Light

Henri Barbusse

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LIGHT

BY

HENRI BARBUSSE AUTHOR OF "UNDER FIRE" "WE OTHERS," ETC.

TRANSLATED BY FITZWATER WRAY 1919

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LIGHT

CHAPTER I

MYSELF

All the days of the week are alike, from their beginning to their end.

At seven in the evening one hears the clock strike gently, and then the instant tumult of the bell. I close the desk, wipe my pen, and put it down. I take my hat and muffler, after a glance at the mirror—a glance which shows me the regular oval of my face, my glossy hair and fine mustache. (It is obvious that I am rather more than a workman.) I put out the light and descend from my little glass-partitioned office. I cross the boiler-house, myself in the grip of the thronging, echoing peal which has set it free. From among the dark and hurrying crowd, which increases in the corridors and rolls down the stairways like a cloud, some passing voices cry to me, "Good-night, Monsieur Simon," or, with less familiarity, "Good-night, Monsieur Paulin." I answer here and there, and allow myself to be borne away by everybody else.

Outside, on the threshold of the porch which opens on the naked plain and its pallid horizons, one sees the squares and triangles of the factory, like a huge black background of the stage, and the tall extinguished chimney, whose only crown now is the cloud of falling night. Confusedly, the dark flood carries me away. Along the wall which faces the porch, women are waiting, like a curtain of shadow, which yields glimpses of their pale and expressionless faces. With nod or word we recognize each other from the mass. Couples are formed by the quick hooking of arms. All along the ghostly avenue one's eyes follow the toilers' scrambling flight.

The avenue is a wan track cut across the open fields. Its course is marked afar by lines of puny trees, sooty as snuffed candles; by telegraph posts and their long spider-webs; by bushes or by fences, which are like the skeletons of bushes. There are a few houses. Up yonder a strip of sky still shows palely yellow above the meager suburb where creeps the muddy crowd detached from the factory. The west wind sets quivering their overalls, blue or black or khaki, excites the woolly tails that flutter from muffled necks, scatters some evil odors, attacks the sightless faces so deep-drowned beneath the sky.

There are taverns anon which catch the eye. Their doors are closed, but their windows and fanlights shine like gold. Between the taverns rise the fronts of some old houses, tenantless and hollow; others, in ruins, cut into this gloomy valley of the homes of men with notches of sky. The iron-shod feet all around me on the hard road sound like the heavy rolling of drums, and then on the paved footpath like dragged chains. It is in vain that I walk with head bent—my own footsteps are lost in the rest, and I cannot hear them.

We hurry, as we do every evening. At that spot in the inky landscape where a tall and twisted tree seems to writhe as if it had a soul, we begin suddenly to descend, our feet plunging forward. Down below we see the lights of Viviers sparkle. These men, whose day is worn out, stride towards those earthly stars. One hope is like another in the evening, as one weariness is like another; we are all alike. I, also. I go towards my light, like all the others, as on every evening.

* * * * * *

When we have descended for a long time the gradient ends, the avenue flattens out like a river, and widens as it pierces the town. Through the latticed boughs of the old plane trees—still naked on this last day of March—one glimpses the workmen's houses, upright in space, hazy and fantastic chessboards, with squares of light dabbed on in places, or like vertical cliffs in which our swarming is absorbed. Scattering among the twilight colonnade of the trees, these people engulf themselves in the heaped-up lodgings and rooms; they flow together in the cavity of doors; they plunge into the houses; and there they are vaguely turned into lights.

I continue to walk, surrounded by several companions who are foremen and clerks, for I do not associate with the workmen. Then there are handshakes, and I go on alone.

Some dimly seen wayfarers disappear; the sounds of sliding locks and closing shutters are heard here and there; the houses have shut themselves up, the night-bound town becomes a desert profound. I can hear nothing now but my own footfall.

Viviers is divided into two parts—like many towns, no doubt. First, the rich town, composed of the main street, where you find the Grand Café, the elegant hotels, the sculptured houses, the church and the castle on the hill-top. The other is the lower town, which I am now entering. It is a system of streets reached by an extension of that avenue which is flanked by the workmen's barracks and climbs to the level of the factory. Such is the way which it has been my custom to climb in the morning and to descend when the light is done, during the six years of my clerkship with Messrs. Gozlan & Co. In this quarter I am still rooted. Some day I should like to live yonder; but between the two halves of the town there is a division—a sort of frontier, which has always been and will always be.

In the Rue Verte I meet only a street lamp, and then a mouse-like little girl who emerges from the shadows and enters them again without seeing me, so intent is she on pressing to her heart, like a doll, the big loaf they have sent her to buy. Here is the Rue de l'Etape, my street. Through the semi-darkness, a luminous movement peoples the hairdresser's shop, and takes shape on the dull screen of his window. His transparent door, with its arched inscription, opens just as I pass, and under the soap-dish,[1] whose jingle summons customers, Monsieur Justin Pocard himself appears, along with a rich gust of scented light. He is seeing a customer out, and improving the occasion by the utterance of certain sentiments; and I had time to see that the customer, convinced, nodded assent, and that Monsieur Pocard, the oracle, was caressing his white and ever-new beard with his luminous hand.

[Footnote 1: The hanging sign of a French barber.—Tr.]

I turn round the cracked walls of the former tinplate works, now bowed and crumbling, whose windows are felted with grime or broken into black stars. A few steps farther I think I saw the childish shadow of little Antoinette, whose bad eyes they don't seem to be curing; but not being certain enough to go and find her I turn into my court, as I do every evening.

Every evening I find Monsieur Crillon at the door of his shop at the end of the

court, where all day long he is fiercely bent upon trivial jobs, and he rises before me like a post. At sight of me the kindly giant nods his big, shaven face, and the square cap on top, his huge nose and vast ears. He taps the leather apron that is hard as a plank. He sweeps me along to the side of the street, sets my back against the porch and says to me, in a low voice, but with heated conviction, "That Pétrarque chap, he's really a bad lot."

He takes off his cap, and while the crescendo nodding of his bristly head seems to brush the night, he adds: "I've mended him his purse. It had become percolated. I've put him a patch on that cost me thirty centimes, and I've resewn the edge with braid, and all the lot. They're expensive, them jobs. Well, when I open my mouth to talk about that matter of his sewing-machine that I'm interested in and that he can't use himself, he becomes congealed."

He recounts to me the mad claims of Trompson in the matter of his new soles, and the conduct of Monsieur Becret, who, though old enough to know better, had taken advantage of his good faith by paying for the repair of his spout with a knife "that would cut anything it sees." He goes on to detail for my benefit all the important matters in his life. Then he says, "I'm not rich, I'm not, but I'm consentious. If I'm a botcher, it's 'cos my father and my grandfather were botchers before me. There's some that's for making a big stir in the world, there are. I don't hold with that idea. What I does, I does."

Suddenly a sonorous tramp persists and repeats itself in the roadway, and a shape of uncertain equilibrium emerges and advances towards us by fits and starts; a shape that clings to itself and is impelled by a force stronger than itself. It is Brisbille, the blacksmith, drunk, as usual.

Espying us, Brisbille utters exclamations. When he has reached us he hesitates, and then, smitten by a sudden idea, he comes to a standstill, his boots clanking on the stones, as if he were a cart. He measures the height of the curb with his eye, but clenches his fists, swallows what he wanted to say, and goes off reeling, with an odor of hatred and wine, and his face slashed with red patches.

"That anarchist!" said Crillon, in disgust; "loathsome notions, now, aren't they? Ah! who'll rid us of him and his alcoholytes?" he adds, as he offers me his hand. "Good-night. I'm always saying to the Town Council, 'You must give 'em clink,' I says, 'that gang of Bolshevists, for the slightest infractionment of the laws against drunkenness.' Yes, indeed! There's that Jean Latrouille in the Town

Council, eh? They talk about keeping order, but as soon as it's a question of a-doing of it, they seem like a cold draught."

The good fellow is angry. He raises his great fist and shakes it in space like a medieval mace. Pointing where Brisbille has just plunged floundering into the night, he says, "That's what Socialists are,—the conquering people what can't stand up on their legs! I may be a botcher in life, but I'm for peace and order. Good-night, good-night. Is she well, Aunt Josephine? I'm for tranquillity and liberty and order. That's why I've always kept clear of their crowd. A bit since, I saw her trotting past, as vivacious as a young girl,—but there, I talk and I talk!"

He enters his shop, but turns on his heel and calls me back, with a mysterious sign. "You know they've all arrived up yonder at the castle?" Respect has subdued his voice; a vision is absorbing him of the lords and ladies of the manor, and as he leaves me he bows, instinctively.

His shop is a narrow glass cage, which is added to our house, like a family relation. Within I can just make out the strong, plebeian framework of Crillon himself, upright beside a serrated heap of ruins, over which a candle is enthroned. The light which falls on his accumulated tools and on those hanging from the wall makes a decoration obscurely golden around the picture of this wise man; this soul all innocent of envious demands, turning again to his botching, as his father and grandfather botched.

I have mounted the steps and pushed our door; the gray door, whose only relief is the key. The door goes in grumblingly, and makes way for me into the dark passage, which was formerly paved, though now the traffic of soles has kneaded it with earth, and changed it into a footpath. My forehead strikes the lamp, which is hooked on the wall; it is out, oozing oil, and it stinks. One never sees that lamp, and always bangs it.

And though I had hurried so—I don't know why—to get home, at this moment of arrival I slow down. Every evening I have the same small and dull disillusion.

I go into the room which serves us as kitchen and dining-room, where my aunt is lying. This room is buried in almost complete darkness.

"Good evening, Mame."

A sigh, and then a sob arise from the bed crammed against the pale celestial

squares of the window.

Then I remember that there was a scene between my old aunt and me after our early morning coffee. Thus it is two or three times a week. This time it was about a dirty window-pane, and on this particular morning, exasperated by the continuous gush of her reproaches, I flung an offensive word, and banged the door as I went off to work. So Mame has had to weep all the day. She has fostered and ruminated her spleen, and sniffed up her tears, even while busy with household duties. Then, as the day declined, she put out the lamp and went to bed, with the object of sustaining and displaying her chagrin.

When I came in she was in the act of peeling invisible potatoes; there are potatoes scattered over the floor, everywhere. My feet kick them and send them rolling heavily among odds and ends of utensils and a soft deposit of garments that are lying about. As soon as I am there my aunt overflows with noisy tears.

Not daring to speak again, I sit down in my usual corner.

Over the bed I can make out a pointed shape, like a mounted picture, silhouetted against the curtains, which slightly blacken the window. It is as though the quilt were lifted from underneath by a stick, for my Aunt Josephine is leanness itself.

Gradually she raises her voice and begins to lament. "You've no feelings, no—you're heartless,—that dreadful word you said to me,—you said, 'You and your jawing!' Ah! people don't know what I have to put up with—ill-natured—cart-horse!"

In silence I hear the tear-streaming words that fall and founder in the dark room from that obscure blot on the pillow which is her face.

I stand up. I sit down again. I risk saying, "Come now, come; that's all done with."

She cries: "Done with? Ah! it will never be done with!"

With the sheet that night is begriming she muzzles herself, and hides her face. She shakes her head to left and to right, violently, so as to wipe her eyes and signify dissent at the same time.

"Never! A word like that you said to me breaks the heart forever. But I must get

up and get you something to eat. You must eat. I brought you up when you were a little one,"—her voice capsizes—"I've given up all for you, and you treat me as if I were an adventuress."

I hear the sound of her skinny feet as she plants them successively on the floor, like two boxes. She is seeking her things, scattered over the bed or slipped to the floor; she is swallowing sobs. Now she is upright, shapeless in the shadow, but from time to time I see her remarkable leanness outlined. She slips on a camisole and a jacket,—a spectral vision of garments which unfold themselves about her handle-like arms, and above the hollow framework of her shoulders.

She talks to herself while she dresses, and gradually all my life-history, all my past comes forth from what the poor woman says,—my only near relative on earth; as it were my mother and my servant.

She strikes a match. The lamp emerges from the dark and zigzags about the room like a portable fairy. My aunt is enclosed in a strong light. Her eyes are level with her face; she has heavy and spongy eyelids and a big mouth which stirs with ruminated sorrow. Fresh tears increase the dimensions of her eyes, make them sparkle and varnish the points of her cheeks. She comes and goes with undiminished spleen. Her wrinkles form heavy moldings on her face, and the skin of chin and neck is so folded that it looks intestinal, while the crude light tinges it all with something like blood.

Now that the lamp is alight some items become visible of the dismal super-chaos in which we are walled up,—the piece of bed-ticking fastened with two nails across the bottom of the window, because of draughts; the marble-topped chest of drawers, with its woolen cover; and the door-lock, stopped with a protruding plug of paper.

The lamp is flaring, and as Mame does not know where to stand it among the litter, she puts it on the floor and crouches to regulate the wick. There rises from the medley of the old lady, vividly variegated with vermilion and night, a jet of black smoke, which returns in parachute form. Mame sighs, but she cannot check her continual talk.

"You, my lad, you who are so genteel when you like, and earn a hundred and eighty francs a month,—you're genteel, but you're short of good manners, it's that chiefly I find fault with you about. So you spat on the window-pane; I'm

certain of it. May I drop dead if you didn't. And you're nearly twenty-four! And to revenge yourself because I'd found out that you'd spat on the window, you told me to stop my jawing, for that's what you said to me, after all. Ah, vulgar fellow that you are! The factory gentlemen are too kind to you. Your poor father was their best workman. You are more genteel than your poor father, more English; and you preferred to go into business rather than go on learning Latin, and everybody thought you quite right; but for hard work you're not much good—ah, la, la! Confess that you spat on the window.

"For your poor mother," the ghost of Mame goes on, as she crosses the room with a wooden spoon in her hand, "one must say that she had good taste in dress. That's no harm, no; but certainly they must have the wherewithal. She was always a child. I remember she was twenty-six when they carried her away. Ah, how she loved hats! But she had handsome ways, for all that, when she said, 'Come along with us, Josephine!' So I brought you up, I did, and sacrificed everything…."

Overcome by the mention of the past, Mame's speech and action both cease. She chokes and wags her head and wipes her face with her sleeve.

I risk saying, gently, "Yes, I know it well."

A sigh is my answer. She lights the fire. The coal sends out a cushion of smoke, which expands and rolls up the stove, falls back, and piles its muslin on the floor. Mame manipulates the stove with her feet in the cloudy deposit; and the hazy white hair which escapes from her black cap is also like smoke.

Then she seeks her handkerchief and pats her pockets to get the velvet coal-dust off her fingers. Now, with her back turned, she is moving casseroles about. "Monsieur Crillon's father," she says, "old Dominic, had come from County Cher to settle down here in '66 or '67. He's a sensible man, seeing he's a town councilor. (We must tell him nicely to take his buckets away from our door.) Monsieur Bonéas is very rich, and he speaks so well, in spite of his bad neck. You must show yourself off to all these gentlemen. You're genteel, and you're already getting a hundred and eighty francs a month, and it's vexing that you haven't got some sign to show that you're on the commercial side, and not a workman, when you're going in and out of the factory."

"That can be seen easily enough."

"I'd rather you had a badge."

Breathing damply and forcefully, she sniffs harder and quicker, and looks here and there for her handkerchief; she prowls with the lamp. As my eyes follow her, the room awakens more and more. My groping gaze discovers the tiled floor, the conference of chairs backed side by side against the wall, the motionless pallor of the window in the background above the low and swollen bed, which is like a heap of earth and plaster, the clothes lying on the floor like mole-hills, the protruding edges of tables and shelves, pots, bottles, kettles and hanging clouts, and that lock with the cotton-wool in its ear.

"I like orderliness so much," says Mame as she tacks and worms her way through this accumulation of things, all covered with a downy layer of dust like the corners of pastel pictures.

According to habit, I stretch out my legs and put my feet on the stool, which long use has polished and glorified till it looks new. My face turns this way and that towards the lean phantom of my aunt, and I lull myself with the sounds of her stirring and her endless murmur.

And now, suddenly, she has come near to me. She is wearing her jacket of gray and white stripes which hangs from her acute shoulders, she puts her arm around my neck, and trembles as she says, "You can mount high, you can, with the gifts that you have. Some day, perhaps, you will go and tell men everywhere the truth of things. That *has* happened. There have been men who were in the right, above everybody. Why shouldn't you be one of them, my lad, *you* one of these great apostles!"

And with her head gently nodding, and her face still tear-stained, she looks afar, and sees the streets attentive to my eloquence!

* * * * * *

Hardly has this strange imagining in the bosom of our kitchen passed away when Mame adds, with her eyes on mine, "My lad, mind you, never look higher than yourself. You are already something of a home-bird; you have already serious and elderly habits. That's good. Never try to be different from others."

"No danger of that, Mame."

No, there is no danger of that. I should like to remain as I am. Something holds me to the surroundings of my infancy and childhood, and I should like them to be eternal. No doubt I hope for much from life. I hope, I have hopes, as every one has. I do not even know all that I hope for, but I should not like too great changes. In my heart I should not like anything which changed the position of the stove, of the tap, of the chestnut wardrobe, nor the form of my evening rest, which faithfully returns.

* * * * * *

The fire alight, my aunt warms up the stew, stirring it with the wooden spoon. Sometimes there spurts from the stove a mournful flame, which seems to illumine her with tatters of light.

I get up to look at the stew. The thick brown gravy is purring. I can see pale bits of potato, and it is uncertainly spotted with the mucosity of onions. Mame pours it into a big white plate. "That's for you," she says; "now, what shall *I* have?"

We settle ourselves each side of the little swarthy table. Mame is fumbling in her pocket. Now her lean hand, lumpy and dark, unroots itself. She produces a bit of cheese, scrapes it with a knife which she holds by the blade, and swallows it slowly. By the rays of the lamp, which stands beside us, I see that her face is not dry. A drop of water has lingered on the cheek that each mouthful protrudes, and glitters there. Her great mouth works in all directions, and sometimes swallows the remains of tears.

So there we are, in front of our plates, of the salt which is placed on a bit of paper, of my share of jam, which is put into a mustard-pot. There we are, narrowly close, our foreheads and hands brought together by the light, and for the rest but poorly clothed by the huge gloom. Sitting in this jaded armchair, my hands on this ill-balanced table,—which, if you lean on one side of it, begins at once to limp,—I feel that I am deeply rooted where I am, in this old room, disordered as an abandoned garden, this worn-out room, where the dust touches you softly.

After we have eaten, our remarks grow rarer. Then Mame begins again to mumble; once again she yields to emotion under the harsh flame of the lamp, and once again her eyes grow dim in her complicated Japanese mask that is crowned with cotton-wool, and something dimly shining flows from them.

The tears of the sensitive old soul plash on that lip so voluminous that it seems a sort of heart. She leans towards me, she comes so near, so near, that I feel sure she is touching me.

I have only her in the world to love me really. In spite of her humors and her lamentations I know well that she is always in the right.

I yawn, while she takes away the dirty plates and proceeds to hide them in a dark corner. She fills the big bowl from the pitcher and then carries it along to the stove for the crockery.

Antonia has given me an appointment for eight o'clock, near the Kiosk. It is ten past eight. I go out. The passage, the court,—by night all these familiar things surround me even while they hide themselves. A vague light still hovers in the sky. Crillon's prismatic shop gleams like a garnet in the bosom of the night, behind the riotous disorder of his buckets. There I can see Crillon,—he never seems to stop,—filing something, examining his work close to a candle which flutters like a butterfly ensnared, and then, reaching for the glue-pot which steams on a little stove. One can just see his face, the engrossed and heedless face of the artificer of the good old days; the black plates of his ill-shaven cheeks; and, protruding from his cap, a vizor of stiff hair. He coughs, and the window-panes vibrate.

In the street, shadow and silence. In the distance are venturing shapes, people emerging or entering, and some light echoing sounds. Almost at once, on the corner, I see Monsieur Joseph Bonéas vanishing, stiff as a ramrod. I recognized the thick white kerchief, which consolidates the boils on his neck. As I pass the hairdresser's door it opens, just as it did a little while ago, and his agreeable voice says, "That's all there is to it, in business." "Absolutely," replies a man who is leaving. In the oven of the street one can see only his littleness—he must be a considerable personage, all the same. Monsieur Pocard is always applying himself to business and thinking of great schemes. A little farther, in the depths of a cavity, stoppered by an iron-grilled window, I divine the presence of old Eudo, the bird of ill omen, the strange old man who coughs, and has a bad eye, and whines continually. Even indoors he must wear his mournful cloak and the lamp-shade of his hood. People call him a spy, and not without reason.

Here is the Kiosk. It is waiting quite alone, with its point in the darkness. Antonia has not come, for she would have waited for me. I am impatient first,

and then relieved. A good riddance.

No doubt Antonia is still tempting when she is present. There is a reddish fever in her eyes, and her slenderness sets you on fire. But I am hardly in harmony with the Italian. She is particularly engrossed in her private affairs, with which I am not concerned. Big Victorine, always ready, is worth a hundred of her; or Madame Lacaille, the pensively vicious; though I am equally satiated of her, too. Truth to tell, I plunge unreflectingly into a heap of amorous adventures which I shortly find vulgar. But I can never resist the magic of a first temptation.

I shall not wait. I go away. I skirt the forge of the ignoble Brisbille. It is the last house in that chain of low hills which is the street. Out of the deep dark the smithy window flames with vivid orange behind its black tracery. In the middle of that square-ruled page of light I see transparently outlined the smith's eccentric silhouette, now black and sharp, now softly huge. Spectrally through the glare, and in blundering frenzy, he strives and struggles and fumbles horribly on the anvil. Swaying, he seems to rush to right and to left, like a passenger on a hell-bound ferry. The more drunk he is, the more furiously he falls upon his iron and his fire.

I return home. Just as I am about to enter a timid voice calls me—"Simon!"

It is Antonia. So much the worse for her. I hurry in, followed by the weak appeal.

I go up to my room. It is bare and always cold; always I must shiver some minutes before I shake it back to life. As I close the shutters I see the street again; the massive, slanting blackness of the roofs and their population of chimneys clear-cut against the minor blackness of space; some still waking, milk-white windows; and, at the end of a jagged and gloomy background, the blood-red stumbling apparition of the mad blacksmith. Farther still I can make out in the cavity the cross on the steeple; and again, very high and blazing with light on the hill-top, the castle, a rich crown of masonry. In all directions the eye loses itself among the black ruins which conceal their hosts of men and of women—all so unknown and so like myself.

CHAPTER II

OURSELVES

It is Sunday. Through my open window a living ray of April has made its way into my room. It has transformed the faded flowers of the wallpaper and restored to newness the Turkey-red stuff which covers my dressing-table.

I dress carefully, dallying to look at myself in the glass, closely and farther away, in the fresh scent of soap. I try to make out whether my eyes are little or big. They are the average, no doubt, but it really seems to me that they have a tender brightness.

Then I look outside. It would seem that the town, under its misty blankets in the hollow of the valley, is awaking later than its inhabitants.

These I can see from up here, spreading abroad in the streets, since it is Sunday. One does not recognize them all at once, so changed are they by their unusual clothes;—women, ornate with color, and more monumental than on week days; some old men, slightly straightened for the occasion; and some very lowly people, whom only their cleanness vaguely disguises.

The weak sunshine is dressing the red roofs and the blue roofs and the sidewalks, and the tiny little stone setts all pressed together like pebbles, where polished shoes are shining and squeaking. In that old house at the corner, a house like a round lantern of shadow, gloomy old Eudo is encrusted. It forms a comical blot, as though traced on an old etching. A little further, Madame Piot's house bulges forth, glazed like pottery. By the side of these uncommon dwellings one takes no notice of the others, with their gray walls and shining curtains, although it is of these that the town is made.

Halfway up the hill, which rises from the river bank, and opposite the factory's

plateau, appears the white geometry of the castle, and around its pallors a tapestry of reddish foliage, and parks. Farther away, pastures and growing crops which are part of the demesne; farther still, among the stripes and squares of brown earth or verdant, the cemetery, where every year so many stones spring up.

* * * * * *

We have to call at Brisbille's, my aunt and I, before Church. We are forced to tolerate him thus, so as to get our twisted key put right. I wait for Mame in the court, sitting on a tub by the shop, which is lifeless to-day, and full of the scattered leavings of toil. Mame is never ready in time. She has twice appeared on the threshold in her fine black dress and velvet cape; then, having forgotten something, she has gone back very quickly, like a mole. Finally, she must needs go up to my room, to cast a last glance over it.

At last we are off, side by side. She takes my arm proudly. From time to time she looks at me, and I at her, and her smile is an affectionate grimace amid the sunshine.

When we have gone a little way, my aunt stops, "You go on," she says;
"I'll catch you up."

She has gone up to Apolline, the street-sweeper. The good woman, as broad as she is long, was gaping on the edge of the causeway, her two parallel arms feebly rowing in the air, an exile in the Sabbath idleness, and awkwardly conscious of her absent broom.

Mame brings her along, and looking back as I walk, I hear her talking of me, hastily, as one who confides a choking secret, while Apolline follows, with her arms swinging far from her body, limping and outspread like a crab.

Says Mame, "That boy's bedroom is untidy. And then, too, he uses too many shirt-collars, and he doesn't know how to blow his nose. He stuffs handkerchiefs into his pockets, and you find them again like stones."

"All the same, he's a good young man," stammers the waddling street cleanser, brandishing her broom-bereaved hands at random, and shaking over her swollen and many-storied boots a skirt weighted round the hem by a coat-of-mail of dry mud.

These confidences with which Mame is in the habit of breaking forth before no matter whom get on my nerves. I call her with some impatience. She starts at the command, comes up, and throws me a martyr's glance.

She proceeds with her nose lowered under her black hat with green foliage, hurt that I should thus have summoned her before everybody, and profoundly irritated. So a persevering malice awakens again in the depths of her, and she mutters, very low, "You spat on the window the other day!"

But she cannot resist hooking herself again on to another interlocutor, whose Sunday trousers are planted on the causeway, like two posts, and his blouse as stiff as a lump of iron ore. I leave them, and go alone into Brisbille's.

The smithy hearth befires a workshop which bristles with black objects. In the middle of the dark bodies of implements hanging from walls and ceiling is the metallic Brisbille, with leaden hands, his dark apron rainbowed with file-dust,—dirty on principle, because of his ideas, this being Sunday. He is sober, and his face still unkindled, but he is waiting impatiently for the church-going bell to begin, so that he may go and drink, in complete solitude.

Through an open square, in the ponderous and dirt-shaggy glazing of the smithy, one can see a portion of the street, and a sketch, in bright and airy tones, of scattered people. It is like the sharply cut field of vision in an opera-glass, in which figures are drawn and shaded, and cross each other; where one makes out, at times, a hat bound and befeathered, swaying as it goes; a little boy with sky-blue tie and buttoned boots, and tubular knickers hanging round his thin, bare calves; a couple of gossiping dames in swollen and somber petticoats, who tack hither and thither, meet, are mutually attracted and dissolve in conversation, like rolling drops of ink. In the foreground of this colored cinema which goes by and passes again, Brisbille, the sinister, is ranting away, as always. He is red and lurid, spotted with freckles, his hair greasy, his voice husky. For a moment, while he paces to and fro in his cage, dragging shapeless and gaping shoes behind him, he speaks to me in a low voice, and close to my face, in gusts. Brisbille can shout, but not talk; there must be a definite pressure of anger before his resounding huskiness issues from his throat.

Mame comes in. She sits on a stool to get her breath again, all the while brandishing the twisted key which she clasps to the prayer-book in her hand. Then she unburdens herself and begins to speak in fits and starts of this key, of

the mishap which twisted it, and of all the multiple details which overlap each other in her head. But the slipshod, gloomy smith's attention is suddenly attracted by the hole which shows the street.

"The lubber!" he roars.

It is Monsieur Fontan who is passing, the wine-merchant and café-proprietor. He is an expansive and imposing man, fat-covered, and white as a house. He never says anything and is always alone. A great personage he is; he makes money; he has amassed hundreds of thousands of francs. At noon and in the evening he is not to be seen, having dived into the room behind the shop, where he takes his meals in solitude. The rest of the time he just sits at the receipt of custom and says nothing. There is a hole in his counter where he slides the money in. His house is filling with money from morning till night.

"He's a money-trap," says Mame.

"He's rich," I say.

"And when you've said that," jeers Brisbille, "you've said all there is to say. Why, you damned snob, you're only a poor drudge, like all us chaps, but haven't you just got the snob's ideas?"

I make a sign of impatience. It is not true, and Brisbille annoys me with the hatred which he hurls at random, hit or miss; and all the more because he is himself visibly impressed by the approach of this man who is richer than the rest. The rebel opens his steely eye and relapses into silence, like the rest of us, as the big person grows bigger.

"The Bonéas are even richer," my aunt murmurs.

Monsieur Fontan passes the open door, and we can hear the breathing of the corpulent recluse. As soon as he has carried away the enormous overcoat that sheathes him, like the hide of a pachyderm, and is disappearing, Brisbille begins to roar, "What a snout! Did you see it, eh? Did you see the jaws he swings from his ears, eh? The exact likeness of a hog!"

Then he adds, in a burst of vulgar delight, "Luckily, we can expect it'll all burst before long!"

He laughs alone. Mame goes and sits apart. She detests Brisbille, who is the personification of envy, malice and coarseness. And everybody hates this marionette, too, for his drunkenness and his forward notions. All the same, when there is something you want him to do, you choose Sunday morning to call, and you linger there, knowing that you will meet others. This has become a tradition.

"They're going to cure little Antoinette," says Benoît, as he frames himself in the doorway.

Benoît is like a newspaper. He to whom nothing ever happens only lives to announce what is happening to others.

"I know," cries Mame, "they told me so this morning. Several people already knew it this morning at seven. A big, famous doctor's coming to the castle itself, for the hunting, and he only treats just the eyes."

"Poor little angel!" sighs a woman, who has just come in.

Brisbille intervenes, rancorous and quarrelsome, "Yes, they're always going to cure the child, so they say. Bad luck to them! Who cares about her?"

"Everybody does!" reply two incensed women, in the same breath.

"And meanwhile," said Brisbille, viciously, "she's snuffing it." And he chews, once more, his customary saying—pompous and foolish as the catchword of a public meeting—"She's a victim of society!"

Monsieur Joseph Bonéas has come into Brisbille's, and he does it complacently, for he is not above mixing with the people of the neighborhood. Here, too, are Monsieur Pocard, and Crillon, new shaved, his polished skin taut and shiny, and several other people. Prominent among them one marks the wavering head of Monsieur Mielvaque, who, in his timidity and careful respect for custom, took his hat off as he crossed the threshold. He is only a copying-clerk at the factory; he wears much-used and dubious linen, and a frail and orphaned jacket which he dons for all occasions.

Monsieur Joseph Bonéas overawes me. My eyes are attracted by his delicate profile, the dull gloom of his morning attire, and the luster of his black gloves, which are holding a little black rectangle, gilt-edged.

He, too, has removed his hat. So I, in my corner discreetly remove mine, too.

He is a young man, refined and distinguished, who impresses by his innate elegance. Yet he is an invalid, tormented by abscesses. One never sees him but his neck is swollen, or his wrists enlarged by a ghastly outcrop. But the sickly body encloses bright and sane intelligence. I admire him because he is thoughtful and full of ideas, and can express himself faultlessly. Recently he gave me a lesson in sociology, touching the links between the France of to-day and the France of tradition, a lesson on our origins whose plain perspicuity was a revelation to me. I seek his company; I strive to imitate him, and certainly he is not aware how much influence he has over me.

All are attentive while he says that he is thinking of organizing a young people's association in Viviers. Then he speaks to me, "The farther I go the more I perceive that all men are afflicted with short sight. They do not see, nor can they see, beyond the end of their noses."

"Yes," say I.

My reply seems rather scanty, and the silence which follows repeats it mercilessly. It seems so to him, too, no doubt, for he engages other interlocutors, and I feel myself redden in the darkness of Brisbille's cavern.

Crillon is arguing with Brisbille on the matter of the recent renovation of an old hat, which they keep handing to each other and examine ardently. Crillon is sitting, but he keeps his eyes on it. Heart and soul he applies himself to the debate. His humble trade as a botcher does not allow a fixed tariff, and he is all alone as he vindicates the value of his work. With his fists he hammers the gray-striped mealy cloth on his knees, and the hair, which grows thickly round his big neck, gives him the nape of a wild boar.

"That felt," he complains, "I'll tell you what was the matter with it. It was rain, heavy rain, that had drowned it. That felt, I tells you, was only like a dirty handkerchief. What does *that* represent—in ebullition of steam, in gumming, and the passage of time?"

Monsieur Justin Pocard is talking to three companions, who, hat in hand, are listening with all their ears. He is entertaining them in his sonorous language about the great financial and industrial combination which he has planned. A speculative thrill electrifies the company.

"That'll brush business up!" says Crillon, in wonder, torn for a moment from contemplation of the hat, but promptly relapsing on it.

Joseph Bonéas says to me, in an undertone,—and I am flattered,—"That Pocard is a man of no education, but he has practical sense. That's a big idea he's got,—at least if he sees things as I see them."

And I, I am thinking that if I were older or more influential in the district, perhaps I should be in the Pocard scheme, which is taking shape, and will be huge.

Meanwhile, Brisbille is scowling. An unconfessable disquiet is accumulating in his bosom. All this gathering is detaining him at home, and he is tormented by the desire for drink. He cannot conceal his vinous longing, and squints darkly at the assembly. On a week day at this hour he would already have begun to slake his thirst. He is parched, he burns, he drags himself from group to group. The wait is longer than he can stand.

Suddenly every one looks out to the street through the still open door.

A carriage is making its way towards the church; it has a green body and silver lamps. The old coachman, whose great glove sways the slender scepter of a whip, is so adorned with overlapping capes that he suggests several men on the top of each other. The black horse is prancing.

"He shines like a piano," says Benoît.

The Baroness is in the carriage. The blinds are drawn, so she cannot be seen, but every one salutes the carriage.

"All slaves!" mumbles Brisbille. "Look at yourselves now, just look! All the lot of you, as soon as a rich old woman goes by, there you are, poking your noses into the ground, showing your bald heads, and growing humpbacked."

"She does good," protests one of the gathering.

"Good? Ah, yes, indeed!" gurgles the evil man, writhing as though in the grip of some one; "I call it ostentation—that's what *I* call it."

Shoulders are shrugged, and Monsieur Joseph Bonéas, always self-controlled,

smiles.

Encouraged by that smile, I say, "There have always been rich people, and there must be."

"Of course," trumpets Crillon, "that's one of the established thoughts that you find in your head when you fish for 'em. But mark what I says,—there's some that dies of envy. I'm *not* one of them that dies of envy."

Monsieur Mielvaque has put his hat back on his petrified head and gone to the door. Monsieur Joseph Bonéas, also, turns his back and goes away.

All at once Crillon cries, "There's Pétrarque!" and darts outside on the track of a big body, which, having seen him, opens its long pair of compasses and escapes obliquely.

"And to think," says Brisbille, with a horrible grimace, when Crillon has disappeared, "that the scamp is a town councilor! Ah, by God!"

He foams, as a wave of anger runs through him, swaying on his feet, and gaping at the ground. Between his fingers there is a shapeless cigarette, damp and shaggy, which he rolls in all directions, patching up and resticking it unceasingly.

Charged with snarls and bristling with shoulder-shrugs, the smith rushes at his fire and pulls the bellows-chain, his yawning shoes making him limp like Vulcan. At each pull the bellows send spouting from the dust-filled throat of the furnace a cutting blue comet, lined with crackling and dazzling white, and therein the man forges.

Purpling as his agitation rises, nailed to his imprisoning corner, alone of his kind, a rebel against all the immensity of things, the man forges.

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The church bell rang, and we left him there. When I was leaving I heard Brisbille growl. No doubt I got my quietus as well. But what can he have imagined against *me*?

We meet again, all mixed together in the Place de l'Eglise. In our part of the town, except for a clan of workers whom one keeps one's eye on, every one goes

to church, men as well as women, as a matter of propriety, out of gratitude to employers or lords of the manor, or by religious conviction. Two streets open into the Place and two roads, bordered with apple-trees, as well, so that these four ways lead town and country to the Place.

It has the shape of a heart, and is delightful. It is shaded by a very old tree, under which justice was formerly administered. That is why they call it the Great Tree, although there are greater ones. In winter it is dark, like a perforated umbrella. In summer it gives the bright green shadow of a parasol. Beside the tree a tall crucifix dwells in the Place forever.

The Place is swarming and undulating. Peasants from the surrounding country, in their plain cotton caps, are waiting in the old corner of the Rue Neuve, heaped together like eggs. These people are loaded with provisions. At the farther end, square-paved, one picks out swarthy outlines of the Epinal type, and faces as brightly colored as apples. Groups of children flutter and chirrup; little girls with their dolls play at being mothers, and little boys play at brigands. Respectable people take their stand more ceremoniously than the common crowd, and talk business piously.

Farther away is the road, which April's illumination adorns all along the lines of trees with embroidery of shadow and of gold, where bicycles tinkle and carriages rumble echoingly; and the shining river,—those long-drawn sheets of water, whereon the sun spreads sheets of light and scatters blinding points. Looking along the road, on either side of its stone-hard surface, one sees the pleasant, cultivated earth, the bits of land sewn to each other, and many-hued, brown or green as the billiard cloth, then paling in the distance. Here and there, on this map in colors, copses bulge forth. The by-roads are pricked out with trees, which follow each other artlessly and divide the infantile littleness of orchards.

This landscape holds us by the soul. It is a watercolor now (for it rained a little last night), with its washed stones, its tiles varnished anew, its roofs that are half slate and half light, its shining pavements, water-jeweled in places, its delicately blue sky, with clouds like silky paper; and between two house-fronts of yellow ocher and tan, against the purple velvet of distant forests, there is the neighboring steeple, which is like ours and yet different. Roundly one's gaze embraces all the panorama, which is delightful as the rainbow.

From the Place, then, where one feels himself so abundantly at home, we enter the church. From the depths of this thicket of lights, the good priest murmurs the great infinite speech to us, blesses us, embraces us severally and altogether, like father and mother both. In the manorial pew, the foremost of all, one glimpses the Marquis of Monthyon, who has the air of an officer, and his mother-in-law, Baroness Grille, who is dressed like an ordinary lady.

Emerging from church, the men go away; the women swarm out more grudgingly and come to a standstill together; then all the buzzing groups scatter.

At noon the shops close. The fine ones do it unassisted; the others close by the antics of some good man who exerts himself to carry and fit the shutters. Then there is a great void.

After lunch I wander in the streets. In the house I am bored, and yet outside I do not know what to do. I have no friend and no calls to pay. I am already too big to mingle with some, and too little yet to associate with others. The cafés and licensed shops hum, jingle and smoke already. I do not go to cafés, on principle, and because of that fondness for spending nothing, which my aunt has impressed on me. So, aimless, I walk through the deserted streets, which at every corner yawn before my feet. The hours strike and I have the impression that they are useless, that one will do nothing with them.

I steer in the direction of the fine gardens which slope towards the river. A little enviously I look over the walls at the tops of these opulent enclosures, at the tips of those great branches where still clings the soiled, out-of-fashion finery of last summer.

Far from there, and a good while after, I encounter Tudor, the clerk at the Modern Pharmacy. He hesitates and doubts, and does not know where to go. Every Sunday he wears the same collar, with turned down corners, and it is becoming gloomy. Arrived where I am, he stops, as though it occurred to him that nothing was pushing him forward. A half-extinguished cigarette vegetates in his mouth.

He comes with me, and I take his silence in tow as far as the avenue of plane trees. There are several figures outspaced in its level peace. Some young girls attract my attention; they appear against the dullness of house-fronts and against shop fronts in mourning. Some of the charming ones are accompanied by their

mothers, who look like caricatures of them.

Tudor has left me without my noticing it.

Already, and slowly everywhere, the taverns begin to shine and cry out. In the grayness of twilight one discerns a dark and mighty crowd, gliding therein. In them gathers a sort of darkling storm, and flashes emerge from them.

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And lo! Now the night approaches to soften the stony streets.

Along the riverside, to which I have gone down alone, listless idylls dimly appear,—shapes sketched in crayon, which seek and join each other. There are couples that appear and vanish, strictly avoiding the little light that is left. Night is wiping out colors and features and names from both sorts of strollers.

I notice a woman who waits, standing on the river bank. Her silhouette has pearly-gray sky behind it, so that she seems to support the darkness. I wonder what her name may be, but only discover the beauty of her feminine stillness. Not far from that consummate caryatid, among the black columns of the tall trees laid against the lave of the blue, and beneath their cloudy branches, there are mystic enlacements which move to and fro; and hardly can one distinguish the two halves of which they are made, for the temple of night is enclosing them.

The ancient hut of a fisherman is outlined on the grassy slope. Below it, crowding reeds rustle in the current; and where they are more sparse they fashion concentric orbs upon the gleaming, fleeing water. The landscape has something exotic or antique about it. You are no matter where in the world or among the centuries. You are on some corner of the eternal earth, where men and women are drawing near to each other, and cling together while they wrap themselves in mystery.

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Dreamily I ascend again towards the sounds and the swarming of the town. There, the Sunday evening rendezvous,—the prime concern of the men,—is less discreet. Desire displays itself more crudely on the pavements. Voices chatter and laughter dissolves, even through closed doors; there are shouts and songs.

Up there one sees clearly. Faces are discovered by the harsh light of the gas jets and its reflection from plate-glass shop windows. Antonia goes by, surrounded by men, who bend forward and look at her with desire amid their clamor of conversation. She saw me, and a little sound of appeal comes from her across the escort that presses upon her. But I turn aside and let her go by.

When she and her harness of men have disappeared, I smell in their wake the odor of Pétrolus. He is lamp-man at the factory. Yellow, dirty, cadaverous, red-eyed, he smells rancid, and was, perhaps, nurtured on paraffin. He is some one washed away. You do not see him, so much as smell him.

Other women are there. Many a Sunday have I, too, joined in all that love-making.

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Among these beings who chat and take hold of each other, an isolated woman stands like a post, and makes an empty space around her.

It is Louise Verte. She is fearfully ugly, and she was too virtuous formerly, at a time when, so they say, she need not have been. She regrets this, and relates it without shame, in order to be revenged on virtue. She would like to have a lover, but no one wants her, because of her bony face and her scraped appearance; from a sort of eczema. Children make sport of her, knowing her needs; for the disclosures of their elders have left a stain on them. A five-year-old girl points her tiny finger at Louise and twitters, "She wants a man."

In the Place is Véron, going about aimlessly, like a dead leaf—Véron, who revolves, when he may, round Antonia. An ungainly man, whose tiny head leans to the right and wears a colorless smile. He lives on a few rents and does not work. He is good and affectionate, and sometimes he is overcome by attacks of compassion.

Véron and Louise Verte see one another,—and each makes a détour of avoidance. They are afraid of each other.

Here, also, on the margin of passion, is Monsieur Joseph Bonéas, very compassionable, in spite of his intellectual superiority. Between the turned-down brim of his hat and his swollen white kerchief,—thick as a towel,—a mournful yellow face is stuck.

I pity these questing solitaries who are looking for themselves! I feel compassion to see those fruitless shadows hovering there, wavering like ghosts, these poor wayfarers, divided and incomplete.

Where am I? Facing the workmen's flats, whose countless windows stand sharply out in their huge flat background. It is there that Marie Tusson lives, whose father, a clerk at Messrs. Gozlan's, like myself, is manager of the property. I steered to this place instinctively, without confessing it to myself, brushing people and things without mingling with them.

Marie is my cousin, and yet I hardly ever see her. We just say good-day when we meet, and she smiles at me.

I lean against a plane tree and think of Marie. She is tall, fair, strong and amiable, and she goes modestly clad, like a wide-hipped Venus; her beautiful lips shine like her eyes.

To know her so near agitates me among the shadows. If she appeared before me as she did the last time I met her; if, in the middle of the dark, I saw the shining radiance of her face, the swaying of her figure, traced in silken lines, and her little sister's hand in hers,—I should tremble.

But that does not happen. The bluish, cold background only shows me the two second-floor windows pleasantly warmed by lights, of which one is, perhaps, she herself. But they take no sort of shape, and remain in another world.

At last my eyes leave that constellation of windows among the trees, that vertical and silent firmament. Then I make for my home, in this evening which comes at the end of all the days I have lived.

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Little Antoinette,—how comes it that they leave her all alone like this?—is standing in my path and holding a hand out towards me. It is her way that she is begging for. I guide her, ask questions and listen, leaning over her and making little steps. But she is too little, and too lispful, and cannot explain. Carefully I lead the child,—who sees so feebly that already she is blind in the evening, as far as the low door of the dilapidated dwelling where she nests.

In my street, in front of his lantern-shaped house, with its iron-grilled dormer,

old Eudo is standing, darkly hooded, and pointed, like the house.

I am a little afraid of him. Assuredly, he has not got a clean conscience. But, however guilty, he is compassionable. I stop and speak to him. He lifts to me out of the night of his hood a face pallid and ruined. I speak about the weather, of approaching spring. Heedless he hears, shapes "yes" with the tip of his lips, and says, "It's twelve years now since my wife died; twelve years that I've been utterly alone; twelve years that I've heard the last words she said to me."

And the poor maniac glides farther away, hooded in his unintelligible mourning; and certainly he does not hear me wish him good-night.

At the back of the cold downstairs room a fire has been lighted. Mame is sitting on the stool beside it, in the glow of the flaming coal, outstretching her hands, clinging to the warmth.

Entering, I see the bowl of her back. Her lean neck has a cracked look and is white as a bone. Musingly, my aunt takes and holds a pair of idle tongs. I take my seat. Mame does not like the silence in which I wrap myself. She lets the tongs fall with a jangling shock, and then begins vivaciously to talk to me about the people of the neighborhood. "There's everything here. No need to go to Paris, nor even so much as abroad. This part; it's a little world cut out on the pattern of the others," she adds, proudly, wagging her worn-out head. "There aren't many of them who've got the wherewithal and they're not of much account. Puppets, if you like, yes. That's according to how one sees it, because at bottom there's no puppets,—there's people that look after themselves, because each of us always deserves to be happy, my lad. And here, the same as everywhere, the two kinds of people that there are—the discontented and the respectable; because, my lad, what's always been always will be."

CHAPTER III

EVENING AND DAWN

Just at the moment when I was settling down to audit the Sesmaisons' account—I remember that detail—there came an unusual sound of steps and voices, and before I could even turn round I heard a voice through the glass door say, "Monsieur Paulin's aunt is very ill."

The sentence stuns me. I am standing, and some one is standing opposite me. A draught shuts the door with a bang.

Both of us set off. It is Benoît who has come to fetch me. We hurry. I breathe heavily. Crossing the busy factory, we meet acquaintances who smile at me, not knowing the turn of affairs.

The night is cold and nasty, with a keen wind. The sky drips with rain. We jump over puddles as we walk. I stare fixedly at Benoît's square shoulders in front of me, and the dancing tails of his coat as the wind hustles them along the nocturnal way.

Passing through the suburban quarter, the wind comes so hard between the infrequent houses that the bushes on either side shiver and press towards us, and seem to unfurl. Ah, we are not made for the greater happenings!

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I meet first in the room the resounding glare of a wood fire and an almost repelling heat. The odors of camphor and ether catch my throat. People that I know are standing round the bed. They turn to me and speak all together.

I bend down to look at Mame. She is inlaid upon the whiteness of the bed, which

is motionless as marble. Her face is sunk in the cavity of the pillow. Her eyes are half closed and do not move; her skin has darkened. Each breath hums in her throat, and beyond that slight stirring of larynx and lips her little frail body moves no more than a doll's. She has not got her cap on and her gray hair is unraveled on her head like flocks of dust.

Several voices at once explain to me that it is "double congestion, and her heart as well." She was attacked by a dizziness, by prolonged and terrible shivering. She wandered, mentioned me, then suddenly collapsed. The doctor has no hope but is coming back. The Reverend Father Piot was here at five.

Silence hovers. A woman puts a log in the fire, in the center of the dazzling cluster of snarling flames, whose light throws the room into total agitation.

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For a long time I look upon that face, where ugliness and goodness are mingled in such a heartrending way. My eyes seek those already almost shut, whose light is hardening. Something of darkness, an internal shadow which is of herself, overspreads and disfigures her. One may see now how outworn she was, how miraculously she still held on.

This tortured and condemned woman is all that has looked after me for twenty years. For twenty years she took my hand before she took my arm. She always prevented me from understanding that I was an orphan. Delicate and small as I was for so long, she was taller and stronger and better than I! And at this moment, which shows me the past again in one glance, I remember that she beautified the affairs of my childhood like an old magician; and my head goes lower as I think of her untiring admiration for me. How she did love me! And she must love me still, confusedly, if some glimmering light yet lasts in the depths of her. What will become of me—all alone?

She was so sensitive, and so restless! A hundred details of her vivacity come to life again in my eyes. Stupidly, I contemplate the poker, the tongs, the big spoon—all the things she used to flourish as she chattered. There they are—fallen, paralyzed, mute!

As in a dream I go back to the times when she talked and shouted, to days of youth, to days of spring and of springtime dresses; and all the while my gaze, piercing that gay and airy vision, settles on the dark stain of the hand that lies

there like the shadow of a hand, on the sheet.

My eyes are jumbling things together. I see our garden in the first fine days of the year; our garden—it is behind that wall—so narrow is it that the reflected sunshine from our two windows dapples the whole of it; so small that it only holds some pot-encaged plants, except for the three currant bushes which have always been there. In the scarves of the sun rays a bird—a robin—is hopping on the twigs like a rag jewel. All dusty in the sunshine our red hound, Mirliton, is warming himself. So gaunt is he you feel sure he must be a fast runner. Certainly he runs after glimpsed rabbits on Sundays in the country, but he never caught any. He never caught anything but fleas. When I lag behind because of my littleness my aunt turns round, on the edge of the footpath, and holds out her arms, and I run to her, and she stoops as I come and calls me by my name.

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"Simon! Simon!"

A woman is here. I wrench myself from the dream which had come into the room and taken solidity before me. I stand up; it is my cousin Marie.

She offers me her hands among the candles which flutter by the bed. In their poor starlight her face appears haggard and wet. My aunt loved her. Her lips are trembling on her rows of sparkling teeth; the whole breadth of her bosom heaves quickly.

I have sunk again into the armchair. Memories flow again, while the sick woman's breathing is longer drawn, and her stillness becomes more and more inexorable. Things she used to say return to my lips. Then my eyes are raised, and look for Marie, and turn upon her.

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She has leaned against the wall, and remains so—overcome. She invests the corner where she stands with something like profane and sumptuous beauty. Her changeful chestnut hair, like bronze and gold, forms moist and disordered scrolls on her forehead and her innocent cheeks. Her neck, especially, her white neck, appears to me. The atmosphere is so choking, so visibly heavy, that it enshrouds us as if the room were on fire, and she has loosened the neck of her dress, and her throat is lighted up by the flaming logs. I smile weakly at her. My eyes

wander over the fullness of her hips and her outspread shoulders, and fasten, in that downfallen room, on her throat, white as dawn.

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The doctor has been again. He stood some time in silence by the bed; and as he looked our hearts froze. He said it would be over to-night, and put the phial in his hand back in his pocket. Then, regretting that he could not stay, he disappeared.

And we stayed on beside the dying woman—so fragile that we dare not touch her, nor even try to speak to her.

Madame Piot settles down in a chair; she crosses her arms, lowers her head, and the time goes by.

At long intervals people take shape in the darkness by the door; people who come in on tiptoe whisper to us and go away.

The moribund moves her hands and feet and contorts her face. A gurgling comes from her throat, which we can hardly see in the cavity that is like a nest of shadow under her chin. She has blenched, and the skin that is drawn over the bones of her face like a shroud grows whiter every moment.

Intent upon her breathing, we throng about her. We offer her our hands—so near and so far—and do not know what to do.

I am watching Marie. She has sunk onto the little stool, and her young, full-blooming body overflows it. Holding her handkerchief in her teeth, she has come to arrange the pillow, and leaning over the bed, she puts one knee on a chair. The movement reveals her leg for a moment, curved like a beautiful Greek vase, while the skin seems to shine through the black transparency of the stocking, like clouded gold. Ah! I lean forward towards her with a stifled, incipient appeal above this bed, which is changing into a tomb. The border of the tragic dress has fallen again, but I cannot remove my eyes from that profound obscurity. I look at Marie, and look at her again; and though I knew her, it seems to me that I wholly discover her.

"I can't hear anything now," says a woman.

"Yes I can——"

"No, no!" the other repeats.

Then I see Crillon's huge back bending over. My aunt's mouth opens gently and remains open. The eyelids fall back almost completely upon the stiffened gleam of the eyes, which squint in the gray and bony mask. I see Crillon's big hand hover over the little mummified face, lowering the eyelids and keeping them closed.

Marie utters a cry when this movement tells her that our aunt has just died.

She sways. My hand goes out to her. I take her, support, and enfold her. Fainting, she clings to me, and for one moment I carry—gently, heavily—all the young woman's weight. The neck of her dress is undone, and falls like foliage from her throat, and I just saw the real curve of her bosom, nakedly and distractedly throbbing.

Her body is agitated. She hides her face in her hands and then turns it to mine. It chanced that our faces met, and my lips gathered the wonderful savor of her tears!

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The room fills with lamentation; there is a continuous sound of deep sighing. It is overrun by neighbors become friends, to whom no one pays attention.

And now, in this sacred homelet, where death still bleeds, I cannot prevent a heavy heart-beat in me towards the girl who is prostrated like the rest, but who reigns there, in spite of me—of herself—of everything. I feel myself agitated by an obscure and huge rapture—the birth of my flesh and my vitals among these shadows. Beside this poor creature who was so blended with me, and who is falling, falling, through a hell of eternity, I am uplifted by a sort of hope.

I want to fix my attention on the fixity of the bed. I put my hand over my eyes to shut out all thought save of the dead woman, defenseless already, reclining on that earth into which she will sink. But my looks, impelled by superhuman curiosity, escape between my fingers to this other woman, half revealed to me in the tumult of sorrow, and my eyes cannot come out of her.

Madame Piot has changed the candles and attached a band to support the dead woman's chin. Framed in this napkin, which is knotted over the skull in her woolly gray hair, the face looks like a hook-nosed mask of green bronze, with a vitrified line of eyes; the knees make two sharp summits under the sheet; one's eyes run along the thin rods of the shins and the feet lift the linen like two in-driven nails.

Slowly Marie prepares to go. She has closed the neck of her dress and hidden herself in her cloak. She comes up to me, sore-hearted, and with her tears for a moment quenched she smiles at me without speaking. I half rise, my hands tremble towards her smile as if to touch it, above the past and the dust of my

second mother.

Towards the end of the night, when the dead fire is scattering chilliness, the women go away one by one. One hour, two hours, I remain alone. I pace the room in one direction and another, then I look, and shiver. My aunt is no more. There is only left of her something indistinct, struck down, of subterranean color, and her place is desolate. Now, close to her, I am alone! Alone—magnified by my affliction, master of my future, disturbed and numbed by the newness of the things now beginning. At last the window grows pale, the ceiling turns gray, and the candle-flames wink in the first traces of light.

I shiver without end. In the depth of my dawn, in the heart of this room where I have always been, I recall the image of a woman who filled it—a woman standing at the chimney-corner, where a gladsome fire flames, and she is garbed in reflected purple, her corsage scarlet, her face golden, as she holds to the glow those hands transparent and beautiful as flames. In the darkness, from my vigil, I look at her.

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The two nights which followed were spent in mournful motionlessness at the back of that room where the trembling host of lights seemed to give animation to dead things. During the two days various activities brought me distraction, at first distressing, then depressing.

The last night I opened my aunt's jewel box. It was called "the little box." It was on the dressing table, at the bottom of piled-up litter. I found some topaz ear-rings of a bygone period, a gold cross, equally outdistanced, small and slender—a little girl's, or a young girl's; and then, wrapped in tissue paper, like a relic, a portrait of myself when a child. Last, a written page, torn from one of my old school copy-books, which she had not been able to throw wholly away. Transparent at the folds, the worn sheet was fragile as lace, and gave the illusion of being equally precious. That was all the treasure my aunt had collected. That jewel box held the poverty of her life and the wealth of her heart.

* * * * * *

It poured with rain on the day of the funeral. All the morning groups of people succeeded each other in the big cavern of our room, a going and coming of sighs. My aunt was laid in her coffin towards two o'clock, and it was carried then

into the passage, where visitors' feet had brought dirt and puddles. A belated wreath was awaited, and then the umbrellas opened, and under their black undulation the procession moved off.

When we came out of the church it was not far off four o'clock. The rain had not stopped and little rivers dashed down from either side of the procession's sluggish flow along the street. There were many flowers, so that the hearse made a blot of relief, beautiful enough. There were many people, too, and I turned round several times. Always I saw old Eudo, in his black cowl, hopping along in the mud, hunchbacked as a crow. Marie was walking among some women in the second half of the file, whose frail and streaming roof the hearse drew along irregularly with jerks and halts. Her gait was jaded; she was thinking only of our sorrow! All things darkened again to my eyes in the ugliness of the evening.

The cemetery is full of mud under the muslin of fallen rain, and the footfalls make a sticky sound in it. There are a few trees, naked and paralyzed. The sky is marshy and sprinkled with crows.

The coffin, with its shapeless human form, is lowered from the hearse and disappears in the fresh earth.

They march past. Marie and her father take their places beside me. I say thanks to every one in the same tone; they are all like each other, with their gestures of impotence, their dejected faces, the words they get ready and pour out as they pass before me, and their dark costume. No one has come from the castle, but in spite of that there are many people and they all converge upon me. I pluck up courage.

Monsieur Lucien Gozlan comes forward, calls me "my dear sir," and brings me the condolences of his uncles, while the rest watch us.

Joseph Bonéas says "my dear friend" to me, and that affects me deeply. Monsieur Pocard says, "If I had been advised in time I would have said a few words. It is regrettable——"

Others follow; then nothing more is to be seen in the rain, the wind and the gloom but backs.

"It's finished. Let's go."

Marie lifts to me her sorrow-laved face. She is sweet; she is affectionate; she is unhappy; but she does not love me.

We go away in disorder, along by the trees whose skeletons the winter has blackened.

When we arrive in our quarter, twilight has invaded the streets. We hear gusts of talk about the Pocard scheme. Ah, how fiercely people live and seek success!

Little Antoinette, cautiously feeling her way by a big wall, hears us pass. She stops and would look if she could. We espy her figure in that twilight of which she is beginning to make a part, though fine and faint as a pistil.

"Poor little angel!" says a woman, as she goes by.

Marie and her father are the only ones left near me when we pass Rampaille's tavern. Some men who were at the funeral are sitting at tables there, black-clad.

We reach my home; Marie offers me her hand, and we hesitate. "Come in."

She enters. We look at the dead room; the floor is wet, and the wind blows through as if we were out of doors. Both of us are crying, and she says, "I will come to-morrow and tidy up. Till then——"

We take each other's hand in confused hesitation.

* * * * * *

A little later there is a scraping at the door, then a timid knock, and a long figure appears.

It is Véron who presents himself with an awkward air. His tall and badly jointed body swings like a hanging signboard. He is an original and sentimental soul, but no one has ever troubled to find out what he is. He begins, "My young friend —hum, hum—" (he repeats this formless sound every two or three words, like a sort of clock with a sonorous tick)—"One may be wanting money, you know, for something—hum, hum; you need money, perhaps—hum, hum; all this expense —and I'd said to myself 'I'll take him some——'"

He scrutinizes me as he repeats, "Hum, hum." I shake his hand with tears in my

eyes. I do not need money, but I know I shall never forget that action; so good, so supernatural.

And when he has swung himself out, abashed by my refusal, embarrassed by the unusual size of his legs and his heart, I sit down in a corner, seized with shivering. Then I obliterate myself in another corner, equally forlorn. It seems as if Marie has gone away with all I have. I am in mourning and I am all alone, because of her.

CHAPTER IV

MARIE

The seat leans against the gray wall, at the spot where a rose tree hangs over it, and the lane begins to slope to the river. I asked Marie to come, and I am waiting for her in the evening.

When I asked her—in sudden decision after so many days of hesitation—to meet me here this evening, she was silent, astonished. But she did not refuse; she did not answer. Some people came and she went away. I am waiting for her, after that prayer.

Slowly I stroll to the river bank. When I return some one is on the seat, enthroned in the shadow. The face is indistinct, but in the apparel of mourning I can see the neck-opening, like a faint pale heart, and the misty expansion of the skirt. Stooping, I hear her low voice, "I've come, you see." And, "Marie!" I say.

I sit down beside her, and we remain silent. She is there—wholly. Through her black veils I can make out the whiteness of her face and neck and hands—all her beauty, like light enclosed.

For me she had only been a charming picture, a passer-by, one apart, living her own life. Now she has listened to me; she has come at my call; she has brought herself here.

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The day has been scorching. Towards the end of the afternoon storm-rain burst over the world and then ceased. One can still hear belated drops falling from the branches which overhang the wall. The air is charged with odors of earth and leaves and flowers, and wreaths of wind go heavily by.

She is the first to speak; she speaks of one thing and another.

I do not know what she is saying; I draw nearer to see her lips; I answer her, "I am always thinking of you."

Hearing these words, she is silent. Her silence grows greater and greater in the shadows. I have drawn still nearer; so near that I feel on my cheek the wing-beat of her breath; so near that her silence caresses me.

Then, to keep myself in countenance, or to smoke, I have struck a match, but I make no use of the gleam at my finger-tips. It shows me Marie, quivering a little; it gilds her pale face. A smile arises on her face; I have seen her full of that smile.

My eyes grow dim and my hands tremble. I wish she would speak.

"Tell me——" Her down-bent neck unfolds, and she lifts her head to speak. At that moment, by the light of the flame that I hold, whose great revealing kindness I am guarding, our eyes fall on an inscription scratched in the wall—a heart—and inside it two initials, H-S. Ah, that design was made by me one evening. Little Helen was lolling there then, and I thought I adored her. For a moment I am overpowered by this apparition of a mistake, bygone and forgotten. Marie does not know; but seeing those initials, and divining a presence between us, she dare not speak.

As the match is on the point of going out I throw it down. The little flame's last flicker has lighted up for me the edge of the poor black serge skirt, so worn that it shines a little, even in the evening, and has shown me the girl's shoe. There is a hole in the heel of the stocking, and we have both seen it. In quick shame, Marie draws her foot under her skirt; and I—I tremble still more that my eyes have touched a little of her maiden flesh, a fragment of her real innocence.

Gently she stands up in the grayness, and puts an end to this first fate-changing meeting.

We return. The obscurity is outstretched all around and against us. Together and alone we go into the following chambers of the night. My eyes follow the sway of her body in her dress against the vaguely luminous background of the wall. Amid the night her dress is night also; she is there—wholly! There is a singing in my ears; an anthem fills the world.

In the street, where there are no more wayfarers, she walks on the edge of the causeway. So that my face may be on a level with hers, I walk beside her in the gutter, and the cold water enters my boots.

And that evening, inflated by mad longing, I am so triumphantly confident that I do not even remember to shake her hand. By her door I said to her, "To-morrow," and she answered, "Yes."

On one of the days which followed, finding myself free in the afternoon, I made my way to the great populous building of flats where she lives. I ascended two dark flights of steps, closely encaged, and followed a long elbowed corridor. Here it is. I knock and enter. Complete silence greets me. There is no one, and acute disappointment runs through me.

I take some hesitant steps in the tiny vestibule, which is lighted by the glass door to the kitchen, wherein I hear the drip of water. I see a room whose curtains invest it with broidered light. There is a bed in it, with a cover of sky-blue satinette shining like the blue of a chromo. It is Marie's room! Her gray silk hat, rose-trimmed, hangs from a nail on the flowery paper. She has not worn it since my aunt's death; and alongside hang black dresses. I enter this bright blue sanctuary, inhabited only by a cold and snow-like light, and orderly and chaste as a picture.

My hand goes out like a thief's. I touch, I stroke these dresses, which are wont to touch Marie. I turn again to the blue-veiled bed. On a whatnot there are books, and their titles invite me; for where her thoughts dwell, the things which occupy her mind—but I leave them. I would rather go near her bed. With a movement at once mad, frightened and trembling, I lift the quilts that clothe it and my gaze enters it, and my knees lean trembling on the edge of this great lifeless thing, which, alone among dead things, is one of soft and supple flesh.

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My customary life continues and my work is always the same. I make notes, by the way, of Crillon's honest trivialities; of Brisbille's untimely outbursts; of the rumors anent the Pocard scheme, and the progress of the Association of Avengers, a society to promote national awakening, founded by Monsieur Joseph Bonéas. The same complex and monotonous existence bears me along as it does everybody. But since that tragic night when my sorrow was transformed

into joy at the lyke-wake in the old room, in truth the world is no longer what it was. People and things appear to me shadowy and distant when I go out into the current of the crowds; when I am dressing in my room and decide that I look well in black; when I sit up late at my table in the sunshine of hope. Now and again the memory of my aunt comes bodily back to me. Sometimes I hear people pronounce the name of Marie. My body starts when it hears them say "Marie," who know not what they say. And there are moments when our separation throbs so warmly that I do not know whether she is here or absent.

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During this walk that we have just had together the summer and the sweetness of living have weighed more than ever on my shoulders. Her huge home, which is such a swarming hive at certain times, is now immensely empty in the labyrinth of its dark stairs and the landings, whence issue the narrow closed streets of its corridors, and where in the corners taps drip upon drain-stones. Our immense—our naked solitude pervades us. An exquisite emotion takes hold of me while we are slowly climbing the steep and methodical way. There is something human in the stairway; in the inevitable shapes of its spiral and its steps cut out of the quick, in the rhythmic repetition of its steps. A round skylight pierces the sloping roof up there, and it is the only light for this part of the people's house, this poor internal city. The darkness which runs down the walls of the well, whence we are striving to emerge step by step, conceals our laborious climb towards that gap of daylight. Shadowed and secret as we are, it seems to me that we are mounting to heaven.

Oppressed by a common languor, we at last sat down side by side on a step. There is no sound in the building under the one round window bending over us. We lean on each other because of the stair's narrowness. Her warmth enters into me; I feel myself agitated by that obscure light which radiates from her. I share with her the heat of her body and her thought itself. The darkness deepens round us. Hardly can I see the crouching girl there, warm and hollowed like a nest.

I call her by her name, very quietly, and it is as though I made a loud avowal! She turns, and it seems that this is the first time I have seen her naked face. "Kiss me," she says; and without speaking we stammer, and murmur, and laugh.

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Together we are looking at a little square piece of paper. I found it on the seat which the rose-tree overhangs on the edge of the downward lane. Carefully folded, it had a forgotten look, and it was waiting there, detained for a moment by its timorous weight. A few lines of careful writing cover it. We read it:

"I do not know how speaks the pious heart; nothing I know; th' enraptured martyr I. Only I know the tears that brimming start, your beauty blended with your smile to espy."

Then, having read it, we read it again, moved by a mysterious influence. And we finger the chance-captured paper, without knowing what it is, without understanding very well what it says.

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When I asked her to go with me to the cemetery that Sunday, she agreed, as she does to all I ask her. I watched her arms brush the roses as she came in through the gardens. We walked in silence; more and more we are losing the habit of talking to each other. We looked at the latticed and flower-decked square where our aunt sleeps—the garden which is only as big as a woman. Returning from the cemetery by way of the fields, the sun already low, we join hands, seized with triumphant delight.

She is wearing a dress of black delaine, and the skirt, the sleeves and the collar wave in the breeze. Sometimes she turns her radiant face to me and it seems to grow still brighter when she looks at me. Slightly stooping, she walks, though among the grass and flowers whose tints and grace shine in reflection on her forehead and cheeks, she is a giantess. A butterfly precedes us on our path and alights under our eyes, but when we come up it takes wing again, and comes down a little farther and begins all over again; and we smile at the butterfly that thinks of us.

Inlaid with gold by the slanting sun we lead each other, hand in hand, as far as the statue of Flora, which once upon a time a lord of the manor raised on the fringe of the wood. Against the abiding background of distant heights the goddess stands, half-naked, in the beautiful ripe light. Her fair hips are draped with a veil of still whiter stone, like a linen garment. Before the old moss-mellowed pedestal I pressed Marie desperately to my heart. Then, in the sacred solitude of the wood, I put my hands upon her, and so that she might be like the

goddess I unfastened her black bodice, lowered the ribbon shoulder-straps of her chemise, and laid bare her wide and rounded bosom.

She yielded to the adoration with lowered head, and her eyes magnificently troubled, red-flushing with blood and sunshine.

I put my lips on hers. Until that day, whenever I kissed her, her lips submitted. This time she gave me back my long caress, and even her eyes closed upon it. Then she stands there with her hands crossed on her glorious throat, her red, wet lips ajar. She stands there, apart, yet united to me, and her heart on her lips.

She has covered her bosom again. The breeze is suddenly gusty. The apple trees in the orchards are shaken and scatter bird-like jetsam in space; and in that bright green paddock yonder the rows of out-hung linen dance in the sunshine. The sky darkens; the wind rises and prevails. It was that very day of the gale. It assaults our two bodies on the flank of the hill; it comes out of infinity and sets roaring the tawny forest foliage. We can see its agitation behind the black grille of the trunks. It makes us dizzy to watch the swift displacement of the gray-veiled sky, and from cloud to cloud a bird seems hurled, like a stone. We go down towards the bottom of the valley, clinging to the slope, an offering to the deepest breath of heaven, driven forward yet holding each other back.

So, gorged with the gale and deafened by the universal concert of space that goes through our ears, we find sanctuary on the river bank. The water flows between trees whose highest foliage is intermingled. By a dark footpath, soft and damp, under the ogive of the branches, we follow this crystal-paved cloister of green shadow. We come on a flat-bottomed boat, used by the anglers. I make Marie enter it, and it yields and groans under her weight. By the strokes of two old oars we descend the current.

It seems to our hearts and our inventing eyes that the banks take flight on either side—it is the scenery of bushes and trees which retreats. *We*—we abide! But the boat grounds among tall reeds. Marie is half reclining and does not speak. I draw myself towards her on my knees, and the boat quivers as I do. Her face in silence calls me; she calls me wholly. With her prostrate body, surrendered and disordered, she calls me.

I possess her—she is mine! In sublime docility she yields to my violent caress. Now she is mine—mine forever! Henceforth let what may befall; let the years go

by and the winters follow the summers, she is mine, and my life is granted me! Proudly I think of the great and famous lovers whom we resemble. I perceive that there is no recognized law which can stand against the might of love. And under the transient wing of the foliage, amid the continuous recessional of heaven and earth, we repeat "never"; we repeat "always"; and we proclaim it to eternity.

* * * * * *

The leaves are falling; the year draws near to its end; the wedding is arranged to take place about Christmas.

That decision was mine; Marie said "yes," as usual, and her father, absorbed all the day in figures, would emerge from them at night, like a shipwrecked man, seeing darkly, passive, except on rare occasions when he had fits of mad obstinacy, and no one knew why.

In the early morning sometimes, when I was climbing Chestnut Hill on my way to work, Marie would appear before me at a corner, in the pale and blushing dawn. We would walk on together, bathed in those fresh fires, and would watch the town at our feet rising again from its ashes. Or, on my way back, she would suddenly be there, and we would walk side by side towards her home. We loved each other too much to be able to talk. A very few words we exchanged just to entwine our voices, and in speaking of other people we smiled at each other.

One day, about that time, Monsieur the Marquis of Monthyon had the kindly thought of asking us both to an evening party at the castle, with several leading people of our quarter. When all the guests were gathered in a huge gallery, adorned with busts which sat in state between high curtains of red damask, the Marquis took it into his head to cut off the electricity. In a lordly way he liked heavy practical jokes—I was just smiling at Marie, who was standing near me in the middle of the crowded gallery, when suddenly it was dark. I put out my arms and drew her to me. She responded with a spirit she had not shown before, our lips met more passionately than ever, and our single body swayed among the invisible, ejaculating throng that elbowed and jostled us. The light flashed again. We had loosed our hold. Ah, it was not Marie whom I had clasped! The woman fled with a stifled exclamation of shame and indignation towards him who she believed had embraced her, and who had seen nothing. Confused, and as though still blind, I rejoined Marie, but I was myself again with difficulty. In spite of all,

that kiss which had suddenly brought me in naked contact with a complete stranger remained to me an extraordinary and infernal delight. Afterwards, I thought I recognized the woman by her blue dress, half seen at the same time as the gleam of her neck after that brief and dazzling incident. But there were three of them somewhat alike. I never knew which of those unknown women concealed within her flesh the half of the thrill that I could not shake off all the evening.

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There was a large gathering at the wedding. The Marquis and Marchioness of Monthyon appeared at the sacristy. Brisbille, by good luck, stayed away. Good sectarian that he was, he only acknowledged civil marriages. I was a little shamefaced to see march past, taking their share of the fine and tranquil smile distributed by Marie, some women who had formerly been my mistresses—Madame Lacaille, nervous, subtle, mystical; big Victorine and her good-natured rotundity, who had welcomed me any time and anywhere; and Madeleine Chaine; and slender Antonia above all, with the Italian woman's ardent and theatrical face, ebony-framed, and wearing a hat of Parisian splendor. For Antonia is very elegant since she married Véron. I could not help wincing when I saw that lanky woman, who had clung to me in venturesome rooms, now assiduous around us in her ceremonious attire. But how far off and obliterated all that was!

CHAPTER V

DAY BY DAY

We rearranged the house. We did not alter the general arrangement, nor the places of the heavy furniture—that would have been too great a change. But we cast out all the dusty old stuff, the fossilized and worthless knick-knacks that Mame had accumulated. The photographs on the walls, which were dying of jaundice and debility, and which no longer stood for anybody, because of the greatness of time, we cleared out of their imitation tortoiseshell and buried in the depths of drawers.

I bought some furniture, and as we sniffed the odor of varnish which hung about for a long time in the lower room, we said, "This is the real thing." And, indeed, our home was pretty much like the middle-class establishments of our quarter and everywhere. Is it not the only really proud moment here on earth, when we can say, "I, too!"

Years went by. There was nothing remarkable in our life. When I came home in the evening, Marie, who often had not been out and had kept on her dressing-gown and plaits, used to say, "There's been nothing to speak of to-day."

The aeroplanes were appearing at that time. We talked about them, and saw photographs of them in the papers. One Sunday we saw one from our window. We had heard the chopped-up noise of its engine expanding over the sky; and down below, the townsfolk on their doorsteps, raised their heads towards the ceiling of their streets. Rattling space was marked with a dot. We kept our eyes on it and saw the great flat and noisy insect grow bigger and bigger, silhouetting the black of its angles and partitioned lines against the airy wadding of the clouds. When its headlong flight had passed, when it had dwindled in our eyes and ears amid the new world of sounds, which it drew in its train, Marie sighed dreamily.

"I would like," she said, "to go up in an aeroplane, into the wind—into the sky!"

One spring we talked a lot about a trip we would take some day. Some railway posters had been stuck on the walls of the old tin works, that the Pocard scheme was going to transfigure. We looked at them the day they were freshly brilliant in their wet varnish and their smell of paste. We preferred the bill about Corsica, which showed seaside landscapes, harbors with picturesque people in the foreground and a purple mountain behind, all among garlands. And later, even when stiffened and torn and cracking in the wind, that poster attracted us.

One evening, in the kitchen, when we had just come in—there are memories which mysteriously outlive the rest—and Marie was lighting the fire, with her hat on and her hands wiped out in the twilight by the grime of the coal, she said, "We'll make that trip later!"

Sometimes it happened that we went out, she and I, during the week. I looked about me and shared my thoughts with her. Never very talkative, she would listen to me. Coming out of the Place de l'Eglise, which used to affect us so much not long ago, we often used to meet Jean and Genevieve Trompson, near the sunken post where an old jam pot lies on the ground. Everybody used to say of these two, "They'll separate, you'll see; that's what comes of loving each other too much; it was madness, I always said so." And hearing these things, unfortunately true, Marie would murmur, with a sort of obstinate gentleness, "Love is sacred."

Returning, not far from the anachronistic and clandestine Eudo's lair, we used to hear the coughing parrot. That old bird, worn threadbare, and of a faded green hue, never ceased to imitate the fits of coughing which two years before had torn Adolphe Piot's lungs, who died in the midst of his family under such sad circumstances. Those days we would return with our ears full of the obstinate clamor of that recording bird, which had set itself fiercely to immortalize the noise that passed for a moment through the world, and toss the echoes of an ancient calamity, of which everybody had ceased to think.

Almost the only people about us are Marthe, my little sister-in-law, who is six years old, and resembles her sister like a surprising miniature; my father-in-law, who is gradually annihilating himself; and Crillon. This last lives always contented in the same shop while time goes by, like his father and his grandfather, and the cobbler of the fable, his eternal ancestor. Under his square

cap, on the edge of his glazed niche, he soliloquizes, while he smokes the short and juicy pipe which joins him in talking and spitting—indeed, he seems to be answering it. A lonely toiler, his lot is increasingly hard, and almost worthless. He often comes in to us to do little jobs—mend a table leg, re-seat a chair, replace a tile. Then he says, "There's summat I must tell you——"

So he retails the gossip of the district, for it is against his conscience, as he frankly avows, to conceal what he knows. And Heaven knows, there is gossip enough in our quarter!—a complete network, above and below, of quarrels, intrigues and deceptions, woven around man, woman and the public in general. One says, "It *can't* be true!" and then thinks about something else.

And Crillon, in face of all this perversity, all this wrong-doing, smiles! I like to see that happy smile of innocence on the lowly worker's face. He is better than I, and he even understands life better, with his unfailing good sense.

I say to him, "But are there not any bad customs and vices?
Alcoholism, for instance?"

"Yes," says Crillon, "as long as you don't exarrergate it. I don't like exarrergations, and I find as much of it among the pestimists as among the opticions. Drink, you say! It's chiefly that folks haven't enough charitableness, mind you. They blame all these poor devils that drink and they think themselves clever! And they're envious, too; if they wasn't that, tell me, would they stand there in stony peterified silence before the underhand goings-on of bigger folks? That's what it is, at bottom of us. Let me tell you now. I'll say nothing against Termite, though he's a poacher, and for the castle folks that's worse than all, but if yon bandit of a Brisbille weren't the anarchist he is and frightening everybody, I'd excuse him his dirty nose and even not taking it out of a pint pot all the week through. It isn't a crime, isn't only being a good boozer. We've got to look ahead and have a broad spirit, as Monsieur Joseph says. Tolerantness! We all want it, eh?"

"You're a good sort," I say.

"I'm a man, like everybody," proudly replies Crillon. "It's not that I hold by accustomary ideas; I'm not an antiquitary, but I don't like to single-arise myself. If I'm a botcher in life, it's cos I'm the same as others—no less," he says, straightening up. And standing still more erect, he adds, "*Nor* no more, neither!"

When we are not chatting we read aloud. There is a very fine library at the factory, selected by Madame Valentine Gozlan from works of an educational or moral kind, for the use of the staff. Marie, whose imagination goes further afield than mine, and who has not my anxieties, directs the reading. She opens a book and reads aloud while I take my ease, looking at the pastel portrait which hangs just opposite the window. On the glass which entombs the picture I see the gently moving and puffing reflection of the fidgety window curtains, and the face of that glazed portrait becomes blurred with broken streaks and all kinds of wave marks.

"Ah, these adventures!" Marie sometimes sighs, at the end of a chapter; "these things that never happen!"

"Thank Heaven," I cry.

"Alas," she replies.

Even when people live together they differ more than they think!

At other times Marie reads to herself, quite silently. I surprise her absorbed in this occupation. It even happens that she applies herself thus to poetry. In her set and stooping face her eyes come and go over the abbreviated lines of the verses. From time to time she raises them and looks up at the sky, and—vastly further than the visible sky—at all that escapes from the little cage of words.

And sometimes we are lightly touched with boredom.

* * * * * *

One evening Marie informed me that the canary was dead, and she began to cry, as she showed me the open cage and the bird which lay at the bottom, with its feet curled up, as rumpled and stark as the little yellow plaything of a doll. I sympathized with her sorrow; but her tears were endless, and I found her emotion disproportionate.

"Come now," I said, "after all, a bird's only a bird, a mere point that moved a little in a corner of the room. What then? What about the thousands of birds that die, and the people that die, and the poor?" But she shook her head, insisted on grieving, tried to prove to me that it was momentous and that she was right.

For a moment I stood bewildered by this want of understanding; this difference between her way of feeling and mine. It was a disagreeable revelation of the unknown. One might often, in regard to small matters, make a multitude of reflections if one wished; but one does not wish.

* * * * * *

My position at the factory and in our quarter is becoming gradually stronger. By reason of a regular gratuity which I received, we are at last able to put money aside each month, like everybody.

"I say!" cried Crillon, pulling me outside with him, as I was coming in one evening; "I must let you know that you've been spoken of spontanially for the Town Council at the next renewment. They're making a big effort, you know. Monsieur the Marquis is going to stand for the legislative elections—but we've walked into the other quarter," said Crillon, stopping dead. "Come back, come back."

We turned right-about-face.

"This patriotic society of Monsieur Joseph," Crillon went on, "has done a lot of harm to the anarchists. We've all got to let 'em feel our elbows, that's necessential. You've got a foot in the factory, eh? You see the workmen; have a crack of talk with 'em. You ingreasiate yourself with 'em, so's some of 'em'll vote for you. For *them's* the danger."

"It's true that I am very sympathetic to them," I murmured, impressed by this prospect.

Crillon came to a stand in front of the Public Baths. "It's the seventeenth to-day," he explained; "the day of the month when I takes a bath. Oh, yes! I know that *you* go every Thursday; but I'm not of that mind. You're young, of course, and p'raps you have good reason! But you take my tip, and hobnob with the working man. We must bestir ourselves and impell ourselves, what the devil! As for me, I've finished my political efforts for peace and order. It's *your* turn!"

He is right. Looking at the ageing man, I note that his framework is slightly bowed; that his ill-shaven cheeks are humpbacked with little ends of hair turning into white crystals. In his lowly sphere he has done his duty. I reflect upon the mite-like efforts of the unimportant people; of the mountains of tasks performed

by anonymity. They are necessary, these hosts of people so closely resembling each other; for cities are built upon the poor brotherhood of paving-stones.

He is right, as always. I, who am still young; I, who am on a higher level than his; I must play a part, and subdue the desire one has to let things go on as they may.

A sudden movement of will appears in my life, which otherwise proceeds as usual.

CHAPTER VI

A VOICE IN THE EVENING

I approached the workpeople with all possible sympathy. The toiler's lot, moreover, raises interesting problems, which one should seek to understand. So I inform myself in the matter of those around me.

"You want to see the greasers' work? Here I am," said Marcassin, surnamed Pétrolus. "I'm the lamp-man. Before that I was a greaser. Is that any better? Can't say. It's here that that goes on, look—there. My place you'll find at night by letting your nose guide you."

The truth is that the corner of the factory to which he leads me has an aggressive smell. The shapeless walls of this sort of grotto are adorned with shelves full of leaking lamps—lamps dirty as beasts. In a bucket there are old wicks and other departed things. At the foot of a wooden cupboard which looks like iron are lamp glasses in paper shirts; and farther away, groups of oil-drums. All is dilapidated and ruinous; all is dark in this angle of the great building where light is elaborated. The specter of a huge window stands yonder. The panes only half appear; so encrusted are they they might be covered with yellow paper. The great stones—the rocks—of the walls are upholstered with a dark deposit of grease, like the bottom of a stewpan, and nests of dust hang from them. Black puddles gleam on the floor, with beds of slime from the scraping of the lamps.

There he lives and moves, in his armored tunic encrusted with filth as dark as coffee-grounds. In his poor claw he grips the chief implement of his work—a black rag. His grimy hands shine with paraffin, and the oil, sunk and blackened in his nails, gives them a look of wick ends. All day long he cleans lamps, and repairs, and unscrews, and fills, and wipes them. The dirt and the darkness of this population of appliances he attracts to himself, and he works like a nigger.

"For it's got to be well done," he says, "and even when you're fagged out, you must keep on rubbing hard."

"There's six hundred and sixty-three, monsieur" (he says "monsieur" as soon as he embarks on technical explanations), "counting the smart ones in the fine offices, and the lanterns in the wood-yard, and the night watchmen. You'll say to me, 'Why don't they have electricity that lights itself?' It's 'cos that costs money and they get paraffin for next to nothing, it seems, through a big firm 'at they're in with up yonder. As for me, I'm always on my legs, from the morning when I'm tired through sleeping badly, from after dinner when you feel sick with eating, up to the evening, when you're sick of everything."

The bell has rung, and we go away in company. He has pulled off his blue trousers and tunic and thrown them into a corner—two objects which have grown heavy and rusty, like tools. But the dirty shell of his toil did upholster him a little, and he emerges from it gaunter, and horribly squeezed within the littleness of a torturing jacket. His bony legs, in trousers too wide and too short, break off at the bottom in long and mournful shoes, with hillocks, and resembling crocodiles; and their soles, being soaked in paraffin, leave oily footprints, rainbow-hued, in the plastic mud.

Perhaps it is because of this dismal companion towards whom I turn my head, and whom I see trotting slowly and painfully at my side in the rumbling grayness of the evening exodus, that I have a sudden and tragic vision of the people, as in a flash's passing. (I do sometimes get glimpses of the things of life momentarily.) The dark doorway to my vision seems torn asunder. Between these two phantoms in front the sable swarm outspreads. The multitude encumbers the plain that bristles with dark chimneys and cranes, with ladders of iron planted black and vertical in nakedness—a plain vaguely scribbled with geometrical lines, rails and cinder paths—a plain utilized yet barren. In some places about the approaches to the factory cartloads of clinker and cinders have been dumped, and some of it continues to burn like pyres, throwing off dark flames and darker curtains. Higher, the hazy clouds vomited by the tall chimneys come together in broad mountains whose foundations brush the ground and cover the land with a stormy sky. In the depths of these clouds humanity is let loose. The immense expanse of men moves and shouts and rolls in the same course all through the suburb. An inexhaustible echo of cries surrounds us; it is like hell in eruption and begirt by bronze horizons.

At that moment I am afraid of the multitude. It brings something limitless into being, something which surpasses and threatens us; and it seems to me that he who is not with it will one day be trodden underfoot.

My head goes down in thought. I walk close to Marcassin, who gives me the impression of an escaping animal, hopping through the darkness—whether because of his name,[1] or his stench, I do not know. The evening is darkening; the wind is tearing leaves away; it thickens with rain and begins to nip.

[Footnote 1: *Marcassin*—a young wild boar.—Tr.]

My miserable companion's voice comes to me in shreds. He is trying to explain to me the law of unremitting toil. An echo of his murmur reaches my face.

"And that's what one hasn't the least idea of. Because what's nearest to us, often, one doesn't see it."

"Yes, that's true," I say, rather weary of his monotonous complaining.

I try a few words of consolation, knowing that he was recently married. "After all, no one comes bothering you in your own little corner. There's always that. And then, after all, you're going home—your wife is waiting for you. You're lucky——"

"I've no time; or rather, I've no strength. At nights, when I come home I'm too tired—I'm too tired, you understand, to be happy, you see. Every morning I think I shall be, and I'm hoping up till noon; but at night I'm too knocked out, what with walking and rubbing for eleven hours; and on Sundays I'm done in altogether with the week. There's even times that I don't even wash myself when I come in. I just stay with my hands mucky; and on Sundays when I'm cleaned up, it's a nasty one when they say to me, 'You're looking well.'"

And while I am listening to the tragicomical recital which he retails, like a soliloquy, without expecting replies from me—luckily, for I should not know how to answer—I can, in fact, recall those holidays when the face of Pétrolus is embellished by the visible marks of water.

"Apart from that," he goes on, withdrawing his chin into the gray string of his over-large collar; "apart from that, Charlotte, she's very good. She looks after me, and tidies the house, and it's her that lights *our* lamp; and she hides the

books carefully away from me so's I can't grease 'em, and my fingers make prints on 'em like criminals. She's good, but it doesn't turn out well, same as I've told you, and when one's unhappy everything's favorable to being unhappy."

He is silent for a while, and then adds by way of conclusion to all he has said, and to all that one can say, "*My* father, he caved in at fifty. And I shall cave in at fifty, p'raps before."

With his thumb he points through the twilight at that sort of indelible darkness which makes the multitude, "Them others, it's not the same with them. There's those that want to change everything and keep going on that notion. There's those that drink and want to drink, and keep going that way."

I hardly listen to him while he explains to me the grievances of the different groups of workmen, "The molders, monsieur, them, it's a matter of the gangs ——"

Just now, while looking at the population of the factory, I was almost afraid; it seemed to me that these toilers were different sorts of beings from the detached and impecunious people who live around me. When I look at this one I say to myself, "They are the same; they are all alike."

In the distance, and together, they strike fear, and their combination is a menace; but near by they are only the same as this one. One must not look at them in the distance.

Pétrolus gets excited; he makes gestures; he punches in and punches out again with his fist, the hat which is stuck askew on his conical head, over the ears that are pointed like artichoke leaves. He is in front of me, and each of his soles is pierced by a valve which draws in water from the saturated ground.

"The unions, monsieur——" he cries to me in the wind, "why, it's dangerous to point at them. You haven't the right to think any more—that's what they call liberty. If you're in *them*, you've got to be agin the parsons—(I'm willing, but what's that got to do with labor?)—and there's something more serious," the lamp-man adds, in a suddenly changed voice, "you've got to be agin the army,—the *army*!"

And now the poor slave of the lamp seems to take a resolution. He stops and devotionally rolling his Don Quixote eyes in his gloomy, emaciated face, he

says, "*I'm* always thinking about something. What? you'll say. Well, here it is. I belong to the League of Patriots."

As they brighten still more, his eyes are like two live embers in the darkness, "Déroulède!" he cries; "that's the man—he's *my* God!"

Pétrolus raises his voice and gesticulates; he makes great movements in the night at the vision of his idol, to whom his leanness and his long elastic arms give him some resemblance. "He's for war; he's for Alsace-Lorraine, that's what he's for; and above all, he's for nothing else. Ah, that's all there is to it! The Boches have got to disappear off the earth, else it'll be us. Ah, when they talk politics to *me*, I ask 'em, 'Are you for Déroulède, yes or no?' That's enough! I got my schooling any old how, and I know next to nothing but I reckon it's grand, only to think like that, and in the Reserves I'm adjutant[1]—almost an officer, monsieur, just a lamp-man as I am!"

[Footnote 1: A non-com., approximately equivalent to regimental sergeant-major.—Tr.]

He tells me, almost in shouts and signs, because of the wind across the open, that his worship dates from a function at which Paul Déroulède had spoken to him. "He spoke to everybody, an' then he spoke to me, as close to me as you and me; but it was *him*! I wanted an idea, and he gave it to me!"

"Very good," I say to him; "very good. You are a patriot, that's excellent."

I feel that the greatness of this creed surpasses the selfish demands of labor—although I have never had the time to think much about these things—and it strikes me as touching and noble.

A last fiery spasm gets hold of Pétrolus as he espies afar Eudo's pointed house, and he cries that on the great day of revenge there will be some accounts to settle; and then the fervor of this ideal-bearer cools and fades, and is spent along the length of the roads. He is now no more than a poor black bantam which cannot possibly take wing. His face mournfully awakes to the evening. He shuffles along, bows his long and feeble spine, and his spirit and his strength exhausted, he approaches the porch of his house, where Madame Marcassin awaits him.

CHAPTER VII

A SUMMARY

The workmen manifest mistrust and even dislike towards me. Why? I don't know; but my good intentions have gradually got weary.

One after another, sundry women have occupied my life. Antonia Véron was first. Her marriage and mine, their hindrance and restriction, threw us back upon each other as of yore. We found ourselves alone one day in my house—where nothing ever used to happen, and she offered me her lips, irresistibly. The appeal of her sensuality was answered by mine, then, and often later. But the pleasure constantly restored, which impelled me towards her, always ended in dismal enlightenments. She remained a capricious and baffling egotist, and when I came away from her house across the dark suburb among a host of beings vanishing, like myself, I only brought away the memory of her nervous and irritating laugh, and that new wrinkle which clung to her mouth like an implement.

Then younger desires destroyed the old, and gallant adventures begot one another. It is all over with this one and that one whom I adored. When I see them again, I wonder that I can say, at one and the same time, of a being who has not changed, "How I loved her!" and, "How I have ceased to love her!"

All the while performing as a duty my daily task, all the while taking suitable precautions so that Marie may not know and may not suffer, I am looking for the happiness which lives. And truly, when I have a sense of some new assent wavering and making ready, or when I am on the way to a first rendezvous, I feel myself gloriously uplifted, and equal to everything!

This fills my life. Desire wears the brain as much as thought wears it. All my being is agog for chances to shine and to be shared. When they say in my presence of some young woman that, "she is not happy," a thrill of joy tears

through me.

On Sundays, among the crowds, I have often felt my heart tighten with distress as I watch the unknown women. Reverie has often held me all day because of one who has gone by and disappeared, leaving me a clear vision of her curtained room, and of herself, vibrating like a harp. She, perhaps, was the one I should have always loved; she whom I seek gropingly, desperately, from each to the next. Ah, what a delightful thing to see and to think of a distant woman always is, whoever she may be!

There are moments when I suffer, and am to be pitied. Assuredly, if one could read me really, no one would pity me. And yet all men are like me. If they are gifted with acceptable physique they dream of headlong adventures, they attempt them, and our heart never stands still. But no one acknowledges that, no one, ever.

Then, there were the women who turned me a cold shoulder; and among them all Madame Pierron, a beautiful and genteel woman of twenty-five years, with her black fillets and her marble profile, who still retained the obvious awkwardness and vacant eye of young married women. Tranquil, staid and silent, she came and went and lived, totally blind to my looks of admiration.

This perfect unconcern aggravated my passion. I remember my pangs one morning in June, when I saw some feminine linen spread upon the green hedge within her garden. The delicate white things marshaled there were waiting, stirred by the leaves and the breeze; so that Spring lent them frail shape and sweetness—and life. I remember, too, a gaunt house, scorching in the sun, and a window which flashed and then shut! The window stayed shut, like a slab. All the world was silent; and that splendid living being was walled up there. And last, I have recollection of an evening when, in the bluish and dark green and chalky landscape of the town and its rounded gardens, I saw that window lighted up. A narrow glimmer of rose and gold was enframed there, and I could distinguish, leaning on the sill that overhung the town, in the heart of that resplendence, a feminine form which stirred before my eyes in inaccessible forbearance. Long did I watch with shaking knees that window dawning upon space, as the shepherd watches the rising of Venus. That evening, when I had come in and was alone for a moment—Marie was busy below in the kitchen—alone in our unattractive room, I retired to the starry window, beset by immense thoughts. These spaces, these separations, these incalculable durations—they all

reduce us to dust, they all have a sort of fearful splendor from which we seek defense in our hiding.

* * * * * *

I have not retained a definite recollection of a period of jealousy from which I suffered for a year. From certain facts, certain profound changes of mood in Marie, it seemed to me that there was some one between her and me. But beyond vague symptoms and these terrible reflections on her, I never knew anything. The truth, everywhere around me, was only a phantom of truth. I experienced acute internal wounds of humiliation and shame, of rebellion! I struggled feebly, as well as I could, against a mystery too great for me, and then my suspicions wore themselves out. I fled from the nightmare, and by a strong effort I forgot it. Perhaps my imputations had no basis; but it is curious how one ends in only believing what one wants to believe.

* * * * * *

Something which had been plotting a long while among the Socialist extremists suddenly produced a stoppage of work at the factory, and this was followed by demonstrations which rolled through the terrified town. Everywhere the shutters went up. The business people blotted out their shops, and the town looked like a tragic Sunday.

"It's a revolution!" said Marie to me, turning pale, as Benoît cried to us from the step of our porch the news that the workmen were marching. "How does it come about that you knew nothing at the factory?"

An hour later we learned that a delegation composed of the most dangerous ringleaders was preceding the army of demonstrators, commissioned to extort outrageous advantages, with threats, from Messrs. Gozlan.

Our quarter had a loose and dejected look. People went furtively, seeking news, and doors half opened regretfully. Here and there groups formed and lamented in undertones the public authority's lack of foresight, the insufficient measures for preserving order.

Rumors were peddled about on the progress of the demonstration.

"They're crossing the river."

"They're at the Calvary cross-roads."

"It's a march against the castle!"

I went into Fontan's. He was not there, and some men were talking in the twilight of the closed shutters.

"The Baroness is in a dreadful way. She's seen a dark mass in the distance. Some young men of the aristocracy have armed themselves and are guarding her. She says it's another Jacquerie[1] rising!"

[Footnote 1: A terrible insurrection of the French peasantry in 1358.—Tr.]

"Ah, my God! What a mess!" said Crillon.

"It's the beginning of the end!" asserted old Daddy Ponce, shaking his grayish-yellow forehead, all plaited with wrinkles.

Time went by—still no news. What are they doing yonder? What shall we hear next?

At last, towards three o'clock Postaire is framed in the doorway, sweating and exultant. "It's over! It's all right, my lad!" he gasps; "I can vouch for it that they all arrived together at the Gozlans' villa. Messrs. Gozlan were there. The delegates, I can vouch for it that they started shouting and threatening, my lad! 'Never mind that!' says one of the Messrs. Gozlan, 'let's have a drink first; I'll vouch for it we'll talk better after!' There was a table and champagne, I'll vouch for it. They gave 'em it to drink, and then some more and then some more. I'll vouch for it they sent themselves something down, my lad, into their waistcoats. I can vouch for it that the bottles of champagne came like magic out of the ground. Fontan kept always bringing them as though he was coining them. Got to admit it was an extra-double-special guaranteed champagne, that you want to go cautious with. So then, after three-quarters of an hour, nearly all the deputation were drunk. They spun round, tongue-tied, and embraced each other, —I can vouch for it. There were some that stuck it, but they didn't count, my lad! The others didn't even know what they'd come for. And the bosses; they'd had a fright, and they didn't half wriggle and roar with laughing—I'll vouch for it, my lad! An' then, to-morrow, if they want to start again, there'll be troops here!"

Joyful astonishment—the strike had been drowned in wine! And we repeated to

each other, "To-morrow there'll be the military!"

"Ah!" gaped Crillon, rolling wonder-struck eyes, "That's clever! Good; that's clever, that is! Good, old chap——"

He laughed a heavy, vengeful laugh, and repeated his familiar refrain full-throated: "The sovereign people that can't stand on its own legs!"

By the side of a few faint-hearted citizens who had already, since the morning, modified their political opinions, a great figure rises before my eyes—Fontan. I remember that night, already long ago, when a chance glimpse through the vent-hole of his cellar showed me shiploads of bottles of champagne heaped together, and pointed like shells. For some future day he foresaw to-day's victory. He is really clever, he sees clearly and he sees far. He has rescued law and order by a sort of genius.

The constraint which has weighed all day on our gestures and words explodes in delight. Noisily we cast off that demeanor of conspirators which has bent our shoulders since morning. The windows that were closed during the weighty hours of the insurrection are opened wide; the houses breathe again.

"We're saved from that gang!" people say, when they approach each other.

This feeling of deliverance pervades the most lowly. On the step of the little blood-red restaurant I spy Monsieur Mielvaque, hopping for joy. He is shivering, too, in his thin gray coat, cracked with wrinkles, that looks like wrapping paper; and one would say that his dwindled face had at long last caught the hue of the folios he desperately copies among his long days and his short nights, to pick up some sprigs of extra pay. There he stands, not daring to enter the restaurant (for a reason he knows too well); but how delighted he is with the day's triumph for society! And Mademoiselle Constantine, the dressmaker, incurably poor and worn away by her sewing-machine, is overjoyed. She opens wide the eyes which seem eternally full of tears, and in the grayish abiding half-mourning of imperfect cleanliness, in pallid excitement, she claps her hands.

Marie and I can hear the furious desperate hammering of Brisbille in his forge, and we begin to laugh as we have not laughed for a long time.

At night, before going to sleep, I recall my former democratic fancies. Thank God, I have escaped from a great peril! I can see it clearly by the terror which

the workmen's menace spread in decent circles, and by the universal joy which greeted their recoil! My deepest tendencies take hold of me again for good, and everything settles down as before.

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Much time has gone by. It is ten years now since I was married, and in that lapse of time there is hardly a happening that I remember, unless it be the disillusion of the death of Marie's rich godmother, who left us nothing. There was the failure of the Pocard scheme, which was only a swindle and ruined many small people. Politics pervaded the scandal, while certain people hurried with their money to Monsieur Boulaque, whose scheme was much more safe and substantial. There was also my father-in-law's illness and his death, which was a great shock to Marie, and put us into black clothes.

I have not changed. Marie *has* somewhat. She has got stouter; her eyelids look tired and red, and she buries herself in silences. We are no longer quite in accord in details of our life. She who once always said "Yes," is now primarily disposed to say "No." If I insist she defends her opinion, obstinately, sourly; and sometimes dishonestly. For example, in the matter of pulling down the partition downstairs, if people had heard our high voices they would have thought there was a quarrel. Following some of our discussions, she keeps her face contracted and spiteful, or assumes the martyr's air, and sometimes there are moments of hatred between us.

Often she says, while talking of something else, "Ah, if we had had a child, all would have been different!"

I am becoming personally negligent, through a sort of idleness, against which I have not sufficient grounds for reaction. When we are by ourselves, at meal times, my hands are sometimes questionable. From day to day, and from month to month, I defer going to the dentist and postpone the attention required. I am allowing my molars to get jagged.

Marie never shows any jealousy, nor even suspicion about my personal adventures. Her trust is almost excessive! She is not very far-seeing, or else I am nothing very much to her, and I have a grudge against her for this indifference.

And now I see around me women who are too young to love me. That most positive of obstacles, the age difference, begins to separate me from the

amorous. And yet I am not surfeited with love, and I yearn towards youth! Marthe, my little sister-in-law, said to me one day, "Now that you're old——" That a child of fifteen years, so freshly dawned and really new, can bring herself to pass this artless judgment on a man of thirty-five—that is fate's first warning, the first sad day which tells us at midsummer that winter will come.

One evening, as I entered the room, I indistinctly saw Marie, sitting and musing by the window. As I came in she got up—it was Marthe! The light from the sky, pale as a dawn, had blenched the young girl's golden hair and turned the trace of a smile on her cheek into something like a wrinkle. Cruelly, the play of the light showed her face faded and her neck flabby; and because she had been yawning, even her eyes were watery, and for some seconds the lids were sunk and reddened.

The resemblance of the two sisters tortured me. This little Marthe, with her luxurious and appetizing color, her warm pink cheeks and moist lips; this plump adolescent whose short skirt shows her curving calves, is an affecting picture of what Marie was. It is a sort of terrible revelation. In truth Marthe resembles, more than the Marie of to-day does, the Marie whom I formerly loved; the Marie who came out of the unknown, whom I saw one evening sitting on the rose-tree seat, shining, silent—in the presence of love.

It required a great effort on my part not to try, weakly and vainly, to approach Marthe—the impossible dream, the dream of dreams! She has a little love affair with a youngster hardly molted into adolescence, and rather absurd, whom one catches sight of now and again as he slips away from her side; and that day when she sang so much in spite of herself, it was because a little rival was ill. I am as much a stranger to her girlish growing triumph and to her thoughts as if I were her enemy! One morning when she was capering and laughing, flower-crowned, at the doorstep, she looked to me like a being from another world.

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One winter's day, when Marie had gone out and I was arranging my papers, I found a letter I had written not long before, but had not posted, and I threw the useless document on the fire. When Marie came back in the evening, she settled herself in front of the fire to dry herself, and to revive it for the room's twilight; and the letter, which had been only in part consumed, took fire again. And suddenly there gleamed in the night a shred of paper with a shred of my writing

—"*I love you as much as you love me*!"

And it was so clear, the inscription that flamed in the darkness, that it was not worth while even to attempt an explanation.

We could not speak, nor even look at each other! In the fatal communion of thought which seized us just then, we turned aside from each other, even shadow-veiled as we were. We fled from the truth! In these great happenings we become strangers to each other for the reason that we never knew each other profoundly. We are vaguely separated on earth from everybody else, but we are mightily distant from our nearest.

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After all these things, my former life resumed its indifferent course. Certainly I am not so unhappy as they who have the bleeding wound of a bereavement or remorse, but I am not so delighted with life as I once hoped to be. Ah, men's love and women's beauty are too short-lived in this world; and yet, is it not only thereby that we and they exist? It might be said that love, so pure a thing, the only one worth while in life, is a crime, since it is always punished sooner or later. I do not understand. We are a pitiful lot; and everywhere about us—in our movements, within our walls, and from hour to hour, there is a stifling mediocrity. Fate's face is gray.

Notwithstanding, my personal position has established itself and progressively improved. I am getting three hundred and sixty francs a month, and besides, I have a share in the profits of the litigation office—about fifty francs a month. It is a year and a half since I was stagnating in the little glass office, to which Monsieur Mielvaque has been promoted, succeeding me. Nowadays they say to me, "You're lucky!" They envy me—who once envied so many people. It astonishes me at first, then I get used to it.

I have restored my political plans, but this time I have a rational and normal policy in view. I am nominated to succeed Crillon in the Town Council. There, no doubt, I shall arrive sooner or later. I continue to become a personality by the force of circumstances, without my noticing it, and without any real interest in me on the part of those around me.

Quite a piece of my life has now gone by. When sometimes I think of that, I am surprised at the length of the time elapsed; at the number of the days and the

years that are dead. It has come quickly, and without much change in myself on the other hand; and I turn away from that vision, at once real and supernatural. And yet, in spite of myself, my future appears before my eyes—and its end. My future will resemble my past; it does so already. I can dimly see all my life, from one end to the other, all that I am, all that I shall have been.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BRAWLER

At the time of the great military maneuvers of September, 1913, Viviers was an important center of the operations. All the district was brightened with a swarming of red and blue and with martial ardor.

Alone and systematically, Brisbille was the reviler. From the top of Chestnut Hill, where we were watching a strategical display, he pointed at the military mass. "Maneuvers, do they call them? I could die of laughing! The red caps have dug trenches and the white-band caps have bunged 'em up again. Take away the War Office, and you've only kids' games left."

"It's war!" explained an influential military correspondent, who was standing by.

Then the journalist talked with a colleague about the Russians.

"The Russians!" Brisbille broke in; "when they've formed a republic——"

"He's a simpleton," said the journalist, smiling.

The inebriate jumped astride his hobby horse. "War me no war, it's all lunacy! And look, look—look at those red trousers that you can see miles away! They must do it on purpose for soldiers to be killed, that they don't dress 'em in the color of nothing at all!"

A lady could not help breaking in here: "What?" Change our little soldiers' red trousers? Impossible! There's no good reason for it. They would never consent! They would rebel."

"Egad!" said a young officer; "why we should all throw up our commissions! And any way, the red trousers are not the danger one thinks. If they were as

visible as all that, the High Command would have noticed it and would have taken steps—just for field service, and without interfering with the parade uniform!"

The regimental sergeant-major cut the discussion short as he turned to Brisbille with vibrant scorn and said, "When the Day of Revenge comes, *we* shall have to be there to defend *you*!"

And Brisbille only uttered a shapeless reply, for the sergeant-major was an athlete, and gifted with a bad temper, especially when others were present.

The castle was quartering a Staff. Hunting parties were given for the occasion in the manorial demesne, and passing processions of bedizened guests were seen. Among the generals and nobles shone an Austrian prince of the blood royal, who bore one of the great names in the Almanach de Gotha, and who was officially in France to follow the military operations.

The presence of the Baroness's semi-Imperial guest caused a great impression of historic glamour to hover over the country. His name was repeated; his windows were pointed out in the middle of the principal front, and one thought himself lucky if he saw the curtains moving. Many families of poor people detached themselves from their quarters in the evenings to take up positions before the wall behind which he was.

Marie and I, we were close to him twice.

One evening after dinner, we met him as one meets any passer-by among the rest. He was walking alone, covered by a great gray waterproof. His felt hat was adorned with a short feather. He displayed the characteristic features of his race —a long turned-down nose and a receding chin.

When he had gone by, Marie and I said, both at the same time, and a little dazzled, "An eagle!"

We saw him again at the end of a stag-hunt. They had driven a stag into the Morteuil forest. The *mort* took place in a clearing in the park, near the outer wall. The Baroness, who always thought of the townsfolk, had ordered the little gate to be opened which gives into this part of the demesne, so that the public could be present at the spectacle.

It was imperious and pompous. The scene one entered, on leaving the sunny fields and passing through the gate, was a huge circle of dark foliage in the heart of the ancient forest. At first, one saw only the majestic summits of mountainous trees, like peaks and globes lost amid the heavens, which on all sides overhung the clearing and bathed it in twilight almost green.

In this lordly solemnity of nature, down among the grass, moss and dead wood, there flowed a contracted but brilliant concourse around the final preparations for the execution of the stag.

The animal was kneeling on the ground, weak and overwhelmed. We pressed round, and eyes were thrust forward between heads and shoulders to see him. One could make out the gray thicket of his antlers, his great lolling tongue, and the enormous throb of his heart, agitating his exhausted body. A little wounded fawn clung to him, bleeding abundantly, flowing like a spring.

Round about it the ceremony was arranged in several circles. The beaters, in ranks, made a glaring red patch in the moist green atmosphere. The hunters, men and women, all dismounted, in scarlet coats and black hats, crowded together. Apart, the saddle and tackle horses snorted, with creaking of leather and jingle of metal. Kept at a respectful distance by a rope extended hastily on posts, the inquisitive crowd flowed and increased every instant.

The blood which issued from the little fawn made a widening pool, and one saw the ladies of the hunt, who came to look as near as possible, pluck up their habits so that they would not tread in it. The sight of the great stag crushed by weariness, gradually drooping his branching head, tormented by the howls of the hounds which the whipper-in held back with difficulty, and that of the little one, cowering beside him and dying with gaping throat, would have been touching had one given way to sentiment.

I noticed that the imminent slaying of the stag excited a certain curious fever. Around me the women and young girls especially elbowed and wriggled their way to the front, and shuddered, and were glad.

They cut the throats of the beasts, the big and the little, amid absolute and religious silence, the silence of a sacrament. Madame Lacaille vibrated from head to foot. Marie was calm, but there was a gleam in her eyes; and little Marthe, who was hanging on to me, dug her nails into my arm. The prince was

prominent on our side, watching the last act of the run. He had remained in the saddle. He was more splendidly red than the others—empurpled, it seemed, by reflections from a throne. He spoke in a loud voice, like one who is accustomed to govern and likes to discourse; and his outline had the very form of bidding. He expressed himself admirably in our language, of which he knew the intimate graduations. I heard him saying, "These great maneuvers, after all, they're a sham. It's music-hall war, directed by scene-shifters. Hunting's better, because there's blood. We get too much unaccustomed to blood, in our prosaic, humanitarian, and bleating age. Ah, as long as the nations love hunting, I shall not despair of them!"

Just then, the crash of the horns and the thunder of the pack released drowned all other sounds. The prince, erect in his stirrups, and raising his proud head and his tawny mustache above the bloody and cringing mob of the hounds, expanded his nostrils and seemed to sniff a battlefield.

The next day, when a few of us were chatting together in the street near the sunken post where the old jam-pot lies, Benoît came up, full of a tale to tell. Naturally it was about the prince. Benoît was dejected and his lips were drawn and trembling. "He's killed a bear!" said he, with glittering eye; "you should have seen it, ah! a tame bear, of course. Listen—he was coming back from hunting with the Marquis and Mademoiselle Berthe and some people behind. And he comes on a wandering showman with a performing bear. A simpleton with long black hair like feathers, and a bear that sat on its rump and did little tricks and wore a belt. The prince had got his gun. I don't know how it came about but the prince he got an idea. He said, 'I'd like to kill that bear, as I do in my own hunting. Tell me, my good fellow, how much shall I pay you for firing at the beast? You'll not be a loser, I promise you.' The simpleton began to tremble and lift his arms up in the air. He loved his bear! 'But my bear's the same as my brother!' he says. Then do you know what the Marquis of Monthyon did? He just simply took out his purse and opened it and put it under the chap's nose; and all the smart hunting folk they laughed to see how the simpleton changed when he saw all those bank notes. And naturally he ended by nodding that it was a bargain, and he'd even seen so many of the rustlers that he turned from crying to laughing! Then the prince loaded his gun at ten paces from the bear and killed it with one shot, my boy; just when he was rocking left and right, and sitting up like a man. You ought to have seen it! There weren't a lot there; but *I* was there!"

The story made an impression. No one spoke at first. Then some one risked the

opinion. "No doubt they do things like that in Hungary or Bohemia, or where he reigns. You wouldn't see it here," he added, innocently.

"He's from Austria," Tudor corrected.

"Yes," muttered Crillon, "but whether he's Austrian or whether he's Bohemian or Hungarian, he's a grandee, so he's got the right to do what he likes, eh?"

Eudo looked as if he would intervene at this point and was seeking words. (Not long before that he had had the queer notion of sheltering and nursing a crippled hind that had escaped from a previous run, and his act had given great displeasure in high places.) So as soon as he opened his mouth we made him shut it. The idea of Eudo in judgment on princes!

And the rest lowered their heads and nodded and murmured, "Yes, he's a grandee."

And the little phrase spread abroad, timidly and obscurely.

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When All Saints' Day came round, many of the distinguished visitors at the castle were still there. Every year that festival gives us occasion for an historical ceremony on the grand scale. At two o'clock all the townsfolk that matter gather with bunches of flowers on the esplanade or in front of the cemetery half-way up Chestnut Hill, for the ceremony and an open air service.

Early in the afternoon I betook myself with Marie to the scene. I put on a fancy waistcoat of black and white check and my new patent leather boots, which make me look at them. It is fine weather on this Sunday of Sundays, and the bells are ringing. Everywhere the hurrying crowd climbs the hill—peasants in flat caps, working families in their best clothes, young girls with faces white and glossy as the bridal satin which is the color of their thoughts, young men carrying jars of flowers. All these appear on the esplanade, where graying lime trees are also in assembly. Children are sitting on the ground.

Monsieur Joseph Bonéas, in black, with his supremely distinguished air, goes by holding his mother's arm. I bow deeply to them. He points at the unfolding spectacle as he passes and says, "It is our race's festival."

The words made me look more seriously at the scene before my eyes—all this tranquil and contemplative stir in the heart of festive nature. Reflection and the vexations of my life have mellowed my mind. The idea at last becomes clear in my brain of an entirety, an immense multitude in space, and infinite in time, a multitude of which I am an integral part, which has shaped me in its image, which continues to keep me like it, and carries me along its control; my own people.

Baroness Grille, in the riding habit that she almost always wears when mixing with the people, is standing near the imposing entry to the cemetery. Monsieur the Marquis of Monthyon is holding aloft his stately presence, his handsome and energetic face. Solid and sporting, with dazzling shirt cuffs and fine ebon-black shoes, he parades a smile. There is an M.P. too, a former Minister, very assiduous, who chats with the old duke. There are the Messrs. Gozlan and famous people whose names one does not know. Members of the Institute of the great learned associations, or people fabulously wealthy.

Not far from these groups, which are divided from the rest by a scarlet barrier of beaters and the flashing chain of their slung horns, arises Monsieur Fontan. The huge merchant and café-owner occupies an intermediate and isolated place between principals and people. His face is disposed in fat white tiers, like a Buddha's belly. Monumentally motionless he says nothing at all, but he tranquilly spits all around him. He radiates saliva.

And for this ceremony, which seems like an apotheosis, all the notables of our quarter are gathered together, as well as those of the other quarter, who seem different and are similar.

We elbow the ordinary types. Apolline goes crabwise. She is in new things, and has sprinkled Eau-de-Cologne on her skin; her eye is bright; her face well-polished; her ears richly adorned. She is always rather dirty, and her wrists might be branches, but she has cotton gloves. There are some shadows in the picture, for Brisbille has come with his crony, Termite, so that his offensive and untidy presence may be a protest. There is another blot—a working man's wife, who speaks at their meetings; people point at her. "What's that woman doing here?"

"She doesn't believe in God," says some one.

"Ah," says a mother standing by, "that's because she has no children."

"Yes, she's got two."

"Then," says the poor woman, "it's because they've never been ill."

Here is little Antoinette and the old priest is holding her hand. She must be fifteen or sixteen years old by now, and she has not grown—or, at least, one has not noticed it. Father Piot, always white, gentle and murmurous, has shrunk a little; more and more he leans towards the tomb. Both of them proceed in tiny steps.

"They're going to cure her, it seems. They're seeing to it seriously."

"Yes—the extraordinary secret remedy they say they're going to try."

"No, it's not that now. It's the new doctor who's come to live here, and he says, they say, that he's going to see about it."

"Poor little angel!"

The almost blind child, whose Christian name alone one knows, and whose health is the object of so much solicitude, goes stiffly by, as if she were dumb also, and deaf to all the prayers that go on with her.

After the service some one comes forward and begins to speak. He is an old man, an officer of the Legion of Honor; his voice is weak but his face noble.

He speaks of the Dead, whose day this is. He explains to us that we are not separated from them; not only by reason of the future life and our sacred creeds, but because our life on earth must be purely and simply a continuation of theirs. We must do as they did, and believe what they believed, else shall we fall into error and utopianism. We are all linked to each other and with the past; we are bound together by an entirety of traditions and precepts. Our normal destiny, so adequate to our nature, must be allowed to fulfill itself along the indicated path, without hearkening to the temptations of novelty, of hate, of envy—of envy above all, that social cancer, that enemy of the great civic virtue—Discipline.

He ceases. The echo of the great magnificent words floats in the silence. Everybody does not understand all that has just been said; but all have a deep impression that the text is one of simplicity, of moderation, of obedience, and foreheads move altogether in the breath of the phrases like a field in the breeze.

"Yes," says Crillon, pensively, "he speaks to confection, that gentleman. All that one thinks about, you can see it come out of his mouth. Common sense and reverence, we're attached to 'em by something."

"We are attached to them by orderliness," says Joseph Bonéas.

"The proof that it's the truth," Crillon urges, "is that it's in the dissertions of everybody."

"To be sure!" says Benoît, going a bit farther, "since everybody says it, and it's become a general repetition!"

The good old priest, in the center of an attentive circle, is unstringing a few observations. "Er, hem," he says, "one should not blaspheme. Ah, if there were not a good God, there would be many things to say; but so long as there is a good God, all that happens is adorable, as Monseigneur said. We shall make things better, certainly. Poverty and public calamities and war, we shall change all that, we shall set those things to rights, er, hem! But let us alone, above all, and don't concern yourselves with it—you would spoil everything, my children. *We* shall do all that, but not immediately."

"Quite so, quite so," we say in chorus.

"Can we be happy all at once," the old man goes on; "change misery into joy, and poverty into riches? Come now, it's not possible, and I'll tell you why; if it had been as easy as all that, it would have been done already, wouldn't it?"

The bells begin to ring. The four strokes of the hour are just falling from the steeple which the rising mists touch already, though the evening makes use of it last of all; and just then one would say that the church is beginning to talk even while it is singing.

The important people get onto their horses or into their carriages and go away—a cavalcade where uniforms gleam and gold glitters. We can see the procession of the potentates of the day outlined on the crest of the hill which is full of our dead. They climb and disappear, one by one. *Our* way is downward; but we form —they above and we below—one and the same mass, all visible together.

"It's fine!" says Marie, "it looks as if they were galloping over us!"

They are the shining vanguard that protects us, the great eternal framework which upholds our country, the forces of the mighty past which illuminate it and protect it against enemies and revolutions.

And we, we are all alike, in spite of our different minds; alike in the greatness of our common interests and even in the littleness of our personal aims. I have become increasingly conscious of this close concord of the masses beneath a huge and respect-inspiring hierarchy. It permits a sort of lofty consolation and is exactly adapted to a life like mine. This evening, by the light of the setting sun, I see it and read it and admire it.

All together we go down by the fields where tranquil corn is growing, by the gardens and orchards where homely trees are making ready their offerings—the scented blossom which lends, the fruit which gives itself. They form an immense plain, sloping and darkling, with brown undulations under the blue which now alone is becoming green. A little girl, who has come from the spring, puts down her bucket and stands at the roadside like a post, looking with all her eyes. She looks at the marching multitude with beaming curiosity. Her littleness embraces that immensity, because it is all a part of Order. A peasant who has stuck to his work in spite of the festival and is bent over the deep shadows of his field, raises himself from the earth which is so like him, and turns towards the golden sun the shining monstrance of his face.

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But what is this—this sort of madman, who stands in the middle of the road and looks as if, all by himself, he would bar the crowd's passage? We recognize Brisbille, swaying tipsily in the twilight. There is an eddy and a muttering in the flow.

"D'you want to know where all that's leading you?" he roars, and nothing more can be heard but his voice. "It's leading you to hell! It's the old rotten society, with the profiteering of all them that can, and the stupidity of the rest! To hell, I tell you! To-morrow look out for yourselves! To-morrow!"

A woman's voice cries from out of the shadows, in a sort of scuffle,
"Be quiet, wicked man! You've no right to frighten folks!"

But the drunkard continues to shout full-throated, "To-morrow! To-morrow! D'you think things will always go on like that? You're fit for killing! To hell!"

Some people are impressed and disappear into the evening. Those who are marking time around the obscure fanatic are growling, "He's not only bad, he's mad, the dirty beast!"

"It's disgraceful," says the young curate.

Brisbille goes up to him. "*You* tell me, then, *you*, what'll happen very soon—Jesuit, puppet, land-shark! We know you, you and your filthy, poisonous trade!"

"*Say that again*!"

It was I who said that. Leaving Marie's arm instinctively I sprang forward and planted myself before the sinister person. After the horrified murmur which followed the insult, a great silence had fallen on the scene.

Astounded, and his face suddenly filling with fear, Brisbille stumbles and beats a retreat.

The crowd regains confidence, and laughs, and congratulates me, and reviles the back of the man who is sinking in the stream.

"You were fine!" Marie said to me when I took her arm again, slightly trembling.

I returned home elated by my energetic act, still all of a tremor, proud and happy. I have obeyed the prompting of my blood. It was the great ancestral instinct which made me clench my fists and throw myself bodily, like a weapon, upon the enemy of all.

After dinner, naturally, I went to the military tattoo, at which, by an unpardonable indifference, I have not regularly been present, although these patriotic demonstrations have been organized by Monsieur Joseph Bonéas and his League of Avengers. A long-drawn shudder, shrill and sonorous, took flight through the main streets, filling the spectators and especially the young folks, with enthusiasm for the great and glorious deeds of the future. And Pétrolus, in the front row of the crowd, was striding along in the crimson glow of the fairy-lamps—clad in a visionary uniform of red.

I remember that I talked a great deal that evening in our quarter, and then in the house. Our quarter is something like all towns, something like all country-sides, something like it is everywhere—it is a foreshortened picture of all societies in

the old universe, as my life is a picture of life.

CHAPTER IX

THE STORM

"There's going to be war," said Benoît, on our doorsteps in July.

"No," said Crillon, who was there, too, "I know well enough there'll be war some day, seeing there's always been war after war since the world was a world, and therefore there'll be another; but just now—at once—a big job like that? Nonsense! It's not true. No."

Some days went by, tranquilly, as days do. Then the great story reappeared, increased and branched out in all directions. Austria, Serbia, the ultimatum, Russia. The notion of war was soon everywhere. You could see it distracting men and slackening their pace in the going and coming of work. One divined it behind the doors and windows of the houses.

One Saturday evening, when Marie and I—like most of the French—did not know what to think, and talked emptily, we heard the town crier, who performs in our quarter, as in the villages.

"Ah!" she said.

We went out and saw in the distance the back of the man who was tapping a drum. His smock was ballooned. He seemed pushed aslant by the wind, stiffening himself in the summer twilight to sound his muffled roll. Although we could not see him well and scarcely heard him, his progress through the street had something grand about it.

Some people grouped in a corner said to us, "The mobilization."

No other word left their lips. I went from group to group to form an opinion, but

people drew back with sealed faces, or mechanically raised their arms heavenwards. And we knew no better what to think now that we were at last informed.

We went back into the court, the passage, the room, and then I said to Marie, "I go on the ninth day—a week, day after to-morrow—to my depot at Motteville."

She looked at me, as though doubtful.

I took my military pay book from the wardrobe and opened it on the table. Leaning against each other, we looked chastely at the red page where the day of my joining was written, and we spelled it all out as if we were learning to read.

Next day and the following days everybody went headlong to meet the newspapers. We read in them—and under their different titles they were then all alike—that a great and unanimous upspringing was electrifying France, and the little crowd that we were felt itself also caught by the rush of enthusiasm and resolution. We looked at each other with shining eyes of approval. I, too, I heard myself cry, "At last!" All our patriotism rose to the surface.

Our quarter grew fevered. We made speeches, we proclaimed the moral verities —or explained them. The echoes of vast or petty news went by in us. In the streets, the garrison officers walked, grown taller, disclosed. It was announced that Major de Trancheaux had rejoined, in spite of his years, and that the German armies had attacked us in three places at once. We cursed the Kaiser and rejoiced in his imminent chastisement. In the middle of it all France appeared personified, and we reflected on her great life, now suddenly and nakedly exposed.

"It was easy to foresee this war, eh?" said Crillon.

Monsieur Joseph Bonéas summarized the world-drama. We were all pacific to the point of stupidity—little saints, in fact. No one in France spoke any longer of revenge, nobody wished it, nobody thought of as much as getting ready for war. We had all of us in our hearts only dreams of universal happiness and progress, the while Germany secretly prepared everything for hurling herself on us. "But," he added, he also carried away, "she'll get it in the neck, and that's all about it!"

The desire for glory was making its way, and one cloudily imagines Napoleon reborn.

In these days, only the mornings and evenings returned as usual, everything else was upside down, and seemed temporary. The workers moved and talked in a desert of idleness, and one saw invisible changes in the scenery of our valley and the cavity of our sky.

We saw the Cuirassiers of the garrison go away in the evening. The massive platoons of young-faced horsemen, whose solemn obstruction heavily hammered the stones of the street, were separated by horses loaded with bales of forage, by regimental wagons and baggage-carts, which rattled unendingly. We formed a hedgerow along the twilight causeways and watched them all disappear. Suddenly we cheered them. The thrill that went through horses and men straightened them up and they went away bigger—as if they were coming back!

"It's magnificent, how warlike we are in France!" said fevered Marie, squeezing my arm with all her might.

The departures, of individuals or groups, multiplied. A sort of methodical and inevitable tree-blazing—conducted sometimes by the police—ransacked the population and thinned it from day to day around the women.

Increasing hurly-burly was everywhere—all the complicated measures so prudently foreseen and so interdependent; the new posters on top of the old ones, the requisitioning of animals and places, the committees and the allowances, the booming and momentous gales of motor-cars filled with officers and aristocratic nurses—so many lives turned inside out and habits cut in two. But hope bedazzled all anxieties and stopped up the gaps for the moment. And we admired the beauty of military orderliness and France's preparation.

Sometimes, at windows or street-corners, there were apparitions—people covered with new uniforms. We had known them in vain, and did not know them at first. Count d'Orchamp, lieutenant in the Active Reserves, and Dr. Bardoux, town-major, displaying the cross of the Legion of Honor, found themselves surrounded by respectful astonishment. Adjutant Marcassin rose suddenly to the eyes as though he had come out of the earth; Marcassin, brand-new, rigid, in blue and red, with his gold stripe. One saw him afar, fascinating the groups of urchins who a week ago threw stones at him.

"The old lot—the little ones, and the middling ones and the big ones—all getting new clothes!" says a triumphant woman of the people.

Another said it was the coming of a new reign.

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From the Friday onwards I was engrossed by my own departure. It was that day that we went to buy boots. We admired the beautiful arrangement of the Cinema Hall as a Red Cross hospital.

"They've thought of everything!" said Marie, examining the collection of beds, furniture, and costly chests, rich and perfected material, all arranged with delighted and very French animation by a team of attendants who were under the orders of young Varennes, a pretty hospital sergeant, and Monsieur Lucien Gozlan, superintendent officer.

A center of life had created itself around the hospital. An open air buffet had been set up in a twinkling. Apolline came there—since the confusion of the mobilization all days were Sundays for her—to provide herself with nips. We saw her hobbling along broadwise, hugging her half-pint measure in her short turtle-like arms, the carrot slices of her cheek-bones reddening as she already staggered with hope.

On our way back, as we passed in front of Fontan's café, we caught a glimpse of Fontan himself, assiduous, and his face lubricated with a smile. Around him they were singing the Marseillaise in the smoke. He had increased his staff, and he himself was making himself two, serving and serving. His business was growing by the fatality of things.

When we got back to our street, it was deserted, as of yore. The faraway flutterings of the Marseillaise were dying. We heard Brisbille, drunk, hammering with all his might on his anvil. The same old shadows and the same lights were taking their places in the houses. It seemed that ordinary life was coming back as it had been into our corner after six days of supernatural disturbance, and that the past was already stronger than the present.

Before mounting our steps we saw, crouching in front of his shop door by the light of a lamp that was hooded by whirling mosquitoes, the mass of Crillon, who was striving to attach to a cudgel a flap for the crushing of flies. Bent upon his work, his gaping mouth let hang the half of a globular and shining tongue. Seeing us with our parcels, he threw down his tackle, roared a sigh, and said, "That wood! It's touchwood, yes. A butter-wire's the only thing for cutting that!"

He stood up, discouraged; then changing his idea, and lighted from below by his lamp so that he flamed in the evening, he extended his tawny-edged arm and struck me on the shoulder. "We said war, war, all along. Very well, we've got war, haven't we?"

In our room I said to Marie, "Only three days left."

Marie came and went and talked continually round me, all the time sewing zinc buttons onto the new pouch, stiff with its dressing. She seemed to be making an effort to divert me. She had on a blue blouse, well-worn and soft, half open at the neck. Her place was a great one in that gray room.

She asked me if I should be a long time away, and then, as whenever she put that question she went on, "Of course, you don't a bit know." She regretted that I was only a private like everybody. She hoped it would be over long before the winter.

I did not speak. I saw that she was looking at me secretly, and she surrounded me pell-mell with the news she had picked up. "D'you know, the curate has gone as a private, no more nor less, like all the clergy. And Monsieur the Marquis, who's a year past the age already, has written to the Minister of War to put himself at his disposition, and the Minister has sent a courier to thank him." She finished wrapping up and tying some toilet items and also some provisions, as if for a journey. "All your bits of things are there. You'll be absolutely short of nothing, you see."

Then she sat down and sighed. "Ah," she said, "war, after all, it's more terrible than one imagines."

She seemed to be having tragic presentiments. Her face was paler than usual; the normal lassitude of her features was full of gentleness; her eyelids were rosy as roses. Then she smiled weakly and said, "There are some young men of eighteen who've enlisted, but only for the duration of the war. They've done right; that'll be useful to them all ways later in life."

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On Monday we hung about the house till four o'clock, when I left it to go to the Town Hall, and then to the station.

At the Town Hall a group of men, like myself, were stamping about. They were

loaded with parcels in string; new boots hung from their shoulders. I went up to mix with my new companions. Tudor was topped by an artilleryman's cap. Monsieur Mielvaque was bustling about, embarrassed—exactly as at the factory—by the papers he held in his hand; and he had exchanged his eyeglasses for spectacles, which stood for the beginning of his uniform. Every man talked about himself, and gave details concerning his regiment, his depot, and some personal peculiarity.

"I'm staying," says the adjutant master-at-arms, who rises impeccably in his active service uniform, amid the bustle and the neutral-tinted groups; "I'm not going. I'm the owner of my rank, and they haven't got the right to send me to join the army."

We waited long, and some hours went by. A rumor went round that we should not go till the next day. But suddenly there was silence, a stiffening up, and a military salute all round. The door had just opened to admit Major de Trancheaux.

The women drew aside. A civilian who was on the lookout for him went up, hat in hand, and spoke to him in undertones.

"But, my friend," cried the Major, quitting the importunate with a quite military abruptness, "it's not worth while. In two months the war will be over!"

He came up to us. He was wearing a white band on his cap.

"He's in command at the station," they say.

He gave us a patriotic address, brief and spirited. He spoke of the great revenge so long awaited by French hearts, assured us that we should all be proud, later, to have lived in those hours, thrilled us all, and added, "Come, say good-by to your folks. No more women now. And let's be off, for I'm going with you as far as the station."

A last confused scrimmage—with moist sounds of kisses and litanies of advice—closed up in the great public hall.

When I had embraced Marie I joined these who were falling in near the road. We went off in files of four. All the causeways were garnished with people, because of us; and at that moment I felt a lofty emotion and a real thrill of glory.

At the corner of a street I saw Crillon and Marie, who had run on ahead to take their stand on our route. They waved to me.

"Now, keep your peckers up, boys! You're not dead yet, eh!" Crillon called to us.

Marie was looking at me and could not speak.

"In step! One-two!" cried Adjutant Marcassin, striding along the detachment.

We crossed our quarter as the day declined over it. The countryman who was walking beside me shook his head and in the dusky immensity among the world of things we were leaving, with big regular steps, fused into one single step, he scattered wondering words. "Frenzy, it is," he murmured. "*I* haven't had time to understand it yet. And yet, you know, there are some that say, I understand; well, I'm telling you, that's not possible."

The station—but we do not stop. They have opened before us the long yellow barrier which is never opened. They make us cross the labyrinth of hazy rails, and crowd us along a dark, covered platform between iron pillars.

And there, suddenly, we see that we are alone.

* * * * * *

The town—and life—are yonder, beyond that dismal plain of rails, paths, low buildings and mists which surrounds us to the end of sight. A chilliness is edging in along with twilight, and falling on our perspiration and our enthusiasm. We fidget and wait. It goes gray, and then black. The night comes to imprison us in its infinite narrowness. We shiver and can see nothing more. With difficulty I can make out, along our trampled platform, a dark flock, the buzz of voices, the smell of tobacco. Here and there a match flame or the red point of a cigarette makes some face phosphorescent. And we wait, unoccupied, and weary of waiting, until we sit down, close-pressed against each other, in the dark and the desert.

Some hours later Adjutant Marcassin comes forward, a lantern in his hand, and in a strident voice calls the roll. Then he goes away, and we begin again to wait.

At ten o'clock, after several false alarms, the right train is announced. It comes up, distending as it comes, black and red. It is already crowded, and it screams. It

stops, and turns the platform into a street. We climb up and put ourselves away —not without glimpses, by the light of lanterns moving here and there, of some chalk sketches on the carriages—heads of pigs in spiked helmets, and the inscription, "To Berlin!"—the only things which slightly indicate where we are going.

The train sets off. We who have just got in crowd to the windows and try to look outside, towards the level crossing where, perhaps, the people in whom we live are still watching for us; but the eye can no longer pick up anything but a vague stirring, shaded with crayon and jumbled with nature. We are blind and we fall back each to his place. When we are enveloped in the iron-hammered rumble of advance, we fix up our luggage, arrange ourselves for the night, smoke, drink and talk. Badly lighted and opaque with fumes, the compartment might be a corner of a tavern that has been caught up and swept away into the unknown.

Some conversation mixes its rumble with that of the train. My neighbors talk about crops and sunshine and rain. Others, scoffers and Parisians, speak of popular people and principally of music-hall singers. Others sleep, lying somehow or other on the wood. Their open mouths make murmur, and the oscillation jerks them without tearing them from their torpor. I go over in my thoughts the details of the last day, and even my memories of times gone by when there was nothing going on.

* * * * * *

We traveled all night. At long intervals some one would let a window drop at a station; a damp and cavernous breath would penetrate the overdone atmosphere of the carriage. We saw darkness and some porter's lantern dancing in the abyss of night.

Several times we made very long halts—to let the trains of regular troops go by. In one station where our train stood for hours, we saw several of them go roaring by in succession. Their speed blurred the partitions between the windows and the huge vertebrae of the coaches, seeming to blend together the soldiers huddled there; and the glance which plunged into the train's interior descried, in its feeble and whirling illumination, a long, continuous and tremulous chain, clad in blue and red. Several times on the journey we got glimpses of these interminable lengths of humanity, hurled by machinery from everywhere to the frontiers, and almost towing each other.

CHAPTER X

THE WALLS

At daybreak there was a stop, and they said to us, "You're there."

We got out, yawning, our teeth chattering, and grimy with night, on to a platform black-smudged by drizzling rain, in the middle of a sheet of mist which was torn by blasts of distant whistling. Disinterred from the carriages, our shadows heaped themselves there and waited, like bales of goods in the dawn's winter.

Adjutant Marcassin, who had gone in quest of instructions, returned at last. "It's that way."

He formed us in fours. "Forward! Straighten up! Keep step! Look as if you had something about you."

The rhythm of the step pulled at our feet and dovetailed us together. The adjutant marched apart along the little column. Questioned by one of us who knew him intimately, he made no reply. From time to time he threw a quick glance, like the flick of a whip, to make sure that we were in step.

I thought I was going again to the old barracks, where I did my term of service, but I had a sadder disappointment than was reasonable. Across some land where building was going on, deeply trenched, beplastered and soiled with white, we arrived at a new barracks, sinisterly white in a velvet pall of fog. In front of the freshly painted gate there was already a crowd of men like us, clothed in subdued civilian hues in the coppered dust of the first rays of day.

They made us sit on forms round the guard room. We waited there all the day. As the scorching sun went round it forced us to change our places several times. We ate with our knees for tables, and as I undid the little parcels that Marie had

made, it seemed to me that I was touching her hands. When the evening had fallen, a passing officer noticed us, made inquiries, and we were mustered. We plunged into the night of the building. Our feet stumbled and climbed helter-skelter, between pitched walls up the steps of a damp staircase, which smelt of stale tobacco and gas-tar, like all barracks. They led us into a dark corridor, pierced by little pale blue windows, where draughts came and went violently, a corridor spotted at each end by naked gas-jets, their flames buffeted and snarling.

A lighted doorway was stoppered by a throng—the store-room. I ended by getting in in my turn, thanks to the pressure of the compact file which followed me, and pushed me like a spiral spring. Some barrack sergeants were exerting themselves authoritatively among piles of new-smelling clothes, of caps and glittering equipment. Geared into the jerky hustle from which we detached ourselves one by one, I made the tour of the place, and came out of it wearing red trousers and carrying my civilian clothes, and a blue coat on my arm; and not daring to put on either my hat or the military cap that I held in my hand.

We have dressed ourselves all alike. I look at the others since I cannot look at myself, and thus I see myself dimly. Gloomily we eat stew, by the miserable illumination of a candle, in the dull desert of the mess room. Then, our mess-tins cleaned, we go down to the great yard, gray and stagnant. Just as we pour out into it, there is the clash of a closing gate and a tightened chain. An armed sentry goes up and down before the gate. It is forbidden to go out under pain of court-martial. To westward, beyond some indistinct land, we see the buried station, reddening and smoking like a factory, and sending out rusty flashes. On the other side is the trench of a street; and in its extended hollow are the bright points of some windows and the radiance of a shop. With my face between the bars of the gate, I look on this reflection of the other life; then I go back to the black staircase, the corridor and the dormitory, I who am something and yet am nothing, like a drop of water in a river.

* * * * * *

We stretch ourselves on straw, in thin blankets. I go to sleep with my head on the bundle of my civilian clothes. In the morning I find myself again and throw off a long dream—all at once impenetrable.

My neighbor, sitting on his straw with his hair over his nose, is occupied in

scratching his feet. He yawns into tears, and says to me, "I've dreamt about myself."

* * * * * *

Several days followed each other. We remained imprisoned in the barracks, in ignorance. The only events were those related by the newspapers which were handed to us through the gates in the morning. The war got on very slowly; it immobilized itself, and we—we did nothing, between the roll-calls, the parades, and from time to time some cleaning fatigues. We could not go into the town, and we waited for the evening—standing, sitting, strolling in the mess room (which never seemed empty, so strong was the smell that filled it), wandering about the dark stairs and the corridors dark as iron, or in the yard, or as far as the gates, or the kitchens, which last were at the rear of the buildings, and smelt in turns throughout the day of coffee-grounds and grease.

We said that perhaps, undoubtedly indeed, we should stay there till the end of the war. We moped. When we went to bed we were tired with standing still, or with walking too slowly. We should have liked to go to the front.

Marcassin, housed in the company office, was never far away, and kept an eye on us in silence. One day I was sharply rebuked by him for having turned the water on in the lavatory at a time other than placarded. Detected, I had to stand before him at attention. He asked me in coarse language if I knew how to read, talked of punishment, and added, "Don't do it again!" This tirade, perhaps justified on the whole, but tactlessly uttered by the quondam Pétrolus, humiliated me deeply and left me gloomy all the day. Some other incidents showed me that I no longer belonged to myself.

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One day, after morning parade, when the company was breaking off, a Parisian of our section went up to Marcassin and asked him, "Adjutant, we should like to know if we are going away."

The officer took it in bad part. "To know? Always wanting to know!" he cried; "it's a disease in France, this wanting to know. Get it well into your heads that you *won't* know! We shall do the knowing for you! Words are done with. There's something else beginning, and that's discipline and silence."

The zeal we had felt for going to the front cooled off in a few days. One or two well-defined cases of shirking were infectious, and you heard this refrain again and again: "As long as the others are dodging, I should be an ass not to do it, too."

But there was quite a multitude who never said anything.

At last a reinforcement draft was posted; old and young promiscuously—a list worked out in the office amidst a seesaw of intrigue. Protests were raised, and fell back again into the tranquillity of the depot.

I abode there forty-five days. Towards the middle of September, we were allowed to go out after the evening meal and Sundays as well. We used to go in the evening to the Town Hall to read the despatches posted there; they were as uniform and monotonous as rain. Then a friend and I would go to the café, keeping step, our arms similarly swinging, exchanging some words, idle, and vaguely divided into two men. Or we went into it in a body, which isolated me. The saloon of the café enclosed the same odors as Fontan's; and while I stayed there, sunk in the soft seat, my boots grating on the tiled floor, my eye on the white marble, it was like a strip of a long dream of the past, a scanty memory that clothed me. There I used to write to Marie, and there I read again the letters I received from her, in which she said, "Nothing has changed since you were away."

One Sunday, when I was beached on a seat in the square and weeping with yawns under the empty sky, I saw a young woman go by. By reason of some resemblance in outline, I thought of a woman who had loved me. I recalled the period when life was life, and that beautiful caressing body of once-on-a-time. It seemed to me that I held her in my arms, so close that I felt her breath, like velvet, on my face.

We got a glimpse of the captain at one review. Once there was talk of a new draft for the front, but it was a false rumor. Then we said, "There'll never be any war for us," and that was a relief.

My name flashed to my eyes in a departure list posted on the wall. My name was read out at morning parade, and it seemed to me that it was the only one they read. I had no time to get ready. In the evening of the next day our detachment passed out of the barracks by the little gate.

CHAPTER XI

AT THE WORLD'S END

"We're going to Alsace," said the well-informed. "To the Somme," said the better-informed, louder.

We traveled thirty-six hours on the floor of a cattle truck, wedged and paralyzed in the vice of knapsacks, pouches, weapons and moist bodies. At long intervals the train would begin to move on again. It has left an impression with me that it was chiefly motionless.

We got out, one afternoon, under a sky crowded with masses of darkness, in a station recently bombarded and smashed, and its roof left like a fish-bone. It overlooked a half-destroyed town, where, amid a foul whiteness of ruin, a few families were making shift to live in the rain.

"'Pears we're in the Aisne country," they said.

A downpour was in progress. Shivering, we busied ourselves with unloading and distributing bread, our hands numbed and wet, and then ate it hurriedly while we stood in the road, which gleamed with heavy parallel brush-strokes of gray paint as far as the eye could see. Each looked after himself, with hardly a thought for the next man. On each side of the road were deserts without limits, flat and flabby, with trees like posts, and rusty fields patched with green mud.

"Shoulder packs, and forward!" Adjutant Marcassin ordered.

Where were we going? No one knew. We crossed the rest of the village. The Germans had occupied it during the August retreat. It was destroyed, and the destruction was beginning to live, to cover itself with fresh wreckage and dung, to smoke and consume itself. The rain had ceased in melancholy. Up aloft in the

clearings of the sky, clusters of shrapnel stippled the air round aeroplanes, and the detonations reached us, far and fine. Along the sodden road we met Red Cross motor ambulances, rushing on rails of mud, but we could not see inside them. In the first stages we were interested in everything, and asked questions, like foreigners. A man who had been wounded and was rejoining the regiment with us answered us from time to time, and invariably added, "That's nothing; you'll see in a bit." Then the march made men retire into themselves.

My knapsack, so ingeniously compact; my cartridge-bags so ferociously full; my round pouches with their keen-edged straps, all jostled and then wounded my back at each step. The pain quickly became acute, unbearable. I was suffocated and blinded by a mask of sweat, in spite of the lashing moisture, and I soon felt that I should not arrive at the end of the fifty minutes' march. But I did all the same, because I had no reason for stopping at any one second sooner than another, and because I could thus always *do one step more*. I knew later that this is nearly always the mechanical reason which accounts for soldiers completing superhuman physical efforts to the very end.

The cold blast benumbed us, while we dragged ourselves through the softened plains which evening was darkening. At one halt I saw one of those men who used to agitate at the depot to be sent to the front. He had sunk down at the foot of the stacked rifles; exertion had made him almost unrecognizable, and he told me that he had had enough of war! And little Mélusson, whom I once used to see at Viviers, lifted to me his yellowish face, sweat-soaked, where the folds of the eyelids seemed drawn with red crayon, and informed me that he should report sick the next day.

After four marches of despairing length under a lightless sky over a colorless earth, we stood for two hours, hot and damp, at the chilly top of a hill, where a village was beginning. An epidemic of gloom overspread us. Why were we stopped in that way? No one knew anything.

In the evening we engulfed ourselves in the village. But they halted us in a street. The sky had heavily darkened. The fronts of the houses had taken on a greenish hue and reflected and rooted themselves in the running water of the street. The market-place curved around in front of us—a black space with shining tracks, like an old mirror to which the silvering only clings in strips.

At last, night fully come, they bade us march. They made us go forward and then

draw back, with loud words of command, in the tunnels of streets, in alleys and yards. By lantern light they divided us into squads. I was assigned to the eleventh, quartered in a village whose still standing parts appeared quite new. Adjutant Marcassin became my section chief. I was secretly glad of this; for in the gloomy confusion we stuck closely to those we knew, as dogs do.

The new comrades of the squad—they lodged in the stable, which was open as a cage—explained to me that we were a long way from the front, over six miles; that we should have four days' rest and then go on yonder to occupy the trenches at the glass works. They said it would be like that, in shifts of four days, to the end of the war, and that, moreover, one had not to worry.

These words comforted the newcomers, adrift here and there in the straw. Their weariness was alleviated. They set about writing and card-playing. That evening I dated my letter to Marie "at the Front," with a flourish of pride. I understood that glory consists in doing what others have done, in being able to say, "I, too."

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Three days went by in this "rest camp." I got used to an existence crowded with exercises in which we were living gear-wheels; crowded also with fatigues; already I was forgetting my previous existence.

On the Friday at three o'clock we were paraded in marching order in the school yard. Great stones, detached from walls and arches, lay about the forsaken grass like tombs. Hustled by the wind, we were reviewed by the captain, who fumbled in our cartridge-pouches and knapsacks with the intention of giving imprisonment to those who had not the right quantity of cartridges and iron rations. In the evening we set off, laughing and singing, along the great curves of the road. At night we arrived swaying with fatigue and savagely silent, at a slippery and interminable ascent which stood out against stormy rain-clouds as heavy as dung-hills. Many dark masses stumbled and fell with a crash of accoutrements on that huge sloping sewer. As they swarmed up the chaos of oblique darkness which pushed them back, the men gave signs of exhaustion and anger. Cries of "Forward! Forward!" surrounded us on all sides, harsh cries like barks, and I heard, near me, Adjutant Marcassin's voice, growling, "What about it, then? It's for France's sake!" Arrived at the top of the hill, we went down the other slope. The order came to put pipes out and advance in silence. A world of noises was coming to life in the distance.

A gateway made its sudden appearance in the night. We scattered among flat buildings, whose walls here and there showed black holes, like ovens, while the approaches were obstructed with plaster rubbish and nail-studded beams. In places the recent collapse of stones, cement and plaster had laid on the bricks a new and vivid whiteness that was visible in the dark.

"It's the glass works," said a soldier to me.

We halted a moment in a passage whose walls and windows were broken, where we could not make a step or sit down without breaking glass. We left the works by sticky footpaths, full of rubbish at first, and then of mud. Across marshy flats, chilly and sinister, obscurely lighted by the night, we came to the edge of an immense and pallid crater. The depths of this abyss were populated with glimmers and murmurs; and all around a soaked and ink-black expanse of country glistened to infinity.

"It's the quarry," they informed me.

Our endless and bottomless march continued. Sliding and slipping we descended, burying ourselves in these profundities and gropingly encountering the hurly-burly of a convoy of carts and the advance guard of the regiment we were relieving. We passed heaped-up hutments at the foot of the circular chalky cliff that we could see dimly drawn among the black circles of space. The sound of shots drew near and multiplied on all sides; the vibration of artillery fire outspread under our feet and over our heads.

I found myself suddenly in front of a narrow and muddy ravine into which the others were plunging one by one.

"It's the trench," whispered the man who was following me; "you can see its beginning, but you never see its blinking end. Anyway, on you go!"

We followed the trench along for three hours. For three hours we continued to immerse ourselves in distance and solitude, to immure ourselves in night, scraping its walls with our loads, and sometimes violently pulled up, where the defile shrunk into strangulation by the sudden wedging of our pouches. It seemed as if the earth tried continually to clasp and choke us, that sometimes it roughly struck us. Above the unknown plains in which we were hiding, space was shot-riddled. A few star-shells were softly whitening some sections of the night, revealing the excavations' wet entrails and conjuring up a file of heavy

shadows, borne down by lofty burdens, tramping in a black and black-bunged impasse, and jolting against the eddies. When great guns were discharged all the vault of heaven was lighted and lifted and then fell darkly back.

"Look out! The open crossing!"

A wall of earth rose in tiers before us. There was no outlet. The trench came to a sudden end—to be resumed farther on, it seemed.

"Why?" I asked, mechanically.

They explained to me: "It's like that." And they added, "You stoop down and get a move on."

The men climbed the soft steps with bent heads, made their rush one by one and ran hard into the belt whose only remaining defense was the dark. The thunder of shrapnel that shattered and dazzled the air here and there showed me too frightfully how fragile we all were. In spite of the fatigue clinging to my limbs, I sprang forward in my turn with all my strength, fiercely pursuing the signs of an overloaded and rattling body which ran in front; and I found myself again in a trench, breathless. In my passage I had glimpses of a somber field, bullet-smacked and hole pierced, with silent blots outspread or doubled, and a litter of crosses and posts, as black and fantastic as tall torches extinguished, all under a firmament where day and night immensely fought.

"I believe I saw some corpses," I said to him who marched in front of me; and there was a break in my voice.

"*You've* just left your village," he replied; "you bet there's some stiffs about here!"

I laughed also, in the delight of having got past. We began again to march one behind another, swaying about, hustled by the narrowness of this furrow they had scooped to the ancient depth of a grave, panting under the load, dragged towards the earth by the earth and pushed forward by will-power, under a sky shrilling with the dizzy flight of bullets, tiger-striped with red, and in some seconds saturated with light. At forks in the way we turned sometimes right and sometimes left, all touching each other, the whole huge body of the company fleeing blindly towards its bourne.

For the last time they halted us in the middle of the night. I was so weary that I propped my knees against the wet wall and remained kneeling for some blissful minutes.

My sentry turn began immediately, and the lieutenant posted me at a loophole. He made me put my face to the hole and explained to me that there was a wooded slope, right in front of us, of which the bottom was occupied by the enemy; and to the right of us, three hundred yards away, the Chauny road —"They're there." I had to watch the black hollow of the little wood, and at every star-shell the creamy expanse which divided our refuge from the distant hazy railing of the trees along the road. He told me what to do in case of alarm and left me quite alone.

Alone, I shivered. Fatigue had emptied my head and was weighing on my heart. Going close to the loophole, I opened my eyes wide through the enemy night, the fathomless, thinking night.

I thought I could see some of the dim shadows of the plain moving, and some in the chasm of the wood, and everywhere! Affected by terror and a sense of my huge responsibility, I could hardly stifle a cry of anguish. But they did not move. The fearful preparations of the shades vanished before my eyes and the stillness of lifeless things showed itself to me.

I had neither knapsack nor pouches, and I wrapped myself in my blanket. I remained at ease, encircled to the horizon by the machinery of war, surmounted by claps of living thunder. Very gently, my vigil relieved and calmed me. I remembered nothing more about myself. I applied myself to watching. I saw nothing, I knew nothing.

After two hours, the sound of the natural and complaisant steps of the sentry who came to relieve me brought me completely back to myself. I detached myself from the spot where I had seemed riveted and went to sleep in the "grotto."

The dug-out was very roomy, but so low that in one place one had to crawl on hands and knees to slip under its rough and mighty roof. It was full of heavy damp, and hot with men. Extended in my place on straw-dust, my neck propped by my knapsack, I closed my eyes in comfort. When I opened them, I saw a group of soldiers seated in a circle and eating from the same dish, their heads

blotted out in the darkness of the low roof. Their feet, grouped round the dish, were shapeless, black, and trickling, like stone disinterred. They ate in common, without table things, no man using more than his hands.

The man next me was equipping himself to go on sentry duty. He was in no hurry. He filled his pipe, drew from his pocket a tinder-lighter as long as a tapeworm, and said to me, "You're not going on again till six o'clock. Ah, you're very lucky!"

Diligently he mingled his heavy tobacco-clouds with the vapors from all those bodies which lay around us and rattled in their throats. Kneeling at my feet to arrange his things, he gave me some advice, "No need to get a hump, mind. Nothing ever happens here. Getting here's by far the worst. On that job you get it hot, specially when you've the bad luck to be sleepy, or it's not raining, but after that you're a workman, and you forget about it. The most worst, it's the open crossing. But nobody I know's ever stopped one there. It was other blokes. It's been like this for two months, old man, and we'll be able to say we've been through the war without a chilblain, we shall."

At dawn I resumed my lookout at the loophole. Quite near, on the slope of the little wood, the bushes and the bare branches are broidered with drops of water. In front, under the fatal space where the eternal passage of projectiles is as undistinguishable as light in daytime, the field resembles a field, the road resembles a road. Ultimately one makes out some corpses, but what a strangely little thing is a corpse in a field—a tuft of colorless flowers which the shortest blades of grass disguise! At one moment there was a ray of sunshine, and it resembled the past.

Thus went the days by, the weeks and the months; four days in the front line, the harassing journey to and from it, the monotonous sentry-go, the spy-hole on the plain, the mesmerism of the empty outlook and of the deserts of waiting; and after that, four days of rest-camp full of marches and parades and great cleansings of implements and of streets, with regulations of the strictest, anticipating all the different occasions for punishment, a thousand fatigues, each with as many harsh knocks, the litany of optimist phrases, abstruse and utopian, in the orders of the day, and a captain who chiefly concerned himself with the two hundred cartridges and the reserve rations. The regiment had no losses, or almost none; a few wounds during reliefs, and sometimes one or two deaths which were announced like accidents. We only underwent great weariness,

which goes away as fast as it comes. The soldiers used to say that on the whole they lived in peace.

Marie would write to me, "The Piots have been saying nice things about you," or "The Trompsons' son is a second lieutenant," or "If you knew all the contrivances people have been up to, to hide their gold since it's been asked for so loudly! If you knew what ugly tales there are!" or "Everything is just the same."

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Once, when we were coming back from the lines and were entering our usual village, we did not stop there; to the great distress of the men who were worn out and yielding to the force of the knapsack. We continued along the road through the evening with lowered heads; and one hour later we dropped off around dark buildings—mournful tokens of an unknown place—and they put us away among shadows which had new shapes. From that time onwards, they changed the village at every relief, and we never knew what it was until we were there. I was lodged in barns, into which one wriggled by a ladder; in spongy and steamy stables; in cellars where undisturbed draughts stirred up the moldy smells that hung there; in frail and broken hangars which seemed to brew bad weather; in sick and wounded huts; in villages remade athwart their phantoms; in trenches and in caves—a world upside down. We received the wind and the rain in our sleep. Sometimes we were too brutally rescued from the pressure of the cold by braziers, whose poisonous heat split one's head. And we forgot it all at each change of scene. I had begun to note the names of places we were going to, but I lost myself in the black swarm of words when I tried to recall them. And the diversity and the crowds of the men around me were such that I managed only with difficulty to attach fleeting names to their faces.

My companions did not look unfavorably on me, but I was no more than another to them. In intervals among the occupations of the rest-camp, I wandered spiritless, blotted out by the common soldiers' miserable uniform, familiarly addressed by any one and every one, and stopping no glance from a woman, by reason of the non-coms.

I should never be an officer, like the Trompsons' son. It was not so easy in my sector as in his. For that, it would be necessary for things to happen which never would happen. But I should have liked to be taken into the office. Others were

there who were not so clearly indicated as I for that work. I regarded myself as a victim of injustice.

* * * * * *

One morning I found myself face to face with Termite, Brisbille's crony and accomplice, and he arrived in our company by voluntary enlistment! He was as skimpy and warped as ever, his body seeming to grimace through his uniform. His new greatcoat looked worn out and his boots on the wrong feet. He had the same ugly, blinking face and black-furred cheeks and rasping voice. I welcomed him warmly, for by his enlistment he was redeeming his past life. He took advantage of the occasion to address me with intimacy. I talked with him about Viviers and even let him share the news that Marie had just written to me—that Monsieur Joseph Bonéas was taking an examination in order to become an officer in the police.

But the poacher had not completely sloughed his old self. He looked at me sideways and shook in the air his grimy wrist and the brass identity disk that hung from it—a disk as big as a forest ranger's, perhaps a trophy of bygone days. Hatred of the rich and titled appeared again upon his hairy, sly face. "Those blasted nationalists," he growled; "they spend their time shoving the idea of revenge into folks' heads, and patching up hatred with their Leagues of Patriots and their military tattoos and their twaddle and their newspapers, and when their war does come they say '*Go* and fight.'"

"There are some of them who have died in the first line. Those have done more than their duty."

With the revolutionary's unfairness, the little man would not admit it. "No—they have only done their duty,—no more."

I was going to urge Monsieur Joseph's weak constitution but in presence of that puny man with his thin, furry face, who might have stayed at home, I forebore. But I decided to avoid, in his company, those subjects in which I felt he was full of sour hostility and always ready to bite.

Continually we saw Marcassin's eye fixed on us, though aloof. His new bestriped personality had completely covered up the comical picture of Pétrolus. He even seemed to have become suddenly more educated, and made no mistakes when he spoke. He multiplied himself, was attentiveness itself and found ways to expose himself to danger. When there were night patrols in the great naked cemeteries bounded by the graves of the living, he was always in them.

But he scowled. We were short of the sacred fire, in his opinion, and that distressed him. To grumbles against the fatigues which shatter, the waiting which exhausts, the disillusion which destroys, against misery and the blows of cold and rain, he answered violently, "Can't you see it's for France? Why, hell and damnation! As long as it's for France——!"

One morning when we were returning from the trenches, ghastly in a ghastly dawn, during the last minutes of a stage, a panting soldier let the words escape him, "I'm fed up, I am!"

The adjutant sprang towards him, "Aren't you ashamed of yourself, hog? Don't you think that France is worth your dirty skin and all our skins?"

The other, strained and tortured in his joints, showed fight. "France, you say? Well, that's the French," he growled.

And his pal, goaded also by weariness, raised his voice from the ranks. "That's right! After all, it's the men that's there."

"Great God!" the adjutant roared in their faces, "France is France and nothing else, and you don't count, nor you either!"

But the soldier, all the while hoisting up his knapsack with jerks of his hips, and lowering his voice before the non-com's aggressive excitement, clung to his

notion, and murmured between his puffings, "Men—they're humanity. That's not the truth perhaps?"

Marcassin began to hurry through the drizzle along the side of the marching column, shouting and trembling with emotion, "To hell with your humanity, and your truth, too; I don't give a damn for them. *I* know your ideas—universal justice and 1789[1]—to hell with them, too. There's only one thing that matters in all the earth, and that's the glory of France—to give the Boches a thrashing and get Alsace-Lorraine back, and money, that's where they're taking you, and that's all about it. Once that's done, all's over. It's simple enough, even for a blockhead like you. If you don't understand it, it's because you can't lift your pig's head to see an ideal, or because you're only a Socialist and a confiscator!"

[Footnote 1: Outbreak of the French Revolution.—Tr.]

Very reluctantly, rumbling all over, and his eye threatening, he went away from the now silent ranks. A moment later, as he passed near me, I noticed that his hands still trembled and I was infinitely moved to see tears in his eyes!

He comes and goes in pugnacious surveillance, in furies with difficulty restrained, and masked by a contraction of the face. He invokes Déroulède, and says that faith comes at will, like the rest. He lives in perpetual bewilderment and distress that everybody does not think as he does. He exerts real influence, for there are, in the multitudes, whatever they may say, beautiful and profound instincts always near the surface.

The captain, who was a well-balanced man, although severe and prodigal of prison when he found the least gap in our loads, considered the adjutant animated by an excellent spirit, but he himself was not so fiery. I was getting a better opinion of him; he could judge men. He had said that I was a good and conscientious soldier, that many like me were wanted.

Our lieutenant, who was very young, seemed to be an amiable, good-natured fellow. "He's a good little lad," said the grateful men; "there's some that frighten you when you speak to them, and they solder their jaws up. But *him*, he speaks to you even if you're stupid. When you talk to him about you and your family, which isn't, all the same, very interesting, well, he listens to you, old man."

* * * * * *

St. Martin's summer greatly warmed us as we tramped into a new village. I remember that one of those days I took Margat with me and went with him into a recently shelled house. (Margat was storming against the local grocer, the only one of his kind, the inevitable and implacable robber of his customers.) The framework of the house was laid bare, it was full of light and plaster, and it trembled like a steamboat. We climbed to the drawing-room of this house which had breathed forth all its mystery and was worse than empty. The room still showed remains of luxury and elegance—a disemboweled piano with clusters of protruding strings; a cupboard, dislodged and rotting, as though disinterred; a white-powdered floor, sown with golden stripes and rumpled books, and with fragile débris which cried out when we trod on it. Across the window, which was framed in broken glass, a curtain hung by one corner and fluttered like a bat. Over the sundered fireplace, only a mirror was intact and unsullied, upright in its frame.

Then, become suddenly and profoundly like each other, we were both fascinated by the virginity of that long glass. Its perfect integrity lent it something like a body. Each of us picked up a brick and we broke it with all our might, not knowing why. We ran away down the shaking spiral stairs whose steps were hidden under deep rubbish. At the bottom we looked at each other, still excited and already ashamed of the fit of barbarism which had so suddenly risen in us and urged our arms.

"What about it? It's a natural thing to do—we're becoming men again, that's all," said Margat.

Having nothing to do we sat down there, commanding a view of the dale.
The day had been fine.

Margat's looks strayed here and there. He frowned, and disparaged the village because it was not like his own. What a comical idea to have built it like that! He did not like the church, the singular shape of it, the steeple in that position instead of where it should have been.

Orango and Rémus came and sat down by us in the ripening sun of evening.

Far away we saw the explosion of a shell, like a white shrub. We chuckled at the harmless shot in the hazy distance and Rémus made a just observation. "As long as it's not dropped here, you might say as one doesn't mind, eh, s'long as it's

dropped somewhere else, eh?"

At that moment a cloud of dirty smoke took shape five hundred yards away at the foot of the village, and a heavy detonation rolled up to where we were.

"They're plugging the bottom of the village," Orango laconically certified.

Margat, still ruminating his grievance, cried, "'Fraid it's not on the grocers it's dropped, that crump, seeing he lives right at the other end. More's the pity. He charges any old price he likes and then he says to you as well, 'If you're not satisfied, my lad, you can go to hell.' Ah, more's the pity!"

He sighed, and resumed. "Ah, grocers, they beat all, they do. You can starve or you can bankrupt, that's their gospel; 'You don't matter to me, *I've* got to make money!'"

"What do you want to be pasting the grocers for," Orango asked, "as long as they've always been like that? They're Messrs. Thief & Sons."

After a silence, Rémus coughed, to encourage his voice, and said, "I'm a grocer."

Then Margat said to him artlessly, "Well, what about it, old chap? We know well enough, don't we, that here on earth profit's the strongest of all."

"Why, yes, to be sure, old man," Rémus replied.

* * * * * *

One day, while we were carrying our straw to our billets, one of my lowly companions came up and questioned me as he walked. "I'd like you to explain to me why there isn't any justice. I've been to the captain to ask for leave that I'd a right to and I shows him a letter to say my aunt's shortly deceased. 'That's all my eye and Betty Martin,' he says. And I says to myself, that's the blinking limit, that is. Now, then, tell me, you. When the war began, why didn't there begin full justice for every one, seeing they could have done it and seeing no one wouldn't have raised no objection just then. Why is it all just the contrary? And don't believe it's only what's happened to me, but there's big business men, they say, all of a sudden making a hundred francs a day extra because of the murdering, and them young men an' all, and a lot of toffed-up shirkers at the rear that's ten times stronger than this pack of half-dead Territorials that they haven't sent home

even this morning yet, and they have beanos in the towns with their Totties and their jewels and champagne, like what Jusserand tells us!"

I replied that complete justice was impossible, that we had to look at the great mass of things generally. And then, having said this, I became embarrassed in face of the stubborn inquisitiveness, clumsily strict, of this comrade who was seeking the light all by himself!

Following that incident, I often tried, during days of monotony, to collect my ideas on war. I could not. I am sure of certain points, points of which I have always been sure. Farther I cannot go. I rely in the matter on those who guide us, who withhold the policy of the State. But sometimes I regret that I no longer have a spiritual director like Joseph Bonéas.

For the rest, the men around me—except when personal interest is in question and except for a few chatterers who suddenly pour out theories which contain bits taken bodily from the newspapers—the men around me are indifferent to every problem too remote and too profound concerning the succession of inevitable misfortunes which sweep us along. Beyond immediate things, and especially personal matters, they are prudently conscious of their ignorance and impotence.

One evening I was coming in to sleep in our stable bedroom. The men lying along its length and breadth on the bundles of straw had been talking together and were agreed. Some one had just wound it up—"From the moment you start marching, that's enough."

But Termite, coiled up like a marmot on the common litter, was on the watch. He raised his shock of hair, shook himself as though caught in a snare, waved the brass disk on his wrist like a bell and said, "No, that's not enough. You must think, but think with your own idea, not other people's."

Some amused faces were raised while he entered into observations that they foresaw would be endless.

"Pay attention, you fellows, he's going to talk about militarism," announced a wag, called Pinson, whose lively wit I had already noticed.

"There's the question of militarism——" Termite went on.

We laughed to see the hairy mannikin floundering on the dim straw in the middle of his big public-meeting words, and casting fantastic shadows on the spider-web curtain of the skylight.

"Are you going to tell us," asked one of us, "that the Boches aren't militarists?"

"Yes, indeed, and in course they are," Termite consented to admit.

"Ha! That bungs you in the optic!" Pinson hastened to record.

"For my part, old sonny," said a Territorial who was a good soldier, "I'm not seeking as far as you, and I'm not as spiteful. I know that they set about us, and that we only wanted to be quiet and friends with everybody. Why, where I come from, for instance in the Creuse country, I know that——"

"You know?" bawled Termite, angrily; "you know nothing about nothing! You're only a poor little tame animal, like all the millions of pals. They gather us together, but they separate us. They say what they like to us, or they don't say it, and you believe it. They say to you, 'This is what you've got to believe in!' They——"

I found myself growing privately incensed against Termite, by the same instinct which had once thrown me upon his accomplice Brisbille. I interrupted him. "Who are they—your 'they'?"

"Kings," said Termite.

At that moment Marcassin's silhouette appeared in the gray of the alley which ended among us. "Look out—there's Marc'! Shut your jaw," one of the audience benevolently advised.

"I'm not afeared not to say what I think!" declared Termite, instantly lowering his voice and worming his way through the straw that divided the next stall from ours.

We laughed again. But Margat was serious. "Always," he said, "there'll be the two sorts of people there's always been—the grousers and the obeyers."

Some one asked, "What for did you chap 'list?"

"'Cos there was nothing to eat in the house," answered the Territorial, as interpreter of the general opinion.

Having thus spoken, the old soldier yawned, went on all fours, arranged the straw of his claim, and added, "We'll not worry, but just let him be. 'Specially seeing we can't do otherwise."

It was time for slumber. The shed gaped open in front and at the sides, but the air was not cold.

"We've done with the bad days," said Rémus; "shan't see them no more."

"At last!" said Margat.

We stretched ourselves out, elbow to elbow. The one in the dark corner blew out his candle.

"May the war look slippy and get finished!" mumbled Orango.

"If only they'll let me transfer to the cyclists," Margat replied.

We said no more, each forming that same great wandering prayer and some little prayer like Margat's. Gently we wrapped ourselves up on the straw, one with the falling night, and closed our eyes.

* * * * * *

At the bottom of the village, in the long pink farmhouse, there was a charming woman, who smiled at us with twinkling eyes. As the days emerged from the rains and fogs, I looked at her with all my soul, for she was bathed in the youth of the year. She had a little nose and big eyes and slight fair down on her lips and neck, like traces of gold. Her husband was mobilized and we paid attentions to her. She smiled at the soldiers as she went by, and chattered willingly with the non-coms; and the passage of officers brought her to a standstill of vague respect. I used to think about her, and I forgot, through her, to write to Marie.

There were many who inquired, speaking of the farmer's wife, "Any chance?" But there were many who replied, "Nothing doing."

One morning that was bright above all others, my companions were busy

holding their sides around a tipsy comrade whom they were catechizing and ragging, and sprinkling now and then with little doses of wine, to entertain him, and benefit more by him. These innocent amusements, like those which Termite provoked when he discoursed on militarism and the universe, did not detain me, and I gained the street.

I went down the paved slope. In gardens and enclosures, the buds were holding out a multitude of lilliputian green hands, all still closed, and the apple-trees had white roses. Spring was hastening everywhere. I came in sight of the pink house. She was alone in the road and she took all the sunshine for herself. I hesitated, I went by—my steps slackened heavily—I stopped, and returned towards the door. Almost in spite of myself I went in.

At first—light! A square of sunshine glowed on the red tiled floor of the kitchen. Casseroles and basins were shining brightly.

She was there! Standing by the sink she was making a streak of silver flow into a gleaming pail, amid the luminous blush of the polished tiles and the gold of the brass pans. The greenish light from the window-glass was moistening her skin. She saw me and she smiled.

I knew that she always smiled at us. But we were alone! I felt a mad longing arise. There was something in me that was stronger than I, that ravished the picture of her. Every second she became more beautiful. Her plump dress proffered her figure to my eyes, and her skirt trembled over her polished sabots. I looked at her neck, at her throat—that extraordinary beginning. A strong perfume that enveloped her shoulders was like the truth of her body. Urged forward, I went towards her, and I could not even speak.

She had lowered her head a little; her eyebrows had come nearer together under the close cluster of her hair; uneasiness passed into her eyes. She was used to the boyish mimicry of infatuated men. But this woman was not for me! She dealt me the blow of an unfeeling laugh, and disappearing, shut the door in my face.

I opened the door. I followed her into an outhouse. Stammering something, I found touch again with her presence, I held out my hand. She slipped away, she was escaping me forever—when a monstrous Terror stopped her!

The walls and roof drew near in a hissing crash of thunder, a dreadful hatch opened in the ceiling and all was filled with black fire. And while I was hurled

against the wall by a volcanic blast, with my eyes scorched, my ears rent, and my brain hammered, while around me the stones were pierced and crushed, I saw the woman uplifted in a fantastic shroud of black and red, to fall back in a red and white affray of clothes and linen; and something huge burst and naked, with two legs, sprang at my face and forced into my mouth the taste of blood.

I know that I cried out, hiccoughing. Assaulted by the horrible kiss and by the vile clasp that bruised the hand I had offered to the woman's beauty—a hand still outheld—sunk in whirling smoke and ashes and the dreadful noise now majestically ebbing, I found my way out of the place, between walls that reeled as I did. Bodily, the house collapsed behind me. In my flight over the shifting ground I was brushed by the mass of maddened falling stones and the cry of the ruins, sinking in vast dust-clouds as in a tumult of beating wings.

A veritable squall of shells was falling in this corner of the village. A little way off some soldiers were ejaculating in front of a little house which had just been broken in two. They did not go close to it because of the terrible whistling which was burying itself here and there all around, and the splinters that riddled it at every blow. Within the shelter of a wall we watched it appear under a vault of smoke, in the vivid flashes of that unnatural tempest.

"Why, you're covered with blood!" a comrade said to me, disquieted.

Stupefied and still thunderstruck I looked at that house's bones and broken spine, that human house.

It had been split from top to bottom and all the front was down. In a single second one saw all the seared cellules of its rooms, the geometric path of the flues, and a down quilt like viscera on the skeleton of a bed. In the upper story an overhanging floor remained, and there we saw the bodies of two officers, pierced and spiked to their places round the table where they were lunching when the lightning fell—a nice lunch, too, for we saw plates and glasses and a bottle of champagne.

"It's Lieutenant Norbert and Lieutenant Ferrière."

One of these specters was standing, and with cloven jaws so enlarged that his head was half open, he was smiling. One arm was raised aloft in the festive gesture which he had begun forever. The other, his fine fair hair untouched, was seated with his elbows on a cloth now red as a Turkey carpet, hideously

attentive, his face besmeared with shining blood and full of foul marks. They seemed like two statues of youth and the joy of life framed in horror.

"There's three!" some one shouted.

This one, whom we had not seen at first, hung in the air with dangling arms against the sheer wall, hooked on to a beam by the bottom of his trousers. A pool of blood which lengthened down the flat plaster looked like a projected shadow. At each fresh explosion splinters were scattered round him and shook him, as though the dead man was still marked and chosen by the blind destruction.

There was something hatefully painful in the doll-like attitude of the hanging corpse.

Then Termite's voice was raised. "Poor lad!" he said.

He went out from the shelter of the wall.

"Are you mad?" we shouted; "he's dead, anyway!"

A ladder was there. Termite seized it and dragged it towards the disemboweled house, which was lashed every minute by broadsides of splinters.

"Termite!" cried the lieutenant, "I forbid you to go there! You're doing no good."

"I'm the owner of my skin, lieutenant," Termite replied, without stopping or looking round.

He placed the ladder, climbed up and unhooked the dead man. Around them, against the plaster of the wall, there broke a surge of deafening shocks and white fire. He descended with the body very skillfully, laid it on the ground, and remaining doubled up he ran back to us—to fall on the captain, who had witnessed the scene.

"My friend," the captain said, "I've been told that you were an anarchist. But I've seen that you're brave, and that's already more than half of a Frenchman."

He held out his hand. Termite took it, pretending to be little impressed by the honor.

When he returned to us he said, while his hand rummaged his hedgehog's beard, "That poor lad—I don't know why—p'raps it's stupid—but I was thinking of his mother."

We looked at him with a sort of respect. First, because he had gone up and then because he had passed through the hail of iron and won. There was no one among us who did not earnestly wish he had tried and succeeded in what Termite had just done. But assuredly we did not a bit understand this strange soldier.

A lull had come in the bombardment. "It's over," we concluded.

As we returned we gathered round Termite and one spoke for the rest.

"You're an anarchist, then?"

"No," said Termite, "I'm an internationalist. That's why I enlisted."

"Ah!"

He tried to throw light on his words. "You understand, I'm against all wars."

"All wars! But there's times when war's good. There's defensive war."

"No," said Termite again, "there's only offensive war; because if there wasn't the offensive there wouldn't be the defensive."

"Ah!" we replied.

We went on chatting, dispassionately and for the sake of talking, strolling in the dubious security of the streets which were sometimes darkened by falls of wreckage, under a sky of formidable surprises.

"All the same, isn't it chaps like you that prevented France from being prepared?"

"There's not enough chaps like me to prevent anything; and if there'd been more, there wouldn't have been any war."

"It's not to us, it's to the Boches and the others that you must say that."

"It's to all the world," said Termite; "that's why I'm an internationalist."

While Termite was slipping away somewhere else his questioner indicated by a gesture that he did not understand. "Never mind," he said to us, "that chap's better than us."

Gradually it came about that we of the squad used to consult Termite on any sort of subject, with a simplicity which made me smile—and sometimes even irritated me. That week, for instance, some one asked him, "All this firing—is it an attack they're getting ready?"

But he knew no more than the rest.

CHAPTER XII

THE SHADOWS

We did not leave for the trenches on the day we ought to have done. Evening came, then night—nothing happened. On the morning of the fifth day some of us were leaning, full of idleness and uncertainty, against the front of a house that had been holed and bunged up again, at the corner of a street. One of our comrades said to me, "Perhaps we shall stay here till the end of the war."

There were signs of dissent, but all the same, the little street we had not left on the appointed day seemed just then to resemble the streets of yore!

Near the place where we were watching the hours go by—and fumbling in packets of that coarse tobacco that has skeletons in it—the hospital was installed. Through the low door we saw a broken stream of poor soldiers pass, sunken and bedraggled, with the sluggish eyes of beggars; and the clean and wholesome uniform of the corporal who led them stood forth among them.

They were always pretty much the same men who haunted the inspection rooms. Many soldiers make it a point of honor never to report sick, and in their obstinacy there is an obscure and profound heroism. Others give way and come as often as possible to the gloomy places of the Army Medical Corps, to run aground opposite the major's door. Among these are found real human remnants in whom some visible or secret malady persists.

The examining-room was contrived in a ground floor room whose furniture had been pushed back in a heap. Through the open window came the voice of the major, and by furtively craning our necks we could just see him at the table, with his tabs and his eyeglass. Before him, half-naked indigents stood, cap in hand, their coats on their arms, or their trousers on their feet, pitifully revealing the man through the soldier, and trying to make the most of the bleeding cords of

their varicose veins, or the arm from which a loose and cadaverous bandage hung and revealed the hollow of an obstinate wound, laying stress on their hernia or the everlasting bronchitis beyond their ribs. The major was a good sort and, it seemed, a good doctor. But this time he hardly examined the parts that were shown to him and his monotonous verdict took wings into the street. "Fit to march—good—consultation without penalty."[1]

[Footnote 1: As a precaution against "scrimshanking," a penalty attaches to "consultations" which are adjudged uncalled-for.—Tr.]

"Consultations," which merely send the soldier back into the ranks continued indefinitely. No one was exempted from marching. Once we heard the husky and pitiful voice of a simpleton who was dressing again in recrimination. The doctor argued, in a good-natured way, and then said, his voice suddenly serious, "Sorry, my good man, but I cannot exempt you. I have certain instructions. Make an effort. You can still do it."

We saw them come out, one by one, these creatures of deformed body and dwindling movement, leaning on each other, as though attached, and mumbling, "Nothing can be done, nothing."

Little Mélusson, reserved and wretched, with his long red nose between his burning cheekbones, was standing among us in the idle file with which the morning seemed vaguely in fellowship. He had not been to the inspection, but he said, "I can carry on to-day still; but to-morrow I shall knock under. To-morrow ____"

We paid no attention to Mélusson's words. Some one near us said,
"Those instructions the major spoke of, they're a sign."

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On parade that same morning the chief, with his nose on a paper, read out: "By order of the Officer Commanding," and then he stammered out some names, names of some soldiers in the regiment brigaded with ours, who had been shot for disobedience. There was a long list of them. At the beginning of the reading a slight growl was heard going round. Then, as the surnames came out, as they spread out in a crowd around us, there was silence. This direct contact with the phantoms of the executed set a wind of terror blowing and bowed all heads.

It was the same again on the days that followed. After parade orders, the commandant, whom we rarely saw, mustered the four companies under arms on some waste ground. He spoke to us of the military situation, particularly favorable to us on the whole front, and of the final victory which could not be long delayed. He made promises to us. "Soon you will be at home," and smiled on us for the first time. He said, "Men, I do not know what is going to happen, but when it should be necessary I rely on you. As always, do your duty and be silent. It is so easy to be silent and to act!"

We broke off and made ourselves scarce. Returned to quarters we learned there was to be an inspection of cartridges and reserve rations by the captain. We had hardly time to eat. Majorat waxed wroth, and confided his indignation to Termite, who was a good audience, "It's all the fault of that unlucky captain—we're just slaves!"

He shook his fist as he spoke towards the Town Hall.

But Termite shrugged his shoulders, looked at him unkindly, and said, "Like a rotten egg, that's how you talk. That captain, and all the red tabs and brass hats, it's not them that invented the rules. They're just gilded machines—machines like you, but not so cheap. If you want to do away with discipline, do away with war, my fellow; that's a sight easier than to make it amusing for the private."

He left Majorat crestfallen, and the others as well. For my part I admired the peculiar skill with which the anti-militarist could give answers beside the mark and yet always seem to be in the right.

During those days they multiplied the route-marches and the exercises intended to let the officers get the men again in hand. These maneuvers tired us to death, and especially the sham attacks on wooded mounds, carried out in the evening among bogs and thorn-thickets. When we got back, most of the men fell heavily asleep just as they had fallen, beside their knapsacks, without having the heart to eat.

Right in the middle of the night and this paralyzed slumber, a cry echoed through the walls, "Alarm! Stand to arms!"

We were so weary that the brutal reveille seemed at first, to the blinking and rusted men, like the shock of a nightmare. Then, while the cold blew in through the open door and we heard the sentries running through the streets, while the

corporals lighted the candles and shook us with their voices, we sat up askew, and crouched, and got our things ready, and stood up and fell in shivering, with flabby legs and minds befogged, in the black-hued street.

After the roll-call and some orders and counter-orders, we heard the command "Forward!" and we left the rest-camp as exhausted as when we entered it. And thus we set out, no one knew where.

At first it was the same exodus as always. It was on the same road that we disappeared: into the same great circles of blackness that we sank.

We came to the shattered glass works and then to the quarry, which daybreak was washing and fouling and making its desolation more complete. Fatigue was gathering darkly within us and abating our pace. Faces appeared stiff and wan, and as though they were seen through gratings. We were surrounded by cries of "Forward!" thrown from all directions between the twilight of the sky and the night of the earth. It took a greater effort every time to tear ourselves away from the halts.

We were not the only regiment in movement in these latitudes. The twilight depths were full. Across the spaces that surrounded the quarry men were passing without ceasing and without limit, their feet breaking and furrowing the earth like plows. And one guessed that the shadows also were full of hosts going as we were to the four corners of the unknown. Then the clay and its thousand barren ruts, these corpse-like fields, fell away. Under the ashen tints of early day, fog-banks of men descended the slopes. From the top I saw nearly the whole regiment rolling into the deeps. As once of an evening in the days gone by, I had a perception of the multitude's immensity and the threat of its might, that might which surpasses all and is impelled by invisible mandates.

We stopped and drew breath again; and on the gloomy edge of this gulf some soldiers even amused themselves by inciting Termite to speak of militarism and anti-militarism. I saw faces which laughed, through their black and woeful pattern of fatigue, around the little man who gesticulated in impotence. Then we had to set off again.

We had never passed that way but in the dark, and we did not recognize the scenes now that we saw them. From the lane which we descended, holding ourselves back, to gain the trench, we saw for the first time the desert through

which we had so often passed—plains and lagoons unlimited.

The waterlogged open country, with its dispirited pools and their smoke-like islets of trees, seemed nothing but a reflection of the leaden, cloud-besmirched sky. The walls of the trenches, pallid as ice-floes, marked with their long, sinuous crawling where they had been slowly torn from the earth by the shovels. These embossings and canals formed a complicated and incalculable network, smudged near at hand by bodies and wreckage; dreary and planetary in the distance. One could make out the formal but hazy stakes and posts, aligned in the distance to the end of sight; and here and there the swellings and round ink-blots of the dugouts. In some sections of trench one could sometimes even descry black lines, like a dark wall between other walls, and these lines stirred—they were the workmen of destruction. A whole region in the north, on higher ground, was a forest flown away, leaving only a stranded bristling of masts, like a quayside. There was thunder in the sky, but it was drizzling, too, and even the flashes were gray above that infinite liquefaction in which each regiment was as lost as each man.

We entered the plain and disappeared into the trench. The "open crossing" was now pierced by a trench, though it was little more than begun. Amid the smacks of the bullets which blurred its edges we had to crawl flat on our bellies, along the sticky bottom of this gully. The close banks gripped and stopped our packs so that we floundered perforce like swimmers, to go forward in the earth, under the murder in the air. For a second the anguish and the effort stopped my heart and in a nightmare I saw the cadaverous littleness of my grave closing over me.

At the end of this torture we got up again, in spite of the knapsacks. The last star-shells were sending a bloody *aurora borealis* into the morning. Sudden haloes drew our glances and crests of black smoke went up like cypresses. On both sides, in front and behind, we heard the fearful suicide of shells.

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We marched in the earth's interior until evening. From time to time one hoisted the pack up or pressed down one's cap into the sweat of the forehead; had it fallen it could not have been picked up again in the mechanism of the march; and then we began again to fight with the distance. The hand contracted on the rifle-sling was tumefied by the shoulder-straps and the bent arm was broken.

Like a regular refrain the lamentation of Mélusson came to me. He kept saying that he was going to stop, but he did not stop, ever, and he even butted into the back of the man in front of him when the whistle went for a halt.

The mass of the men said nothing. And the greatness of this silence, this despotic and oppressive motion, irritated Adjutant Marcassin, who would have liked to see some animation. He rated and lashed us with a vengeance. He hustled the file in the narrowness of the trench as he clove to the corners so as to survey his charge. But then he had no knapsack.

Through the heavy distant noise of our tramping, through the funereal consolation of our drowsiness, we heard the adjutant's ringing voice, violently reprimanding this or the other. "Where have you seen, swine, that there can be patriotism without hatred? Do you think one can love his own country if he doesn't hate the others?"

When some one spoke banteringly of militarism—for no one, except Termite, who didn't count, took the word seriously—Marcassin growled despairingly, "French militarism and Prussian militarism, they're not the same thing, for one's French and the other's Prussian!"

But we felt that all these wrangles only shocked and wearied him. He was instantly and gloomily silent.

We were halted to mount guard in a part we had never seen before, and for that reason it seemed worse than the others to us at first. We had to scatter and run up and down the shelterless trench all night, to avoid the plunging files of shells. That night was but one great crash and we were strewn in the middle of it among black puddles, upon a ghostly background of earth. We moved on again in the morning, bemused, and the color of night. In front of the column we still heard the cry "Forward!" Then we redoubled the violence of our effort, we extorted some little haste from out us; and the soaked and frozen company went on under cathedrals of cloud which collapsed in flames, victims of a fate whose name they had no time to seek, a fate which only let its force be felt, like God.

During the day, and much farther on, they cried "Halt!" and the smothered sound of the march was silent. From the trench in which we collapsed under our packs, while another lot went away, we could see as far as a railway embankment. The far end of the loophole-pipe enframed tumbledown dwellings and cabins, ruined

gardens where the grass and the flowers were interred, enclosures masked by palings, fragments of masonry to which eloquent remains of posters even still clung—a corner full of artificial details, of human things, of illusions. The railway bank was near, and in the network of wire stretched between it and us many bodies were fast-caught as flies.

The elements had gradually dissolved those bodies and time had worn them out. With their dislocated gestures and point-like heads they were but lightly hooked to the wire. For whole hours our eyes were fixed on this country all obstructed by a machinery of wires and full of men who were not on the ground. One, swinging in the wind, stood out more sharply than the others, pierced like a sieve a hundred times through and through, and a void in the place of his heart. Another specter, quite near, had doubtless long since disintegrated, while held up by his clothes. At the time when the shadow of night began to seize us in its greatness a wind arose, a wind which shook the desiccated creature, and he emptied himself of a mass of mold and dust. One saw the sky's whirlwind, dark and disheveled, in the place where the man had been; the soldier was carried away by the wind and buried in the sky.

Towards the end of the afternoon the piercing whistle of the bullets was redoubled. We were riddled and battered by the noise. The wariness with which we watched the landscape that was watching us seemed to exasperate Marcassin. He pondered an idea; then came to a sudden decision and cried triumphantly, "Look!"

He climbed to the parapet, stood there upright, shook his fist at space with the blind and simple gesture of the apostle who is offering his example and his heart, and shouted, "Death to the Boches!"

Then he came down, quivering with the faith of his self-gift.

"Better not do that again," growled the soldiers who were lined up in the trench, gorgonized by the extraordinary sight of a living man standing, for no reason, on a front line parapet in broad daylight, stupefied by the rashness they admired although it outstripped them.

"Why not? Look!"

Marcassin sprang up once more. Lean and erect, he stood like a poplar, and raising both arms straight into the air, he yelled, "I believe only in the glory of

France!"

Nothing else was left for him; he was but a conviction. Hardly had he spoken thus in the teeth of the invisible hurricane when he opened his arms, assumed the shape of a cross against the sky, spun round, and fell noisily into the middle of the trench and of our cries.

He had rolled onto his belly. We gathered round him. With a jerk he turned on to his back, his arms slackened, and his gaze drowned in his eyes. His blood began to spread around him, and we drew our great boots away, that we should not walk on that blood.

"He died like an idiot," said Margat in a choking voice; "but by God it's fine!"

He took off his cap, saluted awkwardly and stood with bowed head.

"Committing suicide for an idea, it's fine," mumbled Vidaine.

"It's fine, it's fine!" other voices said.

And these little words fluttered down like leaves and petals onto the body of the great dead soldier.

"Where's his cap, that he thought so much of?" groaned his orderly, Aubeau, looking in all directions.

"Up there, to be sure: I'll fetch it," said Termite.

The comical man went for the relic. He mounted the parapet in his turn, coolly, but bending low. We saw him ferreting about, frail as a poor monkey on the terrible crest. At last he put his hand on the cap and jumped into the trench. A smile sparkled in his eyes and in the middle of his beard, and his brass "cold meat ticket" jingled on his shaggy wrist.

They took the body away. The men carried it and a third followed with the cap. One of us said, "The war's over for him!" And during the dead man's recessional we were mustered, and we continued to draw nearer to the unknown. But everything seemed to recede as fast as we advanced, even events.

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We wandered five days, six days, in the lines, almost without sleeping. We stood for hours, for half-nights and half-days, waiting for ways to be clear that we could not see. Unceasingly they made us go back on our tracks and begin over again. We mounted guard in trenches, we fitted ourselves into some stripped and sinister corner which stood out against a charred twilight or against fire. We were condemned to see the same abysses always.

For two nights we bent fiercely to the mending of an old third-line trench above the ruin of its former mending. We repaired the long skeleton, soft and black, of its timbers. From that dried-up drain we besomed the rubbish of equipment, of petrified weapons, of rotten clothes and of victuals, of a sort of wreckage of forest and house—filthy, incomparably filthy, infinitely filthy. We worked by night and hid by day. The only light for us was the heavy dawn of evening when they dragged us from sleep. Eternal night covered the earth.

After the labor, as soon as daybreak began to replace night with melancholy, we buried ourselves methodically in the depth of the caverns there. Only a deadened murmur penetrated to them, but the rock moved by reason of the earthquakes. When some one lighted his pipe, by that gleam we looked at each other. We were fully equipped; we could start away at any minute; it was forbidden to take off the heavy jingling chain of cartridges around us.

I heard some one say, "In *my* country there are fields, and paths, and the sea; nowhere else in the world is there that."

Among these shades of the cave—an abode of the first men as it seemed—I saw the hand start forth of him who existed on the spectacle of the fields and the sea, who was trying to show it and to seize it; or I saw around a vague halo four card-players stubbornly bent upon finding again something of an ancient and peaceful attachment in the faces of the cards; or I saw Margat flourish a Socialist paper that had fallen from Termite's pocket, and burst into laughter at the censored blanks it contained. And Majorat raged against life, caressed his reserve bottle with his lips till out of breath and then, appeased and his mouth dripping, said it was the only way to alleviate his imprisonment. Then sleep slew words and gestures and thoughts. I kept repeating some phrase to myself, trying in vain to understand it; and sleep submerged me, ancestral sleep so dreary and so deep that it seems there had only and ever been one long, lone sleep here on earth, above which our few actions float, and which ever returns to fill the flesh of man with night.

Forward! Our nights are torn from us in lots. The bodies, invaded by caressing poison, and even by confidences and apparitions, shake themselves and stand up again. We extricate ourselves from the hole, and emerge from the density of buried breath; stumbling we climb into icy space, odorless, infinite space. The oscillation of the march, assailed on both sides by the trench, brings brief and paltry halts, in which we recline against the walls, or cast ourselves on them. We embrace the earth, since nothing else is left us to embrace.

Then Movement seizes us again. Metrified by regular jolts, by the shock of each step, by our prisoned breathing, it loses its hold no more, but becomes incarnate in us. It sets one small word resounding in our heads, between our teeth —"Forward!"—longer, more infinite than the uproar of the shells. It sets us making, towards the east or towards the north, bounds which are days and nights in length. It turns us into a chain which rolls along with a sound of steel—the metallic hammering of rifle, bayonet, cartridges, and of the tin cup which shines on the dark masses like a bolt. Wheels, gearing, machinery! One sees life and the reality of things striking and consuming and forging each other.

We knew well enough that we were going towards some tragedy that the chiefs knew of; but the tragedy was above all in the going there.

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We changed country. We left the trenches and climbed out upon the earth—along a great incline which hid the enemy horizon from us and protected us against him. The blackening dampness turned the cold into a thing, and laid frozen shudders on us. A pestilence surrounded us, wide and vague; and sometimes lines of pale crosses alongside our march spelled out death in a more precise way.

It was our tenth night; it was at the end of all our nights, and it seemed greater than they. The distances groaned, roared and growled, and would sometimes abruptly define the crest of the incline among the winding sheets of the mists. The intermittent flutters of light showed me the soldier who marched in front of me. My eyes, resting in fixity on him, discovered his sheepskin coat, his waist-belt, straining at the shoulder-straps, dragged by the metal-packed cartridge pouches, by the bayonet, by the trench-tool; his round bags, pushed backwards; his swathed and hooded rifle; his knapsack, packed lengthways so as not to give a handle to the earth which goes by on either side; the blanket, the quilt, the

tentcloth, folded accordion-wise on the top of each other, and the whole surmounted by the mess-tin, ringing like a mournful bell, higher than his head. What a huge, heavy and mighty mass the armed soldier is, near at hand and when one is looking at nothing else!

Once, in consequence of a command badly given or badly understood, the company wavered, flowed back and pawed the ground in disorder on the declivity. Fifty men, who were all alike by reason of their sheepskins ran here and there and one by one—a vague collection of evasive men, small and frail, not knowing what to do; while non-coms ran round them, abused and gathered them. Order began again, and against the whitish and bluish sheets spread by the star-shells I saw the pendulums of the step once more fall into line under the long body of shadows.

During the night there was a distribution of brandy. By the light of lanterns we saw the cups held out, shaking and gleaming. The libation drew from our entrails a moment of delight and uplifting. The liquid's fierce flow awoke deep impulses, restored the martial mien to us, and made us grasp our rifles with a victorious desire to kill.

But the night was longer than that dream. Soon, the kind of goddess superposed on our shadows left our hands and our heads, and that thrill of glory was of no use.

Indeed, its memory filled our hearts with a sort of bitterness. "You see, there's no trenches anywhere about here," grumbled the men.

"And why are there no trenches?" said a wrongheaded man; "why, it's because they don't care a damn for soldiers' lives."

"Fathead!" the corporal interrupted; "what's the good of trenches behind, if there's one in front, fathead!"

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"Halt!"

We saw the Divisional Staff go by in the beam of a searchlight. In that valley of night it might have been a procession of princes rising from a subterranean palace. On cuffs and sleeves and collars badges wagged and shone, golden

aureoles encircled the heads of this group of apparitions.

The flashing made us start and awoke us forcibly, as it did the night.

The men had been pressed back upon the side of the sunken hollow to clear the way; and they watched, blended with the solidity of the dark. Each great person in his turn pierced the fan of moted sunshine, and each was lighted up for some paces. Hidden and abashed, the shadow-soldiers began to speak in very low voices of those who went by like torches.

They who passed first, guiding the Staff, were the company and battalion officers. We knew them. The quiet comments breathed from the darkness were composed either of praises or curses; these were good and clear-sighted officers; those were triflers or skulkers.

"That's one that's killed some men!"

"That's one I'd be killed for!"

"The infantry officer who really does all he ought," Pélican declared, "well, he get's killed."

"Or else he's lucky."

"There's black and there's white in the company officers. At bottom you know, I say they're men. It's just a chance you've got whether you tumble on the good or the bad sort. No good worrying. It's just luck."

"More's the pity for us."

The soldier who said that smiled vaguely, lighted by a reflection from the chiefs. One read in his face an acquiescence which recalled to me certain beautiful smiles I had caught sight of in former days on toilers' humble faces. Those who are around me are saying to themselves, "Thus it is written," and they think no farther than that, massed all mistily in the darkness, like vague hordes of negroes.

Then officers went by of whom we did not speak, because we did not know them. These unknown tab-bearers made a greater impression than the others; and besides, their importance and their power were increasing. We saw rows of

increasing crowns on the caps. Then, the shadow-men were silent. The eulogy and the censure addressed to those whom one had seen at work had no hold on these, and all those minor things faded away. These were admired in the lump.

This superstition made me smile. But the general of the division himself appeared in almost sacred isolation. The tabs and thunderbolts[1] and stripes of his satellites glittered at a respectful distance only. Then it seemed to me that I was face to face with Fate itself—the will of this man. In his presence a sort of instinct dazzled me.

[Footnote 1: Distinctive badge for Staff officers and others.—Tr.]

"Packs up! Forward!"

We took back upon our hips and neck the knapsack which had the shape and the weight of a yoke, which every minute that falls on it weighs down more dourly. The common march went on again. It filled a great space; it shook the rocky slopes with its weight. In vain I bent my head—I could not hear the sound of my own steps, so blended was it with the others. And I repeated obstinately to myself that one had to admire the intelligent force which sets all this deep mass in movement, which says to us or makes us say, "Forward!" or "It has to be!" or "You will *not* know!" which hurls the world we are into a whirlpool so great that we do not even see the direction of our fall, into profundities we cannot see because they are profound. We have need of masters who know all that we do not know.

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Our weariness so increased and overflowed that it seemed as if we grew bigger at every step! And then one no longer thought of fatigue. We had forgotten it, as we had forgotten the number of the days and even their names. Always we made one step more, always.

Ah, the infantry soldiers, the pitiful Wandering Jews who are always marching! They march mathematically, in rows of four numbers, or in file in the trenches, four-squared by their iron load, but separate, separate. Bent forward they go, almost prostrated, trailing their legs, kicking the dead. Slowly, little by little, they are wounded by the length of time, by the incalculable repetition of movements, by the greatness of things. They are borne down by their bones and muscles, by their own human weight. At halts of only ten minutes, they sink down. "There's

no time to sleep!" "No matter," they say, and they go to sleep as happy people do.

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Suddenly we learned that nothing was going to happen! It was all over for us, and we were going to return to the rest-camp. We said it over again to ourselves. And one evening they said, "We're returning," although they did not know, as they went on straight before them, whether they were going forward or backward.

In the plaster-kiln which we are marching past there is a bit of candle, and sunk underneath its feeble illumination there are four men. Nearer, one sees that it is a soldier, guarding three prisoners. The sight of these enemy soldiers in greenish and red rags gives us an impression of power, of victory. Some voices question them in passing. They are dismayed and stupefied; the fists that prop up their yellow cheekbones protrude triangular caricatures of features. Sometimes, at the cut of a frank question, they show signs of lifting their heads, and awkwardly try to give vent to an answer.

"What's he say, that chap?" they asked Sergeant Müller.

"He says that war's none of their fault; it's the big people's."

"The swine!" grunts Margat.

We climb the hill and go down the other side of it. Meandering, we steer towards the infernal glimmers down yonder. At the foot of the hill we stop. There ought to be a clear view, but it is evening—because of the bad weather and because the sky is full of black things and of chemical clouds with unnatural colors. Storm is blended with war. Above the fierce and furious cry of the shells I heard, in domination over all, the peaceful boom of thunder.

They plant us in subterranean files, facing a wide plain of gentle gradient which dips from the horizon towards us, a plain with a rolling jumble of thorn-brakes and trees, which the gale is seizing by the hair. Squalls charged with rain and cold are passing over and immensifying it; and there are rivers and cataclysms of clamor along the trajectories of the shells. Yonder, under the mass of the rust-red sky and its sullen flames, there opens a yellow rift where trees stand forth like gallows. The soil is dismembered. The earth's covering has been blown a lot in

slabs, and its heart is seen reddish and lined white—butchery as far as the eye can see.

There is nothing now but to sit down and recline one's back as conveniently as possible. We stay there and breathe and live a little; we are calm, thanks to that faculty we have of never seeing either the past or the future.

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CHAPTER XIII

WHITHER GOEST THOU?

But soon a shiver has seized all of us.

"Listen! It's stopped! Listen!"

The whistle of bullets has completely ceased, and the artillery also. The lull is fantastic. The longer it lasts the more it pierces us with the uneasiness of beasts. We lived in eternal noise; and now that it is hiding, it shakes and rouses us, and would drive us mad.

"What's that?"

We rub our eyelids and open wide our eyes. We hoist our heads with no precaution above the crumbled parapet. We question each other—"D'you see?"

No doubt about it; the shadows are moving along the ground wherever one looks. There is no point in the distance where they are not moving.

Some one says at last:—

"Why, it's the Boches, to be sure!"

And then we recognize on the sloping plain the immense geographical form of the army that is coming upon us!

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Behind and in front of us together, a terrible crackle bursts forth and makes somber captives of us in the depth of a valley of flames, and flames which illuminate the plain of men marching over the plain. They reveal them afar, in

incalculable number, with the first ranks detaching themselves, wavering a little, and forming again, the chalky soil a series of points and lines like something written!

Gloomy stupefaction makes us dumb in face of that living immensity. Then we understand that this host whose fountain-head is out of sight is being frightfully cannonaded by our 75's; the shells set off behind us and arrive in front of us. In the middle of the lilliputian ranks the giant smoke-clouds leap like hellish gods. We see the flashes of the shells which are entering that flesh scattered over the earth. It is smashed and burned entirely in places, and that nation advances like a brazier.

Without a stop it overflows towards us. Continually the horizon produces new waves. We hear a vast and gentle murmur rise. With their tearing lights and their dull glimmers they resemble in the distance a whole town making festival in the evening.

We can do nothing against the magnitude of that attack, the greatness of that sum total. When a gun has fired short, we see more clearly the littleness of each shot. Fire and steel are drowned in all that life; it closes up and re-forms like the sea.

"Rapid fire!"

We fire desperately. But we have not many cartridges. Since we came into the first line they have ceased to inspect our load of ammunition; and many men, especially these last days, have got rid of a part of the burden which bruises hips and belly and tears away the skin. They who are coming do not fire; and above the long burning thicket of our line one can see them still flowing from the east. They are closely massed in ranks. One would say they clung to each other as though welded. They are not using their rifles. Their only weapon is the infinity of their number. They are coming to bury us under their feet.

Suddenly a shift in the wind brings us the smell of ether. The divisions advancing on us are drunk! We declare it, we tell it to ourselves frantically.

"They're on fire! They're on fire!" cries the trembling voice of the man beside me, whose shoulders are shaken by the shots he is hurling.

They draw near. They are lighted from below along the descent by the flashing footlights of our fire; they grow bigger, and already we can make out the forms

of soldiers. They are at the same time in order and in disorder. Their outlines are rigid, and one divines faces of stone. Their rifles are slung and they have nothing in their hands. They come on like sleep-walkers, only knowing how to put one foot before the other, and surely they are singing. Yonder, in the bulk of the invasion, the guns continue to destroy whole walls and whole structures of life at will. On the edges of it we can clearly see isolated silhouettes and groups as they fall, with an extended line of figures like torchlights.

Now they are there, fifty paces away, breathing their ether into our faces. We do not know what to do. We have no more cartridges. We fix bayonets, our ears filled with that endless, undefined murmur which comes from their mouths and the hollow rolling of the flood that marches.

A shout spreads behind us:

"Orders to fall back!"

We bow down and evacuate the trench by openings at the back. There are not a lot of us, we who thought we were so many. The trench is soon empty, and we climb the hill that we descended in coming. We go up towards our 75's, which are in lines behind the ridge and still thundering. We climb at a venture, in the open, by vague paths and tracks of mud; there are no trenches. During the gray ascent it is a little clearer than a while ago: they do not fire on us. If they fired on us, we should be killed. We climb in flagging jumps, in jerks, pounded by the panting of the following waves that push us before them, closely beset by their clattering, nor turning round to look again. We hoist ourselves up the trembling flanks of the volcano that clamors up yonder. Along with us are emptied batteries also climbing, and horses and clouds of steam and all the horror of modern war. Each man pushes this retreat on, and is pushed by it; and as our panting becomes one long voice, we go up and up, baffled by our own weight which tries to fall back, deformed by our knapsacks, bent and silent as beasts.

From the summit we see the trembling inundation, murmuring and confused, filling the trenches we have just left, and seeming already to overflow them. But our eyes and ears are violently monopolized by the two batteries between which we are passing; they are firing into the infinity of the attackers, and each shot plunges into life. Never have I been so affected by the harrowing sight of artillery fire. The tubes bark and scream in crashes that can hardly be borne; they go and come on their brakes in starts of fantastic distinctness and violence.

In the hollows where the batteries lie hid, in the middle of a fan-shaped phosphorescence, we see the silhouettes of the gunners as they thrust in the shells. Every time they maneuver the breeches, their chests and arms are scorched by a tawny reflection. They are like the implacable workers of blast furnace; the breeches are reddened by the heat of the explosions, the steel of the guns is on fire in the evening.

For some minutes now they have fired more slowly—as if they were becoming exhausted. A few far-apart shots—the batteries fire no more; and now that the salvos are extinguished, we see the fire in the steel go out.

In the abysmal silence we hear a gunner groan:—

"There's no more shell."

The shadow of twilight resumes its place in the sky—henceforward empty. It grows cold. There is a mysterious and terrible mourning. Around me, springing from the obscurity, are groans and gasps for breath, loaded backs which disappear, stupefied eyes, and the gestures of men who wipe the sweat from their foreheads. The order to retire is repeated, in a tone that grips us—one would call it a cry of distress. There is a confused and dejected trampling; and then we descend, we go away the way we came, and the host follows itself heavily and makes more steps into the gulf.

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When we have gone again down the slope of the hill, we find ourselves once more in the bottom of a valley, for another height begins. Before ascending it, we stop to take breath, but ready to set off again should the flood-tide appear on the ridge yonder. We find ourselves in the middle of grassy expanses, without trenches or defense, and we are astonished not to see the supports. We are in the midst of a sort of absence.

We sit down here and there; and some one with his forehead bowed almost to his knees, translating the common thought, says:—

"It's none of our fault."

Our lieutenant goes up to the man, puts his hand on his shoulder, and says, gently:—

"No, my lads, it's none of your fault."

Just then some sections join us who say, "We're the rearguard." And some add that the two batteries of 75's up yonder are already captured. A whistle rings out —"Come, march!"

We continue the retreat. There are two battalions of us in all—no soldier in front of us; no French soldier behind us. I have neighbors who are unknown to me, motley men, routed and stupefied, artillery and engineers; unknown men who come and go away, who seem to be born and seem to die.

At one time we get a glimpse of some confusion in the orders from above. A Staff officer, issuing from no one knew where, throws himself in front of us, bars our way, and questions us in a tragic voice:—

"What are you miserable men doing? Are you running away? Forward in the name of France! I call upon you to return. Forward!"

The soldiers, who would never have thought of retiring without orders, are stunned, and can make nothing of it.

"We're going back because they told us to go back."

But they obey. They turn right about face. Some of them have already begun to march forward, and they call to their comrades:—

"Hey there! This way, it seems!"

But the order to retire returns definitely, and we obey once more, fuming against those who do not know what they say; and the ebb carries away with it the officer who shouted amiss.

The march speeds up, it becomes precipitate and haggard. We are swept along by an impetuosity that we submit to without knowing whence it comes. We begin the ascent of the second hill which appears in the fallen night a mountain.

When fairly on it we hear round us, on all sides and quite close, a terrible pit-pat, and the long low hiss of mown grass. There is a crackling afar in the sky, and they who glance back for a second in the awesome storm see the cloudy ridges catch fire horizontally. It means that the enemy have mounted machine guns on

the summit we have just abandoned, and that the place where we are is being hacked by the knives of bullets. On all sides soldiers wheel and rattle down with curses, sighs and cries. We grab and hang on to each other, jostling as if we were fighting.

The rest at last reach the top of the rise; and just at that moment the lieutenant cries in a clear and heartrending voice:

"Good-by, my lads!"

We see him fall, and he is carried away by the survivors around him.

From the summit we go a few steps down the other side, and lie on the ground in silence. Some one asks, "The lieutenant?"

"He's dead."

"Ah," says the soldier, "and how he said good-by to us!"

We breathe a little now. We do not think any more unless it be that we are at last saved, at last lying down.

Some engineers fire star-shells, to reconnoiter the state of things in the ground we have evacuated. Some have the curiosity to risk a glance over it. On the top of the first hill—where our guns were—the big dazzling plummets show a line of bustling excitement. One hears the noises of picks and of mallet blows.

They have stopped their advance and are consolidating there. They are hollowing their trenches and planting their network of wire—which will have to be taken again some day. We watch, outspread on our bellies, or kneeling, or sitting lower down, with our empty rifles beside us.

Margat reflects, shakes his head and says:—

"Wire would have stopped them just now. But we had no wire."

"And machine-guns, too! but where are they, the M.G.s?"

We have a distinct feeling that there has been an enormous blunder in the command. Want of foresight—the reënforcements were not there; they had not thought of supports. There were not enough guns to bar their way, nor enough artillery ammunition; with our own eyes we had seen two batteries cease fire in mid-action—they had not thought of shells. In a wide stretch of country, as one could see, there were no defense work, no trenches; they had not thought of trenches.

It is obvious even to the common eyes of common soldiers.

"What could we do?" says one of us; "it's the chiefs."

We say it and we should repeat it if we were not up again and swept away in the hustle of a fresh departure, and thrown back upon more immediate and important anxieties.

* * * * * *

We do not know where we are.

We have marched all night. More weariness bends our spines again, more obscurity hums in our heads. By following the bed of a valley, we have found trenches again, and then men. These splayed and squelched alleys, with their fat

and sinking sandbags, their props which rot like limbs, flow into wider pockets where activity prevails—battalion H.Q., or dressing-stations. About midnight we saw, through the golden line of a dugout's half-open door, some officers seated at a white table—a cloth or a map. Some one cries, "They're lucky!" The company officers are exposed to dangers as we are, but only in attacks and reliefs. We suffer long. They have neither the vigil at the loophole, nor the knapsack, nor the fatigues. What always lasts is greater.

And now the walls of flabby flagstones and the open-mouthed caves have begun again. Morning rises, long and narrow as our lot. We reach a busy trench-crossing. A stench catches my throat: some cess-pool into which these streets suspended in the earth empty their sewage? No, we see rows of stretchers, each one swollen. There is a tent there of gray canvas, which flaps like a flag, and on its fluttering wall the dawn lights up a bloody cross.

* * * * * *

Sometimes, when we are high enough for our eyes to unbury themselves, I can dimly see some geometrical lines, so confused, so desolated by distance, that I do not know if it is our country or the other; even when one sees he does not know. Our looks are worn away in looking. We do not see, we are powerless to people the world. We all have nothing in common but eyes of evening and a soul of night.

And always, always, in these trenches whose walls run down like waves, with their stale stinks of chlorine and sulphur, chains of soldiers go forward endlessly, towing each other. They go as quickly as they can, as if the walls were going to close upon them. They are bowed as if they were always climbing, wholly dark under colossal packs which they carry without stopping, from one place to another place, as they might rocks in hell. From minute to minute we are filling the places of the obliterated hosts who have passed this way like the wind or have stayed here like the earth.

We halt in a funnel. We lean our backs against the walls, resting the packs on the projections which bristle from them. But we examine these things coming out of the earth, and we smell that they are knees, elbows and heads. They were interred there one day and the following days are disinterring them. At the spot where I am, from which I have roughly and heavily recoiled with all my armory, a foot comes out from a subterranean body and protrudes. I try to put it out of the

way, but it is strongly incrusted. One would have to break the corpse of steel, to make it disappear. I look at the morsel of mortality. My thoughts, and I cannot help them, are attracted by the horizontal body that the world bruises; they go into the ground with it and mold a shape for it. Its face—what is the look which rots crushed in the dark depth of the earth at the top of these remains? Ah, one catches sight of what there is under the battlefields! Everywhere in the spacious wall there are limbs, and black and muddy gestures. It is a sepulchral sculptor's great sketch-model, a bas-relief in clay that stands haughtily before our eyes. It is the portal of the earth's interior; yes, it is the gate of hell.

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In order to get here, I slept as I marched; and now I have an illusion that I am hidden in this little cave, cooped up against the curve of the roof. I am no more than this gentle cry of the flesh—Sleep! As I begin to doze and people myself with dreams, a man comes in. He is unarmed, and he ransacks us with the stabbing white point of his flash-lamp. It is the colonel's batman. He says to our adjutant as soon as he finds him:—

"Six fatigue men wanted."

The adjutant's bulk rises and yawns:—

"Butsire, Vindame, Margat, Termite, Paulin, Rémus!" he orders as he goes to sleep again.

We emerge from the cave; and more slowly, from our drowsiness. We find ourselves standing in a village street. But as soon as we touch the open air, dazzling roars precede and follow us, mere handful of men as we are, abruptly revealing us to each other. We hurl ourselves like a pack of hounds into the first door or the first gaping hole, and there are some who cry that: "We are marked. We're given away!"

After the porterage fatigue we go back. I settle myself in my corner, heavier, more exhausted, more buried in the bottom of everything. I was beginning to sleep, to go away from myself, lulled by a voice which sought in vain the number of the days we had been on the move, and was repeating the names of the nights—Thursday, Friday, Saturday—when the man with the pointed light returns, demands a gang, and I set off with the others. It is so again for a third time. As soon as we are outside, the night, which seems to lie in wait for us,

sends us a squall, with its thunderous destruction of space; it scatters us; then we are drawn together and joined up. We carry thick planks, two by two; and then piles of sacks which blind the bearers with a plastery dust and make them reel like masts.

Then the last time, the most terrible, it was wire. Each of us takes into his hands a great hoop of coiled wire, as tall as ourselves, and weighing over sixty pounds. When one carries it, the supple wheel stretches out like an animal; it is set dancing by the least movement, it works into the flesh of the shoulder, and strikes one's feet. Mine tries to cling to me and pull me up and throw me to the ground. With this malignantly heavy thing, animated with barbarous and powerful movement, I cross the ruins of a railway station, all stones and beams. We clamber up an embankment which slips away and avoids us, we drag and push the rebellious and implacable burden. It cannot be reached, that receding height. But we reach it, all the same.

Ah, I am a normal man! I cling to life, and I have the consciousness of duty. But at that moment I called from the bottom of my heart for the bullet which would have delivered me from life.

We return, with empty hands, in a sort of sinister comfort. I remember, as we came in, a neighbor said to me—or to some one else:

"Sheets of corrugated iron are worse."

The fatigues have to be stopped at dawn, although the engineers protest against the masses of stores which uselessly fill the depot.

We sleep from six to seven in the morning. In the last traces of night we emigrate from the cave, blinking like owls.

"Where's the juice?"[1] we ask.

[Footnote 1: Coffee.]

There is none. The cooks are not there, nor the mess people. And they reply:—

"Forward!"

In the dull and pallid morning, on the approaches to a village, there appear

gardens, which no longer have human shape. Instead of cultivation there are puddles and mud. All is burned or drowned, and the walls scattered like bones everywhere; and we see the mottled and bedaubed shadows of soldiers. War befouls the country as it does faces and hearts.

Our company gets going, gray and wan, broken down by the infamous weariness. We halt in front of a hangar:—

"Those that are tired can leave their packs," the new sergeant advises; "they'll find them again here."

"If we're leaving our packs, it means we're going to attack," says an ancient.

He says it, but he does not know.

One by one, on the dirty soil of the hangar, the knapsacks fall like bodies. Some men, however, are mistrustful, and prefer to keep their packs. Under all circumstances there are always exceptions.

Forward! The same shouts put us again in movement. Forward! Come, get up! Come on, march! Subdue your refractory flesh; lift yourselves from your slumber as from a coffin, begin yourselves again without ceasing, give all that you can give—Forward! Forward! It has to be. It is a higher concern than yours, a law from above. We do not know what it is. We only know the step we make; and even by day one marches in the night. And then, one cannot help it. The vague thoughts and little wishes that we had in the days when we were concerned with ourselves are ended. There is no way now of escaping from the wheels of fate, no way now of turning aside from fatigue and cold, disgust and pain. Forward! The world's hurricane drives straight before them these terribly blind who grope with their rifles.

We have passed through a wood, and then plunged again into the earth. We are caught in an enfilading fire. It is terrible to pass in broad daylight in these communication trenches, at right angles to the lines, where one is in view all the way. Some soldiers are hit and fall. There are light eddies and brief obstructions in the places where they dive; and then the rest, a moment halted by the barrier, sometimes still living, frown in the wide-open direction of death, and say:—

"Well, if it's got to be, come on. Get on with it!"

They deliver up their bodies wholly—their warm bodies, that the bitter cold and the wind and the sightless death touch as with women's hands. In these contacts between living beings and force, there is something carnal, virginal, divine.

* * * * * *

They have sent me into a listening post. To get there I had to worm myself, bent double, along a low and obstructed sap. In the first steps I was careful not to walk on the obstructions, and then I had to, and I dared. My foot trembled on the hard or supple masses which peopled that sap.

On the edge of the hole—there had been a road above it formerly, or perhaps even a market-place—the trunk of a tree severed near the ground arose, short as a grave-stone. The sight stopped me for a moment, and my heart, weakened no doubt by my physical destitution, kindled with pity for the tree become a tomb!

Two hours later I rejoined the section in its pit. We abide there, while the cannonade increases. The morning goes by, then the afternoon. Then it is evening.

They make us go into a wide dugout. It appears that an attack is developing somewhere. From time to time, through a breach contrived between sandbags so decomposed and oozing that they seem to have lived, we go out to a little winterly and mournful crossing, to look about. We consult the sky to determine the tempest's whereabouts. We can know nothing.

The artillery fire dazzles and then chokes up our sight. The heavens are making a tumult of blades.

Monuments of steel break loose and crash above our heads. Under the sky, which is dark as with threat of deluge, the explosions throw livid sunshine in all directions. From one end to the other of the visible world the fields move and descend and dissolve, and the immense expanse stumbles and falls like the sea. Towering explosions in the east, a squall in the south; in the zenith a file of bursting shrapnel like suspended volcanoes.

The smoke which goes by, and the hours as well, darken the inferno. Two or three of us risk our faces at the earthen cleft and look out, as much for the purpose of propping ourselves against the earth as for seeing. But we see nothing, nothing on the infinite expanse which is full of rain and dusk, nothing

but the clouds which tear themselves and blend together in the sky, and the clouds which come out of the earth.

Then, in the slanting rain and the limitless gray, we see a man, one only, who advances with his bayonet forward, like a specter.

We watch this shapeless being, this thing, leaving our lines and going away yonder.

We only see one—perhaps that is the shadow of another, on his left.

We do not understand, and then we do. It is the end of the attacking wave.

What can his thoughts be—this man alone in the rain as if under a curse, who goes upright away, forward, when space is changed into a shrieking machine? By the light of a cascade of flashes I thought I saw a strange monk-like face. Then I saw more clearly—the face of an ordinary man, muffled in a comforter.

"It's a chap of the 150th, not the 129th," stammers a voice by my side.

We do not know, except that it is the end of the attacking wave.

When he has disappeared among the eddies, another follows him at a distance, and then another. They pass by, separate and solitary, delegates of death, sacrificers and sacrificed. Their great-coats fly wide; and we, we press close to each other in our corner of night; we push and hoist ourselves with our rusted muscles, to see that void and those great scattered soldiers.

We return to the shelter, which is plunged in darkness. The motor-cyclist's voice obtrudes itself to the point that we think we can see his black armor. He is describing the "carryings on" at Bordeaux in September, when the Government was there. He tells of the festivities, the orgies, the expenditure, and there is almost a tone of pride in the poor creature's voice as he recalls so many pompous pageants all at once.

But the uproar outside silences us. Our funk-hole trembles and cracks. It is the barrage—the barrage which those whom we saw have gone to fight, hand to hand. A thunderbolt falls just at the opening, it casts a bright light on all of us, and reveals the last emotion of all, the belief that all was ended! One man is grimacing like a malefactor caught in the act; another is opening strange,

disappointed eyes; another is swinging his doleful head, enslaved by the love of sleep, and another, squatting with his head in his hands, makes a lurid entanglement. We have seen each other—upright, sitting or crucified—in the second of broad daylight which came into the bowels of the earth to resurrect our darkness.

In a moment, when the guns chance to take breath, a voice at the door-hole calls us:

"Forward!"

"We shall be staying there, this time over!" growl the men.

They say this, but they do not know it. We go out, into a chaos of crashing and flames.

"You'd better fix bayonets," says the sergeant; "come, get 'em on."

We stop while we adjust weapon to weapon and then run to overtake the rest.

We go down; we go up; we mark time; we go forward—like the others. We are no longer in the trench.

"Get your heads down—kneel!"

We stop and go on our knees. A star-shell pierces us with its intolerable gaze.

By its light we see, a few steps in front of us, a gaping trench. We were going to fall into it. It is motionless and empty—no, it is occupied—yes, it is empty. It is full of a file of slain watchers. The row of men was no doubt starting out of the earth when the shell burst in their faces; and by the poised white rays we see that the blast has staved them in, has taken away the flesh; and above the level of the monstrous battlefield there is left of them only some fearfully distorted heads. One is broken and blurred; one emerges like a peak, a good half of it fallen into nothing. At the end of the row, the ravages have been less, and only the eyes are smitten. The hollow orbits in those marble heads look outwards with dried darkness. The deep and obscure face-wounds have the look of caverns and funnels, of the shadows in the moon; and stars of mud are clapped on the faces in the place where eyes once shone.

Our strides have passed that trench. We go more quickly and trouble no more now about the star-shells, which, among us who know nothing, say, "I know" and "I will." All is changed, all habits and laws. We march exposed, upright, through the open fields. Then I suddenly understand what they have hidden from us up to the last moment—we are attacking!

Yes, the counter-attack has begun without our knowing it. I apply myself to following the others. May I not be killed like the others; may I be saved like the others! But if I am killed, so much the worse.

I bear myself forward. My eyes are open but I look at nothing; confused pictures are printed on my staring eyes. The men around me form strange surges; shouts cross each other or descend. Upon the fantastic walls of nights the shots make flicks and flashes. Earth and sky are crowded with apparitions; and the golden lace of burning stakes is unfolding.

A man is in front of me, a man whose head is wrapped in linen.

He is coming from the opposite direction. He is coming from the other country! He was seeking me, and I was seeking him. He is quite near—suddenly he is upon me.

The fear that he is killing me or escaping me—I do not know which—makes me throw out a desperate effort. Opening my hands and letting the rifle go, I seize him. My fingers are buried in his shoulder, in his neck, and I find again, with overflowing exultation, the eternal form of the human frame. I hold him by the neck with all my strength, and with more than all my strength, and we quiver with my quivering.

He had not the idea of dropping his rifle so quickly as I. He yields and sinks. I cling to him as if it were salvation. The words in his throat make a lifeless noise. He brandishes a hand which has only three fingers—I saw it clearly outlined against the clouds like a fork.

Just as he totters in my arms, resisting death, a thunderous blow strikes him in the back. His arms drop, and his head also, which is violently doubled back, but his body is hurled against me like a projectile, like a superhuman blast.

I have rolled on the ground; I get up, and while I am hastily trying to find myself again I feel a light blow in the waist. What is it? I walk forward, and still

forward, with my empty hands. I see the others pass, they go by in front of me. *I*, I advance no more. Suddenly I fall to the ground.

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CHAPTER XIV

THE RUINS

I fall on my knees, and then full length. I do what so many others have done.

I am alone on the earth, face to face with the mud, and I can no longer move. The frightful searching of the shells alights around me. The hoarse hurricane which does not know me is yet trying to find the place where I am!

Then the battle goes away, and its departure is heartrending. In spite of all my efforts, the noise of the firing fades and I am alone; the wind blows and I am naked.

I shall remain nailed to the ground. By clinging to the earth and plunging my hands into the depth of the swamp as far as the stones, I get my neck round a little to see the enormous burden that my back supports. No—it is only the immensity on me.

My gaze goes crawling. In front of me there are dark things all linked together, which seem to seize or to embrace one another. I look at those hills which shut out my horizon and imitate gestures and men. The multitude downfallen there imprisons me in its ruins. I am walled in by those who are lying down, as I was walled in before by those who stood.

I am not in pain. I am extraordinarily calm; I am drunk with tranquillity. Are they dead, all—those? I do not know. The dead are specters of the living, but the living are specters of the dead. Something warm is licking my hand. The black mass which overhangs me is trembling. It is a foundered horse, whose great body is emptying itself, whose blood is flowing like poor touches of a tongue on to my hand. I shut my eyes, bemused, and think of a bygone merry-making; and I remember that I once saw, at the end of a hunt, against the operatic background

of a forest, a child-animal whose life gushed out amid general delight.

A voice is speaking beside me.

No doubt the moon has come out—I cannot see as high as the cloud escarpments, as high as the sky's opening. But that blenching light is making the corpses shine like tombstones.

I try to find the low voice. There are two bodies, one above the other. The one underneath must be gigantic—his arms are thrown backward in a hurricane gesture; his stiff, disheveled hair has crowned him with a broken crown. His eyes are opaque and glaucous, like two expectorations, and his stillness is greater than anything one may dream of. On the other the moon's beams are setting points and lines a-sparkle and silvering gold. It is he who is talking to me, quietly and without end. But although his low voice is that of a friend, his words are incoherent. He is mad—I am abandoned by him! No matter, I will drag myself up to him to begin with. I look at him again. I shake myself and blink my eyes, so as to look better. He wears on his body a uniform accursed! Then with a start, and my hand claw-wise, I stretch myself towards the glittering prize to secure it. But I cannot go nearer him; it seems that I no longer have a body. He has looked at me. He has recognized my uniform, if it is recognizable, and my cap, if I have it still. Perhaps he has recognized the indelible seal of my race that I carry printed on my features. Yes, on my face he has recognized that stamp. Something like hatred has blotted out the face that I saw dawning so close to me. Our two hearts make a desperate effort to hurl ourselves on each other. But we can no more strike each other than we can separate ourselves.

But has he seen me? I cannot say now. He is stirred by fever as by the wind; he is choked with blood. He writhes, and that shows me the beaten-down wings of his black cloak.

Close by, some of the wounded have cried out; and farther away one would say they are singing—beyond the low stakes so twisted and shriveled that they look as if guillotined.

He does not know what he is saying. He does not even know that he is speaking, that his thoughts are coming out. The night is torn into rags by sudden bursts; it fills again at random with clusters of flashes; and his delirium enters into my head. He murmurs that logic is a thing of terrible chains, and that all things cling

together. He utters sentences from which distinct words spring, like the scattered hasty gleams they include in hymns—the Bible, history, majesty, folly. Then he shouts:—

"There is nothing in the world but the Empire's glory!"

His cry shakes some of the motionless reefs. And I, like an invincible echo, I cry:—

"There is only the glory of France!"

I do not know if I did really cry out, and if our words did collide in the night's horror. His head is quite bare. His slender neck and bird-like profile issue from a fur collar. There are things like owls shining on his breast. It seems to me as if silence is digging itself into the brains and lungs of the dark prisoners who imprison us, and that we are listening to it.

He rambles more loudly now, as if he bore a stifling secret; he calls up multitudes, and still more multitudes. He is obsessed by multitudes—"Men, men!" he says. The soil is caressed by some sounds of sighs, terribly soft, by confidences which are interchanged without their wishing it. Now and again, the sky collapses into light, and that flash of instantaneous sunshine changes the shape of the plain every time, according to its direction. Then does the night take all back again athwart the rolling echoes.

"Men! Men!"

"What about them, then?" says a sudden jeering voice which falls like a stone.

"Men *must* not awake," the shining shadow goes on, in dull and hollow tones.

"Don't worry!" says the ironical voice, and at that moment it terrifies me.

Several bodies arise on their fists into the darkness—I see them by their heavy groans—and look around them.

The shadow talks to himself and repeats his insane words:—

"Men *must* not awake."

The voice opposite me, capsizing in laughter and swollen with a rattle, says again:—

"Don't worry!"

Yonder, in the hemisphere of night, comets glide, blending their cries of engines and owls with their flaming entrails. Will the sky ever recover the huge peace of the sun and the stainless blue?

A little order, a little lucidity are coming back into my mind. Then I begin to think about myself.

Am I going to die, yes or no? Where can I be wounded? I have managed to look at my hands, one by one; they are not dead, and I saw nothing in their dark trickling. It is extraordinary to be made motionless like this, without knowing where or how. I can do no more on earth than lift my eyes a little to the edge of the world where I have rolled.

Suddenly I am pushed by a movement of the horse on which I am lying. I see that he has turned his great head aside; he is mournfully eating grass. I saw this horse but lately in the middle of the regiment—I know him by the white in his mane—rearing and whinnying like the true battle-chargers; and now, broken somewhere, he is silent as the truly unhappy are. Once again, I recall the red deer's little one, mutilated on its carpet of fresh crimson, and the emotion which I had not on that bygone day rises into my throat. Animals are innocence incarnate. This horse is like an enormous child, and if one wanted to point out life's innocence face to face, one would have to typify, not a little child, but a horse. My neck gives way, I utter a groan, and my face gropes upon the ground.

The animal's start has altered my place and shot me on my side, nearer still to the man who was talking. He has unbent, and is lying on his back. Thus he offers his face like a mirror to the moon's pallor, and shows hideously that he is wounded in the neck. I feel that he is going to die. His words are hardly more now than the rustle of wings. He has said some unintelligible things about a Spanish painter, and some motionless portraits in the palaces—the Escurial, Spain, Europe. Suddenly he is repelling with violence some beings who are in his past:—

"Begone, you dreamers!" he says, louder than the stormy sky where the flames are red as blood, louder than the falling flashes and the harrowing wind, louder than all the night which enshrouds us and yet continues to stone us.

He is seized with a frenzy which bares his soul as naked as his neck:—

"The truth is revolutionary," gasps the nocturnal voice; "get you gone, you men of truth, you who cast disorder among ignorance, you who strew words and sow the wind; you contrivers, begone! You bring in the reign of men! But the multitude hates you and mocks you!"

He laughs, as if he heard the multitude's laughter.

And around us another burst of convulsive laughter grows hugely bigger in the plain's black heart:—

"Wot's 'e sayin' now, that chap?"

"Let him be. You can see 'e knows more'n 'e says."

"Ah, la, la!"

I am so near to him that I alone gather the rest of his voice, and he says to me very quietly:—

"I have confidence in the abyss of the people."

And those words stabbed me to the heart and dilated my eyes with horror, for it seemed to me suddenly, in a flash, that he understood what he was saying! A picture comes to life before my eyes—that prince, whom I saw from below, once upon a time, in the nightmare of life, he who loved the blood of the chase. Not far away a shell turns the darkness upside down; and it seems as if that explosion also has considered and shrieked.

Heavy night is implanted everywhere around us. My hands are bathed in black blood. On my neck and cheeks, rain, which is also black, bleeds.

The funeral procession of silver-fringed clouds goes by once more, and again a ray of moonlight besilvers the swamp that has sunk us soldiers; it lays winding-sheets on the prone.

All at once a swelling lamentation comes to life, one knows not where, and glides over the plain:—

"Help! Help!"

"Now then! *They're* not coming to look for us! What about it?"

And I see a stirring and movement, very gentle, as at the bottom of the sea.

Amid the glut of noises, upon that still tepid and unsubmissive expanse where cold death sits brooding, that sharp profile has fallen back. The cloak is quivering. The great and sumptuous bird of prey is in the act of taking wing.

The horse has not stopped bleeding. Its blood falls on me drop by drop with the regularity of a clock,—as though all the blood that is filtering through the strata of the field and all the punishment of the wounded came to a head in him and through him. Ah, it seems that truth goes farther in all directions than one thought! We bend over the wrong that animals suffer, for them we wholly understand.

Men, men! Everywhere the plain has a mangled outline. Below that horizon, sometimes blue-black and sometimes red-black, the plain is monumental!

CHAPTER XV

AN APPARITION

I have not changed my place. I open my eyes. Have I been sleeping? I do not know. There is tranquil light now. It is evening or morning. My arms alone can tremble. I am enrooted like a distorted bush. My wound? It is that which glues me to the ground.

I succeed in raising my face, and the wet waves of space assail my eyes. Patiently I pick out of the earthy pallor which blends all things some foggy shoulders, some cloudy angles of elbows, some hand-like lacerations. I discern in the still circle which encloses me—faces lying on the ground and dirty as feet, faces held out to the rain like vases, and holding stagnant tears.

Quite near, one face is looking sadly at me, as it lolls to one side. It is coming out of the bottom of the heap, as a wild animal might. Its hair falls back like nails. The nose is a triangular hole and a little of the whiteness of human marble dots it. There are no lips left, and the two rows of teeth show up like lettering. The cheeks are sprinkled with moldy traces of beard. This body is only mud and stones. This face, in front of my own, is only a consummate mirror.

Water-blackened overcoats cover and clothe the whole earth around me.

I gaze, and gaze——

I am frozen by a mass which supports me. My elbow sinks into it. It is the horse's belly; its rigid leg obliquely bars the narrow circle from which my eyes cannot escape. Ah, it is dead! It seems to me that my breast is empty, yet still there is an echo in my heart. What I am looking for is life.

The distant sky is resonant, and each dull shot comes and pushes my shoulder.

Nearer, some shells are thundering heavily. Though I cannot see them, I see the tawny reflection that their flame spreads abroad, and the sudden darkness as well that is hurled by their clouds of excretion. Other shadows go and come on the ground about me; and then I hear in the air the plunge of beating wings, and cries so fierce that I feel them ransack my head.

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Death is not yet dead everywhere. Some points and surfaces still resist and budge and cry out, doubtless because it is dawn; and once the wind swept away a muffled bugle-call. There are some who still burn with the invisible fire of fever, in spite of the frozen periods they have crossed. But the cold is working into them. The immobility of lifeless things is passing into them, and the wind empties itself as it goes by.

Voices are worn away; looks are soldered to their eyes. Wounds are staunched; they have finished. Only the earth and the stones bleed. And just then I saw, under the trickling morning, some half-open but still tepid dead that steamed, as if they were the blackening rubbish-heap of a village. I watch that hovering dead breath of the dead. The crows are eddying round the naked flesh with their flapping banners and their war-cries. I see one which has found some shining rubies on the black vein-stone of a foot; and one which noisily draws near to a mouth, as if called by it. Sometimes a dead man makes a movement, so that he will fall lower down. But they will have no more burial than if they were the last men of all.

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There is one upright presence which I catch a glimpse of, so near, so near; and I want to see it. In making the effort with my elbow on the horse's ballooned body I succeed in altering the direction of my head, and of the corridor of my gaze. Then all at once I discover a quite new population of bronze men in rotten clothes; and especially, erect on bended knees, a gray overcoat, lacquered with blood and pierced by a great hole, round which is collected a bunch of heavy crimson flowers. Slowly I lift the burden of my eyes to explore that hole. Amid the shattered flesh, with its changing colors and a smell so strong that it puts a loathsome taste in my mouth, at the bottom of the cage where some crossed bones are black and rusted as iron bars, I can see something, something isolated, dark and round. I see that it is a heart.

Placed there, too—I do not know how, for I cannot see the body's full height—the arm, and the hand. The hand has only three fingers—a fork—— Ah, I recognize that heart! It is his whom I killed. Prostrate in the mud before him, because of my defeat and my resemblance, I cried out to the man's profundity, to the superhuman man. Then my eyes fell; and I saw worms moving on the edges of that infinite wound. I was quite close to their stirring. They are whitish worms, and their tails are pointed like stings; they curve and flatten out, sometimes in the shape of an "i," and sometimes of a "u." The perfection of immobility is left behind. The human material is crumbled into the earth for another end.

I hated that man, when he had his shape and his warmth. We were foreigners, and made to destroy ourselves. Yet it seems to me, in face of that bluish heart, still attached to its red cords, that I understand the value of life. It is understood by force, like a caress. I think I can see how many seasons and memories and beings there had to be, yonder, to make up that life,—while I remain before him, on a point of the plain, like a night watcher. I hear the voice that his flesh breathed while yet he lived a little, when my ferocious hands fumbled in him for the skeleton we all have. He fills the whole place. He is too many things at once. How can there be worlds in the world? That established notion would destroy all.

This perfume of a tuberose is the breath of corruption. On the ground,
I see crows near me, like hens.

Myself! I think of myself, of all that I am. Myself, my home, my hours; the past, and the future,—it was going to be like the past! And at that moment I feel, weeping within me and dragging itself from some little bygone trifle, a new and tragical sorrow in dying, a hunger to be warm once more in the rain and the cold: to enclose myself in myself in spite of space, to hold myself back, to live. I called for help, and then lay panting, watching the distance in desperate expectation. "Stretcher-bearers!" I cry. I do not hear myself; but if only the others heard me!

Now that I have made that effort, I can do no more, and my head lies there at the entrance to that world-great wound.

There is nothing now.

Yet there is that man. He was laid out like one dead. But suddenly, through his shut eyes, he smiled. He, no doubt, will come back here on earth, and something within me thanks him for his miracle.

And there was that one, too, whom I saw die. He raised his hand, which was drowning. Hidden in the depths of the others, it was only by that hand that he lived, and called, and saw. On one finger shone a wedding-ring, and it told me a sort of story. When his hand ceased to tremble, and became a dead plant with that golden flower, I felt the beginning of a farewell rise in me like a sob. But there are too many of them for one to mourn them all. How many of them are there on all this plain? How many, how many of them are there in all this moment? Our heart is only made for one heart at a time. It wears us out to look at all. One may say, "There are the others," but it is only a saying. "You shall not know; you shall *not* know."

Barrenness and cold have descended on all the body of the earth. Nothing moves any more, except the wind, that is charged with cold water, and the shells, that are surrounded by infinity, and the crows, and the thought that rolls immured in my head.

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They are motionless at last, they who forever marched, they to whom space was so great! I see their poor hands, their poor legs, their poor backs, resting on the earth. They are tranquil at last. The shells which bespattered them are ravaging another world. They are in the peace eternal.

All is accomplished, all has terminated there. It is there, in that circle narrow as a well that the descent into the raging heart of hell was halted, the descent into slow tortures, into unrelenting fatigue, into the flashing tempest. We came here because they told us to come here. We have done what they told us to do. I think of the simplicity of our reply on the Day of Judgment.

The gunfire continues. Always, always, the shells come, and all those bullets that are miles in length. Hidden behind the horizons, living men unite with machines and fall furiously on space. They do not see their shots. They do not know what they are doing. "You shall not know; you shall *not* know."

But since the cannonade is returning, they will be fighting here again. All these battles spring from themselves and necessitate each other to infinity! One single

battle is not enough, it is not complete, there is no satisfaction. Nothing is finished, nothing is ever finished. Ah, it is only men who die! No one understands the greatness of things, and I know well that I do not understand all the horror in which I am.

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Here is evening, the time when the firing is lighted up. The horizons of the dark day, of the dark evening, and of the illuminated night revolve around my remains as round a pivot.

I am like those who are going to sleep, like the children. I am growing fainter and more soothed; I close my eyes; I dream of my home.

Yonder, no doubt, they are joining forces to make the evenings tolerable. Marie is there, and some other women, getting dinner ready; the house becomes a savor of cooking. I hear Marie speaking; standing at first, then seated at the table. I hear the sound of the table things which she moves on the cloth as she takes her place. Then, because some one is putting a light to the lamp, having lifted its chimney, Marie gets up to go and close the shutters. She opens the window. She leans forward and outspreads her arms; but for a moment she stays immersed in the naked night. She shivers, and I, too. Dawning in the darkness, she looks afar, as I am doing. Our eyes have met. It is true, for this night is hers as much as mine, the same night, and distance is not anything palpable or real; distance is nothing. It is true, this great close contact.

Where am I? Where is Marie? What is she, even? I do not know, I do not know. I do not know where the wound in my flesh is, and how can I know the wound in my heart?

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The clouds are crowning themselves with sheaves of stars. It is an aviary of fire, a hell of silver and gold. Planetary cataclysms send immense walls of light falling around me. Phantasmal palaces of shrieking lightning, with arches of star-shells, appear and vanish amid forests of ghastly gleams.

While the bombardment is patching the sky with continents of flame, it is drawing still nearer. Volleys of flashes are plunging in here and there and devouring the other lights. The supernatural army is arriving! All the highways

of space are crowded. Nearer still, a shell bursts with all its might and glows; and among us all whom chance defends goes frightfully in quest of flesh. Shells are following each other into that cavity there. Again I see, among the things of earth, a resurrected man, and he is dragging himself towards that hole! He is wrapped in white, and the under-side of his body, which rubs the ground, is black. Hooking the ground with his stiffened arms he crawls, long and flat as a boat. He still hears the cry "Forward!" He is finding his way to the hole; he does not know, and he is trailing exactly toward its monstrous ambush. The shell will succeed! At any second now the frenzied fangs of space will strike his side and go in as into a fruit. I have not the strength to shout to him to fly elsewhere with all his slowness; I can only open my mouth and become a sort of prayer in face of the man's divinity. And yet, he is the survivor; and along with the sleeper, to whom a dream was whispering just now, he is the only one left to me.

A hiss—the final blow reaches him; and in a flash I see the piebald maggot crushing under the weight of the sibilance and turning wild eyes towards me.

No! It is not he! A blow of light—of all light—fills my eyes. I am lifted up, I am brandished by an unknown blade in the middle of a globe of extraordinary light. The shell——I! And I am falling, I fall continually, fantastically. I fall out of this world; and in that fractured flash I saw myself again—I thought of my bowels and my heart hurled to the winds—and I heard voices saying again and again—far, far away—"Simon Paulin died at the age of thirty-six."

CHAPTER XVI

DE PROFUNDIS CLAMAVI

I am dead. I fall, I roll like a broken bird into bewilderments of light, into canyons of darkness. Vertigo presses on my entrails, strangles me, plunges into me. I drop sheer into the void, and my gaze falls faster than I.

Through the wanton breath of the depths that assail me I see, far below, the seashore dawning. The ghostly strand that I glimpse while I cling to my own body is bare, endless, rain-drowned, and supernaturally mournful. Through the long, heavy and concentric mists that the clouds make, my eyes go searching. On the shore I see a being who wanders alone, veiled to the feet. It is a woman. Ah, I am one with that woman! She is weeping. Her tears are dropping on the sand where the waves are breaking! While I am reeling to infinity, I hold out my two heavy arms to her. She fades away as I look.

For a long time there is nothing, nothing but invisible time, and the immense futility of rain on the sea.

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What are these flashes of light? There are gleams of flame in my eyes; a surfeit of light is cast over me. I can no longer cling to anything—fire and water!

In the beginning, there is battle between fire and water—the world revolving headlong in the hooked claws of its flames, and the expanses of water which it drives back in clouds. At last the water obscures the whirling spirals of the furnace and takes their place. Under the roof of dense darkness, timbered with flashes, there are triumphant downpours which last a hundred thousand years. Through centuries of centuries, fire and water face each other; the fire, upright, buoyant and leaping; the water flat, creeping, gliding, widening its lines and its

surface. When they touch, is it the water which hisses and roars, or is it the fire? And one sees the reigning calm of a radiant plain, a plain of incalculable greatness. The round meteor congeals into shapes, and continental islands are sculptured by the water's boundless hand.

I am no longer alone and abandoned on the former battlefield of the elements. Near this rock, something like another is taking shape; it stands straight as a flame, and moves. This sketch-model thinks. It reflects the wide expanse, the past and the future; and at night, on its hill, it is the pedestal of the stars. The animal kingdom dawns in that upright thing, the poor upright thing with a face and a cry, which hides an internal world and in which a heart obscurely beats. A lone being, a heart! But the heart, in the embryo of the first men, beats only for fear. He whose face has appeared above the earth, and who carries his soul in chaos, discerns afar shapes like his own, he sees *the other*—the terrifying outline which spies and roams and turns again, with the snare of his head. Man pursues man to kill him and woman to wound her. He bites that he may eat, he strikes down that he may clasp,—furtively, in gloomy hollows and hiding-places or in the depths of night's bedchamber, dark love is writhing,—he lives solely that he may protect, in some disputed cave, his eyes, his breast, his belly, and the caressing brands of his hearth.

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There is a great calm in my environs.

From place to place, men have gathered together. There are companies and droves of men, with watchmen, in the vapors of dawn; and in the middle one makes out the children and the women, crowding together like fallow deer. To eastward I see, in the silence of a great fresco, the diverging beams of morning gleaming, through the intervening and somber statues of two hunters, whose long hair is tangled like briars, and who hold each other's hand, upright on the mountain.

Men have gone towards each other because of that ray of light which each of them contains; and light resembles light. It reveals that the isolated man, too free in the open expanses, is doomed to adversity as if he were a captive, in spite of appearances; and that men must come together that they may be stronger, that they may be more peaceful, and even that they may be able to live.

For men are made to live their life in its depth, and also in all its length. Stronger than the elements and keener than all terrors are the hunger to last long, the passion to possess one's days to the very end and to make the best of them. It is not only a right; it is a virtue.

Contact dissolves fear and dwindles danger. The wild beast attacks the solitary man, but shrinks from the unison of men together. Around the home-fire, that lowly fawning deity, it means the multiplication of the warmth and even of the poor riches of its halo. Among the ambushes of broad daylight, it means the better distribution of the different forms of labor; among the ambushes of night, it stands for that of tender and identical sleep. All lone, lost words blend in an anthem whose murmur rises in the valley from the busy animation of morning and evening.

The law which regulates the common good is called the moral law. Nowhere nor ever has morality any other purpose than that; and if only one man lived on earth, morality would not exist. It prunes the cluster of the individual's appetites according to the desires of the others. It emanates from all and from each at the same time, at one and the same time from justice and from personal interest. It is inflexible and natural, as much so as the law which, before our eyes, fits the lights and shadows so perfectly together. It is so simple that it speaks to each one and tells him what it is. The moral law has not proceeded from any ideal; it is the ideal which has wholly proceeded from the moral law.

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The primeval cataclysm has begun again upon the earth. My vision—beautiful as a fair dream which shows men's composed reliance on each other in the sunrise—collapses in mad nightmare.

But this flashing devastation is not incoherent, as at the time of the conflict of the first elements and the groping of dead things. For its crevasses and flowing fires show a symmetry which is not Nature's; it reveals discipline let loose, and the frenzy of wisdom. It is made up of thought, of will, of suffering. Multitudes of scattered men, full of an infinity of blood, confront each other like floods. A vision comes and pounces on me, shaking the soil on which I am doubtless laid—the marching flood. It approaches the ditch from all sides and is poured into it. The fire hisses and roars in that army as in water; it is extinguished in human fountains!

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It seems to me that I am struggling against what I see, while lying and clinging somewhere; and once I even heard supernatural admonitions in my ear, *as if I were somewhere else*.

I am looking for men—for the rescue of speech, of a word. How many of them I heard, once upon a time! I want one only, now. I am in the regions where men are earthed up,—a crushed plain under a dizzy sky, which goes by peopled with other stars than those of heaven, and tense with other clouds, and continually lighted from flash to flash by a daylight which is not day.

Nearer, one makes out the human shape of great drifts and hilly fields, many-colored and vaguely floral—the corpse of a section or of a company. Nearer still, I perceive at my feet the ugliness of skulls. Yes, I have seen them—wounds as big as men! In this new cess-pool, which fire dyes red by night and the multitude dyes red by day, crows are staggering, drunk.

Yonder, that is the listening-post, keeping watch over the cycles of time. Five or six captive sentinels are buried there in that cistern's dark, their faces grimacing through the vent-hole, their skull-caps barred with red as with gleams from hell, their mien desperate and ravenous.

When I ask them why they are fighting, they say:—

"To save my country."

I am wandering on the other side of the immense fields where the yellow puddles are strewn with black ones (for blood soils even mud), and with thickets of steel, and with trees which are no more than the shadows of themselves; I hear the skeleton of my jaws shiver and chatter. In the middle of the flayed and yawning cemetery of living and dead, moonlike in the night, there is a wide extent of leveled ruins. It was not a village that once was there, it was a hillside whose pale bones are like those of a village. The other people—mine—have scooped fragile holes, and traced disastrous paths with their hands and with their feet. Their faces are strained forward, their eyes search, they sniff the wind.

"Why are you fighting?"

"To save my country."

The two answers fall as alike in the distance as two notes of a passing-bell, as alike as the voice of the guns.

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And I—I am seeking; it is a fever, a longing, a madness. I struggle, I would fain tear myself from the soil and take wing to the truth. I am seeking the difference between those people who are killing themselves, and I can only find their resemblance. I cannot escape from this resemblance of men. It terrifies me, and I try to cry out, and there come from me strange and chaotic sounds which echo into the unknown, which I almost hear!

They do not wear similar clothes on the targets of their bodies, and they speak different tongues; but from the bottom of that which is human within them, identically the same simplicities come forth. They have the same sorrows and the same angers, around the same causes. They are alike as their wounds are alike and will be alike. Their sayings are as similar as the cries that pain wrings from them, as alike as the awful silence that soon will breathe from their murdered lips. They only fight because they are face to face. Against each other, they are pursuing a common end. Dimly, they kill themselves because they are alike.

And by day and by night, these two halves of war continue to lie in wait for each other afar, to dig their graves at their feet, and I am helpless. They are separated by frontiers of gulfs, which bristle with weapons and explosive snares, impassable to life. They are separated by all that can separate, by dead men and still by dead men, and ever thrown back, each into its gasping islands, by black rivers and consecrated fires, by heroism and hatred.

And misery is endlessly begotten of the miserable.

There is no real reason for it all; there is no reason. I do not wish it. I groan, I fall back.

Then the question, worn, but stubborn and violent as a solid thing, seizes upon me again. Why? Why? I am like the weeping wind. I seek, I defend myself, amid the infinite despair of my mind and heart. I listen. I remember all.

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A booming sound vibrates and increases, like the fitful wing-beats of some dim, tumultuous archangel, above the heads of the masses that move in countless dungeons, or wheel round to furnish the front of the lines with new flesh:—

"Forward! It has to be! You shall *not* know!"

I remember. I have seen much of it, and I see it clearly. These multitudes who are set in motion and let loose,—their brains and their souls and their wills are not in them, but outside them!

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Other people, far away, think and wish for them. Other people wield their hands and push them and pull them, others, who hold all their controlling threads; in the distance, the people in the center of the infernal orbits, in the capital cities, in the palaces. There is a higher law; up above men there is a machine which is stronger than men. The multitude is at the same time power and impotence—and I remember, and I know well that I have seen it with my own eyes. War is the multitude—and it is not! Why did I not know it since I have seen it?

Soldier of the wide world, you, the man taken haphazard from among men, remember—there was not a moment when you were yourself. Never did you cease to be bowed under the harsh and answerless command, "It has to be, it has to be." In times of peace encircled in the law of incessant labor, in the mechanical mill or the commercial mill, slave of the tool, of the pen, of your talent, or of some other thing, you were tracked without respite from morning to evening by the daily task which allowed you only just to overcome life, and to rest only in dreams.

When the war comes that you never wanted—whatever your country and your name—the terrible fate which grips you is sharply unmasked, offensive and complicated. The wind of condemnation has arisen.

They requisition your body. They lay hold on you with measures of menace which are like legal arrest, from which nothing that is poor and needy can escape. They imprison you in barracks. They strip you naked as a worm, and dress you again in a uniform which obliterates you; they mark your neck with a number. The uniform even enters into your flesh, for you are shaped and cut out by the stamping-machine of exercises. Brightly clad strangers spring up about you, and encircle you. You recognize them—they are not strangers. It is a

carnival, then,—but a fierce and final carnival, for these are your new masters, they the absolute, proclaiming on their fists and heads their gilded authority. Such of them as are near to you are themselves only the servants of others, who wear a greater power painted on their clothes. It is a life of misery, humiliation and diminution into which you fall from day to day, badly fed and badly treated, assailed throughout your body, spurred on by your warders' orders. At every moment you are thrown violently back into your littleness, you are punished for the least action which comes out of it, or slain by the order of your masters. It is forbidden you to speak when you would unite yourself with the brother who is touching you. The silence of steel reigns around you. Your thoughts must be only profound endurance. Discipline is indispensable for the multitude to be melted into a single army; and in spite of the vague kinship which is sometimes set up between you and your nearest chief, the machine-like order paralyzes you first, so that your body may be the better made to move in accordance with the rhythm of the rank and the regiment—into which, nullifying all that is yourself, you pass already as a sort of dead man.

"They gather us together but they separate us!" cries a voice from the past.

If there are some who escape through the meshes, it means that such "slackers" are also influential. They are uncommon, in spite of appearances, as the influential are. You, the isolated man, the ordinary man, the lowly thousand-millionth of humanity, you evade nothing, and you march right to the end of all that happens, or to the end of yourself.

You will be crushed. Either you will go into the charnel house, destroyed by those who are similar to you, since war is only made by you, or you will return to your point in the world, diminished or diseased, retaining only existence without health or joy, a home-exile after absences too long, impoverished forever by the time you have squandered. Even if selected by the miracle of chance, if unscathed in the hour of victory, you also, *you* will be vanquished. When you return into the insatiable machine of the work-hours, among your own people—whose misery the profiteers have meanwhile sucked dry with their passion for gain—the task will be harder than before, because of the war that must be paid for, with all its incalculable consequences. You who peopled the peace-time prisons of your towns and barns, begone to people the immobility of the battlefields—and if you survive, pay up! Pay for a glory which is not yours, or for ruins that others have made with your hands.

Suddenly, in front of me and a few paces from my couch—as if I were in a bed, in a bedroom, and had all at once woke up—an uncouth shape rises awry. Even in the darkness I see that it is mangled. I see about its face something abnormal which dimly shines; and I can see, too, by his staggering steps, sunk in the black soil, that his shoes are empty. He cannot speak, but he brings forward the thin arm from which rags hang down and drip; and his imperfect hand, as torturing to the mind as discordant chords, points to the place of his heart. I see that heart, buried in the darkness of the flesh, in the black blood of the living—for only shed blood is red. I see him profoundly, with my heart. If he said anything he would say the words that I still hear falling, drop by drop, as I heard them yonder —"Nothing can be done, nothing." I try to move, to rid myself of him. But I cannot, I am pinioned in a sort of nightmare; and if he had not himself faded away I should have stayed there forever, dazzled in presence of his darkness. This man said nothing. He appeared like the dead thing he is. He has departed. Perhaps he has ceased to be, perhaps he has entered into death, which is not more mysterious to him than life, which he is leaving—and I have fallen back into myself.

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He has returned, to show his face to me. Ah, now there is a bandage round his head, and so I recognize him by his crown of filth! I begin again that moment when I clasped him against me to crush him; when I propped him against the shell, when my arms felt his bones cracking round his heart! It was he!—It was I! He says nothing, from the eternal abysses in which he remains my brother in silence and ignorance. The remorseful cry which tears my throat outstrips me, and would find some one else.

Who?

That destiny which killed him by means of me—has it no human faces?

"Kings!" said Termite.

"The big people!" said the man whom they had snared, the close-cropped German prisoner, the man with the convict's hexagonal face, he who was greenish from top to toe.

But these kings and majesties and superhuman men who are illuminated by fantastic names and never make mistakes—were they not done away with long

since? One does not know.

One does not see those who rule. One only sees what they wish, and what they do with the others.

Why have They always command? One does not know. The multitudes have not given themselves to Them. They have taken them and They keep them. Their power is supernatural. It is, because it was. This is its explanation and formula and breath—"It has to be."

As they have laid hold of arms, so they lay hold of heads, and make a creed.

"They tell you," cried he, whom none of the lowly soldiers would deign to listen to; "they say to you, 'This is what you must have in your minds and hearts.'"

An inexorable religion has fallen from them upon us all, upholding what exists, preserving what is.

Suddenly I hear beside me, as if I were in a file of the executed, a stammering death-agony; and I think I see him who struggled like a stricken vulture, on the earth that was bloated with dead. And his words enter my heart more distinctly than when they were still alive; and they wound me like blows at once of darkness and of light.

"Men *must* not open their eyes!"

"Faith comes at will, like the rest!" said Adjutant Marcassin, as he fluttered in his red trousers about the ranks, like a blood-stained priest of the God of War.

He was right! He had grasped the chains of bondage when he hurled that true cry against the truth. Every man is something of account, but ignorance isolates and resignation scatters. Every poor man carries within him centuries of indifference and servility. He is a defenseless prey for hatred and dazzlement.

The man of the people whom I am looking for, while I writhe through confusion as through mud, the worker who measures his strength against toil which is greater than he, and who never escapes from hardships, the serf of these days—I see him as if he were here. He is coming out of his shop at the bottom of the court. He wears a square cap. One makes out the shining dust of old age strewn in his stubbly beard. He chews and smokes his foul and noisy pipe. He nods his

head; with a fine and sterling smile he says, "There's always been war, so there'll always be."

And all around him people nod their heads and think the same, in the poor lonely well of their heart. They hold the conviction anchored to the bottom of their brains that things can never change any more. They are like posts and paving stones, distinct but cemented together; they believe that the life of the world is a sort of great stone monument, and they obey, obscurely and indistinctly, everything which commands; and they do not look afar, in spite of the little children. And I remember the readiness there was to yield themselves, body and soul, to serried resignation. Then, too, there is alcohol which murders; wine, which drowns.

One does not see the kings; one only sees the reflection of them on the multitude.

There are bemusings and spells of fascination, of which we are the object. I think, fascinated.

My lips religiously recite a passage in a book which a young man has just read to me, while I, quite a child, lean drowsily on the kitchen table—"Roland is not dead. Through long centuries our splendid ancestor, the warrior of warriors, has been seen riding over the mountains and hills across the France of Charlemagne and Hugh the Great. At all times of great national disaster he has risen before the people's eyes, like an omen of victory and glory, with his lustrous helmet and his sword. He has appeared and has halted like a soldier-archangel over the flaming horizon of conflagrations or the dark mounds of battle and pestilence, leaning over his horse's winged mane, fantastically swaying as though the earth itself were inebriate with pride. Everywhere he has been seen, reviving the ideals and the prowess of the Past. He was seen in Austria, at the time of the eternal quarrel between Pope and Emperor; he was seen above the strange stirrings of Scythians and Arabs, and the glowing civilizations which arose and fell like waves around the Mediterranean. Great Roland can never die."

And after he had read these lines of a legend, the young man made me admire them, and looked at me.

He whom I thus see again, as precisely as one sees a portrait, just as he was that evening so wonderfully far away, was my father. And I remember how devoutly

I believed—from that day now buried among them all—in the beauty of those things, because my father had told me they were beautiful.

In the low room of the old house, under the green and watery gleam of the diamond panes in the lancet window, the ancient citizen cries, "There are people mad enough to believe that a day will come when Brittany will no longer be at war with Maine!" He appears in the vortex of the past, and so saying, sinks back in it. And an engraving, once and for a long time heeded, again takes life: Standing on the wooden boom of the ancient port, his scarred doublet rusted by wind and brine, his old back bellied like a sail, the pirate is shaking his fist at the frigate that passes in the distance; and leaning over the tangle of tarred beams, as he used to on the nettings of his corsair ship, he predicts his race's eternal hatred for the English.

"Russia a republic!" We raise our arms to heaven. "Germany a republic!" We raise our arms to heaven.

And the great voices, the poets, the singers—what have the great voices said? They have sung the praises of the victor's laurels without knowing what they are. You, old Homer, bard of the lisping tribes of the coasts, with your serene and venerable face sculptured in the likeness of your great childlike genius, with your three times millennial lyre and your empty eyes—you who led us to Poetry! And you, herd of poets enslaved, who did not understand, who lived before you could understand, in an age when great men were only the domestics of great lords—and you, too, servants of the resounding and opulent pride of to-day, eloquent flatterers and magnificent dunces, you unwitting enemies of mankind! You have all sung the laurel wreath without knowing what it is.

There are dazzlings, and solemnities and ceremonies, to amuse and excite the common people, to dim their sight with bright colors, with the glitter of the badges and stars that are crumbs of royalty, to inflame them with the jingle of bayonets and medals, with trumpets and trombones and the big drum, and to inspire the demon of war in the excitable feelings of women and the inflammable credulity of the young. I see the triumphal arches, the military displays in the vast amphitheaters of public places, and the march past of those who go to die, who walk in step to hell by reason of their strength and youth, and the hurrahs for war, and the real pride which the lowly feel in bending the knee before their masters and saying, as their cavalcade tops the hill, "It's fine! They might be galloping over us!" "It's magnificent, how warlike we are!" says the woman, always dazzled, as she convulsively squeezes the arm of him who is going away.

And another kind of excitement takes form and seizes me by the throat in the pestilential pits of hell—"They're on fire, they're on fire!" stammers that soldier, breathless as his empty rifle, as the flood of the exalted German divisions advances, linked elbow to elbow under a godlike halo of ether, to drown the deeps with their single lives.

Ah, the intemperate shapes and unities that float in morsels above the peopled precipices! When two overlords, jewel-set with glittering General Staffs, proclaim at the same time on either side of their throbbing mobilized frontiers, "We will save our country!" there is one immensity deceived and two victimized. There are two deceived immensities!

There is nothing else. That these cries can be uttered together in the face of heaven, in the face of truth, proves at a stroke the monstrosity of the laws which rule us, and the madness of the gods.

I turn on a bed of pain to escape from the horrible vision of masquerade, from the fantastic absurdity into which all these things are brought back; and my fever seeks again.

Those bright spells which blind, and the darkness which also blinds. Falsehood rules with those who rule, effacing Resemblance everywhere, and everywhere creating Difference.

Nowhere can one turn aside from falsehood. Where indeed is there none?

The linked-up lies, the invisible chain, the Chain!

Murmurs and shouts alike cross in confusion. Here and yonder, to right and to left, they make pretense. Truth never reaches as far as men. News filters through, false or atrophied. On *this* side—all is beautiful and disinterested; yonder—the same things are infamous. "French militarism is not the same thing as Prussian militarism, since one's French and the other's Prussian." The newspapers, the somber host of the great prevailing newspapers, fall upon the minds of men and wrap them up. The daily siftings link them together and chain them up, and forbid them to look ahead. And the impecunious papers show blanks in the places where the truth was too clearly written. At the end of a war, the last things to be known by the children of the slain and by the mutilated and worn-out survivors will be all the war-aims of its directors.

Suddenly they reveal to the people an accomplished fact which has been worked out in the *terra incognita* of courts, and they say, "Now that it is too late, only one resource is left you—Kill that you be not killed."

They brandish the superficial incident which in the last hour has caused the armaments and the heaped-up resentment and intrigues to overflow in war; and they say, "That is the only cause of the war." It is not true; the only cause of war is the slavery of those whose flesh wages it.

They say to the people, "When once victory is gained, agreeably to your masters, all tyranny will have disappeared as if by magic, and there will be peace on earth." It is not true. There will be no peace on earth until the reign of men is come.

But will it ever come? Will it have time to come, while hollow-eyed humanity makes such haste to die? For all this advertisement of war, radiant in the sunshine, all these temporary and mendacious reasons, stupidly or skillfully curtailed, of which not one reaches the lofty elevation of the common welfare—all these insufficient pretexts suffice in sum to make the artless man bow in bestial ignorance, to adorn him with iron and forge him at will.

"It is not on Reason," cried the specter of the battlefield, whose torturing spirit was breaking away from his still gilded body; "it is not on Reason that the Bible of History stands. Else are the law of majesties and the ancient quarrel of the flags essentially supernatural and intangible, or the old world is built on

principles of insanity."

He touches me with his strong hand and I try to shake myself, and I stumble curiously, although lying down. A clamor booms in my temples and then thunders like the guns in my ears; it overflows me,—I drown in that cry——

"It must be! It has to be! You shall *not* know!" That is the war-cry, that is the cry of war.

* * * * * *

War will come again after this one. It will come again as long as it can be determined by people other than those who fight. The same causes will produce the same effects, and the living will have to give up all hope.

We cannot say out of what historical conjunctions the final tempests will issue, nor by what fancy names the interchangeable ideals imposed on men will be known in that moment. But the cause—that will perhaps everywhere be fear of the nations' real freedom. What we do know is that the tempests will come.

Armaments will increase every year amid dizzy enthusiasm. The relentless torture of precision seizes me. We do three years of military training; our children will do five, they will do ten. We pay two thousand million francs a year in preparation for war; we shall pay twenty, we shall pay fifty thousand millions. All that we have will be taken; it will be robbery, insolvency, bankruptcy. War kills wealth as it does men; it goes away in ruins and smoke, and one cannot fabricate gold any more than soldiers. We no longer know how to count; we no longer know anything. A billion—a million millions—the word appears to me printed on the emptiness of things. It sprang yesterday out of war, and I shrink in dismay from the new, incomprehensible word.

There will be nothing else on the earth but preparation for war. All living forces will be absorbed by it; it will monopolize all discovery, all science, all imagination. Supremacy in the air alone, the regular levies for the control of space, will suffice to squander a nation's fortune. For aerial navigation, at its birth in the middle of envious circles, has become a rich prize which everybody desires, a prey they have immeasurably torn in pieces.

Other expenditure will dry up before that on destruction does, and other longings as well, and all the reasons for living. Such will be the sense of humanity's last

age.

* * * * * *

The battlefields were prepared long ago. They cover entire provinces with one black city, with a great metallic reservoir of factories, where iron floors and furnaces tremble, bordered by a land of forests whose trees are steel, and of wells where sleeps the sharp blackness of snares; a country navigated by frantic groups of railway trains in parallel formation, and heavy as attacking columns. At whatever point you may be on the plain, even if you turn away, even if you take flight, the bright tentacles of the rails diverge and shine, and cloudy sheaves of wires rise into the air. Upon that territory of execution there rises and falls and writhes machinery so complex that it has not even names, so vast that it has not even shape; for aloft—above the booming whirlwinds which are linked from east to west in the glow of molten metal whose flashes are great as those of lighthouses, or in the pallor of scattered electric constellations—hardly can one make out the artificial outline of a mountain range, clapped upon space.

This immense city of immense low buildings, rectangular and dark, is not a city. They are assaulting tanks, which a feeble internal gesture sets in motion, ready for the rolling rush of their gigantic knee-caps. These endless cannon, thrust into pits which search into the fiery entrails of the earth, and stand there upright, hardly leaning so much as Pisa's tower; and these slanting tubes, long as factory chimneys, so long that perspective distorts their lines and sometimes splays them like the trumpets of Apocalypse—these are not cannon; they are machine-guns, fed by continuous ribbons of trains which scoop out in entire regions—and upon a country, if need be—mountains of profundity.

In war, which was once like the open country and is now wholly like towns—and even like one immense building—one hardly sees the men. On the round-ways and the casemates, the footbridges and the movable platforms, among the labyrinth of concrete caves, above the regiment echelonned downwards in the gulf and enormously upright,—one sees a haggard herd of wan and stooping men, men black and trickling, men issuing from the peaty turf of night, men who came there to save their country. They earthed themselves up in some zone of the vertical gorges, and one sees them, in this more accursed corner than those where the hurricane reels. One senses this human material, in the cavities of those smooth grottoes, like Dante's guilty shades. Infernal glimmers disclose ranged lines of them, as long as roads, slender and trembling spaces of night,

which daylight and even sunshine leave befouled with darkness and cyclopean dirt. Solid clouds overhang them and hatchet-charged hurricanes, and leaping flashes set fire every second to the sky's iron-mines up above the damned whose pale faces change not under the ashes of death. They wait, intent on the solemnity and the significance of that vast and heavy booming against which they are for the moment imprisoned. They will be down forever around the spot where they are. Like others before them, they will be shrouded in perfect oblivion. Their cries will rise above the earth no more than their lips. Their glory will not quit their poor bodies.

I am borne away in one of the aeroplanes whose multitude darkens the light of day as flights of arrows do in children's story-books, forming a vaulted army. They are a fleet which can disembark a million men and their supplies anywhere at any moment. It is only a few years since we heard the puling cry of the first aeroplanes, and now their voice drowns all others. Their development has only normally proceeded, yet they alone suffice to make the territorial safeguards demanded by the deranged of former generations appear at last to all people as comical jests. Swept along by the engine's formidable weight, a thousand times more powerful than it is heavy, tossing in space and filling my fibers with its roar, I see the dwindling mounds where the huge tubes stick up like swarming pins. I am carried along at a height of two thousand yards. An air-pocket has seized me in a corridor of cloud, and I have fallen like a stone a thousand yards lower, garrotted by furious air which is cold as a blade, and filled by a plunging cry. I have seen conflagrations and the explosions of mines, and plumes of smoke which flow disordered and spin out in long black zigzags like the locks of the God of War! I have seen the concentric circles by which the stippled multitude is ever renewed. The dugouts, lined with lifts, descend in oblique parallels into the depths. One frightful night I saw the enemy flood it all with an inexhaustible torrent of liquid fire. I had a vision of that black and rocky valley filled to the brim with the lava-stream which dazzled the sight and sent a dreadful terrestrial dawn into the whole of night. With its heart aflame Earth seemed to become transparent as glass along that crevasse; and amid the lake of fire heaps of living beings floated on some raft, and writhed like the spirits of damnation. The other men fled upwards, and piled themselves in clusters on the straight-lined borders of the valley of filth and tears. I saw those swarming shadows huddled on the upper brink of the long armored chasms which the explosions set trembling like steamships.

All chemistry makes flaming fireworks in the sky or spreads in sheets of poison

exactly as huge as the huge towns. Against them no wall avails, no secret armor; and murder enters as invisibly as death itself. Industry multiplies its magic. Electricity lets loose its lightnings and thunders—and that miraculous mastery which hurls power like a projectile.

Who can say if this enormous might of electricity alone will not change the face of war?—the centralized cluster of waves, the irresistible orbs going infinitely forth to fire and destroy all explosives, lifting the rooted armor of the earth, choking the subterranean gulfs with heaps of calcined men—who will be burned up like barren coal,—and maybe even arousing the earthquakes, and tearing the central fires from earth's depths like ore!

That will be seen by people who are alive to-day; and yet that vision of the future so near at hand is only a slight magnification, flitting through the brain. It terrifies one to think for how short a time science has been methodical and of useful industry; and after all, is there anything on earth more marvelously easy than destruction? Who knows the new mediums it has laid in store? Who knows the limit of cruelty to which the art of poisoning may go? Who knows if they will not subject and impress epidemic disease as they do the living armies—or that it will not emerge, meticulous, invincible, from the armies of the dead? Who knows by what dread means they will sink in oblivion this war, which only struck to the ground twenty thousand men a day, which has invented guns of only seventy-five miles' range, bombs of only one ton's weight, aeroplanes of only a hundred and fifty miles an hour, tanks, and submarines which cross the Atlantic? Their costs have not yet reached in any country the sum total of private fortunes.

But the upheavals we catch sight of, though we can only and hardly indicate them in figures, will be too much for life. The desperate and furious disappearance of soldiers will have a limit. We may no longer be able to count; but Fate will count. Some day the men will be killed, and the women and children. And they also will disappear—they who stand erect upon the ignominious death of the soldiers,—they will disappear along with the huge and palpitating pedestal in which they were rooted. But they profit by the present, they believe it will last as long as they, and as they follow each other they say, "After us, the deluge." Some day all war will cease for want of fighters.

The spectacle of to-morrow is one of agony. Wise men make laughable efforts to determine what may be, in the ages to come, the cause of the inhabited world's

end. Will it be a comet, the rarefaction of water, or the extinction of the sun, that will destroy mankind? They have forgotten the likeliest and nearest cause—Suicide.

They who say, "There will always be war," do not know what they are saying. They are preyed upon by the common internal malady of shortsight. They think themselves full of common-sense as they think themselves full of honesty. In reality, they are revealing the clumsy and limited mentality of the assassins themselves.

The shapeless struggle of the elements will begin again on the seared earth when men have slain themselves because they were slaves, because they believed the same things, because they were alike.

I utter a cry of despair and it seems as if I had turned over and stifled it in a pillow.

* * * * * *

All is madness. And there is no one who will dare to rise and say that all is not madness, and that the future does not so appear—as fatal and unchangeable as a memory.

But how many men will there be who will dare, in face of the universal deluge which will be at the end as it was in the beginning, to get up and cry "No!" who will pronounce the terrible and irrefutable issue:—

"No! The interests of the people and the interests of all their present overlords are not the same. Upon the world's antiquity there are two enemy races—the great and the little. The allies of the great are, in spite of appearances, the great. The allies of the people are the people. Here on earth there is one tribe only of parasites and ringleaders who are the victors, and one people only who are the vanquished."

But, as in those earliest ages, will not thoughtful faces arise out of the darkness? (For this is Chaos and the animal Kingdom; and Reason being no more, she has yet to be born.)

"You must think; but with your own ideas, not other people's."

That lowly saying, a straw whirling in the measureless hand-to-hand struggle of the armies, shines in my soul above all others. To think is to hold that the masses have so far wrought too much evil without wishing it, and that the ancient authorities, everywhere clinging fast, violate humanity and separate the inseparable.

There have been those who magnificently dared. There have been bearers of the truth, men who groped in the world's tumult, trying to make plain order of it. They discover what we did not yet know; chiefly they discover what we no longer knew.

But what a panic is here, among the powerful and the powers that be!

"Truth is revolutionary! Get you gone, truth-bearers! Away with you, reformers! You bring in the reign of men!"

That cry was thrown into my ears one tortured night, like a whisper from deeps below, when he of the broken wings was dying, when he struggled tumultuously against the opening of men's eyes; but I had always heard it round about me, always.

In official speeches, sometimes, at moments of great public flattery, they speak like the reformers, but that is only the diplomacy which aims at felling them better. They force the light-bearers to hide themselves and their torches. These dreamers, these visionaries, these star-gazers,—they are hooted and derided. Laughter is let loose around them, machine-made laughter, quarrelsome and beastly:—

"Your notion of peace is only utopian, anyway, as long as you never, any day, stopped the war by yourself!"

They point to the battlefield and its wreckage:—

"And you say that War won't be forever? Look, driveler!"

The circle of the setting sun is crimsoning the mingled horizon of humanity:—

"You say that the sun is bigger than the earth? Look, imbecile!"

They are anathema, they are sacrilegious, they are excommunicated, who

impeach the magic of the past and the poison of tradition. And the thousand million victims themselves scoff at and strike those who rebel, as soon as they are able. All cast stones at them, all, even those who suffer and while they are suffering—even the sacrificed, a little before they die.

The bleeding soldiers of Wagram cry: "Long live the emperor!" And the mournful exploited in the streets cheer for the defeat of those who are trying to alleviate a suffering which is brother to theirs. Others, prostrate in resignation, look on, and echo what is said above them: "After us the deluge," and the saying passes across town and country in one enormous and fantastic breath, for they are innumerable who murmur it. Ah, it was well said:

"I have confidence in the abyss of the people."

* * * * * *

And I?

I, the normal man? What have I done on earth? I have bent the knee to the forces which glitter, without seeking to know whence they came and whither they guide. How have the eyes availed me that I had to see with, the intelligence that I had to judge with?

Borne down by shame, I sobbed, "I don't know," and I cried out so loudly that it seemed to me I was awaking for a moment out of slumber. Hands are holding and calming me; they draw my shroud about me and enclose me.

It seems to me that a shape has leaned over me, quite near, so near; that a loving voice has said something to me; and then it seems to me that I have listened to fond accents whose caress came from a great way off:

"Why shouldn't *you* be one of them, my lad,—one of those great prophets?"

I don't understand. I? How could I be?

All my thoughts go blurred. I am falling again. But I bear away in my eyes the picture of an iron bed where lay a rigid shape. Around it other forms were drooping, and one stood and officiated. But the curtain of that vision is drawn. A great plain opens the room, which had closed for a moment on me, and obliterates it.

Which way may I look? God? "*Miserere*——" The vibrating fragment of the Litany has reminded me of God.

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I had seen Jesus Christ on the margin of the lake. He came like an ordinary man along the path. There is no halo round his head. He is only disclosed by his pallor and his gentleness. Planes of light draw near and mass themselves and fade away around him. He shines in the sky, as he shone on the water. As they have told of him, his beard and hair are the color of wine. He looks upon the immense stain made by Christians on the world, a stain confused and dark, whose edge alone, down on His bare feet, has human shape and crimson color. In the middle of it are anthems and burnt sacrifices, files of hooded cloaks, and of torturers, armed with battle-axes, halberds and bayonets; and among long clouds and thickets of armies, the opposing clash of two crosses which have not quite the same shape. Close to him, too, on a canvas wall, again I see the cross that bleeds. There are populations, too, tearing themselves in twain that they may tear themselves the better; there is the ceremonious alliance, "turning the needy out of the way," of those who wear three crowns and those who wear one; and, whispering in the ear of Kings, there are gray-haired Eminences, and cunning monks, whose hue is of darkness.

I saw the man of light and simplicity bow his head; and I feel his wonderful voice saying:

"I did not deserve the evil they have done unto me."

Robbed reformer, he is a witness of his name's ferocious glory. The greed-impassioned money-changers have long since chased Him from the temple in their turn, and put the priests in his place. He is crucified on every crucifix.

Yonder among the fields are churches, demolished by war; and already men are coming with mattock and masonry to raise the walls again. The ray of his outstretched arm shines in space, and his clear voice says:

"Build not the churches again. They are not what you think they were.
Build them not again."

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There is no remedy but in them whom peace sentences to hard labor, and whom war sentences to death. There is no redress except among the poor.

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White shapes seem to return into the white room. Truth is simple. They who say that truth is complicated deceive themselves, and the truth is not in them. I see again, not far from me, a bed, a child, a girl-child, who is asleep in our house; her eyes are only two lines. Into our house, after a very long time, we have led my old aunt. She approves affectionately, but all the same she said, very quietly, as she left the perfection of our room, "It was better in my time." I am thrilled by one of our windows, whose wings are opened wide upon the darkness; the appeal which the chasm of that window makes across the distances enters into me. One night, as it seems to me, it was open to its heart.

I—my heart—a gaping heart, enthroned in a radiance of blood. It is mine, it is *ours*. The heart—that wound which we have. I have compassion on myself.

I see again the rainy shore that I saw before time was, before earth's drama was unfolded; and the woman on the sands. She moans and weeps, among the pictures which the clouds of mortality offer and withdraw, amid that which weaves the rain. She speaks so low that I feel it is to me she speaks. She is one with me. Love—it comes back to me. Love is an unhappy man and unhappy woman.

I awake—uttering the feeble cry of the babe new-born.

All grows pale, and paler. The whiteness I foresaw through the whirlwinds and clamors—it is here. An odor of ether recalls to me the memory of an awful memory, but shapeless. A white room, white walls, and white-robed women who bend over me.

In a voice confused and hesitant, I say:

"I've had a dream, an absurd dream."

My hand goes to my eyes to drive it away.

"You struggled while you were delirious—especially when you thought you were falling," says a calm voice to me, a sedate and familiar voice, which knows

me without my knowing the voice.

"Yes," I say!

CHAPTER XVII

MORNING

I went to sleep in Chaos, and then I awoke like the first man.

I am in a bed, in a room. There is no noise—a tragedy of calm, and horizons close and massive. The bed which imprisons me is one of a row that I can see, opposite another row. A long floor goes in stripes as far as the distant door. There are tall windows, and daylight wrapped in linen. That is all which exists. I have always been here, I shall end here.

Women, white and stealthy, have spoken to me. I picked up the new sound, and then lost it. A man all in white has sat by me, looked at me, and touched me. His eyes shone strangely, because of his glasses.

I sleep, and then they make me drink.

The long afternoon goes by in the long corridor. In the evening they make light; at night, they put it out, and the lamps—which are in rows, like the beds, like the windows, like everything—disappear. Just one lamp remains, in the middle, on my right. The peaceful ghost of dead things enjoins peace. But my eyes are open, I awake more and more. I take hold of consciousness in the dark.

A stir is coming to life around me among the prostrate forms aligned in the beds. This long room is immense; it has no end. The enshrouded beds quiver and cough. They cough on all notes and in all ways, loose, dry, or tearing. There is obstructed breathing, and gagged breathing, and polluted, and sing-song. These people who are struggling with their huge speech do not know themselves. I see their solitude as I see them. There is nothing between the beds, nothing.

Of a sudden I see a globular mass with a moon-like face oscillating in the night.

With hands held out and groping for the rails of the bedsteads, it is seeking its way. The orb of its belly distends and stretches its shirt like a crinoline, and shortens it. The mass is carried by two little and extremely slender legs, knobbly at the knees, and the color of string. It reaches the next bed, the one which a single ditch separates from mine. On another bed, a shadow is swaying regularly, like a doll. The mass and the shadow are a negro, whose big, murderous head is hafted with a tiny neck.

The hoarse concert of lungs and throats multiplies and widens. There are some who raise the arms of marionettes out of the boxes of their beds. Others remain interred in the gray of the bed-clothes. Now and again, unsteady ghosts pass through the room and stoop between the beds, and one hears the noise of a metal pail. At the end of the room, in the dark jumble of those blind men who look straight before them and the mutes who cough, I only see the nurse, because of her whiteness. She goes from one shadow to another, and stoops over the motionless. She is the vestal virgin who, so far as she can, prevents them from going out.

I turn my head on the pillow. In the bed bracketed with mine on the other side, under the glow which falls from the only surviving lamp, there is a squat manikin in a heavy knitted vest, poultice-color. From time to time, he sits up in bed, lifts his pointed head towards the ceiling, shakes himself, and grasping and knocking together his spittoon and his physic-glass, he coughs like a lion. I am so near to him that I feel that hurricane from his flesh pass over my face, and the odor of his inward wound.

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I have slept. I see more clearly than yesterday. I no longer have the veil that was in front of me. My eyes are attracted distinctly by everything which moves. A powerful aromatic odor assails me; I seek the source of it. Opposite me, in full daylight, a nurse is rubbing with a drug some gnarled and blackened hands, enormous paws which the earth of the battlefields, where they were too long implanted, has almost made moldy. The strong-smelling liquid is becoming a layer of frothy polish.

The foulness of his hands appalls me. Gathering my wits with an effort, I said aloud:

"Why don't they wash his hands?"

My neighbor on the right, the gnome in the mustard vest, seems to hear me, and shakes his head.

My eyes go back to the other side, and for hours I devote myself to watching in obstinate detail, with wide-open eyes, the water-swollen man whom I saw floating vaguely in the night like a balloon. By night he was whitish. By day he is yellow, and his big eyes are glutted with yellow. He gurgles, makes noises of subterranean water, and mingles sighs with words and morsels of words. Fits of coughing tan his ochreous face.

His spittoon is always full. It is obvious that his heart, where his wasted sulphurate hand is placed, beats too hard and presses his spongy lungs and the tumor of water which distends him. He lives in the settled notion of emptying his inexhaustible body. He is constantly examining his bed-bottle, and I see his face in that yellow reflection. All day I watched the torture and punishment of that body. His cap and tunic, no longer in the least like him, hang from a nail.

Once, when he lay engulfed and choking, he pointed to the negro, perpetually oscillating, and said:

"He wanted to kill himself because he was homesick."

The doctor has said to me—to *me*: "You're going on nicely." I wanted to ask him to talk to me about myself, but there was no time to ask him!

Towards evening my yellow-vested neighbor, emerging from his meditations and continuing to shake his head, answers my questions of the morning:

"They can't wash his hands—it's embedded."

A little later that day I became restless. I lifted my arm—it was clothed in white linen. I hardly knew my emaciated hand—that shadow stranger! But I recognized the identity disk on my wrist. Ah, then! that went with me into the depths of hell!

For hours on end my head remains empty and sleepless, and there are hosts of things that I perceive badly, which are, and then are not. I have answered some questions. When I say, Yes, it is a sigh that I utter, and only that. At other times, I

seem again to be half-swept away into pictures of tumored plains and mountains crowned. Echoes of these things vibrate in my ears, and I wish that some one would come who could explain the dreams.

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Strange footsteps are making the floor creak, and stopping there. I open my eyes. A woman is before me. Ah! the sight of her throws me into infinite confusion! She is the woman of my vision. Was it true, then? I look at her with wide-open eyes. She says to me:

"It's me."

Then she bends low and adds softly:

"I'm Marie; you're Simon."

"Ah!" I say. "I remember."

I repeat the profound words she has just uttered. She speaks to me again with the voice which comes back from far away. I half rise. I look again. I learn myself again, word by word.

It is she, naturally, who tells me I was wounded in the chest and hip, and that I lay three days forsaken—ragged wounds, much blood lost, a lot of fever, and enormous fatigue.

"You'll get up soon," she says.

I get up?—I, the prostrate being? I am astonished and afraid.

Marie goes away. She increases my solitude, step by step, and for a long time my eyes follow her going and her absence.

In the evening I hear a secret and whispered conference near the bed of the sick man in the brown vest. He is curled up, and breathes humbly. They say, very low:

"He's going to die—in one hour from now, or two. He's in such a state that to-morrow morning he'll be rotten. He must be taken away on the moment."

At nine in the evening they say that, and then they put the lights out and go away. I can see nothing more but him. There is the one lamp, close by, watching over him. He pants and trickles. He shines as though it rained on him. His beard has grown, grimily. His hair is plastered on his sticky forehead; his sweat is gray.

In the morning the bed is empty, and adorned with clean sheets.

And along with the man annulled, all the things he had poisoned have disappeared.

"It'll be Number Thirty-six's turn next," says the orderly.

I follow the direction of his glance. I see the condemned man. He is writing a letter. He speaks, he lives. But he is wounded in the belly. He carries his death like a fetus.

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It is the day when we change our clothes. Some of the invalids manage it by themselves; and, sitting up in bed, they perform signaling operations with arms and white linen. Others are helped by the nurse. On their bare flesh I catch sight of scars and cavities, and parts stitched and patched, of a different shade. There is even a case of amputation (and bronchitis) who reveals a new and rosy stump, like a new-born infant. The negro does not move while they strip his thin, insect-like trunk; and then, bleached once more, he begins again to rock his head, looking boundlessly for the sun and for Africa. They exhume the paralyzed man from his sheets and change his clothes opposite me. At first he lies motionless in his clean shirt, in a lump. Then he makes a guttural noise which brings the nurse up. In a cracked voice, as of a machine that speaks, he asks her to move his feet, which are caught in the sheet. Then he lies staring, arranged in rigid orderliness within the boards of his carcass.

Marie has come back and is sitting on a chair. We both spell out the past, which she brings me abundantly. My brain is working incalculably.

"We're quite near home, you know," Marie says.

Her words extricate our home, our quarter; they have endless echoes.

That day I raised myself on the bed and looked out of the window for the first

time, although it had always been there, within reach of my eyes. And I saw the sky for the first time, and a gray yard as well, where it was visibly cold, and a gray day, an ordinary day, like life, like everything.

Quickly the days wiped each other out. Gradually I got up, in the middle of the men who had relapsed into childhood, and were awkwardly beginning again, or plaintively complaining in their beds. I have strolled in the wards, and then along a path. It is a matter of formalities now—convalescence, and in a month's time the Medical Board.

At last Marie came one morning for me, to go home, for that interval.

She found me on the seat in the yard of the hospital, which used to be a school, under the cloth—which was the only spot where a ray of sunshine could get in. I was meditating in the middle of an assembly of old cripples and men with heads or arms bandaged, with ragged and incongruous equipment, with sick clothes. I detached myself from the miracle-yard and followed Marie, after thanking the nurse and saying good-by to her.

The corporal of the hospital orderlies is the vicar of our church—he who said and who spread it about that he was going to share the soldiers' sufferings, like all the priests. Marie says to me, "Aren't you going to see him?"

"No," I say.

We set out for life by a shady path, and then the high road came. We walked slowly. Marie carried the bundle. The horizons were even, the earth was flat and made no noise, and the dome of the sky no longer banged like a big clock. The fields were empty, right to the end, because of the war; but the lines of the road were scriptural, turning not aside to the right hand or to the left. And I, cleansed, simplified, lucid—though still astonished at the silence and affected by the peacefulness—I saw it all distinctly, without a veil, without anything. It seemed to me that I bore within me a great new reason, unused.

We were not far away. Soon we uncovered the past, step by step. As fast as we drew near, smaller and smaller details introduced themselves and told us their names—that tree with the stones round it, those forsaken and declining sheds. I even found recollections shut up in the little retreats of the kilometer-stones.

But Marie was looking at me with an indefinable expression.

"You're icy cold," she said to me suddenly, shivering.

"No," I said, "no."

We stopped at an inn to rest and eat, and it was already evening when we reached the streets.

Marie pointed out a man who was crossing over, yonder.

"Monsieur Rampaille is rich now, because of the War."

Then it was a woman, dressed in fluttering white and blue, disappearing round the corner of a house:

"That's Antonia Véron. She's been in the Red Cross service. She's got a decoration because of the War."

"Ah!" I said, "everything's changed."

Now we are in sight of the house. The distance between the corner of the street and the house seems to me smaller than it should be. The court comes to an end suddenly; its shape looks shorter than it is in reality. In the same way, all the memories of my former life appear dwindled to me.

The house, the rooms. I have climbed the stairs and come down again, watched by Marie. I have recognized everything; some things even which I did not see. There is no one else but us two in the falling night, as though people had agreed not to show themselves yet to this man who comes back.

"There—now we're at home," says Marie, at last.

We sit down, facing each other.

"What are we going to do?"

"We're going to live."

"We're going to live."

I ponder. She looks at me stealthily, with that mysterious expression of anguish which gets over me. I notice the precautions she takes in watching me. And once

it seemed to me that her eyes were red with crying. I—I think of the hospital life I am leaving, of the gray street, and the simplicity of things.

* * * * * *

A day has slipped away already. In one day all the time gone by has reëstablished itself. I am become again what I was. Except that I am not so strong or so calm as before, it is as though nothing had happened.

But truth is more simple than before.

I inquire of Marie after this one or the other and question her.

Marie says to me:

"You're always saying Why?—like a child."

All the same I do not talk much. Marie is assiduous; obviously she is afraid of my silence. Once, when I was sitting opposite her and had said nothing for a long time, she suddenly hid her face in her hands, and in her turn she asked me, through her sobs:

"Why are you like that?"

I hesitate.

"It seems to me," I say at last, by way of answer, "that I am seeing things as they are."

"My poor boy!" Marie says, and she goes on crying.

I am touched by this obscure trouble. True, everything is obvious around me, but as it were laid bare. I have lost the secret which complicated life. I no longer have the illusion which distorts and conceals, that fervor, that sort of blind and unreasoning bravery which tosses you from one hour to the next, and from day to day.

And yet I am just taking up life again where I left it. I am upright,
I am getting stronger and stronger. I am not ending, but beginning.

I slept profoundly, all alone in our bed.

Next morning, I saw Crillon, planted in the living-room downstairs. He held out his arms, and shouted. After expressing good wishes, he informs me, all in a breath:

"You don't know what's happened in the Town Council? Down yonder, towards the place they call Little January, y'know, there's a steep hill that gets wider as it goes down an' there's a gaslamp and a watchman's box where all the cyclists that want to smash their faces, and a few days ago now a navvy comes and sticks himself in there and no one never knew his name, an' he got a cyclist on his head an' he's gone dead. And against that gaslamp broken up by blows from cyclists they proposed to put a notice-board, although all recommendations would be superfluent. You catch on that it's nothing less than a maneuver to get the mayor's shirt out?"

Crillon's words vanish. As fast as he utters them I detach myself from all this poor old stuff. I cannot reply to him, when he has ceased, and Marie and he are looking at me. I say, "Ah!"

He coughs, to keep me in countenance. Shortly, he takes himself off.

Others come, to talk of their affairs and the course of events in the district. There is a regular buzz. So-and-so has been killed, but So-and-so is made an officer. So-and-so has got a clerking job. Here in the town, So-and-so has got rich. How's the War going on?

They surround me, with questioning faces. And yet it is I, still more than they, who am one immense question.

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CHAPTER XVIII

EYES THAT SEE

Two days have passed. I get up, dress myself, and open my shutters.
It is Sunday, as you can see in the street.

I put on my clothes of former days. I catch myself paying spruce attention to my toilet, since it is Sunday, by reason of the compulsion one feels to do the same things again.

And now I see how much my face has hollowed, as I compare it with the one I had left behind in the familiar mirror.

I go out, and meet several people. Madame Piot asks me how many of the enemy I have killed. I reply that I killed one. Her tittle-tattle accosts another subject. I feel the enormous difference there was between what she asked me and what I answered.

The streets are clad in the mourning of closed shops. It is still the same empty and hermetically sealed face of the day of holiday. My eyes notice, near the sunken post, the old jam-pot, which has not moved.

I climb on to Chestnut Hill. No one is there, because it is Sunday. In that white winding-sheet, that widespread pallor of Sunday, all my former lot builds itself again, house by house.

I look outwards from the top of the hill. All is the same in the lines and the tones. The spectacle of yesterday and that of to-day are as identical as two picture postcards. I see my house—the roof, and three-quarters of the front. I feel a pleasant thrill. I feel that I love this corner of the earth, but especially my house.

What, is everything the same? Is there nothing new, nothing? Is the only changed thing the man that I am, walking too slowly in clothes too big, the man grown old and leaning on a stick?

The landscape is barren in the inextricable simplicity of the daylight. I do not know why I was expecting revelations. In vain my gaze wanders everywhere, to infinity.

But a darkening of storm fills and agitates the sky, and suddenly clothes the morning with a look of evening. The crowd which I see yonder along the avenue, under cover of the great twilight which goes by with its invisible harmony, profoundly draws my attention.

All those shadows which are shelling themselves out along the road are very tiny, they are separated from one another, they are of the same stature. From a distance one sees how much one man resembles another. And it is true that a man is like a man. The one is not of a different species from the other. It is a certainty which I am bringing forward—the only one; and the truth is simple, for what I believe I see with my eyes.

The equality of all these human spots that appear in the somber gleams of storm, why—it is a revelation! It is a beginning of distinct order in Chaos. How comes it that I have never seen what is so visible, how comes it that I never perceived that obvious thing—that a man and another man are the same thing, everywhere and always? I rejoice that I have seen it as if my destiny were to shed a little light on us and on our road.

* * * * * *

The bells are summoning our eyes to the church. It is surrounded by scaffolding, and a long swarm of people are gliding towards it, grouping round it, going in.

The earth and the sky—but I do not see God. I see everywhere, everywhere, God's absence. My gaze goes through space and returns, forsaken. And I have never seen Him, and He is nowhere, nowhere, nowhere.

No one ever saw Him. I know—I always knew, for that matter!—that there is no proof of God's existence, and that you must find, first of all, believe in it if you want to prove it. Where does He show Himself? What does He save? What tortures of the heart, what disasters does He turn aside from all and each in the

ruin of hearts? Where have we known or handled or embraced anything but His name? God's absence surrounds infinitely and even actually each kneeling suppliant, athirst for some humble personal miracle, and each seeker who bends over his papers as he watches for proofs like a creator; it surrounds the spiteful antagonism of all religions, armed against each other, enormous and bloody. God's absence rises like the sky over the agonizing conflicts between good and evil, over the trembling heedfulness of the upright, over the immensity—still haunting me—of the cemeteries of agony, the charnel heaps of innocent soldiers, the heavy cries of the shipwrecked. Absence! Absence! In the hundred thousand years that life has tried to delay death there has been nothing on earth more fruitless than man's cries to divinity, nothing which gives so perfect an idea of silence.

How does it come about that I have lasted till now without understanding that I did not see God? I believed because they had told me to believe. It seems to me that I am able to believe something no longer because they command me to, and I feel myself set free.

I lean on the stones of the low wall, at the spot where I leaned of old, in the time when I thought I was some one and knew something.

My looks fall on the families and the single figures which are hurrying towards the black hole of the church porch, towards the gloom of the nave, where one is enlaced in incense, where wheels of light and angels of color hover under the vaults which contain a little of the great emptiness of the heavens.

I seem to stoop nearer to those people, and I get glimpses of certain profundities among the fleeting pictures which my sight lends me. I seem to have stopped, at random, in front of the richness of a single being. I think of the "humble, quiet lives," and it appears to me within a few words, and that in what they call a "quiet, lowly life," there are immense expectations and waitings and weariness.

I understand why they want to believe in God, and consequently why they do believe in Him, since faith comes at will.

I remember, while I lean on this wall and listen, that one day in the past not far from here, a lowly woman raised her voice and said, "That woman does not believe in God! It's because she has no children, or else because they've never been ill."

And I remember, too, without being able to picture them to myself, all the voices I have heard saying, "It would be too unjust, if there were no God!"

There is no other proof of God's existence than the need we have of Him. God is not God—He is the name of all that we lack. He is our dream, carried to the sky. God is a prayer, He is not some one.

They put all His kind actions into the eternal future, they hide them in the unknown. Their agonizing dues they drown in distances which outdistance them; they cancel His contradictions in inaccessible uncertainty. No matter; they believe in the idol made of a word.

And I? I have awaked out of religion, since it was a dream. It had to be that one morning my eyes would end by opening and seeing nothing more of it.

I do not see God, but I see the church and I see the priests. Another ceremony is unfolding just now, in another direction—up at the castle, a Mass of St. Hubert. Leaning on my elbows the spectacle absorbs me.

These ministers of the cult, blessing this pack of hounds, these guns and hunting knives, officiating in lace and pomp side by side with these wealthy people got up as warlike sportsmen, women and men alike, on the great steps of a castle and facing a crowd kept aloof by ropes,—this spectacle defines, more glaringly than any words whatever can, the distance which separates the churches of to-day from Christ's teaching, and points to all the gilded putridity which has accumulated on those pure defaced beginnings. And what is here is everywhere; what is little is great.

The parsons, the powerful—all always joined together. Ah, certainty is rising to the heart of my conscience. Religions destroy themselves spiritually because they are many. They destroy whatever leans upon their fables. But their directors, they who are the strength of the idol, impose it. They decree authority; they hide the light. They are men, defending their interests as men; they are rulers defending their sway.

It has to be! You shall *not* know! A terrible memory shudders through me; and I catch a confused glimpse of people who, for the needs of their common cause, uphold, with their promises and thunder, the mad unhappiness which lies heavy on the multitudes.

* * * * * *

Footsteps are climbing towards me. Marie appears, dressed in gray. She comes to look for me. In the distance I saw that her cheeks were brightened and rejuvenated by the wind. Close by I see that her eyelids are worn, like silk. She finds me sunk in reflection. She looks at me, like a frail and frightened mother; and this solicitude which she brings me is enough by itself to calm and comfort me.

I point out to her the dressed-up commotion below us, and make some bitter remark on the folly of these people who vainly gather in the church, and go to pray there, to talk all alone. Some of them believe; and the rest say to them, "I do the same as you."

Marie does not argue the basis of religion. "Ah," she says, "I've never thought clearly about it, never. They've always spoken of God to me, and I've always believed in Him. But—I don't know. I only know one thing," she adds, her blue eyes looking at me, "and that is that there must be delusion. The people must have religion, so as to put up with the hardships of life, the sacrifices——"

She goes on again at once, more emphatically, "There must be religion for the unhappy, so that they won't give way. It may be foolishness, but if you take that away from them, what have they left?"

The gentle woman—the normal woman of settled habits—whom I had left here repeats, "There must be illusion." She sticks to this idea, she insists, she is taking the side of the unhappy. Perhaps she talks like that for her own sake, and perhaps only because she is compassionate for me.

I said in vain, "No—there must never be delusion, never fallacies. There should be no more lies. We shall not know then where we're going."

She persists and makes signs of dissent.

I say no more, tired. But I do not lower my gaze before the all-powerful surroundings of circumstance. My eyes are pitiless, and cannot help descrying the false God and the false priests everywhere.

We go down the footpath and return in silence. But it seems to me that the rule of evil is hidden in easy security among the illusions which they heap up over us.

I am nothing; I am no more than I was before, but I am applying my hunger for the truth. I tell myself again that there is no supernatural power, that nothing has fallen from the sky; that everything is within us and in our hands. And in the inspiration of that faith my eyes embrace the magnificence of the empty sky, the abounding desert of the earth, the Paradise of the Possible.

We pass along the base of the church. Marie says to me—as if nothing had just been said, "Look how the poor church was damaged by a bomb from an aeroplane—all one side of the steeple gone. The good old vicar was quite ill about it. As soon as he got up he did nothing else but try to raise money to have his dear steeple built up again; and he got it."

People are revolving round the building and measuring its yawning mutilation with their eyes. My thoughts turn to all these passers-by and to all those who will pass by, whom I shall not see, and to other wounded steeples. The most beautiful of all voices echoes within me, and I would fain make use of it for this entreaty, "Build not the churches again! You who will come after us, you who, in the sharp distinctness of the ended deluge will perhaps be able to see the order of things more clearly, don't build the churches again! They did not contain what we used to believe, and for centuries they have only been the prisons of the saviours, and monumental lies. If you are still of the faith have your temples within yourselves. But if you again bring stones to build up a narrow and evil tradition, that is the end of all. In the name of justice, in the name of light, in the name of pity, do not build the churches again!"

But I did not say anything. I bow my head and walk more heavily.

I see Madame Marcassin coming out of the church with blinking eyes, weary-looking, a widow indeed. I bow and approach her and talk to her a little, humbly, about her husband, since I was under his orders and saw him die. She listens to me in dejected inattention. She is elsewhere. She says to me at last, "I had a memorial service since it's usual." Then she maintains a silence which means "There's nothing to be said, just as there's nothing to be done." In face of that emptiness I understand the crime that Marcassin committed in letting himself be killed for nothing but the glory of dying.

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CHAPTER XIX

GHOSTS

We have gone out together and aimlessly; we walk straight forward.

It is an autumnal day—gray lace of clouds and wind. Some dried leaves lie on the ground and others go whirling. We are in August, but it is an autumn day all the same. Days do not allow themselves to be set in strict order, like men.

Our steps take us in the direction of the waterfall and the mill. We have seldom been there again since our engagement days. Marie is covered in a big gray cloak; her hat is black silk with a little square of color embroidered in front. She looks tired, and her eyes are red. When she walks in front of me I see the twisted mass of her beautiful fair hair.

Instinctively we both looked for the inscriptions we cut, once upon a time, on trees and on stones, in foolish delight. We sought them like scattered treasure, on the strange cheeks of the old willows, near the tendrils of the fall, on the birches that stand like candles in front of the violet thicket, and on the old fir which so often sheltered us with its dark wings. Many inscriptions have disappeared. Some are worn away because things do; some are covered by a host of other inscriptions or they are distorted and ugly. Nearly all have passed on as if they had been passers-by.

Marie is tired. She often sits down, with her big cloak and her sensible air; and as she sits she seems like a statue of nature, of space, and the wind.

We do not speak. We have gone down along the side of the river—slowly, as if we were climbing—towards the stone seat of the wall. The distances have altered. This seat, for instance, we meet it sooner than we thought we should, like some one in the dark; but it is the seat all right. The rose-tree which grew

above it has withered away and become a crown of thorns.

There are dead leaves on the stone slab. They come from the chestnuts yonder. They fell on the ground and yet they have flown away as far as the seat.

On this seat—where she came to me for the first time, which was once so important to us that it seemed as if the background of things all about us had been created by us—we sit down to-day, after we have vainly sought in nature the traces of our transit.

The landscape is peaceful, simple, empty; it fills us with a great quivering. Marie is so sad and so simple that you can see her thought.

I have leaned forward, my elbows on my knees. I have contemplated the gravel at my feet; and suddenly I start, for I understand that my eyes were looking for the marks of our footsteps, in spite of the stone, in spite of the sand.

After the solemnity of a long silence, Marie's face takes on a look of defeat, and suddenly she begins to cry. The tears which fill her—for one always weeps in full, drop on to her knees. And through her sobs there fall from her wet lips words almost shapeless, but desperate and fierce, as a burst of forced laughter.

"It's all over!" she cries.

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I have put my arm round her waist, and I am shaken by the sorrow which agitates her chest and throat, and sometimes shakes her rudely, the sorrow which does not belong to me, which belongs to no one, and is like a divinity.

She becomes composed. I take her hand. In a weak voice she calls some memories up—this and that—and "one morning——" She applies herself to it and counts them. I speak, too, gently. We question each other. "Do you remember?"—"Oh, yes." And when some more precise and intimate detail prompts the question we only reply, "A little." Our separation and the great happenings past which the world has whirled have made the past recoil and shaped a deep ditch. Nothing has changed; but when we look we see.

Once, after we had recalled to each other an enchanted summer evening,
I said, "We loved each other," and she answered, "I remember."

I call her by her name, in a low voice, so as to draw her out of the dumbness into which she is falling.

She listens to me, and then says, placidly, despairingly, "'*Marie*,'—you used to say it like that. I can't realize that I had the same name."

A few moments later, as we talked of something else, she said to me at last, "Ah, that day we had dreams of travel, about our plans—*you were there*, sitting by my side."

In those former times we lived. Now we hardly live any more, since we have lived. They who we were are dead, for we are here. Her glances come to me, but they do not join again the two surviving voids that we are; her look does not wipe out our widowhood, nor change anything. And I, I am too imbued with clear-sighted simplicity and truth to answer "no" when it is "yes." In this moment by my side Marie is like me.

The immense mourning of human hearts appears to us. We dare not name it yet; but we dare not let it not appear in all that we say.

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Then we see a woman, climbing the footpath and coming nearer to us. It is Marthe, grown up, full-blown. She says a few words to us and then goes away, smiling. She smiles, she who plays a part in our drama. The likeness which formerly haunted me now haunts Marie, too—both of us, side by side, and without saying it, harbored the same thought, to see that child growing up and showing what Marie was.

Marie confesses all, all at once, "I was only my youth and my beauty, like all women. And *there* go my youth and beauty—Marthe! Then, I——?" In anguish she goes on, "I'm not old yet, since I'm only thirty-five, but I've aged very quickly; I've some white hairs that you can see, close to; I'm wrinkled and my eyes have sunk. I'm here, in life, to live, to occupy my time; but I'm nothing more than I am! Of course, I'm still alive, but the future comes to an end before life does. Ah, it's really only youth that has a place in life. All young faces are alike and go from one to the other without ever being deceived. They wipe out and destroy all the rest, and they make the others see themselves as they are, so that they become useless."

She is right! When the young woman stands up she takes, in fact, the other's place in the ideal and in the human heart, and makes of the other a returning ghost. It is true. I knew it. Ah, I did not know it was so true! It is too obvious. I cannot deny it. Again a cry of assent rises to my lips and prevents me from saying, "No."

I cannot turn away from Marthe's advent, nor as I look at her, from recognizing Marie. I know she has had several little love-affairs. Just now she is alone. She is alone, but she will soon be leaning—yes, phantom or reality, man is not far from her. It is dazzling. Most certainly, I no longer think as I used to do that it is a sort of duty to satisfy the selfish promptings one has, and I have now got an inward veneration for right-doing; but all the same, if that being came to me, I know well that I should become, before all, and in spite of all, an immense cry of delight.

Marie falls back upon her idea, obdurately, and says, "A woman only lives by love and for love. When she's no longer good for that she's no longer anything."

She repeats, "You see—I'm nothing any more."

Ah, she is at the bottom of her abyss! She is at the extremity of a woman's mourning! She is not thinking only of me. Her thought is higher and vaster. She is thinking of all the woman she is, of all that love is, of all possible things when she says, "I'm no longer anything." And *I*—I am only he who is present with her just now, and no help whatever is left her to look for from any one.

I should like to pacify and console this woman who is gentleness and simplicity and who is sinking there while she lightly touches me with her presence—but exactly because she is there I cannot lie to her, I can do nothing against her grief, her perfect, infallible grief.

"Ah!" she cries, "if we came to life again!"

But she, too, has tried to cling to illusion. I see by the track of her tears, and because I am looking at her—that she has powdered her face to-day and put rouge on her lips, perhaps even on her cheeks, as she did in bygone days, laughing, to set herself off, in spite of me. This woman who tries to keep a good likeness of herself through passing time, to be fixed upon herself, who paints herself, she is, to that extent like what Rembrandt the profound and Titian the bold and exquisite did—make enduring, and save! But this time, a few tears

have washed away the fragile, mortal effort.

She tries also to delude herself with words, and to discover something in them which would transform her. She asserts, as she did the other morning, "There must be illusion. No, we must not see things as they are." But I see clearly that such words do not exist.

Once, when she was looking at me distressfully, she murmured, "*You*—you've no more illusion at all. I pity you!"

At that moment, within the space of a flash, she was thinking of me only, and she pities me! She has found something in her grief to give me.

She is silent. She is seeking the supreme complaint; she is trying to find what there is which is more torturing and more simple; and she stammers—"The truth."

The truth is that the love of mankind is a single season among so many others. The truth is that we have within us something much more mortal than we are, and that it is this, all the same, which is all-important. Therefore we survive very much longer than we live. There are things we think we know and which yet are secrets. Do we really know what we believe? We believe in miracles. We make great efforts to struggle, to go mad. We should like to let all our good deserts be seen. We fancy that we are exceptions and that something supernatural is going to come along. But the quiet peace of the truth fixes us. The impossible becomes again the impossible. We are as silent as silence itself.

We stayed lonely on the seat until evening. Our hands and faces shone like gleams of storm in the entombment of the calm and the mist.

We go back home. We wait and then have dinner. We live these few hours. And we see ourselves alone in the house, facing each other, as never we saw ourselves, and we do not know what to do! It is a real drama of vacancy which is breaking loose. We are living together; our movements are in harmony, they touch and mingle. But all of it is empty. We do not long for each other, we can no longer expect each other, we have no dreams, we are not happy. It is a sort of imitation of life by phantoms, by beings who, in the distance are beings, but close by—so close—are phantoms!

Then bedtime comes. She is sleeping in the little bedroom opposite mine across

the landing, less fine than mine and smaller, hung with an old and faded paper, where the patterned flowers are only an irregular relief, with traces here and there of powder, of colored dust and ashes.

We are going to separate on the landing. To-day is not the first time like that! but to-day we are feeling this great rending which is not one. She has begun to undress. She has taken off her blouse. I see her neck and her breasts, a little less firm than before, through her chemise; and half tumbling on to the nape of her neck, the fair hair which once magnificently flamed on her like a fire of straw.

She only says, "It's better to be a man than a woman."

Then she replies to my silence, "You see, we don't know what to say, now."

In the angle of the narrow doorway she spoke with a kind of immensity.

She goes into her room and disappears. Before I went to the war we slept in the same bed. We used to lie down side by side, so as to be annihilated in unconsciousness, or to go and dream somewhere else. (Commonplace life has shipwrecks worse than in Shakespearean dramas. For man and wife—to sleep, to die.) But since I came back we separate ourselves with a wall. This sincerity that I have brought back in my eyes and mind has changed the semblances round about me into reality, more than I imagine. Marie is hiding from me her faded but disregarded body. Her modesty has begun again; yes, she has ended by beginning again.

She has shut her door. She is undressing, alone in her room, slowly, and as if uselessly. There is only the light of her little lamp to caress her loosened hair, in which the others cannot yet see the white ones, the frosty hairs that she alone touches.

Her door is shut, decisive, banal, dreary.

Among some papers on my table I see the poem again which we once found out of doors, the bit of paper escaped from the mysterious hands which wrote on it, and come to the stone seat. It ended by whispering, "Only I know the tears that brimming rise, your beauty blended with your smile to espy."

In the days of yore it had made us smile with delight. To-night there are real tears in my eyes. What is it? I dimly see that there is something more than what we have seen, than what we have said, than what we have felt to-day. One day, perhaps, she and I will exchange better and richer sayings; and so, in that day, all the sadness will be of some service.

CHAPTER XX

THE CULT

I have been to the factory. I felt as much lost as if I had found myself translated there after a sleep of legendary length. There are many new faces. The factory has tripled—quadrupled in importance; quite a town of flimsy buildings has been added to it.

"They've built seven others like it in three months!" says Monsieur Mielvaque to me, proudly.

The manager is now another young nephew of the Messrs. Gozlan. He was living in Paris and came back on the day of the general mobilization. Old Monsieur Gozlan looks after everything.

I have a month to wait. I wait slowly, as everybody does. The houses in the lower town are peopled by absentees. When you go in they talk to you about the last letter, and always make the same huge and barren reflections on the war. In my street there are twelve houses where the people no longer await anything and have nothing to say, like Madame Marcassin. In some others, the one who has disappeared will perhaps come back; and they go about in them in a sort of hope which leans only on emptiness and silence. There are women who have begun their lives again in a kind of happy misery. The places near them of the dead or the living they have filled up.

The main streets have not changed, any more than the squares, except the one which is encrusted with a collection of huts. The life in them is as bustling as ever, and of brighter color, and more amusing. Many young men, rich or influential, are passing their wartime in the offices of the depot, of the Exchange, of Food Control, of Enlistment, of the Pay Department, and other administrations whose names one cannot remember. The priests are swarming in

the two hospitals; on the faces of orderlies, cyclist messengers, doorkeepers and porters you can read their origin. For myself, I have never seen a parson in the front lines wearing the uniform of the ordinary fighting soldier, the uniform of those who make up the fatigue parties and fight as well against perfect misery!

My thought turns to what the man once said to me who was by me among the straw of a stable, "Why is there no more justice?" By the little that I know and have seen and am seeing, I can tell what an enormous rush sprang up, at the same time as the war, against the equality of the living. And if that injustice, which was turning the heroism of the others into a cheat has not been openly extended, it is because the war has lasted too long, and the scandal became so glaring that they were forced to look into it. It seems that it is only through fear that they have ended by deciding so much.

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I go into Fontan's. Crillon is with me—I picked him up from the little glass cupboard of his shop as I came out. He is finding it harder and harder to keep going; he has aged a lot, and his frame, so powerfully bolted together, cracks with rheumatism.

We sit down. Crillon groans and bends so low in his hand-to-hand struggle with the pains which beset him that I think his forehead is going to strike the marble-topped table.

He tells me in detail of his little business, which is going badly, and how he has confused glimpses of the bare and empty future which awaits him—when a sergeant with a fair mustache and eyeglasses makes his entry. This personage, whose collar shows white thunderbolts,[1] instead of a number, comes and sits near us. He orders a port wine and Victorine serves it with a smile. She smiles at random, and indistinctly, at all the men, like Nature.

[Footnote 1: Distinctive badge for Staff officers and others.—Tr.]

The newcomer takes off his cap, looks at the windows and yawns. "I'm bored," he says.

He comes nearer and freely offers us his talk. He sets himself chattering with spirited and easy grace, of men and things. He works at the Town Hall and knows a lot of secrets which he lets us into. He points to a couple of sippers at a

table in the corner reserved for commercial people. "The grocer and the ironmonger," he says, "there's two that know how to go about it! At the beginning of the war there was a business crisis by the force of things, and they had to tighten their belts like the rest. Then they got their revenge and swept the dibs in and hoarded stuff up, and speculated, and they're still revenging themselves. You should see the stocks of goods they sit on in their cellars and wait for the rises that the newspapers foretell! They've got one excuse, it's true—there are others, bigger people, that are worse. Ah, you can say that the business people will have given a rich notion of their patriotism during the war!"

The fair young man stretches himself backward to his full length, with his heels together on the ground, his arms rigid on the table, and opens his mouth with all his might and for a long time. Then he goes on in a loud voice, careless who hears him, "Why, I saw the other day, at the Town Hall, piles of the Declarations of Profits, required by the Treasury. I don't know, of course, for I've not read them, but I'm as sure and certain as you are that all those innumerable piles of declarations are just so many columns of cod and humbug and lies!"

Intelligent and inexhaustible, accurately posted through the clerk's job in which he is sheltering, the sergeant relates with careless gestures his stories of scandals and huge profiteering, "while our good fellows are fighting." He talks and talks, and concludes by saying that after all *he* doesn't care a damn as long as they let him alone.

Monsieur Fontan is in the café. A woman leads up to him a tottering being whom she introduces to him. "He's ill, Monsieur Fontan, because he hasn't had enough to eat."

"Well now! And I'm ill, too," says Fontan jovially, "but it's because
I eat too much."

The sergeant takes his leave, touching us with a slight salute. "He's right, that smart gentleman," says Crillon to me. "It's always been like that, and it will always be like that, you know!"

Aloof, I keep silence. I am still tired and stunned by all these sayings in the little time since I remained so long without hearing anything but myself. But I am sure they are all true, and that patriotism is only a word or a tool for many. And feeling the rags of the common soldier still on me, I knit my brows and realize

that it is a disgrace and a shame for the poor to be deceived as they are.

Crillon is smiling, as always! On his huge face, where every passing day now leaves some marks, on his round-eyed weakened face with its mouth opened like a cypher, the old smile of yore is spread out. I used to think then that resignation was a virtue; I see now that it is a vice. The optimist is the permanent accomplice of all evil-doers. This passive smile which I admired but lately—I find it despicable on this poor face.

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The café has filled up with workmen, either old or very young, from the town and the country, but chiefly the country.

What are they doing, these lowly, these ill-paid? They are dirty and they are drinking. They are dark, although it is the forenoon, because they are dirty. In the light there is that obscurity which they carry on them; and a bad smell removes itself with them.

I see three convalescent soldiers from the hospital join the plebeian groups; they are recognized by their coarse clothes, their caps and big boots, and because their gestures are soldered together and conform to a common movement.

By force of "glasses all round," these drinkers begin to talk in loud voices; they get excited and shout at random; and in the end they drop visibly into unconsciousness, into oblivion, into defeat.

The wine-merchant is at his cash desk, which shines like silver. He stands behind the center of it, colorless, motionless, like a bust on a pedestal. His bare arms hang down, pallid as his face. He comes and wipes away some spilled wine, and his hands shine and drip, like a butcher's.

* * * * * *

"I'm forgetting to tell you," cried Crillon, "that they had news of your regiment a few days ago. Little Mélusson's had his head blown to bits in an attack. Here, y'know; he was a softy and an idler. Well, he was attacking like a devil. War remakes men like that!"

"Termite?" I asked.

"Ah, yes! Termite the poacher! Why it's a long time since they haven't seen him. Disappeared, it seems. S'pose he's killed."

Then he talks to me of this place. Brisbille, for instance, always the same, a Socialist and a scandal.

"There's him," says Crillon, "and that dangerous chap Eudo as well, with his notorient civilities. Would you believe it, they've not been able to pinch him for his spying proclensities! Nothing in his past life, nothing in his conductions, nothing in his expensiture, nothing to find fault with. Mustn't he be a deep one?"

I presume to think—suppose it was all untrue? Yet it seemed a formidable task to upset on the spot one of the oldest and most deeply rooted creeds in our town. But I risk it. "Perhaps he's innocent."

Crillon jumps, and shouts, "What! You suspect him of being innocent!" His face is convulsed and he explodes with an enormous laugh, a laugh irresistible as a tidal wave, the laugh of all!

"Talking about Termite," says Crillon a moment later, "it seems it wasn't him that did the poaching."

The military convalescents are leaving the tavern. Crillon watches them go away with their parallel movements and their sticks.

"Yes, there's wounded here and there's dead there!" he says; "all those who hadn't got a privilential situation! Ah, la, la! The poor devils, when you think of it, eh, what they must have suffered! And at this moment, all the time, there's some dying. And we stand it very well, an' hardly think of it. They didn't need to kill so many, that's certain—there's been faults and blunders, as everybody knows of. But fortunately," he adds, with animation, putting on my shoulder the hand that is big as a young animal, "the soldiers' deaths and the chief's blunders, that'll all disappear one fine day, melted away and forgotten in the glory of the victorious Commander!"

* * * * * *

There has been much talk in our quarter of a Memorial Festival.

I am not anxious to be present and I watch Marie set off. Then I feel myself

impelled to go there, as if it were a duty.

I cross the bridge. I stop at the corner of the Old Road, on the edge of the fields. Two steps away there is the cemetery, which is hardly growing, since nearly all those who die now are not anywhere.

I lift my eyes and take in the whole spectacle together. The hill which rises in front of me is full of people. It trembles like a swarm of bees. Up above, on the avenue of trimmed limetrees, it is crowned by the sunshine and by the red platform, which scintillates with the richness of dresses and uniforms and musical instruments.

Then there is a red barrier. On this side of that barrier, lower down, the public swarms and rustles.

I recognize the great picture of the past. I remember this ceremony, spacious as a season, which has been regularly staged here so many times in the course of my childhood and youth, and with almost the same rites and forms. It was like this last year, and the other years, and a century ago and centuries since.

Near me an old peasant in sabots is planted. Rags, shapeless and colorless—the color of time—cover the eternal man of the fields. He is what he always was. He blinks, leaning on a stick; he holds his cap in his hand because what he sees is so like a church service. His legs are trembling; he wonders if he ought to be kneeling.

And I, I feel myself diminished, cut back, returned through the cycles of time to the little that I am.

* * * * * *

Up there, borne by the flag-draped rostrum, a man is speaking. He lifts a sculptural head aloft, whose hair is white as marble.

At my distance I can hardly hear him. But the wind carries me some phrases, louder shouted, of his peroration. He is preaching resignation to the people, and the continuance of things. He implores them to abandon finally the accursed war of classes, to devote themselves forever to the blessed war of races in all its shapes. After the war there must be no more social utopias, but discipline instead, whose grandeur and beauty the war has happily revealed, the union of

rich and poor for national expansion and the victory of France in the world, and sacred hatred of the Germans, which is a virtue in the French. Let us remember!

Then another orator excites himself and shouts that the war has been such a magnificent harvest of heroism that it must not be regretted. It has been a good thing for France; it has made lofty virtues and noble instincts gush forth from a nation which seemed to be decadent. Our people had need of an awakening and to recover themselves, and acquire new vigor. With metaphors which hover and vibrate he proclaims the glory of killing and being killed, he exalts the ancient passion for plumes and scarlet in which the heart of France is molded.

Alone on the edge of the crowd I feel myself go icy by the touch of these words and commands, which link future and past together and misery to misery. I have already heard them resounding forever. A world of thoughts growls confusedly within me. Once I cried noiselessly, "No!"—a deformed cry, a strangled protest of all my faith against all the fallacy which comes down upon us. That first cry which I have risked among men, I cast almost as a visionary, but almost as a dumb man. The old peasant did not even turn his earthy, gigantic head. And I hear a roar of applause go by, of popular expanse.

I go up to join Marie, mingling with the crowd; I divide serried knots of them. Suddenly there is profound silence, and every one stands immovable. Up there the Bishop is on his feet. He raises his forefinger and says, "The dead are not dead. They are rewarded in heaven; but even here on earth they are alive. They keep watch in our hearts, eternally preserved from oblivion. Theirs is the immortality of glory and gratitude. They are not dead, and we should envy them more than pity."

And he blesses the audience, all of whom bow or kneel. I remained upright, stubbornly, with clenched teeth. And I remember things, and I say to myself, "Have the dead died for nothing? If the world is to stay as it is, then—yes!"

Several men did not bend their backs at first, and then they obeyed the general movement; and I felt on my shoulders all the heavy weight of the whole bowing multitude.

Monsieur Joseph Bonéas is talking within a circle. Seeing him again I also feel for one second the fascination he once had for me. He is wearing an officer's uniform of the Town Guard, and his collar hides the ravages in his neck. He is

holding forth. What says he? He says, "We must take the long view."

"We must take the long view. For my part, the only thing I admire in militarist Prussia is its military organization. After the war—for we must not limit our outlook to the present conflict—we must take lessons from it, and just let the simple-minded humanitarians go on bleating about universal peace."

He goes on to say that in his opinion the orators did not sufficiently insist on the necessity for tying the economic hands of Germany after the war. No annexations, perhaps; but tariffs, which would be much better. And he shows in argument the advantages and prosperity brought by carnage and destruction.

He sees me. He adorns himself with a smile and comes forward with proffered hand. I turn violently away. I have no use for the hand of this sort of outsider, this sort of traitor.

They lie. That ludicrous person who talks of taking the long view while there are still in the world only a few superb martyrs who have dared to do it, he who is satisfied to contemplate, beyond the present misery of men, the misery of their children; and the white-haired man who was extolling slavery just now, and trying to turn aside the demands of the people and switch them on to traditional massacre; and he who from the height of his bunting and trestles would have put a glamour of beauty and morality on battles; and he, the attitudinizer, who brings to life the memory of the dead only to deny with word trickery the terrible evidence of death, he who rewards the martyrs with the soft soap of false promises—all these people tell lies, lies, lies! Through their words I can hear the mental reservation they are chewing over—"Around us, the deluge; and after us, the deluge." Or else they do not even lie; they see nothing and they know not what they say.

They have opened the red barrier. Applause and congratulations cross each other. Some notabilities come down from the rostrum, they look at me, they are obviously interested in the wounded soldier that I am, they advance towards me. Among them is the intellectual person who spoke first. He is wagging the white head and its cauliflower curls, and looking all ways with eyes as empty as those of a king of cards. They told me his name, but I have forgotten it with contempt. I slip away from them. I am bitterly remorseful that for so long a portion of my life I believed what Bonéas said. I accuse myself of having formerly put my trust in speakers and writers who—however learned, distinguished, famous—were

only imbeciles or villains. I fly from these people, since I am not strong enough to answer and resist them—or to cry out upon them that the only memory it is important to preserve of the years we have endured is that of their loathsome horror and lunacy.

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But the few words fallen from on high have sufficed to open my eyes, to show me that the Separation I dimly saw in the tempest of my nights in hospital was true. It comes down from vacancy and the clouds, it takes form and it takes root—it is there, it is there; and the indictment comes to light, as precise and as tragic as that row of faces!

Kings? There they are. There are many different kinds of king, just as there are different gods. But there is one royalty everywhere, and that is the very form of ancient society, the great machine which is stronger than men. And all the personages enthroned on that rostrum—those business men and bishops, those politicians and great merchants, those bulky office-holders or journalists, those old generals in sumptuous decorations, those writers in uniform—they are the custodians of the highest law and its executors.

It is those people whose interests are common and are contrary to those of mankind; and their interests are—above all and imperiously—let nothing change! It is those people who keep their eternal subjects in eternal order, who deceive and dazzle them, who take their brains away as they take their bodies, who flatter their servile instincts, who make shallow, resplendent creeds for them, and explain huge happenings away with all the pretexts they like. It is because of them that the law of things does not rest on justice and the moral law.

If some of them are unconscious of it, no matter. Neither does it matter that all of them do not always profit by the public's servitude, nor that some of them, sometimes, even happen to suffer from it. They are none the less, all of them, by their solid coalition, material and moral, the defenders of lies above and delusion below. These are the people who reign in the place of kings, or at the same time, here as everywhere.

Formerly I used to see a harmony of interests and ideals on all that festive, sunlit hill. Now I see reality broken in two, as I did on my bed of pain. I see the two enemy races face to face—the victors and the vanquished.

Monsieur Gozlan looks like a master of masters—an aged collector of fortune, whose speculations are famous, whose wealth increases unaided, who makes as much profit as he likes and holds the district in the hollow of his hand. His vulgar movements flash with diamonds, and a bulky golden trinket hangs on his belly like a phallus. The generals beside him—those glorious potentates whose smiles are made of so many souls—and the administrators and the honorables only look like secondary actors.

Fontan occupies considerable space on the rostrum. He drowses there, with his two spherical hands planted in front of him. The voluminous trencherman digests and blows forth with his buttered mouth; and what he has eaten purrs within him. As for Rampaille, the butcher, *he* has mingled with the public. He is rich but dressed with bad taste. It is his habit to say, "I am a poor man of the people, I am; look at my dirty clothes." A moment ago, when the lady who was collecting for the Lest-we-Forget League suddenly confronted him and trapped him amid general attention, he fumbled desperately in his fob and dragged three sous out of his body. There are several like him on this side of the barrier, looking as though they were part of the crowd, but only attached to it by their trade. Kings do not now carry royalty everywhere on their sleeves; they obliterate themselves in the clothes of everybody. But all the hundred faces of royalty have the same signs, all of them, and are distinctly repeated through their smiles of cupidity, rapacity, ferocity.

And there the dark multitude fidgets about. By footpaths and streets they have come from the country and the town. I see, gazing earnestly, stiff-set with attention, faces scorched by rude contact with the seasons or blanched by bad atmospheres; the sharp and mummified face of the peasant; faces of young men grown bitter before they have come of age; of women grown ugly before they have come of age, who draw the little wings of their capes over their faded blouses and faded throats; the clerks of anemic and timorous career; and the little people with whom times are so difficult, whom their mediocrity depresses; all that stirring of backs and shoulders and hanging arms, in poverty dressed up or naked. Behold their numbers and immense strength. Behold, therefore, authority and justice. For justice and authority are not hollow formulas—they are life, the most of life there can be; they are mankind, they are mankind in all places and all times. These words, justice and authority, do not echo in an abstract sphere. They are rooted in the human being. They overflow and palpitate. When I demand justice, I am not groping in a dream, I am crying from the depths of all unhappy hearts.

Such are they, that mountain of people heaped on the ground like metal for the roads, overwhelmed by unhappiness, debased by charity and asking for it, bound to the rich by urgent necessity, entangled in the wheels of a single machine, the machine of frightful repetition. And in that multitude I also place nearly all young people, whoever they are, because of their docility and their general ignorance. These lowly people form an imposing mass as far as one may see, yet each of them is hardly anything, because he is isolated. It is almost a mistake to count them; what you see when you look at the multitude is an immensity made of nothing.

And the people of to-day—overloaded with gloom and intoxicated with prejudice—see blood, because of the red hangings of rostrums; they are fascinated by the sparkle of diamonds, of necklaces, of decorations, of the eyeglasses of the intellectuals. They have eyes but they see not, ears but they hear not; arms which they do not use; and they are thoughtless because they let others do their thinking! And the other half of this same multitude is yonder, looking for Man and looked for by Man, in the big black furrows where blood is scattered and the human race is disappearing. And still farther away, in another part of the world, the same throne-like platforms are crushing into the same immense areas of men; and the same gilded servants of royalty are scattering broadcast words which are only a translation of those which fell on us here.

Some women in mourning are hardly stains on this gloomy unity. They wander and turn round in the open spaces, and are the same as they were in ancient times. They are not of any age or any century, these murdered souls, covered with black veils; they are you and I.

My vision was true from top to bottom. The evil dream has become a concrete tragi-comedy which is worse. It is inextricable, heavy, crushing. I flounder from detail to detail of it; it drags me along. Behold what is. Behold, therefore, what will be—exploitation to the last breath, to the limit of wearing out, to death perfected!

I have overtaken Marie. By her side I feel more defenseless than when I am alone. While we watch the festival, the shining hurly-burly, murmuring and eulogistic, the Baroness espies me, smiles and signs to me to go to her. So I go, and in the presence of all she pays me some compliment or other on my service at the front. She is dressed in black velvet and wears her white hair like a diadem. Twenty-five years of vassalage bow me before her and fill me with

silence. And I salute the Gozlans also, in a way which I feel is humble in spite of myself, for they are all-powerful over me, and they make Marie an allowance without which we could not live properly. I am no more than a man.

I see Tudor, whose eyes were damaged in Artois, hesitating and groping.
The Baroness has found a little job for him in the castle kitchens.

"Isn't she good to the wounded soldiers?" they are saying around me.
"She's a real benefactor!"

This time I say aloud, "*There* is the real benefactor," and I point to the ruin which the young man has become whom we used to know, to the miserable, darkened biped whose eyelids flutter in the daylight, who leans weakly against a tree in face of the festive crowd, as if it were an execution post.

"Yes—after all—yes, yes," the people about me murmur, timidly; they also blinking as though tardily enlightened by the spectacle of the poor benefactor.

But they are not heard—they hardly even hear themselves—in the flood of uproar from a brass band. A triumphal march goes by with the strong and sensual driving force of its, "Forward! You shall *not* know!" The audience fill themselves with brazen music, and overflow in cheers.

The ceremony is drawing to a close. They who were seated on the rostrum get up. Fontan, bewildered with sleepiness, struggles to put on a tall hat which is too narrow, and while he screws it round he grimaces. Then he smiles with his boneless mouth. All congratulate themselves through each other; they shake their own hands; they cling to themselves. After their fellowship in patriotism they are going back to their calculations and gratifications, glorified in their egotism, sanctified, beatified; more than ever will they blend their own with the common cause and say, "*We* are the people!"

Brisbille, seeing one of the orators passing near him, throws him a ferocious look, and shouts, "Land-shark!" and other virulent insults.

But because of the brass instruments let loose, people only see him open his mouth, and Monsieur Mielvaque dances with delight. Monsieur Mielvaque, declared unfit for service, has been called up again. More miserable than ever, worn and pared and patched up, more and more parched and shriveled by hopelessly long labor—he blots out the shiny places on his overcoat with his pen

—Mielvaque points to Brisbille gagged by the band, he writhes with laughter and shouts in my ear, "He might be trying to sing!"

Madame Marcassin's paralyzed face appears, the disappearance of which she unceasingly thinks has lacerated her features. She also applauds the noise and across her face—which has gone out like a lamp—there shot a flash. Can it be only because, to-day, attention is fixed on her?

A mother, mutilated in her slain son, is giving her mite to the offertory for the Lest-we-Forget League. She is bringing her poverty's humble assistance to those who say, "Remember evil; not that it may be avoided, but that it may be revived, by exciting at random all causes of hatred. Memory must be made an infectious disease." Bleeding and bloody, inflamed by the stupid selfishness of vengeance, she holds out her hand to the collector, and drags behind her a little girl who, nevertheless, will one day, perhaps, be a mother.

Lower down, an apprentice is devouring an officer's uniform with his gaze. He stands there hypnotized; and the sky-blue and beautiful crimson come off on his eyes. At that moment I saw clearly that beauty in uniforms is still more wicked than stupid.

Ah! That frightful prophecy locked up within me is hammering my skull,
"I have confidence in the abyss of the people."

* * * * * *

Wounded by everything I see, I sink down in a corner. Truth is simple; but the world is no longer simple. There are so many things! How will truth ever change its defeat into victory? How is it ever going to heal all those who do not know! I grieve that I am weak and ineffective, that I am only I. On earth, alas, truth is dumb, and the heart is only a stifled cry!

I look for support, for some one who does not leave me alone. I am too much alone, and I look eagerly. But there is only Brisbille!

There is only that tipsy automaton; that parody of a man.

There he is. Close by he is more drunk than in the distance! Drunkenness bedaubs him; his eyes are filled with wine, his cheeks are like baked clay, his nose like a baked apple, he is almost blinded by viscous tufts. In the middle of

that open space he seems caught in a whirlpool. It happens that he is in front of me for a moment, and he hurls at my head some furious phrases in which I recognize, now and again, the truths in which I believe! Then, with antics at once desperate and too heavy for him, he tries to perform some kind of pantomime which represents the wealthy class, round-paunched as a bag of gold, sitting on the proletariat till their noses are crushed in the gutter, and proclaiming, with their eyes up to heaven and their hands on their hearts, "And above all, no more class-wars!" There is something alarming in the awkwardness of the grimacing object begotten by that obstructed brain. It seems as if real suffering is giving voice through him with a beast's cry.

When he has spoken, he collapses on to a stone. With his fist, whose leather is covered with red hair, like a cow's, he hides the squalid face that looks as if it had been spat upon. "Folks aren't wicked," he says, "but they're stupid, stupid, stupid."

And Brisbille cries.

Just then Father Piot advances into the space, with his silver aureole, his benevolent smile, and the vague and continuous lisping which trickles from his lips. He stops in the middle of us, gives a nod to each one and continuing his ingenuous reflections aloud, he murmurs, "Hem, hem! The most important thing of all, in war, is the return to religious ideas. Hem!"

The monstrous calm of the saying makes me start, and communicates final agitation to Brisbille. Throwing himself upright, the blacksmith flourishes his trembling fist, tries to hold it under the old priest's chin, and bawls, "You? Shall I tell you how *you* make me feel, eh? Why——"

Some young men seize him, hustle him and throw him down. His head strikes the ground and he is at last immobile. Father Piot raises his arms to heaven and kneels over the vanquished madman. There are tears in the old man's eyes.

When we have made a few steps away I cannot help saying to Marie, with a sort of courage, that Brisbille is not wrong in all that he says. Marie is shocked, and says, "Oh!"

"There was a time," she says, reproachfully, "when you set about him!"

I should like Marie to understand what I am wanting to say. I explain to her, that

although he may be a drunkard and a brute, he is right in what he thinks. He stammers and hiccups the truth, but it was not he who made it, and it is whole and pure. He is a degraded prophet, but the relics of his dreams have remained accurate. And that saintly old man, who is devotion incarnate, who would not harm a fly, he is only a lowly servant of lies; but he brings his little link to the chain, and he smiles on the side of the executioners.

"One shouldn't ever confuse ideas with men. It's a mistake that does a lot of harm."

Marie lowers her head and says nothing; then she murmurs, "Yes, that's true."

I pick up the little sentence she has given me. It is the first time that approval of that sort has brought her near to me. She has intelligence within her; she understands certain things. Women, in spite of thoughtless impulses, are quicker in understanding than men. Then she says to me, "Since you came back, you've been worrying your head too much."

Crillon was on our heels. He stands in front of me, and looks displeased.

"I was listening to you just now," he says; "I must tell you that since you came back you have the air of a foreigner—a Belgian or an American. You say intolantable things. We thought at first your mind had got a bit unhinged. Unfortunately, it's not that. Is it because you've turned sour? Anyway, I don't know what advantage you're after, but I must cautionize you that you're anielating everybody. We must put ourselves in these people's places. Apropos of this, and apropos of that, you make proposals of a tendicious character which doesn't escape them. You aren't like the rest any more. If you go on you'll look as silly as a giant, and if you're going to frighten folks, look out for yourself!"

He plants himself before me in massive conviction. The full daylight reveals more crudely the aging of his features. His skin is stretched on the bones of his head, and the muscles of his neck and shoulders work badly; they stick, like old drawers.

"And then, after all, what *do* you want? We've got to carry the war on, eh? We must give the Boches hell, to sum up."

With an effort, wearied beforehand, I ask, "And afterwards?"

"What—afterwards? Afterwards there'll be wars, naturally, but civilized wars. Afterwards? Why, future posterity! Own up that you'd like to save the world, eh, what? When you launch out into these great machinations you say enormities compulsively. The future? Ha, ha!"

I turn away from him. Of what use to try to tell him that the past is dead, that the present is passing, that the future alone is positive!

Through Crillon's paternal admonishment I feel the threat of the others. It is not yet hostility around me; but it is already a rupture. With this truth that clings to me alone, amid the world and its phantoms, am I not indeed rushing into a sort of tragedy impossible to maintain? They who surround me, filled to the lips, filled to the eyes, with the gross acceptance which turns men into beasts, they look at me mistrustfully, ready to be let loose against me. Little more was lacking before I should be as much a reprobate as Brisbille, who, in this very place, before the war, stood up alone before the multitude and tried to tell them to their faces that they were going into the gulf.

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I move away with Marie. We go down into the valley, and then climb Chestnut Hill. I like these places where I used so often to come in the days when everything around me was a hell which I did not see. Now that I am a ghost returning from the beyond, this hill still draws me through the streets and lanes. I remember it and it remembers me. There is something which we share, which I took away with me yonder, everywhere, like a secret. I hear that despoiled soldier who said, "Where I come from there are fields and paths and the sea; nowhere else in the world is there that," and amid my unhappy memories that extraordinary saying shines like news of the truth.

We sit down on the bank which borders the lane. We can see the town, the station and carts on the road; and yonder three villages make harmony, sometimes more carefully limned by bursts of sunshine. The horizons entwine us in a murmur. The crossing where we are is the spot where four roads make a movement of reunion.

But my spirit is no longer what it was. Vaguely I seek, everywhere. I must see things with all their consequences, and right to their source. Against all the chains of facts I must have long arguments to bring; and the world's chaos

requires an interpretation equally terrible.

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There is a slight noise—a frail passer-by and a speck which jumps round her feet. Marie looks and says mechanically, like a devout woman, making the sign of the cross, "Poor little angel!"

It is little Antoinette and her dog. She gropes for the edge of the road with a stick, for she has become quite blind. They never looked after her. They were going to do it, unendingly, but they never did it. They always said, "Poor little angel," and that was all.

She is so miserably clad that you lower your eyes before her, although she cannot see. She wanders and seeks, incapable of understanding the wrong they have done, they have allowed to be done, the wrong which no one remembers. Alas, to the prating indifference and the indolent negligence of men there is only this poor little blind witness.

She stops in front of us and puts out her hand awkwardly. She is begging! No one troubles himself about her now. She is talking to her dog; he was born in the castle kennels—Marie told me about him. He was the last of a litter, ill-shaped, with a head too big, and bad eyes; and the Baroness said, as they were going to drown him, and because she is always thinking of good things, "Give him to the little blind girl." The child is training him to guide her; but he is young, he wants to play when other dogs go by, he hears her with listless ear. It is difficult for him to begin serious work; and he plucks the string from her hands. She calls to him; and waits.

Then, during a long time, a good many passers-by appear and vanish. We do not look at all of them.

But lo, turning the corner like some one of importance, here comes a sleek and tawny mastiff, with the silvery tinkle of a trinket which gleams on his neck. He is proclaiming and preceding his young mistress, Mademoiselle Evelyn de Monthyon, who is riding her pony. The little girl caracoles sedately, clad in a riding habit, and armed with a crop. She has been an orphan for a long time. She is the mistress of the castle. She is twelve years old and has millions. A mounted groom in full livery follows her, looking like a stage-player or a chamberlain; and then, with measured steps, an elderly governess, dressed in black silk, and

manifestly thinking of some Court.

Mademoiselle Evelyn de Monthyon and her pretty name set us thinking of Antoinette, who hardly has a name; and it seems to us that these two are the only ones who have passed before our eyes. The difference in the earthly fates of these two creatures who have both the same fragile innocence, the same pure and complete incapacity of childhood, plunges us into a tragedy of thought. The misery and the might which have fallen on those little immature heads are equally undeserved. It is a disgrace for men to see a poor child; it is also a disgrace for men to see a rich child.

I feel malicious towards the little sumptuous princess who has just appeared, already haughty in spite of her littleness; and I am stirred with pity for the frail victim whom life is obliterating with all its might; and Marie, I can see, gentle Marie, has the same thoughts. Who would not feel them in face of this twin picture of childhood which a passing chance has brought us, of this one picture torn in two?

But I resist this emotion; the understanding of things must be based, not on sentiment, but on reason. There must be justice, not charity. Kindness is solitary. Compassion becomes one with him whom we pity; it allows us to fathom him, to understand him alone amongst the rest; but it blurs and befogs the laws of the whole. I must set off with a clear idea, like the beam of a lighthouse through the deformities and temptations of night.

As I have seen equality, I am seeing inequality. Equality in truth; inequality in fact. We observe in man's beginning the beginning of his hurt; the root of the error is in inheritance.

Injustice, artificial and groundless authority, royalty without reason, the fantastic freaks of fortune which suddenly put crowns on heads! It is there, as far as the monstrous authority of the dead, that we must draw a straight line and clean the darkness away.

The transfer of the riches and authority of the dead, of whatever kind, to their descendants, is not in accord with reason and the moral law. The laws of might and of possessions are for the living alone. Every man must occupy in the common lot a place which he owes to his work and not to luck.

It is tradition! But that is no reason, on the other hand. Tradition, which is the

artificial welding of the present with the mass of the past, contrives a chain between them, where there is none. It is from tradition that all human unhappiness comes; it piles *de facto*, truths on to the true truth; it overrides justice; it takes all freedom away from reason and replaces it with legendary things, forbidding reason to look for what may be inside them.

It is in the one domain of science and its application, and sometimes in the technique of the arts, that experience legitimately takes the power of law, and that acquired productions have a right to accumulate. But to pass from this treasuring of truth to the dynastic privilege of ideas or powers or wealth—those talismans—that is to make a senseless assimilation which kills equality in the bud and prevents human order from having a basis. Inheritance, which is the concrete and palpable form of tradition, defends itself by the tradition of origins and of beliefs—abuses defended by abuses, to infinity—and it is by reason of that integral succession that here, on earth, we see a few men holding the multitude of men in their hands.

I say all this to Marie. She appears to be more struck by the vehemence of my tone than by the obviousness of what I say. She replies, feebly, "Yes, indeed," and nods her head; but she asks me, "But the moral law that you talk about, isn't it tradition?"

"No. It is the automatic law of the common good. Every time *that* finds itself at stake, it re-creates itself logically. It is lucid; it shows itself every time right to its fountain-head. Its source is reason itself, and equality, which is the same thing as reason. This thing is good and that is evil, *because* it is good and because it is evil, and not because of what has been said or written. It is the opposite of traditional bidding. There is no tradition of the good. Wealth and power must be earned, not taken ready-made; the idea of what is just or right must be reconstructed on every occasion and not be taken ready-made."

Marie listens to me. She ponders, and then says, "We shouldn't work if we hadn't to leave what we have to our relations."

But immediately she answers herself, "No."

She produces some illustrations, just among our own surroundings. So-and-so, and So-and-so. The bait of gain or influence, or even the excitement of work and production suffice for people to do themselves harm. And then, too, this great

change would paralyze the workers less than the old way paralyzes the prematurely enriched who pick up their fortunes on the ground—such as he, for instance, whom we used to see go by, who was drained and dead at twenty, and so many other ignoble and irrefutable examples; and the comedies around bequests and heirs and heiresses, and their great gamble with affection and love—all these basenesses, in which custom too old has made hearts go moldy.

She is a little excited, as if the truth, in the confusion of these critical times, were beautiful to see—and even pleasant to detain with words.

All the same, she interrupts herself, and says, "They'll always find some way of deceiving." At last she says, "Yes, it would be just, perhaps; but it won't come."

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The valley has suddenly filled with tumult. On the road which goes along the opposite slope a regiment is passing on its way to the barracks, a new regiment, with its colors. The flag goes on its way in the middle of a long-drawn hurly-burly, in vague shouting, in plumes of dust and a sparkling mist of battle.

We have both mechanically risen on the edge of the road. At the moment when the flag passes before us, the habit of saluting it trembles in my arms. But, just as when a while ago the bishop's lifted hand did not humble me, I stay motionless, and I do not salute.

No, I do not bow in presence of the flag. It frightens me, I hate it and I accuse it. No, there is no beauty in it; it is not the emblem of this corner of my native land, whose fair picture it disturbs with its savage stripes. It is the screaming signboard of the glory of blows, of militarism and war. It unfurls over the living surges of humanity a sign of supremacy and command; it is a weapon. It is not the love of our countries, it is their sharp-edged difference, proud and aggressive, which we placard in the face of the others. It is the gaudy eagle which conquerors and their devotees see flying in their dreams from steeple to steeple in foreign lands. The sacred defense of the homeland—well and good. But if there was no offensive war there would be defensive war. Defensive war has the same infamous cause as the offensive war which provoked it; why do we not confess it? We persist, through blindness or duplicity, in cutting the question in two, as if it were too great. All fallacies are possible when one speculates on morsels of truth. But Earth only bears one single sort of inhabitant.

It is not enough to put something on the end of a stick in public places, to shake it on the tops of buildings and in the faces of public assemblies, and say, "It is decided that this is the loftiest of all symbols; it is decided that he who will not bend the knee before it shall be accursed." It is the duty of human intelligence to examine if that symbolism is not fetish-worship.

As for me, I remember it was said that logic has terrible chains and that all hold together—the throne, the altar, the sword and the flag. And I have read, in the unchaining and the chaining-up of war, that these are the instruments of the cult of human sacrifices.

Marie has sat down again, and I strolled away a little, musing.

I recall the silhouette of Adjutant Marcassin, and him whom I quoted a moment ago—the sincere hero, barren and dogmatic, with his furious faith. I seem to be asking him, "Do you believe in beauty, in progress?" He does not know, so he replies, "No! I only believe in the glory of the French name!" "Do you believe in respect for life, in the dignity of labor, in the holiness of happiness?" "No." "Do you believe in truth, in justice?" "No, I only believe in the glory of the French name."

The idea of motherland—I have never dared to look it in the face. I stand still in my walk and in my meditation. What, that also? But my reason is as honest as my heart, and keeps me going forward. Yes, that also.

In the friendly solitude of these familiar spots on the top of this hill, at these cross-roads where the lane has led me like an unending companion, not far from the place where the gentle slope waits for you to entice you, I quake to hear myself think and blaspheme. What, that notion of Motherland also, which has so often thrilled me with gladness and enthusiasm, as but lately that of God did?

But it is in Motherland's name, as once in the name of God only, that humanity robs itself and tries to choke itself with its own hands, as it will soon succeed in doing. It is because of motherland that the big countries, more rich in blood, have overcome the little ones. It is because of motherland that the overlord of German nationalism attacked France and let civil war loose among the people of the world. The question must be placed there where it is, that is to say, everywhere at once. One must see face to face, in one glance, all those immense, distinct unities which each shout "I!"

The idea of motherland is not a false idea, but it is a little idea, and one which must remain little.

There is only one common good. There is only one moral duty, only one truth, and every man is the shining recipient and guardian of it. The present understanding of the idea of motherland divides all these great ideas, cuts them into pieces, specializes them within impenetrable circles. We meet as many national truths as we do nations, and as many national duties, and as many national interests and rights—and they are antagonistic to each other. Each country is separated from the next by such walls—moral frontiers, material frontiers, commercial frontiers—that you are imprisoned when you find yourself on either side of them. We hear talk of sanctified selfishness, of the adorable expansion of one race across the others, of noble hatreds and glorious conquests, and we see these ideals trying to take shape on all hands. This capricious multiplication of what ought to remain one leads the whole of civilization into a malignant and thorough absurdity. The words "justice" and "right" are too great in stature to be shut up in proper nouns, any more than Providence can be, which every royalty would fain take to itself.

National aspirations—confessed or unconfessable—are contradictory among themselves. All populations which are narrowly confined and elbow each other in the world are full of dreams vaster than each of them. The nations' territorial ambitions overlap each other on the map of the universe; economic and financial ambitions cancel each other mathematically. Then in the mass they are unrealizable.

And since there is no sort of higher control over this scuffle of truths which are not admissible, each nation realizes its own by all possible means, by all the fidelity and anger and brute force she can get out of herself. By the help of this state of world-wide anarchy, the lazy and slight distinction between patriotism, imperialism and militarism is violated, trampled, and broken through all along the line, and it cannot be otherwise. The living universe cannot help becoming an organization of armed rivalry. And there cannot fail to result from it the everlasting succession of evils, without any hope of abiding spoils, for there is no instance of conquerors who have long enjoyed immunity, and history reveals a sort of balance of injustices and of the fatal alternation of predominance. In all quarters the hope of victory brings in the hope of war. It is conflict clinging to conflict, and the recurrent murdering of murders.

The kings! We always find the kings again when we examine popular unhappiness right to the end! This hypertrophy of the national unities is the doing of their leaders. It is the masters, the ruling aristocracies—emblazoned or capitalist—who have created and maintained for centuries all the pompous and sacred raiment, sanctimonious or fanatical, in which national separation is clothed, along with the fable of national interests—those enemies of the multitudes. The primeval centralization of individuals isolated in the inhabited spaces was in agreement with the moral law; it was the precise embodiment of progress; it was of benefit to all. But the decreed division, peremptory and stern, which was interposed in that centralization—that is the doom of man, although it is necessary to the classes who command. These boundaries, these clean cuts, permit the stakes of commercial conflict and of war; that is to say, the chance of big feats of glory and of huge speculations. *That* is the vital principle of Empire. If all interests suddenly became again the individual interests of men, and the moral law resumed its full and spacious action on the basis of equality, if human solidarity were world-wide and complete, it would no longer lend itself to certain sudden and partial increases which are never to the general advantage, but may be to the advantage of a few fleeting profiteers. That is why the conscious forces which have hitherto directed the old world's destiny will always use all possible means to break up human harmony into fragments. Authority holds fast to all its national bases.

The insensate system of national blocks in sinister dispersal, devouring or devoured, has its apostles and advocates. But the theorists, the men of spurious knowledge, will in vain have heaped up their farrago of quibbles and arguments, their fallacies drawn from so-called precedents or from so-called economic and ethnic necessity; for the simple, brutal and magnificent cry of life renders useless the efforts they make to galvanize and erect doctrines which cannot stand alone. The disapproval which attaches in our time to the word "internationalism" proves together the silliness and meanness of public opinion. Humanity is the living name of truth. Men are like each other as trees! They who rule well, rule by force and deceit; but by reason, never.

The national group is a collectivity within the bosom of the chief one. It is one group like any other; it is like him who knots himself to himself under the wing of a roof, or under the wider wing of the sky that dyes a landscape blue. It is not the definite, absolute, mystical group into which they would fain transform it, with sorcery of words and ideas, which they have armored with oppressive rules. Everywhere man's poor hope of salvation on earth is merely to attain, at the end

of his life, this: To live one's life freely, where one wants to live it; to love, to last, to produce in the chosen environment—just as the people of the ancient Provinces have lost, along with their separate leaders, their separate traditions of covetousness and reciprocal robbery.

If, from the idea of motherland, you take away covetousness, hatred, envy and vainglory; if you take away from it the desire for predominance by violence, what is there left of it?

It is not an individual unity of laws; for just laws have no colors. It is not a solidarity of interests, for there are no material national interests—or they are not honest. It is not a unity of race; for the map of the countries is not the map of the races. What is there left?

There is left a restricted communion, deep and delightful; the affectionate and affecting attraction in the charm of a language—there is hardly more in the universe besides its languages which are foreigners—there is left a personal and delicate preference for certain forms of landscape, of monuments, of talent. And even this radiance has its limits. The cult of the masterpieces of art and thought is the only impulse of the soul which, by general consent, has always soared above patriotic littlenesses.

"But," the official voices trumpet, "there is another magic formula—the great common Past of every nation."

Yes, there is the Past. That long Golgotha of oppressed peoples; the Law of the Strong, changing life's humble festival into useless and recurring hecatombs; the chronology of that crushing of lives and ideas which always tortured or executed the innovators; that Past in which sovereigns settled their personal affairs of alliances, ruptures, dowries and inheritance with the territory and blood which they owned; in which each and every country was so squandered—it is common to all. That Past in which the small attainments of moral progress, of well-being and unity (so far as they were not solely semblances) only crystallized with despairing tardiness, with periods of doleful stagnation and frightful alteration along the channels of barbarism and force; that Past of somber shame, that Past of error and disease which every old nation has survived, which we should learn by heart that we may hate it—yes, that Past is common to all, like misery, shame and pain. Blessed are the new nations, for they have no remorse!

And the blessings of the past—the splendor of the French Revolution, the huge gifts of the navigators who brought new worlds to the old one, and the miraculous exception of scientific discoveries, which by a second miracle were not smothered in their youth—are they not also common to all, like the undying beauty of the ruins of the Parthenon, Shakespeare's lightning and Beethoven's raptures, and like love, and like joy?

The universal problem into which modern life, as well as past life, rushes and embroils and rends itself, can only be dispersed by a universal means which reduces each nation to what it is in truth; which strips from them all the ideal of supremacy stolen by each of them from the great human ideal; a means which, raising the human ideal definitely beyond the reach of all those immoderate emotions, which shout together "*Mine* is the only point of view," gives it at last its divine unity. Let us keep the love of the motherland in our hearts, but let us dethrone the conception of Motherland.

I will say what there is to say: I place the Republic before France. France is ourselves. The Republic is ourselves and the others. The general welfare must be put much higher than national welfare, because it *is* much higher. But if it is venturesome to assert, as they have so much and so indiscriminately done, that such national interest is in accord with the general interest, then the converse is obvious; and that is illuminating, momentous and decisive—the good of all includes the good of each; France can be prosperous even if the world is not, but the world cannot be prosperous and France not. The moving argument reëstablishes, with positive and crowding certainties which touch us softly on all sides, that distracting stake which Pascal tried to place, like a lever in the void —"On one side I lose; on the other I have all to gain."

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Amid the beauty of these dear spots on Chestnut Hill, in the heart of these four crossing ways, I have seen new things; not that any new things have happened, but because I have opened my eyes.

I am rewarded, I the lowest, for being the only one of all to follow up error to the end, right into its holy places; for I am at last disentangling all the simplicity and truth of the great horizons. The revelation still seems to me so terrible that the silence of men, heaped under the roofs down there at my feet, seizes and threatens me. And if I am but timidly formulating it within myself, that is

because each of us has lived in reality more than his life, and because my training has filled me, like the rest, with centuries of shadow, of humiliation and captivity.

It is establishing itself cautiously; but it is the truth, and there are moments when logic seizes you in its godlike whirlwind. In this disordered world where the weakness of a few oppresses the strength of all; since ever the religion of the God of Battles and of Resignation has not sufficed by itself to consecrate inequality. Tradition reigns, the gospel of the blind adoration of what was and what is—God without a head. Man's destiny is eternally blockaded by two forms of tradition; in time, by hereditary succession; in space, by frontiers, and thus it is crushed and annihilated in detail. It is the truth. I am certain of it, for I am touching it.

But I do not know what will become of us. All the blood poured out, all the words poured out, to impose a sham ideal on our bodies and souls, will they suffice for a long time yet to separate and isolate humanity in absurdity made real? History is a Bible of errors. I have not only seen blessings falling from on high on all which supported evil, and curses on all which could heal it; I have seen, here below, the keepers of the moral law hunted and derided, from little Termite, lost like a rat in unfolding battle, back to Jesus Christ.

We go away. For the first time since I came back I no longer lean on Marie. It is she who leans on me.

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CHAPTER XXI

NO!

The opening of our War Museum, which was the conspicuous event of the following days, filled Crillon with delight.

It was a wooden building, gay with flags, which the municipality had erected; and Room 1 was occupied by an exhibition of paintings and drawings by amateurs in high society, all war subjects. Many of them were sent down from Paris.

Crillon, officially got up in his Sunday clothes, has bought the catalogue (which is sold for the benefit of the wounded) and he is struck with wonder by the list of exhibitors. He talks of titles, of coats of arms, of crowns; he seeks enlightenment in matters of aristocratic hierarchy. Once, as he stands before the row of frames, he asks:

"I say, now, which has got most talent in France—a princess or a duchess?"

He is quite affected by these things, and with his eyes fixed on the lower edges of the pictures he deciphers the signatures.

In the room which follows this shining exhibition of autographs there is a crush.

On trestles disposed around the wall trophies are arranged—peaked helmets, knapsacks covered with tawny hair, ruins of shells.

The complete uniform of a German infantryman has been built up with items from different sources, some of them stained.

In this room there was a group of convalescents from the overflow hospital of Viviers. These soldiers looked, and hardly spoke. Several shrugged their

shoulders. But one of them growled in front of the German phantom, "Ah the swine!"

With a view to propaganda, they have framed a letter from a woman found in a slain enemy's pocket. A translation is posted up as well, and they have underlined the passage in which the woman says, "When is this cursed war going to end?" and in which she laments the increasing cost of little Johann's keep. At the foot of the page, the woman has depicted, in a sentimental diagram, the increasing love that she feels for her man.

How simple and obvious the evidence is! No reasonable person can dispute that the being whose private life is here thrown to the winds and who poured out his sweat and his blood in one of these rags was not responsible for having held a rifle, for having aimed it. In the presence of these ruins I see with monotonous and implacable obstinacy that the attacking multitude is as innocent as the defending multitude.

On a little red-covered table by the side of a little tacked label which says, "Cold Steel: May 9," there is a twisted French bayonet—a bayonet, the flesh weapon, which has been twisted!

"Oh, it's fine!" says a young girl from the castle.

"It isn't Fritz and Jerry, old chap, that bends bayonets!"

"No doubt about it, we're the first soldiers in the world," says Rampaille.

"We've set a beautiful example to the world," says a sprightly Member of the Upper House to all those present.

Excitement grows around that bayonet. The young girl, who is beautiful and expansive, cannot tear herself away from it. At last she touches it with her finger, and shudders. She does not disguise her pleasant emotion:—

"I confess *I'm* a patriot! I'm more than that—I'm a patriot and a militarist!"

All heads around her are nodded in approval. That kind of talk never seems intemperate, for it touches on sacred things.

And I, I see—in the night which falls for a moment, amid the tempest of dying men which is subsiding on the ground—I see a monster in the form of a man and in the form of a vulture, who, with the death-rattle in his throat, holds towards that young girl the horrible head that is scalped with a coronet, and says to her: "You do not know me, and you do not know, but you are like me!"

The young girl's living laugh, as she goes off with a young officer, recalls me to events.

All those who come after each other to the bayonet speak in the same way, and have the same proud eyes.

"They're not stronger than us, let me tell you! It's us that's the strongest!"

"Our allies are very good, but it's lucky for them we're there on the job."

"Ah, la, la!"

"Why, yes, there's only the French for it. All the world admires them.
Only we're always running ourselves down."

When you see that fever, that spectacle of intoxication, these people who seize the slightest chance to glorify their country's physical force and the hardness of its fists, you hear echoing the words of the orators and the official politicians:—

"There is only in our hearts the condemnation of barbarism and the love of humanity."

And you ask yourself if there is a single public opinion in the world which is capable of bearing victory with dignity.

I stand aloof. I am a blot, like a bad prophet. I hear this declaration, which bows me like an infernal burden: It is only defeat which can open millions of eyes!

I hear some one say, with detestation, "German militarism——"

That is the final argument, that is the formula. Yes, German militarism is hateful, and must disappear; all the world is agreed about that—the jack-boots of the Junkers, of the Crown Princes, of the Kaiser, and their courts of intellectuals and business men, and the pan-Germanism which would dye Europe black and red,

and the half-bestial servility of the German people. Germany is the fiercest fortress of militarism. Yes, everybody is agreed about that.

But they who govern Thought take unfair advantage of that agreement, for they know well that when the simple folk have said, "German militarism," they have said all. They stop there. They amalgamate the two words and confuse militarism with Germany—once Germany is thrown down there's no more to say. In that way, they attach lies to truth, and prevent us from seeing that militarism is in reality everywhere, more or less hypocritical and unconscious, but ready to seize everything if it can. They force opinion to add, "It is a crime to think of anything but beating the German enemy." But the right-minded man must answer that it is a crime to think only of that, for the enemy is militarism, and not Germany. I know; I will no longer let myself be caught by words which they hide one behind another.

The Liberal Member of the Upper House says, loud enough to be heard, that the people have behaved very well, for, after all, they have found the cost, and they must be given credit for their good conduct.

Another personage in the same group, an Army contractor, spoke of "the good chaps in the trenches," and he added, in a lower voice, "As long as they're protecting us, we're all right."

"We shall reward them when they come back," replied an old lady. "We shall give them glory, we shall make their leaders into Marshals, and they'll have celebrations, and Kings will be there."

"And there are some who won't come back."

We see several new recruits of the 1916 class who will soon be sent to the front.

"They're pretty boys," says the Member of the Upper House, good-naturedly; "but they're still a bit pale-faced. We must fatten 'em up, we must fatten 'em up!"

An official of the Ministry of War goes up to the Member of the Upper House, and says:

"The science of military preparedness is still in its beginnings. We're getting clear for it hastily, but it is an organization which requires a long time and which can only have full effect in time of peace. Later, we shall take them from

childhood; we shall make good sound soldiers of them, and of good health, morally as well as physically."

Then the band plays; it is closing time, and there is the passion of a military march. A woman cries that it is like drinking champagne to hear it.

The visitors have gone away. I linger to look at the beflagged front of the War Museum, while night is falling. It is the Temple. It is joined to the Church, and resembles it. My thoughts go to those crosses which weigh down, from the pinnacles of churches, the heads of the living, join their two hands together, and close their eyes; those crosses which squat upon the graves in the cemeteries at the front. It is because of all these temples that in the future the sleep-walking nations will begin again to go through the immense and mournful tragedy of obedience. It is because of these temples that financial and industrial tyranny, Imperial and Royal tyranny—of which all they whom I meet on my way are the accomplices or the puppets—will to-morrow begin again to wax fat on the fanaticism of the civilian, on the weariness of those who have come back, on the silence of the dead. (When the armies file through the Arc de Triomphe, who is there will see—and yet they will be plainly visible—that six thousand miles of French coffins are also passing through!) And the flag will continue to float over its prey, that flag stuck into the shadowy front of the War Museum, that flag so twisted by the wind's breath that sometimes it takes the shape of a cross, and sometimes of a scythe!

Judgment is passed in that case. But the vision of the future agitates me with a sort of despair and with a holy thrill of anger.

Ah, there are cloudy moments when one asks himself if men do not deserve all the disasters into which they rush! No—I recover myself—they do not deserve them. But *we,* instead of saying "I wish" must say "I will." And what we will, we must will to build it, with order, with method, beginning at the beginning, when once we have been as far as that beginning. We must not only open our eyes, but our arms, our wings.

This isolated wooden building, with its back against a wood-pile, and nobody in it——

Burn it? Destroy it? I thought of doing it.

To cast that light in the face of that moving night, which was crawling and

trampling there in the torchlight, which had gone to plunge into the town and grow darker among the dungeon-cells of the bedchambers, there to hatch more forgetfulness in the gloom, more evil and misery, or to breed unavailing generations who will be abortive at the age of twenty!

The desire to do it gripped my body for a moment. I fell back, and I went away, like the others.

It seems to me that, in not doing it, I did an evil deed.

For if the men who are to come free themselves instead of sinking in the quicksands, if they consider, with lucidity and with the epic pity it deserves, this age through which I go drowning, they would perhaps have thanked me, even me! From those who will not see or know me, but in whom for this sudden moment I want to hope, I beg pardon for not doing it.

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In a corner where the neglected land is turning into a desert, and which lies across my way home, some children are throwing stones at a mirror which they have placed a few steps away as a target. They jostle each other, shouting noisily; each of them wants the glory of being the first to break it. I see the mirror again that I broke with a brick at Buzancy, because it seemed to stand upright like a living being! Next, when the fragment of solid light is shattered into crumbs, they pursue with stones an old dog, whose wounded foot trails like his tail. No one wants it any more; it is ready to be finished off, and the urchins are improving the occasion. Limping, his pot-hanger spine all arched, the animal hurries slowly, and tries vainly to go faster than the pebbles.

The child is only a confused handful of confused and superficial propensities. *Our* deep instincts—there they are.

I scatter the children, and they withdraw into the shadows unwillingly, and look at me with malice. I am distressed by this maliciousness, which is born full-grown. I am distressed also by this old dog's lot. They would not understand me if I acknowledged that distress; they would say, "And you who've seen so many wounded and dead!" All the same, there is a supreme respect for life. I am not slighting intellect; but life is common to us along with poorer living things than ourselves. He who kills an animal, however lowly it may be, unless there is necessity, is an assassin.

At the crossing I meet Louise Verte, wandering about. She has gone crazy. She continues to accost men, but they do not even know what she begs for. She rambles, in the streets, and in her hovel, and on the pallet where she is crucified by drunkards. She is surrounded by general loathing. "That a woman?" says a virtuous man who is going by, "that dirty old strumpet? A woman? A sewer, yes." She is harmless. In a feeble, peaceful voice, which seems to live in some supernatural region, very far from us, she says to me:

"I am the queen."

Immediately and strangely she adds, as though troubled by some foreboding:

"Don't take my illusion away from me."

I was on the point of answering her, but I check myself, and just say, "Yes," as one throws a copper, and she goes away happy.

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My respect for life is so strong that I feel pity for a fly which I have killed. Observing the tiny corpse at the gigantic height of my eyes, I cannot help thinking how well made that organized speck of dust is, whose wings are little more than two drops of space, whose eye has four thousand facets; and that fly occupies my thought for a moment, which is a long time for it.

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CHAPTER XXII

LIGHT

I am leaning this evening out of the open window. As in bygone nights, I am watching the dark pictures, invisible at first, taking shape—the steeple towering out of the hollow, and broadly lighted against the hill; the castle, that rich crown of masonry; and then the massive sloping black of the chimney-peopled roofs, which are sharply outlined against the paler black of space, and some milky, watching windows. The eye is lost in all directions among the desolation where the multitude of men and women are hiding, as always and as everywhere.

That is what is. Who will say, "That is what must be!"

I have searched, I have indistinctly seen, I have doubted. Now, I hope.

I do not regret my youth and its beliefs. Up to now, I have wasted my time to live. Youth is the true force, but it is too rarely lucid. Sometimes it has a triumphant liking for what is now, and the pugnacious broadside of paradox may please it. But there is a degree in innovation which they who have not lived very much cannot attain. And yet who knows if the stern greatness of present events will not have educated and aged the generation which to-day forms humanity's effective frontier? Whatever our hope may be, if we did not place it in youth, where should we place it?

Who will speak—see, and then speak? To speak is the same thing as to see, but it is more. Speech perpetuates vision. We carry no light; we are things of shadow, for night closes our eyes, and we put out our hands to find our way when the light is gone; we only shine in speech; truth is made by the mouths of men. The wind of words—what is it? It is our breath—not all words, for there are artificial and copied ones which are not part of the speaker; but the profound words, the cries. In the human cry you feel the effort of the spring. The cry comes out of us,

it is as living as a child. The cry goes on, and makes the appeal of truth wherever it may be, the cry gathers cries.

There is a voice, a low and untiring voice, which helps those who do not and will not see themselves, a voice which brings them together, Books—the book we choose, the favorite, the book you open, which was waiting for you!

Formerly, I hardly knew any books. Now, I love what they do. I have brought together as many as I could. There they are, on the shelves, with their immense titles, their regular, profound contents; they are there, all around me, arranged like houses.

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Who will tell the truth? But it is not enough to say things in order to let them be seen.

Just now, pursued by the idea of my temptation at the War Museum, I imagined that I had acted on it, and that I was appearing before the judges. I should have told them a fine lot of truths, I should have proved to them that I had done right. I should have made myself, the accused, into the prosecutor.

No! I should not have spoken thus, for I should not have known! I should have stood stammering, full of a truth throbbing within me, choking, unconfessable truth. It is not enough to speak; you must know words. When you have said, "I am in pain," or when you have said, "I am right," you have said nothing in reality, you have only spoken to yourself. The real presence of truth is not in every word of truth, because of the wear and tear of words, and the fleeting multiplicity of arguments. One must have the gift of persuasion, of leaving to truth its speaking simplicity, its solemn unfoldings. It is not I who will be able to speak from the depths of myself. The attention of men dazzles me when it rises before me. The very nakedness of paper frightens me and drowns my looks. Not I shall embellish that whiteness with writing like light. I understand of what a great tribune's sorrow is made; and I can only dream of him who, visibly summarizing the immense crisis of human necessity in a work which forgets nothing, which seems to forget nothing, without the blot even of a misplaced comma, will proclaim our Charter to the epochs of the times in which we are, and will let us see it. Blessed be that simplifier, from whatever country he may come,—but all the same, I should prefer him, at the bottom of my heart, to speak

French.

Once more, he intervenes within me who first showed himself to me as the specter of evil, he who guided me through hell. When the death-agony was choking him and his head had darkened like an eagle's, he hurled a curse which I did not understand, which I understand now, on the masterpieces of art. He was afraid of their eternity, of that terrible might they have—when once they are imprinted on the eyes of an epoch—the strength which you can neither kill nor drive in front of you. He said that Velasquez, who was only a chamberlain, had succeeded Philip IV, that he would succeed the Escurial, that he would succeed even Spain and Europe. He likened that artistic power, which the Kings have tamed in all respects save in its greatness, to that of a poet-reformer who throws a saying of freedom and justice abroad, a book which scatters sparks among humanity somber as coal. The voice of the expiring prince crawled on the ground and throbbed with secret blows: "Begone, all you voices of light!"

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But what shall *we* say? Let us spell out the Magna Charta of which we humbly catch sight. Let us say to the people of whom all peoples are made: "Wake up and understand, look and see; and having begun again the consciousness which was mown down by slavery, decide that everything must be begun again!"

Begin again, entirely. Yes, that first. If the human charter does not re-create everything, it will create nothing.

Unless they are universal, the reforms to be carried out are utopian and mortal. National reforms are only fragments of reforms. There must be no half measures. Half measures are laughter-provoking in their unbounded littleness when it is a question for the last time of arresting the world's roll down the hill of horror. There must be no half measures because there are no half truths. Do all, or you will do nothing.

Above all, do not let the reforms be undertaken by the Kings. That is the gravest thing to be taught you. The overtures of liberality made by the masters who have made the world what it is are only comedies. They are only ways of blockading completely the progress to come, of building up the past again behind new patchwork of plaster.

Never listen, either, to the fine words they offer you, the letters of which you see

like dry bones on hoardings and the fronts of buildings. There are official proclamations, full of the notion of liberty and rights, which would be beautiful if they said truly what they say. But they who compose them do not attach their full meaning to the words. What they recite they are not capable of wanting, nor even of understanding. The one indisputable sign of progress in ideas to-day is that there are things which they dare no longer leave publicly unsaid, and that's all. There are not all the political parties that there seem to be. They swarm, certainly, as numerous as the cases of short sight; but there are only two—the democrats and the conservatives. Every political deed ends fatally either in one or the other, and all their leaders have always a tendency to act in the direction of reaction. Beware, and never forget that if certain assertions are made by certain lips, that is a sufficient reason why you should at once mistrust them. When the bleached old republicans[1] take your cause in their hands, be quite sure that it is not yours. Be wary as lions.

[Footnote 1: The word is used here much in the sense of our word "Tories."—Tr.]

Do not let the simplicity of the new world out of your sight. The social trust is simple. The complications are in what is overhead—the accumulation of delusions and prejudice heaped up by ages of tyrants, parasites, and lawyers. That conviction sheds a real glimmer of light on your duty and points out the way to accomplish it. He who would dig right down to the truth must simplify; his faith must be brutally simple, or he is lost. Laugh at the subtle shades and distinctions of the rhetoricians and the specialist physicians. Say aloud: "This is what is," and then, "That is what must be."

You will never have that simplicity, you people of the world, if you do not seize it. If you want it, do it yourself with your own hands. And I give you now the talisman, the wonderful magic word—you *can*!

That you may be a judge of existing things, go back to their origins, and get at the endings of all. The noblest and most fruitful work of the human intelligence is to make a clean sweep of every enforced idea—of advantages or meanings—and to go right through appearances in search of the eternal bases. Thus you will clearly see the moral law at the beginning of all things, and the conception of justice and equality will appear to you beautiful as daylight.

Strong in that supreme simplicity, you shall say: I am the people of the peoples;

therefore I am the King of Kings, and I will that sovereignty flows everywhere from me, since I am might and right. I want no more despots, confessed or otherwise, great or little; I know, and I want no more. The incomplete liberation of 1789 was attacked by the Kings. Complete liberation will attack the Kings.

But Kings are not exclusively the uniformed ones among the trumpery wares of the courts. Assuredly, the nations who have a King have more tradition and subjection than the others. But there are countries where no man can get up and say, "My people, my army," nations which only experience the continuation of the kingly tradition in more peaceful intensity. There are others with the great figures of democratic leaders; but as long as the entirety of things is not overthrown—always the entirety, the sacred entirety—these men cannot achieve the impossible, and sooner or later their too-beautiful inclinations will be isolated and misunderstood. In the formidable urgency of progress, what do the proportions matter to you of the elements which make up the old order of things in the world? All the governors cling fatally together among themselves, and more solidly than you think, through the old machine of chancelleries, ministries, diplomacy, and the ceremonials with gilded swords; and when they are bent on making war for themselves there is an unquenchable likeness between them all, of which you want no more. Break the chain; suppress all privileges, and say at last, "Let, there be equality."

One man is as good as another. That means that no man carries within himself any privilege which puts him above the universal law. It means an equality in principle, and that does not invalidate the legitimacy of the differences due to work, to talent, and to moral sense. The leveling only affects the rights of the citizen; and not the man as a whole. You do not create the living being; you do not fashion the living clay, as God did in the Bible; you make regulations. Individual worth, on which some pretend to rely, is relative and unstable, and no one is a judge of it. In a well-organized entirety, it cultivates and improves itself automatically. But that magnificent anarchy cannot, at the inception of the human Charter, take the place of the obviousness of equality.

The poor man, the proletarian, is nobler than another, but not more sacred. In truth, all workers and all honest men are as good as each other. But the poor, the exploited, are fifteen hundred millions here on earth. They are the Law because they are the Number. The moral law is only the imperative preparation of the common good. It always involves, in different forms, the necessary limitations of some individual interests by the rest; that is to say, the sacrifice of one to the

many, of the many to the whole. The republican conception is the civic translation of the moral law; what is anti-republican is immoral.

Socially, women are the equals of men, without restrictions. The beings who shine and who bring forth are not made solely to lend or to give the heat of their bodies. It is right that the sum total of work should be shared, reduced and harmonized by their hands. It is just that the fate of humanity should be grounded also in the strength of women. Whatever the danger which their instinctive love of shining things may occasion, in spite of the facility with which they color all things with their own feelings and the totality of their slightest impulses—the legend of their incapacity is a fog that you will dissipate with a gesture of *your* hands. Their advent is in the order of things; and it is also in order to await with hopeful heart the day when the social and political chains of women will fall off, when human liberty will suddenly become twice as great.

People of the world, establish equality right up to the limits of your great life. Lay the foundations of the republic of republics over all the area where you breathe; that is to say, the common control in broad daylight of all external affairs, of community in the laws of labor, of production and of commerce. The subdivision of these high social and moral arrangements by nations or by limited unions of nations (enlargements which are reductions) is artificial, arbitrary, and malignant. The so-called inseparable cohesions of national interests vanish away as soon as you draw near to examine them. There are individual interests and a general interest, those two only. When you say "I," it means "I"; when you say "We," it means Man. So long as a single and identical Republic does not cover the world, all national liberations can only be beginnings and signals!

Thus you will disarm the "fatherlands" and "motherlands," and you will reduce the notion of Motherland to the little bit of social importance that it must have. You will do away with the military frontiers, and those economic and commercial barriers which are still worse. Protection introduces violence into the expansion of labor; like militarism, it brings in a fatal absence of balance. You will suppress that which justifies among nations the things which among individuals we call murder, robbery, and unfair competition. You will suppress battles—not nearly so much by the direct measure of supervision and order that you will take as because you will suppress the causes of battle. You will suppress them chiefly because it is *you* who will do it, by yourself, everywhere, with your invincible strength and the lucid conscience that is free from selfish motives. You will not make war on yourself.

You will not be afraid of magic formulas and the churches. Your giant reason will destroy the idol which suffocates its true believers. You will salute the flags for the last time; to that ancient enthusiasm which flattered the puerility of your ancestors, you will say a peaceful and final farewell. In some corners of the calamities of the past, there were times of tender emotion; but truth is greater, and there are not more boundaries on the earth than on the sea!

Each country will be a moral force, and no longer a brutal force; while all brutal forces clash with themselves, all moral forces make mighty harmony together.

The universal republic is the inevitable consequence of equal rights in life for all. Start from the principle of equality, and you arrive at the people's international. If you do not arrive there it is because you have not reasoned aright. They who start from the opposite point of view—God, and the divine rights of popes and Kings and nobles, and authority and tradition—will come, by fabulous paths but quite logically, to opposite conclusions. You must not cease to hold that there are only two teachings face to face. All things are amenable to reason, the supreme Reason which mutilated humanity, wounded in the eyes, has deified among the clouds.

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You will do away with the rights of the dead, and with heredity of power, whatever it may be, that inheritance which is unjust in all its gradations, for tradition takes root there, and it is an outrage on equality, against the order of labor. Labor is a great civic deed which all men and all women without exception must share or go down. Such divisions will reduce it for each one to dignified proportions and prevent it from devouring human lives.

You will not permit colonial ownership by States, which makes stains on the map of the world and is not justified by confessable reasons; and you will organize the abolition of that collective slavery. You will allow the individual property of the living to stand. It is equitable because its necessity is inherent in the circumstances of the living, and because there are cases where you cannot tear away the right of ownership without tearing right itself. Besides, the love of things is a passion, like the love of beings. The object of social organization is not to destroy sentiment and pleasure, but on the contrary to allow them to flourish, within the limit of not wronging others. It is right to enjoy what you have clearly earned by your work. That focused wisdom alone bursts among the

old order of things like a curse.

Chase away forever, everywhere, everywhere, the bad masters of the sacred school. Knowledge incessantly remakes the whole of civilization. The child's intelligence is too precious not to be under the protection of all. The heads of families are not free to deal according to their caprices with the ignorance which each child brings into the daylight; they have not that liberty contrary to liberty. A child does not belong body and soul to its parents; it is a person, and our ears are wounded by the blasphemy—a residue of despotic Roman tradition—of those who speak of their sons killed in the war and say, "I have given my son." You do not give living beings—and all intelligence belongs primarily to reason.

There must no longer be a single school where they teach idolatry, where the wills of to-morrow grow bigger under the terror of a God who does not exist, and on whom so many bad arguments are thrown away or justified. Nowhere must there be any more school-books where they dress up in some finery of prestige what is most contemptible and debasing in the past of the nations. Let there be nothing but universal histories, nothing but the great lines and peaks, the lights and shadows of that chaos which for six thousand years has been the fortune of two hundred thousand millions of men.

You will suppress everywhere the advertising of the cults, you will wipe away the inky uniform of the parsons. Let every believer keep his religion for himself, and let the priests stay between walls. Toleration in face of error is a graver error. One might have dreamed of a wise and universal church, for Jesus Christ will be justified in His human teaching as long as there are hearts. But they who have taken His morality in hand and fabricated their religion have poisoned the truth; more, they have shown for two thousand years that they place the interests of their caste before those of the sacred law of what is right. No words, no figures can ever give an idea of the evil which the Church has done to mankind. When she is not the oppressor herself, upholding the right of force, she lends her authority to the oppressors and sanctifies their pretenses; and still to-day she is closely united everywhere with those who do not want the reign of the poor. Just as the Jingoes invoke the charm of the domestic cradle that they may give an impulse to war, so does the Church invoke the poetry of the Gospels; but she has become an aristocratic party like the rest, in which every gesture of the sign of the Cross is a slap in the Face of Jesus Christ. Out of the love of one's native soil, they have made Nationalists; out of Jesus they have made Jesuits.

Only international greatness will at last permit the rooting up of the stubborn abuses which the partition walls of nationality multiply, entangle and solidify. The future Charter—of which we confusedly glimpse some signs and which has for its premises the great moral principles restored to their place, and the multitude at last restored to theirs—will force the newspapers to confess all their resources. By means of a young language, simple and modest, it will unite all foreigners—those prisoners of themselves. It will mow down the hateful complexity of judicial procedure, with its booty for the somebodies, and its lawyers as well, who intrude the tricks of diplomacy and the melodramatic usages of eloquence into the plain and simple machinery of justice. The righteous man must go so far as to say that clemency has not its place in justice; the logical majesty of the sentence which condemns the guilty one in order to frighten possible evil-doers (and never for another reason) is itself beyond forgiveness. International dignity will close the taverns, forbid the sale of poisons, and will reduce to impotence the vendors who want to render abortive, in men and young people, the future's beauty and the reign of intelligence. And here is a mandate which appears before my eyes—the tenacious law which must pounce without respite on all public robbers, on all those, little and big, cynics and hypocrites, who, when their trade or their functions bring the opportunity, exploit misery and speculate on necessity. There is a new hierarchy to make mistakes, to commit offenses and crimes—the true one.

You can form no idea of the beauty that is possible! You cannot imagine what all the squandered treasure can provide, what can be brought on by the resurrection of misguided human intelligence, successively smothered and slain hitherto by infamous slavery, by the despicable infectious necessity of armed attack and defense, and by the privileges which debase human worth. You can have no notion what human intelligence may one day find of new adoration. The people's absolute reign will give to literature and the arts—whose harmonious shape is still but roughly sketched—a splendor boundless as the rest. National cliques cultivate narrowness and ignorance, they cause originality to waste away; and the national academies, to which a residue of superstition lends respect, are only pompous ways of upholding ruins. The domes of those Institutes which look so grand when they tower above you are as ridiculous as extinguishers. You must widen and internationalize, without pause or limit, all which permits of it. With its barriers collapsed, you must fill society with broad daylight and magnificent spaces; with patience and heroism must you clear the ways which lead from the individual to humanity, the ways which were stopped up with corpses of ideas and with stone images all along their great curving horizons. Let everything be

remade on simple lines. There is only one people, there is only one people!

If you do that, you will be able to say that, at the moment when you planned your effort and took your decision, you saved the human species as far as it is possible on earth to do it. You will not have brought happiness about. The fallacy-mongers do not frighten us when they preach resignation and paralysis on the plea that no social change can bring happiness, thus trifling with these profound things. Happiness is part of the inner life, it is an intimate and personal paradise; it is a flash of chance or genius which comes sweetly to life among those who elbow each other, and it is also the sense of glory. No, it is not in your hands, and so it is in nobody's hands. But a balanced and heedful life is necessary to man, that he may build the isolated home of happiness; and death is the fearful connection of the happenings which pass away along with our profundities. External things and those which are hidden are essentially different, but they are held together by peace and by death.

To accomplish the majestically practical work, to shape the whole architecture like a statue, base nothing on impossible modifications of human nature; await nothing from pity.

Charity is a privilege, and must disappear. For the rest, you cannot love unknown people any more than you can have pity on them. The human intelligence is made for infinity; the heart is not. The being who really suffers in his heart, and not merely in his mind or in words, by the suffering of others whom he neither sees nor touches, is a nervous abnormality, and he cannot be argued from as an example. The repulse of reason, the stain of absurdity, torture the intelligence in a more abundant way. Simple as it may be, social science is geometry. Do not accept the sentimental meaning they give to the word "humanitarianism," and say that the preaching of fraternity and love is vain; these words lose their meaning amid the great numbers of man. It is in this disordered confusion of feelings and ideas that one feels the presence of Utopia. Mutual solidarity is of the intellect—common-sense, logic, methodical precision, order without faltering, the ruthless inevitable perfection of light!

In my fervor, in my hunger, and from the depths of my abyss, I uttered these words aloud amid the silence. My great reverie was blended with song, like the Ninth Symphony.

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I am resting on my elbows at the window. I am looking at the night, which is everywhere, which touches me, *me*, although I am only I, and it is infinite night. It seems to me that there is nothing else left me to think about. Things cling together; they will save each other, and will do their setting in order.

But again I am seized by the sharpest of my agonies—I am afraid that the multitude may rest content with the partial gratifications to be granted them everywhere by those who will use all their clinging, cunning power to prevent the people from understanding, and then from wishing. On the day of victory, they will pour intoxication and dazzling deceptions into you, and put almost superhuman cries into your mouths, "We have delivered humanity; we are the soldiers of the Right!" without telling you all that such a statement includes of gravity, of immense pledges and constructive genius, what it involves in respect for great peoples, whoever they are, and of gratitude to those who are trying to deliver themselves. They will again take up their eternal mission of stupefying the great conscious forces, and turning them aside from their ends. They will appeal for union and peace and patience, to the opportunism of changes, to the danger of going too quickly, or of meddling in your neighbor's affairs, and all the other fallacies of the sort. They will try again to ridicule and strike down those whom the newspapers (the ones in their pay) call dreamers, sectarians, and traitors; once again they will flourish all their old talismans. Doubtless they will propose, in the fashionable words of the moment, some official parodies of international justice, which they will break up one day like theatrical scenery; they will enunciate some popular right, curtailed by childish restrictions and monstrous definitions, resembling a brigand's code of honor. The wrong torn from confessed autocracies will hatch out elsewhere—in the sham republics, and the self-styled liberal countries who have played a hidden game. The concessions they will make will clothe the old rotten autocracy again, and perpetuate it. One imperialism will replace the other, and the generations to come will be marked for the sword. Soldier, wherever you are, they will try to efface your memory, or to exploit it, by leading it astray, and forgetfulness of the truth is the first form of your adversity! May neither defeat nor victory be against you. You are above both of them, for you are all the people.

The skies are peopled with stars, a harmony which clasps reason close, and applies the mind to the adorable idea of universal unity. Must that harmony give us hope or misgiving?

We are in a great night of the world. The thing is to know if we shall wake up to-

morrow. We have only one succor—*we* know of what the night is made. But shall we be able to impart our lucid faith, seeing that the heralds of warning are everywhere few, and that the greatest victims hate the only ideal which is not one, and call it utopian? Public opinion floats over the surface of the peoples, wavering and submissive to the wind; it lends but fleeting conscience and conviction to the majority; it cries "Down with the reformers!" It cries "Sacrilege!" because it is made to see in its vague thoughts what it could not itself see there. It cries that they are distorting it, whereas they are enlarging it.

I am not afraid, as many are, and as I once was myself, of being reviled and slandered. I do not cling to respect and gratitude for myself. But if I succeed in reaching men, I should like them not to curse me. Why should they, since it is not for myself? It is only because I am sure I am right. I am sure of the principles I see at the source of all—justice, logic, equality; all those divinely human truths whose contrast with the realized truth of to-day is so heart-breaking. And I want to appeal to you all; and that confidence which fills me with a tragic joy, I want to give it to you, at once as a command and as a prayer. There are not several ways of attaining it athwart everything, and of fastening life and the truth together again; there is only one—right-doing. Let rule begin again with the sublime control of the intellect. I am a man like the rest, a man like you. You who shake your head or shrug your shoulders as you listen to me—why are we, we two, we all, so foreign to each other, when we are not foreign?

I believe, in spite of all, in truth's victory. I believe in the momentous value, hereafter inviolable, of those few truly fraternal men in all the countries of the world, who, in the oscillation of national egoisms let loose, stand up and stand out, steadfast as the glorious statues of Right and Duty. To-night I believe—nay, I am certain—that the new order will be built upon that archipelago of men. Even if we have still to suffer as far as we can see ahead, the idea can no more cease to throb and grow stronger than the human heart can; and the will which is already rising here and there they can no longer destroy.

I proclaim the inevitable advent of the universal republic. Not the transient backslidings, nor the darkness and the dread, nor the tragic difficulty of uplifting the world everywhere at once will prevent the fulfillment of international truth. But if the great powers of darkness persist in holding their positions, if they whose clear cries of warning should be voices crying in the wilderness—O you people of the world, you the unwearying vanquished of History, I appeal to your justice and I appeal to your anger. Over the vague quarrels which drench the

strands with blood, over the plunderers of shipwrecks, over the jetsam and the reefs, and the palaces and monuments built upon the sand, I see the high tide coming. Truth is only revolutionary by reason of error's disorder. Revolution is Order.

* * * * * *

CHAPTER XXIII

FACE TO FACE

Through the panes I see the town—I often take refuge at the windows. Then I go into Marie's bedroom, which gives a view of the country. It is such a narrow room that to get to the window I must touch her tidy little bed, and I think of her as I pass it. A bed is something which never seems either so cold or so lifeless as other things; it lives by an absence.

Marie is working in the house, downstairs. I hear sounds of moved furniture, of a broom, and the recurring knock of the shovel on the bucket into which she empties the dust she has collected. That society is badly arranged which forces nearly all women to be servants. Marie, who is as good as I am, will have spent her life in cleaning, in stooping amid dust and hot fumes, over head and ears in the great artificial darkness of the house. I used to find it all natural. Now I think it is all anti-natural.

I hear no more sounds. Marie has finished. She comes up beside me. We have sought each other and come together as often as possible since the day when we saw so clearly that we no longer loved each other!

We sit closely side by side, and watch the end of the day. We can see the last houses of the town, in the beginning of the valley, low houses within enclosures, and yards, and gardens stocked with sheds. Autumn is making the gardens quite transparent, and reducing them to nothing through their trees and hedges; yet here and there foliage still magnificently flourishes. It is not the wide landscape in its entirety which attracts me. It is more worth while to pick out each of the houses and look at it closely.

These houses, which form the finish of the suburb, are not big, and are not prosperous; but we see one adorning itself with smoke, and we think of the dead

wood coming to life again on the hearth, and of the seated workman, whose hands are rewarded with rest. And that one, although motionless, is alive with children—the breeze is scattering the laughter of their games and seems to play with it, and on the sandy ground are the crumbs of childish footsteps. Our eyes follow the postman entering his home, his work ended; he has heroically overcome his long journeyings. After carrying letters all day to those who were waiting for them, he is carrying himself to his own people, who also await him—it is the family which knows the value of the father. He pushes the gate open, he enters the garden path, his hands are at last empty!

Along by the old gray wall, old Eudo is making his way, the incurable widower whose bad news still stubbornly persists, so that he bears it along around him, and it slackens his steps, and can be seen, and he takes up more space than he seems to take. A woman meets him, and her youth is disclosed in the twilight; it expands in her hurrying steps. It is Mina, going to some trysting-place. She crosses and presses her little fichu on her heart; we can see that distance dwindles affectionately in front of her. As she passes away, bent forward and smiling with her ripe lips, we can see the strength of her heart.

Mist is gradually falling. Now we can only see white things clearly—the new parts of houses, the walls, the high road, joined to the other one by footpaths which straggle through the dark fields, the big white stones, tranquil as sheep, and the horse-pond, whose gleam amid the far obscurity imitates whiteness in unexpected fashion. Then we can only see light things—the stains of faces and hands, those faces which see each other in the gloom longer than is logical and exceed themselves.

Pervaded by a sort of serious musing, we turn back into the room and sit down, I on the edge of the bed, she on a chair in front of the open window, in the center of the pearly sky.

Her thoughts are the same as mine, for she turns her face to me and says:

"And ourselves."

* * * * * *

She sighs for the thought she has. She would like to be silent, but she must speak.

"We don't love each other any more," she says, embarrassed by the greatness of the things she utters; "but we did once, and I want to see our love again."

She gets up, opens the wardrobe, and sits down again in the same place with a box in her hands. She says:

"There it is. Those are our letters."

"Our letters, our beautiful letters!" she goes on. "I could really say they're more beautiful than all others. We know them by heart—but would you like us to read them again? *You* read them—there's still light enough—and let me see how happy we've been."

She hands the casket to me. The letters we wrote each other during our engagement are arranged in it.

"That one," she says, "is the first from you. Is it? Yes—no, it isn't; do you think it is?"

I take the letter, murmur it, and then read it aloud. It spoke of the future, and said, "In a little while, how happy we shall be!"

She comes near, lowers her head, reads the date and whispers:

"Nineteen-two; it's been dead for thirteen years—it's a long time. No, it isn't a long time—I don't know what it ought to be. Here's another—read it."

I go on denuding the letters. We quickly find out what a mistake it was to say we know them by heart. This one has no date—simply the name of a day—Monday, and we believed that would be enough! Now, it is entirely lost and become barren, this anonymous letter in the middle of the rest.

"We don't know them by heart any more," Marie confesses. "Remember ourselves? How could we remember all that?"

* * * * * *

This reading was like that of a book once already read in bygone days. It could not revive again the diligent and fervent hours when our pens were moving—and our lips, too, a little. Indistinctly it brought back, with unfathomable gaps, the

adventure lived in three days by others, the people that we were. When I read a letter from her which spoke of caresses to come, Marie stammered, "And she dared to write that!" but she did not blush and was not confused.

Then she shook her head a little, and said dolefully:

"What a lot of things we have hidden away, little by little, in spite of ourselves! How strong people must be to forget so much!"

She was beginning to catch a glimpse of a bottomless abyss, and to despair. Suddenly she broke in:

"That's enough! We can't read them again. We can't understand what's written. That's enough—don't take my illusion away."

She spoke like the poor madwoman of the streets, and added in a whisper:

"This morning, when I opened that box where the letters were shut up, some little flies flew out."

We stop reading the letters a moment, and look at them. The ashes of life! All that we can remember is almost nothing. Memory is greater than we are, but memory is living and mortal as well. These letters, these unintelligible flowers, these bits of lace and of paper, what are they? Around these flimsy things what is there left? We are handling the casket together. Thus we are completely attached in the hollow of our hands.

* * * * * *

And yet we went on reading.

But something strange is growing gradually greater; it grasps us, it surprises us hopelessly—every letter speaks of the *future*.

In vain Marie said to me:

"What about afterwards? Try another—later on."

Every letter said, "In a little while, how we shall love each other when our time is spent together! How beautiful you will be when you are always there. Later on

we'll make that trip again; after a while we'll carry that scheme out, later on . . ."

"That's all we could say!"

A little before the wedding we wrote that we were wasting our time so far from each other, and that we were unhappy.

"Ah!" said Marie, in a sort of terror, "we wrote that! And afterwards . . ."

After, the letter from which we expected all, said:

"Soon we shan't leave each other any more. At last we shall live!"
And it spoke of a paradise, of the life that was coming. . . .

"And afterwards?"

"After that, there's nothing more . . . it's the last letter."

* * * * * *

There is nothing more. It is like a stage-trick, suddenly revealing the truth. There is nothing between the paradise dreamed of and the paradise lost. There is nothing, since we always want what we have not got. We hope, and then we regret. We hope for the future, and then we turn to the past, and then we begin slowly and desperately to hope for the past! The two most violent and abiding feelings, hope and regret, both lean upon nothing. To ask, to ask, to have not! Humanity is exactly the same thing as poverty. Happiness has not the time to live; we have not really the time to profit by what we are. Happiness, that thing which never is—and which yet, for one day, is no longer!

I see her drawing breath, quivering, mortally wounded, sinking upon the chair.

I take her hand, as I did before. I speak to her, rather timidly and at random:
"Carnal love isn't the whole of love."

"It's love!" Marie answers.

I do not reply.

"Ah!" she says, "we try to juggle with words, but we can't conceal the truth."

"The truth! I'm going to tell you what I have been truly, *I*. . . ."

* * * * * *

I could not prevent myself from saying it, from crying it in a loud and trembling voice, leaning over her. For some moments there had been outlined within me the tragic shape of the cry which at last came forth. It was a sort of madness of sincerity and simplicity which seized me.

And I, unveiling my life to her, though it slid away by the side of hers, all my life, with its failings and its coarseness. I let her see me in my desires, in my hungers, in my entrails.

Never has a confession so complete been thrown off. Yes, among the fates which men and women bear together, one must be almost mad not to lie. I tick off my past, the succession of love-affairs multiplied by each other, and come to naught. I have been an ordinary man, no better, no worse, than another; well, here I am, here is the man, here is the lover.

I can see that she has half-risen, in the little bedroom which has lost its color. She is afraid of the truth! She watches my words as you look at a blasphemer. But the truth has seized me and cannot let me go. And I recall what was—both this woman and that, and all those whom I loved and never deigned to know what they brought me when they brought their bodies; I recall the fierce selfishness which nothing exhausted, and all the savagery of my life beside her. I say it all—unable even to avoid the blows of brutal details—like a harsh duty accomplished to the end.

Sometimes she murmured, like a sigh, "I knew it." At others, she would say, almost like a sob, "That's true!" And once, too, she began a confused protest, a sort of reproach. Then, soon, she listens nigher. She might almost be left behind by the greatness of my confession; and, gradually, I see her falling into silence, the twice-illumined woman on that adorable side of the room, she still receives on her hair and neck and hands, some morsels of heaven.

And what I am most ashamed of in those bygone days when I was mad after the treasure of unknown women is this: that I spoke to them of eternal fidelity, of superhuman enticements, of divine exaltation, of sacred affinities which must be joined together at all costs, of beings who have always been waiting for each other, and are made for each other, and all that one *can* say—sometimes almost

sincerely, alas!—just to gain my ends. I confess all that, I cast it from me as if I was at last ridding myself of the lies acted upon her, and upon the others, and upon myself. Instinct is instinct; let it rule like a force of nature. But the Lie is a ravisher.

I feel a sort of curse rising from me upon that blind religion with which we clothe the things of the flesh because they are strong, those of which I was the plaything, like everybody, always and everywhere. No, two sensuous lovers are not two friends. Much rather are they two enemies, closely attached to each other. I know it, I know it! There are perfect couples, no doubt—perfection always exists somewhere—but I mean us others, all of us, the ordinary people! I know!—the human being's real quality, the delicate lights and shadows of human dreams, the sweet and complicated mystery of personalities, sensuous lovers deride them, both of them! They are two egoists, falling fiercely on each other. Together they sacrifice themselves, utterly in a flash of pleasure. There are moments when one would lay hold forcibly on joy, if only a crime stood in the way. I know it; I know it through all those for whom I have successively hungered, and whom I have scorned with shut eyes—even those who were not better than I.

And this hunger for novelty—which makes sensuous love equally changeful and rapacious, which makes us seek the same emotion in other bodies which we cast off as fast as they fall—turns life into an infernal succession of disenchantments, spites and scorn; and it is chiefly that hunger for novelty which leaves us a prey to unrealizable hope and irrevocable regret. Those lovers who persist in remaining together execute themselves; the name of their common death, which at first was Absence, becomes Presence. The real outcast is not he who returns all alone, like Olympio; they who remain together are more apart.

By what right does carnal love say, "I am your hearts and minds as well, and we are indissoluble, and I sweep all along with my strokes of glory and defeat; I am Love!"? It is not true, it is not true. Only by violence does it seize the whole of thought; and the poets and lovers, equally ignorant and dazzled, dress it up in a grandeur and profundity which it has not. The heart is strong and beautiful, but it is mad and it is a liar. Moist lips in transfigured faces murmur, "It's grand to be mad!" *No,* you do not elevate aberration into an ideal, and illusion is always a stain, whatever the name you lend it.

By the curtain in the angle of the wall, upright and motionless I am speaking in a

low voice, but it seems to me that I am shouting and struggling.

When I have spoken thus, we are no longer the same, for there are no more lies.

After a silence, Marie lifts to me the face of a shipwrecked woman with lifeless eyes, and asks me:

"But if this love is an illusion, what is there left?"

I come near and look at her, to answer her. Against the window's still pallid sky I see her hair, silvered with a moonlike sheen, and her night-veiled face. Closely I look at the share of sublimity which she bears on it, and I reflect that I am infinitely attached to this woman, that it is not true to say she is of less moment to me because desire no longer throws me on her as it used to do. Is it habit? No, not only that. Everywhere habit exerts its gentle strength, perhaps between us two also. But there is more. There is not only the narrowness of rooms to bring us together. There is more, there is more! So I say to her:

"There's you."

"Me?" she says. "I'm nothing."

"Yes, you are everything, you're everything to me."

She has stood up, stammering. She puts her arms around my neck, but falls fainting, clinging to me, and I carry her like a child to the old armchair at the end of the room.

All my strength has come back to me. I am no longer wounded or ill. I carry her in my arms. It is difficult work to carry in your arms a being equal to yourself. Strong as you may be, you hardly suffice for it. And what I say as I look at her and see her, I say because I am strong and not because I am weak:

"You're everything for me because you are you, and I love *all* of you."

And we think together, as if she were listening to me:

You are a living creature, you are a human being, you are the infinity that man is, and all that you are unites me to you. Your suffering of just now, your regret for the ruins of youth and the ghosts of caresses, all of it unites me to you, for I feel

them, I share them. Such as you are and such as I am. I can say to you at last, "I love you."

I love you, you who now appearing truly to me, you who truly duplicate my life. We have nothing to turn aside from us to be together. All your thoughts, all your likes, your ideas and your preferences have a place which I feel within me, and I see that they are right even if my own are not like them (for each one's freedom is part of his value), and I have a feeling that I am telling you a lie whenever I do not speak to you.

I am only going on with my thought when I say aloud:

"I would give my life for you, and I forgive you beforehand for everything you might ever do to make yourself happy."

She presses me softly in her arms, and I feel her murmuring tears and crooning words; they are like my own.

It seems to me that truth has taken its place again in our little room, and become incarnate; that the greatest bond which can bind two beings together is being confessed, the great bond we did not know of, though it is the whole of salvation:

"Before, I loved you for my own sake; to-day, I love you for yours."

When you look straight on, you end by seeing the immense event—death. There is only one thing which really gives the meaning of our whole life, and that is our death. In that terrible light may they judge their hearts who will one day die. Well I know that Marie's death would be the same thing in my heart as my own, and it seems to me also that only within her of all the world does my own likeness wholly live. *We* are not afraid of the too great sincerity which goes the length of these things; and we talk about them, beside the bed which awaits the inevitable hour when we shall not awake in it again. We say:—

"There'll be a day when I shall begin something that I shan't finish—a walk, or a letter, or a sentence, or a dream."

I stoop over her blue eyes. Just then I recalled the black, open window in front of me—far away—that night when I nearly died. I look at length into those clear eyes, and see that I am sinking into the only grave I shall have had. It is neither

an illusion nor an act of charity to admire the almost incredible beauty of those eyes.

What is there within us to-night? What is this sound of wings? Are our eyes opening as fast as night falls? Formerly, we had the sensual lovers' animal dread of nothingness; but to-day, the simplest and richest proof of our love is that the supreme meaning of death to us is—leaving each other.

And the bond of the flesh—neither are we afraid to think and speak of that, saying that we were so joined together that we knew each other completely, that our bodies have searched each other. This memory, this brand in the flesh, has its profound value; and the preference which reciprocally graces two beings like ourselves is made of all that they have and all that they had.

I stand up in front of Marie—already almost a convert—and I tremble and totter, so much is my heart my master:—

"Truth is more beautiful than dreams, you see."

It is simply the truth which has come to our aid. It is truth which has given us life. Affection is the greatest of human feelings because it is made of respect, of lucidity, and light. To understand the truth and make one's self equal to it is everything; and to love is the same thing as to know and to understand. Affection, which I call also compassion, because I see no difference between them, dominates everything by reason of its clear sight. It is a sentiment as immense as if it were mad, and yet it is wise, and of human things it is the only perfect one. There is no great sentiment which is not completely held on the arms of compassion.

To understand life, and love it to its depths in a living being, that is the being's task, and that his masterpiece; and each of us can hardly occupy his time so greatly as with one other; we have only one true neighbor down here.

To live is to be happy to live. The usefulness of life—ah! its expansion has not the mystic shapes we vainly dreamed of when we were paralyzed by youth. Rather has it a shape of anxiety, of shuddering, of pain and glory. Our heart is not made for the abstract formula of happiness, since the truth of things is not made for it either. It beats for emotion and not for peace. Such is the gravity of the truth.

"You've done well to say all that! Yes, it is always easy to lie for a moment. You might have lied, but it would have been worse when we woke up from the lies. It's a reward to talk. Perhaps it's the only reward there is."

She said that profoundly, right to the bottom of my heart. Now she is helping me, and together we make the great searchings of those who are too much in the right. Marie's assent is so complete that it is unexpected and tragic.

"I was like a statue, because of the forgetting and the grief. You have given me life, you have changed me into a woman."

"I was turning towards the church," she goes on; "you hardly believe in God so much when you've no need of Him. When you're without anything, you can easily believe in Him. But now, I don't want any longer."

Thus speaks Marie. Only the idolatrous and the weak have need of illusion as of a remedy. The rest only need see and speak.

She smiles, vague as an angel, hovering in the purity of the evening between light and darkness. I am so near to her that I must kneel to be nearer still. I kiss her wet face and soft lips, holding her hand in both of mine.

Yes, there *is* a Divinity, one from which we must never turn aside for the guidance of our huge inward life and of the share we have as well in the life of all men. It is called the truth.

THE END

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