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The background of the cover is a solid, vibrant red. In the lower half, there are dark silhouettes of soldiers. Some are holding long poles or spears high in the air, while others have their arms raised in a gesture of triumph or defiance. The overall mood is one of intense action and historical significance.

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

**Irvin S. Cobb**

# **Paths of Glory: Impressions of War Written at and Near the Front**

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# Chapter 1

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### A Little Village Called Montignies St. Christophe

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

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

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

I rather imagine I tried to think up something funny to say about the shabby grandeur of the gendarme or the acid flavor of the cooking vinegar sold at the drinking place

under the name of wine; for that time I was supposed to be writing humorous articles on European travel.

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

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

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

As we grouped in the narrow street before his shop, with a hiving swarm of curious villagers buzzing about us, an improvised ambulance, with a red cross painted on its side over the letters of a baker's sign, went up the steep hill at the head of the cobbled street. At that the women in the

doorways of the small cottages twisted their gnarled red hands in their aprons, and whispered fearsomely among themselves, so that the sibilant sound of their voices ran up and down the line of houses in a long, quavering hiss.

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

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

We had heard the guns distinctly in the early forenoon, and again, less distinctly, about noontime. Thereafter, for a while, there had been a lull in the firing; but now it was constant—a steady, sustained boom- boom-boom, so far away that it fell on the eardrums as a gentle concussion; as a throb of air, rather than as a real sound. For three days now we had been following that distant voice of the cannon, trying to catch up with it as it advanced, always southward, toward the French frontier. Therefore we flogged the belly of our tired horse with the lash of a long whip, and hurried along. There were five of us, all Americans. The two who rode on bicycles pedaled ahead as outriders, and the remaining three followed on behind with the horse and the dogcart. We had bought the outfit that morning and we were to lose it that night. The horse was an aged mare, with high withers, and galls on her shoulders and fetlocks

unshorn, after the fashion of Belgian horses; and the dogcart was a venerable ruin, which creaked a great protest at every turn of the warped wheels on the axle. We had been able to buy the two— the mare and the cart—only because the German soldiers had not thought them worth the taking.

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

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

Almost without warning we came on this little village called Montignies St. Christophe. A six-armed signboard at a crossroads told us its name —a rather impressive name ordinarily for a place of perhaps twenty houses, all told. But now tragedy had given it distinction; had painted that straggling frontier hamlet over with such colors that the picture of it is going to live in my memory as long as I do live. At the upper end of the single street, like an outpost, stood an old chateau, the seat, no doubt, of the local gentry, with a small park of beeches and elms round it; and here, right at the park entrance, we had our first intimation that there had been a fight. The gate stood ajar between its

chipped stone pillars, and just inside the blue coat of a French cavalry officer, jaunty and new and much braided with gold lace on the collar and cuffs, hung from the limb of a small tree. Beneath the tree were a sheaf of straw in the shape of a bed and the ashes of a dead camp fire; and on the grass, plain to the eye, a plump, well-picked pullet, all ready for the pot or the pan. Looking on past these things we saw much scattered dunnage: Frenchmen's knapsacks, flannel shirts, playing cards, fagots of firewood mixed together like jackstraws, canteens covered with slate-blue cloth and having queer little hornlike protuberances on their tops—which proved them to be French canteens—tumbled straw, odd shoes with their lacings undone, a toptilted service shelter of canvas; all the raffle of a camp that had been suddenly and violently disturbed.

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

Now, all of a sudden, I became aware that this town had been literally shot to bits. From our side—that is to say, from the north and likewise from the west—the Germans had shelled it. From the south, plainly, the French had answered. The village, in between, had caught the full force and fury of the contending fires. Probably the inhabitants had warning; probably they fled when the German skirmishers surprised that outpost of Frenchmen camping in the park. One



imagined them scurrying like rabbits across the fields and through the cabbage patches. But they had left their belongings behind, all their small petty gearings and garnishings, to be wrecked in the wrenching and racking apart of their homes.

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

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

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

Our poor tired old nag halted and sniffed and snorted. If she had had energy enough I reckon she would have shied about and run back the way she had come, for now, just ahead, lay two dead horses—a big gray and a roan—with

their stark legs sticking out across the road. The gray was shot through and through in three places. The right fore hoof of the roan had been cut smack off, as smoothly as though done with an ax; and the stiffened leg had a curiously unfinished look about it, suggesting a natural malformation. Dead only a few hours, their carcasses already had begun to swell. The skin on their bellies was as tight as a drumhead.

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

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

We went by the church. Its spire was gone; but, strange to say, a small flag—the Tricolor of France—still fluttered from a window where some one had stuck it. We went by the tavern, or wine shop, which had a sign over its door—a creature remotely resembling a blue lynx. And through the

door we saw half a loaf of bread and several bottles on a table. We went by a rather pretentious house, with pear trees in front of it and a big barn alongside it; and right under the eaves of the barn I picked up the short jacket of a French trooper, so new and fresh from the workshop that the white cambric lining was hardly soiled. The figure 18 was on the collar; we decided that its wearer must have belonged to the Eighteenth Cavalry Regiment. Behind the barn we found a whole pile of new knapsacks—the flimsy play-soldier knapsacks of the French infantrymen, not half so heavy or a third so substantial as the heavy sacks of the Germans, which are all bound with straps and covered on the back side with undressed red bullock's hide.

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

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

It was just after we had gone by the barricade that, in a shed behind the riddled shell of a house, which was almost

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

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

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

The blue-clad arms of one of them were twisted upward in a half-arc, encircling nothing; and as the wheels jolted over the rutted cobbles these two bent arms joggled and swayed drunkenly. The other's head was canted back so that, as we passed, we looked right into his face. It was a young face—we could tell that much, even through the

mask of caked mud on the drab-white skin—and it might once have been a comely face. It was not comely now.

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

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

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

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

A glance at our map showed us that at this point the French boundary came up in a V-shaped point almost to the

road. Had the gravediggers picked a spot fifty yards farther on for digging their trench, those two dead Frenchmen would have rested in the soil of their own country.

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

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

An hour later we passed through the back lines of the German camp and entered the town of Beaumont, to find that the General Staff of a German army corps was quartered there for the night, and that the main force of the column, after sharp fighting, had already advanced well beyond the frontier. France was invaded.

# Chapter 2

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### To War in a Taxicab

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

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

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

English ships and German ships somewhere off the New England coast.

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

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

From Liverpool across to London we traveled through a drowsy land burdened with bumper crops of grain, and watched the big brown hares skipping among the oat stacks; and late at night we came to London. In London next



day there were more troops about than common, and recruits were drilling on the gravel walks back of Somerset House; and the people generally moved with a certain sober restraint, as people do who feel the weight of a heavy and an urgent responsibility. Otherwise the London of wartime seemed the London of peacetime.

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

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

And Ostend and, after Ostend, the Belgian interior—those were disappointments too; for at Ostend bathers disported on the long, shining beach and children played about the sanded stretch. And, though there were soldiers in sight, one always expects soldiers in European countries. No one asked to see the passports we had brought with us, and the customs officers gave our hand baggage the most

perfunctory of examinations. Hardly five minutes had elapsed after our landing before we were steaming away on our train through a landscape which, to judge by its appearance, might have known only peace, and naught but peace, for a thousand placid years.

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

As for Brussels—why, Brussels at first glance was more like a city making a fete than the capital of a nation making war. The flags which were displayed everywhere; the crowds in the square before the railroad station; the multitudes of boy scouts running about; the uniforms of Belgian

volunteers and regulars; the Garde Civique, in their queer-looking costumes, with funny little derby hats, all braid-trimmed—gave to the place a holiday air. After nightfall, when the people of Brussels flocked to the sidewalk cafes and sat at little round tables under awnings, drinking light drinks a la Parisienne, this impression was heightened.

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

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

hand. By the evidence of what we ourselves saw we were able to note few shifts in the superficial aspects of the city.

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

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

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

In an inclosed courtyard behind a big gray building, among loaded wagons of supplies and munching cart horses, a kitchen table teetered unsteadily on its legs on the

rough cobbles. On the table were pens and inkpots and coffee cups and beer bottles and beer glasses; and about it sat certain unkempt men in resplendent but unbrushed costumes. Joseph himself—the Joseph of the coat of many colors, no less—might have devised the uniforms they wore. With that setting the picture they made there in the courtyard was suggestive of stage scenes in plays of the French Revolution.

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

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

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

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

hospitals had sat up cutting out and basting together the garments of glory for their menfolk.

No one offered to turn us back, and only once or twice did a sentry insist on looking at our passes. In the light of fuller experiences I know now that when a city is about to fall into an enemy's hands the authorities relax their vigilance and freely permit noncombatants to depart therefrom, presumably on the assumption that the fewer individuals there are in the place when the conqueror does come the fewer the problems of caring for the resident population will be. But we did not know this mighty significant fact; and, suspecting nothing, the four innocents drove blithely on until the city lay behind us and the country lay before us, brooding in the bright sunlight and all empty and peaceful, except for thin scattering detachments of gaily clad Belgian infantrymen through which we passed.

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

All of a sudden, rounding a bend, we came on a little valley with one of the infrequent Belgian brooks bisecting it; and this whole valley was full of soldiers. There must have

been ten thousand of them—cavalry, foot, artillery, baggage trains, and all. Quite near us was ranged a battery of small rapid-fire guns; and the big rawboned dogs that had hauled them there were lying under the wicked-looking little pieces. We had heard a lot about the dog-drawn guns of the Belgians, but these were the first of them we had seen.

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

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

Still without being halted or delayed we went briskly on. We had topped the next rise commanding the next valley, and—except for a few stragglers and some skirmishers—the Belgians were quite out of sight, when our driver stopped



with an abruptness which piled his four passengers in a heap and pointed off to the northwest, a queer, startled, frightened look on his broad Flemish face. There was smoke there along the horizon—much smoke, both white and dark; and, even as the throb of the motor died away to a purr, the sound of big guns came to us in a faint rumbling, borne from a long way off by the breeze.

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

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

And I have wondered, in idle moments since, what he did with our overcoats. Maybe he fled with the automobile containing two English moving-picture operators which passed us at that moment, and from which floated back a shouted warning that the Germans were coming. Maybe he

stayed too long and was gobbled up—but I doubt it. He had an instinct for safety.

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

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

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

Now, too, we became aware of something else—aware of a procession that advanced toward us. It was the head of a

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

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

Yes, it gave a grotesque touch to it. The spectacle inclined one to laugh, almost making one forget for a

moment that here in this spectacle one beheld the misery of war made concrete; that in the lorn state of these poor folks its effects were focused and made vivid; that, while in some way it touched every living creature on the globe, here it touched them directly.

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

They drifted on by us, silent all, except for the sound of feet and wheels; and, as I read the looks on their faces, those faces expressed no emotion except a certain numbed, resigned, bovine bewilderment. Far back in the line we met two cripples, hobbling along side by side as though for company, and still farther back a Belgian soldier came, like a rear guard, with his gun swung over his back and his sweaty black hair hanging down in his eyes.

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

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

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

"No," we told him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We hailed him, and the man who spoke a little French explained our case. At once he turned about and took us

into a side street; and even in their present state the men and women who met us remembered their manners and pulled off their hats and bowed before him.

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

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