Valentine Williams

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PREFACE

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In the words of the Chief of the Italian General Staff, the war correspondent is the link between that part of the nation that fights and that part which is watching—“a noble and fertile mission, as great as any mission ever was, and as necessary, too, for no army can long and resolutely march to victory if it has not the support and enthusiasm of the whole country behind it.”

As the accredited correspondent of the *Daily Mail* at the General Headquarters of Field-Marshal Sir John French, I have spent the greater part of the past six months with the British Army in Flanders. I have seen for myself the life and work of our army in the field. I have visited in person the trenches along practically our whole front. I have talked with our organizers of victory from the Commander-in-Chief downwards to the man in the saphead ten yards from the enemy.

This book is the result. It was written in the field, under the Censorship. That familiar phrase, “Passed by Censor,” stands at the foot of every chapter in the manuscript, as it will stand at the foot of this preface. To that part of the nation which is watching at home I could, in fulfilment of my mission, have offered a more detailed narrative of the life of that other part that is fighting in Flanders, did not considerations of military necessity stand in the way. But, apart altogether from the question of patriotism, the large measure of trust which the army has, in most instances, extended to the writer has made me the more anxious to

respect a privileged position, and to eschew anything calculated to afford to the enemy the least information of value. My endeavour has rather been to present a picture of the life of our army in Flanders built up out of a series of impressions, to reveal the soul of the army as it has been unbared to me in the actual conditions of warfare.

If I should not seem to paint war as terrible or our task in Flanders as stupendous as it is, you must set it down to the army's contagious habit of making the best of things. The army knows that, man for man, it is more than a match for the German. It knows that, given a lead, it can draw upon resources which, both physically and mentally, are better than anything the Germans have now remaining. With unconcealed impatience it looks to the Government at home to increase our machinery of war until, in this respect as well, we can claim superiority over our redoubtable and unscrupulous foe.

I have praised freely—and God knows there is enough to praise out here!—and if my criticism is sparing, it is solely because military criticism in the mouth of an accredited war correspondent acquires a weight in the eyes of the enemy that gives it the value of direct information.

I am anxious to express my gratitude to the Editor of the *Daily Mail*, who has generously allowed me to reproduce some of the admirable photographs in my book, and to M. René Baschet, *Directeur-Gérant* of the very excellent French weekly, *L'Illustration*, for his courtesy in permitting me to reprint M. Georges Scott's striking sketch of "Silent Ypres."

G. VALENTINE WILLIAMS.

In the Field,
September, 1915.

WITH OUR ARMY IN FLANDERS

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CHAPTER I
OF OUR ARMY IN THE FIELD

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All wars present a series of contrasts. Is not war itself the greatest of all contrasts of life? The antithesis of Man at Peace and Man at War is one with which the poets and artists have familiarized mankind all through the ages. And so, though we are in the thirteenth month of the overwhelming change which this, the greatest of all wars, has wrought in our lives, I find, on sitting down to record my impressions of the life and work of the British Army in the field, that I am continually reverting to the perpetual, the confounding contrast between the world at peace and the world at war.

Never were contrasts so marked as in this war. To cast the mind back a twelvemonth is like looking back on one's early childhood. "This time last year!..." How often one hears the phrase out here, with recollections of last year's glorious, golden Ascot, of distant, half-forgotten strife about Ulster, of a far rumbling, as yet indistinctly heard, in the Balkans, where swift and sudden death was preparing for that sinister Prince whose passing plunged the world into war.

"This time last year ..."—City men use the phrase. *They* were then the top-hatted strap-hangers of Suburbia, their thoughts divided between their business, their families, their hobbies. *Then* the word *Territorial* might raise a laugh at a music-hall; on Saturday afternoons soldiering was a

pleasant relief from the office grind, and in summer afforded a healthful open-air holiday. London was full of Germans. We all knew Germans, and in our insular way toadied to the big fry and ridiculed the small, holding our state of military unpreparedness to be the finest tribute to our pacific aims, and making fun of the German, his steadfastness of purpose, his strict national discipline, his thrift. We welcomed at our tables the vanguard of the German army of invasion, the charming, salaried spies of the Embassy who made their way everywhere in that loose-tongued, light-thinking cosmopolitan crowd that in London passes for society, and the humbler secret agents, the waiters who in the trenches in Flanders are now turning their knowledge of our tongue to profitable account. We had German clerks, nice, well-spoken, cheap—cheap labour covers a multitude of sins!—hard-working young fellows who lived in boarding-houses at Brondesbury or Lancaster Gate, according to their means, and who, over their port after Sunday dinner, exchanged assurances with the "*dummen Engländern*" of the mutual esteem entertained by England and Germany for each other.

"This time last year ..."—Aldershot, its ugly barrack buildings standing out hard in the brilliant sunlight, went peacefully about its routine pursuits of war. Maybe the stray bullet that was destined to put a premature end to the splendid career of General John Gough, best beloved of Aldershot Staff officers, had not yet been cast. The army officer went in mufti save in the intervals of duty; the general public had never heard of General Sam Browne and his famous belt. At the Curragh, still seething with the

bubbles of the Ulster whirlpool which had swept John French from the War Office, the training went on as before. The machine-gun was still a weapon preeminently of experts, not common to the army at large, its paramount usefulness as an added strength to the forces not yet realized.

“This time last year ...”—polo at Ranelagh, where neither of the immortal Grenfell twins, the Castor and Pollux of our glorious army, saw Black Care that sits behind the horseman, cricket at Lord’s, throngs at Boulter’s Lock, lunchings and dinings and dancings innumerable....

“This time last year ...”—joyful holidays at Blackpool, New Brighton, or the Isle of Man at hand for the workers of the north, the brief relaxation from the loom, the spindle, the mine, the shipyard. All the life of England, in fine, ran along in its accustomed groove. We made a great deal of money; we spent a great deal more; we played our games; we talked them to the exclusion of topics of vital national importance; we rocked ourselves with dreams of universal peace based on political cries, such as “Two keels to one,” or the “pacific policy of the German Emperor.” One of the leading pacificist societies was arranging a great international peace congress at Vienna.

All at once, in a few hours of a hot August night, with great crowds waiting breathlessly in Whitehall, with a mob surging and singing round Buckingham Palace, it was swept away. The old life stopped. The new life began. Slowly, haltingly, as is our wont, we realized we were at war, though the process of mobilization was hindered by such idiotic cries (never was a people so swayed by cries as the British!) as “Business as usual!” the contraption of the astute City

man who would save what business there was to save at the expense of the army, a catchword that kept the able-bodied young man at the counter measuring out yards of ribbon when he should have been shouldering a rifle at the front. Business as usual, indeed, when nothing was as usual in the world, when the Hun was halfway through Belgium, blasting his path with Titan howitzers larger than any the Allies possessed, and with machine-guns which he elected and made to be the primary weapon of the war, firing villages as he went to light up his work of murder and rapine! Business as usual when our little Expeditionary Force had not even set foot on the ships destined to transport it to France!

"This time last year ..."—the men who use the phrase to me are in the trenches now, Aldershot and Curragh regulars, City men in the famous London Territorial regiments, miners and factory hands and workers from all over the country, in the horse or foot or artillery or air corps or supply services. Every time I pass a regiment on the roads here, or meet one in the trenches, I find myself wondering what most of them did in civil life, what they would look like in civilian clothes.

"All wars are abnormal" is a saying of Sir John French. Though the civilized world must now perforce accept as a normal state of things the organized slaying which is going on right across Europe and over a good part of the rest of the world. I for one cannot bring my mind to adapt itself to the spectacle of the British people in arms as I see it day by day on all sides of me in this narrow but all-important wedge of the allied battle-line, where the ultimate fate of the British Empire will be sealed. The mind boggles at almost every one of the great stream of fresh impressions which

pour in upon it in an irresistible torrent every day, the sea of English faces surging down a white ribbon of Flemish road, the unfamiliar sound of our mother tongue in settings which you intuitively know demand the smooth flow of French, the plain wooden cross over a simple grave which, without realizing it, you automatically accept as containing the mortal remains of a man you loved or admired, or maybe even disliked, one who had made his name in England, not in this bloody business of war, but at the Bar or in politics or in the City, at polo or at golf or football.

No, war is not normal, as all nations, except the Germans, know. It is abnormal in the events it produces as in the passions and virtues it engenders. Particularly it is abnormal to the British, strangest of all peoples, quick at a bargain and keenly sensible, singularly lacking in intuition, absorbed in business, slow to move, slow to mistrust, now, after basking in the sunshine of decades of peace (the Boer War hardly disturbed the national life of the country), saved only from the fate of Belgium by the ever-sounding sea that has stood so often between England and her enemies.

Yet, while following the fortunes of our army in the field, I have often found myself pondering the fact whether, after all, war is such an abnormal thing to this great host of ours, Britishers of all stamps and from every clime drawn to the fighting-line by the same high ideal. The world, I grant you, has never seen so many men of Britain arrayed for battle on their own or any other soil. Yet we were once a military nation. The whole history of these lands of Picardy and Flanders, where our army is now fighting, during the past six centuries proclaims it. Since the days of the third Edward to

the present time Englishmen have fought at intervals in these richly cultivated fields. The bones of many a fair-haired, straight-backed bowman of England are crumbling beneath the smiling plains through which our trenches run in a long winding line.

The country is replete with souvenirs of our military past, of the Black Prince, of Henry V., of the Duke of York, of Marlborough. There are houses still standing in Ypres, despite German “frightfulness,” which witnessed the burning of the suburbs of the ancient capital of Flanders by the English and the burghers of Ghent in 1383. Half an hour’s motor drive from General Headquarters of our army in France will take you to the field of Agincourt, where, 500 years ago, King Harry and his archers struck a brave blow for England.

I went to the field of Agincourt. It was a pious pilgrimage. As another son of England with England’s fighting men in Picardy, I wanted to stretch forth a hand across that gulf of 500 years, and say to those stout English bowmen, who from their native shires followed their knights and squires across the sea, “It is well. We are carrying on. You may rest in peace.” I wanted to tell them in their graves beneath the warm grass ablaze, as I saw it, with buttercups and daisies and the gentle speedwell, that theirs was a clean fight that had left no bitter memories, that the gentlemen of France who fought so valiantly at Agincourt are with us to-day in spirit as surely as their descendants are with us in the flesh; that, like the Dickons and Peterkins and Wats of Agincourt, our men in Picardy and Flanders are brave and steadfast and true till death.

A little grove of trees enclosing a great crucifix planted in a solid base of brick is the only memorial on the battlefield. On a slab of stone affixed to the plinth the inscription runs:

25 OCTOBER, 1415.

C’EST ICI QUE NOS VAILLANS GUERRIERS ONT SUCCOMBÉ. LEUR ESPÉRANCE EST PLEINE D’IMMORTALITÉ. LA PRIÈRE POUR LES MORTS AFIN QU’ILS SOIENT DÉLIVRÉS DE LA PEINE QU’ILS SUBISSENT POUR LEURS FAUTES EST UNE SAINTE ET SALUTAIRE PENSÉE. CETTE CROIX A ÉTÉ ÉRIGÉE PAR VICTOR MARIE LÉONARD MARQUIS DE TRAMECOURT ET MADAME ALINE MARIE CÉCILE DE TRAMECOURT, SON ÉPOUSE, À LA MÉMOIRE DE CEUX QUI AVEC LEURS ANCÊTRES ONT PÉRI DANS LA FATALE JOURNÉE D’AGINCOURT.

PRIEZ POUR EUX.

There were woods on either side of the battlefield, possibly occupying the site of the woods in which our archers of Agincourt waited for the French. But there was no visible means of following the course of the fight from the conformation of the ground. A friendly peasant who was passing, and who proved to be the holder of some of the land, vouchsafed the information that the curé knew all the details of the battle. But the curé was in church.

The slab at the foot of the crucifix—the Calvary, the peasants call it—was covered with inscriptions cut in the stone or written in pencil. The dates showed that almost every one had been written since the outbreak of the war.

They were martial and inspiring in tone. Most of them were the work of French soldiers quartered in the neighbouring villages, and they had signed their names, with the surname first, in approved military style, followed by the number of regiment and company. "*Hommage à nos braves Alliés! Vive la France!*" ran one. "*Dieu protège la France!*" was another, with the more prosaic addition, "*Mort aux Boches!*" "*Vive Joffre! Vive l'armée!*" ran a third. It was signed "*Une petite Française*." Though Agincourt and the brave men who died there are remembered, the feud it stood for is forgotten. "*C'est bien changé maintenant!*" said the peasant at my side. Not only did the inscriptions on the stone attest that: they were also the eloquent expression of the great national revival which has been incorrectly summarized in the phrase, "*The New France*," but which is in reality only the reawakening of a nation that led the world until it suffered the sordid pettiness of politics to carry it away from the true path of national greatness.

Maybe many of the bowmen sleeping under the green grass of Agincourt would recognize the speech of the army that is fighting in France to-day. Every accent, every burr and brogue, every intonation and inflexion, which one may meet with between Land's End and the Hebrides, between the Wash and the Bay of Galway, may be heard in the ranks of our great volunteer army, in its way unique amongst the armed hosts standing in the field.

Englishmen travel but little in their own country. I am no exception to the rule, though I can plead in excuse a long period of service abroad as a newspaper correspondent. But a morning spent among the troops of the great army which

has sprung from our little Expeditionary Force is equivalent to a six weeks' tour of the British Isles. Going from regiment to regiment, you pass from county to county, with its characteristic speech, its colouring, its fetishes, its customs. At the end of my first day with the army, as long ago as last March, when reinforcements came very slowly, and a Territorial Division was a thing to take guests to see, "to write home about," as the saying goes (though in this case the Censor would probably intervene), I felt that I had seen the microcosm of Britain, this Empire so vast, so widespread, so heterogeneous, that its essence has never been distilled before.

One of the most fascinating things to me about our army in France are the variations of speech. I have sometimes closed my eyes when a battalion has been marching past me on the road, and tried to guess, often with some measure of success, at the recruiting area of the regiment from the men's accents or from their tricks of speech.

Take the Scottish regiments, for instance. I have little acquaintance with the dialects of Scotland, but my ear has told me that the speech of almost every Scottish regiment, save such regiments as the Gordons and the Black Watch, that attract men from all over the United Kingdom, differs. I spent a most fascinating half-hour one morning with a handful of Glasgow newsboys serving in a famous Scottish regiment that wears the trews. Their speech was unmistakably the speech of the Glasgow streets, and their wits were as sharp as their bayonets. I told them they were newsboys, and newsboys they were, or of the same class, van-boys and the like. I visited the Cameron Highlanders—

what was left of their Territorial battalion—after the second battle of Ypres, and heard, in the speech of Inverness-shire, their story of the battle. Many of them speak Gaelic. One of their officers confided to me that during the battle, requiring two men to go down to the rear, the wires being cut, to ascertain the whereabouts of the brigade headquarters, he selected two notorious deer poachers as likely to have their wits about them. How many poachers of the red deer of Sherwood or the New Forest were there not at Agincourt?

Leaving the red tartan of the Camerons and getting back to the trews, I remember an afternoon spent with the shattered remnants of the Scottish Rifles, about 150 men all told led out of action at Neuve Chapelle by a Second Lieutenant of Special Reserve. The Cameronians, which is the official title of the regiment, recruit in Lanarkshire and Aberdeenshire, and their speech was, I presume, the speech of those parts, for it was an accent—a Scottish accent—different from any other I had heard from the other Scotsmen out here.

It is a gratifying task, this identification of dialects. I have heard two sappers “fra’ Wigan” engaged in a lively argument with two privates (from Cork) of the Leinster Regiment, in whose trench the two gentlemen “fra’ Wigan” were operating. A London cockney, say, from one of the innumerable battalions of the Royal Fusiliers, would have understood less of that conversation if it had been carried on in German, but only a little less. During the Battle of Ypres two privates of the Monmouthshire Regiment, who were talking Welsh, were pounced upon by two prowling Southerners from one of the Home Counties, and carried off

to Brigade Headquarters as German spies. What with Welsh miners talking Welsh and Cameron Highlanders Gaelic, the broad speech of the Yorkshire *Geordies*, the homely burr of the 3rd Hussars and other regiments recruited in the West Country, the familiar twang of the cockneys, the rich brogue of the Irish regiments, the strong American intonation of the Canadians, a man out here begins to realize of what composite layers our race is formed.

Of that race our army in the field is the quintessence. The voluntary system may collect the scallywags, but it primarily attracts, in circumstances like those of to-day, that brand of Englishman who has done everything worth doing in England's history "for conscience' sake." There was a theory freely ventilated at the front at one time to the effect that the first of the new armies raised by Lord Kitchener would not be of the same material, morally and physically, as the succeeding ones, owing to the fact that, on the outbreak of the war, many men flocked to the colours because they had lost their employment. The second and third armies, it is alleged, being principally composed of men who, having taken a few months to wind up their affairs, had joined alone from a high feeling of duty to their country, would be of a better stamp. This theory does not hold water. Everyone who has seen the men of the new armies at the front has been alike impressed by their fine physique, their magnificent military bearing, their smart, soldierly appearance. "They're all right" is the verdict. No body of troops in an army in the field wants higher praise than this.

Everybody who is anybody is at the front. Never was there such a place for meetings as Flanders. The Strand is not in it. My own experience is that of everybody else. One finds at the front men one has lost sight of for years, old friends who have dropped away in the hurry of existence, chance acquaintances of a Riviera *train de luxe*, men one has met in business, men who have measured one for clothes. Often I have heard my name sung out from the centre of a column of marching troops, and a figure has stepped out to the roadside who, after my mind has shredded it of the unfamiliar uniform, the deep brown sunburn, the set expression, has revealed itself as old Tubby Somebody whom one had known at school, or Brown with whom one had played golf on those little links behind the Casino at Monte Carlo, or the manager of Messrs. Blank in the City.

Fortune, the fair goddess, has high jinks at the front. I wanted to find a relation of mine, a sergeant in a famous London regiment, and wrote to his people to get the number of his battalion and his company. When the reply came I discovered that the man I wanted was billeted not a hundred yards from me in the village, in which the War Correspondents' Headquarters were situated, where he had come with the shattered remnant of his battalion to rest after the terrible "gruelling" they sustained in the second battle of Ypres. At the front one constantly witnesses joyous reunions, brother meeting brother in the happy, hazardous encounter of two battalions on the road or in the trenches. The very first man I met on coming out to the front was a motorcar driver whose father had particularly asked me to

look out for his boy. I discovered that he was the man appointed to drive me!

What is it that has knit this great and representative body of the British people into one splendid harmonious whole, capable of gallantry and tenderness such as Homer sang, of steadfast endurance which Leonidas in Elysian fields must contemplate smiling through tear-dimmed eyes? We know that there is a deep strain of idealism in our race, lying far below a granite-like surface of cynical indifference, of frigid reserve. But who should have suspected its existence in the crowd of underground strap-hangers and tramway passengers, in the noonday throngs pouring out of the factories and workshops, in all that immense mass of workaday, civilian England from which our firing-line in France is now being fed? You cannot go among our soldiers in the field without becoming conscious of the fact that, beneath their unflagging high spirits, their absolute indifference to danger, their splendid tenacity, there burns an immense determination of purpose, an iron determination to set wrong right. For in the mind of the British soldier, who wastes no time over the subtleties of high politics, the world is wrong as long as the German is free to work his own sweet will in it.

Humour is probably the largest component part of the spirit of the British soldier, a paradoxical, phlegmatic sense of humour that comes out strongest when the danger is the most threatening. A Jack Johnson bursts close beside a British soldier who is lighting his pipe with one of those odious French sulphur matches. The shell blows a foul whiff of chemicals right across the man’s face. “Oh dear! oh

dear!” he exclaims with a perfectly genuine sigh, “these ’ere French matches will be the death o’ me!” A reply which is equally characteristic of the state of mind of the British soldier who goes forth to war is that given by the irate driver of a Staff car to a sentry in the early days of the war. The sentry, in the dead of night, had levelled his rifle at the chauffeur because the car had not stopped instantly on challenge. The driver backed his car towards where the sentry was standing. “I’ll ’ave a word with you, young feller,” he said. “Allow me to inform you that this car can’t be stopped in less than twenty yards. If you go shoving that rifle of yours in people’s faces someone will get shot before this war’s over!”

There is a great strain of tenderness in the British soldier, a great readiness to serve. Hear him, on a wet night in the trenches, begrimed, red-eyed with fatigue, chilled to the bone, just about to lie down for a rest, offer to make his officer, tired as he is, “a drop of ’ot tea!” Watch him with German prisoners! His attitude is paternal, patronizing, rather that of a friendly London policeman guiding homeward the errant footsteps of a drunkard. Under influence of nameless German atrocities of all descriptions the attitude of the British soldier in the fighting-line is becoming fierce and embittered. Nothing will induce him, however, to vent his spite on prisoners, though few Germans understand anything else but force as the expression of power. They look upon our men as miserable mercenaries whose friendliness is simply an attempt to curry favour with the noble German *Krieger*; our men regard them as misguided individuals who don’t know any better.

The great strain of tenderness in the British soldier comes out most strongly in his attitude of mind towards the wounded and the dead. No British soldier will rest quiet in his trench whilst there are wounded lying out in front, and the deeds of heroism performed by men in rescuing the wounded have been so numerous in this war that it has been found necessary to restrict the number of Victoria Crosses awarded for this class of gallant action. No British soldier will lie quiet while our dead are unburied. Men will expose themselves fearlessly to recover the body of a comrade and give it decent burial.

A friend of mine in the Cavalry gave me a striking account of a burial service he conducted thus on the Marne. A shrapnel burst right over him and his troop, but by great good luck only one man was killed. The troop was on the move, and it was necessary to bury the man at once. No military funeral this, with the chaplain reciting, “I am the Resurrection and the Life ...” and a firing-party rigid at attention; but a handful of men scraping a shallow hole in the earth, whilst others removed the dead man’s identity disc and effects and equipment. There was no time for prayer, but, my friend said, it was one of the most pathetic ceremonies he had ever attended. They were a rough lot in his squadron, but they showed a great tenderness as they laid the still form in its stained khaki in the ground. “Oh dear! pore ole Jack gorn to ’is last rest!” This and similar ejaculations came from the little group standing at the graveside, the rest of the squadron, with stamping horses, waiting a little distance away. “Now then, chaps, ’ats orf!” cried a veteran private, an old scamp of a soldier who had

re-engaged for the war. The men bared their heads reverently as the poor body was laid in the chill earth. Someone produced a rough cross made out of an ammunition-box, with the man's name and regiment written on it in indelible pencil, the grave was filled in, the cross set up, and the squadron proceeded on its way.

The line of fighting of the British Army is marked by these crosses, now gradually being replaced by that admirable organization, the Graves Commission, which identifies graves and furnishes them with properly inscribed crosses as a permanent identification. Our men do the rest. Troops always look after graves in the vicinity of their billets, plant them with turf and flowers, or, in the case of Catholic soldiers, with statues or holy pictures from the ruined churches which are so plentiful in the fighting zone.

What is the spirit of the British Army in the field? I have been asked. How was it inculcated, and how is it maintained? And I would reply that the spirit of our army is the spirit of our public schools, for it was inculcated and is maintained by the Regimental Officer, himself the product of our public schools. In saying this I do not mean that the British Army is dominated by an aristocratic caste. I mean that its spirit of courage, self-sacrifice, loyalty, and public-spirited obedience is the spirit upon which the whole of our public school system is based, a great commonwealth in which no man is for the party, but all are for the State.

The Regimental Officer, who has blazed for himself an imperishable trail of glory in this war, has cherished and fostered this feeling. His spirit of quiet, unostentatious courage, of uncomplaining devotion to duty, of never-failing

thoughtfulness for the other man, the new-comer, “the fellow who’s a bit rattled, don’t you know?” carries on the tradition of our forefathers who fought with Marlborough and Wellington and Raglan. It is an eminently English spirit. That is why, no doubt, despite the expansion of our little Expeditionary Force into a great democratic host, our new armies have slipped it on with their tunics and their belts, so that the spirit of the new is the spirit of the old.

When this war is over I shall hope to see a monument erected in London, in the most prominent site that can be found, that the honour may be greater, with the plain inscription, “To the Regimental Officer, 1914.” Let it be white like his escutcheon, of marble like his fortitude, and in size vast and overwhelming and imposing like the pile of heroic deeds he has amassed to his credit in all our wars. German organization may have given the German armies high-explosive shells innumerable and machine-guns galore to break our bodies, and asphyxiating gases to stop our breath; they have no weapon to break the spirit of the Regimental Officer, which is the spirit of his men, the spirit of the army. The German Army is inspired by a magnificent military tradition, but it seems to linger principally in the regulars, and to be present only in a diminished form in the officers and men of the Reserve, the *Landwehr*, and the *Landsturm*. For the spirit of the German Army is artificial, the atmosphere of a military caste. The spirit of our army is the spirit of England that sent Drake sailing over the seven seas, that gave our greatest sailor that far-famed “Nelson touch”; it is the vivifying breath of the greatest Empire that the world has ever seen.

“Gentlemen, hats off!” as Napoleon said at the grave of Frederick the Great—hats off to the Regimental Officer. The military correspondent of *The Times* sounded a sane note, in the midst of the great clamour about the shortage of shells, when he bade us remember the value of good infantry, dashing in the attack, steady on the defensive. The Regimental Officer is the soul of our infantry. No matter that he is a boy, or that he is out from home but a few weeks, his sergeants will do the technical part of the job if needs be. But the Regimental Officer will show them all how to die.

Lord Wolseley used to tell how, standing on the parapet of the earthworks before Tel-el-Kebir, he saw a shell, a huge, clumsy projectile, hurling through the air before him. In an instant the question flashed across his mind whether it was the duty of the Regimental Officer to preserve his life usefully for the battalion, or to take a risk and give the men an example in indifference to danger. The shell answered the question for him by passing him by and bursting innocuously behind him. But I know what Wolseley’s, what any Regimental Officer’s answer would have been: “Stay where you are and take your chance!”

Revolutionary changes have been wrought in the army in everything, save in its spirit, since the outbreak of the war. We have come to rely on heavy artillery and high-explosive shells and machine-guns; we count our men by the hundred thousand where we counted them by the thousand before. The Territorial, the raw recruit, have proved their metal in the fiercest fire; the Canadian has not belied the reputation of our fighting race. Caste restrictions in the army have been swept away; exclusive regiments are now exclusive

only to the incompetent. That jealously guarded, poorly paid, and, if the truth were told, rather ill-considered little army that the British people kept to fight its battles before August, 1914, has been swallowed up in the millions of Britons who have heard the country's call. But the soul of the army marches on unchanged, with the same self-sacrifice, the same willing obedience, the same admirable discipline. The soul of the army is enshrined in the Regimental Officer. In the remoteness and the obscurity of the trenches and the billets he goes about his work quietly and without fuss, in the same way as he performs the deeds that win him distinction, in the same way that he goes to his death. His men worship him. His Brigadier trusts him. "The Regimental Officer," said a General to me, "by God, he's the salt of the earth!"

CHAPTER II
THE WAR OF POSITIONS

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The Germans have a mania for phraseology. Their language lends itself to it, capable, as it is, of accumulative word-building and every kind of permutation. “German is a code, not a language,” has been very justly said. Theirs is the pigeon-hole brain in which everything is ticketed with its precise label, and classified under its own particular head. I have been often amused to find them carrying this habit of theirs into military matters. Thus, a German in a letter home, describing an attack on his trench, says that the warning passed along was: “*Höchste Alarmbereitschaft*” (*highest alarm-readiness*).

In the same way they describe trench warfare as the “*Stellungskrieg*,” the *war of positions*. It was from a German prisoner that I first heard this expression, a big, fair Westphalian captured at Neuve Chapelle, with whom I had some conversation in the train that was taking him and some 500 of his comrades down to Havre to embark for England. I did not at first grasp what he meant by his continual references to the “*Stellungskrieg*,” and asked him what the phrase signified. “‘*Stellungskrieg*,’” he said, “you know, what followed the ‘*Bewegungskrieg*’” (*the war of movements*).

The German mind again! “The war of movements!” What a priceless phrase to flash in the eyes of a blindly credulous people! The phrase has the inestimable advantage of being entirely vague. It does not say *which way the movements*

went. I tested my prisoner on this point. He was quite positive that the Bewegungskrieg stopped and the *Stellungskrieg* set in by virtue of the carefully laid plans and ripe decision of the Great General Staff, and not of military necessity imposed on the Fatherland by the Allies. “Everybody knows,” a German-Swiss paper “kept” by the German Government cried the other day, “everybody knows that there never was a battle of the Marne!” That is the conviction of all German soldiers who did not take part in that disastrous and unforgettable retreat.

But this German phrase “*Stellungskrieg*” is a very accurate description of the great stalemate on the western front which we, more vaguely, term “trench warfare.” It is, indeed, a constant manœuvring for positions, a kind of great game of chess in which the Germans, generally speaking, are seeking to gain the advantage for the purposes of their defensive, whilst the Allies’ aim is to obtain the best positions for an offensive when the moment for this is ripe. It is a siege in which we are the besiegers, the Germans the besieged. I adhere to this view despite the great German thrusts against the Ypres salient. Both these were comparable to sorties *en masse* from a fortress, and in both instances, although the besieged were able to push the besiegers a little farther away from them, they failed to achieve their object, which was to break the lines of investment, and, if possible, cut off and surround part of the besieging forces.

The situation on the Western front, at least as far as the British line is concerned, for only of that am I competent to speak, represents siege warfare in its highest expression.