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Arras, The Unburied City

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In Northern France there are many buried towns and villages. They are buried in their own cellars. Arras is still uninterred. She is the corpse of a city that waits for burial, and day by day the German shells are trying to dig her grave. They were at it yesterday when we visited Arras, and this morning they will be hammering her again.

Seven centuries before this war Arras was famous for her tapestries, so famous that in England a tapestry was called an arras. Now she has given her name to a battle—to different battles—that began with the great bombardment of October a year ago, and each day since then have continued. On one single day, June 26, the Germans threw into the city shells in all sizes, from three to sixteen inches, and to the number of 10,000. That was about one for each house.

This bombardment drove 2,700 inhabitants into exile, of whom 1,200 have now returned. The army feeds them, and in response they have opened shops that the shells have not already opened, and supply the soldiers with tobacco, postcards, fruit and vegetables from those gardens not hidden under bricks and cement. In the deserted city these civilians form an inconspicuous element. You can walk for great distances and see none of them. When they do appear in the empty streets they are like ghosts. Every day the shells change one or two of them into real ghosts. But the others still stay on. With the dogs nosing among the fallen bricks, and the pigeons on the ruins of the cathedral, they know no other home.

As we entered Arras the silence fell like a sudden change of temperature. Every corner seemed to threaten an ambush. Our voices echoed so loudly that unconsciously we spoke in lower tones. The tap of the Captain's walking stick resounded like the blow of a hammer. The emptiness and stillness was like that of a vast cemetery, and the grass that has grown through the paving stones deadened the sound of our steps. This silence was broken only by the barking of the French seventy-fives, in parts of the city hidden to us, the boom of the German guns in answer, and from overhead by the aeroplanes. In the absolute stillness the whirl of their engines came to us with the steady vibrations of a loom.

Under our feet were shell holes that had been recently filled and covered over with bricks and fresh earth. It was like walking upon newly made graves. On either side were cellars into which the houses had dumped themselves, or, still balancing above them, were walls prettily papered, hung with engravings, paintings, mirrors, quite intact. These walls were roofless and defenseless against the rain and snow. Other houses were like those toy ones built for children, with the front open. They showed a bed with pillows, shelves supporting candles, books, a washstand with basin and pitcher, a piano, and a reading lamp.

In one house four stories had been torn away, leaving only the attic sheltered by the peaked roof. To that height no one could climb, and exposed to view were the collection of

trunks and boxes familiar to all attics. As a warning against rough handling, one of these, a woman's hatbox, had been marked "fragile." Secure and serene, it smiled down sixty feet upon the mass of iron and bricks it had survived.

The pure deviltry of a shell no one can explain. Nor why it spares a looking-glass and wrecks a wall that has been standing since the twelfth century. It loves a shining mark. To what is most beautiful it is most cruel. The Hotel de Ville, which was counted among the most presentable in the north of France, and which once rose in seven arches in the style of the Renaissance, the shells marked for their own. And all the houses approaching it from the German side they destroyed Not even those who once lived in them could say where they stood. There is left only a mess of bricks, tiles, and plaster.

We visited what had been the headquarters of General de Wignacourt. They were in the garden of a house that opened upon one of the principal thoroughfares, and the floor level was twelve feet under the level of the flower beds.

Here, secure from falling walls and explosive shells, the General, by telephone, directed his attack. The place was as dry, as clean, and as compact as the Admiral's quarters on a ship of war. The switchboard was connected with batteries buried from sight in every part of the buried city, and in an adjoining room a soldier cook was preparing a most appetizing luncheon. Above us was three yards of cement, rafters and earth, and crowning them grass and flowers. When the owner of the house returns he will find this addition to his residence an excellent refuge from burglars or creditors.

We lunched in a charming house where the table was spread in the front hall., The bed of the officer temporarily occupying the house also was spread in the hall, and we were curious to know, but too proud to ask, why he limited himself to such narrow quarters. Our Captain rewarded our reticence. He threw back the heavy curtain that concealed the rest of the house and showed us that the remainder had been deftly removed by a shell.

The owner of the house had run away, but before he went, fearing the Germans might enter Arras and take his money, he had withdrawn it and hitting it in the garden. The money amounted to \$2,500. He placed it in a lead box, soldered up the opening, and buried the box under a tree. Then he went away and carelessly forgot which tree. During a lull in the bombardment he returned, and until 2 in the morning dug frantically for his buried treasure. The soldier who guarded the house told me the difference in the way the soldiers dig a trench, and the way our absent host dug for his lost money was greatly marked. I found the leaden box cast aside in the dog kennel. It was the exact size of a suitcase. As none of us knows when he may not have to bury \$2,500 hurriedly, it is a fact worth remembering. Any ordinary suitcase will do. The soldier and I examined the leaden box carefully. But the owner had not overlooked anything.

When we reached the ruins of the cathedral we did not need darkness and falling rain to further depress us or to make the scene more desolate. One lacking in all reverence would have been shocked. The wanton waste, the senseless brutality in such destruction would have moved a statue. Walls as thick as the ramparts of a for had been blown into powdered chalk; there were great breaches in them through which you could drive an omnibus. In one place the stone roof and supporting arches had fallen, and upon the floor, where for 200 years the people of Arras had knelt in prayer, was a mighty barricade of stone blocks, twisted candelabra, broken praying chairs, town vestments, and shattered glass. Exposed to the elements, the chapels were open to the sky. The rain fell on sacred emblems of the Holy Family, the saints and Apostles.

The destruction is too great for present repair. They can fill the excavations in the streets, and board up the shattered show windows. But the cathedral is too vast, the destruction of

it too nearly complete. The sacrilege must stand. Until the war is over, until Arras is free from shells, the ruins must remain uncared for and uncovered.