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'War As Usual,' Motto of France

Soldier and Peasant Alike in Their Cheery Acceptance of the Situation.

New Type in The Trenches

Mud-Caked Cavemen Unrecognizable as the French Soldiers of the Boulevards.

Soldier and Plowman, Too

The Bearded "Poilu" Fights With One Hand and Tills The Soil With The Other.

Paris, Nov. 15 – In England it is "Business as usual"; in France it is "War as usual." The English tradesman can assure his customers that with such an "old established" firm as his not even war can interfere; but France, with war actually on her soil, has gone further and has accepted war as part of her daily life. She has not merely swallowed, but digested it. It is like the line in Pinero's play, where one woman says she cannot go to the opera because of her neuralgia.

Her friend replies: "You can have your neuralgia in my box just as well as anywhere else." In that spirit France has accepted the war. The Neuralgia may hurt, but she does not take to her bed and groan; she smiles cheerfully and courageously and goes about her duties – even sits in her box at the opera.

Highlanders Excite No Curiosity.

As we approached the front – which now is a French word – this was even more evident than in Paris, where signs of war are all but invisible. Outside of Amiens we met a regiment of Scots with the pipes playing and the cold rain splashing their bare legs. To watch them pass we leaned from the car window. That we should be interested seemed to surprise them; no one else was interested. A year ago when they passed it was "roses, roses all the way" – or at least cigarettes, chocolate, and red wine. Now, in spite of the skirling bagpipes, no one turned his head. To the French they had become a part of the landscape.

A year ago the roads at every two hundred yards were barricaded. It was a continual hurdle race. Now, except at distances of four or five miles, the barricades have disappeared. One side of the road is reserved for troops, the other for moving vehicles. Those vehicles we met – for the most part two wheeled hooded carts – no longer contained peasants with their belongings flying from dismantled villages. Instead, they carried garden truck, pigs, or calves on the way to market. On the driver's seat the peasant whistled cheerily and cracked his whip. The long lines of London buses that last year advertised soap, mustard, milk and music balls, and which now are a

decorous gray; the ambulances, the great guns drawn by motor trucks with caterpillar wheels, no longer surprise him.

English Now "Paying Guests."

The English ally has ceased to be a stranger and is a paying guest in the towns and villages of Artois. The shop windows are dressed chiefly for him. The names of the towns are Flemish; the names of the streets are Flemish; the names over the shops are Flemish; but the goods for sale are marmalade, tinned kippers, The Daily Mail, and the Pink Un.

"Is it your people who are selling those things?" I asked an English officer.

The question amused him.

"Our people won't think of it until the War is over," he said, but the French are different.

"They are capable, adaptable, and obliging. If our men ask these shopkeepers for anything they haven't got they don't say: 'We don't keep it;' they get him to write down what it is he wants, and they send for it."

It is the better way. The Frenchman does not say: "War is ruining me:" he makes the war help to support him, and at the same time gives comfort to his ally.

A year ago in the villages the old men stood in disconsolate groups with their hands in their pockets. Now they are briskly at work. They are working in the fields, in the vegetable gardens, helping the Territorials mend the roads. On every side of them were the evidences of war – in the fields abandoned trenches, barbed wire entanglement, shelters for fodder and ammunition, hangars for repairing aeroplanes, vast slaughter houses, parks of artillery; and on the roads endless lines of lorries, hooded ambulances, marching soldiers.

To us those were of vivid interest, but to the French peasant they are in the routine of his existence. After a year of it war neither greatly distresses nor greatly interests him. With one hand he fights; with the other he plows.

The First Sign of War.

We had made a bet as to which would see the first sign of real war, and the sign of it that won and that gave general satisfaction, even to the man who lost, was a group of German soldiers sweeping the streets of St. Pol. They were guarded only by one of their own number, and they looked fat, sleek, and contented. When, on our return from the trenches, we saw them again, we knew they were to be greatly envied. Between standing waist high in mud in a trench and being drowned in it, buried in it, blown up or asphyxiated, the post of crossing sweeper is one to be desired.

The next sign of war was more thrilling. It was a race between a French aeroplane and German shrapnel. To us the bursting shells looked like five little cotton balls. Since this war began shrapnel, when it bursts, has invariably been compared to balls of cotton, and as that is exactly what it looks like, it is again so described. The balls of cotton did not seem to rise from the earth, but to pop suddenly out of the sky.

A moment later five more cotton balls popped out of the sky. They were much nearer the aeroplane. Others followed, leaping after it like the spray of succeeding waves. But the aeroplane steadily and swiftly conveyed itself out of range and out of our sight.

Fields Scarred with Trenches

To say where the trenches began and where they ended is difficult. We were passing through land that had been retrieved from the enemy. It had been fought for inch by inch, foot by foot. To win it back thousands of lives had been thrown like dice upon a table. There were vast stretches of mud of fields once cultivated, but now scarred with pits, trenches, rusty barbed wires.

The roads were rivers of clay. They were lined with dugouts, cellars, and caves. There burrows in the earth were supported by beams and suggested a shaft in a disused mine. They looked like the tunnels to coal pits. They were inhabited by a race of French unknown to the boulevards - men, bearded, deeply tanned, and caked with clay.

Their uniforms were like those of football players on a rainy day at the end of the second half. We were entering what had been the village of Ablain, and before us rose the famous heights of Mont de Lorette. To scale these heights seemed a feat as incredible as scaling our Palisades or the sheer cliff of Gibraltar. But they had been scaled, and the side toward us was crawling with French soldiers, climbing to the trenches descending from the trenches, carrying to the trenches food, ammunition, and fuel for the fires.

Mud, Nothing But Mud.

A cold rain was falling and had turned the streets of Ablain and all the roads leading to it into swamps. In these were islands of bricks and lakes of water of the solidity and color of melted chocolate. Whatever you touched clung to you. It was a land of mud, clay, liquid earth. A cold wind whipped the rain against your face and chilled you to the bone. All you saw depressed and chilled your spirit.

To the “poilus,” who, in the face of such desolation, joked and laughed with the civilians, you felt you owed an apology, for your automobile was waiting to whisk you back to a warm dinner, electric lights, red wine, and a dry bed. The men we met were cave men. When night came they would sleep in a hole in the hill fit for a mud turtle or a muskrat.

They moved-in streets of clay two feet across. They were as far removed from civilization as in the past they have known it, as though they had been cast adrift upon an island of liquid mud. Wherever they looked was desolation, ruins and broken walls, jumbles of bricks, tunnels in mud, caves in mud, graves in mud.

Nothing Human About This Front.

In other wars the “front” was something almost human. It advanced or wavered and withdrew at a single bugle call. It was electrified in no fixed place, but, like a wave, it enveloped a hill, or with galloping horses and cheering men overwhelmed a valley. In comparison this trench work did not suggest war. Rather it reminded you of a mining camp during the spring freshet. And for all the attention the cave men paid to them, the reports of their “seventy-fives” and the “Jack Johnsons” of the enemy bursting on Mont de Lorette might have come from miners blasting rock.

What we saw of these cave dwellers was only a few feet of a moat that for 300 miles is thrown across France like a miniature canal. Where we stood we could see of the 300 miles only mud walls, so close that we brushed one with each elbow. By looking up we could see the black lead of the sky. Ahead of us the trench twisted, and an arrow pointed to a first-aid dressing

station. Behind us was the winding entrance to a shelter deep in the earth, reinforced by cement and corrugated iron and lit by a candle.

From a trench that was all we could see of this war, and it is all that the millions of fighting men can see of it – wet walls of clay as narrow as a grave, an arrow pointing to a hospital, earthen steps leading to a shelter from sudden death, and overhead the rain-soaked sky, and perhaps a great bird at which the enemy is shooting snowballs.