NO MORE PARADES

By

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To WILLIAM BIRD

MY DEAR BIRD,—

I have always held—and I hold as strongly now as ever—that a novel should have no preface. It should have no preface for æsthetico-moral reasons, and because prefatory matter takes away from the reality of, and therefore damages, a book. A dedicatory letter is a subterfuge. That subterfuge I feel forced to adopt, and must take the consequences.

The reason is this: All novels are historical, but all novels do not deal with such events as get on to the pages of history. This *No More Parades* does. It becomes, therefore, necessary to delimit what, in it, is offered as, on the author's responsibility, observed event.

State, underline and emphasize the fact how you will it is impossible to get into the heads of even intelligent public critics the fact that the opinions of a novelist's characters as stated in any novel are not of necessity the opinions of the novelist. It cannot be done. How it may be with one's public one has no means of knowing. Perhaps they read one with more generosity and care. Presumably they do, for they have either spent money on, or taken some trouble to obtain, the volume.

In this novel the events, such as it treats of, are vouched for by myself. There was in France, at the time covered by this novel, an immense base camp, unbelievably crowded with men whom we were engaged in getting up the line, working

sometimes day and night in the effort. That immense army was also extremely depressed by the idea that those who controlled it overseas would—I will not use the word betray, since that implies volition—but "let us down." We were oppressed, ordered, counter-ordered, commanded, countermanded, harassed, strafed, denounced—and, above all, dreadfully worried. The never-ending sense of worry, in fact, far surpassed any of the "exigencies of troops actually in contact with enemy forces," and that applied not merely to the bases, but to the whole field of military operations. Unceasing worry!

We took it out in what may or may not have been unjust suspicions of the all-powerful ones who had our lives in their hands—and seemed indifferent enough to the fact. So this novel recounts what those opinions were: it does not profess to dictate whether those opinions were or were not justified. There is, I think, not one word in it which records any opinions or words of mine as being my words or opinions. I believe I may say that, as to the greater part of such public matters as are here discussed, I have no opinions at all. After seven or eight years I have been unable to form any. I present therefore only what I observed or heard.

Few writers can have engaged themselves as combatants in what, please God, will yet prove to be the war that ended war, without the intention of aiding with their writings, if they survived, in bringing about such a state of mind as should end wars as possibilities.

This obviously is a delicate task. If you overstate horrors you induce in your reader a state of mind such as, by reaction, causes the horrors to become matters of indifference. If you

overstate heroisms you induce indifference to heroisms—of which the late war produced, Heaven knows, plenty enough, so that to be indifferent to them is villainy. Casting about, then, for a medium through which to view this spectacle, I thought of a man—by then dead—with whom I had been very intimate and with whom—as with yourself—I had at one time discussed most things under the sun. He was the English Tory.

Even then—it must have been in September, 1916, when I was in a region called the Salient, and I remember the very spot where the idea came to me—I said to myself: How would all this look in the eyes of X . . .—already dead, along with all English Tories? For, as a medium through which to view struggles that are after all in the end mostly emotional struggles—since as a rule for every twenty minutes of actual fighting you were alone with your emotions, which, being English, you did not express, for at least a month!—as a medium, what could be better than the sceptical, not ungenerous, not cold, not unconvincible eyes of an extinct frame of mind? For by the time of my relative youth when I knew X . . . so intimately, Toryism had gone beyond the region of any practising political party. It said for a year or two: A plague on all your houses, and so expired.

To this determination—to use my friend's eyes as a medium—I am adhering in this series of books. *Some Do Not*—of which this one is not so much a continuation as a reinforcement—showed you the Tory at home during war-time; this shows you the Tory going up the line. If I am vouchsafed health and intelligence for long enough I propose

to show you the same man in the line and in process of being re-constructed.

There is nothing more to it: I no more back the political opinions of General Campion than those of Sylvia Tietjens, who considered that the World War was just an excuse for male agapemones; I no more accept responsibility for the inaccuracies of Tietjens quoting King's Regulations than for the inaccuracies of the general in quoting *Henry V*. I was roundly taken to task by the only English critic whose review of my last book I read—after he had *horribly* misrepresented the plot of the work at a crucial point—for *my* inaccuracy in stating that poor Roger Casement was shot. As a matter of fact, I had been struck by the fact that a lady with whom I had been discussing Casement twice deliberately referred to the shooting of Casement, and stated that she did so because she could not bear to think that we had hanged him. In making therefore a lady—who had loved Casement—refer to his execution in the book in question, I let her say that Casement was shot. . . . Indeed, I should prefer to think that he had been shot, myself. . . . Or still more to think that we had allowed him to escape, or commit suicide, or be imprisoned during His Majesty's pleasure. . . . The critic preferred to rub in the hanging. It is a matter of relative patriotism.

Whilst we are chipping, I may as well say that I have been informed that a lively controversy has raged over the same work in the United States, a New York critic having stated that I was a disappointed man intent on giving a lurid picture of present-day matrimonial conditions in England. I hope I am no rabid patriot, but I pray to be preserved from the aspiration of

painting any nation's lurid matrimonial conditions. The peculiar ones adumbrated in *Some Do Not* were suggested by the fate of a poor fellow living in a place in the south of France in which I happened to be stopping when I began the book. His misfortunes were much those of my central character, but he drank himself to death, it was said deliberately, after he had taken his wife back. He came from Philadelphia.

So, in remembrance of our joint labours and conspiracies, and in token of my admiration for your beautiful achievements in another art,

I subscribe myself, my dear Bird,

Your humble, obedient and obliged

F. M.
F.

PARIS, 31 *October*, '24—
GUERMANTES, 25 *May*, '25.

PART I

CHAPTER I

When you came in the space was desultory, rectangular, warm after the drip of the winter night, and transfused with a brown-orange dust that was light. It was shaped like the house a child draws. Three groups of brown limbs spotted with brass took dim high-lights from shafts that came from a bucket pierced with holes, filled with incandescent coke and covered in with a sheet of iron in the shape of a tunnel. Two men, as if hierarchically smaller, crouched on the floor beside the brazier; four, two at each end of the hut, drooped over tables in attitudes of extreme indifference. From the eaves above the parallelogram of black that was the doorway fell intermittent drippings of collected moisture, persistent, with glass-like intervals of musical sound. The two men squatting on their heels over the brazier—they had been miners—began to talk in a low sing-song of dialect, hardly audible. It went on and on, monotonously, without animation. It was as if one told the other long, long stories to which his companion manifested his comprehension or sympathy with animal grunts. . . .

An immense tea-tray, august, its voice filling the black circle of the horizon, thundered to the ground. Numerous pieces of sheet-iron said, "Pack. Pack. Pack." In a minute the clay floor of the hut shook, the drums of ears were pressed inwards, solid noise showered about the universe, enormous echoes pushed these men—to the right, to the left, or down towards the tables, and crackling like that of flames among vast underwood became the settled condition of the night. Catching

the light from the brazier as the head leaned over, the lips of one of the two men on the floor were incredibly red and full and went on talking and talking. . . .

The two men on the floor were Welsh miners, of whom the one came from the Rhondda Valley and was unmarried; the other, from Pontardulais, had a wife who kept a laundry, he having given up going underground just before the war. The two men at the table to the right of the door were sergeants-major; the one came from Suffolk and was a time-serving man of sixteen years' seniority as a sergeant in a line regiment. The other was Canadian of English origin. The two officers at the other end of the hut were captains, the one a young regular officer born in Scotland but educated at Oxford; the other, nearly middle-aged and heavy, came from Yorkshire, and was in a militia battalion. The one runner on the floor was filled with a passionate rage because the elder officer had refused him leave to go home and see why his wife, who had sold their laundry, had not yet received the purchase money from the buyer; the other was thinking about a cow. His girl, who worked on a mountainy farm above Caerphilly, had written to him about a queer cow: a black-and-white Holstein—surely to goodness a queer cow. The English sergeant-major was almost tearfully worried about the enforced lateness of the draft. It would be twelve midnight before they could march them off. It was not right to keep men hanging about like that. The men did not like to be kept waiting, hanging about. It made them discontented. They did not like it. He could not see why the depot quartermaster could not keep up his stock of candles for the hooded lamps. The men had no call to be kept waiting, hanging about. Soon they would have to be having some

supper. Quarter would not like that. He would grumble fair. Having to indent for suppers. Put his accounts out, fair, it would. Two thousand nine hundred and thirty-four suppers at a penny half-penny. But it was not right to keep the men hanging about till midnight and no suppers. It made them discontented and them going up the line for the first time, poor devils.

The Canadian sergeant-major was worried about a pig-skin leather pocket-book. He had bought it at the ordnance depot in the town. He imagined himself bringing it out on parade, to read out some return or other to the adjutant. Very smart it would look on parade, himself standing up straight and tall. But he could not remember whether he had put it in his kitbag. On himself it was not. He felt in his right and left breast pockets, his right and left skirt pockets, in all the pockets of his overcoat that hung from a nail within reach of his chair. He did not feel at all certain that the man who acted as his batman had packed that pocket-book with his kit, though he declared he had. It was very annoying. His present wallet, bought in Ontario, was bulging and split. He did not like to bring it out when Imperial officers asked for something out of a return. It gave them a false idea of Canadian troops. Very annoying. He was an auctioneer. He agreed that at this rate it would be half-past one before they had the draft down to the station and entrained. But it was very annoying to be uncertain whether that pocket-book was packed or not. He had imagined himself making a good impression on parade, standing up straight and tall, taking out that pocket-book when the adjutant asked for a figure from one return or the other. He understood their

adjutants were to be Imperial officers now they were in France. It was very annoying.

An enormous crashing sound said things of an intolerable intimacy to each of those men, and to all of them as a body. After its mortal vomiting all the other sounds appeared a rushing silence, painful to ears in which the blood audibly coursed. The young officer stood violently up on his feet and caught at the complications of his belt hung from a nail. The elder, across the table, lounging sideways, stretched out one hand with a downwards movement. He was aware that the younger man, who was the senior officer, was just upon out of his mind. The younger man, intolerably fatigued, spoke sharp, injurious, inaudible words to his companion. The elder spoke sharp, short words, inaudible too, and continued to motion downwards with his hand over the table. The old English sergeant-major said to his junior that Captain Mackenzie had one of his mad fits again, but what he said was inaudible and he knew it. He felt arising in his motherly heart that yearned at the moment over his two thousand nine hundred and thirty-four nurslings a necessity, like a fatigue, to extend the motherliness of his functions to the orfcer. He said to the Canadian that Captain Mackenzie there going temporary off his nut was the best orfcer in His Majesty's army. And going to make a bleedin' fool of hisself. The best orfcer in His Majesty's army. Not a better. Careful, smart, brave as an 'ero. And considerate of his men in the line. You wouldn't believe. . . . He felt vaguely that it was a fatigue to have to mother an officer. To a lance-corporal, or a young sergeant, beginning to go wrong you could mutter wheezy suggestions through your moustache. But to an officer you had to say things slantways.

Difficult it was. Thank God they had a trustworthy, cool hand in the other captain. Old and good, the proverb said.

Dead silence fell.

"Lost the ——-, they 'ave," the runner from the Rhondda made his voice startlingly heard. Brilliant illuminations flickered on hut-gables visible through the doorway.

"No reason," his mate from Pontardulais rather whined in his native sing-song, "why the bleedin' searchlights, surely to goodness, should light us up for all the —— 'Un planes to see. I want to see my bleedin' little 'ut on the bleedin' Mumbles again, if they don't."

"Not so much swear words, O Nine Morgan," the sergeant-major said.

"Now, Dai Morgan, I'm telling you," 09 Morgan's mate continued. "A queer cow it must have been whatever. Black-and-white Holstein it was. . . ."

It was as if the younger captain gave up listening to the conversation. He leant both hands on the blanket that covered the table. He exclaimed:

"Who the hell are you to give me orders? I'm your senior. Who the hell . . . Oh, by God, who the hell . . . Nobody gives me orders . . ." His voice collapsed weakly in his chest. He felt his nostrils to be inordinately dilated so that the air pouring into them was cold. He felt that there was an entangled conspiracy against him, and all round him. He exclaimed: "You and your —— pimp of a general . . .!" He desired to cut certain throats with

a sharp trench-knife that he had. That would take the weight off his chest. The "Sit *down*" of the heavy figure lumping opposite him paralysed his limbs. He felt an unbelievable hatred. If he could move his hand to get at his trench-knife . . .

09 Morgan said: "The ——'s name who's bought my bleedin' laundry is Williams. . . . If I thought it was Evans Williams of Castell Goch, I'd desert."

"Took a hatred for its cawve," the Rhondda man said. "And look you, before you could say . . ." The conversation of orfcers was a thing to which they neither listened. Officers talked of things that had no interest. Whatever could possess a cow to take a hatred of its calf? Up behind Caerphilly on the mountains? On an autumny morning the whole hillside was covered with spider-webs. They shone down the sun like spun glass. Overlooked the cow must be.

The young captain leaning over the table began a long argument as to relative seniority. He argued with himself, taking both sides in an extraordinarily rapid gabble. He himself had been gazetted after Gheluvelt. The other not till a year later. It was true the other was in permanent command of that depot, and he himself attached to the unit only for rations and discipline. But that did not include orders to sit down. What the hell, he wanted to know, did the other mean by it? He began to talk, faster than ever, about a circle. When its circumference came whole by the disintegration of the atom the world would come to an end. In the millennium there would be no giving or taking orders. Of course he obeyed orders till then.

To the elder officer, burdened with the command of a unit of unreasonable size, with a scratch headquarters of useless subalterns who were continually being changed, with N.C.O.'s all unwilling to work, with rank and file nearly all colonials and unused to doing without things, and with a depot to draw on that, being old established, felt that it belonged exclusively to a regular British unit and resented his drawing anything at all, the practical difficulties of his everyday life were already sufficient, and he had troublesome private affairs. He was lately out of hospital; the sackcloth hut in which he lived, borrowed from the Depot medical officer who had gone to England on leave, was suffocatingly hot with the paraffin heater going, and intolerably cold and damp without it; the batman whom the M.O. had left in charge of the hut appeared to be half-witted. These German air-raids had lately become continuous. The Base was packed with men, tighter than sardines. Down in the town you could not move in the streets. Draft-finding units were commanded to keep their men out of sight as much as possible. Drafts were to be sent off only at night. But how could you send off a draft at night when every ten minutes you had two hours of lights out for an air-raid? Every man had nine sets of papers and tags that had to be signed by an officer. It was quite proper that the poor devils should be properly documented. But how was it to be done? He had two thousand nine hundred and ninety-four men to send off that night and nine times two thousand nine hundred and ninety-four is twenty-six thousand nine hundred and forty-six. They would not or could not let him have a disc-punching machine of his own, but how was the Depot armourer to be

expected to punch five thousand nine hundred and eighty-eight extra identity discs in addition to his regular jobs?

The other captain rambled on in front of him. Tietjens did not like his talk of the circle and the millennium. You get alarmed, if you have any sense, when you hear that. It may prove the beginnings of definite, dangerous lunacy. . . . But he knew nothing about the fellow. He was too dark and good-looking, too passionate, probably, to be a good regular officer on the face of him. But he *must* be a good officer: he had the D.S.O. with a clasp, the M.C., and some foreign ribbon up. And the general said he was: with the additional odd piece of information that he was a Vice-Chancellor's Latin Prize man. . . . He wondered if General Campion knew what a Vice-Chancellor's Latin Prize man was. Probably he did not, but had just stuck the piece of information into his note as a barbaric ornament is used by a savage chief. Wanted to show that he, General Lord Edward Campion, was a man of culture. There was no knowing where vanity would not break out.

So this fellow was too dark and good-looking to be a good officer: yet he *was* a good officer. That explained it. The repressions of the passionate drive them mad. He must have been being sober, disciplined, patient, absolutely repressed ever since 1914—against a background of hell-fire, row, blood, mud, old tins. . . . And indeed the elder officer had a vision of the younger as if in a design for a full-length portrait—for some reason with his legs astride, against a background of tapestry scarlet with fire and more scarlet with blood. . . . He sighed a little; that was the life of all those several millions. . . .

He seemed to see his draft: two thousand nine hundred and ninety-four men he had had command of for over a couple of months—a long space of time as that life went—men he and Sergeant-Major Cowley had looked after with a great deal of tenderness, superintending their morale, their morals, their feet, their digestions, their impatiences, their desires for women. . . . He seemed to see them winding away over a great stretch of country, the head slowly settling down, as in the Zoo you will see an enormous serpent slowly sliding down into its water-tank. . . . Settling down out there, a long way away, up against that impassable barrier that stretched from the depths of the ground to the peak of heaven. . . .

Intense dejection: endless muddles: endless follies: endless villainies. All these men given into the hands of the most cynically care-free intriguers in long corridors who made plots that harrowed the hearts of the world. All these men toys: all these agonies mere occasions for picturesque phrases to be put into politicians' speeches without heart or even intelligence. Hundreds of thousands of men tossed here and there in that sordid and gigantic mud-brownness of midwinter . . . by God, exactly as if they were nuts wilfully picked up and thrown over the shoulder by magpies. . . . But men. Not just populations. Men you worried over there. Each man a man with a backbone, knees, breeches, braces, a rifle, a home, passions, fornications, drunks, pals, some scheme of the universe, corns, inherited diseases, a greengrocer's business, a milk walk, a paper stall, brats, a slut of a wife. . . . The Men: the Other Ranks! And the poor —— little officers. God help them. Vice-Chancellor's Latin Prize men. . . .

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