

WAR IN FICTION

BY J. A. T. LLOYD

Not long ago M. Maeterlinck apologized for words on war as though the rage of actuality could break the spell even of his magic, by which so many blackened landscapes are still pervaded. For all that, writers have persistently vied with one another in interpreting that chaos of intensity, that mingling of carnage and heroism, which has so often hypnotized, not a family, but a nation, and not for a month or a year, but for a generation or a century.

The old way of looking at war resembles closely the old way of looking at history, and readers demanded from novelists, as from historians, always the picturesque. One need only glance back at such a romance as *Tom Burke of Ours* to realize how far modern writers have left behind them the old boyish confidence of outlook. For Lever's hero war is essentially a quite normal atmosphere, and for him its horrors are as unworthy of lacrymose comment as were, for example, the shambles of Troy to the chanter of the *Iliad*. And just as one breath of our cold later realism would have made the dragging of Hector's corpse around the city of Ilion a hideous and barbarous triumph, so even a reflective pause in Lever's light-hearted annals would have revealed at least a grimace beneath the ennobling mask of war. But Tom Burke glories in slaughter as whole-heartedly as did Achilles. And his gusto of courage belongs essentially to the youth of the world. This attitude, wholly irreflective and spontaneous, was until quite recently common

to all Europe, and though the Latins tempered it with a kind of halo that rings in *En partant pour la Syrie*, the difference of outlook is merely one of national temperament. Tom Burke stands for the British soldiers who held the Peninsula, the soldiers whose cold tenacity foiled the magnetism of the fugitive from Elba. But except for the fact that his hero is on the side of the enemy there is nothing whatever in Lever's attitude towards war that was incomprehensible to his French contemporaries.

In the same matter-of-fact spirit Erckmann and Chatrian dealt with war as the natural outlet for racial energy. Only for them any individual hero was inevitably dwarfed by the shadow of the Little Corporal to whose despotism of genius men and landscape, united in ruin, were veritably sacrificed as to some blind natural force which none could either control or evade. But incidentally, even in these picturesque and simple records, sidelights on the Legend escape almost unwillingly from the haze of imperial prestige. One sees, as in some minute Dutch picture, a modest home feeding with its youth the insatiable hecatomb. The silence of empty villages, even in these tranquil tales, vibrates with the accusations of ghosts whose anonymous bodies have been devoured by the holocaust of glory. For the picturesque novelist made some attempt at focusing the kaleidoscopic ravages through which the Legend traced itself over Europe. And by betraying, however exultantly, the flame-lit glory of battlefields, he was

ever compelled to reveal the shadows cast by the stricken homes of France.

The purely romantic writers, on the other hand, have disdained the picturesque for the sake of lightening effects. For them war is life in its fullest intensity, flashing carelessly into the apotheosis of death; it is the supreme test of manhood by which alone man asserts the dignity of his race. All such writers are themselves under the hypnosis of war, but it is Victor Hugo who perhaps illustrates best the wholly uncritical interpretation of modern battles. The pity and the waste of war are for him, who understood pity and waste so well, as nothing in the scales by which human courage is weighed in Christian Europe as carelessly as in the legendary Athens. The demiurgos is at work, but no longer with phantoms. They are close to us, these heroic puppets of the Legend, and yet by reason of something incorrigibly hectic in the whole manner of romanticism the Hugoesque combatants of Waterloo are more essentially remote than the Æschylean conquerors of Xerxes. But the pagan audacity of conception lingers with the romantic poet. Waterloo flashes before his eyes like a picture conceived as a whole and remembered minutely in detail. The Greek chanter of the defeat of the Persians had been a private soldier, and the stern record of the 'Persæ' has in it something of the 'all-terrible' which belongs only to those who have sought out their destiny, and faced it uncowed even by the terrors of their gods. Hugo's exaltation is very different but he is equally unabashed, and claims equality with all but the defeated hero of the Legend himself. The great canvas is filled in unhesitatingly, as though the Battle of Waterloo were, after all, but a pause in the flight of the wounded eagles of France. Defeat signifies neither humiliation nor humility, but only yet

another phase of the disillusion of chance. For Hugo the conqueror of Waterloo is a noumenon easily exposed to the last analysis. For surely it is in the very nature of things that the abnormal should be swept aside by the normal, and that genius should yield place to persistency? Rhetoric creates the atmosphere in which all is taken for granted, and one forgets to question the accuracy of too easily adjusted labels. It is enough for the reader that Wellington was the Barrême as opposed to the Michael Angelo of war. At the time of reading, it seems sufficient to state that the English conqueror was no peer of Napoleon but only a Suvorov whose hair had not yet grown gray. Then the result is stereotyped in an epigram as though, after all, words rather than bayonets preserve the *éclat* of arms. But from the mass of troops, as symbolizing not the courage of this or that nation, but rather the courage of the whole race of man, there emerges, grandiose and terrible, the Old Guard of France. And from the Old Guard of France there rises a residue of desperate men among whom a single figure, the core of the symbol, expresses for all time in a single word of scorn the defiance of all human energy.

Romanticism was the natural expression of the popular conception of war, and even *le grand* Victor Hugo merely raised to the *n*th power the ordinary man's vision of glorified carnage. But inevitably, as Romanticism gave place to Realism, a new school of writers began to analyze with new eyes the magnificent incidents which, like a series of meteors, form the parabola of the legend that led from Ajaccio to St. Helena. In *La Force Physique*, for example, glamour is stripped from war as bark is torn from a tree. In such a book man is seen not as the creator of war but as its creation. The puppet,

too, in his turn is as indifferent as the environment that has fashioned him, and beneath the pressure of brutality there rings no cry of protest, no appeal of pity. It is war waged logically by the arch-products of war, and in such an interpretation there is the same consistency as in Romanticism. An avalanche sweeps down all who stand in its way; so troops will trample down those who are weaker, simply as a matter of course, as though obeying unconsciously a natural law. Viewed from this standpoint an army is a natural force in which the individual unit has no more isolated identity than a molecule in the human body. He is merely the expression of force in motion demonstrating the whole rage and sweep of war to which nothing is forbidden and for which nothing is sacred.

But Realism did not content itself with depicting war as the manifestation of a blind natural force, and realists went consciously to work in their process of robbing it of all romantic glamour. Stendhal, for example, in *La Chartreuse de Parme*, elaborately reduces what has been always regarded as terrible to the level of the joyously commonplace. Fabrizio finds himself entangled in a scramble of disorganized life and can hardly realize that this is no other than a battle. 'Now,' he says to himself, 'I shall find out whether I am a coward.' And a little later: 'At last I am really going to fight and kill an enemy.' The baptism of fire is robbed maliciously of all prestige, and Fabrizio finds himself musing out loud to the enraged corporal, not on the advance of heroes but on the retreat of sheep. One thinks of the charge of Victor Hugo's Old Guard, and it is difficult to believe that Henri Beyle was born nineteen years and died forty-three years before the author of *Les Misérables*. For Fabrizio is essentially

the product of a mind that is *blasé* to every appeal of rhetoric, and as one follows his fortunes one is compelled to view the battle, not as a magnificent picture, but as a mere medley of confusing side issues. But under the dry spell of Henri Beyle one sees eye to eye with this hero for whom war becomes at once so little heroic. One follows him through the scramble, and gradually the inexhaustible series of incidents produces upon one the same kindling and animating effect that a journey through a much-traveled highway produces upon a child. For even though this master of the emotion of the brain is apparently almost contemptuous in his analysis of war, he has never succeeded in making it dull. He approaches war without the traditional deference but, as Mr. Maurice Hewlett has observed so truly, 'Not Livy himself can marshal the facts better, or know more surely when to sound the charge.'

It is a long road from the unlabored detachment of Henri Beyle to the equally ruthless bite of life which Maupassant gave to his slightest impression of war. There is no philosophic resistance to the glamour of war in such etchings as *Mademoiselle Fifi* or *Les Deux Amis*. In such works everything is taken for granted from one standpoint, and yet, from another standpoint, nothing at all. Only one feels, in reading him, that Flaubert's great pupil has long passed the stage of subjection to the old hypnosis. As for *Mademoiselle Fifi*, it is as true to-day, in this or that blackened château of France, as ever it was in '70. Again and again photography has given us the grinning gorged faces of exultant bandits, and it is perhaps no idle prophecy to suggest that in the long run the camera, more surely than the prayers of priests and the tears of orphans, will reveal even to the most unthinking the flesh-

less grimace of hate and rapine that has lurked for so many thousands of years beneath the cothurnus of war. Maupassant disdained photographic realism, maintaining that *les Réalistes de talent devraient s'appeler plutôt des Illusionnistes*, but his story of the Jewish prostitute who avenged a slur on French womanhood does, as a work of art, precisely what the camera does as a register of passing events. No one who has read *Mademoiselle Fifi* will ever be able to hum carelessly any repetition of *En partant pour la Syrie*. And whatever else the Realists accomplished in their interpretation of war, they undoubtedly laid the swaggering ghost of Offenbach. Only the brute force still grins at us, nearly half a century later, while German officers still air their animal hubris of culture by destroying that unlabored civilization which their own race with all its toil of assimilation is so impotent to reproduce. It is the same hubris, but nemesis is nearer now, and while the pounding trotters of the conqueror challenge allegiance, the rip of bullets through his hide has brought the werewolf of Prussia to thoughts of mercy — for himself. But to Maupassant there seemed to be no nemesis to check the bestial glee of the marauders, and it is no wonder that he emphasized not only the cruelty but the monotony of the shambles.

It is from this monotony that the anglers in *Les Deux Amis* escape. They cannot resist a few hours' fishing, while the dull boom of the guns rings ceaselessly on the capital. They have been able to leave Paris, and, therefore, they will be able to return; they know the password, and in the meantime they revel in the exquisite stolen moments. That is the actual position, as the Prussian officer reminds them a little later, when he bids them buy their lives by the betrayal of Paris. The two old

friends cast at each other a long regretful look for the summers they are leaving and the quiet angling that will never be theirs again, as they prepare indifferently for the indifferent fusillade of death. Then the Prussian officer orders the fish of the dead Frenchmen to be cooked for himself; it is the Superman's final comment on the paltriness of the weak.

Maupassant in his 'slices of Life' interpreted the physiology of war which on a larger scale Zola was to reveal in *La Débâcle*. Here the disorganized army of France is shown, as under X-rays, hopelessly opposing the organized forces of Prussia. And through these *documenté* pages there vibrates the fevered cry with which that now quite faded novel *Nana* closes — *A Berlin!* It is the nemesis of the conquered rather than the hubris of the conqueror that stands out in *La Débâcle*, but, without care either for the picturesque or for the romantic, Zola has thrown into perspective the actual body of the French army. For so long as men like Jean Macquart, *le simple et le solide*, are to be found in her ranks, France herself is not mortally sick. And even in that other type whose nervous exhaustion was to find expression at last in the rage of the Commune, even in the man who exclaims, *Moi, tu as bien fait de m'abattre, puisque j'étais l'ulcère collé à tes os*, there is no despair for the soul of France. For the rest, it is not Zola's province to analyze the right and wrong of war. It is sufficient for him to describe with minute physiological detail the great test and show at the same time how each of the rival nations responded to its strain.

Count Leo Tolstoy was the first writer of world-wide influence who sought deliberately to tear down the veil from the skeleton of war. Stendhal shows that the trivialities associated

with the great moments of war are as petty as those associated with the great moments of peace; Tolstoy went much further than this. The profound moralist pierced the illusion of war and detected its fundamental lack of morality beneath the heroism and the glory with which its victims enshrined it. It is true that Tolstoy failed, just as Stendhal failed, to make war insipid and uninteresting. The author of *War and Peace* was primarily a creative artist, and when he intended to instruct he was inevitably dominated by the non-didactic persuasiveness of art. In *The Cossacks*, for example, Tolstoy found it as impossible to judge Uncle Eroshka as Shakespeare found it to judge Falstaff. But for the greater part of his long life the hero of the Fourth Bastion realized the criminal side of war, and even in *Sebastopol* itself one finds the recognition that here, on both sides, were good men killing each other without any genuinely clear motive. He was from the beginning a disciple of Stendhal, whom he greatly admired, but less even than his master is he able to dwell on the dreariness of war. His thesis dissolves before one's eyes. He becomes animated by all the color and detail that he has visualized with such astounding certitude. His insight, too, communicates those vibrations of electricity which pass from a platoon to a company, and from a company to a regiment, and then from a regiment to an army corps, until an army flashes into life beneath this vitalizing power of evocation. But side by side with the artist, the moralist peeps out of the record of *Sebastopol*, and in *War and Peace* the psychology of war, as opposed to its physiology, finds ample expression. Here war is laid under the microscope just as Tolstoy's old home life had been laid. The Shakespearean amplitude of Tolstoy includes the movements of vast

masses of troops as easily as, for example, the details of a serf-girl's *lejanka*. And just as he had, in his records of domesticity, been able, while conceiving the whole, to reveal each individual unit in rounded life, so in his great book on war he makes not only the army corps and the army but the anonymous unit, Ivan, the Russian private soldier, stand squarely before us.

It is neither the legitimate nor the upstart emperor who reveals the soul of war, but rather Platon the moujik in uniform. And the director of this soul is not a Russian equivalent of that restless Latin conqueror who was to redden with the life-blood of his army the long snow-tracks of the steppes. He is, on the contrary, the essentially national and inarticulate Kutusoff, who grasped so firmly the great central fact of the campaign that Russia alone could deliver the Russians. But brooding on this war of national self-preservation, the moralist asks through the lips of Prince André whether any human being has the right by a nod of his head to dismiss thousands of unknown units to mutilation or death. Never in a single page, however animated by the variegated movement of war, does Tolstoy forget the long-observed balance between right and wrong as weighed in the scales of immediate necessity. He penetrates all hearts and reveals not only the acute self-consciousness of young officers, but also that group-consciousness of masses of transplanted peasants who feel dumbly that they are being used not so much as warriors but as the mere fuel of war. The most insignificant details in the humblest lives find their place beside the pageantry of emperors on this immense canvas, and so far as war can find expression in printed words Tolstoy has in his great book unraveled the labyrinths of its strange psychology.

Another Russian psychologist has revealed introspectively on a small canvas what Tolstoy has revealed objectively on an immense one. Garshin has minutely recorded his psychical experiences as a private soldier during that long advance which led to Plevna. No diary in the trenches to-day can sound more sensitively both the individual and the group-feeling under the organized upheaval of war. One sees that Russian officer discussing, like a veritable Petronius Arbiter, the niceties of French poetry at one moment and at another striking again and again an unfortunate private soldier in the face. And then one sees the same man in quite another phase of actuality when, after his company has been terribly cut up, he is found broken and unstrung, repeating monotonously to himself the exact number of the casualties. Garshin has drawn his picture in grayish tints revealing both himself and the ordinary Russian soldier as beings who, without pugnacity and without the lure of glory, will advance quietly and indifferently to death. As they approach the river that separates them from the final test their inner cohesion becomes absolute and all individual differences and idiosyncrasies of temperament vanish. The inarticulate mutterings against officers fade away and one realizes that one is not musing on the broodings of a single Russian soldier but rather on the group-consciousness of a vast unit, the Russian army. For this hypersensitive annotator who has written down his own soul has unconsciously merged himself in an all-absorbing unit, so that his short record of the Russo-Turkish War is as valuable, after its fashion, as Tolstoy's magnificent treatise on the Invasion of 1812.

But it has been left to Leonid Andreyev to probe the pathology of

war and to tear, as from its entrails, neither glory nor glamour nor endurance, nor even crime, but the last grim secret of all — madness. Others have

hewn the self-conscious heroes and the self-conscious victims of war. Andreyev has depicted those in whose hearts all motive power has long died away. The outraged puppets of *The Red Laugh* are no longer the all-enduring, inarticulate peasants of Count Tolstoy; they are no longer human cogs in a vast and impersonal machine, but rather its torn and mutilated fragments, the mere *débris* and slag of war. Human nature has given way beneath the ruthless and inscrutable strain, and the gibbering of the maniac reflects the long-concealed insanity of war. Old symbols of flags and trophies are forgotten in this last hideousness of reality. Forgotten are the healing tears of self-sacrifice and the quiet pride of *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*, and only the grin of fear responds to the old challenges of glory. The corpses are endowed with a new horror, and through their putrescence there echoes endlessly the sob of the shambles — the Red Laugh of War, 'We looked round: behind us on the floor lay a naked, light pink body, its head thrown back. And instantly at its side there appeared a second, and a third. And the earth threw them up one after the other, and soon the orderly rows of light pink bodies filled all the rooms.' Andreyev's impressionism verges again and again on the monstrous, but so long as the pathology, as opposed to the physiology, of war, has a place in fiction, his strange novel on the Manchurian Campaign demands attention. For it was not for Tolstoy, the moralist, who reasoned about it, but for Andreyev, who caught it as in a nightmare, to reveal in its last nudity the final outrage of war.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

BOTH lovers of Lincoln and of dramatic literature, we gladly welcome Mr. John Drinkwater's play, *Abraham Lincoln*, the latest addition to Lincoln literature, and the first attempt, as far as we know—at any rate in this country—to put the pathos and drama of the great President on the stage. It is always a matter of surprise and regret to us that our dramatic authors should so persistently elevate one passion, that of sex, above all others, and neglect those of equal force—ambition, power, revenge, patriotism, and sacrifice. Their great prototype, the arch-interpreter of humanity, knew better. He saw life in a juster proportion, as he has proved for all time in *Julius Cæsar*, in *Macbeth*, in *Coriolanus*. He had in *excelsis* the power to see the drama of character. Dramatic history holds brilliant examples of followers of Shakespeare's traditions, and in our own day a notable instance is Mr. John Masefield with *Philip of Spain* and *Good Friday*. But the followers are astonishingly few when one reflects on the inspiration which history offers. Names leap to the mind of heroic or conspicuous figures that must, it seems, inspire great epics and dramas.

Mr. Drinkwater's play is marked by admirable restraint, simplicity, and dignity. The action covers the period from Lincoln's acceptance of the invitation to stand for the Presidency to his assassination by the fanatic Booth. Covering so wide a period and so many events, it is of necessity a series of incidents. These are set out in six scenes, and to link the incidents together the author has adopted the

classic method of the Chorus, recited by two Chroniclers. This Chorus is in irregular rhymed verse, which, if not always inspired, is accomplished throughout, and at times shows much descriptive power. Take, for instance, the introduction to Scene II, after Lincoln's acceptance of his great task, which begins:

Lonely is the man who understands,
Lonely is vision that leads a man away
From the pasture-lands
From the furrows of corn and the brown
loads of hay,
To the mountain-side,
To the high places where contemplation
brings
All his adventurings
Among the sowers and the tillers in the
wide
Valleys to one fused experience,
That shall control
The courses of his soul,
And give his hand
Courage and continence.

For his study of his hero Mr. Drinkwater is much indebted, he tells us, to Lord Charnwood's *Life of Lincoln*, and his conception of Lincoln's character follows very much the lines of that able book. Though we are shown Lincoln's invincible honesty, his detestation of cant, his devoutness of mind, he is by no means a plaster saint. There is a glimpse here and there of his humor, of which we think we might have been allowed to see more; of his abrupt methods, of his peculiarities. His uncouth appearance and manners are dwelt upon, but Mr. Drinkwater is too true an artist ever to permit him to become the buffoon. 'There are some, shall we say graces?' says Lincoln to the Delegation, 'that I lack. Washington does not altogether neglect these.' 'If you send me,' he adds,