

confirm the suspicions of Russian and German radical leaders. This is not the time to talk of Bagdad railways or German colonies. The Russian formula, though we like it not, is better for the present. "Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered," as Paine wrote in a crisis scarcely less dreadful than this.

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CORRESPONDENCE

Russian Political Exiles

(From a letter to a member of the Society of the Friends of Russian Freedom).

HOW happy I am . . . I am so sorry I am too old . . . But never mind! . . . Three days ago I received a telegram from Petrograd: "Grand espoir, travail enorme, embrassons, revenez, Brechkofsky, Tchaykovsky." I am ready to start, but there are difficulties to cope with. First is the money to start with. The government would let us pass gratuitously, but it is impossible to pass freely to Russia. The number of emigrants is very great, but the passage is very difficult and proceeded by small parties. In France and England we have to wait and stay some weeks. The living is very expensive. The special committee in Petrograd sent to Switzerland 172,000 francs to help political emigrants to reach Russia. But the number of emigrants is so great that it is difficult to divide the money fairly. It is necessary to buy shoes and clothes, because in Russia clothes are enormously dear. I am sorry I have not money enough to start independently of the official help offered by the Committee. It is a very delicate question to take money and to start while many others must stay. All the money I had for Babushka I had sent here by the Banque of Montreux to the Banque of Minussinsk. She has not received it, because the Revolution has brought her immediately to Petrograd. I had in cash only 16 francs. The great destitution of comrades forced me to borrow some sum of money to help them. Only men are allowed to pass in Russia via France and England. Many comrades have wives and children. I decided not to take any money from official sum in order to be free in conscience from any reproach of starting as an in any way privileged emigrant. I do not know whether you understand my spiritual and moral trouble? I am ready to get this help rather from my American friends than from the Russian political emigrants' Committee.

Uncle Sam is our ally now. He has a great deal to cope with in his own troubles, but if our American friends find the possibility to send me any material help (in money), they would make perhaps a last but not the least service to the Russian cause, which is now the common cause of the universal democracy.

There is a stupid set of Zimmerwaldists among our Russian socialists and emigrants who in agreement with German government passed from Switzerland via Germany to Copenhagen and Stockholm. We the other emigrants energetically and officially protested against such a shameful proceeding without consent of our Provisional Revolutionary government. I do not wish to pass through the Germany of Bloody Wilhelm II even with the consent of our government. This passage I consider as immoral in the extreme. That is why any money the American friends can send me will make me quite independent from

any faction, or party or committees. These Zimmerwaldists spread the insinuation that the French and English governments do not wish to let them pass to Russia. It is stupid, but is a fact that this sect of Zimmerwaldists wishes to overthrow this revolutionary, but "bourgeois" government in Russia and to make immediate peace with Germany, even separate peace. . . . I fight them energetically here in Switzerland as well as in Russia. Thirty-three persons of them already reached Petrograd. Do not take their action as serious. The Russian Revolution is now in quick process of strong organization and this stupid faction of Zimmerwaldists will have no effect on the issue of this unprecedented revolutionary movement. The whole of Russian democracy is in full, and hearty accord with the democracy of Uncle Sam, France and Great Britain. This war must be the last one.

If I can borrow the money sufficient to start independently, I'll go in two weeks. But I shall be obliged to stay perhaps some weeks in France and England. If some money will be sent from American friends, my wife, Mrs. Lazareff will have all necessary instructions.

Babushka calls me as soon as possible to come to Russia.

Here in Switzerland the life is very dear, by card system. In Russia the shoes cost 130 roubles.

I am going to Lausanne for meeting.

Please tell ——— that our Russian *Constituente* will be elected by universal suffrage by men and women. I am sure! . . .

My brotherly kiss to you to all. I am in a hurry to catch my train.

GEO. LAZAREFF.

It is now beyond my power, and we must try not to make any difficulty to our revolutionary government.

Babushka is right: *Grand espoir, travail enorme!*

Clarens, Switzerland.

[NOTE—The Society of the Friends of Russian Freedom is collecting a fund for the relief of *Siberian* Political Exiles, but will be glad to forward direct to Mr. Lazareff any sums sent to them for such purpose. The Society knows Mr. Lazareff well and has the utmost confidence in him. Checks to the order of Hamilton Holt, Treasurer, should be sent to Paul Kenneday, Secretary, 70 Fifth Avenue, New York.—THE EDITORS].

In Defense of Rupert Hughes

SIR: There are, perhaps, very few of your readers who have a higher regard for your opinions than have I. But I do believe you are wrong in making the statement that Rupert Hughes is a "concessivist," for that term carries with it a suggestion of derogation. True, there is a great demand for Mr. Hughes's work, but that does not mean that he is stooping in order to meet the demand. Rather, I should say that he is developing in the magazine reader an appreciation of good writing. Have you read his latest book of short stories, *In a Little Town*? If not, please read it. And then if you don't agree with me that *Pop*, *Don't You Care*, and *The Mouth of the Gift Horse*, are at least as good as, if not better than, any other small-town stories you have ever read, then I shall immediately begin to believe that probably I am wrong. But I do want to issue this challenge: Name just one writer, past or present, who has ever written as good conversation as Mr. Hughes writes. Doesn't that stump you?

JNO. J. CORCORAN.

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Realism of the Trenches

Le Feu, by Henri Barbusse. Paris: Flammarion. Frs. 3.50.

LE FEU, by Henri Barbusse, which relates the unvarnished daily experience of a squad of French poilus at the front, is a terribly plain answer to the question why Joffre is in haste to get an American army into the trenches. This history is dated December, 1915. The incredible thing, the thing which makes human character seem infinitely tougher than human intelligence, is that troops which were at that epoch enduring the agony and impoverishment of life it describes should still be enduring them in the spring of 1917. *Le Feu* makes Gaspard look something like a vaudeville star; it reduces Mr. Britling's intellectual reactions to insignificance. For this novel is epic in proportions. Its background is not merely an infinitesimal parallel of the second line, its hero is not one man, not even the squad of seventeen to which its author belonged, but every soldier who guards the edge of that scarred desert which stretches from the Channel to the Alps. And Barbusse does not merely display the soldier, he pushes you into his miserable verminous body, his cold, water-logged boots, his bulging, stinking, soaking woolen clothes. The effect of living inside them is something like having a long operation performed without ether. After you have been through it you know there is such a thing as war, and you know that it is not the industrialist, or the engineer, or the military expert who is bearing the brunt of it. *Le Feu* fills you with shame that you have any cover save that which a mud wall opposes to an aching body. It makes you realize that the common man is the hero of this cataclysm, and that from it democracy and organized peace are to emerge supreme.

We first meet the *escouade* stumbling up, livid and hirsute and sodden, from a night's sleep in the lateral shelters of their viscous trench. These well-like openings stink "like mouths," and the long desolation of the dawn reveals too clearly the gray and watery wilderness in which the cave men have for fifteen months lived and moved and had their being. Water, not fire, is the hell of the front; it seeps from every page of this novel. As always, the cannonade is grumbling and crackling, but the soldiers are no more aware of it than they were of the ticking of the clocks in the houses of their now legendary past. Nor do they observe the fantastic divergence of the clumsy outer garments which, like dwellers in the Arctic zone, they have devised to protect themselves from the rain from above, the mud from below and the cold, "that sort of infinite which is everywhere." Their immediate interest is a frenzied search for vermin. Having scratched their fill, they yawn and groan before the ennui of another day.

"In this family without a family, at this hearth without a hearth" which groups them, there are three generations and any number of "races," since they belong to a reserve regiment which has been reinforced from the active and the territorial. Poterloo, with his bright red cheek-bones, is a miner from the Flemish North; Fouillade, a boatman from Cette, rolls wicked little eyes in a brown musquetaire's face and invokes his God with Provençal temerity: "Coquine di Dious!" (Coquin de Dieu). By profession "in the vanished age when one had a social condition" they were mostly laborers and workmen of various sorts. Barbusse, who was before the war a writer and an editor of *Je Sais Tout*, a sort of Paris cousin of *The Ladies' Home Journal*, has strong feelings on this subject: "We

are fighting soldiers, nous autres, and there are hardly any intellectuals, artists or rich men who during this war have risked their faces on the battlements, except in passing or under officers' helmets." But in spite of extreme divergency of age, origin, culture, character, the seventeen are now, broadly speaking, the same: forced by the terrible narrowness of their elemental existence to speak the same argot, to take the same habits, to feel the same primitive needs.

"One is always waiting, in the state of war. One has become a waiting machine. At the moment, it is the soup we are waiting for. Afterwards it will be the letters. But everything in its own time; when we have finished the soup we shall think of the letters. Then we shall begin to wait for something else." As usual, the soup is late. The men grow impatient and quarrelsome. But the first hot spoonful distils a rich beatitude. Obscene jokes begin to circulate. Pipes come out, men spit in a friendly circle. Cocon, invariably statistical, begins to explain the disposition of the trenches. There are ten thousand kilometers on the French side, and as many on the German. And the French front is only about an eighth of the total war front.

"In all that, you see what we amount to, we who are here. . . ."

A vision of their condition, lost "like drops of blood among the deluge of men and things," assails them all.

"On s'embête," says Volpatte.

"We'll stick it out!" grumbles Barque.

"Got to," says Paradis.

"Why?" asks Marthereau, without conviction.

"No need of reason since we have to."

"There ain't no reason," affirms Lamuse.

"There is, too," says Cocon. "It is . . . there are several, rather."

"Shut up. It's much better not to have any, since we got to hold on."

"All the same," says Blaire heavily, who never loses an occasion to recite this phrase,—"all the same, they're after our hide."

Out of such passages comes the soldier's philosophy: *t'en fais pas*—take things as they come and don't kick about them. Do what you're told, while waiting to be told to go home. These men have almost ceased to believe in the end of the war. They have renounced understanding, they have renounced individuality; their days are entirely bounded by a hope not to die and a struggle to live as well as possible.

It is this touching hope and this egotistic struggle, seen through a long series of episodes of trench, bombardment, cantonment and attack, that Barbusse relates with a humanity so passionate and sincere, an observation so keen and so humorous, that the stark brutality of his realism is transfused with a sort of sombre poetry, even a sort of brilliance. The essence of the tragedy, the fundamental truth of the book, is that these are not soldiers, but men: civilians, meant to be happy and peaceable and affectionate and kind, who by the folly of the human race are torn from their normal lives against their will; workmen, inclined to do as they are told, resistant to difficulty, capable of long-suffering; human beings, pathetically ready to believe that the next meal will be more savory and plentiful, the new hay-loft less dank and obscene than the last; "heroes" finally, who scorn the *croix de guerre*, who go into carnage advisedly, fearfully, silently, with a full consciousness of the horror of what they are doing, and who come out of it, whatever the cost to their comrades, mad with the joy of personal escape.