

## La Résistance à Moussey (x)

**Témoignage de Christopher Sykes**, alors le captain Sykes, l'officier de renseignement de l'Opération Loyton

Ci après, présentation et extraits de son livre, écrit en 1946, « *Four Studies in Loyalty* » (Quatre Etudes sur la Loyauté)

La 4ème étude, « *In Times of Stress* », a pour sujet le comportement, exemplaire, des habitants du village de Moussey (x) aux pires moments de la dernière guerre ici : d'août à octobre 44, pendant l'Opération Loyton

(x) En effet, la « town in the green dark valley of the Vosges » est Moussey (et l'indissociable hameau du Harcholet !)

Ce livre m'a été offert par Len Owens, compagnon d'armes de Christopher Sykes pendant l'Opération Loyton, et dernier témoin vivant de celle ci

J'ai longtemps reporté la publication de ces extraits sur ce site, pour cause d'autorisation de la famille et de droits d'auteur

N'ayant jamais pu aboutir dans mes recherches vers la famille comme vers les différents éditeurs, je me décide de publier tout de même

En mémoire de Christopher Sykes, de Len Owens, de leurs courageux compagnons, et de nos parents et grands parents qui étaient ces habitants de cette « town in the green dark valley of the Vosges »

*Je souhaite aussi que cette présentation donne aux lecteurs l'envie de se procurer ce livre attachant, qui explique par l'exemple d'hommes ce qu'est la Loyauté*

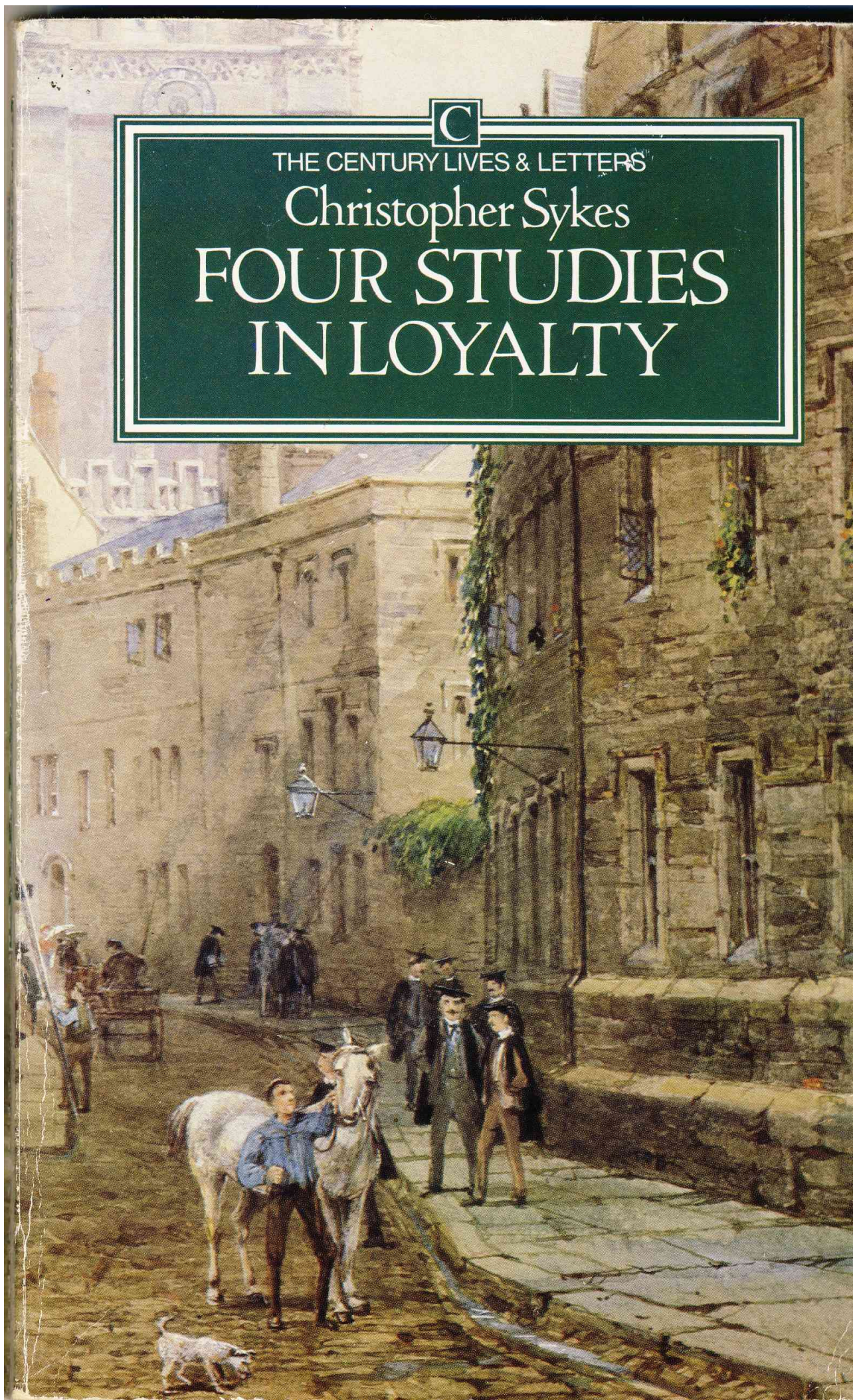
Voir aussi : Une présentation de ce livre dans cet article du magazine *Time*. Cliquer : <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,798352-2,00.html>



C

THE CENTURY LIVES & LETTERS

Christopher Sykes  
FOUR STUDIES  
IN LOYALTY





**By the same author**

WASSMUSS

INNOCENCE AND DESIGN (with Robert Byron)

STRANGER WONDERS

HIGH MINDED MURDER

THE ANSWER TO QUESTION

CHARACTER AND SITUATION

TWO STUDIES IN VIRTUE

A SONG OF A SHIRT

DATES AND PARTIES

ORDE WINGATE

CROSS ROADS TO ISRAEL

TROUBLED LOYALTY: A BIOGRAPHY OF

ADAM VON TROTT

NANCY, THE LIFE OF LADY ASTOR

EVELYN WAUGH

FOR MY FRIEND GERRARD. (MON AMI).

VERY BEST WISHES.

Len Owens

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP.

The cover shows the painting 'Oriol Street, Oxford'  
by Louis Rayner (Gallery George, London)

ESSAY No 4. PEOPLE ARE NAMED.

THESE ARE NOT THEIR TRUE NAMES.

WHY C.S. DID THIS IS NOT CLEAR. THE WAR WAS OVER. THIS CAUSED CONFUSION, ESPECIALLY TO THE FAMILY IN "A VILLAGE CALLED MOUSSEY"

## FOUR STUDIES IN LOYALTY

~~THE~~ EXAMPLES. - MADAM RUSSI WAS ACTUALLY  
MADAM DONY. PERE JOSEPH WAS PERE GEORGE.  
THERE ARE OTHERS WHO I CANNOT REMEMBER.

Christopher Sykes

SOMEONE IN RABESAU PERHAPS CAN.

INTRODUCTION BY

David Pryce-Jones

C.S. I REMEMBER AS AN ACADEMIC RATHER  
ALSO A MAN, BUT A GOOD INTELLIGENT OFFICER  
WHO DID NOT MIX MUCH WITH THE OTHER RANKS.  
HE WAS ONE OF THE SIX OF US WHO CAME  
THROUGH THE LINES TOGETHER. HE ALWAYS SHARED THE  
DUTIES, SENTRY ETC WITH US ALL INCLUDING COLONEL  
FRANKS - THE SAS WAY.

CENTURY HUTCHINSON LTD

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## INTRODUCTION

LOYALTY CAN BE to a friend, a place, an ideal, and each expression of it is attractive. Everyone includes loyalty on the secret list of their virtues, and hopes that the word will feature in what others say about them. Actual expressions of loyalty are variously given by Christopher Sykes in this all-too-short book, but its fame and resonance have derived from something wider: loyalty in the sense of being true—being true to oneself and to the world. When this book was first published, such loyalty had been under strain, as it continues to be, for that matter.

Only a small part of *Four Studies in Loyalty* deals directly with the war against Nazism. Remarks here and there reveal that Christopher Sykes had served in the Middle East and afterwards parachuted into occupied France, but personal bravery and all that is somehow to be taken for granted. The people he chose to celebrate are his own long-dead uncle; a former travelling companion, Robert Byron; and endearing or unusual foreigners, Persian or French, who, when put to the test, showed that particular loyalties could also be universal.

Whatever else it is, the English character has always been loyal to itself, and in a thousand years the Nazis could never have acquired a sound sense of it—that baffling thing of mood and style and timing which brought about their undoing, and is so perfectly expressed in the approach of this book to its subjects. One likes to visualise idealogues reading the story of the author's uncle, for example, another Christopher Sykes. The poor fellow put his trust in princes—or, rather, one prince, the future King Edward VIII—and was ruined by it. But *lèse-majesté* or republican morality does not raise an ugly head. The Snob and the Vulgar Royal Party had simply played out allotted roles in the grand comedy of English life, and not for a moment would either have wished it otherwise.

Humorous appreciation of these matters goes with free-born confidence. Here our author was fortunate in that his father was Sir Mark Sykes of Sledmere, Yorkshire landowner and baronet, linguist and politician; unfortunate, in that he was a younger son, that peculiar social category deriving from primogeniture, and as English as cheddar cheese.

Younger sons in a family like that are equipped at Eton and Oxford for a position which they do not inherit, obliged to respond to the idea of individual worth, meaning in practice that they survive as rolling-stones. What would literature or adventure be without younger sons? True to form, in the '30s Christopher Sykes was to be found in far-away places, learning languages and writing as he pleased.

Robert Byron, with whom he went to Persia, Afghanistan and India, was another of the same kind; penniless bearer of a famous name. The portrait drawn of him is a lucid little masterpiece, altogether a key to understanding the times. Superficially Byron might have appeared an opinionated Oxford aesthete, accustomed to having his own way, in the manner of those who in a famous debate at the Oxford Union voted not to fight for King and country. Instead, intelligence and experience told him that Nazism would have to be fought, and he has the honour of belonging to the tiny circle of those who gave the warning well in advance, and in a tone of voice to break through complacency. The classic scene in which he leaned across a table to ask an appeaser, "Are you in Germany pay?" continues to give pleasure and comfort.

Quite how public opinion comes to be formed is beyond charting, but Robert Byron had a clear-sightedness which spread further than his social circle. Another contemporary, George Orwell, reached similar conclusions, and there is much to compare and contrast in this apparently unlikely pair. Both took pains to teach themselves to write with clarity, and were indifferent to fashion or popularity in what they then wrote. Their premature deaths (in 1941 Byron was on a ship torpedoed without survivors) have left



question-marks about the books they might have written. Robert Byron was cosmopolitan where Orwell was more narrow and political, but a case can be made that in the years leading to the war their different efforts above all made for steadiness among the thinking classes, ever prone to wobble.

"Imagine myself", Sykes writes, "a tall, very young Englishman, and the little round partridge-like figure waddling by my side, pointing his clouded cane in different directions as we walked through the huge piazza or mingled in the crowds and din of the domed bazaars." The imagining is easy. The tradition is the familiar one of a Western visitor and his local guide, in this instance one Bahram Kirmani, in Isfahan. The portrait sounds almost blatant: Bahram too evidently a rogue and fantasist, with his high tales of St Petersburg and Oxford and his low life as pimp and drunkard. A role has chosen him rather than he choosing it. Yet the comic is not to be separated from the all-too-deadly-serious when Bahram rejects the offer to work as agent or informer for the Germany consul in war-time Tehran with the words, "I am surprised that you are so foolish as to make such a suggestion to a Balliol man."

It is fine and proper to have the final essay about the courageous men and women whom Christopher Sykes encountered in the Vozges on his military mission to the Resistance. At the time of writing, he could hardly have been expected to stand back for the sake of objectivity. But the danger to the Resistance and its sympathisers, we now perceive, lay less in the occupying German army than in other Frenchmen, collaborators and *miliciens*, who owed a considerable proportion of their successes, what is more, to anonymous denunciations.

Love of the grand gesture, of colour and heroism, in the fact of an instinct that the sublime and the ridiculous are as siamese twins—the enemies of England have never been able to sort it out. As for us, and our friends, we keep the record through books like this one; and cherish it.

David Pryce-Jones

1986

## FOREWORD

**I**N THE GROUPING of these studies I have been guided by a chronological sequence beginning outside the present century and continuing through personal experience. I have not stressed the connection in time between my first and second subjects, as I am uncertain of the degree of its strength. When I once asked Bahram whether he had ever met my great-uncle, he replied that he had frequently made his acquaintance "in royal circles so-called," but as he never elaborated on this acquaintance, or referred to it again, I take it that what meeting occurred was not of a very material kind. But beyond doubt they shared the same world of pomp and pleasure for a brief space. Between my second and third subjects the link is plain: in the best book he lived to write, Robert Byron was reaping where Bahram in his queer fashion had sown. They were both Oxonians in differing degrees, though Robert never looked back to the University with the affection whose glow coloured Bahram's whole existence. I remember both as companions of unforgettable Persian travels. Between Robert Byron and the experiences I record in my last study, I trust that I have plainly implied another link: the resurrection of France in the war was the answer to consistent faith in Europe such as he had.

My original plan was to compose my book of three studies of individual character followed by a study of group character—the character of a town. Though this intention did not signify any predilection on my part for the hive aspect of human affairs (on the contrary, I remain an unrepentant individualist), I do believe—indeed I have no alternative—that circumstances can call forth, how lastingly it would be hard to say, great



manifestations of common character as marvellous or as terrible as the fullest flowering of an individual identity. I suppose that the mass-degradation of the citizens of modern totalitarian states presents the most arresting example of this fact in its evil aspect which can be found in the whole history of the world. What is less easily noted, though future experience may make it commonplace, is the strength of the response to this challenge. It is easier to believe in vileness than virtue. I have asked the reader to believe that the evil mass-character of the Germans was surpassed in strength by the opposing mass-character of the French. I saw this living thing in action in a French town, and I determined as a mark of gratitude, to attempt to depict in words the single character which then animated those many souls.

I must own that I found this task beyond me, and finally abandoned it for the less ambitious essay which I present in this book. I present instead a gallery of portraits of French men and women whom I met in those times of stress, hoping that the cumulative effect may convey some impression of that now extinct mass-impulse of France to which so many of us owe our lives. There is no fiction in this book, though in the last essay, as, for obvious reasons, in one or two other places, I have suppressed or altered some names.

Having said thus much about the aim and design of this book, I would like to add a further note on the subject of my principal essay: Robert Byron. Uncertain as such things must be, I have little doubt that had he lived he would have become one of the great names of our time. As it is, the early interruption of his achievement is likely to restrict his memory to the lifetime of his friends. Much would be lost if that should happen. I hope that at some future date it may be possible to produce a full-length book on him. I should like to see such a book written by many hands in the style of that remarkable experiment in biography, *T. E. Lawrence, by his Friends*. I see no reason why such a book should

not be as successful in dealing with a relatively obscure subject as it was in dealing with one so famous. If in the meantime my present sketch can do a little to rescue the name of that beloved friend from oblivion, these studies in loyalty will have served purpose enough.

MAY, 1946.

C.S.



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## IN TIMES OF STRESS

To be worst,  
The lowest and most dejected thing of fortune,  
Stands still in esperance.

KING LEAR.

LIKE MANY other Englishmen, I knew France before the war as a convenient acquaintance rather than as a friend. I had got much of my education there, I spoke the language, and if I may illustrate what I mean by "convenience," so as to clear it of any suggestion of rudeness, let me say that I had once migrated to Paris for a year in order to write a book, because there, surrounded as nowhere else by a splendid and yet matter-of-fact pride in culture, I had found a comfortable and inspiring atmosphere in which to work. But though France had often seemed to me Europe at its most fine and ordered, I felt only a distant affection, indeed I avoided intimacy. I argued that there was a whole world's difference between recognition of virtues and the choice of a life's partner, between respect and love, and further, that to attempt intimacy between elements so immensely different as English and French temperaments, traditions, whatever makes up character, was to invite distressing failure. Let the relationship, rather, be confined to those arts of superficial joyous companionship in which no people in the world are more apt than the French; let the everyday commerce of soul and mind be so delightfully restrained as to leave the more serious fabric of esteem out of peril.

I dare say that for those days, when Montparnasse was still haunted by English, Americans and Germans attempting a fatuous imitation of French life and manners, for the miserable bitter years of the 'thirties



when France and England in alliance were more like two fear-stricken and puzzled invalids than the champions of civilisation, my planned frivolity was not a contemptible solution; but I believed that I had formulated an axiom, and that there were deep reasons which proscribed an attempt at deeper initiations. The magnitude of this error was made plain to me much later, towards the end of the war. It was then, during the winter and spring preceding the invasion, that I worked with a group of French officers in England and that I learned not only that the famed exclusiveness of the French temperament was a myth based on as little reality as the legendary pointed top hat and imperial beard, but that no people in the world are more generous or more sincere in the conduct of serious friendship. This was a prelude to the proofs we saw of the majestic strength of French firmness of soul, the sincerity of French loyalty in stress, danger and pain. Let me, in token of gratitude, remember now the names of Guy de Roquebrunne and Roger de la Grandière.

In the last winter of the war I spent a long evening in talk with a French friend in London. He and I had just come back from France, and we were discussing together the widely various and excessively numerous impressions which we had brought back from the military operations, and I, in addition, from my later visit to Lorraine. I complained to him, at one moment, that as a writer I was placed in a thoroughly uncomfortable position, rather like that of an amateur of food and wine who had been forcibly fed and compulsorily made drunk with so great an excess of experience on my hands that rather than be able to select, my capacity for digestion might be permanently impaired. In sympathy he offered me melancholy comfort by reminding me how quickly, and how tragically, experiences of violence become obliterated from conscious memory. Towards the end of the evening I told him of a remark made to me by an Alsatian peasant woman which had amused me. She had explained German success over France in



the following words: "Vous savez comment c'était, Monsieur, les Français sont trop bons et trop bêtes." Now, I said, I had heard a great many descriptions of French character in my time but never that, and I found it in wonderfully absurd contradiction to all known facts in the case. Much to my surprise my friend saw nothing funny in the remark. "I don't say I agree," he said, "with her explanation, but it was not a shallow or an unthinking remark. Don't you see that simplicity, respect for convention, trust (foolish at moments) are the real foundations on which French character is built. All the clever things about France which you know, all the perversity, amorality, and silliness which strike you in the eye, might hide that fact from you for ever. But you ask Frenchmen." He ended by saying: "I believe your Alsatian gave you the stomach powder to help you to digest your banquet."

I have never been able to agree with my friend, or with other Frenchmen to whom I repeated the Alsatian woman's remark, that "too much goodness and stupidity" are dangerous French failings, but I was impressed at the uniformity of intelligent French reaction to my tale. Though I had, in a way, been led by intimacy to my starting-point, having received profound confirmation of what I had first learned from de Tocqueville, namely that the French character is extreme, flexible, and incalculable, I reflected that perhaps, as with the ancient Greeks, the character persisted, because it was so firmly poised on an enduring simplicity and on a recognition that certain things should be changeless. And it occurred to me, too, that without having searched for it, I had seen something of that essential France, face to face, in some of the blackest days of her history.

In this essay I do not wish to give a recital of military events, but to consider the interplay of character and situation as I saw it in a French town, a town I must say now, to which I and my companions owe a debt of



gratitude which can never be repayed. To make my story easily understood, however, let me, in two paragraphs, indicate what were the general circumstances of Lorraine when these things happened.

In the early autumn of 1944 Eastern France had been reduced to a state of helplessness in which the bare hope of survival was the animating force of men's lives. At the end of August the Allied Armies had not yet reached the Moselle, but their advance had been held nowhere since the break-through, and in the Vosges highlands (where my town lies) the people hoped that at the last moment, in the week or so remaining to them, there would be such a rising of the Maquis that the longed-for liberation would not occur in the humiliating way of charity, but, partly at least, as an act of French defiance and revenge. Of course, these hopes were doomed.

In mid-August a small force from my regiment parachuted into the Vosges; at the end of August reinforcements (including myself) dropped to them and the Maquis. We were greeted by a host of untrained, unarmed, expectant, and physically exhausted young men, whose only idea of military formation was to assemble in large masses, whose strategy consisted in firing what few weapons they possessed at every rustle of a rabbit, or in shouting their passwords from wood to wood, and into whose ranks traitors had been introduced. Within a few days the inevitable disaster took place. They were routed by the Germans, who killed nearly a third of them and fatally demoralised the rest. After the first week of September there were but the remnants of a Maquis in the Vosges, and my regiment found itself with a re-formed fragment of these shattered forces whom at the last moment they had been able to rescue. At the same moment the American armies were halted on the Moselle. The people, who had expected to welcome American soldiers in a matter of days, had to wait now for nearly three months. We, the English troops, were faced with a new problem: we had to find an area free from "the



grey lice" (as the Germans were called) where we could receive our armed transport and equipment, and then attack. To achieve this we had to rely on the people of a certain town in the middle of the Vosges, to whose immense conifer forests we had secretly migrated.

The heroics, the stirring deeds, the reckless gallantry in battle of French resistance I never saw. I have no doubt that every word of praise these things received was nobly earned, but the soil on which these fine blooms of courage grew was the ordinary, familiar, ancient life of France, whose strength is as esoteric as it is terrific, which is as flexible in stress as it is firmly rooted, and which I did see persisting amid sufferings which might have been thought overwhelming.

How difficult it is, even so soon after as now, to recall that disgusting Life-in-Death which the Germans imposed in the place of real living nature. With what weariness, with what a feeling of staleness and boredom, one now hears the names of the Gestapo, of the Sicherheitsdienst, of the S.S., and all the rest of the sickening catalogue. This emotion we in England connect with post-war reaction, but something of it was always part of the nightmare; it is also a natural reaction of "health" to "disease," of sanity to madness, and in France it was very visible in the midst of the danger. The French were bored to death with the Germans. They were so bored that they could not be bothered to take precautions against them. It was the outward sign of their greater inner strength, their fast ebbing but greater strength. This French moral superiority, built upon a simple and absolute conviction that on their side was a great right and on the German side only a detestable wrong, has often been remarked on and described; but its most surprising though most natural manifestation was a heavy insistence on ordinary life. I can best explain what I mean by saying that this scrupulous normality in life, which in days of police supervision had provided safety, had incurred a poetry of defiance, and after the passage of



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host waiting for the sign to rise in all their thousands? But even if this supposition is not admissible, it can be said, without any exaggeration at all, that those two women set in motion the most formidable chain of events. They caused panic to the enemies of France in a whole province, they dislocated German military dispositions in a whole sector of the front line, they raised an army in the defence of all that makes human life honourable and endurable, and they inspired a loyalty and love which, with the debasement of the term "Charity," is hard to describe; we have now no fine enough word to depict such virtue.

I made one more visit to the Vosges, nearly a year after our "drop" and nearly nine months after the liberation. We had been invited to send a guard of honour to the memorial service for the townsmen who had perished in the concentration camps, and we took the occasion to form a military cemetery for those of our men who had been killed in battle or been murdered by the Germans in the valleys of the Vosges highlands. It was characteristic of the generosity of this sorely oppressed place that they should have asked us to provide a guard and felt honoured to bury our dead among their own. I repeat again that had it not been that they helped us as they did, or had we not been there to be so helped, most of their tragedies would have been avoided.

It was now, during this last visit, that the extent of the havoc wreaked on this place became at last clear. Final hopes were flickering to darkness, for the first time plain evidence revealed the extent of the ruin. The hundred and forty men who had died came from a population not greater than fourteen hundred in all. Similar dreadful gaps had been made in the populations of all the surrounding villages and towns, but nowhere had such destruction of human life been wrought as here. In the precise and terrible logic of Catholic custom, a requiem mass was offered for every victim in his home town.



Monsieur le Curé estimated that this pious duty would occupy the clergy for the greater part of the coming year. My latest recollection of that place is of streets peopled by black-clothed figures trooping to parish churches, of masses where the simplicity of the ritual was often obscured by the fantasies of local practice, and of the sublime majesty of the "Dies Iræ," the old rude hymn contrasting pathetically with the children's voices.

The inquiry to establish the fate of our missing men was still continuing near by in Germany, and to help in this I interviewed some survivors of the camps. This experience always affected me in the same way: I felt as though I were entering a world whose proportions, colours, action and spring were absolutely unfamiliar, as though by withdrawing every vestige of what is gracious or good you produced a new colour of darkness, profound with mysterious poverty. Nearly always one found oneself wading in unfamiliarly deep psychological waters, and nearly always one could just keep track of the way by gleams of splendid character piercing the blackness with an unearthly light. One of our men who vanished into that vile obscurity is traced by a single incident. He was lying on a straw mattress, exhausted after torture, when a woman prisoner, whom he had never seen before, was thrust into the cell and he immediately gave her his bed and lay on the stone floor. Identifications were usually done from photographs. One of these showed the subject with a pleasant smile on his face. He was a prisoner in three camps in succession before he was murdered. He was identified by a Frenchman, among others, who had been his fellow-prisoner in the place where he was killed, and as he looked at the photograph he said these words: "C'est lui, c'est bien lui, c'est bien son charmant sourire." This boy had refused to salute any single one of his Gestapo captors. In their odious childish way the Germans were particularly infuriated by this, and wreaked vengeance on him by daily, hideous, and insane corporal punishments over a

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When I left him the title of a book, the best title, I have always thought, of any book written, kept repeating itself in my mind, *Grandeurs et Misères d'une Victoire*. Hope was not easy to feel then in those mourning valleys, but it were foolish to forget the audacity which had so marvellously sprung up there, spurned though it might be now because it had won only a freedom to mourn; it were equally foolish to forget the clear French spirit which had the courage to analyse, and from that, to overcome, the great grief which oppressed it.

THE END

