

PAINTING WAR: BY EGERIA CALVERT: ILLUSTRATED FROM UNPUBLISHED PIC- TURES MADE AT THE FRONT



O ver to the Gare de l'Est where the rank and file, the men of France, come in by hundreds after a year's absence in Champagne; look at the reality of those well worn *vareuses* and coarse *capotes*, buttoned beneath faces of humble mold, determination marked in their every bronzed line, strengthened in intelligence, like the less frequently occurring head of refiner type, by this year of tragic reflection. Or again, watch the same men in the almost more impressive moment of departure after their "four days" are over. "Can these people possibly be those excitable Latins, those overstrung, demonstrative Parisiens?" I am sure you would say as you realized that the goodbyes exchanged between those men in the well-worn *vareuses* and coarse *capotes* (now cleaned and brushed to a degree) and the women and children who stand beside them may be goodbye until eternity. The tension in the air almost makes your heart stop beating, but that all-enveloping, intangible sign is the only one to tell you that there is anything unusual going on. Such decency, such dignity! No brawling, no scenes! To a little woman who showed symptoms of tears I heard her companion say, as he pulled his shoulders up and straightened his *kepi* down over his eyes: "Remember, I'm a soldier again."

When you have looked upon scenes like this, when you have stood in awe before the enduring magnificence of the people of Rheims, as I did in the month of August past—I want to say, as I had the honor of doing—there is no need of protestation for the new era which history ever forces into the wake of fertilizing destruction.

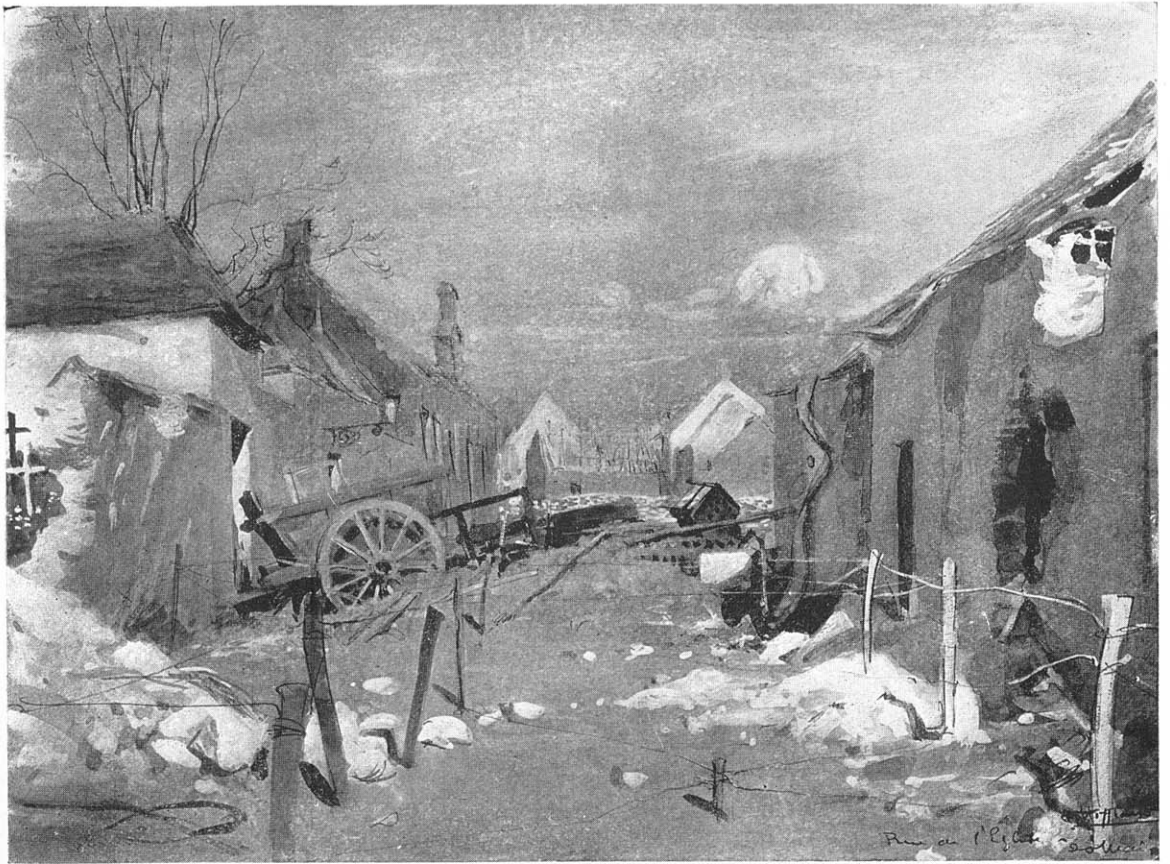
It began for us as early as the days of the battle of Charleroi. After the fifty-four-hour march therefrom, a young painter, Berne-Bellecour, found himself "reformed" in the *caserne* of his regiment at Fontainebleau, with nothing to do but ponder upon the scenes from which illness had separated him—the which he decided he would return to, at any cost. He asked for a "permission" and got it. Somewhere in Fontainebleau he found an old bicycle, and as fast as his tired legs could work its creaky propellers, he brought himself up with the body of the army, then advancing on the Marne. Just how Monsieur Berne-Bellecour got past those sentinels is almost unbelievable; for my own part, I would rather look a dozen frank, cyclopic cannon in the eye than to meet the two accusing optics of a single suspicious sentinel. A French uniform, a *livret militaire* and the fact of a man in soldier's clothes going toward the fight instead of away from it, may count for something in a war zone; however, he



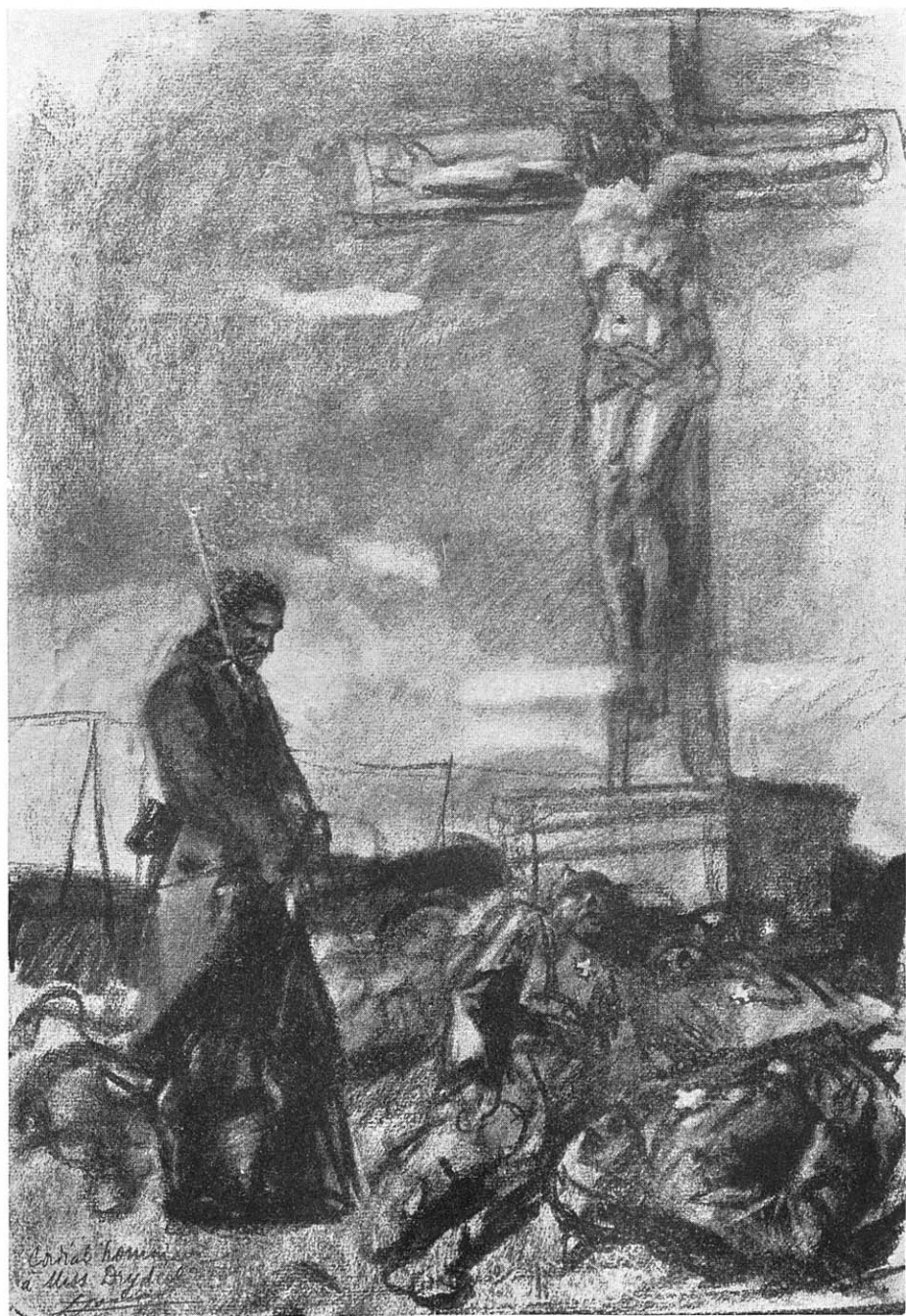
SOLDIER LEAVING THE TRENCHES:
From a painting by J. Berne-Bellecour.



LA VIERGE PENCHE-ALBERT:
From a painting by Charles Hoffbauer.



THE BARRICADE: From a painting by Charles Hoffbauer.



ROADSIDE SHRINE used as barricade: From a drawing by Lucien Jonas.

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managed it; in two or three days the first stage of a pretty feat of adventure was accomplished.

AND what did this young painter-fellow do when he got within sight of the great fight? When he took his stand within some friendly clump of trees, what was it that he sought to record in his faithful sketch book? Was it a general with acorn-covered cap basking beneath an unfurled tricolor; or clashing charges of cuirassiers, gold breasted; or dazzling, cubic puzzles of ever-marching legions? No, no; as he stood beneath some friendly clump of trees during those long autumn days, with the most economic box of colors that a painter ever depended upon poised before him, he recorded in his ever-faithful sketch book a wounded comrade limping away from the trenches over the shining, slippery ground; or perhaps another who had paused in the twilight to raise his *kepi* by a rough, white cross that bore a familiar number; or again, it might be a brown field with the setting sun reflected on an humble cottage, deserted, devastated—simple human things, not official war paintings, were recorded in that sketch book of Berne-Bellecour's. I've seen it!

As he worked, our soldier-painter often recalled a war painting—non-official we might call it for want of a better term—which you too may remember. Browsing about the Luxembourg Gallerie, you stopped, in the room next to the entrance, before a big light-flooded canvas by a master-brush, a scene of slim, bare poplar trees, outlined against a sky so luminous that a mist of smoke did not succeed in veiling it; a thick-set white horse standing in the foreground carried a boy whose bare head dropped upon his breast. How sternly, simply real it seemed! "Coin de Bataille" it was called, painted by Charles Hoffbauer in nineteen-four.

That picture was an innovation in war painting; Delacroix has shown himself less untrammelled here, surely less convincing; it was as real in matter as a photograph, but in spirit always the picture. From Meaux to Epernay, Berne-Bellecour saw Hoffbauer's "Coin de Bataille." Where was the man who had stolen that march on time? His loyal confrère had last heard of him in America, but every Frenchman was now in France. The upshot was a trip to Paris to seek him.

At the Invalides—at the Musée des Invalides to be exact—Berne-Bellecour found old General Niox and confessed his crime.

"How did you manage to keep out of trouble all these weeks?" asked the General.

"My plan was a homely one," replied the painter. "The worst that could happen to me was to be court martialed and that I knew I did not merit. For the rest, I was willing to run the risk. When the

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day's work went well in the field, I showed myself; when it did not, I laid low. Nothing more complicated, *mon General*, than the baldest knowledge of human weakness."

THEN he unfolded a plan that the turn in the war's nature made feasible. He pleaded that a few fellow-painters might be granted *permissions* from the trenches to visit with him some of those scenes which have made history in France during the past year. He asked for Hoffbauer, whom he learned had left off decorating the Confederate Memorial Hall in Richmond, U. S. A., to hasten to a trench in Champagne; for Jonas, who was at Soissons, and for Flameng, who was in the North.

And for once an old soldier listened to reason. France will owe to the perception of General Niox together with that of Monsieur Berne-Bellecour a record, invaluable in its unique sincerity, of this transition in her history as well as in her art.

In his method, Berne-Bellecour has broken as far away from the precepts of his master Détaillé as it is possible for two divergent points of the same range to be. The direct antithesis of the dapper creatures by Détaillé is this simple figure by his pupil, as unaffectedly named as it is painted: "Wounded Soldier Leaving the Trenches." A technique for describing wet earth, that I have never seen in the work of any other painter, adds a new point of interest to the artist's feeling for the setting.

Lucien Jonas finds symbolism at every turn, symbolism without sentimentality; his medium, fusain or colored crayon by preference, together with his rapid way of working, holding back any such tendency, if it ever existed. There is a vigor in his stroke, a power in his conception entirely unexpected in the subjects that seek him—yes, we feel convinced by his utter unconsciousness that he has never gone out of his way to look for this "Roadside Shrine used as Barricade" or any of the other paintings. His portrait sketches of many generals and more officers of the army of Joffre revealing in a single, instantaneous line these hardest working men of the hour.

Those who know the work of Charles Hoffbauer (recently become Corporal Hoffbauer) in the museums of Pittsburgh, Chicago and San Francisco, or in his exhibitions at Knoedler's, will find in his most recent output an increase of strength in that flexibility of brushwork which characterizes it, while his color, if a trifle less poetic than in the days of the mystic "Sur les Toits," has gained in depth and purity. Ever the ardent student of chiaroscuro, he shows us the trench scene: at daybreak, in moonlight, in camp-light, drifting from one to the other with an intensity of enjoyment akin to that of the musician transposing his theme.

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DAWN, all violet and rose, changes a humble, ruined hamlet into an opal. This picture, which in many hands might have become over-melodious, derives great vigor through daring glints of yellow and the aggressive forms of its crumbling walls; a spring flower rising from the white-cross-marked grave of the soldier tempts one to give the name of Resurrection to the deserted scene, which takes its title "The Barricade," from a cob-web of barbed wires in the foreground. A rarely big picture, in subject and rendering, is contained in the limits of this eight by twelve slip of Watman board.

Under a sky steely wet, a train of leaden gray gun carriages, ploughing through the mud of Albert's highway, seems especially detailed there in order to throw into relief the warm, red ruins alongside, washed clean by the descending torrents like the slender virgin who leans from the high church tower, a delicate, slanting ray of rain-washed gold: "La Vierge Penché à Albert."

The mural decoration, which awaits Mr. Hoffbauer's return at the Confederate Memorial Museum of Richmond, Virginia, need not regret this break in its accomplishing.

I think, though few in number, that these examples are characteristic of the work done by the Commission Militaire of the Musée des Invalides, work which has, to the best of my knowledge, been gleaned in a manner unprecedented in the history of art. Imagine the satisfaction of those painters who have participated in it! Yet, the story goes, that one at least among them returned to the monotony of his trench life some weeks since by his own request. The remaining permissions are also over now, the curator of the Invalides has gathered in his multi-colored harvest, and it has not only been my privilege to anticipate the public in seeing the collection, but also to obtain first reproductions of several of the works.

