



## THE PRICE OF GLORY

Sir Alistair Horne was born in London in 1925, and has spent much of his life abroad, including periods at schools in the United States and Switzerland. He served with the R.A.F. in Canada in 1943 and ended his war service with the rank of Captain in the Coldstream Guards attached to MI5 in the Middle East. He then went up to Jesus College, Cambridge, where he read English Literature and played international ice-hockey. After leaving Cambridge, Sir Alistair concentrated on writing: he spent three years in Germany as correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph* and speaks fluent French and German. His books include *Back into Power* (1955); *The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916* (Hawthornden Prize, 1963); *The Fall of Paris: The Siege and the Commune 1970–71* (1965); *To Lose A Battle: France 1940* (1969); *Small Earthquake in Chile* (1972, paperback reissued 1999); *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954–62* won both the *Yorkshire Post* Book of the Year Prize and the Wolfson History Award in 1978 (revised paperback edition 2006). His other publications include *The French Army and Politics 1870–1970* (1984), which was awarded the Enid Macleod Prize in 1985, *Harold Macmillan, Volumes I and II* (1988–91), *A Bundle from Britain* (1993), a memoir about the USA and World War II; *The Lonely Leader: Monty 1944–1945* (1996); *Seven Ages of Paris: Portrait of a City* (2003); *Friend or Foe: A History of France* (2004) and *The Age of Napoleon* (2004). In 1969 he founded a Research Fellowship for young historians at St Antony's College, Oxford. In 1992 he was awarded the CBE; in 1993 he received the French Légion d'Honneur for his work on French history and his Litt.D. from Cambridge University. He was knighted in 2003. He is currently working on an authorised biography of Henry Kissinger, as well as a second volume of his own memoirs.

# THE PRICE OF GLORY

VERDUN 1916



PENGUIN BOOKS

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This Western-front business couldn't be done again, not for a long time. The young men think they could do it again but they couldn't. They could fight the first Marne again but not this. This took religion and years of plenty and tremendous sureties and the exact relation that existed between the classes. The Russians and Italians

weren't any good on this front. You had to have a whole-souled sentimental  
equipment going back further than you could remember. You had to remember  
Christmas, and postcards of the Crown Prince and his fiancée, and little cafés in  
Valence and beer gardens in Unter den Linden and weddings at the Mairie, and going  
to the Derby, and your grandfather's whiskers.... This was a love-battle – there was  
a century of middle-class love spent here.... All my beautiful lovely safe world blew  
itself up here with a great gust of high explosive love....

F. SCOTT-FITZGERALD, *Tender is the Night*

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## PREFACE

In November of this year (1993), three-quarters of a century will have passed since the Armistice of November 1918 brought to a close the 'War to End All Wars', while it is now exactly thirty years since *The Price of Glory* was first published. Miraculously, it has remained in print ever since. It was written in a time of (relative) peace and prosperity. The Korean War had ended ten years previously. In the 'you've-never-had-it-so-good' years, Harold Macmillan and John F. Kennedy were at the helm; in Europe, de Gaulle and Adenauer had clasped hands on a new *entente* between the French and the Germans, marking an end to the old, murderous rivalry. The thought of another European war seemed to belong to a distant age of darkness and folly. At about the same time, several of us British writers, in our thirties, who had grown up or served in World War II, wrote books about that first conflict. In our latter-day superiority we chastised our foolish ancestors for letting it all happen, almost by mistake as it were, and letting it happen that way. They were *donkeys*. In our enlightened world, the Somme and Verdun could never be repeated, said Scott Fitzgerald's Dick Diver, stricken by a visit to Verdun a few years after the battle. If there ever had to be war again, then World War II with its tanks and aircraft and Blitzkriegs showed that there were better ways of waging it than by hurling tens of thousands of men to certain death across the mud of No-Man's-Land.

Our generation knew better.

Through the finely tuned balance of terror between the two superpowers that later became known as MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction), and was perhaps not so mad after all, the Verduns and Sommes continued unthinkable. Perhaps in our self-satisfaction we chose to suppress the unpalatable truth that World War II had not really been won by tanks and aircraft, but by the Verduns fought out of sight of our Western eyes in the East, at Stalingrad and before Leningrad; where hundreds of thousands of Soviet and German infantrymen had died, in appalling battles of attrition, just as they had a quarter of a century previously. The reality is that, between two equally powerful modern industrial states, total war costs lives.

From the recent release of records in Havana and Moscow, we now discover that during the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 – the very month that *The Price of Glory* was first published – the world had actually come closer to a nuclear *Götterdämmerung* than we, or even our enlightened leaders, had ever understood at the time; the deaths from which would

have made Verdun look like a little local skirmish. Since then, apart from a series of quick but indecisive wars in the Middle East, we have had the prolonged nightmare of Vietnam, so demoralising to a generation of Americans, and with it the attendant horrors of Pol Pot's Cambodia, a holocaust every bit as bloodily evil as anything seen at Verdun. We have seen the seven-year-long war of attrition between Iraq and Iran, with its static battles that were miniatures of the Western Front. And then, barely was the Cold War won than, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and with the disappearance of MAD, there was war, murderous, vicious, in Europe once again; in those very same Balkan provinces of old Austro-Hungary where the ineluctable descent to Verdun had all begun in 1914.

Have we learnt anything?

The genesis of *The Price of Glory* dates back to the 1950s, when – as a young foreign correspondent in Germany – I lived amid the visible legacy of that last bout of Franco-German hostility, which was then still all too tangible. Now that relations between France and Germany, the root of evil in the world I had grown up in, had already taken such a miraculous turn, I began thinking of a book (it ended as a trilogy) which might trace the lethal course of these relations over the preceding century. A first visit to the sinister hills of Verdun engendered emotions that were never quite to leave me alone – fascinated by the story, and its profound historic consequences, admiring of the staggering courage of those, on both sides, who fought there, but appalled by the waste and sheer stupidity.

No other book I have ever written affected me quite so deeply; the tears came again and again. It was, unashamedly, an *anti-war* book.

Over the past thirty years, gratifyingly, the letters have flowed in from all over the world (perhaps most, curiously enough, from the United States), with the powerful reactions of readers to the battlefield, old photographs, the reminiscences of survivors and descendants, and sometimes deeply moving verses. Earlier, there were the ghosts, the reappearance of those long-assumed dead – like Lieutenant Eugen Radtke, the first German officer into 'impregnable' Fort Douaumont (see [p. 124](#)), making, in the 1960s, his first appearance in Paris from East Germany, the only time in his seventy years that he had travelled further west than Douaumont (He died shortly afterwards.)

Surprisingly, in all the volume of correspondence, little caused me to want to change more than a line or two in successive editions. There was the elderly Frenchman, ex-Lieutenant Kléber Dupuy, a hero of both wars, and very probably the last officer to stand in the way of

the final German, last-gasp, effort to take Verdun, atop Fort Souville on 12 July 1916. He complained that – in the (not very immaculate) French translation – I had suggested that he had taken refuge within the fort (see [pp. 299–300, 346](#)). Unhesitatingly, I altered the record and we became firm pen pals. Otherwise, there was virtually nothing. The record seemed to start on its own.

At Verdun today, one of the forts, Troyon, has been sold off (for a mere 100,000 francs) and is now a mushroom farm; the sad little plaque on Fort Vaux, once placed there by an unknown French mother, ‘To my son, since your eyes were closed mine have never ceased to cry’, has disappeared, vandalised. The pine forests that were once planted to hide, mercifully, the tormented soil of the Mort Homme have now been felled and replanted. But the hard core of Verdun will, one feels, survive as long as the French nation itself. In the wilderness, battered and crumbling, there still lie concealed, like Shelley’s Ozymandias, half-forgotten monuments to the folly, pride and heroism that epitomised what we still call ‘the Great War’. They continue to take their toll, at regular intervals, from the foolhardy tourist rashly questing for trophies or the ruins of deserted forts, and stumbling up against a still lethal shell. The busloads of Germans continue to flow up to Fort Douaumont, seeking the place where a grandfather or great-grandfather fell.

In the half-dozen or more times that I have been there since writing *The Price of Glory*, I never fail to be haunted by the majesty of the place – and the sadness. In 1966, at the sombre fiftieth anniversary commemorations, I found myself within a few feet of General de Gaulle. Erect as a ramrod he stood until the lengthy *Son et Lumière* presentation reached the date when he, de Gaulle, had fallen wounded in the battle and had been captured. Then he turned on his heel and left. Perhaps it was too much to bear, even for that icy titan. (Nearly two decades later it was also to Verdun that de Gaulle’s successor, François Mitterrand, came solemnly to seal the end of Franco-German enmity by shaking hands with Chancellor Kohl on that savage battlefield.

When I was last there, lecturing to a battalion of Grenadier Guards, the young officers were reduced in short order to respectful silence by the tragedy of the place, for all its distance in history. One remarked to me, ‘Do you know, there are no birds here.’ Until that moment, I had thought that I was the only person to have experienced that peculiar sense of utter desolation.

One of the most dread aspects of Verdun was how, after the first three months, the battle

seemed somehow to have rid itself of all human direction and to have taken over. One German thought there could be no end to it

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until the last German and the last French hobbled out of the trenches on crutches to exterminate each other with pocket knives ...

Strangely, Scott Fitzgerald called Verdun 'a love-battle'. Between the simple, slaughtered infantrymen on opposing sides, there was indeed a special kind of compassion, almost amounting to love. But there was too much hatred at the top which kept the battle going. For 1916 would, in a rational world, have been a good year to have ended the war, along lines of exhaustion. That courageous old nobleman, Lord Lansdowne, tried, but was shouted down as little better than a traitor.

As civil war rages in the Balkans and old animosities between Britain and Germany seem to be bursting forth anew, one realizes with alarm just what a frightening amount of hatred there is loose in today's world. Could a Verdun ever happen again? There were moments during the Cold War – perhaps some would conclude that October 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis, was one of them – when, for the West to survive, it had to show itself at least morally prepared to fight a Verdun. Of all the thousands of epitaphs written on the Battle of Verdun, the one that remains ever in my mind is that written by a Frenchman, Jean Dutourd, deploring the moral debility of his countrymen in 1940: 'War is less costly than servitude,' he declared; *'The choice is always between Verdun and Dachau.'* Perhaps it still is; but it would be hard to find a more terrible choice for the human race.

# LA DÉBÂCLE

*'... car la Revanche doit venir lente peut-être  
Mais en tout cas fatale et terrible à coup sûr  
La Haine est déjà née, et la force va naître  
C'est un faucheur à voir si le champ n'est pas mûr.'*

PAUL DÉROULÈDE

THREE and a half years elapsed between the First Battle of the Marne, when the Kaiser's army reached the gates of Paris, and Ludendorff's last-gasp offensive that so nearly succeeded in the Spring of 1918. During this time the Germans remained on the defensive behind a brilliantly prepared and almost impregnable line, while the French and British wasted themselves against it in vain, at an unimaginable cost in human lives.

Only once did the Germans deviate from this strategy that paid so handsomely. In February 1916, they attacked in the Verdun sector, catching the French there thoroughly by surprise. Compared with the seven German armies that marched into France in 1914 and Ludendorff's sixty-three divisions that struck at Haig in 1918, this assault on Verdun with only nine divisions was but a small affair. A small affair; yet out of it grew what those who took part in it considered to be the grimmest battle in all that grim war, perhaps in History itself. Certainly it was the longest battle of all time, and during the ten months it lasted nearly three-quarters of the French Army were drawn through it. Though other battles of the First War exacted a higher toll, Verdun came to gain the unenviable reputation of being the battlefield with the highest density of dead per square yard that has probably ever been known. Above all, the battle was a watershed of prime importance in the First War. Before it Germany still had a reasonable chance of winning the war; in the course of those ten months this chance dwindled away. Beyond it, neither the French nor the German army would be quite the same again; Verdun marked the point at which, among the Allies, the main burden of the war passed from France to Britain, and its influence upon America's eventual entry in the war cannot be overlooked.

In the aftermath, too, Verdun was to become a sacred national legend, and universally a household word for fortitude, heroism and suffering; but it was also a modern synonym for a Pyrrhic Victory. Long after the actual war was over, the effects of this one battle lingered on in France. Of the men to arise from the triumph of Verdun, one in particular will be forever associated with the appalling tragedy of a generation later, and today the marks of Verdun



upon France and the French have not been eradicated. Behind the scribbles of *'De Gaulle ne passera pas'* on Algerian walls lies perhaps more than just the adaptation of a famous battle-cry.

'This Western-front business couldn't be done again,' declares Dick Diver in *Tender is the Night*. He was right, as 1940 proved; the nearest the Second World War came to it was at Stalingrad, often referred to as a Russian 'Verdun'. The explanation of why there was no 'Western-front business' in 1940, why the German Panzers went rolling round the Maginot Line with such ease, why there was a Maginot Line at all, cannot be explained without reference to the happenings at Verdun in 1916.

Similarly to see how the German forces came to stand before Verdun in 1916, why they chose to attack what was reputedly the strongest fortress in Europe, and why the French withstood their attack with such incredible steadfastness, one needs to hark back to yet an earlier war — to the fateful year of 1870.

\* \* \*

Six weeks after France had declared war that summer, the last Emperor of the French, his face rouged to conceal the agonies caused by a monstrous bladder stone, was on his way to captivity in Germany. Within another four-and-a-half months, at Versailles in the great palace that bears the inscription *'à toutes les Gloires de la France'*, and beneath a painting of Frenchmen chastising Germans, the Prussian King had himself proclaimed Kaiser. When at last the peace was signed, the conquerors insisted that its terms embrace a triumphal march through Paris, and only massed French citizens were able to prevent the Uhlans from perpetrating the ultimate insult of riding through the Arc de Triomphe.

One would have to search diligently through the pages of history to find a more dramatic instance of what the Greeks called *peripeteia*, or reversal of fortune. Where before has a nation of such grandeur (indeed, *La Grande Nation*), brimming over with hubris and refulgence with material achievement, been subjected to worse humiliation within so short a space of time? And when has a military power as assured in traditions of soldierly prowess been more shamefully defeated? In July 1870, Louis Napoleon's forces had set off, optimistically entitled 'The Army of the Rhine', and lavishly equipped with maps of Germany, though none of France. After two minor defeats that were far from decisive, the French Army never ceased retreating. Old crones along the route jeered at the dispirited, bedraggled soldiery. The vigilant Uhlans pursued them; now like a pack of wolves, waiting for stragglers; now like

beaters, driving the frightened coveys towards the guns. Finally, half the army under Bazaine was herded into Metz, where it surrendered after doing nothing for two months. Into the trap at Sedan, just forty miles downstream from Verdun, went the other half, under MacMahon and accompanied by the Emperor himself. *‘Nous sommes dans un pot de chambre et nous y serons emmerdés!’* remarked General Ducrot. The words might have applied to the whole bitter sense of total disgrace felt by the French Army after 1870. It was a terrible slur to be faced by the heirs of Henri IV and Condé, Turenne and Saxe, not to mention the great Bonaparte — by soldiers who, down through the ages, had considered themselves to be *the* warrior race of Europe.

The results of Louis Napoleon’s ill-advised declaration of war were to alter the character of war itself as much as they were to affect the future of all Europe. The employment of mass conscript armies and the merciless sieges where civilians had been indiscriminately blown to pieces by long-range guns introduced a new savagery into warfare, which for some centuries had been a reasonably gentlemanly affair. The harsh Prussian peace terms, requiring the surrender of two of France’s richest provinces and the payment of reparations on an unprecedented scale — so that the war would cost the loser nearly ten times as much as the victors — instilled a new bitterness into European relations. And the French Army would never forget its degradation.

\* \* \*

In 1871, France was exhausted, bankrupt, demoralised; the countryside ravaged and torn by civil war of the most brutal kind. France has frequently astonished the world by her recuperative ability which stems from the intrinsic richness of a country twice as large as the British Isles, and her great resources of human energy — so often dissipated in the boudoir and the political lobby. Never, though, has her recovery been so rapid or so remarkable as after the catastrophe of 1870-1. The legacy of the war was soon liquidated. A scapegoat to bear the collective disgrace of the army was speedily found in the form of Bazaine. Well ahead of schedule, the crushing £200,000,000 of reparations were paid off, and in September 1873 the last Prussian soldiers left French soil. The French economy began to flourish as never before; the Paris Exposition of 1878 showed Europe that the affluence of the latter-day Second Empire was back again, though now a more solid achievement lay beneath the glittering surface.

Nowhere was the renaissance more striking than in the army. A new type of dedicated

young officer — like Ferdinand Foch who, as an 18-year-old student, had seen Louis-Napoleon trail sick and defeated through Metz — strode forward to replace the fops of the Second Empire with their emulative Imperials. A new spirit ran through the whole army, determined to expunge the recent blots on its reputation. With it went a passion for study, replacing the traditions of the café and the vacuous routine of garrison life. It formed a marked contrast to the days when MacMahon had threatened: 'I shall remove from the promotion list any officer whose name I read on the cover of a book'. Penetrating studies were made of the 1870 campaign, and in their sweeping reorganisation, the army leaders made no bones about imitating the conqueror. Three successive laws provided France for the first time with universal military service (of the exceptional length of five years) and a cadre of reserves. Under General Lewal a Staff College was created to lay the foundations for something better than the inefficient old General Staff disbanded by the reformers, and later under General Miribel the *État Major de l'Armée* was formed. In peace, its role was to prepare for war and — notably — to plan the details of mobilisation in which France had been so deficient in 1870; in war, it was to provide the command of France's principal group of armies. Thus, in embryo, came to life the famous *Grand Quartier Général*, or G.Q.G. In 1886, the French army adopted the first model of the Lebel rifle that it would go to war with in 1914; about the same time were laid down the calibres of guns that were used in the war; and a few years later high explosive Lyddite replaced black powder as a filling for shells.

Of all the military reorganisation undertaken by France after 1871, little concerns this story more than the defensive measures she carried out on her new frontier. (By a chain of cause and effect they were, moreover, to make inevitable Britain's participation in the First War; though this could hardly be foreseen at the time.) The War of 1870 had been fought, on paper, more or less between equals. But now any thoughtful Frenchman could reasonably predict that disparity between the two nations would grow with increasing rapidity; the Germans were breeding faster and, with the transfer of Alsace-Lorraine, their industrial power was bound to expand more rapidly. However successful the reorganisation of the French army, it alone could now hardly suffice to protect France against Germany. In addition, the re-drawn frontier brought the hereditary enemy to less than two hundred miles from Paris, with no natural barrier like the Rhine or the Vosges in between. Thus a sapper general called Serré de Rivières was entrusted with the construction of a defensive system on a scale never before contemplated, and only to be outdone by Maginot. Instead of convertin

one or two cities into fortified camps, like Metz, which in 1870 had turned out to be an insidious trap, de Rivières built a continuous line of sunken forts; or rather, two continuous lines. On the Swiss frontier, the system was anchored on Belfort and ran uninterruptedly along the line of hills to Épinal. At the old fortress town of Toul on the Moselle the line began again, along the heights on the right bank of the Meuse, to Verdun. North of Verdun was the dense Argonne, and then the Ardennes, through which (until von Manstein showed the way in 1940) it was assumed no invading army could manoeuvre. Between the linchpins of Toul and Épinal, de Rivières ingeniously left a forty-mile gap in the defences, called the '*Trouée de Charmes*'. It was like a gateway in a wall, intended (perhaps a little naïvely) to entice within and canalise any German invasion, so that the French mass of manoeuvre lying in wait could then conveniently drive into both its flanks and eventually close in behind. Of course, the Belgian frontier was left unfortified, save for a few scattered fortresses like Lille and Maubeuge. It was Verdun, with its vital position, already fortified by Vauban — and indeed as far back as the Romans — that was both the principal strongpoint of, and key to, the whole system.

Fifteen years after Sedan the French Army had regained both its defensive and offensive power to such an extent that it might well have triumphed in a fresh war with Germany; which, in the way of victors, had begun to rest on its laurels. Bismarck, reflecting anxiously on his own maxim 'a generation that has taken a thrashing is always followed by one that deals out the thrashings', thought more than once of a preventive war. For although France's military dispositions were mainly defensive, occasionally she emitted sounds revealing that notions of '*revanche*' never lay very far beneath the surface. French officers' messes took symbolic joy in bowling over skittles shaped like portly Prussian soldiers; while, just across the frontier, German reservists at Metz sipped their beer out of *steins* covered with such fierce inscriptions as '*Kanonendonner ist unser Gruss*' and

He who on France's border stood guard  
Has deserved, as a soldier, his reward.

No cabaret or fête was complete without the appearance, greeted with wild enthusiasm, of an Alsatian girl in national costume. There was the fire-eating League of Patriots formed by Déroulède, who had been at Sedan as a private in the Zouaves, and who was now dedicated to keeping alight the flame of revenge. Finally, there was the outburst of jingoism which found expression through General Boulanger. In 1886, the British Ambassador wrote home

caustically: ‘The Republic here has lasted sixteen years and that is about the time which it takes to make the French tired of a form of government.’ It was true, insofar as the leaders of the *Troisième* already stood in the customary repute of politicians in France. Suddenly the emotions of Paris and much of France were ignited by the swashbuckling magnificence of the Minister of War, General Boulanger, who appeared mounted on a superb charger at the July 14th parade at Longchamps. Without enquiring too deeply where he might lead them, the masses made Boulanger their idol overnight. During the nine days’ Boulangist wonder, inflammatory songs were heard in the street that seemed painfully evocative of the summer of 1870:

*Regardez-le là-bas! Il nous sourit et passe:  
Il vient de délivrer la Lorraine et l’Alsace.*

In Berlin, Bismarck’s finger crooked round the trigger, but, fortunately for the peace of Europe, Boulanger soon committed suicide upon his mistress’s grave, ‘dying’, in the words of Clemenceau’s savage epitaph, ‘as he had lived, like a subaltern’.

With the ridiculous Boulanger, much of the hard-earned esteem of the new French army also passed away. In 1889 a new act reduced military service from five to three years. Militarism cannot be sustained for long without promise of fulfilment. And there were some appealing distractions to mitigate the pain of the amputated territories. The great age of nineteenth-century expansion meant the prospect of colonial acquisitions, and France hastened to join in the rush; cheered on from the sidelines by Bismarck, as he murmured ‘My map of Africa lies in Europe.’ As Algeria had made up for Waterloo, so Morocco and Tunisia, West Africa, Madagascar and Indo-China helped make up for Alsace-Lorraine. By 1914, France ruled over nearly four million square miles abroad, with fifty million inhabitants, the second greatest colonial empire in the world. Admittedly, in the eyes of some soldiers none of it was worth an acre of what was lost in 1871, but, for the time being, they were in the minority. As it was (a factor which Bismarck had certainly never calculated upon), France’s empire made her a great deal richer and more powerful when war finally came, as well as providing her with an additional 500,000 excellent troops.

Life in France was wonderfully good, too, during the three decades that spanned the century’s turn. ‘*La Vie Douce*’ could barely convey all it meant, though the Germans’ envious expression of ‘content as God in France’ perhaps came closer. Never had there been so much for so many. It was the epoch of the Eiffel Tower, of Degas and Renoir, Lautrec and Monet;

of *bistros* and the Moulin de la Gallette, Maxims and the *Lapin Agile*, the *Folies-Bergère* and the *Palais de Glace*; of Verlaine and Rimbaud, Zola and Sarah Bernhardt, Debussy and Ravel, and later, Péguy and Apollinaire; of provocative *horizontales* and *hôtels particuliers*, of picnics and gay phaetons in the Bois, where the new trees were already growing up to replace those that had been felled for fuel during the Siege. It was an epoch seething with ideas and creation. Every day there seemed to be something new; inventions like electricity and the telephone were now yoked to man's service, and new medical discoveries to enable him to enjoy it all a little longer. The bicycle and *le football* introduced new pleasures; the Orient Express and *Wagons Lits* brought new and wider worlds within range of Paris. Once again she assumed her eminence as the world's centre of culture and pleasure (it seemed impossible that the Commune had ever happened) and national pride was further inflated by Blériot's feat and a series of sporting triumphs. In the realm of economics, marvels were wrought, and almost overnight, it seemed, France became a great industrial power. Jointly with Britain, she was known as the 'banker of the universe'. In every sense, it was the epoch of '*enrichissez-vous*' in which, for the first time, bourgeoisie, peasants and even workers participated alike. (Only the wine-growers, their vines stricken with deadly phylloxera, seemed to be left out.) The newly powerful trades unions were seeing that a good part of the workers' demands were fulfilled; and who could complain when a carafe of wine cost you thirty centimes and you could buy a turkey for seven francs? As in Adenauer's 'No Experiments' Germany of today material prosperity distracts minds from grieving unduly over the Oder-Neisse, so in France *la vie douce* was altogether too good for one to think sombre thoughts of arms and revenge.

Then, there was the Dreyfus Affair, or simply *The Affair*, which for more than a decade focused the passions and attention of the entire country, averting its eyes from the clouds that were now mounting over the horizon. At this distance, it is difficult to appreciate the bitterness generated by The Affair, where even the highest in the land were involved. (The newly-elected pro-Dreyfus President had his top hat cleft on Auteuil race course by the cane of an anti-Dreyfusard baron.) In the army, where The Affair had its origins, national divisions were magnified and particularly disastrous. Broadly, the cleavage fell between the conservative, traditionalist, partly Monarchist and largely Catholic, caste of the army and the new, Republican, progressive and often anti-clerical elements of post-1870. When Dreyfus was finally cleared, the army leaders who had ranged themselves solidly against the wretched man sent the army several leagues further down the road of disrepute where Boulanger had

first guided it.

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Following on the heels of The Affair, and closely linked with it, came a measure which, to English minds, smacked of Henry VIII in the twentieth century. In 1902, Emile Combes, an anti-clerical politician, possessed of all the prejudices of a small-town provincial, came to power determined to complete the separation of Church and State in France. He passed a law expelling all 'unauthorised' religious orders (some of which had admittedly intervened in a most rashly improper fashion during The Affair). Schools were closed, even religious processions were stopped, and, in the expropriations of nunneries and monasteries, wanton pillaging occurred. The army was finally called in to effect the expropriations, thereby confronting its officers with a grave issue of conscience, parallel to that experienced by the British army over the 'Curragh Mutiny' a few years later. Typical was the case of a French Lieutenant-Colonel who, on asking what his superior was going to do, was told 'I have' flu'; whereupon, in a rage transcending rank, he seized the regimental commander fiercely, shouting, 'I suppose when the war comes you will have'flu too!' M. Combes' law exacerbated divisions within the army, to a large extent widening the same chasm dug by The Affair. Worst of all, as a result of The Affair, the responsibility for promotions had been transferred from the army commission to the Minister of War, and now the newly-appointed, anti-clerical General André abused his power deplorably. Officers were set to spying on each other; the Grand Orient Lodge of the Free Masons was used as an intelligence service to establish dossiers on their religious persuasions; promotion became more a matter of an officer's political views, and particularly to which church, and how often, he went on Sundays, than of merit. Thus, as late as 1917, the newly-appointed and respectably Protestant Commander-in-Chief, General Nivelle, could fly into a temper on discovering that his HQ had once been a Catholic Priests' seminary. Officers like Foch, whose brother was a Jesuit, and de Castelnau, who was accompanied to the wars by his own private chaplain, would always be at a disadvantage, and it was no coincidence that in 1911 the office of the new Chief of the General Staff, fell to a general who ostentatiously ate meat on Good Friday.

The Affair, Combes and André were followed by the most intense bout of Socialist-led anti-militarism, that France had experienced since 1870. All politicians alike distrusted the General Staff, and the repute of the army sank to its lowest ebb. In 1905, a new Act reduced military service to two years, and with it the army declined from 615,000 men to 540,000; in 1906, a regiment in the South of France mutinied when called to suppress an uprising of the

ruined winegrowers; in 1907 thirty-six per cent of territorials due for service failed to report.

And all this at a time when the danger from without was growing ever more menacing. In Germany, the reins had been wrenched from the hands of Bismarck, who at least had wanted peace and had known how to keep it. Instead, there was the new Kaiser with his bellicose moustaches, a mass of Adlerian complexes attributable to his withered arm, who was capable of such wild switches of both mood and policy that even prominent Germans wondered whether he was quite normal and recalled the 'Sibyl of Silesia's' prophesy of a hundred years earlier — that under this king catastrophe would come to Germany. The Kaiser, having duly noted all that was passing in France and egged on by the now ascendant warlords of the General Staff, was enticed to commit that deadly sin of great leaders; speculation. He began by butting into Morocco, with little idea of what he hoped to achieve and less of how it would all end.

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After the Agadir crisis of 1911, a sharp accentuation of military fervour took place in both France and Germany. Many young men now came to agree with Stendhal that *'La perfection de la civilisation serait de combiner tous les plaisirs délicats du dix-neuvième siècle avec la présence plus fréquente du danger.'* They did not concern themselves too much with what shapes that danger might assume. In France, the swing from the anti-militarism of a few years earlier was particularly marked. Maurice Barrès, haunted by boyhood memories of drunken French soldiers crawling back defeated from battle, had succeeded Déroulède; taking it upon himself to teach French youth how to die beautifully (and, more dangerously, to despise German arms), he enjoyed a far greater vogue in his writings than Déroulède himself.

In 1913, the restoration of military service to three years was greeted with remarkably good humour by the nation at large. On the brink of war, the rifts within the country and the army caused by The Affair and M. Combes appeared to heal almost miraculously. A staunch *'revanchist'* from Lorraine and legal adviser to the Schneider-Creusot arms empire, Raymond Poincaré, had been elected President, and the country was whole-heartedly behind him. When the *'Union Sacrée'* coalition was formed to prosecute the war, all politicians, even the left-wing pacifists, backed it in a degree of loyalty and unity that had not been seen in France since Napoleon I (nor was it to be seen again in the Third, Fourth or even Fifth Republics). In 1914, the Chief of the Sûreté could remark confidently, 'the workers will not rise; they will follow the regimental bands,' and even septuagenarian, anti-militarist Anatole France tried to



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