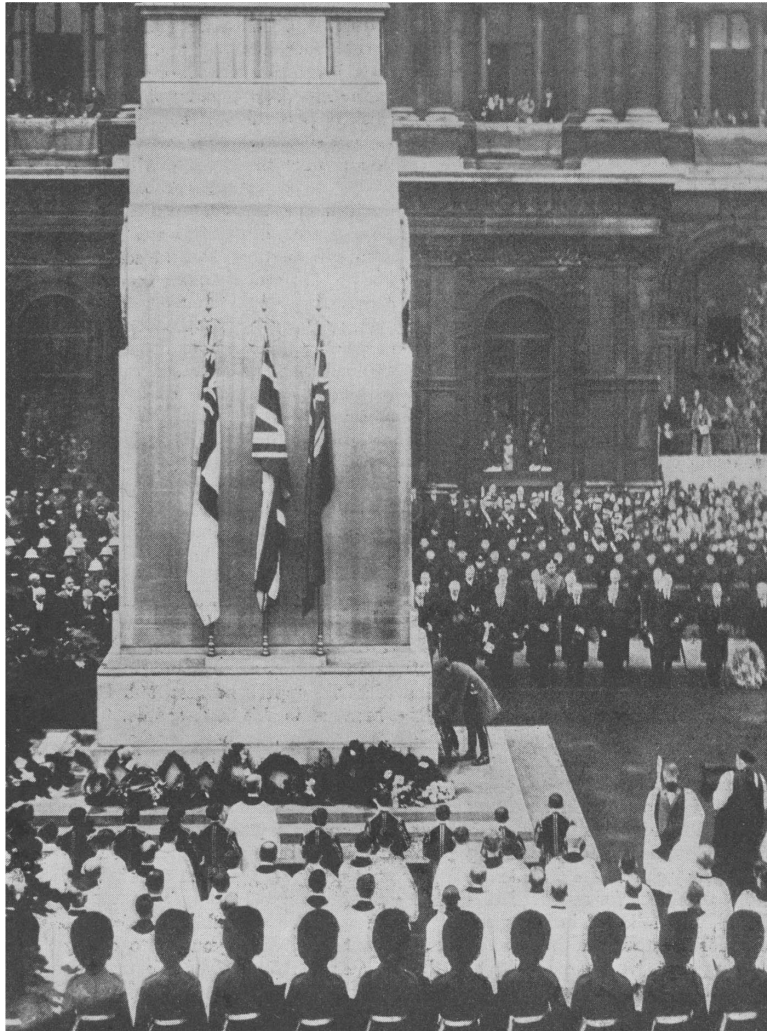


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Three ARMISTICE DAYS

By
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An empire is hushed as a sovereign pays homage—the late King George V laying a wreath at the base of the Cenotaph, Whitehall

ST. NAZAIRE, 1918. It was eleven in the morning when we first heard the news. A piercing whistle from one of the steamers in the harbor, a sudden blast so loud and so startling that even the nurses in their rest camp in La Baule fifteen kilometers away could hear it. A whistle that made everyone sit up. Was it another false alarm? One hardly dared hope. Deceptions and mistakes had made us cautious. We poured into the streets; shopgirls from the Galleries and the small stores along the Rue Ville-es-Martin, doughboys and wounded on crutches from the Base Hospital, workers from the docks, French soldiers on leave, and Y girls in uniform. No, it was not false. It was true. There was the poster. A weary little old man in a cap was sticking it against a wall with a brush and a pot of paste:

L'ARMISTICE EST SIGNÉ.

That single shriek now became a roar. This was the real thing. You could distinguish the various elements composing the roar—the big steam crane on the pier which could pick up a ten-ton locomotive as you pick up a fork, the huge liners like the *Aeolus* and the *Martha Washington* unloading in the shipyard, motorcars, trucks, dock engines, the tiny tramp steamers discharging coal from Cardiff and iron from Wales, the small boats in the Bassin—all joined in the increasing din.

By magic every house now blossomed into color. Flags were at every window, flags of France and the Allies, flags of the United States and France. The posters appeared on every street corner. They invited the populace to "pavoiser" and informed them that a parade would take place at three in the afternoon. Messieurs the citizens were requested to take part. As the streets filled with a delirious mob the noise increased. A truck load of German prisoners rolled past, apparently quite as happy as the rest of us. A big motor bus from Montoir loaded with colored stevedores, its horn tied down, careened through the Rue Thiers, missed a lamp post, almost ran down the excited traffic officer in the Place Carnot, and narrowly missed a sour-faced major general who stalked disconsolately

across into the Rue du Croisic. After all, his job was through.

By noon the entire town was outdoors. Despite regulations every café in the city was open and doing business. After lunch there was a concert on the Boulevard de l'Océan by French and American bands, the latter obliging with "Where Do We Go From Here?"—a number that made a pronounced and immediate hit with the doughboys. Then came the parade. An American band led the line, next the mayor with several high American officers, then the town officials all dressed in their Sunday black. After them a heterogeneous mass of humanity. Men and women and children all carrying flags, all singing different songs at the

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-the second of four pages-

same time in two different tongues. Some were even sober.

Up at the Base Hospital we had to be in early, Armistice Night or not. But all through the long evening I could hear them under my window as they passed along the Rue de la Paix, French and American, black and white, sailors from the ships and poilus from the big caserne on the Guérande road, women from the upper part of town and women from the buvettes and bistros of the port, all kinds, all races, drunk and sober, noisy and noisier, but everyone happy, happy, happy. Exultantly their voices rang through the misty darkness of the French twilight.

"Madelon, Madelon, Madelon . . . and I sez to her, I sez, voulez . . . mérité bien de la République . . . boy, yo' all ain't gwine get home fo' Christmas . . . Madelon . . . sure the Medical Corps'll be the last to leave . . . and I sez I'll be there at neuf heures . . . the Y. M. C. A. they won the war, hooray . . . mon fils, il est mort sur la Somme . . . what the hell if you ain't got no francs, she'll trust you . . . mais oui, chérie, mais oui . . . oh boy, oh joy, where do we go from HERE . . . Madelon, Madelon, Mad. . . c'est Clemenceau qui a fait ça . . . she would like hell, she . . . that old goof the Colonel, gosh, you might think he won the war himself . . . et maintenant, il faut aller jusqu'à Berlin . . . the rotten old tub can't do more than ten knots, so the skipper he said . . . had a cognac and six glasses of vin blanc, that's all . . . I gotta girl at Beaumont, about twenty minutes out by trolley . . . damn gyrenes sticking their ugly mugs into . . . Madelon . . . Madelon . . . MADELON . . ."

LONDON, 1928. It stands in the middle of Whitehall, that wide thoroughfare which connects Trafalgar Square with Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament. Behind us are unpre-

tentious government offices, the Horse Guards and that alley called Downing Street where lives the man who more than anyone rules the destinies of this nation—the Prime Minister.

It stands in the midst of the rush and roar of London traffic, a square monolith covered at the base with wreaths. Here is the heart of London. Here is the heart of the British Empire. This is the Cenotaph. On it, with majestic simplicity are three words: THE GLORIOUS DEAD.

This chill November morning the Cenotaph is surrounded by serried masses of men. There are the Guards in their scarlet tunics and their huge bearskin hats, the marines in blue uniforms and white caps, the Air Force in black shakos and blue dress garb. Yet the scene is sombre, because these soldiers are only a little square of color guarding the monument from a huge mass of civilians. Up and down Whitehall as far as one can see are thousands and thousands packed in so they cannot move.

A soldier in khaki, a little man in a British warm who wears the cap of a field marshal, comes forward with a wreath in his hand. His boots glimmer in the November sun. Behind him are his sons, also in uniform, behind them the generals and admirals of his forces, and nearby in civilian clothes Prime Minister Baldwin and the members of the Cabinet, the lords and officials of the government.

The little man in the British warm walks slowly to the base of the monument. He is a tired, a weary little man as he leans over and places his wreath beside those heaped-up flowers around the base. Then he straightens, salutes, and stands at attention.

Suddenly from St. James Park comes the sound of a gun. They used to say it was impossible for (Continued on page 48)



Il Duce, one-time corporal, at the head of a group of Fascist leaders paying Armistice tribute to Italy's Unknown Soldier

a British crowd to be quiet. That was before there was an Armistice Day. For the hum of London dies at the sound of the gun. You can see a gull flapping across the roofs and hear the beating of its wings. Somewhere in the distance a horse paws the ground and neighs. A flag flaps in the breeze. Never such a silence as this. A King and his people pause sixty seconds in solemn celebration for the dead. It is the Great Hush.

All over England, all over the Empire today, on the ranches of Australia and the farms of Canada, in offices and factories, in fields and forests, a people pause and think of their dead. In every village throughout England men and women and children have gathered together beside the Norman church, grouped around a stone cross for a service ending with this solemn moment of silence. Everywhere on the roads drivers stop their cars and climb down from their seats. Expresses that hurl themselves from London to Scotland without a stop en route slow down, halt while the passengers stand silently. Throughout the British Isles all trains, all traffic comes to an end. A nation remembers its dead.

The moment dies at the Cenotaph. The King and the Princes depart. The troops before us form, re-form and march away. But the tribute to the departed has only begun. Lines form, long lines stretching as far down Whitehall as we can see, two abreast on each side of the monument. Men and women, little children by their side, pass by to lay a flower, a poppy, a wreath or merely a tear upon the stone. At a moderate walking pace they come, men wearing war medals proudly, men in silk hats and morning coats, men in caps and torn jackets, men on crutches, men hobbling on canes or supported by poorly dressed women. You notice that some of these men have strips of cardboard instead of medals on their chests. Those pieces of cardboard are pawn tickets. They wear them proudly.

Down Whitehall we come to Parliament Square and Westminster Abbey. Here again one feels the marvelous and solemn sense of pageantry of the British race. Four abreast, slowly, reverently, two lines enter the Abbey. We take our places in line. Just ahead is a group of British Legionnaires. They are from Bristol, a city in Somerset, and like everyone else they are carrying wreaths or poppies. As we near the entrance a woman with a shawl thrown over her head, in a shabby dress, remarks that it takes forty minutes to enter the Abbey and pass out the other end. Now we are under the portico.

Without any command, by mutual

consent the hum of conversation dies away. Once inside the Abbey there is no noise, no sound except the shuffling of hundreds of feet and the murmurs of the medaled bobbies giving quiet orders, asking the crowd to move along. "Now then . . . please . . ." Slowly we approach the stone. Just a slab in the pavement beside which the two lines diverge and pass on either side. It is heaped with poppies. In fact we can hardly discern the carving on the stone because each passer-by drops a poppy. In an hour it will be a field of red.

Beneath This Stone Rests The Body
OF A BRITISH WARRIOR
Unknown By Name or Rank
Brought From France To Lie Among
The Most Illustrious Of The Land
And Buried Here On Armistice Day
1920

Remember, he is one of 94,000. The other unknown British soldiers lie in unmarked graves on the plains of Flanders.

We pass into the street. As we return along Whitehall and reach the Cenotaph in the center, the lines are still going by. So they will go by all day long, hour after hour. Here comes a section of the Metropolitan police, veterans all, their war medals shining on their tunics. Next a group of veterans, and then the contents of three motor coaches with disabled men from the Legion Poppy Factory at Richmond. They receive cheers from the veterans selling poppies on the sidewalk, and they carry signs: "Pay More For Your Poppy Today." A long line of unemployed files past, caps in their hands, mufflers round their necks, socialists, communists, all sorts and conditions of men, all bearing wreaths to show they are still thinking of pals now lying on what was once the Western Front. It's a long line, a drab line, only the dark blue coats of the pensioners from the Royal Chelsea Hospital making a spot of color in the procession.

When we get up into Mayfair and Kensington traffic is moving and people are rushing about. Just another November day in a big city. No, that is not correct. Here too there are signs a nation remembers. Sandwich men bear signs: "NO MORE WAR," "WE DEMAND PEACE OF THE NATIONAL PARTY." Everywhere men and women request signatures to peace petitions. Of all crowd demonstrations anywhere in the world, this is the most spontaneous, the most moving. You feel a whole people bound together in a clearly defined fervor, in remembrance of their dead, in pursuit of peace. This is a country which detests war.

ROME, 1935. Anno XIV. War again. A nation united, solemn in its resolution that whatever the world may think, it will carry through a conflict it considers just. Here is the feeling of war on every corner; olive drab troops in the streets, pictures of Il Duce in every shop window, stepping onto the balcony of the Chigi Palace, there, fist upraised, standing on a tank. This is war. The rosticceria at the end of the Corso where we buy our provisions is closed. On the shutters is a sign in handwriting reminding us that this is a meatless day. As we pass the café the terrace is filled with customers who grab at the newssellers going past with the latest edition of the Popolo Romano, turning to the casualty lists or the communiqué from the army.

"Nothing to report from the Eritrean and Somalia front." It has a familiar ring.

By eleven, the Piazza Venezia is already blocked with the Armistice Day crowd. Some have come from Turin and Milan and the cities of the North, some have traveled all night from Sicily and towns of the South, some have come afoot or by motor bus from the hill villages to the west; all are quiet, full of a kind of solemn apprehension for the future. As if to assuage this apprehension their leader now gives us a display of his might, something to hearten the most timid. An immense roar fills the space as a fleet of planes zooms overhead.

Not one fleet—ten, twenty, fifty fleets darken the blue sky. Through t h e b l u e Tuscan sunshine squadron after squadron races along in perfect military formation, so low they almost graze the roofs of the capital. Fresh from the factory, these planes are all painted a battleship grey. Under each wing is a round, dark hole through which death and desolation will soon be hurled down over the fields of Ethiopia. The vast crowd that is packed into the Piazza stands with upturned heads and ecstatic faces. The vromb-vromb-vrombing of the engines deafens their cheers, silences completely their exclamations of joy. Then the shadows pass, the roaring diminishes in vigor. "Quattro cento, quattro cento!" shouts the blackshirt behind us. Four hundred planes at once.

Then a roar as stupendous almost as the noise of the planes. Mussolini walks out before them and stands with uplifted arm on the steps of the Altar of the Fatherland. Instantly every arm goes up, every voice cries, "Duce . . . Duce . . . Duce . . ." He turns and mounts the steps. Beside him is the King, the Crown Prince, the Duke of Spoleto, behind them dozens of Fascist officials, their hats and

uniforms making vivid splashes of color among the civilians of the diplomatic corps who bring up the rear.

Military orders ring out. The crowd stands frozen. Mussolini mounts the steps and kneels before the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. He places a wreath upon it, and remains bowed. Then he rises and descends the steps. The crowd presses forward cheering, army bands burst into music: "The Hymn of the Piave." This nation is united. This man is their leader. He can ask sacrifices of them, he can tell them to tighten their belts, and they will obey.

Now a group comes pushing through the Piazza down which a line has been cleared. Fascist organizations, bands playing, flags and banners flying. Then the army, column after column of foot-sloggers, bersaglieri, colonial troops, infantry of the line, artillery of every sort, light and heavy, mountain batteries and machine guns all drawn by cars, motorized detachments of different kinds, carrier-pigeon sections, observation balloons hauled by special trucks, motorized specialists that include men in complete anti-gas outfit from head to foot. Then, as the

last soldier passes, as the last tank rumbles out of sight, the throng presses to the Palace, calling again their refrain.

"Duce, Duce, Duce. . ."

Endless and eternal, they keep at it. Finally the wide French windows of the room on the balcony open. The effect is dramatic and perfectly staged. A slow drawing apart of the window by an unseen hand. The cries grow louder, more frenzied. There is a moment or two of pause. Then he steps before them, strong, confident, sure of himself and of all his people.

He wears the uniform of a Fascist corporal. On his black uniform is one medal. He leans with both hands outspread on the railing, looking down upon the cheering throng, turning his head from left to right, surveying each one. You understand why he has been able to conquer the minds and hearts of the race.

He stands a moment saying nothing. Then he starts to speak. There is silence more dramatic than the roar which greeted his appearance. He leans slightly forward. His face is tense.

"Blackshirts of all Italy. . ."

The cheering breaks out again.

