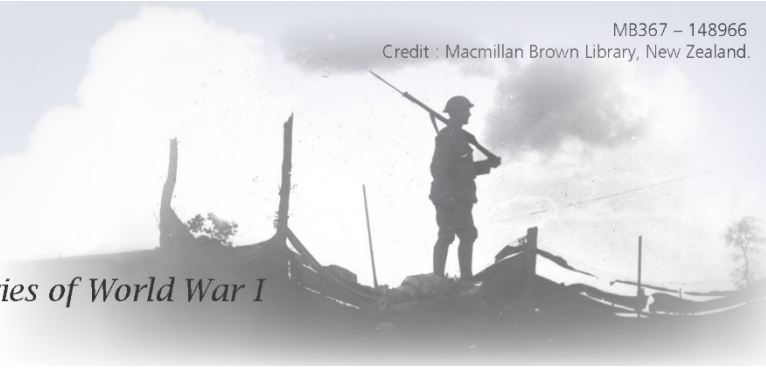






New Forest Remembers

untold stories of World War I



This diary account was digitized by the New Forest National Park Authority and transcribed by volunteer Sue Jackson.

Written in 1914 by Eleanor Ruth Dent, who later married John MacNair.

Reproduced here with the kind permission of Dionis M Macnair daughter of Eleanor.

Dionis was interviewed as part of the Oral History element of the New Forest Remembers Projects. Extracts of her interviews can be heard at

www.newforestheritage.org

Our Past, Our Future
Working together for the New Forest



THE CHRONICLES OF THE BELGIANS
MORE ESPECIALLY THOSE RELATING TO BLACKMOOR
CONVALESCENT HOME

NOVEMBER 1914
ELEANOR RUTH DENT

TO
MOTHER and MRS CLOUGH
as a "souvenir"
of the BELGIANS
who were the cause of much laughter
during the sad years
1914 & 1915

THE FIRST ARRIVALS

It was in the middle of October after the fall of Antwerp that the majority of Belgian Refugees of all kinds arrived in England & were made welcome all over the country.

The first refugees to arrive at Burley were a barber (coiffeur) & his wife & a gardener (abricuturist) & his wife & little girl, later the coiffeurs little girl also came, she had been on a raft in Holland where the kindly Dutch had provided her with a pair of serge knickerbockers & a jersey, so that at first we mistook her for a boy. The coiffeur also possessed a very decorative bicycle, sky blue in hue with red wheels & touches of apple green.

Towards the end of October the Cloughs secured a large family of superior Belgians who they planted down at Blackbush, this family, the Stroobantses consists of M. Maurice Stroobants an engineer with a glass eye & a rolling head, his wife, his mother, madames mother & 4 children:- Yvonne aged 18, Paul aged 15, Jacques 12 & Suzanne 11 & their maid Anna. When the war broke out they were at their seaside house "Les Hirondelles" near Ostend, there they stayed until the fall of Antwerp, when the "Boches" coming too near they thought it wise to retreat, so one morning, armed with £40 & a few summer clothes they took ship to Folkestone & thence to Aldwych where Mrs Clough chose them out & brought them down here. The eldest son Paul, a youth with hair sticking straight up like a doormat, had the luck to be taken at Eton, which he described as "épatant" (a word best translated by "ripping"). Jacques was sent to school at Broughton. Shortly after their arrival Monsieur & Madame came to tea, it was my first experience of Belgians & I spent most of my time pressing eatables upon them to which they said "merci", so I continued to press the eatables & they continued to say "merci" till at last I grasped that in Belgium it means "no" not as in England where it means "yes."

Madame Stroobants had on a dark blue dress with a very pretty embroidered collar, after tea she asked Mummy if there was any way in which she could earn money, mummy was siezed with a bright idea & said "why not copy her own collar in different colours, the materials were obtained & the collars

produced were such a success that Madame began making blouses which in their turn were so popular that she made quite a sum of money.

The next refugees brought to Burley by the Saurins were a gouge-eyed French polisher & his wife who came from Louvain, which town they had seen in flames, they had then walked for three days through Belgium, reached the coast & eventually arrived here. The man used to come up twice a week & give me carpentry & French polishing lessons, he was a very good workman, but melancholy & not in the least interesting, he stayed at Burley till April when he obtained work in London.

THE FIRST SOLDIERS

My first experience of Belgian soldiers was very fortunate as the first two to arrive in Burley were among the very nicest that I subsequently came across. Jules Leclerc & Edward Maldorez were at first with the coiffeur, but it was arranged that they were to go up to Castletop. Mrs Clough was away in France at the time & one day Mother received a letter from her saying would she conduct them up to Castletop to get clothes. The day happened to be Tuesday when Mother had to go to a workparty, so she said that when I went out for a French walk with Mademoiselle Blatter (a Swiss governess) I could show them the way.

Accordingly at 2 o'clock the soldiers appeared. Leclerc was a very jolly looking person with ginger moustaches & bearing a strong resemblance to Mr Kennard. He wore a white sweater, a blue military overcoat & a little round blue & yellow cap. His leg had been broken while taking part in a bayonet charge near Dixmude, a wounded German who they passed lying on the ground, had smashed it with the butt end of his rifle; the German's life was speedily terminated by the bayonet of one of Leclerc's comrades, but poor Leclerc's leg when it healed was shorter than its fellow, so that he will never be able to go back to the front again.

Maldorez was a little dark man; he had been in water-filled trenches for 11 hours & had thus contracted acute rheumatism in his hands, which he was unable to move. He told me that he was an official in the "Douane" & that he

had been married for 10 months, but that since the war he had had no news of his wife. Leclerc had had something to do with tramways in Constantinople, he had hastened back to Belgium at the outbreak of hostilities in order to volunteer as a soldier, his wife to whom he had been married ten years went with him, but he also heard no word of her.

Mademoiselle Blatter, my cousin Mary Sellar, Didi (an amusing little French refugee boy aged 13) having arrived, the procession started up the ridge, Didi making most of the conversation while I plied Maldorez with questions. Before we had gone very far, we met M. Stroobants strolling down the road, he turned round & joined the party. A little further on we met a little girl on a pony led by a lady, who after one gasp of astonishment fell into Mademoiselles arms, as the two turned out to be old friends. The cortège now consisted of:- Leclerc, Maldorez, the coiffeur (who I forgot to say had also come) M. Stroobants, Didi, Mary, Mademoiselle Blatter, her friend, the little Lourdes girl & her pony, myself & Wully.

When we approached near Castletop, I ran on in order to prepare the cook. She & I went into the drawing room where we found the specified vests & pants, which had however to be tried on. The cook was very firm on the subject of the soldiers not entering the drawing room, I was equally firm about not taking the above mentioned garments & displaying them before the company assembled at the front door. We gazed at each other rather helplessly, then the cook was seized with a bright idea. "We'll call in Biddlecome" she suggested, but I remarked that didn't get us much forrader, so at last the cook conducted the clothes to a room in the stables, while I conducted the soldiers. M. Stroobants told me to ask when they were expected to come up to sleep at Castletop, on translating this the cook said "Everything was ready, they could come that evening." "Ah" said Monsieur, "but is there enough food for them" this when translated appeared to insult the cook who flushed angrily, but in the end the three of us arranged that the soldiers should come up the following day. The vests & pants having proved a perfect fit; the cortège proceeded to wind its way home again.

KING ALBERTS NAME DAY

One day Monsieur Stroobants came down & said he must speak to Madame Dent on the most particular matter, he then proceeded to ask whether Madame Clough, Madame Prodero, Madame Fletcher, Madam Saurin & herself were all friends with one another. Mother hastened to assure him that this was the case. Monsieur then explained that on King Alberts name day, he wished to give a little party to all the people in Burley who had been kind to them; “but so often” he said “in the country there were people who one didn’t wish to meet, he knew it from his own experience, so he thought it would be safer to find out first. And also what was the etiquette in England about issuing invitations? Mother gave the desired information & lent some china & the preparations being complete on King Alberts name day a large company assembled at Blackbush mostly wearing the Belgian colours out of compliment to their hosts. We sat down round a large table in the drawing-room laden with delicious food prepared by Madame, including a dream-like cake of maceroons & coffee cream (this sounds very greedy!). Everyone drank coffee, though as a concession to the English taste, tea was also provided. Everyone was very polite & complimentary. Towards the end of tea Mr Saurin was pressed to make a speech which he flatly refused to do. Admiral Prothero however gallantly threw himself into the breach, & made some delightful & flattering remarks about the bravery of the Belgians, especially their king & how er ... er ... grateful (“reconaisant”, murmured Mother, who was prompting the Admirals rather weird French) we were to them & er ... hum ... er, after this he got a little lost & eventually sat down in the midst of much applause. Monsieur got up on his hind legs & in a “few well chosen words” returned thanks at some length. After a few more complimentary speeches on both sides the company took its departure.

BLACKMOOR

The Cloughs possess at Burley Street a large empty house called Blackmoor, it was decided to turn this into a home for superior Belgian Refugees, everyone round kindly lent their superfluous furniture & in a few days the whole house was ready. A more difficult matter, however, was to obtain self supporting occupants & we were told that what was really more necessary was a home for convalescent soldiers. Accordingly one day Mr Clough (Mrs Clough was in France), Mummy, Leclerc & myself set off in the motor car to Bournemouth. First we called at the Boscombe hospital but there were no soldiers there & we were directed to a certain lady in Manor Road who was apparently at the head of the Belgians. There we were ushered in to a drawing where they were having tea, the party consisting of a Canadian Gordon Highlander, a small Eton boy, a very sick looking gentleman & the lady of the house (whose name I have forgotten). She had marvelous bright yellow hair which Mr Clough was very interested in. When we asked her about Belgian soldiers she said she was unable to help us as her hands were tied by the apparently highly objectionable mayor who had behaved very badly about the Belgians, but she advised us to go to Ashton Greys where there were several soldiers. There accordingly we journeyed & Miss Birkhead took us into a ward where there were four soldiers, one, poor thing, had just had an operation & was lying in bed moaning, in the next ward there were three soldiers & in a screened off portion two officers, I asked Leclerc if he would like to come in & see them. "Les soldats oui", he said, "mais pas les officiers." All the Belgian soldiers hate & fear & also despise their officers, I remarked on this to one & said it was so different from our men. "Ah yes" he said, "Your officers lead their men, ours stand behind us & drive us!" this same man also told me that once he, another man & an officer were told off to sleep in a barn in which there was a little straw. The two soldiers used the greater part of it to make a bed for the officer & the small amount that remained they took for themselves, the officer when he saw this said, "take that straw & put it on my bed, you can sleep on the floor." This story is, I believe characteristic, though of course there are exceptions.

Mrs Birkhead told us of an officer Captain Commandant Jansen & his wife & daughter who wanted a home & she also said that a convalescent home for

soldiers was the very thing that was needed, so accordingly the furniture of Blackmoor was slightly altered, more beds were obtained, Mrs Hawkins was installed as cook with her husband as general man & old Madame Verheyen as housemaid, Mummy undertook to do the housekeeping & Mrs Clough having returned all was now ready for the arrival of the soldiers.

VICTOR AND HENRI

Everything as I said being ready, Mr Clough & I set off one afternoon hand in hand in the motor to Bournemouth, to fetch two soldiers from the Herbert Home but first we had been commissioned to procure some household goods in the way of brooms & washing up bowls & flat irons. As you may imagine we were both equally inexperienced in this line of shopping, at the first shop in Boscome where we had been told to go they did not sell the goods we wanted so there we decided to drive slowly down the street & the first likely shop, this was most successful & I prided myself on having made most satisfactory purchases but I was afterwards informed that I had been most extravagant!

We then went on to the Herbert Home where two men with bundles were awaiting us, after they had taken an affectionate farewell of their freinds & of the nurses they climbed into the motor & we drove off. The man who sat beside me was very rheumatic & looked rather miserable, his name was Henri, I tried to find out what part he had played in the war, but his french was very limited, but as far as I could gather he appeared to have killed or wounded seven “Boshes” as he called them single handed. The man in front Victor, was a fair-haired cheerful looking person, the picture of health, we were told there was nothing the matter with him, but he was liable to sudden hysterical seizures, the result I regret to say of cowardice! The next morning when we went down to see them Victor sprang up with an affable smile & wrung us by the hand presenting us at the same time a poem he had composed about the Kaiser. He then proceeded to tell us all about himself, that he was an examiner of railway wheels at Liege where he had a wife & a little girl aged two called Germaine. He had been in the defence of Liège & had been made a corporal, the sensations of battle he described to me one day, were the same as those you would feel if you drank “44 glasses of wheesky!”

Henri too we discovered had a wife at Antwerp, but he had heard nothing of her since the beginning of the war.

For the first few days Victor still remained in glowing health, but one morning Mother & Mrs Clough went down to find him stretched on the sofa, screaming & striking out in all directions, saying that the “Boches” had surrounded him, everybody tried to soothe him & employed every conceivable means of calming his agitation; it was not till a later date that we discovered the way to accomplish this was to leave him in a room by himself, where finding he was no longer the centre of interest he very speedily recovered.

Sulks Minor & Major

One wet afternoon about a week later I went down to Blackmoor with some messages, on entering the sitting room I saw a beautiful young man reclining on the sofa looking intensely bored & another sitting with his head resting on his hands looking intensely miserable, I endeavoured to get into conversation with them but my advances were met by shrugs of their shoulders & “Oui Mam’selle” or “Non Mam’selle” as the case might be, so I went to Mrs Hawkins for information. “They arrived yesterday afternoon in Lord Manners’ es motor” she explained “with a french maid, they seemed very sorry to leave, cried all afternoon they did & wouldn’t eat no breakfast.” “Yes” broke in Mr Hawkins angrily “Been spoilt they ‘ave, turned up their noses at our food!” later he became even more annoyed with them. “Don’t treat me no more than if I was a dog!” he grumbled.

The next day Mother & Mrs Clough went & found them still in the depths of despair & imploring to be allowed to return to the Manners’ es. For days they moped thus earning their nicknames of “Sulks major” & “Sulks minor.” Sulks major later took to learning English with much assiduity & drawing flowers, Sulks minor attired in an English service cap used to drive about in the donkey chair. However they neither of them really cheered up until the day when the Mannesers taking pity on their repeated letters asking to be taken back, did so, & none of us were the least sorry to loose them.

*

*

*

This is a good place in which to describe Blackmoor. It is a fairly large house, white roughcast with a red roof with a lovely view over to Berry. Downstairs the men had a large living room furnished with a round table, a piano, a sofa, several armchairs, a writing table, a table for industries, a gramophone (presented by Mrs Kennedy) & a "Land & Water" war map presented by Miss Annie Maxwell & a portrait of King Albert.

They also had a large dining room & there was a small sitting room which later was used by Mrs Clifford, into which any of the men might go if they didn't feel well or if they wished to be quiet, in summer they had the verandha. The kitchen, scullery & pantry were inhabited by Mr & Mrs Hawkins who kept them most beautifully. On the 2nd floor were the large bedrooms which had two or three men each, they were furnished very plainly, beds, washand stands & chairs, but they were always very clean & nice. Victors room usually had a bunch of flowers standing in front of his wifes photograph by way of ornament, François (the K-nut) had usually a gay tie or two on his dressing table and so on each showing some small mark of individuality. On the third floor were the small single bedrooms.

Pinned up in the sitting room were the rules of Blackmoor written in French & signed by Mrs & Mr Clough, I regret to say they were not invariably kept though on the whole we had wonderfully little trouble with the soldiers.

"C'est défendu d'aller à Ringwood où a la Queens head." The first part of this rule was the most frequently broken.

"Everybody must be in by 7.30.

"Permission must be asked before accepting invitations out to tea."

"Do not destroy the furniture" etc.

The daily life of the men was something as follows:-

Breakfast at 8 o'clock, porridge (if desired, it seldom was!) coffee, bread & marmalade.

After breakfast the men went out in couples for a walk or worked at industries or later on in the summer the fitter ones did light outdoor labour. At about

12.30 Mrs Clough & Mummy used usually to go down to see them, do the housekeeping, arrange about industries etc.

1 o'clock dinner, consisting of soup & cold meat & vegetables & cider, or hot meat, vegetables & pudding or fruit & cider, on Sundays roast joint & fruit tart. After dinner another walk or they lay out in the garden & smoked & every other day they went up to Castletop to tea & an English lesson. Every Tuesday they had a standing invitation to tea with Mrs Bartlett & other people were very kind inviting them to tea.

In the evenings & on wet days they played "chasse cœur" & "weest", danced prepared their English, worked at industries, wrote letters & played the piano & sang. For supper they had bread & cheese or macaroni & cheese & I believe they went to bed about 10.30. On Sunday mornings the barber used to come to shave them & they had cake as well as bread & jam for tea! There is a bathroom at Blackmoor & they used to choose very funny times to have a bath often 12 o'clock in the morning, the rheumatic ones indulged in frequent salt baths, so with the good food fresh air, as much rest & sleep as they desired & in quiet, clean & comfortable surroundings the convalescents had every chance to recover their strength. Many who came to us looking very ill & wretched went away strong & well, & they nearly all wrote to us afterwards saying how happy they had been. Mr Clough used constantly to take two or three off with him for the day in the motor & at intervals all of them went into Bournemouth in the motor to be examined & if ever there was a concert in the village they were sent to it, & at Xmas & Easter they drove into Lyndhurst to the Roman Catholic Church.

The cost of running the convalescent home was at first done by subscription, the Cloughs contributing the house & paying all taxes & the Hawkin'es wages, later we received a government grant of 12/- a week per man (not the réformes). A réformé I must explain is not a man reformed from drink or other vice, but a discharged Belgian soldier receiving a pension of 14/- a week. At first we kept the réformes free but later we took 8/- a week from each of them to pay for their keep. Mummy (who was responsible for the housekeeping) found that feeding & looking after the soldiers very well, that the cost came to between 8/- & 10/- per head per week, vegetables being supplied by kind neighbours & cider by Admiral Prothero.

The Cannonier & the Maréchal

The next two arrivals were a police sergeant & an artillery man who appeared in their uniforms, unlike most of the Belgian soldiers who generally arrived in awful old suits of mufti. The Belgian cavalry uniform is rather picturesque, dark blue tunic & trousers, with red or yellow stripes & facings & large buttons down the front, dark blue cloaks with capes & boat shaped caps with red or white tassels. The sergeants name was Gustav Muss, he had been in the Brussels police & had been hurt by his horse “Napoléon” falling on top of him & crushing his side, as he was surrounded by germans he knew his only chance of escape was to pretend to be dead so he took some of his horses blood, smeared it across his throat & lay quite still, & the Boches passed him by. After dark he crawled along to the banks of a canal. He could go no further so he lay down, numb with cold. Two germans came along & taking him for dead proceeded to take off his boots & socks for their own use, Gustavs feet were so icy that they were not undeceived. Later the Red Cross Ambulance found him & he was eventually sent to England.

The cannonier, or as Mrs Hawkins insisted on calling him the “cannonade” was a little red faced , cheery man, whose name was Jules, he did not stay with us a very long time & of his visit I only remember three incidents. In the first two he succeeded in ingratiating himself very much with Mother & myself, by complimenting me on my French one day when I met him by Shutters & by remarking in a tone of amazement when Mummy happened to mention that she was 50, “tiens, Madame, I thought you could not be more than 34!” The third incident was of not so pleasant a nature, Gustav accused him of theft; this of course sounded terrible until we found that the theft merely consisted of two bone buttons! The cannonade returned to the front early in February.

Gaston & Croquette

Croquette & Gaston Lemaire were the next to arrive, Croquette was a tall, dark, sad-looking man who had lost his right arm, he told us that after he had been wounded he was sent from hospital to hospital as the allies retreated, at one place he had been bundled into a motor ambulance as the Germans were

just entering the village. When he arrived in England it was found necessary to amputate his arm. Most of the time he was with us he spent in learning English & trying to write & do things with his left arm. He left us to go & live with a relation, but a short time ago I heard he had volunteered to return to the front, of course he was not accepted, so then he begged to be allowed to go & make munitions.

Gaston, known as the “featherhead” was a French-looking little man who had received a bayonet wound in the mouth, he had also a wound in his foot & had been reformed. There was now quite a large party at Blackmoor, Victor created much amusement, when he began to go about attired in a frock-coat of Mr Cloughs, (the one in which he had been married & had worn at funerals ever since till it had become too small for him!). The rest of Victor's costume consisted in white flannel trousers, khaki puttees, canvas shoes, a stick-up collar & his weird little round regimental cap, not an altogether suitable mixture!

Leclerc & Maldorez still continued to live at Castletop, I went several times to bring them tobacco & play “Attaque”, a game they excelled in, one day we had them to tea & Leclerc brought his violin, which he played remarkably well, he was able to pick up any tune by ear. At tea time we noticed that they seemed rather embarrassed when you offered them cakes & endeavoured without much success to pick them up with their knives, evidently it is not considered manners to touch cakes with your fingers, thenceforward we always provided forks.

One day I went up to take them some tobacco, I found Maldorez in a great state of excitement, in “L'Independence Belge” he had seen an advertisement from his wife who was at Rotherham enquiring as to his whereabouts. He wrote off to her post haste & in a day or so received an answer telling him to come to her, as she & her family had got work, he accordingly went & I have never heard any more about him. Poor Leclerc was thus left alone very depressed as he had heard no word of his wife & had no work to do.

THE XMAS PARTY

About a week before Christmas we gave a party for all the soldiers. They were to have tea in the dining room & to each man we gave a little present, some cigarettes & a packet of chocolate, at the last moment we bought some crackers. Ninny was very contemptuous “treating them as if they were babies!” but not withstanding the crackers were the success of the evening. Besides the Blackmoor soldiers we had Leclerc, a soldier who was staying with Mrs Saurins Belgian carpenter & a new man who had just arrived. We fully expected to spend the evening entertaining the soldiers. Not at all, they entertained us, to begin with at their arrival they made a little speech of thanks; at tea time they made complimentary remarks about the coffee, the eatables, in fact everything; at the close of the meal they asked if we would like them to sing, of course we said that we would be delighted, so Victor (clad in the frock coat) arose & in a deep & operatic voice with much gesture he sang his song against the Kaiser, set to a tune of his own invention, the rest of the men could scarcely contain their chuckles & when Jules solemnly winked at me, I was reduced to a hopeless state of giggles. The next performer was Gaston who sang a sentimental ditty, Mrs Saurins soldier sang a comic song which greatly delighted his companions then Victor, who could scarcely keep still while the others were singing (in fact he was humming the whole time!) sprang up again & sang a Flemish song. By this time the magic lantern in the drawing room was ready & they all filed in. They enjoyed the pictures hugely & whenever anything ugly such as Captain Hook or a fierce elephant appeared they cried out “The Kaiser!” “The Crown prince” or when the subject was comic “Victor!” I must here say that though the above gentleman was regarded as a huge joke by his companions, they all agreed in calling him a “bon garçon.”

When the magic lantern was finished the singing recommenced, they all sang the “Brabaçonne” & “Teepeerery” (Victors mighty voice predominating) The Marseillaise & last of all they stood up & sang:

“God sav’ our gracious Kung
Long live our nob-le Kung
God sav’ the Kung.”

Then after another speech of thanks they took their departure & Mother & I agreed we had seldom enjoyed a party more, or been so entertained.

THE INDUSTRIES

At Xmas we went away for five weeks, so during that time I do not know what happened at the Home, but when we returned we found besides our old friends (with the exception of Croquette) two new men Marcel & Josef popularly known as Geff.

Marcel had come from the Hays hospital, he was a paler rather depressed looking person, always untidy & with a pathetic habit of calling himself Marcel, if you asked him how he was, he would reply "Marcel très bien merci." Geff was an essentially virtuous person but very dull, but this was partly because his French was very limited, he had been wounded in the arm & his hand was partially paralysed, he was a great student of English.

It was about this time that we started the industries; I had collected enough money to buy a fretsaw & some paints, a few tools & wood & with these we proceeded to make various toys, parrots, jig-saw puzzles etc. At first some of the attempts were simply awful, I had carefully shown them how to paint a nice green & yellow parrot, to my horror, they brought it up with great pride in the afternoon & I found they had coloured the other side orange with pink & purple spots.

The cutter out in chief was Victor, & after a few failures he really became quite expert especially in the jigsaw line, or what he would call a "jeu de dixon."

Marcel was established as a leather worker, making very nice blue, rose & green suède bags & purses & blotting books. At first he too had awful failures, which was trying as the leather was expensive. Gaston framed pictures (chiefly Japanese prints in passe par tout, & made envelopes & blotting books in Italian paper. For their work we paid the men liberally, so that when Gaston went away he had over £3 in his pocket, Marcel 30/- Victor £5 & so on & of course they only did the work when they felt inclined.

Madame Stroobants's blouse business was meanwhile growing apace & Suzanne was started making bead necklaces on a loom.

February & March

In the month of February we had several new arrivals, Jean Devoo, called "Johnny" by Mrs Hawkins & nicknamed by us the "Troubadour", Léon the cultivateur & Paul the dark horse. I had a deep affection for Léon, he was a tall & gentle & rather good-looking man with a rather limited knowledge of french, he became my chief painter & used to come up about once a week to paint in my house & there we used to have long conversations while we painted clowns red & white, crocodiles green & brown with fierce white teeth, parrots green & yellow, pink & grey: & Victor joined the various pieces together with bits of "fil-de-fer." Léon apparently owned a thriving farm in Belgium, with cows & horses, pigs, poultry, 5 "boul-dogs" & many canaries. He had seen a good deal of fighting & he had seen the King of the Belgians (for whom he had a profound admiration) in the trenches. In November he had been wounded in the foot, he told me that the fighting was so fierce & the fire so heavy that the Belgian Red X men had been afraid to enter the trenches, but several English nurses had volunteered for the job & had got the wounded (including Léon) safely out. I regret to say that Léon's otherwise successful stay with us ended under rather a cloud. He was réformé & the Cloughs employed him as a gardener, but in April he fell foul of Mrs Clifford (the new Blackmoor Housemaid) & he went off to London in a huff & we have never heard anything of him since.

Paul Duglis was the most mysterious character we ever had, he was much better educated than the others & more of a "man of the world." He spoke English well but with a strong American accent, so you can imagine my astonishment when the first time I saw him I made a polite little speech in french he answered "Waal I reckon so." He then explained that he had been an engineer on a Belgian-American liner, & had travelled a great deal, having been to N. & S. America, Africa, Italy, Germany & other places, in fact I almost suspected him of being a german spy! He had been very severely wounded both in the leg & a sword cut over his shoulder which had kept him in hospital

in London four months. As he did quite good pen & ink caricatures I at once enlisted him as a painter, but he was never much good, his long suit was really mending watches. Mother never liked him, but I, to this day hold a sneaking affection for him, though he always remained a dark horse, also he was not a good inmate for the home, the others simply hated him, at the end of a fortnight he was not on speaking terms with either Léon or Marcel, while Victor refused to out with. “I have been” he said to me “bien élevé, poliment élevé, & I refuse to be seen with Paul!” Paul got engaged to a girl in the village & in May he went off to some engineering works & we have not heard of him since.

VICTOR’S COSTUMES

Victor’s costumes by reason of their diversity & wierdness, deserve a chapter to themselves. I have already described his winter garments, his uniform was now completely abandoned being kept more or less as a “stage property” which was borrowed by everybody when they desired to have their photographs taken, to this was usually added either a cigar or a walking stick. One day Victor remarked that he had a little “souvenir” for me, I asked what it was “Ma petite veste de soldat! (my uniform jacket)” imagine my feelings or even worse Ninny’s feelings! So I replied “Oh I don’t think you ought to give away your uniform.” Léon who was standing near sniggered “Ah, he has become too fat for it” he remarked. Anyhow I’m glad to say I never got the jacket!

The first warm days of summer brought Victor out like the butterfly, arrayed in immaculate white flannels, with a cream silk shirt & white canvas shoes, where these garments came I cannot imagine. In May however his brother-in-law was killed & Victor arrayed himself in sombre hues & asked if it was possible to have his shoes dyed black!

One morning in July he came looking like what our cook Bertha called “a methodist person on holiday” our old friends the white flannels, a dark coat, black straw sailor very doggy brown gloves & a cane!

THE JANSENS & THE STROOBANTS'ES

The Jansens have been the cause of little amusement. Captain Commandant Jansens is a very nice Belgian officer, who comes here at intervals on leave from the front, bringing pieces of shell & shrapnel, & once a “pickle haube” with him. Madame Jansens is a brisk little lady who wears pink felt slippers in the mornings, & is most excellent with the soldiers. Her greatest regret is that her new & superb “batterie de cuisine” & also her linen that was so fine, have probably been taken by the Germans. Her daughter Julianne makes most beautiful bead necklaces.

On the other hand the Stroobants'es have caused more trouble mingled with amusement than once could believe possible. Their life centres around their meals & they regard our indifference to food with something like horror. Here is a typical instance. Suzanne arrived one morning at Castletop & said she simply must be lent a bicycle on which to go to Ringwood, it was very important. Mrs Clough did not like asking her maids to lend Suzanne a bicycle as she is not at all careful, but the matter seemed so urgent that she decided to do so, she then enquired why this visit to Ringwood was so necessary “Ah Madame” said Suzanne “You sent us a rabbit & so we must have a piece of pork to cook with it” Needless to say after this Suzanne was not lent the bicycle!

On another occasion Monsieur was walking round the garden with Mrs Clough. “I cannot understand” said he “how you English do not understand growing vegetables. Your peas are so coarse, ours are so young, so green, so tender –” “If they are rather old” said Mrs Clough “cook them in a little butter.” “Mais oui” cried Monsieur in a shocked voice. “But we always cook our peas in butter!” He then proceeded (& be it understood that the Cloughs kindly provide the Stroobantses with all their vegetables) “I cannot understand how you, who have travelled, have seen how things are well done, how you can still go on with your beans that have no savour –” Mrs Clough could bear no more & interrupted saying “If there is one subject that has no interest for my husband or myself it is the subject of food.”

Then the Stroobantses have very touchy feelings & their ideas of etiquette & ceremony are most rigid. One day Monsieur came to Mother in a great state

of agitation. "Lately" he said "whenever he had gone to visit Mrs Clough, the maid had said she was engaged with the soldiers or some other excuse, was it then not 'convenable' for him to visit her perhaps?" Mother found this a little difficult to answer as Mrs Clough had just told her she could stand Monsieur's perpetual visits no longer!

Mother once involved herself rashly in the statement that Englishmen never went out to tea. "Ah" said the Belgian sadly "then do men & women never meet in England?" "Oh yes they play games together & so on" she replied, next time we asked the Stroobantes to tea Monsieur did not come, I think he has a poor opinion of English customs.

One day Monsieur arrived literally bursting with offended pride. "What do you think" he puffed "Lady Isobel Ryder as offered me, me, 4d an hour to 'arracher ses mauvaises herbes!' was it compatible with his dignity?" Mother was unsympathetic & severe. "At this time everybody must do anything in their power to help – Lady Isobel herself, the sister of a duke & the descendant of Scottish Kings (Mother piled it on) worked in the garden –" "Cependant, in her own that was very different" "No, she dug, she manured, a peasants garden as the son was away fighting" "Tiens c'est une ecentrique!" murmured Madame in the background. Monsieur then took his tale to Mrs Clough who was also unmoved & harangued him in almost the same words as mother only taking for her example Mr Duff "our gardener who is connected with 'le roi Edouard' & descended from Scottish kings!" I think the Belgians must have thought it was a preconcerted lie, or that the descendants of Scottish kings were far removed from his idea of Royalty!

*

*

*

For a brief & gloomy term, between Xmas & Easter I used to go for an hour's walk with Yvonne every morning with the object of talking french, for the most part we strolled along in the gloomy silence my efforts at conversation producing no answer. When Cicely Farmer stayed with us it was even worse as Yvonne took an awful dislike to her, we think because Cicely spoke of the Belgian girl who lived with them as "ma Belge!" At any rate soon after this remark, when we were in the village Yvonne broke into noisy sobs & wept all

the way home refusing to be comforted, & we could never find any other explanation.

In the winter Madame Stroobants suffered from what she thought was a most pernicious illness, no detail of her inside was left undiscussed by monsieur, at last she went into a nursing home to have an operation, but she returned the next day, as it was found she had only got a “ventre gonflée!”

CRISISES (*CRISES*)

During April we were very full at Blackmoor, besides the men I have already mentioned there were two François. One was Gustavs brother & a civilian who stayed with us a week or so, the other was an ex-pastry cook who had been wounded through the spine, he now lived merely to nurture his ill health, he thought, dreamt & spoke of little else, you had merely to say “Comment vous portez-vous?” for him to launch into a long discription of his symptoms. “Hier c’était un peu mieux, mais je n’ai pas bien dormi, I awoke at 3 & was unable to get to sleep until 10 minutes past 4 etc etc” All the other men became very bored with him & so did we, he refused to do any work, his one occupation being playing the piano & singing for he had rather a good voice & Mdlle. Jansen used to give him lessons, he was also the K-nut of Blackmoor, his appearance being invariably immaculate, he was also very trustworthy “a rock” but notwithstanding an awful bore, & when he departed at the end of June I think no one was sorry.

Things did not always go smoothly at Blackmoor, in fact there were pretty frequent crises. Perhaps one morning when we arrived Mrs Hawkins would greet us with a long face & say “Oh the soldiers were very rowdy last night, making an awful noise & some. I wouldn’t like to say no names, but some I’m afraid were drunk.” The men were then called up & asked to explain their behaviour. “Oh” they replied “perhaps they had been a bit noisy but they had been celebrating the fall of Prinyssel!”

Another time there was a fearful bust-up, Gaston had come in late & was accused of being drunk, someone had tapped on the window & Gustav had gone out in a great hurry, Pauls behaviour had been odd & he had quarreled

with the others, & a great many of them had been out later than they ought to have been. Everybody was examined in turn & the matter was more or less cleared up, Gaston explained that a kind farmer had invited him in & given him a glass of beer & “Tiens, your English beer is very strong!” The others also managed to explain their misdemeanours but Mrs Hawkins said for some time after that “she lived as it were under a cloak!” & in her opinion it was “that Gustav one” who was to blame.

People seemed to take an unholy pleasure in saying to us “Your Belgians were seen driving to Ringwood & beating that poor little donkey so that it had to gallop downhill with three men inside!” “I saw 6 of your Belgians going into the Queens Head!” etc etc odious! Then too there were minor crisis’es as regards the industries, days when nothing went right, when Victor couldn’t get on because he had broken 3 doz saws & had turned his attention to painting & had ruined several things, Marcel had destroyed a good leather skin, Gaston had run out of Italian paper & the glass didn’t fit the pictures he was framing & so on. Also there were dreadful occasions when men who were engaged in some industry suddenly went off leaving us with all the material half finished & with no one to complete it “mais à la guerre comme à la guerre!”

APRIL

Then came the dreadful day when Marcel painted Ringwood red, when Biddlecome had to fetch him from the police station & Paul (Marcel’s arch-enemy) had to undress him & put him to bed!

The following day Marcel remarked to Mother “And did they tell you I was drunk?”

“Yes they did, & I was dreadfully ashamed” began Mother gravely shaking her head “Mais cependant, that was not true, I had two glasses of stout & then I felt unwell, very unwell, & they took me to a room, a very nice room – “ “A police cell” interrupted Mother & poor Marcel had nothing more to say but merely shrugged his shoulders.

A few weeks later Gustav & Marcel came up to bid us farewell as they were returning to the front. With tears in his eyes the sergeant wrung his hands, his attitude was one of self sacrificing patriotism. "We are well, we must return to aid our comrades & fight for "La Patrie." Marcel said nothing but looked very depressed. We had many letters & postcards from them & a killing letter in English from Gustav, however he suddenly ceased to write, his last letter said he was going on a secret mission into Belgium & if he returned he would let us know.

By this time Leclerc had got work at Salisbury, very good & highly paid work. At the end of April he came over to Burley for the night & in the afternoon he came to pay us a visit, resplendent in Sunday clothes, leather gloves & a silver topped cane, the picture of affluence!

A new man arrived popularly known as Devose's cousin, though his real name was Louis Pietermans, he was not particularly attractive, being one of the rather low type men, poor thing he had been wounded in the face & he & "Johnny" spent most of their time going long walks apparently as one was always meeting them striding along together.

After much correspondence & worry a place had at last been found for Gaston at a wool manufactory at Huddersfield, his journey there was a most complicated affair as he knew next to no English, however we told him to hang a white handkerchief out of his pocket & we wrote & told Mrs Outram that she would recognise him by this mark, it sounded most romantic. "The man with the white handkerchief." His departure was complicated by the fact that he had sent his false teeth to the dentist & was so forced to go without them. He was very loathe to go away & bade us "Adieu" with tears in his eyes. He was not at all happy at Huddersfield at first but Mrs Outram was very kind to him & he happened by chance upon a "camarade" & now he seems to have settled quite happily down in a khaki factory. The Belgian Barber & his family about this time departed to London & the old ladie's place was now filled by a Mrs Clifford, a most efficient female & under her régime Blackmoor bore the aspect of a new pin; unfortunately she did not get on with the men her somewhat dictatorial manner rubbed them up very much the wrong way. She had a row with Léon (& I must say it was a good deal his fault). Mrs Clifford accused him of being rude & I find this hard to believe in the gentle cultivateur, he refused

to apologise, but went off in a huff to London, where he got work as a waiter, we have never heard of him since, at which I am very sad as he was my favourite among all the men.

THE SALE

At the end of May we had a sale of all our industries. Mrs Clough very kindly lent us their big room, & in the morning we went up to arrange all the things. It was really quite a good collection, on one table there were all kinds of pictures framed in passe par tout including a lot of japanese prints, on another table there were leather bags & blotting books, Italian paper envelopes & blotting books, bookcases & boxes. On a third table were Madame Stroobantses blouses & collars, & Mdlls Jansens & Suzannes necklaces. Two tables were covered with toys, also the window sills & the mantelpiece was an array of parrots & tits. At three o'clock the people began to arrive & they came in a steady stream until 4.30, by that time nearly everything was sold, in fact we were reduced to putting everything on one table. At some periods of the afternoon there was an awful squash but people overflowed into the garden, which was looking perfectly lovely.

Everybody was most awfully appreciative & nice, the one & only complaint coming from Mrs Esdaile who said "Was there anybody selling or not? Because she wanted to buy a collar and nobody was paying any attention to her. It happened to be the period of the greatest rush & all the people who were selling were rushing about trying to get change. Cousin Evelyn was one of the saleswomen & she was most awfully good as she kept very calm, which was more than Iris & I did, as more than once we sold the same thing two or three times!

I forgot to mention besides the attractions of the sale & the garden there were several raffles, one for a doll dressed most beautifully by Ninny which was won by Mrs Clough & one for a crocheted table cloth made by Mdme Jansens the results of which were to go to a Belgian hospital. Tea was also provided gratis by Mrs Clough. Towards the end of the afternoon the Stroobantses wandered in to see the "fancy fair" as they would all call it, & they were very gratified to

find all their things sold. The soldiers also came up wandered round the garden.

At the end of the day we found that everything had gone. Mdme Stroobants had made £14 clear, the soldiers we were to give an extra bonus, all our expenses were covered & we had a couple of pounds in hand with which to buy materials, so the sale had been a complete success.

THE NEW MEN

Devos & his cousin having been more or less adopted by two people in the village, we had now vacancies for some more men. Accordingly three arrived, first Fernand & Noullet & then André.

Fernand was a curious creature, not like the other men who one treated as children, on the contrary he was very grown-up. In appearance he has thick fair hair a pink clean shaven face, a squint & rather forbidding expression. Poor thing, one feels that this war has thoroughly embittered him, one day he suddenly burst out with "Ah comme la guerre est bête, bête!" & no wonder for he lay for 24 hours on the battlefield among wounded & dead with his leg shot off. Before the war he had been a mechanic in Paris earning very good pay, he told me that he left Belgium with 60 francs in his pocket besides his ticket, when he arrived in Paris he searched round for rooms, & having obtained them for 20 francs a month he proceeded to look for work, eventually he was taken on at a motor works where he did very well. During his stay at Blackmoor we tried to employ him with leather work & painting, both of which he did very well, but they bored him exceedingly, whenever we mentioned he might do something new he would shrug his shoulders & say "Oh la-la-la" & as Mother & I were both rather frightened of him, we eventually gave him up & left him to idleness.

Albert Noullet, dear Noullet, was one of my favourites among the men, from the time he got up in the morning, till the time he went (alas often drunk) to bed he was always happy. Mrs Hawkins said he used to come in singing or whistling to clean his boots or help her wash up, so she always called him "Happy Albert." He wasn't much to look at but he invariably wore a cheerful

smile, he had been wounded in the leg & it was still stiff. He became one of my painters & did it remarkably well, & I have never had so bidable a worker, everything I told him to do he did without any fuss, & he never made difficulties. As a change of occupation he sometimes came & cut the grass edges in the garden. His one disadvantage was that he did drink, & though he was always very repentant afterwards, I fear he led the others astray. Eventually he obtained a place as manservant at a certain Mrs Wiggins, he wrote to us to say he was happy (cela va sans dire) there, & was glad to have regular work. He wrote a postcard to Mrs Hawkins in English

“Dear Mrs Hawkins

I hope you well as I am. Remember me to the boys.

From your boy that was always happy.”

À propos of funny letters, Mrs Hawkins received a postcard from old Madame Verheyen addressed “Sir Hawkins” & Henri when he went for a 5 weeks cure to Bath in March wrote to the Cloughs

“Monseigneur & Madame

When may I return to your castle? ...”

André was a most pathetic figure, a little dark man with nice blue eyes & a sweet smile, he had been a waiter in Brussels since he was 12 years & had run away from a cruel stepmother. During an attack on a fortified German position his leg had been shot off, so now his old occupation was useless & he know no other, he had no relations & though naturally of a merry disposition he was now so miserable that he said he wished he had been killed. We tried to interest him in picture framing & making paper blotting books & envelopes. In some ways he was a trouble as he occasionally drank & often stayed out late, but on the whole there was something very lovable about him.

THE GIANT

Our most exciting occupant of Blackmoor was one Hubert Riadich, an opera singer, Mrs Hawkins called him the giant, as he was close on 7 feet high, he

was also very good looking with a beautiful mouth. His voice I believe was very good, though I never heard it, for he only sang once as it upset him. After he had been with us a few weeks he was summoned to a King Albert Hospital in London for special treatment, he was not at all happy there at first, but eventually he settled down.

Louis Van Dyck was a very sick & sorry soldier, he spent most of his time in bed or on the sofa, if you asked him how he was feeling, he would slowly shake his head & say in low, sad voice "C'est nial." He had been wounded through the spine & it had altogether upset his nervous system. Occaisionly when he felt better he made baskets or caned chairs, & he learnt to frame pictures in passe-par-tout most beautifully. Once or twice he came & sat in our garden clad in pointed yellow boots, & would smile faintly when you spoke to him. He is now at Grata Quies waiting to be medically examined. I am sure he is not fit to be sent to the front.

At the end of June came three new arrivals:- one whose name I have forgotten, but we always called him the "Pirate from the Spanish main" as he had black hair & black moustaches, gold earrings & a yellow complexion, poor thing, the result of jaundice. During his stay he worked very hard out of doors & so we saw very little of him.

Jordans was a carpenter by trade, he had lost his left leg, known by his companions as the "frog-nard". I never the less always found him very nice & he painted beautifully. One day Mrs Clough took the three poor legless men into Bournemouth to have their artificial legs fitted, after spending a very trying time at Bridges, she took the three (all wearing their legs) to tea at the Cadena, suddenly Jordans clutched her by the arm. "Madame", he exclaimed, "my leg is coming off & I shall certainly fall down!" It was a terrible situation, but Mrs Clough managed to get him successfully to where he could put it on again.

Soinet, popularly known as the "baby-boy" was a funny little creature, who was much teased by his companions. One day he showed me a piece of shrapnel that had been taken out of his inside. "Ah oui" he said in his funny little jerky voice "& there were four other pieces, I am all cut up."

He did some painting for me, & very badly (I had to do it nearly all over again).

VICTORS MYSTERIOUS ILLNESS

A rumour has reached the ears of Victor & Henri that they are to be medically examined & may eventually be sent to the Front. It is said that 2000 Belgian soldiers are lost in England & of that number we can account for two:- Victor & Henri. Henri instantly takes to his bed & weeps, but Victor chooses subtler means of evasion. No longer glowing with health with his chest thrown out does he stride along. With a piteous face & shrunken figure & knock knees you now behold him.

At that time he was working in our garden & we had told him to do some pumping. After a short time went to the kitchen & made Bertha feel his heart. In the same way when he was mowing the lawn he puffed & panted & held his side & limped. I went up and asked him what was the matter he shook his head "Ah c'est terrible." With trembling hands he pulled up his trousers & showed me two large lumps on his knees. I was greatly concerned & so was Ninny & Berthe to whom he also showed this self-imposed malady, for Mrs Clough, Mrs Hawkins & Mrs Clifford all assured me it was only malingering, & so it turned out, for as soon as he was threatened with a King Albert Hospital he miraculously recovered. So did Henri, & I must say there was something very mysterious about their being ill together at the mere mention of the word "medical examination."

After this Victor said that for the rest of his stay he was going to enjoy himself & do no work. Dear Mrs Hawkins in vain pointed out that I would be very pained if he didn't, Victor merely remarked "me go promener." Mrs Clough however firmly seized him & made him work in the garden. While he was working in ours, he asked Mummy if he might pick a bunch of flowers to place in front of his wifes photograph. Mother gave the permission, with the result that he picked so much syringa that he had to get someone to help him "bunch it" & he set off home looking like an animated syringa bush!

ANOTHER CRISIS

At the end of June there was another serious crisis. André & Noulet got drunk, & there was in consequence a rumpus. Noulet said that they went to a little

“cabaret” on the road to Ringwood near Crow, he was very repentant and sobbed bitterly when he was told he would have to go. He was a very nice-natured man & it was only want of occupation that drove him to drink. The rule about being in before 9 was impressed on all the men. But the very next night André & Noulet did not come in, & at 11.40 Mr Hawkins went to look for them and found them lying on the grass in the forest nearby & perfectly sober. The following day they explained their conduct to Mrs Clough:- “When they neared Blackmoor they discovered it was after nine, so they thought it would look as if they purposely set Mrs Clough & her rules at defiance ‘se moquer d’elle’ whereas it was quite an accident, so they thought if they slept the night in the Forest it would prove this to her & she would understand!” Rather a nice naïve explanation!

The next trouble did not occur till well on in July, then Fernand, André & Soinet got drunk, at least Soinet was not properly drunk, only excited. Fernand volunteered a confession: True, they had been to that “petit machin là” (everything from a leather bag to a public house was a ‘machin’ to Fernand). Needless to say he had never been drunk before & would never be so again as it was a disgusting sensation. Mrs Clifford was pretty dry about the whole affair. As a matter of fact she was always pretty disapproving, & none of the men could bear her. If she entered the room & said in a dictatorial voice “Work” it was enough to make them stop working for the rest of the day. Mrs Hawkins on the other hand they all loved, & none of them failed to write to her after his departure. Though occasionally she would scold them mildly, yet she was unfailingly kind to them. And I would always accept her judgement as to the nice ones.

CONGÉ

Henri’s cousin & a friend turned up for 8 days leave from the front, they were both very débonnair looking artillerymen, one had jauntily curled moustaches, their names were Josef Schobyn & Emile Vanderstraeten. They enjoyed their stay very much, they had plenty of rest & good food, & bicycles on which they

could explore the country & the night before they left they went to dinner with Mrs Clough. They came & paid me a visit & I took their photographs.

At this time I kept on getting postcards from Marcel who said he hoped soon to be able to “serrer” my hand & those of his comrades, & sure enough the day the artillery men left, Marcel & a friend turned up. They were both clad in sloppy khaki, that looked like a feeble imitation of ours, they had also funny little leather leggings & in their caps red, black & yellow cockades. Marcel spent most of his time bicycling round visiting freinds & he behaved very well, even Mrs Hawkins, no friend of his, had to acknowledge as much. Marcel’s “camerade” was a very nice dark man, a Lutheran, whose french was very difficult to understand, he had not had a days leave since August 1914. We all liked him, but Marcel said in his “roofer” that he would not bring him again as he was a “mauvais garcon.” We long to know why!

I forgot to tell of the most fearful fiasco; in July Mrs Prothero (already somewhat prejudiced against the soldiers) invited them to a strawberry tea, with Aunt Sallies & other entertainments, out of the 11 only 3 went, though Mrs Clough have given special orders they were all to go. Imagine Mrs Prothero’s indignation! Victor needless to say was one of the 3 to go clad in the frock coat & brown tie? or was it immaculate white flannels? “He did not want to” he said “but when people were kind enough to ask him, it was only right he should give them pleasure by going, though it made him very sad to be eating a good tea, when his wife was perhaps starving, but then one must not think of one’s own feelings. It made him “honteuse”, it made him blush with shame to think of the ingratitude of the others!

DIARY FOR AUGUST

August 1st being Sunday we didn’t go to the Belgians.

August 2nd

Marcel & his friend came up to say farewell as they return early tomorrow morning to the front. We gave each of them a packet of chocolate, some

raisins, tobacco & oxo to sustain them on the journey. Marcel says the Belgian Army is very badly fed, dry bread & coffee in the morning, bully beef & bread at 1 o'clock & that's all, though occasionally they get jam & butter from the English soldiers. Though a pouring wet day, several of them went to the show in the afternoon, I hope they behaved themselves.

August 3rd

As Mother was away I went down to Blackmoor to take Fernand some leather. The big room was being cleaned so I found them all in the little room looking very depressed. The new dyspeptic man made some very nice pen wipers & André had made blotting books. Fernand was very acid when I gave him his leather "Ah, encore de travail" he exclaimed. Victor showed me a terrible design for fretwork he had obtained, a sort of photograph frame & pipe rack in one, a veritable horror; composed of arabesques, cut out soldiers etc, this Victor informed me he desired to make as a souvenir for Mrs Clough. I endeavoured to dissuade him, but only succeeded in hurting his feelings. Mrs Clifford informed me very dryly that André had not returned the night before until 11.30 & that Mr Hawkins had gone down to the police station, to look for him! This was not the worst, I met Mrs Clough who said the night before at the pony show there had been an awful row. Louis Pietermans had said Fernand was the spy of Blackmoor, that he went & repeated everything to Mrs Clough. Fernand in a temper had flown & the combatants were only separated by the intervention of Henri.

Aug 4th:

The almost inconceivable has happened! Victor & Henri have gone away!! This morning they came up to get the money they had earned, Mrs Clough had written especially to say we were not to give it to them. When we told Victor this he was very indignant. "Ah, you seem to doubt me!" he cried "But I am not that kind of man, I am married & often I bring 100, 200 francs back to my wife & I give her every centime of it." However notwithstanding this, we thought it safer to give Mrs Clough the money. Henri was feeling very low, & wept silently the whole time he was saying goodbye, Victor on the other hand, was in one of his highfalutin' poses, (slightly aided by alcohol?). "Ah every man must go & fight" he said swelling himself out, "besides I could no longer stay in Burley, I should be ashamed to after what occurred at the pony show, &

people would not discriminate, they would say "Those dreadful Belgians! Including me, yes me!" Apparently this pose lasted till he arrived at Grata Quies when he broke down. Poor Van Dyck was also sent in to Bournemouth to be examined, but he is really so ill I should think he would possibly be réformed & return, I hope so. We are now a very small party at Blackmoor, smaller than we have been since November, just Fernand, André, Soinet & the carpenter, who go away on Thursday & the two new men.

Aug 6th:

On the way down to Blackmoor we met Mrs Prothero, who many tales about the Belgian soldiers, about their being drunk, ill treating the donkey & so on, Mrs Clough also told us that someone had written anonymously to Commandant Schmidt in Bournemouth that the Belgian soldiers in Burley behaved disgracefully. Really it is odious of people to delight in telling us of the shortcomings of our men, people like Mrs Kennedy, who has just sent them a beautiful cake with "Good luck" in pink icing, are much nicer. The carpenter is making a most attractive dolls house & Fernand has just made a fascinating donkey & cart.

The Stroobantses & Mdlle: Jansens have been down playing tennis with much screaming & laughter, the Jansens are now living with the Stroobantses! I wonder how the scheme will work, I should imagine a deadly quarrel is almost inevitable.

Aug 7th:

I received a postcard from Victor this morning. The Carpenter & André have just been up to fetch some cardboard.

Aug 10th:

The carpenter and Soinet have departed, the wretched little baby-boy over £2 in debt to Mrs Clough. I shall have to finish the dolls house as best I can. Fernand is very grumpy & depressed so is André. The dyspeptic is working very hard at the leather & doing it beautifully, I think Fernand is rather jealous of him. The new man Pix will be a good cutter out I think.

Mother has been for three days at Brockenhurst Arts & Crafts where she sold nearly all my toys & a great many of the other industries.

Aug 15th:

We went down in the morning to register everybody at Blackmoor, the men thought it a very useless entertainment & I rather agree with them, Fernand, André & Pix are only 26 years old. Alphonse Phillippe (the dyspeptic) was an awful K-nut in a rather bilious mustard coloured suit. Poor old granny Stroobants is very ill, she was taken off in the motor to Ashton Greys last night.

Aug 16th

Herbert Morris & I played tennis against Paul & Yvonne & England was badly beaten I regret to say. I'm not sure that the Stroobants' altogether appreciated Herbert's pleasantries delivered in somewhat curious french! Paul gave a offended & disdainful smile when Herbert translated "go along" as "Allez-vous-en!" but then as he remarked, the Belgians have no sense of humour.

We heard from Victor who is still at Grata Quies & who says he regrets Blackmoor very much, here he has nothing to smoke! a broad hint I suppose I must send him some cigarettes!

Aug 17th

Madame Stroobants was heard to telephone to Monsieur who is in Bournemouth with his motor "Et comment vas-tu." Monsieur apparently says he is not in good health for Madame says pityingly "Ah pauvre petit choux!" What a description of our lusty windbag!

August 24th

Who do you think has turned up with a beard? Sulks Minor, who I never thought to see again! Biddlecome was sent to meet him at Hinton Station, he found no one there, so on the way back meeting Mummy he asked her if she knew anything about it. Mother said she didn't, so Biddlecome replied "Oh I thought you might have been in the know."

The above beautiful flower was painted by one of the artillerymen, I think the one who was a schoolmaster.

Isn't this characteristic of Victor, he sent a long telegram to Mrs Clough asking for 10/- with which to pay for the enlargement of his daughters photograph, as he couldn't get it until he got the money.

August 27th

André has just had his freind here on leave, so he has been very happy, he goes away to London on Friday, & Fernand is probably going to Birmingham, Pick has gone to Poole, so I forsee us being left with only Alphonse.

Mrs Hawkins had a letter from Henri, he writes a great deal but always in a different hand, as he has to get somebody to do it for him. He is evidently not as happy at Grata Quies as he was at Blackmoor. "He wishes he was back" he says "to pump for your dear husband (Mr Hawkins) who is not strong enough to do it himself. Victor still continues to bleat for money he even wrote to the pirate from the spanish main, wishing to borrow from him.

Old Madame Stroobantz is going on as well as can be expected.

For the first time I have seen André with his leg on, it usually sits in a dejected attitude beside him, or lies on his bed.

I am so delighted, Noulet has sent his money as promised, to be banked by Mrs Clough.

Sept 4th

André came up to say goodbye to us, he is going to London where he hopes to become a "pompier" at an Hôtel. We gather that this means a potboy at a Public House, not, I fear, the best occupation for him. He is going to live with a friend of his a tailor.

A new man has arrived called Marcel, he has a crippled right hand, it was shot with shrapnel.

Soinet has sent Mrs Clough the money he owed her, I am so glad.

Sept 5th

Victor still continues to write pressing letters daily, for money, saying that he is deeply in debt, finally he wrote practically accusing Mrs Clough of being a thief. "Had he know what she was he would have insisted on being paid weekly!"

Mrs Clough wrote back a very severe letter to say that she had beleived he was fond of his wife, but this cannot be if he drinks away his money while she is so poor. Then Victor wrote saying his one wish was to prostrate himself at her feet, she was to send him no money, but to keep it in the bank for his wife. She must know that he was of a nervous temprement & the thought of the medical examination had so upset him that he did not know what he was saying or doing!"

Madame Jansens reports that they have already mapped out their future plans thus:- Monsieur & Madame are to take old Madame Stroobantz back to Brussels, where they will settle happily down under German rule. Mrs Clough is to plant the two girls out in English schools & have all four for the holidays!!!

Sept 6th:

I went down to Blackmoor to take a photograph of the house, I also took Mrs Clifford & Mrs Hawkins & Marcel the new soldier, such a nice man even Mrs Clifford approves of him. He must be a corporal as he has a yellow stripe on his sleeve. His right hand is crippled. Mrs Clifford was just saying how lonely it felt with as few men when a rush of feet was heard & in rushed Victor & Henri on bicycles, Victor glowing with excitement, he was clad in white flannels, a black coat a high collar & red tie & was smoking a cigar, he wrung my hand up & down & beamed, being at first so excited that he could barely speak! & Henri was nearly as bad. "Well" said Mrs Hawkins, this is a surprise!" After than no one got a word in edgeways as Victor commenced to pour forth:- "Yes, they had seen the Belgian doctor who had reforméd them both, Victor on account of his heart, which he said was worse than Gastons, but nobody had known, because he had made no fuss!!

They were to stay three more weeks at Grata Quies & then, with Madame Cloughs permission they hoped to return to Blackmoor!

"Yes" interrupted Henri "Bournemouth no suit me, Blackmoor suit me." He then spied Mrs Hawkins & nearly fell on his neck. Victor now proceeded, still at a fever heat of excitement to pour out questions regarding the "découpage, Madame Dent, his camarades etc" & I enquired after Van Dyck who poor thing was very ill.

We were by this time gathered in a group in the drive, admiring a photograph of Henris baby, I suddenly realized it was nearly one o'clock, so after a warm farewell of the two men I hastened home, leaving a message at Castletop on my way to break it gently to Mrs Clough that Victor & Henri had returned!

Sept 8th

Madam Stroo: told Mrs Clough that Mother had said the two girls could be placed in England, Mother had never said any such thing! Mrs Fisher says that Madame is like the woodcutters wife in "Hansel & Gretel" who said "Now that we can no longer provide for our children, let us desert them."

Fernand Delvin left yesterday morning for Birmingham, I think work was the best thing for him, I always liked him though he could be pretty sulky!

The toy accounts have all been settled up, I am still 10/- in debt to myself but I have more than that worth of toys. All my other debts are paid & now I feel quite sentimental about the empty cash boxes in my room that used to contain the men's money. On the whole the toys were a success, most people liked them & though I fear Victor's chef d'oeuvres were not very stable & the painting sometimes left much to be desired, yet the things were not as amateur looking as they might have been. They would have been much better, & I could have done everything far more economically had I always had the same men, but with the constant coming & going you were always teaching new ones & as they got good, they went away & you had to begin all over again. Also never knowing when it might come to an end you were only able to buy small quantities of wood, paint etc.

Victor went away with £4.10 in his pouch, Léon about 10/- Paul 6/- Noulet 25/- Henri 10/- Pick 5/- Soinet 12/6 & Delvin 25/- (he was so clever at making things that it was a great pity he refused to do anything after the first few weeks & he painted very well) Jordans 7/-.

The chief toys we made were parrots & cockatoos that balanced 1/6 each crocodiles that waggled 1/3. Polichinelles that turned somersaults 1/6 Kaisers on horseback 1/6, cocks & hens 8d, Red Indians, soldiers, goose girls, tits, poodles, black cats, see saws, Red X nurses, officers etc, etc also jigsaw puzzles varying from 25 to 500 pieces for which we charged 2/- per 100 pieces packed in a box.

Sept 9th

We went down to Blackmoor & found Emile Vanderstraten had arrived on 5 days leave, he is now also in khaki. Josef his camarade is in hospital owing to a fall from a horse. I had a very nice letter from Marcel, he hopes soon to come to Blackmoor again on leave. Mrs Hawkins had had a letter (in English) from the coiffeur who said never could they forget the Hawkinses & the happy time they had had at Burley as long as they lived, but they were getting on very well where they were. We saw Mrs Clough, from message I had left her on the day Victor & Henri arrived she had thought they were back for good, consequently & naturally she was somewhat fussed, & when she found out they had only come for the day, she thought I had played her a base practical joke! Henri will probably come back to Blackmoor, but Mrs Clough declines on any account to have Victor back! He explained his urgent requests for money by saying "it was all owing to a fall from his bicycle! His precious watch had been broken & he had to borrow money to have it mended, then once in debt he knew no peace!" He is now able to do no "bêtesses" as the directrice at Grata Quies takes him round with her to console the sick! Henri washes the vegetables!

Josef Snowarten's family are starving in Belgium, so if it can be managed they are coming here, they saw François Mur who is looking for his mother & family in Belgium, poor things they were last seen in a burning village surrounded by German soldiers.

Mrs Clough & Mother are both "off" the Stroobants family. Monsieur gave the command that Yvonne was to set to & make bead necklaces, well it is trouble enough to dispose of those made by Julienne & Suzanne so Mummy was determined not to be involved in any more! She was also slightly hurt because Madame had said that after she had worked so hard her blouses hadn't been sold – well there are only 12 left out of 68 & only a few collars out of over 70.

As Mrs Clough refuses to adopt the four children the Brussels plan is no use, & though Madame said she could not support another winter in Burley she shows no intention of budging, though we all think it would be best if they did! Madame Jansens told us that she saw Madame Stroobantz coming home with three bottles of beer & that in the night she heard corks popping!!!

Victor

I'm afraid there are many priceless tales of Victor that I have forgotten or missed out. Once in the early days of the toymaking Victor & I were constructing a dancing sailor (a new model) down in my house, we were not quite sure whether it would work or not, Victor jumping with impatience, & with trembling fingers adjusting the strings kept on exclaiming "je me pique, je me pique de curiosité!" Another time he was fearfully excited as he was having an enormous enlargement made of a little snapshot of his wife & child. When it was complete he was so pleased with it that he would go round the countryside showing it to everybody he met on the road! I fear he got little sympathy, but that would make little difference to our freinds boundless self assurance!

Strange though it may seem, Victors wife apparently adores him, & from her letters she seems a very nice woman. In one letter he showed us she said "O, Victor que je l'adore, je n'aimerai jamais que vous ..." & then she said that her little girl Germaine would go to the door & say "Papa, papa!" & "oh how I wish that papa was there!" Well, one can't help feeling there is something nice in Victor, though he is an old goose! & very tiresome sometimes, when he insists on painting toys himself (very badly) or letting his fancy roam in the way of cutting out, then one has to be stern, as Mrs Clough said "Victor must be kept in harness, not given the reins." Another maddening habit he had, was following you round, one day, I particularly wanted to speak to Fernand alone, so I took him into the loggia, we had not been there more than about two minutes, when Victor "padded" in, we then withdrew to Mrs Cliffords sitting-room Victor creaking after!

The same day as Hubert arrived, Victors "beau-père" arrived for the night, a more colossal old bore I have never come across, he began talking directly I entered the room (about what, goodness only knows) & went steadily on, till in desperation I fled at the end of 20 minutes, he then pursued me, gave me his photograph, & showed me his passports (things of small interest) told me he was working in a munition factory & commenced a lecture on the manufacture of shells, then Mother came in & I left her to cope with it!

*

*

*

Among the crisis'es, I forgot to mention a fearful occasion when the cynic François said that "only a fool could believe in the Roman Catholic religion." Gaston promptly flared up & there was rather a shindy!

Gustav used to take Rosamond Fisher out riding & they became very attached. When Rosamond left she said to Gustav "You must promise to call your next horse & first daughter after me!" Rosamond's sister Racy used to go out with Marcel.

