

PROMISE
OF GREATNESS



THE WAR OF 1914-1918

Edited by George A. Panichas

Foreword by Sir Herbert Read

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Amos Wilder

AMOS NIVEN WILDER was born in Madison, Wisconsin, on September 18, 1895, the son of Amos Parker Wilder, then editor of the Wisconsin State Journal and later Consul General in Hong Kong and Shanghai. He prepared for college at the Thacher School, Ojai, California, spent two years at Oberlin College, transferred to Yale, and after his junior year there went to France in the fall of 1916. After a winter with the Paris section he joined Section 2 of the American Field Service in February, 1917, and then Section 3 in Serbia in July. When the United States Army took over the ambulance sections, he enlisted in Paris in the United States Field Artillery in November, 1917. He served as a corporal in the 17th Field Artillery of the 2d Division and was discharged in France in June, 1919.

He took his B.A. at Yale in 1920, his B.D. in 1924 (after three years' study at Brussels and Oxford), and his Ph.D. in 1933, also at Yale. He was ordained to the ministry of the Congregational Churches (now the United Church of Christ) in 1926 and served as minister of the Congregational Church in North Conway, New Hampshire for three years. He taught first at Hamilton College (1930-33) and then as professor of the New Testament at Andover Newton Theological School (1933-43), the Chicago Theological Seminary and the Federated Theological Faculty of the University of Chicago (1943-54), and the Harvard Divinity School, from which he retired in 1963 as Hollis Professor of Divinity, Emeritus.

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AT THE NETHERMOST PIERS OF HISTORY

World War I, A View from the Ranks
For Jules Deschamps

THE FIGURE of the old soldier reminiscing about his battles has often been disparaged in life and letters. New generations have other interests, and the grandchildren are restive, as guests are when they are confronted with a travelogue even though enlivened by homemade movies. When veterans forgather, of course, the situation is different. Old cronies will evoke common memories and even get out their maps and souvenirs. But outside the guild all such rehearsals carry the suspicion of parade. There have been too many examples of those who have traded on their exploits like the old rascal in O'Neill's *Touch of the Poet* who had gone so far as to fictionalize his martial disgraces into honors. There is also, of course, the impulse of the combatant to draw the veil upon the atrocious and to say good-bye to all that. In our period, moreover, the taboo on sentiment, rhetoric, and, worst of all, idealization works as a final check on any annals save the most austere.

It is at this last point, however, that I make bold to demur and to take all the risks, with the further excuse, indeed, of the editor's invitation. However it be with World War II and more recently, one cannot properly evoke service in World War I without according a place to sentiment and ideals, and not only as a recognition of regrettable illusions. So far as concerns America's part in that war, I write as an unreconstructed Wilsonian. One thing that specially engages my interest in these annals after so many years is precisely the ambiguity of those ideals as they animated so many of us, the rights and wrongs of our crusading impulse and rhetoric, the fine distinction between truth and propaganda, between historical mission and manufactured inducements, between authentic hopes and deceptive, apocalyptic anticipations.

A related matter that impels my fascinated scrutiny, also in its ambiguous character, is that of the war experience in its dramatic

aspect, in its dimension of myth, the resonances of the sensibility and imagination of youth in its confrontation with the prodigious, and the strange postwar sense of anticlimax and disillusionment that accompanied the return to civilian life defined as normalcy.

Many college men of my generation volunteered in the American Field Service before America entered the war. Our motives were varied. The main idea, as with the Lafayette Escadrille, was to be where things were going on, and with this was mixed the romance of adventure. The urge of the Francophile played no small part. An early appeal of the Field Service for volunteers began with the words of Joffre: "The United States of America have not forgotten that the first page of the history of their independence was written with a little of the blood of France." There was an increasing sentiment, moreover, that America should be in the war. I had been on a Y.M.C.A. staff at a boys' Plattsburg (or training) Camp at Fort Terry (Plum Island, off New London, Connecticut) in the summer of 1916 and had heard Theodore Roosevelt fulminate to the ranks of teen-agers on the disgrace of our delay.

More significant to me as one concerned with the issues of pacifism and the moral aspects of the war was my experience as a student at Oberlin College in 1914-15. President Henry Churchill King in his large Sunday Bible class dealt for many months with the origins of the war, with an analysis of Prussianism, traditional Christian views of church and state, and the Christian attitude to war. The upshot was in effect a justification of American participation with the Allies. No doubt King did not know some of the things that were brought out later by men like Sidney Fay about the origins of the war. In any case the lurid tales of German atrocities were not part of the argument. King, like myself, was a Congregationalist and with Oberlin as a whole represented the tradition of the abolitionists and of the New England theocrats according to which the church associates itself with the moral responsibility of the state. It was the same Calvinist tradition which led Woodrow Wilson later to select the term "covenant" used by John Calvin for the ordering of Geneva (not to mention the Scotch and English Covenanters) for the instrument of the League of Nations. In the spring of 1919 when the Army of Occupation in Germany released many college men to attend French and British universities, I was in the Army School Detachment at the University of Toulouse. Several of us interested in the Christian ministry were assigned to the old French Huguenot seminary at Montauban. The dean, Émile Doumergue (close relative of the late President of France, Paul Doumergue), was the greatest Calvinist scholar of the time. He took immense delight in recognizing this

link between the Geneva of John Calvin and the political and international idealism of Woodrow Wilson, son of a Presbyterian manse.

Americans who were in Europe before our declaration of war encountered bitterness over our delay. Passing through London on my way to the Continent in October, 1916, I heard the following *réplique* on the stage of a music hall. One comedian observed that George Washington "never let a lie slip through his teeth." "Yes," was the answer, "because like all Americans he spoke through his nose." But the disparagement, at least of American civilians, continued after the war in France, and sometimes for good reasons. In his *Chant funèbre pour les morts de Verdun*¹ Henry de Montherlant exclaims at the sacrilege of the first American tourists of the Verdun battlefields who carried off skulls in the trunks of their cars. "Peoples without a past need souvenirs. Already Washington used to exhibit piously one of the supposed keys to the Bastille, which actually were fabricated at Paris by the dozen."² But the American vanguard in France was honored, often in embarrassing ways. Arriving from the front with soiled uniform and, no doubt, marks of fatigue, I was offered a seat by a Frenchwoman in the crowded *metro*. The irritations that are perennial between the Americans and the French at the superficial levels of politics and tourism do not touch the deep confraternity in arms of the anonymous combatants in the ranks.

On the fourth of July, 1917, I was in Paris on the way from the French front to join an ambulance section with the French in Serbia. Thus, it came about that I was present at the Picpus cemetery where Pershing went that day to visit the grave of Lafayette. It has often served me as warning to the historian that though I was an eyewitness within hearing, I long told the story of hearing Pershing say, "Lafayette, we are here." I learned later that the words were spoken by a Colonel Stanton. One sometimes hears it said that the whole episode was a myth. This is going too far, but such are the perils of firsthand reminiscence. In any case I can remember accurately the day in April of that year when we saw the official French *affiche* at Ste.-Menehould announcing the American declaration of war and the emotion it aroused in the army zone among the French *poilus* and the few Americans already in service.

For the purposes of this chronicle I have disinterred from old trunks and cartons the letters I wrote home from France and Serbia, not looked at for fifty years. Most of them were written on the

¹ Paris, 1924.

² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

cheap lined sheets picked up in a village *papeterie*. Correspondence from the Field Service includes the official French postcard designated *Correspondence militaire* and sometimes carries the surcharge *Contrôle postal militaire*. One envelope was stamped RECEIVED WITHOUT CONTENTS. N.Y.P.O., PENN. TERM. STA. One illegible letter received in France had the written annotation *accident de mer*. After I transferred to the U.S. Army the letterhead of the Y.M.C.A. often appears with its red triangle and ON SERVICE WITH THE AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES or that of the Knights of Columbus with its emblem and the American flag in color. From this time on each letter was censored: thus, "John Smith, Lt. 17th F.A." The envelopes carry the seals U.S. ARMY POSTAL SERVICE and A.E.F. PASSED AS CENSORED, again with the signature, which after all these years reminds me of the names of the several officers of my battery.

Army letters were often written in a dugout at night by the light of the little lamps which like our briquettes the French had taught us to improvise. With a small can and gasoline parleyed from a camion driver, supplemented by a strip of cloth for a wick and a sawed-off cartridge, one had a flare that would burn for hours. Books could not be sent through Army mail to the front, but my family tore the covers off them and sent them rolled up like magazines. My letters carry a running comment on classics thus available.

Besides the letters other survivals came to light: a receipt for \$25 from a New Haven garage for a "Course in automobile repair and driving"; a Paris driving license, November 28, 1916 (my driving test was on the Champs Élysées); every kind of identity card, *permis de séjour, ordre de mouvement*—including the tour de force of red tape overcome for permission to spend a week's leave in the Lake District, wangled from both civil and military authorities, French and British, as well as the American Embassy in Paris. Here is a receipt from "Lloyd & Co., High Class English Tailors," Place de la Madeleine, for my ambulance uniform, "tunic, breeches and insignia"; an inventory of equipment received when enlisting in the Field Artillery; a penciled plan of a small French village indicating billeting arrangements for A Battery: officers, men, picket lines, infirmary, pumps for drinking water. A printed set of rules handed to men on leave in Paris included as No. 7: "The Military Police have been ordered to take the names and report all ranks, including Militarized Civilians, who permit themselves to be solicited on the streets."

Even the most trifling of such items gratify by their concreteness.

The past swims less in the vague. So the historian cherishes his papyri fragments, coins, and graffiti. Sometimes such archives have more importance. I found the original of a traced firing mission for batteries of our regiment indicating the successive advances of a creeping barrage, by minutes, in the area of Belleau Wood (duly deposited with the historical section of the 2d Division).

More of the order of minor graffiti is my on-the-spot notation of the humor and profanity of doughboys loading terrified horses by a ramp into a French boxcar (eight *chevaux*—twenty *hommes*). The first horses driven in plunge, kick out, and fall down.

"Bang! Bang! They're making a noise like a dozen batteries. There won't be anything left of this sawed-off freight car."

"Whoa! Whoa! Tie the S.O.B.'s in here before they trample me to death."

"Put a little straw up to 'em. A horse will come out of delirium tremens for a wisp of hay."

"As soon as they get done with it, though, they begin to see things."

Two men come out of the menagerie, pale and limping. "That's the way it goes. I was drunk as a cuckoo when I joined this man's army."

Singing: "Why didn't we wait to be drafted?" "Whoa there, you—brutes! Shut the door on them. They'll all be dead when we open it again, anyhow."

"There gotta be three men stay in there with 'em, too."

The Field Service had had its origins in the activities already initiated by Americans in 1914 under the auspices of the antebellum American Hospital in Neuilly. Before going to Section 2 in the Argonne, I served three months in the Paris section, our cars being stationed at the large new Lycée Pasteur, which had been converted to a hospital. We met the long hospital trains that came from the front into the Gare de la Chapelle. From Neuilly we would go across Paris to this station behind the Gare du Nord in a convoy of twenty or thirty heavy Buick ambulances. The Paris taxi drivers were already at this date a legend and were looked on as our only rivals in the skills of the road. They were not supposed to cut through our convoys, and if they so presumed, they were fair game for reprisal. Some of our soldier-of-fortune drivers boasted of neatly taking a wheel off one or more of these intruders. We took our loads of stretcher cases to hospitals in and around Paris often in the small hours of the night and made it a point of honor to know our way without the aid of the gendarme-guides provided.

I have lately been reminded that it is precisely to this Paris of 1916 that Proust brings back his narrator in the last part of his great work. Marcel observes the city in wartime. Referring to the duels in the sky, the searchlights, and the sirens, he invokes the Walküre of Wagner and the *Götterdämmerung*. He plays with the analogy of Pompeii and Herculaneum and, with his own scrutiny in mind, thinks of how "the frivolity of an epoch, when ten centuries have passed over it, becomes the matter of a grave erudition." He evokes the "august" or "supernatural" aspect of the combatants on leave from the front who in a few hours have exchanged the fabulous world of the lines for the world of the boulevards. He speaks of the touching charm of the young poilus: "*le petit Parigot . . . avec son air dessalé, sa mine éveillée et drôle—quelle finesse, quel bon sens!*" And "*les gars de province, comme ils sont amusants et gentils avec leur roulement d'r et leur jargon patoisier!*"³

Speaking of the slang phrases of the war, "*passeront pas,*" "*poilus,*" "*on les aura,*" Proust finds his teeth set on edge by the vulgarisms, but then finds them sanctified. His sentiment about the warriors in faded blue brings back something of the mood and piety of the time:

But if you saw all this world, especially those of humble lot, the workmen, the small tradesmen, who had no idea of their hidden capacities for heroism and who would have died in bed without ever suspecting it, if you had seen them run through the fire to assist a comrade, to carry off a wounded officer, and when themselves hit smile at the moment of death when the army surgeon says that the trench has been recaptured from the enemy, I assure you . . . that one gets a worthy idea of the French and one can appreciate better the epochs of the past which in our school days struck us as somewhat overdrawn.⁴

The French combatant writers of the time—Duhamel, Dorgeles, Montherlant—all disparage the city and the civilian in contrast with the tenor of the front. In the novel, by Philippe Barrès, *La Guerre a vingt ans*,⁵ Alain, the soldier on leave, attends a dance hall with a companion and is made aware of the abyss between. One could lend oneself, he reflects, to the fiction of a dance on the edge of the volcano. But the affair was flat and gross. The joy with which he had begun his leave from the front, "as one who had escaped from

³ *A la recherche du temps perdu*, III (Paris, 1954), pp. 806-7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 752-53.

⁵ Paris, 1924.

among the dead," is suddenly deflated. "We alone, in our Gehenna, know the value of the world's marvels." Looking about him at these men and women who do not love what he loves or hate what he hates, he would like to "blow up the ceiling of the hall and let them see suddenly, as they lay trembling on the floor, the sky where the sooty cloud of the shell expands like a tragic poem."⁶

During the spring of 1917 I was with Section 2 of the Field Service in the Argonne. This sector was relatively quiet at this time, though at night we witnessed the appalling flashes, star shells, rockets, and glare and heard the interminable hammering of the inferno of the Champagne attacks on our left. Driving to and from the dressing stations in the lines without lights, the ditches on either side of the road masked by the snow in the darkness of the forest; evacuating besides the usual cases now and then a wounded prisoner, and once shut in for the trip with a distracted poilu; running the gauntlet of shelled roads—all this was the common experience of the service. I have lately noted that Dos Passos refers to one of these same posts and shelling at its approaches in his account of ambulance driving, *First Encounter*,⁷ the post at the monastery-church of La Chalade, reached, as he notes, from Les Islettes on the east-west road through the Argonne.

The terrain, topography, place-names associated with the incommensurable drama of war took on, especially for the fresh sensibility of youth, a mythic character. Moving up to the front was like entering a preternatural landscape. The soldier in the twentieth century felt himself enveloped as it were by archaic spells. Especially as one moved into the calcined desolation of the forward trenches, a kind of electric alertness metamorphosed all perception. The peculiar feature of so much of World War I, with its relatively stable lines and no-man's-land, meant that the advanced trenches were like the frontier of chaos, charged with the passion of the world.

When this area was convulsed by barrages, mortars, attacks, while the hinterland teemed with supporting units, and laboring gun crews and harassed convoys of supplies, batteries, tanks, cars, ambulances, the whole experience took on a legendary character. Montherlant's war novel *Le Songe*⁸ operates with a continuous counterpointing of the experiences of 1917-18 with motifs drawn from the *Iliad*, Plutarch, and other ancient fables like the *Song of Roland*. The drama is caught up into a timeless epic. "The ancient realm

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

⁷ New York, 1945. Republication of *One Man's Initiation*, 1919.

⁸ Paris, 1922.

and the modern, the realm of phantasms and the realm of things, were confounded in a fantastic universe which no longer threatened him."⁹ The night-shrouded camion carrying the casqued men to battle is *Argo*. The eve of battle with its omens and hallucinations is described in a chapter entitled "Noctium Phantasmata." Strains of music are heard in the heavens, and Plutarch is recalled and his account of the strange harmonies of instruments and voices that were heard overhead by the armies in the middle of the night that preceded the decisive battle between Antony and Octavius. "Once again at the right moment the great life of antiquity imparted to its exiled child what little was required . . . ; the great tomb opened and a swallow or an eagle flew to him bearing its omens." And noting that this tormented night ushered in the decisive victories of July, 1918, the narrator hails the "fabulous concordance" with the eve of that battle in which the Roman order and the world's weal were born in the victory of Octavius.¹⁰

I recognize that readers today may be puzzled, if not scandalized, by this theme of the prestige of the war experience and its imaginative overtones. I can only quote again from Montherlant, in this case from his *Chant funèbre pour les morts de Verdun*: "One would prefer that nothing resulted from war except evil. Many problems would thus be simplified. But this violin bow, spotted with blood, draws profound accents from man which it alone can evoke from him."¹¹ One can illustrate further from the related mystique of the fraternity of the combatants over against the civilian world and their disenchantment with and alienation from the postwar world. The then young French writers, Joseph Kessel, Philippe Barrès, Montherlant, focus their early war novels (*L'Équipage*, *La Guerre à vingt ans*, and *Le Songe*, respectively) on the gulf between the solidarity of combatants on the one hand and the relative insipidity of all civilian relationships. These first testimonies reflected the shared experience of an incommensurable action and passion and the bonds of fealty to the dead, as also in the greater works of Georges Duhamel. Montherlant cites¹² three similar passages from the novels in question:

[The war] altogether a somber and sublime universe in which the spirit drew near to the depth of things.

P. Barrès

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 109.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

Now that he emerged from the kingdom of shades and of naked souls, he knew.

J. Kessel

Now he knew what counted and what did not count.

H. de Montherlant

From July to October, 1917, I was with one of the two ambulance sections in the Balkans. Evacuating French casualties and victims of malaria from Monastir most of the time, we were also confronted in this colorful theater of the war with Serbian, British, Annamite, Greek, and even Russian troops—the latter vituperated as they lay down their arms in consequence of the revolution. Returning to France and enlisting in Paris in the U.S. Field Artillery as a private in November, 1917, I was assigned to a battery in the 17th F.A. and so served in the ranks through the rest of the war in the 2d, or Indian Head, Division.

I cite passages from two letters written in this period which, naïve as they are, may be taken as firsthand documentation of the men in the ranks, the American doughboy: "One hundred years—five hundred years from now, what idea will the historian or the average American have of the men who fought his second War of Independence¹³ for him? They have the soldier's vices—wine, women and dice. What are their virtues? The men are so young. Their qualities are all condensed in the one great quality of zest for life. That overflowing consciousness of being alive is the basis of any amount of generosity and lavishness of power which makes the French love us so much. And add to this something which the 'bossy' American is not accustomed to in his imperial days of peace—the pause that comes before a revelation of the *épouvantable*, the appalling, in life, as I have seen it show in eye and cheek after the first experiences of shelling—and you get a malleability, a disposable enthusiasm, that overrides all the vices. The shock of war tempers the bravado, recklessness and insubordination of this human type which are nevertheless admirable traits. They have such surpluses of vigor that they take their zest as a witness against the possibility of their doing or taking harm. That's exactly what I mean to say: they feel like kings and the king can do no wrong."

Again, in a letter from a replacement camp in September, 1918, I describe the ethnic variety and savor and unexpected talents that abounded in the ranks. Here was a corporal among these casuals

¹³ No doubt what I had in mind by this curious designation was that America was now again finding its identity in the world of nations, as was not the case in the Civil War.

who had mined in Kentucky and in the Andes and who, though like most he had never been to college, had his own curiosities: He was an expert on the Cherokee Indians and on the habits of spiders. Here was a Swede who had run away from home in Sweden to go to sea, been shipwrecked on his own coast, and had eventually become a foreman in Colorado. He was a gifted narrator and talked among other things about Socialism among the workers in Denver. Here was a Galveston longshoreman who told a kind of Eugene O'Neill story about proving himself on the docks against his father's veto. "What an amount of fine raw-material is going into the war in the ranks. Unschooled, coarse often, disrespectful, but variously disciplined by home memories—a stern but just father, a worn-down but unflinching mother—or by a long pull in the first years of bread-winning, or by some schoolboy romance, or by some unknown grade-school teacher, or childhood imagination captured by some forgotten Decoration Day ceremony. Most of this is pretty well submerged by the recklessness that they like to put on. And there is a tendency to assume a crowd spirit with much grumbling and sometimes worse. But getting at each man alone, or getting the crowd in good spirits, you have a promise for America that is immeasurable."

The deeper currents of history and its meaning are better sensed among the anonymous many or the common soldiers than in loftier quarters. By the same token the professional historian writes at two removes from the dense reality of events and from those who carry the burden of time and who are exposed to its hidden intentions and secret omens. Even the writer or artist is disqualified to the extent that his vocation separates him from the mass or makes him a nonpolitical being. It was unfortunate that our best-known World War I American writers as a rule (in contrast with such French writers as I have named) were not fully immersed in the war and in the ranks.¹⁴ We had no Duhamel, and none with the human-politi-

¹⁴ E. E. Cummings served in an ambulance unit, not the Field Service, until his unpardonable arrest and mistreatment by French authorities. After his release and return to the States the war ended before his enlistment in the Army could return him to France. John Dos Passos notes in data supplied to a reference work that he served in several ambulance units, again not the Field Service, and the U.S. Medical Corps. Hemingway, who sought active service but was rejected because of his eyes, served in Italy in ambulance and canteen service briefly before he was wounded in the summer of 1918 and then returned to the same service for a few weeks before the Armistice. He did not serve in the elite corps of the Italian *arditi*, as is sometimes stated, but with them. Nothing could be further from my thought here than to question their courage or motives or to lack appreciation for their talent. It is simply a question of the narrow base of experience in this war which lay behind their writings.

cal commitment of a Charles Péguy. The soldier characters of our American writers go A.W.O.L. like Dos Passos' artist-hero, John Andrews; or are affronted by the unwonted austerity of discipline, sometimes indeed excessive as in E. E. Cummings' *Enormous Room*; or make an esthetic separate peace, as in Hemingway. The prestige of such writers has done much to encourage a foreshortened view of the American role in the war, something less than honor to its dead, and misjudgment as to the instincts of the nation in that juncture as they came to expression and to temporary frustration in the tragic drama of Woodrow Wilson and our relapse into normalcy.

As one who served in the ranks in a Regular Army division that was among the first in the field, I take this occasion to testify that our indeed inarticulate common soldiers so far from their native ground had, nevertheless, a sense of being willing actors in a necessary drama and one inseparably linked with the meaning of the American story. The core of the matter was not some engineered hatred of the "Hun," or sentiment for France, or the jeopardy of Britain, or unlimited submarine warfare and the honor of the flag, but an instinct for civil order and due political authority among the peoples. Though the United States had had a short history, its Roman and Calvinist heritages from the founders, together with its experience with lawlessness on the frontier, had conferred on us a sense of the life-and-death urgency of public authority, the a priori necessity of law and its sanctions over against human veracities, and dikes against anarchy and mania. This issue explains the stubbornness with which Wilson linked the peace treaties with the League of Nations. This issue, more general than that of who started the war and deeper than that of democracy and self-determination, was obscurely recognized by the American soldier. And it was in this context that we construed the apocalyptic overtones of the war and of such actions as the attack at dawn on July 18, 1918, in the forest of Villers-Cotterêts or that of November 1 in the Argonne.

Three days afterward I described the bombardment which preceded the latter attack in a letter which for all its ingenuousness suggests the sensitivities in question: "I went outside when it started, and as far as one could see either way there were the continuous flashes and roar, which went on hour after hour until light and then on until midday. When one lay down indoors the guns sounded like the sucking and ebbing and swirling of a great whirlpool. At such times one feels with uncomfortable clearness that sense of awe towards the future. History making itself now,

now, at this ordinary night and day and in this ordinary gray landscape. One comes close to the Plan and sees Castor and Pollux fighting over the Romans palpably."

At another angle, as of any war, the aspect of this war was loathsome and atrocious. It is not surprising that any inducements to Americans to participate in it would appear fraudulent. I choose one example among many and cite a discussion of the war by soldiers in various of the Allied armies as presented in John Dos Passos' *First Encounter*.¹⁵ Here, in Chapter IX, there is a long diatribe against "the lies, the phrases, the press" that brought America into the war, seen as "a tragedy," and as "goin' back on our only excuse for existin'! Who shall ever know what dark forces bought and bought until we should be ready to go blinded and gagged to war? . . . People seem to so love to be fooled. . . . We are slaves of bought intellect, willing slaves."¹⁶ In the context the speakers identify themselves as "merely intellectuals" over against "the stupid average working-people who have the power." The Americans, it is explained to the Europeans, "are like children. They believe everything they are told, you see; they have no experience in international affairs, like you Europeans."¹⁷

This reaction to the enormity of war on the part of the more emancipated artists and intellectuals in the Army was understandable. But it was superficial. The artists have their own admirable personal codes—for example, the heroic code of Hemingway—or their iconoclastic enthusiasms: Dos Passos' group in the passage in question unite in the hope of an eventual revolutionary Socialism. It is relevant to cite here as representative for many of the artists and writers of the period André Gide's statement that he "regretted that under Mallarmé's influence he had long been unpolitical."¹⁸ Dos Passos himself, writing an introduction to the 1945 reprinting of his book (*First Encounter* was first published as *One Man's Initiation* in 1919), calls attention to the impact of the war of 1914–18 on Americans as "a horrible monstrosity, outside of the normal order of things," as compared with World War II.¹⁹ And he has presented a radically different picture of the earlier war and its issues in his recent work *Mr. Wilson's War* (1962).

The Americans in the ranks were certainly less sophisticated and articulate, but they had an obscure sense of the meaning or inevita-

bility of the war. Woodrow Wilson expressed it after an imperfect fashion, and his personal tragedy was an index of the same impasse and resistances that determined the ordeal of the soldier. No doubt there was sentimentality and utopianism in the idea that this was the war to end war. But such intensity of hope when all is at stake is not unfamiliar, nor was it silly in analogous periods, like those of the English Puritans or the founders of New England, not to mention the beginnings of Christianity. Certainly the goals of Wilson were less sentimental than those of the contemporary Marxists, and he was more realistic than those who sought a vindictive peace and the several forms of national aggrandizement or those Americans who failed to recognize that the time had come for committing the nation to responsible international structures.

At the conclusion of his massive work on this war the French historian Pierre Renouvin notes that though Wilson was only the final compiler-editor of the many elements that went into the Covenant of the League of Nations, yet "it remains true that without him, his tenacity, his faith, the new conception of international relations would not have been made the foundation of the peace treaties of 1919–20."²⁰

Yet if at this remove in time one still defends America's participation in the war and insists on the core of truth in the high-flown rhetoric of promise, one can do so only in full recognition of the abomination of the slaughter: the ghastly and protracted carnage which understandably motivated the revulsion and even the cynicism of many interpreters. This consideration excludes any rational justification of the war. What we are pointed to is the kind of historical fate or linkage of events which Lincoln dealt with in the categories of offense and judgment with respect to the Civil War. We are pointed to the human condition itself whose cure exacts these kinds of fates which transpire over our heads and which are wiser than any of those who either protest or serve them.

²⁰ *La Crise européenne et la première guerre mondiale* (Paris, 1962), p. 663.

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹⁸ Van Meter Ames, *André Gide* (New York, 1947), p. 162.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 8.