

# How "Under Fire" Was Published

SIMONE TERY

I DO NOT doubt that the day in 1916 when I first saw Henri Barbusse marks an important date in the life of Barbusse and in the history of mankind.

My father, Gustave Tery, one of the great French polemicists, had founded *L'Oeuvre*, a daily newspaper. He had been maddened to see every day in the academic newspapers "the old gentlemen" gayly encouraging young people to go and kill for civilization and What is Right. He thought that civilization and What is Right was not where these official journalists, these comfortable old men, feigned to see it; and that it was time that the feelings of the soldiers in the trenches and all the poor people of France whose sons, husbands and brothers the war was slaughtering, who could bear no more of misery and sadness, should be expressed. It was in order to tell the truth—at least as far as the terrible censorship would allow—that he had established *L'Oeuvre*.

I was not very big at the time. I was a boarding student at a Lycee at Versailles, where I studied; and I had a holiday every fifteen days to go to see my father in Paris. But he was terrifically busy and most often, after having embraced me, he told me to wait in a corner of his office and I remained there, making myself insignificant, as wise as a mouse. But there was nothing to stop me from watching the goings and comings or from listening to what the people, my father's collaborators and visitors, said.

One day I saw a soldier enter who appeared immense to me. He was so thin that his skyblue soldier's coat, discolored by the rain and dirt, twice too big for him, floated on his large body and beat against the calves of his legs. On his face, pale and wasted away, with its long thin nose, one could read sweetness, sorrow, resolution. He had above all a striking appearance. In his clear eyes, full of dreams, there surged suddenly an anguished look, which would be extinguished and would burst forth anew, like the beacon of a light house.

Barbusse went across the room in three long steps, his body a bit bent over, and threw on my father's desk a large manuscript, like a longshoreman dropping his load.

"There," he said. "I have brought you *Under Fire*."

"What is it?" my father asked.

"It is a book on the war," replied Barbusse. "It has been refused by all the newspapers in Paris. They have treated me as a defeatist. I have used the few days of my ve in fruitlessly walking the streets. In

an hour I return to the front. You are my last hope. They tell me that you have founded a newspaper to tell the truth. Do you wish my *Under Fire* then?"

Barbusse was at that time a little known journalist. My father looked at him for a long time. He was a discoverer of men. He saw that he had before him a real man.

"So you have spoken the truth?" he said, "We will listen."

"I tell of the life of the soldiers in the trenches and of their death. The others speak of their 'glory,' of the pleasure which young men have in dying for Civilization and What is Right, I speak of what I have seen, of that which I have come up against, of the dirt, the lice, the blood and the filth, of youngsters who call for their mothers during hours of agony caught on barbed wire. I speak of the brutal savagery of the war."

"I see," said my father.

He opened the book at random and read two or three pages. For a long time there was a great silence. Barbusse was seated all doubled up, his elbows cutting his knees, his head leaning forward. I scarcely dared move. You could hear a fly buzzing. Suddenly my father gave a long whistle and raised his head.

"Barbusse," he said in a deep voice, "I think that you have written the book I am waiting for, that all France is waiting for. Without reading further, I can say immediately that *Under Fire* will appear in *L'Oeuvre*."

Barbusse got up with a bound. Without a word he clasped my father's hand violently. He was too moved to speak. Neither was father able to say anything further. The two men, with hands clasped, stood looking at each other. Then Barbusse turned and without a word went out of the room.

The reception of *Under Fire* was amazing. Never had a newspaper known such a success. In the trenches the soldiers fought over copies of *L'Oeuvre* in which the story was running. For the first time their feelings were at last expressed, by one of themselves, with a powerful realism and a dramatic restraint. It was written in a language raw and full of taste—their language.

But this was certain to be opposed by the censor and the authorities. The officers forbade the reading of *L'Oeuvre*. The police seized numbers of it in the kiosks and the censors carvassed the army. In the middle of the large white spaces in each number, set aside by the scissors of Anastasia (which was what the censor was called), my father printed a large picture of the beard of M.

Gautier, the chief of censorship. It was in the end a small war where cleverness, intelligence and talent fought for peace.

In several days Barbusse became famous. His novel, which soon appeared in book form, went through enormous editions. And I at the Versailles Lycee, hid under my mattress a copy of *Under Fire* with a book by Romain Rolland, and these I read in secret. It was with these two books that I entered into life, that I commenced to have a conscious understanding of things. And like me how many young girls, how many young boys of France!

Alas, I arrived in Moscow too late to see Barbusse alive for the last time. As I got off the train I learned that he had died.

The first day of my first visit to the U.S.S.R., the first thing that I saw was the face of Henri Barbusse. In 1916 he opened the doors of life to me; in 1935 I found him on the threshold of the Soviet Union. For the second time he opened to me the doors of a new life. Dead? No, not dead, but living in us.

And while I looked with sadness on his prophet's burning face, now cold, while there rages outside, like a human storm, the tide of International Young Communists, it seems to me in truth that we, the young people, have come to receive the word of command from the great one who has passed on.

We are taking up his work.

## I Met a Man

I met a man the other day,  
Gave him a lift—driving out his way.

He said:

(His hair was red)

"A man might's well be dead  
As have no work to do."

(His eyes were soft bewildered blue;  
His hands had bands of hard sinew.)

"God damn!" he cried,

"The world's cock-eyed!

Be jigged if they're not honing for

Another stinking bloody war!"

I stopped before his neat house door.

"There's so much in this world needs  
mending;

Many fine jobs a man might be tending—  
Roads, and waterworks, steelrail bending...

See that nice little bus you've got?

Well, I used to forge those frames by the  
lot;

Can work a machinetool on the dot!"

(There was a break in his right shoe.)

"Thanks for the ride," he said; "thank  
you."

IRVING FINEMAN.



LANDSCAPE

George Picken

# Macaroni for Africa

GRACE FLANDRAU

**T**HERE is something people are saying nowadays and writing in articles for newspapers and magazines. Especially Mr. Brisbane is saying it. And that is how glad well-wishers of the Ethiopians should be that their country has the chance of becoming a European colony so that there will no longer be any slavery, hunger or injustice. And when I read that I am surprised, because in 1927 and '28 I spent a good many months in Central Africa, in places that are already the colonies of various European nations.

There was to begin with Porte Gentil in the French Gabun. It was night and the white glare of our searchlights picked up the throngs of small craft come out from shore. There were gay shouts, greetings, commands, the clatter of cargo loaded and unloaded and through it all, soft and clear, there was the clink of chains. Up out of the darkness of the sea they came in hundreds—young men and old, nearly naked, with long chains around their necks fastening them together in pairs. They were being transferred to another part of the French Congo.

It was Matadi, the principal port of the

Belgian Congo. We sat, at high noon, in the waiting room of the local official who would, when he finished his lunch and the siesta that followed it, inspect our passports. It was dim and cool, the Venetian shades were lowered, the tiles dampened, the wicker chairs deep and easy. Only the open door was a blaze of intolerable sunlight. And before it black men, chained together by neck and ankle, walked slowly back and forth. They carried rocks on their heads and were building something or other for the official's garden. In the silence was only the soft frivolous tinkle of their chains.

It was night on the Congo River. The boat lay tied up to the breast of the forest and for hours chained men passed up and down the gang plank carrying wood for the next day's run. It was Stanleyville, a thousand miles up the great river. It was Buta, our last outpost on the new motor road. It was this or that small military post far from all roads in the depth of the Ituri forest and always, wherever we went, there were chained men.

"Who are they?" we asked. "What have they done?"

"Well, for the most part they have failed

to pay their taxes," the voice of authority replied.

Taxes! It would seem that those naked men, barefoot, bareheaded, wearing only a loin cloth made of tree bark, were as denuded of taxable property as the forest animals themselves.

Nor are the men in chains the only slaves of empire throughout the length and breadth of colonial Africa—and all of Africa is colonial except Ethiopia and Liberia. Imperial conquest is expensive, it costs even more in money than it does in blood. And money, if not blood, can be repaid, must be repaid. It must be repaid out of the mines and forests for possession of which these lands were conquered and the tropical products which are raised for export. And it is the conquered people who must do the work. They must take out the minerals, cut down the trees, plant the coffee and cotton, build the railroads and highways over which these goods are to be taken to the sea. They must do this work for nearly nothing if the necessary profit is to be made. But of course, when men are drafted there is never much trouble about wages.

So throughout equatorial Africa—which