

CIVILISATION, 1914-1918

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Civilisation, 1914-1918 by Georges Duhamel & T. P. Conwil-Evans

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GEORGES DUHAMEL & T. P. CONWIL-EVANS

**CIVILISATION,
1914-1918**

CIVILISATION

1914-1918

BY

GEORGES DUHAMEL

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

T. P. CONWIL-EVANS

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

WITH the exception of, perhaps, "Le Feu" by Henri Barbusse, no book made such a stir in the France of 1914-1918 as Georges Duhamel's¹ "Civilisation." Its success was as immediate as its appeal was universal. Like "Le Feu," it was awarded the Prix Goncourt, and ran to an enormous circulation.

There is no doubt, too, that posterity will acclaim it as a remarkable work. For it is something more than a human document of the war. One feels in the poignant experiences of the few French soldiers, depicted by M. Duhamel, the tragic fate of twentieth-century man—the Machine Age man—in the grip of the scientific monster he has created for himself. These intimate

¹ Georges Duhamel, born 1884, poet, dramatist, and doctor of medicine. His poems include "Des Légendes," "Des Batailles" (1907), "L'homme en Tête" (1909), "Selon ma loi" (1910), "Compagnons" (1912); and plays: "La Lumière" (played at the Odéon, 1911), "Dans l'ombre des Statues" (Odéon, 1912), "Le Combat" (Théâtre des Arts, 1913), "La plus grande joie" (Théâtre du Vieux Colombier); and several critical works on poetry. "Vie des Martyres," 1917; "Possession du Monde" (Essays), 1918.

CIVILISATION

pictures have the cumulative effect of an epic in which the experiment of humanity is menaced by man's own inventiveness and heroism.

This impression is the creation of the particular style of M. Duhamel. It is not by the vigorous simplicity of a Guy de Maupassant that he achieves his effects, nor by the exact observation which one might expect of him as a doctor of medicine. His strength lies in the violent imagery with which he intensifies his descriptions, giving the impression of life and feeling to inanimate objects. He thus often produces the effect of a monstrous dream or nightmare.

Emile Zola was a past master of this method; but, in his case, too often, the subject did not lend itself to such treatment. M. Duhamel does not lay himself open to this objection. No style could be more appropriate than his for expressing the cold precision of the machinery by means of which this so effectively organised war has ruined our world.

Like Emile Zola, M. Duhamel does

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

not shirk any detail however unpleasant. Differences in language and point of view make it impossible to reproduce all of these. But with the exception of "Les Amours de Ponceau" all the tales comprising "Civilisation" are included in the translation.

I am much indebted to Miss Eva Gore-Booth for kindly reading the proofs.

T. P. C.-E.

LONDON, *October* 1919.

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