



The
**CANADIAN
 COURIER**
The National Weekly



Vol. XVIII.

October 30th, 1915

No. 22

PTE. HANDCOCK'S PROMOTION

A Tale of the Trenches

By LIEUTENANT R. DURAND

In London Daily Mail

In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died; And their departure was accounted to be their hurt. —The Wisdom of Solomon, iii. 2.

“B LIMEY! 'Oo's in command now?” Private Handcock (hate five ho 'Ancock, as he described himself when drawing new boots from the quartermaster-sergeant) dragged himself from underneath a pile of dying Prussians. He had survived, breathless but unhurt, a desperate onslaught—the second that day—on the trench in which he was stationed. The last Prussian survivor of the previous charge had died fifty yards away, writhing, moaning, and blaspheming among the wreckage of the trench's barbed-wire screen. In their second charge the Prussians had reached Handcock's trench and fought hand-to-hand with its defenders. They had died to the last man, but had taken so many gallant British lads with them into the Great Beyond that not one man in twenty had survived their attack.

Handcock looked up and down the winding trench. His platoon commander was lying face downwards, blood spurting from a little red hole among his yellow curls. The platoon sergeant, sobbing and choking, a bayonet thrust in his lungs, was sitting propped against an ammunition box. He might live, thought Handcock, if the ambulance men reached him soon enough, but he was past taking over command.

“'Oo's in command?” shouted Handcock. “Corpril 'Obbs! Corpril Tyson! Ain't there any bloomin' corprils left?”

“Looks like they've outed them all,” panted a man from his post ten yards farther along the trench. “Corporal Dawes went west first time they attacked and Corporal Macdonald's past caring who wins the Boat Race. There's Hicks and Jimson and Harris the other side of me, and me and you and Silly Billy over there, and that seems to be all.”

“Then I'm in command. 'Strewth! 'Oo'd 'ave thought it. Privit Lance-Corpril Brigadier Genril 'Ancock takes command of the platoon—an' the company too, so far as I can see, pendin' orders. Now, boys, get to work. You, 'Arris—you're a City gent when at 'ome—get into the funk 'ole an' telephone that Privit 'Ancock regrets to report that—”

“Telephone's smashed,” replied Private Harris (of Messrs. Harris, Lovell, and Doubleday, solicitors, Gray's Inn). “The last cannonade did for it.”

“Well, then, Jimson, you'd better 'op along with a message. You've got a bullet through your arm, by the look of your tunic, so you won't be much use with a gun. Say wot's lef' of us is too weak to defend the firin' trench, so we're fallin' back to 'old the 'ead of the communicatin' trench. Remainder! Right turn! Quick march.”

And just then, little more than a hundred miles away, the first cuckoo of the year called across a peaceful Sussex valley that spring had come.

“OUR relief ought to be 'ere in 'arf an 'our's time,” said Handcock, when his little party halted at the head of the communication trench. “But if I know anything of them 'Uns they'll make another charge before then, an' if they can take the communicatin' trench our boys 'll be in the soup. We'll block up this end so as to 'ave cover to fire over. Come, boys, get lively.”

“What are you going to block it with?” asked Harris. “Empty ammunition boxes won't stop a bullet and there's no time to dig.”

“Corpses, of course. There's enough and to spare of them. We'll take the sergeant-major for a start. Funny thing! I never really liked the man till now, an' yet I believe 'e was a good sort at 'eart. Git 'old of 'is legs, two of you, an' I'll take a pull on 'is 'ead.”

By great good luck, Handcock's party had time to finish their gruesome task undisturbed.

“Now, lads, collect all the guns you can lay your

'ands on an' charge the magazines,” commanded Handcock. “We won't 'ave time to reload when the 'Uns come buzzin' round.”

“The reliefs ought to be here soon if Jimson got through all right,” said Hicks, a few minutes later.

“The Germans 'll be 'ere sooner,” replied Handcock. “They're comin' now. Stan' to arms—one hundred yards—at the 'Uns—six o'clock—all the rounds you've got—rapid fire.”

The Prussians came on in a mass on which the fire of Handcock's command had scarcely more perceptible effect than if it had been summer rain.

FRESH FROM THE TRENCHES



This photograph was taken just after the recent Drive of the British near Lens, in France. It shows the mud-spattered condition of the men as they leave the trenches to clean up and get a rest.

They swarmed into the vacated trench with a Berserk yell of victory, but recoiled in confused heaps before the fire poured on them across the grisly barricade of dead. So close packed were they that only a few at a time could reply to it, and thus Handcock's party and the Prussian swarm were momentarily almost equally matched. As Handcock threw away

the sixth rifle he had emptied and turned to pick up a loaded one he seemed to feel a red-hot gimlet pierce his throat. He reeled and fell, but as he fell he saw the leading man of the relief party appear round the traverse of the communication trench. There was work to be done before anyone had had time to notice him, but before he died Handcock was able with due formality to hand over his first—and last—command to the officer commanding the reliefs.

“We kep' 'em back till you come, sir,” he gasped. “An' all the boys did their bit—and—wipe my mouth again, sir—an' most of 'em's dead—an' my number's up, too—but—otherwise—all correct.”

ALL correct? All was correct there in the muddy trenches where men believed and acted on the belief that many things—shirking, for example—are worse than death. But on the other side of the Channel all was far from correct. There, picture palaces and theatres filled nightly; and young men sold neck-ties to other young men and behaved just as if no war were raging, except that they wore “patriotic” badges in their button-holes; and makers of ammunition, the big-gun ammunition that saves men's lives, loafed idle for days together because, being paid about ten times as much as Handcock had been paid, they could afford to do so. A month after Handcock died, Jimson, released on sick leave from Millbank Hospital, spent one miserable day of liberty and then went back and urged the P.M.O. to let him return to work.

“I want to get back to my pals, sir,” he pleaded. “I've no use for the lot I met yesterday. I want to be among the sort of men that a fellow can have a drink with without feeling ashamed.”

After the War—What?

By VISCOUNT BRYCE

Extract from his Presidential Address to the British Academy

EVERYONE feels that after the war we shall see a different world, but no one can foretell what sort of a world it will be. We all have our fancies, but we know them to be no more than fancies, for the possibilities are incalculable. Nevertheless, it is worth while for each of us to set down what are the questions as to the future which most occupy the public mind and his own mind.

Will the effect of this war be to inflame or to damp down the military spirit? Some there are who believe that the example of those States which had made vast preparations for war will be henceforth followed by all States, so far as their resources permit, and that everywhere armies will be larger, navies larger, artillery accumulated on a larger scale, so that whatever peace may come will be only a respite and breathing time, to be followed by further conflicts till the predominance of one State or one race is established. Other observers of a more sanguine temper conceive that the outraged sentiment of mankind will compel the rulers of nations to find some means of averting war in the future more effective than diplomacy has proved. Each view is held by men of wide knowledge and solid judgment, and for each strong arguments can be adduced.

The effects which the war will have on the government and politics of the contending countries are equally obscure, though everyone admits they are sure to be far-reaching. Those who talk of politics as a science may well pause when they reflect how little the experience of the past enables us to forecast the future of government, let us say in Germany or in Russia, on the hypothesis either of victory or of defeat for one or other Power.

Economics approaches more nearly to the character of a science than does any other department