

## The Old Bus.

*I sabile heres ago  
Fortibus es in aro.*

*Latin Primer.*

"Here, Cash, be a sport and write us something," said the Commandant.

"What about?" said I. "Oh, any old thing," said he.

"Right oh," said I.  
So here goes for the old Bus.

Forty busses? More like four hundred; yes, maybe six hundred:

"Stormed at with shout and yell  
Bravely they rolled and well  
Into the Valley of—(Hell,  
That's what I may not tell)  
Noble six hundred!"

**P**ERHAPS you don't know the old chariot? I expect you've seen her, doubtless many times and never looked twice at her. Well, I know her—I mean Bus No. 12 of the 135th or the 147th or the 159th Bus Co.—I'm not sure which. Anyhow some Bus Co. attached to l'Armee, Britanique, as the other half of the "L'entente Cordiale" calls us. Yes—I know the old tub—been properly introduced and all that sort of thing. At first I wasn't much impressed, but "Things are seldom what they seem," and the way in which she subsequently manœuvred her differentials and shuffled her gears plainly showed that she was no dud. Also I learned (and the knowledge raised her greatly in my estimation), that she had shed her gaudy trappings, and had shaken the dust of Piccadilly off her feet, or to be more strictly correct, off her running gear early in the game; and now for well over two years she has been speedily chugging up and down, back and forth, over the highways and by-ways of Northern France, doing her bit with the very best of them.

It was bright and early in the morning of a toasting hot day, and I was a "long, long way from home," so when good old No. 12 lurched into view, and considerably shut off steam so as to allow me to hop on to her quarter deck, I was exceedingly grateful, not to say relieved, and no wonder, and who wouldn't be? With the prospect of having to hoof it for twenty blazing, boiling, roasting miles thro' the dustiest dust that was ever featured anywhere! Grateful! Well, I should shay sho. The clutch clanged, the gears ground, grinded, or whatever you call it, anyway, they made a beastly noise, and we were off in a cloud of dust.

Great bodies move slowly, and old 12 was no exception to the rule; and as she swung heavily through the main and only street of a dilapidated French village, with the inevitable sharp twist in the middle, it was no wonder that the few natives still left craned their necks till they cracked, for what she lacked in speed, she more than made up for in noise, and I haven't the faintest doubt in the world that the natives in question were greatly amazed to see nothing but an old London bus, when the indications were that, at least, a British Army Corps was approaching.

With her exhaust pipe coughing and her old joints creaking, we soon left the village, with its gaping inhabitants, and old 12 shook herself (and incidentally us also), and got down to business. Over an old bridge and down a narrow lane, sloppy with the overflow of a long stretch of water troughs, we chugged, or rather she did. Past an old Chateau, its walls covered with moss, and its windows merely gaping holes, and then rounding a sharp bend in the road, full speed ahead, we dashed into full view of a British Cavalry Camp. There was nothing particular about this camp to distinguish it from any other British Cavalry Camp, yet it was plain to me from the unpleasant manner in which she was lurching and jerking that something was upsetting the old boat. "Life Guards," murmured the driver, and I suddenly "compried." Gone were the flashing breast-plates, gone were the brilliant helmet plumes, and here they were, just like the rest of us, mud coloured, and business-like; but they couldn't fool the old Bus. Not for nothing, had she rolled daily past those magnificently arrayed sentries at Whitehall when neither she nor they ever dreamed for one moment that they would be where they are now.

Inexorable routine and stern discipline prevented any closer renewal of bygone friendship, and as with proud, pungent puffs from the exhaust we rumbled out of sight, the dear old trolley gave a parting flip of her back hair—I mean stair—as, I presume, a farewell salute to her former cronies in shining armour, and which came perilously near upsetting a tin-hatted Tommy who had selected that inauspicious moment for going up aloft.

Forty minutes later we rattled into the cobble-paved market-place of a fair-sized town, and No. 12 drew to a dignified halt.

One hour for grub, announced the Commadore, or the Bus Conductor, or whatever he is known as on the Bus Company's establishment, and all on board promptly disembarked and proceeded to hustle for the same, leaving old No. 12 in her glory and still panting with the emotion caused by the sight of her former friends.

Prompt to the minute, back came the crew; the crank cranked, gr-r-r-r went the gears, and with a sort of hop, skip, and jump we were off again. On we scudded, scattering road gangs and reducing by many years the lives of countless frantic mothers in their frenzied rushes to save their respective offspring from what they seemed to consider certain death. Quite indifferent, indeed, stolidly contemptuous, rolled on our masquerading Juggernaut. No one was sacrificed—not even the scrawniest chicken—and as Estaminet succeeded Estaminet each seemed to outdo the other in the grandiloquence of its name, and all equally unsavoury in their surroundings, we rapidly approached the point at which No. 12 and I were to sever connections. But for the fact that my vehicular friend's whole