

## A Little Retrospect of Waterloo

By Edith G. Bayne

THE old man took his pipe from his mouth and laid it upon the table. "Tell you about Waterloo?" he asked, a slow smile spreading over his face. "Why, I'll try." His glance passed beyond us and rested on a framed photograph that hung over the mantel. It was the picture of a drummer lad in khaki. "I have no sons," explained the old man. "I had only one child, a daughter. That's her oldest boy. He's named for me. He begged so hard to be allowed to go. You see he is just eighteen and, not having gotten his full growth, he couldn't enlist with the regulars. Ah, but the blood's in him!"

The speaker sighed. His eyes took on a far-away expression and we thought he had forgotten us. But presently he leaned back in his easy chair and began to tell the story.

I can't tell it as my grandfather did—the fire and the eloquence will be wanting—but I'll do my best. I wish I could impart the peculiar thrill that always went with his telling of the story. Many and many a time have I sat at his knee in the winter evenings listening spell-bound to his account of that glorious day. How his old eyes would flash as he told of the charge of the Scots Greys! The superb fellows, alas, were utterly annihilated. Sometimes he would rise on his rheumatic old limbs and try to act out that memorable scene when the French cuirassiers came up the slope at Mont St. Jean, all unsuspecting, and Wellington shouted to his kneeling squadrons: "Up, guards, and at them!"

I think I can see the old man now—his white mane, his wrinkled visage, his trembling hands—and once more I envy him his share in that day of imperishable glory! A brave man was my granddad. He was less than twenty-five in the year of Waterloo and he was then a captain. His brother Frank was a sergeant with the troops that held the chateau of Hougoumont against Jerome Bonaparte. The Treaty of Ghent had been signed in the previous year and the war in Canada was over, but my grandfather, who fought at Lundy's Lane and Stoney Creek, still carried scars from those conflicts. You have all read how the English Guards ambuscaded themselves in the old chateau at Hougoumont, and of how they held out till the very last watching Papelotte and La Haye Sainte burning, and finally breaking away the lower part of the spiral stairway to prevent the French from mounting to the upper rooms. The orchard at Hougoumont—ah what a shambles it was! It was this bit of ground, but a few hundred yards in extent, that saw some of the fiercest fighting. Fifteen hundred men fell here in less than an hour. A sunken garden, balustraded and terraced after the old French style, led to the orchard and at the other end there was a stone wall concealed by a quickset hedge. Soye's brigade, coming blithely up from the south, thought they had only to scale this hedge. But behind the deceiving verdure there were thirty-eight loopholes in the wall and as many muskets. However, the French—those left alive—climbed the wall by their nails and a hand-to-hand fight took place under the fruit trees.

But, to go back a bit, my grandfather was one of the guests at the famous ball given by the Duchess of Richmond in Brussels on the night of the fifteenth of June, 1815. Well did he recall the panic and excitement among the dancers at the sudden booming of the cannon at Quatre Bras. He told us of the frenzied dispersing of the crowd, of brave men turning pale and women fainting, of the bugle calls and the tramp of horses' feet, of the confusion and the cries. Byron has described that scene better than anyone else, I think:

"But hark! A deep sound strikes like a rising knell!  
Arm! Arm! It is the cannon's opening roar!"

The foe, they come, they come!

The English slept calmly on the night of the seventeenth—the eve of Waterloo. Many brave hearts that would not beat

by sunset of the next day, slumbered about the bivouac fires at Mont St. Jean. But the French were alert and restless. Napoleon could not sleep. Throughout the night he rode up and down before his troops, giving orders and inspecting positions and watching Wellington's watchfires which half-girdled the horizon like a string of rubies, gleaming redly through the pouring rain.

Yes, it rained before Waterloo. A noted French writer has said that a little rain, a cloud crossing the sky when rain was not expected, was sufficient to overthrow an empire. For the wet delayed the action and allowed Blucher time to come up. The French see in Waterloo an

obscure enigma. The English, who could scarcely account for their victory either, are more inclined to call it divine chance—preordination.

There was Napoleon then, restless, eager, yet cool withal, riding with his aide-de-camp along the lines, stopping occasionally to watch the lightning and listen to the thunder. The man of destiny was calm, confident, colossal. His men eyed him with a sort of religious awe. He inspired fear and reverence and hero-worship. They knew him for a genius. He was one too—this young general of forty-six. Call him cold-blooded and calculating if you will. He was cruel and inexorable, but he was also great. It is ridiculous to compare the Kaiser with Napoleon. They are alike only in their lust for world-domination. The German Emperor is vain, superficial and boastful.

Napoleon was confident, subtle and brilliant.

At daybreak Napoleon, seated on a truss of straw, called his generals about him and laid out the plan of attack.

To procure an idea of the field of Waterloo, you have only to imagine a capital A. The apex is Mont St. Jean, the end of the right leg La Belle Alliance, Napoleon's position. The end of the left leg is Hougoumont, and to the right of Hougoumont and slightly up is La Haye Sainte, with Ohain and Papelotte further east again. Behind the English camp on the plateau was the deep and intricate forest of Soignies, which would have proved a veritable death-trap had Wellington been obliged to retreat upon it, for it was filled with quagmires and marshes.

The left leg of our A represents the

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