

"The little cares that fretted me,
I lost them yesterday.
Among the fields, down o'er the lea
Among the winds at play;
Among the lowing of the herds,
The rustling of the trees,
Among the singing of the birds
The humming of the bees."

We march back to the line with renewed hope and courage, thoroughly refreshed and ready.

Billets.

Billets—the soldier's home. We shall never hear the word without it calling up memories. Most of us, I imagine, had heard it used in pre-war days, yet anyone who has not been on active service is unable to appreciate the full significance of the term. It may stand for so much, or so little.

Two years spent in France. We have had experience with innumerable kinds of billets, and still we are told that there are others. It may be true, but most of us are more than satisfied, knowing what we do of crowded billets, billets that leak, billets that the wind blows through, and sometimes, to be honest, a cosy billet. Anything from a few square feet under a tree to a comfortable room in a house may be termed a billet; but the favourite places are barns or tin huts.

One learns much about billets while on the march. As we tramp along over these seemingly endless kilometres of France, it is a matter of much conjecture what our billets for the night will be like. Which section will be lucky—lucky in being allotted a clean, dry place, preferably near an estaminet? It is rather a useless query, for the other fellow always gets the best. After doing many miles—and always a "bit" more—we arrive at our intended home, usually in a very small village, or occasionally a farm, which it requires no great stretch of the imagination to associate with a well-known picture of Bairnsfather's.

We stop, so tired that we are willing to drop anywhere, provided that we are allowed to rest. A few minutes, and then someone calls: "Twenty men here, and if you are lucky enough to be in the first twenty you move along and file into a dilapidated-looking shed. It might have been used years and years ago for something else, but at present it is only fit for

the billeting of soldiers. The door, if any, is usually off its hinges, and there are holes in the walls which serve as a system of ventilation. The inside view does not appear so hopeless, however, for the abundance of fresh, clean straw is a "sight for weary backs." The roof looks more like a net than a protective covering, but these tile roofs are deceiving, and may not leak so badly as one might think. Fatal optimism, however, for after moving fifteen times during the night to escape the drip, you wake in the morning to find your boots half-filled with water.

The march may be short, or we may spend several nights under similar circumstances before reaching the place where our headquarters are likely to be for some time. A difference is noted in our billets here. As a rule, they are more substantial, being usually tin huts with boarded floors. On taking possession, there is little else than the huts themselves, unless you mention the rats, which are always on hand to welcome us. After the lapse of a few weeks, appearances will have changed considerably, however. One of the characteristics of a good soldier is his ability to acquire anything and everything, and here is an excellent field for "rustling." The once bare hut is now furnished, rudely, perhaps, but serviceably, with a table, benches, perhaps a stove, and various other articles which contribute to our comfort.

Weeks and months pass, and we begin to look on our camp as a permanent home. It is always open to us on our return from "up the line." We know every nook and corner of it, and just the best place to dodge the Orderly Sergeant. When the Order to move comes, we pack our "kits" regretfully, and yet in a sense we are glad to proceed to pastures new, for every soldier gets the "wanderlust," and is always eager to explore fresh fields.

We have learned to sleep soundly, and be not anxious for the morrow. It may rain, it may blow, there may be no roof, but the sky, yet—"ish ka bible." True, we will grouch—that is a soldier's privilege—but we will "carry on."

