

DEATH BECOMES A COMMONPLACE ON FIRING LINE

No Place for Sentiment Over Death Where Death is the Most Familiar of Visitants

DEATH WELCOMED BY MANY SOLDIERS

Relieves Them of Their Terrible Suffering in the Trenches—Yet They Are Not Despondent

By Herbert Corey.

London, Jan. 9.—Death doesn't matter. Dead men do not matter. By and by the soldier in the trenches seems to become fairly indifferent to both. It is not so much that he is superhumanly brave, as that he is stupefied by fatigue. His senses are blunted by the most incredible discomfort. He has become used to the sight of the waste products of war—just as a horse might to a bit of fluttering paper by the roadside.

"Walked through fields of dead men, I have," said Corporal Frank Wilson, "and never looked up. Thought of nothing but how my feet hurt, I did."

In other wars, so old soldiers have reported, each man believed in his personal luck. Other men might be killed, he thought, but not he. Now one hears of a different attitude among the men. They have resigned themselves to death. From the moment they become accustomed to the terrific turmoil of this bodiless fighting—to blowing up men they cannot see, and to being blown up by men who are hidden from the eye—they give themselves up for dead. It makes for a strange cheerfulness.

"By Rights We're Dead."

"We're cheating," said a pair of British officers in Calais on one of the three-day furloughs recently. "By rights we are dead."

The colonel of one of the great British regiments—a man whose family name has been conspicuous in British history and whose town

house is one of the sights of London—wrote to a friend:

"We no longer wonder if we will be killed," said he. "We all know that we cannot expect to live through this war. And we suffer so in these infernal trenches that we hope death will come soon."

This seems to hold good for the men of all armies. It is not that they are despondent or frightened. For the most part, they manage to enjoy themselves excellently when they get the chance. It is merely that they are numb. Many close their eyes to the grim possibilities of war—but for most one suspects that the bitterness of death passes when they make up their minds they will never see the folks at home again. Thereafter they fight and suffer in a strange sort of peace.

Dead Valuable for Uniforms.

To the higher officers of all armies the dead are merely "losses." They are not an encumbrance, as the wounded are. They have a certain small but definite value—that of the unspooled clothes which may sometimes be stripped from them before their naked bodies are consigned to the common trench. They are a potential nuisance which, if not abated, may interfere with the process of killing other men. If it is quite convenient their identity is ascertained for the information of the War Office and the folks at home.

But this depends entirely upon convenience. The operations of war are rarely interrupted in order to give decent burial to the men who have fallen. There are fields upon fields littered with the remnants of men and swept by the fire of both armies. The other day, in northern France, an armistice was agreed in order that the Germans and British might bury the bodies that lay between their lines. This was so uncommon an occurrence that "Eyewitness," the official observer of the British army, commented upon it in his report to the press.

Almost Unprecedented.

An armistice for this purpose," said he, "is uncommon—almost unprecedented—in this war."

Mourning relatives searching for their slain are not wanted at the front. They are in the way—and they may impair the morale of those who still live. Because this battle line is in France the French leaders have been forced to endure these deprecatory visits to some extent. But when the bodies are found—if they

are found—transportation upon railroad trains is forbidden. Those trains are needed for the wounded men, some of whom may be patched up for killing later. With characteristic forethought the Germans arranged this in advance.

"Bodies may not be carried upon trains," is the gist of the order that was issued. "Upon proper application relatives may secure a pass permitting them to take bodies from the field in automobiles."

No Reverence for the Dead.

The men do not fear the dead. Surrounded by ghastly realities, they do not tremble at ghostly visitants. They watch the darkness for the moving shadows—for the shadow that may have knife or rifle in its hands—and not the harmless dead among which it crawls. Almost the only trace of the age-old reverence for the dead is in the prompt punishment given to those ghouls who rob the bodies. They are rarely flattered by a court-martial. Capture is quickly followed by a firing squad.

Back of the line—in the base towns and the permanent encampments—there is a different and more human attitude. There the final honors are paid those whose lives have been taken by war. Sometimes a firing squad plays a crackling requiem over the graves. As the open hearses pass through the streets of Calais and Boulogne the tender-hearted French people bare their heads reverently and say a brief prayer. Often the nursing sisters are able to place a few flowers on the cheap casket that is being jolted over the cobbled streets. But on the firing line there is no time for sentiment. There the rule is to abate the nuisance quickly.

Death has become a mere commonplace of the business of war.

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HEROIC MOTHER GAVE HER SON HIS HEARING

Corporal, Defeated by Experience on Battlefield, is Cured by Shock of Seeing His Mother Fall Downstairs

CORPORAL TUCKER, of the 2nd Battalion, Welsh Regiment, who was wounded at Ypres and is now at his home in Talygarn Street, Cardiff, tells a remarkable story. He asserts that he was rendered dumb by the explosion of a shell, and was unable to speak a word for weeks after he left the trenches. His speech was restored, he declares, after his mother had deliberately thrown herself downstairs in order to give him a shock. Here is his story in his own words:

Buried Alive.
"At Ypres I was buried alive by three 'coal-boxes' which came along at the same time. At first I did not know what happened. It was all so quiet and dark. I felt a great weight on all parts of my body, and I could not move a finger.

"Fortunately some men soon dug me out, but my nerves were completely shaken, and I could not speak a word. I was sent to England and met my wife, but was unable to greet her with a single word.

"I had not seen my mother for a long time, so I went to London to pay her a visit. Naturally, she was very much upset, and, of course, I was very miserable, as I was not able to speak. "On Tuesday night I came home from a picture palace, and, feeling downhearted, I sat alone in the kitchen downstairs.

Got a Shock.
"I was thinking of my hard luck when I heard my mother scream. Then came a thud as of some one falling down the stairs. I jumped up, rushed to the foot of the stairs, and stumbled over my mother, who lay groaning. What I said or did I don't know, but I fancy I called out 'Oh, mother!' Then I fainted.

"When I recovered I found my mother standing in front of me, and I was crying. She was quite cool and smiling, and was telling me to have a good cry, as it would do me good. "In the morning I learned that my mother did not slip down the stairs, but had deliberately thrown herself down in order to give me a shock. In doing so she bruised herself. She might easily have met with serious injury, as the stairs are very dangerous."

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FOOD PROBLEM HARD TO FACE IN BELGIUM NOW

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GERMANS SEIZED FOOD SUPPLIES

Actual Starvation at Louvain—Inhabitants Quartered in Ruins of the City Hall and Cathedral

THE Commission for Relief in Belgium, 3, London-wall-buildings, E.C., have received the following telegram, despatched by their Special Commissioner from Maastrecht, Holland.

"I met to-day a number of refugees just arrived here from various parts of Belgium. The first batch came from Malines—their story was told me by Mlle. Maria Thirimmann. There is now no food at all in Malines," she said. "Once daily a single cart comes from Antwerp with bread, but only those able to pay money get any; those without money have only what is given them by the people who are better off." I must point out that the Commission have already sent supplies to Malines, but these, apparently, are exhausted. To keep all these places in food 80,000 tons of supplies will have to be sent into Belgium every month.

Situation Deplorable.

"A skilled mechanic named Paternot, who reached here yesterday from Berchem village, adjacent to Antwerp, accompanied by several friends, said: 'In Berchem and neighbouring villages of Borgerhout and Merxem, the general situation is deplorable. All the ready capital of the Commune has disappeared; the local authorities, consequently, have no money with which to buy food for the hungry population. For some time there has been no food available in the district.



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Jan 15, m, w, f, tf

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Seized All Food.
"It is feared that serious consequences are likely to arise from this, because it was at Berchem that the Germans stored food seized at Antwerp, which they stated was being sent to Brussels. Consequently the people, while starving, see quantities of food within their reach. Meetings are being held nightly, when the chances of attacking the German garrison for the purpose of taking possession of food are seriously discussed. The stock of flour now in Antwerp is only calculated to last three days more. Until this week, besides bread, there has been a bi-weekly distribution of fuel and potatoes to families, of green vegetables once a week, but this has now ceased."

Food For Well-to-do.

"These statements were confirmed by a crowd of refugees who arrived here later this afternoon. They all agree in saying that until the last day or two there has been sufficient food in the central parts of Antwerp for those able to pay; three days ago, however, the bakers closed down, but hoped to open in a day or so if flour could be secured. In the suburbs of Antwerp there is practically a food famine, the inhabitants being solely dependent upon the Commission's distribution. When this becomes temporarily exhausted, privation once ensues.

"The refugees report that conditions in Louvain are much worse than in Antwerp. Actual starvation prevails there; almost all buildings are destroyed; the inhabitants are living almost anywhere—amongst the ruins of the Hotel de Ville, or in what remains of the cathedral, with no means of providing heat.

"The Belgian Consul-general from Rotterdam told me that Belgians of good position just returned from visiting Termonde state the food question there is vital."

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It has also been ordered that letters and Post Cards to our Troops on Active Service in Great Britain, or (through the Agency of the General Post Office in Great Britain) to our Troops on Foreign Service, be forwarded without being stamped.

Postmasters will please observe this NOTICE and govern themselves accordingly.
H. J. B. WOODS,
Postmaster General.
Jan 13, 4i

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