

OH MARS!

(O'MARKHAM AT THE FRONT.)

ONE of the many curious phenomena of the great world-struggle has been the recrudescence of poetry, and scarcely a month passes but there is published a notable addition in verse to the literature of the War. The latest of these—and one which is assured of a wide circle of readers—is a small brochure issued by Messrs. Backwoods under the title of "A Rubayat of the Trenches." The writer is a Canadian soldier who looks on life at the Front with something of the studied detachment of vision and philosophic aloofness of mind of an Oriental. We confess that it appears somewhat incongruous to us that a man of such delicacy of mind and refinement of intellect should be found in the uniform of a volunteer army! That he ever enlisted seems from his opening verse to be due rather to inadvertence than design. This is how he speaks of his visit to the recruiting office:—

One day as down the thronging street I bent
My aimless steps, I saw with wonderment
A crowd of men before an open door,
And, scarcely knowing wherefore, in I went.

There are not many verses dealing with his training as a soldier, as he did not find that the "dull mechanic exercises" had a stimulating effect on his imagination; but he had not long been in the trenches before his emotions are thoroughly stirred:—

Into this Inferno, and why scarce knowing,
Through stinking mud and water ever flowing,
And out of it through "Blighty's" crimson door,
Grudging no price—so long as I am going!

Those of our grumblers at home who cavil at the Food Controller's restrictions will find solace in seeing how they sometimes fare in France, where—

No place is this for epicure or glutton,
With skilful tea and butter something rotten;
Where only change from bread and bully beef
Is merely one to bread and bully mutton.

The quality of the butter seems to have affected the quality of his generally unimpeachable rhymes!

A twenty-four hours' bombardment he writes of in great disgust; but he is more upset with a night or two in front of our barbed wire:—

I went myself patrolling No Man's Land,
To learn of Fritz' movements at first hand;
But all the knowledge that I gleaned was how
The bottom of a big shell hole was planned.

A bag of bombs, a Lewis Gun, my brow
Bedewed with anxious sweat amidst the row,
I crouch in muddy holes with one clear thought—
That I were back again behind a plough!

Beware! for Heine in the bowl of night
Has cast the flare that makes the darkness light,
And lo! the L.G. in the east breaks loose,
Sweeping the parapet from left to right!

We thought at first that the letters L.G. were a cryptic reference to our versatile Prime Minister, but our military critic informs us that they refer to the famous Lewis Gun, for which the writer seems to have a great veneration.

I sometimes think that never was a shell
One half so big as that which by me fell;
And every bomb that's hurled by Fritz' hand
Is like the Pitcher's throw from "Base"—in Hell!

We acted once as "striker" in a Charity game of Baseball in a match against the Canadians, and we thoroughly appreciate the allusion.

His experience in the trenches, however, seem to have served as a sauce for his enjoyment of the simple life in billets, as—

Here in these battered remnants of a House,
Where once both shot and shell did make Carouse,
(But now, thank heav'n, is well behind the line),
I sleep and eat in peace and idly drowse.

I sometimes think there never was a bed
One half so soft as this beneath my head,
Nor other joy deem worth a Pipe of peace,
With skin both dry and clean—and eke well-fed!

"How sweet is rest in Billets," mutters one;
Others: "For me a 'Blighty,' and the Hun
With all his kind for aye be damned!" And oh,
Oh! the brave music of a *distant* gun!

The respite, however, is all too brief, and he gets his marching orders for the trenches again; so—

Come, fill the Stokes, and in the nest of Fritz
Lob sundry bombs and give the blighter fits:
For see, his T.M.B. is close, and know
'Twere better he than we were blown to bits!

—a sentiment with which, save for the possible exception of Their Graces of Oxford and Ely, our readers will cordially agree.

R. W. H.



A picture similar to this in some Canadian paper is described as: "Canadians fresh back from the trenches, making urgent repairs to their clothes. They are experts with their housewives!" (Oh yes, quite so!)