

THE CASE OF BILKINS

By A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

THERE is a chap named Bilkins, who lives in a town I hesitate to name. He is a great champion of individual liberty. He has built a house which he thinks is fire-proof. As a matter of fact, it is not fire-proof; but Bilkins believes that it is—which is all that matters. So when he took note of the fact that a part of his taxes were being used to support a fire brigade, he vigorously protested. He said: "I do not need fire protection. I know that no fire can ever damage my property. I am confident, indeed, that fire will never reach it. So I do not want to be compelled to work for a part of every year to support a fire brigade. Kindly return to me that portion of my taxes which would otherwise be paid out for fire engines, firemen's salaries, etc." When the town authorities told Bilkins that they did not care how much faith he had in his fire-proof house—that they believed fire to be a menace to the community and that they proposed to compel every member of that community to help prepare to fight it—he grew very red in the face and called them an ugly name. He said that they were "Conscriptionists."

BILKINS is helped in his propaganda by a fellow "towny" of his who remembers when the place was protected from fire by a volunteer brigade. Then any man who felt so inclined joined the brigade and "ran with the boys" to any fire which was announced. When the alarm rang—they kept a man in the fire-hall for that purpose—every member of the brigade jumped out of bed, tumbled into his fireman's clothes, ran down his own front steps and raced away to the fire-hall to hear where the excitement was, and to help drag the hand-engine through the streets. It was great fun—most of the community turned out, being roused by the springing of amateur firemen to duty in every other house—but it was a trifle slow and did give the fires a considerable start. Still it had the advantage of being entirely voluntary. No man had to pay a penny toward it who did not choose to. They held concerts and took up subscriptions and employed all sorts of devices to raise money for the brigade. There was no compulsion—no "conscription."

THE Mayor objects, however, to reverting to the old system. He points out that, though the town is ten times as big now as it was then, it suffers much less annual injury through fires. Fires occur oftener, of course; but they are put out quicker. Bilkins replies that this is a very sordid view to take of the case. He, for his part, is not willing to barter away his blood-bought British liberty for any amount of "cash down." Let us bear our fire losses, he says, but let us keep our freedom. It would be better in his opinion that the whole town should be burned down than that it should be "Prussianized." What do we want a town for anyway, except to live in, with heads erect, freemen like our glorious forefathers. And he simply will not pay his fire taxes if he can help it.

AL D. O'BRIEN—who is fairly free with his tongue—says that Bilkins, and all who think with him, are "shirks" and "spongers." He—O'Brien—wants to know why their property should be protected from fire at the expense of the rest of us. It does not make any difference whether they want us to protect it or not. We are bound to put out a fire in Bilkins' stable because it may spread to Johnston's house or Avery's grocery. We can't just let it burn—as O'Brien would dearly love to do. We must use our engine and our fire brigade and our hook-and-ladder and all the rest of it to put that fire out; and yet Bilkins does not want to contribute a cent toward the upkeep of our fire-fighting army. In fact, O'Brien goes so far as to say that the community have a supreme right to invoke the law of self-preservation, and that we could make Bilkins get up in his "nightie" and carry buckets of water to the fire if we wanted to.

THEN an incident happened which somewhat shook Bilkins' faith in the efficacy of "individual liberty" as a complete code for the running of a community. His little girl came home one day with the scarlet fever. Bilkins put it down to contact on the street or in school until he happened to learn that the family next door had had two cases of the disease, but had not either placarded their premises or tried to keep their children from playing with his. That annoyed him very much, and he wanted to be told why the authorities had been asleep? Why hadn't they compelled that criminally careless family to put up the yellow placard? Well, it seemed that the heads of the family did not believe that scarlet fever was very catching, and had persuaded a good-natured family physician to "keep dark" about the matter. "By George!" said Bilkins, "somebody would go to jail for that in any civilized community." To which his neighbour replied, with

a wink: "You don't want this free community to be 'Prussianized,' do you?"

STILL Bilkins thinks that that is beside the question. There is no similarity in the two cases, he argues. A community should protect itself against disease, he contends, because no one knows when he is exposed to it; but that does not give it the right to tax everybody to protect itself against fire. Anybody can see a fire. He cannot be burned to death without noticing it. Indeed, this whole policy of compulsory and universal taxation seems to Bilkins to be of doubtful righteousness. Let us all "chip in" as we feel like it, he says. That is the way a church is run; and what can be better than a church? Let the community pass round the hat, he suggests; and let us all drop in envelopes, one marked "for fire protection," another "for paying," a third "for schools," etc. He would always put in something for schools. He has children, and public schools are cheaper than private tuition. But he would not put in a cent for "fire protection." Let those who want to fight fires go out and do it. As for him, he believes that, if everybody would only build fire-proof houses, there would be no need for fire brigades; and it is odious tyranny to compel him to help support one.

THE MONOCLE MAN.

Germany's Crawl Down

WH Y did Germany suddenly become so polite to the United States? Why did the Kaiser consent to modify his policy of indiscriminate murder with submarines? Was it to please the United States and to keep that country out of war? Those who read Ambassador Bernstorff's letter at its face value may think so. Those who read between the lines may detect another furtive dose of astute Kaiserbund philosophy. When it is remembered that the submarine menace which has been the one horrible German success in German naval warfare—so-called—has been throttled, defeated and practically demoralized by the anti-submarine activities of Great Britain, it may be concluded that the Kaiser was after all conceding very little in his polite crawl-down to the United States. Here is the letter to the American Secretary of State. But between the lines are the ghosts of a lot of wrecked German subs—and Ambassador Bernstorff knows it.

"My Dear Mr. Secretary:—With reference to our conversation of this morning I beg to inform you that my instructions concerning our answer to your

last Lusitania note contains the following passage: "Liners will not be sunk by our submarines without warning and without safety of the lives of non-combatants, provided that the liners do not try to escape or offer resistance."

"Although I know that you do not wish to discuss the Lusitania question till the Arabic incident has been definitely and satisfactorily settled, I desire to inform you of the above, because this policy of my government was decided on before the Arabic incident occurred.

"I have no objection to your making any use you may please of the above information.

"I remain, my dear Mr. Lansing,

"Very sincerely yours,

"J. BERNSTORFF."

THE New York Herald, which has been one of the fairest pro-Allies newspapers in the United States, takes the point that the German back-down is a victory for American diplomacy. The editor takes the occasion to whack poor old disgruntled Bryan and to rap the Teddy Bear over the knuckles while it extols the diplomacy of President Wilson.

The Herald says:

"Verily, in the words of Chief Justice White, of the United States Supreme Court, it is 'the greatest victory for American diplomacy in a generation.' The ultimate results, however, will be determined not by Germany's words, but by Germany's deeds.

"So far as reparation is possible for injuries which are without measure, Germany can be counted upon to make reparation for the lives of Americans murdered upon the high seas. But what reparation can the German government make for the slaughter its surrender has caused in the ranks of the faithful?

"Another \$5,000 might help with Fair Play, the usual '\$1,750 per' may be sufficient balm for the sensitive soul of The Fatherland; but what of the Riders, the Weissmanns, the Koelbles and the lesser lights of the Kaiserbund who have so vociferously extolled the 'kultur' that kills American men, women and children? Where does this surrender leave these, who have defended acts which Germany itself now admits are indefensible and, in the case of the Arabic, says had been repudiated before committed?

"And where does it leave the timorous person who scuttled from the Ship of State mumbling dire prophecy that the firm stand President Wilson was taking in behalf of American rights meant WAR-R-R? What reparation can Germany make for all the suffering it has caused Mr. Bryan?

"But the casualties are not confined to the Kaiserbund. Where does Germany's surrender leave Mr. Roosevelt with his insistent exhortation of 'Wilson diplomacy' as a thing of weakness? It has proved strong enough to accomplish its purpose, hasn't it? And isn't that the true measure of any diplomacy?

"It is a mighty victory!"

Between the lines of this laudation may also be seen the failure of the submarine menace. Germany's submarine policy was not defeated by United States diplomacy. It was beaten by British navalism—and the Herald knows it.

A SQUARE MILE OF WHEAT



Part of a wheat-field near Morden, Man., just being hauled to the stacks for late threshing. This field looks as though it would do much more than its share of the 275,000,000 bushel crop of Western wheat estimated for 1915. That estimate is based upon an average of not more than 20 bushels to the acre. Last week one field in Manitoba yielded 56 bushels to the acre.