

THE ROAD TO GLORY

VERY early in the morning, only three o'clock. The flat fields, the few outstanding trees, the battered, ruined cottages are all swallowed up in intense darkness.

The trench occupied by the 10th Blankshires stretches across what was once a flourishing turnip-field, but it is now an area torn up by shells and covered with barb-wire and the debris of a continual struggle.

There is an expectant hush all along this trench. The men know that the Colonel has received an order from Divisional Headquarters:

"There will be a heavy bombardment of the German trenches by our artillery for twenty minutes, beginning at four o'clock. This is to be followed immediately by an attack of the 10th Blankshires, supported on the left by the 8th Territorials, and on the right by the 5th Blankshires. The trench must be captured at any cost and held until reinforcements arrive."

The Colonel appreciates the meaning of the last sentence. This is an important section of the line, and its taking is a stepping-stone to ultimate victory. He knows his men, too. He passes up and down, giving orders and encouraging his companies. He feels that such iron determination and muscle cannot fail to win the earthen rampart opposite.

The Junior Subaltern is leaning against the door-post of his dug-out. His platoon, fully armed in every particular, is in its place ready for the signal to advance. The Junior Subaltern is, in sooth, very young. He is barely eighteen, and it would not be hard to determine that he is but recently come from a big English public school. His first conception of war was in the training camps in England. Then, it seemed to consist in the main of endless drilling, smart uniforms, saluting and other etiquette, parades, muddy parade-grounds, innumerable route-marches, and many hard knocks. His second and real conception of war came upon him suddenly during his first day in the trenches. Then, in a flash, "battle, murder, and sudden death" were revealed to him in their true horror. Not so long ago, war was something unreal and far-away. It has now a significant and sinister meaning for him.

He is pondering on the coming advance, and all that it means. What, after all, is the barrier that separates him from the Germans opposite? It is a barrier of bullets and steel which can press into the yielding flesh. But this is not the thought that occurs to the Junior Subaltern as he stands in the midst of it all. The more he thinks of it, the more absurd it seems that there should be between him and the enemy only a conventional strip of land belonging to no one, and the quivering air for a barrier.

A star-shell explodes, throwing the trees and ruined farmhouses into bold relief against the sky. By the glaring light, the whole length and breadth of that strip of land with its ghastly tangle of wire, burst shells, and remnants of other fights, is illuminated.

IT is too big a question for him. He wonders what the feelings of the other men are before battle, and if they are at all like his. He listens to the subdued whispering of his platoon. Some of the men are holding long, earnest conversations. A great many are joking. Others, led by the Junior Subaltern's highly musical Corporal, are quietly singing songs that are famous now. The Junior Subaltern does not feel like singing, still less joking. He decides that even quiet conversation does not appeal to him before battle. The men have forgotten his presence, and he leans against his post and watches them, admiring their strong, sturdy figures limned clearly by the light of star-shells.

Someone thinks he hears a sound in front and a rifle shot rings out sharp and clear in the still night. Four or five answering bullets patter on the parapet, but no one is disturbed and there is silence once more. The Senior Major passes by, and, seeing the Junior Subaltern standing alone, stops for a moment to make a few cheery remarks.

The young soldier is grateful for the little attention. He is beginning to feel a little depressed and lonely. After all, he is very young, and older minds than his have been overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of like impending events. Home, and school-life, and England, seem very remote. He is alone in a seething mass of armed men—armed to kill one another. The pity of it, but never the fear, crosses his mind. Then, he remembers the letter he has received the previous afternoon from his father. He takes it from his pocket, and, by the fitful light of matches and star-shells, he reads it again. It is

**"Not once nor twice in our rough island story,
The path of duty was the way to glory."**

—Tennyson.

The Story and the Indelible Memory of the Junior Subaltern who went that path and found that road

By MARY JONES

very short, but goes to the right spot, and the Junior Subaltern probably would never admit that he blinks a little as he reads:

"Dear Boy,—

"This is not going to be a long letter. Your mother and I think of you constantly and wish we could be with you in your lonely moments—for I know you have them. Remember that our thoughts and prayers are always with you and that no one can be more proud of what you are doing than we. Only, if you do great things, do not let other men's praise turn your head. For you are very young, and this is a great test for you in more ways than one. Whatever you do, my boy, you are fulfilling your duty, and duty often leads to great deeds, so that . . ."

There is the whizz of a shell coming from behind, then another and another, followed by a series of reverberating explosions. The boy hastily refolds his letter and thrusts it back in his pocket. One thought stands out clearly in his mind. He must do his duty—his whole duty, for the sake of those who love him at home.

The bombardment has begun. There is a steady whining and whizzing through the air, and now and then terrible crashes which smite against the ear-drum. Muffled orders are passed along, and men look to their bayonets and grasp their rifles more firmly. The Junior Subaltern is standing upright, with his eye fixed on one spot on the parapet. He is measuring the distance, for he contemplates a running leap.

The tense moments pass very slowly. The Senior Major looks at his watch.

"Eighteen minutes past . . . nineteen . . . and a half," he muses aloud.

Then, rising to his full height, he shouts an order. There is a shrill whistle. At the same moment the din of the cannonading stops. For a second the men crouch to spring. In that second, a tall, lithe figure is outlined against the paling sky and drifting smoke. It is that of the Junior Subaltern. He is the first over the parapet, leading his battalion on to victory. Immediately the parapet becomes a mass of scrambling, panting men. Huddled and jumbled together they disappear in the dense smoke.

The Junior Subaltern's toe catches in a shell-hole. He stumbles, but is up at once and presses forward, choking and gasping, half blinded by the smoke. Many bullets whistle past his ears, for the Germans know the game. He plunges on and hears the trampling of the men behind him, and the crack of

the rifles in front. He stoops down to cut an obstinate tangle of wire, and as he does so he feels a strange, stinging sensation in his left arm. His fighting blood is up, however, and he forgets the

pain in the tremendous excitement of the moment.

He is past the entanglements, and a very few yards separate him from his goal. Behind him is the tearing of cloth, and muttered oaths, as the men thrust themselves through the embracing wire. He hears muffled groans as they fall one by one before the deadly rifle fire, but he feels inexplicably callous to such sounds. The smoke is clearing and dimly in the half-light he can see the men behind the opposing rifles. Suddenly, a little to the left, a machine gun opens fire on the advancing men. It spits out its terrible messengers in rapid succession with an even, clicking noise.

Impulsively, the Junior Subaltern turns towards the weapon of death. It is not aimed at him, but it is mowing down his companions. His one thought is that it is his duty to silence that gun at any cost.

Partly concealed by the eddies of smoke from the recent cannonading, he goes in long strides towards the gun. He does not notice that there is a jagged reddening tear in the left sleeve of his tunic. All his energies, mental and physical, are concentrated on silencing that gun.

One last stride brings him up to the machine gun emplacement in a sap-head. The gunners have been so engrossed in their terrible work and handicapped by dense smoke, that they have not noticed him advancing from the side like a ghost through the gloom.

THE Junior Subaltern pauses on the edge of the sap and cocks his revolver. He shoots at the head of the German who is working the gun, who falls over, a ghastly grin spread across his face. An intense loathing surges up in the Junior Subaltern's heart as he notices the evident pleasure the men take in the result of their work. He shudders. That gun must go!

Without hesitation, he leaps in among the frenzied Germans. For a moment the strength of Samson is his. Buffeting his way through the tiny group of four or five men, he throws himself upon the gun. With a tremendous effort he wrests the tripod from under, rendering the gun partially useless for a few moments. At least, he reflects, his own men will be in that sap-head before the gun can be set up and in use again.

This thought flashes through his mind, and he turns to fight, single-handed, with the infuriated machine-gun section, but without warning a cold blankness comes over the mind and body of the Junior Subaltern. The scene is suddenly blotted out, and his Sergeant, leaping in behind him, is in time to catch him as he falls. A German bayonet has got him.

Later, the sun rising on the stricken fields of France, rises, too, on this battle-ground that was once a turnip-field. The 10th Blankshires are "one up," holding on bravely to the bit of line which they have captured. Reinforcements are already streaming across the captured ground to aid them. The advances on the right and left are being made good also. The Colonel has indeed estimated aright his men's courage, and is even now urging the remnant of his command to hold on till the last—though they need no encouragement in the supreme test.

And the sun gently kisses the pale, smiling face of a gallant officer, who was very, very young, but not too young to play a man's game and win. The Junior Subaltern has been laid by his men for a while in the sap-head, beside the gun he has captured. It seems as if, having done his work well, he has closed his eyes for a while to enjoy the sweet sleep of the victor.

To the men of his platoon, holding on stubbornly in the main trench, a big Something seems to have gone out of the fight. Then the reinforcements come up, and there is an order for the 10th Blankshires to fall back to second line trenches. The remnant of the fearless battalion—tired, parched and panting—straggles back across the ground won at such cost, strewn with the rigid figures of many men who started out so bravely.

And the remainder of "A" Company carries back the body of their young Subaltern. They bear more than that. They carry, too, the indelible memory of a young subaltern, who walked the path of duty and found it the way to glory.

The Return

A son of Canada lies overseas

Before a battlefield in war-scarred France,
Couched in a quiet spot among the trees,
A fitting sepulchre designed by Chance.

In generations gone, his fathers came

From that same France in whose just cause
he died,

And, though there may be nothing in a name,
Their blood called out and would not be
denied.

But daisies growing in that hallowed place

Hear in the whispering wind that rustles by,
An echo of the winds near Boniface,

And with the breeze they bow their heads
and sigh.

—ERNEST BLACK.

France, Dec. 4th, 1916.