

INTRODUCTION

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far less impressive than a portrait painted in the firm lines of reality. There is an austere grandeur in the reality of what he is and does which needs no fine gilding from the sentimentalist. To depict him as a Sir Galahad in holy armour is as serious an offence as to exhibit him as a Caliban of marred clay; each method fails of truth, and all that the soldier needs to be known about him, that men should honour him, is the truth.

What my son aimed at in writing this book was to tell the truth about the men who were his comrades, in so far as it was given him to see it. He was in haste to write while the impression was fresh in his mind, for he knew how soon the fine edge of these impressions grew dull as they receded from the immediate area of vision. "If I wait till the war is over, I shan't be able to write of it at all," he said. "You've noticed that old soldiers are very often silent men. They've had their crowded hours of glorious life, but they rarely tell you much about them. I remember you used to tell me that you once knew a man who sailed with Napoleon to St. Helena, but all he could tell you was that Napoleon had a fine leg and wore white silk stockings. If he'd written down his impressions of Napoleon day by day as he watched him walking the deck of the *Bellero-*