

MEDICINE AND DUTY



M.O. (after listening to "Bath Mat's" horrible list of ailments): "Yes, my lad, you're suffering from a bad attack of Swingtheleaditous."
 BATH MAT: "Yus, sir; and it seems to be getting worse instead of better."
 M.O.: "I quite believe you."

In the Days of the Cigarette Famine.

When Mac "stuck his shingle out" announcing that the "B.C. Cash Store, 23, Rue de Sunken Road, invites the patronage of soldiers and Canadians," his cup of satisfaction overflowed.

"We'll do well here," he said. "There ain't much competition and the troops are going to be paid. Looks to me like a good chance to scare up a few shekels for the regimental fund."

I looked at the spot selected for the canteen with disfavour and said nothing. The Hun had owned it at one time, and, like the unsatisfactory tenant he usually is, had left *débris* of many kinds scattered over the shell-pitted earth. The site was maladorous and evil looking; the view consisting chiefly of crump-holes, broken trees and shell-bursts, altogether rather a discouraging place for a commercial venture—and I never had much faith in a tarpaulin roof as protection from the black smoke stuff.

There was no denying we did well. The troops were paid and the troops shopped. They bought us out half-a-dozen times. I believe they would even have bought the "War Cry" had it been procurable. As it was we sold all the old-lapsed stock that had lain on our shelves for months. At intervals fresh supplies came up, and these, too, soon went.

It was towards the end of our stay there that the Hun gave us notice to quit—a hoarse, crescendo whistle terminating in a thunder-clap overhead—and when I took my head out of the sardine case I saw Mac ruefully regarding a tin of apricots whence the life blood flowed in a syrupy stream.

"If this sort of thing keeps up it'll take all the gilt off the ginger-bread," said Mac, conning the sauce bottles over with an anxious eye.

"It does," I agreed, thinking less of sauce than of safety.

"We're only selling at a skin profit as it is," he continued, "and our loss by breakage is far too high this month already."

"Far too much," I echoed, fervently. "We can't afford to take risks. Hadn't we better move to that deep dug-out over—"

Just then one of our fellows stuck his head over the counter whistling softly under his breath (I wish people wouldn't whistle under their breath when I'm waiting for the next shell, it gives me the jumps), and I collided with the canned corn in my anxiety to give a life-like imitation of nothing at all.

"A franc's worth of chocolate," said the whistling one. "Any cigarettes?"

"Ain't made now," said Mac. "No bon for the troops. Guess the blockade must be on."

The whistling one departed, muttering bitterly and profanely about the incompetence of canteen men and the general unsatisfactoriness of our army organisation.

In due course the next shell arrived, wrecking the reserve stock of packet biscuits, giving me just the impetus required for a fine flying start for the deep dug-out, and leaving Mac doing rapid mental arithmetic over the biscuits.

"We'll have to move," Mac announced, as he joined me in the dug-out with the cash-box under his arm. "We can't stand that."

"I can't," said I, with emphasis.

"We'd better begin packing the stock across," said Mac a moment later. We did so, pausing under shelter whenever a gust of explosive sent the chalky subsoil flying.

It was during one such "rest" that I saw Mac craning out of the dug-out door.

"What fools!" he muttered. "What fools!"

I looked over his shoulder and saw a line of men worming their way towards our late quarters.

"Hey! what you doin' there?" shouted Mac.

"Got any 'Players'?" filtered back through the noise, and for once I was glad we hadn't.