

Letters from Laddie

Written for The Western Home Monthly By Bonnycastle Dale

OUR big ship and her active convoy are safe outside the worst danger zone; but a rumor of a wireless, telling of larger cruiser subs bound towards America is on all lips, so we still wear our cork outsidewear—safety first for us residents of Blightyville. We are well treated, well fed and happy as the day is long, excepting those who are seasick. It's odd, but true, I don't take it. You may remember on the way across two years ago that I was slightly indisposed, but seasick? Never!

"I have as room-mate a chap who was on the Italian front. He has some weird tales; he's just warming to his subject, so I'll quietly take some notes:—

"We were on the northern side of a foothill of the Alps, after a four-days march. We had just relieved a company of 'feather-tops,' those Alpine hill climbers—good men at the work, too. The Cap' has just got us all settled down nicely to our knitting when out broke a 'rat-tat-

tat,' not a bit like a machine gun or mortar. Some new Hun devilry, we guessed, so we all ducked and stayed put.' (He was a Boston, U.S., man.) 'Finally the Cap' crept up to me and asked what I made of it, as although the reports were plain enough, no bullets were singing overhead. "Rat-tat-tat" it went, not very far off either; but the night was blank dark on the cold side of the hill, and a cutting sleet was falling.

"Hoo—ooe—Help!—the devil is out in the mountains!" came a faint, distant voice out of the gloom, then came a cry so wild and fearful that every one of us promptly put on an extra thick coat of gooseflesh. "Tat-tat-tat—Whopp. Hoo—ooe—take care where you're coming you long legged swab!" Then a mighty burst of most fearful laughter—then silence. Not a sound for hours, while we stood ready to repel attack. The cold grey dawn came, the tips of the snow-clad Alpine heights caught the sun; the icy ledges and glittering snowbanks broke

out into a rattle of rifle shots. "What's that?" asked the man next me. "What's what?" questioned the Cap' who heard the exclamation.

"Them two spider webs running across the valley? Say, if they've got them spun for flies they must be dandy big ones—Lookee! Here comes the daddy of all spiders." It was a wonderful sight. Our minds filled with the man's idea of webs and spiders helped, I must admit; but there, about a mile away, stretched a glittering double strand of a web from hillside to hillside—fully half a mile high up and perhaps a mile long across.

"Take a look through my glasses at your first Telefricka, an aerial transport line," said the officer. I looked. It was a small wire basket-like car that was swinging along one of the web-like strands. In it was a wrapped up bundle that instinct told us was a wounded man. The car passed down the sag, struck the upslope, and a wheel slipped and the basket stuck and tipped at a hair-raising angle. The bundle in it tossed its arms loose and clung on for dear life. Out from our side started another basket—just like those you see in a cash-carrying system in some

big department stores, only much larger. In it was a "feather-top." As soon as he reached the disabled car he started, might and main, to raise its dismantled pulley into place; then, finding himself too weak for this work, he slowly but surely changed places in mid air with the human bundle. Now the exchange is complete and the wounded man is drawn back in the good car to the starting point, and the white, shining slopes volley with ringing cheers, to be raised again later when the rescuer, unaided, gets his basket righted and swings off in safety.

"It was weeks later before I solved the whole action of the night before. It seems a new man was going across and met a strapped in mule at the sag—a mule with wildly flying legs and loud, startling cries. No wonder he called—"the devil is out in the mountains."

"Yes, that sounds good to me," broke in a hearty voice from the shelter of the lifeboat. "Up-pup-pup," he went, as a vicious, plunging roll of the great liner sent a curling, roaring, miniature waterspout all over him.

"Up above it's all right; you ought to be down below with us! Once we came up so close to an enemy sub I could have lassoed the spyglass if I had had my rope with me." (Evidently an old western plains cattle man, the cowboy of the merry fiction writer.)

"We just backed off in the dusk and blew her stern away as clean as a whiffet, then we picked up all the men we could find, crowded them on our deck, after we carefully searched them, wirelessly a destroyer and transferred them safely.

"Our one big enemy is not the Hun.

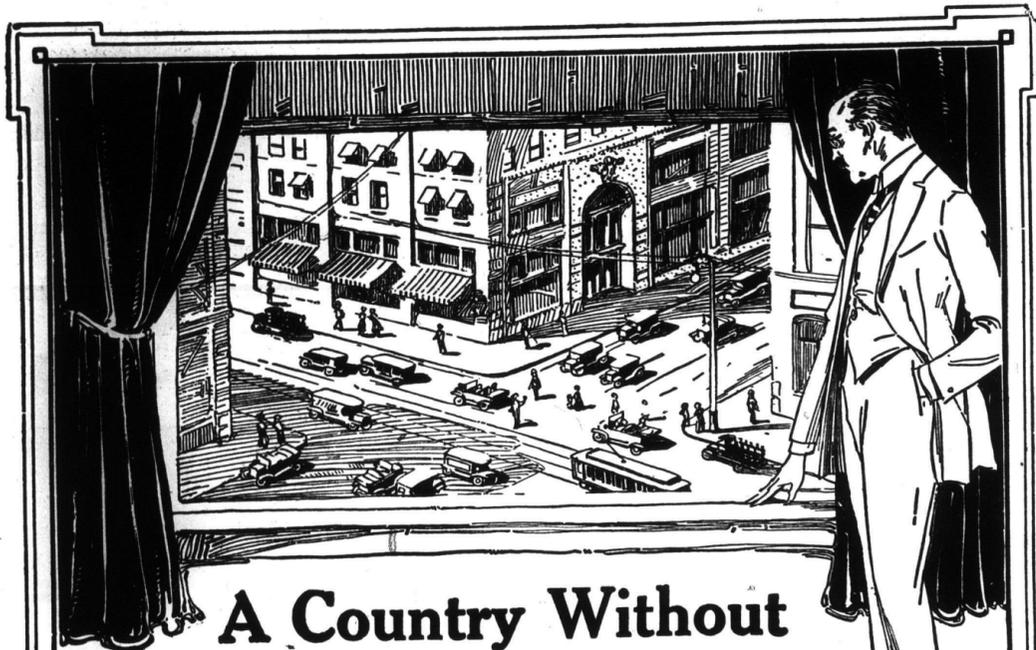
Oh! indeed no; the ever-present British navy. You see a destroyer hasn't time to ask who we are and if we will come over to five-o'clock tea. No; she just smashes a hail of quick firers over at all subs, I guess, and picks up the remains. So it's a below when we see the White Ensign. In fact our own boats are our worst trouble. We, when we are in enemy water, have to make sure that we are not after a neutral or an Allied boat, while the sneaking German can sink anything he finds, for he has nothing afloat on the high seas but some oil spots. The strangest thing that ever happened a diver I was on was once when we were swirled off balance, running thirty feet down.

Over we went on one side, until the sweating arch above was almost the beam below, then back we were swirled the other way. "Net," growled the young engineer. "Weeds in our spinner?" hazarded a voice from one of the dark cubby holes. A signal light glowed; the engineer slid the gear and up we started. Once on deck we saw the cause. A school of whales were rising and falling and putting all about us, when "slam!" "splash!" In came a big H. E., or it sounded like it—I used to be with the guns you know. Well, the big targets were off ahead now, so we all crowded up to see the fun. The very lean devil of a sub we were after was firing shell after shell into the splashing, spouting confusion. The visibility was bad and I guess they thought it was a flock of "Tin Lizzies."—What's a Lizzie? Oh, that's the new mosquito fleet the convoys carry and flop overboard in wads—you ought to see them go. It's unhealthy for a sub to be there or thereabouts at just that time. In went our gun; down we all crowded; in slid the peeper, and off we went after those whale hunters. Several times the observer took a peep, and at last we came up and sent our compliments over—twice. Then we slid under, just in time to hear a loud explosion.

You see if we are far out, and in danger we cannot save a whole crew; no room in our sweat-box you see. But we got after the poor chaps that were left, and, as it wasn't too bad a sea, got the collapsible out and filled it with them. It would have made any chap laugh to see one good swimmer paddling about the remains of one of those whales, trying to find the landing place. Yes, we took him in too, and towed them until we met our patrol boat. There have been dozens of whales killed and hundreds of porpoises and seals by over-ready gunners on the merchant marine. Yes, and on the navy, too.

"We got the day's news just then, as we were crouched nearest to the wireless cabin. In fact we were the only ones up there that wild day. Odd news, too: We hear of some of our farmers raising Cain about the boys being taken off the farms. But for the British navy there would have been no farms to take them

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A Country Without Motor Cars

IMAGINE, if you can, a country without motor cars, and you have a country whose commerce is seriously crippled.

The motor car is just as necessary in our daily life as the telephone, the telegraph, or the railroad. It would have disappeared long ago, as many mere fads do, if it had no function higher than mere pleasure. Its permanent usefulness is recognized.

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