

## Meal-Time at the Front

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Aubrey Fullerton.

THERE is at least one respect in which an army is like a circus; its dining service is very interesting and wonderful. It would greatly simplify the working details of either organization if its commissariat department could be eliminated; but a goodly part of its human interest would be gone if the cook-tent and field-kitchen went. No ready-to-eat, tabloid foods could possibly make up in convenience and practical efficiency what they would lose in domestic picturesqueness and sociability. Armies are fed not merely to keep them alive, but also to help maintain their morale at a good and constant level, and in the present war this double importance of the food and drink question is recognized more fully than in any other of the world's conflicts. Yet it is no new discovery. A little more than a hundred years ago, Wellington said of his army in the Peninsula:

"I found the English regiments in the best humor when we were well supplied with beef; the Irish when we were in the wine countries; the Scotch when the dollars for pay came up. This looks like an epigram, but I assure you it was the fact, and quite perceptible. But we managed to reconcile all their tempers, and I will venture to say that in our late campaigns, and especially when we crossed the Pyrenees, there never was an army in the world in better spirits, better order, better discipline."

If Wellington could see the kitchens and dining-camps of the several armies in Europe to-day, he would be moved to more adjectives than one. Admirably dined and wined as was his army, those of 1915 are being served marvelously, sometimes almost miraculously. The mysteries of a circus pantry or an ocean liner's kitchen are as nothing compared with the feeding of the soldiers in the trenches and on the battle-line in France and Germany.

One would expect, of course, that the French soldiers would be well fed, for France is reputed to be a land of good cooks and cooking. She is ingenious, too, and could well be trusted to get her army's food supplies to the front. But in some cases she has done it even better than could have been expected of her. An Englishman who was with the French army in Lorraine feasted royally:

"Even so close behind the lines there is no scarcity of provisions or even of luxuries. At luncheon near the front such a meal was set before us as could not be surpassed in the most famous restaurants in Paris. The table was decorated with carnations that could only have come from the Riviera coast, and on the menu there figured Marennes oysters and lobsters which, in some mysterious way, had been brought up absolutely fresh from the sea."

We were able to convince ourselves of the admirable way in which the French soldier is fed by a surprise visit to the kitchen of a reservist regiment in a small village near the firing line. In a large barn three great fires were blazing cheerfully, and over each of them hung a number of large pots from which savory odors were steaming. The regimental cooks, one of whom in civilian life was the chef of a well-known restaurant, invited us to taste the soup and meat which they were cooking, and to appreciate them the hunger of the trenches was not needed as a sauce."

But the French, nor any army, could maintain this standard of dining service everywhere. For average meals and regularity of supply, the British army excels, and it is being spoken of as the best cared-for and best-fed army in history. That is largely due to the efficiency of General Robertson, who has had the responsibility of the commissariat. If occasional luxuries get in to the French lines, plain, substantial food, but plenty of it, goes regularly to the British camps, and the men keep fit.

In recent letters from the front some of the Canadian soldiers have made incidental references to the matter of food supply. A Winnipeg doctor, serving

with one of the field ambulances in France, tells of his ride to railhead, within a few miles of the trenches:

"All arrangements were perfect, the train running like clockwork, and all necessities arranged for. I do not think I ever drank so much coffee before, as we made a rush for the buffet at each stop in order to have a warm drink. We had our regular rations to eat, of course, bully beef, bread, jam, and cheese."

When he reached his billet, on the night of the second day, he "had a grand meal of omelets and several other courses, with vin ordinaire and more coffee in tall glasses."

Two weeks later, he and his men were established in their own mess:

"We are now living pretty well off the rations, which are excellent, and do very well with a few supplementary articles. The tinned butter being served out is good, and there is no poor food. It is apparently carefully inspected, and the men generally have quite as much as they can possibly manage, and they are not specially troubled with lack of appetite. The great marvel to the French is that the British Tommy actually has 'confiture' (jam) given to him—that is the height of luxury."



A Beaver House

Another Western Canadian, a corporal in the first contingent, wrote at about the same time and from a similar billet on a French farm:

"We reside in a loft and beneath us are the usual occupants of a stable, including a goat. There are eighty of us in the loft, but as there is lots of straw we are comfortable and warm at nights, in spite of plenty of ventilation. The food is fair, considering, and we can purchase eggs, milk, and butter from the dame in charge of the farm."

Table luxuries at the front, however, sometimes cost very dear. The diary of a British subaltern gives a realistic picture of the finding of two army cooks, killed at their work by a German shell:

"Above them, slung from a crossbeam, hangs the hollow carcass of the pig which they were scouring when they fell, and at the other end of the barn there still smoulder the embers of the fire they had lit for roasting it. It was the simple striking of a match to kindle it, against orders, that was their death. Merrily the tufts of straw caught and crackled into heavy volutes of blue smoke; there was no chimney, no window that could betray them to the enemy—where was the harm? Unfortunately, the troop-cooks had failed to notice that a tile was missing from the gable—and a moment later the shell had arrived."

It is, naturally enough, a difficult matter to get an adequate supply of food into the trenches, and for even the best organized system it sometimes will be impossible. In a letter to his mother in Winnipeg, telling of his experiences at Ypres, a private of the Cameron Highlanders says:

"Rations were short and sometimes not forthcoming, but I had some plain chocolate and that kept me going for two days with what I did get."

We expose ourselves scarcely at all during the day. All our grub, mail, etc., we run into our dug-out like animals to their lair, venturing forth after dusk. We generally cook somehow inside the dug-out."

And sometimes the trenchman must go without food at all. Another Manitoba boy, who was in the thick of the fighting at Ypres, writes home thus expressively:

"I hadn't washed or shaved for about two weeks, and hadn't had anything to eat or drink for four days. Believe me, I was a picture. My lips were cracked and black for want of a drink, and my face was splashed with mud and discolored by shell smoke, and the green tint around my gills finished the picture."

At Langemark, one of the later engagements in which the Canadians distinguished themselves, their experiences, in this respect, were very much the same. An officer who was wounded there tells of coming out of the trenches at midnight and finding some biscuit and cheese at headquarters, "the first mouthful we had had to eat for three days."

Better a dinnerless trench, however, if a trench of the Allies, than to be a guest of the Germans: so the Britishers say. There have been letters from some who

were caught as prisoners of war, and whether from the bad relish of their captivity or from the really inferior quality of the food served to them, they have a poor opinion of the German commissariat as applied, at least, to prisoners. There is a bit of doggerel among the British to this effect:

"Soup hot, soup cold;  
Pork young, pork old;  
Mutton tender, mutton tough;  
Thank the Kaiser,  
We've had enough."

An English officer, writing home after four months' imprisonment in the German camp, says that for those four months he was fed pork and sausage twice a day. A Canadian private writes to his mother, like a boy at a hungry boarding-school:

"This is to let you know that I am well. Also that I am a prisoner of war. I want you to send me some eats every week, if you can—jam, cakes, biscuits, milk and sugar—anything you like. Also fags (cigarettes). Be sure and pack them well."

Surely it is a very human side of modern warring that is revealed by such messages and narratives as these.

Two little brothers, aged respectively four and six years old, fell in with a stray kitten, which, suffering by the hands of some cruel person, had of its tail scarcely half an inch remaining. "Poor little kitten" said the younger one. "Who has cut off its tail?" "Wonder if it will grow again." To which the elder gravely remarked: "Of course it will. Don't you see the root is there?"

## Things of To-Day

## Why Things Go Wrong

The "silly season," after all, has not been so silly. We have had trivialities in the public Press, and the big gooseberry, if not the perennial sea-serpent, has made its customary appearance, while many people have evidently taken advantage of the leisure of the holidays to pen long letters to the newspapers on almost every conceivable topic.

On the whole, the discussions that have been going on have been more than usually interesting, and by no means unprofitable. Take the comprehensive subject, "What is Wrong?" discussed at length in the columns of the "Daily News." All kinds of views were expressed in the various answers to the question, and many remedies were suggested for the ills that the age is heir to. Of all the letters which appeared, however, none struck us as being timely, more true, or more sincere than that written by Dr. Horton, that eloquent and cultured preacher whose jubilee will be celebrated this autumn.

"I can only state very succinctly," says Dr. Horton, "what seems to me to be the answer to the question, What is wrong? It is this, that vast numbers of people in England to-day have forsaken the best and highest ideal of life known to them before they have found a better and higher. Some have forsaken it in order to find a higher and better—which is misguided; but most have forsaken it, and are making no serious effort to find a higher and better. This, indeed, is the explanation of all wrongness in human life."

The bulk of the people, he goes on to argue, surrender the old and tried ideal, fling it aside, and live without a conscious aim at higher and spiritual things. According to their Pagan creed to command wealth is to be happy, yet they are wretched. "They have no real object to live for, outside their own personal desires; they cannot benefit others, for they have no real good to impart to them. They fall into that dreary, uninspired realm of the commonplace in which the only relief is to aim at social recognition in a higher grade, or to shoot, or play golf, or drive abroad, veiled and panting, casting up dust and emitting noisome smells in motor cars."

Yes, Dr. Horton is right. The best and highest ideal of life known at present to men is the Christian. When men live and act faithfully up to it, the noblest results are attained. A serious alternative hypothesis to the one which was offered by Christ has yet to be offered. We cannot have a view of life, a rule of conduct better than that which Christ gave us—that which issues in "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."

Night after night, long after sunset, the writer has mingled with the eager, excited crowds of debaters in Hyde Park, and has heard ignorant and blasphemous attacks on the Christian faith—attacks met, happily, in not a few instances by Christian people who think it worth their while to show their colors and bear their testimony in a field of service too often neglected. These men may fling aside the old ideal with a laugh and a sneer—but they have not attempted to find a better. They have not discovered anything new that will

Minister to a mind diseased,  
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,  
Raze out the written tablets of the brain,  
And with some sweet oblivious antidote  
Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff

Which weighs upon the heart.

Only one message, only one hypothesis, only one ideal can do this, and it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What is wrong is that the "old, old story," with all its sweetness and beauty—the best and highest that we know—has been thrown aside, and there is nothing that can ever take its place, and things can never be right until men cease trying to find satisfaction in worldly pleasure without a conscious aim at higher and spiritual things.

Oh, for a great spiritual awakening during the coming winter!