

Wedded to His Work

Written for The Western Home Monthly
by Marvin Leslie Hayward

TO the weary men in the front line trenches the brief period of daylight appeared inordinately short, and the sun, according to Corporal Pet Brewer, "if ye could possibly get a squint at it ought to be at least an axe handle high"; but the eventide falls fast in Flanders where the drama of the ages is being played on a stage of blood for the benefit of the neutral manufacturing nations, and the murky twilight had dropped like a black pall over the Canadian trenches. Several miles to the rear a hundred sabres of flame stabbed the inky night, as the field artillery roared out their diapason of death.

The "star shells" flashed across the sky; and the indescribable hum of battle rose like an incense to Mars. The transports and ambulances passed and repassed with their burdens of life and death; and the voices of Weldon's Engineers, or the "Monquat Rangers" as they were commonly called, rolled back from the front trench to the dugout where Blaine and Arthur Broderick, as the latter was wont to declare, "lived the life of angleworms and would die the death of rats."

The Rangers were singing their official marching song—the production of some rural New Brunswick Milton, and the doggerel chorus rang out lustily between the roars of the big guns.

"And Weldon he says,
"Get out of the Path,
Of the bullies of Bristol,
And the sluggers from Bath."

Blaine smoked away impassively, but Broderick twisted nervously, and broke into complaining speech.

"How can the poor beggars sing, I'd like to know," he demanded. "Good Lord; the sun hasn't shone for four weeks, and the mud's deeper than Trousers Lake."

"Haven't they as much to live for as any of us?" replied Blaine.

Broderick dug fiercely at a mud laden puttee, and cursed after the manner of the English in Flanders in the days of the great and original Churchill.

"Speak for yourself; but it's not saying much as far as I'm concerned," he added.

Blaine placed his pipe on the bench beside him and gazed at his brother Lieutenant in frank surprise.

"And I always fancied that Elsie cared for you," he exclaimed impulsively.

It was Broderick's turn to look surprised.

"How did you know I loved her?" he demanded.

"When one is in love himself he is pretty keen on noticing such things," was the calm reply.

"In love himself," repeated Broderick, a wave of understanding lighting up his gloomy countenance. "But do you mean to tell me that you have been my rival for the past four years and I never knew it?"

Blaine was gazing into the bowl of his depleted "cornucop," and nodded gravely; while both men fell to industriously replenishing their empty pipes, an em-

barrassed silence filling in the intervals of the "Rangers" song.

"I don't suppose there's any more chance of getting the mail this week than there is of the war closing in 1920,"

declared Broderick, shifting the discussion into the one subject of perennial interest.

Blaine did not have time to follow the convenient lead. Sergeant Sipprell pushed his broad shoulders through the narrow

door and flung a batch of Canadian mail on the rickety table.

Both of the men made a dash for it as if it were a German trench, sorted out their own letters, and tore them open.

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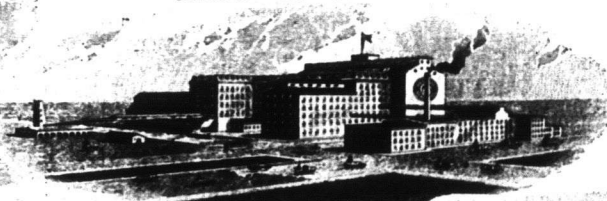
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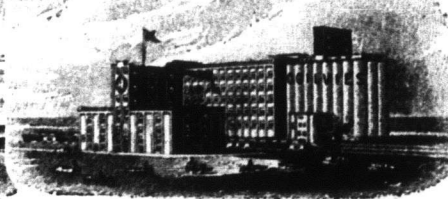
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