

ODES TO TRIFLES

To a Ration Cigarette

Tommies are most ungrateful blokes,
All said and done;
And I am no exception to
The general run.
Indeed, the mental exercise of grumbling
Is an incentive ever to keep mumbling.

I've looked gift horses in the mouth,
But never thee;
I've feared those bearing army gifts
When they were free;
I've railed against the quality and tissue
Of almost every blessed thing that's "issue."

I've damned the texture of my pants,
My tunic's fit;
I've sworn that Sister Susie's socks
Were badly knit;
But ne'er an "'Arf a Mo'" have I wished milder,
Or "Roughriders" less rough, or "Woodbine" wilder.

'Gainst Beef and Biscuits I have joined
The parrot cry;
And on the Jam, when Damson, looked
With doubtful eye;
But, when the Q.M.S. says "Here's yer baccor,"
I envy not his "Nestor" to the slacker.

One leans against the parapet,
And feels fed up,
Imagines grievances to fill
A brimming cup;
And then, a draw at thee and all's forgotten;
One magic puff, and life is none so rotten!

Cheap as they make it be thy cast,
Thy brand obscure,
More reminiscent of chopped hay
Than 'baccy pure,
And negligently rolled in paper riceless,
Still is the solace that thou bringest priceless.

Puff! and each ring that upward curls
Frames some fair thought,
That but for thee unto my mind
Were never brought.
Puff! the pip passes, and the blues turn rosy.
Puff! and a dug-out's e'en a corner cosy.

Sweet Cigarette, thy end's at hand;
Hast served thy turn.
A farewell word to thee before
My fingers burn.
Yet—listen! Doubly to ensure thy victory
I'll smoke another ere my valedictory.

—R.M.E.

To a Green Envelope

There's not a word in thee of Parados,
Platoons, Positions and Plans—Military;
There's just a score of kisses for Herself,
Then a wee one for her sister Mary.

There's not a mention in thee of Petards;
And if I use the word "Lachrymatory"
It only deals with a domestic bomb
That hoist me ages since—another story.

There's not a line in thee to help the Bosch,
Should'st thou by mishap reach his fist nefarious;
Merely the usual, "I wish I were there,"
And "You remember—eh?—occasions various!"

Perchance they'll tear thee open at the Base,
And table thee for rude evisceration,
And cynically search mild metaphors
For scraps of surreptitious information.

In thee there's not a hint of great deeds done;
No purple patchwork effort at description;
There's just a mention of some cigarettes,
MY sort—the Melachrino-ish, Egyptian.

Thou dare not tell my dear one where I am,
Thou must not mention trenches that we've taken;
But really, really, does she give a damn,
So that thou prove'st my love is her's unshaken?

There's not a whisper in thee of the war,
As Heaven and the Censor are above me!
Of where, and when, and why, and what I am,
And in what portion of the Line they shove me.

So speed thee to thy destination hence,
Beneath the cachet of my Parole d'honneur.
And bid her—it's the fashion to spout French,
Even of leave to England—"a la bonne heure."

—R.M.E.

THOSE TALES

Just think of the stories that will be invented,
We'll hear them when war days are over.
The number of men who will say *they* prevented
The Germans from landing at Dover.

The sappers will tell you they let off a mine
Just under the German headquarters,
And then there's the man who bombarded the Rhine
With his own special line of trench mortars.

Then the flying men say they dropped bombs upon Lille,
Where the whole German army was hiding;
Jones will tell how a shell neatly pierced the back wheel
Of the new motor-bike he was riding.

The prisoners, too, will have stories to tell,
It was all the staff's fault they were taken;
How they nearly escaped; how internment was "hell",
How they longed for poached eggs and good bacon.

And what will my yarn be, you're anxious to know.
Of course *I've* no need to tell lies, sir,
I took a small part at the end of the show—
I'm the fellow who captured the Kaiser!

THE CRIMINAL

Till the day I joined the army I had never known the sense
Of shame that haunts indulgence in felonious offence.
Now I've learned full well how people feel when out in a
crime.

Since the day I did the cake walk and supposed it marking
time.

My self-respect had vanished (it was all I had to lose)
And I cannot pass a policeman without shaking in my shoes;
While my former ruddy features of all color are bereft
Since the order came, "About turn," and I did it to the left.

I imagine every passer has a look distinctly dire;
Like a hangman estimating how much rope I shall require.
I'm a terror-haunted poet and I have been since the day
I adopted the wrong turning (like the lady in the play).

Are they ominous, these errors in the rudiments of war?
Will they become to be a habit I'll indulge in more and more,
Till one day when we're attacking some invulnerable bit,
And the order comes to double shall I straight proceed to
quit?

—THETA.