

## His Little Joke

To use his own words, Private Charles Walker "enjoyed his little joke."

Whenever and wherever men are gathered together nature seems to have ordained that there shall be a wag amongst the party. Every battalion, company, even section, boasts its slow droll fellow, its mimic, or its effervescent comedian, who takes it upon his shoulders to provoke the mirth of his fellows. Sometimes those shoulders are fitted for the burden; in other, and, I think, more frequent cases, they are not, which makes it hard on other fellows!

Pte. Charles Walker of "ours" was NOT funny by nature, but a life-long study of the cheaper vaudeville entertainments had raised in his soul a great hero-worship of the vermilion-nosed wielders of the delapidated umbrella. To emulate them—to make crowds of people roar with mirth, was Charlie's ambition in life; and when he joined the army and was attached to my own battalion he evidently thought he had attained the audience of his dreams. His simple kindly disposition, his generosity, his evident desire to please and be a "good fellow," speedily won all our hearts. It was impossible not to like him, and, for a time, his carefully cherished jests and quips, culled from the red-nosed gentlemen in by-gone nights at the theatre, amused us and raised a laugh now and again.

Unfortunately, elated by success, he wore them threadbare by constant repetition; and when Charlie aspired to originality in his wit—poor Charlie!—it was very hard to even force a smile. Often would he fall into a long silence, gazing into space with knitted brows; and we knew that the germ of some alleged witticism was being chased, caught and polished in Charlie's head. Then, with a look of glad satisfaction, out would come the "joke" and he would gaze around with such a look of joyous expectation that we simply had to force some sort of a laugh to complete his happiness.

When our training was complete and we were shipped to France, Charlie, of course, went with us: and when we marched up to the front and began to taste the hardships of war, he came out strong. Never did his spirits leave him, and not once did he lay aside the cap and bells. When we first came under shell fire his crude wit helped to pull several through that queer nauseous bad-time which comes to most of us during our baptism of fire. A man is glad of any cause to break the tension with a laugh during that time, and we loved Charlie for his unconscious help in his self-imposed duty as regimental comedian. It was this "duty" coupled with a heart that didn't seem to know the meaning of fear which brought to Charlie his last great jest.

We were in the first-line trenches, expecting an attack, and being worried by a sniper who was doing deadly work and effectually keeping our heads below the parapet. And herein Charlie saw an opportunity to be amusing. Making a rough flag with a handkerchief tied to a rifle, he suddenly jumped up on the parapet for an instant and down again. Even as he landed back into safety, "ping" came the sniper's bullet in the place where he had been. Up went the impromptu flag, and in the manner of the rifle range he signalled a "miss" at the same time shouting the information to Fritz and roaring with laughter between whiles. "Keep down" roared the Sergeant, but the spirit of office was upon him, and before we could prevent it he had bounded to the parapet again.

There was a soft dull thud, a little cough, and he swayed and toppled limply, pitifully, back into the trench. We rushed to him, but a single glance told us we could do nothing, and we stood mute around the pathetic form.

Quite still he lay for a minute, then the eyelids flickered and the paling lips moved. I knelt down and bent over him to catch the words I felt were coming. A wistful

eager look spread over the drawn features, and I caught in a whisper, faintly and haltingly—"Sig-nal a Bull."

I glanced up, and with a meaning look at the Sergeant, repeated the words aloud, and the Sergeant understood! He took up the impromptu flag, made a pretence of waving it, and roared out in a voice even more throaty than usual "A bull, Fritz, a bull!" Following my lead the little group burst into a laugh, a very choky sort of a laugh it is true, but it served its purpose. Charlie's eyes slowly opened: a gratified look spread over his face; and bending low over him, I caught the whispered words, "That—one—went—well."

Then, with a queer contented little sigh, the comedian made his final bow, the curtain fell, and he passed off the stage and out of the Service. Poor old Charlie, he enjoyed his little joke!

KRITICOS.

## Contributions and Acknowledgments

### NORTH SEA PATROLS.

Night on the waters: ghostly the moonbeams  
Silv'ring the wave-tops and marking our wake.  
Steely the sea is, and far off are soft dreams  
Out here patrolling, with Empire at stake.

Far-off the fire-side, and far-off the ingle,  
Gone from our ken as a dream that is past.  
Far,—Oh God—so far, the dear ones who mingle  
Tears with their prayers that we come home at last.

Night on the waters. Death darkly lurking  
Under each billow and over each cloud.  
Death for the watching, and death for the working—  
Sky for a pall!—and sea for a shroud!

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Draw close the curtains, pile on the bright logs,  
Peel the glad music' and bandy the jest.  
Sleep calm and dreamless; dread not the war-dogs;  
Hostages, we, for your safety and rest.

KRITICOS.

The following definitions have been drawn up for the benefit of new patients:—

HOSPITAL.—a place for the accomodation of wounded soldiers and other gentlemen of leisure.

M.O.—short for "move on" —as quickly as possible.

WARD RULES.—a gospel whereby soldiers are converted into conscientious objectors.

TREATMENT.—something you don't want, but have to have. It may consist of boiling, baking, freezing, drowning, electrocution, or merely WORK.

EXAMINING ROOM.—a modern reproduction of the Spanish Inquisition. The instruments of torture are very interesting and well worth a visit. The "Suspense" room is where victims spend a two or three day vigil for the chastening of their souls—and bodies.

ORDINARY.—the name of a diet. From the greek roots Ordus, meaning tough, and Nary, luck. Hence the grousing!

SCOTCH DOUCHE.—sometimes pronounced "Scotch Deuce" You stand in a corner and somebody throws a ton of cold water at your back. Avoid if possible.

### Y.M.C.A. NOTICE

"These tables are not for sitting on, they are for eating"  
When the tables are eaten they will probably start on the forms.