

FROM HARRY TO MONKUS

Letter From a Well-known Varsity Footballer in the Trenches to His Chum at Home

Belgium, Nov. 3rd, 1915.

WELL, old chum, and how goes the war with you? I've just forgotten when I received your last letter—but seems to me it was last week sometime, back in France in our billets at Bailleul. You'll find it on the map, about 15 miles south of Ypres and almost due west of Armentiere. I'm allowed to tell you where we have been if we've been there a week.

And those were considerable billets, Monkus—life was just one bottle after another. But that's all over now and we're away on now in Belgium billeted at — (I'll tell you next week). We're just a mile behind the boys in the first line and, well, any old time you want to hear the big shells sing, just say so and I'll open the record. Just across the road is good "Bruin"—she throws a shell a foot in diameter, and when she blows you want to dig down into the ground about a mile. Can you imagine hearing a shell 12 inches in diameter whistling your way—seemingly going to wallop you right in the middle of the back?

Boy, we're apt at any time to have a dig-out of these old shacks and go hustling toward Spain. Usually they carry on the big bombardments about midnight. Can you picture diminutive William digging across turnip fields about a foot thick in mud in his pyjamas. It doesn't seem natural, does it? But that's what happens every once in a while.

I don't know that you'd exactly take to the trenches either, Monk—not unless you were a mud hen or something. The usual depth is just over your knees in the first line—and cold—boy, that slush is cold, that's what I mean. Add to that rain day and night and you get just a hazy idea of the winter work here. The Germans are just about forty yards over the way—from the Allies' first line. Believe me, they have the best little old games of bomb-throwing you ever did see (bombs are the biggest danger). You can see the rifle grenades coming quite plainly, so that you get a chance to duck around the corner if you're looking. A chap and I were watching them to-day—all of a sudden I catches sight of one which looked pretty much to me as if it was all booked up for us. Well, we just waited about half a sec' to

make sure, and say, boy, we sure did hop to it into the next traverse. They're digging out that cave-in yet.

But I think the worst fun is the mud—Monk, you couldn't imagine it—it's beyond all reason. The fellows are just plastered from head to tail always.

At present a third of the Brigade is in the trenches to-night. I'm going up again to-morrow and will be checking things up for a while. I wonder how many casualties there'll be in the morning—our big game is having pools on which of a certain bunch will get potted first—I wonder if I win?

YOU know, the only thing to do is to work the backs off the men when they're in the trenches—you've got to keep them warm. Heard one fellow, an N. C. O., yell at one poor devil, "Say, over there, are you ossified?" That man got up from where he was busy—put his entrenching tool down, and said:

"Well—you, what do you think I am? My name's Simpson, not Sampson."

One sign up there reads, "Keep your head down, your King and Country want you," but these are all just little bits of trench life, Monkus—for of course, as you know, the Tommies are the most humorous people in the world in the tightest corners. I only wish I could go on telling you more—but I might just as well start a book. But if you want sure death, just poke your old bean over the trenches—and, boy, you'll not have to hold it there longer than twenty seconds, guaranteed Greenwich time, before you'll have at least one little blue hole square through the centre, probably three or four. Just to illustrate, push over your periscope—the mirror will come tinkling down in ten seconds.

We're right in the middle of the Canadians here—so far I haven't seen very many, but when I get more time I'm going to look them up.

So far, Big Boy, this letter has been all military—now I'll change, and it's up to you to tell me a few things in exchange. They say over here that at least 150,000 more are coming over—and believe me, they're going to need them all, too. In ways, I hope you make the grade yourself, Monk—it's hard work when you eventually land—but up to that time it's

more or less of a sightseeing tour.

You'd love to hear the old guns rumbling away. It sort of makes you feel great every time the boys pump some shells into them. As far as I can make out, they pump a devil of a lot more into them than vice-versa.

But I've strayed again. Let me see, and how is the little fairy getting along? I can just picture the two of you over here sitting on a hill this dark night holding hands and watching the big show. See those star shells, aren't they clear? (If you're up on the parapet when one breaks you don't flop, you stand freezing until it goes out, it's safer that way, although it's pretty much like being in a hive of bees and waiting for the sting). Zowee, hear that big fellow sing—look over there; see the flash where he bursts? And listen to the double boom coming rolling back? Believe me, the night is night, for no one sleeps, that's all done in the day-time. But I think you'd really enjoy Shea's more—it's not quite so muddy—so horribly wet—so cold—and besides, one's not quite so apt to be hit there.

I had to walk four miles in the dark to-night—hell, it was, and no mistake. Believe me, I kept my old forty-five right jam full and on the safety in my pocket. The natives around here are the best snipers you ever saw; they picked off two mounted despatch riders a half-mile from here last night. But I got in all right, although just one smear of mud. In one place it was four inches above boot tops, knee-boots at that.

Well, Monkus, that little old sleeping bag on the floor looks mighty good to me. I don't think there'll be any trouble about pounding the ear. Often I dream of you all in Canada—it's all plain as day—the sailing—the shows—the pink teas—the big games—everything. Then a rat (they're right on the job, too) starts chewing your boot by your ear and you have to start all over again.

The candle is just done—the rain patters on the tin roof—the stove smokes (so do I) and all things call for an early closing. Pass the good word back and for the love of Pete don't wait for me to write. We move too often.

As ever,

HARRY SYMONS.

THE PATRIOTIC PUMPKIN OF 1915

The Story Told by Tom Spunkins 20 Years After

By H. A. CODY

"The Patriotic Auction was begun last night, when the Mayor sold the big pumpkin for three hundred dollars."—Daily Newspaper, 1915.

"IS it possible that I haven't told yez about the Patriotic punkin! Well, that's queer," and Tom Spunkins blew a cloud of smoke into the air from his old clay pipe. "It was a great affair, sure," and a smile lurked about the corners of his mouth as thoughts of the past surged through his mind.

"Tell us about it, Tom," I urged, speaking for the rest of the men who had gathered into the store, as was their custom after the work of the day was over.

"I kin see that punkin now," Tom continued. "It was a fine one, ho, ho! Zeb Scribner, who has been dead fer ten years, raised it the same as he did his calves an' pigs. When he went to give the critters milk, he always gave the punkin a drink, too. I did hear say that sometimes he gave it something stronger than milk, fer Zeb was mighty fond of the bottle. Howsomever, the punkin grew until it was the biggest one I ever sot my eyes upon. It fetched a good price in the market, so I understood, an' it deserved it."

"How did it become a patriotic pumpkin?" queried a young man sitting in the corner.

"Well, ye see, it was the time of the Great War, twenty years ago, an' they were rasin' money in the city fer the Patriotic Fund, which was gittin' purty low. They were agoin' to have a big Patriotic Auction, an' the Mayor wanted something to boost the affair along, an' give it a good send-off. Strollin' through the market, he spied Zeb's punkin, an' a happy idea shot into his mind. He bought it, an' the papers began to advertise it like mad. It was to be sold the first thing, so they said, an' it was sure to bring a handsome price."

"And did it?" I inquired, anxious to learn what happened.

"Did it? Well, I should say. I was present myself an' saw it knocked down fer three hundred dollars."

"Oh!" It was the exclamation from all in the store, and the tone was one of doubt.

"Yez may 'oh, ho' all ye like," Tom replied, unabashed by the incredulity of his listeners. "If yez don't believe me go to the city an' look over the old

newspapers fer the week that punkin was sold, an' find out fer yerselves. I was there, an' I guess I ought to know. Yez kin ask Martha, as well, fer she remembers how I came home clean crazy over the price that punkin brought. Zeb Scribner went about mad when he heard it, fer he got only two dollars. But we wern't the only ones who had our mental machinery knocked askew over that punkin."

"Why, what happened?" Ned Crocker inquired, as Tom paused and gazed reflectively into the smoke-laden air.

"NO, we wern't the only ones," the old man repeated. "It was wonderful what a fad that punkin became. It bust into fame in no time. Why, there were Punkin Leagues in nearly all the churches; punkin baseball teams; cats an' dogs were named after it, an' even a steamer, which ran fer awhile on the river, was called 'The Punkin.' She bust her biler one day, an' no wonder. But the limit was reached when a baby was named 'Punkie.' I don't know whether the kid lived or not, but it must have had a hard time of it if it did. Why, punkin blossoms were sold instead of roses, an' fer awhile people wore little green punkin leaves on their coats. I did hear that some wanted to have the punkin leaf as the Canadian emblem instead of the Maple Leaf, ho, ho!" and Tom leaned back and fairly shook with laughter.

"Did the interest soon die down?" I inquired.

"No, not at all. It spread throughout the country like wildfire. Every farmer began to raise punkins, an' as punkin-pies were all the fashion the prices soared up into the clouds. It was something like that fox business I've often told yez about. People went crazy over that fer awhile until the war hit it a sudden knock-out blow under the ear. Well, people began to invest in punkin farms instead, an' combines were formed. Farmers raised their prices, an' fer a while they did a rushin' business. But they couldn't compete with the patriotic punkin. The demand was fer that an' fer that alone. Hotel an' restaurant keepers had to swear that they would serve only patriotic punkin pies or they would lose their customers. They charged what they liked so long as they handed out the real genuine article."

"Was it mere sentiment," I asked, "which caused people to demand the patriotic pumpkin?"

"No, not at all. Ye see, it all had to do with that first punkin which sold fer three hundred dollars. The man who bought it gave it back again. It was then cut up into a number of pieces, an' it was wonderful how people fought to buy them. I ferget now how much each piece brought, but it was a big sum. One man, I heard of, took his home, an' his wife made it into a small pie. Some relations were invited in fer dinner, an' each was given a tiny bit of the pie so he could say that he had eaten some of the patriotic punkin. But, my lands! the effect was wonderful. No sooner had each eaten his bit than he began to sing 'God Save the King,' 'O Canada,' an' 'Rule Britannia.' Men, women an' children shouted the verses at the top of their voices. Even the cat, which had got hold of a tiny bit of the crust which had dropped upon the floor, set up sich a howl that it had to be turned out of doors. It was too patriotic fer the family."

"An' that wasn't the end of it, either. Every one who had tasted that pie marched at once to the recruitin' office an' tried to enlist. When they wouldn't sign on the women an' children there was sich a fuss that the police had to be called in to settle the disturbance. The same thing happened to all the other families, so I understand, which ate pies made from the rest of that punkin. They all became so patriotic that they rushed off at once to enlist. The fightin' spirit ran so high that they wanted to pitch into everyone they met, an' the ones who were turned down got landed into jail because they thought that their neighbours were Germans. I tell yez, there was big excitement fer awhile, an' all over that punkin."

"But what had that to do with the combines, and the high price of pumpkins?" I asked.

"I'm comin' to that, if ye'll only give me time," was the reply, as Tom brought forth a plug of tobacco, and began to whittle off several slices. "That forms the most interestin' part of the whole affair. Ye see, a number of mighty shrewd chaps bought up all the seeds of that patriotic punkin, an' they paid a dollar a piece fer them, too, so I learned. Now, them were the seeds which were planted on the punkin

(Concluded on page 18.)