

"NUTS AND RATIONS."

Ting a ling. "Just answer that phone," called the Sergeant to the orderly in charge, who, after carefully noting various details, reported: "Sergt. George, Sergt.-Major Harry, Tom, Dick and Pat, to report at once to the Court house to give evidence in the case now being heard."

Here was a chance for an afternoon off.

It did not take long to procure the necessary pass out of barracks, for the purpose of attending, for the first time in my life, a Court of law, the interior of which had been but an imaginary picture, carried in my mind through a long and varied experience in different parts of the world. Strange how some men seem to put in quite a lot of time attending cases in Court, either as prosecutor, defendant, or witness, whilst others, with more variety in their lives, have never seen the inside of such a place. Such however has been my lot, and it was with mingled feelings of curiosity and fear (to culminate eventually in what is commonly known as stage fright) that I entered the Hall of Justice. Never did house of cards collapse with greater rapidity than did the illusion of my mind. Where was his Worship, bewigged, and clothed in ermine? Where was the woosack? Where were the wigs of the counselors? Where were the stately ushers resplendent in their silken gowns? These questions crowded in upon my bewildered brain.

That was evidently the Judge seated up there, beneath the Royal Coat of Arms, but the counselors! Were those ordinary looking men, who kept bobbing up and down, they, who were to match their glib tongues against my poor wit?

What were those men doing, seated at a long table in the centre of the Court, directly in front of the Judge? Here was one man, with his head upon his outstretched arms, so interested that he had fallen into a deep, but not too passive, sleep, from which he occasionally roused himself to readjust his arms to a more comfortable position. There were two others, who seemed to have drifted in for no other reason than to have a conversation, coupled with so much gesticulation and shoulder shrugging, that it led me to believe they were discussing the merits of such and such an exercise in P.T. or were devising some new style of using the Indian clubs. Another, seated at the far end of the table, brought to mind Tommy Traddles, of our school days, except that his drawings were the heads of animals, and not skeletons. Then, glancing across to the opposite side of the Court, (to the right of the Judge) one was compelled to acknowledge the total collapse of all preconceived notions of the interior of a Court house, for there were seated the most nondescript crowd imaginable. Clerks and salesmen, trainmen and shunters, (dropped in from the adjoining station), messenger boys seated side by side with gentlemen of leisure.

The one bright spot was to be found in the south east corner, where one could see a quorum of fair ladies busy plying their knitting needles, creating some article of comfort for their present or absent loved ones. On my right and on my left, was such a display of khaki, with crowns and stars upon sleeves and shoulders, that almost compelled my right hand to remain fastened to my right eyebrow.

But my interest was chiefly centred upon the witnesses, and the tone of voice used by the Counsel, now soft and seductive, like a mother pleading with her wayward child, and now commanding, like a new fledged N.C.O. showing off before a bunch of "Rookies". Soon it came to my turn, and I could scarce answer to the reiterated call of the usher for "Pat" (only he didn't say Pat), conscious of the fact that I was to be the cyposure of all eyes, for the time being. Having reached the elevated stand at the right hand side of the Judge, I was the better enabled to form an opinion of some of the chief characters. The Judge himself might have been my old schoolmaster, or a minister, from his clean shaven and rubicund countenance, and the Counselors, members of my own club.

Having duly sworn that I would speak the truth without



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evasion, equivocation, or mental reservation, I was bewildered by a number of questions, on this, that, and the other, and I was relieved when I heard his Worship say, "Stand down", an order which I promptly obeyed, and within one minute I was seeking to revive my scattered wits, standing in the rain, out in the Court yard, with my favourite pipe between my teeth.

Thus, was another mental picture taken from the peg from which it had hung so long, and an engraving of actual experience put in its place.

—PAT.

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