

WE PREPARE FOR WAR.

"The battalion will proceed to France on Saturday." This is the news that sweeps through the camp and stirs the innermost feelings of one and all.

It means action for all of us, after a stay of four months in preparation for this longed and hoped for event—action not only on the other side of the water, but on this side as well, for the issue of war impedimenta means a task for the quartermaster which needs a Hercules to tackle. Web equipment is exchanged for the old leather harness, and meets with the approval of all and sundry. Rifles of the rebored Ross pattern are issued, cleaned and made ready for the coming battles which we all long to engage in. Extra clothing of all description is flying from the Q.M.S. hands to the arms of the ready receivers, with many and trite comments; sunshades, gas helmets, soap, bread sacks, and a varied assortment of articles with uses so obscure that it would puzzle Euclid himself to find a good and sufficient cause for their being.

Transports fly here and there loaded to their utmost capacity with "returned empties," rifle cases, old equipment, and all the spare junk that accumulates wherever one finds a camp. The transport officer is heard to say things that he only is allowed to say, but he is forgiven and sympathised with in his trouble.

Take a walk down the lines, and we find a group of men with a set of the new equipment in their midst, the several parts scattered in a circle around the belt; one more bold than the other essays to catch the beast and reset its dislocated members. He starts in the right manner by putting his heel on the belt, and then endeavours to correctly place the ammunition pouches; then the haversack catches his eye, and that is examined and placed in its wrong position; then the pack comes in for its abuse; the entrenching tool is looked over and thrown on one side as no good; and so the various parts of the new issue are condemned to rest awhile, until some other bold spirit comes around and says that he knows how to tame the beast: then we sit and watch his endeavours, and give him the hew-haw.

Further on we find still more busy men, each possessed of a file, each confronted by a bayonet in a home-made clamp, and each

endeavouring to vent his wrath on its dull edge, so that when the time comes for the 49th to take part in a bayonet charge he may have an instrument that will cut the toughest hide a German can show.

Then even the cooks show a tendency to hustle now that they are provided with the active service kitchens; one can always see a cloud of smoke vomiting from the bowels of these creatures on two wheels, but, smoke or not, we notice a decided improvement in the meals turned out.

Oh! you pioneers, how the saw and the hammer goes apace providing boxes of all shapes and sizes to accommodate the various squeak instruments of the two bands, the hobby-horses of the orderly room, and all the odds and ends that go to make up fighting togs of a battalion on the warpath!

Outside the company quartermasters' tents we see a litter of cast-off garments, all of which will eventually find a resting place on the backs of other individuals, if they are not beforehand condemned to the rubbish pile or sent away in the various and curious parcels that it is the lot of the post corporal to receive.

The rank and file are not the only ones who show signs of fermentation, for in the officers' lines one sees batmen colliding with one another in their efforts to do the bidding of their bosses, who are also despatching their sundry pairs of socks, pyjamas, and unnecessary personal belongings. They assume the shapes of all the geometrical figures known before and after the flood, and some have so much that they even have to make two parcels, and even then not getting rid of all the surplus. Bedding is reduced to a minimum, air pillows are pricked to make them lighter, tooth brushes have the bristles pulled so that the sharp ends will not prick the officers' back when they wear the harness; moustache wax is tabooed in case some of these flowing whiskers should assume the shape of elongated eyebrows; in fact, all things great and small (it's not the first line of a hymn) are ditched, and every man from the C.O. down tries by all the arts of magic to make his pack as light as possible, for all realise that the row we have to hoe is full of weeds. We are ready to do our duty in whatever sphere we are placed, be it as a fatigue battalion or as an escort to Kaiser Bill.

JUNIUS.