

AN INCIDENT.



I came to the edge of ——— town

(The shells had ceased but a pipeful past),

A bent old woman climbed her roof

To raise the tiles and make them fast.
Quick were her movements, bright her eyes
As those of a squirrel blithe at bay;
But I saw the blood-drops, small and dark,
Where the fallen wooden slippers lay.

“Mother,” I said, “You ask for death
To linger thus at the gates of hell.
See but your neighbour’s low-roofed house:
It was gutted and torn by yon last shell.
Rouse thee, fly to Old England’s arms;
Thou hast suffered for her, and she waits
for thee.

Her broad-built fires and gardens old
Call thee in pity across the sea.

The old wife paused for a moment’s space.
“Who fears to die?”—the bright eyes
flashed—

“Our lives are but as yonder tile
That slipped and on the pavement dashed.
I have no fear of German shell.
His time is known, His time is best;
And on the love that placed me here
My faith I lean, my hopes I rest.

“If in mine age I leave this spot,
Through fear of death or dread of pain,
The years may bear your comrades back:
I shall not see my home again.
How can I live on stranger soil?
I have not seen the distant sea.
Tho’ others move from town to town,
My home is more than life to me.”

Down to her task she bent once more
(For Belgian women look on earth
Till eyelids close). I went my way,
And felt a struggle as of birth
Within my mind. Again there rang,
Stronger than death, the melody:
“Home! Home! Not see my home again?
My home is more than life to me.”

O Belgian wife! for thee and thine
Death has no terrors, nor for them
That find the balm of self and sin
In roots that rear no single stem.
Had they, the proud, cold-blooded fools
That pandered to men’s passions thus,

Deep-planted loves and humble hearts,
Our homes were more than life to us.

This was the rock that braved the storm,
Whereon the German galleons break,
And this the rock that age to age
A thousand armies shall not shake.
Hush the wild Discord! Let it die!
Still may ye hear the Harmony
Home! I will face the world in arms!
My home is more than life to me.

Sapper C. A. GIRDLER,
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THE SONG OF THE TELEPHONE MAN.



HIS is the song of the telephone man,

The man with the buzzer box,
With dirty face and filthy
clothes,

With mud-covered hair and eyes
and nose,

Who gets no sleep but a fitful dose,
Who daily does work of which no one knows,
Who’s life is any old colour but rose.
The poor old telephone man.

Whoever thinks of the telephone man,
The man with a constant grouse.
If he’s a ’phone man, his life’s a curse;
If he’s a lineman, it’s something worse.
In either case he’ll need a nurse,
Or else a stretcher in lieu of a hearse,
And as an epitaph something terse:
“This was a telephone man.”

What is the work of a telephone man,
The man who’s the cause of this sorrow?
It’s to be on duty early and late,
With a black buzzing ’phone for his only
mate;

Unless he’s a lineman (whom all men hate),
And who, if he’s lucky, will sleep on a gate.
Who gives a damn? For at any rate
He’s only a telephone man.

And what does he do when the battle’s done?
Does he live and sleep like a man?
No; he pinches and steals his neighbours’
wire,
And denies the fact with curses dire,
Taking no heed of the other’s ire;