

A Veteran's Experiences.]

(From the "Daily Mail" of June 26th, 1965.)

SEVERAL unusual sidelights were thrown on the early conduct of the present war, when, on the arrival of the 10.15 Channel Tunnel Express, A/Pte. John Dimp limped off the train with the aid of his crutches.

As the cool breeze swept through the veteran's flowing beard he looked around with bewilderment and grief. Picture the sorrow and chagrin of a native of these islands arriving on his natal shores, only to find the speech of his own country unintelligible, and its customs a closed book!

A French estaminet keeper, an aged man who had attained riches in important war work, and who chanced to be travelling by the same train, offered his services as interpreter, and John Dimp was thus enabled to give his story to our special reporter.

"I was born in England," said the ancient warrior, "but at an early age was taken by my parents to Canada, in which country I enlisted at the beginning of the war.

"I have been so long on the Continent that I have forgotten my native speech entirely, although I could readily give my simple autobiography in either French, Flemish, German, or one of a score of Slav dialects.

"I was probably the most surprised person on the western front when a grateful Government ordered me home. My leave was not really due until 1980, so, although I had been parading sick with senile decay for the last ten years, I was utterly taken aback when my warrant came through. There was much heart-burning among the octogenarians when it became known that I was to go out of my turn. I feel sorry for the disappointed ones, of course, but to refuse was obviously out of the question. What makes me especially pleased is that I shall have an opportunity to go to the Pensions Department to arrange to have my old age pension paid into our grand, last, and final Victory War Loan. After that I intend to get a smart regimental beard-cut, and go to see my grand-nephews at Tooting. I propose to spend the remainder of my leave in bed.

"I hope to return to the trenches in time to see the last of this wonderful war, as I am confident it cannot continue for more than two weeks. The Germans are running short of food, on the verge of famine, indeed; the Kaiser grows increasingly decrepit, and the day cannot be far distant when the Huns will be unable to withstand our heroes in khaki dressing-gowns."

When asked by our reporter for a few reminiscences of the earlier days of the Titanic struggle, the venerable Tommy replied:—

"My memory is not what it used to be. Much of the first fighting appears to me as a hazy dream of artillery actions at the absurdly short range of five miles. Imagine that—five miles! Nowadays, when we engage in actions at a minimum distance of one hundred and fifty miles, such a statement must sound like falsehood of the boldest sort.

"Our first tanks were laughably crude—although we thought them wonderful in those days. I well recall my astonishment on seeing the first ration tank brought up for the purpose of conveying supplies to our patrols on the near edge of the vast No Man's Land. It was not, however, until Professor Imalire perfected his now famous individual, portable tank that we had anything resembling our present armoured runabout.

"In the old days our equipment was impossibly crude and unhandy. We carried a large assortment of obsolete tools and contrivances, such as wire-cutters, gas-masks, and entrenching-tools, which, while useful in billets, were at a discount in action. Now that electricity supersedes every other force of destruction used in modern warfare, the clumsy and dangerous weapons formerly employed seem fabulously ineffective. The soldier carried an intolerable burden of equipment in those times. Indeed, now that our infantry carry only spare rubber gloves and unbreakable milk bottles, we feel the deepest commiseration for our forerunners of the retreat from Mons.

"Our rations, too, were absurdly bulky and ridiculously lavish. Now that all troops are compelled to 'Fletcherise' by numbers, and our mainstays are barley water and biscuit pap, the work of the Q.M. department has been practically obliterated.

"To-night," said the senile soldier, his wizened old face wrinkling in a toothless imitation of the cheerful grin which has ever distinguished our troops, "I feel that I should like to be gay, to sing some of the old trench songs, and to dance our antiquated dances. I daresay you have never heard of the 'Tank trot,' the 'Whizz-bang waltz,' the 'Minenwerfer move,' the 'Rum-jar romp,' or the 'Stokes squirm,' but, if my rheumatism permits, I shall try them all."

As the old man's quavering voice faltered and ceased, I hailed a passing taxiplane, and saw him safely on his way to the Pensions Department.

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Doctors Less Courteous than in Pre-War Days.

"PROFESSIONAL MANNER" DEAD.

Before the war, when one went to a doctor, was it his custom to belittle one's ailments, to deprecate one's symptoms, to smile cynically at the monologue of one's aches and pains? It was not! Since the beginning of the war there has been a deplorable falling off in the traditional courtesy of the medical profession.

In former times, if one went to him with a persistent pain in the side, a slight feeling of lassitude, and mild insomnia, the verdict was rarely ever anything less than appendicitis. Nowadays such a complaint would be received coldly, even scornfully. How sad that one can no longer become ill! Oh, the delights of those diseaseful days! Then microbes lurked in every corner, bacteria lay in wait momentarily, germs worked overtime. But now, the acquisition of any really dangerous ailment seems impossible. Perhaps the introductory scowl of the battalion medical officer checks its growth. Perhaps the brusqueness of his greeting chills its budding activity. What tender little germ, with all the potentialities of typhoid, say, could endure the shame of being classed "Bowels—No. 9"? No, the ignominy is too great. It would simply refuse to develop.

Before enlisting one was the happy prey of imminent, stealthy disease. Now one is proof against even the most trivial illness.

There is just one consolation left. When one goes sick with any complaint, from leprosy to cauliflower ear, no longer does one have to say: "Aw, Doc, have a heart! I'm a poor man. I can't afford an operation!"

"WIRELESS."

NOW—AND THEN.

I wish I were one of those old boys
Of 1860 or so,
With a patch of fuzz on either cheek,
And a "pill-box," or shako;

A tunic of red and pants of blue,
A yellow stripe down the sides:
A shilling a day and free pipe-clay,
And licence to loot besides.

Those were the days! There were no Huns then
To trouble and astound us
With the barbarities of Kultur,
And twelve-inch guns to pound us.

The whizz-bang's voice was then unheard,
The Krupp spoke not at all,
Nor from the realm of musketry
Had cartridge ousted ball.

Inoculation was unknown,
The gas-mask ne'er was seen,
Nor had the flammen-werfer
In action ever been.

The coffee, cocoa, or the tea—
Our constant ration here—
Were rarely used. They drank instead
Just honest English beer.

And when on active service
Across the sea they hied,
A little fancy marksmanship
Was all that term implied;

A brush with heathen nations brave,
Yellow, or black, or brown;
A punitive expedition,
The taking of a town.

I sigh, I pine, I languish for
A foeman of renown,
A civilised barbarian—
Yellow, or black, or brown.

J. W. C.