

To Sir William Baker
with pleasant memories
of "The Open Arms" when this
was being written
from
Archibald

TURNED SOLDIER

BY

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THERE may be monotony even in the medical work at a base hospital in France, and we have sought and found some relief from this by enquiring into the civil occupations of the patients. The results of questioning the soldiers on this point have not often brought any help towards a diagnosis of the diseases from which the men have suffered, nor have they often aided us in treating the malady, but sometimes they have been of assistance in cheering and "bucking up" the patient. The medical officer, the sisters, and the wardmaster have one and all been delighted at the discovery of a novel calling, like the astronomer "when a new planet swims into his ken." The patients, too, have entered into the spirit of the thing and have been much amused sometimes and filled with wonderment at the curious trades of their fellows.

Coming from different hospitals another "medico" and I have met in slack times, and, after a walk along a pretty road beside a little stream, have enjoyed an evening meal in a quiet French *estaminet*. Here, whilst discussing the excellent dinner, we have exchanged the "bags" of the preceding week and have related the stories which our patients have told us.

No week has thus far surpassed in richness, in variety, and in downright absurdity the contents of the "bag" of a short time back. I was bursting all the way out to tell of my finds, but we had already agreed that it was not until after the *hors d'œuvre* were consumed that our respective discoveries were to be displayed. I began with the account that Admiral Jellicoe's Gardener was in my ward, and also an Opal Chipper; my friend retorted with his Sergeant who had shown Roosevelt about Africa and a Tripe Dresser. But I was not to be outdone so soon, and had been canny enough to reserve some

tit-bits in the shape of the Black-Worker¹ and the Kangaroo Shooter. He, too, had not given away all in his first outburst of enthusiasm, and produced his *Miniature Painter* and his *Clicker*.²

Great Britain and Greater Britain have called forth soldiers from lands in every sea and under every clime, and in very truth it is a citizen army as no army before ever was. It is hard to realize to what extent labour had been specialized before the war. The workers have all been gathered up in one basket, as it were, so that the File Blacker and the Bromide Paper Finisher jostle the Theological Student and the Fowl Plucker against the Motor Cycle Photographer and the "Hoven" Man in a Pottery; and Cuthbert the Cowman and the Turbine Borer are cheek by jowl with the Swiss Embroiderer, whilst the Vigneron and the China Clay Dipper rub with the Houp-la Stall Proprietor and the Bath Enameller. But in the modern army occupations may be almost as diversified as in ordinary life, and countless varieties of duties are now assigned to Thomas Atkins.

The process of collecting the men and redistributing them may be likened to the narrowing bed of a river which gathers together the broad reaches of the waters above and redirects and guides them into the numerous rocky channels and courses below. We have heard much of the cry that men should be employed in the army on work as like as possible to that of their ante-bellum days. This the authorities have been enabled to do in the case of the Cinema Operator, for there are now definite Cinema Companies. The River and Lighter Man now becomes master of one of the barges on the French canals and the champion Shoeing Smith of England is in the Army Veterinary Corps.

The task of the army was not quite such a simple one, however, when the Bacon Roller and the Stained Glass Window Maker presented themselves. We humbly suggest that the Elocutionist and the Female Impersonator might

¹ i.e., Undertaker.

² i.e., one who sews on the uppers of boots.

be induced to decoy the Hun into a trap and the Smoke Man¹ might easily be employed in putting up a barrage to cover the movements of our own troops. We have been told that the Chief Camouflage Officer of the British Army once arranged the scenery of the Metropolitan Grand Opera in New York, and surely the more delicate screen work might be done under his direction by the Fancy Trimmer, who in civil life found his delight in "slashes," with the Miniature Painter from Baker Street as his *aide*. The Antique Chair Maker could furnish officers' messes at the front, with the help of the Table Decorator at the Crystal Palace. Surely there is work up in the trenches for the Man who takes "Squeaky" out of Boots. He might follow his craft before the men go "over the top" on a raid so that the element of surprise might be more complete. The Circus Proprietor and the Conjuror could readily arrange entertainments for the troops when out "in rest." The Jam Boiler, too, could try his hand at "plum-and-apple."

In one hut we had at the same time together an extraordinary group of men from widely separated parts of the Empire, and we were made to have a very lively sense of distance. There was the Vignerons from Australia, whose work, minus the association with molluscs, was similar, we suppose, to that of the Oyster and Cellar Man who laboured beneath Regent Street for the benefit of the guests in the Café Royal above. Then there were side by side the Bath Attendant on a P. and O. boat, who loved to tell how he had "laved and abluted" some of the world's most famous globe-trotters, and the young British West Indian Fisherman from the Island of St. Lucia, who, as he said, did not speak French, but *patois*, and replied in the affirmative to questions of his M.O., "Waay, mon Capitaine." Across in the other row of beds lay close together the Farm Servant from Inverness and the Employee of the German Government Harbour Commission at Samoa, who said, "Oh yes, everybody knows about Mr. Stevenson." Farther down towards the other end of the hut the Cypriot

¹ *i.e.*, on the rafters of a bacon factory.

and the Christian Post Office Official from Calcutta were opposite the French-Canadian half-breed, whose bright eyes and hectic tinge over high cheek-bones spoke of that slow and insidious disease which carries off so many of the North American Indians. Near the door were the huge Russian Sailor of the Baltic, who enlisted in Canada, and the Maori from New Zealand, who had been a Milk Cart Driver before the war. When asked to say "Ninety-nine" the latter uttered something which sounded like "Iwa-tekau-maiwa." There was likewise in hospital at the same time an aborigine from Australia.

At other times we had in the ward Boers who fought against us in the South African War, a Fiji Islander who was a Carpenter in peaceful times, and a Cingalese who had been something far more prosaic than a Pearl Diver—merely a Labourer on a Tea Plantation. Recently we have had an Eskimo from Labrador.

Naturally enough a convoy of patients is made up largely of men from the same regiment or division, so at one time there was a "run" of Yorkshire Pitmen and Coal Getters and at another time of Drapers' Assistants and Costermongers from London Town. For some weeks we seemed to reserve a particular bed for a Postman, whether he came from North Wales, from Brighton, or from the Modern Athens. The trade of French Polisher appeared to be very popular for a time and also that of Printer's Compositor.

At one end of the hut one day there was a Carman from Guildford, in Surrey, and the next patient questioned, who lay many beds away, said that he followed the same calling, and when asked where he lived, he replied, "In Guildford." These two were formally introduced and, strange as it may appear, they had not known each other before. Members of this profession call themselves Carters or Car Drivers or Carmen or Draymen, but most often Carmen. This employment of Carman carries with it a certain position of importance, for several patients have stated that their former occupation was that of Assistant Carman! It seems that these latter have

certain definite duties; one may be termed the *dynamic* (i.e., whilst the cart or car or dray is in motion), for then the assistant keeps street urchins from stealing rides on the back of the vehicle. The other is the *static*; for the remaining half of the time, when the Driver is off the seat and the Vice-Carman holds the reins whilst his master decorates the inside of a public-house and imbibes of the brew of the hop—we suppose to keep up his courage.

Recreations have been well represented in our "catches," and Pros of Football, Cricket, Golf, and Billiards have occupied our beds. A Manager of a Games Shop also stayed with us for some time. As soon as it was discovered that one of the patients was the champion Twelve-Mile Runner of Wales he was chaffed by his fellow-companions in the ward about his running up and down Snowdon before breakfast! May we consider that we may class among the Recreationists the young man of shiny face and plastered hair who said that he did "Nothing" before enlisting? We leave this question for others to answer.

Several times a patient with a very superior air has told us that he had acted as Secretary to a Company, but he was never specific. We strongly suspect that at least one of these was in a firm of Auctioneers, Pawnbrokers, Pledgers and Salvagers—that is to say, he wore a distinct look of business sagacity, although he said his name was Lamb. One young fellow, and not of a very convincingly intellectual appearance, assumed a certain air of superiority and impressiveness in the face of our usual question, and declared that he was going in for the Modern Language Tripos at Cambridge. We felt honoured—for the moment—to have such an important personage in our ward and we were ashamed to have committed the sin of under-estimating this rather unprepossessing individual. But the truth will out! We cannot blame the wish for being father to the thought, and the next day this boy, who aspired to high honours, confessed that he had been up at the seat of learning for two weeks only.

If a patient is inclined to minimize, to put it mildly, the amount of alcohol indulged in during those far-off and happy

peaceful days, he at least is perfectly frank in telling of his trade or profession. The Antique Chair Maker, for instance, to men on him again, did not attempt to screen himself, and we know of a man in another hospital who confessed that he was a human form of the species *Anobium*, for his work was that of a Maker of Worm Holes in Furniture. The Sewerman was proud of his position under the London County Council, and one patient—not in our ward, oh no!—related that before the war he was a Burglar.

Of course, we have had our favourites, and the Fish Porter from Billingsgate Market was a dear old rascal, rich in the wisdom of this world. He was far above the army age but joined up to do his bit. Before settling down to his piscatorial calling he had wandered all over England from Land's End to Gretna Green. He had many a good yarn to spin, and of a truth he was not that rarest of birds—a silent Cockney. He has material enough for a modern *Penniles Pilgrimage*, or the *Money-Lesse Perambulation of John Taylor*. By his merry talk we are sure that he helped to cure some of our patients.

Many are the reasons that have induced the men to join the army. It occurred to us to ask the Sea Cook if he was not out of his element on land, but he replied, "I got rather tired of the navy," and when we sought an explanation he said, "Well you see, sir, I was torpedoed three times," and he named the ships and the occasions. Let us hope that the now Army Cook has nights of undisturbed rest. In another ward a British West Indian, who had been a Chauffeur to a fabulously rich American in Paris, was asked why he had forsaken such a lucrative employment; he replied, "I reckon, sah, that's the time my cooriosity got the better of my intelligence."

Some day someone should write a treatise on "Parasitic Trades"—it would be a very fruitful piece of research, we feel sure. Here was the man who told us he was a Meat Cloth Washer. It seemed that our ears had played us false. He explained, "We get all the meat cloths from Smithfield Market and wash 'em and sell 'em again as polishing cloths for five-

pence or sevenpence. 'cordin' to size." The Tripe Dresser had plied his trade for twenty years. "You see, sir, I sells the scrapin's for pigs' food and keeps myself in beer and tobacco."

A poor miserable bantam Cockney named Strongi'th'arm kept us all, patients included, in fits of laughter. He was a Fireman in a Laundry. He made the most extraordinary grimaces and wrinkled up his forehead when he talked in his dead-earnest way. His ailment called for starvation for a short time, and the day after this treatment had been begun he asked his medical adviser—and the whole ward shook with merriment at his particularly picturesque description of his inward feelings—"Please, sir, do give me something to eat. 'Seuse me, sir, as we s'y in Lunnon, the insoides is beginnin' to eat up the worms."

The Female Impersonator from Banbury was a pretty pink-checked boy. The sister decked him up in an old rose bed-jacket; his bed became his stage and the other patients an approving audience. We asked him how he could sing so like a girl, and he explained, "You see, sir, I just put the American Clips on the back of my tongue and it's easy. They're made of silver, and my sister sent them to me from New York."

One day we saw a fine set of white teeth half worn down on the right side in front. The diagnosis was obviously not an old clay pipe, and the owner explained: "That's from biting opals. I am a Farmer and Miner in Australia and that's the way we test their colour." From that day forth this romantic person was shown off to all our visitors as "Buzzacott, the Opal Chipper." Here surely was a title for a shilling shocker.

What treats there are in store for us during the coming year we know not, but it will take a very extraordinary trade to surprise us now. There is a very human side to every patient, especially in these troublous times. If any worker in a hospital or any visitor to the wards finds his task irksome and tiresome let him try our prescription. It is a sure cure for *ennui*; in the questioner as well as in the questioned.