

Gentlemen  
in  
ARMS  
of  
Centurion

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GENTLEMEN AT ARMS

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# GENTLEMEN AT ARMS

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BY  
"CENTURION"  
A CAPTAIN IN THE BRITISH ARMY  
WHO HAS SERVED IN FRANCE



*"The nobler a soul is, the more  
objects of compassion it hath"*

McCLELLAND, GOODCHILD & STEWART  
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TO  
THE DUKE OF CORNWALL'S LIGHT INFANTRY  
THE DORSETS  
THE SOMERSET LIGHT INFANTRY  
THE WILTSHIRES  
THE DEVONS

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## PREFACE

These stories, with the exception of the two chapters entitled "The Husbandmen," are all based on the experiences of the writer when serving in France and elsewhere, or on those of fellow-officers with whom he has been brought into contact. The writer makes no claims—and possesses none—to be considered a writer of fiction. Several of these stories deal with the battle of Mons, the Marne, the Aisne, Ypres, and the Somme; in each of these cases an attempt has been made to describe things as they actually occurred, though the art of "camouflage" has been practised to the extent of disguising the names of the characters and units concerned. Other and more strategical pens have described these mighty battles viewed at leisure as examples of the art of war; the writer has limited himself to describing them as they presented themselves in glimpses to the eyes of men who, being engaged in fighting them, had no time to speculate about them. The particular phases recorded in these pages are here made public for the first time; some day they will doubtless receive more orderly treatment in the records of certain West-country regiments and the history of two batteries of artillery. For the truth of the story called "No Man's Land" the author does not vouch; it is sufficient to say that it is based on a conversation with a fellow-officer one night in billets behind the lines.

CENTURION.

*February, 1918*

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OF  
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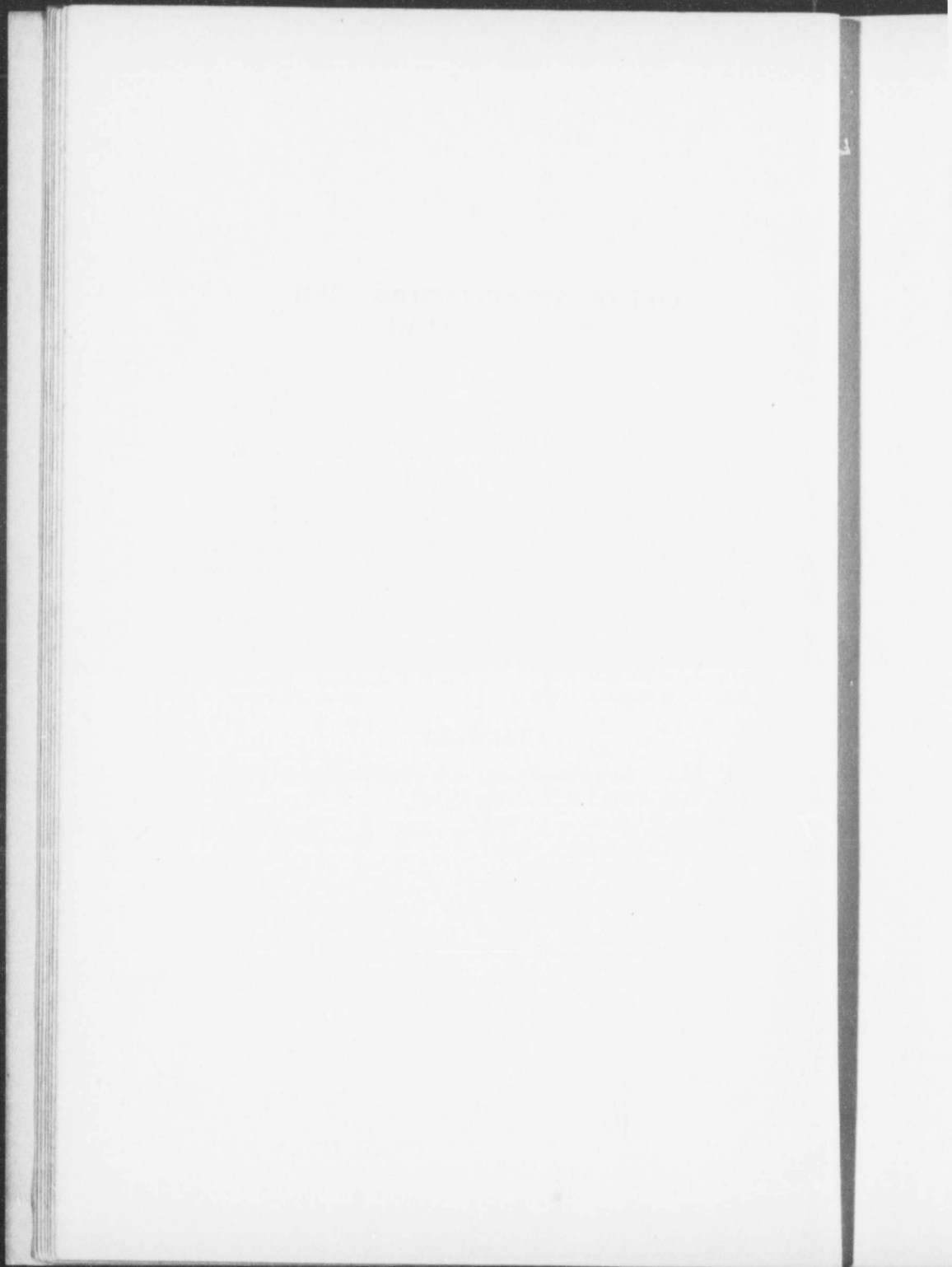
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS VOLUME

<p>O.P. Observation Post.            F.O.O. Forward Observing Officer.            M.G. Machine Gun.            L.G. Lewis Gun.            F.P. Field Punishment.            C.B. Confinement to Barracks.            I.H.L. Imprisonment with Hard Labour.            C.M. Court Martial.            G.C.M. General Court Martial.            M.I. Military Intelligence.            A.P.M. Assistant Provost-Marshal.            L.I. Light Infantry.            R.F.A. Royal Field Artillery.            R.G.A. Royal Garrison Artillery.</p>	<p>C.O. Commanding Officer.            O.C. Officer Commanding.            G.O.C. General Officer Commanding.            N.C.O. Non-commis'ed Officer.            H.Q. Headquarters.            G.H.Q. General Headquarters.            M.O. Medical Officer.            R.T.O. Railway Transp't Officer.            L. of C. Lines of Communication.            H.E. High Explosive.            A.A.G. Assistant Adjutant General.            A.G. Adjutant-General.            A.D.M.S. Assistant Director of Medical Services.</p>
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## GLOSSARY

A.B.C. Shop.	Aërated Bread Company's refreshment and tea room.
Mr. Cox.	Of Cox & Co., Army Bankers.
Bully Beef.	Canned corned beef.
Bob.	Shilling (24 cents).
Chit.	Memo. or note.
Trolley.	Hand-car or push-car.



GENTLEMEN AT ARMS

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## GENTLEMEN AT ARMS

### I

#### THE LIEUTENANT

ON THE day he was born his father wrote two letters. One was addressed to the head of a certain school of ancient foundation in a southern county; the other to the Dean of a college at Oxford. For, like some London clubs, they took a good deal of getting into and his father, whose name was on the registers of both of them, determined to leave nothing to chance.

The boy grew and waxed strong in spirit. He lay for hours on his back cooing to himself and doing mighty Swedish exercises, breasting the air like a strong swimmer with his arms and kicking lustily with his legs. "Isn't he sweet?" said his mother to the doctor for the thousandth time.

"Hum! his patellar reflexes seem all right," said the doctor who was used to such maternal ecstasies.

They called him Anthony—Tony for short. He began life with a face of extraordinary solemnity that was almost senile, but it grew younger as he grew older. His eyes, which were at first a neutral colour inclining to mouse-gray, gradually changed till the irises revealed the deep brown tint of his mother's,

so that looking into them she seemed to be looking into a mirror. But his nondescript nose took on the clear-cut Grecian profile of his father. You could see just that nose, slightly defaced by time, on the stone effigies of chain-mail knights in the village church, where they lay under the trefoil arches with their feet crossed and their hands folded, resting from the last crusade. The first discovery that he made was that his toes, which seemed to remain with him, were his own. The next thing he discovered was that in the immensity around him some things were near and others distant, and that sometimes, as he put out an exploring hand to grasp her breast, his mother was within reach and sometimes not—whereby he arrived at a distinction which has vexed the metaphysicians for centuries: the difference between self and not-self. But in the case of his mother, unlike other of the big people who hovered round him from time to time, he never succeeded in completely establishing this distinction, and all through his life distance only brought her more near, till one day—but that comes later.

One night, when he was about three years old, he was lying asleep in his cot in the nursery when a log fell from the untended fire, and sending up a spurt of flame threw a gigantic shadow on the wall by his bed. He woke with a start and a cry, for the shadow was now leaping, now crouching, as though it were going to pounce upon him. And he cried lustily. The next moment there was a light footfall of bare feet, two soft arms were clasping his neck, and a

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shower of auburn hair, soft as silk, fell around his face. "What is the matter with Mummy's boy? Is he frightened then? Where's the little man who was going to kill Apollyon? What will poor Mummy do when she meets Apollyon if her little man is afraid?"

"I'se not afraid," he said stoutly, his lips quivering. And after that, although he sometimes knew fear, he was never afraid. For he always remembered in the nick of time that some day Mummy would want him to fight Apollyon. But he had made a great discovery—almost as portentous as the discovery of self and not-self. He had discovered that he had two selves, the self which said "I am afraid" and the self which said "Go to! I am not afraid." And from that day he learnt to despise the former and respect the latter. The first he called "Mr. Feeble-Mind," and the second "Mr. Great-Heart." And when he was sure he was alone he often talked with the former, hurling the most derisive epithets at it and bidding it get behind him, for it had an *alias* which was "Temptation."

His early world was bounded by a yew hedge which marked the end of the bowling green. The house, which was visited on one occasion by a party of grave gentlemen in spectacles—he learnt afterward that they called themselves the County Archæological Society—was shaped like the letter "E" and had great gables with mullioned windows whose leaden casements glowed like fire in the westering sun. The oak-panelling was black with

age, and on the plaster wall of one of the bedrooms Moses and the patriarchs were frescoed in doublet and hose, and Pharaoh's daughter stooped over the bulrushes in a farthingale. Tony loved it at first because it seemed specially designed to enable him to play hide and seek in its oak closets, long corridors, and deep alcoves, and he loved it to the end of his life because it was his home. Beyond the yew hedge was the paddock, beyond the paddock was the park, and above the tops of the beeches Tony could see the edge of the world, which was a chalk down. Beyond that chalk down, he felt assured, was the Celestial City, although he had heard grown-ups call it "the howizon."

He passed from the hands of a tutor to the public school for which his father had put his name down on the day of his birth. He began as the lowliest of fags and the first thing he discovered was that for his name, which was illustrious, was rudely substituted another and a homelier—"Freckles." He came back after his first half with an immense stock of knowledge, not to be found in books, and a vocabulary which was unfamiliar to everyone at home except his father—a vocabulary in which "to thoke" is to slack, "to brock," is to bully, in which "Longmeads" stands for a day off and "Moab" does duty for a lavatory. "It is a vocabulary which once learnt is never forgotten; men of his school speak it in the hill-stations of India, on the African veldt, in the back flats of Australia, and wherever two or three of them are gathered together. Also he exhibited a

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discoloured eye. At all of which his father rejoiced, but his mother was sorrowful, feeling that he had passed without the cloister of her heart. But in this she was mistaken.

In due time he reached the dizzy heights of the Sixth and became a prefect with the right to turn his trousers up and to wear brown boots, which is only permitted to the elect. Also he won his cap as centre forward in the School Fifteen. Small boys imitated him, big boys envied him, and he had a retinue of clients like a Roman patron. He put down bullying in his house with a strong hand—and other things. By this time he had learnt to turn out a good hexameter and a neat iambic; also to put Burke into a Latin prose that was stately without being pompous.

Thence he went to Oxford. His name was already on the books of his father's old college, but, as it turned out, he needed no precedence, for he took a classical scholarship. There he learned the same lesson that he had learnt at school—namely, that the first thing to do is to live down an outside reputation; the greater the reputation the more modest it behoves you to be. He found that a first-year man does not call on a second-year man, but waits to be called on. No! not though the one be a scholar and the other a commoner. Also that one is never elected into the best clubs or college societies in one's first term. But not being a pushful person he had really no need to learn these things, for he knew them by instinct. But men sought him out

and discovered his worth so that in his second term, when he lavishly returned the hospitalities of the first, the size of his battels drew a mild rebuke from the Dean. But beyond occasionally getting gated, he managed to keep on good terms with the Dons, who can rarely resist the man who is at once an athlete and a scholar. After tubbing in the Morrison fours, he rowed seven in the Torpids and his boat did a bump every night near the "gut." Great faggots blazed in the quad the last night, and for once in his life Tony got rather drunk and was with difficulty restrained from mounting the pyre, having to be put to bed by his friends, loudly protesting that he was Joan of Arc. He got ploughed in Divinity Mods for a character-sketch of St. Peter, which the Examiners voted learned but profane; your Anglican don does not like to hear the disciple described as "*the enfant terrible* of the Twelve." Also he entertained a Socialist chimney-sweeper in his rooms like a man and a brother and (what was far worse in the eyes of Anglican Dons), a Nonconformist draper with whom he insisted on discussing the right of entry in single-school areas. For it was his fashion to try all things. In long walks over Shotover and Cumnor, in high talks at night in the quad or in his rooms, he discussed in the manner of Plato's dialectics, the Nature of the State, the Responsibilities of the Empire toward Subject-races, the Meaning of Good, the Nature of Truth, and the Ornaments Rubric. For of such things do men talk at Oxford, plumbing the depths of speculation in a

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world where speculation takes the place of experience and men see Life, like the dwellers in the cave of Plato's myth, by the shadows that the outer world throws upon its enchanted walls.

His first long vacation was less than half-way through when a cloud no bigger than a man's hand rose upon the horizon. It first appeared when his father opened the newspaper at breakfast one morning and read out that an Archduke had been assassinated in a tiny satrapy of the Austrian Empire. "Another of those Balkan melodramas," he said lightly as he turned to the stock markets. But in a few days the cloud grew bigger. The bank-rate went up like a rocket, dark hints of "mobilization" appeared, the word "ultimatum" was repeated in the papers, one read curiously of an encounter between patrols on the Franco-German frontier, and noted with consternation that a man had been killed. And then the storm burst. The King called for men.

The cornfields were brilliant with scarlet pimpernel and rest-harrow, and the wheat, changing from sea-green to gold and heavy in the ear, gave promise of an early harvest. But father and son ceased to talk of days among the stubble; the boy was silent, until one day he announced his intention of "doing his bit." His mother turned pale but said nothing. That night she entered his room, according to her habit, to kiss him good-night. She went down on her knees beside him and with her arms round his neck said: "Don't—you are all I have." He looked

straight into her face and said reproachfully: "Mummy! who was it told me—do you remember?—never to fear Apollyon?" And from that moment she knew it was useless, nor did she try to dissuade him, for she would not have had it otherwise. They remained in long communion as he told her all the secrets of his heart, and when she rose to go her eyes were dry, for in that hour she knew, as she had not known since he was a little child, that he and she were one.

He joined the O.T.C. He learnt section drill, platoon drill, company drill, and many other things. And then one day he applied for a commission. He duly filled up all the interrogatories on M.T. 392 and against "unit preferred" he wrote the name of a well-known West-Country regiment in whose officers' mess his family name was a household word. And he sent it to his old Head for the usual certificate of moral character. He blushed when it came back, and was slightly annoyed, for the Head, not content with the words, "I certify," had added an afterthought: "He is an excellent fellow; one of the best."

At the School of Instruction he learnt the art of war, his tutor being a Major invalided home from the front who taught him all that can be learnt by oral instruction on rationing, patrols, relief by sections, and the making out of work-tables. And when all home-keeping folk were in bed he marched them out in column of fours to a lacerated field where they practised "Night Op." with the aid of a trip-wire, a flare pistol, and implements of husbandry. The

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Major was a wise man; he had drilled with the recruits of his own regiment on the square when he had been first gazetted from Sandhurst, and he held that the best training for an officer is to learn to do what you want done. Wherefore he made his cadets learn their job by the sweat of their brow, dig their own trenches, and throw out their own saps—always remembering, when you begin to dig a sap, to put up a sandbag on the end of a fork first, otherwise you may never live to finish it.

The palms of their hands became as hard as a cobbler's, but it was good schooling, for it taught them the most valuable of all lessons: to know when they were giving orders exactly how much they were asking of their men to do. And in dealing with men this is the beginning of wisdom. Also he gave them two pieces of advice, one of which was that at Mess you are practically on parade and should behave accordingly; the other that the first duty of a young officer is to place the comfort and well-being of his men before his own. But being a gentleman Tony did not need to learn the one; and having been head of his house he had already learned the other. So that when the O.C. sent in his report upon him, on his "paper-work," "bearing," "punctuality," and "power of handling men," he marked the first three "good," but the fourth "excellent."

The Major must, I think, have taken rather a fancy to him, for one day he asked him if he knew anything about revolver-shooting and on being answered in the negative, he took him privily aside and

1 taught him a thing or two—first that you mustn't  
2 grip the revolver too tight or it will throw your  
3 wrist off, second that you really fire with the whole  
4 hand rather than with the trigger-finger and should  
absorb the shock into your whole frame, and, last  
and greatest of these, that in shooting a descending  
figure you should incline the whole body as you  
lower the arm and never make a series of elbow-  
jerks. At the end of it all he plugged the target with  
six shots in an eight-inch circle and the Major gave  
him his blessing—and his revolver. He was to  
owe his life more than once to what the Major  
had taught him.

Then he joined his battalion and was put in com-  
mand of a platoon.

“It's very like being a prefect again with the Adju-  
tant as the ‘Head,’” he wrote to his mother of his  
first day's duty as orderly officer, and so it was. To  
carry on as orderly officer from reveillé to tattoo—  
and later—requires tact. From the time when he  
inspected the issue of rations in the early dawn to the  
hour when he turned out the quarter-guard just  
before midnight he was responsible for the “tone”  
of that camp. He had to see that everything from  
cook-house to guard-room was “clean and regular,”  
to examine the rations with the eye of an Inspector  
of Food and Drugs and to smell the men's dinners  
with the nose of a chef, to see that the utensils were  
unspotted from the world and the rifles of the guard,  
barring the safety-catch, ready to go off of them-  
selves. Also he had to hear and adjudicate upon

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"complaints" like a *cadi* under a palm-tree. To do this kind of thing properly you have to be vigilant without being fussy and alert without being restive—otherwise your orderly sergeant and sergeant of the guard get fussy and restive, too, and that kind of thing is catching and bad for the men. He completed his report to the Adjutant next morning with the words, "Nothing unusual has occurred during my tour of duty with the exception of that noted overleaf." The Adjutant said nothing—and an Adjutant's silence is golden. It means that you will do.

The first thing he did was to get to know his men. He taught them that cleanliness was next to godliness and having commended their souls to the padre he devoted himself to their bodies. He made them take their caps off on parade to see if their hair was parted and hold out their hands like bishops at confirmation to see if their finger-nails were clean. Also he encouraged them to play "footer," which keeps the pores open and is an infallible remedy for "grouse" disease. And one night he talked to them like a man and a brother in one of the hutments on the history of the regiment. He told them of a certain glorious episode in the defence of the Residency in virtue of which they were entitled to call themselves "L.I." and how the soup-tureen, now safely banked with the regimental mess-plate, got the hole in it. Also why they were entitled to wear a red flash on their hats and a half-red pugaree on their helmets in virtue of their having shown the red feather by way of biting their

thumbs at Montcalm's men in Quebec. And other such things, till his men felt—and, as things turned out later, proved—that the honour of the regiment was dearer to them than their lives. They began to think better of the geometry of platoon drill after this, and to see that platoon, advancing in column of fours, form forward into column of sections when he uttered the words "On the left, form sections," was as good as watching the rhythmical swing of a well-stroked eight. And by reason of all this, the O.C. commended him, the captain of his company cherished him, and his platoon-sergeant delighted to do his bidding. And when the battalion went route-marching over the downs, moving like a long caterpillar as each section of fours rose and fell over the crest, and he marched at the head of his platoon, he felt it was good, very good, to be alive.

He went out with his battalion to the front. His letters home told his mother that he was having "a ripping time." He did not tell her that he wrote them in a cave of clay with his feet in water and his head in a cloud of smoke from damp coke and damper wood. He endured without grousing rain and cold and frost and mud and, what was far harder to bear, a sad deficiency in machine-guns and trench-mortars that were made out of stove-pipes.

He went through the second battle of Ypres, and when his company officer and all his fellow officers were knocked out he carried on with a handful of men in a hole about the size of a dewpond and saved the position. The next thing he knew was that his

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name appeared in the *Gazette* with the Military Cross. The only comment he made was that other fellows had a better claim to it—which was untrue. And when he came home on seven days' leave his mother discovered that her boy had become a man. At twenty he was wise with the wisdom of thirty-five—wiser, perhaps, for he had seen things such as come not once in a generation to the sons of men. His leave coincided with one of those recurrent interludes in which that elusive mirage "the end of the war" appears before the wistful eyes of men, and they talked of his future at Oxford. But he shook his head.

"No," he said pensively. "I shall never go back, Mummy—I couldn't. My year's scattered like the leaves of the forest," he went on as, with his back to them, he gazed through the window at the dead leaves spinning under the beeches in the park. "And anyhow I'm too old." This at twenty. But they knew what he meant and talked of the Bar, a seat in Parliament, Quarter Sessions. To all of which he returned no answer.

He went back. They saw him off by the boat-train from Victoria. He held his mother a long time and kissed the eyes into which his own had first looked when he opened them in wonder upon the world. And father and mother went home together to the big country-house which suddenly seemed to have grown still bigger—so forlorn and empty did it seem.

One night he had to go out on patrol—a recon-

noitring patrol, which is always a small affair and does not command the full complement of a fighting patrol. He sat in his dug-out writing a letter home on the flimsy of a "Messages and Signals" form. The N.C.O. appeared at the dug-out and raised the screen of sacking. Tony folded up the letter, sealed it, addressed it, and marked the envelope, "To be forwarded only in the event of my death." Then he examined the chambers of his revolver and rose and went out into the night.

Far away across a sodden land lit up by the flashes of guns like sheet-lightning, across a waste of waters where a chain of destroyers rose and fell with the Channel swell, beyond the rolling downs of the south country, a woman in a great house awoke with a cry out of a troubled sleep and put out her hand. "Jack," she said, "Tony's dead!"

Her husband woke with a start and bent over her.

"Nonsense, Mary," he said with faltering lips, "you've been dreaming." She was sitting up in bed, a shower of hair, still auburn, and still soft as silk, falling about her shoulders as she gazed at the window. She sank back and buried her head in the pillows.

"No!" she said. "I've seen him."

Three days later a boy came up the drive with an orange-coloured envelope in his hand. The father saw him approaching from the dining-room window, and something pierced him like a two-edged sword. He learnt—but that was later—that Tony had gone

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out on patrol with a corporal; they had been surprised by a party of the enemy and the N.C.O. had got badly hit. He begged Tony to leave him. But the boy took him up on his young shoulders and made his way back. Sometimes he fell, for the man was heavy and the ground bad, but he laboured on. A star-shell went up behind them, and the earth was suddenly stricken with a pallid glare of light. Then a hail of bullets enveloped them and the boy fell—this time to rise no more. The corporal said afterward—this to the boy's parents when they came to see the corporal in hospital—that the boy had said something at the last—"something I couldn't quite understand, ma'am, not being a scholar like him, something that sounded like 'Apolylon.' But I fancy his mind was wandering-like. And he never said no more."

## II

### THE TIDE OF BATTLE

*"The Tide of Battle" is a story of the first battle of Ypres, and it is based on actual incidents.*

THE aromatic mist of a late autumn morning wrapped the wood in a woolly shroud, and there was an unmistakable nip in the air. From every twig of beech and pine and chestnut hung beads of moisture which, when they caught the sun as it pierced the mists, sparkled like crystals. Little drops of moisture hung also on the grass of some newly-turned sods of earth close by the turf emplacements, and as the mist cleared one could see that these sods formed a mound some six feet by two. It was the grave of the battery sergeant-major. Some eight hours earlier it had been dug by the gun detachment, in the darkness of the night, while the owls hooted in the wood; and the captain commanding the battery had recited so much of the Burial Service as he could remember, throwing in a few handfuls of earth upon the still form under the blanket when he reached the solemn words of committal. He looked at the grave as he walked to the telephone-dug-out, and wondered what further casualties the day had in store for him.

At that moment an orderly came up and handed

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him a note. He opened it. It was written on a "Messages and Signals" form, in blue pencil.

"A new target," he said to the subaltern. "Miller, I want you to go forward and observe. We're to take on Z—— church. The Germans must have been using it as an O.P. since they drove back the 7th Cavalry Brigade yesterday. We haven't got it registered."

He took his map and ivory scale, and worked out the angle of sight from the range and the height of the new target. The gun detachments were already at their stations. The direction was put on the dial-sight. Two men then threw the trail over with the aid of handspikes. As he shouted out the range and angle of sight, No. 1 of each gun repeated his words like a litany; there was a pause as the layer moved the handle of the clinometer-sight till he shouted "set."

"Lyddite," said the Captain. The loader thrust a shell into the breach and closed the wedge.

The Captain took out a cigarette, lit it, and waited.

About ten minutes later the telephonist, who had been waiting with his ear at the receiver, spoke:

"Mr. Miller has arrived at the O. P., sir."

"No. 1 gun ready?"

"Ready, sir," said the sergeant.

"Fire."

The loader pulled the lanyard. There was a loud report and a sheet of orange flame.

"One degree more right, sir," said the telephonist, with the receiver still at his ear. The section commander repeated it.

The layer readjusted the dial-sight, and the gun was fired again. There was a pause.

"Ten minutes more left, sir," called the telephonist.

"Ten minutes more left," chanted the Section Commander and Number One in succession.

There was another pause. "Hit, sir," said the telephonist. The Captain, having given the order "repeat," mounted a ladder by a haystack and turned his glasses to the southeast. What he saw apparently satisfied him, and he descended the haystack.

The air fluttered, there was a loud thud, a crashing of timber some fifty yards to the left, and out of the living trees rose the mirage-like silhouette of a dead tree outlined in a crayon of coal-black smoke above the wood which drifted into nothingness against the sky. No one took any notice. At such times the russet-brown leaves of the beeches overhead trembled violently, and for some minutes afterward floated down upon the men below till they came to rest on their heads and tunics and there remained. From the direction of the morning sun there came a loud and continuous crackle of musketry, the monotonous tap-tap of machine-guns, and occasionally there was a sound like the crack of a whip over the heads of the gunners.

"What d'you make of it, Bovington?" said the Battery Commander.

"It sounds nearer, sir," said the subaltern.

"So I think," said the other pensively. "I don't like it. I'm afraid we're being driven back. The

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2nd Welsh and the Queen's are up there. And the German heavies are busy. God! I wish Ordnance rationed us half as liberally."

"Yes, I thought so," he added, as he read another H.Q. message, brought up by an orderly. "We've got to shorten the range again. Give them shrapnel over an arc of ninety. Hullo, wait a minute, sergeant. The wagon limber's on fire. Get some earth and that tarpaulin! Quick!"

They ran to the limber, and the sergeant snatched the loose sods from the newly-covered grave and threw them on the limber, while the gunners plastered it with spadefuls of damp earth. There was a loud pop, then another. Then silence. The Captain inspected the limber-wagon cautiously.

"It's all right," he said to the subaltern with a sigh of relief. "There are only two or three cartridges gone off. If the back of the limber hadn't been forced outward, the whole box of tricks would have exploded. And we haven't any to spare. I hope the teams are all right. We've already lost a leader and a wheeler of No. 1 gun."

Meanwhile the gun had been swung round again to its former position facing east. The gunners threw off their tunics and rolled up their shirt-sleeves. The gun-layer, having moved the sight-elevating gear to adjust the shortened range, gave a twist to the gun-elevating gear till, seeing the insect-like crawl of the bubble, he stopped. This done, they commenced to spray the German lines with a hail of shrapnel.

The sun rose higher in the heavens, and the mists cleared. The Captain advanced to the edge of the wood some ten yards in front of the guns, keeping well away to the left to avoid the blast of his guns, and with his glasses swept the long road marked by a line of tall, fluttering poplars still in leaf. He saw an irregular procession of figures drifting up the road; he noted that all of them limped painfully. Every now and then spurts of brilliant flame would suddenly appear from nowhere in the sky, a white ball of smoke would unfold itself into a scroll shaped like a sculptured dolphin, and one or two of the limping figures would fall in the road, and lie where they fell. At such times, or rather a moment before, some of the figures would dart for the shelter of the poplars and behind the trunks; it was the slower ones who fell. In the distance, about half a mile away, was a solitary figure moving so slowly that he hardly seemed to move at all, and executing as he went a kind of clog dance, making no attempt to dodge the shells which fell around him. A soldier passed; his right arm hung uselessly down, and the side of his face nearest the Captain was plastered with coagulated blood. Stretcher-bearers were nowhere visible. This surprised the Captain the less as he knew that every battalion detail who could carry anything was carrying on with a rifle.

As the morning advanced, the omens darkened. The units of the German armies in front of the sunken road that cut the road to Menin at right angles through Gheluvelt were thrusting forward like the

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fingers of a gigantic outstretched hand, and in the narrow spaces between each pair of fingers each British battalion was being slowly squeezed to death. Such was the picture which presented itself to the Battery Commander's imagination as he pieced together the fragments of intelligence that came in at frequent intervals and were passed along, some formally in a bewildering series of orders, others informally in hurried scraps of conversation that passed like missiles from one mounted officer to another as they met, saluted, and went their ways. That the staff was hard put to it was obvious; cooks left their field-kitchens, A. S. C. men their lorries and were hurried up to the front with rifles to take their places in the firing line. There were no reserves left.

The Captain looked at the four guns in their turf emplacements. In the last forty-eight hours he had shortened his fuses from four to two thousand yards; every H.Q. message calling upon him to engage a new target had indicated an objective that was getting nearer and nearer. The guns were now firing over an arc of ninety degrees, sweeping the German front, and the range was little more than a mile. The enemy advance was creeping on like an oil-stain and, if the reports that our centre was being driven in were true, in no long time his gunners would be shot down where they stood and the guns turned on our own infantry in retreat. He ran his eye rapidly over the vital parts of the guns, and as it rested on each part he thought out all the orders he might have to give in the hour of extremity. There were the

sights, their brass-work glinting in the sun; with a blow from one of the spades strapped behind the shield he could smash their delicate mechanism. There was the breech-loading wedge, fitting like the back of a watch; it might be possible to dent the edges. At the back of it was the striker plug; if he unscrewed that, he could fire a rifle-bullet into the opening. There was the elevating-gear; a hand-spike through its diminutive wheel would settle that main-spring of the gun forever. Or he could take out the bolt below the muzzle which secured the piston-rod and fire a last round at high angle in the direction of the enemy, and with the gun's recoil the shock would dismount her. But to lay violent hands on the guns that had served him so well was a counsel of despair, and for the moment he put it from him. At all costs he must save them.

As he meditated on these things, he heard a loud droning hum overhead. He looked up between the smooth oval leaves of a beech-tree. A Taube aeroplane was flying over the wood, the black iron crosses clearly marked on its diaphanous wings, and as it passed on it dropped a white fire-ball. He knew what that meant. In no long time the right section of his battery might be knocked out by a direct hit. He rode back to the gun teams a few hundred yards away, to warn them to prepare to go up to the guns at a moment's notice. He found them grouped where he had left them the day before, some of the horses off-saddled and the drivers massaging their backs with the flat of the hand. He

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ran his eye rapidly over the teams; they mustered the same strength as overnight. If they sustained no more casualties he might hope to get his guns away.

"Get ready to go up and hook in," he said to the drivers.

As he looked at the sleek and well-groomed teams, he felt thankful that he had never let pass an opportunity of impressing on his men the duty of dismounting to ease the girths, of looking after the horses' feet, and all the little arts of horsemastership. He had bidden them remember the horses were their best friends, and that some day they might have to make a heavy draft on that friendship. The day had come.

At that moment there was a rush in the air behind him, and a loud thud. His horse reared on her haunches and then came down on her fore feet with a plunge that nearly threw him out of the saddle. He could feel her quivering under him in every nerve as he reined her in and patted her neck. He was nearly blinded, but as the coal-black smoke cleared before his eyes he saw one of the horses on her back with her legs lashing the air in agony and her smoking entrails exposed. She screamed as only a "dumb" animal can scream—a long-drawn-out shriek that was like an expiration. .

"Drag him out of the way, sergeant, quick, or she'll lash his brains out," he shouted, as she rolled toward her driver. The latter lay quite still, both legs severed below the knee with jets of blood spurt-

ing from the severed arteries. Some of the horses were plunging, and one was bolting madly down the road. The men, dazed by the shock, were holding on to the others.

The Captain jumped off his horse, handed the bridle to an orderly, and pulled his revolver out of its holster. With one shot he put the mangled beast out of her futile agonies. He ordered the rest of the team to be withdrawn a few hundred yards to such thicker cover as the wood afforded. But the German guns were searching that wood with inexorable persistency, shivering the chestnut and beech and pine into splinters, and pollarding the poplars as with a gigantic axe. The four teams were now reduced to twenty-four horses, and each gun would have to be brought away with a pair short. He would think himself lucky if he lost no more.

He galloped back to Headquarters for instructions, and as he rode down the long, straight road, bordered by a parallel line of poplars which met in a diminishing perspective, he passed more men limping along in every stage of decrepitude, some breathing hard, their faces livid and their uniforms covered with black earth from head to foot as though they had been dipped in pitch. Wounded men, with blood streaming down their faces, were dodging from tree to tree, seeking a wholly imaginary shelter from the shells which, with freakish malignity, fell here and there, as though playing a diabolical game of hide and seek. Three men wearing their equipment and with their rifles at the carry paused irresolutely in

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the road. An A.P.M. advanced from behind a tree and met them in the middle.

"Hullo! Who are you? Where are you going?"

"We was the 2nd Welsh, sir," said the spokesman of the party. "We's all that's left of B Company—we've lost touch with the Borderers on our left flank and the line's broken in. We was looking for someone to post us, sir."

The A.P.M. shepherded them together at the side of the road for despatch to the collecting station.

Other stragglers came up. They were from the 1st Queen's, and they brought news of an overwhelming enemy attack on their right and a murderous enfilading fire.

The A.P.M. fell them in with the rest to send up in support. The *débris* of other units came straggling in, Welsh Fusiliers, Queen's, a man of the Black Watch, and it struck the Captain whimsically, as he reined in to gather information, that this show was strangely like a *cotillon d'Albert* in the sergeants' mess with everybody changing partners. Only there was no "sitting out."

Looking down the road which ran straight as an arrow between the poplars, he perceived about fifty yards away the same figure which had arrested his attention half an hour before. How it had escaped the hail of shrapnel was a mystery. It had taken that half hour to cover barely half a mile. He saw now that it was a Highlander without cap or equipment or rifle, a short man with the thick knees, powerful deltoid muscles, thin lips, and high cheek-

bones, so characteristic of his kind. There was something about his gait which was at once ludicrous and pathetic. The upper part of his body was rigid, but the lower part described a semi-circular movement as though it were a pivot, and his agitated legs pirouetted on the balls of his feet, so that he seemed to hesitate between a shuffle and a dance. But it was a melancholy dance in which the dancer's legs seemed to move of themselves, and in their convulsive movements he betrayed neither interest nor volition. His arms hung at his sides curiously immobile, but the hands twitched ceaselessly, turning on his wrists as on a hinge. The corners of his mouth also twitched and his eyelids perpetually rose and fell.

The Brigadier, who had spent the night in a dug-out by the side of the road, caught sight of him. All the morning he had moved to and fro in the open, receiving reports and issuing orders, while smoking a cigarette with unstudied nonchalance. Now and again he found time to speak to the stragglers, rounding them up with words of encouragement. It is not often that a general plays the part of "battle police," but the General knew that in this vital hour every man was worth his weight in gold—also that every man had earned, and should receive, a general's commendation. He took the man gently by the arm. "What unit are you, my lad? The 2nd Gordons?" The man blinked at him and made a resolute effort to speak.

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out the syllables as though he were jumping a terrific obstacle.

"Who's your company commander?"

"I d-d-d-dinna k-k-k-ken, sir."

"Well, what's your name, my lad?"

"I c-c-c-canna——" And tears came into his eyes.

The General led him gently to the side of the road, and made him sit down. He sat there, and a man of the 2nd Welsh handed him a "woodbine." He took it and put it uncertainly between his lips. Then he struck a match. He tried to apply it to the cigarette, but the match danced in his hand like a will-o'-the-wisp and went out. He struck another, but the distance between the match and the cigarette was insurmountable, and he dropped it.

"Shell shock. I've seen cases like it before," said the General laconically. "C Company of the Gordons had a devil of a time on Thursday, and he's one of the relics of it." And with a word to the A.P.M. to get the stricken man to the château in the wood he turned to his brigade-major. The Captain looked after the man, following his quivering movements with a strange fascination. He had seen his gunners blown to pieces by his side, and the horses of his teams frightfully mangled, but to this day the remembrance of that convulsive figure remains with him as a symbol of the hell in which the infantry fought and died.

"He wass blown up," said a survivor of the 1st Welsh Fusiliers, whose face was pitted with the blue

marks that betray the collier. "By a coal-box. My butty wass buried by one, and all his section. I wass dig him out, but he wass dead. And his face wass swell up like the fire-damp. There's swelled up it wass!"

"Aye," said a man of the 1st Queen's, as though dismissing a platitude. "I tell you what, mate, this isn't war."

"Ho! I don't think," said his neighbour. "What is it, then? We've been outflanked and enfiladed on both sides; outflanked we have. All our officers is gone, and there aren't seventy of us have got back. If that ain't war, what is it?"

"It's b—— murder," said the other.

No one seemed inclined to dispute this proposition. The little group was not talkative. The nervous jocularity which precedes action, the almost subconscious profanity which carries men through it, the riotous gaiety which follows after it—all these were absent. They were worn out with want of sleep, parched with thirst, stunned with concussion, and their speech was thick and slow like that of a drunken man. But the Welshman, with the volubility of his race, talked on, no one heeding him.

"But we wass give Fritz hell, boys. They come on like a football crowd—a bloke couldn't miss them, even if he wass only just off the square. And they fire from the hip! But *Duw anwyl!* they're eight to one in machine-guns, and their coal-boxes is something cruel. I heard their chaps singing last night—singing splendid, look you—like the Rhondda Male

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Voice Choir it was. But we give them a funeral to-day, yes, indeed."

"Fall in," said an N.C.O. whom the A.P.M. had impounded. "Fr-r-om the left, number!" They numbered off from one to twenty. "Four paces to the right ex-tend! One to ten right half section. Eleven to twenty left half section! Right turn. Sections right wheel. Quick march!" And he marched them off to a farm in the wood. The Captain looked after them for a moment. They were going back into the hell from which they came, and they knew it. But they betrayed no more consciousness of this than if they had been marching back into billets. The Captain remembered that the Welsh Fusiliers had *Nec aspera terrent* for their motto and that "Albuera" was blazoned on their colours. "It's the same breed," he said to himself reflectively. While he waited, the Brigade-Major returned from the telephone with his instructions from Divisional H.Q. He was to withdraw both sections of his battery to D—— without delay. He galloped back, followed by the trumpeter, and putting his horse at the ditch, leaped it and tore up through a clearing. A branch overhead whipped his cap off and just shaved his head as he ducked; he dashed on. He drew rein by the teams and was relieved to find there had been no more casualties.

"We are going to retire," he said, curtly. "Take the teams up at once and hook in." And leaving the orderly to bring them up, he rode on to the guns and gave his orders to the section commanders. One

gun was in action, firing shrapnel at short range; the others were already being dug out, in readiness for limbering up. He stepped forward to the edge of the wood where it broke away into ploughed land and looked over his left shoulder in the direction of the northwest. A battalion was coming up in gun "groups," moving steadily forward under a hail of shrapnel and thinning as it went. It was obvious that they were going to hurl themselves into the breach. It was the last throw of the die and the fate of Europe hung upon it. He did not know at the time the name of the unit; he was to learn afterward that it was the 2nd Worcesters. He left the section commander in charge of his guns, and rode back along the lane to the cross-roads. He found a field battery commander looking down the road with his glasses, and right in the centre of it an eighteen pounder was in position, with the gun-layer on the left of the gun, the loader behind her, and her nonchalant subaltern smoking a cigarette under the enemy's shrapnel. It seemed a miracle that he was not hit, and the Captain stopped in mild astonishment to ask the battery commander what the gun was doing there.

"Doing?" said the latter laconically. "Firing. We've got word that the Germans have driven in the Welsh and are coming down that road in mass formation. Well, we're ready for them. That's all. What a target, eh?" And putting his glasses back in their case, he rubbed his hands as though he were having the time of his life. Which he was.

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The Captain crossed the road and turned down a lane, and in a few minutes had returned to his battery. The guns were dug out, the teams brought up to the left of the carriages, the rings were slipped on the poles, and the gunners fastened the wheel-traces.

Shells were crashing through the wood, bursting all round the battery, but the drivers sat motionless on their horses.

"Walk! March!" said the battery commander.

The drivers eased the reins and closing their legs each to his riding horse, they rested their whips across the neck of each off horse. There was a "hwit! hwit!" overhead and a shower of broken leaves and crackling twigs. The rattle of musketry was strangely near and there seemed to be voices in the wood. There was another crack and No. 1 leader of the team fell like a stone, bringing her driver down with her. He was up in an instant and stooping over the dead horse he unhooked the "quick release" and mounted the off horse. The Captain looked back over his shoulder as he eased the reins of his horse. At that moment he sighted something over the top of the hedge, and he rose in his stirrups. He saw at a glance a number of spiked helmets and heard the push of bodies through the bracken.

"Gallop!" he shouted. And then the blow fell. Something seemed to snap in his head and he felt himself soaring up and up into space, as though propelled by some tremendous force.

Then the pace gradually slackened, the impenetrable blackness was stabbed with points of light, he saw the face of one he loved, and he wondered whether he was in this world or the next. Objects suddenly became distinct, trees took shape before his eyes, he was conscious of his own body, and tried to move. But he seemed to be held in a vise. In his agony he dug his heels into the soil, and he saw that his right arm was gone. A face was bending over him. It was the shoeing-smith.

"Are you alive, sir?"

He turned his head. "Am I alive?" he asked himself. "I—I think so," he gasped. "But my number's up. Leave me!"

Someone got a stretcher and they took him through the undergrowth to the cross-roads. There a doctor injected morphia into his arm and they took him to the dressing-station at Hooze. He was in the trance of morphia, but could hear the doctors, apparently a long way off, saying that he was a bad case. At Ypres they put him under chloroform, and he knew no more till he woke at Boulogne.

His case was grave. He had lost a great deal of blood, and his wounds were septic. Rest, mental as well as physical, was vital; but he could not rest. The exhortations of the doctor were lost upon him: he seemed to have something on his mind. He was allowed no newspapers on the ground that they might excite him, which was a mistake. A box of cigarettes by his bedside he left untouched. At length he called the doctor to him.

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"Look here, doctor, will you do me a favour? Well, I want you to find out what's become of my battery. Did they get the guns away? I want to know; I want an official answer."

The doctor promised to do what he could. The Divisional H.Q., who had their hands full, were somewhat annoyed when they got a telephone message from a Base Hospital, asking for information about a battery. But they gave it.

The doctor returned.

"Your battery's all right. All your guns are in action at Z——"

"Thank you, doctor," said the Captain, and they lit his first cigarette.

From that hour he began to mend. Three years have passed; the Captain still lives, but he is a cripple for life. His fighting days are done; he will never give the word "Action Front!" again. The battery itself is but a memory; near the grave of the sergeant-major lie a subaltern, gunners, drivers, and the horses they loved so wisely and so well. Their graves have long ago been pounded into dust by guns of whose calibre they never dreamed; old things are passed away and all things have become new; the very wood in which they fell has long since disappeared from off the face of the earth. But these mortals in dying put on immortality, being dead, they live, being silent, they speak; and, leaving behind them an imperishable memory, they need no memorial

### III

#### THE SOWER OF TARES

**E**IGHT points starboard!" called the Lieutenant from the bridge.

"Eight points starboard, sir," chanted the skipper in antiphon from the wheel-house as he glanced at the compass overhead.

As our drifter changed her course, making a right turn, a pennant fluttered up the flag-staff at a signalling station on our port bow, paused interrogatively at the truck, descended, and then ran up to the truck again. It was the "Pass friend, all's well" of those that go down to the sea in ships. The exchange of salutations was repeated at the guardship as we cleared the harbour mouth and stood out to sea. The sun glinted on the brasswork of the six-pounder in our bows, the sea was smooth, and the telegraph was set at full speed ahead. Our mizzen sail was furled and our masts bare, save for the spidery web of our "wireless"; nothing was to be heard except the faint throb of the triple-expansion reciprocating engines in the bowels of the ship. Our craft had an ingenuous air, and but for one or two unobtrusive things might have been merely putting to sea for a quiet trawl among the herrings as she did in the old days before my Lords of the Admiralty

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requisitioned her and made her stout, smooth-faced skipper with the puckered eyes a warrant officer in the R.N.V.R. The flaws in the illusion were the presence of the six-pounder forward, certain extremely lethal cases under the bulwarks aft, a wireless operator secreted in his dark room down below, and the fact that we all wore life-belts. And in the wheel-house was a small armoury of rifles.

Still, it seemed extremely like a pleasure trip, and I settled myself down on the bridge behind the "dodger" with a leisurely conviction that I had chosen the quietest way I could of spending a few days' leave. The crew moved softly about the deck stowing away gear; one of them peeled potatoes into a bucket outside the galley, and my friend the Lieutenant went below to the chart-house to read some cryptic naval messages and glance at the Admiralty "monthly orders." The Admiralty can give points to the War Office in the matter of periodical literature; you would never look for a plot in an Army Council Instruction, but in the Admiralty Orders every order "tells a story." But if you ask a naval-patrol man on shore leave, he will answer you like the needy knife-grinder: "'Story?' God bless you, sir, I've none to tell." The Admiralty does not love story-tellers. This is not a story.

"Something ahead on the port bow, sir," shouted the look-out man forward.

The Lieutenant, whose faculty of hearing, like his faculty of vision, seems to be abnormally developed, came rushing out of the chart-house, scaled the

bridge ladder like a cat, and in two seconds was by my side. He pulled a pair of binoculars out of a pocket in the "dodger" and looked through them for a moment. Then he ran to the telegraph and put her at "slow." At the same moment one of the crew, without waiting for orders, handed him a rifle from the wheel-house. No one spoke a word.

About a quarter of a mile ahead, a point or two off our course, I saw a dark round object bobbing up and down like a cork.

The Lieutenant got a "bead" on it, and I watched him intently. The next moment he lowered his rifle and laughed.

"It's only a ship's tub," he said. "Like to have a shot at her?" he added as he pumped two cartridges at the vagabond. One shot fell just short, the other just over. I saw the skipper's eye on me as the Lieutenant handed me the rifle, and feeling the reputation of the junior service was at stake I did not welcome the invitation. But luck was with me.

"A bull's eye," said the Lieutenant approvingly. My reputation was saved.

"It might have been a floating mine," the Lieutenant explained. "One never knows."

"So that's why we're wearing these beastly cork jackets," I said to myself. I began to understand the Admiralty instruction that you must never stop to pick anything up. For, in these days, things are not what they seem, and a tub, a life-buoy, a sleeper, an upturned boat, all the ingenuous flotsam and jetsam of the sea may be—and often are—merely a trap

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for the unwary. The Admiralty does not encourage souvenir-hunting. We only collect two things—mines and submarines.

We were out on an uncharted sea. So long as we had kept in the channel swept by the mine-sweepers in the gray dawn our charts were useful; once outside it, those charts were about as helpful to us as one of Taride's maps would be to a divisional staff at the front. Trenches, saps, dumps, listening-posts, "strong points," have altered the geography of the front; floating and anchored mines have confused the hydrography of the Channel. The soundings on our charts were more delusive than the roads and water-courses on a French ordnance-map of the Somme. But at the front the R.E. can, and do, make new maps for old, whereas we had to grope in the dark, making the best use we could of our senses. The earth is solid, stable, and open to aërial reconnaissance and survey; the sea is forever shifting and inscrutable. We had our secret staff map of the sea, and very useful it is for wireless work, but it tells us nothing of the tares sown in the deep, and the soundings on our charts reveal to us none of the shoal water of the mine-fields. Once we leave the fairway kept clear for the merchantmen, and make for our line of traffic patrols on point duty, we are like a reconnoitring party that goes "over the top" at night. We are out on the No Man's Land of the sea.

We were leaving the fairway now. We had altered our course a few points to the south, steaming in "line ahead" formation, a motor launch following

us, then another drifter, each keeping a distance of about half a mile apart. If we sighted a periscope to port or starboard we could suddenly put the helm over and bear down on it. Steering thus in a bad light, our drifter had once rammed the mast-truck of a sunken ship in mistake for a periscope and scraped her bottom badly, for she never misses a sporting chance. But our distance was also a defence formation. One does not march in column of fours when the enemy batteries have got the range. And when you are cruising over No Man's Land of the sea you must proceed on the assumption that at any moment you will strike a mine, in which case it is just as well that Number One should go to the bottom on her own. We were Number One.

But the naval patrol takes these things as a matter of course. Down in the bowels of the ship in the crew's quarters, reached by a perpendicular iron ladder opening at a hatchway about the size of a pin-cushion, two members of the crew slept like dormice in a blissful "fug." Next door, the wireless operator, with the receiver to his ear, was immured in his sound-proof box, calling spirits from over the vasty deep. Below the engine-room hatch the engineer, with his eye on his pressure gauges, was dreamily making apple dumplings out of cotton waste. If we scraped a mine they would all be drowned like rats in a hole—a mine always gets you amidships. The skipper would probably go through the roof of the wheel-house, and the Lieutenant beside me on the bridge would execute a series of graceful gambols in

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the air like a "flying pig" from a trench mortar. This had happened to one of the drifters in that patrol a week before; they picked up one man, who will never go to sea again, and the others are all "gone west."

"They were good men—some of the best," said the Lieutenant.

As I looked at the cloudless horizon and the smooth sea sparkling in the sun I reflected on the treachery of the illusion, and it occurred to me that of all the risks of active service, those endured by the "Auxiliaries" of the naval patrol were the most unpleasant. Personally, I prefer the trenches. But the Lieutenant would have none of it. He said—and obviously thought—that his was a "cushy" place in comparison. I had heard a submarine commander to the same effect. Also my pilot in a Maurice-Farman. It's a curious fact that every arm of both services thinks the other arms take nearly all the risks. Which is as it should be.

The Lieutenant was an imperturbably cheerful person. A perpetual smile dimpled the corners of his mouth and completed the illusion of precocious boyhood produced by his diminutive stature, his frank, ingenuous countenance, laughing blue eyes, and kittenish agility. His face was tanned to the colour of newly-dressed leather, but when he removed his cap the tan was seen to terminate suddenly in a sharp horizontal line on his forehead, above which the infantile pink and white of his brow presented a contrast so startling as to suggest that he wore the false scalp of a low comedian. But the palms of his hands were as

hard as a cobbler's, and his muscles like tempered steel. There were many deficiencies in his kit, and, seeing me glance at the toes of his feet which peeped out of his sea-boots, he gravely explained that as the water came in at the top, the holes at the toe were useful to let it out at the bottom! He was the only commissioned officer on board, and his repertoire was extensive—he was commander, gunnery lieutenant, signalling officer, and half a dozen other things besides, and he carried in his head all the secrets, which are many and complicated, of the Admiralty codes and instructions. I suppose he sometimes slept (though I never once saw him asleep), for he showed me his sleeping cabin forward, which I shared, and it did not escape me that the stove chimney was red with the rust of sea water to the height of about five feet—which opened my eyes to the luxury of his existence in the winter gales. At one time, early in the war, he conducted a series of brilliant tactical operations against a number of Medical Boards who shared a belief, amounting to an infatuation, that a man who, as the result of an accident in childhood, could not march a mile without falling out and suffered excruciating agonies at regular intervals of about a week, was "unfit for general service." They know better now.

Our approach to our immediate objective was the occasion of a spirited display by the Lieutenant of his gifts as a trapeze artist. We had run up a hoist of signals as we neared the line of patrols, and the engines being put at half speed, the Lieutenant took two

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signalling flags in his hands like a pair of Indian clubs and perched himself upon the rail of the bridge. He twined his calves with simian-like flexibility round the uprights, his feet suddenly became prehensile as he anchored them to the middle rail, and, with his lower limbs thus moored, he proceeded to hurl his body about in space. His arms described an arc of three-quarters of a circle with dazzling rapidity as he executed a series of alphabetic jerks in the medium of semaphore varied by almost imperceptible commas and full stops. Then he paused to take breath.

An ecstatic figure on the upper rail of the bridge of the other drifter answered with similar gesticulations, to which the Lieutenant feelingly articulated in reply.

The interlocutory proceedings of these knock-about comedians concluded with an inquiry from the patrol boat, which had been on point duty in mid-channel for fourteen days, as to the success of a wedding ashore, at which the Lieutenant of our drifter had assisted as best man.

"A. I. THE BEST MAN LOOKED LOVELY," signalled the Lieutenant, and we descended to the chart-room for a midday dinner.

He apologized for the *menu*, which was simple enough. I discovered afterward that he made it a point of honour to share the same rations as the crew. The table appointments were also exiguous, and there seemed a shortage of plates.

"They're 'gone West,' sir," said the orderly with a faint smile. "That depth-charge did them in."

I raised my eyebrows interrogatively. And the

Lieutenant, by way of explanation, told a tale. It cannot be told here, but there is a certain *U*-boat which will never make a "land-fall" in German waters again. The Admiralty, which is hard to convince, paid the blood-money over to the Lieutenant a few weeks ago and the patrol shared it out, according to their ratings, like a herring catch. And there was a "bump supper" at the Naval Base. But the auxiliaries hide their light under a bushel, and the lady visitors at a fashionable watering-place are still wondering querulously why the sea is so lustrously wet—they say their bathing-dresses won't dry and that they smell strangely of oil.

So one more of the Thugs of the sea had been put out of the way, and her crew lie fathoms deep in the Channel awaiting the day when the sea gives up its dead.

"Dirty devils I call them, sir," said the skipper quietly, smoking his pipe with his hands thrust into his pockets and a reef in his jumper as we did a dog watch together. He was a large stalwart man, speaking the East Anglian dialect, in which an "a" frequently does duty for an "e" and a "w" for a "u." Apart from these phonetic peculiarities his speech was good King's English, and I noticed that he used none of that truculent pidgin English which by a curious literary convention so many longshoremen of letters put into the mouth of those who go down to the sea in ships. Your novelist, dealing in words, is so apt to mistake strong language for strength of mind.

The skipper paused and refilled his pipe, pursuing

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some obscure strain of thought. Then he found speech.

"Did you hear tell of the *Belgian Prince*, sir? Aye, everybody has. There's never a dog watch kept in any ship afloat in which that story isn't told. I've heard as men tell it in every boarding-house in Limehouse and 'Frisco and Sydney and Shanghai. It's gone round the Horn, and it's gone east of Suez. Why, there's sailor-men as doan't know enough to read their own discharge-note as have got that story by heart like a 'chantey.' They'll never forget it till the Day of Judgment. I'm thinking as sailor-men as are not yet born will be telling that tale round the galley fire at night long after your an' my watch is up. . . ."

He paused and gazed out over a "lipper" sea. I noticed he had forgotten to light his pipe. "I knew a skipper as had once done the dirty at sea. No one knew the rights of it exactly, and the 'Old Man' never lost his 'ticket,' but the story I heard tell was that he'd been 'spoken' by a ship flying signals of distress, and instead of putting down his hellum to stand by, he'd kept on his course and left her to sink with all hands. And from that day he never entered a 'pub' parlour but all the skippers 'ud get up and lave their glass untouched and walk out. If they saw him making down street on their port bow they'd port their hellum so as to give him a wide berth. Never a one as ever passed the time of day with him or said 'what's yours?' And it grew so that not a sailor-man would sign on if he knew as he was to sail with that skipper; some of them 'ud desart at first port they

made wi'out waiting to be paid off. They got the idea as he brought bad luck, like a Russian Finn. And if you once get a notion like that in a sailor-man's head, he'll never get it out. I've heard tell of that skipper hauling up to 'speak' a ship, and when his hoist had told the name of his craft t'other ship wouldn't so much as dip her ens'n to wish him 'God speed.' And if ye're an outcast at sea, God help ye; for the sea's a lonesome place. It so preyed on the mind of him that he began to see ships flying signals of distress a-beckoning of him, ships as wasn't there—till one night he put her straight on a reef and then went over her bows. . . . You see, sir, sailor-men have got their share of original sin, I'm no saying they haven't, but there's one sin no sailor dare commit, for it's the sin against the Holy Ghost—and that's leaving other sailor-men to perish. The sea's shifty enough and tarrible enough and treacherous enough as 'tis without men being——” He did not finish the sentence. “Well, sir, I'm hanging about tack and tack instead of trimming my yards for a straight run, but the course I'm steering is this: the outlawry of that skipper warn't nothing to the outlawry as awaits the German when he once more weighs anchor and puts to sea.”

And he lit his pipe. It seemed to me that his hand shook slightly.

The sun was sinking slowly in the west, his light lingering on the headlands; in the east the sky was a deep blue flushed with rose-pink, but nearer the heart of the sun these delicate tints gave place to fleeces of ochre, and these in turn to flames of molten gold.

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The next moment the sun seemed to cease breathing upon the sky, all the colours swooned and went slowly out, and even the golden aureole changed to a dull vermilion. The rocks became silhouettes, the clouds turned black, and the shoals of rose-shadow on the surface of the sea sank out of sight and gave place to a purple bloom. As the sun disappeared below the horizon a lingering ray tinged the darkling clouds with silver surge.

With the last expiration of the sun the wine-dark sea changed to a leaden hue, and one by one stars twinkled overhead—the crescent of the Corona Borealis to port, the Pleiades to starboard, and over the truck of our foremast the constellation of the Great Bear. The air grew very cold. A great silence encompassed us, broken only by the lapping of the water against the ship's sides. Round about us was a waste of waters stretching away into impenetrable darkness. All the friendly lights that guide the homing ships in time of peace were put out. More than once before this our drifter, smothered in a fog with no warning light or siren to guide her, and unable to take a cross bearing, had found herself casting the lead in thirty-five fathoms right under the lee of a towering cliff with only just time to put her engines full speed astern. Nothing lightened our darkness except a great beacon which, elusive as lightning, winked at intervals across the sea, revealing for a second the dark silhouette of the motor launch as she drifted about a mile away. Our isolation was as complete as that of a listening-post. We were out in the No Man's Land of the sea.

"The letter is——" said the Lieutenant softly to one of the watch as he passed along the deck. It was our secret signal in the event of our bumping up against a destroyer seeking to speak with her adversary in the gate. If our watch forgot it our number would be up. We showed no lights; but hooded lamps, making faint patches of radiance on the deck, were stowed away under our bulwarks.

Our station was one of the favourite beats of the German submarines and we lay there waiting for the deadly sower of tares, waiting for her as for a thief in the night. From time to time pale shafts of light, terminating in an arc of phosphorescent cloud, crept across the sky, searching for the secret menace of the air as we were searching for the lurking terror of the sea. Now and again wraith-like ships with all lights out stole across the field of our vision, and sometimes our ears caught the pulsation of the engines of a ship we could not see.

Time itself seemed to stand still, and how long we lay like that I could not tell. Mystery brooded over our watch and I found myself speaking to the Lieutenant in subdued whispers. Suddenly, one of the men, ascending through the hatchway that led down to the tomb of the wireless operator, passed up a piece of flimsy paper to the Lieutenant. He took it into the unlighted chart-room, and, as I fell over the table, he struck a match and by its flickering light I saw his face as he read the message—HOSTILE SUBMARINES IN SIGHT. COURSE NOT KNOWN. As he read these words aloud—and others—the match went

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out. He groped in the dark for a locker, detachable and weighted, and taking something therefrom he invited me to come below. Once down in our sleeping cabin he unrolled a mysterious map under the oil-lamp, and putting his finger on one of the squares he said, "They're there." Then we went on deck.

He took an electric signalling-lamp and holding it up over the bulwarks he flashed a message to the distant motor launch. A sequence of flashes answered it. And once more we resumed our vigil.

The night dragged on, the watch was relieved, the stars changed their stations as the earth rolled on through interstellar space. I sat in the bows gazing into the mysterious night and hearing nothing but the whispered soliloquy of the waters beneath me. The dark-gray silhouette of a transport crept by, deeply laden, for the sound of her propeller never reached me. Then a barque glided past, but not a murmur escaped her, not a sail thrashed, not a block creaked. They might have been the ghosts of the murdered ships that lay fathoms deep beneath us, deep in the sepulchral sea. From time to time dark objects floated by—a packing case, a hatch, an upturned boat, a derelict sleeper, the mute and plaintive witnesses to a sinister and implacable terror "more fell than hunger, anguish, or the sea." I gazed down at the waters in which the phosphorus glowed faintly like pale marigolds, wondering what tragic secrets their inscrutable depths concealed. There grew on my drowsy senses a feeling that the sea, as it heaved on its bed under the tidal moon,

was talking in its sleep. Faint peals of sound seemed to animate the watery depths as though the sea were a belfry in which the bell of every foundered ship was tolling the watches of the night. I heard a dull tapping on our stern—I went aft but could see nothing but the shadowy figure of one of the deck hands. Then a hollow gasp, like a cork drawn from a bottle, came from our port bow. The next moment a deep sepulchral cough echoed from amidships; I looked down through the skylight and saw one of the crew turning uneasily in his sleep. By some strange acoustic illusion his coughing seemed to be coming from the depths of the sea. Each illusion was dispelled only to be succeeded by another. A block creaked, the cordage chafed, a chain rattled. And there grew on me a masterful conviction that we were not alone. I lifted my eyes and they lighted suddenly upon a dark, boat-shaped object gliding stealthily past in the current about two hundred yards away. The next moment the beacon flashed across the waters, rending the veil of night, and in one trenchant glimpse I saw that it was a ship's lifeboat. Over the gunwale drooped the body of a man, the head downward between the extended arms and the hands lapped by the hungry waters. Across the stern another head rested with the pallid face turned upward and gleaming in the cold, searching light. I heard a soft footfall behind me, and turning, saw the skipper gazing over my shoulder. The next moment the beacon went out.

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THE SOWER OF TARES

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One by one the stars paled, diminished, and disappeared; the surface of the waters turned from black to a leaden gray and, with the first flush of dawn, gleamed like mother-of-pearl. I looked around me. Far as the eye could reach I saw nothing but the salt, inhospitable, secret sea.

## IV

### THE CROWN OF THORNS

*"La couronne du soldat est une couronne d'épines."*—DE VIGNY.

**M**Y FRIEND paused for a moment and stared reflectively at the pattern of the dado; "Courage. What is courage? I don't know. Courage in the heat of action, we've all got that, I suppose. It's an animal instinct. There's a certain gregariousness in it, the instinct of the herd, the eyes of other fellows on you. And after all, to face death requires far less courage than to face life, which, at any rate by the time you are forty, is much the more terrible of the two. But there's another kind of courage—the courage to take lonely decisions amid a dance of conflicting ideas, to resist the importunities of pity, or maybe of prudence, and all the beckoning spectres of imagination; that kind of courage—resolution, in fact—well, that's not so common. I mean what that chap Conrad calls a power to ignore 'the solicitation of ideas.' That's what I call the courage of the Higher Command. The courage of a subaltern is one thing; the courage of a commanding officer is quite another. You know what I mean? A fellow may be a good observer, a good judge of positions, perfectly cool in

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charge of the fire-control when the enemy's ranging and gets a bracket on you—and yet he may be utterly unfit to command a battery, still more a brigade—incapable of knowing when to take his guns out of action, for example; he may hang on too long or not long enough. He may *think* too much. It's really not a question of cowardice at all—a man's more often undone by fear for the safety of others than by fear for his own—by a want of *hardness* in his composition, if you know what I mean."

"Yes," I said, "I know. It's a distinction not unknown to military law, after all. Physical cowardice: cold feet, blue funk, means undue regard for one's personal safety, as the charge sheet puts it. Moral cowardice: irresolution, doubt, all that we call 'conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline.'"

"Quite. And it's the second that is really seductive. It's not danger that intimidates the man of forty, but responsibility. Even his affections may betray him. I knew an O.C. who never got over having his battalion cut up and losing three-fourths of his officers—it broke his nerve, he always got calculating prospective losses in an attack; it wasn't his own life he valued but the lives of his men. I often think he courted the bullet that put an end to his perplexities, poor chap. The Hun, who thinks of everything, thought all that out long ago. Do you remember that passage in his text-book in which he warns the German officer against 'the contagion of humanitarian ideas'?"

"Now I knew a case, a hard case if ever there was one, one of those dilemmas of duty and conscience that De Vigny used to say were the baneful lot of the soldier who thinks too much. Yes, I'll tell it to you. It happened during the retreat from Mons. I suppose there never was a show which called for greater resolution, for all that one understands by moral courage, than that; for uncertainty brooded over us like a nightmare. It was not what we *knew* we had to face, but what we did *not* know, that troubled us. There were we constantly reconnoitring and taking up a position and then being ordered to abandon it; continually getting alarms; sometimes firing a round point blank with the fuse at zero, through a hedge in a village, at Uhlans who were not there; despatch riders rushing in from encounters with enemy patrols and magnifying them into armies; and the inscrutable woods dogging us the whole way, dark and sinister. The air was thick with rumour and suspicion, and every day came fresh orders—orders against spies, against intermittent smoke from chimneys, against guides, against refugees. I never took my clothes off the whole time—except on the 28th, when some damned fool of a staff officer sent out the order to burn all officers' kits, and, seeing that I might just as well burn my old tunic and breeches instead of my new ones in the valise, I did a quick change. We never unlimbered after Le Cateau; and that night—I'm coming to it in a moment—we didn't even unhar-ness; the horses slept on their feet, and the drivers

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beside them. Talk about scares! One never knew what was behind one—no, nor what was on our left or on our right. Why, I remember the Cornwalls received one of our supply columns in the dark at the point of the bayonet. We moved in a mist—a mist of conjecture, rumour, invention, exaggeration, and doubt. Mind you, I'm not saying the men ever got the wind up. Oh, no! not they! Besides, every O.C. told his men that it was all part of a great strategic plan to lure the Germans on and catch them in a trap. And the men believed it. So did we officers for that matter, but our trouble was that we did not know what that plan was. We did not know we were playing a big game—we knew the rules of the game but we did not know what the game might be. I'd have given anything to know exactly what we were up against. At last we got that Intelligence Summary of the 31st. It told us something like this: *'The march of a German column five hours' long was observed yesterday on the road from Amiens to Saint-Just-en-Chaussée—aërial reconnaissance establishes the movement of strong and hostile columns fifteen miles long, preceded by cavalry, from Roye to Compiègne, also of a force southeast toward Montdidier.'* and so on. Pretty stiff, wasn't it? And yet I felt positively bucked up. Yes, bucked up. Anyhow, I thought, bad news is better than no news—and so it is, in war. But that was on the 31st, remember. The story I'm going to tell you happened before that, at a time when no one knew anything.

“It was in the retreat from Le Cateau. I didn’t see very much of the battle itself. As you know, a gunner never does, unless he’s observing, and my battery was well under cover behind rising ground. In fact, beyond stray shells searching for our wagon-line positions—which I had, of course, placed carefully about 400 yards back on the flank of the battery—we didn’t get it very hot. But about 2 P.M. there was a great volume of enemy artillery fire, the crackle of our musketry came nearer and nearer, and I knew that we were being driven back. My battery received orders to retire to a position to cover the retreat of the other batteries. The infantry began retiring past us, the cavalry helping to cover their retreat. Jolly well they did it, too—they were everywhere. Acting the part of a stage army, dismounting, putting in a few rounds rapid, then into the saddle and starting the same game somewhere else, so as to give the enemy the impression of our being in greater strength than we really are. That went on till nightfall when the battery received the order to retire, which we did, wagons leading so as to be ready for ‘action rear’ at any moment. But a lot of the infantry were still behind and our Brigadier ordered us to halt for them to catch us up, in order that we might take as many as possible on our limbers, for they were dead beat and dropping in their tracks. We took them up, eight to twelve on a carriage, all clinging to each other like tired children to prevent their falling off, and nodding, nodding, nodding their heads like

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clock-work dolls. That halt was nearly fatal because the rest of the column had gone on ahead of us; the night was dark, the road unmetalled, and they had vanished out of sight and hearing, like ghosts.

"I felt pretty uncomfortable, I can tell you, for that had happened once before and I had heard of columns taking the wrong road and marching straight into the Germans and never being heard of again. I had no instructions as to the route and all the country people seemed to have fled. And there was I, with the tail end of the column at a place where five cross-roads met. I legged up a sign-post, flashed my torch on to it, and hung on there perplexed and profane, with the moths fluttering in my face, when, as luck would have it, up came General—, our Divisional G.O.C. with a staff officer of his. He put us right. He told me to stop where I was and see that all the column followed the correct road toward a certain place and then to ride along it and report if the whole of it was closed up and of what units it was composed.

"It was a strange business, uncanny you might say. The night was dark and the order had been given that there was to be no smoking or talking in the columns. One heard nothing but the steady tramp, tramp, tramp on the road as the shadowy frieze of tired men marched past in a cloud of dust like a river mist, silent and half asleep. Every now and then a man would pitch forward on his face and lie where he fell as though struck by a

bullet. I was half asleep myself, but woke suddenly as a cockchafer came straight at me and with a buzz hit me in the face. The faint whisper of the poplars gradually grew louder, the wind rose, and rain began to fall. Every few yards I pulled up, in order to identify the units, and called out 'Who are you?' At that some sleepy O.C. would pull up his horse, halt the column, the men, who held their rifles at 'the carry,' would suddenly come to the 'on guard' position with the bayonet, and the O.C., ranging up beside me and peering into my face with his hand on his revolver, would say 'Who the devil are you? What do you want to know for?' The whole of 'em would be suddenly most unpleasantly wide awake. Oh! they were topping! You see I wasn't a staff officer, and for all they knew, I might be a German spy—such things happened more than once. I had many altercations but I always satisfied them—or I wouldn't be here now. Once or twice my horse stopped dead, throwing me forward on her neck, and shied at a dark object lying motionless on the road. I peered down and saw it was a soldier fast asleep. They lay everywhere as they had fallen out, sleeping like corpses.

"I'm telling you all this so that you may understand what the tension of that night was—and remember, there had been several nights like it before Le Cateau, and some of the men, as you'll hear in a moment, were not so lucky as these were, but had got strayed far from the column and were wandering through hedges and ditches far away to

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our left with the Germans on their flanks. It was worse for them because they were away from the batteries, and it's wonderful how the sight of a battery will put heart into an infantryman—it makes him feel he's being looked after. I collected reports from practically every unit, though there was one derelict battalion without its O.C., and, what was stranger still, quite ignorant of what had happened to him. I then rode ahead of the Column to report to the General and found him in a cottage with the rest of his staff. A staff officer sleepily pointed to an inner room. I knocked; there was no answer. I gently opened the door and saw the General in a chair with his head resting upon his arms which were extended on the table. He was fast asleep, and from a tallow candle burning limply in a bottle the hot grease dripped upon the back of his hand and stuck there. I coughed loudly but the General slept on. Then I deliberately kicked over a chair. The General raised his head and stared dully at me as I saluted and made my report. Before I had finished he was fast asleep again.

“I could find no shelter of any kind for myself, and the men lay in the streets—many of them without overcoats—amid the rain which was now drizzling steadily. They did not even pile arms, every man slept with his rifle beside him, and of course no fires were lit. Each unit had been ordered to provide its own outposts—one or two officers and from ten to twenty men posted on the high ground on each side of the road. I lay down against a hay-

stack—(or was it a shock of corn? I can't remember)—in a stubblefield, but the night was so cold that, tired as I was, I could not sleep. So I got up and walked about and masticated bully beef to get some warmth into me. I shall never forget that night—the mysterious silence, broken only by the steady hiss of the rain, the statuesque figures of the outposts, the recumbent forms of the men, some of whom now and again turned and muttered in their sleep, and far away to the north the glare of burning homesteads lighting up the sky. At 4 A.M. the whole column got the order to move toward —. We fed and watered our horses, and every man in my battery found time to shave and was as spick and span as though we were on parade. And the infantry marched off in column of fours in perfect step, singing 'Tipperary' as though they hadn't a trouble in the world. And this you will remember was after days and nights of marching and fighting with not more than a few hours' sleep on a *pavée* street for a spring mattress. D'you know, I've come to the conclusion that the English soldier's always at his best when things are at their worst. There be three things that are too wonderful for me—the way of a Tommy in a hole, the way of a Tommy up a tree, and the way of a Tommy in the midst of a rearguard action. Selah! . . .

"Where was I? Well, now, my story really begins where I personally leave off because it's concerned with the fortunes of the missing unit (or what was left of it) and their O.C., whom the night had

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swallowed up like the vasty deep. But I've had to tell you all this in order that you might realize what that night must have meant for them. Trying as it was for us it was much worse for them because, as I've said, they'd got hopelessly lost and were practically isolated away on our left in the direction of the Germans. It was only afterward that I learnt what I'm going to tell you—never mind how! They'd got away from the battle, the men being thrown into 'artillery formation' to reduce as much as possible the risks of shrapnel, and somehow the file that some of them were following, led by their O.C., got separated and they lost their connection with the main body. They halted at a village at dusk and snatched some sleep for an hour or two—all of them except the O.C. who was afraid to go to sleep as he had no one he could rely on to wake him up. He'd been walking arm in arm with his adjutant (before he lost sight of him) like two drunken men—the two of them having agreed on this as the likeliest way of keeping each other awake. That O.C. had been, if I recollect rightly, without sleep for five nights—perhaps you know what that means. And he had no horse; his horse had gone lame. Well, they marched more or less throughout the night, steering south by the compass, and fetched up about midday in a certain place of which we are hearing a good deal just now. There'd been much coming and going of our staff in that place, but by the time the O.C. and his men got there everybody had cleared out, for the Huns were reported in great strength

in the neighbourhood. Shells had been falling on their right some distance outside the town, and as they crawled into it a motorcyclist, hatless, livid, crouching over his machine with the throttle opened out for all he was worth, shouted to them that he'd been chased by Uhlans who had cut up a French civil guard. Also other things—most of them unintelligible but all of them bad. Then he disappeared. The O.C. halted his men in the station-yard and made inquiries about trains. There was not a sign of a R.T.O. and no one in the station except a distracted station-master who informed him that there wasn't so much as a trolley left. A panic-stricken French civilian rushed up, beckoned, pointed vaguely toward the northeast, and shouted '*Alleman s'*'; then ran, hell for leather, out of the deserted station-yard.

"The O.C. was at his wits' end to know what to do. He told his men to stand easy while he went off to the *mairie* to find out how matters really stood. The *maire*, who was tearing up and down the room, running his hand through his beard, looked at him with eyes full of terror.

"*Oh, mon Dieu! c'est fini!*" he cried at the sight of the officer, and, taking him by the arm, he drew him toward the door and begged him to clear out.

"But why?" said the bewildered officer, who could not understand why the sight of a British uniform should be so unwelcome.

"*Oh, mon Dieu!* we are all undone if you stay. Go! Go! Leave us, I beg of you. The Germans

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surround the town. Hark!' The windows rattled in their frames as the thunder of distant artillery reached their ears. 'You do not understand—no? If the Germans find you and your men here they will destroy us all. You have heard what they have done in Belgium—yes? *Oh, mon Dieu!* think of the women and children. If they find you here, they will say it is not "an undefended town." They will burn our roofs over our heads, they will shoot us, husbands and fathers, against the wall and then—ah! *après!* Think of the women and little children.'

"We will defend you,' said the officer with a confidence he did not feel.

"You! How many men have you got?' shrieked the mayor.

"About two hundred,' said the officer.

"Two hundred! It is a jest—*une mauvaise plaisanterie*. The Germans—they are an army corps.'

"The officer went back to the station-yard. He looked at the men who lay sleeping on the cobbles. They had cast down their packs, and many of them had taken the boots off their blistered feet. 'They're done up, sir,' said the sergeant-major, and it was pretty obvious. What was the O.C. to do? It was doubtful whether the men were capable of marching out of the town or whether, if they were, they were physically capable of putting up a fight when they got outside. On the other hand, if they remained under arms where they were, their presence would give the Germans just the kind of excuse which, as

you know, they are not slow to seize, an excuse for wreaking a fury of lust and slaughter upon the unoffending inhabitants. The O.C. decided that the only thing to do was to wait until his men had slept off something of the deadly fatigue which drugged them like an opiate and in the meanwhile— Well, there's the rub. Now I'm not going to defend what he decided to do. No! I'm not. There are several things he ought to have done first—he ought to have sent out a party to reconnoitre and discover where and in what strength the Germans really were. He ought never to have signed that paper, or, at any rate, he ought never to have put in those words about 'unconditional surrender'—but more of that in a moment. He ought, at the worst, to have sent out a flag of truce and put a bold face on it, and bluffed the Huns with talk of terms as though he were in great force. He ought to have done anything but what he did do. Still, it's easy for me to say all this after the event, sitting in a club arm-chair, after a good dinner and a night between linen sheets. Oh, yes! Well, he ordered the N.C.O's to fall the men in and he then began a short speech. He told the men there was no chance of escape and that to attempt to defend the town would merely provoke a massacre of the inhabitants when the Germans arrived. Then he asked the men if any one of them would 'like'—'like,' mind you—to fight their way out. When an O.C. throws the reins on the neck of his own men like that, well, things are in a pretty bad way—

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it's uncommonly like abdication. What could you expect? The men stared at each other, not knowing what to make of it. Some said 'Yes,' some said 'No,' others said nothing at all, wondering what was coming next.

"Well," said the O.C. after a pause, 'you're prisoners of war. You must disarm,' and he ordered the N.C.O.'s to stack the arms in a shed. The men were restive at this, the N.C.O.'s. took counsel together apart, and at last one of 'em spoke up and said something about what was the use of stopping there and getting their throats cut. The O.C. pondered on this, and at last he said it was all right, he would see that everything was in order and have a paper ready for the Germans telling them it was a formal surrender. The men had the most implicit faith in their O.C., and they had to be content with that. And mind you, that O.C. was one of the bravest men who ever wore the King's uniform—Oh, yes! There's no doubt about that. He didn't care a brass farthing for his own life, but he cared a great deal for the lives of the women and children in the town; and tired, dead tired, faint and drugged with want of sleep, perplexed in the extreme, he—well, there's no more to be said. Perhaps he hoped to gain time—to secure a mental armistice for the conflict of ideas in his brain, until he and his men were fit to march and could relieve the town of their compromising presence.

"Anyhow, he went off to the *mairie* to sign that paper. Never mind what was in it—the less said the

better. Enough that there were two words that, as it happened, could never be blotted out, and those two words were 'unconditional surrender.'

"The hours dragged on. The sun passed its meridian, the shadows deepened in the yard, and the men lounged about without their arms, some of them washing, some of them asleep. The O.C. sat in a room that looked out on the square, only half awake, when he was startled by a clear young voice outside.

"Now then, you men, what the devil are you doing there? Turn out! Come on! Get your arms. Fall in!"

"The officer sprang to his feet and rushed out.

"There was a young cavalry subaltern—only a boy, faced by a group of sullen men now reinforced by an O.C. old enough to be his father.

"What d'you mean by ordering my men about?" said the O.C.

"I never learnt the name of that young cub, but I must say he was a topper. He faced the O.C. without turning a hair and said coldly: 'Where are their arms?'"

"It was a deadly thrust. I won't repeat all that followed—it was pretty painful. Let it pass. The O.C. tried to explain. The explanation was horribly like an apology, and this from an O.C. to a subaltern in the presence of the men! The subaltern turned his back and once more ordered the men to fall in. I suppose that brought the O.C. out of his trance. He stepped forward and told the men

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that the situation had changed and that he would march out at the head of them.

"But what about the paper?" said a voice.

"The paper. What paper?" said the subaltern, fixing his eyes on the O.C. And then the whole story came out. The subaltern said nothing, but when the O.C. said he would go to the *mairie* and destroy the paper, the subaltern followed him. They walked there side by side in absolute silence. When they arrived the O.C. asked for the paper, but as the *mairie* held it out, the subaltern stepped forward, seized it, and put it in his pocket.

"It is my duty to keep this for the G.O.C., sir!" he said quietly.

"The O.C. said nothing. What *could* he say?"

"A few minutes later the men limped out, their O.C. at the head of them, followed by a string of carts carrying those who were too lame to walk. When they had gone about three miles and were safely on the right road, the subaltern reined in his horse, saluted, and said, 'I think I can be of no further use, sir—I will push on to H.Q.'"

"The O.C. returned his salute, and, after a momentary hesitation that must have been unspeakably painful to see, put out his hand. The sub. was surprised, as any sub. would have been, at this civilian gesture. But I guess he understood what a hell the other must be going through, and leaning down from the saddle, he shook the outstretched hand. Then he put spurs to his horse and vanished in a cloud of dust."

## V

## THE A. P. M.

**A**N A.P.M. has more acquaintances and fewer friends than any officer in His Majesty's forces. It is his duty to know everyone wisely but not to know any one too well. He should never accept hospitality, and rarely offer it, unless it be a lodging for the night. If he offers you this form of entertainment you cannot refuse. He has to know all about etiquette; if he asks an officer for his name and regiment he must be careful to have his armlet on, and if he enters another A.P.M.'s "beat" he must be equally careful to have it off. He should know a lady when he sees one. He may ask an officer for his belt, but he should not ask him for his "slacks." He should never swear, except at a court-martial, and then not profanely. It is never safe to ask him the way, as he is naturally suspicious and may think you know it but cannot walk it. The fact that he is called Assistant Provost Marshal does not mean that he is meant to assist officers home, though he sometimes offers to do so. When he does that be sure you ask for a medical officer as soon as you get there, and say you don't feel at all well. The A.P.M. has few equals and no superiors. He can ask any officer he likes to go for a walk with him, though it is a mistake to suppose this is

a compliment, and it is unwise to refuse. He is privileged to attend executions, which he does with a pocket-handkerchief, but not to blow his nose. He is very fond of exercise. He takes other people's pleasures sadly. He has a profound distrust of human nature but he is seldom indignant and never surprised. It is very difficult to make him see a joke—especially a practical one. His manners are, indeed, more subdued than jovial; he will sometimes touch an officer on the shoulder, but he rarely slaps him on the back. He is fond of frequenting *estaminets*, especially after 8 P. M., but this does not mean that he has convivial tastes. He has the insatiable curiosity of a child without its ingenuousness—his curiosity lacks charm.

From all of this it will be gathered that an A.P.M., although invariably a man of parts, is usually more feared than loved. He is a lonely man.

Now there was once a young A.P.M. who feared neither God nor man—always excepting the P.M. who is a Brigadier and has power to bind and loose. He was zealous—so much so that the zeal of his office had almost eaten him up. So when he was not posting road-controls and instructing examining posts, or parading his "red caps," he would sit and meditate on spies like the harlot in the Book of Joshua. In the matter of spies your Intelligence Officer is the plain-clothes man and your A.P.M. is the policeman; the Intelligence picks up the scent but the A.P.M. does the kill. Now this young A.P.M. longed with a great longing for a bag. So far he had had no luck. It

never seemed to come his way as it came the way of other fellows he knew. There was Wetherby in a certain home command, who had had a glorious stunt, capturing the commercial traveller with a valise of saturated underclothing which had yielded the most surprising results in the hands of an analytical chemist; there was Chipchase, A.P.M. to a Division, who had located the sniper under the tombstone just behind our lines; there was Ledger who had caught a female of disarming ingenuousness at a certain base as the result of a train of induction which began with no other data than the fact that in knitting she always looped the yarn over the forefinger of the left hand instead of the right, and in eating laid her knife and fork parallel across her plate, which is a way they have in Germany—but then Ledger had had a German governess and his bag was luck, pure luck. Still these things showed what could be done by observation.

One morning as he was sitting in his office making up his weekly report, the orderly entered and placed a buff-coloured envelope in the "In" box where it lay until such time as the A.P.M., glancing up from his papers, chanced to observe that it was marked "Confidential." He languidly ripped it open with a bored intuition that some officer had been over-staying his leave or having a difference of opinion with Mr. Cox about the principles of banking. Then he suddenly sat up in his chair as he caught the head note "From the Commander of the ——— Naval Base to the A.P.M. of the ——— District." And this is what he read:

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Lieutenant Commander — of the Night Patrol reports that about 11 P. M. on the 25th, he observed intermittent lights on the coast some 500 yards from Winstone Point. They appeared to be signals in the Morse code addressed to some ship at sea. We have no signalling station at that point. Lt.-Commdr. — was unable to read the messages in full, owing to the signals being apparently addressed to someone lying nearer in shore. The only words he succeeded in detecting were "Yes"; "No"; "Repeat." There has been considerable activity of late on the part of *U*-boats along this coast, under circumstances which seem to indicate precise knowledge of the sailings from — harbour. It will be remembered that on the 25th a tramp steamer which had cleared from the harbour about 10 P. M., while following the course indicated in the Admiralty sailing instructions, and showing neither port nor starboard lights, was torpedoed about midnight. I should be glad if you would keep this locality under strict observation, please.

The A.P.M. read this through twice. There might be nothing in it, of course—he had known more than once what it was to get on a false scent. And he felt alternately exalted and depressed. The coast was well patrolled and all approaches to the beach were prohibited by an order issued by the C.N.A. under Defence of the Realm regulation 28A, closing them nightly at 6 o'clock. Besides, the Morse code seemed a little too obvious, and the A.P.M. had a passion for the obscure, not realizing that the most successful deceptions are always the simplest, and that monosyllables like "Yes" and "No" may, in a cipher,

stand for other things than mere affirmatives and negatives.

The A.P.M. had read a great many detective stories—which is a very bad training for a detective. Life is never so elaborate as fiction. In the spy stories of fiction there is usually a master mind who erects a scaffolding round a house in a perfect state of repair and employs six secret agents as bricklayers, merely in order that one of them may drop a brick from his hod on the head of the detective as he passes by; he hires a powerful Rolls-Royce to procure his death by a street accident; or he watches his movements by aerial reconnaissance from an aeroplane; and he invariably uses a cipher language so obviously obscure that it shrieks for elucidation as loudly as a cuneiform inscription. You must have noticed this if you are in the habit of reading detective stories. But the real spy never does anything so melodramatic or so suggestive; he usually journeys by tram or motor-bus, eats buns in an A.B.C. shop, travels in Dutch cigars or cinema films, and is nothing if not unobtrusive. He does not use numerals for letters or transpose the alphabet; he sends transparently simple messages about invoices, or contents himself with posting a catalogue of cigars or a newspaper. It is only your trained "Intelligence" men who will guess that the commercial correspondence, the price list of Havanas, or the stop press space may have a secondary meaning. The art of espionage consists in making the primary meaning so obvious that a secondary meaning will never be suspected. It is the art of the *double entendre*.

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The A.P.M. knew nothing of all this. He was not an "M. I." man and had never worn the green tabs of an intellectual life. Consequently his first flush of certitude was succeeded by a cold fit of doubt. The situation seemed to lack colour. A restaurant in Soho, a suite of rooms at the Ritz, an alcove in the National Liberal Club, an opium den in Whitechapel—such romantic surroundings, he felt, were the proper *mise en scène* for a real spy stunt. At that moment the orderly entered with a telegram. The A.P.M. opened it, and as he read his heart went "dot and carry one." For this was what he read:

"TAHW ECIRP EMBARKATION DRAFTS RETTOR MA  
DEF PU ON DOOG ATAT.

"DECENCY LONDON."

Decoded this ran:

*Suspect embarkation drafts sailings are known to  
U-boats please set a watch upon coast in vicinity of  
harbour.*

Then he knew his chance had come. He spent a restless day counting the hours till dusk. About 8 P. M., after a deliberately frugal meal, he girded up his loins with his Sam Browne belt, slipped his Mark Webley into its holster, and set out on foot for Winstone Point. As he proposed to begin with a reconnaissance he decided to go alone. It was a warm night, but there was that brooding apprehension in the air which seems to portend a thunderstorm, and

low down on the horizon Orion, the herald of troubled weather, shone with a baleful light.

Winstone Point is a bold headland on the west side of which lies a small fishing village. The Point is the limestone termination of a long greyhound-backed down which runs inland for many miles and is covered with short, crisp turf and creeping cinquefoil. It is intersected by a winding track strewn with flints chipped into sharp and minute splinters like thorns by the chisel-like feet of flocks of sheep. The A.P.M. carefully avoided this track as he climbed the down, and finding a small dew-pond like a shell-hole, which commanded a view of the whole ridge as it ran inland, he crouched against its grassy slopes. The night was dark save for the feeble light of the stars, and as he glanced at the phosphorescent glow of his wrist watch he could just make out the position of the hands—they were at 10:30. His position was about a mile due north of the spot where the ridge terminated in an abrupt cliff, some four hundred feet above the sea, and he was facing northeast. For a long time nothing happened as he lay there listening to the beating of his heart and the faint chafing of the sea upon the distant beach. Then he suddenly saw a flash about a mile and a half farther inland, where the down attained a greater altitude. It was followed by a sequence of short and long flashes, and he realized that someone was signalling in the Morse code. He made out the words "ANSWER," "GENERAL ANSWER." Then a pause. Then "No"; "Yes"; "REPEAT"; "No";

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"YES"; "109 BATTALION"; "JUNE 4." Then the signals ceased.

He lay on his stomach on the turf waiting for their repetition. Nothing happened. Reflecting that his prey might use the track on his right for his return journey, he continued to wait, oblivious of time. Meanwhile the sky, long obscure, grew black above him, the air curdled and thickened, not a breath of wind stirred the sultry atmosphere. Something cold as dew hopped on to his hand, and as he moved jumped suddenly, so that his heart jumped with it. It was a toad. The sheep grazing on the brow of the hill had disappeared. The furze bushes were suddenly shaken by a violent convulsion, the clumps of young heather rustled like tissue paper, and every bent of grass trembled. At that moment a shaft of light cleft the sky downward from zenith to horizon, and in one trenchant glimpse he saw the whole sea for miles, and outlined upon it, like the silhouettes in a naval textbook, the shapes of the patrol-boats black as ink against a background of burnished silver. The heavens opened their batteries, and as the thunder crashed the rain descended in torrents and smote the hard, dry earth like hail. Another flash rent the sky, and by its blue corrosive light the A.P.M. saw the whole ridge and every furze bush upon it. But not a living thing stirred. The mysterious signaller had vanished. Drenched to the skin, with runnels of water down his back, the A.P.M. rose stiffly. All further quest was useless that night. He took out his knife, cut a branch of furze, and digging a small

hole in the earth he planted it upright in front of him. Then he drew back some two yards, and placing his walking stick in a line with the twig on what he judged to be the point where he had last seen the signals, as though he were bringing the sights of a rifle to bear on a given object, he planted the stick firmly in the ground. An hour later he was in bed.

He was trying to read a signal of baffling brightness, when he awoke out of a troubled dream to find the sun shining full upon his face. He rose and dressed and, after a hasty breakfast, determined to visit the scene of the night's operations. Before leaving he gave orders that the sergeant of the military police with a picquet of three men should join him at 2 P. M. at the fishing village on the western slope of Winstone Point.

He went armed as before, but this time he took with him a magnifying glass with a handle such as is used for reading print by persons who suffer from myopia. He had purchased that magnifying glass some months earlier as the result of a careful study of the operations of a classical detective whose name is a household word as the discoverer of the Inductive Method. He felt that the time had come to use it.

He left his horse at the village inn and ascended the down. He discovered the two sticks without difficulty, and taking a compass bearing he found that they were aligned on a point due north northeast. He walked slowly in the direction indicated, keeping a sharp eye on the turf after he had covered about a mile. He suddenly came to a halt at a spot where he

saw a number of matches. Examining the ground more closely he thought he found traces of trampled grass which the rain had not wholly obliterated. Then he went down on his hands and knees and scrutinized every blade of grass with his magnifying glass. At the end of half an hour he had gathered the following:

- (1) Nineteen burnt matches.
- (2) A piece of burnt paper.
- (3) A pipeful of tobacco only partially consumed.
- (4) A small piece of sausage.

Then he sat down and applied the Inductive Method. He tried to reconstruct the personality of the suspect from these apparently insignificant trifles. At the end of half an hour's deep meditation he had arrived at the conclusion that the man had a tooth missing in the centre of the upper jaw, was one-armed, probably careless of money, and very probably a German. How? By a simple process of ratiocination: The serrated edge of the half-eaten sausage revealed the marks of an even row of teeth, but in the middle of the perimeter there was a gap. Nineteen matches had been expended in an attempt to light one pipe—there was no trace of ashes beyond those of the half-consumed wad of tobacco—and each of the matches had only burnt to the extent of an eighth of an inch; this showed that they had been extinguished as soon as lit, a *contretemps* so unusual as to be only explicable on the assumption that the

smoker had been unable to use his left hand to shield the match held in his right. The waste of tobacco costing 11½d. an ounce pointed to an indifference to considerations of economy; an application of the method of Observation and Experiment to the tobacco by first smelling it and then smoking it had convinced the A.P.M. that it was a choice blend of "John Cotton." The nationality of the suspect was more difficult to establish; the sausage suggested German nationality; but the A.P.M. would have felt more assured if he could have detected in its composition traces of those cubes of onion and garlic with which the maker of *Delikatessen* tickles the coarse palate of the Hun. But an examination with the magnifying glass yielded no assurance on this point. Still it was a working hypothesis.

Then he turned his attention to the scrap of paper. It was a piece of ordinary writing paper some three inches by four, but on holding it up against the light he failed to find any traces of a water-mark. He scrutinized the written characters and saw at a glance they were in a foreign tongue. He did not know a word of German although he knew that the language was not French. But he was struck by the prevalence of words ending in the letters "ch." Although the characters had been partly obliterated by the rain, he could make out clearly the words "bach" and "hoch." His pulses quickened as he reflected that the German tongue was notoriously a language of gutturals. Then he caught sight of the word "Strafe," and persuasion became a certainty.

The fragment of sausage, inconclusive and insignificant in itself, added nothing to what was now a conviction, but undeniably it strengthened it. He descended the hill with a light heart.

He knew that stern things lay ahead of him. For the uninterned German who chooses to play the part of spy an ignominious death is the inevitable penalty, and the man would in all probability sell his life dearly. But the A.P.M. was not a man to flinch. He telephoned through to his office, giving orders to the sergeant that each man was to bring his revolver. Then he went to a chalk-pit some hundred yards from the village and fired the six chambers of his own revolver in succession to test the trigger-pull; the weapon was in perfect trim though the pull was a bit heavy, and he regretted now that he had not, as he had long intended, had the pressure reduced to six pounds. Only one thing remained to do—and he did it. He sent off a code telegram to “Decency, London.” It contained the following message:

“HAVE MATTER WELL IN HAND. IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS. WILL REPORT TO-MORROW.”

This was not strictly necessary, but you must remember that the A.P.M. was young and zealous. And youth does not like to hide its light under a bushel; it prefers to let it shine before men. It is a venial fault.

During the afternoon he rehearsed his plans for the night. He despatched his four men by different

routes, avoiding the beaten track, with orders to assemble at a stunted beech tree which was within a few yards of the place of his discoveries. They were instructed to keep completely out of sight, taking all possible cover so as to escape notice by any one who might be keeping the open spaces of the hillside under the observation of a pair of field-glasses. The A.P.M. himself approached the rendezvous by the most open route like any casual wayfarer. They met at the appointed place at the end of half an hour. Each of the men reported that he had seen nothing. They had carefully observed their direction and the A.P.M. felt confident that forty minutes would suffice for the night's advance. He therefore timed the start for 10:20 P. M.

At the appointed time the four men, who had been disposed in such a manner that they formed an approximate circle with the beech tree in the centre, slowly converged on their objective and halted some hundred yards away. The A.P.M. had arranged to simulate the plaintive cry of a peewit as the signal for closing in. They lay there for what seemed an interminable time until a rosy flush in the east heralded the approach of dawn and a lark rose in the morning air. The A.P.M. began to fear that they had been observed.

He decided to remain where he was all the next day, keeping the men with him so that no movement of theirs on the hillside should be visible to the secret watcher. One man was detailed as a ration party to crawl down the hill as unobtrusively as

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possible and bring back food and water. It was a tedious vigil. The sun beat down fiercely upon their heads, the flies tormented them like the seven plagues of Egypt, they had a most amazing thirst, and as he lay on his back the A.P.M. reflected that the attractions of a detective's career are greatly exaggerated in fiction. The sun set at last, sinking in a ball of fire below the horizon, and within less than half an hour one man crawled in from his observation post a hundred yards away, and reported the approach of four men. The A.P.M. was a little taken aback at the number. He drew his revolver out of its holster and waited.

His men had orders that no blood was to be shed except in case of extreme necessity; it was important to capture the spies alive, for they might be the means of eliciting valuable information. The newcomers were slow in arriving, but as they approached their voices grew more distinct. They spoke a foreign tongue full of strange gutturals. And at times they uttered the letter "l" in a curious way as though they were clearing their palate with a view to expectoration. The A.P.M. despatched his man to relieve another who was stationed nearer the doomed men; the other reported that their conversation was unmistakably German—he had distinctly heard the word "Strafe," though the rest of it was unintelligible. The four spies clustered together, and one of them suddenly flashed a lamp.

At that movement the military policeman by the side of the A.P.M. tried to distract his attention in a hurried whisper. "Hush! you fool," said the A.P.M.

testily, and pursing his lips as though he were drawing at a pipe he uttered the shrill cry of a peewit. The A.P.M. and three of his men rushed forward noiselessly over the turf, the fourth unaccountably lagging behind. It was beautifully done. Each military policeman closed with the man nearest him, the A.P.M. catching his man with either hand around the ankles and bringing him heavily to the ground. He fell with him and as he did so received the impact of a huge fist in his eye which make him see flashes such as are not recognized in the Morse code.

"Blast!" said his victim, and as he struggled he poured forth a torrent of invective. Most of it was unmistakably English, but unfamiliar words like "*Duw*" and "*Diawl*" caught the A.P.M.'s ear and the accent was foreign and peculiar. Therefore the A.P.M., giving himself the benefit of the doubt, tightened his grip on the profane man's windpipe.

"Let me go now, look you. Yes, indeed," said a voice near by, as though the owner was trying to agree with his adversary quickly. "You have got your knee in my guts whatever. There's foolish you are, man. I was have a belly-ache. And for why? *Duw anwyl!* man, stop it, I tell you."

"It's the South Wales Borderers, sir," said the fourth policeman who had betrayed such indecision at the last moment and who now came up panting. "And I think they've been doing signal practice. I saw the answering signal on the hill t'other side of the bay just now, sir. And I tried to draw your attention to it, sir," he added with gloomy satisfaction.



The A.P.M. relaxed his hold, and the combatants rose to their feet. He had nearly strangled the life out of a sergeant of a crack Welsh regiment. The others rose also, including a military policeman who, having been an ostler in private life, had been trying desperately to sit on his opponent's head, and was surprised to find that he still kicked. Serious things had been done upon the earth that night. The penalty for striking a superior officer on active service is death—and the sergeant had struck, and painfully. The penalty for an officer who strikes a soldier at any time is dismissal, and the A.P.M. had incurred it. Four military policemen had committed an unprovoked and aggravated assault on three inoffensive soldiers engaged in the performance of a military duty—which is a tort, a misdemeanour, and also a statutory offence under the Army Act.

The British army is a wonderful thing. The sergeant of the Borderers gravely saluted the officer to whom he had given a black eye, and the A.P.M. returned the salute with no less gravity. The sergeant, with his windpipe still somewhat contracted by the pressure from his superior officer's fingers, proceeded to offer an explanation with the mechanical precision of a soldier giving evidence at a court-martial:

*“At 6 p. m. on the 24th, I was ordered by the signalling officer of the 109th Battalion the South Wales Borderers to proceed to Winstone Point. I was arrive there at dusk——.”*

“That will do, sergeant,” said the A. P.M, smiling

bitterly. "I think I know the rest—which I can explain better than you can." And he did.

As the A.P.M. retired down the hill with his picquet he thought deeply—this time deductively. The major premiss of his syllogism does not matter, but the conclusion was depressing. He could not stand the sergeant of the Borderers a drink; in an A.P.M. that would be conduct exceedingly "prejudicial." To offer him the price of one would be worse. But a little gift in kind—there would be no harm in that, just to show there was no ill feeling. When he got back to his billet that night his eye (the uninflamed one) lit on a book which had been one of his dearest possessions, but which he now regarded with a hostile air. He had had it specially bound in tooled morocco. He packed it up and posted it to the sergeant with his compliments. Its title was "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes."

The sergeant of the Borderers held his tongue—for obvious reasons. But one of his men must have talked. And as the sparks fly upward, the story spread from hutments to the orderly room, from the orderly room to the officers' mess, from the officers' mess to Brigade H.Q., and from Brigade H.Q. to the H.Q. of the command, till it was noised abroad from Dan even to Beersheba. I have already said that an A.P.M. is more feared than loved, and that he is apt to be a lonely man. The A.P.M. was no longer sure that he was feared but he was certain that he felt very lonely. He has applied for a transfer.

## VI

### NO MAN'S LAND

**T**HIS story was told me by Kennedy as we sat one night over the fire in my billet in France in a little town which serves as the Headquarters of the Second Echelon. You can make of it what you please. Only let me tell you that Kennedy is not an impressionable man—but neither is he obtuse. He has read much and thought more. He is forty, an age at which a man is either a fool or a philosopher. Kennedy is not a fool. And philosophy, as a wise man has remarked, begins in wonder. He might have added that it also ends there.

I had read out an announcement on the front page of the *Times*, which told us for the first time that a friend, whose fate had long been the subject of painful speculation to us both, was "Reported missing; believed killed." It reminded me, and I reminded Kennedy, of the story of an old *grandmère* I had met in one of my billets whose only son had been reported "missing" at Gravelotte in 1870, and who still, in this year of grace 1916, watched and waited, as for forty-six years she had waited and watched, for his return.

"Mad, of course, poor thing," I had added, as I finished my story.

"Don't be so sure of that," retorted Kennedy, and then, seeing my look of surprise, he said quietly: "Who knows? He may still be in No Man's Land. No! It's a land you'll never find on any staff map. But I see you think I'm talking in riddles. Well, you've told me a story, I'll tell you one.

"It was at my billet at —, the H.Q. of the —th Corps; about a month ago before I was shifted here. The house has a good deal to do with the story; so I'll have to begin with that. I'd been home on sick leave, having been knocked out on the Somme by an H.E. shell, and they'd given me a staff job in the 'I' branch. I arrived late at night, the leave boat having been held up while the mine-sweepers were out, and the first thing I did was to make tracks for the Camp Commandant's, of course, to get the usual *billet de logement*; on it was inscribed the name of a Madame Doutrepont, 21 rue Royer-Collard. He told off an orderly to show me the way—it was a perfect rabbit warren of a place and dark at that. A French town under *état de siège* is none too well lighted. We went stumbling along over the cobbles, and, after what seemed an interminable journey, in the course of which we met nothing but wailing cats—we found ourselves in a kind of *cul-de-sac* and at the end of it was a blind wall with one of those huge double doors like the 'Gate' of an Oxford College; it had a kind of wicket in it.

"It was black as pitch and I had to pass my hands over the door, like a blind man feeling the contours of somebody's face, until I found a bell-pull. As I

pulled it, there came from far away a long, echoing sound like a bell at the bottom of the sea. The wicket door opened noiselessly in response—so noiselessly that I fell over the threshold as I leaned against it. Odd, isn't it, the way those French doors open automatically? I never quite get over the surprise of finding no one behind them. Well, we found ourselves in a kind of covered courtyard which was even darker, if anything, than the street outside, and then an inner door opened and I saw a woman standing in the doorway holding a lamp in her hand.

“*Qu'est-ce là?*” she called out in a startled voice. But her alarm changed to irritation when I tendered her my billeting paper. She scrutinized it closely and then looked long at me, holding the lamp above her head so that its light fell full upon my face while her own remained in darkness. A dog barked furiously at his chain on the farther side of the courtyard.

“*Tiens,*” she said to him angrily, and then to me, “*C'est la guerre,*” as she motioned us in.

“That was all the welcome I got. Still, what can one expect? I always feel like a beastly bailiff when I quarter myself uninvited upon a woman ‘*conformément à la loi,*’ as the billeting paper puts it. And they only get half a franc a night for it. It's treating their place like a doss house.

“As she put down the light in the hall I saw that she was a tall, sallow woman of meagre figure, but with abundant, thick, black hair done up in heavy

folds. Her face wore a curious, apathetic expression and her eyes had an introspective look as though her mind dwelt wholly in the past.

"She conducted me upstairs, the orderly thumping after us with my valise on his shoulder and making the shadow a hunchback on the wall in the flickering candle-light, until we had mounted four long flights of stairs and got to the very top of the house. She threw open the door of a room without a word. It had rather a musty smell as though it had been long disused and there was no window in it, which was pretty beastly, but opening out of it was a kind of small dressing room. The dressing room did have a window, fortunately—shut, of course. Having thanked the lady and dismissed the orderly, I unpacked my valise. After some trouble I succeeded in unscrewing the window-bolt and getting a little clean air into the room. Then I looked round. In the wall of the dressing room on the far side, opposite the folding doors and commanded by my bed in the other room, was a big cupboard reaching from the floor to the ceiling; it was locked. The only furniture of the room was a table and a chair. I looked out of the window but could see nothing. The air of the courtyard had a curious smell, pungent but not unpleasant. And there was a continuous sound of running water.

"I slept soundly that night, for I was tired. In the morning, as I was going out to breakfast at the mess, I met Madame Doutrepoint and passed the time of day. She was a trifle more gracious than

the night before and volunteered the information that her husband was at the war, at Verdun, that she lived all alone except for a *bonne* who came in every day to clean up, and that she managed her husband's business in his absence. The business was a tannery, it adjoined the courtyard and was worked by a water-mill. I tried to make friends with the dog as I passed out, but he only snarled and crept into his kennel. So much for the house. Altogether it seemed to me that the atmosphere of No. 21 was not exactly sociable.

"I put in a hard day's work over the maps and things, and after dinner in the mess I decided to take my work home to my billet. It was like all 'I' work, highly confidential, and the things I took with me were worth their weight in gold to a spy. I had a staff map showing our new lines, a large-scale oil-paper tracing of the positions held by the —th Division, two or three of those buff manuals issued from G.H.Q. and marked 'not to be taken into the trenches,' and so on.

"I sat up working until after midnight with my maps spread over the table in the dressing room and about 12.30 A.M. I extinguished the candle and went to bed, leaving the folding doors of the dressing room wide open. In five minutes I was asleep. How long I slept I don't know, but I was suddenly awakened by the sound of footsteps in the dressing room. They seemed to come from the window. I lay awake listening, being in some doubt whether I was not still asleep, and watching the dressing room,

the floor of which was plainly visible from my bed as it was now moonlight.

“Now the dressing room was very small and its window, which was on the left, disproportionately large, and the shape of the window was clearly silhouetted in a pattern upon the floor. And it struck me I must be asleep after all, and dreaming, because nothing obscured the squares of pale light upon the boards. Yet all the time there seemed to be feet shuffling across it in a curious, uncertain way. I was still stupidly pondering this when the footsteps stopped—apparently by the cupboard, and I heard a scratching sound—it was just as if someone was passing his fingers over the panels in the dark. Only it wasn't dark. I could see the cupboard in the moonlight almost as plainly as I can see you. I raised myself in bed and stared hard, but I could see nothing. And yet by this time I felt certain there was someone in that room. I felt sure of it with the assurance that you feel someone behind you in the street. But there was this difference: in such cases you have only to turn round to have your intuition confirmed by your sense of sight, whereas in this case my sense of sight gave the lie to my intuition while my sense of hearing confirmed it.

“I was trying to puzzle out this contradiction of my senses when I saw the cupboard doors move. They moved slowly outward and I heard them creak. But stare as I did I could see nothing. There were those cupboard doors slowly but perceptibly advancing toward me as if they moved of



their own accord. For a moment I was really afraid—afraid of myself, intimidated by the incoherence of my senses. I remembered reading in a morbid phase of mind, when I was recovering from shell-shock and fancied I had the symptoms of every disease I could lay a name to, that there is such a thing as 'mental blindness.' It occurs when a man has suffered some lesion of the nerve tracts connecting the occipital lobes with other centres—that's how the book put it. A man sees but doesn't see right. He can't classify the optical impressions his eyes receive and he'll call a clothes-brush a pair of spectacles. Or he may have mental deafness—he'll hear a bell but be powerless to recall what a bell looks like; he'll say he's heard a drum. His senses play fast and loose with one another until his mind capitulates altogether. It's often the first stage in delusional insanity."

Kennedy paused for a moment to gaze at the dying embers of the fire.

"I think what kept me sane," he resumed, "was the conviction, a kind of psychic conviction, that there really was someone there. I felt its presence far more than I heard it. And then in a flash I remembered my staff maps and Intelligence papers and with an effort I quelled the insubordination in my brain. Some spy, I felt assured, was playing a trick on me to take advantage of my confusion. The thought of it aroused in me a wholesome anger and from that moment I had myself well in hand.

"I debated with myself what to do. Not only

were all my confidential papers in the dressing room, but so was my Webley revolver, which I had left on the table. If I so much as turned in my bed, the visitor, whoever he was, would be able to seize it and cover me with it from where he was before I could reach the dressing room. What was I to do? I have acquired the habit of prompt decision—you learn that out on patrol—and it didn't take me long to decide that my best course was to lie still and wait till he tried to pass again through my room, for he could have entered no other way. He must have had a key of his own, for I had locked the door from the inside before I went to bed. But how had he managed to unlock it and enter without awaking me? That puzzled me.

“There followed what seemed an interminable interval of silence, during which I could hear my wrist-watch ticking as loudly as if it were an eight-day clock. Then I heard the footsteps recommence. They started at the cupboard and approached my room. I seemed to be listening with every nerve in my body, and, as they approached, it struck me that there was something very odd about them. They were not so much a walk as a shuffle, and one foot seemed to be reconnoitring before the other as if a blind man were exploring the floor. They approached my bed. I lay rigid with my head on my pillow and with my eyes wide open, but I could see nothing—no! not so much as a shadow. The man seemed to be holding his breath all the time. It's curious when I come to think of it—I never once heard

him breathe. I was waiting my chance to leap out of bed and spring on him from behind, as soon as I should hear him fumbling with the bedroom door, when I suddenly felt the touch of a hand at the foot of my bed. It touched the outline of my feet and then drew sharply away as though the owner were startled; the next moment it began groping the bedclothes. I felt it through the counterpane travelling up my body. But it didn't feel like a human hand at all. It was more like a claw; it seemed to be a hand without any finger-tips and it moved with a kind of stealthy uncertainty. You know how a dog paws your bed? There was something hypnotic about that touch; I tried to shake it off and I couldn't. I was paralysed. I felt again that strange insubordination in my brain, and that I was losing all control over my senses. For my eyes were wide open and I could still see nothing.

"How long I lay like that I don't know. I could hear the valves of my heart beating against my ribs and there was a cold feeling down my spine; my throat was dry as a furnace and my skin crept. Do you know the kind of nightmare in which you dream you are tied down to two lines of rails with a train approaching along the track and you strain and strain to break your bonds till your heart seems to be going to burst? Then you wake. But I couldn't wake, or if I was awake I couldn't move. As the hands travelled up to my chest I made a violent effort to break the spell and sprang in a cold sweat from my bed. There was a startled shuffle of the

feet, as though the owner had sprung back from the bed, and they scuffled back toward the dressing room. I hurled myself after them, hit out wildly in their direction, and bruised my knuckles against the folding doors. There was nothing there. My hands were tingling with pain, but action had restored my circulation and I rushed into the dressing room. I didn't want to strike again—I felt a sudden sense of pity; I didn't know why. But I was determined to corner him. The footsteps were retreating toward the window; I tried to intercept them, but as I did so I felt a cold blast upon my face, the window suddenly shut to, and the footsteps ceased.

"I opened the window. The night was still; there was no wind, nothing but the soft sighing of the poplars. I could see nothing. But as I stood at the window, listening to the beating of my own heart, I heard the dog whining in the courtyard below, the rattle of his chain like an anchor-chain drawn through a hawse-hole, then a pause, and then the rattle of the chain followed by another pause. This went on for several minutes and I knew that the dog was wildly pacing to and fro to the very limit of its tether. I called to him, but instead of barking furiously at the sound of my voice, as he usually did, he merely whined.

"The dressing room itself seemed undisturbed. Indeed what puzzled me more than anything else was that the cupboard was shut, and when I tried to open it I found it was locked. And then I reflected that the fact it was locked was the most

reassuring thing I could have expected. I must have had a nightmare after all! After that I felt more cheerful and I determined to have a pipe before turning in again. I filled my pipe, struck a match, and was about to light up when I suddenly caught sight of the cupboard door in its flickering glow. On the jamb of the door was the impression of a thumb and four mutilated fingers. I stood staring at this with the match in my hand until the flame burned my fingers and I let the match fall to the floor. It went out. I stood staring at the cupboard, unconscious of my blistered fingers, conscious of nothing except that mark upon the door."

Kennedy stopped in his narration and gazed into the fire, as though he could see some image there. After a long pause he resumed:

"Mechanically I reached out my hand for the box of matches, never taking my eyes off the door, and tried to strike another, but I struck so hard that the head of the match came off. I struck again, lit the candle, and held it up to the cupboard. The marks were still there: the very cuticle of the skin was clearly traceable in a dirty pattern, as though a dusty hand had left its imprint upon the door. The thumb was clearly outlined, so was the hand, but the fingers stopped at the knuckles as if they had been amputated. I stared at them for a long time.

"Had I delusions? For a moment there came back to me the awful days I had gone through when I was on sick leave and heard unfamiliar voices coming from great distances and was afraid to be

alone with my own shadow. I asked myself the question: was that baneful image really impressed upon the door or was it a projection of my own disordered brain? I tried looking at the walls and the ceiling; it was not there. I then looked at the cupboard doors again; it was still there. I reasoned with myself that if it was really there it would reflect itself. I took the mirror from the dressing table and, standing at an angle to the door, I held it up so that the door was reflected in it. The image appeared in the mirror. Finally, to put the matter beyond a shadow of doubt, I took a piece of oil paper, such as one uses for map tracings, and having heated it slightly over the candle I held it firmly for a few seconds against the marks upon the door. Then I held it up to the light. There was a faint anthropometrical impression of a thumb and four mutilated fingers upon it. I put the paper down and thought a long while. Then I locked it up in my attaché case, and taking up the candle I went down on my hands and knees and explored the planks in the floors; they were firm. I tapped the walls; they were solid. I studied the ceiling; the plaster showed no crevice. I tried the door of my bedroom; it was locked. My papers I had seen at a glance were undisturbed.

"I looked at my watch. It was 2 A.M. I then put a chair against my bedroom door and sat down upon it with my Webley across my knees—cocked, with my finger upon the trigger-pull. The candle I kept alight beside me. I waited and watched until

the moon paled and dawn broke, but I heard nothing except the sighing of the poplars, the trickle of water through the sluices, and the dog feverishly paying out his length of chain. Perhaps I dozed a little. I got up shivering with cold and crossed the room to look at the cupboard door. All trace of the hand had gone. I unlocked my attaché case and looked at the oil paper. It was as blank as the door. I held it up to the morning light; the impression of the skin had entirely disappeared, but I thought I could detect the periphery outline of the thumb and the four stumps of fingers.

"I felt worn out and irritable, but my tub and a shave refreshed me somewhat, and after dressing I went downstairs to breakfast at the mess. On my way down I encountered Madame. She looked even paler than usual, but said nothing except a languid '*Bon jour, M'sieur.*' I looked straight at her and, watching the effect of my words, I said: 'Madame, is your house haunted?'

"I thought she was going to faint. Her face turned an ashen gray and her fingers fumbled with her dress. '*Mais non, M'sieur. Certainement, non. Oh, non, non.*' I couldn't make her out. Her answer was more in the nature of a petition than a denial. I had a sudden suspicion that she was concealing something from me. But I merely bowed and passed out.

"I worked hard all day to escape my thoughts and went home to my billet early. On entering my bedroom I was surprised to see Madame in the

dressing room in front of the cupboard, the door of which was open. As she heard me behind her she hastily shut the cupboard door and, murmuring something about *lingerie*, she brushed past me and disappeared. I didn't like finding her in my room but, after all, it was her house, not mine, and I had already taken good care to remove all my papers back to the office. After she had gone I went to have another look at the cupboard, and I suddenly noticed that in her haste and agitation she had left the key in the door. I turned the key and threw open the cupboard. It was already growing dark, and in my hurry I didn't think about a light at first. I could see the outline of something with four legs. Then I remembered to strike a match. It was a child's rocking-horse!

"And yet when I recalled the experiences of the night and Madame's agitation in the morning, to say nothing of her excuse about *lingerie*, I wasn't altogether satisfied. That cupboard was certainly no linen cupboard. For one thing there was no linen there, nothing but this plaintive plaything. For another, the cupboard was thick with dust and the horse caparisoned with cobwebs. French housewives are much too particular about their linen to house it in a dusthole.

"Nothing happened that night, but next morning, much to my surprise, Madame asked me, with some diffidence, if I would take a cup of tea with her in the salon. I assented. There was nothing remarkable about the room. It was like most of the salons in

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French middle-class houses—a parquet floor, a gilded radiator like a row of organ-pipes, a gilt and marble clock in a glass case, and so on. Over the mantelpiece was a portrait of a child—a boy of about ten years of age. After pouring out the tea Madame took up some knitting and began clicking her needles; she explained that she was making a *tricot* for her husband in the trenches. I thought it was a pretence to hide the agitation of her hands—curious, isn't it, that a European reveals his agitation in his fingers, an Oriental in his toes, and I noticed that she perpetually dropped her stitches as she talked. What did she talk about? Oh! everything, but she always came back to the war and casualties. Were they very heavy in our armies? How many did I think they were? I drew in my horns at that—it is one of the first things a spy is concerned to find out—for obvious reasons. And yet it seemed to me that she had something on her mind and was more anxious to speak than to be spoken to. She seemed to be speaking to gain time. You know how a person speaks when all the time they are thinking of something else? But anyhow she never got her guns laid on the register, whatever it was, and after an hour or so I got up and went to bed. She made no further approaches after that. But one thing struck me. I noticed every night as I went up to bed that her door—which at first she had kept locked—was always slightly ajar and a light burning in her room.

“A week went by and I had begun to forget all

about my strange experiences when one evening as I got back to my billet I saw a gendarme and a woman enter the house just ahead of me. I hastened my steps, and as I entered the hall I heard someone sobbing in the salon. It sounded like Madame's voice and I pushed open the door and walked in without ceremony. The gendarme and a woman in black were standing with grave faces in front of Madame, who was sitting in a chair gripping the arms convulsively. The gendarme held a piece of blue paper in his hand. For a moment it flashed through my mind that it was a warrant for her arrest. But the idea no sooner entered my mind than I dismissed it, for on the gendarme's face and the face of the woman who accompanied him—I now recognized her as a neighbour—was a look of profound pity.

“*Votre mari était un héros, madame,*” the gendarme said softly.

“Then I understood. You know they never send telegrams in France as we do. The announcement is always made personally by the *maire* or a gendarme, and a neighbour usually goes with him. Yes, they're not so prompt as we are, but I think they're more merciful. There is always a touch of ceremony about these things in France, you know.

“I don't know how it was, but the sight of me seemed to give the poor soul some comfort, though Heaven knows my thoughts had been uncharitable enough. She turned her stricken face to me, still clutching the sides of her chair, and cried: ‘*Ah!*’

*monsieur le capitaine, c'était lui, c'était lui!* I know, I know. I heard him that night.'

"My eyes must have betrayed my astonishment; I thought her sorrow had turned her brain.

"You do not understand, *non?* But it was his room, your *chambre à coucher*. He used to sleep there. And the little room with the cupboard—it was the toy-cupboard of *le petit*, our little one whom we lost. *Mon mari*, I—sometimes the one, sometimes the other, sometimes the two—used to go to the cupboard to look at his little horse. It was all of him we had left. One must have something, *m'sieur le capitaine. C'était lui! C'était lui!*

"As I mounted the stairs I heard her still repeating her litany of pain. '*C'était lui! C'était lui!*'

"Was it he?' I said to myself.

"The next day I went back to my billet earlier than usual, determined to atone for all my uncharitableness with such words of comfort as I could offer her. I thought her strangely composed. Perhaps she divined as much in my eyes.

"*Ah, m'sieu' le capitaine,*' she said simply, 'there are some things worse than death. There is life. Had he lived he would have been blind,' and she handed me a letter. It ran as follows:

*"Chère Madame,—Votre mari était mon camarade et avec grande douleur j'écris pour vous annoncer qu'il est mort. Il était frappé par l'éclat d'un obus et il a mis les doigts devant les yeux pour les protéger et les doigts sont brisés et les yeux rendus aveugles. Il est mort à une heure et demi*

*après minuit dans la poste de secours le mardi, octobre le troisième. . .*

"I read no more. I turned my face to the wall and pretended to be studying the crayon drawing of the dead child. I was afraid she might read in my face all that I had seen and heard on the night of Tuesday, October the 3rd. With a few hasty words of condolence I left the room. That is all."

We gazed a long time at the fire while the rain beat against the window panes and the ashes fell softly in the grate.

"But," I said.

"Yes," interrupted Kennedy. "I know what you're going to say. No! I can't explain it. Do you remember those words of Pascal, '*Les espaces infinis m'effrayent?*' I thought of them to-night when I looked up at the moon riding the heavens. The moon and the stars and the heavenly bodies are not more removed from us than we are removed from one another. If each of us is separated from one another by such vast solitudes in life, why should there be any greater separation in death? Sometimes I think the dead are nearer to us than we are to one another. You know those lines of Matthew Arnold:

Yea in the sea of life enisled  
With echoing straits between us thrown.

"Sometimes I can't even hear the echoes. And it's when I'm farthest from my fellow creatures in life

that I feel nearest my fellow creatures in death. D'you remember the old regimental mess?—where's the C.O.? where's the major? where is Guppy? and Trelawney and Haig-Brown? I am the only one left."

We were both silent for a long time. At last Kennedy rose to go home to his billet. "Perhaps you understand now what I mean by 'No Man's Land,'" he said quietly as he bade me good-night. "Sooner or later all of us have to go 'over the top' and sometimes we return."

## VII

### "HOT AIR"

LET her go!" said the Lieutenant.

She went. At one moment I had been looking into the faces of the men around the car; at the next I was looking down upon their heads and could study the parting of their hair—they had their caps off and were in their shirt-sleeves. Only a drag-rope now anchored us to earth and that rope was very taut; the balloon seemed to have suddenly developed a personality of her own and was obviously impatient to be off. I suddenly felt extraordinarily volatile; there seemed to be nothing under my feet, and nothing there was except some basket-work barely an inch thick. I felt that I was made of india-rubber, and that I might bounce at any moment—which is a nasty sensation, for it makes you feel a wild desire to bounce over the side of the car and see what will happen to you. The Lieutenant cast off the rope. We rose with amazing rapidity; the earth rushed away from us; the white faces of the crowd looking up at us behind the fence lost all their individual features; the ecstatic shouts of the children died away. I suddenly felt very queer.

No! I didn't like this. I didn't like it at all. I

have "proceeded"—in the Army you never "go" anywhere because that might imply you came to rest somewhere, and there is no rest in the British army—to some objective or other in nearly every form of transport known to the two Services, and of all of them I liked this beastly toy the least. I have flown in a Maurice Farman in a 30-mile gale at six thousand feet and felt nothing but a surprising absence of feeling—except when the bus "bumped," or when she began to volplane down and I felt as if I were descending a gigantic staircase with a rather long leap from one stair to the next and no banisters to hang on to. I have helped to steer a tank, looking after the brakes while the tank commander performed like an organist with his hands and feet, peering through the visor as though he were reading a piece of music, and have reflected that this, too, was very unsensational except at the moment when we came to a crater and our great leviathan paused irresolutely on the edge, as though she were afraid of it, until she made up her mind to it, after which all you feel is that it's uncommonly like flying with an occasional "bump." I have looked on in a submarine while it submerged in the disciplinary silence that is the rule on those occasions, and have stood by the coxswain as he worked the plane-controls and wondered, as I watched the tell-tale bubble and the pointer of the depth-gauge, why the submarine didn't make a little more fuss about it. A hunt for a submarine in a naval drifter when the wind began to freshen—yes! this was—

this was uncommonly like that. It was distinctly sensational. There was the same feeling in the pit of my stomach. Was I going to——? I looked over the side of the car. No, it would be too disgraceful. Another outrage upon an inoffensive civilian population.

I looked up through the ring into the open neck of the balloon and saw to the very top of the yellow interior—it seemed uncommonly empty; I studied the diagonals of rope-netting—the ropes seemed remarkably thin; I looked at the clothes-basket in which I and the other three stood—it was desperately small. I looked over the side, which reached no higher than my waist, and hastily withdrew my gaze. I looked at the coil of rope and the bags of sand at our feet and thought I had better sit down. I looked at my three companions and I thought I had better not. For all three of them were sitting nonchalantly on the edge of the basket like performing monkeys on a trapeze, their arms embracing the stays overhead. One of them was swinging a long leg over the side.

“It’s—it’s—a fine day,” I remarked, desperately.

“You’ll feel better in a moment,” said the Lieutenant pointedly. “It’s the gas, you know. It always affects one a bit at first.”

“I rather like gas,” I said, insincerely. “But I don’t like it quite so fresh from the meter.”

“There’s the river!” said the Lieutenant, whom I will call the pilot, for such he was. The other two, each wearing a single “pip” on their sleeves, were



"learning the ropes"—more particularly the valve rope.

I began to sit up and take notice. I looked over the side. I saw quadrangles, polygons, circles, also buildings leaning back at various angles much as a house appears in a badly focussed photograph.

"What a city to bomb!" I said involuntarily.

"Yes, isn't it?" said the pilot. "One always feels like that at first." So this was sensation Number Two.

"We did bomb her the other day," he resumed, "with sandbags. We'd got over Battersea and found ourselves suddenly coming down and likely to get a cold tub in the river. So I said 'Poop off some ballast' to a fellow who was learning the ropes. And before I knew what he was doing the silly fool had thrown out half a dozen bags—bodily. Of course, you should always shake out the contents slowly—like a sower going forth to sow. They landed like bombs bang on the skylight of a factory or workshop or something of the kind. I saw them go through. As we rose, I saw a crowd of people rushing out into the street like ants when you've kicked over an ant-heap. They must have thought it was a raid—broad daylight, too. The last I saw of them was a fat man shaking his fist at us."

We rose to about 800 feet and, as we ascended, the several noises of London were merged into one diapason hum, but out of it certain individual sounds retained their identity. They were cab

whistles. The whole city seemed alive with them, and one could hear each and every one.

"The whistling for a cab, the barking of a dog, the crowing of a cock," said the pilot in a literary style faintly reminiscent of the Book of Proverbs, "these are the last sounds one ceases to hear."

As we travelled over the north of London a dark mist blotted out the great city, but the white trail of smoke from railway engines showed through it clearly like streaks of cotton wool. It was raining below. The houses were invisible, but railway tracks gleamed through the mist with a curious effect as though we were gazing at their reflection in water. My destructive mood returned; I felt at that moment that I longed of all things to drop a bomb on that railway track. Which suggests that there's something very impersonal about bombing a city. I think of all lethal enterprises aerial bombing must be the least demoralizing to the character. You don't think in terms of men but of targets, especially structural targets.

Thus meditating I took out my cigarette case.

"Put it back, please," said the pilot hastily. "This isn't a smoking compartment." And he pointed overhead. There was nothing to see overhead except the delicate fabric of the balloon. And then I suddenly remembered that gas. I had no desire to go up to heaven—or down to earth—in a chariot of fire like the prophet. So I put it back.

"We haven't got any parachutes, you see," he explained apologetically. He spoke as though it were

the most natural thing in the world to take a leap out of a balloon with a closed umbrella that might never open. "If anything went wrong we should be done."

This interlude provoked him to a most unfeeling strain of reminiscence: "When I was learning flying at the W—— aërodrome—before I got my transfer to the Balloon Wing—there was a Russian chap, a learner. He went 'solo' and had a smash. They took up seven basketfuls. The difficulty was to bury him."

"Why not a sack?" I said. It sounds a callous conversation, but after all there's only one way of looking at it if you want to keep your nerve. You must laugh at it.

"Oh! I don't mean that. I mean the Burial Service, Rites of Holy Church and all that kind of thing. You see a Russian can't be properly buried without incense and no end of ritual. Well, they discovered a Russian priest in the uniform of a Canadian padre. At least he said he was. Perhaps he was anxious to oblige."

"But what about the incense?"

"I'm coming to that. Some bright youth said he'd look after that—which relieved the C.O. mightily as he was anxious to do the correct thing and impress the fellow countrymen of the deceased. Very important to keep on good terms with Russia just then, you know! . . . There was a great turn-out. The padre chanted away like a gramophone—and an N.C.O. duly lighted the sacred fire. Everybody sniffed. 'There's something very famil-

iar about that smell,' whispered the C.O. to me. 'Very familiar.' And he sniffed like a fox-terrier. 'I have it, sir,' I said, 'it's tobacco.' And so it was. The N.C.O. had also contributed some packets of wood-bines—like the widow's mite—which was rather decent of him when you come to think of it. And before the padre had finished I heard the sergeant say in a stentorian voice—'Collect the empties.'"

"It sounds a bit blasphemous," I remarked.

"Well, anyhow it was a good brand," said the pilot piously. "It was John Cotton."

The air seemed fresher. I looked at the aneroid; we had risen to 3,000 feet. The little red bubble in the statoscope—looking like a drop of coagulated blood or what the bacteriologists call a "smear"—which alternately solidified and liquefied, was crawling to the right; a sure sign that we were still ascending. Periodically one of the learners shook out the contents of a sandbag which descended like pepper. We had a steady southeast wind behind us, and we made out our course by observation of the roads and railways, checking them off on our map with the aid of a compass. The mist had cleared and I saw that we had left the city far behind us. We passed over woods and forests, their tops looking like a bed of asparagus; we sailed over growing crops of cereals, still green (it was early August), resembling, after the heavy storms, nothing so much as a cushion of green plush all rubbed the wrong way. "Barley," said the pilot. "And that's corn"; he pointed to a beaten field; I seemed to be looking

down at a rough plaster-cast in yellow clay. From far below us came a continuous hum and a large beetle appeared to be racing along the road at a tremendous speed.

"A motorcyclist," said the pilot. Again I felt that lethal instinct. To aim a bomb at a rapidly moving target—"short!"; "over!"; "hit!" Undeniably there was a sporting element in it.

"We're beating him," said the pilot. Yet our motion was imperceptible. We seemed to hang in the ether like a lonely planet.

We picked out one feature after another with the aid of our map. It was like doing a puzzle. Aërial observation has a fascination of its own. Introduce an element of *camouflage* into it, such as a screened battery, and you're back at the old nursery game of "Puzzle, Find the Woodman." There is much to be said for an aërial life. It's clean, which is more than you can say of the trenches, and invigorating. And if you get "knocked out"—well, it's all over in no time.

"It's about tea-time," said the pilot, and he pulled a rope. I wondered if it was to summon the waiter. Then he let go. There was a loud clap.

"The valve," he explained. It may have been, but more of that later on. A shower of tiny chalk-like crystals descended on us from the interior of the balloon, as though some chemical change was going on up there. Sometimes the valve-rope catches. Then you climb up inside the ring. At least you do if you can think of nothing better. Personally, I would rather not.

He pulled again at intervals, and one of the others paid out some 300 feet of drag-rope. As we descended, the rope touched the ground, and I watched the deep furrow it made in the grass—the aftermath of a hayfield. There was something uncanny about that rope. As we crossed a park of elms, having thrown out ballast to clear it, the rope rose from the ground, jumped the park fence, climbed the trees, and followed us across their fan-like tops like an animated thing. An enormous serpent seemed to be following us with diabolical persistency, hissing as it brushed the trees. We passed a gabled manor-house with tall chimneys and having cleared the park threw out the grapnel. By this time the smooth, full cheek of the balloon was beginning to crinkle and pucker like a rubicund countenance that has suddenly been stricken with senile decay. The pilot pulled the “rip” rope, opening a panel in the top of the balloon, and we came down with a bump.

We bounced, bumped, and bounced yet again. I found my head and shoulders caught in a snare of collapsing tackle with the balloon heaving like a wounded bird above us.

“Will you take tea or coffee, sir?”

I looked up, like a mouse caught in a trap, and I found myself staring into the face of a housemaid in cap and ribbons who was peering over the car in a state of wide-eyed excitement.

“I think we’ll get out first,” I said, struggling like Samson with seven green withes. I was not yet

feeling quite terrestrial and I had a vague idea that the waiter had answered the bell.

"Her ladyship saw you coming over the park," said the housemaid, by way of explanation. "And she sent me out and said, she said, 'If they're not Germans, ask them whether they'll have tea or coffee? But if they're Germans, send for the police at once.'"

"Be they Germans or bain't they?" I heard a masculine voice behind the housemaid. "Because if they be——"

"Put that gun down, you silly old ass," shouted the pilot, with his head in a noose. "What the hell do you damned well mean by——"

"They be English all right, Jarge," said another voice reassuringly. "Cassn't thee tell by the way they talk? That's good edicated English."

"Aye, 'tis, Jacob; depend on it, 'tis. No German Hun could talk such beautiful English, I'll take my gospel oath on it. The gentleman hev' a very proper gift of speaking."

A number of heads seemed suddenly to appear from nowhere in a circle around us. An aged man, holding a gun, looked over the side of the basket as though he were inspecting pigs in a netted cart.

"Beg your pardon, gentlemen," he said, in a tone in which he strove manfully to conceal his disappointment.

"Don't mention it," said our pilot, politely, as we extricated ourselves and clambered out of the basket. "Got a horse and cart anywhere? Good.

You men, there, you can help us flatten her out. No, no, like this. Start at each end and roll her up."

They all set to, kneading the collapsed balloon as they squeezed the gas out of her billowy folds.

"It do just seem like holding down a pig at killing-time," said one of them pensively. "What a girt chitterling it be!"

"It's the way mother makes dough," whispered one child to another, as she stood looking at us with a finger in her mouth. The men rolled the fabric over and over, crushing the pink clover and sulphur-coloured toad-flax beneath it. In a few minutes our balloon was packed up in a green canvas hold-all little bigger than a kit-bag, to the no small astonishment of those who had witnessed her descent. Canvas bag and basket were hoisted into the cart with directions to drive to H—, the nearest railway station, some six miles away.

"Thank you, madam, we'll take tea," said our pilot as we entered the house.

"I'm afraid it's a little strong," she said, graciously. "It's been waiting some time for you."

I remembered that the pilot had pulled a mysterious rope about "tea-time."

I'm not in the R.F.C. But I hear that their methods of aërial communication are very wonderful.

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## VIII

### A DAY ON THE SOMME

I WAS engaged in studying the scheme of mural decoration in my friend's room at the H.Q. of the ——th Corps. The furniture of the room was designed for us and not for ornament. It consisted of those ascetic deal tables, chairs, and chit-boxes which are turned out daily by the sappers with no other assistance than a hammer, a saw, and a plane. The south wall was covered by one of those *chefs d'œuvre* of the 1st Printing Co. R.E., in which the leading principle of composition is a gridiron and the mind of the artist seems obsessed by an enthusiasm for geometrical design which may be helpful, but is certainly monotonous. None the less, that map was an unfailing mental stimulant to my friend, Colonel X——, and he returned to its contemplation again and again with the same feeling of proprietary pride as that with which an art collector might return to the study of an Old Master. And as is the way with all works of art, the more one looked at it the more one saw in it. Not only did it show the position of every culvert, well, quarry, and ditch behind our lines, but it also bore upon it certain conventional signs indicating the exact location of our trench railways, supply dumps, and observation posts.

These things were freely and boldly figured in somewhat the same manner as the maps of the old voyagers and merchant adventurers body forth the fauna and flora of vague continents with elephants standing in lagoons and negroes reclining under palm trees. Certain coloured lines of an irregular tracery indicated the course to the nearest decimals of our front line and support trenches, and they were corrected to date. From all of which it may be inferred that the Germans, who are great collectors in their way, would have put their last shirt on the chances of adding that masterpiece to their collection.

I was still admiring the bold freedom of its nomenclature and weighing the uneasy significance of "Flea Trench," "Acid Drop Copse," and "Stink Alley," when my friend the Colonel put his forefinger on a point in one of the rectangles, and said: "That's Brigade H.Q.; Battalion H.Q. will be about—farther on; we'll leave the car behind the wood." The point may be described, with deliberate ambiguity, as A.2.c.b.3—to use the masonic language of operation orders.

"You can leave that behind," said X—, pointing to my revolver, a Mark VI Webley, which is a pretty heavy weapon. "It isn't as if we are going up by night, and in any case we shall have a guide. Besides, it'll be heavy going and we must travel light when we get beyond that obscene wood. But you'd better take one of these." And he handed me a shrapnel helmet.

"Also this nose-bag. It's the new pattern." I took the canvas bag and slung it over my right shoulder. It contained one of the new gas masks known colloquially as "emus"; they give the wearer the appearance of a passionate attachment to a baby's feeding-bottle. I have heard a blunt soldier describe them as "slinging your guts outside"; they certainly do suggest that the wearer has only remembered at the last moment to take his alimentary canal with him. The bag also contained a field-dressing and some morphia tablets.

Thus equipped we entered our car, taking two other officers with us, one of whom beguiled our journey by telling us a story of a certain divisional commander and a gas helmet.

It was a good tale, and some day, with God's grace, I will tell it.

Our car was taking us through undulating country of chalk and gravel with harebells and yellow toad-flax still in bloom; the slopes of the downs were scarped with those traces of primitive husbandry which in the south of England are known as "lynchets." The shocks of corn were still bivouacked among the stubble, but the sheaves were black with rain. Here and there a solitary peasant was driving the plough, and the nodding horses left a gleaming ripple of brown earth behind them. A slight mist was breaking into diaphanous wreaths under the morning sun and the air was full of an autumnal softness. Small parties of men in dust-coloured uniforms, with low flat heads, projecting ears, and

under-hung mouths, passed us at intervals. A peasant paused at his husbandry, and, regarding them, spat upon the ground. They were German prisoners.

As we approached F—— we were caught up into the tide of war, an interminable procession of mounted men, limbers, lorries, and columns of infantry. One has the impression of some gigantic powerhouse sending out steams of energy and, in that great current of men, horses, and guns, we lost all sense of our own identity. And as we mounted the hill ahead of us where four or five other roads met our own at acute angles, we could see four or five processions converging upon our own, the tail of each procession fading away into the distance and the mounted men diminishing into small black objects until it seemed as though all the ant-heaps in the world were in migration. The nearer we approached the larger the figures became until they resolved themselves into thousands upon thousands of mounted men, each man carrying panniers of shells on either side of his saddle, as though the baskets were huge holsters. And before and behind the horsemen came and went batteries in column of route, their teams straining at the traces as the wheels sank into the mud and their drivers raising their short whips to the salute as we passed. Upon the heels of the guns followed huge motor-lorries. The multitude and variety of heraldic symbols upon the tail-boards of those lorries told me that nothing less than an army was on the move, for each division,

and each supply column within a division, has its own device. Here was the fish, the butterfly, the cat within the circle, the greyhound rampant, the thistle, the shamrock, the three legs, and the inverted horseshoe. As all these processions converged upon the cross-roads it seemed as if nothing but inextricable confusion awaited us. But at the meeting of the ways was a road control of the M.P., and the columns of men and horses and guns writhed in and out with the rhythm of gun-teams in a musical ride and so went their appointed ways.

On the sky-line funnels of black smoke uprose from the earth, expanded into voluminous bouquets, and then disappeared. They were German 8-inch shells. As we turned sharply to the left in their direction we passed our own "heavies," each within a stone's throw of the next, and with not so much as a fig-leaf to hide their nakedness, firing at a few paces over our heads—we felt the shock as we passed.

"They might be firing salutes in Hyde Park," said the Colonel contemplatively, "for all the trouble they take to hide their light under a bushel. The fact is the Hun has given up spotting. His flying men never come over here for a change of air now. Our own fellows drop cards on 'em every day, but they never return the calls. Beastly impolite, I call it. There's the wood; let's get out."

He pointed to what looked like a row of gibbets on the sky-line about a mile away—things that looked like everything but a tree: gaunt, twisted and bare, and resembling not so much a wood as a scaffolding

in collapse. To reach it we had to pass on foot through what had once been a village, but was now merely a muddy waste with here and there a patch of brick and stone embedded in the mud. There was not so much as a gable-end left standing, and I saw nothing to convince me that the place had ever contained a living thing except a woman's red flannel petticoat trampled in the mud, a child's wax doll, and the leg of a dead German projecting from the wall of a communication trench. Truly our guns grind exceeding small.

We entered the wood, and as we entered it, we seemed to leave all life behind us. Whether it was one of those tricks of acoustics by which the configuration of the ground or the relative density of the atmosphere creates a "pocket" I know not, but once in that wood we seemed as isolated from all auditory intercourse as a signaller whose wires are suddenly cut. And we were quite alone. We knew the guns were speaking, for behind us we could see orange flashes of flame and in front of us brooding black clouds. But in the wood itself there was, or seemed to be, a deep and sepulchral silence. It was—or had been—a wood of fir and beech. I recognized the trees by their trunks as an anatomist might recognize some extinct mammal by a bone, for these were mere skeletons of trees to which not one leaf adhered. Some were cut clean at the base as though by a woodman's saw; others were rudely pollarded at the top; many were shivered as by a blast of lightning. It was October, and in the valleys below the

beeches and poplars were still in full leaf; yet in this stricken wood not a leaf nor a blade of grass nor even a patch of moss appeared. Our progress was slow and painful, for the ground was scooped and moulded into circular pits of a surprising symmetry, so close that one could leap from one to the other, and so deep that they reached to our shoulders as we stumbled into them. They were shell-holes, and from each of them as we slid into it there arose an angry hum, swelling into a diapason as clouds of large black flies rose in agitation. They rose from shrapnel helmets, and as they rose I saw that these helmets, upturned like a pudding-basin, were full to the brim and dreadful to look upon. The wood was a shambles: dark crimson masses of pulp lay on all sides of us, and what at first sight looked like sea-shells—white concave objects half embedded in the ground, their gleaming surface still covered with a thin integument of blue and red veins. They were skulls.

We groped our way amid an immense litter of broken rifles, bayonets, kit, pickaxes, spades, gas-masks, field-dressings, Lewis gun cylinders, Mills bombs, and cotton wool, with here and there a packet of cigarettes. A peculiar sickly smell suffused the wood.

"Fifty thousand dead here, I should think," said the Colonel meditatively as we dropped with a splash into a disused communication trench. "Don't lose sight of me whatever you do or we may never find each other again." And we wormed our way

between the sticky walls of the trench, brushing against ghastly objects and obscene which protruded like the roots of a tree.

The soft porous mud clung to our boots like treacle, and we were glad when the trench debouched upon the open ground. Our way to Brigade H.Q. lay across a slope covered with strands of rusty field telephones and pitted with shell-holes. As we came in view of a low ridge, some six feet high, khaki-clad figures gradually detached themselves from the brown background and the holes of the Brigade dug-out appeared.

At about a hundred yards distance from our objective I was surprised to see a khaki-clad figure crouching in one of the shell-holes with his rifle in his left hand and gazing fixedly toward the ridge. One does not usually do outpost-duty in the rear. As we came up to him I turned to ask him what he was doing there, but as I opened my lips to speak I saw that his body was strangely rigid, the hair under his helmet thick with flies, and his ears black as ebony. He was dead.

The brigadier greeted us at the entrance of the dug-out, where sat a sapper under a tarpaulin with the receiver of a telephone at his ear and a kitten between his feet. "You want to get on to Battalion H.Q.? Right, you'll want a guide. Here, can you read a map?" he added, as he turned to a man wearing the blue and white brassard of the signallers.

"No, zur, but I knows the way."

I knew that accent, and I turned to look at the



speaker. He was a well-built youth, with a broad, homely face, honest gray eyes, straw-coloured hair, and a large, good-natured mouth. He carried as his only weapon a long staff about five feet in length. You can—you could—see many such as he keeping sheep in Pewsey Vale. My surmise turned out to be correct—we came from the same county and from that moment my guide became colloquial. He was shy at first, which was not surprising, for he was a private and I was a "brass hat." But that wore off, as you shall hear.

We topped the ridge, the signaller doing a pole-jump and stopping to give me a hand. A sequence of H.E. shells were falling again and again in a cloud of earth and black smoke upon a corner of a road about four hundred yards to our left, while at something the same distance on our right 5.9 "universals" were bursting into low clouds of snow-white fleece. The ground we were crossing was a perfect snare of wire, and as I studied my steps I noticed that the clay in the shell-holes we skirted was black and the clods newly turned. The Colonel called over his shoulder, "Watch me, and do as I do."

"There's a girt big church over there, zur," our guide remarked to me confidentially, as he pointed with his staff at a spire peeping out between the trees on a wooded ridge about four miles to our left. "It be a mortal big——"

There was a sibilant hiss in the air ahead of us. The Colonel had disappeared. The next moment I saw him lying flat on the earth a few yards in front

of me and pulling his helmet, which hitherto he had carried in his hand like a bucket, over the nape of his neck. I dropped, and as I heard a dull thud and the patter of falling stuff all around me I was disagreeably conscious of having the largest spine of all vertebrate beings. "It be as big as Zaulsbury Cathedral, zur, I do think." . . . I looked up from under my shrapnel helmet as a tortoise looks out from under its shell and saw the signaller looking down at me. He had remained upright and had never moved. I saw the Colonel rising to his feet. The Colonel now broke into a quick trot. He has a cool head—incidentally he's a V.C.—and never runs without a purpose. What is more, he knows the whole octave of shell-music and the compass of all the diabolical instruments that produce its weird harmonies. Wherefore, when he ran I ran. The air overhead was now producing the strangest orchestral effects, in which were blended sounds like the crack of gigantic whips, the pulsations of enormous wings, the screams of frightened birds, and, more often than not, a reptilian hiss.

"They do say as Zaulsbury spire be the girtest spire in Hengland," continued the signaller imper- turbably, "parson told I so. . . . It be all right, zur," he added after a pause, as he waited for me to rise again, my attention having been diverted by the Colonel again prostrating himself like a Moslem in prayer. The Colonel's posture was sacred, but his language was profane. "He hev only caught his foot in a wire, zur," my guide added with-

out the suspicion of a smile, as I rose to my feet. "Churches do seem to come natural like to me. My feyther he be sexton. He be a hancient man and zays as he hev a buried the whole parish in his time. The only thing that do worrit 'un is that he won't be able to bury hissself when 'a turns up his toes. He can't a-bear the idea of being buried by zum-m'un else. It do make 'un quite low-spirited at times. But he be getting childish. He do worry about my not getting Christian burial out here. Not that he ain't a very good feyther to me," he added apologetically, "but you see, zur, it be his profession. But I tell 'un 'what mun be mun be.' . . . And anyhow I ain't dead yet," he added cheerfully as a shell hissed overhead. "This be the communication trench. It be all we 'ave at present." He spoke like a host apologizing for an indifferent hospitality.

It was barely eighteen inches wide, it was not more than five feet deep, and it was not traversed. It had been hurriedly thrown up, for we had only just captured the ground. As I looked over it to my left I saw four figures marching in a direction parallel with our own, but toward our rear. They were marching over the open ground as steadily as if they were doing stretcher drill in a training camp. As they drew nearer I saw that they bore a stretcher high upon their shoulders; the feet of the patient were bare except for the white bandages, the loose ends of which fluttered in the air.

"That poor chap's got it bad," said the signaller

as he drew my attention to the red label. "And 'ere be the walking cases," he added as men in twos and threes with white labels depending from their buttonholes began to squeeze past us, some of them very pale, and one, whose lips were blue with cyanosis and his face livid, muttering with trance-like repetitions in a kind of soliloquy, "Been buried three times this morning—three times I been buried—it's me chest."

"That fellow looks pretty bad," I remarked over my shoulder to the signaller. I got no answer. I looked back. The signaller had dropped behind; he was loosing the straps and braces of the man with the blue lips. "They do hinder 'spiratory haction; it be the fust thing to do, zur," he said to me a moment later as he panted after me, lifting his feet in the mud.

We found the Battalion H.Q. in a dark dug-out. It had no boarding, merely a few pit-props to hold up the roof; the floor and the walls were of the earth earthy. The O.C., with three days' growth of beard and a huge and indecent hole in his breeches, sat on an oil-tin studying a trench-map with the aid of a pungent tallow "dip" stuck in a bottle. My friend discussed with him the strengthening of the position; there was talk of strong posts and saps and how to consolidate.

"Yes, it's pretty lively just now," said the O.C. to us. "I lost ten per cent. of my stretcher-bearers yesterday."

I left the O.C. and my friend engaged over the map

in that dark hole, like two conspirators, and dragged my feet along the trench, carrying about three pounds of ochreous mud upon each of them. The men not on lookout duty were sitting down in the mud stolidly eating bully beef as though it were an occupation rather than a meal. But as I elbowed my way round a traverse I hear the cheerful sound of animated chatter and loud laughter. The sound is not so common in the trenches as to be unnoticeable. It is only in the music-halls that life in the trenches appears to be one uproarious farce. That is a stage convention the imperiousness of which all soldiers cheerfully acknowledge. It would never do to allow the civilian to feel depressed.

"He-he-he!" "Haw-Haw-haw. It do do a bloke good to have the likes of you to talk to," said one of these voices. "Whose 'elmet did you say it was, mate?" chuckled another. "Blimey, if the orficer 'ad a pinched mine, wouldn't I 'ave copped it? Not arf! Why I uses mine ter. . . ." (The speaker lowered his voice to a whisper and I could not hear the rest.) "Well, so long, young feller, and thanks for the Woodbines." As I came round the traverse I ran into the signaller.

"I hope you and the Colonel ain't been kep' waiting, zur. It do cheer the chaps up to talk to 'em a bit and pass the time o' day."

It never seemed to occur to him that he ran greater risks than they. Every day he was in the habit of crossing the ground between Brigade H.Q. and the first-line trenches, and everyone knows that, except

when the enemy are about to attack, such ground is infinitely more unhealthy than the front line itself.

As I rejoined the Colonel at the entrance of the Battalion dug-out I heard a low droning hum overhead and instantly every face in the trench was turned skyward. One of our biplanes was returning from her reconnaissance, flying straight as a crow. A number of woolly skeins, black as ink, suddenly appeared one after the other around her and she changed her course to a series of giddy spirals, like a snipe. Every eye followed her. "Time to get back," said the Colonel, "we'll do the whole way back across the open. It's quicker. That communication trench was a delusion and a snare. It doubles the time without halving the risks. We're within machine-gun range, of course, but I doubt if the Hun'll think it worth while." And without another word he clambered out of the trench.

The signaller and I followed. As we gained the open a small black shell about six inches long fell vertically and without noise about five yards in front of me, as the hum of the aëroplane grew more distinct. "A dud," said the Colonel dispassionately, "they'll never hit her," and we hurried on.

"It do knock the stuffing out of a chap, zur, when he do see what warfare really is," ruminated my guide. "There ain't much room for pride and vain-glory out here. And it do seem as though one becomes like a little 'un again, a hearing of the collects and the catechism. Them things do kind o' come back to one. Every marning as I goes over the top

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of the ridge I thinks o' them words, 'Defend us thy humble servants.'"

His speech was good homespun English; he often spoke dialect but never slang—and between the two there is all the difference in the world. It was a well of English undefiled in which there were no impurities. He was an unlettered man and his speech had no literary quality, but he used naturally and unaffectedly the diction of the Bible, for it was the only diction he knew. And there is none better. There are combes and uplands in Wiltshire in which men still talk as he talked, and I recognized his speech and felt as I walked something of the exhilaration of the air off the Wiltshire chalk. Also that he and I were of the same folk.

All this time his eyes were always on duty, and now and again he called to the Colonel, "Bear to the right, zur"—"Mind thuck maze o' wire, zur." The Colonel had a theory, which was largely sound, that if you have to go through a "strafing" the simplest and safest plan is to get through it as quickly as possible. He did not fear shells—barring the signaller, I think he is about the most fearless man I know—but he respected them. His trained ear seemed to have the most extraordinary acoustic properties, and to watch him waiting for an 8-inch shell to burst was like watching a setter point. My throat was parched and there was a painful stitch in my side; also at times I felt as if I had been beaten all over. I was feeling something of the same fear as I felt when I first flew over London in a Maurice

Farman and we occasionally got into a "pocket" and dropped like a stone only to pull up with a sudden luxurious security and find ourselves "as you were." It was the same after each explosion; the feeling of relief was only equalled by the tension which had preceded it. And always there was an exultant feeling that we had scored again. It was absurdly like a game.

Meanwhile the signaller continued to talk, and the more vigorous the strafing the more animated he became, until I found myself elaborating a theory of sympathetic connection, which I am sure is totally devoid of scientific support, between brain-waves and shell trajectories. As we glanced toward our right at the churchyard of G— where the Hun shells were busy at their ghoulish task, his talk took a fresh direction. It was occasionally interrupted, but never seriously disturbed, by the necessity of lying flat in the mud, nor was it discountenanced by the fact that I now rarely returned any answer, my whole attention being earnestly concentrated on the Colonel in front whose premonitory symptoms had an almost hypnotic effect upon me. But the signaller never lost the thread of his discourse.

" . . . It do seem to I as the ancient Britons were god-fearing men in a manner of speakin' . . . though parson do call 'em heathens as worshipped graven images. They did some tidy burying in them barrows up on the Downs, which do seem a Christian thing to do—I allers buries a poor chap if I 'as time and an entrenching tool. . . .

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Do seem to lie easier like," he added, as we passed a grave in the open with a wooden cross. "I ain't up in the burial service like feyther, what can say it backward, but I do say the Lord's Prayer as the next best thing. D'you think it matters, zur?"

But by this time we had gained the ridge and the comparative security (it was very comparative) of Brigade H.Q. Our way back was now clear and our guide's task was done. He abruptly ceased to talk and his whole bearing changed. He and I were no longer two wayfaring West-country men but private and officer, and he stood sharply at attention. He was quite incapable of presumption. Had his friendly musings been designed to beguile my attention from the dangers which beset us or were they merely the naïve speculations of a mind as simple as it was brave? I shall never know.

The signaller saluted us and my superior officer returned his salute. He stood looking after us, holding his stake as though it were a quarter-staff; the sun fell upon his cheerful, homely face and glinted on the brass letters of his shoulder straps. There came into my mind that feeling of perplexed recognition which sometimes attends the casual encounters of life. Surely, I speculated, I had met him somewhere before. And in a flash I remembered the first book I had ever read. I saw once again the Hill Difficulty and the Ground of Enchantment, the thunderbolt that smote Mr. Not-right, and the

snare, pits, traps, and gins over which the stout-hearted guide took the pilgrims with fortifying discourse. And then I knew that I had met our signaller before.

His name was Mr. Greatheart.

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## IX

### THE HUSBANDMEN

THE Musketry Inspection Officer of a Home Command was sitting in his room at Headquarters turning over a file of that *feuilleton* literature with which the War Office thoughtfully beguiles the little leisure we have by providing us with material for light reading. Of the making of Army Council Instructions there is no end, and much learning of them hath made many a "brass hat" mad. The room in which the officer sat was superbly appointed. It contained a deal table with an improvised penholder of corrugated brown paper, a pad of fawn-coloured paper such as grocers use to wrap up Demerara sugar and the Stationery Department issues for writing inter-departmental "chits," a copy of the Army List, two uncomfortable chairs, and a telephone.

The scheme of mural decoration was the harvest of a dutiful eye. Over the mantelpiece was a diagram of the Lewis machine-gun, resembling in its structural complication a naval architect's plan of a submarine. It was flanked by a list of landscape targets, a table of the number of men under training for drafts, a roll of range superintendents, and the plan of a Solano target. These artistic efforts were

all in black and white, but a touch of colour was afforded by a map of rifle and field-firing ranges picked out in violet ink, and a large-scale ordnance map showing the rifle ranges on a vast tableland which has been the training ground of troops ever since primitive man hammered out his arrowheads of flint and the Roman Legionary practised the throw of his javelin. On that ordnance map parallelograms of yellow marked the location of the classification ranges with their "danger areas," while similar geometrical designs in drab showed the field-firing ranges, each range within the parallelogram being marked in blocks.

It was the room of a man whose only distraction was his work—and a tin of tobacco.

The officer was turning over an A.C.I. as to the use of drill purpose and emergency rifles, when the telephone rang at his elbow. He took down the receiver.

"Who are you?"

"Range-warden of No. 27, sir. I rang up to ask if I can change from G range to A and B."

"That's for the Musketry Officer. Ask him."

He put back the receiver and resettled himself to his work when the telephone rang again.

"Damn it!" said the officer wearily, "I might as well be in R.E. Signals as a staff-officer third grade. Well, what is it? Who are you? . . . John Leighfield of Littlecote Farm! I'm afraid it doesn't convey anything to me, Mr. Leighfield. . . . Farm six hundred acres, do you? I congratulate

you—I wish I did. . . . Short of labour? Yes, so am I. . . . Oh! I see. Well, you must apply to the C.O. of the nearest Depot. He'll supply you with men; there's a new Army Council instruction to that effect. . . . What? suspend field-firing for fourteen days! It can't be done. There's a war on. Where are you situated? . . . Lydiard Deverill? Wait a minute."

He put the receiver on the table and rose and studied the map. Then he returned to the telephone.

"We'll give you six days. Right oh! Good-bye."

He rang off. Then he returned to the map and stuck a small flag in one of the parallelograms.

The sun was at its meridian and the foreheads of the toilers of the field, stooping among the bronze-coloured grain, glistened with sweat. The wheatfield was bordered with a hedge wreathed with bryony like a vine, and the field itself was brilliant with a pageantry of purples, blues, reds, and golden tints, where knapweed, cornflowers, poppies, and yellow ox-eye gleamed among the yellow stalks. The grain drooped with a "swan's neck"—a sure sign that the wheat was ripe. Some days before, the farmer, having anxiously considered the heavens, had surveyed his ten-acre field and sampled the ears of wheat, plucking a stalk here and there, and rubbing the grain between the palms of his hands like two millstones, to test its quality, for he feared it might be milky in the ear or stained by the recent

rains. He had found the grain hard and firm; a day or two more and it would shed itself. The experiment was decisive, and without further hesitation he had given orders for the field to be "opened" by hand with the bagging-hook, to cut a track for the "binder."

The workers were stooping to their task, each holding the wheat back and away from him with his left hand while he cut in with his right. The man nearest the hedge, a sinewy labourer of middle age, named Daniel Newth, having progressed a few yards and left the cut grain standing, now worked back again, and using his right foot as a lever, he rolled the wheat into a sheaf. Plucking a few straws from the sheaf he knotted the ears together, and using them as a string he tied the sheaf round the "waist." Then he rose to his feet and mopped his brow with a red handkerchief decorated with large white spots.

"Time to eat our vittles, neighbours," he said, stretching his back. "And I could do with a drap in my innards—I'm mortal dry."

A number of heads rose from among the corn like hares popping out of their "form"; the women adjusted their sun-bonnets and shook their skirts; the men stretched their arms. Among the latter were three soldiers in regulation shirts, breeches, and puttees, who, as they stood upright, performed, by way of easing their muscles, a variety of military exercises in which an Army Instructor would have recognized a satisfactory reproduction of the

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“Rest,” “Bend,” and “Stretch” positions. A moment later the head of a fourth soldier appeared in close juxtaposition to that of a girl in a lilac sun-bonnet. The owner of the sun-bonnet was flushed with a glow which may have been due to the heat of the sun, but may also have had a more emotional origin. A coil of auburn hair had slipped from under the flap of her bonnet and hung distractingly on the nape of her white neck, and as she rose she surreptitiously put it up.

The little party moved to the shade of an elm beside the hedge and sat down to their meal. One of the women produced a bottle of “small beer”—a cottage brew of nettle, clytes, dandelion, and other herbs, more cooling than invigorating—and poured it into a cup. The man who had spoken uncorked a large jar of yellow earthenware, and handed it to an old man at his side, who, holding it unsteadily with both hands, elevated it to a horizontal position and drank with earnest concentration. The other men watched him with a look of studied disinterestedness. He then wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and passed the vessel to his neighbour, the jar circulating among the members of the group like a loving cup.

“It be a neighbourly way of drinking—like Holy Communion,” said the old man, “but I could do with a half-pint mug. It don’t get no head on it.”

He was an old man of fourscore and upward, and his years carried with them the prerogatives which age always commands in a rural community domi-

nated by oral tradition. His knuckles were shiny and swollen with rheumatism, his arms brown as a kippered herring and mottled, and the skin on each side of his neck hung in loose folds—a chronology of age as unmistakable as the rings on a cow's horns. His blue eyes had a lustreless watery look, and when he laughed—which he did with difficulty, for his maxillary muscles had lost their flexibility—the wrinkles round his eyes were multiplied till they added another ten years to his face; his nose drooped toward his chin, and his nut-cracker jaws revealed, as they parted, a solitary tooth which hung at the entrance of his mouth like a stalactite in a cavern. But he was wise with the wisdom of his years, was learned in a homely meteorology and in agrarian history, and could tell you the exact year in which the bagging-hook gave way to the binder and the scythe to the mowing machine as instruments of husbandry. He spoke a dialect which was pure Anglo-Saxon, enriched by the opulent vocabulary of the Scriptures and the Book of Common Prayer, although he could neither read nor write. Also he had that dignity of manner which is the reward of a placid old age, and of a life spent in the calm, unhurried tillage of the soil.

For some minutes the party ate contemplatively and no one spoke, until the old man's eye alighted on the wooden leg of William Tuck, late of the Wiltshire Regiment, now discharged under the King's Regulations from His Majesty's Army as permanently disabled.



"A tidy piece of carpentry, that leg o' yourn, William Tuck," said the old man.

"It be that," replied William Tuck, contemplating his anatomy with a feeling of distinction. "But it be strange at first, very strange it be. D'ye know, neighbours, when I gets a touch o' rheumatics in me thigh I can feel it below the knee in the leg as isn't theer."

They pondered this statement in silence, until the old man, fixing William Tuck with his eye, put a question.

"That's a ghostly leg to have, a ghostly leg it be. Say, young William, did they give that leg o' yourn Christian burial in France?"

"No! they've no time for the likes of that."

"Then take my word for it, William Tuck," said the old man solemnly, "that lonely leg o' yourn be a haunting ye. If thee doesn't write to Government asking for that mournful leg o' yourn to be buried with th' sacraments of Holy Church, that leg'll haunt thee to thy dying day. Thee'll have to account for him at Judgment Day to thy Creator, seeing as He made thee in his own image."

At this the whole party stared at William Tuck as though shocked by his callous want of natural feeling toward the departed member, and, conscious of their scrutiny, he attempted to divert the conversation. "I done my bit anyhow," he said, with some irrelevance, "which is more than Jacob Fox hev done," he added as he caught the eye of that delinquent fixed upon him with a look of horrified fascination.

"Shame on ye, William Tuck," said the old man magisterially. "How can ye cast stones at that poor natural? Jacob Fox, tell the folk what the medical gentleman said to 'ee. Speak the truth, young feller, and shame the devil."

Jacob—an anæmic-looking youth who had a way of moving his hands uncertainly as though they did not belong to him—now finding himself the centre of attention, blushed with nervous trepidation. He had a prominent Adam's apple in his long neck which resembled the "bubble" in the clinometer of a field gun in being a kind of index of his equilibrium, so that whenever he was about to speak in company it could be seen to wobble agitatedly through his skin. When, after some ineffectual attempts of its owner to swallow it, it returned to the horizontal, Jacob found speech.

"I went into a room—a girt room as big as Farmer Leighfield's barn, and I zeed a lot of young fellers there all standing naked wi'out so much as a fig-leaf between 'em, and I thought as it was the Judgment Day. And there was a officer gentleman as was a pinching 'em and feeling 'em as though they were fat ewes in a pen on market day and 'e a gwine to buy 'em. And a soldier called out my name and I say: 'Here, begging your pardon, sir'; and the officer gentleman says: 'Jump that form!' and I jumps 'en. Then he says: 'Hop on your right foot', and I hops. Then he says: 'Open your mouth', and I opens it. And he looks at my teeth and I says: 'I be twenty-two, please sir,' seeing

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as I thought he was counting my years of wisdom in my mouth like a hoss. And he looks at me with eyes like a sparrer-hawk's and laughs, and then he holds a thing like a cider-funnel to my chest and says: 'Say Ah', and I says 'Ah-h' so be as if we were in church, and he listens with his head on one side to the works of Nature in my innards as though I was a watch and he wanted to see if I was still a-going. I felt mortal afeard. I do b'lieve, neighbours," added Jacob Fox, looking round with homeless eyes, "as that man could read a body's unlawful thoughts like the Almighty—so I tried to think of the Lord's Prayer whereby he might not catch me in carnal meditations."

"A pious thing to do, and prudent, Jacob," said the old man approvingly, "though I never could mind anything but the 'Churching of Women' when I tries to repeat them holy things."

"And when I'd got to 'Thy Kingdom come' he took away his weapon and began to tap all the bones in my chest, one after t'other, same as if he was a bum-bailiff taking a hinventory, to see if they were all there. And I says: 'Begging your pardon, sir, I might not have the lawful number, seeing as I was born two months afore I was expected in the world.'"

"Aye, that you was, Jacob Fox, I do well remember it, and a mortal tribulation you was to your poor mother. It was nigh six months afore she wur churched."

"And the medical gentleman says: 'What's that, my man?'—sharp, like that—and I says:

'Yes, sir, my mother and the neighbours do say that that was the reason why I get the falling sickness and am so afflicted in my intellects.' And then he looks at me hard and questions me. 'Cross your legs', he says, and I crossed 'em and he fetched me a clout on the knee-cap. Yes, that ah did. Lordy, the liberties that man did take with my person, neighbours, ye would never believe. And at last he writes something on a piece of paper and the soldjer with the stripes says: 'We shan't want you, my man'; and he gives me a paper."

"And was that all he said, Jacob Fox?"

"Yes, it were. But I did hear him say as I was a wonderful chap," Jacob added proudly. "He said as I was the most half-wittedest fellow as ever he'd zeed."

"Aye! that you be," said the patriarch, looking round for approval as though this were a compliment paid to the whole parish. "Yes, we do all know as you be wonderfully half-witted."

At this they all stared at Jacob Fox with a kind of communal pride, whereat Jacob blushed confusedly, and, astonished at having held the centre of the stage so long, retired hurriedly into the wings, taking refuge behind the broad back of Daniel Newth, the patriarch's son, a hale youth of about fifty-five, who in his father's opinion was still merely adolescent.

"It do mind me of Scriptures," said the old man reflectively, "this recruiting do. One shall be taken and t'other shall be left. It do all seem like

the Last Day, it do. It were never like this before. I mind how they'd 'list fellers in the old days—the recruiting sergeant 'ud come round with his cap full o' ribbons and talk pleasant like about the wonderful life a soldjer 'd hev in foreign parts. Lawk-a-massey! how that feller could talk—like a parson—aw could make ye feel as proud as Lucifer telling ye how His Majesty had taken a partic'ler fancy to ye as a likely young feller to stand before kings and golden thrones. He got hold of poor Jarge Kibblewhite that way and giv 'en three ribbons of many colours like Joseph's coat—poor Jarge as was killed at the Battle of Alma. That recruiting sergeant used to come round at hiring-fair, Lady Day and Michaelmas he come round, and if he'd see a likely looking young carter with the whipcord plaited round his hat he'd go up to 'en and charm the soul out of 'en like witchcraft."

"D'you remember the Crimea?" asked one of the soldiers.

"Ah, that I do, young feller. I remember a mint o' things afore you was conceived in your mother's womb. I be an old man, the oldest man in the parish, bain't I, neighbours?"

"Yes, grandf'er, that you be. You be a terribly ancient old man."

"Yes, I be. I've a-buried three wives. And I've never once been on the parish. Yes, I do mind the Crimeer. There was thirteen men went from this parish and all on 'em passed save one. It was just after our Tontine club had its 'break-

up,' and we walking two and two with red staves to the 'Goat and Compasses.' All of 'em was in the Wiltshires except Jude Teagle as joined the Holy Boys, the same regiment as sold their Prayer-Books for playing-cards, which was a sinful thing to do. It was a terrible big battle—the Battle of Alma. I do mind as we had a song at harvest home that year after we'd carried the last load.

“There's old Jacky Rooshian  
And a million o' men.  
And there's poor John Bull  
W:" dree score and ten.

“I do forget the rest. They shot down our men like sparrers till we scaled the hill, and then they run like flocks o' sheep away from 'em—they do say as it's the same now—and Old Boney, who was their head man, as was brought up to see 'em drive us into the sea, says, 'Men, we're beaten.' And beaten they was.”

“Why didn't you do your bit along with them?” said one of the soldiers mischievously. “You must have been a tidy young feller,” he added, as he gazed with a wink of his eye at the bony figure of the ancient man gnarled, like an old oak.

“Young feller,” said the old man solemnly, “I was a married man wi' dree childer, and the quartern loaf cost a shillin' and more. How'd I find vittles for 'em? There warn't no separation allowances in those days, there warn't, and no sol-

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diers' wives living on the fat of the land an' love-childer a-getting it too same as if they was born in lawful wedlock. No, that there warn't. But I hev attested now and be ready to come up when called upon if the King be so minded."

At this all four soldiers laughed incredulously.

"It be true, I'll take a gospel oath on it," said the old man's son. "It was when they had bills stuck up on the school by Lord Derby, calling on His Majesty's subjects to attest like men. And afore we knowed what he was gwine to do, feyther goes up to squire and says: 'I be come to attest, sir, and do my bit against those ungodly men.' And squire says: 'You're too old, Jarge, you're an old ancient man.' And feyther comes home and sits in chimibly and never a word says 'e to any on us. And he won't touch bite or sup, and sits there a-fretting and won't speak to any one, as though he were turned into a pillar of salt. And we calls in the doctor as examined him and couldn't find nothing wrong with 'un, and he says 'E's got summat on his mind.' And at last he gets it out on 'en, and feyther tells 'en as squire says he be too old and the grasshopper's a burden and desire do fail—and feyther says as he'll never go out of the house again except veet voremest, and it ain't no good hoeing and hedge-cutting for squire, for if he be too old for a soldjer 'e be too old for labour at a shillin' a day, and 'e don't want no charity. And squire, when he heerd it, sent for feyther and—you tell 'em what squire said, feyther."

The old man wiped his forehead with trembling hands.

"'E said to me, 'e said: 'Jarge, I made a mistake, I did. We'll put you in group one hundred and dirty dree—to be called up if so be required.' And he give I two shillin' and nine-pence and said: 'It's the King's money, Jarge, and I congratulate you. You're a credit to the parish and an hexample to the younger men.'"

"Aye, that you be, grandf'er," chorused his fellow-parishioners.

"Well done, old sport," said the soldier who had interrogated him, "we'd sooner have you in the battalion than any of those cold-footed, conscientious objectors any day. Lord love me, we would."

"We would that," said another. "We'll make you our mascot."

"Mascot," said the old man, "what be that?"

"Pride o' the reg'ment," replied the soldier laconically. "We've got a bull-dog. I guess you're one of the same breed."

The old man ignored the compliment. "This war be a deep and fearful thing, neighbours," he said solemnly. "When I did last hear parson read the Commination Service I did think of that there Kayser at the Last Day, when the sea gives up its dead, and all the drowned babes and sucklings and the women with child and the poor chaps that hev died in torment a-calling on their mothers do rise up and point the finger of accusation at 'em and do say: 'Thou art the man!' I tell ye it do make my old



bones like water when I think of the wrath of the Almighty and what He hev in store for that misbegotten man."

"True, most true, and well-spoken, Jarge. It were better a mill-stone were hung round that man's neck, it were—but 'tis time to put these sheaves up, sonnies."

They rose to their feet.

"Now, my lads," said Daniel Newth tutorially to the four soldiers, "you just bide a bit and zee how I does it."

He took two sheaves and embracing one maternally in each arm he stood them upright upon the soil so as to get the butts about a yard apart. He then sloped them toward one another so that they made an isosceles triangle with the ground. This done he took a second couple and placed them against the first, but not quite parallel, so that they stood at an angle to it, stacked together like four rifles. "It makes 'em stand easier," he explained, "and packs the ears better." This done the shock was complete.

"Now my lads, ye zees as I've a placed 'em in fours. That's so as they'll get more air and dry quicker, though the sheaf to the north won't get much sun. Some folks shocks em lengthways in sixes with the ridge running north and south. Well, that's to get the best of the sun on 'em and to make 'em stand against the wind better. But they don't dry so well that way."

"It's like filling sandbags and consolidating," said

one of the soldiers reflectively. "You wouldn't think it, mister, but there's a lot of science in building a parapet. You've got to fill yer sandbags only three parts full, beat 'em with yer entrenching-tool, and then slope 'em so as they are well and truly laid."

"Aye, aye, it be the same with thatching. It be wonderful what a lot of science there is in the works of man's hand. There's a right way and a wrong with everything."

As they talked, a burring sound as of a gigantic insect was heard behind them and two horses appeared driven by a girl in a "smock" and breeches who sat gracefully in the tiny saddle of a low iron vehicle. Below the axle was a row of sharp steel knives like a shark's teeth, and at the side of it "sails" of painted wood revolved like the arms of a windmill with the progress of the machine and, revolving, pressed the wheat on the near side of the driver against the knives and then carried the cut grain over the driving-wheel by means of an endless web of canvas. A curved arm, threaded with twine like the needle of a sewing-machine, encircled the bundle of grain, tied it, cut the twine-band, and the sheaf was then thrown off the machine.

The chariot passed on, leaving a swathe of sheaves of yellow grain entwined with a garland of lilac scabious, pink and white convolvulus, scarlet pimpernel, poppies, and all the hectic flowers of the cornfield. A hare bolted from her sanctuary in the diminishing wheat and was pursued with shouts of

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*Kamerad* by the soldiers till she made her escape through the yarrow in the hedge.

They returned breathless from the pursuit, and as the machine, which was steadily reducing the rectangle of the standing grain to smaller and smaller dimensions, returned, they gazed on it, their attention divided between its human-like gesticulations and the girl who drove it.

"Tanks ain't in it with that old windmill," said one of them. "It'll begin to talk next, like a blooming gramophone."

"Its a binder," said the old man; "they came in in ninety-two. They be mortal clever things and can do everything but talk. But they don't bind as tidy as a man do—they don't keep the butts together."

"There ain't no flies on that girl," said another soldier as he watched this new Persephone gathering the flowers of the field with the finger-beam of her docile chariot.

"I don't hold with 'em," said the old man dubiously. "I don't mind wenches a-binding sheaves—it's like holding a little maid against a woman's bosom and tying her pinafore behind her—and women can do it tidy. But this driving of hosses—it's men's work. The world's getting topsy-turvy with maids a-doing the work of men. It's against Nature. 'Male and Female created He them,' I say."

The day wore on to its close, the shadows of the elm deepened, and the sun began to sink like a ball of

fire over the downs. A light breeze flickered among the stalks of uncut grain and brushed the surface with an invisible caress so that a ripple passed over the drooping ears of grain.

"Time to be getting home-along," said Daniel Newth.

The toilers rose and straightened themselves. There was an unmistakable sound of amorous salutation behind one of the shocks of wheat and the girl in the lilac sun-bonnet emerged, readjusting the strings, her face a deep crimson. She was followed by a soldier wearing a look of studied unconsciousness. His comrades gazed at the pair with a mortifying conviction of lost opportunities.

"They do say as kissing goes by favouring," said the old man reflectively.

Five days later the Musketry Inspecting Officer, sitting in his room at the Headquarters of the Command, was interrupted by a ring on the telephone. He took down the receiver.

"Hello! What? Harvesting finished, did you say? Right oh! We'll open the field-firing range again." And he rose and removed a flag from the map.

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### THE OLD GUARD

*“Notre armée avait recueilli les invalides de la grande armée et ils mouraient dans nos bras, en nous laissant le souvenir de leurs caractères primitifs et singuliers. Ces hommes nous paraissaient les restes d’une race gigantesque qui s’éteignait homme par homme et pour toujours”*—DE VIGNY.

**T**HIS is a plain tale—the tale of a West-country regiment and how it carried on in the first three months of the war. It is the regiment with a hole in its soup-tureen, but I’ll tell that story another day. They went into the first battle of Ypres with four companies; they came out of it at the end of twenty-one days with rather less than two. During those three weeks they never took their boots off, but one of their officers believes he once had a wash.

But I must go back a bit. Their transport cast off her moorings and cleared a certain harbour on August 14, 1914, at the going down of the sun. The quays were black with crowds who had come to wish them God-speed, but as the ship backed away the drum-fire of cheering which followed them suddenly fell to a dead silence, and the spectators held their breath; the stern of the great ship was within a

hair's breadth of crashing into the bows of another. The Captain ran to the telegraph. At the same moment a clear tenor voice from among the crowd of men on deck broke into a song; with the second note the whole battalion took it up, singing very softly and in perfect time. The song rolled away from the ship, echoed against the tall warehouses on the quay and died away upon the upper reaches of the river. It was "Tipperary." The crowd listened in silence, hanging upon every note; a woman sobbed hysterically; the waters churned with the thrash of the propeller, and slowly the transport, as she answered her helm, described a great arc until her bows were pointing toward the open sea. She glided down the river amidst a flutter of handkerchiefs, and the subdued cheers of people who had suddenly grown thoughtful. They watched her in silence as she diminished to the size of a ship's buoy, faded into a wreath of smoke, and finally sank below the red horizon.

Within a week they were at Mons, and on a Sunday afternoon under a blazing sun they found themselves on the far side of the canal, where they put out outposts and dug themselves in. As they watched the white road in front of them, small patrols of men in field-gray uniforms suddenly appeared upon it and, not liking the look of them, scuttled back. At four o'clock a solid mass of the enemy advanced toward a point which the battalion had carefully ranged on—to be precise, it was "500"; the battalion lay very still, each man with his eye on the sights of

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his rifle and his finger on the trigger, looking back occasionally at the platoon commanders who were standing up behind them, which is a way platoon commanders had in those days. There was a shrill whistle, a crackle of musketry, and, amidst spurts of dust, the gray mass ahead of them suddenly dissolved like smoke. The remnant of a German battalion fell back in disorder, and told a strange tale of the English "swine-dogs" having massed some hundred machine-guns on a front of a few hundred yards. The enemy believed that story for quite a long time, until they discovered that they were up against the finest marksmen in the world.

After that they were busy, learning many things—among others not to put their heads up, and that this wasn't manœuvres after all. Of the next ten days they have no very clear recollection, except that they lost nearly everything except their wits—their horses and first-line transport having been badly "strafed" at Le Cateau. They beat all records in somnambulism, but when the Germans trod on their toes at Crepy they suddenly showed themselves most disagreeably wide awake. This, I think, was also on a Sunday, and long after that the men would bet any odds every Saturday night on there being quite a big "scrap" the next day.

During those days they led a vagabond life, quite unlike anything they had ever known in barracks. It was very much to the taste of Private John Yeoman, the black sheep of the regiment, whose conduct-sheet covered six pages of flimsy.

"No guard room, no orderly room, no morning parade—a bit of allright." Yeoman has succeeded where ambitious men of letters have failed; he has described the Great Retreat in a single sentence.

On the third Sunday, at Tournan, they quite forgot themselves on parade when the C.O. read out a Brigade Order, of which they only heard the first three words: "Army is advancing. . . ." The rest, which does not matter, was inaudible, and Yeoman threw his cap into the air. He was always a little premature.

The next thing they knew was that they were picking up the trail. They followed a hot scent and pungent—the ashes of the enemy's bivouacs were still warm and they stank like dung-heaps. Yeoman, who had often incurred extra fatigues and pack-drill for appearing "dirty on parade," drew the line at offal and broken bottles, and he wondered what kind of enemy it was who could smash a child's toys and throw them into the street. There were other things at which he drew the line; it was near Fère-en-Tardenois, and the mother who had given him a glass of *vin rouge* showed him the body of her little daughter, with whom the Prussians had done their worst. Yeoman was a hard nut, but he wept. He emptied his pockets on to the table and bolted. They had halted there, and this made him late in falling in, for which he got "crimed" to the tune of three days' F.P. No. 1. He did not think it worth while to explain.

During those days they spent most of the time

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dodging in and out of thick beech woods and climbing steep chalk cliffs, driving the Germans—who were uncommonly strong on the wing—before them like a line of beaters. They were advanced-guard and had to feel their way, with the result that they got into a very hot corner where they were held up by German wire and badly enfiladed. It was here that Yeoman lost his pal; having no crape he blacked the second button of his tunic and made certain resolutions, which may account for his getting the D.C.N.—but that comes later.

The sun was very hot and the German dead lay where they had fallen some days before; and for the first time he realized the meaning of the words he had as a boy often heard in the parish church—before he fell from grace and went “mouching” on the Sabbath—words about a “corruptible body.” He began to associate war with beastly smells. Most of the time he lay very flat on his stomach, clicking his bolt and emptying the magazine; at intervals he heard the order “Cease Fire! Advance”; whereupon he advanced in short rushes and again lay on his stomach with his cap on the back of his neck to keep off the sun. He had a most amazing thirst, and sighed often for a pint of bitter.

It was at this stage that he realized that the wants of man are really very simple, and although artificially multiplied by civilization may be reduced to four:—cover, drink, victuals, and sleep; later, in Flanders, he found there was a fifth which was warmth. Women he had always regarded as a

luxury and unattainable, and on the last sheet of his Pay-book, opposite his M.O.'s certificate that his inoculation was complete, and below the words "IN THE EVENT OF MY DEATH I GIVE THE WHOLE OF MY PROPERTY AND EFFECTS TO. . . ." he had written: "Hannah Honey, whom I hereby appoint my next-of-kin," which was magnanimous, seeing that Hannah had refused him thrice. He sometimes wondered whether she knew about his conduct-sheet. He did not know that it was Hannah who, recognizing the tenor voice when he struck up "Tipperary" on the transport, had sobbed hysterically, for, with all his faults, which were many, he was a simple soul and had a very poor opinion of himself which he felt sure was shared by the whole battalion.

He did not know that his C.O.'s sense of values was also undergoing a revision, and that just as Yeoman had discovered that on active service there were only four wants, so his C.O. had discovered there were only four virtues—truthfulness, courage, fortitude, and unselfishness. All these Yeoman had, and although he did not know it, there were some who were beginning to take note of the fact.

On the night of September 9th, having run clear out of ammunition, they withdrew three-quarters of a mile, and the platoon sergeant called the roll; there were many who never answered it. Here they learnt for the first time that there had been a big battle and, with some astonishment, that they had been in it. The men themselves called it a "scrap"; and as it did not happen to fall on a Sunday they

stuck stoutly to the opinion that it was a very minor affair. They were told later that it will be known to future generations as "The Battle of the Marne," but in the battalion it is always referred to as "the scrap at Montrool." "The place where I got stopped all them days' pay for losing my pack" gave it the dignity of history in the opinion of John Yeoman.

Up to this time the enemy, being in a hurry, had only got his field-guns in action, and they had encountered little but shrapnel, which, although surprisingly indiscriminate and deadly enough, is nothing like so intimidating as lyddite, and much cleaner. Most of the men were under the impression, difficult to explain and hard to eradicate, that big guns were a private affair between opposing batteries; as Yeoman put it, "it bain't 'warfare,'" to use heavy guns against infantry. He still cherished vague ideas that war was like a football match, and that somewhere in heaven or on earth there was an umpire who saw that the rules were observed, although he was fast coming to the conclusion that the Germans were generally "off-side" and that occasionally they did a "foul." But near M—, after they had crossed the Aisne on pontoon rafts, they were undeceived.

It happened about nine o'clock on Tuesday morning, while they were waiting in the village in close formation for our artillery to open fire on a hill which they had been ordered to attack. A *Taube* flew over the heads of the men in the village, and

just half an hour later the church tower crumpled up suddenly and men were lying on their backs all over the street amid blocks of masonry, a cloud of yellow smoke, and showers of white dust fine as flour. Yeoman, more fortunate, looked round angrily to see who it was had suddenly hit him in the back. He coughed, wiped his nose, and thrust his knuckles into his eyes; he saw that he was white as a miller from head to foot. From that time forward he began to associate war with sights no less than smells, and equally beastly.

Later on—in Flanders—these assaults on his senses were multiplied; his ear-drums rattled like a tambourine, his eyes smarted as though someone had thrown pepper into them, and his palate tasted the extremes of pineapple and chlorine, which is rather like almonds. Also his tactile sense was offended by lice. All this, however, was to come.

The next five minutes gave him a glimpse of hell. The whole village was tumbling to pieces about him, and the streets were a shambles. He heard an order, "File out by companies! No doubling!" Each company waited its turn with stolid equanimity. Later in the day on the hill above the village they got their own back. Yeoman was better at making history than at writing it; all he could ever tell you about the Battle of the Aisne was: "It wur where I got a punch in the back from a German gunner bloke dree mile away—hitting below the belt I calls it."

For five days afterward they led a woodman's life

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in a forest where they lived in wigwams made of faggots and waterproof sheets. When the shrapnel came whining overhead they made a bolt for their "splinter-proofs," and lay in the burrows for what seemed an interminable time, after which first one head would pop out and then another. The weather was dry, the soil gravel, and the bracken made good bedding; later on, in the wet clay of Flanders, they looked back to those days on the Aisne and idealized them as a blithe pastoral. Here Yeoman set snares and caught rabbits, which rather raised his reputation in the battalion. They got to know the German ways pretty well—first a salvo, then a dead pause for five minutes by way of enticing the unwary out of their holes, and then five or six salvos again. This taught them another lesson, which is that there is such a thing as psychology in war or, as Yeoman put it, "There bain't no vlies on Vritz." One night when they were standing by for an attack, the French put up a "strafe" eight miles away at a place called Soissons, which they knew by its tall crag of a cathedral tower. There was the roar as of a thunderstorm in the air and the sky was one great conflagration so that you could read your watch by it and see the whites of the next man's eyes. At this stage they began to realize that the war was going to be rather a big thing, and that it might not be over by Christmas after all.

The leaves had hardly begun to change colour on the beeches when their trenches were taken over by the French, and they were on the move again for

an unknown destination away up north. They did a great trek of 150 miles by way of Abbeville, where they stopped for the night; a journey chiefly memorable to Yeoman for the fact that there he got into trouble for being found by a prowling "red cap" in an *estaminet* after the hour of 8 P.M. This led to his being "told off." The C.O. asked him if he would take his award, and when Yeoman, who was of an obliging disposition, said, "Yes, please, sir," as he always did on these judicial occasions, he was astonished to be merely told not to do it again.

"Sorry to disappoint you, my man," said the C.O., with a mysterious smile as Yeoman waited for something more. "By the way, your platoon commander says you showed up well at Montreuil. I suppose you're one of those fellows who are always looking for trouble, and so long as the Germans provide you with it, you're content for the time being." Which was true.

Eleven days after they had left the Aisne they found themselves in a flat country where not a beech was to be seen, but pollarded willows grew thick as nettles. It reminded Yeoman of Sedge-moor, but he had never seen women in wooden shoes with towing-ropes round their waists before. Also the beer was thin as nettle-beer. It was a bad country for artillery observation, and for infantry it was heavy going, for the soil was clay and clung to the soles of your boots like yeast. At Bethune he gave his coat to a Belgian refugee, and got "crimed" for "losing by neglect certain articles of clothing,

to wit one overcoat." It was commonly said of Yeoman—whose father had been a poacher in days when a West-country labourer was expected by the gentry to bring up a family of ten on nine shillings a week—that he did not know the difference between *meum* and *tuum*—which may have been true, for he never could keep anything of his own if he thought others were in need of it. He sometimes "pinched" in the old days, when in the society of his pal, but he did this largely from an adventurous appetite for mischief; he never indulged in the meaner form of larceny, which is solitary theft. Moreover, since he had seen what the enemy could do, in the way of loot, he had ceased to take any pleasure in being light-fingered; he had a vague feeling that fellows who stole might find themselves doing worse things. Which in its way was an ethical discovery.

On the first day they took up a position facing north, but that night they changed it, and in the morning they found themselves facing the sun. The division was, as a matter of fact, engaged in wheeling round with its left, swinging on their right as on a pivot while masses of French cavalry were operating on their left flank in an attempt to roll up the German right. It was the beginning of "the great sweep," and their objective was to cut the German line of retreat on Lille. It failed, as everybody knows, and from that moment their long thin line, extending away north up to Ypres, was stretched to breaking point, for they had no reserves. They pushed forward and got astride the Estaires-La

Bassée road; it was the extreme point of their advance. They were brought up against a wasp's nest of a sugar factory full of machine-guns. They could not see anything to fire at, and they dare not move to dig. The next morning their left company suddenly found themselves between two fires; the Germans had rushed the regiment on their left and driven it in. They knew this from a survivor who, covered with clay from foot to head as though he were a natural feature of the landscape, crawled in a little later. They had just one platoon in hand and this they rushed up. It checked the enemy's advance, who may have mistaken the platoon for a battalion. There was nothing theatrical about the old B.E.F., except that it was always on tour, but in one respect it *was* a stage army. It was always pretending to be bigger than it was.

Yeoman remembered that village as "the place where I lost my blooming pipe," which is all he did remember. He felt rather annoyed about it.

Then came a night which those who survived are not likely to forget.

But at this point I will let Borlase take up the tale. After all, Yeoman was in his company and he knew him better than I did, for Yeoman had poached in Borlase's preserves in the old days before he took the King's shilling, and he had always had hopes of him.

"The enemy made three attacks that night, beginning at seven in the evening and repeating themselves at intervals of about three hours. Their guns

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were busy all the time, first shrapnel in bursts of six or eight, then H.E. I was kept pretty busy dodging the shrapnel as I had to negotiate that street several times during the night—was adjutant just then—to get down to the signal office, and send messages to Brigade Headquarters. I didn't mind the shrapnel; it was the H.E. that troubled me. You know what a 'strafe' with heavies is like. You seem to be taking a long breath between each shell and you've no sooner ceased wondering where the first is going to burst than you start wondering about the next. Also you feel as if the enemy guns had all got you specially 'registered' and were concentrating on you personally. Which is rather egotistical when you come to think of it. Of course, one gets over that obsession after a time, and you make up your mind that some inscrutable Power has long ago determined that you're either going to get hit or you're not, and that whether you loiter or whether you hustle it'll all be the same in the end.

"The air above us seemed alive with frightened birds—first a flutter, then a scream, and then, as the enemy began to shorten their fuses, we got the shell-bursts right in the middle of the village—followed by a roaring landslide of falling masonry. And all along the line stretching right away up to Ypres the same thing was going on. A brick landed on my foot from nowhere as though thrown by a footpad. I must have looked like a ghost, for my face was running with sweat and the white mortar settling on it formed a sort of plaster-mask. There were

hayricks and barns in the village, and as these caught fire one after the other, each rick glowed like a thousand red-hot needles. One patch of the street would be light as day, the next dark as night, and the 'walking cases' rushed the one and then paused to take breath in the other. Their figures made monstrous shadows against the wall as they hurried past. But there was really no cover anywhere, and along our line every man who moved was a mark for a German rifle. Looking down the trench—it was, as a matter of fact, only a shallow furrow—you could see a row of gleaming bayonets, and occasionally a white face, as a man emptied his magazine and fingered his pouch for another clip. There was a most infernal orchestra of sound—machine-guns going like kettle-drums, the buzz, the crack, and the twang of rifle-bullets like stringed instruments, and at quick intervals the tremendous bass of the artillery and the crash and roar of falling houses. The only sound you never heard was a human voice. Odd, isn't it? The more resolute an English soldier is, the more silent he seems to become. The men must have had a raging thirst—you know how dry one's throat gets at these times—they had long ago emptied their water-bottles, and it was impossible for the ration parties to get up.

"It was in one of these journeys that I met Yeoman. He was coming down from the firing-line, and when I saw him the lower part of his face was covered with blood—he looked just as if he'd cut his throat. As a matter of fact, half his left jaw

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had been shattered and the bullet must have just missed the jugular vein. I fancy it was a flat-nosed bullet. His left wrist was shattered, too. He'd been sent back by his platoon commander. I didn't take much notice of him—there were too many other things to think about.

“I looked in at our First-Aid Station, just beyond Battalion Headquarters where the M.O., half-dead with exhaustion, was working by candle-light in overalls amidst a strange smell of blood, iodoform, methylated spirit, and hay. It was a big barn; a row of men were laid out like mummies on the floor awaiting their turn—some had given up waiting!—with the soles of their boots upturned. It's odd how expressive a pair of feet can be—you heard very few cries of pain, but I noticed the boots of more than one man beating together while the rest of his body lay as still as a statue.

“About an hour later I met Yeoman going up to the trenches again, his face swathed in bandages. I asked what on earth he was doing up there, and hadn't the M.O. sent him down to a Casualty Clearing Station? I suppose he thought he was going to get 'crimed' again for disobeying a lawful command, and he was horribly apologetic about it. I say horribly because he spoke thickly like a man who's forgotten to put his false teeth back. As a matter of fact, all the teeth on the left side of his jaw had been knocked out.

“‘Thorry, thir,’ he said, ‘but I heard we'd no rethervth left.’

“He went back to the firing-line. He was hit

twice again that night, but he carried on and only retired with the rest at four in the morning, when we were relieved—not much relief about it—by the K.O.S.B. and went into support. He must have lost a lot of blood.

“In that one day—or rather night—we had four officers killed, eleven wounded, and rather more than three hundred N.C.O.’s and men killed, wounded, and missing. You know the rest. The long dreary winter near Richebourg. By the time spring came there were just fifty men left in the Battalion of those that embarked on August 14th at Avonmouth. The rest were all new drafts. Yeoman? He got the D.C.M. Also he got a stripe as lance-corporal, and what is much more extraordinary he kept it. Eventually he became platoon-sergeant. His character quite changed—No! it developed. He found himself. Perhaps he’d never really had a fair chance before. He’d had a rough time before he enlisted, poor as a church mouse and as hungry.

“Do you know; C——, I’ve come to the conclusion that there’s something wrong with our social values in time of peace. We give a brute who kicks his wife a fine with the option of a month’s I.H.L., and the man who pinches a pheasant gets three without any option at all. Why is it that the law of England has always been so damned tender to offences against the person and so ‘shirty’ about offences against property? Why is it that if a man steals a loaf of bread he gets ‘crimed,’ while if he grinds the faces of the poor by profiteering he gets—well, knighted for

a subscription to party funds? My men brought nothing into the world and it's quite certain they took nothing out. The nation gave them a shilling a day and valued them accordingly, but, my God! they repaid that shilling—paid it with usury. They're all dead. Or else they're maimed and broken for life. And there was a time before the war when not a damned potman would serve 'em in uniform; perhaps it'll be like that again!

“What is it Kipling says? ‘Oh, it's Tommy this and Tommy that, and chuck him out, the brute.’ ‘Militarism,’ you know! I'm not saying that the men hadn't their faults, but you know what a ‘New Model’ the old Army became after the Boer War. There were very few ‘bad hats’ in it, and even Yeoman wasn't a bad sort—in fact, he was a damned good sort. You know I often think that there was something wrong with a society which could offer nothing better to chaps like him than twelve shillings a week with rheumatism and the ‘Union’ at the end of it (unless he reached seventy and got a beggarly five bob) and which could give him nothing better in the long winter evenings than the village tap-room. Perhaps that's why he poached—and enlisted. It always seemed to me that he felt life had never given him what he wanted and had a right to ask, and that he was always looking for something. He found it at last.”

“What? Where?”

“On the Menin ridge. A bullet. He died in my arms the same night.”

## XI

### THE BATMAN

AS WE turned into the road to Cosham, our car met a "W.D." wagon, and the driver of the wagon dropped his right hand smartly.

"When I first put this uniform on," said the subaltern with a faint reminiscence of Gilbert and Sullivan, "I was saluted in succession by a policeman, a commissionaire, a boy-scout, and a member of the Women's Emergency Corps. I felt very embarrassed. What ought I to have done?"

"The first two had probably been soldiers, the third hoped to be one," said the Major. "You should have saluted all three."

"But what about the girl?"

"Kiss her, of course," said the Major, gravely. "A kiss is a salute. There's scriptural authority for it."

"I never thought of that," said the subaltern wistfully.

"What a target!" exclaimed the Major as a platoon in close formation appeared on the skyline. "Tangent-sight at eight hundred—I *think*."

"But supposing she boxed my ears?" persisted the subaltern.

"That's all right; the penalty for striking an

officer on active service is DEATH," replied the Major. "You could explain that to her. She can't have it both ways."

"By jove! that's true," said the subaltern. He began to look thoughtful.

"That reminds me" . . . said the Major, meditatively. "Eyes RIGHT," he said suddenly as he caught sight of the subaltern exchanging glances with a buxom wench on the left of our car as we shot past.

"It reminds you," I prompted.

"Of a batman—a fellow I had in the South African War. Such a batman! As a rule, if a batman's honest he's not intelligent, and if he's intelligent he's not honest. This fellow was both. He made my buttons shine like stars, he polished my boots till I could see my face in them, and he never once forgot to call me in the morning. When I was sick he nursed me like a—like a——"

"Like a woman!" said the subaltern enthusiastically.

"Well, yes, like a woman. He made tea that was neither black as ink nor sweet as syrup. He did not smoke, neither did he drink. He took as much care of my horse as he did of me. He never told a lie—except once. And he never whistled."

"His name, please!" I said, taking out my pocket-book. I have had two batmen—one honest, the other intelligent. I am looking for a third.

"That I can't tell you. No, I don't mean I won't, I mean I can't. I don't know it—I never did.

I can give you his address, though, if that's any good. 'Galveston, Texas,'—at least that's the post-mark. D'you think if I knew his name I'd— But I'm putting the cart before the horse. Well, I'll tell you the story. I had a commission in Trelawney's Horse—they gave me a commission in the regulars afterward—which you may remember was a well-known unit of irregulars. And a very hefty lot they were. A very scratch lot, too—colonials, mining engineers, remittance-men, soldiers of fortune, and so on. South Africa was swarming with levies of that kind, each one differing from the other in arms, kit, formation, and all the rest of it. They were enough to make an R.T.O.'s hair stand on end. But, as I say, a hefty body of men and not one of 'em but knew how to sit a horse as soon as look at it.

“Well, one day a likely-looking youth with an American accent you could cut with a knife came into camp and said he guessed he'd join us. There wasn't much attestation red tape about Trelawney's Horse; if it comes to that I daresay half of 'em could have been court-martialled for fraudulent enlistment. All a recruit was asked was: 'Can you ride? Can you shoot?' and if the troop-sergeant was satisfied no one asked any more questions. In fact, it was about as tactful to ask a man in Trelawney's Horse about his past as it would be to ask an officer under arrest about his future. It was a case of *Omne ignotum pro magnifico* which, you may remember, in the revised version means, 'If



“a man’s conduct-sheet is lost, his character is exemplary.”

“Can you ride?” said the sergeant. “I can that,” said the Yank. “Oh, you can, can you?” said the sergeant. “Very well, let’s see you put that mare through her paces.”

“The mare was a stiff proposition, too stiff for most of us, and Trelawney’s Horse gathered round expecting to see some fun. So did the mare, I fancy, for the moment the Yank got on her back she started bucking for all she was worth. She reared and plunged, and, finding that no use, tried to bolt. She had a mouth of iron. Well, to cut a long story short, in half an hour that mare was like clay in the hands of the potter. She was all of a lather and butter wouldn’t melt in her mouth. After that, Trelawney’s, who knew a good horseman when they saw one, all crowded round the Yank and offered him smokes and drinks.

“I don’t smoke and I don’t drink,” he said. “Well, what the hell *do* you do?” said one of ’em. “I ride,” he said quietly and walked away.

“I liked that chap, and when I heard that he knelt down and said his prayers every night in the tent—and there were six men to every tent—I liked him all the more. I wanted a batman and one day I offered ‘Hop’—his name was Silas P. Hopkins, but we called him ‘Hop’ for short—the job. He hesitated at first, which rather nettled me, the more so as it meant he’d draw five bob a week extra pay.

“Well, if you don’t like being in my service . . .”

I began. 'It isn't that, sir,' he said—he always said 'Sir,' and generally saluted, which was more than most of 'em did—'Well, I'll take it on.'

"And he did.

"I soon found I'd done a good stroke of business. Never man batted like that batman. For one thing he used to *think*, which, you may have noticed, no batman ever does as a rule. I never found a hole in my socks, for the simple reason that Hop always discovered it before I could darn it. I never lost a shirt button, because as soon as it got loose Hop sewed it on tight again. And you must remember that the Boer War wasn't like this war, when if you're 'deficient in articles' you can send a chit to your hosiers or your tailors in the West End and get your order executed and the goods delivered in France inside of a week. No! we were up country, far from railhead, with our lines of communication constantly being cut, and our supply columns looted by brother Boer, some of whose commandoes hadn't one whole pair of trousers between them. So they always raided our columns, if they could, whenever they wanted a change of underclothing, and we often went short. I remember a picnic outside Pretoria—but I'll tell you that another time.

"Well, the result was that Trelawney's Horse were eventually rigged out like a fancy-dress ball, and were *decolleté* enough to satisfy the producer of a theatrical *revue*. But I myself never wanted for anything—shirts, socks, and so on—Hop saw to all that. I never asked any questions—as I half

suspected he pinched 'em, and I didn't want to be c.-m.'d as a receiver of stolen goods, 'knowing them to have been stolen,' as the charge-sheet puts it. All I knew was that my kit was like the widow's cruse of oil—there was always petrol in the tank.

"Then he was as punctual as zero. He always called me to the second, and while I was sponging myself down in my collapsible tub he'd be busy about the tent laying out my shaving kit, and shaking the sand and locusts out of my things, until he'd say 'Anything else, sir?'

"But there was never anything else—he'd always seen to that. As you may imagine, the fame of my batman got noised abroad for, like the virtuous woman, his price was far above rubies. Every brother officer wanted him, and some of 'em tried to bribe him into their service until, getting wind of their fraternal designs, I told him I proposed to double the five bob. He wouldn't take it. 'I'm quite satisfied, sir,' he said.

"Naturally, we got rather friendly, and I got to treat him more and more as a warrant officer than an ordinary trooper, and sometimes I tried to get him to talk about himself. But he always headed me off. All I could learn was that his father was a big mule contractor in Texas, and that he'd been sent over from New Orleans with a cargo of mules to Durban and, after unloading, had thought he'd like to go up country. He always rather kept himself to himself.

"He was certainly a wonderful chap with horses.

You know what delicate beasts Argentines are; well, he cured mine of a bad attack of sand colic and he was as particular about preparing my horse's bran mash as he was about my breakfast—which is saying a good deal. And no coolie or black boy or up-country Jew storekeeper could ever take a rise out of him—he used to do all my shopping. Well, one day we were in for a great Boer drive near Hartebeestfontein, the whole squadron being strung out like a paper-chase. We'd crossed a drift and had come out on some flat country all pimpled with ant-hills, when we sighted a Boer farm and the usual kraals in the middle of some blue gum trees. The next moment I heard the 'plip-plop' of a Mauser, and my batman, who was next me, suddenly gave a kind of shriek and I saw him fall over his horse's neck like a sack. We soon rushed the farm and cleared it out, and I then turned my attention to my batman. Fortunately, the horse hadn't bolted and let me come up to him. I caught hold of his rider in my arms and laid him on the ground. He was a very light weight and rather slender. By that time he had fainted. There was a dark stain on his tunic, the colour of port-wine; he'd been hit in the chest. I unbuttoned his shirt, and as I did so I noticed two little bright rods of steel stuck through it. I wondered what the devil they were for. Then I cut away his singlet—and—you could have knocked me over with a feather. My batman was a woman!

"So that's how I was kept in new socks!" was the first thing I said to myself as I looked at the knit-

ting-needles. And I kept on saying. 'Plain and purl! Purl and plain!' As you know one generally does say something idiotically trivial like that when one gets a big shock. I suppose it's nature's way of keeping one going until one's mind recovers its balance. Perhaps you'll think I ought not to have been so surprised, and you may think me an ass. But telling a story's one thing, living it is quite another, and the story I'm telling you was spread over many months, in the course of which I had many other things than Hop to think about.

"Well, my first thought was how to get him—I mean her—away, and my second how to keep her secret, for my sake as well as hers. I should never have heard the end of it in the regiment if it had got about. Of course I couldn't leave my troop, but after much trouble I got hold of a Cape cart and got Hop fixed up in it and sent back one of my men whom I could trust as escort, giving him a confidential chit to the M.O. in which I explained matters and asked him to do all he could for the poor girl.

"By the time that I had completed these arrangements she had recovered consciousness and told me something of her story. It seems she had been brought up on her father's ranch, and when her brother fell sick and couldn't take charge of the consignment of mules she offered to go in his place disguised as a teamster—and went. We hadn't much time for a pow-wow, and when she'd finished telling her story it was time for me to get a move on.

'Good-bye, Hop . . . and God bless you,' I said. 'My name's Lucy,' she said with a look I've never forgotten. I sometimes think—but no matter. And it was only when that cart had disappeared over the veldt like a ship at sea that I suddenly remembered I'd forgotten to ask her her surname—and her home address. And I never got to know it. By the time we got back from our drive of the Boers and I was able to communicate with the Base, I found she'd been evacuated and sent back to the States. I tried hard to trace her but it was a wash-out. But once a year, on the anniversary of the day she entered my service, I got a card without any address and only two words on it 'From Lucy.' That happened every year until two years ago—I have heard nothing since. I sometimes think——"

The Major stopped abruptly and gazed straight in front of him at the wind-screen. There was something almost wistful in his look.

The subaltern broke the silence. "Women *are* topping," he said.

Neither the Major nor I made any reply. The subaltern is very young, and, as is the way of youth, he sometimes thinks his discoveries are new.

## XII

### THE ATTACK

(July 1, 1916)

#### I

**H**E BELONGED to the bombing party of No. 1 Platoon, A Company, of "the Springers." You will not find them under that name in the Army List, but in the Sergeants' Mess, where oral tradition dies hard, the long-service N.C.O.s never call the regiment anything else—and thereby keep alive the memory of a great day in the Peninsula when the regiment cleared a six-foot wall in a bayonet charge. No one ever "writes up" the Springers, for they do not wear kilts and are not as the "tin-bellies" who sit mounted at street corners, spreading broad their pipe-clayed phylacteries. They are merely one of those unobtrusive line regiments which go on from generation to generation adding fresh laurels to their colours and saying very little about it, for they are men of few words and they speak a dialect which is unintelligible to any one except a West-country man. They have "Peninsula," "Ferozeshah," and "Sobraon," on their colours, and they can now add the most coveted name in military annals, for they were at Mons. They have their own libretto for the bugle-calls; and when they talk of Defaulters' Call they do not

speak of "Angels' Whisper." Also they have a feud with a certain Irish regiment, dating from the day when they arrived in Dublin and lowered its colours at "footer." Their homespun speech is pure Anglo-Saxon, the same as their fathers spake when they broke the Danes at Ethandune. It is a soft speech, like honey in the mouth; those who speak it are slow to anger and of great kindness. But they are very unpleasant when they are roused, and though they can give quarter they never take it.

John Knighton had kept sheep on a hillside, one of those bold escarpments of the North Downs where the chalk breaks into greensand, falling away into the great dairy-farming plains of coral rag. When the war came like a thief in the night his mental horizon was as bounded as his physical environment; he knew a great deal about sheep-dip and could tell you all about the healing virtues of the rest-harrow, but France was for him merely a geographical expression, recalling painful hours over a primer in the village school. But he knew many things that a town-bred teacher did not know; he could tell the seasons and the time of night by the stars, and when he looked at Orion he needed not the Pole Star to tell him where the true North was. He knew where—and in what season—to look for the bat's-wings of Cassiopeia and the great square of Pegasus. But he would have been incredulous if you had told him that the same stars looked down upon the fields of France.

One day in April, 1915, when the lambing season



was over, John Knighton walked into the nearest recruiting office with a few chattels tied up in a red handkerchief with large white spots and announced his wish to enlist. If you had asked him his reason for this momentous decision he would have given you every reason but the true one, which was that Major S——, late of the Springers, now on half-pay, but still a foster-father to the regiment, had come to John Knighton's village one day, and at a recruiting meeting in the village schoolroom, with the squire in the chair, had told them things which set John Knighton's teeth on edge.

In his lonely night-watches on the Downs, where Neolithic man had fashioned his arrow-heads of flint and the Roman auxiliary cast his javelin, he had pondered deeply on these things, and though he could not have told you where Belgium was on the map, he knew that there or thereabouts evil stalked upon the earth. And thinking upon these things it seemed to him that he, John Knighton, must go forth to combat it. He was a likely-looking man, tall and deep-chested, and, although he did not know it, he came of a family which, five hundred years before, had done mighty things with the long-bow at the village butts in a field which to this day is known as the "Butt-haye." He had the terracotta skin of perfect health, and the M.O., as he watched him jump the form, and hop round the room on his left foot, and then on his right, felt that he could dispense with the usual tattoo upon his chest-bones.

The mazes of platoon-drill troubled him at first, but at observation he had nothing to learn, and on the range he soon turned out a first-class shot. He was even as good with the bayonet—pitching hay is quite a good apprenticeship—and there were few who could show better form on the assault-course. Thus it was, that after a few lessons in bombing he found himself No. 1 bayonet-man in the bombing-party of his platoon. And one day the company orderly sergeant read out his name from the nominal roll and he found himself warned for an overseas draft.

## II

“It bain’t comin’ off, I do think,” said John Knighton, as he “stood to” one rosy morning in June in a chalk trench upon the Somme. He had come there after months of duty in the trenches in Flanders, followed by a stimulating interlude in carrying “spit-locked” trenches at a kind of dress-rehearsal of an attack behind G.H.Q., at which a flag did duty for a barrage and a tape indicated the objective. He liked the rolling hills of the Somme, for they reminded him of his native Downs. But he chafed at a delay the reasons for which were wholly obscure to him, and although every time they were relieved he saw behind the lines an increasing accumulation of “dumps” and timber and hobbled horses and a mighty concentration of guns and limbers, his incredulity grew upon him.

“Thic year, next year, zumtime, never,” said his

comrade Jacob Winterbourne, as he blew upon imaginary petals. "It'll be about hay-making time zoon, in Broad Hinton, John. Wonder whether any on us 'ull ever see the wold place again?" He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand as he finished his rum ration.

But at that John Knighton said nothing.

The colonel of "the Springers" had his own opinion as to the date of the opening performance for which there had been so many rehearsals, but he kept his own counsel. He had attended a seven days' course of lectures at the Army School about a week earlier, hearing many things which he already knew and a few which he did not. And four days later he had attended a divisional conference of battalion O.C.'s and brigadiers, while a major-general from "Operations" at G.H.Q. had talked intimately with a pointer in his hand before an enormous map. The "I" summaries had also been more than usually explicit of late as to the strength and location of the German units opposite the line, their inquiries being assisted by a large collection of shoulder-straps, a mild inquisition of the "third degree," and a collection of *belles-lettres*, the trophies of some carefully-organized raids. The A.D.M.S. had also been mobilizing his field ambulances, and an order had gone down to the Base to evacuate and prepare many thousands of beds. Also the directorates of Supplies, and Transport, and Water, and Railways, had been doing heavy night shifts, and their caravans covered the face of the earth. And

the Divisional A.P.M., who had been nearly worked off his head with traffic controls, had doubled his examining-posts and worked out a scheme of positions for "battle police." And all these vast forces, thus set in train, although they knew nothing of him nor he of them, were converging upon John Knighton like a pressure of the atmosphere, and were dark with the fate of him.

These things were talked over in whispers by staff-officers with blue, and red, and parti-coloured brassards at Brigade and Divisional and Corps Headquarters, until one night at the end of June the A.A.G. at the Corps H.Q., after looking behind him to see that the mess-sergeant had closed the door, turned to the Camp Commandant and whispered something in his ear.

"Damn it!" said the Camp Commandant, "and to think we're here right at the back of the dress-circle. I wish I'd been able to pull the leg of my last Board. But they wouldn't pass me for anything but light duty. And to think my old regiment's up there. Well, here's luck!"

### III

It was ten o'clock. The men had been numbered off from the right and one in three posted for look out duty. The night was calm, but the air drowsy as though thunder were brooding over the earth, and the illusion was heightened by sheets of flame which flickered incessantly in the sky. A battalion runner arrived from Brigade Headquarters with a message

for the Colonel in his dug-out. He opened the sheaf of papers and saw the words "Operation Orders." He took one glance at them and then sent an orderly to summon the Major and the company commanders. Meanwhile he took out a map and spread it upon the table. His adjutant took four tallow candles stuck in bottles, lit them, and placed a bottle on each of the four corners of the map. The map was covered with irregular lines which in places tied themselves up into knots like congested veins, and double lines of red crosses marched with them. Here and there were clusters of red stars and occasionally a blue blot. The stars were craters; the blue blots were unexploded mines. He was still poring over this chart when the company commanders arrived.

"We attack to-morrow," he said quietly, as they saluted.

"At what hour, sir?" asked one of them with studied nonchalance.

"I don't know," said the Colonel, "soon after dawn I expect. I have not had 'zero' yet. Now, gentlemen, this is the Divisional objective—20 x A 83 to 20 x D 72." And he moved his pencil across the rectangle. "The compass-bearing on which the battalion will march will be 73 magnetic. The first and second waves will take the German first-line trench; the third and fourth waves will take the second-line trench. The bombing parties must bomb their way up the communication trenches east of Nose Switch, and A company must occupy the trench behind them."

The Colonel and the Adjutant, together with the Major and the four company commanders, peered at the map, their heads, which were close together, throwing great shadows on the walls of the dug-out as the Colonel explained in detail the nature of their respective tasks. Finally the Adjutant wrote them down in duplicate on a "Message and Signals" form, and gave each officer his copy. Then they went their appointed ways to confer with their platoon commanders. There were many things to do, but every one of them found time to do another that was not in his Operation Orders—they each wrote a letter home.

The Colonel sent for an R.F.A. subaltern commanding the Stokes guns. "Your barrage will commence at minus eight minutes and cease at zero," he read out, explaining circumstantially that they must establish the said barrage from the right of trench A 7/1 to the left of trench A 7/2 with a view to covering the enemy's machine-guns. And he handed him orders which told him how many rounds his sub-sections were to fire in the first minute, how many in the last, and how many in the six minutes intervening.

Two hours after midnight the runners arrived with another message. It was as brief as it was fateful. It told the Colonel that "zero" had been fixed for 6.30 A.M.

The men were called in at 4.30 A.M. for "Stand to," and paraded in sections by the corporals. The rum ration was served out and every man was given

100 extra rounds of ammunition by the company sergeant-major. They moved off by platoons up the communication trench to the assembly trenches which extended in straight lines, without traverses, behind the fire-trenches, the trenches being about eighty yards apart. Every infantryman carried two empty sandbags stuck in his belt like a pair of gloves, a bomb in either pocket, a pick or a spade upon his back, a gas-mask depending from his neck, and he held his rifle at the "carry." At the head of each platoon marched the bombing parties carrying their little barrel-shaped bombs in a nose-bag attached to their belts. The Lewis gunners carried their guns at the slope, each man with two "drums" of cartridges strapped over his back. Every man wore a vivid patch of coloured cloth upon his shoulder, and on the back of his tunic was a small piece of burnished tin which gleamed in the flashes that ever and anon lit up the sky. For the most part they marched in silence up the long ravine, but occasionally they chaffed one another; some of them smoked cigarettes with great rapidity, throwing them away before they were half-consumed.

As they lined up in the assembly-trenches John Knighton, who was on the extreme left, pulled a large tin watch out of his pocket and shaking it solemnly, peered at it in the pale light of dawn. The watch, which he had bought for five shillings one market-day at Marlborough, was a subject of many pleasantries in his platoon, for it never kept time. But John Knighton treasured it above rubies and was

accustomed to check its idiosyncrasies by the stars and the position of the sun in the heavens. The hour and minute hands were at six o'clock.

"Bist gwine to have yer old ticker synchronized by the signalling-officer, John?" said his neighbour, nervously fingering the safety-catch of his rifle.

"Did ye leave yer hairloom to yer best girl in yer pay-book?" asked another. "Lawk a massey, look at that girt 'un!"

There was a gurgling sound in the air overhead and a 9.2 shell burst on a "strong point" in the German lines, sending up a geyser of black smoke which, as it drifted away, slowly formed the pattern of a gigantic weeping-willow upon the sky. All through the night a sound as of someone knocking at a door had been coming from behind the lines, and the air overhead was never still. "Fix bayonets," said the platoon commander suddenly, as he looked at his watch, and with a clink fixed his own in the socket.

The hands of the platoon commander's watch were at nineteen minutes past six. The bombardment died away. There was a lull.

#### IV

At that moment the subaltern in charge of the fire-control of a battery of field-guns some three thousand five hundred yards back, was waiting with a stopwatch in one hand and a megaphone in the other at the elbow of the telephone orderly just beside the battery. The Operation orders had been given out



the night before; the fuses had been set with the fuse-key, and the corrector put at 148. A pile of shells lay banked like drain-pipes under a tarpaulin painted in a mottled pattern of greens and browns. Each gun-layer sat beside his gun, and the other men of the gun detachment knelt behind, some stripped to their waists, others with their shirt-sleeves rolled up exposing their sinewy arms. At the other end of that telephone-wire, some three thousand yards in front of the battery, were the Battery Major and the F.O.O., established in a low-turfed emplacement like a grouse-butt. The telephone orderly suddenly answered the Battery Major through the telephone: "Yes, sir," and as he did so turned his eyes toward the subaltern. Then he began repeating each monosyllable of the O.C.'s message one by one as they came through. "Ten, nine, eight, seven, six"—the subaltern was strangely conscious, as he listened, with his eyes on his stop-watch, of a scene on the tow-path at Oxford two years ago when he had sat leaning over an oar with his feet planted firmly against the stretcher and his heart thumping a response to the coach's measured tones—"five, four, three, two, one. Fire!"

"Fire!" shouted the subaltern through his megaphone to the subalterns in charge of the guns.

## V

The storm burst. Forward in the assembly-trenches it buffeted the ears of the men—a mighty knocking upon great doors, but this time it was as if

blows were being rained upon all the doors of all the houses ever built with hands. It had broken on them with a sound as though the sky above them were made of a huge canvas suddenly torn and ripped asunder. A thousand field guns were firing from sixteen to twenty rounds a minute, as fast as the sweating gunners could open and close the breech. The sound grew more and more insistent, and each man in the assembly-trenches looked at his neighbour with a wild surmise, shouting to make the other hear. The shells went spinning overhead with a long metallic scream. They were H.E. shells with "delay" fuses, and, as they burrowed into the German fire-trench, they threw up spouts of black earth like waves upon a promontory, and black smoke rose at even intervals above its parapet and drifted along horizontally as though it screened a line of locomotives travelling up a cutting. At the same moment the trench-mortars in our evacuated front line began to give forth their dull thudding note, increasing in frequency as the first minute passed. In the sap in front of it, two machine-guns, traversing the German front line with a "two-inch tap," added their rapid knuckle-rapping to the brazen fury of the storm.

"The orchestra's tuning up, mates," shouted one man with a nervous laugh; "Programmes sixpence each." But no one heard him. The speaker glanced upward. A white cloud, soft as lamb's wool, appeared above the trenches and he suddenly collapsed into the bottom of the trench. At the

same moment there was a patter like rain on the earth around them and something rattled on men's helmets like hail. All eyes were fixed on the platoon commander, who was looking at his wrist-watch. Each man put his left foot in a foot-hole cut in the wall of the trench and, reaching up, firmly gripped a stake in the parapet above him. They leaned forward with their chests against the earthen wall, straining like hounds at the leash.

"Now, men," he said quietly, "remember we're the Springers, don't lose your heads, and—" (a whistle sounded) "over you go." But no one heard this. John Knighton could see the officer's lips moving as he shouted, but that was all. He saw also the platoon-sergeant shouting into this officer's ear, but again no sound reached him. They took their cues by sight and not by hearing. They hauled themselves up, and with a spring were over the top. John Knighton, looking back over his shoulder, saw three other waves behind him rising up out of the earth. He advanced at a pace that was neither a walk nor a run, but something between the two, and made for one of the planks thrown at intervals across the fire-trench. As he crossed it he saw the Stokes gunners in their emplacements in the trench beneath him rapidly taking their gun to pieces to join up with the fourth line; one man already had the barrel over his shoulder as though about to perform a "turn" with a stove-pipe.

Slipping through one of the gaps cut overnight in the intricacies of the "double-apron" wire, he heard

above him the thin whine of shrapnel, and tongues of flame appeared in the air overhead, followed by scrolls of white smoke. There was a soft patter as the dispersing bullets struck the earth, and he saw men to the right and left of him suddenly fall out of the line as though they had forgotten something and, falling, lie very still. "It do seem——" said his neighbour, Jacob Winterbourne; the sentence was never finished. John passed on. His throat was dry as a furnace, his nostrils were filled with the reek of burnt powder, his eyes dazed with dust, and the sweat ran down his face. Only a moment before, the gun-layers back at the batteries, working to time, had turned the sight-elevating gear of their guns until the range-drum recorded another hundred yards. The German front-line trench was clearly visible; the "tail" of the creeping barrage had lifted. Behind that trench smoke-shells, each exploding as it fell in graceful stems of smoke embroidered with thousands of tiny sparks of burning phosphorus, expanded into ostrich feathers of white vapour, which merged into a screen of mist. The next moment he had leapt into the German trench.

The trench was pounded into the semblance of a dried water-course, and here and there lay the bloody débris of what had once been men. It flashed through his mind that this débris looked curiously like the scarecrows he had seen in a Wiltshire corn-field dismantled by the storm. He heard groans and cries and savage oaths to the right of him, as, turning to the left, he advanced at the head of his

little bombing party. They bombed their way round a traverse as the second wave with the Lewis gunners on its left leapt into the trench. Pallid men in dirty gray uniforms crept out of holes in the earth, held up their hands, and gibbered for quarter; they were bundled over the parapet and ran ridiculously, with arms above their heads, through the oncoming waves of the third and the fourth lines.

In a few minutes the trench was won. Someone set a signal alight on the parapet where it glowed like a great red carnation. The signallers were talking confidentially to the aëroplanes whose droning hum came nearer and nearer as they circled overhead and "banked" at an angle of forty-five degrees. As they came lower their drone changed to the whirr of a saw-mill, and, looking up, John Knighton could distinguish the airmen and every rib of their planes. Filling their empty sandbags in a fury of haste the men turned to "consolidate" the parados while the Lewis gunners emptied their trays of cartridges over the top at the German second-line trench.

John Knighton, turning up a communication trench, heard a loud uproarious cheer as the third wave, carrying their rifles at the short trail, leapt across the trench, some ahead, some behind, like men in a hurdle race. He noticed a machine-gunner carrying the tripod fantastically over his shoulders, as a shepherd carries a lamb, with two legs in front. Behind the fourth line the carrying party, consisting of D Company with spare bombs and coils of wire slung on poles, were coming up. Far as the eye

could see, the whole countryside was alive with men advancing like beaters in a heath fire. On the left an enemy machine-gun was holding up the battalion advancing on that side, until it was shrouded in smoke-bombs out of which, as they alighted, wisps of smoke, emerging like genii out of a bottle, uncoiled themselves into sulphurous clouds.

The bombing-party advanced stealthily up the communication trench, John Knighton, as bayonetman, leading the way with the safety-catch of his rifle forward. Behind him was No. 2, with his safety-catch back, and then came bomb-thrower No. 1, with a bomb-carrier in turn behind him. The trench suddenly widened. "Island Traverse!" shouted John Knighton, and stood still with his rifle "on guard." Bomber No. 1 took a little barrel-shaped object out of his bag, slipped a ring on to a hook of his belt, and with the palm of his hand firmly clasping the lever against the bomb, he pulled out the pin. He held the bomb against his hip, and then with a mighty overhand throw he launched it over the "island" of sandbags. There was a loud report, and a cloud of woolly white smoke rose behind the traverse. "Fifteen yards, five yards left," shouted the N.C.O., and the bomber threw again. Then John Knighton rushed round the traverse with the rest of the bombing party on his heels. The Germans were bolting like rabbits with a ferret behind them. Ten yards behind the bombers a subaltern was squatting with a Stokes gun between his legs and popping off at a "pocket" of the enemy.

They were getting on. Half an hour later the Major was telephoning remarks to the Colonel, punctuated by frequent gutturals:

Bombing attack is going very well AC. AC. The artillery fire and M. G. and L. G. from my post at the Mound are very effective, enemy keep bolting from trench across the open AC. AC. I require more S.S.A. for men and L.G.s AC. AC. The latter have expended approximately ten magazines and have done good work AC. AC. At least fifty of the enemy have been forced out of the switch trench and for 200 yards east of the Nose AC. AC. Lieutenant A—— has orders to occupy the German trench immediately behind the bombing party AC. AC. Will you arrange for artillery to lift off the Nose?

But there came a lull; something had held up our left flank. Our left was "in the air," and John Knighton and his bombing party found their way blocked by enemy bombers rushing up a lateral trench at its junction with the communication trench along which they were forcing their way. He saw a man in front of him raise his hand from his thigh and swing his arm over his shoulder; there was a loud report, a sheet of violet flame, and he knew no more.

## VI

He lay where he fell while the battle surged over and beyond him. Many hours later some stretcher-bearers picked him up and carried him back to the

regimental aid-post. He was given a hasty injection of 500 units of anti-tetanus serum, and then passed on in a hand-cart to the advanced dressing station of the field ambulance where surgeons toiled all night in their overalls under the pallid glare of an acetylene lamp. His wounds were dressed, a waterproof envelope was tied to his buttonhole, and he was put on one side for despatch to the Casualty Clearing Station. The envelope contained a Field Medical Card and its red-coloured border told its own tale to the orderlies who passed him on. But of what was written on that card he knew nothing. He was unconscious.

He awoke in hospital at the Base. As he opened his eyes he felt a slight pressure on his wrist and he saw the R.A.M.C. captain, whose hand was upon his pulse, incline his head. At that a nurse softly opened a screen at the foot of his bed and shut out his view of the ward. His nostrils were filled with the penetrating smell of methylated spirit and iodoform, and in his ears was a rhythm of crashing waters followed always by the multitudinous scramble of pebbles on the beach. It was the beat of three succeeding waves upon the shore—that last pulsation of a rising tide—as, under a full moon flooding the room with her cold silver light, the great waters heaved and the cables of the lightship out at sea grew taut. There was a sudden lull; the tide was on the turn. He gazed at the screen and pictures passed across it as though his brain were full of lantern-slides. He saw a thatched cottage, dressed



with flints, and a red brick wall covered with ivy-leaved toad-flax; he heard the tinkle of sheep-bells upon a green down, and in his nostrils was the scent of wild thyme. Then the picture faded away before the pattern of a gigantic weeping willow outlined in black crayon upon the moonlit screen, and his face grew troubled. The eyes in the motionless head followed the movements of the nurse by his bed and she saw a question in them.

"What is it, sonny?" she said, as she stooped over him, smoothing his pillow and looking down at the leaden glaze upon his face. His thumb and forefinger were plucking softly at the coverlet.

She seemed very far away. "Cassn't thee tell I, lady, whether we've a took thuck trench?"

She did not know. But she knew that John Knighton, who had kept the faith that was in him, had finished his course. His race was run.

"Yes," she said.

The troubled look died out of his eyes. He sighed with deep content and, sighing, fell asleep; and, sleeping, went out with the tide.

### XIII

#### FIELD PUNISHMENT

**I** SEE the brutal and licentious soldiery are getting it in the neck again," said my friend, Colonel K—.

He had dropped his newspaper, and was staring reflectively at the horns of an ibex. The ibex with other trophies of migratory members adorned the walls of a well-known service club in which we were sitting after dinner. I knew that expression of his. K. has been in the army twenty years, and the sudden change in the public temper at the beginning of the war from habitual depreciation of the service to one of impassioned flattery had left him surprised, but incredulous. Wherefore, when the sacramental words about "the military caste" made one of their inevitable appearances in a newspaper leader, the Colonel always went one better and penitentially referred to himself and all officers as brutal and licentious.

"Well, what have we been doing now, sir?" I replied.

"Field Punishment," said K. laconically. "Some fellow in the newspaper says it's the mark of the beast. 'Militarism,' you know, and all that. It reminds me," and he measured the length of the

ibex's horns with his eye. "That soldier was a holy terror," he added inconsequently.

"Go on, sir," I said, encouragingly. I knew he had a story at the back of his mind.

"So I will in a moment. But, talking about F.P. and particularly F.P. No. 1. I see they say it's degrading. Perhaps it is. But is there anything half as degrading as being cashiered—eh! what?"

"I have yet to hear of it," I replied.

"Well, what's the penalty for an officer being drunk on active service? Cashiering, or dismissal which amounts to much the same thing. And then FINIS. He's a marked man ever afterward—black-balled in clubs, ostracized in society, an object for the contempt of some and the pity of others. And what's your private get? Eighty-four days F.P. and forfeiture of pay—rarely more, usually less. And who's the wiser? His field conduct-sheet isn't public property. He's got to square the account with his wife, of course—when she writes and asks why her allotment has been stopped—which he does by telling her some cock-and-bull story of having lost his haversack and being 'crimed' by a brutal court-martial. And then the local M.P. is got at and puts a question in Parliament: 'Whether the right honourable gentleman's attention has been drawn to the vindictive and degrading punishment inflicted on Private John Jones by Field-General Court Martial, and whether he will take steps to put a stop to the brutal and barbarous practice,' etc.,

etc. Faugh! Fetch me an ounce of civet—I mean a liqueur brandy. Waiter! Damn that boy!

“And then as to being drunk. If a private’s drunk he’s drunk. But if an officer’s taken quinine and gets dizzy, if he’s had shell-shock and gets excitable, if he’s taken morphia and gets dazed, if there’s a lack of muscular coördination—well, the Lord help that officer if he’s taken a single glass of whisky that day, for the A.P.M. won’t! In the army there’s only one rule for the officer—he’s either sober as a judge or drunk as a lord. A court-martial recognizes no intermediate shades of distinction. None of your police-surgeon’s tests about the ‘British Constitution,’ no trials of tendon reflexes, and all the rest of it. ‘Sentence promulgated, accused to be handed over to A.P.M. at Boulogne, notice to Messrs. Cox and Co.’ And then—as I say—FINIS. Very necessary, of course. Many a poor lad’s gone that way, and for a first offence, too.”

“Yes,” I remarked, “dismissal from the service is death to an officer, but discharge with ignominy seems to be meat and drink to a certain type of private—or it was before the Military Service Act and the cancellation of discharges. But that doesn’t stop some of ’em trying to get to Parkhurst all the same. I remember a Tommy saying to me the other day: ‘There are fellows who say “distance is better than cover” and commit these crimes so that they will be sent to prison.’ Cold feet, evidently.”

“Well, of course. Why, if you’d been in the army

as long as I have, my friend, 'you'd know that getting 'crimed' and jugged was one of the favourite dodges of a man with cold feet. Do you know the reason for the rule that an accused is not to wear his cap when in court?"

"Ceremony, I suppose."

"Ceremony be damned. It was to prevent his throwing it at the president. That used to be a favourite dodge with cold-footed wasters who were afraid the court-martial would acquit 'em. Yes, I mean it. Look here, my friend, lawyers may talk shop till they're blue in the face about Jeremy what's-his-name and theories of punishment—the reformatory, the retributive, the deterrent, and all the rest of it, but there's only one theory in the army, and it's the preventive. You've not only got to prevent crime, but you've got to prevent crime committed as a means of punishment. You've got to punish the criminal in the way he least expects or most dislikes—see? Now, field punishment is punishment in the field. D'you follow me? Consequently, the fellow who commits a crime in order to get jugged should not be jugged—he should get F.P. And as you can't give C.B. in the trenches you must give F.P."

"Yes," I said, "but why F.P. No. 1? Why not F.P. No. 2? Why tie him up? Why not put him on extra fatigues?"

"Why, because every man's doing extra fatigues in the trenches as it is; it's the daily round, the common task, latrines included. And you can't put

him in a guard detention-room. There's no guard-room in the trenches even if you could spare men to look after him. Besides, the chances are with a real bad hat that he wants to hit the sergeant in the eye just to get jugged. Oh! yes, I know the penalty for that. Death! But it isn't often inflicted and the men know it—there'd be a holy row in Parliament if it was!"

"Well, but what about the new Suspension of Sentences Act?" I interjected. "A confirming authority can suspend the sentence the moment he confirms it and keep the man in the trenches. Doesn't that dispense with the necessity of F.P.?"

"Not a bit of it. Quite the contrary. Supposing you've suspended the sentence, and the fellow is one of the kind who doesn't want to retrieve his character; in fact, an old offender or a cold-footed rotter who doesn't care a damn for your clemency, and he goes and commits another offence, where are you? You've got to send him to gaol after all unless—that's where F.P. come in."

"Your counsel is as the counsel of Ahithophel," I said.

"Not mine. It's the A.G.'s—bless his holy name. He thought it all out. You see, you've got to stop up every earth. As to F.P. No. 1.—they call it 'crucifixion.' It's sometimes a thief on the cross, I admit—some fellows think nothing of pinching a pal's belongings—but there isn't any cross. I've never seen one. I've known a fellow pegged out—once—and that was because he tried to kick the

provost-sergeant in his vitals. But the only F.P. I ever inflicted when I was a O.C. was tying up by one arm. Why, damn it! A fellow must wipe his nose, you know.

"Of course, there are limits to F.P. If a fellow's made up his mind to get jugged to avoid service, jugged he'll get, sooner or later, and if his conduct in prison is ingeniously and scientifically bad, then you can't send him back to the trenches under suspension. So he gets out of the army—or rather out of the trenches—and to a certain kind of man and his class Wormwood Scrubs or Parkhurst is no disgrace. Mind you, I'm not saying they are typical. Most of the men in the army are first-rate fellows, but you've now got conscription, and that means you've got the worst as well as the best. But there's no such way open to an officer if he should get cold feet, for the simple reason that prison to him is a stumbling block and cashiering foolishness. In other words, the only way of leaving the army, open to an officer, is closed to him—to put it paradoxically. He can't resign his commission."

"No," I said. "I remember when I asked you, just after I was gazetted, how an officer could resign his commission on active service, you said 'the only way you can be sure of doing it is to go into the orderly-room and hit the adjutant one in the eye.'"

"Yes," said the Colonel, "it's never been known to fail. But it isn't often used."

"You were going to tell me a story," I said after a pause. "About a holy terror."

“Was I? Oh, yes! Well, there was a fellow in a certain regiment who was absolutely the limit. A general practitioner in army ‘crime,’ in fact. He wasn’t so much vicious as intractable. His tenancy of the guard-room was so frequent, continuous, and exclusive that I sometimes wonder he didn’t get put on the register as a voter in virtue of an occupation franchise. That fellow’s regimental conduct-sheet was quite unique. He’d have given the recording angel writer’s cramp. You know how zealously conduct-sheets are kept in the army, and that fellow’s record extended over twelve years. ‘Absent from tattoo parade when on inlying picket—6 days, C.B.’; ‘Absent from defaulter’s roll-call at 2 P.M.—168 hours.’; ‘Absent until apprehended by the police at 6.30 P.M.—2 months’ I.H.L.’; ‘Disobedience of Battalion Orders, fastening his kit with coat-straps—8 days’ C.B.’; ‘Drunkenness—fined 2s. 6d.’; ‘Putting his head through a pane of glass in the guard-room—stoppages of pay’; ‘Dirty on parade’; ‘Quitting fatigue without permission’; ‘Irregular conduct on Church parade’; ‘Improper language to a N.C.O.’; ‘Pulling the leg of the regimental goat’; ‘Singing “Onward Christian soldiers” at punishment drill,’ and so on.

“Well, when the present show started, he went out with the rest of his battalion and the leopard didn’t change his spots. Very good fellow in a scrap all the same. And I must say the O.C.’s bull-pup had a high opinion of him—and I’ve never known that dog make a mistake. He had nursed the pup



through a distemper. One day in the trenches he was brought before the O.C. in his dug-out and charged with giving the sergeant lip. 'Do you elect to be tried summarily?' said the O.C. 'Yes, please, sir,' he said.

"As you know every man who is tried for an offence involving forfeiture of pay (and F.P. always means that) can elect to have a court-martial. But he was a downy bird—knew the Red Book from end to end, though he'd never read a word of it—and he knew that an O.C. can only give 28 days' F.P. at the most, while a C.M. can award as much as 90 days. 'Very well,' said the O.C., after the hearing was over, '14 days' F.P. No. 1.' So the sergeant took him back to a dump and lashed him to a wagon by one arm, making it extra tight with a double knot, for he knew his man. That was for a two-hour shift, which, as you know, is the maximum dose *per diem*.

"Well, a few minutes later a *Taube* came reconnoitring over our lines. It soon spotted the dump and signalled to the enemy batteries. And then the Hun began pitching heavy stuff over—8-inch. First short, then wide, but always getting nearer the spot until that dump was as black as a Man-of-War coaling her bunkers. The O.C. and two or three company officers were watching the display from the trenches near the O.C.'s dug-out in the support-trenches, and the company officers were exchanging odds on the chances of the Hun's getting a direct hit.

“I’ll bet you two to one the next’s a dud,’ said one of them who was bored stiff.

“‘Done!’ said the other.

“Of course, everyone had forgotten all about the holy terror—the O.C. had many other things to think about. And suddenly the O.C. said, ‘Good God!’ and scrambled over the parados and made a bee-line for the dump. His officers no doubt thought he’d gone off his chump. And the O.C.’s bull-pup, who was getting fed up with the trenches, went tearing after him. Well, he made tracks over the open ground—unhealthy place, and the surface like a Gruyère cheese—and after doing the mile in record time he got to the wagon. There was the fellow, still tied, covered with black earth, the veins on his temples standing out like whipcord, and yelling ‘I’ll be hit—Gawd’s trewth, I’ll be hit.’ He was not a coward by a long way, but by that time his nerve had gone. The bull-pup, who had no nerves, began leaping up trying to kiss his dirty face.

“The Colonel whipped out his knife, and in a trice cut him loose. He had to be pretty quick. ‘Now follow me, my man,’ he says, and they made a sprint for the communication trench. It was rather quaint, as the dog kept running from one to the other, thinking it all a huge lark and being frightfully pleased because, for the first time in his life, he was being taken out for a walk at one and the same time by the only two men he cared a cuss for. He’d always been trying to bring them together,

not being very well up in military etiquette. When they'd got a few hundred yards they got a bad dose of shrapnel. And as luck would have it the holy terror got hit in the leg, which flopped as though he'd got locomotor ataxia—tendons smashed.

"'I'm done, sir,' he said and collapsed. So the O.C. picked him up and——"

"What a splendid thing to do," I said impulsively.

My friend snorted. "Not a bit of it," he said. "The O.C. had had him tied up—what else could he do but go and untie him? You don't suppose he was going to leave him there. He'd never have been able to look his dog in the face again. Oh, no! Damn it! Can't leave a fellow like an Aunt Sally for Huns to shy at.

"Well, now, would you believe it, that fellow turned over a new leaf from that very day. When he was evacuated and returned fit for duty he was a new man. Talk about the penitent form at a revival meeting! He's a company sergeant-major now. And he'd have licked that O.C.'s boots if the O.C. had let him; he had to content himself with blacking them as his batman till he got his stripes."

There was a pause. The Colonel studied the ibex; I studied the Colonel.

"I say, sir, what was the name of that O.C.?" I asked.

"Fine pair of horns that," said the Colonel. "I

remember when I was shooting buck in South Africa——”

“Excuse me, sir, but what was the name of the O.C.?” I persisted.

The Colonel seemed annoyed; he coloured slightly. “I—I forget,” he said.

## XIV

### THE LOST PLATOON

#### I

IT WAS a warm August night, but there was a fire in the guard-room. It's a way we have. The hands of the clock pointed to twenty-five minutes to ten. Six men in khaki uniform lay on as many beds, most of them on their backs with their hands clasped under their heads, and gazing contemplatively at the whitewashed walls. The corporal of the guard was sitting up reading an evening paper by the light of his own tallow "dip," stuck in an empty bottle, from which depended a stalactite of grease. He read most of the time in silence, but occasionally he whispered a long word, dwelling on each syllable as though to give it due weight, and glancing inquisitively at the sergeant. The sergeant was sitting stolidly at a deal table making entries in a buff document. He tickled the bottom of the ink-bottle with his pen as though seeking inspiration therein. Then he inclined his head to one side, protruded his tongue athletically, squared his elbows, and proceeded to write.

"U-l-t-i-m-a-t-um! I say, sergeant, what is a ultimatum?"

"Wait till I've finished this blooming' guard re-

port," said the sergeant, adding to himself: "Defaulters—one."

There was silence for a time, broken only by the scratching of the sergeant's pen, and the purring of the kettle on the range.

"Bank-rate—ten per cent," read the corporal confusedly. "What the 'ell does that mean? What did you say a hultimatum was, sergeant?"

"I didn't say it was anything," retorted the sergeant, cautiously. "Here, lemme see the paper." He studied it for a moment. "It means," he said resolutely, "get out or get under."

"Well, why can't they say so?" said the corporal grievously. "I passed the fifth standard, but these jaw-breaking words give me the hump."

He glanced at the sergeant, and seeing he was resting from his literary labours he felt encouraged to proceed: "When the orderly officer came round to-day he sez to Private Whipple what was on sentry, he sez, 'Give up your orders!' and Private Whipple repeats his orders like as if he was saying the Lord's Prayer, and when 'e'd got to 'No mendicants or persons so-soliciting ahms to be 'llowed within the barrack-gate,' the orderly officer sez, he sez, sudden-like, 'What's s-soliciting ahms mean?' and Private Whipple sez, 'Trying to pinch rifles, sir,' and the orderly officer smiles sarkastic-like and told me to see as Private Whipple understood his orders. What *do* soliciting ahms mean, sargeant?"

"If you gives a copper to a bloke in the street . . ." explained the sergeant.

"Not me," said the corporal apprehensively. "I ain't such a mug. One and eightpence a day is all I gets, and there ain't much change out of that."

"If you gives a copper to a bloke in the street," persisted the sergeant, "and he asks you for it, he's soliciting alms off you."

The corporal gazed at the sergeant with respectful admiration. "You must 'a studied hard in your time, sergeant."

"A tidy bit," said the sergeant loftily. "That's the way to get on, young feller."

"It is—is—expected—that the German Ambassador will be 'anded his passports,'" read out the corporal slowly. "Now what might that mean, sergeant?"

"It means," said the sergeant, as he blotted the guard report, "as he'll go on furlough. And maybe he'll get his 'ticket.'"

"D'you think as there'll be war, sergeant?"

"Guard, turn out!" It was the voice of the sentry outside. The six men sprang from their beds, stretched their arms, pulled their tunics straight, and made for the rifle-rack. Each man took down a rifle with bayonet fixed, and filed out of the guard-room. The sergeant took down a rifle without a bayonet, and followed them. As he reached the doorway he shouted: "Sound ten o'clock." The Guard fell in. On the tenth stroke of the gong the notes of the "Last Post" rang out over the barrack square.

A well-built man with the Royal Arms on his sleeve walked up smartly. It was the regimental

sergeant-major. He had a well-arched chest, the clean, sloping shoulders of an athlete; his deltoid muscles rippled through his tunic, and he moved on his feet with a quick, resilient tread. In every movement there was a suggestion of suppressed power; he was like a coiled steel spring. As he saw the company orderly sergeants, he shouted: "Staff Parade! 'Shun!"

"A Company!" called the sergeant-major.

"Present, sir."

"B Company!"

"Four absent, sir."

And he rang the changes on the companies, the band, the drums, the signallers, till he reached "canteen."

"Closed and correct, sir."

Which being done, the sergeant-major turned to the orderly officer. The latter stood by him in mess kit, with sword and cap, the light of the lamp over the guard-room door gleaming on his glazed shirt-front.

"Staff parade present, sir," said the sergeant-major with a salute.

"Staff parade! Dismiss!" said the orderly officer, and he turned away.

At that moment an officer in mess kit, but without a cap, walked into the light. It was the Adjutant. He carried a telegram in his hand, and his face was grave.

"Addison! Sergeant-major!" Officer and sergeant-major turned and saluted.



"Yes, sir," said Addison.

"Look at that, my son," said the Adjutant, and he handed him the telegram. It contained a single word.

Addison gave a low whistle. "So it's come at last?"

"Yes," said the Adjutant slowly, "it's come at last. The regiment's got to mobilize. This means war." He turned to the warrant officer. "Sergeant-major, have the officers' call sounded. And the orderly-sergeants' call. And I want a cycle orderly to go down to the Colonel, quick!"

"Yes, sir. I suppose the reservists'll be coming in in a couple of days?"

"Yes!" The Adjutant was thinking rapidly. "The colours must go to the depot. The regimental mess plate will be taken to the bank—but the mess-president will see to that; the plate of the sergeants' mess had better go with it. Sergeant-major! Have the gymnasium and the church open to put the kits in. Get the church orderly warned at once. See that the officers' call and orderly-sergeants' are sounded."

The sergeant-major saluted and disappeared.

The notes of the two calls floated over the barrack square.

"The ord-'ly-sergeants are want-ed now—ord-'ly sergeants to run!" hummed the orderly officer mechanically. He was trying to think.

"Well, Addison," said the Adjutant reflectively. Neither spoke for a moment. Each man was think-

ing of a woman and wondering how she would take it.

"Well," said the subaltern, "no shooting this autumn."

"No! nor cubbing, either. I'm going to sell my hunters for what they'll fetch."

"I wouldn't do that. This show will be over by Christmas."

"Will it, my boy? I wonder! If I know anything of the gentle German *his* lamp is trimmed. Tisn't sense to think he's asking for a licking. Oh, no!"

"Well, the regiment couldn't be in better form. The men are topping. Don't tell me the Germans could beat our men at the butts. Why! the returns for recruits' firing Part III were up to ninety point three last week. I'd put my last shirt on 'em."

"I know. I know. But what kind of 'predicted area' are we going to bump into out there? Mind you, Addison, I'm not grousing. Our army's not large, but by God it's good. And soldiering's a very different thing from what it was. We've sweated the last ounce out of ourselves over training. These staff rides!—why, I know every bit of cover round here from a dandelion to a copse. We've mugged up strategy and tactics as if we'd been back at an army crammer's. And the men! Topping, I agree. Their conduct-sheets show that. As for the sergeant-major he's never once let me down all the time I've been adjutant."

"Yes. He's a jolly good sort. He's taught me a lot. D'you remember the fight he put up when he

was runner up for the Army championship? My! That left of his was . . . .”

“Orderly-sergeants all present, sir.” The sergeant-major had returned.

“Thank you, sergeant-major. Right! I say, sergeant-major.”

“Yes, sir.”

“You know what we’re in for?”

“Y-yes, sir. Germans, isn’t it?”

“Is—is the battalion all right, d’you think?”

“Yes, sir, I think they’re all right. Thanks to you, sir.”

“Well, you’ve had a hand in it, sergeant-major. I suppose we’ve all done our best. All right, good-night. Serg—— Wait a minute, though. There’ll be the men’s pay-books to be issued. The quartermaster-sergeant will see to that, of course. There’s a form for making a will on active service on the last page. But the company commanders will explain all that to the men. Yes, good-night, sergeant-major.”

“A good chap that, Addison!” said the Adjutant as they moved toward the orderly room, “a very good chap!”

They disembarked at Boulogne and within a few days found themselves at Mons. There on that fateful Sunday they held the salient of the canal against overwhelming odds and, holding it, decided the fate of the world. But of what mighty issues hung upon their resolution most of them knew little

and boasted not at all, and those who survived will to this day tell you nothing except that it was very "warm." They were badly cut up; Addison disappeared, and when the roll was called at the end of the first day of the retreat not a man of his platoon was there to answer it. Months afterward the Adjutant (by this time a Colonel) picked up their trail by a painful induction from the lists of "Prisoners died of wounds," which filtered through from time to time, and adding them up he could account for twenty men. It struck him as something curious that nearly half a platoon should die of wounds at such long intervals after their capture—but he left it at that. Of Addison and his fate he could discover nothing at all. And then one day, some twenty-one months after the event, he learnt that the regimental sergeant-major had been repatriated as a disabled prisoner of war. He took advantage of a few days' leave to get in touch with "Records," and at last he found himself on a hot scent. It ended at a big stone building on a lonely down in a southern county.

## II

The medical superintendent glanced at the card. "Show him in," he said.

An officer entered. It was the Colonel. He took in the room at a glance—he noted a row of books with the names of Hughlings, Jackson, Ferrier, and Clouston on their backs and saw on the table the corrected proof-sheets of a typescript with the super-

scription, "The Localization of Cerebral Disease." Then he glanced again at the medical superintendent and suddenly encountered a pair of eyes which seemed to be looking right through him. It was not the colour of the irises that arrested him but their visual intensity—they seemed to see things invisible to the ordinary eye of sense. You will often see that look in the eyes of an alienist. It is a lonely look. The next moment the doctor's eyes had changed their expression. They were masked by a homely look of bland and sociable enquiry, and this so suddenly that the Colonel wondered whether he had been dreaming.

"I have come to enquire after a man of my regiment, a sergeant-major. George Smith. Wounded and captured at Mons, I believe. I heard he'd lately been repatriated from Germany. Records inform me that he was sent to D. Block at Netley and then here. I should like to have a talk with him, please."

"I see," said the medical superintendent, pensively. "I see. Won't you sit down?" He seemed to hesitate.

"Perhaps it's not your regular visiting day," said the Colonel. "I'm sorry, but I'm on short leave."

"No," said the medical superintendent. "No, it's not that. But he wouldn't know you—and perhaps you wouldn't know him."

The Colonel smiled incredulously. "Not know me! I was adjutant to the battalion and he was regimental sergeant-major. Surely his case is not so bad as that? Look at these cases of shell shock.

There's nothing you doctors cannot do in the healing line. Why! I knew a man——”

“You do us too much honour,” said the doctor, deprecatingly. “Shell shock is primarily a physical shock. The disorders it produces are functional, not organic—unless of course there's a predisposition to insanity. A brain lesion's another matter, you know. I've given much thought to his case—much thought.” He looked out at the garden, brilliant with the early flowers of spring, and gaudy with the meretricious hues of Dutch tulips. “Those daffodils reminded me of it just now. Ever heard of chromesthesia? No? Ah, well, I won't weary you with psychiatry. It's not a thing to take up as a hobby. Let us look up the case.”

He crossed the room and taking down a large leather-bound folio turned the leaves rapidly. At the head of each page were the words “Medical History Sheet!” followed by a man's name and a number of entries in chronological order. In the middle of each page was pasted a photograph.

“Smith—Alfred, Arthur, Charles,” muttered the doctor, “George! Yes, here it is. Sent here from Netley. ‘Discharged from the army under 392 (XVI) of King's Regulations. Permanently unfit. Delusional insanity.’ They sent us a copy of his military history sheet. Long-service and Good Conduct Medal, I see. Yes, yes, quite so. A clean-living man, I should say. No traces of syphilitic trouble. His pupils respond to light. His weight's improved, I see. He was ten stone when he came

here and anæmic. Starvation, of course. He's up to thirteen now—he'll recover his normal weight in time. That's his photograph. We always photograph them on admission."

The Colonel looked at the photograph. He looked at it for a long time in silence.

"Well," said the doctor. "Do you still wish to see him? Very well," and he pressed an electric button.

"Bring No. 1101 here," he said to the attendant. "I suppose he's dressed. If not, tell them to dress him."

The Colonel was looking at the view commanded by the doctor's window—a training camp under canvas, and, behind the bell-tents, mile upon mile of rippling down crowned with spinneys of beech. The long shadows thrown upon their green slopes by the fleecy clouds travelling across the sky chased one another till it seemed as if the downs themselves were in ecstatic motion. And he felt it was rather good to be alive.

"I think I know what the Psalmist meant when he said 'the mountains skip like rams,'" he mused. "He must have been thinking of the South Down country on a sunny day in——"

The Colonel turned at the sound of shuffling feet. He saw at the door a patient in loose gray clothes. He stared a long time. What it was that he saw I never have been quite able to understand, for when he told me the story weeks afterward he could remember nothing clearly about the man's appearance

except that the hands moved continually and fumbled with the clothes.

The Colonel advanced a step to speak. As he did so, the patient recoiled and raised his arm in front of his face as though to ward off a blow.

"Well, sergeant-major," said the Colonel tentatively. "You remember me? Come, come." He felt as if he were coaxing a child. "You remember your old adjutant."

At the sound of his voice George Smith drew his heels together and saluted vaguely. He turned his head in the direction of the voice and listened intently. He seemed to be trying to locate the Colonel's voice.

"Is he blind?"

"Not exactly. There's no sensory blindness. He sees you but doesn't recognize you, and your uniform conveys nothing to him. It's what we alienists call psychic blindness. D'you follow me?"

"Not quite. If he doesn't know my face how does he come to recognize my voice?"

"The visual memory's gone, but the auditory memory, though impaired, remains. How? Well, I suspect some lesion to the nerve tracts connecting the optic centres with the centres for other ideas. To be plain with you, I think he's had a blow on the head—he may have been treated to the butt-end of a rifle from one of his guards. It's a way they have, you know. The sound of your voice—I mean, the crude acoustic effect—has awakened something, of course, revived some auditory impression stored up



in the cells of the brain. Yes, yes. His brain is like a dark room in which his mind is trying to develop a negative. The negative is the image conveyed by the sound of your voice. But who can see into a man's brain? I've been trying to do it all my life. All I know is that the mental photograph that's being developed at this moment in George Smith's brain will probably be hopelessly blurred."

"D'you remember the Delhi manœuvres, sergeant-major?" said the Colonel suddenly as he leaned forward on his chair. "When we were up at Paniput? No! he doesn't—poor chap! Remember when the huts at Blacktown caught fire and the tug-of-war teams put the rope round the huts on each side of the mess and pulled them down and saved the mess plate? Surely you remember that? It was your notion—that. And how we got the mess-sergeant to call you in after dinner that night and all drank your health? No! D'you remember Mons? Theslag-heaps! No!"

The Colonel reflected for a moment. Then he drew his whistle and sounded it, watching the man's face. The patient's lips moved. He trembled violently. Then he began to speak.

"Hold your fire! Wait till I give the word. Three hundred! Steady! Let them come on. At the enemy in front—five rounds—rapid—FIRE! Oh! Very good. Christ! the place's alive with 'em. Where's our flank? They're on our right now—they're enfilading us. Where are our supports? Never mind! Give 'em hell, boys. Where's Mr. Addison? Sir?"

The Colonel leaned forward eagerly and was about to speak. The doctor held up his hand. "Don't interrupt him," he whispered, "it won't help matters."

"Where are our supports? Where's the runner? No! No! mustn't retire. Where's Mr. Addison? How many? About thirty? Thirty, did you say? Out of fifty-five! See that chimney-stack! Three hundred! Yes, three hundred. Recruit are you, my lad? Only just off the square. Never mind! Remember old six o'clock. Get tip of foresight into line with the shoulder of the U of the backsight and aim at bottom of the stack! That's it. I don't know. Well! We've got our iron rations. After that it'll be a case of 'March Past.' How many of us did you say? About twenty-one! Twenty-one out of fifty-five. They've outflanked us! It's a wash-out. We've no ammunition left. We've the wounded to think of. But I never thought it 'ud come to this. Where's Mr. Addison?"

"Fifty-five!" said the Colonel quietly to himself. "Yes, it would be about fifty-five. We were up to full strength." The voice had stopped. The Colonel, glancing at the doctor, saw that his eyes were narrowly watching the sergeant-major. The sergeant-major was gazing fixedly at the desk in front of him behind which the doctor sat. The doctor leaned forward and very quietly, very unobtrusively, placed his hand over something lying on the front of the desk, grasped it, closed it with a click, and put it in his pocket. It was a penknife.

The stealthy look died out of the sergeant-major's

eyes and the next moment he had resumed his monologue:

"Don't club him like that! He's hit in the leg; he can't. He can't, I tell you. Christ! Call yourself a soldier. Where's your officer? 'Prisoners!' I know we are. But we're men same as you. How would you like . . . Oh Christ! leave me alone. You dog, leave me alone . . . I can't carry it any more, you've broke my arm. It's *your* pack!—No! I ain't got anything to give you, my lad. They've been through my pockets, too. Rations! They've taken mine, too. No! I ain't had anything for forty-eight hours. How does it go 'Come to the cook-house door, boys, come to the cook-house door.'"

"It's the men's way of putting the cook-house call," whispered the Colonel to the doctor.

"No! it's mouldy. How many? Fifteen did you say out of fifty-five? Yes! They've clubbed five of us because they couldn't keep up. A horse tent. Yes, they've bedded us down with straw. Look at the straw—it's moving. It's alive. Christ! Don't they itch? Something cruel. They say it's good enough for English swine. How many did you say? Fourteen! Fourteen out of fifty-five! Yes, he died of hunger, poor chap. How's it go? 'Come to the cook——' No! I can't remember any more. There ain't any cook-house here, my lad. No! don't give in. Spat in your face, did they? Tell 'em to go to hell! Your shirt itches, do it? Throw it away then. Took yer kit away, did they?"

Christ! ain't we deficient in articles! The O.C.'ll take an inventory when we get home same as he did with deserters an'll order us to be put under stop-pages to make good. The Adjutant won't like it——"

The Colonel was gripping the arms of his chair. He muttered something under his breath. The doctor toyed with a pen, his eyes fixed on the patient. The latter now clenched his fists convulsively. The attendants moved a pace closer.

"No towel! Use your shirt, my lad, mustn't be dirty on parade. Soup like sewage, ain't it! '*Straf-baracke!*' What's it mean? Means 'in clink,' my lad. . Yes! fifty pfennigs a day for fatigues. Ain't this baulk of timber heavy? Offering you bread, are they? No! Don't take any notice; they'll only snatch it away again to get a rise out of you. Blast them, they ain't human. Tighten yer belt, instead, my lad. How does it go? 'Come to the——' No! I can't remember it: I'm that hungry. How many did you say? Eight. Eight out of fifty-five. It's the typhus done it. Where's the platoon? Not even a section! Never say die, boys. . . . How many did you say? Three of us poor sinners left. One on us left—not enough to mount guard now. . . . They're going to tie him up to the post, he was a sergeant-major, he was.

"Tie him up to the post! Yes! All night, and it's snowing. Jesus! The wind's something cruel. What for? For giving back answers! Why did they call him an 'English swine' then! Yes! a double knot. Round the ankles, then round the knees,

then round the shoulders, then round the wrists, then a slip-knot round the tree. It'll be about tattoo at home now, it will. Tell 'em to go to hell . . . tell 'em. . . ."

"What about Addison? Ask him about Addison," the Colonel entreated. But the doctor shook his head.

The sentences grew more and more confused. He uttered substantives without verbs and verbs without substantives. He faltered, stammered—and stopped. The brain had run down like a clock.

"Like spirit-rapping—oh! most damnably," was how the Colonel put it afterward. "And not a trace of feeling, no! Not a flicker on the poor devil's face. And there were we talking over him as though he were a dog or a horse—like two 'vets.' And those attendants standing beside him like two damned deaf mutes. As for him, you'd have sworn he was talking about someone else. A brain without a mind, you know. Ever noticed how the tape clicks out the Exchange telegrams and then gives you 'the right hon. gentleman said x x x x x?' All noughts and crosses, you know. It was just like that."

The Colonel put this to the medical superintendent at the time. He urged him to help him find a cue—to play the prompter to that darkened brain.

The doctor shook his head. "We alienists are still groping in the dark," he protested, with his eyes still on the vacant face of the sergeant-major. "We can observe much; we can experiment but little—or not at all. 'Fear not them which kill the body'

—you know the rest. I cannot cure the soul. I have been asked that question before—oh! too often.

“Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,  
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow?

“Would that I could! You know at times he thinks he has committed an unforgivable sin and that he’s condemned to stand forever on his toes tied to a post in the snow. What did you say? Oh, yes! An auditory impression, if sufficiently resonant, will sometimes stimulate the other senses. A good deal’s been done that way in cases of hypnotism—take a tuning-fork, for example; if sounded close to the ear, it will sometimes increase the acuteness of vision. One can even conceive of its rendering first-aid to a defective memory. But these are mere conjuring tricks. What’s that?”

Through the open window there floated upon the air a single silvery note. It was followed by another, tentative and tremulous, and then a series of volatile trills and flourishes. In the larch tree outside a thrush, piping its morning call, stopped inquisitively. The listlessness died out of the sergeant-major’s face; he listened, his head on one side, with the painful effort at location of a new-born child. Upon the green hillside, half a mile away, a happy bugler was practising his calls. He broke into the “pick-me-up, pick-me-up” quavers of the sergeants’ mess-call, changed suddenly into the “drummer’s knock,” blew a few bars of the “last post,” and then sounded

a plaintive sequence of three notes which came and went as in a fugue. The sergeant-major started to his feet, put his hands to his temples, stared at the Colonel's uniform, and, suddenly coming to attention, saluted.

"The orderly-sergeants' call, sir!"

The Colonel watched him breathlessly, waiting for a resurrection that never came.

"We've got to mobilize—to mobilize—to mobilize. Send the colours to the depot. Open the church for the men's kits, orderly. The reservists will be here to-morrow. Quick!" And he made for the door.

Strong arms clasped him in a grip of iron. He struggled in the embrace of the attendants.

"Let me go! Let me go!" he shouted. "I'm the sergeant-major! Where's the Adjutant? Damn you! Let me go!"

"No," said the Colonel to me afterward. "I'd had enough. The last I saw, or rather heard, of him as I left that horrible place was his voice from down a long corridor as they led him away. There is a peculiar *timbre* about the voices of the insane—you may have noticed it? . . . When I think of the old regiment—the old regiment marching up from rail-head, the advanced-guard like a spear-point, the connecting files, the column of fours, and the sergeant-major up in front with the C. O. and me, all the men with marigolds in their caps and singing, singing, "Tipperary" in the heat and dust—and then *that!* . . . What? Addison? No! I never heard."

## XV

### DRAFTS

THE O.C. who accompanied me on the tour of inspection was as proud of his Base Training Camp as though it were the family estate entailed on him and the heirs male of his body lawfully begotten. I told him so.

"Hum!" he said reflectively, "I hope I'm not tenant for life of this place. I'd like to get back to my old regiment some time. Still, it's a pretty place, eh, what?"

I looked round. Far as the eye could reach was a wilderness of sand dunes among which clumps of elder, sea-nettle, and couch-grass maintained a desperate struggle for existence. Occasionally a light wind played over it, changing its contours in a second, and depositing a thousand grains in our eyes and nostrils so that I sneezed and winked alternately. Our walk reminded me of the walrus and the carpenter.

"It makes me weep," I said, with a handkerchief to my eyes, "to see such quantities of sand."

The O.C. regarded this as a reflection on the capital value of the estate. "It's dry," he said argumentatively

"I'm sure it is," I hastened to agree. "I'm not



crabbing it. You've done wonders." And he had. "We've got our plans for demobilization well in hand; we might do worse than begin to consider the realization of these assets. Only an advertisement would express all I feel. 'For sale by private treaty, a highly desirable sporting estate, with mine craters, strong-posts, assault-courses, bombing-trenches, hutments, and an open-air theatre with oil-drum fauteuils—the whole in an excellent state of preservation. Inspected and thoroughly recommended.' A cinema-film manufacturer would make a fortune out of it."

"Well, G.H.Q. might do worse than take an official film of this show. It might convince the people at home that the Army knows how to organize. We've several 'stunts' on—we're rehearsing the Somme battle next week with ten thousand 'drafts' as supers and no end of black powder. Unfortunately G.H.Q. won't lend us any live Huns."

But there appeared to be a multitude of inanimate ones. There must have been a *Kadaver* factory somewhere in that camp, for in every trench for bayonet and bombing practice there lurked an obscene figure of straw and sackcloth individualized as Hindenburg, or Fritz, or *Kamerad*, according to the taste of the artist. The illusion was a trifle obvious, but it seemed adequate to a party of dismounted Bengal Lancers at bayonet drill on our right, who, as they lunged, gave a homicidal grunt of satisfaction and showed their teeth.

The O.C. suggested a gas inspection, and we

climbed a slope of sand swept smooth as a glacier by the wind. I stopped for a moment as I came to a party of men reclining on their elbows on the sand, chewing bents of grass with bovine content while a sergeant discoursed colloquially on the art of taking a trench.

"When you goes along a trench, don't pass any one. It ain't good manners to cut a Hun dead—not in a trench. If there's a German lying there, stick him. If he's dead, he won't feel it. If he's alive, he's no business to be there. And never leave a dug-out so long as there's a moan or a groan."

The rest of this lethal discourse escaped me for we passed on. A bombing class was being put through its paces, and, as we drew near, the O.C. thought it discreet to take cover in a caged trench in the rear, for they were practising with live bombs. The N.C.O. was a realist and had apparently disdained such precaution for he kept his pupils posted in a shallow trench in front of us with no other cover than a few sandbags grouped round the bomber who was about to throw. The bomber drew out the pin with the thumb and forefinger of his left hand, keeping the lever firmly clasped against the barrel with his right.

"Now this 'ere bomb is as full of T.N.T. as a egg is full of meat," explained the N.C.O., "and the meat in it is pretty high. If you waits more than five seconds after you let's go the lever, you—well, the bomb won't wait for you—see?"

The bomber stood rigid as a Greek wrestler, his right arm held against his hip.

"That's it. Now remember you stretches your arm as if you was bowling in cricket, and you don't hook it up as if you was putting the weight. You just throws from the hip. It gives you an ache in the back like lumbago at first, but you soon gets used to that. Steady on there, my lad," he said sharply as he saw the bomber relaxing one of his fingers. 'Don't do that. A bloke what did that last week, he's got a white cross now. He's what you might call 'missing.' Now then."

The bomber threw. The bomb pitched about sixty yards ahead—a good throw. For an appreciable space nothing happened; and one or two eager spirits stood on tiptoe craning their heads over the sandbags.

"Keep yer blooming heads down! A chap what put his head up last week is in Blighty now."

As they ducked, there was a report like that of a 6-inch howitzer, a sheet of flame, and a cloud of woolly white smoke.

"It's not what you might call King's English," said the O.C. to me as we did a half-right; "but these N.C.O.'s talk sense, and you can't possibly mistake what they mean." Which is true.

We skirted a sand-dune and came upon a company drawn up in ranks some ten deep listening to an exhortation from a corporal of painfully scientific attainments on the properties of noxious gases. I suspect that corporal of being a Bachelor of Science in private life, perhaps a University Lecturer. He was much too good for this savage world.

The men, who were standing easy, glanced at him suspiciously from time to time as though they thought they were being "had."

"Never breathe into your mask," the corporal was saying, "or you'll get it full of your own," the wind carried his voice away for a moment—"di-oxide."

"That bloke don't know what he's talking about; 'e's balmy," muttered a man with a Cockney accent a few yards away as he examined his gas mask. "It ain't oxhide; it's flannel."

"He means the gas what you breathes out of your inside, Bert," said his neighbour helpfully.

The speaker stared sullenly. "I don't breathe any gas out of my inside," he retorted combatively, "I ain't a blinkin' sewer."

"Stop talking in the ranks," shouted the sergeant.

"Use the tube and breathe gently through that," continued the lecturer in a refined voice. "Don't take deep breaths or you'll get some gas in. It's owing to officers and men moving up and down the line and breathing hard that they get slightly gassed. Don't exert yourselves too much."

"Now he's talking sense," said Bert approvingly, "what price fatigues?"

The O.C. and I had withdrawn to the shelter of a clump of elders to light a cigarette as the lecturer digressed to the subject of gas blankets and vermores solution. Occasionally, as he raised his voice, some of his sacramental words such as "cyanosis" and "pulmonary epithelium" reached us, followed

always by a profane commentary from the furtive couple behind the elder.

"Ammonia inhalations from the capsules should be immediately given by the stretcher-bearers," said the lecturer.

"They'll have to give the poor bloke first-aid with a dictionary if they talk to him like that."

"I will now proceed to say a few words about tear-shells. Tear-shells look like 'duds.' They don't explode at first; the fuse only burns enough to set the gas going. The gas is phosgene. This induces irritation of the lachrymatory glands——"

"What's 'e getting at now, Bert?"

"I dunno. I fink he means it makes yer do a weep."

"I wonder whether it 'ud make a Jock weep," ruminated the other doubtfully. "Funny chaps the Scotties. I know a chap what knew one—knew one, mind yer. He used ter say as it took two years to know a Scotty, but after that 'e'd eat out of yer hand."

"Ah! The Hun's a funny blighter, Alf. He's always 'off side.' His notion of starting a fight is to begin by kicking you in the guts. . . . Say, Alf, if you met a Hun wot put his hands up and said: 'I've got a wife and ten children,' what 'ud you do?"

"I should say: 'Yer oughter be ashamed of yourself.' But I dunno. I might give the blighter a fag and tell him to 'op it. And I might not."

"Shun!" shouted the sergeant. "The company

will now march in single file into the trench beginning with No. 1 of the rear rank. Right about t-u-r-rn. Quick—Mar-rch!”

They filed into the revetted trench, some forty yards in length, in which a small flask had been placed. It was a decanter of phosgene of the choicest vintage. We moved up to the exit of the trench. I caught a whiff of something colourless, pungent, and sweet as pineapple, and my eyes smarted painfully. At that moment No. 1 emerged from the ordeal, the others treading on his heels. They wept copiously and with hilarity as though they had all been attacked by a fit of hysteria. But a very phlegmatic hysteria. It would have disappointed the Hun.

“Genuine sorrow, I calls it,” said one.

“Like pepper,” commented another. “I ain’t wept like that since I was a nipper.”

“I’m feeling that bereaved I fink I could bury some pore chap, Alf. What price that blinking corporal?”

“Fall in,” shouted the sergeant. “‘Elmets on!”

Each man carried in his hands one of the old-fashioned gas helmets of flannelette, soaked in a solution of glycerine and caustic soda, which you slip over your head like a sack. But there are different ways of doing it. Some held it as though it were a nose-bag and began mouth first, tossing it over their heads like a horse determined to get the last oat. Others put it on as a child puts on a paper cap out of a ‘cracker,’ carefully pulling it

down on both sides as though afraid of tearing it. They all proceeded to tie the strings demurely under the chin like a dairymaid with a sun-bonnet. From each helmet protruded a snout of gutta-percha, and as they breathed heavily little drops of saliva glistened on the end of it. They then turned and glared at each other through the goggle-like eye-holes. Here surely was the fraternity of "The Black Hand." They looked like a secret murder society.

"Fancy that coming at you in dead silence over the top with the point of the bayonet!" commented the O.C.

They filed off into a subterranean chamber—with an emergency exit—where a retort lay in wait for them with a gas of eight atmospheres or a pressure of about 120 lb. to a square inch. As the man in charge turned on the tap the fog-coloured smoke escaped in little wisps through the chinks of the chamber, and giving it a wide berth we strolled away. A whiff of that gas and you feel as if the blade of a knife were going down your lungs. The corporal was adding a few belated platitudes to his hooded pupils about the advisability of reserving your gas helmet for use against gas.

"That fellow seems to alternate between the obscure and the obvious," I remarked to the O.C. as we walked noiselessly down the sandy slope.

"True," rejoined the O.C. "But there is something in what he says about gas helmets being meant for gas. The average soldier thinks they're meant for a Wolseley valise. You know the story about

old S——, the G.O.C. of my Division? No! I thought that story was all over the front, from Dan even to Beersheba. Well, he had a passion for gas helmets. Every G.O.C. and O.C. has a bee in his bonnet—I daresay I've got one myself—and it buzzes at times. With some it's machine-gun emplacements, with others it's dumps, with others it's buttons. With old S—— it was gas helmets. And when there was nothing doing and he got fed up with divisional routine orders, he'd come stalking about the back of the trenches seeing if he could catch any one without his gas helmet. Well, one day he came up and he suddenly discovered he'd forgotten his own. So the first soldier he met he stopped, took his gas helmet, and slung it over his arm. And the next moment whom should he meet but one of our subs without a helmet. 'What's the meaning of this?' he fumed. 'Where's your helmet?' The sub stammered something about having left it in his dug-out. 'I don't believe you would know how to put it on if you had one,' said the G.O.C. 'Take mine and show me how you put it on.' So the sub took it, and opened it, and out fell a pair of dirty socks, a still dirtier towel, a packet of woodbines—and an obscene postcard. . . . 'What did you say? Oh, no! We never got *strafed* about gas helmets again. Yes, the corporal was right. Mind that wolf-hole—my men are enthusiasts about wire.'



## XVI

### THE CANADIANS

(April, 1915)

IT WAS a warm April day—so warm that it might have been midsummer but for the anemones and the wild hyacinths which gleamed in the patches of woodland. The drab and gray monotones of the winter landscape of mud and low-lying mist had changed in a few days to a scheme of primary colours in which the blue of the skies, the green of the young grass, and the yellows of marsh-marigold and lesser celandine startled the eye with their sudden improvisations. It was one of those days when the spirit of spring takes on a visible incarnation and the mysterious force of life is felt in the air and in the blood. In the thrust of the tiny crumpled leaves on the trees, emerging from the buds like a butterfly from a chrysalis, one could almost see the secret impulse that animated them.

The red roofs of V— glowed in the afternoon sun. The front and back doors of every house stood open and on the cobbled pavements the dogs lay with their heads between their extended paws opening and closing a drowsy but watchful eye. Except for two company orderly-sergeants who stood at a door smoking in intimate silence the street was

deserted. The *estaminets* were empty although it still wanted four hours till closing time. The sergeants had discarded their belts and presented the *négligé* air of men who are "resting" in billets.

"Some day!" remarked the taller of the two, economically.

"Jake!" replied the other. "Guess you'll owe me a dollar to-night, Jack. The machine-gunners will knock spots out of them."

"I'll make it two to one, if you like, Bob," said the first speaker confidently.

"Done!" said the other. And they relapsed into silence.

They fidgeted occasionally, as from time to time loud shouts were borne upon their ears from the direction of a field outside the village. They appeared to come orchestrally from a crowd of men all shouting at once though now and again a powerful voice was heard above the rest and its nasal note repeated the same theme at intervals as in a fugue—"Take-him-out-of-the-box!" . . . "Take him-out-of-the-box!" The cry was repeated from time to time in notes which alternated between menace and entreaty.

The origin of these sounds was to be sought in a field hard by the village. In this field was a crowd of officers and men who had posted themselves on two sides of it in such a manner as to form with their backs outward an angle of ninety degrees. The men composing one side of this V-shaped formation were cheering lustily while those on the other were fero-

ciously silent. In the centre of the V four gray-shirted men in khaki trousers appeared to be engaged in a physical attempt to perform the mathematical problem of squaring a circle, or circling a square; they were dashing madly round from one point to another, touching, as they went, four white bags on the ground at the corners of a square and having apparently as their objective the bag nearest the apex of the V. An untutored mind might have mistaken their efforts for a variation of that unauthorized form of army exercises known as "whipping to the gap." Far out in the field a breathless man was trying to pick up a ball and seven other men, gloved as to the left hand, adjured him with many imprecations to "get on with it." A ninth man, his face covered by a steel-barred mask and his left hand hooded in an enormous leather glove, stood by the corner bag.

In the centre of the field was an officer with the peak of his cap at the back of his head; his languid demeanour and the spare ball in his hand marked him as the umpire. Three of the runners had reached "home" at the corner and the fourth was straining toward it when there was a flash of white and the clean smack of a caught ball, which was no sooner caught than it was thrown to the masked keeper of the "home" base. The latter pirouetted on his feet as he caught it and, stooping with a half turn, quickly touched the shoulder of the runner who at the same moment dived headlong for the bag, as though seeking sanctuary. Was he diving or had

he dived? He lay prostrate, with the catcher upright beside him, while all eyes were turned from these two to the umpire. No imperial gesture deciding the lethal issue of life and death between two gladiators could have been more anxiously awaited. Without a word the umpire jerked his thumb over his shoulder. The runner was "out."

At that, the sullen silence of the crowd of spectators on one side gave place to delirious cheering while the exultations of the supporters of the "in" side were transformed into howls of execration and dark threats against the umpire, who was freely accused of "graft" and other corrupt and illegal practices.

"Safe a mile," yelled a voice above the rest. "Use your eyes, umps! Wait till you come to me with a bullet in your liver! I'll show you what 'out' means, you astigmatic rotter."

It was the regimental M.O. He shook his fist at the umpire as he uttered his maledictions.

"Go it, Dickie," urged a company commander at his elbow, encouragingly; "you haven't begun to warm up yet."

"Kill the umpire," yelled the M.O. with lethal fury. "Kill him! Scalp him! Tar and feather him! Tickle his feet!"

"Dry up, Dickie," said a subaltern beside him. "He was out all right."

"That doesn't cut any ice," retorted the M.O. "Can't I have a yell to myself! The umpire's got a glass eye and a cheap 'un at that. Take him away! Give him 'medicine and duty.'"

His soliloquy fell on deaf ears. The umpire, who had maintained a massive silence, suddenly looked up as another man took the place of the vanquished at the "home." As the newcomer grasped the bat, he was hailed with loud entreaties to "knock the ball out of Belgium" on the one hand, and, on the other, sinister assurances that if he did his life would hardly be worth living. Meanwhile, the pitcher some twenty yards in front of him and the catcher a yard or two behind him seemed to be engaged in mysterious intercourse in a deaf-and-dumb alphabet of their own. The pitcher was juggling with the ball as though not quite certain what to do with it while the catcher was patting his gloved and ungloved hands together as though inviting him to join in the ancient game of pat-a-cake. All this pantomime would have been very disconcerting to a nervous batter. It was meant to be. In baseball everybody does his best to put everybody else off his game. This is useful, for it teaches you self-confidence. Also courage, for you will get no encouragement. The next moment the pitcher suddenly brought his hands together over his head, whirled them round in an ellipse, and suddenly hurled the ball in the direction of the batter.

A shell whined toward the field and dropped with a roar and a great spurt of black earth and blacker smoke some half a mile away. The spectators ignored it. The Captain, who had been urging the M.O. to still more inflammatory efforts, happening to glance in that direction, noted curiously a figure in

yellow baggy clothes and a red tarbush advancing across the field. The figure alternately ran and stumbled. He noted, too, that the gun-fire to the northeast had swelled to a loud, continuous roar. A click recalled him to the game; the batsman had hit the ball to centre field and, dropping his stick, ran desperately toward the first base about ninety yards to his right. The ball was fielded by the centre-field with incredible velocity and thrown to the baseman as the batter measured his length on the ground. Loud shouts of exultation arose from a group of field ambulance men under a row of poplars on one side of the field as a third machine-gunner entered on his innings. The new batsman fingered the "bat" nervously.

"Don't be afraid of it. It won't hurt you," shouted the ambulance men encouragingly. "It ain't septic."

"Who's bought you?" shouted a man with a megaphone darkly at the pitcher. And he proceeded to make a number of defamatory remarks, chosen with extreme care, upon the age of the player, his deportment, his choice of a career, and his private morals. If you are of a sensitive disposition you had better not play baseball; it is very bad for self-esteem. But it is uncommonly good for self-control.

At that moment a man, belted as on duty, thrust his way through the boisterous crowd and, approaching the umpire, saluted and gave him a bit of paper. The umpire took the message and, having read it, suddenly turned his cap peak foremost. He raised

his hand. "The game's called," he announced in a clear, slightly nasal voice. He turned and, nodding toward the menacing roar in the northeast, added with a faint smile: "on account of the rain!"

Silence fell upon the crowd as he paused for a moment. Men turned one to another. Explosions of light suddenly appeared in the northeast succeeded by three coloured stars one above the other, which scintillated brilliantly like gems for a minute and then went out. Two company sergeants appeared on the edge of the crowd, wearing their belts; they were panting with exertion as though they had been running. A soldier from a Belgian working-party with a shovel on his back emerged in a patch of blue from the crowd of khaki and, talking excitedly, pointed over his shoulder in the direction of the church. The crowd was like a field of oats suddenly set in motion by a breeze—each individual member of it seemed to be flickering to and fro although the crowd as a whole remained stationary.

"The battalion will fall in at once," said the subaltern suddenly in a changed tone of voice. "Heavy marching order."

The breathless sergeants became articulate.

"A and B Companies stand to!" shouted the one.

"C and D Companies! Back to billets, boys; kits on and fall in," shouted the other.

"What is it?" said the Captain to one of the orderly-sergeants.

"The Germans have broken through on the left flank, sir."

Our bet's off," said one man to another. "Tell you what, mate, I'll take you in three to one on the M.G.'s next time." The odds were accepted.

They streamed back to billets, discussing the match as they went. The orderly-sergeants were everywhere at once—on their flanks and in their rear—rounding up the argumentative laggards like sheep-dogs on a hillside. On reaching the village they fell in and awaited orders. They found the streets of V— choked with a stream of men, women, and children—on foot, on horseback, in carts, in perambulators, all with their faces turned toward the west as though intent on some desperate pilgrimage. Incredibly old women and bedridden old men borne limply in wheelbarrows or carried in handcarts, with their atrophied legs dangling helplessly over the sides, were being pushed or dragged through the crowd. The Captain, glancing at these human derelicts, noticed curiously that one ancient paralytic reclined in a barrow with his hand ceaselessly twitching while his body and members remained rigid, like a poplar whose trunk and branches are still while the leaves at the extremities flutter ceaselessly. Young women carrying babies at the breast and with children clutching at their skirts, their twinkling feet taking three steps to the mother's one, stumbled forward with the same set look upon their faces. Some were bent double with the weight of large feather mattresses; others held bird-cages, clocks, cats, caskets in a close embrace. Now and then there was a scream as some cripple fell



and the crowd pressed on and over him. And from this surging crowd there arose a single cry as though it possessed but a single voice, swelling into a loud diapason—" *Les Boches viennent!* "

There was a sound of wheels and a clatter of hoofs on the *pavé* behind, and the crowd turned in terror at the pursuit. They broke into a furrow and through them galloped French gunners on horses with the traces cut, followed by other mounted men driving limbers without guns—and mercilessly lashing the "leaders" whose mouths were white with foam. And they also cried "*Les Boches viennent*" and passed on. They were followed by men on foot wearing red fezes; their livid bluish faces, their lips flecked with froth, their hands fumbling at their throats, their gasps for breath added to the terror of the crowd with which they mingled.

The Captain eyed them with feelings in which anger and pity strove for mastery. "They've got the wind up and no mistake," he said to a subaltern. "But what the hell's the matter with them? They haven't got a scratch."

"Their uniforms are as clean as ours," speculated the subaltern. "They can't have been buried. I've never seen that look on a man's face before."

"That pitcher weren't no good," said a man in the ranks. "They oughter have taken him out of the box long ago."

The men who had been standing easy now fell out and fetched their rifles, packs, and ammunition. Water-bottles were filled, nominal rolls were

checked, and for a few minutes the company quartermaster-sergeants were incredibly busy. The men squatted on the ground, wearing their equipment, with their packs lying on the "kicking-straps" beside them. They debated freely the respective merits of the two sides, the fielding, the pitching, the catching, and the prospects of a game that, as it happened, was never to be resumed.

"Comp'ny!" shouted each company commander.

The men scrambled to their feet, and, putting out their cigarettes, put on their packs.

"Comp'ny! 'Shun! . . . Form fours! Right! At ease, quick-k march."

The short spring day was drawing to a close, the air grew cold, the shadows deepened. They marched along the Ypres road, thrusting their way through the refugees and, turning off to the left near the asylum, crossed the canal just north of the doomed city. Clouds of white and black and red dust rose above it, as shell after shell crashed down upon it and died away in crayon upon the evening sky. In the west the sun was going down in a great conflagration. The air was still dry and clear, but to the northeast there was a faint greenish haze lying over the fields like a river-mist in the crepuscular light. In the fields on either side of them horses and cows lay dead on their backs in uncouth attitudes with their legs sticking up toward the sky. A vast desolation brooded over the landscape. They were alone. Not a living man or beast was to be seen. Dead men in bleached uniforms lay

about in contorted attitudes—their faces livid and on their lips little bubbles of foam. Except for the intermittent roar of the guns the air was still as death. In this vast mortuary not a bird sang.

The road dipped into a hollow and, as the column descended, the advanced-guard began to cough, then the connecting files coughed, and these phthisical sounds were gradually taken up by the whole column. Night had fallen, and in the dark solitudes these hollow sounds were as loud and distinct as the hooting of owls in a wood.

“Silence in the ranks!” said the Captain, and then he began to cough. His eyes watered. He sniffed.

“This place stinks like a damned latrine,” he said irritably, as he blew his nose.

“It’s like chloroform,” said one subaltern.

Another wondered how long it was since he had tasted almonds.

As the column emerged from that sepulchral hollow and breasted the rise they breathed more freely.

As they neared the cross roads at B— shells began to whistle over their heads and the night air was full of strange and sibilant voices. They crossed the canal and at that moment a shell fell in the middle of the column. The men in the immediate vicinity stopped dead while those in the rear continued to march until, treading on the heels of the men in front of them, the whole column was pulled up like a horse that is suddenly thrown on its haunches. Confused voices were heard, and the groans of wounded men. The M.O. was down on

his knees beside the prostrate forms flashing an electric torch upon them while he masked its light with his Burberry. The shell had wiped out a machine-gun team. The M.G. officer lay dead where he had fallen. The wounded were picked up and placed on the wheeled transport and the battalion resumed its march. No one knew whose turn would come next. But they continued to march steadily, each man's eyes fixed on the pack of the man in front of him.

At midnight they halted by the side of the road due north of St. J—— and waited for dawn. They found some deserted gun-emplacements and established their Battalion Headquarters therein. They put out outposts and dug themselves in, after which the men snatched an hour or two of fitful and uneasy sleep under the stars.

The morning broke cold and clear, and with the first flush of dawn the men were on their feet, stamping to keep themselves warm. In front of them was a dark wood and in the middle distance a farm and its outhouses. It was a small wood and if you look for it to-day you will never find it, but its name will go down in history. From this moment the battalion was split up; C and D Companies were ordered to march off in the direction of the wood, where they were to join up with the Third Brigade. As they marched off by platoons in file they waved their hands in salutation to their comrades; it was the last the latter ever saw of them.

As the sun came out the air grew warm, but not a

lark climbed the heavens. Of the two companies that remained one was ordered to move straight on its trenches in open order by platoons; the other was to advance by sections toward the farm whence they moved out by platoons. They raced forward, and as they approached their objective the German guns got the range and opened on them with shrapnel and high explosive. A dark gray mass of men was clustered round a farm about nine hundred yards away on their left front and, as they drew nearer, this mass opened on them with rifle fire. Bullets licked the earth all around them, throwing up spurts of dust, but the shooting was poor and they advanced steadily. The Captain, who was signalling officer and was in the rear, watched the waves of two other battalions advancing on the left to attack the ridge and as the German machine-guns got to work on them he noticed that the first wave grew thinner and thinner. It struck him that it was extraordinarily like a cinema film; he was looking all the while at the same picture and yet it was never quite the same. There was the wave, always there, but from moment to moment gaps appeared in it; flickers of flame came and went above it; little white clouds appeared from nowhere over it, hung about, and disappeared as though they had never been. But with each cloud another gap appeared in the line. Now and again it was wholly obscured by great patches of coal-black smoke like enormous ink-stains, and the earth shook. As the smoke cleared away he was almost astonished

to see that the men—some of them—were still upright and still advancing without haste and without rest.

“This is going to be some hell, to-day, eh, what, Dickie?” he said to the M.O. who was on his way to a farm, to get it going as a regimental aid-post.

“That’s so,” said the M.O., cheerful at the prospect of having something more professionally exciting to do than look at men’s tongues in billets. “I guess I’m going to do quite a lot in the general practitioner line to-day. Say, old man, if you come my way I’ll patch you up beautifully. I’ve quite a good bedside manner.”

The M.O. had a disconcerting habit of envisaging everybody else as a possible casualty. Which was rather premature when you came to think of it.

“Get along, Dickie, you old body-snatcher. I’d sooner die a natural death,” retorted the other. “The Boche has slain his thousands but you M. O’s. your tens of thousands.”

“I’ll never be slain by the jawbone of an ass,” said the M.O. pugnaciously.

“Now, Dickie,” laughed the signalling officer good-naturedly, “you’re getting riled. You’re better at giving chaff than taking it. You just hike away to your consulting-room.”

The M.O. “hiked.” And for no apparent reason they shook hands. But you could not help liking the M.O. and one of them felt it might be the last time.

They were busy after that. The Captain ordered

field-telephones to be laid out from the farm which was to serve the double purpose of aid-post and Battalion Headquarters. They were laid out to the lines of unfinished trenches which had now been occupied by the waves of infantry. It was neither open warfare nor trench warfare but a curious combination of the two—a contest of positions which were only half entrenched—while the German infantry hung about in clusters like loafers at a street corner apparently uncertain whether to advance or not. The truth was they were puzzled. They felt that by all the rules of the game the Canadians had no business to be there. The latter had one gun and no aëroplanes; they were being drenched with shrapnel and submerged with high explosive; their left was in the air and their allies had bolted the day before in a wild *sauve qui peut* before a new and sinister weapon which the Boche knew to be his own peculiar and nasty secret. And yet here were these *verdammte* Canadians coming right up to them and making themselves extremely unpleasant with nothing better than two or three machine-guns and their rifles, though, to be sure, the rapid and accurate fire of those rifles was something to reckon with. The Boche, who had had things all his own way the day before when he bayoneted inanimate men half suffocated by his poisonous gas, didn't seem to approve of this at all. The Boche is like a large unhealthy fat boy who does fearful execution in pulling off flies' wings and thumping very small boys but howls tearfully and cries "*Kamerad*" when

tackled by a boy who, though half his size, is a match for him. From that moment he began to hate the Canadians. He thought of him as a *méchant animal*. "*Quand on l'attaque il se défend.*" When he got the chance and found a convenient barn door he crucified him. The Canadians duly made a note of this and, after that, many Germans wished that they—or the Canadians, preferably the Canadians—had never seen born.

During the whole of that day a storm of iron beat upon the farm and the position in front of it. Shells ploughed up the trenches, burying men where they stood and leaving not a trace behind. Some men were blown to dust, others were killed without a scratch; it seemed as if not the engines of war but some mysterious force of nature were blasting them out of existence. The survivors fired again and again at their fitful targets, until their rifle-barrels grew hot, their nostrils were filled with the reek of blood and burnt cordite, their ears stunned with concussion, their eyes half blinded with showers of black dust, and their faces running with sweat. Shells formed huge craters round and about the farm, shaking it to its foundations and bespattering its walls with the filth of the midden-heap.

The signalling-officer found himself wondering how long it would be before the Battalion Headquarters would be wiped out. As he sat there with the C.O. receiving and transmitting messages he felt as though he were dwelling in a haunted house. Soot fell in showers down the chimney on to the hearth-



stone, windows rattled, doors opened and shut, pictures fell from the walls, and plaster pattered on to the floor. Voices shrieked and whimpered overhead. And all the while he was conscious of waiting for something to happen—something was surely bound to happen! Would it be the next or the next but one? No! that was a "dud." Short! Over! . . .

He got up and went out. There was a lull. Then the storm burst forth again. He began to count the shells falling in or near the farm and the trenches occupied by A and B Companies. He counted for fifteen minutes by his watch; he found at the end of that period that he had counted no fewer than ninety high-explosive shells.

Night brought little or no respite from shell-fire, but the enemy's machine-gun fire died down and they were able to get stretcher-bearers and ration parties with water up to the trenches. The M.O. worked all night in his overalls, dressing the wounded, injecting morphia and anti-tetanus serum, and evacuating them on empty limbers and supply wagons. When dawn broke the signalling officer was ordered to occupy a disused trench near a private road on the right, facing the wood. He had not been there long before it struck him that something was happening in that wood. Shells were raining on it at intervals and, in the pauses, he heard the rifle-fire of C and D Companies who were holding it. But each time the rifle-fire diminished in volume; it grew more and more fitful, dying down like a fire of twigs that crackle and consume.

Meanwhile he was busy collecting "details" and organizing the supports. At intervals an order would come in to supply "two N.C.O's and forty men" to some hard-pressed position and he had to start reorganizing all over again. Cooks, batmen, signallers—all were impounded. A military policeman passed on to him every straggler. Derelicts of every regiment in the Divisions—Scottish, English, Canadian—came drifting in, and in that curious medley, drifting together like fallen leaves under a breeze after the storm has momentarily spent its fury, he saw only too clearly the evidence of what had happened the day before. There was no need to ask any questions. A morose Highlander, a company sergeant-major who had lost his battalion, volunteered the information that he was "fed up." He seemed dazed and was argumentative in a dull, slow way like a drunken man.

"I thocht this was a war, d'ye ken, sorr?" he said, thrusting his face close to the Captain. The latter noticed that his eyes were tired and bloodshot. "It iss not! It iss a bluidy massacre. And the Jair-mans call us mercenaries! As if there was siller in it! How many bawbees d'ye think I'll be taking as company sergeant-major, now, sorr?"

But the Captain had suddenly put a field-telescope to his eye and was gazing hard in the direction of the wood about a thousand yards away. "Here, sergeant-major, stop jawing and look through this," he said, thrusting the telescope into the hands of the N.C.O.

The effect was magical. "A cop, sorr; a fair cop. It's a sight I dinna expect to see every day. Eight hundred, do you think, sorr? Five rounds rapid will be enough to lay them out, I'm thinking."

What he had seen through the glass was a gray mass of men hanging irresolute about the corners of the wood. They had spiked helmets. The Captain gave the word of command, the company sergeant-major repeated it. The improvised platoon with their sights at 800 burst into a splutter of rifle-fire. The Captain looked through his telescope. The gray mass had disappeared.

But the Captain was uneasy. Something must have happened in that wood for the Germans to get through it. And it struck him that for more than half an hour silence had brooded over it. Not an enemy gun had played on it; not a sound of rifle-fire had come from it. . . . What had become of C and D Companies? He was still revolving that question when he saw a man without a cap running from the direction of the wood, bearing away to the right to avoid the Canadian fire and taking such cover as the ground afforded. As he drew nearer the Captain saw that he had bright red hair.

"By God, it's G——!" he exclaimed. It was the lance-corporal who had had charge of the telephones of C and D Companies.

"I've managed to bury it, sir," said the fugitive as he arrived, breathless and exhausted.

"Buried what?"

"The telephone. I'm the only one to get through.

C and D Companies were cut off and enfiladed. Sixty per cent. casualties. All their ammunition exhausted. They were just snowed under. Could you lend me your water bottle? Thank you, sir." He took a long drink..

Overhead a *Taube* was circling like a hawk over its prey, flying as low as 200 feet, so low that they could see the observer looking over the side. He dropped a smoke-ball and a few minutes later a "coalbox" landed just short of the trench and threw up a spray of loamy dirt which covered them from foot to head and filled their eyes and nostrils, half blinding them. At that moment a runner arrived with a message from Battalion Headquarters. They were to fall back. The German line which had been concave before the enemy had taken the wood was now convex and was thrusting forward in a great bulge.

As they approached the farm, upon which A and B Companies were retiring, a shell landed on the roof. When the pillar of cloud cleared flames were seen coming from it as from the heart of a volcano. The barns, filled with straw, were blazing fiercely.

In the farmyard stood a figure in overalls, bare-headed and with arms bare to the elbow. His overalls were splashed with blood, his face was black as a nigger minstrel's with soot out of which his white eyeballs glared with a fierce glow in their irises. He was shouting orders, directing stretcher-bearers, and rushing in and out of the burning barn carrying the limp bodies of wounded men in his arms.

He was about to rush back when the signalling officer caught him by the arm. He tried to shake him off but the other held him in an iron grip.

"Blast you, M——! Take your hands off me or I'll trepan you," and he raised his fist. "I've got men in there, I tell you."

"I know, Dickie," said the other softly. "I know. But look! You've done all you can, old man," and as he pointed to the barn the roof fell in with a crash and tongues of fire and smoke burst from the doorway, scorching them where they stood.

The M.O. stood for a moment like one dazed. He shook his fist in the direction of the Germans. He was a master of language, but for once in his life words failed him. He uttered a choking sound and turned away.

The next moment the farmhouse itself caught fire. There was a sound like the popping of corks and brass-caps flew freakishly in all directions as though a swarm of bees had been disturbed. The S.A.A. had caught fire and was going off in a fusillade. The signalling officer and his men rushed to and fro, pulling out the boxes of ammunition and throwing them into the mud.

They fell back and dug in again. There they held on. As the day drew to its close, the sky became obscured with clouds, and before night rain began to fall. It fell in a steady drizzle, wetting them to the skin as they hung on without flares, without wire, without sandbags, waiting every moment of the night for an attack which never

came. Two days later they were relieved by reinforcements, and retiring by sections they marched back to billets by the light of the moon. Out of the two companies that remained only 170 men were left. Of the four machine-guns they had saved but one. The machine-gun officer who had umpired at the match was dead. Of the eighteen men who had played the game of Machine-gunners v. Ambulance men only eight survived.

As they passed "Suicide Corner" the Captain caught sight of a somnolent sepoy sitting against the bank on the side of the road, his face curiously gray in the moonlight.

"Lost his unit!" he said to himself. It was a common occurrence. He went up to him and, seeking to wake him, pulled him gently by the neck of his tunic. He fell forward stiffly against the Captain. He was dead. The back of the man's head was gone and his face was merely a mask.

They reached V— at dawn. The men unslung their rifles and packs and threw themselves down heavily without taking their boots off. And for the first time for five days they slept.

## XVII

### THE HUSBANDMEN—II

*"One generation goeth and another cometh, but the earth endureth for ever."*

IT WAS one of those late autumn days when the "windfalls" of the orchard are gathered into the cider press, and the farmyard is filled with the aroma of the pomace; when the last sheaf of corn has been harvested upon the staddles and the final speke has been driven into the thatch; when the "lands" are ploughed and cleaned of couch under the teeth of the drag, and the earth is dressed for the sowing of the winter wheat. A red sun shone through the autumnal mists of the morning, dyeing them to a flagrant glow; in the far distance the fan-shaped elms stood out in a sharp black silhouette upon the gray screen of vapour. The fall of the leaf was far advanced, but tufts of old man's beard still hung on the hedgerows like fleece; a few leaves of briar decorated the intricate pattern of twisted elder, pallid ash, and spiked hawthorn. The one touch of bright colour came from the hawthorn berries, which glowed with the dark crimson hue of blood upon the hedgetops.

It was eleven o'clock in the morning. An old man

was turning the handle of a swede-cutter in a gabled barn whose high roof was supported by oak rafters and tie-beams festooned with cobwebs. The open doorway of the barn commanded a view of the fields which sloped upward from the edge of the farmyard. One of those fields was marked by deep furrows and salient ridges of newly-turned earth, all cut with a straightness of line that marked the work of a skilled ploughman. A man was advancing down the middle of one of the "lands" with a cradle-shaped box slung against his waist in front of him; he dipped his right hand into the box, and describing with each step he took a semicircular movement with his hand he scattered the seed in front of him. With just those gestures bygone men had sown these same fields for a thousand years before him. There was a slow, even rhythm about the movement of his hands and feet as though he were measuring out paces on the land.

The old man at the swede-cutter paused a moment to watch his progress. "It be loike ancient toimes, sowing wi' hand," he said, reflectively. "This cas'alty weather hev made the ground too hard for the drills. And them tractors—I don't hold wi' 'em. They be no good on wet heavy soil—they kneads it loike dough. They be all very well for the light, brashy soil up Faringdon way. But give me that boy Dan'el and his two harses, hey, thatcher?"

The thatcher, who was mounted on a ladder against a rick just outside the barn door, looked down.

"True, old Jarge. It be the zame wi' thatching.



I don't hold wi' these new tin sheds. If ye wants to keep a rick warm, there's nothing like a good thatch and the work of a man's hands. Here, William Tuck, hand me up some of those 'elms. . . . Aye, but I forgot that wooden leg o' yourn. It be a clever piece of carpentry, but it can't climb a ladder, I'll warrant."

He descended the ladder and gathered up some fabrics of combed straw, each piece a foot wide and three feet in length, and carried them up the ladder in a forked stick known as a "shuttle." Arrived at the top, he proceeded to lay them flat against the sloping roof of the rick. For some seconds nothing was heard but the tap of his mallet as he drove in his "spekes" of cleft hazel at regular intervals into the rick. He was laying the "yelms" like the tiles of a roof, each one overlapping the other.

The old man watched him. "Eli Riddick do know his job and mun make dree pound a week at it in these toimes. Thatchers be so scarce. But maister never ought to hev left thuck rick unthatched all this time. 'Twas tempting Providence—and the justices. I heerd on a varmer as was fined twenty pound for 't t'other day."

Meanwhile, the object of his original meditations, his son Daniel, a stout "boy" of fifty-five, was ploughing the field next to that in which the sower pursued the even tenor of his way. He had placed a stick in the middle of the far end of the field, and returning to the near end had hooked in his team to the plough. He had "set" his plough somewhat as

a carpenter sets his plane, having by an adjustment of screws and bolts got a distance of nine inches horizontally between the right wheel and the coulter, and another distance of four inches vertically between the coulter and the bottom of the wheel. He then shifted a bolt in the iron head-draught of the plough to correct the "pull" of the off horse. This done, he took a handle of the plough in each hand, together with the reins, and, with the light touch that was neither a push nor a pressure he guided the plough straight ahead with his eye on the distant observation post. The turn-furrow of the plough threw up a ripple of brown earth, which, as it turned over, showed an iridescent gleam where the pressure of the steel had polished it. As the nodding horses and the ploughman diminished toward their objective they were followed by a flock of rooks and starlings, which swooped down upon the creeping things disinterred from their home in the earth by the action of the plough.

"The boy do plough a straight vurrow to'ard and vrom'ard," said the old man. "Though aw never did win prizes as I've a-done. I mind I won a silver cup against dirty-dree ploughmen in the year vivty-vive."

No one heeded these thrice-told tales of his former prowess, and he relapsed into an old man's silent reveries. He turned the handle of the swede-cutter with slow revolutions, his shoulders bowed, his chest narrowed, and his right foot advanced. His breath came short with each turn of the wheel, so that he stood like one of the Fates spin-

ning each moment of his own existence. There was something marmoreal in the concentration of his pose, as though man and machine were one. A shambling, ill-constructed youth named Jacob Fox was engaged in feeding the hopper with its supply of purple roots, which he did at irregular intervals, first trimming them with a knife, so that the receptacle was sometimes full and sometimes empty; the ancient man, unmindful of these gaps, continued to turn blindly like an old woman who drops her stitches.

William Tuck, who sat on a milk-stool splitting hazel-sticks with a bill-hook, rose and looked down at the heap of hairpin-shaped "spekes" he had prepared for the thatcher. He stretched his dorsal muscles and emitted a low whistle.

"Extra fatigues I calls it," he commented. "I wish I was a soldjer again. I can't abide the vittles ye folk gets at home. This war bread be like the prodigal son's—it be full of the husks that the swine did eat."

"Aye," said the old man, meditatively, roused from his mechanical trance. "There'll be a mort of pig-killing this year, I do think. There ain't no offals for 'em. And where 'ull us get our bacon arterwards?"

"True, old Jarge. The Germans 'ull have a sight more o' pig-meat than us, I'm thinking."

"And how do ye figure that out, William Tuck?"

"They'll eat one another."

At this Jacob Fox turned a horrified look upon the

speaker. The latter noted it with mischievous satisfaction, and proceeded to enlarge upon his theme.

"Yes, they have a corpse factory where they boils all the dead corpses down into dripping to make lardy-cakes. But they always keeps the spare-rib for the officers."

"That be an ungodly thing to do," said the old man. "I've heerd that eatin' live frogs is good for the consumption but to eat mortal man—come, now, William Tuck, thee cassn't belave such things. . . . Though I do remember a miss'nary from the cannonball islands as did say something of the kind. Be the Germans black men, William Tuck?"

"Aye, when they're dead—in hot weather. Sometimes they turns green."

"Ah well, dog eats dog. You must 'a seen a mort o' dead corpses, William Tuck."

"Aye, that I have. Hunderds. Thousands. Stuck my entrenching tool into 'em same as I might this bill-hook into Jacob Fox here."

"Let him bide, the poor natural. Cassn't thee see he's all of a twitter? . . . It do mind me o' when I wur a-digging up on Longbarrow Down for a party of gentlefolk with glasses on their noses, what were studying heathen larning. They were all round us with their tails up, same as if we were digging out an old vixen and they a-waiting for a kill. I strikes a sarsen stone with my pick, and lo and behold! there was a skellington a-sitting up a-waiting the Day of Judgment. And he had a lot o' flint

tools with him to help him cut his way out when aw 'eers the Last Trump. It did seem an un-Christian thing to disturb the poor soul. I used ter double lock my door for a month of nights after that, thinking he was outside asking for a lodging. I never would do any more digging for those ould 'newsy' folk—a-poking their noses into other people's sepulchres. There be lots of 'em up there, Romans an' Britons and other heathen folk—all a-waiting. I do often think what a lot of 'em be waiting like that out in France—poor souls. Do they give 'em Christian burial, William Tuck?"

"Zumtimes. They has 'em all registered like parish clerk—if they can find 'em."

"I once peeped over churchyard wall and saw parson a-burying," interrupted Jacob Fox, as though anxious to show that he, too, had assisted on such ceremonial occasions. "Aw wore a white surplis and aw said:

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust,  
If God won't have ye the divil must!"

"True, most true, and well spoken," said old Jarge. "But I do think ye've got it a bit mixed up in that mazy poll o' yourn, Jacob Fox. Not but what it bain't a very pious sentiment. . . . Death and the powers of darkness do seem to be abroad in the land. And signs and portents. I do mind me as the very night avore Abigail Hunt got news of the death of her youngest lad in the war, I

was a-zitting up and I suddenly 'eers a bat tapping at the winder. And I looks up, and behold! there was a winding-sheet in the candle. And I knowed as zumone was took."

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the toilers of the fields. The head of Levi Godbehere, a gaunt, sinewy man, appeared in the doorway. He was a silent man soured by domestic strife, and he placed his seed-lip down on the ground without a word. He was immediately followed by the thatcher, who was reputed to be a "warm" man with a Post Office Savings Book, and was respected accordingly as a great authority on high finance. Each proceeded to pull out of his capacious pocket a large spotted handkerchief, which, when unfolded, disclosed thick slices of bread and cheese. The thatcher's rations were further distinguished by the presence of a piece of fat bacon. Each of the others in turn produced his midday meal and they all sat down, slowly masticating their food like a cow chewing the cud.

This ritualistic silence was broken by the entrance of Daniel Newth, who proceeded to remove two large incrustations of loamy brown soil from his boots. They remained on the floor bearing an exact imprint of his hob-nailed soles.

"Well, neighbours," he said, sociably, "toime to hev' a bite and sup. Let's eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we tightens our belts. If this war goes on we shall all be turned out to grass. There won't be nothing else to eat. We starves the beasts

and they'll end by starving us. There's mighty little oil-cake for the cattle, and no barley meal for the pigs, and next to no maize for the poultry. There'll be as girt a slaughter of beasts as there is of men, and what then? Hey, neighbours?"

"A solemn thought, Dan'l. A solemn thought, 'tis," ruminated the old man. "There's Blackacre Field as hev' been under roots these seven year, and is now given over to whate, and what 'ull the cattle do for winter vittles then? Die they must loike burnt offerings—'tis a sacrifice, sure it is. It do mind me o' the old toime, when I saw meat only once a week. But there'll be a powerful lot of bread, there will. Varmer be ploughing up pasture. There's 'little Scotland' field as was laid down in '79—the year o' the great blight when corn fell to vorty-dree shillin' a quarter, and the cattle rotted in the fields. A terrible year that was! It rained vorty days and vorty nights and the corn sprouted in the shocks, and cows and sheep got the vluke in the liver and wasted away, like a maid in a decline. And half the varmers in the parish was sold up. 'Once bit, twice shy,' says t'others, and they turned all their arable into pasture. And now they've got to plough it up again. Well, tis' an ill wind as blows no one any good. It'll be a tidy toime for ploughmen. There's Dan'el as gets twenty-nine shillin' a week. I've a-ploughed a hacre a day in my toime with two horses and only got twelve shillin' for it. And Oi could drive as straight a vurrow as any man in the parish."

"Aye, that you could, veyther," said Daniel Newth, propitiatingly. "We do all know as you could."

"Yes, and zow, too. I do mind as how afore these seed-drills comed in I've a-zowed eleven acres of rye, which is eleven sacks, in a day. Rye takes some zowing!—short steps, and a full handful from the seed-lip for each step. . . . Ye've an easy job ploughing this year, Dan'l, after the roots. Those roots have been hoed clane of charlock and clytes and couch, and ye've no skim-ploughing to do. Them lands are as clane as my hand."

"Well, there'll be a good time coming for Eli Ruddick," said the ploughman. "He'll be thatching day in, day out, next year. Ye'll be buying housen zoon, Eli. Ye must have saved a tidy bit. What do ee put it in, if I may so ax?"

"I lends it to Government," said Eli Ruddick, shortly.

"Well, it be better than laying yer talents up in a napkin," said the old man reflectively. "But what I zays is, 'Spend it as quick as yer can.' 'Tis the end of the world coming, sure it is, when all earthly things 'ull pass away. Or lend it to the Lord. I did put an extra penny in the plate last Sunday."

"A good hinvestment, old Jarge," said Levi God-behere, gloomily breaking his long silence. "A good investment it be. Ye gets a hundred per cent. on it. I do mind that hymn they sings in church when the sidesmen comes round with the plate all looking t'other way, and pretending not to see the



trouser-buttons what some folks drops in. How do it go?

“Whatever, Lord, we gives to Thee  
Repaid a hundredfold shall be

“Well, us brought nothing into this world, and us can take nothing out. Though I suppose the Almighty ’ull allow William Tuck to keep his wooden leg. . . . How be getting on wi’ that leg o’ yourn, William Tuck?” said the old man, for whom the soldier’s wooden limb had an inexhaustible fascination.

“It be a useful tool to hev! A very useful tool. Oi can plant taters wi’ un. . . . Them doctors can do most wonderful things. They’ll graft and prune ye like a rose bush. I know’d a chap as had half his face blown away, and one eye gone to kingdom come—a terrible sight he wur. The birds could ha’ flown in an’ out of his face like an old ruin. And they builded ’un a new face wi’ a glass eye so as his own mother wouldn’t a know’d the difference. They could cut up Jacob Fox here like butcher’s meat and put ’un together again, if they had a mind. And make quite a pretty man of ’un, too.”

“How much do ’ee think they’d charge a body for doing it, Mr. Tuck?” said Jacob, who had been sadly ill-favoured by Nature.

“Jacob Fox,” said the old man, reproachfully, “Doan’t ’ee brivet about that headpiece o’ yourn so. It’s a gift of God, and ye mun make the best of it. We do all know ye be a wonderful ugly

man, the ugliest man in the parish, bain't he, neighbours?"

"Aye, that he be," they all echoed, studying his homely features with critical attention. "You be a wonderful plain-featured man, Jacob Fox."

"Well, Oi do mind a horse as took quite a fancy to me," said Jacob, desperately. "It wur thuck gray mare of maister's. She would follow Oi about like a bitch."

"Ye've a wonderful soothing way wi' horses, Jacob, there's no denying it," said Daniel Newth. "I never zeed such a chap for coaxing 'em into a halter."

"Well, neighbours," said Jacob, tremulously, "it do seem to Oi as dumb animals be more human than men. Meaning no offence, friends and neighbours all."

"How do 'ee figure that out, Jacob Fox?" said the old man, magisterially. "It be a heathen thing to say."

"Because ye never see animals a-slaughtering and making war on their own kind. Except rooks."

"That be a deep saying, sonnies," said Daniel Newth, reflectively. "A deep saying it be. The lad do think deep thoughts at toimes."

"Howsomever, killing do seem to be a law of nature," said the old man. "The hounds kill the vox, the vox kills the vovls, and the vovls kills the worms. . . . William Tuck, have ye ever slain a German Hun wi' your own hands; smiting 'un under the fifth rib, so to speak?"

"Aye, that I hev. I've a-spit one with my bayonet, right in his innards. Aw did give a kind of grunt."

"It do seem a fearful death. But I'd sooner be bayonitted than hung. I mind when I was a little 'un I went to Hang Fair, at Zaulsbury, to see a woman hanged as had poisoned her lawful husband. And my veyther held Oi up over the heads of the crowd to see her zwinging. I mind well as 'er had clean white stockings on, and 'er kicked off one shoe wi' t'other. It did give me quite a turn. Still, it were a sinful thing to kill a husband. Being an offence against Holy Matrimony."

"True, most true, Jarge," said Levi Godbehere darkly. "Marrying be like dying—ye can't escape it, and ye never knows what 'ull come after it."

"Aye. But ye can only die once," said the old man, significantly.

"True. I takes yer m'aning, Jarge. Ye've ha' buried drew wives, as we do all know. Ye oughter have dree gold stripes for it, like the chaps that have been wounded. There was a fellow in Winterbourne Parish, Abraham Love was his name, what buried four wives. Buried four wives, aw did. Aw had a beautiful headstone stuck up in churchyard for his virst, and when t'others died, he had their names all carved like a nobleman, one under t'other. When he'd buried the fourth, aw died hisself and there warn't much room for a subscription left. So they just put Also Abraham Love, husband of the above. At Rest.' A very proper subscription 'twas."

"A very proper one. I never could understand how King Solomon could 'a put up wi' all those hundreds of wives, all at once. I figure he must hev had a girt dorm-it-ory for 'em, same as they hev' for old folks in the workhouse."

"I do like to hear about King Solomon," said Jacob Fox, emboldened by the success of his last observation. "Aw wur main fond of animals."

"What be the lad got into that head of his'n now? What do 'ee mane, boy."

"Well, neighbours, it says as he kept dree hundred concubines. I expect as aw liked stroking 'em. Though aw must hev' had very horny hands. I saw two on 'em in thuck travelling menagerie as come to Marlbro' last year. They had prickly quills all over like hedgehogs."

"Ye stun-pool, ye do mane porcupines. They bain't concubines. Concubines be wenches."

A loud sally of laughter greeted Jacob Fox's excursion into Biblical history, and blushing to the roots of his yellow thatch-like hair he retreated into the shadows of the barn.

"Matrimony be destiny, depend on't," said the thatcher as the laughter subsided. "There was Liz Rumming as hung her shift inside-out on a gooseberry bush at Midsummer eve and sat up to see the form and features of her fated husband, as maids do at such times. And about eleven by the clock, she hears footsteps in the garden. She peeps through the buttery window and zees zumone in the dark a-tearing her shift from off the gooseberry bush. She

tiptoed out all of a tremble, and lo, and behold, it was one of the shorthorn cows out of the pasture."

"There bain't much sense in that," said the old man.

"Bain't there, though, Jarge!" retorted the thatcher. "Inside of twelve months she married the cowman."

"Well, it mid have been the finger of fate," the old man conceded. "I do belave in witches and sooth-sayers. Ye finds 'em in the Bible. 'Tis allowed to larn things to come from searching the Scriptures. There's this attacking of Jerusalem. It be very like the Second Coming. I heerd from parish clerk as can read the newspapers as soon as look at 'em—a clever man that, sonnies—as this godly man of war, Lord Allanby, is to be greeted wi' loud hosannas as he enters the Holy City riding on an ass. A man from God, sure he be. And there is some as do say that we Englishmen be the Lost Tribes, and Chosen People, so to speak."

"Sure, 'tis strange things be happening," said the thatcher. "There's lads as hev' never been outside this parish all their lives as be now in the land of the Pharaohs, a-making love to princesses, and in ancient Babylon a-worshipping strange gods, and in Africa a-riding on camels and larning all manner o' new sins."

"Well, I do hold as it be the end of the world, neighbours," said the old man. "There be wars and rumours of wars, nation rising against nation. There be fire and brimstone. There be engines o'

torment in the heavens above and in the deeps beneath. My son Dan'l here wur a-reading Luke the twenty-virst to me t'other night, and it be all there as plain as the palm of your hand. Famine and pestilence and fearful sights. And Jerusalem encompassed with armies."

"True, most true," said Levi Godbehere, darkly. "I mind them holy words. It do say 'tis to be as in the days of Noe—folks eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. And so they be. There's more banns called in this parish this last year than I can iver call to mind. 'Tis the separation allowances, maybe. But 'tis a sign and portent, all the same."

"'Tis a thing to turn a man's thoughts heavenwards," said the old man conclusively. "A deep and fearful toime it be. But ye can see by the sun 'tis past noon, neighbours." And he arose and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

The thatcher took up his shuttle, the sower slung his seed-lip against his chest, William Tuck took down his bill-hook from the nail on the wall. The ploughman hooked in his team again. Each went his appointed way. And nothing was to be heard in the barn save the clank of the swede-cutter and the patter of the orange-coloured slices as they fell into the bushel-measure below.

## XVIII

### A FARM IN FLANDERS

THE air was drowsy with the scent of the flowers of the downland—wild thyme, harebell, eyebright, yellow bedstraw, and creeping cinquefoil. A "Lulworth skipper" opened and closed her orange wings upon the golden petals of the ragwort as though fanning herself in the swooning heat. Between the chalk cliff on which we lay, and the Purbeck limestone of the opposing headland, the coast curved inland in a sickle-shaped bay whose waters gleamed blue as sapphire in the July sun. The surface of the channel was smooth as molten glass, save when the propeller of a patrol-boat left a furrow of white foam behind her. The complete absence of motion combined with the transparency of the air to give Nature something of the fixity of Art; we seemed to be looking at a water-colour painting. Borlase and I lay at full length on the down, smoking our pipes and enjoying the view with the proprietary pride of two West-country men and that sensation of unlimited opulence which seduces every officer on leave, a sensation which is wholly subjective and has nothing to do with the state of one's account at Cox's. In fact, it often leads to overdrafts. And like the enchanted disciple on

the Mount we talked of building tabernacles—after the war.

“No building for me!” I said. “I will buy me a certain manor house, whose walls are as jasper—walls of old red brick sun-ripened like a peach, gabled roofs, mullioned windows, oak panelling. . . . Damn these flies!”

“And I,” said Borlase meditatively, “will buy a farm in Flanders.”

“A farm in Flanders! Not you, my son! Don’t I know them! Cold tiled floors, walls of mud and timber, a courtyard whose chief decorative feature is a midden-heap, a landscape of pollarded willows and slimy dykes with an obscene *estaminet* in the middle distance. And no cubbing, either!”

“I didn’t say I should *live* there,” said Borlase slowly. “But I shouldn’t like to feel it belonged to any one else.”

“Where is it?” I asked languidly as I watched a golden-brown fritillary fluttering ecstatically. Borlase was gazing out to sea, beyond the white cliffs of the Needles to the distant haze which masked the coast of France.

“D’you know the bit of country between Richebourg and Festubert?”

“Do I not?” I said feelingly. “I lost my way there once and all but walked straight into the German trenches.”

“Well, it’s there. The last time I saw it—and jolly glad I was to see the last of it—it was mostly dust and ashes; a Jack Johnson knocked it endways.



It was our headquarters and was back about three hundred yards behind the trenches—very unhealthy. The Huns used to 'search' up and down on either side of us with their smaller howitzers, first up one side of the road on which our house stood, then down the other, as methodically as a gardener with a watering can. I used to watch their black and yellow bursts creeping nearer and nearer with a kind of ugly fascination and wonder whether the next would get us. We had no cellar and didn't like to bolt to our funk-hole across the yard for fear we should give the show away. They got T—— that way—I found his boot afterward. . . . We moved into that sector at the end of 1914, having been in the whole show from the beginning at Mons. We'd done our bit, too, in the big sweep of October when Smith-Dorrien tried to roll up the German right resting on La Bassée. We were in that eleven days' fighting round the sugar-factory at Lorgies and after that were moved up and down the lines in a sort of game of "General Post," acting as reserve to the division—one battalion to a division! That was what was meant by 'reserve' in those days. We'd trek after a week or ten days in the trenches and settle down in billets and get the camp kettles going for a hot tub, and within a few minutes, along would come the order: 'Be prepared to start for—— at half-an-hour's notice.' And we'd start.

"That went on till we settled down more or less at the spot I've spoken of. We found fairly good fire-trenches when we took over, but that was all.

There were no communication trenches—we relieved by sections over the open ground—no support-trenches and no reserve-trenches. And here, like Cæsar, we went into winter quarters, except that Cæsar rested and we didn't. No one who has not gone through that first winter out there will ever realize what the Old Army endured. We had no wire at first, and consequently had to post extra sentries at night. We had no flares—till we invented that stunt of sodium in jam tins. We had no trench boards, and no pumps, and when the water got into our trenches it rose steadily till our men stood more than knee-deep in a compost of icy mud and water, which gradually stiffened round their legs like concrete. Our company sergeant-major lost both feet that way. There were no four-day reliefs in those days; we were relieved about once every ten and even then at least half the battalion, and sometimes the whole of it, were kept up in close support all night in case of a sudden attack. We were always on the defensive and the Hun knew it. Raids were out of the question—we hadn't the men to spare and, as you'll remember, raids were never thought of till the November following, when the New Army had taken the field. Besides, we had no bombs.

“But we couldn't take all the taunts of the Jager battalion opposite us lying down, and it was then that we started experimenting with the ‘jam pots’ made by the sappers. We used to call our bombers ‘Tickler's Artillery,’ and if they didn't terrify the

enemy they certainly succeeded in terrifying us. You remember the kind of thing?—one of Tickler's jam tins with a little gun-cotton priming in the middle, a fuse which one lit with a match like a pipe, and for a charge pounded crockery, belt-buckles, shirt-buttons, ten centime pieces; in fact, anything we could lay our hands on. It was the best we could do. . . . Of course, we had none of your portable Lewis guns, only the old heavy machine-gun of gun-metal weighing fifty-eight pounds, and only two to the battalion at that. As for trench mortars, no one had ever heard of 'em except the Hun, until the sappers sent up their improvised stove-pipes—five out of six were duds, and the sixth gave the show away.

“And night and day the Hun pounded us with his artillery—sprayed us with shrapnel and blew us up with H.E., and there were our howitzers behind us eating their heads off for want of stuff. When things got a bit too warm we'd telephone back praying the C.O. of a battery of 18-pounders to dust the Huns up a bit, and what constantly happened would be something like this—I'd spot some Huns with my field-glasses about six hundred yards away making an M.-G. emplacement at their leisure; I'd ring up the battery, and they'd put in four shells, two short, two wide, then a dead stop; I'd ring up again and the answer would come: 'Sorry, we've fired the ration—Four a day is all we're allowed.' Then the Hun, after waiting a bit, would proceed to concrete his emplacement at his leisure, and after that there was the devil to pay.

"I tell you it was heartrending—we were like Dervishes with spears up against a machine-gun; our men had nothing except their courage and their musketry—but they never once got the wind up and they put the fear of God into the Huns. It was just as bad for the gunners. I remember old Haig-Smith, the C.O. of the Battery, showing me once, almost with tears in his eyes, his boxes of ammunition: all the duds saved up like talents in a napkin since the South African War and marked 'Singapore,' 'Hong-Kong,' 'Perth, W.A.,' and the Lord knows what else. That battery was put on low diet and for some unexplained reason it had to be taken like medicine once every twenty-four hours; if the gunners saved it for an emergency they had to return it like an unexpended Treasury balance; so they used to fire it off after tea on principle if it wasn't wanted earlier. Comic! wasn't it?

"This went on for weeks, and week by week I saw my pals—fellows who'd been at Sandhurst along with me, men I'd played poker and hunted with for years—knocked out one after the other, also my best N.C.O., who'd taught me all I knew, the men in my company—all knocked out. I remember in one morning we lost ninety men killed or mortally wounded when about fifty yards of trench was wrecked and B Company split into halves, left half being cut clean off from the right where the communication trench joined the front trench. There the wounded lay—and rotted. You see that damned M.G. emplacement of theirs commanded

the whole of it, so it was certain death to try to get the wounded away.

"I tell you that when I considered the heavens in the fire-trench at night and watched the eternal bombardment of Ypres like a blast-furnace in the sky, I used to ask myself what the old country was doing, and whether it had completely forgotten us. We used to read of strikes in South Wales and on the Clyde, and speeches by stipendiary M.P.'s in the House jawing about 'militarism' and threatening revolution if the Government ever dared to introduce compulsory service, and I tell you I felt sick. 'Militarism!' It was militarism we were up against, evil incarnate. D'you remember the girl P—— found near Richebourg after the Germans had done with her? D'you remember what we found in Warnton? D'you remember—but, of course, you know. How much does an M.P. get? Double the pay of a company commander, isn't it?

"We heard of ——'s new army, of course, but hope deferred made our hearts pretty sick, and it used to be a standing joke with the battalion to say: 'It's rumoured that Italy and the New Army are about to abandon definitely their neutrality.' A silly joke, I admit, because we might have known that the authorities at home were working night and day to get a move on and succour us. And at last, like the dove to the ark, there came two Territorial regiments—attached to us for instruction. Topping fellows they were, too! And, then, as winter gave way to spring, and spring to summer and

the floods subsided in our trenches, the New Army began to arrive. We could hardly believe it at first. And it grew and grew like a grain of mustard-seed. And all kinds of fancy things came with it—Stokes guns, and Mills bombs, and Lewis guns, and stacks of shells. By that time I could cheerfully have said *nunc dimittis*, for I knew we were saved. I felt old, very old, like the Johnny in the Bible, but like him I could have said, 'Now lettest Thou thy servant depart in peace.' I tell you I could have wept for joy as if I'd sniffed a tear-shell. But by that time——"

Borlase stopped and gazed out to sea in silence. He was silent for so long a time that at last I gave him a cue.

"Yes, I know," I said. "I've been there. But I can't see why you want to buy that filthy farm. You know you said it was all dust and ashes by now."

"So I did. But you see all my pals are buried there."

## XIX

### THE ALLIES

**D**OOZE oofs, *see voo plaise! Compronnay, madame?*" Marie Claire's lips parted and displayed two rows of teeth. They were filbert-shaped and very white.

"*Oui, Je comprends* very well. What you call it? Twelve eggs, yes?"

"*Non, dooze,*" said the sergeant stoutly. And he held up two fingers. She noticed that the skin of the inside of his thumb and of the middle joint of his forefinger displayed a hard abrasion like a cobbler's. It's the trigger that does it.

"*Ah! deux! Ecoutez! 'Un' c'est 'one'. 'Deux' c'est 'two.' Dites: 'deux'. Comme ça!*" And she expired the monosyllable from her lips as though she were blowing a kiss.

"*Do!*" said the sergeant.

"*Non; 'deux'!*"

"*Dew.*"

"*Bien! Très bien. Voilà!*"—and she produced two eggs from their nest in the crate and laid them on the counter.

"*Combien, madame?*"

"*Vingt centimes. Mais 'madame'!—pas encore!*"

'*Mademoiselle*'; *anglais*, '*Mees*'. Voyez.'" And she displayed the fingers of her left hand as though it were a parade inspection.

The sergeant looked at them. With a sudden movement he placed his hand upon them as they lay upon the counter.

"*Non!*" she said coldly as she hastily withdrew her hand. "*Fini! Bonjour!*" And she turned her back upon him.

Sergeant John Lawrence put his twenty centimes on the counter, took up his eggs, saluted, and walked out of the *cr merie* without a word. He felt hot and uncomfortable.

On the afternoon of the next day he came again. Before he could open his mouth Marie Claire had placed two eggs on the counter. She looked at him abstractedly as though he were a piece of household furniture rather the worse for wear, which might soon need replacing, and said indifferently: "*Vingt centimes.*"

This done, she turned to a shelf behind her and began moving the jars of *confitures*, occasionally pursing her lips to blow away the dust. These expirations grew louder as he lingered until their blasting effect upon him emotionally produced the kind of functional paralysis associated with the effects of high explosive. He stood rooted to the spot, his eyes fixed on the back of her neck. He suddenly put down the purchase money, pocketed the eggs, and walked out. After proceeding a hundred yards with knit brows he stopped and ruminated.



Opposite him was a dead wall, the gable end of a house. He put his hand in his pocket, drew out an egg, took a short run, like a man practising on a bombing-course, and throwing from his hip hurled the egg at the wall. He noted with gloomy satisfaction the protoplasmic effect, and taking the other egg he hurled it after its predecessor. And he resumed his walk.

Four days succeeded one another and each day Marie Claire rehearsed a frigid reception for Sergeant Lawrence. She rehearsed it in a newly-ironed blouse and after carefully washing her hair. Each morning as she rose from *petit déjeuner* she prepared herself to resent his appearance; each evening as she sat down to *diner* she felt unaccountably annoyed that he had not appeared. She began telling herself that it did not matter two sous to her whether he appeared or not. She told herself this very often.

One evening toward dusk she was sitting behind the counter engaged in knitting a *tricot*. Her needles clicked mechanically as she gazed abstractedly at the wall and occasionally she stopped to count the dropped stitches. She heard a footstep and looked up. Sergeant John Lawrence was standing at the counter. Before she had time to collect her thoughts he had vanished—vanishing as suddenly as he had appeared; so suddenly that she began to doubt the evidence of her senses. But on the counter lay a rose. She stared at it for some time and then suddenly took it up, burying her nose in its petals as she inhaled their fragrance. It was a *Maréchal Niel*.

She examined it, pulling back the petals as though she were peeling an artichoke. But there was nothing there. It was simply a rose. She sat with her chin upon her hands trying to conjure up the appearance of the man who had laid it before her and wondering what it was about him that had seemed so unfamiliar. And as she mused, it dawned on her that he had a rifle slung over his left shoulder, a pack on his back, a water bottle on his hip. She rose and looked at the clock.

“Marie Claire! Marie Claire! *Diner, Nom de Dieu! J'ai une grande faim. La soupe est froide!*”

She ignored this plaintive remonstrance which came in a stertorous voice from the parlour behind the shop, and, slipping a shawl over her head, she stole out into the street. It was curiously empty.

She crossed the *Place*, already steeped in shadows, and having covered some four hundred yards, she stopped. Ahead of her in the middle of the street were a number of soldiers drawn up in long lines two deep. They were in full marching kit and in front of the nearest platoon a sergeant was calling the roll. It was Lawrence. He held a roll-book in his hand and as he called each name, the owner shouted, “Here”; the sound was taken up in a series of repetitions which, as they collided acoustically with the same sounds from other platoons farther up the street, produced the effect of a prolonged echo. Having finished calling the roll Lawrence went up to the platoon commander, saluted, and made his report. The company commander took over.

“Form Fours!—Right! At Ease—Qu-i-i-i-ck March!” There was a shuffle of heavy feet and the long lines dissolved into columns of fours. The men’s feet went “clip-clop clip-clop” on the pavement with the rhythm of a pendulum. The next moment the street was empty and Marie Claire was staring fixedly at the tail of the column oscillating like a tuning fork from right to left as it receded in the distance in a cloud of dust.

■ Sergeant Lawrence having cleaned his teeth with his army tooth-brush stood in front of a mirror and studied attentively a fixed smile—a smile which he produced and reproduced with the reflex movements of his maxillar muscles. It was a serious smile without mirth; being intended, like the capacious smile of a “chorus” lady, for purely exhibition purposes. Dissatisfied with the result, he went over his teeth again with a piece of charcoal until their lustrous whiteness convinced him that art could do no more for Nature. For some days he had knocked off cigarettes owing to their discolouring effect on the enamel; he had also been at pains to remove, with the aid of a piece of pumice-stone, a large stain of chemical brown on the inside of the middle finger of his right hand. His face glowed with the application of soap and hot water; his buttons shone and twinkled like the stars of the firmament.

At the end of an hour of these ministrations he pronounced himself “clean and regular” and, taking a small cane in his hand, he walked with an air of studied nonchalance down the street, a prey to a

secret obsession that he was a subject of morbid curiosity to every passer-by. As he reached the corner of the *rue Gambetta* he suddenly ran into Sergeant Robert Chipchase.

"Hulloa, Jack!" said the other. "Going for a stroll?"

"Y-yes," said John Lawrence.

"I'll come with you," said the other, sociably.

Lawrence hesitated and was lost. He fell into step beside his companion. He walked some distance, replying to conversational overtures with monosyllables.

"Got the hump, Jack?" said the other suddenly.

"N-no," replied Lawrence. He stopped dead. "I've forgot my handkerchief."

"Strewth! I knew you had something preying on your mind like. Why didn't you say so before, mate? Here you are—use mine." And he tendered first aid.

Lawrence gazed at the handkerchief abstractedly.

"Anything wrong with it?" said the other, sensitively.

"No! No offence, I hope," said Lawrence.

"The fact is, Bob," he went on breathlessly, taking each full-stop at full gallop, "I-can't-walk-as-well-as-I-used-to—I-think-I've-a-touch-of-trench-feet-you'll-excuse-me-old-chap-no-no-I-can-get-back-to-billets-all-right-don't-let-me-spoil-your-walk-Bob." He paused to take breath. "It'll do you good," he added, earnestly. "So long, old man." And he turned on his heel.

His companion gazed after him. He walked

slowly at first, but his feet appeared to recover their circulation with remarkable rapidity and he was soon lost to sight. Sergeant Chipchase soliloquized.

"Sits in a corner of the mess mugging up 'French and How To Speak It.' Says a man ought to improve himself. Looks at a pal as if he wasn't there. Dreamy like. Never passes the time of day. Asked me if I heard a blooming nightingale. . . . Christ! *It's a woman!*" And, having finished his train of induction, he went on his way, whistling.

Meanwhile Sergeant Lawrence, having turned the corner of the *Place*, had arrived at the door of the *crémèrie*. He reconnoitred it from outside and, seeing two soldiers at the counter, he retreated. He walked up and down once or twice, advanced to the door, and again retreated, until seeing the eye of a military policeman on the opposite side of the street watching him with professional curiosity, he walked straight into the shop. At the same moment the two customers emerged from it.

Behind the counter was Marie Claire. A wave of colour swept over her face as she saw him. They stood looking at each other.

"Bonjour, M'sieu' Douze-œufs," she said at last.

Sergeant Lawrence's eye caught sight of a rose in a vase on the shelf behind her. It was a languid rose with drooping petals, long past its first bloom, but he thought he recognized it. On the counter lay a small book with the words '*Francaise-Anglais*' on the cover. He suddenly had an inspiration.

"*Madame*——" he began.

"*Mademoiselle*," she corrected. "*Encore mademoiselle.*"

"*Mademoiselle Marie Claire*"—(she wondered where he had got hold of her name)—"*voulez-vous me donner-lessons—French—pour un franc?*"

"*Moi!*"

"*Oui.*"

She hesitated a moment.

"*Maman! Ici!*"

There was a sound of heavy breathing. "*Maman*" appeared. She was large and round and so richly endowed by Nature that her chin seemed to melt into her neck, her neck into her bosom. Where other people display joints her body exhibited nothing but creases. Her bosom rose and fell continuously in short respirations and the purple satin of her blouse rose and fell with them as though it were a natural plumage. A large dimple appeared on either side of her mouth, giving the spectator the impression that she was smiling. The "smile" was perpetual and afforded no index to the state of her emotions—it was one of Nature's tricks of *camouflage* and served to mask a variety of moods ranging from lazy benevolence to active rapacity. It was useful in business. If any one objected to Madame's terms she always dismissed the objection with "*Les affaires sont les affaires,*" and continued to smile with the same impassivity. She was a typical *bourgeoise*.

"*M'sieu'—*" began Marie Claire, turning interrogatively to the sergeant.

"Lawrence—John Lawrence," said the sergeant.

"M'sieu' Lorens wants me to give him lessons in French, *maman*," said Marie Claire to her mother in her native tongue. "He offers me a franc a lesson," she added quickly, seeing her mother hesitate and fearing a prohibition of such intimacy.

But Madame was not pondering the proprieties.

"*Deux francs!*" said Madame with a smile of benediction which expressed a genuine conviction that it is more blessed to receive than to give.

"*Oh, Maman!*" protested Marie Claire.

But Sergeant Lawrence jumped at the stipulation. "Done! *Bong! Bien!*" he exclaimed hurriedly. Had Madame made it ten francs he would cheerfully have acquiesced.

Then commenced for Sergeant Lawrence a course of "French Without Tears." It was intensive training, for he knew that the battalion's "rest" in billets was short and he took two lessons a day. They were given in the parlour behind the shop with *Maman* always in attendance except for brief and occasional absences when a customer claimed her attention. During these absences the conversation took on a less Ollendorffian character; they ceased to ask each other whether the gardener's mother-in-law had the paper-knife of the tailor's step-brother, and Sergeant Lawrence found himself speaking English, as a language more naturally expressive of the emotions.

"Mademoiselle, will you come for a *promenade?*" he said suddenly in one of these truant intervals.

She hesitated. "It is not *convenable*."

"Why not?" he pleaded.

"In France we do not go for a walk unless we are—what you call it?—'engaged'—*fiancée*."

"Then let's get engaged," he said, decisively.

"*Parbleu!* To go for a walk?" Her eyes were full of mirth.

"No! To get married," he said.

She coloured but said nothing. He leaned forward and seized her hand. This time she did not withdraw it.

"In France," she said at length, "it is not *convenable* to ask a girl that." And seeing his look of astonishment, she added: "You must speak to *Maman* first."

"*Bon!* Right away!" he said.

"Have you asked your papa?" she said as they waited for *Maman's* return from the shop.

"My papa!" he exclaimed. "You mean my old governor? Lord, no! Nor my grandpapa." He remembered there was a Table of Affinities in the door of the church porch at home, proclaiming to all that a man may not marry his grandmother, but could not see what that had to do with it.

"In France," explained Marie Claire, "the children do not marry without the consent of their papas and mammas. The *garçon* asks his papa and his papa asks the papa of the *demoiselle*. Then there's a *conseil de famille*."

"Lord love me! It sounds like an inquest. . . . Madame!" he said, rising to his feet as



*Maman* returned, "I would like to marry your daughter, Marie Claire. I—I love her," he added simply.

"*Bien*," said Madame, with the eternal smile.

He thought she said "*Combien?*" and added hastily, "I'm a platoon sergeant, my pay's two shillings and tenpence a day, I don't chuck money about, and I've got £50 in the bank. I've a clean conduct-sheet, Madame. You can ask the adjutant."

To all of which, uttered in hurried English, Madame made no reply but continued to smile. For Madame knew it all already. How? By a series of judicious enquiries conducted in many quarters. She had an instinct for these things.

Lawrence did not tell her that he had the D.C.M., that he had been at Mons, and that, if the Fates spared him, he would one day wear a medal with many clasps which would record "Mons," "Le Cateau," "The Marne," "The Aisne," "Ypres," and many another tale of epic battles. After all, these were not things that a fellow talked about.

And Marie Claire put up her mouth and received his first kiss. *Maman* looked on with a mercenary smile, being engaged at that moment in a rapid mental calculation of how many francs there were in fifty pounds. Sergeant Lawrence wondered whether it was not "*convenable*" to kiss one's *fiancée* except in the presence of her *maman*. He wondered also

whether he ought to have kissed *Maman* first. He even wondered for one brief moment whether *Maman* had ever looked like Marie Claire, but he peremptorily dismissed this unbidden thought as treasonable and a temptation of the devil.

Sergeant Lawrence had an interview with his C.O. and the C.O., having satisfied himself, in the spirit of No. 1360 of the King's Regulations, that the lady was a virtuous woman and precious above rubies, duly notified the D.A.G., 3rd Echelon, who in turn communicated with the Officer in charge of Records. Which being done, the C.O. was dully informed that there appeared to be no just cause or legal impediment in the way of the marriage. And John Lawrence went before an officer who was a Commissioner of Oaths and made a statutory declaration to the same effect. He also produced a birth certificate. All of which solemn declarations the C.O. forwarded to the *Procureur de la République* of the *arrondissement* who thereupon communicated with the *maire* of the commune.

All these things took time, and Sergeant Lawrence had to go into the trenches again before the marriage ceremony could be celebrated and Marie Claire spent many sleepless nights trying to dispute a fixed idea that all the enemy batteries had got John Lawrence personally "registered" and were laid on him. But he came out all right, and one day Marie Claire and her *Maman*, with an amazing retinue of relations, illustrating all the degrees of affinity, who accompanied them, met Ser-

geants Lawrence and Chipchase at the *maison de commune*. *Maman* introduced him to a *beau-père* who was not *beau* and a *belle-sœur* who was not *belle*, but he reflected that the French are nothing if not polite. It seemed extraordinarily like a lesson in French as the step-father was a *cordonnier* and the brother-in-law was a *charcutier* and they all got mixed up in the most approved *Ollendorffian* manner.

Lawrence had obtained a *certificat de coutume* from the consul at the Base to the effect that in English law the consent of the father is not necessary to the present marriage, and this being duly read by the *maire adjoint*, whom Chipchase called the adjutant, Lawrence again solemnly declared that there existed no just cause or legal impediment.

Whereupon the "*contractant*" John Lawrence in English and the "*contractante*" Marie Claire in French declared their wish to take one another for spouse.

And the *Adjoint* declared them united in marriage. And *Maman* for the first time lost her smile and wept. And all the relations to the number of two score and three wept likewise until Lawrence felt more than ever that it was like an inquest. But Marie Claire's smile reassured him.

And the *Adjoint* having recited his entries in the register of the *état-civil* wrote down "*Lecture faite,*" repeating the words like a litany, and held out his pen. Whereupon John Lawrence and Marie Claire,

his wife, and her *Maman*, and a great cloud of witnesses duly signed their names.

"You're married, right enough, Jack," said Chipchase as he took his turn with the pen and gazed at the nine signatures which preceded his own. "It's like a Summary of Evidence—you'd better take the old adjutant's award."

And John Lawrence gave his wife a nuptial kiss before them all. Whereupon Sergeant Chipchase, seizing the youngest and prettiest of Marie Claire's girl friends, kissed her also, explaining that this was the "custom" in England and that the validity of the marriage might be gravely imperilled in English law if this ceremony were omitted. This *obiter dictum* was so well received that he promptly kissed all the others, thereby wiping away all tears and putting everybody in the greatest good humour.

I knew Lawrence and was in fact in France at the time of the wedding, but it happened in 1915 and I had forgotten all about it till one day last summer when I was spending a few days' leave in Dorset. I had just heard that he had got a bar to his D.C.M. And as chance would have it, my walk over the cliffs took me in the late afternoon into a village churchyard within a stone's throw of the sea, where I sat on the thick turf in the shade of the cypresses, watching the swallows darting to and fro in curves of eight each silhouetting a fleur-de-lys against the sky. And while I mused in the declining rays of the

sun my eye fell on a tombstone opposite me. I read  
the inscription.

To the honoured memory of  
SERGEANT WILLIAM LAWRENCE  
(of the 40th Regiment Foot)

Who after a long and eventful life

In the service of his country

Peacefully ended his days at Studland

November 11, 1869.

He served with his distinguished regiment

In the war in South America 1805

And through the whole of the Peninsular War, 1808-13.

He received the silver medal and no less than 10 clasps

For the Battles in which he was engaged

ROLEIA VIMIERA TOULOUSE

VIUDA RODRIGO

BADAJOS

(In which desperate assault being one of the volunteers

For the Forlorn Hope he was most grievously wounded)

VITTORIA FYRENEES NIVELLES

ORTHES TOULOUSE

He also fought at the glorious victory of

WATERLOO

June 18, 1815.

While still serving with his regiment during the  
Occupation of Paris by the Allied Armies  
Sergeant Lawrence married Clothilde Clairet  
at St. Germain-en-Laye who died September 26, 1853  
and was buried beneath this spot.

I got up and walked round to the reverse side of the tombstone. On it was inscribed the words:

Ci-gît  
CLOTILDE LAWRENCE  
Née at Saint-Germain-en-Laye (France)  
Décédée à Studland  
le 26 Sept. 1853.

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Was it merely a coincidence? I do not know.

## XX

## THE POWERS OF DARKNESS \

**U**NDENIABLY, Charteris had a long nose. There was no getting away from the fact, especially when you saw that nose opposite you in your dug-out day after day and heard it droning away night after night. Jefferies resented that nose. It was, it is true, not infrequently concealed by a gas mask, but the mask only seemed to Jefferies to accentuate the objectionable feature, and the gutta-percha, chisel-shaped snout merely substituted a badger's nose for something more equine. (Jefferies forgot that he also wore a mask at times.)

It is surprising how prominent a feature in the human face even the most unobtrusive of noses may become if you consider it attentively. And Jefferies considered Charteris's nose very often—much too often. He also considered his laugh; most people rather liked Charteris's laugh—Jefferies had liked it himself at one time, though he would have been hotly contentious if you had reminded him of this—but Jefferies now thought it affected and almost as obtrusive as the nose. Jefferies had an idea that when Charteris laughed he was laughing at him—he could not conceive what else there was to laugh

about. After all, to be planted down with a R.G.A. battery in a mud emplacement in Flanders for months, with no other outlook than the triangle formed by your battery as the apex and a ridge of mud as the base, is not exactly a jest. Gas shells are very unpleasant, especially when they necessitate your wearing your respirator for fourteen hours at a stretch; watching a *Taube* hovering over you for a nice spot to drop its eggs on is worse; and to wait while the unseen battery, which you can't locate, behind the ridge is ranging to get a direct hit on you is the very devil. Also, it is very annoying to be detailed to check the reserve of ammunition and indent for supplies when you never know what percentage between 20 and 75 of what you indent for will reach you, owing to the pack horses getting knocked out on the way up. In indenting for ammunition you must always proceed on the Oriental principle of asking for twice as much as you expect to get. But this is harassing, and takes time to learn.

Jefferies could not see that there was anything funny in all this. Besides, he had no time to laugh; there were so many details to attend to. There were the duck boards. They formed a long track, unrolling itself like a strip of corrugated brown cardboard from the dug-out to the battery, and it was very important not to miss that track at night. One of the bombardiers had missed it; Jefferies identified his hand the next morning, as it protruded from the mud like the root of a tree; the man had



always worn a ring on the little finger of his left hand. After that, Jefferies found he could not traverse that duck board without counting every plank in it—which he did with extreme care, sometimes retracing his steps to make sure he had not missed one. When he got to the guns he would count the minutes on the dial-sight; he could not feel sure that they were numbered right. He always made a point of touching the doorpost of the dug-out when he emerged from it; he would sometimes go back to do it if he was sure no one was watching him.

One night he had a dream. He dreamt he was standing in a large, bare room without cap or belt, with an officer by his side, and five other officers seated at a table facing him. And the five officers each rose and kissed a book one after the other and promised to administer justice without partiality, favour, or affection, and the senior officer then read out a document which recited that he, George Anthony Jefferies, was charged with misbehaving before the enemy in such a manner as to show cowardice in that he— The officer recited this through his nose in a curious droning way, and Jefferies was about to object to the constitution of the Court on the ground of the nasal intonation of the President, when he awoke in a cold sweat and realized that the droning sound came from the ground-sheet opposite him in the dug-out. It was Charteris. After that he disliked Charteris's nose more than ever, and he also secretly found fault with his lisp—for Charteris

lisped. He brooded over that lisp, and when Charteris said "Anything wrong, old man?" he disliked him all the more. Also he made a point of exposing himself rather needlessly when he went forward to the O.P., being under the impression that the men were looking at him. This went on for some time, until one day the Major commanding the battery sent for him, and suggested he should take ten days' leave. This convinced Jefferies that the Major thought he had got the wind up, and he refused. That was a mistake, seeing that he had had no leave for eighteen months.

One morning, Charteris relieved him at the O.P. They exchanged no words, Charteris having given up speaking to a man who never answered him with anything but black looks. An hour later a message came down by runner—the telephone dug-out had been blown up—that Charteris had been killed by a 9.2 shell. They buried him the same day, and the C.O. wrote a letter to his young widow, saying how much they would all miss him, what a gallant gentleman he was, and how his cheerful, indomitable laugh was the life and soul of the battery—which was true. And Jefferies, lying awake in his dug-out, suddenly remembered that Charteris had once been his friend and that he had been most damnably rude to him. All this his death brought home to him, and, as is the way with death, it made Charteris more real than he had ever been in life, so that every intonation of his voice, every gesture of his hands, the fleeting smile that played about his lips, sud-

denly acquired the vividness of a *tableau vivant*. Conversations with Charteris, long forgotten, were now remembered; words which had seemed written in sand were now discovered to be graven on marble. Jefferies' memory had become a monumental brass, and on that brass was an epitaph of Charteris.

One starlight night, about one o'clock, Jefferies was walking up to the O.P., picking his way carefully over strands of rusty wire. He was glancing up at the starry mist of the Milky Way when something seemed to snap suddenly in his head, there was a strange singing in his ears, he seemed to be rushing through space, and then everything was blotted out. He found himself in bed, and, to his amazement, he saw that it was a real bed with white linen sheets. He put his right hand above his head, expecting to touch deal boarding, and was surprised to encounter nothing. His sense of touch having failed to controvert the evidence of his sense of sight, he looked about him, and saw other beds in a row with men lying in them, and in the middle of the room—for indubitably it was a room, and remarkably free from mud—was a glass-topped table with swabs and nickel instruments upon it. He realized, at last, that he was in hospital.

His first instinct was to move his limbs. He moved his right leg and his right arm; then he tried to move his left leg and his left arm—he had an anticipatory image of the sensorial consequences, but he was conscious of no sensation. For the moment, he had a horrible intuition that the limbs were missing; then he drew down the bed-clothes with his right

arm, and saw that his left arm was there, though curiously inert. He drew his right foot up; it encountered his left leg, but the left leg was insensible to the encounter. He stammered when he spoke. He laughed often and inconsequently; and for the first time in his life he lisped.

They evacuated him to England. A medical history sheet accompanied him. He did not see it. On it were the words:

*"Shell shock. Left hemiplegia and anæsthesia. Left visual field contracted. Reflexes normal. Speech imperfect. Lisps, but not known whether this is congenital."*

The medical report said nothing about insomnia, though Charteris could have enlightened them on that point. He was sent to a shell-shock hospital for treatment and observation. The functional disorders gradually disappeared under electrical application, and he recovered the use of his limbs. After that he was given two months' sick leave at home, with orders to report to a medical board at the end of it. Outwardly, he seemed his normal self, but his mother noticed a curious introspective look in his eyes. He lisped slightly.

His people were wise in their generation; they did not ask him questions about "the front." Instead, they took him to theatres to distract his thoughts. The experiment was singularly unsuccessful. They sat in the stalls, but the players always seemed to him as remote as if he had sat in the topmost row

of the gallery, and their voices were an immense distance away. So were his own people, who sat on either side of him; so, indeed, was himself. When he spoke—which was seldom—he could hear his own voice, always with that lisp, whispering ventriloquially from the wings, the boxes, the dress-circle, everywhere but from himself. He had an almost irrepressible desire to get up in the middle of an act and walk out; at times he nearly screamed. When he was in the streets he walked with feverish rapidity, and the sauntering pace of people in front of him infuriated him beyond measure. He was always in a hurry to get somewhere—he did not know where.

His mother had been in the habit of coming into his room at night; but he now put her off, and locked his door with extreme care. He sat there alone, a prey to an increasing fear as one o'clock approached, starting at every sound, and jumping up from his chair. One night the tyre of a motor car in the street burst with a loud report. He dived under the bed. How long he crouched there he did not know, but he remembered distinctly the next morning that he had afterward thrown himself on his bed in his clothes, determined not to take them off, and with the light burning. He awoke in the morning to find himself between the sheets in his sleeping-suit and the light extinguished; his clothes were nowhere to be seen. After a long search he found them neatly folded up in the wardrobe. He had a bad headache, and he saw in the mirror that his

face was flushed, his pupils dilated, and his tongue furred and coated. He examined the door of his room; it was unlocked. He looked at the water-bottle; it had been full over-night. It was now empty.

At breakfast, he was silent and morose. He stayed up in the smoking-room till after midnight, unable to face the prospect of entering his bedroom. He ascended the stairs three times, stopped irresolutely on the landing, and then descended again. The fourth time, by a tremendous effort, he entered the room, and, as he entered it, turned round and locked the door sharply, feeling he was just in time to shut it in the face of someone who was following him. He looked at the window; it was shut. He took the candle, and, raising the valances, he peered under the bed; there was nothing there. He turned to the hearth; a fire was burning in the grate and a large arm-chair stood in front of it with its back toward him. He approached the chair—and suddenly stopped. There was someone sitting in it. The right arm of the sitter hung over the right arm of the chair; he could not see who it was, but there was something familiar about the attitude. Then he saw that the sitter had thrown his left leg over the left side of the chair—the leg terminated in a muddy field-boot; the figure seemed to be asleep, for it never moved. He advanced irresolutely. In the chair sat Charteris. Jefferies stood rooted to the spot; his mouth open, his throat dry, his right leg quivering from the hip downward, his hands clenched,

and his body cold as ice. All the while he could hear the steady swing of the pendulum of the grandfather's clock in the hall as though it were at his elbow. In a flash, he understood.

So it was Charteris who had taken his clothes off and hidden them in the wardrobe while he lay asleep. It was Charteris who had doped him with brandy and drunk the contents of the water bottle. It was Charteris who had unlocked the door every night. But how had he got the key? And that voice with a lisp coming from a long way off whenever he spoke—it must have been Charteris mocking him as he had so often mocked Charteris. Who else could it be? He himself had never had a lisp. Yes! Charteris had come to get his own back. He looked at the shadow behind him on the wall, enormously elongated so that the head and shoulders were projected on to the ceiling; it seemed to gesticulate in the flickering firelight. Perhaps that was Charteris's shadow, not his; he remembered that he and Charteris were about the same height. He felt a wild desire to escape from that presence before it awoke. He retreated toward the door, trying to walk on tiptoe, but his left leg dragged, and he moved with curious and crab-like movements from one piece of furniture to another. He kept looking over his shoulder, but the figure never moved. His journey seemed interminably long; but at last he reached the door. His only hope of salvation lay in unlocking that door with as little noise as might be, opening it, slipping out, and then closing it on the sleeper, and

locking him in. But at the moment he reached the door, spent and out of breath, he suddenly forgot where he was; his mind became a blank. When consciousness returned, he found himself still standing by the door. He looked over his shoulder at the chair. It was empty. He turned to the door; it was open. The sleeper was gone, but at any moment he might return. He slammed the door with difficulty; it resisted his efforts as though there were someone behind it. He turned the key in the lock, and with frantic haste seized the end of a heavy chest of drawers and tried to pull it toward the door. His breath came with difficulty, and in gasps, his heart thumped against his ribs, and his brow was moist with sweat. He got the chest of drawers against the door, exhausting himself in the effort. Then his legs gave way under him, and he fell senseless to the floor.

They broke down the door in the morning, and found him asleep in his clothes on the floor. There was complete loss of function in his left arm and left leg, and anæsthesia on the left side. The pupils of his eyes seemed contracted and curiously dark. He was conscious and could articulate, but his speech was confused and the lisp was more pronounced than before. At times he laughed darkly and without mirth.

In Harley Street—that tragic *rue des pas perdus*—there lives a physician famous as a consultant for the treatment of mental diseases and neurasthenia.



They sent for him. He listened attentively to the story told him by Jefferies's mother and asked a good many questions about the patient's childhood. He seemed especially concerned about the lisp—he wanted to know whether it was congenital or acquired—and then, with apparent irrelevance, he asked if Jefferies had "exalted" notions. "Oh, I don't mean, 'is he a saint?'" he added, seeing the look of surprise on the father's face. "Far from it. I mean, has he what we physicians call ideas of *grandeur*; excessive conceit, in fact? No? So much the better. Well, I'd better see him—alone, if you please."

Jefferies was on his guard. But the doctor talked to him about everything but himself—about horses, books, golf, especially golf—until Jefferies thought him an expensive fraud; any fellow could talk that kind of "tosh," especially if he were paid so many guineas an hour for talking it. He did not know that the doctor's irrelevance was deliberate, and was, as a matter of fact, pure diagnosis, being directed to finding out whether the patient could talk rationally about common things, and, in particular, as to whether some uncommon thing was lying ambushed in his consciousness like a footpad waiting to dart out in his speech. At the end of it all, he put a few questions about sleep, and the secretive look came into the patient's eyes again. No! he couldn't sleep, he was afraid.

"Afraid of what?"

"Oh, nothing!"

Jefferies was determined that no one should know about Charteris; they would only laugh at him—think him mad, perhaps. That was all very well for them, but who was it unlocked his door from the inside? That was a facer—such a facer that he almost yielded to a triumphant impulse to give it the doctor like a straight left. The doctor switched off, and began to tell him how he'd holed in three at the ninth hole at Denham. What a soporific bore the fellow was! What was that he was saying? Look at him; well, why not?

Jefferies was suddenly conscious that the irises of the doctor's eyes were brown, and his voice rather low and musical—a good baritone, in fact. Relax his limbs? Well, why not? It was rather refreshing after all this “gas.” He obeyed—with his right leg. The doctor was holding up his watch in his right hand, and its ticking seemed enormously distinct. He heard him saying: “Yes; yes, that's right. Now go—to—sleep; go—to—sleep; go—to—sleep.” The words were carefully modulated like the swing of a pendulum. . . .

“Now! wake up! Yes, wake up. That's right. I've just been inducing a little sleep. You'll feel all the better for it. I'll come and see you tomorrow.”

The doctor took his departure. He had already discovered a great deal. Jefferies did not know that for a quarter of an hour he had been talking freely to him about Charteris, and how he unlocked the door of his room and doped him in his sleep, and

what a beast he, Jefferies, had been to him, and how he'd only got what he deserved, seeing that if he'd been at the O. P. Charteris wouldn't have been there, and would never have been knocked out, and it all came of his not counting the planks in the duck board. Also he was quite unaware that he had lifted his left arm and crossed his left leg over the right, and, stranger still, that during that quarter of an hour's unconsciousness he had been speaking without a lisp.

That night, about eleven o'clock, he suddenly fell fast asleep. He awoke with the sun streaming into the room, and was astonished that he could recall no apprehension preceding sleep. The door, too, was still locked, his head was clear and his tongue clean. He said as much to the doctor later in the day. He was beginning to think the latter rather a decent sort. He felt half inclined to tell him all about Charteris.

"Was it about eleven o'clock you fell asleep?" said the doctor.

"Yes," said Jefferies, and wondered how the doctor had hit upon the exact time. But Jefferies had never heard of post-hypnotic suggestion.

At the end of a fortnight he was a different man. The sleeplessness had wholly disappeared, so had the motor symptoms, and the lisp with them. The doctor assured him that he would stake his professional reputation on his being his old self within an appreciable time, and such assurance is infectious. Jefferies did not know that the doctor had been

studying with considerable satisfaction that morning the laboratory report of a pathologist on his blood serum. It read:

*"Results of Wassermann test: Blood —negative. Cerebro-spinal fluid—negative."*

"I thought so," said the doctor to himself. "Negative results are not conclusive, but in this case they corroborate. I knew that young man had led a clean life. But I didn't like that lisp at first—it might have been incipient G. P. I."

He never had mentioned the name of Charteris to Jefferies, but one day he asked him if he had ever known a man of that name.

"Yes," said Jefferies, without a trace of self-consciousness. "A topping fellow. One of the best." And he talked freely about him, though not quite so freely as when he had talked on without knowing it. Had he any people? Well, yes, he had left a widow and a baby—six months old, he believed. Jefferies suddenly felt rather ashamed he had not looked her up; he had been best man at the wedding.

"Why don't you go and see her?" said the doctor, suddenly. "Yes, I mean it. Go and cheer her up. It's your duty. Yes, and it's to your interest. Think of others—it's not a bad recreation. You've been thinking too much about yourself. Don't seek sympathy—give it. Sympathy is very bad for you. I've never given you any"—which was both true and untrue.

He went. He found her in a tiny flat in West Kensington; the pension of the widow of a second-

lieutenant is not opulent, and she had little else. She was in black, and the long oval face with its grave gray eyes, clear complexion, and masses of fair hair, had the charm of a Gainsborough portrait.

"Oh, I knew you'd come," she said in all sincerity. She took him to see the baby. It was very like Charteris—even the nose, and yet the nose seemed quite normal. Only he had never seen Charteris put his toes in his mouth.

He looked down at the baby and the baby looked up at him. He put out his forefinger, having a vague feeling that the correct thing to do was to stroke them like a pup; four small fingers and a thumb closed upon it. The clasp of those little fingers affected him strangely; he felt as though their impulse came from beyond the grave. He looked round at the tiny nursery, neat and clean as an operating theatre; but the flat was cheaply furnished, and it suddenly occurred to him that life must be rather hard for her.

"I want you to be his godfather," said the mother softly. "You were his father's best friend."

She was chastising him with whips, though she did not know it. He turned to the window with a gulp in his throat, and tears came into his eyes.

"No; I was a beast to him," he said.

"Oh, you mustn't say that! It isn't true. He always said in his letters that you were 'such a good chap,' and did not know what fear was."

"Was that all he said?" he asked, with his face still averted.

"All! I think he once wrote that you seemed rather worried about something, and that you wouldn't tell him what it was. Oh! yes, and that he thought he must have offended you without knowing it. Only that. Oh, do promise! He's so small, you know."

He turned round. Undeniably he was small; it was very odd how small babies were. And the baby was looking up at him—looking at him with the unwinking stare of infancy. He was horribly afraid it was going to say: "Well, old thing, what have you got to say for yourself?"

He suddenly seized both her hands in his. "I promise," he said.

He stooped over the cot, and the baby made a grab at his finger, missed it, grabbed again, and this time caught it firmly. At that she laughed. And he laughed. And the baby, who mimicked everybody he saw, like a variety artist, laughed also, whereat they laughed the more.

Jefferies did not quite know what the official duties of a godfather were, but he did his best. He bought hideous golliwogs, hirsute bears, volatile monkeys, and a "Child's History of England," having the vaguest ideas of the mental attainments of an infant in arms. Most of these the baby accepted with a regal air as though receiving the adoration of the Magi, and then threw them on the ground. He screamed lustily till Jefferies picked them up, whereupon he threw them down again. Jefferies again picked them up. The strange thing was that he enjoyed this almost as much as the baby.

Jefferies impounded a friend as second sponsor, and one Sunday they attended with a very youthful godmother at the font to be sworn in. The whole ceremony seemed to Jefferies extraordinarily like going bail that the baby would come up for judgment if called upon. He had to promise as "surety" for the infant, for the remission of whose sins the parson had already prayed with great unction, that he would renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, and all covetous desires of the same—which seemed to Jefferies rather gratuitous and uncommonly like an innuendo. After which he had to give a solemn undertaking that he would call upon his godson "to hear sermons" (he registered a mental reservation as to this) and to learn various holy injunctions "in the vulgar tongue." And, being thus bound over, and having a vague feeling that his recognisances would be estreated if he failed to produce his godson whenever the parson wanted a "deadhead" for a matinée sermon, he left the church with the mother and the baby, who uttered vigorous but unintelligible comments on the whole performance in a very vulgar tongue, whereat the church cleaners—aged females, whom Jefferies called "the moppers-up"—said to one another: "My! ain't the biby a picture; the little dear."

"Well! what does the Board say?" said the doctor to Jefferies, one morning in his consulting-room, a few weeks later.

"They've reported me fit for light duty, sir. I expect to go out again in a month. But I'm really quite fit for general service, as it is."

"Don't be in a hurry," said the doctor. "You're a different man, I can see that. I see you've got the Military Cross. I congratulate you. I met the C. O. of your battery the other day; he says you thoroughly deserved it. Cold feet? Nonsense! I'll admit you were afraid, but not with that kind of fear. Your trouble was that you were afraid of being afraid. That's not the stuff that cowards are made of—'undue regard for his personal safety,' as they call it in the Army. Your fear was moral fear, not physical. A physical coward's never afraid of being afraid; what he fears is being courageous. I have yet to meet the man who knows no form of fear; he must be either a beast or a god. After all, fear is the oldest of the emotions. What is it the Latin poet says? *Primus in orbe deos fecit timor*. All religions begin in fear. A man who fears nothing will neither fear God nor regard man. I've called your fear moral, and so it was; some might call it psychical, and so it may have been. The shock of the actual shell that knocked you out was merely the medium of a psychical explosion of a growing fear of being afraid.

"Blame you? My dear fellow, who am I that I should blame you? I've not looked death in the face day by day and hour by hour, and seen my friends obliterated one after the other. . . . If you'd remained insensible to all that—well, you'd



deserve to be shot—not for cowardice, but for callousness. We're beginning to learn. So is the Army. Why do you suppose that we've been asked to supply a neurologist to every army corps at the front? Why, to give every poor devil who finds himself charged with desertion or cowardice a sporting chance. There is a certain G.O.C. I know—never mind his name—who, before he relinquished his command in the field, always made it a rule never to confirm a death sentence if the man's medical history-sheet recorded a wound. Why? Because he said a man was never the same afterward or, what amounts to the same thing, that you could never be sure he was. I take off my hat to him. In laying down that principle, he won an even greater military victory than in winning the first battle of Ypres. Ah! I've told you who he is now—but no matter.

"You want to know about your own case? Well, there's no harm in telling you now. I knew you were afraid of something, and my first task was to investigate the history of the fear. I did—never mind how. Your fear recurred toward midnight—the time when you were knocked out. It was a case of traumatic revival. The lisp? Oh! that's easily explained. Neuro-mimesis—the unconscious imitation of another person to whom one is attached—is quite common in cases of shell shock. Then you had that hallucination about Charteris sitting in the chair. No! there's nothing to be alarmed about in that. Most people have an hallucination once or twice in their life; the danger is when they don't

*recognize* it as such. You didn't, and you were so obsessed by remorse for your behaviour about Charteris—oh, yes! you told me all that—that when you 'saw' that irrational apparition you began to rationalize it. That was the crisis. It's when a patient begins to rationalize the irrational that the signal's at danger. You see, once grant the major premise of a delusion, once accept it as a reality, and all the rest can be made to follow logically—oh, perfectly logically. The logic of the mentally afflicted is the most irrefutable of reasoning. There's never a flaw in it. . . . That's what makes it so deadly."

"Yes," said Jefferies. "I see that. But who was it unlocked my door and undressed me?"

"Yourself. Your other self, if you like. You were in a condition of somnambulism. It was your subconscious self that unlocked the door and went downstairs to the brandy decanter. Yes! I asked your father if he'd noticed a difference in the load-line; he had. He suspected the butler, and his suspicions were confirmed by the butler's talking about ghosts. Ghosts don't drink brandy, though I believe Sir Oliver Lodge says they drink synthetic whisky. I hope they don't take it on an empty stomach. I don't know. I'm not interested in haunted houses or tables that do the tango; I'm only interested in haunted men."

"Yes, sir; but what do you mean by my other self? You speak as if a man had two selves."

"Of course I do. It's the first thing that every student of psychology learns; and a doctor's very

little good if he's not something of a psychologist. Look at me; I'm copying out a long prescription, and I'm talking to you all the time. My subconscious self is doing the one, my conscious self is doing the other. But my two selves are on speaking terms, whereas in hysteria and masked epilepsy the two selves may be total strangers to each other. Have you never read 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde'? We've all got a Mr. Hyde in us. The great thing is to know it, and keep him under lock and key; he's always trying to steal the key and dope Dr. Jekyll. Why, I've known a case in the Salpêtrière clinic where a doctor put a woman in a trance and raised a somnambulic self in her that had been 'dead' twenty years—and a very ugly self it was. Your secondary self got the upper hand and robbed the primary self of its functions. I made it give them up. Have you never seen a lady patient under an anæsthetic? No, of course not; most improper. But I have. They all swear like troopers—every one of them. Where do they acquire the vocabulary? They don't—not consciously; but their subconscious memory does. They hear foul language in the street like everybody else, and their subconscious memory registers it. Switch off the will, side-track the conscious self, and the subconscious self—'the self below the threshold,' someone has called it—surges up; and a very ugly monster it sometimes is—sleeping lecheries, lurking fears, dark 'throw-backs,' all the primeval self that each of us carries within us. The Beast in the Jungle, in

fact. But he has a keeper, and men call him The Will."

"I should rather like your profession," said Jefferies, musingly.

"No, you wouldn't. It's all very well to study it as a hobby, to read Janet and Ribot—how delightfully those French fellows do write—it's another thing to study it clinically. If it wasn't for my Sunday round of golf—ah! I bored you with that, didn't I?" said the doctor, with a smile as he looked at his watch.

Jefferies rose, and took his cap and stick.

"Sir, I can n-never thank you enough for what you've done for me," he said fervently.

"Don't thank me, my dear fellow. I regarded you as my colleague—not merely as my patient. You learnt to forget yourself; you 'called up' your will. Without that reinforcement, I should not have succeeded. How's the godson? And Mrs. Charteris? No, no. No more thanks, please. Listen to me—the words are not mine; they were uttered two thousand years ago by the greatest of physicians. 'Thy *faith* hath made thee whole. Go in peace.' Good-bye. God bless you."

## EPILOGUE

### THE FAITH OF THE SOLDIER

*"What of the faith and fire within us  
Men who march away?"*

*"Every soldier, when not prevented by military duty, will  
attend divine service."*—THE KING'S REGULATIONS.

I HAVE read somewhere of late statements by two Army chaplains—one, I think, a Wesleyan, the other an Anglican—to the effect that the ministrations of their Churches had failed to "reach" the soldier. Whether this confession of failure was a reproach, and, if a reproach, whether it was directed against Church or against Army, I do not know. But the conclusion itself is indisputable. Yet the Churches have not wanted for advantages. Their chaplains have been given commissioned rank and a spiritual hierarchy is recognized under military forms. The soldier is classified according to his religious profession, and once his election is made, the secular arm is called in to punish him if he is late on Church Parade or neglects to "follow the drum." A prayer-book figures in the inventory of his kit, and to be without it is to be "deficient in necessaries." His religion is stamped on his identity-disc, and is recorded in the nominal roll of his company returns, with his name, his number, and his rank.

With all these facilities for access to him the Churches, according to lists from officers, have failed to "reach" him. In an earlier age—when, as on a wet and gusty morning at Agincourt, the priests shrived the archers and men-at-arms as they formed up in order of battle—such an admission would have meant not that the Church had failed, but that the Army was damned. But in those days men were more exercised with the problem of how to die than with the question of how to live. To-day if a man has solved for himself the latter, he may well be excused if he ceases to trouble himself about the former. And in that sense the soldier has a faith and by that faith he is justified.

This may seem to some a hard saying. The soldier is sometimes ribald, often profane, and always ironical. He does not sing hymns on going into action like Cromwell's Ironsides or accompany *réveillé* with a morning psalm. He has been known to put the tune of "Onward, Christian Soldiers" to base uses. The name of Christ is often on his lips, but as an imprecation rather than a prayer. He will make a jest of a "white cross" as though it were a new Army decoration. The language in which he speaks of death is, in fact, often picturesque, but it is rarely devout. A pal may have "gone West" or "stopped one" or been "outed"; he is never spoken of as being "with God." Death is rarely alluded to as being the will of God; it is frequently characterized in terms of luck. A soldier on going into action is much more exercised

about the condition of his rifle than the state of his soul.

There are, of course, exceptions, but the average soldier does not seem to feel any confidence that he is in the hands of a Divine Providence; he is fatalistic rather than religious. After all, if you have looked on the obscene havoc of a battlefield, as the writer has done, and seen the entrails of men torn out, their heads severed from their bodies, and all the profane dismemberment of that which, according to the teaching of the Church, is the temple of the soul, you find it rather difficult at times to believe that the fate of the individual, whatever may be the case with the type, is of any concern to the Creator. For the soldier who ponders on the realities of war, the judgments of God may be a great deep; what he feels to be certain is that they are past finding out.

As to whether this agnosticism is real or assumed, transient or permanent, the writer offers no opinion. But he will hazard the conjecture that it is not without its sublimity. To go into action with a conviction that your cause is everything and yourself nothing, to face death without any assurance that in dying you achieve your own salvation, whether victorious or not, is surely a nobler state of mind than that of the old Protestant and Catholic armies in the "Wars of Religion," equally assured of their own personal salvation and of the damnation of their opponents. The religious soldier of history may have been devout, he was certainly fanatical. And as he was fanatical, so he was cruel. Regarding

himself as the chosen instrument of God, he assumed he did but anticipate the Divine Judgment—and incidentally ensure his own salvation—by giving no quarter to the papist or the infidel.” The morning psalm ended in the evening massacre.

The English soldier is not cruel; though he can, and does, take a terrible revenge for treachery. He certainly despises Fritz but he rarely hates him. He believes in “getting his own back” but he does not give himself religious airs about it. His view of death may be light, but, at any rate, it is not morbid, neither is it egotistical. I am no theologian, but it has always seemed to me that the religion of the English Churches, with its profoundly Calvinistic colouring, has always been inclined to a certain egotism in its emphasis on personal salvation and its attainment exclusively by admission to the congregation of the elect, whether by baptism, confirmation, or profession. The literature of English religion, especially in the seventeenth century, is full of an extraordinary preoccupation, sometimes a morbid preoccupation, with the state of the individual soul and a frantic desire to escape a damnation which was regarded as the common lot of men. “Save yourself” was its burden, and the official professors of religion exhorted others to join them in a kind of spiritual *sauve qui peut*. “Save others” is the creed of the soldier: all his military education is directed toward making him forget himself. He has, indeed, no time to think of himself; all his time is given to thinking of others—to “doing his bit,” to holding a line of trench, keeping



up a covering fire, getting up rations, delivering his "chit," for fear that otherwise someone else will be "let down." Self-effacement and not self-assertion is the rule of life in the Army.

It was well said by De Vigny that the virtue which characterizes the good soldier is abnegation, and that his is a cross more heavy than that of the martyr: and one which must be borne a long time in order to know the grandeur and the weight of it. The renunciation of the pursuit of gain, the surrender of one's liberty of thought and action, the acceptance of the duty of implicit obedience, the certainty of punishment in the case of failure, the uncertainty of reward in the event of success, the contraction of ambition, the repression of emotion—these, indeed, are great abnegations. They might, perhaps, seem, like the vows of the early religious orders, more calculated to cramp the character than to develop it, were it not that the soldier, unlike the monk, lives a life of action, not of meditation: that this long abnegation has for its object, however remote, some definite achievement and that it carries with it, in the case of our own nation, no imputed righteousness and few or no prerogatives.

Except in rare moments the British nation has never "spoilt" the British Army, still less has it glorified it, and the disabilities of the soldier have been far more obvious than his privileges. Pacifist writers may fulminate about militarism, but there never was a less "militaristic" army than the old British Army: and if ever there was a job that the

British officer hated, it was being called in to "aid the civil power." He knew it would never bring him any credit, while it might often involve him in irretrievable disaster. If he took counsel of the King's Regulations, the only thing he found was that whatever he did was almost certain to be wrong. His military character invested him with no sanctity, but it often exposed him to much obloquy. The soldier took his oath of attestation, and the officer accepted his commission knowing full well that he sacrificed far more than he gained. He joined a great fraternity, but he did not become a member of a caste. He accepted these sacrifices as incidental to his choice and in that act of voluntary abnegation he consecrated them.

It is this spirit of sacrifice which animates the soldier of to-day. For this army had that character stamped upon it in the first two years of the war and it has never lost it. Never in any country in the world had there been anything like that great crusading rush to the colours: and by the time the rush had begun to spend itself the character of the New Army was fixed for all time. If ever men dedicated themselves to a cause these were they. Long-service N.C.O. instructors were astonished at the enthusiasm with which the men learnt their duties, often learning more in the new fourteen weeks' intensive training than the men had learnt in a year in the days of the old Army.

The abnegations of a military life may make a man or they may mar him; it all depends on the

spirit in which they are accepted. If the original impulse is compulsory, as in Germany, they will enslave him; if it is voluntary, as in England, they will exalt him. The British soldier has learnt how to extract the best out of military life—to see that, if rightly regarded, it offers every day such opportunities for voluntary sacrifice as are to be found nowhere else; you have only to read the awards in the *Gazette* to find the proof of it, and when you read them remember that for one deed that stands rewarded a thousand go unrecorded.

Every nation gets the army it deserves, and in the British Army, as in no other, one seems to find the solution of the problem which has so often perplexed philosophers—how to reconcile liberty with authority. The spirit was always there, for it was native to the English character. There never was any army in which respect for the individual was so strong. It was always bad form for an officer to punish a man “with his tongue”—it was enough for him to say “Will you take my award?”—and it was absolutely fatal to his career for him to lay his hands upon him. The very first thing a subaltern learnt when he did his day’s duty as orderly officer was that his first thought must be the comfort of the men: and an Army Order reminds him, if he is in danger of forgetting it, that he must put it before his own. The recruit is quick to discover this and perhaps not more quick than surprised. Also he discovers that he himself is “his brother’s keeper.” He learns that everything he does or does not do

involves others besides himself. This is a war of platoons, and the "specialists," bombers, rifle-bombers, Lewis gunners, learn to work together and with the riflemen, like the forwards in a football team who "feed" each other with the ball.

It is the same with discipline as with tactics—the man who goes "ca canny" or defaults soon discovers that others have to suffer for his dereliction as well as himself, and if a corporal neglects to see that the rifles of his section are clean at a company inspection, he may be the first to hear of it, but assuredly he will not be the last, for the platoon sergeant and the platoon commander will hear of it, too, and all of them "get it in the neck." In the Army the fact that you expiate your fault does not mean that others may not have to atone for it.

In an army thus constituted, a soldier finds a rule of life and a theory of conduct. It is not in itself a religion, though it may easily become one if he is inspired by an ideal in submitting himself to it. It bears the same relation to that ideal as dogma does to faith. One may have the dogma without the faith; one may be disciplined merely because one is docile. But the acceptance of a dogma sometimes generates a faith, and the soldier who joined the Old Army merely because he liked it, and strove to keep his conduct-sheet clean because he knew that a "dirty" one obscured his chances of promotion, was in the process of becoming a good soldier, well

on the way to becoming a good man. To tell a falsehood is a military offence; in learning to avoid it he was in a fair way of discovering it was a moral offence. There are, it is true, military offences which are not moral offences, and there are moral offences which are not military offences. But, generally speaking, in the Old Army a bad man made a bad soldier, and a good man a good soldier. In the New Army most of the recruits had a faith before they learnt the dogma. Many of them joined for the sake of a "cause," all for the sake of an emotion, but it was an emotion—whether patriotism, pride, emulation, or love of adventure—which had little or none of the impurity of ambition. Most of them accepted the discipline without any great enthusiasm for it, and probably with some aversion from it as a thing foreign to their civilian habit of mind, and were surprised to find that it had a meaning and even embodied a theory of conduct. In their impulse to join there was an emotion; in the discipline to which they subjected themselves there was a morality. And if it be true, as someone has said, that religion is morality touched with emotion, then these men were assuredly religious.

How far the introduction of conscription altered this character, and whether, indeed, conscription as a permanent system was compatible with it I am not concerned to discuss. But as regards the British Army during the years of 1914-1916, and more particularly the Old Army which leavened it, it is sufficient to say that by their works ye shall know

them. Kitchener never wrote anything finer than the allocution which he addressed to the old B.E.F. when they landed in France. It breathed the very spirit of those Articles of War which Henry V issued to the host on the landing at Harfleur. The men were worthy of it and they lived up to it. During the first eight months of the war, there were only two cases of offences against the inhabitants of the country. The British soldier showed himself to be what he was—a gentleman. The French were prepared to find him that; what they were not prepared to find was that he was gay, witty, tender, and debonair. His playfulness with children delighted them; his tenderness to animals astonished them. British gunners and drivers often show extraordinary devotion to their horses, but after all horsemanship is part of their training and "ill-treating a horse" leaves a black mark on a soldier's conduct-sheet and has to be expiated by F.P. That, however, does not account for the passion of a battalion for making a pet of a dumb animal, nor does it explain the spectacle, very stupefying to the Italians, of a fox-terrier marching at the head of a rifle battalion and giving himself the airs of a second-in-command.

There is a sort of lyrical temperament in the British soldier; you discover it in the way he sings. The French rarely sing on the march; the British often. It is true the German sings—but he sings to order. Nothing is more characteristic of the difference between the British and the German

armies than the fact that a song book—doubtless passed by the censor—figures in the German soldier's list of necessities and is absent from the Englishman's. German officers have been known to strike a man across the shoulders with the endearing exhortation: "*Singen Sie!*" The English soldier makes his own songs and sings them or not as it pleases him. I have even seen in the early days of the war a fatigue-party of soldiers, under sentence of F.P., marching to their unsanitary tasks singing "Keep the Home Fires Burning"—a spectacle which would produce a fit of apoplexy in the German mind. I often think that, whatever else the British Army has or has not done in France, it has destroyed forever on the Continent the legend of a dour phlegmatic England, hostile to cakes and ale. It has restored the old tradition of a "Merrie England."

But the British soldier has something deeper than gaiety or wit; he has humour. The former are transient; the latter is permanent. Wit is a thing of the intellect, but humour has its roots in the character. The British soldier is not witty when in the trenches—no one is—but he is humorous. Like every other natural trait this humour is largely unconscious. It is an attitude, not a gesture. As for example, the two men who—when out one night in No Man's Land lying in wait for a German patrol that was long in coming their way—were heard by a friend of mine, their Platoon Commander, whispering to one another: "I hope they haven't come to no

harm, Bill." These men were characteristically humorous, but they were not attempting to be funny. There is much fortitude, some naïveté, and a good deal of irony in the humour of the British soldier. The irony finds expression in his endearing nicknames for "unhealthy" places, and there is a kind of fortitude in this irony as though in stigmatizing a danger you depreciated it. There was irony, too, in the way the soldiers no sooner learnt that the Germans called them "contemptible" than they accepted the adjective with delight. So, too, when they heard that they were "mercenaries"; as soon as they grasped the meaning of the term, the idea that they endured what they did, dazzled by the opulence of a shilling a day, struck them as a really priceless jest for which the Boche deserved every credit in anticipating them.

This same soldier—cheerful, humane, sardonic, engrossed in learning how to live the military life and to do his bit—has not troubled his head about how to die. That is, I suppose, why when it comes to the point he is so little exercised about it; not having sought to "save" his life, he is hardly conscious that he "loses" it.

He is as one

Who in the heat of conflict keeps the law  
In calmness made, *and sees what he foresaw*

I remember reading some words of that fine soldier, Donald Hankey, in which he speaks with



something like indignation of the attempt of a desperately well-meaning chaplain at an open-air service the night before the men went into the trenches, to "frighten" them with the prospect of death. They refused to be frightened and the chaplain's bag was very small: I have seen many soldiers die. I do not know what, if anything, they would have said to a *padre*. I only know that all I ever heard them say was "I've done my bit"; "What must be must be"; "It wur worth it"; "It bain't no use grousing"; or "I'm all right—I'm topping." I've often thought that the secret of their fortitude was that they had done what they could.

What the soldier might teach the Churches is that there is only one thing that really counts, and that is character. In the army it is the only chance of distinction a man has, and nowhere is it so quickly grasped. The soldier is less concerned with whether a man's beliefs are "true" than with whether he truly believes them. He has no respect for the sacerdotal character as such; what interests him is not the priest but the man. He is not interested in religion as a science but he has some respect for it as an art. If a *padre* is a good fellow and sincere the soldier will accept him as such, but he will not tolerate the attitude of a man who assumes that he and his alone possess the keys of heaven and hell. It is only when the priest secularizes himself that he can command a sympathetic hearing. The Church will have to renounce all its worldly prestige,

forget its hierarchical character, and go forth like the Twelve without gold or silver or scrip if it is to get hold of the men after this war.

I often think that it was an immense mistake ever to give the chaplains commissioned rank, for it is a case of rendering unto Cæsar the things which are not Cæsar's. It puts a gulf between the chaplain and the soldier which is never bridged and it is altogether anomalous, for a chaplain has no disciplinary authority. He is with the men but not of them. The regimental officer who lives, works, and fights with his men may, and if he is the right sort he does, get to know them, although even then the men never talk with quite the same freedom as they do among themselves. But this communion is denied to the padre. I have, indeed, met chaplains in the fire-trenches and have known of one or two who, in defiance of orders, went over the top. Their willingness to take risks is not in dispute, but that is not the point. The point is that they are only spectators and privileged spectators at that. If the clergy had been allowed to join up and to forget their sacerdotal character in the ranks, they might have achieved great things. There are some 20,000 priests in the ranks of the French Army as soldiers. I am not arguing for the application of conscription to the clergy, and I daresay its application in France was anything but disinterested—it was, I believe, a political move of the anti-clerical, but it has operated to strengthen the Church instead of weakening it, for the anti-clerical forget that in

destroying a caste they were creating a brotherhood.

One chaplain I knew was, indeed, remarkably successful. But then he was far more convinced of the salvation of the men than he was of his own. I suppose he was very unorthodox; he was certainly dying to fight. Also he had no brotherly love for the Boche at all; he hated him. I forget his creed—if indeed I ever knew it, for he was the last man to obtrude it. He never tried to improve the occasion; if a dying soldier wanted religious consolation he gave it, if he did not want it he was content to sit and hold the dying man's hand—and it was no bad *viaticum*. The men respected him as a man and loved him as a brother. He was quite ready to take another chaplain's duty and, what was more remarkable, to let him take his, for he never seemed to be exercised as to whether the chaplains of other faiths than his own had "grace," and I don't suppose that he ever vexed himself about apostolic succession. Like the Galilean fishermen he was of lowly birth and he had the humility of Him who washed the disciples' feet. I knew just enough of his religious beliefs to know that they were the religion of the Sermon on the Mount. He got his way at last and went up with a draft to the front. I never saw him again, but I heard afterward that he was killed when dressing a wounded soldier under fire.

I often think that in his own way that chaplain was a born soldier. It was not so much that the men had his religion as that he had theirs. Theirs is a

religion which has never hardened into a creed; it is the religion of humanity.

Give unto me, made lowly wise,  
The spirit of self-sacrifice.

It is the spirit of the gunners and drivers in the retreat from Mons who got off their horses and limbers and walked in the heat and dust, in order that the weary infantry might ride; the spirit of the thousands of nameless and unremembered men who have crawled out into the open under fire to rescue the wounded and been sniped for their pains; the spirit of the gunner captured at an observation post who, though scourged, buffeted, and despitefully used by a German officer, broke his instruments before his face and refused to betray the position of his battery; the spirit of those lonely exiles who held their heads up and never flinched when spat upon and kicked through the streets of German towns in the long *via dolorosa* that leads to the hell of a *Defangenenlager* and often to the grave.

It is on those exiles, and their proud, indomitable spirit, that my mind most often dwells when I think of the faith of the soldier. They were not happy in an opportune death on the field of battle; they were wounded not only in body but in spirit; they were scourged and mocked and starved in an alien land in which the very spirit of humanity seemed dead and hope deferred enfeebled the heart. But they refused to be cast down. The Germans robbed them

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of everything but their self-respect. That remained and it endured to the end. Of such as these a great Englishman must surely have been thinking when he wrote:

This man is free from servile bands  
Of hope or rise or fear to fall;  
Lord of himself, though not of lands;  
And having nothing, yet hath all.

THE END



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