

From
Mud
to
Musti



By

Bruce Baird father

To Mother with love -

from

Green

June 19, 19



PRESENTED

TO

**THE CORPS OF ROYAL
NEW ZEALAND ENGINEERS**

by

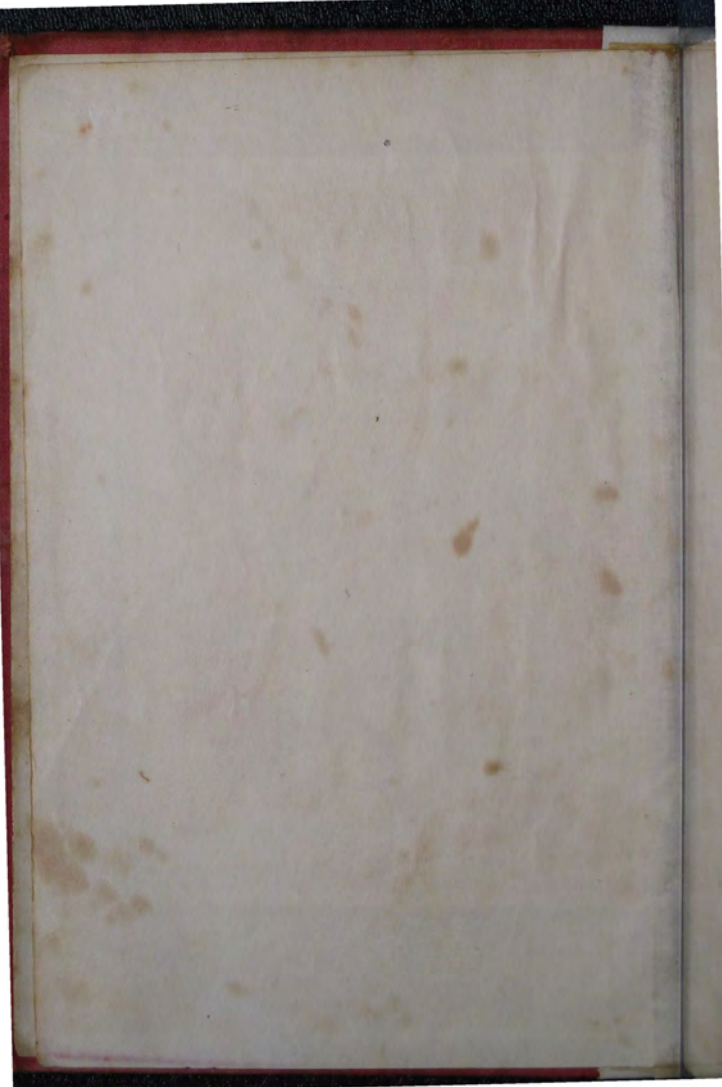
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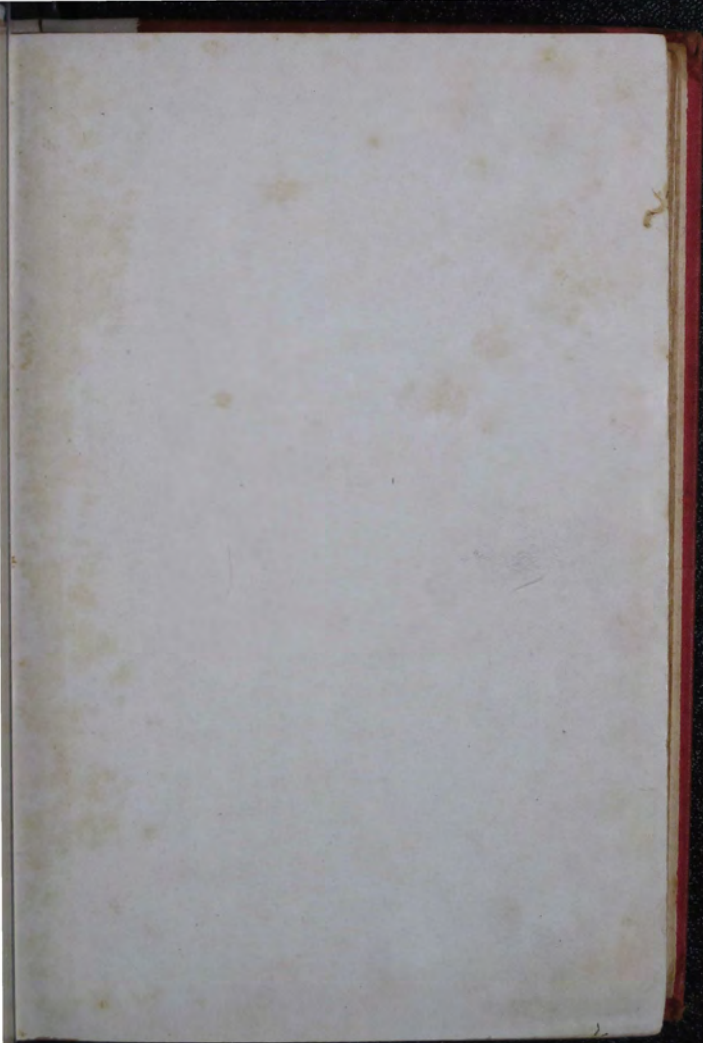


FROM MUD TO MUFTI

BY

BRUCE BAIRNSFATHER

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1919





"Les Joyeux"

Prince
Rainfather.

From
Mud
to
Multi

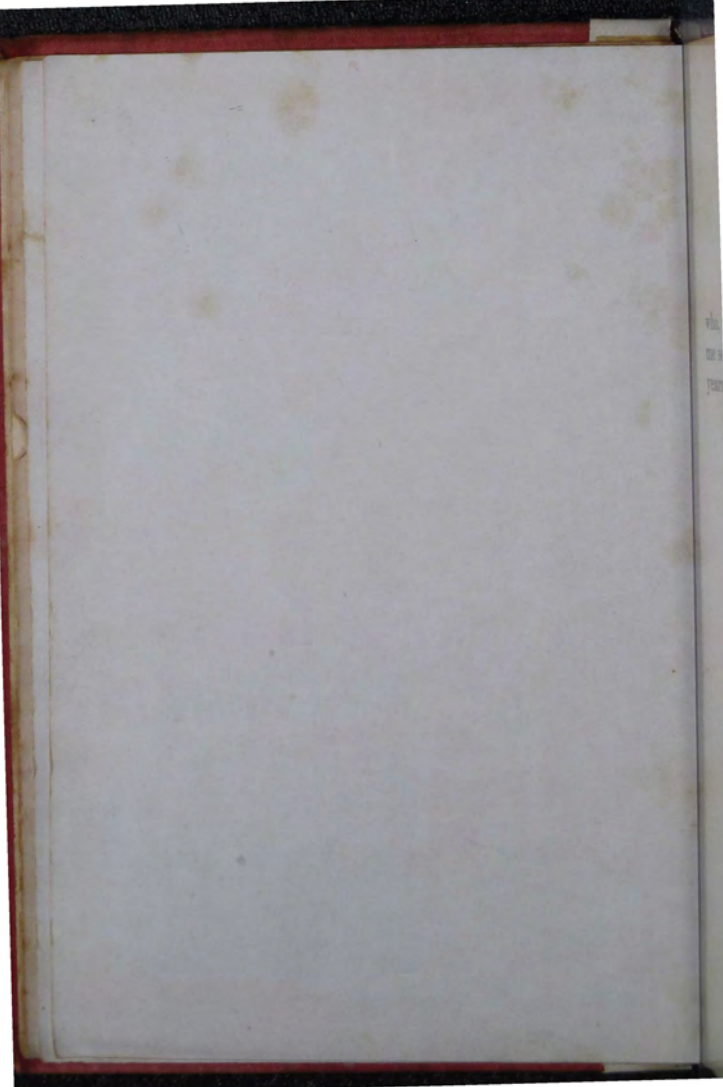
with
Old Bill



On All
Fronts

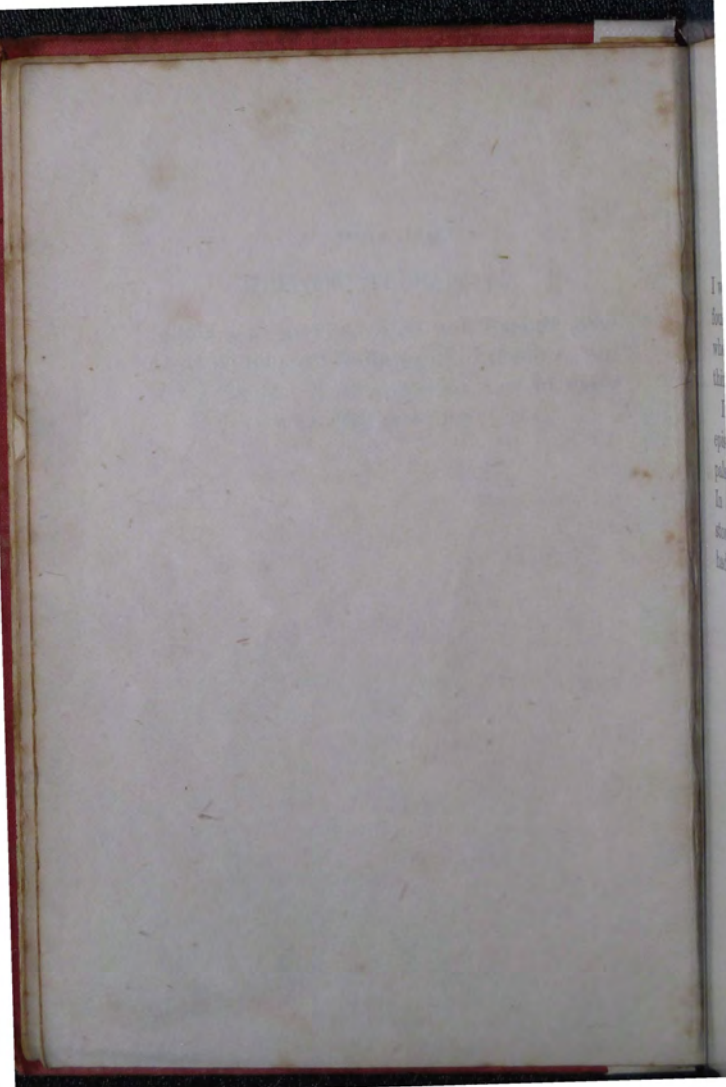
By
Bruce Bairnsfather

London : Grant Richards Ltd



DEDICATED TO
MY MASCOT MOTHER

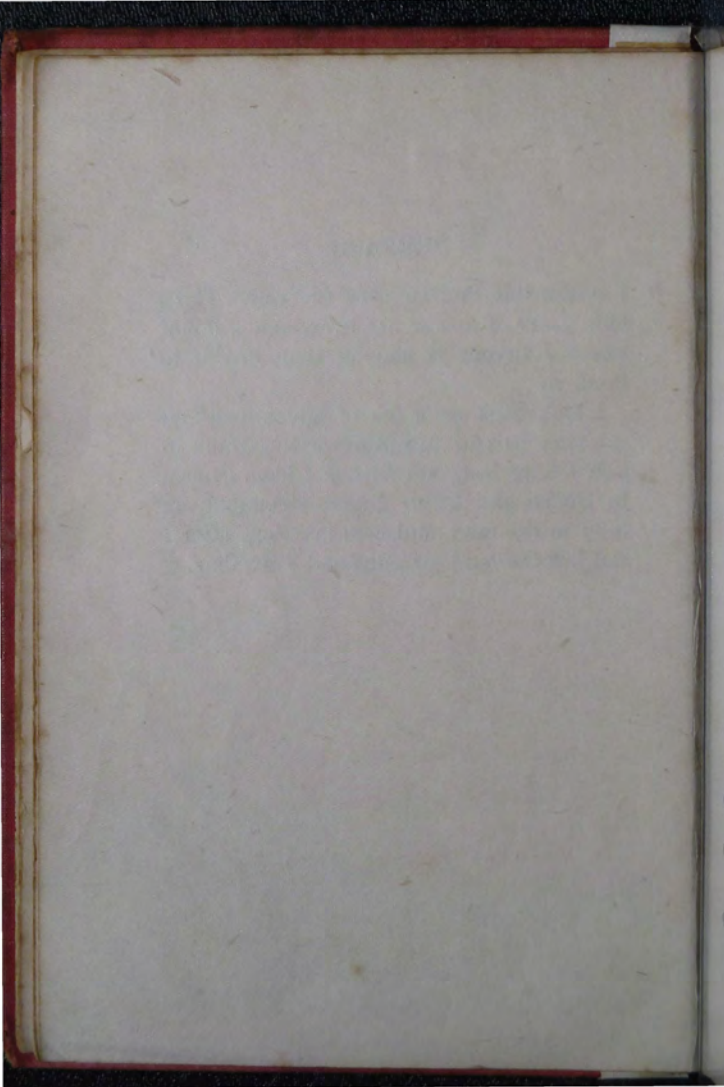
who, though way back at home, has helped
me so much in inspiration through all these
years of war, and who, in her anxiety, has
endured more than I have.



PREFACE

I WRITE this Preface after the war. Those four years of horror are over, and I doubt whether anyone is happier than myself to think so.

I look back on a sea of adventures and episodes, painful and otherwise. I think of pals I have lost, and friends I have gained. In *Bullets and Billets* I have recounted my story in the mud, and here my story after I had left the mud for Tabs and Travelling.



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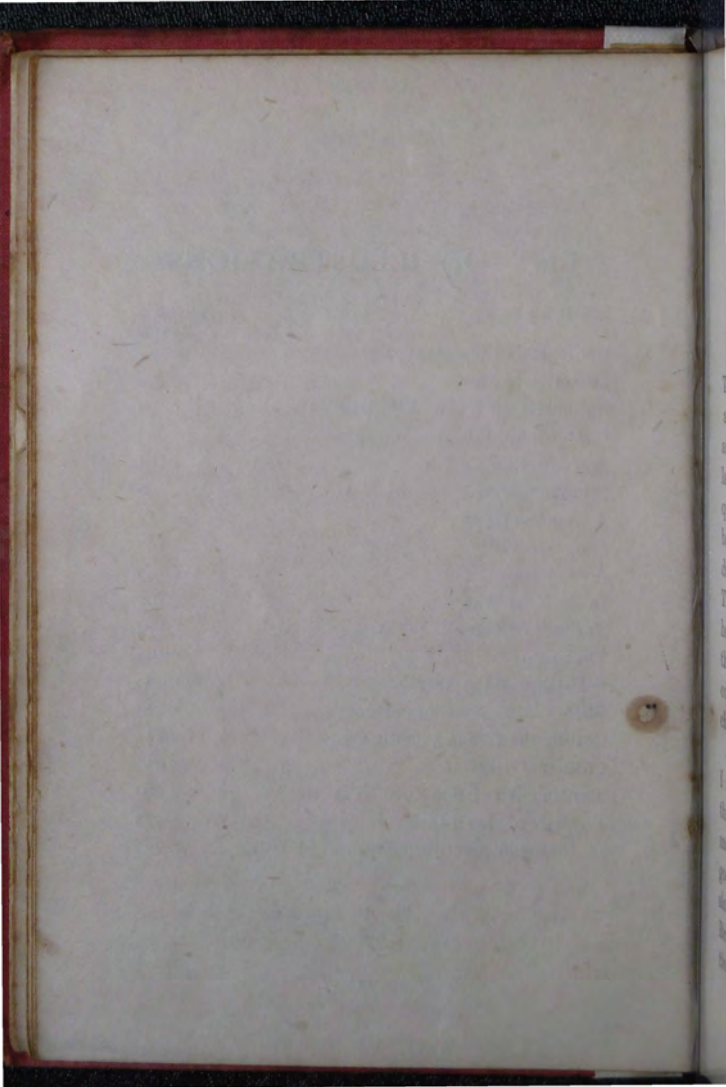
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CHAPTER I

BEGINS IN HOSPITAL—A SURPRISE VISIT—FIND
MYSELF IN REQUEST

THOSE who have endured *Bullets and Billets* and have possessed sufficient mental control and iron determination to have finished the last chapter, will remember that, subsequently to being wafted out of the second battle of Ypres by a "Johnson," I was in due course deposited in a London hospital. This was a large building, one of the finest hospitals in London, I should say. One of those Olympic palaces with endless stone corridors, lifts, rice puddings and temperature charts.

But what a harbour of refuge it seemed! I really think it is quite worth while going through an offensive in order to get that marvellous feeling of rest, security, and the good will of human beings which comes slowly over you on admission to one of our British hospitals. After months of saturation in all the excessively masculine and

harsh ways of war, to recline in a comfortable bed and watch a nurse moving towards you across a carpet, with nothing more dangerous than a thermometer or a tonic, one feels that the world is a nice, kind thing after all. Those marvellous hospitals! Day after day, week after week, month after month, thousands of new cases come in and yet the staff turn on an enthusiastic and cheery welcome each time with unfailing regularity. One feels that one is the first and only case with which they have had to do. It's the same in all our hospitals, and I've had experience of one or two.

I was pretty rotten for some little time, and *had* to put up with those well-known long and weary days in bed. Days when you look forward to the doctor's visit on his rounds, after which you spend the rest of the time watching the daylight fading into the evening, and then wait for the night nurse to come and take that confounded temperature of yours again prior to wishing you good night. During these days my mind seemed to be going all through the war again, from the day I began. All the varied scenes and episodes I had been in, in which I had

taken part, culminating in that big bother at Ypres; all these thoughts went surging through my mind, tumbling and tossing about in fantastic profusion. I rushed into the salient and fired machine-guns into writhing, hateful masses of Boches about twice nightly—in my dreams.



I think everyone who gets “knocked out” knows this sensation of “fighting one’s battles over again.”

It’s just like one of those long perforated paper rolls used in pianolas: you have the tune first, re-wind, and then have it all over again.

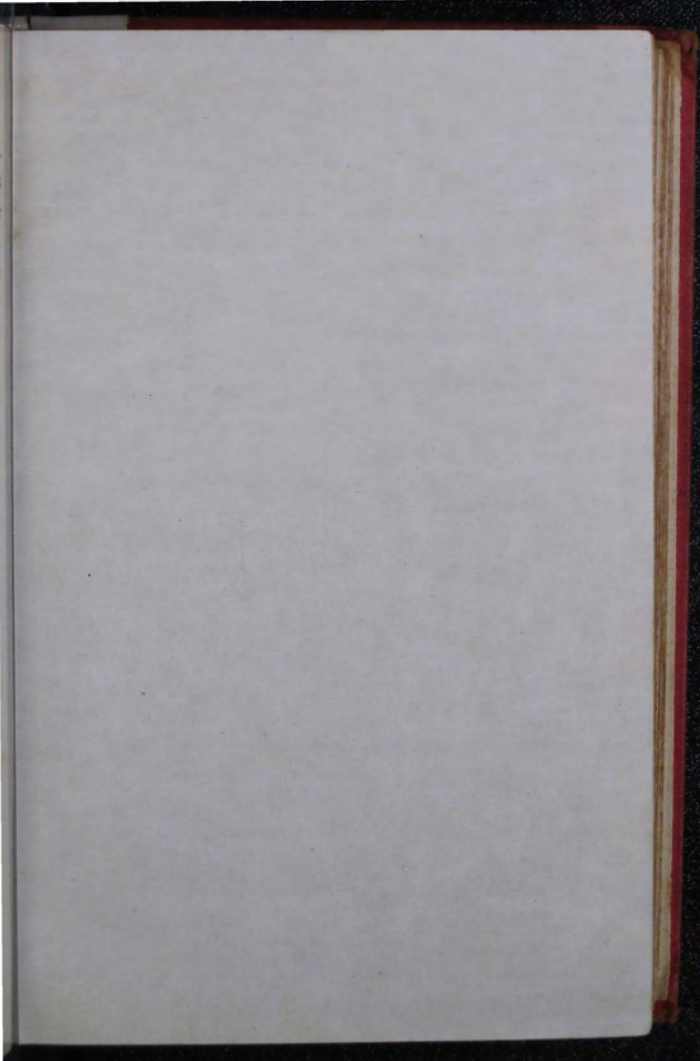
I wasn’t allowed to see “strangers” for some time; only my mother was allowed to be with me, and she read to me and brought me things.

At last came the time when I was pronounced “distinctly better.” It was no longer necessary to have that Y-shaped tube thing of the doctors, groping its way through

my pyjama jacket to listen to my heart. Everything seemed brighter, and I was immersed in one enormous, enthusiastic desire to go out and see the world again. Not a sand-bag, shell, and corrugated iron world, but to go out and roam at ease 'midst all the soft and comfortable things of peace and security. At the front one feels it's one's business not to live, but to die, and here I was, after an intervening mystical period of repairs in a hospital, entitled to go forth and place a greater importance on living than dying. Result: a vast sparkling joy in life, and all the things that go with it.

But one's ideas about recovery are always in advance of the hospital's views on the same subject. I had to remain there, in spite of my daily protest: "I'm all right now, doctor."

At this time, as I mentioned in *Bullets and Billets*, I had done only a few sketches. The first Fragments had gone in and been accepted. My Ypres affair and subsequent hospital had temporarily knocked out drawing desires, but now, as I revived, a torrent of ideas came pouring into my head, and I started off again. My mother brought me a sketch-book, and in it I weaved a series of





"NAO!! I AIN'T PINCHED YER BLINKIN' PAPER; AND NEXT TIME TAKE
YER 'AT OFF WHEN YE COME INTO MY 'OUSE."

rough drawings depicting various scenes, painful at the time, yet humorous to look back on; incidents, in fact, of the last few months. Yet the continuance of *Fragments from France* was not for a moment in my mind. The wealth resulting on my first few drawings was perhaps not such as would create a wild desire to "send up" more.

But now a certain day arrived. I was beginning to be allowed to see people, and one morning I was told that a gentleman had called to see me. He sent up his card, with the announcement that he was a representative of the *Bystander*. I was glad I knew this, as his "make-up" was "an undertaker" to the life, and I should have undoubtedly thought that the doctor had been lying about my recovery. A young man of about thirty summers (as the novelists say) entered the room. He placed his funereal bowler and umbrella on a table and advanced to my bed. I shot out a tattooed arm from under the red blanket, and shook hands.

The *Bystander* presented its compliments and hoped I was better. After which my visitor informed me that the *Bystander* had had applications for the originals of the

drawings I had so far sent up, and also complimentary letters. Finally, the *Bystander* would be pleased to see any other drawings I might do.

I pointed out that I was, at that moment, closed for structural alterations, but on re-opening would see what I could manage.

The mournful one left. I recoiled into my red blanket and grinned into the pillow. I then sat up and grinned at the room, at my mother, at the bunch of grapes, and the temperature chart.

"Well I'm d——d! Fancy them wanting some more drawings!"

A great enthusiasm got hold of me. I should have wanted a mental tennis racquet to fence off the ideas which hurtled into my mind.

"Just wait till I get out of here," I said to myself.

And in the next few days I got out of there, and went home to convalesce and think.

CHAPTER II

THE MEDICAL BOARD MYSTERY—AWAITING THE VERDICT—LIGHT DUTY

MY home being in the country, a restful recovery was aided in every way. I progressed from day to day, and rapidly sailed along in the direction of one of those mysterious and problematic institutions—a Medical Board.

The London hospital had given me sick leave, marking its termination with a compulsory visit to the above-mentioned Medical Board.

Now a Medical Board is a curious institution. For very good reasons, no doubt, it has the following peculiarities. You never know where it's going to be held, or when, until a few hours before it comes off. Say you have two months' sick leave; well, you get your notice to attend the Medical Board, at the last place you have thought of, on the last day of that leave. A wire arrives giving time and place in such a way as to leave you a mere wisp of a chance for catching the only train that day to the appointed spot. My

board was in Birmingham. I had for some days had my money on Salisbury or Warwick, but just as in the three-card-trick, I was "wrong again."

The Birmingham Medical Board was held in an enormous impregnable building. With a few others I awaited my turn in a vast stone corridor. A row of massive, polished doors faced us. On these are the various titles of the different medical and temporary owners. One by one my companions disappeared through one of these apertures. I felt like Ulysses as he watched the Cyclops daily reducing the number of his companions.

At last your turn comes. A different door opens to the one you've had your eye on, and an hilarious combatant who has just got another month's sick leave is ejected. Behind him you see the Cyclops—a medical major generally, who barks at you from behind the mahogany to come in.

Inside you stand before an immense table covered with papers. Behind the table sit two of the Board. The third member (there is generally a third) seems to have a sort of roving commission—lurking by the window,

THE MEDICAL BOARD MYSTERY 21

or standing by the fire, ready, I suppose, to do anything from chucking you out to calling someone else in.

You stand before the table. Nobody speaks, but the heaviest member of the Board looks through a folio of papers. 'This folio comprises your history. The Board read it to themselves, and mutter to themselves; then with an air of suspicion, as if they didn't believe for a moment that there had ever been anything the matter with you, one of them tells you to take off your coat.

(Business with Sam Browne and tunic.)

You now shyly approach them from the row of clothes hooks, where you have hung your trappings, minus dignity and rank, which, of course, you have left on the sleeves of your tunic.

They've got you now, and they know it.

They ask you how you feel. You are mesmerized into saying cheerfully, "Quite all right."

One of them produces that Y-shaped silver tube thing, and fitting it to his ears he insinuates the loose end into the opening of your khaki shirt.

A moment or two of this, then the Board

exchange mystic words, and finally start writing on blue paper. One of them looks up and says, "That will do, you can put your coat on." You retire to the clothes rack like an artist's model and put your tunic on again.

The Board, suddenly: "Two months' light duty!"

It's over! You know your fate, and to creep from the room is all that remains to be done. I left the room with as much military demeanour and nonchalance as I could summon, but on arriving out in the stone corridor I found that that flapping noise I heard behind me came from my braces, which I had omitted to put over my shoulders before replacing my tunic.

It just shows how nerves can bring about one's undoing. I regained the entrance hall and thence passed out into the open air.

"Two months' light duty!" Well, that meant a return to my regiment's reserve depot. I hadn't been there since the start of the war, and now I was going back after many months of wanderings, trials and adventures. I was keen and interested at the thought of going. Those far-away days

at the beginning of the war seemed weird, romantic memories. Days when we had marched around and drilled and played; each day awaiting the command which we all longed for—the command to be sent to the front!

I had left for the war, a second-lieutenant, from a bell-tent in a sodden field. I was now returning a captain, with six months' war behind me. The second lap of my war race was beginning.

CHAPTER III

THE DEPÔT—BARRACKS AND BOTANY—SETTLING IN

THE Isle of Wight is my regimental depot, and very nice too, you might think; but you must not confuse the war-time Isle of Wight with the peace-time version. White flannels, yachts, and romantic hotel life, punctuated by regattas, were all sent West when the war began. Now, you have a mighty armed camp; one congealed mass of khaki. You can't escape; the island is quite small, so you must cheerfully resign yourself to living under the full force of British militarism. It had all changed immensely when I returned this time. The old, primitive collection of bell-tents, whence I had sprung, had disappeared, and my battalion was now housed in red-brick grandeur. There are large and spacious barracks at the depot, and latterly a myriad of supplementary huts. All this change was distasteful to me. No doubt things were more comfortable and all that, but I missed the old, haphazard, primitive tents in the sodden field. Things had

become more businesslike and definite. The buccaneering glamour had gone. Well, I returned to "the Island" and reported myself to the colonel. Reporting yourself to anyone means that you've got to find him first. Not always an easy matter at large regimental depots. An old soldier, however, gets a few elementary rules into his head for this job.

If you are looking for colonels, try the orderly room first. If you are looking for second-lieutenants, try the ante-room. If you are looking for captains, have a look at the leave book before taking any further trouble.

I went across the enormous barrack square—that gravel desert which seems essential to military incubation—and entered the orderly room. There I found the colonel, the adjutant, and a host of minor stars. They had had notice that I was returning, so had plenty to say when I turned up.

"Glad to see you back again," said the colonel; "hope you're better."

I have known this colonel for a long time, as I was in the same battalion with him before the war on militia training. He and the

adjutant had evidently settled my fate long before I got there, for I was at once posted to a company and given all instructions.

I left the orderly room and set about looking for quarters. I found the quartermaster, and also found that there was a



fearful rush on quarters. The prospect of no quarters didn't in the least disturb me, and never more in this life will disturb me. To one who is thoroughly versed in rolling oneself up in a mackintosh sheet in a clay-hole in Belgium, "no quarters" conveys

nothing disagreeable. Leaning against one of the barrack blocks in a greatcoat for the night is good enough for me. A week in a greatcoat under Westminster bridge is better than one night in some trenches I have known.

Since I had left the island to go to war the military outfit there had grown enormously.

The number of officers was treble what it used to be. All the large officers' buildings were full up. I got hold of a hut that night, and kept a greedy, jealous eye on a certain upper chamber in the main block of buildings. The owner, a captain, was about to leave for the front, so they said. I met him in mess frequently, and took an immense interest in his departure. He had "been out" before, but had now finished his light duty and was waiting for the word to go out again. One day he went, and I got his room.

I know of nothing, with the exception of a base camp, quite as distressingly plain and uninteresting as the average barrack quarters: this room I had got was the plainest of plain cubes. It had the barest necessities in the way of furniture, a large plain window, no blind, no carpet, and a small wooden board hanging up on which was printed a list of the meagre articles which had been supplied by the quartermaster's stores. I don't mean to say this was a unique room. All barrack rooms are the same. After all, why should they be different? They are only meant as a case to contain you at night, to keep you safely till the next day, when the

adjutant gets you in his grip again from about 6 a.m. onwards.

You mustn't look for domestic pleasures in an army. You are one of a vast horde of trained gladiators. You are only alive by an accident. The proper use for a soldier is putting him on to shooting, clubbing or sticking someone else who happens to get in the way of his country's welfare. Unless he is in one of these attitudes he is wasting the country's money. A certain amount of time is, of course, allowed for perfecting these arts. Anyway, bothering about such things as window blinds, carpet on the floor, etc., is sheer froth. This necessary simplicity and Spartan atmosphere doesn't end with your room. In fact you'll soon find out that this forbidding cube is about the best place in the whole barracks. Your window looks out on to about six acres of gravel. Round this barren waste are ranged a series of oblong red-brick blocks like so many workhouses. It is here that the soldiers are kept. Behind these outrageously ugly buildings are others nearly as bad, but not quite. They comprise a variety of offices and stores. The chances of the owners of living there longer than

an ordinary soldier puts in generally lead them into such anti-military acts as growing a geranium in an empty ammunition box in the window, or training a bit of something up the wall. Three sides of the square have to put up with what I have described above, but on the fourth side you come to the *pièce de résistance*—i.e., the officers' mess.

It is just like the other huge blocks in shape but has a few extra adornments stuck on the front. You generally have to go up some steps to the entrance hall. Some garden-beds are under the windows. Perhaps some tender-looking pansy faces gaze out from amongst a geranium or two—what a mockery! Pansy faces and geraniums for a soldier! His job is gravel squares, rations, feet inspections, and shooting or getting shot. Away with all this sentimental pansy business.

The two main component parts of the officers' mess are: the ante-room and the mess room. They are both plain, but might be worse. I'll take the ante-room first. It is very large and is furnished mainly with leather chairs and divans, tables for matches and ash-trays, and tables for papers. The

wall decorations nearly always consist of one or two portraits of Royalty or famous generals, an engraving of Wellington meeting Blücher, and the intervening spaces are filled up with subscription lists for things you haven't either the time or the inclination to take advantage of. Now the mess-room : empty, except for several long tables and a sufficient number of chairs to accommodate the surging mass of officers which debouches into the room three times daily.

This is a barracks, and this was where I now had to put in two months' "light duty."

When you are in a precarious shell-hole, with shrapnel squibbing overhead at 4 a.m. in France, you look back on barracks as one of the bright spots of life. When you get back to those barracks, and have had a week of them, you'd pay quite a handsome sum of money to be miraculously transported back to the shell-hole. Anyhow, that's how I felt after the first week of two months' light duty.

CHAPTER IV

TAKE OVER A COMPANY—OLD SOLDIERS' TRICKS— COMPANY PAY-DAY

BEING on light duty, my first job was to be put on to a company which also went in for light duty. A couple of companies were kept there in those days, which were entirely composed of men who had been out to the war, but who, having been either wounded or temporarily invalided, had gravitated back to the depot.

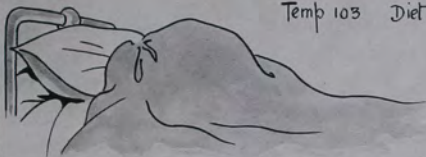
I was posted to one of these companies, and was now, therefore, responsible for its entire welfare. There were several men there who had been with me in France; men who had been through the winter in the trenches, and who, at varying dates, had been wounded and had left the front in consequence. The whole company was a collection of "has beens." This company of mine (I'll call it X company) was not remarkable for a thirst for barrack-life work. It was astonishing how bad those old wounds

became on the day that the route march came round. But how could you blame them? They had all had a fearful time in France, and really did deserve a bit of a slack. To get them completely fit again was the main point, and this with the minimum amount of toil to them. I confess I am leniently inclined to these people. I think others who have "been out" and "had some" feel the same. But at that period there were a good many in authority who had not been to France, and who consequently had little sympathy for easy work.

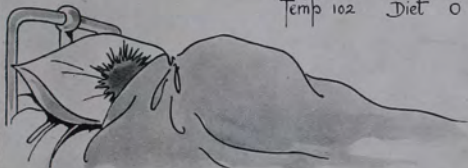
Everyone, now, has "been out," but the time I write about is late 1915. Those veterans I had in my company were the most work-evading group that ever existed, yet if they had been ordered out to an attack they would have sailed into it with the good old original "Battle of Mons" spirit, or held any line till all was blue. I love those old work-evading, tricky, self-contained slackers—old soldiers! They are the 'cutest set of old rogues imaginable, yet with it all there is such a humorous, childlike simplicity.

They can size up their officers better than any Sherlock Holmes. I'll guarantee that

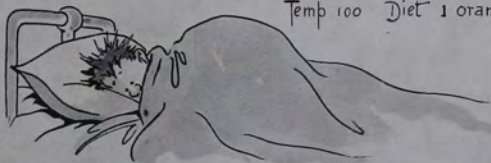
Temp 103 Diet 1 No 9



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Steak and kidney
pudding, one bottle
of bass



Once Upon a Father

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an "old soldier" will know to a nicety how dirty he can keep his buttons without being hauled up by his new officer after doing one parade under him. An "old soldier" will pinch a tunic from a man in another company because he has pawned his own, and come on parade with it, entirely to deceive you, temporarily. If you were lying wounded in the middle of a barrage, that same man would come and pull you out.



And good "old Bill" belongs to these lovable humor-ists. *Total Outlook:* As

I'll bet that — Baumsfather is at the bottom of this"

little work as possible. *Total Ability:* Fight like hell, and can't be beaten.

Many is the time I have come across their quaint and cunning tricks amongst themselves, or directed against me; and many a

time I have had to go off behind some huts to laugh it out to myself.

Company work is all right, but company upkeep is another matter.

This company of mine was about two hundred strong, and when I "took over" I was, of course, immediately put in charge of all the documents and books which appertain to the looking after of a company.

Now this is where I am no good whatever. I do not think that I shall ever live to see a day when I can say I understand that backbone of the army, "The Pay and Mess Book."

It is only one of a set of books necessary to company upkeep, but it has an atmosphere all its own. It consists simply in a statement of what a soldier ought to get, and what he does get, and I think you subtract one from the other (I'm not quite certain). Sounds simple; but it's only in about one case in a million that a soldier does get exactly what he is theoretically entitled to. He has either borrowed some in advance, been fined, or has had some compulsorily deducted at the request of a turbulent wife. This makes the interior of the pay and mess book a treatise on mathematics to me. If you are a halfpenny

out at the end of the week, you spend an afternoon with your quartermaster-sergeant trying to find it. You would willingly pay the halfpenny yourself and call it square, but that doesn't do at all. Throws the whole thing out. At about 4.30 p.m., when all signs of troops have melted away, everyone has gone to play, the sun is shining outside and distant laughter comes from the football field, the quartermaster-sergeant looks up from the pay and mess book, and turning to you says, "I've found it, sir!"

He points a perspiring finger at a pencilled halfpenny in one of the columns, and explains that there is a halfpenny due back from Mrs. Dubbs, the washerwoman, on behalf of Private Stickleback's shirt which ought to have gone to the wash but didn't. Relief! The pay and mess book is now temporarily correct and can be put away—only temporarily though. It is going to come out again next time you "pay out."

This "paying out" comes once a week. X company got paid on a Friday. Barring the part where you have to carry a couple of sacks of assorted coins up from the bank to do it with, it's a comparatively easy job.

This is how the whole operation goes : Friday comes. There's going to be no parade in the afternoon because it's pay day, and after attending battalion orders at 2 p.m. in the orderly room, you are due to go to your sergeant-major's hut and pay your company out.

In the morning, whilst you are drilling your company, inspecting their huts, etc., you have sent one of your subalterns down to the bank, wherever it may be, with a cheque for the amount required. This officer goes to the bank, gets the money, and then tries to return with it. If he is in good health and hasn't any heart trouble he will probably turn up with the sack of half-crowns, shillings and sixpences before lunch, and have them ready for you. About a hundred and fifty pounds' worth of nothing larger than a half-crown, is a rotten thing either to walk or bicycle with.

Orders are over, and paying out time has arrived. You and the subaltern who is going to help you go to the sergeant-major's hut. He is there ready for you, likewise your company-quartermaster-sergeant, who has covered a table with a G.S. blanket and has

produced that bogey—the pay and mess book—and has laid it on the table. You, the company commander, now sit at the table, and your subaltern shoots out all the money in front of you and starts making neat little piles of half-crowns, shillings and sixpences. The quartermaster-sergeant sits at your side, ready to interpret the mathematical enigmas in the pay and mess book. The quartermaster-sergeant, by the way, knows everything there is to know about company upkeep, book-keeping and everything else. To me he stands out like a human lighthouse in a sea of trouble.

The company is now surging about outside the hut, like hens waiting to be fed. Some of the bolder ones put their heads round the corner of the door and let their eyes feast on the dazzling array of half-crowns. They are frightened off by the sergeant-major, who has now taken complete charge of the scene.

He turns to you and says: "Are you ready, sir?" You hastily review the piles of wealth and murmur, "Are you ready, quartermaster-sergeant?"

He murmurs, "Quite ready, sir."

You then suddenly remember that you must get two witnesses to the "paying out." These are hurriedly obtained, after which you say, in a loud, truculent voice :

"Carry on, sergeant-major."

You've started; paying out has begun.

The quartermaster-sergeant reads out the names. He does it like this : "Eighty-four ninety-eight Blobbs !" (8498 Blobbs).

A face of avarice is framed in the doorway, salutes and comes forward. Quartermaster-sergeant murmurs to you, "shilling, sir."

You hand a shilling to Mr. Blobbs, who takes it, forgets to salute, makes a left-about turn, and walks away ; but is immediately stopped by the sergeant-major at the door, who makes him go all through the motions of taking a shilling on pay-day again—this time correctly—which is : salute, take money, salute, right-about turn, and exit.

Private Blobbs goes out and darts off amongst the huts to get into some lonely corner where he can figure out how much amusement and worldly benefit can be derived from that shilling. He should have had more, only he is being fined for having three days before slit a mattress from end to

end with his bayonet, in an outburst of untimely jocularly.

Quartermaster-sergeant again :

"Forty-six eighty-three Perkins !" (Turning to you.) "Six shillings, sir."

You look up to see who this model of virtue may be who is entitled to all his pay, and you hand him six shillings with a thrill of admiration. He salutes and departs.

Quartermaster-sergeant again :

"Thirty-two sixty-four Smith !"

A freckled giant shoots in at the door.

Sergeant-major is suspicious. "What's your number ?"

Freckled giant : "Twenty-nine thirty-five Smith."

Sergeant-major, quartermaster-sergeant and company commander (together, petulantly) : "Wrong number !! It's thirty-two sixty-four Smith we want !"

The real Smith appears, and gets his money, and so the job goes on.

Paying out X company used to take me about an hour and a half.

Paying is easy enough, but at the end you have to "balance the books" and "enter things up." This, as I said before, may lead

to anything. In my case it generally led to another couple of hours grappling with figures. I think this must have been the fate of anyone who had X company under his care.



CHAPTER V

BARRACK ROUTINE—A DISCIPLINARIAN MAJOR— ORDERED TO SALISBURY PLAIN

LIFE at the front and life in one of these enormous English depots are two very different things. And so they should be. In the island, just as at all the other home depots for training reserves and recruits, the work consists of nothing but training. Other side lines which go on, such as "Commanding Officer's orders," "pay day," "kit inspections," etc., are all necessary accessories to the one great important feature which is tirelessly being carried out, and that is providing a ceaseless flow of efficient men for our great armies in the field. When at a depot, you are regarded as an amateur learning the art. When in France, you are there as a professional. It is, therefore, easy to see that the mode of life and work must be very different in the two places. I must say I prefer the front. I think everybody does. There is something very adventurously attractive about being in a real war. There are

times, though, when I admit frankly that I have thought the adventurous side a bit overdone. Being sprayed with machine-gun bullets whilst you are lying in an insufficient fold in the ground, at dawn in a thin drizzle, throws up the life of a bank clerk in a delicious bas-relief of security!

As time went on, and my light duty was waning, I was shifted to a more arduous company. I was now much better, but far from quite right. Anyhow, I was better, and was now on quite a different line in companies. This time I was posted to a recruit company, full of activity and ambition. I was a company commander, but two companies were clubbed together and the whole outfit was under a higher command—that of a major. Some major too!—one of the real old chutney variety; the old British Army epitomized. One felt something like a Zulu must have felt at a witch hunt, when the devil doctors “smell you out” to be thrown to the crocodiles—on one of his parades. I don’t know who was the most frightened, my company or myself. (I think I was.) Discipline was, and is, his motto, and quite right, too. There’s nothing like it for winning

wars ; but it's damned uncomfortable when you are on parade.

If that major thought you a bit shaky about company drill, out you'd come ; and there, standing in the middle of the square, you'd have a good chance of improving yourself. And moving companies about a square is no easy matter, as all who have tried will know. It's easy enough to start them moving, but to move 'em where you want to, and get them back where you want to, "aye, there's the rub."

You stand about the centre of the gravel desert and with one mighty lung-tearing shout you order the company to move. Before you can think of the next command to get them back again, and before you have recovered from the first exhausting vocal outburst, the company is "marking time" against the barrack wall, as they can't march through it. "Bairnsfather ! you must give your commands quicker and louder." Blush, and try again.

In the evenings, when all this strafing was over, I and a few pals went off down in the town about a mile and a half away and played about till time for mess. At week-ends we

progressed further and perhaps went over to Cowes, Ryde, or Ventnor. So the time went on. I was slowly getting through my light duty, and the question was now looming up, "What next, when this is finished?"

In the ordinary course of events I should be put on the list of those ready to return to France again, but, of course, date uncertain.

Anyway, the prospect of nearing the end of my time at the island was exciting. The idea of something new happening, of some new move in existence, always cheers when one's bored. I was bored. There's a very bottled-up sensation in the Isle of Wight, after you have been there some time. It's aggravated by seeing one's pals disappearing out to the front at odd moments on the receipt of telegrams. You yourself, somehow, always seem to be the last to go. It's strange, the magnetic influence of those torn and mutilated plains of France and Belgium. I can see the old cracked remnant of Smelly-Pig Farm in my mind's eye as I write, and I feel I want to be there.

One day the call came. A telegram came to the orderly room, and it contained a message for me. To go to the front? No!

I went to the orderly room and there heard the worst. I was to go to a new division, then forming, as machine-gun instructor.

A good job, I thought, as I had been a machine-gun officer all my time in the trenches so far. I found out all about this division, or rather as much as I could, and eventually when I was to go. It appeared that I had to be off as soon as possible. That evening I packed my traps, and pondered on the coming move. Machine-gun instructor to a new division; a division that would shortly be going to France. An interesting job, forsooth, and as I had had a pretty varied experience in this business, from the practical point of view, I felt that I could be of some use in this new departure. My Isle of Wight job was over; so was the light duty, and now I was bound for a new division somewhere on Salisbury Plain. I knew, also, that I was taking another step in the direction of the front—soon I should be back again, back amongst the dilapidated estaminets, the shattered châteaux, the land of “bullets and billets.”

CHAPTER VI

HANDING OVER—ARRIVAL AT DIVISIONAL H.Q.—

I DIG MYSELF IN

INSTRUCTIONS for most military movements are run on the same lines as instructions for attending Medical Boards. You get a curt wire about two hours before you have to start. As a general rule, the more drastic the move you have to make, the less warning you get. For instance, if you have got to be at a lecture one day, you will probably be told about it a week in advance. If you've got to go to the front—which entails packing, collecting everything you may need, handing over your company, and saying good-bye—you will probably get a wire half an hour before starting.

This exodus of mine to the new division was arranged just in this way. I had to shin off from the island with the greatest rapidity. I collected all my worldly goods, and handed over my company to another captain. "Handing over" meant, in my case, palming off a set of disorganized accounts, and paying

for all losses out of my own pocket. I forget exactly what it cost me this time, but I know that running a company is an expensive amusement unless you are very careful.

Early one morning, my valise and I set forth on this new life. We left from Cowes and watched the island fade into the mist as we glided up the Solent.

Salisbury Plain was where rumour said this new division lived. In due course I arrived there.

Pretty vague, that, I know, for Salisbury Plain is a vast expanse, larger than something or other, and nearly as big as anything you like (no, the Germans are not going to get any information out of me). At the time of which I write, enormous numbers of soldiers were quartered all over the plain, in different parts. It was winter time, and phenomenally wet, so it really represented life in a leviathan bog. There were many divisions there. Each of course had a divisional headquarters, and then each divisional headquarters had a divisional general. It was just like a lot of bees, in several different swarms. Each day the bees would all stagger forth into the treacle round about and mix with

each other, practising field days, route marches, and all that sort of thing, and at night all the different hives would swarm round their various queen bee divisional commanders again. It was to this humming hive of industry that I came. I arrived at the station frequented by my particular swarm, and inquired the way to their hive.

The divisional headquarters, was, I found, about three miles from the station. I got hold of a taxi and, putting my traps into it, drove off through the squalid little town out into the country towards divisional H.Q. This part of Salisbury Plain I was in was certainly one of the best parts, but there is not much choice. Except for the fact that it isn't shelled and mutilated, it is nearly as bad as the front to look at. In fact, if someone would lend me a couple of howitzers for a day, I could make quite a passable imitation of the Somme valley near Fricourt, out of Salisbury Plain. I drove along in the taxi full of interest, combined with a certain amount of nervousness at the coming new job that lay before me. It was all so very different to the front. It's far easier to be one of the crowd doing a real job, and putting

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BY MEANS OF A TURKISH BATH OLD BILL HOPES SOME DAY TO BOIL THE
EFFECTS OF PLUM AND APPLE, BOLSHEVISM AND DEMOBILIZATION
COMPLETELY OUT OF HIS SYSTEM.

everything you do to a practical and immediate use, than having to demonstrate the same things to warfare students in the security of Salisbury Plain. The H.Q. of the division had a very charming house situated in very charming grounds. H.Q's. always know what they are about as regards where they are going to fix up. No bell tents for them, and quite right too; for the complications and impedimenta necessary for running a division, particularly a new one in course of formation, are beyond comprehension. I shot along the curved gravel drive in the taxi, and pulled up in front of the noble front door of the mansion. Here I was at last—no hope of escape now. Having discharged my taxi I entered, and broke the news of my arrival as gently as possible.

As luck would have it, there was already an officer doing the job I was booked for, and although he was leaving to return to France his departure had been postponed for another week. This was very fortunate for me as I soon found out how he had arranged things, and what was the correct method to adopt. He was a most expert machine gunner, and had put in a long and arduous time in the

Ypres salient. He had been wounded at Ypres on the same day on which I received my "knock out" at the same place, although he was, of course, in another regiment and in a different part of the show. I went to see him the night I arrived, and finding him down at his hut, talked the whole thing over.

For a week I lived up at the divisional château, and daily absorbed his methods for instruction. At the end of that time he left, I bagged his hut, and started on the job by myself.

A point which may strike readers here is, "Why bag his hut when you are living at the château?"

There were two reasons. First and foremost, I far prefer a hut to a château. I am much happier in a match-board box with a corrugated iron roof and a smoky stove, than in one of England's sumptuous country-house bedrooms. My line is rough, straightforward, masculine freedom in simple surroundings, and I deteriorate, mentally and physically, to a ridiculous degree in grand houses. The other secondary reason for leaving the château was, that it was rapidly filling up with more

important people than I, and rooms were getting scarce. .

I went to the huts, as I have said, and felt better all round. The huts were attached to a brigade headquarters. A division contains a number of brigades. I was now living with a brigade although on the divisional staff.

CHAPTER VII

THOSE FIELD DAYS—WHO'S WON?—A KEEN DIVISION

IT didn't take me long to size up this new division. It was just the most hard-working and keen division that ever was, but at that time I think the whole of Salisbury Plain was crammed with such divisions. It was almost entirely composed of men from the north country, and was just bursting to reach the last stage of proficiency and go out to France or anywhere, to have a smack at the Boches.

When I arrived, the situation was that at any time the order for the exodus might come. Training and final equipment was going on with relentless vigour. The work of the divisional and brigade staffs was enormous. Enthusiasm ran like an electric current through the entire concern.

My little part consisted of getting hold of all the machine-gun sections of the division with their officers, and imparting practical tips for Prussian puncturing.

I took a group out daily into the country round about, and reconstructed actual front-

line scenes and episodes, coupling it all with as good word pictures and advice as I could command.

I took about fourteen men out at a time. We marched off into a new bit of country daily, and there spread ourselves for perfecting the gentle art of machine gunning. I arranged "attacks" of all descriptions on all sorts of places, and at the end of an arduous morning, sat in the middle of a perspiring group, correcting faults and illustrating them with examples from my knowledge of the front.

The rest of the division was almost invariably out on a field day or a route march. The machine-gun department nearly always worked on its own. Occasionally there came a great day of combined work, in the shape of a full-blown field day, in which all the component parts of the division took part. These days, though very hard and tiresome, are generally tinged with humour—humour arising out of pain generally. This division I was with was great on field days. About a week before one came off, all the "crowned heads" of the division were given what is known as the "general idea." This consists of a group of intricate documents laying out

concisely what sort of a field day the divisional general is going to have, say, "next Tuesday." Then comes the "special idea," and finally out of all this the fact dawns on the mere regimental officer that on Tuesday next there is to be a field day when "a Brown force" will be opposed to "a White force," which

is the invariable army method for distinguishing the two sides for the "battle."

For a week the staff officers have worked themselves to red-tabbed shadows preparing for this monster game of hide and seek. The general's right-hand man—in army parlance,

"The G.S.O. 1"—performs miracles of work on these occasions.

At last Tuesday arrives. It is pouring with



rain generally, but the plan is far too vast to be interfered with by any considerations of weather. The Brown force has been set in motion against the White force and now no power on earth, except the general being suddenly superseded, can possibly avert the ultimate collision of these two ponderous pieces of human mechanism that have now been set in motion.

At about 6 a.m. the Brown and White forces, numbering thousands each, covered with equipment and ammunition, exuding profanity and determination, stagger forth into the surrounding morass and disappear into the neighbouring country.

The two forces, of course, take different paths immediately. They will ultimately meet in a fearful mock collision (arranged by the G.S.O. 1) in about three hours' time.

The great charm about these onslaughts is that from that day on you never really know who has won the battle. There being no convincing argument such as real barrages and devastating machine-gun fire, it is always possible for each side ever afterwards to prove to its own satisfaction that it "won hands down."

A whole battalion, with enormous self-satisfaction and consciousness of undisputed strength, storms a hill and refuses staunchly to believe (though repeatedly told) that a solitary machine gun concealed in a hedge has entirely murdered them (in theory) whilst they were approaching the hill. In actual war one is apt to get painful and convincing arguments of an exceedingly practical nature. At home, rehearsing, it's left to words and superior judgment. I have often thought that if only we were Spartan enough what a valuable training a *real* scrap would be. There is nothing in the world illustrates better what a mistake it is to march in fours down an enfiladed road than a couple of real live machine guns at the end of it. The appearance of a red-tabbed military apostle in an apoplectic temper at the end of the said road announcing in uncomplimentary terms that "the whole lot of you would have been simply wiped out" leaves one cold.

But anyway one learns a lot on these field days. They are great training in endurance. Nothing could keep one in better training. My only comment is that they rarely, if ever,

are the least bit like the real thing in the way of an attack. It is quite impossible to make them so. Other wars may have been a bit on the lines of a field day, but not this one. War wouldn't be half so bad if it was like a field day, with all its marching and "outflanking movements," etc., etc.

There is some sporting adventure and "go" about that. But the Germans have, wisely for themselves, taken to mud and mechanics and have thereby spoilt the true sporting idea of a battle.

My division always threw themselves with whole-hearted enthusiastic vigour into these field days. These were days before the great battle of the Somme. How little those fine chaps knew of the kind of thing the real field days would shortly be!

I used to try, by means of sketches and word pictures, to give my machine gunners as clear a vision as possible of the front and what it means; but it's very, very hard—nearly impossible—to convey the correct idea. Nobody who has not actually been to the front can know what it is really like, and by going to the front I don't mean going to some headquarters and being taken to "as near as

it's safe," and then be given a pair of field glasses.

A visitor to the front knows he can leave when he has seen it. A soldier knows that he can't and isn't going to. There's the difference.

Being accidentally caught in a bit of shelling whilst visiting the front, doesn't give you the idea either. You are buoyed up by the knowledge that a car is waiting back there near the cross roads to whisk you off to security and a good lunch.

You want to be in a morning's shelling and then, having escaped when it stops, realize that you'll probably get the same thing again to-morrow morning.

I have heard of people saying, when shown Ypres, that they thought it would be much worse.

If they will come to me, I will soon tell them how to get that opinion altered.

This division, of course, didn't know and couldn't appreciate it, but what they did know was that they were ready for anything, and would go through anything. They fully acted up to it, too, in their splendid performance on the Somme, a few months later.

CHAPTER VIII

MY SOLDIER SERVANT—BLOBBES' LOVE AFFAIR

FIELD days on the grand scale came off about once a week. The intervening times were filled up with all sorts of highly important training, so life for the division was one of ceaseless activity and hard labour.

I used to be free at about 4 p.m. when I would retire to my wooden hut to have a rest, decide what I was going to do that evening and plan the next day.

It was the usual simple sort of officer's hut, and all I had inside was a camp bed, a washstand, a tin bath, and a table. My bag and valise was all my luggage and that was in the corner.

It was winter time and pretty cold, too, so a fire was urgently necessary in the little stove.

A few days after I had adopted this hut for a home, I had procured my "soldier servant." He belonged to a regiment coming from one of England's eastern counties.

He was the most charming example of that rapidly dying class, the ploughboy yokel, that you could possibly find. The whole simplicity of his life and mind, combined with the constitution of a rhinoceros, gave him a most lovable aspect to me.

Until I caught this specimen, I didn't know that such things still lived, and when I found that they did, I was annoyed and troubled to think of the danger that such a genuine, simple creature ran, of having his outlook altered by this ideal-shaking war.

He was about twenty years old, and as strong as an ox. Thick set, short, with a healthy red complexion, he was just the sort of rustic type that, on the stage, sucks a straw and wears a smock.

His head was delightfully thick as well. It took him a long time to fully grasp anything you wanted him to do, but when he had got hold of the idea and digested the fact that you wanted him to do whatever it might be, he went at it with the relentless vigour of a charging bison.

This blossom hadn't done any soldier-servant work before, so all was new to him, and I used to derive considerable amusement

by knowing full well that he thought I was insane in most of my desires and tastes.

I told him how to look after the hut and when to light the stove. He thought it all slowly over and then carried out these items with unfailing precision and thoroughness. I remember the first time when I told him I wanted a bath. He was standing in the doorway, having finished whatever it was, and was evidently waiting for me to tell him something else to do. "Blobbs," I said, "I want a bath. Hot water, do you see, and then fill up this tin thing here." I indicated the bath.

In a queer hesitating manner he repeated, "Oi see, you wants a bath." I said, "Yes, I want a bath."

He fingered the bath about a bit, half went to the door and then stood looking at me in a hesitating way. After a few moments' pause he suddenly jerked out, "I'd better get it now," and disappeared like a jack-in-the-box through the doorway.

He returned later with a vast volume of scalding water, about enough for three baths, all having been conveyed there by himself in a collection of canvas buckets. I wished

I'd asked him for the bath itself as well. I'm sure he would have gone to some house and severed a porcelain one from its pipe connections and brought it along.

He had no personal initiative, but when guided and commanded he was nearly as good as one of those dear old genii in the *Arabian Nights*—"rub-the-lamp-and-it-appears" sort of thing.

He woke me in the mornings by a method all his own. (I watched him once or twice with eyes feigning sleep.) He would bring along my clothes and boots and put them near the one and only chair, then he would bring a pail of hot water and then hesitate a bit. He appeared to be thinking deeply. After a minute or two's hesitancy he would suddenly come to the side of my bed and say in a loud voice, "Shall you be wantin' the stove?" This sentence, you will observe, combined waking me with getting instructions. Why he always did it this way goodness knows; I soon ceased to try and probe into his beautiful mind.

He interested me intensely, this man. I soon began leading him on into conversations about himself and about his private and home

life. Later on I encouraged him into discourses on his love affairs. It appeared that he had a "gurl," in other words he was "a-courtin'." "Splendid!" I thought, "now I'll get some funny stuff out of this cove." And I did. Conversation one morning conducted something like this.

Me: Have you had any leave yet, Blobbs? I expect you'd like to go back to your home for a day or two, eh? Go back and see that girl of yours.

Blobbs (with a rubicund grin): Oi! I shouldn't 'arf loike a bit o' leave. The sergeant says the other night, that 'e thought as 'ow Oi was a-goin' soon, and (bashfully) she won't 'arf be pleased to see me, too, I reckon (business, of critically examining a row of chilblains on the back of his hand).

Me: What did she say when you joined the army, Blobbs?

Blobbs: Just afore I joined she wouldn't speak to me. It was because I was drivin' Dad's thrashin' machine down the road past 'er 'ouse. She says, "Arthur, you never looks at me now that you are a-drivin' that there thrashin' machine." You see, she thought I was a-doin' the grand, soon as I got to drivin'.

Dad's big engine. One day I sees 'er by the rick in 'er Dad's farm, and I picks up a pitchfork and I runs at 'er this like (imitation, savage run with pitchfork).

She says, "Why do you do that, Arthur?" I says, "Cos I'm goin' to join the Army, Ciss, that's why." So I chucks down me pitchfork and she says as she was proud o' me, and now she writes to me reg'lar every week.

Me : That's right, Blobbs. You stick to her and she'll stick to you. Now you might just go and get me a bucket of water as I want to have a wash before lunch time.

Duologue closed. I have often wished that I could hear that that splendid simple country jake got back safely to Ciss and his thrashing machine out of all this devastating turmoil.



"I DON'T THINK I'LL DRESS FOR DINNER TO-NIGHT, BERT."

THE CHURCH
STONED

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CHAPTER IX

THE CENSOR DEFIED—MACHINE-GUN TRAINING—
RUMOURS OF WAR—BLOBBES GETS INTO TROUBLE

Now I wonder if I shall incur the odium of the authorities or prolong the war by saying where it was that we lived in those days on Salisbury Plain. I should like to say the name, as it was a nice place, the nicest in the neighbourhood. I wonder if I dare—shall I? No—yes, I will. It was Sutton Veney! (The German mark goes up in value on all the exchanges—consternation in Wall Street—wish I hadn't said it now.) Well, I've done it, so there you are. Sutton Veney was the place; a delightful little English village it must have been before all we khaki locusts settled upon it. It was quite a pleasure having all this military training set in such delightful surroundings. The headquarters themselves possessed most charming gardens, but as I have said in a previous chapter, such luxuries always seem painful to me. Mailed fist work and charming gardens are so desperately out of harmony with each other. Yet all the Sutton Veney times seemed

mighty pleasant to me. Perhaps it was that I had not long since come out of that drab whirl of events, the front : houses without roofs and châteaux turned inside out, still lingered in my mind's eye. On the whole, it was a short but happy time at Sutton Veney, standing out with pleasing brightness in all my war life.

I do not write all this sort of stuff which you've just read (or slurred over) with the idea of demonstrating that I am thinking differently to anyone else about war. I do so in the hopes and, indeed, with the knowledge, that there were, and are, many who have looked on their various war experiences in the same way that I have.

I was merely a common or garden captain, leading a common or garden captain's life, and now as I write I wonder why the diabolio I have the cheek to write about it at all. I have apologized once in the preface of *Bullets and Billets*. I won't do it again.

.

Here at Sutton Veney, and all over the plain, thousands of men were leading the most arduous and dullest of lives imaginable. It was a new picture altogether to me. Pre-

viously I had only seen the practical application of warlike skill. Now here, at Sutton Veney, all the technique was being acquired.

In my daily work with the machine gunners I used to make desperate attempts to brighten up the job for them by giving them as vivid word pictures of the front and its ways as possible.

Occasionally I organized and ran a small "battle" in some part of the surrounding country. This led to quite exciting times. I galvanized the



opposing gun teams into enthusiastic action by means of prizes and competitions. Whilst all this training was in progress an assistant trainer joined me—a second lieutenant, who had been wounded, and was on light duty like myself. He was a most efficient machine gunner, in fact, I have never seen his equal at machine-gun mechanism.

We both went out and each took a hand in the competitions. Over a wide tract of variegated land, two sides, composed of two gun teams in each, would attack each other. We invented a series of rules so that decisions could be arrived at, and then had breathlessly exciting mornings. We crept about the country after each other, and butchered each other silently round hedges and ditches, until the overwhelming superiority of one side over the other became apparent owing to someone sticking a head lathered in mud out of a culvert and announcing that "We've been enfilading you for at least half an hour." Dispute, verdict, then—"Fall in on the road."

So we'd all march back to barracks beguiling the tedium of the way home by arguments as to which side had really won.

Things were now getting pretty ship-shape

with the division all round. The air was full of rumours.

Sample rumours : "I hear we're going to Egypt," or, "I shouldn't be surprised if we had orders to go to France any day now."

All this made life much more interesting and exciting.

Leave was being granted in great profusion, which was a good sign. It looked as if "they" were trying to let everyone have home leave before going out. The whole circus was bristling with equipment and excitement. Amongst the gentlemen to have leave was Mr. Blobbs, my servant. That dense but happy rubicund face burst into my hut one morning, and gave forth the following :—"Sergeant says as I'm in the next lot for leave."

"Are you, Blobbs?" I said, "that's a good job. You'll be able to go along and see that girl of yours—and go for a spin in your father's thrashing machine if you're lucky." A bovine grin, followed with "That's roight, sir."

In due course Blobbs got his leave, and went to his home in Suffolk. Like all good soldiers he, of course, overstayed his pass.

(Always suspect a soldier who comes back on the day he's been told to.) Then, like all good soldiers, he had to be hauled up and punished. The first step in this procedure consists of the offender coming up before his immediate commander. In this case Blobbs had to be "got at" by me. He had returned two days late, so I sternly asked him why.

"Well, it was like this, sir," he replied. "Me and my mate started to come back the day as was on the pass for us to come back, and we left Bury St. Edmunds in the mornin' to come along to Lunnon. When we got there, a bloke on the platform says to us, 'Where are ye for?' says 'e. And I, silly like, says 'Bury St. Edmunds'; and he took us along to a train and the next thing was we was back at Bury. You see, sir, I thought as the man was askin' us where we 'ad come from, not where we was a-goin' to. Well, there weren't a train back to Lunnon not till night time, so we comes on that, and we got to Lunnon about six o'clock in the mornin'. Me and my mate 'ad never been to this 'ere station before, and we wasn't goin' to ask no more questions again; we'd 'ad enough o' being sent back to Bury. Presently, up

comes a lady, an' she says as she would show us 'ow to go. She says, 'Where are you goin'?' she says. So I says, 'Sutton Veney'; so she says, 'Come along with me, then,' and we went down a lot of tunnels to where the trains was a-runnin' into a 'ole like. She says as she couldn't stop, but she says, 'Take the next train as comes in.' Well, sir, I reckon we watched about 'alf a dozen of them trains go out afore we got into one."

"What made you do that, Blobbs?" I inquired. "What did you want to wait there for?"

"Well, sir," replied Blobbs, "this is 'ow it was. A carriage would come into the station, shuntin' like, without any injun on, and I says to my mate, 'There's 'eaps of time,' I says; 'the train can't go without an injun on.' And just as we was sittin' on that there seat, the carriage would go off by itself down the 'ole at the end. I knows what it was now; but ye see, sir, I didn't understand anythin' about them 'lectric trains as 'aven't got no injuns, and no more did my mate."

Poor old Blobbs and mate! They know something about trains by now. The knock-

about wanderings that will have led them through Southampton, Havre, Rouen, Amiens, will have gone a long way to destroying the old-world, cabbage-like simplicity which at that time they possessed.

CHAPTER X

THE FINAL POLISH—A ONE-HORSE TOWNSHIP—IN
“THE ISLAND” AGAIN—DETAILED FOR ALDERSHOT
—THE OLD GUARD

Now came a day of fearful excitement and anticipation. Not an order for the division to leave, but a much more delicate hint that departure was at hand. Sun helmets were issued all round. They spelt two things: The East! and early departure likely! All was joy. The months of mud and training were nearly over, and now for the war!

I was still on “light duty,” so was a bit nervy as to what my chances were of being allowed to go with them. I hoped for the best, and looked forward with a buoyant interest to the departure. The time was now entirely filled up, so far as I was concerned, in machine-gun firing on the ranges. We were served out with great masses of practice ammunition and a full rig-out of guns, so the machine-gun end of the butts gave forth a splendidly nerve shattering rattle for the surrounding neighbourhood until we left. The inhabitants of Sutton Veney, however, had no hope of escape. We were not the first

division to be there, nor were we to be the last. When we left another division took our places.

The weather was terribly wet. We stood about in pouring rain squirting lead into the hillside from our Maxims for about a week. The entire division was firing all day long in ceaseless practice, until the word came for departure. As is the way with all military movements, you never know exactly what is going to happen till it happens. Suddenly all the sun helmets were "called in." Hullo! Egypt "off," everyone thought, and they were quite right.

The soldiers didn't mind where they went as long as they went somewhere. They were all for "up and at 'em" now. They would willingly part with all the simple little joys provided by the neighbouring township of Warminster. They would cheerfully relinquish the pleasures of penny shows and cheap cinemas which grew thickly in the neighbourhood. What they wanted now was to have a real live try-out of their skill and energy combined with all the romantic attraction of "foreign parts."

Every evening, when work is over, the one idea possessing the minds of all soldiers is to

walk into the nearest town. This crowd that I was with walked into Warrminster, which was only about three miles distant from our huts. Apart from this, Warminster had little else to recommend it. In the dark winter evenings, with its anti-Zeppelin



*A chaplain to the Forces
that would have been welcome*

lighting arrangements and squalid streets, this little one-horse township presented as rotten and unattractive appearance as you could wish for. It served as a very good incentive to hurry back to the camps at the time requested by the authorities. The road

from Sutton Veney to Warminster was, at about 6 p.m., almost a solid mass of soldiers, all walking in to partake of the meagre delights of the town. A few movable side-shows, seeking to add to the paucity of Warminster's attractions, had taken root in the fields on either side of the road. A few men were seduced off into these places, lured by the light of a naphtha flare, or the exaggerated announcements shouted out by a half-caste negro showman. The bulk of the division, however, got down into Warminster itself and flooded out the various cinema palaces.

Rain, soldiers, mud and poor lighting, gaudy fronted cinemas with "Charlie Chaplin" posters, those are my impressions of Warminster. I went down several times whilst I was at Sutton Veney. I suppose even now it is still the same old thing. Now that our departure was imminent, I went down more frequently. It seemed to look a bit brighter somehow—brighter, I suppose, because we were leaving. Any way, the vast congealed masses of soldiers on the road were brighter. They knew they were going, and that was all they wanted.

In a few days they left, and a finer division

never went anywhere. About half of it was composed of Scottish regiments, so when the whole lot took to the road with their bands and pipes playing and skirling, the division presented as fine an assortment of British Army types as one could wish to see. The East was "off," as the sun helmet episode had foreshadowed, and now it was to be France. On the day of departure I got my orders. I was not to go with them, as I had only been attached and did not belong to the division. Where was I to go? Back to the Isle of Wight, they said. I could have "cried my eyes out" as they say of children.

The Isle of Wight again! Oh, help! I should have liked to rush into the headquarters and flung myself at the feet of the General imploring him to stay this dread sentence. Instead of which I walked away amongst the huts and pondered on the advisability and possibility of stowing away in a machine-gun case, or a blanket wagon, and thus "getting over."

The Isle of Wight! The Isle of Wi—oh, curse the—no, I won't say it again. The division went. So did I, and although I didn't know it at the time, I, too, was to be in

France within three weeks. I sorrowfully trekked off back to the island, and rolled up to the red brick barracks on the square again.

Things hadn't changed much. Several officers had gone, others had come, and the Roll of Honour in the ante-room had grown a bit longer. Somehow I found the island was not now so objectionable as I had anticipated. Couldn't make this out at the time, but I know what it was now. I was feeling better myself, my nerves were settling into a more placid condition. Sutton Veney had done good. I had been a long time in getting right after my knock-out at Ypres—far longer than I knew myself at the time. I became quite exuberant in the island on this tour. Took a lively and active part in a series of soldiers' "gaffs" which we held in the barracks. Merry shows these were. You suddenly find on these occasions that quite half the regiment are comedians. When feeling particularly hilarious, I am "induced to give a song," and when I do it always takes a comedy turn. Red nose, bowler hat and umbrella effect, I find is about my mark when I'm roped into a soldiers' gaff. We were now having these convivial evenings about once a

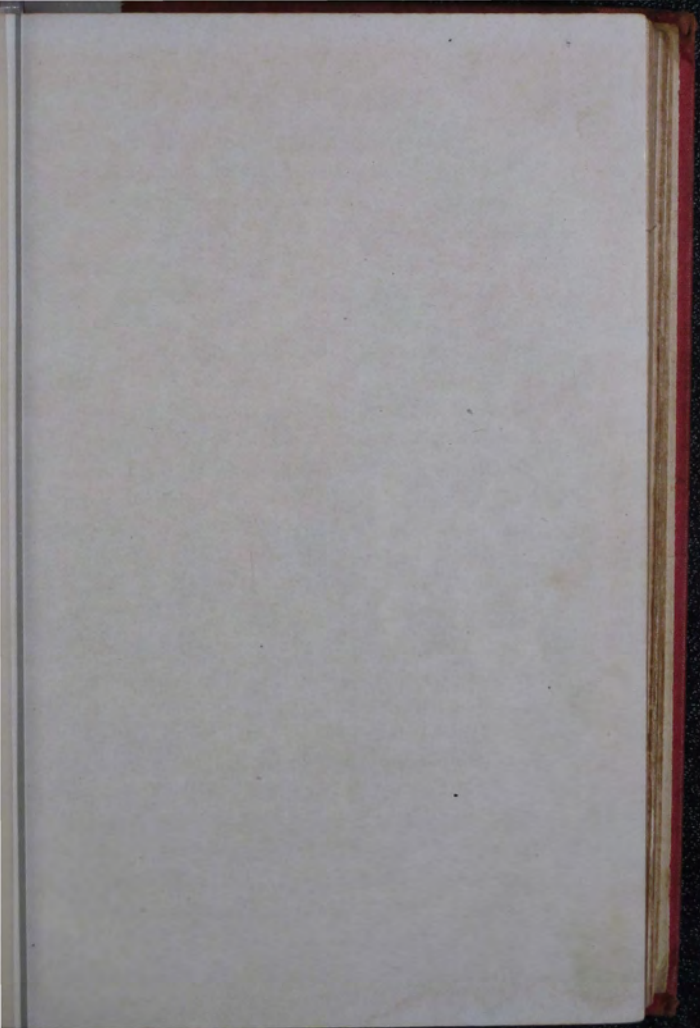
week, and I was invariably to be found at them. Huge audiences crushed their way into the large gymnasium, and sang the choruses through clouds of smoke.

Sometimes we took these shows over to one of the towns on the island, and one particular occasion I remember well, when we "did a show" at Ryde. The proceeds were, of course, for charity, and at this entertainment my job was to draw lightning sketches on the stage, to be auctioned amongst the audience. Yes, I was altogether much brighter on my second return to the Isle of Wight. Just when I was really thinking that "Jove, this isn't half a bad place," I got orders to join a Works company and take them to Aldershot. It's a curious thing, that you always seem to like a place best when you know you've got to leave it. Join a Works company and go to Aldershot—that didn't sound particularly attractive. I went to influential quarters and tried to get a reprieve—no good—had to go.

The Works company was a sort of company used for doing odd jobs and "dirty work" such as carrying uninteresting military objects from one place to another, clearing up mangled roads and being generally useful.

Sort of scene shifters and stage carpenters to the army. They were "non-combatants"—wouldn't have been able to be combatants if you'd paid 'em any amount. No doubt they had all fought splendidly in the Crimea, but I could see at a glance that they would never wield a battle-axe against Prussian militarism. Dear old chaps they were, but taking them to Aldershot caused me great anxiety. I managed to get to Southampton without losing any in the Solent, but, when arrived there, had unfortunately very little time to catch the train which left the station a long way from the docks. This brought on a sort of rout of the company down the main streets of Southampton—Napoleon's-retreat-from-Moscow appearance, or "Chelsea Pensioners' hundred yards handicap at the annual sports." It was a fearful rush, but thanks to the R.T.O., who kept the train back a little, we caught it, baggage and all, and glided off to Aldershot.

We arrived at Farnborough and apparently weren't in the least expected. We waited about for a bit, hoping for someone to say something about us, but as nothing happened I lined the Old Guard up outside the station,





"A SHARP RISE IN TIN."

stood them at ease, and went off to telephone in all directions to find out who would like a Works company. In about a couple of hours' time I found that the Aerodrome at Farnborough wanted one. A lot of aerial goods had to be shifted. I took the company along to this place—about a mile and a half away. Here, in a worn-out field, were a set of empty bell tents. We collared those tents and the company collapsed inside them in batches of ten.

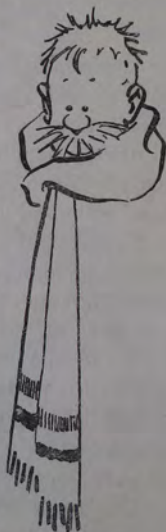
I went and reported the arrival of the company, found out what they were to do, when they had to start, and then set about arranging for their life there.

It was first of all necessary to see about rations for them, also plates and cups and knives and things. Here was a Works company, homeless and destitute as it were. Nobody knew, and nobody cared. We had nothing but a set of old bell tents pitched in a squalid field of the sort that you generally find round a gas works.

I went off that evening to Aldershot, and by visiting several offices, eventually obtained a permit to get a camp equipment at a certain store. I and the driver of a motor lorry I had got hold of spent a heated hour packing

assorted bowls, plates, knives and forks into the lorry, and wrapping the lot up in straw. We then returned and tackled the local canteen for food. The outfit was now complete, and the Works company was saved. That night I got an empty room in one of the huts at the aero stores, and rolling out my valise on the floor in the corner, went to sleep.

I awoke early, as the floor boards were particularly hard in that hut, somehow. A valise on the ground is all right, but is mighty hard on floor boards. I lay awake, thinking. Very fed up with prospects now, I was. I took another Gold Flake from the yellow packet always beside me, and inhaled it as an antidote to temper. "Curse this Aerodrome; why can't I go to France? I wish I had gone with that division." Later I rose and went on with my job of seeing to the welfare of the Works company.



CHAPTER XI

THOSE AUTOGRAPH ALBUMS—FITS—A WIRE FROM
WAR OFFICE—NEW APPOINTMENT

FOR a couple of days I stuck pretty solidly to my Works company and my little wooden hut, as there was a lot to be done in getting the men's domestic affairs in order; also I wanted to grasp fully the "ins" and "outs" of the whole job myself, and to see what was required by the Aerial Potentates of the neighbourhood.

After a few days things straightened out, and I was then free to spend the evenings more or less as I liked. "As I liked," of course, meant going off into Aldershot.

I walked up the Farnborough road, and in due course reached the Queen's Hotel. Many of my readers will know this "resort of the *élite*." I admit I am at times lured by a whisky and soda, but in this case I expected a letter or two as I had given the hotel as an address. Not knowing the neighbourhood, it was a good central spot to call at.

I went in and up to the Box Office.

"Any letters for me?" I ask.

Sweet Maiden with smile (and a brooch made out of a second lieutenant's metallic star culled from a "British warm"): "Are you Captain Bairnsfather?"

Me: "Guilty, me lord."

S.M. with s. (only a bit wider): "Here are three letters for you, and I wonder if I dare ask you, but would you be awfully good and put something in my autograph album? Any little thing will do."

I smilingly reply, "Righto, with pleasure." False creature that I am, I don't say that this makes the five hundredth album I've seen, and that the sight of one more will make me commit some diabolical atrocity. I can't say that, as the owners of those five hundred albums would think me "stuck up," and I should hate to be thought "stuck up."

So I take the morocco bound volume scented with Shem-el-Nessim, with the golden word "Album" scrawled about its concave padded cover, and turn over the multi-coloured pages, in the hopes of finding one on which it may be possible to make

a rapid scribble. I held converse with the damsel and then had dinner. By easy stages I returned to my wooden hut, slipped myself into my canvas scabbard—*i.e.*, my valise—and went to sleep. Next morning, as usual, I emerged into the daylight and confronted my Works company. I found them standing in two ranks at a variety of angles and I proceeded to inspect them. I had to be careful whom I spoke to about dirty buttons, or no buttons at all in that group. I knew by rumour that at least one member of the party went in for having fits. I saw a fit in progress on one occasion, but owing to the crowd surrounding the patient, I couldn't see what he was like, so I never was able to recognize him on parade. I wasn't going to risk a strafe on buttons which might end in one member of the party flipping about on the ground like a landed trout; particularly in front of the Commander of the Aerial Stores.

I had hardly begun the parade, when an orderly approached from the main offices across the field. He handed me a military telegram.

Having squirted out that time-honoured

formula, "Carry on, sergeant-major," I turned away to read the wire.

I can't remember the exact wording, but it was very much to this effect :

"Captain Bairnsfather to proceed at once to join the Expeditionary Force, Staff Capt. Fourth Army Railheads."

I nearly had a fit myself then. My great wish had been granted. I was to go at once to France, and be amongst the real stuff once more. But what was all this about "Staff Captain," and "Fourth Army Railheads?" All that was Greek to me. I felt frightened of the job. I



knew the ordinary regimental front, but this staff captain business was something quite different. However, I didn't worry about that; all I cared about was the fact that I was going out.

It's a curious feeling, this wanting to go back. Nobody could possibly want to go back to life in the trenches or to participate in an offensive, if one looks at it from that point of view alone. But it's because all your pals are out there at the front, and all the people who really matter are at the front ; that's why you long to be one of them, and in with them, in the big job on hand. The satisfaction of feeling that you are in the real, live, and most important part of the war, is very great. The feeling that you are amongst all the gang who have the nasty part to do, and that you are accepted by them as one of the throng, is enormous.

But people must never be misled into thinking that just being "out in France" is sufficient to produce this feeling of satisfaction. Oh dear no ! You must have been either in the Infantry or the Flying Corps. Infantry is the thing. You can take your hat off to anyone in any infantry battalion anywhere at the front, to a distance of not more than two miles from the firing line. You can then be certain that you have saluted men who have gone to the hub

of the show. Those are the chaps to be amongst.

That I was to go to France again was my one great joy, but I could see by the wire I was not going as I had done before. I was now a staff captain! No more sitting through long days and nights in waterlogged trenches with "Bill," "Bert" and "Alf." No more picking my way past the stiff and swollen cows at Dead Pig Farm, on my way to the ration dump. No more sand-bag filling on rainy nights. I was both pleased and sorry—sounds curious, but it's true. I was pleased at the honour of being promoted to staff captain (vision of red tabs), but sorry that I should not be one of the "Jungle Folk of the [trenches," as I always used to call them.

However, I knew I should be right up close to the front, and would see it all, and also I was glad to think that I should now be able to observe the war from a different and wider point of view. I was red-hot keen for going out, and forthwith began to set about making arrangements for handing over the Works company.

I left next day, and as the train slid out

of the station I felt that now at last I was off to where this war life appealed to me most. The Isle of Wight, Salisbury Plain, Aldershot, all this was over. Now for France, Flanders, and adventure.

CHAPTER XII

OVERSEAS ONCE MORE—OUR EVER-GROWING ARMY
—TRAINS AND TRIBULATIONS—MY DESTINATION AT
LAST

BEING a rotten sailor I was relieved to find that I was to go out at the narrow end of the Channel; *i.e.*, by the Folkestone-Boulogne route. By setting my teeth and staring intently at some object on deck, such as a life belt, or a deck chair, I can generally survive this passage, if the sea is calm. A staff captain with red tabs, and a red hat, leaning against the bulwarks like a gymkhana dummy, is lowering to oneself and encouraging to the enemy.

I kept well, thank goodness, and staggered down the corrugated gangway at Boulogne in a most efficient manner. I have crossed to France about eight times so far in this war, and up to the time of writing this, have drawn it lucky.

I walked down the wharf I knew so well, and on past the Hotel de Louvre to the station. Near the A.M.L.O.'s office (I don't know what that means, but countless thousands will know the place), I stumbled

across a "Fragment from France" right away. A war-weary "Bert," elated by prospects of going on leave, was approaching the docks. He had just asked the French porter some question. A torrent of explanatory French followed.

"Our Bert," weighed down by haversacks and equipment, stood stolidly listening and gazing intently at the porter. The verbal torrent ceased, and Bert slowly



*Perhaps it's just
as well that He
was never in the Navy.*

asked, "And 'ow does the chorus go?"

A slight effect, but it amused me at the time, and making a mental note of the scene, I drew a picture of it later.

I got all my ticket business fixed up by the R.T.O. (Railway Transport Officer) and found I had some time to wait for a train.

I took a stroll through Boulogne. Very amusing it was to me. This was the place where, after the second battle of Ypres, I was put into hospital. This was the place where I stopped for a day when I first came out to the war.

I mentally fought those days over again. But Boulogne was altered. Everywhere were the signs of the growing British army. Things were looking more settled and business like. The primitive military arrangements which we had of necessity when the war first broke out, were all gone. One could feel the ever growing British army was "digging itself in," and slowly but surely settling down to "make a job of beating the Bounder Boche." I lurked about the town for a bit and then returned to the Hotel de Louvre and had a final meal before pushing off on the train in the Amiens direction.

All *good* trains in France seem to start in the evening, and you get to wherever you want to go some time the next morning.

I had never been to the battle area between Arras and Amiens before, as all my time previously had been put in between

Ypres and Epinette (south of Armentières). This journey in a new direction was quite a novel experience to me. I found it just like all other war time French journeys. Twelve hours in an overcrowded first-class carriage with all the windows shut.

The R.T.O. had grasped where I wanted ultimately to get to, and had made out one of those bilious looking yellow forms entitling me to go to a place called Longpré. When arrived there I was possibly to be met by a car. Longpré conveyed nothing to me, except that I knew it was somewhere down Amiens way.

An overcrowded train pushed off from Boulogne some time in the evening, and we drivelled about through Etaples and Abbeville all through the night. I have done a fair amount of travelling in France in war time, but if you really want a good sample of a boring journey, Boulogne to Amiens or *vice versa* is as good as any to experiment with.

You leave Boulogne—late in all probability—and after gazing for about two hours at some grass-grown derelict railway siding just outside the station, the train

moves on until you get a commanding view of a sodden cabbage patch in a fifteen acre field, from which mammoth faded wooden hoardings regale you with allurements, such as: "CHOCOLAT MENIER" or "THE HELIOPOLIS HOTEL CAIRO (close to golf course)." These are varied with "THE LIPTON" or "HEINTZ PICKLES, 57 Different Varieties." You now move on another hundred yards in the twilight and come opposite a vast yellow board with faded and scabby chocolate coloured lettering, exhorting you to take "DUBONNET aprees le bain."

Sleep now overpowers you, and by means of balancing your head against the screwed-on ash tray in the "Fumeur" carriage, you doze, and finally slumber.

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You awake with a start, and remove your legs from the French major's lap who is sleeping next to you, and who, through continental politeness, has raised no objection to them being placed there. You rub your eyes and try to look out of the window. Great scare! What time is it? Wonder how

long I've been asleep; wonder if we've passed Longpré.

Your watch tells you that you have been asleep four hours. You rub the fog off the carriage window in a panic. "Great Scott! We may have passed Longpré and be at Amiens!!"

As you can't see through the foggy window you rise and open the one over the door. Some weed-overgrown lines and the sharp end of a low platform are visible, but not a soul is about. Presently a figure looms out of the darkness and comes along the line at the side of the train. You don't know the French for "Is this Longpré?" So you blurt out "Longpré, Monsieur?" with as much interrogation about it as possible.

Indignant answer from figure on lines: "Non! Non! Non! Etaples!"

"Merci, Monsieur." You collapse into the carriage. "Etaples!!! Cæsar's Ghost! Etaples! Why that's the next station to Boulogne." . . . Sleep again.

The train rattled and jolted its shameless way into Longpré at about 8 o'clock in the morning, as far as I can remember.

Longpré is a ridiculously small place with

an importance quite out of proportion to its size, owing to the war. It happens to be a junction.

I got out on to the line (no platform ever near the train when it stops), and pulling out my meagre belongings after me, deposited them on the track.

There's something about the way a valise flops on to the grass covered line that says, "Here you are now, and it's going to be a — of a time before you go away again."

I wandered to the R.T.O.'s office, a small wooden hut complete with telephone and maps.

I told him who I was, and where I was going. A very nice chap he was, too. He started off a telephone call to the place I was bound for, asking whether they would send a car or whether I should go on by train, and then invited me to have some breakfast in his place, which was a small cottage about a hundred yards away.

I went with him when he had finished with that train, and after an excellent breakfast kicked around the place until an answer rolled up on the 'phone.

The answer when it arrived, was pleasing.



"WHAT THE 'ELL ARE YOU DOIN', SPINNIN' A WEB?"
"NAO! MY PUTTEE'S UNDONE, SARGINT."

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A car was being sent and would be there at 3 o'clock.

This was now the last lap of my journey. In a few hours I should start off for Montrelet, the place where I was to carry out my new job.

The R.T.O. had told me that Montrelet was my headquarters, but beyond that he knew nothing, except that it was a very small village on the way to Doullens, and that it was in my Army area.

At 3 o'clock the car arrived, and bundling my valise and bag into it, I started off for Montrelet, which was to be my home for some little time to come.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LAST LAP—A PEACEFUL SCENE—MEET MY C.O.
—A FRENCH BED

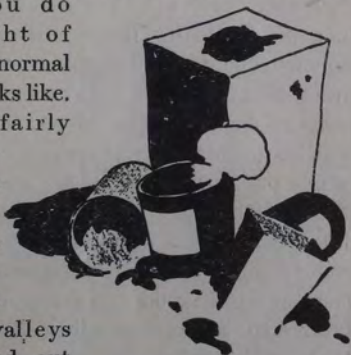
THE car buzzed along the dusty country roads under the efficient guidance of an A.S.C. chauffeur, and I surveyed the scenery at ease. It all struck me as so very, very different from the Ypres-Armentières Sector. This was far more France, and consequently prettier. The little villages amongst the valleys, and the wooded hills and streams, all combined to give an entirely different tone to the war in this area.

I talked to the driver. Montrelet, I found, was a small village not far from Candas, which in turn was not far from Doullens. It was there that the present Army Administrative Commandant had fixed up his temporary abode. How long he was staying there the chauffeur didn't know. He, the chauffeur, had to drive about all over the army area and knew it all, so I soon got the hang of things. I gazed around me at the scenery; it was really quite nice. For the first time in the war I was able to get an idea

of the country in which hostilities were being carried on. That's the advantage of a staff job. If you are bound for the trenches and a battalion life your horizon is extremely limited. You go by night into the war zone, and your life from then onwards is cast amongst mangled estaminets, ruined villages and trenches. On a staff job, although you see all the mangled-up part, yet now and again you do catch sight of what the normal country looks like.

It is a fairly hilly country about Montrelet, and the road twisted about amongst valleys and in and out

of woods, until at last we reached a pretty little village, with a few scattered cottages and an ancient church, and turned into a farm-yard. Hens hysterically scattered in all directions, and the car



pulled up at the farm-house front door. The village was Montrelet, and this farm-house was to be my billet. My things were carried in and, entering the house, I met a corporal in the hall. It appeared that the colonel was out. He had to be out nearly all day and every day, but would be back in the evening. So I left my traps in a heap at the foot of the stairs, and strolled out to look around. "This is a curious job I'm in now," I thought to myself. "How different from my last time out here! Fancy being able to live in a house like this!" For the house was certainly a good one. I always have thought that houses without the front torn out and a couple of holes in each gable end are much better than those possessing that doubtful decoration. This was a real old square-built farm-house with the farm sprawling round it on three sides, and a garden behind. Beyond the garden was a little old grey stone church which stood on the edge of a very large wood.

It was a beautiful evening in early summer, and the whole outfit was really very pretty and peaceful. I strolled about the garden, and mused around the church and wood.

It all struck me most forcibly as beautiful, but sad. There was such a quiet melancholy about this place, an effect produced, I think, by the close proximity of war to this scene without that proximity having disturbed the place or knocked it about.

Here was normal, peaceful French village life. Only a few miles away were the trenches before Albert, with all the mangled-up desolation which surrounds them.

Somehow I found that the village of Montrelet, on this still summer evening, with its little cottages in the sunlit valley, its old grey church and the peaceful farm-yard, had the effect of emphasizing the pathos of this devastating war in a greater degree than many a ruined landscape that I had previously seen.

I returned to the farm-house after my stroll around, and sat down to smoke in one of the front rooms. Quite a good room it was, with a lavish distribution of looking-glass in gilt frames, and a highly-coloured ornamental ceiling like the top of a Christmas cake.

Presently a car rolled into the yard and up to the door. The colonel had returned. I felt, somehow, that he would be a terrifying

person who would come into the hall and be heard saying, "Fee, Fi, Fo, Fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman," or something on those lines; but he didn't. Instead, he walked into the room where I was, and I introduced myself to him. He was as nice a colonel as ever I have met. A Scotsman, in a Highland regiment. Discipline with understanding were his chief props, and he was a real good sort. I can always allude to him as "The colonel" after this, which saves me putting down his real name or inventing a false one (tricky fellows these authors, you know).

It was about 7.30 p.m. now, so it was dinner time, and the colonel's batman proceeded to get the meal ready. He disappeared into the room across the hall, and one could hear him working off crude French with a Scotch accent on to the people of the farm. A pretty considerable quantity of this farm-load of soldiers was Scottish as I soon found.

The colonel, his servant, and a party of soldiers billeted in a loft, completed the military outfit which came from the north of the Tweed. There were a couple of other

fellows who could claim nothing more than Middlesex, Essex or Suffolk for their origin.

The dinner appeared and was spread on the table by Clark, the colonel's man, who darted about the room in a kilt, full of timidity of the colonel, and a desire to please. We sat down to a plain but efficient meal, and the colonel outlined the job that lay before me, after which we got to discussing things in general, including, of course, the war. The colonel, I found, had been serving in many parts of the show where I myself had been, and had experienced all sorts of wild and strenuous times. We coincided, as regards knowledge of the front, at Messines and Ypres, and I soon saw that he had had what the vulgar might term "a skin full" of the Ypres salient—so had I—and our conversation resulted in considerable mutual understanding. He had had a terrific overdose of Hooge, a spot I have never been to, but I can thoroughly guarantee that part of the line as a first-class sample of modern war.

For an hour or two we regaled each other with stories of trials, tribulations and grim jokes, in the manner that you will notice

any two do who find that they both have known the same part of the front, and we laughed a lot about it, too. When one looks back on some of the pickles one has been in, they do seem funny. They are anything but amusing at the time, but

everyone laughs at them after.



I remember trying to smile in the middle of the second Ypres tornado, just to see whether my face *could* crack up into that facial contortion known as a grin. I was curious to see whether the death-charged and hateful atmosphere pervading the

salient had permanently stopped my capabilities in this direction. I tried to think of something to smile at. I looked around me as I lay in a fold of the ground under a machine-gun deluge, and surveyed the scene, "Crumphs" exploding in all directions. Every house with the roof off, or in

the act of coming off, and then I thought "What a world ! We build houses to live in and enjoy ourselves, and have doctors to mend us as much as possible to prevent decease, and yet here we are ; all trying to knock everything down and kill as hard as we can." I smiled at the incongruity. The colonel and I aired these thoughts to each other that night, and we smiled again.

I was to start on my job next day. I knew nothing about it as yet, but I was to go out with the colonel in the morning to a railhead south of Albert, and so I would pick up what I had to do.

We sat and smoked a bit and then went to bed. It was a curious old place, this farmhouse. Good old-fashioned rooms. My bedroom overlooked the farm-yard and contained two huge wooden beds with those canopy sort of structures sticking up at the pillow end, from which curtains hang in regal festoons.

I had my valise and boxes dragged upstairs, and by the light of a candle proceeded to "dig myself in."

The chief ingredient of a French bed seems to be a nondescript sort of a pillow-eider-

down - mattress. An enormous feather-stuffed cushion—it's a mile too large for a pillow, and not large enough for anything else.

What you are supposed to do with it, I don't know. You are nearly smothered if you use it as a pillow, and your feet would be frozen, if you use it as a counterpane. Each of the beds had one of these monstrosities and feather beds as well. I decided to be continental, and risk it. I chose the bed nearest the window, sank out of sight into the feathers and pulled the other thing over the top of me; thus enveloped I went to sleep.

CHAPTER XIV

MY NEW JOB—A TYPICAL DAY'S PROGRAMME—HOW
"FRAGMENTS" ARE EVOLVED

I DISCOVERED in the morning that the colonel maintained an office in the place. What had been a sort of jam and pickle storeroom had been given over to us, and in these I found the colonel writing at one table by the window, whilst a youthful clerk encased in khaki was toiling at a tall sloping desk on which was strewn all the inevitable impedimenta of a military office. Blue forms, white forms, buff forms and buff "slips," all were here. A gaudy assortment of coloured pencils and rubber stamps, files and O.H.M.S. envelopes; in fact everything that can bring joy to the heart of a quartermaster-sergeant or an orderly-room clerk. Now I am sorry to say I'm very poor at this sort of thing, in fact it might be said, rotten; so I saw at once that to stay efficiently in this new job of mine, without incurring the odium of British militarism, I should have to buckle to, and pump up as much knowledge and enthusiasm

as possible over all these buff slips and indent forms.

The colonel, it appeared, came down early and did a bit before breakfast, as he had to be out so much in the day, so I made a mental note, "I must do the same."

I turned over a variety of papers dealing with the work until breakfast was ready, and tried to get the hang of things. The colonel at breakfast amplified my scanty knowledge by giving an outline of the job. It appeared that he was responsible for discipline on all the communications in the area, approximately between Doullens and Amiens. I was to be his adjutant, as it were. Each army has an administrative commandant and each one of them has a staff officer.

Now I do not want to be confused with the real staff officer. By real, I mean those on Corps, Divisional or Brigade staffs. They are all "combatant" officers. My job was now on communications. I had got from strafe to staff, and this was as much staff as my physical ability at that time would permit of.

I was a staff officer right enough as per

"book of the words," but I never can consider anyone quite the real thing, quite the neat stuff, who is in any job other than the active strafing department.

Of course, an army must have people behind it. If you took the A.S.C. away, the army would be done in a week.

Anyway this job was as much as I could do, and I soon found that it was going to provide me with a view of the war such as I had never had before.

After breakfast the colonel ordered his car round, and we both started off for one of the daily jobs.

He had chosen Montrelet as his headquarters, as it was about central for the whole area he had to see to.

This day we had about twenty miles to go, and this was my first view of the Somme country, a country shortly to be made famous by our mighty effort, "The Battle of the Somme."

It was very hot and dusty. The car buzzed along through long poplar-lined lanes, and in and out of ramshackle dusty villages. The colonel, with a map spread on his knee, would every now and then

shout instructions to the driver. Sometimes we were on a broad, white high road, passing a whole stream of giant motor lorries taking supplies to the dumping grounds, and at other times going slowly through a billeting village crammed with dusty khaki-clothed soldiers, resting from a spell in the trenches. As we neared the front all the villages seemed to be hives of soldiery. The land seemed alive with men in khaki, and out in the fields vast groups of horses were tethered or limbers stacked in rows. Dust and ponderous motor traffic everywhere. Mile after mile we sped on through this varied scene, and now we were approaching the place we were making for — a certain railhead. What horrible dry, dusty, uninteresting places railheads are, and how fearful it must be to be an R.T.O. ! Imagine a paltry French wayside station for a home. A railhead is a place where stuff of any description for the front arrives and is subsequently taken over for distribution by motor lorries and wagons.

The station selected may be small or large ; it all depends on the position of the trench line in that area. If the station is

small, then an army of assorted huts springs up round it, and in these lurk the individuals who operate the railhead. Presiding over this industrious scene is the Railway Transport Officer or R.T.O. He is usually selected from the ranks of those who have "done their bit," and are only fit for something a bit milder than life in the trenches.

It all depends on the railhead as to what sort of a time this cove has. Some railheads have a frenzied hour's work a day, when everything seems to happen at once, after which there is nothing to do but take a pride in the dandelions on the siding, or get on with the latest E. Phillips Oppenheim sent out from home.

Other railheads never leave off being a pandemonium day or night. Six howitzers arrive from the Sinai Peninsula at four o'clock in the morning, or an Army Corps of Portuguese Infantry are passing through and have to change at midnight.

The railhead we visited the morning I write about was a cross between the two. There was a good bit of ammunition work to see to there, and that is a more regular sort of occupation.

We stopped the car by a goods shed, and the colonel and I got out. The colonel was monarch of all railheads; they were one of the units under his command. I trailed along beside him, absorbing the scene and trying to learn the job for the future.

I looked around at the huts and the station. A face, distorted by the hate of many inquisitive interruptions, suddenly appeared at a window and hastily disappeared again. I guessed it was the R.T.O., and I was right. The door of the hut opened and this potentate came out. We now, all three, had to evince an interest in the deadly dull details of the railhead.

I have, of course, percolated through a host of railheads, so I will only describe, not an individual, but a typical one.

A railhead nearly always gives you the impression that it is a station which the railway company have been disappointed with, and have readily given away to the military authorities. It mostly consists of apparently inconsequent sidings, no platforms and a row of uninteresting huts. It appears to be always a kind of derelict

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A HOPELESS DAWN.
 JUST BACK OFF LEAVE. AMIENS IS ONLY 34 HOURS MORE IN THE TRAIN
 NOW. YOU KNOW THAT BECAUSE YOU CAN SEE THE CATHEDRAL
 QUITE CLEARLY.

terminus in a forty-acre field. When it's not raining all day this enthralling scene is enveloped in an opaque cloud of dust. The occupation of the inhabitants, moreover, is most inartistic, and soul destroying. Counting rusty truck loads of howitzers, or tins of jam; anxiously regarding a prodigious quantity of fifteen-inch shells and wondering when they can be got rid of; those are the daily joys and sorrows of the R.T.O. and his assistants. Added to these activities, he of course worries over an interminable correspondence which he finds on many coloured forms (chiefly buff and white) which come floating in to him from all parts of France and from every angle imaginable.

For instance :

"We have as yet received no news of the trench mortar dispatched from Khartoum, and last seen at Abbeville," etc., etc.

or

"Re your indent for a drinking trough for sparrows at your railhead. Please state size."

The colonel, the R.T.O. and myself, all three fully conscious of these dull and uninteresting shortcomings, but determined

to serve our King and country, wandered round the railhead.

The three parts played by the colonel, the R.T.O. and myself were :

The Colonel : To summon as much mailed fist and military severity as possible, and to frame cunning, terrifying questions to the R.T.O. on the details of his work.

The R.T.O. : To attractively walk alongside the colonel and be ready with a plausible answer—with a substratum of truth—for everything; occasionally volunteering to show something which he had previously ascertained was in perfect order.

Myself : To walk along looking as clever as possible, and refrain from letting the least sign leak out that I knew less than either about the job.

And so these visits proceeded, week after week, and after each inspection the colonel and I would return across the miles of that sad, bleak country, back to our headquarters at Montrelet. During this time I employed all my leisure in drawing further "Fragments from France." Jokes that appeared week after week in the *Bystander*—how little people know where they were made, and

how ! It somehow pained me—when I knew that the result spelt laughter—to think how often the idea had come to me through the infinite sadness of the Somme valley. In the evenings I have often wandered around a mutilated little village, and gone off by myself to inspect the deserted and partially smashed church, or the silent weed-grown courtyard of an old farm, and have sat and reflected on the whole monstrous conflict, and as often as not with that same feeling that prompted me to smile during the second battle of Ypres. I have smiled here, and thought of a ridiculous and amusing situation—amusing to those who KNOW, because founded on truthful pain, but merely light comedy to those who don't and can't know.

I have now emerged from the war, and look back on a vast sea of episodes and curious incidents, but nothing strikes me more forcibly than the various and extraordinary places in which I have drawn my pictures. In weird, safe, dangerous and unique spots, which range from the North sea to Goritzia and the Austrian Alps. But of that anon.

CHAPTER XV

DIVERSIONS IN AMIENS—HÔTEL DU RHIN—AN
EXTENDED INSPECTION TOUR—BIRTHPLACE OF
“OLD BILL”

FOR many, many weeks this job went on, full of a variety of small incidents, good, bad and indifferent. I got to know my work and continued to persevere with life in that peculiar resigned but optimistically determined fashion which is common to all the component parts of the Allied armies in the field.

I liked the job, I liked those I lived with, and those I met. Now and again we went into Amiens, and this was always a great event for us. Something like market day to a farmer, who lives a crowded rural life ten miles from a station, and drives a consumptive horse in once a week to the nearest apology for a town.

Whenever the colonel had to visit a railhead near Amiens he went there either before or after his inspection, and you can bet I was always on for being in that expedition. I am glad I saw Amiens in those days

because I saw it afterwards,—and I can feel for the inhabitants in that terrible trial which befell the city during the last big dying flicker of the Prussian push.

Amiens was about fifteen miles from our headquarters, but it was well worth the trouble of getting there. Montrelet was very nice and picturesque, and all that, but I confess I like a bit of crowded humanity and sparkle now and again. Not that one got much in Amiens, but still it was better than nothing. We used to go there after a devastating and dry visit to Longeau or Heilly, or some miserable oasis near by. The great thing was to lunch somewhere. If anybody ever reads this book he is almost sure to have a gladiator relation or friend who has been to Amiens, and has had lunch at one of the restaurants or at the "Hotel du Rhin." All my pals seem to have drifted in to the "Hotel du Rhin"—in fact if I come across an old sport who "knows" the front I succulently murmur something about the "Hotel du Rhin," and it at once conveys visions to his feverish mind of the gladdest nights that were then permissible. How many, many of those wonderful, courageous

chaps have wandered in to Amiens and had what was to them the best of fun—a lunch in Amiens; and then gone back to their squadron, battalion or platoon never to return. The buccaneering romance of this is enormous—and sad.

Well, anyway, we used to go to Amiens, and in a crowded, frowsy restaurant down one of the main streets, we would lunch, and revel in the joys of fried fish, mysterious meat, and red wine.

It was a dear old town, and to see the cathedral with a pyramid of sandbags at the front door makes one very annoyed at these perpendicular-haired gentlemen who have elected to disturb the world so violently.

And so the weeks went on. Work and travel, evenings full of war gossip and rumours of great events to come, now and again punctuated by these visits to Amiens—I went on with it all; but slowly, and bit by bit, the whole environment was reducing me to a very low ebb. Those who read may wonder why—and possibly those who read may never understand, but to me, the sum total of the “idea” and real horrible reality of this terrible, elementary, and brutal war

was burning a hole into my mind and system which time can never heal.

Somehow, when I sat in that dreadful death-charged mud, I felt it less, but here—outside and behind it—I got a clear perspective of the frightfulness of the thing. It's not the actual danger or the death and sorrow,



it's the idea of this drastic antagonism of humanity, separated by merely national aims.

But why should I bore or wound people with these thoughts of mine? I will return to the real great and inspiring idea of war;

bright uniforms—heroic victories, medals, and cheering multitudes. I write these lines as our mighty and wonderful nation, with the assistance of others, has just reached the glorious and hard-fought conclusion which was vitally necessary. I have only digressed for a few moments in order not to forget the amazing wonder of those simple, valorous souls, who, as component parts, did things the greatness of which few realize and none can grasp—things which in their country and home-loving way (although submerged owing to their smallness) are mightier than the war itself.

There came a time, at Montrelet, when it became necessary for the colonel to wander further afield. There was a tendency for journeys to be taken north of Doullens. I welcomed this, and was still further elated when one morning he announced that he had to go right up north—to Ypres in fact. This was splendid—I was more than keen to see, once more, the old stamping-ground: Armentières, Bailleul, Locre and Ypres; they were all places with a big fascination for me.

The day came when we started. The colonel, the driver and myself slid off in a

large car, and soon were rolling along the winding, dusty road from Montrelet. It's a great game, being able to go about the front in a car—you can loll back amongst the upholstery, and calmly survey the ruins as they flash past you ; now and again having the satisfaction of being accidentally mistaken for a general, as some dust-covered pedestrian catches sight of you as you flit past. When one really has acquired that "Limousine loll" it's a great sensation. Beats sitting in a frozen dugout, with "stand to" at 4 a.m. ; beats it hollow. We went through a vast mass of dull, blackened country, and wound our way over the cobbled streets of innumerable small towns and villages, now and again stopping to try and reconcile an unintelligible signpost with the road on our map, or listening to the still more unintelligible explanations and directions of some Frenchman, from whom, in a weak moment, we had asked the way.

Anyway, on we went, and bit by bit approached that mystic and romantic area known as the Ypres-Armentières sector. As I began to recognize the once familiar landmarks the whole of the old time war atmo-

sphere came back with clear vigour. Here were the roads I knew so well, the broken houses, shelled-out woods, etc. Here was the land of *Bullets and Billets*; that weird country which holds in its keeping a certain dank and mysterious horror, "Plugstreet" wood—the birthplace of "Old Bill."

CHAPTER XVI

THE OLD FIGHTING GROUNDS—SOMETHING WRONG
—HOSPITAL IN BAILLEUL—HOME SICKNESS

WE arrived at Bailleul. In those days it was still a respectable and reasonable town. In fact it was much the same as when I had been there before. A few more restaurants and officers' clubs had sprung up, but that was all. It had not been much shelled. Of course it occasionally had to go through an air raid or something of that sort, but on the whole it was still quite a presentable spot. We didn't stop, but went straight on to the colonel's destination—which was Locre. It was here that a certain division had its headquarters, and it was here that the colonel had someone he particularly wanted to see. Locre is a nasty spot, becoming nastier still towards the end of the war; but at this period, and even before, it was charged with a most unpleasing atmosphere—air raids, and back-area shelling were its specialities. I remember disliking this spot intensely, when I spent the night with my machine-gun section in its unwholesome

surroundings on the night before the second battle of Ypres ; but now I found myself disliking it still more. The place looked horribly mutilated and dismal. The colonel went to a headquarters—I waited outside. As he was going to be some time I went to



have a look at the various parts of the place I knew. I went to the large church there, and entered. Here it was that I had billeted on that turbulent night, the 23rd of April, 1915, and had stabled my machine-gun section by means of piling up some pews

and chairs around the part where the organ is fixed.

It was from this place that, at dawn, we had all moved off to Vlamertinge, the day before that scrap in front of St. Julien.

Outside the church several long rows of crosses (new ones being daily added) testified to the severity of holding that part of the line. Later on I joined the colonel, who asked me to come with him to a house where a certain staff was located—I went, and there had the honour of meeting Colonel Congreve, the famous and valorous son of the equally famous general of that name. Congreve was perhaps one of the most wonderful and courageous characters in the war.

With a row of decorations, earned during the war, he was one of the youngest senior staff officers in the army. An unaffected, courtly young man, with a lion's courage;—shortly after this he was killed on the Somme.

While sitting in this office I noticed that I was feeling very quaint. This wasn't due to the office, for I had suspected, whilst coming along in the car, that I was not very well. I remember feeling astonishingly bad as I left that office, and waiting by the

car outside, I realized I was feeling worse every moment, and a fearful pain had started at the back of my neck. Feeling for the cause of this disorder I found a nasty sort of swelling below the hair at the back of my head. Most annoying just when I wanted to be going strong for my visit to The Salient, and—"What the devil is it?" I wondered to myself.

However, I didn't say anything; but we all went off to see a battalion headquarters near Kemmel. My! I did feel bad, and got worse every minute. I can scarcely remember that old farm we went into—near the front-line trenches. I can dimly recollect a hospitable but drastically plain lunch, a crowd of officers, and seeing a lot of my cartoons torn from the papers pinned on the dilapidated walls. I don't know how I pulled through that meal.

Eventually we somehow got back to Bailleul and, not being able to stick the pain longer, I told the colonel that I had symptoms of an obscure and unattractive kind, and that I thought I was going to be ill.

He immediately said he thought I ought

to see a doctor in Bailleul. He was right; for, by the time we reached Bailleul, I felt like a dead fly in a cream jug.

They took me to a hospital—a converted convent or monastery, or something; and there I waited in a collapsed heap on a form till my turn came for inspection. At last a doctor came, and suspiciously examined me. Verdict: “Very feverish, with a carbuncle on the back of his neck.”

If you look up the word carbuncle in a reasonable dictionary you will see that it means—“A beautiful gem of a deep red colour”; or—“A painful and highly inflamed tumour.” I had the latter. In fact I had, I think, a mixture of the two, something that might be described as “A gem of a highly inflamed tumour, of a beautiful deep red colour.”

I felt rotten. They gave me some medicine and said I must go to a clearing station—in other words, a field hospital.

Here was a disaster! Me, ill! Got to leave my job and be sent to hospital—what a blow! I knew this would mean weeks, and heaven knows what might happen after that. However, there it was, and as by now I was feeling thoroughly ill I resigned myself to

my fate. I spent that night in a bunk at the Bailleul hospital.

This was my second time of collapsed removal from the salient—evidently an unsuitable place for me. My first exit was after that little affair I had with a shell near St. Julien—the second, this infernal carbuncle. But how unheroic this second exit! To have to leave the Ypres salient owing to a carbuncle on the back of the neck is to my mind one of the most degraded forms of heroism.

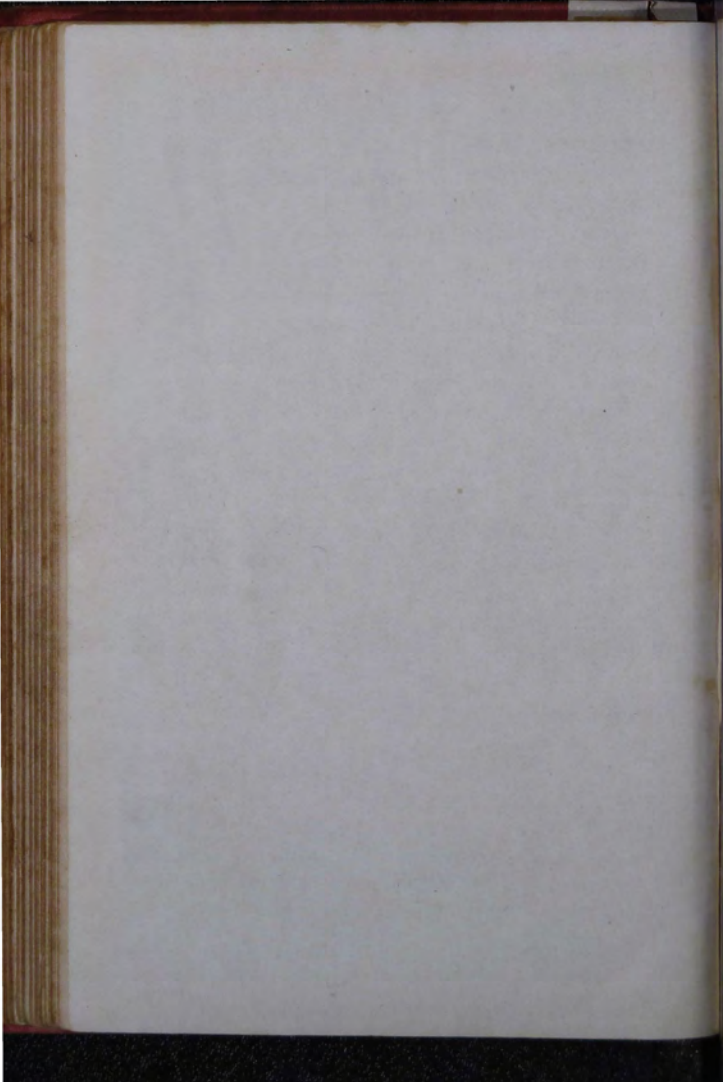


There are worse places than the back of the neck to have carbuncles. I found that out most painfully, later, whilst languishing on the Italian alpine front; but I will come to that in time.

Next morning I was taken in an ambulance from the monastic Bailleul hospital—off along the dusty, dreary roads, down to the old sector around Dcullens, and as I was carted along I dwelt with some sadness and



"LOOK OUT, BILL, YOU'RE SITTING ON A WASP'S NEST."



depression on my bad fortune. Here was the end of my first staff job. I somehow felt that, once inside that hospital, I should lose all the ground I had gained, and return, when repaired, to my same old life—that of a regimental captain.

Visions of interminable months of trenches, billets, and ordering people to carry corrugated iron, floorboards, or something . . . Well, anyway, here I was now—staff-captain, complete, with carbuncle, turning in at the gates of a beautiful chateau which at that time had just been converted into a hospital.

The ambulance stopped at the front door. I got out and entered. In half an hour I was in a suit of pyjamas (giant's size) and lying on an iron bed by a window. One of the hospital doctors was coming to see me shortly.

I lay and pondered. I thought of the farm at Montrelet. I thought of the colonel. What would happen now? Would I return there when I was well again, or not?

Outside the sun was shining in the beautiful grounds of the beautiful chateau. On the spacious lawn several nurses were walking about—those who at the moment were off

duty. Several officers were out there too, convalescents and others. At the far end of the lawn, under the shade of a clump of lofty trees, a regimental band was assembling.

The scene was one of delightful summer calm. "What band is that?" I asked. Somebody answered me through the window: "The Royal Warwickshire Regiment."

That was my own regiment, and as I lay there they started up the Warwickshire march. Warwickshire is my county, and I love everything belonging to it. I don't know why—I was ill, perhaps—but that tune, floating across that sunny tranquil lawn, made me nearly cry with an intense love and longing for England.

CHAPTER XVII

EVACUATED TO BASE—MONASTIC SECLUSION—
RETURN TO LONDON—CONVALESCENCE

THE doctor came and examined me. He did a few conjuring tricks with that half golf ball at the back of my neck and gave me things to take. I read, and thought, and slept, and incidentally felt very ill.

Time went on, and after a week I appeared to be no better. I was apparently very "run down."

After ten days there the doctor who watched me came and said that any idea of my going back to Montrelet was "off," and that I must be "evacuated to the base." "That's done it," I thought; but I little knew that that moment was the turning-point in the whole of my war career, and that I was soon to find myself in a position which I had never dreamt of.

What I took to be an unfortunate termination to my staff career was in reality the first premonitory sign of being wafted into a job which was the only one of its kind in the army. I didn't know it then, and with a depressed spirit I went off with a gang of

others, all correctly labelled with our various complaints, down to the base.

You never could say what base it was going to be, or what hospital there. Those mysterious labels they tie on you may convey a wealth of meaning to the medical authorities, but nothing to yourself.

After the usual form of train journey (I refer to the sixty-miles-with-sixty-hours-to-do-it-in variety) we arrived at Rouen, and were split up into several different groups and sent in ambulances to the various hospitals. I went to a fine big one on the hill above the town. This one, again, was a trifle ecclesiastical—it had been, I think, a sort of incubator for would-be monks. These hermits had all been roped in for service with the French Army, and the building was rented at a preposterous figure by the British authorities for use as a base hospital.

It was a fine hospital, too; platoons of nurses and V.A.D.'s, doctors, and all the whole outfit.

I was put into a room by myself. That sounds very grand, but in reality it was a sort of cubicle in a long corridor. There were open wards there as well, but a lot of us were kept in the cubicles. I imagine these box-

like creations were in ordinary times used by the budding monks—they were austere enough for anything. One almost wanted to get up twice a night to scourge oneself so as to complete the picture.

In this harbour of refuge they were all very good to me. The doctors said I was very run down and must rest quietly. There was really no physical reason for this, but I have had such miserable times with my state of mind and imagination about the war that it is difficult for me to explain to others what a terrible ordeal it can be. There is no reason why one should not attempt to explain this phenomenon. It is simply this: there are types of men who can go to a war such as this and only see its practical and physical side. Such a man, on returning home, will say, "It was terrible at Ypres!" Somebody will say, "Why?" He will then explain that the mud was something awful, and that they had to be up all night in pouring rain, and never had a wink of sleep. Moreover, the ceaseless shelling necessitated them working on the trenches every day. I envy that man.

I know there are others, like myself, to whom all that, though objectionable, is not

the worst feature. It's the horrible idea of the thing—the sudden reduction in the value placed on human life. The thoughts on the devastating pain and sorrow caused away back at home at each casualty. The precarious conditions regarding the mode of burial, which all depend on the local conditions prevailing at the time. These thoughts, and a host of others, make such a mess of one that physical ills are nothing compared to them.

In fact, to sum up :

The pain and devastation to the individual is directly proportional to the amount of imagination that individual possesses.

The most suitable man for a war is a butcher ; the most unsuitable, a poet. And so it was that I was ill and run down. But, thanks to an inherited juvenile spirit, I can permanently camouflage a lot of troubles, come up to the surface and drink in the joys of life. Under the soothing influences of kind-hearted nurses, aided by succulent substantial assets, such as chicken and occasional champagne, I slowly recuperated in my cubicle, and in a few days began to look back on past events and ache for

pencils, paints and paper. I got these, and dived off into a volume of scribbles, sketches and jokes on a host of topics which ironically amused me. If ever that monk goes back to that cubicle of his, he's going to find a fine mess on the walls. I perpetrated a series of most worldly drawings on the sides of his ethereal cell.

I added enormously to the already nauseating number of autograph albums which I have from time to time scribbled in.

Later on I was better still, and went out. The medical officers very kindly invited me to their mess. I disgraced their walls with further efforts, and later still I reached that state of physical fitness which entitled me to go outside the grounds and roam around the town. I wasn't long in taking advantage of this, and daily went for a couple of hours off into Rouen.

It's a nice old town, and was very pleasing in those summer days. I examined it all thoroughly. I sat in cafés and amused myself as I always do with Pelmanizing the place and the people. I wandered around and observed the life of the place. Rouen had been swooped down upon by the British

army and had become a large military base. This, of course, leads to a lot of "Back of the Front" departments. "Brass hats" shone all over the place. The Hotel de la Poste fairly glittered with them. Some, ex-gladiators from the front; others, who had only heard about the front through the papers or their friends. It was a merry town—Rouen.

So the time passed. I was better, but again the Medical Board at that hospital decided that I ought not to return to the front. Now this showed me a new and painful difficulty. I knew that if sent to England, by the approved rules of the game, this would automatically cause me to be struck off the lists of the British Expeditionary Force, and I should be put back in the home forces.

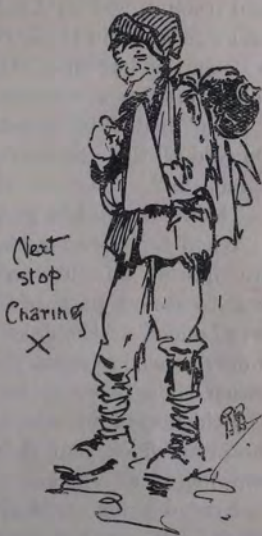
More depression and forebodings. However, I am very fatalistic, and I curled up mentally in order to await the day which I knew was coming, *i.e.*, to have a label tied on my tunic directing me to England. At last it came, and I left that kind, hospitable Red Cross monastery and was shipped with a crowd of others for England. We all

went on the *Asturias*, which most people will remember was subsequently torpedoed.

The boat was crowded, almost entirely with wounded returning from the battle of the Somme, that great and glorious conflict which cost us so much.

I had a bunk in a crowded ward on the ship, and we all were very cheerful. A hospital boat returning to England contains an astonishing amount of cheer and brightness. The idea in every man's mind that he is being taken by Englishmen back to England, and the visions that he sees of dear old Blighty, are enough to make them cheerful. It's the best tonic I know.

A chap with an arm in a sling and with all



his clothes torn to ribbons would be sitting on the side of a bed smoking a "stinker" and recounting, laughingly, exactly how they all got held up in the barbed-wire in front of a Boche machine-gun. His companion would follow up this story with a grouse that his "push" had all been north of the battle, and "heard all the row goin' on, but hadn't had a look in."

That's the stuff to give 'em.

When the *Asturias* reached Southampton we were all put into ambulance trains and sent to various parts of the country. My lot was London. At midnight I and a few others were removed from the station by motors and taken to a hospital, but with the strange coincidence, in my case, that it was the same hospital which had received me after my blowing-up at Ypres.

I entered that hospital at Camberwell, and when I left, cured, it was to start on the most extraordinary part of my war life, viz., my tours round all the fronts. Before the end of the war I was to see the fronts from the North sea to the Adriatic, and the backs of the fronts, from Rome to New York; and so I start another chapter.

CHAPTER XVIII

SICK LEAVE—SUMMONED TO WAR OFFICE—AMAZING
INTERVIEW—A UNIQUE JOB

IN due course I was better, and after going before a Medical Board I was given sick leave. I then went home and wondered about the future. It was "Good-bye, Montrelet!" I knew that, but what would be my next job? Back in the old "apple and plum," I supposed.

I spent two weeks amongst the leafy calm of Warwickshire getting better every day. In a few days now I should have my final Medical Board and then report at the headquarters of my Battalion Reserve Depot. The days slid on and I was just about to go through the above formula when the blow fell or the squib exploded—or whatever you like to call it. I awoke one morning to find, amongst other letters, a long envelope with O.H.M.S. on the cover.

I was summoned to London to the War Office!

Now, my feeling about the War Office is almost identical with that one has at school,

when you are requested to visit the head-master's study after "prep." with a view to



being caned. I don't know why, but perhaps it's that wonderful and unique chill which

one associates with long unfurnished stone corridors.

The War Office is well worth a visit to those who haven't been there. A vast pile with an intricate labyrinth of long, dull-coloured corridors—one almost expects to find the mummied corpse of a king when one gets to the centre—something like entering the Great Pyramid at Gizeh.

You feel that somewhere in the middle there must be some vast and highly coloured potentate—maybe, a super-general—who is, perhaps, dead in a sarcophagus, or alive like a queen bee; but, anyway, guarded by a host of officials, minor satellites and girl guides.

You, of course, never get near or see this personage; you merely feel the gloom and awe which his presence creates.

I haven't been to the War Office very often, but I have never lost this sensation. You enter the building and fill up a form. In time you are boisterously told by a Boer War veteran to "follow the girl." The girl—a guide of sorts in a dark brown engineer's overall—sets off sullenly down a cement passage with a group of assorted officers

pursuing. She, I fancy, revels in the intricacies of these stone catacombs. Having apparently described a complete parallelogram by means of walking round the edifice in a forbidding looking corridor, you suddenly come upon a lift. It is always disappearing upwards when you arrive, so the whole group silently wait for its return. It comes down suddenly and disgorges an assorted crowd, when, headed by the girl guide, you enter and are taken up. Now we all repeat the corridor and parallelogram business again; this time you have to abandon trying to realize where you are. Nothing but the girl guide can save you now.

Lost in the War Office!!—how awful that would be! I can imagine a visitor, having lagged behind the guide a bit, suddenly realizing that he was lost! How he would vainly beat on those stone walls and scream for help—how his skeleton would be found by a typist, weeks later, in an attitude which evidently showed that he had succumbed while endeavouring to gnaw his way through a door . . . I followed the guide, and after being handed to several officials who take

you to other officials, at last came up with THE official, whose duty it was to prevent, if possible, anyone seeing the officer who had summoned me by letter from my rural retreat.

The official took my paper form and reverently asked me to "wait a minute." He then disappeared through a door ten feet high and five feet wide, and closed it behind him.

I now sat on a chair and idly listened to the suburban gossip of a couple of typists, which floated out from behind a couple of screens. "Have you been to *Chu Chin Chow*, dear?"

"No, darling; I was going but something happened, I don't know what. Harold told me he had seen you there."

A rattling burst of typewriting indicates that another monstrous door has opened down the passage, and a staff officer has come out.

He passes the typists and me, carrying an armful of buff-coloured papers, then all is still again.

My door opens. The official comes out. He beckons me in. I go in. I am in. I hear

the ponderous door close softly behind. I am face to face with the occupants of the room.

The interview was brief, but to the point. I was complimented on the effect of my pictures. I was told that the War Office would not only like me to continue as I pleased with my ordinary cartoons, but that I was to be placed in the Intelligence Department, to be used, pictorially, for certain work which they wanted done. They then hinted that in the near future they might require me to visit the French and Italian armies, and to produce similar work to that which, during many months, had grown out of the mud, as it were, on the British front. I was told of certain work to get on with immediately, and initiated into a lot of details dealing with the Intelligence Department. I left the War Office as an official and fully licensed humorous cartoonist, and have continued in that capacity up to the end of the war.

I left Whitehall and nearly ran down the street outside—I was so bucked. I went into the "Old Ship," a restaurant which you will find nearly opposite Cox's bank. Here,

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A PROPHECY,—BUT I WON'T GUARANTEE OLD BILL TAKING THE COMMISSIONAIRE'S JOB.

with a cup of coffee and a Gold Flake I sat and thought it all over. I looked back at the start of it all. Back into those dank dark days of early 1914, when I, as a very poor and submerged second-lieutenant, slushed around the Messines mud, and at night drew my first sketches by the light of a candle-end stuck on an empty tin, keeping myself warm by the heat of a fire-bucket.

"From that to this," I thought, and I smiled with sadness as I recollected the various ups and downs and trials of those early days.

Here I was now attached to the Intelligence Department of the War Office! "The War Office like my drawings!!" Overcome with pride, I paid my bill and went across the road to draw as much as I could out of that one pound nineteen and elevenpence that still remained to my credit at Cox's.

CHAPTER XIX

OFF TO FRENCH FRONT—LONELINESS IN PARIS—
FOLIES BERGÈRES

Now I want to ask all readers of this book to exonerate me from any charge of egoism. I feel that many will be interested to hear exactly all about what my job as a cartoonist was like, and how and where the pictures were drawn; also, it is necessary for me to give a general idea of the results of the pictures and a variety of personal details, if I am to explain fully. The vast mass of letters that I have received from all over the world has emboldened me to put as much as I can of the personal note into these pages. I have felt there are so many who would like to know the "inside" of *Fragments from all Fronts* that I am going to describe the actual work in connection with my drawings, as well as the geographical adventures which led to them.

My first return to the Continent after the events related in the last chapter was to the French Army. The French Army Intelligence Department applied for me to be sent

to their front, to live amongst the troops there and to bring out pictorially, and in my own way, a series of cartoons. At the time this came about as an order, my pictures in the *Bystander* had been bound into several books under the title of *Fragments from France*, and had had an enormous circulation. The French papers had commented on them, and ultimately the application which I have mentioned above occurred.

I went to the War Office and having received my pass and certain papers, I set off for France.

A large and complicated paper had been given to me amongst others, which told me the number of a certain corps in the French army I had to report to. It said nothing about the part of the line where I should find this corps; but somehow or other I got it into my head that this particular corps lurked about somewhere near Rheims or Soissons.

After a suffocating all-night journey, following a nauseating passage to Boulogne, I arrived at the Gare du Nord in Paris, where I reported to the French Provost Marshal's headquarters. I was shown into an office.

A very courtly French colonel explained most politely and gently to me that the corps in question was near Rosendael.

"And where is that?" I asked. He turned to a large map and pointed a finger practically at Ostend.

"Heavens! near Ostend! and here have I come all the way down to Paris!" (Vision of another long, suffocating journey with a suit-case, almost back to where I had started from.)

I thanked the colonel and returned to the station to find out the trains for next morning. I really couldn't get into a train again that night.

"I'll stay the night in one of these pubs here," I thought to myself, and, acting on this impulse, selected the Hotel Terminus du Nord, which faces the station.

Mine was to be a lonely job. During all my wanderings from this date on I was cast for long, solitary train journeys, and nights in various hotels, estaminets and billets, all on my own. Here I was now in Paris, just about to have a sample of the kind of evening I have had so many of.

I went that night to the Boulevards and

wandered around. I sat in several cafés, always with my notebook and pencil, and watched the cosmopolitan and semi-military crowd as it moved in an apparently endless stream down the Boulevard des Italiennes.

It was late autumn, and the interior of the cafés were crowded. Looking out from the brightly lighted interior the street seemed to be a joyous mass of humanity, all for ever moving onward.

I sat back on the frowsy seats, and with a sheet of paper and a drink on the marble-topped table in front, followed my



customary habit of weaving pictures in the tobacco smoke around.

Later I went to the Café de Madrid and

*All this herbage
— and then perhaps
only a second Lieutenant*

had dinner. To-morrow I was starting for Rosendael and the front.

After dinner, shunning the dull quiet of the Hotel Terminus du Nord, I decided to go to a show somewhere, and soon concluded that what would be about my mark would be the Folies Bergères. So off I went, and after the usual robbery at the entrance, roamed around the palm court, listened to the band, and with the aid of a whisky and soda, watched the fountains squirting water out into the smoke-laden atmosphere. What a mass of women they have in that place, somehow! Gaudy, doubtful women, fountains and lazy bands form a very curious background to that front which, not so many miles away, is dealing exclusively in death, toil and devastation.

But here it was ; all going strong. " Eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow "—somebody else dies.

There was some show going on on the stage, but as I can't understand a word of French at the speed the natives talk it I contented myself with absorbing the sights of the palm court.

Having sat in the palm court at the Folies

Bergères and in kindred theatres a score of times, I have come to the conclusion that there are other dangers beside the trenches. This fancy—(it's probably only a stupid hallucination of mine)—I have recorded in the shape of a drawing which you will find in one of the books of *Fragments*, namely, "Come on, Bert, it's safer in the trenches!"

I left before the end of the show, and walked back to the hotel. Having overhauled my baggage and told a swarthy rogue of a Boots to call me in the morning, I went to bed, and recuperated for my journey to Rosendael in the morning.

CHAPTER XX

WHERE WIRE MEETS SEA—CRACKED COXYDE—
CORDIAL RECEPTION—CHILLY QUARTERS

ROSENDAEL is a paltry, unattractive little town near the sea in the Dunkirk direction. I and my suit-case arrived there in due course. I presented myself to the corps general. He graciously saw me in a chateau just outside the town, which he used as his headquarters. He was a very famous French general, but there is no need to mention his name. I showed him my papers and explained to him at his request exactly what I would like to do. I wanted to go into the French trenches in that sector, and thoroughly get into the spirit of what holding that part of the line was like; also I wanted to familiarize myself with the way the French soldiers lived and fought. He quite understood, and gave a few rapid orders to an officer who was in the room. He then told me that he had decided that I should go to a certain division who were at the time holding that part of the line which runs

alongside the Yser canal, and which had its left flank on the sea.

This sounded very interesting, as this sector comprised places of such war-historic interest as Dixmude, Nieuport, Furnes, etc.

A car was placed at my disposal and I was whirled off along the flat, bleak, and occasionally poplar-lined roads up towards the front and towards the great Yser canal, the scene of so much Belgian gallantry. It was very, very cold, and the long drive in the open car as the evening came on was not a particularly exhilarating performance.

We at last arrived at a lot of sand-hills, amongst which were some scattered villas of the sort that you will inevitably find at Belgian seaside resorts. This place the driver announced was Coxyde—and this was where the division had its headquarters. My destination at last!

Personally, the architecture and total surroundings of a Belgian seaside resort in peace time, I consider fairly unattractive, but under war conditions I confess that I was bordering on a feeling of absolute revulsion at the general appearance. A cheap stucco and red-tiled villa on a wind-

swept sand-hill is bad enough at any time, but when there is a shell hole through the roof, a couple of windows missing and a corner chipped off, its appearance is still more repulsive.

There were a good number of these sea-side atrocities standing about, and it was in one of these that I found the divisional commander and all his staff, to whom I reported myself. They had heard that I was coming, and as luck would have it knew all about my pictures, and therefore I was saved that painful explanation which I have from time to time had to indulge in—that of telling officials what my work consists of. To explain my business to a man who has never heard of me or my work is a terrible ordeal.

The subject is so large, and the whole story so peculiar, that I never know where or how to begin. Fortunately now-a-days there don't seem to be many people who are unaware that there is such an individual existing as Bruce Bairnsfather, and that he happens to make a series of marks on bits of paper which a kind-hearted world has taken to calling cartoons. Things are

not so hard for me now as they used to be. But you can imagine that for some time after I began to draw cartoons, it was a bit trying to explain to some fire-eating general who had never heard of me, and whose one "bête noir" was cartoons, that I was a licensed military cartoonist, and wished to be allowed to wander all around his trenches so as to get the "atmosphere" and feeling of that particular sector. After a life spent in pondering on the theory and value of howitzers, road maps, discipline and battles, a general is naturally a bit strange to the flimsy unreality and apparent uselessness of art.

Oh yes, I've had some trying times, believe me!



*The worst of Kierulff is,
its almost unrecognisable
at times*

However, here at Coxyde, I was most cordially, understandingly and enthusiastically received by this French army commander, and my introduction was followed by my being allotted quarters and then going to lunch with the staff. They were a most happy, light-hearted group of officers, and all worked hard. The general himself, a short, thick-set, swarthy, strong man, was one of the brightest and most cheerful ornaments of the mess; a general at his work, and a human being when it was over. All the group of officers connected with him were perfectly free and happy at that mess. All was brightness and freedom, with, whenever necessary, a rigid and vigorous return to work and hard discipline. I was very much struck with that headquarters mess. I had occasion to have many meals there and I also saw all the members at work, and was most forcibly impressed by the difference between their headquarters and the equivalent in the English army. Since then, having had similar experiences with the Italian and American armies, I am still more struck with the same difference to our own English

equivalent. That frigid atmosphere which some of our "headquarters" can and do assume is entirely lacking in any foreign army. In any other army but ours, a second lieutenant, when at some "off duty" period, say at dinner, can talk with his general and be answered and talked to by his general like two human beings who have respect for each other's knowledge, each in his own sphere. You will frequently find with us that, under similar circumstances, a gloomy, unintellectual silence is maintained, with an occasional remark from the general which is followed by a sycophantic answer from someone of a rank no lower than a captain; whilst a second lieutenant (if there is one present) munches his toast in dead silence, consigned as he is to unquestionable ignorance at the far end of the table.

I've 'ad some myself.

No offence meant—only a slight digression on insularity.

.

After lunch at that Coxyde villa, I was was taken round and shown where I was to

be stabled, and from where I would make excursions to the various trenches in the sector. The place I was to live at was a hotel on the sea front. You will notice I say "was," and I still stick to that word. Of all the chilly, horrible hotels, I think this one was the peach. Being almost winter it was dark when I and my guide got there, and as I was taken up the uncarpeted, creaky, cheap stairs, with a Zouave leading the way with a candle stuck in a bottle, I couldn't help thinking how unfavourably the place compared with the Savoy. A long, bare corridor with the wind whistling down it through a window with no glass in it greeted us at the top of the stairs. Macbeth's castle was a cosy invalids' home compared with this place. The Zouave, with his dark red Turkish-looking hat, led the way. The candle spluttered and blew about in the breeze. We opened a door on the right and the candle went out in the draught.

The Zouave entered and re-adjusted the sheet of sacking across a broken pane of glass in the window at the far end. He then re-lit the candle and showed me my room. A bed, one chair, and a washstand, all made

out of a horrible, bilious yellow-coloured wood, and standing on a carpetless floor.

Those were the contents, the other attractions consisting of a rattling window and a mouldy smell such as one, I imagine, would associate with a derelict hotel. The Zouave, of course, could speak nothing but French. I can't do much at that, and as I fancy he threw in a little Arabic now and again, I found I could do nothing to establish an "entente." I indicated with a smile and a few gestures, that I was "quite alright now, thanks very much," and leaving me the candle, he went away. I sat on the bed which was damp from the sea air blowing through the open window. Outside I heard the waves breaking on the shore, whilst inside the hotel was emitting a variety of creaky, weird noises.

The candle, burning with sullen dullness, was standing on the cheap washstand, and apparently it was all it could do to illuminate the surface of that unattractive piece of furniture.

"Here I am at Coxyde, and this is where I have got to live with the French soldiers, find ideas and draw them," I thought to

myself. "If you knows of a better 'ole, go to it."

There was no better 'ole, and if there had been I couldn't go to it, so I resigned myself to forthcoming life at "Coxyde les Bains."

Dont forget, that when
you are out doing a bit
on your own, and you
feel like the spot
marked with a
cross in This
picture



you are probably
looking like this
in Herr Von
Stickybach's
glasses



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CHAPTER XXI

GOING THE ROUNDS—MUD AND MONOTONY—
VERDUN HEROES—THOUGHTS ON SHELLING

THE next day I began my work. The general had arranged for me to have a guide, and to be taken to a regiment that was in front line trenches to the right and in front of Nieuport.

It was a bleak, grey, dismal day as we went down the long, monotonous, shell-pitted road towards Nieuport. What a dreary waste that country round the Yser Canal is, particularly in all the wild, wet weather of winter. We went as far as we safely could in the car, and then walked a short way to the place where the regimental commander lived. He had a fairly large, well-built subterranean dugout, where my guide explained all about me, and what I wanted to see and do.

It appeared that the colonel had been already rung up on the telephone about me, and he readily grasped the idea. He prepared to come round with us and show us all over his particular command. All

through my many visits to the various parts of the stupendous battle-line from Ostend to Goritzia

I have been particularly impressed by the willing courtesy shown by the different commanders whom I have had the pleasure of meeting. In spite of the strenuous lives they had



*Portrait of a gentleman
who knows that Morocco
is a far far "better 'ole"
than Verdun*

to live they always found time to do all that was possible to show me everything in their power, and were invariably most hospitable. Trench hospitality is a wonderful and touching thing. Every one of my official hosts would turn out extraordinarily good meals in my honour, and on

many occasions I have known that this must have meant curtailing their own none too luxurious rations. The colonel got ready, gave some orders, and then started to show us round. We followed close behind. I shall never forget that water-logged, dreary waste near Nieuport. Vast, perfectly flat country, with long, mournful grass waving about in the cold wind under a lead-coloured sky. We went along "duck boards" most of the way, occasionally passing groups of war-worn poilus, who were toiling at that everlasting necessity—the battle between Man and Mud. To these men the colonel would always say something—perhaps praise, perhaps criticism. But to those poor, cold, wet devils, even a harsh corrective word of command must have been relief. Those winter months on the Yser were a triumph for our Belgian and French allies.

We went on, and at last slushed our way into a series of muddy trenches. It is hard for those who have never seen those trenches to imagine the fearful conditions under which the soldiers lived; no worse, indeed, than what our own army has had to contend with, but they were just as bad as you could

want. There is so much marsh land in these parts, that to make anything but a sloppy bog for your home is nearly impossible. Dark days, mud, rain, danger and death. When you add those ingredients together and multiply it by the length of a whole winter—you'll find it wants a lot of beating.

And these were the soldiers, these were some of those amazing fellows who had "stuck out" so much.



These were some of those wonders who had astonished the world by their heroic performance at Verdun. I looked at them all keenly, and thought hard as I followed behind the colonel down trench after trench. Here were these splendid men, in old, dirty uniforms covered with mud; some sitting down

on ledges at the back of the mud and sand-bag parapet, and others standing

about with their hands in their pockets, stamping their feet on the old worn "duck boards" to keep warm; while others, again, were occupied on their ceaseless watch for the enemy over the parapet. An English officer following their colonel round was an unusual sight—I was the first they had ever seen there, and they all looked with silent curiosity as I passed, and then muttered something amongst themselves. I don't know what they said, but if it had been me I should probably have said, "What's this ——— fool doin' muckin' around here."

I expect they said that—I hope so; it's human and friendly.

I don't know many things more tiring than being shown round miles and miles of trenches. To begin with, you can't walk normally—you always seem to be stepping over things or stooping under things; added to which, you have occasionally to do about half a mile in a bent-up attitude, because the parapet is low. This latter procedure is advisable owing to a latent desire on the part of those Rhineland gentlemen to snipe your head if it shows.

I got tired out that day, but I saw and

learnt a lot. I scrambled about in various ditches known technically as communication trenches. I went on "all fours" into sundry dugouts or trench mortar emplacements. I slushed through hundreds of yards of dirty, marshy, shell-torn ground, tripped on old rusty barbed wire, in fact "saw" those trenches thoroughly. We stopped for lunch at the dugout of a company commander, and there we sat round a low table—a survival of some mutilated home close by, and partook of a plain but very welcome ration lunch, given to us with the utmost cordiality and hospitality; after which a smoke, and a removal of as much mud as one could.

They are invariably a cheery and friendly crowd, these French officers, and there is invariably a "happy family" atmosphere in all French regiments.

During this visit of mine to these Nieuport trenches there was very little shelling or violent interruptions of any kind—a little rifle firing and a little "back area" strafing, that was all. That form of amusement indulged in by artillery and known as "back area" shelling, consists of lobbing nice, large, juicy shells over the heads of the

trench holders, way back on to some town, village, camp or building ; occasionally varying this by deluging a certain road so as to make it unattractive if not impossible to use. Of the various forms of irritant which this war has possessed, I hate shelling most. Against one of those large, flying umbrella stands, in the shape of a fifteen-inch shell, you can do nothing. It's mere delusion to think you are safe in a house, dugout or cellar. These shells have a persistent and noisy way of penetrating anywhere, with the almost inevitable result that you go out either bodily or in pieces. I can laugh, and have laughed, at the rattling splutter of machine-gun bullets against a wall when I have been on the other side, but when those mammoth howitzers start squirting those explosive drainpipes over at you, I confess my smile fades. That "Boom" (very soft in distance), then the swirling, rotating, swishing crescendo overhead ; the ghastly momentary pause, as you see an earth fountain waft a cottage a hundred yards into the air, followed by a crash like a battleship being dropped into Olympia—No! No! I *don't* like it.

These Nieuport trenches were comparatively quiet that day, but when the time came for us to retrace our steps along the sodden "duck boards" I wasn't sorry. They were a clammy, horrible, depressing sight, and very reminiscent to me of those dark, dank ditches I used to live in before Messines.

I looked back when we had gone about half a mile;—under the darkening, dreary, wet sky the flat war-torn country lay in gloomy silence. The long waving grass, a skeleton farm roof silhouetted against the lemon-coloured light of the setting sun, and beyond, the dark, hazy mystery of where those primitive trenches lay, and where, night after night, week after week, month after month, those muddy, weather-beaten, war-worn poilus for ever "held the line."

CHAPTER XXII

METHODS OF WORK—A WONDERFUL TUNNEL—AN
“AIRY” BIT OF LINE—BACK TO COXYDE

My life now consisted in going daily to some new part of the line, seeing different regiments and noting a host of various incidents. At night, back in that drastic hotel by the light of two candles stuck in their own grease, I worked away on my detail drawings and wrote notes on all the little effects and points which I had observed in character and design amongst the soldiers and in the trenches. I have sketch-books and note-books full of the various characteristics of different trenches, localities and soldiers. Thinking it may interest readers of this book, I am having a typical page from one of my sketch-books reproduced. It is a hurried detail drawing made at about the time of which I have just written. A cracked and deserted cold hotel is not the best studio on earth, but here it was that I collected all the material that I wanted in the way of technical detail. I made no attempt to get ideas for pictures;—I never do, at this period.

I just go in for letting the whole scene and conditions of life soak into my system;



*The Regimental Mascot
finds it cold on the
Yser*

did that one go?" picture to a cabin in mid-Atlantic.

livewiththem
all, and feel
what it is to
livethere with
them all, then
afterwards
when I come
away, a
clearer vision
of what it was
struck me
most comes
along and
then I can
carry on.

The times
I have had
in fearful
"studios!"
—from that
dugout where
I drew my
first "Where

Incidentally having perpetrated sketches in a broken-down estaminet in the Vosges, a swimming-bath on the Carso, and a host of other weird and unstimulating spots.

I thoroughly investigated that Yser area, and will not describe any more of the ordinary trench life there, as it is all much the same everywhere. I will, however, give you an idea of what the line was like in those days on the extreme left. This, by the way, was to me a very interesting spot. This was where the whole battle line ended. The line was, as everyone knows, approximately from Ostend to Belfort.

The part I am about to describe was the North Sea end of it all, about eight miles westward from Ostend.

Here the trenches ended because of the sea, and the barbed wire defences of each side ran out into the sea for a finish.

This thought amused me, I don't exactly know why. I somehow felt how ridiculous it was for vast numbers of twentieth century human beings, who more or less all prided themselves on progress and enlightenment, to be facing each other in two long slots in the ground, with the ends

stopped up, one by the North sea, the other by the Alps.

A Zouave regiment was holding these trenches, and I was most interested to see the men and to absorb all the characteristics of the places around. As before, we went



in a car as close to the line as possible, and afterwards had to walk, but this time we had to leave the car a long way behind the front. This precaution was very necessary, as a lot of shelling went on here, and the Germans, having a good view from some

high sand-hills and towers in the distance, were able to send a pretty nasty occasional burst of shelling down into the lines which led to the Zouave trenches. To circumvent this, the regiment had made a long tunnel under the sand, over a mile in length. This was really a wonderful piece of work. It was impossible to detect the tunnel from the outside, and yet inside it was big enough for two people to walk abreast, and was completely wood lined from end to end, with electric light and telephone wires running its whole length. The carpentry of it and its general structure were excellent—truly a wonderful bit of work for an infantry battalion to have accomplished. Now and again in the course of its length there was a slot left open on the sea-ward side from which, as you passed, you could see the ocean.

I went along this tunnel affair, and came out at the far end, just at the mouth of the Yser canal. A few terribly mutilated houses, miniature lighthouses and ruined canal lock-gates marked the end of this historic Yser canal.

Beyond the canal, about a thousand yards away, were the sand-hills which formed the

Allied front line. I don't claim to be a military genius, but I confess that, at the very time I first saw those trenches it struck me as a dangerously airy place to have them. For, against the advantage of having got a thousand yards of sand-hill beyond the canal towards the enemy, there was the obvious disadvantage that the canal was behind our lines. It was very wide at that part, and, moreover, supplies were entirely dependent on our being able to maintain intact a series of bridges across the water. I said nothing, of course, and imagined that there was some good reason for our line being thus thrown forward, but subsequently when we got that very nasty smack from the Huns in these very sand-hills, I read the account and saw that the canal and the ruptured bridges had been the cause of the trouble.

The Germans had concentrated artillery fire on the only bridges by which reinforcements could come to the aid of the garrison of the sand-hills which was held in a deathly struggle with overwhelming numbers.

The Zouaves are a magnificent crowd, and this particular crew had done wonders

at Verdun. They were here "resting." Holding these trenches compared to Verdun was indeed resting—but "resting" in this war has been a much abused word. A few of my pals in the trenches will endorse that sentence, I know.

I spent the day crashing about amongst Zouaves and sand, and began my journey back to Coxyde towards evening.

I was now accompanied by my guide and a Zouave officer. We thought we would chance it and go above ground instead of bothering to walk back along the tunnel. We started off, but about three-quarters of a mile back, as we walked down the main but completely shattered street of Nieuport Bains, a shell or two whizzed over our heads and landed with a nasty bang a hundred yards ahead of us. We all thought the tunnel advisable after this—I most certainly did. We dived down a hole in the basement of a house and by means of an underground passage constructed out of a series of cellars, reached the tunnel by the sea again.

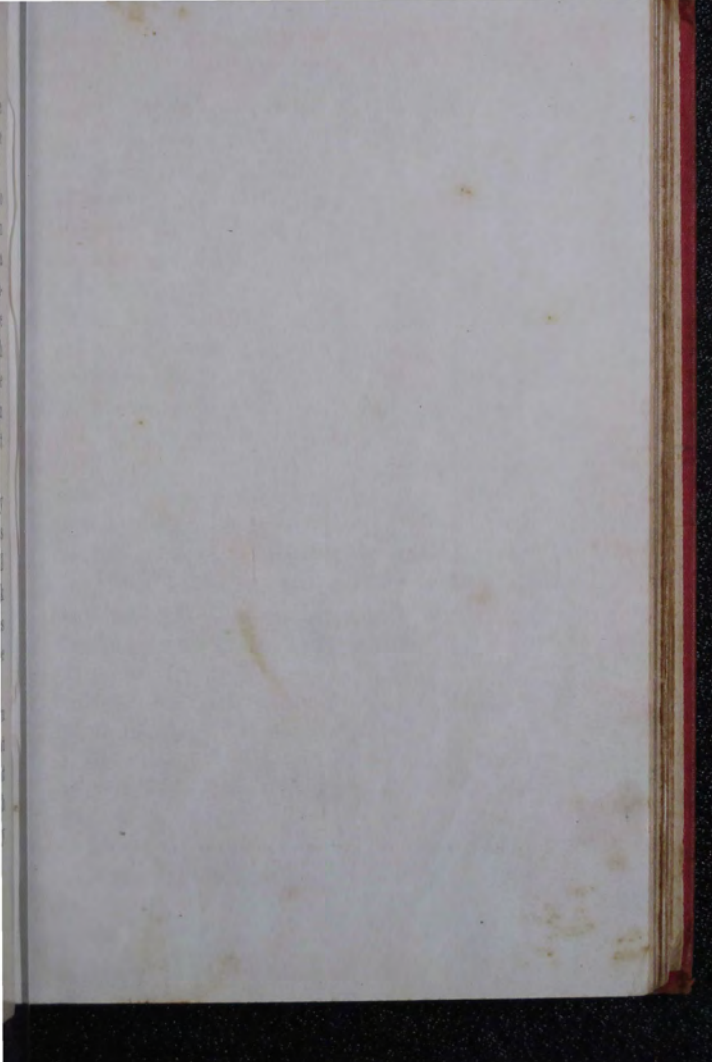
In due course we emerged, and as we got into the car we saw another couple of shells

burst in the road we had lately left. We motored off back to Coxyde, arriving there without further incident.

Before leaving that sector I was taken to see the old city of Nieuport. I have seen a lot of ruined cities, but this one wants a deal of competing with for thorough ruination. I asked the commandant, more jokingly than otherwise, if there was such a thing as a whole unbroken house in the town. He said that a careful examination had been made, and it had been found that there was not.

The town was in a fearful mess. Every house was knocked to pieces, and the streets were a mass of shell holes. The town hall and church were appalling wrecks. I took a lot of photographs, made sundry sketches and left. I left by moonlight, and an eerie sight it was.

A clear night, and a large, full moon shining down on the deserted, ruined, silent city. Far away in the trenches out in front an occasional rifle shot would cause a harsh echo amongst the still, cold ruins as they stood there under the moon.





WHY IS THIS SORT OF THING ALWAYS DOWN AT THE BASE, WHERE MEDALS
KEEP COMING OUT ON HIM LIKE A RASH?

CHAPTER XXIII

AN INVITATION TO DINNER—IN PARIS AGAIN—OFF
TO VERDUN—BAR-LE-DUC

My time in this North sea area was drawing to a close. I had got all I wanted, a crowd of impressions and a forest of detail. Now came the big event, the star turn, the thing I was longing to do. I was now to go to Verdun! Verdun, with all its epic story of cast iron endurance and its mighty battles! Verdun, the Ypres of the French army!

I was glad, in a way, to leave that damp and dismal Rosendaël sector, but I was sorry to leave the jolly, friendly crowd of French officers at Coxyde who were more than good to me. Before leaving I received an invitation on which I will say a few words. I was invited to dine with Prince Alexander of Teck who lived over at La Panne, and was the British representative with the King of the Belgians. His senior staff officer was a friend of mine, and I went over one night and enjoyed a very pleasant evening. I had the honour of sitting next the Prince who

told me a lot of interesting things about the sector and the Belgian army.

I mention this dinner, you see, to show that I don't always live on bully beef in dug-outs, but now and again glide off up into the realms of *table d'hôte*.

This pleasant little episode happened just before I left. Another invitation to go to the Naval Division, who operated some venomous looking naval guns in the sand-hills close by, I had to cancel, as I was leaving for Paris. After a variety of small bothers, such as getting one's papers and "authority to proceed," etc., I left Rosendael for Paris.

I went to the French authorities and saw an Intelligence Department lieutenant who gave me a couple of reams of paper entitling me to go to Verdun.

I managed to snatch a night in Paris. I wanted something to contrast with the joys of the Rosendael mud wastes.

What a rotten thing loneliness in great cities is! One night is quite enough for me, but circumstances have caused me to have a great many.

After one evening in Paris I started for Verdun. I rattled off from my hotel in one of

those reckless petrol-driven bathing machines known as taxis, and having paid my Jehu a hundred per cent. over his fare (daren't argue, as I don't know enough French), I walked into the station. It's a mighty station, is the Gare de l'Est, and I have never seen it without its being packed to suffocation with people. All the Paris stations seemed to be the same during the war. One large seething mob of soldiers, civilians, women and children. Trains about a mile long are always standing at the platforms and are allowed about two hours to load up with passengers. They seem to believe in a few trains of staggering length to a greater number of reasonable proportions. My heart bleeds for the engine that has to start pulling that enormous dead weight out of the station. I'm sure the station-master must give the train a bit of a shove so as to make things easier. It is very rarely that I have managed to evade carriages with eight a side, the floor covered with baggage, and a family of assorted babies sprawling over it.

I have done hundreds of miles in a carriage like the Black Hole of Calcutta.

This journey to Verdun was crowded, but minus babies. I think that sector is unsuitable for babies, but it apparently deals largely in farm labourers, who seem to live exclusively on garlic and onions (at least so I surmise from my travelling experiences and a keen sense of smell).

A boisterously healthy, swarthy Hercules, with a luxuriant moustache, will sit in a first-class carriage and open a parcel in which is wrapped a lunch enough to feed a platoon. Then, with a brigand-like pocket knife, he will proceed to cut cheese against a monstrous, dirty thumb, looking blandly out of the window with eyes like "The Soul's Awakening."

It was just such a journey as this that I made towards Verdun. You can't go the whole way to Verdun by train—only as far as Bar-le-duc—then hope for the best.

I arrived at Bar-le-duc in the evening, and was motored out that night to a certain army headquarters which was established in an old stone town hall in a small town. An effective, romantic sort of a place—I remember noticing a lot of shields and old historical spears hung on the walls.

Everything was very solid and gloomy.

I was told what was the procedure necessary before being allowed to enter and see Verdun. In about half an hour I was in the French staff car again, and being motored back to Bar-le-duc. It was late at night when I got there, and I found a room in one of the few hotels in the main street. Somehow the whole air seemed charged with a quaint air of excitement and mystery. Bar-le-duc to-night, and to-morrow I was to be called for and taken to Verdun. I was mighty keen on this visit. Verdun spelt to me such a mysterious, romantic charm, and at this time the world was echoing the great story of the ceaseless German attacks, and the amazing tenacity of the French troops in holding the town and the salient.

Verdun, Douaumont, Vaux;—all magic, terrifying names; each one conveying a wealth of martial meaning to every man and woman in France. One big story of the courageous spirit of undefeatable France, and one big necropolis for the Germans.

I spent a fairly reasonable night in a fairly reasonable hotel, and when daylight broke again I prepared myself for my visit to the mighty fortress of Verdun.

CHAPTER XXIV

VERDUN—UNDERGROUND HALLS—DEATH AND DEVASTATION

A LARGE French staff car appeared before the hotel at about nine o'clock in the morning. I left with a French officer guide and a chauffeur. The road was long and winding, and it is a famous road that, being the main artery which feeds the salient. As we went along, we passed an incessant stream of motor lorries proceeding in both directions. A vast traffic was here, I could see, and my mind immediately flew to thoughts of the mighty mechanism behind it all. Long, apparently never-ending, streams of motor lorries carrying food and ammunition, followed by another stream carrying fresh soldiers for the fray.

The backward freight consisted of battle-worn poilus being taken back for short but urgent rest. That road was charged with all the tense, electrical seriousness of the great battles of Verdun. Our car dashed along past all this traffic, and I gathered from the

milestones that we would soon be in sight of the historic city.

At last we were there. We entered under a huge, stone-built gateway, giving entrance through the walls of the citadel. Guards challenged us, and looked at our passports. All was well, and entering the town we proceeded slowly along. Huge, massive walls were on either side; walls built for defensive purposes at a very much earlier date. We stopped before an arched, dark opening on the left. This opening was the entrance to a massive stone tunnel, and led to the interior of the underground fortress. We got out of the car and the French officer led me into the tunnel.

That underground system at Verdun is truly wonderful. Long, electrically lit passages take one into great arched stone halls where there is room and equipment for everything and everybody. We went along a series of passages and up sundry stone stairs, down others—more passages—until we arrived at the quarters of the French general commanding the citadel. Here I was introduced to the general, and my visit explained. The general expressed a wish

to show me the town and fortress that day ; this more than pleased me as, of course, I wished to see everything, and as soon as possible.

The general ordered his car round and was good enough to ask me to come with him on a tour of inspection. We drove slowly through the town. It was impossible for the Germans to see into the town, as they had been prevented from gaining the heights commanding the place, but from the monstrous shell holes and demolition round about I clearly saw that they went in for extensive shelling on the off chance of making themselves a nuisance. I was shown a lot of the interesting historic buildings of Verdun all more or less knocked about. The old walls of the city were very curious ; the terrific shelling had blown away so much masonry and so many houses, that another set of ancient walls had been exposed to view!

Verdun is a most ancient town, and has a very great historical interest. Mr. Atilla and his Huns originally dashed through this place, in their customary rude and pushing way, and were ultimately defeated utterly at

Chalons-sur-Marne—which is not very far away.

I went into the Cathedral. Such a pitiful mess it was in! Piles of smashed and twisted metal—originally priceless wrought iron work—were lying on the chipped and scarred stone floor. The great decorative domed ceiling had a huge, gaping shell hole in it, whilst several of the altars were torn and lacerated by shrapnel. It is a very ancient cathedral, and is most massive and magnificent in structure.

We spent the rest of the day cruising around the various spots of interest in the city. Verdun stands on the Meuse, and is surrounded by a series of hills, all about two miles away from the town, and all held by the French. It was these hills that the Germans were after, and had they ever got them they could have dominated the town and knocked the bottom out of all the defences. This they were precious near doing at one time, but the magnificent courage and heroic endurance of the French were too much for them.

Towards evening we drove back to the underground department. The general in-

vited myself and my officer guide to dinner that night, and ordered someone to show me where I was to sleep.

I was led into a sort of dormitory full of wooded cubicles, one of these was to be mine. I sat on my bed and made some notes and rough sketches, then had a wash and brush-up for dinner.

At a little before the time a French soldier called for me; something like the jailer coming for the doomed man to take him to the scaffold. I followed this soldier to my doom. We went down another set of maze-like passages and ultimately entered the dining-hall. A huge, vaulted hall, with several rows of tables, met my gaze. The room was rapidly filling with a great number of French officers. The whole scene was full of life and bustle. The pulsating flicker of rather yellow electric light flooded the place. Soldier servants and cooks were working with enthusiastic vigour at preparing the feast.

Two tables ran down the centre of this vaulted hall, and one across the top end at right angles to the others.

The room was soon full, and the general entered. He took his seat at the centre of

the top table and summoned me to sit beside him. The dinner started. I wish he had let me be at the far end of the junior officers' table, or amongst the cooks and waiters. High places at these functions always end in my eating nothing. A great rattling roar of people talking and eating now filled the place, and I worked hard at my poor French to evolve sentences for the benefit of the general and the other officers round about. I'm sure that dear old general mistook me for an ambassador or something. At the end of dinner he made a speech, referring to me in the middle of it, and later on a band played "God save the King," during which I had to bear the scrutiny of about two hundred pairs of eyes, whilst all stood to attention. I was honoured, but uncomfortable. The evening concluded in a most cordial and happy way with a smoking concert.

The next few days I spent in examining the outer defences of Verdun. I went to see the famous forts of Douaumont and Vaux. I was shown where the various German attacks had been beaten, and all the ground over which the French had fought during those

long anxious months which were vital to the whole cause of the Allies. And what a dreadful country it was! I looked out from Souville fort on to the ground around Fleury and Douaumont. The land seemed to radiate nothing but an atmosphere of death and decay from its dull brown, shell-churned surface. As I looked heavy shells were bursting continuously over the French advance trenches, and over the broken remains of Douaumont fort. Souville marked the spot that had proved a Waterloo for the Germans. Out on the ground in front lay the unburied remains of many who had fallen, and everywhere the ground was littered with old, rusty, broken rifles, bayonets and bombs.

Mud was everywhere in gigantic quantities, and everything within sight seemed to be blasted and destroyed. A truly ghastly sight was this land around those outer forts, steeped as it was in all the full fury of the worst kind of war that man could make. As I had anticipated, this Verdun salient was quite on a par with the horror of Ypres. I picked up an old bayonet to take away with me as a souvenir, and it now hangs,

with other trophies, in my Warwickshire home. We had just left Souville to return, and had hardly gone thirty yards when a heavy shell crashed alongside the place where we had been standing. Almost immediately the woods behind seemed to burst into life with French guns, barking more death and more destruction at the Germans.

And so that relentless argument went on, and day after day the death-charged atmosphere reigned over the Verdun salient, ultimately bringing the world's greatest disappointment to Germany and its gospel of brute force.

I was glad to leave that area. It was a long time before I could forget the horrible look of that unearthly ground before the forts.

We returned through the mutilated Souville forest into Verdun—I went to see the general, and, thanking him very much for the facilities he had so kindly granted me, awaited the car to take me away. I was glad now, and very pleased with things in general. I had spent a night in Verdun, and had seen it all; this seemed to form the cap to my interesting French army experiences. Now I

would return to Paris and then to England, after which I should begin my series of drawings from the French front. I had seen them in comparative quiet on the Yser, and in hell at Verdun. I knew their story. I knew their feelings and outlook. I was charged with the "atmosphere," and had amassed a great volume of detail. My job was over for the present. Now for civilization—by which I mean escape from the devastating mental nausea of the war areas.

The car came round, and took me to Bar-le-duc, from where I went by train to Paris. In a few days I was back in England once more.

CHAPTER XXV

SUPPLYING "COPY"—A CROWDED EXISTENCE—
ORDERED TO ITALY

ALL through these wanderings and adventures I was always at work on my weekly contributions to the *Bystander*. I worked in any old place that I could find, and by means of a compact portable set of implements and paints, spread myself out into an artist in a "studio."

From the day I began to the present time I have never missed getting a drawing back somehow or other to the *Bystander* offices in time for the weekly publication. Once or twice I got men, going on leave to England, to take a parcel and post it in London; and once—when I drew a picture in my cabin, somewhere off Newfoundland—I got the Turkish bath attendant on the ship to post it on his return to Liverpool; so you see, what with my own precarious existence, followed by the equally precarious posting and delivery, those weekly cartoons have seen a bit of life before they emerged in the paper.

Having returned from this French visit I started out full steam ahead to work out my finished pictures, and in due course they were completed.

I have a sort of idea that a lot of people imagine that this job of mine is a delightful,



easy and simple occupation. This sort of thing: "Fancy! How topping it must be to be a cartoonist; nothing to do but draw pictures; no fighting, only going on visits to the fronts and making jokes; isn't he a lucky chap?"



THE SPAHI: THE MOST PICTURESQUE MAN IN THE WAR.

In case I am
does generally

First of all
completely in
one job or the

I not original
war, and the
original and
pain and an
my war does

If I had a
than the info
been impossi
the war is a
is it, with
leaving it.
only reason
drawings.

Following
actual work
have had
and a very
I have been
to be in your
leave me of
these things
of clock and

In case I am right (and this idea undoubtedly does prevail), I will tell you the real story.

First of all, it would have been wholly and completely impossible for me to have made one joke or drawn one line on the subject, had I not originally been burnt in the fire of the war, and badly burnt, too. My life in the original mud, and the consequent strafing, pain and anguish, were the foundations of my war drawings.

If I had started life in any other capacity than the infantry, these drawings would have been impossible. No amount of looking *at* the war is any good; you must have been *in* it, with a darn good chance of never leaving it. I believe this to be the one and only reason for the popularity of my war drawings.

Following this initial necessity comes the actual work; few can realize how much and how hard it is, and nobody except myself and a very intimate few will ever know what I have been through. Work of this class has to be in your system all the time. You don't leave an office at six o'clock, as it were, and then forget all about your work till nine o'clock next morning.

For over three years now I have done on an average three or four drawings a week, out of which, possibly, two have been what I thought suitable to use. Added to this, I have been deluged with letters and autograph albums from all parts of the world. These cannot be ignored, and I have always done my best to get all such applications attended to in some way or other. Each drawing takes me about two days to complete. In the "spare" time resulting on all this I have worked on another book, *Bullets and Billets*—a forerunner of this volume. I have written the play entitled *The Better 'Ole*, also one or two short theatrical sketches. Add to all this innumerable drawings for charities of all kinds, and you will observe that I have had rather a crowded existence, and by the time it is realized that the material for all these activities has been collected by personal visits to the war zones on all the fronts, with the consequent fatiguing journeys and hard fare, you will see that to be "Bruce Bairnsfather" has been an intricate and arduous job. But I am lucky, though,—I fully appreciate that. Here I am, at the end of the war, with a complete set of component

parts : two legs, two arms, two eyes, a nose and a mouth. How many of my pals have been less fortunate!

After a short session of work in England I was told by the War Office that I was shortly to go to the Italian front. I was most elated at this, as I was longing to see Italy and the war there. The accounts of the fighting on the Carso and in the mountains seemed to be so full of interest compared with the mud scrambles in France. Italy, with its warm sun and bright days! I felt things couldn't be quite so bad there as elsewhere, and that the grandeur of the scenery would outweigh a lot of the nasty parts which are inseparable from visits to war zones.

I was keen on the Italian job, and presently the day arrived when I was to start. I went to the War Office and was told a lot of things that I must observe, and details in connection with my journey. I got my passport and papers, and went back to my hotel. Here I overhauled my "props," and having procured various articles I wanted for my work, I left Charing Cross on my way to Italy. Same old Folkestone and Boulogne journey, with Paris to follow.

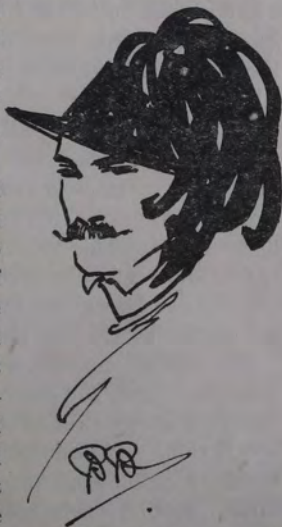
I arrived at the Gare du Nord, Paris, and dragged myself and baggage into the same old hotel. I always make for railway hotels as they are generally more "up" in the trains, and in my case are easier to do things from. The next morning I drove off in a taxi for the Gare de Lyon, there to catch a train for the frontier on my way to Italy.

CHAPTER XXVI

EN ROUTE TO MILAN---HOTEL BRIGANDS---SPAGHETTI
---ON TO UDINE

By some extraordinary lucky chance I got a seat in the train. The usual trouble was prevailing, and you almost needed a shoehorn to get the last few people into that train. We pushed off.

It's a beautiful journey, the run from Paris to Milan. First of all, of course, one passes down through the best part of France—trees, meadows, old towns, villages and chateaux. Right down through the centre of France one goes, and then comes the Riviera. Splendid scenery here. At last



the train reached Modane. This place is a very important feature *en route* to Italy, as it is the frontier station, and here in war time it was necessary to change trains. In the days before the war one could go from Paris to Rome without a change, but now it was different. I got out at Modane, and was crowded, pushed and banged about on a super-crowded platform, in an endeavour to board the train which was to take me on to Italy.

The scenery had all changed now. Huge mountains on either side, and the line running along cuttings in the sides of the cliffs, over precarious looking bridges, or through long tunnels. This was Italy ! Everything looked different now, even the character of the houses ; I was mighty pleased to have got as far as this on the journey.

We went on through a host of wonderful mountain sights and arrived at Turin (I call it Torino at times, like the Italians ; sounds well, I think). Turin is a fine, bright-looking town. I didn't stop there, but went on to Milan, which brought me to the end of the first half of my journey.

Udine, on the Carso, was my destination,

but a pause in Milan was necessary for the purpose of picking up a train to that area. I wasn't sorry either. Milan is good enough for me for twenty-four hours. I got out of the train, and was nearly bitten in half by a swirling mass of hotel porters. Brigands in all sorts of uniforms, with the name of their hotel written in gold letters round a military hat. I got my back against the train and turned to face my attackers (effect : Horatius Cockles defending his suit-case). I didn't know which hotel would suit me best, so I got out of the difficulty by asking in French which hotel was nearest the station. A tall, dark, thin outlaw immediately sprang at me, and grabbed my baggage. He evidently was unquestionably the clutching hand belonging to the nearest hotel. The rest of the group looked menacingly at this man, and sullenly began to move off. Some, however, still skulked along close to me and my porter as if there might be a chance that either I should change my mind, or that the porter would drop my baggage, in which case they would spring in and seize it. One swarthy child of Milan followed me and my porter right across the

station square outside, keeping up a seductive barrage of Italian as to the absurdity of my going to any other hotel but his, and occasionally glancing venomously at my own porter with all the hate and vendetta of ages in his eyes. I suppose that after trains have come in and travellers have been dragged in to the various hotels, these men go to some lonely spot and fight it out. The mortality amongst foreign hotel porters must be terrible.

My hotel was quite a nice one, and the management could speak English. This, of course, is a blessing to one who doesn't know a word of Italian. A good mixture of French and English can get you to most places now-a-days though.

It was a beautiful evening when I arrived at Milan, and the whole scene was most pleasing. The feeling of the South was borne in upon me strongly. My mother has told me that I was born somewhere in India. For several years I lived there, and I fancy that the frying I had in the days of my infancy has never quite got out of my system. I love the sun, and warm, balmy breezes. One seems to be able to swell out

two sizes larger in that sort of a climate, and to look altogether more blandly and lazily on life.

I had dinner outside on a sort of terrace where all the tables were set, and remember being most interested in an Italian officer dining at a table a few feet away. The object of my interest was his marvellous dexterity with his macaroni, or rather spaghetti. I didn't dare to eat mine after watching him. He could dip a fork into about a hundredweight of this stuff in a bowl in front of him, and bring it out with a tight knot wound round the end. My fork had a lot of strings dangling from the prongs like a dozen anæmic worms. He could do it every time with deadly precision—practice, I suppose. Before going to Italy again I shall attend a college and take a spaghetti course, because one is always up against having to eat this stuff there. I wandered round Milan and went, of course, to see the Cathedral. I mingled with the crowds taking their evening strolls, sat about in various cafés and had a touch of the "lonely" nuisance again.

It's extraordinary how, when one is by

oneself in a crowded city, everyone else seems to have someone to be with or talk to, and all are apparently laughing in your face with the sheer joy of life. I liked Milan, but was anxious to get along up to the front and see the wonders of the war in the mountains.

The next morning I caught the train for Udine. From Milan to Udine takes the best part of a day. Udine is on the Carso, and at that period was very close to the front, which ran from Monfalcone on the Adriatic, through Goritzia up towards the mountains. You miss Venice by about twelve miles on your right, on the journey to Udine. I arrived that evening, and drove from the station in an open, tumble-down carriage to the headquarters of the British Mission. I drove sedately along behind what sounded like a three-legged horse, looking at the town as I passed. A very old place is Udine, full of odd corners and ancient monuments. The Romans spread themselves a good bit around here in days gone by. I found the British Mission headquarters and reported myself. There was a British general there who helped

me very much during my visit to the Italian front. He was head of the Mission, and as such was very much in touch with the Italian Army Command. I dined with the general that night, and he very kindly set about making arrangements for me to visit various parts of the front, beginning on the morrow. I was given a room in the building, which had been appropriated as the Mission's billets, and passed off into a pleasant sleep, dreaming mostly of spaghetti, hotel porters, generals and Alps.

CHAPTER XXVII

ARRIVAL ON CARSO—BERSAGLIERI—A HEATED WAR
—TRANQUIL UDINE

It wasn't long before I started my examination of the Italian front. The next morning the general very kindly arranged for me to go down in a car to see life on the Carso. He had fixed it all up with the Italian authorities, and I was free to go right up to the front towards Trieste. We set off in an English car, and made for some spot with a name something like sarsaparilla, in order to see a famous regiment of Bersaglieri who were then in trenches south of Goritzia. Any liking I had about warmth and sunshine was fully gratified here. It was scorching hot. The roads were white with burning dust, the trees simply frizzling in the summer sun. To touch the leather upholstery or the metal sides of the car was nearly impossible. The heat was immense. Fighting battles in this weather must be a "poor line," I thought.

And now was to come my first view of the Italian army in the field. I conjured up

ideas, founded mostly on coloured pictures I had seen of the famous Bersaglieri with their plumed hats and gallant charges across



open country, shouting soul-stirring phrases as they pushed heroically for ever onward, the flag of Italy waving proudly in the breeze. I arrived on the Carso and found, apparently,

a group of organ-grinders playing cards under a tree, all very swarthy, healthy and happy. "These are Bersaglieri," said my officer guide. . . . You should never go by appearances. A Guards' parade outside Buckingham Palace is a very sorry indication of the same regiment in billets behind Ypres.

These Bersaglieri were resting, and even if they weren't, they did the battle business minus any of the highly-coloured heroism beloved of artists. Those wonderful plumed hats, where were they? Back in Milan or Rome, I suppose, in a wardrobe with camphor bags. There was a great mob of these men sitting about under shrubs and trees, in the blazing heat.

The trenches were a short way off, being held in shifts, as it were. There was no shelling—no rifle fire. A delightful calm Italian day with the sun shining down on the tranquillity of the Carso. This is the sort of war I like, much better than that noisy, dangerous running about water-logged ploughed fields I had been used to. Unfortunately, I found it had not always been like this. There had been some terrific scraps with the Austrians around this spot, and

I was shown how far these people had been driven back. The Bersaglieri, which are some of the finest troops in Europe, had, to put it plainly, "wiped the floor" with the Austrians around there, and had suffered very heavily in doing so.

I went all around that area and saw thousands of Italian soldiers, some resting, some in the trenches. They are a wonderfully swarthy, healthy crowd.

But what a different landscape to fight in from our front!

Instead of the sticky mass of sloppy sand-bags along the edge of a narrow canal which constitute the normal trench

on the Western front, these men had nothing but rocks and sand to deal with. The Carso has about two inches of soil over solid rock, so you



can imagine what making trenches is like. Moreover, when a shell lands on ground like this, the resulting explosion is greatly augmented by flying bits of rock.

The first thing that struck me about the Carso itself was, what on earth did anybody want to fight about it for? I would willingly give it away, if I owned it. It's a huge, barren, rocky desert, that's all.

The part I was now inspecting was just opposite Goritzia.

To the south lay Trieste, and it was possible to see from this place I was in, the mountainous difficulties lying between the Italians and the capture of that city. There is a nasty looking mountain called the Hermada which is right in the way of a march on Trieste.

The Italians had made wonderful progress prior to my visit, but were now sitting down a bit to consider what was the best way to snooker the Austrians who had fortified this Hermada with howitzers and barbed wire to an alarming degree.

A day doesn't go very far when one starts looking at a front. I spent the whole of this first day squinting about round this one



A MEMORY OF THE YSER.

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regiment, its trenches, and its billets, and in the wonderful Italian evening drove back to Udine. Those warm southern days breed wondrous evenings. There is a still, clear warmth under the glorious deep night blue ; the people are all sitting outside their houses, and everything is bathed in a sort of Venetian tranquillity. When I got back it was about six o'clock, and I went out for a prow around the town.

I have most pleasing memories of Udine ; so picturesque and so tranquil. Except for the fact that there were a good many assorted kinds of Italian soldiers strolling about, you wouldn't have known there was a war on. The architecture, too, was old-world and pleasing. A lot of Roman efforts still remained, and a goodly sprinkling of the Venetian period. What bold lads those Romans were ! I stood bashfully in the main square of the town looking at a group of rude statues, and dwelt upon the lack of Y.M.C.A's. and the absence of Mrs. Grundy in the days of Vespasian.

They are a happy, healthy crew these Italians, and I've half a mind to live in Udine when I retire.

I had dinner in some café or other, and sat out in the courtyard under the wonderful sky. A distant song, or perhaps a mandoline being played, were the only noises which broke on that calm evening air.

In this curious, unwarlike scene, full of all the beauty of this wonderful land, I couldn't help visioning my past career in the war. How little I thought as I went forth to the war, an impecunious, submerged second lieutenant, that one day I should see all the fronts, have dinners with the Great Ones and be sitting in the character of a "free lance" under the southern evening sky in old Udine. I even thought further back still;—back to the weird, dark abyss in my life when, as an electrical engineer earning two pounds ten shillings a week, I returned in a wood pulp carrying ship from Canada just in time to participate in this mighty conflict.

If someone had come to me whilst I sat on that ship with the cook who was peeling potatoes, and told me that one day I should be having dinner with the Duke of Milan in an old Italian garden near Venice, I should have told him to go to—well, never mind; anyway, I shouldn't have believed him.

It's a comic world, but there are times when the comedy is hard to see.

And yet these things have actually happened to me.

I wandered back to my billets late at night, and keenly awaited the next day.

I was to go to see Monfalcone which was the nearest point possible to Trieste, and there would be able to survey the whole of the battle line, which meant so much to Italy. I should also be able to get a distant view of Trieste which can be seen from Monfalcone. This, then, was my programme for the following day.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MONFALCONE—CAMOUFLAGED ROADS—A PEEP AT TRIESTE

THE car turned up in good time, and the officer guide and myself were driven off in the direction of Monfalcone. On the way we stopped at the interesting old village of Aquilia. This is the site of an old Roman town of the same name, and contains a wonderful old church dating from that period. Part of this church was once a Roman swimming-bath or something of the kind, and had an amazing mosaic floor. When I was there some antique employees of the church were endeavouring to restore this marvellous floor which had been broken and obscured in many parts. Restoring it mainly consisted of searching through endless piles of rubbish for the minute particles of mosaic, and piecing them together. Solving a jig-saw puzzle is child's play compared to this.

Outside the church, in a charming cypress-tree graveyard, one of the ancient walls had a large marble slab fixed to it, bearing a

short, inspired verse by Gabriel d'Annunzio, the famous Italian poet. A few minutes afterwards I saw the poet himself inside the church, looking round its ancient, inspiring relics.

We went on from here to Monfalcone. Monfalcone—what a mess it was in! Here was the same old war that I knew. Tangled masses of plaster, iron, and brick-work that once were houses. It is a typical Italian looking town, and before being demolished in this way must have been a pleasant spot to live in. Judging by the look of the camouflaged roads which we encountered on the way there, the Austrian artillery must have been a big nuisance. The town, of course, was entirely denuded of civilians, which fact was very apparent as we drove through its deserted streets.

We had to be careful, though, as at any moment a bother might break out and a lively shelling commence. The car was left at a good hidden spot where chances of its being hit were remote, and we got out to walk the rest of the time. We examined the town and I made sundry sketches and took a few photographs. Nothing but ruin and desolation everywhere.

Now for the docks; that was the "star turn" of Monfalcone, which boasts of quite



*Italy, and very
nice too*

a big shipping yard situated, of course, on the Adriatic. The docks are some way from the town, so we fished the car out again for this job. We drove down an elaborately camouflaged road. These are just ordinary roads, with a

screen constructed from a kind of rush matting fixed up on the side nearest the enemy.

The appearance of these roads from a distance is just like the rest of the country. Of course this doesn't prevent the enemy

from firing at such roads which they know exist, but it prevents deliberate aim at a definite object and therefore it would probably be a sheer waste of shells to fire on the off chance of hitting something. It's not a very nice sensation driving along these camouflaged roads, but there it is, and the danger is not really great.

We reached the outskirts of the docks, hid the car and walked on to them. We had now arrived at the nearest point for a view of Trieste.

It was a stifling hot day. A blazing sun shone out of a cloudless blue sky with true southern vigour. The ground had that trembling haze over it from the heat. We entered the ship-building sheds and the first thing that caught my eye was a bit of machinery stamped with the name of a famous English firm of shipbuilding engineers. I roamed about all over these yards. Several Austrian submarines, all rusty and derelict, in dry dock, caught my eye. The Austrians had shinned off out of Monfalcone very quickly, and had been obliged to leave these things behind them.

We were joined by an Italian officer or

two who knew all about this place. They led us further into the maze of silent, deserted dockyards. I listened to an unintelligible torrent of sound from one of these men who was talking to my officer guide. When interpreted I found it meant that there was a large, half-finished liner in the docks, inside which the Italians had made an observation post, and from which it was possible to get the best view of Trieste.

I was keen on this, so we all made for the ship.

It was a monster. A great wall of rusty iron plates seemed to spring out of the earth and tower upwards above our heads. We walked alongside this metallic mammoth, and arrived at a set of wooden steps which ran up its side. I followed the others up this stairway: temperature about 400 degrees I should think. It was a real scorching day—impossible to touch the iron side of the ship without burning your fingers. The ladder led us up on to some deck or other, and we proceeded along a dark corridor towards the sharp end of the boat, by which I mean the part furthest from the rudder.

The walk down this stifling corridor being over we arrived at a sort of wooden hut built up inside the ship, and turned into a telegraphist's and observer's office. The heat here was almost unbearable.

The sun was streaming down on this huge iron box of a ship, and inside there was not a breath of air. It was all I could do to evince an interest in Trieste. Someone handed me a pair of German binoculars, and I looked out through a narrow slot cut in the side of the ship. I saw Trieste. It was about as interesting as seeing Tunbridge Wells from Clapham on a clear day. However, I didn't want to dishearten the Italians in their quest, so I remarked that it was "very interesting." One could just see a lot of blue hills with a town of the Monfalcone order, only larger, at their base.

I turned away from the slot in the ship's side, and handed the binoculars to someone else to have a look. The close, oppressive heat was terrific. I had seen Trieste and that was enough for me. When everyone of the party had satisfied their gloating ambitions by looking at Trieste we returned from the ship to the car. No shelling

interrupted our movements. All was silent, hot, and rusty in that shipyard.

We bade farewell to the officers who had kindly shown us round, and then drove back towards Udine.

I knew the war in the plains fairly well by now, and subsequently had several experiences in the way of seeing more trenches and more troops. I went to all sorts of battalion headquarters and saw the Italian soldiers in every phase of their life on the plains.

By the time I had seen all this I felt I "knew" the war on the Carso. Goritzia, Monfalcone, Udine, Trieste: all this was a definite story to me. Now for what I was after most—the war in the mountains. I applied to the authorities for permission and extorted a promise that I should go there.

I waited in Udine for the day on which I should be permitted to start, and in the meantime, was invited to a famous dinner which I must really describe.

CHAPTER XXIX

AN INTERNATIONAL DINNER—OFF TO THE
MOUNTAINS—MY DUCAL GUIDE—A PRECIPITOUS
MOTOR DRIVE

UDINE was the Italian General Headquarters at this time; consequently, if any foreign powers had representatives with the Italians, they were located there. Well, the Italian army did suffer from foreign representatives, and whilst I was at Udine I found a nest of them consisting of English, French, Russian, Belgian, Roumanian, Serbian and Japanese. So you see the Italians were not hard up for encouragement from their Allies.

It was the custom once a week for a dinner to be given to this assembly, at a certain chateau in the town, and whilst in Udine I was honoured by being asked to join these functions. I went once, and that once I will describe.

I should have gone more often only, as I have hinted previously in this book, I prefer a "sausage and mash" in a pub round a corner to table-d'hôte at the Ritz. I hate

meals elaborated by means of marble pillars, sycophantic head waiters, and publicity.

This International dinner was a fearfully swell affair. It



"How do ye
like Italy
Bert?"

was held in a beautiful garden behind this old world chateau, and was really a most picturesque sight. An old Venetian chateau which possessed an equally old garden and a lawn, with a border of tall dark cypress trees surrounding it. On the lawn was a long dinner-table, and there, prior to dinner, the International guests assembled.

One by one the guests arrived, and what a sight! Each one in the full peace time uniform affected by his particular Army. I

had, of course, to turn up in khaki which had a miserably sombre effect in the midst of so much grandeur. By dinner time the lawn was a mass of different coloured cloth and gold braid. A circus procession was tawdry compared to this.

Again, another axiom which experience has taught me :

“ The gaudiness of uniform is inversely proportional to the size and importance of the Power.”

A haughty stiffness filled the air, partly due to the starch in these fancy dresses, and partly to the different languages. In time we all folded at the middle, and sat down to dinner. I had an Italian officer on my right, a Roumanian general on my left, a Cossack officer and a Serbian A.D.C. opposite. I can only talk English properly, with merely a diabolical attempt at French, so you can imagine that the soup went down amidst almost complete silence. As I gazed at the Cossack's shaved head and grey uniform, I made a mental note “Sausage and mash at a café in Udine, for you, me lad, in the future.”

The dinner progressed with all the polite

stiffness inseparable from these orgies, but the scene was certainly romantic and picturesque. A wonderful setting sun behind the cypress trees, the dark olive-green lawn and these mighty ones in their fancy dresses. I again thought of that mud hole in the trench near Messines and realized what a long way I had come.

All these Allied representatives dispersed each day to various offices and represented their different countries, which—to boil it down—I feel sure means being a “damn nuisance” to the Italian Army Headquarters, who of course had to diplomatically please them, and at the same time get on with the war.

Am I right, Cadorna?

After this one visit to see the “Sea lions fed” I decided that I would not be lured into that again. I in my “customary suit of solemn” khaki was a damper on this wonderful, kaleidoscopic colour-display. Besides, dinner in a café in Udine, with a Gold Flake and coffee to follow, was much more in my line.

I now waited for the day on which I was to go off to the mountains.

One morning I heard all about it. I was to go with the Duke of Milan who was at the Italian Army Headquarters. We were to start in a car, and stay some days with the Alpine regiments who were in the line up in the Dolomite Alps.

This was splendid. The Duke was an exceedingly nice companion who talked English, and the Dolomites were what I particularly wanted to see.

The day arrived, and we set off. We whirled along over the dusty flat roads, heading for the mountains. In the distance one could see the mighty forms of the red-coloured Dolomites towering high above, with their snow-capped peaks. With my faculty for seeing the ridiculous in the sublime I could not help thinking that they looked like a row of gigantic strawberry ices.

We got nearer and nearer to the mountain region and at last began to leave the baking-hot plains and mount the foot-hills which led to the mountains. We drove along the narrow, winding roads, past innumerable beautiful villages, now and again passing over a bridge and a raging torrent of emerald

coloured water. The atmosphere was, needless to say, as clear as crystal, and as we gained in height the great heat diminished. Occasionally we would pass a stream of motor lorries on their way to or from some part of the battle line, and now and again we would nearly collide with an Italian staff car which was doing its usual ninety miles an hour round impossible corners.

Higher and higher we went; always spiralling upwards along the mountain roads. It seemed an endless drive. One seems to have to do so much road work to get such a little distance. Always going round and round the same mountain to get to a point you have seen half an hour before.

We were making for Belluno because from there we would make a second day's journey to see the Alpini. Belluno was a good convenient spot to make a start from for the last lap of the business, and moreover contained a lot of military headquarter officials with power to give permission for various visits. We scaled a crowd of mountains in that car, and crashed along through many a lonely forest glade.

The water in the radiator started to boil



"THERE'S 'EAPS OF ICE 'ROUND 'ERE, BILL. ALL WE WANTS IS A DROP
OF VANILLA."

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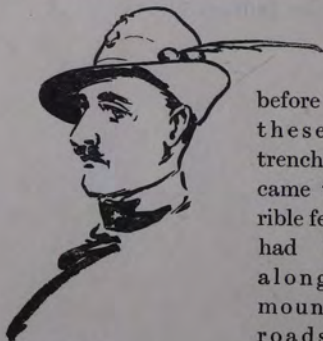
in the middle of one mountainous forest, and we had to explain radiators and their need for water to two aboriginal girls who were living in a wood-cutter's hut hard by. They fetched us some water, and were suitably rewarded by the Duke.

The same evening we started our spiral descent down towards Belluno which lies in a valley in the mountains. About six o'clock we crossed the bridge into the town, and glided up to the courtyard of an hotel, just off the main square. So ended the first stage in the journey.

CHAPTER XXX

MORE MOUNTAINS—ORDEAL BY MULE—THE ALPINI

ANOTHER night, in another hotel, and then came the visit to the Alpini. In the morning we went round to see some potentate or other, who lurked in the Town Hall which had been taken over by the military authorities. He gave us some permission to do something which I did not catch, and off we started. It was necessary to do about



twenty
miles in
the car

before we got near these mountain trenches, and then came the most terrible feat of all. We had been driving along the usual mountain spiral roads, rushing

through forests, over cascades on thin, flimsy-looking bridges, past vast waterfalls, half of which were usually frozen and

covered with snow. At length we came to a halt. I wasn't surprised, as the road had ended, and a colossal mountain stuck up on either side. "Are we there?" I asked. "Not quite," replied someone, and with that I became aware of a group of mules being led towards us. I hoped they would pass, but no. "What do we do now?" I asked again.

The Duke interpreted the cataract of conversation he had been listening to. "We now have to do about an hour and a half's ride on these mules," he said. He seemed to relish this idea. Dukes are prone to riding, I have noticed—I am not. I would have given a large sum of money to have seen a glacier or something slide down the hill and obliterate those mules.

We all got out of the car, and the Duke and I, plus a few assorted officers who were to act as guides, made for the mules. I clambered up the side of my mount, and was relieved to notice that an Alpini soldier was going to lead the beast with a rope. The Duke and the others rode these mules as if they liked nothing better. I sat like a pair of compasses on mine.

We started off. First of all over a perilous wooden bridge, and then off up a precarious slope at an angle of forty-five degrees.



Oh! that ride! For one hour and a half I was busily engaged trying to avoid sliding off over the mule's tail. That road was a disgrace, if you could call it a road. It

was a narrow, twisting track, winding through a pine forest at an almost impossible angle.

Many times on that journey I felt it was a toss up as to whether my mule and I would go sliding all the way back to the bottom of the hill. The path was made of large, rough stones with occasional wood struts across it, and apparently the object of the designers had been to take one round the most frightful hair-raising corners and nerve-shattering ravines. I confess that, when crossing a mighty chasm full of a raging mountain torrent on a three-foot bridge, I was in a funk. These mules were amazing. They seemed to think nothing of crossing one of these elementary bridges with a half-melted glacier underneath, on three legs, with the other over the side.

They ought to ride monkeys, not mules, in these places. "An hour and a half of this!" I thought, as I rode along. My Alpini guide was ahead, assisting the mule and me, by means of a long rope fixed somewhere near the mule's nose (I couldn't see where). I wished he wouldn't do this, as it forced a pace on me which was very uncomfortable,

especially about the seat of the trousers. I didn't like to speak about it though, as I hate hurting people's feelings, even an Alpini's.

It seemed to last for hours, that trip. A never-ending forest and a path that seemed to have been designed to include everything in the way of excitement.

At last, when my stamina and nerve were at the lowest ebb, I became aware of the fact that there was humanity about. This phenomenon manifested itself by means of sundry swarthy faces which peeped at one from behind trees. The woods became alive with curious dark brown eyes, glaring out of the undergrowth. These faces belonged to the Alpini, whose forest home we had now reached. The sight of an English officer awakened them a bit. The first they had ever seen, and a poor specimen at that.

I must have looked like a sort of mascot officer on a toy mule; of the sort you might see at Gamage's. I did my best to throw an expression of "I-love-hunting-and-am-a-devil-for-riding" into my face, but I fear I failed. These mountaineers saw through it. At last our cavalcade came to a welcome

halt. The Duke, who had enjoyed the ride, I think, dismounted, and I removed my stiffened, battered body to the ground. The mules were dragged off to some cavern, but were unfortunately fostered for our return. We now had to do the rest of the



journey on foot. We scaled a precipice, and at last reached what we were looking for: the forest mountain home of the Alpini.

We saw the colonel of this regiment, and he showed us all around. I still felt I was riding the mule. The Duke, on the other hand, was walking about as if nothing had

happened. I looked with pain at the various means of defence and offence employed by these wonderful mountaineers. (Oh, that mule!) I was shown ridiculous trenches which ran up to the side of an almost perpendicular mountain of solid rock. In some cases I observed that the Austrians and Italians shared a mountain. Appalling discomfort and no result. The only offensive that occurred in these volcanic regions was occasionally when an Italian would unexpectedly meet an Austrian round a boulder, and would at once engage in mortal combat, ending probably by having a dagger—or possibly a bayonet stuck in each, and both rolling down six thousand yards of mountain, there to be marked hereafter by two neat, but small wooden crosses. Such is national antagonism. After an exhausting few hours looking at these wonders we were piloted back to lunch.

These Alpini saw other human beings about once a year, so when I was dragged in to lunch they were determined to make the best of it. Being a British officer, too, the interest was intense.

The Ancient Mariner, stopping one of

three, was nothing to this. They held me in conversation for an incredible period. I thought that lunch would never end. From about half-past twelve till four o'clock it lasted, and during that time I had to describe what was going on on other fronts, and war



news generally. Poor devils, they were stuck away up in these impossible mountains without any chance of coming into the world ; I suppose some day, years hence, they will come back to the world and find that the war's over—they will never hear about it otherwise.

I spent many days after this going to see various forms of mountain fighting, and I wandered through many miles of Alpine scenery, spent hours in many a still mountain forest glade, and pondered on this distant, obscure warfare which was being relentlessly pursued.

I saw all the celebrated mountains which had been captured, and had many a meal with various mountain detachments. Night and silence midst those vast mountains was a wondrous thing—very depressing to me somehow. The futility of it all seemed to hit me hard. I remember, near Monte Piave, coming to some few isolated wooden crosses, marking a few graves on the icy shadows of the mighty mountain, and I couldn't help evolving a small verse as I looked at the scene, and have since made a large painting of the theme :

Here, amidst the frozen Dolomites,
A battered cross—some mountain flowers
—a breeze ;
A hero of a hundred Alpine fights ;
One hears his story from the whispering
trees.

I left the mountains one fine morning and returned to Udine. My time was up now on the Italian front. I had seen many things and had absorbed the many wonderful details in connection with the peculiar war which it was necessary for Italy to cope with. The main feature which struck me most forcibly was their great engineering ability. Their rapid rebuilding on devastated areas, their great wire rope transport schemes in the mountains, etc., etc. I left the Italian front, taking my hat off deep and low to their ability.

Before leaving Italy I asked permission to visit Rome *en route*—I was very keen to do this. As I was so near, I was most anxious to have a day amidst the historic wonders of Rome. I was readily given leave, so off I started, and left Treviso in a Pullman-car seat for the ancient city on the Tiber. After Rome, I was to return to England to turn the mass of impressions and detail I had obtained into a set of pictures of life on the Italian front. I determined to work a bit in Rome, and then return, *via* Paris, to London to complete the job. I arrived in Rome.

CHAPTER XXXI

ROME—RETURN TO LONDON—"THE BETTER 'OLE"
—A REQUEST FROM AMERICA

WHAT a charming spot Rome is! Here one was clean out of the war. Hotels, cafés, theatres, bright sunny days, with people all amusing themselves. I had only two days in Rome, but I got busy in that time. I bribed a motor merchant to take me everywhere worth seeing; I took his car for a morning and went off to the Appian Way. Saw the baths of Caracalla and the Coliseum. I should have liked a week in Rome to let all these wonders soak in. A good look round St. Peter's and the Vatican completed my sightseeing. I stayed at the Grand Hotel near the station, and found it to be the usual sort of pomp, glitter and marble business, which apparently is inseparable from grandeur in all countries.

At this date, besides my pictures, which had been appearing regularly every week, I had completed another effort with which most people are now familiar, namely the play, *The Better 'Ole*.

It had been finished just prior to my departure for Italy, and the theatre management had been getting on with the production. I picked up papers in Rome which announced its forthcoming appearance in London. Being particularly anxious to be back in time to look over the final rehearsals and details I was not sorry that the Italian tour had ended at such an opportune moment. I was not going to stay long in Rome, but hurry along back, so that whilst getting on with my finished sketches, I could also now and again go to superintend rehearsals at the theatre.

After the usual journey—Rome, Paris, London—I settled down to work hard on all the subject matter I had culled in Italy. Each day, and all day, I have worked for months on end at the real hard labour which drawing cartoons entails. I started on my Italian drawings, and found time in the evenings to go to rehearsals of that show, *The Better 'Ole*. Now that it is an accomplished fact, I want you to exonerate me from any idea of ego or advertisement whilst I tell you the result of this show.

It played in London for over a year,

twice daily. Five touring companies toured and are touring as I write, and have played in the same towns over and over again. It is an equal success in America, Canada and Australia, whilst amongst its minor activities it has toured India. Yet on the night before the first production, I would willingly have accepted a small fee to have the whole show cancelled.

I felt that I could place little or no reliance on others sufficiently understanding to interpret the real meaning of "Old Bill," "Bert" and "Alf"—for they are the embodiment of my idea of a great and curious phenomenon: the psychological temperament of the British race. Added to which there was the peculiar atmosphere and romance which this unique war has possessed.

However, the play started, and has had the results above mentioned, much to the surprise of the management and sundry other individuals whose ideas, of necessity, largely rotate round girls, tights and rag music.

The Better 'Ole having been fairly launched on its run, I worked all day and every day on my drawings for the War Office, which

subsequently went to papers all over the world.

Now came another big and interesting move for me. I was suddenly informed that the American Propaganda Department had applied to know whether it was possible for me to go to visit and live with the American army in the field, "there to find and create similar characters to "Bill," "Bert," and "Alf." So said the cable.

This was great news. I had been with the British, French and Italian armies, and now was to go to the last joined army of all—the American.

America was just beginning to send her first troops to France, and I was to be with them on their initial appearance.

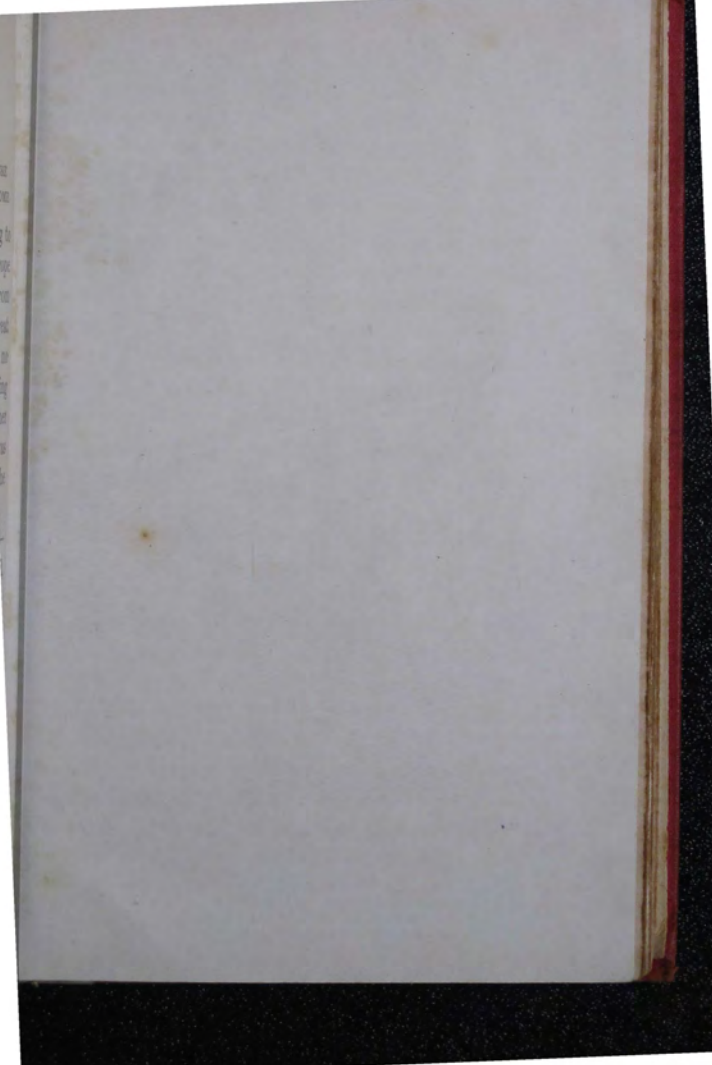
I received my orders and instructions, and forthwith set off to join the ever-rising tide of the American army, and to see life way out in Alsace-Lorraine. I little thought that this was to be my last front in the war; but after the long session I spent out round this area, I left it to hear of the armistice before my return again to France. I left for the American front full of enthusiasm, vigour and curiosity.

CHAPTER XXXII

START FOR AMERICAN FRONT—COMMON-SENSE
METHODS—NEUFCHATEAU—A CORDIAL WELCOME

I THINK, perhaps, I was keener on going to this front than any. This arrival in Europe of a vast army of our own kith and kin, from over three thousand miles away, was a great and wonderful event; and what was no small consideration in my case, I was going amongst soldiers who spoke my own mother tongue. Moreover, the American army was taking over the most romantic part of the whole French battle-line, Alsace-Lorraine.

All ways to the front run through Paris—at least, all fronts except the British, and, consequently, I found myself once more in the French capital, thus making the eleventh time I had crossed the Channel. Back at the old Gare du Nord, and a lonely night or two in Paris. I reported at the Headquarters of the American Intelligence Department in the Rue St. Anne, off the Avenue de l'Opera, and there received intelligent consideration and answers, which somehow one expects but does not always find in an Intelligence





AS FAR AS THEY CAN MAKE OUT WITH THE BINOCULARS, FROM MONTE
MACARONI ACROSS THE VALLEY, THE MAN MARKED "X" IS ALMOST
CERTAIN TO GET THE ITALIAN VICTORIA CROSS.

department. The American staff officers were most courteous, and without any loss of time explained how I was to get to my destination. Going to the American front was made the easiest thing in the world, if you were authorized to go, and your mission was genuine.

The American methods are direct and to the point. "Common sense" is turned on rapidly and clearly, and a decision

one way or the other arrived at without a month or two of "passed for necessary action."

I left Paris for the railhead most suitable for my ultimate destination, which was



Gondricourt, and made very much the same journey that I had taken before, when going to Verdun. We passed through Bar-le-duc, and trickled along a desolate line of rails until we reached the dull-looking, war-worn town known as Gondricourt. This was an American railhead, and this was my first sight of the American army. There were a few of these children of the West hanging about the station, and I could feel at once the type of soldier they were. My first big impression of America in our European war, and an impression I still retain, is : that they seemed to jump in at the point which it had taken us four years to get to. Within a week of landing they looked as if they had been in the war since 1914. They wallowed off into the mud, misery and destruction, without any amateurish-looking deportment.

The men at the station were probably waiting around for *the arrival of military stores, or something of that sort, whilst, of course, the collection comprised one or two military police, which you find anywhere. All fine, healthy-looking men, a hint of what I was to see later.

A car was waiting for me at the station, and

in I got, with my baggage. We drove off towards Neufchateau, which was at that time the headquarters of one of the first American divisions to arrive in France. The chauffeur had been told where to take me, so I lay back behind my suit-case and half under a rug and looked out at the scenery.

A very grey, bleak country, undulating and desolate. Now and again we would flash through a muddy, dilapidated village, frightening a lot of hens, causing a pig or two to stare, or some man or woman to pause in his or her work to gaze at us. We had several miles of this sort of thing to do, but finally we topped a rise and began a descent on a winding road into Neufchateau. Everywhere now were the signs of the American army. Rows of motor lorries on the road, groups of soldiers, men working on the telegraph and telephone lines at the side, men standing around their billets, a general busy confusion, getting thicker and thicker as we approached the town. We reached the main street and reduced our speed as we wended our way through the mass of soldiers moving about in the narrow, old-world street. Here I was now right amongst the Americans. First

impressions : big, strong, healthy, cheerful, with all the effective cowboy looks, strap of hat behind their heads, and the familiar large felt hat.

I felt at once, "I shall be all right here." Driving down the main street we at length



turned up a still narrower lane, and reached a market-square with the inevitable statue in the middle. Turning out of this square we descended a hill and came at last to an hotel. Of course, the word "hotel" is absurd ; but the proprietor's feelings might

possibly be hurt if I described it as anything else.

A room had been booked for me here. My bags were dragged in, and I went to this room. It was only one stage better than the hotel at Coxyde, but had the advantage of not being shelled, or living in fear of a shelling. You can have no idea how much nicer a hotel is when there is no prospect of a few "five-point nines" coming through the roof during your stay.

My bedroom was a plain, uncarpeted room, no fire-place, and a plain, yellow wood bed. A candle furnished the only illumination. I sat on the bed and surveyed the situation, after which I unpacked and dug myself into the room as much as possible. After repeated imprecations down the staircase, a young, but portly, Alsatian girl brought up some hot water and placed it in the enamel tin basin. Whilst I was having a wash and brush-up, there was a knock at the door, and on opening it I found an officer from the Press Censor's office, who gave me a message from the Divisional general. The general had very kindly asked me to dine with him that night. I was very tired, but

still, of course, I decided at once to accept this hospitality, and consequently prepared myself to go. The officer told me how to get to the Headquarters, and by dinner time I reached the place. The general was most cordial and hospitable. I have seldom met a nicer man, and several times after this I had the privilege of being taken by him round the sights in his area. He, of course, had a group of staff officers around him, and they were in every way the most friendly group I have ever met. They gave me permission to do everything I liked in the divisional area. The general talked a lot about my pictures. He had a collection of them all, and was most interested in my war wanderings and the adventures I had met with. He was only just recovering from an attack of pneumonia, and this worried him considerably, as it prevented him from being as active as he wished. Altogether a most kindly and genial headquarters; I wish all were like this one.

I explained exactly what I had to do, and how I liked to do it. They did everything in their power to assist. The general told one of his A.D.C.'s to go with me next day,

and to show me as far as possible over the various component parts of his divisional area. Late that night I left the headquarters and wended my way back to my old hotel. I mounted the creaky stairs, entered my bleak, cold room, and crept into bed.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A PRIMITIVE "HOTEL"—YANKS IN TRAINING—
VISIT TO MARINE H.Q.—KEENNESS AND EFFICIENCY

THE weakest point in that outrageous hotel was, I found, the question of breakfast. I asked for breakfast; I talked about breakfast; I intimated that I was perfectly willing to pay for breakfast—but I couldn't ever get any. Whilst living there I had to be up early and off on some expedition or other in the cold mornings, and I never could start the day right owing to this defect in the management. The hotel was a French one, and was not patronized by the Americans, who lived in billets and arranged for their own breakfasts. For several days I made repeated attempts to encourage the management into some effort towards a breakfast, but no—it was useless. The best that happened was that I had a cup of atrocious coffee on a damp, marble-topped table, with a roll of unbreakable bread about two feet long. The room was a saloon bar, the time usually about seven a.m. Opposite me sometimes sat the manager in shirt sleeves

and carpet slippers, eating an enormous slab of repellent cheese, and washing it down by drinking a quantity of red wine. This sight alone, at seven a.m., is unnerving.

Later, I bought some biscuits and a tin of jam in order to deaden the taste of the coffee.

My first views of the American army were made in the vicinity of Neufchateau, in this divisional area. A great quantity of training was, of course, on at this time, and everywhere one could see strenuous work and enthusiasm. One felt and saw at once that these people had not come over from so far in any mood of a light and breezy expedition. There was business and determination in the air, and what was more, that which ultimately meant the crushing of Germany—I mean the "big outlook" which you could see the American General Staff was taking. They realized that the war was going to be a big job. Everywhere were signs that the work was not going to be underdone. If need be, Germany was to be swamped by the might of America. This early, clear vision, and its resulting big, relentless, effort, was as instrumental as anything in starting

the demoralization of the enemy, which ultimately led to his downfall.

I went to a certain bayonet exercise school. Here an English sergeant was giving instruction to the American soldiers. He was a gymnastic sergeant and a "Non. Com." in the old "regulars," and I don't suppose a finer instructor could have been found anywhere. The Americans all appreciated his value, and he appreciated their rising ability.

It was a vigorous school, that. Bayonet charges over fields and trenches, rifle ranges, and all the arts necessary to efficient Prussian puncturing.

Near this place I saw huge hospital arrangements, some finished, others being constructed. I drove with the general in his car one day to some of the outlying camps, and saw the American army at work on all phases of war training. It was a busy live sector this Neufchateau.

In the evenings, when I got back, I used to prowl around the men's billets and cook-houses and watch their life there.

There was a French and American officers' club at Neufchateau, and a great place it

was, too. I had dinner here several times and met many different men.

Cocktails, tobacco smoke, talking and laughter—dinner—then more cocktails, tobacco, talk and laughter: a truly cheery spot. I felt that Americans way back in the homeland would have liked to know what a cheerful job their countrymen made of things. One can say with truth in this war that the nearer one was to the front the more cheerfulness one found around.

There were several war correspondents in this area, representing several different papers in the States, and I had the pleasure of meeting some of them. They, too, like myself, had "hotels" as their temporary homes.

On a certain day it happened that one or two of them were going over to stay at a place about twenty-five miles away, in order to live with the Marines for a bit. They asked me whether I would like to come. "Rather!" I replied enthusiastically. So a morning was fixed for our departure. A large car stood outside one of the "hotels" at about seven in the morning; we all got in, and started off. I have had much motor-

ing to do during my war life, and have known what it is to be motored alongside a precipice on a four-foot road, over a yawning chasm on an amateur bridge, etc., but heaven preserve me from an American war-time chauffeur again. He *reduces* his speed to about eighty miles an hour whilst passing through towns and villages, but in the country, when he doesn't know



the roads, that's when he goes "all out." I arrived at the Marine area in what you might have taken to be the winning car in a Cup Race; tears were pouring out of my

eyes, and frozen stiff on my cheeks.

The Marines are the star troops of the American army, and are simply splendid; their countrymen may well be proud of them.

We went to a Battalion colonel's house and found him in. I have seen a good many colonels in my time, but never a better from a military point of view than this one. He had, as a regular soldier, seen service in all parts of the world, and subsequently told me many interesting adventures of his campaigns. With him were several regimental officers who all lived in quite a nice little house in the village. The Marines were billeted all around, and also occupied several wooden huts.

We had a most hospitable reception, and I knew at once that this area was going to be of great use to me in my job. I went about amongst the lines, making rough notes, and taking photographs.

Here was a typical sample of the American army dumped down in this strange land to take part in a most peculiar and mighty war. And a jolly good job they meant to make of it. The housing, feeding and general upkeep of the American soldier is excellent, and the health and strength of the Marines I saw was perfect.

We all had lunch in the little house, and afterwards the colonel took myself and a

couple of the war correspondents for a walk around his area. The discipline he maintained was that of a battleship. He called out a few men here and there and ordered certain things to be done to show us details of their routine. He ordered out a squad of men to do some bayonet work and turned a strict, acid criticism on the performance. Everywhere the whole of his command worked with alacrity and smartness. Now and again he caught a malefactor, and in a few warm phrases made him think that perhaps there was a "better 'ole" elsewhere than that particular spot at that particular moment. The Marines are comparable to our Guards, and one cannot say more than that.

I got a wealth of material on this visit. I made drawings from life of several of the soldiers, and listened to stories of Cuba and Mexico. I went into one billet, and after I had been talking for some time to those around me, one man asked me whether I had ever met Bairnsfather, "the man who draws the pictures." This was rather embarrassing. I said I had known Bairnsfather for about thirty years, in fact that

I myself was Bairnsfather. This caused great merriment to those in the place, and bashful confusion to my questioner.

I had tea up at the chateau where the Marine Brigadier General lives, and one day attended a tea party given by the French owner of the chateau and his wife. They were very nice people, and made very light of the evil times they and their estate had fallen on. I found all my picture stuff well known to them, as Madame had kept on buying it at Brentanos whenever she went to Paris.

Finding that I am known in advance before I arrive at a place is always a great relief to me, as I hate explaining. I have been very fortunate in this respect. The first general I met up in the Italian Alps immediately produced my book *Bullets and Billets*, and told me he had got it in Rome.

The conversation amongst the Marines at this time almost entirely consisted of the theme "when are we going to be allowed to go to the trenches and begin?"

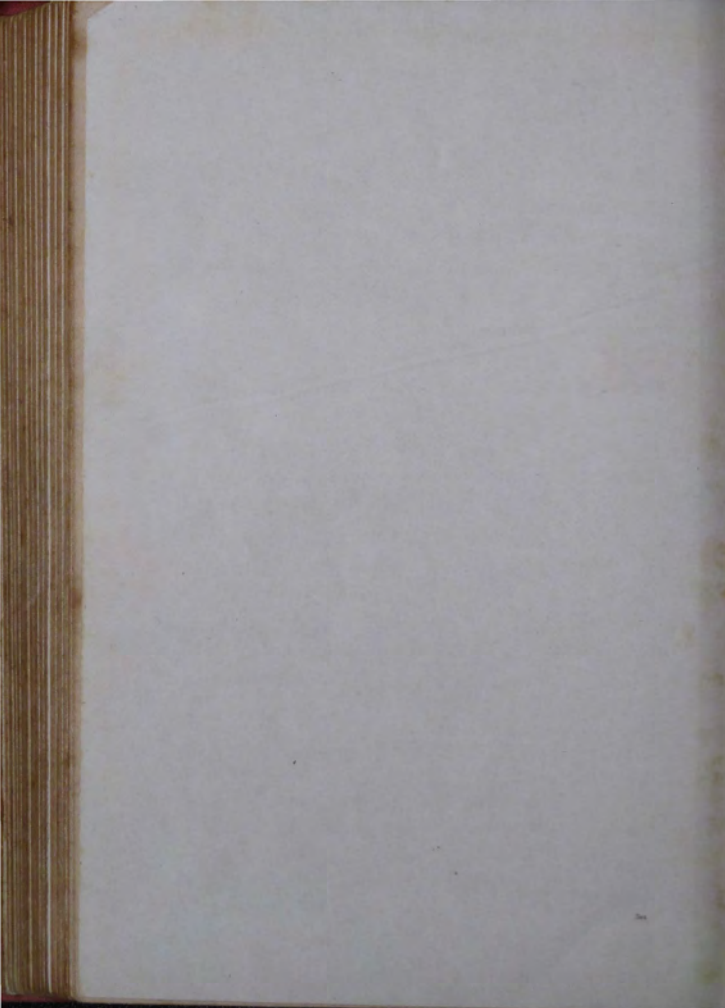
The keenness was terrific. No better news could have come to them than that a big

battle called for their immediate attendance. Poor chaps ; they got their wish before long, when they performed their splendid achievement at St. Mihiel, and took that long-enduring salient from the Boches.



"Chateau Thierry"

Prince
Dainoffather



CHAPTER XXXIV

VISITS TO SHELLED AREAS—SALVATION ARMY
CANTEEN—A BREWERY BILLET—AN OMEN

ONE cannot recount every episode which befalls in times so varied and full as these. My visits on all fronts have led to so many adventures and afterthoughts that the length of a book is barely space enough in which to fit them. But these chapters of mine are merely intended to pick out the salient features, and so I will not enumerate a lot of little incidents which happened on this front, but go ahead with an account of a visit to quite another part of the American line. Afterwards I shall tell of my last billet in the war and how I saw in it a big omen which I correctly interpreted as foreshadowing an early termination to my war-wanderings.

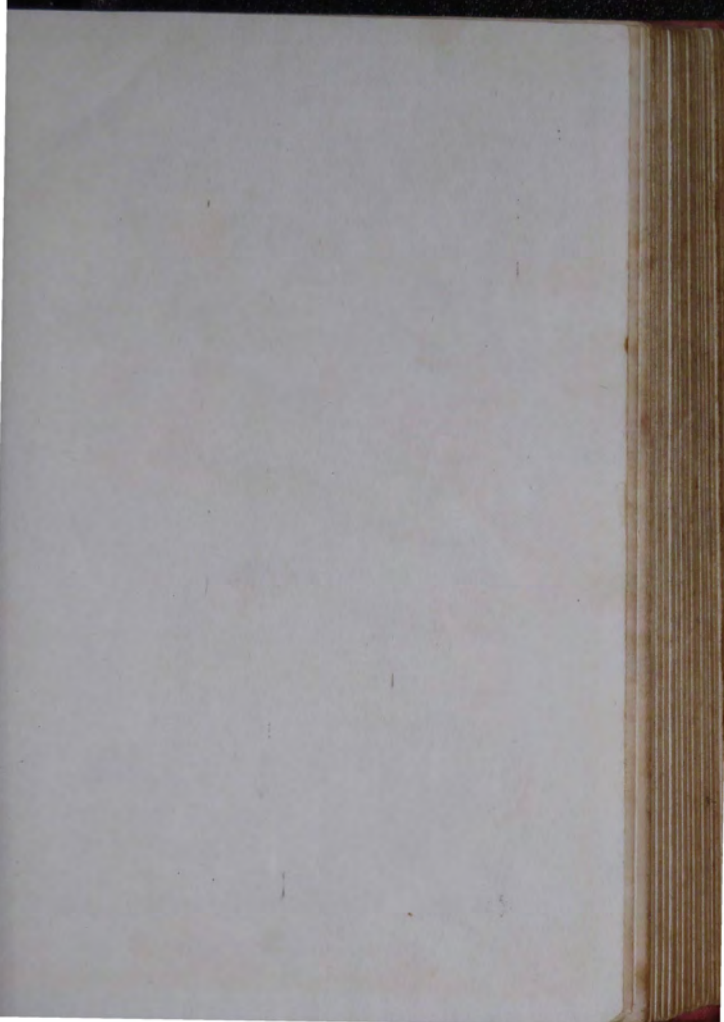
One day I saw a chance of visiting a sector in which reposed much artillery. I took the chance, and went with an officer in a car. We passed through many places of interest; towns whose names I had seen on maps, and which had always pricked

on the road. Out of the ensuing cloud of dust and smoke shot a motor-bicycle. A dispatch rider had just missed the explosion. He motored past us totally unconcerned, and went on his way. The colonel thought it inadvisable for us to move away until this riot had subsided, and I mentally conjured up a vision of what would happen if one of those shells hit our car, which it easily might. We retired to a sandbagged dugout—the colonel's headquarters—and had a smoke.

Whilst there, the Germans endeavoured to drop shells in as many unpleasant places as possible, but in about an hour the firing ceased. This was our opportunity, so we got out the car and motored to Beauvais, a little village not far away. Near here we begun to feel mighty hungry, so the allurements of a roadside Salvation Army canteen held us tightly. We halted at this canteen, which we found had been established in an old, shell-shattered barn. A large tarpaulin formed the roof, and here and there a hole in it let the bright daylight stream through down on the heads of a crowd of American "dough boys" who were rest-



THE MAN WHO CAME 3000 MILES.



ing from their labours. They were either eating, playing cards or lying around smoking, and it struck me as a weird scene. The tarpaulin and the patches of sunlight striking their cowboy hats and sunburnt faces gave a beautiful effect of light and shade. At the end of this room some girls were frying eggs, and making toast and coffee. It was such a human scene, and I could not help admiring the courage of these Salvation Army girls, living up at such a place, and working as they were doing.

What a terror an American soldier is for eggs! I saw a plate containing a dozen fried eggs, and found on inquiry that they were all for one man. Those hens around there must have been doing overtime for many months now.

I took away many pleasant recollections of that scene. The tired, strong soldiers in their muddy clothes and rough felt hats, the girls working away for their comfort, such as it could be, under such surroundings. We all had fried eggs and coffee and very good they were. Feeling much better after this scratch meal we started on our return



"SAY, WHO ARE THOSE GUYS OVER THERE?"

"Y.M.C.A. OFFICIALS."

"YES, I KNOW THAT, BUT I MEAN THOSE TWO BY THE TREE."

"SOLDIERS MAY BE."

to that ancient, dingy borough of Neuf-chateau.

Towards the end of my visit I again went to the Officers' Club. I turned to this as a welcome relief from the chilly horrors of my "hotel." On this occasion I was dining with Mr. Floyd Gibbons of the *Chicago Tribune*. As we left the place together late that night he asked me where I was staying. I confessed to my "hotel."

He, an open-hearted companion in my misfortune, suggested my coming for a couple of nights to his place. He had, it appeared, discovered a "peach" in the way of billets; an old brewery at the far end of the town. Of course no beer in it, but a few rooms, looked after by the wife of the manager, who was away fighting somewhere. We reached the place, and Gibbons took me up to the rooms he had got hold of. Very nice too, and a hundred per cent. advance on that "hotel." There were two chambers, one leading out of the other, with two beds in the inner one; I had one bed, he had the other, and next morning—bacon and eggs! My first decent breakfast since arrival!

Gibbons had to go off somewhere that day whilst I drew hard at sketches till the evening, when, following my usual custom, I went round seeing what I could. These prowls on my own in Nieuport, Ypres, Verdun, Udine, Neufchateau, etc., etc., have been perhaps the least painful parts of the war for me. That night, again, I went to the Club and there got a message that Gibbons would not be at dinner, but that he would go straight to the brewery billets as he would be back late. Somehow or other I got enveloped in a very convivial evening. It was my last prior to my return to England, and it's a curious thing how one's last evening at a place always seems to be the best. It was very late when I emerged into the darkness, and plodded off to the brewery. Feeling sure that Gibbons would probably be in bed and have left the door open, I went along whistling and revelling in the joys of my return towards England on the morrow. A good night's rest, I thought, then every hour will bring me nearer civilization and good old *Angleterre*.

I arrived at the brewery; all was dark and still, the huge and double doors of the

yard were shut. I had forgotten about these doors, but didn't regard them as an insurmountable barrier as I felt sure that there must be a small side door somewhere that was open. So I didn't worry, but looked casually for the side door. I looked, I groped, I scratched, and then the truth, in all its chilly horror, dawned on me. I was locked out! Locked out of a brewery at midnight! I stood, silent and still, under the moonlight, coupling other words beginning with B to the brewery. "What the —," "Why the —," etc., etc.

One doesn't expect to be locked out of a brewery under the moonlight at midnight; I had a sort of feeling that something romantic ought to happen. A lattice should open somewhere above one's head, and a pale, delicate hand drop a little scented note with a seal on it; a momentary light in her window, a rustle somewhere in the shadows, and Madeline is beside you.

But no! This was just a cold, dark brewery, hermetically sealed.

I began at last to be practical. I searched the brewery's outer defences for the least crack that would permit of my getting into

the yard, and thus reach the door of the house. Finding nothing that would help me, I decided to climb the wall. There was a dark, narrow passage along one side of the left-hand wall, dividing the brewery from a private house. I entered this passage and kicked against some projecting wood sheds which I hadn't seen. Looking upwards, I saw the tiled top of the yard wall, grim and clear against the moonlit sky.

I began to climb up these wooden out-houses. I got on the roof, but slipping, removed most of the skin from my left hand, and allowed a leg with a military top-boot on to crash through a window covered with wire netting. Then, what a tornado! The sheds were filled with rabbits and hens, which, till then, had presumably been paralysed by fright into silence. The top-boot broke the spell. A wild, scratching scamper, mixed with hysterical clucking of terrified hens, broke the still night air, and I lay dumbfounded on the tiled roof about two yards from the top of the brewery wall. A lattice did open now, and a gnarled and twisted brown hand gesticulated wildly in emphasizing a barrage of unintelligible French, which was hurled

out of the window. When the first furious blast was over I, sitting on my tiled roof, endeavoured to instil calm and understanding into this proud possessor of hens and rabbits. Short gaps in his speeches (when he was pausing for breath) enabled me to get quick, jerky little conversational stabs at him, and ultimately one of these got home. He at last understood that I was an officer who lived in the brewery, and had got locked out. His grizzled head disappeared, and presently I heard the door-key of his house turn and he came outside. He wasn't at all annoyed now, but opened the side door of the brewery yard. I thanked him and entered. At last! time, about half-past one. "I shall soon reach my bed, and to-morrow I have to get up early to drive off to Gondricourt, on my way back to England," I thought to myself.

I stood for a few moments outside the door of the house on some stone steps, moonlight and stillness flooding the large yard of the deserted brewery. An old waggon and an empty cask or two stood in the shadows of an open shed.

"Here I am," I thought, "in 1918, standing in a brewery in Alsace, far, far away from

the spot where I first started in the war." I thought of all the host of things that I had done and seen since those early days. As I thought on these things I suddenly remembered that *my very first billet in the war had been a brewery*: the old deserted brewery at Nieppe, near Armentières. "What an omen!" I thought; "my first billet a brewery, and now a brewery again." Did it mean that this was to be my last war billet? It did.

CHAPTER XXXV

EN ROUTE TO ENGLAND—AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

GIBBONS, with his own private key, got back and to bed sometime or other during that night, as I found him there on waking next morning. He was most amused at my adventure, and was sorry he had forgotten to tell me about the yard shutting after a certain hour. These episodes amuse me too—when they are over.

This was the day I left the American front. I had seen these Western soldiers, training, fighting, resting—I knew the story and I felt their part, and now had come the time for me to leave. I enjoyed my visits to the American army as I have enjoyed no others. I look upon those times as the best I have spent in the war. Both officers and men are a fine crowd. I thanked Gibbons for his kindness to me, and incidentally mentioned to him the omen of the night before. He smiled. Poor fellow! I'm sure he thought the war was going to last till the Fall of 1925.

I left old Neufchateau in an American Press car, and was whirled away to Gondricourt. *En route* one passes the birthplace of Jean d'Arc, at Domremy. It's a weird little place, and most gloomy. I don't wish to be disrespectful to the Maid of Orleans,

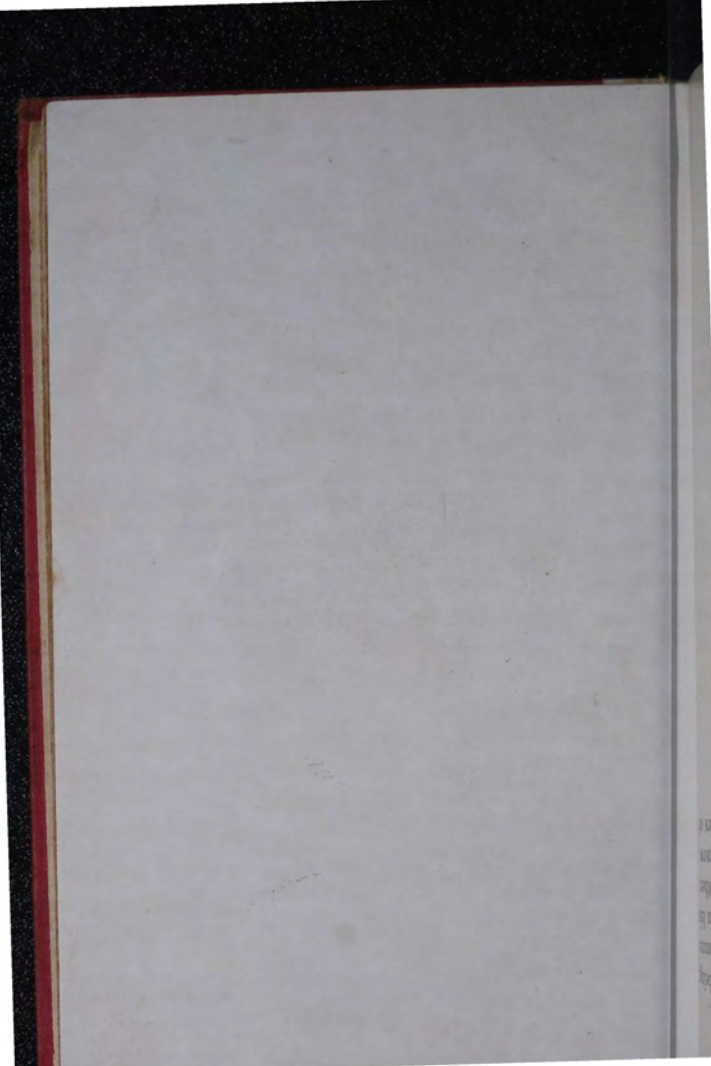


but I feel that had I been born there myself I should have been bothered with visions too. I reached Gondricourt, and of course had the usual hour's wait on a grey, bleak platform, on a grey, bleak day. At last the train of preposterous length rattled into the station, and I found a seat on it somehow. And now we left Gondricourt—farewell to the

American army and all the times I had had there. We passed through Chateau-Thierry, of course, and I little thought that so soon would be coming that terrific German onslaught which took this place, and that, in the ensuing battles, those chaps I had left so recently would be playing such a glorious part. The American resistance at Chateau-Thierry forms an episode that will live in golden letters on the pages of American history. I returned to Paris and went to the Rue St. Anne to thank the authorities for my visit and for all the facilities they had given me. The next day I left for England, via Boulogne, and had the good fortune to run into my young brother on the wharf there. He is one of those people of whom ladies say, "He has got on so well, you know." He is a Staff-Captain. You know what I mean; a red hat, two strawberry marks on the collar of his coat, highly nuggeted top-boots, spurs and shorts. He condescended to lean against a counter in the Hotel Folkestone and have a cocktail with me. We hadn't seen each other for ages, and he was going back to his corps up north, somewhere.

Beginning his life in the war by being nearly assassinated at Morval, in the Somme battle, he, bit by bit, has "risen high in his profession." He's a good lad, is my brother.

England! that's where I was going now. I went, and so begin the closing chapters of my war career.





THE SORT OF MAN I DISLIKE INTENSELY: WHO SAYS IN A LOW BARI-TONE VOICE THAT HE HAS HEARD FROM THE CABIN BOY THAT IT WAS JUST HERE THAT THE *INSOMNIA* WAS STRUCK AND WENT DOWN IN UNDER THREE MINUTES.

CHAPTER XXXVI

START FOR AMERICA—HELD UP—A DEVI-
COURSE—NEW YORK—LIBERTY LOAN—SPEECH-
MAKING—GO SICK—START FOR HOME

It has been a wonderful war this, full of surprises for everyone, and I somehow think the Germans have been more surprised than anybody. But, way down amongst the ordinary small mortals, who form the component parts of this monstrous catastrophe, I doubt whether anyone has been cast for a more varied or unexpected rôle than myself.

“It’s an ’ell of a time way back to 1914,” as Old Bill would say, and when I, fastidiously but firmly, stepped into that historical Flanders mud, I little thought that, ere my part was done in this conflict, I should number a visit to the United States of America amongst my other wanderings. And yet, here I am, penning these lines on a troopship crossing the Atlantic on my return from America. (“Penning these lines,” by the way, consists in searching for the paper with an oscillating fountain-pen, and occasionally stabbing it down to the bed; then waiting till the next wave comes.)

On a troopship in mid-Atlantic—that's where I start to write "The Eleventh and Last Voyage of Sinbad the Sailor," as it were; but it is in England where this last yarn begins.

When the startling and bewildering news that I was to go to the United States was squirted at me by the powers that be, I was in London, recently returned from the American front in France. Whilst with the Americans I had frequently wished that sometime or other I could go to the country they came from. To my mind, one's judgment of an army is quite incomplete unless one knows what sort of a thing is behind that army, what sort of a feeling those behind have for those they have sent to war, and what those behind are doing, saying and thinking. I little thought that this vague wish of mine would be so soon realized.

Anyway, events developed. One night I received my orders, and two days later off I started. Now, in these days of strife, going to America is, as everyone knows, a complicated and secretive sort of business. There is scarcely any doubt that the Germans do not like us. In fact, they have gone still

further, and what's more have been very nasty about this sailing to and from America. I shall, therefore, in accordance with what is best for all concerned, refrain from mentioning where I sailed from, the name of the ship I travelled in, and any other details which I feel might cause jubilation, information, or gratification in Cuxhaven, Berlin, or elsewhere.

I left London, swathed in the garments which we have all grown to associate with Captains in the British Army, with three boxes, complete with labels.

After a frantic and exhausting rush to a certain sea-port, in order to catch the boat which threatened to leave hourly, I then languished for a week in an hotel, as the sailing was cancelled on arrival. This, of course, was part of some cunning nautical plan, but I also learnt from sundry philosophers of the neighbourhood that there was some trouble about coal—either there was no coal, or too much coal, or nobody to poke the fire, or something, I don't quite know what (I'm no sailor); but, anyway, some bother about coal had something to do with the delay. The days of ships driven by means

of twisted elastic being now quite past, we all had to wait for this coal crisis to right itself. Hence that week in the hotel. I hate hotels as I have said before ; I am unmanned by an hotel. Vast palm-courts and marble dining-halls depress me. This hotel was one of those gigantic new structures with several revolving front doors and an array of haughty females safe behind mahogany counters, who book you a room "if there is one."

Time dragged along slowly in this gilded and stupendous edifice. I discovered a Turkish and swimming bath somewhere down below in a labyrinth of halls and passages, and spent most of my time down there. At last, after several false alarms, I finally got notice of the day and time I was ordered to embark.

It's extraordinary in hotels how news of your departure leaks out, and what a lot of interest it evokes. Strangers, in Field-Marshal's uniforms, enter your room with a skeleton key, and offer to remove your luggage, order you a taxi or take your clothes away to be brushed. The whole staff of housemaids who have your room in hand—from one anæmic-looking wench to about six

monarchs of physical culture—all visit your room. Two lift boys take you down, and in the hall your boxes are struggled for by a platoon of swarthy foreigners in red jackets, like goldfish after crumbs. Then, finally, on both sides of the rotating doors, you encounter an array of giants in costumes of blue with gold braid, which would put to shame the diplomatic uniform of even the smallest Balkan State.

You want to set aside about five pounds for this side of hotel life.

I drove off down to the docks, and was not long in getting on board.

What dread words those are for me—"Getting on board."

There can never have been a worse mariner than I.

If I catch sight of the funnels of a ship from the hotel windows, a mile away, I feel ill.

And as for the final walk up the gangway—I am from that moment onwards a strange and unearthly being.

There is something about the whole construction and personality of a ship that adversely permeates my whole system. I

have endured several thousand miles on various oceans, and never have I got any better. That peculiar smell which hits you as soon as you get on a ship, that compound of paint, oil and stuffiness is worse than a gas attack to me. Well, anyway, I drove off down to the docks on this occasion, and courageously went on board.

It was a big ship (the larger the better for my purpose), and was about the 25,000 tons sort of thing.

Two days were now spent slowly and laboriously extricating ourselves from the aftermath of the aforementioned coal crisis, and the complications of the local docks; then we pushed off.

The Teuton, in his agony of thwarted hate, had certainly succeeded in making the trans-Atlantic passage peculiar, if nothing else. The submarine was conquered, but considerable strange mannerisms were still retained. The most objectionable one, to my mind, was the fact that a voyage lasted twice as long as normally. This left me with the incessant worry as to whether we can ever reach the other side before it becomes "very rough indeed." I live from hour to hour on a ship.

I can strut truculently about the deck if the sea is as flat as a looking-glass, and can fight that nauseating gust which comes at you up a ventilator, but, if at all rough, I am down and out in a second.

I am thinking of leaving a large sum of money to establish a fund for promoting kindness to passengers amongst stewards. Oh! the anguish of a voyage, sometimes. This voyage of which I write was, fortunately, a smooth one: this was lucky as it lasted twice as long as it usually did.

After an eccentric and mysterious passage we at last knew that in a few hours we would come within sight of New York.

Everything from now onwards seemed to go rapidly. I stood on the front of the ship by some railings (I don't know what the part is called, but it is towards the sharp end of the boat) watching for the first vision of New York. At last! The mammoth Woolworth building reared its head, dim and pale yellow, over a confused mass of other buildings, lost in morning haze. The voyage was over. In a few hours we had passed up the Hudson and were safely secured in a dock. An hour or two more and we had emerged from the

suspicious and curt scrutiny of the Customs officials, and were, most of us, waiting for scarce taxis, surrounded with luggage and coloured porters. New York! New York in war-time, that's what I was to see. I was very familiar with the three other large capitals at war—London, Paris and Rome, and now, here was the headquarters of the newest additional nation to the determined company of Kaiser Crushers.

I drove along in a taxi, gorging on all the new sights.

After a life spent mostly amongst two and four storey buildings, I confess the Woolworth building strikes one more like a nightmare than anything else. It's a bit dwarfed in New York owing to the fact that there are so many other buildings which have run to seed. An ordinary three or four storied house in New York would probably get run over by a tram or something; people's attention is centred much higher. In the distance the effect of these monstrous buildings is peculiar. They are all so geometrically uninteresting. Giant cubes, or triangles, or parallelograms; one of these habitations near my hotel was of the shape of a safety-razor

blade on its end, enlarged millions of times—a giant wedge, as it were. My hotel was on Broadway. A mighty cube, entrance as usual by means of rotating glass doors. My rooms in the hotel luckily looked out on Broadway, and, as Broadway crosses Seventh Avenue just in front of the Hotel Astor, the view is more varied still. The chaotic whirlpool in front of the Hotel Astor is known as Times Square.

Well, here I was at last, fixed up in New York in the Hotel Astor. Now, before going on further with this narrative, I must first explain a few little points which may not have occurred to the reader and which, if they did, he might set down as egoism or swelled head, or self-advertisement on my part. But, in order to give a clear and concise picture of my time in America, it is necessary for me to tell you exactly how things went with me. He of the domed head and starched, wide collar—Shakespeare to wit—once said “What’s in a name?” and I now know he was joking. A name can nearly kill you, that’s my experience.

The news of my going to America had preceded me. I smelt a rat when I was

asked to sign a volume of *Fragments from France* on coming down the gangway from the ship, but after a few hours at the Hotel Astor, any hope that I had ever entertained of being in America quietly was completely dispelled. The first signs of the riot which was to come took the shape of the telephone ringing incessantly. Later on, I used to spring up with a start when the telephone stopped—the silence jarred on me so.

Then came the interviews. For several days I told a sequence of pleasant but perfect strangers what I thought of New York, what I thought of the war and what I thought of the American soldiers in the field in France. Occasionally this would vary with how I came to think of Old Bill, and what places and battles I had been to. All these interviewers were very pleasant and clever people. On reading the torrent of articles which followed in the papers afterwards, I was amazed at what practice can do for them, in the taking of interviews. One man, I remember, to whom I talked solidly for nearly three-quarters of an hour, took no notes down whatever, but he had bottled all I had said, and got most of it right too.

As I sat in that room at the Astor, giving word pictures of my travels and adventures, I couldn't help thinking much of those dim, distant days, when first I slushed around on those bleak Flanders fields, and of my first meeting with Old Bill.

A big jump! The trenches at Messines to the Astor, New York; but war is full of surprises.

My visit exactly coincided with the stupendous and all-absorbing movement—the raising of the Fourth Liberty Loan. I have seen war loans in various forms raised from time to time in England; I have seen our methods of doing so; I have read advertisements which pointed out in clear, dictatorial terms the small-minded stupidity of anyone who failed to be enticed by four and a half per cent. I have seen all our English methods at work; but for real, prodigious, enthusiastic effort New York, during the Loan drive, beats everything I've ever seen.

Soon after I arrived I had reason to be shot around the city in a car and, incidentally, passed down Fifth Avenue. My first impression was that the war was over. From one end to the other, on both sides of

the street, and festooned down the middle, hung every flag of every size and description. A vast canopy of coloured cloth in kaleidoscopic profusion seemed to block out the sky and the walls of the cube-like, monstrous buildings on either side of the Avenue.

Here and there, through the chinks of this mammoth Joseph's coat, minor activities were rioting with each other for predominance. Here, perhaps, you might see a patriot standing on a platform in front of a picture depicting the entry of Honduras into the war, who, by means of dramatic gestures and in unintelligible words, was holding the attention of a cosmopolitan, swaying crowd, the rear ranks of which ran the risk of heavy casualties from the passing crush of taxis, lorries, decorated fire engines and private cars.

There again you might see four frantic and sexless-looking women, framed in an avalanche of flags, candidly advertising the size of their mouths as they brandished Liberty Bond forms in the air and shouted exhortations, which nobody listened to. A few yards further on you ran into a procession. No amount of inquiry could tell you

what procession; you just had to use your judgment and experience, picked up by travel, to find out *what* procession it was. For instance, if you suddenly came upon a crashing band of cymbals, and over the sea of cars and people caught sight of a couple of hundred Mongolian faces wearing top-hats with the Stars and Stripes wound round them, you might safely conclude that this was Siam, Java, or Juan Fernandez showing unmistakably that she, too, was in favour of raising the loan; whilst a decorated furniture wagon or fire engine, with the words "Juan Fernandez has sent more than half a platoon to the Western Front" inscribed thereon, would evoke frenzied applause and show clearly that Juan Fernandez approved of the United States, and that there was no chance of a rupture for years to come.

Fifth Avenue at Loan time is really a mighty sight. I knew that even when peace was declared London would be unable or, shall I say, unwilling to equal it.

I saw these wondrous and enthusiastic sights soon after my arrival, just before all the papers had really got going with "Cartoonist Bairnsfather says" or "Bairnsfather



A PAGE FROM ONE OF MY SKETCH-BOOKS.

praises U.S. soldiers," etc., etc., but I was soon to be drawn into the Liberty Loan whirlpool. Everybody had something to do with it. Everywhere all effort was directed towards the big aim in view—"Six billion dollars," and very soon the Big Clutching Hand said, "I see by the papers that there dwelleth in an upper chamber at the Hotel called Astor, a cartoonist by name Bairnsfather. He must forthwith be extracted and used in our enterprise."

In two days' time letters, telephone messages and callers arriving in massed formation, left me no further doubt as to my future in New York. Out of the usual average of about twenty applications a day, I selected one or two meetings at which I would speak, and determined I would do my best, such as it was, in the cause of the Liberty Loan.

I would rather have a day in the trenches than make a speech. Once I get up on the platform or whatever it is, I feel better, but in that ten minutes before I go on, I tremble like a blancmange in an east wind. All the little things which I have previously decided to say, and which I have repeated to the bedroom looking-glass with enormous suc-

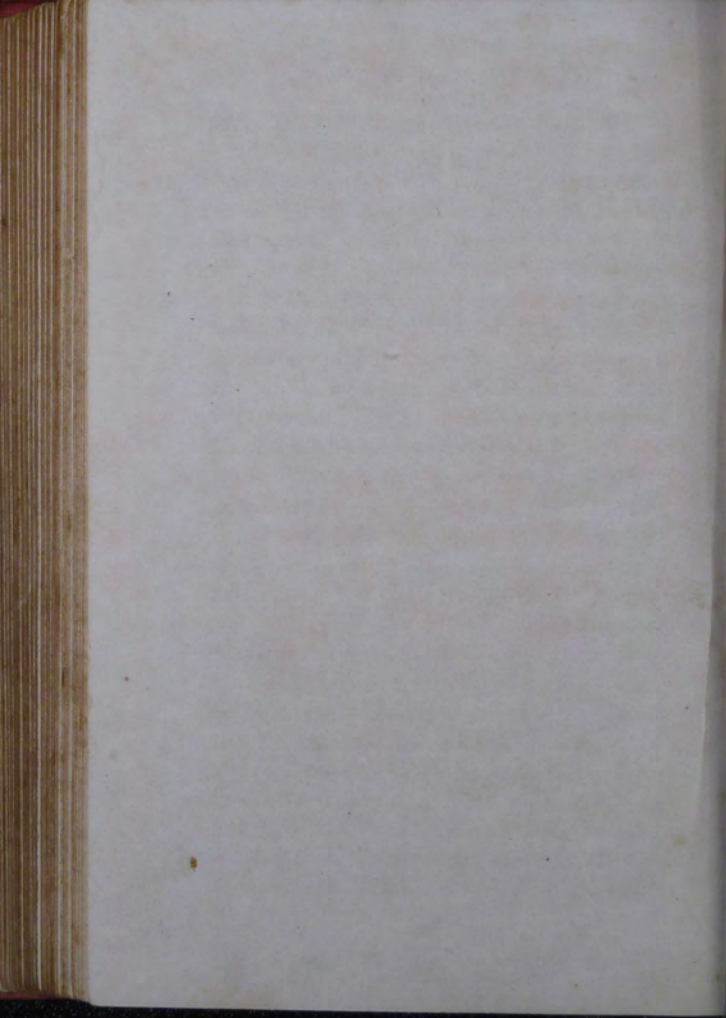
cess, are of course completely forgotten ; instead, some lukewarm phrases are exuded through trembling lips and chattering teeth, and finally, by some miraculous piece of luck, I squirt out a lucky, pithy and perhaps pertinent or humorous remark, which saves me from a catastrophe, then sit down in a bath of perspiration.

I made speeches in various parts of New York and the country round ; sometimes at theatres, sometimes on a platform in a hall, once on a platform at a railway station, and once in a church. Besides these horrible activities I held forth at innumerable dinners. The after-dinner speaking is the easiest brand, as you have nearly always got your hearers in a comatose state before you begin. I made one speech at a dinner where nothing but iced water was provided. I found it far harder to "get it over," as they say on the stage. I like an audience that has been built up on a good foundation of cocktails, table-d'hôte, good wine and cigars.

And now, whilst all this rattle and bang was going on in New York and America generally, came the creaking and cracking of the war. The papers daily recorded signs



IF THEY HAD ONLY ELECTRIFIED THE BARBED WIRE.



and portents that all was not well with the Germans and their Allies. Bulgaria had left the cast, then Turkey, then Austria!

The excitement in America was intense. On all sides people felt that our turn had come at last. The Germans, deserted by their dupes, were at last ringed round by the ever-increasing power of the Allies. The weight of America at the right moment was turning the scale. I read the papers with great eagerness. I searched every line for any indication of the end. The end of the war!! It hardly seemed possible that such a thing was near. The American public, I could see, couldn't fully grasp what a long business it had meant for us. The four years which Britain and France had endured were, for them, difficult to realize.

Whilst in New York I got ill. A serious trouble broke out in my left ear, and rapidly reduced me to a very low level of cheerfulness and vigour. Specialists told me that it was due to my being in a very low state of health, and excessive nerve strain. I felt very bad indeed. An acute attack of melancholia, coupled with an incessant pain from an abscess behind the drum of my ear, obliged me to

cancel any further engagements. Never in my life have I felt quite so ill as I was then. I went to the British Consulate and explained the whole situation. They quite understood, and on the advice of a specialist I decided that further work out there was useless. I was really on my way across America to Australia, but I knew inwardly that my "number was up" on this trip. I was very ill, and I realized it. People that are about me when I get ill, rarely take in how bad I'm feeling, as I, unfortunately, instinctively camouflage myself over with a film of jocularity.

However, some very friendly British officers understood, and did everything possible to arrange for my passage home. I went back to the hotel again and, until the boat left, made the best of it. I lay on my bed most of the time, occasionally pulling myself together to go downstairs for a meal. I think the accumulated strain of the past four years had at last got me, and that I now, for a space, had to put up with a "nervous breakdown," and the side-lines that go with it.

I caught a Cunard boat, and started on the return voyage to England.

For four consecutive days and nights I lay asleep in my cabin. I was completely exhausted. After that I began to sit up and "take notice," as they say of babies.

In two days more I pulled myself together sufficiently to draw a picture which, I am glad to say, brought £100 for the Seamen's Orphanage. It was auctioned at a "gaff" on the ship.

They were a jolly crowd on that boat. It was a troopship, packed to the lid with American soldiers bound for France. A large, crowded convoy steadily plodded over its zig-zag course on its way to England. Meanwhile, the Marconi daily news was filling the hearts of those on board with the hopes of the successful termination of the war.

CHAPTER XXXVII

ENGLAND—ARMISTICE—END

THE crowded transports reached the Mersey. I went on deck, and lovingly gazed on the docks of Liverpool, bathed in the rose-pink light of the dawn. The forest of masts and funnels, the distant tower of the Royal Liver building! England once more! Hours, of course, must elapse now, before they pull your boat round impossible looking corners, through absurdly narrow lock-gates, until they finally fix you up alongside a wharf, with just enough distance to prevent you jumping ashore.

At last the time came for disembarkation, and having said good-bye to the officers of the ship I went on shore with all my tackle and got a taxi.

I bought papers as soon as I got to the station—bought them in large quantities. "Yes," I thought as I read, "this war is breaking." One could feel in the air that

this mighty catastrophe which had lain like a cloud over the world for four years, was drawing to a close. By an extraordinary but painful coincidence I was back in England just when all this wonderful News was giving England wonderful Peeps into what would be wonderful Peace. It seemed hard to realize that the end might be near.

I arrived in London, and felt myself slowly recovering.

There is no tonic like getting back to England, but what a tonic the world was to have in a moment! Suddenly the great news of the Armistice Terms echoed round the world, followed by those tense hours of waiting.

I was in London, spending my days resting in bed, striving for complete recovery.

Then came the great news. The Germans had signed. The war was over.

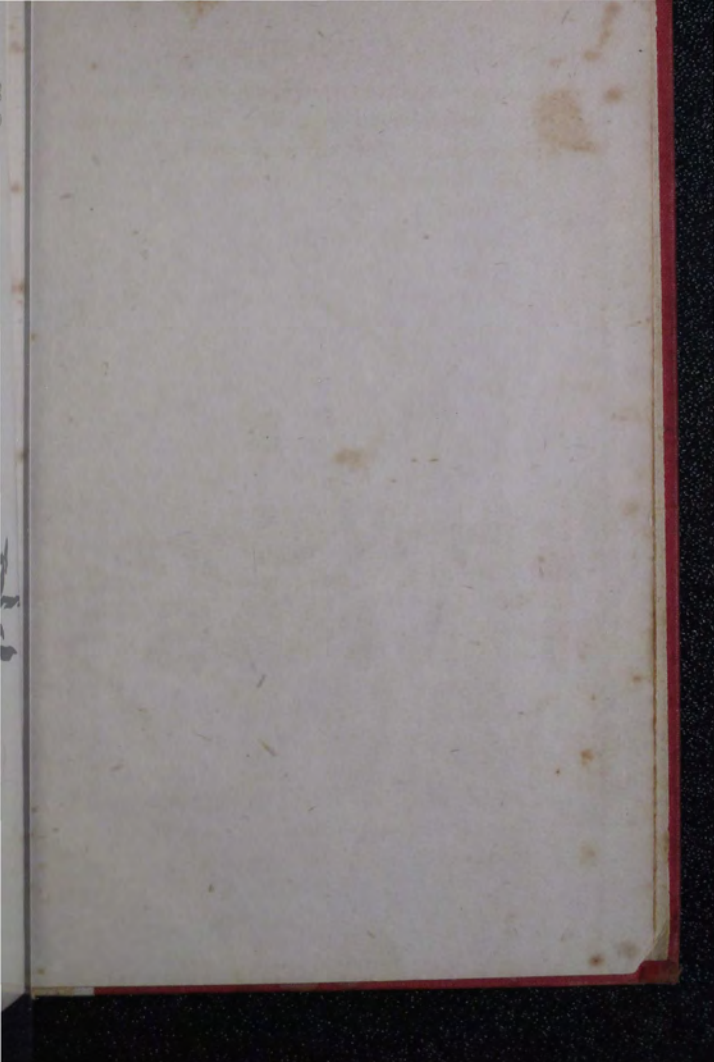
My own private war was over too, for on that night I felt that there were many strains and worries that now would be no more.

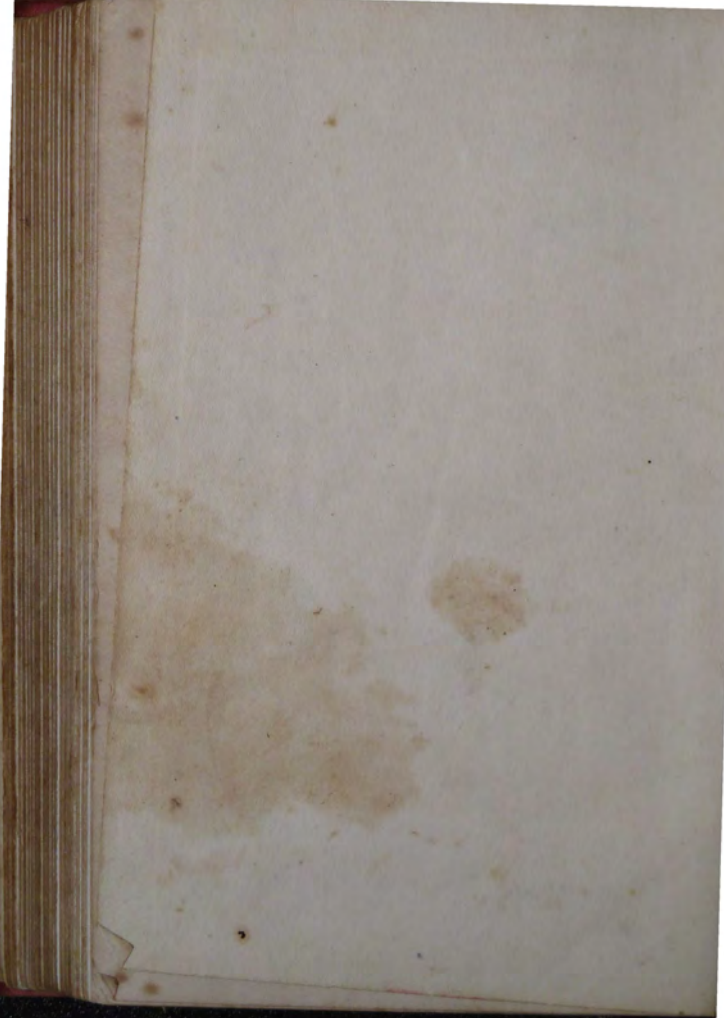
The war over! I wondered what Old Bill thought. I could see those muddy, battered trenches, the land soaked with all the tragedy of years, the faces of those war-worn

soldiers, as the news spread down the long line, which runs from the North Sea to Switzerland. The war was over !

Old Bill would go to Maggie.







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