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## **TOMMY ATKINS AT WAR**

"The English soldier is the best trained soldier in the world. The English soldier's fire is ten thousand times worse than hell. If we could only beat the English it would be well for us, but I am afraid we shall never be able to beat these English devils."

*From a letter found on a German officer.*

**TOMMY ATKINS  
AT WAR  
AS TOLD IN HIS OWN LETTERS  
BY  
JAMES A. KILPATRICK**

## NOTE

This little book is the soldier's story of the war, with all his vivid and intimate impressions of life on the great battlefields of Europe. It is illustrated by passages from his letters, in which he describes not only the grim realities, but the chivalry, humanity and exaltation of battle. For the use of these passages the author is indebted to the courtesy and generosity of the editors of all the leading London and provincial newspapers, to whom he gratefully acknowledges his obligations.

J.A.K.

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## TOMMY ATKINS AT WAR

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### I

#### OFF TO THE FRONT

"It is my Royal and Imperial Command that you concentrate your energies, for the immediate present upon one single purpose, and that is that you address all your skill and all the valor of my soldiers to exterminate first the treacherous English and walk over General French's contemptible little army."<sup>[A]</sup>

While this Imperial Command of the Kaiser was being written, Atkins, innocent of the fate decreed for him, was well on his way to the front, full of exuberant spirits, and singing as he went, "It's a long way to Tipperary." In his pocket was the message from Lord Kitchener which Atkins believes to be the whole duty of a soldier: "Be brave, be kind, courteous (but nothing more than courteous) to women, and look upon looting as a disgraceful act."

Troopship after troopship had crossed the Channel carrying Sir John French's little army to the

Continent, while the boasted German fleet, impotent to menace the safety of our transports, lay helpless—bottled up, to quote Mr. Asquith's phrase, "in the inglorious seclusion of their own ports."

Never before had a British Expeditionary Force been organized, equipped and despatched so swiftly for service in the field. The energies of the War Office had long been applied to the creation of a small but highly efficient striking force ready for instant action. And now the time for action had come. The force was ready. From the harbors the troopships steamed away, their decks crowded with cheery soldiers, their flags waving a proud challenge to any disputant of Britain's command of the sea.

The expedition was carried out as if by magic. For a few brief days the nation endured with patience its self-imposed silence. In the newspapers were no brave columns of farewell scenes, no exultant send-off greetings, no stirring pictures of troopships passing out into the night. All was silence, the silence of a nation preparing for the "iron sacrifice," as Kipling calls it, of a devastating war. Then suddenly the silence was broken, and across the Channel was flashed the news that the troops had been safely landed, and were only waiting orders to throw themselves upon the German brigands who had broken the sacred peace of Europe.

And so the scene changes to France and Belgium. Tommy Atkins is on his way to the Front. He has already begun to send home some of those gallant letters that throb throughout the pages of this book. If he felt the absence of the stimulating send-off, necessitated by official caution and the exigencies of a European war, he at least had the new joy of a welcome on foreign soil. It is difficult to find words with the right quality in them to express the feelings aroused in our men by their reception, or the exquisite gratitude felt by the Franco-Belgian people. They welcomed the British troops as their deliverers.

"The first person to meet us in France," writes a British officer, "was the pilot, and the first intimation of his presence was a huge voice in the darkness, which roared out 'A bas Guillaume. Eep, eep, 'ooray!'" As transport after transport sailed into Boulogne, and regiment after regiment landed, the population went into ecstasies of delight. Through the narrow streets of the old town the soldiers marched, singing, whistling, and cheering, with a wave of their caps to the women and a kiss wafted to the children (but not only to the children!) on the route. As they swept along, their happy faces and gallant bearing struck deep into the emotions of the spectators. "What brave fellows, to go into battle laughing!" exclaimed one old woman, whose own sons had been called to the army of the Republic.

It was strange to hear the pipes of the Highlanders skirl shrilly through old Boulogne, and to catch the sound of English voices in the clarion notes of the "Marseillaise," but, strangest of all to French ears, to listen to that new battle-cry, "Are we down-hearted?" followed by the unanswerable "No—o—o!" of every regiment. And then the lilt of that new marching song to which Tommy Atkins has given immortality:—

"IT'S A LONG, LONG WAY TO TIPPERARY"<sup>[B]</sup>

Up to mighty London came an Irishman one day;  
As the streets are paved with gold, sure ev'ry one was gay,  
Singing songs of Piccadilly, Strand and Leicester Square,  
Till Paddy got excited, then he shouted to them there:

CHORUS

It's a long way to Tipperary,  
It's a long way to go;  
It's a long way to Tipperary,  
To the sweetest girl I know!  
Good-by Piccadilly,  
Farewell Leicester Square.  
It's a long, long way to Tipperary,  
But my heart's right there!  
It's a' there!

Paddy wrote a letter to his Irish Molly O',  
Saying, "Should you not receive it, write and let me know!  
If I make mistakes in spelling, Molly dear," said he,  
"Remember it's the pen that's bad, don't lay the blame on me."

(Chorus)

Molly wrote a neat reply to Irish Paddy O',  
Saying, "Mike Maloney wants to marry me, and so  
Leave the Strand and Piccadilly, or you'll be to blame,  
For love has fairly drove me silly—hoping you're the same!"

(Chorus)

It may seem odd that the soldier should care so little for martial songs, or the songs that are ostensibly written for him; but that is not the fault of Tommy Atkins. Lyric poets don't give him

what he calls "the stuff." He doesn't get it even from Kipling; Thomas Hardy's "Song of the Soldiers" leaves him cold. He wants no epic stanzas, no heroic periods. What he asks for is something simple and romantic, something about a girl, and home, and the lights of London—that goes with a swing in the march and awakens tender memories when the lilt of it is wafted at night along the trenches.

And so "Tipperary" has gone with the troops into the great European battlefields, and has echoed along the white roads and over the green fields of France and Belgium.

On the way to the front the progress of our soldiers was made one long fête: it was "roses, roses, all the way." In a letter published in *The Times*, an artillery officer thus describes it:

"As to the reception we have met with moving across country it has been simply wonderful and most affecting. We travel entirely by motor transport, and it has been flowers all the way. One long procession of acclamation. By the wayside and through the villages, men, women, and children cheer us on with the greatest enthusiasm, and every one wants to give us something. They strip the flower gardens, and the cars look like carnival carriages. They pelt us with fruit, cigarettes, chocolate, bread—anything and everything. It is simply impossible to convey an impression of it all. Yesterday my own car had to stop in a town for petrol. In a moment there must have been a couple of hundred people round clamoring; autograph albums were thrust in front of me; a perfect delirium. In another town I had to stop for an hour, and took the opportunity to do some shopping. I wanted some motor goggles, an eye-bath, some boracic, provisions, etc. They would not let me pay for a single thing—and there was lunch and drinks as well. The further we go the more enthusiastic is the greeting. What it will be like at the end of the war one cannot attempt to guess."

Similar tributes to the kindness of the French and Belgians are given by the men. A private in the Yorkshire Light Infantry—the first British regiment to go into action in this war—tells of the joy of the French people. "You ought to have seen them," he writes. "They were overcome with delight, and didn't half cheer us! The worst of it was we could not understand their talking. When we crossed the Franco-Belgian frontier, there was a vast crowd of Belgians waiting for us. Our first greeting was the big Union Jack, and on the other side was a huge canvas with the words 'Welcome to our British Comrades.' The Belgians would have given us anything; they even tore the sheets off their beds for us to wipe our faces with." Another Tommy tells of the eager crowds turning out to give our troops "cigars, cigarettes, sweets, fruits, wines, anything we want," and the girls "linking their arms in ours, and stripping us of our badges and buttons as souvenirs."

Then there is the other side of the picture, when the first battles had been fought and the strategic retreat had begun. No praise could be too high for the chivalry and humanity of our soldiers in these dark days. They were almost worshiped by the people wherever they went.

Some of the earliest letters from the soldiers present distressing pictures of the poor, driven refugees, fleeing from their homes at the approach of the Germans, who carry ruin and desolation wherever they go. "It is pitiful, pitiful," says one writer; "you simply can't hold back your tears." Others disclose our sympathetic soldier-men sharing their rations with the starving fugitives and carrying the children on their shoulders so that the weary mothers may not fall by the way. "Be invariably courteous, considerate, and kind" were Lord Kitchener's words to the Army, and these qualities no less than valor will always be linked with Tommy Atkins' name in the memories of the French and Belgian people.

They will never forget the happy spick-and-span soldiers who sang as they stepped ashore from the troopships at Boulogne and Havre, eager to reach the fighting line. These men have fought valiantly, desperately, since then, but their spirits are as high as ever, and their songs still ring down the depleted ranks as the war-stained regiments swing along from battle to battle on the dusty road to Victory.

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## II

### SENSATIONS UNDER FIRE

It is said of Sir John French that, on his own admission, he has "never done anything worth doing without having to screw himself up to it." There is no hint here of practical fear, which the hardened soldier, the fighting man, rarely experiences; but of the moral and mental conflict which precedes the assumption of sovereign duties and high commands. Every man who goes into battle has this need. He requires the moral preparation of knowing why he is fighting, and what he is fighting for. In the present war, Lord Kitchener's fine message to every soldier in the Expeditionary Force made this screwing-up process easy. But to men going under fire for the first time some personal preparation is also necessary to combat the ordinary physical terror of the battlefield.

Soldiers are not accustomed to self-analysis. They are mainly men of action, and are supposed to lack the contemplative vision. That was the old belief. This war, however, which has shattered so many accepted ideas, has destroyed that conviction too. Nothing is more surprising than the revelation of their feelings disclosed in the soldiers' letters. They are the most intimate of human documents. Here and there a hint is given of the apprehension with which the men go into action,

unspoken fears of how they will behave under fire, the uncertainty of complete mastery over themselves, brief doubts of their ability to stand up to this new and sublime ordeal of death.

Rarely, however, do the men allow these apprehensions to depress or disturb them. Throughout the earliest letters from the front the one pervading desire was eagerness for battle—a wild impatience to get the first great test of their courage over, to feel their feet, obtain command of themselves.

"We were all eager for scalps," writes one of the Royal Engineers, "and I took the cap, sword, and lance of a Uhlan I shot through the chest." An artilleryman says a gunner in his battery was "so anxious to see the enemy," that he jumped up to look, and got his leg shot away. Others tell of the intense curiosity of the young soldiers to see everything that is going on, of their reckless neglect of cover, and of the difficulty of holding them back when they see a comrade fall. "In spite of orders, some of my men actually charged a machine gun," an officer related. After the first baptism of fire any lingering fear is dispelled. "I don't think we were ever afraid at all," says another soldier, "but we got into action so quickly that we hadn't time to think about it." "Habit soon overcomes the first instinctive fear," writes a third, "and then the struggle is always palpitating."

Of course, the fighting affects men in different ways. Some see the ugliness, the horror of it all, grow sick at the sight, and suffer from nausea. Others, seeing deeper significance in this desolation of life, realize the wickedness and waste of it; as one Highlander expresses it: "Being out there, and seeing what we see, makes us feel religious." But the majority of the men have the instinct for fighting, quickly adapt themselves to war conditions, and enter with zest into the joy of battle. These happy warriors are the men who laugh, and sing, and jest in the trenches. They take a strangely intimate pleasure in the danger around them, and when they fall they die like Mr. Julian Smith of the Intelligence Department, declaring that they "loved the fighting." All the wounded beg the doctors and nurses to hurry up and let them return to the front. "I was enjoying it until I was put under," writes Lance-Corporal Leslie, R.E. "I must get back and have another go at them," says Private J. Roe, of the Manchesters. And so on, letter after letter expressing impatience to get into the firing line.

The artillery is what harasses the men most. They soon developed a contempt for German rifle fire, and it became a very persistent joke in the trenches. But nearly all agree that German artillery is "hell let loose." That is what the enemy intended it to be, but they did not reckon upon the terrors of Hades making so small an impression upon the British soldier. There is an illuminating passage in an official statement issued from the General Headquarters:

"The object of the great proportion of artillery the Germans employ is to beat down the resistance of their enemy by a concentrated and prolonged fire, and to shatter their nerve with high explosives before the infantry attack is launched. They seem to have relied on doing this with us; but they have not done so, though it has taken them several costly experiments to discover this fact. From the statements of prisoners, indeed, it appears that they have been greatly disappointed by the moral effect produced by their heavy guns, which, despite the actual losses inflicted, has not been at all commensurate with the colossal expenditure of ammunition which has really been wasted. By this it is not implied that their artillery fire is not good. It is more than good; it is excellent. But the British soldier is a difficult person to impress or depress, even by immense shells filled with high explosives which detonate with terrific violence and form craters large enough to act as graves for five horses. The German howitzer shells are 8 to 9 inches in caliber, and on impact they send up columns of greasy black smoke. On account of this they are irreverently dubbed 'Coal-boxes,' 'Black Marias,' or 'Jack Johnsons' by the soldiers. Men who take things in this spirit, are, it seems, likely to throw out the calculations based on the loss of *moral* so carefully framed by the German military philosophers."

Every word of this admirable official message is borne out by the men's own version of their experiences of artillery fire. "At first the din is terrific, and you feel as if your ears would burst and the teeth fall out of your head," writes one of the West Kents, "but, of course, you can get used to anything, and our artillerymen give them a bit of hell back, I can tell you." "The sensation of finding myself among screaming shells was all new to me," says Corporal Butlin, Lancashire Fusiliers, "but after the first terrible moments, which were enough to unnerve anybody, I became used to the situation. Afterwards the din had no effect upon me." And describing an artillery duel a gunner declares: "It was butcher's work. We just rained shells on the Germans until we were deaf and choking. I don't think a gun on their position could have sold for old iron after we had finished, and the German gunners would be just odd pieces of clothing and bits of accouterment. It seems 'swanky' to say so, but once you get over the first shock you go on chewing biscuits and tobacco when the shells are bursting all round. You don't seem to mind it any more than smoking in a hailstorm."

Smoking is the great consolation of the soldiers. They smoke whenever they can, and the soothing cigarette is their best friend in the trenches. "We can go through anything so long as we have tobacco," is a passage from a soldier's letter; and this is the burden of nearly all the messages from the front. "The fight was pretty hot while it lasted, but we were all as cool as Liffy water, and smoked cigarettes while the shells shrieked blue murder over our heads," is an Irishman's account of the effect of the big German guns.

The noise of battle—especially the roar of artillery—is described in several letters. "It is like standing in a railway station with heavy expresses constantly tearing through," is an officer's impression of it. A wounded Gordon Highlander dismisses it as no more terrible than a bad

thunderstorm: "You get the same din and the big flashes of light in front of you, and now and then the chance of being knocked over by a bullet or piece of shell, just as you might be struck by lightning." That is the real philosophy of the soldier. "After all, we are may-be as safe here as you are in Piccadilly," says another; and when men have come unhurt out of infinite danger they grow sublimely fatalistic and cheerful. An officer in the Cavalry Division, for instance, writes: "I am coming back all right, never fear. Have been in such tight corners and under such fire that if I were meant to go I should have gone by now, I'm sure." And it is the same with the men. "Having gone through six battles without a scratch," says Private A. Sunderland, of Bolton, "I thought I would never be hit." Later on, however, he was wounded.

Though the artillery fire has proved most destructive to all ranks, by far the worst ordeal of the troops was the long retreat in the early stages of the war. It exhausted and exasperated the men. They grew angry and impatient. None but the best troops in the world, with a profound belief in the judgment and valor of their officers, could have stood up against it. A statement by a driver of the Royal Field Artillery, published in the *Evening News*, gives a vivid impression of how the men felt. "I have no clear notion of the order of events in the long retreat," he says; "it was a nightmare, like being seized by a madman after coming out of a serious illness and forced towards the edge of a precipice." The constant marching, the want of sleep, the restless and (as it sometimes seemed to the men) purposeless backward movement night and day drove them into a fury. The intensity of the warfare, the fierce pressure upon the mental and physical powers of endurance, might well have exercised a mischievous effect upon the men. Instead, however, it only brought out their finest qualities.

In an able article in *Blackwood's Magazine*, on "Moral Qualities in War," Major C.A.L. Yate, of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, dealt with the "intensity" of the war strain, of which he himself had acute experience. "Under such conditions," he wrote, "marksmen may achieve no more than the most erratic shots; the smartest corps may quickly degenerate into a rabble; the easiest tasks will often appear impossible. An army can weather trials such as those just depicted only if it be collectively considered in that healthy state of mind which the term *moral* implies." It is just that *moral* which the British Expeditionary Force has been proved to possess in so rich a measure, and which must belong to all good soldiers in these days of nerve-shattering war.

Little touches of pathos are not wanting in the scenes pictured in the soldiers' letters, and they bring an element of humanity into the cold, well-ordered, practical business of war. Men who will meet any personal danger without flinching often find the mists floating across their eyes when a comrade is struck down at their side. Private Plant, Manchester Regiment, tells how his pal was eating a bit of bread and cheese when he was knocked over: "Poor chap, he just managed to ask me to tell his missus." "War is rotten when you see your best pal curl up at your feet," comments another. "One of our chaps got hit in the face with a shrapnel bullet," Private Sidney Smith, First Warwickshires, relates. "'Hurt, Bill?' I said to him. 'Good luck to the old regiment,' says he. Then he rolled over on his back." "Partings of this kind are sad enough," says an Irish Dragoon, "but we've just got to sigh and get used to it."

Their own injuries and sufferings don't seem to worry them much. The sensation of getting wounded is simply told. One man, shot through the arm, felt "only a bit of a sting, nothing particular. Just like a sharp needle going into me. I thought it was nothing till my rifle dropped out of my hand, and my arm fell. Rotten luck." That is the feeling of a clean bullet wound. Shrapnel, however, hurts—"hurts pretty badly," Tommy says. And the lance and the bayonet make ugly gashes. In sensitive men, however, the continuous shell-fire produces effects that are often as serious as wounds. "Some," says Mr. Geoffrey Young, the *Daily News and Leader* correspondent, "suffer from a curious aphasia, some get dazed and speechless, some deafened"; but of course their recovery is fairly rapid, and the German "Black Marias" soon exhaust their terrors. A man may lose his memory and have but a hazy idea of the day of the week or the hour of the day, but Tommy still keeps his nerve, and after his first experience of the enemy's fire, to quote his own words, "doesn't care one d—— about the danger."

As showing the general feeling of the educated soldier, independent altogether of his nationality, it is worth quoting two other experiences, both Russian. Mr. Stephen Graham in the *Times* recites the sensations of a young Russian officer. "The feeling under fire at first is unpleasant," he admits, "but after a while it becomes even exhilarating. One feels an extraordinary freedom in the midst of death." The following is a quotation from a soldier's letter sent by Mr. H. Williams, the *Daily Chronicle* correspondent at Petrograd: "One talks of hell fire on the battlefield, but I assure you it makes no more impression on me now than the tooting of motors. Habit is everything, especially in war, where all the logic and psychology of one's actions are the exact reverse of a civilian's.... The whole sensation of fear is atrophied. We don't care a farthing for our lives.... We don't think of danger. In this new frame of mind we simply go and do the perfectly normal, natural things that you call heroism."

When the heroic things are done and there comes a lull in the fighting, it is sweet to sink down in the trenches worn out, exhausted, unutterly drowsy, and snatch a brief unconscious hour of sleep. Some of the men fall asleep with the rifles still hot in their hands, their heads resting on the barrels. Magnificently as they endure fatigue, there comes a time when the strain is intolerable, and, "beat to the world," as one officer describes it, they often sink into profound sleep, like horses, standing. At these times it seems as if nothing could wake them. Shrapnel may thunder around them in vain; they never move a muscle. In Mr. Stephen Crane's fine phrase, they "sleep the brave sleep of wearied men."

### III

#### HUMOR IN THE TRENCHES

One of the most surprising of the many revelations of this war has been that of the gaiety, humor, and good nature of the British soldier. All the correspondents, English and French, remark upon it. A new Tommy Atkins has arisen, whose cheery laugh and joke and music-hall song have enlivened not only the long, weary, exhausting marches, but even the grim and unnerving hours in the trenches. Theirs was not the excitement of men going into battle, nervous and uncertain of their behavior under fire; it was rather that of light-hearted first-nighters waiting in the queue to witness some new and popular drama.

"A party of the King's Own," writes Sapper Mugridge of the Royal Engineers, "went into their first action shouting 'Early doors this way! Early doors, ninepence!'" "The Kaiser's crush" is the description given by a sergeant of the Coldstream Guards as he watched a dense mass of Germans emerging to the attack from a wood, and prepared to meet them with the bayonet. When first the fierce German searchlights were turned on the British lines a little cockney in the Middlesex Regiment exclaimed to his comrade: "Lord, Bill, it's just like a play, an' us in the limelight"; and as the artillery fusillade passed over their heads, and a great ironical cheer rose from the British trenches, he added: "But it's the Kaiser wot's gettin' the bird."

Many of the wounded who have been invalided home were asked whether this humor in the trenches is the real thing, or only an affected drollery to conceal the emotions the men feel in the face of death; but they all declare that it is quite spontaneous. One old soldier, well accustomed to being under fire, freely admitted that he had never been with such a cheery and courageous lot of youngsters in his life. "They take everything that comes to them as 'all in the game,'" he said, "and nothing could now damp their spirits."

Songs, cards and jokes fill up the waiting hours in the trenches; under fire, indeed, the wit seems to become sharpest. A corporal in the Motor Cycle Section of the Royal Engineers writes: "At first the German artillery was rotten. Three batteries bombarded an entrenched British battalion for two hours and only seven men were killed. The noise was simply deafening, but so little effect had the fire that the men shouted with laughter and held their caps up on the end of their rifles to give the German gunners a bit of encouragement." The same spirit of raillery is spoken of by a Seaforth Highlander, who says one of the Wiltshires stuck out in the trenches a tin can on which was the notice "Business as Usual." As, however, it gave the enemy too good a target he was cheerily asked to "take the blooming thing in again," and in so doing he was wounded twice.

"The liveliest Sunday I ever spent" is how Private P. Case, Liverpool Regiment, describes the fighting at Mons. "It was a glorious time," writes Bandsman Wall, Connaught Rangers; "we had nothing to do but shoot the Germans as they came up, just like knocking dolls down at the fair ground." "A very pleasant morning in the trenches," remarks one of the Officers' Special Reserve; and another writer, after being in several engagements, says, "This is really the best summer holiday I've ever had."

Nothing could excel the coolness of the men under fire. With a hail of bullets and shells raining about them they sing and jest with each other unconcernedly. Wiping the dust of battle from his face and loading up for another shot, a Highlander will break forth into one of Harry Lauder's songs:

"It's a wee deoch an' doruis,  
Jist a wee drap, that's a',"

and with a laugh some English Tommies will make a dash at the line "a braw, bricht, minlicht nicht," with ludicrous consequences to the pronunciation! According to "Joe," of the 2nd Royal Scots, the favorite songs in the trenches or round the camp-fire are "Never Mind," and "The Last Boat is leaving for Home." "Hitchy Koo" is another favorite, and was being sung in the midst of a German attack. "One man near me was wounded," says a comrade, "but he sang the chorus to the finish."

It is remarkable how these songs and witticisms steady the soldiers under fire. In a letter in the *Evening News* Sergeant J. Baker writes: "Some of our men have made wonderful practise with the rifle, and they are beginning to fancy themselves as marksmen. If they don't hit something every time they think they ought to see a doctor about it.... Artillery fire, however, is the deadliest thing out, and it takes a lot of nerve to stand it. The Germans keep up an infernal din from morning till far into the night; but they don't do half as much damage as you would think, though it is annoying to have all that row going on when you're trying to write home or make up the regimental accounts."

Writing home is certainly done under circumstances which are apt to have a disturbing effect upon the literary style. "Excuse this scrawl," writes one soldier, "the German shells have interrupted me six times already, and I had to dash out with my bayonet before I was able to finish it off." Another concludes: "Well, mother, I must close now. The bullets are a bit too thick for letter-writing." To a young engineer the experience was so strange that he describes it as "like writing in a dream."

Some of the nick-names given by Tommy Atkins to the German shells have already been quoted, but the most amusing is surely that in a letter from Private Watters. "One of our men," he relates, "has got a ripping cure for neuralgia, but he isn't going to take out a patent for it! While lying in the trenches, mad with pain in the face, a shell burst beside him. He wasn't hit, but the explosion rendered him unconscious for a time, and when he recovered, his neuralgia had gone. His name is Palmer, so now we call the German shells 'Palmer's Neuralgia Cure.'"

The amusing story of a long march afforded some mirth in the trenches when it got to be known. A party of artillerymen who had been toiling along in the dark for hours, and were like to drop with fatigue, ran straight into a troop of horsemen posted near a wood. "We thought they were Germans," one gunner related, "for we couldn't make out the colors of the uniforms or anything else, until we heard some one sing out 'Where the hell do you think you're going to?' *Then we knew we were with friends.*"

Football is the great topic of discussion in the trenches. Mr. Harold Ashton, of the *Daily News and Leader*, relates an amusing encounter with a Royal Horse Artilleryman to whom he showed a copy of the paper. "Where's the sporting news?" asked the artilleryman as he glanced over the pages. "Shot away in the war," replied Mr. Ashton. "What!" exclaimed Tommy, "not a line about the Arsenal? Well, I'm blown! This *is* a war!" "We are all in good spirits," writes a bombardier in the 44th Battery, Royal Artillery, "and mainly anxious to know how football is going on in Newcastle now." "I got this," said a Gordon Highlander, referring to his wound, "because I became excited in an argument with wee Geordie Ferris, of our company, about the chances of Queen's Park and Rangers this season."

An artilleryman sends a description of the fighting written in the jargon of the football field. He describes the war as "the great match for the European Cup, which is being played before a record gate, though you can't perhaps see the crowd." In spite of all their swank, he adds, "the Germans haven't scored a goal yet, and I wouldn't give a brass farthing for their chances of lifting the Cup." At the battle of Mons it was noticed that some soldiers even went into action with a football attached to their knapsacks!

But there is no end to the humor of Tommy Atkins. Mr. Hamilton Fyfe tells in the *Daily Mail* how he stopped to sympathize with a wounded soldier on the roadside near Mons. Asking if his injury was very painful he received the remarkable reply: "Oh, it's not that. I lost my pipe in the last blooming charge." In a letter from the front, published in the *Glasgow Herald*, this passage occurs: "Our fellows have signed the pledge because Kitchener wants them to. But they all say, 'God help the Germans, when we get hold of them for making us teetotal.'"

What a Frenchman describes as the "new British battle-cry" is another source of amusement. Whenever artillery or rifle fire sweeps over their trenches some facetious Tommy is sure to shout, "Are we downhearted?" and is met with a resounding "No!" and laughter all along the line.

To those at home all this fun may seem a little thoughtless, but to those in the fighting line it is perfectly natural and unforced. "Our men lie in the trenches and play marbles with the bullets from shrapnel shells," writes one of the Royal Engineers; "we have been in two countries and hope to tour a third," says a letter from a cheery artilleryman; and Mr. W.L. Pook (Godalming), who is with one of the field post-offices, declares that things are going so badly with "our dear old chum Wilhelm" that "I've bet X—— a new hat that I'll be home by Christmas."

Bets are common in the trenches. Gunners wager about the number of their hits, riflemen on the number of misses by the enemy. Daring spirits, before making an attack, have even been known to bet on the number of guns they would capture. "We have already picked up a good deal in the way of German souvenirs," says one wag; "enough, indeed, to set a decent-sized army up in business." The British Army, indeed, is an army of sportsmen. Every man must have his game, his friendly wager, his joke, and his song. As one officer told his men: "You are a lively lot of beggars. You don't seem to realize that we're at war."

But they do. That is just Tommy's way. It is how he wins through. He always feels fit, and he enjoys himself. Corporal Graham Hodson, Royal Engineers, provides a typical Atkins letter with which to conclude this chapter. "I am feeling awfully well," he writes, "and am enjoying myself no end. All lights are out at eight o'clock, so we lie in our blankets and tell each other lies about the number of Germans we have shot and the hairbreadth escapes we have had. Oh, it's a great life!"

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## IV

### THE MAN WITH THE BAYONET

Some military writers have declared that with the increasing range of rifle and artillery fire the day of the bayonet is over. Battles, they say, must now be fought with the combatants miles apart. Bayonets are as obsolete as spears and battle axes. Evidently this theory had the full support of the German General Staff, whose military wisdom was in some quarters believed to be infallible—before the war.

As events have proved, however, there has been no more rude awakening for the German soldiery than the efficacy of the bayonet in the hands of Tommy Atkins. In spite of the



employment of gigantic siege guns and their enormous superiority in strength, though not in handling, of artillery, the Germans have failed to keep the Allies at the theoretical safe distance. They have been forced to accept hand-to-hand fighting, and in every encounter at close quarters there has never been a moment's doubt as to the result. They have shriveled up in the presence of the bayonet, and fled in disorder at the first glimpse of naked steel. It is not that the Germans lack courage. "They are brave enough," our soldiers admit with perfect frankness, "but the bayonet terrifies them, and they cry out in agony at the sight of it."

Admittedly, it requires more than ordinary courage to face a bayonet charge, just as it calls for a high order of valor to use that deadly weapon. Instances are given of young soldiers experiencing a sinking sensation, a feeling of collapse, at the order "Fix Bayonets!" their hands trembling violently over the task. But when the bugle sounds the charge, and the wild dash at the enemy's lines has begun, with the skirl of the pipes to stir up the blood, the nerves stiffen and the hands grip the rifle with grim determination. "It was his life or mine," said a young Highlander describing his first battle, "and I ran the bayonet through him." There is no time for sentiment, and there can be no thought of chivalry. Just get the ugly business over and done with as quickly as possible. One soldier tells what a sense of horror swept over him when his bayonet stuck in his victim, and he had to use all his strength to wrench it out of the body in time to tackle the next man.

Many men describe the effects of the British bayonet charges and the way the Germans—Uhlans, Guards, and artillerymen—recoil from them. "If you go near them with the bayonet they squeal like pigs," "they beg for mercy on their knees," "the way they cringe before the bayonet is pitiful"—such are examples of the hundreds of references to this method of attack.

Private Whittaker, Coldstream Guards, gives a vivid account of the fighting around Compiègne. "The Germans rushed at us," he writes, "like a crowd streaming from a Cup-tie at the Crystal Palace. You could not miss them. Our bullets plowed into them, but still on they came. I was well entrenched, and my rifle got so hot I could hardly hold it. I was wondering if I should have enough bullets, when a pal shouted, 'Up Guards and at 'em.' The next second he was rolled over with a nasty knock on the shoulder. When we really did get orders to get at them we made no mistakes, I can tell you. They cringed at the bayonets. Those on the left wing tried to get round us. We yelled like demons, and racing as hard as we could for quite 500 yards we cut up nearly every man who did not run away."

One of the most graphic pictures of the war is that of attack in the night related by a sergeant of the Worcester Regiment, who was wounded in the fierce battle of the Aisne. He was on picket duty when the attack opened. "It was a little after midnight," he said "when the men ahead suddenly fell back to report strange sounds and movements along the front. The report had just been made when we heard a rustling in the bushes near us. We challenged and, receiving no reply, fired into the darkness. Immediately the enemy rushed upon us, but the sleeping camp had been awakened by the firing, and our men quickly stood to arms. As the heavy German guns began to thunder and the searchlights to play on our position we gathered that a whole Army corps was about to be engaged and, falling back upon the camp, we found our men ready. No sooner had we reached the trenches than there rose out of the darkness in front of us a long line of white faces. The Germans were upon us. 'Fire!' came the order, and we sent a volley into them. They wavered, and dark patches in their ranks showed that part of the white line had been blotted out. But on they came again, the gaps filled up from behind. At a hundred yards' range, the first line dropped to fix bayonets, the second opened fire, and others followed. We kept on firing and we saw their men go down in heaps, but finally they swarmed forward with the bayonet and threw all their weight of numbers upon us. We gave them one terrible volley, but nothing could have stopped the ferocious impetus of their attack. For one terrible moment our ranks bent under the dead weight, but the Germans, too, wavered, and in that moment we gave them the bayonet, and hurled them back in disorder. It was then I got a bayonet thrust, but as I fell I heard our boys cheering and I knew we had finished them for the night."

This is one of the few accounts that tell of the Germans using the bayonet on the offensive, and their experience of the businesslike way in which Tommy Atkins manipulates this weapon has given them a wholesome dread of such encounters. Private G. Bridgeman, 4th Royal Fusiliers, tells of the glee with which his regiment received the order to advance with the bayonet. "We were being knocked over in dozens by the artillery and couldn't get our own back," he writes,<sup>[C]</sup> "and I can tell you we were like a lot of schoolboys at a treat when we got the order to fix bayonets, for we knew we should fix them then. We had about 200 yards to cover before we got near them, and then we let them have it in the neck. It put us in mind of tossing hay, only we had human bodies. I was separated from my neighbors and was on my own when I was attacked by three Germans. I had a lively time and was nearly done when a comrade came to my rescue. I had already made sure of two, but the third would have finished me. I already had about three inches of steel in my side when my chum finished him."

The charge of the Coldstream Guards at Le Cateau is another bayonet exploit that ought to be recorded. "It was getting dark when we found that the Kaiser's crush was coming through the forest to cut off our force," a sergeant relates, "but we got them everywhere, not a single man getting through. About 200 of us drove them down one street, and didn't the devils squeal. We came upon a mass of them in the main thoroughfare, but they soon lost heart and we actually climbed over their dead and wounded which were heaped up, to get at the others." "What a sight it was, and how our fellows yelled!" says another Coldstreamer, describing the same exploit.

Tommy Atkins has long been known for his accurate artillery and rifle fire, but the bayonet is his favorite arm in battle. Through all our wars it has proved a deciding, if not indeed the decisive, factor in the campaign. Once it has been stained in service he fondles it as, next to his pipe, his best friend. And it is the same with the Frenchman. He calls his bayonet his "little Rosalie," and lays its ruddy edges against his cheek with a caress.

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## V

### CAVALRY EXPLOITS

"We have been through the Uhlans like brown paper." In this striking phrase Sir Philip Chetwode, commanding the 5th Cavalry Brigade, describes the brilliant exploits in the neighborhood of Cambrai when, in spite of odds of five to one, the Prussian Horse were cut to pieces. Sir Philip was the first man to be mentioned in despatches, and Sir John French does not hesitate to confirm this dashing officer's tribute to his men. "Our cavalry," says the official message, "do as they like with the enemy."

There is no more brilliant page in the history of the war than that which has been furnished to the historian by the deeds of the British cavalry. They carried everything before them. In a single encounter the reputation of the much-vaunted Uhlans was torn to shreds.

The charge of the 9th Lancers at Toulain was a fine exploit. It was Balaclava over again, with a gallant Four Hundred charging a battery of eleven German guns. But there was no blunder this time; it was a sacrifice to save the 5th Infantry Division and some guns, and the heroic Lancers dashed to their task with a resounding British cheer. "We rode absolutely into death," says a corporal of the regiment writing home, "and the colonel told us that onlookers never expected a single Lancer to come back. About 400 charged and 72 rallied afterwards, but during the week 200 more turned up wounded and otherwise. You see, the infantry of ours were in a fix and no guns but four could be got round, so the General ordered two squadrons of the 9th to charge, as a sacrifice, to save the position. The order was given, but not only did A and B gallop into line, but C squadron also wheeled and came up with a roar. It was magnificent, but horrible. The regiment was swept away before 1,000 yards was covered, and at 200 yards from the guns I was practically alone—myself, three privates, and an officer of our squadron. We wheeled to a flank on the colonel's signal and rode back. I was mad with rage, a feeling I cannot describe. But we had drawn their fire; the infantry were saved."

"It was the most magnificent sight I ever saw," says Driver W. Cryer, R.F.A., who witnessed the Lancers go into action. "They rode at the guns like men inspired," declares another spectator, "and it seemed incredible that any could escape alive. Lyddite and melinite swept like hail across the thin line of intrepid horsemen." "My God! How they fell!" writes Captain Letorez, who, after his horse was shot under him, leapt on a riderless animal and came through unhurt. When the men got up close to the German guns they found themselves riding full tilt into hidden wire entanglements—seven strands of barbed wire. Horses and men came down in a heap, and few of the brave fellows who reached this barrier ever returned.

The 9th Lancers covered themselves with glory, and this desperate but successful exploit will live as perhaps the most stirring and dramatic battle story of the war. The Germans were struck with amazement at the fearlessness of these horsemen. Yet the 9th Lancers themselves took their honors very modestly. "We only fooled around and saved some guns," said one of the Four Hundred, after it was over. He had his horse shot under him and his saddle blanket drilled through.

Captain F.O. Grenfell, of the 9th Lancers, was the hero of an incident in the saving of the guns. All the gunners had been shot down and the guns looked likely to fall into the enemy's hands. "Look here, boys," said Grenfell, "we've got to get them back. Who'll help?" A score of men instantly volunteered—"our chaps would go anywhere with Grenfell," says the corporal who tells the story—and "with bullets and shrapnel flying around us, off we went. It was a hot time, but our captain was as cool as on parade, and kept on saying, 'It's all right; they can't hit us.' Well, they did manage to hit three of us before we saved the guns, and God knows how any of us ever escaped." Later on Captain Grenfell was himself wounded, but before the ambulance had been brought up to carry him off he sprang into a passing motor-car and dashed into the thick of the fighting again.

The 18th Hussars and the 4th Dragoon Guards were also in these brilliant cavalry engagements, but did not suffer anything like so badly as the 9th Lancers. Corporal Clarke, of the Remount Depot, which was attached to the 18th Hussars, thus described their "little scrap" with the German horsemen near Landrecies: "We received orders to form line (two ranks), and the charge was sounded. We then charged, and were under the fire of two batteries, one on each side of the cavalry. We charged straight through them, and on reforming we drove the Germans back towards the 1st Lincoln Regiment, who captured those who had not been shot down. We had about 103 men missing, and we were about 1,900 strong. The order then came to retreat, and we returned in the direction of Cambrai, but we did not take any part in the action there."

History seems to be repeating itself in amazing ways in this war. Just as the charge of the Light

Brigade at Balaclava has been reproduced by the 9th Lancers, so the Scots Greys and 12th Lancers have reproduced the famous charge of the "Greys" at Waterloo. This is the fight which aroused the enthusiasm of Sir Philip Chetwode, for his brigade went through the German cavalry just as circus horses might leap through paper hoops. "I watched the charge of the Scots Greys and 12th Lancers," writes Sergeant C. Meades, of the Berkshires. "It was grand. I could see some of the Germans dropping on their knees and holding up their arms. Then, as soon as our cavalry got through, the Germans picked up their rifles and started firing again. Our men turned about and charged back. It was no use the Germans putting up their hands a second time. Our cavalry cut down every one they came to. I don't think there were ten Germans left out of about 2,000. I can tell you they had all they wanted for that day." An officer of the dragoons, describing the same charge, says the dragoon guards were also in it, and that his lads were "as keen as mustard." In fact, he declares, "there was no holding them back. Horses and men positively flew at the Germans, cutting through much heavier mounts and heavier men than ours. The yelling and the dash of the lancers and dragoon guards was a thing never to be forgotten. We lost very heavily at Mons, and it is a marvel how some of our fellows pulled through. They positively frightened the enemy. We did terrible execution, and our wrists were feeling the strain of heavy riding before sunset. With our tunics unbuttoned, we had the full use of our right arms for attack and defense."

Another charge of the Scots Greys is thus described: "Seeing the wounded getting cut at by the German officers, the Scots Greys went mad, and even though retreat had been sounded, with a non-commissioned officer leading, they turned on the Potsdam Guards and hewed their way through, their officers following. Having got through, the officers took command again, formed them up, wheeled, and came back the way they went. It was a sight for the gods."

Another episode was the capture of the German guns by the 2nd and 5th Dragoons. An officer of the 5th gives an account of the exploit. "We were attacked at dawn, in a fog," he relates, "and it looked bad for us, but we turned it into a victory. Our brigade captured all the guns of the German cavalry division, fourteen in all; the Bays lost two-thirds of their horses and many men. The Gunner Battery of ours was annihilated (twenty left), but the guns were saved, as we held the ground at the end. This was only a series of actions, as we have been at it all day, and every day. My own squadron killed sixteen horses and nine Uhlans in a space of 50 ft., and many others, inhabitants told me, were lying in a wood close by, where they had crawled. We killed their officer, a big Postdam Guard, shot through the forehead. L Battery fought their guns to the last, 'Bradbury' himself firing a gun with his leg off at the knee; a shell took off his other leg. He asked me then to be carried from the guns so that the men could not hear or see him."

One of the 2nd Dragoons, wounded in this engagement, says the Bays were desperately eager for the order to charge, and exultant when the bugle sounded. "Off they went, 'hell for leather,' at the guns," is how he described it. "There was no stopping them once they got on the move."

"No stopping them." That sums up what every eye-witness of the British cavalry charges says. The coolness and dash of the men in action was amazing. Their voices rang out as they spurred their horses on, and when they crashed into the enemy, the British roar of exultation was terrific, and the mighty clash of arms rent the air. "Many flung away their tunics," writes a Yeomanry Officer with General Smith-Dorrien's Division, "and fought with their shirt sleeves rolled up above the elbow. Some of the Hussars and Lancers were almost in a horizontal position on the off-side of their mounts when they were cutting right and left with bare arms."

Most intimate details of the fighting at close quarters are given by another officer. "I shall never forget," he says, "how one splendidly-made trooper with his shirt in ribbons actually stooped so low from his saddle as to snatch a wounded comrade from instant death at the hands of a powerful German. And then, having swung the man right round to the near side, he made him hang on to his stirrup leather whilst he lunged his sword clean through the German's neck and severed his windpipe as cleanly as — would do it in the operating theater."

And here is another incident: "A young lancer, certainly not more than twenty, stripped of tunic and shirt, and fighting in his vest, charged a German who had fired on a wounded man, and pierced him to the heart. Seizing the German's horse as he fell, he exchanged it for his own which had got badly damaged. Then, his sword sheathed like lightning, he swung round and shot a German clean through the head and silenced him forever."

The soldiers' letters throb with such stories, and the swiftness, vigor, and power of expression revealed in them is astonishing. Most of them were written under withering fire, some scribbled even when in the saddle, or when the writers were in a state of utter exhaustion at the end of a nerve-shattering day. "'Hell with the lid off' describes what we are going through," one of the 12th Lancers says of it. But the men never lose spirit. Even after eighteen or nineteen hours in the saddle they still have a kindly, cheering message to write home, and a jocular metaphor to hit off the situation. "We are going on all right," concludes Corporal G.W. Cooper, 16th Lancers; "but still it isn't exactly what you'd call playing billiards at the club."

The Highlanders have been great favorites in France. Their gaiety, humor and inexhaustible spirits under the most trying conditions have captivated everybody. Through the villages on their route these brawny fellows march with their pipers to the proud lilt of "The Barren Rocks of Aden" and "The Cock o' the North," fine marching tunes that in turn give place to the regimental voices while the pipers are recovering their breath. "It's a long way to Inveraray" is the Scotch variant of the new army song, but the Scots have not altogether abandoned their own marching airs, and it is a stirring thing to hear the chorus of "The Nut-Brown Maiden," for instance, sung in the Gaelic tongue as these kilted soldiers swing forward on the long white roads of France.

A charming little letter published in *The Times* tells how the Highlanders and their pipers turned Melun into a "little Scotland" for a week, and the enthusiastic writer contributes some verses for a suggested new reel, of which the following have a sly allusion to the Kaiser's order for the extermination of General French's "contemptible little army":

"What! Wad ye stop the pipers?  
Nay, 'tis ower soon!  
Dance, since ye're dancing, William,  
Dance, ye pair loon!  
Dance till ye're dizzy, William,  
Dance till ye swoon!  
Dance till ye're deid, my laddie!  
We play the tune!"

This is all quite in the spirit of the Highland soldiers. A Frenchman, writing to a friend in London goes into ecstasies over the behavior of the Scots in France, and says that at one railway station he saw two wounded Highlanders "dancing a Scotch reel which made the crowd fairly shriek with admiration." Nothing can subdue these Highlanders' spirits. They go into action, as has already been said, just as if it were a picnic, and here is a picture of life in the trenches at the time of the fierce battle of Mons. It is related by a corporal of the Black Watch. "The Germans," he states, "were just as thick as the Hielan' heather, and by weight of numbers (something like twenty-five to one) tried to force us back. But we had our orders and not a man flinched. We just stuck there while the shells were bursting about us, and in the very thick of it we kept on singing Harry Lauder's latest. It was terrible, but it was grand—peppering away at them to the tune of 'Roamin' in the Gloamin' and 'The Lass o' Killiecrankie.' It's many a song about the lassies we sang in that 'smoker' wi' the Germans."

According to another Highlander "those men who couldn't sing very well just whistled, and those who couldn't whistle talked about football and joked with each other. It might have been a sham fight the way the Gordons took it." With this memory of their undaunted gaiety it is sad to think how the Gordons were cut up in that encounter. Their losses were terrible. "God help them!" exclaims one writer. "Theirs was the finest regiment a man could see."

But that was in the dark days of the long retreat, when the Highlanders, heedless of their own safety, hung on to their positions often in spite of the orders to retire, and avenged their own losses ten-fold by their punishment of the enemy. Private Smiley, of the Gordons, describing the German attacks, speaks of the devastating effects of the British fire. "Poor devils!" he writes of the German infantry. "They advanced in companies of quite 150 men in files five deep, and our rifle has a flat trajectory up to 600 yards. Guess the result. We could steady our rifles on the trench and take deliberate aim. The first company were mown down by a volley at 700 yards, and in their insane formation every bullet was almost sure to find two billets. The other companies kept advancing very slowly, using their dead comrades as cover, but they had absolutely no chance.... Yet what a pitiful handful we were against such a host!"

The fighting went on all through the night and again next morning, and the British force was compelled to retreat. In the dark, Private Smiley, who was wounded, lost his regiment, and was picked up by a battery of the Royal Field Artillery who gave him a lift. But he didn't rest long, he says, for "I'm damned if they didn't go into action ten minutes afterwards with me on one of the guns."

Some fine exploits are also given to the credit of the Black Watch. They, too, were in the thick of it at Mons—"fighting like gentlemen," as one of them puts it—and the Gordons and Argyll and Sutherlands also suffered severely. In fact, the Highland regiments appear to have been singled out by the Germans as the object of their fiercest attacks, and all the way down to the Aisne they have borne the brunt of the fighting. Private Fairweather, of the Black Watch, gives this account of an engagement on the Aisne: "The Guards went up first and then the Camerons, both having to retire. Although we had watched the awful slaughter in these regiments, when it was our turn we went off with a cheer across 1,500 yards of open country. The shelling was terrific and the air was full of the screams of shrapnel. Only a few of us got up to 200 yards of the Germans. Then with a yell we went at them. The air whistled with bullets, and it was then my shout of '42nd forever!' finished with a different kind of yell. Crack! I had been presented with a souvenir in my knee. I lay helpless and our fellows retired over me. Shrapnel screamed all around, and melinite shells made the earth shake. I bore a charmed life. A bullet went through the elbow of my jacket, another through my equipment, and a piece of shrapnel found a resting place in a tin of bully beef which was on my back. I was picked up eventually during the night, nearly dead from loss of blood."

Perhaps the most dashing and brilliant episode of the fighting is the exploit of the Black Watch at



## VII

### THE INTREPID IRISH

"There's been a divil av lot av talk about Irish disunion," says Mr. Dooley somewhere, "but if there's foightin' to be done it's the bhoys that'll let nobody else thread on the Union Jack." That is the Irish temperament all over, and in these days when history is being written in lightning flashes the rally of Ireland to the old flag is inspiring, but not surprising.

Political cynics have always said that England's difficulty would be Ireland's opportunity, but they did not reckon with the paradoxical character of the Irish people. England's difficulty has indeed been Ireland's opportunity—the opportunity of displaying that generous nature which has already contributed thousands of men to the Expeditionary Force, and is mustering tens of thousands more under the patriotic stimulus of those old political enemies, Mr. John Redmond and Sir Edward Carson. The civil war is "put off," as one Irish soldier expresses it; old enmities are laid aside and Orange and Green are fighting shoulder to shoulder, on old battlefields whose names are writ in glory upon the colors.

No more cheerful regiments than the Irish are to be found in the firing line. Their humor in the trenches, their love of songs, and their dash in action are manifested in all their letters. An English soldier, writing home, says that even in the midst of a bayonet charge an Irishman can always raise a laugh. "Look at thim divils retratin' with their backs facin' us," was an Irish remark about the Germans that made his fellows roar. And when the Fusiliers heard the story of the Kaiser's lucky shamrock, one of them said: "Sure, an' it'll be moighty lucky for him if he doesn't lose it"; adding to one of three comrades, "There'll be a leaf apiece for us, Hinishsey, when we get to Berlin."

In the fighting the Irish have done big things and their dash and courage have filled their British and French comrades with admiration. Referring to the first action in which the Irish Guards took part, and the smart businesslike way in which they cut up the Germans, Private Heffernan, Royal Irish Fusiliers, says they had a great reception as they marched back into the lines: "Of course, we all gave them a cheer, but it would have done your heart good to see the Frenchmen (who had a good view of the fighting) standing up in their trenches and shouting like mad as the Guards passed by. The poor chaps didn't like the idea that it was their first time in action, and were shy about the fuss made of them: and there was many a row in camp that night over men saying fine things and reminding them of their brand new battle honors."<sup>[D]</sup>

A fine story is told of the heroism of two Irish Dragoons by a trooper of that gallant regiment. "One of our men," he says, "carried a wounded comrade to a friendly farm-house under heavy fire, and when the retreat was ordered both were cut off. A patrol of a dozen Uhlans found them there and ordered them to surrender, but they refused, and, tackling the Germans from behind a barricade of furniture, killed or wounded half of them. The others then brought up a machine gun and threatened the destruction of the farm: but the two dragoons, remembering the kindness of the farm owners and unwilling to bring ruin and disaster upon them, rushed from the house in the wild hope of tackling the gun. The moment they crossed the doorway they fell riddled with bullets." Another story of the Irish Dragoons is told by Trooper P. Ryan. One of the Berkshires had been cut off from his regiment while lingering behind to bid a dying chum good-by, when he was surrounded by a patrol of Uhlans. A troop of the Irish Dragoons asked leave of their officer to rescue the man, and sweeping down on the Germans, quickly scattered them. But they were too late. The plucky Berkshire man had "gone under," taking three Germans with him. "We buried him with his chum by the wayside," adds Trooper Ryan. "Partings of this kind are sad, but they are everyday occurrences in war, and you just have to get used to them."

The Dragoons also went to the assistance of a man of the Irish Rifles who, wounded himself, was yet kneeling beside a fallen comrade of the Gloucester Regiment, and gamely firing to keep the enemy off. The Dragoons found both men thoroughly worn out, but urgency required the regiment to take up another position, and the wounded men had to be left to the chance of being picked up by the Red Cross corps. "They knew that," says the trooper who relates the incident, "and weren't the men to expect the general safety to be risked for them. 'Never mind,' said the young Irishman, 'shure the sisters 'll pick us up all right, an' if they don't—well, we've only once to die, an' it's the grand fight we've had annyhow.'"

One of the most stirring exploits of the war—equaled only by the devotion and self-sacrifice of the Royal Engineers in the fight for the bridge—is that of the Irish Fusiliers in saving another regiment from annihilation. The regiment was in a distant and exposed position, and a message had to be sent ordering its retirement. This could only be accomplished by despatching a messenger, and the fusiliers were asked for volunteers. Every man offered himself, though all knew what it meant to cross that stretch of open country raked with rifle fire. They tossed for the honor, and the first man to start-off with the message was an awkward shock-headed chap who, the narrator says, didn't impress by his appearance. Into the blinding hail of bullets he dashed, and cleared the first hundred yards without mishap. In the second lap he fell wounded, but struggled to his feet and rushed on till he was hit a second time and collapsed. One man rushed to his assistance and another to bear the message. The first reached the wounded man and started to carry him in, but when nearing the trenches and their cheering comrades, both fell dead. The third man had by this time got well on his way, and was almost within reach of the endangered regiment when he, too, was hit. Half-a-dozen men ran out to bring him in, and the

whole lot of this rescuing party were shot down, but the wounded fusilier managed to crawl to the trenches and deliver the order. The regiment fell back into safety and the situation was saved, but the message arrived none too soon, and the gallant Irish Fusiliers certainly saved one battalion from extinction.

In one fierce little fight the Munster Fusiliers (the "Dirty Shirts") had to prevent themselves from being cut off, and in a desperate effort to capture the whole regiment the Germans launched cavalry, infantry and artillery upon them. "The air was thick with noises," says one of the Munsters in telling the story, "men shouting, waving swords, and blazing away at us like blue murder. But our lads stood up to them without the least taste of fear, and gave them the bayonet and the bullet in fine style. They crowded upon us in tremendous numbers, but though it was hell's own work we wouldn't surrender, and they had at last to leave us. I got a sword thrust in the ribs, and then a bullet in me, and went under for a time, but when the mist cleared from my eyes I could see the boys cutting up the Germans entirely." The losses were heavy, and the comment was made in camp that the Germans had cleaned up the "Dirty Shirts" for once. "Well," said an indignant Fusilier, "it was a moighty expensive washin' for them annyway."

How Private Parker of the Inniskilling Fusiliers escaped from four Uhlans who had taken him prisoner is an example of personal daring. His captors marched him off between them till they came to a narrow lane where the horsemen could walk only in single file—three in front of him and one behind. He determined to make a bid for liberty. Ducking under the rear horse he seized his rifle, shot the Uhlan, and disappeared in the darkness. For days he lay concealed, and on one occasion German searchers entered the room in which he was hidden, yet failed to find him.

Private Court, 2nd Royal Scots, pays a tribute to the gallantry of the Connaught Rangers, and tells how they saved six guns which had been taken by the enemy. The sight of British guns in German hands was too much for the temper of the Connaughts, who came on with an irresistible charge, compelling the guns to be abandoned, and enabling the Royal Field Artillery to dash in and drag them out of danger. Another soldier relates that the Connaughts were trapped by a German abuse of the white flag and suffered badly when, all unsuspecting, they went to take over their prisoners; but they left their mark on the enemy on that occasion, and "when the Connaught blood is up," as one of the Rangers expresses it, "it's a nasty job to be up agin it."

Stories of Irish daring might be multiplied, but these are sufficient to show that the old regiments are still full of the fighting spirit. "Now boys," one of their non-commissioned officers is reported to have said, "no surrender for us! Ye've got yer rifles, and yer baynits, and yer butts, and after that, ye divils, there's yer fists." A drummer of the Irish Fusiliers who had lost his regiment, met another soldier on the road and begged for the loan of his rifle "just to get a last pop at the divils." Sir John French is himself of Irish parentage—Roscommon and Galway claim him—and there is no more ardent or cheerful fighter in the British army.

"It beats Banagher," says a jocular private in the Royal Irish, "how these Germans always disturb us at meal times. I suppose it's just the smell of the bacon that they're after, and Rafferty says we can't be too careful where we stow the mercies." From all accounts the Germans taken prisoner are about as ill-fed as they are ill-informed. Private Harkness of the same regiment, says the captives' first need is food and then information. One of them asked him why the Irish weren't fighting in their own civil war. "Faith," said he, "this is the only war we know about for the time being, and there's mighty little that's *civil* about it with the way you're behaving yourselves." The German looked gloomy, and, added Harkness, "I don't think he liked a plain Irishman's way of putting things."

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## VIII

### "A FIRST-CLASS FIGHTING MAN"

"If ever I come back, and anybody at home talks to me about the glory of war, I shall be d——d rude to him." That is an extract from the letter of an officer who has seen too much of the grim and ugly side of the campaign to find any romance in it. Yet out of all the horror there emerge incidents of conspicuous bravery that strike across the imagination like sunbeams, and cast a glow even in the darkest corners of the stricken field.

Valor is neither a philosophy nor a calculation. The soldier does not say to himself, "Look here, Atkins,

'One crowded hour of glorious life  
Is worth an age without a name.'"

He goes into the business of war determined to get it over as quickly as possible,<sup>[E]</sup> and when he does something stupendous, as he does nearly ever day, it is just because the thing has to be done, and he is there to do it. Tommy Atkins doesn't stop to think whether he is doing a brave thing, nor does he wait for orders to do it; he just sets about it as part of the day's work, and looks very much abashed if anybody applauds him for it.

For instance, there is a man in the Buffs (the story is told by a driver of the Royal Marine Artillery), who picked up a wounded comrade and carried him for more than a mile under a

vicious German fire that was exterminating nearly everything. It was a fine act of heroism. "Yet if anybody were to suggest the V.C. he'd break his jaw," says the writer, "and as he's a man with a 4.7 punch the men of his regiment keep very quiet about it."

Some fine exploits are recorded of the Artillery. When the Munster Fusiliers were surrounded in one extended engagement a driver of the R.F.A. named Pledge, who was shut up with them, was asked to "cut through" and get the assistance of the Artillery. Lance-Corporal John McMillan, Black Watch, thus describes what happened: "Pledge mounted a horse and dashed through the German lines. His horse was brought to the ground, and, as we afterwards discovered, he sustained severe injuries to his legs. Nothing daunted, he got his horse on its feet, and again set off at a great pace. To get to the artillery he had to pass down a narrow road, which was lined with German riflemen. He did not stop, however, but dashed through without being hit by a single bullet. He conveyed the message to the artillery, which tore off to the assistance of the Munsters, and saved the situation."

The saving of the guns is always an operation that calls for intrepidity, and many exploits of that kind are related. Lance-Corporal Bignell, Royal Berks, tells how he saw two R.F.A. drivers bring a gun out of action at Mons. Shells had been flying round the position, and the gunners had been killed, whereupon the two drivers went to rescue the gun. "It was a good quarter of a mile away," says the witness, "yet they led their horses calmly through the hail of shell to where the gun stood. Then one man held the horses while the other limbered up. It seemed impossible that the men could live through the German fire, and from the trenches we watched them with great anxiety. But they came through all right, and we gave them a tremendous cheer as they brought the gun in."

Sir John French in one of his despatches records that during the action at Le Cateau on August 26th the whole of the officers and men of one of the British batteries had been killed or wounded with the exception of one subaltern and two gunners. These continued to serve one gun, kept up a sound rate of fire, and came unhurt from the battlefield.

Another daring act is described by W.E. Motley, R.F.A. "Things became very warm for us," he says, "when the Germans found the range. In fact it became so hot that an order was passed to abandon the guns temporarily. This is the time when our men don't obey orders, so they stuck to their guns. They ceased their fire for a time. The enemy, thinking our guns were out of action, advanced rapidly. Then was the time our men proved their worth. They absolutely shattered the Germans with their shells."

Some gallant stories are told of the Royal Engineers. One especially thrilling, is given in the words of Darino, a lyrical artist of the Comédie Française, who joined the Cuirassiers, and was a spectator of the scene he describes. A bridge had to be blown up, and the whole place was an inferno of mitrailleuse and rifle fire. "Into this," he relates, "went your Engineers. A party of them rushed towards the bridge, and, though dropping one by one, were able to lay the charge before all were sacrificed. For a moment we waited. Then others came. Down towards the bridge they crept, seeking what cover they could in their eagerness to get near enough to light the fuse. Ah! it was then we Frenchmen witnessed something we shall never forget. One man dashed forward to his task in the open, only to fall dead. Another, and another, and another followed him, only to fall like his comrade, and not till the twelfth man had reached the fuse did the attempt succeed. As the bridge blew up with a mighty roar, we looked and saw that the brave twelfth man had also sacrificed his life."

During the long retreat from Mons the Middlesex Regiment got into an awkward plight, and a bridge—the only one left to the Germans—had to be destroyed to protect them. This was done by a sergeant of the Engineers, but immediately afterwards his own head was blown away by a German shell. "The brave fellow certainly saved the position," writes one of the Middlesex men, "for if the Germans had got across that night I'm afraid there would have been very few of us left."

Other daring incidents may be told briefly. One of the liveliest is that of seven men of the Worcesters, who were told they could "go for a stroll." While loitering along the road they encountered a party of Germans, and captured them all without firing a shot. "We just covered them with our rifles," writes Private Styles; "so simple!" Sir John French relates a similar exploit of an officer who, while proceeding along the road in charge of a number of led horses, received information that there were some of the enemy in the neighborhood. Upon seeing them he gave the order to charge, whereupon three German officers and 106 men surrendered! On another occasion a portion of a supply column was cut off by a detachment of German cavalry and the officer in charge was summoned to surrender. He refused, and starting his motors off at full speed dashed safely through.

Hairbreadth escapes are related in hundreds of letters, and they have a dramatic quality that makes the ineffectual fires of imaginative fiction burn very low. Sergeant E.W. Turner, West Kents, writes to his sweetheart: "The bullet that wounded me at Mons went into one breast pocket and came out of the other, and in its course passed through your photo." Private G. Ryder vouches for this: "We were having what you might call a dainty afternoon tea in the trenches under shell fire. The mugs were passed round with the biscuits and the 'bully' as best they could by the mess orderlies, but it was hard work messing through without getting more than we wanted. My next-door neighbor, so to speak, got a shrapnel bullet in his tin, and another two doors off had his biscuit shot out of his hand." Lieutenant A.C. Johnstone, the Hants county cricketer, after escaping other bullets and shells which were dancing around him, was hit over



the heart by a spent bullet, which on reaching hospital he found in his left-hand breast pocket. Private Plant, Manchester Regiment, had a cigarette shot out of his mouth, and a comrade got a bullet into his tin of bully beef. "It saves the trouble of opening it," was his facetious remark.

One of the Royal Scots Fusiliers was saved by a cartridge clip. He felt the shock and thought he had been hit, but the bullet was diverted by the impact owing to a loose cartridge. Had it been struck higher up all the cartridges might have exploded. Another letter mentions a case where a man got two bullets; one struck his cartridge belt, and the other entered his sleeve and passed through his trousers as far as the knee, without even scratching him. Drummer E. O'Brien, South Lancashires, had his bugle and piccolo smashed, his cap carried away by a bullet, and another bullet through his coat before he was finally struck by a piece of shrapnel which injured his ankle; and another soldier records thus his adventures under fire: (1) Shell hit and shattered my rifle; (2) Cap shot off my head; (3) Bullet in muscle of right arm. "But never mind, my dear," he comments, "I had a good run for my money." Staff-Sergeant J.W. Butler, 1st Lincolns, was saved by a paper pad in his pocket book; the bullet embedded itself there.

Sapper McKenny, Royal Engineers, records the unique experience of a comrade whose cap was shot off so neatly that the bullet left a groove in his hair just like a barber's parting! He thinks the German who fired the shot is probably a London hairdresser.

Private J. Drury, 3rd Coldstream Guards, also had a narrow escape, being hit by a bullet out of a shell between the left eye and the temple. "It struck there," he relates, "but one of our men got it out with a safety pin, and now I've got it in my pocket!"

The amusing escapade of "wee Hecky MacAlister," is told by Private T. McDougall, of the Highland Light Infantry. Hecky went into a burn for a swim, and suddenly found the attentions of the Germans were directed to him. "You know what a fine mark he is with his red head," says the writer to his correspondent, and so they just hailed bullets at him. Hecky, however, "dooked and dooked," and emerged from his bath happy but breathless after his submarine exploit.

But while the men in the trenches applaud all the brilliant exploits of their fellows, and laugh and jest over the lively escapes of the lucky ones who, in Atkins's phraseology, "only get their hair parted," there are other fine deeds done in the quiet corners of hospitals and out of the glamour of battle that move the strongest to tears. Such is the incident related by a member of the Royal Army Medical Corps, and it is a fitting story with which to close this chapter. One soldier, mortally wounded, was being attended by the doctor when his eye fell on a dying comrade. "See to him first, doctor," he said faintly, "that poor bloke's going home; he'll be home before me."

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## IX

### OFFICERS AND GENTLEMEN

"He died doing his duty like the officer and gentleman he was." Could any man have a finer epitaph? It is an extract from a letter written by Private J. Fairclough, Yorkshire Light Infantry, to General A. Wynn, and refers to the death of the General's son, Lieutenant G.O. Wynn, killed in action at Landrecies. The letter goes on to tell of the affection in which the young officer was held by his men, and this story of courage and unselfishness in the field is the simple but faithful tribute of a devoted soldier.

The war has brought out in a hundred ways the admirable qualities of all ranks in the British Expeditionary Force; but the relations of officers and men have never been revealed to us before with such friendly candor and mutual appreciation. Over and over again in these letters from the front the soldiers are found extolling the bravery and self-sacrifice of their officers. "No praise is too great for them," "our officers always pull us through," "they know their business to the fingertips," "as cool as cucumbers under fire," "magnificent examples," "absolutely fearless in the tightest corners"—these are some of the phrases in which the men speak proudly of those in command.

One officer in the 1st Hampshire Regiment read *Marmion* aloud in the trenches, under a fierce maxim fire, to keep up the spirits of his men; and they "play cards and sing popular songs to cheer us up," adds another genial soldier. Not that the men suffer much from depression. On the contrary, the commanders agree that their spirits have been splendid. "Our men are simply wonderful," writes an officer in the cavalry division; "they will go through anything."

The most surprising thing in the soldiers' letters is that they should show such an extraordinary sense of the dramatic. They throb with emotion. Take this account of the death of Captain Berners as written by Corporal S. Haley, of the Brigade of Guards, in a letter published by the *Star*:

"Captain Berners, of the Irish, was the life and soul of our lot. When shells were bursting over our heads he would buck us up with his humor about Brock's displays at the Palace. But when we got into close quarters it was he who was in the thick of it. And didn't he fight! I don't know how he got knocked over, but one of our fellows told me he died a game 'un. He was one of the best of officers, and there is not a Tommy who would not have gone under for him."

Among those who fell at Cambrai was Captain Clutterbuck, of the King's Own (Lancaster)

Regiment. He was killed while leading a bayonet charge. "Just like Clutterbuck," wrote a wounded sergeant, describing the officer's valor, and adding, "Lieutenant Steele-Perkins also died one of the grandest deaths a British officer could wish for. He was lifted out of the trenches wounded four times, but protested and crawled back again till he was mortally wounded."

A sergeant of the Coldstream Guards, in an account given to the *Evening News*, speaks of the death of Captain Windsor Clive. "We were sorry to lose Captain Clive, who," he says, "was a real gentleman and a soldier. He was knocked over by the bursting of a shell, which maddened our fellows I can tell you." The utmost anger was also aroused in the men of the Lancaster Regiment by the death of Colonel Dykes. "Good-by, boys," he exclaimed as he fell; and "By God, we avenged him," said one of the "boys" in describing the fight.

Many instances are given of the devotion shown by the soldiers in saving their officers. Private J. Ferrie, of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, wounded while defending a bridge at Landrecies, tells in the *Glasgow Herald* how Sergeant Crop rescued Lieutenant Stephens, who had been badly hit and must otherwise have fallen into the enemy's hands: "The sergeant took the wounded lieutenant on his back, but as he could not crawl across the bridge so encumbered he entered the water, swam the canal, carried the wounded man out of line of fire, and consigned him to the care of four men of his own company. Of a platoon of fifty-eight which was set to guard the bridge only twenty-six afterwards answered to the roll call."

On the other hand, there are many records of the tremendous risks taken by officers to rescue wounded men. Private J. Williams, Royal Field Artillery, had two horses shot under him and was badly injured "when the major rushed up and saved me." "I was lying wounded when an artillery major picked me up and took me into camp, or I would never have seen England again," writes Lance-Corporal J. Preston, Inniskilling Fusiliers. Lieutenant Sir Alfred Hickman was wounded in the shoulder while rescuing a wounded sergeant under heavy fire. How another disabled man was brought in by Lieutenant Amos, is told by Private George Pringle, King's Own Scottish Borderers. "Several of us volunteered to do it," he says, "but the lieutenant wouldn't hear of anybody else taking the risk." Captain McLean, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, saved one of his men under similar circumstances. All the letters are full of praise of the officers who, in the words of Private James Allan, Gordon Highlanders, "seem to be mainly concerned about the safety of their men, and indifferent to the risks they take upon themselves."

Every Tommy knows he is being finely led. The officers are a constant source of inspiration and encouragement. Private Campbell, Irish Fusiliers, writes:

"Lieutenant O'Donovan led us all the time, and was himself just where the battle was hottest. I shall never forget his heroism. I can see him now, revolver in one hand and sword in the other. He certainly accounted for six Germans on his own, and inspired us to the effort of our lives. He has only been six months in the service, is little more than a boy, but the British Army doesn't possess a more courageous officer."

The Scottish Borderers speak proudly of Major Leigh, who was hit during a bayonet charge, and when some of his men turned to help him, shouted "Go on, boys; don't mind me." A lieutenant of A Company, 1st Cheshires: "I only know his nickname," says Private D. Schofield—though wounded in two places, rushed to help a man in distress, brought him in, and then went back to pick up his fallen sword. Captain Robert Bruce, heir of Lord Balfour of Burleigh, distinguished himself in the fighting at Mons. One of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders relates that, in spite of wounds, Captain Bruce took command of about thirty Highlanders who had been cut off, and throwing away his sword, seized a rifle from one of the killed, and fought side by side with his men.

How the guns were saved at Soissons is told in a letter, published in *The Times*, from Sergeant C. Meades, of the Berkshire Regiment. "We had the order to abandon our guns," he writes, "but our young lieutenant said, 'No, boys; we'll never let the Germans take a British gun,' and with a cheer we fought on.... The Staffords came up and reinforced us. Then I got hit, and retired.... But the guns were saved. When the last of the six got through every one cheered like mad." One of the West Kents also described the daring action of an officer. In the midst of terrific fire, he walked calmly down the artillery line, putting our lost guns out of action so that they would be useless to the Germans.

Even into the letters describing these gallant incidents there creep frequent evidences of Atkins's unconquerable spirit and sense of humor. Private R. Toomey, Royal Army Medical Corps, tells of an officer of the Royal Irish shouting at the top of his voice, "Give 'em hell, boys, give 'em hell!" He had been wounded in the back by a lump of shrapnel, but, says Toomey, "it was a treat to hear him shouting."

Most of these accounts refer to the weary days of the retirement from Mons to Compiègne, a test of endurance that brought out the splendid fighting qualities of officers and men alike. That retirement is certainly one of the most masterly achievements of a war already glorious for the exploits of British arms. Day after day our men had to fall back, tired and hungry, exhausted from want of sleep, yet fighting magnificently, and only impatient to begin the attack. This eagerness for battle is in marked contrast to the spirit of the German troops, of whom there is abundant evidence that the men have often to be driven into action by the threatening swords and revolvers of their officers.

Francis Ryan, Northumberland Fusiliers, tells in the *Scotsman* how young lieutenant Smith-

Dorrien pleaded to be allowed to remain with his men in the trenches after a retirement had been ordered. The South Staffords shires thought they were "getting along splendidly," says one of the men, "until the General came and told us we must retreat or we would be surrounded." The officer spoke very encouragingly, and praised his men; but they were all so unwilling to yield ground that one of them, expressing impatience, made a comment he would never have thought of doing in peace time. The General only smiled.

This impatience pervaded all arms of the service. Some of the Highland regiments began to grow grim and sullen, in spite of their play with the bayonet; and the Irish corps became "unaisy." It was then that the officers' fine spirit brought reassurance. This is how the King's Royal Rifles were cheered up, according to Private Harman: "The officers knew we were disappointed, because on the fifth day of retirement our commanding officer came round and spoke to us. 'Stick it, boys, stick it,' he said; 'To-morrow we shall go the other way and advance—Biff, biff!' The way he said 'Biff, biff,' delighted the men, and after that we frequently heard men shouting, 'Biff, biff!'"

General Sir John French, who is a great favorite with all ranks, and spoken of with affection by every Tommy, makes frequent tours of the lines and has a cheery word for every regiment. Driver W. Cryer, Royal Field Artillery, relates in the *Manchester Guardian* that, at St. Quentin, Sir John French visited the troops, "smiling all over his face," and explained the meaning of the repeated retirements. Up to then, says Cryer, the men had almost to be pulled away by the officers, but after the General's visit they fell in with the general scheme with great cheerfulness.

Summing up his impressions of the nerve-strain of these weary rearguard actions, a famous cavalry officer writing home, says: "We had a hell of a time.... But the men were splendid. I don't believe any other troops in the world could have stood it."

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## X

### BROTHERS IN ARMS

There is a fine fraternity between the British and the French soldiers. They don't understand very much of each other's speech, but they "muddle through," as Atkins puts it, with "any old lingo." The French call out, "Bravo, Tommee!" and share cigarettes with him: and Atkins, not very sure of his new comrades' military Christian name, replies with a cheery "Right, Oh!" Then turning to his own fellows he shouts, "Are we downhearted?" and the clamorous "No!" always brings forth a rousing French cheer.

Having seen each other in action since they first met on the way to battle they have grown to respect each other more and more. There is not much interchange of compliments in the letters from the trenches, but such as there is clearly establishes the belief of Atkins that he is fighting side by side with a brave and generous ally.

"We always knew," writes one soldier, "that the French were swift and dangerous in attack, but we know now that they can fight on the stubbornly defensive." One of the South Lancashires is loud in his praise of their behavior under fire. "Especially the artillery," Sergeant J. Baker adds; "the French seem to like the noise, and aren't happy unless it's there."

One of *The Times* correspondents mentions that the German guns have a heavy sound "boum," and the French a sharper one, "bing"; but neither of them is very pleasant to the ear, and it requires a cultured military taste like that of the French to enjoy the full harmony of the music when the British "bang" is added to the general cannonading. The French artillery is admitted to be fine, the deadly accuracy of the gunners being highly praised by all who have watched the havoc wrought in the German lines.

For the French soldier, however, the path of greatest glory lies in the charge. Dash and fire are what he possesses in the highest degree. His highly-strung temperament chafes under delays and disappointments. He hasn't the solid, bull-dog courage that enables the British soldier to take hard knocks, even severe punishment, and come up smiling again to renew the battle that he will only allow to end in one way, and that way victory.

In the advance, as one writer describes it, the French dash forward in spasmodic movements, making immediately for cover. After a brief breathing space they bound into the open again, and again seek any available shelter. And so they proceed till the charge is sounded, when with gleaming bayonets and a cry of "*pour la gloire*" upon their lips they sweep down upon the enemy at a tremendous pace. The whole thing is exhilarating to watch, and to the men engaged it is almost intoxicating. They see red and the only thing that can stop them is the sheer dead weight of the columns in front. To the French the exploit of the 9th Lancers, already described in this volume, is the greatest thing in the war. They would have died to have accomplished it themselves. The fine heroics of such an exploit gives them a crazy delight. Then there are the forlorn hopes, the bearing of messages across a zone of withering fire, the fights for the colors. One incident which closely resembles the exploit of the Royal Irish Fusiliers is recorded. A message had to be borne to another regiment and volunteers sprang forward eagerly to the call. The enemy's fire was particularly deadly at this point, and it seemed impossible for a messenger to get through, but no man hesitated. The first fell dead before he had traveled many yards, the

second had a leg shot off, the third by amazing luck got through without a scratch. Deeds of this kind have endeared the French soldier to Tommy Atkins more than all his extravagant acts of kindness, and the sympathetic bond of valor has linked them together in the close companionship of brothers-in-arms.

Having shown what the British soldier thinks of the French as fighting men, it is pleasant to turn to our Ally's opinion of Tommy Atkins. Here the letters deal in superlatives. M. Duchene, French master at Archbishop Holgate's School, York, who was wounded with his regiment at Verdun, writes in glowing terms of his comrades' praise. "Ah, those English soldiers!" he says. "In my regiment you only hear such expressions as '*Ils sont magnifiques,*' '*Ils sont superbs,*' '*Quels soldats!*' No better tribute could be given." Another Frenchman with the army of the Republic is stirred into this eulogy in a letter to a friend in England: "How fine they are, how splendidly they behave, these English soldiers! In their discipline and their respect for their officers they are magnificent, and you will never know how much we have applauded them."

Another Frenchman, acting as interpreter with a Scottish regiment, relates with amazement how the Highlanders go into action, "as if they were going to a picnic, with laughing eyes and, whenever possible, with a cigarette between their lips. Their courage is a mixture of imperturbability and tenacity. One must have seen their immovable calm, their heroic sang-froid, under the rain of bullets to do it justice." Then he goes on to describe how a handful of Scots were selected to hold back a large body of Germans in a village to enable the main body of the British to retire in good order. They took up a position in the first house they came to and fired away at the invaders, who rained bullets on the building. Some of the gallant little party fell, but the others kept up the fight. Then there came a pause in the attack, the German fire ceased, the enemy was seeking a more sheltered position. During this brief respite the sergeant in command of the Scots surveyed the building they had entered. It was a small grocer's shop, and on an upper shelf he found a few packets of chocolate. "Here, lads," he shouted, "whoever kills his man gets a bit o' this." The firing began again, and as each marksman succeeded, the imperturbable Scot shouted "Got him," and handed over the prize amid roars of laughter. "Alas," comments the narrator, "there were few prize-winners who lived to taste their reward."

The same eulogist, whose narrative was obtained by Reuter's correspondent, also speaks of the fastidious Scot's preoccupations. He has two—to be able to shave and to have tea. "No danger," the Frenchman declares, "deters them from their allegiance to the razor and the teapot. At —, in the department of the Nord, I heard a British officer of high rank declare with delicious calm between two attacks on the town: 'Gentlemen, it was nothing. Let's go and have tea.' Meanwhile his men took advantage of the brief respite to crowd round the pump, where, producing soap and strop, they proceeded to shave minutely and conscientiously with little bits of broken glass serving as mirrors."

The same sense of order and method also struck another Frenchman, who speaks of the "amazing Englishmen," who carry everything with them, and are never in want of anything, not even of sleep!

Certainly there is much truth in these tributes to the British military organization, but that is another story and for another chapter. The opinion of an English cavalry officer, however, may be quoted as to the relative merits of the French and English horses. "The French horses," he writes, "are awful. They look after them so badly. They all say, 'What lovely horses you have,' to us, and they do look fine beside theirs, but we look after ours so well. We always dismount and feed them on all occasions with hay and wheat found on the farms and in stacks in the fields, also clover. The French never do."

As a result of these observations the French appear to have been applying themselves to the study of the British fighting force. "I know for a fact," says Trooper G. Douglas, "that French officers have been moving amongst us studying our methods. The French Tommies try to copy us a lot, and they like, when they have time, to stroll into our lines for a chat or a game; but it's precious little time there is for that now."

But it is in character and temperament that the chief differences of the allies lie. "Brigadier" Mary Murray, who went to the front with other members of the Salvation Army, records a conversation she had with a French soldier over a cup of coffee. "Ah," he said, "we lose heavily, we French. We haven't the patience of the English. They are fine and can wait: we must rush!" And yet Tommy Atkins can do a bit of rushing too. Private R. Duffy, of the Rifle Brigade, sends home a lively account of the defense of the Marne in which a mixed force of British and French was engaged. The object to be achieved was to drive back the Germans who were attempting to cross the river. "About half a mile from the banks," writes Duffy, "we came out from a wood to find a French infantry battalion going across in the same direction. We didn't want to be behind, so we put our best foot forward, and one of the most exciting races you ever saw followed. We got in first by a head, as you might say, and we were just in time to tackle a mob of Germans heading for the crossing in disorder. We went at them with the bayonet, but they didn't seem to have the least heart for fighting. Some of them flung themselves in the stream and tried to swim to safety, but they were heavily accoutered and worn out so they didn't go very far. Of about three hundred men who tried this not more than half a dozen succeeded in reaching the other bank."

In spite of all the hatreds the war has engendered—and one of the Royal Lancasters declares that the sign manual of friendship between the French and the English soldier is "a cross on the throat indicating their wish to the Kaiser"—there is still room for passages of fine sympathy and

chivalry. One young French lieutenant distinguished himself by carrying a wounded Uhlan to a place of safety under a heavy German fire, English soldiers have shown equal generosity and kindness to injured captives, and the tributes to heroic and patient nurses shine forth in letters of gold upon the dark pages of this tragic history. Here is a touching letter from one of the King's Own Royal Lancasters. "In one hospital, which was a church," he writes, "there was a young French girl helping to bandage us up. How she stood it I don't know. There were some awful sights, but she never quailed—just a sad sweet smile for every one. If ever any one deserved a front seat in Heaven this young angel did. God bless her! She has the prayers and all the love the remnants of the Fourth Division can give her."

And another pretty little tribute is paid to the kindness of a French lady to four English soldiers billeted at her house. "She was wondrous kind," writes one of the grateful soldiers, "and when we left for the front Madame and her mother sobbed and wept as if we had been their own sons."

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## XI

### ATKINS AND THE ENEMY

In one of his fine messages from the front, Sir John French, whom the *New York World* has described as the "best of war correspondents," referred to the British soldier as "a difficult person to impress or depress." He meant, of course, that it was no use trying to terrify Tommy Atkins. Nothing will do that. His stupendous sense of humor carries him, smiling, through every emergency.

But Atkins is a keen observer, and he takes on very clear and vivid impressions of men and affairs. He hates compromises and qualifications, and just lets you have his opinion—"biff!" as one officer expresses it.

"Bill and I have been thinking it over," says one letter from the trenches, "and we've come to the conclusion that the German army system is rotten." There you have the concentrated wisdom of hundreds of soldier critics who talk of the Kaiser's great military machine as they know it from intimate contact with the fighting force it propels. They admit its mechanical perfection; it is the human factor that breaks down.

Nothing has impressed Tommy Atkins more than the lack of *morale* in the German soldiers. "Oh, they are brave enough, poor devils; but they've got no heart in the fighting," he says. That is absolutely true. Hundreds of thousands of them have no notion of what they are fighting for. Some of the prisoners declared that when they left the garrisons they were "simply told they were going to maneuvers"; "others," says a Royal Artilleryman, "had no idea they were fighting the English"; according to a Highland officer, surrendering Germans said their fellows had been assured that "America and Japan were fighting on their side, and that another Boer war was going on"; and a final illusion was dispelled when those captured by the Royal Irish were told that the civil war in Ireland had been "put off!"

It is not only that the men lack this moral preparation for war. Their system of fighting is demoralizing. "They come on in close formation, thousands of them, just like sheep being driven to the slaughter," is the description that nine soldiers out of every ten give of the Germans going into action. "We just mow them down in heaps," says an artilleryman. "Lord, even a woman couldn't miss hitting them," is the comment from the Infantry. And as for the cavalry: "Well, we just makes holes in them," adds one of the Dragoons. At first they didn't take cover at all, but just marched into action with their drums beating and bands playing, "like a blooming parade," as Atkins puts it. After the first slaughter, however, they shrank from the attack, and there is ample evidence of eyewitnesses that the German infantry often had to be lashed into battle by their officers. "I saw a colonel striking his own men with his sword to prevent them running away," is one of the many statements. Revolvers, too, were freely used for the same purpose.

But, generally speaking, there is iron discipline in the Kaiser's army. The men obey their officers implicitly. Trooper E. Tugwell, of the Berwicks, tells this little story of a cavalry charge from which a German infantry regiment bolted—all but one company, whose officers ordered them to stand: "They faced round without attempting to fire a shot, and stood there like statues to meet the onslaught of our men. Our chaps couldn't help admiring their fine discipline, but there's not much room for sentiment in war, and we rode at them with the lance, and swept them away." "They are big fellows, and, in a way, brave," writes Private P. Case of the King's (Liverpool) Regiment, describing one of their attacks; "they must be brave, or they would not have kept advancing when they saw their dead so thick that they were practically standing up." "Their officers simply won't let them surrender," says another writer, "and so long as there's an officer about they'll stand like sheep and be slaughtered by the thousand." The essential difference between the German soldiers and our own is in the officering and training, and it is admirably expressed by Private Burrell, Northumberland Fusiliers. "*We* are led; *they* are driven,"<sup>[F]</sup> is Burrell's epigram.

According to other letter writers, the German soldiers are absolutely tyrannized over by their officers. They are horribly ill-used, badly fed,<sup>[G]</sup> overworked, constantly under the lash. "They hate their officers like poison, and fear them ten times more than they fear death," says Private

Martin King. "Most of the prisoners that I've seen are only fit for the hospital, and many of them will never be fit for anything else this side of the grave. Their officers don't seem to have any consideration for the men at all, and we have a suspicion that the heavy losses of German officers aren't all due to our fire. There was one brought in who had certainly been hit by one of their own bullets, and in the back too." Other soldiers say the same, and add that if it weren't for dread of their officers the Germans would surrender wholesale. "Take the officers away, and their regiments fall to pieces," is the dictum of one of the Somerset Light Infantry, "and that's why we always pick off the German officers first."

There is not the slightest divergence of opinion in the British ranks as to the German infantry fire. "Their shooting is laughable," "they couldn't hit a haystack in an entry," and "asses with the rifle," are how our men dispose of it. The Germans fire recklessly with their rifles planted against their hips, while Tommy Atkins takes cool and steady aim, and lets them have it from the shoulder. "We just knocked them over like nine-pins," a Highlander explained. As to the German cavalry, one Tommy expressed the prevailing opinion to nicety. "I don't want to be nasty," he said, "but what we all pray for is just half-an-hour each way with three times our number of Uhlans."

When it comes to artillery, however, Atkins has nothing but praise for the enemy. Their aeroplanes flutter over the British positions and give the gunners the exact range, and then they let go. "I can only figure it out as being something worse than the mouth of hell," declares Private John Stiles, 1st Gloucesters, and it may be here left at that, as the devastating effects of artillery have already been dealt with in a previous chapter. One thing which has puzzled and sometimes baffled our men is the way the Germans conceal their guns. They display extraordinary ingenuity in this direction, hiding them inside haystacks, in leaf-covered trenches, and sometimes, unhappily, in Red Cross wagons.

Stories of German treachery are abundant, and official reports have dealt with such shameful practises as driving prisoners and refugees in front of them when attacking, abusing the protection of the White Flag, and wearing Red Cross brassards in action. The men have their own stories to tell. An Irish Guardsman records a white flag incident during the fighting on the Aisne: "Coldstreamers, Connaughts, Grenadiers, and Irish Guards were all in this affair, and the fight was going on well. Suddenly the Germans in front of us raised the white flag, and we ceased firing and went up to take our prisoners. The moment we got into the open, fierce fire from concealed artillery was turned on us, and the surrendered Germans picked up their rifles and pelted us with their fire. It was horrible. They trapped us completely, and very few escaped." The German defense of these white flag incidents was given to Trooper G. Douglas by a prisoner who declared that the men were quite innocent of intention to deceive, but that whenever their officers saw the white flag they hauled it down, and compelled them to fight.

Many British soldiers suffered from the treachery of the Germans in wearing English and French uniforms, and their letters home are full of indignation at the practises of the enemy. It was in the fighting following such a ruse at Landrecies that the Honorable Archer-Windsor-Clive, of the Coldstream Guards, met his death. "Another time," an artillery officer relates, "they ran into one of our regiments with some of their officers dressed in French uniforms. They said 'Ne tirez-pas, nous sommes Français,' and asked for the C.O. He came up, and then they calmly blew his brains out!" A similar act of treachery is recorded by Lieutenant Oswald Anne, R.A., in a letter published in the *Leeds Mercury*: "At one place where the Berkshire Regiment was on guard a German force arrived attired in French uniforms. To keep up the illusion, a German called out in French from the wire entanglements that they wanted to interview the commanding officer. A major of the Berkshires who spoke French, went forward, and was immediately shot down. This sort of thing is of daily occurrence." Lieutenant Edgcumbe, son of Sir Robert Edgcumbe, Newquay, tells of another instance of treachery in which British uniforms were used, and declares, in common with many other officers, that he "will never again respect the Germans; they have no code of honor!"

They strip the uniforms from the dead, come on in night attacks shouting "Vive, l'Angleterre!" and sound the British bugle-call "Cease fire" in the thickest of the fight. Twice in one engagement the Germans stopped the British fire by the mean device of the bugle, and twice they charged desperately upon the silent ranks. But in nearly every case their punishment for these violations of the laws of civilized warfare has been swift and terrible, and no mercy has been shown them.

Charges of barbarity are also common in letters from the battlefields. One officer, who says he "never before realized what an awful thing war is," writes: "We have with us in the trenches three girls who came to us for protection. One had no clothes on, having been outraged by the Germans. I have given her my shirt and divided my rations among them. In consequence I feel rather hungry, having had nothing for thirty-two hours, except some milk chocolate. Another poor girl has just come in, having had both her breasts cut off. Luckily I caught the Uhlan officer in the act, and with a rifle at 300 yards killed him. And now she is with us, but, poor girl, I am afraid she will die. She is very pretty and only about nineteen."<sup>[H]</sup>

Captain Roffey, Lancashire Fusiliers, tells how he was found wounded, and handed over his revolver to the Germans, whereupon his captor used it to shoot him again, and left him for dead. There is no end to the stories of this kind, and one of the wounded vehemently declared that the "devilry of the Germans cannot be exaggerated."

There are others amongst the wounded however, who have received nothing but kindness from the enemy. Lieutenant H.G.W. Irwin, South Lancashire Regiment, pays a tribute to the treatment

he met with in the German lines; Captain J.B. George, Royal Irish, "could not have been better treated had he been the Crown Prince;" and one of the Officer's Special Reserve says the stories of "brutality are only exceptions, and there are exceptions in every army."

And here it is worth quoting a happy example of German chivalry. It is taken from one of Sir John French's messages. A small party of French under a non-commissioned officer was cut off and surrounded. After a desperate resistance it was decided to go on fighting to the end. Finally, the N.C.O. and one man only were left, both being wounded. The Germans came up and shouted to them to lay down their arms. The German commander, however, signed to them to keep their arms, and then asked for permission to shake hands with the wounded non-commissioned officer, who was carried off on his stretcher with his rifle by his side.

After this account of what British soldiers think of the enemy, it is interesting to read what is the German opinion of Tommy Atkins. Evidently the fighting men do not share the Kaiser's estimate of "French's contemptible little army." Three very interesting letters, written by German officers, and found in the possession of the captives, were published in an official despatch from General Headquarters. Here are extracts from each:

(1) "With the English troops we have great difficulties. They have a queer way of causing losses to the enemy. They make good trenches, in which they wait patiently. They carefully measure the ranges for their rifle fire, and then they open a truly hellish fire on the unsuspecting cavalry. This was the reason that we had such heavy losses."

(2) "The English are very brave and fight to the last.... One of our companies has lost 130 men out of 240."

(3) "We are fighting with the English Guards, Highlanders and Zouaves. The losses on both sides have been enormous. The English are marvelously trained in making use of the ground. One never sees them, and one is constantly under fire. Two days ago, early in the morning, we were attacked by immensely superior English forces (one brigade and two battalions) and were turned out of our positions. The fellows took five guns from us. It was a tremendous hand-to-hand fight. How I escaped myself I am not clear.... If we first beat the English, the French resistance will soon be broken."

The admissions of prisoners that the Germans were amazed at the fighting qualities of the British soldier, and had acquired a wholesome dread of meeting him at close quarters, may have been colored by a trifling disposition to be amiable in their captivity; but letters such as those just quoted are honest statements for private reading in Germany, and were never intended to fall into British hands.

Although Tommy Atkins makes occasional jocular allusions to the enemy as "Sausages" there is no doubt that he considers the German army a very substantial fighting force. "The German is not a toy terrier, but a bloodhound thirsting for blood," is one description of him; "getting to Berlin isn't going to be a cheap excursion," says another; and, to quote a third, "in spite of all we say about the Teuton, he is taking his punishment well, and we've got a big job on our hands."

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## XII

### THE WAR IN THE AIR

Mr. H.G. Wells did not long anticipate the sensations of an aerial conflict between the nations. Six years after the publication of his *War in the Air* the thing has become an accomplished fact, and for the first time in history the great nations are fighting for the mastery not only upon land but in the air and under the sea.

Fine as have been the adventures of airmen in times of peace, and startling as spectators have found the acrobatic performance of "looping the loop," these tricks of the air appear feeble exploits compared with the new sensation of an actual battle in the clouds. Soldiers, scribbling their letters in the trenches, have been fascinated by the sudden appearance at dusk of a hostile aeroplane, and have gazed with pleasurable agitation as out of the dim, mysterious distance a British aviator shot up in pursuit.

"It is thrilling and magnificent," says one officer, "and I was filled with rapture at the spectacle of the first fight in the clouds. The German maneuvered for position and prepared to attack, but our fellow was too quick for him, and darted into a higher plane. The German tried to circle round and follow, and so in short spurts they fought for mastery, firing at each other all the time, the machines swaying and oscillating violently. The British airman, however, well maintained his ascendancy. Then suddenly there was a pause, the German machine began to reel, the wounded pilot had lost control, and with a dive the aeroplane came to earth half a mile away. Our man hovered about for a time, and then calmly glided away over the German lines to reconnoiter."

Nothing could excel the skill and daring shown by the men of the Royal Flying Corps. They stop at nothing. Some of their machines have been so badly damaged by rifle and shell fire that on descending they have had to be destroyed.

"Fired at constantly both by friend and foe," Sir John French writes, "and not hesitating to fly in every kind of weather, they have remained undaunted throughout." The highest praise is bestowed upon Brigadier-General Sir David Henderson, in command of the Corps, for the high state of efficiency this young branch of the service has attained. It has been on its trial, and has already covered itself with glory. General Joffre, the French Commander-in-Chief, has sent a special message singling out the British Flying Corps "most particularly" for his highest eulogies. Several English airmen have already been made Chevaliers of the Legion of Honor.

That the nervous strain of aerial warfare is severe is shown by expression in several airmen's letters. Not only have they to fight their man, but they have to manage their machines at the same time. This means that if an airman ascends alone he is unable to use a rifle and must depend for attack on revolver fire only. This is illustrated by a passage in one of the official reports: "Unfortunately one of our aviators, who has been particularly active in annoying the enemy by dropping bombs, was wounded in a duel in the air. Being alone on a single-seated monoplane, he was not able to use a rifle, and whilst circling above a German two-seater in an endeavor to get within pistol shot was hit by the observer of the latter, who was armed with a rifle. He managed to fly back over our lines, and by great good luck descended close to a motor ambulance, which at once conveyed him to hospital."

This appears to be only the second instance recorded during the first two months of the war in which our airmen have suffered mishap, yet half-a-dozen German machines have been brought down and their navigators either killed or wounded. Private Harman, King's Royal Rifles, describes an exciting pursuit in which a German aeroplane was captured. The British aviator, who had the advantage in speed and was a good revolver shot, evidently greatly distressed the fugitive, for, surrendered, he planed down in good order, and on landing was found to be dead.

According to an officer in the Royal Flying Corps the worst aerial experience in war is to go up as a passenger. "It is 'loathly,'" he says, "to sit still helplessly and be fired at." In one flight as a spectator his machine was "shelled and shot at about a hundred times, but luckily only thirteen shots went through the planes and neither of us was hit." An interesting account of a battle seen from the clouds is given in a letter published by *The Times*. "I was up with — for an evening reconnaissance over this huge battle. I bet it will ever be remembered as the biggest in history. It extends from Compiègne right away east to Belfort. Can you imagine such a sight? We flew at 5 p.m. over the line, and at that time the British Army guns (artillery, heavy and field) all opened fire together. We flew at 5,000 feet and saw a sight which I hope it will never be my lot to see again. The woods and hills were literally cut to ribbons all along the south of Laon. It was marvelous watching hundreds of shells bursting below one to right and left for miles, and then to see the Germans replying."

Another officer of the Flying Corps describes his impression of the Battle of Mons, seen from a height of 5,000 feet. British shells were bursting like little bits of cotton wool over the German batteries. A German attack developed, and the airman likens the enemy's advance formation to a "large human tadpole"—a long dense column with the head spread out in front.

Evidently the anti-aircraft guns, though rather terrifying, do very little damage. Airmen have had shells burst all round them for a long time without being hurt. Of course they are careful to fly at a high altitude. When struck by shrapnel, however, an aeroplane (one witness says) "just crumples up like a broken egg." On the other hand, bombs dropped from aeroplanes do great damage, if properly directed. A petrol bomb was dropped by an English airman at night into a German bivouac with alarming results, and another thrown at a cavalry column struck an ammunition wagon and killed fifteen men. A French airman wiped out a cavalry troop with a bomb, and the effect of the steel arrows used by French aviators is known to be damaging. The German bombs thrown by Zeppelins and Taube aeroplanes on Antwerp and Paris do not appear to have much disturbed either the property or equanimity of the inhabitants. So far as aerial excursions are concerned the most brilliant exploit is undoubtedly that of Flight-Lieutenant C.H. Collet, of the Naval Wing of the British Flying Corps, who, with a fleet of five aeroplanes swept across the German frontier and, hovering over Düsseldorf, dropped three bombs with unerring effect upon the Zeppelin sheds.

Bomb-dropping, however, has not been indulged in to any great extent by either of the combatants, and the chief use to which air machines have been put is that of scouting. The Germans use them largely for range finding, and they seem to prove a very accurate guide to the gunners. "We were advancing on the German right and doing splendidly," writes Private Boardman (Bradford) "when we saw an aeroplane hover right over our heads, and by some signaling give the German artillery the range. The aviator had hardly gone when we were riddled with shot and shell." A sergeant of the 21st Lancers says the signaling is done by dropping a kind of silver ball or disc from the aeroplanes, and the Germans watch for this and locate our position to a nicety at once.

As scouts—and that, meantime, is the real practical purpose of aeroplanes in war—the British aviators have done wonders. Their machines are lighter and faster than those of the Germans, and as they make a daily average of nine reconnaissance flights of over 100 miles each it will be understood that they keep the Intelligence Department well supplied with accurate information of the enemy's movements.

French airmen are particularly daring both in reconnaissance and in flight, and the well-known M. Védrines, whose achievements are familiar to English people, has already brought down three German aeroplanes. In one encounter he fought in a Blériot machine carrying a mitrailleuse, and



the enemy dropped, riddled with bullets. So completely have some of the aeroplanes been perforated, without mishap, says the *Daily Telegraph's* war correspondent, that the pilots have found a new game. Each evening after their flights they count the number of bullet holes in their machine, marking each with a circle in red chalk, so that none may be included in the next day's total. The record appears to be thirty-seven holes in one day, and the pilot in question claims to be the "record man du monde."

Zeppelins have not maintained their reputation in this war. One sailed over Sir John French's headquarters and indicated the position to the enemy, but they are no match for the swift and agile aeroplanes. A wounded dispatch carrier saw one English and two French machines attack a Zeppelin and bring it down instantly. A half hour's fight with another is recorded; among the captured passengers in this, according to a soldier's letter, was a boy of nine. Private Drury, Coldstream Guards, saw one huge German aeroplane brought to earth, three of its officers being killed by rifle fire and one badly injured.

There is something strange, mysterious, and insubstantial about the war in the air that the soldiers do not yet feel or comprehend. Often the feverish activity of aircraft at a high altitude is known only to a very few practised observers. A gentle purring in the air and the scarcely audible ping-pong of distant revolver shots may represent a fierce duel in the clouds, and often the soldiers are unaware of the presence of a hostile airman until the projectiles aimed at them burst in the trenches. One evening, a graphic official message states, the atmosphere was so still and clear that only those specially on the lookout detected the enemy's aeroplanes, and when the bombs burst "the puffs of smoke from the detonating shell hung in the air for minutes on end like balls of fleecy cottonwool before they slowly expanded and were dissipated."

Of course, the tactics adopted for dealing with hostile aircraft are to attack them instantly with one or more British machines, and as in this respect the British Flying Corps has established an individual ascendancy, Sir John French proudly declares that "something in the direction of the mastery of the air has already been gained."

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## XIII

### TOMMY AND HIS RATIONS

A medical officer at the front declares that the British Expeditionary Force is, without doubt, the "best fed Army that has ever taken the field." That is a sweeping statement, but it is true. It is confirmed over and over again in the letters of Tommy Atkins. It is acknowledged by the French. Even the most sullen German prisoners agree with it. There has been universal praise for the quality and abundance of the food, and the general arrangements for the comfort of the British soldier.

One French description of the feeding says that the English troops "live like fighting cocks," another marvels at "the stupendous pieces of meat, and bread heavy with butter and jam," a third speaks of the "amazing Tommees" who "carry everything in their pockets and forget nothing at all." And so on.

But the most remarkable tribute of all to the perfect working of the transport and supply service is that given by the British officers and men themselves. Captain Guy Edwards, Coldstream Guards, says: "They have fed our troops wonderfully regularly and well up to the present; we have had no sickness at all, and every one is in splendid spirits." In another letter an officer refers to the generosity of the rations. "In addition to meat and bread (or biscuit)," he says, "we get 1/4lb. jam, 1/4lb. bacon, 3oz. cheese, tea, etc., while the horses have had a good supply of oats and hay." During the whole of the long retreat from Mons, says an officer of the Berkshires, "there was only one day when we missed our jam rations!"

And it is the same with the men. Here are some brief extracts from their letters:

Private —, 20th Field Ambulance:

"Our food supply is magnificent. We have everything we want and food to spare. Bacon and tomatoes is a common breakfast for us."

Driver Finch: "I am in the best of health, with the feeding and the open-air life. The stars have been our covering for the last few weeks."

Sergeant, Infantry Regiment: "The arrangements are very good—no worry or hitch anywhere; it is all wonderful."

Cavalryman: "We live splendidly, being even able to supplement our generous rations with eggs, milk and vegetables as we go through the villages."

Gunner: "Having the time of my life."

Of course, the exigencies of war may not always permit of the perfect working of the supply machine. Already there have been many hardships to be endured. Incessant fighting does not give the men time for proper meals, sleep is either cut out altogether or reduced to an occasional couple of hours, heavy rains bring wet clothing and wetter resting places, boots wear out with

prolonged marching, and men have to go for days and even weeks unwashed, unshaven, and without even a chance of getting out of their clothes for a single hour.

The officers suffer just as much as the men. After a fortnight or three weeks at the front one cavalry officer wrote that he "had not taken his clothes off since he left the Curragh." "For five days," another says, "I never took off my boots, even to sleep, and for two days I did not even wash my hands or face. For three days and nights I got just four hours' sleep. The want of sleep was the one thing we felt." Sleep, indeed, is just the last thing the officers get. Brigadier-General Sir Philip Chetwode outlines his daily program as "work from 4 a.m. to 11 p.m., then writing and preparations until 4 a.m. again." To make matters worse just at the start of the famous cavalry charge which brought Sir Philip such distinction, his pack-horse bolted into the German lines carrying all his luggage, and leaving him nothing but a toothbrush!

One of the Dorsets' officers reports that "owing to the continuous fighting the 'evening meal' has become conspicuous by its absence," but in spite of having carried a 1lb. tin of compressed beef and a few biscuits about with them for several days they are all "most beastly fit on it." "No one seems any the worse, and I feel all the fitter," writes an officer of a Highland Regiment, "after long marches in the rain going to bed as wet as a Scotch mist."

The men are just as cheerful as their officers. "You can't expect a blooming Ritz Hotel in the firing line," is how a jocular Cockney puts it. An artilleryman says they would fare sumptuously if it weren't for the German shells at meal times: "one shell, for instance, shattered our old porridge pot before we'd had a spoonful out of it!" Lieutenant Jardine, a son of Sir John Jardine, M.P., relates this same incident. Gunner Prince, R.F.A., has a little joke about the sleeping quarters: "Just going to bed. Did I say bed? I mean under the gun with an overcoat for a blanket." There is no sort of grumbling at all. As Lieutenant Stringer, of the 5th Lancers, expresses it, the A.S.C. "manage things very well, and our motto is 'always merry and bright.'"

Occasionally, when there is a lull in the operations, the men dine gloriously. Stories are told of gargantuan feeds—of majestic stews that can be scented even in the German lines. Occasionally, too, there is the capture of a banquet prepared for the enemy's officers as the following message from the *Standard* illustrates: "A small party of our cavalry were out on reconnaissance work, scouring woods and searching the countryside. Just about dusk a hail of bullets came upon our party from a small spinney of fir trees on the side of a hill. We instantly wheeled off as if we were retreating, but, in fact, we merely pretended to retire and galloped round across plowed land to the other side of the spinney, fired on the men, and they mounted their horses and flew like lightning out of their 'supper room.' They left a finely cooked repast of beef-steaks, onions and fried potatoes all ready and done to a turn, with about fifty bottles of Pilsner lager beer, which was an acceptable relish to our meal. Ten of our men gave chase and returned for an excellent feed."

Another amusing capture is that of an enterprising Tommy who possessed himself of a German officer's bearskin, a cap, helmet, and Jaeger sleeping bag. He is now regarded as the "toff of the regiment." The luxury of a bath was indulged in by a company of Berkshires at one encampment. Forty wine barrels nearly full of water were discovered here, and the thirsty men were about to drink it when their officer stopped them. "Well," said one, "if it's not good enough to drink it'll do to wash in," and with one accord they stripped and jumped into the barrels! Nothing has been more notable than Tommy's desire for cleanliness and tidiness. It is something fine and healthy about the British soldier. One wounded man, driven up to a hospital, limped with difficulty to a barber's shop for a shave before he would enter the building. "I couldn't face the doctors and nurses looking like I was," he told the ambulance attendant.

Of all the soldiers' wants the most imperative appears to be the harmless necessary cigarette. All their letters clamor for tobacco in that form. "We can't get a decent smoke here," says one writer. An army airman "simply craves for cigarettes and matches." From a cavalryman comes the appeal that a few boxes of cigarettes and some thick chocolate would be luxuries. "Just fancy," to quote from another letter, "one cigarette among ten of us—hardly one puff a-piece."

In the French hospitals the wounded men are being treated with the greatest kindness, and during convalescence are being loaded with luxuries. "Spoilt darlings," one Scottish nurse in Paris says about them, "but who could help spoiling them?" They are so happy and cheerful, so grateful for every little service, so eager to return to the firing line in order to "get the war over and done with." "We've promised to be home by Christmas," they say, "and that turkey and plum-pudding will be spoilt if we don't turn up."

Home by Christmas! That is Tommy Atkins' idea of a "Non-stop run to Berlin"—the facetious notice he printed in chalk on the troop trains at Boulogne as, singing "It's a long way to Tipperary," he rolled away to the greatest battles that have ever seared the face of Europe.

## FOOTNOTES:

[A] Extract from *The Times* report of the German Emperor's Army Orders, dated Headquarters, Aix-la-Chapelle, August 19th, 1914.

[B] Copyright Chappell & Co., Ltd., 41 East 34th St., New York.

- [C] *Daily Express*, Sept. 25th, 1914.
- [D] The Irish Guards were created entirely on the initiative of Queen Victoria, and as a recognition of the fine achievements of "Her brave Irish" in the South African War.
- [E] Gunner Batey, Royal Garrison Artillery, writes of a comrade, Gunner Spencer Mann: "He seems in his glory during the fighting. He fears nothing, and is always shouting, 'Into them, lads: the sooner we get through, the sooner we'll get home.'"
- [F] "The German officers are a rum lot," writes Sergeant W. Holmes; "they lead from the rear all the time."
- [G] "When they are working hardest their rations would not do for a tom-tit," says Sergeant J. Baker.
- [H] This letter was written to the son of a London vicar, and published in *The Times*, Sept. 12th, 1914.

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