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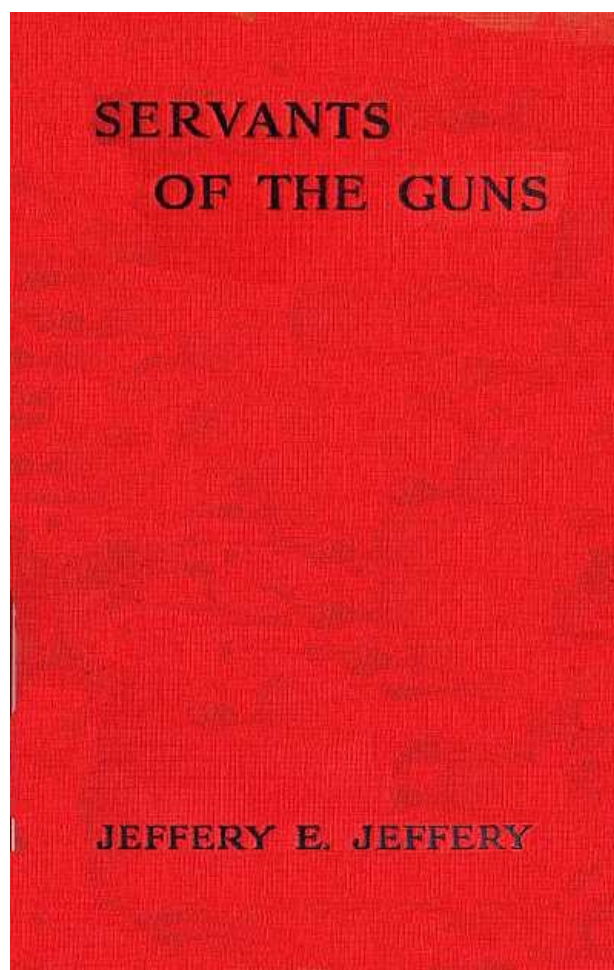
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SERVANTS OF THE GUNS ***



SERVANTS OF THE GUNS

BY

JEFFERY E. JEFFERY

*By the ears and the eyes and the brain,
By the limbs and the hands and the wings,
We are slaves to our masters the guns,
But their slaves are the masters of kings!*
GILBERT FRANKAU.

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1917

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TO

ONE WHO KNOWS NOTHING OF GUNS

BUT MUCH OF LIFE

MY MOTHER

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PART I

THE NEW "UBIQUE"

BEGINNING AGAIN

[3]

As the long troop train rumbled slowly over the water-logged wastes of Flanders, I sat in the corner of a carriage which was littered with all the *débris* of a twenty-four hours' journey and watched the fiery winter's sun set gorgeously. It was Christmas evening. Inevitably my mind went back to that other journey of sixteen months ago when we set forth so proudly, so exultantly to face the test of war.

But how different, how utterly different is everything now! Last time, with the sun shining brilliantly from a cloudless sky and the French sentries along the line waving enthusiastically, we passed cheerfully through the pleasant land of France towards our destination on the frontier. I was a subaltern then, a subordinate member of a battery which, according to pre-war standards, was equipped and trained to perfection—and I can say this without presumption, for having only joined it in July I had had no share in the making of it. But I had been in it long enough to appreciate its intense *esprit-de-corps*, long enough to share the absolute confidence in its efficiency which inspired every man in it from the major to the second trumpeter.

[4]

But now it is midwinter, the second winter of the war, and the French sentries no longer wave to us, for they have seen too many train-loads of English troops to be more than mildly interested. The war to which we set out so light-heartedly sixteen months ago has proved itself to be not the "greatest of games," but the greatest of all ghastly horrors threatening the final disruption of civilised humanity. More than a year has passed and the end is not in sight. But the cause is as righteous, the victory as certain now as it was then.... The methods and practice of warfare have been revolutionised. Theory after theory has been disproved by the devastating power of the high explosive and the giant gun. Horse and field batteries no longer dash into action to the music of jingling harness and thudding hoofs. They creep in by night with infinite precautions and place their guns in casemates which are often ten feet thick; they occupy the same position not for hours, but for months at a time; they fire at targets which are sometimes only fifty yards or even less in front of their own infantry, with the knowledge that the smallest error may mean death to their comrades; and the control of their shooting is no longer an affair of good eyesight and common sense, but of science, complicated instruments, and a multiplicity of telephones.

[5]

And I, a novice at all this kind of work, am no longer a subaltern. I am directly responsible for the welfare and efficiency of the battery which this long train is bearing into the zone of war. How we fare when we get there, what kind of tasks are allotted to us, and how we succeed in coping with them I hope to record in due course. But this I know now—the human material with which I have to deal is good enough. We have the advantage of being a homogeneous unit, for we belong to one of the "locally raised" divisions. With only a very few exceptions (notably the sergeant-major, who is a "serving soldier" of vast proportions and great merit), the N.C.O.'s and men all come from the same district. Many of them were acquainted in private life and enlisted in little coteries of five or six. Christian names are freely used, which is fortunate seeing that we have four Jones', five Davies', and no less than eight Evans' on our roll. In moments of excitement or of anger they resort to their own language and encourage or abuse each other in voluble Welsh....

[6]

A few miles back we passed G.H.Q. I was vaguely impressed with the silent dignity, the aloofness, as it were, of that now celebrated place. Our train drew up in the station, which seemed as deserted as that of a small English country town on a Sunday. "Here, within a mile of me," I thought, "dwell the Powers that Be, whose brains control the destinies of a million men. Here somewhere is the individual who knows my destination and when I am likely to get to it." But this surmise proved incorrect. It was three-thirty on Christmas afternoon and even the staff must lunch. Presently a R.T.O.^[1] issued from a cosy-looking office and crossed the line towards me. His first question was positively painful in its naïve simplicity.

[1] Railway Transport Officer.

"Who are *you*?" he inquired haughtily. My reply was not only correct but dignified. "We know nothing about you," he said. "The staff officer who should have been here to give you your instructions is away at present." (I think I mentioned that it was Christmas Day!)

"Never mind," I replied, "but would it be disturbing your arrangements at all if I watered my horses and gave my men some food here? They've had nothing since last night, and the horses have been ten hours without water."

[7]

"No time for that. You'll leave in two minutes."

And sure enough in half an hour we were off again!...

When, soon after five, we learnt that we were within a few minutes of our journey's end I leant across and woke "The Child"—who is my junior subaltern. If this war had not come to pass the Child would probably be enjoying his Christmas holidays and looking forward to his last term at his public school. Actually, he has already nine months' service, of which three have been spent at the front. He has been home wounded and is now starting out again as a veteran to whom less experienced persons refer their doubts and queries. Last week he celebrated his eighteenth birthday. He is the genuine article, that is he holds a regular commission and has passed through "the Shop."^[2] His clothes fit him, his aspirates appear in the right places, he is self-possessed, competent, level-headed and not infrequently amusing. Of his particular type of manhood (or rather boyhood) he is a fine example.

[8]

[2] R.M.A. Woolwich.

"Wake up, Child," I said. "We're nearly there."

He rubbed his eyes and sat up, wide awake at once.

"*Some* journey," he observed. "Hope it's not Hell's own distance to our billets."

The R.T.O. at — where we detrained was an expert, the passion of whose life it is apparently to clear the station yard in an impossibly short space of time. He addressed me as follows, the moment I was out of the train.

"You *must* be unloaded and out of this in two hours. You can sort yourselves in the road afterwards."

I promised to do my utmost, but the prospect of sorting men, horses, vehicles, and harness on a narrow road flanked by deep ditches whilst the rain streamed down out of a sky as black as tar, appealed only vaguely to my optimistic spirit.

The R.T.O., having given minute instructions and made certain that they were in course of being carried out with feverish haste, became communicative.

"You see," he said, "there's been the dickens of a row lately. One unit took four and a half hours to detrain and several have taken more than three. Then 'Brass Hats' get busy and call for reasons in writing, and I have to render a report and everybody gets damned. If you exceed your time I shall *have* to report you. I don't want to, of course, and I'm sure you don't want me to."

[9]

But at this moment I spotted, by the light of an acetylene flare, my prize-fool sergeant (every battery is issued with at least one of these) directing his drivers to place their harness just where it could not fail to be in everybody's way. I turned to the R.T.O.

"My good man," I said, "you can report me to any one you please. I've reached the stage when I don't care *what* you do." And I made for the offending sergeant. The R.T.O., justly incensed, retired to the warmth of his office.

As a matter of fact things went rather well; the men, heartened by the thought that rest and food were not far distant, worked with a will, and by the time the allotted two hours had elapsed we were not only clear of the yard, but hooked in on the road and nearly ready to start. Moreover, being the first battery of the Brigade to arrive we had had our choice of billets, and knew that we had got a good one. The Child, preceded by a cyclist guide whose knowledge of the country was palpably slight, and followed by the mess cart, had gone off into the darkness to find the way. It was his job to make all arrangements and then come back to meet us. Since it was only drizzling now and not really very cold, the outlook was distinctly brighter.

[10]

"Walk—march," I ordered, and we duly started. We progressed without mishap for, roughly, twenty-five yards, when there was a shout from the rear of the column. The sergeant-major took in its ominous purport before I did. He forgot himself—and swore aloud. "G.S. wagon's overturned in the ditch" was what I eventually heard. It was enough to make an angel weep tears of vexation.

A battery is provided by a munificent government with two G.S. wagons. One contains supplies (*i.e.* food for horse and man), the other contains baggage and stores. To be without either is most unpleasant. I went back to the scene of the disaster. The ditch was deep and more than half full of water. In it, completely overturned and firmly wedged, was the baggage wagon. Behind the wagon, also in the ditch and still mounted upon a floundering steed, was our old farrier, talking very fast to himself in Welsh. We got him out and soothed him—poor old man, he was wet through from the waist downwards—and then looked sadly, reluctantly, at the wagon. Evidently there was no hope of shifting it without unloading, and that would take too long. So three unfortunate gunners and a bombardier were told off to mount guard over it, given some tins of bully beef and a few biscuits and marooned, as it were, till the morning. All this took time. And we were very tired and very hungry.

[11]

"I am the most unlucky devil on earth," I thought, as riding up to the front again I found that the pole of an ammunition wagon had broken and was going to cause still further delay. But it was a selfish thought. There was a distant rumbling, not of thunder, far behind us. I looked back. The night was clearing and the black horizon was a clear-cut line against the heavens. Into the sky, now here, now there, kept darting up tiny sparks of fire, and over the whole long line, for miles

and miles, a glimmer, as of summer lightning, flickered spasmodically. For in that direction lay "the front." On this Christmas night in the year of grace nineteen hundred and fifteen, from the North Sea to the Alps, there stood men peering through the darkness at the dim shape of the parapet opposite, watching for an enemy who might be preparing some sinister scheme for their undoing. And I had dared to deem myself unlucky—I who had hope that some time that night I should undress and slip into bed—warm and dry....

[12]

St. Stephen's Day! I wonder if the U.H.C. are meeting at Clonmult to-day. Closing my eyes I can picture the village street with its crowd of holiday-making farmers, buckeens, horse-dealers, pinkcoated officers and country gentlemen, priests and "lads on jinnets," as it was when I went to a meet there that Boxing Day the year that "Brad" and I spent our leave in Cork. But now hunting is a thing of small importance and Brad—is a treasured memory....

We are comfortable here, extraordinarily so. The whole battery is in one farm and more than half the horses are under cover. The men sleep in a roomy barn with plenty of straw to keep them warm, the sergeants have a loft of their own. We have arranged harness rooms, a good kitchen for the cooks, a washhouse, a gun park, a battery office, and a telephone room. "*M. le patron*" is courtly and obliging, Madame is altogether charming. Their parlour is at the officers' disposal for a living-room: I've got a bedroom to myself. We are, in fact, in process of settling down.

[13]

My admiration for the soldiers of the New Army increases daily. For I perceive that they too, in common with their more highly trained, more sternly disciplined comrades of the original "Regulars," possess the supreme quality of being able to "stick it." The journey from our station in England to this particular farm in northern France was no bad test for raw troops—and we are raw at present, it is idle to deny the fact. We marched to Southampton, we embarked (a lengthy and a tiring process). We were twelve hours on the boat, and we had an exceptionally rough crossing, during which nine-tenths of the battery were sick. We disembarked, we groomed our horses and regarded our rusty harness with dismay. We waited about for some hours, forbidden to leave the precincts of the quay. Then we marched to the station and entrained. Any one who has ever assisted to put guns and heavy wagons on to side-loading trucks, or to haul unwilling horses up a slippery ramp, knows what that means. And I may add that it was dark and it was raining. We travelled for twenty-four hours—with a mess-tin full of lukewarm tea at 8 a.m. to hearten us—and then we detrained at just the time when it was getting dark again and still raining. Moreover, whilst we were in the train, cold, hungry, dirty and horribly uncomfortable, we had ample time to remember that it was Christmas Day, a festival upon which the soldier is supposed to be given a gratuitous feast and a whole holiday. But all this, to say nothing of a five-mile march to our billet afterwards and the tedious process of unharnessing and putting down horse lines in the dark, was done without audible "grousing." Truly this morning's late *réveillé* was well earned.

[14]

The sun is shining this afternoon. The gunners are busy washing down the guns and wagons, the drivers sit around the courtyard scrubbing away at their harness: through the open window I can hear them singing softly. The poultry picking their way delicately about the yard, the old *patron* carrying armfuls of straw to his cattle, and Madame sitting sewing in the kitchen doorway almost make one feel that peace has come again into the world. But from the eastward occasionally and very faintly there comes that ominous rumbling which portends carnage, destruction—Death....

[15]

It was the quartermaster-sergeant's idea originally. He is a New Army product, but he has already developed the two essential attributes which go towards the making of a good quartermaster-sergeant—a suave manner and an eye to the main chance. It was he who suggested, laughingly, that since the men had missed their Christmas dinner, we should pretend to be Scotch and celebrate New Year's Day instead. The arrangements are now complete. The men are to be "paid out" to-morrow and they have all agreed to subscribe a franc apiece. This will be supplemented until the funds are sufficient. The Expeditionary Force canteen at — has been visited, and in spite of the heavy demands previously made upon it for Christmas has provided us with numerous delicacies. The old farmer, entering cheerfully into the spirit of the affair, has offered beans and potatoes which Madame proposes to cook for us. Bottled beer has been purchased, beer on draught will be forthcoming. There are even crackers. To crown all, the Child returns triumphantly seated upon the box seat of a G.S. wagon which contains—a piano!...

In the end circumstances forced us to celebrate the birth of the year of victory on the last day but one of 1915. For to-day two officers and a large party of N.C.O.'s and men departed for the front on a course of instruction. So we had to have our "day" before they went. And what a day it was! The dinner—thanks largely to the energy and resource of the "quarter-bloke" and the cooks—was an immense success. Every man ate until, literally, he could eat no more. Then, after the issue of beer and a brief interval for repose and tobacco, an inter-section football match was started. The two subalterns whose commands were involved made a sporting agreement that the loser should stand a packet of cigarettes to every man of the winning section—some sixty in all. The game, which was played in a water-logged meadow, ended in a draw, so they each stood their own men the aforesaid packet—a highly popular procedure.

[16]

The piano, need I say, was going all the afternoon. It was necessary to practise for the evening's concert, and besides we are Welsh and therefore we are all musical. Moreover—and this I record with diffidence—I saw the one sergeant we have who is *not* Welsh but Irish inveigle the

dairymaid into waltzing round the yard!

In the officers' mess we too "spread ourselves a bit." We had guests and we gave them an eight-course dinner which began with *hors d'œuvre variés* (but not very varied seeing that there were only sardines and chopped carrots) and ended with dessert. Specially selected ration beef was, of course, the *pièce de résistance*, but it was followed by roast pigeon and a salad, the latter mixed and dressed by Madame's own fair hands. But the pigeons, though cooked to a nicety, were undeniably tough—a fact which was not surprising seeing that they were quite possibly the oldest inhabitants of the farm!

[17]

Eventually, well pleased with ourselves and each armed with a brand of cigar which one can buy at the rate of nine inches for twopence, we adjourned to the smoking concert in the barn. The stage was our old friend the G.S. wagon; the lights, siege lamps, hung round at intervals. Bottled beer and cigarettes were in constant circulation; the performers were above the average, and the choruses vociferous but always tuneful.

Every unit has its amateur comedian; but we have got a real professional one—a "lad fra' Lancasheer" who is well known in the north of England. I will not divulge his stage name, but he is a corporal now. His voice is exceptional, his good-nature unlimited, and as for his stories—well! Moreover, he is gifted enough to be always topical, often personal, but never disrespectful.

[18]

The Child also performed. He has no great voice and had dined well, but, since he *is* the Child and sang a song about any old night being a wonderful night, was wildly applauded. Then the saddler-sergeant, a quaint character of whom more anon, brought the house down by playing a quavering solo upon a penny whistle. Finally, the sergeant-major made a speech which ended as follows:—

"Now there's just one point I want to remind you of. We all wear a badge in our caps with a gun on it—those of us that is who haven't gone against orders and given them away as souvenirs" (audible giggles—although as a matter of fact this has not occurred). "We're all members of the Royal Regiment. It's got a fine history—let's play up to it. We'll now sing 'the King,' after which there'll be an issue of tea and rum...."

The windows of our mess-room, as I have said, face the courtyard. We were enjoying supper and a welcome drink whilst the long queue of men waited for their tea at the cook-house door outside, when suddenly in a dark corner of the yard a chorus started. But it was not an ordinary chorus, raucous and none too tuneful. Neither was it music-hall sentiment. It was Grand Opera, sung by a dozen picked men and sung beautifully. We threw open the window to listen.

[19]

The effect was extraordinarily striking. It was a gorgeous starlit night, and against the sky the farm buildings opposite looked like silhouettes of black velvet. The voices of these unseen artists (for they *were* artists) came to us softly out of the darkness, rising and falling in perfect cadence, perfect harmony. They sang two selections from *Il Trovatore* and then the "Soldiers' Chorus" from *Faust*. Meanwhile the battery sipped its hot tea and rum and listened critically. Then there followed a solo, "He like a soldier fell," from *Maritana*. As a finale, most wonderful of all, they sang "Land of my Fathers" in Welsh. The occasion, the setting, the way they put their very souls into every note of it, made me catch my breath as I sat on the window-sill and listened. And I went to bed feeling that there is yet a thread of romance running through all the sordid horror which vexes our unhappy world.

A BATTERY IN BEING

[20]

The author of a little red book "War Establishments," labelled "For Official Use Only" (presumably a gentleman with a brain like an automatic ready-reckoner), probably thought of nothing whatever, certainly of no human being, when he penned the decree "Farrier-Sergeants—per battery—1." But if he could only see the result of his handiwork! For our farrier-sergeant David Evans is simply splendid. He is small and sturdy and middle-aged, with grizzled hair that shows at all times in front of his pushed-back cap. His soft Welsh accent is a joy to hear; his affection for the horses is immense, his industry unflagging, and his workmanship always of the very best. He knows nothing about guns or drill or any kind of soldiering, he is an indifferent rider and in appearance he would never be mistaken for a guardsman! But we have only cast one shoe since he joined us months ago, and he has been known to sit up all night with a sick horse and carry on with his work as usual on the following day, whistling merrily (he always whistles while he works) and hammering away as if his very ration depended upon his shoeing the whole battery before dusk. The Child summed him up with his customary exactitude.

[21]

"I love the old farrier," he said, "he's such a merry old man. I bet he's a topping uncle to somebody!"

Then there is the saddler. I know that the formation of our new armies has produced many

anomalies, but it is my conviction that our saddler is unique. To start with he is a grandfather! He is a little wizened old man with a nose like a bird's beak and he wears huge thick spectacles. He is sixty-two, and how he got into the service is a mystery. He has never done a parade in his life, but when it comes to leather-work (again I quote the Child) "he's a tiger." The battery was newly formed and living in billets in North Wales when he joined it. His original appearance caused a mild sensation, even amongst that motley and ununiformed assembly. For he wore check trousers and a pair of ancient brown shoes, a tweed tail-coat from the hind pocket of which protruded a red handkerchief, and—most grotesque of all—a battered top hat of brown felt! And in this costume he served his country, quite unconcernedly, for two months before the authorities saw fit to provide him with a khaki suit. It is his habit, no matter where the battery may find itself—in barracks, camp or billets, to seek out a secluded spot (preferably a dark one), to instal himself there with his tools and a tangle of odd straps, threads and buckles, and proceed to make or mend things. For he is one of those queer persons who really like work.

[22]

I was not fortunate enough to see him in his civilian garb, but I have a vivid recollection of his first appearance after being issued with a "cap, winter, overseas, with waterproof cover." This cap, though practical, does not tend to add to the smartness of the wearer, even if the wearer is in all other respects smart. But the saddler went to extremes. He managed to put on the cover so that the whole, pulled well down over his ears, resembled a vast sponge bag or an elderly lady's bathing cap, beneath which his spectacles gleamed like the head-lights of a motor-car. The wildest stretch of the imagination could not liken him to any sort of soldier. Nevertheless, after his fashion, he is certainly "doing his bit."

[23]

It is, of course, impossible to describe them all. Equally is it impossible to understand them all. I wish I could, for therein lies the secret to almost everything. The sergeant-major, for instance, who is the personification of respectful efficiency—what does he think of this infant unit? From the dignified way in which he says, "Of course in *my* battery we did so and so" (meaning, of course, his old "regular" battery), I gather that his prejudices are strong and that he harbours a secret longing to go back whence he came. And I sometimes wonder whether he finds himself quite at home in the sergeants' mess. But he shows no outward sign of discontent and he allows no discord: his discipline is stern and unbending. He knows all about every man and every horse, he is always to be found somewhere in the lines, and he is extraordinarily patient at explaining to ignorant persons of all ranks the "service" method of doing everything—from the tying of a headrope to the actual manœuvring of a battery in the field. Last, but by no means least, he is six foot three and broad in proportion, and his voice carries two hundred yards without apparent effort on his part.

The quartermaster-sergeant—I learnt this only a day or so ago—is a revivalist preacher in quieter times; the ration orderly, besides his faculty for wheedling extra bacon out of the supply people, has a magnificent tenor voice; the great majority of the rank and file are miners. It is only comparatively recently that they have really settled down to take a pride in themselves and an intelligent interest in the reputation of their unit. For we are not K1. We are nearer to being K5 or VI, and we were not amongst the first to be equipped and trained. We got our guns, our horses and our harness late in the day, and we were, perhaps, the least bit rushed. Consequently we were slow to develop, but we are making up for lost time now at an astonishing pace. I can remember a time when, on giving the order "Walk—march" to any given team, there was always an even chance that drivers and horses would disagree as to the necessity for moving off. I can also remember a time (and not so very long ago either) when our gunners had but the smallest conception of what a gun was designed to do and (I know this) rather shrank from the dread prospect of actually firing it. But now we drive with no mean attempt at style; a narrow gateway off a lane is nothing to us, and our horses, artistically matched in teams of bay or black, are prepared to pull their two tons through or over anything within reason with just a "click" of encouragement from the drivers they know and understand. And we open the breech as the gun runs up after the recoil, we call out the fuzes and slap in the next shell with more than mere drill-book smartness; we're beginning to acquire that pride in our working of the guns which is the basis of all good artillery work. In fact we have reached a stage where it would be a wholesome corrective to our conceit to be taken *en masse* to see the harness, the horses and the gun-drill of some regular battery that has borne the brunt of things since Mons. Then we would go home saying to ourselves, "If the war lasts another two years and we keep hard at it, we'll be as good as they are."

[24]

[25]

But in the meanwhile we are quite prepared to take on the Hun, moving or stationary, in trenches or in the open, at any range from "point-blank" to six thousand. And we have had it dinned into us, until we yawned and shuffled our feet and coughed, that it is our *rôle* at all times to help our infantry, whose life is ten times more strenuous than ours, and by whom ultimately victory is won. We know the meaning of the two mottoes on our hats and we are distinctly optimistic. Which is as well....

[26]

To-day I visited "the Front." We rode up, a subaltern and I, to see the battery to which our men are at present attached and which we will eventually relieve. It is a strange experience for the uninitiated, such as I am, this riding along the flat and crumbling roads towards the booming of the guns and the desolation of "the line." The battery position, we found, was just on the borderland of this zone of desolation. One would never have suspected the presence of guns unless one had known exactly where to look—and had gone quite close. A partially ruined house

on the road-side had its front and one gable end entirely covered with a solid wall of sandbags, but these were the only obvious indications of occupation. This house, however, was the mess and officers' quarters, and the Child was there at the door to welcome us.

"We've had quite a busy morning," he said gaily. "They've been putting four-two's and five-nine's into ——" (—— is a village about a quarter of a mile up the road). "I was just going out to look for fuzes: but perhaps you'd like to see round the position first."

[27]

We crossed the road and entered a small orchard. The Child led me up to a large turf-covered mound which had a deep drain all round it and a small door at the back.

"This," he said, rather with the air of a guide showing a visitor round a cathedral, "is No. 4."

I bent my head and stepped inside. The gun-pit (which was not really a pit since its floor was on ground level) was lit only by the narrow doorway at the rear and by what light could filter through the hurdles placed in front of the embrasure. But in the dimness I could just make out the rows and rows of shells all neatly laid in recesses in the walls, the iron girders that spanned the roof and held up its weight of sandbags, brick rubble and—reinforced concrete. Ye gods! concrete—for a field gun! And there, spotlessly clean, ready for instant action, was the gun itself. I felt sorry for it—it seemed so hopelessly out of place, so far removed from its legitimate sphere. To think that an eighteen-pounder, designed for transit along roads and across country, should have come to this!

"The detachment live here," said the Child, and showed me a commodious dug-out connected with the gun-pit by a short tunnel. Inside this dug-out were four bunks and a stove—also a gunner devouring what smelt like a very savoury dinner.

[28]

"What will these keep out?" I asked.

"Oh!" replied the Child, airily, "they're 'pip-squeak'^[3] and splinter-proof, of course, and they might stop a four-two or even a five-nine. But a direct hit with an eight-inch would make *some* hole, I expect. Come and see the telephonist's place. It's rather a show spot."

[3] German field gun shells.

As we were walking towards it a stentorian voice shouted, "Battery action."

Instantly, the few men who had been working on the drains and on the pits, or filling sandbags, dropped their tools and raced to the gun-pits. In a few seconds the battery was ready to fire.

We entered the telephone room—a shell-proof cave really. A man sat at a little table with an improvised but extraordinarily ingenious telephone exchange in front of him and a receiver strapped to his ear. A network of wires went out through the wall above his head. His instrument emitted a constant buzzing of "dots" and "dashes," all of which he disregarded, waiting for his own call. Suddenly he clicked his key in answer, then said—

"Hullo, oh-pip^[4]—yes. Target K.—one round battery fire—yes."

[29]

[4] "Oh-pip" is signalese for O.P. = Observation Post.

This order was repeated to the guns by megaphone.

Bang went No. 1 and its shell whistled and swished away towards its goal.

Bang followed No. 2 just before "No. 1 ready" was called back.

It all seemed astonishingly simple, and it seemed, too, quite unconnected with war and bloodshed. Orders to fire came by telephone from some place thousands of yards in front. The guns were duly fired by men who had no conception of what they were firing at, men who had in all probability never been nearer to the enemy than they were at that moment, and who had in fact not the slightest conception of what the front line looked like. According to order these same men made minute adjustments of angles, ranges, fuzes, until the battery's shells were falling on or very close to some spot selected by the Forward Observing Officer, the one man who really knew what was happening. And when this exacting individual was satisfied, each sergeant duly recorded his "register" of the target upon a printed form, reminding me vaguely of the manner in which a 'bus conductor notes down mysterious figures on a block after referring to his packet of tickets. After which the detachments, receiving the order "Break off," returned to their work or dinners with no thought whatever (I am sure of this) as to where their shell had gone or why or how! But then this was not a "show" but just an ordinary morning's shoot.

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We lunched in the mess, a comfortable room with a red-tiled floor and a large open fireplace on which logs of wood crackled merrily. On inquiry I learnt that these same logs were once beams in the church at —, devastated not long since by heavy shells and now a heap of shapeless ruins from which the marauding soldier filches bricks and iron work. And that church was centuries old and was once beautiful. War is indeed glorious.

I have heard it said that people who live close to Niagara are quite unconscious of the sound of the Falls. I can believe it. Practically speaking, in this part of the world, two minutes never pass, day or night, during which no one fires a gun. But the human beings whose job it is to live and work here evince absolutely no interest if the swish of the shell is *away* from them and very little if it is coming towards them, unless there appears to be a reasonable chance that it is coming *at*

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them. Throughout lunch the next battery to this one was firing steadily. Rather diffidently I asked what was going on. The major commanding the battery shrugged his shoulders.

"Old — has probably got some job on—or he may be merely retaliating," he replied.

I subsided, not knowing then that before the day was over I was to learn more about this same retaliation.

After lunch we set out for the O.P. [5]

[5] Observation Post.

"We've got quite a jolly little offensive *strafe* on this afternoon," remarked the major. "There's some wire-cutting, and while it's going on the attention of the Hun will be distracted by the 'heavies' who are going to bash his parapet a bit. Then at dusk the infantry are to slip across and do some bombing. We'll be rather crowded in the O.P., but I dare say you'll be able to see something."

The Child and my other subaltern, who from his habit of brushing his hair straight back and referring constantly to his *blasé* past is known to his intimates as Gilbert, came too.

We passed through —, which is shelled regularly. Some of its houses are completely wrecked, but many are still partially intact. Infantry soldiers lounged about the ruined streets, for this village is used as a rest billet for troops waiting their turn in the trenches: the expression "rest" billet struck me as euphemistic. I noticed that several shells had burst in the graveyard near the church. Even the dead of previous generations, it seems, are not immune from the horrors of this war. [32]

After going up the road for nearly a mile we turned off on to the fields. Every ten yards or so it was necessary either to step over or stoop under a telephone wire. These nerve strings of modern artillery were all neatly labelled—they all belonged to some battery or other. "They strafe this part fairly often," said the major unconcernedly.

It is this unconcern that amazes me. I suppose (or I hope anyway) that I shall get used to this walking about in the open, but, at present, I am far from feeling at ease. The odds against getting hit on this particular bit of ground are enormous, but the chance exists all the same. As a matter of fact we did get one salvo of "pip-squeaks" over as we were going up. They were high, to our left, and at least two hundred yards away, but they made me duck sharply—and then look rather foolish. [33]

The Child pointed to a two-storied ruined house with a skeleton roof.

"Behold 'the Waldorf,'" he said. "Personally myself" (a favourite phrase of his) "I think it's rather a jolly O.P."

Approaching it, we crossed some derelict trenches—our front line before the battle of X—. I felt somehow that I was standing on holy ground—on ground that had been wrested back from the invaders at a cost of many hundreds of gallant lives and an infinite amount of pain and suffering.

Several batteries observe from "the Waldorf," and I found that for all its dilapidated appearance it was astonishingly strong inside. Telephone wires ran into it from all directions, and there were several signallers sitting about cooking over braziers or, if actually on duty, sitting motionless beside their instruments.

Except for a narrow passage-way and a small recess for the operators, the entire ground floor was blocked solid from earth to ceiling with sandbags; there is a distinct feeling of security to be derived from eight or ten feet thickness of clay-filled bags! [34]

We climbed a wooden ladder and squeezed into the tiny room upstairs from which the fire of this particular battery is directed. A long low loophole carefully protected with sandbags and steel plates provided me with my first view of the front.

I was now some fifteen feet or so above ground level and could see the backs of all our lines of trenches, could see the smoke of burning fires and men walking casually up and down or engaged in digging, planking, revetting, and so on. Beyond was the front line—less distinct and with fewer signs of activity in it; beyond that again a strip of varying width, untrampled, green and utterly forsaken—No Man's Land. A few charred tree-trunks from which every branch and twig had been stripped by shell fire, stuck up at intervals. I could see the first German parapet quite plainly and (with glasses) other lines behind it, and numerous wriggling communication trenches.

So this was "the Front," that vague term that comes so glibly to the lips of the people at home. I looked at it intently for a long time and I found that one idea crowded all others from my mind.

"What madness," I thought, "this is which possesses the world! What *criminal* waste, not only of lives and money, but of brains, ideas, ingenuity and time, all of which might have been devoted to construction instead of to destruction." [35]

The Child noticed my absorption, read my thoughts perhaps, and translated them into his own phraseology thus:—"Dam' silly business, isn't it, when you come to think of it?"

The expression fitted. It *is* a damnably silly business, *but*, if we are to secure what the whole

world longs for—a just and lasting peace—we have got to see this business through to the end, however silly, however wasteful it may seem. We have got to "stick it," as the soldier says, until the gathering forces are strong enough to break the barrier beyond all hope of repair; to break it and then to pour through to what will be the most overwhelming victory in the history of the world....

The major turned his head and spoke into a voice-tube beside him.

"Battery action," he said.

The operator on the ground floor repeated his words into a telephone. I pictured over again what I had seen in the morning; the detachments doubling to the places and the four guns instantly ready to answer the call. [36]

It is altogether astonishing, this siege warfare. An officer sits in a ruined house, strongly fortified, and not so many hundred yards from the enemy. From there with ease and certainty he controls the fire of his four guns. He knows his "zone" and every object in it as completely as he knows his own features in a looking-glass. Further, he is connected by telephone with the infantry which he supports, and through the medium of his own headquarters with various other batteries. Normally this "observation" work is done by a subaltern, who, nowadays, thank Heaven and the munitions factories, shoots as much, if not more, than he is shot at. But occasionally the enemy is stirred up and "retaliates." This word, in its present military sense, was unknown before the war. It means just this—

One side organises a bombardment. It carries out its programme, perhaps successfully, perhaps not. The other side, sometimes at once, sometimes afterwards, "retaliates" with its artillery on some locality known to be a tender spot: this is by way of punishment. A year, six months ago even, the aggression came almost entirely from the Germans, and our artillery from lack of ammunition could only retaliate mildly, almost timidly, for fear of drawing down still further vengeance on the heads of its unfortunate infantry. But that state of things has passed for ever. The aggression now is all on our side—I speak, of course, of an ordinary day when there is no "show" on: moreover it is rigorous and sustained and wearing. If and when the Germans reply to our aggression, we re-retaliate, so to speak, with a bombardment that silences him. For instance, to quote from "Comic Cuts" (the official Intelligence Summary is thus named)— [37]

"Yesterday the enemy fired thirty-five shells into ——. We replied with 500."

That is all: but the whole situation on the Western front *now* is summed up in that bald statement. In these days we have the last word *always*....

On this particular afternoon, however, we had a definite object in view. The "heavies" by two hours' methodical work made what the Child calls "Hell's own mess" of a selected bit of parapet. Meanwhile a field battery industriously cut the wire in front of it and other field batteries caused "diversions," as one says in Ireland, by little side-shows of their own. The enemy went to ground, no doubt in comparative safety, and sulked in silence. But as soon as dusk began to creep over the sodden lines, he woke up and started to retaliate. It had evidently occurred to him that we might be going to attack that hole in his parapet. [38]

I watched what seemed like a glorified firework display for five or ten minutes, and somehow gathered the impression that I was merely a spectator. Then there came three sharp cracks outside the loophole—*just* outside it seemed—followed by the peculiar but unmistakable whirr of travelling splinters.

"Safer downstairs," observed the major, and we descended quickly.

For the next quarter of an hour it really seemed as though the enemy had made up his mind to flatten out the "Waldorf." He had not, of course: he couldn't even see it. What he was really doing was putting a "barrage," or wall of fire, on the road just in front of us to hamper the advance of our supports in case we genuinely meant to attack on any scale. We waited patiently downstairs until it was over; rather like sheltering in a shop from a passing shower.

The signallers packed up their instruments and prepared to go home. Personally I was inwardly none too happy about the prospect of sallying forth into the open; but these men appeared to have no qualms whatever. They were used to it for one thing, and for another they had had a long day and wanted their tea. In such circumstances it takes much to deter the British soldier. [39]

"Seems to be over: might as well 'op it, Bill," said one.

"Righto," answered the other. "Bloomin' muddy this way. What say to going down the road?"

Tack-tack-tack-tack came from the direction of the road. Even war-worn signallers retain their common sense.

"Ark at that there [adjectived] machine-gun, it's 'ardly worth it;" they agreed and squelched off through the thick clay, grousing about the state of the country but perfectly indifferent to the deafening din around them.

Five minutes later we followed them and walked back, facing the flashes of our own guns, which were still firing steadily—just to make certain of having the last word with the Hun....

It was nearly nine o'clock when we at last clattered into the courtyard of our billet and slipped

wearily off our horses. It had been a long day but an interesting one, for we had seen, at close quarters, a battery doing its normal job under the prevailing normal conditions. And very soon now our battery will be in that position, putting the last finishing touches to its education and doing that same job, I hope efficiently. Then, and not till then, will it really be a Battery in Being.

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"IN THE LINE"

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We are beginning now to regard ourselves as old stagers. We have been in action for nearly three months and in that period our education, in all the essential things, has advanced at a most surprising pace. Our most cherished illusions—culled from the newspapers for the most part—have been dissipated and replaced by the realities of this life. How often, I wonder, have we read that this is a war of attrition, or of artillery, or of finance, or of petrol! It is none of these things—at least not from our limited perspective. It is rather, to us, a war of mud, of paper (so many reams of it that the battery clerk's head buzzes and he cannot sleep at night for thinking of the various "returns" that he must render to headquarters by 9 a.m. on the following day), of routine, and, above all, of marauding.

Wherefore we have adapted ourselves to circumstances. We have learnt that mud in itself is harmless and, since it is impossible to avoid, not worth noticing at any time; that unpunctuality in the submitting of any report or return demanded (however senseless) leads to far more unpleasantness from high quarters than any other sin one may commit; that routine is an irksome fetish of the Powers, but that it makes each day so like its predecessor that the weeks slip by and one forgets the date and almost the month. Lastly, we have learnt that the way to get things is to find them lying about; that while it is possible to indent for material, it is also possible to collect it if one takes the trouble. Timber, for instance, is required for building gun-pits, so are steel girders and brick rubble and brushwood. Well, do not the winds that shriek across this flat country blow down trees sometimes? Is there not a derelict railway station less than a mile away, and are not piles of rubble placed along the roadsides for mending purposes? It is pleasant, too, to have a real door to one's dug-out instead of a hanging corn sack: there is more than one partially ruined cottage near at hand. We are beyond the borderland of civilisation here; We have left our scruples behind us, for we know that if we refrain from taking those rails, those doors and window frames, those stout oak beams, some one else will have them shortly.

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Circumstances, too, have brought it home to us that this war is not so "stationary" as we imagined. The relative positions of the two opposing armies remain the same, weary month after weary month. But the positions of the units composing them do not. We, for example, soon after our arrival in the country were sent up to be attached for instruction to a battery which was in action. It was explained to us that we would eventually "take over" from that battery when its division went out to rest. We were at pains, therefore, to acquire all the knowledge we could in the time. The subalterns learnt the "zone" which they would have to watch and fire over—every yard of it. The sergeants mastered the particular system of angles, "registrations," etc., in use; the signallers knew the run of their wires and understood the working of the circuit; the gun detachments, as a result of many hours of patient sand-bag filling and building, had begun to regard the place as their future home which it was meet to make as strong and (afterwards only) as comfortable as possible. And I, as the battery commander, besides being fairly confident of being able to "carry on," had noted, with satisfaction, it being then midwinter, that there was a fireplace in what would be my room.

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But did we "take over" this position? Not we! Three days before the relief was due to take place we were sent off to another battery about which we knew nothing whatever and took over from it in a hurry and a muddle. Which strange procedure may be accounted for in one of two ways—as having been done expressly with a view to training us in dealing with an unexpected situation or, more simply, as merely "Dam bad staff work." We will leave it at that.

We occupied this new position, which, by the way, was a good one with a quite comfortable billet close at hand, for just three weeks. At the end of this time we had thoroughly settled down: we had done a great deal of constructive work—strengthening gun-pits, improving dug-outs, fixing voice-tubes for the passing of orders from the telephone-hut to the guns; we had laid out an extra wire to the O.P. and relabelled all our circuit: we had cleaned up the wagon-line, rebricked the worst parts of the horse-standings and laid down brushwood so that the vehicles were clear of the all-pervading mud. We had arranged a bathroom for the men as well as a recreation room: we had built an oven (nothing acquires merit more simply in the eyes of the Powers than a well-devised oven—"Your horse-management is a scandal, Captain ——" "Yes, sir: but have you seen our oven?" Wrath easily deflected and the Great One departs to make a flattering report). We had visualised at least twenty various "stunts" that would make things safer, or more comfortable or more showy. We had reached a moment, in fact, when we were secretly rubbing our hands and saying "the place is not only habitable but *good*: and we are about to enjoy the fruits of our labours thereon." Which was a foolish attitude to adopt and one which, now that we are a more

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experienced (and therefore a more cynical) unit, would not be conceivable.

This time they moved the whole division, telling us (or the infantry rather) that the order should be regarded as a compliment in that the division had done so well that it was to be entrusted with a more difficult—which is a euphemism for a more dangerous—portion of the line.

Resignedly we packed up everything that we possessed, "handed over" to the incoming battery, and, after failing to persuade the mess cat to accompany us, trekked off in a howling gale to the new place. This latter was not without merits, but had the great disadvantage that the only house available for a mess was nearly a quarter of a mile from the gun position. [46]

The gun-pits, with the exception of one which had been partially reconstructed on sound principles, were bad. They had been built in the summer when every one was saying, "No use wasting material—we won't be here next winter." But here we are all the same, regarding rather gloomily the defects which it will take weeks of hard work to remedy.

I overheard one gunner expressing his opinion thus to a friend of his—

"Well now, Dai, [6] I don't know what battery was here before us now just, but they weren't great workers, see! Our pit couldn't keep the rain out last night—what'll it do if a shell comes along?"

[6] David.

So I indented on the Royal Engineers (who own vast storehouses called in the vernacular "Dumps") for rails and bricks and cement and sandbags, and I sent marauding parties out at night to collect anything that might be useful.

The men with a good-will which was beyond all praise, seeing that this was their third position within the month, started the arduous task of dismantling the old pits and dug-outs and building them anew—guessing by this time that in all probability they would be moved on elsewhere before their labours were finished. For that is one very definite aspect of this war.... [47]

Our mess is a cottage which we share with a French family. Monsieur works in a mine close by, the numerous children play in the yard or are sent on errands, Madame in her spare moments does our washing for us. In the evening they all assemble in the kitchen and try to teach French to our servants. It amazes me to watch the sangfroid with which they go about their daily occupations regardless of the never-ceasing sound of guns and shells, regardless of the fact that the German line, as the crow flies, is less than two miles away. At 8 p.m. to the moment, whilst we are at dinner, they troop through into their own room to bed, each with a charming "Bon soir, messieurs." And on each occasion they make me personally feel that we are rather brutal to be occupying two-thirds of their house and spending our days making the most appalling havoc of their country. But I console myself by remembering that these people once had Uhlans in the neighbourhood and are therefore prepared to disregard minor nuisances such as ourselves. [48]

Seven to seven-thirty p.m. is generally rather a busy time. Official correspondence, usually marked "secret" and nearly always "urgent," is apt to arrive, and it is at this time that the intricate report on the day's shooting has to be made out and despatched to Group Headquarters. I am in the midst of this, working against time, with an orderly waiting in the kitchen, when the door is flung open and the Child enters with a cheery "Good evening, Master."

The Child calls me Master sometimes because I am always threatening to send his parents a half-term report on his progress and general conduct, or to put him back into Eton collars! He has now just returned from forty-eight hours' duty at the O.P. and presents an appearance such that his own mother would hardly recognise him. He wears a cap of a particularly floppy kind which he refers to as "my gorblimy hat," an imperfectly cured goatskin coat of varied hues which smells abominably, fur gauntlets, brown breeches, and indiarubber thigh boots. Round his person are slung field glasses, a prismatic compass, an empty haversack, and a gas helmet. Moreover, he is caked with mud from head to foot and flushed with his two-mile walk against the cold wind. For this is still March, and we have had frost and snow and thaw alternately this last week. [49]

"Anything happen after I left?" I ask. I had been up at the O.P. in the morning, and we'd "done a little shoot" together.

"Nothing much. The Hun got a bit busy with rifle grenades about lunch time and started to put some small 'minnies' [7] into our second line. So I retaliated on three different targets, which stopped him p.d.q. Later on he put a few pip-squeaks round our O.P. and one four-two into the church. That's about all, 'cept that I had to dodge a blasted machine-gun when I was leaving at dusk—one of those 250-rounds-a-minute stunts, you know—and I had to nip across that open bit, in between his bursts of fire. The trenches are in Hell's own mess after this thaw—I went down to the front line with an infantry officer to look at a sniper's post he's located; we might get the 'hows' [8] on to it. Any letters for me?"

[7] Minenwer, *i.e.* trench mortar bombs.

[8] Howitzers. [50]

I push them across to him, but forbid him to remain in the room with that smelly coat on.

"Righto," he grins; "I'm off to have a bath and a shave before dinner."

"But, my dear Child," I say, "you shaved last week! Surely—"

He grins again and saunters gracefully out. The Child is always graceful even when wearing a goatskin coat and ungainly thigh boots. But he's tired—I can see it in his eyes. His last two days have been spent as follows: At seven p.m. the night before last he arrived, in the capacity of liaison officer, at the headquarters of the battalion that we are supporting. He dined there and slept, in his clothes of course and always at the menace of a telephone, in a draughty hovel next door. Before dawn the next morning he was groping his way along three-quarters of a mile of muddy communication trench to the O.P. Arrived there it is his business to make certain that the telephonists below in the dank cellar are "through" on every line. Then he ascends the ladder of the observation tower and stares through the loophole at the mists which swathe the trenches in front of him. And there, alternately with the subaltern of the other battery which uses this particular O.P., he must remain until it is again too dark to shoot.

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There are diversions, of course, which help to pass the long hours. One is "shooting the battery." The F.O.O., as the subaltern on duty at the O.P. is called, is allowed, within fairly wide limits, to shoot when and at what he likes provided always that he has a reasonable objective. The principles laid down for him are simple enough: whilst never wasting a round if he can help it, he must also never miss an opportunity. That is to say that he must keep ceaseless watch for signs of movement or of new work being carried out by the enemy, for the flashes of hostile batteries, for suspected O.P.'s, for machine-gun emplacements and snipers' posts—for almost everything in fact. And when he sees, he must shoot—at a rapid rate and for a few moments only. For it is useless to "plaster" the same spot for any length of time: the enemy will not be there—he must be caught unawares or not at all.

Another diversion is noting down the action of the hostile artillery, of which a report has to be rendered every evening. This is easy enough when he happens to be shelling at a convenient distance from you: it is not so easy, however, to count the number of "pip-squeaks" that burst within a few yards of the house in which you are, or of "minnies" that arrive in silence and explode with a terrific report apparently just at the foot of your tower, filling your observation room with acrid fumes.

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Visitors appear at all hours—generals, staff officers, infantry colonels, trench-mortar or sniping officers. Each wants to examine some portion of the line from the vantage point of the tower, and each expects to be told unhesitatingly everything he wants to know. But to return to the Child and his tour of duty. After dusk he goes back to infantry headquarters to feed and sleep. Then follows another long day in the tower, at the end of which he is relieved by the "next for duty" and returns to the battery with the privilege of breakfasting at any hour he likes on the following morning. The Child, I may here remark, has been known to eat poached eggs and marmalade at 12.30, and unblushingly sit down to sausages and mashed potatoes at 1.15.

But those two days at the O.P. are a strain. No hot meals, long hours, disturbed nights, shells for ever passing overhead, "mutual exchanges of rifle grenades," snipers' bullets which have missed their mark in our front line trenches flattening themselves against the outer wall of the house—there are pleasanter ways of living than this. And two things are always possible: one that the enemy may decide that this ruined house that he has watched for so long really *is* an O.P., and therefore well worth razing to the ground with heavy shell; the other that an attack (either with or without gas) may suddenly be launched against our line. In the first case the cellar *may* be a safe place, in the second there will be what the Child calls "Hell's own job," requiring a quick brain, keen vision, and the battery roaring in answer to sharp, curt orders. But if the two occur at once, as is more than probable, why, then the cellar is out of the question, for at no matter what cost the guns—always ready, always hungry—must be effectively controlled, the long-suffering, hard-pressed infantry must be supported. But at present these are dull days. Neither side is trying to do more than annoy the other.

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"9.44 a.m. Working party seen at —, fired on, dispersed."

"2.10 p.m. Fired 10 rounds at suspected O.P. at —. One direct hit with H.E. Drew quick retaliation on —."

Thus is the daily report compiled. Is it worth all the trouble, the science, the skill, the organisation? It is, for everything, every little detail, every little effort helps to bring nearer the day when our guns will be pulled out on to the roads again, to be used for their legitimate purpose—the "quick thing," the fight in the open, "the moving show."...

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Our colonel is "some man"—which phrase, being expanded, means an individual whose keen eye misses absolutely nothing from the too-sharp rowel of a driver's spur to the exact levelling of a concrete gun-platform; whose brain is for ever evolving schemes for the undoing of the wily Boche; whose energy enables him to walk and ride fifteen to twenty miles a day, deal with all his official correspondence and yet find time to talk about hunting at odd moments. Periodically he holds conferences of battery commanders at his Group Headquarters. After seeing that every one is provided for, he produces a large scale map with all the "zones" marked on it, sticks out his chin in a manner peculiar to him, and says—

"The Hun is becoming uppish again and must be suppressed. Now, what I propose to do is this"—and he proceeds to detail something entirely original in the way of a bombardment. But he is seldom content to use his own batteries by themselves: nearly always he manages to borrow a few "heavies" and some trench mortars of various sizes. With these at his disposal he feels that he can "put up a good show," as he says, and it must be acknowledged that he generally does.

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In addition to these definitely organised bombardments he is constantly ordering small "joy strafes" to be carried out. For instance, he will study the map and decide that two roads in a given area are in all probability used by the enemy at night. He will forbid any one to shoot on the northern one (say) and order two batteries to put salvoes on to the southern one every night until further orders, "just to impress the Hun," as he puts it, "with the idea that the southern road is a distinctly unhealthy spot. Then he'll have double traffic on the northern one. We'll wait till we know for certain that it's his relief night and then we'll fairly plaster that road."

This thoughtful scheme was duly carried out about a week ago—with what results, of course, it is impossible to say: but from the way the hostile batteries woke up and retaliated, we gathered that something had been accomplished.

And so the days and weeks pass by—quickly on the whole, so quickly that we are already beginning to badger the adjutant with queries as to when we are likely to get leave. There are rumours, too, that the division is shortly going out "to rest." The infantry deserve it, for theirs is the hard part: daily I admire them more, every man of them from the humblest private who digs in the slushy trenches or stands on guard in a sap thirty yards or less from the enemy and quite possibly on top of a mine to their brigadier who conceals his V.C. and D.S.O. ribbons beneath a rubber suit and spends more of his time in the front line trenches than out of them.

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But for us gunners it is different. We live in comfort and in perfect safety (unless our actual position is spotted and "strafed," in which case we merely withdraw our men until the enemy's allowance of ammunition is expended). Except possibly for our hard-worked telephonists we need no rest. Moreover, it would be heartbreaking to leave the position that we have made so cosy, so inconspicuous, and, we all believe, so strong.

We happen to be close to a main avenue of traffic. All sorts of people pass by—"brass hats" going up to inspect the line, R.E. wagons laden with every conceivable kind of trench store, mining officers caked in yellow clay returning after a strenuous tour of duty underground, a constant succession of small parties of infantry who are either "going in" or "coming out," ration carts, handcarts filled with things that look like iron plum-puddings but are really trench-mortar bombs and, occasionally, an ambulance. Infantry officers or men who happen to halt close by are generally invited to have a look at the gun-pits. More often than not some one of them recognises a friend or a relation in the battery: it must be remembered that we are a homogeneous division. If by chance we are firing when a party of infantry (unaccompanied by an officer) is passing, it invariably halts and watches the performances with huge interest and quite often with a shout or two of encouragement.

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"Go it, boys, give 'em a bit more marmalade," I heard one ribald private yell out, when to his joy he heard the order, "Two rounds battery fire one second." When the guns had flashed and roared in their sequence, and the shells had gone rumbling away towards the distant lines, he picked up his burden, hitched his rifle more comfortably across his shoulders, and went upon his way, remarking, with a pleasant admixture of oaths—

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"That'll give 'em something to think about for a while."

This, on a minor scale, is an example of the great principle of infantry and artillery co-operation. I can picture that same private rejoining his platoon in the trenches and saying to his "batty"—^[9]

[9] = pal or friend.

"Look you, Trevor, as I was coming up the road now just, I see a battery of our fellows givin' them — Hell."

And his friend would answer perhaps—

"Well, 'tis fine to hear our shells come singing over. What about them fags, Tom? Did you get 'em?"

Neither of these men would know whether the rounds had been well or badly placed, but each would be left with the impression that the artillery exists for the purpose of helping him and his fellows when in difficulties and of preparing the way when the time comes. A small point, perhaps, but nevertheless a vital one....

It is fortunate that amid all the horror and the misery and the waste that this war entails it is still possible to see the humorous side of things sometimes. Here is an example. A major on his way up to the front line saw a man hunting about amongst some ruins for "souvenirs"—and this in a place which was in view of the Germans and only about 350 yards from their trenches. The major was justly annoyed: firstly, the man was evidently wasting his time; secondly, there was every prospect that hostile fire would be drawn to the spot. So he drew his revolver and put a round into the brickwork about six feet to one side of the man.

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The effect was wonderful. The souvenir hunter, convinced that he had escaped a sniper's bullet by a mere inch, made a wild dive into a handy shell-hole and lay low. Twenty minutes later he emerged, crawling on hands and knees through deep slime and eagerly watched by a working party who had seen the incident. He arrived, panting and prepared to give an account of his thrilling experience—only to be asked his name and unit and placed in arrest on a charge of loitering unnecessarily in a dangerous place thereby tending to draw fire.

Another incident, not devoid of humour (though I cannot say that I thought so at the moment),

occurred a week after we had arrived at our present position. W—, the captain of the "regular" battery which we had replaced, came over to inquire about a telescopic sight and a clinometer belonging to his unit which had somehow got mislaid during the muddle of "handing over."

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"They must be somewhere here," W— suggested politely, "and we *must* have them because we are going back into action to-morrow."

I assured him that to the best of my belief I had only my own, "but," I added confidently, "we'll go round and ask at each gun to make certain."

The sergeant of No. 1 was quite positive. The corporal of No. 2 was apparently equally so, but I noticed the suspicion of a smile at the corners of his lips.

"Are you certain," I repeated, "that you've only got your own telescope and sight clinometer?"

The corporal's answer was positively brutal in its honesty. He winked—an unmistakable wink—and said—

"Well, sir, o' course I've got those what I pinched off t' batt'ry that was here before!"

If the mud had then and there engulfed me I should have been grateful. As it was I could only weakly murmur, "Fetch them at once," and then glance round to see the expression on W—'s face. But he, good soul, was walking quietly away, though whether with the idea of relieving his own feelings or of allowing me to vent mine upon the corporal, I never dared to ask.

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On the following day the corporal, who by the way is our professional comedian from Lancashire, saw fit to apologise. He did so thus—

"Sir," he said, as I was walking past his gun-pit. I turned and regarded him sternly, for I was still rather angry.

"I'm sorry about what happened yesterday," he observed contritely. "*I didn't mean to make a fool of you!*"

The charm of the remark lies in the fact that, while disregarding the enormity of his offence in "pinching" essential gun-stores from another battery, he was genuinely upset at having made *me* look ridiculous. Which being the case I could do nothing but accept his apology in the spirit in which it was offered.

SPIT AND POLISH

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"*Personally* myself," said the Child, tilting back his chair until his head touched the wall behind him, and stretching out a lazy arm towards the cigarette-box—"personally myself, I've enjoyed this trip no end—haven't you?"

"I have," I answered; "so much so, Child, that the thought of going back to gun-pits and trenches and O.P.'s again fills me with gloom."

It was our last night in a most comfortable billet near —, where, on and off, we had spent rather more than a month of ease; on the morrow we were going into the line again. The trip to which the Child was referring, however, was an eight days' course at a place vaguely known as "the —th Army Mobile Artillery Training School," from which our battery had but lately returned.

The circumstances were these. When, five weeks ago, the division moved (for the *n*th time!) to a different part of the line, it transpired that three batteries would be "out at rest," as there would be no room for them in action. It also so chanced that it was our colonel's turn to be left without a "group"^[10] to command. This being so, he suggested to higher authorities that the three batteries "out" should be those of his own brigade, in order that he might have a chance "to tidy them up a bit," as he phrased it. Thus it was that we found ourselves, as I have said, in extremely comfortable billets—places, I mean, where they have sheets on the beds and china jugs and gas and drains—with every prospect of a pleasant loaf. But in this we were somewhat sanguine.

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[10] A certain number of batteries.

The colonel's idea in having us "out" for a while was not so much to rest us as to give us a variation of work. Being essentially a thorough man, he started—or rather ordered me to start—at the very beginning. The gunners paraded daily for marching drill, physical exercises, and "elementary standing gun drill by numbers." N.C.O.'s and drivers were taken out and given hours of riding drill under the supervision of subalterns bursting with knowledge crammed up from the book the night before and under the personal direction of a brazen-voiced sergeant who, having passed through the "riding troop" at Woolwich in his youth, knew his business. The strangest

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sight of all was the class of signallers—men who had spent months in the foetid atmosphere of cellars and dug-outs, or creeping along telephone wires in "unhealthy" spots—now waving flags at a word of command and going solemnly through the Morse alphabet letter by letter. Of the whole community, this was perhaps the most scandalised portion. But in a few days, when everybody (not excluding myself and the other officers) had discovered how much had been forgotten during our long spell in action, a great spirit of emulation began to be displayed. Subsections vied with one another to produce the smartest gun detachment, the sleekest horses, the best turned-out ride, the cleanest harness, guns, and wagons.

The colonel, after the manner of his kind, came at the end of a week or so to inspect things. He is not the sort of man upon whom one can easily impose. A dozen of the shiniest saddles or bits in the battery placed so as to catch the light (and the eye) near the doorway of the harness room do not necessarily satisfy him: nor is he content with the mere general and symmetrical effect of rows of superficially clean breast-collars, traces, and breechings. On the contrary, he is quite prepared to spend an hour or more over his inspection, examining every set of harness in minute detail, even down to the backs of the buckle tongues, the inside of the double-folded breast collars, and the oft-neglected underside of saddle flaps. It is the same thing with the guns and wagons. Burnished breech-rings and polished brasswork look very nice, and he approves of them, but he does not on that account omit to look closely at every oil-hole or to check the lists of "small stores" and "spare parts."

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For the next week or so we were kept very busy on "the many small points which required attention," to quote the colonel's phrase. Nevertheless, as a variation from the monotony of siege warfare, the time was regarded by most of us as a holiday. Many things combined to enhance our pleasure. The sun shone and the country became gorgeously green again; the horses began to get their summer coats and to lose their unkempt winter's appearance; there was a fair-sized town near at hand, and passes to visit it were freely granted to N.C.O.'s and men; at the back of the officers' billet was a garden with real flower-beds in it and a bit of lawn on which one could have tea. Occasionally we could hear the distant muttering of the guns, and at night we could see the "flares" darting up from the black horizon—just to remind us, I suppose, that the war was only in the next parish....

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But it was not to be supposed that a man of such energy as our colonel would be content just to ride round daily and watch three of his batteries doing rides and gun drill. It occurred to him at once that this was the time to practise the legitimate business—that is, open, moving warfare. Wherefore he made representations to various quite superior authorities. In three days, by dint of considerable personal exertion, he had secured the following concessions: two large tracts of ground suitable for driving drill and battery manoeuvre, good billets, an area of some six square miles (part of the —th Army Training area) for the purpose of tactical schemes, the appointment of himself as commandant of the "school," a Ford ambulance for his private use, three motor lorries for the supply of the units under training, and a magnificent château for his own headquarters. And all this he accomplished without causing any serious friction between the various "offices" and departments concerned—no mean feat.

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Each course was to last eight days, and there were to be four batteries, taken from different divisions, undergoing it simultaneously. It fell to us to go with the second batch, and we spent a strenuous week of preparation: it was four months since we had done any work "in the open," and we knew, inwardly, that we were distinctly rusty. We packed up, and at full war strength, transport, spare horses and all, we marched out sixteen miles to the selected area. At the halfway halt we met the commander of a battery of our own brigade returning. He stopped to pass the time of day and volunteered the information that he was going on leave that night. "And, by Jove!" he added significantly, "I deserve a bit of rest. *Réveillé* at 4 a.m. every morning, out all day wet or fine, gun drill at every odd moment, schemes, tactical exercises, everybody at high pressure all the time. The colonel's fairly in his element, revels in it, and 'strafes' everybody indiscriminately. But it's done us all a world of good though. Cheerihoh! wish you luck." And he rode on, leaving us rather flabbergasted.

We discovered quite early (on the following morning about dawn, to be precise) that there had been no exaggeration. We began with elementary driving drill, and we did four and a half hours of it straight on end, except for occasional ten-minute halts to rest the astonished teams. It was wonderful how much we had forgotten and yet how much came back to us after the first hour or so.

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"I want all your officers to drill the battery in turn," said the colonel. "I shall just ride round and correct mistakes."

He did—with an energy, a power of observation, and a command of language which I have seldom seen or heard surpassed. But the ultimate result by midday, when all the officers and N.C.O.'s were hoarse, the teams sweating and the carriages caked in oily dust—the ultimate result was, as the Child politely says, "not too stinkin' awful." And it had been good to hear once again the rattle and bump of the guns and wagons over hard ground, the jingle of harness and the thud of many hoofs; good to see the teams swing round together as they wheeled into line or column at a spanking trot; good above all to remember that *this* was our job and that the months spent in concrete gun-pits and double-bricked O.P.'s were but a lengthy prelude to our resumption of it—some day.

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In the evening, when the day's work was over and "stables" finished, we left the tired horses picking over the remains of their hay and walked down the *pavé* village street, Angelo and I, to

look at the church. Angelo is my eldest but not, as it so happens, my senior subaltern. Before the war he was a budding architect, with a taste for painting: hence the nickname, coined by the Child in one of his more erudite moods.

The church at L— is very fine. Its square tower is thirteenth century, its interior is pure Gothic, and its vaulted roof a marvel. For its size the building is well-nigh perfect. We spent some time examining the nave and chancel—Angelo, his professional as well as his artistic enthusiasm aroused, explaining technicalities to me and making me envious of his knowledge. It was with regret that we turned away at last, for in spite of the tattered colours of some French regiment which hung on the north side of the chancel, we had forgotten the war in the quiet peacefulness of that exquisite interior. But we were quickly reminded. At the end of the church, kneeling on one of the rough chairs, was an old peasant woman: her head was bowed, and the beads dropped slowly through her twisted fingers. As we crept down the aisle she raised her eyes—not to look at us, for I think she was unconscious of our presence—but to gaze earnestly at the altar. Her lips moved in prayer, but no tear damped her yellow cheek. And, passing out into the sunlight again, I wondered for whom she was praying—husband, brother, sons?—whether, still hoping, she prayed for the living, or, faithfully, for the souls of those lost to her. They are brave, the peasant women of France....

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Madame our hostess, besides being one of the fattest, was also one of the most agreeable ladies it has ever been our lot to be billeted upon. Before we had been in her house ten minutes she had given us (at an amazing speed) the following information:—

Her only remaining son had been wounded and was now a prisoner in Germany.

She had played hostess continuously since August, 1914, to every kind of soldier, including French motor-bus drivers, Indian chiefs (*sic*), and generals.

English officers arriving after the battle of Loos slept in her hall for twenty-four hours, woke to have a bath and to eat an omelette, and then slept the clock round again.

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She remembered 1870, in which war her husband had fought.

The Boches were barbarians, but they would never advance now, though at one time they had been within a few kilometres of her house.

The lettuce and cabbages in her garden were at our disposal.

She took an enormous interest in the Infant, who is even younger than the Child and is our latest acquisition.

"Regardez donc le petit, comme il est fatigué!" she exclaimed to me in the tones of an anxious mother—and then added in an excited whisper, "A-t-il vu les Boches, ce petit sous-lieutenant?"

When I assured her not only that he had seen them, but had fired his guns at them, she was delighted and declared that he could not be more than sixteen. But here the Infant, considering that the conversation was becoming personal, intervened, and the old lady left us to our dinner.

Towards the end of our week we packed up essentials and marched out to bivouac two nights and fight a two days' running battle—directed, of course, by our indefatigable colonel. After the dead flat ugliness where we had been in action all the winter and early spring it was a delight to find ourselves in this spacious undulating country, with its trees and church spires and red-tiled villages. We fought all day against an imaginary foe, made innumerable mistakes, all forcibly pointed out by the colonel (who rode both his horses to a standstill in endeavouring to direct operations and at the same time watch the procedure of four widely separated batteries); our imaginary infantry captured ridge after ridge, and we advanced from position to position "in close support," until finally, the rout of the foe being complete, we moved to our appointed bivouacs.

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In peace time it would have been regarded as a quite ordinary day, boring because of its resemblance to so many others. Now it was different. True, it was make-believe from start to finish, without even blank cartridge to give the vaguest hint of reality. But there was this: at the back of all our minds was the knowledge that this was a preparation—possibly our last preparation—not for something in the indefinite future (as in peace time), but for an occasion that assuredly *is* coming, perhaps in a few months, perhaps even in a few weeks. The colonel spoke truly when, at his first conference, he said—

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"During these schemes you must all of you force yourselves to imagine that there is a real enemy opposed to you. The Boche is no fool: he's got guns, and he knows how to use them. If you show up on crest lines with a whole battery staff at your heels, he'll have the place 'registered,' and he'll smash your show to bits before you ever get your guns into action at all. *Think* where he is likely to be, *think* what he's likely to be doing, don't expose yourselves unless you must, and above all, *get a move on.*"

It was a delightful bivouac. We were on the sheltered side of a little hill, looking south into a wooded valley. Nightingales sang to us as we lay smoking on our valises after a picnic dinner and stared dreamily at the stars above us.

"Jolly, isn't it?" said the Child; "but I s'pose we wouldn't be feeling quite so comfy if it was the real business."

"Don't," said Angelo, quietly. "I was pretending to myself that we were just a merry camping

party, here for pleasure only. I'd forgotten the war."

But I had not. I was thinking of the last time I had bivouacked—amongst the corn sheaves of a harvest that was never gathered, side by side with friends who were soon to fall, on the night before the first day of Mons, nearly two years ago. [74]

The following day was more or less a repetition of the first, except that we made fewer mistakes and "dropped into action" with more style and finish. We were now becoming fully aware of the almost-forgotten fact that a field battery is designed to be a mobile unit, and we were just beginning to take shape as such when our time was over. A day's rest for the horses and then we returned to our comfortable rest billets. It had been a strenuous week, but I think every one had thoroughly enjoyed it....

We have had two days in which to "clean up," and now to-morrow we are to relieve another battery and take our place in the line again. Our holiday is definitely over. It will take a little time to settle down to the old conditions: our week's practice of open warfare has spoilt us for this other kind. We who have climbed hills and looked over miles of rolling country will find an increased ugliness in our old flat surroundings. It will seem ludicrous to put our guns into pits again—the guns that we have seen bounding over rough ground behind the straining teams. To be cooped up in a brick O.P. staring at a strip of desolation will be odious after our bivouacs under the stars and our dashes into action under a blazing sun. Worst of all, perhaps, is the thought that the battery will be split up again into "gun line" and "wagon line," with three miles or more separating its two halves, instead of its being, as it has been all these weeks, one complete cohesive unit. But what must be, must be; and it is absurd to grumble. Moreover—the end is not yet. [75]

"Let's toss up for who takes first turn at the O.P. when the relief is completed," suggested the Child.

"Wait a minute," said I, remembering something suddenly. "Do you know what to-day is?"

"Friday," he volunteered, "and to-morrow ought to be a half-holiday, but it won't be, 'cos we're going into action."

I passed the port round again. "It's only a fortnight since we celebrated the battery's first birthday," I said, "but to-day the Royal Regiment of Artillery is two hundred years old. Let's drink its health."

And we did.

A BATTLE

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Somewhere about the middle of June, we knew definitely that we were "for it," as the soldier says; we knew that our division was one of those chosen for the great concentration which was to culminate in the "great push"—and we were proud of the distinction. A three days' march brought us to a certain training area, where we camped for a week and worked some seventeen hours a day—counting, that is, from *réveillé* at 4 a.m. until the last bit of harness was hung up clean and ready for the morrow at 9 p.m.

During this period two incidents of note occurred. One was that the Child suddenly developed pleurisy, and was removed to hospital—a serious loss at any time, but especially so at this particular moment. The other was that a squadron of hostile aircraft flew over our manoeuvre ground and actually dropped a bomb within 150 yards of the tail of our column. Which, seeing that we were some twenty miles from the nearest part of the line and at the moment only playing at soldiers, was most disconcerting. [77]

From the time when we left this training until, about three weeks later, we were withdrawn to rest in a quiet part of the line, I kept a rough diary of our particular share in the greatest battle ever fought by the British Army. The following are some extracts from it, in no way embellished, but only enlarged so as to make them intelligible.

June 27.—Nine-hour night march southwards, arriving in comfortable billets at 3.30 a.m. Aeroplanes (or at any rate, hostile ones) are the curse of this war: if it was not for fear of them we could move by daylight in a reasonable manner. The old saddler, dozing on a wagon, fell off and was run over: nothing broken, but he will be lost to us. A great pity, as he's a charming character and a first-class workman.

June 28 and 29.—Rested, the continuation of the march having been postponed.

June 30.—Orders to move on to-night. Was sent off with a small party on a road and river reconnaissance: this presumably with a view to going forward "when the advance begins." By the time we got back to where the brigade was to billet, had ridden about forty miles. Job only half finished. Battery marched in at midnight.

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July 1.—Started at 5.30 a.m. with same party to finish reconnaissance. Reached a point about four miles behind the line, at 7.15 a.m.: a tremendous bombardment in progress. Left our horses, and walked on two miles to a river. Here learnt that the attack had been launched at 7.30 and was going well. Walked north up the river-bank, keeping well under the shelter of the steep ridge on the east side, and only emerging to examine each bridge as we came to it. Thousands upon thousands of shells of every size, from "Grannies" to 18 prs., passing over our heads unceasingly: expected the enemy to retaliate. But not a round came: probably the Boche was too busily engaged elsewhere. Met streams of wounded coming down; some with captured helmets, nearly all with grins.

Finished the river reconnaissance about 10.30 and walked back by a roundabout (but less unpleasant!) way, and reached our horses about midday. Rode back to the battery and spent the afternoon writing out full report. Orders to move at 11.30 p.m. Long night march to new billets, arriving 4.15 a.m.

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July 2.—Rested. In the course of the day the Child returned, having in some amazing way persuaded the hospital authorities that pleurisy and a temperature of 104° are the best possible things to have on the eve of a great offensive. Swears he's all right now, and objects to being ordered it to take it easy—while he can. Heavy bombardment all day, but we are eight miles back here. Official *communiqués* record further successes.

July 3.—Moved at 9.30 p.m., and arrived (5.30 a.m.) soaking wet at the worst bivouac it has ever been our unhappy lot to occupy.

July 4.—Saw about 150 German prisoners being brought back. In the afternoon, after a violent thunderstorm, went to look at the position which we are to take over. Found that it was immensely strong. Originally it was only 1200 yards from the enemy front line, but now, since the advance, is about 3000. Steady rain all the time. Got back to find the camp converted into a veritable bog, and men of all the batteries making shelters for themselves by cutting down trees and looting straw. There will be a row over this, but—well, it is too much to expect men to submit to such *unnecessary* discomfort.

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July 5.—Took the Child and two telephonists and went up to new position. Bombardment proceeding incessantly. Was amazed at the amount of material already brought up, at the gangs already working on the shell-wrecked roads, and at the crowd of spectators who lined a convenient ridge to "watch the show."

Went with the Child and the battery commander from whom we were taking over to get a look at the country and visit the O.P. Passed through Fricourt—not long captured. Never could a bombardment have done its work of destruction more thoroughly than here. Not figuratively, but literally; no one brick stood upon another, scarcely one brick was whole. Walked on up the sunken road that leads north from Fricourt past the Dingle and Shelter Wood. For days this road had been a death-trap. It was strewn with corpses, with stretchers on which lay wounded men awaiting removal, with broken bits of equipment, English and German—and it stank. We arrived at the headquarters of a battalion and asked if we could see the colonel.

"No," they told us, "you can't at present. He's just been buried in his dug-out by a shell, and it will be some time before we get him clear; he's all right, but a bit shaken."

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So we went on up a battered trench to the O.P. In it a subaltern and two signallers, all three caked in mud. At the moment the wire to the battery was intact. Two men had been killed and one wounded whilst mending it. From here we could see the famous Quadrangle Trench, which at that time was holding up the advance. Many batteries were shooting at it. Having got our bearings, so to speak, we did not linger in this most unhealthy spot, but returned to the battery position.

On the way home we met our own colonel bearing the news that the brigade would probably go into action in quite a different area. This news confirmed at H.Q. at 5 p.m. Turned back and reconnoitred the new position, which was farther south, nearer Fricourt; rather cramped and quite unprepared for occupation. Cadged dinner from an old friend whom we met at D.H.Q. Met the battery on the road about 10 p.m. and led it to new position. Work of getting guns in, ammunition and stores dumped, and teams away completed by 3 a.m. Awaited dawn.

July 6.—As soon as it was light went up the hill on the right front of the battery to meet the colonel, choose an O.P. and "learn" the country. The scene of wreckage upon this hill now is past all belief, and is, I should imagine, a perfect example of the havoc wrought by a modern "intense" bombardment. The whole face of the earth is completely altered. On the German side of No Man's Land, not one square yard of the original surface of the ground remains unbroken. Line upon line of trenches and tunnels and saps have been so smashed that they are barely recognisable as such: there are mine craters seventy to a hundred yards across, and there are dug-outs (some of these still intact) which go down fifty feet and more into the chalk. On every side is débris—rails, timber, kit, blankets, broken rifles, bread, steel helmets, pumps, respirators, corpses. And nowhere can one get away from the sickening smell—the smell of putrescent human flesh....

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The morning mist cleared at last and we were able to see the landscape. From the O.P. we chose, the view, for our purposes, was ideal. Below us lay the ruins that once were Fricourt, to the right Fricourt Wood, farther off Mametz Wood and village, and on the skyline Contal-maison. Returned, very dishevelled, to breakfast at 8 a.m. During the morning ran out a wire, got "through" to the battery, but did not dare to start shooting until further information as to the situation of the infantry was available. Eventually gathered that we only hold the southern edge of Mametz Wood, and that the Quadrangle Trench which lies to the left (west) of it is not yet in our possession. Spent the afternoon registering the guns, and then began shelling Mametz Wood. Was relieved by the Child at tea-time. Came down to the battery and washed. Looked forward to decent night's rest but was disappointed, viz.:—

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July 7.—Woken by Angelo at 1 a.m., who brought orders for a "strafe," which was to start at 2. Battery fired at a rapid rate from that hour till 2.30. Went back to bed. Woken by the Infant, who had relieved Angelo, at 6. Big bombardment to start at 7.20. Went to telephone dug-out at 7.15, unwashed and half-dressed, and remained there all day; meals brought in to me. The battery fired practically continuously for fourteen hours at rates varying from one to twenty-four rounds a minute. Targets various—mostly "barraging" Mametz Wood and ground immediately to the west of it. Worked the detachments as far as possible in reliefs, turning on spare signallers, cooks, and servants to carry ammunition as it arrived.

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The Child, who was at the O.P., sent down what information he could, but reported that it was hardly possible to see anything owing to the smoke. Passed on everything to Brigade H.Q. (communications working well), and received their instructions as to changes of target, rate of fire, etc. By dusk we were all very tired, and several of the men stone deaf. There were several heavy showers during the day, so that the position became a quagmire into which the guns sank almost to their axles and became increasingly difficult to serve. Empty cartridge cases piled several feet high round each platform: mud awful. No official *communiqué* as to result of the day's operation. Got eight hours' sleep.

July 8.—Shooting, off and on, all day—mostly registration of new points. In the intervals when not firing the detachments kept hard at work improving and strengthening the position. Hostile artillery much more active, but nothing really close to us. Fired 150 rounds during the night into Mametz Wood: northern portion not yet in our hands.

July 9.—A good deal of barrage work all day, but as it was mostly at a slow rate the men managed to get some rest—goodness knows, they both need and deserve it.

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July 10.—Went out with the colonel to reconnoitre an advanced position. Got caught in a barrage, and had to crouch in a (fortunately) deep trench for half an hour. Sitting there began to wonder if this was the prelude to a counter-attack; just then, looking out to the left, that is towards the south-west corner of Mametz Wood, saw a lot of men running hard. Suddenly spotted the familiar grey uniform and spiked helmets of the enemy.

"God!" I cried, "it is a counter-attack. Those are *Huns!*" Expected every moment to have one peering in over the top of the trench: did not dare to run for it, owing to the barrage, which was still heavy. T—, who was with me, remained calm and put up his glasses.

"All right," he said; "they're prisoners. Look at the escort."

And so they were, running for their lives through their own shrapnel—and the escort keeping well up with them!

The storm being over (no "hate" lasts for ever) returned as quickly as we could, and reported that the position was possible but by no means tempting! A lot of night firing.

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July 11.—Set out with the Child, two sergeants, and my trusty "look-out man" to look for a more favourable spot. After a good deal of walking about found one, a fairly snug place (though pitted with shell-holes).

Intended to reconnoitre for an O.P. in the front edge of Mametz Wood, but met a colonel just back from those parts who assured us that the enemy front line ran there. Reluctantly (!) we abandoned the enterprise and returned. At 6 p.m. the Child started off with a digging party to prepare the new position. Move of the battery ordered for 9.30, then postponed till 10.30. Road crowded with infantry and transport; progress slow. To be mounted and at the head of a column of twelve six-horse teams is a very different thing to being alone and ready to slip behind a wall or into a trench if occasion calls for it. Luck was on our side, however, and we got through before any shells came.

Occupied the position quickly, emptied the ammunition wagons, and got the horses clear without casualties. The Child reported that a few four-twos had come pretty close while he and his party were digging and had stopped their work for a while: nevertheless, quite a lot already done. Time now 12.30. Turned on every available man and continued digging till dawn. Men very beat, but not a word of grouching.

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July 12.—At dawn went up to find a new O.P.: took the Child and two signallers, the latter laying a wire as they went. Found excellent place with good general view in an old German redoubt. Trenches, however, crammed with sleeping infantry, over whom one had to step, and under whom the signallers had to pass their line! Thick mist till 8 a.m., when light became good enough to start on our task, which was to cut through the wire at a certain spot in the German main

second line north of Mametz Wood. Observation difficult, as we were rather far back and the whole line was being heavily bombarded by our "heavies." About 10.30 what was apparently an excursion party of generals and staff officers arrived to see the fun, crowded us out of our bay in the trench and lined up, with their heads and red hat bands exposed. Lay down in a corner and tried to sleep, but got trodden on, so abandoned the idea. Shoon (another of my youthful subalterns) came up to relieve us at 2.30, so the Child and I returned to the battery and got about three hours' sleep. The detachments with amazing industry and endurance again hard at work digging. A good deal of hostile fire all round us, especially close to the nullah, but nothing within 200 yards of the guns.

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About 5.30 p.m. Shoon rang up from the O.P. to say that he and a signaller had been wounded. Angelo went up to take his place. Poor old Shoon, when he arrived down, was pretty shaken. Evidently the crowd of spectators previously remarked upon had attracted the attention of some cross Boche gunner. A five-nine dropped just beside the O.P. and knocked both signallers and Shoon, who was observing his wire-cutting at the moment, head over heels back into the trench below. While they were picking themselves up out of the *débris* a salvo landed on the parados immediately behind them. One signaller was untouched (and rescued his precious telephone), the other was badly cut about the head and leg and departed on a stretcher—a good man too. Shoon got a scratch on his forehead and some splinters into his left arm. Swore he was all right, but since he didn't look it was ordered to bed.

Ammunition replenished in the evening in a tearing hurry. It is not pleasant to have teams standing about in a place like this. Heard that on the return journey to the wagon line last night a bombardier, four drivers, and five horses had been wounded—all slightly, thank Heaven!

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Shot all night at the wood (Bézantin-le-petit), and at the front line.

July 13.—Continued wire-cutting and searching the wood all day. Scores of batteries doing the same thing, and noise infernal. The Child went off to find out if he could see the wire from the front edge of Mametz Wood (which now really *is* in our possession). Failing to see it from there, he wandered on up an old communication trench known as Middle Alley, which led direct from our own to the German front line. Eventually he found a place from which he could see through a gap in the hedge. The wire was cut all right—and, incidentally, he might have come face to face with a hostile bombing party at any moment! But what seemed to interest him much more was the behaviour of the orderly who had accompanied him. This N.C.O., who is the battery "look-out man," specially trained to observe anything and everything, raised himself from the ground a moment after they had both hurled themselves flat to await the arrival of a five-nine in Mametz Wood, peered over a fallen tree-trunk and said, "*That* one, sir, was just in front, but slightly to the left!"

Spent the afternoon preparing detailed orders and time-tables for to-morrow's "big show." Slept from 11 till 2.45 a.m.

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July 14.—The "intense" bombardment began at 3.20 a.m.; the infantry attack was launched five minutes later. Even to attempt to describe this bombardment is beyond me. All that can be said is that there was such a *hell* of noise that it was quite impossible to give any orders to the guns except by sending subalterns from the telephone dug-out to shout in the ear of each sergeant in turn. The battery (in company with perhaps a hundred others) barraged steadily, "lifting" fifty yards at a time from 3.25 till 7.15 a.m., by which time some 900 rounds had been expended and the paint on the guns was blistering from their heat. We gathered (chiefly from information supplied by the Child at the O.P., who got into touch with various staffs and signal officers) that the attack had been very successful. About 7.30 things slowed down a little and the men were able to get breakfast and some rest—half at a time, of course.

At midday cavalry moved up past us and affairs began to look really promising. Slept from 3 to 5 p.m., then got orders to reconnoitre an advanced position in front of Acid Drop Copse. (It may here be noted that from our first position this very copse was one of our most important targets at a range of nearly 4000 yards.) Chose a position, but could see that if and when we do occupy it, it is not going to be a health-resort. And, owing to the appalling state of the ground, it will take some driving to get there. Had a really good night's rest for once. Battery fired at intervals all night.

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July 15.—Attack continued. By 10.30 a.m. our guns had reached extreme range and we were forced to stop. (We started at 2700 in this position.) News very good: enemy much demoralised and surrendering freely. Practically no hostile shelling round us now—in fact, we are rather out of the battle for the moment. After lunch formed up the whole battery and thanked the men for the splendid way that they had worked. Shoon, whose arm has got worse, sent under protest to hospital. Desperately sorry to lose him.

In the afternoon switched to the left, where we are apparently still held up, and fired occasional salvos on Martinpuich. Ditto all night.

July 16.—Everybody much concerned over a certain Switch Trench, which appears to be giving much trouble. Fired spasmodically (by map) on this trench throughout the day. In the evening all guns removed to a travelling Ordnance Workshop for overhaul—they need it. Late at night received orders to dig the Acid Drop Copse position next day, and occupy it as soon as the guns are sent back.

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July 17.—Took all officers and practically every man up to new position at 7 a.m. and started to

dig. Shells all round us while we worked, but still no damage. This is too good to last. In the afternoon went out with George (another B.C.^[11] in the brigade), the Child, and a telephonist to look for an O.P. whence to see this infernal Switch Trench. After a while parted from George, whom we last saw walking *forward* from the villa, pausing occasionally to examine the country through his glasses. We learnt afterwards that he spent a really happy afternoon in No Man's Land carrying various wounded infantrymen into comparative safety! For which he has been duly recommended.

[11] Battery Commander.

Got into the old German second line (taken on the 14th), and found that it had been so completely battered by our bombardment that its captors had been obliged to dig an entirely new trench in front of it. This part of the world was full of gunner officers *all* looking for an O.P. for Switch Trench. Returned to Acid Drop Copse about 5 p.m. and found that the digging had progressed well. Marched the men back to the old position, where they got tea and a rest. Teams came up about 8. Packed up and moved forward. Ground so desperately heavy that it became necessary to put ten horses in a team for the last pull up the hill to the position. Got all guns into action and twenty-one wagon loads of ammunition dumped by 11 p.m.—no casualties. Work of the men, who were much worn out, beyond all praise.

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The noise in this place is worse than anything previously experienced. Being, as we are now, the most advanced battery in this particular sector, we get the full benefit of every gun that is behind us—and there are many. Moreover, the hostile artillery is extremely active, especially in the wood, where every shell comes down with a hissing rush that ends in an appalling crash. About midnight the Boche began to put over small "stink" shells. These seemed to flit through the air, and always landed with a soft-sounding "phutt" very like a dud. One burst just behind our trench and wounded a gunner in the foot. Found it impossible to sleep, owing to the din.

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July 18.—At 4 a.m. the hostile bombardment seemed so intense that, fearing a counter-attack, I got up to look round. Was reassured by Angelo, who had already done so. Beyond the fact that the wood was being systematically searched with five-nines, there was nothing much doing. Returned to bed, but still failed to sleep.

Fired at intervals throughout the day at various spots allotted by Brigade H.Q. Having no O.P. had to do everything from the map. Men all digging when not actually firing: position now nearly splinter-proof. A most unnerving day, however. A Hun barrage of "air-crumps" on the ridge in front of us by the Cutting, another one to our right along the edge of the wood, many five-nines over our heads into the dip behind us, and quite a few into Acid Drop Copse on our left rear.

In the afternoon we had half a dozen H.E. "pip-squeaks" very close at a moment when there were three wagons up replenishing ammunition. One burst within four yards of the lead horses—and no damage. This *cannot* last. Orders for a big attack received at 4 p.m. At 5 counter-orders to the effect that we are to be relieved to-night. Fired continuously till about 8.30, then packed up and waited for the teams, which arrived about 9.

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We were just congratulating ourselves on our luck, it being then rather a quiet moment and three out of the four teams already on the move, when a big "air-crump" burst straight above our heads, wounding the sergeant-major in the thigh. Put him up on the last limber and sent the guns off as fast as they could go—ground too bad to gallop. Two more shells followed us down the valley, but there were no further casualties. At the bottom missed the Child: sent to inquire if he was at the head of the column—no. Was beginning to get nervous, when he strolled up from the rear, accompanied by the officers' mess cook.

"Pity to leave these behind," he observed, throwing down a kettle and a saucepan!

Nervy work loading up our stores and kits on to the G.S. wagon, but the enemy battery had returned to its favourite spot by the Cutting, and nothing further worried us. Marched back to the wagon line (about five miles). Much amused by the tenacity with which one of the sergeants clung to a jar of rum which he had rescued from the position.^[12] At the wagon line collected the whole battery together, and while waiting went across to see the sergeant-major in the dressing-station. Am afraid, though it is nothing serious, that it will be a case of "Blighty" for him. A very serious loss to the battery, as he has been absolutely invaluable throughout this show.

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[12] This jar was afterwards found to contain lime-juice!

Marched to our old bivouac at the swampy wood, but were allotted a reasonable space outside it this time. Fell into bed, beat to the world, at 3.30 a.m.

July 19.—Much to do, though men and horses are tired to death. Moved off at 6 p.m. and did a twenty-mile night march, arriving at another bivouac at 2 a.m. Horses just about at their last gasp. Poor old things, they have been in harness almost continuously throughout the battle bringing up load after load of ammunition at all hours of the day and night.

July 20.—Took over a new position (trench warfare style) just out of the battle area as now constituted, and settled down to—rest.

The above is an accurate, though, I fear, far too personal record of the doings of one particular

unit during a fortnight's continuous fighting. It is in no way an attempt to describe a battle as a whole. That is a feat beyond my powers—and, I think, beyond the powers of any one actually engaged. Thinking things over now, in the quiet of a well-made dug-out, I realise that the predominant impressions left upon my mind, in ascending order of magnitude so to speak, are: dirt, stink, horrors, lack of sleep, funk—and the amazing endurance of the men. In the first article of this series I wrote: "But this I know now—the human material with which I have to deal is good enough." It is. I grant that our casualties were slight (though in this respect we were extremely lucky), and that compared with the infantry our task was the easier one of "standing the strain" rather than of "facing the music." But still, think of the strain on the detachments, serving their guns night and day almost incessantly for fourteen days on end. In the first week alone we fired the amount of ammunition which suffices for a battery in peace time for thirty years! They averaged five hours' sleep in the twenty-four, these men, throughout the time; and they dug three separate positions—all in heavy ground. Nor must one forget the drivers, employed throughout in bringing up ammunition along roads pitted with holes, often shelled and constantly blocked with traffic.

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The New Ubique begins to be worthy of the Old.

PART II

[99]

"AND THE OLD"

BILFRED

[101]

... Fellow-creature I am, fellow-servant
Of God: can man fathom God's dealings
with us?

* * * * *

Oh! man! we, at least, we enjoy, with
thanksgiving,
God's gifts on this earth, though we look
not beyond.

You sin and you suffer, and we, too, find
sorrow
Perchance through your sin—yet it soon
will be o'er;
We labour to-day and we slumber to-
morrow,
Strong horse and bold rider! and who
knoweth more?

A. LINDSAY GORDON.

I

In some equine Elysium where there are neither flies nor dust nor steep hills nor heavy loads; where there is luscious young grass unlimited with cool streams and shady trees; where one can roam as one pleases and rest when one is tired: there, far from the racket of gun wheels on hard roads and the thunder of opposing artillery, oblivious of all the insensate folly of this warring human world, reposes, I doubt it not, the soul of Bilfred.

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His was a humble part. He was never richly caparisoned with embroidered bridle and trappings of scarlet and gold. He never swept over the desert beneath some Arab sheikh with the cry "Allah for all!" ringing in his ears. He bore no general to victory, no king to his coronation. But he served his country faithfully, and in the end, when he had helped to make some history, he died for it.

It is eight years since he joined the battery—a woolly-coated babyish remount straight from an Irish dealer's yard. Examining him carefully we found that beneath his roughness he was not badly shaped; a trifle long in the back perhaps, and a shade too tall—but then perfection is not attainable at the government price. There was no denying that his head was plain and his face distinctly ugly. From his pink and flabby muzzle a broad streak of white ran upwards to his forehead, widening on the near side so as almost to reach his eye. The grotesquely lopsided effect of this was enhanced by a tousled forelock which straggled down between his ears.

The question of naming him arose, and some one said, "Except for his face, which is like nothing on earth, he's the image of old Alfred that we cast last year."

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Now a system prevailed in the battery by which horses were called by names which began with the letter of their subsection.

"Well," said some one else, "he's been posted to B sub; why not call him Bilfred?"

And Bilfred he became.

Our rough-rider at the time was a patient man, enthusiastic enough over his job to take endless trouble with young horses. This was fortunate for the new-comer, who proved at first an obdurate pupil. Scientists tell us, of course, that in relative brain-power the horse ranks low in the animal scale—lower than the domestic pig, in fact. This may be so, but Bilfred was certainly an exception. It was obvious, too obvious, that he *thought*, that he definitely used his brain to question the advisability of doing any given thing. To his rebellious Celtic nature there must have been added a percentage of Scotch caution. When any new performance was demanded of him he would ask himself, "Is there any personal risk in this, and even if not, is there any sense in doing it?" Unless satisfied on these points he would plead ignorance and fear and anger alternately until convinced that it would be less unpleasant to acquiesce. For instance, being driven round in a circle in the riding school at the end of a long rope struck him as a silly business; but when he discovered (after a week) that he could neither break the rope nor kick the man who was holding it, he (metaphorically) shrugged his shoulders and trotted or walked, according to orders, with a considerable show of willing intelligence. It took four men half a day to shoe him for the first time, and he was in a white lather when they had finished. But on the next and on every subsequent occasion he was as docile as any veteran.

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A saddle was first placed upon him, at a moment when his attention was distracted by a handful of corn offered to him by a confederate of the rough-rider's. He even allowed himself to be girthed up without protest. But when, suddenly and without due warning, he felt the weight of a man upon his back, his horror was apparent. For a moment he stood stock still, trembling slightly and breathing hard. Then he made a mighty bound forward and started to kick his best. To no purpose; he could not get his head down, and the more he tried, the more it hurt him. The weight meanwhile remained upon his back. Exhausted, he stood still again and gave vent to a loud snort. His face depicted his thoughts. "I'm done for," he felt; "this thing is here for ever." He was soothed and petted until his first panic had subsided; then coaxed into a good humour again with oats. At the end of a minute or so he was induced to move forward—cautiously, nervously at first, and then with more confidence. "Unpleasant but not dangerous," was his verdict. In half an hour he was resigned to his burden.

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Yet not entirely. Every day when first mounted he gave two or three hearty kicks. He hated the cold saddle on his back for one thing, and for another there was always a vague hope.... One day, about a fortnight afterwards, this hope fructified. A loose-seated rider, in a moment of bravado, got upon him, and immediately the customary performance began. At the second plunge the man shot up into space and landed heavily on the tan. Bilfred, palpably as astonished as he was pleased, tossed his head, snorted in triumph and bolted round the school, kicking at intervals. For five thrilling minutes he enjoyed the best time he had had since he left Connemara. Then, ignominiously, he succumbed to the temptation of a proffered feed tin and was caught, discovering too late, to his chagrin, that the tin was empty. It was his first experience of the deceitfulness of man, and he did not forget it.

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Six weeks later he had become a most accomplished person. He could walk and trot and even canter in a lumbering way; he answered to rein and leg, could turn and twist, go sideways and backwards; greatest miracle of all, he had been taught to lurch in ungainly fashion over two-foot-six of furze.

But he had accomplished something beyond all this. He had acquired a reputation. It had become known throughout the battery that there were certain things which could not be done to Bilfred with impunity. If you were his stable companion, for example, you could not try to steal his food without getting bitten, neither could you nibble the hairs of his tail without getting kicked. If you were a human being you could not approach him in his stall until you had spoken to him politely from outside it. You could not attempt to groom him until you had made friends with him, and even then you had to keep your eyes open. You got used to the way he gnashed his teeth and tossed his head about, but occasionally, when you were occupied with the ticklish underpart of him, he would show his dislike of the operation by catching you unawares by the slack of your breeches and throwing you out of his stall.

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But there was no vice in him. He was always amenable to kindness, and prepared to accept gifts of sugar and bread with every symptom of gratitude and approval. Rumour even had it that he had once eaten the stable-man's dinner with apparent relish. And he flourished exceedingly in his

new environment. His baby roundness had disappeared and been replaced by hard muscle. He no longer moved with an awkward sprawling gait, but with confidence and precision. His dark-bay coat was sleek and smooth, his mane hogged, his heels neatly trimmed. Only his tail remained the difficulty. It was long and its hairs were coarse and curly. Moreover, he persisted in carrying it slightly inclined towards the off side, as if to draw attention to it. Frankly it was a vulgar tail. But, on the whole, Bilfred was presentable.

When the time came to complete his education by putting him in draught he surprised an expectant crowd of onlookers by going up into his collar at once and pulling as if he had done that sort of work for years. And so, as a matter of fact, he had. Irish horses are often put into the plough as two-year-olds—a fact which had been forgotten. But he would not consent to go in the wheel. He made this fact quite clear by kicking so violently that he broke two traces, cut his hocks against the footboard and lamed himself. Since ploughs do not run downhill on to one's heels, he saw no reason why a gun or wagon should. Persuasion was found to be useless, and for once his obstinacy triumphed. But he did not abuse his victory nor seek to extend his gains. He proved himself a willing worker in any other position, and soon, on his merits as much as on his looks, he was promoted from the wagon to the gun and definitely took his place as off leader. It was a good team; some said the show one of the battery. The wheelers were Beatrice and Belinda, who knew their job as well as did their driver, whom they justly loved. Being old and dignified they never fretted, but took life calmly and contentedly. In the centre Bruno and Binty, young both of them, and rather excitable, needed watching or they lost condition, but both had looks. The riding leader was old Bacchus, tall and strong and honest, a good doer and a veteran of some standing. Moreover, he was a perfect match for Bilfred. All six of them were of the same mottled dark-bay colour.

In course of time Bilfred, quick, like most horses, to pick up habits, exhibited all the characteristics of the typical "hairy." (It is to be observed that the term is not one of abuse but of esteem and affection.) He became, frankly and palpably gluttonous, stamping and whinnying for his food and bolting it ravenously when he got it. At exercise he shied extravagantly at things which did not frighten him in the least. He displayed an obstinate disinclination to leave other horses when required to do so; and at riding drill he quickly discovered that to skimp the corners as much as possible tends to save exertion. Artillery horses are not as a rule well bred; one finds in their characters an astonishing mixture of cunning, vulgarity, and docile good-tempered willingness which makes them altogether lovable. Their condition reflects their treatment, as in a mirror. Properly looked after they thrive; neglected, their appearance betrays the fact to every experienced eye. They have an enormous contempt for "these 'ere mufti 'orses," as our farrier once described some one's private hunter. Watch a subsection out at water when a contractor's cart pulls up in the lines; note the way they prick their ears and stare, then drop their heads to the trough again with a sniff. It is as if they said, in so many words, "Who the deuce are you? Oh! a mere civilian!"

Bilfred was like them all in many ways. But, in spite of everything, he never lost his personality. He invariably kicked three times when he was first mounted—and never afterwards on that particular day; he hated motors moving or stationary; and he was an adept at slipping his head collar and getting loose. It was never safe to let go his head for an instant. With ears forward and tail straight up on end, he was off in a flash at a trot that was vulgarly fast. He never galloped till his angry pursuers were close, and then he could dodge like a Rugby three-quarter. If he got away in barracks he always made straight for the tennis-lawns, where his soup-plate feet wrought untold havoc. And no longer was he to be lured to capture with an empty feed tin. Everybody knew him, most people cursed him at times, but for all that everybody loved him.

II

I think that when a new history of the Regiment comes to be written honourable mention should be made therein of a certain team of dark bays that pulled the same gun of the same battery for so many years. They served in England and in Ireland, in France and in the Low Countries; they thundered over the grassy flats of Salisbury Plain; they toiled up the steep rocky roads of Glen Imaal; they floundered in the bogs of Okehampton. They stood exposed in all weathers; they stifled in close evil-smelling billets, in trains, and on board ship. They were present at Mons; they were all through the Great Retreat, they swept forward to the Marne and on to the Aisne; they marched round to Flanders in time for the first battle of Ypres. They were never sick nor sorry, even when fodder was short and the marches long, even when there was no time to slake their raging thirsts. They pulled together in patience, and in dumb pathetic trust of their lords and masters, knowing nothing, understanding nothing, until at last Fate overtook them.

At the beginning of August, 1914, the battery had just returned to its station after a month's hard work at practice camp. Bilfred, a veteran now of more than seven years' service, had probably never been in better condition in his life. Ordinarily he would have been given an easy time for some weeks, with plenty of food and just enough exercise and collar work to keep him fit for the strain of the big manœuvres in September.

But there were to be no 1914 manœuvres. About August 6 things quite beyond Bilfred's comprehension began to happen. Strange men arrived to join the battery and in their ignorance took liberties with him which he resented. Every available space in the lines became crowded with unkempt, queer-looking horses, obviously of a low caste. Bilfred was shod a fortnight before his time by a new shoeing-smith, for whom he made things as unpleasant as possible. His harness, which usually looked like polished mahogany decorated with silver, was dubbed and

oiled until it looked (and smelt) disgusting. When the battery went out on parade, all these absurd civilian horses with bushy tails (some even with manes!) went with it, and for a day or two behaved disgracefully. The whole place was in confusion and everybody worked all day long. Bilfred, ignorant of the term "mobilisation," was completely mystified.

A week or so later he was harnessed up in the middle of the night, hooked in and marched to the station. Now it had been his habit for years to object to being entrained. On this occasion he was doubly obstinate and wasted much precious time. Other horses, even his own team-mates, went in quietly in front of him; it made no difference, he refused to follow them. A rope was put round his quarters and he was hauled towards the truck. He dug his toes in and tried to back. Then, suddenly, his hind legs slipped and he sat down on his haunches like a dog, tangled in the rope and unable to move. In the dim light of the station siding his white face and scared expression moved us to laughter in spite of our exasperation. He struggled to his feet again, the cynosure of all eyes, and the subject of many curses. Then, for no apparent reason whatever, he changed his mind and allowed himself to be led into the next truck, which was empty, just as though it was his own stall in barracks. And once inside he tried by kicking to prevent other horses being put in with him.

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He continued in this contrary mood for some time and upheld his reputation for eccentricity. Some horses made a fuss about embarking. He made none. He showed his insular contempt for foreigners by making a frantic effort to bite the first French soldier he saw—a sentry on the landing quay, who, in his enthusiasm for his Allies, came too close. He got loose during the night we spent at the rest camp, laid flat about an acre of standing corn, and was found next morning in the lines of a cavalry regiment, looking woefully out of place.

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On the railway journey up to the concentration area, he slipped down in the truck several times and was trampled on by the other horses. The operation of extricating him was dangerous and lengthy. When we detrained he refused food and water, to our great concern. But he took his place in the team during the twenty-mile march that followed and was himself again in the evening.

Where everybody was acutely conscious of the serious nature of the business during the first day or so, it was something of a relief to watch the horses behaving exactly as they normally did at home. We, Heaven help us! knew little enough of what was in store for us, but they, poor brutes, knew nothing. Oats were plentiful—what else mattered? Bilfred rolled over and over on his broad back directly his harness was removed, just as he always did; he plunged his head deep into his water and pushed his muzzle to and fro washing his mouth and nostrils; he raised his head when he had drunk, stretched his neck and yawned, staring vacantly into space as was his wont. For him the world was still at peace. Of course it was—he knew no better. But we who did, we whose nerves were on edge with an excitement half-fearful, half-exultant, saw these things and were somehow soothed by them.

[115]

Bilfred's baptism of fire came early. A few rounds of shrapnel burst over the wagon-line on the very first occasion that we were in action. Fortunately, the range was just too long and no damage was done. Some of the horses showed momentary signs of fear, but the drivers easily quieted them; and, besides, they were in a clover field—an opportunity too good to be wasted in worrying about strange noises. Bilfred, either because he despised the German artillery or because he imagined that the reports were those of his own guns, to which he was quite accustomed, never even raised his head. His curly tail flapped regularly from side to side, protecting him from a swarm of flies whilst he reached out as far as his harness would allow and tore up great mouthfuls of grass. He had always been a glutton, and it was as if he knew, shells or no shells, that this was to be his last chance for some time. It was; there followed four days of desperate strain for man and beast. Through clouds of powdery, choking dust, beneath a blazing August sun, parched with thirst, often hungry and always weary, Bilfred and his fellows pulled the two tons of steel and wood and complicated mechanism called a gun along those straight interminable roads of northern France. Thousands of horses in dozens of batteries were doing the same thing—and none knew why.

[116]

Then, on the fifth day, our turn came to act as rear-guard artillery. The horses, tucked away behind a convenient wood when we came into action just before dawn, had an easy morning—and there were many, especially amongst the new-comers received on mobilisation, who were badly in need of it. Now the function of a rear-guard is to gain time, and this we did. But, when at last the order to withdraw was given, our casualties were numerous and the enemy was close. Moreover, his artillery had got our range. The teams issuing from the shelter of their wood had to face a heavy fire, and it was at this juncture that the seasoned horses, the real old stagers, who knew as much about limbering up as most drivers and more than some, set an example to the less experienced ones. Bilfred (and I take him as typical of the rest) seemed with a sudden flash of intuition to realise that his apprenticeship and all his previous training had been arranged expressly that he might bear himself courageously in just such a situation as this. Somehow, in some quite inexplicable fashion, he knew that this was the supreme moment of his career. Regardless of bursting shells and almost without guidance from his driver he galloped straight for his gun, with ears pricked and nostrils dilated, the muscles rippling under his dark coat and his traces taut as bow-strings as he strained at his collar with every thundering stride. He wheeled with precision exactly over the trail eye, checked his pace at the right moment, and "squared off" so as to allow the wheelers to place the limber in position. It was his job, he knew what to do and he did it perfectly. B was the first gun to get away and the only one to do so without a casualty...

[117]

More marching, more fighting, day after day, night after night; men were killed and wounded; horses, dropping from utter exhaustion, were cut loose and left where they lay—old friends, some of them, that it tore one's heart to abandon thus. But there could be no tarrying, the enemy was too close to us for that.

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Then came the day when the terrible retreat southwards ceased as abruptly and as unexpectedly as it had begun. Rejoicing in an advance which soon developed into a pursuit we forgot our weariness and all the trials and hardships of the past. And I think we forgot, too, in our eagerness, that for the horses there was no difference between the advance and the retirement—the work was as hard, the loads as heavy. For our hopes were high. We knew that the flood of invasion was stemmed at last. We believed that final victory was in sight. Reckless of everything we pushed on, faster and still faster, until our strength was nearly exhausted. It mattered not, we felt; the enemy retreating in disorder before us must be in far worse plight.

And then, on the Aisne, we ran up against a strong position, carefully prepared and held by fresh troops. Trench warfare began, batteries dug themselves in as never before, and the horses were taken far to the rear to rest. They had come through a terrible ordeal. Some were lame and some were galled; staring coats, hollow, wasted backs, and visible ribs told their own tale. A few, at least, were little more than skeletons for whom the month's respite that followed was a godsend. Good forage in plenty, some grazing and very light work did wonders, and when the moment came for the move round to Flanders the majority were ready for a renewed effort. Compared with what they had already done the march was easy work. They arrived on the Yser fit and healthy.

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But the first battle of Ypres took its toll. Bringing up ammunition one dark night along a road which, though never safe, had perforce to be used for lack of any other, the teams were caught by a salvo of high explosive shell and suffered heavily. Four drivers and nine horses were killed, seven drivers and thirteen horses were wounded. Bilfred escaped unhurt, but he was the only one in his team who did. A direct hit on the limber brought instantaneous death to the wheelers and their beloved driver. A merciful revolver shot put an end to Binty's screaming agony. Bruno and Bacchus were fortunate in only getting flesh wounds from splinters. It was a sad breaking up of the team which had held together through so many vicissitudes. It comforted us, though, to think that at least they had died in harness....

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The winter brought hardship for horse as well as man. We built stables of hop-poles and sacking, but they were only a slight protection against the biting winds, and it was impossible to cope with the sea of slimy mud which was euphemistically termed the horse lines. In spite of all our precautions coughs and colds were rampant. About Christmas-time Bruno, always rather delicate, succumbed with several others to pneumonia, and a month later Bacchus strained himself so badly, when struggling to pull a wagon out of holding mud whilst the rest of the team (all new horses) jibbed, that he passed out of our hands to a veterinary hospital and was never seen again. Bilfred alone remained, and Nature, determined to do her best for him, provided him with the most amazingly woolly coat ever seen upon a horse. The robustness of his constitution made him impervious to climatic conditions, but the loss of Bacchus, his companion for so long, distressed him, and he was at pains to show his dislike of the substitute provided by biting him at all times except when in harness; then, and then only, was he Dignity personified.

The end came one day in early spring. The battery was in action in a part of the line where it was impossible to have the horses far away, for in those days we had to be prepared for any emergency. It so happened that the enemy, in the course of his usual morning "*strafe*," whether by luck or by intention, put an eight-inch howitzer shell into the middle of the secluded field where a few of our horses were sunning themselves in the warm air and picking at the scanty grass. Fortunately, they had been hobbled so that there was no stampede. The cloud of smoke and dust cleared away and we thought at first that no harm had been done. Then we noticed Bilfred lying on his side ten yards or so from the crater, his hind quarters twitching convulsively. As we went towards him, he lifted his head and tried to look at the gaping jagged wound in his flank and back. There was agony in his soft brown eyes, but he made no sound. He made a desperate effort to get up, but could only raise his forehead. He remained thus for a moment, swaying unsteadily and in terrible distress. Then he dropped back and lay still. A minute later he gave one long deep sigh—and it was over.

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Our old farrier, who in his twenty years' service had seen many horses come and go, and who was not often given to sentiment, looked at him sadly.

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"E's gone," he said. "A good 'oss—won't see the like of him again in the batt'ry this trip, I reckon."

And Bilfred's driver, the man who had been with him from the start, ceased his futile efforts to stem the flow of blood with a dirty handkerchief.

"Oh! Gawd!" he muttered in a voice of despair, and turned his back upon us all to hide his grief.

We kept a hoof, to be mounted for the battery mess when peace comes, for he was the last of the old lot and his memory must not be allowed to fade. The fatigue party digging his grave did not grumble at their task. He was an older member of the battery than them all and a comrade rather than a beast of burden.

I like to imagine that Bilfred had a soul—not such a soul as we try to conceive for ourselves perhaps—but still I like to picture him in some heaven suitable to his simple needs, dwelling in quiet peacefulness among the departed of his race. What a company would be his and what tales he would hear!—Tales of the chariots of Assyria and Rome, of the fleet Parthians and the ravaging hosts of Attila; stories of Charlemagne and King Arthur, of the lists and all the pomp of chivalry. And so down through the centuries to the crossing of the Alps in 1800 and the grim tragedy of Moscow twelve years later. Would he stamp his feet and toss his head proudly when he heard of the Greys at Waterloo or the Light Brigade at Balaclava? But stories of the guns would delight him more, I think—Fuentes D'Onoro, Maiwand, Néry, and Le Cateau.

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It pleases me to think of him meeting Bacchus and Binty and the rest and arguing out the meaning of it all. Does he know now, I wonder, the colossal issues that were at stake during that terrible fortnight between Mons and the Marne, and does he forgive us our seeming cruelty?

I hope so. I like to think that Bilfred understands.

"THE PROGRESS OF PICKERSDYKE"

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I

Second Lieutenant William Pickersdyke, sometime quartermaster-sergeant of the —th Battery, and now adjutant of a divisional ammunition column, stared out of the window of his billet and surveyed the muddy and uninteresting village street with eyes of gloom. His habitual optimism had for once failed him, and his confidence in the gospel of efficiency had been shaken. For Fate, in the portly guise of his fatuous old colonel, had intervened to balk the fulfilment of his most cherished desire. Pickersdyke had that morning applied for permission to be transferred to his old battery if a vacancy occurred, and the colonel had flatly declined to forward the application.

Now one of the few military axioms which have not so far been disproved in the course of this war is the one which lays down that second lieutenants must not argue with colonels. Pickersdyke had left his commanding officer without betraying the resentment which he felt, but in the privacy of his own room, however, he allowed himself the luxury of vituperation.

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"Blooming old woman!" he said aloud. "Incompetent, rusty old dug-out! Thinks he's going to keep me here running his bally column for ever, I suppose. Selfish, that's what 'e is—and lazy too."

In spite of the colonel's pompous reference to "the exigencies of the service," that useful phrase which covers a multitude of minor injustices, Pickersdyke had legitimate cause for grievance. Nine months previously, when he had been offered a commission, he had had to choose between Sentiment, which bade him refuse and stay with the battery to whose wellbeing he had devoted seven of the best years of his life, and Ambition, which urged him, as a man of energy and brains, to accept his just reward with a view to further advancement. Ambition, backed by his major's promise to have him as a subaltern later on, had vanquished. Suppressing the inevitable feeling of nostalgia which rose in him, he had joined the divisional ammunition column, prepared to do his best in a position wholly distasteful to him.

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In an army every unit depends for its efficiency upon the system of discipline inculcated by its commander, aided by the spirit of individual enthusiasm which pervades its members; the less the enthusiasm the sterner must be the discipline. Now a D.A.C., as it is familiarly called, is not, in the inner meaning of the phrase, a cohesive unit. In peace it exists only on paper; it is formed during mobilisation by the haphazard collection of a certain number of officers, mostly "dug-outs"; close upon 500 men, nearly all reservists; and about 700 horses, many of which are rejections from other and, in a sense, more important units. Its business, as its name indicates, is to supply a division with ammunition, and its duties in this connection are relatively simple. Its wagons transport shells, cartridges, and bullets to the brigade ammunition columns, whence they return empty and begin again. It is obvious that the men engaged upon this work need not, in ordinary circumstances, be heroes; it is also obvious that their *rôle*, though fundamentally an important one, does not tend to foster an intense *esprit de corps*. A man can be thrilled at the idea of a charge or of saving guns under a hurricane of fire, but not with the monotonous job of loading wagons and then driving them a set number of miles daily along the same straight road. A stevedore or a carter has as much incentive to enthusiasm for his work.

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The commander of a D.A.C., therefore, to ensure efficiency in his unit, must be a zealous disciplinarian with a strong personality. But Pickersdyke's new colonel was neither. The war had dragged him from a life of slothful ease to one of bustle and discomfort. Being elderly, stout, and constitutionally idle, he had quickly allowed his early zeal to cool off, and now, after six months of the campaign, the state of his command was lamentable. To Pickersdyke, coming from a battery with proud traditions and a high reputation, whose members regarded its good name in the way that a son does that of his mother, it seemed little short of criminal that such laxity should be

permitted. On taking over a section he "got down to it," as he said, at once, and became forthwith a most unpopular officer. But that, though he knew it well, did not deter him. He made the lives of various sergeants and junior N.C.O.'s unbearable until they began to see that it was wiser "to smarten themselves up a bit" after his suggestion. In a month the difference between his section and the others was obvious. The horses were properly groomed and had begun to improve in their condition—before, they had been poor to a degree; the sergeant-major no longer grew a weekly beard nor smoked a pipe during stable hour; the number of the defaulters, which under the new *régime* was at first large, had dwindled to a negligible quantity. In two months that section was for all practical purposes a model one, and Pickersdyke was able to regard the results of his unstinted efforts with satisfaction.

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The colonel, who was not blind where his own interests were concerned, sent for Pickersdyke one day and said—

"You've done very well with your section; it's quite the best in the column now."

Pickersdyke was pleased; he was as modest as most men, but he appreciated recognition of his merits. Moreover, for his own ends, he was anxious to impress his commanding officer. He was less pleased when the latter continued—

"I'm going to post you to No. 3 Section now, and I hope you'll do the same with that."

No. 3 Section was notorious. Pickersdyke, if he had been a man of Biblical knowledge (which he was not), would have compared himself to Jacob, who waited seven years for Rachel and then was tricked into taking Leah. The vision of his four days' leave—long overdue—faded away. He foresaw a further and still more difficult period of uncongenial work in front of him. But, having no choice, he was obliged to acquiesce.

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Once again he began at the beginning, instilling into unruly minds the elementary notions that orders are given to be obeyed, that the first duty of a mounted man is to his horses, and that personal cleanliness and smartness in appearance are military virtues not beneath notice. This time the drudgery was even worse, and he was considerably hampered by the touchiness and jealousy of the real section commander, who was a dug-out captain of conspicuous inability. There was much unpleasantness, there was at one time very nearly a mutiny, and there were not a few court-martials. It was three months and a half before that section found, so to speak, its military soul.

And then the colonel, satisfied that the two remaining sections were well enough commanded to shift for themselves if properly guided, seized his chance and made Pickersdyke his adjutant. Here was a man, he felt, endowed with an astonishing energy and considerable powers of organisation, the very person, in fact, to save his commanding officer trouble and to relieve him of all real responsibility.

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This occurred about the middle of July. From then until well on into September, Pickersdyke remained a fixture in a small French village on the lines of communication, miles from the front, out of all touch with his old comrades, with no distractions and no outlet for his energies except work of a purely routine character.

"It might be peace-time and me a bloomin' clerk" was how he expressed his disgust. But he still hoped, for he believed that to the efficient the rewards of efficiency come in due course and are never long delayed. Without being conceited, he was perhaps more aware of his own possibilities than of his limitations. In the old days in his battery he had been the major's right-hand man and the familiar (but always respectful) friend of the subalterns. In the early days of the war he had succeeded amazingly where others in his position had certainly failed. His management of affairs "behind the scenes" had been unsurpassed. Never once, from the moment when his unit left Havre till a month later it arrived upon the Aisne, had its men been short of food or its horses of forage. He had replaced deficiencies from some apparently inexhaustible store of "spares"; he had provided the best billets, the safest wagon lines, the freshest bread with a consistency that was almost uncanny. In the darkest days of the retreat he had remained imperturbed, "pinching" freely when blandishments failed, distributing the comforts as well as the necessities of life with a lavish hand and an optimistic smile. His wits and his resource had been tested to the utmost. He had enjoyed the contest (it was his nature to do that), and he had come through triumphant and still smiling.

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During the stationary period on the Aisne, and later in Flanders, he had managed the wagon line—that other half of a battery which consists of almost everything except the guns and their complement of officers and men—practically unaided. On more than one occasion he had brought up ammunition along a very dangerous route at critical moments.

He received his commission late in December, at a time when his battery was out of action, "resting." He dined in the officers' mess, receiving their congratulations with becoming modesty and their drink without unnecessary reserve. It was on this occasion that he had induced his major to promise to get him back. Then he departed, sorrowful in spite of all his pride in being an officer, to join the column. There, in the seclusion of his billet, he studied army lists and watched the name of the senior subaltern of the battery creep towards the head of the roll. When that officer was promoted captain there would be a vacancy, and that vacancy would be Pickersdyke's chance. Meanwhile, to fit himself for what he hoped to become, he spent whole evenings poring over manuals of telephony and gun-drill; he learnt by heart abstruse passages of Field Artillery Training; he ordered the latest treatises on gunnery, both practical and theoretical, to be sent out

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to him from England; and he even battled valiantly with logarithms and a slide-rule....

From all the foregoing it will be understood how bitter was his disappointment when his application to be transferred was refused. His colonel's attitude astonished him. He had expected recognition of that industry and usefulness of which he had given unchallengeable proof. But the colonel, instead of saying—

"You have done well; I will not stand in your way, much as I should like to keep you," merely observed—

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"I'm sorry, but you cannot be spared."

And he made it unmistakably plain that what he meant was:

"Do you think I'm such a fool as to let you go? I'll see you damned first!"

Thus it was that Pickersdyke, a disillusioned and a baffled man, stared out of the window with wrath and bitterness in his heart. For he wanted to go back to "the old troop"; he was obsessed with the idea almost to the exclusion of everything else. He craved for the old faces and the old familiar atmosphere as a drug-maniac craves for morphia. It was his right, he had earned it by nine months of drudgery—and who the devil, anyway, he felt, was this old fool to thwart him?

Extravagant plans for vengeance flitted through his mind. Supposing he were to lose half a dozen wagons or thousands of rounds of howitzer ammunition, would his colonel get sent home? Not he—he'd blame his adjutant, and the latter would quite possibly be court-martialled. Should he hide all the colonel's clothes and only reveal their whereabouts when the application had been forwarded? Should he steal his whisky (without which it was doubtful if he could exist), put poison in his tea, or write an anonymous letter to headquarters accusing him of espionage? He sighed—ingenuity, his valuable ally on many a doubtful occasion, failed him now. Then it occurred to him to appeal to one Lorrison, who was the captain of his old battery, and whom he had known for years as one of his subalterns.

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"DEAR LORRISON," he wrote,

"I've just had an interview with my old man and he won't agree to my transfer. I'm afraid it's a wash-out unless something can be done quickly, as I suppose Jordan will be promoted very soon." (Jordan was the senior subaltern.) "You know how much I want to get back in time for the big show. Can you do anything? Sorry to trouble you, and now I must close.

"Yours,
"W. PICKERSDYKE."

Then he summoned his servant. Gunner Scupham was an elderly individual with grey hair, a dignified deportment, and a countenance which suggested extreme honesty of soul but no intelligence whatsoever, which fact was of great assistance to him in the perpetration of his more complicated villainies. He had not been Pickersdyke's storeman for many years for nothing. His devotion was a by-word, but his familiarity was sometimes a little startling.

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"E won't let us go," announced Pickersdyke.

"Strafe the blighter!" replied Scupham, feelingly. "I'm proper fed up with this 'ere column job."

"Get the office bike, take this note to Captain Lorrison, and bring back an answer. Here's a pass."

Scupham departed, grumbling audibly. It meant a fifteen-mile ride, the day was warm, and he disliked physical exertion. He returned late that evening with the answer, which was as follows:—

"DEAR PICKERS,

"Curse your fool colonel. Jordan may go any day, and if we don't get you we'll probably be stuck with some child who knows nothing. Besides, we want you to come. The preliminary bombardment is well under way, so there's not much time. Meet me at the B.A.C.^[13] headquarters to-morrow evening at eight and we'll fix up something. In haste,

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"Yours ever,
"T. LORRISON."

[13] Brigade ammunition column.

There are people who do not believe in luck. But if it was not luck which assisted Pickersdyke by producing the events which followed his receipt of that note, then it was Providence in a genial and most considerate mood. He spent a long time trying to think of a reasonable excuse for going to see Lorrison, but he might have saved himself the trouble. Some light-hearted fool had sent up shrapnel instead of high explosive to the very B.A.C. that Pickersdyke wanted to visit. Angry telephone messages were coming through, and the colonel at once sent his adjutant up to offer plausible explanations.

Pickersdyke covered a lot of ground that afternoon. It was necessary to find an infuriated artillery brigadier and persuade him that the error was not likely to occur again, and was in any case not really the fault of the D.A.C. section commander. It was then necessary to find this latter and

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make it clear to him that he was without doubt the most incompetent officer in the Allied forces, and that the error was entirely due to his carelessness. And it was essential to arrange for forwarding what was required.

Lorrison arrived punctually and evidently rather excited.

"What price the news?" he said at once.

Pickersdyke had heard none. He had been far too busy.

"We're for it at last—going to bombard all night till 4.30 a.m.—every bally gun in the army as far as I can see. And we've got orders to be ready to move in close support of the infantry if they get through. *To move!* Just think of that after all these months!"

Pickersdyke swore as he had not done since he was a rough-riding bombardier.

"And that's boxed *my* chances," he ended up.

"Wait a bit," said Lorrison. "There's a vacancy waiting for you if you'll take it. We got pretty badly 'crumped'^[14] last night. The Boches put some big 'hows' and a couple of 'pip-squeak' batteries on to us just when we were replenishing. They smashed up several wagons and did a lot of damage. Poor old Jordan got the devil of a shaking—he was thrown about ten yards. Lucky not to be blown to bits, though. Anyway, he's been sent to hospital."

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[14] Shelled.

He looked inquiringly at Pickersdyke. The latter's face portrayed an unholy joy.

"Will I take his place?" he cried. "Lummy! I should think I would. Don't care what the colonel says afterwards. When can I join? Now?"

"As soon as I've seen about getting some more wagons from the B.A.C. we'll go up together," answered Lorrison.

Pickersdyke, who had no conscience whatever on occasions such as this, sent a message to his colonel to say that he was staying up for the night (he omitted to say precisely where!), as there would be much to arrange in the morning. To Scupham he wrote—

"Collect all the kit you can and come up to the battery at once. *Say nothing.*"

He was perfectly aware that he was doing a wildly illegal thing. He felt like an escaped convict breathing the air of freedom and making for his home and family. Forty colonels would not have stopped him at that moment.

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II

The major commanding the —th Battery sat in his dug-out examining a large-scale trench map. His watch, carefully synchronised with those of the staff, lay on the table in front of him. Outside, his six guns were firing steadily, each concussion (and there were twelve a minute) shaking everything that was not a fixture in the little room. Hundreds of guns along miles of front and miles of depth were taking part in the most stupendous bombardment yet attempted by the army. From "Granny," the enormous howitzer that fired six times an hour at a range of seventeen thousand yards, to machine-guns in the front line trenches, every available piece of ordnance was adding its quota to what constituted a veritable hell of noise.

The major had been ordered to cut the wire entanglements between two given points and to stop firing at 4.30 a.m. precisely. He had no certain means of knowing whether he had completed his task or not. He only knew that his "lines of fire," his range, and his "height of burst" as previously registered in daylight were correct, that his layers could be depended upon, and that he had put about a thousand rounds of shrapnel into fifty yards of front. At 4.29 he rose and stood, watch in hand, in the doorway of his dug-out. A man with a megaphone waited at his elbow. The major, war-worn though he was, was still young enough in spirit to be thrilled by the mechanical regularity of his battery's fire. This perfection of drill was his work, the result of months and months of practice, of loving care, and of minute attention to detail.

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Dawn was beginning to creep into the sky, and he could just distinguish the silhouettes of the two right-hand guns. The flash as one of them fired revealed momentarily the figures of the gunners grouped round the breech like demons round some spectral engine of destruction. Precisely five seconds afterwards a second flash denoted that the next gun had fired—and so on in sequence from right to left until it was the turn of Number One again.

"Stop!" said the major, when the minute hand of his watch was exactly over the half-hour.

"Stop!" roared the man with the megaphone.

It was as if the order had been heard all along the entire front. The bombardment ceased almost abruptly, and rifle and machine-gun fire became audible again. On a colossal scale the effect was that of the throttling down of a powerful motor-car whose engine had been allowed to race. Then, not many moments afterwards, from far away to the eastward there came faint, confused sounds

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of shouts and cheering. It was the infantry, the long-suffering, tenacious, wonderful infantry charging valiantly into the cold grey dawn along the avenues prepared by the guns.

For Pickersdyke it had been a night of pure joy, unspoilt by any qualms of conscience. He had been welcomed at the battery as a kind of returned wanderer and given a section of guns at once. The major—who feared no man's wrath, least of all that of a dug-out D.A.C. commander—had promised to back him up if awkward questions were asked. Pickersdyke had only one cause for disappointment—the whole thing had gone too smoothly. He was bursting with technical knowledge, he could have repaired almost any breakdown, and had kept a keen look-out for all ordinary mistakes. But nothing went wrong and no mistakes were made. In this battery the liability of human error had been reduced to a negligible minimum. Pickersdyke had had nothing further to do than to pass orders and see that they were duly received. Nevertheless he had loved every moment of it, for he had come into his own—he was back in the old troop, taking part in a "big show." As he observed to the major whilst they were drinking hot coffee in the dug-out afterwards—

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"Even if I do get court-martialled for desertion, sir, that last little lot was worth it!"

And he grinned as does a man well pleased with the success of his schemes. To complete his satisfaction, Scupham appeared soon afterwards bringing up a large bundle of kit and a few luxuries in the way of food. It transpired that he had presented himself to the last-joined subaltern of the D.A.C. and had bluffed that perplexed and inexperienced officer into turning out a cart to drive him as far as the battery wagon line, whence he had come up on an ammunition wagon.

It was almost daylight when the battery opened fire again, taking its orders by telephone now from the F.O.O.,^[15] who was in close touch with the infantry and could see what was happening. The rate of fire was slow at first; then it suddenly quickened, and the range was increased by a hundred yards. Some thirty shells went shrieking on their mission and then another fifty yards were added. The infantry was advancing steadily, and just as steadily, sixty or seventy yards in front of their line, the curtain of protecting shrapnel crept forward after the retiring enemy. At one point the attack was evidently held up for a while; the battery changed to high explosive and worked up to its maximum speed, causing Lorrison to telephone imploring messages for more and still more ammunition.

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[15] Forward observing officer.

The long-expected order to advance, when at last it came, nearly broke the major's heart.

"Send forward one section," it said, "in close support of the 2nd Battalion ——shire Regiment, to the advanced position previously prepared in J. 12."

One section was only a third of his battery; he would have to stay behind, and he had been dreaming nightly of this dash forward with the infantry into the middle of things; he had had visions of that promised land, the open country beyond the German lines, of an end to siege warfare and a return to the varying excitement of a running fight. But orders were orders, so he sent for Pickersdyke.

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"I'm going to send you," he said, after showing him the order, "although you haven't seen the position before. But the other lad is too young for this job. Look here."

He pointed out the exact route to be followed, showed him where bridges for crossing the trenches had been prepared, and explained everything in his usual lucid manner. Then he held out his hand.

"Good-bye and good luck," he said. Their eyes met for a moment in a steady gaze of mutual esteem and affection. For they knew each other well, these two men—the gentleman born to lead and to inspire, and his ranker subordinate (a gentleman too in all that matters) highly trained, thoroughly efficient, utterly devoted....

There was not a prouder man in the army than Pickersdyke at the moment when he led his section out from the battery position amid the cheers of those left behind. His luck, so he felt, was indeed amazing. He had about a mile to go along a road that was congested with troops and vehicles of all sorts. He blasphemed his way through (there is no other adequate means of expressing his progress) with his two guns and four wagons until he reached the point where he had to turn off to make for his new position. This latter had been carefully prepared beforehand by fatigue parties sent out from the battery at night. Gun-pits had been dug, access made easy, ranges and angles noted down in daylight by an officer left behind expressly for the purpose; and the whole had been neatly screened from aerial observation. It lay a few hundred yards behind what had been the advanced British trenches. But it was not a good place for guns; it was only one in which they might be put if, as now, circumstances demanded the taking of heavy risks.

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Pickersdyke halted his little command behind the remains of a spinney and went forward to reconnoitre. He was still half a mile from his goal, which lay on a gentle rise on the opposite side of a little valley. Allowing for rough ground and deviations from the direct route owing to the network of trenches which ran in all directions, he calculated that it would take him at least ten minutes to get across. Incidentally he noticed that quite a number of shells were falling in the area he was about to enter. For the first time he began to appreciate the exact nature of his task. He returned to the section and addressed his men thus—

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"Now, you chaps, it's good driving what's wanted here. We must get the guns there whatever happens—we'll let down the infantry else. Follow me and take it steady.... Terr-ot."

The teams and carriages jingled and rattled along behind him as he led them forward. Smooth going, the signal to gallop, and a dash for it would have been his choice, but that was impossible. Constantly he was forced to slow down to a walk and dismount the detachments to haul on the drag-ropes. The manoeuvre developed into a kind of obstacle race, with death on every side. But his luck stood by him. He reached the position with the loss only of a gunner, two drivers, and a pair of lead horses.

As soon as he got his guns into action and his teams away (all of which was done quietly, quickly, and without confusion—"as per book" as he expressed it) Pickersdyke crawled up a communication trench, followed by a telephonist laying a wire, until he reached a place where he could see. It was the first time that he had been so close up to the firing line, and he experienced the sensations of a man who looks down into the crater of a live volcano. Somewhere in the midst of the awful chaos in front of him was, if it still existed at all, the infantry battalion he was supposed to have been sent to support. But how to know where or when to shoot was altogether beyond him. He poked his glasses cautiously through a loophole and peered into the smoke in the vain hope of distinguishing friend from foe. [147]

"What the hell shall I do now?" he muttered. "Can't see no bloomin' target in this lot.... Crikey! yes, I can, though," he added. "Both guns two degrees more left, fuze two, eight hundred...." He rattled off his orders as if to the manner born. The telephonist, a man who had spent months in the society of forward observing officers, repeated word for word into his instrument, speaking as carefully as the operator in the public call office at Piccadilly Circus.

The guns behind blazed and roared. A second afterwards two fleecy balls of white smoke, out of which there darted a tongue of flame, appeared in front of the solid grey wall of men which Pickersdyke had seen rise as if from the earth itself and surge forward. A strong enemy counter-attack was being launched, and he, with the luck of the tyro, had got his guns right on to it. Methodically he switched his fire up and down the line. Great gaps appeared in it, only to be quickly filled. It wavered, sagged, and then came on again. Back at the guns the detachments worked till the sweat streamed from them; their drill was perfect, their rate of fire the maximum. But the task was beyond their powers. Two guns were not enough. Nevertheless the rush, though not definitely stopped, had lost its full driving force. It reached the captured trenches (which the infantry had had no time to consolidate), it got to close quarters, but it did not break through. The wall of shrapnel had acted like a breakwater—the strength of the wave was spent ere it reached its mark—and like a wave it began to ebb back again. In pursuit, cheering, yelling, stabbing, mad with the terrible lust to kill and kill and kill, came crowds of khaki figures. [148]

Pickersdyke, who had stopped his fire to avoid hitting his own side and was watching the fight with an excitement such as he had never hoped to know, saw that the critical moment was past; the issue was decided, and his infantry were gaining ground again. He opened fire once more, lengthening his range so as to clear the *mélee* and yet hinder the arrival of hostile reserves, which was a principle he had learnt from a constant study of "the book." [149]

Suddenly there were four ear-splitting cracks over his head, and a shower of earth and stones rattled down off the parapet a few yards from him.

"We're for it now," he exclaimed.

He was. This first salvo was the prelude to a storm of shrapnel from some concealed German battery which had at last picked up the section's position. But Pickersdyke continued to support his advancing infantry....

"Wire's cut, sir," said the telephonist, suddenly.

It was fatal. It was the one thing Pickersdyke had prayed would not happen, for it meant the temporary silencing of his guns.

"Mend it and let me know when you're through again," he ordered. "I'm going down to the section." And, stooping low, he raced back along the trench.

At the guns it had been an unequal contest, and they had suffered heavily. The detachments were reduced to half their strength, and one wagon, which had received a direct hit, had been blown to pieces.

"Stick it, boys," said Pickersdyke, after a quick look round. He saw that if he was to continue shooting it would be necessary to stand on the top of the remaining wagon in order to observe his fire. And he was determined to continue. He climbed up and found that the additional four feet or so which he gained in height just enabled him to see the burst of his shells. But he had no protection whatever. [150]

"Add a hundred, two rounds gun-fire," he shouted—and the guns flashed and banged in answer to his call. But it was a question of time only. Miraculously, for almost five minutes he remained where he was, untouched. Then, just as the telephonist reported "through" again the inevitable happened. An invisible hand, so it seemed to Pickersdyke, endowed with the strength of twenty blacksmiths, hit him a smashing blow with a red-hot sledge-hammer on the left shoulder. He collapsed on to the ground behind his wagon with the one word "*Hell!*" And then he fainted....

At 8 p.m. that night the —th Battery received orders to join up with its advanced section and occupy the position permanently. It was after nine when Lorrison, stumbling along a communication trench and beginning to think that he was lost, came upon the remnants of Pickersdyke's command. They were crouching in one of the gun-pits—a bombardier and three gunners, very cold and very miserable. Two of them were wounded. Lorrison questioned them hastily and learnt that Pickersdyke was at his observing station, that Scupham and the telephonist were with him, and that there were two more wounded men in the next pit.

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"The battery will be here soon," said Lorrison, cheerily, "and you'll all get fixed up. Meanwhile here's my flask and some sandwiches."

"Beg pardon, sir," said the bombardier, "but Mr. Pickersdyke 'll need that flask. 'E's pretty bad, sir, I believe."

Lorrison found Pickersdyke lying wrapped in some blankets which Scupham had fetched from the wagon, twisting from side to side and muttering a confused string of delirious phrases. "Fuze two—more *right* I said—damn them, they're still advancing—what price the old —th now?..." and then a groan and he began again.

Scupham, in a husky whisper, was trying to soothe him. "Lie still for Gawd's sake and don't worry yourself," he implored.

By the time Lorrison had examined the bandages on Pickersdyke's shoulder and administered morphia (without a supply of which he now never moved) the battery arrived, and with it some stretcher-bearers. Pickersdyke, just before he was carried off, recovered consciousness and recognised Lorrison, who was close beside him.

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"Hullo!" he said in a weak voice. "Nice box-up here, isn't it? But I reckon we got a bit of our own back 'fore we was knocked out. Tell the major the men were just grand. Oh! and before I forget, amongst my kit there's a few 'spares' I've collected; they might come in handy for the battery. I shan't be away long, I hope.... Wonder what the old colonel will say...." His voice trailed off into a drowsy murmur—the morphia had begun to take effect....

Lorrison detained Scupham in order to glean more information.

"After 'e got 'it, sir," said Scupham, "'e lay still for a bit, 'arf an hour pr'aps, and 'ardly seemed to know what was 'appening. Then 'e suddenly calls out: 'Is that there telephone workin' yet?' 'Yes, sir,' I says—and with that 'e made for to stand up, but 'e couldn't. So wot does 'e do then but makes me bloomin' well carry 'im up the trench to the observin' station. 'Now then, Scupham,' 'e says, 'prop me up by that loophole so I can see wot's comin' off.' And I 'ad to 'old 'im there pretty near all the afternoon while 'e kep' sending orders down the telephone and firing away like 'ell. We finished our ammunition about five o'clock, and then 'e lay down where 'e was to rest for a bit. 'Ow 'e'd stuck it all that time with a wound like that Gawd only knows. 'E went queer in 'is 'ead soon after and we thought 'e was a goner—and then nothin' much 'appened till you came up, sir, 'cept that we was gettin' a tidy few shells round about. D'you reckon 'e'll get orl right, sir?"

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It was evident that the unemotional Scupham was consumed with anxiety.

"Oh! he *must!*" cried Lorrison. "It would be too cruel if he didn't pull through after all he's done. He's a *man* if ever there was one."

"And that's a fact," said Scupham, preparing to follow his idol to the dressing station. As he moved away Lorrison heard him mutter—

"There ain't no one on Gawd's earth like old Pickers—fancy 'im rememberin' them there 'spares.' 'Strewth! 'e *is* a one!" Which was a very high compliment indeed....

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Official correspondence, even when it is marked "Pressing and Confidential" in red ink and enclosed in a sealed envelope, takes a considerable time to pass through the official channels and come back again. It was some days before the colonel commanding a certain divisional ammunition column received an answer to his report upon the inexplicable absence of his adjutant. He was a vindictive man, who felt that he had been left in the lurch, and he had taken pains to draft a letter which would emphasise the shortcomings of his subordinate. The answer, when it did come, positively shocked him. It was as follows:—

"With reference to your report upon the absence without leave of Second Lieutenant Pickersdyke, the Major-General Commanding directs me to say that as this officer was severely wounded on September 25 whilst commanding a section of the —th Battery R.F.A. with conspicuous courage and ability, for which he has been specially recommended for distinction by the G.O.C.R.A., and as he is now in hospital in England, no further action will be taken in the matter."

To be snubbed by the Staff because he had reported upon the scandalous conduct of a mere "ranker" was not at all the colonel's idea of the fitness of things. His fury, which vented itself chiefly upon his office clerk, would have been greater still if he could have seen his late adjutant comfortably ensconced in a cosy ward in one of the largest houses of fashionable London, waited upon by ladies of title, and showing an admiring circle of relations the jagged piece of steel which a very famous surgeon had extracted from his shoulder free of charge!

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For, in spite of his colonel, the progress of Pickersdyke on the chosen path of his ambition was

SNATTY

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"This 'appened in a battle to a batt'ry of
the corps
Which is first among the women an'
amazin' first in war."

—KIPLING.

I

Driver Joseph Snatt, K3 Battery, R.H.A., slouched across the barrack-square on his way to the stables. Having just received a severe punishment for the heinous crime of ill-treating a horse, in spite of his plausible excuse that he had been bitten and had lost his temper, Snatty, as he was always called, felt much aggrieved.

"Orses," he thought to himself, "is everything in this 'ere bloomin' batt'ry—men's nothing."

Nor, in his own particular case, was he far wrong. For the horses of K3 were certainly quite wonderful, and Snatty was undoubtedly a "waster." His death or his desertion would have been a small matter compared with the spoiling of one equine temper.

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The officers disliked him because he was an eyesore to them; the N.C.O.'s hated him because he gave them endless trouble; and the men had shown their distrust of his personal cleanliness by ducking him in a horse-trough more than once. Driver Snatt felt that every man's hand was against him, and since he possessed neither the will power nor the desire to overcome his delinquencies by a little honest toil, he not infrequently drowned his sorrows in large potations of canteen beer. In person he was small and rather shrivelled looking—old for his age unquestionably. A nervous manner and a slight stammer in the presence of his superiors, combined with a shifty eye at all times, served to enhance the unpleasing effect which he produced on all who knew him. There was but one thing to be said for him—he could ride. Before enlisting he had been in a training stable, but had been dismissed for drink or worse. On foot he lounged about with rounded shoulders and uneven steps, always untidy and often dirty. But once upon a horse, the puny, awkward figure that was the despair of N.C.O.'s and officers alike, became graceful, supple, almost beautiful. The firm, easy seat that swayed to every motion, the hands that coaxed even the hard-mouthed gun-horses into going kindly, betrayed the horseman born. Snatty might kick his horses in the stomach; he would never jerk them in the mouth.

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At the conclusion of the midday stable-hour Snatt was summoned before his section officer, one Bridlington by name, more frequently known as "Biddie," and thus addressed—

"Now, look here: you've made a dam' poor show so far, and this is your last chance. If you don't take it, God help you, for I won't. See?"

Snatt stared at his boot, swallowed twice, and then fixed his gaze on some distant point above the opposite stable.

"Ye-es, sir," he said huskily.

"Very well. Now you've never had a job of your own, and I'm going to try you with one. You'll take over the wheel of A subsection gun team to-day, and have those two remounts to drive. I shall give you a fortnight's trial. If I see you're trying, I'll do all I can for you. Otherwise—out you go. Understand that?"

Again the deep interest in the distant point, but this time there was a trace of surprise in the faintly uttered, "Yes, sir."

Snatty saluted and retired, wondering greatly. The wheel-driver of a gun team is an important personage: he occupies a coveted position attained only by those who combine skill, nerve, and horsemanship with the ability to tend a pair of horses as they would their own children, and to clean a double set of harness better than their fellows. Snatty at first was resentful: "'E's put me there to make a fool of me, I s'pose. All right, I'll show 'im up. I can drive as well as any of them." Then he experienced a feeling of pleasurable anticipation. As it so happened he detested the driver whose place he was to take, and he looked forward with satisfaction to witnessing the fury of that worthy when ordered to "hand over" to the despised waster of the battery. He was not grateful—that was not his nature—nor was he proud of having been selected. He was on the defensive, determined to show that, given a definite position with duties and responsibilities of his own, he could do very well—if he chose. Which was precisely the frame of mind into which his thoughtful subaltern had hoped to lure him.

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In the barrack-room Snatty met with much abuse. In a battery which prides itself enormously on its horses, any ill-treatment of them is not left unnoticed. Barrack-room invective does not take the form of delicate sarcasm: on the contrary, it is coarse and directly to the point. The culprit sat upon his bed-cot and sulked in silence, until a carrot-headed driver, sitting on the table with his hat on the back of his head, remarked—

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"I see ole Biddie givin' you a proper chokin' off after stables."

The chance for which Snatty had waited very patiently had come, and he retorted quickly—

"Oh! did yer? Well, p'raps you'll be glad to 'ear that 'e 'as given me your 'orses and the wheel of A sub., says you're no — use, 'e does!"

Howls of derision greeted this sally, and Snatty relapsed into silence. But that evening he whistled softly to himself as he led his new horses out to water and watched his red-headed enemy, deprived of his legitimate occupation, put to the unpleasant task of "mucking out" the stable. The day, so Snatty felt, had not been wasted.

II

From that time dated the conversion of Driver Joseph Snatt. The change was necessarily gradual, for no man can reform in a week: the habits inculcated by years of idleness cannot be cast aside in a moment, nor can the doubts and suspicions clinging to an untrustworthy character be dispersed by one day's genuine work. But still a change for the better was evident. The comments of the barrack-room were free but not unfriendly, for Snatty was beginning to find his true level after his own peculiar fashion. Briddlington, too, did not fail to notice the success of his experiment. Whilst inclined to boast of it in a laughing way to his brother officers, he had the good sense to overlook many trivial offences and to make much of anything that he could find to praise. What pleased him most of all was Snatty's behaviour to his horses. Dirty he still was upon occasions, and scarcely as smart as most drivers of the battery; nor was he always quite devoid of drink, but to his horses from that first day onwards he became a devoted, faithful slave. They were a pair of which any man might well have been proud. Both were bright bays, well matched in colour and in size. In shape they were almost the ideal stamp of artillery wheeler, which is tantamount to saying that they might have graced the stud of any hunting gentleman of fifteen stone or thereabouts. Snatty's pride in them was almost ludicrous. A word said against them would put him up in arms at once, and when Territorials borrowed the battery horses for their training on Saturday afternoons his indignation knew no bounds.

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"Ow can I keep me 'orses fit," he used to say, "if a bloomin' bank clerk goes drivin' 'em at a stretched gallop the 'ole o' Saturday? Proper dis'eartenin', that's wot it is." And this in spite of the fact that he was allowed a shilling for his trouble. The villainies that he perpetrated for their wellbeing, if discovered, would have given him small chance before a stern commanding officer. He stole oats from the forage barn, bread and sugar from his barrack-room, and even the feeds from the next manger. Snatty's moral sense, as we have seen, was not a very high one. But pricked ears and gentle whinnies as he approached, and velvety muzzles pushed into his roughened hand, betrayed the effect of many a purloined dainty, and amply compensated for any qualms which a guilty but belated conscience may have given him. Not that he was particularly caressing in his manner. He would growl at each one as he groomed him, or scold him as one does a naughty child, and his "Naow *then*, stand still, will yer, Dawn?" was well known during stable-hour. Who it was who had first called the off horse Dawn was never quite clear, but Snatty in a fit of poetic inspiration had christened the other Daylight. Dawn was difficult to shoe, so difficult indeed that his driver's presence was required in the forge to keep him still. And when Snatty went on furlough for a month both horses began to lose condition.

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The years went by, and Snatty soldiered on, winter and summer, drill season and leave season, content to drive the wheel of A and drink a bit too much on Saturdays. But in that time he had become a man—not a strong, determined man, certainly not a refined one, but for all that a man. To Briddlington, who had raised him from the mental slough in which he had lain to all appearances content, he at no time betrayed a sense of gratitude. On the contrary, the position of a privileged person of some standing which he had gained he attributed largely to his own cunning in deceiving his superiors combined with his consummate skill with horses. But still he had learnt his job, and was fulfilling his destiny to more purpose than many better men. Moreover he was happy. Crooning softly as he polished straps and buckles in the harness-room, with a skill and speed born of long practice, he was contented, and was vaguely conscious that the world was not a bad place after all. An officer who knew him well once said—

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"I wouldn't trust him to carry a bottle of whisky half a mile, but I'd send him across England with a pair of horses—by himself. And as to driving—well, I don't know about the needle and the camel's eye, but I know that Snatty would drive blind drunk along the narrow road to Heaven and never let his axles touch!" For two years in succession the battery won the galloping competition at Olympia, with Snatty in the wheel. And over rough ground, moving fast, he was unequalled.

When his time was up and Snatty had to go, there was never, perhaps, a time-expired man who was so hard put to it to assume a joy at leaving which he did not feel. Of course, like other men, he swaggered about saying that he was glad to be "shut of" the army; that he had got a nice little place to step into where there wasn't any "Do this" and "Do that" and "Why the deuce haven't you done what I told you?" But in his heart he was more affected than he had ever been before.

"Wot about yer 'orses, Snatty?" some one asked him; "who's going to 'ave them when you're gorn?"

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"Ow should I know?" he answered, rather nettled.

"Nobbler Parsons, so I 'eard. 'E'll soon spoil 'em, I bet yer."

Then was Snatty very wroth, and he replied—

"You leave me and my 'orses alone, or you'll be for it, I warn yer," thereby revealing his inmost feelings most effectually.

On the eve of his departure he was treated by his friends till he grew almost maudlin. Then he slipped away "just to say good-bye to 'em," and even that hardened assembly of "canteen regulars" forbore to scoff. He was found when the battery came down to evening stables, a pathetic figure, in his ill-fitting suit of plain clothes, standing between his beloved pair, an arm round the neck of one, his pockets full of sugar, and tears of drink and genuine grief trickling down his unwashed cheeks.

"Six bloomin' years I've 'ad yer," they heard him say. "Six bloomin' years, and no one's ever said a word against yer that I 'aven't knocked the 'ead of. P'rades and manœuvres, practice camp and ceremonial, there's nothin' I can't do wiv yer and ... and, Gawd, I wish I wasn't leavin' yer now to some other bloke." Then they led him gently away, and on the morrow he was gone. For a week he was missed; in a month he was forgotten. Only Daylight and Dawn still fretted for him, and turned round in their stalls with anxious, wistful eyes.

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For six months Snatty struggled to keep body and soul together, living upon his reserve pay and upon such small sums as he could pick up by doing odd jobs in livery stables. But the self-respect which he had won so hardly slipped away from him, and he sank slowly in the social scale. The lot of the ex-soldier whose character is "fair," and whose record of sobriety leaves much to be desired, is not a happy one. Snatty was in rags and well-nigh starving. Small wonder, then, that one day the blandishments of an eloquent recruiting sergeant proved too much for his resistance and that he succumbed to the temptations thrust upon him by the great god Hunger. Manfully he perjured himself when brought before the magistrate. His name was Henry Morgan, his age twenty-three years and five months, and he had never served before, so help him God. All false—but Snatty wished to live.

He asked to be put into the infantry, fearing that his knowledge of the ways of troop stables would betray him if he joined a mounted branch. The penalties attached to a "false answer on attestation" were heavy, as he knew, and he would take no chances. In due course, therefore, he found himself posted to a crack light infantry regiment, and his troubles soon began. To be marched about a barrack-square followed by shouts of objurgation was bad enough: to be pestered with the intricacies of musketry was worse: but what galled him most of all was to have to walk. He loathed the life. This was not the world of soldiering that he had known and loved. His soul hungered for the rattle of log-chains and the jingle of harness; the smell of the stable still lingered in his nostrils. Moreover, he was in constant trouble, for desperation made him reckless. Those who had known him in the battery would scarcely have recognised in the sullen ne'er-do-well whom men called Morgan, the cheerful Snatty of a former time. He had just passed his recruit drills (with difficulty be it said) and taken his place in the ranks, when the war which wise men had predicted as inevitable was forced upon the nation with disconcerting suddenness. The regiment was ordered out on service, and with it, amongst nine hundred other souls, went Private Henry Morgan, *alias* Snatty.

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III

A hot sun beating down from a cloudless sky upon a land parched and dusty from a lengthened drought; miles upon miles of rolling downs, which once were green but which the driest summer for many years has baked into a dirty yellow; here and there an oasis consisting of a copse of fir-trees, farmstead, and a field or two of pasture marking the presence of a kindly stream: a landscape in short so typical of hundreds of square miles of this particular region that ordinarily it would fail to interest. But to-day the peace of the country side is disturbed by the boom of guns and the rattle of musketry. Two mighty armies are at grips at last, and in the space between them hovers Death.

Upon a little rise commanding a good view of the surrounding country there is a long line of khaki figures lying prone behind a scanty earth-work. These are infantry, and shaken infantry at that; shaken because they have marched all night and stormed that hill at dawn with fearful loss, because they are weak from hunger and parched with thirst, and because they feel in their hearts that the end is near. Relief must come, or one determined rush will drive them back to ruin. Shells burst over them with whip-like crack, rifle fire tears through their ranks, and sometimes a harsh scream followed by a deafening report and clouds of acrid smoke marks the advent of a high-explosive shell.

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A much harassed brigadier sat behind a rock near the telephone awaiting the answer to his urgent demand for guns. It came sooner than he expected it, and took the tangible shape of a little group of horsemen which appeared on the hill some way to his right. There was a quick consultation as glasses swept the front. Then the horses were led away under cover and the range-takers began operations. The brigadier recognised the signs and gained fresh hope as he

saw that his prayer was answered. At the far end of the line Private Morgan, busily engaged in excavating a hole for himself by means of an entrenching tool much resembling a short-handled garden hoe, looked up quickly as he heard a well-known voice say—

"All right, Biddie, I'll observe from here. Bring 'em in quick."

"Strewth!" muttered Snatty to himself, "it's the major. So the old troop's comin' into action 'ere."

For weeks he had scanned every battery that had been near him, hoping to meet his own. But Horse Artillery act with cavalry and work far ahead of the toiling infantry in rear, so that it was not till now, when a pitched battle was in progress, when the advanced cavalry had come in and every available gun was being utilised, that Fate permitted Snatty to see his old battery once more. Looking over his shoulder, he said—

"It's all right now, sergeant. There's some guns coming."

"You shut yer mouth and get on with yer work," was the rejoinder, "Wot do you know about guns, I'd like to know?"

"Oh, nothink! But you watch 'em, that's all," said Private Morgan, with an ill-suppressed gleam of pride, which made the sergeant wonder.

The line of six guns, each with its wagon behind it, thundered up the rise. There was a shrill whistle, and a hand held up. Then the hoarse voices of the sergeants shouted, "Action front," and the wheelers were thrown into the breeching, almost sitting on their haunches to stop the weight behind them: the gunners leapt from their horses and sprang to the gun: a second's pause, then, "Drive on," and six limbers went rattling away to the rear as six trails were flung round half a circle and dropped with a thud. Hardly were they down before each gun had its wagon up beside it and the horses unhooked. They too galloped to the rear. In ten seconds there was not a sign of movement. The battery was there, and that was all.

Of the weary infantry who lay and watched there was one at least who could appreciate the merit of the performance.

"Couldn't ha' been better in the old days on Salisbury Plain," was his comment. "But, Gawd! the 'orses 'ave fell away proper. Skeletons, that's wot they are now."

But Private Morgan's soliloquy was again cut short by the remorseless sergeant behind him.

A few curt orders passed rapidly down the battery, then came two sharp reports, followed by the click of the reopened breech, as the ranging rounds went singing on their journey. A spurt of brown earth showed for a second in front of that thick black line a mile or more away, another showed behind.

"Graze short—graze over," said the major, still staring through his glasses. "Eighteen hundred, one round gun fire."

The order was repeated by a man standing behind him with a megaphone, and followed almost instantaneously by a round from every gun. Some puffs of smoke above the target, the echo of the bursting shell borne back along the breeze, and then for perhaps a minute all Hell might have been let loose, such was the uproar as every gun was worked at lightning speed. A whistle—and in a moment all was still again.

"Target down—stop firing," was the laconic order. "But," added the major, softly, "I think that sickened 'em a bit."

The attacking infantry had dropped down under cover, but not for long. Nearer and nearer pressed the relentless lines, sometimes pausing a while, or even dropping back, but always, like the waves of the incoming tide, gaining fresh ground at every rush. The end was very near now, and the bitterness of defeat entered into the defenders' hearts. For they did not know that the struggle for this particular hill, though of vital importance to themselves, was merely serving the subsidiary purpose of diverting attention while greater issues matured elsewhere. They only knew that ammunition was scarce, that they wanted water, and that now at last the order to retire had come. They got away in dribblets, slowly, very slowly, until at last nothing was left upon the hillside but a handful of infantry, the battery, and the dead and wounded. The riflemen crawled closer to the guns, feeling somehow that there was solace in their steady booming. The major looked at his watch, and then at the attacking lines in front of him.

"In ten minutes we'll have to get out of this," he said, "bring the horses up close behind us under cover." The minutes passed and the net around them drew closer.

"Prepare to retire—rear limber up."

The few remaining infantry emptied their magazines and crept off down the hill. The guns fired their last few rounds as the teams came jingling up. Their arrival was the signal for a fresh outburst of fire. The few moments required for limbering up seemed a lifetime as men fell fast and horses mad with terror broke loose and dashed away. But years of stern discipline and careful training stood the battery in good stead now. The principle of "Abandon be damned: we never abandon guns," was not forgotten. Through the shouting, the curses, and the dust, the work went on. Dead horses were cut free and pulled aside, gunners took the place of fallen drivers, and at last five guns were got away. The sixth was in great difficulties. The maddened

horses backed in every direction but the right one, and the panting gunners strove in vain to drop the trail upon the limber-hook. Beside the team stood Briddlington, trying to soothe the horses and steadying the men in the calm, cool voice that he habitually used upon parade.

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Then suddenly from behind a rock there crawled out a strange figure. Filthy beyond words, hatless, with an inch of scrubby beard, and one foot bound up in blood-stained rags, this apparition limped painfully towards the gun—

"Naow then!" a husky voice exclaimed, "stand still, will yer, Dawn?"

"By God! it's Snatty," cried Briddlington, and as he spoke the driver of Snatty's horses gave a little grunt and pitched off on to the ground. Without a word the erstwhile private of infantry stooped and took the whip from the dead man's hand. He patted each horse in turn, then climbed into the saddle.

"Steady now—get back, will yer?" he growled, and they obeyed him quietly enough. The men behind gave a heave at the gun and a click denoted that the trail was on its hook.

"Drive on," cried Snatty, flourishing his whip, and down the hill they went full gallop.

Safety lay not in the way that they had come, but further to their left, where the ground was bad. At the bottom of the hill there was a low bank with a ditch in front of it, and just before they reached it the centre driver received a bullet in the head and dropped down like a stone. There was no time to pull up. The lead driver took his horses hard by the head and put them at the bank. They jumped all right, but the pair behind them, deprived of a guiding hand upon the reins, saw the ditch at the last moment and swerved.

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"My Gawd!" said Snatty, sitting back for the crash he knew would follow. The traces and the pace had dragged the centre horses over in spite of their swerve, but one of them stumbled as he landed. He staggered forward, and before he could recover Snatty's horses and the gun were upon him in a whirling mass of legs and straps and wheels. Briddlington, who had been riding beside the team, leapt to the ground and ran to the fallen horses.

"Sit on their heads," he cried. "Undo the quick release your side. Now then, together—heave." There was a rattle of hoofs against the footboard as Daylight rolled over kicking wildly to get free. Briddlington, at the risk of his life, leant over and pulled frantically at a strap. The two ends flew apart and the snorting horses struggled to their feet, but Snatty lay very still and deathly white upon the ground.

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"Don't stand gaping. Hook in again—quick. We're not clear away yet by a long chalk," said Briddlington. Then he bent down and putting his arms round Snatty's crumpled figure lifted him very tenderly aside. "Lie still now," he said with a catch in his voice as he saw that the case was hopeless, "and you'll be all right." But those flashing hoofs and steel-tyred wheels had done their work. Snatty's last drive was over.

"It warn't their fault. I should 'ave 'eld them up," was all he said before he died.

The gun rejoined the battery safely, and defeat was turned to victory ere nightfall, but Private Henry Morgan was returned as "missing" from his regiment.

IV

To this day, on the anniversary of the battle, in the mess of K3 Battery, R.H.A., it is the custom, when the King's health has been drunk, for the President to say—

"Mr. Vice, to the memory of the man who brought away the last gun." And the Vice-president answers, "Gentlemen, to Driver Snatt."

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Then the curious visitor is shown a large oil painting of a pair of bright bay horses with a little wizened driver riding one of them.

"That's Snatty," they will say, "a drunken scoundrel if you like, but he loved those horses, and he used to drive like hell."

FIVE-FOUR-EIGHT

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I

Rain! pitiless, incessant, drenching rain, that seemed to ooze and trickle and soak into every nook and cranny in the world, beat down upon the already sodden ground and formed great pools of water in every hollow. Fires blazed and flickered at intervals, revealing within the glowing circles of their light the huddled forms of weary soldiers; and all the myriad sounds of a huge camp

blended imperceptibly with the raindrops' steady patter.

According to orders the —th Division had concentrated upon the main army for the impending battle. At dawn that day its leading battalion had swung out of camp to face the storm and the mud; not until dusk had the last unit dropped exhausted into its bivouac. For fourteen hours the troops had groped their way along the boggy roads: and they had marched but one-and-twenty miles. Incredibly slow! incredibly wearisome! But they had effected the purpose of their chief. They had arrived in time.

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The headquarters of the divisional artillery had been established in a ramshackle old barn at one corner of the field in which the batteries were camped. Within its shelter the General and his staff of three crouched over a small fire. The roof leaked, the floor was wet and indescribably filthy; their seats were saddles, and their only light a guttering candle. But to those four tired men, the little fire, the dirty barn, the thought of food and sleep, seemed heaven.

Brigadier-General Maudeslay, known to his irreverent but affectionate subordinates as "the Maud," was a fat little man of fifty, who owed his present rank largely to his steady adherence to principles of sound common-sense. For theoretical knowledge he depended, so he frankly declared, upon the two staff officers with whom he was supplied. Nevertheless, those who knew him well agreed that in quickness to grasp the salient points of any given situation and in accuracy of decision he had few superiors. It was his habit, when pondering on his line of action, to walk round in a circle, his hands behind his back, humming softly to himself. Then, swiftly and with conscious certainty, he would act. And he was seldom wrong.

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At the moment, however, his thoughts were not concerned with tactics but with food. For some time he sat before the fire in silence, then suddenly exclaimed—

"Thank the Lord! I hear the baggage coming in. Go and hurry it up, Tony."

Tony, whose rarely used surname was Quarme, was an artillery subaltern of seven years' service, attached to the General's staff as personal A.D.C. On him devolved the irksome task of catering for the headquarter mess. It was his principal, though not his only function: and, owing to scarcity of provisions, a daily change of camp, and a General who took considerable interest in the quality of his food, it was a duty which often taxed his temper and his ingenuity to the utmost.

He got up, wriggled himself into his clammy waterproof, and splashed out into the mud and darkness.

"Tony," observed the General to his Brigade-Major, "is not such a failure at this job as you predicted."

"He's astonished me so far, I must confess," was the reply. "I always thought him rather a lazy young gentleman, with no tastes for anything beyond horses and hunting."

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"My dear Hartley, he was lazy because he was bored." The General, being devoted to hunting himself, spoke a little testily. "Peace soldiering," he went on, "*is* apt to bore sometimes. Tony is not what *you'd* call a professional soldier. His military interests are strictly confined to the reputation of his battery, and to his own ability to command two guns in action. Naturally he was pleased when I appointed him A.D.C. The part of the year's work which interested him, practice camp and so on, was over. In place of the tedium of manœuvres as a regimental subaltern, he foresaw a novel and more or less amusing occupation on my staff for the rest of the summer, and he knew that he would go back to his own station in the autumn in time for the hunting season. But he did not reckon on the possibility of war, and therefore he is now dissatisfied. I know it as well as if he'd told me so himself."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Oh! he doesn't dislike the job: I don't mean that. But he can't help feeling that he's been sold. I can almost hear him saying to himself, 'Here have I struggled through seven years' soldierin' thinking always that some day I should be loosed upon a battle-field with a pair of guns and a good fat target of advancing infantry. And now that the time *has* come, I'm stuck with this rotten staff job.'"

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"By Jove!" said the other, "I never thought of that."

"No, Hartley, you wouldn't. In your case the 'gunner' instinct has been obliterated by that of the staff officer. The guns have lost their fascination for you. Isn't that so?"

"In a way, yes."

"Well, in some men—and Tony happens to be one of them—that fascination lasts as long as life itself. Often enough in ordinary times it lies dormant. But as soon as war comes it shows itself at once in the mad rush made by officers to get back to batteries—that is, to go on service *with the guns*. It is the curse of our regiment in some ways: many potential generals abandon their ambitions because of it. But it's also our salvation."

He relapsed into silence, staring into the fire. Perhaps he, too, regretted for the moment that he was a General, and wished that, instead of thirteen batteries, he commanded only one.

Meanwhile the subject of their discussion had succeeded in finding the headquarters' baggage wagon. Ignoring the protests of infuriated transport officers who were endeavouring to direct

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more than two hundred vehicles to their destinations, he had lured it out of the chaos and guided it to its appointed place. As the wagon came to a standstill outside the barn the tarpaulin was raised at the back and the vast proportions of the gunner who combined the duties of servant to Tony and cook to the mess slowly emerged.

From his right hand dangled a shapeless, flabby mass.

"What the devil have you got there, Tebbut?" demanded Tony.

"Ducks, sir," was the unexpected reply. "We was 'alted near a farm-'ouse to-day, so I took the chanst to buy some milk and butter. While the chap was away fetchin' the stuff, I pinched these 'ere ducks. Fat they are, too!"

He spoke in the matter-of-fact tones of one to whom the theft of a pair of ducks, and the feat of plucking them within the narrow confines of a packed G.S. wagon, was no uncommon experience.

"Well, look sharp and cook 'em. We're hungry," said Tony.

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He stayed until he saw that the dinner was well under way, and then floundered off through the mud to see his horses. Of these he was allowed by regulations three, but one, hastily purchased during the mobilisation period by an almost distracted remount officer, had already succumbed to the effects of overwork and underfeeding. There remained the charger which he had had with his battery in peace time, and which he now used for all ordinary work—and Dignity.

The latter was well named. He was a big brown horse, very nearly thoroughbred—a perfect hunter and a perfect gentleman. Tony had bought him as a four-year-old at a price that was really far beyond his means, and had trained him himself. He used openly to boast that Dignity had taken to jumping as a duck takes to water, and that he had never been known to turn from a fence. In the course of four seasons, the fastest burst, the heaviest ground, the longest hunt had never been too much for him. Always he would gallop calmly on, apparently invincible. His owner almost worshipped him.

Horse rugs are not part of the field service equipment of an officer. But to the discerning (and unscrupulous) few there is a way round almost every regulation. Dignity had three rugs, and his legs were swathed in warm flannel bandages. As he stood there on the leeward side of a fence busily searching the bottom of his nosebag for the last few oats of his meagre ration, he was probably the most comfortable animal of all the thousands in the camp.

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Tony spent some time examining his own and the General's horses, and giving out the orders for the morning to the grooms. By the time he got back to the barn it was past ten, and Tebbut was just solemnly announcing "dinner" as being served.

"The Maud" eyed the dish of steaming ducks with evident approval, but avoided asking questions. Loot had been very strictly forbidden.

"We ought by rights to have apple sauce with these," he said, drawing his saddle close up to the deal low table and giving vent to a sigh of expectancy.

"Hi've got some 'ere, sir," responded the resourceful Tebbut. "There was a horchard near the road to-day."

He produced, as he spoke, a battered tin which, from the inscription on its label, had once contained "selected peaches." It was now more than half full of a concoction which bore a passable resemblance to apple sauce.

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For half an hour conversation languished. They had eaten nothing but a sandwich since early morning, and the demands of appetite were more exacting than their interest in the programme for the morrow.

But as soon as Tebbut, always a stickler for the usages of polite society, had brushed away the crumbs with a dirty dish-cloth and handed round pint mugs containing coffee, Hartley unrolled a map, and, under instructions from the General, began to prepare the orders.

As a result of a reconnaissance in force that day the enemy's advanced troops had been driven in, and the extent of his real position more or less accurately defined. The decisive attack, of which the —th Division was to form a part, was to be directed against the left. Barring the way on this flank, however, was a hill marked on the map as Point 548, which was situate about two miles in front of the main hostile position. The enemy had not yet been dislodged from this salient, but a brigade of infantry had been detailed to assault it that night. In the event of success a battery was to be sent forward to occupy it at dawn, after which the main attack would begin. General Maudeslay had been ordered to provide this battery.

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"Don't put anything in orders about it, though, Hartley," he said. "It will have to be one from the —th Brigade, which has suffered least so far. I'll send separate confidential instructions to the Colonel. Get an orderly, will you, Tony?"

"I'll take the message myself, sir, if I may," suggested the A.D.C. "It's my own brigade, and I'd like to look them up."

"All right; only don't forget to come back," said the General, smiling.

Tony pocketed the envelope and peered out into the night. The rain had ceased and the sky was

clear. Far away to right and left the bivouac fires glimmered like reflections of the starry heavens. The troops, worn out with the hardships of the day, had fallen asleep and the camp was silent. Only the occasional whinny of a horse, the challenge of a sentry, or the distant rumbling of benighted transport broke the stillness.

Tony's way led through the lines of the various batteries. The horses stood in rows, tied by their heads to long ropes stretched between the ammunition wagons. Fetlock-deep in liquid mud, without rugs, wet and underfed, they hung their heads dejectedly—a silent protest against the tyranny of war. [188]

"Poor old hairies!" thought Tony, as he passed them, his mind picturing the spotless troop-stables and the shining coats that he had known so well in barracks, not a month ago.

He found the officers of his brigade assembled beneath a tarpaulin. Their baggage had been hours late, and though it was nearly eleven o'clock the evening meal was still in progress. He handed his message to the Adjutant and sat down to exchange greetings with his brother subalterns.

"Oh! there's bully beef for the batteries, but we've salmon all right on the staff," he sang softly, after sniffing suspiciously at the unpleasant-looking mess on his neighbour's plate, which was, in fact, ration tinned beef boiled hurriedly in a camp kettle. The song, of which the words were his own, fitted neatly to a popular tune of the moment. It treated of the difference in comfort of life on the staff and that in the batteries, and gave a verdict distinctly in favour of the former. He had sung it with immense success about 3 a.m. on his last night at home with his own brigade. [189]

"Now, Tony," said some one, "you're on the staff. What's going to happen to-morrow?"

"A big show—will last two or three days, they say. But," he added, grinning, "you poor devils stuck away behind a hill won't see much of it. I suppose I shall be sent on my usual message—to tell you that you're doing no dam' good, and only wasting ammunition!"

But though he chaffed and joked his heart was heavy as he walked back an hour later. Somewhere out there in the mud was his own battery, which he worshipped as a god. And he was condemned to live away from it, to be absent when it dashed into action, when the breech-blocks rattled and the shells shrieked across the valleys.

He found the others still poring over the map. From the wallet on his saddle Tony pulled out a large travelling flask.

"I think that this is the time for the issue of my special emergency ration," he announced.

"What is it, Tony?" asked "the Maud."

"Best old liqueur brandy from our mess in England," he replied, pouring some into each of the four mugs.

Then he held up his own and added— [190]

"Here's to the guns: may they be well served to-morrow."

Over the enamelled rim the General's eyes met Tony's for a moment, and he smiled; for he understood the sentiment.

Tony crawled beneath his blankets, and fell into a deep sleep, from which he roused himself with difficulty a few hours later as the first grey streaks of dawn were appearing in the sky.

II

The press of work at the headquarters of a division during operations comes in periods of intense activity, during which every member of the staff, from the General downwards, feels that he is being asked to do the work of three men in an impossibly short space of time. One of these periods, that in which the orders for the initial stages of the attack had been distributed, had just passed, and a comparative calm had succeeded. Even the operator of the "buzzer" instrument, ensconced in a little triangular tent just large enough to hold one man in a prone position, had found time to smoke.

Divisional headquarters had been established at a point where five roads met, just below the crest of a low hill. A few yards away the horses clinked their bits and grazed. Occasionally the distant boom of a gun made them prick their ears and stare reflectively in the direction of the sound. The sun, with every promise of a fine day, was slowly dispelling the mist from the valley and woodlands below. [191]

It was early: the battle had scarcely yet begun.

A huge map had been spread out on a triangular patch of grass at the road junction, its corners held down with stones. Staff officers lay around it talking eagerly. Above, on the top of the hill, General Maudesley leant against a bank and gazed into the mist. The night attack, he knew, had been successful, and he was anxiously awaiting the appearance of the battery on Point 548.

Tony was stretched at full length on the grass below him. He was warm, he was dry, and he was not hungry—a rare combination on service.

"This would be a grand cub-hunting morning, General," he said.

Ordinarily "the Maud" would have responded with enthusiasm, for hounds and hunting were the passion of his life. But now his thoughts were occupied with other matters, and he made no reply. [192]

Then suddenly, as though at the rising of a curtain at a play, things began to happen. The telephone operator lifted his head with a start as his instrument began to give out its nervous, jerky, zt—zzz—zt. There was a clatter of hoofs along the road, and the sliding scrape of a horse pulled up sharply as an orderly appeared and handed in a message. Rifle fire, up till then desultory and unnoticed, began to increase in volume. The mist had gone.

"The Maud," motionless against the bank, kept his glasses to his eyes for some minutes before lowering them, with a gesture of annoyance and exclaimed—

"It's curious. That battery ought to be on 548 by now, but I can see no sign of it."

"You can't see 548 from here, sir. It's hidden behind that wood," said Tony, pointing as he spoke.

"What do you mean? There's 548," said the General, also pointing, but to a hill much farther to their right.

"No, sir—at least not according to my map."

"The Maud" snatched the map from Tony's hand. A second's glance was enough. On it Point 548 was marked as being farther to the left and considerably nearer to the enemy. [193]

He turned on Tony like a flash.

"Good Lord! Why didn't you tell me that before?" he cried. "There must be two different editions of this map. Which one had they in your brigade when you went over there last night—the right one or the wrong one?"

But Tony, unfortunately, had no idea. His interest in tactics, as we have seen, was small, and his visit had not involved him in a discussion of the plan of battle. He had not even looked at their maps.

"The Maud" walked round in one small circle while he hummed eight bars. Then he said—

"They must have started for the wrong hill, and in this mist they won't have realised their danger. That battery will be wiped out unless we can stop it." He looked round quickly. "Signallers—no—useless: and the telephone not yet through. Tony, you'll have to go. There's no direct road. Go straight across country and you may just do it."

Tony was already halfway to the horses.

"Take up Dignity's stirrups two holes," he called as he ran towards them. "Quick, man, quick!" [194]

It took perhaps twenty seconds, which seemed like as many minutes. He flung away belt and haversack, crammed his revolver into a side pocket, and was thrown up into the saddle. "The Maud" himself opened the gate off the road.

"Like hell, Tony, like hell!"

The General's words, shouted in his ear as he passed through on to the grass, seemed echoed in the steady beat of Dignity's hoofs as he went up to his bridle and settled into his long raking stride.

Tony leant out on his horse's neck, his reins crossed jockey fashion, his knees pressed close against the light hunting saddle. Before him a faded expanse of green stretched out for two miles to the white cottage on the hillside which he had chosen as his point. The rush of wind in his ears, the thud of iron-shod hoofs on sound old turf, the thrill that is born of speed, made him forget for a moment the war, the enemy, his mission. He was back in England on a good scenting morning in November. Hounds were away on a straight-necked fox, and he had got a perfect start. Almost could he see them beside him, "close packed, eager, silent as a dream." [195]

This was not humdrum soldiering—cold and hunger, muddy roads and dreary marches. It was Life.

"Steady, old man."

He leant back, a smile upon his lips, as a fence was flung behind them and the bottom of the valley came in sight.

"There's a brook: must chance it," he muttered, and then, mechanically and with instinctive eye, he chose his place. He took a pull until he felt that Dignity was going well within himself, and then, fifty yards away, he touched him with his heels and let him out. The stream, swollen with the deluge of the previous day, had become a torrent of swirling, muddy water, and it was by no means narrow. But Dignity knew his business. Gathering his powerful quarters under him in the last stride, he took off exactly right and fairly hurled himself into space.

They landed with about an inch to spare.

"Good for you!" cried Tony, standing in his stirrups and looking back, as they breasted the slope beyond. From the top he had hoped to see the battery somewhere on the road, but he found that [196]

the wood obstructed his view, and he was still uncertain, therefore, as to whether he was in time or not.

"It's a race," he said, and sat down in his saddle to ride a finish.

But halfway across the next field Dignity put a foreleg into a blind and narrow drain and turned completely over.

Tony was thrown straight forward on to his head and stunned.

A quarter of an hour later he had recovered consciousness and was staring about him stupidly. The air was filled with the din of battle, but apparently the only living thing near him was Dignity, quietly grazing. He noticed, at first without understanding, that the horse moved on three legs only. His off foreleg was swinging. Tony got up and limped stiffly towards him. He bent down to feel the leg and found that it was broken.

Slowly, reluctantly, he pulled out his revolver and put in a cartridge. It was, perhaps, the hardest thing he had ever had to do. He drew Dignity's head down towards the ground, placed the muzzle against his forehead and fired.

The horse swayed for a fraction of a second then collapsed forward, lifeless, with a thud: and Tony felt as though his heart would break. [197]

Gradually he began to remember what had happened, and he wondered vaguely how long he had lain unconscious. In front of him stretched the wood which he had seen before he started, hiding from his view not only the actual hill but the road which led to it. He knew that on foot, bruised and shaken as he was, he could never now arrive in time. He had failed, and must return.

Then, as he stood sadly watching Dignity's fast glazing eyes he heard the thunder of hundreds of galloping hoofs, and looked up quickly. Round the corner of the wood, in wild career, came, not a cavalry charge as he had half expected, but teams—gun teams and limbers—but no guns. The battery had got into action on the hill, but a lucky hostile shell, wide of its mark, had dropped into the wagon line and stampeded the horses. A few drivers still remained, striving in vain to pull up. They might as well have tried to stop an avalanche.

Tony watched them flash past him to the rear. Still dazed with his fall, it was some seconds before the truth burst upon him.

He knew those horses. [198]

"My God!" he cried aloud, "it's my own battery that's up there!"

In a moment all thought of his obvious duty—to return and report—was banished from his mind. He forgot the staff and his connection with it. One idea, and one only, possessed him—somehow, anyhow, to get to the guns.

Dizzily he started off towards the hill. His progress was slow and laboured. His head throbbed as though there was a metal piston within beating time upon his brain. The hot sun caused the sweat to stream into his eyes. The ground was heavy, and his feet sank into it at every step. Twice he stopped to vomit.

At last he reached the road and followed the tracks of the gun-wheels up it until he came to the gap in the hedge through which the battery had evidently gone on its way into action. The slope was strewn with dead and dying horses: drivers were crushed beneath them; and an up-ended limber pointed its pole to the sky like the mast of a derelict ship. The ground was furrowed with the impress of many heavy wheels, and everywhere was ripped and scarred with the bullet marks of low-burst shrapnel. But ominously enough, amid all these signs of conflict no hostile fire seemed to come in his direction. [199]

The hill rose sharply for a hundred yards or so, and then ran forward for some distance nearly flat. Tony therefore, crawling up, did not see the battery until he was quite close to it.

Panting, he stopped aghast and stared.

Four guns were in position with their wagons beside them. The remnants of the detachments crouched behind the shields. Piles of empty cartridge-cases and little mounds of turf behind the trails testified that these four guns, at least, had been well served. But the others! One was still limbered up: evidently a shell had burst immediately in front of it. Its men and horses were heaped up round it almost as though they were tin soldiers which a child had swept together on the floor. The remaining gun pointed backward down the hill, forlorn and desolate.

In the distance, for miles and miles, the noise of battle crashed and thundered in the air. But here it seemed some magic spell was cast, and everything was still and silent as the grave.

Sick at heart, Tony contemplated the scene of carnage and destruction for one brief moment. Then he made his way towards the only officer whom he could see, and from him learnt exactly what had happened. [200]

The Major commanding the battery, it appeared, deceived first by the map and then by the fog,

had halted his whole battery where he imagined that it was hidden from view. But as soon as the mist had cleared away he found that it was exposed to the fire of the hostile artillery at a range of little more than a mile. The battery had been caught by a hail of shrapnel before it could get into action. Only this one officer remained, and there were but just enough men to work the four guns that were in position. Ammunition, too, was getting very short.

Tony looked at his watch. It was only eight o'clock. From his vague idea of the general plan of battle he knew that the decisive attack would eventually sweep forward over the hill on which he stood. But how soon?

At any moment the enemy might launch a counter-attack and engulf his battery. Its position could hardly have been worse. Owing to the flat top of the hill nothing could be seen from the guns except the three hundred yards immediately in front of them and the high ground a mile away on which the enemy's artillery was posted. The intervening space was hidden. Yet it was impossible to move. Any attempt to go forward to where they could see, or backward to where they would be safe, would be greeted, Tony knew well enough, with a burst of fire which would mean annihilation. Besides, he remembered the stampeding wagon line. The battery was without horses, immobile. To wait patiently for succour was its only hope.

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Having ascertained that a man had been posted out in front to give warning of an attack, Tony sat down to await developments with philosophic calm. The fact that he had no right to be there at all, but that his place was with the General, did not concern him in the slightest. It had always been his ambition "to fight a battery in the real thing," as he would himself have phrased it, and he foresaw that he was about to do so with a vengeance. He was distressed by the havoc that he saw, but in all other respects he was content.

For hours nothing happened. The enemy evidently considered that the battery was effectually silenced, and did not deign to waste further ammunition upon it. Then, when Tony had almost fallen asleep, the sentry at the forward crest semaphored in a message—

"Long thick line of infantry advancing: will reach foot of hill in about five minutes. Supports behind." Almost at the same moment an orderly whom Tony recognised as belonging to his General's staff arrived from the rear. Tony seized upon him eagerly.

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"Where have you come from?" he demanded.

"From the General, sir. 'E sent me to find you and to tell you to come back."

"Did you pass any of our infantry on your way?"

"Yes, sir. There's a lot coming on. They'll be round the wood in a minute or two."

"Well, go back to them and give *any* officer this message," said Tony, writing rapidly in his notebook.

"Beg pardon, sir, but that will take me out of my way. I'm the last orderly the General 'as got left, and I was told to find out what 'ad 'appened 'ere, and then to come straight back."

"I don't care a damn what you were told. You go with that message *now*."

The man hurried off, and Tony walked along the line of guns, saw that they were laid on the crest line in front, and that the fuzes were set at zero. This would have the effect of bursting the shell at the muzzles, and so creating a death-zone of leaden bullets through which the attacking infantry would have to fight their way. Then he took up his post behind an ammunition wagon on the right of the battery, and fixed his eyes on the signaller in front. He felt himself to be in the same state of tingling excitement as when he waited outside a good fox-covert expecting the welcome "Gone away!"

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Suddenly the signaller rose, and, crouching low, bolted back towards the guns. Just as he reached them a few isolated soldiers began to appear over the crest in front. As soon as they saw the guns they lay down waiting for support. They were the advanced scouts of a battalion.

A moment afterwards, a thick line of men came in sight. The sun gleamed on their bayonets. There was a shout, and they surged forward towards the battery.

"Three rounds gun fire!" Tony shouted. The four guns went off almost simultaneously, and at once the whole front was enveloped in thick, white smoke from the bursting shell. In spite of diminished detachments the guns were quickly served. Again and once again they spoke within a second of each other.

The smoke cleared slowly, for there was scarcely a breath of wind. Meanwhile the assailants had taken cover, and were beginning to use their rifles. Bullets, hundreds of them, tore the ground in front and clanged against the shields. Tony stepped back a few yards and looked down into the valley behind him. A thin line of skirmishers had almost reached the foot of the hill. His message had been delivered.

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He came back to the cover of his wagon. The enemy began to come forward by rushes—a dozen men advancing twenty yards, perhaps.

"Repeat!" said Tony.

Again the guns blazed and roared: again the pall of smoke obscured the view. A long trailing line

of infantry began to climb the hill behind him. But the enemy was working round the flanks of the battery and preparing for the final rush. It was a question of whether friend or foe would reach him first. For the second time that day Tony muttered, "It's a race!"

Then, as he saw the whole line rise and charge straight at him——

"Gun fire!" he yelled above the din, knowing that by that order the ammunition would be expended to the last round.

He jumped to the gun nearest him, working the breech with mechanical precision, while the only gunner left in the detachment loaded and fired. [205]

"Last round, sir," came in a hoarse whisper, as Tony slammed the breech and leant back with left arm outstretched ready to swing it open again. In front they could see nothing: the smoke hung like a thick white blanket. Tony drew his revolver and stood up, peering over the shield, expecting every moment to see a line of bayonets emerge.

There was a roar behind. He heard the rush of feet and the rattle of equipment. He was conscious of the smell of sweating bodies and the sight of wild, frenzied faces. Then the charge, arriving just in time, swept past him, a mad irresistible wave of humanity, driving the enemy before it and leaving the guns behind like rocks after the passage of a flood.

Tony fell back over the trail in a dead faint.

Long afterwards, when the tide of battle had rolled on towards the opposing heights, Tony, pale, grimy, but exultant, started back with the intention of rejoining his General. Halfway down the hill he met him riding up.

Tony turned and walked beside him.

"What's happened here, and where the devil have you been all day?" asked "the Maud," angrily. [206]

"I've been here, sir."

"So it appears. I sent an orderly to find you, and all you did was to despatch him on a message of your own, I understand. We were in urgent need of information as to what had happened up here. You failed to stop this battery, and it was your duty to come straight back and tell me so."

Tony had never seen the placid Maud so angry. He glanced up at him as he sat there bolt upright on his horse looking straight to his front.

"It was my own battery," said Tony. Then, after a pause, he added recklessly, "Would you have come back, sir, if you'd been me?"

The Maud stared past him up the hill. He saw the guns, with the dead and wounded strewn around them, safe. He was a gunner first, a General only afterwards. He hummed a little tune.

"No," he said, "I wouldn't."

PART III

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IN ENEMY HANDS

SOME EXPERIENCES OF A PRISONER OF WAR

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October 15, 1914. Hospital, Bavai, France.—Woke up to find the ward seething with excitement. One of the English wounded had escaped in the night, leaving his greatcoat neatly placed in his bed in such a manner as to suggest a recumbent figure. How he succeeded in evading the attentions of a night-nurse, an R.A.M.C. orderly, a German sentry at the main gate and two others in the courtyard outside the ward, is a complete mystery. The situation for the French hospital authorities is serious. So far, although the Germans are in occupation of the town, have

garrisoned it with a company of "Landwehr" and have appointed a "Governor" with a particularly offensive polyglot secretary, they have left the running of the hospital in the hands of the French staff. Bavai has been looted but not sacked, no inhabitants have been shot and no fine inflicted. But what will happen now?

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Technically, of course, responsibility for the custody of the patients rests with the Germans, since they have posted sentries at the hospital and in the town. But conventions and technicalities do not count for much in these days. The doctor, five or six nurses, and the lady by whose charity the hospital is maintained hold a conference, animated by many dramatic gestures and an astonishing flow of eloquence. They are torn between fear of the consequences which may recoil upon the hospital and admiration for the daring of the man who stole forth into the rain, unarmed, and without a coat, to face the dangers of an unknown country infested with the enemy—alone.

"Quelle bêtise!" cried one. "Oui, mais quel courage!" answered another. "Si les Allemands l'attrapent, il sera fusillé, sans doute."

It is decided to inform the Governor, and a deputation is formed for the purpose. In less than a quarter of an hour a squad of stolid Teutons arrive and search the hospital from attic to cellar. They even enter the apartments of the nuns, to the horror of our kind old priest. Of course they find nothing. It is by now eight o'clock. At nine the edict is given. In two hours every patient in the hospital who is able to crawl is to be ready to leave. I ask my friend the doctor if he can in any way pretend that I am worse than I am. "Pas possible," he replies, shaking his head sadly.

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So it is over—this long period of waiting and hoping; waiting for an advance which never came, hoping where no hope was. Seven weeks have passed since I was brought in here, left behind wounded when the tide of war ebbed back towards Paris, and in that time I have gathered many memories which will never fade. I have seen strong men racked with pain day after day, night after night, until sometimes at last exhausted Nature gave up the struggle and the nurses would come and whisper to me, crossing themselves, "Il est mort, le pauvre. Ah! comme il a souffert." I have realised to the full the compassion of Woman for suffering humanity, irrespective of creed or nationality; and I have known the blessing of morphia. Once, very early in the morning, just as the dawn was beginning to creep in and light with a ghostly dimness the rows of white beds and their restless, groaning occupants, I heard the tinkle of the bell announcing the approach of the priest bearing the Host; and drowsily (for I was under morphia) I watched Extreme Unction being administered to a dying German officer. Death, the overlord, is a great leveller of human passions. The old *curé*, whose face was that of a medieval saint and in whose kindly eyes there shone a pity akin to the divine, muttered the sacred words with a sincerity of conviction that one could not doubt. A few hours before I had heard his sonorous voice rolling out the Archbishop of Cambrai's prayer for victory: "Seigneur, qui êtes le Dieu des armées et le maître de la vie et de la mort, Vous qui avez toujours aimé la France...."

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11 a.m.—We are ready to start. The dining-hall (in times of peace this hospital is a school) is crowded as we are given our last meal. The nuns, the doctor and his wife, the nurses, the village shoemaker who was our barber and who always used to have a reassuring rumour of some sort to retail—all are there to wish us a last sad "Au revoir." They ply us with food and drink, but we are too miserable to take much. Then the word is given—we file out slowly through the courtyard into the sunlit street where two transport wagons are drawn up opposite the gate. There are nineteen French soldiers, two English privates, and myself. Our names are called by a German officer. Those who cannot walk are helped (by their comrades) into the wagons. We three English are carefully searched, but our money is not taken. It is decreed that the Englishmen must be separated by at least two Frenchmen. Does our escort (twenty armed men under a sergeant) fear a combined revolt, I wonder, or is this done merely to annoy us? I suspect the latter. A crowd of inhabitants forms round us, pressing close to say good-bye. Suddenly the German officer notices this and in one second is transformed into a raging beast. He wheels round upon the crowd, waves his stick and pours forth a torrent of abuse. The people cower back against the wall and his anger subsides. It is the first display of German temper that I have seen. To hear women reviled, even in a strange tongue—and for nothing—is horrible.

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We start. At the corner I look back regretfully at the hospital where I have received such kindness as I can never forget. From a top window a handkerchief is waving. It is the nurse who, when I was really at my worst, never left my bedside for more than five minutes during two long nights and a day. To her, I think, I owe my life. For a moment the face of the cobbler distinguishes itself from the others in the crowd. He makes himself heard above the rattle of the wagons on the *pavée* street. "Vous reviendrez après la guerre, mon lieutenant," he shouts.

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"Oui, je vous assure—à bientôt," I call back as we turn out into the open country and face the straight poplar-lined road that leads to Maubeuge. Halfway we stop at an *estaminet* for beer. The prisoners, even the English, are allowed to purchase some. The German sergeant chucks under the chin the attractive-looking French girl who serves him. She smiles, but as he turns his back I note the sudden expression of fierce hate which leaps into her eyes.

It is after 3 p.m. when we reach the outskirts of Maubeuge and cross the drawbridge over the old moat, made, I believe, by Vauban. Inside the town there are many signs of the devastation of war—buildings gutted, whole streets of small houses laid flat in ruins. The pavements are crowded and people throw chocolates and cigarettes to us. German officers, wrapped in their long grey cloaks, swagger about, brushing everyone aside in haughty insolence. From the windows of two or three hospitals French soldiers peer out and wave to us in obvious sympathy. Approaching the

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railway station we go past the identical spot where, eight weeks ago to the day, the battery detrained. The logs on which we sat to eat our belated breakfast after the long night journey up from Boulogne are still there. Oh! the humiliation of it all; a week in the country, one hour's fighting, seven weeks in hospital, and now—prison.

In the open space outside the station we are drawn up by the pavement. The French are allowed to sit down on the curb; not so we three unfortunate English. On our attempting to do so the sergeant in charge shouts at us and one of the escort threatens us with a bayonet. Some inhabitants who approach us with offers of food and drink are driven off harshly. A crowd of German soldiers, some half-drunk, collects round us. They all know the English word "swine." Pointing us out to each other they use it without stint. One man has a more extended vocabulary of abuse. Having exhausted it he proceeds to recount for our benefit the damnable story that English soldiers use the marlinspike in their clasp-knives to gouge out the eyes of German wounded. We have already heard this allegation made before. The English-speaking secretary of the Governor at Bavai was very fond of it. But he, who was educated and who had lived in London for years, knew, I'm sure, that it was a malicious lie invented by the authorities for the express purpose of exciting the Germans against us. But these men undoubtedly believe it. They produce knives of their own from their boots and threaten us with them. The expression on their faces is that of angry, untamed beasts. And yet, I dare say, at home these very men who now would like to tear us to pieces are really simple, harmless working folk. Such is war.

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It is an awkward moment. If either of my compatriots loses his temper (which is not improbable, for the British soldier will not stand insult indefinitely) he will let fly with his tongue or even his fist, in which case we shall all three be put against the nearest wall and shot. So I keep muttering, "For God's sake take no notice; try to look as though you don't hear or understand"—knowing that besides being the safest attitude this will also be the most galling for our revilers. Contemptuous indifference is sometimes a dignified defensive weapon. Finding that we are not to be drawn, the crowd gradually disperses, and for an hour and a half we are kept standing in the gutter. Then another long procession of dejected prisoners winds its way into the yard and we are taken with them into the station. The wait inside is enlivened for me by a conversation with a German N.C.O. who speaks English perfectly. He has lived, he tells me, eighteen years in South Africa and fought for us against the Matabele. Until this war he liked the English, he frankly confesses. Now nothing is too bad for us. *We* started it, *we're* the bullies of Europe, it's *we* who must be crushed. Germany can't be beaten. Napoleon the First couldn't do it. "We Germans," he says, "fight without pay for love of our country, but you are mercenaries; you enlist for money." From motives of personal safety I refrain from making the obvious retort: "On the contrary, we are volunteers—you go into the army because you're dam' well made to."

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A diversion is caused by a wounded French soldier who faints, has to be given brandy, and is discovered to be far too bad to travel. Why not have left the poor devil in his hospital? He's surely harmless enough from a military point of view.

6 p.m.—We file across the line on to the other platform. On the way one of the English privates is kicked, hard, from behind by a passing German soldier. His whispered comments to me are unprintable. Our train appears to consist entirely of cattle trucks. Just as I am about to enter one of these in company with some French soldiers, a German captain touches me on the shoulder. "You are an officer, aren't you?" he says in French, and motions me aside. Pointing at me, the sergeant who had brought us from Bavai says something to the officer, the purport of which, I gather, is that his orders were to put me in with the men. Fortunately, however, this captain has gentlemanly instincts; he ignores the sergeant, leads me down to the other end of the platform and deposits me in a second-class carriage with three French officers. We begin to exchange experiences. Two are doctors, the other a captain of Colonial Infantry wounded during the siege of Maubeuge. They tell me that there is another English officer on the train. I now begin to realise that I am hungry and half dead with fatigue. To march eight miles and then to stand upright for nearly three hours, after having walked no more than the length of the hospital ward for weeks, is no joke. The above-mentioned English officer comes in from the next carriage and introduces himself as Major B., cavalry, wounded at the very beginning and put into Maubeuge to recover; of course he was taken prisoner when that place fell. He and the French officers give me food and a blanket, for both of which I am more than grateful. An elderly Landsturm private armed with a loaded rifle and a saw-bayonet occupies one corner of our carriage, so that there is not much room to lie down. We start about 7.30, but I am so over-tired and so cold that I get very little sleep.

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October 16.—Woke to find that we had only gone about 20 miles and had not yet reached Charleroi. A long, wearisome day, during which we exhausted our supplies of food. Passed through Namur and Liège but were unable to see signs of the bombardment of either place. In the evening reached Aix, where we were given lukewarm cocoa and sandwiches made of black bread and sausage—particularly nasty. But by this time we were so hungry that anything was welcome. The guard in our carriage, finding that we were not really likely to strangle him if he took his eyes off us for a moment, relaxed considerably, accepted cigarettes, gave us some of his bread, confessed to one of the Frenchmen who could speak a little German that he hated the war and heartily wished that he was home again; finally he put his rifle on the rack and slept as well as any of us.

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October 17.—All yesterday and all this morning we passed train after train of reinforcements going to the front; some of the carriages were decorated with evergreens, and nearly all of them were labelled "Paris" in chalk. Many of the men looked very young—hardly more than boys.

Several trains, crammed with wounded, overtook us. The sight of English uniform was always enough to attract a crowd at any station where we stopped. I wonder if the inhabitants of the Maori village at Earl's Court experienced the same sensations as I did—sitting there to be stared at, pointed at and not infrequently insulted.

At about 11.30 we were taken out of the train, and locked into a waiting-room with about half a dozen Belgian officers, all wounded, who had arrived from some other direction. An extremely fussy N.C.O. had charge of us and persisted in counting us every ten minutes. Got into another train about 1 p.m. and eventually arrived at our destination, Crefeld, at 1.30. We were taken out of the station almost immediately, marched through a large and rather hostile crowd and put into a tram. In this we went up to the barracks—about two miles. Male inhabitants shook their fists at us, females put out their tongues: so chivalrous!

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In spite of the relief of at last being at the end of our journey, there was something terribly depressing in the sound of the heavy gate shutting to behind us. We were first taken up to an office and made to fill in our names, ranks, regiments, and monthly rates of pay on a special form; then put inside the palisade and left to find our way about. There are about sixty French officers here, a dozen or so Belgians (including the commander of Antwerp and his artillery general), and seven English, one of whom is a retired captain who happened to be in Belgium at the outbreak of war and who was arrested as a spy on no evidence whatever. Spent the remainder of the day settling down and writing home. It is a comfort, at any rate, to think that I can at last let people know what has become of me. Comparing notes with the other English here, we discover that they were all wounded early in the War, on the Aisne. We learn for the first time details of the stationary trench warfare into which the campaign is developing and hear all about the German preponderance in heavy artillery. We feed here in the big dining-hall attached to the canteen (in which by the way a great variety of things can be bought, including beer, wine, and tobacco). We live and sleep in the barrack rooms and we have the whole space of the barrack square—200 yards long by about 80 wide—to play about in! Subalterns are paid 60 marks a month, higher ranks 100. Every one is charged 2 marks a day for messing. The unfortunate subaltern, therefore, finds his accounts flat at the end of the month—unless the month has thirty-one days, in which case he owes the Imperial Government 2 marks! Am glad I've got about a fiver with me, which ought to last until I can get more from home. Slept like a log on a bed as hard as iron.

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October 18.—Five more English officers arrived this morning, including Major V—. They were all more dead than alive, having spent three days and three nights in a cattle truck, the floor of which was covered with six inches of wet dung; the ammonia fumes had got into their eyes and they could hardly see; they had had practically no food and all through the journey they had been submitted to every conceivable insult. The cattle truck contained fifty-two persons—officers, privates, and civilians. Such treatment is beyond comment. From Major V— I heard for the first time of the tragic fate of the battery on September 1. He could give no details beyond that it was surprised in bivouac at dawn by eight "dug-in" German guns at 700 yards' range, that it was simply cut to pieces, but that the guns were served to the last, that the hostile batteries were silenced, and, in the end, captured. All the officers were killed or wounded. It's too awful to be ignorant of further particulars. Went to bed more depressed than I have been all these weeks. I daren't think that "Brad"^[16] has been killed.

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[16] The late Captain E. K. Bradbury, V.C., R.H.A.

October 19.—This morning we were made to parade at 10.30 to be counted; this is to be a daily amusement. The food here might be worse and at present there is plenty of it. Took some exercise round the square—a deadly business. In the afternoon shaved off a month's beard with a cheap German safety razor, which was a painful operation! Ordered some underclothing from the town.

October 20.—Employed a pouring wet day writing many letters, including one to Bavai, though it is questionable if it ever gets there.

October 22.—Two more English officers arrived, one wounded. Both seemed to think that things were going well but neither knew much. This morning the new commandant took over. He looks like an opulent and good-natured butcher disguised as a Hungarian bandsman. Actually, I am informed, he is a retired major of Hussars. In the course of a chatty little discourse at the roll-call parade he informed us that in future we are to be counted at 7.45 a.m. and 10 p.m.; further that alcoholic liquors will no longer be obtainable. Thus we are robbed of two of our luxuries—drink and sleep! Two new arrivals at midday, whose only news is that British troops are now in N.W. Belgium. Football started on the square. The monotonous horror of this life is just beginning to make itself felt on me. The worst part of the whole thing is the total lack of privacy. There is no room, no corner of a room even, where one can go to escape the incessant racket and babble of talk. Reading and writing are practically impossible.

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This evening twelve more English arrived. Learned from them of the transfer of our army from the Aisne to Belgium and realised from their accounts the appalling losses that many regiments seem to have had. One of these new-comers told me of Brad's heroic death when "L" was smashed up. To the regiment and to the army his loss is great; to those of us who knew him well and were privileged to serve with him, it is irreparable. In everything he did he set up a standard which all of us envied but none of us could attain. He lived as straight as he rode to hounds—and no man rode straighter. To his brilliant mental gifts he added a conscientiousness, a

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thoroughness, and a quick grasp of detail which seemed to augur a great future. His was a personality which stamped itself indelibly upon all with whom he came in contact, and the influence for good which he wielded over both officers and men had to be seen to be believed. The men feared him, for he was strict and was no respecter of persons; but they loved him too, for he was always just. By his brother officers he was simply worshipped. He was not a typical British officer, he was far more than that, he was an ideal one. He died as he had lived—nobly. And he was an only son.

October 28.—A vile cold has added to my depression of the last few days. A good many new prisoners have been brought in lately—mostly of the 7th Division, which appears by all accounts to have had an awful doing. The battle W. and N.W. of Lille still rages. A French officer retails a rumour that he had heard before being captured that the Allies had retaken Lille; a Belgian, that the Germans are retiring on the West and that our fleet are doing great execution along the coast.

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Am now sharing a room with an infantry captain and three subalterns of the same regiment. We have bought cups and saucers and have tea in our room every afternoon. New regulation that we may only write two letters a month.

October 31.—General von Bissing, commanding the district, inspected the Landsturm battalion here to-day. Afterwards he visited some of the prisoners' rooms. Seeing one English officer who, having only just arrived, was far from clean, he asked him through an interpreter how long he had had his breeches. The officer, who imagined that he was being asked how long the British army had been clad in khaki, answered politely, "Nearly fourteen years!" Whereupon von Bissing was pleased to call our uniform "Dirty-coloured, disgusting, and bad." However, I hear his son is a prisoner in France, so perhaps this undignified vituperation relieves his feelings.

November 1.—The Belgian officers departed to-day for some other camp. Rumours of the arrival of 200 Russians not yet fulfilled. Have bought some books, Tauchnitz edition, and tried to settle down to read. We have started the formation of an English library, which will be a blessing.

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November 2.—We have often jokingly said: "We've got English, French, Belgians, and Arabs here—all we want to complete the show is a party of Russians." Well, now we've got them—200 arrived this evening. Such a scene in the canteen before roll-call! The roar of voices, the atmosphere of tobacco, and the pushing crowd in the bar reminded one of the Empire on a boat-race night—minus the drink!

The authorities with their usual thoughtfulness for our comfort have decreed that the English or French and the Russians are to be mixed up in the rooms in approximately equal numbers. So three of us (G—, T—, and myself) migrated to another block this afternoon and installed ourselves in the beds nearest the window before the arrival of our "stable companions." These when they did turn up seemed pleasant enough, but as they could talk no English and only a few words of French, conversation was limited. They could give us no news, having all been prisoners in some other place for two months. One, however, produced a map of Europe and showed us how the German columns were being swept aside—one apparently to Finland, another to Constantinople, and a third to Rome! Evidently an optimist! "*Neuf millions*" is all the French he knows; it is his estimate of the strength of that portion of the Russian army which is at present mobilised.

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November 3.—Letter from home—the first since I left England on August 16. Infinitely cheering; no news, though, owing to fear of the censor, except a few details about the battery on September 1.

November 9.—Overcrowding becoming desperate. A seventh added to our room to-day—a French lieutenant whom we nicknamed Brigadier Gerard, because he's always twirling his moustache in front of the glass. There are so many prisoners here now that we have to have two services for each meal—*i.e.* breakfast 8 and 9 a.m., lunch 11.45 a.m. and 1.15 p.m. supper 6.45 and 8 p.m. One does a week of each alternately, with the idea presumably that constant change is good for the digestion. But the day consists of fifteen long waking hours all the same. There are moments when I hate all my fellow humans here. A youthful Russian who inhabits this room irritates me almost beyond endurance by singing and whistling the same tune all day long. Poor devil, he's got no books and nothing on earth to do—but if only he'd go and make his noises outside. I find myself unable to fix my mind on anything and sometimes I feel that this life will drive me mad. It's a *hell* of moral, physical, and mental inactivity. I'd rather do a year here with a room to myself than six months as things are at present.

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November 11.—Somebody got a bundle of old *Daily Graphics* past the censor, I can't think how. As they were the first English papers we'd seen for ages they were most interesting.

November 14.—Howling gale and heavy rain all yesterday and the day before. Hope the German fleet is at sea in it! Have made great friends with Tonnot, the French captain of Colonial Infantry with whom I travelled from Maubeuge. He talks interestingly on a variety of subjects and I am learning a certain amount of French from him. Curious how much more well endowed with the critical spirit the average Frenchman is than the Englishman of a corresponding class. The latter is more inclined to take men and affairs and life for granted.

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Am getting anxious about the non-arrival of my parcels. Clothes, books, and tobacco are what I want. Dozens of officers who arrived after me have received parcels. In my saner moments I know that it is purely a matter of chance, but I have a tendency, when day after day a list of

names is put up and mine is not amongst them, to grind my teeth in rage and regard it as a personal spite on the part of the German Government. The arrival of letters and parcels is the only event of any importance in this monotonous life. An officer who receives two or three of either on the same day is regarded in much the same light, as, at home, one regards some lucky person who has inherited a fortune. Every pleasure is relative and depends on circumstances. Here, a tin of tobacco and two pairs of pyjamas are joys untold.

November 21.—The same continuous stream of rumours and counter-rumours continues to flow in. Heard this week that Lille had been retaken and that four French corps were marching on Mons. The latter theory borne out by the arrival of some very badly wounded prisoners from the hospital at that place. No confirmation, however. Learnt of the Prime Minister's speech on War loans, in which he stated that the war will not last as long as expected. This is comforting, as he is not given to exaggeration. Perfect weather—dry, frosty, sunny. Long to be on mountains instead of trudging round this damnable square.

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November 23.—Immense excitement this evening. Two Russians attempted to escape; they had obtained civilian clothes, passports, and a motor, but were given away by the man whom they had bribed to help them. They now languish in the guardroom. The German authorities spent two hours this evening searching all the rooms, I suppose for money.

November 26.—All the bells in Crefeld ringing this evening and extra editions of the papers announcing the capture of 40,000 Russians. Won't believe it. That's always the tendency—to believe any rumour favourable to us, however wild, and to discredit anything and everything the Germans say.

December 1.—The "Allies" who live in this room have now been more or less educated by our pantomimic signs of disapproval and make less noise. Have bought some more books and read all day except for an hour's walk in the morning and another in the afternoon or evening. Daren't play football owing to the bullet in my neck.

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December 15.—The deadly "even tenor of our way" continues. Have now bought a small table and a lamp of my own. Ensnconced in the corner behind my bed I can read or work at French in comparative peace. But C— has had a box of games sent to him—amongst them (horror of horrors!) "Pit." I do draw the line at the room being made into more of a bear-garden than usual by the addition of various strangers who wish to gamble on "Minoru"—and I foresee trouble and unpleasantness over it. Of course it's selfish of me, but there is no other place where I can go for peace and quiet, and—well—we're all inclined to be irritable here. It's a marvel to me that there haven't been more quarrels already.

Wild rumours that Austria is suing for peace with Russia. As usual, no confirmation.

December 18.—To-day Major V— escaped. Having gone down to the dentist's in the town with two other officers and a sentry, he somehow managed to slip past the latter into the street and find his way out of the town. He speaks German like a native and was wearing a civilian greatcoat. A very sporting effort, as he'll have a bad time if he's caught, I'm afraid. If he can get home and lay our grievances before our authorities there is a chance that, through the American Embassy, the Germans, fearing similar treatment for their prisoners in England, may make things pleasanter for us.

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December 19.—Wild scene in the canteen following the announcement that no more tobacco would be sold after the 26th of this month. "The prisoners are being too well treated," is apparently the popular clamour in the town. Fierce scrimmage round the bar to purchase what was left. However, the patriotism of the canteen contractor (who, need I say? is making a fortune out of us) was not equal to his love of gain. He bought up an entire tobacconist's shop, so that we were all able to lay in three or four months' supply.

Rumours that Major V— had crossed the frontier into Holland. Later, that he had been caught in that country and interned.

Somewhere about this date a score or so of English soldiers arrived here. This was the result of our repeated applications to be allowed to have servants of our own nationality as the Russians and French have. The appearance of these men horrified me. It was not so much that they were thin, white-faced, ragged and dirty, though that was bad enough; but they had a cowed, bullied look such as I have never seen on the faces of British soldiers before and hope never to see again. Apart from what they told us, it was evident from their appearance that for months they had not been able to call their souls their own and that temporarily, at any rate, all the spirit had been knocked out of them. Better food and treatment will doubtless put them right again.

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December 25.—Christmas Day is Christmas Day even in prison. In the morning we held a service and sang the proper hymns with zest. At lunch we were given venison (said to be from the Kaiser's preserves) and had some of an enormous plum-pudding which T— had had sent him. Then suddenly we rose as one man, toasted the King (in water and lemonade) and sang the National Anthem. The French officers followed with the Marseillaise and until that moment I had never realised what a wonderful air it is. Then the Russians, conducted by an aged white-haired colonel, sang their National Hymn quite beautifully. And we all shouted and cheered together.

Into our room this afternoon, when we were all lying on our beds in a state of coma after too liberal a ration of plum-pudding, there burst the N.C.O. of the guard and four armed men. He shouted at us in German and we gathered from his gestures that he was accusing us of looking

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out of the window and making faces at the sentry. However, as we all went on reading and took not the slightest notice of him, I think we had the best of it. I imagine that, it being Christmas Day, he had "drink taken," as one says in Ireland. We complained to the senior British officer, who saw the commandant about it. This sort of thing is becoming intolerable. The other night the guard entered a room, seized an unfortunate English officer (it is always the English), accused him of having had a light on after hours, although actually he was asleep at the time, and dragged him off to the guardroom, where he spent the night without blankets.

This evening we feasted on a turkey which we had bought and had had cooked for us in the canteen, and more plum-pudding. Afterwards we sang various songs, including "Rule, Britannia" (which the Germans hate more than anything) until roll-call. I think "Auld Lang Syne" produced a choky feeling in the throats of most of us—so many are gone for ever. The authorities, fearing a riot, doubled all the pickets—and it was a cold night!

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December 27.—It has been announced that, as a punishment for the escape of Major V—, all smoking will be prohibited from January 2 to 15; all tobacco is to be handed in at 10 a.m. on the 2nd. I wonder if we'll ever see it again. I dread this fortnight's abstention.

December 28.—Received £5; also parcels containing food, books, clothes, and tobacco.

January 2, 1915.—Tobacco duly handed in and receipt given for it. Some mild excitement caused over a letter which I had received from F. P—, who is in India, part of which had been censored. The commandant here wanted it back again. Fortunately I had destroyed it. I had not been able to read the censored part, but had gathered from the preceding sentence that it was something about the Indian troops. Wonder what the Boches are after. Anyway I was hauled up before the permanent orderly officer, who is an aged subaltern of at least sixty, known to the French as "l'asperge" because he is long and thin and looks exactly like an asparagus stalk when he's got his helmet on; and to us as "the chemist" because he has rather the air of a suave and elderly member of the Pharmaceutical Society. As a matter of fact, he is a baron! For a German, he was quite polite, believed me when I told him I had destroyed the letter, and seemed relieved when I mentioned that it was dated September 13—which was true.

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News gets scarcer and scarcer, German papers emptier and emptier. But there are signs of shortage in the country. No more rolls or white bread for us, for example.

January 5.—Managed to smuggle through the parcels office a tin of 100 cigarettes which had arrived for me, but resisted the temptation to open it. If any one was caught smoking during this fortnight it would mean no more tobacco for any of us for months if not for ever. All the same, I find the privation hard to bear.

January 8.—It has become evident that the authorities do not desire to take further steps in the tobacco question. Yesterday "the chemist" searched various rooms. Entering one he found several Russians smoking—whereupon he left without comment. This was the act of a gentleman. This evening, therefore, we broached my tin of cigarettes. Crouching round the stove we smoked them very carefully, blowing the smoke up the chimney. Rather like school-days and very ridiculous. Tobacco never tasted so good to me.

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To-day one of the Russians who was implicated in the attempt to escape some weeks ago returned here. His *rôle* in the affair had been to stand at the gate and keep watch while the other two slipped out to the motor. All three of them, he says, have been kept handcuffed, in solitary confinement, ever since, and fed only on black bread and weak coffee—and this *whilst awaiting trial!* Eventually his case was dismissed, as it was not proved that he was attempting to escape. The other two are to undergo imprisonment for six more weeks. They are desperate and want to commit suicide. And this is civilised warfare in the twentieth century!

It is nearly a month since we had any fresh German official *communiqués* posted up in the dining-hall. Perhaps it is a sign that things are going badly for them. From rumours it appears that Turkey is getting a bad time from Russia—and so is Austria.

The quality of the food is rapidly deteriorating. The bread is black, sour, and hard, with a large proportion of potato flour in it. The meat is generally uneatable. Fortunately supplies are coming fairly regularly from home and we subsist almost entirely on potted meats, tongues, etc.

January 14.—The Russian New Year's Day. Went to their Church service and was greatly impressed by the solemnity of it; also by their beautiful singing. Toasted the Russian army at lunch; much bowing and scraping and a great interchange of compliments.

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January 25.—Heard to-day of the second battle of Heligoland and of the sinking of the *Blücher*—Good. Amused to notice that the German papers claim this fight as a great victory—a Trafalgar, they called it. Prefer to believe the statement of our Admiralty—quoted by the Crefeld paper with many sneering comments and notes of exclamation interspersed.

There is, I think, no doubt that Germany has begun to feel the pinch. The altered manner of our "kindly captors" towards us is remarkable. There is a good deal less of the haughty conqueror about them.

The authorities here are compiling a list of those prisoners who are wounded and unfit for further service. An astonishing number of officers were brought forward by the doctors of each nationality for examination by the German medico! Particulars of our cases were taken down, to be forwarded to Berlin. I fear that, as far as I am concerned, there is not much chance of getting

February 3.—Permission granted to us to write eight letters a month instead of two. Perhaps this is due to pressure brought to bear since the arrival home of V—. We knew he'd reached England safely some time ago, but have heard no details as to how he did it. Women conductors on the trams in Crefeld now; and Carl, a German waiter, late of the Grosvenor Hotel and at present underling here to the canteen manager, is under orders for the front. Both facts are significant, especially the latter, seeing that the aforesaid Carl is as good a specimen of the physically unfit as one could wish to see.

February 7.—Marked improvement of German manners continues unabated. Carl still here. The civilian who heats the furnace for the bathroom (doubtless an authority!) confesses quite openly that Germany is beaten, that he has been convinced of it for months and believes nothing he sees in the papers.

Our hosts having now condescended to allow us to hire musical instruments, and having even granted us a garret to play them in, we enjoyed quite a pleasant concert this evening. But the crowd and the atmosphere were awful. The orchestra surprisingly good, considering its haphazard formation: and a Russian peasant chorus beautifully rendered.

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February 8.—Fine day with a grand feeling of spring in the air. Heading in a German paper: "The enemy takes one of our trenches near La Bassée." But what an admission! Am convinced that at last the German *people* are beginning to realise what their Government must have known from the time when the first great rush on Paris failed—namely, that there can only be one end to this war for them—defeat.

February 10.—Received a second £5 from Cox within three weeks. He must have lost his head on finding me with a balance credit for about the first time in my career.

February 11.—There was a rumour to-night, apparently with some foundation in it, that the first batch of wounded to be exchanged (two English and nine French) are to go on Monday. I continue to hope that I may get away later on, but can't really feel there is much chance, as there is so little permanently wrong with me.

February 12.—The incredible has happened. I'm to be sent home! I hardly dare believe it. This afternoon Major D—, R—, and myself were sent for by the commandant and told to be ready to start at 9 o'clock to-morrow. He further informed us that the authorities knew that our wounds were not very serious, so that he hoped we would realise the clemency of the Imperial Government. We were made to give our word of honour not to take any letters, etc., from prisoners with us. Finally, after an interview with the paymaster, who squared up our accounts, we went through a ceremonious leave-taking with the commandant and "the chemist." Felt quite sorry for the latter; he looks so old and careworn and has lost two sons in the war, I believe. Spent the evening packing my few paltry possessions in a hamper I managed to buy in the canteen. Found it very difficult to conceal my elation from all the poor devils we will leave behind to-morrow. Far too excited to sleep.

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February 13, Saturday.—The Germans evidently have been instructed to make things as pleasant as possible for us. A taxi provided at 8.30 and a most suave N.C.O. to accompany us. A large crowd of fellow-prisoners assembled at the gate to see us off. In spite of the depression they all must have felt at watching us go, not one of them showed a sign of it. They were just splendid—French, Russians, and English—and wished us "Good luck," "Bon voyage," and whatever the Slavonic equivalent may be, as though they themselves might be following at any date, instead of having to look forward to months and months more of that awful dreary life.

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At 8.35 turned out of the gate for ever.

At the station H— joined us from the hospital; being partially paralysed he was carried on a stretcher. R.'s kilt caused considerable interest, but the onlookers, evidently knowing our circumstances, were not in the least offensive—very different from four months ago. We were taken charge of by an N.C.O. whom we knew well, as he was employed at the barracks. He became most friendly, aired his small knowledge of English, and continually asked us if we were glad to be going home. What a question! When we changed trains and had about an hour to wait he ordered our lunch for us and saw that we had everything that we wanted. Travelling *viâ* Münster we reached Osnabrück at about 4 p.m. and were conveyed in a motor to the hospital. Had thought, ever since last night, that I could never be depressed again, but the sight of the ward with nearly fifty empty beds in it, the smell of iodoform and the whole atmosphere of the place had that effect on all of us for a bit. Found another English officer here, wounded in the head months ago, and still partially paralysed, but recovering. He is to join us. Gathered from listening to his experiences that one might have been in much worse places than Crefeld. No information as to when we are to move on. Later in the evening another officer arrived—one leg shorter than the other as the result of a broken thigh. Found the soft, comfortable hospital bed most pleasant after the hard mattresses of the prison.

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February 14.—Spent a long dull day confined to the ward; occasionally we were visited by some of the German wounded, of whom there were many, more or less convalescent, in the hospital. They were quite agreeable. Have noticed that the hate and malice engendered by the authorities against the English manifests itself more amongst those Germans who have not been to the front. Men who have actually been there and have come back wounded are far more inclined to sympathise with fellow-sufferers than to make themselves offensive. Moreover, I take it that by

this time the front line troops have acquired a wholesome respect for the British army.

About midday we were all examined by a German doctor. This was nervous work, especially for R — and myself—we both being far from permanently disabled. However, we seemed to satisfy his requirements. In the evening an aged Teuton in shabby waiter's evening dress came and informed us that we could order anything we liked to eat or drink if we chose to pay for it. Evidently he was acting under instructions to make himself pleasant. Anyway we ordered a good dinner but confined ourselves to beer. Still no news of when we are to start, but presumably it will be soon because of the "blockade," which starts on the 18th.

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February 15.—This morning a board of four German doctors made a careful examination of all of us. They came in so unexpectedly that I was obliged surreptitiously to withdraw the plug from the hole in my palate and swallow it! However, I managed to convince them that I could neither eat, drink, nor speak properly, and they passed me without demur. Am sure that I went pale with fright at the prospect of being dragged back to prison again, and perhaps this fact was of assistance to me. There was a long consultation over R—. He was asked if he was capable of instructing troops in musketry; whereupon he proceeded to explain that, in spite of his three years' service, he himself was still under instruction! In the end we were all passed as incapacitated.

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We were told this afternoon that we might start to-night, but nothing definite. At 7 p.m. were ordered to be ready in half an hour. Hurried on our specially ordered dinner and split three bottles of wine amongst us. At 7.45 started for the station in motors and were then put on board an ambulance train. The "sitting-up" cases had distinctly the best of it here; we were in comfortable second-class carriages, whereas the others were put in slung-stretchers in cattle trucks. As this same train is to fetch back the exchanged German wounded from Flushing, there was evidently no malice aforethought in this rough-and-ready accommodation; presumably it is the best they can produce. On the train are seven officers, 200 or so N.C.O.'s and men, a few German nurses and Red Cross men, and one civilian doctor. Started at 8.45 and reached the Dutch frontier just after midnight.

February 16.—Had dozed off but woke up when we reached the frontier and was much amused when the Dutch Customs officials came and asked us if we had anything to declare! They even pretended to search our few miserable belongings. Can never forget the kindness of the Dutch both here and everywhere we stopped all through the journey to Flushing. They crowded into the carriages; they showered food, tobacco, cigarettes, sweets, fruit, even English books and papers on us; they forgot nothing. If they'd been our own personal friends they could have done no more for us. Dutch doctors and guards boarded the train at the frontier, and also an English newspaper correspondent with whom we talked for a couple of hours, gradually picking up the thread of all that had happened since we were cut off from the outer world. An exhilarating feeling to have left Germany behind and to be amongst friends again.

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Reached Flushing about 10.30 and were welcomed by the British Consul and by several English people over there in connection with Belgian relief work. Their hospitality was unbounded. Had a merry lunch with them in the hotel, and then strolled out to see the town—followed by a large and noisy crowd of school children. But what a joy to be a free man, to be able to go where one likes and do what one likes! Wired home.

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In the afternoon the boat which is to take us back arrived from England with the German wounded. The two batches of men were close together on the platform. What a contrast! the Germans, clean, well-cared for, dressed either in comparatively serviceable uniform or new civilian clothes; the English, white-faced, pinched and careworn, in threadbare khaki (some even in tattered French or Belgian uniform) with no buttons, most of them with no hats or badges. At first our men were indignant—they had suffered much, and it was evident to them that the treatment of prisoners in the two countries was very different. But soon the inherent chivalry of the British private soldier overcame his other feelings. The Germans were enemies but they were wounded—cripples for life most of them—and they too were going Home. It formed a bond between the two groups. In five minutes cigarettes were being exchanged and conversation (aided by signs) in full swing.

There was an English corporal, paralysed, lying on a stretcher in the waiting-room. I helped one of the English ladies to take him some tea. She knelt beside him, put the cup to his lips, and, when he had drunk, asked him how he felt. For a moment he didn't answer but merely stared at her with great dark wondering eyes. Then he said slowly: "Are you English?" That was all, just those three words, but they expressed everything—the misery of all the months he had been in foreign hands, his patience, his suffering, and now at long last his infinite content at finding one of his own country-women bending over him. His head dropped wearily back on to the pillow and he closed his eyes; he was happy.

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Had dinner at the hotel where we met the doctors who had come over with the Germans and who were to go back with us. Afterwards went on board the boat which, however, was not to start till the morning. To my dying day I shall remember sitting in the saloon and watching the sad procession of two hundred crippled N.C.O.'s and men being brought on board. There were paralysed cases on stretchers, blind men, deaf men, men with an arm or a leg gone, dozens hopelessly lame manœuvring their crutches with difficulty, helping each other, laughing at each other—happy enough for the moment. But oh! the pity of it. What of the future of these maimed and broken men? They are happy now because they're thinking only of to-morrow, but what of the day after? what of the thousands of days after? England is proverbially ungrateful to her

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lesser kind of heroes as well as to her greater kind of poets. Geniuses have been known to starve in garrets—and so have Balaclava survivors. These men deserve well of their country. Will they be remembered or forgotten?

Went to bed late, again too excited to sleep. Feel at last that it's a reality and not a dream.

February 17.—Woke to find that the boat had started, that it was blowing half a gale, raining hard and that we were in for a vile crossing. Too happy to be ill, however. A large number of Belgian refugees on board. Talked to several of our men. All their stories tallied in essentials. They had been underfed, under-clothed, singled out for all the disagreeable work and all the abuse—*because they were English*. Watched them playing cards, helping anxious Belgian mothers with their sea-sick children. Listened to their talk and laughter and choruses, of which the most popular was a version of "Tipperary" which stated that the Kaiser would have a long way to go to St. Helena. At intervals, every half-hour or so, a mighty shout would go up, "Are we downhearted?" and all the crutches would rattle on the deck before the crashing answer, "No!"

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Disembarked at Folkestone Pier at about six p.m. No fuss, no worry, everything done in perfect order. A buffet on the platform provided us with English tea and English buns (there can be great joy in a common penny bun) served by English ladies. The rain streamed down out of the inky sky as the long ambulance train puffed its way out of the station at 8 p.m. Even the weather was typically English, as if to welcome us! Everything for our comfort had been thought of. In our saloon were flowers, great bunches of violets, and a gramophone. And so at last, just before eleven, we rolled over the darkened Thames and drew up in Charing Cross—Home!

HENRY

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His real name was Henri Roman, but we called him Henry because it was easier to pronounce. His status in the French army was not high—he was a private in the 1st Territorial Regiment; it was his custom, however, when in conversation with unsuspecting strangers, to omit the word Territorial and by merely pointing to the "1" on his *képi* lead them to suppose that he belonged to the First Regiment of the Line—a rather more distinguished unit than his own. Like ourselves, he was a prisoner of war, and in his capacity of *valet de chambre* he was, if not perfect, at any rate unusual. We first became conscious of his possibilities as a source of merriment when, owing to the arrival of a fresh batch of prisoners, we were ordered to change our room.

"Je viens avec messieurs," Henry announced simply, and proceeded to help us pack our things. It is a fact that my hair brushes and razor made the journey in one of his trouser pockets, G—'s pipes, a half-empty pot of jam and a face towel in the other.

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To us, accustomed to the diffidence of the English soldier in the presence of his officers, it was refreshing to watch Henry enter our room in the afternoon bearing on his shoulder the daily supply of coal. He would lower the large bucket carefully to the ground and then wipe his huge hands on his baggy and discoloured red trousers with the air of a man who has done a hard job of work conscientiously and well. From a pocket, the bottom of which was apparently somewhere in the region of his knee, he would produce a half-smoked and much worn cigar, readjust any loose leaves that might be hanging from it, and then light it with all the care that a connoisseur bestows upon a corona. Having opened the door of the stove to satisfy himself that the fire was "marching well," he would draw up a stool and sit down amongst us for five minutes' rest.

Conversation with him was of course an unequal contest. Our French was weak—his, on the contrary, was powerful—in the sense that an express train is powerful, that is, rushing, noisy, and only to be stopped by signal. He was thirty-five, he told us, and it was obvious, from the way he referred to himself as a *père de famille* that he considered himself as a man well past the prime of life, looking forward hopefully to a complacent but always industrious old age. He came from Commines, which is north of Lille on the Belgian frontier, and he had worked all his life in a braces factory, for ten hours a day, six days a week, earning thirty to forty francs, which he considered good wages. On the outbreak of war his regiment had formed part of the garrison of Maubeuge, which place, in his opinion, was undoubtedly sold to the enemy. He had spent about a month at a prisoners' camp in Germany, and then had been sent to us with twenty other French soldiers who were to act as our servants and waiters. He confessed that he found the change agreeable because he was better fed and had some work to do. The idleness at the soldiers' camp had bored him. All of which led us to believe that he was that kind of man to whom work is a necessity. Facts proved otherwise.

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He used to appear in our room in the morning at any time between seven and half-past. His first objective was the fire. It had happened once that the Russian officers who shared the room with us had in our absence banked the stove up so high over-night that it was still burning on the following morning; in consequence Henry had been saved the trouble of laying and lighting the fire afresh. Just as a terrier who has once seen a cat in a certain place will always take a glance

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there when passing by, so Henry, hoping daily for a recurrence of such luck, made straight for the stove. He was invariably disappointed; but the action became a habit.

His next act was to go through the formality of waking us. His procedure was to stand at the foot of each bed in turn and place a gigantic hand on some portion of the occupant's anatomy. As soon as the sleeper stirred, Henry would mutter, "Sept heures vingt, mon capitaine" (or "mon lieutenant," as the case might be—he was most punctilious about rank), and pass on to the next bed. The actual time by the clock made no difference. He always said, "Sept heures vingt." All this, as I have stated, was pure formality. His real method of waking us was to make a deafening noise clearing out the grate and laying the fire. Having done this he abandoned us in favour of his own breakfast.

He reappeared about 9 a.m. to give the room what he called *un coup de balai*—his idiom for a superficial rite which he performed with a soft broom after scattering water freely about the floor. The resultant mess he picked up in his hands and put into the coal-box or pushed under a cupboard if he thought no one was looking. He spent the rest of his time till his dinner hour at eleven in cleaning the boots, making the beds, and pretending to dust things—all the while giving vent to his opinions on life in general and prison life in particular. In the afternoons we seldom saw him after two o'clock, by which time he had brought the coal and washed up the tea things, left dirty since the day before. [256]

Henry possessed neither a handsome face nor a well-knit figure. When he stood upright—which he only did if he had some really impressive anathema to launch against the Germans—he was not more than five feet eight. His skimpy blue blouse disclosed the roundness of his shoulders and accentuated the abnormal length of his arms. The ends of his wide trousers were clipped tight round his ankles, so that his heavy hobnailed boots were displayed in all their vast unshapeliness. In walking he trailed his short legs along, giving one the impression that he had just completed a twenty-mile march and was about to go away and rest for some hours. When we first knew him he had had a scraggy beard of no particular colour, but he startled us one morning by appearing without it, grinning sheepishly, and exposing to view a weak chin which already had a tendency to multiply itself indefinitely. Except on Friday, which was his bath day, his long moustache draggled indiscriminately over the lower part of his face; but after his douche he used to soap the ends and curl them up, giving to his rather foolish countenance a ludicrous expression of semi-martial ferocity. On these occasions he seldom failed to pay us a visit in the evening, shaved, clean, and palpably delighted with himself. [257]

The first time we saw him thus we asked him why he elected to wear his moustache like the Kaiser. For a moment he was disconcerted; then suddenly realising that a joke was intended, he threw back his head and emitted a series of startling guffaws. Being of a simple nature he was easily amused. Jokes about the war and the Germans, however, he considered to be in bad taste. His political philosophy was summed up in his simple phrase, "C'étaient eux" (the Germans) "qui ont voulu la guerre," and on this count alone they stood condemned eternally before God and man. Of history, diplomatic situations, international crises he took no heed. In his eyes the Germans were a race of impoverished brigands for ever casting greedy eyes upon the riches of peaceful France. He told me once in all sincerity that before the war he had never borne a grudge against any man, that he had been content to live at peace with all the world, but that now he was changed—he hated the Germans bitterly—"above all," he added, his voice quivering with impotent rage, "this fat pig of an under-officer who occupies himself with us orderlies. Nom d'un chien!" (his invariable expletive) "one can only think he is put over us on purpose to annoy us." [258]

Poor Henry! I knew the gentleman to whom he referred—a fine type of the fat bully rejoicing in a position of power over unfortunate men who could in no way retaliate.

At first we had accepted Henry gladly as a kind of unconscious buffoon whose absurdities would enliven a few of our many dull hours. But in course of time we discovered other and more pleasing traits in him. He was a devout Catholic and, in his humble fashion, a staunch Republican. One day I asked him why he attached so much importance to that form of government. [259]

"Sous la république, mon capitaine," he replied with dignity, "on est libre."

Free! free to work sixty hours a week for twenty years and then to march off to a war not of his making with but twelve francs in his pocket, leaving a wife and three children behind him to starve!

Like most Frenchmen of his class Henry was thrifty to a degree; I doubt if he spent sixpence a week on himself. With the blind faith of a child he one day confided his savings to me because he was afraid the Germans might search him. By their regulations he was only allowed to have ten marks in his possession at once—the surplus he was supposed to deposit with the paymaster. But I really think he would rather have thrown the money away than done so. He kept a five-franc piece sewn in the lining of his trousers "in case," he informed me, "we get separated when the war is over. Of course you would send me the rest, but when I get back to France I must be able to celebrate my return."

Each week he used to add to the little hoard which I kept for him, knowing not only the total but even what actual coins were there. [260]

Upon occasions he could be courtesy itself. One day a Russian officer came into our room at a

moment when Henry was standing idly by the table looking at the pictures in an English magazine. The Russian, mistaking him for a French officer, saluted, bowed, and held out his hand. An English private would have been embarrassed—not so Henry. With that true politeness which always endeavours to prevent others from feeling uncomfortable he returned the salute and the bow and shook the proffered hand! Could tact have gone further?

On Christmas Day we gave him a box of fifty cigars. He was immensely touched and overwhelmingly grateful. Tears sprang to his eyes as he told us that he had never had so many cigars before—even in France.

"Avec ça," he exclaimed, fingering the box, "je serai content pour un an," and he insisted with charming grace, that we should each accept one then and there.

His musical talent was discovered when some one received a concertina from England. Coming into the room suddenly on the following morning I surprised Henry sitting upon my bed giving what was a quite passable rendering of "Tipperary." In no way abashed, he remained where he was, only ceasing to play for a moment to tell me that the concertina was too small—a toy, in fact. The truth was, I rather think, that his enormous fingers found difficulty in pressing less than two stops at once. He admitted that he had a passion for music, that he had learnt the harmonium from a blind man in Commines, and that he had had an accordion specially made for him in Belgium at a cost of 260 francs which had taken him years to save. He was inclined to turn up his nose at catchy airs and music-hall songs, preferring what he called *la grande musique*, by which I think he meant opera. Eventually he was given the concertina as a present and went off delighted—doing no more work that day.

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The optimism with which Henry had begun his prison life gradually faded away. At one time he was certain that he would be home for Christmas, then for Easter; finally I think he had resigned himself to remaining where he was for life. It was his habit to believe implicitly every rumour that he heard; and since there were seldom less than fifty new ones current every day, he had a busy time retailing them, and was, in consequence, always either buoyed up with false hope or weighed down with unnecessary despair.

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But it was at about the end of December that he began to get anxious and worried. Up till then he had been more or less content. His was not a super-martial spirit; he did not pine to be "at them" again nor did he chafe under the restrictions of a life of confinement. He confessed frankly that he was not anxious to fight again, but that when his day's work (!) was done he enjoyed sitting by the stove in the stable "avec les camarades" (the servants lived in the stables) "tandis que chacun raconte sa petite histoire de la guerre."

One day he told me what was on his mind. He had had no news of his family since leaving home five months before. At first he had not worried, knowing that letters took a long time. But an answer was overdue by this time—others had heard from home. "Every day," he said, "there are letters, but none for me." I could proffer sympathy but not, alas! advice, and I hadn't the heart to tell him that Commines was in the thick of the fighting, and had probably been blown to pieces long ago. His wife and children *might* be safe, but they were almost certainly homeless refugees. From that day on he used often to come and talk to me about his happy life before the war, growing sadder and sadder as the weeks passed and still he had no news.

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I shall always remember Henry's pathetic little figure by the gate on the morning I left the prison, his baggy trousers more discoloured than ever, his enormous right hand at the salute, and his lips twisted into that wistful smile of his. I wonder what has happened to his wife and little daughters. I wonder if he or I or any one will ever know.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Of the contents of this book, SNATTY and FIVE-FOUR-EIGHT appeared in BLACKWOOD'S, and were both written before the war broke out—a fact which I mention with the selfish object of excusing myself for various technical errors therein: HENRY appeared in THE NEW STATESMAN. My thanks are due to the editors of both these journals for kindly allowing me to republish the stories. The remainder have all appeared in THE CORNHILL MAGAZINE, to the editor of which I am deeply indebted for his unfailing courtesy and assistance.

FLANDERS,
November, 1916.

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