BACK TO BLIGHTY

TLE STORIES RECORDED

CAPTAIN A.J. DAWSON

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

CAPTAIN BRUCE

BAIRNSFATHER

The worst of "Kultur" is
— it shows so
in the face

BACK TO BLIGHTY


cheero!

This determined forder of rivers, from north of Tweed to north of Ancre, has definite ideas about the Rhine.

Frontispiece.

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CHAPTER I

JOHN BULL AT WAR.

MANY wonders have been produced by this great war, including the bringing home into the sanctuary of the hearts and minds of practically all the men, women and children of the most peaceable nation in the world some understanding of what war—life and death war on a great scale—means. It is fully a century since the little word war has had anything approximately resembling the same personal significance for the ordinary run of people in these islands that it has to-day.

Britain has been harshly criticised for

her extreme unpreparedness for war, as disclosed by Germany's outrageous aggression of August, 1914. Her people probably deserve the blame that has been laid at their door. Certainly they were utterly unprepared. Certainly, also, they had been warned many times of their danger by authorities whose military and general knowledge and experience should have given weight to their words. But, whether or not we may regret it, Britain's unpreparedness for this war—the persistent scepticism of her people as to the possibility of its coming—was entirely in keeping with the general attitude and temperament of this people, and with the national character.

The British people may be insular, careless, and not over gracious. There is

no more magnanimous people, and none in the world more given to thinking the best about its neighbours in all serious matters. The average Englishman, for example, might smile or sniff in a most irritating and, if you will, foolish manner over what he regarded as a peculiarity in any foreigner. But he has always been the slowest man in the world to suspect foreign individuals or nations of baseness, of criminal intentions. The armed invasion of a little State like Belgium, the deliberate plunging of a continent into bloody war for purposes of self-aggrandisement—this strikes a Briton as a crime of an extraordinarily brutal and heinous character. The average Briton never contemplated any such infamy himself and, quite sincerely, never believed that any other nation

contemplated or would perpetrate such an outrageous crime.

That, in the last analysis, is why Britain was totally unprepared for this war. It took the average Briton many weeks to realise that Germany really had committed this unforgivable crime. Months had to pass before his radically good-natured, easy-going mind fully grasped the stark fact that Germany had coldly prepared for this crime for many years, and meant really to carry it through to its bloody end. Then quietly, slowly, with extraordinary but quite characteristic deliberateness, the average Briton in the street made up his mind about it all. You have to figure him —and his wife—passing some such verdict as this :—

" Well, but look here, you know, this

isn't playing the game. This is a crime. We had all agreed to protect Belgium. This is simply murder and robbery. It's all very fine to aim at a place in the sun, expansion, progress, and that kind of thing; but this job that Germany's started isn't business at all. It isn't the thing. Hang it! It isn't common decency. Nobody would ever be safe if this kind of thing were to be allowed. It's clean against all the rules. We shall have to stop it, whatever happens, or there'll be an end of freedom. But Germany won't stop. She has millions of soldiers and thousands of guns, and she is simply hacking her way through everything—women and children, too."

You see John Bull, with his rather stupid, kindly face, his worried look,

scratching his head, greatly annoyed to think how many of his peaceable engagements this will upset. And at long last, very regretfully, he says: "Well, it seems there's nothing else for it. Apparently these Germans won't take no for an answer. One always thought them quite decent fellows, too. Queer! I sent my Expeditionary Force to warn 'em. But they won't be warned. Well, if they won't bend they must break, that's all. A pity; but there's clearly no other way, so here goes!"

John Bull may deserve blame for having been totally unprepared for Germany's murderous aggression. The attack did find him unready; but it drew no whimpering from him because of that. With one hand he helped—France, at least, will never forget the original Expeditionary Force;

neither will Germany; and the world knows what the British Navy has done—to hold the garrotter at bay, whilst with the other he set to work to produce munitions, stores and money for himself and all his Allies. John never ceased to play for his "side." The mere unreadiness of his hands proves, at all events, that they were clean, void of that blood guilt of premeditation which through all the ages to come must convict Germany as chief instigator of the greatest crime in history.

For two years John played for his "side" with one hand, while the other strove mightily in the preparation of material, also for his "side," quite as much as for himself. And then, on a day which neither John, nor his French comrades, nor his Teutonic enemies will ever

forget, John brought both hands into play, having schooled his vast munitions output and his training system to run alone. That was on July 1st, 1916. That marked the end of the period of holding Germany off, and the beginning of the period of beating Germany. The second period may last longer than the first, or it may prove rather shorter. It is the period of punishment: the purgative and, we may hope, curative period. The question of whether it is to be long or short concerns Germany even more than it concerns John or his Allies. One thing is perfectly certain, and that is that the preparations have been completed, and will prove adequate if the period should cover a dozen years. While John lives he will not slacken or withdraw from the task he has set himself.

As John Bull sees it, the only kind of life he cares about, the life of freedom and of playing the game according to its rules, is unattainable whilst the menace of German cut-throat military aggression remains. Therefore, that menace has got to be removed and will be removed, and nothing else is of interest to, or will be attempted by, John Bull until this removal has been completed.

On July 1st began the Somme offensive. Ever since, it has gone on remorselessly, like a process of nature. The German writers say it is slow. Their soldiers say it is incredibly bitter. Truth says there is this about it: it has embraced a little of pretty nearly everything known to modern fighters, except one thing—fluctuation. There have been many halts for consolidation.

There has been no going back on the Allied side. Its retirements have been exclusively German. Every power that the whole military might and science of the Central Empires could bring to bear has been brought to bear on the Somme, and very often the attackers have been held up by demonstrations of gun strength unprecedented in all the annals of warfare. But never once have they been driven back since July 1st.

There is a moral in that. And if the German people, as a whole, have not yet been permitted to take that moral to heart, there are not wanting proofs that it has been fully realised by their leaders. As to whether the German rank and file understand already the true nature of the period ushered in by the morning of July 1st, I

am reminded of the simple utterances of a young lad whom I last saw lying in the shaded upper bunk of a hospital train about to pull out from the docks at Southampton. He had just been landed from the Red Cross ship, and fifty hours before that had been fighting Boches, hand to hand and knee to knee, in a blood-stained, corpse-strewn waste of muddy shell holes north-east of Thiepval.

The son of an English country parson, this young officer won his second star before, by all strict rights, his years entitled him to his first. He has twice been wounded, and for months on end has successfully commanded men in the field—and been almost worshipped by them—at an age when, in times of peace, he would hardly have left school.

I hope he will not lose his eyesight. I know very well he never will lose heart, as the saying is, while breath is in his body. The bandages covered most of his face while I talked with him; yet essentially his outlook was—but let me just put down here in their plain English simplicity his own words. That is what one has tried to do throughout this little book—just to set down their own words, for a few of the wounded of all ranks, as they landed at Southampton—back in Blighty—from the Somme. He said :—

"I think the Boches mostly know the game's up for them. You see, sir, they're jolly well trained soldiers and, anyhow, they've no choice but to go on fighting, and doing their best, too; because, apart from anything we can do—to oblige 'em, you

"Well, if the 'owitzers can't knock this —— stuff out, I'll —— well do it myself."

know, sir—the driving power behind them is pretty stiff. A German bullet in the back makes just as nasty a hole as an English bullet in front. We saw something last Thursday, just before I was pipped, of the way they are driven out of their trenches to meet our boys, who run at 'em singing, as you know. Oh, they've got to fight, and they're well enough trained and disciplined to fight really hard, too—until it comes to hand to hand. Then they've somehow no stomach for our chaps.

"But, as I say, I think they know the game's up, sir. Oh, I think so. After all, you know, sir, although they have been so frightfully stupid in some things, one knows they've learned things out of books, and, even if we hadn't shown them since July, they must know from history that

when the English really do get down to serious business they can't be beaten. They must know that: they can't seriously believe they can beat us on equal terms. Why, they couldn't really beat us even at eight to one, in the beginning of the war. And then, sir, look at the French! Look at Verdun!

"They may be jolly clever, these Boches, at bagman's tricks—making shoddy, underselling, and so on. And they're great swotters, of course; no end of application and industry—like ants. But when you get 'em man for man, you know, sir, a German private or non-commissioned officer against one of ours—well, I mean, the Boche is off his game at once. He just swipes with his eyes shut, and our chap gets his middle stump next ball, sure as

fate. Now the Frenchman, he's a sport; and a gentleman, too, you know, sir, officer or private. He's absolutely different from our chaps, but—he gets there every time. I saw a lot of 'em, down on our right, in this show. He's got a kind of a fire about him, has the Frenchman, a sort of dash, a cut and come again. By Jove, he's fine, you know, sir! No Boche has that. They're more like cattle; good cattle, of course, and well herded; but cattle. But our chaps are men, with a good bit of the devil in 'em when they're warmed up; and the French—well, they're French, you know, sir. They're like their own Seventy-fives. They go over the sticks like—like bombs. You can't beat 'em.

"Our chaps don't care much now how long it takes. They know they've got the

Boche. They've got him measured up, you know, sir. They know just how many points they can give him, and they know he can't stop 'em. It puzzles Master Fritz when he hears our chaps laughing and singing. But it's simple enough, really. They've tried him out. They know they can beat him; and, in his heart of hearts, he knows it too."

CHAPTER II

ATTACK AND COUNTER-ATTACK

Our firing line in France is a queer place, where one sees some strange happenings. No-Man's-Land is an extraordinary place; mighty eerie o' nights and pretty deadly at any time. But I am inclined to think that of all the wonderful points in this war perhaps the most wonderful is the landing-stage at Southampton.

Among the wounded arriving in the hospital ships at Southampton, the general level of high spirits and confidence seems to rise each week; though, at first, that seemed impossible. Whether a man's

injuries be slight or severe, one finds no suggestion here of men broken in the war. Nowhere is there a sign of that. Rather, on all hands, is the suggestion that here are men temporarily released, for a holiday more than for cure and convalescence, from the furious turmoil of victorious fighting, of which the end is assured. Whatever other people may think, our wounded are absolutely certain as to the ultimate upshot of the fighting, and admit elements of speculation only on the point of how long the process of crushing Germany's military power may take.

"It may be soon, and it may be late; but we've got them absolutely; and they know it. The whole thing is absolutely different from 1914 and 1915, when they had all the advantages of men and

metal on their side. The only question now is how long it will take. There's any amount of fight left in the Boche machine; only, its doom is set. It can't win; and I'm pretty sure the bosses behind it know that now; since July 1."

The speaker, whose left arm was slung, and whose head was bandaged for slight scalp wounds, was in a position to speak with some authority, for, since late 1915, he has been a valued member of the Brigade Staff, in a Division which has done most admirable work in the southern sector of our line. Within a few yards of him, on the deck of the hospital ship—an hour later both were speeding on their journeys to opposite ends of Great Britain, in two of our beautifully fitted Red Cross trains—was a young officer (well known at

Ranelagh, Hurlingham and Brooklands in civil life), who has risen, since the autumn of 1914, to be second-in-command of a fine Service Battalion. His two wounds were both slight—machine-gun bullets—and he hopes to be with his Battalion once more before the month is out. Questioned about the Somme advance, he modestly disclaimed any personal knowledge of it :

" Sorry to say we hadn't the luck to be in the start. Someone had to be behind, you know, at first, and, as luck had it, it fell to my Battalion. So we weren't in that glorious Saturday advance. No, I got my little punctures—nothing, really, but the M.O. hustled me out of it to the Field Ambulance—in a Boche counter-attack south-east of Contalmaison. In the first counter-attack they made there the Boches

came at us with really magnificent dash, and it looked as though they must submerge us. I'm bound to say they fought well. They seemed wonderfully certain of themselves. The last few minutes of that attack especially I shall never forget. Wave after wave—it was like fighting against a rising tide. But our fellows stood their ground with extraordinary tenacity. If Boche could have lasted another ten minutes he might have downed us by sheer weight. But our chaps were too much for him at close quarters. Their blood was up, and they fairly let themselves go. I never saw Englishmen so—how do you call it?—so un-self-conscious and abandoned to the heat of their job. They fought like furies. I got nothing in that scrap but a cut hand, when I grabbed a

Boche bayonet. I'd lost my revolver, and had to tackle that blighter with my hands, till I got his rifle from him. Then his number was up, and I made my first score with the steel. You can take it from me it's more exciting than polo.

"Well, then they came at us again, reorganised for a second counter-attack, about an hour and a half later; just as our chaps were trying to get something to eat. And that attack was a complete failure. They hadn't a chance in it. We had machine-guns waiting for 'em, and, positively, I believe the yells of our fellows frightened Boche more than the bullets. He put up a very poor show, anyhow; quite different in spirit from the first one. But yet I had the bad luck to get pipped in it. My theory is the same men must have

been employed; but this time they were hopelessly disillusioned men. The reason I think that is partly what I gathered from a prisoner. I met three of them helping to carry back some of our wounded under the guidance of a Red Cross corporal, and one of these three had been a hotel waiter in London for years and knew England as well as I do; most intelligent chap, and utterly sick of the war. He talked to me in just the sort of tone he'd have used if he'd been taking my order for supper. He admitted he'd got all the information he could for his own country during the time he'd spent in London.

"Well, this chap said that in his regiment the officers had explained to them that our advance on July 1st, on their particular front, was made by the Brigade

of Guards (who've never been near the place, you know), but that the Guards had since been withdrawn to another front, what was left of 'em, and that the British troops now in our line there were 'Kitchener's conscripts,' and all quaking in their boots, at that. 'We were told you would throw down your rifles directly we got close to you, and that you knew no more about soldiering than children,' said my waiter chap. 'We came on for a walk-over, to have the sport of going right through your line. We were told we need not bother with prisoners and could knock you over like driven birds. Well, as you know, it was not so.' And he kind of grinned at me at that. 'Indeed,' says he, 'it was very otherwise, sir, wasn't it?'

"'Very otherwise!' My hat! I should

think it was 'very otherwise.' I bet my fellows gave 'em the hottest quarter of an hour of their lives. They weren't in the mood for negotiations, I can tell you; but just kill and come again. Oh, it was a sweet thing! But I wish I could have been in the first advance."

A young officer whose unit advanced from opposite Carnoy said his men suffered comparatively few casualties in No-Man's-Land, though he himself was hit as he crossed our own parapet. But, although hit in the left shoulder, he reached the fourth Boche trench, with his platoon still three parts intact, or nearly so.

"What pleased me was the way my fellows carried on when we got there. It happened that every single one of my N.C.O.'s was knocked out before then,

and I was obliged to squat down in the mouth of a ruined dug-out there. I was no more good; but the men I had left carried on exactly as though under their usual N.C.O.'s on a field day show. They bombed the dug-outs, and sent back what prisoners they got, and without pausing a minute, set to work building up a parapet where the Boche parados had been, just as I'd told 'em before we started. They were fine. And, mind you, after a burst like that, a man would give a good bit for a quiet sit down for a minute or two. But not one of 'em took it."

A wounded lance-corporal of a south-country regiment was proud of a singular curio he had from the battle-field, and prouder yet of the way he obtained it. Directly after he was wounded he had the

luck to capture a German captain, entirely to his own cheek. This officer had carried two weapons—a pistol, which he aimed at the lance-corporal, and a whip, which the lance-corporal now proudly carries. The whip has a short haft, and two thongs, each with a strand of wire twisted in the end of it. The pistol missed fire, perhaps. At all events, the arm that wielded it was pinned, skewered right through, by the lance-corporal's bayonet. And, after that, the lance-corporal, himself bleeding freely from his wound, carried the whip, and marched his prisoner back to one of our own dressing stations, where they were both bandaged, and the German officer led away to the rear. "But I reckon his whip wasn't meant for us. That's their notion of leading their men, I think, sir," said the

lance-corporal. If this be so, a certain number of German soldiers will be glad to have seen the last of this particular captain for the period of the war, and there is no special ground for rejoicing in the fact that the lance-corporal's bayonet took the fellow's arm, and not his heart.

CHAPTER III

THE PADRE'S VIEW

It would seem to be clear that, as is the case with our French Allies, the British High Command in France has now attained an extraordinarily high standard of efficiency in the matter of flesh and blood economy. No doubt, the ultimate dictators in this vital matter are the makers of munitions. Every munition worker in Britain should try to realise this. They have the powers of life and death in their hands now. Our casualty lists are theirs to lighten or lengthen, according to the continued rapid increase of munitions

output, or to any sort of check or wavering in that output.

But, having made due allowance for that, the scientific manner in which the French and British High Commands have succeeded in reducing the cost of offensve action, in flesh and blood, is little short of miraculous. The whole thing is as much systematised as any process could be in the peaceful security of a great laboratory or manufactory. And yet the difficulties! —the difficulties which a year or two ago would have been pronounced by all both insuperable and incalculable——. But it is hopeless to attempt even to indicate these in writing; though one may form a dim conception of them from talk with wounded men newly arrived from the fighting line.

And as to that phrase: "newly arrived"—it is to be noted, as evidence of the relief of pressure and the smooth working of scientific organisation, that the wounded who arrive each day at Southampton now are different, not alone in numbers—in which respect there is, of course, no longer any comparison with the early days of the offensive—but in condition. The most of them have been rested and tended in our hospitals and clearing stations in France, which are as comfortably and scrupulously well administered as any in England, for from six to ten days or so, before making the journey to Blighty. Very many are coming home now, rather for recuperation, convalescence, and "picking up again," than for healing treatment.

An invalided padre (the Army Chaplain is always a "padre") said to me on the landing stage:

"It is only right our people at home should understand that the front in France is—well, really, you know, it is as near an approximation to mortal ideas of hell as anything that mortal eyes will ever see. The Hun has undoubtedly forced upon Europe a veritable hell upon earth. It is beyond words terrible; and all the skill and science in the world cannot alter that. But the way our troops live through it, the way they 'stick it,' as we say—why, that is a marvellous illustration of the triumph of mind over matter; of morality over sheer devilishness.

"It is quite the exception to find a man showing the slightest sign of depression,

or even irritation. If one finds men doing a little grousing one is quite pleased; because one knows they must be better off at the moment than usual. They never grouse when things are at their worst. That is the time when they sing and cheer, and crack their queer jokes. What I regard as an essentially religious spirit is most extraordinarily strong in our men.

"I could fill books in describing what I mean by that spirit. But calm and cheerful endurance of the apparently unendurable, and unfailing readiness on the part of those most terribly situated themselves to assist those even more hardly hit or badly placed; combined with unvarying and universal readiness to carry on, cheerily without a murmur, and with

one's whole heart, in the pursuance of duty, when duty is infinitely harder and much more difficult than any civilian in England has ever dreamed of its being, in conditions such as the hardest worked and poorest civilian worker has never suffered for one hour—that's all part of it.

"Up there near Trones Wood last week I found a man with a badly injured foot, who had been ordered back to get his foot dressed. What do you think he had done, with never a word about it from anyone, before starting? He had heard, or fancied he heard, a faint sound of moaning from a shell hole, out beyond the trench in which he was injured. He had crawled out there on his belly, and found there a wounded man who had lain in that hole for three whole days and

nights, utterly helpless—chilled to the bone by night, scorched and blackened by the pitiless sun in the days; with foul earth about his lips, and never a drop of moisture of any kind. The man with the injured foot had secured the fill of his own water-bottle to help him on his limping way down to the dressing station. What does he do now? He used the whole of his treasured drink to cleanse the mouth of the man in the shell hole, and for that poor chap to drink; then, with infinite labour, dragged him back to cover; and, when I found him, was carrying the man pick-a-back, and limping along with him to the dressing station—his own right foot being really badly injured, mind you.

"I have seen things like that during every single day of this offensive. Nobody

had told the man with the injured foot to do anything but look after himself. He was entirely unconscious that he had done anything in the least out of the way, and couldn't for the life of him see what I could find to admire in his action, any more than I should admire him for the loan of a match. Our fellows are doing this kind of thing all the time, often using abominably bad language while doing it, and always taking such things with a laugh and a joke, as an ordinary part of the day's work. If this is not true Christianity, what is it ?

" Our Army ! Oh, I can't pretend to any military knowledge. I am very proud indeed to serve them, I can tell you ; God bless their brave hearts ! We have an Army of heroes. The words may be

stale. They *are* heroes, from their Generals to their last-joined privates. They are the truest sort of Christians; many of them without knowing it—fighting against the forces of hell itself, and overcoming them. Do you know what have become the most beautiful material objects in the world to my eyes? Shells, guns, munitions. Why? Because they are substitutes for the most precious flesh and blood in the world—the flesh and blood of our truest Christians. The more we have of the one the less we need to sacrifice of the other. That's why the deadly things have become of all things the most beautiful in my eyes. That is why if I were not the servant of our men in another capacity, I should be working in a munition factory at home to-day."

CHAPTER IV

FROM GERMAN TRENCHES

THE following is an extract from a letter received in hospital in London by an officer who was wounded during the early part of the Somme fighting.

"We had an exceptionally hot time between Pozieres and Bazentin le Petit; the sort of time you would have enjoyed, because it included a lot of close work; the sort of strafing in which one could see the faces of the men one was fighting with; what you used to call 'very' interesting,' and some of us used to think too 'interesting' to be comfortable.

"Just now we are back for a dose of 'alleged rest,' to use your own phrase. As an actual fact we really have had a night's rest; most luxurious. But the thing that would interest you is the place we've had it in. You remember—you're not likely to forget—'the sunken road,' where the old farm-cart lay upside down in No-Man's-Land. Remember the dip, where you put your hand in the caved-in chest of that dead Boche, when we were crawling, on our first patrol. What a night! Those damned machine-guns playing from Ovillers on our left, and La Boisselle on our right. Very well. Shut your eyes, and look along to the south, past the old roller to the mound where we scuppered that Boche patrol. Remember those sort of chalky cliffs in their front

line there; quarter left from the advanced trench we dug; where they had it so honeycombed with machine-gun emplacements. Right there, my son, is where we had our night's rest. I was in a German company commander's dug-out, with —— and ——. For breakfast next morning we went up to a huge old dug-out in the Boche's old support line. You remember that dark brown gravelly bit, where you spotted their trench excavator machine at work, and got our heavies on to it that afternoon; up the hill from the queer curtained place that our artillery smashed up the day poor —— was killed. Just south of that, in a communication trench, is a dug-out you could accommodate half a battalion in. That's where we had brekker. After breakfast I made a


"OUT SINCE MONS"
'Ere Bert! where's the 'at rack
Bruce Bairnsfather

regular tour round with —— of the ——s.

"I suppose it would seem nothing to other people, but you, who were here with us through all those dismal winter months —will one ever forget those patrols, and the wiring parties; that awful left sector, where we joined up with —— ?—you will understand how thrilling it was to be able to walk about on that ground in broad daylight, smoking one's pipe. Remember how our chaps used to risk their lives in the early days for such silly souvenirs as nose-caps, and that kind of thing. You could gather 'em by the cartload hereabouts, and Boche caps and buttons, and bits of uniform and boots, and broken rifles and odd tags of equipment; cartloads of it. To other folk, and on the

maps, one place seems just like another, I suppose, but to us—La Boisselle and Ovillers—my hat! To walk about in these hells. Not one of those broken walls we knew so well through our glasses is standing now, and only a few jagged spikes where the trees were. I went along the 'sunken road' all the way to Contalmaison.

"Talk about sacred ground! When I think what that No-Man's-Land was to us for nearly a year! The new troops coming up now go barging across it in the most light-hearted way. They know nothing about it. It means no more to them than the roads behind used to mean to us. It's all behind to them and never was the front. But when I think how we watered every yard of it with blood and sweat—

those devilish Narrows, you know. Children might play there now if it didn't look so much like the aftermath of an earthquake. But, you know, there's a kind of a wrench about seeing the new chaps swagger over it so carelessly, and seeing it gradually merged into the Behind the Line country. I have a sort of feeling it ought to be marked off somehow; a permanent memorial.

"You remember that old couple who had the blacksmith's shop at ——. The wife was down at the corner by —— the other night, when I came along with half the platoon. I found her wringing the hands of some of our stolid chaps in 13, and couldn't make it out. Then she told me, half sobbing, how she and her husband owned a couple of fields just beyond our

old front line, and how she wanted to thank us for getting them back. Think of it. Think what those fields must have been in the spring of 1914, and what they are to-day; every yard of 'em torn by shells, burrowed through and through by old trenches and dug-outs; think of the hundreds of tons of wire, sand-bags, timber, galvanised iron, duck-boards, revetting stuff, steel, iron, blood and sweat; the rum jars, bully beef tins, old trench boots, field dressings, cartridge cases, rockets, wire stanchions and stakes, gas gongs, bomb boxes, S.A.A. cases, broken canteens, bits of uniforms, and buried soldiers, and Boches—all in the old lady's two little fields. Think how she must have felt, after two years, to know we'd got 'em back. She's walked over them by now, I daresay.

"But I must get a move on. We're for the thick of it again to-morrow morning. Advance on that Bapaume road, my boy. Our cavalry will know something about it before so very long. It's some advance, all right. You mustn't grouse too much about not being with us; but I wish to God you could be. For, I can tell you, I think we've got 'em really moving this time. They'll never get back the ground we've won, and the advantage of it over our old line is beyond words. But don't be in a hurry. Tell everybody they mustn't be impatient. It can't be a quick job; but, if I know anything about it, it's going to be a very sure one. My notion is the Boche will fight it out to the last gasp. His army is a very fine machine, and their discipline is so good they simply must

fight to the bitter end. But, all the same, I believe he knows now that he's beaten. But he didn't know it until July 1st. The prisoners are thundering glad to be prisoners, I can assure you."

CHAPTER V

THE MAN WITH THE TWISTED NOSE

"I DARESAY you know more about the Push generally than I do. We haven't had much chance of reading newspapers lately," said a senior officer among the wounded landed at Southampton. (In the last advance above Pozieres this officer got a rifle bullet through his left thigh, and escaped death narrowly by virtue of the steel helmet he wore, the crown of which was dinted in till it touched his head, evidently by a biggish scrap of shrapnel.)

"Judging simply from what I have seen

myself—our battalion has been in the thick of it all the time since July 1st, barring two little rests of three days each —the thing that impresses me is that the gains we have made since the first week have cost a great deal less than the start. In fact, the whole thing seems to me progressively good. That's what makes it all so very hopeful, I think; it's extraordinarily well managed.

"Of course, everyone has known for a long time that either side could temporarily seize a sector of enemy trench at any stage, providing they were prepared to pay a tremendous price. At all events, we thought that up till a little while back. I'm not quite so sure about it now, as far as the Boche's capabilities are concerned. I have my doubts about his being able to

take any of our line, unless we really wanted him to have it, knowing perfectly well we could take it back after he had paid a very heavy price.

"But, until this Push came, the problem was, first, how to take any of the enemy line at a price which would not be altogether prohibitive, and then how to be sure of holding it once it had been got and paid for. As a problem, that's a washout, now. The last few weeks have shown us that, as the business is managed now, we can eat away at the Boche's line at a price, in man-power, which is strictly reasonable and worth while, and hold what we bite off with something approaching certainty. The thing's progressive; that's the feature of it that keeps all our chaps in such fine heart. Paying terribly

dearly in flesh and blood, and then losing what you've bought, is a process to take the heart out of the finest troops in the world. There's none of that in this present show.

"No doubt there are a lot of causes contributing to this; but I would place three of them first: Perfectly methodical pre-arrangement, including splendidly thought-out communications; abundance of guns and ammunition; the lie of the land. Every trench gained is not only ground gained from the Boche, but material strategical advantage in position. It's an uphill game, you see, in more senses than one.* You'd hardly credit what a joy

* This officer was wounded and left the front before our troops reached the crown of the first ridge, which they have long since crossed and left well behind them.—A. J. D.

it is to the men getting on to these higher positions, and out of the deadly pockets in which all the physical advantages of the ground lay with the Boche. The start of a Push like this was absolutely bound to be costly, but the continuation of it—which I suppose is what he never expected—is proving a thundering sight more costly to the Hun, I can assure you.

"'Acts of bravery and distinction!' Well now, do you know I have seen more acts of that sort on every day of the last month than I ever saw in my whole life put together, before. You must never suppose that the only deeds of heroism are those that get into dispatches and win decorations. Judged by any standard we ever had before, I assure you it's no exaggeration to say that scores of

thousands of V.C.'s have been earned by our fellows since July 1st. You could hardly begin to notice 'em without injustice to the hundreds you'd never hear of. Nine times out of ten one never knows who the men are that do the fine things one sees.

"Take our last 'do,' now, from Pozieres; the one I was knocked out in. Night time, you know, but moonlight, never properly dark. The Boche communication trenches were blocked by our bombers, and a lot of Boches scrambled out over their parados, and made back overland. I was on the extreme right of our battalion, and I climbed out over the parados, or what was left of it, with a whole lot of our fellows, chasing the Boche. We shot a lot that way, and bayoneted some.

"Must have been twenty or thirty paces

in rear of the trench when I was knocked over, in a bit of a hollow. I was rather dazed at first. Then I heard the order given several times for our chaps to get back to the trench. They were at work consolidating, I expect. There was some hand-to-hand fighting not far from me, where some of our fellows had caught up a bunch of Boches. I could see it plainly enough in the moonlight. Then, after the shouting for our chaps to get back, I saw a big, burly, dark chap with a queerly bent nose making back for our trench. I'm practically certain he was not of our battalion; a fine, big man, anyhow, with nothing on his head.

"It was queer to see him striding back, in a jerky, hesitating sort of a way, as though a string were pulling him after the

Boches, but not strong enough to overcome the pressure the other way of discipline. He'd had his orders to get back. That trench was our objective.

"He was just on the edge of my hole, when he swung right round, facing the Boches, and I saw what he saw, twenty or thirty paces off. Two of our men were down, wounded, and three Boches were prodding at 'em with their bayonets, meaning to take 'em along back, you see, as prisoners. Two of the poor devils struggled up to their feet, and fell again. They'd nothing in their hands. The Boches were yelling at 'em to get on, and as one fell again, a Boche kicked him on the side of the head.

"At that, my big chap with the twisted nose let out a roar like an angry bull.

'You dirty German swine!' he yelled, and he made one bolt of it for those Boches. Mind, there were plenty bullets flying, and there wasn't a sign of another man of ours about then on his feet. Run! That fellow fairly bounded over the broken ground. The Boches ran, too; and they yelled; screamed like frightened women. One of 'em got clear away; but my dark chap stuck one through the back, and the other he just jumped on, brought him down and smashed him.

"The fire got a bit hotter, and I saw no more of the dark chap. Must have been bowled over, I thought And I was sorry for that. But five minutes later, the fire slackened again, and next thing I saw was my dark chap crawling past the side of my hole with one of these wounded men

of ours on his back. I thought that was pretty good for him. But ten minutes later, hanged if he didn't come striding past me again; no crawling this time; walking at his full height, and with a regular swing, as if he'd been crossing a parade ground, instead of a ploughed-up No-Man's-Land, with a dropping fire falling all across it.

"I plainly saw him get hold of that other wounded man of ours, and fix him across his back; but then he went down on hands and knees, and started crawling back for the trench. You see, he'd go upright himself, but preferred to give the other fellow a better chance by crawling; though, mind you, it's not easy over ground like that. I lay very low, partly to escape fire and partly because I didn't

want to attract that dark chap's attention, or I felt he'd come out again for me; and it was hardly to be expected he'd get through three trips. I felt sure that if I could just lie there and rest a bit I could manage to get in all right on my own, and I promised myself I'd find out who this dark chap with the twisted nose was, and let his Company Commander know the stamp of man he was.

"As it happened, I think I must have been unconscious for a while after that. Anyhow, it was getting near daylight when I did crawl into the trench, and then I came jolly near being killed by one of our own sentries, who took me for a Boche patrol, and fired at me once before I could change his mind. If I'd been able to get about I might have found

out who that dark chap was, but, after all, the Army's full of men like that, full of 'em. I've seen a good many things as good, myself. But, mind you, it was cool, you know, the way he came back the second time; and for that matter, a man's got to have good stuff in him under fire to start off absolutely on his own, on a punitive expedition, chasing Boches, when he and his mates have been ordered back to a trench. Our men are individuals, you see; not just cogs in a machine, and the Boche is starting out now on the process of learning this."

CHAPTER VI

TWO BITS OF ONE FRONT

DAILY conversation with the wounded officers and men represents a liberal education in the study of war news. From it one soon learns that a certain training is required for the right understanding of the news.

The infinite variety of men's experiences in active warfare is such that an officer or a man in one battalion may quite easily form a radically different impression of a given engagement from that formed by an officer or a man of the battalion on his immediate flank. The observer who

concludes that one or other of his informants must be wrong in his conclusions, or that the impression of one or other must be the correct impression of the whole engagement, will certainly be led astray. The impressions of both are probably quite sound; but—and this is the point to remember—their impressions are not at all impressions of an engagement, but of single, sharply limited facets in the combined front of that engagement. And, over a front of, say, one mile it is easily possible that half-a-dozen conclusions may be arrived at, so widely different that one may be diametrically opposed to another, and yet all be perfectly accurate, as regards the particular bit of line to which they refer.

To illustrate this, one records here, from

one's notes, the remarks of an English Temporary officer, and an Australian private, both of whom were wounded in the advance from Pozieres, in which our troops gained some five hundred yards upon a three-thousand-yard front. Both the Australian and the Englishman spoke in all good faith of what their own eyes had seen, and spoke frankly, without fear or favour. But it would be incorrect to accept the conclusions of either as applying to this particular action generally, still less to draw conclusions regarding the enemy morale generally, from what fell within the narrow bounds of eye-range for two individuals in an advance.

The English officer, of a south-country regiment, advanced from the left of the position of the Australians—that is, from

the side nearest Thiepval, a notable German stronghold. He said:

"It was almost dark when we went over, and we'd a longish way to go, on an upgrade, too, the better part of five hundred yards, I think. I don't think the Boche was expecting us. At all events his machine gun fire was not so hot as I had anticipated—nothing near so intense as we had in advancing easterly from Authille way on July 1st. At the same time there was quite enough of it, and more than a third of my platoon were wounded before we got to the Boche front line, and I think the proportion in the rest of the company—my left, that was—was heavier.

"The ground had all been pretty much torn up, you know; there wasn't a yard of smooth going; but as for the Boche

trenches themselves — well, they were hardly trenches at all. The whole place had been pulverised. You may guess, when I tell you that at twenty or thirty yards I wasn't quite sure where their trench began, and I came to the conclusion that there were no Boches holding it at all.

"Then, quite suddenly, they appeared —seemed to spring out of the earth all round, and I must say they fought well and hard. I saw no cases of hands up, not a single one. I've been in a good many scraps since July 1st, and some before, but I never saw the Boche stand up to the steel, and use the steel himself, as well as he did that night. We heard afterwards they'd had the most emphatic orders that they must hold that line at all costs, and I can believe it. They certainly did their

best. We got no prisoners at all there. I honestly think my platoon accounted for three of theirs ; but there were mighty few of mine left on their feet at the finish.

" The Boches won't let you admire them ; at least, that's been my experience of the beggars. However much you may want to treat 'em like sportsmen and soldiers, they won't let you. Those chaps fought so desperately hard, you felt like respecting 'em, but they wouldn't let you. Every chance you gave 'em they'd ' do you dirty,' as our fellows say. But they fought hard—by God ! they fought desperately hard. There wasn't a yard of their ground we got without hand-to-hand scrapping for it, and the last of 'em struggled as hard as the first. Their casualties must have been very heavy indeed. It was the bloodiest

business I've seen, and the way our chaps stood up to it and saw it right through was just fine."

The Australian private had advanced from the extreme right of this particular push. His wound was a clean one, from a rifle bullet, and will not keep him out of things for long. And this was the way the show had impressed him :—

"We had 'em fairly on a string this time. The blighters never thought we were coming, I'm sure of that; but if they had, they never could have stopped us. They hadn't snap enough left in 'em to stop a school treat. I reckon the Boche is done; he's fairly got the wind up him. Why, you'd never believe the difference between the scarecrows we struck this time and the sort of men we had to fight in

taking Pozieres. They were fighters then, all right. My word! they fought like wild cats in Pozieres. Why, there was a Boche there who'd been knocked out—one of his legs was helpless—and he tackled me with his bayonet as I passed him, spitting and cursing like a cat. Nearly ripped the breeches off me, he did, and after I'd biffed him, blessed if he didn't fasten his teeth in my hand, so that I'll never lose the marks of him—see! I had to kill that chap, and really I was sorry for it. My word! I never thought to be sorry for killing a Boche. But he was that game!

"But this crowd on the Friday night—well, as I say, they were fairly done before ever we saw them. We didn't do any shouting, you know; just went over, as though it was a patrol, and got across No-

Man's-Land steady and quiet, as though we were going to billets. I believe I was the only man in my platoon hit while we were crossing. And when we got there there was no scrap in it. They just bobbed up all round like frightened kids, giving themselves up. You could no more fight the beggars than if they had been kids. There were three came to me, and I give you my word the tears were running down their cheeks—enough to make you sick. We just bunched 'em like sheep, and sent 'em to the rear under escort.

" The trenches were just dust-heaps, and I saw two dug-outs that were fairly smothered. The men had to crawl out of them on their hands and knees, and one more shell would have buried 'em altogether. There was a place between two

trenches, or all that was left of trenches, where I saw a Boche sergeant driving a dozen men at us, and it made me think of sheep being driven in a bad drought. Fighters! Why, you could tackle 'em with one hand tied behind your back. Two or three of 'em dropped their rifles as they shambled on—moaning and groaning they were. Only a Boche sergeant could have driven such miserable cattle at all. He was prodding 'em with his bayonet, and cursing a good 'un all the time. Every one of 'em dropped his rifle when they got up to us. Up went their hands. 'Mercy! Mercy! Don't shoot!' They learn a little English, you know. You couldn't touch 'em. They were too far gone. But that sergeant fought, for he stuck a mate of mine clean through the thigh before I got

him. I didn't dare to shoot for fear of hitting my mate, but I swung the butt of my rifle on his jaw, and then I stuck him as he stepped back. He was the only real man in the bunch that I saw.

"My opinion is the Boche is done. He'll have to go on fighting, of course; his bosses will see to that. But I think he's done. There's no two ways about it but that lot had the wind up 'em, anyhow; fairly done, and broke to the world, they were."

CHAPTER VII

DING-DONG FIGHTING

"I HAVEN'T been at Verdun, of course, but, honestly, I don't see how any fighting could possibly be hotter or more violent than it's been round Longueval, where I was hit. I met a French liaison officer in Mametz, who'd had nearly three months at Verdun, and he told me they'd had nothing hotter there. I don't know what the Brass Hats think, but we chaps in the line think that when once we get through the last of the old-established Boche systems—and, of course, we shall, though it's bound to take time—we shall be able

to speed things up a lot. I suppose Master Boche is busy putting up other systems all the time, but unless he can keep on putting up fresh regiments—and one doesn't see how he can do that—he'll hardly be able to get the same sticking power out of his men that he had in the first three systems. We're beating 'em back, back, back; and they all know it. The prisoners we get are only too jolly thankful to be prisoners. They've learned a lot in the past few weeks, and some of the Boche lies must be coming home to roost now, at last, I think. They won't be able to get their men to believe in future either that we torture and kill prisoners, or that the British troops are raw amateurs incapable of a real offensive. I fancy they're losing by their lying teaching, now."

The speaker was a lieutenant of Territorials who was knocked over by a Boche machine-gun bullet in the village of Pozieres. His wound is a clean and simple one, and he affirmed with satisfaction that he had a medical officer's assurance that he would be "back again in a month or two."

"Of course, we know a bit more about it all now than we did in July," said a senior officer—another clean and light wound from a machine-gun bullet. "And our chaps look for great doings before very long. That's why everyone hit is in a hurry to get back. It wasn't in human nature to regret a holiday from the old trench grind, where you hardly ever saw the chaps who potted at you. But our fellows have got the advance in their blood

now. They're out for victory in real earnest, I can tell you. They all know now what the Boche is at close quarters, and they're as eager as can be to get after him. As for giving themselves up, as the Boches do, well, honestly, we haven't got a man who will do it, not a single man.

"But, mind you, I don't encourage the talk about the drive that's coming, and all that. They don't need any encouragement in that direction. They'll stick the difficulties all right. I know that. And they'll get through eventually. There's not the slightest doubt about it in my mind. The thing is so perfectly arranged and the supplies are so good that Master Boche has just got to go back. And he will. But mark my words, he has to be beaten back, foot by foot. There's no walk over

about it. Not a bit of it. Providing our munition supply is kept up, and increased a bit as the thing progresses, we shall get through. We're all certain of that. But the public shouldn't be surprised if it's slow. The way some of our young bloods talk, you'd think the Rhine was just the other side of Longueval. Well, it isn't; and any number of strong Boche positions are. And the Boche has his back to the wall, mind you. He's pouring in his resources; column after column of fresh men; battery after battery of guns, and avalanches of ammunition. The Hun is desperate, and he will force his 'cannon fodder' up and up and up again, till all that country's soaked in their blood. And there'll be a lot of ours mixed with it. Must be. That's the price; and it's got

to be paid. There's nothing of the triumphal procession about it. Not a bit. It's going to be ding-dong fighting all through, and Master Boche is going to be beaten down to his ham-bones—but he'll do a lot of heavy punching before then.

"I'm thankful to see we're wasting nothing. Our casualties are a good deal less wholesale than I thought they'd be. As long as the thing goes as it's been going this last few weeks, there's nothing whatever to worry about in our casualties. They're all well paid for; and not one of 'em's wasted. There'll be no waste of our blood, so long as the munition supply's all right. You see, we're not pitting flesh and blood against steel and wire and H.E., as we had to do in the early days of the war. It's all a question of munitions and

reserves; and, thank God, we're rich in both. But, tell the people at home they must be patient. Don't be in a hurry, and don't let there be any change, except in the direction of increase, in the munition supply. Those are the two things for the people at home to concentrate on. And if that part of the show is all right, they can rely on it the end will be all right. They needn't worry about the New Army. It never was in better heart, or more sure of its job."

"The Boche put up a fine show where we were," said a private, who had two bullet wounds in his left arm, and a number of shrapnel splinter scratches about the head. "His men came on again and again in counter-attacking. But I think our guns are better than his now: seem to

"Where do yer want this put, Sergeant?"

me able to put up a thicker barrage. He's very strong with his machine-guns, but I think we've got him beat in artillery, and I know he can't hurt us in close fighting when our infantry gets close to his. No, he don't like close quarters, sir; not a bit he don't. No, it wasn't really a fight, sir, that I got this Boche officer's helmet in, not to say really fighting. I got him in the entrance to a dug-out, and he surrendered all right; put his hands well up over his head, he did; and 'All right, I come!' he says. So I turned half right, as it might be so, you see, sir, to call to my sergeant, who was climbing over the parados, just half a traverse away from where we was. I wanted to know what to do with the officer. An' then, just as I turned half right, as I say, Mister Boche

officer he fires his revolver—I hadn't seen his revolver—an' gets me in the arm here. I turned half left pretty sharp, you may be sure, sir; an' I gives him the baynit then; short jab it was; an' fairly lifted him off his feet. His revolver went off again then, but it didn't hit nothing, an' I took it from him, when I'd pulled me baynit out. Seein' he was dead, an' had no use for it, I took his helmet. I'd lost me cap. An' I took his revolver, too. He was the only German officer I saw all day."

CHAPTER VIII

ONE SUBALTERN TO ANOTHER

With the R.A.M.C. officers on the landing stage at Southampton was one whose duty has taken him to a number of hospitals in different parts of the kingdom during the past few weeks. Talking things over, he said :—

"I suppose August, 1914, was one of the most stirring months that our people have ever lived through, and, from what I can make out from the wounded men I've talked with, it looks as though August, 1916, ran it very close.

"But what an extraordinary month

July was ! It somehow changed the whole atmosphere of the war. I'm always talking to regimental officers fresh back from the front, and so I notice it. We have changed our ground out there ; the daily trench routine has been changed ; the kind of strafing is different, and the expenditure of ammunition, of course, is totally different. The public know all about that, and it's to be hoped that everyone realises the absolute need of keeping up and increasing the enormous munitions output. It's very much brought home to anyone in my job : the relation between our expenditure of heavy ammunition and the character and numbers of our casualties. The thing is as direct and inevitable as the working of any natural law.

" But I wonder if the public realises at

all the huge, far-reaching changes July, 1916, brought among the individual officers and men of our Armies—the personal aspect of it all? Not so easy to grasp that, you know, unless you are moving about among 'em. Thousands of wounded officers and men—a very large proportion wounded quite slightly, one is thankful to note—arriving all the time in Blighty. Think what it means to individuals and families. Think of the stir of it all in tens of thousands of British homes.

"Then there's the point of view of the wounded officer or man himself. Take the case of a single Battalion, the ——'s. They were raised in my home country, you know, and did their 1914 and early 1915 training there. They are magnificent, these 1914 Battalions. Well, these early-raised

Battalions were families, you know, when they went out to France. A year's shared training brings men closer together than ten years of casual meetings or association in civil employment.

"Then came the bigger part of a year perhaps, in the trenches together. Casualties, of course, but not on a large scale. Some have come and gone several times. All have got very close one to another in the shared life of the dug-out, the trench, and billets.

"Then came the 1st of July—a great date that—with its breakfast-time advance and the beginning of really big things. Before the day was out most of the officers of that Battalion had passed through dressing stations to the rear. Before the week was out they were distributed

between Edinburgh and Torquay, taking their ease in our hospitals, and a sudden end had come for them to that extraordinarily intimate life, in which I get into your blankets in the dug-out, when you're in the trench, and we eat our meals together off the same old sugar-box table, and I often take your oilskin in place of my own, and you sometimes curse to find you've accidentally put on my trench boots in the dark.

"It's a tremendous revolution, you know. Gradually some of these fellows get to hear where some of their wounded pals are lying and give some hours of their hospital days to correspondence. The public would find some of those letters fascinating reading. You see, a fellow in hospital in London, since a few days after the

Push began, will get a letter from a pal who reached an Edinburgh or Glasgow hospital, from Pozieres, or Delville Wood, this week. I've got one here I can show you as a specimen. Yes, there's no objection to any use you like being made of it, so long as the names are not used. It's one subaltern to another, from Glasgow to Woolwich, as a matter of fact."

And this is how the letter runs :—

"So the wounded hero business begins to pall after a few days, does it? I haven't reached that stage yet, and the joy of a ten-hour night's sleep is fresh and beyond words delicious to me. But if it's excitement you want, old sport, get the Board to pass you as soon as you can, and go back to our chaps at ——. Hurry up, before the fun's over. Seriously, it was

pretty hot stuff there last week, I can tell you.

"I reckon the Hun was never so much in earnest as he is at this moment. He's forgotten all about his gramophones, and as for his morning and evening Hymns of Hate—remember those two machine guns opposite the Nab: how we tricked 'em every morning at Stand-to, with the three dummy figures? That must have sent up their S.A.A. indents some, eh?—what was I saying? Yes; why, he's just hymning all the blessed time, as hard as ever he knows how, and then he's doing no good for himself.

"You talk about casualties, old son, and I know they do seem a bit thick on the ground when you see 'em spread out at comfortable intervals here in hospital

But, my dear chap, the Boche losses are ever so much greater than ours, and worse in character. Don't forget that. Tremendous lot of our chaps are able to walk down to the dressing stations when they're hit; but a much bigger proportion of the Boche casualties are regular knock-outs. And then there's the prisoners. We're getting 'em in all the time; and all they ever get of ours are odd men here and there, wounded. No hands up, and squads by the right, with our chaps, I can assure you.

"There's no mistake about it, our gunners are doing us well—a regular treat it is the way they plough and harrow for us. I'd be sorry to be under their harrows. The Boche wire is a complete wash-out, and latterly we seem to have got on to those deep dug-outs of theirs a lot better

than we did at first, or else it is they haven't got so many good ones in these back lines.

"From what I could make out up there at ——, I believe we've buried thousands of their men in deep dug-outs, by fairly smashing in the surface earth on top of 'em; and that's better than having to dig graves for them, and a darned sight less costly for our chaps.

"But the gas about the Boche morale being utterly broken, and that sort of thing, is all my eye and Betty Martin. If it were so, I suppose we'd have an easier job; but it isn't so, and it's all rot to make out it is. Not fair to our chaps, either. Because, as a matter of fact, we are up against devilish good soldiers, jolly well trained, and quite perfectly equipped, backed up and led—

well, driven, anyhow, and managed. We can beat 'em, and we're doing it, because these chaps of ours could beat any soldiers in the world on equal terms—I'm dead sure of that. But it's no use saying the Boche morale is broken, because it isn't.

"They never had any morale much, as we understand it, outside a few of their crack regiments, but they always were a tremendous fighting machine, and they are still, and will be till the end of the chapter. Their individual men haven't the feeling and spirit our men have, of course; but you know the way their N.C O.'s and officers work 'em. Well, the system goes on just the same. They've just got to stand up to their job and advance when they're told. Bullets in

"Don't chuck that —— thing away, 'Arry ; you'll want it in the next war."

front are better than bullets behind, and whips, and kicks, and dagger points.

"You'll never frighten their machine out of business. It's got to be smashed, and it is being smashed, as sure as God made little apples. Come to that, you know, as far as we're concerned, a bullet tastes just the same to our chaps, whether the man behind the gun is a sport, and really keen, on his own, like our fellows, or sick of the show, and working only because he jolly well has to. The bullets make the same sized hole. Boche machine-made morale has been too long in the making, I think, and the machine's too big and strong, to be very much affected until it's really broken.

"No, you're right, there's no place for a rest cure between Pozieres and Delville

Wood—the Bazentins are hot stuff, I assure you—but you needn't be alarmed; we've got the ground all right, and Master Boche will never see it again. Back there on our old stamping ground—remember that advanced sap on the left, where we bagged the Boche patrol that Sunday night?—I actually saw civilians from —— and a pony cart.

"I heard our fellows were for the High Wood, Foureaux, the day I was shipped off. Well, it makes small odds to them, so they let 'em get after the Boche and shift him. Our chaps have got the game in their blood now, and the Company's doing just splendidly—absolutely splendid. Sergeant ——and your own No. 14 have risen to the occasion nobly. There's not a better platoon in the Brigade—except

one : you never could beat my chaps, old sport !

" You see, there's no more mystery about the business now. May get bad luck, and may get it good ; but we all know just what the Boche is, and every mother's son in the Battalion knows that once he can get up to a Boche he's got him. That Boche's number is up, and if his hands don't go up also, why, he's for the West—through express, no change. Cheero ! My salaams to old ——. We'll have a flutter together before we go back."

CHAPTER IX

A BOCHE WHO WAS BRAVE

Our wounded officers and men are just as anxious to hear what the Huns have to say about our offensive as we are to hear what our own fighters have to tell. One was talking on the landing stage to a North-country lance-corporal, who had had both hands and fore-arms knocked about by a bomb. Something he said about Boche casualties made me show him a quotation from a German newspaper to the effect that when England realised what her casualties were in this offensive she would lose heart and give

up her struggle against the invincible Teuton.

"Well, that there's a good 'un, that is; now that *is* a good 'un," said the corporal, a mill operative in civil life, I gathered. "Us to give up, eh? Reckon that 'ld suit Master Fritz to rights, that would. What's he mean about when we know? Don't we know all about our casualties all the time? There's nothin' hid from our chaps over yonder, and I know 'tain't hidden here at home, for my missus she sends me the papers regler, an' gives me the news in her letters, too. I reckon we ain't got nothin' to hide. Can't cook goose 'ithout bastin'; but be what I see with me own eyes I knows for every one of us they've knocked out there's two to three Boches gone to roost; aye, an' more. Why,

I saw them lyin' one atop o' t'other in the trenches we took, an' them that was left, they ups wi' their hands an' 'Mercy, mercy, Kamerade!' was what they give us.

"There was two men o' my section wi' me, an' we rounded up nineteen o' they Boches in one traverse. The most of 'em come out o' one dug-out. One o' those two men o' mine had his left arm broke; hit bad he was, anyhow. So I sent him back with they nineteen Boches. He'd his rifle an' baynit all right, ye see; an' I told him if one of 'em stepped out of his place to let fly. Devil a fear o' them steppin' out. They was too glad to be took. One of 'em spoke English as well as you or me. They understood all right. Us to lose heart, eh? Why, we never was in better heart; as why wouldn't

we be, when we've got Boche on the run. Must 've bin a daft-like sort o' liar, the Hun what wrote that. Somewhere back in Germany, I reckon. It's certain he couldn't ha' seen the front, or he never could 've made that mistake. It's them as is losin', all along. Their guns is all right, but their men, why they haven't half the snap they had two or three weeks back."

"Tell you a thing Fritz must be missing just now," said a young subaltern who was wounded between Longueval and the High Wood; "and that's their blooming comfort. Great boys for grub an' comfort, the Boches. I used to watch their breakfast fires going, when their morning hate was quietened down, opposite the line where we were. But I never knew how

jolly well they'd done themselves till after we'd got the Push well going, and I'd been in their old lines and eaten my own grub in some of their old dug-outs. Stands to reason, you know, they can't have quite the same elaborate shelters in the back lines we've driven 'em to now. Good many of their officers used to hang out in dug-outs pretty well back, of course. Men will have those now, and the officers and N.C.O.'s must be pretty short in the matter of comforts. And, anyhow, even Boche officers can't very well have been living farther back than their second system, and we've got that now, and their third system must be mighty unhealthy, mind you, the way we've been crumping it this last week. There's no doubt they must have made their men work devilish

hard, to have all the beautiful dug-outs they had in their first and second systems. Most of those I went into had two separate flights of steps, with a little landing between. Seems clear they reckoned never to leave those trenches, except by the one way—when they were ready to come forward, an' sweep us away. All our trenches were jumping-off places; anyone could see that. The Boches made theirs residences. They'd settled down, pending the mastery of Europe. Well, well, they've got the wind fairly up 'em now."

A Captain who was in the taking of Bazentin le Petit had a queer story to tell. "I lost touch with my fellows after I got peppered in the thigh, in the beginning of the village fighting. But my orderly stayed with me, and we did a bit

of amateur first aid. We dressed a bomber and two other fellows, not of my battalion either of 'em, in quite professional style. The bomber still had seven bombs and the others had rifles and bayonets, and I had my revolver and trench dagger, so, as there was still a good bit of kick in us, we started on the prowl. That bomber was a sportsman. There was one place where we could see a Boche machine-gun section at work in the cellar of what had been a cottage. There was nothing left but cellar then. The rest was level with the ground. There must have been twelve or fourteen Boches round that gun, bobbing up and down, you understand, as they wanted cover. We crawled on and on among the *débris* till we were no more than twenty paces on their left flank,

while they were blazing away like one o'clock, quarter right, at our chaps. Our bomber was rather badly wounded in his left shoulder, but he bowled well with his right, I can tell you. He lobbed two beauties, right on the Boche typewriter, and held his bombs long enough before shying—'Hundred an' one, hundred an' two, hundred an' three,' you know—so that they exploded in landing.

"They seemed to put the gun out of action all right, but for some reason I never shall understand they only killed one man of the bunch and wounded a couple of others. And just then four or five more Boches came scuttling into that cellar from somewhere in rear, so there they were as thick as bees. Seemed like murder to bomb 'em, but, after all, they were out

to kill as many of us as they could, I knew that, and it wasn't likely a dozen or more of 'em would surrender to five cripples like us. Just for fun I thought I'd try 'em. They mostly know a bit of English. I just showed up for a few seconds, round the end of a broken wall. I'd explained to my chaps to keep back, and not show up when I spoke. Then I shouted, as though I meant 'em to join me: 'Come on, lads! We've got 'em!' And, to the Boches: 'Hands up!'

"Those Boches dropped their rifles as though their hands burned. Up went their hands, all except one chap, a sergeant, and he let fly at me. But I ducked. It was the funniest thing. The sergeant was a soldier all right. He was cursing his men for all he was worth, and, as he

cursed, the habit of discipline told, and the Boches picked up their rifles, and stood on guard. Then the moment I showed up again, down goes every rifle, up go all the hands, and the sergeant lets fly once more. They were like marionnettes on wires, those Boches, up and down according as I showed my head, with a proper scowl for the on-guard position, and a regular 'Please pity the poor harmless Boche' whining set out as the hands went up.

"Only one real man in the lot, you see. But it seemed rough luck for him to have to be killed, because he was a man; so I gave the tip to my cripples, and we made a dash for that cellar, and while the rest of the bunch was bailed up by my orderly and the wounded bomber, I fairly jumped on the sergeant. I didn't want him to

notice my right leg was pretty helpless, so I embraced him round the neck with one arm, and shoved his chin up with the other hand, while one of my cripples got his rifle, and so we took the bunch. They're not hard to handle now, once you can get 'em away from their N.C.O.'s. As for their officers, they seem to be busy taking care of number one, and keeping well to the rear I liked that sergeant for the spunk he showed; and he made a regular doctor's job of my leg for me—bandaged it most beautifully and got two of his men to take it in turns carrying me on their backs on the way down to our dressing station."

The slightly wounded Adjutant of the ——th —— said:

"The Boche casualties are far worse

than ours, not only in numbers, but in quality. Most of theirs that I saw are laid out by our artillery (and sometimes by their own), or by bombs, or by the steel; and I can assure you there's not many will fight again. With us, on the other hand, time and time again one saw men wounded for the second, third, and fourth time, still quite able to walk without help down to our dressing stations. The proportion of bullet wounds has been high with us, and the Boche has hardly touched us with the steel. What's more, he hasn't touched the spirits of our men in the slightest, unless to raise em', whereas our chaps have put the fear of God into the Hun."

CHAPTER X

"THE STICKER WITH THE STOUT HEART"

At Southampton, more perhaps than elsewhere, one is reminded that, even in this third year of its tremendous progress, the war begins afresh with every day that passes for some of our citizen soldiers and defenders.

Every day, Southampton welcomes home for rest and recuperation men from the thick of the fighting whose bandages form honourable certificates of the fact that they have "done their bit." Very many of them will return to continue doing their active best, after a few weeks at

home. Many would not have left the front even for a short interval, but for the fact that they do so under orders. Among them all, I have not yet discovered one who grudges the sacrifices entailed by active service in the bloodiest war the world has ever seen; not one whose experiences on the field have brought about the smallest diminution of the cheery, matter-of-course determination and courage which would seem to be the key-note of the spirit animating the entire British Army.

From various ports in England a daily stream of men and guns, transport and equipment flows steadily outward for the reinforcement of the fighting line in France. This fact makes these ports singularly rich in contrasts of the most dramatic kind. Their magnificent docks are a microcosm

of Blighty; a rare vantage point from which to study in all its world-wide variety and far-reaching might the militant power of the British Empire, after two years of war. Bound to or from the fighting lines of the Near East and France, you shall meet here, going to and fro, men in khaki whose homes are as widely separated as the Orkneys are from Tasmania; as Calcutta is from Ottawa.

Some are worn by the bloody stress of long months of incessant trench fighting. Some are spick and span from the parade grounds of English country camps: men who never yet have seen a rifle fired in anger. Conceive the contrast; the fundamental differences; the gulf between them!

You might think such men would be more widely separated than the poles;

that nothing could bridge the difference between them. As a matter of fact, the thing that strikes you is the extraordinary similarity of the level of the spirits ruling in both divisions: those going out, and those coming home. All alike are in the best of high spirits. Our ports mean for both the realisation of their hearts' desire. The man who has been out, and fought, and proved himself, is very happy to be landing in Blighty for a spell. The man who is going out, has truly and literally been longing for this chance which now is his, until the one overmastering desire has come to dominate his whole being to the exclusion of almost every other thought.

This is not a figure of speech. It may not be easy for the stay-at-home civilian to comprehend. It is an undeniable truth.

I have seen grown men—aye, and family men in middle life—break down and sob like children, in the bitterness of their disappointment, when some technical point has arisen to prevent or delay their departure for the front with their units. I do not know whether or not that spirit can be found in Germany; but there is no officer commanding a unit in training in England who is not perfectly familiar with it. And in the remotest uplands of the Empire, many thousands of miles away from Southampton, men of our stock have, during the past two years, been making prodigious efforts, sacrificing the fruits of long years of arduous toil, travelling many hundreds of miles on foot, giving up everything they possess in the world—to purchase for themselves the opportunity of

carrying rifle and pack in one of these outward bound companies of British soldiers for the fighting line in France.

Never were individuals less dramatic; heroics in the accepted sense are as remote from them as public opinion in Mars. The passion which compels them finds its only expression in simple little jokes and quips; and in nothing more suggestive of emotionality; not even in the supreme moments of deliberate self-sacrifice and death. And yet—what men they are! And what a tidal wave of determination it is which sweeps them along, from every corner of the globe, to the portals of the Imperial sea-gates from which they pass out daily to that roaring, shell-swept line along which the flower of the manhood of France and Britain and Belgium oppose

their simple, invincible determination to the massed and concentrated fury of Germany's millions; to the slaves of the most destructive war machine the world has ever seen; to the engine upon which the Hun relied to win him success in the adventure which was to bring him the mastery of Europe; the imposition upon the world of Boche kultur.

"There they go," I said to a senior officer who not long since was in the firing line. (We could see the heads and shoulders swing past, as the outgoing troops entered a dock-side shed.)

"Aye; there they go—— Good luck to 'em!"

"And what's the quality they most need? What's the thing most to be striven for?"

"Oh, stout hearts, without a doubt; the power and the will to stick it. Nothing else matters, by comparison with that. Sticking it's the thing. Discipline, discipline, discipline; first, last, and all the time. What else does it mean, but the quality of invincible determination; the power of sticking it, everlastingly? Give me the genuine sticker, and I won't bother examining him in the text-books. Stout hearts and munitions; with those we're going to win this war. Our reserves of both will presently exceed the Boche's; and then he'll be finished."

"Then the thing for the fellows who are still at home to cultivate is the stout heart?"

"That's it. To be absolutely determined and absolutely real. There's no

make-believe in this war. It's no good leaving anything to the other fellow. No kind of pretence is any earthly good at all. You must be real; you've got to stick it; you must see it through; every single thing. What was it Kipling said? 'No easy hopes or lies; but iron sacrifice.'—That's the whole thing. There's no skating fast over thin places, and skimming through—somehow, you know, on appearances. If a man's not real, this show finds him out in ten minutes, and breaks him, and chucks him aside; or else somebody has to carry him. That's no good, you know. The sticker with the stout heart. That's the chap; and nothing else matters much. That's where we score over brother Boche. We grade up better; our average is higher."

As bearing on that, a commanding officer of R.F.A. was telling me of one of his subalterns, an Australian-born lad, who was acting forward observation officer for his battery the other day.

"The Boche put up a terrific barrage soon after dark, and I was pretty anxious about our front line; so I telephoned through to —— to ask about it. 'How is it in front there?' I asked him. 'All right sir; nothing wrong.' I was astounded. The barrage was most violent. I knew it must be a perfect hell up there. 'Well, but look here,' I said; 'what about this barrage?' I could almost fancy I saw the boy take his cigarette out of his mouth, you know, up there in that pulverised ditch. 'Oh, yes, sir; there's a bit of a barrage on; but it's nothing to

hurt. It's only from the —— to ——, you know, sir.' I asked him how the devil he knew the limits of it, and he calmly said he'd just been out to see. I found out afterwards that directly it began, he crawled along from one end of it to the other to make sure. The ditch was levelled along half its length, you know. It was overland travelling really; and one of the hottest barrages I've seen. And when that boy was so calmly talking to me down the 'phone. he'd just crawled in from his reconnaissance. Heaven knows why he was still alive. The particulars he gave me were precisely correct. 'Yes,' says he; 'there's a bit of a barrage on between —— and ——; but otherwise the front's quiet, sir.' Otherwise! You can't beat that spirit, you know."

CHAPTER XI

MIGHT AND RIGHT

"If you take a line east and west, from Authille to the Delville Wood, I think it's pretty safe to say that within a mile or so of that line there's been the hottest fighting known in this Push, and, perhaps, the hottest fighting in the whole war."

The speaker, Major ——, as Second-in-Command of a well-known Service Battalion, had been in the thick of the fighting east of the Ancre since the memorable first of July. He has had two or three little wounds—"scratches" he called them—which he did not allow to keep him off

duty for more than an hour apiece. But in the last push to the north-west of Pozieres, having fallen in a shell-hole, with a machine-gun bullet through the lower part of one leg, he was pinned there by some nasty shrapnel splinter wounds in the back.

"Ovillers was pretty hot stuff, you know. Try to imagine fighting, hour after hour, in the bowels of a rabbit warren made by rabbits as big as tigers, and as bloody-minded. La Boisselle was bad, they tell me. My battalion wasn't there. Pozieres, Bazentin le Petit, Delville; and then back west again, the fighting up to Mouquet Farm. Honestly, I don't think there has been tougher or bloodier fighting in all this war.

"Of course, we know from the papers taken on prisoners, as well as from what

they have said, that the Boches gave orders over and over again that this ground was to be held at any cost at all. Queer people they are, aren't they? Fancy trying to hearten up your men by telling them in effect that the survivors would be court-martialled! That sort of thing illustrates the difference between the general spirit in their Army and in ours. You'll hear all sorts of rot talked about the Boche, I daresay. But you can take it as absolutely true, I think, that the Boche soldier is driven, and that the British soldier is led; aye, and that our man gives himself to his leaders, very gladly and willingly.

"From all I've seen of 'em in the last five weeks I think that's true. But, mind you, it doesn't mean that the Boche morale

is broken, or anything of that sort. Not a bit of it. They have a magnificently efficient fighting machine. But their system is different from ours. It is their policy to drive, and it is ours to lead. I daresay it suits their people a lot better than our system would suit them. They're a herded people, you see; and jolly well herded, too. The way they will march straight into certain death is extraordinary. I only know of one thing finer, and that's the way our chaps will run into it, singing. That really is much finer, you know; because with us there's no driving at all, but the free will and determination of the men themselves, and their officers.

"Some fellow sees a bunch of Boches coming over with their hands up, wailing for mercy, and he says the Boche morale

has been broken. All my eye! The Boche Army has to be broken before you can break its morale. They carry on with their job, and will carry on with it; because the machine behind them is a marvellously efficient one, which hasn't any cracks and crannies in it. Our sort of sporting morale, the spirit which makes our chaps absolutely bent on seeing a show through while they've breath in their bodies—for the sake of the show, you understand, and quite apart from any orders, or anything else outside themselves—the Boches haven't got that at all. But then I doubt if they ever had; the bulk of 'em, I mean.

"But nobody who has seen anything of that line from Ovillers to Delville Wood can possibly doubt that the Boches have a marvellously efficient fighting machine.

They've fought for every inch of it; their leaders have poured out their blood over every yard of that ground before we could win it; their men's blood, I mean, not their own. The Boche leaders are mighty careful of their own blood, and the fact that they can economise in it as much as they have done is another proof of the extraordinary efficiency of their machine.

"Oh, it's a great machine, all right, and it's a bit of a puzzle to me that it can survive in the second decade of the twentieth century; because, mind you, it's one of the ugliest, wickedest, most damnable Juggernauts that the mind of man has ever conceived.

"And with all its wonderful efficiency and completeness, which overlooks nothing —unless, perhaps, the element of human

decency—it's being beaten, slowly, surely, quite certainly beaten, out there above the Somme, and for all the cold-drawn lying of their dispatches, the leaders must know it—do know it; I'm sure of that. They must know it, because they were prepared to make any sacrifice at all rather than lose that Thiepval plateau; yet they know they're doomed to lose it.* They know that now. They've had lots of time. They've put all their science and all their thoroughness into making it absolutely impregnable. And now they see it being wrested from them, yard by yard and trench by trench, slowly but quite certainly—by whom? By the Army and the nation they boasted they had bled white and exhausted to

* This was some weeks before the capture of Thiepval and the rest of the ridge.—A. J. D.

death, and by the " contemptible " English amateurs, who were not an army at all!

" Aye, it's a terrible thing, this war; but, as sure as you're alive, it's the finest triumph of Right over Might that the world has ever seen. Talk about your miracle plays! It's nineteen hundred and sixteen years since there's been such a Morality as this! "

One does not often get such views as these from a regimental officer. Major —— was not concerned with strategy and tactics; neither had he a word to say of the hair-breadth 'scapes, the daring deeds, the heroic episodes, of which every soldier in the present offensive has seen a good deal. But behind his words there was a weight of quiet assurance and long-thought-out conviction which made them very impressive to me.

CHAPTER XII

HUMAN DOCUMENTS

THEY are "cases"—"walking" or "stretcher"—when they land at Southampton; the gallant fellows wounded on our battle front in France. But how intensely human all the time; with their quips and jokes, their unfailing, cheery patience, their little stores of "souvenirs," and the absolute confidence of their outlook! And, what human documents are made by their talk! Thus:—

Corporal H——, 13th ——: "I used to be a batman, but latterly I was put on to looking after the stretcher-bearers. We've

put the fear of God into the Boches all right. You see the beggars go down on their knees when they put their hands up; many a time I've seen 'em. In one dug-out where eight of 'em were, they'd tied a white rag on the end of a long stick, and had it poking out at the entrance, in case our chaps might mistake 'em for fighters. One of 'em in that dug-out gave me this wrist-watch—thought I was goin' to kill him even when I went to bandage his wound."

Lieutenant ——, R.A.M.C.: "Where I was dressing wounded men, behind the front line, I heard a Lance-Corporal engaged in the most heated argument as to the relative quality of German bombs and our own. Theirs are not a patch on ours, he claimed. He had three tablets from a

Boche bomb in various parts of his own anatomy, so should know something about it; and the same bomb had killed one of his pals, and wounded two others and a sergeant. But he would have it they were rotten bombs, and that Germany couldn't produce anything to come near our hand grenades."

Lieutenant ——, 16th ——: "Well, I had a pretty dirty job, burying Boches in Delville Wood. They were lying four deep in many places; and they'd been lying a long time, too. It was that that bowled me over, I suppose. Place was stiff with 'em."

Sergeant ——, 1st ——: "I was on the Pozieres front over three weeks. We were creeping forward the whole time. Slow work, of course. It's slow or slaughter;

for their positions were a regular honeycomb, you know. I've seen Boches come up from hidden dug-outs that had been behind our front for a week. I caught one bunch sniping our chaps in the backs at night. I gave 'em sniping! They had machine guns down some of those cleverly hidden holes, and grub enough to last 'em a fortnight. But the Boches haven't got the snap in 'em that they had at the start. They put their hands up a good deal more readily now. Those in front of us now are a bit more refined, like; not so many of the scrawny, long, red-necked kind that fought like wild cats."

Private ——, 13th —— (busily working on a piece of embroidery): "No, you can't get any sleep in the front line, or the support line; but then you don't want

any. It's too exciting. The worst thing is thirst. You forget you're hungry till you're relieved; but if the water don't come up for any reason, and you don't happen to find any dead Boches with water bottles where you can get at 'em safely, then it's fair hell; what with the dust flyin', and the sun, and the different stinks. Fritz is pretty artful, you know, and puts up all the barrages he can to cut off the water supply. But take it all round it's a great do, you know, sir. I wouldn't have missed it for anything. One thing we have taught Master Boche, I reckon. He knows now that if once he lets us get up to him, our chaps to his chaps, and nothing between 'em, he just hasn't got a lame dog's chance. No, he's finished then, and he knows it. Called us contemptible,

didn't he? Well, once we get at him, we do the contempting."

Private I——, 10th ——: "We had orders to take the redoubt opposite where we was. Well, we took it all right, what there was of us when we got there; but we couldn't hold it. Two to one might ha' been all right; but the Boches there was about eleven to one of us; an' we was beat back. Bimeby, our Major came along, an' told us the orders were we was to take it again, an' hold it, whatever happened. He sent back and got a lot more bombs for us, and we took it again; about half a platoon of us left, then; an' after a bit of a scrap the Boche got it away from us again; about a battalion of the beggars. There was only about eight of us left then; but we got some men up out

of 'B' Company to help us, and we took it again, and that time we held it. The Boche was tired. We bombed him in heaps, till the bodies of 'em made parapets, an' we were bombing over 'em, as though they were traverses. They give it up then. There wasn't many of us left, but I think we had to have that place; an' it seemed worth while, anyhow, just to show Master Boche."

Private M——, Aust. Inf.: "It was in a raid at —— I was hit. Queer chaps, the Boche officers. We found three down a deep dug-out, all of 'em in silk pyjamas; gorgeous, they were. Two came along like lambs, but the third, a Major, would not shift. He was busy tearing up papers. We gave him every chance, but he would not come, and we had to carry him; then

we smashed the place up with bombs. We'd blacked our faces for the raid, so's not to show up in No-Man's-Land, you know, and I fancy those Boches took us all for savages of some kind. One of the two who came out with us—a Lieutenant and a Captain, I believe—said it was a pity we were wasting so many of our people, because the war was almost over now, and, of course, we hadn't an earthly chance. The only news they ever get must be pretty carefully doctored for them, I think. They don't seem to me to be brave, or good fighters, the Boches. They can't face hand-to-hand fighting, and their officers use their men much as we use sand-bags. I don't see anything brave about 'em. They're proud; but what have they got to be proud of? Too proud

to fight, it seems to me, when you come to the real thing."

Sergeant ——, R.F.A. : " There's where I was hit ; just south-west from ——. Our guns lie thick there. There'd been no time to dig in the battery we took over. But we soon built a proper emplacement, with head-cover. Why not? There was plenty stuff lying about. We always dig in, even if we don't expect to stay. I shouldn't have got this wound in my head if I hadn't taken off my helmet. I'd had it on all day, and felt it hot and heavy, and just then a 4.5 shell burst, hundreds of yards away, but near enough to land a splinter in my head. The new German helmet is a good life-saver ; comes down over the ears and back of the neck. I'll make it my business to get one of 'em when I go back."

Sergeant S——, M.G. Coy. : " We were at Guillemont, and did a lot of indirect fire. The guns worked beautifully. I've fired 8,000 rounds without a check. I was hit by an explosive bullet, and my officer was hit by another. The doctor said it must have been an explosive. I've found lots of German clips full of cartridges with the bullets reversed—like this " (specimen German clip produced). " My officer sniped twenty-one Boches that day. We spotted the sniper that got him, up a tree, and soon had him down."

Lieutenant ——, —th Army Water Column : " Oh, yes, we get casualties, too. We were very much annoyed by fire that seemed to come from a place in Mametz Wood. On a thorough search being made, we found an isolated dug-out, cleverly

concealed, well stocked with provisions, and inhabited by one Boche officer. Several days before that, our troops had advanced well beyond this line. One felt quite well-disposed towards that German officer, for the practical pluck he had shown. We get so many instances of the opposite thing, directly a Boche of any rank is separated from the big machine that runs him, and called on for any individual action."

CHAPTER XIII

A LITTLE SERMON

WALKING down the covered gangway of a hospital ship to the landing stage at Southampton, after a crowded hour spent in interviewing new arrivals of wounded officers and men from the Somme battlefield, prior to their departure in the waiting Red Cross trains for destinations dotted all over the Kingdom, between Edinburgh and Torquay, a R.A.M.C. officer said to me :—

"What a useful lesson it would be for the civilian public of this country to have an opportunity of listening to the sort of talk you've been hearing!"

"Yes?"

"Well, I mean, contrast the attitude of all these chaps with the attitude of the civilian public as a whole; especially if you exclude the real hard war-workers, like munitions makers, and so on. Here you get these soldiers of all ranks, day after day, arriving here, more or less in pain; wounded; some lightly, some severely; some so damaged that life can never be anything like the same for them again. And have you heard a word of discontent or growling? Do you hear any complaints; any hint of pessimism?"

"Never a hint of it, I'm bound to say."

"Nor I. And I've been here in the midst of it since the very beginning of the war; seen the whole lot of 'em. These are the men who have given everything

they've got; offered their lives as well; and get nothing but loss out of the war. Thousands of 'em gave up all they had to show for many years of more or less successful effort in the world, to 'join up.' They've been living a life of pretty acute hardship and discomfort ever since; many of em' being men who had never really known what hardship or discomfort meant before. And they're all as cheery as can be; apologising if they give one the least bit of trouble; modest; anxious to help each other and spare us; grateful for the smallest attention; never a word of complaint, and as for boasting—no amount of direct encouragement can make 'em brag."

I nodded complete agreement, as all must who have been privileged to witness

this wonderful Southampton panorama of the return from the battlefield.

"Can you imagine a more impressive moral lesson," continued the R.A.M.C. officer, "than these sheds offer as the trains come in; when you've hundreds of cases lying waiting in their stretchers? What an extraordinary picture of cheery endurance these men give you! There isn't one ounce of fuss to the ship-load of them; not a vestige of that sort of selfish apprehension that is really characteristic of most of us; especially when there's anything the matter with us; the sort of protest in advance, you know; the querulous look—you know what I mean. Calm, invincibly patient; instant response, generally with a smile, if you so much as look at 'em. It makes you proud to be of the

same race. Nothing in my life has impressed me so much as this. And, after seven hundred days of it, it impresses me more to-day than at the beginning."

"And what's the lesson you have in mind? The lesson for the civilian public, I mean."

"Oh, well; that's a long story. Don't you see it? Think of the complainings about little things. Anything that causes the smallest departure from the normal comfortable rut; the querulousness it brings. One reads of goodness knows how many thousands of solemn complaints from people who think the amount of petrol allowed for their motor cars is not big enough; complaints of people who think their milk costs them a penny a quart too much, or that the hours in which they can

At the Second Line: "You'll 'ave to indent for a safety pin, me lad."

buy liquor are inconveniently short, or that there are no cheap trains, or not enough 'buses, or too few porters, or that the streets are too dark; complaints of inconveniences. Think of it! Inconveniences; at the height of the greatest, bloodiest, most awful war the world has ever known, with the existence of our kind of civilisation at stake!

"This morning I heard a relative of my own growling like the devil about the number of his cans of petrol; and here I've been handling badly wounded men who have lain out untended sometimes for two and three days of blazing sunshine, on filthy, blood-stained shell-pulverised earth, their tongues swollen, and their lips caked. Never a sign of complaint, though they have known what it was to feel they would

gladly give a hand or a foot for a petrol can that had a half a pint of dirty water left in it.

"The contrasts are queer, aren't they? One man shows only cheery, modest good spirits, and never dreams of making any sort of complaint, or even *feeling* a complaint, mark you—when he has almost died for lack of a little water to drink; as many do on the Somme battlefield; when he hasn't had a comfortable meal for weeks and weeks on end; when his business affairs at home have gone utterly by the board long since, and he himself is badly wounded, to boot. And another man, who spends eight hours every night in a comfortable bed, and eats three or four good meals every day as a matter of course, and takes a drink whenever he feels like it;

going comfortably through his daily life, with his pipe and his amusements; this other man fills the air with his complainings because one thing costs a penny more than it did, and another thing is not so easy to get as it was; because of inconveniences! Inconveniences! Heavens, what a lot they might learn from these rows of stretchers!"

A quick look at his wrist watch; an apology for preaching and waste of time, and the R.A.M.C. man was off at the double.

As a matter of *noblesse oblige*, we ought to see to it, one fancies, that complainings are never heard at home. The pick of our manhood, the flower of our race, toil and sweat and bleed, fall, and up and on again; always with a cheer and a joke, and a stiff upper lip; day and night, through what

a padre has called the nearest possible approximation to mortal ideas of hell, out there at the front—for us; to keep our British life inviolate. Complainings should surely be taboo, among the rest of us. It must be our job to feed the fighters, with munitions and good cheer; never for an instant to fail them, or be unworthy of them, in word, or thought, or deed. It did not seem to me that the R.A.M.C. man's preaching called for any apology; on the contrary, it seemed to me well worth recording.

CHAPTER XIV

YOU NEVER KNOW YOUR LUCK

"You never know your luck in this war," said the tall sergeant.

He was pretty thoroughly disguised in bandages, as he lay there in his cot on the hospital ship; but, though wisely chary about moving at all—he had been badly knocked about by a German bomb, at close quarters—was apparently glad of a cigarette and a chat. His trouble was that chuckling shook him, and was therefore to be avoided; yet his temper was such that he was for ever tending to laughter or chuckling about something.

The prevailing element of humour, of the comic, in most things, seemed to impress him hugely ; and the busy nursing sister in the ward told me that he appeared to regard the necessary dressing of his numerous flesh wounds as one of the most intriguing forms of amusement he had ever encountered.

" No, you never know your luck. I've been out there since the early days, and through most of this Push ; and I never saw anything to beat the gun fire there, south o' Thiepval, where I was knocked out. Never saw anything like it. Why, the shells was thicker there than bullets were at Loos. And yet, as far as I could make out, we'd fewer casualties than we've had in any other show in this Push. We didn't lose a man, not a single man,

in my platoon before we got to their front line. And as for that Boche front trench—well, there was more dead Boches than sand-bags in it. No, I mean that, really, sir; more dead Boches than sand-bags. You had to walk on 'em to move in the trench. And there was very few alive in the dug-outs, either.

"We found plenty in the line behind; the second line, you know; but they'd no stomach for fighting. You couldn't bayonet those chaps. They all put their hands up before you could touch 'em. Fed up! I never saw men so fed up as those Boches were. All they could say was 'Mercy, Kamerade!' Fairly got the shakes, they had. Of course, the Boche is like that. He will *not* fight when you get up to him. But, mind you, sir, that

perticler lot, they had been getting proper hell. If our gunners can keep that game up we'll pretty soon have Thiepval, I reckon; though it is one of the strongest places in the whole Boche line. The rain couldn't cover the ground closer than our field guns covered it, before we went over; and the heavies, too; they were all busy. Far as you could see, the Boche lines were just spouting earth, like a whale spouts water, out at sea. It was a sight. It's that that'll end the war, you know, sir: guns an' shells. I don't know what the munition reserves are, but if we can get all we want of guns an' shells, it's all U.P. up with Master blooming Boche. We know he can't stand in-fighting. All our chaps know that now. But, if he can beat us at munitions, why,

of course, we can never get to the in-fighting. And if our guns and shells can beat his, why he hasn't an earthly; because he can never stand five minutes against our chaps at close quarters; hasn't got it in him; no Boche has."

Private ——, of the ——, said: "We went over the top there at High Wood, and took a trench that had been taken once, and lost. We had orders to go on and dig in about 400 yards farther on. We got there all right, and started digging in. It was that misty, we couldn't see the Boche lines; a fair mix up. You'd see some one pokin' along with a rifle an' bayonet, when you was diggin'; and when he'd almost bumped into you, he'd growl out something about 'Mein Gott,' and you'd know he was a Boche, an' lay

for him with your pick or your shovel. Most times he'd put his hands up, but if he didn't you'd bash him one quick, before he could get his sticker into you. It was a regler Blind Man's Buff. When I'd dug in enough for cover, I squatted in a hole to get a bit of breakfast, and just then the mist began rolling up like a curtain, and the Boche counter-attacked. Seemed our Lewis guns weren't at home, and I thought one time the Boche would get us back; they came on so strong. But, between the rifle and the bayonet we managed 'em. They don't like the steel.

"I saw one thing there, just at the finish, made me laugh till I ached. There was one bunch of Boches, one section, I suppose; twelve or fifteen of 'em. Every one of 'em had dropped their rifles, and

was coming on for us with their hands up high; comin' in for breakfast, as you might say, an' pretty much fed up of the show. And a little fat officer bobbed up from a shell hole, and waved 'em back towards their own lines. Round as a little barrel, he was; with a revolver. Fact, he shot one or two of 'em. They sorter checked a bit. But they'd had all they wanted of their own lines, and they started on again for ours. Well, that fat little officer, he started running rings round 'em; just the same as a sheep dog will. You never saw the like. I was trying to get a line on him, and couldn't hit him for laughing. Wasted a whole clip o' cartridges on that little officer, I did; an' then I never got him. It was my platoon sergeant got him, in the end;

a clever shot, through the head we thought it was; an' him runnin' like a little rabbit, round an' round that bunch o' Boches, as though they was a may-pole. They all started to double when the officer dropped; an' they got a bit o' breakfast with us after all. It was the funniest thing ever I saw. But what a poor-spirited lot of blighters; more like sheep than men!"

A youthful-looking subaltern of the Gordons said: "I've only been out a month. Hard luck getting pipped so soon. I couldn't get out before, just because I wasn't nineteen. Rotten shame, that age limit. Our machine-gun got across close behind us, and got down to business right away, firing at the retreating Boches from their own front line. The Boches disappointed me, very much. I'd

done a lot of bayonet work at home, and so had my men. But the Boches wouldn't give us a chance with the bayonet. All right as long as they could fire, but directly we got within ten paces, they ran like hares. We got some, as they climbed out behind their line; but only one here and there with the steel. They simply won't face it. We'd been waiting six hours in the advanced trench for that rush, and you might have supposed our men's courage would have oozed away in the waiting. But devil a bit of it. They went over with a roar; never saw them in better heart; shouting and cheering all the way. The Boches had a machine-gun on our right that cut into us a bit; and our chaps simply rushed straight at it, yelling vengeance, and those who

got there just smothered those machine gunners. Their machine-gun men seem to me about the best stickers the Boches have got. One of our sergeants saw a Boche No. 1 kill one of his gun crew who tried to bolt from the gun."

CHAPTER XV

SILHOUETTES

The time that elapses between the berthing of one of our hospital ships from France at Southampton Docks, and the pulling out of the last Red Cross train conveying its wounded passengers to their different destinations throughout the country, is wonderfully short; the R.A.M.C. organisation having reached something very like perfection at this point.

Consequently, for every new arrival from whom one obtains anything like a picture of his recent experiences out there above the Somme, there are a dozen from

whom one gets a sketch only, a score who leave one with no more than a sort of flashlight silhouette, and a hundred who, like ships that pass in the night, come and go before one's eyes, stamping an impression upon one's memory indeed, and, at times, an impression which is like to prove indelible, but with never a word of explanation or elucidation.

The pictures are apt to be so compelling as to leave no room for any attempt at presentation of the sketches, which is a pity, since these are often both stimulating and richly suggestive. Here, for example, are some specimen sketches or silhouettes of the past twenty-four hours. It is to be remembered, of course, that the front line soldier, be he officer or man, necessarily argues from the particular to the general.

His impressions of a vast enterprise, involving the life and death efforts of hundreds of thousands of men, are based upon his personal vision and experience of half a hundred, or even half a score. The fall of twenty comrades, or the capture of twenty Boches, may easily look to him like defeat or victory. There are times when, along a mile or two of raging battle line, a score of victories, and as many defeats, are experienced in one crowded half hour and, as such, colour for a long time the reflections and views of the gallant fellows who spill their blood during that time.

Lieut. ——: "Just where our line joins the French, we were. 'A' company had worked 250 yards along an old Boche communication trench and blocked it, and I took up a party of bombers to help

hold it. Guessed it would be a thirsty business, and took along as many petrol cans of water as we could lay hands on; and a good thing, too, for no sooner had we got into position than Fritz put a perfect hell of a barrage behind us. We'd never have got there, or anywhere else, if it had come a few minutes sooner. It was a bit of a crump that burst quite 250 yards behind us that knocked me out, and I was up there 36 hours before there was a chance for a cat to have got back. I brought this back—("This" being a fine Boche helmet, complete with grey-green cover and in perfect condition) —but I only picked it up in the trench, you know. I wish I hadn't lost the one I got the day before, because I got that from a Boche I killed myself. We were

advancing, protected by gas and smoke clouds, and I just spotted a machine-gun detachment getting ready to fire at us—about forty yards. I had the luck to pot their No. 1, and before they could get the gun firing after that we were on 'em, and laid out the rest of the crew. We took the gun back with us, quite undamaged. I carried the lock myself, but some beggar pinched the No. 1's helmet that I brought back."

Lieut. ——: "About the best men they've got, those Boche machine-gunners. The way they make their bullets skim close to the ground, especially when they're trying to pick off our wounded, is uncanny. They're dead nuts on getting our wounded and stretcher-bearers, but on our side we still stick to tradition in

that respect. I suppose it's right. Our machine-guns were got up to Delville Wood without loss, and did pretty good work there."

2nd Lieut. ——: "I was the only officer left not hit in my company when we got orders to take the Boche trench for three hundred yards on our left, while the 11th —— made a frontal attack on the remainder of the Boche line. It came off all right. We didn't do the usual bombing stunt, working along traverse to traverse. We climbed out of the trench and ran along the side of it, shying bombs down into it as we went. The Boche didn't seem prepared for that, and we fairly had 'em."

2nd Lieut. ——: "My signallers had a hell of a hot time coming up behind you,

laying wires to that same front line. I had 14 out of 16 hit, but we made connection all right."

Colonel ——: "That advance in front of Bazentin le Grand was the best show I have seen at all. Everything went like clockwork; beautiful to see. Our —— guns pumping biggish shells at thirty to the minute, made things altogether too hot for the Boche. We found our Lewis guns splendid for spraying suspected places. By the way, we bagged a General, very haughty beggar; wouldn't say a word. Looked most infernally sorry for himself."

2nd Lieut. ——: "My tin hat's quite a souvenir, you know. I was lying in a shell-hole where I'd been knocked by a bit of shrap. I heard a ping and felt a tap, then a much louder one directly after.

When I looked this is what I found." (His "tin hat" showed a bullet-shaped depression, an elliptical hole close to the apex, and a jagged hole an inch square on one side.) "My luck was in all right that night. Our own shells were bursting twenty paces in front of me, and the Boche stuff about as far behind me. I was there for three hours, and never got another scratch."

2nd Lieut. ——, A.S.C.: "No, it's not all peace and a quiet life in the A.S.C.; especially taking up artillery ammunition as far as limbered wagons can go. It was a bit of a 6-inch how. laid me out, close to Maricourt."

Capt. ——: "What struck me most round Guillemont was the tremendous effect of our —— guns. I think they're

the best thing in the war. The way they pump hell into the Boche lines is superb, and the rate—marvellous!"

Private ——: "I was knocked sideways by a crump when I was carrying up rations; fourteen of us by the one crump. The shelling goes on just the same day and night, all the time; and, well, the communication trenches don't amount to much you know, not right up there. A man's much safer in front."

Corporal ——: "It was at stand-to in High Wood, Fritz gave us a 'Bon Santy,' all right, including a Blighty ticket for me. We've got a fine lot of machine-guns now, and every man learns how to load and fire. I think it must end soon, you know. Boche can't stand much more of it, day and night the same. I think the wind's up him now."

Capt. ——: "I was opposite the Glatz redoubt. We got on swimmingly, thanks very largely to our —— guns. Gad! it was a treat to see that battery spitting out shells so fast you could see thirty in the air at a time. Wonderful guns."

Private ——: "I had a fine pocketful of souvenirs, but my jacket was pinched. I had a clip of Boche cartridges with liquid in 'em: poison, I reckon. You could screw the bullets out, and there was the little chamber full of this stuff We all reckoned it was poison; found a lot of 'em on three Boches we scuppered. I was hit carrying S.A.A. up to Trones Wood. Yes, we managed to get rations up fairly regular. The water was the worst trouble. What with the stink of dead Boches—hundreds of 'em, pretty old, too—and the

smell of H.E., and the heat and the flies, you did get a thirst, you know."

Private ——: "I was knocked out by a Boche bomb. It fell right on my foot, and exploded there. If it had been one of ours it would have killed me, of course; but a lot of their bombs are poor stuff, like that. They say we copied ours from theirs, but if we did we make 'em a jolly sight better than they do. Anyone will tell you that."

Corporal ——: "At Guillemont we had practically no trenches, nothing worth talking about. We kept on creeping forward and digging ourselves in. We're a sight better at this game than the Boche, because he's accustomed to his deep dug-outs, but we're used to being in the open. I reckon they're pretty near finished.

Why ? You can tell from the way their hands go up. Well, that's what I saw. I reckon they're a dirty, treacherous lot, anyhow, the most of 'em."

CHAPTER XVI

AUSTRALIANS ON THE SOMME

Among the officers arriving in England from the Somme battlefield, a Lieut.-Colonel, whose left arm was carried in a sling, as the result of shrapnel wounds, paid a notable tribute to the Australian troops at Pozieres.

"They are too good to stand in any need of recommendation, and, as a matter of fact, I have met some of them whose modesty has been sorely tried by the adulation lavished on the Anzacs. The fact is they have become such jolly good soldiers that they have learned to hate

extravagant praise; and especially to resent anything which seemed to suggest that they were better than their comrades from the homeland countries. I have seen quite a lot of them in the present show, and I think they are a very fine force. A great many of them have given up pretty important work and positions to join; and the training and experiences many of them have had in their own country have made them very resourceful and most excellent campaigners.

"I'll tell you another thing about them. Their practical good will is a great asset for them. What I mean is, they are anxious to be really good soldiers, from a professional military point of view. Their intelligence has shown them the vital necessity of discipline, and, having grasped

that, nobody could be keener on every detail of discipline than they are. You don't get any nonsensical claptrap from them out there about discipline being red-tape and pipeclay. Not a bit of it. They've seen for themselves that success in really big fighting is impossible without it, and, seeing that, they become enthusiastic disciplinarians.

"There is a singular uniformity about their opinion of the Boche, that is, in all of them I have talked with. They all feel a strong contempt for the Hun. They say his machine may be efficient, but that the individual Boche is a complete rotter. As a man, and in man-to-man fighting, they hold the Boche to be vastly inferior to the Turk, though he has such a magnificent organisation behind him."

Here are a few notes of the remarks of wounded Australians who have just landed at Southampton from the fighting line in France.

Lance-Corporal R——, Australian Infantry: "I was in the first landing in Gallipoli, and in the taking of Pozieres village. This Somme show is much hotter stuff than Gallipoli. There's no rest and mighty little decent cover. As fast as you dig, the earth falls in. But the Boche is not as good a fighter as the Turk. No, when it comes down to close work, and you can get right up against him, he's a dingo every time, is your Prussian guardsman. It's hands up and 'Oh, Kamerade!' every time. My mate and I bagged 17 and an officer in one dug-out. Our officer thought the Boches had all cleared out,

but I noticed a dug-out with two entrances, and sent my mate to one while I went in at the other. Directly we got in we saw there was a crowd inside, and up went their hands like lightning, without any invitation. Their officer handed me his revolver, and they marched out as quiet as lambs. You don't get Turks doing that. They may be awful scallywags, but I reckon the Boche is worse.

"'Glad to be a prisoner?' I said to the officer. 'No,' he says, 'I like to go on fighting.' But he'd got a mighty queer way of showing it, I thought, for an officer, too."

Private B——, Australian Infantry: "I was at Pozieres too. Some of the German dug-outs were just palaces, and deep!

Well, there was one where we counted 82 steps down to it."

Private C——, Australian Infantry: "I was at Pozieres. We bagged a machine-gun with its crew in a cellar. Here's a photo of one of 'em I had from him; a Bavarian, I took him to be. He gave me this. They wore white caps with blue bands, like sailors. Gallipoli wasn't near such hot stuff as Pozieres. There's no sportsmanship about the Boches."

Lieut. R——, M.-G. Co., Australian: "I had heard about the way the English advance just as if they were on parade, but I was surprised when I saw it. But isn't it going a bit far for the officers to carry their canes, and show they are officers? We prefer to take rifles. But I consider the British Army, officers

and men, by far the best fighters in the world.

"We were about a hundred yards from the windmill, Martinpuich way, you know; and the bushman with his highly developed bump of locality is just the chap you want there, for no ordinary mortal can be counted on to avoid losing his direction. One of the funniest things I have seen was a fight between thirty of our men and about a hundred Boches, in the open. The Boches had cut our chaps off, and wanted to get 'em into the Boche lines. But our fellows shouted 'Not that way!' and started hustling the Boches towards our own lines, crowding 'em, you know, like sheep. Presently one of our Lewis guns opened on them, the Boches being on our side of the push, you see. At that

our chaps started hustling the Boches along with their fists and their feet, and an odd thrust of the bayonet here and there. Remember, these Boches weren't prisoners yet, but fully armed men, and scrapping, after a fashion, with our chaps. The upshot was that, although twelve of our men were knocked out by machine-gun fire, they brought in the bulk of those Boches alive. Those particular Boches were well fed and well clothed. In fact, they had brand new kits, and apparently had only just come into the line. The Hun can't fight when it comes to close quarters, you know. He's a cur and a bully at heart; all right as part of his machine; but no sort of use once you cut him off from it, and ask him to put up a fight on his own. All the same, this

Somme job is a much bigger business than Gallipoli."

Lieut. M——, Australian Infantry: "Our machine-gunners, Lewis gunners I mean, are a pretty useful lot now. The Huns started an attack from opposite our right, towards our centre, under cover of a very heavy barrage. Our artillery were putting a hot counter barrage about 30 yards in front of our trench. Three of our Lewis gunners nipped out with their gun, through both barrages on our left, and enfiladed the attacking Huns with such effect that the whole lot swerved towards the right of our line. A swarm of them got across there, rather surprising the men on our right, and managed to get nearly fifty prisoners from the trench there, and started off back for their own lines with the

prisoners. But our Lewis gunners were one too many for them. While the trench scrap was going on, they had crept right across our front, and caught the Huns before they had got half-way back to their own lines, knocked over some of 'em, and then held their fire to avoid hitting our own chaps, and under the muzzle of their gun, drove the whole bag of 'em back to our own trenches. It was a pretty neat stunt, really."

Private W——, Australian Infantry: "We got two officers, with their servants, in one deep dug-out; very deep it was. They were having a meal, and I don't think they knew there was an attack on at all. You couldn't hear anything down where they were. They've a great reputation as soldiers, these Boches, but I don't

OUR HENRY (on emptying a Lewis gun magazine into a group of Kultur):

"'And me another record, mate; they don't seem to like this tune."

think much of 'em. They've precious little guts for fighting, it seems to me, when you get really up against 'em. They're pretty hot stuff in the matter of guns, and deep dug-outs, strong places, and all that, but I've seen boys at school who'd fight a sight better, when you come to it, at close quarters. No, if you ask me, the Boche is a pretty low-down sort of a tough for a white man."

Captain H——, Australian Infantry: "German morale? Well, I don't know. There's a Captain of the S——s aboard this ship, told me a thing that happened to him alongside us. He was working along a communication trench with a party of bombers when he met a regular procession of Boches, all holding their hands well up, and led by one who carried an enormous

cigar box over his head. The English officer suspected some sort of foul play, of course. The Boches have played so many dirty tricks. But the fellow whipped open the big box and showed it had nothing in it but cigars, and explained as well as he could that it was by way of being a sort of propitiatory offering, you know. He wound up by saying: 'This war no good; no good at all, sir. Piccadilly again soon, now, sir!' Of course, they're fed up, but they've got a big machine behind 'em yet."

CHAPTER XVII

A MESSAGE TO MUNITION WORKERS

"THIEPVAL is just a dust heap; and not much heap, either," said a Lance-Sergeant, the left side of whose tunic hung in blood-stained ribbons over the snowy bandage that supported his left arm and shoulder, in which he had managed to gather eleven separate pieces of a German bomb, without in any way affecting his good spirits, or that cheery, casual sort of sangfroid which appears to be one of the most universal characteristics of our New Army. "Only for their wonderful dug-outs and some of the cellars under where the houses

used to stand, our artillery would have killed everything in the village that had any life in it. But, thanks to the warrens they had dug out for themselves, the Boches were able just to fill the air with bullets all round the village—a wonderful thing.

"In a Push like this, you don't wonder at the number of casualties; but what you do wonder at is how in the world anybody gets through. I think I must have seen scores of broken machine-guns in that place, to say nothing of all they had doing regular business up to the very end. I fancy the Hun had made up his mind that whatever happened we could not possibly break through there. Well, he's had to learn a lot o' different lessons this month, and I reckon he won't forget in a hurry the one he learned at Thiepval.

Mind, sir, I'm not saying anything against him. No, I don't hold with all this talk about Master Boche being a skunk who can't fight, and all that. I know they stood up to it at Thiepval, and I know they must ha' lost some good few thousands before we got the place. No, I say they're soldiers, all right; they're doing their job, and they'll stick most anything that anyone could stick, except just the one thing. They can't stand our chaps when we get near enough to give 'em the cold steel. They don't like the close work. Well, after all, nobody can't expect 'em to be just like Englishmen, now can they, sir? 'Twouldn't be reasonable. But, accordin' to their lights, an' as Boches, mind, I think they're pretty good, an' pretty tough; I'll say that for 'em."

And just then and there I lost the Lance-Sergeant, and afterwards hunted in vain on the landing stage for his stretcher. He must have got away by the first train, and now I suppose I shall never know his regiment or name; since I had not had time to note these when he was carried ashore. There was tremendous essential vitality about the man. I liked his almost regal English arrogance. His was the point of view of the men who fought under Nelson and Wellington. There's more of that fine and simple spirit left among us than some folk think; and the life of the New Army has brought out a lot of it. It is a real asset in war; and, too, in peace, I fancy. It has played a part in the development of the British Empire. I am sure of that.

A few minutes later I was talking with the intelligence officer of a battalion which has suffered heavy losses, and inflicted vastly heavier ones, at Longueval. I was asking about our artillery; their part in the Push, and how they kept up the work of preparation for our splendid infantry.

"Well, I can only speak of what I've seen, of course," said the intelligence officer; that's up to Tuesday, the 25th, round about Longueval. There, and up till then, the work they have done for us is simply splendid. I couldn't help wishing some of the munition workers could have seen it; so they'd know what their work in the war amounted to. The infantry have played the game, you know. My hat! They have played the game. They've gone down smiling, where they've

had to go; and, by the Lord, they've made Fritz pay; they've made him pay for every casualty he's scored against us. Our boys haven't thought of themselves; they haven't tried to spare themselves; and they've taken their dose like the sportsmen they are, where it was coming to them. All this rot about classes has got to go by the board, as I see it. Give 'em the chance that all men have in war, and I tell you our fellows are *all* gentlemen. They are, upon my word.

"But what I was going to say was about munitions. Fine as our men have been, they couldn't have accomplished anything much in this Push but for the artillery, you know; and the artillery couldn't have done much for 'em, really, but for the enormous stores of munitions they've

been laying up. We used to grouse sometimes, because they wouldn't give us half as much heavy stuff as we asked for. But, Lord, you can understand it easy enough, once you've lived through two or three weeks of this Push. We're using shells instead of flesh and blood now. Last year we were using flesh and blood instead of shells. But to bring the thing off, they have to use ammunition in a way that nobody ever dreamed of a couple of years ago. They don't have to shoot men. They have to remove landscapes, by sheer pressure of H.E. If the pressure is a bit short anywhere—well, we've just got to pay for it in blood, that's all; not odd men here and there, you know; but swathes—thick swathes, too.

"If I were a munition worker, I think

I'd feel I was doing as big a thing as anybody can do in this war; and, begad, I wouldn't want to lose any time over it, either. Time lost in munition production would seem to me a bit too much like murder. What do the lawyers call it? An accomplice before the fact, is it? You know what I mean. Oh, but our artillery has been simply magnificent; and the rain of our heavy stuff, day and night—why, the singing of it is the finest music ever you heard. 'Tis to us, anyhow. 'That's up you, Fritz, old man,' says Tommy, when a hurricane burst sweeps over. There's nothing vindictive about Tommy, as you know. But he has a plain and direct kind of logic; and when he hears that kind of music overhead, he recognises it for what it is: the substitute

for his blood, provided by the munition workers; the thing that's going to make his work worth while; his sacrifices of even the most rudimentary comforts a thing for which he will stand a sporting chance of getting his reward. He will cheerfully go without rest and food, and even baccy; and he may be absolutely relied on to get his own back from Master Boche every time—if he gets his sporting chance. The guns, and the guns only, can give him his sporting chance; and they can only do it while the supply of ammunition is—not just big, mind you—that's no good against what Boche has put up now; but enormous, unlimited, and steadily increasing.

"Holidays! Believe me, there isn't a munition worker in the country who'd

take a holiday if they were given treble pay for it, if only they could see just what the rising tide of guns and shells means to Tommy."

"The Derby scheme men are shaping fine," said a wounded Major, second-in-command of a London battalion. "We had quite a lot of 'em. They haven't got quite the easy veteran swank yet of our 1914 and early 'fifteen boys, but they're picking it up fast; and the Boche will find before we're through with this offensive, that we can put up men who never handled a rifle before this present year, and that will down his best, man for man. Our men who began training in 1914, and even in 1915, can beat the best the Boche can put up now. The last few weeks have absolutely proved that. Wherever we have

been able to get through to real close contact, Boche has gone down; killed or prisoner, every time. Nothing the Kaiser says can alter that. I read in a newspaper something about his getting out of a train somewhere to go and pray; read it in Havre. Well, he's quite right, too. If anybody needs to pray he does. I suppose there never was a man in all history with so big a load on his conscience. His chicks are coming home to roost now. The pity is that he and his accomplices in crime only have to pay through the blood of better men, instead of their own.

"The Boche infantry are not equal to our chaps; but they're devilish good soldiers, and the machinery behind them is superb. It will take a whole lot of smashing, I can assure you, but we've got

fairly going on the job now, and, somehow, I think they know it. They know we're going to carry it through. Got a lot of Irishmen in our battalion, Irishmen and Cockneys, and they've gone into this thing, all through, as though they loved it. Never saw anything finer in the old Army. They put their heads down to it, as though the bullets were rain drops, and they go at it with a laugh and a cheer—Bless 'em ! You can't stop 'em, while there's life in 'em "

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW

"AND of all its different features, what is the thing most notable about this offensive; the thing that has impressed you most?" was the rather unfair question I put to the Commanding Officer of a Service Battalion, on the stage at Southampton. He came straight from the red centre of the fighting between Ovillers and Longueval, and was carrying shrapnel fragments in one arm and shoulder.

"The thing that has impressed me most? Well, I think I would say the spirits and the morale of our men—

though, if you give me another five minutes I may think of something else. There are so many notable features; so many things specially impressive. But, on the whole, I do think the spirit of our men, and the difference between this and the spirit of those of the Boches that we see, impresses me more than anything else.

"You see, out there, sudden death is everywhere. The earth and the air are full of sudden death, from all sorts of causes, in all kinds of unexpected places, too. Sudden death lurking everywhere; nerve-racking strain of every imaginable sort; incessant din; omnipresent dust and omnipresent and infinitely various stinks; endless sweating toil, thirst, hunger, dirt, and complete absence of comfort of even the most elementary

sort. You would not say those things were calculated to make for cheery good spirits, for equanimity, or for hilarity, would you ?

" And yet, do you know, I have never seen troops anywhere in higher spirits than our men are in. You simply can't depress or daunt them. It isn't only in the moments of success and achievement, when some exhilaration would be natural. It's all the time; and especially at times of greatest difficulty and hardship. They are absolutely splendid; brave, kindly, modest, sane, humorous, and absolutely certain of themselves. I am convinced there are no finer troops in the world; and none in better heart."

Three of the points made by Colonel —— are borne out by almost every

wounded officer one speaks to: The high spirits of our men—sufficiently obvious even among the wounded—the radical difference between their spirit and that of the Boche; and the way in which sudden death lurks everywhere within a five-mile radius of the fighting line. The Boche is "sticking it," and will go on "sticking it." The machine behind him leaves him no choice. But he would appear to be definitely incapable of carrying on in this titanic struggle, with cheers and song and laughter, as our own men do. Their indomitable spirit colours all the speech of our wounded, of all ranks. Thus:

Captain B——, R.F.A.: "I was hit in the eye by a bony fragment of very old Hun. The bodies of dead Boches

lie so thick there, S.W. of ——, that you might say for every fresh corpse a shell makes it exhumes three old ones. My guns had no doubt been spotted by a Boche plane flying low. I saw this same plane brought down by one of our Archibalds; but no doubt its pilot had had time to signal to the Boche artillery. Their planes have been much more in evidence lately than they were a while back. I think our own airmen have rather shamed them. As we keep going now, there's no time to get anything but the flimsiest of cover from view for the guns. The dry weather has made H.E. more destructive than ever. You see the hardness of the ground makes penetration less, and so increases the radius of action. We know from observation

that one of our shells will often kill a Boche many hundreds of yards away from the point of explosion; and—we're not immune ourselves, of course. But, all the same, we're able to give the Boche more than we get all the time now thank goodness."

Lieut. P——, —th ——: "The Boches had a pretty good eye for the lie of the land, and they did have the bulge on us in many parts of the ground we're fighting on now. We've very nearly got that ridge from Martinpuich to Guillemont now, and from there we shall get on fine. It will be splendid to look down on the beggars. Given anything like equal terms, you know, the Boche never is able to stand up against our chaps. You've only got to see 'em together; our fellows and the Boches,

and you understand it right away. The natural superiority of our men, as men, is unmistakable. You can see it in their very faces."

Corporal C——, —th ——: "I was one of the battalion bombers, and got along pretty well. We had to take a bit of trench on our left; continuation of the one we were in. We ran along the top, throwing our bombs down in. It's the quickest way, of course. The Huns shied some at us, naturally; but his are not much good. There's nothing to touch the Mills bomb, I reckon. We finished the Boches in that trench, anyhow. Our orders were, we had to get the trench, and we cleaned it out properly. No, we didn't take prisoners, that time. They go on firing at you, or lobbing bombs

at you, till you get right alongside 'em; and then, if there's any of you left alive they put their hands up. So if you're bombing they're apt to get caught out. All the Boches I have seen are like that. They'll go on fighting right enough till you get close to 'em. After that, they've no notion of fight at all; quite different from our chaps in that way; most other ways, too, I reckon. It was a bit of a shell knocked me out."

Private J——, R.F.A.: "It was a premature from my own gun that laid me out. Shell burst close to the muzzle. I know they say it's caused by dirt, but we were always mighty careful not to let any grit get in if we could help it. First time he saw the same thing happen, my mate said he wasn't taking any

chances of that sort. He got shifted somewhere else. It kind of hurt his feelings, you know; same as if his own dog had bit him. Wonder what'll happen when the war's over, and they start ploughing, an' that. There's any amount of dud shells lying about, stuck in the ground, and in trees and walls. Fritz must have had a pretty hot time the last month, anywhere within five or six miles of his front. Not much rest for him there, I reckon. If we can keep the guns and shell supplies going, and increase 'em a bit, the Boche will never stop us again."

Private D——: "It's a great do, sure enough. Yes, it's all right to get a bit of a rest, and I'm glad to be back in Blighty; but I think I'll be glad to get

back out there again, too. It is a great do. Well, it's worth seeing, I can tell you, sir. You somehow don't get time to feel tired. There's always something happening, you see; and our chaps are as jolly as sandboys. But I think the Boche is pretty well fed up. I do that. I was company range-finder; but there weren't any ranges to take, and I just went over with my platoon. No-Man's-Land was just one mass of shell holes, and you couldn't help tumbling down now and then. You saw your mates tumble, but you never knew whether they were hit, or just stumbling like. We kept our line pretty well, all the same; just as we'd been taught. Just as we got to the Boche parapet a bullet hit me in the thigh, and bowled me over. No,

it didn't hurt. Then I saw a bomb coming right at me; and I rolled over and over, quick, into a hole to get out of the way. I suppose some bits of it got me all right; but the next thing I knew I was in the dressing station, and a corporal there was giving me a cigarette. Lord, it was good, that smoke!"

Corporal ——, R.A.M.C.: "Our first-aid post had a pretty narrow escape. There was a box of star-shells happened to have been dumped alongside the entrance. It was hit by a splinter, or something, and blew up. We reckon the Boches thought it must have been an ammunition depot. They just rained shells round us for a quarter of an hour. I kicked something on the ground as I was running from one dug-out to another.

I suppose it was a bomb. Anyhow, it blew my foot off."

Private L——, R.F.A. (driver): "Our guns were being shelled pretty heavy, and orders came to get 'em back. The shells were dropping very thick; but I managed to get hitched up, and was going to mount when a shell burst close behind my wheelers and we all went up together. I'll be all right in a few days now, I reckon. The Push? Oh, it's a great do. I reckon we've got the Boche all right, this time."

When he "went up," Private L—— got pretty badly knocked about. But he is quite convinced he will be back in the fighting line in a week or two, and is keen to be there. He has the kind of laughing, devil-may-care gameness which has come

to be associated with his particular accent and the purlieus of Bow Bells; as fine a brand of fighting man as any in the world.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PADRES AND THEIR FLOCKS

MANY and various, if generally very unconventional, are the tributes paid by our wounded officers and men to their padres. Here are a few specimen remarks, culled from those one hears every day on the lips of the wounded of all ranks, landing at Southampton.

"Oh, he's a pretty good sport, our padre, I can tell you."

"Only thing that sometimes rattles our chaplain a bit is the fact that he's a non-combatant, and so mustn't carry arms, or lend a hand in any kind of

strafing. But his heart's in the right place."

"When our padre first came to us all the boys thought they'd got a soft thing on. He looks about seventeen, and they all thought they were going to twist him round their fingers, and work him for all sorts of little dodges, you know; dropping out of fatigues, and all that. My aunt, what a sell! Inside of a week he had the measure of the trickiest old soldier in the Battalion. He's wire and whip-cord, our padre; hard as nails, and good as gold. Once the boys found it out they got really fond of him. They never try to pull his leg now; but, begad, they're on to him before you can say knife when they've any real trouble; and he's always on the spot, every time."

"I didn't take much stock in our padre at home, in camp; but I'm bound to say he's been a regular brick out there; especially since this Push began. He earns his pay all right; and there's no doubt the men like him, and value him a whole lot."

"There's no mistake, one does meet some pretty sporting padres at the front. Near H—— I met one who was a sort of a Knight Templar; he seemed to be a kind of a free-lance. Battalions came and went, but he stayed on in his dug-out in the second line, as if he'd settled there for life. He knew that part of the line better than any man living; every nook and cranny in it; and when any party got fogged and wanted a guide, to anywhere, nobody could help them so well

as the padre. And I'm bound to say, nobody could have been more willing to help. He labelled his dug-out 'The Vicarage.' One day two men belonging to a draft fresh out from home—Cockneys they were—came along that trench. 'Look here, Bill, blimey if 'ere ain't a Vicarage!' said one to the other. Out pops the padre, at that, with half his face lathered, as he was having a shave at the time. 'Yes,' says he; 'and here's the Vicar. What can I do for you?' Imagine how the Tommies looked. They say that padre applied officially to be appointed 'Chaplain of the Trenches.' Well, he belonged, all right; he was one of us."

Lance-Corporal ——, a Rifle Brigade man, said: "Where I was, near Guillie-

mont, we got across No-Man's-Land with very few casualties. I was one of a bombing party. Going across, we spotted a Boche machine gun with its team in a small shell hole that they'd dug out fairly deep. That gun winged a good few of our chaps, but we got round its flank and put it out of business. No, we didn't take the team prisoners. If you want to get a team prisoners, and they are in a small, deep shell hole, it's better not to throw Mills bombs into the hole. But though we didn't take the team prisoners, we got their gun, and our own machine gunners had that working in the Boche front line inside of a very few minutes."

In telling how he came by his wounds, Lieut. ——, R.F.C., said: "Half-a-dozen of us went out on a little bombing raid

over the German lines. When we were about six miles across and 12,000 ft. up, I noticed what I thought was one of our screen of scouts, a —— machine, just below me. At the same moment I was hit in my left shoulder, and it made the left arm useless. So I turned and started flying westward. Just then a bullet passed clean through my petrol tank and carburettor. There was nothing to be done then but plane down as gradually as I could, my engine being out of business. When I was over the Boche front trenches I was only 1,500 ft. up; so you can imagine what it felt like. The Boches were peppering me with every sort of rifle and machine gun fire then, and it seemed as if I must be done. I got one bullet in the thigh, and I think it was that

made my descent a bit clumsy. But I got clear out of sight of their lines all the same, in a bit of a ravine. I could have managed that descent better, but one of my control wires was cut by a bullet, and that led to my smashing the under-carriage in landing. That didn't matter so much, because the machine was already hopelessly spoiled by the machine-gun and rifle fire; but it was a great pity I hadn't been able to use my bombs to any purpose. When the surgeon came to get the bits of bullets out of me—a biggish piece of humerus and shoulder blade had been shot away—he found some pieces of ——, which made it clear that what I had taken for a —— scout was really a German plane, that had managed somehow to worm its way through our screen.

Pretty nippy of him, and if he'd followed me up—well, naturally, I shouldn't be here now. Their fliers have been a good deal more active lately; making desperate efforts, but we've managed to hold 'em off our own lines pretty well. Eh? Yes, it's a great game, sure enough."

A Lance-Corporal who, in one of the advances of the present Somme offensive, had been with a party that was cut off by a terrific enemy barrage which prevented reinforcements being sent up, described the curious period of twenty-four hours during which he and his mates crawled back to our own lines, from one shell hole to another, frequently pursued by Boche machine-gun fire. Some of the men occupied a much longer time in "dribbling back"; and one man seen

by this Lance-Corporal told him he had been eleven days in three shell-holes, nursing his wounds, living on the emergency rations of dead Boches in the neighbourhood, and getting back his strength. His baggage, when at last he reached our own lines, consisted of a waterproof sheet, and a few little souvenirs in a Boche helmet which he could not bring himself to discard.

A Captain of the ——, who had found himself in command of his battalion for the time being, was looking out on Bapaume forty-eight hours before I saw him at Southampton. "Out there on the left of High Wood we could look right down on Bapaume. It was tantalising. It looked as though it would be so easy to break right through. But

the look of the thing is nothing to go by. That's what irritates our chaps: the elusiveness of the Boche. The beggar's nearly always out of sight. It's all fighting bits of iron, say the men. I know what they mean. Death comes at you everywhere from unseen strongholds. The men don't funk that. They are prepared for any amount of it. What disgusts them is the fundamental cowardice of the Boche; for that's what it is, you know. He's efficient, and he is cruel, and he is a bully. But his efficiency stops short at the clever manipulation of mechanism. He's no fighter. Whenever our chaps are able, after superhuman efforts, to come to actual grips with the Boche, the blighter slings his arm in, as they say; puts up his hands, you

know, every single time. Fight they will not; when it comes to man to man. That's why I say they are cowards at bottom, every mother's son of 'em. We give 'em every sort of show. If any of 'em can get through our barrage we're always ready to put up a decent fight for 'em at close quarters. But they funk it, and retire. When we are attacking they will give us all the hell they can, naturally, at shooting ranges, but never, never, never will they give a stand-up fight to those of us who get through. They'll fire till you can almost touch 'em; and then—the damned curs!—twenty of 'em will throw up their hands to three of our men."

CHAPTER XX

LESSONS FRITZ HAS LEARNED ON THE SOMME

Among wounded officers and men whom I talked with at Southampton were many who took part in the fighting immediately south of Thiepval. Greatly as their experiences varied, one fact emerged clear and definite from the remarks of all, and that was that the Boches put up a most desperate resistance to our gradual advance upon the stronghold of Thiepval. A Major who was wounded there (a fortnight before Thiepval fell) said :

"I have talked with a good many of all ranks, both on the spot and since I was knocked out; and everyone seems agreed that the Boche resistance has reached its climax to the south of Thiepval, and in an only slightly lesser degree at Guillemont. Among prisoners we got there I saw men who had spent a long time before Verdun; and they said Verdun at its worst was a less crushing business; less intense, you know, than this Thiepval fighting. A French officer who was more than two months at Verdun told me the same thing, in Amiens.

"You see, since this present offensive began, one of the things the Boche has learned—and, mind you, it has taught him many unpleasant lessons—is that, once he allows our men to get face to

face with his, once they get to close quarters, that particular engagement is over. It isn't a question of what often or generally happens. It's invariable. It's not my job to boost up the New Army; for I belong to it. I'm a temporary officer myself. But it simply is an indisputable fact that this show has established once for all, the Boche infantry cannot stand up against our infantry, when they get to grips. The reasons of it, and the conclusions to be drawn may be matters of opinion; but that much is a matter of fact. Our chaps are just as susceptible to the weight of flying metal as any other mortals; but when machinery has had its say, and the flesh and blood units of the two sides come together, only one thing ever happens: the Boche is beaten.

Nine times out of ten he simply refuses the final challenge and puts his hands up. Where he doesn't put his hands up, he goes down; every time. As an individual he is the inferior of our men.

"But, of course, it's the getting there that's the trouble. His machinery is just as formidable as ever; and if we were in the same boat now as we were last year in the matter of munitions, we could no more have got on to the high ground we're on now than we could have got to the moon. And even now, the Boche concentration of guns round Thiepval, and Martinpuich and Flers and Ginchy, too, is absolutely terrific.

"Honestly, I do think it's marvellous, the way our chaps have held out, and kept up their creep, below Thiepval.

There's hardly one that hasn't earned decoration, for sheer sticking power and endurance, in the face of the most tremendous offensive-defensive effort the German Army can make. We call it the New Army, but they're veterans all right, I can assure you. When a man's stuck that, even for a few days, keeping cool and steady, and filching ground here and there all the time, he knows as much of the horrors of war as he would have learned in a long term of service before 1914. And our chaps don't waver; they never whine; their hands never go up. Whine! Why, I assure you they keep up their little jokes right through the most hellish bits of all; and always when a given strafe slows down a bit—that's the nearest we get to the 'all quiet'

of the *communiqués*, you know—they're a little farther forward than they were.

"Well, I'll tell you; my own theory is that right up to the late autumn of last year, the upshot of this war still swung in the balance. It was a matter of munitions, and if the Boches were the invincibly great people they think themselves, they would have been in Paris and Calais last Christmas. But they failed to rise to the only chance they'll ever have. The end of uncertainty came with the failure of their first month before Verdun; and this Somme show has signed, sealed, and delivered the wash-out of the Hun's pretensions to the over-lordship of Europe. He's failed to smash us at our weakest, and now, at his strongest, he's failed to resist and hold us. Domino!

"That's how we feel about it out there, anyhow. And that's how I believe the Boche in the fighting line feels about it. But, of course, it will take a long time yet to bring the bosses of his machine to admission of that. They've a long distance to go yet; but—well, they're on the way."

A Lance-Corporal of a London Battalion which includes in its ranks many men of very considerable means who are well-known in civil life, was strong in his praise of stretcher-bearers.

"Many a man whom we reckoned a 'dud' because he was no good at drill, and who was made a company stretcher-bearer because of that, has worked like a hero in this show, and saved a great many lives. A lot depends on those chaps, you

know. If a man's really badly wounded, and he's got to be carried over a mile or two of ground that's been torn up by every kind of shell, he can very easily lose his life as the result of a little carelessness or lack of devotion on the part of a stretcher-bearer. I've seen stretcher-bearers who have been on the go for thirty hours on end, with hardly a mouthful of biscuit or water in that time; and handling wounded just as tenderly and gently as any woman. That's how I mean they have saved lives.

"Lots of 'em have been killed, of course, trying to get wounded men in from exposed places. They're a regular mark for the Boche snipers, who specialise on stretcher-bearers; just as some of 'em specialise on sniping wounded men who

try to crawl back. And when I think we've had the beggars at Henley and Cowes! Well, some people think that once we've beaten 'em in this war, we ought to be ever so kind and civil to the Hun and treat him in just as friendly a way as ever. It's a matter of taste; but after what I've seen, I know very well I'll never sit at the same table with 'em again; and what's more, I'll take mighty good care I never boost them at the expense of our own people by buying anything 'Made in Germany'; not much, I won't."

A private who was wounded near Guillemont said: "We had four days and nights without rest there; very hot stuff. What struck me most was the difference between the Boche casualties

and ours. You see we'd only just taken the trench my battalion was in. Well, by what I could see up there there must be four or five Boche casualties to every one of ours. I don't know what it is in other places; but that's how it was there; a regular slaughter yard. Well, you can tell, we had plenty food up there, but we couldn't eat it, for the stench everywhere. We just nibbled biscuits. You couldn't look at other food in all that stench. The bottom of the trench was sort of spongy, and if anything shifted the earth at all the smells that came up would nearly knock you down. It must have been a queer business for the Boches who were in that trench the week or two before we got it. As far as you could see all round about it the ground was

thick with dead Boches; thick with 'em. I don't think our casualties have been anything at all like theirs; not anywhere that I've been."

CHAPTER XXI

COMRADES *

JUST before leaving the docks I saw a strange, dramatic sight. In the same place you may see a hundred every day. I saw this one, and was grateful.

A long Red Cross train, newly filled from end to end from one of the hospital ships—casualties from the Somme battle-field—was pulling slowly out for its run to London. Almost every window in all its great length served to frame an outward-gazing soldier, officer, or man, in tattered, blood-stained muddy khaki.

* This chapter was published in "The Great Advance."


The Winning Smile

These were the sitting-up cases, nearly all with heads bandaged or arms in slings. You may guess that to them England looked——. But it is not difficult to imagine, or easy to tell, how England looks to a wounded Englishman who has come direct from an intense bombardment and an advance from trenches above the Somme.

Just near the dock gates the hospital train met another equally long train, coming in, and packed from end to end with fresh troops bound out for France from some English depot camp. Each of its windows framed not one, but two or three men in khaki; red, lusty faces, well sun-browned, looking out over the close-cropped heads of their mates; full of eager curiosity and expectation; and

full of the sappy, clean robustness which camp life in the English countryside brings to all.

For fifty yards or so, and at a foot pace, the two contrasting trains of King George's soldiers glided side by side, in an uncanny silence. The writer watched them from an office window overhead, and could plainly see in the faces of the untried troops their eager interest, their profound respect for their comrades who had been tried. A strange light, a radiance, shone out from many of the eyes in those fresh faces. Hard to describe, the light was quite unmistakably a pledge; a dumb promise. The assured pride, the easy fearlessness of the man who has already proved himself in the teeth of Death; this was marked in the faces of

the wounded. But no man spoke a word. Silent and inarticulate, the men to be tried gazed into the faces of the men tried, as they were carried past. So slowly the trains glided, it almost seemed their progress must be held in check by sheer telepathy; the poignant weight of meaning behind all those gleaming eyes.

Suddenly, then, in a rather quavering voice, most singularly vibrant with emotion, a very young Lance-Corporal—of the Dorsets, I think, but cannot be sure—whose right arm was in a white sling, and whose head was swathed in bandages, cried out, in all the sunny silence:

"Are we down-hearted?"

And then the tension snapped. It seemed that hundreds of these brave

fellows—coming home and going out—heaved long sighs. All had ached to give expression to the powerful emotions inspired by the chance juxtaposition of those two trains; and, in their English innocence, none had known how. Here was a way. The music of the roar which rose now from the cabined hundreds of both trains was something to grip the bowels of a Briton; to touch with magic of some kind the least impressionable mind in all this realm. Those wonderful rising and falling waves of sound I shall never forget. It was only when the two trains were divided by a gap of fully two hundred yards that the music of it died away, slowly, in the soft summer air.

The wounded Lance-Corporal was

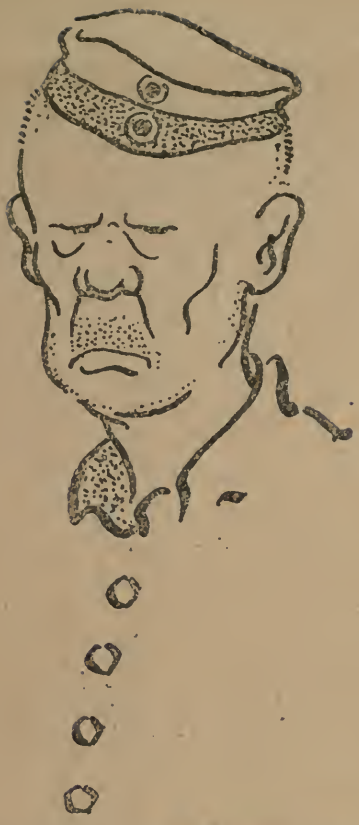
answered as great Kings and Generals have been answered; from the very bottoms of the hearts of brave men strung to tense feeling by a sudden pressure of emotions that not one among the many hundreds of them could analyse or explain. Pride, modesty, eager curiosity, deep-seated determination, pity, respect, wonder, admiration, satisfaction, reassurance, aspiration, high ambition, and heart-felt good wishes and comradeship —all were there for the ears that could catch their different notes, in the thrilling, ringing successive waves of:

"No! No! No! No!"

Well one knew, without any telling, where the fainter weaker notes came from. In carefully shaded cots, hidden away inside the hospital train, tenderly cared

for by those sweet-natured, big-hearted sisters who never fail, no matter how long the day, how longer yet the night of effort, there lay heroic men sore stricken; hard hit. The pent emotion of the silent moments of passing had communicated itself, all unseen, to fevered brains within, as well as to the hearts and minds of the lightly wounded window-watchers. Their part in the swelling sound waves of answer to the debonair Lance-Corporal who loosed the spell, was shaky and low. But, my word for it, it was there. My thought is, it was this, perhaps, which made that shouted answer different from any other I ever heard, and distinguished above all others among the shouts of the least articulate and most lovable soldiers in the world.

Deep spoke to deep, across the railway steels. I pray God those good chaps all may meet again, and happily, in the coming days of peace, when we shall have done our job and earned our rest; having drawn for ever the poison fangs of the dragon of Prussian militant despotism.



The worst of "Kultur" is
— it shows so
in the face