

Private Spud Tamson

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Title: Private Spud Tamson

Author: R. W. Campbell

Release Date: November 08, 2014 [eBook #47315]

Language: English

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Private Spud Tamson

BY

CAPTAIN R. W. CAMPBELL

TWELFTH IMPRESSION

William Blackwood and Sons
Edinburgh and London
1916

I TAKE THE LIBERTY TO
Dedicate this Book
TO
MY COMMANDING OFFICER,
MY BROTHER OFFICERS,
AND
THE N.C.O.'S AND MEN
OF
MY GALLANT REGIMENT.

NOTE.

The Glesca Mileeshy is no regiment in particular. The story is simply a composite study of the types who fill the ranks of our Militia Regiments, now known as The Special Reserve. In the near future I hope to give a pen picture of our Territorials—the splendid force with which I am at present connected.

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CHAPTER I. SPUD TAMSON ENLISTS.

THE Glesca Mileeshy was a noble force, recruited from the Weary Willies and Never-works of the famous town of Glasgow. It was also a regiment with traditions, for in the dim and distant past it had been founded by 1000 heroic scallywags from out of the city jails. These men were dressed in tartan breeks and red coats, given a gun and kit, shipped straight to the Peninsula, and on landing there were told to fight or starve.

"We'll fecht," was their unanimous reply, and fight they did. Inured to hardships, they quickly adapted themselves to the tented field, and early displayed a thirst

[pg 4] "Ay—I waant tae jine the Mileeshy."

"Which Militia?"

"The Glesca Mileeshy, of coorse."

"Very well, come with me, and I'll get you a Field-Marshal's baton," said the sergeant with glee, for this recruiter was feeling thirsty and much in need of his half-crown fee. He led Spud into the recruiting office, and told him to strip.

"When did you have a bath last?"

"Last Glesca Fair," answered Spud, quite unashamed of his nigger-like skin.

"What! Ten months ago?"

"Ach! that's naething; ma faither hisna had a waash since he got mairret."

"Well then, what's your age?"

"Age! I dinnae ken!"

"Don't know your age?"

"Naw, but I wis born the year that the auld chap wis sent tae Peterheid."

"Oh, what was that for?"

"Knockin' lumps aff the auld wife's heid wi' a poker."

"Very well, we'll say you're nineteen," added the sergeant. "Now, what's your religion?"

"The Salvation Army. Ye see, the auld [pg 5] chap kept in wi' them, for

they gie him a bed when he's 'on the bash."

"And what's your occupation?"

"Cornet-player. I blaw the trumpet, an' the auld chap gies oot the balloons and candy."

"What is your full name and address?"

"Spud Tamson, Murder Close, the Gallowgate, five up, ticket number 10,005."

"That's a big number!"

"Ay, that's the number o' fleas in the close."

"Now, my lad, get into that bath and then you'll pass the doctor."

When Spud emerged from the water he was a different lad. The grime of years had gone, leaving his skin pink and fresh. He looked fit indeed with the exception of his spurtle legs and somewhat comical face. However, the old sergeant wanted his half-crown, so Spud had to pass by hook or by crook. He made him hop round the doctor's room like a kangaroo, and when he was just on the verge of failing in the eyesight test he whispered the number of dots in his ear. And so Spud Tamson was passed as a fullblown private into the Glesca Mileeshy.

[pg 6] "There's the shilling. Go home and say good-bye to your friends; but remember, be at the station to-night at eight."

"A' richt, sergint. I'll be there," replied Spud, as he marched proudly out of the door. Soon after, he announced the news to his now fond and proud parents.

"I'm prood o' ye, son," said Mrs Tamson. "Here, tak' yer faither's shirt and Sunday breeks and pawn them. You'll get twa shillin's on them. And bring back a gill o' the best, twa bottles o' table beer, an' a pun' o' ham. We'll hae a feast afore ye gang tae the Mileeshy," concluded his mother, as she handed Spud the articles for pawning. He blithely stepped off, and on his return was followed by all the thirsty members of the "Murder Close Brigade."

"Here's tae Private Spud Tamson of the Glesca Mileeshy," said Mrs Tamson, raising a glass to her lips, and giving Spud a look of pride.

"Ay, he'll be a braw sodger," chimed in an old wife.

"If it wisnae for his legs," said Tamson senior.

"Let's hae a sang," interjected "Hungry [pg 7] Bob," another relative who was a professional militiaman. All were agreed, and Bob commenced to sing—

"Their caps were tattered and battered,
 And jackets faded and worn,
 Their breeches ragged wi' crawling
 When boosey and a' forlorn;
 Yet when dressed in the tartan

They're the pride o' the women's eye,
 Are the Rusty, Dusty, Deil-may-care,
 Plucky Auld G.L.I."

"Hear! hear!" echoed the audience, sipping up the last of the refreshments, then rising to follow Spud to the station.

"What's up?" asked the neighbour, Mrs M'Fatty, as she saw the crowd go marching out of the close.

"D'ye no' ken—Spud Tamson's jined the Mileeshy!"

"D'ye tell me! But he's got bachle legs and bleary een. A braw sodger he'll mak'," said the other with a snicker.

"Oh, but he'll blaw up weel when he gets a skinfu' o' skilly and army duff," said Mrs M'Fatty, shutting her door again.

Meantime Spud was marching to the station, headed by the melodeon and tinwhistle band of the "Murder Close Brigade." [pg 8] It was the proudest day of his life, and he stuck out his chest as he marched into the Central Station.

"In here," said the old sergeant, getting him by the scruff of the neck and half pitching him into a railway carriage for Blacktoon. The whistle blew, and as the train moved out his friends shouted—

"Keep oot o' the Nick, Tamson."

"Pawn your claes an' send me the ticket."

"I'll come oot tae see ye," said his faither.

"If you're no in Barlinnie," shouted Spud as a last farewell, then collapsed down on the seat, to the disgust of a woman next to him.

"Dinnae smother ma wean," she said.

"I'm sorry, missus. I thocht it wis a doll."

"Did ye, ye impident keely. If I wis your mither I wid hae drooned ye."

"I'm ower bonny for that," answered Spud in a good-humoured way.

"Ha! ha! ha! What a face!"

"What's wrang wi' ma face?"

"It's like a burst German sausage."

"She's got ye that time," said an old packman in the opposite corner; "but whaur are ye gaun?"

[pg 9] "Tae jine the Mileeshy."

"Man, I'm a piper in that 'crush.' You'll like it—it's great sport. But mind Sergeant-Major Fireworks. He's a holy terror. He's got a chist like a horse, and a breist o' tin medals. When he howls the dogs start barking, and when he curses he mak's ye shiver as if ye had the fever. But he'll mak' a man o' ye."

"What d'ye get tae eat?"

"Hard breid, skilly, bully beef, an' army duff. You'll smell the beef a mile

away. And mind the blankets.”

”What’s wrang wi’ them?”

”They’re like the picture shows—movin’. But here’s Blacktoon, an’ there’s a sergint waitin’ for ye. I’ll see ye at camp, and mine’s a pint. Ta-ta,” concluded the old warrior, as Spud stepped out to meet the sergeant.

”I’m Private Spud Tamson,” said our hero, saluting the sergeant.

”Alright, but don’t salute me—salute the heid yins, that’s the officers. Quick march.” And off went Spud and his escort through the streets of Blacktoon.

There was a smile as the bold Militiaman went by, and a little gang of unwashed [pg 10] urchins joined the procession, singing—

”Oh, this is Jock M’Craw,
 A sodger in the raw,
 But Bully Beef and Duff
 ’ll mak’ him fat an’ tough,
 And then he’ll be
 Like Bob M’Gee,
 A twelve stane three
 Mileeshiman! Mileeshiman!”

[pg 11]

CHAPTER II. SPUD ARRIVES AT THE DEPOT.

THE Depot in Blacktoon was a somewhat ancient affair. In its palmiest days the blood-sucking Hanoverian mercenaries of King Geordie had been quartered there. And during the Russian Scare a score of low jerry-built buildings had been added to house the braw lads hastily summoned to defend their kail-pots and their wives. The Depot was therefore a glorified "Model"—in fact, some of the "Mileeshy" described it as a "bug and flea factory." However, that was not the fault of His Majesty's Government, but rather the result of collecting from the highways and byways all the odds and ends of humanity. Nevertheless, it was a useful institution from a social reformer's point of view. In times of stress and unemployment the Depot became [pg 12] a refuge and soup-kitchen for all those who could muster enough chest measurement and say "99" while an old horse surgeon thumped the lungs with his ironlike fists. And strange to say, it was also viewed by the magistrates as a sort of reformatory penitentiary. Many a lad summoned before the bailie for sheep-stealing, burglary, wife-beating, or "getting a lassie into bother," was given the option of "sixty days—or jine the Mileeshy." Naturally, these rascalions preferred the lesser of the evils, and, in this way, the Secretary of State for War was enabled to put on paper that "The Militia was up to the established strength and filled with men of a hardy and soldier-like kind." Still, these men could fight. Wellington, as I have already said, had found the Glesca Mileeshy able to rise to the noblest heights. So, you see, there was enough of tradition to whet the enthusiasm of the warlike Spud, and as he marched through the barrack gates he swung out his pigeon chest, tightened up his shanks, and swaggered across the parade in the style of a braw "Mileeshiman." The sergeant marched him straight to where Sergeant-Major Fireworks was standing.

[pg 13] "Halt!" the sergeant commanded.

Then addressing the sergeant-major, said, "Private Spud Tamson from Glasgow, sir."

"Umph! You're a beauty. What are you—a burglar or wife-beater, eh?"

"Naw, I'm Spud Tamson, rag merchant, frae Glesca."

"Say 'sir' when you speak to me. And keep your legs to attention. You're a soldier now! Don't scowl at me; I'll have no dumb insolence from you, understand! And remember, you belong to the Glesca Mileeshy, the right of the line and the terror of the whole world."

"I ken a' about that. Ma uncle wis in it."

"What was his name?"

"Rab M'Ginty."

"M'Ginty! Why, that was the d— rascal who sneaked my trousers and stole a barrel of beer."

"Ay, that's him. He's got an' awfu' thirst. I think he's got a sponge in his thrapple."

"Very well. You'll go to 'A' Company. March him off, sergeant." And away went Spud to join the leading company of his regiment.

He was introduced to a barrack-room where twenty men lived under the rule of a [pg 14] red-nosed corporal nicknamed "Beery Bob." The walls of this room were whitewashed and decorated here and there with photos of boxers and ballet girls in tights. Along each side of the room were the little iron beds with rolled-up mattresses and blankets neatly folded. A single shelf contained each man's belongings, while at the end of the room there was a cupboard to hold the rough bread, greasy margarine, and chipped iron bowls and plates. To the sensitive eye the place just looked like a prison, but the average Militiaman regarded it as a palace, for he hailed from a brute creation who only know squalor and misery. Indeed, it was frequently argued that to house these men in a more artistic sphere would be stupid, for the simple reason that they would wipe their feet with the tablecloths and use the saucers for the boot blacking. In any case, it was life under the crudest conditions. On a pay-day it was simply Hell.

Dinner was being served as Spud entered. This consisted of a greasy-looking stew, coupled with queer-looking potatoes. The old soldiers, of course, made sure of receiving the biggest share. This was an unwritten law, handed down from the Army of the [pg 15] Romans, and it was *infra dig.* for the recruit to object. Imagine the surprise of the hungry Spud Tamson on sitting down to a bone and a couple of potatoes. It was too much for his fiery nature, and, on observing the plate of an old Die-hard next to him, which was loaded up with the choicest titbits, he remarked to him, "You're like Rab Haw—you've eyes bigger than your belly."

"Nane o' yer lip, or I'll knock your pimped face intae mincemeat."

"Wid ye! D'ye think I'm saft?"

"Shut up, I tell ye."

"Tha'll no' frichten me, auld cock—I'm gem."

"Tak' that," said his opponent, wiping his hand across his face. Spud promptly hit back, with the result that the table went up with a bang and all the dinners crashed to the floor.

"Mak' a ring! Mak' a ring!" shouted the others, for Militiamen dearly love a scrap. In a few seconds this was done. Spud and his enemy off with their jackets, and soon the thud, thud, of blows, and an occasional grunt told of a deadly combat. If Spud was lean, he was wiry, and he had been reared in the school of self-help. He hopped round the old Die-hard like a bantam, and now and [pg 16] then slipped in a terrific blow on the elderly man's corporation.

"Go on the wee yin!"

"Two to one bar one!"

"Slip it across him!"

"Whack his beer barrel!" were some of the rude but encouraging remarks. But all the pluck of Spud was useless against the great hulking form of "Dirty Dick," as his opponent was called. After a ten-minutes' bout Dick gave out a terrible snipe which sent the brave Spud to the floor and caused the blood to spurt from his nose in a regular stream.

That was the end of the combat. Willing hands tended the unconscious Spud, and on his recovery they hailed him as a fit and proper person for the Glesca Mileeshy. Dick, in a true sportsmanlike manner, shook hands and marched the whole crowd to the canteen. There the health of the gallant recruit was pledged with Highland honours, followed by the "Regimental" Anthem of the Glesca Mileeshy—

"Beer, beer, glorious beer,
Fill yourself right up to here;
Don't make a fool of it,
But down with a pail of it,
Glorious, glorious beer."

[pg 17] This episode was duly reported to Tamson senior. That worthy ragvender was well pleased—so pleased, in fact, that he got fu' on the strength of it, and received a hammering from Mrs Tamson, who cracked the frying-pan over his head. In the Gallowgate, the Murder Close Brigade also hailed the news with pride. Spud was "one of the boys," and they determined to give him a public reception in a fried-fish shop when he returned.

Meantime Spud was being initiated into the arts of the soldier. From the stores he had received a pair of wide, ill-fitting tartan breeks, resembling concertinas, a red jacket, which hung like a sack, a white belt, and a leatherbound Glengarry cap. A penny swagger cane and the inevitable "fag" completed the

picture of Spud as a warrior bold. He also received a rifle and equipment. The rifle was an ancient affair, officially known as a "D.P." (Drill Purposes). A certain number of good rifles were allowed to each company for firing purposes. This arrangement, perhaps, saved the lives of many in the Depot of Blacktoon, for the Glesca Mileeshy at large resembled the Dervishes of the Khalifa.

[pg 18] Before dealing with the drilling of Spud on the barrack square I must not forget to record his first ragging affair. This, as in the case of every recruit, occurred on the first night in the barrack-room. It is known as "setting the bed." As each bed is a collapsible affair, kept together by movable bolts and stays, it is quite an easy matter to abstract a few, leaving sufficient to allow the practical jokers to carry out their scheme. On the night in question Spud, of course, was quite unconscious of any trouble to come. When "Lights out" sounded he hopped into bed and soon was fast asleep. His snoring was the signal for the mischievous rascals to crawl out of their beds. Dirty Dick was one. He fastened long strings to the legs of the sleeping man's bed. To the ends of his blankets strings were also attached. During these operations a "ghost" was getting ready by draping a white sheet over his body and tipping his fingers and eyes with phosphorus. A sergeant's sword was also given a touch of gleaming phosphorus. This completed, all scuttled back to their beds and waited for the signal.

"Go," shouted the leader. The strings [pg 19] were tugged, away went the legs, off went the blankets, and with a horrible crash Spud's bed collapsed like a pack of cards on to the floor. His dreams were rudely shattered, and he found himself standing in his shirt-tail 'midst the wreckage, muttering some unparliamentary thoughts. The stillness and darkness of the barrack-room made the affair uncanny. He had just commenced to wonder whether his brain was sound when he was again startled to see a ghost advancing down the room, loudly exclaiming, "Spud Tamson, I am the Ghost of Jack the Ripper. I have come to slit thy gizzard with a sword, so prepare to pass into the land where the angels sell ice-cream and all drinks are free." This eerie person also waved his blazing-sword and hands in such a terrifying way that poor Spud shivered with a strange and awful fear. He thought he was in something like Dante's Inferno. Nearer, nearer came the "Ghost," waving his awful sword. Was he to die? Would he never see his dearly beloved Gallowgate again? And oh, what of his Mary Ann, that romantic Glasgow creature who held his heart in the hollow of her hand? Something had to be done.

[pg 20] Just then he caught the suppressed laughter of his fellows. His fears vanished with the wind. He knew he was being ragged. Again he would show his pluck. Picking up an iron leg of his bed, he waited for the "Ghost" to come quite near.

"Spud Tamson, bare thy black and unwashed neck—I have come to slit it

like a butcher cutting a pig——”

Bang! went Spud’s iron stanchion. It struck the sword, then Spud gave the ”Ghost” a terrific blow below the belt. He howled, then flew at his aggressor like a tiger. In a second the still barrack-room was turned into a boxing-booth. The unseemly noise was so bad that it roused the corporal, ”Beery Bob,” out of his usual heavy sleep. Well used to these affairs, the corporal, seizing a big stick, jumped out of his bed. Crack went the stick over the nether region of the ”Ghost,” who at once galloped to bed. Crack went the stick again over Spud’s poor meatless form. There was a yell, and Tamson exclaimed, ”It wisna me, corporal! It wisna me!”

”Naw, but that wis me. Get tae bed and nae mair o’ yer yelpin’,” he said, turning [pg 21] in, while the remainder of the Militiamen were laughing underneath the blankets. Poor Spud, realising that he was amongst the Philistines, immediately camped for the night midst the wreckage of his dreams.

[pg 22]

CHAPTER III. ESPRIT-DE-CORPS.

SERGEANT Cursem could drill anything from an elephant to a baboon. His figure was a walking advertisement for Lipton's, while his voice resembled the rasping fog-horns on the Clyde. He had the eye of an eagle, the moustache of a Kaiser, and the finest vocabulary of curse-words in the Army—hence his name of Cursem. Of course he was a Regular, one specially selected to thump duty, drill, and discipline into the motley array annually enlisted to defend his Majesty, his heirs and successors. His was a tough job, but he managed it. His brute personality and muscular strength were sufficient to repel the insolence and insubordination of the average Glesca keely. Naturally, he was famous. Round the hot plates of the "Models," in the ticketed dens [pg 23] of the Gallowgate, and in the stone yards of Barlinnie, there were ancient heroes who recited his deeds and mimicked his adjectives. And Cursem's nicknames were legion. "Blowhard," "Hardneck," "Swankpot," and "Grease lightning," were just a few. Still he was popular, for underneath his rough exterior was a heart of gold. Old swaddies delighted to tell of his gallantry, too, for once on the Frontier of India he had slaughtered ten bloodthirsty Pathans in the space of an hour. Spud and his pals, in consequence, always paraded in fear and awe. When Cursem bellowed "Fall in" they trembled, while his thunderous "'Shun" made them shiver and pale.

Cursem had a stock address for recruits on their first parade. "The first duty of a soldier is obedience," he would say. "If you're told to cut the whiskers off a German, or stick your stomach in front of a pom-pom—do it, and no back answers. You're not paid 'to think,' you're paid to die. And when you die—die like a soldier and a man. It doesn't matter whether you've been a tinker, burglar, or wife-beater, once you're a soldier—you're a gentleman. If you want to get drunk, there's the canteen. Don't [pg 24] go into the beer-shops in town and fill yourself up to the neck, then get arrested for assault and battery. Next—wash yourselves. Some of you chaps haven't had a bath since you were born. Take a pride in yourselves. Cleanliness is next to godliness—you've a chance of getting

to heaven if you wash the black collars off your necks. There's enough germs below your finger-nails to kill the Army with itch and fever. And when you're marching—march like guardsmen. Don't waddle like ducks and bulldogs. Stick out your chest. If you haven't got a chest shove some cotton-wool in your tunic. Swing your arms out and straighten up your legs. Step out as if you owned the whole Empire. And keep your eyes off the ground. There's no fag-ends or half-crowns there. Now, answer your regimental names—”

”Tamson,—”Here.”

”M’Fatty,—”Here.”

”Muldoon,—”Here.”

”M’Haggis,—”Here.”

”M’Shortbread,—”Here.”

”Whiskers,—”Here.”

”M’Sloppy,—”Here.”

”M’Ginty,—”Here.”

[pg 25] ”Very good—now, we’ll do some drill. Squad—’Shun. As you were—put some life in it. ’Shun—by the right—quick march. Step out—hold up your heads—swing out your arms. Left—left—left—right—left. Come along, M’Ginty, you walk like a beer-barrel. Step out, M’Haggis,—you’re not at a funeral. Left—right—left—about turn. I said right—about, Tamson, not left—about. Don’t sulk and scowl at me. No dumb insolence here, my lad, or I’ll clap you in the guard-room. Squad—right turn—lead on. Stop that talking in the ranks. Tamson,—hold your head up.”

”Haud your ain— heid up,” muttered Tamson.

”Squad—halt. What do you mean, you tin-chested, bandy-legged rag merchant. Didn’t I tell you not to talk in the ranks?”

”It wisnae me—it wis M’Ginty.”

”You’re a liar, Tamson,” answered M’Ginty.

”Silence, you red-haired, spud-bred Irishman. I’ll do all the talking here,” roared Cursem, his whiskers sticking out like needles and his eyes blazing with anger. ”Now, no more nonsense. By the right—quick march. I’ll sweat you to death, and [pg 26] make your shirts stick to your back like glue. About turn—keep your eyes off the colonel’s cook—she’s married and got a family. Right form—come round now—steady—forward—by the right. That’s better. Squad—right turn—leave the canteen clock alone—it’s not twelve yet, and there’s no free beer. Come along, Muldoon,—step out—you get a loaf of bread and a pound of beef to do it on. Halt! Now you can talk about your Mary Ann’s,” concluded Cursem, after the first spasm. But the rookies had no wind left to talk. They were content

to gasp and study in silence the mountainous personality of Sergeant Cursem.

It was also during the minutes at ease that the sergeant discovered the callings and antecedents of his men.

"What do you outside?" he inquired of the pimple-nosed M'Ginty.

"Everybody, sarjint," replied this sharp imp of the streets.

"I *thought* you were a burglar. And, Muldoon, what's your calling?"

"Gravel crusher, sergint?"

"Umph! What's that?"

"Road merchant and milestone counter."

[pg 27] "You're a tinker, eh?"

"Ay. Hae ye ony tin cans or umbrellas tae mend—I'll dae them for a pint?"

"No. Now, M'Haggis, what are you?"

"A coal merchant."

"Where?"

"Doon below."

"In the pits—I thought that, by your neck. And where did you get the name of Whiskers?" he next inquired of a queer-looking mortal from Cowcaddens.

"Frae ma faither. The hair used tae grow oot o' his nose an' ears. He wis a Hielanman frae Tobermory."

"Umph—I can see the heather sticking out of your toes as well," interjected Cursem. Then turning to Tamson, he asked his pedigree.

"Rags and balloons, sergint."

"I suppose you push the barrow?"

"Na—I blaw the balloons, mak' the candy, and soond the trumpet for the auld chap."

"Where did you get that broken nose?"

"In a fish shop."

"A fight?"

"Ay—an Italian hit me wi' a bottle for pinchin' a plate."

[pg 28] "Well—you're a lot of beauties," said Cursem, addressing the crowd.

"You could steal the hair off a billiard ball and burgle the Bank of England in broad daylight. But never mind, lads," he continued, in a more intimate and kindly way, "you're doing your little bit for your country. That's more than some of the vulgar rich *can* do. And you can all stop a bullet, or plank a bayonet in a German's stomach. Hooligans can be heroes just as well as aristocrats. This old Militia was first raised in a prison and died like heroes in the Peninsula. And I've seen men like you slicing the heads off big fat niggers out in India. And, mind you, I would sooner lead a company of the Glesca Mileeshy than a company of Oxford grads."

"Why, sergint?" ventured one of the squad.

"These gents think too much—you don't. A good soldier never thinks. If he does, he's a nuisance. A soldier's a man who doesn't ask why he's got to die. He does it, and that's the end of it. And I want to talk to you now about Esprit-de-Corps."

"What's that, sergint?"

[pg 29] "Esprit-de-Corps means that you've got to feel and believe that you're equal to a hundred niggers, ten Frenchmen, five Germans, and a couple of Yanks."

"Is that no' swank?" asked Tamson.

"Well—yes. What you call swank won Waterloo, the Crimea, and the Mutiny. See! But just to make it clear, gather round here and I'll tell you of a fight I was once in."

The recruits came closer, for when Curseem opened up his heart they loved him. And then all liked to hear the yarns of the tented field. And Curseem was a clever enough soldier to know that this was the best way to let these simple-hearted youngsters understand that tradition and duty are the mainsprings of an army.

"You see, this affair happened out on the Frontier. That's where the sun peels your nose like a banana, and gives you a thirst that gallons can't kill. Well, we had been marching, skirmishing, and killing for nearly six months. We had lost half of the regiment with bullets, fever, and sunstroke when we arrived at a place called Fugee. There the old colonel told us that there were three thousand oily-skinned Dacoits [pg 30] waiting to kill us out by a night attack. Mark you, we were only five hundred strong, and half-starved at that. The nearest garrison was 100 miles away, and we had only rations for three days. Pretty tight, I tell you. So the officers and sergeants had a pow-wow. The colonel put it straight to us when he said, 'It's fight and get out, or stand still and get butchered to death.' We voted to fight. 'Very well—we'll burn our camp baggage, spare rifles, and everything we can't carry on our backs. Then we shall sally out at night. 'A' Company will make a feint at the enemy, while the remaining companies slip round their rear. 'A' must fight its way through or perish, while the remainder must also take pot-luck. Do you agree?' We all said 'Yes,' and went back to get ready.

"Everything was burned. And as I was in 'A' I got my boys ready for their job. The old colonel shook hands with every man of 'A,' and wished us luck. He never expected to see us again. Then out we crawled to the foot of the hills. It was as dark as the devil's waistcoat. And now and then we fell into dongas and holes. [pg 31] No one spoke, and all tried to keep behind the captain, who had an illuminated compass. For over an hour we stumbled along, when the captain whispered 'Halt!'

”Sergeant,’ said he, ’I can smell niggers. Come with me for a minute.’ We went forward. ’Steady!’ says he; ’there’s one asleep.’ And before I could say Jack Robinson his sword was in the nigger’s stomach. The beggar roared like a donkey, and that started the bother. In a minute the hills were ablaze with bullet flashes. The captain was shot dead; so was the subaltern. My helmet was riddled, and I got pinned in the leg. Just then the dawn broke, and I saw one chance for us all—through a little valley. ”A’ Company, fix bayonets—charge,’ I roared. And didn’t the boys come on. All Glasgow lads—and plucky ones. We shot, bayoneted, kicked, battered, and cursed through a thousand dirty-smelling Dacoits. They made mincemeat of twenty of us in five minutes. I was bleeding like a pig, for they were cutting me up for sandwiches. But on I went with the remainder of the company. The shots, the whistling knives, the wild yells and curses made it just like hell. Yes; that’s [pg 32] the word. Once I looked back and saw the enemy disembowelling some of our boys. Just then our silly bugler, who got in a funk, sounded the ’Retire.”

”And did you, sergint?” asked Tamson.

”No—I shot him dead. The battlefield’s no place for fools. Well, we cut, cursed, and blundered through till we got on to a hill. There were only ten of us left. You see, we had tackled the main body, so that I knew the regiment had got safely through. It was hopeless for us to follow. We were cut off. It was to be a last stand for us all. The enemy had shied clear for a while. They knew they could get us any old time. So I got the boys to build a sangar, and we lay down. There was no water, and we had only a few biscuits to last us out. Our throats were parched, our tongues hanging out, and nearly every man had some kind of wound. We tied them up with rags. But oh, my God, the sun! It burnt the sinews of our legs, and sent one fellow raving mad. He rushed down the hill like a mad priest, and in five minutes he was shot dead and disembowelled by the outposts of the enemy. All through the night the Dacoits chanted their death songs, for they [pg 33] were biding their time. For three days we lived like that. Four more died. And on the fourth day the enemy drew near for the final murder of us all. We were weak, but frenzy made us strong. I fired as if I was at Bisley, and potted ten of them dead. All the others did the same. That stopped their rush. But only for an hour. Then they crept on again. Nearer they came. I could smell them—their dirty, evil eyes were mocking us. But every head that popped up from behind a stone got bashed with a bullet. Then our ammunition went done. I had one round left. I heard them come on. I felt it was domino for us all. My brain was going; blood was trickling down my shoulder; but just as my memory snapped I heard the echo of a bugle and cheer. The relief column had got through. When I came to I was in hospital. I was a lunatic for six months, and the only one left out of a hundred men. That’s what we call *Esprit-de-Corps*.

Do you understand what I mean now?" he asked in a quiet voice.

"Ay, sergint," was the humble response from all.

"Squad—Dismiss," and off they trooped [pg 34] to the barrack-room with the spirit of duty and honour in their souls. That's how Sergeant Cursem drilled the Glesca Mileeshy. And that is how he earned his Victoria Cross.

[pg 35]

CHAPTER IV. DISCUSSING THE OFFICERS.

"GINGER!"

"Ay, Spud."

"Whut's a colonel?"

"Oh, he's the heid bummer o' the Mileeshy. The man that curses everybody on parade."

"Yon fat man wi' the red nose an' the medals?"

"Ay."

"Whut did he get his medals for?"

"Slicing beef-steaks aff the niggers in Egypt. D'ye ken his nickname?"

"Na."

"It's 'Corkleg.' He's only got wan leg. A nigger chowed it aff in the Soudan."

"Whut dis he work at when the Mileeshy's no 'up'?"

"He shoots phaisants an' kills rabbits."

[pg 36] "Ay, an' whut's yon gless in his ee fur?"

"Tae see if yer buttons are clean, an' they're nae fleas on yer bonnet."

"An', Ginger, wha's yon wee man wi' the rid hair an' pinte neb?"

"That's the 'Dandy Major.' He can scoff a bottle tae his brekfist. He's awfu' fond o' actresses. They ca' him 'Dandy Dick.' He wis in the Regulars, but he got chucked oot for hittin' the colonel on the nose."

"Whut about?"

"A wumin, of coorse,—weemin an' wine is whut they chaps live for."

"Then there's Captain Hardup—wha's he?"

"He's a professional Mileeshiman, wan o' thae chaps that mak's a leevin' oot o' the Mileeshy. He's a ranker. Rankers ken owre much. There's naethin' like a real toff for an officer. They've got the bluid, an' the men ay follow them in action. Hae ye seen oor captain yet, Spud?"

"Na."

"Weel, he's the real Mackay. His auld man's a Duke. He wears corsets, an'

pits pooder on his face, and speaks in a hawhaw wey, but he's a guid yin. He's ay got [pg 37] a hauf-quid to gie the lads a drink. D'ye ken—"

"Whut?"

"He knocked a man oot last camp. Dirty Bob, a daft piper, wis a bit fu', and said he wid lay the captain oot.

"How dare you?" ses the captain.

"Ay, I wid dare," says Dirty Bob.

"Take that, you beastly fellow," ses the captain, stretchin' him oot like a deid yin. An' that's no' the end o't. Next mornin' he sent for Bob. Ses he, 'There's a half-sovereign to you—see and behave yourself in future.' Bob's the best sodger in the company noo. Thae toffs ken hoo tae haun'le men."

"Whut wey are these officers no' in the Regulars, Ginger?"

"They're like us—they hinna got muckle brains. The Mileeshy's for orphans, unemployed, an' daft folk. But it's the back door tae the Army. If ye can get yer brains an' chest measurement up in the Mileeshy, they'll tak' ye intae the Regulars."

"An' whut are the Non-Commeesioned Officers for?" inquired Spud, still anxious to learn.

"Tae dae a' the dirty work. Ye see, [pg 38] we're a' supposed to be like cuddies—broad backs an' saft heids. The Non-Coms. are payed tae whup us on—see?"

"Then hoo d'ye get stripes?"

"Some chaps get made lance-corporal for bein' smert; ithers get it for giein' the colour-sergint ten bob. An' some get the stripe for makin' up tae the officer."

"But that's no richt, Ginger?"

"Naethin's richt in the sodgers. Ye're no' supposed tae think. If ye think owre much they'll pit ye in the nick for insubordination. That's whut they ca' Disceplin. If ye waant tae get on in the Mileeshy, kid ye're daft, an' gie the salaam tae everybody. That's hoo tae get a staff job."

[pg 39]

CHAPTER V. CANTEEN YARNS.

THE unwritten laws of the Glesca Mileeshy were as rigid as the etiquette of the Brigade of Guards. The most important was that which compelled recruits to "stand their hand," or, in plain English, give free drinks all round. This to the cultured instinct may seem a somewhat coarse enactment, but to an old Militia hand, possessed of an Indian thirst, it was all-important and always demanded. The recruit's first pay-day was usually selected for this purpose. Pay-day in the Militia, I may say, is just a sort of Dante's Inferno in miniature. And in the times of Spud Tamson the weekly pay amounted to one shilling per day. This would not keep a millionaire in matches, but it was sufficient to lure to the barracks' gate the official and unofficial wives of this [pg 40] regiment, as well as to rouse in the breasts of their noble lovers dreams of foaming ale and nights of song and story.

Just as German students have their beer clubs and drinking bouts, so did this regiment possess its boosing schools and captains. This was a weird system. Each company had a school, and on pay-day every man paid so much to the captain. The captain divided this money over the days of the week, and thus ensured that all had liquid refreshment till the next pay-day came round. The captain, of course, had other duties. He chaired all meetings in the canteen, maintained law and order, and, more important, he secured patrons possessed of unlimited cash and willing hearts. The recruit, of course, was the most important. A youngster deemed it an honour to sup with those veterans of "Models" and wars, and for the privilege was content to disgorge. Spud was therefore inveigled into one of these schools, and in true Tamson style called for "pints o' the best." For this act he was made the guest of the evening, and so long as his pay lasted the old guard were content to listen to his blethers with all the deference born of thirst and cunning.

[pg 41] The canteen was, of course, under discipline and regulations. A corporal stood at the door to officially measure the pints of ale that trickled down

the Militiamen's necks. As soon as a man's head wobbled, and his eyes rolled in a stupid and vacant style, he was seized by the scruff of the neck and given the order of the boot. If he objected, he was marched to the "clink" under escort. This was religiously adhered to in the Glesca Mileeshy for the first hour, but as the clock went round, the very thirsty corporals of this regiment sent duty and regulations to Hong-Kong, and sat down to partake of the feast given free because of their superior rank.

Picture the scene, then,—a long, low room, packed with boozing schools, and badly lit with evil-smelling oil-lamps. Round the tables were seated some of the biggest rogues and many of the biggest-hearted souls in creation. In one corner, the corporal sat blind to all the world; while in the opposite part of the canteen Spud Tamson was seated amidst his new-found friends listening to the tales of woe and war.

"Speakin' about funny things," said Rab [pg 42] M'Ginty, "I mind when we were oot at the War on ootpost duty. It wis a rotten job—naethin' but hard chuck an' bully beef. An' every nicht the enemy used tae open fire. We got fed up wi' this, an' thocht oot a scheme tae save us bother. D'ye ken what we did?"

"Na," said the others.

"Weel, we got a' the auld tin cans an' auld dugs we could get oor haunds on. We tied the tin cans tae the barbed wire and every ten yerds we fixed a dug up on a chain."

"Whut fur?" asked Tamson.

"Tae rattle an' bark when the enemy wis comin'. Man, it wis a great thing! And when on duty we could get tae sleep; for the dugs barked when they heard the least soond. But wan nicht we got a terrible fricht. Ye see it wis gey daurk and aboot midnicht, a' the tin cans an' dugs commenced tae rattle an' bark. Then I heard something cherging up and doon the wires. So I let bang! That started it. In five meenits the hale army o' ten thoosan' men were firing. But the cans kept rattlin' an' the dugs barkin'. I wis shiverin' wi' fricht. [pg 43] Tae mak' things worse, there was a terrible braying—an eerie noise in front o' us. We couldnae stop it. Some said it wis auld Kruger's ghost, others said it wis the Deevil himsel'; but, man, it wis awfu'. For twa hoors we fired ten thousand rounds o' ammuneeshin but that didnae end it."

"Whut wis it?" queried the anxious and interested Spud.

"Wait," said Rab. "We kept on firing till the dawn came. An' then we saw them—dizens o' them lyin' deid."

"The enemy?" some one asked.

"Na! Donkeys."

"Donkeys! Hoo wis that?"

"Ye see, a' the transport cuddies got loose an' wandered. They got mixed

up wi' the wires an' that wis the cause o' the bother. Jist fancy, ten thoosan' rounds tae kill three dizen cuddies."

"Did ye get the V.C.?" queried Tamson.

"V.C.! Nae fear. I got ten days in the nick for openin' fire on His Majesty's cuddies."

"Ach, sure an' I've a better yarn than that," said Paddy Doolan.

"Tell it," ordered the captain.

[pg 44] "It was out in India when I was in the ould Dublin Fusiliers. We were at a place nicknamed 'Holipore,' that's where the Holy Fathers pour medicine down the niggers' necks, an' beer down the sodgers'. The affair happened at night. I was on sentry-go, and about twelve I was startled to see a mad fakir wid fire in his eyes and a sword in his fingers advancing on me.

"Halt!" ses I, shiverin' in my pants. But he never stopped. On he marched.

"Be jabbers, if yes don't halt I'll riddle ye," I roared. That didn't halt him. I rammed a cartridge in and tried to fire, but divil a bit could I fire. It was jammed, or I was drammed. And then he stopped.

"Great Sahib," he said.

"Yis," ses I, all shakin'.

"I am the Chief Priest of the Temple of Skulls. I bless you and annoint you one of my beloved and a son of the faithful. And I command you to ground your arms."

"I can't—I'll get the "nick" from the sargint."

"Great Sahib, obey, or I shall cut out thy heart and eyes."

[pg 45] "I dropped my gun like a hot Connemara spud.

"Sahib, double march and follow me." Off went the mad fellow into the jungle. I galloped after him. The tigers were roarin', elephants trumpeting and hyenas crying like ould cats. But they fled from the sight of the ould fakir. I was puffin' an' blowin' like a roarin' race-horse, and sweatin' like a pig, when he cried, 'Halt, O Sahib of the great white race.'

"Not so much of the Sahib," ses I, 'but give me a drink.'

"There is no refreshment in the Temple of Skulls. Your blood shall be the refreshment for our Gods. Watch, O Sahib.' And before I could cough the ground opened up before me showing a stair made out of bones.

"Enter," said he, like a bloomin' ould butler. Down I went into the devil's hole. It was a temple lit up with oil. The walls were made of skulls, and the floors had carpets made out of Highlanders' kilts, fusiliers' trousers, artillerymen's pants, and cavalrymen's dongarees. Holy Moses! I shivered like a cat on the tiles. As I got in, [pg 46] a dozen mad fellows commenced to play their pumpkin drums, and sing—"

”Death to the Sahib,
 His blood for our Gods,
 Death to the Sahib,
 His bones for our rods;
 Death to the Sahib,
 And then he shall know
 The secrets of Rahib
 The High Priest below.’

”Ye dirty ould spalpeen,’ ses I, knockin’ daylight out of the fellow who’d introduced me to this Madame Tussaud’s. But he dodged, and pulling a string, I was enveloped in blue flames, and then tied to an altar in front of the Holy Water.”

”Have a drink, Paddy.” interjected the captain at this point, to the disgust of the fascinated Spud and spell-bound Militiamen.

Paddy quaffed a pint from the foaming tankard, then resumed: ”Yes, they got out their scimitors—knives like the master-cook cuts the rations up with. But before slicing the beef-steaks off me the High Priest offered up a prayer ’for the soul of Sahib Paddy Doolan, of the Dublin Fusiliers, who was to be sliced, fried, and eaten on the altar of Rahib, the High Priest of the Twopenny Tube in the Jungle of Tigers and Panthers.’ [pg 47] Next, they did a can-can—a sort of Highland fling—round me.

”Stop,’ ses I, ’I’ll never get drunk again,’ but they just sung—”

”Death to the Sahib,
 His blood for our Gods.’

”Finally, they sharpened their ould ham knives, and with a wild, wild yell, stuck every one into my ould hairy chest. And then I woke up—in hospital.”

”In hospital?” queried the amazed Spud.

”Yes, I was in the D.T.’s (delirium tremens).”

”Ha! ha! ha!” laughed the crowd in a rollicking way, for Paddy Doolan was the champion liar in the corps. But his story was sufficient to drag another drink out of the green-eyed Spud, and that was the main point so far as Doolan and his pals were concerned.

”It’s your turn now, ’Dominie,’” said the captain to a grizzled old red-nosed warrior, who had seen better days.

”What do you want?”

”Tell us about Algy—some of them haven’t heard that yarn.”

”Well,” said the Dominie, lighting up his [pg 48] old cutty-pipe, ”Algy was a gent who listed in my first ’crush’—the Perthshire Kilties. He arrived one night at

Fort George with a cabful of luggage, a bicycle, a box of sardines and prunes, and a big printed roll showing how he descended from Willie the Conqueror—that's the chap who led the Normans."

"D'ye mean the Mormons?" interjected Spud.

"No, you fathead. However, Algy rang the bell. When the sergeant opened the gate he saluted, for he thought this was some new officer.

"I'm a recruit, sergeant," said Algy.

"What's yer name?" asked the sergeant.

"Algy de Verepot—I've been "plucked" at Sandhurst, and I want to get a commission through the ranks."

"You'll be lucky if you get your dinner; but come tae the sergeant-major," said he, pointing out the sergeant-major's quarters. The sergeant-major gave Algy a welcome, and told his colour-sergeant to coddle and be kind to him.

"In his room he hung up his pedigree, threw around his public-school blazers and badges, and dropped here and there some [pg 49] family notepaper with a handsome crest on it. Every soldier loves a real live toff, so all the boys gave him a hand with his kit, and acted generally as his lackeys.

"Don't bother about paying me, colour-sergeant," he said one day. 'I've plenty of money. Keep it and give the boys a drink.' This charmed the company, and he was made a hero. He also ordered superfine clothing, and many other odds and ends, from the Master Tailor and outside tradesmen. 'Just send on the bills,' was his aristocratic command. They were delighted, for the whole garrison was full of the romance of this peer's nephew in the ranks. And the girls—didn't they rush him! Even the officers' daughters went crazy about him. In his private's uniform he used to walk them out to tea. You see they pitied him, and thought he was getting thin on bully beef, toad-in-the-hole, and dead-cat stew. And then the colonel's wife met him. He used to tell her of his fiancée, Lady Gwendoline, and the great times he had with Lord Noddy at his Highland shootings. The dear lady became interested, and even got the length of walking round the ramparts arm-in-arm. Didn't we envy him, for she was [pg 50] a beauty. And they say she kissed the old colonel one night and said, 'Now, dear, you must be kind to that boy and get him his commission.'

"Certainly! Certainly!" answered the old chap.

"In this way, you see, he got into the hearts of all. And he was as keen as mustard. He used to slope arms and salute in front of the mirror, and 'paid' a man well to clean his kit. At night, too, he used to go to the adjutant's room and get books on drill. The adjutant told him everything.—How the regiment was worked; the keeping of the books, the filing of records, and the recording of the cash in the orderly-room safe.

"Then the adjutant keeps all the regimental pay in the safe?" he asked of

him one night.

"Oh yes, there are the keys," replied the captain casually.

"Shortly after this Algy received a wire saying, 'Can you come for grouse-shooting on the Twelfth.—Lord Noddy.' He rushed to the colonel and presented it, at the same time asking for leave.

"Well, it's unusual, my lad, but seeing [pg 51] who you are, you can go for seven days.' And away went Algy with all his luggage. He got a cheer from the boys as he went through the gate, for he was the idol of all. The seven days passed, but on the eighth no Algy appeared.

"Private Algy de Verepot absent, sir,' was the report on the morning parade. It startled everybody. It was the talk of the garrison, and caused grief among the ladies in town. Had he been killed! Had he deserted! What had happened! These were the topics of the day. Algy's disappearance caused more commotion than the coronation of a king. And then some strange things were discovered.

"£300 had been stolen from the adjutant's safe.

"A sergeant had lost his false teeth.

"Algy's servant missed all his furlough money.

"The colonel's wife had given Algy a cheque for £50.

"Five officers had lent him a fiver.

"And a barmaid from the town was missing. 'It can't be Algy who has done this!' said the regiment.

"It was Algy,' telegraphed the police [pg 52] from London, for he was arrested there, and got five years' penal servitude.

"Now, who do you think Algy was?"

"Tell us," cried Spud.

"Algy was the biggest crook in London. He was proved to be the man who stole King Edward's dressing-bag at Euston Station."

Just as Dominie had completed this yarn, the whole canteen was startled with the shout, "Who's a liar?"

"You are—you stole ma pint o' beer—ye thocht I wis drunk."

"Awa' an' bile yer heid," said the aggressor, a tramp piper, whose doublet was well soaked with ale.

Bang! went the fist of the aggrieved private on the piper's nose. In a second the place was turned topsy-turvy. All joined in the fight. Lamps were smashed, tables crashed on the floor, glasses hurled across the room, and all the windows cracked. For ten minutes a deadly battle was waged in the inky darkness. And then some one shouted, "Scoot, boys, scoot—here's the picket coming." And they did scoot. Some jumped through the windows, others hustled through the doors, and then half-staggering [pg 53] and running they reached their barrack-rooms, where, like true Militiamen, they tumbled quietly into bed.

Next morning the Glesca Mileeshy paraded with black eyes and battered noses. As this was the usual thing after pay-day, the colonel simply smiled, and gave the order, "Form fours—right—double march." While they were galloping round the square, this commander remarked, "D— rascals, but d— good soldiers."

"Yes, sir," replied the adjutant.

[pg 54]

CHAPTER VI. THE LIGHTWEIGHT.

GARRISON

SPUD, having experienced the usual ragging affairs, was now a full-fledged confidant of the older hands. And being of a mischievous turn of mind, he seized every opportunity to play tricks on his unsuspecting comrades. These ragging affairs were great or small according to the mental and physical fitness of the unfortunates. A powerful recruit was let down easily, for obvious reasons. A weakling or "saftie" had "to go through the mill" in an unorthodox way. Beefy M'Fadyen was of the latter kind. Like all of us, he had a pet delusion. His was, that Nature had destined him for a bantam lightweight. As a matter of fact, Beefy couldn't knock a herring off a plate. Still, that did not prevent him from coddling his puny biceps and tackling all the penny automatic [pg 55] punch-balls in the ice-cream shops of the garrison. He devoured boxing literature by the yard, and would slide down the chimney of the Sporting Club to get a free peep at the cracks of the noble art. Naturally, this tickled the funny side of all, especially Spud, who casually inquired of him one day if he could be his trainer.

"Of coorse," said Beefy.

"What d'ye usually train on?"

"Weel, I've had tae get fit on fish suppers, ice-cream, and woodbines."

"And have you boxed ony champions?"

"Oh ay—Wee Broon o' the Coocaddens, and Pud Webster o' the Gallowgate."

"But they're schule laddies. Hooever, that disnae maitter. I'll get ye in training tae box Curly Broon, the ex-champion o' the Garrison."

"Richt ye are."

"But mind ye, Beefy," said Spud solemnly, "you've tae dae whut I tell ye."

"Certainly."

"Noo, the first thing you've got tae dae is tae haund owre yer piy on piy-days."

"Whut fur?"

"Tae get beef-steaks, kippers, an' four ale—that's the stuff tae get yer muscles up."

[pg 56] This and other arrangements were duly completed. In the evening it was publicly announced that Beefy was in training to fight the champion named. The training was somewhat rigorous. After five gallops round the barrack square, Spud applied a hose-pipe to the body of his man. Then coarse towels were used, and now and again Beefy's limbs were scoured with dripping and bath-brick. As he was a little weak in the joints, a touch of blacking was painted round "tae keep oot the cauld." Minor contests were got up in the meantime, and in all these it was arranged to let Beefy have the knock-out blow. This whetted his ardour, and when he was informed that a belt and thirty shillings was to be the prize at the great contest, he became doubly keen.

One Wednesday afternoon, when the officers were having a lawn-tennis party on the green, Spud called his man into the training quarters. There he daubed the usual blacking on his knee and ankle joints, rubbed ham fat on the remainder of his body; next dressed him up in a comic harrier kit, decorated with a skull and cross-bones.

[pg 57] "Noo, Beefy, d'ye see yon green whaur the ladies an' officers are haein' tea an' tennis?"

"Ay."

"Weel, ye've tae gallop roon' that twenty times wife-beating stoppin'."

"Richt ye are, Spud."

"Ready?"

"Ay."

"Go." Off went the poor, unsuspecting mortal. As soon as he started, a hundred waiting heads popped out of the windows to see the fun. Meantime Beefy had reached the green, and, true to his trust, commenced to gallop round. The colonel's wife spotted him first. The awful apparition sent her pale. Mrs M'Haddie, the Provost's wife, let out a shriek, but nearly all the young ladies and subalterns burst into peals of laughter. Colonel Corkleg, however, fumed and cursed like Marlborough's troops in Flanders.

"Stop—"

"Who—"

"What—"

"Why—" shrieked the old commander, as he pursued Beefy round the green.

Beefy, however, simply grinned in an [pg 58] inane manner and kept on. He was in training for the garrison belt. That, to him, was a very serious affair, and he did not intend to allow any interference—even from Colonel Corkleg. But

he had yet to reckon with the adjutant. That officer ordered the bugler to sound the Fall in, at the same time letting loose a couple of bulldogs. The result was that in three minutes half the Glesca Mileeshy were in swift pursuit of the light-footed Beefy. He dodged, then led them round the barrack square, to the secret delight of Spud and his mischief-makers. Then came the end. With a deathlike gasp he fell into the arms of Sergeant-Major Fireworks.

"What do you mean?" yelled this monument of army rations.

"I'm trainin'."

"Training?"

"Ay, trainin' for the garrison belt."

"Put him in the guardroom, corporal," roared the sergeant-major, and off went poor Beefy to the cells.

Next morning the whole story came out at the orderly-room, and Beefy M'Fadyen was awarded fourteen days Confined to Barracks.

[pg 59] This did not postpone the fight. Oh no. Beefy's delusion was a permanent affair, and he would fight his rival by hook or by crook. Arrangements, however, had to be made secretly. The key of the gymnasium was quietly appropriated on the night of the tussle, and after dark the whole regiment trooped in.

"Gentlemen," said Spud Tamson, "allow me to introduce Beefy M'Fadyen, the Champion Bantam Weight o' the Glesca Mileeshy. He has been trained on woodbines, fish suppers, ice-cream, haddies, an' Dublin stout, and turns the scale at 9 st. 10 lb. He's a beauty. His muscles are like corks, and his wind as soond as the wind in bellows—walk up."

Beefy entered the ring, shook hands with Curly Broom, then sparred. All laughter was duly suppressed at a wink from Spud, for his man had to be impressed with the seriousness of the business. Beefy commenced by hopping round like a cat on a hot plate, delivering natty little blows at his opponent's chest. Curly accepted all without any pretence of defence. This roused the hopes of Beefy higher still, and of course he was cheered to his task.

[pg 60] "Go on, Beefy."

"Give him a thick ear."

"Under the belt."

"That's it—slip it across him."

These were some of the remarks. To be brief, in the tenth round, he delivered a severe blow under Curly's chin. With a well-feigned grunt and a hopeless sigh, Curly collapsed like a pack of cards. There was a rousing cheer, and Spud gladly held out his hand to the victor.

Producing a big leather belt made out of old straps and studded with various cap and collar badges, Spud fixed this round the champion's waist. Another

member presented a tin medal neatly fixed on some old red serge. Then all let out three lusty cheers.

"Noo, Beefy, you've got tae step intae the officers' mess for your prize-money—jist as ye are. The colonel'll gie ye the money at the table." Unsuspecting, Beefy glibly complied, while Spud and his friends took post in the darkest corners to watch the affair.

The officers were having dinner at the time, in fact they had just arrived at that part where the band plays the National [pg 61] Anthem, and the subaltern of the day proposes the toast of—

"Gentlemen—The King!"

when in burst Beefy M'Fadyen all perspiring and somewhat bruised—a perfect nightmare in his boxing attire. All the young officers burst out laughing, but the colonel roared, "Silence, gentlemen!" Then, turning to Beefy, he said—"How dare you enter the officers' mess? What do you mean, sir?"

"I want my prize-money."

"What money—you fool?"

"Ma thirty bob for knockin' oot Curly Broom."

"Who sent you here?"

"Spud Tamson."

"Well—get out."

"Nae fear—I want ma thirty bob. You'll no frichten me," said Beefy, sitting down on a chair.

"You—you—you—insubordinate scoundrel. How—how—dare you!" shouted the old colonel, getting red at the neck.

"Keep your hair on, auld cock," said Beefy.

"Send for the guard, adjutant."

[pg 62] In a few minutes an escort appeared, and Beefy, the vaunted champion, was seized and carried forcibly to the guardroom. All that was heard as he was hustled away was, "I want ma thirty bob."

Spud Tamson got fourteen days cells for this little trick, and poor Beefy received a paper stating, "You are discharged from His Majesty's Service as unlikely to become an efficient soldier."

"What dis that mean, Spud?" said Beefy, showing him the paper as he was leaving.

"It jist means that *you're* daft."

"Weel, Spud, I'm no' sae green as I'm cabbage-lookin'. Ta-ta." And this was true, for next day nearly every man in the Glesca Mileeshy had lost his spare

shirts, socks, and boots.

"Jings, he's no' sae daft efter a'" was Spud's final comment on the departed boxer.

[pg 63]

CHAPTER VII. A LECTURE.

It was Lord Wolseley, I think, who discovered that the ordinary soldier had really got brains. When this startling discovery was made, the General Staff realised that lectures were necessary, so that the headpieces of the troops might be of greater use in war. Lectures were accordingly devised, and these consisted of various military topics. Everything—from the cutting of the soldiers' corns to the washing of army babies—was noted down. Company officers were entrusted with this important duty. Many performed the work in an interesting way, others made a hash of it. This was due to their profusion—or lack—of brain power. And of the Militia—well, the War Office did not expect too much. It was therefore interesting to listen to Captain Coronet tackling this job.

[pg 64] "Men," he would say, "I want to talk to you about Active Service; first of all, Tamson, just explain the exact meaning of the word 'enemy.'"

"The Germans," answered Spud promptly.

"Well—not exactly. Of course I know they're beastly people—beer drinkers and sausage guzzlers. Still, that doesn't say that the word 'enemy' means that race in particular. What is your opinion, M'Whiskey?"

"Niggers, sir."

"Not necessarily; the enemy may be white or black. But the meaning is simply this, any force opposed to—"

"The Mileeshy," interjected some one.

"Well, have it that way if you care. Now, M'Ginty, what is the first thing expected of a soldier in the field?"

"The salute, sir."

"No—Instant Obedience. And what is the next thing, M'Haggis?"

"He should waash his feet."

"That's important, certainly, otherwise your feet will become objectionable. Now, the second thing is Courage; and the third, Doolan?"

"Head erect an' thumbs in line with the [pg 65] seam of the troose, sir," said

Doolan, glibly repeating some of the Drill Instructor's patter.

"I'm afraid you couldn't keep your head erect, et cetera, if the enemy was potting bullets into that beery corporation of yours. The third thing is Endurance. What does that mean, Tamson?"

"The Prudential, sir."

"Prudential! What the d— is that?"

"Threepence a week—insurin' your life—ye ken fine, a' you toffs are insured."

"Don't be so beastly familyah, my man—"

"Haw—haw," mimicked some one in the back seat.

"Look here, you pudding-faced fellow," said the captain, adjusting his monocle, "I'll kick your posterior if I have any more nonsense—I will."

Having settled that little affair, the captain proceeded. "Active Service, men, is different to sham fights. At manœuvres at home you get your beef, bread, and extras; on active service it's biscuits, bully beef, and—"

"Sudden daith," cheeped a wag.

"Yes. You're liable to get a fifteen-pound [pg 66] shell into your little Mary any day. Do you think a man could live after getting a shell there, Callaghan?"

"Depends on his chist measurement, sur."

"I'm afraid he wouldn't have any chest after that. He would be—"

"Irish stew."

"Exactly."

"Now, what is the first thing you do when you see the enemy?"

"Take his name an' address, sir," said a sheepish-looking recruit who had been chucked out of the Police Force.

"Oh! I'm afraid he would have your life while you were doing that. No, my lad—get under cover, and then—"

"Knock his lights out."

"That's the sort of answer I want. But how would you knock him out?"

"Below the belt, sir," cheeped Tamson.

"Look here, Tamson, this isn't a bally boxing-school. And don't be so flip-pant. What you have got to do, men, is Shoot—and Shoot well. And what I next want to know is, what happens after a force has concentrated a severe rifle-fire on an enemy's position for a considerable time?"

[pg 67] "Stick yer bayonets in their guts," answered M'Whiskey.

"That's how Carlyle would put it, and that's just exactly what you have got to do. But when advancing to the Charge, what does the attacking party do?"

"Makes a hellifa noise, sir."

"Certainly, but it's not necessary to use these Gallowgate adjectives. Adjectives are all right when you're thrusting the sausages inside a German's stomach.

In fact, the more you curse and yell when charging the enemy, the greater will be the effect of the charge.”

”What’s an adjective, sir?” inquired some one.

”An adjective’s a d— nasty expression—a swear word.”

”But hoo d’ye no’ let us sweer at a lectur’ an’ tell us tae sweer at a Charge?” piped in Spud Tamson.

”My dear fellow, you’re a positive bore. But I will tell you—in peace time a soldier is expected to be a gentleman; in active service he’s got to be a lunatic. That’s the A B C of it all. To continue, though—what do you do after the Charge is over?”

[pg 68] ”Search the deid men’s pooches,” chirruped a Coocaddens lad.

”A natural thing for you—for all of you. You’re all pickpockets, I hear.”

”No me,” said Spud.

”What are you?”

”Rag and bone merchant.”

”Beastly job—no wonder you want a wash. That by the way. After a Charge you have to assist in routing the enemy. And then——”

”The canteen opens, sir,” said an old hand with a grin.

”Well, as the canteen is open now, and I have got a couple of spare half-crowns, you had better fall out.”

”You’re a guid yin, sir,” said Spud with a familiar wink.

”Get out and don’t be so beastly familyah,” concluded the captain, adjusting his monocle, stretching his tunic, then marching out like an advertisement for corsets and hair-wash.

[pg 69]

CHAPTER VIII. ANNUAL TRAINING.

THE annual training of the Glesca Mileeshy was an event of importance. It cleared the Models and allowed the local policemen an opportunity for holidays. To the gallant Militiamen the training meant six weeks' pay, a bounty, his shirts, and a pair of boots. The shirts and boots were important items, for many arrived shirtless and almost bootless. As the average Militiaman had no permanent place of abode, he was summoned to camp by a proclamation in big type, which was pasted on the kirk, police, and public-house doors. This notice was hardly necessary. The men enjoyed the training, and were always pleased when the date came round. They journeyed to their headquarters in various ways. Some cheerfully hoofed it; others rode in their [pg 70] tinker's carts; but the majority went by train. When they arrived in Blacktoon, they found a hearty welcome prepared by the local publicans. Tons of bread and cheese were cut and ready; fresh barrels turned on; and hauf mutchkins piled up behind the counter ready for the fray. There was a wild rush for these bars, and above the din nought could be heard but the clamouring for "a gill and a pint."

"Hello, M'Greegor, whaur hae ye been a' this time?"

"In Barlinnie."

"Whut fur?"

"Takin' the len' o' anither chap's watch. But what hae ye been daein' yersel', Wull?"

"The same auld job."

"Naethin'?"

"Na, I'm in the umbrella trade, ye ken, an' the wife's on the road wi' me. She sells laces, an' mooches the grub. Man, it's the best thing I ever did, when I got mairret. There's naething like a wife tae work for ye, lad."

This is a sample of the greetings exchanged over the foaming ale. When all had sufficient, and were more or less groggy about the legs, they sallied out into the streets [pg 71] *en route* for the barracks. Of course the town was prepared.

The Chief Constable had a "Guard of Honour" right to the barracks gate, while the Parish Minister had quietly lectured the old maids and young maids to be indoors on that occasion. The more timid shopkeepers "baured the windows and door," but all the bairns turned out to see the fun. Up the streets they leisurely ambled, some mumbling on the way—

"Soon we'll be married
 Never more to part,
 For little Annie Rooney
 She is my sweetheart."

Others warbled—

"I'm fu' the noo, I'm absolutely fu',
 But I adore the country I was born in.
 My name is Jock M'Craw,
 An' I dinnae care a straw,
 For I've something in the bottle for the mornin'."

But the majority sang—

"We're soldiers of the King, my lads,
 Who've been, my lads, who've seen, my lads,
 The fights for Britain's Glory, lads,
 When we've had to show them what we mean;
 And when they ask us how it's done,
 We proudly point to every one—
 Yes, we proudly point to every one
 Of Britain's soldiers of the King."

[pg 72] And in this stirring tune all eventually joined, formed into a rough formation, and tramped nobly through the barracks gate and on to the square. Colonel Corkleg's eyes moistened with emotion as he saw them come in. If they were rough dogs, he knew them to be faithful, and he lived for the day when he would lead them into action once more. They were immediately formed into companies, given out their kits, and told to change—but not in the barracks rooms. Oh no, that was never permitted, for the plain reason "that their own clothes could 'walk.'" They changed in the open, which necessitated the drawing of the blinds in the married quarters.

All were thankful to discard their unsanitary rags, and feel the comfort of

good shirts, uniforms, and boots. The better suits of clothing were packed away, but many of the more tattered and torn had to be destroyed. This outfitting occupied most of the day. At 5 P.M. the bugle sounded "Fall in." The parade, of course, was unsteady, nearly every man being fu'. But when old Colonel Corkleg yelled, "Glesca Mileeshy—'Shun," there was a lull [pg 73] and a steadiness which displayed the soldier born.

"All present, sir," reported the adjutant.

"Form fours—right—by the left—quick march." Off they stepped to "The Cock o' the North," played by the pipers, and followed by "Stop your ticklin', Jock," drummed out by the band. As they marched through the gates, there was a rousing cheer from the ladies in shawls, who quickly spotted their particular "lovers." These women yelled out a parting jest, and the glib reminder, "Send me a quid oot o' yer bounty."

"Mebbe," was the reply of all, for Militiamen are absent-minded beggars.

Discipline works wonders. By the time the regiment had reached Bogmoor Camp all were thoroughly sober and obedient. Strange to relate, they found themselves camped side by side with the Perth Mileeshy, a notorious body, recruited from the marmalade and jute-making town of Dundee. These regiments were deadly rivals, and the reason was not far to seek. In the Grand Manœuvres held ten years previous to the camp mentioned, the Perth Mileeshy had [pg 74] mutinied and robbed the Glesca Mileeshy canteen. This terrible breach of courtesy was never forgotten, and anger was always stirred when both corps were deep in their cups. The trouble commenced again on this, the first night in camp. And all through an old Glesca hand, who remembered that the Perth Mileeshy had broken the square in the Soudan Campaign. This daring gent stalked into the Perthshire's canteen.

"What d'ye waant?" asked the waiter, somewhat surlily.

"Ceevility first, and then a pint o' broken squares."

"Chuck him oot! Chuck him oot," shouted a dozen enraged Perthshire hands.

"Gie's that pint," said the Glesca man quite coolly, and after his first mouthful he turned to the "enemy" and remarked, "You couldna chuck your denner oot." This was a challenge quickly accepted. In a flash he was seized and surrounded. But his shouts brought a rallying crowd of the Glesca Mileeshy, and then the battle commenced. Skin, hair, and blood went flying. Men hooched, punched, cursed, and yelled. Burly tramps and burglars laid out their [pg 75] terrific blows on the heads and faces of the puny "Dundee Jam Sodgers," as they were called. In ten minutes the once peaceful canteen resembled a shambles. Tables were destroyed, and the stores of bread, cheese, cigarettes, and beer stolen or scattered around. The fight, originally confined to a hundred men, eventually developed

into a tussle between eight hundred. Discipline for the moment was useless. Officers and Non-Coms. were simply swept aside, and though Colonel Corkleg had a scowl on his face, he had a smile in his heart—his men were winning, and he hated the Perth Mileeshy like poison. Nevertheless matters looked black, and something had to be done. This was Spud Tamson's opportunity for fame and lance-corporal. Rushing up to the colonel he saluted and said, "Wull I turn the hose pipe on them, sur?"

"Good idea, my lad. Yes, put it on, full steam ahead."

Spud rushed to the water-stand, fixed up the hose, then running it out he let go. Swish went the cold battering fluid into the angry, struggling mob. Militiamen hate water as much as they do soap. And Spud's [pg 76] terrible shower-bath was too much. They broke and fled, the water and blood trickling down their faces and clothes and damping the stolen goods in their pockets. Just as they dispersed the "Fall in" sounded. All doubled on parade, where the roll was called, and the seething excited mass reduced to silence and order.

"Parade—'Shun," yelled Colonel Corkleg. They sprang up like the Guards' Brigade.

"Every man will empty his pockets of the stolen goods. Then the companies will march in succession off parade."

There was a titter and then a chuckle as the sergeants went round and ordered the looters to lay out their wares on the ground in front. Tins of paste, blacking, polish, cheese, cakes, cigars, cigarettes, buttonhooks, lemonade, &c., were quickly disgorged. When finished each company marched off. When the last one had left the ground the old colonel quietly chuckled as he looked along the sixteen lines of stolen goods.

"D— rascals, but d— good soldiers," he muttered. Then, turning to the sergeant-major, he ordered him to return the wares [pg 77] to the much-battered canteen of the Perth Mileeshy.

Next day in the regimental order there appeared: "Promotions—Private Spud Tamson, promoted Lance-Corporal for meritorious conduct."

[pg 78]

CHAPTER IX. LAUGHTER AND LOVE.

"PAW!"

"Ay, wumin," answered Tamson senior, turning from his task of blowing up his old balloons.

"Spud's comin' hame on week-end pass, an', d'ye ken——"

"Whut?"

"He's been made an officer."

"Ye're haverin'."

"I'm no'! Listen," said she, digging a letter out of her old leather purse and reading aloud—

—————

"DEAR MITHER,—I'm weel. I hop' you fayther an' the dug's weel. I've been made a heid yin here. The Kurnel made me a Lance-Korporal for distingwishet kondukt. I expect to get made a genral in about a [pg 79] month. I'm kumin' hame on pass for a week-end. Love tae a'—an' the dug.

"SPUD.

"P.S.—Hoo's ma lass. Tell her I'll staun her a slider an' fish supper when I kum."

—————

"That bates a'," said Tamson, adjusting his specs. "I kent the sodger bluid o' the Tamson wid mak' a man o' him."

"He gets his brains onywey frae the McSkelpie's," retorted Mrs Tamson, a little offended.

"Awa' wi' ye, wumin. The McSkelpies are a' loonies."

"Anither word an' I'll leave the hoose! Dinnae insult ma family. They've ay worn hats on Sunday, an' that's mair than the Tamsons could ever dae," concluded Mrs Tamson, as she kicked the cat half into the fire.

"Weel, we'll no' fecht about it. You're the best o' the bunch, an' no' a bad-lookin' lass," old Tamson crooned in a softer tone, for he was a born diplomat.

"Thank ye," she replied a little tartly, but inside she was real pleased, for she was only a woman after all.

"An' I say, wife, we'll need tae hae a [pg 80] spree for Spud comin' hame. Hoo's the funds?"

"Weel, I've twa shullin's, but we can get five mair on your Sunday breeks an' that auld knock o' oors."

"The very thing. Awa' the noo an' see," ordered Tamson.

Mrs Tamson wrapped the Sunday trousers and eight-day alarm clock in her apron, then blithely stepped down the stairs on a visit to "Uncle." *En route* she announced to all in the close that Spud had been made an officer in the Mileeshy, and expected to be a general in a month.

"You'll be haein' a spree," inquired Mrs M'Fatty, the last to hear the news, and one who shrewdly guessed the meaning of the parcel under Mrs Tamson's apron.

"Ay. He'll be hame the nicht. I think I'll get some table beer, iron brew, finnin haddies, gingerbreid, an' cookies. It'll be a chinge tae the laddie efter eatin' biscuits an' bully beef. But Ta-ta the noo," and off she went to the pawnshop. There, the goods which had been regularly pawned once a week for twenty years, were again handed over in return for cash. All the necessary goods were next secured, after which the [pg 81] happy housekeeper returned to her attic in the Gallowgate.

"You've been decoratin'," she said with a smile as she entered and saw how the ingenious Tamson had made an arch of Welcome out of coloured rags and streamers of variegated hues from all the coloured paper delivered from the mid-dens.

"Jist that, wumin," he answered, tacking up "Welcome Home" above the mantelpiece, which completed the general scheme.

"We'll be prood, prood folks the nicht, missus," Tamson mused as he slipped his arm round her waist and gave her a peck on the washed portion of her face.

"It's a gless o' beer you're efter, ma man—ye ken fine hoo tae get roon' us puir weemin."

"Maybe ay, maybe no', but I'll no' refuse it."

Meantime Spud Tamson, attired in his best, and with ten shillings in his pocket, was being hurled swiftly from Bogmoor Camp to Glasgow in the train. Just before he was due at the Central Station the melodeon and mouth-organ band

of the Murder Close Brigade tramped on to the platform playing "The March of the [pg 82] Cameron Men." A large crowd of girl followers were also present, and in the centre of these smiling hussies was Mary Ann, her chubby face suffused with delight and expectancy. This was the proudest moment of her life, for was she not the chosen lass of Lance-Corporal Spud Tamson of the Glesca Mileeshy?

"Here's the train. Here's the train," somebody yelled.

"Form up," ordered the Chief of the Gallowgate Brigade. A rough line was formed, the melodeons and mouth-organs in front, and, as the train steamed in, these blaring instruments bellowed forth "The Cock o' the North," while the others let loose a deafening cheer to Spud Tamson, who was hanging out of the carriage with a face like Sunny Jim.

"Mary!"

"Spud!"

There was a wild embrace, which lasted longer than the time allowed by the official programme. Other greetings were then given. Next the band formed up, with Spud and his girl in the centre, the remainder following behind, and off they stepped out of the Central Station to yells [pg 83] and hoochs and the tune of "The Old Brigade." Traffic had to be suspended at various points in Argyle Street till the laughing throng marched past. As they neared the Gallowgate they received a stirring welcome. And from out of his father's window Spud observed a string of balloons with "Welcome" painted on their sides.

The echo of the cheering and the band had completely upset the equilibrium of Maw Tamson. She dropped the finnin haddies among the cookies, and mixed table beer with the lemonade. Even the cold-blooded Tamson was roused. He was hanging over the window waving an old red shirt, and shouting, "Hooray! Hooray!" The mongrel "dug" was doing a sort of gaby glide along the waxcloth, while the cat skipped over the floor in a joyful tango style.

"He's comin'! He's comin'!" shouted Mrs Tamson at last, at the same time wiping her large red lips with her rough brown apron. Just then the door burst open, and Spud, Mary Ann, and the whole crowd entered.

"Ma son! ma son!" said the excited old [pg 84] lady, grasping the fragile form of her offspring into her great arms. Her kisses almost lifted the skin off her hero's face. Indeed, she only released him on his shouting, "You're chokin' me, Maw." Tamson senior next tendered a hearty welcome. These formalities over, the company were invited to take seats and be merry. Of course there was a crush. But Mary Ann was given a place of honour at the miniature table, while the remainder were accommodated on the jawbox, dresser, the bed, fender, and coal-bunker.

"Ye'll jist need tae tak' pot-luck," was Mrs Tamson's opening address, as she dispensed a bit of potted heid, finnin haddie, gingerbread, a cookie, and a glass

of liquid refreshment all round.

"Help yersel', Mary," said Spud to his chosen one, at the same time pressing her foot underneath the table.

"The'll be a waddin' here next, Mrs Tamson," piped in shrewd Mrs M'Fatty.

"It's anither free feed ye're efter, I'm thinkin'," retorted Spud, with a wink at his beaming Maw. "Onywey, I'll no' get mairret till I'm a gen'ral."

After supper there was a general entertainment. [pg 85] Paw Tamson danced the Fling and the Hornpipe, just as he used to do at the Hielanmen's Corner; Maw sang—

"Spud, he is ma daurlin', ma daurlin',
Spud, he is ma daurlin',
An' a braw Chevalier."

This was followed by solos on the melodeon and mouth-organ, and then came the dance. The old attic fairly shivered with the rattle of the feet. Indeed, Paw Tamson sat breathlessly waiting for the surging floor to crash through to the neighbours below. An equally startling thing occurred. In the middle of a barn dance, all gave a thrilling jump and a hooch. This loosened the clothes-pulley on the roof of the house below. Down it went with a crash, tearing the clock, pictures, and dish-racks with it, as well as striking the bald and withered head of Paw Grumpie, a hereditary foe of the Tamsons.

"Thae d—— balloon an' candy keelies," he groaned, at the same time seizing the poker and rushing upstairs. With a kick he smashed in a panel of the door, then flinging it open, he dashed in, followed by all the Grumpie clan. In a minute a joyful [pg 86] party was turned into a regular vendetta. Pokers, brooms, dishes, mats, and haddie bones were freely used, and it was only the cry of "Polis" which ended this startling combat. As the Tamson party heard the echo of the bobbies' feet, they fled to their various buts and bens, leaving Spud and Mary Ann to sweep up the wreckage, and renew in private their tender endearments.

"Guid nicht, Mary," said he at the close, later on, giving her one more kiss.

"Guid nicht, Spud, an' ye'll see me the morn'?"

"Oh ay."

"An' you'll aye be true tae me?"

"True as daith," he said, gripping her firmly by the hand. Giving her another kiss and a wave of his hand, he shouted, "Ta-ta," and made for bed.

Mary Ann's sleep that night was one long rosy dream. She lived in a land of love, and the hero of it all was this gallant Lance-Corporal of the Glesca Mileeshy. She longed for the coming day, to renew the hours of bliss; but, alas! that never came. For her early slumbers were shaken by the newsboys' cry of "War—Troops

for the Front.” Her first thoughts were of Spud, and she [pg 87] flew to his abode, but all she saw was Mrs Tamson, as pale as death, and sitting with a tear-stained telegram in her hand.

”Spud’s awa’—read that,” said she to Mary, with a sob. The girl gripped it feverishly, then saw—

”Lance-Corporal SPUD TAMSON Regiment for Active Service Rejoin immediately.

ADJUTANT.”

”God help me!” shrieked the girl, swooning away on the floor, for the poor can love perhaps more truly than the rich.

[pg 88]

CHAPTER X. MOBILISATION.

WHEN Spud arrived at Bogmoor Camp he found the regiment in an excited but jovial mood. They were going to war. War, to militiamen, meant bounties, blood, and loot. Though these men were, in many ways, the scrapings of humanity, they had those rugged, almost brutal qualities essential in war. Like bulldogs, they could bite, and once having nibbled an enemy, they could hang on till the end. Of course the regiment was not up to war strength in officers or men. That deficiency, however, was being attended to. Hundreds of men had been already wired for. These were known as the Militia Reserve, or "The Royal Standbacks," to quote the barrack-room wags. All day they came trooping in; some from the open road, others from the Model, a few quite recently [pg 89] from the jail. They all looked like villains in their muddy rags, but once in khaki, many had the appearance of real good Guardsmen. Naturally, there were many reunions, and these had to be sealed in beer. The canteen quickly became a Tower of Babel, wreathed in thick tobacco smoke, and permeated with the nauseating breath of the merry Falstaffs, who incessantly called for the proverbial pint. Discipline was not exacted on this, the first day. It was useless to expect it; the officers knew the calibre of their men.

While the men were thus celebrating the "Great Day," and discussing how they would dispose of Kaiser Bill, the officers were also arriving from many corners of the land. Some came post-haste from the grouse moors; others had hurried from Piccadilly; a few had been dug out of ruined castles, where they represented a poor but splendid nobility. Of course there were new hands. These gentlemen came from the O.T.C., in official language, The Officers' Training Corps. This is an organisation devised by a great War Minister to create heroes out of Carnegie's pet children at our universities. In theory, a perfect system: in practice, [pg 90] at times disappointing. There being no compulsion, the more robust students had shunned the Corps, leaving its ranks open to a few keen, and a greater number of the health culture species, who recognised that a drill-sergeant

might improve their chest measurement and digestion. Still it was a scheme acquired in the Lager-laden garrisons of Germany, and we Britishers, perforce, had accepted it as the hall-mark of German military efficiency. However, Second Lieutenants Briefs, Coals, and Grain were detached to this Militia regiment and duly arrived. Briefs, who was studying for the law, arrived in a greatcoat, with an umbrella above his military accoutrements to keep off the rain. As this umbrella trick was the particular prerogative of the late Duke of Cambridge, Briefs was immediately arrested by his brother subalterns for being "Improperly dressed," and forced to pay drinks all round. Drinks all round are very expensive in His Majesty's Service. He never erred again. Second Lieutenant Coals was vomited out of one of his father's pits. He was as black as the devil's waistcoat, and as big as a bullock. He didn't know much about form fours, but he could kill [pg 91] a pit pony with a punch and chuck a man over his head. "A useful man," the colonel whispered to the adjutant, and then in a louder tone remarked, "Put Mr Coals in No. 3 Company." This company, by the way, had its records in the poaching and wife-beating annals of every Parish Council. Coals was therefore in a sphere where his hulking personality would be useful.

Second Lieutenant Grain had the smell of horses about him. He was studying for medicine, but he knew more about his father's Clydesdales. Indeed, when he arrived, his boots had the scent of the stable, and his coat a few stray wisps of straw sticking around. A rough but likely looking chap. The colonel saw this, and after looking him up and down remarked, "You'll be transport officer. Here are some warrants—go out anywhere, everywhere, for two days. Commandeer 107 horses, and mind—no crocks."

"Very good, sir," replied Grain, disappearing with the transport sergeant. He returned two days later with 107 thoroughbred hunters, Clydesdales, and roadsters. The colonel gasped when he [pg 92] saw them on the square, and promptly stood the subaltern a drink.

"Useful man, that Grain," he said to the adjutant that night. "The O.T.C. has been kind to us, if they've been unkind to other regiments. Get him gazetted lieutenant."

This was one instance of the work of mobilisation. And mobilisation, I can assure you, is enough to send men to the grave. Think of gathering 1200 men, then fitting them out for war. Trousers came from Pimlico, buttons from Birmingham, thread from Timbuctoo, jackets from the sewing-rooms of the Hebrews, while rifles came in instalments from Woolwich, Stirling, Ashanti, and Lahore. Shovels were found in the ironmongers next the barracks; shirts were collared in the nearest emporium; plates, basins, knives, forks, and spoons were found in the fish and chip bazaars of the town. "Buy locally," was the order from the C.O.O.—(the Chief Ordnance Officer)—a very important personage, whose

duty is to supply everything, from siege guns to bed pans. Imagine the worry! The Quartermaster took heart disease and died; the Quartermaster-Sergeant got drunk and [pg 93] was reduced, and so the work devolved upon a faithful corporal and a few intelligent aides. But the work went on, for Colonel Corkleg was a soldier. He might easily have given Napoleon points in organisation for war.

Accommodation was also difficult. No more tents could be had. Twenty men were therefore crammed into these little canvas homes. To avoid a plague and prevent bloodshed, the colonel ordered all men to place their socks outside the tents. If you know the Militia you will understand. But even tents have their limits. The newer arrivals had to be billeted in the homes of the citizens near by. These Weary Willies lolled in their feather beds like princes. It was a hustling time. The colonel cursed from reveille till tattoo. Still, in seven days he had the job done, and wired to the War Office—"Ready."

Back came the reply, "Proceed at once to Mudtown, for Coast Defence."

"Coast Defence!" muttered the old colonel, purple with rage. "Coast Defence!...!...?..."

His after-remarks cannot be printed, for he was a true soldier. He wanted to see Red [pg 94] Blood—not the billets of a seaside town. He could handle his men in a battle like a boy playing "bools," but billets, he knew, meant worry, trouble, and crime. Still, orders were orders, and he at once obeyed. In three hours the regiment stood in marching order, and to the tune of "Hielan' Laddie" blithely marched to the train. It was followed by thousands—wives, sweethearts, mothers, and friends. There were tears, cheers, and jeers.

"Here's a scone, Jimmy, keep up yer heirt," said an old budie, throwing a tartan-coloured scone to her son.

"Hie, you!" shouted a woman in a shawl to a roguish-looking private with an amorous leer in his eye.

"Me!" he answered mockingly.

"Ay, you—ye hinnae paid for yer wean—ye low rascal. But I'll pit the polis on ye—ye'll no diddle me."

"Yer haverin'; awa' an' waash yer een;" and on marched the careless prodigal to the train.

"Haw, look at oor Jock—he's the only man in step," yelled the admirer of Jock Broom, a fifteen-stone corporal, whose belt was too small and tied with string.

[pg 95] "Is that oor Tam?" queried a half-blind woman, as a rakish-looking youth went by.

"He's thin enough for a pull through," interjected a friend of Tam's.

"An' there's Puddin' Johnson—he's awfu' like a barrel."

"I weesh I wis a barrel—I'm awfu' dry," answered the man concerned.

Behind this valiant stepped Lance-Corporal Spud Tamson, his chest puffed out like a bantam and his calves well stuffed with cotton wool. He was an important person, for he marched in the supernumerary rank. Dignity was part of his job. Still, he had time to wink at the lassies as he went by. Close to the station he sighted his fond parent somewhat elated with the thoughts of war, and aided by the cheapest gin. He would show him something.

"Left—right—left—March by the right," yelled Spud, as his section struggled and rolled up to the waiting train.

"Guid, Spud! Guid! You've the bluid o' the Tamsons. Man, I'm prood o' ye." Spud winked and passed on.

After the halt was given, entraining commenced. Now, it is a rule in the service that when a regiment entrains every door [pg 96] and every bar of the station has to be guarded to prevent the rush for liquid refreshments. Colonel Corkleg had duly provided for this, and smiled grimly as he quickly entrained his men. Nearly all had been settled in their carriages when he was startled by a queer sound from the other side of the line. He went to the end of the train and looked across. "Well, I'm d—," he muttered. This is what had happened. As quickly as the bold Militiamen had been ushered into their compartments, the more daring quietly opened the doors on the other side of the train, jumped down on to the rails and clambering on to the platform rushed the refreshment bar. The colonel saw hundreds struggling and fighting for "a gill and a pint" round three demented waitresses. It was an awkward moment, but Colonel Corkleg had experienced many in his life. For such moments he had one really trusty man. This was Sergeant Bludgeon, the provost-sergeant, an ex-champion wrestler and hammer-thrower. He had muscles like boxing-gloves, and he never struck a man without dislocating his framework. His stick was the most powerful thing in the regiment. It had quelled [pg 97] many mutinies. Thus was it called in again. Sergeant Bludgeon knew what was in the colonel's brain, for he stood twitching his murderous-looking stick in anticipation of orders.

"Sergeant Bludgeon—clear 'em out," the colonel ordered.

Bludgeon was across the line in a flash. Like a cyclone he fell on to the stragglers in rear. Half pushing and pitching, he dumped a dozen back on to the rails, then with a superhuman jerk he burst into the bar. His great stick whirled in the air and fell with a terrific clash on to the marble slab. There was a fearful clattering of pots, glasses, and money, as the startled men jumped back; next came a click of heels as Bludgeon thundered, "Shun." Every man stood as still and erect as Roman sentinels.

"About turn." They whipped round like men of the Guards.

"Double march," finally roared the provost-sergeant as they scampered out of the bar. In three minutes every man was back in the train.

"All correct, sir," said Sergeant Bludgeon grimly, a few minutes later, to the colonel, who had quietly observed the scene.

[pg 98] "Any casualties?" queried the colonel with a grin, as he looked at the sergeant's stick.

"None, sir,—this time."

"Thank you, sergeant," concluded the colonel, ordering the train to go. As it slipped out amidst the deafening cheers, he turned and remarked to the adjutant—

"Useful man, that!—useful man!"

"Yes, sir," replied the adjutant.

The journey to Mudtown was a long one—sufficiently long to allow some of the inebriates time to soak into their bodies a few "hauf mutchkins" and some bottles of Bass. This refreshment, with the heat and roll of the train, quickly let loose the lung-power of the crowd. They sang, danced, and yelled with a devilish delight, and at times threatened disaster to every window and every N.C.O. in the carriages. Poor Spud Tamson shivered in his corner. He was in charge of eight tough-looking pirates, who knew neither fear nor pain. Fortunately they regarded Spud's stripe as a necessary evil, and eventually left him alone. And so pandemonium reigned till Mudtown came in sight. The fame of the Glesca Mileeshy had travelled before them. There was no [pg 99] civic welcome. The Provost had locked his chain and robes of office up in his safe; while his nervous citizens sat fearfully in their little suburban homes. In every manse the minister prayed for guidance in the coming trials; while every mother gathered her daughters round and told them that, on no account, must they go out at nights. They became still more alarmed when the news trickled round that the regiment was to be billeted in church halls, picture houses, and other public buildings near. It was monstrous, they argued. How dare the War Office do such a thing? They would protest. Poor ignorant souls, they did not know their danger. They never realised the perils of invasion; nor the fact that they had in their midst the toughest and finest bunch of fighters in the British Army. Drunkards and devils, may be, but soldiers to a man. Meantime, the tradesmen of Mudtown beamed with delight. They had no use or time for the men as men, but they were delighted with the prospect of a boom in trade. And, of course, the publicans were careful to hoist the Union Jack above their barrels, and put out the sign, "All Soldiers Welcome Here."

A bugle-call in Mudtown Station was the [pg 100] signal to get out of the train. The men rolled, jumped, and staggered down. The more merry chorused—

"I'm fu' the noo, I'm absolutely fu',
But I adore the country I was born in.
My name is Jock M'Craw,

But I dinnae care a straw,
For I've something in the bottle for the mornin'."

"Silence," roared the mountainous Sergeant-Major Fireworks. His voice made the station tremble, and the men gave a perceptible shiver as they fell into the ranks. Sergeant-Majors are wonderful men.

"Form fours—right," ordered the colonel, and into the town stepped the famous corps of Militiamen. They staggered bravely on till the halt was given in a sort of square. There the billeting officer met them, and issued the accommodation orders. The regiment then divided to the various halls and billets in the town. Spud Tamson found himself and his company in an old church, and, strange to say, he was allotted the pulpit as his doss. This was hardly in keeping with his theology, but such is the fortune of war. Another company was shoved into an old picture house, the platform of which was promptly captured as a [pg 101] rendezvous for card-playing and clog dancing. Barns, stables, and old manor-houses accommodated the remaining companies. Flower gardens were immediately converted into cook-houses; wash-houses became colour-sergeants' parlours, and old closets were cornered as the special quarters of such important people as the cooks and pioneers. A disused backyard with a tarpaulin over was transformed into the quartermaster's stores. This quickly became a centre of curiosity. Citizens were much interested and amused to observe ration parties coming out from this place, their loaves of bread in somewhat doubtful blankets, and great chunks of juicy red beef in their horny hands. Hunger, however, is "good sauce, while plain feeding means high thinking,"—so the philosophers say. Colonel Corkleg sometimes disagreed about the high thinking. In fact, he believed that the issue of one pound of beef per man was designed to give soldiers a primitive lust for blood.

It is easy to imagine the difficulties of training, organising, and disciplining a battalion in billets. It is like trying to make alligators out of snakes. Men get into all sorts of corners when they ought to be on [pg 102] parade. Visitors are also a nuisance. Maiden ladies will insist on entering to read the New Testament while the men are careering round in their somewhat spare night attire. Deputations frequently arrive with shortbread and liquid refreshments for their pals just as the colonel is making his inspection. And the night-birds find the windows a convenient exit into the darkness where they may pursue the antics of the owl. Can you wonder, then, that the officers felt depressed? Still, difficulties are made to be conquered, and Colonel Corkleg determined to conquer them. Sergeant-Major Fireworks and Sergeant Bludgeon would see to that.

Meantime the regiment, like the civil population of the country, was most excited about the German advance. Belgium was to be invaded, Paris taken, next

London, and then—Mudtown. So there was really a chance of seeing service in their own native land. That was a solace to the bloodthirsty warriors. During many of these discussions in the billets some wag incidentally remarked that Mudtown was crammed full of German waiters.

"Germans! Whaur?" queried the patriotic Spud.

[pg 103] "In a' the hotels," replied the informer, Micky Cameron by name.

"They're spies," declared Spud, who had read all the penny horrors in his days.

"Ay, 'yin o' them gied me a pint, an' asked me hoo mony men were in the regiment."

"I tell't ye," declared our heroic lance-corporal, who then declared his intention of leading an attack on the German waiters.

"A'm wi' ye," declared Micky Cameron.

"An' me."

"An' me."

"An' me," shouted many others all over the room. That settled the attack, and made Lance-Corporal Spud Tamson conjure up visions of fame and promotion by his daring night raids on the hotels. A conference was next called to discuss details.

"Should we shoot them?" asked Micky.

"Na, that'll mak' owre much noise," interjected Spud.

"I've an awfu' guid razor," remarked Beefy M'Lean, as he thumbed a murderous-looking blade. Other methods were suggested, such as pole-axing, hanging, and tying them up in barbed wire. But the cautious spirit, engendered by Tamson's [pg 104] stripe, ruled all these murderous designs out of order.

"Let's mak' them a' prisoners an' march them to the colonel." This was finally agreed to, and the party sallied out to tackle the first hotel—namely, The Grand, where twenty waiters were employed.

"Whaur are ye gaun?" a sentry asked.

"Active Service," chirped Micky Cameron, giving him a wink.

On arriving at the hotel they tackled the back door. A patriotic kitchen-maid told them that the waiters were upstairs in their bedrooms.

"But there's wan," she remarked, pointing to a portly Teuton carrying a salver into the dining-room.

"Charge!" ordered Tamson. The wild, murderous crew tore like Dervishes through the hall. Poor Otto von Onions was so startled that he dropped his dish of choice grilled steak. Then, realising his danger, he lifted a carving-knife and edged towards the stairs. Kismet was with him. Tamson's army halted to pick up and sample the steaks. This was a golden chance for Otto. He turned and dashed up the stairs.

"Come on, lads," ordered Spud. His [pg 105] men followed with the half-chewed steaks sticking out of their mouths. Up the stairs they panted and yelled, alarming all the guests into a state of hysterics. Old ladies shrieked in terror, while the younger women swooned away on the various landings. At last Otto von Onions was brought to bay. Spud's army found him, knife in hand, at his bedroom door.

"Stops, or I vill kill yous all. I am a naturalusized ceetezan."

"A what?" queried Micky.

"A Breeteesh subjects. I haf Scotteesh wives and cheeldrens."

"Oh, you've more than wan wife, eh?" asked Spud.

"No! No! One wives."

"You're a spy," roared Micky, advancing under the cover of a broom.

"I keel you! I keel you!" shrieked the foreigner.

"Awa' an' kill yer granny," roared the intrepid Militiaman, striking him with the broom and wresting the knife right out of his hand.

"No keel me—no keel me—kind shentlemans. I give you moneys—wheesky—ceegars."

[pg 106] "Noo, you're talkin'," said Spud. "Oot wi' it." From his trunk the terrified Teuton disgorged his gold, his fine Havannas, and a bottle of Special Scotch. This loot was quickly collared and lodged in various pockets.

"An' noo tell me whaur these ither Germans stay?" asked Tamson.

"Away! They mobilised. Gone Shermanys."

"When?"

"To-nights. Ten train. They Sherman. I, Breeteesh subjects," he declared again.

"All right, old cock, we'll let you off," concluded the valiant lance-corporal, looking at the clock, which had just turned 9.30 P.M. Turning to his men, he said, "Look here, boys, we've time tae capture them deevils. Come on—aff tae the station." And down the stairs they walloped like a lot of schoolboys. The terrified visitors gave a sigh of relief as they went out through the great hall door, while poor Otto von Onions sat down and cried.

"This way, lads," yelled Spud, as they thundered into the Mudtown Station. There they saw a mongrel gang of heavily-built [pg 107] Germans waiting for the train. A Consular official with a ponderous umbrella was in charge. He had them marshalled in a rough sort of group. Some had still their tail-coats on, others had napkins round their necks, while a few showed their bare heels over the tops of their shoes. A villainous crowd; more ready to use the stiletto than their fists. All were eagerly discussing the great Day, and how long it would take them to invade our country, when they were startled by the terrific yell of Spud Tamson's men.

Charge! was the order of the day. In a second a peaceful station was turned into a bear garden. Kicks, shrieks, and yells rent the air. Human beings rocked to and fro, and tumbled over the luggage littered over the platform.

"I protest, in the name of the Kaiser," said the Consular gent with the umbrella.

"Tak' that, in the name o' the King," said Spud, delivering a terrific punch on the German's bulbous nose. Blood burst all over his ponderous paunch, but he was game, and pluckily tackled Spud with his umbrella. One whack over his enemy's head smashed the whole framework.

"Made in Germany," yelled Spud, giving [pg 108] him one full on the waist-line. He staggered and fell into a writhing mass of Germans and Militiamen. Micky Cameron was seen furiously belting a stout little German, with one hand; with the other he was rapidly relieving him of his watch, money, and trinkets, including a few silver napkin rings which the waiter had "borrowed" as a present for the Kaiser. Beefy Duncan found a fiendish delight in flattening the nose of Adolph Squarehead, the late boots of The Grand; while they nobly strived to tap blood and gather as much loot as possible in the struggle. It was a titanic conflict. Blood, skin, and hair were flying like snowflakes. Faces resembled lumps of beefsteak instead of respectable features. And although the Militia were outnumbered, they struggled bravely on. At last there was a cry of "Surrender." The Germans shrieked for mercy, while the stationmaster vainly implored for peace. An armistice was granted, during which the enemy gathered up their false teeth, collars, and other displaced apparel.

"Fall in now," ordered Lance-Corporal Tamson, as he wiped his bleeding nose.

"Quick march," and out of the station [pg 109] marched the escort with their captures. Hundreds had gathered and followed the convoy along. Spud headed straight for the Officers' Mess. There was no halt on arriving at the door. He marched them into the anteroom, where Colonel Corkleg and his officers were enjoying an evening smoke. All were startled at the sight of the twenty bleeding and battered Germans as well as the rowdy-looking escort. Before they had recovered, the whole lot was in the room, and Spud Tamson standing to attention at their head.

"What the devil do you mean, corporal?" roared the colonel.

"Twenty prisoners, sir. They're a' spies. We captured them at the station."

"In the name of the Kaiser, I protest—"

"Haud yer tongue—I'm speakin'," said the corporal to the Consular gentleman. But the colonel had realised that this assault on these Germans was a breach of the Convention. It was awkward, and although he had no love for the enemy he knew that International law permitted their being mobilised and shipped to

their country. The colonel felt an inward pride as he [pg 110] surveyed the bleeding captures, but he had to assume the mask of duty. Turning to the adjutant he said, "Place this corporal and all of our men in the guardroom; I will see them tomorrow." Turning to the Germans, the colonel remarked in his best official tone, "I'm sorry, gentlemen, that you should have been assaulted. It is all through the ignorance of my men, as you see—"

"In the name of the Kaiser, I pro—"

"Very well," interjected the colonel, "you may lodge that protest when we arrive in Berlin. Now, you may go," he said, pointing to the door.

Gladly they tripped to the station. Another train conveyed these battered Teutons to the Port of Hull, where they found a steamer for Lagerland.

Of course there was a Court of Inquiry, the result of which was a Regimental Court-Martial for Spud and his pals. Diplomatic reasons demanded punishment, and Colonel Corkleg had to comply.

That day was a memorable one in the annals of this corps, for inside the Reading Room the bandaged Militiamen stood before their judges. After a pile of evidence had [pg 111] been read and the usual formalities finished, Colonel Corkleg asked, "Do you all plead guilty?"

"Yes, sir," was the firm response.

"Well, Lance-Corporal Tamson, I sentence you to be reduced, and fourteen days' field imprisonment with hard labour. The remainder are sentenced to seven days' field imprisonment."

"March them out, sergeant-major," ordered the adjutant. Without a tremble, they turned about and tramped from the room.

"Useful man, that Tamson," the colonel remarked, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Yes, sir," replied the adjutant, who, by the way, was a perfect military machine, knowing everything from the strength of a regiment to the number of grain seeds per diem allowed to a transport horse.

[pg 112]

CHAPTER XI. OFFICERS AND BILLETS.

If the officers of His Majesty's Service have a wonderful innings in the piping times of peace, they have a very rough outing in the time of war. It is not all beer and skittles, for, in addition to facing death, they have to pay for the privilege of doing the same. The sword and revolver with which they kill the Huns is purchased out of their pockets. The few shillings per diem which they receive will not even pay for their food and drinks. This system has many disadvantages for the poor but keen soldier. It has practically denied thousands the right to make the Army a profession, and has turned many educated N.C.O.'s out into the world to become somewhat fierce antagonists of a system largely founded on privilege and caste. But things are improving. And, in passing, it is only fair to observe that the [pg 113] men produced by the old system were really of the ruling caste—leaders and fighters, and gentlemen with very few exceptions. It is true they purchased text-books and never read them, yet it is equally true that, in war, they have seldom failed, and have even managed to outdo such skilful tacticians and strategists as the Germans. The Militia, of course, was never so efficient as the Regular Army. That could not be expected. The officers were mainly men of means who had served in the Regular Army; others were county gentlemen with a passion for rank and arms; some the well-to-do sons of ambitious business men; while the more junior officers were cadets of poor but good families, who used the Militia as a back door to the Army. And in this time of war the vacancies were largely filled by the wonderful children of the O.T.C. An occasional ranker with a corpulent quartermaster gave such a gathering a democratic leavening, which did no harm. This, then, was the sort of stuff which composed the regiment under review. All had fighting instincts, and every man believed that it was "the thing to do." They felt it a pleasure to serve, and deemed it an honour to die. [pg 114] There was no vulgar bragging about what they would do with the Germans. Indeed, they had chivalry enough to accord the Germans admiration for their work. War was no picnic to them. If they had slacked it in the past, they bucked into their

job with a thoroughness which did them credit. In brief, they represented a few of the willing thousands who have always been eager to die for the Britain which, unfortunately, left them and their men in the lurch when saddled with poverty and old age. A materialist has termed such men the "Fools of Imperialism." Thank God, materialists are in the minority. Such "fools" have secured to us a mighty heritage. Men of this breed have stuck to the flag in the freezing Antarctic and in the sun-baked East. We know little of them, and in the times of peace care less. Yet when the drums of war are rolling hard, we turn and yell for their arms and aid. How brutally selfish; how horribly weird! Let us hope the war will teach us to honour and care for such men, when these awful days are past.

Now let us review these gentlemen and their billet. First, there was old Colonel [pg 115] Corkleg. He was a tough old dog, with a red nose and cork stump, the relic of a grim struggle with Dervishes. He could neck the best part of a bottle of Scotch at a sitting, yet, next morning, he would be found in his cold tub before parade. Spick and span as a dandy, erect as a Guardsman, as strict as Wellington, yet every inch a gentleman. The men loved him because he gave them a square deal. And he knew his job. True, he could curse like Marlborough's men in Flanders, but you cannot drill Militiamen without a wide vocabulary of oaths. The more original the better. To these heroic scallywags, it was the hallmark of soldierly efficiency. But Colonel Corkleg could do more than curse. He could drill and manoeuvre his men "on the top of a barrel," as the old sergeant-major used to say. When he shouted "'Shun" they shivered; when he roared out "double" they ran like hares. And he was not afraid. Men loved to tell of how he had killed a dozen niggers in a skirmish, and captured a cannibal king with only a smile and a walking-stick. You will therefore realise that Colonel Corkleg was a good fellow; you will also understand how every man felt confidence in his leadership. [pg 116] Confidence in a colonel, let me tell you, is worth everything in a fight.

The second in command was "The Dandy Major," a rollicking squire who owned broad acres and big cellars. A bit of a Beau Brummell, too. He was measured for his socks, pyjamas, and ties. There was a touch about his waist-line which suggested the "Nut," and a look in his eye which was deadly. The subalterns said that he had kissed everything human, from a Geisha girl to an Eskimo. He had done everything from killing a tiger to sticking a Hun, and had crowned his career with the capture of a famous beauty of the land.

Major Tartan was the junior major. He was chief of a clan possessing numerous castles and miles of heather. He looked a ghillie, and was very proud of his calves. These never required the Sassenach stuffing of cotton wool. And in his bedroom he hung a painted scroll of his lineage. That was his weakness. He could recite his descent from Macdonald M'Tartan, who ran away with the wife

of Dugald M'Phail, once chief of the thieves on Benmore. He loved the kilt and he lived in it. It greatly distressed him to think that his regiment [pg 117] had the awful trews. But this owner of Highland homes and grouse moors hadn't a bean to call his own. Everything was mortgaged, even his kilt, and that was a sore strait for a true Highland gentleman. So he lived in a cottage on the shore of a lonely loch. There he read the 'Spectator,' drank Scotch, and cursed the Government, as every Tory is expected to do. Yet he was as proud as Cæsar. He was content to accept the little dole left when his lawyers paid the interests on his heavily mortgaged bonds. He was glad of this war. It gave him something to do. And he had the dour, grim, hacking qualities which always distinguish the Highland soldier. If he was as surly as a Highland bull, he was also as kind as a little child. His last shilling had often gone into the beer-pot of a scheming Militiaman. Militiamen, I can assure you, are like Chinamen—as deep as the seas and as canny as the snakes. They can squeeze blood out of a stone, and so this kind old major was frequently their prey.

The most interesting senior captain was Captain Coronet. A splendid fellow, but annoyingly clean. He washed himself six times per day. His shirts were spotless, [pg 118] and his clothes were aided by corsets. Captain Coronet had the waist-line of a lady, and the smooth creamed complexion of a girl. His features were regularly massaged, and he always prided himself on his pinky-coloured nails. Through the ages his family had fought like devils for God and Duty. Their tombs could be found in Flanders, Egypt, and burning Hindostan. Naturally he was rich. Tons of gold lay to hand, and he lavishly sent it round. An awfully good fellow, as an Oxford grad. would say. Soldiering was his game. He cursed the passing of the Feudal System and the rise of commerce. Killing was the family job. Leading was his special prerogative. Naturally he scorned the man in trade, and only had time for men of his caste. Haughty as a Prussian to all who would ape his own, yet as generous as a monk to the poor beggars in the ranks. He loved good deeds, and did them without offence. When he gave a thousand guineas he did not inform the Press. A civilian would sum him up as a snob; a soldier would call him a man, and would follow him to the gates of death. True, Captain Coronet had the little faults of his kind, but [pg 119] these were mainly affected and superficial—simply a pose, which hid a real white man. When you scratch the skin of such a type you will find a courage and grit which simply staggers. If you know the Army you will understand. He was called the chocolate soldier for many a day, till once a man was drowning in a tidal river before the eyes of the whole regiment. No one ventured to the rescue except Coronet. He plunged in, rescued his man after a thrilling struggle, and calmly brought him up to the bank. All he ever said about it was that "it was beastly wet."

Another interesting gent was Captain Hardup. He was a professional Militiaman, and therefore a mystery. His pedigree was uncertain; his schooling vague; while his cheques were frequently marked "overdrawn." But he had the necessary qualifications to keep up appearances—that is to say, he had a knickerbocker suit, a club address, and a mess kit, which, by the way, had the appearance of having passed through the hands of grenadiers, fusiliers, light infantry, and other branches of the service. In the times of peace he collared a living, for about four and a half months of the year, [pg 120] by training with various militia corps. For this he received a captain's pay, which was supplemented by his winnings at bridge and an occasional cheque for taking a richer fellow's turn of duty. The county men tolerated him, regarding him as a necessary evil, and, at times, a useful friend. What Captain Hardup did when the Militia "broke down" was wrapped in a cloud. Some said he canvassed for insurance; others averred that he travelled for beer; while a few suggested that he ran baby incubators at country fairs. Nevertheless, Hardup was a man of experience. He knew his job, and could even tell when a Militiaman had no feet in his socks. To Colonel Corkleg he was invaluable, for he could twist a company outside in.

The subalterns, of course, were equally interesting; they always are. These youthful officers are the life of a regiment. Invariably they are splendid sportsmen. To the outside world they present a haughty air, which generally merits for them the title of snobs. But this is an unfair characterisation. The air of supreme importance which they adopt is really the result of old army training, which compels an officer to hide his virtues [pg 121] and his failings under a mask of chilling hauteur. Scrape that, and you will always find a generous heart and a kindly soul. It is in the mess that you realise this. There, they are all big bouncing boys, full of innocent fun and youthful candour. To them a spade is a spade. If a brother officer is really a prig and abuses his men, these youths will take it out of his skin. A broken bed and a broken head is the penalty of unpopularity. Tar and feathers is the punishment of the cad. Drinks all round is usually the verdict when a subaltern forgets his manners and commits a smaller sin. The mess is the school for courage, honour, and truth. In the British officers' anteroom you will find the foundations of that splendid chivalry which has given us fame. Isolated cases to the contrary usually mean that the colonel is an idiot, and the adjutant a fool. But these are rare, and when found the War Office has a blunt style of treatment. A German officer has shown us, in the pages of 'Life in a Garrison Town,' how things are in the Army of the Kaiser. You will not find these things in the Army of our King. This statement can also be applied to the Militia and Territorials.

[pg 122] And this was the type in Colonel Corkleg's corps. Jim Longlegs, the senior sub, was cox of the Cambridge boat. His nose had been flattened while

learning the noble art of self-defence. He could tear a pack of cards with his hands, and crack an iron bar over his knee. He was clean-limbed and alert, good at a spree, and if he did like a whisky-and-soda, he could drink it as Luther did, in the manner of a gentleman.

Cocky Dan was an impish sprite from a public school. He was five feet of delightful impudence and daring. His nose was always stuck in the Maxim gun. This tricky machine was his hobby and his job. When he rode alongside of it on his piebald charger he resembled a beaming boy scout with the all-round cords. Cocky Dan was a name that suited him. And then there was Willie Winkie, the sausage merchant's son, who tried so hard to be a gentleman. He would have been a perfect gentleman if he hadn't worried too much about 'Etiquette for Officers,' and that other social handbook, 'Manners made Easy.' Billy Isaacs was hampered by his name. Not that he was a Jew, but, as he said himself, one of his female ancestors had got mixed up in a [pg 123] money-lending affair with a Hebrew, who was financing her fads in silks, port, and rouge. To save the family pewter and the old manorial brick bungalow, she married the man, and thus hampered a decent fellow with a hooked proboscis and an ikey name. Still, he was a devil at finance, and almost sent the colour-sergeant insane when he balanced a halfpenny out in his pay-sheet. Then there was Gerald Hay Du Patti Brown, who made the dickens of a row about some of his people coming over with William the Conqueror. This carried him far till Second Lieutenant Briefs discovered in the Doomsday Book that his ancestor was a pioneer-sergeant in the army which landed at Hastings in 1066. Still, he was a good fellow, and always willing to stand a port the day before the month's pay was due. Brown's boon companion was Giddy Greens, a husky youth intimate with the musical comedy stars. He had only a hundred a year, and was always dodging the Jews. His suits were easily the best, for the reason that he changed his tailor monthly and always burnt their bills. But there, one might rave for ever about the subalterns of this famous corps.

[pg 124] Now, the billets in which they were lodged at Mudtown was hardly in keeping with their tastes. It was a musty manor, with a touch of age and a scent of dead cats. Dirt was rampant and barrenness profound. Where the pictures once hung they found great holes, while through the windows came sparrows, bats, and rain. The floor was rotten, indeed Colonel Corkleg lost his artificial stump in a mouldy corner of his room. There wasn't a bath. All had to wash themselves in biscuit tins, and wipe their faces on a greasy roller towel. As to the kitchen, only a single fire remained to cook soup, fish, entrees, and sweets. These had to be served up on one old kitchen table.

"This is——" muttered the colonel.

"Yes, sir," replied the adjutant.

Still, it was war time, so things had to be devised. Tables were made out of floor boarding and salmon boxes; beds were created out of blankets, ancient and modern. These were sewn together in the form of sleeping bags. Candles were used for illumination; while other necessaries were begged, borrowed, or stolen from patrons and friends. But all the worry or discomfort did not upset the usual cheerfulness of the [pg 125] subs. Life to them was one continual round of joy. They danced till their legs burst through the floors, and sang so loud that the senior major vigorously protested. Guest-nights were occasionally held, when fellow-officers in other corps arrived to sample their good things. Tinned sardines, ration beef, Irish stew, slippery jellies, and musty macaroni were served on the one plate, liquid refreshments were gladly drunk out of bowls and collapsible mugs. After these sumptuous repasts the senior sub, Jim Longlegs, put his juniors through the "Modulator." This is a performance which the priggish youth hates like prussic acid, but one much enjoyed by all true sportsmen. In the course of this ceremony, a sub may be ordered to stand on his head, sing "Annie Laurie" in that position, and afterwards endeavour to swallow a Scotch. A somewhat ignoble performance to the uninitiated, but underneath all these foolish pranks there is a deep reasoning, and that is the teaching of youth a respect for authority and a prompt obedience to orders. Anteroom court martials were also held in the billets of Mudtown. At these tribunals all delinquents were bluntly catechised for their sins. For [pg 126] instance, Cocky Dan was charged with "irregular conduct, unable to control his horse, riding through a ham merchant's window and sitting in a basket of rotten eggs." This conduct was deemed unbecoming to an officer and a gentleman, so Cocky Dan received a formal sentence of "drinks all round, and to sleep three nights without his pyjamas." Being winter, this sentence will be well understood. Du Patti Brown was also arraigned on a charge of "unauthorised swank—blowing his horn about his Norman pedigree, having a double-barrelled and plebian name, and attempting to enter his name in Burke's Peerage." This was deemed a fraud. His sentence was "a cold tub in full regimentals, and afterwards drinking two quarts of ice-cold water." Billy Isaacs was charged with "Jewish tendencies, in that he in the billets of Mudtown did order a fatigue party from his company to search for the sum of one penny which he had lost on parade." Sentence of death was passed, but this was remitted on the understanding that Billy Isaacs would lend every subaltern a "fiver" till next pay-day.

There *were* nights when the wine was rich and merriment strong. On these occasions [pg 127] the spirit of mischief and devilry became rampant. One of these famous nights was the celebration of Captain Coronet's receiving what he described as another "beastly legacy of fifty thousand from an old aunt, who had cheated her heirs for ninety-five years." The flowing bowl went round. Colonel

Corkleg, with "The Dandy Major" and Major Tartan, like true sportsmen, helped to consume a few quarts of champagne vintage. Their red faces and beaming eyes told all that they had reached that stage which demands, for a senior, immediate retirement from the scene of action, so as not to prejudice good order and military discipline. In the privacy of their rooms they supped more wine, damned the Kaiser and the Radicals, and figured out their actual part in the triumphal march through the Unter der Linden. Meantime, the gay young bloods danced and hooched to their hearts' delight. Choruses, of course, were popular, and many of those songs so dear to all of our public schools echoed out into the still Mudtown night. And then the Tempter came into Jim Longlegs' brain.

"Let's rag the captains," he whispered round.

[pg 128] "Right ho," all cried. Now this is a violation of the unwritten law. A captain in the service is a little tin god. He must not be ragged by his juniors. But the spirit of mischief abounded. Armed with mops, brooms, hose pipes, and minus their caps and jackets, they rushed the captains' rooms. Danger had been scented. As they entered the sacred sanctum they were received with well-directed douches from buckets of water. This soaked them to the skin, and for a moment checked the general advance.

"Charge!" ordered the senior sub. An order is an order, so they promptly obeyed. There was a merry scrum. Jim Longlegs seized the nearest man and promptly commenced to give this somewhat portly person a half-nelson and a duck in a basin. Heavens! when he looked at his antagonist's face he found it was that of Major Tartan, who had been visiting the captains' rooms. He was nonplussed for a moment, for a major is like the prophet Allah, one of the Holy of Holies. To even touch a hair of his head is more irreligious than the tearing out of the precious eyes of a Brahmin's god. But the major was a [pg 129] sport. The temporary astonishment of the senior sub was used by him to the best advantage. With a great effort he encircled Longlegs' waist, and heaved him with a terrible crash to the floor. The lamp was smashed and the revellers found themselves in darkness. This lessened the fear of the consequences. Beds were lifted and crashed around. Basins were emptied out over the blankets. Brooms smashed through the windows, while many of the captains and subs had their shirts torn from their backs. And then the whistle blew "Retire." The subs retired singing "Rule, Britannia," and yelling

"Glory, Glory, Halleujah,
 Glory, Glory, Halleujah,
 Glory, Glory, Halleujah,
 We've wrecked the Captains' Home."

It was in the after-discussion of the night's escapade that Cocky Dan dared Jim Longlegs to sneak into the C.O.'s room and collar the colonel's cork leg, which always lay by the side of his bed.

"Done," said the senior sub before he realised his venture. But it had to go on. His pluck was at stake. There was a tense silence as he crept out of the room in his [pg 130] stocking soles. Quietly he opened the colonel's door and slipped inside. The old gentleman lay on his bed asleep. Jim crept forward and stealthily picked up the colonel's cork limb. He smiled grimly as he turned towards the door. Cocky Dan would have to yield him that fiver after all. But just as he touched the handle there was a rustle on the bed and then a terrible roar—

"Damn you, Mr Longlegs—how dare you?...?...?" cursed the colonel, who slept lightly, due to his years of living amongst the Dervishes and Afridis.

"I'm—I'm—I'm sor—"

"Put that leg down—get out, you scamp. Report to me in the morning."

The senior sub placed the leg down again, in the most shamefaced manner. He was sorry he had been caught. He had meant no disrespect, for the colonel was a lovable old gentleman at heart. But he had violated a sacred rule, and he guessed what the morning would bring forth. When he arrived back in the subs' rooms his fellow-officers went pale with terror and quickly scampered to bed.

"I think we ought to report this ragging business to the colonel," said a supercilious senior to old Major Tartan next morning.

[pg 131] "What?"

"Report it to the colonel!"

"Don't be an ass," said old Tartan, stumping out of the room. He had been a true subaltern in his day.

The colonel, however, ordered the adjutant to bring Mr Longlegs in.

"Well," commenced the old gentleman in his best official manner.

"I—I—I'm very sorry, sir."

"Should think you would be! Damned impertinence, sir. How dare you? How dare you? Never heard of such a thing in my life. Good mind to cashier you."

"Really, I'm very sorry—"

"Hold your tongue, sir."

Then he harangued him in the best style of Judge Hawkins for a quarter of an hour, after which the senior sub felt like a little grease spot instead of a man.

"Now you can go, sir; don't let it happen again—understand!"

"Yes, sir," said Longlegs, saluting and marching out.

As the door shut, the colonel, with a subdued twinkle in his eye, remarked—"Useful man that, eh?"

"Yes, sir," replied the adjutant.

[pg 132]

CHAPTER XII. THE GENERAL STAFF.

THE General Staff is improving. Red Tape is being killed; common-sense is beginning to triumph. It took exactly two hundred and fifty years for our General Staff to realise that soldiers cannot be expected to skirmish in busbies, or entrench a position in crimson tunics and skin-tight trews. This admission, you will agree, is evidence of awakening, so the British public need not be alarmed. Years ago, generals received their rank through the influence of their wives, or somebody else's wife. Now, a general is expected to have the brains of Wellington and the sauce of the Kaiser. He is promoted for his efficiency, not for his glass eye or double-barrelled name. Indeed, it is only a brave man who would be a general, for he is supposed to know [pg 133] everything, from the weight of a soldier's socks to the number of men that can be killed by a shrapnel shell. And he is the generator of all schemes for the training of His Majesty's men. When the G.O.C. speaks, all are expected to show that they have a wholesome fear and awe of this almighty personage. The correct reply to a general, on all occasions, is "Yes, sir." Woe unto the man who would dispute the theories of the G.O.C., for "Death or such less punishment" lies in the hollow of his hand. A general who is keen of C.B.'s, knighthoods, and a baton, is always careful in the selection of his Staff. Up till fifteen years ago the young bloods of Mayfair were chosen because of their lineage, cash, and ability to ride a hunter at a five-barred gate. Now, a general seeks for an aide who can work twenty-three hours out of twenty-four, and possessed of all the knowledge that the Staff College can bestow. It is pleasant to note that many clever aspirants can be found, and that is the reason for the success of our arms to-day. If Wellington had had men of this type, he, like Hannibal and Napoleon, might also have conquered the Alps. But Wellington had to deal with aides who [pg 134] were simply British gentlemen with a passion for fox-hunting and a primitive thirst for blood. The modern Staff officer can secure the maximum of efficiency with the minimum of friction. He can inspire the training of a thousand muddling amateurs, and in six months can

procure veterans of the type that conquered at Waterloo. Nothing is too much for him. He can make transports out of mud barges; bridges from milk carts; impregnable redoubts from biscuit-boxes, rubble, mud, and sand. In the midst of a most crushing reverse, he will collar a thousand retreating men, stick them in hen-houses, mills, and churchyards, and thus delay the advance of several army corps. He is tireless, persistent, sometimes dogmatic, but ever tactful and cheerful. Haking has instilled into him that soldiers are mainly human, and, in certain instances, fools, hence his ever cheerful charm, his pertinacity and human understanding. Of course there are a few of the old Peninsular type still left on the Staff. When you find them, Heaven help you! Their skulls are as shallow as the aborigines, and their tongues as cutting as a circular saw. They swear by The King's Regulations, and meet [pg 135] every problem by a precise reference to para so-and-so, section something, of the supplement to His Majesty's manuals of military muddles and laws. They terrify the simpleton by the fierceness of their dogmas, and ruthlessly crush the intellectual by thundering adjectives and cries of—insubordination and arrest. Thoroughly honest, thoroughly patriotic, but equally incompetent. They are tolerated for the simple reason that a shell or the age limit will eventually pass them out.

Now, in the Division to which the Glesca Mileeshey belonged there was a G.O.C. of the modern school. He was as big as a Cossack, and as cute as an Oxford Don. Common-sense was his theme; regulations he abhorred. He cursed everything which savoured of stupid obedience and ignorant obstinacy. Yet he had the faculty of humour, and in the midst of a fierce castigation would soothe the ruffled pride and vain dignity by a funny yet kindly touch. This G.O.C. was nicknamed "Sunny Jim." Somehow his parents had missed the way to the Peerage and 'Who's Who?' Still, his worthy folks had produced an abnormal and interesting type. In a kindly family [pg 136] atmosphere "Sunny Jim" imbibed the true belief that love is the only philosophy to secure happiness and success. In a good public school this genius developed his amazing brain, and at the same time hardened his strong arms. Tin soldiers was his early game. Boy soldiers followed next. He armed his little army with mops, brooms, and carving knives, and, playing on an old frying-pan, marched them out to war. This was the beginning of great things. And from these boyish battles "Sunny Jim" moved into Sandhurst. And in Sandhurst "Sunny Jim" learned the more noble idealism of arms and the bedrock of those things which can be summed up as the chivalry of war. When he joined his regiment he created a stir. He was unorthodox. For example, he upset the tradition of three hundred years by ordering a sentry to stand under a verandah out of the wet; while he shocked his brother officers by eating an apple on the line of march. "It isn't conventional," his captain remarked. "Oh, hang convention!" was his tart reply. And so he progressed, upsetting all

of the portly seniors, who declared that the Army was going to the dogs. While these old gentlemen [pg 137] went off to shoot grouse, "Sunny Jim" went forth to every sort of man-hunting expedition. His sword within ten years had been inside the paunch of many Dervishes, Afridis, hillmen, and negroes. His breast of ribbons told all the tale of days of hardship and of daring. In every scrap he was always "Sunny Jim." That was why he got the charge of the famous "Mixed Division." It was very mixed—twenty thousand gentlemen and scallywags, with little knowledge of war, but a terrible thirst for blood. Jim had to train them.

"Get them fit," he ordered.

"How, sir?" said the A.A.G.

"Make them charge mountains with fixed bayonets for a month."

"But there's no mountains nearer than fifteen miles, sir."

"March them out to them—good for them!"

"They'll probably kick, sir."

"Then we'll have them shot." And so the Mixed Division tramped, manoeuvred, and charged. It lowered each man's weight, and made him wring his shirt after the day's darg was done. The older soldiers cursed [pg 138] and growled; the younger men whined and often fell out.

"Too stiff, eh?" inquired "Sunny Jim" one day of a perspiring Tommy.

"A wee bit, sir," said the man with a wan smile.

"It's example these men want. I'll show them. Here, you," he shouted to a young subaltern in charge of an infant company.

"Yes, sir."

"Hand over your company to me."

"Very good, sir."

The company was awed. They had only heard of "Sunny Jim." Now, there he stood in his gold-braided cap and ribboned chest—a perfect type of soldier.

"Shun," he roared. They shivered, for the voice told them that Jim was very much alive.

"Advance." They trekked behind him over the manoeuvring area. The whole regiment stopped to look on.

"Extend," was his next command.

They went out in a sleepy way.

"Come back! Come back!" he roared. They doubled back half startled.

"Now, look here, you young rascals, I'm fifty, and about fifteen stone. I've been [pg 139] through five wars and fifteen battles. I've been wounded twice and half starved in all my Army life, but if I couldn't double better than that I would desert and go home." Then in his thundering voice he bellowed, "Extend," once more. Out they ran like whippets.

"That's the way, my lads, and that's the way you'll run when the bullets

are cracking round your ears. Now, advance.”

Off they went again.

”Down—at the enemy in front—at five hundred—fire.”

They flopped down in an awkward manner.

”Well! Well!” muttered the general. ”Get up! Get up!” All rose in a shame-faced way.

”Now, watch me,” and off he went at the double; next he flopped on to the muddy ground. It was mighty quick, but then ”Sunny Jim” had done this many times to save his skin. All the while the men marvelled at this wonderful general doing such things when he might have ridden his horse and cursed them in the orthodox way. But they gladly followed his lead; ran, lay down, and opened fire.

[pg 140] ”Rapid fire,” he yelled above the din. The reply was a feeble thing to a trained ear.

”Oh dear! Oh dear! What the ...? ...” he roared, using the most choice and original adjectives. ”It’s fifteen rounds a minute I want, and fifteen rounds I’m going to have. Give me your rifle,” he yelled to a shivering youth. Lying down, he quickly opened fire, while an aide-de-camp timed his shooting with a watch.

”How many?” he inquired when closing his bolt after firing the last round.

”Just fifteen, sir, to the minute.”

”There! And these young scamps take about half an hour. Now, my lads, ready once more.”

”Rapid fire!” The response was good, almost perfect.

The old general smiled grimly as he muttered—

”They’re getting on.”

In this way he conducted the fight to the point of assault. This, of course, was the critical stage of the whole manœuvres. But before proceeding he gave another address.

”Look here, my boys. This is where you’ve got to frighten the devil out of the [pg 141] enemy, and charge like Hell. When you charge, open your mouth and yell like a mad Dervish. Keep yelling till you get at them, and then plug your bayonet home with a mighty thrust. As you pull it out give it a pleasant twist. Every twist helps to end the war. Are you ready?”

”Yes, sir.”

”Well, charge!” and off went ”Sunny Jim” at their head yelling like a mad fakir. They gleefully followed and charged as they never had before. At the conclusion he formed them up, remarking, ”Well, how did you like that?”

”Fine, sir,” was the quick response.

”All right, lads; that’s the way I want it done—good day to you.”

”Good day, sir,” answered the company, as proud as Punch.

There was no more growling in the Mixed Division, for the general had

shown them that he could do their job.
[pg 142]

CHAPTER XIII. TRAINING FOR WAR.

THE soldier of to-day is a very different person to the one of fifty years ago. In the past, all that was asked of a Tommy was clean buttons, a padded chest, and handling of arms. To-day, the soldier is equal to the officer of Wellington's time. His brain is a well-packed encyclopedia on everything from minor tactics to sanitary duties in war. In the past, he was a machine—a splendid machine; now he is an individualist, one trained to use his science in such a way that he feels that upon his conduct the fate of a battle depends. Many stripes have been lost, and many hearts broken, in the achievement of this necessary standard; but, thank Heaven, common-sense has come to stay. It is now practically impossible for an officer to hide his inefficiency [pg 143] under a mask of haughty reserve. Modern tactics demand that he shall teach his men the alphabet of military affairs, as well as those side-issues which count so much in the making of a soldier. Mental superiority and physical efficiency are the only qualities which can inspire loyalty, discipline, and confidence. Of course, the strain is hard, especially upon an officer. Too hard, perhaps, when one thinks of the niggardly pay and the chance of losing one's life in the tender and more useful years. Nevertheless, it is mighty interesting and equally amusing. Imagine a corps like the Glesca Mileeshy suddenly mobilised and ordered to train and become fit within three months. Fortunately Colonel Corkleg was a resourceful and a clever man. He commenced at the bottom—that is, on the square. It is there that obedience and discipline are developed and perfected. When a regiment can march and drill like the Guards' Brigade, there is no fear for its conduct in the sternest battle. This was the colonel's reasoning, and all agreed that he was correct. Each company then went out to march and drill. Let us study a sample. This was Captain Coronet's company. [pg 144] His colour-sergeant, known as Fiery Dick, was a regular terror. This valiant was supported by Sergeants Maloney, O'Dooley, M'Sappy, and Greegor. Very tough gents, I assure you. If they lacked a knowledge of the three R's and perfection in the King's English, they could bash their sections about in

the most vigorous style. The preliminary address of Fiery Dick was interesting.

"Look 'ere, you funny bundles of humanity, you've got to drill like soldiers, not like fishermen. And when I says "Shun,' I means "Shun.' None of your hankey-pankey tricks, such as wiping your wet noses on your sleeve, or keeking round the corner for a smell of the canteen. Stand erect, head still, eyes to your front, and puff out your chest. Keep your thumbs in line with the seam of your trousers, not inside of the next man's pocket. Remember, pickpocketing's not allowed in His Majesty's Service. If you want a bob, I'll lend you one—and charge you interest. Now—'Shun!" This evidently was not perfect. "Here, O'Riley, don't squint at me like that. That's dumb insolence. Won't have it. None of your moonlighter tricks here."

[pg 145] "To the divil wid ye," muttered O'Riley, who was a bit of a hard case.

"Take his name, Sergeant Maloney. I'll teach him not to talk back in the ranks. Squad—'Shun!" There was now a stillness that pleased the professional eye.

"Not bad for Militiamen. Now we'll try the slope. Look slippy! Chuck it about. It won't bite you. And don't wobble your head like a looney in the asylum. Squad—Slope. Macsausage, wait for the last word—you're too slippy—expect you've been a bookie in civil life, always slipping the cops. Stand still, Private Rednose. Squad—Slope—arms!" There was a weird attempt at precision. Weird is the word, for Fiery Dick immediately bellowed, "As you were." They tumbled back to the order again. "You for soldiers—you're like a lot of monkeys gettin' up a pole. But I'll teach you—Double march." Off they galloped round the square, to the grim delight of Dick, who heaved his chest with martial pride, and followed their antics with his eyes. "Double," he roared, as they slacked a little. "Who told you to crawl like worms? Hi, M'Ginty, you're rolling like a bloomin' old fishwife. O'Riley, I'll get [pg 146] a stretcher for you, you lazy spud-eating Paddy."

"Ach, to H— wid you," shouted back O'Riley.

"Halt!" roared Dick, aflame with military wrath. "What do you mean, talking back to a Non-Commissioned Officer?"

"Yis couldn't drill my ould cat," leered O'Riley in a fearless way.

"What—you— How dare—"

"Aisy, sargint, or, be jabers, you'll burst."

"Sergeant Maloney, march him to the clink. Skilly and cells will teach him."

"Thank yis, sargint—I'll get a sleep in the clink," chirped O'Riley as he was marched away.

"Double march," roared Dick to the remainder again. When he had almost pumped the last breath out of their bodies he gave the halt, then—"Stand at ease."

"Wipe your sweat off, and then we'll try the slope again." Gladly they mopped their brows. When finished, the old sergeant ordered, "Slope—arms." Every rifle went bang on to the shoulder with a precision that was truly amazing.

[pg 147] "That's the way. You can do it when you like. Now, Present—arms." This had its faults.

"Keep your stomachs in—it's corsets you want. And grip your guns. They ain't dynamite. Just think it's a beer pot. No laughing, Muldoon, or I'll clap you in with O'Riley."

"I couldn't help—"

"Silence! Who ever heard of talking in the ranks? Company—Slope—arms. By the right—Quick march."

"By the right! By the right! Don't wobble like ducks in a mud-pond. Hold your heads up—swing your arms—stick out your measly chests, and march. Steady now! About—turn. One—two—three—four—Step out—you're not at O'Riley's funeral yet. Right—form. Come round like one man. Keep back, Tamson, it's not dinner-time yet."

"I weesh it wis," whispered Tamson.

"Squad—Halt! Stand at—ease," concluded Fiery Dick. "Now you section commanders march off your sections. Slip it across them. If they look sideways, double them till their wind-bags burst."

The sergeants gladly complied, for they [pg 148] were itching to emulate the style of their worthy "Flag," as the colour-sergeant is known in the Service. When sufficiently apart, the din commenced.

"Left—right—left—haud up yer heids—oot wi' yer chists—eyes aff the grun, there's nae money there," piped Sergeant Greeger, the sprightly commander of No. 1 section. His colleagues followed suit, much to the amusement of Captain Coronet and his Subs (Lieutenants Greens and Briefs), who quietly observed all from a corner of the drill-ground. This section drill went on for a week. At the conclusion, the company commander and his subalterns fell to and instructed them in company drill. The methods of these gentlemen were of the polite order. Their adjectives had not the strong flavour of Fiery Dick's. Indeed, their treatment was much too ladylike in the opinion of the sergeants. However, these trusty henchmen kept the scallywags in order. If they stumbled, mumbled, or jumbled when on parade, a quiet dig with a boot mended matters.

Having polished the eight companies into shape and order, Colonel Corkleg and his adjutant decided on battalion drill. Battallion drill under such a colonel was a [pg 149] treat. He was a martinet, and could drill a regiment like a Guardsman.

"Battalion reported present, sir," announced the adjutant on the first parade.

"Thank you," said the colonel, clearing his throat, and viewing a thousand expectant souls.

"Battalion—what's all the moving now? When I say 'Battalion,' every man should stand still and wait for the next word of command. Who's that moving about on the right of Number Eight? Sergeant-Major."

"Yes, sir."

"Take the name of the fat, red-headed man—third from the right of Number Eight. Give him marked drill. That will teach him."

"Battalion—'Shun. Slope—arms. By the right, quick—march." Any man who quivered an eyelid or turned his eyes the eighth of an inch was promptly collared and marked for drill. Up and down they went, neither looking to the left nor to the right, as if in terror of their lives. The bailies of a hundred towns, with all the men in blue, had tried to quell and train this same material, but it had been left to Colonel [pg 150] Corkleg to instil into them that orders were orders. Discipline—discipline, and obedience, the holy watchword of His Majesty's men. From a sullen, slovenly, careless gang of devil-may-care cut-throats and vagabonds, he whacked them into a regiment of steady, proud, and sterling men. And he did not hesitate to curse them. He knew his men. There was not a sense of cruelty or spite in Colonel Corkleg's soul. He was a gentleman, but he knew that these men were the victims of environment. In their dreary crime-and-drink-sodden homes they had learned to emulate the law-breaker, to idolise the criminal, and applaud the football god. Their philosophy was material—necessarily so: for poverty made them steal; environment sent them out to seek the heat of the ale-house and the shelter of the jail. Brutes, some people would call them. But they had never seen these men dying on the sands of Egypt or on the plains of Hindostan. Colonel Corkleg had. While he cursed them in his stern way, that was simply because these men knew no other tongue. In his heart he loved them as his own children. They had stuck to him in many a bloody combat. He knew this same type would [pg 151] stick to him again. Yes, and the men loved him, too. They were shrewd. A cruel world had given them a keen perception. One look at a man and they knew him to be friend or foe. Many a time old Corkleg had met them on the open road and stopped his high-stepping mare to give them a lift and the price of their doss. Often had Colonel Corkleg amazed his guests at his country-seat by hauling a dirty old blackguard off the highway and introducing him as "one of his boys."

Having steadied them up at drill, the regiment was then initiated into the wonders of modern war. First came musketry. Musketry was never good in the British Army till the War Office made a soldier shoot for his pay. This truly brilliant thought made Thomas Atkins spot the bull as he never did before. Those who hitherto spent their lives in tasting ale realised that during musketry they

had to study abstinence and do with a pint a day—a great sacrifice on the part of such men. Next they discovered the difference between the line of sight and the trajectory. This kept them low—dead on at six o'clock. The ribbons on their caps, or the fluttering flags [pg 152] on the range, gave all the tip of the wind; while the wonders of the wind-gauge aided in getting the bullets into the best billets every time. All of these theories were amply explained by the N.C.O.'s, who had learned the latest crazes from "The madmen of Hythe." Those queer professors of the art of shooting went to bed with their rifles. They wallowed in cartridges, and prayed for new ideas to get the British Army bulls. And to the horror of all thirsty privates they invented green-and khaki-coloured targets at which the soldier had to pop to qualify for his pay. Standing, kneeling, lying, and sitting, the Tommy was expected to hit the khaki specks on the landscape. Rapid fire was another theme, while grouping, and cones of fire, they argued, were the theories to win a modern war. Very excellent, but, at first, annoying to those who had been used to firing volleys and keeping their cartridges still till they saw "the whites of the enemy's eyes." Yet, in time, all realised that the madmen of Hythe were right, and so the British Army has become the finest shooting force in the world.

Of course, the best-regulated systems are [pg 153] liable to fraud. Spud Tamson proved that. While marking at the butts, under the officer of the day, he found that a pencil pushed sharply through the target resembled the puncture of a bullet. Now this was a great discovery. It meant salvation to many of his pals who were third-class shots. It also indicated to Tamson the road to a lucrative income by charging so much per head for every bull that he secured by the aid of his pencil. Naturally there were risks, but Tamson was willing to take them. To ensure success, he squared his orderly sergeant to get him the job of permanent marker at the butts. Having accomplished that, Spud intimated to many hopeless aspirants for first-class shot that he could pull them through, and thus secure them the threepence a day which is the reward for musketry efficiency. He put dozens through his hands; indeed, he was so zealous that not a third-class shot was found in many of the companies.

"This is really marvellous shooting, sir," said the A.A.G. to the G.O.C. one day during this regiment's course. "Not a third-class shot, so far."

"Don't believe it. There's something [pg 154] wrong there," quickly observed the general, who knew the rifle upside down. "I'll test this regiment today," he concluded, putting on his cap and making for the range. There he found a company doing great things at the game. Bull after bull was going up to the delight of all, especially Colonel Corkleg, who was proud of his men's achievement.

"Here, my lad," said the G.O.C. to a blind-looking man firing at a target,

"give me your rifle." Lying down, the general fired two shots.

"What's that?" he inquired casually.

"Two bulls, sir," answered the colonel.

"Bulls, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well—blow the cease fire."

This was sounded, and the general ran up to the butts. There he found the zealous Tamson "pasting up."

"Show me the last two shots on number one target," ordered the general.

"Here they are, sir," replied the cool and resourceful rascal.

"Umph! Not much of a bullet went in there."

"Oh yes, sir, that's right enough. I saw them spit on."

[pg 155] "Well, lend me your pencil for a minute, my lad."

Out came Tamson's pencil, which he handed to the general.

"Now, look here, young man—I fired the last two shots at number one target, but I fired them in the air. They went miles from here—somewhere in the sky."

"It's gey funny, sir."

"Not so very funny, either," replied the G.O.C., "especially when I look at your pencil. It's the exact circumference of a bullet, and a little paste on each side shows that you have been sticking it through the target."

"No' me, sir! No' me, sir!"

"Oh no—it was your pencil. Put him in the guardroom, colonel, and all of your companies must fire over again with neutral officers in the butts. Good-day." And off stamped the G.O.C. with a grim smile in his eyes. He knew Tommy Atkins, and had caught many a regiment before. In the next shooting many "marksmen" suddenly fell to the status of third-class shots. Thus was a Bisley standard foiled. Tamson got seven days' cells without the proverbial option. But he didn't mind. He was thirty shillings [pg 156] to the good. Colonel Corkleg's opinion cannot be printed.

Having performed the necessary musketry course, all hands were initiated into skirmishing and the need of taking cover. Skirmishing, as you are aware, was invented to dodge the unpleasant effects of "Black Marias," "Coal Boxes," and whizzing volleys of death in tabloid form. This new formation gives all the sporting chance of getting through a war and winning a medal and a wife. As for taking cover, that undignified game has robbed war of much of its chivalry, compelling the most austere martinet to hide behind a blade of grass. This sort of thing would not have pleased the army of Wellington. Imagine the Iron Duke's Guards, clad in the glories of red and gold, hiding in a mud-hole, or crawling along a ditch, like a lot of boy scouts. These gentlemen would have declared that

the Army was going to the dogs. Speaking of dogs, the soldier of to-day is very much of a dog. He is expected to scent, crouch, crawl, and spring on his prey. The closer he gets to mother earth the better his chance of getting a bite. Of course, such a proceeding is very annoying to one with the girth of Falstaff or Bailie [pg 157] Nicol Jarvie. And it was a very difficult matter to get these gallants to understand the tricks of the weasel. The sudden flop on to mother earth at first dislocated the internal bag of tricks. Crawling, too, was bad for their tender knees. Nor did they realise that the effect of posing with their nether regions like humps of khaki meant an unpleasant wound. Think, then, of the difficulties. Imagine training one thousand men into crawling monkeys. You can picture the scene. How weird! How funny! But it had to be done. As the drill-book says, "You must see without being seen, and take advantage of all cover." Thus did the Glesca Mileeshy wriggle and crawl. Darwin would have been delighted. The sight would have convinced him that man *did* come from the crawling and clambering apes of the forest.

A week of this business fitted them for a more interesting stage—namely, "Artillery Formations," or, in other words, the tactical disposition of men to avoid the effects of artillery fire. The modern shrapnel shell has a forward throw of about 200 yards and a lateral spread of 50 yards. This necessitates the breaking of a company into four [pg 158] little groups. Two groups or sections are in the front line, about 50 yards apart; two in the rear line with about 200 yards between them and the first line, and about 50 yards between sections. The four sections then move forward in a sort of diamond formation. This really prevents a gunner getting the correct range, and even if he does get a hit he can only blot out one of the sections. The sporting chance of life, you will observe, is there for all. Quite a cunning device of our General Staff; presenting to every man the opportunity of glory and the chance (sometimes meagre) of getting home to one's own fireside.

Artillery formation was at first a weird business to the old soldiers accustomed to the straight business and marching with their whiskers in line. The idea of manœuvring in a lot of disordered groups distinctly upset their precise barrack-square drill. It didn't look well, and that seemed a weak point in the scheme. However, as the G.O.C. remarked, "They would be glad of it when the Kaiser had his guns going at them." But we must get on. Well, on reaching, say, seven hundred yards, all were impressed with the need of urgently and rapidly extending [pg 159] to avoid the rude effect of the enemy's rifle-fire. An enemy has little respect for football-like crowds advancing to the attack. Their machine-guns usually squirt out lead injections at a furious rate, with the most startling results, hence the open order at the range indicated. It is here, too, that the soldier must get behind a blade of grass or a jam tin, anything likely to stop the bullet from putting him on the roll of honour. From a vantage point, all are expected to

create as many German widows as they possibly can. Quite a murderous job, but delightfully thrilling to the man who has the hereditary thirst for blood. In such a phase, the third-class shot is of little account. The marksman, however, has the time of his life. He can inoculate the brain or the little Mary of his foe at will. Indeed, he can play nasty tricks with the angles of the square-headed Teuton. If such is the case at seven and six hundred yards, imagine the deadliness of matters at five, four, and lesser ranges.

Mistakes will happen in field-firing practices, as officers know to their sorrow. Many rifle-ranges are used as grazing grounds for cattle and sheep. These quadrupeds, [pg 160] as you are aware, have very bad manners. They persist in getting in front of the targets just as a company is opening out a deadly volley. Officers under such circumstances are always careful to cease fire and clear the offenders away. But on one occasion at the Mudtown range the officers happened to be having a little refreshment in the range-keeper's hut. During this interval a flock of prize sheep happened to stroll along in front of the khaki figures. Just then Sergeant Maloney bellowed out—"At the enemy in front—at four hundred—rapid fire."

"Z-r-r-r-p," rattled the volley—not at the targets. The devil had tempted the noble Militiamen to pot the sheep in front. Fifty fell, others screamed and ran blindly about with bullets in their skin.

"Cease fire!" roared Sergeant Maloney, but too late! The damage had been done. "What the ...?..."

Then the officers arrived. More ...? ...?...?...

Next the farmer, and still more ...? ...?...?...

Finally the colonel!...?!...?!...?!...!

Sergeant Maloney was placed under arrest, [pg 161] and every man was marched back to the guardroom. This little incident cost the small sum of two hundred pounds. The officers gladly paid—for the honour of the regiment. But the affair was chronicled deep in regimental memories, especially in the canteen, where the culprits received a certain amount of hero-worship. "It wis d— guid," as Tamson often remarked.

Another interesting phase of modern training is scouting. Each battalion has about twenty men trained for this job. The toughs of a battalion make the best scouts. They will face anything, from a mad bull to a German Division. Life to them is cheap. They glory in slitting an enemy's throat and getting back with sound news. Naturally the training of such gentlemen in peace times is troublesome. They *will* get lost. Any colonel will tell you that at manœuvres he sees his scouts at the beginning of an attack, seldom during or after the mimic battles, especially in a district where inns and hospitable old ladies abound. For example, in one great fight on the Hills of Mudtown, Colonel Corkleg was determined to

win the day. Information of the enemy's whereabouts was, of course, absolutely essential for victory. [pg 162] For this he hailed his worthy band of scouts. Spud Tamson was one. They were told to double out a mile or so ahead and get in touch. As soon as they located the enemy, all were instructed to retire at once with their reports. Gleefully they marched away. Their intentions were good, but, alas! Colonel Corkleg was opposed by a colonel of a Territorial Corps who had studied well the temperament of the Militiamen against him. This alert Terrier instructed his scout officer to bag the enemy's scouts at all costs, and see that they were well treated.

"I understand, sir," replied his alert intelligence officer. This smart young subaltern marched off his merry men towards the enemy. He did not worry about using his glasses or sending his men ahead to crawl through hedges and drain-pipes. No, he simply marched them to the village, which lay in the centre of the manœuvre area. There was only one inn. In that hostelry he was sure to find the opposing Buffalo Bills.

"Steady," he cried, as they drew near. Creeping forward, he peered through a corner of a window. Yes, there they were, sitting round a table and enjoying four ale [pg 163] of an appetising kind. There was another attraction—a buxom wench of eighteen, who had singled out Spud Tamson as the object of her jests and affection. This bold young man was leering into her eyes with a persistency akin to the style of Don Juan.

"Good!" muttered the subaltern as he crept back again to his waiting men.

"Sergeant."

"Yes, sir," answered the subaltern's henchman.

"Here's five shillings. Take half the men and get inside there. Pay for all they want and keep them merry. Whatever you do, see that they are well entertained for two hours."

"Very good, sir," replied the non-com., boldly stepping towards the door. The officer then crept away with the remaining scouts. In twenty minutes he located Colonel Corkleg's Corps in quarter column behind a hill, with only half a company thrown out as an observation post. The colonel was waiting for his scouts before he set out to annihilate "those bally amateurs," as he termed the Territorials. While he was fretting, fuming, and cursing the overdue scouts, the gallant subaltern was busily [pg 164] pedalling back on a borrowed bicycle with his report.

"Well," said the Territorial colonel, as his chief scout arrived.

"I've bagged all their scouts, sir, and we can decimate the whole regiment."

"Good," said the C.O., avoiding unnecessary inquiries in anticipation of future trouble with headquarters.

"You can double the regiment, sir, to within five hundred yards of the en-

emy. One company might engage their observation post; the remainder might make a detour with our Maxim guns and annihilate the regiment.”

”Right—lead the way,” ordered the colonel, signalling the advance. Quickly they covered the ground. In half an hour they arrived at the point to deploy. Leaving a company to engage the enemy in front, the others circled round, then moved into long skirmishing lines. Down on their knees they went, and up the hill all quietly crawled to bag the Glesca Mileeshy.

”Where *are* those scouts?” said Colonel Corkleg in a furious manner.

”*Can’t* understand, sir—most annoying,” replied the adjutant.

[pg 165] ”It’s worse—it’s *damned* annoying,” raved the colonel, looking at his watch. ”But we can’t wait. We had better move out—”

”Bang!” interjected a shot in his rear. Next there was a fierce volley of blank on three sides of his position, while away to the front he heard the volleys of his defending outposts. The startling onslaught frightened his charger, which reared and flung him to mother earth. The crack of the enemy’s Maxims and the terrible crash of their musketry threw the regiment, for the moment, into a state of panic and alarm.

”Good Lord!—they’ve trapped us,” roared the angry colonel, as he was helped to his feet.

”Yes, sir,” replied the adjutant.

”Extend—extend,” ordered the now alert veteran, in an endeavour to save his regiment. Alas! he was too late. Like one man the whole seven companies of Territorials fixed their bayonets and charged down on to the surprised Militiamen. It was, indeed, a glorious victory—one which startled the Brigadier, who happened to ride on to the scene.

”You’ve been scuppered, Corkleg,” said the general, with a dry grin.

[pg 166] ”Yes, sir,” was the tart reply of the disconsolate C.O.

”Well—you’re out of action. But why were you caught napping?”

”Waiting for my scouts, sir.”

”Ah, Corkleg,” interjected the Brigadier, ”I thought you knew better. Scouts are the only privileged absentees at this game. Have a look in the nearest public-house,” concluded the Brigadier as he rode away, well pleased with the work of ”those d— amateurs,” as Colonel Corkleg had termed the enemy. By the way, this defeated colonel *did* look for his missing men. With his adjutant he rode towards the village. As they neared the inn, sounds of revelry rent the air. A cracked piano was playing ”Tipperary,” while many fuddled voices mumbled out the words of this popular air. ”Tipperary” was followed by a general shout of—

”Oh, we won’t go home till morning,
We won’t go home till morning,

We won't go home till mor-n-n-ing,
And so say all of us."

"Shun!" roared the adjutant, as he led the way into the tap-room.

Spud Tamson disengaged his arm from [pg 167] the barmaid's neck and jumped, or, rather, staggered to attention with his pals.

"What are you men doing here?"

"We're scouts," answered all, with one accord.

"And who are you?" inquired the colonel of the Territorial's sergeant and his party.

"Scouts, sir."

Corkleg stamped out and rode home like the Kaiser in a rage. For the next ten days the scouts of the Glesca Mileeshy were under the care of Sergeant Bludgeon, the police sergeant. His total prohibition campaign made them thirsty, but not wiser, men.

Any chapter on training must also refer to night operations, generally called Night Attacks. These operations are never popular in times of training. They interfere with social engagements. The finest dinners have to be refused, and the most amorous engagements cancelled. These attacks in real war are simply organised nightmares to shorten the life of the enemy. They are difficult, and only successful under the most favourable conditions. Mistakes always happen. And, to an officer, such sorties are anxious affairs. Think of leading a company, every man of which has a [pg 168] bayonet as keen as a razor edge. Remember that every bayonet is carried at the "Charge." If there is a sudden halt in the course of the advance, the officer's anatomy generally acts as a sort of buffer for the nearest blade. Indeed, it is safe to assert that the reason for an officer's quick and gallant advance in the assault is not his thirst for death ahead, but his fear of death from some careless fellow behind. To prevent such accidents, the officers of the Glesca Mileeshy always carried coats, canteens, and a general emporium on their backs. These articles were most useful as a shield in case of accidents.

Talking was barred and smoking absolutely prohibited. The red glow of one cigarette on a night job is enough to give a whole Division away. This had to be deeply impressed on the brains of these gallants. They did their best to comply—a severe test to the garrulous gentry who also believed in "thick black." Subdued excitement was always characteristic of these affairs. The chirping of a bird, the rustle of leaves and creaking of trees, were signs of "the enemy."

Preliminary night attacks were done on [pg 169] the Mudtown Common—a great expanse which had been gifted by a king to the sweethearts of all ages. The loneliness and darkness of this area may be imagined. This place, by the way, was the rendezvous of the Territorials at dusk. In all of its dark corners

these gay Lotharios told the old, old tale. The Militia knew this, and, still bitter with the poison of their great defeat, determined to have revenge. It was to be accomplished on a night attack.

"We'll get oor ain back the nicht," said Spud Tamson on hearing the orders given for night operations.

"How?" asked Micky Cameron.

"The Terriers are no' trainin' the nicht. They'll be a' owre the place. We'll capture them an' their weemin and bring them in tae the colonel." This great plot was quietly sent round. When the regiment paraded, all were thrilled with the prospect of fun ahead. Of course the officers knew nothing about it. That would have spoiled the game.

"Gentlemen," said the colonel to his group of officers, "we shall imagine an enemy at the other end of the Common. Our plan is to make a simple reconnaissance from this, [pg 170] our outpost line. Two companies will go out, the remainder will stay here. The enemy which is represented by the Mudshire Militia will also have strong patrols in front. Elude or capture them, but do something useful."

"Very good, sir," replied the officers concerned, moving off. These officers split up their companies into strong patrols and sent them out as arranged. The darkness swallowed them up almost instantly. For half an hour there was a tense silence, broken only by an occasional patter of feet, as a scout returned with the necessary false news from the various patrols to keep the officers at ease while the comedy went on in the darkness. Then the trouble began. Shouts and screams rent the wintry air and carried far, while here and there a thud or scuffling noise made the expectant colonel and his staff prick up their ears.

"What the devil is wrong?" said Corkleg anxiously.

"There's women there, that is evident from the screaming," ventured Coronet.

"It seems to me your patrols have gone woman hunting instead of man hunting."

"Well—eh—yes."

[pg 171] "Send another patrol out and see what's on, and stop that awful din," ordered the irate C.O.

Another patrol went forth, but to no purpose. The screaming and scuffling continued, to the annoyance of the officers and the secret delight of the men. To understand it better, let us picture the scene. In each dark corner, and beneath every great oak tree, was a loving couple. These youthful warriors and their girls were lost to the world. What mattered the Germans? What mattered the waiting sergeants who were calling the roll in the billets beyond? They loved and were beloved. And so into each servant and shop-girl's ear they poured those words

which have thrilled all women since the advent of Eve. So lost were they in this fairyland that none heard the crawling patrols of the Glesca Mileeshy. The real enemy mattered little to these warriors. It was the Terriers' blood they desired. Into each nook and up to each tree went these rascals. Just as each pair were renewing their bonds of affection in a long—long—kiss there was a general shout of "Hands up" all over the Mudtown Common.

"Oh!" shrieked the girls.

[pg 172] "Get out," roared the Terriers.

"Hands up," persisted the Militiamen, presenting their glittering bayonets in a manner distressful to the anatomy of the men. This menacing attitude, with the fierce expression on the tough faces of the aggressors, sent nearly all the ladies into tears and hysterics. But all the tears and shrieks were of little avail. They were prisoners, and, as such, would be presented to the powers that be. They cursed and struggled, but the rifle slings and bootlaces of their captors eventually subdued all resistance. Pitiful they looked; more pitiful were the girls who followed their captured braves, with handkerchiefs to their eyes.

This, then, was the awful din which Colonel Corkleg had heard. Louder it grew as the returning warriors neared the zone of flashing torchlights, which now indicated the end of the operations and the position of the outpost lines.

"In the name of Heaven, what is this?" ejaculated the C.O. on seeing one patrol emerging into the light with four battered Terriers and their weeping lovers.

"Prisoners, sir," was a Tommy's blunt reply.

[pg 173] "What—more of them?" he again remarked as a great big sergeant was carried in, all gagged and bound. This was the scout-sergeant who had played his part so well in the old village inn. The colonel recognised the N.C.O., and inwardly chuckled.

"Still more, sir," ventured the adjutant, as four more patrols came forward with the battered remnants of the Territorial Force.

"But these men are not the enemy," insisted the colonel in his official tone.

"Na, sir, but they *were* the enemy the ither day. We're piyin' them back," chirped Micky Cameron.

"Ay! an' here's an officer," gleefully yelled a brave then coming into the light.

"A what?" queried the now startled colonel.

"An officer, sir," said Spud Tamson, saluting proudly as he presented the form of a young subaltern who had been having a quiet stroll with the daughter of the Brigadier.

"I protest, sir. It is an insult to me and my regiment."

"Yes, positively disgusting," pouted a [pg 174] very charming maid of seventeen, with a haughty flush on her cheek.

"We didnae protest the ither day when you made us fu' in the pub," chirped Spud, almost sticking his nose into the young scout-officer's face.

"Silence!" roared Colonel Corkleg.

Addressing the officer, he said, "I apologise for this rude interference with your very pleasant mission. I can well understand your indignation," at the same time casting a roguish glance at the pretty girl.

"Oh, it's all right, sir," replied the subaltern, saluting and marching off.

A similar apology was tendered to all the other captured swains when they were allowed to depart. "Fall in" was then sounded, and all marched merrily home. In the officers' mess that night the laughter was loud and long, for their men had squared the defeat of the previous day. Even the colonel let himself go, and laughed till his old artificial leg rattled on the floor with glee.

"Useful men, eh," he concluded.

"Yes, sir," replied the adjutant.

[pg 175]

CHAPTER XIV. ALL ABOUT SPIES.

GIDDY Greens, to whom you have already been introduced, was a queer fellow. He was a mixture of Beau Brummel, Cæsar, and Don Juan—one who dressed well, fought well, and kissed gloriously, as a flapper would say. He was also a student, and certainly a daring adventurer. His fine complexion, well-groomed figure, and air of blasé indifference, gave to all the idea that he was simply a delightful idiot who hunted women and tiddled good wine. But Giddy Greens was something like that hero in 'The Scarlet Pimpernel'—a man who had his strength and ambition under a mask of genial imbecility. He knew English literature upside down, and delighted to rave about the glories of Shakespeare, Milton, and Stevenson. A traveller too, for Giddy [pg 176] Greens had toured the whole world on a ten-pound note. He had done everything from cattle-ranching to that of a super in a third-class Musical Comedy. To women he was ever a hero. His magnetic personality was of a forceful yet charming kind.

Still Greens was a very serious man. Imperialism was his dream; patriotism his ideal and pride. He lived for Britain. In all his wanderings he preached for the flag. In these ramblings, too, he observed things, noted them down, and then startled his friends by his discoveries. The Germans he loathed, and the Germans he had followed from John o' Groats to Timbuctoo. He had dogged German travellers and spies from Tilbury Docks through Egypt, Ceylon, Australasia, Canada, and Japan. Like Sherlock Holmes, he followed quick, yet silent. At the outpost of Empire he had seen the evil work of Prussian hands. It was Greens who discovered "The League of the Fatherland"—that is, a German semi-official and social organisation within the British Empire. He found that it was bossed by their Consuls, and he found nearly all Vice-Consuls to be officers—and spies. He had written to the press and revealed [pg 177] these things, but the luxurious-living public only laughed. They had no time; they had engagements for music halls, football, and golf. The awful dangers, however, stirred this zealot on. He kept at the Teutons' heels and learned more things. These were revealed one night at

mess when Greens had declared that the bombardment of Sandtown-on-Sea was the fruitful work of spies.

"Explain, Greens," shouted one of the subalterns.

"Well, I'll tell you. I first discovered the Germans at work on the North-east Coast. Every German waiter, schoolmaster, and tradesman in all the towns from Peterhead to Dundee I found to be spies. They were in "The League of the Fatherland." All were registered by the Consul. In the event of invasion every man would have a part in the job. In the times of peace they studied the coast, the tides, the location of ships and troops, the position of guns, everything, in fact, which would be of use. These things were reported in writing to their Consuls, or verbally, when the League met at the many German clubs and gatherings. I pointed this out.

[pg 178] "In what way?" asked an anxious sub.

"A story which appeared in 'The Daily Owl.' In that romance I let them know what was going on. Yes, I frightened the lackadaisical bounders into a panic. Lunan Bay I pointed out as a landing-place. The coast near St. Andrews I also emphasised as a jumping-off shore, while Dundee was proved to be without a gun or boat to defend it; in fact, the whole coast displayed a general invitation to the Germans to come and shoot."

"What happened?"

"Some official big-wig stopped the story."

"Why?"

"It showed every weakness up, but——"

"What?"

"They got to work. Dundee got a submarine base; Montrose got aeroplanes; Fife was scheduled out for guns, troops, and trenches; Cromarty was seized and fortified; and Rosyth works pushed on."

"You finished then, I suppose?"

"No fear. I went out to the Dominion of Canada to see how things were going."

"And what did you find?"

"A German traveller in every train representing subsidised goods to cut out our [pg 179] British trade. A German club in every town for the general entertainment of spies. German women who were willing to sell their souls to gain the secrets of State, and fools in Canada like our own fools at home, who laughed at it all, who gave trade to these Germans, who toyed with the women designed to lure and rob them of their heritage. Worse, in every coast town on the Atlantic and Pacific there were the same German waiters, the same rascally Consuls, the same old League of the Fatherland. These men knew and had told the War Gods of Berlin that the forts of Halifax, Quebec, and Esquimalt were almost

obsolete; that their guns were somewhat ancient; and that the Canadian Militia system was inadequate, loosely organised, and unfit to provide an auxiliary force for a sudden mobilisation to aid our Expeditionary Force at home.”

”Prove it,” interjected Lieutenant Longlegs.

”Read Bernhardt’s book. He got his information from these spies in the Dominion of Canada.”

”Well, what did you do?”

”I spoke to the man then at the helm of [pg 180] military matters. I emphasised the dangers, and asked him what he was going to do. ’Young man,’ said he, ’we’ve enough to do. We’ve got a mighty fine country to develop and people. We can’t be pioneers and soldiers too. And we can’t get men in this country to soldier for a shilling a day.’”

”What did you say to that?”

”I simply said that there was some truth in his statements, but I also pointed out that Canada, like America, was getting dollar mad. Materialism, I argued, was beginning to be their all in all. Success had made them a little selfish, and I showed him that up till then they had contributed little in the way of ships to guard the Pacific against the coming peril, and aid our merchant destroyers in the time of war. Of course he got angry. Canadians don’t like the truth. That was proved by General Fearless, who chucked up his job there rather than command such a system.”

”But, you’ll agree, they’re playing the game now.”

”Certainly, and they’ll fight the Germans like devils; but my point is this, that if they had had their Pacific Fleet thoroughly organised, we might have been able to avoid [pg 181] disasters and have shortened the war. And, of course, it is only fair to say that their new Defence Minister is nobly trying to remedy the horrible slackness of the past. But politics are the curse of Canada. Politics have retarded Canadian defence. However, things will be better there after this war.”

”Are the Australians the same?”

”Not quite. They have done more for true Imperial defence than any other dominion. They have got national service. Every man is a soldier. And, mark you, it was a Labour Government that introduced national service into Australia. Now, that’s a wonderful thing, when you consider that Australians used to abhor discipline and stake their all on pleasure. But these labour men realised the growing yellow peril. Again they had plumped for a white Australia, and so they determined to defend a worthy ideal. I grant you that their Fleet is somewhat small, that the armaments of Sydney defences and other harbours need much attention. But they can’t do everything in a day. They have only a population of five million to work on, and a great country to develop. What they have done [pg 182] is wonderful, and they deserve the greatest credit.”

"Then, have the Germans been working there too?"

"Yes. Australia was permeated with the German system of espionage. Their commercial Huns have collared the metal market there. The North German Lloyd Company have been trying for years to cut out the Orient Line and the P. and O. And, in Sydney itself, I have heard the German Vice-Consul drink to 'The Day,' and curse the Empire which kept his country out of the sun. The Australians, like the Canadians and ourselves, were too busy with other things to hunt out these tools of the Kaiser. However, they have now got the order of the boot."

"Do your remarks apply to New Zealand?" inquired a sub.

"New Zealand," continued Greens, "is a land of patriots. The New Zealanders call it God's country. That is a good name. It flows with milk and honey, and its people have not forgotten how to love. Their temperate climate has preserved all the nobility of our northern temperament, while the general prosperity of the land has [pg 183] eliminated almost every trace of the misery and poverty so characteristic of Great Britain. The beauty of New Zealand is that it is small. Bill Jones of Auckland in the North Island knows Tom Brown in Invercargill (South Island). When Lizzie Smith of Wellington gets married, every townsman and cockey in both islands wires his congratulations. A New Zealand lady can give you the pedigree of every known family in the little Dominion. And every one knew Dick Seddon, just as well as they know Bill Massey, the present Premier of the Dominion. A Governor-General in New Zealand is compelled to be 'At Home' to all—and a good thing too."

"What about defence?"

"Splendid! Their defence system is the same as that in Australia. Every man carries a gun; better still, every one is delighted to carry his gun. Their mounted men are wonderful, and they possess some of the finest field artillery in our Imperial Army. One great mistake they made was the installation of the German Telfunkin system of Wireless. They were too honest, perhaps, to realise the full significance of such a decision. And like Australians, [pg 184] Canadians, and Britishers, they have been foolish enough to be courteous to the parasites who represented the evil materialism of Kaiser Bill."

"You haven't said anything about the women?"

"Oh, charming!" interjected Greens, with a smile which suggested many hours of delight with the ladies of the North and South Island. "And my advice is this—if you want a real fine girl for a wife and chum, marry a New Zealander."

"Cheer oh!" chirped Coronet, inviting all to drink to the girls of Maoriland.

"At the same time, Greens, don't you think that our Secret Service is just as good as the Germans?"

"Well—it's quite good. And its great merit is that it never speaks. While the Germans openly vaunt their wonderful system, our men apply themselves

quietly and sternly to their task. Such a service includes men of the most chivalrous and daring kind; it also numbers some of the queer folks. You see they are not officially recognised. If nabbed in the act, they must pay the price. While a thoroughly patriotic service, it is, unfortunately, one which we [pg 185] can never honour in a truly public way. There are skeletons 'neath the soil in all parts of Germany of many noble fellows who have died for the Cause. In German fortresses you can see others who foretold the war, who helped to place our Expeditionary Force in the right spot to meet the great hordes who tried to capture Paris. The work of these men has been accomplished throughout a period when public opinion denied Germany's intentions and refused to affirm the theories of such splendid prophets as the late Lord Roberts. Think of the mental tortures of such patriots. Picture their agony and grief when viewing the careless throng. How cruel! How maddening it must have been! Yet each went on ploughing a lonely and dangerous furrow over the fields of German espionage and defence. You talk about bravery under shrapnel and in face of the bayonets of Huns! But it takes a brave heart to do that job. And, mark you, if Germans are good at the game, the French are as good, and the Russians infinitely better. It may be a sound policy for us to allow the cocksure German spy to buy the faked maps, plans, and news, and to stop the same from [pg 186] going through the post. But public opinion ought to be more firm on the question of naturalised Germans and their families. These are the men who have grown wealthy in our midst, who have married our women, who have been honoured by the greatest of our institutions; yet, all the while, their homes and offices have been the centre of intrigue for the downfall of this land of ours. The real German spy, who is unnaturalised, and risks his life, deserves as much credit as the brave men of the Prussian Guard. But the low swine who would sever the hand that has fed them are the ones we should hound out of our country."

"But I say, Greens," interrupted Captain Coronet, "don't you think we have frightened these bounders?"

"No. They are still working. And they even cover their sins by sending their sons into the commissioned and other ranks of our forces. Many of these boys fight gallantly for us, while their dirty old fathers are playing a double game. I admit we must be generous. A German must remain a German. He is entitled to his patriotism. Still, that is no argument for our stupidity. Our land, our homes, our liberty, and our [pg 187] women are dear to us. By heavens! we have got the finest heritage of all the nations. It's worth fighting for; yes, worth dying for."

"Good old Greens," echoed the thrilled subalterns. Then Longlegs started him off again by the sceptical inquiry—

"Look here, Greens, can you prove what you say? If you can catch a real live spy in Mudtown within the next month, I'll stand champagne all round."

"Done," said Greens, with an emphasis which startled all. "But, I say, it's two A.M. We've been talking for hours. We'd better go to bed. Good-night."

"Good-night, Greens," answered his fellow-officers, remaining a little behind to discuss the wonderful phase of his character which Greens had so well revealed.

"Longlegs," said Coronet, as he turned into his sleeping bags, "you've lost your bet. Greens will keep his word."

"Good luck to him," replied the long subaltern as he also went off into the arms of Morpheus.



For many nights Greens was absent from dinner. This did not surprise those in the [pg 188] know. He was spy-hunting. Though the military and police had terrified many of the fraternity, Greens knew that he would at least catch one. So he lounged carelessly through the streets, casually glancing at every face. Unlike the average policeman, he did not search for the square head, flaxen hair, and soft-footed Teuton. He could tell by their eyes. Strange as this may seem, any Intelligence Officer will substantiate the same. The spy has that peculiar glint of cunning, with a touch of the haunted and hunted, and the shifty movements which always suggest a base intent. Such a keen student of espionage found little difficulty in locating his man. Nevertheless he waited almost a fortnight before he got his chance, and then it came almost unexpectedly. While lounging carelessly in a public place, he was amazed to hear a man using German gutturals behind. This person was inquiring of his friend, in a somewhat casual style, as to the number of troops in the town, where they were located, and what was their job in the event of any attack. Listening intently, he discovered a keen German brain analysing all the replies of the honest and simple-minded citizen. Through a [pg 189] mirror the observant officer studied the face of the spy. Strong, almost English, with firm set lines and a chin suggesting courage of a bull-dog kind. An excellent type for such a mission. His flaxen hair and a slight student cut on the lip were the only outward signs of his race. His English, to an ordinary man, would have passed unobserved, but Greens detected the thick guttural now and again, as well as a furtive glance towards his own person. This German agent was unaware of the keen scrutiny which he was being subjected to through the mirror. Nor did he imagine that the officer who paid his bill and went out would confront him again with his escort of soldiers.

"Who is he?" asked Greens of the proprietor.

"A German, sir."

"Thank you, I'll be back in a minute," and off went the spy hunter to the

nearest billet.

There he collared an escort, and marched to the place again. The German was just going out.

"Excuse me, aren't you a German?"

"Yes, sir. Here is my passport, signed [pg 190] by the Foreign Secretary, also my birth certificate," replied the Teuton, pulling out the bonds of safety which a sleepy officialdom gives to the enemies of our country.

"Naturalised?"

"Yes, certainly; my mother and friends are knitting socks for the troops," he answered testily.

"You seem to be interested in our troops here?"

"Everybody is—it's natural at a time like this."

"Perhaps," said Greens, stroking his chin and sizing up his man in case of emergency.

"What are you doing here?"

"I'm an agent for iron goods."

"The name of your firm?"

"—, London."

"That's an alien firm."

"A naturalised German. You don't deny us the right to live?"

"No, but I deny you the right to spy."

"You are insolent, and you will be asked to prove your words," said the German in a threatening way.

"Keep cool! Now, look here, this passport shows that you were in Germany at the time of mobilisation. It also shows that [pg 191] you were in France at the time that the advance was made on Paris. Can you explain?"

"Of course, I was on business for my firm."

"The Secret Service, eh?"

"No, sir; again you insult me."

"Very well; quick march."

"I refuse."

"Take him off," ordered Greens sternly to the escort.

"Uh!" was the fierce exclamation of the baffled Teuton, stepping on with his guards. He was quickly placed under lock and key. In his bag Greens found correspondence in code, envelopes from a famous "firm" which always paid well for information, as well as a heap of notes and gold. A simple citizen and the ordinary policeman would have passed this man as innocent, but Greens found a clever Intelligence Officer who labelled this German as an Inspector of the Espionage System. He travelled around for his iron goods. He also called on his local "friends," and paid good cash for "services rendered," as many receipts in

his possession showed. In a few words, Greens proved his contention that this man, like [pg 192] thousands more, was a spy, immune from arrest because of naturalisation,—a scrap of paper which ought to be ruthlessly burned and disregarded when found on any of German birth or origin. There was a smile on Greens' face as he entered the mess-room that evening.

"Why that smile?" inquired Longlegs.

"The smile means champagne. Your spy is in the garrison guard-room, and to-morrow, no doubt, will find him interned for many a long day."

"Cheer ho," yelled the subs, gathering round to hear the spy-hunting exploit. That was the last spy caught in Mudtown. The German Secret Service labelled it "Dangerous." If every policeman was as alert as Greens, all of these naturalised scoundrels would be under lock and key to-day.

[pg 193]

CHAPTER XV. A COMPANY OFFICER'S WORRIES.

UNEASY lies the head that wears a captain's crown, for the lot of a company officer is like that of a policeman—not a very happy one. He is not only captain of 120 souls, but father, jailor, pastor, and moneylender. His day is a day of toil and worry. It is only a strong man who can hold a company within bounds and at the same time retain their love and respect. A captain must necessarily be a gentleman. I do not mean by that that he must have his name on the scroll of peers, but rather the possession of honour, with a great sense of justice and infinite tact. The company officer is the man who has helped to win many battles. Quebec, Waterloo, and Mons were successes because the company officer loved his men and the men loved their company officer. [pg 194] Germans cannot understand how British soldiers fight and die so gloriously without that brutal discipline so characteristic of Teuton arms. When Germans are captured, it is always noted how the officers refuse to sympathise with their men in their shame and defeat. They stand aloof and scorn the men who have braved so much for the Fatherland. They seem to loathe the men, who have really done remarkably well in view of the overpowering opposition of the Allies. To a Britisher this is disgusting, for the Britisher realises that Love rules this whole world. "Look after the men," said Colonel Corkleg, "and when you're in a tight corner they'll look after you." That was why no officer of his regiment ever tasted food till the men had been fed; why many an officer carried a sick man's rifle and pack on a weary march; why they bribed everybody and anybody in the Quartermaster's stores for extra bread, extra beef, spare boots, shirts, and socks. In the officers' mess no one dared to allude to his men in scornful tones. The subalterns themselves deemed this an offence which merited a cold bath in full regimentals and drinks all round. But there, it is the company officer [pg 195] we have to specially deal with at the moment.

An efficient company officer must know every man's name and understand

each man's temperament. More important, he must be able to handle each man's moods, to instil into him the best and kill the worst. There are men that he must curse, and curse loud and long; there are others he must only coax and wheedle like an obstinate beauty in a ballroom. When there is mutiny, unhappiness, and discontent, never blame the men; blame the officer. He doesn't know his job, and should get the boot. A well-disciplined company means a happy company. To a casual observer, the average company officer may seem an idle person who issues orders then disappears. Not at all. Every day he finds a thousand problems. For example, Captain Coronet was one day met at the corner of the billet by Private Micky Malone, who carried a black-bordered envelope in his hand.

"Beg pardon, sor, can I spake?"

"Well, Malone."

"My ould father's dead, sor—can I get a wake-end pass?"

[pg 196] "Your father?" queried the captain, who knew his man.

"Yes, sor, he died wid consumption o' the bowels."

"But look here, Malone, your father died last year, for I remember giving you a pass and lending you a pound to go to the funeral."

"That was the wife's father."

"How *many* fathers *have* you got?"

"Wan, sor."

"But look here, Malone, you've had about a dozen grandfathers, fathers, mothers, sisters, and wives who have died since mobilisation. You're a bit of a liar—eh?"

"Ach, sure, sor, ye know I'm dacent. I've only been in the guardhouse twice this month."

"But why do you tell lies, Malone?"

"Well, sor, to tell ye the truth, Widow Riley's havin' a dance for the bhoys. She's a bit swate on me, an' she's asked me through."

"That's a different story. Why didn't you tell me that at first?"

"Sure, sor, I only told the truth once in me life, an' the ould judge sentenced me to thirty days."

[pg 197] "Well, you can have a pass—but, by the way, let me see that letter."

Malone hesitated, then handed the captain the black-bordered epistle. This the company officer carefully perused. A smile crept over his face as he remarked—"Look here, Malone, this is the same letter that Cameron, M'Haggis, and Muldoon showed me when they wanted leave for a funeral."

"Yis, sor."

"You pass this round, I suppose?"

"Yis, sor."

"Well, you won't pass it round any more, understand!" said the captain,

tearing it up.

"Yis, sor," replied Malone, saluting smartly, and marching off to report to his cronies how the captain had collared this general service document.

Just as Captain Coronet reached the foot of the stairs he was met by Private Sneaky, a weedish-looking gent.

"Well?"

"I waant tae mak' a complaint, sir."

"What about?"

"Private M'Ginty punched me for naethin' at a', an' gied me a black e'e."

"I see; well, come with me," said the [pg 198] captain, entering the billet and calling for M'Ginty.

"Look here, M'Ginty, this man complains that you struck him without cause."

"Well, sir, he's a greedy yin. He's pinched wan o' the recruit's dinner every day for a week, so I jist punched him on the nose."

"Quite right, M'Ginty. If you get him at it again, knock his head off, and break every bone in his body. Get out, you scoundrel." Off tailed the little rascal, for in all regiments you will find a few undesirables.

"Private M'Nab wishes to see you, sir," then remarked the colour-sergeant.

"What is it, M'Nab," inquired the captain kindly, for M'Nab was a good soldier.

"The wife's bad, sir, an' the wee boy's got consumption. The doctor says they're tae get steak, eggs, an' beef-tea, but I canna' dae that on a shillin' a day."

"I'm sorry to hear that, M'Nab—very sorry. But look here, I'll write to the doctor to-day and tell him to buy everything that they need. Will that keep your mind easy?"

"Thank ye, sir. It's awfu' guid o' ye."

[pg 199] "And it's very good of you, M'Nab, one with all your responsibilities, to serve your country. That's why I do it."

"I'll no' forget you, sir," concluded M'Nab with a lump in his throat, as he saluted and marched away.

"Here's a letter from Private Smith's mother, sir. She says he hasn't sent any money for a month, sir, and when he was on pass he got drunk, smashed up the crockery, and pawned the old woman's bedclothes."

"Call him up."

"What's this you have been doing?"

"Nothing, sir," was the insolent reply.

"Do you call insulting and robbing your mother, nothing? You're a low rascal. Now, look here, I'm sending your mother two pounds to-day to keep her going. But I'm going to stop it out of your pay. Charity would be wasted on a

man like you. And if I were not an officer I would give you a sound thrashing.”

”I’m sorry, sir,—I’ll no’ dae it again.”

”You had better not—fall out.”

”Private O’Toole has lost his eye, sir,” remarked the colour-sergeant.

”What!” exclaimed the amazed captain.

[pg 200] ”His eye, sir.”

”Is he in hospital?”

”No, sir.”

”Why not? He must be in agony. How did it happen?”

”It’s a false one, sir,” chirped in O’Toole with a grin.

”Ah!” laughed the captain, ”I never knew that before.”

”I used tae hae a guid wan, sir, but I lost it. The wife gied me yin oot o’ a doll’s e’e. It didnae look weel, but it wis guid enough.”

”How did you lose that one?”

”I left it on the bed tae watch ma hauf loaf. When I came back it wis awa’.”

”Well, I’ll buy you a new one. Still, I don’t see how you can shoot at the Germans.”

”If I cannae shoot, sir, I can feel them wi’ the bayonet. Nelson had only wan e’e, sir.”

”All right, O’Toole.”

”Thank you, sir.”

”What’s next, colour-sergeant?”

”The meat is short. All the men are complaining, but the cook says the weight’s there.”

[pg 201] ”Umph! Is the cook married?”

”No, sir; but I believe he is well in with a widow in the town.”

”Well, colour-sergeant, you know what widows are, and you know what cooks are. Put a policeman on to watch him. You’ll probably find him carrying all the choice steaks out at night. If you nab him, I’ll deal with him.”

”Then, sir, a lot of the blankets are being stolen.”

”Heavens! This life is full of troubles. What is the cause?”

”Women, sir! Women! Root of all evil, sir.”

”Well, I’ll see the colonel about that.”

(Next day Sergeant Bludgeon and his policemen raided the haunts of every Mary Ann in Mudtown. Two hundred blankets were found—and collared.)

”Some of the boots have gone amissing. These devils would steal the sugar out of your tea, sir. I’m nearly balmy, sir. They pawn them for beer, sir.”

”Well, I’m—!” ejaculated Coronet. ”What are we to do?”

”Make them march in their bare feet, sir. That will teach them. They’ll soon [pg 202] find another pair—without paying for them. You’re too kind-hearted, sir.

They put it on to you.”

”I suppose they do; in fact, I know they do. But there! they can fight like Trojans. And that is a great consolation, should we ever get in a fix. Now, is there any more correspondence?”

”Just one letter, sir. And a queer one, too. Here it is,” said the colour-sergeant, handing over a dirty, grease-marked epistle.

DEAR OFFICER,—

I'm in grate pane, my Sweethart Privit Spud Tamson in your Kumpany is gaun wi' ither weemin. He hisnae ritten me for a fortnicht. And a lad on Pass tell't me that he wis flirtin' an' kissin' ither lasses (servants in big hooses). He promist tae mairry me owre a year ago, an' I've been savin' up. It's jist awfu'. If he disnae stop it, I'll droon masel' in the Clyde. Wull ye tell him that, kind sir. I'll no' forget ye, and I'll send ye a pair o' hame-made socks at Ne'erday.

I Am,
Yours Respeckfully,
MARY ANN.

[pg 203] ”The limit, sir, eh?”

”Worse than that. Call that man up.”

”Yes, sir,” said Tamson, unprepared for the revelations concerning his infidelity.

”Listen,” said the captain, in his most solemn tones. Then he read the amazing document, during which Private Spud Tamson grew red, then white, red again, and finally finished up in a sort of purple, apoplectic hue.

”Very serious, Tamson. I'm afraid you are a cabbage-hearted youth. And you seem to have been having the time of your life below stairs.”

”The lassie's bletherin', sir. I wis jist gettin' a feed. A' the cooks are kind tae the sodgers.”

”Cupboard love, I suppose?”

”Na, beefsteak, sir.”

”I'm afraid you'll be landed in for a breach of promise case. Pretty serious that, Tamson.”

”I'll square her a' richt, sir.”

”How?”

”Buy her a new shawl on piy-day.”

"It's not a shawl your Mary Ann wants. It's love. Do you know what that means?"

"Fine, sir."

[pg 204] "What is it?"

"Oh, kissin'."

"Anything else?"

"Gettin' mairret, sir."

"And—"

"Sausage and eggs for breakfast."

"That's stomach love, Tamson; but there, I expect your heart's all right. See and write that girl a letter. She's pretty bad."

"All right, sir—ay—"

"What?"

"Can you lend me a shullin' tae buy a stamp, sir?"

"Yes—when you bring the letter."

Thus was Tamson reminded of the obligations of the past. His lapse had only been of a temporary kind. He had simply been enjoying himself in the kitchens of the mighty suburbanites of Mudtown. The much-blotted and effusive epistle which he penned was generously marked with crosses, and in each corner was placed a crude-looking heart with the shaft of Cupid piercing through.

Such are the worries of a company officer.

[pg 205]

CHAPTER XVI. NEW YEAR'S EVE.

THE end of the year is always a merry—and a critical—time in a Scottish regiment. Since the invention of whisky and haggis, New Year has become the season of high feeding and hard drinking. Even the Free Kirker deems it his duty to carry a hauf-mutchkin and a cake. And in the Army it has long been the custom to almost abandon discipline and allow officers and men to enjoy themselves in a thoroughly hearty way. But on this New Year's Eve there were circumstances which compelled Colonel Corkleg to adopt stern measures so as to keep his men in hand. The first and most important was the activity of the Teutons. These alert students of human nature knew the value of landing in Scotland. They also understood the tipping temperament of the average [pg 206] Scot at this period. And as they had every ship and Zeppelin ready to disturb the orgies of the Scottish nation, it was essential to be spruce, sober, and alert. Every officer realised this, but every Tommy entirely disagreed. They would spend their Ne'erday, come what may. Colonel Corkleg and his fellow-chiefs decided to counteract their schemes of revelry. Passes were barred after 9.30 P.M. Every road was picketed. Every public-house within a radius of three miles had almost a regiment on duty at the door. All mounted men were turned into policemen, while all N.C.O.'s were duly warned to abstain from the evils of the national fire-water. Each company officer harangued his men about the wine which stingeth like a serpent and biteth like an adder. And Sergeant-Major Fireworks, with his crony, Sergeant Bludgeon, suddenly became pious and abstemious—in anticipation of events. The final stratagem, however, staggered all. No man was to be paid on this—the great day. Lamentations, groans, and curses were heard on all sides when this order went round. It almost smashed the ingenious scheming of thirsty gentlemen who knew every shebeen in Mudtown. Nevertheless [pg 207] they sallied forth, determined to get hospitality—or demand it—from their many pals and patrons. Down the muddy road they tramped, singing—

"We've had no pay,
 We've had no pay,
 We've had no pay,
 No b—y pay to-day."

And drink they found. Those that did not secure it, managed to collar a draught of methylated spirits—a time-honoured beverage amongst penurious Scots. Having had their fill, they sauntered towards the Cross to bring the New Year in. The pickets, however, requested or shoved them back to billets without ceremony. And, amazing to relate, on the roll being called, only ten were absent. When "lights out" went, there was a prompt response, which surprised the officers. These unsuspecting gentlemen, believing that the usual revelries would not occur, departed to their beds to rave about the splendid discipline of the regiment. Sergeant-Major Fireworks and Sergeant Bludgeon knew better. The deathlike stillness they gauged to be a deep game.

"Don't trust them, major?"

[pg 208] "No; I'm too old a soldier for that. They've got something on—I bet. Let's have a walk round."

Quietly they slipped round the billets of the regiment.

"Here, Bludgeon—what's that?" said the S.M. peering through the darkness.

"It's a long pole, and the blighters are sliding down it."

"A pole!"

"Yes. Listen."

One by one, over a hundred men slid down the long pole from the window to a quiet field. There they were gathering prior to a general advance on Mudtown Mission Hall, where a hundred mill-girls had pledged to bring the New Year in and kiss them under the mistletoe. It was an awkward situation—doubly awkward because of their discontent about pay and the lures of the buxom wenches beyond. Once women enter into such problems the difficulties are manifold. A thousand men with fixed bayonets would not stop this contingent. Something unusual and extraordinary had to be done. For once, Sergeant Bludgeon knew that his immortal stick was useless. Yet he knew there was only one road to [pg 209] the Mission. This climbed up a hill through a deep sort of gully. The head of that gully must be held at all costs.

"I've got the idea, major," whispered the provost-sergeant.

"What?"

"Weesht! This way," and off scampered the wardens of military discipline. On arriving at the guard-room, Sergeant Bludgeon 'phoned to the local Fire Brigade. In a few words he explained his needs, and requested that the great steam fire-engine should be rushed at once to the head of the Mudtown road.

There the firemaster was ordered to clear for action and wait for orders.

"That will do them, major," said Bludgeon with a sardonic grin, as he replaced the 'phone and led his superior quietly by a circuitous route to the scene of the coming action. The fire-engine was waiting behind a great hedge. Three powerful nozzles lay ready for drenching deeds. Quietly Bludgeon detailed his orders; the firemen gladly concurred. Just as the final points had been explained there was heard a low mumbling of voices and soft patter of feet.

"The blighters have got their boots off," whispered Bludgeon. "But—listen!" [pg 210] "We've fairly bate them this time," said the apparent leader.

"Ay! Auld Bludgeon 'ill get a fricht in the mornin'."

"Man, we'll hae a fine time. Thae weemin 'ill hae plenty o' hard stuff an' shortbread."

"If you get there!" muttered Fireworks under his breath, as he espied the column of crawling and creeping revellers.

"Ready?" whispered Bludgeon.

"Yes," answered the firemaster.

"Fire!"

The three great nozzles sent forth gigantic waves of freezing water. The leading men were knocked down and almost petrified with the amazing deluge. Those behind were also drenched and chilled to the bone.

"God! It's the Germans," said a silly youth, as he turned and fled. But the harder cases cursed and charged up towards the foaming nozzles. The firemaster simply increased the water-power and down they went like ninepins, rolling and cursing in the most awful manner. Still, they were all as game as bantams, and cunningly clambered up the banks to make a flank [pg 211] attack. Here another surprise awaited them, for on reaching the top they heard a voice yell out, "Rapid fire". Twenty rifles spat out their lurid, flashing lights. The crash was terrific and terrified many. They rolled and fell back into the foaming lane of water.

"Are ye kill't?" one asked.

"Na, that's only blank ammunition. Charge!" yelled the leader, leading the way up the bank in an angry and determined style. Soaked as they were, they meant to conquer. It was an awkward moment, and Bludgeon thought that his great scheme was about to fail. Up over the bank came the half-drenched army. But just as they got up to make a final onslaught, Bludgeon rose from behind the hedge. He lifted his big stick in the air, at the same time yelled, "Fix bayonets—charge!"

"Heevens! It's Bludgeon. He'll kill us," yelled a timid soul.

The name of Bludgeon—not the bayonets—was enough. All turned and fell, or scrambled into the now surging stream of water and dashed for home.

"That's one little lot settled," chirped the Napoleonic provost-sergeant, as

he listened [pg 212] to the yells of the fast retiring mob. Turning to the firemaster, he thanked him for his services, and, accompanied by Fireworks, made for the main billets of the regiment. But if he had nobly killed the raid on the Mission Hall, he and the sergeant-major had still to reckon with the devotees of Bacchus now running riot in the great rooms in which they lived. This place, so peaceful at "Lights out," was now alive with lights, laughter, and singing. You see, the hour was twelve, and, in accordance with custom, the Glesca Mileeshy were acting up to all traditions.

"Expected that?" said Fireworks, pausing to listen to the awful din.

"Yes," said Bludgeon, gripping his stick in a way that boded ill for the revellers beyond. Through the great doors they quietly slipped, and, in a flash, were inside the rooms of the men. What a sight! Five hundred men, dressed something like Adam in the Garden of Eden, doing cake-walks, Highland flings, and Irish jigs. Some also chirped the "Wee Deoch-an-Doris," while others glibly sang—

"Oh, it's nice tae get up in the mornin',
But it's better tae lie in yer bed."

[pg 213] In another room Bludgeon saw Tamson at the head of a procession of worthies. Round his attenuated shanks was a tattered blanket, on his head a dixey lid, in his right hand a mop, and in the other a bottle, which, alas, was empty. His entourage was dressed in similar style. This procession was accompanied by mouth-organs and melodeons, playing "The Lament of Lochaber," which signified the general wail of the unpaid habitués of the barrack-room. Round and round they went, knocking here and there, and occasionally throwing a more peaceful soul out of his bed and through the window to the green below. Next came a sword-dance by Mickey Cameron, after that a fling by the general company, followed by "The Floo'ers o' Edinburgh," and other well-known barn dances. The entertainment was more pleasant than annoying. Indeed it was so orderly that Bludgeon and Fireworks thought it better to leave them alone. But in the midst of their revelry another company decided to pay a fraternal call. They arrived beating a march on ration tins and old canteens. Unfortunately, they decided to take charge of Tamson's party, and generally boss the show.

[pg 214] "Here," said Tamson, "this is oor pitch—clear!"

"Awa' an' bile yer heid," replied a bulbous-nosed private, giving him a push.

"Wha are ye pushin'?"

"You!"

That was enough. Tamson hit out. His friends followed suit. In two minutes the room was a bear-garden. Brooms, pokers, shovels, rifles, and other hefty weapons were being wielded with cool indifference as to the result. Blood, hair,

and skin were flying like snowflakes. The lights were smashed, and darkness reigned. Still the fight went on in the inky night. It was serious, so Bludgeon set to with his stick and voice to quell the awful din. This was useless. The fight had got beyond control.

"It's hopeless, sergeant-major. We can't stop this Donnybrook."

"Pretty bad, certainly, but it's got to be stopped."

"Why not sound the alarm?"

"Yes; the very thing," answered Fireworks, dashing out for a bugler. In a few minutes the shrill call of the bugle pierced through the din.

"It's the alarm," a voice yelled.

[pg 215] "Yes—Fall-in!" shrieked Tamson.

The din ceased, and the combatants fled to their rifles, packs, and ammunition-pouches. By the aid of matches and candles they dressed, flung on their equipment, grasped their rifles and dashed breathlessly on to the parade-ground. In twenty minutes every man was present and ready for action—a tribute to the discipline and zeal of the corps.

"Well, sergeant-major—what's up?" asked the adjutant on arriving at the muster-place.

"A free fight, sir. Only way to quell it."

"What's that?" interjected the colonel, who, at that moment, made his bow.

"A free fight—skin and hair all round. Had to sound the alarm, sir. Only way—absolutely, sir—"

"When did you sound it?"

"Twenty minutes ago, sir."

"Twenty minutes! That's good business!"

"Yes, sir."

"Why were they fighting—too much beer?"

"The want of it."

[pg 216] "Well—I suppose some concession has to be made," he muttered, walking to the head of the column.

"Battalion—'Shun!"

All sprang up like Guardsmen.

"Look here, men, I don't mind you making a butcher's shop of a German's face, but I object to your doing that with your own. They are not too pretty at the best of times. If you make them worse you'll frighten every woman in Mudtown. However, you have turned out remarkably quick. And as you are not required on a Hun-hunting expedition, I propose—on this special occasion—to march you all to the canteen and give you a pint of beer. But, mark you, if I hear a word from you after you go to bed again, I'll have the canteen closed for a month, and feed you on salt herrings, just to tickle your thirst and teach you forbearance.

Understand?”

”Yes, sir,” roared a thousand voices.

”Parade—dismiss.” As each company went by they gave old Corkleg a smart salute, and sang, ”For he’s a jolly good fellow.”

Bludgeon got a bottle of Scotch, a box of cigars, and a new blackthorn cudgel, ”for [pg 217] services rendered,” as the colonel tersely put it, when handing over the gifts.

”Thank you, sir,” said Bludgeon.

”Welcome! Welcome! And when we all meet down below, Bludgeon, I’ll have you appointed provost-sergeant to Old Nick.”

[pg 218]

CHAPTER XVII. WAR.

THE preceding chapters have given you the fun of the game, but do not imagine the training of this corps was fun—and nothing more. The Glesca Mileeshy spent many weary days and nights preparing for war. Every weakness was found and ruthlessly eradicated. Every loafer and weed was booted out. At the end of their training, one and all were as tough as tinkers, and fit to shoot the tail of a sparrow at 500 yards. Better still, every man was out to conquer and to kill. Colonel Corkleg was proud of them, and he deserved to be, for, as old "Sunny Jim," the G.O.C., had said, "They were the pride of the Mixed Division." Imagine their bearing and think of their cheers on being ordered to move. Of course, the Kirk-session of Mudtown made [pg 219] no protest about their departure. The regiment mustered 1020 strong, and on their backs was piled everything, from a shovel to a beer bottle. A thrill of pride ran up the backbone of every officer as they viewed the throng, while old Colonel Corkleg felt the strings of emotion pulling at his old heart. Keen he was to fight and win; keen even to die at the cannon's mouth. But he knew the cost of war, and realised that ere the game was done many of his gallants would bite the dust, thus adding to the roll of the widows and fatherless. However, duty was a stern call. He received the adjutant's report of "All present" with the same stiff air which marked his attitude on all parades.

"Battalion—'Shun! Advance in fours from the right of companies—Number one leading,"

"Quick march," ordered the leading commander. The band struck up "The Girl I Left Behind Me," and with many a laugh and cheer the heroes stepped to war. If you have never known this great experience you will never understand. But a soldier knows it well. It is the greatest moment in his life. His pride is dominant, his step [pg 220] jaunty and gay, and his whole body permeated with an electric-like thrill peculiar to his kind. And there is a look in a woman's eye which is a fine reward. Soldiers, on such occasions, rouse all that is great in a

woman's soul. She feels she is gazing at men. She realises that such men guard her from the brutalities of the Huns; she knows the children of her blood will not be bayoneted like the babes of Liège and Namur. Deep in her heart there is also sympathy and love, for women have a keen perception. Though she never lives in the tented field, she fully understands the horrors of it all. To one who has a lover in the van it is more trying still. Even the poorest are capable of great devotion. To see the object of their affection march to the field is a proud, yet a heart-gripping affair. If many of these men were scallywags, they were delightful scallywags, if one may use the term. And in their own way they could express that love which is mightier than the sword. Words will, therefore, hardly depict the sadness of parting. Thousands of fathers, mothers, and sweethearts had gathered to see their heroes off. No rudeness; no mock hilarity was seen. Even the men grew [pg 221] somewhat sad at leaving their all in all. As they swung through the station in their sections of fours, women burst into tears, some even swooned away.

"God bless you, laddie!" said an old woman, falling on the neck of her son. He kindly unlinked the withered arms and marched silently on. Another woman seized her husband in the frenzy of grief and despair; while many a young girl clutched the hand of her lover for the last time on earth. Even the officers' wives could not restrain their feelings. Caste and education could not stem the tears of sorrow for their own. Beautiful women in beautiful clothes stood sobbing by the carriage doors. Tearful partings were seen in the quiet corners of the great station. Even Spud Tamson was curiously white and still as he stood by the side of his own Mary Ann.

"You'll no' forget me?" pleaded the distracted girl.

"Na, Mary, I'll no' forget ye," was the soft reply.

Then the great bell rang, after which a bugle sounded "Advance." A rattle of carriage doors, a shriek of the engine's whistle, and off steamed the great express. [pg 222] Some one led a strong Hurrah! and a band played out a cheerful Good-bye. Handkerchiefs were waved and kind words echoed far. Grief, for a moment, subsided, and patriotism sprang to its heights. All gladly cheered their heroes off to war.

When the regiment arrived at Southampton they marvelled at the organisation of the Embarkation Staff. A place for everything and everything in its place. System paramount; disorganisation cursed and banned as soon as it reared its head. The clockwork precision was amazing, and the catching of the tides as ingenious as the sardine packing of troops on the great transport ships. Even a place was reserved for "the tears of the Marys and Lizzies," as an unromantic skipper remarked. In two days the Mixed Division was embarked. In five days it was landed all complete. Of course, it caused a stir in gay Boulogne. Twenty thou-

sand husky Scots in kilts and breeks amused and amazed the excitable folks of France. The ladies threw flowers to the gay commanders; the maids cast kisses to the men. The Glesca Mileeshy, however, got more than flowers and kisses, thanks to a very cute Bandmaster, who made [pg 223] his bandsmen play "The Marseillaise" till their cheeks almost burst. The regiment lilted the air in grand style, thus earning many a good flagon of real red wine.

Their first billets on the outskirts was also the scene of L'Entente Cordiale. Gay little girls came out in scores to see their khaki gods. Every billet had a swarm of unconventional flappers, who smoked the Tommies' Woodbines with gusto, and donned their coats and caps, to the amusement of the crowd. The Glesca Mileeshy had never seen such figures, such lips, such eyes. Their women at home had not approached them with such polished ease and frankness. These charming souls even put out their lips to receive all the greetings that came their way. Naturally, all were delighted, with the exception of the colonel and Sergeant Bludgeon.

"There's going to be trouble here, Bludgeon," remarked the colonel on the second day.

"Yes, sir, I expect anything from abduction to murder," answered the sergeant, handling his great stick in a sinister way. For once Bludgeon was wrong. When parades were done, the whole regiment swarmed [pg 224] into town, and soon were in the toils of women and wine. Even the wizened and bald-headed old veterans were rejuvenated. They sipped the champagne with gusto, and danced the gay Can-can like the belles of the Russian Ballet. Every café had its patrons. Tommies and "Frenchies" vied with each other in "Tipperary," "A Wee Deoch-an-Doris," and other popular airs. Never had the citizens seen such gay sports and fine soldiers. Yet all played the game to a man—no riotous drunkenness, no absentees. If all enjoyed themselves, they also remembered that they were at war, and in a few days would be 'midst the horrors of the same. When they parted there were many tears and lots of cheers, and, of course, all decided to return again. Alas! they little reckoned on the grim days ahead.

Their first job was burying the dead and clearing up the battlefields of the weeks before. Parties went out to gather up the stiffened corpses of all nations. In places, too, they found human bodies torn, shattered, and disfigured. It was a gruesome job, still the apprenticeship was sound. The more irresponsible at once realised the seriousness of the game; the older men [pg 225] perceived that this was different to the wars they had seen before. The dead occasionally found in heaps showed the cruel power of the modern shell; the great craters made in the ground also illustrated the disastrous impact of those huge missiles from the German guns. Blood-stained accoutrements, broken guns and rifles, dead and

wounded horses, trenches which had become cemeteries, dug-outs transformed into catacombs, revealed what they were up against. It was the science of fifty years exploited by the most cruel, clever, and cunning disciples of Mars. And all the while there passed through their ranks the motor transport with loads of wounded and dying men. Prisoners, too, came in batches. Great strong men they were, some stricken with hunger and cruel hardships, others dumb with the sense of humiliation and despair. Over their heads the regiment frequently noted the airships of their own army and the enemy. A bomb occasionally fell in their ranks, forming a useful introduction to the game beyond. It taught them how to run, how to take cover, and how to hit the petrol-tank of such impudent offenders. They also acquired at first hand a knowledge of our Allied arms. [pg 226] Little Belgians, they realised, were poor at the pomp and flashwork of war, but sound at the game of killing and holding men. The French, they saw, had all the *élan* of their fathers, but less of their stomach and nerve. They needed victories to inspire them, and the sight of the khaki troops to remind them that war is only for the patient and the strong. These early days created a sense of comradeship with their Allies. The ever-generous heart of the French and Belgians inspired a mutual feeling of love and respect. This, they all felt, would hold them in the days to come.

Having served this apprenticeship, and learned that the men who wore red breeks were French, and those with porter's bonnets Belgians, they marched forward into the great battle-line in Flanders. What devastation! What ruthless savagery! Churches, hospitals, cottages, in ruins. Women and children homeless and fatherless, and cursing the barbarous Huns. And still more processions of prisoners, wounded and dying. Death on all sides, blood everywhere. Horror upon horror, allied with hardship, pain, and sorrow. Tough as this regiment was, the sights saddened and made them [pg 227] wise. This was war. And they were plunged into the midst of all in less than a day. It was their job to relieve a regiment of regulars, who had been fighting since Mons. This corps was stuck in trenches a hundred yards from the enemy's lines. Snipers had thinned the officers' ranks; repeated assaults had killed and worn out the N.C.O.'s and men. To relieve them was a problem, for the area behind their trenches was a shell-swept zone. But it had to be done. The safest time was at night, so when dusk had come they cautiously went forward. Sometimes they ran, at other points they had to creep and crawl. For a while all seemed well, but aerial scouts had told their tale. Just as the regiment reached the trenches, all were startled with the lurid flashing of great star-shells in the sky. This lit up the whole area and showed the lines of men advancing into the trenches.

Crack! went a Mauser rifle. This was a signal for hundreds more. More star-shells went up, and then the Maxim guns of the enemy opened a deadly fire.

"Double to the trenches!" roared a staff officer, who was the guide. In a few minutes the whole were jumping into the [pg 228] long water-logged fortresses. Many were left behind wounded and dying, but the danger ahead was too great to study these casualties. Volley after volley came across the narrow zone. The hits were now few, for sighting was impossible. To the crouching men, who had just been baptised, the affair was somewhat awe-inspiring. Many a man shivered, just as nearly all brave men shiver in their first fight. The moans of the wounded men who lay behind did not help matters. Worse, however, was yet to come. The Germans, somehow, feared a night attack. Determined to check this, they sallied out on a counter-assault. Across the hundred-yard zone they ran, cursed, yelled, and stumbled. It was an anxious moment, for the star-shells only lit the ground in a dim way. Colonel Corkleg, however, was equal to the hour.

"Out men and at them!" he roared from a point somewhere in the darkened region. There was a loud clatter as his gallants leapt out of their trenches. A second to fix their bayonets, then passing through the little avenues in the barbed wire they quickly formed and charged.

"Give them Hell, lads!" roared Coronet. [pg 229] And then there was a crash of bodies and of steel. The sickening plug of bayonets into flesh was heard all along the line. Still, these Bavarian men were game. They took their punishment and nobly tried to wrest the laurels of this night affair. But they were up against the toughest lot of men in the whole line. The impact was terrific, the onslaught fierce and frightful. They felt the backward push of those determined Militiamen. Their counter-assault was useless, so, with a yell, they turned and fled. The victors pursued them, routed them out of their own trenches, captured two Maxim guns and smashed them, and after denuding the knapsacks of their fleeing enemy, returned across the darkened zone into their own lines.

"Well done, colonel," whispered the staff officer to Corkleg. "Your men are the right stuff," he concluded, as he disappeared into the night *en route* for headquarters of the Brigade.

Next morning the regiment counted the cost and the gains. In front of their own lines lay a hundred Germans dead; side by side lay fifty of their own; while in the rear of the trenches more dead were found.

[pg 230] "Not bad for a first night," said Greens, peeping out.

"Hardly a comedy," replied Coronet, bandaging up a wounded hand.

"No, melodrama, with full effects. Corkleg's a sound actor manager. But, I say, how can we get those dead men buried? They'll soon smell like polecats."

"Not during the day. It isn't safe," remarked the captain, putting his cap up out of the trench on top of a stick. Crack! went a bullet.

"A bull!" shouted the owner, drawing it down and surveying a battered cap badge.

"Sniper, eh?"

"Yes, Greens, a top-hole one at that. We'll need to be careful." The men, however, enjoyed the sport. Spud Tamson and his friends delighted in putting up empty jam-tins on the end of sticks. In a second there was the usual crack, and down came the tin with a bullet-hole through it. When an unfortunate sentry popped his head up too far, he generally met the same fate, and was immediately struck off the strength of the regiment. In some cases the men signalled such hits by putting up a white piece of cardboard, meaning a bull's-eye to the [pg 231] sniper. These German snipers were also sportsmen. Each time a Tommy inoculated the square head of a Teuton with a dose of lead, they also signalled a hit. In this way the troops managed to keep a musketry record. Of course, all sorts of tricks were employed. One section placed a row of turnips with Balaclava hats and Glengarrys on them at the edge of the trench. At once there was a terrible fusilade, and for half an hour each sniper had a go. Indeed, the refusal of these turnips to become casualties so annoyed the opposing Germans that they all commenced to pop at them. While their whole attention was thus concentrated, a small body of marksmen under Lieutenant Greens suddenly popped out of a sap-head. They placed steel plates for protection in front of them. All then took a deliberate aim at the enemy. In three minutes they shot twelve men through the head, and would have got more but for the sudden attack of a Maxim gun. This was rather unpleasant, so Greens and his merry men flopped down into their burrow again.

There were three kinds of trenches in which the men were placed. The first line nearest the enemy was long and as deep as [pg 232] the holes in a graveyard. No head-cover was allowed, and luxuries were barred. For forty-eight hours all danced, cursed, snored, or shivered according to the thermometer and the fulness (or emptiness) of the stomach. When one grew tired of being a mole and absorbing the germs of rheumatism, pneumonia, and enteric, he simply put up his head and got a free discharge from an obliging sniper.

A communicating trench led to the supporting trenches. There was also a telephone to inform the Brigadier when the first line had been sent to heaven and more living targets required. Trunk calls to Oxford Street and Piccadilly, of course, were barred—an annoying restriction. In these supporting trenches, however, a man could manage to scrape a hole in the earth and there lie down. This was not exactly a comfortable experience, especially for those who slept with mouths open. Worms, snails, and other messy slugs would persist in dropping right into the gullets of the sleeping innocents. Only Frenchmen who had eaten frogs could enjoy such delicacies.

From the supporting trenches another communicating line led to the reserve [pg 233] trenches. These trenches were the last word in cunning, comfort,

and luxury. They were literally dug-outs or caves, where officers and men improvised everything, from biscuit tins to toilet paper, in the making of underground homes to while away the weary days. Bridge and nap was played—not for money, but full tins of jam, which a beneficent commissariat showers upon all British soldiers to keep off scurvy and other Whitechapel diseases. Nights were made merry by liberal issues of rum, and hope was inspired by the regular arrival of love epistles through the F.P.O. Replies to these communications had to be vague and somewhat guarded, for the colonel censored all officers' letters, while the officers acted similarly with the correspondence of the rank and file. Parcels of tucker cheered the somewhat plain fare, and bundles of New Testaments from anxious maiden ladies taught many that their former deeds would eventually make them stokers down under. When things became too monotonous, the German artillery plunked a few Jack Johnsons over. This employed all hands on burial services and writing letters of sympathy to the widows and orphans.

[pg 234] The most wonderful person in this system was the transport officer, Lieutenant Grain. He had an army of enlisted ostlers, carters, and jockeys to bring up the rations from the rear. This had to be done over quagmires and along serpent-like roads which were packed with Hammersmith omnibuses, field guns, motor-cars, and hare-brained motor cyclists. Worse, his job had to be done at night. It was enough to try the will and nerves of Hannibal. But Grain did it every time. It was his boast that the regiment had fresh bread, fresh meat, cigarettes and tobacco every night—a great accomplishment. Fancy delivering cans of hot tea and dixieys of good stew to the front trenches at midnight! This had never been done in any previous campaign. No wonder some men wrote home saying that they were "still well, but overfed."

This life in the trenches levelled all distinctions, and revealed all that was good and bad. The skunk came forth in all his shady colours; the loyal and patient soul quickly won the affection of all. Discipline was difficult, especially when rain and frost gripped the flesh and bones. Cold feet in the first line of trenches is more demoralising than a thousand shells. Men object to [pg 235] being killed on a frosty morning. It is very uncomfortable, and certainly unromantic. They feel it better to die on the greensward with the sun lighting up the scene and the birds twittering out a grand amen. But war is never waged to suit the convenience of all. It is a battle for the fittest. The strong must survive and the weakest die. And war in the trenches is the most awful strain on officers and men. Perhaps it is worst for an officer. He suffers just the same hardships; worse, he has the anxiety of responsibility. Men seldom understand this. While they may sleep the officer has to be awake, ever watchful for the assault and ever jealous of the honour of his regiment and his name. Only men who have been thoroughly disciplined can stand such a strain. The amateur at this game is usually a nuisance, and better at

home.

The disadvantage of trench-fighting is that it robs even the best soldiers of their dash and initiative. Men who have been stuck in trenches for months get out of condition, and, at times, fail to seize opportunities to strengthen and consolidate their lines. Perhaps that was the reason for the deliberate progression of the Allied Army. [pg 236] Each week a certain forward movement had to be done, even if this only amounted to a few yards. Saps were made underneath the enemy's barbed wire, explosions levelled these obstructions low, then with a rush our men would have a go to capture another of the German trenches. This work provided scope for all. Variety was frequently afforded in village fighting—the toughest job in war. The most interesting was a fight for a little house which commanded a short bridge and road over a Belgian canal. It was important to gain this point. Half a battalion of the Glesca Mileeshy, under Major Tartan, was ordered out to the job. The house itself was loopholed and sandbagged. There were two machine guns inside as well as fifty snipers. Outside there was a circular redoubt, manned by three hundred more. The whole place was thoroughly protected by barbed wire and other tricky lures.

"It will cost us a lot of men, major," said Colonel Corkleg; "but the Brigadier says it must be done."

"Yes, and we'll do it, sir," replied Tartan, with a decision in his words which was inspiring.

[pg 237] "Very well, Tartan, I leave it to you—you know your job."

Tartan's attack was preceded by a terrific bombardment by our artillery. But these shells did not dislodge the enemy. They stuck gamely to their job, and opened a fierce fusilade on the three skirmishing lines, which moved forward after the bombardment.

Captain Hardup had the first line. He took his men forward inch by inch. Trees, walls, holes, fence-posts, all sorts of cover were used by the men. Now and again a groan and curse was heard as men fell back wounded or dead.

"Come on, lads!" roared Lieutenant Longlegs, who was Hardup's subaltern. They gallantly replied and pushed forward to within one hundred yards of the barbed wire entanglements. Matters were serious here, and casualties heavy. Ten men were knocked out in twenty minutes.

"Sergeant Brown, have a go with your cutters."

"Right, sir," said the sturdy little fellow, crawling forward. He wriggled like a snake right up to the wires. Click! went his cutters through one strand, click! through [pg 238] another, and up went his arm to get a strand higher up. All the while he was under a terrible fire. Just as he cut the third strand a bullet struck his arm. It fell limp and shattered. With wonderful fortitude he adjusted his body and cut the fourth strand with his other hand. Zip! sang a bullet again. It went

right through his head. He rolled over dead.

Lieutenant Longlegs saw it all, and looked round for another man. But he had no need to shout. A young lance-corporal jumped over a wall and crawled up to the wires. Seizing the dead man's cutters he coolly commenced to cut right and left. Bullets whizzed around,—they even passed through his cap and clothes,—but still he went on, making a great gap in the strands of wires. He was succeeding splendidly when a bullet struck the wire-cutters, smashed them, and pierced his right hand. At once he lay low, tore out his field dressing, bandaged his hand, then commenced to crawl back to his lines. He got half-way when a bullet struck him in the spine. A weird yell told all of his fate.

"By God," muttered Longlegs, "that's too brave a lad to leave out there." He [pg 239] jumped over the wall, and, heedless of the fire, ran forward, picked up his man and brought him into the shelter of his line. A great cheer went up as he returned. Longlegs had asserted his pluck.

This success at cutting the wires inspired many more to go forward. In three hours five good gaps had been made, and the way paved for a final assault. Meantime Major Tartan had arrived in the firing line with the reserves. He opened a fierce fusilade and accounted for almost a hundred of the enemy. Having done all that was possible at that point he passed the word along, "Prepare to charge." Bayonets were fixed, and every eye centred on the tough figure of the old Highland Chief. Like a deer he rose, and, raising his arm, shouted, "Up, lads, and at them." What a din! Four hundred gallants running, yelling, cursing, and panting. Through the gaps in the wire they rushed, leaving many on the way. Things were going well till a bullet struck the old major in a vital part. He fell mortally wounded. The sight checked the whole advance. His eyes saw the pause.

"Go on, men—give them it—never mind——" and he rolled back dead. Hardup [pg 240] and Longlegs now called them on. With a mighty rush they scaled the great redoubt and leapt down into the ranks of the Germans. Some of the Teutons fought gamely; others cowered back, listless and powerless, an awful fear and awe in their eyes. The sight chilled the men, but a bloodthirsty old sergeant shouted, "Remember the Belgian atrocities, boys." That was enough. They bayoneted every man on the spot. During this bloody combat the machine guns and snipers in the house were pumping out volleys of death.

"Take the house now, men," roared Hardup.

"By God, we'll soon do that," answered Muldoon, the worst character in the regiment. Running forward to the walls this powerful man got near the mouth of a Maxim gun projecting through the wall. With a terrible swipe he smashed the end of the tube, breaking his butt at the job. Another man did the same for the other gun, while the remainder of the men made for the doors. A check happened

here. The doors were barred and the enemy firing furiously from within.

"Smash it in," ordered Hardup, standing [pg 241] near. Three men sprang forward. First they smashed the protruding rifle barrels and then they tackled the doors. In ten minutes great holes were made. Captain Hardup was the first man through. Longlegs followed at his heels. The captain pinned a great big German with his bayonet, but another of the enemy stuck the gallant officer right through the chest. Longlegs had just got in when he saw his captain fall. Jumping forward he clubbed the man's brains out. The remaining Germans cleared up a stair to the next floor. This gave a breathing space and time to get more men through. When enough had been collected Longlegs led the way. Another barred door was found. Willing hands quickly ended this, and into a room Longlegs and his men dashed. The enemy stood at the end of the room with bayonets fixed.

"Come on, lads—wipe them out." Forward they went. There was a terrific tussle for five minutes. Longlegs had the muscle of his arm torn away with a bayonet, while three of his men were killed on the spot; but every German was bayoneted to death. Longlegs had his arm hastily bandaged. "Come on," he shouted again, and up to the [pg 242] top flat they rushed to end their job. There they found a German officer and a host of men inside a loft. The door of the place was also barred. But this was easily smashed, and into the den the gallants rushed. As they went an old sergeant pushed Longlegs back out of danger.

"What's wrong?" he inquired angrily.

"I'm in charge o' this lot, sir. You're owre braw a fechter tae get kill't."

"Nonsense, sergeant."

"Nae nonsense aboot it, sir. Staund there," kindly insisted the old non-com., who saw that Longlegs would soon faint from loss of blood. Meantime the din inside the room was deafening. Squeals, groans, and curses rent the air. It was a battle to the death. The officer fought like a Trojan for his life, but, in the end, he was bayoneted to death. Half of the enemy were killed, the other half surrendered or jumped through the windows, smashing their legs on the hard stones below.

"We've won, sir," reported the sergeant, rushing out of the shambles to where the pale-faced officer was standing at the top of the stair.

"Good!" said the subaltern, tumbling in [pg 243] a heap from loss of blood. At that moment a thundering cheer was heard outside the house. It was the colonel and the other half of the battalion, who had been sent up in support. The job, however, had been well done. Old Corkleg was met at the door by the faithful sergeant.

"We've done it, sir," said he, saluting.

"Yes," said the colonel gravely, as he looked at his dead and wounded men. Then looking up, he remarked, "Where is Major Tartan?"

"Killed, sir."

"And Captain Hardup?"

"Inside, sir, badly wounded."

"What about Mr. Longlegs?"

"He's lying upstairs wounded too."

"Any other casualties?"

"Two other officers wounded, sir, and I think we've lost over a hundred men."

"Sad—very sad, and some of the best," said the old colonel, turning away to hide the moisture in his eyes.

"Well done, Corkleg," said the Brigadier, walking up to the scene.

"Yes. Our men have done well, but our casualties have been awful."

"Still, Corkleg, your men have captured [pg 244] the key to the whole German lines here. They will have to retire for almost a mile now. Good business! Good business! Terrible scamps, these men of yours, but heroes every time. Let me have any recommendations."

Hardup and Longlegs got the D.S.O., the old sergeant and wire-cutting corporal received the Distinguished Conduct Medals, while every paper in Britain wrote columns about the gallantry of the Glesca Mileeshy.

"Useful men! Useful men!" said Corkleg, on reading the appreciation in 'The Times' a few days later.

"Yes, sir," replied the adjutant.

[pg 245]

CHAPTER XVIII. THE POWER OF BREAD.

ROADWAYS are the mainsprings of an army. They are more precious than jewels. When captured they have to be jealously guarded. For this purpose the drill-book says you must have examination posts. These posts are simply clearing-houses for the liars and laggards of war. It is an important job, and usually given to important men. As the Glesca Mileeshy were the most important gentlemen in the Mixed Division, it fell to them to guard the main highway which led through their lines right into the heart of General Von Burstem's camp. Captain Coronet's company, on this occasion, supplied the guard, consisting of Sergeant Killem, Privates Tamson, Muldoon, and Cameron. This observant detachment was posted in a little hut at the cross-roads. The point commanded [pg 246] communication and regulated the flow of spies, patrols, and supplies. Every waggon, motor, officer, and man had to be halted, examined, and passed by the man on sentry-go. The job suited the temperament of Spud Tamson, for he had all the craving for novelty and sensation. He swaggered up and down the beaten path with the air of a new-born subaltern. Nothing escaped him, and as night came he grew still more alert.

"Halt—who goes there?" he challenged out.

"A Gordon!" was the reply.

"Pass, Gordon—all's well."

"Halt—who goes there?" he shouted again.

"Black Watch Picket."

"Pass, Black Watch—all's well."

"Halt—who goes there?" went his challenge once more.

"Wot the 'ell's it got to do with you?" piped some one in the dark.

"Pass, Canadian—all's well," was the apt retort, which in itself reflects the unruly but otherwise splendid man from the Golden West.

For a time there was silence, during which [pg 247] Tamson puffed the smoke out of his dirty old cutty-pipe. Between puffs he mused on the mud and

hunger of war, and occasionally switched his fancy back to where his own Mary Ann would be sitting in anxious dread. During this sort of meandering he was roused by the flashing lights of a powerful motor-car. On it came, right up to the barbed wire gate which Spud was guarding. Gripping his rifle in no uncertain fashion, he came down to the charge and bellowed out, "Halt—who goes there?"

"Staff officer, you fool—open the gate," said a muffled voice from the front of the car.

"Step oot and gie the countersign," ordered Spud.

"— you—open the gate. I'll report you to your colonel."

"Report yer granny—gae me the countersign," persisted Spud, his whole cunning roused by the well-muffled face of this staff officer.

The officer jumped from the car. As he did so the alert sentry noted his hand behind his back. Something was wrong.

"Stand and gie the countersign."

The officer whipped the hidden hand round. [pg 248] A revolver banged in the stilly air. The aim, however, had been turned by a cunning parry, followed by a dexterous thrust by the nimble Spud. He had pinned his aggressor right through the breast. The man fell with a groan. As he tumbled, Sergeant Killem and the guard dashed out. One glance, and the sergeant staggered a little. "God! Tamson—it's a staff officer. You've kill't him."

"A spy, ye mean," said the cool sentry, putting his foot on the dying man's chest, and with a jerk withdrawing his bayonet.

"A spy!"

"Ay—see the revolver! He tried tae shoot me."

"That's queer, man," ejaculated Sergeant Killem, bending down. Lifting the red-banded cap off the wounded man's head and unwinding the muffler, he was startled to see a face clearly German, with the usual student scar. Opening a British warm jacket, the sergeant also found a close-fitting tunic worn by the German officers.

"You're richt, Tamson. By Heaven! he's got a cheek," muttered Killem, as he extracted a large six-inch map, a note-book, a woman's photo, and other things from the [pg 249] dying man's pocket. When this search had been completed they lifted the almost dead German into the guardroom. Spud now tore out his own field dressing and tried to stanch the mortal wound, while the sergeant rang the telephone bell in the Divisional Headquarters.

"Well?" replied an aide-de-camp.

"I'm the sergint on the examination post. A sentry has jist shot a spy in a motor-caur. He's dying in the hut."

"Let him die," was the blunt reply. "And I say, sergeant?"

"Yes, sir."

"Search the man and his car. Keep everything till the Intelligence Officer arrives."

"Very good, sir," said Sergeant Killem, hanging up the 'phone. A further search revealed many things. Papers showed the amazing daring and skill of this spy. The strength, guns, morale, and distribution of the Allied Arms was almost perfect. In the garb of a staff officer he had been everywhere—an easy thing when one remembers the mighty salaams and reverential awe which the "Brass Hats" receive from the respectful Tommy Atkins.

[pg 250] "This is his last trip, onywiy," said the sergeant, casually picking up the woman's photo which the spy had carried in his pocket. Spud came forward to view it.

"That's an actress," remarked Tamson.

"Ay. English at that."

"It's the Principal Boy in that big London panto," exclaimed Spud, who knew the name of every actress, boxer, and racehorse.

"Man, you're richt; but listen—"

"A motor-caur! That'll be the officer," said Spud.

A few minutes afterwards the car stopped at the door, and a major of the Intelligence Staff came in.

"Here he is, sir," said the sergeant, showing him the wounded German in the corner of the hut.

"Good Lord! it's Von Darem!" muttered the startled officer.

"Wha, sir?" inquired Killem.

"Oh, the late Military Attaché in London," was the off-hand reply of the officer.

"Here's his papers."

"Thanks," said the major, walking to the lamp. Opening out the note-book, he quickly read the contents. He was as fascinated as he was surprised.

[pg 251] "Well, sergeant, this is a good night's work. Who caught him?"

"Me, sir," chirped Spud, clicking his heels and giving a smart salute.

"You know your job. I'll see the General about you. You ought to be a sergeant. Good-night all."

"Good-night, sir."

Next morning Private Spud Tamson had a paragraph of praise in Divisional Orders, and at night the colonel of the Glesca Mileeshy informed him that he was pleased to promote him to sergeant. The examining guard had brought Spud Tamson fame. A few days later the newly-promoted sergeant was also given the job of taking out a standing night patrol towards the enemy's lines. For this purpose he was allowed to select his men. Muldoon and Micky Cameron were, of course, in the band. It was a dangerous job, yet Spud was not alarmed. It suited

his nature and whetted his ardour for the all-precious D.C.M.

"The Field Training Manual' has it that patrols are primarily intended for reconnaissance, not fighting,—in other words, to see without being seen. Spud remembered this. [pg 252] He was also aware that the German commissariat was badly managed. Perhaps that accounted for his stuffing of bread and meat into the haversacks of his party. The men were also ordered to keep their tongues and rifles from barking, and when the enemy was spotted—to lie down. Having duly impressed his little band with these instructions, he gave the order to march. Away they went, Spud at the head. Like cats, they stalked on the metalled roadway for almost a mile.

"Halt!" whispered Spud on nearing a long line of trees which he knew were occupied by the outposts of the enemy. Then all lay down. For a time they could see nothing in the darkness, but gradually their eyes grew accustomed to things. A crunching of feet told its own tale of sentry-go, and a few minutes later the patrol discerned two men at the edge of the wood.

"Micky, you come wi' me," said Spud to his old friend Cameron. "You others stiy here. If you think we're gettin' done in, come owre an' len' a haund. But mind, nae shootin'—the bayonet, every time."

"Right ho, Spud," was the willing response as the sergeant and Micky crawled away on [pg 253] their hands and knees. For twenty minutes they wriggled like snakes. Luck and the shadows favoured them. They finished up fifty yards from the German sentries.

"Here, Spud," whispered Micky, "this is sudden daith for us."

"Are ye feart, ye puddin heid."

"Na, I'm no' feart, but are we no' daft?"

"Blethers! Noo, look here, Micky, get yer haversack haundy, an' mind the breid."

"What's that for?"

"Catchin' them."

"Catchin' them?" queried Micky.

"Ay, jist like catchin' canaries. But, listen, when thae chaps turn their backs, mak' a jump for it. Nae killin', though. Haunds up, and then gie them a lump o' breid."

"Braid?"

"Dae whit yer tell't. I'm fed up wi' yer questions. If yer feart, awa' hame." This sharp retort ended Micky's fears. For the next ten minutes they lay watching their prey. Then came their chance. The two sentries met and turned their backs to have a chat. With a light bounding step, Spud and Micky reached their men. The startled [pg 254] sentries turned and then jumped for their rifles, which were leaning against a tree. Too late, though. A glistening bayonet and a low com-

mand, "Haunds up," ended their service in the German Army. Both held their hands up in terror, expecting a sudden despatch to the heavenly land, at the same time tearfully muttering, "Don't hurt me—Don't hurt me," for, like nearly all Germans, they spoke English well.

"Here," said Spud to his man, handing a lump of bread and a sausage. The man grabbed it like a hungry wolf. His comrade did the same with Micky's peace-offering. This bait reduced them to a state of friendliness and civility. Indeed, the attitude of Spud and Micky amazed them. They had been told that the British Army were murderers and barbarians. When they had finished their simple repast, Spud casually inquired—

"Whaur's yer picket?"

"Back there," said one, pointing to the end of the wood.

"Hoo strong?"

"About a hundred."

"Any Maxims?"

"Two."

[pg 255] "Whaur are they?"

"At that end," said the German, showing Spud a sort of earthwork at their end of the wood, about six hundred yards away.

"Many men there?"

"Plenty."

"All right, come wi' me."

The Germans hesitated.

"Step oot," said Spud, fingering his trigger in a determined way.

"Well, don't kill us."

"Na, we'll no' kill ye. But mind, keep quiet as ye go," he ordered, pushing his prisoners ahead. The victors followed, carrying the rifles of the enemy. But they were not to get off scot-free. The clumsy Germans made a fearful din, rousing their compatriots some distance away. This and the rising moon told the now vigilant Teutons that something was wrong. A searchlight was flashed across the danger zone. Spud and his men were spotted.

"Double," he roared, giving the Germans a prick with his bayonet, but the crash of rifles and then the patter of feet told the daring sergeant that he was pursued.

Zip! went a bullet past his ear. Zip! went another, striking Micky in the leg [pg 256] and smashing a bone. He tumbled with a groan.

"Here, you German waiters—lift him," ordered Spud. The prisoners hesitated, but the stern look in the sergeant's face, as well as the danger of death from the rifles of their own friends, made them grab the wounded man and carry him on. A five minutes' run brought them to the spot where Spud's reserves were

handy.

"Halt!" challenged Muldoon, jumping out of a hole.

"It's me, Pat—haud on here. Stop these scallywags that's chasing us up. Gie them a dose o' Rapid. They'll think they're up against a hunner men."

"Roight, sargint," replied Muldoon, assuming command of the reserves.

Spud with his unwilling bearers ran on, glad to be out of the danger zone. A few minutes afterwards, the German patrol, which had followed them, came panting and stumbling towards Muldoon's little army.

Z-r-r-p! crashed a volley. Cries of amazement and shrieks of pain rent the air.

Z-r-r-p! rattled another, and still another. The enemy fled in disorder towards their startled friends. Muldoon sent more volleys [pg 257] into the retreating host, and then retired about a hundred yards. Crash went his rifles again. The Germans were thoroughly checked and their whole line surprised.

"Back, bhoys, for the love of Saint Patrick," ordered Muldoon, leading his three men at a trot down the long winding road. They quickly pulled up on Spud and his burdened prisoners, and in half an hour were marching in triumph through their own lines.

"Two prisoners, sir," said Spud, jumping into Colonel Corkleg's dug-out.

"Oh! How did you get them, Tamson?"

"Wi' a bit o' breid, sir."

"Bread!"

"Ay, sir. Ye could catch a regiment wi' a twa-pun' loaf."

"Well, that's the limit. Where did you learn that?"

"The Gallowgate, sir."

"Ah! Tell me how you did it."

Spud quickly told of his adventure, and also imparted the useful information he had received.

"That's good, sergeant. Do you think we could capture the redoubt and the guns?"

"Ay, sir—easy."

[pg 258] "How?"

"A night attack, sir."

"Sound, very sound, sergeant. I'll put your captain on to it. Thank you, Tamson."

Spud saluted and jumped out. His company gave him a warm welcome on entering their dug-outs; indeed, Captain Coronet called him in for a tot of service rum. After this warm beverage had been devoured, Spud elaborated his own ideas about the capturing of the enemy's Maxims. The captain listened attentively and then dismissed him to have a rest preparatory to the projected assault.

The night affair was arranged by the colonel during the day. Captain Coronet was to make the attack, supported by another company. The whole thing was to be led by the now famous sergeant. It was a daring adventure; but if successful it was worth the risk. Machine guns are annoying at all times. These would be better out of the way. The position, too, was desirable. Its capture would allow the Mixed Division an opportunity to clear the wood of objectionable snipers.

At dusk Coronet and his men sallied out. Spud headed the column, and from front to [pg 259] rear all were guided by a great, long rope held by each man so as to ensure direction and avoid straggling. At first they marched, but on nearing the enemy's line all fell on their knees and commenced to crawl. This was continued for half an hour, when a whispered "Halt!" made them lie low.

"It's owre there, sir," said Spud, pointing in the direction of the redoubt.

"Not much to be seen, Tamson," remarked the captain, placing his monocle in his eye.

"Listen, sir."

Both lay still, and eventually analysed the many sounds. Some men were coughing, others appeared to be singing, while here and there "All's well" rang out in German. During this wait for the light of dawn the company was surprised by the tramp of a small patrol. On they came straight towards Coronet's men. It was an anxious moment for all. To fire would have been madness, revealing the whole plan. The captain held his breath, uncertain how to act. It was one of those awkward incidents for which no remedy can be found in infantry training, new or revised. Captain Coronet could handle a division in a war [pg 260] game and win many a brilliant battle on regimental staff rides, but this situation was beyond him, and like a simple British gentleman he whipped out his sword.

"Na, sir, no' that," whispered Tamson. The flush which suffused Coronet's cheek could not be seen in the dark. Spud Tamson had presumed to override the officer class. For a second the captain almost lost his temper. Another second's reflection, however, told him that this sergeant from the slums was right.

"Let them come right up, sir, then grab their legs, drap them, and choke them."

"Very sound—tell the men what's on," commanded the captain, well pleased to have found a solution to the problem. A few more minutes brought three figures within view of the attackers' eyes. They tramped and stumbled forward right into the waiting men. The captain, Tamson, and Sergeant Killeem grabbed the legs of the Germans, and with a jerk heaved the surprised men to the ground. Only one shout was heard, for, like a flash, strong hands pounced on to their throats. A spluttering and low choking broke the stillness of the night.

[pg 261] "Don't kill them—tie them up," whispered the commander. Some mufflers were quickly produced, and with the aid of rifle-slings, rope, and spare

equipment straps, the German patrol was bound and gagged.

"I wonder if they heard that beggar shout?" whispered the captain.

"Na, sir. Ye wid hae soon heard the bullets if they had."

"I'm glad—it's getting light," said the captain, looking up to the sky.

"Ay, sir,—yonder's the gun pits," said Tamson, pointing to a redoubt about two hundred and fifty yards away.

"Pretty tough job, Tamson," mused the captain, studying closely the flanking trenches and some objectionable barbed wire.

"The barbed wire's no' very high, sir."

"High enough for trouble."

"If they tak' aff their coats an' fling them owre the wire it'll no hurt them sae much."

"Good idea,—tell them to carry their coats in their hands, and get ready."

Tamson turned and whispered the order. In a few minutes the whole company was eager for the fray.

"Prepare to charge," whispered the captain, putting his monocle into his eye. [pg 262] Leaving his sword on the ground he picked up one of the German rifles and jumped to his feet. The company followed suit, and with a thundering cheer charged forward towards the German lines.

A sentry outside the barbed wire dropped his rifle and ran towards a little gateway in the entanglements. Unhooking some loose strands he dashed through, followed by Coronet, who pinned him with his bayonet in the back. About twenty more squeezed through this gap. The remainder flung their coats across the wires and floundered over into the German trenches. Then the butchery began. Half-sleeping Germans found themselves face to face with cursing, yelling scions of the Glesca Mileeshy. These old toughs from the "Model" plugged, stabbed, jabbed, hacked, and butted the life out of the defenders in the flanking trenches. Those who tried to escape by jumping out were clubbed to death. Coronet and Spud were everywhere, and, like others, quickly covered themselves with German blood. Things went well till a Maxim gun started its nonsense. A clever gunner opened a traversing fire on the daring band.

"Lie down, men," roared Coronet. They [pg 263] obeyed, but not before twenty men had been killed or wounded. It was an anxious moment for the company commander. The check was serious, and, like a true British officer, he looked round for his sergeant. He saw Tamson at the far end of a trench coolly aiming at the German gunner.

Bang! went Spud's rifle. He missed. Muttering an oath, he quickly fired again. The man dropped back dead. Another sprang to his seat, but before he could touch the handles Spud despatched him to the Happy Land. This was good, but not altogether useful, for a host of Germans were sallying out of their dug-

outs and rushing to avenge their dead.

"Rapid fire!" roared the captain.

Click! click! went the bolts, and next a fearful crash, but our musketry cannot always stem a wild German rush. Remembering he had a company in support, Coronet signalled them up. Recollecting, too, that he had read somewhere in Haking's text-book on company training that an assault should be met by a counter-assault, he ordered his men to charge.

"I'll see tae the guns, sir," shouted Spud to his captain above the din.

[pg 264] "Right, sergeant," answered Coronet, looking back.

"This way for the Gallowgate, lads," was Tamson's order to a few of his cronies. They followed at his heels, and dashed towards the first gun. A young German officer met Tamson with his sword. The Teuton made a furious swipe at his red-coloured head.

"Missed it, young fellow me lad," shouted Tamson, parrying. Still the point hooked an ounce of good flesh out of the sergeant's arm.

"Got ye," yelled Spud, lunging forward with his bayonet. The officer writhed in a horrible way at the other end of his rifle. With difficulty he disengaged, but rather late, for a powerful Teuton made a terrible blow with his butt. Tamson was struck on the side of the head and stunned. He fell to the ground. Pat Muldoon saw it all and jumped forward to guard him from further injury. Standing astride over his prostrate form this great Irishman faced all odds. He wielded his rifle in the same easy manner as he had formerly handled his pick. An Irishman in a fight is a sight for the gods. He is a mixture of the dervish and the devil. [pg 265] And a strange charm hung over the life of this son of Erin. Man after man he felled like a woodman cutting pine. As the neighbouring gun team had no desire to earn such a hurried despatch, they bolted to a more safe and pleasant region in the dim beyond.

Meantime, Captain Coronet had been getting on with his job. His counter-attack crushed the first impact of the German host, but at a terrible cost. Seventy men had bitten the dust, while he himself had been prodded like a prize pig with German bayonets. Fortunately none of his gashes were serious. Still, he and his men were about worn out when a thundering cheer told them that the supporting company had arrived. Into the fray dashed the eager avengers. Their enthusiasm turned the tide. Away ran the Germans; the position was won.

Out of the shambles rose Spud Tamson, somewhat dazed with the blow.

"Cheer up, ould pal,—are yis better?" queried Muldoon.

"What wis it?" asked Tamson.

"Begorra, it's the stars ye've been seein'."

"Three star brandy wisnae in it, Pat. It's worse than the D.T.'s."

[pg 266] "Never mind, me bhoy, we've got their ould bullet engines," said

Pat, pointing to the machine guns with the gun team lying round. "But I say, Spud, have a nip."

"Sure, Pat, whaur is it?"

"Here," he said, drawing a beautiful silver brandy-flask out of his pocket.

"Whaur did ye get this?"

"In that German officer's pocket."

"Man, it's the rale thing. Did ye get onything else?"

"I did that,—a purse of gould German quids."

"I get hauf o' that. It wis me that kill't him."

"Roight, we'll share it out by-and-by."

"Nae fear. Hauf it the noo."

"Why?"

"A bird in the haun's worth twa in the bush."

"That's what the ould judge said when he gave me thirty days for stealin' Mike Docherty's pigs," concluded Pat, as he ruefully parted with half of his bag of gold.

Spud also got his D.C.M.

[pg 267]

CHAPTER XIX. AN IMPERIAL AFFAIR.

"I SEE Sergeant Tamson is in divisional orders to-day," said Colonel Corkleg to Lieutenant Greens during breakfast in the dug-out.

"What for, sir?"

"Oh, his leading of that attack the other night. He's been awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. Useful man. Useful man."

"Yes, sir. Isn't it wonderful how a man like that, born in the slums, has all the instinct of a leader, as well as the pluck of a dozen ordinary men?"

"They're all the same, Greens," said the colonel, laying down his knife. "You know, I have always commanded that type of man. In peace times you find him convicted daily for drunkenness, absence, insolence, and a hundred other things, yet in war he is always a hero."

[pg 268] "I think, sir, the reason of that is that they are nearer to the brute creation, and better able to stand the shocks of war."

"Well—yes. Those fancy corps composed of gilded youths haven't much stomach for a long campaign. They're bothered with brains. They think too much. A man who thinks deeply isn't much use in the ranks. An officer can do the thinking, the man must go to the cannon's mouth without asking the reason why. It wouldn't do to have three million generals in an army."

"Another point, sir, that I have often thought of; that is, how these men from the slums have always fought Britain's battles. Up till a few years ago it could be said that Britain's battles were won by aristocrats and paupers."

"I never thought of that, Greens, but it's quite true, only the word 'pauper' might be interpreted in a broader sense. What I mean is, that the very poor—honest poor in many cases—have always been in the ranks. There are many reasons. First, since the feudal days, it has been their lot to serve. Traditions have been passed down, even into such a place as the Gallowgate. And tradition, as you know, is a wonderful incentive."

[pg 269] "But hasn't poverty got something to do with it, sir?"

"Yes. Forty per cent enlist for the thrills of the business, another forty per cent come in because of an empty stomach; the remainder have probably been inspired to clear from their haunts through an energetic policeman or an unfortunate affair of the heart. Still, poverty's no crime, and a Don Juan is usually a gallant soldier. And, after all, every one is a volunteer."

"True. And yet I think this class of man will eventually pass out, sir. Look at the hovels they live in,—the awful lives they're compelled to lead. That, in time, will debilitate this class. Worse than that, I'm afraid that Socialism is rapidly spreading. In fifty years these men from the backlands of our cities will be anarchists and revolutionaries."

"You're wrong, Greens. These men are instinctively conservative; they will remain conservative to the end. Every Britisher is at heart a Tory. Look at Blatchford and Lloyd George. They used to wave the red flag, but now they're ranting Imperialists—quite on a par with Salisbury or Kipling. It's in the blood, my boy. They can't help [pg 270] it. Mark you, Greens, I'm not arguing that there is no discontent in the slums. That is partly the fault of the ruling caste, and partly the result of our industrial system. We have been much too selfish in the past, and these great factories are sweating the life-blood out of our city people. I wish to God we could get them back to the land. The old, old days were best. Then a man was 'passing rich with forty pounds a year.'"

"I'm afraid, sir, that 'back to the land' is only a play term—nothing more."

"In our country—certainly. But we have a solution in our oversea dominions. Why, I have seen boys from the slums of our country sent to Canada, New Zealand, and Australia; now they are prosperous farmers. If we cannot save our men in the ranks from the pauper's roll, I certainly think we ought to get at their children. It is our duty. Their blood has sealed the bonds of Empire. Let us give their children a share of the Empire's treasure. If we don't, Greens, disease, as you say, will kill these people, and then the vulgar rich will have to work their own mills and defend their money-bags."

These Colonials in our Division are certainly an excellent advertisement for the [pg 271] Colonies. If their discipline is weak, their physique and pluck leave nothing to be desired. It makes one feel awfully proud to see them doing their bit. And the sight must annoy the Kaiser very much."

"Ah, yes," said the old colonel with a fine gleam in his eyes, "we have the right to feel proud. These men represent the finest Empire the world has ever seen. No wonder they fight well. They've got something worth fighting for. Of course, you know the Colonies well."

"Yes, sir. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are fine countries. And I can understand why these men find discipline irksome. They are pioneers. Every man has had to cut his way. They have pushed the plough and the cash-desk

over the prairies and on to the hills. They have sustained civilisation and culture at the point of their rifles. Indians, Maoris, and aborigines have been overawed by them and gathered into their keeping. It's really wonderful what these young nations have done. Do you know, colonel, I believe our colonial cousins will eventually become so powerful that no hostile Alliance will be able to tackle us."

[pg 272] "Yes; but, hello, who's this?" concluded the colonel, as a figure darkened the doorway of the dug-out. It was the brigade-major.

"Good-morning, Jones—anything on?"

"Good-morning, sir, I've got some trouble for you," remarked the major with a dry smile.

"Oh!"

"The Kaiser's got another brain storm. He has decided to lunch with the gay madames of Calais. Our Division is, of course, in the way, and the Brigade in particular, so there's going to be some fun."

"When?"

"Soon, sir. Our aeroplanes and agents report a great concentration behind the enemy's lines. As we hold them on the most likely line of advance, you may expect to be in the affair."

"Well, Jones, it's a case of us making our wills. We hold the key of our whole line. Their fury will be spent on that."

"Yes, sir; and the brigadier wishes you to hold on at all costs. He will reinforce you if things go badly. He said that he was glad you were there."

[pg 273] "Old toughs for a hard road, eh, Jones. Now—any more orders?"

"Only one more, that is, to double your sentries and reinforce your firing-line trench. If you can make any obstacles or entanglement tricks in front of your line, the brigadier will be very glad."

"I'll see to that."

"Thank you, sir, good-morning."

"Good-morning, Jones," and out jumped the brigade-major in continuance of his task. When he had gone, the colonel sent for his company commanders. The situation was explained, and all were instructed to strengthen the line, erect more entanglements, and use every means in their power to embarrass the enemy's advance. Nothing, of course, could be done during the day. The enemy was only three hundred yards distant from the first line of trenches. But for the next three nights all were busy. Fifty yards in front of their trenches deep pits were dug. The earth was removed, and over the deep gaps thin sticks were laid or wedged into the sides. Green sods, which had been carefully cut, were neatly laid across the sticks, so as to disguise the pits and resemble the general lay of the ground. [pg 274] Behind these death-traps low barbed wire entanglements were fixed. Some loose brushwood and other green stuff aided in the disguise

of these lures. Finally, the higher entanglements were strengthened in such a way as to make the complete scheme a death-making obstacle of no mean order. Many of the trenches were also screened by a few dummy earthworks to draw the enemy's fire, and thus minimise the casualty roll. Every man was given 250 rounds, all rifles thoroughly cleaned, bayonets grimly sharpened to a razor-like standard, and sentries doubled. These preparations were continued all along the line. Behind, in the reserve area, reinforcements were prepared at a central point to enable the G.O.C. to throw them forward where required.

These arrangements, of course, were an indication to the rank and file that something was on. That was all they knew, for in this war the Allies had learned the need of secrecy and the folly of allowing war correspondents to publish the orders of the day. This system is wise, though annoying to the soldier and civilian with an inquiring turn of mind. It makes the soldier feel like a chessman on a board—a mere atom to be [pg 275] moved forward to death, or back into cover at the will of the master-hand. It is the German system, and a splendid one, for published orders and war correspondents are the curse of an army. South Africa proved that. Intelligence agents of the Boers used to cable back the illuminating paragraphs which had been sent by "Our Special Correspondent." The new system naturally upsets the podgy club critics, who like to direct the affairs of Britain from behind the cover of roast-beef and whisky. "K," however, is a master-hand in dealing with this type. He knows his job, and he has the will to overrule the clubman and the crowing cocks at our parish pumps. But we must get on with the killing business.

Meantime the Germans had not been idle. With that vigour and thoroughness so characteristic of the nation, they prepared for "The Day"—another of the THE'S, of course. Victory was certain, for the Kaiser had invoked the aid of his God. In a general proclamation sprinkled with oaths, imbecile pleas, and biblical embellishments, he called on his generals and army to charge for the Fatherland. He would be with them—miles to the rear, of course—and he would [pg 276] stand waiting with thousands of iron crosses to plaster round his soldiers' chests. God was to be on the side of his big battalions.

The plan on this occasion was the old one—dense masses of men. Line after line of conscripts to be thrown to death and destruction. But the preliminary bombardment was a thing which they also relied on. This commenced at the dawn of a cold and drizzling day. The boom of the first shell roused "Sunny Jim" and the Staff of the Mixed Division. A tinkle of a telephone bell stirred the British gunners to action. Observers cunningly concealed in some haystacks in the forward part of the line immediately 'phoned back the range of the German batteries. The crash of our shells 'midst the guns of the enemy was a fitting reply. The range was accurate and the toll a deadly one. However, these German

gunners have a wonderful pluck and persistency. Their observers saw many guns, new trenches, and here and there fields dotted with turbans, caps, and badly concealed guns in the Allied lines. Eagerly they worked out their range tables, and crash went their guns again. One great line of trenches with Indian turbans and [pg 277] Tommies' caps peeping over was bombarded with three hundred powerful shells. The parapets were wrecked, trenches burst, and great craters made in the surrounding fields. Deadly gunnery and deadly havoc. No wonder Krupp's hirelings gained the iron cross. The exposed guns were crushed to smithereens, and the gunners near knocked down like dollies in a fair. This made the German observers glad. To them the battle promised well. But one of the German observers, stationed in an old windmill, received sudden marching orders through the agency of a powerful British shell.

"Sunny Jim" was pleased to allow the "hits" of the German batteries. His unorthodox methods had proved supreme. With his wonderful cunning he had prepared those long and exposed lines of dummy trenches, dotted with turbans and caps. The "guns" which they had smashed were simply trees resting on the wheels of old farm carts. The "gunners" killed had been made out of old khaki suits filled with straw. True, the Germans had registered some good hits on the real trenches and live men, while here and there a gun had been knocked out of [pg 278] action. Yet the stagecraft of this clever G.O.C. had lessened the casualty roll and drawn the enemy's fire away from the hives of our warriors. Britons are not so stupid as they seem. As for our guns, they were a match for Krupp's newest and latest. The Mixed Division was armed with weapons of a powerful range and a deadly type. There was no useless aiming or extravagant shooting. Almost every shell burst near a breech block and mangled its defenders. For six hours they pumped death and destruction into the gun-pits, trenches, and masses of grey-coated Germans waiting for the assault. This was very annoying to Kaiser Bill, sitting in his three-ply armour-plated travelling booth. But it did not alter his decision. "Forward" was his order after the bombardment. As he himself was excused the honour of advancing, he made certain of the fulfilment of his commands.

There was an air of death and stillness in those British lines towards which the deep ranks of the Germans marched. The gunners must have done well. A spirit of victory filled them: more eagerly they marched to Calais—the Kaiser's dream. But the reckoning was to come. Deep in their burrows lay [pg 279] thousands of expectant British warriors. Every magazine was charged, and every sentry coolly watching the stern advance of the German host. Nearer, still nearer they came. At last they reached the deadly zone—300 yards.

"Rapid fire," roared Colonel Corkleg, and every other commander in that great, long line. The crash was terrific, the surprise amazing, and the shrieks of

death and pain alarming. The great line paused in terror, but only for a moment. On they came again, the living jumping over the dead. Do not call them cowards. They can fight and die. They faced their punishment nobly. Maxims and rifles poured death into line after line; still on they came. With a devilish delight the Glesca Mileeshy watched their advance.

"They're near Bannockburn noo," said Spud to his pals as the enemy ran towards the pits.

"They're in! They're in!" he yelled as the first line tumbled down into the death-traps. Hundreds floundered to an awful end in front of the British lines. The cries of the struggling mass were even heard above the din of shooting. The next line [pg 280] paused in horror, and many tried to run, but the officers' swords and revolvers drove on the men in rear and shoved still more into the chambers of horror. At last they were filled, and over the mangled and moaning men the others charged to the trenches.

"Rapid fire!" ordered Spud, and every other section commander all along the line. The response was startling. Worse, something caught the feet of the first line. It was the low entanglements. The running men were thrown forward on to the jaggig stakes and piercing wire. Again the advance was stemmed, and again the British maxims and rifles exacted a frightful toll. To the sensitive soul such a sight is awful and sickening. Brutality is triumphant, and war shown in all its hellish aspects. There is little culture in the business. It is simply the awful expression of Hate. Nevertheless, such men as the Glesca Mileeshy viewed almost calmly the scene. They even joked and laughed as they sent their bullets into the reeling masses of men.

"They're comin' again—Rapid fire," commanded Spud to his men once more. The weight of numbers had pushed the living over the maimed. They clambered across [pg 281] their bodies towards the high entanglements. A crisis was near, and every man in the Glesca Mileeshy fixed his bayonet, then opened fire again. Dead men paved the way to the higher entanglements.

Click! Click! Click! went the enemy's wire-cutters all along the line. Some even tore themselves over or through the barbed wire. They had reached their goal.

"Gae them H—, boys," roared Spud above the din. There was no need to command. Out of the trenches leaped the front line of the Glesca Mileeshy. The slaughter was fierce. Blood spurted everywhere. Germans and British struggled like Dervishes for the mastery. Screams were mixed with curses, moans drowned in the awful din. Germans hate our British bayonets; in fact they loathe cold steel at any time. Seldom will they face such music, but this attack had been driven on. To turn meant death from the bayonets behind; even if they had escaped from the crush a German officer's revolver would have quickly ended their flight. Brave

as they are, when equal in numbers against our arms the British assert their superiority with natural ease. The Glesca Mileeshy, like their co-partners, had [pg 282] centuries of tradition behind them. Germans, after all, are young at the game of war.

Colonel Corkleg viewed the awful struggle from the supporting trenches. The condition of affairs was uninspiring. He saw more and more grey masses of the enemy surging forward to swell the attacking line.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, as two great columns burst through on the right and left of his line. He also noticed that the regiments on his flanks were retiring. Was it panic? Were they complying with previous orders? He did not know. All he knew was that his regiment had been told to hold on at all costs. He would do so, for, like a true soldier, he had a firm sense of duty and a belief in his general. As it was useless to waste more men in his front line, he signalled to them to retire through the communication trench.

"Retire, man by man," ordered Lieutenant Greens, waiting with Spud to see all the men through. Perhaps the action of the officer and sergeant was unnecessarily cautious and daring; yet it is typical of the British officer and N.C.O. Quickly the men jumped down into the communication trench and ran on to [pg 283] the supports. Nearly all had gone, when Spud was alarmed to hear some one say—

"Sergint—Spud—for the love of God, don't lave me—I'm done in, bhoy." Spud turned from his act of bayoneting a German to see poor Muldoon lying half mangled across the parapet.

"Get hold of him, sergeant—I'll keep the devils off," roared Greens, smiting the attackers with the butt-end of a rifle. Spud jumped forward and grabbed the heavy form of his faithful chum. He staggered with the weight, but, with a superhuman effort, half carried and dragged the wounded man along the deep communicating trench. Colonel Corkleg and his men had seen it all. They even stopped for a second to cheer. As Spud dropped his load he turned to look for his officer. He saw him surrounded by half a dozen wild Bavarians.

"Come on, three o' ye," he shouted to the nearest men. They clattered down the trench behind his nimble form. Into the surging mob they dashed, gashing and hacking as they went. Poor old Greens had fallen. He seemed almost dead as Spud jumped and pulled him out from beneath the attackers' feet.

[pg 284] "Haud them for a meenit," roared Spud, "and I'll get him back."

"Richt ye are," was the willing response of the three stalwarts. Nobly they tackled their men, but, alas! two were killed in the *mêlée*; the third man had to flee with a terrible bayonet wound in his chest. Spud pulled the lieutenant under cover of the supporting trench, and then handed him and the other wounded men over to the stretcher-bearers.

"Things look bad," mused Colonel Corkleg, viewing the surging horde of yelling Bavarians, who were now advancing again. He knew he was in a tight hole; he was also aware that the eyes of his men were on him. That is the Tommie's way. In danger he looks to his officer. If the officer is still the same cool gentleman who has kindly but firmly guided him in the other affairs of peace and war—all's well. But—if there is a sense of despair, a touch of pallor, a command given out in a nervous way, then that wonderful confidence which wins all battles dies out in a flash. Corkleg knew the working of the soldier's mind. This was an occasion to preserve to the last the air of ease and the sense of hope. [pg 285] Between puffs of a cigarette he calmly issued his orders, directed the fire, and occasionally cursed a slacker who fiddled with his bolt.

"Thank Heaven for our Maxims," he remarked to the adjutant, as he watched Cocky Dan and his gunners sending death and disorder into the German ranks. Then jumping over the dead bodies of some of his gallant men, he entered a little dug-out where the telephone was. Turning the handle, he waited. A faint tinkle quickly echoed through the din.

"Hello—is that the brigadier?"

"Yes."

"We're in a tight fix here, sir. We've lost the first line of trenches. The regiments on my right and left have gone. It looks as if we're going to be scuppered."

"Hold on, for God's sake, colonel. Yours is the key of the whole line. They must not get it. We'll reinforce you soon. Good-bye."

"I hope to God you will," he muttered, dropping the 'phone. He was not afraid of slaughter, but he was certainly afraid of the enemy capturing this, the pivot of the defence. The colonel, of course, was not aware of the higher policy which had placed him [pg 286] there, for even commanding officers are seldom informed of the inner secrets of attack and defence. In this case the G.O.C. knew the strength of the enemy and fully estimated the deadly weight of their numbers. Brave as his men were, it was impossible for them to repel this great attack in its early stages. Nor would it have been wise to do so. He knew the enemy could break the line. It was, therefore, essential to work out his defence in such a way that he might avoid needless casualties, gain time, inflict a frightful slaughter, and then drive home the counter-attack—the soundest maxim of war. The point held by the Glesca Mileesha, however, could not even be temporarily surrendered. It was on a knoll commanding the flat country round. If captured by the enemy it would have been an easy matter for them to gallop forward their light field batteries under cover of this hill, and then render to the attacking German infantry a weighty co-operation which would have been fatal to the British general's plan. That was why this regiment was there, and the presence of this regiment gave their general the assurance that they would hold out while he attempted a ven-

ture thrust [pg 287] upon him by the will and numbers of the enemy. Colonel Corkleg, of course, may have divined this thought of the G.O.C., but he had not been informed of the fact. He had been given a definite order—"To hold out till the last," and in the British Army orders are always obeyed. The orders to the colonels of the regiments on his immediate right and left were to promptly retire when the enemy reached the first line of their trenches. On arriving at two little knolls covering the ground which they had surrendered, they were instructed to immediately reform behind them. There they would find sixteen Maxim guns and fresh troops to aid them. That was all they knew. But behind a great earthwork screen, some five hundred yards to the rear of this second line, the Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, and Gurkhas lay under cover, ready, if need be, to repulse a serious reverse, but really destined to carry out the counter-assault.

Now, imagine the scene. The Glesca Mileeshy fighting like Trojans against the helmeted hordes who tried to envelop and crush them. Their trenches were filled with blood, and hundreds lay maimed and dead. [pg 288] Round their flanks swept rank after rank of the Germans, in vigorous pursuit of the little sections of retiring regiments who fired a few rounds, then ran on to the next bit of cover, where they repeated the same performance with a coolness truly wonderful and inspiring. Their volleys were deadly enough, but feeble against such a mighty deluge of men. Still, they lured them on, then finally disappeared behind the flanks of their second line of defence. Meantime, the German reserves had arrived. Inspired by the success of their first lines, they pressed bravely forward to finish their job, leaving the Glesca Mileeshy almost encircled by their friends.

Z-r-r-p—Z-r-r-p—Z-r-r-p spat the machine-gun batteries behind the little knolls. This was accompanied by a terrific explosion of land mines, which burst beneath the feet of the enemy, as well as the rapid fire of the infantry and the crashing bombs from five aeroplanes above. Hundreds were blown lifeless and mutilated into the air, hundreds more were riddled with the traversing fire of the Maxim guns, while many were caught with the well-aimed musketry of the eager Tommies. The great host reeled with [pg 289] the blow. Death and fumes, the smoke and noise, stupefied them all. They were like lost sheep in a wilderness. Indeed, the enemy had reached that mental state when a counter-attack will always win.

"Double forward the reserves, and, when ready, charge," was the order flashed from the G.O.C. of the Mixed Division. Out of the earth rose the Indians and Colonials—brothers in arms. Their advance was covered by the men and Maxims on the knolls in front of them. Gleefully they ran—Indians mixed with Canadians, New Zealanders, and Australians. They reached the second line of defence and lay down for a breath.

"Fix bayonets—prepare to charge," was the next order flashed along the line.

The clicking of the steel rings on the bayonet standards was a cheerful sound to all.

"Charge!" A wild hurrah was heard from seven thousand men. Seven thousand bayonets gleamed in the now sparkling sun. And down like an avalanche swept the sons of Empire. Words can never depict a charge. It is wild, almost insane, yet glorious. There is a thrill of pride in the veins that kills all fear and makes even the fattest [pg 290] and laziest envious of the fleet-footed subalterns, who always lead the way. And this was an Imperial charge—a charge of willing volunteers, who loved the Motherland.

The stupefied Germans were horror-struck. Seven thousand fresh and lusty warriors struck terror into their hearts. And those bayonets! Well, who wouldn't run! They fled like hares on a frosty morning, pursued by the yelling and stabbing multitude. The slow-footed fell in hundreds. But on pressed the Mixed Division. Over their original line they charged to a great and glorious victory. The counter-attack had won the day.

Just as the battle ended, "Sunny Jim" dashed up in his motor-car. News of the victory had cheered him, but he was anxious to learn the fate of the Glesca Mileeshy. As the car neared Colonel Corkleg's position, he was received with a cheer from a hundred men.

"Good God, colonel—is that all that's left to you?" said the general quietly, looking on the living, then at the piled-up dead.

"Yes, sir," said Corkleg, with a catch in his voice, as he tried to salute. The strain and an awful bayonet wound in the shoulder [pg 291] had drained much of his blood. He collapsed at the general's feet.

"Never mind me, doctor," he whispered in a weak voice to the surgeon who had jumped to his side. "Look after Sergeant Tamson."

"Who, sir?"

"The man who saved me," said the colonel, trying to point to the prostrate form of Spud, who lay almost lifeless on the top of some dead Germans. Then closing his eyes he swooned away, muttering, "Useful man—useful man."

Spud Tamson was found living, yet seriously wounded. He had been bayoneted in the chest while gallantly rescuing his colonel from a band of lusty Bavarians.

"Save him if you can, for he has earned the V.C.," said the adjutant to the doctor as Spud was lifted into the motor ambulance.

"Oh, he'll live all right," was the cheerful reply as the motor started on its way. And live he did. The whole Empire cried "Well done," and all the world wondered at this hero from the slums.

A CONVENTIONAL FINISH. EXTRACT FROM THE PRESS.

MARRIAGES.—At the residence of Colonel Corkleg, C.B., by the Rev. Father Murphy, Sergeant Spud Tamson, V.C., The Glesca Mileeshy, to Mary Ann M'Ginnes, daughter of Patrick M'Ginnes, The Gallowgate, Glasgow.

THE END.

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