A Soldier's Sketches Under Fire

By

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A SOLDIER'S SKETCHES UNDER FIRE.

PART I.

ON THE WAY TO THE FRONT.

INTRODUCTORY.

ON THE WAY TO THE FRONT.

CHAPTER I.

FROM SOUTHAMPTON TO MALTA.

On the outbreak of the war I joined the Royal Fusiliers, uninfluenced by the appeal of wall-posters or the blandishments of a recruiting sergeant. My former experience as a trooper in the Hertfordshire Yeomanry being accounted unto me for military righteousness, I sailed with my regiment from Southampton on September 3rd, 1914. We thought we were bound for France direct, and only discovered on the passage that we were to be landed, first, at Malta.

I think I know the reason why the short trip across Channel was avoided, but, as it behoves me to be very careful about what I say on certain points, I don't state it.

I show the fore part of the boat, the bows being visible in the distance. The doorways on the right are those of the horse boxes, specially erected on the deck. In fact, the whole liner, with the most creditable completeness and celerity, had been specially fitted up for the use of the troops, still retaining its crew of Lascars, who did the swabbing down and rough work required.

My sketch shows a crane bringing up bales of fodder for the horses from the hold, with two officers standing by to give orders.

ABOARD THE TRANSPORT.

We experienced some exciting incidents on the way out; for instance, in the Bay we ran into a fog, and the order was given for all to stand by. For the next two or three hours all were in doubt as to what might happen—of course there was fear of torpedoes.

We heard in the distance several shots fired, presumably by the battle-cruiser which was our escort. When the fog lifted, we could just see the smoke lifting on the horizon of some enemy craft, which had been chased off by our own warship. We again steamed ahead towards our destination and were soon sailing into smooth and calm waters, the temperature becoming quite genial and warm as we approached the Straits of Gibraltar. As we passed through the Straits the message was signalled that those two notorious vessels, the "Goeben" and the "Breslau," were roaming loose in the Mediterranean.

AT MALTA.

On arrival at Malta, I and others were put through our firing course, and the regiment took over the charge of prisoners and interned Germans, of whom, together, there were on the island—so soon after the beginning of hostilities—no fewer than 8,000. One of the first sketches I made was of our Bivouac.

BIVOUAC AT MALTA.

MALTA AND THE PIRATES.

Malta, which has been called "the master key of the Mediterranean and the Levant," "the stepping-stone to Egypt and the Dardanelles," and "the connecting link between England and India," is one of our Empire's most valuable possessions, and its physical formation has made it for generations past of great maritime value. The island is, in itself, a rock, and all its earth and mould has been imported. In the days when there were no submarines or warships, it was the headquarters of pirates roaming at large in the Mediterranean. These pirate crews, after capturing their prey, used to bring their captures into one of the entrances of the island, now called the Grand Harbour. At the base of the harbour is the town of Valetta, which was catacombed in those early times, and tunnels were made through the island rock. When pirates had brought a ship under cover of the natural harbour to these tunnels, they took all the merchandise ashore and then broke up the vessel, so as to leave no trace of the incident. The crew were usually massacred to a man, and when chase was given, no trace whatever could be found of either the pirates or their captures, and

later on their ill-gotten gains would be shipped off from the other end of the tunnel in another part of the island.

Looking through between the trees in my sketch of the Casement Gardens, under the Barracks of Floriana, which stand on an eminence overlooking the spot, a portion of the harbour is seen which commands the back moorings, and the water where the P. & O. liners lay up. Beyond the vessel drawn I indicate the island of Fort Manoel, which is an ancient fortress which possesses a very handsome gateway, which may have been built by the Romans. In fact, all over this island are remarkable relics, some of them probably as old as those of Stonehenge, but how or by whom the original materials were brought there or the original buildings constructed is now left by historians to conjecture.

CASEMENT GARDENS, MALTA.

Other public gardens are those of Biracca and Floriana. Public establishments include the biggest Fever Hospital in the world, the Castille Prison, and the Governor's Palace.

SERGEANTS' MESS.

SERGEANTS' MESS AT FLORIANA, MALTA.

The view of the site of the Sergeants' Mess at Floriana gives a good idea of the massive style of architecture and the palatial design of many of the buildings. The big construction of the walls will be noted, and the height of the chimney. All the houses have flat roofs, and on them people sleep at night because of the intense heat. From the roof of this house is obtained the best view of the island. Although Malta is composed entirely of rock, flowers grow profusely, and a variety of creeper, very similar to our own azalea, climbs up the front of the forts, requiring little or no root. A garden of this flower was attached to the Sergeants' Mess house.

FORTIFICATIONS.

ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT, MALTA.

The ancient fortifications proved impregnable for ages, and are now modernised for the use of up-to-date artillery equipment. I show the

exterior of the Army Ordnance Department, Fort Tigne, and on the extreme left, on the other side of the harbour, a portion of Fort Manoel.

THE MALTESE.

The habits and manners of the Maltese have long been notorious for their rude characteristics, probably attributable to the people's Moorish origin, although the race has now blended with the smooth Italian. Throughout the Levant they have the bad name first deserved by their robberies and murders. British rule has effected great reforms, but it cannot change the leopard's spots.

The experience of our boys in some of the outlying parts of the island, and even in many streets and cafés, was that these primitive people had not altogether lost their primitive instincts in the course of becoming civilised. One of their customary tricks is to offer one of their bangles, or some other souvenir, to get you to spend money in the cafés and dancing saloons, and he would be a clever man who ever succeeded in obtaining one of the souvenirs promised him from day to day. The women of Malta certainly have strong claims to beauty, at any rate up to the age of sixteen, for they mature early. They have large and lustrous black eyes, and are of a swarthy and somewhat Spanish type. They still wear the traditional hood, a black scarf, called a "Faldetta," thrown over the head and shoulders, and disposed in such a style as to exhibit the countenance of the wearer in the most alluring form. Although picturesque in the distance, they are very slovenly in their hair and dress on closer acquaintance, and generally exhibit the traces of their Oriental origin. They are great experts in the making of Maltese lace, for which they have won a world-wide reputation, and their native filigree work is also very famous and very beautiful. Churches (where weddings are celebrated in the evening) are very numerous, and priests and friars are always to be seen in the streets. The boys of our regiment said that Malta was chiefly notable for "yells, smells, and bells."

We passed a very merry time here for nearly three weeks—such a time as many were destined never to know again—and then were shipped to Marseilles, en route for the trenches on the Western Front.

In the "Main Guard" of the Governor's Palace at Valetta we left behind us a fresco memorial of our short sojourn on the island. For many generations it has been the custom of regiments stationed in Malta to paint or draw regimental crests, portraits (and caricatures), etc., on the interior walls of this "Main Guard," and on its doors also. Walls and doors, both are very full of these more or less artistic mementoes, but space was found which I was asked to cover with a black and white series of cartoons of prominent members of our (the 2nd) Battalion R.F.

CHAPTER II.

FROM MALTA TO MARSEILLES.

From the bows of our boat as she lay in harbour at Marseilles, I "spotted" three typical figures. The one holding the rope is a French sailor, the one at the bottom of the picture is a French gendarme, and the third is a Ghurka, one of our fine sturdy hillmen from India, who had come out to France to stand by the Empire.

Marseilles was a most wonderful sight at the time I was there, and although I had made many previous visits in normal times, when I had greatly admired its grand proportions, none of them had given me any idea of what its appearance would be when it became the clearing station in the time of such a great war, and one of the chief bases of all food supplies. Troops of all descriptions were working like ants by day and by night, unloading boats to the huge stores of all descriptions of provender, and loading the trains with all kinds of artillery, ammunition, Red Cross wagons, motors, horses, and all the paraphernalia of modern warfare.

The town is the third largest in France, and the chief Mediterranean seaport. Its history teems with exciting incidents of plague, fire, sacking, siege, and hand-to-hand fighting, so it is quite in keeping that it should take so important a part in the present conflict. It was here Monte Cristo was hurled from the Chateau d'If in the sack from which he cut his escape. Francis the First besieged it in vain, and it prospered under King Rene. In the French Revolution it figured so conspicuously as to give the title to the national hymn of the French.

THE STORY OF "THE MARSEILLAISE."

Is it too late to tell again the story of the origin of "The Marseillaise"?

ON THE QUAYHEAD AT MARSEILLES.

Its author and composer (or it might be more correct to say composer and author, for in this case music preceded words), Rouget de Lisle—a young aristocrat and an artillery officer—had as a friend a citizen of Strasbourg, to whose house, in the early days of the Revolution, he came on a visit one evening. The tired guest was cordially welcomed by the citizen and his

wife and daughter. To celebrate the occasion his friend sent the daughter into the cellar to bring up wine. Exhausted as he was, de Lisle drank freely, and, sitting up late with his host, did not trouble to go to bed. He had been amusing the family by playing some of his original compositions on the spinnet. When the host retired for the night he left de Lisle asleep with his head resting on the instrument. In the early hours of the morning the young officer awoke, and running through his head was a melody which, in his semi-drunken state the evening before, he had been attempting to extemporise. It seemed to haunt him, and, piecing it together as it came back to his memory, he played it over. Then, feeling inspired, he immediately set words to it. When the family came down he played and sang it to them, and his host was so moved by it that he became quite excited and called in the neighbours. The instrument was wheeled out into the garden, and in the open air young de Lisle sang the song that was to become the national air of his country to this local audience. The effect upon them was "terrific," and from that moment the song became the rage. It seemed to embody the whole spirit of the Revolutionists, and spread like wildfire throughout France. It was to this song that the unbridled spirits of Marseilles marched to Paris, hence its name, "The Marseillaise." Shortly after this, de Lisle received a letter from his mother, the Baroness, dated from her chateau, saying, "What is this dreadful song we hear?" Fearing that his own life might be in danger, he being an aristocrat and a suspect, he had before long to take flight across the mountains. As he went from valley to crag, and crag to valley, he time after time heard the populace singing his song, frequently having to hide behind rocks lest they discovered him. It sounded to him like a requiem, for he knew that many of his friends were being marched to the scaffold to his own impassioned strains.

CHAPTER III.

FROM MARSEILLES TO ARMENTIÈRES.

The incidents of the railway journey from Marseilles to Etaples, en route to Armentières, told in detail, would fill a book. It was made in ordinary cattle trucks, in which, packed forty to a truck, we spent four days and a half at one stretch. Yet was it a bright and merry trip, for our spirits were raised to the highest by the thought that we were going into action, and we were at all sorts of expedients to make ourselves comfortable. For instance, before we started the Stationmaster's Office was ransacked, and every available nail pulled out to make coat and hat pegs of in the cattle trucks. We had to sleep on the floor. Our corporal, who was an old soldier of many campaigns, of iron physique and a perfect Goliath, and the life and soul of our party, was so tired when he got aboard the train, after strenuous efforts, that he fell dead asleep on the floor, and there was so little available space, and his massive form took up so much of what there was, that no fewer than nine men, as they became tired and dropped down from the walls of the truck, fell on him and went to sleep on the top of him. However, that corporal slept the sleep of the just for four or five hours, and even then did not awaken until, the train halting and somebody mentioning wine, there was a scuffle, and another man stepped on his head, whereupon he flung him off and made a good first out of the train.

FORTY PASSENGERS IN EACH CATTLE TRUCK.

We were regaled at each station by the populace, who brought us cakes and wine, small flags, toys, tin trumpets, oranges, and other fruits, and we parted with nearly all our buttons as souvenirs.

TUB, TEA AND A HALT.

At one stopping place a large leathern hose was depending from a water main for giving the engine water, and somebody turning this on, we all took shower baths under it, or plunged into the huge tub alongside, some being so keen on not missing their chance that they took their baths in their clothes, tunics and all. Try to imagine our feelings after being cooped up in

the train for just on three days and nights and then getting a wash or prehistoric bath!

We had a two hours' wait here, and the "dixies" (about a dozen in all) were filled with water, and a huge fire was lighted, and soon a "long felt want" was satisfied in the form of tea. Though it was like Indian ink, it went down with a rare relish (I think my little lot was the best drink of tea I ever enjoyed); but unfortunately there was no second edition.

A WASH AND A WAIT.

After our "tub" we made a line for the station, the train being so long that only a portion of it was in it. We received a pleasant surprise in the form of a stall, where there were cakes, buns, bottles of red wine, fruit and many other luxuries.

After we had cleared out the whole lot, the French people living in the town came to the railings at the side of the station and bombarded us with all kinds of food and dainties. Just as we were all thoroughly stretching our legs and enjoying ourselves, the order was given to board train, so, with much cheering, singing and shouting, we resumed our seats—or rather our "standing room only."

"DOOMSDAY BOOK."

"DOOMSDAY BOOK": A FRENCH LESSON IN A CATTLE TRUCK."

Our corporal (behold him with an open book of Family Bible dimensions) often busied himself with expounding his views on the French language, in which he was labouring to become proficient. His linguistic ambitions did not end at self-proficiency, for he was solicitous to instruct his fellows, and we had quite a number of French lessons from him, although it must be admitted that they suffered many interruptions in good old plain English from the Tommies, provoked by the jolting of the train. They nicknamed this huge French dictionary the "Doomsday Book," because it was their doom to have its contents thrown at them every day.

THE LAST STAGE.

The weather set in very cold and snowy, and as the cracks in the bottom of the truck measured three inches in width, it can be guessed what a draught there was. But in spite of everything and the general discomfort of things, jam and biscuits were "lowered" in plenty. I amused the boys by making sketches on biscuits and throwing them out of the window at the various stations we passed through to the crowds of French civilians, soldiers, and Red Cross nurses. Perhaps some of my comrades will find some of these biscuit souvenirs at their homes—if they ever get there—for not a few were kept to the end of the journey and posted to friends in England.

We passed over several bridges which the Germans had destroyed, but which had been made temporarily good again by the French engineers. Over these our train had to travel gingerly. As we neared the fighting zone the booming of the guns could be heard, and a little further on things became more warlike. We noticed the devastated stations, villages, and large shell holes in the embankment of the line.

All this seemed to bring to the surface our fighting spirits, and we only wanted to be out and at the Huns.

On arrival at Etaples, after a rest of two hours or so in the station yard and street adjoining same, we marched in full pack and kit, including blankets and our waterproof sheets, to a fishing village, where we struck a camp and turned in for the night. We were under canvas for four days—the only four days under canvas during the whole time I was in France. The Colonel gave orders that all the men's heads were to be shaved, as we were proceeding to the trenches.

LADY ANGELA FORBES'S SOLDIERS' HOME AT ETAPLES.

A never fading recollection of Etaples will be that of the kindness and hospitality we received at the hands of Lady Angela Forbes and the "very gallant gentlewomen" who assisted her in the management of her Soldiers' Home there. The warmest of welcomes and the best of cheer awaited every soldier who crossed its threshold. Nothing that thoughtfulness could suggest and liberality could provide was lacking. Tact and an

understanding sympathy characterised the administration of every department. We left behind us blessings and thanks we could not express in words.

ON THE ROAD TO THE TRENCHES.

We had a three days' march (most of the way on cobble stones) from camp to Armentières, via Aire, Hazebruck and Bailleul, things getting hotter and hotter. In the course of the first day the enemy's aircraft dropped bombs on our route. We scattered in the hedges and ditches, lying flat and getting what cover we could. We had several men wounded by the splinters of the bombs, but fortunately nothing serious occurred, and all went well that day.

ROAD TO THE TRENCHES.

The third day we reached a village and were billeted in some barns. We had just "got down to it comfortable" when a shell took the roofs off, and a loud cheer went up as it was realised that the enemy had missed the mark. They put about twelve of these huge shells in the place, but they all went high. After three hours the order was given to creep out and get into some cottages further down the road. These cottages were inhabited, and the terrified people made us welcome indeed—had not we come to protect them from the Germans? We had a short rest here and then had to push on and make the most of the darkness.

As the firing grew heavier we made a circular route over fields, etc., to the trenches, for the rest of the way. The enemy made an attack on our second night in them—and their loss was pretty heavy.

PART II.

AT THE FRONT.

CHAPTER IV.

SOME SAMPLE EXCITEMENTS OF LIFE IN THE TRENCHES.

MY SKETCH BOOK.

I don't think I'm a bit sentimental in the matter of souvenirs, and anyway I can't need anything to remind me of the unforgettable, but all the same there's one souvenir of my experiences in the trenches and the firing line that I shall never part with—and that's the little notebook (measuring 5-1/2 ins. by 3-1/2 ins., bought in Armentières) which I carried with me through everything, and in which are the originals of the sketches here collected, taken "under fire," either literally or in the sense that they were taken within the zone of fire. In the nature of things I might have been finished myself by shot or shell before I could have finished any one of them. Sketched in circumstances that certainly had their own disadvantages as well as their special advantages, I present these drawings only for what they are. There were many happenings—repulsions of sudden attacks, temporary retirements, charges, and things of that sort—that would have made capital subjects, but of which my notebook holds no "pictured presentment," because I was taking part in them.

AT ARMENTIÈRES.

We reached Armentières (relieving the Leinster Regiment and the 9th Lancers in the first line trenches, distant from the first line German trenches 30 yards) at a critical time.

The effort in progress was to straighten out our line so as to get it level with Ypres, and the whole position all around was a very perilous one. We were short of men—very short—and had practically no reserves. Almost every available man had to do the work and duty of three. For a month or so almost all the heavy work fell upon the line regiments, we doing the wiring, digging, and the usual work of the Royal Engineers, the number of these being relatively scanty indeed.

There was also some shortage of shells and ammunition for guns and rifles, while of trench mortars a division had but few. We had to make our own bombs out of jam tins. These were charged and stuck down, a detonator being inserted, and we crawled out with them at night and heaved them into the German trenches. We had to time each heave with the most extreme accuracy, for the fraction of a moment too late meant the bursting of the bomb in our hands. The game we played with the Huns (keeping up a continuous fire all night, for instance) was one of pure bluff. They were massed in, we estimated, four army corps, and could have walked through us—if they had only known.

As my illustrations do not follow all the movements of my detachment, I will say here that from Armentières we were shifted to Houplines, about 4-1/2 to 5 miles north-east, where we made an advance of a hundred yards or so to straighten up. From Houplines we were moved south to La Bassée, and from La Bassée to Neuve Chapelle (where our 3rd Battalion was almost wiped out in the indecisive victory that proved much and won little), and then back to Armentières, whence we were sent north to St. Eloi, after making a short advance in the vicinity of Messines. From St. Eloi we were ordered to Hill 60, taking part in the now historic battle there. After Hill 60, Ypres, where shrapnel and poison gas put an end to my soldiering days—I am afraid for ever.

To come back to our first arrival at Armentières, our position was in touch with a small village not marked on the map, in the direction of Houplines. This village, which became almost wholly destroyed, had been knocked about by the enemy fire, but the tall chimney of a distillery had been spared, no doubt because the Germans wanted it themselves, intact. However much they wished, and often and hard as they tried, to take it—especially as from it could be conned not only our lines but the lay of the surrounding country—they never did take it, and it never fell, though it was hit in two places and cracked.

At 10.30 one morning I crawled over the parapet—that is, the sandbags—of our trench to sketch the picture of which this distillery shaft is the central feature. The trench also near the middle we had dug overnight for

communication purposes. The enemy were to the left of the buildings shown, and our own men were occupying the position to the right of the chimney at a range of 250 yards.

OUTSKIRTS OF A VILLAGE.

Our boys in the trenches could never understand a bright light which in daytime issued from the garden adjoining the farm-buildings on the British side. But one day a spy, who did work disguised as a farmhand, was discovered. He used a tin bowl as a reflector to send the enemy signals. The rascal was duly attended to.

FETCHING WATER.

MY FIRST SNIPING PLACE.

Here is a little view of the outskirts of the same village, made a few days later, when I was told off with two others to go to the house on the right of the sketch to get water from the pump, exposed to the enemy's fire. While pencilling the sketch I saw the wide gap made in the tree's branches, as shown by a shell passing through it, which burst on the road some fifteen yards away from us. This was an indication the enemy had spotted figures moving in the direction of the house. However, having got the water, we all reached "home" safely, though we ran a further risk in rummaging in the orchard, where we found some beds of lettuces, of which welcome vegetables we brought back with us enough to supply the whole section.

The house on the left of the shelled tree was the position from which I and two others were ordered to snipe. We climbed the ricketty building and fired from the eaves and from the cover of the chimney. The building was in a state of almost total ruin, but we took our places on the shaken beams and considered we made a quite successful bag, for we could guarantee that at least five or six occupants of the enemy's trenches would give us no more trouble. This in the course of one morning. Finally the enemy saw us and we had to vacate our position, as both the building and the barricade across the road were being rapidly hit.

CAPTURE OF A GERMAN TRENCH.

CAPTURED GERMAN TRENCH.

Without their coveted observation post the German gunners got the range of the town beyond the village so completely that one day they poured a continuous stream of shells over our heads from 4.30 in the morning till mid-day. It was, I remember, at day-break next morning that under cover of our own artillery, we made an advance and took the trench here depicted just as it was left by the turned-out. So hurried was their exit when faced by British bayonets that they left behind them in the trench quite a number of articles most useful to us—such as saws, sniper's rifles mounted on tripod stands, haversacks, and a quantity of other equipment, also a very fine selection of cigars, which came as quite a godsend to us. Personally, I clicked on a pair of German jack boots, which, as the weather was wet and the ground soft and muddy, as usual, came in very handy. I also came across a forage cap and a pocket knife, and picked up a photograph—that of a typical Fraulein, probably the sweetheart of Heinrich, Fritz or Karl.

A NIGHT RELIEF.

Duty in the trenches and rest and sleep in our billets in their rear alternated with something like regularity, but it was a regularity always liable to interruptions, such as were necessitated by not infrequent exigencies.

For instance, we had just got back to the latter one night, at exactly 10.30, after seven consecutive days in the trenches of our most advanced position, and were thinking that now we should get a few hours' quiet repose—subject, of course, to the disturbance of shelling—when a sudden order was given to fall in. We turned out, were numbered, "right turned," and marched off, singing and whistling merrily. After proceeding in this fashion for half a mile, word was passed down to form Indian file, seven paces apart. We moved thus for about a quarter of a mile, and then word was again passed down—"no smoking, whistling, or talking." The night was pitch dark, foggy, and a drizzle was beating in our faces.

We were now within range of the enemy's rifle fire and heard spent bullets as they pinged and spluttered into the mud. We crossed a railway line, and marched or crawled the best way we could along the ditch parallel with it—truth to tell, cursing and swearing. We passed an old signal station, now just a pile of bricks, with one side wall still erect and one glass window intact. We had come to know well that wall and that window and the strewn bricks around, for we had passed the spot so often in our little excursions from trench to billet and billet to trench. A little further along the whistle of the bullets grew louder and more continuous—their sound something like the sound of soft notes whistled by a boy. Machine guns—"motor bikes" in our nomenclature—rattled our left and right, our position being that of the far apex of a triangle, exposed to inflated fire all the way up.

Arriving within a few yards of the opening of the trench we were to occupy in relief of the North Staffords, the first section of whom were moving along the ditch, a star shell burst above as the searchlight was turned on, and every man stood stock still till all was dark again.

Between men of the incoming and outgoing battalions such casual greetings were exchanged as: "Wot's it like up here, matie?"; "'Ow are yer goin', son?"; "Yer want to keep your 'ead well down in this part—it's a bit 'ot"; "So long, sonnie." Sprawling, ducking and diving, we got in, and "safe" behind the sandbags. Just as my chum and I had entered the dug-out, and were preparing to make ourselves comfortable, as our turn for sentry-go would not be for two hours, the sergeant shoved his head in and shouted that we were wanted for a ration party.

RATION PARTIES.

A ration party consists of fourteen men—fewer sometimes, but fourteen if possible, as the proper full complement. The small carts in use are generally of rude and primitive construction. As everybody knows by now, rations comprise bully beef Spratt's biscuits—very large and rather hard—loaves of bread packed in sacks, bacon, jam, marmalade, Maconochies in tins, and, when possible, kegs of water. Let not the rum be forgotten. No soldier is more grateful for anything than for his tablespoonful of rum at

half-past six in the evening and half-past four in the morning. His "tot" has saved many a man from a chill, and kept him going during long and dreary hours of wet and press. As to bread, by the bye, it is highly probable that one small loaf, about half the size of an ordinary loaf, will be divided between seven men. With the good things already enumerated, a plentiful supply of charcoal and coke is usually to be expected. The horse transports with these provisions never get nearer than, at the closest, say half-a-mile of the front trench itself, when the men in charge dump their loads down and get away back to their stores and billets as quickly as possible. There is a lot to risk, for as a rule the enemy have the road well set, and the shelling is often very severe.

It is the duty of a ration party to bring up the loads from where they have been left. On regaining the opening to the trench, they take the rations to the quartermaster-sergeant's hut or dug-out. The sergeants of each platoon come to this hut or dug-out, and to them the things are delivered in quantities proportionate with the number of men in the section each represents. The sergeants then send along two men to carry the whacks to the respective traverses in the trench. This goes on night after night. So on the occasion I am recalling we were very late—and the distance we had to go was as much as a mile and three-quarters.

This ration carrying, the final stage of ration transport, is an even more dangerous and risky job than the preceding stage, and, as usual, snipers got busy on us, hitting three men, though none was killed. The rattle of bullets from machine guns on the ricketty sides of the old cart added to the programme of the night's entertainment, and there were frequent intervals, not for refreshments, but for getting flat and waiting.

GATHERING IN OUR FIREWOOD.

Chopping up firewood was regarded not so much as work as it was regarded as one of our recreations in the trenches—of which I shall have a little to say presently. But it often happened that there was no recreation, but only the excitement of danger in the night-time job of bringing in the firewood for day-time chopping. It would happen that a man had spotted in some shelled house or fallen farm-building a beam, plank, door, or

something else wooden and burnable, that he couldn't carry without assistance, or that he couldn't stop to bring away at the time. It must be fetched, for fire we must have. It might be only a few score yards away measured by distance, but an hour measured by time—"thou art so near and yet so far" sort of thing. Fetchers might get hit at any moment, and had to creep and wriggle very cautiously over open ground all the way. By some strange twist of mental association, whenever I was a fetcher in these circumstances I found myself mentally quoting Longfellow's line in "Hiawatha"—"He is gathering in his firewood"!

THE WOODCUTTER'S HUT.

Our champion at the game was a Private Hyatt—quite a youngster, but of fine physique and fearless daring. His dug-out was called "The Woodcutter's Hut." He made a regular hobby of wood-getting. He was an expert, a specialist. On certain occasions he even went out after wood in the daylight, slithering along on all fours towards his objective, and would be fired at until recalled by one of his own officers. On one occasion when he had crawled out and into a building to collect wood, as he crawled back through the doorway we saw little clouds of dust rising from the brick-work surrounding him, which showed that the enemy's snipers had spotted him, and we shouted to him from the trench to "keep down." He took refuge behind the wall of the doorway, and lay there three-quarters of an hour, and then returned, bringing with him the much prized plank of which he had gone in search, and which, when chopped up, supplied our section with sufficient firewood for a whole day and night. In the sketch it will be observed he is reading a letter. This he had received just after the above incident, and sat down on his valise quite unaware that I was sketching him. Later on I gave him a copy of the sketch, and he enclosed it in his affectionate reply to his folk at home.

"STAND TO."

The most anxious time a soldier can know is the time, be it long or short, that follows the command to stand to. Many a time we had to stand to the whole night—the entire battalion, from evening twilight till the full dawn of day—as an attack was expected. Everyone was at his firing position,

with bayonet fixed and his rifle loaded—and in tip-top working condition, the daily rifle inspection having taken place at dusk. Sometimes our artillery would presently open fire for the enemy's first line, perhaps for five or six minutes—it might be more, it might be less. Then a wait of six or seven minutes, when the enemy returned the fire, and we all got well down. It was as well to keep as hard up against the parapet as possible, and to keep out of all dug-outs, for into them the forward impetus of bursting shrapnel was likely to throw a lot of splinters. Again silence, comrades and pals passing a few remarks in anticipation of what everybody knew was coming. The officers with us were one with us, and at their words, "Well, come on, lads," there was never a laggard in getting "over the tops" (in our own phraseology). As soon as we put our hands on the sandbags to clamber over the top of the parapet a hailstorm of bullets pelted us. It is impossible—at all events for me—to describe a charge. Speaking for myself, always my brain seemed to snap. It was simply a rush in a mad line—or as much of a line as could be kept—towards the enemy's barbed wire entanglements, which our guns had blown to smithereens in preparation for the assault. We scrambled on to their parapet, each getting at the first man he could touch. When we had taken their position (we didn't always) we might have to wait some time till our artillery had shelled the second line, but there was a lot of work to be done at once. The parapet had to be reversed.

After an attack there was generally a roll call—from which there were many absentees.

More trying—more wearing and tearing to the nerves—than anything that in my experience ever followed it was the stand to itself. The moments, minutes, even hours, that followed that old familiar order, "stand to," were the worst I ever went through. As every eventide comes on I still feel just a little—just a very little—of what I felt then. Even now: and I fear me I always shall till death bids me stand to.

I see I have written so much with only one illustration, that perhaps it won't be amiss if I place here a few typical heads and a couple of typical

full figures, the original sketches of which I pencilled in spare places in my notebook at odd times. If they be really typical they need no labelling.

CHAPTER V.

THE LIGHTER SIDE OF TRENCH LIFE.

That there was (and is) a lighter side, a social side, of trench life, as of the life generally of a soldier on active service, even in this war, merely incidental remarks of mine such as could not be omitted from any true and fair description of that life must furnish abundant evidence; but this lighter side was, in my experience, so very real and so pronounced that to illustrate a few set observations thereon I take a few sketches from my notebook out of the order in which I find them in it.

SING-SONGS.

Our concert parties were "immense," and there was no forced gaiety in our enjoyment of them. Some of the best sing-songs were in "Leicester Lounge," named after the luxurious resort (which it didn't resemble) hard by the Empire Theatre. The reflection occurs to me for the first time that only men with whom high spirits were rampant would or could have been so fond of inventing such nicknames as—in mood jovially ironic—we coined for all sorts of places, persons and things. "Leicester Lounge" was a dug-out adjacent to "Hammersmith Bridge," and the surroundings of "Hammersmith Bridge," there being nothing in connection with them to suggest—save by absence—either a garden or a city, were "the Garden City."

"HAMMERSMITH BRIDGE."

It was the biggest, roomiest, and most palatial dug-out we had. The top was just a small roof-garden, carefully planted and laid out. It had statuary, too, in groups. The statues were fashioned in clay by amateur hands, and the artistic effects were original and novel, to say the least. It was also the safest place, this "Lounge," because it was sunk four feet below the level of the trench itself. It accommodated twelve easily. Impromptu concerts were frequent here; our far-famed mouth-organ band performed at such intervals as our own military duties and the enemy's cascades of shells permitted. It was here the names of neighbouring streams and nullahs were chosen from which we drew our daily beverage of "Adam's Ale"

(untaxed, and rather thick), such as the portentous "Cæsar's Well." In another spacious dug-out we had our "Times Book Club." This "eligible tenement" had the special distinction of a stove and chimney (purloined from a ruined farm)—that is, it had a chimney till the enemy spotted and so riddled it that it collapsed. It had a glass window (fixed in clay), statuary (modelled in clay), decorations (log-cabin order), one chair (also purloined, back broken off), one table (very treacherous); and I mustn't forget the president's bell (tobacco tin shell, and a cartridge for a clapper). It was lit by many candles, and as the fee for membership was a book or magazine from home, it served a good purpose.

"DIRTY DICK'S."

After a time the sing-songs in a trench some little distance away from "Leicester Lounge" knocked spots off all the others anywhere, thanks to the acquisition of a piano for them—probably the only instrument of its kind which has ever been in the British trenches at the front. It came from "Dirty Dick's." The picture of "Dirty Dick's" gives a rough idea of the devastation of war. The portion of a building to the right was all that remained of what, but a few weeks before, had been a handsome and prosperous hotel, and the wall with window and door spaces left, shown to the left, had been the residence of a prominent citizen. All that was left of the hotel was a shaky wall, though the sign-board remained, having escaped the enemy's fire.

We were placed in the trench shown in the foreground, and the Germans were also entrenched in the space seen in the distance between the ruins. When we first took up our position the hotel was intact except that the roof had been destroyed. The wall towards our trench was standing, and when it fell the bricks came tumbling over us, and the dust of the red masonry turned us into copper-coloured men. But prior to this three "Jocks" and three of our own regiment crawled out of the trench and into the house, and we spotted a piano on the ground floor. The temptation was too great; we decided to remove it. The operation took us two and a half hours' hard struggle. Eventually we got the instrument into our trench, somewhat battered about and minus one leg, but still answering to the keyboard. Unfortunately two of the party were wounded in doing this, but they

didn't mind. Night after night we had sing-songs accompanied on the piano in proper style, and used to give forth with the full strength of our lungs—

"The Germans are coming—Hurrah! Hurrah!"

The "harmony" of this stunt used to be wafted on the silent night air to the German trenches, and we soon saw how it upset Fritz and Karl. They got so annoyed that they trained their artillery in the direction of the sounds, and used to shell us all along the line in the hope of silencing our concerts. However, they could never quite locate the exact spot in which the instrument was temporarily placed.

"ENTRENCHING" THE PIANO.

One night, while one of our concerts was at its height, the officers even joining in, the order came to advance. So we had to bid a hasty farewell to our much-prized "Johanna," which had given us so much pleasure.

"SEVENTY-FIVE HOTEL."

Now I think of it, there was another ex-"pub" where we touched lucky in the matter of finding things—though they didn't include a piano. This was "Seventy-five Hotel." We called it that because the enemy fired seventy-five shells into it in seventy-five minutes on one memorable occasion, and then only killed one man. The building, which had been the scene of fierce fighting even before our battalion arrived on the scene of action, still bore the sign "Estaminet," and so we could safely conclude that it had been the village "pub," or wine lodge. There were a few bottles of wine still in the cellar, which the Germans must have overlooked when they were in possession, or had not time to take away. We found many articles, some useful, some otherwise; amongst them a large warming-pan, which caused amusement. The article we put to the best use was the dinner bell. This was turned to great account. In front of the estaminet was our "listening post," where we kept watch and guard at night. Well, by aid of the dinner bell we installed our own brand of telephone system. This was to connect the bell by string to the wrists of those out on the watch. Whenever they saw anyone approaching or any other indication of possible danger they gently

pulled the string, the bell tinkled, it was heard by our companions in the trench, word was passed along, and everyone prepared for emergencies.

"CHICKEN FARM."

Here something really like a little bit of sport came in our way. When we arrived there the farm was deserted, its lawful owners having found the situation too hot for them. Cows roamed about at random, and so did pigs. But after we had dug ourselves in and made our position secure, the chickens were what interested us most. There were two hundred and fifty of these at the least, and they used to parade on the strip of ground shown in the picture and the bolder spirits peep over the edge of our trench. Catching them was good sport, but eating them was something finer. What a nice change from bully beef and biscuit! Cooking not quite a la Carlton or Ritz, but more on prehistoric principles. So many fowls were caught, killed and plucked for cooking and eating that the wet mud was completely covered with feathers, and resembled a feather bank. As for ourselves, the feathers, sticking to the wet mud on our uniforms and equipments, turned us into Zulus, wild men, or Chippeway Indians. The enemy presumably did fairly well also with a poultry farm in the distance. They appeared to have a portable kitchen. We often watched the funnel moving about their trench. One day a line was stretched from this funnel to a pole and German officers' uniforms were hung out on the line to dry over the stove. It made us a lovely target. Shooting at officers' uniforms was a pleasant diversion, and they had been well pierced with bullets before they were taken in.

A FRENCH COMEDIAN.

Later on, and farther on—after our capture of a position I shall shortly have occasion to describe—we made the acquaintance of a French "born comedian," who was a tower of strength at our entertainments, and who in various other ways was a cause of constant amusement. He had been left behind by his regiment, and we found him hanging around the place. It had been his home, and it seemed that the magnet of life-long associations held him to it. He was very useful in taking us round to cottages which, to our surprise, we found to be still inhabited, and in giving us the tip where to find cheap, if very thin, beer and other refreshments. He was particularly

proud of his German jack-boots—made for legs very much bigger than his own. When we had concerts he used to give us clever imitations of the late Harry Fragson in his "Margarita" and other varieties, to the accompaniment of the mouth-organ band. He used to say: "Ze Engleesh soldier—très bon—ze French soldier—bon—mais ze Allemand—no bon!" On one occasion he told us: "Après la guerre, ze Engleesh soldier beaucoup admirers—ladees! Ze French soldier admirers, too. Ze Allemand—non!"

A FRENCH COMRADE-COMEDIAN.

He got hold of peasants to wash our clothes for us and introduced us to a little mill-race, which we reached through a thicket which concealed us, and the spectacle of our men stripping and diving into the stream in cold weather amused him hugely. He jumped about in his big boots, exclaiming: "Vat your vife say if she see you in ze water? Vat she say if she see you ici? The English replied, in the best French at their command, "beaucoup lavé—très bon," at which our comical comrade-at-arms laughed more heartily than ever. When his regiment found out where he was a guard was sent up, and he was obliged to remain in charge of it, to his great regret, when we moved on. He wished us "bonne chance," assuring us that it was his one desire after the war to get to Angleterre, where he had never been; but now that he knew the English he must visit us to make our further acquaintance. So much for our comical French friend, ever so amusing and ever so polite.

We found fun in all sorts of things, made fun of all sorts of things. That we could do so and did do so may appear strange—it seems strange sometimes to me now. But 'twas a merciful thing that we were able to.

CHAPTER VI.

THE "MAKE" OF A BRITISH TRENCH.

The four following sketches will, I hope, give a fairly clear and accurate idea of the construction of a British trench. The first depicts one of my comrades (who was also a brother-artist by profession, and a brother-sniper) sitting reading, during a surcease of the firing, on the firing platform in a trench corner. It will be noticed that he wears his sleeping cap. Very close and handy are his tall jack-boots—so serviceable in wet weather and heavy mud. My artist-friend, I should like to remark, was considered among snipers a great shot, and there is no doubt that he often did deadly work with his rifle.

A TRENCH SNIPER RESTING.

After the trench has been dug out the sandbags are placed along the top so as to form what is called a "parapet." Then the trench is dug deeper still and the firing platform is put in. Next the vertical struts of wood are put in position with wiring in between to hold back the mud, and in places where it is possible blocks fill in gaps to strengthen the structure. Finally the bed of the trench is boarded over with long heavy planks, some of which require two men to carry them; these are very often placed on bricks or blocks of wood to give air spaces underneath to keep them dry as far as possible. The trench is now completed as far as its construction is concerned, but it is left to be "furnished" with any supplies that happen to be handy. One of the first essentials is naturally the fireplace. This, as in the present instance, is very often an old tin pail with a few holes knocked in it, somewhat similar to the one used by Mr. Wilkie Bard in his famous sketch, "The Night Watchman." The fuel consists of charcoal, wood and coke, to get which fully lit it is usual to swing the receptacle round and round so as to create a draught and start the contents thoroughly on the go. There is a great danger attending this, for if the Germans catch a glimpse of the brazier being whirled in the air they immediately locate the whirler and begin firing in his direction.

The black patch in the centre of the picture represents the sniping place, which is a thick piece of iron let into the parapet with a hole bored through

it large enough to take the muzzle of the rifle. It also allows enough space for the sniper to see through, and, with the aid of the periscope, held usually by a comrade at his side, he is able to get the sight for his firing.

A TRAVERSE.

Here is a "traverse" in a trench. The sergeant is reading the orders of the day to one of his men. This was a very damp corner—on the top of the dug-out to the left tunics were hanging to dry in the early morning air. The soldier still has on his sleeping cap (like the figure in the last picture); his mess-tin is by his side, and his rifle, encased in a waterproof cover. He is sitting on the firing platform, and the depth of the trench is noticeable, showing how low the men are in the ground. The sandbags shown it took us four hours one night to place in position. As fast as we put them up they were shot down again by the enemy's maxim fire. We were all so tired and sleepy that, working on automatically, we hardly knew whether we were putting the mud in the sandbags or outside them.

It was not only the dampness and the incessant maxim fire we had to contend with here, but an army of insects, which jumped about us in battalions, and saw to it we were never lonely. A Cockney member of our company, after catching a particularly active jumper, called out: "Now then, you blighter, where is your respirator?"

The enemy were only thirty yards away, and we could often hear them shouting at us and would answer back. Many of our men were hit by snipers, while the shelling was often terrific, but we stuck on, as we were holding a part of an important military position. I remember how on an occasion when the shelling was very heavy one man engaged himself in making soup as coolly as if nothing was happening until the earth knocked up by the shells began to drop into the mess-tin, when he gave us his opinion of the Boches in his own forcible vernacular. We often laid for hours at the bottom of the trench—flat on the ground in the water and mud to escape the shells.

THE BIRTH-PLACE OF A SONG.

The third bit of trench of this chapter has a claim to fame as the birth-place of a song. The song was one which only British soldiers could have concocted, and none but British soldiers would have sung. It had no known author and no known composer. It sort of "growed," like Topsy. If it had had a title given to it I suppose it would have been called "I want to go home," for that was its dirge-like refrain, always sung very cheerfully indeed, or with mock earnestness. Time and again I heard its chorus taken up with terrific gusto from end to end of this trench, and the whole extraordinary composition spread to other trenches like a contagion. Its popularity was instant and enduring—and as unaccountable as the popularity of many other popular songs. I think I quote the inspired words of the chorus correctly:—

"I want to go home,I want to go home—Tho' the Jack Johnsons and shrapnelMay whistle and roar,I don't want to go in the trenches no more;I want to beWhere the Alleymonds can't catch me:Oh my!I don't want to die—I want—to go home."

Three rifles are deposited on the steps of the fireplace—the usual position for rifles when not in hand, dropped inside canvas bags, bayonets protruding—kept well greased, to prevent them from getting rusty.

TRENCH PERISCOPE.

TRENCH PERISCOPE IN USE.

The uses of a trench periscope are so well known that they need not be described. The feature of my last sketch of a trench from the inside is that it shows one in actual employment.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RUSE OF A GERMAN SNIPER.

Snipers on both sides exhibited the most extraordinary artfulness, cunning and ingenuity in the discovery, adaptation and invention of "cover." The great desideratum, of course, was to hide where we could see without being seen, to shoot from where there was least danger of being shot.

I helped to track and put an end at Houplines to one German sniper who had resorted to a ruse that I really think deserves the dignity of a short chapter all to itself. The story is tellable in a few words, and may be introduced by this drawing of "The White Farm," so christened because of the whiteness of the walls of its house; although, as will be noticed, there was little of this or anything else left upstanding when I drew my sketch.

"THE WHITE FARM."

The position shown is the entrance to the trench at this point, and the shovels, barrels, pails and water trough are all such implements as had been used in making and draining the cutting.

The cart shown is the "ration cart" used at night for bringing provisions from the Transport Corps wagon. It was usual for the ration parties (as elsewhere) to go out every night after dusk. These were even more than ordinarily dangerous excursions, as the enemy trenches commanded the road, we having captured the position from them shortly before. Hence sniping was continuous, and the cart was often hit and our men killed or wounded. We therefore took observations.

THE SNIPER WHO LIVED IN A TREE.

A GERMAN SNIPER'S NEST.

In course of time we came to notice that the most dangerous part of the road lay between a willow tree-stump and the White Farm. Our men were shot here nightly in getting back to the trenches. A party was formed to make a tour of the field in which the tree-trunk stood. The first thing we noticed was that after we entered this enclosure the shots were less numerous. We split up in open order and approached the willow, taking

care to drop to the ground on our hands and knees. As we neared the tree, lo and behold! a shot rang out from it and only just missed the corporal. He jumped up at once and we all followed suit. All dashed on for the tree. What did we find? It was nothing but a purposely hollowed trunk used as a shielded nest for a German sniper, the inside being fitted with a shelf to rest his arm on as he coolly picked off our men through a hole. He endeavoured to make his escape in the darkness, but we brought him down. He had evidently been using this sniping place for weeks, though this was the first time we had located him.

CHAPTER VIII.

THREE DEATH TRAPS.

I suppose it may be said, without exaggeration, that we were in a death trap all the time, but I have sketches to show of three particular and "extra special" sort of death traps. The first is of:—

"SUICIDE BRIDGE."

This bridge, made by the British, was called "Suicide Bridge," because it was, and was at, such a specially dangerous spot. The British trenches were in the foreground and beyond the bridge. We held these trenches for fourteen days against the enemy's attacks. The gap was nine feet deep at this corner, and the black hole on the left faintly showing a fireplace was our kitchen, scarred by bullet marks made by snipers.

The place was infested with rats. Great water-rats were continually getting at our food and cheese in the dug-outs. In one "rat hunt" we killed eighteen of these rodents in one morning. The stream itself supplied us with drinking water, but one day our men began to fall ill. The doctor analysed the water and discovered that the dastardly Huns had poisoned the stream higher up, where it ran through their lines. We warned the rest of the battalion by the field telephone wires and saved them all from being poisoned.

An exasperating though not murderous "kultur" trick was to send us insulting messages down the stream enclosed in bottles, calling us "dirty dogs," "English swine," etc., etc.

The final furious attempt of the Germans to dislodge us began in the daylight. Their snipers advanced first in an open field beyond the trees and took cover in a wagon, which we located by the ridge of flame.

At night they advanced in great masses for hand-to-hand fights, which took place in the stream. The carnage was terrible. The poisoning tricks had worked our fellows up to a high pitch, and they fought with reckless bravery. We managed to explode a mine and caught their reserves. Then their artillery opened on the stream and we rushed out to meet them. They

didn't get "Suicide Bridge" from us, but the losses were heavy on both sides and the stream itself was red with blood.

"SUICIDE SIGNAL BOX."

The sketch of "Suicide Signal Box" takes us to a spot on the railway line close to the scene of one of the biggest battles of the war. Its chief feature is the dug-out actually under the line itself. Of course the line was not being used across the top of the dug-out. As a matter of fact, at this time a railway truck was run up to the edge nightly propelled by forty of our men, bringing filled sandbags for making a barricade across the line, thus affording the relieving party cover when getting out of trench. The position was known to us as "Suicide Signal Box," because it was so dangerous as to be almost suicidal to cross the line, as was necessary to reach the road only five yards beyond. The ruined building is the signal box itself, protected by the line of sandbags in front of telegraph poles and shelled trees.

A most curious fact about this place was that, though it was being continually shelled by the enemy and their maxim guns were trained day and night on this very important position to catch troops coming up as relieving parties, it was a wonderful place in which to hear the birds sing. The larks trilled at every dawn to herald the coming day, and never seemed in the least disturbed by the roar of artillery. In the left-hand corner of the sketch will be noticed the firing platform, over which is the "funk hole," so called from its being the refuge to run to when the shells arrive. The soldier buries his head like the ostrich—only he beats the ostrich by getting his shoulders in as well—and then feels fairly secure.

A MILE-AND-A-HALF OF HELL.

A GHASTLY PROMENADE.

I show a little bit of a ghastly promenade near Messines, some six miles from Armentières. The road of which the bit in the foreground leads to what remains of a very handsome gateway to a park is a mile-and-a-half in length, and had to be traversed by our men in order to get to the British position, which was placed beyond the left corner of the picture (where the broken tree slants). Relieving parties had to cover the whole of this distance

exposed to the enemy's enfilading fire from two sides of the triangle right up to the apex. The apex was a British trench in the most advanced position we could possibly hold. Our determination to throw back the enemy made it absolutely necessary to hold it. The road was covered by the Germans' maxim guns from three points, both down each side and from the centre between the pillars of the gateway. Our method of advance was in Indian file at several paces apart, and instructions were given that whenever the maxims fired upon us we were to drop flat on the ground immediately, and when the searchlight was turned upon us (which it frequently was with blinding force) we were to stand stock still in whatever position we were, the reason being that even with such powerful searchlights as are used by the enemy, which have a perfect range of five miles, it is easier for them to distinguish a moving object than a stationary one. It was almost unendurable to have our rifles in our hands—the barrels frequently hit by the enemy's bullets—and to have to stand still unable to use them—by order; but of course it would have been fatal to have opened fire. We should all have been annihilated.

THE HOLE IN THE WALL.

As a pictorial sequel to "Suicide Bridge" and my little account of the great fight there, hand to hand in the darkness, the next illustration will not be out of place. The barricade across the road, at the entrance to a village, marks the spot to which we advanced from the stream after that struggle in it. The clean hole in a remaining wall of the almost demolished house on the left had been cut by a shell. The house in ruins on the right had been a mansion, and pictures and furniture were strewn about—some of which we used in the trenches. A case of wine had been left behind unbroached. A cat left behind, that refused to quit, bore a charmed life—never was hit—and often ran about on the parapet. The parapet barricade of sandbags was called "The High Jump," because we had to mount it and get over it each night and jump for our lives, to take up our positions by our advanced listening and observation post. It was absolutely fatal for anyone to show himself on the road in the daytime. Many a time we should have liked to have stretched our legs, but dared not. But after the fourth day we did

actually get on the road, as the enemy shifted their position, and the relief was wonderful. It had been a speculation whether we or the Germans would get on the road, and after dislodging them we managed it. Our men ran about, some skipping with a piece of wire, others rolling on the ground, in their enjoyment of newly-found freedom, occasional spent bullets reaching us from a great distance. The position was always referred to as "Hole in the Wall."

CHAPTER IX.

GERMAN BEASTS IN A FRENCH CONVENT.

It is fitting that my sketch of a French Convent, as the abode of holy women whose innocent lives were dedicated and devoted to the service of the Prince of Peace, should stand by itself, apart from any drawings suggesting less faintly the devilry of war. The nunnery had been in the possession of the Germans for some short time before we arrived on the scene, and bore traces of their customary depredations and violations. The stories related by the nuns themselves were not of a description to bear retailing in the public Press. I would to God that they could be told to every coward of a shirker at home, to every skunk of a "conscientious objector," to every rat of a "stop-the-war" "pacificist." They would stir to boiling indignation the dregs of their manhood—if they have any dregs. They would make them sick—even them; and I should like them all to be sick—sick unto death. There are not many of them, all told, but they are noisy as well as noisome. The good sisters hailed the British as deliverers, and gave us a welcome I can neither describe nor forget.

A VIOLATED CONVENT.

The enemy had abstained from destroying the building, probably from a subtle motive. They had retired to a wood in the rear. We made a sharp attack upon them to the right of this wood the next day; caught them at night completely unawares, and, after a very stiff fight, routed them, and they left 150 dead on the ground.

There was a pond in the Convent grounds, and while getting water for our transport teams we came across some tin cases hidden away by the enemy—a great find, for on getting them out we found they contained many thousands of rounds of the enemy's ammunition. It was perfectly dry, as the cases were watertight; so we made a big haul of most useful supplies.

CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER SCENE OF BOCHE BRUTALITY.

The accompanying sketch is of the Market Square of Armentières, the building shown in the centre being the Town Hall. The cobble stones of the roadway and the lattice-shuttered windows are of the style which has lasted for generations. This quaint and picturesque town was devastated and almost totally destroyed; in fact, the bit of it I show was the only portion the enemy left uninjured. We captured the place, taking four machine guns, several horses, a quantity of equipment and ammunition. Two of the machine guns were mounted in the clock tower, a position commanding the range of the street. It is revolting to recall the stories we were told here, and carefully verified, of the shameless atrocities of the Huns. The populace were still in occupation of the buildings when we were driving the Germans back from the barricades. Of course they were greatly terrified, and we did our best to pacify them and soothe their nerves as we came in contact with them. How different was the treatment they received from the enemy. Take the house on the left of the picture. Here Germans walked their horses through the door shown, along the passage into the yard in the rear, as a mere piece of bravado—an incident scarcely worth mentioning in view of the crimes they proceeded to commit. The householder, with his wife and two daughters, was sitting eating his dinner when the party arrived. The cowardly brutes shot this man on sight—in full view of his family—carried his body out and later on buried it in the chicken run. Meanwhile, they came back and ate the dinner. The various members of the family were tied up to beds and subjected to the grossest of infamies and greatest of cruelties.

WHERE GERMANS RAPED AND MURDERED.

I repeat that we verified the stories of these horrors, as we had verified elsewhere other such stories before, and as we verified elsewhere other such stories afterwards.

Naturally, our men fought their hardest, and by four o'clock in the afternoon of the day we advanced we drove the Boches at the point of the bayonet.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TRICK THAT DIDN'T TRICK US.

"THE BLACK HOLE."

Returning to the "group system," the three following sketches in juxtaposition relate to one and the same happening—our taking of a distillery (on the outskirts of Armentières) of which the Germans had been in possession for about three weeks, and within the boundaries of which they set a big trap that didn't catch us. The air was poisoned with the stench of dead animals as we arrived within smell of the block of buildings I show first—and, with thoughts in the minds of some of us of what we had read of the ill-savour of the Black Hole of Calcutta, "the Black Hole" was an ejaculation before it was a designation. The enemy occupied the portion of yard shown in the foreground and used the front of the buildings and the gateway for cover. The British advanced to a position within twenty yards of the gateway in front of it, and, after several nights' work, erected a barricade of twigs, grass, and earth, rapidly collected and thrown into place. By one of their clever tricks the Germans had made the buildings look as though entirely deserted. They had been careful not to shell them when they took them from the French, and it was their intention to draw us on into the yard unsuspectingly and so get us at their mercy. For the surrounding buildings contained machine guns, though we did not then know the fact, and so quiet was everything that I was able to make my sketches undisturbed. The yard could have accommodated quite 3,000 of our men, who, if the enemy had had their way, would have been riddled with shot. However, we naturally proceeded with military caution. Scouts advanced first, and were somewhat deceived because the Germans had artfully left a caretaker and his wife in the building seen adjoining the central arch. These people, doubtless under orders, passed out milk through the window to the scouts at night to give the idea that the buildings were still peacefully occupied, though, as a matter of fact, they contained, not only the enemy soldiers, but their machine guns as well. Really we might have been drawn into the trap but for one lucky incident. The enemy were foolish enough to do some secret signalling with a light at

night from the tower above the gateway. This was immediately observed by the scouts, and the game was up.

"JAM-TIN ARTILLERY PARTY."

When the scouts gave the warning that the enemy were in the buildings, volunteers were called for to make up a bombing party to blow up the tower where the signalling had been observed. We had no idea how many Germans the tower contained, but later found traces of only one. There were evidences that he had been there for some time, and he had stores of milk and food for a longer stay; they were not wasted, but he had no part in their consumption. The volunteers were known as the "Jam-tin Artillery Party," from the fact that their bombs were made of jam-tins filled with gun-cotton, cordite, etc. The party had to do all the "sticky work," and this was a very sticky job. The plan was to lay a trail with a fuse to bombs, which we placed under the floor at the top of the stairs leading to the upper storey of this old and disused gateway. We crept up these stairs silently for three nights running before we were successful. One hitch and the whole show would have been given away. However, we managed to place the bombs, light the fuse, blow up the floor, and blow off the top of the tower as well, the German signaller being blown up with it. Then we waited. Still the enemy showed no sign of moving, and word was sent back to our artillery to shell the building, which it did to great effect. We were then ordered to advance with fixed bayonets, in platoons, to take various buildings. The place when we captured it was found to be fitted up like a fortress inside, with machine guns trained on the yard to mow our men down as they came through the gate, if the enemy's plan had succeeded; but it entirely failed. We found but little resistance. Inside were a number of dead Germans killed by our artillery fire, a very scientific signalling apparatus, and a complete telephone system to the army corps which was intended to have wiped us out. It was solely due to our scouts and the "Jam-tin Artillery Party" that we were not all killed.

THE BLACK TOWER.

The sketch entitled "The Black Tower" exhibits the other side of the gateway, and shows the road with the caretaker's house, and our barricades to the right.

DILAPIDATED QUARTERS.

WHERE THE TRAP WAS SET.

The part of the distillery buildings standing in its yard interior, where we blew up the tower and the spy, and into which the enemy had hoped to entice us to our destruction, was very old, very dirty, and very dilapidated—in fact, had apparently not been used for years. We had to sleep in it for several nights, and made the acquaintance of thousands of rats and other pests. There was only one staircase, by which some hundreds of troops had to find access and egress. A curious fact was that the fumes of the spirit had eaten so into the woodwork, which was generally worm-eaten and rotten, that to strike a light near it was to incur the danger of igniting it and burning the building down. But our boys found a walled-in yard in the background covered by a tarred roof which had no windows, and this they converted into a smoke-room. Roominess and a covering offered a welcome change from the mud, dirt, and rain of the trenches, and Tommy's spirits kept up, in spite of all shortcomings. Our musical evenings continued as before, and we thoroughly enjoyed being able to stretch our legs. In fact, we had become quite reconciled as well as quite used to our surroundings by the time we were called away. Afterwards we looked back with pleasure to our stay in the distillery, for we were much worse off in the next place at which we were stationed. We were moved from here into one of the most dangerous positions in the line at Ypres.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BARRED ROAD TO CALAIS.

Almost on the last page of my Sketch Book I come on the last sketch I took "under fire."

"GOLGOTHA.".

It shows the most advanced positions taken by the British in the course of one of the biggest battles of the war—at St. Julien. The trench, which was a very rough one, was originally dug by the Germans and captured by our forces in our advance. The fighting was so intense at this spot that the casualties went far into five figures on both sides, the losses of the enemy being admittedly much higher than our own. Appropriately enough was it called "Golgotha."

To the left of the picture will be seen the remains of a building which was all that was left of what once was a magnificent chateau. The avenue of trees outlined the road to this chateau. Several trees, it will be noticed, had been either cut in two or broken off by the enemy's shelling; by-and-by there was not one left standing. On the right of the picture the ruined building was what was left of a large farm which had a moat around it. The ruined walls of the farm were found very useful cover for our men to take whilst sniping the enemy, and by the road, at a much lower level, ran the stream which fed the lake in the grounds of the chateau. The elevation of the road giving us fair protection from the enemy's shots, we were able, by stringing a number of boards together and making rafts, to indulge in bathing; until the water became so dirty from the earth dislodged from its banks by the shells that it was repugnant for us to indulge in ablutions in it any longer—none of us having been ordered mud bath treatment by the medical officer.

On the third day of the second grand attempt of the Germans to break through to the road to Calais I was bowled over by shrapnel and poison gas. Gas in cylinders and gas in all manner of shells was used against us—and our regiment had no respirators then.

Before I dropped I had the satisfaction of knowing that the Royal Fusiliers, supported by the Hampshires and the Durhams, had taken five lines of the enemy's trenches in counter-attack; and afterwards I had the satisfaction of learning in hospital that the German casualties for the day amounted to 60,000 against British casualties of 20,000. Mine was one of about 500 gas cases—perhaps more.

IN HOSPITAL.

My hospital itinerary was from the field to the dressing station at Bailleul, thence to Boulogne; from Boulogne to Rouen, and from Rouen to Southampton and Brighton.

I like to remember that the day on which I finished my little bit for the Empire—or rather the day on which it was finished for me—was an "Empire Day": Monday, May 24th, 1915—a day on which Britons of every clime salute the symbol of their unity and the pledge of their emergence from every peril; that dear flag under which I did what I could.

"Good banner! scarred by hurtling war,

But never in dishonour furled;

And destined still to shine, a star

Above an awed and wondering world."