SHORTY BILL

BY

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Shorty Bill

PART I

I

I HAVE in my mind the tale of a superior young man—a very superior young man, genteel, and thoroughly versed in the intricacies of etiquette. The majority of the human race was, without any loss to itself, unaware that he existed; but the "ladies" and "gentlemen" on the staff of Mogg's Mammoth Emporium viewed him as the supreme arbiter of elegance. And just because the average human being would have asserted—and asserted correctly—that for such as him there is no hope save drowning in puppyhood, I would tell his story. It is the exception which proves the rule. It is the proof that we are the slaves of custom and environment; and that, given something as the bed-rock, much may be done by a good teacher. There was something in this very superior young man as it turned out, though few would have suspected it, had they seen him before the war. But then, no one can ever listen to a person of the male sex proffering a good line of stockings in Lisle thread at one and eleven-three without experiencing a strong desire to be sick. Which goes back to what I said before: the whole thing is one of environment. The stocking vendors knew no better; for want of the necessary teaching they took to their nauseating trade. It's all in the Old Book—how shall they learn, unless they be taught? Had they had the teaching—well, listen to the story of this very superior young "gentleman," one time deputy chief stomach bender of Mogg's Mammoth Millinery Emporium—terms. Strictly Cash. What the sub deputy chief waistcoat creaser will say if he reads these words I shudder to think. You see, the very superior young "gentleman" was so genteel.

A hot morning sun shone down on the outskirts of the town. Nothing moved, nothing stirred; utter silence brooded over the houses that once had been buzzing with people—the people of Arras. Now their only occupants were rats. The little gardens at the back were dank with unchecked weeds, save where a great conical hole showed the clean brown earth. And at the bottom of each of these holes lay a pool of foetid green water. The walls were crumbling, decay was rampant, the place breathed corruption. Occasionally the silence would be broken by a crash, and a little heap of brick rubble would subside into the road, raising a cloud of thick choking dust. Occasionally there would be another sound, like the drone of a great beetle, followed by a dull echoing roar

and a bigger cloud of dust. Occasionally would come the ping-phut of a stray bullet; but of human life there was no sign.

Not, that is to say, to the casual observer; but to the man who looked out of the aeroplane circling above much was visible which you or I would not see. To him there came the vision of an occasional move behind some mouldering wall: sometimes an upturned face, sometimes the glint of steel. In one garden by a broken cucumber frame a man was polishing his bayonet, and the flash from it caught the observer's eye. Just opposite—thirty yards away—two or three men were sitting round a fire from which the smoke curled slowly up. And the bayonet cleaner was clothed in khaki, while the cookers had on a dirty field grey; between them lay No Man's Land. But to the casual observer—silence: silence and death and the dreadful stink of corruption. Many others had cleaned bayonets and cooked stews under these same conditions, and many in the doing thereof had gone suddenly, and without warning, into the great Silence. For it was a sniper's paradise, as the victims—could they have spoken—would have testified. As it was they lay there lightly buried, and the same fool men made the same fool mistakes and came and joined them. As I say, it was a sniper's paradise....

Into this abode of joy, then, came the very superior young "gentleman." It was principally owing to the fact that Miss Belsize—the "lady" who dispensed camisoles, or some equally seductive garments—had flatly refused to accompany him any longer to the High Street Picture Palace if he remained in his frock coat, that our friend had donned khaki. For a long while he had stoutly affirmed that he was indispensable; then the transfer of affection on the part of camisoles to a dangerous-looking corporal from the wild and woolly West decided him. He did not like that corporal. No man who, meeting a comparative stranger, beat him on the back painfully, and, having looked his latest glad rags up and down, remarked with painful distinctness, "Lumme! is it real?" could possibly be considered a gentleman. But Miss Belsize had laughed long and laughed loud; and—well, I will not labour the point. In due course our superior one found himself in the haunt of death I have briefly described above, still full of self-importance and as inconceivably ignorant as the majority are who come for the first time to the game across the water.

Recently arrived with a draft it was his initial experience of war in France, in contrast with training in England; in fact, the morning in question was his first visit to the trenches. And because many better men than he have endeavoured

to conceal a peculiar sinking of the stomach by an assumed bravado, let us not blame him for the attitude he endeavoured to take up.

"Pretty quiet, isn't it, corporal?" he remarked airily, as his section came to rest in a trench behind a mass of broken brick and cobble stones. "Lor', look at that glass up there, hidden in the stones." For a moment curiosity mastered him, and he reached up towards it with his hand. The next instant he gave a cry of anger, as a jolt in his ribs with a rifle doubled him up. "What the deuce—" he began angrily.

"Don't you deuce me, my lad," said the corporal dispassionately, "or you and me will quarrel. Just you do what you're told, and I'll write and tell your ma you're a good little boy." The corporal—a man of few words—went on his way, leaving our hero—whose name by the way was Reginald Simpkins—fuming.

"If that blighter hits me again," he remarked when the N.C.O. was out of hearing, "I'll—"

"You'll what?" An old soldier looked at him scornfully. "He goes an' saves yer mouldy life and then yer bleats. Got yer bib, Reggie darling?"

"Not so much of your row." The corporal had come back again. "This ain't a ruddy colony of rooks in the nesting season. Now, Simpkins, you and Ginger—first relief. There's your periscope—you can relieve them other two."

"Where's the periscope?" asked Reginald of his companion in a whisper.

"The glass up there, you flat-faced perisher—hidden in the stones. Wot d'you think it is? A noyster laying eggs!"

The trench settled down to silence as the company relief was completed, and Reginald morosely nursed his grievance. Much of the gentle flattery to which he had been accustomed at Mogg's Mammoth Emporium seemed conspicuous by its absence in this new sphere in which he found himself. Not to put too fine a point on it, people seemed positively rude at times, even ruder than they had been at home. He confided as much in an aggrieved whisper to the unsympathetic Ginger.

"Rude!" That worthy spat with violence and accuracy. "You wait till you bump into Shorty Bill. Rude! Gawd! 'E's a 'oly terror."

"Who is Shorty Bill?" queried Reggie, his eyes fixed on the glass whose mysteries he was beginning to understand.

But Ginger was in no mood for further confidences. "You'll find out fast enough 'oo Shorty is. 'E's down 'ere today. You watch that there periscope. This ain't no rest cure—this bit 'ere. It's 'ell."

"It seems pretty quiet," ventured the watcher after a short silence.

"Yus! That's wot the last man said wot I was with behind this wall. There's 'is brains on that stone behind you."

With an involuntary shudder Reginald looked round at the stone, on which the grim stains still remained. "What did it?" he asked, barely above a whisper.

"Black Fritz," answered the other. "'E's a sniper, what lives opposite; and 'e's paid for 'is keep that swine 'as—paid for 'is keep. Charlie Turner, an' 'Arry, an' Ginger Woodward, an' Nobby Clark, an' the sergeant- major, an' two orficers. Yus—'e's paid for 'is keep, 'e 'as—'as Master Black Fritz."

"And he's over there," said Reggie, a little breathlessly.

"Yus. Where the 'ell do you think 'e is? In an aeryplane?" Once again Ginger spat dispassionately, and then relapsed into a silence from which he refused to be drawn until the presence of two more men beside him indicated that the hour of relief had come.

"Now look here, Simpkins," said the corporal when the relief was completed, "this is your first visit to the trenches, isn't it? Well, you can sit down now and have a sleep, or you can write or read if you like. But, whatever you do, don't go showing your ugly face over the top; because this place ain't healthy." He turned away, and Reggie was left to his own resources.

"Come round the corner," said Ginger in his ear. "I'll show you a spot to sleep. I know this 'ere bit like me own back parlour."

And so—had any one been sufficiently interested in his doings to report the fact—it might have been noted that ten minutes later our friend was sitting on the fire step writing a lurid epistle to Miss Belsize, while Ginger lay peacefully asleep beside him, breaking the complete silence with his snores.

At last the letter was finished, and Reggie gave way to meditation. Everything was so utterly different to what he had anticipated that he could hardly believe he was actually in that mystic place the trenches. To his left a crumbling wall ran along until it bent out of sight, a wall which in most places was three or four feet high, but which at one spot had been broken down until it was almost flush with the ground, and the bricks and rubble littered the weeds. In front of him lay the town, desolate, appalling, with a few rooks cawing discordantly round the windowless houses. And over everything brooded an oppressive hot stinking stillness that almost terrified him....

After a while his gaze settled on the place where the wall was broken down, and his imagination began to play. If he went there—it was only about ten yards away—he would be able to look straight at the Germans. So obsessed did he become with this wonderful idea that he woke up the sleeping Ginger and confided it to him. There being a censor of public morals I will refrain from giving that worthy warrior's reply when he had digested this astounding piece of information; it is sufficient to say that it did not encourage further conversation, nor did it soothe our hero's nerves. He was getting jangled—jangled over nothing. It was probably because there was such a complete nothing happening that the jangling process occurred. A shell, a noise, anything; but not this awful, silent stagnation. He bent down mechanically and picked up half a brick; then just as mechanically he bowled the half-brick at the lump of dÚbris behind the broken bit of the wall. And it was that simple action which changed our very superior young "gentleman" into a man: on such slender threads hang the destinies even of nations.

He watched the brick idly as it went through space; he watched it idly as it hit the ground just by a clump of dock leaves; and from that moment idly ceases to be the correct adverb. Five seconds later, with a pricking sensation in his scalp and a mouth oddly dry, he was muttering excitedly into the ear of the now infuriated Ginger.

"A man where, you ruddy perisher?" he grunted savagely. "Fust yer tells me if you goes and looks at the 'Uns you can see 'em; and then you says there's a man in the nettles. You ought to be locked up."

"There is, I tell you. I heaved a brick at that bunch of leaves, and it hit something that grunted." Reginald was still clutching his companion's arm.

"Un'and me, Clara," said the other peevishly, "this ain't a sixpenny 'op."

He got up—impressed in spite of himself by the other's manner—and peered at the mass of dÚbris. "Wot d'yer want with 'eaving bricks for, anyway," he continued irately after a long inspection which revealed nothing. "This 'ere ain't a bean-feast where you gets the bag of nuts."

"Watch this time, Ginger." Once again a large fragment came down in the neighbourhood of the dock leaves—followed by an unmistakable groan.

"Lumme, mate," said Ginger hoarsely, "wot is it?" The two men stood peering at the rubbish, not ten yards away. "I'll go and get the corporal. You..." But he didn't finish his sentence.

Two shots rang out almost simultaneously. One was from the German lines, and there was a short stifled scream from the other side of the traverse. The other was from the rubbish heap ten yards away, and the blast made a piece of hemlock rock violently. Otherwise the rubbish heap was lifeless— save for a sepulchral voice—"Got him." There was a crash of falling bricks from a house opposite—the sound of what seemed to be a body slithering down—and then silence.

Ginger's grip relaxed, and he grinned gently. "Gawd 'elp you, Reginald; you 'ave my blessing. You've been dropping the brickyard on Shorty Bill's back." He faded rapidly away, and our friend was left alone, gazing with fascinated eyes at the miraculous phenomenon which was occurring under his very nose. Suddenly and with incredible swiftness a portion of the rubbish heap, with dock leaves, nettles, old cans, and bricks adhering to it, detached itself from the main pile and hurled itself into the trench. With a peculiar sliding movement it advanced along the bottom, and then it stopped and stood upright. Speechless with amazement, Reginald found himself gazing into the eyes of a man which were glaring at him out of a small slit in the sacking which completely covered him. A pair of dirty earth-stained hands gently laid down a rifle on the fire-step—a rifle with a telescopic sight. Then from the apparition came a voice.

"Say, kid, are you the son of a —, who has been practising putting the weight in my back? Don't speak, son, don't speak, or I might forget my manners. Once in the ribs—and once in the small of the back. God above, my lad, if I'd missed Black Fritz, after lying up there for him for eight hours as part of the scenery, I'd have—"

"'Ullo, Shorty." The corporal rounded the traverse. "Fritz has got another. Poor old Bill Trent. Copped clean through the 'ead."

The corporal, followed by the strange uncouth being in sacking, with his leaves and bricks hanging about him, moved away, and Reginald followed. With his heart thumping within him he looked at the dreadful thing that ten minutes before had been a speaking, seeing, man; and as he looked something seemed to be born in his soul. With a sudden lightning flash of insight he saw himself in a frock coat behind the counter; then he looked at the silent object on the step, and his jaw set. He turned to Shorty Bill.

"I'm dam sorry about that brick; but I'm new to the game, and I had no idea you were there. Didn't you say you'd got Black Fritz?"

"'Ave you, Shorty—'ave you got the swine?" An eager chorus assailed him, but the man in the sack had his eyes fixed on the very superior young "gentleman." At length he turned to the men around.

"Yep—I got him. Half left—by the base of that red house. He came out of the top window. You can see a black thing there through a periscope." The men thronged to have a look, and Shorty Bill turned to the stone thrower.

"Can you shoot?"

"A little; not much I'm afraid."

"Like to learn the game? Yep?—Right. I'll teach you. It's great." He moved slowly away and turned up a communication trench, while into the eyes of Mogg's pride there came a peculiar look quite foreign to his general disposition. A game—a great game! He looked again at the poor still thing on the step, and his teeth clenched. Thus began his fall from gentility!...

II

It was not a very rapid descent. The art of sniping and its attendant pastime scouting is not learned in a day. Moreover, in company with the other games that are played in the trenches, it has the one dominant feature about it. One mistake made in the rules is one too many; there is no chance of making a second. True, the player will have taught the man who takes his place yet another of the things not to do; but personally—even at the risk of being dubbed a pessimist—the method of teaching is one I would prefer to see others employ, sentiments which were shared to the full by Shorty Bill. Therefore our superior young friend, having gazed upon the result of a sniper's bullet, and in the gazing remoulded his frock-coated existence, could not have come under a better master.

Shorty Bill was a bit of a character. Poacher and trapper, with an eye like a lynx and a fore-arm like a bullock's leg, he was undoubtedly a tough proposition. What should have made him take a liking to Reginald is one of those things which passes understanding, for two more totally dissimilar characters can hardly be imagined. Our friend—at the time of the shooting of Black Fritz—was essentially of that type of town-bred youth who sneers at authority behind its back and cringes to its face. Such a description may sound worse than the type deserves; for all that, it is a true one of the street-bred crowd—they've been reared on the doctrine. Shorty was exactly the reverse. Shorty, on one occasion, having blocked six miles of traffic with a fractious mule, and being confronted suddenly by an infuriated Staff officer who howled at him, smiled genially and electrified the onlookers by remarking pleasantly, "Dry up, little man; this is my show." That was Shorty in front of authority. Behind its back— well, his methods may not have commended themselves to purists in etiquette, but I have known officers sigh with relief when they have found out unofficially that Shorty had taken some little job or other into his own personal care. There are many little matters—which need not be gone into, and which are bound to crop up when a thousand men are trying to live as a happy family— where the unofficial ministrations of our Shorty Bills—and they are a glorious if somewhat unholy company—are worth the regimental sergeant-major, the officers, and all the N.C.O.'s put together. But—I digress; sufficient has been said to show that the two characters were hardly what one would have expected to form an alliance.

The gentle art of sniping in the battalion when Bill joined with a draft had been woefully neglected. In fact, it was practically non-existent. It is not necessary to

give any account of how Bill got the ear of his platoon commander, how he interested him in the possibilities of sniping in trench warfare, or any other kind of warfare for that matter, and how ultimately his platoon officer became mad keen, and with the consent of his C.O. was made Battalion sniping officer. Though interesting possibly to students of the gun and other subjects intimately connected with sniping, I have not the time to describe the growth of the battalion scouts from a name only to the period when they became a holy terror to the Hun. I am chiefly concerned with the development of our frock-coated friend into a night prowler in holes full of death and corruption, and one or two sage aphorisms from the lips of Shorty Bill which helped that development. They were nothing new or original, those remarks of his teacher, and yet they brought home to him for the first time in his life the enormous gulf which separated him from the men who live with nature.

"Say, kid, do you ever read poetry?" remarked Bill to him one night soon after the episode of the brick-bats as they sat in an estaminet. "I guess your average love tosh leaves me like a one-eyed codfish; but there's a bit I've got in me head writ by some joker who knows me and the likes o' me.

"'There's a whisper on the night wind, there's a star agleam to guide us, And the wild is calling, calling... let us go.'"

Shorty contemplatively finished his beer. "'The wild is calling.' Ever felt that call, kid?"

"Can't say I have, Shorty." His tone was humble; gone was the pathetic arrogance that had been the pride of Mogg's; in its place the beginnings of the realisation of his utter futility had come, coupled with a profound hero worship for the man who had condescended to notice him. "When are you going to teach me that sniping game?"

The real sniping commander of the battalion—I mean no disrespect to the worthy young officer who officially filled that position— looked at the eager face opposite him and laughed.

"You'd better quit it, son. Why, to start with, you're frightened of the dark."

"I'm damned if I am." The aggrieved Percy waxed indignant.

"Oh, cut it out! I don't mean you're frightened of going to bed in the dark, or that you want a nightlight or a nurse. But yours is a town dark: standing

under lamps gettin' the glad from a passing skirt. But in the real dark, when it's pressing round you like a blanket, and there are things moving, and people breathing near by, and you don't know whether it's a German or a pal, or where the wire is, or which way your own trenches are—what then, son, what then? Why, I reckon you don't even know which the Pole Star is, or what it's there for?"

"I guess not, Shorty," remarked the other, abashed; "but I'd soon learn, if you'd teach me."

"Well, I'll see. An' there's that blamed old woman with a face like a wet street tryin' to shut up the shop. Give me another, mother darling; no good your na-poohing me—I'm going to have it if I takes it."

Being what he was he got it, and that evening the lessons began. Going back to their billet, they had to cross a field. It was a pitch-black night, and before they had proceeded twenty yards Reggie could hardly see his hand in front of his face.

"Dark, Shorty, ain't it?" he remarked.

There was no answer, and he stopped and repeated the question. Still no answer, though he seemed to feel some one close by. Something brushed his face, and then silence. With a short laugh he walked on—a laugh which had just the faintest touch of bravado in it. Four times in the distance to the billet did that something brush his face again, and though each time he felt that there was some one near him, yet he heard nothing. The fourth time he stopped and spoke.

"Is that you, Shorty?" The next instant he gave a jump of pure nervous fright. From within six inches of his ear came the single word "Yep."

"Jove! You did give me a start." He laughed a little shakily. "Where have you been?"

"Circling round you, son, dusting your face with my glove. Understand now what I meant by helpless in the dark?"

Thus ended the first lesson....

The others followed in due course. The correct way to crawl through grass so as to avoid being mistaken for a rhinoceros going to water; the power of observation so as to be able to spot a change in the German trenches—maybe, only a few sand bags moved, but just enough to place the position of a machine gun; the value of disguise to defeat the curious on the other side; patience, the way to fire a rifle, the use of his eyes. All these and certain other things was he taught.

And the certain other things were mysterious and secret. They occurred at odd times and in odd places, and the instructor was always Shorty Bill personally.

"Some men," he would say, "like killing with a rifle; I do for one. Some like killing with a revolver; not bad either, and essential, son, when you're out on the tiles by night and can't carry a rifle. A rifle is a dam nuisance at night if one's on patrol, whatever any one says to the contrary. An' if you don't carry a gun you can't use a bayonet, which is a beautiful method of sticking 'em." Shorty thoughtfully removed his pipe. "I was almost converted to the bayonet one day by a pal of mine. He's dead now, poor devil, but he lived well. He was givin' tongue over the beauties of picking Huns out of dug-out entrances with the bayonet like winkles out of their shells with a pin. Gosh! it was great—that boy's palaver. He almost converted me, an' then I showed him a couple o' little stunts of mine." Shorty put his pipe in his pocket. "Come here, son, an' pay attention. It was through forgetting in the excitement of the moment and not payin' attention that my pal the winkle plucker went west."

Thus the mysterious lesson would start. "There'll come a time one night, boy, when you're out in the dark, an' you're crawling near the wire, when you'll feel on a sudden there's some one near you. Maybe, by the smell of him, you'll know it's a Boche. Well—then it's up to you to make good. You can plug him with your hand gun when you've got his dirty face dead set; but if you start shooting practice in No Man's Land, the audience join in. So I'll just show you a couple o' little tricks—silent tricks, which you can use when you get your hands on him. They kill just as clean if not cleaner than a gun, and no one's the wiser. Now come at me as if you meant to hurt me. No; not as if you were out pushing the baby in the pram, but just as if you was goin' all out to kill me. That's better, son; an' where are you now?"

To be correct our one and only Reginald was lying on his face with the unpleasant knowledge in his brain that if he moved an inch his left arm would snap at the elbow; and that kneeling above him Shorty held, in the

neighbourhood of his ear, a villainous weapon of his own invention, which resembled a cross between a bill-hook and a kukri.

"You see the idea, boy, don't you? Now, you ask him if he'd like to surrender, and if you don't understand what he says or he seems doubtful like, put your clasp knife in there." Reginald felt a prick under his right ear. "Right in—you take me. Get up, and we'll do it again."

"Where did you learn that, Shorty?" asked our pupil as he got up.

"A Jap taught me that an' a good few more in Los Angeles. Jujitsu, he said it was; dam good sense I call it. Come on—it takes practice."

And Reginald Simpkins practised. With growing confidence he practised day in, day out. Mogg's had faded into the limbo of forgotten things; his horizon consisted of a foetid shell hole, a panting, writhing Hun fighting for his life in the darkness of the night, a cracking arm and then... His imagination never took him beyond that point. Sufficient of the old Adam of gentility still remained to prevent him picturing the final tableau. You see, Reginald Simpkins had not as yet killed anything larger than a rat, and even then he had bungled....

III

As was proper and fitting his first head was gained cold- bloodedly and from a distance. It was his blooding into the ranks of the snipers. His probationary period was over; Shorty Bill had professed himself satisfied. The battalion had moved from the place in which we found them, and had gone farther north. The country was flat and desolate; periodically the ground would shake and tremble, and in No Man's Land chalk and rubble and the salmon-pink fumes of ammonal would shoot upwards, showing that the men of the underworld still carried on. Slag-heaps, sandbags, and desolate mounds of earth formed the scenery for his debut, while the orchestra consisted of rum jars and rifle grenades.

D Company it was who had lost a sergeant through a German sniper; and the fact was duly reported. Now when a German sniper takes the life of a man in a battalion which goes in for the art itself, it is an unwritten law that from that moment a blood feud exists between the German and English snipers opposite. Though it takes a fortnight to carry out, yet death is the only finish.

Wherefore, one morning, just as the first pale glints of dawn came stealing over the silent land, Reginald Simpkins climbed carefully into a great mound of sandbags which had conveniently been deposited just behind the front line by the miners. But it is doubtful if Miss Belsize of the camisole department would have recognised him. No longer the frock coat and pearl tie, no longer the patent-leather boots and immaculate trousers. In their place a dirty-faced man in khaki, tastefully draped in flapping sandbags— his boots covered, his hands stained. Very cautiously he made himself comfortable; with immense care he laid his rifle—also covered with sacking—in the direction he required; and then he covered his front and sides with filled bags. Through a hole—also carefully arranged—his screened telescope covered the bit of German trench where the day before the German sniper had lain. Then he waited.

The mists cleared away; the morning sun shone down. From his point of vantage—for he was seven or eight feet above the trenches below—he watched the German lines. His fingers itched to pull the trigger two or three times; and once when he saw a German officer come out of his dug-out in the second line and lean against the back of the trench, smoking a fat cigar, he almost yielded to the temptation. But the splintering of a periscope glass below him, as a German bullet hit it, told him that the sniper was there—hidden somewhere, and watching too; and he knew that, perfect though his position was for one

shot, that one shot would probably give him away. And that one shot was for the sniper, and not to be wasted on a fat Ober Lieutenant....

Three or four hours passed, and the silence was complete. The perspiration trickled down his neck as he lay there motionless and clouded the eyepiece of his telescope. Then suddenly he saw a little black object shoot up into the air from the junction of two trenches near the German support line—an object which turned over and over in the air, and fell with a soft thud fifty yards to his right. A roar—and some sandbags and lumps of chalk flew in all directions, while fragments pattered down on Reginald out of the sky.

"Hope to God they don't come any closer," he muttered, watching the next rum jar shoot up. "Anyway, I've marked the place they're coming from." Then his eyes came back to the sniper's locality, and as they did so a quiver of excitement ran through him. Utterly regardless of the second rum jar which burst with a crack behind him, he knew for the first time the feeling of the big game man who has stalked his quarry successfully. There, five yards to the left of where he had been looking, a little stunted bush was moving— and there was no wind. Trembling with excitement he focussed his telescope on the bush, and even as he did so, he knew his vigil was over. The thing which up to that moment he had taken for a log was a man— the man, the sniper. He could see the faint outline of his face, now that his attention was drawn to it, and with infinite care he drew a bead on the centre of it. Then suddenly he started shaking with nervous keenness; his left hand wobbled like a jelly through sheer excitement until he almost sobbed with rage. The German moved again as another rum jar burst, confident that the English would have gone to ground to escape the trench mortaring. It was that arrogant movement that infuriated our friend. It struck him as a deliberate challenge. And for just a moment the German's face and the crossed hairs of his telescopic sight coincided, and coincided steadily.

It seemed to Reginald that his pressing the trigger and the wild convulsive lurch of the man opposite were simultaneous. With his eye to the telescope he watched the log that writhed and squirmed; then it grew still, and the disguise had gone. No more a log: just a motionless twisted form; while something that showed dark and ominous through the telescope spread round its head. The sergeant of D Company was avenged....

With a feeling rather as if he personally had won the war, our hero slipped backwards into the boyau beside him, and went in search of Shorty Bill. Two

hours later he found him and poured out the story. Shorty listened in silence; then he spoke.

"I've heard men talk like you, son, when they've kissed their first woman. Have you reported where that trench mortar is?"

"God! Shorty, I clean forgot. I'll go and do it now," remarked Reggie, his ardour somewhat damped.

"I should dam well think you'd better." Shorty relit his pipe, and grinned amiably. "Well done, kid; but for Holy Mike's sake don't crow over one plurry Boche. When you've touched three figures we'll celebrate...."

He may have been right; but even on his own showing, is there any kiss which is quite like the first? Is there any Hun, who—? Still, possibly the analogy is unfortunate. Anyway, I have given the account of his first cold-blooded victim; I will follow with his first hot-blooded one.

IV

It occurred about six weeks later in the same part of the line; and as a mark of special favour he had been allowed to accompany Shorty on one of his nightly prowls. That worthy was wont to remark that two men on a joy ride in No Man's Land was one too many; wherefore it must be assumed that Reginald had grown in wisdom and cunning, and found favour in the sight of his taskmaster.

They slipped over the top about ten p.m. Shorty was armed as usual merely with the villainous billhook-kukri of his own design, while Reggie carried a revolver and a clasp knife which resembled a young bayonet. It was not a reconnoitring patrol as laid down in the book of the words; it was merely a pleasure ramble, so Shorty said, as they passed silently out of a sap and disappeared in the darkness.

The first thing Reggie did was to kick a tin and fall into a shell hole, where he was joined by Shorty.

"Frightening rooks, son," he remarked kindly, "or rehearsing as a knockabout comedian? About twenty-five yards from here on our left is the German sap party that I am visiting tonight. I like 'em to know I'm coming."

"Sorry, Shorty," muttered the delinquent. "I never saw the ruddy thing."

"You don't say. I thought you'd a-done it on purpose," returned the other with ponderous sarcasm. "Now you stop here; I'm goin' to that sap— an' I'll come back for you."

Like a wraith Shorty faded into the night, leaving our friend alone with his thoughts. A Lewis gun was firing away down the line in short bursts, while Verey lights and flares went up every now and then with a faint hiss. Above, the low-flying clouds scudded over the sky, and our friend lay back in his shell hole and pondered. With an inward chuckle he wondered what the beautiful Miss Belsize and the other fair ones of Mogg's would say if they could see him at that moment. A sense of physical well-being was on him, and he stretched himself luxuriously. The next instant he was struggling impotently in a grip that throttled him.

"Quite so," remarked a voice as the grip relaxed, and by the light of a flare he found Shorty occupying the shell hole once again. "A ruddy lot o' good you are. Killed and dead as mutton by now, if I'd been a Boche."

Reggie reddened in the darkness with shame. "I wasn't thinking, Shorty. I—er..." His words died away.

"Thinking! You flat-footed clam—this show ain't a debating society, nor yet a penny reading." Shorty snorted with rage. "Go over to that saphead there—d'you see it—an' see what thinking does." His hand pointed to a low hummock of chalk behind a crater. "Go an' look in, I tell you; an' if ever you sit out here again dreaming like a love-sick poet, I hope to God it happens to you. You'll deserve it."

With a push like the kick of an elephant's hind leg he propelled the wretched Reggie in the required direction. Puzzled and surprised, but feeling very ashamed of himself, he moved cautiously towards the low mound that stood up dimly outlined against the night sky. Once on the short journey he crouched motionless while a flare burnt itself out twenty yards away, only to move forward immediately the darkness settled again with quickened step. There is no time so good to movement as the few seconds after the eyes of possible watchers have been dazzled....

And so he came to the saphead, and cautiously peered in. Under ordinary circumstances his action was that of a fool; but Shorty had ordered, and those who knew Shorty got in the habit of carrying out his instructions. For a while in the blackness he could see nothing. He noted the sap running back towards the German lines; but at the head of it there was no sign of life. He carefully stretched farther over, and as he looked at the bottom of the trench he made out a dark, huddled figure. Then the next flare went up, and Reginald Simpkins got the shock of his life.

The green ghostly light came flooding in, and then went out as abruptly as it had come. But the moment was enough. Clear stamped on his brain, like a photographic exposure, was the image of two men. One lay at the bottom of the trench and grinned at the sky with his throat cut from ear to ear; the other—huddled in a corner with his hand still clutching a bomb— was even as he looked turning on his head and his knees, only to subside with a squelch in the mud, kick spasmodically, and lie still.

"Right in—you take me?—with your clasp knife." Shorty's words came back to him and he gasped. So this was what his teacher had meant, when he'd sent him to see the dangers of thinking.

It was just as he was visualising the scene: the sudden ghostly appearance of Shorty on top of the unsuspecting Germans; the sudden stroke of that awful weapon; the feeble attempt to get the bomb; the—well, it was just then that Reggie found himself contemplating from about six inches range the glaring face of a Prussian N.C.O. who had suddenly materialised. By the light of a flare down the line he watched, as he lay on top of the ground, with his head over the edge of the sap, the ring of the Prussian's revolver as it moved up towards his face.

What happened, happened quickly: most of these things are touch and go. The bullet whizzed past his face into the night—his left hand hit the revolver just in time; and even as the bullet went wide his right hand struck sideways with the knife. It sank into the Prussian's neck; he felt a rush of something warm and sticky, and then he was grabbed from behind.

"Quick," muttered Shorty in his ear, "hop it; hop it like hell. I'll guide you."

Blinded and dazed by the blast of the revolver, he stumbled mechanically after his leader. "Into this shell hole for a moment," whispered Bill imperatively, as a machine gun let drive with a few rounds which passed over them like a flight of cockchafers. "Now come on. Home this trip, my boy—I didn't know that swab was there...."

"I killed him, Bill," said Reginald, half an hour later, as he sat rubbing his eyes on the fire step of their own trenches to get the stinging of the cordite out.

"You done well, son," said Bill; "an' if any one doubts it— show 'em your hand."

By the light of a match Reggie looked at it, and he shuddered. It bore, as Bill implied, the proof of death.

He was silent too awhile; the first hot-blooded one is more rattling to the nerves than a stranger three hundred yards away. Then a great thought struck him, and he cursed.

"I've left my knife in his neck, Bill. What a blasted idiot!"

V

It is quite possible that there are some who, having read thus far, will consider that the education of Reginald Simpkins as a soldier was now complete. Transformed from a dreadful being who cut up silks and things and discoursed on the merits of what I understand is known as lingerie, he had become a man: a man with a quick hand and a sure eye, a man who had met one of his kind in fair fight and killed him. In his mind there had been born pride—the right sort of pride. Not the spurious article which had passed for it at Mogg's—that unpleasant type of conceit of which pimples and a high collar are the outward and visible sign. No, not that at all. He had cast that off with his frock coat, and in its place had grown the inherent pride which is the birthright of a man.

It was just because the metamorphosis had been so complete, and the growth had been so rapid, that his education was by no means finished. It had only just begun.

So far I have dealt principally with one phase in the gentle game of war: the phase that concerns itself with outing the wily Hun by means of a rifle bullet. True, Reginald had tasted of other pleasant methods under the kindly guidance of Shorty Bill; he had even gone so far as to enter into wordy warfare with the battalion exponent of bayonet fighting with regard to the relative merits of the bayonet G.S. and the weapon that he had presented to the Huns on his night prowl. In fact, our friend was beginning to hold opinions—and quite decided opinions—of his own. He was still in his infancy, I admit; but to those who were privileged to watch his growth he seemed a hopeful specimen. The seed appeared to be falling on good soil.

But it may be remembered that with regard to the question of the sower, the seed which fell on stony ground appeared good for a time, until it was found that there was nothing behind it. Precocity is a dangerous thing, and in his new school Reginald was certainly precocious. Nowadays it is necessary to form judgments quickly in the Army: the game is being played at such high pressure. And so mistakes are bound to occur, though the Honourable James Lascelles disliked making them now, just as much as he did in the days when he could take his time.

The thing in question at the moment was the fitness of our friend for the stripe when a vacancy occurred; and the Honourable Jimmy, being the Adjutant of the South Devons, and having the headquarter specialists under his eye, was

somewhat intimately concerned with the solution of the question. I think I have failed to mention previously that it was the South Devons that Reginald adorned—that celebrated regiment known to the Army and the world at large by the more familiar soubriquet of the "Stick 'em and be damned."

So when the edict of Toby Seymour, the C.O., went forth, the Adjutant seized the opportunity of trying to find out a little more fully whether it really was good soil in Reginald's case, or whether it was stony. Today the edict would seem almost a matter of routine; at that time things were different. Toby ordered a raid, and it was so.

It was to be a raid on a large scale: no isolated affair like the pilgrimages of Shorty Bill, but an affair where the enemy's trenches were to be entered by a large party. No silent, stealthy work, but a thorough good jolly, with bombs and noises complete.

Today raids are stale, and things of but little account. Sometimes the bag is large, and sometimes the bag is small; but the performance occurs twice nightly, with frequently a matinee thrown in. Then they were something new, and enterprises to be talked about.

The project first took concrete form in the back room of a certain estaminet which served as the Headquarters mess when the battalion was resting after a spell in the trenches. The omelette had been successful, the port had recently arrived, and that pleasing, though somewhat selfish, glow which comes even to the best of us when we realise that it is the other fellow who is out in the cold wet night permeated the room.

"Sarah Jane," remarked Toby to his second-in-command, as he thoughtfully sipped his port, "I have been thinking."

"Have you, dear old soul? That's very jolly."

"I have been thinking," went on the C.O., "that the boys require waking up. There is a danger of their degenerating into trench machines. They want ginger."

The second-in-command looked at his Colonel keenly. "I agree with you," he returned after a short silence. "But it's rather hard to give 'em anything to ginger with in the middle of winter and in this locality. The division will probably be pulling out to train shortly, and then—"

"No—that won't do," Toby interrupted him. "I don't mean that sort of ginger. How many men of this battalion feel instinctively, and know as a positive fact, that—man for man—they are better than the Huns? That's the point, and training behind won't help that; at least, it won't start it. Once give it to them as a foundation, and the training will gain five hundred per cent. in its value."

"True, O king, but how?"

"They must fight the Germans, and find out for themselves. We've got some new drafts, Sarah—quite a number of new drafts who not only have never fought the Hun, but who have never even seen him. Their horizon is bounded by a dirty sandbag and a smell; and I maintain that their value as fighting troops is not one quarter what it might be."

He carefully lit his pipe while the rest of the mess watched him curiously—wondering what was in his mind.

"Listen to me, you fellows." Toby leant forward in his chair and emphasised his remarks with his ancient and powerful briar. "Every one in this room is—for want of a better word—blooded. We have all, thank Heavens! had the unforgettable pleasure of killing Huns at close quarters, with our own hands. Now that broadens one's horizon at once. We are not bounded by sandbags and stinks; when we are in the trenches, we know—our imagination tells us—that over the way are men whom we can visualise: living, actual beings whose ideal and object in life is to kill us. Not so, I regret to say, with a new draft: how can you expect it? To them the Hun is a strange something living in a trench, whom they never see, and whom they don't particularly want to. One might almost say that 'live and let live' is bound to be the way they look at life at present. Until the terrier sees the rat he has no wish to kill it; and until he has killed it he has no idea what a delightful occupation it is. Same with the men; and we've got to alter it."

"Bravely spoken, sir, as the poets would say," remarked the Honourable James. "The only point is how to do it."

"Easy as falling off a log. One night we will pay the Huns a visit and kill 'em. Cheery amusement, charming hobby. The terriers will get bitten on the nose, and as soon as that happens they'll see red. Then they'll start to kill; and once they've done that there will be no holding them. Their tails will be stickin' up above their heads."

"It was done a few weeks ago up the line, wasn't it?" The second-in- command thoughtfully replenished his glass.

"I believe it was—but what matter? The Stick'ems don't require any damned pilot for their fences." The C.O. brought a fist like a leg of mutton down on the table. "Before the division leaves the line, we are going to visit the Hun; we are going to kill the Hun; we are going to capture the swab, to wound him, to out him; and when we've done it and got him as wild as a civet cat in the nesting season, we'll laugh at him by platoons."

"Prolonged applause from a breathless audience," laughed the Adjutant. "We can merely murmur a Benedictined Bismillah."...

Now it is possible that to those who sit at home, and regard war from armchairs as a movement of little flags on a large-scale map, the words of Toby Seymour may come in the nature of a surprise. It is possible that they have never really thought about the human side of killing: of killing as a hobby—as a trade. Vaguely they realise that a soldier does not go into the army to pick buttercups; vaguely they understand that men die and are killed in war, and that soldiers are the people who kill and are killed. But I venture to think that they do not realise the intense importance of inculcating in every private soldier the necessity and the desire of outing the other fellow. Horrible, you say; revolting. Of course it's horrible, my good man; of course it's revolting; but what the devil do you think this war is— minding a crþche for imbecile children? You bring in a crowd of men whose sole qualification in August 1914 to be considered soldiers was an intense and national love of games. You pit them against a machine perfect in technique, in which every part had been trained from earliest infancy in the trade of soldiering, and the trade of ruthless killing.

You ask them to go across the water and beat this machine for you. And so, if I harry you at times with details of the type blood- curdling, it is only that you may understand something of the nature of the task: the task which your brothers and sons and partners and clerks are carrying to a successful issue.

Has it occurred to you why they are succeeding?

You say that right is triumphing over might; that a good cause must win. It is beautiful, it is magnificent your contention; but it is not war. History does not support you; common sense does not bear you out. We are beating them

because as a nation of sportsmen the men have taken to the new sport as a duck takes to water; and the new sport is to kill, capture, wound, or out the Boche before he kills, captures, wounds, or outs you. And having taken to it as a sport, now that the technique and other things are equal, we are better at it than the Hun who views it as a business.

Which recalls to mind the celebrated utterance of a celebrated officer. Should he read these lines, I trust he will pardon the plagiarism; but the utterance was so wonderful that it should be perpetuated, even thus modestly. He spoke lightly; but if I may be forgiven the platitude, there is many a true word spoken in jest.

Why not institute, he suggested, a list of battalion averages? Just as the relative position of Tottenham Hotspur and Sheffield Wednesday in the Football League is the subject of frenzied back chat; just as the defeat of Yorkshire by Kent causes head shakings in the public-houses of the North towards the end of August, why not have a league of battalions?

A wonderful idea if one thinks into it. A dead'un two points, a prisoner one; the Ober-lieutenant five points and a Colonel twenty—with other grades according to fancy. Think of the frantic excitement in the London clubs and the quiet villages when the relative scoring merits of a Jaeger sharpshooter and a one-eyed Landsturmer were sized up. Think of the Putney Peashooters' ladies meeting those of the Shoreditch Snipers at a small and early, and counting up the bag: five Saxons and a stretcher-bearer against four prisoners and a carrier pigeon.

One might almost wind up with England versus Scotland, the winner to play Australia on a percentage basis. In fact, there is no limit to it; and I will cease, lest I get lost in a maze of wonderful developments.

I will cease, and return to the Stick'ems; but as a last word I would say, in all seriousness, that wildly farcical though that celebrated utterance may be, there underlies it an absolutely true valuation of the fundamental bedrock of war. To emulate the deeds of others and go one better, to put the men in good heart with their tails up, that is the secret of winning. And the best way of doing it is to treat the matter as a sport: the Englishman understands it that way best....

VI

No Man's Land in that part of the line where the South Devons resided was wide—well over a quarter of a mile to be exact. Across their front, about a hundred and fifty yards from the German lines, there ran a small bank two or three feet high, with its right resting on a main road which crossed No Man's Land, and its left gradually falling away till it came level with the ground. The remnants of a hedge and two or three forlorn tree stumps still remained on the bank, over the top of which could be seen the German wire—running round a small orchard in which lay their front line trenches. The locality was peaceful; the Hun was quiet, asking for nothing more than that he should be left alone, which undoubtedly made Toby Seymour's breach of the rules the more reprehensible from the exclusively Teuton point of view. They were extremely angry; in fact, one large prisoner went so far as to state that it was a barbarous method of fighting, and unheard of in civilised warfare. The suggestion that he should be kept as the battalion mascot and supply the comic relief at all subsequent smoking concerts, unfortunately fell through. Other "non-barbarians" who escaped joining him in captivity emulated his altruistic spirit by informing the South Devons daily from a position where the lines ran close together, that they were looking forward to crucifying the next Englishman they caught, which again was an immense success, and was greeted invariably by a specially selected choir chanting the Hymn of Hate. And yet the damage done was not very great from the material point of view. It was the mental jolt, the jar to their spiritual loftiness, that tickled the dear souls up....

Now primarily my story concerns Reginald Simpkins and his transformation to manhood. And therefore, before I tell of the raid itself, I will touch on one or two matters concerning that transformation, and the methods of the Honourable James.

D Company won the toss, so to speak, and was deputed to perform; and Reginald Simpkins was not in D Company. Being a sniper, he was attached to that mystic band of specialists who adorn battalion headquarters. And so, one morning, the snipers were assembled and the Adjutant gazed at them benignly through his eyeglass.

"D Company are going to raid the Huns," he remarked. "I want six volunteers to go with them." The result was as he anticipated. "I said six, not the whole bunch," he continued genially, "so I'll have to draw lots."

Now nothing would induce me to hint that everything was not perfectly square in that drawing, but—Reginald Simpkins was one of the six. In due course his part in the programme was explained to him, and during the explanation his face became more and more suggestive of a street corner on a rainy day.

"You understand what you have to do, Simpkins?" The Honourable James looked at him keenly.

"Yes, sir, I understand; but—but—ain't I to have a go at the swine at all?" Our friend's grievance boiled over. "Can't I just go into the trench once and have a go at them? It'll be a bit hard sitting by the tree stump, and hearing the boys at it, and having to ...." His words died away under the steady glance of the man opposite.

"And because it's a bit hard, you don't want to do it?"

"It ain't that, sir, it's—it's—"

"Well, what is it? Not the showy part of the performance, eh? Not the part where the fun comes—sitting by a bank and taking the roll as they come back. But some one has to do it—why not you?"

The second lesson in the making of a soldier—subordination of self.... As a matter of fact there was no reason why Reginald should have been deputed to the job: there were many others who could have done it equally well if not better. But the Honourable Jimmy had his own methods....

The desire for the game was there in the pupil: that he knew: the point was whether the character which would suppress and master that desire when necessary was there too. Could reliability be added to keenness? ...

That was what the Adjutant wished to find out. He knew that our friend was—in the vernacular—throwing a chest. He knew that lately, well, Reginald Simpkins had been rather full of—Reginald Simpkins. Adjutants—good Adjutants—do know these things. Which was all to the good—within certain limits....

An unpromising subject had learned the first lesson of the soldier: would he be able to learn the second, without which the third and greatest would be impossible? All soldiers must learn the first lesson; only a limited number can learn the second and third.

So it came about that for the good of his soul Reginald played a very minor part in this raid, and my information on the doings that occurred in the Hun lines was obtained from the lips of one Samuel Pipston, sometime auctioneer's assistant, who had joined the battalion with the last draft. He was just a second Reginald—one stage behind him in development, that's all—an apathetic lad, finding war a tedious operation.

It was not until ten o'clock on the night, as he lay with his party behind the bank of which I have spoken, that a pleasurable thrill of anticipation began to take hold of Samuel. A slight frost nip was in the air, and in the sky there shone a myriad stars. Away behind him lay the trenches he had just quitted, peaceful and still in the faint moonlight; and looking to his front he could see the German lines, just as still, only much closer. He tried to realise that he was shortly going to be inside those trenches, and that when he got there he would meet real live men, who would endeavour to kill—him, Samuel Pipston. He thought of Mary Johnston, the daughter of the leading grocer, and wondered what she was doing at the moment, and what she would think if—

"Don't shoot—for God's sake—not a sound."

With a start Samuel heard the hoarse whisper of a subaltern beside him, and became suddenly aware that a struggle was going on two or three yards away. He peered eagerly in the direction of the noise, and saw three men in a confused mass heaving on the ground behind the bank.

"What the devil—" he muttered, and then the heaving ceased. In the dim light he saw a still figure lying on the ground, and two men crouching over him. "Someone 'ad a fit, I reckons," he whispered to the man next him, an old hand at the game.

"Fit be blowed. It's a 'Un, yer fool—or was before he 'opped it. He's dead."

"A 'Un!" Samuel gazed stupidly at the speaker, and then peered at the motionless figure. "Wot's the sargint a-doin' of."

A low question came from the officer. "Have you killed him, Melstead?"

"I have that, sir; but I can't get my perishing bayonet out. Put your foot on his chest, Charlie, and heave. Again, so, heave." The sergeant sat down suddenly as the bayonet came out, and immediately crawled to the subaltern. "There'll be another with him, sir, for a cert." The two peered over the bank towards the

German lines, while drawn by an irresistible impulse Samuel crept towards the dead man. He peered into the distorted face, he looked at the still twitching body, and an uncontrollable fit of shuddering took him and gripped him. His knees knocked together; his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth; and only one coherent thought hammered at his brain.

"Lemme get away; it's awful. Gawd! it's awful. Lemme go." He was whispering and muttering to himself, and Heaven knows what might have happened, because there are moments when a man is not responsible for his actions, when a large body hit him on the head, and he found himself at the bottom of a mass of struggling, kicking men.

As a matter of fact it was merely the expected arrival of number two of the German patrol, and he could not have selected a better place to come to as far as Samuel was concerned. There is no better banisher of knocking knees than a heavy kick in the ribs from a German boot, and in an instant our friend was fighting like a tiger cat.

"Quietly, quietly, for the love of Heaven." The officer's insistent voice reached him, and he felt for the German's mouth with his hands. He was lying on his back, and the Hun was on top of him; but beyond that, the only other clear remembrance of the episode he has is of a fine and complete set of teeth nearly meeting in his hand. That was enough; one new terrier at any rate was blooded. He don't quite know how he killed him; in fact, it is quite on the cards that it wasn't he who killed him at all. The fact remains that the German died; and whether it was the sergeant, or whether it was the subaltern, or whether it was Samuel, is immaterial. All that matters is that as far as motive and endeavour went Samuel Pipston killed his first rat, and gloried in the operation. Such is the effect of mistaking the thumb of even our nearest and dearest for a ration biscuit....

Thus ended the little episode of the German patrol. For months previously those two men, or others like them, had wandered over No Man's Land, and returned in due course to their sausage and their beer, with nothing of interest to report. Then, as the invariable rule of war, there came the hundredth time when the unexpected happened. Shells, bombs, bullets— they take the others and pass you by. But sooner or later, it will be "nah- poo." You can only pray Heaven it's a Blighty. With the German patrol, it was not.

A whispered word came down the waiting line. "Get ready." All along the bank men tightened their belts and took a last look at their bombs and rifles. Two parties—each under a subaltern—were going to enter the German lines, while, as a reserve, the Company Commander, with a machine gun and some rifle grenadiers, and Reginald Simpkins were remaining at the bank. The two parties were going to enter at different points and move towards one another, the leading men of each ceaselessly calling out, "'Ow's yer father?" Then when the mystic answer came, "Merry and bright," they would know they were meeting one another and be careful with their bombs. En passant, it is not too easy to recognise who's who at night in a strange trench when every one is somewhat excited.

"Are you all ready, 'A' party? Then come on." Worming over the bank Samuel followed his subaltern into the darkness, and the raid had begun. Without a sound they approached the wire through which they had to cut, crawling as they had practised. Timed to a nicety they reached it and lay still, just as a couple of flashes from the rear proclaimed the gunners were beginning. Five—six—seven seconds, and with a shrill scream two shells whistled over their heads and burst fifty yards in front of them.

"Come on." The whisper was hardly audible, and quite unnecessary: they had all been too well drilled. Snip—snip; the wire strands parted as they forced their way through to the silent lines, while the shells still moaned over their heads; and the German sentries, who had heard shells before and liked them no more than any one else, kept their heads down till the English swine should have concluded their nightly hate. Three minutes later the party dropped into a deserted bit of trench and the fun commenced....

Samuel was a bomber, and he carried twenty of these pleasant little instruments as his stock in trade. With every nerve tingling with excitement he followed the officer in front of him, who with a couple of bayonet men headed the party. The first man they met was the sentry, who was crouching on the fire-step to avoid the shelling, and from that moment on—well, things hummed.

The subaltern—an excitable youth—smiled genially at the dazed Bavarian, who was regarding the sudden invasion of his privacy as if it was a bad dream; and having shot him in the stomach, passed breezily on round the traverse, followed by his surging mob.

"Picket the other entrance," he roared to those behind, as he stepped by the first shaft of a dug out, up which a man was rushing. "Come on, my pet, come on—roll, bowl, or pitch, it's a cocoa-nut to a berlud orange...." The man fell back with a bullet through his brain, and slid head down to the bottom of the shaft. "Bomb 'em, boys; bomb 'em."

With a roar the bombs went off in the confined space below the ground; the lights went out, and a confused medley of shouts and groans followed them up the trench as they sought pastures new. Control was impossible: it was every man for himself, and to hell with everything he could see. Each man fought his own little battle, in his own little way, against one or two or three of the bewildered men who appeared suddenly from odd places. And though they were bewildered, they fought—those Huns: fought like good 'uns. In one corner a great burly miner grappled with a Bavarian N.C.O. who had suddenly dropped over the back of the trench armed only with a pick—straight from a working party. Farther on, the subaltern and a bayonet man carried on the good work with howls of joy, while a small party of bombers, having found a large sump pit covered by boards in a communication trench, removed the boards just in time to catch a relief party of six who came rushing up the trench. With a resounding splash they went through the ice several feet below the top of the hole, and were immediately joined by two bombs.

As the corporal in charge of that party put it afterwards: "It was a good idea that sump 'ole; because them that wern't killed by the bombs was drowned, and the only one wot was neither, I 'it over the 'ead with me gun; and 'ere he is. Ain't 'e a little dear?" The little dear with a cracked jaw, and a face reminiscent of Hindenburg on the morning after, looked the part....

But I have neglected Samuel Pipston. As I mentioned, he was a bomber, and he was also excited. In the general confusion and darkness he got parted from the rest of the gallant band, and found himself in a bit of trench alone save for a large and morose sapper who was tenderly nursing a mobile charge of several pounds of ammonal. Away in front the noise and shouting and the crack of bursting bombs was getting fainter, and Samuel was undecided. He had explored a little cul-de-sacon his own, and had drawn blank; and at the moment he was in the unfortunate predicament of thirsting for blood and being unable to get any. In front the trench was being cleared up; behind it had been cleared up; wherefore Samuel stood undecided, and cursed fluently.

"Shut yer mouth"—the morose sapper gripped his arm— "an' listen. I heard some of the swine, I reckons."

Silently the two men stood in the trench, and suddenly from close at hand there came the noise of a man climbing a dug-out shaft. It was exactly as a faint cry of "'Ow's yer father?" came from a long way off that a curtain just beside them moved, and a man, crouching slightly, came out of a screened dug- out shaft into the trench. It must be remembered that neither of our warriors had a rifle, and that bombs and ammonal charges are not weapons with which to tackle a man you can touch. They are apt to be impartial to friend and foe alike.... Resource was necessary, and it is at moments such as these that the national instinct for games is so invaluable. There was a psychological moment as the crouching man came up into the trench with his rifle and bayonet, when his chin was in the perfect position: moreover, the sapper was a full back of merit. He kicked hard and true, and if any one doubts the effect of a service boot on the point of the jaw, no doubt he can experiment with the matter—at a small cost. The Bavarian fell forward as if he had been pole-axed, and having relieved him of his rifle the sapper held forth.

"There's a ruddy dug-out full of 'em, mate, wot was missed." They peered down the opening, where a faint light showed. "They think we've gone on, and they're coming up to see. Look, there's one."

The shadow of a man showed grotesquely in the flickering light, and Samuel quivered with excitement.

"I'm a-going down the plurry steps," he affirmed, "an' I'll bomb 'em from the bottom."

The next instant he was down the shaft and peering cautiously round the corner; and having peered he let out one wild whoop and gently lobbed his first bomb into the far corner. It was a bomber's paradise.

All round the walls in bunks were Bavarians—stout ones, thin ones, drunk ones, sober ones—and the bunks were arranged in tiers one above the other. Two men were up, getting on their equipment, and evidently preparing to sally forth after the gentleman upstairs; but after the first bomb burst the fog of war descended on that Hun hostel. Samuel had just time to see the fearful mess up in the far corner before the light went out, and then things moved. Shots came whizzing past his head into the woodwork of the shaft, but Samuel didn't care

a damn for shots; had he not been bitten in the hand less than an hour previously? Methodically he pulled out pins, and impartially he distributed his favours in every direction, what time he softly sang a song that had long been one of his favourites, and which dealt with the singer's overmastering predilection for "fish and chips."

Suddenly he found the sapper behind him. "Stand by to 'op it like a ruddy 'are," remarked that worthy tersely. "I'm a going to give 'em my little present from Brighton, and it won't be 'ealthy when it goes off."

There was a sudden sizzle as he lit the fuze, and he saw a stream of smoky light fly through the darkness and fall on to the ground in the centre of the dug-out. Then Samuel 'opped it, the sapper just behind him, up the shaft and into the trench. The sapper rushed him round a bend, and then crouched down.

"Twenty seconds," he gasped, "an' me out of training. Lumme! wot a life."

The next instant the ground quivered as if an earthquake had occurred; a thunderous roar shook the air, while the blast of the explosion nearly knocked them down.

"Nothin' wrong with that there ammonal," remarked the Sapper professionally. "'Andy stuff it is too. Let's go and see what's 'appened."

But that they will never know. From the dug-out shaft a volume of smoke and dust was belching out, while from inside there came a medley of noises and grunts indicative of annoyance and pain.

"Sounds like one of them there gramophone records, don't it?" murmured Samuel. "A summer morning, or the departure of a troop ship. Ain't it lovely? 'Ullo, wot's that?"

Clear above the din and the moaning, and the spasmodic fighting which they could still hear going on up the trench, there sounded the officers' dinner call. Twice it blared forth from the British lines, and every man knew what it meant: "Come back, at once." The raid was over....

And so by ones and two and threes D Company returned to the fold, where hot tea and a noggin of rum awaited them, giving their names to Reginald on the way. To the casual observer it might have seemed that D Company were

drunk—one and all. They were—but not with wine. They were drunk with excitement, and with the knowledge just acquired that they could beat the Germans, man-to-man. They were blooded.

The lies they told—those cheery lads! Not a man had done in less than forty Boches, which rose to eighty when they wrote their girls. What matter? D Company of the Stick'em and be damned was made for life. The men walked three inches higher; the men, as men, had come into their own. Every new draft that came heard the story; every new draft realised it had got something to live up to. No longer sand bags and smells their horizon, but the memory of one glorious half-hour.

And when he thought over it afterwards, there was only one small thing that struck Samuel Pipston as peculiar. He was just retailing to Reginald Simpkins—with some wealth of detail—his experiences in the German dug-out, when he became aware of the Honourable James beside him, who listened for a while until he had finished.

"So you had a good time did you, Pipston?" he remarked. "Splendid!" Then he turned to Simpkins. "The Company Commander tells me you were a great help to him, checking the men as they came back. Well done."

It struck Samuel that he might have had a "Well done."

But then, he didn't know the Honourable Jimmy's methods; nor did he know that while he and those with him had merely learned the first and easiest lesson that night, Reginald Simpkins had learned the second.

VII

And so, with two of the lessons learned, we come to the third and greatest. The first was basely material, and was taught by Shorty Bill; the second was a little nearer the heart of things, and was taught by the Honourable James; the third is the heart of things, and can be taught by no one. The rules—vague rules—may be given by men who have learned it to those who have not; but its true meaning, its real significance, can only be reached by the pupil for himself. And there are many who fall by the way....

It arises out of the second: it must be preceded by subordination of self. For until a man can subordinate himself, he cannot take on his shoulders the cares of others; he cannot put those others first, And until he can put others before him, he cannot be put in a position of responsibility: he is not fitted to fill it. And it is the principle of responsibility on which the British Army is built up: another thing about which I am very doubtful as to the knowledge of those whose paths have not led them near things military....

I have touched on things material; let me hold forth awhile on things spiritual.

What think you, my masters, is the driving force of a regiment in the field? The answer is in one word—Leadership. Quite so, you say; the remark seems to have been made before. It has, which makes it all the stranger that it is so little understood.

What does the word mean to you? Prancing in front of the men with a drawn sword, shouting, "For King and Country"? They'd laugh at you, and follow a—leader: one of their own. Ruling by fear, ruthlessly without thought of human weakness, without tinge of mercy? They'd hate you, and you would have to drive them like the Prussians do. Ruling by pusillanimous kindness, by currying favour, by seeking to be a popularity Jack? They'd despise you—and rightly.

The quality of leadership is none of these things: it is something much more simple, much more homely, if I may use the word. To lead men a man must first of all understand men, understand human nature; he must know his job, and know it better than his men; he must possess intensity of purpose.

Human nature! What the men like and what they dislike; the little fetishes they put up, the little gods; the few words of praise when they have done well, of disappointment when they have not; consideration for them, giving them beer and concerts; being with them in the trenches when the weather is bad, and not in a dug-out. Little points perhaps, but it's the little points that are so important.

Human sympathy—the appealing to the spark of better things that lies in the worst; the inculcation of an ideal to live up to—the ideal of the regiment. All the hundred and one things that go to make up a man's life and not an automaton's; all the things that make for the affection and love of those under you. It is a very great thing for an officer to be loved by his men....

Knowledge! The capability of doing yourself anything you call on those under you to do; of showing them when they are right and when they are wrong; of making them trust your ability. It is a very great thing for an officer to be trusted by his men.

Intensity of purpose! The driving force that gives enthusiasm, that causes the hand on the plough to remain there until the job is done; the quality that abhors vacillation, that prevents a man taking a thing up one moment with red-hot eagerness and dropping it the next because he's tired of it. The men despise vacillation and chopping and changing. Being "messed about," they call it; only the word is not messed. And it is a terrible thing for an officer to be despised by his men....

From good leadership there springs good discipline, that other word so little understood by those who have not met it in the flesh. Not, believe me, the rigorous punishment for breaking certain arbitrary rules, enforced by an autocrat on men placed temporarily under him by a whim of fate; far from it. Discipline is merely the doctrine which teaches of the subordination of self for the whole; it teaches the doctrine of playing the game; it teaches the all-important fact that the fear of being found out and punished should not be the chief force in a man's life, but rather that the realisation of his responsibility should be the guiding factor.

Such is the ideal aimed at in a good regiment. That there are some who miss that aim none but a fool would deny; the same may be said of most professions, even, I suppose, of bishops. That there are some officers who go the wrong way to work, who nag and bully and generally turn themselves into

something even worse than nature intended is an undoubted fact. That there are some men who are wasters; who were born wasters and will die as such is also quite true. But I maintain that the training, the ideals, the traditions, the morale of the good British regiment does produce, and has produced, a growth of character and a condition of mind in the men who belong to it which was largely conspicuous by its absence in civil life.

Why, I do not profess to say. Why the great thinkers and the vaporising burblers between them should not have hit on some method of training character which would have produced equally good results to those produced by what they are still pleased to call "militarism," I do not know. All that I do know is that they did not. Let us leave it at that.

I have digressed; our Reginald is calling. For weeks his battalion was destined to remain in peace trenches, to live that dreary life of monotony which tests the capabilities of the leader as no big push can do. The excitement is absent, there is plenty of time—too much time—for thought. And boredom is of all things one of the hardest to combat. It calls for leadership of the highest type. There is many a man capable of supreme devotion in a crisis who is incapable of the steady, unseen strain, day in, day out, of keeping up his men's spirits—in fact, of appreciating human nature in one of its many phases.

The men feel that dull routine on which the lime-light does not shine, and only the leader can help them. It claims its victims, just as do the big offensive, that trench life, when the flares lob up ceaselessly and the bursts of machine-gun fire come swishing over the ground. Here men are wiring; there is a party digging a new bit of trench; and out beyond—in No Man's Land—an officer and three scouts are creeping about examining the enemy's wire. So it goes on throughout the night, until as the first streaks of dawn show faintly in the east it ceases. The men come in, back to the dreary mud holes; and next night there is the same damned thing to be done all over again somewhere else....

Only, Ginger won't be there any more; he has put up his last bit of wire. He started on the last journey unnoticed save by the man standing next him; and—Gawd above!—what's the use? They'd been together for two years, share and share alike; and now the end. Putting up a bit of rusty wire round a sap....

"Easy, boy, easy. 'Ere, cut them ruddy braces away. 'Orl rite, old son, you've copped a Blighty. Thro' yer stummik—Gor luv yer— no. Get that dressing on, Bill; turn over, mate—we'll give yer a drink in a minute; but one thing at a

time, old pal, that's my motto. Always merry and bright, as the perisher said in the play." Back in the trench, pulled in from the wire where the work goes on, an officer's electric torch shines on the stretcher bearers working with clumsy gentleness on the quivering body. "Now, then, mate, we can't get the blinking stretcher along this 'ere trench, so we'll 'ave to carry you."

"Copped it?" asks an N.C.O. in a whisper.

"Gawd! a fair crumpler," mutters the other. "Come on, Ginger, let's get off on the first stage for Blighty. On me back, we does it—on me back. 'Ere, boy—lumme! turn 'im over, Bill." The torch shines down on the face upturned to the stars; the stretcher bearers bend down and suddenly straighten up again. For Ginger is even now passing along the last great road: he has copped it. The group disperse; the officer goes back to his job; the stretcher bearers do their work; and soon nothing remains save the stain on the dirty sandbags. Just another letter to a woman at home; just war.

Only to his pal, it's Ginger: Ginger whom he'd joined up with; Ginger—killed putting up a bit of rusty wire. Not doing anything brilliant, not in a charge or going over the top, but putting up a bit of ruddy wire. What is the use of it all, what?...

Come on, my leader; come on, you platoon commander; the soul of Ginger's pal is in the melting-pot, though he doesn't know it, and would curse in your face if you told him so. A quiet hand on the back, a laugh perhaps, just a word to show him that you feel with him. His outlook on life is not as big as yours; help him—for Heaven's sake, help him. Thus is it done if the leader of the regiment is a man of understanding; for each of his assistants, right down the long chain to the junior lance-corporal, have been imbued with their responsibility to those under them. They are there to help them, to lighten their burdens, to sink self for the men they lead. The strong must help the weak—that is the principle; and every one must pull his weight for the good of the team.

But I have got off the rails again; I apologise.

During those weeks of boredom, Reginald, though he knew it not, was being watched, still watched, by the Honourable James. And it seemed to that judge of character that the soil was good.

"The Adjutant asked me if I'd like to take the stripe this morning, Shorty." Reginald and his pal were watching an inter-company football match on the ground by the Lens main road, near the little village of Noyelles-les- Vermelles. It is on the borders of the coal country—that village, and all around it rise the great pyramidical slag heaps of the pits.

"Did 'e now?" Shorty contemplated with interest a shell bursting on the derelict fosse in the next village of Annequin, and turned thoughtfully to the speaker. "An' what did you say to him?"

"I said I didn't want to. Why the devil should I? I don't want a stripe, Bill—I'm happier as I am. It means a lot of extra work an' trouble, an'—"

"Did you tell him that, son?" Shorty Bill hooked himself over on his arm and proceeded to fill his pipe.

"Yes, I told him that: and he—"

He did not finish his sentence for a moment or two; he seemed to be turning something over in his mind. Then he burst out: "He talked a lot of rot about responsibility."

"Cut it out. It's you that is coughing up the rot. Listen here a moment, an' I'll tell you what the Honourable James said. Got a match?" He took the proffered box and carefully lit up. "He first-ways told you that he'd had his eye on you for some time, an' he was pleased with 'ow you was doing. That may have been a lie or it may not, but the Honourable Jimmy knows more'n one cottons to. Then he told you what a gran' thing it was to be in this regiment, and that to be in a position of responsibility was grander still. Then he told you that no man worthy of the name of a man ought to be afraid of shouldering responsibility. An' lastly he said: 'Will you take the stripe?'"

Reggie was staring at the speaker amazed. "Lumme! you might have been there, Shorty. How did you know?"

"Because he offered the same thing to me six months ago," returned the other shortly. "Now see here, boy: that there aristocratic Johnny is the goods. It don't matter a damn to me if a man's a duke or a coal-heaver as long as he's the goods, and the Honourable Jimmy is. So's the ole man. An' what he says—goes. He's right d'you see, son; he's right." Shorty brought his fist down into his open palm. "I've been watching you lately, an' you're worth teaching—you've

shown that. But now you've begun to feel your legs, you're inclined to think you're a bit bigger cheese-mite than you really are. You want a bit o' sobering up; an' there's nothing like taking on responsibility to sober up a man. As soon as you start looking after other fellows, you begin to realise you ain't the Lord High Emperor of the whole outfit."

"But I don't want to look after other fellows, Shorty." Our friend's tone was dubious. "Why, good Lord! I'd be bossing it over you if I took the stripe."

An enigmatic smile wreathed gently over Shorty's face. "Don't you worry about that; I'll chance it." Then he turned suddenly on the man lying beside him. "You've got to take it—this bally little stripe in this funny old army. Otherwise you're a quitter—see? a quitter. You'd not be pullin' your weight. Do you get me?"

"Right ho! Bill; I'll tell him I will." Reginald Simpkins stared silently at the football match for a while, and then a sudden thought struck him. "Say, why didn't you take it, Shorty?"

"Never you mind; there are things as you can't get a hold of as yet. I pull more weight where I am, my son, than I would if I was the ruddy sergeant-major himself."

With which sage utterance our friend had to rest content. But while we are on the question, it is passing strange that, in a community such as a regiment, the power of the old soldier should be as great as it is. There was but little exaggeration in Shorty's last remark. In his present position he exercised a far greater influence on the men around him than if he had been a sergeant. It was his individuality—an individuality which made him an oracle whom all approached with their little grievances and their little troubles. Had he been a senior N.C.O. there would have been the bar of rank; and though his influence would have been very great, now it was even greater. But with our friend the case was different. He had no such individuality developed as yet which marked him out at once as a man among men; and before he could become an oracle to whom others would turn in their troubles, he must first be given a helping hand—shown a short cut, so to speak—to the character on which men lean instinctively.

And there is only one way to produce that character—only one. It may succeed and it may fail; the shrewdest judges of human character make mistakes, the

best leaders err sometimes. But—give him responsibility, and help him to understand that responsibility, with the help that only a good leader can give. Help him to grasp that phrase—My men; help him to realise that their worries are his worries, their amusements his amusements; help him to understand the value of cheerfulness when everything is damnable—utterly damnable. Then watch him. He may fail; well, you've made a mistake; but he may succeed, and then you've made a man. Which is always a thing worth doing....

VIII

And so it came about that three months later Reginald Simpkins— lance-corporal—and Shorty Bill—private—were seated on the fire-step of a trench side by side. With one continuous droning roar the shells passed over their heads and crumped into the German lines opposite. The days of peace for the battalion were over; in a quarter of an hour they were going over the top. Thousands like them sat on similar fire-steps and realised that same fact, for it was no little show this time: it was one where divisions and corps were involved. But to the pawns in the game, the horizon is limited: it is just their own destination, their own life, their own fate that looms up big and blots out the rest. It's not the other hundred thousand who matter at the moment—it's the pawn himself who wonders, and laughs, and sings, and prays....

Shorty, smoking his pipe imperturbably, was feeling the edge of his own particular weapon, with critical finger, and every now and then stealing a look at the boy beside him. Apparently satisfied at last with its sharpness he laid it down on the step and turned to our friend.

"You done well, son," he remarked at length, thoughtfully removing his pipe. "I'm pleased with you. I was afraid at one time—just after you took the stripe—when some of 'em was ragging you, as you would turn out a quitter. But you got guts. You're twice the man you was when you took it; and as for what you was when you joined us, you wasn't nothing at all save a walking disease."

"I'm glad you think I've made good, Shorty." Reginald was swallowing a little hard. "I—er—I—Good God! Shorty, I'm just sick with funk—that's straight." It was out at last, and Shorty Bill smiled gently and nodded his head.

"Son," he remarked, "it's one good sign that you ain't afraid o' saying so. Now personally I'm not—though it ain't no credit to me. It's how we're made, I reckon. When my time comes, it comes, and there's no blamed use worrying."

"I know all that, but—somehow—it ain't much comfort that idea, when it comes to the point. I tell you, Shorty, I don't want to be killed; I—" His voice died away, and he looked shamefacedly at the sandbags in front of him.

"No more don't I, son; no more don't I. An' no more don't your men—your six boys you are responsible for. They're your men, that little bunch: they're

looking to you, they're relying on you." He put his hand on the other's knee. "Are you a'-goin' to let 'em down, that six?"

Once again the great doctrine—the third great lesson— the doctrine that laughs at life and death, the doctrine of thinking for others—of responsibility.

"It's better, I reckon, to die a man than live a worm. So long, son; time's up."

The last words were shouted, and even then they could not be heard. Five minutes previously it would have seemed impossible that there could have been more noise; then suddenly it seemed to double and treble in intensity. The ground shook; and over the German trenches there hung a choking cloud of fumes which drifted slowly across the front with the wind. As if by clockwork, the men got out of their trenches and walked slowly over No Man's Land behind the creeping barrage towards the reeking caldron. A great long line of men—thousands and thousands of men; but do not think of them as the men of "some of our county regiments who did well, whom we are now allowed to mention"; as some "kilted battalions and Canadians who greatly distinguished themselves"; do not think of them in the mass, rather think of the individual.

The farm-hand, until two years ago just a clod-hopping countryman, was there; and the local lawyer's articled clerk. The gillie from a Scotch stream, and the bar-tender from a Yukon saloon walked side by side; and close to them a High Church curate in a captain's uniform grinned pleasantly and strolled on. The sheep-rancher, the poacher, the fifth son of an impecunious earl, and the man from the chorus were all there—leaving their respective lives behind them, the things which they had done, good and bad, the successes and the failures. For the moment nothing mattered save that seething volcano in front: it might be the end—it might not.

And some were quiet, and some were green; some were shouting, and some were red; some laughed, and some cursed. But whatever they did, however they took it, the leaders of whom I have spoken, each in his own sphere, big or little as the case might be, kept 'em, held 'em, looked after 'em, cheered 'em. Though their own stomachs were turning, though their own throats were dry, they had a job to do: a responsibility rested on their shoulders. And until death relieved them of that responsibility they could not lay it down. They were the leaders; to them much had been given; of them much was expected....

But in this great advance, which has already been ably portrayed by the powers of the journalistic world, we are only concerned with the fortunes of two individuals. To them those flowery phrases, those magnificent "dashes carried out in faultless style," those wonderful "lines which went into the jaws of hell as if on parade," would have conveyed a peculiarly inept description of their feelings. Not that the descriptions in many cases are not wonderfully good! They are—but they represent the point of view of the spectator in a pageant; not the point of view of one of the actors. To him they are meaningless: he only knows the intense vital part he plays himself. The shell that burst next door to him and killed his sergeant is only one of similar thousands to the looker-on behind....

And so, in a dazed world of his own, Reginald Simpkins, Lance-Corporal and sometime pride of Mogg's, walked over No Man's Land. Every now and then he looked mechanically to his left and right, and grinned. At least he made a contortion with his facial muscles, which experience told him used to produce a grin. He did it to encourage the six. Whether he succeeded or not is immaterial: the intention was good, even if the peculiar tightness of his skin spoiled the result. Occasionally he spoke. No one could have heard what he said, but once again the intention was good.

"Steady, boys—come on." He said it four or five times and punctuated it with grins. Then he tripped over a body and cursed.

He wondered if he was doing all right; he wondered if Shorty was pleased with him. The funk seemed to have gone: in its place had come a kind of dazed doggedness, while a fury of impatience to justify himself and his powers of leadership shook him at times. Surely to God they could go faster than this cursed crawl. Why was the barrage lifting so slowly? It seemed interminable that walk over the torn-up earth; and yet the German trenches were still some way off.

He grinned again, and turned round just in time to see the garage assistant next to him fall forward into a shell hole, and lie with his head stuck in the slimy ooze at the bottom. He frowned, and then almost uncomprehendingly he saw the back of the fallen man's head. Of course—he was shot, that's what it was: his six were reduced to five.

"Steady, boys—come on." As he spoke he felt something catch his coat, and he looked down irritably on feeling the material tear. It was a strand of barbed

wire that stuck up from the ground, with its free end loose. They had come to the wire....

In all directions—twisted and torn, with ends that stuck up, and stray strands uncut—was wire: thick and rusty it coiled in and out between the screw pickets—cut to pieces, but still there. Men picked their way over it gingerly, stepping with care and walking round the little ridges that separated the shell holes. Festoons of it lay in these holes, and in one large crater a dead Hun lay sprawled on a mattress of it. To the spectator behind, it was one dead Hun—one of thousands. To the man who happened to see him as he passed, it was an individual whose chalky face had been ripped by one of the barbs as he fell.

And there is a difference....

Then they came to the trenches—the front line, or what was left of it. Just facing them a man with his hands above his head opened and shut his mouth. He appeared to be saying something, but no voice could be heard above the din. Reginald grinned again: the Hun who was trying to imitate a fish struck him as a humorous spectacle; moreover, in a flash of memory, he reminded him very much of Mr. Mogg's ample wife. He grinned again as he thought of Mogg's.

Once more they were advancing again over the other side of the trench: the moppers-up would attend to the piscatorial gentleman. Our friend was better now—very much better; he felt more sure of himself; in fact, absolutely sure of himself. In addition he was beginning to get excited. And then a machine gun opened fire.

Hundreds of other machine guns opened fire too; but this one was Reginald's machine gun—the one that concerned his limited horizon. For a moment it did not strike him that way, though he saw the gun quite clearly. He looked round for help, and in looking round for help, he found that his five and three others who were close to him were looking to him for help. And he realised his responsibility: he had learned the lesson....

It was a masterly little piece of work: an excellent piece of subordinate leadership. With his arm he directed those eight—he had not been trained as a scout in vain—and with the loss of only two he got them out of the direct zone of fire. A few minutes later he, with the six remaining, fell upon that gun's team from a flank. In five seconds it was over, and the little group passed on.

It was just after this that he saw Shorty. At the moment that worthy was lying in a shell hole drawing a bead on some target with the utmost care. Reggie saw the kick of the gun, but failed to see what he had been firing at until the firer stood up and screamed in his ear.

"Machine gunner—nest of them over there. Hanging up the ruddy advance."

"We're doing well, Shorty." He howled back the answer.

"I reckon so. The swine are running all along the line; only one or two of 'em holdin' us up. Look out." He pulled Reginald to one side, and pointed behind him.

Majestically, squelching through the mud, came Tiny Tim, or the Tired Tank. It was pitching and rolling like a squat old tramp making heavy weather beating up Channel. They waved at it as it passed by, lurching ominously but going straight for the machine-gun nest. Once it almost seemed to disappear as it waddled down an extra large hole with its two stern wheels waving foolishly in the air; but a moment later it squirmed solemnly up the far side, and rolled on to its chosen target. The wire was uncut; but it trod on the wire, and the wire was not.

"Look at the perishers running," howled Shorty, as he watched some men doubling back from the death-trap. Their arms were waving foolishly: one could imagine their faces grey-green with terror, their hoarse shouts of fear, their desperate hurry to avoid the thing that was coming. "Lumme! I must draw a bead on that bunch," muttered Shorty eagerly. "Now then, son, you can hit one of that lot." He turned from the scene in front, and the next instant he was down on his knees. "What is it, boy, what is it?"

The man lying stiffly on the ground grinned yet once again, and shook his head. Thus does it come—suddenly, in a second. To the spectator behind—"our losses were not as great as had been anticipated." To the man—journey's end.

"I've got it this time, Shorty," he remarked, and he seemed to speak with difficulty. The roar of the guns was passing onwards, the din was not quite so deafening. "My bally old back seems all numb."

Just a stray bullet; just a broken back; just a finish. With the eye of knowledge Shorty looked at the grey tinge already spreading over the boy's face, and the mystery of death struck him forcibly: something of the strangeness of it all. In

five minutes—four—ten— what matter?—the lips now capable of speech would close for ever: the man whom he had known and lived alongside of for months would be gone for good. The desperate finality of it; the utter futility of the onlooker....

"Is the Tank clearing 'em out, Shorty?" The dying man interrupted his thoughts, and he looked up to see what was happening.

"It is that, son; it's doing fine. The old thing is sittin' there like a broody hen spittin' at 'em, and the swine are running like hell."

"God! Shorty, could one hit 'em with a gun?" The glazing eyes brightened; the lolling head straightened with a jerk.

"Sure thing." Shorty looked at him, and understood. "Like to try, boy; you'd get the cocoa-nut, I'll bet."

"That's it, Shorty; that's it. Turn me over, an' prop me up. I'd like to.... Lord! man, I can see 'em there, hundreds of 'em running to beat the band. Give me the gun, Bill, quick; I must just get one; I...."

With powerless hands he took the rifle for the last time, and looked along the sights. "God!" he whimpered, "I can't hold it steady—I can't.... Shorty, Shorty, I'm wobbling all over the target."

But Shorty did not come to him. He was lying on the ground two or three feet away, with his own rifle hugged to his shoulder. "If there be anything in religion," he muttered fiercely, "let me shoot straight this time, God."

"That's all right," he shouted; "you've got him covered fine. Fire, son, fire—an' hit the perisher. You ain't wobbling."

And so Reginald Simpkins, lance-corporal and man, fired his last shot. Heaven knows where it went; all that matters is that a running grey-green figure two hundred yards away suddenly threw his hands above his head and pitched forward on his face.

"Great shooting, son, great shooting." Shorty Bill was beside him, turning him over once again on his back. "You plugged him clean as a whistle. Good boy."

The grey had spread; the end was very near. "I thought I heard— another shot—close by." The tired eyelids closed. "I've made good, Shorty, ain't I?... Honourable Jimmy... Regiment great thing... responsibility... greater...." And so he died.

IX

Shorty Bill thoughtfully ejected a spent cartridge case from his magazine and pulled back the safety catch. "I'm glad I hit him. It'll be something for the boy to take away with him. I suppose he'll remember it." Shorty's brow wrinkled with the strain of this abstruse theological problem. Then he shrugged his shoulders and gave it up. "So long, son; you made good—you did well. But the old Tank has cleared 'em out, an' I must be toddling on." Then he remembered something, and produced his own patent weapon. It was only as he actually started to cut another nick in the long row which adorned the stock of his rifle that he paused: paused and looked up.

"Lumme! I'd better wait a bit; it wouldn't never do for the boy to know it was me what hit that Hun. I'll just go on a little, I'll... Good-bye, boy; I'm sorry—dam sorry."

With his strange, loping walk the poacher and jailbird walked off in the wake of the Tank, which was now ploughing merrily forward again. Fifty yards away he stopped, and cut another nick. "Ninety-three," he muttered; "not bad. But it wouldn't never have done for the boy to have known." Undoubtedly theology was not his strong point.

Slowly, an inch or two at a time, Reginald Simpkins slithered down the sloping side of the shell hole till he reached the bottom. To the batches of prisoners coming back—just a casualty; to the reinforcements coming up—just a casualty. To the boy himself—the great price.

And so, in the shell-ploughed, gun-furrowed No Man's Land is the seed of Britain sown. And the harvest—?

PART II

I

It was about the size of an ordinary tennis lawn at the top, and it was deep enough to contain a workman's cottage. It was a crater—a mine crater. Suddenly one morning the ground near by had shaken as if there was an earthquake; dugouts had rocked, candles and bottles had crashed wildly onto the cursing occupants lying on the floor, and IT had appeared. Up above, a great mass of earth and debris had gone towards heaven, and in the fullness of time descended again; a sap-head with its wooden frames had disappeared into small pieces; the sentry group of three men occupying it had done likewise. And when the half-stunned occupants of adjacent dugouts and saps, and oddments from the support line had removed various obstacles from their eyes and pulled themselves firmly together in order to go and investigate, they found that the old front line trench had been cut in two and blocked by the explosion. About twenty yards of it had lain within the radius of destruction of the mine, and had passed gently away; so that instead of a trench to walk along, the explorers found themselves confronted with a great mass of newly thrown up earth which blocked their way. One, more curious than discreet, climbed on top to see what had occurred. He had even got so far as to inform his pals below that it was "Some 'ole," when with an ominous 'phut he slithered a few feet backwards and lay still, with his boots drumming gently against one another.

"Gawd!" A corporal spat viciously. "Wot the 'ell's'e want to go and get up there for? Don't show yerselves, and get a hold on 'is legs. That's right; 'eave 'un in."

In silence the investigators looked at the price of curiosity, and then they covered up his face and took him away. And somewhere in the Hun lines a sniper laughed gently and consumed what was left of his breakfast sausage.

Thus did the crater occur, and with it four vacancies in the roll of the South Devons. Viewed impersonally it seemed a very small result for such a very large hole; but in a performance where the entire bag of a fifteen-inch shell is quite possibly a deserted patch in an inoffensive carrot field, cause and effect have taken unto themselves new standards.

The main result of the crater was the activity produced in the more serious band of investigators who came on the scene a little later. The front line was

cut; therefore, the front line must be joined together again. The far lip of the crater was adjacent to our own front line; therefore, the far lip must be held by a bombing party. And so, through both the walls of earth which blocked the trench, a gallery was pushed by sappers working day and night, while every evening a party of Infantry crept out to the far lip, and sat inside during the night watching for any activity on the part of the Hun.

Which brings us to a certain morning when Shorty Bill sat at the bottom of the crater, and ruminated on life. On each side of him two black holes appeared in the walls of the crater—holes about six feet high and three feet wide—which led by timbered shafts to the two broken ends of the front line trench. In front there rose steeply a wall of earth, along the top of which ran a strand of barbed wire.

It was like sitting at the bottom of a great hole in the dunes, where one's horizon is the broken line of sand and coarse grass above. There was no wind, and the sun warmed him pleasantly as he lay stretched out with his tin hat tilted over his eyes. The fact that there was nothing but fifty odd yards between him and the gentlemen from Berlin disturbed him not at all; the fact that he was thirty odd yards in front of our own front line disturbed him even less.

The sun was warm, the sky was cloudless; he had breakfasted well; and—this was the main point—he was in possession of a letter: one might almost say the letter. It had come with the mail the previous day, and as Shorty's correspondence was not of the bulk which had ever caused the regimental postman to strike for higher wages, it had occasioned consider able comment. And spice had been added to the comment by the fact that Shorty had just returned from leave in England.

Shorty, however, was not to be drawn. Completely disregarding all comments, scandalous and otherwise, he had placed the letter in his pocket, to ponder on and digest at a future date, when separated from the common herd. And now, with his eyes half closed, he lay thinking at the bottom of the crater. Beside him, close at hand, was his rifle; and though to a casual observer he might have seemed half asleep, in reality he was very far from it. Almost mechanically his eyes roved along the edge of tumbled earth in front of him; his brain might be busy with things hundreds of miles away, but his subconscious mind was acutely awake: watching, waiting—just in case a Boche head did appear and look down on him from the other side. Shorty didn't make mistakes; in the game across the water it is advisable not to. More over, other people did make

them, and had you looked at Shorty's rifle you would have seen on the stock a row of little nicks—cut with a knife. Those nicks were the mistakes of the other people...

Short, almost squat, with a great scar across his cheek, due to faulty judgment as to the length of reach in a bear's fore paw, he looked a tough customer. He was a tough customer, and yet those grey eyes of his, with the glint of humour in them, told their own story. Tough perhaps, but human all the while. A man to trust; a man who wouldn't let a woman or a pal down. And as an epitaph few of us will deserve more than that: many will ask for less—in vain...

A noise behind him made him look round, and a man stepped out of one of the wooden galleries.

"Hullo, Shorty," remarked the new-comer. "You're here, are you?" He sat down beside him and stretched himself comfortably. "Nice and warm, it is, too."

For a moment Shorty did not answer, and then he spat reflectively. "What was it you taught them guys at Oxford, son?" he remarked gently.

"Higher mathematics, Shorty. A dull subject, and sometimes now I wonder how the devil I ever stuck it."

"Was it much good to 'em?" Shorty's tone was still soft and mild. "Were you one of the big noises at your school?"

The new-comer shuddered slightly. "We will pass over the word school, Shorty," he gulped; "and as for the other part of your question, I dare say other people would be able to answer you better than I can."

"Wal, I guess it cuts no ice either way. But if you intend to go back, if you're a sort of national institootion like Madame Tussaud's waxworks or the Elephant and Castle, you'd better be making tracks for your ticket now."

John Mayhew, sometime tutor in the realms of the purest and highest and deadliest mathematics, who would keep his pupils occupied for an hour trying to follow one step on the board, looked at his friend in mild surprise.

"I don't want my ticket now, Shorty."

"Oh, don't you? I was thinking I could come and certify you as being insane." Shorty sat up and scowled. "After all these months, training you and turning you into a man—wasting me time on you showing you tricks, an' little ways of making the other man pass out first—you goes and comes into this blinking crater same as if you was blowing into a fancy resturant with your glad rags on. Yer gun hung over your shoulder, yer 'ands in yer pockets—singin' a love song. Oh, it's cruel!" With a hopeless gesture of resignation he dismissed the subject, and lay back once again.

"But, damn it, Shorty, I knew you were here." There are many undergraduates who would willingly have given a month's pay to have seen John Mayhew's face at that moment. Men who had battled on paper for hours, only to confess themselves utterly defeated; men who had heard John's famous remark, "Well, gentlemen, I can supply you with information, but I regret that I cannot supply you with brains," would have given a month's—nay, a year's pay to have seen him then. Utterly crestfallen, he contemplated the irate little man beside him, and confessed miserably to himself that his excuse was poor.

"Knew I was here!" Shorty Bill snorted. "You didn't know nothing of the blinking sort. You never knows where I am. There might have been a crowd of Boches in here for all you knew. Come round a corner, I tells yer again and again, unless you knows yer all right, with yer gun ready to stab or shoot. Don't go ambling about like a nursemaid pushing the family twins."

John Mayhew preserved a discreet silence, and for a while the two men watched an aeroplane above them, and listened to the 'plop of a British Archie, which was apparently trying to hit it. A cannon-ball from one of our 60-pounder trench mortars passed overhead, its stalk wobbling drunkenly behind it, and from the German trenches came the dull crack of the explosion; while away down the line a machine gun let drive a belt at some target. But everything was peaceful in the crater: peaceful and warm...

"What have you got there, Shorty?" Mayhew broke the silence, after watching his companion for a while out of the corner of his eye. Clutched in Shorty's hand was the letter, at which every now and then he stole a furtive glance.

"A letter from a little gal I met in England, son. Nice little gal."

"Good. Are you going to get spliced?"

"Wal, I dunno as she's that sort." Shorty Bill frowned at the sky "She ain't...wal...she's not..." He seemed to have some difficulty in finding his words.

John Mayhew smiled slightly; for a mathematical genius he was very human. "I see. But perhaps if we never do anything worse, Shorty, than she's done, we'll not do so badly."

Once again did his companion sit up. "You're right, son: right clean through. They're the salt of the earth some of them girls; and I reckons it was our fault to start with. Care to see?" He paused and went on shyly, "Care to see what she says?"

In silence Mayhew took the letter, and for a second or two his eyes were a little dim. The cheap scent, the common pink paper, the pathos of it all, hit him—hit him like a blow. Two years ago he would have recoiled in disgusted contempt—the whole atmosphere would have struck him as so utterly commonplace and tawdry. But in those two years he had learned in the Book of Life; he had realised this his pre-war standards did not survive the test of Death: that they were the things which were cheap and tawdry. He had got bigger; he had got a little nearer the heart of things...

"DERE BILL" (so ran the letter), "I likes you: better than any of the others. Why have I got to do it, Bill? I hates them, and a lady come down to-day and give me a track. Blarst her! It will always be you, Bill. Come home soon again. ROSE."

"P.S.—Am nitting you a pare of socks."

The letter dropped unheeded from Mayhew's hand, and his mind went back to his own leave. Then again it was the woman who had been all that mattered. She didn't use cheap scent or pink paper—but...

"It's a leveller," he muttered. "By God! this war is a leveller."

"What's that, mate?" demanded Shorty, picking up his precious letter. But John Mayhew made no answer; he was back with his thoughts...back on leave...

A little picture came to him, a picture full of that Cursed cynical humour that chokes a man, and then makes him laugh—with the laughter of a man who is in the pit...

The man had driven up in a taxi just in front of him. He got out and his wife stood by him while he fumbled in his pocket for some money. Then the girl—she was just a girl, that's all, with the suffering of the world in her eyes—leant forward and touched his on the arm.

"I think, Bob, I'd like him to wait, old boy. I don't want to have to go looking round for one, after..."

He looked at her, and she looked away quickly—too quickly. Instinctively his hand went out towards her; then it dropped to his side, and he turned to the driver.

"Will you wait for this lady? I'm going off by the leave train." He took his bag from the man and grinned gently at his wife. "Jolly good idea of yours, old thing. Let's go and find a seat."

Round every Pullman were gathered small crowds of officers and their friends, while the wooden barrier beside the platform was crowded with men in khaki and their womenkind, each little group intent on its own affairs; each little group obsessed, with that one damnable idea—"Dear God! but it's over; he's going back again."

They met on a common footing—the women. Wife, mistress, mother, what matter the actual tie in the face of that one great fact—that helpless feeling of utter impotence. For a week or ten days they had had him, and now it was the end. There was so much to say, and only such a little while to say it in; so many things had been forgotten, so many things they had wanted to ask about, which, in the excitement of having him back, had slipped their memory. And now, the system was claiming him again, the inexorable machine was taking him away.

Mayhew had wandered slowly up the platform, catching a word here and there. A small child held in her father's arms was diligently poking his face with a wet finger, while her mother, with one eye on the clock and another on her offspring, was speaking disjointedly.

"Ain't she a wonder, Bill? An' you will tell me if you gets yer parcels: I'm sending them regular. That's all right, old gal. I'll do fine."

Close beside them two flappers giggled hysterically, with their arms round the necks of a couple of gunner-drivers; and pacing up and down a youngster, with his arm through that of a white-haired man, was talk ing earnestly.

Mayhew, his seat taken, got to the end of the platform, and leaned against a pile of baggage. The stoker, smoking a short clay pipe, was leaning unconcernedly from the engine, and the steam was screeching through the safety-valve. Then, above the uproar, he heard the girl of the taxi speaking close by. To move meant being seen: and at such times there is only one man for the woman.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" she said; "but it's been good having you again." She raised her swimming eyes to the man and smiled. "I'm not going to cry, Bob—at least, not very much. You will write, old man, won't you. It's all the little things I want to know: whether your servant is looking after you, and whether you're comfortable, and if you get wet, and your clothes are mended." She smiled again—a wan little smile. "You once said you couldn't tell me any of the interesting things, because of the Censor. Dear, the things I want to know, the Censor won't object to. I don't care what part of the front you're on—at least, not much. It isn't that that I want to hear about. It's just you; you, my darling. And more especially—now." She said the last word so softly that he scarce heard it.

For a while the man looked out over the network of lines into the blue of the summer's morning. To save his life at the moment he could not have spoken without breaking down, and as a nation we do not break down in public. The night before, in the hotel where they were staying—well, that is different perhaps. And the place on which we stand is Holy Ground—so let us leave it at that...

"Of course I'll write, old thing," he got out after a bit, and his tone was almost flippant. "I always dowrite—pages of drivel."

An Australian beside him was kissing a girl whose painted cheeks told their own tale.

"Here's a quid, Kid," he was saying. "You'd better take it; it's about the lot I've got left."

"I don't want it, Bill." The girl pushed it away. "Oh, my God, what a bloody thing this war is! Have made you happy, old man?" She clung to his arm, and the soldier looked down into her eyes quizzically. "Yes, Kid. You've made me happy right enough."

He tilted up her face with his hand and kissed her lips. "Poor Kid," he muttered. "You've got a rotten life, my gal—and you're white inside. Take the bally flimsy; I wish I could make it more. I'd like to think you could take a bit of a rest. There, there—don't cry: I'll come and see you again in six months, or may be a year."

They moved away, and John Mayhew followed them with his eyes. "Pages of drivel," he repeated mechanically. "God! but this is the devil for women."

"Take your seats, please." The guard's voice rose above the din.

"Good-bye, my darling, and God bless you." For just a moment he watched the man called Bob hold her two hands, and with his eyes tell her the things which it is not given to mortals to say. Then he kissed her on the lips, and without a word she turned and left him. Once she looked back and waved—a little flash of white fluttering for an instant out of the crowd. And then a kindly taxi driver helped her to find the step she couldn't see; and the curtain had rung down once again...

"It's different for me. No one else can feel quite as we do; no one else can love quite as much." With so many that thought is predominant; to so many it seems so real.

My lady, go down on your knees and thank your God that it isn't different for you—that it's just the same. You don't think so now, but it's true nevertheless. To you—just now life seems utterly inconceivable without him. To-day it seems hideous that forget fulness can come to those we love—if the worst occurs. But the greatest gift of God is that it does come—in time...

And never forget, lady, that his understanding is greater after than before. He wouldn't have you suffer; he wouldn't have you grieve—too much. Just for a little perhaps—but not too long. He under stands; believe me, he understands. You're not being disloyal...

"What d'yer think of the little gal's letter, mate?" Shorty Bill's voice broke in on Mayhew's reverie. "She ain't altogether a devil dodger's wife, I suppose, but she's white: white clean through."

"And nothing else matters this outfit, Shorty."

John Mayhew smiled thoughtfully. "We were getting just a bit above ourselves before the war. We were thinking in 'isms. You can take it from me, old man, most of these damned rituals amount to a snow-ball in hell when you come to the goods. We were getting a bit too complicated, Shorty; we've got to get simple again. We've got the goods here, and I don't give a ten cent piece whether a man's a Catholic or a sun worshipper if he just sees straight, plays the game, and takes his gruel without whining."

"I guess you're right, son." Shorty produced a dangerous-looking pipe. "But speaking of being simple, there's a little thing I want to show you, which is an improvement on that throttle hold under the ear. An' it's as easy as falling off a log. What the devil are you laughing at?"

John Mayhew controlled himself with an effort. "You're never heard, Shorty, of the law of inherent connection. I know you hav'n't, old boy; so don't bother about it! Just carry on and show me this toe hold of yours."

II

Now with Shorty Bill killing was a science. As far as was humanly possible he had eliminated chance; and though no one can ignore the rum jar and five nine which descend impartially upon the just and the unjust, at the same time, where it was man to man, the betting was five to one on Shorty. And he specialised in making it man to man. As a sniper he had been known to lie for hours—right through the heat of the day—disguised in dirt, bits of brick, and a fly barrage, waiting for his target, immovable, seemingly a bit of the landscape. As a prowler in, strange places he had been known to disappear into No Man's Land, when the great green flares started bobbing up at nightfall, and return in time for stand to. He never volunteered much information as to his doings on these occasions; he rarely took any one else with him. But sometimes in the morning, after one of these nocturnal excursions, he might be seen on the fire step, sucking his pipe and carefully making a nick in the handle of his own peculiar weapon. It was half knife, half bill-hook, and a man could shave with it.

And so, although Shorty at the moment was ruminating on love, he had not come to the crater for that purpose only. He had a little job in his mind, which he proposed to carry out that night, and it had struck him that the crater was the best place from which to conduct his preliminary investigations. It concerned a certain sap head, and the occupants thereof, and Shorty was far too great an artist to plunge blindly into anything without a very careful previous reconnaissance.

To him, in fact, it was a sport—a game; and the sport of it lay in the bigness of the stakes. The other man's life or his—those were the points, and no abstruse doubts or qualms on the abstract morality of war ever entered his head. The game is beating the Boche; and beating the Boche, when reduced to its simplest terms, is killing him. At that Shorty left it. But to some the matter is not quite so simple; to some the slaughter of the individual seems but a strange antidote for the madness of their rulers. And theoretically they are doubtless right. The trouble is that war concerns not itself with theories. There is no good indenting for timber to build yourself a dugout, if you can comfortably pinch it through a hole in the fence round the R.E. dump. It is the practical side of the question on which a man must concentrate, before he dabbles in the theoretical; and shooting second won't help the concentration. Thus it is in hard logic; only, as I said, to some...it's difficult...

It was in a dugout, I remember, down Arras way, that the point cropped up. It concerned killing, and the German temperament, and ours, and—one, to whom killing was difficult. Leyburn started it—Joe Leyburn of the Loamshires—who was killed at Cambrai just after he'd brained a Boche with a shovel lying outside his dugout.

"When an Englishman sees red it is the result of a primitive instinct; with the German it is the direct result of a carefully acquired training. The inculcation of frightfulness is part of their military system, and from the very nature of the brutes their frightfulness has a ring of artificiality about it."

Leyburn paused and lit a cigarette. Then, after a moment, he continued thoughtfully: "There's nothing quite so pitifully contemptible as when the bluster ing frightfulness collapses like a pricked bubble before the genuine article. You can see the man's soul then, pea-green in its rottenness, and it's a sight which, once seen, you never forget. It's like looking on something rather slimy—in a bottle: a diseased anatomical specimen—pickled."

"Yes, we're a nasty body of men," remarked the doctor, "but we do our little best. Am I right in supposing that there is a story behind your words, Leyburn; or is this thusness due to port?"

Joe Leyburn grinned gently. "You unholy old sawbones," he answered genially, "have we lived together these many moons, and at the end you accuse me of thusness after two glasses. No, I was thinking of little Jack Bennett. I don't know what brought him to my mind, except that I saw an account of his marriage in the paper this morning. Does any one remember him?"

"Sandy-haired little fellow, wasn't he?" remarked the second-in-command reminiscently. "In B Company for a few days after I came, and associated, somehow, in my mind with Plymouth Brethren."

"That's the man, only Plymouth Brethren is a bit wide of the mark. His religious proclivities were quite orthodox, with no leaning towards fancy persuasions. As a matter of fact when war broke out he was in training, or on probation, or whatever occurs prior to becoming a padre."

"Reading for Holy Orders is the official designation of the condition," grunted the second-in-command; "though to listen to 'em after they've done it, it defeats

me what the deuce most of 'em ever read. Of all the drivelling, platitudinal ineptitudes—"

"Hush!" murmured the doctor. "We have a second-lieutenant amongst us. It behoves us to consider his susceptibilities."

Second-Lieutenant James Paton—aged forty-two—roused himself from his gentle doze. "So I should dam well hope," he remarked. "And if Joe is determined to inflict us with his yarn, for heaven's sake don't interrupt him, or we'll be here all night."

"I can't call it a yarn"—Leyburn's fingers were drumming idly on the table—"it's not one at all; it's only a sort of psychological fragment which bears on that subject of seeing red. I was commanding B Company at the time when young Bennett joined us, and so I naturally took a fatherly interest in his welfare. He struck me immediately as being a thoroughly good type of subaltern, and his principal job in life—the platoon's comfort—came to him naturally. He was a real good boy—the way he looked after his men, and they loved him. Number Seven he had, with Murgatroyd as his platoon sergeant—you know? the fellow who stopped one at Givenchy six or seven months ago."

"When Bennett came we were out of the line—back west of Bethune—so he had lots of time to get settled down; and he was with us three months before we went over the lid again. At the time I had no idea he was anything in the Church line. He was quiet, and I doubt if the only story I once heard him tell would have amused the doctor, but...Sit down, Pills; you needn't bow.

"As I say, his platoon was very efficient, and he seemed in close touch with them—was, in fact, in close touch with them. Moreover he preached the platoon commander's end-all and be-all with gusto: 'Kill, Capture, Wound, or Out the Boche and continue the practice.' And so it came as all the greater surprise to me.

"We popped the parapet at dawn one morning in April down La Bassee way—small show—you were sick I think, Bill?"

The second-in-command nodded.

"Everything went like clock-work, and we got our objectives with very few casualties. Bennett had gone over with the leading wave, and he was the first person I saw when I dropped into the trench. There was a dead Boche lying in

the corner, and the strafing going on was unusually mild. Bennett must have been there ten minutes before I arrived, and I was annoyed to find he wasn't doing any thing in the way of superintending consolidation. I walked up to him to curse him—and then I saw his face."

Leyburn was silent for a moment or two, and his forehead wrinkled in a frown. He seemed to be seeking for the right word. "I've never seen a similar look on any man's face before or since," he went on after a while. "For a moment I thought it was fear—craven, abject fear; but almost at once I saw it wasn't. He was standing there motion less, with his eyes fixed on the dead German. His face was working like a man with shell-shock, and his right arm holding his revolver was rigid and motionless by his side.

"'What the devil are you wasting your time for?'" I asked him. 'And what's the matter with you, any way?'

"He seemed to make a physical effort to tear his eyes away from the body, and then he looked at me. 'I've killed him,' he said, and his lips moved stiffly; 'I've killed him.'

"'And a damn good thing too,' I cried. 'What's that to make a song about? Get on with your job, and put the men on to consolidating.'

"For a time he almost seemed not to understand me; then, slowly and mechanically, he turned on his heel and walked away. I saw him once or twice again that morning, and he was working hard with his men, shifting sand bags. But on both occasions there was a look in his eyes which at the moment I hadn't the time to try and understand. Afterwards I realised it was horror."

The doctor nodded shortly. "Yes, to talk about killing and to do it are not quite the same thing. A regimental aid post would be a good and useful experience for many people I wot of."

"It was horror," went on Leyburn, "the horror of having killed a man—that expression on his face. He talked to me about it one evening after dinner a week or so later. We were alone, and he was very anxious I should understand. It was then I found out he had been going into the Church.

"'I saw him,' he told me, 'standing by the traverse—that Boche. He was looking sort of stupid and vacuous, and his jaw was hanging slack, as if he was half dazed. He was fumbling with something in his hands, and I—well, I can't say I

thought it was a bomb; I can't say I really thought about anything at all. I just saw him there, and we looked at one another. Just two ordinary men looking at one another; no heat, no panic, no nothing—only he was a Boche, and I was an Englishman.'

"I remember the boy seemed almost meticulous in his analysis of the occasion; he seemed to be trying to make a case against himself.

"'I don't think,' he went on, 'that my life was in danger. In fact, I'm certain it wasn't. It was no case of him or me; it was just two men. And then suddenly there came to me a temptation so extraordinarily strong, that I couldn't resist it. I don't think—no, I don't think I shall ever have that temptation again; but, if I ever do, the result will be the same. It was a fascination—an unholy obsession—which said to me, "You can kill that man." And I did.'

"As he said it, Bennett's head went forward towards the fireplace, and he stared at the flames. He was speaking in a lifeless monotone as he dissected himself for my benefit, and I didn't interrupt him. 'I levelled my revolver at his face,' he continued, 'and he watched me. He never moved—he just seemed dazed. I could see his eyes, and there was a film over them, a film of lifeless apathy. Then he moved—suddenly; and as he moved I fired. For a moment he remained standing, and then he tottered forward, and fell at my feet. It was then the unholy temptation left me; and I realised—what—I—had done.'

"'You see,' he told me, 'I was going to be a parson, before the war. I was qualifying myself to preach the gospel of Christ—of kindness, of mercy, of love. I was qualifying myself to be a help to other men, to be a friend who guided them and on whom they might rely. And then came the war, and it seemed to me that that could wait. It seemed to me that my job was to help those other men actively—by deeds not words; to lend a hand in getting the Hun under, so that such a set-back to what God would have on earth could never happen again. But thought of that sort is abstract. It was right, I know; I feel now that I was right—when I can get the concrete case out of my mind. That poor, hulking blighter the other day is the concrete; Prussian militarism the abstract. The trouble is that to the individual it's the concrete that fills the horizon. And, dear God,' the boy got up with his hand to his forehead, 'as long as I live, the picture of his face will haunt me...'"

For a while we were all silent, while Joe Leyburn filled his pipe. Then the doctor spoke thoughtfully. "I've seen 'em like that too; in a C.C.S. some times one hears a man raving. It's much like one's first operation as a student."

"No, I'm damned if it is," answered Leyburn.

"Then it's the natural dislike to seeing blood and mess; with young Bennett, it was something a good deal deeper. It was futile going over all the time-honoured, hoary arguments, about a sense of proportion, and the fact that there is a war on, and we're out to win it, and that there's only one way to do so. He knew all that as well as I did. His trouble was that the individual's outlook had swamped the big one: he was endowing Germans with a personality. A fatal mistake; it can't be done. If the other man surrenders—well and good; you can dabble in his personality then to your heart's content. But if he doesn't, you've got to kill him; such is the law—and the fact that Bennett's first effort appeared to have been half-baked was—well—unfortunate. But as I pointed out to him, where the laws are brutal and primitive, you don't dally over their execution. The thing has got to be done, however much he disliked it. It was what he'd let himself in for, and there was no more to be said on the matter. Moreover, if he did say anything on the matter, he would be failing in his very obvious duty.

"I took that line—it seemed to be the only possible one—and the boy listened to me in silence. When I'd finished he shook his head.

"'It's only because I know that what you say is right that I haven't gone off my chump,' he said quietly. 'With my brain I know you are correct; with my brain I know one can't stop to talk about the weather when you meet a Boche; but, with my soul, I see a woman and some kids and a half-dazed stupid face, and she'll be waiting and waiting, and—I did it.' He got up wearily. 'Don't worry, sir,' he said; 'I won't let the company down. I expect you think I'm a fool; I'm not; but the individual side of war has hit me for the first time. And as long as I live, nothing will ever be quite the same again.'

"And that's the end of Part One. Doc, pass the whisky." We waited for him to fill his glass.

"Part Two," continued Leyburn, "is where the psychological interest comes in. I think we agree that most Englishmen feel much the same as that boy did—though perhaps not quite so strongly. His case is more or less typical in its

dislike to shooting the sitting bird, in its dislike of killing without the element of sport or danger. As a race we like to give the things we kill a run for their money. And as a race the Huns do not. With them it is merely a business, the same as it has to be with us; but there is this fundamental difference. We do it with compunction, as a matter of grim necessity; they do it without thought, as a matter of drill.

"Had the positions been reversed in Bennett's case, would the average Hun have given the matter a second thought? And so"—Leyburn leaned forward to emphasise his point—"to the casual observer it might seem that the Hun was the better soldier."

"Quite so, Joe," remarked the doctor, "but he ain't."

"As you say, doc, he ain't. But why? In that boy's case the thing he had done haunted him. He felt he hadn't played the game, and it showed for weeks in his eyes and his bearing. Murgatroyd, his sergeant, noticed it—and Murgatroyd was a shrewd man.

"'Let him be, sir,' he said one day to me. 'He just wants a bite in the nose—like as 'ow a terrier wants a nip from a rat—and he won't know himself." Murgatroyd was right.

"It took place on the Somme just beyond Fricourt. I'd taken one through the knee, and was lying out watching. Suddenly I saw a Boche—a great hulk ing-looking blighter—with the utmost deliberation shoot two of our wounded who were lying in a shell hole. Then he started crawling away with his revolver still in his hand. Just a business—you see—a drill. I was reaching down to pick up a rifle from a dead man beside me when I saw young Bennett. He'd got up and—regardless of the strafing—he was making for that Boche. So I pulled out my glasses and watched. His face was snarling and his teeth were showing in a fixed sort of grin; and in his hands he held a rifle with the bayonet fixed. The German saw him coming and took deliberate aim: as a matter of fact, I found out after he got him through the shoulder. But he didn't stop; he just went for that Boche with his bayonet. I saw the Hun's face, and it was white with terror. I saw his hands go up, and he was mouthing with fear. It was the slimy thing in the bottle and the red fury of the primitive man; it was fright fulness bolstered up by artificiality, and the brand that is spontaneous—up against one another." Leyburn paused and grinned. "I watched him kill that Boche four times, and then in my excitement I slipped down the side of the shell hole."

"Which is the reason," said the second-in-command, musingly, "why we beat the Hun every time when it's man-to-man. Sport versus business, leading, versus driving; there's only one answer, old boy, only one."

"Precisely," murmured Second-Lieutenant Paton, waking up suddenly. "Waiter—a lemon. I ordered some to-day specially for the grog."

But then, it's absurd to expect a second-lieutenant of forty-two to be anything but frivolous; and any way, the digression from Shorty Bill is unpardonable.

III

We left him at the bottom of the crater with John Mayhew, sedulously inculcating his willing pupil with his improved method of throttling the wily Hun when it came to close quarters. And if there was anything incongruous in this eminent pillar of Oxford diligently striving to master the art of the garroter at the bottom of the mud hole, it certainly did not occur to Shorty Bill.

"I reckons you're not quick enough, son," he murmured reflectively as for the fourth time in succession he sat on Mayhew's stomach with the weapon an inch off his throat. "Your right hand, somehow, don't seem to jump to it."

"It's rather a new departure for me, Shorty," gasped the winded mathematician. "Still—I'll get it; you mark my words, I'll get it."

With a look of determination on his face he struggled to his feet and removed some of France from his face.

"It's a thing you want a lot of practice at," remarked Shorty professionally. "You can't afford to make no mistakes. Now in your gaff—teaching figures an' all that sort of thing—mistakes don't matter. You spits on the black-board and begins again. 'Ere it's different."

For one fleeting moment John Mayhew shook silently. A sudden vision of many gowned dignitaries of various ages expectorating on their morning's labours, proved almost too much for him. Then he controlled himself, and assented gravely. If the point of view was novel to him, how much more was his novel to Shorty? And in this great citizen army of ours to-day, there is every point of view living side by side. The angles are getting rubbed off, the corners are being rounded; we're beginning to see things from the common footing. And the common footing isn't yours or mine or his—it's ours. We've all got to come into line, and realise that the big noise—as Shorty would say—of the constituency be fore the war, is a very small squeak in France. Wherefore don't laugh at the other man's point of view; quite possibly he's the one who should be the tooth-wash advertisement...

"I will try it to-night, Shorty," said John, "if I get a chance."

"Going out on patrol, son?" Shorty was relighting his pipe.

"Yes. Are you coming? It's an officer's patrol—and fairly strong."

"Maybe I'll see you—maybe not. I was thinking perhaps I might take a look at that sap of theirs by Vesuvius mine. But we'll see." Shorty once again composed himself for rest and meditation. "Don't forget, son: your right thumb under the lobe of his ear, and get it there at once. That's your weak point." With which sage utterance Shorty apparently slept.

IV

With every soldier action must come first, motive second. And with every soldier the action is very simple, though the motive may be most complex. A League of Nations may be thought about; propaganda for turning the Hun from his unpleasing rulers may be put on foot; the right of self-determination for small nations may be shouted in high places. And very nice too.

Moreover, all these abstruse problems may be discussed and thought about by the men who have actually got to do the job. In an academic way they may be considered, along with conscription for Ireland and the position taken up by the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. But they all come second. First and foremost with the soldier must come action. And while things remain as they are in this funny old world, while the Hun refuses to dislike rulers who have, on the face of it, at any rate, given him a deuced good run for his money—that action can only be of one type. Politicians may talk; novelists may decide the fate of Africa; but the soldier must either kill or be killed. In the intervals—if his mind is clear, and his brain is strong—he can follow the ramifications of intellect of those great and good men who speak so beautifully on the condition of the world as it undoubtedly ought to be. And having followed them, the poor blighter comes back to the world as it is in the shape of a carrying party for barbed wire at the R.E. dump at Hell Fire Corner. He knows—good, honest lad—how well he is being looked after. His morals, his rum, all those things which are generally a man's own private af fairs, are now the subjects of impassioned debates and hysterical societies. And he appreciates it: he would indeed be a churlish fellow who did not. His appreciation even goes to the length of wishing that he might meet some of those kindly benefactors of his—possibly at the R.E. dump at Hell Fire Corner; and that he might thank them for all they had done and were doing, and load them up with barbed wire and pickets, and lead them up the same old damned duck walk, and push 'em into the same old damned shell holes...just out of gratitude.

In Shorty Bill's case the motive was simplicity it self. And in its simplicity lay its strength. It wasn't a motive that would have been approved of by the Bench of Bishops; but then, honesty compels me to admit that Shorty would hardly have met with that approval himself. However, since he would have approved of them even less than they did of him, the matter is all square.

He very rarely mentioned any motive—he simply carried on and killed. But John Mayhew did get it out of him once, in an estaminet near the rest billets of

the battalion. It was just after the little episode of the German sap, and Shorty had been getting one or two small points off his chest on the subject of that night's entertainment.

"Never," he remarked witheringly, "have I heard such a ruddy noise in the whole of me natural. There was I—waiting—trying to catch the faintest sound, when your procession arrives like a Cook's tour. You shouts at one another through a megaphone; very near falls into the phurry sap into the bargain. What the hell was you doing, any way, son?"

"Well, Shorty," returned Mayhew, in a slightly nettled voice, "you must admit that that dead sentry wasn't a pretty thing to meet suddenly when you weren't expecting it."

"Pretty thing! What did you want—a tulip bed? 'E was a dead Hun, and that's better nor being pretty—it's useful."

"How did you kill him, Shorty," asked Mayhew fascinated.

"Never you mind, son. You might get trying it yourself, an' get boxed up. A little trick I learned from a cove in Nagasaki."

"We saw you go in on the second."

"I knows that," Shorty's tone was aggrieved. "It was a question of move, and move damn quick. He'd got a flare pistol in his lunch hook when I fell on him, and your little crowd would have looked pretty if he'd let it off."

Mayhew pondered thoughtfully. "The officer lost his way; his compass went wrong," he remarked after a short silence.

"Compass!" The withering scorn of Shorty's voice must have put out for ever the luminous glow of that painstaking instrument. "'E didn't want no compass; 'e wanted a nurse." With which the conversation languished.

"Do you often go round on your own like that, Shorty?" asked his companion when he had seen to the replenishing of both glasses.

"Sure thing. I reckons it's the greatest sport in the world; and besides that, I hates them bloody Huns."

The two great fists spread out over the table clenched, and for a while Shorty looked out of the window in silence. "I hates them: hates 'em like poison; and if I can reach three figures in them I've killed, before they outs me, I reckons we call it 'quits.'" Again he paused and looked out on to the street, where the lorries came bumping by and the men strolled aimlessly about. "I had a young brother," he went on after a while, "a young fellah who was doing well in England. He was in the clerking department of some big crowd in London; messed about with figures did my young brother—same line as you."

John Mayhew bowed silently.

"When this dust-up come along Jimmy was off like a scalded cat to the nearest recruiting office: chucked up a job worth three pound a week without a by-your-leave. An' mark you, son, 'e was the goods was Jimmy. Different sort of cove to me. I guess I'll never be no great shakes; but Jimmy—'e might have done wonders. Steady and respectable; church on Sundays; in fact, I did 'ear that once he took round the bag. Which shows what he was for a young man." Shorty gazed at his companion in a kind of hushed awe, and Mayhew controlled himself.

"Undoubtedly, Shorty," he murmured. "Undoubtedly."

"Wal, as I says, Jimmy hops it—church, bag, clerk ship, everything—hops it and joins up. I was over in 'Frisco at the time, and I come belting back to try and git in the same crush. And then when I lands I goes off to see the old people. Of course, I didn't cut much ice there." Shorty paused, and the tragedy of the rolling stone showed for a moment on his face.

"He didn't cut no ice at home; everything revolved round the younger brother, who was respectable. And Jimmy was missing. So they told Shorty, the ne'er-do-well who had come to them out of the back of be yond, with the tears flowing down their furrowed old faces.

"Jimmy was missing and wounded, and then they told the old folk that he was a prisoner of war."

Shorty drained his glass, and started to fill his pipe. "They sent him to Switzerland after a while," he said quietly, "and then he came home. Jimmy came home to the old people—came home to die. But before he died I saw him: the Colonel, he give me special leave. And when I saw him he told me what

they'd done to him in Germany." For a moment the veins stood out in his neck, and his thoughts seemed far away. "That's why I hates them—the swine."

It may not be Christianity—but war is not Christian. It may not reflect credit on our vaunted civilisation; neither does war. It's not a pretty subject; it may not help us any nearer the coming Dawn. From an intellectual point of view the slaughter of a Boche infantryman in the front line trench has nothing much to do with the ill-treatment of a prisoner behind. But to-day—more than ever—it is not intellect that rules the world. It is sentiment, emotion, call it what you will—a feeling that springs from a deeper source than the brain. And with Shorty that sentiment was revenge. An eye for an eye was his motto—and he didn't wait for the eye to come to him. He went and took it.

"They took him, and they dumped him in a cattle-truck, son," he went on after a moment. "It was thick with filth, and there were fifty of them in it. For three days and three nights they kept 'em there—not allowing 'em out once. And Jimmy was delirious and his wounds were gangrened. They had no food, nor no drink; and when they got to their destination they was pulled out and lined up—them as could stand. Jimmy lay down, and a nice-looking woman come up to him, smiling all over her blarsted face, with some water.

"'Water, my poor boy,' says she, all kind like.

"Jimmy puts out his hand to get the cup, when that she-devil chucks it in his face—and then, not content with that, spits on him. Gawd's truth, if I could ever meet her." Once again the veins stood out on his neck.

"But maybe I've killed her brother, or her husband—or the brother or husband of one of them swine, any way." He paused to gain comfort from the reflection.

"Then, when they got him to the horspital, Jimmy, 'e couldn't walk. So they puts 'im on a stretcher, and carries him in. An' every few yards the swine in front says something, and the pair of 'em dropped the stretcher. An' 'im with his leg all shattered and gangrene set in, and a chip out of his head as well. When he moaned they kicked him; and the Red Cross women laughed—laughed like hell.

"When they got him inside they give him a bit of black bread and some coffee in a tin what 'ad been used as a slop pail, and flung him down on a board without no blankets—nothing. Then they left him for two days without going near him.

And the place was stiff with doctors. I'm glad I saw him and heard about it before the youngster died."

Shorty Bill's eyes glowed sombrely, and John Mayhew waited in silence. "I likes it—it's sport; but it's more than sport, son, with me—it's me duty to Jimmy."

With a brief "So-long," he rose and passed through the doors into the sunny street, and Mayhew watched him, with his long uneven stride and his great arms hanging loose by his side, threading his way through the traffic. And after a while he too rose, and went outside. There was a hill—a hill with grass on it and a little copse at the top, close by the village—and he turned his steps towards it. John Mayhew wanted to think...

One or two of the men in his platoon hailed him as he passed them, but Mayhew hardly heard them, and they took no further notice of him. Even in the strange mixture of our army to-day he stood apart from the others, and they recognised it. There was no trace of condescension about him, but their ways were not his ways—their ideas not his. By nature a dreamer, and at the same time intensely analytical, John Mayhew was wont to subject his most cherished visions to a very searching inward examination. Shorty Bill's rank but splendid materialism had brought forcibly to his mind, once again, the old question of the why and the wherefore of this thing that has come upon us. And it was not the cause so much perhaps as the effect which he was turning over in his mind as he reached the trees at the top of the hill, and lay down on the grass with his face turned towards the east. Far away, on the horizon, almost invisible in the haze, half a dozen sausages floated motionless; while the mutter of the guns was hardly audible above the buzzing of insects and the chattering of a family of tits who were anxiously awaiting "Feed away!" to sound...

The knock-out blow—Shorty's doctrine pushed to its logical extreme...Mayhew turned over on his back and closed his eyes. Was it possible, was it probable, was it worth it? Why, of course; for what else was he fighting? The crushing of militarism in Prussia, was not that the avowed object of this war? They had brought it on themselves; they were the aggressors, and as such they deserved all they got. In fact, they could never get all they deserved. Always would they owe a debt to posterity, a debt for ravaged cities and shattered homes, which no crushing defeat could ever repay in full. They had forfeited the right to be judged as free men; they had deliberately elected to assume the role of vandals and domineering bul lies. So be it; the course was plain. They must be crushed, and only with their crushing would rest and goodwill return to a

blood-stained world. Even as they had crushed Russia, so must they in turn be crushed. Let it be an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; for then, and then only, would there be peace. Mayhew smiled cynically. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, and he asked himself one question. Supposing the inconceivable happened, and England was the one who was crushed—would there be peace?

For ten years, perhaps twenty—even fifty. But what then? Can there be peace by repression, by conquest—permanent peace? What of Russia, when in the years to come she gradually comes into her own again, and finds herself encircled by the bonds of a conqueror? Will there be peace then? What of Alsace and Lorraine? Did the victory of '70 bring peace with it—permanent peace? And yet both nations, Russia to-day and France yesterday, were crushed militarily...

Mayhew leaned on his elbow and lit a cigarette. The thing was not on the level. With Russia and France it was the aggressor who had won; in this case it was going to be the aggressor who was knocked out. That made a difference. Right and might with them had been on opposite sides; in this case they would be hand in hand. Once more did he smile cynically. The question of Right takes people different ways. The white figure of Truth is apt to appear green to one beholder and speckled to another, according to their points of view and digestions. And immeasurably foolish though they may be, there seemed to him but little doubt that the Germans regarded Right as being on their side: a point of view which the friendship of the Kaiser with the Almighty and developments on the Eastern front had done much to strengthen. Which brought our philosopher back to the beginning of the vicious circle once again. Entirely owing to their failure to grasp an elementary truth, even when a triumphant army of W.A.A.C.'s marched down the Unter den Linden, the Germans would present the same proposition to us as France did to them in '70. Which undoubtedly made things "cruel 'ard," for a self-respecting idealist who in his spare time was being coached by Shorty Bill in the methods adopted by Levantine Greeks for shortening the lives of those who displeased them. So much for Might triumphant alone...

Mayhew lay back once again on the grass and turned to the other end of the picture. And having regarded it for half a second he laughed shortly and threw away his cigarette. It may be true that this world would be a better, purer spot if Right always came out on top, though it would undoubtedly be more boring. But since the world has no desire to be either better or purer, the triumph of

Right, unassisted and unadorned, must remain for the present the exclusive property of a large body of novels of revolting sentimentality, and the means by which the top-hatted villain is foiled in the Cornish fishing village by the funny man of the play, ensconced in a hollow tree.

There are some who say that Russia has tried the policy of Right in the abstract. Let us not argue on it: even if they be correct, her present condition is all there is to be said about it. In the days to come she will add Might to that Right, even as France has done to-day. But in the meantime...No, that won't do. Worse far than any conquest and repression, would be a peace of that nature; an attempt to impress on the Hun, by our beauty of character only, that we are right and he is wrong, and that for the future peace of Europe we should like him to agree with us. He won't. No more should we in his place...

"Put it how you will," muttered Mayhew to him self, "if you're going to have another war in thirty years, it's better to be top dog during the preparation period."

And that's the point. Must the legacy of this carnage over the water be left for our children to realise all over again? Is there no method by which in truth this can be made the war to end wars? In all its details it is so utterly repulsive and hideous; in every respect it is so utterly insensate and cruel.

To achieve the result by the lofty raising of the banner of Right is the wild vision of the fanatic; but to achieve it by the military victory of Might alone is equally futile. There must be a combination of the two if there is to be a lasting peace. There must arise in the hearts of the great mass of Germans the certain knowledge that war does not pay. They themselves must acquiesce in the decision of the rest of the world—willingly or unwillingly—but they must acquiesce. They must see Truth as we see it, and we must see it as they see it. For if there be any rancour left on either side—and it is hard to see how the world will escape it—we are but laying up for ourselves the seeds of another war, more damnable even than this.

Only by Might can they be made to see that it does not pay; only by a fresh view of Right can they be made to realise that it ought not to pay.

John Mayhew rose and stretched himself, and with a final glance at the silent balloons which watched the Madness of Men, he strolled down the hill.

"Shorty," he said, as he marked down that worthy buying a picture postcard, "come and give me a bit of practice in that neckhold again."

"Sure thing, son. Feeling bloodthirsty?"

Mayhew grinned. "So so. But I've been thinking on abstract subjects since I last saw you. Might and Right—and how to combine 'em into a working scheme. It's Might first, Shorty, and Right is amongst the also rans—as far as we're concerned. And any way, if we are all at it again in thirty years, I'll be a special constable guarding a brewery by then."

V

There are many degrees of nearness to the Hun in France, and each is, sooner or later, occupied by a battalion. It may be in the line, where the principal worry is the rum jar of German extraction; it may be right out, thirty odd miles, where the principal worry is the absence of the rum jar of the homelier English type. It may be in brigade reserve; it may be existing beautifully as part of the divisional reserve a bit farther back, troubled only by aeroplane bombs and the Royal Engineers, who unceasingly demand men wherewith to carry on their nefarious designs.

And of all these different localities perhaps that which strikes the sharp contrasts of war most fully, is the one, three, four, five miles behind the front line. Up in front is silence and desolation. No living thing moves above ground, and only the tumbled earth and the ceaseless bang-bang of trench-mortar bombs show that it is populated. Away right behind every thing is normal. Save for the presence of khaki every where the villages are as they were before the war—as much out of it as if they were in England. But in that strip, which is out of it and yet not out of it, which is in it and yet not in it, there comes the con trast. Everything goes on as usual—or almost as usual: shops are open, business thrives. Occasionally a house disappears as a Boche aeroplane circles high overhead, or a long-range gun gets a bull. But those who live close to are used to that, and almost be fore the dust and debris have come to earth again, les autres are carrying on. It may be their turn next, but c'est la guerre...

And to these towns there come officers and men from the front, who try and pretend for the afternoon that there is no such thing as war. For the men there are recreation rooms run by the Y.M.C.A., that society whose name is for ever blessed, and the record of whose work in France should be blazoned to the ends of the earth. For the officers there is a club.

It is not what the Londoner would expect to find as a club. To the habitues of the Bachelors and the Carlton its general appearance would in all probability create a strong desire to have their money back. Not that it is very much: ten francs procures for you a card which constitutes you a member for six months; a hundred would doubtless make you one for life, with an option on the premises themselves thrown in as a make-weight.

Two or three years ago it was the eminently respect able abode of an eminently respectable lawyer, who practised in that country town in France, as his father

had done before him. They were of the North, the family of Monsieur l'avocat: a hard-headed, shrewd family, as is essential when the clients are workers in the manufacturing districts. And then there came the day when ordinary business stopped, and men stood about in bunches at the street corners, and discussed the thing that had happened. One by one, as the days passed by, the men disappeared—clients and lawyer, patients and doctor, they went into the unknown world of war, leaving the women behind to carry on. At times they return "en permission"; at times the news comes through, and a woman, wild-eyed and staring, rocks to and fro and tries to realise it. Verdun;—le Chemin des Dames—what matter where it happened? It has happened, and that is all that counts to her...

But with Madame l'avocat things were better. If you go into the house, and force your way through the coats which almost meet across the entrance pas sage, you will find a large soldier who sits at the receipt of custom. He is possibly a Highlander, possibly a Cockney, who has been lent to Madame for the time, to assure her that the official eye still smiles upon her. He sits in a little alcove off the hall, and removes your coat and ten francs, should you fail to convince him of your membership. After that the world is open to you. On your right a barber snips ceaselessly in what was doubtless Monsieur's study, and anoints your head—unless you are firm—with powerful unguents closely resembling a gas attack. On your left the dining salon, bar, smoking, and ping-pong room combined extend to you their hospitality. And there Madame may be seen at certain hours of the day, imparting some much-needed ginger to vari ous attendants, both male and female.

One cannot but be struck by the sound common sense of Monsieur in taking unto himself such a wife. Not beautiful—true; but is beauty required in the wife of a lawyer whose clients are coal-miners? No, no; to Madame the far better and rarer quality which enables her to cover, with perfect affability and charm, the fact that she is fully aware of how many beans, marbles, or vegetable-marrows must be produced to make the total up to five.

Her husband will doubtless be coming on leave some day, and in the meantime everything is going on very nicely. Thus does she give you to understand, as she passes from table to table. Anxious—mais non. She shrugs her shoulders, and one agrees with her. Cui bono? indeed; especially as there is a suspicion that Monsieur is very comfortably employed in Paris, where his ideas on the subject of beauty may or may not be undergoing revision.

In the meantime, what a man of common sense he is...

"Mais, monsieur, this ees no use. C'est napoo." All-enveloping, and magnificent, she politely sorts out the one-franc Rouen note and hands it back to its un happy owner, who smiles at her ingratiatingly.

"Mais, madame," he begins gently, "it's no bally use to me either. Ce n'est pas napoo; c'est tres bong."

"Oui, monsieur—c'est tres bon—en Rouen."

"No go, Ginger; stung again, old man." His fellow luncher grins at Madame. "It's his hair, Madame, chevaux jaunes, n'est-ce pas?"

She smiles benignly, and nods her head. What yellow horses have got to do with the question is a little obscure; but as she has long given up the slightest attempt at understanding the remarks addressed to her in French, the point is immaterial. A good one-franc piece has been substituted for the dud Rouen note, and Madame is happy. Every one is happy, in fact—Monsieur in Paris, and the ping-pong players, and the man with a good number of La Vie Parisienne seated by the bar drinking a strange and wonderful concoction called a cocktail. It is made by a little boy—a fat little boy—of incredible impudence, and is un like any cocktail ever before thought of. But what does it matter? What does anything matter save the fact that for a while you are back six miles odd behind the trenches? This evening a motor lorry will bump you up the road till you come to the dead villages, where men live in cellars and one-time houses are heaps of bricks. Guns will bark angrily all round you—angry spitting field guns from cunningly concealed positions: big ones sedate and stolid, from behind houses and coal stacks, where you least expected them. You will curse an Archie which you pass on the road for completely deafening you; and should you know its owner you will endear yourself to him for life by asking him what he is shooting at. You will do lots of things before you finally sit down to dinner in the company mess; but that is all—this evening. Just now—well, Madame is happy, and so are you, in the little club six miles behind the lines...

What matters the job that night? What matters the unpleasing conviction that you are for that delightful solace to the weary—a working party? Is not that the reason you came out to rest?

There is activity up in the dead land; there are rumours in the air that things are going to happen. And before things can happen, things where the theories of Shorty Bill are tried on a big scale, and Might comes into its own, many preparations must be made. This is no war of battle-axes and brute force; it is a war of science, and no unnecessary chances. It is a war where preparation fills 90 per cent, of the time. And those preparations are many and varied, and the success of Might depends entirely on their accuracy.

For instance, if you had wandered along Devon Lane on Monday morning you would have arrived at the junction in Number 23 Boyau—popularly known as "Fritz's Own" owing to the large number of dead Huns who graced it with their presence. You would have perceived Number 23 forking away left-handed to the front line thirty or forty yards ahead; you would have seen Devon Lane, under its new name of Number 22, doing the same thing towards the right. Only, as the wooden notice-boards conveying these mystic numbers had long ago been burnt for firewood, and the new tin ones had not arrived, all that you would really have perceived on Monday morning would have been the junction of two streams of liquid mud, lying stagnant and grey between their chalky walls. Here and there a few sand bags had fallen in, forming a sodden brown island at the bottom of the trench; here and there the decaying end of a trench-board sat up and laughed. If you stood on it, the other end, working on the principle of a see-saw, arose and knocked you down; if you didn't stand on it, you drowned. Which all goes to show that it was an excellent spot to spend Monday morning.

Firmly gripping his waders with both hands as he took each step, an officer plucked his way along the morass until he reached the junction. Arrived there, he leaned against the side and carefully examined a trench-map which he produced from his pocket. Then once again he struggled on up the right-hand branch of the fork. A. went perhaps twenty yards, and then he stopped, and cautiously peered over the side. His eyes searched the flat sea of dirt and desolation in the hope of spotting some landmark which would serve him as a guide for the job that had to be done that night. But the quest was hopeless, and after a moment or two he felt in his pocket for his compass. Taking off his steel helmet—for accuracy was essential—he made a rapid calculation.

"True bearing of the bally trench, one hundred and twenty degrees," he muttered. "Compass bearing—one hundred and thirty-two. That will bring us near that little mound, and—"

Ping-phat! With the agility of a young lamb the officer descended into the trench and replaced his tin hat.

"Taking the air, sapper?" said a voice behind him, and the maker of calculations turned to find the second-in-command of the battalion holding the line grinning gently. "Methought I heard a little visitor up there."

"Of course, James," returned the sapper in pained surprise, "if your snipers are so singularly rotten that they allow the Hun to interrupt me in my work, no one can blame me if the assembly trench is laid out wrong."

"Is this where we start from?"

The major thoughtfully filled his pipe.

"A cheery trench to get a working-party up at night?" he continued.

"Better to bring 'em up along the top. Our friend yonder will have closed down by then." The sapper replaced his map. "But I'm thinking we'll have some casualties to-night."

And of all casualties perhaps the working-party ones are the most unsatisfactory. In an attack a man is up and doing; he is moving, and he has a chance of doing the killing himself. In a working-party, when the men are wiring or digging, it's a different matter. They are shot at, and they cannot shoot back; they are killed, and they cannot kill back. And yet without the working-party, without the trenches where the other men later may assemble before an assault, the attack is bound to fail. The dull preparations—out of the limelight—are as important as the final job—on the day. Such a little thing may cause such a big difference. A trench a few degrees out of the line in which it should be may throw out the direction of one wave of the assaulting troops; may bring them askew on to their objective; may cause disaster. It is the same all through. One battalion will gain its objective with thirty casualties; the one next to it with six hundred. And the reason is one machine-gun in an unexpected place, or an officer's watch half a minute wrong. Mais—c'est la guerre!

"To your right, Sergeant Palmer. Get that tape two yards to your right." From Boyau 22 came the muttered orders to the N.C.O. who was standing on the top. Inside the boyau, with the compass laid carefully on the side to give the direction, stood the sapper officer. Glowing faintly in the darkness, the

luminous patches on the lid of his instrument showed the bearing of one hundred and thirty-two degrees, which marked the direction in which the assembly trench had to be dug. Before the infantry working-party arrived, the white tracing tape which showed them in the darkness what they had to do must be stretched along the ground. It marked the front of the trench, and on it the men would be extended at a distance of two yards. Then—dig, and go on digging till the job is done.

"That's got it. Now carry on in that line. I'll check you every fifty yards." The sapper officer came out of the trench, and followed along behind his sergeant, who was running the tape off a stick.

"Steady! Let's have a look at the direction now."

With his compass in his hand he peered steadily at the white line on the ground. "Getting a little too much to the left, Palmer. Save the mark—where's that one going to?"

Both men watched with expert eyes the trail of sparks that shot up into the air from the German lines. It was the outward and visible sign of the rum jar—so called because of its likeness in appearance to that homely and delightful commodity. Except in appearance, however, the likeness was not great. The sparks continued for a while and then disappeared as the abomination reached its highest point of flight and started to descend. You can't see it—that's the devil of it. You know it's there—above you—somewhere; you know that in about two seconds, according to friend Newton's inexorable rule, it will no longer be above you. You also know that one second after it has become sociable, and returned out of the clouds, a great tearing explosion will shake the ground; bits of metal will ping like lost souls through the night; a cloud of stifling fumes will hang like a pall for a while—a cloud which will gradually drift away on the faint night breeze. Moreover, it always happens at the moment when you're waiting that you remember the poor devil who inadvertently went to ground in the same hole as the rum jar, and who was finally identified by his boots.

"It's short, I think, sir," said the sergeant.

The officer did not answer. He was listening, waiting for the soft thud which would announce the arrival of the Hun's little message of love. Suddenly he heard it—ominously near. There was a faint swishing as the rum jar came

down through the air, and then a squelching thud. As if actuated by a single string, the two men dived into a shell hole and crouched, waiting.

"It's near, sir!" The sergeant just got out the words before it came. A shower of mud and water rained down on them, and the fumes drifting over left them coughing and spluttering. With a metallic ring a lump of metal hit the officer on his hat, and then once more silence reigned.

"Damned near! Far too damned near! If they're going to send over many of those, Palmer, we're go ing to have quite a cheery time. Where was it exactly?"

"Here, sir!" The N.C.O.'s voice came to him out of the darkness. "It's cut the tape."

Just one of the little things. Had they started from Boyau 22 a quarter of a minute after they did, that rum jar would have bagged a bigger quarry than a piece of white tracing tape.

"Knot it together. We must be getting a move on, Palmer. The working-party will be here soon."

It was a quarter of an hour later, to be exact, that the two men retraced their footsteps along the tape towards Boyau 22. No more rum jars had come to disturb them; only the great green flares had gone on continuously lobbing up into the night. From away to the south, where the horizon flickered and danced with the flashes of the guns, there came a ceaseless, monotonous rumble; but at Devon Lane all was peace. Everything was ready for the alteration of the landscape; only the actual performers, who would prepare fresh vistas for the beholders on Tuesday morning, were absent.

The sapper officer looked at his watch.

"Very nicely timed, Palmer. I hope they're not late."

VI

Now Shorty Bill liked digging as little as any one else. He agreed to the full with Oscar Wilde's profound aphorism that man is made for something better than disturbing dirt. But once get it into his head that a job had to be done, and he did it—cheerfully. And in that last word is contained the very essence of the good soldier…More than that, it is the doctrine of Life.

"Grin, son, grin." Thus Shorty's constant exhortation to all and sundry. And surely it's the only sermon that matters a curse—grin. "I guess I'm no great shakes on the religion stunt—but grin, you perisher, grin." Thus did he unofficially join forces with the padre, and they became sworn friends. Because, when two men of understanding meet little things don't matter much. It's the main big thing that counts, and on that they agreed—right away. And Shorty altered his whole opinion of the Holy Catholic Church.

It was one Sunday morning that Shorty found himself occupying a front seat in the divisional canteen, while Divine Service was in progress. In his exalted position sleep was impossible, but his mind had wandered during the performance to the relative number of notches on his rifle and his own peculiar weapon. The padre was talking, and Shorty heard him half-consciously. He was a new man, and to Shorty just a mere devil dodger like the last. Then, suddenly, came the revelation: and Shorty very nearly created a scene by cheering.

"Well, you fellows, I am not going to talk to you any more this morning." The padre shut his book with a bang. "All I want to get into your heads is the one word 'Grin.' Keep smiling, boys; be cheerful—no long faces. 'Grin.' We will now sing Hymn Number 24 in the little book—and let drive, boys, let drive. Take the top off the tent. Ah, bless the dog!..."

The remaining words of the speaker were lost in the slight confusion that was caused by a large yellow dog—temporarily running amok—which had be come entangled in his surplice, and had deposited him forcibly between two large beer barrels just behind the little platform on which he was standing. But what matter? A crack piano wheezed out the tune, the padre plucked from his face two cases of Woodbines and a cake of soap, which had accompanied him in his rapid descent, and then with his clear strong baritone he led off with the opening words. That mighty roar which conies when a battalion—or all of it that the canteen marquee will hold—starts to sing; that slow grand volume of

men's voices, which brings the glint of perhaps long-forgotten things to the eyes of those who hear, rolled out, drowning the piano, glossing over the fact that at least three of the most important notes were—in the vernacular—napoo.

The peasants, clustered in the doors of the little village street, listened silently; and though the guns were speaking just as usual, and along the pave a motor lorry was stolidly bumping, for the moment war was forgotten. Not their creed, it's true; but what are creeds and schisms when the Great Reaper is at every man's side—day and night? And if they thought of it at all, maybe they realised that the same Power Who gently receives their widow's mite, their sou, their little offering at the shrine opposite, where the glass is cracked and the weeds are growing—the Power Who in their trusting faith will bring them back their Jacques, their Pierre; even that same Power is listening to the hymn that rolls out from the tent near by. The means are different; the results are the same. A great Amen rings out into the frosty air, and from inside the tent there comes a sudden peculiar shuffling which may be heard once during every service in a military church. It is the men moving their feet to come to attention, and the signal is one note from the cracked piano. Then once again the singing starts, and the peasants nudge one another as they recognise the tune. It is the English "Marseillaise"; it is "the King." Two minutes afterwards the men stream out; hats are put on, markers are called for. A word of command, and the battalion swings away down the road; the service is over. The canteen resumes its normal appearance, and even while the padre is removing his belongings and putting them in his little bag, a stoutish gentleman of uncompromising aspect, who officiates behind the bar, comes back to his lawful domain...

Thus was formed the alliance between the padre and Shorty: which endured until death. As a clergy man of the orthodox Church of England giving tongue to the virtuous of Slupton-under-Slush, I would have reckoned him a non-starter. But as a padre amongst men, where the game is your life or the other man's, where the conversation is not that which holds in the drawing-rooms of respectability—though a damned sight less noxious in many cases—where rum and beer replace lime-juice and tea, and a man is all the better for them—there, I say, he was a prince among men. He was worth an army corps to his side.

It was his cheerfulness that was such a godsend; nothing ever perturbed him. A smiling face in France is worth a bottle of champagne every time you see it; and if a man can't smile naturally he should go into a secret place and practise daily. His conjuring entertainment, for instance, was worth a small fortune to

every one who saw it, owing to the wild hilarity which greeted it. For a few hours he helped the men to for get, which is the sole object of all the concert troupes and cinemas behind the line. They are not a sign, as some misguided individuals apparently think, that we do not take the war seriously in France: they are the very wise result of a very human man who understood the psychology of those under him. And so the padre conjured.

I have forgotten most of the tricks he failed to do—for let me say at once he was no expert. One only I remember clearly, and that was the last, though there were many others. The watch which turned into a rabbit and back again he had unfortunately smashed with a hammer owing to hitting the wrong bundle; and in the excitement of the moment the rabbit had escaped, and died dreadfully at the back of the hall. On every occasion he had named the wrong card amidst howls of delight; and then came the last one—the vanishing billiard ball.

Unabashed by his past failures, and with his face shining joyfully, the padre advanced and addressed the audience. O'Toole—the wild Irishman—whom the padre had roped in to help him, was dancing in the wings with excitement as the bonne bouche of the performance approached. For the benefit of the uninitiated I might explain that the trick consists of rubbing a billiard ball between one's hands until it gradually disappears. Its resting-place is really a small bag—hung like a sporran—of the same colour as the performer's trousers, into which, by deft manipulation, the ball is dropped.

"Now, boys," began the performer, "I come to my last trick. A wonderful trick! I have been offered thousands to give away the secret. You see the billiard ball; no delusion—a nice good-looking billiard ball. I propose to make it vanish before your eyes, by rubbing it between my hands. Quite easy; no deception. I just rub and rub and rub—and there you are."

"Only too true," murmured the colonel, as with a loud crash the ball ricochetted off the conjuror's foot, shot across the stage, and came to rest amongst the orchestra. "I only hope it hasn't smashed the big drum."

"That's the worst of these French billiard balls," remarked the performer, quite unmoved. "I'll just try it once again—with the red this time."

Once again a breathless silence settled on the audience. The padre rubbed and rubbed, and the billiard ball was slowly brought down towards its final resting-place.

"It's vanishing," howled an enthusiast from the front row. "It's gettin' smaller, every second."

Lower and lower came his hands, and the excitement became painful. As every one knew the trick, the betting on whether he'd get it in the bag or not was fast and furious. Shorty Bill was heard making a book half way down the room, in the intervals of shouting advice to his ally on the stage—and then O'Toole spoiled it all.

With a loud shout he dashed in from the wings, carrying in his hand the little bag the padre had for gotten to put on. With an agonised dive he caught the ball as it crashed, and stood up triumphantly. "'Tis gone, padre, dear, gone entoirely this trip. But 'shure I was only just in toime with the little bag..."

And thus, while he was with us, did a very gallant gentleman play the game. Always did the entertain ment finish the same way. Gradually silence would settle on the audience, and the padre—standing on the platform—would watch the rows of upturned faces through the grey blue of smoke. His eyes grave and quiet, with the kindly glint of a God-sent humour in them, seemed to search each individual heart in the room; for to each of them he was a personal friend. Gently at first, then swelling to a mighty roar, one or two of the old, old songs would roll out into the night. Not ragtime then—that-came earlier in the evening—but the songs that count, and that mean something to a man when he hears them, wherever he is, who ever he may be, saving only that he shall be British.

The songs that conjure up the red lanes of Devon, and the crags of Cumberland; the marshes of the fen country, and the rolling downs of Sussex; the songs that conjure up England to men whose steps have led them to the Lands beyond the Mountains. For they tell of the glory of our island—the glory which is eternal, the glory which can never be dimmed. And to every one of her sons they come as a whisper of what has been, is, and ever more shall be...

Then at the last the padre would raise his hand, and in the solemn hush his strong, clear voice would start some well-known hymn. Shyly at first, for the words were unfamiliar, the men would join in. To some it meant but little, to

others the years rolled away and they were back again in the mists of memory, in the land that is peopled with glorious chances. Perhaps it was the little cottage with the smell of peat in the room, and the harmonium wheezing in the corner while the sun set in a blaze of golden glory over the purple hills; perhaps it was a great cathedral, with the choir boys' voices stealing softly out of the grey dusk, and a woman kneeling close beside; perhaps it was just a nursery, and a fire, and a Mother. But whatever it was, however bitter the contrast with the present, for just a fleeting second a man might draw near to God, and in drawing near—forget. I have seen a hardened rascal, the despair of his officers, wiping his eyes surreptitiously with the back of his hand; and what matter if he was on the mat again next day?

For just a moment he had been as a little child, and there had been granted to him the tears that cast out bitterness. And there is no more precious gift...But we lost our padre, though the spirit he left be hind him will never be lost. He died as he would have wished to die, alongside the men he loved...The stretchers-bearers had brought in a remnant to the dressing-station—a remnant with the flicker of life still in it. It was beyond human aid—that poor, mutilated fragment—as it lay in the light of the guttering candles breathing in stertorous gasps. There were other things for the doctor to do: and so the padre sat beside the thing that had been a man half-an-hour previously. The padre knew his history, at least as much of it as any one did. For there are many who are not given to talking of the past...

In the ranks of the old Army one occasionally met the man whose hands bore traces of having, at one time or another, been used to the attentions of the manicurist: whose accent was not as that of those with whom he lived, whose eyes when they met those of his officer held in them that cynical glint, that name less something which told its own tale. Sometimes they made good those gentlemen rankers, and some times they found what they sought—the sniper's bullet—fighting on the outposts of Empire, at the back of beyond. More often the latter, for they were a hard-bitten crowd, and black sheep—tired black sheep—have a way of remaining black to the end.

In the ranks of the new Army, things are different. To-day, where all classes and types are bound together in the one big family of the Regiment, where the grocer's son has a commission and the stockbroker is in the ranks, the same contrast does not exist. When a private can read Virgil, and the platoon commande cannot write English; when a corporal has earned four figures annually as a flat-race jockey, and the sergeant has been in Holy Orders,

things are apt to get a little mixed. And yet even now, just as formerly, the black sheep are there. More hidden perhaps, harder to find but there just the same, with the same cynical glint in their eyes—only sometimes when no one is looking it's tired, not cynical; with the same indefinable set of the shoulder, with the same half-humorous twist of the mouth. These are not your 'Varsity experts; these are not your stockbrokers and other men of gentle birth who have joined the ranks, these are the men who have made a mess of things before the war: the men who came to grief in the game of life, and who don't care if they come to grief in the game of death...And it was such an one the stretcher-bearers had carried in. What matter their failure now? It was over—the piteous maimed thing was just part of the price.

And there are those who talk of the Glory of War, of our jesting soldiers...There can be no Glory against high explosive: the jest but covers a heart—sick or callous—according to the nature of its owner. "I...did...try." The padre saw he was speaking more through the eager look in the glazing eyes than by anything he heard.

"What is it, boy?" he asked leaning forward. Overhead the shells were carrying on the same old game of mutilation, and the roof of the dressing-station shook with each concussion.

"No use, padre. I never had a fair chance." The feeble voice carried on, and then was silent. For a few moments it seemed that the fragment had found peace—it lay so still.

The doctor paused for a moment as he passed. With the sweat dripping off his forehead he had been working continuously for eight hours, and his face was drawn and haggard. As fast as he got the men away in ambulances, others came in to fill their place. Men wheezing arid' choking with mustard gas—blistered and burning where the liquid had caught them: men shot through the stomach—men shot through the head: men with a leg torn off by a bit of a shell—men with an arm hanging by a thread. Silent mostly: though every now and then a piteous moan would be wrung from some wretched sufferer. It was hell—just a corner of it: a corner where I would that some of our wretched German lovers might spend an hour. For though it is the same on the other side—the Hun started it...

"Can you come over here, padre." The M.O.'s voice was tired. "You can't do anything there; and there's a sergeant..."

Then it came. One of the crumps that had been falling all about the aid post struck the roof. To any one seeing it from outside it was much the same as any other crump. A few sheets of corrugated iron flew upwards in the black cloud of smoke; the passers-by ducked and then passed on. But inside...no words can describe it; no brush could paint it. It was utterly hideous: a shambles—reeking and bloody. It was war; the product of Kultur. A few things crawled out moaning; but for the rest...

Thus did a Failure cross the Great Divide, with our padre at his side to help him. And thus for two days did they lie together—with those others—until Shorty brought his ally back. No one has ever heard what Shorty did during those two days and nights; no one ever will. But he came back with the padre slung over his shoulder, and a look in his eyes which for bad any questions. His head was gashed, and he had a bullet through his leg, but on his own peculiar weapon were a row of notches which had not been there before. And when, a few days later, the line once again advanced and the ground in front became the ground behind, the burying parties—callous though men be come of such things—told some strange and fearful stories of what they had found in odd shell holes. Of course it was nothing to do with Shorty; but then, the little bunch of wild flowers in a jam tin on a grave way back behind was nothing to do with him either.

VII

And now let me turn for a while to another of Shorty's friends—and one who, incidentally, was also a friend of mine. They were an ill-assorted collection—those friends of his—from a social point of view; but they all had one thing in common. They were Men—in the Land where Men are wanted. And that is enough...

I met him quite unexpectedly in the course of a wander along a slowly moving mass of sticky glue which was falsely known as a trench. Misguided optimists at head-quarters were wont to speak gaily of revetting and deepening, of constructing fire steps and building up the parados with special attention to the berm—and having spoken they concluded that it was so. It wasn't; it remained mud. It will remain mud to the end.

And so one morning, plucking my way along this delectable resort, I encountered another plucker. He was one of those who carried out the deepening programme; I was one of those who reported that he had, and if he and his laughed as consumedly over his work as I did over my reports, they must have had a merry time. With his sleeve rolled up he was delving into an apparently bottomless hole filled with slush, and I waited for him to finish. As a matter of fact I had already walked fifty yards, and being therefore completely exhausted, I sat on an island for a space and communed with the company commander who was going round with me.

It was then that the delver, having discovered the boot, mess tin, or what not which was the cause of the dredging operations, looked up, and our eyes met. Encased as he was in a layer of dried mud, I might have passed him by—khaki is a wonderful alterer of men. But a sudden grin on his face as he looked at me made me glance at him again, and instantly I recognised him.

"Well, Pete," I said, "how goes it?"

"Nicely, thank you, sir," he answered. "I 'opes yer orl rite yerself, sir."

"I've been worse," I assured him. "How's Kate? The last time I saw her, she was rather angry with me, if I remember aright."

He grinned again. "She sees things different now, sir. She was that pleased over this 'ere, there weren't no 'olding 'er."

"This 'ere," I ultimately discovered under the prevailing camouflage of filth to be the ribbon of the Military Medal.

We talked a bit longer and then we left him to con tinue the round.

"What sort of a fellow is he?" I asked my companion when we were out of earshot.

"First class—one of the best. The only trouble is that he's very intolerant of authority, especially N.C.O.'s." I grinned gently to myself. "But a good man; always doing some stunt of his own, that's got a bit of excitement in it. Did you know Smith be fore the war?"

"Smith? Is that his name," I returned guardedly. It was the second-in-command's turn to grin. "That is the name under which he has enlisted."

"A rose by any other name," I mumured. "I certainly knew him before the war, but not as Smith."

"And what was he?"

"Well—he was always doing some stunt of his own," I returned. "And he was, as you say, intolerant of authority."

We wandered on, and the conversation closed. But that evening, having reported for the fifteenth time that work was proceeding on Acacia Avenue, and that the further time required for completion was five years or the duration, my thoughts came back to "Smith." Although I have no doubt his case is not unique, yet it may be of interest to some who are students of human nature. There is no story with a plot about him; he just was and, as far as I know, is, which is all that can be said of most of us...

It was some time in 1908 that an unmerciful fate decreed that I should spend two days of hard-earned leave with an aged aunt who lived in Hampstead. In addition to having to lie on one's bedroom floor and blow the smoke up the chimney if one desired a cigarette, there had been obtained, with great forethought, a bottle of invalid port, which must have cost at least two shillings. The combination of these two things, and the hoarseness attendant on talking to her at dinner—she was stone-deaf—brought me to such a state of hilarity that I came to the conclusion the only fitting crown to such a crowded evening was to slip gently out of the dining-room window after she had retired

for the night, and repair rapidly to a night club. The matter was one requiring care, as I knew the betting was about even on me and the Cat's Home at Upper Balham for the principal share of the old lady's boodle; and I therefore decided on eleven-thirty as the earliest possible hour to start.

It was just as I was tiptoeing past the dining-room door at a quarter to twelve that I heard a movement inside, and the faint chink of silver being moved. The matter somewhat naturally I regarded as a personal affront; the silver, at any rate, would be mine, even if the Feline Sanatorium took the rest, so I faded rapidly up the stairs again to obtain a revolver, which by the merest fluke was in my kit. It belonged to a fellow who was going to shoot at Bisley, but it came in very handy that night...

Adopting a bold demeanour I flung open the dining-room door, and switched on the light.

"Keep quite still," I urged him; "but for the Lord's sake don't drop that plate about. You'll dent it."

He was a cheery-looking fellow, and he grinned all over his face.

"Put the pop-gun away, guv'nor," he remarked kindly. "It's a. fair cop, and it might ruddy well go hoff."

As I knew it was unloaded the contingency failed to frighten me.

"'Ave yer sent for the perlice?" he demanded.

"No," I said, "I have not. And provided you be have yourself I don't propose to. Sit down there at the table."

We sat down facing one another, and he produced a packet of "gaspers."

"For the love of Heaven don't smoke," I cried.

"I'd be cut out of the will for a certainty. But I'll give you a bottle of very fine old port if you like."

He accepted it, and I breathed again, which is more than the burglar did after the first mouthful.

"Gaw Lumme! wot's this?" he spluttered. "I thort you said port."

I smiled and felt better. "Sorry you don't like it," I told him, "but my aunt got it from the grocer this morning in exchange for ninety-three soup-square labels."

He looked at me suspiciously. "Wot the 'ell are you doing in a 'ouse like this?" he demanded. "The old gal don't never 'ave no one to stay—leastways, no man."

"I might ask you the same question," I reminded him, "except that the object of your visit is a little obvious. Do you usually specialise on the houses of lonely old women?"

"Cheese it, guv'nor; I've got to live, ain't I? And I reckon you're only 'ere for wot you can git out of the old trout, so there ain't much difference between us."

I confess that the point of view was novel, but as it was nearer a bull's-eye than I altogether liked, I changed the conversation.

"Is this your first effort?" I asked him.

"First! No, it ain't. I'm listed at the C.R.O., I am."

"And what may that be?"

"Criminal Records Horfice," he returned sullenly.

"But don't yer try any dam soft talk on wiv me; for I ain't taking any. I don't want none of yer repentance stunt."

I reassured him of my complete inability to preach repentance to any one, and after a while he forgot his suspicions and we talked. We talked till four, did Pete Jobson and myself, and between us we even finished the port.

The beginning had been the usual thing—foul surroundings. A temporary respite for a few pennies could be obtained at the movies, where one lives in a whirl of explosions and Red Indians, and no one moves with less than three revolvers and a bowie-knife; but temporary respites of that sort are danger ous. The high-spirited boy sees the daily round of soul-killing, slave-driving monotony to which the vir tuous of his own kind are driven, and he rebels. With a proper environment and training, possibly the result would be different; as it is, the boy drifts naturally to the almost inevitable finish. And in time he is

listed at the C.R.O.: he is a marked man, with his hand against every man and every man's hand against him.

At least, that is how he feels on the matter, and encounters with well-meaning bores, who entreat him to repent and turn from the evil of his ways, do noth ing to remove the impression. One cannot expect cause and effect to be too clearly outlined in his mind; one cannot expect him always to realise that his pres ent unenviable position is entirely his own fault—that he started the ball rolling so to speak, and he cannot complain now that society has continued the game.

"My very worst frind, from beginnin' to ind,

By the blood av a mouse, was mesilf!"

And yet, was it entirely his own fault? Are those who preach quite certain that had they started in the same position, the result would not have been the same? The question is a big one, and we are not concerned with it at present. So let us leave generalities and come to the case of Pete Jobson, as I got it from him that night.

He was a husky young devil, and possessed of a nimble brain; and had he been given a fair start he might have done well. As it was, however, at the age of twenty-one, the C.R.O. had marked him down, and the oft-waged fight began yet another unequal contest. After all, the man has such a very small chance.

From twenty-one to twenty-three the outside world had not troubled Pete. A little affair out Ealing way, a little blunder, and—the inevitable. He was met at the door of the prison by a kindly gentleman, who told him to keep up heart, and gave him a tract. And there at once you get the two sides of the case; which are both so easy to understand. That gentleman meant well—though it's a dreadful indictment to fling at any one: he meant well. Honestly and conscientiously he was doing what he thought to be good and helpful. To Pete the whole incident was as a red rag to a bull. For a tiny blunder he had been jugged for two years—two of the best years of his life; and rightly or wrongly, he felt Fate had treated him unkindly. So with great and unceasing fluency he cursed that kindly gentleman, and his tract; he mentioned other kindly gentlemen and their tracts, and then he felt better. Which, of course, was all very wrong, and showed an unrepentant spirit...But, how very natural!...

I gathered that he had a certain standard of his own—had Pete. If he relieved a wealthy Hebrew in the suburbs of some surplus table silver, and his wife of a ring or two, no one was really hurt by the transaction, and Pete was benefited. If some one was mug enough to try and spot the lady coming up from Epsom in the train, when Pete was manipulating the cards—well, surely enough has been said about the three-card trick by now to give knowledge to even the most unsophisticated.

But—one night, he had visited a house in Earl's Court, and as he was leaving with the very diminutive amount of booty he had been able to collect, the light was switched on, and a woman—a middle-aged woman—came into the room.

"I am all alone except for a maidservant in the house," she said quietly; "but would you not take that silver tray. It was a wedding present I greatly value, and my husband was killed at Majuba." Pete looked at her hard as she stood there, and her eyes met his without flinching. "You've pluck," he said at length. "I likes pluck. Why didn't yer ring up at the station?"

"Because I don't want you to be put in prison, even if they caught you." Pete looked at her suspiciously. "There are so many hundreds of people who are doing the same as you, and who live in large houses; and so many thousands who might be but for some little freak of fate, that I don't think it's fair. So I ask you as one person to another, not to take that tray. That's all."

"Strite?" The training of a lifetime is not shed in a moment.

"Straight," she answered.

"Then 'ere you are. Taike the 'ole lot back." He was gone before she could speak again; which was Pete—his way, though it was like opening an oyster to get that yarn out of him...

At four a.m. we parted the best of friends. "Come dahn to Lower Dock Halley, guv'nor," were his last words to me as he faded through the window. "The Dancing 'All. I'll look after yer."

And so one night, having nothing better to do, I went, albeit with some trepidation, to the Dancing 'All in Lower Dock Alley. Visions of mysterious dis appearances floated through my mind as I wandered through a network of unpleasant streets; and my perturbation was not diminished by the kindly words of P.C. 34, from whom I enquired the way. I think his number was 34,

though I am not sure. But I looked at him closely, I leaned upon him mentally, I felt loath to leave him—that large imperturbable P.C. 34. He exuded an atmosphere of safety which, mingled with that of fried fish from a shop near by, reminded me of home. I speak metaphorically: we are really rather particular...

"Going to Lower Dock Halley?" said P.C. 34. "Second right, third left, and I wouldn't."

"Wouldn't you?" I remarked nervously. "I've got a friend there."

P.C. 34 became professional. "'Ave you?" he said; and I fancied my reputation had suffered. "Well, don't say I didn't warn you."

I assured him I would be most careful what I said, and we parted, effusively on my part, a trifle coldly on his. I felt he regarded me as outside the pale, and the half-crown's worth of hush money I pressed into his hand failed to remove his displeasure altogether. And so I came to the Dancing Hall. It was a big room and one end was filled with small tables. At the other end of the room a piano and a violin supplied the music for the couples who danced in the open space, and without going any farther than the musicians themselves the psychologist might have amused him self for quite a while.

They were father and daughter, the players, and the girl played the piano. She had no technique, but technique is not required in an East End dancing sa loon; she had, however, the divine touch of the artist, and that is. It came from her father, who sat beside her, drawing the music of the gods from his fiddle—and drunk, hopelessly drunk.

"There was a time, sir," he would say magnificently, "when I could command my own price. The Queen's Hall, the music-halls, even the Albert Hall, I have played in them all; and now—you perceive the straits I am put to; I and my daughter—to play here!" He shrugged his shoulders magnificently. "Entirely bad luck, my dear sir, which has ever dogged my footsteps."

"Cheese it, father; it's drink, and yer damn well knows it." Wearily the handsome black-eyed girl would sit down and vamp the beginning of a ragtime stunt. "Come on, come on; no yer don't; not another till this is over."

Apologetically, with a wave of the hand which in vited you to sympathise with him in the buffeting of life, a great artist would sit down and hack out some popular rag: hack it out from a cheap violin, with hands which had once held a

Strad; hack it out with lack-lustre eyes—eyes which had once glowed with the fires of genius. But sometimes, if you were very lucky, he would forget his surroundings, he would for get everything save the gift which is God-given, and gradually a silence would settle on the room. Lost to everything save the glory of his art, he would play—that man who was. The greasy waiters would move on tiptoe, and men would stare motionless at sights which came to them out of the past, and women would let the tears pour unchecked from their eyes. For he played of the "Might have been"; and the spirit of God comes very near to all of us then—often too near for our peace of mind. But on those nights he would go home drunker than ever...

I met Pete, that first night, and he gave me the in troductions I wanted. From then on I was privileged: I was vouched for. And so it came about that often, when the conventional prosiness of London West bored one to extinction, the life of London East would stretch forth a tempting hand. An old dark suit, a flannel collar, and the atmosphere of "nothing matters"! Lord! but it came back to me that night as I reported in triplicate on Acacia Avenue...

It was at the age of twenty-seven that Pete took unto himself a wife; which, being interpreted, meaneth that he took unto himself a girl to live with permanently.

I remember the night he first met her—Kate, the girl I asked him about. The old musician had given us one of his rare outbursts, and the Beauty of the Ages was in the room. It just had us by the throat that thing he played, and Kate was at the table next to mine. She seemed utterly unconscious of any one as, with her lips parted and two great tears hanging on her eyelashes, she sat forward with her chin cupped in her hands. After a while she stirred restlessly, and her eyes came round to mine. The music was dying gently away, and her breast was rising and falling convulsively...

"Gawd! but it makes yer see things," she whispered; "things as never was, things as never will be for us."

It was then I saw Pete, standing against the wall close by. He was looking at her, and in Lower Dock Alley one does not disguise one's feelings: camouflage is unknown. The girl saw him too, but for a moment the look blazing in Pete's face made no impression on her. Back with the might have beens she was still unconscious of his existence, and only when he sat down opposite her did she suddenly realise he was speaking to her.

"Dance with you?" she said slowly. "Ain't you Pete Jobson?"

"'Ow did yer know?" he demanded. "I ain't seen yer 'ere before."

"Wot's yer line?" she said after a moment, ignoring his question.

"Wot the bloody 'ell 'as that to do with you?" His jaw stuck out, and his clenched fist met the table with a bang.

The girl threw back her head and laughed, showing two rows of strong white teeth. "I likes yer when you're angry." She looked at him appraisingly. "I'll dance with yer once—Pete." The might have been had gone; life as it is had returned.

It would not have passed muster in some drawing-rooms—that dance; in others, feeble imitations of it may be seen nightly. In Lower Dock Alley there are no dress shirts to crumple or frocks to spoil, and you dance as the spirit moves you—and the girl. A dance means something there: it ceases to be a polite form of post-prandial exercise—it becomes an expression of life.

At the end of that dance she looked at Pete's face, she looked at his eyes, and once again did she laugh quite softly.

"Good-night, Pete Jobson," she said, and her voice was mocking. "Did yer like it?"

"Gawd! my gal," he muttered hoarsely, "but you can dance." And as he spoke she was gone. He caught her at the door, and followed her out into the darkness. Then he kissed her. She did not struggle, but lay in his arms—lifeless, inert.

"Wot's the matter with yer?" he growled sullenly, as he let her go.

"This." She stood in front of him, and he could see her eyes gleaming by the light of the street lamp. "The man wot kisses me like that I've got ter love; and I 'ates you. Taike that, you—" Pete felt a stinging blow on the side of his head, and the next moment he was alone. For a while he stood rubbing his ear tentatively, and then with a peculiar look on his face he went inside again.

"See that girl I was dancing wiv just now?" he asked a pal. "Oo is she?"

"Old man Shearman's daughter," answered the other. "Lives down Box Street. But yer won't get much change out of 'er, Pete."

"'Ow the 'ell do you know?" demanded Jobson fiercely. "'Ave you been tryin' any monkey tricks with 'er yerself?"

The other crook recoiled a pace. "Orl rite, orl rite, don't get so ruddy 'uffy. I don't know nothing abaht the girl 'cept wot I've 'eard."

"Then you keep it at that, Joss Straker, or you an' me'll be 'aving words. An' the man I catch monkeying with 'er—Gawd 'elp 'im."

Thus did Pete enter the lists of the love makers. To a less sophisticated soul, the beginning might have left something to be desired, but Pete had made love be fore, and he argued that if in one meeting he could work the lady up sufficiently to say she hated him, there was hope. At least, that is how he put it to me; and now Kate has two little Petes, so it is to be as sumed he was right...

This is not a story, and there is no plot. It is just a sketchy slice from a man's life, which may show that love of adventure and not inherent viciousness is at the bottom of the minds of many of our so-called crim inals. Leaving aside the blackmailers, and one or two other branches of the fraternity of rogues, it is my con tention that they are the victims of a system over which they have no control. And the viciousness of the system is frequently aggravated by those who, with the best intentions in the world, try to make it better. Sometimes, indeed, I have wondered whether they are actuated by the best intentions; or whether a peculiar form of selfishness and self-satisfaction is not the driving force.

On one occasion, I remember, I went down to see Kate. She asked me to come; at least, I ultimately deciphered her letter to mean something of the sort. Pete was undergoing a temporary retreat at His Majesty's expense, and things were a bit strained in the house. I arrived with some food in one pocket and a bottle of gin in the other, which, of course, was hopelessly reprehensible.

In the middle of our conversation, which turned largely on ways and means and was considerably helped by the gin, a lady arrived—a district visitor—and I dodged into the scullery. It was a most improving visit, I have no doubt; and it is possible that lady went to bed that night with the virtuous glow of self-

righteousness at fever heat. But as for Kate...well, it's the Kates who are supposed to benefit...

She was a fine example—that district visitor—of what not to be. In the first place she was utterly igno rant of the practical conditions of life amongst those she visited; in the second place she sniffed—the self-satisfied sniff; in the third, she used the phrase, "My good girl." And the combination put the brass hat on. To be called a good girl is much the same as being alluded to as "a person." And people hate being called persons. To be informed that a young person has come and wishes to see one, is almost as in furiating as to be told by a frock-coated excrescence in a millinery emporium that "this young lady will attend to one's wants." One can't ask a "young lady" for a bone collar stud; it's positively indecent. Heavens above! what's wrong with the words "man" and "woman"?

The district visitor spotted the gin just as she was going, and wanted to remove it. It was that which brought me from my seat in the scullery sink, and tied things up still more.

"It's my gin"—I removed the bottle from her hand—"entirely mine. If you want some yourself there is unlimited opportunity for you to obtain some, at comparatively small cost. Good morning, my good woman, good morning."

It struck me there was nothing like assuming the offensive spirit, and carrying the war into the enemy's camp. It would have been feeble for her to call me her good man after that; so it was a case of "thumbs up," as far as we were concened. In fact, she was routed in disorder.

But it's all a long time ago, that life—in the pre-war dispensation. Things have changed now; let us pray the Powers of Common Sense that they will never revert. I like to think that perhaps I had some thing to do with the concrete fact of Pete in khaki—the mud plucker with the Military Medal hidden by the congealing filth.

It was the last time I saw them—just after the war began—that I quarrelled with Kate, and it was over that very thing—Pete in khaki—that the quarrel occurred.

It may have been the charm of my presence, it may have been the gin—and any way it is as well not to inquire too closely into matters of cause and effect—but the fact remains that these two lawless derelicts trusted me. When trouble was

afoot I gen erally got to hear of it somehow, and we would fore gather in the Dancing Hall of Lower Dock Alley. She came straight to the point, did Kate, when I saw her. Pete had recently emerged from—however, he had just emerged—and was looking remarkably sheepish.

"This blarsted fool," announced his loving wife, before even the beer arrived, "wants to 'list."

"Good for you, Pete," I said, and he grinned feebly.

Then Kate spoke. She was not polite, and soon quite a crowd had gathered, and helped end the combat with suggestions.

"Look here, Kate," I said, when she stopped for breath, "have some beer."

"I don't want none of yer —— beer," she stormed, putting away a good half pint. "Wot I wants to know is why the 'ell 'e should go and fight for them ——, wot's done nothing but put him in clink? Where the 'ell do I come in?"

"Look here, Kate," I said quietly, "you just listen to me for a bit."

It wouldn't have passed muster on a public platform, the stuff I ladled out to them. A critical audience would have torn it to shreds, especially an audience whose God was money. But one thing rose clear, one thing was certain: that the love of country—that nameless love which is the greatest driving force which the world has ever known—was not absent from the so-called criminal classes. Eighty per cent, of my audience that night had done time; eighty per cent were at war with law and order; and yet, Country—the Old Country—held them. Can the same be said of many of their more sanctimonious brethren? There was not a man there, at any rate, who would have pleaded conscience to escape his obligations, and at the same time would have been content to reap the benefits of other men's obli gations. There was not a man there, at any rate, who would have bolted to the funk-hole of indispensability in a trade of which he was completely ignorant.

They had no consciences; they knew they were not indispensable; they knew they could do one thing—fight!—and they've done it, damned well. They may be an unholy crowd, they may not conform to the strict paths of morality; but they have fought. They have sat and suffered in the Land of filth and Death for the benefit of many who regard them as pariahs and social lepers. But then, the

"unco guid" are a very poisonous and nauseating crowd. The pity is that their voice is so big...

They have found—these pariahs of ours—that authority need not, of necessity, be despotism. They have found that life can be lived without cease less war between them and their rulers; they have learned the Law of Give and Take—the great law which governs Humanity. For the first time they have left their filthy slums—their disgusting tene ments—where, huddled together in revolting con ditions, they were dragging out their drab and dreary lives.

"Oh. it isn't cheerful to see a man, the marvellous work of God,

Crushed in the mutilation mill, crushed to a smeary clod!"

So sings a soldier poet; and Heaven knows he is right. But it is worse—far worse—to think of those marvellous works of God—thousands of them; millions of them—crushed in the mutilation mill of disease and foulness; struggling, snarling, cursing, for a wretched pittance with which to buy forgetfulness for a short hour. Denied a bit of God's blue sky; denied the sight of God's green trees; sinking, slithering, writhing in the foetid pool of material degradaion—they existed for a space and then they died...And district visitors came and gave them tracts...

They wanted no tracts for their souls; first of all they wanted clean, healthy surroundings for their bodies. It was up to us their leaders to see that they got them. And we failed...

They have died—by the thousands—in France; and in dying surely they have found life. Let us look to it that those who return may also find the life they are entitled to, at home here. They have felt the Human Touch over the water—that touch which draws men very close together; that touch which smooths away the roughnesses, and helps to make the path so easy. Let us keep that Human Touch alive when we write Finis on the war.

VIII

And now—for I have wandered far afield—let us return to Shorty Bill. He was living amongst the rural delights of Passchendaele, when the catastrophe occurred. For weeks there had been peace and quiet; for weeks Shorty had wandered at odd times out into the darkness and desolation of No Man's Land, and, in due course, had returned. After some of these perigrinations there appeared a new nick on the handle of his own peculiar implement; more often the morning would find him sorrowfully shaking his head.

"Blank again, son." Thus would he greet enquiries. "Damned if I know where the perishers have gone to."

And then one morning peace ceased and throughout the salient there rained down a storm of shells big and small—gas and otherwise. It became like old times again, and every one began to sit up and take notice. Was this the much-talked-of German offensive, or was it merely the effect of the coming spring—an ebullition of joy, a friendly greeting. Zonnebeeke was plastered, Polygon Wood got back to its old form: the poor old Cloth Hall gathered in a few more for luck, while even Poperinghe took upon itself once again past glories in the shell line.

And then the news began to come through; the news which took men different ways. Some grew thoughtful—some cursed; some laughed and said it was just a flash in the pan, while others remarked that the flash seemed more in the nature of a young explosion. To each and every one according to the manner of the brute, the German break-through at St. Quentin, came differently. Not a man but had fought over the ground; not a man but knew the Somme battlefield, and the evacuated area, or some little bit of it as well as he knew his own back garden. And it was so deuced hard to understand—that was the devil of it. That it would all come right, no one—save the faint heart—doubted; but what had happened; why had it occurred?

"Coming on in masses, son," remarked Shorty one night to Mayhew, "coming on in masses, and we not there to kill them. Did you see that officer who said he'd fired three hundred rounds and killed three hundred Boches?" Shorty spat reflectively. "Not that I call that amusing gun work myself: it's merely a duty—though a damned pleasant duty." He relapsed into silence, running his thumb-nail up and down the notches on the stock of his rifle, and frowning thoughtfully.

"What I can't get at is why they've come back so far." Mayhew shifted his position in the corner of the dugout, and stared out of the door. "It's bad,

Shorty, rotten bad. If one man can kill three hundred Boches..." He left the sentence unfinished, and for a while there was silence.

"We wasn't there, mate; so we oughtn't to say nothing." Shorty spoke with slow deliberation. "It may be that when they've spent 'emselves, that French bloke will clip 'em one in the wind from the south, and cut 'em off; then again it may not."

"You must have written as military correspondent for the Press, Shorty," murmured Mayhew with mild sarcasm.

"But whether he does or whether he doesn't," Shorty ignored the interruption, "I'll bet one thing, I'd even stake this on it." With due solemnity he lifted the weapon. "I don't give a dam for the Boche numbers, though that may have had something to do with it; and cut the cackle about morning mists and such like. The root of the trouble was that the boys have forgotten their best friend, and how to use him." He held his rifle in front of him and looked at it lovingly. "That, and a new situation—now, we've no trenches. Just man to man." His eyes glistened, and his great gnarled fist shook slightly at the picture in his mind.

"And rumour, Shorty," Mayhew broke in quietly. "Boche agents telling men they were up in the air; telling parties to retire. Wind vertical every where; wind blowing like a hurricane. A machine gun poked through, and letting drive into somebody's back."

"Who let it through?" demanded his companion fiercely. "After all these years—after all these years." He seemed to be following a train of thought of his own, and for a long while he stared silently at the brazier in the corner. "Maybe we'll be down there soon ourselves, son." The advent of the mail brought him out of his reserve. Since his one letter from Rose he had never been known to get another, but he always became hopeful when the postman arrived. As usual he drew blank and returned to the contemplation of the glowing charcoal. And it was only half consciously that Mayhew—engrossed in a letter from his wife—heard his murmured words. "Comin' back! Retreatin'! God! but it's a dam tough billet to chew!"

THE END