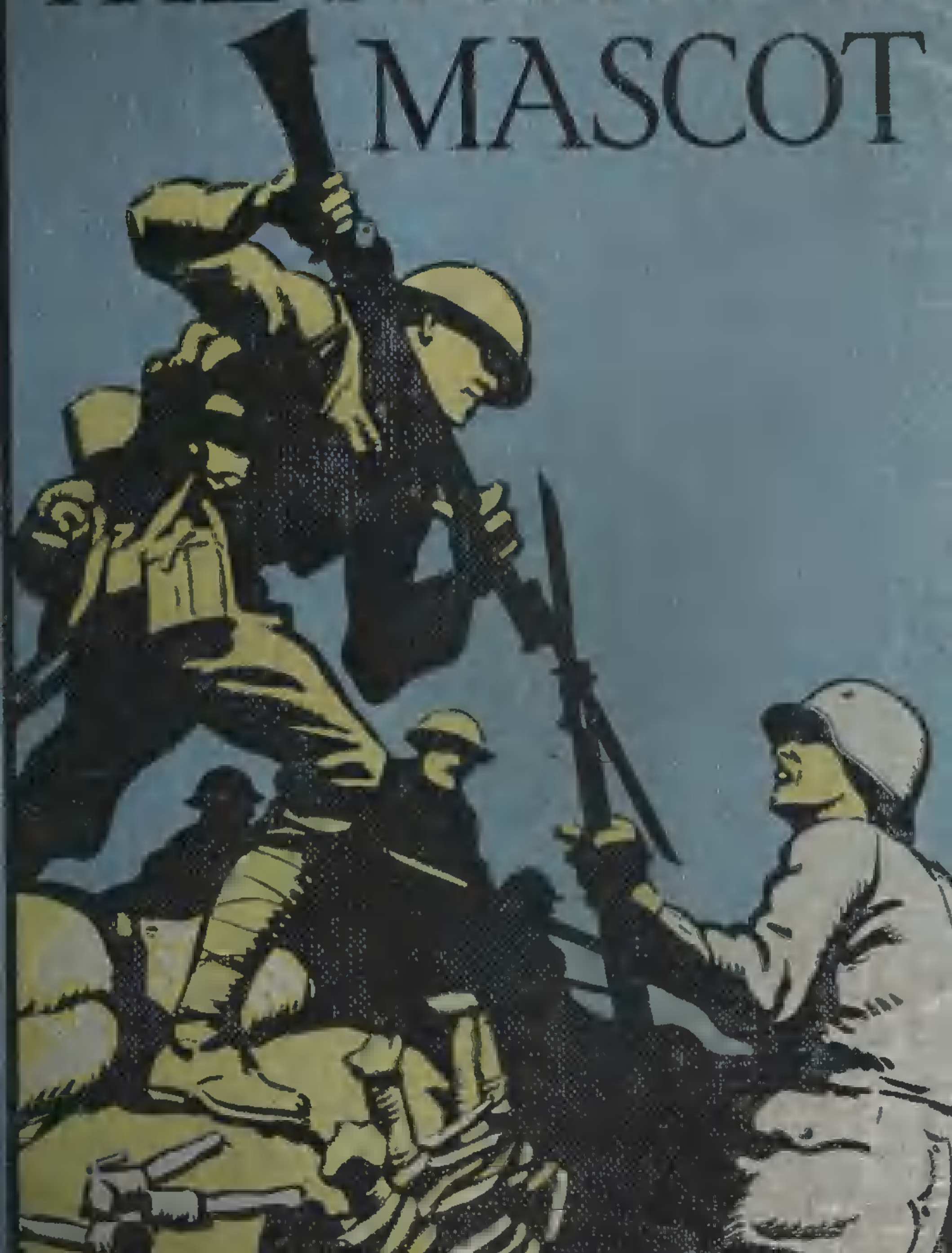
THE FIGHTING MASCOT



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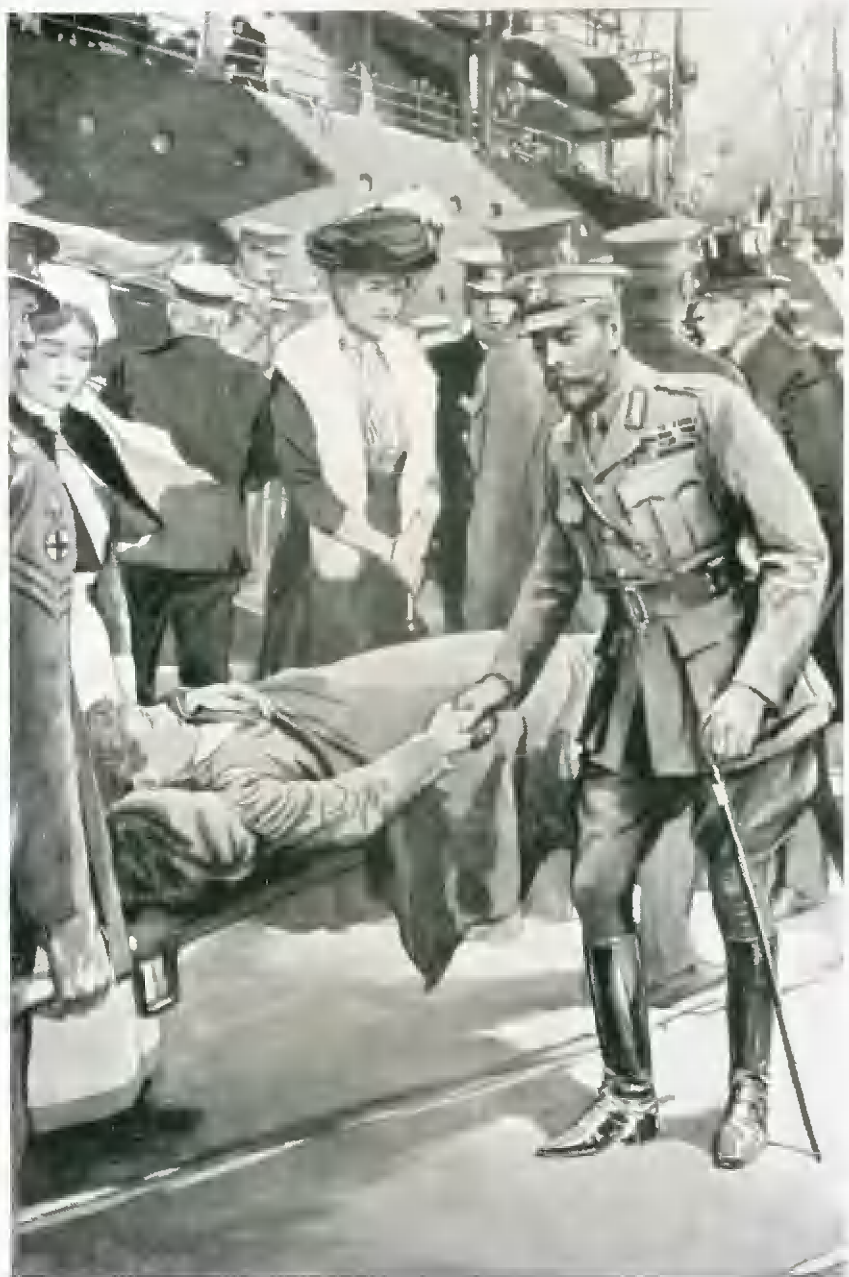

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THE KING OF ENGLAND WAS SHAKING HANDS WITH ME!

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THE FIGHTING MASCOT

The True Story of a Boy Soldier

BY

THOMAS JOSEPH KEHOE

Rfm. No. 203144, 5th King's Liverpool Regiment

THE BOY SOLDIER HIMSELF

Illustrated by Christopher Clark, R.I.

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FOREWORD

Bit by bit I've told this story of my adventures at recruiting meetings and Red Cross rallies and to lads I've met here and there on land and sea—told whatever scrap of it came into my head and let the rest go for another time.

I never could piece it all together the way it ought to be, and I was never a good hand at the writing. So I've found a writing man who knows a thing or two about how to straighten it all out, and how to put the first part at the beginning and the last part at the end, and the fighting and the talking and the rest in where they belong, while he drops what don't matter much into his scrap basket.

He's dropped more into that basket than I wanted him to, some fine songs I wrote for him from my own head having gone there; but the story's all here, with the hard words spelled right, and everything clear and sensible, which is more than ever I could have done myself.

THOMAS JOSEPH KEHOE, Rfm.

P.S.—The writing man's name is E. L. Bacon, if anybody should wish to know.

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THE FIGHTING MASCOT

CHAPTER I

Squeezing in through the Band

I'm glad I never could learn to play a bugle. If ever I had caught the trick of it I should be blowing it yet, with never a look-in at the fighting.

"If we was fightin' the Germans with chunes," the Bandmaster told me, "we'd have ye in the front trenches, me lad, and there'd be a Hun drop dead every time ye gave a toot."

I got to the front trenches all right, but not with a bugle. I carried a gun. I was three years too young for the firing-line—just turned sixteen at my first battle—but the Colonel couldn't stand my bugling any longer.

I was a Liverpool lad before I went to war. There's good seafaring blood in my veins, and I might have gone to sea myself. But my mother would say:

"Stick to the dry land, Tom. Your father was a sailorman, and now he's gone to the bottom, and his ship with him. Stick to the dry land, my lad. There's too many dangers at sea."

So I've stuck to it. But I've been through more dangers on land, and been closer to death a hundred times, than ever I should have been on the water. There's a bullet-hole in my thigh, and the scar from the butt of a German's gun on my head, and I should never have got them if I had followed the sea, the days of pirates being over.

My mother and my stepfather live at 15 Maria Street, and the windows of our home look out over the big pier's head on the River Mersey, where the liners come in. There's a little room up under the roof in that house where many's the night I've sat propped up in bed reading *Treasure Island* by candle-light. I'll not soon forget the awful shock it gave me when my mother would glide in and take the candle away just when the pirates were doing their worst.

I read that grand old book so many times that I shouldn't wonder if I could recite it backward if I tried. The more I read it the more I longed to sail away with a ship and see the world. But, remembering what my mother had said, I made up my mind that I should have to look for my adventures on land if there were any for me to find at all. If only I had lived in the days of Jim

Hawkins and Long John Silver there would have been plenty of them, but I was afraid I had been born about one hundred and fifty years too late for such things.

That's what I was thinking just before the big war broke loose, which brought more adventures than Jim Hawkins ever dreamed of. But how could I know the war was coming?

I meant to get into that war, even though I was too young. It was too good to miss, and there might not be another in a lifetime. I had blown a bugle a few times—just about enough to make a noise through it—and I thought that if they weren't very particular about how the music sounded I might get into the band of the Fifth King's Liverpool Regiment, where Billy Collins, who lived almost next door to us, was a rifleman. That would be a step towards getting into the fighting ranks.

I managed it without much trouble, and went with the battalion to Camp Oswestry, the training-camp near Cardiff. Nobody asked me whether I was much of a bugler, and there was no reason why I should tell them. They would find out soon enough. And they did. The Colonel said I was the worst bugler in the service of the King, and what the Bandmaster said was even worse.

By that time some of the riflemen wanted me as a mascot to bring them luck, and they did their best to help me get into the ranks. I weighed

only ninety-six pounds, and my height was only four feet ten, so it was hard to convince the Colonel that I was big enough, but the more he heard my bugling the more he seemed to like the idea of my carrying a gun. And at last he made a rifleman of me. I had to throw in three years to my age for good measure. I hope I may be forgiven for that one, for my mother brought me up to tell the truth. Anyway, it was in a good cause.

In May, 1917, a batch of men was being made up for France, and our battalion was chosen. I took the train for Liverpool to say good-bye to my mother and my stepfather and my friends.

It was hard at home to say good-bye, for my mother cried over me, and said she couldn't see why I wanted to go and fight at my age and come home with bullet-holes through me, and that it had been better had I gone to sea. But she screwed up her courage when it came time for me to go, and when I left the house she came running after me, threw her arms around me, and tried to keep back the tears. As I marched down the street she stood in the door and cried after me words that came into my mind many a time after that:

"Be brave, have faith in God—and come back home!"

That night we crossed England on the train, and the following morning rolled into Folkestone on the Channel. It was May 16, 1917—my

sixteenth birthday. That day we sailed for France.

At the end of the first day's march toward the front there came a drizzling rain. A few hundred yards back from the road an old barn stood on the side of a hill, and it seemed to me it was just the kind of lodging I wanted. I found the door closed, and when I tried to open it a chorus of voices cried out:

"No room! No room! Get out!"

The Tommies were wedged in so close they were almost sleeping on top of one another.

I prowled around to the rear, where I found a dog-house built against the wall. I took off my pack, got down on hands and knees, and began to creep in. Suddenly a man's foot was planted on top of my head and shoved me back.

"Well, blind me eyes!" somebody croaked inside. "I thought it was the dog come back. Welcome to me 'umble 'ome, ye little swab. Come in!"

It was so dark inside that I couldn't see him at first, but as he seemed to be lying full length, and as the dog-house wasn't much more than five feet long, I knew he couldn't be very big, especially as there was plenty of room for me alongside him.

"Seems just like 'ome, matey," he said. "Many's the night in my young days in the old country I've slept in a dog-'ouse."

I thought, "This chap must have been a tramp

before he joined the army". I asked him if the dogs never objected.

"I never knew 'em not to," he answered. "But I'm death on dogs, matey. A bloke in my trade can't spend much time arguin' with 'em. He's got to know 'ow to settle 'em."

"What's your trade?" I asked.

"Well, matey, a sort of a night-worker's job was mine. Detective Martin, from Scotland Yard, who's now in A Company, could tell you a thing or two about wot I did. Knows all about me. Been keepin' an eye on me hever since we left England. Did you never 'ear of Bonesey? Well, that's me."

Yes, I had heard of him, and I began to wish I hadn't crept into that dog-house. The men in A Company had been talking about Bonesey only that day. They said he had been one of the cleverest housebreakers in England.

My eyes were getting used to the dark, and I took a look at him. His name certainly suited him, for he didn't seem to be much but skin and bones, though he looked healthy enough and as if he might be as strong as iron, as some bony men are. He was a middle-aged chap, whose hair was turning grey. He had sharp little eyes, a hard mouth, and an old scar lay across his nose. I thought that with a dark lantern in one hand, and a pistol in the other, he must have been a desperate-looking lad when doing his house-breaking.

That night I dreamed that Bonesey had crept into my room at home and was holding a gun at my head.

Next day we were together on the march, and from that day on through six months of fighting we were pals.

CHAPTER II

Into the Big Noise

The next day we passed through little villages where houses and churches had been torn with shells. Sometimes there would be nothing left of a village but ruins, with not a living thing in sight except now and then a lonely cat or dog.

The noise of the guns was growing louder and louder. Boom! boom! boom! Even the ground seemed to shake. By afternoon we heard for the first time the rattle of machine-guns. Typewriters was the name we learned for them after we got to the trenches, and they sound just enough like them to make a chap think of some girl pounding the keys in an office at home.

Oh, home and mother! Was I ever going to see them again!

We knew when we heard the clickety-click of those typewriters that we were getting very near. I began to feel afraid. I couldn't help it. I felt myself shaking; I could hardly hold my rifle. Billy Matchett, who was marching next to me, laughed. He had nerves of iron, that lad. The noise of the guns made him more and more

cheerful the louder it grew. But there were other men—big chaps, too—who were shaking more than I was. They were as white as sheets, and one of them fainted and dropped in the road. He was a poor lad the Tommies had been calling "Windy Dick" because he had been frightened ever since we left England. Windy is a word in the trenches to describe a chap who is nervous and jumpy under fire.

But Windy Dick was a good enough sort at heart. He just couldn't help being afraid. While we were crossing the Channel he thought of nothing but submarines, and he had begun to shake the very first day we heard the guns. He had been shaking ever since. When I saw him drop I felt sorry for him and thought of what he had said to me one day on the march:

"Tommy,"—and his voice was shaking even then—"I hope I get shot before I'm caught running away or doing anything like that. It isn't that I'm not willing to die if I have to. It's the fear of disgracing myself that worries me. I just can't help being afraid. It's my nerves."

We left the poor chap for the water-carts to pick up. He was going to have all the chance in the world to show himself a man later on.

It was queer, but the sight of Windy and those other frightened lads braced me up, and the shaky feeling left me after a time.

Once we got a glimpse of Ypres, far off—a ghostly lot of ruins; broken steeples, roofless

houses, tumbling walls. Beyond it was a stretch of open ground without a tree or even a blade of grass, for the shells had ploughed up every inch of earth and pitted it with holes. Farther off were low hills, half-covered with patches of woods.

I thought they were going to send us right into the fighting at the end of that day, but they didn't. Instead, we slept beside the road, while our ears buzzed with a noise like the pounding of a thousand boiler-makers on sheet-iron. Yet with all that clatter most of the lads went sound asleep as soon as they were curled in their blankets, and didn't wake till morning.

But Billy Collins, Billy Matchett, old Bonesey, and I cuddled up together and talked things over. Three of us were pals already, and naturally got together whenever we had a chance and needed a little consolation, but Bonesey, who hadn't been in the same company with us till we got to Boulogne, was a brand-new chum. He seemed to take a liking to us, and he was about as hard to lose as a "cootie" after that.

Before long the two Billies fell asleep, but Bonesey was a night-owl, and it was a long time before he stopped talking and dropped off. As for me, I was on the edge of the biggest adventure a boy could ever hope to find, and I lay thinking about it half the night, listening to the guns and watching the rockets and the shells against the black sky.

In the morning the first thing I heard was the voice of Billy Collins saying:

"I got some straw down my neck. I can't get it out."

Then I discovered that I had a prickly feeling myself, and began to dig for it. All around me the lads were doing the same thing.

"Straw!" said the Sergeant. "Why, that ain't straw you blighters have got. It's cooties."

And he was right. We all had them—the little crawlers that get into every soldier's clothes as soon as he gets to the front, and stick to him like a loving brother till he gets back to Blighty. I wonder if Jim Hawkins had those things. I hadn't counted on them when I went adventure hunting.

Before the sun set that day I had gone into the greatest bit of adventure a boy could ever hope to find, for that afternoon we filed into the trenches.

Frightened? Oh, I'll admit it. So was Billy Collins. I'm not so sure about Bonesey. He kept his mouth shut and looked as serious as an undertaker, and there was no telling how he felt. Billy Matchett was the only one of us who didn't change a bit, no matter how close the shells came. He went in humming a tune.

We relieved the Black Watch, who had been there for weeks, and who didn't like the place a bit. They said it was one of the worst positions on the front—the dirtiest trenches, the biggest

rats, the liveliest cooties, and the hardest fighting.

"I feel a bit sorry for you poor blokes," said the big Black Watch trench-guide who took us in. "After you've been in this blooming hole as long as we have you'll be glad enough to get out. Keep your heads down, you pop-eyed blighters, if you don't want Fritzie to drill holes through you."

Those Black Watch lads made me open my eyes, I can tell you. Grimy they were, as if they had been wallowing in mud for a year, and some had scars from knives or bayonets or bullets across their faces. Their regiment had been through some of the hottest fighting of the war. Veterans, every one of them, these lads, who had seen more terrible things than I had ever dreamed of, who had killed Germans by the hundreds, who had had more wonderful escapes from death than they could remember. And here I was in their trenches chumming with them—with the heroes I had heard of so often—and one of a regiment come to take their places. It was a strange world, sure enough. Anything might come true after that.

Bonesey nudged me as we filed along.

"Say, Mascot," he whispered; "I've seen 'ard-lookin' blokes in my time, but never the like of these. W'y, that big lad that's leadin' us 'asn't 'ad a bath in ten years, and, blimey, if I don't believe 'e was a murderer before 'e joined the

army from the looks of 'im. How'd you like to meet a chap like that alone in a dark alley, now?"

Bonesey was a hard-looking blighter himself, but he looked as sweet as an angel beside those Black Watchers.

I hadn't been in the trenches half an hour before I forgot my fear. It seemed to be a fairly safe place, after all. Shells were flying overhead, and now and then a bullet plunked into the parapet, but hidden down there I didn't see any pressing need for worry.

That's what I was thinking, when suddenly a fine young lad jumped to the firing-step to get a look at the Germans. He lifted head and shoulders above the top, and looked over. Just below him I stood staring up at him, wondering at his recklessness. I saw him wave his cap, like the poor, innocent rookie he was, and I heard a sergeant roar at him to come down. He did come down, that very instant, falling backward almost on top of me, with a bullet-hole in his head.

The sight turned me half sick with fear and horror. He was the first man I had ever seen killed, and, though I've seen hundreds dead and dying since that time, I shall never forget the way he came tumbling down in a heap at my feet, without a cry or a groan. You never forget the first dead man; afterward there are too many to remember.

The Black Watch went away to a well-earned rest before long, and their trenches became ours.

But the lad who had led us in hung on for a time to tell us a few more pleasant things about what we might expect. The more he told us the sadder we grew, and the sadder he saw us growing the worse became his story of what we had come to.

CHAPTER III

In Dead Men's Alley

"Make your wills and say your prayers," said the big Black Watcher, "for if any of you lads get out of this hole alive you'll be lucky, I can tell you that. Dead Men's Alley we've named it, for of all the blooming unlucky spots on the line this bit of trench is the worst."

Maybe we weren't a nervous lot when we heard that! Ow! I felt cold and shaky all over.

Something happened a few minutes later that didn't make me feel any better, I can tell you.

There came a sound like a railroad train going through a tunnel with the engine whistle going. Then came a crash that seemed to shake the whole trench, and not a hundred feet from where I stood a black column of smoke shot up to the sky. A shell had struck against our sand-bags.

When the smoke cleared away I saw a man's body hanging over our wires and another lying across the parapet. Soon the news ran along the line that three others had been struck by pieces of the shell and badly wounded.

A thing that seemed strange to us, who were new to the queer ways of shells, was that a lad who had been standing only two yards from the explosion was not hurt nor even knocked off his feet, though a man close beside him had been blown out of the trench and was one of those I had seen lying dead.

For the first few hours after the Black Watch chap and his regiment of grimy old veterans left us it didn't take much to make us think the Germans were coming. Sometimes one of us would believe he smelled gas, and we would grab for our masks. If the German typewriters rattled a little louder than usual, our officers would imagine they were getting ready for a raid and would call every man of us to the firing-step. The first time I got there I found I couldn't reach to the top, so I got a sand-bag and stood on it. That made me just high enough to see over and shoot.

But the first Hun we saw came from another direction than we expected. With a loud buzzing noise he dropped down on us in his airplane right out of the sky, and swooped along our trench not a hundred feet above our heads, peppering us with lead as he went. One man was killed not ten feet from where I stood, and several more dropped not very far away.

I had often wondered what it was going to be like to be under fire, and had never once thought that I shouldn't have the nerve to face it. But when I saw that lad fall dead almost at my side,

while the shadow of that big, buzzing monster was creeping along the trench, the old shaky feeling got hold of me again, and I was as weak as a baby. I crouched in the bottom of the trench, and covered my eyes to shut out the sight of the horrible thing overhead, and I thought of No. 15 Maria Street, and of what a safe, cosy, comfortable home it was. Oh, that little room of mine at home, and *Treasure Island* by candle-light!

It was all over in a moment. The buzzing noise died away, and the stretcher-bearers were coming through the trench after the dead and wounded.

I got to my feet and looked about to make sure nobody had noticed me. The men I saw were too busy watching the sky to pay any attention to what might be going on in the trench. I looked up. There, far above us, the Hun was being attacked by one of our own flyers.

They circled round and round each other, firing all the time, and then Fritzie broke away and flew off as fast as he could go, our man giving him a hot chase.

A big, black thunder-cloud was rolling from the east, and Fritzie made for it. In a moment they had both disappeared inside it. While we watched for them we could hear the thunder bellow and see flashes of lightning. They had gone right into the heart of the storm.

Then came a streak of lightning that blinded us, and in the same instant, out of the spot from which the flash had come, an airplane, disabled

and helpless, dropped as straight as a rock over the German lines.

Whether it was our man or Fritzie we had no way of knowing, but a moment later the other plane came swooping out of the storm and circled easily down behind our trenches. Then we knew it was Fritzie who had lost the fight, and you should have heard the cheers that our men sent up. Even the Germans heard them far away in their lines, and answered them with a terrific rattling of their typewriters.

One of our sentries was killed a few minutes later. I had a good look at him as they carried him past us on a stretcher. He was a man I had known at Oswestry, and he had been joking with me only that morning. I had seen more than one man die that day, but the sight of that lad that I had known so well made death seem more dreadful than ever before. I had heard him speak of his mother and sisters he had left at home, and I felt like crying when I thought of them.

That night we crept into our dug-outs to sleep. Next to me lay Billy Matchett.

"Well, Mascot," said Billy, "here we are in it at last; right into all that we've been dreaming about. Seems queer, don't it? Begin to wish you were back home, don't you now?"

"Not yet, Billy," I answered. "I want to see the whole thing through. Then home will seem like a good place to get back to for a while."

I meant every word of it, for the big adventure

was only just beginning then; but if anybody had asked me the same question a month or two later, after we had been shot at and shelled and bombed and gassed, and had slept in mud and rain along the Flanders roads, I think I should have given a different answer.

CHAPTER IV

The Colonel Gets a Warning

The Black Watcher had told us those were the worst dug-outs he had ever been in. I don't believe he exaggerated. They couldn't have been worse. They were so small that only four men could creep into one, and they were dirty and smelly. If the four men happened to be big chaps they had to sleep almost on top of one another; but I was so small that there were really only three and a half in ours, and, one of them being Billy Matchett, who was long and narrow, we had room to spare.

"Sleep tight, Mascot," said Billy. "No telling how soon they'll call us out of this."

But how can a fellow sleep tight when a rat runs over his face every five minutes? I had no more than dropped off when the first one came. The feet of a rat are the most horrible, cold, clammy things in the world, and when they pattered right across my face I came wide awake with a jump and a yell.

Up jumps Billy the same moment.

"Ow! I say, Mascot! I can't stand this, you know. That thing was kissing me, that's what he was."

"Oh, let him kiss you; what's the difference?" somebody growls in the dark.

All four of us grumble and squirm a while; then we drop off.

"Ow!" It's Billy's voice again. "I say! That rat's come back."

"Pull your coat over your face and shut up."

Billy and I took the hint, and slept till the Sergeant called us out.

That morning we heard that the Prussian Guard had taken the places of the Saxons in the trenches facing us, and that we might expect trouble. Prussians always mean trouble. They're the best fighters in the Kaiser's army — the best, the meanest, the cruelest.

The Fritzies' artillery and typewriters were much busier after the Prussians arrived, and our lads on the firing-step didn't take any chances in sticking their heads up any higher than they had to.

A lad gets used to the typewriters and the rifles, but oh, those big guns! They sent all kinds of stuff at us, but the whiz-bangs were the worst. We called them that because of the way they went with a whiz and a bang. A whiz-bang does a plucky lot of damage when it strikes, and very often they struck much too near to be pleasant. It made me nervous watching them

and wondering how much would be left of me if one should explode too close.

One of these things struck our cook-house, smashed it to pieces, and killed every cook on duty—five of them. Dinner was an hour late that day. After that, whenever the food wasn't up to the mark, some lad would be sure to say: "I'm thinking it's about time we had some more cooks killed."

Everybody had an idea that with all that firing the Prussians were getting ready to raid us, and to show us what kind of lads they were. But there wasn't one of them to be seen all day—not even a helmet popping up. I know now why they didn't come; they had another kind of a game in mind.

We had all heard, of course, of the miners—the moles who spend all their time tunnelling deep under No Man's Land with shovels and picks, hoping to plant a charge of dynamite under the enemy's trench. We had seen some of our own, who would disappear into dark holes and be gone for hours. A story spread along the line that the Germans' miners were digging underneath us, and that we might expect to be blown to the sky any minute. We didn't know whether to believe it or not, but it wasn't good for our nerves. As for me, I should rather have heard the whole German army was coming at us than to feel that we might be standing over a mine.

Along came Bonesey, looking glum as an owl.

"What's the trouble, Bonesey, old boy?" I sung at him, trying to cheer him a bit. "You're not worrying about that mine?"

"Mine be blowed! If one goes off under me I'll never know it, so wot should I care? It's this Scotland Yard lad that's on me nerves, little man. When I joined the army I thought I was goin' to be somewheres where the police wouldn't be botherin' of me, but that lad's got 'is eye on me hevery time I come within sight of 'im. Wot's he think I'm up to now—'ousebreakin'?"

A Royal Welsh Fusilier, whose regiment held the same line as ours, came along a moment later, and began to tell us of what had been going on before we arrived. He had been in the war ever since it started, and he told us things that made our eyes open. He told us how the Huns tortured prisoners and women and children, and of horrible things he had seen with his own eyes. From what we heard from him, and later from many others too, I knew that the Huns had gone mad, the whole race of them, that fighting them was just like fighting savages, and that it might be better to be killed than to fall alive into their hands. And I knew it not only from what I heard, but from what before long I saw myself; terrible things that sent cold shivers through me and that I couldn't get out of my thoughts. I would dream of them at night, and sometimes I would wake up with a cry, thinking those fiends had come to torture me.

"We old-timers don't take any prisoners," said the Welshman. "Not after what we've seen. After you've been in the trenches a month, my boy, you'll find killing Huns is just like killing vermin. You'll know the Lord is glad every time you stick your bayonet into one."

I've heard stories of how the North American Indians tortured people, but they were not as bad as what I heard and saw in Flanders.

That Welshman had heard about the mine too, and he told us it wouldn't surprise him if the whole trench went up into the air before long. He said the talk about the mine had been going on for days, and that all the officers had heard it, and had put our miners at work investigating. The miners, he said, thought at first that it might have been the rats that had started the scare, and that the sound caused by their scurrying about in the dark had been mistaken for the scraping and shovelling of underground Germans. But he thought they must have given up that idea, because they were still searching for a tunnel.

"But I'm telling you," he said, "that getting blown up by a mine would be the pleasantest sort of an end a Britisher could come to in this plaguey spot."

I've met more cheerful lads than that Welshman. He was as solemn as a mourner at a funeral, and he talked about nothing but trouble. Five minutes with him would take the laugh out

of a laughing hyena. I felt glum for the rest of the day. A mine right under my feet, as likely as not, and a couple of hundred yards away the worst fiends on earth waiting for a chance to torture me. Nice place I had come to.

That evening came an order to withdraw to a trench in the rear, and we knew the mine story must be true. We filed out through the communication-trenches, leaving the sentries to keep guard until we were gone.

Fifteen minutes later came a crash and a roar that staggered me. The whole world seemed to be blowing to pieces. Smoke and flame and flying earth filled the whole sky. Then it came again and again. Boom! boom! boom! It was enough to burst our ear-drums—the most awful noise I had ever heard. Then out of the great black smoke-cloud the body of a man was tossed a hundred feet into the air—one of our own men who had stayed behind too long.

We learned later that our miners had discovered, not ten minutes before the order came for us to get out, that the Germans were ready to blow us up, and word had been sent to the Colonel in a hurry. It's lucky the Colonel acted promptly. The old boy could act as quick as lightning when there was trouble in the wind.

CHAPTER V

The Germans Come

That cloud of smoke had scarcely disappeared when the Germans opened up on us with everything they had. Bullets and shells were flying everywhere. The whiz-bangs tore gaps in our wire fences and in our sand-bag parapet. Showers of sand, earth, and pebbles fell over us and half-blinded us. We lost some men—how many I don't know, but I saw two blown to pieces by a shell that dropped right into the trench.

We four pals—Billy Collins, Billy Matchett, Bonesey, and I—were squatting in the trench in the dark, glad it wasn't our turn on the firing-step in all that fuss, when along came that same funeral-faced Welshman.

"I say, old 'Ard Luck," shouted Bonesey; "wot's biting yer now?"

"That mine was there all right," croaked Welshie. "Didn't I tell you? And I'm telling you now that there's more trouble coming before long."

As he spoke we heard somebody shouting orders down the trench.

"Coming!" yelled Billy Collins. "It's here now!" And he jumped to his feet.

The same instant came the gas-mask signal. I grabbed for mine. My hands were shaking so that I could hardly hold it, but there wasn't any time to lose if I wanted to live. As I fumbled with it I kept mumbling to myself: "Fifteen seconds! Fifteen seconds! One, two, three, four——"

According to instructions, fifteen seconds was about the time allowed for a gas-wave to arrive, and if that mask wasn't adjusted properly by the time I had counted fifteen, then good-bye to Tommy Kehoe.

I had got up to ten, and was still fumbling, when Welshie grabbed me and put the thing in place on my head. Then we both jumped for the firing-step.

Not one hundred feet away a long, low fog-bank was creeping toward us close to the ground. It was the gas-wave. Our rockets were shooting up through the dark, and in their glare the wave turned yellow and red and green as it rolled on. Behind it all was pitch black. By the light of the rockets I could look along our line of trench and see our lads in helmets and masks, stiff as statues, with their rifles pointing over the parapet.

My mask was warm and stifling, and I felt like pulling it off for a big breath of fresh air before the wave should reach us, but I didn't dare. I had heard of men who had taken such a chance and who hadn't lived to tell of it.

One moment the wave was sparkling white, like phosphorescent surf on a sand-bar, the next it gleamed green and red, like the deadly thing it was. And it crept toward us, oh, so slowly! Perhaps it was only ten seconds before it rolled over the sand-bags, but it seemed like ten times as long.

Then it swept over us. I gasped for air. I thought I was suffocating. I was sure there was a hole in my mask somewhere, and that it was all over with me. But it wasn't as bad as that. I was half stifled, but there was a lot of life left in me, though the gas did get a few fellows—knocked them flat.

There wasn't time to do any thinking about the lack of air, for I saw something else rolling toward us out there in the dark. Another gas-wave, I thought. The fellows beside me were firing into it as fast as they could pull the triggers, and I got busy with my rifle, too. But why were they shooting at a wave?

Then I saw what it was—not a gas-wave, but a mass of charging men. And how they did come! It seemed only an instant before they were in plain view—hundreds of hooded Huns, rushing on with fixed bayonets.

What marks they were, all massed together, with the rockets throwing a glare over them! We scarcely had to take aim. Our bullets were sure to find them. I saw them fall, sometimes groups of them going down together. The ma-

chine-guns were mowing lanes right through their ranks. Yet they never once stopped. Again and again the gaps in their ranks closed up. Always came more men from over there in the dark to take the places of the dead and wounded.

Not a hundred feet away they were when our lads were jumping to the parapet to meet them with their bayonets. I made a leap for the top of the ladder, grabbed at it, missed, and slipped back. Somebody reached out a hand and pulled me up.

Almost on us they were. Oh, never in my worst dreams—and I've had many a bad one since then—have I seen a more dreadful sight than that. They came at us out of the dark like fiends from another world, like the pictures I've seen of men from Mars, for their heads were covered with the most devilish-looking masks that anybody could imagine, masks with huge round eyes and long, piggish snouts. Shells were bursting above them, machine-guns were tearing through their ranks, and their masks were white and ghastly in the light of the rockets. Many a time I had thought of what war would be like, but never had I thought I should look on such a sight as that.

"Fight or die, Tommy Kehoe! Fight or die!"

That's what I told myself as I crouched in front of the sand-bags, with my bayonet ready for them.

Whopping big men they were, head and shoul-

ders above me. But as I waited there a thought flashed through me of the Bantam regiment, little fellows scarcely bigger than I, who had made good against even those giant Prussians. Size didn't count behind a bayonet. It was quickness that counted. I was sure of it. If it didn't, then it was all over with me.

Even then, when they were almost up to us, how the guns were mowing them down! It looked as if none could be left in a moment or two. But those that didn't fall came on like madmen, and poured through the lanes where the big guns had levelled our wires.

One—he was a six-footer if he was an inch—ran straight for me with his bayonet out. I crouched, and thrust at him—thrust upward. His bayonet went over my shoulder. He staggered, and fell over my gun.

I had got him! I had got him!

'Twas lucky for me there was no time to think over it or to stand there gaping at the dead Hun. For a second or two I turned dizzy and sick. But it was fight again or die. I jerked my rifle back and stumbled.

"Buck up! Tommy Kehoe. Buck up!" I told myself. "Size don't count."

A fellow was coming for me swinging his gun above his head, ready to strike me with the butt. He frightened me. I hadn't counted on that kind of fighting. Just then somebody stuck him from behind with a bayonet, and he fell.

There were more Huns coming, and I thought it was all up with us. But as I looked at them again I saw that they were without their rifles, and that they were holding their hands above their heads. They were surrendering. The fight was over.

Yes, it was over; but dead and wounded men were all about us, and we had lost many of our own. I didn't recognize any of them as they lay there, for they were masked, but later I found that lads I had known were missing. There was much work for the stretcher-bearers in front of the trenches that night. Dangerous work it was, too, for the Huns never stopped shooting at them.

Before long a wind sprang up that blew the gas away, and we pulled off our masks, glad to breathe the fresh air again. Oh, how good that fresh wind was in our faces! We got together in little groups and talked over the fight. One lad named John Golder, from London, showed us a steel breastplate he was wearing under his uniform. He said his father had sent it to him, hoping it would save his life.

"And it has saved it," Golder said. "Look here."

He struck a match, and showed us a dent in the breastplate close to his heart, and a little above it he pointed out a scratch.

"The dent's where a bullet struck," he said. "Knocked me flat on my back, but that's all the harm it did, thanks to my old man at home.

And that scratch I got from a Boche bayonet. The Hun ran at me and jabbed me hard. Must have thought I wasn't human when his bayonet wouldn't go through. He's out there near the wires now, what's left of him. I got him."

"This workin' in the dark is wot suits me," said Bonesey. "I got three of the beggars, but I'd 'ave 'ated to meet 'em by day. I never was no good in the daytime."

From somewhere in the dark I heard, "Didn't I tell you there was going to be trouble?" I knew that voice. It belonged to that funeral-faced Welshie.

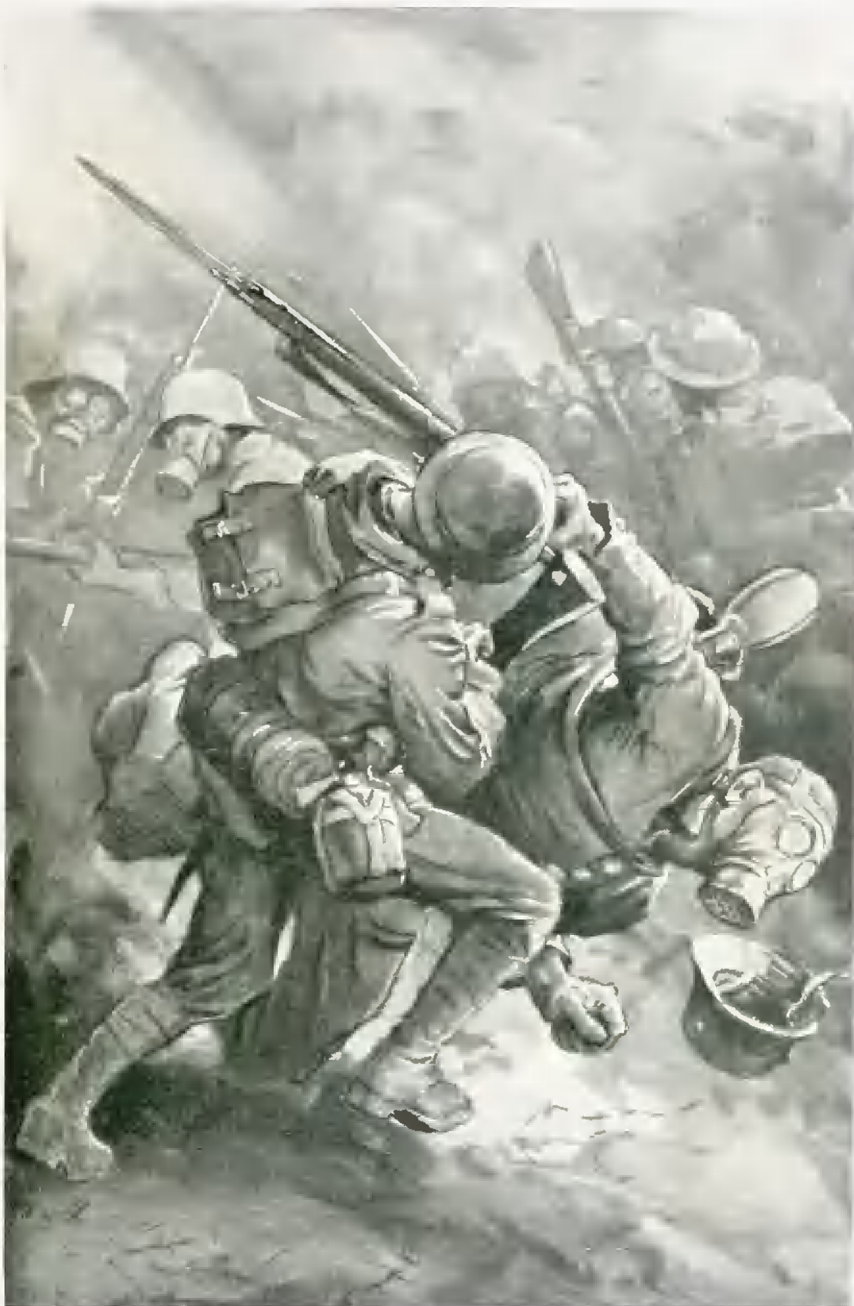
"No need of tellin' us, old 'Ard Luck," sung out Bonesey. "There's always trouble comin' when you're about."

"Cheero!" said Billy Matchett. "It's all over." And he sat down in the bottom of the trench and sang:

"Are we downhearted? No!
Not while Britannia rules the waves! Not likely!
While we've Jack upon the sea and Tommy on the shore
We needn't fret.
It's a long, long way to Tipperary,
But we're not downhearted yet."

"Come and sing, Mascot," he said, "and forget about trouble for a little."

I sat down beside him in the dark, and we sang together "The Ship that's Bound for Blighty", "Boys in Khaki, Boys in Blue", and "Take Me Back to Dear Old Blighty", and for a time I



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HE STAGGERED AND FELL OVER MY GUN

forgot about the bloody work we had had that night.

Some of the lads came along and crouched down beside us to listen. When we had finished, old Bonesey pulled me up and pounded me on the back.

"I'm thinkin' the Mascot made good," he said. "The bloomin' little shaver got one—got 'im square 'e did! Ain't 'e the cute little beggar now?"

Bonesey always did have a good word to put in for me. But I didn't need it that night. I had killed my first German, and I was as puffed up with pride over it as a lad who's just got his V.C.

CHAPTER VI

The Lost Patrol

Billy Collins was a great lad for dreams. Once he dreamed that a German officer was lying in the bottom of a shell-hole near our wires with a wounded leg. And, so help me, it was the truth. The German was found there the night after Billy told about it.

I was never much of a believer in dreams and things like that myself, but the lads in the trenches get to believe almost anything, so many queer things happen there, and I've more faith in dreams than I once had. I've known them to come true many a time. Two of Billy Collins's did—the one about the German and another about himself.

"Mascot," he said to me one morning as he crawled out of his dug-out, "I had a bad one last night."

"About what?" said I.

"About being out between the lines," answered Billy. "Ow! It makes me shiver yet. It was this way. They sent me out in the dark with a patrol. That is, in my dream they did. The

first thing we knew we had walked right into a party of Germans three times as big as our own. They were all around us, and we couldn't get away. And they came at us with the bayonets."

"And what happened to you?" I asked.

"I don't know a blooming thing more about what happened," said Billy. "That's the end of the dream."

And that same day they picked Billy Collins as one of a party to go out on patrol.

That night he and fifteen other lads went out. I saw them go. Just before they climbed up over the sand-bags Billy came up to me and shook me by the hand. A fine young fellow he was, all smiles and jokes as a rule, but he looked as solemn as an owl just then.

"Good-bye, Mascot," he said. "And if I shouldn't come back write a letter home for me."

Standing on the firing-step, I put my head over the top and watched them go out. I could see them until they had passed through the lanes between our wires and a little beyond; then the darkness swallowed them up. I wondered whether I should ever see Billy Collins again.

"Of course he'll come back," I told myself. "That dream has got on his nerves. But there's no sense in dreams, and, anyway, he didn't dream he was killed."

Then I turned in for some sleep.

It was daylight when I woke up, and the big guns were booming, as they almost always were.

"Did our patrol get back all right?" I asked of a sergeant.

"Still out," he answered. "Something gone wrong, perhaps, or they may be lying safe out in shell-holes or in the wood over yonder."

The morning passed, and they hadn't returned. But we didn't give up hope, because patrols had been known to stay out two or three days and come back safe. By the time it grew dark our officers decided that something must have happened to the patrol. There came a call for volunteers to go out and search for them.

In the party were Bonesey and I and eight others. It was dangerous work, because the sky was clear, there was no fog, and the moon was due in less than an hour. It was dark enough to hide us from the German trenches, but if the moon should come up in a clear sky we should have to come back in a hurry, and more than likely the Boches would drop us on the way.

It was rough going, because almost every square yard of the ground had been churned up by shells. Sometimes we sank to our ankles, and, as the earth was sticky, it was hard to pull our feet out. Whenever the Germans sent up a light we dropped flat on the ground and lay there till it grew dark again.

We had been prowling about for perhaps fifteen minutes, when Bonesey dropped to the ground and pulled me down beside him.

"Boches!" he whispered.

The beggar's ears were as sharp as a bird dog's.

"I can't hear anything," I said.

"Whisht! Listen!" whispered Bonesey.

The rest of the patrol had followed our example, and were lying flat, too. We lay still for a full minute. Then I heard voices. They seemed to be drawing nearer. The men, whoever they were, were speaking very softly, but now and then we could hear their footsteps and the rattling of their guns.

"Perhaps they are our own men," I said.

"Don't be fooling of yourself, little boy," answered Bonesey. "Didn't I 'ear 'em talking? And don't I know their bloomin' language when I 'ears it?"

The next moment I saw them. They were coming straight towards us. I counted them. Twenty-two! We were outnumbered more than two to one. If they saw us we were as good as done for. Oh, what beautiful marks they were! We could have drawn a line on eight of them and missed not one. That would have left fourteen, and we might have got a few more before they would begin shooting. But then what would happen? As soon as they heard the firing, the Germans in the trenches would open upon us with their star-lights and guns and wipe us out. It's never safe to fire a gun in No Man's Land.

The patrol came closer. I almost stopped breathing, thinking every second that they would

see us. For a moment one of them stood so near to me that I could have reached out and almost touched him. I don't think I breathed at all while he stood there. I thought he must hear my heart pounding against my ribs, for it was going like a trip-hammer. But he passed on, and, after a few moments, I heard Bonesey whisper:

"They're gone. Blind me eyes! I've 'ad close squeezes, Mascot, but never one like that."

I jumped up and gasped for air. I was shaking all over."

We waited, listening, a little while; then we moved on. After a few minutes of prowling about we decided we should have to go back, or the moon would catch us. We had just turned toward our own trench when we came across a body. It was one of the men in the missing patrol. There was a bayonet-hole through him. We searched over the ground near where he lay and found six more of them, all dead. The others we couldn't find, and we were sure they must have been taken prisoners. I saw one of our lads bending over one of the bodies. He looked up, and turned to me.

"Give a hand, Mascot," he said, "and we'll carry him in. It's Billy Collins."

It was hard going, and all we could do to get across the rough ground with the bodies, but we knew we had to move fast. Once I looked over my shoulder, and what I saw gave me a scare.

Over the German trenches the sky was growing bright.

Suddenly a glow of light fell over us. The moon was up. The Germans would surely get sight of us in a moment. Just then we came up against the wires—our own wires—and in another minute we were safe.

The next day the postman brought a letter and a package for Billy Collins. The letter was from his girl, for I knew her writing—a pretty girl in Liverpool whom he had hoped to marry some day. There was a package for me, too, from my mother. Inside were some things to eat and a mouth-organ. I played the mouth-organ, and Billy Matchett sang a song, while we tried to forget about what had happened to Billy Collins.

But I couldn't forget that the poor lad had asked me to write to his people at home. I'm a bad hand at writing, but I got out a pencil and paper and did the best I could. I got as far as "You will be sorry to hear that Billy is dead", and there I stuck. I couldn't think of another word to say that would do any good. After a lot of thinking I made up my mind to add that the Boches drove a bayonet through him, but Bonesey told me not to.

"You got to write only wot's cheerful and consoling," he said. "Say, ''E died like a 'ero, fighting for hold England'."

So I did, and let it go at that.

"Now," said Bonesey, "I'm thinking that I

should be doing some writing myself. The close squeeze I 'ad last night has set me thinking that I may get killed before this war is over, and my will's not made."

He pulled out his pay-book, for there is a blank place left in them for the lads to make their wills, and began to write.

"Didn't know you had a family, Bonesey," I said.

"Not a soul belonging to me in this world," he answered.

"Then what's the good of making a will?"

"There might be a few shillings of back pay comin' to me," he said, "and there's a few little things I've left back in London."

"Who's going to get it?"

"A girl, Mascot. She's the daughter of a lad that was once a pal of mine. Shot by me side, 'e was, while we was doing a little job of 'ouse-breaking one night. I've looked after 'er since she wasn't much more than knee 'igh to me, and many's the night I've taken chances with the bobbies to get swag enough for 'er proper schoolin'. She's full-grown now, and able to look after 'erself, but she 'asn't forgotten old Bonesey, not she!

"When we marched off for the war about every blighter in the company 'ad somebody come to see 'im off and wish 'im well. And I says to myself, 'I'm the only bloke in the lot that's got nobody to say good-bye to.'

"But, so 'elp me, the next minute I gets me eyes on that little lassie, come hall the way from London to give me a cheer. Blimey, if it didn't make me feel good!

"She'll get the back shillings coming to me, Mascot, and w'atever else I've got, for she's the only bloomin' soul on earth wot will drop a tear for Bonesey when 'e's planted under the daisies."

A shell ploughed into the sand-bags, and the shock almost sent the pad out of his hands; but he held on to it and began to write his will.

CHAPTER VII

Ghosts of the Night

Night sentry-go is an ugly, creepy job. My first try at it was the longest night I've ever put in. Afterward it wasn't so bad.

"So that mascot of ours is going to guard us to-night," said Billy Matchett, who thought he was a great joker, because before he joined the army he got his living in the music-halls in that way and with his singing. "That means the Boches will get us sure. The kid's scarce old enough to keep awake in the daytime, let alone at night."

Then he and big Tom Brannigan got busy stretching the joke along till I felt like giving them a feel of my bayonet. Red-headed Murphy joined in with them, too, and he was worse than either of them, for he never knew when to stop; but I saw him killed on the road to Arras a month later, and I can forgive him for all the fun he got out of me.

Sentry-go was two hours on and two hours off all night. I hadn't slept well the night before, for the cooties and the rats had been after

me hard, but up there alone on the firing-step I felt so important that I forgot all about being sleepy. I got to thinking of all the sleeping soldiers I was guarding from danger, and of how the lives of all of them might hang on how well I did the job, in case the Huns should creep up in the dark. And I said to myself:

"It's quite a job for a sixteen-year-old lad, Tommy Kehoe, and you should be proud of yourself. There's many a friend of yours at home in Liverpool that would like to be in your shoes to-night."

Sometimes it grew so quiet that I could hear our men talking together in low voices in the dug-outs. One voice was shrill and squeaky, and I knew it belonged to Windy Bullen, who was always talking about the cooties and rats he had killed. He was a proud lad whenever he killed a cootie that was different from the rest.

"The blighter!" I heard him squeaking; "if it wasn't pink with green eyes! And he chewed clean through me bloomin' hide!"

Then the artillery would begin again or a machine-gun would break loose. Every few minutes a star-light would go up from the Germans' trenches, and, oh! it was a lovely sight as it sent a soft glow over all the ugly shell-holes. It was like watching fireworks at home on a holiday, only the air smelled better at home.

When my legs grew stiff from standing still looking over the sand-bags, I marched back and forward along the firing-step. A guard can do that, but it's none too safe, for you never know when the Germans will get busy. I had heard of a night-guard who was taking a little walk to stretch his legs, when a Hun crept up and knocked him on the head just as he made the turn in his beat, and I couldn't help thinking that the same thing might happen to me.

Two hours of it brought my lay-off, and I got a little sleep till the Sergeant rapped me up with a biff on the sole of my foot. Then back again to the firing-step. Nothing to do but stand there looking over the sand-bags, wondering whether a sniper would get me. More likely it would be a machine-gun, for it was too black for snipers. A sniper is a wonder when the moon is up or the stars bright and the air clear, but dark nights put him out of business, and I felt lucky for that. Snipers or no, a guard has to keep his helmet over the top more or less.

Except when the star-lights went up, I could see just about as far as our wires.

The worst thing about night sentry-go is the trouble a lad has keeping awake. If you go to sleep and the Sergeant catches you—ow! They could shoot a man for doing that, and no matter how lucky he may be, he never gets off easy. But I couldn't help getting sleepy. I tried to keep awake by walking, but as soon as I would

come back to my perch I would begin to nod again. And then I dropped off.

I didn't know anything more till I heard a low whistle. That brought me wideawake with a jump. I had been standing up, leaning against my gun, but I may have been snoring for all I knew. It gave me an awful scare. For a second I didn't know whether the whistle had come from the Sergeant or a German, but either way would have been bad enough. I thought I was done for. Then from somewhere down in the trench came a whisper:

"Whisht! Wake up, Mascot!"

So it wasn't either the Sergeant or a Hun, and I was safe. I kept wideawake after that.

There's something about night sentry-go that stirs up a lad's imagination till everything about him is like a dream, and mostly like a bad dream, too. The Irish boys from Liverpool are always seeing ghosts in the dark. Brannigan used to see a headless soldier walking up and down in front of the trench, and he would watch the thing until cold shivers ran through him. He saw the headless soldier coming for him in a raid once, and it was the only time I ever saw Big Tom afraid. He came near getting shot by his officer for starting to run back to our trench. And one day a little later, when a Hun whose head had just been blown off tumbled right on top of him in a shell-hole, he let out a yell that we could hear above the artillery.

That first night on guard I saw something myself that I know now couldn't have been true, but that I couldn't get out of my mind for days and days afterward. As I was staring over the top a rocket went up from the Germans, and sent a broad path of light from their trench almost to ours. Right in the centre of that lighted way I saw somebody coming toward me. It was a woman with her arms stretched out, as if she were pleading. The light was shining full on her face, and I saw it was my mother.

I thought I heard her calling "Tommy, lad! Tommy, lad!"

But the artillery was going just then, and I knew I couldn't have heard her voice at that distance.

Then the light went out, and she disappeared in the dark.

I believed that night that I really had seen her, and I wondered whether she was groping about for me out there in the dark. Then I began to be afraid. I thought my mother might be dead, and that this was her ghost come to find me. It was terrible to think of her moving about there among all those dead men; but it seemed just as bad to have her creeping toward me out of the dark. Ghosts are ghosts, and I didn't care to meet with one alone in the night, even my mother's.

A week later I got a letter from her that told me she was as well as ever.

It wasn't death or the dead soldiers that frightened the Tommies; it was those dead soldiers' ghosts.

I remember that, after Charlie Tapper was killed, his pal, McGuire, couldn't sleep nights for fear Charlie would come back and haunt him. And one night Charlie's ghost did come.

McGuire was in his dug-out writing a letter home. He felt a puff of cold air on his face, and, looking up, he saw Charlie, who didn't seem to be made of anything much but white fog, coming in through the door.

"Mac," says the ghost, "I can't rest easy till I get a plug of tobacco. Could you spare your old matey a cut of it?"

Mac spilled the ink all over the paper and buried his head in a blanket. When at last he got up nerve enough to peek out, Charlie was gone, and Mac never forgave himself for not passing over the plug.

Thinking over those things up there against the parapet made me nervous. I thought I saw a dead German move his arms, and it made me jump. Then a rocket went up, and I got a look at his face, and he looked as if he might be asleep, dreaming of his home.

"Well, Fritzie," I told him, "I shouldn't wonder if that's how it will come to all of us—with a dream of home."

Then I thought of my own home, and imagined I could see my mother looking out of the window

to the pier's head where the ships come in, and wondering when I was coming back.

"Tommy, lad," I said to myself, "if ever I get back there again that's where I'll stay. It's too full of dead men's ghosts out here.

CHAPTER VIII

Heroes and Cowards

You may think a man a coward when he's not; you may think another is brave when he's not. I've found that it's only in the trenches that you find out much about a man that's more than skin deep.

"There's many a lad that's no good that looks good and seems good," our Chaplain, Father O'Brien, told me. "And there's many a lad who's all white inside without you ever thinking it. A man's got to do more than say his prayers to prove he's a Christian."

One night a party went out on patrol, and one of them was Windy Dick, who had fainted when he heard the artillery as we marched to Ypres.

"Better say your prayers, Windy," somebody called to him. "That's a bad job you're on. The Boches will get you, like as not."

Windy didn't make any answer to that. The lads had been making fun of him ever since the day he dropped in the road, and he had learned that it only made them worse to talk back. He went up over the top with the rest of the party,

and that was the last we saw of him till after dark the next evening. The patrol had got back long before that without him, and it was an even bet whether Windy had been shot or scared to death.

We had about made up our minds we were never going to see him again, when three men hove in sight out of the dark beyond the wires. One was driving the other two along at the end of his bayonet, and was ripping out a curse at them with every step.

"Blimey if it isn't Windy Dick!" cried Bonesey. "Has me eyesight gone wrong, or am I dreaming?"

That was who it was, too; Windy with two prisoners, and his chest was sticking out like a pigeon's with pride.

"I've been lying out in a shell-hole all day with these two blokes waiting for dark before bringing them in," he said. "They've been whining 'kamerad' at me three times a minute for fifteen hours thereabouts, and I've been tickling them with the bayonet every time they said it."

"You're not meaning to tell us you got that pair all by your little self?" said Big Tom.

"I did," answered Windy, "which is more than you've done. And don't you be calling me Windy any more, either."

The lads thought Windy must have gone balmy. Not only had he taken two prisoners all by himself, but he was a changed lad. There

wasn't anything meek and timid about the way he carried himself now.

The next day he told me what had happened. Somehow in the dark he had got separated from the patrol, and while wandering about alone trying to find them he had caught sight of the two Huns.

He had been so scared when he went out with the patrol that he made up his mind he was going to be killed sure, and when he saw the Huns he thought his time had come to go west. That idea put some ginger into him, and he said to himself that if he'd got to die he might as well pass out fighting. So he sailed into the Huns, who didn't see him coming, and who were so taken by surprise when they saw his bayonet under their noses that they threw up their hands.

Windy wandered about with the two Boches till sunrise, for he had lost his bearings, and was afraid of getting into the German trench by mistake. When it grew light he made sure which way to go, and dropped with the Boches into the shell-hole to wait for dark, when walking wouldn't be sure death.

After that there wasn't a better fighter in the company than Windy Dick, who had been scared into being brave.

One of the bravest men of the war was in our regiment. He was James Proctor, of Liverpool. He brought in twenty-four wounded men one at a time on his shoulders from in front of the German guns, and won the Victoria Cross.

I wasn't there when that was done, but the lads were all talking about it, and one of them, Michael O'Grady, of A Company, said he was going to win the Victoria Cross, too, or die trying for it.

"I'm going over to the Boches' trench to drop a bomb," he told Sergeant Griffiths.

It was a bright night, with the snipers busy, and the Sergeant warned him that he would be killed.

"I don't care," answered O'Grady. "I want to earn something."

He crept up over the top, and began crawling toward the Germans. The Sergeant thought he would be killed before he had gone ten yards, but although the bullets began to fly, none of them struck him. He had crawled to within a few feet of the Germans' first line when he was killed.

Another brave man was "Red" Bullen, who was brave because he had got the notion into his head that he couldn't be killed.

"I've been through more tight places than any man in the company," Red would say, "without a scratch to show for it. If I'd been slated to die I'd have been buried long ago. Look at this. It's what saves me. I can't be killed so long as I've got this about me."

Then he would pull out a little cross a French girl had given him, and that he wore hanging from a string around his neck. She had told him it would save him from being shot as long as he wore it.

One day he and three other men were together behind the lines when a shell exploded where they were standing. Red was knocked down, but he jumped up and found that he was unhurt, except for some gravel in his eyes. Then he saw that the three men who had been standing beside him had all been killed. After that he was more certain than ever that the cross would save him.

No matter how fast the bullets came, Red didn't care.

"They can't get me," he would say. "I needn't worry."

And then one day a bullet did get him.

"He must have lost his cross," said Big Tom, who was superstitious, and believed in things like that.

And, so help me! he had lost it. It wasn't on his body, and the string round his neck was broken.

"Don't tell me there's nothing in luck pieces," said Big Tom. "And yet I've known 'em to fail. A man I knew in B Company had a bead a girl had given him, and he always wore it next his skin, thinking it would save him. But he was killed the first day he was in the front line. How can you account for that now? The way I see it is that some of these luck pieces are lucky and some are unlucky, and there's never any telling which is which. You've just got to wear 'em and take a chance."

But I never could see it that way myself. If

a lad has to take a chance with them he might as well take a chance without them. I never wore one, and here I am alive.

Speaking of brave men, there were none braver than the Gurkhas, who fought side by side with us in those Ypres trenches. They had brought with them from India their big knives, curved like mowing-sickles, and sharpened on the concave edge, and they used them more often than the bayonet. They would swing them around just as if they were mowing grass. Of all the men in our line, the Germans dreaded those black Gurkhas the most.

Sometimes we would steal the Gurkhas' shirts, but they were a good-natured lot so long as we didn't go too far with our jokes. But if anybody went past the limit with them he was sure to be in trouble, for the Gurkha is a bad man to have dealings with when he's angry.

Whenever they set out for the German trenches the Gurkhas never stopped, no matter how thick the bullets were flying. And, oh! how Fritzie hated to see them coming! With those big knives of theirs they could clean out a German trench quicker than any men I ever saw.

We had many lads of our own as brave as any Gurkha that ever lived, but we had cowards, too, and that's more than the Gurkhas had. I learned a thing or two from those men who were afraid. I found that they were just as likely to get killed as the men who were brave. And I said to myself,

"What's the use of being a coward when it doesn't even save your life?"

Most of them were born cowards, and they never got over it, no matter how much fighting they went through. One of them came up to me one day and held up his trigger finger.

"Shoot it off for me, will you, Mascot?" he said. "I want to go back to Blighty.

I wouldn't do it, but he kept on asking till he found somebody who did the job for him. I could count a dozen such men who tried to lose the trigger finger to get out of the war. And I knew another who wanted to lose a finger but who hadn't the nerve. Every day he would talk about it, but when somebody would offer to shoot it off he would change his mind. That poor chap was always afraid, and even after he had been weeks in the trenches he would jump every time a shell came near.

Then came a night when he had to go over the top in a raid. He was shaking so much he could scarcely climb out of the trench. Half-way across No Man's Land he got a bullet in the back, and it was said afterward that it was one of our own officers who shot him because he was running away.

Better to be a brave man than a coward, and just as safe—perhaps a little safer. That's the lesson I learned from such men as he.

CHAPTER IX

"Hard Luck" Prophesies again

"Blind me eyes! If 'ere isn't old 'Ard Luck back again! Wot's going to 'appen to us now?"

It was old Bonesey, giving a welcome to the funeral-faced lad from the Fusiliers. We hadn't seen Welshie for some time, but he hadn't changed. He was the same old cheer-killer.

"Now, I'm telling you there's trouble on the way," Welshie began as soon as he had joined us.

"There's always trouble, with you about," growled Bonesey. "Wot's the gay word you've brought now?"

"Just set your eyes on that sky," said Welshie. "I'm telling you we're in for bad weather, and you'll know what that means after we've had a few days of it. It rains something awful in this God-forgotten land when it does rain, and I'm telling you it's on the way. There'll be good swimming in these trenches before it's over."

Welshie should have been in the Government weather-office. People would always know when storms were coming then. Only there'd be nothing else but storms.

It came just as that cheerful lad had predicted. That evening it began to rain. It rained all night hard. The water came into our dug-outs and soaked us through and through. No chance of dry clothes to change to. When we got wet we stayed wet. While we slept we oozed with water and mud. The rats splashed about beside us, spattering us now and then running over us. A dry rat feels bad enough on a lad's face, but a wet one—ow! I squirmed all the rest of the night after feeling one.

In the morning we got some tea, dog-biscuits and bully-beef, but we couldn't get the mud out of our mess-tins, and it got mixed up with the food. There was only one thing to console us: the guns weren't so busy as usual. Sometimes an hour would pass without a sound but the rain and the curses of the soldiers. Now and then the artillery would loosen up a little, and the shells sent the mud spouting up in big, brown geysers. A shell struck only a few feet away from us, and the mud-storm that went up from the hole it made came down all over us. I thought before that happened that we were as muddy as we could be, but we were a lot worse afterward.

"I say, Mascot," Billy Matchett called to me as he tried to wipe the mud out of his eyes. "What did you ever get into this blinkin' war for? You didn't have to."

"To get a bit of adventure, Billy," I answered. "And I'm getting it—more than I wanted. Those

old pirates I used to read about were better off than we. They didn't have mud like this where they were, or if they did the book-writers forgot to mention it."

"When this war is over," said Billy, "I'll look for my adventures down on the tropic islands, if I need any more. I've had enough of this country."

The trenches were filling up fast. The pumps worked steadily, but the water came in faster than they could send it out. By the end of that day it was up to my waist. And, oh, it was cold! I almost froze. It wouldn't have been so bad if I had known I was going to have a dry place to creep into at night to sleep, but there was no hope of that. We knew we should have to stay where we were, shivering and with our teeth chattering, until the rain stopped and the sun came out, and there was no telling when that would be.

"The water's spoiled all my fags," moaned Billy. "I'd give all the back pay coming to me for a smoke."

Most of the lads were in the same fix, and not having any cigarettes made them sadder than ever, for a Tommy doesn't think life is worth living when he can't smoke. There was no singing in the trench that day; even Billy had lost his voice, and it wasn't often he was without a song to cheer us with.

Nothing but growls and curses, and the swish, swish, swish of the rain. Up on the firing-step the sentries, with the water running from their

helmets, were staring over the top, but they couldn't see anything but the rain. There didn't seem to be much need of their being there, for the Germans weren't going to attack in such weather. The fight must have been taken all out of those Huns, as it was out of us.

And yet one of them did come—just one—through all that rain and mud. But he hadn't come to fight. He came wallowing through the mud and water like a half-drowned rat, with his hands above his head, and crying, "Kamerad! Kamerad!"

The sentries let him pass, and as he jumped into the trench the splash he sent up half blinded us.

"How did you get here?" asked the Sergeant, when Fritzie had come to the surface and had blown the water out of his mouth.

"Ach! Mein Gott!" cried Fritzie. "I svimmed here."

Then he told how, when nobody was looking, he had climbed out of his own trench, which he said was in even worse shape than ours, and had crawled over the sand-bags into the mud. In all the rain the German sentries didn't notice him, but for the first few yards he was afraid to stand up, and crawled through the mud, where sometimes he sank so deep that he thought he was lost. Once he fell into a shell-hole, and sank in mud and water to his neck. He thought he would never get out of that hole, but he managed it at last.

Then he lost his way, and splashed about for

hours. At last he came up against our wires, but he didn't know whether they were ours or the Germans'. He lay there listening, and after a time heard somebody calling in English.

He told us he had had enough of fighting, and had been trying to get away for weeks. He had been told that the British tortured their prisoners; but long before the war he had been a waiter in a London hotel, and had learned so much about the British, then, that he didn't believe what he had heard about us in the trenches.

That night the dug-outs were too full of water to sleep in, and we stayed in the trenches. Oh, what a night! Rain, rain, rain! It never stopped. And all night long the cold, muddy water half covered us. Some of the men dropped asleep standing up. Sometimes one of them would lose his balance, fall over into the water with a big splash, and disappear. Then he would come floundering up from the bottom with the sleep all washed out of him, and mad as a hatter. That happened to Billy Matchett once, and when I saw him coming up from under the water blowing, and puffing, I thought of the worrying he had done on our first day at the front about how he was going to get his regular daily bath, for he had been a natty chap back in Liverpool. We had just gone into the first-line trench, when he asked of a Black Watcher:

"Tell me, old top, how do we get our morning tub?"

"You gets it when it rains," said the Black Watcher. "And then you gets it good."

For an hour or two after he heard that Billy lost all interest in trench life. He had been talking about baths and dreaming about them ever since. And now that he was getting a good one he was no more satisfied than he had been before.

We thought the lads out on "night ops" between the lines were lucky for once, for they didn't have to spend the night in water, and could move about and get warm. But when they came back, just before daylight, we found they hadn't been so lucky after all. We were a hard-looking lot ourselves by that time, and they looked even worse than we.

They had been on the go all night in mud so deep and sticky that every step was hard work. Sometimes they had sunk in it to their knees. They were covered all over with it, and we couldn't recognize our best friends among them.

They told us they had spent the worst night of their lives, and that there wasn't one of them who hadn't fallen into a shell-hole, where he went out of sight in the mud. Once they had been so close to the enemy trench that they heard what the Boches were saying, and they had stayed to listen to some of Fritzie's sad songs. The Boches will sing, no matter how unhappy they may be, but when things go wrong their songs are about as cheerful as a funeral march.

About noon that day the rain stopped, and

before long the sun came out. But that didn't help matters much, because the water and mud in the trench were as bad as ever. At last the pumps got the water out, but a good part of the sun-baked mud stuck to us as long as we were up in front.

CHAPTER X

"Give 'em the Bayonet!"

A big push was coming. We all knew it, though how is more than I can say. For days the word had been going about that we were going to get after Fritzie hard, and send him back a little nearer to where he came from.

"It's about time," growled Big Tom, "that this blinkin' lot of blighters got another name than the 'Scruffy Fifth', and here's our chance to get it if we're going after them bloomin' Boches at last."

The Scruffy Fifth we were called because we were so grimy, but it wasn't through any fault of ours. How could we be anything else but scruffy when we hadn't been able to wash our faces since we got to the trenches? I'd have bet my pay that a lot of others who gave us that name were no cleaner than we. I never could understand why they picked us out for that title when the whole army should have had it, if anybody. But we had got it, and there wasn't a lad among us who didn't make up his mind, when he heard the big push was coming, that the Scruffy

Fifth would win a better name, if we all had to die for it.

One evening the word was passed around that we were going over the top some time before morning, and before long we were told that the time was set for midnight sharp.

I had heard enough from the old-timers to know what that meant. It meant that a lot of us would be killed, and a lot more wounded. I couldn't help feeling nervous and jumpy. A good deal worse I should have felt, too, if I hadn't killed that big Hun in the raid, but that put heart into me, and made me sure that, even though I was only a ninety-six pounder, I was going to have an even chance with those six-footers from Prussia.

"Go for 'em, Tommy!" I kept saying to myself. "Go for 'em! Dodge under their bayonets, and get 'em from below."

We spent a lot of time cleaning our guns and making sure our bayonets were in good shape, and the bombers filled their haversacks with enough stuff to blow up the whole German line.

Twenty minutes before midnight every man of us was ready and waiting. Those minutes of waiting were the hardest part of all that night's work, for it was only then that we had any time to think, and worry, and wonder what was going to happen to us. And that little bit of time dragged along as if it were hours. I never knew the men to be so quiet; no talking, no laughing,

no singing. If we had been old-timers it wouldn't have mattered, and we should have been as cheerful as ever, but a lad does a lot of hard thinking just before his first time over the top.

Twelve o'clock came. Up we went and over.

It was a black night, but dozens of rockets were going up, and the way lay clear before us. Our wire-cutters had cut wide lanes in our fences for us, and we crowded through them. The artillery and the machine-guns were going like mad. The bullets were singing all around us.

Some of our men fell. One toppled over right in front of me, so close that I had to run over him. If he was dead it didn't matter, and if wounded, I doubt if my ninety-six pounds hurt him much.

A shell whizzed along just above us. I felt the wind from it. It was so close that it lifted the caps from some of the men's heads.

Once I stumbled and fell. For a moment I lay there feeling myself all over, wondering if I had been hit. When I had made sure I was all right I jumped up and ran on. By that time the men were well ahead of me. As I tried to catch up a shell burst among them, and I saw some bodies flying into the air.

Then the way began to be filled with dead and wounded. Some of the wounded were dragging themselves over the ground, trying to get into shell-holes or back to our trenches. I passed a man who was kneeling by the side of a dying lad

whose legs had been blown off. The man on his knees was our chaplain. I heard him praying as I went by. A brave man was Father O'Brien—brave and good, and careless of his own life when there were wounded lads who needed him. He had gone over the top with the first of us; though I have known of many a chaplain who would never do that, and who would wait for the wounded to be brought to him behind the lines.

Over to the right a big tank—the first I had ever seen in action—was bobbing along toward the German line. It broke through the wires as if they had been no more than cobwebs, and came to a stop right over the Germans' first trench, with all its guns spouting.

I was almost there now, and I saw our lads piling in on top of the Huns. Ow! How they did pile in on them! Even the artillery couldn't drown the chorus of yells and groans that came up from that tangle of fighters. It was like a whole menagerie of starved wild-cats let loose. I didn't think of anything then but of jumping into the fight. There wasn't time to be afraid.

As I reached the trench I came up in front of a big Hun, who was standing on the parapet with his gun raised over his head and his bayonet pointing down at me.

I ducked my head and went for him. I'd have been a goner if I hadn't. It was my only chance. His bayonet must have slid over me just as my own got him. He threw up his arms, his gun

came tumbling over me, and he went down on his knees, while his body slowly crumpled up into a heap.

It's queer what thoughts sometimes come into a chap's mind at such moments. As I jabbed him the words of that Welsh Fusilier ran through my head: "You'll know the Lord is glad every time you stick your bayonet into a Hun". And I did know it. I knew the Lord was fighting on our side, as Father O'Brien had told us, and that I was doing His work.

A good many of our men had jumped clear over that first trench and had gone on to the next, but when I made the leap I landed in the bottom in a heap. It isn't easy to make a long jump with a rifle in your hands, unless you're long in the legs, and I'm not.

When I got to my feet I saw a German coming for me. I jumped back a foot or two just as he made a lunge for me with his bayonet, and he missed me by an inch. He was going at me again, when one of our lads brought the butt of a gun down on his head and knocked him cold.

About twenty feet away there were some more Germans, but before I had to worry about them a bomber did the trick for the whole lot. There were six of them. The bomb killed three, and the others couldn't have lived very long.

By that time the first trench was fairly well cleaned out. The only Germans left in it were dead or wounded, except the prisoners, and there

were a lot of them. Fritzie will fight hard until he sees the game is up, and then he doesn't lose any time in throwing up his hands and crying "Kamerad!"

It was while I was watching those prisoners that I learned what a tricky, savage beast Fritzie can be. There was one among them who managed to get his hand into his coat, and from it he pulled out a bomb. He was about to throw it into a group of our men when somebody ran him through with a bayonet. The bomb dropped to the ground. It didn't explode, and the man who had killed him picked it up and threw it over the top. It burst with an awful crash a few yards away, but no one was hurt.

After that I climbed up to see what had become of the lads who had gone on to the second trench. There was a lot of fighting going on over there. and I decided to make a run for it and take a hand in the fuss, for my fighting blood was up by that time, and I wasn't thinking of danger.

I went, and luck was with me, for, though the artillery and the typewriters were showering all the ground that lay between, I wasn't touched. Perhaps it was because I was so much smaller than the rest and harder to hit. I have often thought there was something in that notion, for it always seemed to me there were more big men killed than little ones.

I was almost across to the second trench, when I saw a lad from our company crawling toward

me, wounded. I stopped, thinking I should help him.

"Go on, kid, and fight," he cried. "It's only a broken leg."

So I left him and ran on.

It was the liveliest kind of a fight that I jumped into. Our lads and the Huns were all mixed up together, clubbing, bayoneting, and shooting, while our bombers were cleaning out the dug-outs fast.

I killed another Hun in that trench. It was easy, for I caught him on my bayonet while he was going at somebody else, and he didn't see me coming. That made two for me—fairly good for a lad of my size, I thought—but I didn't get a chance at another, though we captured a third trench before the fighting was over.

By the time we got that third trench we liked the fighting so much that we didn't want to stop, and we might have gone on to Berlin if our officers had let us. That was the place I wanted to get to, and I thought I should see it some day. I wanted a chance to shake my fist in the Kaiser's face, and perhaps to run a prince along at the end of my bayonet.

But the fighting was over for that day, though there was much work to be done—running the prisoners back to the rear, patching up the trenches we had won, and putting up parapets—and we were a tired lot when night came. We got some sleep then.

But out on the shell-pitted ground we had crossed there was no sleep for the stretcher-bearers. Four hundred and fifty of our dead and wounded lay out there in the dark, and many a fine lad I had known among them.

Yes, the finest of all was among them—our chaplain, dead beside a dying rifleman. They found him on his knees, and they thought at first that he was praying. The tears came to my eyes when I heard that he was gone, for he had been a good friend to me, and there wasn't a man among us who didn't love him. Many a time after that I thought of him, and sometimes when I was feeling home-sick, or when the rains and the mud and the hard marching were taking the heart out of me, it seemed to me I heard his voice speaking to me, telling me to be brave and have faith in God.

CHAPTER XI

It's the Fighting Fifth

Good-bye, old Scruffy Fifth! It's the Fighting Fifth now. Ask any British soldier who was at Ypres in the summer of 1917 what they called the Liverpool Fifth Battalion. Ask a London Scottie or a Welsh Fusilier; ask the Bantams or the Gurkhas, for they were all there, and any one of them will answer: "The Fighting Fifth is their name, and they've earned it."

From the night we took the three German trenches at the loss of so many of our men we began to hear that new name, and it wasn't many days before we were known by it everywhere. And I can tell you I was proud of it. I belonged to the Fighting Fifth, and the old fighters in the lines would have to forget that they had called me "the Scruffies' mascot". We all went about with our chests sticking out, as if every one of us had won the V.C., and we no longer envied even the Black Watch, famous though they were, and heroes of many battles.

"It's about time, I'm thinking," said Big Tom, "that, since we're the Scruffies no more, they

should send us back where we can get a little water to wash our faces with, to say nothing of washing all over."

We had been in the front trenches a month, and I know my own face hadn't been washed in all that time, except in the muddy water that we wallowed in when it rained, for clean water was too scarce to use for washing. But at last we were told that we were going back to rest billets, and that every one of us was going to have a bath. It made us all happy except Bonesey.

"Blimey!" he grumbled. "I don't know as I take to this hidea of a bath, it's so long since I've 'ad one. It'll give me a cold or worse. Wot's the use of washin' us? We're all right as we are, and most of us blokes weren't the bathin' kind at any time. There's that old blighter in A Company that was a tramp before the war, and that would rather sit up on the sand-bags for the snipers to shoot at than get scrubbed. 'E'll desert to the Germans if this bloomin' bath is forced on 'im."

But Billy Matchett almost fainted with joy when he heard the news. Back in Liverpool he had never gone without his morning tub, and he had been ashamed to keep company with himself ever since he got to the front.

We needed that rest, for we had lost a lot of sleep in the trenches, and had fought and worked hard. There had been two days when we got along on nothing but tea and biscuit, for something

—I never learned just what the trouble was—had gone wrong with the food supply, and at the best of times the food hadn't been anything to brag about. We had shivered in the wet for days together. We had put up with cooties and rats, and the German artillery had been hammering at us day and night. We were fed up with front-trench life, when at last the order came that sent us back to the rear.

A grimier lot of lads never came out of a coal-mine than we were when we went marching back to our base, five miles away. Our clothes were ragged, most of the men hadn't shaved in more than a month, and almost all of them had a tired, half-wild look in their eyes. No wonder the girls we passed wouldn't give us so much as a smile, and that the children ran away from us. But we didn't care. We were the Fighting Fifth.

Back at the base we got all cleaned up in no time, even Bonesey—baths, new clothes, shaves, though I didn't have to trouble about the shaving part of it, not being old enough to grow whiskers. I wished those girls we had passed could have seen us then. We would have shown them what a fine-looking lot the Fighting Fifth could be.

It was an easy, cushy life back at the base—nothing to do but lie about most of the time and talk and play "house" and "brag". Those are the two card games the soldiers play.

Poor old Bonesey did love the cards, and we hadn't been back at the base two days when he

had lost his pay playing "house", besides a German helmet and a lot of other relics he had brought from the front. Even his fags he lost, and he had to borrow smokes to keep him going to the next pay-day.

For hours at a time we lay out in the sun talking over all we had been through and what each of us had done in the big raid on the Germans. Bonesey had killed ten men, so he said, but I think he must have counted wrong, for some of the lads who had been fighting close to him said he killed only one and wounded another. But Big Tom had killed six, and had witnesses to prove it. I don't know how many Billy got. He was a brave lad, but wasn't given to bragging.

We had a theatre back at the base, and Billy was one of the singers. Some famous singers and players came over from England to entertain us. Harry Lauder was one of them, and the lads gave him a great welcome. Life in those dirty old front trenches seemed like a bad dream while we were having all those good times.

When it rained we crept into dug-outs or shacks or houses, but in fair weather we were out under the sky day and night. At night, lying in our blankets on the ground, we watched the shells and rockets shooting up into the sky, and were glad we were out of all that danger for a while. We could lie there, clean and quiet and peaceful, and watch the stars twinkle while we

thought about our people at home and of how good it would be to get back there.

All kinds of people we met at these rest billets —Belgian women and children who had been driven from their homes by the Germans, old Frenchmen who had been in the Franco-Prussian War, and men in our own army who had served for many years and had fought in many lands.

There was Sergeant Doyle, of our own regiment, who had fought in India and with Kitchener in the Soudan, and who had many a tale to tell of what he had been through. A very different kind of fighting it had been from what we knew in Belgium; fighting with never a trench nor dug-out, tank nor gas; fighting with the army on the move all the time, and with the cavalry playing as big a part as the infantry. It all seemed as strange to us lads as the old days of the knights in armour, yet Sergeant Doyle was the younger side of fifty, and it couldn't have been so very many years ago. I suppose that when I am a grey-headed gaffer the way we fought in Belgium will seem as strange to the young soldiers as the way Sergeant Doyle fought in the Soudan did to us.

And there was Fogarty, who had fought against the Mad Mullah in Somaliland and against the savages in South Africa, and who had wounds to show for it. Once he and a few other men had been surrounded on the desert by more than two hundred of the Mad Mullah's soldiers.

"We dropped into a hollow," Fogarty told us, as we lay out in a field one night under the stars, "and though there were only twelve of us, we made it so hot for those Arabs that they didn't dare come near. But they were on all sides of us, and we couldn't get away. All day we lay there, and the heat was fit to kill. Then the night came down, but there wasn't a chance to sneak off in the dark, for the lines were drawn too close around us. We might hold them off, for they weren't too eager to lose a lot of men by rushing us, but it was the fear of thirst that worried us the most. Our water bottles were almost empty, and we didn't dare take another drink. Our throats were so dry we couldn't speak above a whisper. And then morning came, and the sun came up, scorching hot, and the thirst drove us almost mad. Some of the men could stand it no longer, and drained their bottles dry, but the rest of us kept what few drops we had and only moistened our lips, not knowing how long we might be there. Before that day was over two of the men who had drained their bottles went crazy, and were for going out and fighting their way through the Arabs alone. We had to hold them back, and they fought us with their fists till the strength was all gone out of them. We knew we couldn't stand another day of it, and how we kept our senses through the night I don't know. The next day broke, and we thought it was our last. And then, just as the sun came up

over the sand, we caught sight of a column of British soldiers coming toward us, and we knew we were saved."

Another night a Frenchman with one arm—he was out of the war for good then—told us how he had fought in the Battle of the Marne and of the vision that his regiment had seen. Not one of us knew more than a few words of French, but he could speak English as well as anybody, for he had lived for years in London.

"It was at the end of that great day when we turned the Boches back from their drive on Paris," he told us. "The greatest day of the war it was, for the city was only a few miles away, and the whole world thought the Kaiser was going to get it. But we drove his big army back, weak though we were. That evening there came a blaze of light over in the northern sky, and above it, among the clouds, we saw Joan of Arc, on a white horse, leading her army. You may doubt it, but I tell you I saw it with my own eyes, and so did thousands of others, and to-day the story is told all over France. There can have been no doubt of what we saw; it was seen by too many to leave any question. If only I myself had seen it I might have thought I had been dreaming, but the whole regiment told the same story, and I saw many men fall down on their knees as they stared at it, while others cheered, as if they took it as a sign from Heaven that France would be saved."

The Tommies blew out a lot of cigarette smoke as he finished that story, and they said not a word. It was a queer one, I'll admit, and hard to swallow; but I heard it later in France from many a soldier who had fought at the Marne.

CHAPTER XII

The Mad Woman of Ypres

We thought we had learned in the trenches what a bad lot the Boches were, but after we had been back at the base a few days we knew far worse things about them. Many a story we heard of the black things they had done that made us feel like going out and trying to wipe out the whole bloody army of them, if we had to die for it.

It had been a fine country around Ypres, full of lovely gardens and splendid houses, before the Huns got there, but the gardens were ruined now, and so were the big homes they belonged to.

One day Billy, Bonesey, and I were out for a stroll, when we came to a big château. At the foot of the road that led up to it stood a lodge which had been battered by shells and was falling to pieces. Inside the gate in what was left of a great flower-garden were rows and rows of little wooden crosses that marked the graves of soldiers. The château, like the lodge, was half ruined. Every window in it was broken, and shells had torn great holes through the roof.

We went inside, and there we saw what a wreck the Huns had made of all the expensive furnishings. They had slashed the tapestries on the walls, chopped chairs and tables to pieces, broken mirrors, and used their knives on the woodwork without any other reason than love of mutilating things. Even the fine piano they had hacked to pieces.

We were looking about at all this ruin, and Billy was talking loudly of what devils the Boches were, when an old man stepped up and spoke to us. He was a wrinkled, white-haired, stoop-shouldered old fellow, and his voice was not much more than a whisper. He spoke in broken English, with a lot of French words mixed in, but Billy knew a little French, and we managed to understand what he was saying.

He told us that for fifty years he had been a servant of the family that owned the château. When the Germans were coming through Belgium the family had hurried over into France just in time to escape, but the old man had said, "No; I shall not go. This has been my home always, and I shall live and die here."

Then his two grandsons—only boys they were, younger than I—said they would stay with their grandfather, no matter what might happen.

The Huns came, and the old man tried to keep them out of the château, telling them it had been left in his care, and he must protect it, but while he pleaded with them a soldier knocked him

down with his gun. The blow made him unconscious for a while. When he came to life again he found that he had been dragged out into the garden, and was lying there alone on the ground.

After lying there some time, he managed to get to his feet, and began to look about for his grandsons. He couldn't find them. At last he learned that the Germans had brought some charge against them, and had marched them away to be shot. He wouldn't believe it until he found some persons who had seen them killed, and who told him everything. And they were not the only young boys the Germans killed on the charge of being spies or of firing on the soldiers.

"Some day," the old man said, "the master and his family will come back, and the old château will be made over; but I may not live to see that time. But I mean to live long enough to see the Boches beaten and punished. I know you will fight hard and win, you Britishers. It is the Lord's work you are doing."

More stories as dreadful as that old man's we heard as we went about over the country. Women who had lost their husbands and children told them to us. Children told them to us who had lost their fathers and mothers. And, oh, what hate their eyes showed as they spoke of the Boches!

At one time, while we were speaking with a

group of children and trying to teach them some of the good old English songs, a woman came up and questioned them one by one. It was always the same question:

"Have you seen my little Mimi?"

And the children would always shake their heads.

A tall, fine-looking woman she was, with sad eyes and a soft voice. After she had questioned them all, she stood a moment staring at me, then at Bonesey, then at Billy, without saying another word. And then she began to cry very softly, and walked away.

"It's the mad woman," one of the children told us; and we learned how the Huns had killed her little Mimi, leaving the mother all alone in the world, for her husband had fallen while fighting for his country.

Hearing such dreadful things made us so sad and gloomy that we were glad to get back to where the Tommies could cheer us with their jokes and their singing. Often I would lie awake at night long after the other lads had fallen asleep, and think over the stories I had heard, and wonder whether savages had ever been worse than those German devils that were trying to wipe us out. I made up my mind to kill as many of them as I could, and never to try to take a prisoner. And I told myself, too, that I should rather be killed than be taken prisoner by them. There are some kind Huns, I suppose, just as there are

kind savages, but I had heard of some of our soldiers who had fallen into the hands of the bad ones, and who had been tortured.

Glad we were when we could forget now and then the mad country we were in and all the mad things that were being done there, and bring our thoughts back to the good old days in England. It was good to hear old Bonesey tell stories of his housebreaking and of how he would manage to fool the bobbies. He didn't always fool them, for he had been caught and sent to prison several times, but he must have been a clever lad in his line, if half of what he told us was true. I asked Martin, the Scotland Yard man, about him one day, and he said:

"Yes, your friend Bonesey is a hard un, and some day, when the war's over, I may have to send him to prison myself. But I hope not. He's been too good a soldier. Better reform him, Mascot, while you've the chance."

I did try to reform Bonesey, but it wasn't any use.

"Wot! Me be honest!" he would say, as he winked one eye at Billy. "Why, bless yer bloomin' 'eart, Mascot, I don't know wot bein' honest is. Back to the 'ousebreakin' trade I'm goin' when the war's over. But I'd sort of like to get a V.C. meantimes. With that on me it would sort of make me seem respectable in my line of work."

"Don't you be trying to change a high-class

burglar into something he's not fitted for," put in Billy. "Every man to his trade is what I say, if he's good at it. There's chaplains I know of that are such cowards they stay behind the lines and wait for the dying soldiers to be brought back before they'll pray over them. And there's a lad I know who was only a beggar in the streets of Liverpool before the war, yet he's as brave as the best of them when it comes to bringing in the wounded from out in front. It's not what a man is outside, or what he calls himself; it's what he is inside that counts. Just remember——"

"Aw, shut up with the preachin'," grumbled Bonesey. "It's an actor you are, Billy Matchett, and I'm tellin' yer now you're no account at the preachin'. A jail-bird the Mascot 'ere would be if he listened to you, for you're so mixed up with wot you're tryin' to say that you'd 'ave him believin' a burglar's honest and an honest man's a burglar. Every man to his trade, and an actor to 'is, is wot I'm thinkin'."

CHAPTER XIII

Soldiers Three

Because a tin rooster hung over the door, Billy called it Chanticleer Tavern; but it had a French name that I never could pronounce. The wine they sold there was just to Billy's taste, and, as there was good food too, he and I were often in the Chanticleer together of an evening. It was there that we met the red-headed tanker, and his friends, the one-eared sniper and the fat miner.

They all three came in together one night and sat down at our table. Being a chummy lot, they were soon telling us of some of the things they had been through. I thought I had had a bit of adventure myself since coming to the front, but it was nothing to what those three lads had seen.

"I was in a tank at the Somme, where we gave the Boches the surprise of their lives," said the red-headed one, and he dipped a finger in his beer and drew wet lines on the table to show how the trenches had lain.

"Over here," he said, as he daubed with his finger, "were the Boches, and over there were

we, and here was the river. The artillery had been pounding the Boches hard, and there was nothing much left of their front trenches, but their fences were still up, and our infantry might have been shot to pieces before they could get through them.

"'Twas then they sent us tankers into the fight. Along we rattled, swaying and bumping and rolling, with the bullets buzzing against our old steel shell and making not so much as a dent. And behind came the infantry, with us protecting them. We got to those wire fences, and we went through them without so much as a pause, and the infantry poured in after through the big lanes we made.

"The ground was all full of shell-holes, but we never stopped. We would drop into a crater, and climb out again, and into another and up again, and though the old tank 'most bumped the skin off of us, she never got a puncture, She was afraid of nothing. Right up to a machine-gun she'd crawl, and look at it, and blaze away at the gunners, then squash right over it.

"Of a sudden came a bump that sent us sprawling against her insides and raised welts all over us. She had tumbled into a crater as big as a volcano's, and we thought for a second she was done for. But she righted herself as easy as if she was a jumping kangaroo, and went purring along as fresh and sound as ever.

"All along the line the other tanks were going

ahead, through wires and over shell-holes and through big craters, just as we were, mowing the Boches down by hundreds. Nothing could stop them. The infantry swept along with them, fighting like devils, and we all had the Huns scared blue. It was a great victory we won that day, as you lads have doubtless heard before.

"But maybe it wasn't hot inside that old tank! One hundred degrees and more, if it was anything at all. Stripped to the waist we were, and some of us stark naked, and the sweat was running off us in streams. And every time she bumped into a hole we would go bumping against her insides, till we were scratched and bruised and black and blue all over.

"And maybe the army didn't cheer us when we got back! Oh, for a few minutes we lads were the heroes. You should have heard the regiments yell when they caught sight of us, all bruised and black and grease-smeared as we were."

"That's all well enough," spoke up the fat man, "but I've been through more myself."

He had eyes as round and sharp as a bird's, that lad, and a neck like a bull's.

"I've been through more myself," he said, "and I'll lay my pay that I've done for more Huns than ever did that blinkin' tank of yours. There was once we planted a string of mines that blew up a whole German front line.

"There was another time when, as we were

burrowing out under No Man's Land, we heard the Huns scratching away close to us digging a tunnel of their own. We broke the head of our shaft into theirs, and there we were face to face with 'em in the dark. It was dark enough with the lights going, but they were put out, and then it was black as ink. We groped for those Huns down there under the ground, where we couldn't see our hands before our faces, and we fought 'em with our picks. And sometimes we fought them with our bare hands.

"I bumped into a man, and I didn't know whether he was friend or foe till I'd taken him by the throat and then had loosened his pipe a second to let him yell. When I heard him I knew he was Boche, and I tightened up his pipe again till he went limp in my hands.

"Then the lights went up once more, and we could see just enough to tell which were Boches and which were our own. We cleaned out their shaft without a shot fired, and the Huns over in the trench never knew what was happening. And we got back to our own line safe and sound, except three lads the Boches had killed while we were fighting in the dark."

The one-eared lad put his elbows on the table and asked Billy for a fag. He was as thin as the miner was fat, and the one ear that he had left stuck out so straight that he had a funny, lop-sided look.

"Now, I'm not sayin' my two pals here haven't

done a few things in this bloomin' war," he said, as he struck a match, "but it's only once in weeks they get a chance at the Boches, while I'm the lad that's gettin' 'em all the time. Snipin' is my job, and I've got upwards of two hundred Huns to my credit by now.

"One day I lay out in a clump of grass behind our line when a new German regiment had come up to the front. A green, careless lot they were, and it was little they knew about us snipers. Never have I had easier pickings than those lads. Every few minutes one of 'em would be sure to show himself a couple of inches or so above the top, and if he was there more than a second I'd be fairly sure to get him. I kept count, and it was twenty-three men that dropped to my gun that day.

"There was a hole in their parapet where old-timers would have known enough to bend down as they passed it, but it took a long time for those new lads to learn that much. I'd keep my blinkers on that spot, and every few minutes a head would pass by and I'd let go at it. I got a dozen in that one place."

"But it's little good you snipers are when it comes to takin' trenches," put in the red-headed tanker. "And you lie all day behind the line in your clump of grass, and run no bloomin' danger at all to speak of. And you have it cool and easy, while we tankers are sweatin' and skinnin' our hides against the iron."

"And are you tryin' to tell me we run no danger?" growled the sniper, putting his hand over the place where his ear was missing. "Where's that bloomin' ear of mine gone? Tell me that now. It was shot off by a Boche sniper, that's what it was. And when they find out where we are, their machine-guns pepper us, and we're lucky if we get away with our lives. Danger! It's little a tanker knows about danger, stuck away safe inside his shell, where the bullets can't get him."

That's the way they were giving it to one another, back and forth, when there came a crash that sent the chairs from under us and sent us sprawling on the floor. The whole building rocked with it, and I thought the walls were coming down. We ran out, and found that a shell had exploded a few feet outside the door. Just as we got outside another struck close by. We must have broken some running records for the next minute.

CHAPTER XIV

Bombs

Up to the trenches again we went when we had been two weeks in rest billets. They were not the same trenches we had left, for the whole line had been pushing forward while we were resting. Fritzie had been getting a hard pounding day after day, and he must have been sorry more than once that he started that war.

Part of our new trench ran into a wood, which was a black, creepy-looking place at night. There had been more than one hot fight in that gloomy spot, and many men had been killed there. The trees were all torn by shell-fire, and many of them were no more than stripped, dead trunks, sticking up like poles. I didn't like that wood. It looked so dismal that it took the heart out of me every time I set my eyes on it. I never looked at it that I didn't think of all the lads that had fallen there, and of those that had lain for hours wounded and suffering under the trees. It's strange what a difference the bright sunshine makes. If it hadn't been for those trees and the dark shadows

they cast, I shouldn't have thought half so much about all the terrible things that had happened on that bit of ground.

As for the trench, it was about as bad as the one we had been in before, and we knew that if it rained we should be wallowing in mud again.

"I hear some of the Huns have pianos, and electric lamps, and arm-chairs, and nice cement floors and walls in their trenches," said Big Tom. "How'd you like to be one of them Huns? Never any mud; and when you want to have a little rest and a smoke there's a nice plush-covered easy chair for you with a footstool in front of it. And when you're feeling blue you go and play a little piece on the piano. Wish we could find a trench like that. I'm thinkin' the Boches wouldn't keep it long."

We thought Big Tom was joking, but later we met men who had captured cement-lined trenches, and who had seen officers' dug-outs so grand that a prince would think he was back home in his palace.

"I wonder if there are any rats in this new hole they've brought us to," said Billy.

He found out when he crept into his dug-out for the night. The rats were there all right. And so was the mud. The lads that built that trench hadn't taken any lessons from the Huns with the pianos.

Fritzie gave us a warm welcome by sending

over a lot of trench-mortar bombs, along with other presents, such as whiz-bangs, pip-squeaks, and minniewurfers. They always had been generous with gifts of that sort, but they were more free-handed than usual when we arrived. I suppose they wanted to make sure we knew they were there.

The trench mortar would go off with a big click, so we knew the bomb was coming a second or two before it reached us. When we heard the click we would dive for the dug-outs. We heard the click the very first day in the trench, and I and two other lads tumbled into a dug-out that was right behind us so fast that we sprawled over one another. Then we heard the bomb hit the ground with a thud. About a second later it went off. We heard the timbers crashing around us, and the whole dug-out went to pieces. I thought that ended the war for us. We were buried under earth and timbers, and everything went black.

I was a bit surprised when I discovered I wasn't dead. I couldn't move, and there must have been a ton of stuff on top of me, but I could breathe, and I didn't feel any pain. In a few minutes they dug us out, and the three of us were as sound as ever, except for a few scratches and a lot of dirt in our eyes and mouths.

"It's well for the Fighting Fifth that they didn't kill our mascot," said Billy. "Our luck would have been spoiled for the rest of the war."

"No need to worry," put in Big Tom. "We'd get another mascot soon enough. Anything will do for a mascot—a cat, a dog, or any old thing; it don't matter so long as we've got one. And one kind's as lucky as another."

It wasn't long before Fritzie got a lesson from us about how to use bombs. One day a man named Edwards, who came from near my home in Liverpool, where I had known him well, and who had fought in South Africa, said he thought we had stood about enough from the Germans, and that he was going to take some of the freshness out of them.

That evening he went over the top alone with a load of bombs. It was fairly dark, and there was a mist hanging close to the ground, so the Germans didn't see him coming. He crawled up to their trench, pulled out his wire-cutter, made a hole in their fence, and went through. The Germans didn't get sight of him till he jumped right in on top of them. He had a bomb in his hand, and when he struck the bottom of the trench he held it up so they could all see it, and said, loud enough for them to hear:

"Hands up, or I'll give you this to whack amongst you!"

I don't know whether they understood what he said, they being nothing but Germans, but they saw the bomb all right, and they knew what was going to happen if their hands didn't go up. So up their hands went.

He managed to bring every one of those Huns back with him to our line—sixteen of them.

He missed the honour that was coming to him, for he was killed the next day, but his widow got the Military Medal for what he had done.

CHAPTER XV

Groping in the Dark

A few days later a patrol-party was being made up, and I wanted to be in it. The Sergeant wouldn't take me at first, saying I was too young for such work, but he changed his mind later, and I went along.

There were fifteen of us, and every one in the lot was glad of the chance. We waited till some time after dark, and then we stole out. It couldn't have been a better night for a patrol, for it was as black as ink—no moon, no stars, and a thick fog that hung close to the ground. We couldn't see three feet in front of us, and the Huns didn't have a chance of seeing us. Close together we kept, for we had to. We would never have found one another again if we had got separated. The Sergeant had a compass—an illuminated one that shone in the dark—and that showed us the way.

We made straight for the Germans' line, for the Sergeant had a plan for dropping a few bombs into their trench. He kept count of his steps, measuring the distance as well as he could, and when he thought we must be close to their wires we all got down and crawled.

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WE GOT SIGHT OF A GERMAN GUARD LOOKING OVER THE TOP

Just then a star-shell went up that sent a blaze of light through the fog. The fence was so close that we could have reached out and touched it. And right in front of us we got sight of a German guard looking over the top. We heard him give a surprised grunt, and we knew he had seen us. The next second his gun went off, and one of our men gave a groan and rolled over dead. Maybe we didn't do some fast crawling after that!

"Keep down!" our Sergeant whispered. "Drop into the first shell-hole you find."

The Huns' typewriters were going, and we could hear the bullets singing over our heads. Then a star-shell went up, and we stopped till the light went out. We had crawled a few yards, and were beginning to think the worst was over, when we heard the thud of a bomb hitting the ground close by. I could hear my heart beat as I waited for the crash. I might have tried running, but I didn't know where the thing lay, whether in front of us or behind, and it was about as safe to lie still as to take a chance of diving right into it.

It must have been fairly close, for the crash lifted me right up from the ground a foot or two. I came down with a bump that knocked the breath out of me, and the flying earth came down over me in a shower.

I expected another one to come any second, and I crawled off as fast as I could. After a minute I stopped and listened, but there wasn't a sound but the typewriters.

"I'm lost!" I told myself. "Where's the blooming Sergeant and his compass?"

I didn't know north, south, east, nor west. There wasn't anything to do but keep on crawling and trust to luck, and for all I knew I might have to crawl around in No Man's Land all night, and find myself out there for the Germans to shoot in a nice clear sunrise.

After a few minutes I found a shell-hole, and dropped into it. It wasn't a very big one, but good enough for night-time. I lay there awhile, thinking hard. There were several things I thought of doing. I could stay where I was, get my bearings when the sun came up, lie there all day, and crawl over to our trench after dark. But that would mean a whole day without food and with not much water, and the shell-hole wasn't any too big for day-time. Or I could crawl about till I found a bigger shell-hole, and try the same plan there. But if I should do that there was danger of getting up against the German wires and being seen again.

"Oh, keep on crawling," I said to myself, "and take a chance. I'm as likely to get killed one way as another."

So I crawled about till the clothes were almost worn off me, and after a time the machine-guns weren't so noisy, and I got to my feet and walked.

I must have been walking for at least an hour, and going around in circles, I suppose, for I hadn't come to either the Huns' line or ours, when I

bumped square into a man. I jumped back, and so did he. We were both scared half to death. We had both jumped so far that we could scarcely see each other in the fog, but it seemed to me I had caught sight of our own uniform. I made ready to run at him with the bayonet in case of need, and then I whispered at him.

"I say, you little blinkin' beggar," he called back, "you've shortened my bloomin' life ten years with the fright I got; that's what you've done."

It was old "Piccadilly Charlie", one of our patrol.

I asked him if he knew where our trench lay, but he was just as much lost as I was. He had crawled away when the bomb blew up, and had been roaming about alone, trying to make up his mind what to do.

"I'm thinkin', Mascot," said Charlie, "that it's best to just keep on walkin'. If there was any other way of passin' the time, well and good, but there ain't."

It must have been about half an hour later that we came up against some wires.

"It's an even chance whether it's the Huns' or our own," said Charlie.

We found a break in the fence, and crawled through. Charlie was just ahead of me. He had almost reached the sand-bags, when he turned and came crawling back. I knew what that meant. We got through the hole in the fence again,

crawled for a few yards, and then walked. Knowing where the Germans were helped us a little, for we could keep on going straight for a few yards anyway. As it happened, we must have gone fairly straight all the way, for before long we found ourselves in front of our own trench.

The Sergeant and six others, one with his hand blown off, had got there before us. Two others came in the next night, having lain in a shell-hole all day. Two nights later a patrol-party found the body of another. What became of the rest I don't know.

CHAPTER XVI

The Low-down Cur

There were a few new soldiers in our Company when we came out of rest billets. One of them was a tall, lank, shifty-eyed lad called "Spike". I didn't like the look of him from the first time I set eyes on him. He was a bad one. I'd have laid my pay to that. There were men among us who knew all about him, and they said he had never done an honest day's work in his life till the army took him, and that he had been known as a killer back in Liverpool.

"Watch out for that blighter," Big Tom told us. "I'm saying he's a low-down cur, and that's not saying half enough about him."

Spike didn't have a friend in the trench, except a lad who had been trying ever since he got to the front to get somebody to shoot off his trigger finger so he could get back to Blighty. The rest of us kept away from him as much as we could.

Spike had heard that Big Tom had been saying things about him, and he swore he would get even some day.

"And he will, too, if he gets the chance," said

Big Tom. "He was behind the bars once for knifing a man in the back, and he's thinking, like as not, about doing that same thing to me. I know the kind he is. He'd never meet a man face to face, not he."

Not many men like Spike were among us, but there were a few, and some black stories were being told about two or three of them. If a man wanted to do murder he could find no better place than the front for it, because he could blame it on the Germans, and nobody would know the difference. And such things had been done in the trenches, so the stories went.

"We've had others like this new-comer," said a chunky little chap who was known as "Spud". "There was that fox-faced bloke who was killed last week for one. I've been thinking he got what he deserved when the shell hit him. It was no Hun bullet that killed old Kelly a month ago. It was that fox-faced blighter's gun that did it. He had sworn he'd get him, and when Kelly fell he was close beside him, and his gun was smoking. It's easy getting away with a deed like that out here."

A few days later Bonesey caught Spike stealing his fags. Bonesey was a good-natured lad as a rule, but before he had managed to get those cigarettes he had gone without smoking for three days, except when he picked up a butt some officer had dropped, and he was red-hot with rage when he caught Spike trying to steal them. Spike got a blow in the jaw that sent him sprawling in the

mud. When he picked himself up he was feeling his teeth to see if they were all there.

"You got what was coming to you," I told him. "Anybody who'll steal fags should get worse than that."

He squinted his eyes and looked me up and down.

"I'd hand yer one, ye little imp," he growled, "if it wasn't for the big friends you've got about yer. But wait a while. There's some here that's got something comin' to em' from me and they'll get it some day."

"Some night yer mean," said Bonesey. "Some time in the dark and be'ind their backs. I knows the kind of muck you come from. I may not be much to brag of meself, but if I wasn't a few shades better than you I'd put a bullet through me 'ead."

Spike slunk away, but we knew there was murder in his heart.

"There's three of us 'e's got marked for future reference," said Bonesey. "I'm one, you're another, Big Tom's a third. Watch out, lad!"

Spike kept away from us as much as he could after that. He was a lonely beggar, with scarcely a word for anybody, but the surly look in his eyes told us fairly well what he was thinking about.

It happened a little later that he and Big Tom were on night guard at the same time. Our line never ran straight, but was all curls and angles, and between the two posts the trench bent

backward like a letter V. Tom was on one side of the V and Spike on the other, and they were not fifty yards apart. The night was so black that they couldn't see each other, but each knew exactly where the other was.

Before long a bullet came sputtering into the sand-bags at the spot where Big Tom stood. A few minutes later another struck in the same place, and Tom began to think it queer that the two had found the same mark on a quiet night when the Huns were doing so little shooting.

He took a peep over the top, and at the same moment an exploding shell sent a dazzling light over the trench. Just as the shell exploded something struck his helmet, and he fell over to the bottom. He picked himself up unhurt, but the top of his helmet had a hole in it. It was not such a hole as a bit of a shell would have made, but had been drilled by a bullet.

Big Tom knew who had sent that bullet, but he said nothing about it till the next evening, when I heard him telling the story.

"Full well I knew he was going to do something of the kind sooner or later," he was saying, "but my mind was running on other things than him last night, and I didn't expect it. Then those two bullets came plunk into the sand-bags and set me wondering. When the shell exploded my face was toward the spot where that blighter was posted, and for half a second I saw him plainer than if the sun had been up. He was just going to shoot,

and, so help me! his gun was pointing straight at me. Don't tell me it wasn't his bullet that got me. I know better."

So, as if the danger from the Huns wasn't bad enough, it was plain murder we must guard against. We were not afraid of the Boches any longer, because we had been fighting them so long, but we were afraid of Spike. He was as sly and tricky as any German, and he had a better chance at us than they had. They would have to fight hard to get at us, and risk their lives doing so, but Spike could strike from behind us or shoot close by from the dark with small danger to himself.

"I'm thinkin' some of us would better 'ave a little talk with that gay lad, and put some fear into 'is black heart," Bonesey suggested.

But Big Tom shook his head.

"'Twould do little good," he said. "He's an old-timer at dirty tricks, and there's no scarin' him. We got to be careful, that's all. He may get one of us and he may not. If he's a bullet in his belt that's got my number or yours, you or me will get it sooner or later."

From that night on I kept the tail of my eye on Spike, and whenever I knew he was near me in the dark my nerves would start a-jumping.

CHAPTER XVII

Bonesey Becomes a Hero

Very soon we had other troubles to worry over, and for the time we forgot about Spike. The German artillery opened up on us, and while the shelling lasted our trench was dreadfully unhealthy. In all the time we had been at the front we never had had such a dose from the big guns as we got then.

"Lie down and duck your heads when you hear a shell coming," an officer sang out to us just after the first one had struck close by.

The next minute we heard another one on the way, and we all went down on our knees or our stomachs. We put our hands over our eyes so that we should not be blinded if flying splinters came our way, and waited for the explosion. The thing burst a few yards off and spattered us with dirt.

Then a shrapnel-shell burst just over us, so close that I almost felt the heat of it. I thought I was done for that time, and it surprised me when I couldn't feel any pain. I twitched my arms and legs to make sure there was nothing wrong with

them, and they moved easily enough, but I couldn't understand why none of that shrapnel had hit me when it was flying all around me as thick as flies. At least one poor chap hadn't been so lucky, for I heard a cry for stretcher-bearers.

"Blimey! That was a bad one!" said the lad next to me. "Must have copped more than one of us. We'll all go west if many more like that come this way."

"Spud's down," somebody called.

"Aye! And three more. Hope there's no more shrapnel comin'."

A wounded man was groaning dreadfully somewhere near. Then another shell came and sent the dirt flying over us again. Every minute one flew over us, sometimes sending splinters into the trench; and most of the time we were on our knees or our stomachs with our hands over our eyes.

I thought that shelling would never stop. There's nothing worse than heavy shell-fire—the awful noise of it, the flying splinters, and the thinking that every minute that passes may be your last. Give me bullets, give me rain and mud, give me rats and cooties, anything but shell-fire. I'd have gone through No Man's Land twice over if I had had my choice, rather than spend five minutes in a trench where the shells were flying. The waiting for each shell to burst, and the shock from the crash of them, get on a lad's nerves till he shakes all over.

For two hours the shelling lasted, and then of a sudden stopped. We got up and stretched ourselves, and we all looked as if we hadn't slept for a week—all of us that were left, for the stretcher-bearers had been busy, and there was many a face I missed. For a long time my head buzzed from the noise of the shells, and every nerve in my body was on the jump.

A little later a sentry caught sight of a wounded man out in front. We thought he must be one of a small raiding-party that had gone out the night before. Almost every one of us took chances with bullets to take a look at him from over the top. Every little while he would wave his hand to call our attention to him, even though it brought the danger of being seen by the Boches, who would have fired on him if they had known he was alive.

It was dreadful to see him lying suffering out there, probably with no water left in his bottle, while we knew we could do nothing to help him. It was hot, hot as blazes, and he was lying with his face to the glaring sun. And we could only watch him suffer.

"Blimey! I can't stand lookin' at him any more," said Tom, who had a soft heart in his big body. "If it wasn't that I have a wife and children at home I'd go out after him. I would that."

" 'Twould be no more than foolishness," the Sergeant told him. "You wouldn't live to get half-way. What's the sense in committing suicide?"

"There'd be just a chance if 'twas dark," said Bonesey, "and it will be that when night falls, for the moon don't get up till late."

"There might be," the Sergeant said; "and again there might not. The Boches were never so wide awake as these last few days."

"Who is the poor bloke lying out there?" somebody asked. "Anybody know?"

The Sergeant shook his head.

"Five men were missing from that last patrol-party when it got back. He may be any one of those five. Or he may have been out there for days. Perhaps he's been lying in a shell-hole, where we couldn't see him, and has managed to crawl out of it. Anyway, he's one of our own men. I got a good look at him, and I know that."

"The Germans will get sight of him soon if he keeps on signalling," said Billy. "It's a pity we can't let him know we've seen him so he'll lie quiet."

After a time Bonesey stepped up to me looking solemn as an owl.

"Mascot," he said, "I'm thinkin' some one of us blokes should go out and bring that lad in, whoever he may be."

"I'm too small," I said. "I couldn't carry him."

"'Ow about me?" said Bonesey. "I've no woman nor kids. 'Twould be better to get shot out there than while sneakin' through some rich bloke's 'ouse back 'ome. 'Twould sort of improve me reputation with Scotland Yard, I'm thinkin'."

All the rest of the day I couldn't get the wounded man out of my mind. Every lad in the trench looked serious; there was never a smile nor a laugh, for how could we be cheerful while that poor suffering chap lay out there just beyond us signalling for help and not getting it? It was the first day that passed without a song, and even Billy, who was the finest singer in the lot, and one of the jolliest, never raised his voice.

A little after dark Bonesey said to the Sergeant:

"I'm goin' over the top to bring 'im in. The Boches won't see me now."

The Sergeant nodded, and Bonesey went up the ladder.

"Hug the ground," the Sergeant called after him. "Don't lift your head, or they'll get you sure. And don't forget to lie still whenever they send up a light."

I wished the night had been darker, for though the moon wasn't up the stars were shining in a clear sky, and we could see all the way across to the German line. Yet it might have been worse, for there was hardly any rifle-firing at the time, and the heavies and the typewriters were as quiet as a church.

I climbed up, and watched Bonesey on his way. He was too wise a lad to take foolish chances, and was moving along almost flat to the ground and as slow as a turtle. He was well beyond the wires when a star-shell went up and sent a glare

over him. I could feel my heart jump. But he lay as still as a dead man while the light lasted, and no shot came his way. A moment later he went out of sight in some dip in the ground or a shell-hole, and I didn't see him again for a long time. Then I heard somebody cry:

"There he is! Strike me pink! He's got him! He's got him!"

And, so help me! he had got him. He was crawling with the wounded lad on his back. It was slow work over that rough ground, with a shell-hole in the way every few feet, and I couldn't see how the Germans could help seeing him, but there was no sign that they did. I could hardly breathe as I waited for the next light to go up. They would surely see him then, I thought.

He was half-way back when the light broke. He stopped and lay low, but the wounded man on top of him was a mark the Boches couldn't fail to see. Bullets began to fly, and the lights went up one after another in quick succession.

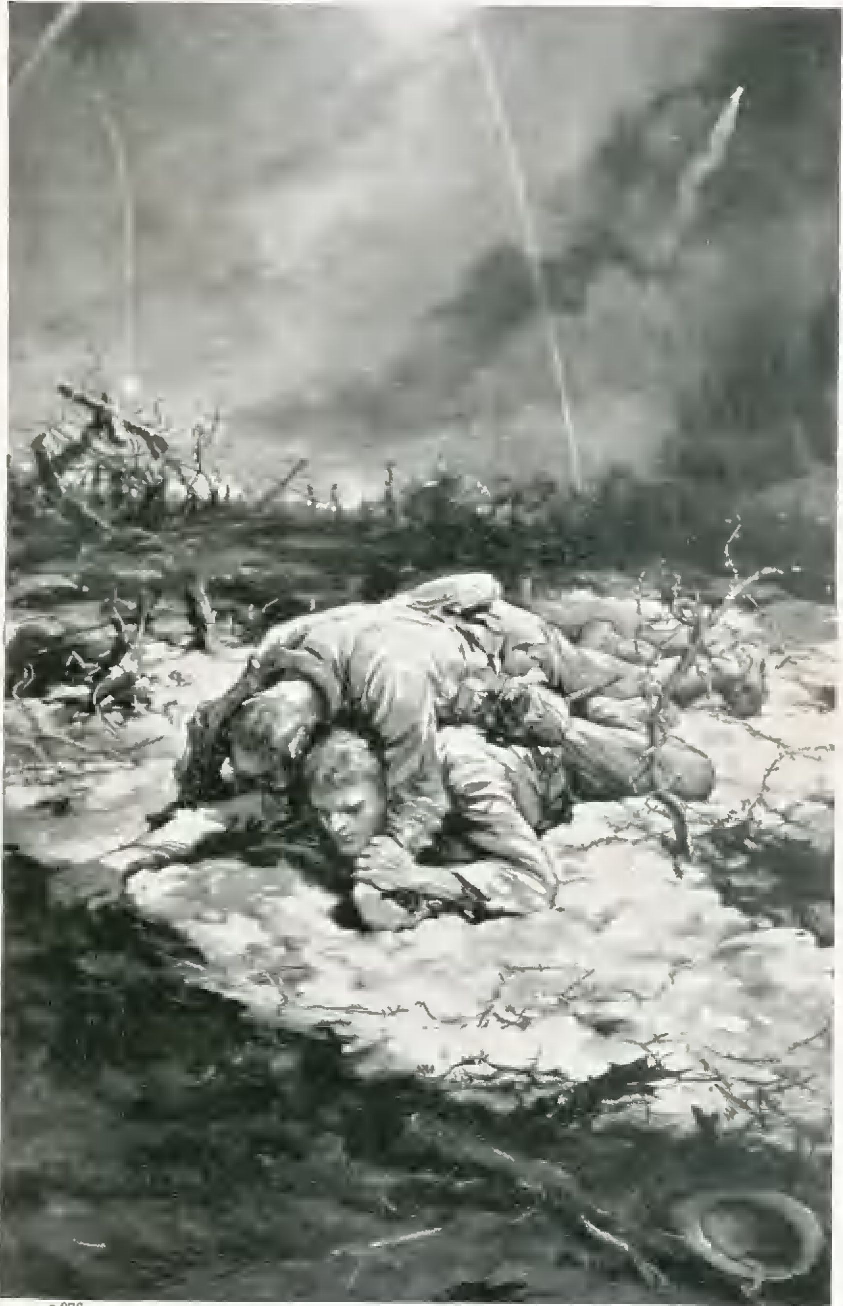
Bonesey and his man got into a shell-hole, and lay there for a good half-hour. Then they came in sight, not twenty yards away. The Germans saw them, and began firing again. When close to our line Bonesey stopped crawling, got to his feet, and broke into a run. It takes a strong man to do that with such a weight on his back. He got to our parapet, and two men climbed up to help him down.

Bonesey hadn't so much as a scratch, but the

man he had brought in lay still, and his eyes were closed.

"A bullet got 'im as I was crawlin' with 'im," Bonesey said. "I fear 'e's done for."

The Sergeant knelt over the poor chap, and found the bullet-hole in the back of his head. He was stone dead.



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BULLETS BEGAN TO FLY, AND THE LIGHTS WENT UP ONE AFTER ANOTHER

CHAPTER XVIII

The Man from America

Don't let me forget the man from America, for I have been so busy telling about the fighting that I haven't mentioned that chummy lad who, when we were feeling blue and homesick, and things were at their worst, made us forget the shells, the rats, the mud, and all our troubles, as he told us of his adventures in strange lands.

His name was M'Bride. A tall, skinny chap he was, with a twinkle in his eyes, and a good word for everybody. He was one of the new men in our Company, and from that trench he was getting his first look at the war.

Many a queer story M'Bride told us of digging gold in the Klondike, of hunting bears in the Rocky Mountains, of cowboy life on the plains, for he had been everywhere in America where there was adventure to be found.

"Now let me ask yer, did yer ever see any Indians?" Piccadilly said to him one day.

"Sure," M'Bride answered. "Lots of 'em. I've fought against 'em when they were trying to raid New York City. We drove 'em back into Jersey, where they got away in the woods."

"What yer givin' us?" growled Piccadilly, his little eyes getting red, as they always did when he was angry. "Do yer think I know no more of America than to swallow one like that? There's no Indians within two hundred miles of New York."

"You're right," spoke up M'Bride, without so much as blinking. "Did I say New York? It was a slip of the tongue. It was Buffalo I meant."

"That's more like it," said Piccadilly.

"They came again a few days later," M'Bride went on, "and did a war dance around the edge of the town. Then they raided us, waving their tomahawks, and yelling fit to freeze your blood. They captured the mayor, tied him to a stake, stuck pine-needles into his skin and set fire to them. Then they scalped him. We rescued him just in time, but he's had to wear a toupee ever since."

"You should have fighting enough over there, without comin' to this bloomin' place," Piccadilly said, as he puffed his cigarette.

"I wanted a change," M'Bride explained. "And I thought I'd like to see England, and take a squint at the King."

"It's easy seein' 'im," Bonesey put in. "I've met 'im 'undreds of times as he strolled along the street with a gold crown on 'is 'ead, an ermine robe flappin' round 'im, and a big cigar between 'is teeth."

Of course old Bonesey was spoofing the Yankee

lad—"stringing" or "joshing" as they say in America.

"We've kings of our own," M'Bride said. "Oil-kings, steel-kings, soap-kings, all kinds of kings. Whenever one of 'em wants to build a new palace he levies an extra tax on his subjects, and without the trouble of asking his parliament about it, either. Any one of 'em is so rich he could buy all of King George's crown jewels and give 'em to the kids for playthings."

This M'Bride was much given to boasting, though not so much about himself as of his country. He thought the war would be over very soon now that the Yankees were coming in.

"We used to think that if we sent the Giants or the Red Sox over here we could clean up most of Europe without much trouble," he said, "but it looks now as if we'd have to send a few of our regiments. When they get here we'll lead you straight through to Berlin without stopping, and we'll have the Kaiser singing 'The Star Spangled Banner', and wishing he'd never sunk the *Lusitania.* We're going to take him back with us and put him in the Central Park Zoo."

But even with all his boasting we all liked him well, and there was never a time when he wasn't glad to cheer us up a bit with his tales of the wild places he had lived in. Listening to him brought back my old longing to take to the sea and visit such places as he had seen. He had even been in the West Indies and the ports

of the old-time buccaneers, and, like as not, had seen the very island that Jim Hawkins told about.

"There's many an island I've been to down in those seas," he told me, "that was once the hiding-place of pirate gold. And there's plenty of the gold buried on some of 'em to this day. Men still go digging for it, though it's only once in a half-century or so that they find any worth mentioning. But it's the Klondike you should go to, son, if it's adventure you're looking for. If your luck's with you you'll find gold; if not, you may starve or freeze to death hunting for it. No need of going to war for excitement when there are such places as that scattered over the map. But you want to take a wad of money with you, for prices are way up. I've been in Dawson when eggs were five dollars a-piece, and if you took a girl into a restaurant and bought her a couple of 'em fried she'd be yours for life. There was a one-eyed, ugly-looking guy there who stole the belle of the town away from as handsome a feller as you ever set eyes on, and who couldn't understand how it had been done till he found the one-eyed guy had been buying her fried eggs."

He told us of his life in the high mountains, of the bears he tracked through the forests, of the mountain lions that came prowling down to his camp after dark and howled all night; and there wasn't a man among us who didn't wish he was out of the blooming war and in some such place as that.

"That's the life, son," he would say. "It beats the trenches; and, believe me, I'm going back to it as soon as this fuss is over."

The bullets would be flying over us, and the big guns roaring as he told his stories, but I didn't seem to hear them at all. I was 'way over there in America, in the places he was telling about, digging gold and hunting bears.

CHAPTER XIX

On the March

Good news came at last. We were going to leave Ypres. Where they were going to send us we didn't know, but somewhere south. But, wherever it was, we learned there would be days of marching, instead of being cooped up like rats in the dirty trenches.

We didn't shed any tears over leaving that old hole in the ground, but we were sorry for the poor chaps who relieved us, for we knew what we had been through and what they would have to put up with after us.

On a fine starlit night we filed out to the rear with our big packs on our shoulders, and struck into the road. There were thousands of other men on that road, all coming up to the Ypres front, and we cheered them as they marched by, regiment after regiment. They were all singing, and we gave them song for song. I wondered where they had come from and what fights they had been in, for they were no new soldiers just over, but old veterans, who had been in many

a battle. A jolly crowd they were. Little they cared what trouble might be waiting for them ahead. They had been through so much that nothing more could worry them.

Sometimes the road was so crowded that we had to pass in single file, exchanging jokes with the lads who were passing us, and telling them what nice trenches we had left for them at Ypres. Sometimes all of us—those coming and going—would have to get out of the way for the ammunition wagons that came banging and rattling along with mules and horses at a gallop. Sometimes, at a big bend in the road, we could see the lighted ends of the soldiers' cigarettes trailing along for a mile or more, like a file of fireflies.

Till long after midnight we marched, halting now and then to rest beside the road, and at last we turned in for some sleep in an open field just outside a little village.

Oh, it felt good to be out in the open country again, away from the shells and the bullets, and to lie out in the green grass and the flowers and listen to the frogs singing in the marshes! I was tired from the march, but I lay awake for an hour listening to those croaking frogs and looking over to the little village that was such a pretty sight against the sky.

When the sun came up the birds were singing all around us, and I felt as fresh as a daisy. We fell in after breakfast, and took the road that led

through the village. Our band was playing, and we were all singing as we trailed along behind it; for it was singing that made the marching easy and kept our spirits up. When we got to the cobble-stoned village streets the band began to play "Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean", and you should have heard the women and children cheer the tune and clap their hands as we went swinging by.

"That's the stuff!" M'Bride cried. "That's the best tune I've heard since I've been at the front. I'm fed up with 'God Save the King!'"

A few moments later the band gave us "The Star-Spangled Banner", and that American began to yell like a savage.

"Sing it, fellers! Give us the grand old song!" he cried.

And sing it we did—those of us that knew the words. The regiments that passed us on their way to Ypres took it up from us, and in a few minutes there were miles of Britishers singing the American song.

We passed through so many villages that day that I lost count of them, and in each one the women and children and old men came out to welcome us. We were near the edge of France, and often they were singing the "Marseillaise" as we passed.

About dark we halted for the night at a place that had been fairly well banged to pieces by the Boches. Half the cottages were without roofs,

and the little church had lost its tower. But the Boches had been gone for many months, and the village was as peaceful as a graveyard now.

"I want a bath," said Billy, "and I know where I'm going to get it. There's a brook not far from here. Come on, Mascot!"

"I'm thinkin' you should 'ave been born a duck or a fish," grumbled Bonesey. "I never knew such a bloke for wantin' to dabble in the water. You'll wash the 'ide off of yer some day. It ain't 'ealthy, so much bathin'."

So Bonesey left us, and went hunting for a place where he could buy some beer, and Billy and I went off through the fields toward the brook. We found it in a little wood—as fine a brook as I ever saw, with clear, cool water, and shiny pebbles underneath. We stripped, and splashed into it in a hurry, and oh, how good it felt! The dirt was caked into us, and we didn't have any soap, but we lay on the pebbly bottom and soaked till we got half-way clean. When we came out we found a patch of soft moss, and we lay there till we were dry, for the evening was warm.

Then we strolled back to the village, where we found a woman who could speak a little English, and who told us how she and her children had lived in her cellar for two days while the Germans were shelling the place. She had heard from the soldiers that had passed through

on their way towards Ypres that there was big fighting going on to the south of us, and that the Germans were getting the worst of it.

"That's what they're sending us into," said Billy. "There's lively times ahead, lad."

The villagers took as many of our men into their houses as they had room for; but Billy, Bonesey, and I slept in the open again, and we were glad to be out there rather than under a roof, since the night was clear and dry. But luck turned against us, for along toward morning it began to rain. When day broke it was coming down in sheets, and the cheer had all gone out of us. We fell into line for the march, sopping wet, and the whole Company was grumbling and swearing, for they couldn't even smoke, the rain was so heavy.

Regiments were still going past us, and they were a dreary-looking crowd in the storm. Never a song was heard, and even the bands had stopped playing. Now and then some of the lads passing by would call out something about hot times to the south, so we knew the woman in the village had told us the truth, and that we were in for it. But there wasn't a sign of trouble so far, and the woods and fields were as quiet as if the war were a hundred miles away.

All day we marched, stopping every two or three hours for rest, and the rain never stopped. The wind was blowing in our faces, and the storm half blinded us. The water made our packs and

our clothes as heavy as lead, and squirted from our boots with every step.

"This bloomin' battalion's got a curse on it," grumbled Bonesey. "Nothin' but trouble for us poor blokes wherever we goes."

CHAPTER XX

Sinking in the Bog

That night we spent in the sopping fields beside the road. All night the rain came down, with never a let-up, and when morning broke it was still with us. All day we marched through it, silent and glum, and whenever a voice was raised it was only to grumble and growl and curse.

"I 'opes yer gettin' washin' enough to satisfy yer for the time," Bonesey called to Billy. "Yer won't be cryin' for a bath again just yet, I'm thinkin'."

Billy was too much fed up with trouble to answer. Never had I known a time when there were fewer words passed along the line; and so it was all day—not a joke nor a song.

Then another night in the wet. Yet we slept like the dead, for we were nigh to being done for, from the weight of our packs and the beating of the wind and rain against us. When the bugles called us up in the cold, grey dawn the rain was coming down as hard as ever.

"If only I 'ad a dry fag now I could bear up and be a bit cheery," Bonesey grumbled, "but

me smokes are soaked through and spoiled, hevery one of 'em. Any bloke got a dry fag about 'im?"

"'Ear 'im! 'As any bloke got a dry fag!" came from somewhere in the line. "Wot does 'e think it's been doin' these last days and nights? 'E must 'ave dreamt the sun was shinin'. There's not a dry fag in the bloomin' army."

And the lad was right; there wasn't a dry thing of any kind in the blooming army, not even our skins, for we were as well soaked as if we had dropped into a pond with our clothes on.

Along toward the end of the day there came a grumbling and roaring from the south.

"There's thunder," said Piccadilly. "That don't sound much like it was goin' to clear."

"Thunder me eye!" growled the Sergeant. "It's guns."

The noise grew louder as we marched on, and it was as the Sergeant had told us; it was the guns. We were getting near the fighting, though it was little we felt like going into more trouble than we had already. The fighting-blood was all soaked out of us. For once I hated to think of going into battle. I wanted to see the sun shine, and to be out lying in the grass in the dry, open fields again, with everything quiet and peaceful and the birds singing.

Maybe our officers knew what was ahead of us in the way of fighting, and knew just where we were going to, but they never let us poor

Tommies know about such things. It was just follow orders with us, and ask no questions. It was just work and march and fight with us, and bear our troubles as well as we might, while the officers did the thinking, and got whatever information there was, and kept their mouths shut about it. But we couldn't help wondering where the battle was, and how it was going, and whether the Boches were getting beaten or our line was breaking. And the only answer we got to all the questions we asked ourselves was the roaring of those guns.

"They're speakin' to us," said Bonesey. "They're sayin', ''Urry up! 'Urry up! 'Urry up, and get into the fight!' And that's the only word that ever comes for us poor tired beggars."

We got into the edge of the fuss the next day, when shrapnel began to crack over our heads. A shell exploded in a cottage a few hundred yards away, and up shot a mass of black smoke and flying dust and bricks. When the smoke cleared away the cottage was gone. There wasn't even a scrap of a wall left.

The Boches had the range of our road, so we turned off from it to get away from their fire, and struck through the fields. Sometimes we were pushing through the long, wet grass, but often we were wallowing in ploughed ground, where the mud was over our ankles and the going was hard enough to take the heart out of the strongest of us.

At last we came back to the road, and soon we began to see signs of the fighting. Artillery limbers were rolling along the cross-roads, through the driving rain, with ammunition, and galloping horses were dragging empty limbers back for more. Red Cross motors came in sight, moving carefully along, full of wounded men. Then a group of wounded came walking by, and, for all their hurts and their dripping clothes, their spirits were still high, for they were laughing and joking. One was limping along between two comrades who had bandages round their heads, and another, just able to hobble, passed by all alone, looking white and sick.

It grew dark, yet we were still on the march. And the rain was still coming down, with the wind whistling through it. The night grew inky black, and I could scarcely see the lad who marched shoulder to shoulder beside me. What a night that was! But the swish of the water and the roar of the wind were as nothing to the noise of the big guns. There were shells flying overhead, and, as they broke, they sent a glare far up into the sky across the sheets of rain, so that the big drops looked miles long.

We left the road again, and there's no telling how our officers managed to find our way in all that blackness. Maybe they didn't find it. They may have taken the wrong course for all I know. But I know that, whether it was the right way or the wrong one, it was a dreadful course to

follow. Over sticky furrows we stumbled and fell, we slipped in wet grass, we bumped into trees, and we went splashing into pools of water to our waists.

Then a shell struck among us, and there came cries and groans from wounded men and shouts from the officers. But we could see not a thing of what was going on. Not even the ground at our feet could we see. Dark nights I have known at the front, and many of them, but never one so black as that. Even the light of the lanterns spread only a few feet through the storm.

A squad of about twenty of us got separated from the column when the shell exploded. A moment later the man who carried our lantern fell into a hole of water, and the light went out for good. We groped about, trying to find our way back to the rest of the Company. After a while we stood still and listened. Wherever the column was, we couldn't hear them, nor any other sound but the storm and the guns.

Then we went into the mud—worse mud than any we had pulled through since the rain began. One moment we were sinking into it half-way to our knees, and it was as much as we could do to pull ourselves free; the next we were splashing in pools of water, while the mud at the bottom gripped our feet.

We floundered along, not knowing which way to turn, and the bog grew worse and worse. Once I went into the mire to my knees, and

thought I was lost, for it took the last bit of strength that was left me to get out.

There came a cry for help.

"I'm sinking! I'm sinking!" the voice cried. "The mud's sucking me down!"

And then:

"We can't help him. We're sinking ourselves."

I felt the mud pulling me down too. Not another step could I take. All the time I was struggling to get loose, the voice of the frightened lad, whoever he was, was crying for help over and over again.

Then came a flash of light. It may have been lightning, or it may have been a bursting shell, or a mine, or a rocket. I was too busy trying to save myself to know what it came from. All I knew was that it lit up the whole bog with a dazzling glare, and that close in front of us a lad had sunk into the mud to his shoulders and was slowly going out of sight.

For half a second we saw him. His face showed white as chalk, and his arms were reaching out to us. Then the light went out.

For a few moments he kept calling to us. Then we heard him no more. Another light flashed, and in the spot where he had been there was nothing but black mud. I began to shiver and shake as the mud drew me down. It took the heart out of me, that sight.

I cried out, for I thought the bog had got me

for good and all. An arm reached out from behind and grabbed me, and with that help I pulled myself free. The next step brought me to firmer ground.

"We'll all be done for if we don't get out of here soon," said the lad who had helped me. "I was almost gone myself a minute ago, and I'm that twisted I don't know which way to turn."

Close together we moved carefully along, and soon we found easier going. Before long we heard someone calling out, "This way, boys!" and we followed the voice. After a few minutes we had reached grass-covered fields, and, as a light flashed, we saw the road not a hundred yards ahead.

CHAPTER XXI

The Battle of Flanders

As we were drawing away from the bog a man edged up to me out of somewhere in the blackness and kept by my side. I spoke, but he said not a word. After a time, in one of those flashes of light, I looked square into his face. The sight of it turned me cold, for it was Spike who was beside me.

I jumped away from him, and I am not sure that I didn't cry out, for my nerves had gone to pieces in the struggle in the mud. Even back in that bog I should rather have been, taking chances with being swallowed by it, than out there in the open alone on such a night, with that blighter sneaking along beside me in the pitchy dark. He could knife me or shoot me, and nobody would ever be the wiser.

I made off from him as fast as I could, but it seemed to me that all the time he was keeping behind me. It may have been my shaky nerves that made me think so, for, when I got to the road where the lights of marching regiments were flickering along the way, I was alone.

As I sat resting by the roadside, and trying to scrape some of the thick cakes of mud from my clothes and boots, a few lads came straggling out of the fields and joined me. They were part of our Company, and had been with me in the bog. As shaky as I they were, and we were all so tired out from what we had been through, that as we started off to try to find our place in the column we slunk along as if our feet had been weighted with lead.

"I'd give all my back pay for a fag," said one of them, some lad I must have known, though I couldn't recognize him in the dark. "My nerves are jumping something awful. And not a smoke among us! I lost my gun, and nigh to lost my life along with it, in that mud-hole. Blimey! I wish this bloomin' night was over."

As fast as we could we marched along the road, and not very far ahead we came up with our battalion. The lads in our Company didn't even know we had been away; they didn't know anything but that the rain was soaking through them and that their packs were growing heavier with every step.

Before long we turned off the road again, and we found, a little farther on, that they were sending us into the trenches. They were more like brooks than trenches. We waded through them with the water up to our knees. Half dead we were for want of sleep, but it was little rest we got that night in all the wet.

It was there that we learned that our army had been driving the Huns back for almost a week, and that there was big fighting going on over more than twenty miles of line. We were on the edge of the great Battle of Flanders, and Fritzie was getting his worst beating since the Marne.

In the morning the storm let up, but it was a dark, foggy day, and our clothes were still sopping wet. I could think of nothing but that I wanted to go to sleep, and every time I sat down my head began to nod. But there was no time to doze. They were going to send us into the fight, and we had to clean our guns and make ready.

Before long our artillery got to work, and made a terrible din. It was the biggest bombardment I had ever heard, and our officers told us that we were giving the Germans twice as many shells as they were sending back. We knew well what all the big gun-fire meant. They were getting the German trenches into shape for us to break through. They were going to wipe those trenches out if they could, so that we could meet Fritzie in the open.

In the afternoon, soaked and tired though we were, we went over the top and at them. It was mud, mud, mud everywhere, and it was all we could do to get through it. We slipped, and fell, and wallowed a bit, and were up again, and the mud was caked over us from head to foot as we drove forward through the bullets and shells.

Ahead of us, in the mist, I saw a grey line of

men crouching out in the open with their bayonets ready for us. We went into them full tilt, and we found that they were lined up in front of trenches that had been shot to pieces and almost levelled by the big shells.

A Hun rose up out of a hole in front of me, and the mud and water was dripping from him as he jabbed at me with his bayonet. I caught his gun against mine and turned it. And then I got him. He dropped back into his hole, and I heard the mud splash as he fell.

Near by, some Boches were jumping into a dug-out through a door in the top. We went for them, and the door closed with a bang. We tried to break through, but the door was made of steel and was fastened tight. The whole dug-out was steel and concrete, and had held fast through all the shell-fire that had wiped out the trench. If we had pried away at it all night we wouldn't have made a dent.

A group of bombers came up and crouched down beside the door to wait for it to open.

"Fritzie'll 'ave to open up some time," said a fat Tommy who held a bomb in his fist, "and w'en 'e does we'll drop a few of these into 'im."

The Huns' line went all to pieces as we drove into it, and in not much more than a minute there were hundreds of Boches with their hands in the air, singing "Kamerad!"

We went on to attack the second line, and there, too, we found the trenches almost wiped

out and the Huns waiting for us in front of them. They had had such an awful dose of shell-fire that they didn't put up much of a fight, and the cold steel we gave them did the trick in no time.

I came back with three prisoners who had been turned over to me to take to the rear. As we passed the concrete dug-out the bombers were still crouching over the steel door waiting. They were like cats watching a mouse-hole.

"I'm tellin' yer it's only a question of time," said the fat Tommy. "Then they opens the door and we drops the bombs."

One of my prisoners was an officer, and he was showing signs of getting balky. I tickled him with the point of my bayonet, and he gave a yell and went ahead without any more trouble. I drove the three of them along in front of me through the mud, letting them know the bayonet wasn't keeping very far away from their skins, and it was as easy as driving horses. But I was a bit worried when I saw the fog creeping in around us again, thinking that if it got thick they might try to break away.

They must have been thinking the same thing, for, when the fog did thicken up a bit, one of them jumped into it and ran. I fired at him, and I must have hit him somewhere, for I heard him yell, but he kept on running. I couldn't go after him with the other two on my hands, and before I could shoot again he was hidden in the fog. But I was thankful he wasn't the officer.

The fighting was still going on all along the line, but I didn't have any more of it that day. After I delivered my prisoners I found a fairly dry spot in our trench with nobody near, and I curled up in it for a bit of rest. I was so fagged I couldn't have kept going five minutes more, and I had no more than touched the ground when I dropped asleep.

A sergeant woke me up with a crack from the butt of his gun on the soles of my feet. I must have been sleeping there more than an hour, so some of the lads told me. It did me good. I felt fresh again, and like going out and doing some more fighting.

When night came the big guns were still going, and we heard that some of our infantry was attacking in the dark not far away.

Next morning we went to work digging trenches where the shells had levelled those of the Huns, and filling sand-bags for the parapets. As it grew dark we were hurried up to the new front and into a trench we had taken from the Germans, but which had been left in fairly good shape. The Boches were getting ready to attack, and we had small chance of sleep.

About two hours after dark their artillery opened up strong, and a little later they came at us.

We climbed up, and met them in front of the sand-bags. We put the bayonets to them, and the punishment they got from us was more than

they could stand. Little by little we pushed them back, and when their line broke we chased them through the mud, stumbling over the dead and wounded.

It was then that I saw Spike going forward a few feet away from me, and I kept the tail of an eye on him, knowing well that he hadn't forgotten his grudge, and that he was still waiting for a chance to get even. A little later I caught sight of Bonesey. Spike was just behind him, keeping the same distance as they went forward, and I knew it was no German he was after. He was tracking Bonesey and waiting for his chance, for he never let him get out of his sight. I ran forward to give Bonesey a warning, but I hadn't reached him when Spike raised his gun and fired. Bonesey clapped a hand to his cheek, where the bullet had cut a gash through the skin, and at the same time a German in front of him fell forward dead. He had been killed by the same bullet.

Bonesey wheeled around, with his gun raised ready to shoot, but Spike had made off into the dark, and we didn't see him again till the fighting was over.

We might have complained to an officer of what he had done; but what would we gain by it? Spike could say he had shot at the German, and we could never prove that he hadn't. And yet we knew well that he would try the same trick again sooner or later.

"Some one of these nights, or some day in a

fog, 'e'll get one of us," Bonesey said, "unless we get 'im first. I'm goin' to shoot 'im in the next fight, Mascot, providin' the chance comes me way."

But Spike's chance didn't come in Flanders, though we fought there for a full week longer, driving them back mile after mile, taking the heart out of them till they wanted to fight no more and wished they had never crossed the Rhine.

CHAPTER XXII

Victims of the Huns

Many a lad was missing from our Company when we went on the march again. Some were lying under the daisies in Flanders, some were among the wounded in the hospitals, and a few were in German prison camps, for the Huns, even though we had given them a hard beating, had managed to round up a few prisoners now and then.

We filed out one night from the trenches where the big battle had been fought, and took the road to the south. The dreadful rains were over, the stars were all out, and we were a jolly lot as we swung along, our packs on our backs, singing and joking into France.

For the next few days we were on the go a good part of the time, headed for we didn't know where, but into another battle as likely as not. We were going through a country the Germans had just left, and the marks of the brutes were everywhere — houses blown to pieces, churches battered by shells, orchards chopped down, crops ruined. But the people were the saddest sight— the old men and women and children who had lost their homes.

Toward the end of the first day we were marching along in the dust under a scorching hot sun, and our water-bottles were empty. We had come a long way through the heat, and our tongues were dry with thirst. We came to a pool of water beside the road, and some of the soldiers ran up and drank from it, though the water was warm and muddy. More of us were about to try it, but the officers stopped us. They said the Germans had been there only a short time before, and that they might have put poison in the pool, that being a favourite trick of theirs.

When the lads who had drunk the water heard that they began to worry. And they had reason to, for soon they all turned terribly sick, and one dropped dead in the road.

Our officers sent men back to warn the regiments that were following us, and it was well they did. When our men got to the pool the Bedfordshires had just come up to it, and some of them were on their knees beside it about to drink when they got the warning.

When we turned into the fields beside the road that evening to spend the night, I caught sight of the fat bomber who had been squatting over the steel door of the dug-out where the Germans were trapped in the battle of Flanders. He was lying on the grass now smoking a cigarette, and I went up to him and asked him what had happened to those Huns.

"We waited a full hour for them," he said,

"and then they lifted the bloomin' door a bit, and we dropped the presents we 'ad for them through the crack. There may be bits of Germans lyin' round there yet."

The bomber and I slept side by side that night, and before morning I was sorry I hadn't chosen some other spot, for he had a way of waking up from time to time and poking me with his foot to get me to listen to something he had done in the line of blowing Huns to pieces. I never took a fancy to those bombers. They were good lads to keep away from, for there was never any telling whether they had the stuff hidden about themselves somewhere; and it went off by accident sometimes.

When we got to La Bassée the big church there was full of wounded soldiers. It was in that church that we saw something that turned me cold—the most dreadful sight of all the awful things we had seen. One of the nurses in charge of the wounded was a Sister of Mercy who came forward to welcome us. An officer held out his hand to her, but she drew back from him and shook her head. Then she lifted her arms for him to see. Both hands had been cut off by the Huns. As I stared at her I thought of what the Fusilier had told us, when we came to Ypres, of what devils the German soldiers were, and I knew then that he had been right when he said it was doing the Lord's work to kill them.

It was like a dreadful dream, that long march of

ours from village to village, for every day, almost every hour, we came to some new sight that saddened us or sent our blood running cold. We had thought in Flanders that we had seen all the terrible things that a man could ever lay eyes on, but what we saw as we went through France was worse than those battle-fields full of dead men. I want to forget most of it. I don't want it to come back and haunt me. I don't want it to come to me in my dreams or when I am alone in the dark.

One morning, as we were resting beside the road, a pretty girl, not more than eighteen years old, came running up to us, and just as she reached us fell forward into the dust in a faint. Some cold water was thrown over her face, and before long her strength came back and she told her story.

She and a young man had been taken prisoners by the Germans, who had locked them up in a house, meaning to send them back behind their lines later. Some German soldiers were there with them, and a guard was pacing back and forth outside. The soldiers found wine in the cellar, and before long were very drunk. They began to threaten the two prisoners with their bayonets. After a time the soldiers fell asleep, and the girl and the young man crept to a window and softly opened it. They saw the guard still pacing back and forth. The young man got a knot of firewood, and, holding it ready to strike, waited for him to get to the window. As the guard passed it the young man struck him on the head with the

knot of wood and knocked him senseless. Then he and the girl climbed out and ran off through the fields. The girl lost him somewhere in the dark, and ran on alone. At last, miles away from where she had escaped, she caught sight of us beside the road and knew she was saved.

She drew two pieces of bread from her dress, and told us they were all that she had left to keep her from starving. Her home was gone, her parents had been killed by the shell that destroyed it, and she had nothing in the world but the clothes she wore and those two pieces of bread.

Our Captain gave her a little money, and sent her down the line to be turned over to the care of the Royal Garrison Artillery.

A little later we came to a farm-house full of old men, women, and children whose homes had been destroyed. A very old man with a white beard owned the farm-house, and had lived there alone. Then the Germans came and destroyed almost all the houses in the neighbourhood. Whenever the old man heard of a homeless family he sent for them and took them in under his roof, until now almost all his neighbours were there. It was a big house, and he had enough wine and wheat-cakes to keep them all from starving for a time.

When the Germans came the old man was away on a visit to Amiens. On his return he found that his daughter and his grandchildren had been killed by the soldiers, and he was all alone in the world. Then he made a vow that all the rest of

his life he would help his homeless neighbours, and that his home should always be theirs until they could build new homes of their own.

Glad I was when at last we heard the big shells screeching over our heads again. We could forget then all that we had seen and heard on the march through the land of tears. That is what I heard one of our officers call it—the land of tears. And I know he was right.

We had no more than heard our first shell when along came that funeral-faced Welshman we had known at Ypres, and I knew there was trouble in the wind. What he was doing down there I don't know to this day, for there wasn't a sign of his regiment, but there he was all alone and as gloomy as ever.

"Hey, there, 'Ard Luck!" Bonesey sang out. "You forgot something. 'Ow is it yer wasn't predictin' that rain and mud and fighting' we got into down by the River Lys?"

Old Hard Luck stopped for half a minute, and called after us as we passed him.

"Now, I'm tellin' you," he said, "there's goin' to be trouble down where you're goin'."

That was all we heard, and we had to wait till we got there to find out what the trouble was to be.

CHAPTER XXIII

An Enemy Leaves Us

Louder and louder the big guns spoke as we moved on into the south, and we thought the Boches must have made up their minds to get even for the beating we had given them in Flanders. We passed regiments that had just come out of battle, and they told us Fritzie was as busy as a bee all along the front as far as Arras. Now and then on the road we got a bad dose of his shell-fire, so we knew we must be marching along the edge of his main line, and that at any hour he might move forward and attack us or that we might be sent in after him.

At one spot the shells were falling in the road, and we had to move out through the fields. It was while we were crossing those farms that the Boche artillery got the range on us and killed some of our men.

Then a shell struck a few steps away from me and burrowed into the ground under my feet. The explosion sent me up into the air, and when I fell the flying earth came down and buried me deep. Some of the lads set to work with shovels trying to dig me out, and if they hadn't worked fast I should have been done for. They dug down till they

came to one of my feet, and they pulled me out by the leg. I was half dead, and it took some time to bring me back to life, but they doctored me up and I was as sound as ever. I hadn't got a scratch.

"You weren't made to get killed, Mascot," said Billy. "If the Boches had a bullet with your number you'd have got it by this time, with all the fighting you've been through, and it's the same way with me. There's no bullets with our numbers, Mascot, and we'll both pull through this bloomin' war alive."

I began to think the same thing myself after all the close squeezes I had had. Many a lad in our Company had got the idea in his head that he couldn't be killed because he had come through so much fighting without a scratch. But I wasn't so sure myself. I had known a chap who had been in the war ever since the battle of the Marne, and because he had been lucky he, too, had got the notion that there was no bullet with his number. The idea made him brave and reckless, and he took all kinds of chances. But there was a bullet with his number after all, and it got him at last in the battle of Flanders.

Soon we got into the fighting again, but it wasn't in the trenches this time. We found the Boches in a village, where, as they lay hidden in the cellars of ruined houses, they fired at us with machine-guns. Our artillery opened up on them, and then we went in with the bayonets. They raked the streets with their machine-gun fire, and

we had to shelter ourselves behind the broken walls of the buildings. Then we would run out when the firing died down, and charge them. We cleaned them out of one cellar after another. It was like fighting rats in a pit, and it was just like rats that they squealed when they found the British terriers jumping in on top of them and giving them the cold steel.

There was one cellar on top of a little rise in the ground where the Boches gave us the hardest work of all. They had several machine-guns with them, and they were behind broken stone walls that were a foot thick. Two or three times they drove us back, and it looked as if we should have to lose many men before getting them. Our officers called us off after a time.

"I'm goin' to get those blighters meself," I heard the fat bomber say. He had a talk with our Captain and then disappeared. The next time I saw him he was crawling along on his stomach behind some piles of broken stones. From there he crept into a patch of long grass on the slope leading up to the cellar where the Boches lay. A few minutes later he ran forward, right in front of the muzzles of their guns. It was the bravest deed I had ever seen. In a moment he was up on the cellar wall.

Then there came a crash, followed by another almost in the same second. A cloud of smoke and dirt rose up, and we gave a yell and charged. There wasn't a man left to meet us—only the dead

and wounded—but just outside the wall we found the fat bomber crouching low and nursing an ugly cut in his forehead.

There was still some fighting going on in other parts of the village, but it didn't last long. We passed big groups of Hun prisoners, and more were running in all the time with their hands raised and calling "Kamerad!"

Then we began the search for our dead and wounded, and there were many of them, for the machine-guns had been pouring a dreadful fire into us.

It was then, as I was helping in the search, that I found, lying beside a cellar wall, a lad whose face I thought I knew, though it was covered with blood and dirt. He was still alive, and just able to call out feebly for help, but he was going fast.

"Blimey!" he whispered, as I bent over him. "So it's you, ye little imp!"

Then I knew him. It was Spike.

"'Old me up, matie," he pleaded in a voice so weak I could hardly hear him. "I knows I'm goin', for it's gettin' dark."

The sun was shining down on us, but I knew the light was going out for him for good and all.

"I 'opes the Lord may forgive me for the black deeds I've done," he mumbled. "Take me 'and, matie, and say there's no 'ard feelin's before I goes."

So I took his hand, and the next moment his eyes closed and I heard a rattle in his throat.

CHAPTER XXIV

The Fight in the Stone House

Very often in the trenches or on the march I thought of the far-away *Treasure Island* nights in my room at home, and I would say to myself, "Tommy, you never expected then that some day you'd be going Jim Hawkins one better, did you now?"

I bring in Jim Hawkins again because I am drawing near to an adventure that has reminded me ever since of the liveliest part of that boys' story, the pirates' attack on the block-house. Many times at home I had dreamed about that block-house fight, and of course in the dream I wasn't Tommy Kehoe but the Hawkins boy. Dreams like that don't come true once in a million times, but mine did. Only in my case the heroes were outside and the villains within. But our block-house fight made the crowd on *Treasure Island* seem like blooming swabs.

We were marching cheerily along toward Arras, and must have been about six miles from the town. It was four o'clock of a warm, sunny afternoon. Our throats were dry and our stomachs

empty; but our hearts were light enough, for we were looking forward to bully-beef, biscuits, and tea, and perhaps a fine, hot stew at the end of the day's march, and a good sleep beside the road. Some of the lads were singing, and Billy Matchett and I were talking of what we might expect in the way of fighting at Arras.

In front of us, between bare fields, lay a long stretch of white road. Far off near the sky-line stood a gloomy-looking stone house. As we came nearer we saw that the windows were all smashed, and the roof torn by shells. There wasn't a sign of life about it, and I thought that whoever had lived there must have deserted it long ago.

I can't say what it was about that dismal house that aroused my curiosity, for we had passed many a building that had been battered by shells, but for some reason I couldn't keep my eyes from it. There was something uncanny about the place, and I've learned that often when things are wrong, while seeming to be all right, there's something he can't explain inside a man that tells him so.

We were within perhaps a hundred yards of the house when I thought I saw a man's head appear in one of the broken windows. The next moment came the dreadful click-click-click-click that we all had heard so often. Machine-guns! They were being fired from those windows.

"Typewriters!" cried Billy, his eyes growing big.

The same instant a man right in front of him fell forward and lay still. I saw two more drop before we could fall into position.

In less than a minute we were lined up along the road, the front line lying flat on their stomachs, the line behind them on their knees, and the men in the rear standing up, and then our bullets began to patter against the walls of the house like a hailstorm. But those Germans were very well protected, and had had plenty of time to make all their arrangements for defending themselves before opening fire on us.

More of our men fell. It didn't look as if we could stay there much longer without being badly shot up. But there was no cover in sight. We might have fallen back out of range and waited for the artillery to come up, but I suppose our officers wouldn't have cared to have the house shelled. Of course, as always, they must have wanted to take some prisoners. Prisoners are valuable, because often the officers can squeeze useful information out of them. There wouldn't have been any live prisoners left if the artillery had got to work. And, besides, the artillery might be hours away for all we knew.

The men spread out all around the house, and Fritzie didn't find us so easy to hit after that. We kept on pumping shot at them, hoping to throw such a hot fire through the windows that the machine-gunners would have to go out of business. I think we did put one or two of their guns out of

action, but at least one was still going, and now and then one of our men would fall.

The fight had been going on quite a time when one of our officers, who had been skirmishing about through the fields, came back with the news that he had found a big log, and some of the men went with him to get it. They came back in a few minutes lugging it along with them. It was the trunk of a tree, fifteen or twenty feet long and at least a foot thick.

Right away we saw what was in the wind. That log was going to be used as a battering ram.

A squad of men got hold of it and went charging down the road as fast as they could go, yelling like savages. In front of them, with a good grip on the end of the log, was old Bonesey, the ex-burglar, on the way to the best bit of housebreaking he had ever done in his life, while Martin, the Scotland Yard man, was running along behind keeping an eye on him.

All of us who were still on that side of the house went tearing after them. The machine-gun bullets were spattering all around us in the dust, but we didn't care. It was a brand-new kind of adventure, and we were wild to get into it. On the march my feet had dragged as if they had been weighted down with lead, but I had forgotten all about being tired, and raced along like a two-year-old just out of the paddock. Fighting in the trenches was about as exciting as a prayer-meeting compared to this.

Old Bonesey and the rest of the crowd with the ram were making a bee line for the front door of the house. One of them dropped dead when they were within thirty yards of it, but the rest kept on without so much as hesitating, and came up against the door at full speed. The big log struck it square in the centre. There was a tremendous crash, and the whole door flew into pieces.

Half a dozen men drove through the broken door before the splinters had stopped flying. By the time I got there the ground floor was so jammed with Huns and Tommies that there wasn't room to swing a gun.

I think the first men to rush in must have killed or wounded a good many of the Germans, but there were still plenty of them to be accounted for. It was the liveliest hand-to-hand fighting I had ever seen. There was scarcely room for bayonet-work or even for shooting, though now and then a gun would go off. Our men were using their knives and their fists. The yells and groans and occasional shots made a terrible noise.

It wasn't the sort of a mess for me to be getting into, for I was altogether too small for such close hand-to-hand work as that, and I couldn't see a Fritzie in the lot who didn't stand head and shoulders above me. I had more than one chance to knife one of them in the back, but doing that is too much like Fritzie's own style of fighting.

I say there wasn't room to swing a gun, but there was one exception. In the corner of the

room stood a big Prussian who was using the butt of his gun as a club, and nobody could get near him. He could have been shot, of course, but either nobody cared to fire at him or nobody thought of it. I think it must have been the fun of a hand-to-hand fight with him that kept them from shooting. His gun was swinging like the sail of a windmill in a gale, and a Tommy with his knife in his hand who tried to crawl under it was knocked flat.

At this the big Hun gave a roar like a lion, and began to bellow names at us. He called us pigs, and probably a good many worse things, too, but it didn't hurt our feelings much since we couldn't understand more than one word in ten.

"Put the steel to 'im! Put the steel to 'im!"

The whole roomful of us was yelling and pushing and struggling to get near.

A moment later one of our lads jabbed at him with a bayonet, but Fritzie parried it, and sent the Tommy's gun flying against the wall. It must have been two or three minutes that he held everybody off. Then a Tommy made a spring for him, as quick as a cat, and drove a knife into him. Fritzie's gun dropped with a crash to the floor, and he fell on top of it.

The big room in which all this fighting took place covered almost all the ground floor, but there was a little adjoining room, and I saw some of the Tommies standing at the door and looking into it. I squeezed in among them, and there

before us lay a man, a woman, and a baby stone dead. They had been stabbed with bayonets. I never felt so much like fighting as when I saw that little baby lying there. Old Bonesey was in the group at the door, and, though he as well as all of us had seen many dreadful things before that day, there were big tears running down his face. He wasn't a bad sort of a burglar after all, poor old Bonesey.

By that time the fighting on that floor was over. There wasn't a live German left on it who wasn't wounded, but several had jumped through the windows, and had been captured by men watching outside. But there was a staircase running down along the wall of the big room, and two men among several who had tried to climb it had been shot down by Germans who were lying flat on the upper landing.

A dozen Tommies made a rush for the stairs, but the Germans, lying well sheltered on the floor at the top, shot down into the thick of the crowd, hitting three or four, and sending the rest back to cover. It began to look as if four or five Fritzies could hold those stairs against a regiment.

For a moment after that last rush for the stairs all the noise died down, and we heard from the floor above a sound that made us all stand still and listen. It was a queer, whimpering cry. We knew no man would cry like that. It might have been a woman, but it sounded more like a child.

"The devils!" snarled a man in front of me

under his breath, and sprang for the stairs. Just in time somebody pulled him back. It would have been sure death for him if he had gone a few steps more. It was Bonesey who showed us how to do it. Housebreaking was just in his line, and he knew exactly how to go about the work that lay before us. He whispered a few words to a sergeant, and then rushed outdoors. Most of us followed him.

"Keep your bloomin' mouths shut!" warned the Sergeant as we went out.

We followed Bonesey around to the rear of the house. There we saw him climbing to the shoulders of a Tommy who stood against the pillar of a porch, whose roof jutted out from under the second-story windows. He went up to the roof like a monkey, with the rest of us after him as fast as we could get there. Then we made a rush for the windows. With the points of their bayonets the men in front drove the Germans back and jumped into the house.

I got there just behind the first rush, and the way our men were cleaning out those Germans was a sight a man isn't likely to set eyes on once in a lifetime, unless he's born lucky.

Right in the centre of the big room — there was only one room on that floor—a Tommy had gripped a Hun by the throat, and was strangling the life out of him. Another Fritzie knocked me flat as he fell over me with a knife thrust clean through him. Our men hadn't forgotten

what they had seen in the little room downstairs, and they were not taking any more prisoners. They were not letting any more go wounded either. They meant quick death for every Hun in sight, and that place was a slaughter-house for a few minutes.

Then came a rush of feet on the stairs. The Tommies below had been listening to the fighting, and hadn't been able to hold themselves back any longer. Two or three shots rang out as the Germans on the landing fired down into them, but it would have taken artillery to have stopped that maddened crowd. They drove the Germans at the top back into the room, and came piling in after them.

Suddenly, as all that mass of fighting men drove in on us, came a frightful crash. The whole house seemed to be going to pieces. The shell-torn roof had fallen in on us, and we were half buried in the ruins. The air was so full of flying dust and splinters and plaster that we could scarcely see.

The falling timbers had knocked me off my feet. I picked myself up, sound enough except for a few bruises, and looked around me, wondering whether anybody but myself had been left alive in all that wreckage. Then I saw Tommies everywhere rubbing the dust and plaster out of their eyes, and most of them unhurt, though one had been killed by a falling beam, and several were badly cut and bruised.

Dead Germans were everywhere in the ruin. As I stood there half dazed I thought of the whimpering cry we had heard when in the room below, and wondered what it could have been. For a moment I could see nothing but the Tommies and the dead Germans. Then, in a dark corner, I saw two girls cowering close together on the floor. One looked to be not more than fourteen years old, and the other a year or two younger. They looked as if they were ready to faint with fright, and there was a half-mad stare in their big, dark eyes. All the ghastly work that had been done in that room as they crouched there must have seemed like a terrible dream to them.

We got them out of that awful place as soon as we could. Out in the fields, in the bright sunshine, a little colour came back into their cheeks, and after a little time they became less frightened, and were able to talk with us.

They told us that just before we had appeared on the road the Germans had killed their father, mother, and baby sister. The Germans had been drinking, and acted like madmen. They began to break open wine casks in the cellar, and became worse than ever.

A little later the London Scottish Regiment came in sight, and we turned the little girls over to them. Then we marched on.

CHAPTER XXV

An Old Pal "Goes West"

In the time when I read creepy stories at home, and dreamed about them afterward in the night, it seemed strange to wake up and find myself in my quiet room, with the sun shining in at the window, so soon after being on some wild island, or hiding aboard ship from mutineers. Blind Pew would be gripping my arm, or Long John Silver holding a gun at my head; then, quick as a flash, they would fade away—and there I would be, in bed, looking out through the window at the roofs.

It was the same sort of a feeling I had as we marched away from that stone house, while the sun was shining on the fields, and the birds were singing all around us, and everything was so quiet and peaceful. It seemed as if I must have dreamed the dreadful things that had been happening only a few minutes before. I turned my head for a last look at the place, half thinking it might have faded away, as those dreams had done at home. But there it was against the sky, the gloomiest, creepiest-looking house I should ever care to see. It seemed then more

dreadful than before, with its broken roof and its dark empty windows, for I knew there was blood trickling down its stairs, and that there were dead men lying on the floors.

Out between those fields the war seemed very far away, for there wasn't a sound but the birds and the voices of the soldiers. Our wagons, which sometimes made such a rumbling and rattling, were far off in the rear. Almost always there had been the sound of distant firing, but now we heard not a gun.

"'Twould be nice, to my way of thinkin', if we should find the bloomin' war hall over, and 'ear they was sendin' us back to Blighty," said Bonesey, who was marching beside me. "I'm tired of the fightin', Mascot. I want to get back to Blighty, and 'ear the noises in the streets, and see the people goin' by, and drop in at a pub for a swig o' beer. 'Alf dead I am for a glass o' good ol' Lunnon beer down me throat."

"It's my morning tub I'm dying for," put in Billy. "I haven't had a bath in a week, and there's the blood of one of those bloomin' Huns back there on my hands this minute. Perhaps we'll come to a brook soon."

"Yer must 'ave some fish blood in yer," Bonesey grumbled. "Never 'ave I 'eard of a bloke so fond of sousin' 'imself in water."

"Give us a song, Billy," I said, "and you'll forget about the morning tub."

So he gave us some old-timers, "Silk Hat

Tony", "The Lights o' London", and "The Girl from Dundee". Soon there was singing all along the road—nice, peaceful songs, with no fighting or trouble in them—as if we hadn't been putting the bayonets to a houseful of Huns only a little time before, and losing some of our own lads while we were doing it.

Our kitchen wagons came up a little later and gave us our supper beside the road, and we spent the night there, getting a fine long sleep in the dry grass, with the stars blinking down at us.

When we woke up in the morning we heard the guns going to the south of us, and we knew it might be many a night before we should get the chance of another such rest.

"Funny 'ow I keeps thinkin' of Blighty, Mascot," said Bonesey, as we rolled up our blankets. "I wants to get out o' the fightin' and go back there w'ere it's peaceful. I 'ad a bad dream last night, and something's goin' to 'appen to me if I don't."

But the big guns were calling us again, and there wasn't a chance of going back to Blighty yet unless we got hit.

"'Ear them guns," Bonesey grumbled. "Hit's always them guns, sayin' ''Urry up' to us poor blokes. And we'll 'urry up once too often and 'go west', where there's many a good lad gone before us who's lyin' under the daisies now."

We got to the edge of Arras that morning, and the Boches were waiting for us in houses and

cellars and behind piles of broken stones. Our artillery was playing on them, but it didn't seem to do much good. We infantry lads were the ones for that kind of work. The big guns might have pounded away there for a month without cleaning the Huns out from such hiding-places.

So in we went, and it was ticklish work, and not to my liking, for we could never tell when a typewriter was going to shoot at us from a house or a cellar. Even raiding a trench back in Flanders, though that was bad enough, seemed better than this fighting in the streets. We knew what to expect and what we had to do when we went over the top and across No Man's Land, but here we didn't know what kind of trouble might be waiting for us.

Not so much as the shadow of a German did we see as we came to the streets, and the place was as quiet as a graveyard. A hungry-looking cat crept across the way in front of us, and was the only living thing in sight.

Oh, what a place it was! Grass and weeds growing in the wide cracks of the cobble-stone paving; heaps of bricks and stones where houses had stood; rows of houses still standing, but roofless, and with only ugly holes where the windows had been.

I jumped when I heard the rattle of a machine-gun, it came so suddenly out of the quiet. All at once the guns began to play on us from at least half a dozen places.

In our first rush we took some cellars from which the Germans had been shooting at us. They kept their guns going till our front line was almost on top of them, and then threw up their hands, yelling "Kamerad!" But our lads didn't think they had surrendered soon enough, and they gave some of them the bayonets by way of a lesson. Fritzie had a nasty way of keeping his gun going till the last second and then raising that "Kamerad" cry, just as if he hadn't been shooting our men down as long as he could after he knew his game was up.

There came firing from some half-destroyed houses farther on, and we knew the hardest work was yet to be done, for the Boches were protected by stone walls, and there was any number of hiding-places for their snipers. It was a matter of crawling along in the shelter of walls and rubbish-heaps till we could get near them.

About twenty of us were working our way through a narrow lane when a bullet hit the ground a couple of yards in front of me. It had come from a little cottage a few yards ahead. We fired at the windows, and then we made a rush at the place and broke the door down. As it fell in, a machine-gun began to bark in another house near by, and, huddled all together as we were, we were a fine target. Before we could all dive in through the broken door, the gun got two of our party, and bored a hole through the helmet of a third without hurting him.

Inside, a dead German lay on the floor, but, except for him, the house seemed to have been deserted. A corporal bent over the dead man and felt him.

"He's stone cold," he said. "And, what's more, there's no gun beside him. So where's the bloke that shot at us? He can't have gone out through the back, for our men have been coming up on that side."

We had a bomber with us, and he went nosing about to see if there were any place where he should drop the stuff he carried. The upper story had been blown off by shells, so there was only the floor we were on and the cellar where anyone might be hiding. We poked about behind piles of rubbish and into what was left of a closet, and looked into a broken chimney-hole, but we found nobody.

"We might take a look in the cellar," I said to the Corporal.

"And get our heads blown off, like as not," he answered. "We'll let the lad with the bombs attend to the cellar. Clear out through the back while he does the trick."

We went out through the windows into a little walled court, and watched the bomber creep up to the door over the cellar stairs. He lifted the door a foot or two, dropped in a bomb, and made a dive for a window. The explosion shook the walls, and sent the door flying into splinters.

When the smoke had cleared away the bomber

went back to the stairs, and we followed him down below into the dark.

"Why, here's a rum go!" the bomber said, as the Corporal struck a light. There's two cellars here, with a thick wall between 'em."

A heavy, iron-braced door in the wall had been burst open by the explosion, and the bomber was stepping up to it when four men rushed out on us. The Corporal's light went out, and we were there in the dark, not knowing who was friend and who was Hun.

I remember a shiver ran through me after the light went out, for it was a dreadful thing to be penned up in a black hole with enemies that couldn't be seen, and with the thought that any moment one of them might run a bayonet through me without my having a chance of dodging or parrying it. At the same time I heard a scuffle, then a groan, and the thud of a body falling on the dirt floor, though there was no telling whether it was a Hun or one of our own lads who had dropped.

It was then that the Corporal did a brave thing, which no man careful of his life would have risked in such a situation. He struck another light.

The same instant a gun went off, and the Corporal, with a cry, let the match drop, for the bullet had hit him somewhere. But the light had done its good work, for in the second that it flared we got sight of the four Boches, one of

them dead or wounded, and we made for the three that were up and ready for us. When somebody struck another light they had been done for. We hadn't lost a man, though the Corporal was holding up a wounded hand, which the bullet had struck.

Up from that musty black hole we climbed, without stopping to waste useful time in burying the bodies or dragging them along with us, and it was as good as a drink to a dying man to be in the light of day again, knowing which way to turn, and where to strike when the next shot came.

Tommies were running by in front, so, thinking the machine-gun that had fired on us as we broke through the door must have been silenced by then, we went out and joined them.

At the end of the lane a wounded man—one of our own lads—was dragging himself on his hands and knees from the doorway of what was left of a house. Such a common sight were wounded men that I scarcely noticed him at first, but, as we drew nearer, I took another look, and for a moment my heart stopped beating.

"It's poor old Bonesey," said the Corporal.

Yes, it was poor old Bonesey; and badly hurt, for he was hardly able to move. As we gathered round him he took no notice of us, and then I saw that a bullet had struck him near the eyes, and that he was stone blind.

"It's the Mascot, old pal," I said, as I bent

over him. "We're going to take you along with us."

"No use of that, little man," he answered, "for I'm goin' fast, and ye 'ad best let me die 'ere as elsewhere. Gimme a drink of water, Matie; just enough to moisten me pipes, for I'm burnin' up."

Though it was against orders to give water to a wounded man, I let a few drops from my bottle trickle into his mouth—hardly enough to swallow—and it seemed to do him a lot of good.

"Many a time me old mother 'as told me I'd be shot sooner or later sneakin' into somebody's 'ouse," he said. "And 'ere it's come true—down 'ere in France. But there's no job for Scotland Yard in it."

A spell of coughing stopped him, and seemed to shake out of him all the little strength he had left, but he found his voice again after a moment.

"There's the address of the girl back 'ome, that I've told yer about, in me pay-book, lad. Send 'er a line sayin' I was a good soldier and died servin' me country, will yer?"

Then he went west, where the good soldiers go, and I had lost as fine a friend as a lad ever had.

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CHAPTER XXVI

Into the Trenches Again

Little time there was to mourn for my old pal, for our men were moving on, cleaning out the Boche nests in front of us, while the stretcher-bearers were hard at work picking up the wounded and the dead.

We pressed on, with the Germans running and scattering before us, and my fighting-blood was up as we picked them off when they showed in the open. One of them I got, by way of helping to square accounts for what they had done to Bonesey; though how is the death of a Hun, or of many of them, to balance against the loss of a good British soldier?

All the rest of that day we were fighting, and all of the next, till there wasn't a fighting German left. Then we had a little rest and quiet, and we made ourselves comfortable in the houses that were still standing.

Four days later, when we were beginning to feel at home, the German artillery shelled us and drove us out. Then their infantry swarmed in and took our places. But we didn't leave them long in comfort. As we had done before, we drove them before us from house to house and

from cellar to cellar. Day after day we fought there, and when we were through we had five hundred German prisoners, to say nothing of all their dead and wounded. Their dead lay everywhere, in streets and houses and cellars and yards, and it was a long job getting rid of them.

We turned our prisoners over to the Bedfordshires, and marched away, for we had had all we could stand of fighting for a while. For five days we rested in a big field. I slept in a haystack, and it was the finest bed I had had since leaving England.

Oh, those were days to remember! We had better meals than we had ever had before, and we dug potatoes, and boiled them in their jackets. We found a brook, where we bathed, and Billy grew cheerful again. We raked the cooties from our shirts, and washed our clothes and hung them up to dry. We got our hair cut, for it had grown so long that we looked like savages, and soon we made such a fine showing that nobody would have thought of calling us the Scruffy Fifth. In the evenings we had concerts, and some of the lads gave a play. We could hear heavy firing miles away, to remind us that the war was still going on, but no shells came our way, and our troubles were over for a time.

"'Ow would a chicken dinner appear to yer, Mascot?" said Piccadilly one morning. "I got me blinkers on a fine fat rooster a while back about a mile from 'ere, and I'm thinkin' 'e's better

in our stomachs than roamin' loose. 'Elp me catch the blighter and I'll give yer 'alf of 'im."

We found the rooster sitting on a fence, watching us out of the corners of his eyes, and he was such a fine, fat bird it made me hungry to look at him.

"I'll cluck at 'im," Piccadilly said, "and 'e may come. 'E looks like a sociable bloke."

Piccadilly clucked; but the rooster just sat there blinking at us.

"'E don't hunderstand English," said Piccadilly. "A little talkin' of French at 'im and 'e'd come."

He tried the few French words he knew, but the rooster didn't move, and at last Piccadilly made a jump for him. The rooster flew off the fence and made off through the fields, with us after him. A lively runner that bird was, and we must have chased him for a mile. Then Piccadilly got him by the leg, and we made off with him.

That evening I gave a bit of my share to Billy, and it seemed like the best meal we had ever had in our lives. After that we kept our eyes out for chickens, but we never found another.

Sunday came while we were there in the field, and we had our first church service in months. It was a fine sight, all those Tommies on their knees out there in the open, thanking the Lord for bringing them through the fighting alive, though it was little we knew whether the next week might not be our last.

It was to be the last for some of us, as it turned out, for the next day we made a ten-mile march and went into the trenches and the fighting.

These trenches had been lined with cement by the Germans, and were the finest we had ever seen; yet we didn't fare so well in them as we had done in Flanders, except that there was no mud to speak of. They were just as full of rats, bigger rats than those at Ypres and a good deal more dangerous, for they were the biting kind. After we heard that they had nipped the throats of four men, who had died from the poison of the bites, we feared the things far more than we did the Germans.

A queer lad we met out there in front of Arras. He was the son of a rich baronet, and had been driving "shakers", which is the name we had for motor-cars. He was such a wild driver that he had put more than thirty of them out of business, he told us, but had come through every accident without a scratch. So unlucky he had been with the shakers that they had made him a stretcher-bearer, which is no less dangerous a job.

"I've been in the war ever since it began," he said, "and all those three years I've been trying to get a wound so I could get back to Blighty. But I've been unlucky. No matter how hard I try to get hit, there's no bullet with my number. A hundred times I've been out between the lines with the bullets flying all around me, yet here I am, with nothing to show for it, and getting more home-sick all the time."

One evening our Captain told us that at twelve o'clock that night we were going over the top. That had become an old story, and it didn't worry us. After all the fine rest we had had we were in fighting trim and eager for trouble. At 11.40 we were ready and waiting, and most of the lads braced themselves with a couple of drams of fire-water. Sharp when the hour came we went over.

We ran into the heaviest kind of firing, and lost a good many men on the way. A bullet struck Piccadilly's helmet and knocked him over, but he was up again unhurt the next moment. The Germans climbed out of their trench to meet us, and we went into them fast and hard. But after a few minutes we had won their trench and a lot of prisoners with it, and it had been easy work.

Our prisoners told us they were tired of the war. Some of them hadn't liked it even when it began, and they were not the soldier kind. One was a solemn-faced, middle-aged chap with big spectacles, whom we called the professor. He had been a piano teacher in Germany, and he said the sight of blood made him sick. He was a gentle old boy, and it made me laugh to think of him trying to kill anybody with his bayonet. He had surrendered without even putting up a fight.

But we knew too much about Kaiser Bill's army to think that many of them were such easy ones, though our hardest lesson from them was still ahead of us.

CHAPTER XXVII

I Meet "Israel Hands"

Now I come to a time when the luck that had brought so many of us through alive and unhurt would have little more to do with the Fighting Fifth; a time that makes me wonder, when I look back upon it, that I am here among the living instead of lying under the daisies in France, where, by all but one of a thousand chances, I should be to-day.

The German lines grew stronger and stronger as we lay there before them, and their artillery gave us no rest day or night. And yet we were to go forward. Those were the orders. We were to go forward, no matter what the cost, and we knew that many a lad of ours would go west before the fighting there was over.

For hours at a time the shells flew over our heads or dropped among us, while we crouched on our knees in the bottom of the trench with our hands over our eyes, thinking every minute would be our last. The shell-fire shook our nerves and took the heart out of us. It wouldn't let us sleep, and sometimes it wouldn't let us eat, for in the

thick of it bringing the food up from the cook-houses was a job too hard to handle. We thanked our stars when our own artillery grew strong and gave the Huns shell for shell, though we knew that that meant the time was nearer when we should have to go over the top into the hardest fighting of all.

At last the German fire grew weaker, and our own big guns began to bellow worse than ever. They were clearing the way for us poor Tommies, and giving us a chance against death. The sound of them was like music then, for we knew that every bark they gave made easier work for us, and perhaps another gap or two in the trenches lying ahead.

Then the day came when we were told we were going in. And we were going in by the light of day, a grey day, to be sure, but much too clear to please us. Four-forty was the time set, and we went over the top on the minute.

The Huns were ready for us, and they gave us such a dose of shells and bullets as I had never gone through before. We were not through our fences when the lads began to drop, and one went down who was running shoulder to shoulder with me. He was a lad I knew well, but there was no chance to stop and help him or even to make sure whether he was dead or wounded. It was every man shift for himself, and it was lie there and suffer and wait for the stretcher-bearers when you fell wounded, or perhaps for a German to

run a bayonet through you if we were beaten back.

A hot, stinging blow, a bullet cutting through the skin of my forehead, staggered me, and blood came trickling down over my face. I ran on, but the bullets were flying so thick that I couldn't see a chance of getting across. Dead and wounded men were everywhere, and the Fighting Fifth would be lucky if it wasn't wiped out. The blood half blinded me, and I began to feel afraid, for I knew that if I couldn't keep my eyes clear I should stand a small chance when it came to the hand-to-hand work.

Half-way across a bullet hit me in the thigh, and I fell. I felt no pain to amount to much, but I couldn't move. Our lads ran on and left me, and from where I lay I watched them being mowed down.

Then I saw their line break and some come back, but the rest ran on into what looked like sure death. As they drew near the trench the Germans came over the top with a yell, and went at them. Our lads were outnumbered three to one, but they fought till the last one of them was down or captured.

The Huns came on, trampling on the dead and wounded, and I was lucky to escape their feet as they passed me. I saw them driving what were left of our men back into the trench, and I went cold as I thought of the bloody work they were doing with the bayonets to our poor lads.

I was growing dizzy and weak, and oh, what a thirst I had! There was water in my bottle, but I didn't have the strength to lift it to my lips. Near by was a wounded man dragging himself along with his arms, for his legs had gone bad. Close beside me he stopped, his strength going fast.

"I can't go another yard, matie," he whispered, "and I'm done for. We're all done for, those of us that are out here, for the Huns will be back presently, and it's small pity they show to the wounded. They'll fix us with their bayonets, like as not. I've seen them do that to the wounded more than once."

I asked him for a drink. Little I cared then what the Huns might do to us; all I could think about was water. My life I would have given that moment, I think, for one swallow of cold water, and the bottle hanging by his side drove me half mad. He tried to raise himself up on his elbows again that he might crawl to me, but he was too weak to manage it.

"I can't do it, matie," he said. "I can't even reach the old bottle, and I'm half dead for a drink myself."

He was silent for a time, but before long I heard him groaning, and calling for water in a voice that was not above a whisper.

It grew dark, and the stars came out. The man beside me was gasping for air and now and then muttering to himself. I lay staring up at the sky,

and it seemed as if there were a fire inside of me burning me up. After a long time I heard steps, and some Germans passed by a few yards off. They prowled about in plain sight, and as I watched them, not caring whether they found me or left me to lie there and thirst, I saw the dreadful thing happen that I had heard of so often. They were running their bayonets into the wounded.

A cold shiver went through me, and the sky and the shell-holes and craters and the far-off hills began to go round and round.

Then the stars went out, and I was back home, sitting up in bed reading about Jim Hawkins, and hurrying over the pages for fear my mother would come stealing in and take the candle away.

After a time the room dropped away into the dark, and I was Jim Hawkins himself, sitting on the cross-trees of the good ship *Hispaniola*, with Israel Hands below me coming up the mizzen-shrouds holding a dirk in his teeth.

"Jim," says he, "I reckon we're fouled, you and me, and we'll have to sign articles. I'd have had you but for that there lurch; but I don't have no luck, not I; and I reckon I'll have to strike, which comes hard for a master-mariner to a ship's younker like you, Jim."

All in a breath his hand went back over his shoulder, and the dirk sung through the air.

Of a sudden Israel Hands' red cap changed to a helmet, and the dirk became the butt of a gun. The gun-butt struck me on top of the

head, I felt a stinging pain, and everything went black.

I came to in a dug-out hospital, where an M.O. —a medical officer—and a woman nurse were standing beside me.

"How goes the fighting?" I asked.

"Suppose you keep your mouth shut and lie quiet," the M.O. answered. "You've been raving about the fighting ever since we got you, and it's better you should think of something else."

The nurse spoke a few words to him in French.

"I'll tell you this much," said the M.O., as he turned to me again; "your battalion came back at the Huns and fought like wild-cats. They cleaned the devils out, and, after driving them back where they came from, took a good part of their first line away from them. They've more than made up for getting beaten, and they are the proudest men in the army to-day."

"And then the stretcher-bearers picked me up?"

"No; a nurse found you—a French woman. She carried you in herself. You had been lying out there forty-eight hours, and we thought you were done for when we got you here. There's a nasty scratch over your eyes, a wound in your thigh, and a dent in your head from the butt of a gun; but you needn't worry. You'll pull through in time."

I went under an operation a few minutes later, and twenty-four hours passed before I came back

to consciousness. A nurse asked me where I lived, and I tried to answer, but I found I couldn't say a word. For two days and nights I lay without speaking; then suddenly my speech came back to me.

"How goes the fighting?" I asked.

"We're giving the Germans hell," said the M.O.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"Good-Bye, old Pals!"

"You're going back to Blighty," the M.O. told me a few hours later.

"When?"

"Oh, in two or three days you will be on the way."

"How goes the fighting now?"

"Our line is still moving forward. Your Fighting Fifth has carried another trench, I hear. They deserve their name, those lads, for they've done great work. You should be proud you were one of them."

I could feel every nerve in me tingle as I heard him praise our brave old battalion. Small need there was of his saying I should be proud to be one of them. There wasn't a prouder lad in the army.

As I lay there in the dug-out listening to the artillery, I wondered how many we had lost and whether any of my pals had fallen. More wounded were being brought in, but the few I managed to see I didn't recognize. Before many hours the big

guns stopped booming, and I knew the fighting must be over for a time.

I had been in the dug-out three days when the M.O. told me that before night they were going to start me off toward Blighty. I didn't want to go without seeing some of my pals, and I told him so. The M.O. shook his head. He said he didn't see how it would be possible. But, a little before the time came for me to start, in came Billy, M'Bride, and Piccadilly. I don't know how they managed it, but there they were, just as much alive as ever. I told them I was going back to Blighty.

"Never mind, Mascot," the Yankee lad said. "You won't miss much, for the war is soon going to be over. The Americans are coming in, and that'll settle it. Why, son, I know regiments back in New York that could lick their weight in wild-cats. Ever hear of the Seventh or the Sixty-ninth? Believe me, Kaiser Bill will yell for help when he sees them coming for him."

"If you're a fair sample, 'ow is it you turned tail so quick w'en the Germans was drivin' us back?" Piccadilly asked, his eyes snapping.

"Me?" said Mac, looking surprised. "Why, I was holding 'em till there wasn't a man left to back me up. All the same, Pickie, old sport, the Fifth's done pretty well in this war, considering there's been only one Yank to help 'em."

Piccadilly was boiling mad by this time.

"I'd 'Yank' yer if I 'ad yer outer 'ere," he

growled. "'Ave ye forgot this is a 'orspital we're in, and no place for your boastin'?"

They were working up to the fighting-point, and they might have reached it if a nurse had not told them to make peace and be quiet.

"Those two are always going at each other like that," Billy explained to the M.O., who had come up to find out what the trouble was about. "They don't mean anything by it. It's just a habit of theirs that they can't break. It don't make any difference where they are. They'll be jawing each other the same way in Heaven, if they ever get there."

"Tell the youngster what's been going on since he's been here," said the M.O."

"It would take a week to tell it," Mac answered. "Believe me, son, you've missed a lot. We've been mopping the Boches up fast. Some scrapping! Wow! I got three with my bayonet inside of three minutes."

"You're a liar!" Piccadilly put in, keeping his voice low since the nurse had told him to be peaceful and quiet. "'Twas meself that got three, and you got none at all, as you know well."

"Let it pass," said Mac, keeping the tail of his eye on the M.O. "It don't matter. Maybe I made a mistake in the count. But, anyway, it was some scrapping."

"Big Tom's out of it for good," Billy told me. "Got hit in the arm. He's going back to

Blighty. We'll all be back there soon if it keeps up like this."

"I'm thinking it's time to say good-bye," Piccadilly said. "They told us not to stay long."

He held out a grimy hand as big as the two of mine.

"Good-bye, old pals," I said. "I'll be thinking about you back in Blighty."

Then they each said good-bye and a few words to cheer me, and marched out. As they went I heard Piccadilly say:

"Wot are we goin' to do for a mascot now? We'll 'ave to get a dog, or a cat, or something. Any kind of animal will do to bring us luck."

A little later I and a number of other wounded lads were carried out and put into a shaker, and away we rolled for the railroad. I learned then why they called the ambulances shakers. The life was almost shaken out of me before we had gone half a mile. Every time the thing bumped or lurched a chorus of groans went up, and one chap fainted, and didn't come to all the rest of the ride. Every jolt set my wounds throbbing and paining, till I wished the Boches had done for me for good and all and had saved me from all that misery. It took two dreadful hours to get to the railroad, and we were all half dead by that time.

The train wasn't much better than the shaker, though, being full of wounded, it travelled slowly. The wound of the lad next to

me was bleeding, and his eyes were closed. I think he must have passed out before we got to the end of the journey. Even now I never think of that ride without a shiver, and I can still hear the cries and groans that sounded all day long around me.

At last they carried us out and into the base hospital at Boulogne, and the place was Heaven after the shaker and the train. There were clean white sheets to lie in—the first I had seen since leaving England—and good food, and everything to make us comfortable. But there was one thing I missed, the noise of the guns. The stillness got on my nerves. If I could have heard artillery going good and strong, and machine-guns rattling outside the windows, the place would not have seemed so strange, and I should have rested easier.

The nurses gathered round my cot the first day I was there, to get a look at me, for I was the only patient they had had of my age, and there was much talk of the "boy soldier", though it was little I felt like a boy after all I had been through. Small I was, and young, but I felt ten years older than before we went into the trenches at Ypres, and I had seen more trouble than many a man does in a lifetime.

One morning I was lying in my cot, staring up at the ceiling, when a big shadow fell across me and a voice I knew well cried out: "Why, bless my blooming eyes, if it isn't the Mascot!"

It was Big Tom, looking as healthy and strong as an ox, though one of his arms was in a sling. For a time he stood beside me, telling of his last fight and of how he got his wound, and then lumbered off to board the boat that was to take him back to England.

Two weeks I lay in the Boulogne hospital, and then the day came when they shipped me for old Blighty. It was a fine, clear day, with a breeze blowing strong and salty from the sea, and the wounded were all happy; the time had come when they were to see their friends and families again. Out on the pier some of them were singing feebly, "Take Me Back to Dear Old Blighty", and "The Ship That's Bound for Blighty".

It was a hard crossing for us all, for the boat rolled up and down in the big sea-swells till I wished myself back at Boulogne. I was in bed on the upper deck, strapped down with weights, with not a soul to talk to, and nothing to do but listen to the chugging of the engines and the splashing of the sea. Out in mid-channel I overheard a nurse say that three operations were going on at that very moment, and that a wounded man had passed west a few minutes before. Then people came hurrying past me talking of a submarine that was chasing us, and I didn't know for a time whether it was Blighty or the bottom of the sea I was going to. But the submarine dropped out of sight, and at last we steamed into

Dover. There we landed, but we were soon afloat again on the way to Folkestone and London.

I heard the little river steamers chugging as we went up the Thames, and the breezes from the fields of old England were in our faces, and I felt like a lad coming out of a dream, and a bad one, with the war so far away and home so near.

CHAPTER XXIX

I Meet the King

"Up to mighty London came an Irish lad one day."

So the good old song goes; but he wasn't wounded and flat on his back as I was.

As far back as I could remember I had longed to see the greatest city in the world. When I was a very young lad—not more than eight or ten—I had been near to running away from home to find my way to it, and to stay there until I had had a good look at the King. A cat may look at a king, and so could I if ever I could find my way to the Buckingham Palace gate, and should wait there long enough. And here I was at last in mighty London, with small chance of seeing any of its wonders, or of getting to Buckingham Palace or anywhere else but a hospital.

The boat came in to her pier, and I could hear them making her fast. In a few minutes I was put on a stretcher and carried down the gang-plank in a long line of wounded.

I heard cheers, and, lifting my head a bit I saw a great crowd of people. They were there to welcome us—men, women, and children,

thousands of them. Then the stretcher-bearers stopped, and, looking up again, I saw, close by, a small, bearded man in a general's uniform standing in the centre of a group of officers. He came up to me and held out his hand.

It was the King. The King of England was shaking hands with me, a poor wounded Tommy!

"How do you feel?" he asked.

For a moment I couldn't find my voice, and the thought was running through my head, "What would they think back home if they knew the King was speaking to me?" At last I managed to say, though not much above a whisper:

"I am all right, sir."

He looked at me for a moment with very serious eyes.

"Your age?" he asked.

I told him, and he gave a little start of surprise.

"Sixteen! So young!" he said. "At your age you should never have been there. But, my boy, if all the men of England showed such spirit we should soon win the war."

He made way for some one, and I saw the Queen beside me. She gave me her hand and passed on. As she disappeared the officers came crowding up to shake hands with me, and then the King saluted us and turned away.

That is how I met King George. Small chance that ever I shall shake his hand again, but I have that moment to remember for the rest of my life.

A finer man I never spoke with. May his reign be long! God save the King!

The line of stretchers moved on, and, when my mind had cleared a bit from the excitement, I began to wonder what Billy and Piccadilly and the rest of the lads would say if they heard King George himself had spoken with me. I felt sorry for those poor chaps, facing the shells and bullets, and sleeping with the rats in the trenches, while here I was, welcomed by the King and Queen and their officers, and cheered as a hero by the crowds.

A line of sixty ambulance motor-cars was waiting for us, and, three of us in each car, we moved slowly away for St. George's Hospital. The streets were black with people, and they cheered us as we passed, and threw cigarettes and flowers into the cars. Men stood with bared heads as we went by, and many a woman had her handkerchief to her eyes. There was good cause for their tears, for more than one poor lad among us was near to death, and knew nothing of the welcome he was getting as we moved on through the shadows of the great buildings.

At the hospital the nurses made much of me. They treated me as if I were only a child, and each of them gave me a kiss, though it was little of the child that was left in me after the life in the trenches. There was an American doctor there, Dr. Ransom, who told me he had no doubt that I was the youngest soldier in the British Army; and it may have been so. I knew I had been the

youngest at Ypres and also at Arras, and, though I had heard of one or two lads under age who were in the war, they were older than I.

The whole city was ours from the day we arrived. Perhaps we should soon be forgotten; but for those days we lay in the hospital we were heroes, honoured and admired. The Lord Mayor came to see us, and he gave me a one-pound note, besides distributing pipes, tobacco, and cigarettes among the rest. Then a company of the Black Watch paid us a visit, and talked with us of our life at the front. One day we had a concert, when some famous actors joined in entertaining us. Being wounded was not so bad after all.

For almost three months I lay there in the hospital. When at last I was able to get to my feet again there was no uniform that could be found to fit me. My old one had been burned up, so I had to stay indoors until a nurse one day brought me a new one made to my measure. It fitted like a glove, and that night I went to a great ball at the Lord Mayor's house to which five hundred soldiers from the hospitals had been invited.

Oh, that was a sight worth seeing, stranger to me than the trenches or the battle-fields, and more full of interest. It was nearer to being a palace than any place I had ever been in. All ablaze with lights it was. Hundreds of beautiful women were dancing, and everywhere were officers of

high rank, their breasts covered with decorations, with now and then the greatest prize of all, the Victoria Cross, among them, and there were tables piled high with food and sweets in great dishes of silver and gold.

Then a new order came that as the soldiers in the hospitals received no pay they could go to any theatre free. I lost no time in going to Drury Lane with a nurse, where we saw "Seven Days' Leave". When it wasn't the theatre it was a motor-drive or a football-game, and wherever we went the crowds cheered us and showered us with cigarettes and flowers.

Oh, London was good to us wounded Tommies! London had a big heart, and remembered what we had been through in mud and rain among the bullets and the shells.

CHAPTER XXX

The Last Adventure

At last came my discharge from the army as unfit for service, and I went home with fifty-six pounds in my pocket, and the promise of a pension of a pound a week.

As I came to Maria Street, my eyes busy with all the old, familiar sights, I brushed against a stout young chap who was leaning against a wall eating cookies out of a paper bag. It was Jimmie Kelly, a lad who had been a pal of mine when we went to school together.

"Hello!" he said. "I hear you've been in the war."

"I'm just back from it," I answered, and pointed to the service medal on my coat.

"And did you see any of the fighting?" he asked.

I had to laugh at him. Did I see any of the fighting! I told him I had killed a few Germans myself, and had lain wounded for forty-eight hours out in No Man's Land.

"Are ye fooling?" says he.

I showed him the wound on my head, and his eyes grew bigger and bigger.

I left him standing there, and when I turned around for another look at him he had dropped the bag of cookies on the walk and was staring after me with his mouth open. I was beginning to find out what it was like to be coming home a hero, and I threw my chest out and held my head high as I marched up to the old house where I knew my mother was waiting. The door flew open, and there she stood, with her arms held out for me. It was the greatest day of her life, she said, and, though she had visited me in the hospital, she couldn't look at me enough nor hear too much of all that I had been through.

In the evening many of the neighbours came in, and I had to tell my story all over again. Old Mr. Kelly, who was past eighty if he was a day, and fairly deaf, sat close in front of me, his whiskers almost in my face, and a hand to his ear. When I had got through with what we had done at Ypres and with how the shells and bullets and bayonets had more than once come near to wiping us out, he piped up, "But did ye see any of the fighting, lad?" And I had to tell it once more, shouting it into his ear.

One day I happened to be at the Sailors' Home, where a ship's officer asked me to take a job with him. I asked where the ship was going.

"To the United States," said he. "She's the *Cuthbert*, of the Booth line. We need a coal-passer. You'll do."

"I'll go," I said; and the next day we sailed,

although my mother warned me again that I should keep away from the sea.

There were three other coal-passers on the *Cuthbert.* We worked in shifts, two of us to a shift, four hours on and eight off. No army mules ever worked harder than we did, as we rolled barrels of coal from the bunkers to the fires.

Stripped to the waist we were, and dripping wet with the heat. When I thought I could stand it no longer the fires would send a hotter wave than ever over me, till my head grew dizzy and I gasped for a breath of cool air; never a moment was there for even a word, for the fires were always hungry for more.

The two of us were black with coal dust from our hair to the waist-line, with only the whites of our eyes showing through all the grime. The lads of the Scruffy Fifth should have seen me then. We had been clean—white as snow—in the trenches at Ypres compared with what I was down there in the bunkers.

At last the shift would change, and old Peter, the man who worked with me on the job, would go with me to the deck to cool off. For a time I would lie there half dead from the hard work and the heat, but old Peter had been a coal-passer since he was a boy, and didn't mind it a bit. He had never known what any other kind of a job was. Almost all his life he had spent down in the hold of a ship. I showed him my service badge and my discharge papers, and told him of what I

had seen of the war and of my meeting with the King.

"And King George shook your 'and?" said old Peter.

"He did that," said I.

He puffed his pipe for a few moments without a word. Then he held out his hand to me.

"Boy, I'm askin' ye to let me shake the and that shook the 'and of the King," he said. "'Twill be something to remember."

One day we were up on deck resting, when suddenly old Peter jumped to his feet.

"Look, lad!" he cried. "They're after us!"

Off a few hundred yards or so I saw a submarine rising like a whale out of the water. Then we saw the wake of a torpedo. There were two ships behind us, and from one of them came the sound of an explosion. In the same moment our gunners began to fire, and we put on full steam to run for safety.

The stern of the ship that had been struck was dipping deep into the water. She was sinking; there was no doubt of that, but it was against orders to stop to help her. We should have been sunk ourselves if we had done so.

The next minute another torpedo came rushing through the water headed straight for us.

"It's going to get us," cried Peter; and I thought he was right, and made up my mind to jump into the sea. I held my breath as I watched the thing coming. We were going fast, and there

was just a chance that it might miss us, but it looked to me as if it were going to strike amidships.

It missed us. We saw it pass our stern, not ten yards away. And, in the same moment, the sinking ship behind us shot out a great cloud of steam and dropped out of sight like a stone.

A shell came screeching over our decks; then another, and again we thought we were lost. But we were giving the German as good as they sent, and they were beginning to submerge. Next minute the danger was over.

We learned that word had reached our captain that the sea ahead of us was full of danger, and we turned far out of our course to get around the waiting submarines. The next day old Peter told me we were headed south, and were already off our path by at least a hundred miles.

More than a week late, because of the roundabout course we had taken, we steamed into New York harbour on a clear, sunny morning, and the Statue of Liberty and the skyscrapers lay before us like stage scenery.

Not a soul did I know in America, and after leaving the ship I roamed the streets feeling lonely and a bit homesick, not knowing where to go nor what to do next. At last I came to a crowd of people, who were listening to a soldier making a speech. I edged my way up to the front, and before long the speaker caught sight of the service badge on my coat.

"I'll bet that chap has been in the war," he called out. "Come up here, and tell this crowd what you've seen, and help the Red Cross drive."

So I climbed up the steps to where he stood. Little I knew what to say, and I began to shake with stage fright as I saw all the people staring at me.

"Brace up, sport!" said the man who had asked me up, "and if you've seen any fighting, tell 'em about it. That's the stuff they want."

All in a breath my thoughts went back to the trenches and to the long marches, and I told them of how we had fought at Ypres and Arras, of the homeless women and children, and of the nurse who had lost her hands. They cheered, and shouted for more, and men and women went down into their pockets to give to the Red Cross fund.

When the meeting was over the soldier took me in tow, and introduced me to a lot of people, and I became a regular speaker for the Red Cross and the Liberty Loan. One evening after I had been telling my story a red-headed chap came up to me and said he had a cousin in the Fifth Liverpool named M'Bride. He asked if I knew him.

"Sure I know him," I said. "It was from thinking of all he told me about his bear-hunting and gold-digging that I made up my mind to come to America. He's been a great hunter of big game, that lad."

"Yeah?" said the red-headed man. "Why, son, that cousin of mine is the darnedest liar that

ever came down the pike. The only big game he's ever seen is musk-rats up on the old farm. He's never been west of Hackensack."

So perhaps I won't go bear-hunting or gold-digging after all, though I'm still hunting for adventure.

It's the life in the old trenches that is calling me now, and glad I should be to go back to it. But I am on the wounded list as unfit for service. Whenever I am alone my mind turns to Billy and Piccadilly, and the rest of the lads I knew, and I grow sad thinking that I shall never be with them there again, and that my fighting days are over for good and all.

Often at night queer dreams come to me, and I am with them in the fighting lines once more, and I hear the big guns going as we lie in the mud and rain. And sometimes, when the shell-shock that came to me at Arras has been shaking up my nerves a bit, I start up from my sleep, groping in the dark for my gun, with the voices of the Tommies in the stone house ringing in my ears:

"Put the steel to 'im! Put the steel to 'im!"

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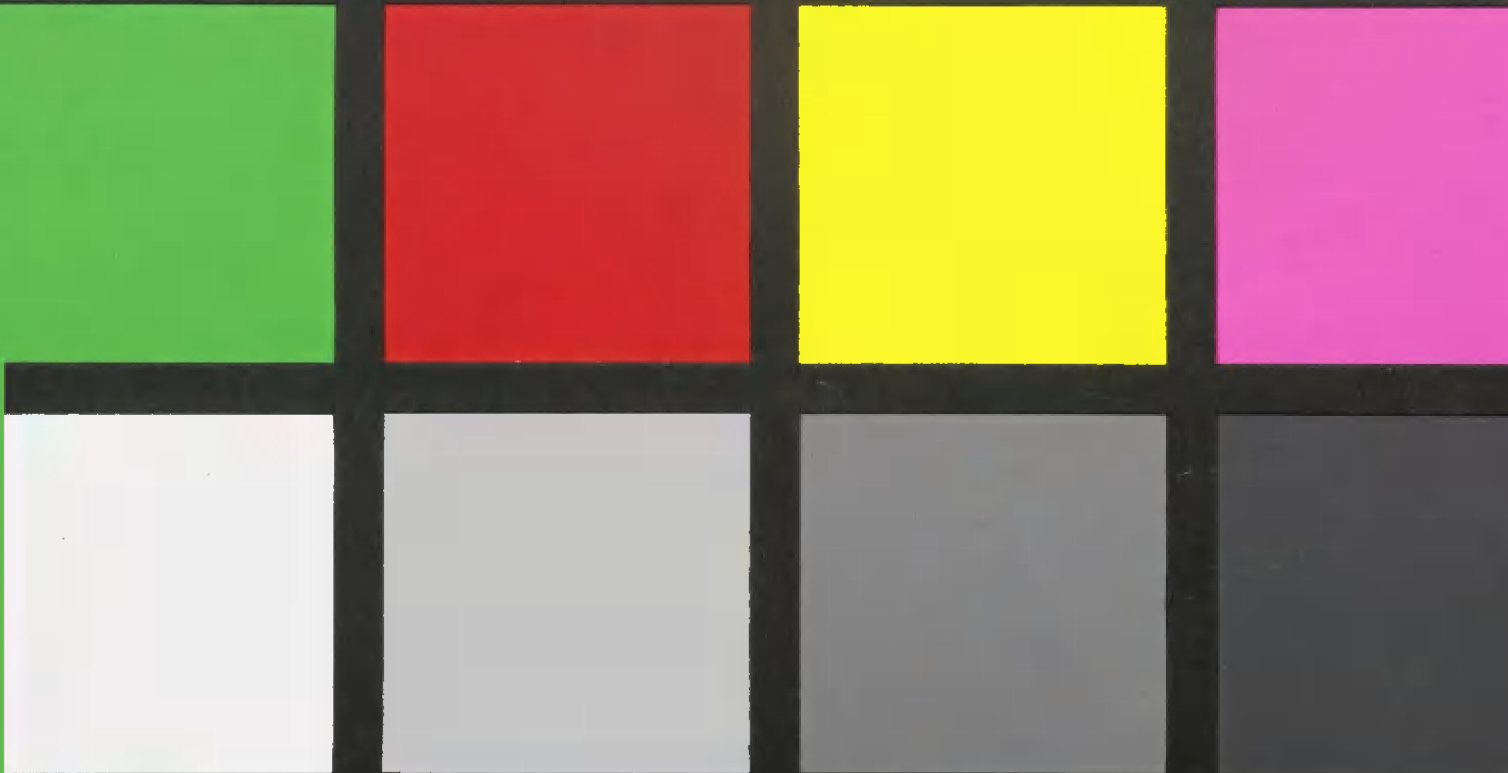
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