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Book A 33









# BEING IT THROUGH

BRITAIN  
WERED  
CALL

A. ST. JOHN  
ADCOCK







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SEEING IT THROUGH



# SEEING IT THROUGH

HOW BRITAIN ANSWERED  
THE CALL

BY

A. ST. JOHN ADCOCK

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

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## BRITAIN'S WAY.

*There's a stir in every street  
Like the sound of hearts that beat—  
    Every road that leads from England  
Pulses with the tramp of feet ;  
Who are these that without stay  
Down the dark and dusty way  
    Of the Valley of the Shadow  
March with faces toward the day ?*

*These are they who, called to arms,  
Came from shops, and desks, and farms—  
    Men of Peace while Peace was with us,  
Men of War at War's alarms !  
Swift the warning message ran  
To the Empire's farthest span,  
    And they rose for England's honour,  
Armed for love of God and man.*

*They have nothing there to gain  
On the thunderous battle-plain  
    But the saving of the nations  
That a tyrant would enchain ;*

*They have seen the wrongs he wrought,  
And, undriven and unbought,  
Go to fight again for Freedom,  
As of old their fathers fought.*

*Let the wordy War-Lord boast  
Of his mighty vandal host,  
He shall end "The Day" he drank to  
In the Night he did not toast!  
He and all his ravening race,  
Brutes primeval, blonde and base,  
Have outlived their barbarous era  
And are passing to their place.*

*From the Britons oversea  
That have never bent the knee  
At the throne of any tyrant  
Come the cohorts of the free:  
They are with us to defend  
All the Prussian Lord would rend,  
And we've sworn an oath together  
That his reign of blood shall end.*

*By the children he has slain,  
By the patience and the pain  
Of the Christ whose laws he tramples  
And whose word he takes in vain,*

*By the God he dare not trust,  
We will curb his ruthless lust,  
Break his pride and power for ever,  
Leave him humbled in the dust !*

*At his blighting nod or frown  
Church and cottage, thorpe and town  
Crash in ruin—and in ruin  
Shall his glory thus go down :  
We will match his mightiest guns,  
And outnumber all his Huns  
With our surely gathering millions,  
Freemen all, and Freemen's sons.*

*Listen—listen ! Day and night,  
Through the dark and through the light  
From the homes of all the Empire  
Rolls the sea of England's might :  
Hear its tide across the gloom,  
With a fateful surge and boom,  
Rising, rising still—and, risen,  
It shall sweep him to his doom.*





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## CHAPTER I

### THE CLOUD BURSTS

Stand  
Firm for your country, and become a man  
Honoured and loved ; it were a noble life  
To be found dead embracing her.

BEN JONSON'S *Catiline*.

ALREADY it seems years rather than months since we were living at peace with all the rest of the world and wrangling furiously among ourselves—wrangling so furiously, split into so many opposing sections, so fatally disunited, to all appearance, that a resolute, well-prepared enemy may be forgiven for expecting to find us an easy, almost helpless prey. To think of the condition into which we were fallen less than a year ago is like recalling a wild nightmare. The labour world was seething with discontent and bitter resentment against an unjust division of the fruits

of our national prosperity that resulted in the disgraceful poverty of the too-poor and the equally disgraceful affluence of the too-rich. There had been rioting and shooting in South Africa, you remember, and the nine deported labour leaders exiled here among us had accentuated the ill-feeling, that was bad enough before they came, between employers and employed. There was trouble brewing in connection with those Indian emigrants (now said to have been dupes of German intrigue) who had been refused permission to land and settle in Canada. The suffragettes were desperately militant, burning houses and churches, breaking shop windows, damaging works of art, and revolting in prison to call attention to their demands. Another storm was raging round the question of Welsh Disestablishment. Ireland, apart from its own acute labour agitations, was an armed camp and apparently on the eve of revolution, with Ulstermen ready to fly at the throats of Nationalists, and officers of our army out there threatening to throw up their commissions sooner than obey

orders of which they did not approve. Even down to the end of last July gun-running was still going on in Dublin.

At this moment, when all these and other social and political disputes at home and in our Colonies had us entangled in a very Gordian knot of difficulties—the enemy struck. And in a flash all our discords ended, and the whole British Empire, united as it never had been united before, rose out of chaos and stood four-square against the common danger. No wonder Germany was surprised; we were a little surprised ourselves at the instant unanimity with which all our warring elements coalesced and, as at a sudden bugle-call, were gathered into a loyal and mighty brotherhood with a single determination shaping all its energies—a determination to fit itself swiftly and at any personal sacrifice to cope with and crush for ever the most ruthless, the most soulless renaissance of barbarism that has ever threatened the peace and hopes of the civilised world.

On July 28th, after a month of tortuous

and obscure diplomatic negotiation concerning the murder of the Austrian Crown Prince by a Serbian subject, Austria, under German influence, declared war upon Serbia, and so doing lit a fire that swept with terrible rapidity across Europe. The Czar, as the traditional protector of the Slav nations, had warned Austria that he would not stand by and see Serbia destroyed, so on August 1st, Germany, ostensibly supporting her ally, declared war against Russia, and on the same day invaded Luxemburg, which is not on the road to Petrograd. On August 3rd, Germany invaded Belgium, and on the 4th declared war on Belgium and on France. On that same 4th Great Britain, fulfilling her treaty obligations, protested against the gross violation of Belgian neutrality and delivered an ultimatum that expired at midnight; and since no answer was forthcoming, in the first hour of August 5th we declared war on Germany.

It was this prompt and decisive action on the part of the British Government that upset Germany's elaborate calculations,

falsified the pretentious forecasts of her academic military experts and bloody-minded professors ; and she hates and maligns us at this hour because we have spoilt her programme by not proving ourselves the fools and poltroons that her wise men and heroes had thought us. She had analysed our national character with that cocksure, philosophic solemnity which sensible people never take too seriously ; she had weighed our enormous Empire in a balance of her own making and found it wanting everywhere. Her oracles had assured her that whatever happened on the Continent, Great Britain would not go to war—she dare not, for her Empire was rent with internecine strife and tottering to its fall—India, a hot-bed of disaffection and yearning for an opportunity to rise and throw off our oppressive yoke : Canada, Australasia, South Africa, weary of their connection with us and certain to refuse to become anyway involved in a European war that might be our concern but could not be theirs : Ireland obviously ready and waiting for such a chance to strike for

independence and join with an enemy to crush us. All this looked so plausible and gratifying on paper that the complacent German people were convinced it was all true. There was nothing scientific about the construction of the British Empire ; and Germany is so materialistic nowadays that she has no faith in anything but brute force and scientific machinery ; it had grown slowly, unmethodically through the centuries like a mere thing of nature, whilst Germany had been clever enough to construct her own carefully systematised Empire in a matter of fifty years. Clearly, then, the British were no authentic Empire builders, had no scholarly, codified theory of government and their Empire must needs tumble to pieces at once before the intelligent onslaught of a race that had really studied and understood the business. We had no method, they argued ; our progress had been haphazard and accidental ; the different parts of our dominion were nothing but a disorderly mass of unorganised countries—instead of being forcibly and firmly clamped together under



a uniform, cast-iron rule, most of them made their own laws; their relations with us were purely voluntary; England had no power to compel them to obey her, and was it likely that such free peoples, failing to consult their own safety, would go forth voluntarily to spend their blood and money in assisting to maintain an Empire that did not hold them in subjection, had never bridled and harnessed them to its triumphal chariot, and so, from the German point of view, was an Empire in name only? As for the homeland itself, it was contemptibly degenerate and effete, altogether given over to a childish love of sport, to comfort and luxury, to a narrow, unidealistic commercial greed that made it more than ever a nation of shopkeepers, so pusillanimous, so shop-soiled, so wedded to peace at any price that it would sacrifice anything except its own skin and its own cash sooner than allow its Government to become involved in a Continental war. It seems a muddled sort of reasoning, for neither a love of sport nor commercial greed is compatible with soft living, but these were their

convictions, this is what their spuriously subtle wiseacres thought they knew about us.

I only know that after our ultimatum had gone to Germany, throughout August 4th, which was a Bank holiday, the one feeling in our London holiday crowd and, as we afterwards learned, throughout the kingdom, was a fear—not that we should go to war, but lest our and Germany's diplomatists might so shuffle the dirty cards that we should not. There was a strong sentiment that the entente with France, of itself, ought to leave us no choice; but, above all, a deep indignation against the invasion of Belgium fired us with an intense desire to fulfil a duty made thus doubly clear and imperative. At the root of it, this fear was a consuming anxiety lest a pacifist policy of non-intervention should prevail; lest Germany should offer us pledges that might justify us, on diplomatic grounds, in standing aside from the conflict, but must on every other ground brand us with dishonour.

It was this feeling that fretted the multi-

tude that gathered and overflowed Whitehall and all its tributaries late at night on August 4th, and waited impatiently until Big Ben struck twelve. Then there was some cheering ; then a strange, expectant silence. They were waiting for the news ; and another half hour was not past before it came. It ran through the dense crowd in a moment that war had been declared on Germany, and it was greeted everywhere with a sense of profound relief and satisfaction. The cheers that stormed up thunderously thrilled you with a certainty that this vast crowd spoke for the nation its pride and its thankfulness that our people had in this supreme crisis stood firm and, without hesitation and fearlessly, done the only right thing in the only right way. Cheer after cheer rose almost frantically, it was so good to be freed of the almost intolerable tension of suspense ; then, as by a common impulse, hats were whipped off and, standing bareheaded, those exultant thousands lifted their voices first in the National Anthem, then in the stirring strains of the Marseillaise. There was no

mafficking ; no rowdyism ; for this was a crowd sanely and deeply in earnest. Still cheering, it broke up and went its ways, neither boasting nor fearing, but merely glad from the heart of it that we had thrown down the gage to a braggart, arrogant race whose squalid, out-of-date religion of bloodshed and conquest was a challenge and an abomination to all decent, civilised human beings.

Next day, Lord Kitchener succeeded Mr. Asquith as Minister of War, and whilst we were preparing swiftly and in a most practical, resolute spirit to enter upon our share of the greatest war that had ever fallen to our hands, tidings came that Canada, Australia, New Zealand were enthusiastically raising and equipping troops that were to come and join our battle line ; that the warrior Princes of India were eagerly placing themselves and their armies at our service and petitioning to be sent to the front ; that South Africa would relieve us of garrison duties, raise troops for her own defence, make war on Germany's South African colonies and undertake to

suppress any outbreak of the rebellion that Germany had been fomenting among a certain small section of the Boer-British community. And at home here, no sooner did Lord Kitchener call for a new volunteer army than men of every class, rich and poor, clerk and docker, the town or country aristocrat with the swineherd and the bricklayer, went swarming in thousands to the recruiting stations all over the kingdom.

Some of the newspapers chattered shrewdly about capturing German trade, but no such ambition as that could have inspired a man among us to take up arms. It was a flaming anger against the unprovoked wrongs inflicted upon Belgium, a spontaneous sympathy with France, threatened by a cunning, calculating aggressor whose avowed intention was to break and humble her so utterly that she should never again be able to lift her head from the dust—it was these things, far more even than any thought of the danger that threatened our own shores and our existence as a nation, that appealed irresistibly, transformed as by magic our men of peace

into men of war and sent them to Whitehall and the other recruiting depôts in such enormous numbers that many of them had to return there two and three days in succession to take their places again in the long queues, before they were able to get in at the doors to be examined and passed for service.

One could not witness these things then, and cannot recall them now without some touch of pride and emotion. None of those men were unwilling conscripts, blind servants of a tyrannical system: they were free men who knew why and for what they were to fight and were giving themselves to their country's cause because they felt it was a cause that was good enough to live for, or to die for.

In the very early days of all this I met with an old friend who had been a most pronounced pacifist, an uncompromising denunciator of all wars and of those who made them; but now, he had sacrificed a lucrative appointment, cast off his civilian tall hat and morning coat, and walked clad in khaki, keen and alert to fit himself to be

sent out quickly to the front as a private soldier.

“ Yes,” he said, guessing at my surprise, “ but this is not war in the usual sense of the word. I’m out to fight for peace ; that’s all. There can be no peace in the world so long as a nation so brutally militant as Germany sits in the middle of it hungry for conquests and forcing all its neighbours to live under arms in self-defence. It’s a stupid state of things that can’t be tolerated at this time of day. It has simply got to be ended, and it can only be ended by smashing Germany, so for the sake of peace I’m going to war. I have been sick for years of the big armament savagery and seeing all Europe showing its teeth. If Bernhardt’s gospel of murder and silly swaggering domination is good enough to fight for, well, I reckon the sane gospel of peace is too good to be given up till we’ve had one last hard fight for it. So far as I’m concerned the war is just a horrible necessity—it’s a war to end war, and that’s why I’m in it.”

In those early days, too, when the Kaiser



was still telling us clamorously that God was his old ally and sure to give him victory over his enemies, I happened to pay a visit to a kindly, gentle old lady who holds strict and quite orthodox views in all matters of religion.

“Strange,” I remarked to her, “that while the papers are full of tales of German atrocities the Kaiser still seems to think that God is with him and will reward him for all he is doing.”

“I do not trouble about what the Kaiser thinks of God,” she said quietly. “We know what God thinks of the Kaiser.”

I was rather taken aback, but, without noticing this, she opened the Bible that lay on the table beside her, turned to the sixth chapter of Proverbs, and read out, with a glance up at the end of each verse to see that I caught its significance :

“These six things doth the Lord hate ;  
yea, seven are an abomination unto  
him :

“A proud look, a lying tongue, and  
hands that shed innocent blood :



“ An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief :

“ A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.”

She shut the book.

“ Now,” she asked emphatically, “ is there more than one king among those that are fighting who need tremble when he reads those words ? ”

## CHAPTER II

### KITCHENER'S MEN

“ Come ye, whate'er your creed—O waken all.  
Whate'er your temper, at your Country's call,  
Resolving (this a free-born Nation can)  
To have one soul, and perish to a man  
Or save this honoured land from every lord  
But British reason and the British sword.”

WORDSWORTH.

SOMEBODY just behind me in the crowd remarked, “ It's wonderful when you come to think of it ! ” and I guessed what he meant.

We were standing on the pavement in Queen Victoria Street watching a few hundreds of Kitchener's new soldiers marching past in the roadway ; smart well-set-up fellows in khaki, keeping step with that keen, buoyant look men have when they are doing something they are able to put their hearts into.

The wonder was that until a week or two ago most of these men had never so much as dreamt of ever handling a gun. They were placidly serving behind counters, writing at desks in quiet offices, teaching in schools ; they were factory hands, farm labourers, or idle young men of means lounging through an easy life about town. For the strength of Kitchener's army is that it is a real democratic force, a people's army in the actual sense of the term. Every grade of society is represented in its ranks, from navvies to university professors, from costermongers to the younger sons of peers.

And, on second thoughts, it was no such wonder, after all, that our men of peace should have been so swiftly transformed into enthusiastic and capable men of war. Our German enemy never made a worse mistake than when he complacently assumed that because we were not an aggressively military nation, because soldiering was not a universal business with us, therefore we must needs be weak degenerates with no fighting spirit left in us ;

that merely because we were not always showing our teeth we did not possess any.

Germany's military scientists, who know so much more of machinery than of men, appear to have convinced themselves that the fighting spirit was something which kindled under a brass helmet and was extinguished by a top-hat ; and that when they had counted the numbers of our professional soldiers they had counted all that mattered of our fighting men.

Well, in less than twelve weeks after he had called for a new army of a million, over eight hundred thousand had responded eagerly to Lord Kitchener's appeal, and by now there are already some two million who are proud to be known as " Kitchener's men." And this great force is made of far finer, more reliable stuff than if he had raised it by conscription, for there is no leaven of unwilling or constitutionally un-military material in it. Each one of these men has his own good reason for what he is doing : he knows why he has joined, what he is going to fight for, and goes gladly and ardently to fight for it.

Take, for instance, a man in my own neighbourhood, who enlisted almost as soon as Kitchener's call to arms appeared on the hoardings. He is a grocer in a small way, a steady, decent, hard-working fellow with so little of swagger or dash about him that once I should have said there was not an ounce of the warrior in his blood; but now I know better. I met him in his khaki, a month after he had enlisted, when he was home on a week-end leave; and he was looking as perfect a soldier as any I have seen. At first he was a little diffident and awkward in accounting for himself, for even in normal times he was one of the reticent kind. I could get no more from him than that he had felt it was up to him to go, the same as anybody else; that he didn't care to stick at home and let somebody else go and fight for him, he just wanted to do his share; then, suddenly, he broke out:

“Look here—it's like this. My wife can manage the shop all right till I come back, and—well, look here, you know what's happened in Belgium, and do you

think I want to risk having to see my kiddies grow up under this sanguinary Kaiser? Well, there you are—and it isn't going to be my fault if ever they have to."

Feelings of that sort have prompted a good many of the volunteers who have shouldered a gun and gone to the front, or are presently going.

I know of another, a Sussex labourer. He did not join quite early in the day, only because his wife begged him not to. But he read the papers restlessly, and it was the stories of German atrocities that roused him so and were more than he could endure. They tell me he was fond of children, and a little grave in the village churchyard held the only one that had been his own. One evening he came in from work and put the newspaper down before his wife and showed her a report of how a party of Uhlans had ruthlessly butchered a Belgian mother and three children.

"Read that," he said, terribly moved. "It's no use, lass—I must go—I must go. I can't stand any more of it—I must go."

She read, and so far from opposing him

further agreed that he must. She still did not want him to go, but she was convinced that he must and, weeping bitterly, walked with him to the station—and he went.

When I go over the long roll call of my personal friends who have enlisted I grow ashamed of the causes that keep me still at home, though I am prouder than ever of the country that is mine, of the race to which I belong. Some went, maybe, from a gallant love of adventure; many, as I know, because being qualified by age and circumstances, they were bound in honour to go, this fight being what it is—for our common human right of freedom, and against the most stupid and most merciless tyranny that ever sought to throw civilisation into the melting-pot and revive the brute-glories of a primeval day. It may be needless to praise those who are merely doing their duty in face of this general peril, but one cannot but have admiration, and something more than admiration, for the many that march beside them who were under no such obligation to go.

One of these is a man of forty-six, who

has spent his time and money in a long struggle to make headway in his profession. He is an accomplished violinist, and at last seemed to have come within sight of the goal he had striven so strenuously to reach. In the last five years or so he had toured successfully through the country, and has had engagements at some of London's largest halls. But he happened to have studied under a famous teacher in Paris, and at the outbreak of the war his sympathy and affection for the French people pulled him—the thought of their being trampled into the dust under German hoofs became intolerable to him. He had everything to lose and nothing whatever to gain by putting his sympathies into action, nevertheless he promptly flung his profession to the winds, turned his back on his private hopes and ambitions, and offered himself for enlistment.

At the recruiting station he gave his age as thirty-four. He is physically fit, but he scarcely looks so young, and the officer at the table eyed him critically, and asked :



“What particular branch of the service do you want to join?”

“Any that will have me,” said he.

“That’s good—thank God for that!” said the officer, with emphasis. “So many insist on joining special regiments, and that often makes difficulties. But you’re the man for us. We’ll find room for you.”

And they did.

Another was an expert mechanic; he has had experience in the building of aeroplanes, and has flown in them as an assistant. He is over fifty, but the spirit moved him, and he offered himself to a flying corps, giving his age as forty. He would have risked being younger if he had not been grey-haired.

“You are as right as rain,” said the doctor who examined him; “your constitution is not more than thirty-five, and there are so many applications that the younger men stand the best chance.”

So when he reached the military authorities he was careful to adopt the age of his constitution.

“I daresay I can put you through,”

observed the officer, "but of course our people are taking the younger men first. "If you had not been more than thirty, now——"

"As a matter of fact," interrupted the recruit, "I am thirty, but as I am a bit grey I thought you might not believe me if I said so."

"Oh, I believe you," laughed the officer. "You tell the truth and stick to your right age if you want to get through quick."

And as he got through at once you may depend that he stuck to it.

"But," he confessed to some of us afterwards, "I hope to goodness they won't go on expecting me to take much more off, or I shan't be born presently."

But somehow, I think, perhaps the recollection of this kind that touches me most poignantly is one of a certain old gentleman of private means who enjoyed all the comforts of life in a pleasant house of his own some forty miles to the north of London. Shortly after Kitchener asked for his new army, a large number of troops were in training on the common that stretches

within sight of his door, and one morning he walked into camp to interview the Colonel in command. He and the Colonel were old friends; they had played golf together in piping times of peace, and more than once he had carried the Colonel with him on his yearly caravanning holidays. Tall, thin, full of energy, he is a sturdy man still, though he is nearer seventy than sixty.

“I have come, Colonel,” he said quietly, “to offer my services. Now, wait a minute—listen to me. I am not so mad as to ask you to help me, at my age, to get a commission, or even to imagine they would pass me anywhere to serve in the ranks. I would do it if they would, but they won't. Still, you know, I'm a capital cook—I haven't gone caravanning for nothing—so I want you to arrange to take me into one of your battalions as cook.”

They tell me the Colonel stared at him for a minute, and was oddly moved.

“My dear old chap,” he said, “do you know what you are asking for? You would have nothing but the damn'dest hard,

dirty work, and no possible chance of any kind of honour or distinction at all."

"I know that," said the game old gentleman obstinately. "I don't care about that. But do you think I'm just going to sit at home like this all the while? I can't do it—I won't do it. I am determined to do my bit in this business somehow, and I'm asking you as a friend to give me the only job I'm fit for, and I shan't die happy if you don't let me have this chance."

There was no dissuading him; within a week he might have been seen, smart and active, swathed in an apron, cooking for those troops out on that Buckinghamshire common, and he has since gone joyously to the front with them to cook for them there.

Almost everyone you meet now can tell you such tales of our countrymen—of the gallant, self-sacrificing spirit in which old and young alike have risen to the great occasion and made haste to meet the German challenge. And this is the people that our enemy had fatuously written down as

degenerate and negligible. If I were to say all I think in my heart of these and many other such incidents I might seem to be talking boastfully, foolishly. But I have not gone about in these latter days, mixing with all sorts and conditions of my fellows, without being made to feel that the old fighting spirit which built up our Empire is not dead in us or even asleep. It is alive and alert and as ready to answer any good call that is made on it as it was when Shakespeare felt it gloriously astir in the air of his time and wrote exultantly :

“ This England never did and never shall  
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror.”

## CHAPTER III

### HEROES AND MARTYRS

“ They were heroic souls who had lain life’s all  
On Freedom’s hungry altar.”

GERALD MASSEY.

I REMEMBER being told when I was a boy, by a man who spoke as if he knew, that the French are a very gallant people, but emotional; and that much the same might be said of the Italians. I gathered from him that to be emotional is not exactly anything to their discredit; it is a national characteristic and we have no right to blame them for it—they are born like that and are unable to hide their weakness. On the other hand, he gave me to understand that we Britons are made of much sterner stuff; are not given to sentiment at all, and, though we have the best kind of human feelings, we are a proud, self-controlled race and never reveal them in public. Of

course, it is nothing to boast of—this dignified reticence—it just happens to be a national characteristic of ours, and no more.

I doubt whether I should ever have found this fact out for myself. I accepted his word for it because he appeared to be so well informed. But ever since Belgian refugees began to come over to England, and ever since we have had Belgian wounded soldiers in our midst, I have been exercised with a growing suspicion that perhaps he may have been mistaken.

Naturally, we were bound to feel sorry for the martyred Belgian people assailed by a dishonourable, barbarous enemy and ruthlessly driven out of their ruined towns and villages, Naturally we could not help admiring and honouring the indomitable heroism of the Belgian soldiers. I say nothing against that ; but I keep coming across English men and women who break all such bounds and go enthusiastically beyond them, and somehow it does not seem fair to that national characteristic

which serious students of psychology have for so long attributed to us.

That my tailor should have failed in this respect does not matter so much ; one does not look for stoicism in a tailor ; besides, he never even mentioned the matter until I chanced to speak of the war whilst we were trying the coat on. Then he agreed that it was terrible, and added quite casually—much as he might have referred to the acquisition of a new fashion in waistcoats—that he and his wife had arranged to adopt a little Belgian boy and girl, whose parents had been butchered, and intended to bring them up with their own children. He made a few more chalk marks where the coat did not fit nicely on the shoulders, and that was all we said about it. And I was rather pleased that we both knew how to behave ourselves so properly.

But I can't say so much for that policeman at Charing Cross. You may have read the story in the papers at the time. Soon after the sack of Louvain, sixteen Belgian refugees, mostly old folks and weary child-



ren, arrived at the station towards midnight, when he was going off duty. He contrived to make out who they were, and as it was then too late to take them to the Belgian Consul, he carried the smallest child in his arms and shepherded the rest of the forlorn party to his own home. He and his wife fed them, gave up their bed to two, and manufactured beds for the others in their sitting-room and kitchen. In the morning, after a good breakfast, the policeman took them all by bus to the Belgian Consulate. Meanwhile, the refugees had made a private collection among themselves, but when one of them at parting offered him the money, I understand that he laughed and waved it aside with a large official gesture and would have none of it—would even have gone off abruptly without so much as letting them thank him only they went after him; and, after all, it was not his fault that they were in tears, nor that some of them insisted on kissing the hand that had been kind to them.

But there was another thing that I witnessed myself. Some weeks later, after

committees had been formed to take care of these wanderers whom the modern Huns have left homeless, two shabby women, an old and a young one, with two bewildered little girls were in the centre of a questioning, well-meaning crowd at the corner of Kingsway, but nobody in the crowd could understand what they were saying. Suddenly a passing carriage was checked and drew up at the kerb, an elegant young lady, who had noticed them, stepped out briskly, pushed through, spoke to the poor women in their own language, and, taking an arm of the elder one and a hand of one of the children, walked with them a hundred yards or so and led them into the Belgian Refugee Committee Room that was near by. Two cheerful girls came forward to meet them in the vestibule, as if they had been waiting their arrival, and in a couple of minutes, without wasting any time on formalities, had them seated at a table with a pleasant array of bread and butter and cakes and cups-and-saucers and tea set out on the cloth before them. The two children started at once to eat ravenously,

and if the two sad women delayed and cried a little first, you may be sure it was not entirely because of the trouble through which they had come.

Nevertheless, I did not think our national characteristic came out quite strongly on that occasion. And, if I am to tell the truth, it gets very badly shaken whenever we happen to come upon a Belgian soldier in the streets. Some of us may pretend not to look at him, but as a matter of fact we can't help looking at him, and you will see a good many of us turn and stand to gaze back at him after he has gone past. One day two of those soldiers, one of them limping slightly, were strolling along Fenchurch Street, and these eyes beheld an Englishman, a weedy, poor fellow who might have been a carpenter, pass them staring intently, and then turn impetuously and hurry back and get in front of them and snatch off his cap and wave it, crying "Vive Belgium!" with tears running down his cheeks. Even that did not altogether satisfy him; he stood there saying foolish, friendly things to them in English which

they evidently did not understand, and still with his hat off he shook hands with them both, and they smiled and seemed pleased, though they had to answer him awkwardly, in a language that was as incomprehensible to him as his was to them. And somehow I was pleased too. I admit I was a bit ashamed of him, but I thoroughly approved of what he had done and felt that, for the moment, he was the delegate of the whole street.

Again—last Lord Mayor's Day I did not go out to see the Show ; it is our habit to affect indifference towards that ancient institution ; but being out I was caught by sheer accident in the thick of the crowd on Ludgate Hill. I was crushed at the back of it, and could see nothing but heads and the tops of bayonets as the procession went by. But exactly opposite, on the other side of the way, four wounded Belgians with a couple of Red Cross nurses sat in a window to themselves, and I and that part of the mob which was packed beside and behind me were contented to be able to watch how they were enjoying it. Some

of those behind me were continually talking of them, of their heroism, their misfortune, the brutality of the German enemy, or calling attention to the eagerness with which all four leaned forward with their faces against the glass to find out what was coming next, when there was a break in the procession ; but when, all of a sudden, the four Belgians rose spontaneously, one with his head in bandages, and, each lifting a hand, stood at the salute whilst the Lord Mayor's fairy-coach was passing, nobody talked—nobody said a word ; and I believe I understood why, for just then I doubt if I could have said a word myself.

Somewhere about that same date, when I was setting out for the city one morning I found the gates at the level crossing closed rather sooner than usual ; boys and girls were perched on the top of them, and a vast, motley crowd was surging alertly round, waiting to see the train go by. Another crowd overflowed the booking-office of the station. Whilst I was wriggling and pushing a way through, a crisp bugle-call rang out, and when I contrived

to reach the platform I found that all the excitement centred on a contingent of some hundred Belgian soldiers who were en route for London.

Presently the train came steaming in, and to roar upon roar of cheering the Belgians boarded it. I scrambled in where I could, and so came to share a carriage with five of them, one being, to my particular gratification, the bugler.

They did not possess a complete uniform between them—these five. One wore the khaki cap of a British infantryman; the others had tweed caps of a civilian fashion; their trousers and mufflers were glaringly unmilitary; but they were all as cheerful and high-spirited as if they were going on a picnic instead of back into the firing line. They were too much occupied at the moment to pay any attention to me, and I only found out where they were going and something about them when we were well advanced on our journey. It was not till then, when we had become calm enough to converse in such broken language as we could manage, that they told me they

had all been wounded, and been in hospital at Dollis Hill, but for the last fortnight had been recuperating in my own neighbourhood on the skirts of a small fishing town near the mouth of the Thames. And you might gather some notion of the number of friends they had made in that fortnight from the swarm of people that had come to-day to see them off. There were girls and boys and old men who had tramped in from villages three miles away on purpose to give them a last good-bye.

The bugler and another stood at the window on my side of the carriage; the other three made the most of the window opposite. When the train started the cheering, which had never ceased since it came in, swelled to a deafening volume. First a porter, then girls and men from the general throng darted forward for a shake of the eager hands held out to them; the bugler, who was blowing gloriously all the while, keeping one hand free for this friendly use. We swept in triumph between the gates of the crossing, and something in the sunlit air, the heartfelt cheers,



the waving hands, hats and handkerchiefs stirred your blood even more than the ringing call of the bugle did.

The lane that runs for some distance beside the line was packed with fishermen, labourers who had dodged out from the gas works there, women and girls and children ; there were people leaning from upper windows, or dashing out hurriedly into little back yards, and everywhere was the flutter of hands and the mingling treble and roar of human voices. And the soldiers cheered back as heartily, and the bugler blew and blew and blew till the last of the crowd was left out of sight behind.

Then the two soldiers at my window sat down, looking at me and laughing apologetically, as it were, for their excitement. One drew in from the other window, a grave, stolid man, who smoked thereafter and scarcely uttered a word throughout the journey ; but the remaining two, keen vivacious boys of twenty, still stood gazing out over the country.

The man who sat facing me was a homely, rural-looking fellow of thirty or so ; the



bugler, who made his seat alongside me, was younger. It was the homely man who spoke first. He nodded to me again, smiled and winked in that odd, apologetic way, and said, as explaining their behaviour :

“ Ah, ye-es, everybody so kind.”

“ You are going back to the Front ? ”

I suggested, with a view to developing conversation.

“ The Front ! ” cried the bugler, catching at the familiar word. “ Yah ! To Paree—then the Front.”

“ The Front ! The Front ! ” chuckled the homely man, pleased to give me a word that we both understood. Then he raised an imaginary rifle to his shoulder, tilted his head, closed one eye, as taking aim at a mark, and added, still chuckling, “ Der Kaiser ! Der Kaiser ! ”

Thereupon our talk became as miscellaneous as our linguistic difficulties would allow. The bugler showed me an address on an envelope to inform me of his name and indicate the whereabouts of the hospital where their wounds had been nursed ; then

he reached down a bundle from the rack, took out a gigantic cigar-box and opened it to show me his treasures—a bundle of picture postcards, three cigars, several packets of cigarettes, some chocolate, a small knitted purse, which he picked out and held towards me in his palm, with a droll, roguish twinkle in his eyes.

After insisting on my testing one of the cigarettes, he put these away; then produced from his pocket an album of patriotic songs, words and music; probably another present; and turning the leaves, struck up the Marseillaise, the homely man joining lustily in the tune, and the stolid one removing his pipe to help with the chorus. They sang the Belgian National Anthem; then the Russian; then “lah-lah’d” the English, giving “Send him victorious,” and “God save the King” in my own tongue with great gusto, glancing at me to see that I recognised the words.

At intervals, one of the two boys, who were not yet able to tear themselves away from the window, would turn to shout eagerly and beckon, and on the instant

the bugler would leap up, squeeze in between them and blow a resounding blast, which would move some men who were working far off in the fields to straighten their backs and look round, and when they saw the heads that must have been protruding from most of the carriages of the train, they would snatch off their hats and you could see they were cheering madly, though you could not hear a sound of it. Sometimes, half a mile away, they would start running in a frantic endeavour to keep pace with the train, waving and cheering, till we had hopelessly outstripped them.

By and by, when all the district they knew and that had known them was left well in the rear, the two boys reluctantly pulled their heads in. One dropped into his seat resignedly and lit a cigarette. The other, a bright-faced, good-looking youngster, hesitated a minute ; then seeing me in my corner, the only Englishman present, he suddenly threw out his hands towards me with a curious, impulsive, appealing gesture, and cried :

“ I go—ah, yes, I go—and I lose my second Motherland ! ”

And sat down abruptly, and covered his face with his hands.

His comrades shot a shamefaced glance at me and at each other, and then began to laugh quietly. I can't describe what a sort of kindness and good humour was in that laughter of theirs. And first the bugler, then the others took out handkerchiefs, or substitutes for them—one was obviously a blue checked duster ; one was a miniature Union Jack—and made burlesque pretences of weeping. They nudged the boy and, calling to him in their own language, persisted in pressing the loan of their handkerchiefs upon him, till he straightened up quickly and, with a swift glance round, laughed back as gaily as any of them ; but they were real tears that were shining in his eyes.

Two stations beyond mine we have a large hospital which is crowded with British, French and Belgian soldiers who have been broken in the war ; and on another morning when I got into the train to go to

London there was a Belgian in the now familiar blue uniform, though then it was still strange to most of us, seated in the carriage. He carried his right arm in a sling, and had a corner next the door. Beside him sat a large, expansive Englishman in a tall hat and a frock coat ; a man of a loud, rolling voice and a complacent, rather pompous manner. He was talking when I got in, and he continued talking, with the rarest intervals of silence after he had asked a question, but even then he did not pause long enough to obtain an answer. Sometimes he used a French word or two, by way of intimating that he could converse in that tongue if he thought it desirable to do so, but for the most part he compromised by orating in the kind of broken English that foreigners employ and so may be considered to find more comprehensible ; and the soldier listened and nodded and smiled with unflinching politeness and amiability.

“ The mistake—mee-stake—you Belgians made was,” said the expansive man in the friendliest style, emphasising the important

words by shouting them louder, "in trying to hold those forts at Liége. My dear sir, forts are no good against modern artillery. No, no. Non, non. No good. But it was brave, mind you!—it was noble—no-bell. It was hero-ic. But," he closed his eyes, shook his head slowly and flourished his hands, "it was attempting the impossible—ze impossi-bell! Now, when you knew the Germans were coming to attack Liége, my advice to you would have been this. . . ."

Whilst he unfolded his advice confidently and at great length, I noticed how the squat, sturdy old man who sat next to me was glaring across at the Belgian with a peculiar expression of vindictiveness. From his appearance, I should have guessed him to be a labourer of some kind: his hands were rough and knotty, his clothes and his cloth cap the worse for wear, his face was seamed with wrinkles, and he had a stiff tuft of grey beard that thrust forward aggressively from under his chin. His look was so darkly malevolent that I could not help watching him, puzzled;

I fancy he was confused by the talk of the expansive Englishman and, catching only his louder, broken English, took him, also, to be some kind of foreigner ; and presently he seemed to feel that I was regarding him, and our glances met.

“ What’s he doin’ here ? ” he demanded huskily, leaning towards me and signalling at the Belgian with a flick of his eyelid. “ No right to allow these wounded Germans to run round loose like this.”

I explained matters in an undertone, and his face cleared, and softened curiously.

“ I thought they was a pair of them Germans what ought to be kept locked up like the papers complains about,” he growled. “ Belgian soldier, is he—that one ? ”

He fixed his eyes on the wounded man, and there was a new, strange light in them.

“ My son’s out there,” he went on growling to me presently. “ We had a letter from him only the other day. My missis read it out to me—my eyes are no good—and he said in the letter these Belgians, he says, they’re the right stuff. He says



his regiment would have been all cut up by the Germans if some Belgians hadn't come up in time to help them ; they were good pals and stood by them, he says, and if ever you meet any of 'em over here, he says, don't you forgit it but do what you can for 'em. Some of 'em died for us chaps, he says, and don't you forgit it."

He fell silent, and stared, as if he could not take his eyes from that Belgian's face. Once he made as if to lean forward and speak to him, but he drew back as quickly, perhaps from some feeling of shyness, perhaps only because the soldier was too completely absorbed by the overpowering attentions of the tall-hatted gentleman to have any chance of noticing him.

"You are going to Hampstead? To visit a wounded friend? Yes, yes. *Oui, oui, m'sieu.* Good!" the tall-hatted gentleman was saying. "Now, Hampstead is a long way. Have you ever been there before? . . . No, you haven't. Well, well, well. Then, of course, you don't know how to get there. Let me see if I can



explain to you which is the best and quickest route.”

He proceeded to elaborate and minute explanations, and concluded them with, “When you get to the Hampstead station you will have a longish walk—von long walk, you understand—to the address you want. But it’s a pretty straight road. You will have no difficulty;” and he proceeded to impress upon him the names of the thoroughfares he must traverse, and the right and left turnings he must take.

“How can he understand all that jaw about the roads he’s got to take? He couldn’t remember it if he did,” the old man breathed scornfully in my ear. “And he don’t look equal to no long walks. Why, I reckon he’s only just up out o’ bed.”

He sat brooding darkly, still with his eyes feasting on the Belgian. By-and-by, he furtively fumbled in his pocket, brought out his money and appeared to be covertly counting it. I grew hot and uncomfortable, fearing he was thinking of offering a trifle to the soldier, who looked better off than

himself, and was relieved when he put it back without doing so.

Before we reached the terminus the tall-hatted gentleman had repeated his directions several times, and when we got out he grasped the Belgian by the arm in a masterful manner and led him off ahead of us. I overtook them downstairs in the doorway, where he was telling his protégé which way he must go in order to reach the station whence he could book to Hampstead.

“Now, if you are not quite sure you can find it,” he concluded, “say so, and I’ll come along with you and show you where it is.”

“No, no,” cried the Belgian anxiously. “Tank you, tank you, but I find him easy, quite well. Yes. Tank you. Tank you.”

“Very well, very well. You can’t miss it. I am delighted to have met you. Good-bye.” And to my surprise he not only shook hands again but he raised his hat and added a boisterous, “God bless you!”

He strode away to the left, and the Belgian went to the right, as directed, and the next moment I perceived that my small man with the tuft of grey beard was following him. He overtook him before they reached the corner, touched him diffidently on the arm and raised a forefinger to his cap respectfully.

They spoke together in some complicated fashion ; I was not near enough to hear what was said, but the Belgian laughed, a pleased, breezy laugh, and shook his head emphatically. But the other was obstinate ; he laid a detaining, a pleading hand on the soldier's shoulder, and whilst I was wondering whether he was thus pressingly inviting him to adjourn to the tavern that was conveniently adjacent and accept refreshments, he glanced round and signalled to a taxi which stood by the kerb. He called to the driver some instructions concerning a hospital at Hampstead, then drew the still laughing and protesting Belgian forward, resolutely helped him into the cab, climbed in after him, and slammed the door.

I forgot all about our national characteristic as I stood and saw the taxi drive away with them. I had a rash, silly impulse to take off my hat and shout, and though I was too self-conscious to do anything of the sort, I did, as a matter of truth, take it off in my heart to them both.

## CHAPTER IV

### “ THE COLOSSAL BRITISH CALM ”

“ The gods love courage armed with confidence.”

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER'S *Bonduca*.

THERE is something very boyish, something almost childish in the German idea of “frightfulness.” It harmonises with the ferociously upturned moustaches of the Kaiser, with the swagger of the ridiculous goose-step, with the wearing of impressively spiked helmets that look like iron or steel but are for the most part *papier maché*, and indicates an attitude of mind that is common to boys and undeveloped races who seriously fancy they can scare an adult opponent with horrible noises, ghastly painted faces and other shocking sights. There was a time when our ancestors decorated themselves with woad, wore grim head-dresses and did their best to frighten the enemy with shows of terror, but that

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was long ago. We are now a mature people, and it would be strange if this sort of thing moved us to anything but amusement and contempt. But though their efforts in this direction on Belgian territory have done no more than frighten women and children and inspire Belgian manhood with a deep resentment and more determined courage, the Germans still cling with a pathetic tenacity to a belief in these crude methods of boyhood and barbarism. They have told us that when they land in England they will so devastate our country that ruined Belgium shall seem a garden by comparison ; they have sternly warned us that if our civilians dare to take up arms in defence of their homes they will slaughter them ruthlessly ; they have stated that they intend to strike our whole nation with panic by bombarding our coast towns and sending enormous fleets of Zeppelins over our inland cities to murder us helpless citizens with bombs—even though we are not to be allowed to fire on their sacred soldiery. And the other day a prominent German official

declared that they were just about to begin this essay in "frightfulness," and would do such things as would shake "that colossal calm on which the British so pride themselves."

Nevertheless, I go about at large among my fellow countrymen and discover no signs of perturbation. Nor did I expect to. We may be a more emotional people than is generally supposed—I think we are ; but fear is not to any extent one of our emotions. I confess I have been surprised to see stolid business men weep over the sufferings of the Belgians ; I have seen the tears come into their eyes when they heard of the heroism of some of our men at the front ; but though I have spoken on the subject with hundreds of them I have never yet found a man or a woman among us who has been affected by those German menaces to anything but laughter or a quiet readiness to abide the event. It is not that we consider them incapable of carrying out their worst threats, but, as I say, our race has left its boyhood behind it, and in the main, we face the great issues of life

and death with the sanity and philosophy that are natural to mature years. It is because we have arrived at this stage of maturity that we read in their own papers with surprise of the implacable, limitless rage of hatred that burns in the universal heart of Germany against our country. We have no such hatred of the Germans; I cannot conceive that we are capable of it. We dislike them, no doubt, but not beyond the limits of decent human feeling. In proof of which I could adduce many personal experiences, of which the following anecdote is sufficiently typical.

In the first few weeks of the war, certain of our newspapers started a rather frenzied campaign against German spies in England, and especially in London. They conveyed a false impression to foreigners that our nerves just then were in a quite jumpy condition, but the scare went very little beyond the columns of those newspapers. The man in the street was interested, but he did not take the German barber or the German waiter too seriously as a dangerous



secret agent ; he assumed that the usual authorities were probably as well informed as any excitable journalist and that if the alien enemy in our midst needed looking after they would look after him. At that period, I went one morning into the shop of a City barber whom I occasionally patronise. Usually four Germans were at work there. That morning there was only one assistant, and he was an Englishman.

“ A good job too,” he remarked viciously, as he lathered me. “ Been too many o’ them Germans over here taking the bread out of us Englishmen’s mouths. Now some of us will get a chance. They’re glad now to be able to get hold of some of us. But we haven’t cleared them all out yet—not by a jug-full ! I know where plenty of them are still at work. Out ’em all, that’s what I say. I’d like to raise a party of our chaps and go round London and root out every man jack of ’em. I know where to find ’em. Why, there’s two still workin’ just round the corner here. Decent enough fellows in their way—I used to work in the same shop with them once—but let

'em stick to their own country; that's what I say. We don't want 'em here, p'ticularly not now. Clear 'em out—every one of 'em."

"Certainly," I agreed, "if they are spies, or even if there is the smallest reason for suspecting them. But I don't like being too indiscriminate. I met a German yesterday whose business was shut up and ruined, and he was in a state of absolute despair. He was going back home because he had to, but so far as I could judge he was much more bitter against his own country than against ours. His friends are here, and he had grown prosperous here. After all—what share did you have in making this war?"

"Me? Why, none, of course. How could I?"

"Neither did I. And it seems possible that many of these poor beggars of Germans over here had no more to do with making it than you or I did."

"Well," he confessed tolerantly, "that's what one of 'em said to me. These two round the corner—I was passing their shop

on my way here to-day and one of 'em was standing at the door, and spotting me he come out fussy-like to shake hands. All right in his way, y'know, as I say—we was always pretty good friends when I worked along of him ; so what could you do ? I shook hands, but I says to him, ' Look here, what are you doing over here ? Why haven't you gone back home ? ' ' Zis is my home—here,' says he. ' I'm not going.' ' Haven't you had your papers ? Haven't they called you back to serve ? ' I arst him. ' No matter,' he says, ' I'm not going. I did not make zis blasted var,' he says—just like that, in his broken English, y'know, ' and vhy should I fight it ? I vill not. I have lived here over twenty years ; my wife is English, and I haf my children,' he says, ' and one of dem is in ze hospital and I vill not go.' ' Well, you can thank your precious Kaiser for that,' says I ; ' he's the curse of Europe, that's what he is.' ' Tank him ! ' he says, stamping his foot and all of a tremble. ' Dam der Kaiser, dat's vat I say, bringing all zis misery on his own people and everybody else—dam

der Kaiser!' Well, what could yer do? I thought he was going to bust out crying, so I just said dam the Kaiser too, and shook hands with him again and left it—and there you are. What could yer do?"

So far as my experience has gone, our average man's hatred of the German seldom goes much deeper than that. He reserves his hatred for the autocratic German government and the barbarous German system that drives its people in such subjection as a self-governing nation would never submit to.

In the bulk we are not a fussy race; we have no marked inclination for pushing around to tell everybody else how his work ought to be done. It was impossible for those newspapers to make our flesh creep with sensational tales of the German spies who were swarming up and down the country betraying us with impunity, simply because we were satisfied that our elected governors were as anxious and as competent as ourselves to deal with that question; and it is as impossible for the Kaiser to alarm us with his timid coast bombard-

ments and his flamboyant threats of Zeppelin raids, simply because we are confident in the capacity and proved courage of our army and navy to give us all the protection that is humanly practicable. This night, as I am writing these lines, messengers have been sent through the little town where I live, near the mouth of the Thames, to warn us that the streets will remain unlighted to-night and that our windows must be completely darkened as a wireless warning has come that a fleet of Zeppelins and aeroplanes left Germany this evening for a raid on England. Well, we have duly screened our windows and are contentedly minding our business as usual, taking it for granted that the local authorities are minding theirs and are in need of neither our advice nor assistance. Which does not indicate any slackness or indifference in us, as I have shown and shall show further, but that our native common-sense stands us in good stead even under the shadow of danger.

The only effect of the wanton bombardment of unprotected Scarborough, apart

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from the brutal murder of women and children and unarmed men, was to stiffen the backs of some who had been hesitating and quicken our recruiting movement. The more recent and equally barbarous air-raid on Yarmouth had the same healthful effect. No sooner had the enemy aircraft finished scattering death and destruction at random and run away, than the men of the town marched in a great procession through the streets shouting the war-cry of our troops at the front, "Are we downhearted?" and answering it with a thunderous "No!" So far from being terror-stricken you will find, if you go among them, that the folk of Scarborough and of Yarmouth take a sort of perverse pride and satisfaction in what has happened to them, for the fact that they too are sharing in the perils and horrors of the war seems in some strange, fine way to draw them into closer sympathy and fellowship with their lads who are out in the firing line and make them brothers in arms with them.

I understand the feeling, and in a lesser degree have been warmed by it myself.

For on Christmas Day a German aeroplane flew over my own little town and flung down bombs at a venture that fell harmlessly on the outskirts of a small village farther up the river. The loud buzzing of the machine overhead and a sound of occasional shots brought a good many people out into the streets: they stood in groups here and there to watch the enemy machine flying rapidly seawards hotly pursued by two British airmen and, as soon as they were beyond sight, broke up, laughing and chattering, and returned to their Christmas dinners. It was an inevitable accompaniment of the war; the sort of thing we had all been expecting since the Yarmouth affair. It aroused a keen interest in the neighbourhood; there was a little natural excitement, the pleasant thrill of satisfaction that we, like our fellows in France, were in the danger zone, but never a thought of fear in any man, woman or child of us all.

“They’re bound to come over and have a try,” was the general comment, “and if they didn’t get a little bit of useless



success now and then, as they did at Scarborough, it would be a miracle, and we never expected miracles."

Two days ago (on Sunday, January 24th) we heard the boom of heavy gun-firing in the distance. It was faint, far-away, and we guessed that something was happening off the coast; that perhaps the fort at Shoeburyness was engaged, some five or six miles beyond us at the mouth of the Thames, or the fort at Sheerness on the other side of the river. The firing was continuous until nearly one o'clock, and when we saw yesterday's papers we concluded that it must have been the sound of the fight in the North Sea that was raging on Sunday morning and ended in disaster and defeat for the marauding Germans, who had sallied forth to attempt another coast bombardment. But at the time we could only guess at the meaning of the sounds and wait for enlightenment.

About noon I went out for half an hour's walk, and the streets were fairly alive with the usual streams of worshippers going home from church. They were gossiping



as unconcernedly as on any ordinary Sunday, though the intermittent throb and rumble in the air mingled rather ominously with their cheerful talk. I caught enough of their conversation in passing to know that the war was rarely the subject of it, and the only sign they gave that they were aware of the distant thunder of battle was that now and then somebody would turn towards the sound and throw a casual glance skyward, as if wondering whether there were any hostile airships in the vicinity.

In a sedate byway I overtook two comfortable-looking, tall-hatted, middle-aged men walking in the road, whilst their two comfortable, middle-aged wives walked in line with them on the pavement.

"It has been going on for a long time now," one of the ladies remarked as I went by. "I expect it's the Germans again. Another air-raid, perhaps."

"Maybe," said one of the men; with a placid suggestion in his tone that it was somebody else's business and was no doubt being attended to. "I shouldn't be surprised."

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“Either that,” added the other, as blandly, “or a submarine attack down by Shoebury—something of that sort.”

“I took his word for it,” said the first man, evidently resuming an interrupted narrative. “I never care about buying second-hand things as a rule, but he being a friend and anxious to sell it, and as he assured me it was as good as new—and then the very first time we used it . . .”

And the guns went on booming.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SOUL OF THE NATION

“ Count how many they stand,  
All of them sons of the land.”

E. B. BROWNING.

“ Day, like our souls, is fiercely dark ;  
What then ? 'Tis day !  
We sleep no more ; the cock crows—hark !  
To arms ! Away ! ”

EBENEZER ELLIOT.

EVEN in those early days when men were flocking to the recruiting stations in such vast numbers that the wonderful emergency organisation of the War Department was inadequate to cope with them, a few of our public men and a few of our newspapers began to cry out that the manhood of the nation was not doing its duty and that a measure of conscription should at once be brought into operation. We, who know our public men and our newspapers,

listened to or read this too self-opinionated minority, and did not worry. Lord Kitchener had the best means of knowing the truth, and he told us that he was fully satisfied with the recruiting—it was going on so rapidly that the army clothiers and the armament factories could not keep pace with it. Moreover, those of us who took the trouble to go about with our eyes open saw for ourselves, and were profoundly moved to see, how eagerly and in what a spirit of gallant self-sacrifice our fellows from every walk of life, rich and poor, gentle and simple, were giving themselves by thousands in answer to our country's call. An infinitely finer, more inspiring and more effective spectacle than if we had been needlessly dragooning willing men and unwilling, natural fighters and natural non-fighters into a possibly even larger, but certainly less potent army. Nevertheless, our mechanical, stay-at-home Jeremiahs, who will never admit that they are mistaken, have continued at intervals to repeat their lamentable and needless appeal for conscription. It is of no con-

sequence here, where we understand what it means, but to speak plainly it is a false and unpatriotic cry, and one that has done us no little harm in neutral countries that have naturally been misled by it.

In these latter weeks I have had a good many letters from Americans; some of them men who play a prominent part in American public life; and replying to one who was especially troubled on this point, I gave him a number of significant facts that are within my own knowledge, and begged him not to believe a word he might read in one or two of our papers that reflected on the spirit in which our men were meeting this great crisis. When he answered me, he said he had been over-persuaded by an American editor who had wanted to publish that letter of mine. "I hope I have not broken the laws of courtesy," he went on; for, of course, I had written to him privately (though I willingly absolve him for what he has done). "If I have, you must lay it to the strong, universal desire on the part of Americans to learn as well as possible the fighting

spirit of England, to which your letter bears ample testimony. You must not blame us if we have been suspicious that Englishmen were not responding as they should. We did not want to believe it. We wanted to think of them rising as in the days of old with a powerful and united front against the enemy. But your own papers have been the cause of our suspicions, if we have had any, as the enclosed clipping bears out. . . . How I wish I were in England! I made a visit there in August, 1913, and took a trip almost encircling the island. But I should like to be with you to do some form of service for the fighters or the workers. We all recognise that you are fighting our battle, for if Germany should win it would mean war with her for us within ten years. You have our sympathy because we are of the same racial stock, because you are fighting for our ideal, and because that ideal must be absolutely valid. There is considerable interest in doing what little we can for you over here. Wherever you go you see ladies knitting. They take their work

with them to concerts, even to church in some cases. But stricken Belgium gets the most sympathy. I am to assist as chairman of the committee in holding a mass meeting in the interests of the Belgians. Madame Vandervelde, the wife of the Belgian Minister of State, will make the appeal. We hope our city will respond generously. . . . Be assured that you have American sympathy in this terrible crisis; and we read with pride anything that tells of the courage and daring deeds of the British soldiers and sailors."

This represents very fairly the general tone and attitude of those other letters I have referred to. And as one of the unfortunates who are not qualified for service in the first line, I can only say that I resent angrily, and with all my heart, the way in which the boundless enthusiasm and courageous spirit of the men around me have been misrepresented by even a few of our own people.

Of course, there are slackers and possibly cowards among us ; no nation on earth is composed exclusively of saints or of heroes ;

but it is already a commonplace that no nation in the history of the world, without being invaded and so forced to fight for mere life, has ever risen as ours has risen, so spontaneously and in millions, to this high occasion. The slackers and cowards are inevitable, but a minority. There are numbers, fit and of the right age, who are held back from enlistment by chafing circumstances which nothing short of an actual emergency would justify them in ignoring ; but most of these are serving in some home defence force. There are some—too many—who have been discouraged and held back by the stupidities and blunderings of the War Department, which uses too much red-tape and too little practical business humanity in carrying out its obligations to the men who are fighting for us ; and if I touch first on this aspect of affairs it is because it is good that we should know under what disadvantages and in face of what discouragements thousands of our comrades have gone away to do their share of the duty that is upon us all.

Only the unwise, and such as have not



made themselves acquainted with the motley life that lies outside their own social circle, will indiscriminately denounce all the able-bodied young single men who have not promptly joined the colours. If they are young men of means, or poor men with no dependents, then there is no excuse for them, unless it be that they are naturally effeminate and chicken-hearted, and so even if they were impressed would form elements of weakness in any regiment that was unlucky enough to contain them. Which is one of the reasons why I have not the smallest faith in compulsory service. The right enthusiastic and fearless spirit is burning from end to end of the kingdom ; we are already getting all the men we want and more than we are prepared to handle, and long ago we should have had even more if we had conducted our recruiting arrangements with a more business-like efficiency.

Consider some of those difficulties and discouragements in spite of which our new armies have grown to upwards of two million strong in half a year.

“ I wish to heaven I could go ! ” said one young fellow to me last August ; he is a clerk in a city office. “ I hate to be sitting here adding up figures and keeping accounts—it seems all so footling and useless at a time like this. But what can I do ? You know how I’m fixed. It isn’t as if my dad were still alive. There’s my mother and my young sister to think of. We have never had enough income to be able to save anything, and if I went how on earth could they manage on my bob a day and the small allowance I could get from the Government for them ? We live cheaply enough, but it would barely pay the rent and taxes of our little bit of a house. My only way would be to sell up the home and put them in one room somewhere. That’s what ties me by the leg. If only some patriotic millionaire johnny would allow them thirty shillings a week while I’m away I’d be off to-morrow—I can’t tell you how I want to go ! But as it is—what would you do if you were me ? ”

That question has been put to me by at least a dozen of such men, and I confess

I have not dared to advise them that they should brush those considerations aside and unhesitatingly sacrifice their dependents as well as themselves, until the nation's need of them is greater than it is. Yet I know of plenty who have made that sacrifice, and have in some cases been urged to it by those they had to abandon.

On the outskirts of London, before the days of the war, lived a certain family in a very small house in one of the most unpretentious of streets. The man of the house, a sober, steady fellow, was a reservist. His wife, two sons of nineteen and twenty-one, and a male cousin who lodged with them made up his establishment. On the outbreak of war the husband rejoined his regiment. As soon as Kitchener asked for recruits, the cousin and the elder son enlisted, and, said that soldier's wife bravely and as if it were a matter of course, "it was quite right that they should." A few weeks later the younger son came home from work one evening and said, "Look here, mother, I'm afraid I shall have to go. The others have all gone and I can't stay

here behind. I can't do it—it makes me miserable—I feel I must go.”

“ Well,” she says, in telling you of it, “ I felt it would be a bit of a job to manage all alone, but it seemed right, you know, and I couldn't say anything to stop him.”

So he too went.

When her four men were at home they paid her between them an average of fifty-six shillings a week. Now—her husband allotted part of his pay to her, and the authorities made it up to the usual allowance of twelve shillings and sixpence a week for herself and half-a-crown for her six-year-old child. But this fifteen shillings was not paid promptly ; it was some weeks before it began to be paid at all, and how she contrived to live in the interval I do not know—I imagine her neighbours helped her, as such poor neighbours always will, and that the local tradesmen allowed her a little credit.

In her district, as in every district all over the country, committees, largely of women, have been formed to find out and visit the wives and mothers of soldiers and

give them help if they need it, drawing on the Prince of Wales's Fund for the purpose. They are doing a useful and necessary work, and on the whole doing it admirably. Most of these women visitors are sensible, kindly, sympathetic souls who, when it is wise to strain a point in any direction, strain it towards the home-folk of our fighting men ; but now and then, here and there, a woman of the wrong sort happens to have joined these committees, and I would urge them to weed her out of her place with as little delay as possible, for apart from the pain she causes, she is doing incalculable harm. A visitor of this wrong sort happened to be the one that was chosen to look after the welfare of the soldier's wife of whom I am speaking. She was a lady of considerable means, who never having suffered poverty herself, or taken much interest in such as did, had no comprehension of the matters she was dealing with. She secured a contribution of four-and-sixpence a week towards the rent of her protégé, and there her service, though not her visits, ended. Thus we find our

soldier's wife receiving a total income of nineteen-and-six weekly. Out of this she paid every week in rent, eight-and-six ; the little daughter being consumptive, she had to buy for her, under a doctor's orders, special nourishment of eggs and milk, and divers medicines, including Parrish's Food and Scott's Emulsion, which took another six-and-fivepence ; leaving her with four-and-six a week for fire and light and her own food. Later her position was improved when by outside intervention the committee was moved to grant her medical relief, and she was able to procure the child's medicines gratis.

This was a detail her visitor would have put right more promptly had she realised her duties. But she was so far from doing this that during one of her visits, having pestered and hurt her subject with a too-inquisitorial catechism, she said :

“ I'm not surprised that you have not let your rooms—you cannot expect to in these times. You ought to sell some of your furniture, then you and your child

could live very comfortably in one room somewhere."

"No, ma'am, I can't do that," said the soldier's wife resolutely. "I shall keep things together if I can—I daresay I can get some work to do—I must have a home here for my man and the boys when they come back."

In September she had heard from her younger son that he had asked the War Department to pay her from October 1st last three-and-sixpence a week, which was half of his pay. But the money did not arrive. Writing after a week or two she mentioned this to the boy, and he replied that he had made the arrangement and the amount had been deducted each week from his wage. She waited patiently, assuming that it would come in due course. Then, on the advice of a friend, she wrote to the authorities about it. Down to the beginning of January not a penny of this money, that had all along been scrupulously deducted from her son's pay, had been forwarded to her. It was only when a troublesome outsider wrote indignantly to



the defaulting War Department and threatened that if it were not disgorged a full statement of the facts should be sent round to the press that all the arrears were promptly sent on and the payment began to be made regularly. Even now—and this is the experience of many soldiers' wives—the allowance on account of her husband is occasionally allowed to fall a week and two weeks in arrear, which is a real and a great hardship, when you remember how she is dependent on it.

But you are not to think that she complains of all this. She never mentions it, except by way of asking counsel of her intimates; and if she ventures, being sorely pressed, to send a note of reminder to the authorities, she does it in fear and trembling, lest she should get her husband or her sons into trouble. But naturally her friends talk of it, and such talk does not encourage other men similarly placed to throw up their situations and enlist, leaving their wives subject to such privations. You or I might blame the clerks of the War Department and protest that any private firm



would have a short way of dealing with such muddlers ; but she is more tolerant and makes excuses for them. They must have a terrible lot to do, she thinks, and things are bound to go wrong now and then, so she says nothing and patiently makes the best of it.

I like to remember a pleasant old lady who is living alone in one of our sleepy English villages. Her only son is away in the firing line. She has a portrait of him, taken in his khaki, standing on her mantelpiece, and if you take notice of it when you call at her cottage it does you good to see and hear the quiet pride she takes in him.

“ He was in good work at the farm here, but he was one of the first to go from these parts,” she says. “ He came home and said, ‘ Mother,’ he says, ‘ Lord Kitchener says he must have more men and it’s up to me to do my bit. I can’t stick here while other chaps go and fight for me, can I? I’ll have to go. I must have a smack at them Germans. I’ll arrange about you,’ he said ; ‘ you’ll be all right, but I feel I

must go.' I didn't like him going, but somebody had to go," she says, straightening her back and glancing again at the portrait, "and somehow I shouldn't have liked him not to go, either. He's such a good boy, too. There isn't a better lad in the world." Wonderful how many of these mothers use just the same words when they are speaking of their sons. "He was always fond of his mother. He writes to me regular, and he keeps saying: 'Don't you bother over me. I'm well and hearty. Take care of yourself and write and tell me how you are, and don't worry.' They send me part of his money and an allowance, and I'm glad because if I couldn't write and say I was quite comfortable he'd be anxious about me. But I can't help worrying a little this bitter cold weather for wondering whether he's got warm things on in those dreadful trenches, and sometimes I lie awake in bed for fear he might be wounded and lying out there on the ground with nobody to take care of him, and I can't sleep for thinking of it."

She says it simply and almost without a touch of emotion, and perhaps you have a passing vision of how in every town and village of the country, nowadays, some of these mothers and wives lie awake at night thinking like that. And this not only in such homes where they are living as under siege, keeping the wolves from the door, but in countless homes where petty financial cares are not added to the great anxiety.

These financial obstacles to recruiting could be largely mitigated; the nation is rich enough to make adequate provision for the responsibilities of its soldiers, and, which is even more important, is competent to see to it that whatever provision be granted is promptly and punctually paid. There have been other serious obstacles—there were bound to be, since we were taken unprepared, and our recruiting arrangements are only now sufficiently enlarged and perfected—but their deterrent effect has to be taken into account. There was a period, indeed, when the authorities deliberately damped down the enthusiasm of recruits because they were coming

forward in such unmanageable crowds; and it is not easy to rekindle a generous enthusiasm that has been systematically half-smothered. Before we say a word about "slackers," real or imaginary, it is chastening to recall these things. The one other grave obstacle to recruiting that still remains is the Official Press Bureau's insistence on starving us of news as to what is happening. We do not ask to be told anything that should be kept from the enemy. We can understand the need for keeping us mystified as to when and where our troops embark and where they are to be stationed in the long line of battle; but we cannot understand why we are to be told next to no details of any action that is fought, even after the action is over. It is very well to tell us that more men are needed, but we want to see the need for ourselves. You have to recollect that thousands of men who hear and feel the call to serve cannot answer it without making great sacrifices—without flinging away a career and prospects which, if they come back, they may have no chance to resume.

This is not a thing for practical men to do lightly and with their eyes shut, and the marvel is in the circumstances, not that some have hesitated to do it, but that such multitudes have done it without any hesitation at all. The heart of the nation is sound and fearless and willing. Show them the truth; let them see with their own eyes what is happening; and I will answer for it that once the necessity is apparent there is scarcely a two-legged man in the country who will not make haste to offer his services. Our people are no longer an ignorant mob; they can read, and think, and judge for themselves, and they prefer to do so. You cannot have been abroad amongst them and learned to know them without knowing they are not afraid of the dark, but they are keen to go into it as free men should—with their eyes open.

Howbeit, in defiance of all these and of other obstacles, when we called for men they came, as Lord Kitchener testifies, and they are still coming. Down to July last it was a rare thing for us to meet a soldier or two about any but our garrison towns.

Now they are a familiar sight everywhere. Almost every week takes a new draft of them away to the front ; you see trains crammed with them and piled high with their baggage ; you know they are gone, and yet there is no appreciable difference in the vast numbers that are still getting ready to go. Walk up the main thoroughfares of London at any hour of the day, and every third or fourth man you meet is in khaki. Go out into the suburbs ; travel through country towns and villages and they are there too in plenty. Heath and moor and common have been turned into training grounds ; and everywhere you find the men keen to learn their new business, drilling and shooting and digging trenches with all their hearts and minds, living in towns of brand new huts, or billeted in the older, more permanent thorpes and towns that are nearest to them.

If any man doubts or is foolishly pessimistic about the patriotism or the fighting spirit of the nation, let him cure himself in a day by taking a motor-drive round London and across it, and reflect that what

is going on there is going on in and around Manchester, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Birmingham, Liverpool, and all our other cities. From Clapham and Wimbledon Common down south, round by the open spaces east or west, and out to Hampstead Heath and Stanmore Heath farther north—all London is ringed with marching and drilling regiments, in more or less advanced stages of preparation. Drive across the town, and in one street you overtake a company of mounted troops, and a little farther on, and a little farther on again, you meet a battalion of khakied men out on a route march—marching without any band, but smart, alert, cheerful, whether they sing or whistle a tune to keep step to or go by in silence; spick and span if they have just started out, or dusty or splashed with mud from a long journey. Mr. Will Irwin, the American novelist, has seen these gallant fellows footing it through London, and though he has probably looked on them with more impartial eyes than mine, he says in a recent article in the *Daily Mail*, “they marched with their heads thrown



back ; for all their English calm, there was a light of exaltation in their eyes. They looked like people going to take a sacrament. A far, far nobler thing than any conscript has ever done"—because each of these men has accepted his duty voluntarily. "He goes not for romance—there is no romance in the madness of Europe—nor yet for any religion of valour. He goes for that noblest motive in war, pure patriotism."

Still a little farther on, and you notice some half a dozen companies of energetic young civilians at company drill, or practising the charge, or the advance in open order under the wintry trees of Temple Gardens. And presently, as you pass the Foundling Hospital, the crisp cry of the drill instructor rings in the air, and there are two large bodies of ununiformed troops going through military evolutions in the Hospital grounds. Round the corner, and here are more of them, in their shirt-sleeves despite the frost on the ground, lustily practising Swedish drill in the private centre-garden of a Bloomsbury square—



four long lines of them, two at each end of the garden. It is the same throughout your ride—in Hyde Park, in Regent's Park, wherever there is a large or small available plot of ground, there are men, uniformed or ununiformed, at drill on it.

There are other preparations going on less publicly. I called at a city office one evening to see a friend, but was told he had gone for the day.

"He has gone early," I remarked.

"No," said the clerk, casually. "He goes at five every Monday, Wednesday and Friday—to drill, you know."

I did not know, for he had not mentioned it. He is well past the military age, but it seems he had joined one of the numerous home defence forces, and three evenings a week he devotes two hours to fitting himself for active service. Thousands of the middle-aged or elderly clerks, or dignified perhaps rather pompous employers, that you see busy in their shops and offices all day, are doing likewise. One such employer told me that thirty men had gone from his works to the front (as many as six hundred

have gone from another and much larger establishment) ; he told me too, though not till I asked him, that both his sons had gone ; but he left me to find out for myself that he was enrolled in the Citizen Army that has been formed in his own neighbourhood, thirty miles out of London. All day he issues orders to his manager, his staff of clerks and boys ; but on three evenings of every week he submits himself willingly to the orders of a drill-sergeant in the electric-lighted school-room of his parish. These eyes have seen him standing stiffly in a line of fifty others, local tradesmen and shop-assistants, and have seen him turn at the word of command and march, or form fours, and go through the rest of his exercise as submissively and as promptly as any Tommy in the ranks. That sort of thing is in progress in drill halls and school-rooms in hundreds of towns. Every now and then I keep coming across these men—steady, unromantic business men, well up in years, whom I had never suspected of harbouring so fine a spirit. They will do a hard day's work in the city, make a

railway journey of anything up to forty miles home, have an early dinner and then turn out again, not merely uncomplaining, but as keenly as they went to cricket or football when they were boys, and for two strenuous hours surrender themselves to the drill-instructor to learn how to fight at home for their country, if the occasion comes, as their sons and nephews and friends are fighting abroad.

And here you are not at the end of it, for there are others of them in plenty who, having finished a usual day in the office or the shop, are parading the frosty streets by night as special constables ; and still you are not at the end of it when that has been said. In my own district, as in far more than I am aware of, rifle clubs have been started, and to these go men who are so circumstanced that they cannot contrive to devote three evenings a week to the work of one of the citizen armies. Go into any one of such clubs between seven and ten at night, and you shall see four or six civilians shooting, with careful aim, at the small targets, and a group of a dozen or so

waiting their turns, with fresh arrivals dropping in at intervals.

I once had some talk with a man in a rifle range of that sort in one of our East Coast towns. He was leaning against the wall, holding a gun and waiting till a target was free for him—a tall, scraggy, bald man, with a mild, serious face and a fringe of grey whiskers under his chin.

“ I’m getting on pretty well,” he replied with a diffident grin. “ I never had a gun in my hand till a month ago, and I made two bulls out of ten shots last time. Not so bad ; and, anyhow, no German is so small as the target, so I’m all right.”

“ Are you joining the Citizen Army ? ”

“ Wish I could, but I can’t do the three evenings a week. My assistant has gone to the war, y’see, and I’m making a little allowance to his missis till he comes back, and rubbing along as best I can on my own, and there’s nobody to leave with the shop. But I come here every early-closing night—that’s the best I can do, and I wanted to do what I could. I’ve bought my own gun, and I know how to use it a bit, so if there’s

going to be any run-away invasion like they talk of, I begin to feel ready for them."

"You know what happened in Belgium when civilians fired on the Germans?" I put in warningly.

"It would have happened anyhow," he said with quiet conviction. "They were out to murder and pillage, and they did that first and then found an excuse after. And it would be the same if ever they landed here. Besides, what's the use of talking about laws of war? If civilians mustn't shoot them, then their soldiers mustn't come here in their aeroplanes and throw bombs down on civilians. We can't reach 'em in the air, but let them come on their feet and me and a lot of us here have made up our minds that before they start the burning and murdering we'll have a shot at them, and they'll have to settle us first."

If you had seen the look that came over his face and the light that kindled in his eyes, as he spoke, you would have been sure as I was that he would be as good as his word. If ever the Germans do succeed

in making a landing thereabouts, you may take it that if he and his friends can have no place in the recognised military forces, they will set up a firing line of their own, and render a respectable account of themselves.

But there is more of the story yet ; it is growing and developing every hour. If I were attempting the task of telling it in full I should have to get in more than a passing reference to the doctors, many of whom have discarded valuable practices to join the Army Medical Corps ; to the women from every walk of life who are serving on the field under the Red Cross, and nursing in military hospitals at home, who are knitting and sewing garments for the soldiers, or working hard on the innumerable committees that are concerned for the welfare not only of the soldiers' and sailors' families, but of civilians who have lost work or been reduced to embarrassed circumstances by reason of the war.

All class distinctions and rivalries among us seem to have been wiped out ; we are stripped of them, and welded into a nation

of men in earnest, with one purpose to fulfil, a common enemy to grapple with, and no thought of resting from our labours till they are ended in victory. From the highest to the lowest we are at one; two hundred peers are roughing it in our old and new armies, and men have gone unforced from every factory and workshop to fight beside them or under their leadership. The very invalids and cripples have found means to do their share and, through newspapers or otherwise, have got into touch with some lonely soldier here and there in the trenches who has nobody to write to him, and are sending him books and tobacco and keeping up a friendly interchange of letters. It is not easy, indeed, to discover anyone who is not doing something, in however humble unobtrusive a fashion, for the great cause.

Thinking on all these things, and the like of them, "methinks I see in my mind," as Milton's stately phrase has it, "a noble and puissant nation rousing herself, like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks." Everywhere I turn I am heartened by the new spirit of fellowship



that has drawn us all together and encircles us like an impregnable wall, by the sense of irresistible courage and determination, of mighty effort united to a righteous end, that one feels in the very air like the first invigorating breath of a new dawn, which shall soon be a new day.



## CHAPTER VI

### IN THE TRENCHES

“ Thou didst wage  
War not with Frenchmen merely ; —no,  
Thy strife was with the Spirit of the Age.”  
JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

“ Who counsels peace, when Vengeance like a flood  
Rolls on, no longer now to be repressed ;  
When innocent blood  
From the four corners of the world cries out  
For justice upon one accursed head ? ”  
SOUTHEY.

To understand that calmness and confidence of our home-folk, the sight of which seems to pique the enemy to new and more sensational efforts of “ frightfulness,” one must know something of what our soldiers and sailors are doing in the war zone, and the spirit in which they are doing it ; for, of course, our confidence is not nearly so much in ourselves as in them. It was too deeply rooted in them to be shaken in

the least at any time ; from the first hour of the war we have never doubted or lost heart, because they haven't.

I went about London during the long, heroic retreat from Mons, and there was no gloom on the faces in the streets in those days, no slackening of the air of steady determination and confidence in the result which still characterises our people. We did not understand it, but we knew there were men on the spot who did, and that was enough for us. In a practical, businesslike way we set to work to raise new armies ; we put iron netting round certain of our public buildings as a precaution against air-bombs, and, by and by, as a precaution against the same menace, we began to keep the streets of our cities less than half lighted of nights and to give our coast towns over to complete darkness. But the shadow over them was not of fear, or even of anxiety ; it might be a little inconvenient, but one soon got used to it and forgot its significance. I have groped my way through some of those coast towns on nights that

were so black that passers-by could see no sign of each other ; they walked invisible, and you only knew they were there by the sound of footsteps, of voices in careless talk, of the sudden laughter of two who had come into collision. And our cheerfulness in these circumstances, under air-raids and coast bombardments and blustering threats of more, is nothing but a reflection of the cheerfulness of our fighting men afloat and ashore.

When news came at last that the long retirement from Mons was ended, that the Allies had taken the offensive and the Germans were falling back before them, there was no particular excitement among us ; it was the news we had been expecting, sure it would come in good time. But the troops themselves had carried out that brilliant movement grudgingly ; they did not dream it was anything but a strategic move, but if you talk to any man who shared in it he will tell you how the men " grouched " at having to keep on going back, and fumed and raged against it, asking when they were to be allowed to hold their ground

and "stick it out." They entrenched, and fought, and retreated; entrenched and fought and retreated, again and again, day and night without rest, till they were so wearied that some of them slept as they marched, and some of their officers went afoot because they could not keep awake on their horses and fell off. Dirty, ragged, worn, they were always ready to entrench again and make another stand; always undefeated, unbroken, facing the greatest odds and the worst hardships light-heartedly, with invincible courage, and only grumbling when the command came to continue the retirement. And when the retreat ended and it was time to turn, "you couldn't believe the change in everyone," says a lieutenant in the R.F.A. "We hadn't a minute's rest, any more than when we were retiring, but now it was northwards, driving the Germans before us, and every one was whistling and singing." "The long retreat had depressed no one," writes Lieutenant-Colonel Lowther, of the Scots Guards, "and we turned north with much zest. . . . All the time the men were very

cheerful, though dog-tired." Once, he says, when it was raining all night and impossible to get billets for three companies, the men stood up all night round their camp-fires "trying to keep dry; but the rain did not damp their spirits in the least." One of the men finishes a description of the hardships of the retreat by saying, "still, I would not have missed it for a great deal"; and "we had a very warm time," remarks another, "but now we are getting our own back." But you get the spirit of them all epitomised in two lines of a letter from Corporal Cunningham, of the Irish Guards: "A lot of us got knocked out," says he, "but no one of the name of Cunningham is properly knocked out until dead." And you have it again in Sergeant M. H. Crockett's phrase—after telling how all his men were "altered" by the end of the retirement and had "long beards and haggard, worn faces," he adds "but we still stick at it through thick and thin until we are killed or wounded"; and frequently after they were wounded, for there are many stories such as that of the

Highland Light Infantry Captain near Le Cateau, who was hit in the arm by some pieces of shrapnel, and the men near him ejaculated, "That's done it," but he laughed and said, "Stick to it, boys, I'm not going away. It's nothing"; took his field-dressing from his pocket, bandaged the arm himself, and held his place.

One thing that strikes you continually in reading these letters from the front is the fine sense of comradeship and brotherhood that has grown up between officers and men. Here are a few out of hundreds of similar testimonies chosen at random from the letters of private soldiers: "It is marvellous, the pluck of our officers; they would face anything, and where they go we follow them, and would follow them anywhere." "Our officers are very careful of our lives, and never bring us into action without making a personal reconnaissance of the position." "I have been asked what I think of our officers. No words of mine would ever convey any idea of what they are like. They are real trumps. They are our leaders, and we look to them to lead,

and they do it. No shirking with them." "We are all good chums and very happy, with very good officers." "Our troop officer is great. He can speak the language and fears nothing." "We cannot speak too highly of our officers. Their bravery and coolness is beyond words." "We have lost heavily, but are not down-hearted, as we know we are winning. You have only to look at our officers to know that. They are cool as cucumbers and crack jokes with the men in a way that would make my old Colonel turn in his grave. . . . The only complaint against our officers is that they will not take cover but expose themselves too much." "There are some fine men in the British Army. Take the officers. They are the bravest of the brave. Sometimes I watch them and think to myself there are no officers in the world like ours."

Then for what the officers think of their men: "The men are splendid," writes one, "and as happy as schoolboys." "The British Tommy is wonderful," says another, "I do not think he can possibly lose his head



unless it is blown off by a Black Maria. One of my men had his hat riddled with bullets from a machine gun. He turned round, picked up his hat, felt inside, pulled out a mangled packet of Woodbines, said a few well chosen words on the subject of German machine guns, replaced his hat, and advanced ! ” And so you have it from other officers : “ The men are very good. In comfortable billets they grouse like hell ; but in a clay trench for forty hours in pouring rain under heavy fire, no matches, very little water or food, they laugh and jibe and sleep and never a word of grumbling.” “ From the general behaviour of the men we might have been engaged in autumn manoeuvres. The fact that they were outnumbered never for a moment affected their spirits.” “ If anybody tells you about the decadence of the British soldier, tell him to go to blazes. There is not a finer lot of fellows anywhere, and the way they stand up to the most awful wounds is marvellous.” “ If my friends in North Hackney could see me, they certainly would not recognise their representative,”



writes Captain Raymond Green, North Hackney's M.P. ; " we get covered with mud, our clothes coated with clay, and we look rather like a gang of miners who have been working all day at digging ore. The men really are heroes and stick to it without any grumbling." " What brave men are ours," says Lieutenant L. Tasker, of the R.A.M.C. " If the people of the United Kingdom could see the conditions under which our men fight, how they fight, how they die, the deeds that are done, lives given and wounds received, V.C.'s would be won many times a day. You should see how the wounded act. They suffer wounds without a murmur, get them dressed, take chloroform, give consent to having limbs, fingers, etc., amputated as though they were getting their hair cut. They are all gloriously brave." " Only the highest praise can be given to the men," declares another Lieutenant ; and in a letter from Captain L. A. F. Cane, of the East Lancashire Regiment, you have a casual revelation of how finely the officer realises his responsibilities : " Our men are

behaving admirably. . . . They put implicit trust in their officers, so we must not let them down." Since writing that, Captain Cane has died at the head of his men, living up to that high ideal.

Reading such things as these, it is easy to believe there is not a word of exaggeration in the letter General Sir H. Smith-Dorrien wrote from the front to the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association: "Never has an army been called on to engage in such desperate fighting as is of daily occurrence in the present war, and never have any troops behaved so magnificently as our soldiers in this war. The stories of the battles of Le Mons and Le Cateau are only beginning to be known, but at them a British force not only held its own against a German army four times its own size, but it hit the enemy so hard that never were they able to do more than follow it up. Of course our troops had to fall back before them, an operation which would demoralise most armies. Not so with ours, however; though they naturally did not like retiring for twelve successive

days, they merely fell sullenly back, striking hard whenever attacked, and the moment the order came to go forward there were smiling faces everywhere. Then followed the battles of the Marne and the Aisne. Tell the women that all these great battles have, day by day, witnessed countless feats of heroism and brave fighting. Large numbers will be given Victoria Crosses and Distinguished Conduct Medals, but many more have earned them, for it has been impossible to bring every case to notice. Tell the women that proud as I am to have such soldiers under my command, they should be prouder still to be near and dear relations to such men."

Since the great battles of the Marne and the Aisne, the months of stubborn fighting in trenches, with desperate night attacks, and slow advances from time to time, have made even sterner calls on the endurance and heroism of the men and their officers, and you may gather a sufficient idea of how they have responded to it from these fifteen letters that appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* :

“The thing that has impressed me most here,” wrote Lord Castlereagh, on duty somewhere in France, “has been the aeroplane service—a splendid lot of boys who really do not know what fear is”; and further testimony to the daring and efficiency of our air-craft men appears in the first of the following :

1.—*From Lieutenant Jack Bainbridge, A.S.C., to Mr. B. G. Stone, of Elkington.*

“Our aeroplanes are doing some wonderful work. Every day the sky is full of them, and in every direction you will see little clouds of white smoke coming from the shells as they burst above and around them. I have counted over fifty shells fired at one, but have never seen one hit yet. Yesterday two came over and were chasing each other; we could distinctly hear the shots as they fired at each other, and on they went, still firing, out of sight. The trenches are most without head cover, and have two feet of water in some places, and the poor men are simply wet through and covered with mud, but I have never heard

a grumble yet, in fact they are always cheery. I was up at the trenches last night and talked to some of the Hunts men ; they were mud up to the eyes, but quite cheery. It is truly an honour being allowed to help such men, and if England only knew one tiny bit what is happening out here she would be proud of her sons."

2.—*From Corporal E. Clark, 1st Lincoln Regiment, to Major Haggard, Chairman of the Veterans' Club :*

" We found ourselves surrounded in the shape of a horseshoe, the enemy firing at us from all angles. We just got the order to retire when a shell struck the trench just in front, a piece catching me on the nose and burying me, but I managed to crawl out nearly blind, and started to retire under a murderous rifle fire. No one could realise what it was like unless actually there. Men were crawling about like ants trying to reach safety, but it was only luck for those that did. I managed to get to a wood, where I found a number of wounded, and waited until the firing cooled down,

when we chanced it over the river, getting there as best we could, the Germans shelling the bridge the whole time, also a railway cutting in which we got for shelter. That is where I received a shrapnel in the right calf.

“ It was impossible to leave there. The ambulance could not get near us, so we had to make the best of it until eight o'clock at night, when the stretcher bearers told us we must get to Braisne, about four miles, as best we could. By this time I could not open my eyes. It was the blind leading the blind. How we got out of it I do not know, but was not sorry when we found ourselves in a farmhouse (a lot we had to leave behind in different places, as their wounds were too bad), so after a hot meal—the first bit to eat for thirty-six hours—we anchored for the night.

“ In the morning the ambulance was waiting for us. We collected ourselves together, and no sooner were we outside the door when a shell smashed through the house, knocking it to the ground. We managed to get in the ambulance, when they

sent us another reminder, catching me in the left ankle, besides two or three more, so I can thank my lucky stars I am still alive.

“ A private of the Welsh Regiment staying in my tent helped to bury your nephew (Captain Mark Haggard). He told me his last words were ‘Go along, the Welsh,’ and that he was buried about twelve midnight on September 14th in the battle of the Marne.”

3.—*From an officer in the Duke of Edinburgh's (Wiltshire) Regiment to his wife :*

“ We are living in fair-sized ‘dug-outs,’ about 5 feet deep and 8 feet wide and 20 feet long. There are five of these ‘dug-outs’ on the edge of a wood all connected by deep communication trenches. The ‘dug-outs’ are roofed over with pine logs and about 18 inches of earth. We have tables and chairs and straw inside, so we are fairly comfortable. We cannot go outside much, as shrapnel keeps on bursting over us and bullets that have gone



high over the trenches in front keep on hitting the trees all round, which are all pitted and cut with bits of shell.

“ Our kitchen is just next door in a deep hole, with a trench connecting up. You would be very amused to see us all bobbing in and out like a lot of rabbits. The firing line is about three-quarters of a mile in front of us. We have great difficulty in getting water, which is scarce, and then we have to boil it. However, we manage to do ourselves pretty well all the same. We get our Government rations every day, and supplement them with the things you all send out to us. Our menu to-night is going to be

Tinned Ox Tail Soup.

Fried Fillet of Beef.

Potatoes and Peas.

Rice Pudding.

Whisky and soda.

“ Don't you think I am pretty good at raising a dinner. We sleep in one hut, all huddled up, as it is very cold, but I use the sleeping bag and find it very warm. We have not been able to take our clothes off



now for four days. Although we are in the best of spirits, we are going through a pretty critical time, as the fighting has been very heavy indeed."

4.—*From a member of the Honourable Artillery Company :*

"Have had a very busy week—no time to write a line. Up at six, off before dawn, digging trenches near the firing line, back at dark. Weather horrid—rain, and even snow. Am feeling well, but tired. No luxuries to eat. Do send me cake and 'chocs.' Many thanks for mother's letter and prayer-book, which I'll keep—though no time to read—for her sake. We are billeted in a beastly barn, into which rain and wind blows, but we manage to keep warm and well. It is most interesting here.

"Tommy Atkins is magnificent even in these conditions. They are very nice to us, and to-day the Scots Fusiliers gave us tea and apples while on the march. I have had my first experience of fire. Very interesting, no casualties; we acted as

reserves. The battery shelled the Germans out, the British retiring from first trench. Then after hard fire, our first line charged, capturing the first two German trenches and 160 men.

“The Germans are thoroughly demoralised, and their fire is nothing to be frightened at—even the artillery has not the range or accuracy of ours. In fact, they have been shelling our trenches for weeks without damage until yesterday, when, unfortunately, we sustained our first loss—one killed and nine wounded in No. 3 Company; I don't know them. The experience of going under fire is not at all alarming.”

5.—*From Sapper George Comber, Royal Engineers, whose father is a Redhill tradesman:*

“Those who condemn football would not say a word against the game if they had seen and heard what I have in passing to and from the trenches and firing-line. The grim horror of war is relieved by the football instinct of many of our soldiers.

When the Royal Highlanders were ordered to make a charge in an engagement they jumped out of the trenches, and might have been kicking off in a cup-tie final. They commenced to shout, 'On the ball, Highlanders,' and 'Mark your men.' They continued yelling to one another until they had driven the Germans back, 'Mark your men,' the officers and non-coms. joining in as loud as they could. Who can say, 'Mark your men' did not have a stimulating effect upon the Highlanders?

"The French soldiers cannot understand the sang-froid of the British troops. One day at Bethune the Lincolns had a game of football, and the Frenchmen looked on. During the game a German aeroplane came over and dropped a few bombs, but no one was injured. The game was stopped, and there was a rush for the rifles. They fired, but did not wing the aeroplane, and a French machine gun was brought into action. It brought her down, and the game was continued. The Frenchmen cheered the players, and one of them said to me, 'You English are very, very

misunderstandable. Fancy playing football when German bombs are dropping from the skies.' ”

6.—*From an officer in the 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment to a friend in England :*

“ On the night of October 22nd, we advanced a bit and dug ourselves more or less in by dawn, and soon after light we saw great masses of German infantry emerge from woods and hedges some 1,000 yards to our front, and advance to attack us. We opened fire on them, and killed dozens. This was answered by the Germans with a tremendous shell fire from their heavy guns. The Devons were perfectly wonderful ; not a man left his trench. All day long the battle raged, and you never saw such an inferno. By night the place was a mass of fire, smoke, dead, and dying. All night they attacked us. Sometimes they got right up to our trenches, only to be hurled back by the Devons' bayonets. Dawn broke on the 24th with the same struggle still going on, and it continued all

day and night, and all through the 25th. We never slept a wink, and by night we were absolutely done. No humans could have done more.

“The men were perfectly splendid, and repulsed every attack, with great loss to the enemy. We were relieved at one a.m. on October 26th, and as we marched back a mile into billets all the troops cheered us frantically. General Smith-Dorrien sent a wire congratulating us on our splendid fight. We heard officially from Divisional Headquarters that there were 1,000 dead Germans in front of our trenches. The whole place was littered with their dead. We lost four officers killed, four wounded, and 150 men killed and wounded. One shell pitched in my company's trench, killing and wounding two officers and thirty-five men.

“On the 27th we were in another fight. This time we relieved another regiment, some five miles north of our last fight, and here we found the Germans entrenched forty yards from us. We fought here until November 1st, night and day again. The

Germans made six attacks on our left on October 29th, all of which we drove off. We killed a lot here. One of the bayonet charges accounted for seventy dead Germans and fourteen prisoners. The German losses here are perfectly gigantic, and we are winning all along. The splendid behaviour of the English troops has won everyone's admiration—even the German. After our last fight, the Devons again were congratulated all round. They have made a tremendous name here, and everywhere one goes all ranks pass the word, 'Good old Devons.' "

7.—*From a Lieutenant in the R.A.M.C. :*

" In front of us are the German trenches, only 100 yards away. A bobbing head, a shaking fist, an occasional spade-wave, bespeak the presence of our foe. Yesterday, one of our merry men fixed up a target. On white paper he drew the bull's-eye, with a charred stick, tied it on a cardboard box, placed it in front of the trench, and with flag behind recorded the misses of our friend Fritz. I feel sure that if in

those trenches we had a more humorous foe instead of the phlegmatic Teuton, we might pass away many of the weary hours of watching in friendly joke. But we are up against a wary foe ; there is no leisure, for barbed wire, artfully contrived hoops and loopholes for ever claim the attention of our brave men.

“ There are times, though, when even under fire the humour of our soldiers bursts forth. On one occasion, after a German shell had fired some wood, our men, seeing the fire seized the opportunity to cook their food. Yesterday I heard an amusing story under trying circumstances told concerning a man in the regiment lying next to us. Shrapnel had burst killing two men on his left, and badly shattering another. He was trying to light a pipe, and having some difficulty he said to his mate, ‘ Shure ’tis Belgian tobacco, and these French matches will be the death of me.’ I sometimes help the officers to censor the men’s letters home. One man says, ‘ We have shells for breakfast—not egg-shells. I shall be in Berlin in a fort-



night, and I'll send you some sausages.' I overheard on the march one Pat say to another, 'I never believe anything I hear, and only half of what I say.' I might add, 'nothing that you write,' for on one occasion I saw the letter of a man sitting in perfect safety beginning, 'Midst shot and shell I write to thee, dear mother.' But honestly, I think our men always try to look on the light side of life, and they bear their ailments with fortitude. It takes a great deal to make them give in."

8.—*From Corporal A. G. Reid, A.S.C., to his brother-in-law at Redhill:*

"I saw it stated in a letter that the Germans were not brave. Don't you believe it. They will not stand up to the bayonet unless pushed on to it—I know; but they face rifle fire and shrapnel in a manner which you can't help but admire. The way they are massed and marched against trenches is madness, but they are not cowards. I am telling you what I know personally and have seen.

"It was only last week I saw such a sight.



I shall never forget it. I was at a place just behind our trenches when a whole corps of Germans made for us. Mind you, they did not come in a mad rush, but they stepped out as if out for a long march. They sang their national song lustily, and must have known, as they were so thickly massed, they were marching on to destruction. But they came on, and our chaps were awaiting them with glee. Not a shot was fired until they got so close that it was impossible to miss them.

“ Then the order was given, and didn't our rifles and maxims speak ! Of course they fell in their hundreds, but there was no wavering. It was amazing. Hundreds stepped into their places and the ranks closed again. They still came on, only to fall, and this kind of fighting went on for some time until they realised that even numbers can't take British trenches in this fashion. They had to fall back to take cover, but were shelled out of all kinds of hiding places, only to face shrapnel. The ground round the trenches was packed with dead bodies, and hundreds were taken

prisoners. One of them who could speak English well begged me to give him food."

9.—*From an officer in the Camerons to the Headmaster of Eton :*

"Two of the Camerons were sitting in their trench one day, when one of the biggest 'Jack Johnsons' arrived and blew their rifles literally to matchwood, but did not touch the men. One of the same sort pitched in a farmyard some days before we got here, where two horses were tethered under a projecting sort of penthouse roof of a big barn. It blew a big hole through the roof and the largest piece of horse they could find afterwards was a hind leg on the top of the barn. In the early part of the war we had two meals a day and more exercise than we could do with ; now we eat four meals a day and get no exercise at all. I am getting a colossal size, and can hardly button my coat. Perhaps it's not a bad thing with cold weather and possibly long treks in front of us. Anyhow, I have made up my arrears of sleep now.

"We are beginning to be inoculated

against enteric, which is a good move; what with living in a pit like this and unburied men and horses all over the place, it won't be long before something breaks out. I believe the Germans have already got it. . . . We use our signal officer's claymore for a toasting fork, and a captured bayonet as a carving knife, and a very good one it makes. Someone said if you saw that being done in a war play on the stage, like 'An Englishman's Home,' you would say it was all rot, but somehow we found ourselves doing it without thinking about local colour.

“ The nightmare battle is still going on, and no man can see the end. When it comes to attacking you do want weight behind you. The German theory is right there, but they apply their weight in the wrong place. Personally I have had enough of this valley and of this excessively quiet and lazy life. I should like to go straight forward and have a look at the German trenches and their position generally. It's a natural curiosity when one has been looking at a ridge for about a month, which

might as well be in the moon as far as getting there goes.

“ One odd feature of this show is the universally pessimistic note of all the diaries taken off dead and captured *Deutschers*. I have never been pessimistic or optimistic either. I suppose the reason is that, in common with every one else, I have been confident all along that we are bound to win in the end, so have not worried. But unless all German soldiers are ordered to keep pessimistic diaries, the lot in front of us here have got their tails down properly. This is in great contrast to the French.”

10.—*From an officer in the Guards to his father :*

“ We spent a quiet night in the trenches, and on Sunday morning sniped some Germans about 500 yards away, bagging an officer. At one p.m. the bombardment began, and lasted till dark. They had the range almost exact, and blew several trenches into the air. I suppose 100 shells burst within a few yards of me, coming in

groups of four as a rule, and shaking the whole ground. At 6.30 p.m. we heard cheering on our right, and gathered that a counter-attack was taking place. Soon after a considerable body of men were seen approaching, and word was passed to us that they were our troops, so we did not fire. Three came right on to the traverse of my trench, and about three yards from me I saw a German helmet. We at once opened fire. I shot the first man, the second was bayoneted, and the third taken prisoner, as he laid flat down until the first flurry was over.

“ We drove the whole lot back in about fifteen minutes, with the exception of about 200, who were captured, having got through where the trenches were blown in. It was awkward knowing some were behind us, as we did not like to shoot for fear of hitting our own reinforcements. In my trench I and one man looked out behind, the remainder watching the front. They had a machine gun in front, and one had to duck occasionally when one heard it. Our gun behind was also sweeping with shrapnel

and every shell just touched our parapet, so I had to watch for the flash and shout 'Duck!' The other companies lost some officers and men when rounding up those that had got through, which was awkward work, seeing that the darkness was only relieved by the light of burning houses.

"From eight to nine a.m. on the 26th the German guns wasted some ammunition at some unoccupied trenches just in the rear of the line; but they then discovered their mistake, and literally blew our trenches to pieces.

"Fresh troops came up, and I believe all is well with the situation. We are feeling a bit tired, but are quite well, and in a few days shall be ready to have another go."

II.—*From Lance-Corporal J. Ryall, of the 1st King's Royal Rifles, to his mother at Cowes:*

"Our lads in the company are sticking it well up till now. We all work together and do our best. If we only had to fight their infantry we would make a bit of a name and soon be in Berlin, I think.

Smoking gives you a lot of comfort when you are in the trenches, with only shots and shells flying about. The Germans have not moved from here yet, but before we finish our tour of France we are either going to make sausage-meat of them or wait until November 5th, and burn them.

“ Whilst I have been out here I have seen the finest and saddest sights of my life. You see some amusing incidents as well. The Germans were shelling a field opposite to us for an unknown reason, for there were only a few dead cows there. Some of our chaps were getting walnuts, and the German shells were knocking walnuts down and the men were picking them up. During the first day of the battle here two of our companies were acting as right flank guard to the brigade, and we encountered the Kaiser’s famous Prussian Guards. We were greatly outnumbered, and our commanding officer told us that we killed five of theirs to one of ours. They were finely-built fellows and a great height.

“ Our position here puts me in mind



of the Wild West pictures. I think if I come through safely I must have fourteen lives, but I have been very lucky in all these big scraps up till now."

12.—*From an officer of the 1st Battalion Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment:*

"We had two days' fighting last week, and the regiment did splendidly. Our casualties were fortunately few, but the loss inflicted upon the enemy was enormous. The brigade took over 400 German prisoners on one day, all of whom seemed only too delighted to be behind our firing line instead of in front of it. In our advance we were pulling them out of the cottages and barns and ditches in all directions, and a very mixed lot they were.

"The German shrapnel fire was terrific, but fortunately it did not cause us much loss. We are all so used to it now that what they call its 'moral effect' is almost nil. Their rifle fire is not to be compared with that of our men, while our own shrapnel is, on a low estimate, four times as deadly as theirs, having far greater explosive power.



“ One of the Queen’s said to me the other day, ‘ Why can’t we stop the guns for twenty-four hours, sir, and let us have a good go at them with the bayonet?’ Every one of us feels and knows that he is a match for three Germans at least. Our only trouble is when we have more in front of us than we can shoot in the time. They have now taken to attacking at night in order to minimise the effect of our rifle fire, but even then they do not get any change out of us.

“ We are all extraordinarily well fed and clothed, and as happy and contented as we can be—a regular band of brothers. An officer in another battalion who was watching the Queen’s advance the other day said he had never seen anything finer. He said, ‘ Well, this is the real thing ; this is war.’ The absence of illness is quite extraordinary. It really seems as if there were more invalids in one street at home than one ever sees out there.

“ It is men we want. It is only by sheer numbers and nothing else that the enemy can push on. We all feel if our million

men were ready now we would drive the Germans back to the Rhine as fast as we could march behind them."

13.—*From Trooper A. Finlay, of the Royal Horse Guards (Blue) to his aunt at Beckenham:*

"The night of all nights and the one I shall remember to my dying day was on Sunday, the 1st. We were lying in the trench, when we were all startled by a band in front of us playing the German National Anthem. Then on they marched and the maxims commenced playing quite a different tune. They then halted and sang some sort of a hymn. What the idea was I cannot quite grasp. Whether it was to frighten us or to inspire confidence in themselves I do not know.

"Anyhow, they came on with their famous goose-step in six different columns, five abreast, rifles at their hips, shouting their war cry. But back they went, but not all of them, not by a good many. Three times they tried and three times they went back. The boys were mad by this time.

It was as much as the officers could do to hold them back. A party of Germans got through on our left flank and came up behind the regiment, but the 'contemptible little army' wiped out the lot.

"On our right flank was a small town, which the enemy tried to get through, but the Life Guards charged them with bayonets—the first time in the annals of the English Army that Life Guards have charged dismounted with bayonets. And a fine show they made. When we got to the trenches we could not get in for dead. We could not kill them fast enough either with bayonets or bullets. The prisoners we took were mere spits of boys, 16 to 17 years of age, who cried for mercy."

14.—*From the Rev. Owen Watkins, Wesleyan Chaplain, serving with the 14th Infantry Brigade:*

"Lieutenant Davidson has just been sent in wounded in one of the ambulance wagons. Early in the day our gunners had found it impossible to locate certain German guns which were fast rendering our trenches

untenable. The country was so flat that there was no possible point of vantage from which the gunners could observe except the steeple of the church in Lourges. But the Germans knew that as well as we did, so the church was being vigorously shelled, and already no less than twelve lyddite shells had been pitched into it.

“ It was the duty of Lieutenant Davidson to ‘ observe,’ so he calmly went to the church, climbed the already tottering tower and, seated on the top, proceeded to telephone his information to the battery. In consequence German battery after German battery was silenced, the infantry, which at one time was in danger of extermination, was saved, and the position, in spite of an attack in overwhelming force by the enemy, was successfully held. The church was rendered a scrap-heap, but still Davidson sat tight on the remnants of his tower. For seven solid hours, expecting death every moment, he calmly scanned the country and telephoned his reports.

“ At dark his task was done, and he came down to rejoin his battery. As he left the

ruins a fall of timber in one of the burning houses lit up everything with a sudden glare, there was the crack of a rifle—the German trenches were only a few hundred yards away—and a bullet passed through the back of his neck and out through his mouth. But, without hurrying his pace, he walked to his battery, gave them his final information, and then said, 'I think I'd better go and find the field ambulance, for the beggars have drilled a hole in me that needs plugging.' And he walked half a mile to the nearest 'collecting point.'

"In the infantry of the 14th Brigade men can talk of nobody else but 'Davidson of the Gunners.' They themselves face death every hour of the day and night, they themselves do unrecorded deeds of heroism worthy of the V.C., but with one voice they declare, 'Davidson is the real thing. If he doesn't get the V.C.—well, nobody deserves it.' So I sat and looked at the ruins, and wondered what the thoughts and feelings of that young man had been as he sat alone on the shaky tower seven hours waiting for death."

15.—*From M. Paul Renault, an officer in the French Army, to friends at Reigate:*

“To the British my own fair country owes a debt it will never be able to repay. To what has military greediness, ambition, and jealousy brought us? I cannot restrain myself when I think for one moment of the loss of thousands of innocent lives, of the misery and ruin that have been brought about by the madness of one man and his band of sycophants.

“Of your officers and men I cannot express my admiration of their prowess, their steadiness, their humanity, and their fairness to their enemy. I have been in adjoining trenches with them knee-deep in slush, while a flood of rain and bullets beat down from overhead, but not a word of complaint. It was not far from my native village I first came in touch with them, and their conduct and bravery I freely admit gave us courage then and also on many other occasions.”

## CHAPTER VII

### KEEPING THE GATES

“ Never saw the wild North Sea  
Such a gallant company  
Sail the billows blue ! ”

LONGFELLOW.

IF we have little enough of official news about the deeds of our soldiers, of necessity we know even less of what the Navy is doing. Now and then, when some German raiders are hunted down on the high seas, or when one of our patrolling fleets catches one of theirs sneaking out from behind the shelter of Heligoland and shatters and drives it home again, the veil lifts and vivid but none too detailed reports of those actions come to us ; then the veil falls again, and day after day passes and we see and hear no more. Except unofficially, from the letters the sailors write to their friends, or perhaps from a



talk with a chance bluejacket home on a day or two's leave.

But this silence and secrecy is right and inevitable. There is nothing, indeed, to tell in the interval but a long story of patient watching and waiting out on the waste of waters in sun and rain and wind and snow ; in clear nights when the great ships with their flotillas of small attendant vessels prowl still and ghostly under the moon ; in black nights of fog or mist, when they grope their way lampless and invisible, peering and feeling after an enemy who may possibly be coming upon them unawares or trying to dodge past them through the impenetrable darkness. All the while, by day and night, in calm or storm, there is the ever-present danger of touching a floating mine and being suddenly whirled into roaring destruction and death ; of being taken unawares by a lurking submarine and in a moment torpedoed out of existence. This alert, unwearied policing of the North Sea keeps our eastern and northern coastline immune from invasion and the English Channel inviolate, so that



our troops have crossed by thousands into France without the loss of a single transport. We hear very little about it; we know of it dimly and imperfectly, and not till the full story comes to be told in later days shall we realise, with wonder and admiration and gratitude, all the perils and the magnitude of the task that our Navy is so masterfully fulfilling.

Thinking of it now, with such small knowledge as we have of the facts, it seems impossible that the stress and strain of seven months of keeping such constant watch and ward amidst hidden dangers, with a powerful enemy for ever ready to spring and strike in any unguarded hour, should not wear down the most iron nerved, and play havoc with the confidence and the moral of the bravest and most disciplined of men. But as a matter of mere truth it has had no such effect. Officers and men grow impatient and yearn more and more to be at grips with the reluctant foe, but through it all their cheerfulness and their confidence and their courage remain unabated. I have never read a complaint

in any of their letters home, except at the timidity of the Germans. Over and over again, with trivial variations of phrase, you find them sighing, "I wish the German fleet would come out." "It is a tiresome job," says one, "waiting for the German ships to come out. At any moment we may be sent to the bottom by their mines, but we are very happy, and in good fighting trim." First-class stoker Lambert Tidman Evans writes to his mother, "We are anxious to get a cut at the sausages, you bet your boots. We will bust the Germans or sink. . . . If we meet with bad luck you will know all died game, and that your son has done his duty to his country, pleased with the honour." "The spirit of our men is wonderful!" exclaims Signalman Fred Porch, of H.M.S. *Lord Nelson*; an officer assures his friends in England that "the spirits of the sailorman, like all good spirits, improve with keeping, and the impatience produced by waiting for his turn will send him into any action there may be under a high head of steam." Marine Colour-Sergeant W. Still, of the

*Vanguard*, touching on the same phase of the proceedings, thinks "the time of waiting for the final action is monotonous, but if our friend William fancies that he is going to wear us down by keeping us waiting he never made a bigger mistake in his life." They always sleep with one eye open, he adds, ready at any moment to engage the Germans, day or night, "if their ships will only come out." Sometimes they write rather enviously of the men on those ships that are or have been in action off the Belgian coast shelling the Germans ashore, being shelled in return, and smartly dodging the submarines that steal on them out of Zeebrugge; "still," they console themselves, "we are all merry and bright, and our day will come." "To be always on the look out for so long a period," Carpenter Joseph Payne, of the *St. Vincent*, writes to his father, "becomes monotonous, but our spirits are good. We are not depressed, because we live in hope that when 'The Day' comes we shall put the German fleet where they are not likely to trouble us again"; and he takes the

news that "Syd has been wounded" with the admirable philosophy that "this being the fortune of war we cannot complain."

Nevertheless, a distinct increase of the note of joyousness is apparent in the letters that are written just after an action has, at last, been fought. "On the whole, it was an enjoyable day," comments a wireless operator on the *Fearless*, in describing the first big battle off Heligoland. "It was great," writes another bluejacket on the same occasion. "I hope they will come out again, and oh, may it be soon!" But I particularly like the epistle from the middy who, in view of his experiences, is full of pity for his brother who is still at school at Harrow, and admits, "It is awful for Reg, while this is going on. But I have written to try and cheer him up by saying the war is certain to last for two years, and by that time he may be able to join us." Lance-Corporal J. Butnell, of the *Undaunted*, sends his mother a vivid account of a brisk combat with four German destroyers, and concludes, "It is very exciting, the way you attack the enemy

and, my word, my captain is a brick and goes right into them. I feel honoured to fight under such a gentleman ” ; and leading wireless telegraphist William Pegg, of the same ship, gives his father this little sketch of the same engagement :

“ We engaged the enemy’s four destroyers and finished them off nicely in about an hour and twenty minutes—pretty smart work, eh ? I was on watch in the wireless telegraphy office, but went up on deck to watch the firing. It looked pretty awful to see their ships go down, especially one, whose magazine blew up in one big flare. A lot of German sailors were swimming, but, as you can guess, we had no time to pick them up ; we were too busy. You know it would have been quite possible to have got torpedoed through stopping. As it was they tried hard to torpedo us, but our skipper was there every time and simply altered our course and we steamed past them. They fired ten torpedoes at our ship alone.

“ The last to go took a lot of sinking, so we ordered one of our destroyers—the

*Legion*, I think it was—to take off her survivors. She sent a boat to her, but when the boat was being rowed alongside the dirty cads opened fire and blew off a lieutenant's foot, and a seaman had his leg blown off. The latter has since died. Then we gave her a couple of additional shots to go on with, and she finished. We captured thirty Germans, including one officer. We had all our boats smashed by concussion from our guns, and missed a cloud of shrapnel by a few yards. One thing has been amply demonstrated: our captain is O.K., and everybody on board knows it. The way he manœuvred our ship around those torpedoes was marvellous."

More than once you read in the sailors' letters that they are "tired of waiting," and wish it were possible for them to land and help the soldiers, "because," says one, "they seem to be fighting against such terrible odds"; while a man on the *Venerable*, well occupied off Nieuport in rendering that help, by shelling the Germans out of their trenches on land, is convinced that "we are the luckiest ship in the Navy,

because we are in the thick of it and getting all the fun." But even the men who are left to that dreary game of waiting and watching, day and night, in the North Sea, know how to make the best of things ; they contrive to get some fun out of it too, as you may gather from this letter, which a Welsh officer recently received from his brother :

" Thank you very much for your letter. Letters mean more to men now than they have ever done before. Life on board during active service is necessarily hard and grim, full of discomforts and alarms, but for all that it is astonishing how one and all make the best of things, how one fixes one's eye on the bright side. Occasionally one detects in ordinary conversation the unforgettable fact that we are at any moment liable to be hurled into eternity. On a dark, bitterly cold, stormy night, for example, a man cheerfully reminds the rest of us that a torpedo would make our last moments very unpleasant indeed in such a sea.

" Personally I get a lot of fun out of my



shipmates. My servant is a source of unending amusement to me. He is a Marine Reservist ; one knows that because just below the lowest of a series of very whiskery chins he keeps his tunic collar, and upon the collar is his badge and the letter ' R.' He has many protuberances in the equatorial regions ; he has several teeth knocked out on the port side of his face ; and keeps a nasty little excrescence, which was once an ear, on the starboard side. Both these disfigurements are relics of youthful scraps. He seldom talks. He walks with stupendous dignity.

" Fortunately there are times when he loosens his tongue and unbends his dignity. At such a moment he confided to me that he is an ' Hex Pug.' This I gathered was only his way of saying that he is an expugilist. I can only say that he thoroughly looks his part, notwithstanding the fact that years and fat have somewhat toned him down.

" Then there is the bugler, a cheeky, perky little chap of fifteen. Unfortunately, every member of the crew, for no apparent reason,



fetches him a clip on the ear if he happens to come within arm's length and provided there is no officer about. You will gather, therefore, that he walks through life warily and very circumspectly. But is he down-hearted? No. He boldly faces this decidedly unpleasant situation with sailor-like pluck; with a frantic effort he recovers his tongue again, and his features then reveal the satisfied and joyful condition of his soul. What if his outlook on life is made gloomy and melancholy when a clip is fetched on the ear? Is it not immediately made bright and cheerful again by deftly rescuing an elusive tongue?

"I always picture him as he appeared one night in the North Sea. We had a nasty surprise about 10.30. It was pitch dark or foggy at the time. The look-out suddenly came upon a warship about half a mile ahead. We made a recognition signal, but got no reply, simply because we were still in a bank of fog, and the other ship could not see our flashlight signals. Without exaggeration we were in full fighting trim within 60 seconds,

every man—many only half-dressed—at his post, decks cleared, guns loaded, spare shells in readiness, aim set. The first sound of a bugle would have caused our guns to spit out steel death into the ship ahead. But where was the bugler? The poor child was still fast asleep. In one second he was the centre of an agitated crowd. What a display of energy of language, of clips on the ear, of tongue swallowing, of its joyful recovery! One large man shot him up the gangway and deposited him—a dazed and bewildered little fellow—upon the decks, a still larger man rammed the best part of a bugle down where his tongue usually slipped. With his customary dexterity he rescued both the bugle and his tongue, and dolefully shouted, ‘Where’s me breeks? I ain’t got my breeks on.’ Fortunately, at that moment our signal was repeated, and this time answered by one of our own ships. Within five minutes practically every man was in bed again, including the poor bugler, just as if nothing had happened.”

The other day, shortly after the North

Sea fight, in which the *Blucher* was sunk, I fell in with a sailor who had taken part in it; his ship was repairing in harbour and he was ashore on leave. A big, genial, capable-looking fellow, he walked with the leisurely seafaring roll of his kind, and was carrying under his arm a large, flat parcel, carefully wrapped in brown paper and tied round with string. We were going the same way and drifted easily into conversation, and when I made out that he was fresh from the latest sea victory I thought I might get a few descriptions and impressions from him.

“How did you feel,” I asked him, “when you were first under fire?”

“Oh, I was in that other scrap too,” he said, “when we settled the *Mainz*.”

“You had a pretty hot time then,” I suggested.

“About the same as this last time,” he replied. “It was warm while it lasted, but,” he laughed, “it was jolly good. We were glad to get on to them, I can tell you. It was fine. A bit slow, I expect, for some of the chaps who didn’t happen

to be working the guns, but we all liked it. They'll give us a chance for another go soon, I hope."

"You haven't had a look in yet at any of their best Dreadnoughts, have you?" I inquired artlessly.

"Dreadnoughts!" he grinned. "They ain't got none. Dredeverythings is all they've got, as our chaps say, and as soon as they like to bring 'em out we'll take care they don't go in again, don't you fear."

I tried to lure him on into describing the battle, but he seemed to have been too busy to take particular notice.

"They was running away all the time," he said, "and we was after them, peppering them a fair treat. They shelled us back a bit, but nothing to matter much. If you want to know what it was like, this," tapping the parcel under his arm, "is a picture I did of our ship in action."

Yielding to my natural curiosity, he presently untied the string and produced from the brown paper a large painting on a sheet of cardboard. I am not going to

pretend that, as a work of art, it showed any great talent ; to be quite outspoken, it was rather crude in the matter of execution, but it had a certain rough and ready realism and was astonishingly spirited. There was a long, lean-bodied, black cruiser, going full speed with great plumes of black smoke fluttering from its funnels and a handsome wave splitting away from its prow and foaming mightily. Guns along the side of it were spitting out red and yellow fire, and round the ship and over it large shells were bursting in great blots and splashes of brilliant colour.

“ Capital,” said I. “ It looks impossible for anything to live in such a hail of fire, doesn’t it ? ”

“ Oh, I dunno,” he returned placidly. “ I daresay it looks a bit worse in a picture than we noticed it at the time. But that’s what it was like. I showed it to my captain, and he was awfully pleased with it and wanted to buy it ; but I give it to him, and glad to, and it’s hanging in his cabin now, and this is a copy of it which I painted for my mother. She’ll

like it. I didn't reckon my captain would think so much of it, but he did."

"Pretty good sort, is he?" I enquired.

"Good sort!" he spoke almost indignantly. "One o' the very best. There ain't a better officer in the Navy; you take that from me. The pluckiest chap—it'd take more than all these Germans could do to upset him." For the first time a sort of enthusiasm seemed to get the better of him. "You ought to see him in action! Takes no more notice of the shells than if they was confetti. Good sort!—why, our chaps would do anything for him. Good sort! Why, if he was to want the ship took into hell itself, he's only got to say the word. He knows that. So do we. That's the sort he is. A real gentleman."

His heat had simmered down, and he was beginning to wrap the picture up again when I checked him to ask:

"Which is your gun?"

"This is mine." He laid his finger on a noble cabbage of smoke with a crimson heart. "It was hot while it lasted, but

jolly good. We helped to polish off the *Blucher*. I went in one o' the boats to help pick up some o' them Germans out o' the water after she'd gone down. Funny thing was, y'know," his face beamed into a slow, amused grin, "when we heard about that Scarborough bombardment, killin' women and kiddies, our fellows said no more saving drowning Germans—not after that; and when we'd got the blighters safe aboard I reminded a pal o' mine about that, and he smacks hissself on the leg—like that—and says, 'Damme,' he says, 'I'd forgotten that!' And funny thing was so had I till that minute."

He laughed quietly at the recollection, a big, genial, easy-going laugh, and we shook hands on it, and I left him feeling, somehow, prouder of that forgetfulness of his than I could have felt if he and his gallant comrades, remembering in time, had sung some silly Hymn of Hate against Germany and left their beaten enemies to drown.



## CHAPTER VIII

### FROM THE BRITAINS OVERSEAS

“ Show the way, England !  
Let that grim master  
Of earth’s disaster,  
Let the War shadow  
But darken the sun—  
Trust your child, Canada,  
She will be with you,  
Shoulder to shoulder,  
Gun to your gun :—  
She will reply with you,  
Fight for you,  
Die with you.  
So wide to the world  
Be the old flag unfurled—  
Show the way, England ! ”

WILFRED CAMPBELL.

“ Then each shall take with stubborn grip  
His rifle as he took his whip.  
And when the Flag’s unfurled,  
The clerk shall drop his futile pen  
To lift his well-loved lance—and then  
A nation fronts the world ! ”

ARTHUR H. ADAMS (Australasia).

THERE was a time, not so very long ago,  
when I used to argue that the idea of  
nationality was primeval and should be



obsolete ; that it was a survival of crude tribal feelings, a local, a parochial gospel that was unworthy of an enlightened generation. I was all for a wide international brotherhood, a realisation of the common humanity of all mankind that should know nothing of different countries and stop short at no accidental frontiers. I thought, and still think, it is almost as absurd to regard as aliens all men who live on the other side of the English Channel as it would be for the men of London City and the men of Southwark to treat each other as foreigners merely because the Thames divided them. But now I have modified those notions. I still believe in that ideal of international brotherhood, but I believe as strongly, too, in the idea of nationality. The two are not incompatible ; they can and should exist side by side. A reasonable man need not stifle his own individuality in order to be able to live in the friendliest community with his neighbours.

This war has taught us, among many other things, how inexplicable, how potent

and how beautiful a spirit is that of nationality. Who has not been thrilled by its mighty workings in France, in Russia, in Belgium, in Servia? It may be carried to extremes, like everything else, and then it becomes a vice and a public nuisance. So far as one can see, the German race has over-indulged in it, and as a consequence the spirit that should be only in their hearts has got into their heads they are drunk with it, and, as drunken men often do, that have grown obsessed with a notion of their own amazing superiority and intolerably quarrelsome; they have been foolishly fired by it to attack outside nationalities in a frenzied yearning to smash them into subservience and swagger over them triumphantly. Yet one cannot but admire, even in Germany, and despite the nameless brutalities with which she has sullied her record, the passionate love of country which has braced and united her people and brings her soldiers in close-packed ranks, as mere foredoomed "cannon-fodder," singing undaunted to their deaths.

But it is the larger, subtler, more finely human manifestations of this spirit of nationality that have filled me with profound wonder and given me a new love of my country and my own people. Here, in England, for instance, you have a man who has met with nothing but misfortune. Circumstances here have been hard upon him ; he has been poor, burdened with care, without hope, and at last has shaken from his feet the dust of the land that has proved so inhospitable and unkind, and has gone away to the other end of the earth in search of opportunities that were denied to him in the place of his birth. Far off, when we have forgotten him, he has established a home for himself, is enjoying a prosperous career, is happy and at rest. If a chance traveller from England visits him he speaks harshly to him of us ; he has a feeling that we wronged him and drove him into exile. Then one day news reaches him that the old country is at war ; that she is assailed by a powerful enemy, threatened with invasion, and calling her sons together to a struggle for very life. He does not even

hesitate; he puts his private interests aside, forgets his present happiness and his past misery, knows only that the homeland is in danger and as swiftly as a ship can carry him he is back here to fight beside us for its safety, and if need be to die for it. We can understand this, but we can't explain it; it is too big and fine a thing to be subject to our peddling little psychological dissections.

But the sense of nationality moves men even more mysteriously than that. Perhaps your broken exile, instead of going into quite foreign parts, emigrates to one of the great British Dominions oversea. He settles down there, makes a position for himself, and feels he has done with the homeland for ever. Sons are born to him, the years pass, and he dies. Then one day War bursts upon us terribly, and the call goes forth, and those sons who have never seen their father's land, nor heard from him much that was good about it, are among the first to sacrifice their careers and hasten over to take their place with us in the firing line, eager to give their lives

sooner than the old country shall be worsted in the strife.

Typical of the letters from Britons who have gone to live abroad was that received, in the initial stages of the War, by Colonel J. M. McMaster, commanding the 5th Battalion of the King's Liverpool Regiment. The writer had aforetime been a sergeant in the battalion, and wrote now to say, "I beg to offer myself as a volunteer for the front. I am thirty-nine, in the best of health, and hard as nails. I have arranged all my affairs here, and can pay my own expenses." So far from feeling that he was laying his homefolk under any obligation, he added: "I shall consider it an honour if you can view my offer favourably." An Australian who has four sons on active service, one in the Australian Navy, and three out with the Australian contingent that is helping to hold the Suez Canal against the Turks, says that all four volunteered promptly during his absence from home, and he is proud and glad that they did. One writing to tell him of what they had done, said: "The old country

wants all the fighting men she can get, and it is up to us to do our bit so we have joined and expect to embark before you get back"; and another, explaining how he felt it impossible for him not to go concluded: "Don't worry. I shall do my best, and if the worst happens, anyhow, you will know that I did the right thing." And that is a noble, characteristic letter written to Mr. L. L. Grimwade, of Stoke-on-Trent, by his brother Edward, settled in New Zealand, who has sent one son to the war and is ready, if need be, to let the other go: "On this subject his mother is in liquidation, and his dad not much better. None the less, if the Motherland calls, Ted must go too . . . I am prepared to give another son (as I have given one) and I am prepared to get into the fighting line myself. Further, I am prepared to suffer loss of fortune and see starvation rather than sacrifice the honour of our Empire. . . . My boy, Len, went away with his regiment yesterday. All we can say is 'The Lord bless the lad.'" There are South Africans serving in our new

Armies, and we know the heavy work they have undertaken for the Empire within their own borders. And Canada has answered the call as immediately and as whole-heartedly. "Thirty-three thousand of our boys have come over here already," as one who had come with them said to me, "and if three hundred thousand are wanted they will be ready before your folk ask for them." Privates in the ranks of those thirty-three thousand are several Members of Parliament, wealthy merchants, doctors, lawyers, University professors, clergymen, and certain financial magnates who equipped sections of the troops at their own expense. Amongst them also is a good sprinkling of Americans, several of whom abandoned enviable commercial positions in order to hurry over the border and be in time to sail with the first regiments to set out from Canada.

I spent parts of two or three days last August with an American citizen who was over here on a month's holiday, and at first he was disposed to be puzzled and disappointed at what seemed to him our



indifference in the face of such a momentous crisis.

“ You don’t seem to be half so excited about it in London as we are in N’ York,” he remarked. “ Just before I left, if I went out at night, there were crowds singing the ‘ Marseillaise,’ and once I heard them let themselves go on your National Anthem, waiting outside one of our newspaper offices to see the latest news flashed on to a huge sheet all up the front of the building. But here I go out at nights and everybody’s comfortable and cheerful as usual and nothing more doing outside the newspaper offices than anywhere else.”

I tried to persuade him that we had set our teeth to see this job right through, and were working at it vigorously, resolutely, and with a thorough appreciation of its magnitude, though we were making no fuss about it ; and when I met him again a few days later he had satisfied himself that it was so.

“ Man,” he cried enthusiastically, “ I’ve been two days running and stood outside your chief recruiting station in Scotland



Yard, and there's a line of men four deep stretching clean out into Whitehall, and it never grows shorter, because as fast as the guys inside can attend to them and some more are let in, others have added themselves on at the other end of the line—all of them as full of ginger and as keen to get in as if it was the pit door of a theatre. It struck me dumb. When I could talk I spoke to one of your cops about it, and he was as unmoved as if he'd been made of wood. He seemed to pity my excitement. "Oh, it's like this every day," says he, as if there was nothing uncommon in it at all. I've chatted with some of your business people—solemn old boys some of 'em, and some of 'em as stodgy as they make 'em anywhere, but you've only got to give them a scratch and you find under the surface they're all full of this affair and on fire with it. I believe I begin to understand you over here. You're a great people; I admit it; and I suppose like all big things you are solid and quiet. But you're doing it, and you'll get it done. I feel that in my bones. I've had a letter from an old

pal of mine in New York this morning. He tells me he and two other fellows were just bolting North to join your Canadian contingent. True-blue Americans all of them, and one the head clerk in his office. Mad it sounds, doesn't it? No business o' theirs, eh? But I dunno—perhaps it is because we haven't strained all the British blood out of us even yet. Quaint thing! Why, do you know when I stood watching those recruits outside Scotland Yard I found the tears in my eyes once, and had a frantic impulse to tack myself on the end of the queue and go and be one of them. I believe if I went there too much I should do it, too!"

I had not had a chance to talk with any of the Oversea soldiers until late one evening last December, when I was coming back to town from Reading, and designedly got into a railway carriage where five of them were seated. Four were kilties, and they had the four corners; the other, a well-featured, rather shy looking youngster in khaki had a centre seat opposite me. Two of the kilties were stolid, uncommunicative

youths, who smoked and said nothing ; one in the right-hand corner facing me was a stout, genial, quiet man with black, twinkling eyes ; the fourth, immediately on my left, was a tall, raw-boned, soldierly looking fellow of a downright manner of speech that had a pleasant hint of a brogue in it ; and it was to him that I addressed myself :

“ I see there are a lot of you on the train here. You are not off to the front, I suppose ? ”

“ To the front ! ” with an exaggerated air of surprise. “ No such luck. Why, I hear that Kitchener isn't going to send us out till about March, and by that time there won't be any sanguinary war to go to.”

“ Oh, it won't be over by then,” I said consolingly.

“ Won't it ? We'll see. I'll bet we shall see nothing of it, and I'm fairly fed up with messing about here all this time. I didn't come over here to play about on Salisbury Plain learning my A B C. I'm an old Boer War man. I was eighteen months in South Africa. I know my business, yet

here I am wasting my time forming fours and playing kiss-in-the-ring with a swarm of raw recruits. Mind you, I'm not blaming Kitchener. He knows what he's doing. Most of us are new hands, and have got to be properly trained before they're good for anything. But there's a good ten thousand of old Boer War men among us who are fit and ready to go this minute. Why can't we be sorted out and formed into separate battalions and let us go out now—at once? That's what I say. What do you say, Wally? Am I right?"

"Quite right, boy," agreed the stout kiltie, smiling and twinkling at us placidly.

"If I'd known we were going to be set down here like this I don't believe I'd have come. I reckoned on going straight to the front. When I knew the old country wanted men, I wasn't going to stop out of it. What do you think? I chucked a job worth ten pounds a week on purpose to come. So did Wally there. Didn't you, Wally?"

"Ah, I did," Wally contentedly agreed.

"Yes. There you are. Then they tell

us to run away and play on Salisbury Plain. I want to go to the front. I joined because I wanted to do a bit for the old place and have a smack at these blighted Germans. If I'd only wanted a holiday I'd have gone to the seaside. I'd ha' got decent grub there, at all events."

"And don't you now?" I asked gently.

"Don't I now? Look here! Ever since we landed in this country we've had nothing but Irish stew. Nothing but Irish stew—day after day till I'm sick of the very smell of it. Is that so, Wally."

"That's so, boy," Wally chuckled. "Quite right."

"I've no fault to find with the food," the khaki youngster put in a little diffidently.

"Oh, haven't you?" The lean kiltie was down on him promptly. "What do you have, then?"

"Bit of bacon for breakfast, porridge sometimes; sometimes an egg."

"What do you have for dinner?"

"Sometimes beef, sometimes mutton. And we always have a pudding——"

“ My God, Wally,” the other burst forth explosively, “ this chap has pudding ! Whereabouts is your camp ? Pudding ! He don’t know where he is. He’s in Paradise ! What sort of pudding ? ”

“ Oh, plum duff.”

“ My—God ! ” He sank back overcome with memories. “ I haven’t tasted plum duff since—since—Do you pay any extra for it ? ”

“ Oh, yes.”

“ Ah, well, there you are. You can have anything if you pay for it, but we’re roughing it and taking what comes and nothing ever comes but Irish stew. And now, when we ought to be out yonder having a go in the trenches, because we’ve been good boys we’re let off for a couple of days leave in London.”

“ I’m going to Glasgow,” said the khakied youngster.

“ What for ? ” the lean kiltie demanded. “ Isn’t London good enough for you ? ”

“ Oh, yes, and I shall stop in London if I can’t catch the 11.10 from Euston to-night. Do you think,” he asked me, “ we

shall reach Paddington in time for me to catch that ? ”

“ We might,” I thought, “ but it will mean a rush, and you’ll only do it by the skin of your teeth.”

“ I’ll have a try,” he said quietly.

“ What do you want to bother about Glasgow for ? ” enquired the kiltie. “ Born there ? ”

“ Oh, no. I was born in Canada.”

“ Oh ! Relatives up there, I suppose ? ”

“ No. I don’t know anybody there. I just thought I’d like to have a look at it, that’s all.”

He made a queer little nervous gesture with his hands and cast a quick, shy glance first at the kiltie, then at me, and was silent.

We were silent too. I knew somehow, as well as if he had said it, that his father, perhaps his grandfather, was born in Glasgow, he had listened to their reminiscent talk of the old home-place, and had a sort of longing to see it. I fancy the kiltie had a suspicion of this as well, for after he had said nothing for a while he looked at his watch and growled.



“ You’ll just about do it, man.”

And when we got out at Paddington he shouted,

“ There you are—there’s a taxi yon. Nip into that.”

And the youngster took his advice.

“ Well, now,” I said to the lean kiltie, as we were saying good-bye, “ I’m awfully sorry you are having such a rotten bad time over here, and—— ”

“ Look here—that’s all right,” he interrupted. “ I daresay I’ve made the worst of it. I’d have come if I’d known it was going to be ten times as bad, and that’s straight. But if a British soldier isn’t entitled to grumble, then what rights has he got left to him, eh? I don’t mind about the stew, or anything. What I want is to go to the front. That’s what I came for. Once I get out there, give me stew all the while till I get to Berlin and you won’t hear me grouching about it—not a whisper. I want to be where the Germans are—that’s my only complaint. Put me among the Germans, and there’ll be nothing the matter with me.”



Since then, some of the Canadian troops have been fighting gallantly beside our own out in France, and I hope and believe that kiltie from Canada has had his desire and is one of them.

Even if we take it as nothing more than natural and magnificently right that these brothers of our own blood should stand so doughtily by us in the hour of our necessity, you cannot explain the enthusiastic loyalty of our Indian fellow subjects in the same way. Something of self-consciousness always makes me a little ashamed when I speak in praise of my country or my countrymen, though I can really do so with a kind of detachment, I have had so infinitesimal a personal share in whatever ruling has been done ; but it seems to me that had our methods of government been intolerant, oppressive, unjust, it must have been impossible for us to inspire any people under the sun with such a spontaneous eagerness to serve us and lay down their lives in our cause as our Indian comrades have shown and are showing. We may have blundered at times, but I think

that in the main we have striven to deal justly by them, we have aimed at giving them righteous rule, enlarging their liberties, and opening more and more all the ways in which they can fit themselves for self-government; and, for my part, I accept their instant loyalty, their pride in counting themselves one with us, co-partners in the Empire, as an unhesitating recognition of this.

If it had been otherwise, they and their Princes never could have offered their services with such generous promptitude, nor have fought by our other men so valiantly and with such invincible cheerfulness. The papers are rich already in stories of their heroism—of the terrible, irresistible charges of the Ghurkas, the Pathans, the Bengal Lancers, the steady valour under fire of Hindoo and Mohammedan regiments alike. But my business is not so much with details of the fighting as with the spirit in which the Indians, in common with the rest of the Empire, have risen to the height of this great argument, so I shall content myself with one or two notes that sufficiently

illustrate this. Again and again you read in letters from their officers of how keen they are to be advancing and to be allowed to quit the trenches and drive the enemy back at the point of the bayonet, and English soldiers who have seen them on the field say, "Once they get the order to charge there is no holding them back"; "Their officers can hardly get them to come out of the trenches when a battle is finished." "They are very eager for fighting. A lot came in the other day to have their wounds dressed, and as soon as the doctor turned his back they sloped back to the firing line." "The Ghurkas always want to be advancing and it is a job to keep them back." An Indian officer went to visit a Sikh soldier who was in hospital, shot through both legs and one arm, and said how sorry he was to see him so badly injured. "Sahib, what does it matter?" replied the Indian, with a smile. "This is what we came out for." "This is a good war," said another Indian; and another, when he was asked by Lieutenant Anne how he liked being in action, ejaculated,

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“ Oh, Sahib, all wars are beautiful, but this one is heavenly ! ” “ These Indians fight remarkably well,” writes Lieutenant Gendre - Chardoux. “ They had never heard the guns before, and at first they showed some nervousness, but they soon grew accustomed to it. The Ghurkas the other day gave it hot to some German regiments. They crawled in the fields for two hours without being seen by the Germans. When they got quite close to the enemy they sprang up with their kukri in hand, and what was left of the Germans took to their heels. The Ghurkas are born fighters. They are very small men, well knit, with a Japanese face. They are as nimble as cats.”

The only Indian I have seen who has been at the front was at a kind of social gathering, when a number of wounded English and Belgian soldiers were present. He was a stately, upstanding figure of a man, dignified, silent, and carried his left arm in a sling. A lady who had been particularly interesting herself in the Belgians, passed over to him and after some

friendly questions about his wound asked, partly no doubt to make conversation and partly to satisfy a casual curiosity as to what part of India he hailed from :

“ And which force do you belong to ? ”

He eyed her deferentially, evidently rather doubtful of her meaning, then flashing his white teeth in a sudden smile, said, with the slightest touch of pride :

“ Madame, I am a Britisher. ”

## CHAPTER IX

### SEEING IT THROUGH

“ The great word went from England to my soul,  
And I arose.”

BROWNING'S *Strafford*.

THIS morning, as I was sitting down to make a beginning of the present chapter I caught the monotonous, rather melancholy sound of a bugle, far off, blowing continuously on the same two or three flat notes. I knew what it meant, for in these last five months I have heard it many times ; so I stood at my window and presently could see, as I have seen before, a file of Belgian soldiers marching into view down the long road that winds in from the small town that lies beyond the fields. They were men who had been wounded. Discharged from hospital, they had been convalescing in the country hereabouts, and were making now for the railway station, that lies ten

minutes below my house, on their way back to the front. There were about a hundred of them, marching three abreast, with the bugler leading. Shabby, war-worn, muffled and overcoated, none of them in a complete uniform, they trudged on sturdily, though here and there was one that still went with a slight limp. As they were passing, the bugler's wind seemed to give out and he rested from his blowing. Instantly, all the men broke into singing the Marseillaise and, keeping step to that, it was good to see how their shoulders squared and their pace quickened. I watched till they had winded out of sight, and listened till their singing had lessened and died in the distance.

There was something strangely touching in the sight and in the sound of them. There was all the desolation of Belgium in it, the crying of slaughtered women and children, the black ruin of shattered villages, the wail of the living for the dead, the misery of a desolated country and a people wandering homeless. But there was in it, too, an undercurrent of high courage, an

unbroken confidence that the end was not yet, and would not be until their wrongs were avenged and their country their own again. It was the defiant ring in their voices and something in the dogged set of their figures, I think, that brought back to my recollection the story told by our soldiers of how in the Belgian trenches they saw a woman placidly seated beside her husband. He was all that was left to her ; her children had been butchered ; her home was in ashes ; her other friends slain or scattered ; so she stayed there resolutely in the trenches by her man, keeping him supplied with ammunition and loading his gun for him.

We are so afraid of appearing unpractical and foolish that it comes easier to say that, as a nation, we have gone into this war in self-defence, and because we knew that if Germany crushed France and Russia we should soon have to fight against her alone for our very existence. I won't answer for the diplomatists, but I repeat that, beyond question, it was a keen sympathy with France and above all a flaming



indignation against the barbarous cruelties that have made Belgium a wilderness and a place of tears, a feeling that our honour was pledged to the protection of that small nation, which appealed to the chivalry of our manhood and was largely responsible for the eagerness with which thousands of volunteers hastened to swell the ranks of our new Armies. It is this sentiment, principle—call it what you will—that has roused the women of our country and made them as warlike as their men; and it is this that helps to stiffen the determination of our fighters in the field, and that rankles in the minds of our wounded and makes them impatient of their inactivity. “I shall be going back next week, and I’m jolly glad,” one man said to me, who was invalided home near the end of the retirement from Mons. “If you had seen those poor devils of Belgians bolting out of blazing villages, terrified women and old men lugging bundles of things along with them, and poor little bits of kids crying their hearts out—I wake in the night and it makes me mad to remember it—you’d

never be able to rest till we have seen this thing right through."

Turn over the letters from our soldiers and the same thing is constantly cropping up in them: "You can't possibly understand what those Belgians have suffered unless you could come over here and see for yourself." "The worst part of it all is to see the poor little kiddies in their stockinged feet, and some with none on, straggling along behind their mothers. It is awful." Another tells of how he and his comrades could not bear to hear these children crying for food: "I have seen our soldiers give them their own meal and go to bed hungry after fighting all day." There are scores of such tales: "I gave my rations and my waterproof sheet to a Belgian woman with three children who were wet through and hungry." "We met a lot of tired women and children who had been driven out of their village. They were pretty well starved. We gave them our day's rations. It was all we could do for them." "There was a poor Belgian woman almost naked. My chum gave her his blanket. Do send him out

another blanket if you can. Send it care of me." "If you had seen some of the things that we have seen out here, you would not wonder if our fellows are roused and would sooner be killed to the last man than be beaten in such a war as this."

But they will not be beaten, and they know it. Turn to another phase of their letters and you find behind all their humanity a settled confidence and a grim soldierly joy of battle that will carry them through to victory at all costs: "Mind you, we are doing this with a good heart, and whatever happens, we will win in the end." "We shall win, right enough. In fact we shall not hear of anything else." "It is tough work, very tough work, but we are out for business, and we are going to win, and to win well." "It is worse than murder, but it has got to be done." "Everyone here is sticking it." "It is going to be a long, long struggle, but it has got to be done, or we would never be able to live in peace." "We are not worrying; we feel that our day has come." "We keep pegging away. Slowly but surely we are going to Berlin."

“ I shall not be sorry when it’s over, but rather than let them win I would sooner keep at war for ever.” “ We will struggle on till we beat them, no matter what lives it costs.”

This is how the men at the front are taking it, and if you look at the letters from the men in hospitals at home, here is a handful of characteristic utterances: “ I had rough times of it, but I have that feeling—I want to be at the front.” “ I want to get back and be at ’em again.” “ When my time to return comes, I shall go with a good heart.” “ I shall be back again before long, and I shall not be sorry. I’ve got a reckoning to have with the Germans.” “ As you say, it is glory to have done a bit, but of course as soon as I’m better I shall be off to the front again.” And this from another, anxious to mend and go back to his place beside his comrades, puts into simple black and white what has been said to me in effect by several of the wounded men I have spoken with: “ It is lovely lying in a nice soft bed instead of in the trenches, but so long

as the boys are fighting out there my mind is not at ease.”

Another very striking thing in many of the letters and stories from the front is their revelation of a completely selfless devotion to a sense of duty. The men who write them, or are the theme of them, are so obviously not out after any personal honour ; it is the honour of their country they fight and, if need be, die for, and bound up with that, for each man, is the honour of his regiment. If you would know the real spirit of chivalry and self-sacrifice that lies behind the pluck and light-heartedness with which so many of our soldiers have gone uncompelled to this war, it is in this anecdote related by a doctor in one of our Field Hospitals. After a furious bayonet charge, a young British infantryman was carried in unconscious and fatally wounded. At the last, he became conscious, but lay with fast glazing sight, painless but indifferent, till of a sudden he seemed to remember, half raised himself on his elbow, and looking up at the doctor with kindling eyes, asked anxiously,

“ How did we do ? ” “ Magnificently, my boy,” said the doctor. “ Your chaps cleared the Germans out of the trenches and chased them for a mile.” He dropped back with a satisfied sigh, muttered, “ That’s all right, then,” and next minute was dead. And that same selfless devotion finds ever larger and nobler utterance in the letter, published in the *Daily Telegraph*, that was written to a friend at home by Captain Norman Leslie, shortly before he was killed in action :

“ Try and not worry too much about the war units. Individuals cannot count. Remember we are writing a new page in history. Future generations cannot be allowed to read of the decline of the British Empire and attribute it to us. We live our little lives and die, and to some is given the chance of proving themselves men, and to others no chance comes. Whatever our individual faults, virtues or qualities may be, it matters not ; when we are up against big things let us forget individuals and let us act as one great British unit, united and fearless. Some will live and

many will die, but count not the loss. It is far better to go out with honour than survive with shame."

This is not the spirit of a decadent nation, or of a nation that has finished its work ; and so far as my reading and experience go—and they have gone a good way—it is in this spirit, more or less consciously, that our people the world over have answered and are still answering the call of the Empire.

## EPILOGUE.

*Still from far off the listening spirit hears  
A music of the spheres,  
Though heard too close their sweet accord may round  
To one gross roll of sound.*

*And War, that with its thunderous gloom and gleam  
Storms through our days, may seem,  
By peaceful hearths, in some far-coming year,  
A music, that was discord heard too near.*

*The soul of beauty walks with aspect sad,  
And not in beauty clad ;  
And when God's angel comes, his passing by  
Blinds us like light too nigh.*

*But the too-dazzling day that dims our sight  
Leads us, when all its light,  
Upgathered in Night's lifted hands afar,  
Orbs to the still perfection of a star.*









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