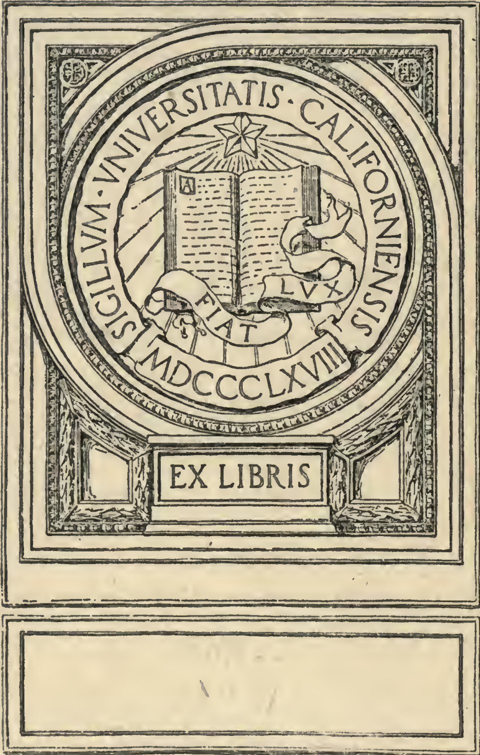
From Dug-Out & Billet

An Officer's Letters to his Mother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From Dug-out and Billet

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UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

London: HURST & BLACKETT LTD.
PATERNOSTER HOUSE, E.C. : 1916

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From Dug-out and Billet

Dear Little Mama,

Don't stare. It isn't such an odd beginning when the reason's given. The other day in billets a Frenchwoman showed me a letter—oh, the pride of her!—from her soldier son. Being in French, and *provençale* at that, I couldn't get the hang of much of it, but it began with, "*Chère petite Maman.*" Ever since, it has struck me that "Dear Mother" is much too staid a way to address you. If that big baby of a man, who's doing in Boches with sanguinary enjoyment down Alsace way, can use an affectionate diminutive to his big Maman, surely I can do the same. She, *Maman*, *marchande de tabac* in the North, is the largest woman I have ever seen. She has three

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chins, no waist, the arms of a prize-fighter, and she weighs fourteen stone if an ounce. Yet she is Piou-Piou's "*Petite Maman,*" and no higher than his heart. No man's mother is.

So that's the reason why I've taken a leaf out of Piou-Piou's letter, dear little Mama, and I wish I had half his vocabulary of *chéri's*, *ange's*, *mie's* and *mignon's*. There's no doubt about it, the English language curdles a proper expression of sentiment.

I'd give anything to be able to say something to buck you up properly, but I'm afraid I don't know how. Ordinarily, I'm a rotter at letter-writing, as you know. After weeks of handling an entrenching tool (I generally do my whack at it with my Company) my fingers simply can't get a grip of a pen. I'll do my best, except to give you a diary of the usual stuff about hand-to-hand encounters, wild charges and other heroic deeds. I bar all that. You can get it out of the papers if you want it. No man can really

describe what he's done under fire. He doesn't know anything about it while it's going on, and afterwards he'd be bound to give a wrong impression of it. I'm doing my bit, or trying to, and there's an end of it.

What I'm concerned with most is yourself. I know you're going about smiling and doing the innumerable things of everyday life that women find to their hands. But I'm equally jolly well sure that the smile comes off at night and that your prayers are pangs. Also that you lie awake in the darkness and wonder where on the bare earth—somewhere in Flanders—your "brave" boy is lying. And in the morning you wake up from an hour's troubled sleep, feeling like a bad egg, and put on the smile again to go down to breakfast with instead of an appetite. I know you do.

Don't worry. The facts don't warrant it. Most days the fellow you're grousing about is undergoing nothing worse than healthy

exercise that makes him hard as nails. They may be long hours, but they seem short. When he has time to think it's of you—and dinner. The A.S.C. provides the latter, and generally speaking does it famously. You can't expect them to write your letters from home as well!

And don't for a moment imagine there's any discomfort in a bed on what you call the "bare earth." I've heard men who have been home on short leave say that a spring-mattress and pillows kept them awake. When bye-bye time comes round you roll yourself in your blanket and in a moment are sleeping the sleep of the healthy just. Hours of it. Honest! With ordinary luck you get all the sleep and rest you want and wake up fit as a fiddle, shake yourself like a dog, and start another day of alarums and excursions.

Fellows with bad nerves or weak tummies go back home and talk weirdly of what they've undergone—sufferings and want

of food. That sort would say the same thing of a hard run with the beagles. The sufferings of all except those who try and stop high-explosives with their heads don't amount to more than blistered feet or the gall of a pack-strap. And you can be happy though hungry, so long as you don't have to make a hobby of going without food. Backwoodsmen and cattle-punchers far from the sound of war frequently have to wait for their dinner until they can get it, and go without if they can't.

Of course it's war, and some war at that, and it provides sights enough to disturb fastidious tastes. But, oh, believe me, we enjoy it! We're out here for England, home and duty—or is it beauty?—right enough; but don't make any mistake, we do our fighting for the love of it—for the scrum of it. The Boches only fight for hate, which is why a good many of them squeal at the sight of the merry bayonet. The German is remarkably like the villain of

the piece, all hatred and bombast and given to the gnashing of teeth. The bombast goes out of him when he's tackled, though, and only the hatred remains. But hate never won a war yet. That's why Tommy is so full of confidence. He's not down-hearted, oh dear, no!

War's only hard on you women and the chaps who have to stop at home. I don't mean the slackers and the strikers. *They* ought to be collected in dust-carts and used for what the Boches call cannon-fodder. They're asking for it. We, here, don't want them in the same trench with us. Yes, war's hardest on you women. You can't help seeing things in a sort of twilight nightmare. The idea of bloodshed unnerves you. You don't show it in public, but *we* know. Every mother's son of us—every man in uniform who's got a mother or a sister or a wife or a sweetheart at home—knows how you feel. You go about pretending to be cheerful and hopeful, but

deep down in the smouldering volcano of your hearts—and you're all volcanoes in sentiment, *chère p'tite Maman*—you seethe with troubled emotions. The pity of it is that none of you womanly women can help it. You'll make sacrifices, you'll smile; but when you put the sword in our hand you drive another into your own heart as well. You think of us as the wee mites we used to be, to be coddled and tucked up in bed. You can't see that we're grown up and simply revelling in our job.

It's not altogether because he's a German that Tommy likes killing him, though that's good reason enough, but Tommy being a fighting man by instinct enjoys war for its own sake. You can't get away from it: war is a necessity of masculine human nature. The fighting spirit is probably as ineradicable in a healthy youngster as his liking for an underdone beefsteak. If it weren't, war would have gone out of fashion long ago. As long as men manage

things in this world there will always be wars, fierce and savage, according to their nature. Men are built that way.

I really think all the good men of the nation are out here already. It would do your heart good to see the brotherly spirit that prevails among all classes, lords and labourers, dukes and dustmen. What a happy world it would be if all but the commanding few were paid no more than seven bob a week, and their hours of labour were controlled by nothing but necessity. Then if you deported the able-bodied louts who expect others to do their fighting for them, and put a painless end (preferably at the Dogs' Home) to the noisy eleventh-hour patriots who are interfering with the conduct of this war, we should be celebrating the Millennium.

What you good people at home ought to concentrate on just now, instead of bothering your heads about our imaginary sufferings, is just the everyday things that

interest you most. I gather you don't read novels or go to the Academy or give dinner-parties and dances or do any of the things you used to like doing. I bet you don't trouble to look up the prices of old silver and china at Christie's last sale, though that's your hobby, any more than Jane in the kitchen with her Bill at the Front is excited by what's going on in police-court circles. You're all taken up with war news.

It's a mistake. Out here we're fed up with the stuff the papers are full of, stuff that reflects the frame of mind of you people at home. We don't cavil at the absence of racing news. We suppose there's a good reason for stopping it. But we'd much rather read about the Derby and the Leger than what the long-range correspondent of the *Daily* ——— has to say about Neuve Chapelle. What we look for—at least Tommy does—is the usual five columns concerning the latest mysterious murder,

or a description of a twenty-round prize-fight. Instead, we have to wade through pages of what *we're* supposed to be doing, which is the limit, because most of it is imaginary and the rest "slobber." Why can't somebody print a paper for us fellows at the Front with all the war news left out? We're *doing* our bit. We don't want to read about it.

I've covered a lot of paper for a man with a hole in his arm. There, it's out! That's why you're getting six pages passed by the Censor. It's not worth putting me to bed for. I'm fit enough to be on the war-path, but our R.A.M.C. is like a doting mother. Talk about kissing the place to make it well!

Now don't worry, there's a dear little soul. Could I possibly write all this if I were slowly bleeding to death, or coughing gas, or raving in delirium? Fact is, I'm luxuriating in the Base Hospital and getting fat on all the delicacies of the season.

Must stop now. Sister says so. She's Lady——, the ——'s youngest daughter, you know. Last year—fair, blue and white dress, spangled fan. That's how you'd have described her on a dance programme. I had two waltzes with her soon after she was presented. Then butter wouldn't have melted in her mouth. She was awfully girlish and rather demure. Now she's by way of being a capable understudy to a swagger Harley-Street surgeon. She just looks at you and you do what you're told. She's twenty, and she's seen men die and helped them over their last fence in style. When the war's over and she marries she'll be one of the mothers of real men.

So long, *chère Maman, petite mignon, je t'embrasse.* The prettiest French isn't fragrant enough for you. It's only you I think of when my mind's on anything big or there's anything big to do. There have been girls—but only one shrine. I place a candle before it now—MOTHER.

Give my love to England, which means you first.

Your loving son,

CHOTA.

How trite ! I want Piou-Piou's touch !

(2)

Sweetheart,

When I was a boy and heard about the toast of "sweethearts and wives" I took the word sweetheart to mean mother. I don't think I was so far out, either. And when, as grown men, we drank it at mess, finishing with the inevitable "and may they never meet," I always made a point of leaving out the ribald tag and drank only to the nearest and sweetest and dearest of beings who stood to me for both. Messes are getting mere memories now—unless you can call three mud-caked objects eating out of a meat-tin in a funk-hole being at mess—but I never miss drinking to the only sweetheart I know when I take my gruel, all the same.

Oh, you precious little soul! a thousand

thanks for your cheery letter. It did me a world of good. I could read into it how perfectly delighted you were to know that I was safe in hospital and out of the enemy's range. I believe you'd rather like me to be peppered (in a harmless way) every now and then so as to be able to satisfy yourself that I was in bed and out of danger most of the time! What an army it would be if mothers had their way!

Talking of that reminds me how much more seriously a kiddie thinks of his hurts than a man does. Do you remember the way I ripped up my knee and made a mess of my nose when my bike ran away and laid me gently on a pile of flints at the bottom of a hill somewhere Boscombe Chine way? Or that time when I caught my eye on the key of the nursery door and fainted on the mat? Lord! how I tried to keep a stiff upper lip. My instincts were all for roaring like a bull; but somebody, a little fairy woman with chestnut hair, kept on rocking me in

her arms and assuring me that I was a man and asserting that men never cried. Of course I wanted to be a man (though I felt much more like a mouse), and kept back the howls, and then curiously enough all the pain went. There must have been more Christian Science about in those days than we knew of, what?

Pain must be a relative thing, or some people wouldn't stand it better than others. Some can't stand the sight of blood. I don't say that women are always horrified at it (look at our plucky Red Cross nurses); but it doesn't upset our sex like it does yours. A little girl will frighten herself looking at the stained bandage round a cut finger long after the pain has gone. It can't be the *colour* of blood that's so upsetting (what female was ever unnerved by colour?); it must be because it's wet! Pity we can't bleed something dry. A child doesn't faint when her favourite doll leaks sawdust. It's such a clean, nice-smelling dribble. Of

course, to be at war and not get accustomed to the sight of blood is an impossibility. You get callous of it when you see men laughing though they're covered with it, fighting though they can't see for it, dying for the loss of it.

And just as you get to think of blood as a customary sight, so you become accustomed to the idea of death. It's all around you, not remote as in times of peace. It's peace that makes the love of life so falsely precious. In places where a man carries his life in his hands, and in war, he sees death in its right perspective, which means, oddly enough, that it's shorn of its terrors. Perhaps it needed a great war like this to bring things into focus again.

I'm not one of the over-religious, and out here you haven't much time for theological speculation (your simple faith and the prayers you taught me fill the bill as far as I am concerned); but paradox as it may seem, war knocks the materialism out

of the most hardened of men. You get to believe absolutely in a life after death. When you've seen the spirit flaming at its highest just before it leaves the battered body you refuse to believe that total extinction is its end. Endurance, epic in sacrifice and heroism, must have a better fate. War takes you down to bedrock.

I've read your letter for the third time. It's getting crumpled. Your dear little prayer at the end is all *you*, but, mother o' mine, its spirit is rather reminiscent of that picture in the *Punch* you sent me in which the small girl-kid wished she was an angel so that she might drop bombs on the Germans!

I was interrupted just now by the man in the next cot to mine, a Canadian, wounded in the head. They say it's all up with the poor chap. He's a giant of a fellow, and when he feels like it, which he often does when he's in pain and the nurses are out of earshot, his language makes the windows

rattle. They say he's done some fine things, but he won't be drawn on the subject. Five minutes ago he said he'd like to see the letter I was reading. I didn't like handing over the heart of my mother for a stranger to pry into, so I made the excuse that it was private.

"Huh!" he grunted. "From some fool-skirt, I reckon."

"No, from my mother," I said. "I don't think it would interest you. It's all about my home, and a bazaar they had for the Red Cross, and how the garden's looking, and what it's like in the evenings, sitting alone and thinking of us out here."

He stuck out his hand. "See here, sonny, have you got a monopoly in mothers? I don't remember mine. Be a friend and pass it on."

There was such a wistful look in his face—though it sets hard enough when his wound is being dressed or he's letting himself go about the Boches—that I gave

him the letter. He grabbed it without a word, and turned over on his side to read it. I think he was trying to make believe it was *his* letter. He took a long time over it, and I thought he had fallen asleep, when, all of a sudden, up went his hand to the bandage round his head and he had it off. Nurse came running up and asked him what he meant by being so naughty, and fixed him up again.

"Sorry, Sis," he apologized. "I must have been dreaming I had a hat on and took it off to a lady."

He gave me back your letter after she'd gone, and all he said was: "My, you're rich!" I didn't regret sharing it with him, after all.

I'm glad you didn't send me the whole of Canon Lyttelton's speech. What there was of it makes me glad I wasn't at Eton! Some of the fellows out here who were are fearfully wrath about it. There's too much of that sloppy sentiment being ladled out

in England. The astonishing thing is that a head master of a public school, presumably a good Christian and a clear thinker, should reason so badly. I don't set myself up to be an authority on the Bible, but speaking from memory, it seems to me that the injunction to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us was not addressed to a people. Christ tried to get at the heart of the individual. He did not concern Himself with nations, nor with war. Unless I'm wrong, the only time He touched on the larger issues that might spring out of His teaching was when He said "I come not to bring peace but a sword."

There are deeds that are beyond forgiveness. I've seen some of them and heard first-hand about others. There is something inconceivable about the brutalities of the Germans. They don't bear talking about. But I would have liked to show Canon Lyttelton and the other clergymen who preach about toleration

to our enemies a little church we came across a month ago. There were sights there to awe an irreligious man. The place was wrecked, and wrecked in a way that only fiends could have thought of. If anyone needed convincing that this *is* a holy war in which the enemy are the powers of Darkness and no other, they had but to look on that hellish devastation—ribald words scrawled on a crucifix, holy images defiled, even a statue of the Virgin and Child disfigured. It was such a girlish little Virgin, a face so serene and happy. The brutes had hacked it about and stuck the stump of one of their foul cigars—taken the trouble to gum it—between the holy, smiling lips! That's what the Germans dare to do to the Mother of God! Can you wonder at their crimes against the mothers and sisters and wives of Belgians and Frenchmen? What would they not do to the mothers of Englishmen if they could—if they ever see the Day?

They won't see the Day, of course. Our men are firm on that point. They know what they're fighting for now, not only their bit of ground in England—whether it be a village allotment or a "country house with shooting"—but the honour of their women, the safety of little children. At first they couldn't understand the bitterness of the French and Belgians against these unspeakable brutes. Tommy fought without malice. But not now. Now he is beginning to write home about the things he's seen, and perhaps he'll succeed in rousing the slackers and stirring the nation generally. But, oh, the lack of preparation, this shortage of shells, these strikes, the slow, slow discussions in Parliament! It's such weary hearing for us out here. At times the strongest man's heart loses faith in his countrymen.

Please don't think I'm depressed. It's only the lying here inactive and feeling well enough to be up and doing that

makes me chafe. I'm to be moved soon, thank goodness. I suppose they'll keep me in cotton-wool for another week or two among the convalescents and pamper and over-feed me. I'm all of a fidget to get back to my men again. I want to hear the odd mixture of Cockney and Lancashire and brogue they talk. It's the mixiest *bat* you ever heard. I keep on thinking of their grinning faces and the cheery welcome they'll give me. It will be like going home. They're magnificent fellows. I'm proud of them. What I don't like to think about is the faces I shall miss.

Talking of *bat*, a native regiment we ran across a little while ago somehow or other found out my idiotic Christian name and that I was born in India. I found myself recollecting long-forgotten bits of Hindustani. Of course I'm "Chota-sahib" to everybody now. Ridiculous, at my height.

This pencilling's getting wobbly. It's not my strength going, but the light fail-

ing. The light is failing in England, but please God, only for the night. I can see you sitting in the soft glow of a shaded lamp near the open window. I can see the big bowls of roses everywhere, smell them and the night-stocks just outside. A big moth drums in from the garden, brushes against your cheek and startles you, so that you look up from your work—a soldier's shirt or pyjamas—and you get up and walk in the garden because suddenly your thoughts have flown to me, and we so often walked in the garden after dinner, you and I, up and down the lawn.

Come along, little woman! Here's your shawl. Let's have a stroll together; my body in France, yours in England, but our spirits side by side in our dear old garden. Listen to the nightingales! When they stop for breath the soft warm silence of the night wraps us round. Isn't it peaceful. *Is* there a war going on, or is it only a dream?

Think it a dream and sleep through it. We out here will take care to guard you from its realities. Good-night, dearest, God bless you (as if He could do anything else!).

Your CHOTA.

Husky (that's the big Canadian), who has been watching me scribbling, says rather ironically that I ought to have been a newspaper correspondent. He wants me to leave a space for him to write you something at the back of this. Queer chap—poor chap.

(*Enclosure*)

DEAR ENGLISHWOMAN,

He's the right sort, your son, but Gee, what a mother he must have! He let me read your letter. I hope you don't mind. It *was* some letter. Please write again soon, before they put the screen round me.

Your obedient,

———

(3)

LITTLE BRAVE HEART,

It was just like you to write to Husky. If anything could have kept him alive that sweet letter of yours would have done it. More's the pity, the poor fellow died the day before it arrived. He had a persistent hallucination at the last that angels were all around his bed. He got quite angry because we couldn't see them. One of the nurses who had been in a children's fever hospital told me that some of the poor mites there used to have similar delusions. Husky reminded her of them. He died in his sleep. Be sure there are crowns set with rough diamonds specially kept in the Elysian Fields for valiant souls like his.

I left hospital three days ago. You'd feel so serene if you could see me now. I'm literally in the bosom (for they've taken me to theirs) of a typical upper class Belgian family. They've turned their château into a convalescent home for officers. It's a noble old house, full of beautiful furniture of the courtly period from which the French and Belgians get their exquisite manners. (This place might almost be said to be in France, it's so close to the frontier, and being just out of the track of invasion, it has luckily escaped destruction.)

At present there are only two others here, like myself being "cured" as if we were bacon before it's sent off to be "smoked." One is the Nawab of——, a hardened warrior of twenty-two. He was at dear old Wellington, so we have experiences in common. The other was a Bugler, now promoted to a 2nd Lieutenancy. On the subject of his commission

there hangs a tale which he won't or mustn't tell. But knowing where he was last in action and something of his regiment I can make a pretty shrewd guess at it. When things are going a bit wrong and some unfortunate, losing his head, orders the "retire," and instead a bugler sounds the "charge," thereby saving the situation —eh? I think that's the key to the mystery. This is a war in which the romance of promotion would run to volumes.

We're the best of pals, in spite of the fact that the Nawab first saw the light in a cradle jewelled in seventeen holes, I in a swinging contrivance of silk and lace and bows, and the Bugler probably in an improvised sugar-box, which later on developed wheels and turned into a mail-cart. We've all been through the same mill since. It's hard marching, shrapnel and machine-gun fire, barbed wire and all the rest of it that levels cabbages and kings.

About our hosts. We haven't seen M.

le Comte. He's an Artillery officer on the Belgian Staff. Madame is the ideal Comtesse of tradition, aristocratic and exquisite. She makes you think of the Versailles of old. Her eighteen-year-old daughter, Désirée by name, is one's ideal of what a girl should be. There are little ceremonials in our daily intercourse. When Madame takes leave of us we kiss her delicate finger-tips. In response to Mademoiselle's curtsy, the old-world grace of which would be the despair of a hockey-playing hoyden, we are acquiring a bow of quite Continental elegance.

My two companions are a bit envious of my French. Such as it is it enables me to keep up a conversation with Mademoiselle. They pretend I'm cutting them out, but of course there's no question of that. In the first place, I haven't enough of the *homme galant* in me, and secondly, one wouldn't dream of flirting with Mademoiselle Désirée, or indeed any other

well-brought-up French girl. She's much too innocent. Just now Mademoiselle is sitting sewing while I write. A little way off Madame la Comtesse is gathering roses, with the Nawab and the ex-Bugler holding her baskets. How peaceable we must look, we fighting men—fourth-rate Samsons shorn of our strength!

Mademoiselle interrupts me. I translate the conversation that ensues.

"M'sieur writes with a facility. Is it a letter to the fiancée?" she asks mischievously (her feminine way of voicing poor Husky's assumption that I am writing to "a fool-skirt").

"But, no, Mademoiselle. I write to the little mother all alone in England," I tell her.

"Speak to me of madame your mother," she entreats very charmingly.

So I tell her about you. I have never said so much about my mother to anyone before in my life. It does me good to let

myself go to her, probably because she's French and because I've learnt that with the French the love of children for parents and vice-versa goes tremendously deep. I was able to feel I could talk to her without being laughed at. She understood. She seemed to want to hear about you. And, of course, talking of you led on to talking of our dear old home. That was another love she understood.

"Perhaps M'sieur will describe madame his mother," she said in a venturesome way presently.

"She has a small smiling face with a soft colour in it, and there is a little grey in her hair."

"But—is she then old, madame your mother?"

"Not so very old. You must remember that I am a veteran of twenty-eight, and that she was married at nineteen. Calculate it for yourself, Mademoiselle.'

She figures it out on her pretty fingers.

"But that is young for a mother of one so big!" she cries. "Then it is true, what I have been told! In England all the mothers and grandmothers are young, always with the golden hair and the complexion pink and well-powdered!"

(Too many of them are, but it won't do to admit it.)

"That, I fancy, is a slight exaggeration," I rejoin. "Some of them perhaps, *les papillons de société*, disfigure themselves so, but the little mothers who sit at home grow old gracefully.

"*Comme maman?*"

"But one does not call Madame la Comtesse old."

She smiles, and after a pause says a little wistfully: "One day, perhaps, when I am married I will travel to England and make the acquaintance of your mother, M'sieur."

"You are then *fiancé?*" I ask, in surprise.

"Oh, but no! I am too young. Doubtless in time that will arrange itself."

"And the choice?

She picks up her sewing again. "The choice will be with my parents, *bien entendu.*"

"And will your choice be their choice?"

She looks up then, and I read in her eyes the most perfect filial trust and love.

"But, of course, M'sieur; for their choice must be the best."

Well, it's very pretty and dutiful and an excellent plan as a rule, I'm told, this Continental way of making marriages. I don't know why I've recorded this trivial conversation. It didn't seem trivial while it was going on.

(*Later*)

I have another week here, I believe. I shall miss the delicate refinement of this

place and its nice people when I'm gone, but when I get into the thick of it again I shall feel more than ever that I'm fighting for Belgium as well as England. You won't wonder at that when I tell you what happened this afternoon.

I was sitting at my bedroom window which overlooks the grounds and the gates at their entrance when, unexpectedly, as I gather, a biggish car turned in at them. There were two ladies and a Belgian officer in it, and the chauffeur was a soldier. I had just time to notice that one of the ladies was fair and slight, and then I lost sight of the car as it drew up directly under my window. Five minutes afterwards the visitors came out on to the lawn with the Comtèsse and Mademoiselle.

The little fair lady's back was towards me, so I couldn't see her face. But I should have judged her to be very distinguished and patrician even without the deference

the Comtesse showed her. The other fellows must have appreciated this too, for they jumped out of their garden chairs and stood at attention until they were made known to her.

For myself, I did not intend joining the party. The lady was clearly of importance, and I thought it more tactful to stay where I was. But Madame's amiability was not going to allow her to forget an undistinguished guest. A servant was sent to fetch me. I felt unaccountably diffident as I went out on to the lawn. I did not, in consequence, catch the lady's name when I was presented to her, but when she turned her face to me—so young but so sad, as if it had seen a thousand agonies—my embarrassment vanished. It was a face so full of soft womanliness and pale care. It had in it something of the expression of the martyr, the angel, and the mother as well. I find it difficult to describe its effect on me. Reverence, I think it was. For all

that, she had a way—a certain sweet simplicity—that was very winning.

All this while the ex-Bugler was palpably suffering agonies of nervousness. He could barely answer when she spoke to him. But the Nawab made up for that. He has a wonderful Oriental fluency which now and then brought a flicker of amusement into her sorrowful face. I think she must have intimated that she wanted to talk to me, for presently I found myself alone with her. In a slow sweet voice she put one question after another. Not personal ones. She only wanted to hear of two things—armies and soldiers. She talked of them with unassuming intimacy. She said that from the beginning of the war she had been moving about, always moving, never in one place. She had seen Belgium's travail in every one of its phases, and the memory of it was reflected in her face. All the time I could see that she was repressing her feelings. Like a man who feels

strongly, she used the fewest possible words. You could see that she was suffering acutely.

"Have you relations fighting, Madame?" I asked, greatly blundering.

"All of my sons," she replied. "Those that have not already fallen."

"But forgive me, Madame, your sons must be children."

Her eyes filled. "My little ones are safe in England; but every Belgian, dead or fighting, is my son," she said with tremendous emotion. "I am Rachel, Monsieur le Capitaine, and I cannot be comforted. I can but try to comfort."

And so only did I stumble on the truth, that I was in the presence of the most tragic of living figures—Belgium's indomitable spirit incarnate in her brave little Queen. I think the sun got into my eyes then.

Hullo, I'm down to my last sheet of paper, and as I'm writing in my bedroom and it's nearly midnight I can't go and

fetch more. The household is asleep, and I would like to think that the little wandering Queen, who rests here for the night, is asleep too, and dreaming, not of her stricken country, but of the Day—Belgium's Day of Resurrection—which will see it freed from the unspeakable German, triumphant through sacrifice, sanctified as only a nation can be that has suffered and been crucified.

Good-night, dearest. All my love. I didn't mean to cram it in so small.

CHOTA.

(4)

Dearest and Best,

Wasn't it the nigger in "Huckleberry Finn" who likened the life in King Solomon's household (of many wives) to being next door to a boiler factory? I couldn't help thinking of that simile when I got back to our Lines. The change was so sudden. I had left a scene of perfect calm and stepped straight into Pandemonium. Of course it wasn't my first experience of it, but that tranquil week at the château had dulled my memory.

It must be true of this war (I hear the same thing on all hands) that what strikes you most about it is its overwhelming noise. All the other sensations are secondary—heat, cold, pain, fatigue, danger.

That's Nature all over. She doesn't allow you to experience more than one emotion at a time. I know that the four days I've just spent in the trenches have left this one impression on my mind: a shattering roar which no language can describe.

You may shout at the top of your voice to the man alongside for something or other and he doesn't take the slightest notice. When in turn he bursts his lungs trying to say something you think he's only making grimaces. In the periodical lulls you find yourself a deaf mute. You know the guns have ceased firing by the absence of concussion, but you can't hear anything for all that, and you can't speak for hoarseness. Afterwards, when you've got your voice and hearing back, you call it a "bit of a racket." Another proof of the transitory nature of things!

Here I am in the Reserve Lines. Relatively it's quiet—the quietness of the crowd at Epsom or a busy day at Waterloo

Station—and I'm taking advantage of it to write to you. But the din of active war conditions isn't quite out of my head yet, and I'm not at all sure that what I'm going to say will have average coherence. I'm always envying the literary gents who make week-end trips to the Front. They not only see into the mind of French or Joffre and know exactly what is happening (which we on the spot don't), but they picture it in what I believe are called "flaming words." I suppose it's the noise that inspires them in the quiet and seclusion of their studies when they're at home again!

One of our men back from a country Red Cross hospital had something to say about the noises there. A railway line ran at the bottom of the grounds, and a lady visitor anxious for his comfort put the question, "And do the trains disturb you?" Tommy, I gather, stared at her uncomprehendingly. The *trains!* Did the

gentle, softly-murmuring trains disturb him? He wanted to laugh, but seeing how really sympathetic she was he answered meekly, "We manage to sleep through it, lady.'

I remember saying that the getting back to my Company would be like going home It wasn't quite that: rather more like the beginning of a new school term. On those occasions you looked first for your particular pals, curious to hear their experiences since you'd seen them last, and to tell your own. That part of it was very similar. Here, familiar faces there were too—some of them actually those of old schoolfellows —and their owners had things to tell. Not schoolboy yarns, but stories, for all that, which, in the form of deathless history, will be written for the boys of the next generation. Oh, yes, very like school, even to the gaps in the ranks, replaced by the newcomers. So many of the old faces missing—good men who had had their

last remove. In the old days it was a name hacked with a penknife on a desk, now a roughly painted inscription on a plain wooden cross to remember them by. Looking at those pitiable crosses makes me think of poor old Colonel Newcome and wonder whether they had time to get in "Adsum!" before they went out.

There were no tuck-boxes in the trenches on my first morning there, but when the dawn broke and it was safe to light a fire tea was brewing in bully tins. "Have a cup, sir?" says someone, and with much pride, "There's condensed milk in it." Mighty strong and grateful was that mug of tea. My cigarette-case comes out after it. "Thanks, sir. Don't waste a match. After you, sir." And we light up from a stick taken from the fire. "Glad to see you back, sir. Where did they get you? In the arm?" Then we chat casualties. The slight ones are discussed with professional imperturbability; but

when it's a case of a pal or an officer lost for all time sore affliction comes into the faces of the group of men around. A few bald words, a gruff voice, averted eyes, tell more eloquently than any lengthy glowing description of somebody's heroic end. "He was the best chum I ever had." "Ah, he was a gentleman, he was. A finer officer never lived." And there's just as much feeling in the tone for the one as the other. Then the speaker fidgets with the bolt of his rifle, looks to see if his magazine is charged, and with set jaw goes down the trench. You find him presently with his finger on the trigger staring through some peep-hole patiently waiting to avenge his loss.

It was a three-mile tramp in the dark the night before, and the men started off with "Here we are again." Ours isn't exactly a musical regiment, but the cheery words and the rhythm of the air got into my toes. I'm afraid it gradually changed to "Green-

land's icy mountains," though the words sounded rather like "Kathleen Mavourneen." I'm not quite sure; my ear for music is about as defective as the average German's. It's unaccountable to me how the Boches have got a reputation for being a musical nation. So far as I can see it's only based on their frantic desire to make a noise. The way they interfere with a piano is unbelievable. Occasionally they have one in their trenches, and if we're close enough to hear it, the men complain of the absence of tune in the performance. "What the blazes are you playin'?" one of them shouted across once. "Wagner,' came the reply. "Well," grumbled Tommy, "I don't wonder we're fightin' you about it!"

It isn't quite accurate to say that the tuck-box is never seen in the trenches. It's taken there from Billets or the Reserve Lines, if it arrives in time. You are in high favour with the residents of our dug-out on ac-

count of the last parcel. Grateful thanks were accorded you (and Holy Russia) for the caviare especially. When our mess servant opened the jar he looked at it doubtfully and hazarded the opinion that "sardine oil had got into the sago and turned it bad." But he had been made suspicious by the olives, one of which he had tasted and then gone out hurriedly. We heard afterwards he'd expressed his disgust to some of the rank and file at our liking for "pickled plums."

I confess we ardently look forward to the receipt of these treats. You can buy practically nothing in the villages. They've been cleaned out of everything eatable long since. But we suffered a terrible disappointment over a certain box a little time back. It was sent to one of our fellows by his sister. The contents looked most inviting—tins and jars and packets of various cooked foods and condiments. That day for some reason the Commissariat wasn't

working full time, but with this box of delicacies we felt able to ignore its shortcomings. With appetites in first-class order we started on a tin labelled "Protemno,' which we took to be a *hors d'œuvre* of sorts. The only thing I can liken it to is fine sawdust flavoured with Stickphast. We had a go in turn at "Neo-gamine" soup, "Compactum," described as a food and tonic in one, and other high-sounding comestibles. One and all proved absolutely uneatable.

I don't like to think of that meal. We felt emptier than ever after it, and were strongly of the opinion that it was planted on us as a practical joke, until it came out that the sender is a confirmed vegetarian. Every one of those so-called foods consisted of highly-concentrated proteids and albumenoids, which really means mashed peas and nuts and starch, not counting chemical additions supposedly permitted by the Adulteration of Food and Drugs Act. We talk about the unauthorized

means the Boches employ for killing us off, but I'm not sure I wouldn't as soon be "laid out" with chemicals as have my interior arrangements ruined by the abominations which vegetarians delight to feed on.

This distaste of theirs for good, wholesome meat is incomprehensible to men who need it. We're flesh-eating creatures, I take it, or we shouldn't be provided with canine teeth. I can't conceive of Joshua's army blowing down the walls of Jericho on a vegetarian diet. Flesh-pots and fighting men seem a reasonable enough combination. And if it's right to kill to eat it can't be wrong to kill to live. That's what we're doing here now. The enemy as well as ourselves. We can't help it. It's a case of doing as you are done by and doing it first if you can. The difference between us and the Boches is that they prefer underhand warfare and we hold with straightforward fighting. I'm quite sure that when

the commandment "Thou shalt do no murder" was handed out, there were either no Germans in the crowd or that they pretended not to understand the language. They'll have a lot to answer for by and by. There's always a big bill to pay when the individual knocks up against the tablets of stone, and there's no reason to suppose that a nation will be let off.

Well, that's all for to-day. A dull letter, I'm afraid ; but I warned you it might be. We're none of us very good—officers or men—at describing our own line of business (the evidence of the ha'penny papers notwithstanding) ; but set us a composition on "Home" and there wouldn't be enough ink and paper to go round. Well, that's what we're fighting for, isn't it?—Home and the sweet-faced women who have made it. So long, little Mother. It must seem *so long* to you, I know.

Every bit of my love.

CHOTA.

(5)

DEAREST,

I know you put your heart in that P.S.: "Dear Boy, do tell me more about *yourself*." I'm always meaning to, but directly I begin, I unaccountably dry up. The essential thing is, I'm remarkably well. I shouldn't be in harness again if I weren't. Yes, the knitted arrangement fits perfectly; in fact there's almost too much fit about it, but I suppose it will stretch. I've got it on, and I won't discard it, honest Injun. My kit is in fair repair generally, though no one mends my socks. It saves trouble to get new ones, a bit thick and hefty, from the A.S.C. (hosiery department).

I meant to have asked you in my last

letter to drop a line to Madame de ——
to thank her for her many kindnesses to
me. And don't forget to include Made-
moiselle Désirée. A dear little girl, that;
so different from the ordinary run one
meets. When I left the château she gave
me a souvenir—a little mother-o'-pearl
crucifix—a talisman to keep me safe. I've
an idea it will.

Anyhow, going across an exposed spot
a couple of days ago to the support of the
Brigade on our right, we ran into a hottish
rifle fire. We couldn't see where it was
coming from and there wasn't any cover.
It was rather like being unexpectedly
caught in a hail squall. The only thing to
do was to sprint for it. As you know, I'm
pretty good on the quarter-mile mark, so
giving the men a "View Hallo," I set the
pace. Being a few yards in advance I
didn't expect them to catch up with me,
but to my surprise the beggars did. Some
of them, in fact, got in front and spread

out in a sort of screen between me and the spot where the bullets were coming from. When I tumbled to what they were at I yelled to them to ease up. But do you think they would? Not they: they pretended they didn't hear. When we got out of the trouble two of those good fellows began giving each other first aid. They had deliberately taken the fire meant for me! I'm thankful to say they were only suffering from flesh wounds, and I felt it incumbent on me to expostulate, pointing out what they'd got for disobeying orders. They only grinned. One of them had the audacity to deny that he was wounded at all; said his nose always started bleeding when he ran fast (his cheek was laid open), and the other capped it by trying to explain away a damaged hand as the result of "'avin' it in the air when Bill barged into me, sir."

They're up to these games all the time, always thinking of their officers. I've seen

them wounded and keeping on as if nothing had happened. It's not that they don't feel the pain—make no mistake about that—they *won't* feel it. During an advance, if cover's scanty, they won't monopolize it if an officer is anywhere about. When you do the smallest thing for their comfort or convenience they're quick to appreciate it; in success their enthusiasm is the most sanely delightful thing conceivable; a reverse doesn't dishearten them. They grumble at trifles and laugh at difficulties. Oh, Tommy's a wonderful chap. When I start talking about him I daresay I get monotonous in my praise, but to the unending glory of the army he deserves it all. There's something about him, dirty or clean, swearing or silent, glad or sad, hurt or whole, that is just *unbeatable*. You can't knock him out. If our fellows are devoted to us, it's only a case of reciprocation. They look up to us and believe in us and obey us with the same blind hero-worship

that youngsters have for their big public-school brothers. It's quite touching.

I wonder if you will think it strange that in the heat of action, or rather in the warm glow of anticipation that precedes it, men frequently intercede with their Maker to help them in their killing? The other day I heard one fairly sob out this prayer while he loaded himself up with hand-grenades: "Oh, Lord, don't let me get done in by them Boches till I've sent at least three of 'em to 'ell. Oh, Lord, who knows what war is 'cos You 'ad it in 'eaven, make it so." For myself, in the midst of all the inferno I seem to hear the clanging of odd fragments of all the Battle Hymns I've ever known.

Jehovah of the Thunders, Lord God of battles, aid!

. . . . . .

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall
never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before
His judgment seat:
Our God is marching on'

That was made in America, but there's red, white and blue all through it.

C.

(6)

It is late and I am very sad. ——— was killed yesterday, almost by my side. It is a knock to lose one's very best friend. If I were a woman I should cry. I almost wish I could. He was such a fine chap, so cheery and such a good soldier. And only twenty-six! The men adored him. It seems such a hopeless waste of good material. I oughtn't to say that, I suppose. From the military point of view the individual can't be considered. To fight for one's country and to die for it, if needs be, is only one's duty as well as one's privilege. Scores of good men as worthy and splendid as ——— have been taken. But it's the selfish personal loss that's cutting deep into me to-night.

Poor Rupert Brook put into words what we inarticulate ones can only echo. They should be carved in stone and put up in Westminster Abbey, or better still in Belgium on a monument to commemorate the honoured dead—immortal verse in praise of the immortals written by one who is already counted amongst them.

> "If I should die think only this of me:
> That there's some corner of a foreign field
> That is for ever England. . ."

Then come words I forget, and then:

> "A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
> Gave once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
> A body of England's, breathing English air,
> Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home."

We buried ——— this evening. When I turned away with a heart of lead I could almost hear his boyish voice reiterating the words that always came most readily to his lips: "Buck up, old chap! It's all in the day's work."

I can't realize that he is really dead. My mind keeps reverting to the days of our first meeting. It's getting on for twenty years ago but it seems only yesterday that we were little chaps of eight and ten and very sore-hearted at leaving home for the first time. We slept in the same dormitory, and smothered our grief under the bed-clothes, but when, like whales, we had to come to the surface to breathe, we heard each other's sobs. We chummed up that night. Do you remember his coming to stay with us the first hols and how shy he was when you kissed him? He thought you looked too young! Then Wellington and Sandhurst strengthened the bond between us. A few years of soldiering and now—finish!

Little soul, it's all so sad. I must write to the girl (there was one). There's so little I can say. "I loved him too," can't comfort her. I know I needn t apologize for letting myself go once in a way. You'll

understand. There's a gloom over us all. Dear old —— is well dug into his last trench to-night. This time yesterday we were curled up in our blankets having a final pipe and watching the stars. He is—I mean was, or is it still "is"?—such an imaginative being, full of speculations about the infinite and the ultimate meaning of things—the giant Query.

Well, he knows more than I do now—unless there's no answer at all.

C.

(7)

My Dearest Mother,

I have had such a sweet letter—so unexpected—from my little Belgian friend! It was like a rose out of her garden. Written in English too! I can picture how often the little golden head must have bent in pretty uncertainty over the English dictionary. I copy the letter for you. I would send it, but it might get lost in transit, and I've rather a fancy to keep it. You have only to imagine the writing—the clear, symmetrical hand the French teach (Désirée went to school at a French convent).

Dear M. le Capitaine,

In the times of peace it would not be correcte that I write to a gentleman unmarried, but these are the days

of the war so terrible, to cause one to follow first the inspiration of the heart. Therefore I have the permission of Maman to inquire from you the news of your health, and to express the hope that we see you again presently, not *hors de combat* as we say in French, but well and for a small resting.

Maman and myself have been extremely honoured to receive a so charming and thankful letter from madame your mother. Truly we deserve no thanks for the small hospitality it was our happiness to extend to you and your amiable compatriots, of which we think always with great pleasure. Nevertheless, the letter of madame your mother was charming. I have made a little reply to it, and you will pardon me that I have spoken to her much of you, of how you look and of your good spirit, for it is not probable, M. le Capitaine, that you

tell of such matters yourself which are always of great importance to a mother.

We are greatly occupied at this moment because of seven more of the wounded who come to us since yesterday. Nevertheless, Maman desires me to say that when the opportunity, greatly to be desired, shall arrive and you find yourself in our neighbourhood we shall be desolate if you do not revisit us.

Accept, M. le Capitaine, the most amiable sentiments and the good wishes from Maman and myself for your success and your continual safety.

Your little friend belge,

Désirée ——.

Probably you ask why I write in english when you understand the french so well. It is, if you will please

neglect the faults, the little compliment I would pay you.

Doesn't it sound delightful? I know the last sentence was an attempt to make me feel at home, and that I have good friends in a foreign country. I owe that to you. Had you not written to these dear people little Désirée would not have had the excuse to write to me.

I've been in luck this week with my correspondence. Of course nothing can make up for the loss of ——, but I try and convince myself that where he is he cannot be lonely. The army of the Lord must be full of good men and true like himself. I like to think of him somewhere in the serenity of space, looking on and seeing more of the Great War Game than we with our limitations can.

But I'm not going to be gloomy to-day. The sun is shining and the flowers fairly riot bloom. Wherever this unhappy coun-

try has escaped the defiling hand of the invader Nature seems to be trying to atone for his misdeeds. In this zone such exceptions are rare enough. You come across them like surprises. Yet in the most unlikely places Nature keeps on struggling to assert herself. A few nights ago we slept in what was left of a deserted farmhouse on the edge of a wood. It had been badly shelled and the garden literally upheaved. But two things persisted in it—the birds and the flowers. Very few of the flowers are growing where they were planted. The guns had blown them, roots and all, this way and that, and where they had fallen they had taken root again, in crannies of the walls, on the remains of roof, among heaps of débris, anywhere—stocks, sweet williams, snapdragons, love-lies-bleeding, forget-me-not—all the homely flowers you love. The effect would have struck you as farcical if there hadn't been so much of tragedy in it.

As for the birds, I've never seen so many gathered together in peace time. In the morning their song shamed the réveillé. It was one continuous serenade. Naturally, I can't spot the different varieties by their note, but "Pretty Dick" of Ours, who is by way of being a naturalist and contributes to the *Field*, greeted each by name and whistled responses to their calls. We others had to give up all attempts at a last snooze.

> "The little birds sang east,
> The little birds sang west,
> And I smiled to think God's greatness
> Flowed around our incompleteness,
> Round our restlessness His rest."

I can't think where those lines come from, but they fit the occasion and I rather like them. Odd how stray ends of verse stick in the memory. One forgets authors and origin, but that doesn't prevent them, like birds, coming home to roost.

And now I must tell you about "Kim." One day perhaps you'll see him. He's just the ugliest puppy you can imagine, with the most beautiful eyes that ever shone in dog's or human's face. Barring his eyes he hasn't a physical point to recommend him. The little beggar appeared out of nowhere while we were on the march a week ago and attached himself to me. He didn't look lost or starving or miserable, so I told him to go home. I said it in English, which of course he didn't understand. He stuck to me all day, and although I lost sight of him when we reached our quarters for the night, he was on hand when I turned out in the morning—waiting. I gave him his breakfast and tried to dismiss him. He just wagged his tail and licked my boots. He licked them as though he did it out of love, not puppy-play, and I hadn't the heart to drive him off. After that we understood each other. He belonged—a little dog of Flanders—to me.

"*Eh b'en, mon brave, voici nous des camarades*," I said in the language he was used to, and by the frantic delight he showed I verily believe he understood me, accent notwithstanding.

Soon he was chumming up with the men, and finding a pal in every one of them. Now we should feel quite lost without Kim, so named because he's a "little friend of all the world." Still, he's a tremendous anxiety and more reckless in his disregard of shell-fire than the most careless of Tommies. How he has managed to escape being potted I don't know. To get over the parapet of a trench and bark at the Boches gives him more enjoyment than anything else. It's a business to get him back without risking human life.

I hope he'll get through all right. I should miss him now. It seems much more than a week since he started to eat out of my hand. He fancies ration biscuit no end, and I fairly envy his teeth! I wonder what

Fifi and Bengy will think of him if they ever meet him. You'll have to explain to them that he must be treated with great respect, since they, so to speak, are the backboneless "knuts ' of the dog-world, whereas Kim is the seasoned warrior and worth a dozen of them in all that matters. He's lying at my feet as I write. He's so ready with his affectionate pink tongue that I think I'll get him to lick the envelope for me!

I'm so glad to hear that you have Norah —— with you. She's just the sort of companion you want just now and I hope she'll make a long stay. Now, don't smile that little wise smile of yours! I'm perfectly well aware of your fond plans for both of us, though I hope N. hasn't seen through them. It must hurt the proper pride of a nice girl when she can't help seeing that a man's mother would like her for a daughter-in-law in spite of the fact that the man doesn't show himself of the same way of

thinking. N.'s much too good for me. Give her my love.

To-night we're sleeping in a barn. Most of the fellows must be writing home; they're so quiet. The air smells of the one scent the richest of women cannot have distilled for her—essence of summer night, earth, flowers, dew—a fragrance too fleeting to be captured and put in a glass-stoppered bottle. Think of a crowd of men sitting, each with a pen in his hand and a different adored image in his mind's eye. We want to say such a lot, how we love you and long to see you, and in what perfect reverence we hold you, and then just as we get in the mood to let ourselves go we remember that Englishmen are generally ridiculous when they're sentimental. So we dry up, and for all the tender things we meant to say, the love and the kisses, you must look between the lines.

Come on, Kim! Say good-night to the Little Woman. It's time we turned in.

You'll sleep with one eye open though mine will be tight shut!

Your devoted CHOTA.

Added since last night.

This is to tell you to expect Private —— whom I'm sending to you (with a formal letter of introduction) for a few days' holiday. How he managed to get leave I don't know, but he's an Irishman and capable of anything. Give him a good time and feed him on duck and green peas. He says he's been dreaming of nothing else for a week!

He's the sort of chap who's never happy unless he's doing odd jobs for somebody. So give him the run of the place. He'll wind your wool and the clocks and brush the dogs. You can also let him loose in the kitchen garden and the stables. He has all an Irishman's love of horses, and Kitty will be quite safe with him. He won't believe she walks into the house when you're at

lunch and asks for biscuits. "'Tis only the pigs would do that same," he says.

But don't believe the tall yarns he's likely to pitch about me. He's the sort of grateful idiot who will tell you I saved his life the day I won the battle of Neuve Chapelle! And don't present him with six tummy belts. If you do he'll wear them all at once to please you. Also keep an eye on the housemaids if you don't want them demoralized by his blarney. "The colleens" are his weakness. He calls himself a "lonely soldier" and has a "way wid him.' You'll find that out for yourself.

By the way, he's a Catholic, of course. Fix him up a shrine, with the Virgin and a lighted lamp, and he'll think he's in paradise. A plucky good chap, or I wouldn't plant him on to you. Too utterly dare-devil to last this campaign. That's why I want him to enjoy himself while he can. You'll see to that.

C.

(8)

Dearest and Very Dear,

Has it ever occurred to you that the "Letters from the Front" published in the newspapers are very much edited? That is the opinion of one of the Censor's Staff with whom I'm acquainted, and it's also mine after seeing unfinished letters found on some of our poor chaps who have fought their last fight. Very few of those letters described any of the exciting doings their writers may have been engaged in. Most of them were worded in homely, affectionate language to wives or sisters or mothers—full of sentiment, in fact.

I rather envy the simple souls—the grocer's young man and the under-housemaid—who see no necessity to hide their emotions behind the written word. What

they honestly feel they set down on paper to the best of their ability, often very charmingly. You see the same thing in their everyday actions. The man courting his girl (I believe the correct term is his "little bit of fluff") goes about with his arm round her waist for all the world to see. The girl kisses him good-bye in public and broad daylight. Neither consider they have anything to be ashamed of. Nor have they. When they're married, and he wants in a letter to say he loves her he tells her so at length with a line of crosses for kisses. If the letter is to his mother he's just as genuinely outspoken. I've read both kinds and I know.

Yet, when I write to you I don't seem to have the capacity of the grocer's young man for expressing real feeling. I can't emulate his stirring, downright diction or his flowery phrases. Some of them are too crude I suppose, and some too trite for a public-school-fed pen. It's a discreditable

admission, I daresay, but I know other men who suffer the same disability. With them and myself "I love you" has to stand for everything. It means "thank you for being my mother."

It was easy to see by your last letter that you had a fit of the blues, in spite of the largesse of brave words you poured out. Birthdays mean so little to a man. You can hardly expect me to be filled with emotion at remembering that twenty-nine years ago I was an unlovely brat. Of course you will deny that. A mother's ugly duckling is always her resplendent swan (and just as unmusical!). I daresay you *would* like to go back on time and have me in your arms once more, a small bundle of insignificant fragility. But, you dear, think of all I'd be missing! Don't imagine that, because as a youngster I took your love for granted, I haven't appreciated it ever since. It has always been a miracle to me, one to worship you for. Darling Mother,

best and most precious, for once in a way I'll take a leaf out of the books of Piou-Piou and the grocer's young man and say how I would love to kiss and squeeze you and let you go breathless only to take you in my arms again, you Littlest Darling!

I am quite sure you imagined me to be spending my birthday in the trenches under heavy shell-fire, and that when you compared this anniversary with past ones it made you golomy (which is a misprint for gloomy and a new and a wonderfully expressive addition to the language). Admit it now—you also had a presentiment that I was mortally wounded. Presentiment is, as you see, as dangerous as prophecy. As a matter of fact, I was in Paris. Headquarters, of course, were blissfully ignorant that one of their most brilliant officers was a year older and (let us hope) wiser, and allowed the event to pass without beat of drum. But as good luck would have it, it did not for all that go uncelebrated. Things

have temporarily quieted down in this zone, and —— and I quite unexpectedly got very short leave, too short for a run home (that is a joy to come); only twenty-four hours, in fact.

I wonder what you would think of Paris if you could see it now. Men who knew it before '70 tell me that it has altered more in the last few months than in the previous twenty years. The people, not the city itself. Fresh from it I can well believe all they say. In fact to me the place itself seemed to have changed, although I've only known it off and on of recent years. When I was last there Paris was like a girl, very charming, pretty, engaging, quite lovable. She was heart-whole; sorrow had not touched her. Now, in place of the girl I remember I find a woman, calm and sorrowful, almost stoic, restrained. To-day, all the soul of her is glass-clear, beautiful in its affliction.

We did the first part of our journey in a

returning motor-ambulance. It saved us a lot of time and also gave us the opportunity of seeing some of the country fought over before we settled down to underground warfare. To describe the woeful damage to the villages would only be repetition. You've read the unhappy story in the papers. What no pen can describe is the mental havoc wrought in the survivors. Looking at these poor souls, and remembering that not a touch of war had disfigured my own country, I almost felt ashamed at its immunity. These people are quite passionless. But it is not, as some would have it, a bovine impassivity. The French and Flemish peasants are simple but not simpletons as they very often are in the depths of rural England. All their emotional excitement has spent itself. You don't hear a murmur of complaint. They have fed on all the horrors. The rest is a terrible silence which they do not break with useless lamentation.

After the ambulance, the train—south of the Aisne. There things looked fairly normal until we got out at the Gare de l'Est. Then we were in camp again. Soldiers filled the station and the streets. Every other shop appeared to be closed. The cafés were lifeless. The Parisian is too true a votary of joy to pursue it at the wrong time. To see French people, Parisians above all, grave of face and thoughtful, almost without exception, gives one almost a sensation of pain. It signifies that Paris, the trunk-nerve of France, is all sympathy. Men of fighting age are not to be seen, only *anciens* and boys. The women are dressed in black or sober greys.

Still, there was one comfort in seeing Paris, subdued as it is. It gave me a double satisfaction to know it had escaped being overrun by the Boches—firstly because of the absence of damage to it, and secondly because of the bitter disappointment they must have felt at their failure to take it. I

doubt whether in the whole course of the war they will suffer anything to equal that. You have to know what German bombast and cocksureness are to appreciate their blighted hopes. I sigh with gigantic relief to think what Paris escaped. When the Allies get near Berlin let us hope there won't be any similar slip "'twixt the cup and the lip." If there's one thing the Belgians have truly earned it is the humiliation of the Huns in their own vaunted capital. And may I be there to help!

Thanks for small mercies, there's one noticeable improvement in Paris. You can get across the streets now without running the risk of being rammed by off-side motor-cars! They've all been requisitioned for military purposes. You remember what the Champs-Elysées used to be like, with the stream of cars tearing up and down it at forty miles an hour? You can saunter across its emptiness to-day.

To see English Tommies strolling about

the boulevards was another novelty. The Parisians have quite taken to Tommy, and he to them. Perhaps they mistake his easy unconcern for modesty. They love to see him salute their own officers, about which he's most punctilious. I got a lot of amusement watching him in the company of the French rank and file. They are on the most amiable terms, and manage to understand one another through sheer camaraderie. Piou-Piou gesticulates and Tommy slaps him heartily on the back. Sometimes Tommy knows a little French. I heard one, a long service man, who had evidently been in India, explaining himself to a bewildered Frenchman something like this:

Tommy (holding up a cigarette): Avez-vous un match, vieux sport?

Piou-Piou (thinking the cigarette is meant for him): Merci bien. Voodbine? Verrie good.

Tommy: Oui, not half. Après vous before it *hogeas*. (Sees a pretty girl while he is light-

ing up from Piou-Piou's match.) *Dekko! Jaldi!* Un petit morso de all-right, quar?

Piou-Piou: Oui, oui, belle jeune fille.

Tommy: Donnez souvenir, eh? (Fishes out a sixpence from his pocket. Piou-Piou takes off his képi to the girl and explains the situation. Girl blushes with pleasure.)

Girl: Mais c'est très charmant de monsieur.

Tommy (cap off): Not at all. Par de too, mamselle. Au-resevoir.

(Girl bows prettily and walks on.)

Tommy: Votre *ourats* jolly well prenez le biscuit.

Piou-Piou (looking bewildered): Plait-il?

Tommy: The prize—cadeau. J'aimer tout le boiling. You comprenez what I mean, *sumja?*

Piou-Piou (looking dumbfounded): Oui, oui.

Tommy: Course you do! Then nous allons gargle—have a *peg*—a bock somewhere. Marchongs!

Piou-Piou: Ah, un bock! Si, si!

Tommy: Vive la France! Vive Angleterre! Vive everybody, except the blighted Germans!

(They go off arm-in-arm.)

It loses in the telling, but it sounded very funny. Very much love.

CHOTA.

(9)

Darling Mother,

I thought you'd wonder at my going off to Paris when I might have spent my leave in renewing a very pleasant friendship with the de ———. The friendship is there, and it won't cease. Unfortunately, it isn't always expedient to go where one's inclinations would take one. I've never kept things from you, so I may as well own up right here that the less I see of little Désirée the better for my peace of mind. I don't think it's fair, at least it wouldn't be in my case, to get engaged or to marry a girl in war-time, offering her love in one hand and probable sorrow in the other.

Don't refer to this when you write, because I don't want to dwell on it. You

needn't, however, imagine that I'm melancholy. I might be if I saw more of her. As it is, I only send my thoughts straying her way when I want to, which is a sure indication that I've got myself in hand.

Now, I think of you on and off all the while and can't help it. In the morning I know the exact time you are in the garden pottering about amongst the roses. I know too that more than once a day you go into my bedroom and shut the door and just stand still and look round. I think of you in the afternoon when people begin to drop in, and I can fairly *see* the expression on your face each time anyone says: "And what news of your son?" Then you and the visitor draw your chairs a little closer and tell each other little bits out of the letters you have each received from the absent one. But you aren't sentimental, and you won't show your dearest friend the inside lining of your heart. Outwardly, you're intensely calm. "There have al-

ways been soldiers in my husband's family. I'm glad my son got sent out so soon. He wanted to go. Yes, the roses are still very nice, aren't they? but they were quite a show last week. . . . No, I hadn't heard that Mrs. ———'s boy has been killed (*steady, voice!*). And just after he was recommended for the D.S.O.? What bad—luck! (*sitting very straight in your chair*). I'm thankful to say ——— has been most fortunate so far—only wounded in the arm. Quite a scratch. It doesn't do to be unduly anxious, you know. One hopes for the best."

Bravo, little woman! And if certain lines or the equivalent of their sentiment run in your head you crush them down and no one's the wiser except the God who made you a mother.

> I did not raise my son to be a soldier,
> I brought him up to be my pride and joy.
> Who dares to place a musket on his shoulder
> To kill some other mother's darling boy?

——— arrived back yesterday on the heels of your letter telling me all about him. He's full of beans, a model for the "Fit and Fat Brigade." However, the fatness will soon wear off. He fairly worships you. That was inevitable. He tells me you have promised him a place in the establishment as soon as the war is over, but so as to make doubly sure of keeping you to your word I gather he's made love to your maid, two housemaids and old nurse. Anyway, it's a moral certainty that you'll see him again if anyone does. He wanted to tell me about everything he had done and seen in one breath—the place, you, you, the place, the dinners he had had, you, the bed he had slept in, you. When at last I managed to get in a question as to how you were looking he answered:

"Sure, herself is lookin' like the Mother of God and all the saints in Heaven. And whinever I did be spakin' of you, sor, her eyes was that full of the moisthure you

couldn't see the colour of them for the shine."

But as to whether you looked well or ill, I couldn't get much out of him. Once he admitted you were pale, but then his own idea of a good colour is brick-red. What seemed to strike him most was that you didn't ask him to talk about the war. For this he was deeply grateful.

"Herself is the wise woman," he said. "No doubt she'll be appreciatin' that ye can't see anything to mention when all ye're allowed to do in this holy war is to hide yourself for fear of bein' shot."

He's like Kim, fairly asking for it.

It was clever of you to appreciate that, even if we could, we don't want to talk about war. A sailor will never describe a shipwreck if he can help it; a soldier does not care to give more than technical details of a battle, and of course he's even precluded from doing this when he's a participator, not a spectator. Those who want

grim details can have 'em by reading certain papers that publish that sort of thing. I quote from a Sunday penny weekly (short story) which I came across the other day:

"The battle was over. . . . Some were silent as the grave; others, squirming as in death-throes, murmured or groaned, or screamed according to the degree of consciousness left. It was war, in all its grim horror."

And so on for a column or two more. The author hadn't been there, and his imagination must have got lost and strayed into the German lines. After a battle *our* wounded are nearly as silent as the dead.

Sensible people avoid discussing fighting with soldiers. If Tommy talks to you of his own accord well and good. With the Indian troops it's different. They're in a new world, and it's not to be wondered at that they can't keep their impressions of it

to themselves. Moreover, to the fighting castes war, like religion, is the breath of their lives.

Just now, with a native division in the place, you can at times almost imagine yourself in India. The warm weather helps the illusion—that and the smell of the cooking when the wind blows our way. I like it. I also like forgathering with them when I can. It's funny how the language has come back to me considering I left India when a mere *butcha*. True, when I speak it I mix it with French like Tommy on the boulevard, and then it's Chandra Singh's turn to stare instead of Piou-Piou's. But I understand it quite well.

I have smoked the pipe of peace with a Subadar Major who has exhibited extraordinary reverence towards me ever since he discovered that my father commanded his very own regiment in the days when he was a sepoy. At first he was too full of the technical differences between fighting as he

had known it on the North-west border and under European conditions to be interesting; but when he came down to bedrock he burst into a sort of Magnificat, an extolling of the glories of everything warlike. It came after a long pause. His eyes were fixed in the introspective stare peculiar to the Oriental whenever he delivers himself of anything fervent. As near as I can remember it this is what he said. You might almost call it the song of his soul.

"War is good. It is beautiful to kill. Of all the pleasures of life, sahib, the greatest are these: love of a woman and the joy of battle. For what is more satisfying than the rapture of love or the slaying of an enemy? One brings contentment and the other peace. Yea, love is good, but war is better. Surfeit of love a man can have, so that it renders him slothful. In contentment his body waxes fat and his mind drowsy. Then is the sword blunted. But in war men grow lean of body and exalted in spirit. The lust

of battle does not pall. The sharp sword is like a trusty friend. It giveth vigour to the arm and courage to the heart. Yea, all wars are good, but this, because it is a sahib's war, is best of all. Thus it is easy for one like me, a servant, to take part in it without fear and to serve my Raj with gladness. Death is inevitable and its hour unknown. So that a man die fighting it is a little thing. For what is death? Does the child fear to be born? Therefore why should a man fear to die? The brave never die. He that is of a stout heart and showeth courage earneth eternal merit."

A very white man in spite of the colour of his skin, don't you think?

I've just heard that the C.O. is going to inspect us. That means I've got to overhaul my Company first and see that the villains are tidy. I'm always expecting he'll ask to see their nails!! My love.

C.

(10)

DEAREST MOTHER,

Since I wrote you last I have been taken out of the humdrum of trench and billet life, seeing new sights and getting some interesting experiences. For once in a way I can be thankful for the stream of visitors to Divisional Headquarters. There were so many of them that the Staff were overworked showing them about, and thanks to my modest knowledge of French one of them was handed over to me. It meant a motor-car and practically liberty to go where I liked. My charge was an American and a distinguished one at that. Better still, he was interesting and clever. You know I'm partial to the good-class pure American. He's so palpably

alive. This one was particularly so. We had a delightful time together.

It was a case of the guide deriving as much pleasure as the disciple. For a start I had, of course, to take him the usual round of inspection of our Brigade, but that done (and I didn't let it take longer than I could help) we motored off, attracted by the sound of spasmodic firing to the south. Thanks to a tip from a good-natured despatch rider whom we met on the road, ten miles on we tumbled on a Brigade Commander's quarters from which an interesting little scrap was being conducted. The name of the place doesn't signify and you wouldn't be any the wiser if I gave it to you, which for obvious reasons I can't. But you may identify it for yourself in the next published despatch.

Just at the edge of a wood that sloped gently downwards we had a view of level country very slightly broken by folds in the ground like long gentle swells of the sea.

There was a slight rise two-thirds of the way across, a mile or so from our front trenches and about four from where we stood. This we were told was the objective of our attack. At the time of our arrival it hadn't developed; only desultory artillery fire was going on from somewhere on our right, still further south. Still, even if I had not known that something was afoot, I think I should have guessed it. There was a certain tension in the manner of those who were conducting it, and seemingly in the atmosphere of the place itself. It was not exactly silence, for the birds were chirruping and larks sang unresentfully overhead. But the absolute absence of any movement, always excepting a couple of aeroplanes circling so high up that their engines were inaudible, in all those miles of country, which obviously must be scored by trenches and teeming with soldiers, pointed to something unusual.

We only had our noses above ground,

for you must understand that nowadays a battle is as often as not directed from a dug-out. This one was, anyway—a pretty big dug-out, masquerading as a telephone box. It held one instrument and a switch-board, and the General's aide sat before it with the receiver glued to his ear, and his fingers busy with the pegs as he talked incessantly to battery and infantry and artillery-observing officers scattered over miles of country.

Just as a curtain is rung up at a theatre, so things began. Directed from the dug-out, invisible batteries began thundering. We watched their shells bursting all around the distant ridge, churning it up like water—an irruption of dirty brown earth and dense smoke. It went on for forty minutes or so. Behind us the aide was digging his pegs into the switch-board, talking all the time, controlling the fire, giving ranges, warning unseen regiments to be ready for the advance. And all the

while not a man showed between us and the horizon. It was the uncanniest panorama imaginable, a storm of projectile coming out of the unseen and converging on what looked like a deserted hillock. Then, just as abruptly as the guns had opened, the firing ceased, and simultaneously men, the size of dots, rose in long lines out of the plain and crept (as it seemed, though I knew the fellows were going at the double) nearer and nearer to the smoke-topped ridge. I could hear the continuous rattle of rifle fire and the quicker purr of machine guns, though whether they were ours or the Germans' or both it was impossible to tell. Nor could I at that distance have told how the affair ended, but for the voice at the telephone.

"Righto! Good luck! Splendid! Dig in!" it came out with at last, and as if to celebrate success the guns, with increased range to interfere with the enemy's supports, banged away again, sending their

shells somewhere beyond the position won.

There, I've given you the best description I can of an actual battle, and you've got to thank an American stranger for it. He said it was the finest side-show he had ever seen, and thanked me as if I'd stage-managed it purposely for him. The truth is I was as much impressed and certainly more intimately affected by it than he could possibly be. To be in a fight, stirred by the excitement of it, leaves you no time for anxieties about danger and results. Your sensations are then entirely individual. You're not concerned with anything beyond the credit of your own company or regiment. You take it for granted that they'll play the game and come well out of it. You hardly have time to anticipate and deplore the inevitable casualties in your ranks. It seems a matter of moments and mental exaltation. But to be a passive spectator of the same thing, to

watch the operation from a distance, so that you get the whole perspective of it and have time to wonder how this body of men break through the wire which you know is between them and a shattering machine-gun fire, or that section be held up and decimated by it, is a nervy experience. The stranger knows nothing, except by hearsay, of the cruel lot of the poor chaps who strew the ground during the advance, or of the heart-rending sights incidental to a forced retirement. You have time to think about them when you're a watcher only, to feel your heart sink with uncertainty while your eyes follow those distant dots of men who seem to go so slow, so very slow, as if they were purposely courting death. Up above them the sky was serene and clear, but I think the angels wept.

No, all said and done, I would far rather be in a battle than watch it. The civilian no doubt visualizes the General in command, calm and stoical, far from the firing line,

perhaps smoking a cigarette, thinking of tactical considerations and his own reputation as he throws masses of men against a murderous enemy. That may be and probably is the temperament of a German G.O.C. His men to him are mere *dungervolk* and cannon-fodder. But I doubt whether any allied commander doesn't feel a grave responsibility to God as well as man when he goes into battle. I know of English generals who are father and mother to their soldiers, anyway.

When I was a child the Biblical assurance that God cared for every sparrow that fell to the ground used to puzzle me considerably. It didn't seem reasonable that He could care if He allowed it to fall, but viewing things in the light of a maturer judgment it seems to me now that for some omnipotent reason He must remain powerless to stop mortality amongst birds or mankind. It doesn't necessarily signify that the Maker of Men is callous any more

than a commander of men. Men, leaves, empires, sparrows must all fall, each in their appointed time. If Deity only grieves over us that's a big thing in itself. The machinery of existence can't come to a standstill because a few millions of individuals get pulped in the process. It's a Great Machine and the works are perfect, though we don't understand them.

My speculations are far from the point and quite abstruse. Cut them out if you like.

Take care of yourself. *Feed well.* —— told me that they are quite concerned in the servants' hall because you don't seem to "take to" your food. Now, old lady, that isn't fair of you. I shan't feel happy if, when I see you, you've lost weight. Now then!

CHOTA.

(*Excerpt from a letter*)

The Prince! God bless him! We all

drank his health to-night. Twenty-one and in the thick of it! He must be having the time of his life. He was all eagerness to get out, and now that he is here, all eagerness to do and see all he can. Think of the experience! It's impossible to exaggerate the advantage all this will be to him. A future king, and a king of England at that, could not ask more of Fortune than to have it. To mix, as the Prince does, with men of all ranks, to be sharing their work, to be seeing life in the raw and the majesty of unpanoplied death; to be working and sweating with the rest of us under a discipline that tempers and hardens men's souls as it hardens their muscles and enlarges their outlook on life! What an inestimable boon to a man who is to rule men! And he'll profit by it. Some of us will live to see a great King in England.

Some few weeks ago I was with Jerry ——, who was busy overhauling a new aeroplane, when a young Staff officer,

rather a boy, strolled up and commenced asking one question after another. Very intelligent questions they were, too. Jerry explained things no end, as he always will do when he has a keen listener, and the Boy was eager for knowledge. His eyes never left J.'s face and he never opened his mouth except to ask a quiet, pertinent but entirely unassuming question. After some little time he thanked J. and we saw him get into a small car some distance away and drive off with another man. We only knew later who he was.

Did I tell you the story that has gone the round about him and K. of K.? H.R.H. nearly broke his heart because K. wouldn't hear of his going out at first. Finally at an interview he burst out with: "But I don't care if I *am* shot!"

Reputed answer: "Neither do I, sir. *But you can't go!*"

Anyway, he's here now and long life to him. No heeltaps.

(11)

Darling!

LEAVE! A whole blessed solid week of it!

Keep it quiet. I don't want any dinners or congratulations. I want you every moment of the time.

I'll wire you the train later. It'll be Tuesday. Meet me in London. We'll spend a day or two there and finish up at home if that suits you.

We'll travel down by the last train with all the blinds drawn because of aircraft—and hugs! Tell old nurse. And Glenister, if you like. They'd consider themselves aggrieved if they weren't at the door.

Talk about home for the holidays! This beats it out and out! I won't send kisses. You shall have 'em.

Chota.

To think that I shall see the old place again and before the summer's through! Don't let Ball and Roberts get tidying the grounds up too much. I want to see what improvements I can make in the time.

Perhaps if you think we ought to, you can ask the Vicar and Dr. ——— and wife and the ——— girls to dinner. I don't want to be entirely selfish and unsociable.

(12)

Dearest,

I suppose I didn't dream it. Yet, now I'm back those five days at home hardly seem real. Like a dream recalled, my doings are coming back in a detached way, one by one without much order and then in lumps! That's the result of cramming so much into a limited period. There's a story of a man who dreamt he was in Heaven and woke up in the train with the guard asking him for his ticket, which he couldn't find.

I feel rather like that man. I was no sooner back chewing the cud of my "leave" reflections in the reserve lines than orders came for an immediate concentration It was nine a.m., abominably wet and

windy, and we got off with everything just anyhow, kit uncollected, units lost, servants strayed and rations to follow in the rear. What it was all about nobody knew. We certainly thought we were "for it." There were all sorts of rumours about the Germans having broken through somewhere, and as we could hear artillery getting busy in the distance there was a certain amount of excitement. We marched for four hours in a downpour and then halted (presumably to dry ourselves) in a derelict village. Nothing to eat and nowhere to get it. The hungrier I got the more I thought of my final luncheon at the "In and Out. When scouting resulted in the securing of a dozen eggs and coffee from the one and only farm in the vicinity we were glad to eat the former raw and drink the latter *au naturel*—black and strong.

Of course, after that rations turned up, but no sooner had we drawn them than another trek had to be done. It was 6.30

p.m. when we halted, still raining in sheets, no cover and fuel soaked. We dug in under the lee of a hedge and so kept out of the wet till the hedge collapsed on top of us. Cooking under these conditions a bit trying. Slept where we were that night; up at 4.30, and in the afternoon found ourselves on the flank of a regiment who were expecting an attack. We were a few hundred yards from the German trenches, but for some reason or other they lay doggo until morning. It broke with a hot mist. You couldn't see more than a dozen yards, and as nothing was doing some of us had a dip in a crater hole which the rain had filled. Then, of course, the Germans started shelling us, and one of their Black Marias came plop into our bath. I got back into our trench with only my boots on! Some of our batteries came up soon afterwards and knocked out the enemy in front, and after another day of intermittent scrapping we got back into billets again, this time in a comfortable

farm-house. It took us all the next day to get clean and dry. Gott strafe Deutschland!

These alternations of war and peace are too kaleidoscopic to let one settle down to anything for long. Even thinking is apt to be interrupted. I feel quite scatterbrained trying to recall my impressions of the short time at home in any order. They're kaleidoscopic too.

I find it difficult to tell you how much that short time actually meant to me. For weeks beforehand I had pictured it, and when I did arrive it seemed years since I had left England. To emerge from a war-scarred country into a land unaltered in every respect was rather a shock. I found myself wondering at the calm, regular routine of it. London, still London, more martial but not martial enough. Khaki and a sprinkling of Navy blue in the street and clubs is a very mild reflection of the real thing in the rough as we have it here. Country towns still asleep, safely nestling round

their old grey churches (all the spires intact); fields smiling, wheat nodding; peasants unperturbed; tiny wayside stations placidly dreaming; men and women for the most part still drowsing—England. Like the sleeping beauty in the deep forest she slumbers on in a trance. What will her waking be?

Having you with me in London, I enjoyed being there, but to tell the truth I was glad to leave it. It made me savage to see creatures of fighting age in mufti, daring to walk the same pavement with men in uniform—backboneless things in coloured socks and straw hats, complacent, unashamed! I don't understand how their women-folk stand it!

It was best to get away from town and back to the old home. The peace there was assured by generations of my ancestors who had fought and bled in other wars for its security. If, like so many other old country homes, it is safe and restful to-day

it's because of the premium on insurance their owners or their sons are paying for it. No brooding drowsiness of decay there; only the ineffable calm of earned repose. I don't think I quite realized how much I loved the place until this particular home-coming. Every stick and stone of it, all its household gods are more than ever to me now. If the shirker of villadom —he's the main culprit—who sits still, surrounded by his Tottenham Court Road furniture and linoleum-covered floors, had, instead, an ancient home full of historical associations, would he better understand the fighting instinct and want to come out and do battle for it? I wonder!

You all struck me as so beautifully clean. Don't smile. Out here cleanliness doesn't come next to godliness. It's a luxury, not a virtue. Dirt and weariness line men's faces. Clothes are the colour of the soil, but, unlike the soil, entirely untended. In England you were all so trim and tidy. I

revelled in the decencies of home, and it was a delight to be with you, but, I must confess it, I was glad to get back again. After three days I had the fidgets when I thought of the good men who hadn't had leave and were doggedly sticking out their everyday life of discomfort in the trenches. I expect you thought me nervy and grumpy towards the end, for I saw you looking at me very wistfully sometimes. You, with a mother's divine prescience, probably knew what was in my mind. Every now and then I felt a positive nostalgia for a sight of the cheery, dirty devils I had left behind; for the very smells (unpleasant as they are when under one's nose) of the air they breathe; for a taste even of something out of a dixie or a camp-oven. For everything in fact except sitting still, twiddling my thumbs while men sweated and fought and died.

How *can* they take it easy, those stay-at-homes who have to be advertised for like

lost or strayed dogs? The vital something which nature has implanted in the heart of a man and a game-cock alike to make them undismayed must be missing in them. If conscription comes I trust the War Office will put the "Wait-till-I'm-fetched" army into a uniform that can't be mistaken for that worn by the voluntary service men. If it doesn't, we here shall feel disgraced. We don't think the same thoughts and we don't want to wear the same kit as the shirkers. They'll only be fit for the dirty work of the army, and I can promise you every man-jack of us will see to it that they do their servile duties full tale. If the appeal of the National Guards, the Gorgeous Wrecks—I should glory in the name were I one of them (this isn't writ sarcastic)—grizzled, stiff of limb, marching along the streets, red-armleted, obsolete Martini carbines on their shoulders—fail as an example to the able-bodied poltroons nothing on earth can be expected to move them. I take

off my hat to the splendid veterans. I think of them as I would of the ghosts of Napoleon's Old Guard. Feeble of body they may be ; but what big hearts beat in those bodies! The French ranks are full of such men, elderly poilus, fathers of families, valiant souls all of them. They fight side by side with their sons, their grandsons not infrequently. In England I watched sleek-haired pipsqueaks, the would-be "nuts" of the towns and the dull-faced yokels of the country-side sneering at the heroic derelicts. Ye Gods, they thought them funny!

One day, not so far off I trust, when they march in inglorious batches, a big brass C attached to their uniforms to distinguish them from us, with N.C.O.'s rounding them up and telling them off till they know themselves for the insects they are, their queer sense of humour will fail them and they'll whimper like whipped curs.

What fatuity it is to talk about equality!

Do the mean creatures who only live to make money out of the war seriously imagine they are the equals of the men who are fighting for them? Can the tradesman who takes advantage of the times to put up his prices and so defraud the public claim to be anything but a canker on the race? What of the shopman who asks a returned wounded soldier double price for anything he comes in to purchase? That he does so is not denied. All of us are familiar with the advertisements in the papers, the shrieking appeal of the trading community to the public to buy this and that, as if it were of infinitely more importance to the latter to spend their money than to use it for prosecuting the war. Look at the crafty way of taking in the charitable and generous by urging them to foist useless things in the guise of "Active Service" commodities on the men at the Front, from a gramophone in solid cowhide case (price £5 18s.) to a nerve tonic at three shillings a bottle!

I'm afraid I'm getting bad-tempered. It must be the reaction. Perhaps it would have been better for me had I not come home and had ocular demonstration of national failings. England's my country and I'll fight for her with the last breath in my body, just as I'd protect a woman I'd married who might have morally deteriorated in some way or other. I fight for what she was, what she may still be, not for what she is now.

What an interminably long screed! I find myself forgetting that I write to you often more as a man to a man than a man to his mother. It's your fault, dear, because you're such a pal. That's the reason why I'm so frank with you, telling you pretty well all my experiences—all except the gagaboo (meaning unpleasant) incidents of war. In that respect I have to be my own censor and hide from you what is not good for a woman to hear. Just as the wise Anglo-Indian memsahib refrains from trying to transform her native cook-house into a

cleanly English kitchen, so will you, being sensible, not look for the more distressing details of campaigning. It's enough that there must sometimes be nastinesses in the kitchen and worse ones in war, in spite of the efforts of sanitary experts in the one case and Hague Conventions in the other. One day perhaps we shall all be so highly civilized that our food will be prepared antiseptically and cooked in a vacuum, and our national disputes settled by our solicitors! If it comes to that, though, meals will probably taste like a chemist shop and the nations never be free from litigation.

Here's the post. And a letter from you. Hurrah!

Love to all,

CHOTA.

(13)

DEAREST,

I have just emerged from a dug-out that would make you stare. Now, there are dug-outs and dug-outs. They all aim at being a home from home, but this one was fairly It. It hadn't a carpet, but it was furnished with old oak (loot from a German trench whose previous occupants had obviously looted it from somewhere else). In it we ate our dinner off delicate Sèvres plates and drank out of rare old cut glasses. A dug-out de luxe! But even the common or garden dug-out shows some attempt at cosiness. I am coming to the conclusion that man is considerably more of a real home-maker than woman. What woman,

living as we do, would, without the incentive of male companionship, go to the trouble of trying to make a mud cave into the semblance of a civilized house? A woman living alone, especially in a temporary abode, troubles little or not at all about her personal comfort. She doesn't even take pains about food. She only studies these two amenities of life if she has a man to share them. Now we, on the contrary, always have a desire to make the best of circumstances. We collect (or steal) planks, bricks, doors and windows to help give a semblance of civilization to our funk-holes. The men keep the trenches neat and make gardens behind the parados. A sense of humour gives spice to the task. It shows in the names bestowed upon our residences—"The Keep," "Minnenwerfer Villa," "TheGasworks." "Myholme" is also very popular. But there's something besides humour that incites Tommy to put up a board marked "Trespassers will be

Prosecuted" over his kitchen garden. He means it. His impotent rage when a German shell ignores the prohibition is comic to a degree.

After one of these annoyances some of the men of my company in desperation stalked a German sentry, brought him in alive and made him write in huge German characters the words KARTOFFELN GARTEN—VERBOTEN, which they hoisted on a board facing the enemy's lines. I believe that sentry is secretly being kept as a hostage against further damage!

We have been very slack just lately. Nothing doing. Kim has had a bath and is accordingly flea-less and uncomfortable. The men are grumbling at the inaction. Although the heat is getting trying, the ground is at least dry, and after a winter of fighting in the mud and wet it seems a pity to waste the fine weather in garden-making and bathing dogs! This must be the first war on record in which hostilities have not

been pressed forward all the summer. We can only wonder at the reason of our inactivity. We don't like to put it down to want of shells, but—we see the papers, and, frankly, the outlook is disheartening. What you read first thing in the morning gets to us in the evening. Imagine an army regularly kept informed of the previous day's doings! Such a thing has never happened before. Likewise never before have the rank and file been newspaper readers. The consequence is that the men are beginning to nourish a grievance against their own country. They put all the trouble down to slackness and strikes—things that concern their own class. They're so bitter against the strikers that if they were suddenly taken back in a body I verily believe they would (if they could) settle that trouble by taking the law into their own hands. It would mean a bad time for any workman who had shirked his job.

We officers, however, see plainly that the

responsibility for the muddle lies with the politicians. There's a very Wise Man at the War Office and he's the only one who does things and says nothing all the time. It is inconceivable to us that the country doesn't rise as one man and forcibly suppress certain members of the Government. Somebody said that the proper place for politicians in war-time is bed, and I agree with him. How they lie and brag, these salary-drawing inefficients who for years past refused to grant money for the purchase of ships, guns, rifles and munitions of war! And how they have tried to take credit to themselves for any bit of organization or little success that we've achieved in spite of them! The blatancy of them! Men here read these things and look at one another aghast. Then they laugh shamefacedly.

I heard the arrogance of politicians summed up very effectively in the form of a story last week. The teller was once on the stage. A certain low comedian, he said,

was engaged by a pompous provincial actor-manager for one of his pantomimes. The comedian was vulgar but funny and used to playing to "full houses." The manager at the time was himself playing Macbeth, and to impress the comedian with the superiority of real Art, he invited him to come and see his illustrious performance. In a very empty house the comedian sat it out. "Well, what did you think of my Macbeth?" he was proudly asked. "If you *must* know, guv'nor," replied the comedian, "I think it's the likes of *us* as keeps *you!*"

I suppose actor-managers and politicians both live on notoriety, but the latter forget apparently that there are millions of fighting men who will have votes to cast when peace is made. They won't forget their betrayers. So sleep well in bed, Mother dear, there's a good time coming.

Your loving CHOTA.

(14)

Dearest of Mothers,

Little Kim's number is up, I'm sorry to say. Late yesterday afternoon in the trenches, where we were waiting to be relieved, I missed him and got a bit anxious when there was no answer to my repeated whistles. The last the men had seen of him was barking at the Boches over the parapet, a forbidden sport, as you know. Snipers had been worrying us during the day, and we were afraid, though none of us would admit it, that he had drawn their fire. More than once messages have been thrown into our trench informing us that they meant to get him if they could. We hoped, unconvincingly, that he had gone rabbiting.

Some time later he must have crawled

back to cover. Nobody saw him return, but a thin blood-stained trail was discovered and traced to the bunk in my dug-out, where it ended. He'd managed to climb up somehow, poor little devil, and there I found him on his blanket at the foot, curled up, mute, but shivering with pain and a nasty hole in his chest. He looked bad. Our first-aid outfit doesn't include any quick means of deliverance for a mortally wounded dog and we hadn't a R.A.M.C. man handy. Somebody volunteered to fetch one. Waiting, it was evident to me that if the medico couldn't do anything I should have to.

I sat with the poor little unfortunate, distressed to see that he thought I was angry with him for playing truant. I could tell that he was worrying more on that imaginary score than over his own abominably real pain. I'm sure he thought I was cross because I could do nothing to relieve it. The dumb question was in his dull eyes. Hadn't

I always made his paws well by pulling the thorns out of them? Why not now? In his trustfulness and veneration for me, his master, he could not understand that, racked as I was to see the agony he was enduring, I could do nothing to help him. My impotence gave me a damnable sensation. I could only stroke him and tell him how beastly sorry I was; and he licked my hand.

It is incomprehensible to me why animals should be made to suffer. We are taught that pain and tribulation are part of a human being's training for eternity, and also partly his age-long punishment for man's first recorded transgression. But if a dog may not look for eternity, as superior persons insist, why should it have to undergo physical torture for no fault of its own? As it is, its blameless life is all too short. Some of the mysteries of nature seem needlessly cruel.

Kim was only a puppy and as guileless a one as I've known, yet he was made to

suffer for something without purpose and for something beyond his comprehension. Is it fair? Tommy and I know we play with chance if we show our heads over the parapet and jeer at the Germans; but Kim had no knowledge of the risks he ran when he barked at them out of sheer *joie de vivre*. Poor little chap! Best of four-footed pals! I wished the Little Mother had been at hand. She would have made him understand that I was not angry with him. He got colder and colder, and I drew the blanket over him, but it moved tremulously with his shivers. And all the while his sad eyes were on mine.

At last, when the medico was brought in —one of the Vet. corps—I saw there was no hope.

"His number's up, I'm afraid," he said, and offered to shoot him for me. I told him I would rather do it myself. I think Kim knew and understood my reason. At least, I hope so. He lay still, very patient. . . .

I had no idea the men would take it so badly. One or two fairly blubbered. They asked, as a favour, to be allowed to bury the little body. . . . It went hard with them that they were not able to do it with full military honours. They put a board over the little mound and inscribed:

KIM
A COMRADE
KILLED IN BATTLE.

There's no sense in giving one's heart to a dog to tear, and yet we do it over and over again. I don't want to turn in to-night. I shall miss the weight of the little body on my feet.

Thank goodness we've been told to hold ourselves in readiness to move off first thing in the morning. There's a rumour that we're in for the Big Push at last. If it's true this time, it's enough to key the men up to concert pitch; but there's something more in it to them than crumpling up the Ger-

mans (if we can do it): they mean to avenge Kim's murder. They're getting ready grimly, tidying themselves.

If Tommy has sufficient notice he likes to fight trim, dressed for the part. He shaves, brushes his hair, mends his kit. Also he sees carefully to the action of his rifle, and he finds something wherewith to put a fierce edge to his bayonet.

They'll be difficult to hold back this time. I don't feel like holding them back either. Good-bye, dearest, I must tidy up too. I want to get a bit of my own back as well.

CHOTA.

(15)

Mother Dearest,

Nothing very surprising that you saw it in the papers first. I really forgot to tell you. Purely a piece of luck, dear. Congratulate me if you like, as you would congratulate a man who wins the love of a very nice girl without knowing how he did it. But don't praise me. As a matter of fact we "saw red" that day. We had a score to settle on account of a little dog. It wasn't the Big Push unfortunately, but the next best thing to it, a distinct gain in our area. What I may have done doesn't count in the aggregate. All I know is that we took a receipt in full. Dozens of other men deserve the D.S.O. quite as much as I do. On the Christmas tree there aren't prizes for all

the good children. Even a V.C. is a thing to be humble about. Notice the words: "For *conspicuous* bravery." In other words, for bravery that is *witnessed* by someone who is in a position to put you down for a ticket which will entitle you to a prize off that Christmas tree. Inconspicuous bravery is just as fine and far more frequent. It's going on all the time. Don't take it that I'm making light of the distinction. I'm not. It's splendid. It's splendidly jolly to get it. But all the same, what I'd like best would be to share it with the dear fellows who weren't lucky enough to be in the limelight.

Bravery, when you come to think of it, is one of the most fluid of qualities. There is such a thin line dividing it from cowardice, and the name of that line, which sometimes is stretched so tightly that it has to snap, is not, mark you, lack of courage, but of nerves. If a man's nerves are good he stands a good chance of doing something

decent; if they're not, all the more honour to him if he stands at all and doesn't run away. I've seen a little cowardice out here—a very little, I'm thankful to say—and in every case but one I was utterly sorry for the man. No one chooses to be a coward. Every man is perfectly well aware that its fruits are the living death. Bravery is sometimes paid for with one's life; one pays for cowardice all one's life.

I condemn the craven. He's a breed apart. He ought to be shot, and he generally is. One's pity goes out to those unfortunates, now bearing the stigma of disgrace, who, had their nerves stood a few seconds longer, would in all probability have been hailed as heroes. None of us would be here if we hadn't meant to do our best. There must be some failures. In a campaign like this one you can't estimate what your nerves will stand until they're actually put to the test. In our case, public-school boys, and men with traditions to maintain, breed-

ing and training are behind us. They constitute a kind of armour.

> "Who misses or who wins the prize;
> Go strive and conquer if you can,
> But if you fall, or if you rise,
> Be each, pray God, a gentleman."

We may funk it for a moment. Sometimes we do. But it doesn't matter. The main thing is not to show you're afraid, and to act as if you weren't.

Don't I ramble? But the moral of my discourse is this: I've done nothing that heaps of other men haven't done. I've a strong tummy and good nerves, and I can lead men because I understand my job and have an unadulterated vocabulary that goes straight to the heart and mind of Tommy in moments of stress.

By the way, it's rather curious, isn't it, that men should be more deeply addicted to poetry than women? There's hardly one of us who hasn't got his favourite battered

volume of poetry somewhere handy. Kipling bestrides this fighting terrain like a Colossus and lies in our pockets in small editions; but I've even come across a lady on a battle-ground—a slim little collection of, guess—Ella Wheeler Wilcox. It might interest you——

(*Later*)

I was called away here, and for the life of me can't remember what I was about to say. So sorry. Must send this off just as it is.

C.

(16)

My Dearest Mother,

It is clear to me that deep feeling prompted your last letter, and therefore I'll reply to it at once. If what I am about to say disappoints you, it will at least relieve your uncertainty. I would give much to do as you wish about marrying. Indeed there is little I wouldn't do to please you; but— and it is a big "but"—I doubt whether in this case I ought to let my desire to please you conflict with my duty as I see it. I quite appreciate all the reasons you cite in favour of my marrying. Bunny, as you say, is delicate and may never live to grow up. No more than you do I want to see the old place pass into the hands of a distant rela-

tion. Also the fact that there's plenty of money should make it easier for me to ask a woman to be my wife—or widow.

But aren't you a little prejudiced? Because you are very partial to a certain girl you want me to love her. It makes you assume that she loves me. I must discount that. You haven't any positive proof of it. Still, suppose you were right, and I did write to N. and she accepted me. I should be obtaining her confession of love under false pretences. Good friends as we are, much as I admire her, my feelings for her are not those I ought to have for a wife. When I do think of marriage I do not see N. at all, but someone else—someone so very young and childlike and so comparatively a stranger to me that, at a time like this, I cannot approach her as a suitor.

N. is very charming, steadfast, beautiful, and essentially the best type of Englishwoman; all, in fact, that a man could ask

for in a wife ; much too good indeed to be offered anything but the very deepest a man could give. I should have to go to her with empty hands.

But apart from the fact that it is quite indefinite when I may get home on leave again, I haven't given you my best and main reason for wanting to avoid matrimony. Well, dear, it's this : the very prospect you hold out of my leaving the someone to come after me. That someone might never know what it is to have a father. If you think it over you will, I'm sure, admit that I am right. You see, darling, although you've been everything to me that a mother can, and far more than most sons deserve, I cannot help being sensible of what I have missed in growing up without a man's hand on my shoulder. The fact of my not being able to remember my father has not prevented me from thinking about him, wondering what he was like, and wishing for him very often. As a child needs two

people to bring him into being, so its nature demands that the same two shall give it a hand until such time as it can walk alone. You must know as well as I do that there are episodes in a boy's life which a woman cannot handle. If he has a good father his difficulties can be smoothed out. If he hasn't one to go to at all it's rather sad, I think.

There's no pessimism in all this. I don't anticipate an untimely end. I don't think about it. Soldiering dulls one's sensitiveness concerning death. One takes one's chances of it as a matter of course, knowing that the odds are in one's favour. But we can't properly serve two masters at the same time. My present job is national duty, and I mustn't let any personal interests interfere with it. So let us leave the question of marriage for the future. There will be peace some day, and then perhaps . . . But I needn't hunt the hypothetical to its lair!

Darling, you're full of grumbles! I don't think it's fair to reproach me for what you call the "impersonality" of my letters. After all, failing events of real importance, the only things worth recording are one's impressions. For instance, it might interest you greatly (though it's certainly not epoch making, only stomach-aching!) to know that yesterday I had a 40-h.p. pain after eating something out of a tin! But why tell you of it? Long after I had forgotten the pain you would have started to worry about it!

In your next parcel you might send me some soap, but not scented. Something with carbolic in it for choice. And I will make you happy by the confession that I could also do with some more socks—thin ones.

My love to you.

C.

P.S.—A letter from old nurse (copied).

Darling little Master (Little, mark you!),

I have sent you a box like at school with goodeyes. I think about you all the time and the dreadful dangers. Please pardon me for writing to you. I pray for you to keep safe. My Dear lady keeps up. In the nursery we often sits and talks. My respectful love from your dear

Nannie.

Bless her! Tell her I'm writing to her to-morrow.

(17)

Dearest,

It will buck you up to know that the British army is going strong just now. The new drafts are pouring in, and our corner of France and Flanders is inundated with them. From here to the coast, I'm told, you see nothing but khaki. You can hardly imagine yourself in a foreign country. The native population is on extraordinarily good terms with Tommy. He behaves beautifully. They pet him—especially the women—and scold him when he deserves it, just as they do their own men. It amused me immensely last week to see a whole village full of females turn out to belabour and vociferously revile a North-country territorial who came home to his billet slightly

the worse for liquor. He was beaming, feeling at peace with all the world, when they fell on him. They boxed his ears, called him a Boche, and told him he was a disgrace to his uniform, which strictly speaking he was. He took his gruelling without a word and won't transgress again in the same way, I fancy.

It's killing to listen to the crude jokes that pass between the veterans and the newcomers. The former, war-stained, confident, free from all illusions, line the road and welcome the spick-and-span men from home with merciless chaff.

"Pretty dears!" they remark very audibly. "Pity to think they'll all be on crutches next week."

"Where's *your* crutch, old sport?" is the sarcastic response.

"Oh, we're the survivors, the few what's left. Are you down-hearted?"

A cheery chorus of "No!"

"That's right. Straight on for the

cemetery," comes a dry voice from the side of the road.

Those new drafts grin at the joke, but here and there a face—generally a youthful one—shows inappreciation of it. Yet, when their time comes to go into the trenches they face the music like tried troops. It's wonderful that the fighting spirit should have prevailed in the nation after practically a hundred years of peace. They fought stripped to the waist in Nelson's days. Now, soldiers and sailors alike fight with souls stripped instead. The manhood's there just the same.

So, although every day one loses old friends, one has the compensation of getting to know and love new ones. You see men for what they really are, not what you think they may be, often a disappointment in times of peace. Out here there's no social veneer to wear off before you discover the true character underneath the skin. You don't have to trust to hearsay about such-

and-such a one's good qualities. If they're there you see them for yourself. It permits of your making a pal without preliminaries or mistrust. War is a first-class club, and the only qualification for membership of it is manliness.

I could give you many instances of war's refining influence, but one will suffice. You remember young ———, what an exquisite he was, rather to be avoided because of his effeminacy, his stage-door habits and partiality for brandy and soda at breakfast time? Well, he joined the ——— as a private, did several months drilling, came out and developed into as stub-nailed, dirty, hard-working a ranker as there was in his notoriously devil-may-care regiment. In less than a month after that he was prominent in three of the hottest bits of work the army has seen, and each time proved himself a pattern of what a soldier should be. A commission in Ours is the result. If it hadn't been for the war I shouldn't have

known him as I do now, and he certainly would never have known himself.

The other night, as we sat in our dug-out, listening to the gunning, watching the star-shells breaking white over the shadowy, wasted country, he burst out with:

"By gad! Look at it all! And to think that this time last year I thought it fine to sit in a front-row stall and watch girls' legs." (Saving your modesty, Mother mine.) "What a blighter I must have been! Well, that's all over, thank heaven!" Then he went off to shepherd sentries and look bursting shrapnel in the face.

There's too much good material of his sort being wasted in the ranks. Unfortunately, too, a considerable number of unclassified individuals, neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring, have been jerked into commissions by back-stairs influence. Promotion of that sort doesn't pay for itself. I'd rather see it come from the ranks, though

that doesn't always pan out well. A V.C. corporal who recently declined the honour put it sensibly enough when he said that what he had done to earn the distinction only proved that he was a man, not a gentleman, and that from personal experience he knew the men would rather be led by an incompetent gentleman than an experienced ranker who hadn't the advantage of good birth. It was the most succinct defence of aristocracy anyone could have made. But it took this war to give it sure point.

I think the democracy will discount a good deal of what their leaders have told them of late years about us gentry. The death roll of the army must surely convince them, not only that we're not the selfish brutes the demagogues tried to make out, but that, whatever our faults, we tumbled over one another to render the country service out of all proportion to our numbers. The rank and file know it, anyhow. They

know we're in it as a matter of duty first and secondly because it's our nature to lead. That we don't want justifying they can see when they consider how little we get out of it and how much we give up to wear the King's uniform. In that respect I fancy we compare favourably with place-hunting politicians and those of the commercial class who spend their lives in self-aggrandisement and the making of money.

I don't suppose the self-appointed persons whom the people have been paying fat salaries to preach strikes and class-hatred will mend their ways after the war. They'll ask for their hound's fee whatever happens. The Board-school Radical rump, who hate every gentleman on sight, will still strive to keep their seats in Parliament and—what is much more to them—their four hundred a year.

Think of the absence of self-respect in these creatures who are drawing their Judas pay! Before the war every pro-German of

them shrieked for neutrality: the moment they came up against the danger of war they went about the country breathing futile defiance of the foe. They were so fearfully patriotic (at the expense of other people)! "We," they mouthed, were going to bring Germany to her knees, break down her capacity for mischief; destroy her "militarism!" Some of them, I notice, are writing "war articles" for the popular papers—fire-eating articles, every word of which is prompted by pitiful, personal fear. Only when the pistol muzzle is pressed against their venomous carcasses do they admit the inborn capacity of an officer and a gentleman to set an example, shielding them from the horrors of invasion. And then the sickening eulogy they pour out on the very men they vilified in peace-time!

They can't do without their betters in time of trouble. They shut their eyes to the patent fact that were it not for the German aristocrat who leads and drives his men into

action those men would not be the dangerous adversaries they are. Even our own rank and file, each worth a dozen Boches, would be a mob without leaders—leaders on the pay of an indifferent clerk! Oh, well, *noblesse oblige*, and don't let's bother to translate the term to those who wouldn't understand its meaning.

So Bunny is paying his annual visit? I expect he's having a high old time with my ancient toys. Is he stronger? I think he ought to be allowed to ride Kitty now. I rather think I promised him he should.

You know, for a mere child of six and considering he only comes once a year he's extraordinarily fond of the old place. Before the war it seemed a remote contingency that it might ever belong to him. But now—— He once said to me that he would like to live there always, and I told him he wouldn't do that unless I died and had no Bunny of my own. I liked the way he put his hand in mine and said:

"Don't die, Uncle Chota. But can't I be your very own Bunny?"

He's a good little chap, Mother. Let him love the place as much as he likes. It may be his yet. All love.

C.

(*Enclosure*)

My dear old Bunny-boy,

It *is* a pity I can't be with you for jolly games and rides on Big Tiger's back. I have asked Auntie Loo if you may ride Kitty. You'll like that. I wish I could tell you of all the things I'm doing here. It's like a huge game of soldiers on the biggest table you can think of—bigger than the billiard table, much!—and so much more fun because we're really all alive. We don't get bowled over with reels of cotton, but all sorts of balls that go bang and burst!

> This is the noise the bullet makes:
> Phut! Phut!
> This is the noise when shrapnel breaks:
> Bang—crash!

This is the purr of the maxim gun :
Rur-rur-rur-rur !
This is the cannon that makes 'em run :
Boom-slam-slammerty-bang—Roar ! Roar !

Isn't that a spiffing row? You try it out loud.

Bye-bye, old man.

Your loving uncle

CHOTA.

(18)

Dearest Little Mother,

That you should have come across O'Neil in hospital is certainly a coincidence, but it's not so very strange that I forgot to let you know he was wounded. The casualties were pretty heavy a fortnight ago, when we avenged Kim's death, and I had others to think of besides O'Neil. Fortunately for him he had only "copped a blightie," which is soldier slang for one of those wounds, a temporary knock-out, which good nursing is safe to remedy. It means being sent home for a spell. O'Neil probably regards a "blightie" as he would a stripe, a means of promotion—to the luxuries of hospital. He had a taste of them in the spring, and his eulogies on the subject

when he rejoined made the unwounded men envious. His brogue is irresistible. I allow myself to listen to it rather too much. It was the food and the comforts of the hospital train that principally aroused his enthusiasm.

". . . An' chicken, your honour, widout a bone showin'; an elegant bird entirely. An' jellies which had the taste to them of wine fit for a nobleman's table. Indade, any mortal blessed thing ye'd be crazy enough to fancy and clever enough to put a name to was there for the askin'. 'Twas like a magician's table. Ye had but to think of beef-tea, or beer, or what-not, and 'twas there in the twinklin' of an eye. An' the nurses that sweet and beautiful that it made you want to kiss them, which misfortunately they didn't be seemin' to have the time for."

All of which is very true. The feeding, the nursing, our hospital service generally, are all beyond praise. So much so indeed

that to receive a supportable wound which qualifies for hospital treatment and perhaps a trip home is quite a side ambition of Tommy's. Things have changed a lot since the South African war. The scandalous behaviour of some of the nurses then made the hospitals anything but inviting to many an unfortunate. There is none of that now. Here the nurses are all workers and saints. At the outset there may have been a few who came out for a picnic, but they were soon cleared out and disillusioned. Now all sorts and conditions of women are seriously working under the Red Cross. Such a thing as scandal isn't known in their ranks. They have no time for anything but their unremitting duties.

In this war our women have glorified themselves. Previous to it I confess my sympathies were not with Woman Suffrage. But when the question is revived again, as it will be, I cannot well see how the vote is to be denied them. Both the women at

home and those out here who have worked so unselfishly, shown themselves such ministering angels, at least deserve that small reward from their country. I don't think they'll abuse it. The suffragette's greatest claim to political consideration now is that from the first moment of danger to the country she made no claims. The shirkers, the agitators, the strikers and the peace-blitherers have all been—well, of the other sex, the yellow-livered section of it. The clamorous, hysterical, stone-throwing suffragette has metamorphosed herself into the nurse, calm, stoical, tender, often exhibiting perfect courage in the face of physical danger. It mustn't be overlooked that she has been rendering inestimable service to the very men who have disputed her fitness for anything but the domestic virtues.

They'll have to reconsider that opinion. It will be difficult not to concede her a capacity for sweet reasonableness and clear thinking after proving herself such an

ally in every sense of the word. I daresay it wouldn't have paid to give the Victorian miss a vote. Probably she would have fainted at the very idea. Anyway, she wouldn't have known what to do with it. Neither would she have been much use as a nurse in war time. She was just a doll of a creature, all heart, doubtless, but without any self-reliance. The exceptions must have been rare, as in the case of Florence Nightingale. Hence her fame. To-day there are thousands of women like her. Ask Tommy. Ask O'Neil. He has a holy respect for nurses, owing chiefly to the fact that his wiles haven't always succeeded with them.

I would like, too, to have a few words with those people who are putting it about that a great many lady-nurses, especially those of rank or eminence, are over here for effect or advertisement. The absurdity of imagining that such women would undertake menial work for effect! For that's

what it often is—floor-scrubbing, cooking, bed-making, long hours, plain meals and not always enough sleep. Gently nurtured women don't take all that on for effect. No woman is indifferent to her looks and her dress for effect. If you could see ———, so justly renowned as one of our best and most beautiful actresses, unselfishly taking on duties that are spoiling her looks, literally wearing herself out in unostentatious service, you would agree that she deserves more laurels than she ever won on the stage. Things are all topsy-turvy. It's we men who work in the glare of the searchlight and the star-shell nowadays; the women serve us unpretentiously in the background.

I haven't any news. The weather's delightful. It makes me wish this show were over and that we were all cosy again in our homes. Killing's a weird game.

By the way, I've never told you what I should like done with my personal belong-

ings if I'm knocked out. The rest is all arranged for. The agate ring with our crest to Bunny; my civilian clothes to any poor Belgians; gold watch and chain to Hunter; all my "gladdest" socks and ties to—the dustbin; my first editions of Kiplings to young ———; and my body, if you can get hold of it, to England.

I hope I haven't made you feel melancholy. I didn't mean to.

Your CHOTA.

(19)

Mother Dear,

Forgive pencil. I have brought notepaper out from the house and am writing in a garden—the garden of the château. Having a few hours to spare and an extraordinary longing, which for once I could not keep under, to come here again, I borrowed a motor-bike and arrived without notice. That I have been disappointed in finding everyone away is my own fault. There are only the servants here. They tell me that Madame la Comtesse and Mademoiselle have gone to ——— to be sœurs bénévoles in a Red Cross hospital. The château is still kept open for convalescent soldiers, but there are none here at present.

Marie, the motherly fat cook, begged of

me not to go at once, so here I am, a bit lost and depressed, with nothing to do for an hour or two. I have been wandering everywhere with an imaginary companion, a slight, dark girl with shy eyes.

Whizzing along at forty miles an hour, I gave myself up to the joys of anticipation. I pictured mother and daughter as they sat in their garden, and the surprise I should give them. Perhaps I should be lucky enough to get Désirée alone for a little while. And perhaps they would ask me to stay the night. I could have managed it. And perhaps, later, after I had lit Désirée's candle and seen her go up the big staircase I might return to the salon and the Comtesse, and there say a great many things I had made up my mind not to think of, much less talk about, and perhaps . . . I should not have to leave the château without permission to speak a little of the sentiment that I've tried so hard to stifle.

Dreams!

The reality is a convincing proof of what my head long ago assured me—that this is not the time to let one's heart get the upper hand of one's hopes.

There is something mournful about the temporarily deserted home. From where I sit I can see dust-sheets swathed about the furniture. Dust-sheets always give me the pip. I fancy a dog must experience the same sort of desolate feeling when he sees his owners packing boxes, and knows that he is to be left behind. The gardens are still in perfect order, but the flowers want picking. You can see the womenfolk are away.

(*Later*)

I had just written this and was preparing to clear out when Marie came running out, beaming, in her hands a tray with chocolate and two cups.

" Monsieur! Monsieur! A la bonheur! Quelle chance! Mademoiselle est arrivée!"

She disappeared in a hurry before I could ask her any questions.

Désirée come home! It was too good to be true!

She came out to meet me, eagerly and unaffectedly. She gave me both her dear hands and I held them. Neither of us said a word, only kept looking into each other's eyes.

She had altered. The dress, of course, makes a difference—white, with the Red Cross on the nun-like coif. But she herself was no longer a child. She had looked on suffering and her heart was a woman's heart. Only eighteen! And she had seen blood run like a river, and staunched wounds with those tiny hands—so fairy-like. I wanted to kiss them.

She had motored over for a few hours, she presently told me, to make ready beds and rooms that would be wanted. Yes, she would have a cup of chocolate too. And would I talk about myself, because she had

thought of me so often. I can't remember much of what I said. It was so good just to see her. She told me a lot about her hospital work and how much she liked it. Oh, how brave men were! She could speak of things. She told me poignant little stories with tears in her eyes.

Very soon afterwards we went indoors, and our talk had to be deferred. The big salon had to be transformed into a ward, beds put up, tables arranged, the carpet taken away, floors scrubbed. She directed everything with an astonishing competence.

Afterwards we returned to the garden until the car should be ready for her. We said very little. With a good-bye so imminent speech failed us both. She had been joyous while she worked, but now her face had clouded over and for the life of me I could not cheer her up. We attempted to talk cheerfully about the end of the war, when it would come, what we would do

when the all-devouring breath of it was only a memory.

"Then you will marry?" I felt impelled to say.

She was not embarrassed. An abstracted look came into her eyes, as if they were staring, staring, into the future and could see nothing.

"I think not, monsieur," she said in a still, small voice. "It has come to me that I may never marry now. . . . Something here, at my heart, tells me that for me there will be no one, that my affinity, *n'est-ce pas?* will be killed in this war. I pray the good God that I may never know him, for to know love and lose it—that would be desolation!"

Then she turned her eyes on me. The look in them changed. Something I did not say, but could not prevent my face from showing, must have made things plain to her. She went so white, and got up with a little cry, instantly stifled.

Then Marie came to tell us that the car was waiting. So we said good-bye.

That's all.

C.

(20)

DARLING,

Bunny has been in my thoughts a good deal lately, hence the enclosed letter, which is for him to read when he is twenty-one if he succeeds me. Read it yourself if you wish. Of course I agree with you and deplore it that his mother is what she is. But even if she marries again I should not attempt to take Bunny from her altogether. It might be better for him, but on the other hand it might not. Whatever her faults she is passionately fond of the boy. You ought to try and love the kid, dear, because parentally he has everything against him, and that's a very hard beginning, you know. Instinct makes a child look up to its parents with supreme love and trust as the very

centre and pivot of its existence, not as a dog does to his owner because he provides it with food and maintenance, but with the blind, unquestioning acceptance of the blood-tie. And then think of a boy, and an extremely sensitive delicately balanced boy at that, who is bound to find out that his father shot himself because his mother forgot she was a wife. In those days of cruel enlightenment he will want very careful watching.

Be kind to him, Mother. He'll need it. It's difficult for you, I know, to disassociate Bunny from his mother. He's so ridiculously like her; but remember that's only an external resemblance. Somewhere in that not over-strong little frame is Bunny's own lonely ego—neither his father, nor his mother, but just himself. He mustn't be the innocent victim of a silly woman's misdeeds and a weak man's method of self-effacement.

If it falls to your lot to see more of Bunny

than you have done hitherto, be to him just something of what you've been to me. Try. He mustn't miss everything.

I've absolutely nothing to record. Five of the men are down with trench-fever, and I've got a rotten cold in my head. Haven't got out of my clothes for four days. They're sticking to me like a bathing garment. Puttees are all wrong in wet weather. I never liked them at any time. Thick socks with one big toe to them and stout sandals would be the ideal wear as far as I'm concerned.

I suppose we shall be relieved to-morrow —perhaps. Ye Gods, I *do* want a bath!

C.

(*Enclosure*)

MY GOOD BUNNY,

First I must stretch the legs of my imagination and then I can get going. I've got to march ahead mentally some fifteen years and picture you as being twenty-one, just about to step into my shoes. You, on

the other hand, will have to throw your mind back a similar period and try and recall the rapidly-dimming memory of an uncle with whom you once used to play kiddie games. You might also recollect that we were good pals, and that, although you will feel quite a mature person by the time you read this (if you ever do), I must of necessity be a long way your senior, especially if I am dead! Now let's cut the cackle and come to the 'osses.

The old place is yours. You enter into possession. At first glance it will seem to you that a little *pied-à-terre* in Mayfair, a shooting box in Scotland, an old Manor house in Surrey and a liberal income are yours to do what you like with. Excepting the income, which no one can prevent you dissipating if you have a mind that way, that is exactly what you cannot do. The Manor house and the rest belong to Alured ———, who first saw the light in 1514, to Sir Geoffrey, who fought his ship against the

Armada, to my lord ——–, who lost his head on TowerHill,and so on (you can read it all up for yourself in the family archives). The estates belong to your ancestors, taking whom one with another were a fairly creditable lot and stout fighters, otherwise they would never have kept as much of it as will revert to you. Being English gentlemen they never sold an acre, I'm glad to say. What they lost was by confiscation and through loyalty to their king. When you yourself are an ancestor and have joined the great dead you will have a sound title to the family property, but not before. In the meantime, it's yours *in trust* for your lifetime. Look at it that way, and if you don't feel it, go straight with this letter into the picture gallery and let *them* talk to you. I think you'll understand what I mean after that. I did, very early.

I wish I could be with you, old chap, to give you advice when you're standing alone. With the best of mothers I've often

felt lonely myself, lacking a man I could talk to. Responsibility is such a tricky burden. Sometimes it seems to weigh so lightly on one's shoulders that it's difficult to believe it's there at all, and at others it's like marching with all your worldly possessions on your back, and a bit over. Still, it's rank bad policy to try and shift the weight or get rid of it. Even if you're a civilian it's easier to get on in life if you take the soldier's standpoint. Obedience, discipline, responsibility. Those are the watchwords. I'd like you to be a soldier if you're fit enough. Soldiering is a great game, and actual fighting while you're young enough to appreciate it is an incomparable enjoyment.

Whatever you do be a faithful steward. Keep the wrong people out of your house. You know what I mean. There will be a goodish few (especially women) after you for your money and position. They're generally an amusing crowd. If they were not

they wouldn't gain an entry anywhere. Let them amuse you. Amuse yourself, if you like, but don't let them mould you. Let your ancestors do that. Be strong, old fellow.

And when you get this you'll have been told all that you will have to know about your father and mother. I wish I could have told you myself. Don't let it worry you overmuch. It really isn't your concern, you know. Your father was one of the best, only he lacked ballast; and your mother lacked prudence. It was fairly apparent that one of the two would have to go overboard, and he was the one. So, if you're ever tempted at any time in any way to follow the line of least resistance, battle against it for all you're worth, and conquer immediate heredity. There are finer traditions behind you.

Least of all do I want to say a word against your mother. Let it console you to know that she has played so long in the shallows

that she will always avoid the depths. You must not expect more of her than that. Be tolerant of her and don't lecture her when you're a man, and never reproach her. Whatever she did she's your mother. Remember that always.

I hope your health will improve and that by the time you read this you'll be as fit as a fiddle. Healthy outdoor exercise is what you want—riding, shooting, cricket, rowing. You can't have too much of them. Though their main attraction is pleasure—pleasure through bodily fitness and efficiency—they all teach a lesson, and that's straightness. Row with a straight back; play with a straight bat; ride straight to hounds, shoot straight, live straight. In a word, be a sportsman. The country will need good sportsmen after so very many of the breed have laid down their lives for her in this war.

If, as you have grown up, I have occasionally been permitted to walk by your side

in the spirit, I think there will be imbued in you not only a great love but an entire allegiance to our House. In that case I should have nothing left to ask for.

But one thing: Bunny, old man, if my mother is alive when you read this I want you to do for her in her old age all that I, as her adoring son, would have done. I don't suppose I need specify what that is. If through the years you have had the luck to have her by your side, you will, I know, love her so dearly that you could do no other than treat her as the great woman she is.

I should be very sorry if during her lifetime she ever left the home where her married life and widowhood were spent. When you reach your majority she is sure to offer to do so. She will tell you she can be just as happy in the Dower House. Never listen to the loving lies of a fond and proud woman. ——— is her home. It would have been her home always with me.

Well, now I'll cease this solemn lecture. Go forward and good luck. Think of me sometimes.

Your affectionate uncle,
CHOTA.

(21)

My Dearest Mother,

Don't let yourself be depressed. In a war of such dimensions as this you can't expect a quick decision. Every century or so Europe has been at war. Some of them have lasted for many more years than this one is likely to do. Things were much worse with us (in England, I mean) in Napoleon's time than they are now.

We can't go fast against Germany. The nation that prepares for war, as she did, must have the initial advantage. The Boer War was an illustration of that, and it took us over two years to see it through. Don't forget either that when we drove the Germans back over the Marne we spoilt their plans for good and all. In good time we

shall drive them out of France and Belgium altogether. Their present successes in Galicia won't affect the situation. They may even take Warsaw. It's the general opinion here that they can't destroy the Russian armies. That they won't break through this front is more than an opinion. You may take it that it's an impossibility. The moment we have all the men we want and the right guns and shells (and we are going to have them) you will see a change. Meanwhile, we must and can stick it out.

When whole peoples go to war it is not surprising that fighting reverts to the ancient type. For in spite of high explosives and modern machinery that is what it has come to. Enveloping movements and flank attacks and all the paraphernalia of strategy have had to go by the board. There are no flanks on either side to be turned. The frontal attack is the only one possible. Entrenching was practised in the Middle Ages. As in those times, we use the knife;

the bayonet and the kukri are its modern equivalents; the butt end of the rifle replaces the mace; bombs were used by the Chinese centuries ago. In fact, there's nothing new under the sun. The short, quick wars which Germany made against Austria, Denmark and France will never be repeated. War in Europe in the future will always be a national affair with entire populations in arms. In a sense, that is all to the good. It disposes of the German idea of a quick and crushing victory for the nation which has secretly prepared to dominate its neighbours. The winner will always be the one with most men, most money, and right on its side. But time is essential to it in any case.

That egregious person, Norman Angell, has been preaching absurd theories about war, and the uninstructed have regarded him as a prophet. His theory that war is economically impossible will have the bottom knocked out of it directly it is seen that

Germany can continue fighting without money or external trade. She will be able to find men to drill, to feed and arm them, out of her own resources long after her gold supplies are exhausted. Nor will the financial losses of the other nations lessen their efforts against her. National war is a matter of sentiment, not of profit or loss. Indeed I think this will be an era of great and savage racial wars as bitter as the religious wars of old. The faith of peoples does not stir them nowadays to make crusades, but their racial pride will.

There are lots of good reasons why we and our allies should have confidence in our ability to beat the Germans. It is quite certain that in time we shall be able to put more men into the field than they can and keep them overwhelmingly supplied with munitions; our present superiority in sea power will keep on increasing; because of it and the blockade we exercise we shall never be short of the necessary commodi-

ties the want of which Germany is already beginning to feel. This alone may be the decisive factor. But in addition to these advantages the faith we have in the justice of our cause, so different from the self-delusion of the Germans, gives us a moral superiority which is bound to tell in the long run. I haven't the remotest doubt about all this. Nobody at the Front has. We meet Frenchmen, Belgians, Russians, Italians; they're all confident of the result. Most confident of all are the Americans.

I suppose, like all lookers-on, the Americans see most of the game. They're not prejudiced. This war is not the vital matter to them that it is to Europeans. As they would themselves put it, this isn't their funeral. I daresay if the Germans got the upper hand they would try and dominate America. Their covetous eyes would certainly fall on South America, and in that respect alone they might endanger the United States. But they couldn't conquer

the North. The little book you sent me, "America Fallen," is very interesting and plausible to a certain extent, but to maintain that Germany could secretly send a sufficiently big force across the Atlantic to conquer the country is simply a stretch of the imagination. And Canada is left out of account.

It is unreasonable to suppose that Canada would be caught napping. Besides, by that time she would be so trained in war, her equipment for it would be so advanced, that she would be at least as dangerous to the Germans as the States themselves. That she would gladly come to the assistance of the latter there isn't an atom of doubt. The two would be as one country in face of the invader. And with the railway system that unites them they would have exactly the same advantage over the Germans that the Germans have over the Russians. No, I can't see that America is in any danger.

Nor do I see why some of our unhealthy

newspapers should keep harping on Germany's threatening attitude towards the States. They overdo their anxiety just as they overdid it about Italy, and as they are still doing it about the Balkan States. It may or may not be advisable for the latter to come into the war on our side. That is a question which they will decide for themselves at the right moment. War is a big matter which is weighed by the best minds of a country; not by the vapourings of obscure foreign journalists. The Americans were probably quite aware that their trade would be dislocated by this war; very early in it they must have anticipated a loss of ships and lives; they knew their country was honeycombed by German propaganda. But so long as they are not directly attacked I don't see why they shouldn't keep out of the trouble. I do think it was a mistake for America, as the leading and most powerful neutral nation, not to have protested against the violation of Belgian neutrality;

but after all that is an ethical rock on which American or any other diplomacy might have split. The fact that their government did not protest has evidently had a very discouraging effect on many Americans. That they did not do so is of course due to their utter lack of military power to back their words. The peace-at-any-price party in the United States put their country in the same unenviable position that ours was at the beginning of the war. The whole trouble lies in that. The world isn't ripe for general peace yet, perhaps it never will be; and while war remains a possibility the country that neglects ordinary precautions will always be at a disadvantage.

Peace! How inconceivable it is! The world eternally at peace is a mere hope of Paradise! Until mankind is perfect, without sin, filled with the spirit of God, strife will not cease. To-day, if all the armies of the nations were disbanded, if all the navies were scrapped, it would be the signal for

the vicious among us to make war on our fellows. An army is only a big police force for protection against foreign law-breakers. As a natural consequence, the nation that tries to save money by doing without an army is courting attack. The man who has conscientious objections against contributing to the protection of his country ought not to be allowed to use his money for insuring his life.

Our turn again in the trenches to-night. It would be interesting and possibly amusing to have a few of the archpriests of the peace-at-any-price party with us when we get there. Amusing to us, I mean. A capable German sniper (and there are some) carefully concealed a hundred yards off might make them see the necessity of hitting back.

I didn't mean to write such a prosy screed, but you "asked me for it." It was the only thing I could do after seeing how downhearted you were getting. I've tried

to make the situation clear to you as we see it here. To do so I expect I've held forth like a serious political leader-writer! I hope it won't bore you stiff. I needn't ask you *not* to send it to a newspaper. To see it in one would give me the everlasting pip! Some of the men out here are complete wrecks owing to their relations having made public various incidents of their daily life. That sort of thing is all very well when the writer's too dead to care; but when he's alive he can't help being sensitive about seeing his views in print.

Take care of yourself, mother darling.

Your devoted CHOTA.

(22)

DEAREST,

I feel extraordinarily contented and pleased with everything to-day. Nothing of any importance has happened on the Western front, as the newspapers would say. My feeling of satisfaction is entirely within myself. I feel as if there is going to be peace, as if the end of hostilities is near; and bound up with this is a queer conviction that I shall be home quite soon. It's a sort of inner vision to which, I admit, I'm not prone. I hope it will make you feel as happy as it does me.

Don't be surprised then if I just turn up one day without notice. I shan't wire you, I shall stroll about the place, just as if I'd never gone away, and after a bit I'll come

in to wherever you may be, and you mustn't look delighted or surprised, because that would spoil the illusion, but just let me sit by you without talking, in the perfectly silent bliss of finding myself with you again. It's only a fancy, so don't buoy yourself up with the hope that leave is imminent. I haven't heard anything about it, and on the face of it, it doesn't seem in the least likely that I shall get it.

I am rather fed up with this Angels of Mons business, which the cheap papers are exploiting. It's too much like the bathos they indulged in during the early stages of the war when, unable to fill their columns with anything authentic, they drew on imaginary horrors and exaggerated every disaster. When they

> "Interviewed the wounded and photographed the dead,
> And coined the tears of women for coppers in the street."

Machen's little book (many thanks for it) is a pleasant piece of entirely unassuming literary work, but the mystery that attaches

to it is obviously manufactured. Silly papers cater for silly people, and silly people start silly rumours.

Our men *have* seen visions. Dog-tired, overwrought men, compelled to march, fight and do without sleep, dream awake, but they know they are overworked and dog-tired and therefore place no mystic interpretation upon the shadowy figments of a fatigued brain. Angels are supposed to have comforted Christ in Gethsemane. Possibly, labouring under stress, He thought He saw them, but angels could not save Him from the cross, and angels have not won a battle for us in this war.

I myself, after two nights of enforced wakefulness, have seen a vision. I know it was my imagination playing tricks with my senses, and were my temperament of the highly-strung and credulous order I should write to the *Occult Review* about it in some spare moment. I heard barking about midnight. The moon was full. Looking out, I

saw as distinctly as I now see the pen in my hand a quite solid and unghostly Kim sitting on the parapet and baying mournfully. But I knew Kim was dead and buried and that I had been thinking of him too much. Kim wouldn't have come back merely to sit on a parapet and howl. If what I thought I saw had really been the ghost of my little dog he would have made straight for me, wagging a joyous spectral tail. Nothing in ghosts, mother dear; not the kind you see, anyway. They're cheats.

I am quite sure *something* is going to happen. I can't see the end of the lane, but I feel it in my bones that the turning is near, and then, perhaps sooner than we may expect, we shall look upon open country—the plains of heaven.

Just got orders to move. Something doing. We're "for it," I fancy.

Hope on, little woman, and bless you, bless you.

CHOTA.

(23)

War Office Telegram.

Greatly regret to report death of Major ——— which occurred at ——— on the —th inst.

———

Dear ———,

It is with the deepest regret that I have to give you the sad news of your son's death. He was killed in action.

Although this is a task frequently imposed on me, I assure you it never becomes easier with repetition. In your case, believe me, it is doubly painful, for your gallant son was one of my very best officers, a fine soldier and a man of splendid character. It is but the simple truth to say that he is

mourned by the entire regiment without exception.

I cannot offer you consolation, but I trust it will be some comfort to you to know that he met death in the most intrepid spirit and whilst leading his men with a dash that has covered him and them with glory.

His sword and accoutrements will be dispatched to you in due course. With deepest sympathy,

Believe me,

Yours most sincerely,

———

Colonel ———

Me ladyship,

Himself has been taken from us. I cannot see straight for the water in me eyes for the love in me for him was great. Conshiderin it was me that had the honor to take his head in me lap as he died Im thinkin ye would like to know that he seemed comfortible intirely.

Twas at —— as ye will know and a murderrous battel indeed. There was a wood there but not now. The Major was hit after we had taken the trench beyant it. Shure the good God is mighty partail to gentleman like his Honor, the saints rest his sowl. He never spake until the last and I was the only one to hear. Twas dawn. Is that you O'Neil says he, is it dark and am I dyin? I towld him it was gettin light. I shant see it says he. I thowt he had gone but after a spel he says Ask me mother. An I waited. Ask me mother to write to, twas a name. To who says i for the word was a strange one intirely and he says it again. Yer honor I says it is a word I dout I shall misrimimber. He says it again God forgiv me for wastin of his precious breath beginnin with a d and endin with an a, it seems. Its a French name says he. I will say that says I. So will yer Honor kindly write words of himself to the French name which was the last he had in his mind. And

after that breathin gently he says, open country, says he, just that an died. When the stretcher bearers come twas finished.

Yer honor dear it is the great greif ye will have and ivry man of us is sharin it with ye. There was two things of his I left with him thinking twould be his wish, the likeness of yer honor which I found in his pocket book and a little cross of mother of pearls round his neck. He was a great gentleman and he fought like a gentleman and he died like a gentleman, an we cried when we buried him.

I have the honor to be my lady
Your respectful
J. O'Neil,
Private ——

THE END

Printed at The Chapel River Press, Kingston, Surrey.

Paternoster House,
Paternoster Row, E.C.
January, 1916.

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By **LINDSAY RUSSELL**

The Woman Who Lived Again

By the Author of "Souls in Pawn," "The Years of Forgetting," etc.

Possessed of a wonderful secret discovered in the East, an old Eurasian experiments on the dead body of a young woman found on the doorstep of his house. Brought to life, Zara creates a stir in Society by her beauty and the mystery of her past, and among those who are fascinated by her is a Cabinet Minister. Zara is used by the Eurasian and a German spy in a conspiracy to obtain Cabinet secrets, the period being just before the opening of the war. For a while Zara lives in a strange world, the real and the visionary, always haunted by some dim knowledge of the life she has lived, always seeing the end of her present existence drawing near. Love leaves her cold, but good impulses come to her, and it is due to these that a charming young girl, one of the principal characters of the story, finds the man who is made for her, and that the Cabinet Minister is saved from the German's schemes and reconciled to his own estranged wife. Not only for the story itself, but for the enthralling manner in which it is told, this novel will be voted one of the freshest and most readable of the season.

By COSMO HAMILTON.

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Before everything else this is a love story, but it is also a crushing indictment of the Divorce Laws of America and England. The atmosphere is new to English readers and the story thrills with emotion, anger, honest endeavour to play the game against overwhelming odds, and the love of home and children. The novel is quite different from anything yet given to his wide circle of readers by Cosmo Hamilton, and is certain to awaken deep interest and arouse much discussion.

By "A PEER"

Philippa's Pride

By the Author of "The Hard Way," etc.

Sir Philip Beresford, at the end of a very convivial men's party, in a daredevil spirit bets that he will marry the great heiress Philippa Reddington. In the morning he wishes to destroy his signed record of the bet, but it has disappeared—stolen, in fact, by Rose Dacre, who lives in the house and has conceived a mad passion for Sir Philip. The heiress has many wooers and distrusts all. She travels with her companion Mollie Marston, and in Paris Sir Philip and his friend Roger Day attract them. Later Sir Philip accidentally meets Philippa in England, when he takes her to be a governess; and in Japan, where all four meet again, Philippa adopts the rôle and Mollie passes as the rich Miss Reddington. Finding that Sir Philip loves her for her own sake, Philippa is married to him on their way to his old Irish home. Here, on the wedding day, Rose appears with the evidence of Sir Philip's bet and Philippa loses faith. The story works itself out in the Irish home, where the pride of Philippa, matched by that of her husband, brings about startling situations and exciting moments, in which Philip's cousin Hanly, who falls in love with Philippa, is largely concerned. The many changes of scene, the large number of character sketches, the author's light and humorous touch, combine to make this one of the brightest of novels.

By MARGARET PETERSON

Butterfly Wings

By the Author of "To Love,"
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Peggy, the girl heroine in Miss Margaret Peterson's new novel, "Butterfly Wings," is essentially a creature of sunshine and laughter—"the soul of a woman with butterfly wings." Hence the idea for the title. How Peggy loses her wings and finds out for herself, through the vicissitudes of an unhappy marriage and the breaking of her ideal, that life is not all sunshine, and that love requires something more stable than wings if it is to come triumphantly through trouble, is shown in the working out of the story. Peggy finds happiness in the end, but this is not achieved except through sorrow. In strong contrast to Peggy is the other girl character in the story—a modern type of woman, who stands fearlessly alone, whatever may be the price that has to be paid for such freedom. The story is in the present day, and the war moves as a cloudy background to their adventures, some of the chapters showing life in a hospital in France. But the book does not attempt to be in any way a war book, and is concerned solely in the working out of Peggy's character.

By R. A. FOSTER-MELLIAR

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By the Author of "Blindstone"

On its publication "Blindstone" was recognized by the Press generally as a most uncommon story, and its author was thought to have done excellent work even in that first novel. His new novel is just as much outside the beaten track, while in many respects it shows a distinct advance on "Blindstone." The story hinges on a woman's flight from her husband on the day of their marriage, for a reason which is not shown until the end of the book, though the reader may hazard a guess which is likely to be wrong. Before Mary's evasion of her vows is ended, her own niece Betty has fallen in love with Mary's husband, and it is in the portrayal of the young girl Betty that the author has done some of his most brilliant work. The scenes are laid in Norfolk and Cornwall, and the descriptive backgrounds are remarkably good.

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By the Author of "Sands o' the Desert."

This novel is brimful of colour and sentiment. Its setting is Java, with a picturesque background of native huts and the white villas of a European settlement. A young and beautiful woman is something of a mystery. The other women make the worst of it, but the men like her. The son of a very friendly neighbour returns—he had been the Judge when the woman's husband had applied for a divorce, but he did not know that there had been a subsequent trial before another Judge. He hesitates to denounce her, though finding her in close intimacy with his mother: indeed he loves her. Then another man arrives who is ill and is nursed by the woman, but she will not explain. The mystery is afterwards cleared up, and the Judge, with eyes opened, is humbled that she should still consent to marry him.

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