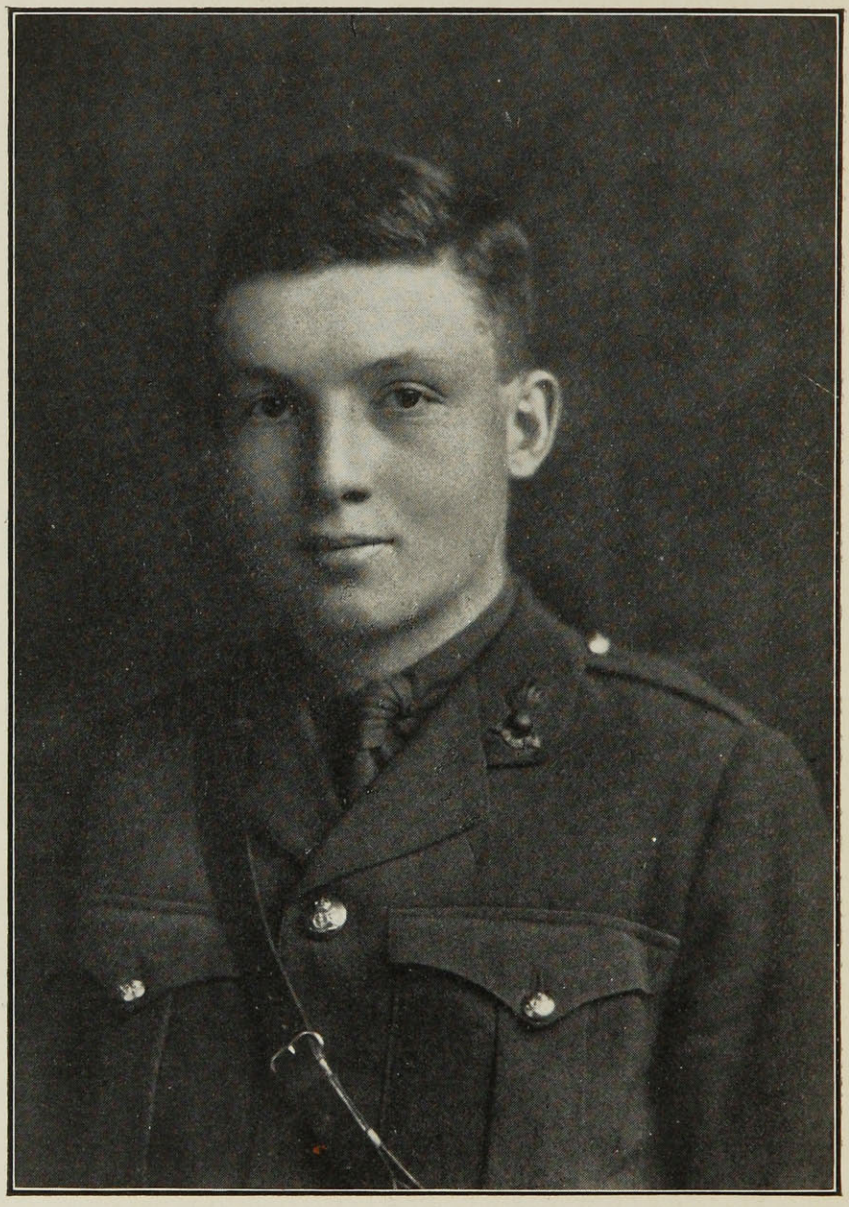

Poems and Letters
of
William R. G. Mills

Second Lieutenant Royal Field Artillery
(Killed in action in the Salient, Ypres)

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MCMXVIII

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Preface

WILLIAM ROBERT GRANVILLE MILLS (BILLY), the eldest child of Granville Mills, of the P.W.D., India, and Cordelia his wife, was born at Secunderabad, Deccan, on December 31st, 1897.

He was educated at l'Ecole de l'Ile de France, Liancourt, France, at Hartford House, Winchfield (Mr. Lloyd's), and at Eagle House, Sandhurst (Mr. Lockhart's), where he obtained a Foundation Scholarship at Winchester College in June, 1911.

Both at his preparatory schools and at Winchester he won many prizes. At Winchester, in 1913, he won the Headmaster's Prize for French; in 1914, the Warden and Fellows' Prize for English Verse; and in 1915 the Warden and Fellows' Prize for English Essay. He was a College Prefect and played in College fifteens and ran well in Junior and Senior 'Steeplecha'.' At Christmas, 1915, he was elected to the Senior Classical Scholarship at Christ Church, Oxford.

On leaving Winchester he was given a commission in the Royal Field Artillery, Special Reserve, and was gazetted in February, 1916.

On June 30th, 1916, he went to the front and was all through the battle of the Somme and at Contalmaison, Martinpuich, Mametz Wood, and Le Sars.

The Battery moved to the Ypres Salient and he was home on leave from January 5th to January 15th, 1917. Returning to Ypres, he was killed by a shell in the front line trench on the afternoon of February 16th, 1917. He was buried next day at Transport Farm, Zillebecke.

I have collected and published these, his poems and letters, thinking those who knew and loved him would like to have them as a memento of his life and character, and that those who come after may perhaps read and ponder on these ' foot-prints on the sands of time.'

C. MILLS.

5 Gliddon Road,
W. 14.
3rd May, 1918.

POEMS, ETC.

Pan

THE mists were rising from the ground
When I rode across the heath;
I cantered along without a sound:
The turf was firm beneath.

A piper piped a melody,
Haunting and low and sad;
It floated through the twilight gray:
I heard and I was glad.

Of distances the music spoke,
Of barren wind-swept hills,
Of the lonely peasants' peat-fire smoke,
And the emptiness that fills:

Of tinkling sheep-bells on the down,
And the chalk and the short-cropped grass;
Of the upland rabbits' burrow-town,
And the track where the wild-goats pass.

Of rivers flowing midst the reeds
Majestically slow,
Of browsing kine in water-meads,
Where the flags and the bullrushes grow.

In rhythm all around me swayed;
  Smiling I left my horse:
I found the man in a dewy glade,
  Beside the flaming gorse.

He was a dusty wandering wight,
  His face was calm and wise;
His ragged cloak was thin and light,
  But his soul was in his eyes.

His eyes were brown and wonderful,
  So joyful, yet so sad,
So stern, and yet so merciful,
  So sober, yet so mad.

The gypsy's pipe in his lean brown hand,
  Was a reed unknown in the glen:
It must have grown in a foreign land
  Far from the haunts of men.

'O piper, piper, pipe again,
  Pipe me that magic tune,
It gladdened me, yet gave me pain;
  Pipe; 'tis a princely boon!'

'O princely boon, that you would hear
  Twice that which mortal man
Save you and me, nor prince nor seer
  E'er hears, the song of Pan!

Ah, no, Sir, no: I pipe that tune
  But once in all the year,
On a rainless evening late in June,
  For the moon and the clouds to hear.'

'I may not hear it once again:
O stranger, you are hard!
Where did you learn that wondrous strain?
Is Pan some mighty bard?'

A dreamy look came o'er his eyes;
They seemed like limpid pools
Beneath whose depths a treasure lies,
The long-lost wealth of fools.

'' 'Twas sorrow made me leave my home,
The sorrow of mankind,
'Twas sorrow made me swear to roam
A remedy to find.

Alone I wandered in distress,
A wandering without end,
Till I came to the land of happiness,
And there I found my friend.

In Arcady are deep cool streams,
And the fruit on the trees hangs ripe;
'Tis the paradise of all man's dreams;
'Twas there I found my pipe.

I met beside a running brook
An idle shepherd boy:
He greeted me with a friendly look,
And a laugh of purest joy.

His body was brown and lithe and tall,
And straight as an aspen spear,
His hands were finely-shaped and small,
And his feet were the feet of a deer.

Beneath the bronze-hued velvet skin
  Like waves in a sunlit sea
The muscles rose and fell within,
  All rippling smooth and free.

His lips were like cherries, full and red,
  Brown as a nut was his cheek,
Like a mettlesome steed he carried his head,
  His eyes were the eyes of a Greek:

Steel-gray eyes with floating specks
  That danced in the light with glee,
And laughed like the breakers that wash the decks
  Of storm-tost ships at sea.

His smell was the smell of the country-side,
  The smell of the morning dew,
The smell of the covert, the smell of the ride,
  The smell of the woodland yew.

His voice was like tinkling faery bells,
  Like the wind that sighs o'er the weald,
Like a torrent that rushes through mountain dells,
  The voice of the open field.

"Ho stranger with the solemn face,
  And eyes so dark and sad,
Come tarry by this stream a space
  With a lonely shepherd lad:

And share some wild-goat's milk with me,
  And barley bread, and cheese,
And tell why you wander so heavily,
  And what is your heart's disease."

I told of the sorrow that burdened my soul,
And it fell to the ground like a load
That a man has carried as far as his goal,
Then gladly lays down on the road.

He laughed—then picked a pipe from the ground,
A curious reed-fashioned toy,
And I listened in awe to the unknown sound
As he played me the song of joy.

And then he played me the song of grief,
And the song of things unseen,
And the song of the newly-opened leaf,
And the song of the country green.

I buried my head in the cool green grass,
And sobbed like a little child:
I heard the throbbing music pass,
So terrible, so wild.

I sprang to my feet and stared around,
'Twas even as I feared:
The wonderful pipe still lay on the ground,
But the boy had disappeared.

"By Heaven, I know thee now," I cried,
"Thou art no mortal man:"
That tune that breathed of the country-side
Was the tune of the pipes of Pan!

I have never seen him once again,
Though I have sought him long:
But my pipe can soothe me in sorrow and pain
When it plays me that magic song.'

'And where is Pan now, stranger, say?
And can I find him too?
And how can I reach Arcady?
And will my dreams come true?'

'I know not, friend, but I have fears
That the Pan that I saw is dead;
He has left for ever this vale of tears,
And the cold green turf is his bed.

For none of the gods of the open-air
Can live in a world of lies,
And agony, and toil, and care,
And smoke-hidden brazen skies.

Yet shall I find him in the end;
Soon may my journey cease.
Write over me: "Pass softly, friend,
A wanderer is at peace!"'

I looked at the piper and cried aloud,
For he lay on his face in the grass:
And the moon looked out through a broken cloud
To see a man's soul pass.

* This Poem won the Warden and Fellows' Prize for English Verse at Winchester College, July, 1914.

Failure

HE wore a red sash, and one of those red knitted caps that sailors used to wear, with a tassel. His hands were horny, as sailor-men's are. From his clear brown skin, his roving black eyes, and his light springy walk, you would have thought him but a boy. The gold rings in his ears were the gift, he told me, of the Emperor of Ceylon. I knew, then, that this was none other than the famous sailor Sinbad.

For many years I had wished to meet this man and to question him; above all, I wished him to tell me of his meeting and struggle with the old man of the sea. And when I had heard his story, I pondered on it.

This old man, it seems, is really no man, but a devil, who lies in wait for every sailor who sails the sea. I cannot recall his name in the Persian tongue, but the meaning of it, translated, is our word Failure. His method of attack is to wait until his victim has passed him by, and then to spring on his back from behind. Once his arms have made

fast their grip, it is indeed a terrible task to shake him off.

Sinbad, to tell the truth, was in utter despair until he found a calabash, full of red wine. In the moment of his delight he completely forgot the old man's existence, and, as he drank, gradually he came to realize that his tormentor had lost all weight, and all power to annoy. At this discovery he began to dance with joy, and old Failure, in his rage and mortification, relaxed his grip and fell to the ground. Sinbad acted as any sensible man would, under the circumstances: he picked up a large stone, took careful aim, and dashed out the old man's brains.

As we live we must meet Failure again and again; and unless we can gain a true philosophic conception of his insignificance, he will cling round our necks all our lives, and strangle us, as he has strangled many a poor sailor before us. To-day, especially, the sea is stormy and the clouds are lowering. None of us can know what we may be called upon to face, either during the war or in the hard time to follow. But whether as individuals, as a class, or even as a nation, we must be prepared to face with courage, and in the spirit of sportsmen, failures which may be great or small, but which will all be bitter. While we are yet young, then (and he is very old, as old as the world itself), let us drink deep of the wine of good hope, and kill past failure with the great stone of present effort. It was for effort that we were sent into the world;

it is the effort itself that counts, and will count, whether the result be success or failure; and if it is certain failure that we must face, all the finer and the more worthy the effort. The Serbians have a proverb, 'No true effort is ever wasted,' and it is worthy of them. Assuredly the effort is never wasted, in all time, though the success or failure of it may vanish in a night.

Let us drink deep of this knowledge, as of good red wine from a calabash. Then we shall be able to put Failure in his place, as a minor incident in the course of our lives. And the sooner we put him in his place, and keep him there, the better for our inward happiness. There are few finer things than a gallant failure; such a failure is no failure at all, but true success.

Arthur

OVER the marsh where the wild pigs wallow,
Over the flats where the curlews cry,
Over the green-black bog will I follow
Under a purple sky.

Into the land of the last awaking,
Into the land of the last long rest,
Into the land where the waves are breaking
Over the shores of the west.

There may I seek for the end of sorrow,
There may I find the long day done,
There may I rest in the shade of to-morrow
Under the setting sun.

Lines on the Abolition of College Beer

YES, all is o'er. We must drink water now,
Or sip the anaemic juice of the cow.
Swipes are for ever gone; the doctors say
Beer hinders work, and saps the strength for play.
Besides, of course, the present situation
Makes it the gravest danger to the nation.
If College were to go on drinking beer,
What could prevent the German's landing here?
What were the worth of our all-shattering guns
If College traitors drank—and helped the Huns?
Yet, Swipes, methinks the spectres of the past
Rise from their graves to watch thee breathe thy last.
And Bacchus drapes his portly paunch in black,
To signify, O Swipes, we wish thee back.

The Song of the Pessimist

A WRIGGLING little worm put out
His flabby little head.
(It may have been his tail, no doubt:
Both ends are soft and red.)

It rained, and rained, and rained, until
The grass was merely mud.
The rain poured down the roof of Mill;
One huge, enormous pud—

Dle gathered underneath the trees:
The worm just wriggled out,
And wondered, with a wormish sneeze,
What it was all about.

'Last year it rained like this,' he said,
'It rained the year before.
My learned father, lately dead,
Told me what it was for.

" It rains for Eton match: " said he,
" Sometimes for Domum day.
But then it only drops, you see,
In a gentlemanly way.

" But when you see it tearing down,
Like an early-rising thrush,
When the ink-black heaven tries to drown
Earth in one savage rush;

" Why, then, my son, fifteens are near:
That week keep underground.
Fifteens come only once a year;
It's painful to be drowned." '

He followed then his sire's advice,
With wisdom, as I think;
His fast receding tail waved twice,
Pathetically pink.

At the Telephone

AH Julia! 'twas not for thy golden hair
I loved thee, nor for those twin sparkling eyes,
Nor for the lashes which o'ercloud their skies:
Light clouds, that half reveal the heaven there.
Nay Julia, thou hast caught me in the snare
Of other beauties. Richer is the prize
Thou givest me than all the gold that lies
In Ophir or in cruel Ocean's care.

Thy voice it was that won me, and the fall
Of sound, like dew from roses, drop by drop.
Oft in the evenings, pensive and alone,
'Tis sweet in idleness to hear thy call.
I need but clamour 'one five six hop,'
To hear thee speak—upon the telephone.

Bluebeard

At The Jollity Theatre, Gliddon Road,
on January 27th, 1916.

COMMAND PERFORMANCE

Mr. William D'Arcy, assisted by a distinguished all star Company, presents the Tragedy of

'BLUEBEARD.'

Caste.

JOHN BLUEBEARD .....Mr. William D'Arcy.
ROSABELLE, his wife .....Miss Jessie Jollity.
Anne, her sister ..... Miss Averil Ainsworthy.
Isabel ..... Miss Connie Comely.
Jack ..... Mr. Cecil Charming.

Soldiers, Pages, Brothers and Attendants.

SCENE I.

Bluebeard's Palace.

(Enter a Page blowing a trumpet. Then Bluebeard *and* Rosabelle *followed by two bridesmaids.)*

Bluebeard. Now we're married, man and wife,
You are mine for all your life,
Welcome home, my Rosabelle.

Rosabelle. Oh, this house will suit me well.
Why, it's quite a palace, John,
Golden chairs to sit upon,
Golden floor and golden tables,
Golden roof and golden gables.

Anne. Yes, and golden forks and knives,
You'll be happy all your lives.

B. Ah, if gold gave happiness
Gold would then be well worth winning.
I have found it gives me less
Than I had in the beginning. *(Sighs)*
Well dear, it may give you pleasure
To inspect my house at leisure.
Very well then, now's your chance,
I must leave to-night for France.

R. What so soon. You couldn't John.
What shall I do when you're gone? *(crying)*
Really John, I think you might
Stay here on our wedding night.

B. Urgent business, I must go,
Sorry to disturb you so.
I'll be back, dear, in a week.

R. One would think to hear you speak,
We'd been married twenty years.

B. Come my darling, dry those tears.
Anne may stay till I come back,
So may Isabel and Jack.
You may wander where you please,
I will give you all the keys.

A. Oh, the keys are golden too.
Golden keys for golden doors,
Golden keys to let us through
While we tread on golden floors,
Breathing heavenly perfumes,
Wanderers in golden rooms.

R. This one's iron, I declare.
What is iron doing here?

B. That's the key you must not use,
Use the others when you please:
Open any door you choose
With these ordinary keys.
Pass the iron portal by;
Don't attempt to enter.

R. Why?

B. Why, because I tell you so
That's enough for you to know,
Do what you are told to do:
What are women coming to?

R. There, there, don't get angry, John,
I shall miss you when you're gone,
So be pleasant while you're here.

B. Well, I must be going, dear.

R. Mind you bring some pretty things
Home from France when you come back.
Necklaces and golden rings,
Toys for Isabel and Jack,
And a pretty golden fan
For your little sister Anne.

B. All right. Now I must be going,
All my men are in the court.
Mind your cooking, mind your sewing,
Drink the claret, leave the port.
Doing, Sweetheart, being good,
Everything that good wives should. [*Exit.*

(Song from outside dying away: 'Keep the Home Fires burning,' &c.)

CURTAIN.

SCENE II.

(The same, two days later. Enter ROSABELLE *and* ANNE.)

A. Oh, I'm sick to death of gold,
Sick of doing what I'm told,
Use the iron key, now do,

See where it will lead us to.
Are you frightened of a man?

R. No, John told us not to, Anne.

A. John is miles away in France,
Now's your time and now's your chance.
Well, if you're afraid, I will:
I will do it: you sit still.

(She snatches up the key and rushes out, R. *follows slowly, wringing her hands. A Pause, Shrieks and a Thud. Re-enter* R. *with the key which is covered with blood.)*

R. Here's a pretty 'How-de-do;'
Anne has fainted—well she might.
Oh, I nearly fainted too,
I am in an awful fright.
Bluebeard murders all his wives,
We're in danger of our lives. *(Enter* ANNE.*)*

A. Have you shut that awful door?

R. Yes and locked it, here's the key.

A. Well then, we can scrub the floor
So that John will never see.

R. Oh, we'd better run away
Or he'll kill us like the others.

A. We can go back home to-day,
We can go back with our brothers.

R. Oh, I hope they'll come here soon.
What a happy honeymoon. *(Weeps.)*

(Song outside, gradually gathering strength:)

'Here we are, here we are, here we are again,
Here we are, here we are, here we are again,
Hullo, Hullo, Hullo, Hullo, Hullo.
Here we are,' &c.

A. Listen, he is coming back,
John is coming on our track. *(Shrieks.)*

R. Steady Anne, and let us see
Whether we can wash this key.
*(*ANNE *runs out and fetches a basin.)*

A. Here's some water: now we'll try.

R. That's right: now we'll wipe it dry.

A. That's no use, the stain still shows.
(Both weep.)

R. Here he comes, we'd better hide.
What will happen Heaven knows,
Heaven only can decide. *(Exeunt both.)*

(Enter BLUEBEARD.*)*

B. Through the mud and through the rain
Bluebeard marches home again.
I have won a glorious battle
I have plundered sheep and cattle.
Now behold me home once more
Knocking at my castle door.
Ho! Where are you Rosabelle?
Here she comes: I see her.—Well?

R. Oh, I'm glad to see you, John.

B. I come home to find you gone!
You have used the iron key.
Don't deny it, I can see.

(He grips her wrist, snatches the key and looks at it.)

(Sternly) Very well then, now you know
Rosabelle, that you must die.

R. John you couldn't; let me go.

B. Listen: I will tell you why.
Astrophil, the witch, my nurse,
Cursed me with this awful curse.
When a boy I ne'er obeyed her,
Many and many's the trick I played her.
So she cursed me: 'John,' said she,
'Just as you have worried me
So your wives shall disobey you,
Cheat you, rob you and betray you.'
Driven by the magic spell,
I've already killed nine wives.
There they hang where you know well.
Dismal end to happy lives.

R. Let me live just one more day.

B. You may live an hour to pray.
(Binds her with a scarf.)
In an hour I'll return.
I would save you if I could,
But the Fates will never turn,
Nothing's ever any good. *(Groans.)*
[Exit.

R. Well you heard what happened, Anne.
I have got another hour.
Run and see what you can scan
From the castle's highest tower.

If our brothers come I may
Live to see another day.

(Pause.)

Anne, do you see anyone?

A. Nothing but the setting sun.

(Pause.)

R. Anne, do you see anyone?

A. Nothing but the setting sun.

(Pause.)

R. Anne, do you see anyone?

A. Nothing but the setting sun.

(Pause.)

A. Yes I can, I see them now.
Here they come across the hill.

(Pause.)

Here they are, they've crossed the brow,
Oh, they're riding with a will.

(Enter BLUEBEARD.)

B. Well your time's up Rosabelle,
Don't forget I loved you well.

R. Yes, and I forgive you John,
Think of me when I am gone.
Go now quick and bring the knife,
I will say good-bye to life. [*Exit* BLUEBEARD.

SONG *(gathering strength.)*

'Hullo, Hullo, who's your lady friend?
Who's the little girlie by your side?
I've seen you, with a girl or two.

Oh, Oh, Oh, I'm surprised at you.
Hullo, Hullo, stop your little games,
Don't you think your ways you ought to mend.
It isn't the girl I saw you with at Brighton.
Who, who, who's your lady friend?'

A. Sister, can you hear them sing?
Can you hear them galloping?

(Pause. Re-enter BLUEBEARD, *amid loud shouting, pursued by the three brothers.)*

1ST BROTHER. Turn, you scoundrel, turn.

B. All right, kill me, kill me, I won't fight.

R. Spare him, spare him.

1ST B. No we won't. There, there, there, there.

R. Don't, oh don't.

(All stab him. Shrieks. FIRST BROTHER *unties* ROSABELLE, *who falls on to* BLUEBEARD, *weeping.)*

B. Good-bye, good-bye, Rosabelle,
Bluebeard bids you all 'Farewell.'

CURTAIN.

LETTERS

On the Somme

June 30, 1916 (8.30 p.m.)

We are hanging about in the mouth of Southampton Water, so I am writing for something to do. This is quite a decent old transport; it was once a Booth Liner. There are quite nice cabins with three berths in each. There are a lot of Gunner officers on board, principally Australians. I can't think what we are waiting for. We shall reach Havre about 8 o'clock in the morning I believe. It is most lovely weather, and D. and I have been smoking a long time on the bridge.

The journey down was very familiar, and I am glad to say I caught a glimpse of Chapel Tower down in the hollow, and Hills and Water-meads.

HAVRE,

July 1 (9 a.m.)

We are waiting in the harbour again, I don't know why. We will disembark in half-an-hour. We have just been amusing ourselves throwing pennies to

penner plees, Sare,' etc., ad lib. The most amusing part was when someone tossed out half-a-crown by mistake.

It was grand coming down Spithead last night in a very fine red sunset. The last we saw of England was the searchlights of the Portsmouth Forts sweeping the water.

No. 2 General Base Depot,
Havre,
July 1 (10 a.m.)

I have spent the night here, and don't know how long we shall have to stay. It may be a few hours it may be a week. Meanwhile we are all very comfortable in little wood and canvas huts. The weather is glorious and yesterday it was almost too hot to bear.

We disembarked and spent several hours in Le Havre before reporting. We went to the English officers' club and then we went and drank vermuth on little tables in front of a rather jolly little café. We lunched at a rather second-rate hotel, though I must say the cooking was very good. Then we came up here on a tram, half-an-hour's journey, and reported and had some tea. (The first of the horrors of war is condensed milk!) We then found our luggage had disappeared, so D. and I had to go back to Havre, and walked miles and lost our tempers with each other pretty soon. We were neither of us to

blame, really, so we soon made it up and tracked our luggage down. Then we were lucky in striking the best restaurant in Havre for dinner, Tortoni's. It is in the Place opposite the docks, and frequented by Naval officers, Brass Hats, French officers, and all sorts of nuts. We had our dinner out on the verandah opening on the street, and it was great fun; only 4 frs. a head including Normandy cider, 'extra supérieur.' Jolly good I thought! It was the best dinner I've had for years anyway.

We saw some freshly caught Huns just after we disembarked, being marched down the street as prisoners—very interesting. They looked fine fat fellows—utterly beastly, of course, but quite clean and shaved and plump and cheery, I suppose at the thought of travelling first class to Donnington Hall.

July 3 1916 (3.30 p.m.)

Just a very brief line. I'll write again soon. We all left Havre for the front at ten to-night, so Cheero. I know what Division I'm going to, but no more, nor to what part of the Front. D. is going to the same Division.

I am feeling 'in the pink,' as the men say. 'Hoping as it finds you the same.' I have been censoring letters all morning.

I do hope you aren't worrying and are keeping cheerful; there is nothing to worry about me, so please don't, Mother dear.

23RD DIV. RE-INFORCEMENT CAMP,

July 5, 1916.

After two nights in the train we are here at rail-head, some ten miles from the fighting, awaiting orders.

I really enjoyed the journey awfully. We left after midnight on Monday and went to a big town not far off. It was only about seventy miles but the journey took eight hours. Well, we had several hours in the town, and entrained for the front about four o'clock in the afternoon.

It was lovely weather, a warm summer evening and we sat with our carriage door open as the train went along very slowly. All the women were hay-making in the fields and waved to us like anything, and others would come to their doors and wave. The inevitable small boys stood on the roads and in the fields as we passed and kept on shouting:— 'Biskay, Biskay, Bouilly beef,' and got quite a good harvest.

The country was awfully pretty, I thought, all hay and poppies everywhere.

This morning we were soon in a more marshy sort of country with a lot of poplar trees, and I began to hear the guns very distinctly and before long we detrained. We passed a very smart-looking Indian Cavalry regiment bivouacked back on the line. I hope we shall be told which batteries we are to be sent to from here before very long.

Don't send cigarettes. I got a lot of Abdullas

awfully cheap at one of those canteens that ladies run on the stations out here. I can't tell you what a blessing they are—hot tea and everything of the best when you have to wait about for hours on end at these beastly French stations, usually at about midnight. I bet those women don't know how grateful everyone is to them, and I can tell you they are jolly hard worked.

23RD DIV. AMMUNITION COLUMN,
July 8, 1916.

We came up in a motor-lorry and slept in a barn near here, and reported at Div. H.Q. on the morning of the 6th.

The guns were a wonderful sight last night, they were like great flashes of lightning flaring up all over the sky.

Well, three of us were posted to Batteries and three to Ammunition Columns, and I had the bad luck to be sent here as one of the junior three. I do hope I shall be sent up when they want to replace casualties in the Batteries. It's absolutely sickening to be so near to the fighting and yet so far away, three or four miles behind the line.

Well, I've had my grouse so I'll get on. Our Division has greatly distinguished itself in the fighting, and the King has sent our corps a special telegram of congratulation. The infantry are splendid, they came back from the line with German helmets

on and grinning all over, you should just see them. But there is very heavy fighting ahead. I went up to a dump about a mile and a half behind the line yesterday to deliver a large quantity of infantry ammunition, and I went up and saw a big consignment of prisoners at a farm. It was pouring with rain and they looked very wretched, poor beggars. I have not yet got a helmet but I'm going to do my best. A fellow gave me a German button yesterday which he got in a fight two days ago.

Our guns did the hell of a strafe yesterday. You should just have heard them. We had a huge one just close, the explosion knocked several tents down each time it went off.

The country here is most awfully pretty—it really is! All big fields of wheat, with quantities of poppies and cornflowers mixed in. The weather has been perfect except for yesterday, when it poured with rain. I was quite comfortable. I shook down for the night in a wagon with hay on the floor and my blankets, and I put my ground-sheet slantwise over the top for the rain to run off. It is fine again to-day, but the mud—is all that people say of it. It is just like thin gruel, yards deep and it stinks. We have our horses picketed out, of course, and we live under a tarpaulin rigged up against a wagon. We are all right, but you can imagine the job we have getting the horses and harness clean and watering the horses. That's all we have to do the whole day long, and it takes us all our time.

There's a very interesting church here, where the

statue of the Virgin has been knocked off and hangs out holding the Baby in her arms over the town. I hope you are keeping fit, and certainly don't worry about me, as I'm as safe in this job as if I were a conscientious objector. I'm going up the hill now on the off chance of seeing a Hun shell burst in the distance.

From the Diary. July 5.

We left the Junction at two in the morning. I was sound asleep and woke in quite a different country, all poplars and marshy ground. From several indications I judged we were somewhere behind the French lines and before long we came to Amiens. At Doullens a Padre appeared and we learned we were bound for the neighbourhood of Albert, where the great British offensive had begun. He cheered us in a peculiar way of his own, telling us about the huge numbers of casualties, and giving us vivid accounts of amputations he had seen. We arrived at Frechincourt at about eleven o'clock and spent the day at the re-inforcement camp there: in the morning we saw the artillery of our Division moving down the roads. At nine at night we left in a motor lorry, forty of us, officers and men. The crush was awful and we were in it four hours. We went right through Albert in among the guns. The flashes were enormous and lit up the whole sky. Eventually we came back to D. where I spent the night in a barn with the men, quite comfortably.

Diary, July 6.

Very early I went off with a corporal to get hold of some rations, and we got some from an A.S.C. dump just outside the village. We passed a little cemetery and wayside cross. The country is very pretty, all cornfields full of poppies and cornflowers and the weather is splendid. The sky is quite crowded with aeroplanes and observation balloons.

Diary, July 7—16.

For ten days we stayed in the field near Dernancourt, while the battle was going on round Contalmaison, Mametz Wood and the Bois des Trônes. I had a little excitement on the fourteenth as I went up to beyond the Bois to Becourt to salve one of our wagons. Becourt Wood was a wonderful place, full of gun positions and of graves.

July 13, 1916.

I'm still in this show. I'm told one is fairly certain to get to a battery in time so I'm not quite so dismal, though it's hard to keep patient with so much going on.

I had rather an exciting morning (for this show) to-day. One of our wagons got on fire last night. It was picking up salvage in amongst the trenches when a lot of bombs exploded and we had a horse killed, two wounded and a corporal and an officer wounded too. I was sent up this morning with a wagon and three men to inspect the remains and see if anything could be done, and put a guard on it.

We found the wagon quite close to the front, as you will understand when I say it was on ground that belonged to the Germans a fortnight ago. It was awfully interesting. What strikes one most, I think, is the extraordinary silence of everything. It seems rather a funny thing to say, with the noise of the guns firing from every hole and corner, but I think you will know what I mean. There was some machine-gun fire to be heard too, but nothing else at all. It's awfully queer.

Well we came back through the town, under the hanging statue I told you of—a wonderful sight, painted bright gold. There was a motto in Latin painted under the windows of the church:—'Glory to God in the Highest,' but the rest is rather appropriately blown away. The church is fearfully battered, and so is the whole town, as the Boche shells it every day. We watered and fed our horses and then came straight back. I picked up several German bullets as clean as new pins, but I have only kept one as a 'souvenir' and gave the rest away to the fellows. Immediately I got in I rode off to a Château and got a glorious hot bath in a proper deep bath.

. . . .

I had to break off in the middle of this letter last night as I was sent off to collect the remains of that wagon. I took four men and a wagon to carry it in, and got there at half-past nine on a nice moonlight night. It lay beyond a big wood they used to call Blighty Wood. You should have seen the crowd

of infantry, and the travelling kitchens, and the little pack ponies that carry up the ammunition. The place was crowded, and packed with guns, firing as hard as they could go.

We got the wagon, or the remains of it, back about midnight. Incidentally I saw my first Boche shell as we came up the road out of the town. It wasn't very terrifying, it just came over ' whizz-bang ' and pitched in the field by the roadside about twenty-five yards from us, just over and a little ahead. You should have seen all the horses jump. It was rather amusing. I turned round to see my drivers laughing so hard they could hardly keep in their saddles. I found the cause of it was that my bombardier, who is an excellent father of a family but has a reputation for not being very fond of whizz-bangs, was already under the seat of the wagon taking cover behind his steel helmet.

It was the only shell that came at all near us, as our side was doing most of the strafing.

We have a band across the way playing ' Toreador.' Bands play the infantry up and down to and from the trenches, so you musn't imagine there is none of that over here. Several cavalry regiments passed the other day, including some native Lancer regiments in full war paint. Every one out here is cheerful and full of go, it certainly is a fine army we have out here. The Germans are a fine set of men, too (I mean the prisoners), but they look awfully down in the mouth. They have the cheek to chatter English to each other and to their escorts, though

I am told if a Hun sees an Artillery badge now-a-days he will snarl and spit and do all the rest of his horrible tricks, and they all are busy 'hating' our artillery, and have vowed to take no artillery prisoners, which is likely enough in the present state of affairs.

July 17.

I have got a fine German steel helmet; not one of the flashy ones but the new shrapnel helmet. It has a shrapnel hole in the top. I am going to try and get it home. Up at the battery positions the dead are lying like flies, I believe, and you can get helmets and rifles and any mortal thing just for the picking up. I've not been up there yet.

A big batch of several hundred prisoners passed our camp two days ago. Everyone came out to watch them pass in dead silence. You couldn't help being sorry for them. One of the officers amused us very much by hissing 'Schweine' in the approved Prussian style, but no one said a word the whole time they were passing, I am glad to say. Some were fine big fellows, but the greater number were wretched little weeds, I thought. Batches vary a lot, though, and sometimes you get a whole set of quite decent-looking Huns. They are usually Guards, I believe.

July 20.

I am enjoying myself fairly well out here, though I am getting a bit sick of stables and harness-clean-

ing, and wish I could get up to a battery. I took a good few wagon-loads of shells up to the gun positions at about eight o'clock the other evening, just before sunset. The whole line of guns was in action. You notice the whistle of the shells going over even more than the bang of the guns going off. They are just like express trains whizzing past.

I met a fellow who was in College with me on the road yesterday. He said 'Good morning' in a friendly sort of way without recognizing me at once, so I said 'Good morning, Ellenburger.' I think he got a bit of a shock meeting me out here like that. We had a chat for about five minutes and then I had to trot on and catch up my wagon.

I have got all Mother's letters in a bunch, please thank her for them, and tell her I should like a Persian carpet in her next parcel for our hut, also a gramophone and a billiard table. I shouldn't mind a cake either, though that isn't quite so important.

Diary, July 16 (Sunday).

On July 16th we moved into a new camp on the left of the main road and just south of Albert. The very first night I was out till 2 o'clock taking ammunition up to the wagon lines, and from this time on a very busy time started. On Wednesday the 19th, I took four loads of howitzer ammunition right up to the gun positions. We passed through Fricourt —no one could describe the mess the place was in: not one brick on another. The guns were in lines blazing away like anything, some in hedges, mostly

in the open; the noise was terrific and the whistle of the shells going over the queerest thing. On the road near Fricourt I met E., the sole survivor of the officers of his battalion, the 9th K.O.Y.L.I., who went over the top on the 1st of July. I heard the Germans had retaken Delville Wood. A lot of Australians are encamped near us, awful thieves but magnificent specimens. We have put up an officers' hut which is a very fine place, roofed over with felt, on the other side of the road, opposite the camp.

Diary, July 22.

Went into Albert in the afternoon to find a field cashier but failed. The Germans were putting some crumps into the town, which was full of Australians. We got orders to move the next morning. We had quite a tea-party in the afternoon, Captain A's brother, a friend, and S.

Diary, July 23-24.

Got up very early and moved into our new place at nine. It was a sandy bottom, close to the Albert —Amiens high road. Our horse lines were just in front of the Irish Guards' tents, on their parade ground.

July 29, 1916.

We are now in a sandy sort of bottom, close to a big main road, and we have put our own hut and a bell tent we have borrowed on the terraces in a high bank that runs behind our camp; there are stairs cut

all the way up the bank and it's all covered with shrubs, so we have our dining-room on the first floor and our bedroom on the top.

There hasn't been much doing since I wrote last. I took the men bathing in the river here yesterday and it was very pleasant. It's only a stream, really not more than four feet deep, but it's quite well known. The weather is fearfully hot over here, I don't know what you are getting.

Well, Mother dear, I hope you won't get any more letters from this address. I am hoping from certain reasons now my turn will come soon to go up to a battery, so I feel more cheerful about that.

I must tell you I have been extraordinarily struck by what I have seen of the French army. I think the war has made a great difference to them. The officers look very smart and efficient, and I consider their new uniform is as much better than ours in every way as it used to be worse. Smarter looking, better stuff and everything. The men seem bigger and stronger than the typical Frenchmen one used to see about, and they are far surlier and less talkative than our fellows. They have a queer sort of veteran look about them; there's no doubt the war has made a new country of France, though mind you, I don't think they are particularly fond of us, especially the country people.

P.S.—Going to a battery, just got orders.

Diary, July 29.

After a very ordinary day, most fearfully hot at tea-time, Captain A. told me that I had been posted to the 105th Brigade, and I had orders to go up at once. I took all my kit in a small arms cart and drove up to Brigade Headquarter's wagon line. There the Padre entertained me, till a horse was ready and I rode on with a guide through Fricourt to Brigade Headquarters in Bottom Wood. There I saw Colonel N. and was posted to C. Battery, Captain R. I walked to the battery position, which was just on the left of Mametz Wood and close to Acid Drop Copse, with Contalmaison on the far side of the hill. Our target was a portion of the new switch line from Pozières, which had just been captured, to Flers, in front of Courcelette and Martinpuich. I arrived just in time for mess and thought the food exceptionally good. There were four other subalterns, Blyth, Andrews, Eastwood and Hindson, who was in B. House at Winchester. He was wagon line officer.

July 30 1916.

Just a short line to let you know my address, and that I am still kicking. The full address is:—'C Battery, 105th Brigade, R.F.A.'

It is an 18 pounder battery, I'm glad to say, and has rather a good reputation There are four other subalterns and the Battery Commander, a very jovial old fellow, an ex-sergeant-major in the Horse gun-

ners. His particular 'bête-noire' is anyone being late for breakfast. He addresses everyone as 'Kiddy,' especially me. He has promised to take me up to have a look at the Germans to-morrow, a personally conducted affair, which I'm rather looking forward to.

I saw a German on my way up to the battery position yesterday, a dead one. He was lying on his face in a cart-rut and they had covered his head and shoulders with soil. All the ammunition wagons run over him. We haven't buried all our own dead yet, let alone Germans. I believe our positions are supposed to be a fairly hot corner as these things go, anyhow there seem to me to be plenty of shells knocking about. No sooner did I put my head out of my dug-out this morning before breakfast to have a look round, than a beastly 'whizz-bang' burst over-head. You could see the shrapnel kicking up little spurts of dust in front, I believe one of them was about an inch off one of the 'batmen,' who was cleaning boots at the time. I returned to my dug-out. None of the others have come so near this morning. We have been doing absolutely nothing all day as our guns haven't been in action yet. They were firing a barrage most nights, but there's no need to stay up for that and I slept very comfortably considering. The weather is absolutely broiling hot.

I'm astonished at the magnificent food we get here, far better than in the column. Here is our menu at mess last night: soup, beefsteak, potatoes and French beans, fruit salad (cherries, greengages

and pine-apple) and a most priceless savoury, served up very hot, I don't know what it was. (They're strafing like H-ll now). Then we'd coffee with rum in it. This morning we got yesterday's papers.

Well I hope you are all feeling fit at home, and don't worry about me, as I am very fit. I'm glad I'm not too late for this show anyhow, though I expect the battery will go for a rest before it's over as it has been in action for some time.

I had a very nice letter from A. Did you know Winchester beat Eton this year. It's rather funny, I should have been leaving to-morrow, I suppose, if there hadn't been a war. I'm very anxious to know how high A. got in the examination for the Shop.

We have a most priceless little black dog in the battery, I think Averil would love him. Tell me all the news, how you are enjoying yourselves and so on.

July 31.

We should'nt be having a bad time now if it weren't for the Germans. The food is grand and we get yesterday's papers. Our dug-outs, too, are quite comfortable, except for black beetles and flies of course.

Last night, a bit after midnight, was the time the blighters chose to attack us with gas shells and tear gas. I was woken up and soon had a helmet on and eventually went to sleep in it. The gas hangs about in the dug-outs though, and this morning we were all very blear-eyed, with the tears rolling down our

cheeks. I used up three handkerchiefs before breakfast. I was awfully afraid our little dog would suffer from it, but the captain wrapped him up in a blanket, and he was all right, though he was a little funny about the eyes too. He is a very jolly little black dog, called 'John,' and was born about eight months ago at a farm the battery was staying at. He had a very nice glossy coat once, they say, but one fine morning he strolled in front of a gun just as it was being fired, and all his coat was singed and burnt. He's rather lucky to be alive, I think. John's one fault is laziness. When once he's settled down to sleep in the sun, I don't believe a 15 in. shell would wake him.

Diary, July 31.

Captain R. had promised to take me up to the trenches, but we got strafed so badly all day it was impossible. We really did get it rather in the neck and had three casualties. Two were fortunately only slight, but poor Fraser died two days after. It was a marvel he lived so long: a 5.9 burst in front of No. 3 gun-pit, and he had a dreadful wound in the forehead. It was an awful sight. He was quite a young fellow and had just been recommended for a commission. Altogether it was a bad day. . . . Domum Day.

Diary, August 1.

Eastwood took me up to the trenches after lunch and we had a very interesting time. There was no-

thing much doing up there. We went up Welsh Alley, along Lancashire trench to Gloster Alley, our front line trench. Our O.P. was there, and you could get a very good view both through glasses and with a periscope of Pozières, the Bapaume Road and Martinpuich. We also went up a long sap out in front of our line. There were a good many of our dead lying on the parapet from the last attack and the smell was pretty bad. The heat was awful, also the flies, and my steel helmet grew too hot to touch.

Diary, August 2.

Nothing much happened all day. After tea I went out with Blyth into Mametz Wood to cut walking sticks. It was rather a gruesome place, smashed and battered by artillery fire, full of cast-off equipment, boots, bombs, &c. We stumbled across a dead German lying on his face absolutely black with half his head off, covered with flies. It was a dreadful sight, I was nearly sick.

August 4, 1916.

We are still in action and I may have told you this battery is the crack one of the division and carried off all the competitions in training, including the four laying prizes. I hope some of our shots are going home, as we've fired enough, Goodness knows.

Myself, I have been given no responsible work so far, I don't know when I shall be. I just knock about and pick up all I can. I went up after lunch two days ago with another fellow to pay my first

visit to the trenches. We were home again for tea, but we managed to see quite a lot. We went to our observing post and along our bit of front line trench. In parts you can put your head up and have a good look round with your glasses and, of course, we have a very good periscope too. Then we went up a long sap out of our trench to within some thirty yards of their front line. The sap runs right on into the German trench, but, of course, it's barricaded with sand-bags. Up there you can't even put a periscope up if you value it, let alone your head. It was all very interesting, but the smell up there was sickening.

We all live in shirt sleeves and I've not had a tunic on for days. In some of the batteries the men are stripped to the waist. The flies are very bad. I've got a dug-out of my own now, about 6 ft. by 4 by 4. I'm very comfortable in it, and it has a roof of iron girders with two layers of sand-bags, waterproof felt and earth on top, so it ought to keep out anything but a direct hit. I've also got a fine steel helmet, new pattern. There isn't much difference, except that it has a rough surface and is a better colour.

Have I told you we have an Italian cook as brown as my boot? His name is Vosse and he comes from Soho, and by George he can cook. It's like living continually at the 'Rendez-vous,' and you'll find me quite 'blasé' when I come home. He's never content to give you anything plain, but always has it garnished and dished up in the most marvellous fashion. I've had no occasion to talk French yet, the native remains discreetly in the background in

these parts. The only occasion on which I've talked French, and talked it most forcibly, was to an old woman who deliberately gave me the wrong change at Havre, a franc short.

Diary, August 4.

Another pretty quiet day. Starting at nine o'clock however, we had a terrific night bombardment, four rounds per gun per minute for several hours on Munster Alley. I was with No. 4 gun until half past one in the morning, when the rate of fire slackened off to one round every four minutes. It was an extraordinary experience; the flashes and the noise and the stink of dust and cordite—just like a d—d nightmare. As the batteries were in lines three deep about 200 yards apart, it was only natural we should have casualties from prematures. A fuze cap put a hole through our water cart, which was a beastly nuisance, and we had two men wounded, one in the leg and one in the elbow. The latter, Matthews, was standing close to me and behaved with extraordinary pluck, I thought. He never groaned, just had it bandaged up and went on setting fuzes until someone told him to go off to the dressing station with the other casualties.

I helped with the ammunition most of the time. Our gun fired 374 rounds that night and the inside of the barrel was almost red-hot. She rocked and creaked as she ran up after firing, and I think the buffer springs were near breaking. We were glad to hear that two hundred Boches couldn't stand it

and came in and surrendered straight away. The Australians won their objective, and part of Munster Alley was captured by the 68th Infantry Brigade that night.

After a fairly quiet day, we had the h-ll of a night: gas shells started about four o'clock in the morning, and then they got right among our positions with 5.9 H.E. This lasted till six o'clock. One of them pitched within three yards of my dug-out. I slept fairly well considering. We had a driver killed and six horses killed, a wagon smashed, one gunner, two drivers and the Quartermaster-Sergt. wounded.

Diary, August 6.

In the afternoon we buried the dead driver down by the road in the valley. A very nice Padre came up and read the burial service. When we got back we were standing in front of the Captain's dug-out, Blyth, Andrews, the Captain and myself, when a d—d premature from the battery in our rear wounded the Captain. A shrapnel bullet went right through his thigh. We bandaged him up, and half-an-hour later he was carried away on a stretcher. Poor old man, he quite broke down at having to leave the battery. He wished me good luck. Andrews was put in command of the battery and carried on, and told me I could now take my turn as Orderly Officer with the others. We were shelled again in the night, but fortunately I slept through it.

August 7.

I hope you are 'all in the pink' and having a decent time at Peaslake; we have been having a very lively time here. We're all subalterns in the battery now, as the Captain was knocked out at tea-time yesterday, which was Sunday.

We'd only just come back from a funeral service for one of our drivers. It was a very nice 'Blighty' wound in the thigh, but he was very much upset at having to leave the battery, poor old man, and we are all very sick about it too. I should think it would be three months at least before we get him back. It's a beastly nuisance. We have had nothing but fine weather for four weeks now, it seems too good to last, doesn't it? Give my love to the family.

I do so like that photo of yours in the little case; I've just been looking at it again.

August 9.

I hope you won't mind my writing rather seriously for a bit, but you seem to have been worrying rather about me. I wish you wouldn't. Without being morbid, and looking at the matter coolly and without sentiment, the odds are quite heavy that I shall not be killed, ten to one at least. Certainly I have none of those miraculous presentiments on the matter myself. In any case, one soon learns out here it isn't a matter of very great importance either way. We must all die some day, and certainly I could be spared better than most, and you are lucky in having 'Boy'

to fall back on, as some have not. Anyhow, try and dismiss the matter from your mind entirely, as I try myself, and find it a great success.

I am very happy out here except for thinking that you are worried, so please worry as little as possible about anything.

Now for what little news I can give you. I'm in the wagon lines now, and am staying down here to help straighten things up until the battery comes out of action, which I hope won't be long. We had two days rest and then went into action again under our new B.C., and I was left down here. The new B.C. is only a subaltern, but he seems a very good sort indeed. He is quite youngish too. He came from another brigade to take over.

I quite enjoyed my ten days in action, though I felt rather in the way and a nuisance having nothing to do, but I suppose one can't expect to be much use to anybody for a bit. Still it's rather a beastly feeling.

It was rather amusing, we were rather heavily shelled as we were going away, and a big one landed right in the middle of our luggage, which was piled up in the road. Most luckily it didn't explode. As it was, our boxes were all chucked about, and if it had gone off, we should none of us have had anything left in the world.

The other subaltern at the battery line is an old Wykehamist, funnily enough. We were at Winchester together, but he was in a house and a good deal senior to me, so we only knew each other by

sight. We have rigged ourselves up quite a decent little shanty close to the horse lines, and I am very glad we did, as we are having our first rain for a month to-day.

I ordered a new soft cap from Lincoln & Bennett and it has just come. I'm very pleased with it, as it really is rather priceless; my other was too disreputable for words, and, from what I can see, it is even more the thing to be smartly dressed out here than at home: you can understand it in a way. You are very good sending parcels. I hope you don't mind it, but you don't know what a great event the post is out here.

August 18.

'We are staying at a farm': but it isn't a bit like Bairnsfather's, as it's a very decent place a good way back and we have all got beds, some of them with sheets. I expect we shall have a few days here, which will be rather nice.

You asked whether it was much use understanding the lingo out here, and I certainly have found it rather useful lately, especially when another fellow and I went into a big town for a 'bust.' We had a fine time, and bought lots of things and had a very good dinner at the best hotel, where such a pretty girl came and sat next me, with a young Frenchie, I could think of nothing else the whole time. We rode out of the town at nine and went the six miles back to our camp, and then had to get

up at three in the morning. I call that 'the strenuous life,' don't you? Round here the inhabitants hardly speak French at all, though.

I've had a lot of letters lately. One from Breynton and one from Trobs, and one from Paul Estrabaut, the fellow Mr. H. mentioned who has been keeping an account of old boys of 'L'Ecole de L'Ile de France.' He wrote me a very polite French letter, beginning: 'Cher Camarade.' He is wounded himself, poor fellow, pretty badly as he has been four months in hospital in Auvergne. I asked him about the two French fellows I liked best at the school. Girard is a cyclist, and has done very well as he has been 'cité a l'ordre du jour.' Pierre Paille is a 'brigadier' in the Artillerie de Compagne at the front.

Well, Mother dear, I've just heard we shall be in action to-morrow, so our rest has been short. I'm not sorry, though.

I must tell you 'John' had a terrible adventure this morning. He rushed at the old farm sow and quite playfully caught her by the tail. You never saw anything so funny in your life. The next thing we saw was 'John' legging it for home as hard as he could go, with the enraged sow bellowing behind him. She chased him right up to the door.

August 26.

I have not had time to write; I dare say you will understand why. You do seem to have had a good

time at Peaslake, it sounds as if it were just the place for you. Thank you for the heather you put in the letter.

We are very much settled down, and you should just see our mess with a most tasteful green cloth and all sorts of pictures on the walls, and one side table for bottles and another for illustrated papers, and a writing table and everything. We take turns for everything; so that we get two days observing in every six, two days orderly officer, and two days rest, more or less. I was going to ride back to the nearest town to-day but it came on to rain just after I'd started, harder than any rain I've seen, so that you were absolutely drenched in five minutes, so I decided to go back, have a change, and have my lunch in comfort and write some letters.

I rather enjoyed my first turn at observing. It's not bad sport, though I suppose it gets boring in time like everything else. I had a shoot too, and got two direct hits on a farm; it was a very pleasant experience seeing the brick dust go up in a big red cloud. I hope there was a Bosche or two inside. It's rather a funny thing. I have just discovered D.B.'s battery must have been hereabouts a few months ago, about March I should say. I have not seen him yet.

I was very pleased with your account of the day at Battle; you seem to have had a great time. I have had all your papers, thank you very much. I think every single fellow in the mess has the 'Weekly Times' sent, one has three, so, although

it's a very good thing, I think you may as well stop sending it, Mother dear, don't you?

I picked up a very fine Bavarian 'pickelhaube' two days ago, eagle and all. It was one of those field grey felt ones, not a black one, but still I was distinctly fed up when it was pinched from my dug-out yesterday, as I wanted it more particularly because of the place where I found it.* Bad luck to the thief, anyway; may he sit on the spike. I've got a belt as a souvenir of the place anyhow, with a 'Gott mit uns' clasp. Of course they are very common. I daresay I'll get another helmet soon too, they aren't hard to get up the line. The corporal I took with me had a fine bag; he got a complete officer's knapsack, belt, Mauser automatic pistol, pouch with ammunition sword knot and an officer's nickel-plated bayonet with a saw back. Also a wallet with some letters from Hamburg, a coloured post-card of Hindenburg, who looked about as pleasant as he usually does, and a Marching Song entitled: 'Wir müssen siegen.' As this remark occurs at the beginning of the chorus to every verse, I suppose the Boche has some doubts.

Did you get my letter about sending me my third tunic? The posts are very irregular now, but we can't grumble. They have been marvellous, so that now we're quite surprised not to get a mail every day.

Thank you very much for the magazine you sent me. About books—I'm not sure the best things

* Le Sars.

to send aren't really good solid books. In fact if you can get a cheapish edition of 'Vanity Fair' I'll start in on that—a thousand pages should keep me busy! Get an edition I can chuck away when I've finished. Don't cut down the magazines and papers, though.

I did see Bairnsfather's picture of Lieut. Jones, R.F.A., in the belfry. We were all very much amused. Did you see *Punch's War Number*: it was full of grand things, and you must get it and keep it. There were two very good gunner jokes.

What news of Ted now-a-days?

Who do you think is chaplain to our brigade? Tony Chute, who was junior chaplain to the Winchester Mission at Portsmouth. He came up to tea and held a service in the trench behind our position a few evenings ago. It was the first I'd been to since I left England.

You will be pleased to hear that our battery has done very well, and the Captain is in for the D.S.O. (and thoroughly deserves it) and one of our subalterns for the M.C., so if it comes off we shall not have done so badly, with a few Military Medals and D.C.M.'s for the men. And when we get back to civilization we'll have a 'bust' and wallow in the 'fizzy.' May it be soon.

Well, I shall miss the post if I don't stop now. Give every one my best love and thank J. for her letter.

P.S.—I've found the helmet. Cheero.

105 Brigade, R.F.A.

August 31, 1916.

Don't write to me at this address again as I shall have a new one in a day or two. The officers of the brigade are all being dispersed and we are all rather sick about it. I thought this battery would see me out the war. I shall be very sorry to leave my comfortable quarters.

I've had a lot of Winchester news, a letter from the Head, one from Greenwood and another from Mrs. K. The casualties in College have been awfully heavy. Well over two hundred Wykehamists have been killed. You remember Gibson: I was his 'valet' four halves. He's dead, and so is Ware who came to College on my roll. Johnstone, Prefect of Hall my first year, is wounded and missing: Sladen, who went into the Rifles a year ago is wounded, and two more men killed who were in College with me. It was an awful budget to get in one evening.

I'm so glad you got the little souvenir all right. I told the shop to send it, as we passed through, and paid them, and I didn't know if they would pocket the money.

There's not much one can say, so you must excuse dull letters. I hope leave will be opening again in a year or two. So long as the weather keeps fine, there's very little to complain of out here anyway.

September, 1916.

I've not much to say, but I thought you might like to know that I've changed into my new battery all right and that they seem a very decent lot. We have a perfectly enormous number of subalterns, which is rather a nuisance in a way, because there is so little to do. Another nuisance is that we are only attached, and therefore liable to be shifted again any day. But I suppose it's no good grousing.

I got the afternoon off yesterday and rode back to a little town about ten miles back. It was a very decent little place, almost English now; English notices in the shops, English papers and everything. I did a lot of shopping and got through quite a lot of money. I had an absolutely priceless dinner at a place called the Café de l'Entente Cordiale which is reserved for officers—hors d'œuvres, asparagus, chicken and green peas, grapes and half a bottle of wine—not bad for a place less than ten miles behind the line. Then I rode back in the dark, which took over an hour. I think my groom had been having a good time too, as I gave him all his pay before we started. You can get through quite a lot of money in a little place like that. Uncle C. was once Mayor or Town Major of the place I believe.

September 11.

I'm having quite a decent time out here: I don't suppose you will see me home for a good many

months yet, though, as there's no leave being given.

Nearly all the officers of our battery went into the town yesterday afternoon and we had a very amusing evening. I got a couple of 'souvenirs' for you and J., so you ought to get them soon after this. They are made out of German bullets and buttons and things. J. had better have the paper knife and you the other I should think, but you can settle that between you.

Well, six of us from this battery went into the same little place for dinner, Madame Salmes, the 'Entente Cordiale.' It was packed with officers and awfully cheery, I should think nearly all the division had some one there, and there were songs and things afterwards, and the girl there sang very well, and five of us got through three bottles of fizz, so we quite enjoyed ourselves; then we turned out at ten o'clock, and fetched our horses from the inn and rode back 'Hell for leather'—the Captain set the pace. We took a wrong turning which helped to make things amusing, but luckily it was a fine moonlight night. Well—we can't tell when we shall get the chance of another evening like that.

B Coy, 103 Brigade,

September 14, 1916.

I have been leading the strenuous life lately, so this is my first chance to write. We had very little sleep for three nights running, but it has not made me feel more than reasonably sleepy and to-night

(Boche permitting) I mean to have a jolly good sleep on a Boche bed that my servant found for me in a dug-out. It's a very clever idea, awfully neatly made of wood and iron lathes with an upward slope where the pillow comes. I slept in sheets the other night for the first time since I left England, and they were very acceptable at three o'clock in the morning. I was billeted on the village blacksmith and his wife, quite a good place.

September 16.

We had a very great success yesterday, I suppose it's all in the papers by now. It was fine work, perfectly arranged. We are in action almost continuously day and night, and it's an extraordinary sight and noise. We take the night duty in shifts, so we get a reasonable amount of sleep. But I can't say anything about it, so I'll just shut up. Our Observing Officer ran across the cinematograph operator yesterday, of all people, right in the middle of it all. I was fearfully interested to see that Cuffley was the place where the Boche landed in England, I thought from the first account it must have damaged some of Mr. B.'s ground. The Boche seems to have a 'down' on Waltham Cross and Enfield Lock somehow, doesn't he?

September 21.

I have just finished my two half days at the O.P. and have four days down here with the guns now.

I'm not sorry to be out of the trenches. It rained all the time I was up there, and the trenches are shallow and knee-deep in mud, so you soon get in a beastly state. By George, I did pity the infantry up there having to stay up night and day in the same soaking clothes. I've got rather a good servant now, and have got rid of the awful fellow I had. This one is quite young and a most superior youth as he has passed several first class examinations, training as a surveyor—which, of course, should make him very useful for our work, and I think I shall take him up to the O.P. later on. Anyhow he makes me astonishingly comfortable considering the conditions. I've been asleep three hours this afternoon, which was pleasant. One gets quite a rest down here at the guns, so we are not badly off. The post is going, so give my love to everyone.

September 23.

I quite like the Benson book. Perhaps it is a trifle dull, the people seem an uninteresting lot, but I'm not sure it isn't the right thing to read out here. The lemonade and soap were just what I wanted, and the sardines made a good 'hors d'œuvres' for dinner.

I found a lot of Boche papers when I was observing last, and read as much of them as I could. They were very interesting. Several of them were less than a fortnight out of the printer's hands. They were all either Leipzig, Dresden or Chemnitz papers,

so I suppose they were Saxons. They keep on 'strafing' England, I notice, as the soul of the opposition. I enclose a sample sheet all about War Loan. I don't know if you will get it.

You ought to be getting some jolly good news in England about now. We were awfully fed up with the last paper—nothing but Zeppelins all over, while we were getting really good news from everywhere. Zeppelins will soon be like a red rag to a bull out here.

Just one or two things I want you to get me. One is a smart pair of puttees as mine are getting very frayed, though they'll pass all right in a front line trench. The place I want you to go to is T. & A. in Jermyn Street. They advertise that they specialise in cavalry puttees. So next time you're passing Piccadilly way you could look in there—there's no hurry. I expect they'll be a bit expensive, but don't be frightened off unless they go over fifteen shillings; then you can hedge, I think. You do certainly send me most useful parcels.

Well I must end up now as the post is going. My servant has found a good place to send my washing to every week, which is a good thing. That Crown on the souvenir is only a Boche button melted on. Best love to the family.

October 2.

Thank you so much for the little thermometers, they are absolutely 'it.' The parcels never fail to give one an interest in life.

I forgot to send you the newspaper sheet last time so enclose it now.

You seem from your account to have got the house very nicely fixed up; I should like to see it, but leave looks as distant as ever. No one minds much as long as we are still pushing ahead; peace will seem dull after this. The infantry have a great inducement to take Boche trenches, because they are invariably more comfortable than ours. They seem to have got the hang of the thing pretty well now.

October 4.

I saw a very queer thing up in the trenches yesterday. There was a bit of a 'strafe' on and I saw two infantrymen very much amused by something, and when I came along they showed me what it was. Two very small field mice had come to the mouth of their hole in the trench, obviously very much alarmed by the 'strafe,' and were sitting there with their heads close together, shivering. The men were standing stroking their heads, and they seemed rather to like it than otherwise.

Aunt E. sent me a brace of partridges yesterday, which was very nice of her. They will be a great treat. We aren't doing badly here now though; we get roast meat and roast potatoes, and all that, pretty regularly, so don't waste any pity on officers out here. The men deserve a certain amount, especially the infantry and our drivers. The gunners on the whole have a fairly 'cushy' life.

October 10.

Thank you ever so much for your last letter and papers. I was very sorry indeed to hear Roseveare was wounded and hope it will not be serious. That is 'Bimbo' Tennant who was killed the other day. He was quite a decent fellow.

You seem to have heard about old Delamain. I had not meant to tell you; but I don't expect you'll worry much about things. He was shot through the heart by a sniper not many yards from our present observing station. There is not a live Boche within a mile of the place now.

So you went to see the Somme pictures. I expect they were very interesting. I wonder if you saw a real 'strafe.' The sudden way they start is the striking part. A sudden crash and everything is blotted out as far as you can see to right or left by flames or smoke. I don't think anyone who has seen a 'strafe' will ever forget it, somehow. There's never been anything at all like this before, even in this war. . . .

Thank you very much for the letter I got yesterday. I thought it an awfully nice letter and I read it again to-day.

About those questions you asked me—I take my turn with the others. All the responsibility there is, is two hours night duty every night on one day in five at the observing station. The only thing is there are too many of us I think—six subalterns with the battery, and of course I'm the junior, and only attached in any case, so that I may be shifted any

old time—but I hope not. I like the fellows here very much, they are a very good lot, and the Captain is a very sound man and not only knows his job but never tells anyone to do a thing he wouldn't do himself—which is what every B.C. should be, but a good many are not.

I liked that poem you sent me very much indeed. I've not seen Bimbo Tennant's though, if you could get it for me. By the way, Trobs wrote me a long letter a day or two ago and mentioned that he had met Roseveare in Town, and that he is all right—but his shoulder's pretty badly smashed in. Well, a good many worse things can happen than that, that's the only way to look at it. It seems a shame that a fellow so good at games should be crippled, somehow.

I'm very fit and flourishing, but don't expect me home for Christmas, Mother dear. If I get my leave in February or March I shall be lucky.

I must tell you I've been awfully extravagant and got some absolutely dazzling cream-coloured breeches from Tautz. They arrived this evening and are highly satisfactory: they fit marvellously well, and they have not been fitted at all. I shall not take them up into the trenches. If I get to Paris they will be useful, don't you think? But I'm beginning to think the junior subaltern's chances of getting to the 'Ville Lumière' are slender. Anyhow, on the march and riding you want a really nice pair.

I expect you'll enjoy 'The Professor's Love

Story.' I'm told it's very good. I tell you what I want to take you to when I get home and that's this 'Potash and Perlmutter' show. What do you think?

I'm most awfully sorry M. is killed. It's all very sad for the people at home, and somehow out here it seems so little.

Well, Mother dear, imagine me leading a gay life on the spree in Paris in a week or so—and don't I wish I may get there. Five others above me on the list.

October 21,

Our weather at present is very nice—sunny, and a blue sky, frosty mornings and a bit of a nip in the air. We have got quite a decent billet, but the people in this village are the absolute limit; perfectly disgusting, I call it, the way they behave to us with their inhospitable manner, grudging us their roofs over our heads—and we've had quite a hard time. The woman of the house is always in nagging over trifles, worrying the men in the kitchen, &c. I do most of the necessary quarrelling as I have most French to spout. We would all like to see this village smashed like—some other villages we've seen. They want some Boches to Prussianize them. The people aren't like this in all the villages, I must say I think we are particularly unlucky.

Well we had a glorious time yesterday I can tell you. Three of us rode over to a big town and put

up our horses at an inn, and I did some shopping and got a most glorious hair cut, shave and shampoo. Then we had dinner at a topping restaurant—oysters and chicken and fruit salad and a bottle of Moet and Chandon. We had a very nice ride home in the dark, and you can imagine my disgust at finding the old beast at my billet had locked me out. After about a quarter-of-an-hour he shuffled down and let me in with a horrible sort of chuckle (he's a sort of mixture of sly dog and village idiot). Thank Heaven, I remembered enough French to tell him exactly what I thought of him before going to bed. He curled up; he had done it quite deliberately.

I'm afraid the Paris stunt is quite off for me, though four of us will get a few days there. It's very annoying. Who do you think I met two days ago? Derek Baumer. I met him on the road, going to the town for a 'bust,' in all his best, and I was in a filthy state as we had got in at twelve the night before, got up at five and moved off at seven without a chance of a wash or a brush-up. It had been raining the day before and we had marched miles; men, horses and wagons were just one mass of mud and we were all soaked through, so you can imagine what a sight we looked. All the troops on the road turned round to stare—'War-worn heroes, what?' I was very glad to find a clean tunic waiting for me. My new cream breeches are quite dashing, I must say.

Well, Mother dear, I'm feeling quite as if I'd like a leave. Perhaps in four or five months—. Give them all my best love.

October 28.

Paris prospects look a bit rosier, but—I don't know. If it comes off, I think I will go to the Hotel d'Iena. I was thinking of going to the Meurice, but it's all swank anyway, don't you think? And I should like to go to your place.

Well, Mother, I went into the Town yesterday and went to a very smart restaurant for lunch which I had not heard of before. Who do you think I met there? Ted, and a couple of other fellows in his regiment. We had dinner together at the same place that evening, and, by Jove, it was the best dinner I've ever had. It was a bit of luck meeting like that, as he had come in by car about fifteen miles in the opposite direction to me. He was looking very fit, I thought, and we were a very cheerful party. We had a most priceless old fat waiter, just like Mr. John Bunny in the film.

There's not much to do in these French towns really, but I had a hot bath and went and saw the cathedral, which is really a fine one, I believe, and one can always go into a café and drink a sirop or a cocktail or something.

How jolly good Roseveare getting the Military Cross. Of course I made sure he deserved it, for he's that sort of fellow, born good at everything and born lucky—if it can be called luck. Then out here deserving a thing is not the same as getting it, so I'm jolly glad.

November 4.

I'm afraid this letter may seem to you a bit fed up, but I'm only a little bored—winter has pretty well come now and the mud in these villages is horrible—they have no drains of any sort. And my Paris leave has fallen through again—they won't let more than one go at a time, which of course takes half the spice out of it, I think. Then the story of leave opening again was a false alarm—there's nothing in it at all; so that altogether I shall be thoroughly pleased when we are in action again. I think I must really 'joy' into town after tea and have a good dinner.

I had quite a strenuous morning for this place. I took a ride for junior N.C.O's. and signallers and put them through it and thoroughly enjoyed myself, mostly without stirrups. I was terribly afraid I'd grown too fat to mount without stirrups, but I said quite brazenly: 'It's quite simple, like this,' and it came off all right, thank Goodness. It was All Souls' day in the town when I went in last, and it is evidently a great event out here. Parties of people with wreaths going to all the cemeteries, and all the shops shut and the streets absolutely thronged with people and soldiers, French and English. It was quite an interesting sight, though I must say, I was very angry at the time at the shops being shut.

November 8.

We had an inspection by the General yesterday; several batteries were passed together. Our battery had far the smartest turn-out of any, I think. It was a fine day and I put on my new breeches and my best tunic for the occasion, and my batman made quite a good job of my spurs and gaiters, in fact, 'we were all very lovely.' Old P. limped round grunting, and said nothing at all except to roar 'Stand still' if anyone moved an eye-lid. He's lame and leans on a stick, and possesses a very wide vocabulary of swear words, and everyone stands in mortal terror of him. He's quite a little man.

There are only two of us left in the battery now—the second in command and myself. The Captain's not back from leave, and R. is in Paris, lucky devil, and the three others have been sent for to replace casualties in the other batteries of the brigade in action. It's only temporarily. I think. The result is that, for the time being, I'm very hard worked, taking out the exercise, looking after stables, attending all the parades, mounting the guard, inspecting billets, visiting dinners, &c., &c. I can't say I mind much. I was getting very sick of doing nothing.

I must withdraw something of what I said about this village, because the lady of the house where I sleep now is a most charming old woman, very active and busy, and goes out of her way to do anything for you. She dries your socks and shirts at her fire, knocks at your door and says 'Goodnight': in fact, she does everything short of tucking

me into bed. The Grandmothers seem to be running this country at present, the young women are quite under their thumb and the men left are most wretched creatures. The old ladies are very active. They don't seem to run to fat like the old women in England. The disagreeable people at our mess seem to be well-known characters. My old lady laughs and says they're 'No bon.'

I know you will be sorry to hear Jack Girling has been killed in action out here. It was a great shock to me; I saw it quite by an accident in the paper. I saw him last when we were up at Oxford in December. He was one of the best friends I ever had. I've written to Dr. Girling to say how awfully sorry I am. I'm afraid his people will feel it very badly. He was always so brilliant in everything he took up, and one of the best fellows you could meet. He was gazetted to the Hampshires about the same time as I was gazetted to the R.F.A.

Thank you very much for the cake, Mother dear, and please thank old 'Boy' for his swab. A very fine piece of work, I think, and what years it must have taken him. By the way, could Miss F. let me have another of those photos of 'Boy' and Connie, the old one has quite faded away.

I have not started 'Vanity Fair' yet, but I've nearly finished 'Lettres de mon Moulin' and I'm awfully struck with it—thank you very much for sending it. I liked 'Les Etoiles' especially.

November 12.

Just a line to let you know I am keeping fit. We are in action again and have quite a strenuous time in front of us—we've had two officers sent to other batteries, only temporarily I hope, so the situation is very different, plenty of work for everyone, sending F.O.O's. to battalions and the battery observation to be done, and the night observation and night duty at the battery. I'm quite glad really.

This place will soon be a sort of 'home from home' for me—we should feel quite home-sick anywhere else. I'm afraid winter is beginning to make its mark on the place. I don't know if you have any idea what it looks like, but it would be quite easy to draw. Everything is just a brown plain of mud, stiffer in some parts than others, but all mud. It's quite a mud-lark. Then you must imagine the whole pitted with little ponds, two or three yards across, pretty close together—the shell-holes. They are all full of water, generally a very quaint shade of bright green, and usually about two feet deep. It's a lovely place to wallow about at night in. We marched up in pitch darkness and the most tragic part was I had my best new breeches on. I suppose it will brush off. We all waded well over our knees in it, and several men nearly stuck. We had a wagon stuck on the road to-day in daylight. Not only was a horse buried, but his driver on his back was up to his waist. Both were dug out in time, luckily, but several batteries have had horses drowned.

Well, we are all quite happy—we live in gum boots

and we are taking great trouble to make ourselves comfortable before the rain comes, laying down paths with trench boards and wire netting and putting in stoves.

November 13.

Jolly good news in this evening. We're still forging ahead, aren't we? We had a great amusement this morning. A gentleman appeared on the scene in mufti and a weird bow tie, with a tin hat on top. He was an American correspondent from Chicago and quite an amusing fellow. We tried to get him to come and have a whisky and soda in the mess, but he said he must push on. He had an old white-haired Second 'Loot.' piloting him round.

I didn't tell you we had a great game of 'rugger' our last day in rest. It was great. Anything we lacked in skill we made up for in energy, and anyone who got the ball was immediately collared and scragged unmercifully. Huge roars of applause and shouts of laughter from a very big 'gate,' whenever anyone was tackled.

I made great friends with the old woman at the billet where I slept, and she was awfully nice to me and got up and gave us coffee (beautiful coffee) in the early morning before we started. She told me her son was killed five weeks ago near Peronne. The old man at the Mess had the audacity to ask for 'un petit cadeau' when I paid him for the Mess. I told him they had been 'très méchant' and I was not going to give him a penny. My old lady told

me an excellent yarn about this same old man. In the early days of the war the Boches came through the village, and a Uhlan shouted to ask the old man the way. Instead of answering he ran away, and the Boche jumped off his horse, put up his rifle, and shot him through—well, where he usually sits down. I quite liked that Boche.

I have now sent you three parcels, let me know if they arrive safe.

November 15.

This letter has been a long time going off, we are awfully busy really. I'm just off after lunch to spend forty-eight hours at Battalion Headquarters as infantry F.O.O. I'm not looking forward to it a bit, it's most horribly cold to-day. Luckily the rain is keeping off.

November 10.

I was very pleased to hear 'Boy' had got his helmet and that you had got the spike on all right. I didn't tell you I had sent it for fear you would be disappointed if it failed to arrive. Now I'll tell you what I want done: it's my Christmas present to Yarnton, so I want you to take it to Rowland Ward or the Army and Navy Stores and have it thoroughly cleaned and polished and disinfected. The mud had got soaked in, and it could be made to look much nicer, besides it's more sanitary to have it cleaned. Have it done at my expense.

We have had a dose of most unpleasant weather these last few days. First it came on very cold and everything froze very hard, even the mud, and the shell holes were all covered with quite thick ice. Then the next night it snowed and we woke up to find everything white. Then we had very cold rain and sleet all day, and the snow and ice mixed up and melted together, and the second state of the mud is worse than the first. I did get chilblains, but was quite cheerful thinking of the bottle of stuff you had sent me, but found my batman had lost it in our last move, as well as my fur gloves. Luckily the chilblains don't seem very bad, but do send me some more stuff. I think camphor ice is best—bottles break.

It's very cold now, but we have stoves and things and it might be a lot worse. You can tell Connie I'm very grateful for her mittens. You would be amused to see us in winter kit. We have been issued leather jerkins without sleeves, they are like waistcoats only looser and longer and you wear them over your tunic—they are rather good things.

Aunt E. sent me a beautiful brace of partridges three days ago and we had them hotted up for dinner—they were in perfect condition. Our Mess is rather reduced—the Captain, P. and me. It's quite pathetic. Incidentally, the Captain has just been made acting Major, which is a good thing. Leave seems pretty certainly opening, so I should get home early in February.

November 26.

I'm just writing to let you know I'm still alive and kicking, and to thank you for the papers and letters. We are in action still, although we all believed a certain rumour that we were going out to-day; not a sign of it. Everything is 'Demn'd moist' but there's nothing else to grouse about. I was very pleased to get your letter and the *Bystander*, *Referee*, and *Observer*. I notice that the *Observer* thinks that the war will be over 'by the winter of 1918' if we have any luck, otherwise it will probably go on indefinitely until the end of the world. How cheerful everyone seems to be getting. I suppose it's the weather, and I don't wonder if your weather is like ours. Seriously, I daresay you are right. What does Aunt C. say? Leave has been postponed again, confound it. Never mind, I think it will start again before long. I'm sorry Connie hasn't got a helmet, very sorry. Will you tell her, 'girls don't wear helmets,' please.

I'm afraid this is a rotten letter, rotten paper and everything. You can't get a thing in this poisonous place. I'm not grousing, because I'm really quite enjoying life, but the place is poisonous. I should think anyone with an artistic imagination, &c., would suffer awful torture. Luckily I'm not worried that way. My torch is worth untold gold to me out here, so please keep up the supply of refills. I use up about one every four or five days, stumbling about the position in the dark. Tell me if my money is running out and I will send you some more. I'm

very flush just now, which I should not have been if I had gone to Paris; so it's an ill wind. . . .

Letters seem to take six or seven days to reach us now, parcels longer. The mail has been very bad lately, and rather unkind to me. I can assure you your letters get read more than once, Mother dear.

December 3.

Thank you so much for your splendid parcel . . . the dates and biscuits were quite a Godsend to the Mess, and I am very glad of the camphor ice myself. The *Punch* and *Bystander* arrived this morning, and also the cigarettes I had written for, so I had quite a post-bag. I was very glad as we probably shan't get another mail for about a fortnight, while we are on the march, and I was hoping everything would arrive before we started. You say everyone seems to be getting leave. Well I wish I was a 'war-worn "eroe" pouring out of Victoria' this very minute but—leave hasn't started for us yet.

It has been very cold out here and quite extraordinarily foggy every day, which makes things a bit dull. I rode down to the wagon line the other day, the coldest day of all. Everyone on the road was in winter kit, most of them in furs, and the whole scene was ridiculously unmilitary and Bairnsfatherish—crowds of men everywhere. You can't realize how good those wonderful drawings are, until you see how exactly like that the British Tommy talks and behaves. The thing he gets best is the attitude people stand in, I think.

I'm going to command a section on the line of march. I don't know whether I shall get a section as a permanent thing. I'm awfully bucked, there's no knowing what I may rise to now. Perhaps I shall get a second ' pip ' in a few months.

I'm sending you another fiver, and I want you to spend a pound on presents for the family, whatever you think. I was hoping to be somewhere where I could get you something decent out here. We must go shopping when I come home.

So Mr. D. is off to India. I expect he will enjoy himself, don't you? Nice warm place, India! This isn't! Well I think it's about time to retire to my dug-out. Everyone else is in bed. We are early here; it's only half past nine.

Give all the family my love, and I can't tell you how your letter and papers bucked me up.

Ypres

YPRES, December 8.

What on earth have you been doing in England? I bought a Continental *Daily Mail* in town yesterday and had a fearful shock. Lloyd George Prime Minister, Asquith gone, and Bucharest taken. Whew. . . . And Franz Josef dead too, and the fat seems in the fire in Greece. And so things go on. I hear the betting at Lloyd's now is six to one that the war lasts three years more. Hooray.

We are having a very interesting time; it is a bit of experience for me, as I've never been on the line of march before. There is a terrible lot to learn. The horses are wonderfully fit considering, and the battery in column of route looks awfully jolly.

(Two days later.)

We have had a day's rest and go on again to-morrow. I've got a topping billet here, a bedroom and dressing room all to myself and a very obliging old couple to look after me. This is far the prettiest, cleanest place I have seen in France. I bought the paper I am writing on in a town a few days ago, where I also had a hot bath and bought some lemon soles and liqueur for the Mess. It was a ten mile ride each way and well worth it.

December 17.

There's a good chance we may spend Christmas in rest, which would be rather nice as we would have the whole battery together and could have quite a decent time here, and get up a concert and free beer for the men in a barn. On the other hand, we may go into action on Christmas Day or Christmas Eve, I don't know.

Edith's cake is a great success. Babs sent me a cake too from Liverpool, which was very nice of her, don't you think? Leave has started now, our first subaltern goes on the 23rd. They have quickened things up out here, so my leave is now due about January 1. They keep chopping and changing so in this question of leave that I don't put too much faith in anything, and you had better not either. We are getting ten days clear anyhow, which won't be so bad. We have all had a sort of 'flue,' a good many men and all the officers in the battery: I suppose it's catching. I've been rather seedy for the first time since I came out, but we are all recovering and have got to the sniffy stage now.

'We are staying at a farm.' It isn't such a bad place: anyhow I have got a bedroom and a bed; and there are a good many shops in the village as well as a canteen and a cinema show. English papers arrive one day late. It's very British round here, the inhabitants can all talk English, more or less.

December 23.

I was very glad of another pair of mittens. You know how I scoffed and said I had four pairs; well, I lost them all one by one, and I've discovered what very useful things they can be on a cold day.

The chief event lately has been an inspection by Sir Douglas Haig of the 103rd Brigade. It was rather an honour in its way, as our General picked our brigade out of the division, and I think Haig wanted to see us because of the Division's reputation, so we were awfully bucked with ourselves; I don't know if we had any justification, I'm sure.

You can imagine all the scrubbing and scraping, the blacking of boots and polishing of buttons, the expeditions to forage for 'Brasso' and boot polish. We were formed up in a hollow square, one battery to each side of the big 'place' in the village, and the General walked round with a lot of staff officers and shook hands with each of the battery commanders as he passed them and had a talk to them. I was standing two yards behind our Major so I got a good view. The General is a fine looking man, not very much like his photographs. He looks bigger and his hair is whiter; in fact, he looks very like the pictures you see of Joffre. I heard him say: 'I want to thank you for your good shooting on the —th, Major. I have heard a great deal about the division.' We are fearfully bucked, as you can imagine, and I believe the other brigades are awfully fed up because they were not inspected.

We are just going to be here for Christmas Day,

so we are making great preparations. We have just bought two barrels of beer and 2,000 cigarettes for our Christmas present for the men, and the Major has been out and bought some 'fizz' and a turkey—and our Christmas feed isn't going to be cut down to three courses. I expect we shall run to five any way.

We had a service in the barn here to-day instead of Christmas Day. T. Chute, the Winchester Mission 'Padre,' ran the service and we had a Communion at the end, the first I've had since I've been out here. It was very nice and quite Christmassy. As Chute said, it was very appropriate to have a Christmas service in a hay-loft above a stable. I rode over to a town twelve kilometres away immediately after to do some shopping. I had an excellent lunch at the officer's club. We are settling down in this country you know. The town is only four or five miles behind the lines, and it has an excellent club, billiard room, lounge, all the latest papers, &c., &c. —and quite moderate prices. There was a fearful gale blowing, I should think they will have an awful channel crossing. P. has gone on leave to-day, so there are only three of us left in the Mess—R., the Major and myself. I can foresee a strenuous time when we go into action—all I hope is that they won't invent new uses for subalterns' superfluous energy—such as sitting up at night to watch the pretty star shells or that sort of game. Give me bed at night, or my valise, every time.

They have sent in my name for leave on the 8th, so I should arrive on the 9th. We are getting ten days now; it will be rather sport, won't it? By Jove, I am looking forward to it. You want to spend six months in this beastly country to know what leave means.

We had quite a decent Christmas Day. It did not rain and we bought two barrels of beer for the men and a packet of cigarettes each; and we got their meat roasted in the farm and some hot pudding for them with sauce and rum and flames and everything. I'm very glad I didn't miss Christmas out here, I must say.

Well after that dinner, I'm sorry to say, I had to get up at five o'clock next morning and from that moment to this we have had a very strenuous time and I've not had a minute to write. You see with P. on leave, there are only two of us left, and the result is we are practically on duty the whole time.

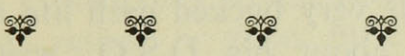
'We are staying at a farm,' Mother dear. Such a pretty little farm, you would be amused if you could see it; just a mass of bricks and rubble, one broken wall left standing and a broken cane-bottomed chair stuck comically on the top of everything with the four legs pointing upwards. Our ''appy 'ome' is not so much in the farm as under it, not at all a bad little dug-out and quite strong. We must do something to prevent it leaking in wet weather though.

Did I tell you Uncle R. sent me a 'fiver' at Christ-

mas? I'm as rich as Dives, which is just as well if I'm coming on leave. It was jolly nice of him, don't you think?

Our old General came round in his car on Christmas Day and visited each Battery Mess, which I thought rather sporting of him. 'The compliments of the season, gentlemen, the compliments of the season.'

Well, please give my love to all the family. I shall see you all soon, I hope.



January 16, 1917.

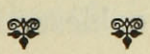
Here I am again—same old place, just a little bit drearier with the snow on the ground, that's all.

I had rather a beastly journey, but I arrived at the battery at eleven o'clock this morning, just twenty-eight hours after leaving Victoria. A nice calm crossing, I'm glad to say, so I was not sick. I had two hours in Folkestone so I went and looked up Aunt M.

We had a splendid time, hadn't we? My leave fully came up to my expectations.

I found one of the Christmas cards from Winchester waiting for me here—so that's all right.

I'm no longer the junior subaltern—one joined while I was away. He seems quite a good sort; I believe he is younger even than me.



January 20.

You will find this a scrappy letter I'm afraid, but I'm very busy. To-morrow will be my third day running in the trenches, and as it's an hour's walk each way and plenty to do when you get there I'm getting plenty of experience. I've got rather a decent little job for to-morrow so I'm rather looking forward to it, especially as I'm going to be allowed a hundred rounds to loose off at my friends over the way. We've had a good deal of snow, more than in England, I think.

The Major is very bucked with life as he had the official 'chit' about his D.S.O. written in most glowing terms and signed by Fasson and Babington. 'Most valuable officer—conspicuous bravery,' &c., &c., a jolly nice thing to have. It ends up: 'No task is too difficult for either him or his battery.'

Now I have a lot to do before bed, so I'll stop.

My love to the chicken-poxy family.

January 26.

I've been so busy lately, I had almost forgotten your birthday, I'm ashamed to say. Anyhow I can't buy anything here, so I am sending a small cheque. Will you buy something for yourself and each of the girls' birthdays. And many happy returns of the day, Mother dear. The only condition I make is that you must buy an 'extravagance,' and not something that you would have got for yourself, anyhow.

We are having the coldest weather I can remem-

ber in the whole of my life. Nine degrees of frost for the last five or six days. The running stream near our Mess is frozen, and you wake up to find your sponge and tooth-brush a mass of icicles: I'm not exaggerating a bit. It's not bad weather out, if you are well muffled up, though I must say it nearly bites your ears off: bright sunshine and a beautiful blue sky and everything under snow, and crowds of aeroplanes up on both sides, buzzing about. I believe they can get very clear photographs when there is snow on the ground, especially of gun positions: so I wish they would keep away.

I'm reading rather a good little book, called 'Daddy Longlegs.' I'm sure you would like it; the play is on in London, I believe. It's very sentimental and gentle and childish. A most hardened old ruffian of a Canadian Major saw me reading it and said: 'That's rather a good book, it's just the stuff you want to read out here.' I was quite surprised. Well I'm going for a stroll round the trenches before tea, so I must stop.

January 31.

My dear Jessie,

I am writing to wish you many happy returns of your birthday; you are quite growing up now, old girl. I wish I could be home among you all again, but—I'm afraid I shall have to wait a few months.

How's the chicken-pox? I hope you are both up and about by now, though I suppose you won't be

back at school yet. I sent Mother a little present for you; I hope you will be able to get yourself something you like with it. I hope Mother is well and happy. Let me know. You girls must behave yourselves while you have to stop at home and give as little trouble as you can.

I'm afraid I have not much news for you. I'm in the same place and everything is under snow and ice. The time passes very slowly out here in the winter and we are all longing for the warm weather, when I hope we shall finish the business once and for all. This place is not so desolate as some. There are lots of birds about, swarms of big brown rats and a cat. I suppose two years or so ago she was the farm cat, but now she is very wild and shy. Sometimes you see her slinking along the old wall with a plump rat or mouse between her teeth. You can't get near her at all.

January 30.

Thank you for the 'Bystander' and the splendid parcel with everything. I think you are the best mother anyone ever had, you are quite a sheet anchor to me.

I've been a bit gloomy lately. I think I've been thinking too much and getting out of my depth and miserable. I suppose a good many others feel like it at times. I've been thinking about you a good deal. I'm afraid I've got to the stage where I've lost a good many of my old comfortable beliefs and

have got very little to replace them—'swept and garnished' so to speak, and the seven devils are giving me socks. Meanwhile the old war rolls on in a monotonous sort of way, until you almost think it's all a dream. I hope we shall start fighting again soon. It's still very cold.

No, Mother dear, I can't quite see my way to letting you lend me the rest of the money for that war loan. It's mortgaging myself really, and I want to start quite clear and have plenty of cash handy for my next leave—I hope it won't be very long delayed beyond the regulation three months. Besides, I look at it this way—if I get a 'blighty' and get put on home service for some months, I shall need all the cash I can get to live in decency, without being under any sort of obligation, even to you, Mother dear. Some of those places at home are very expensive to live in in comfort; and anyone may get a 'blighty' any day. So will you please just get me the ten pounds' worth? I must have a little to spend next leave, musn't I? I did enjoy myself, so I hope you did too.

I'm going to have a day off to-morrow and ride into our local town, so I hope to get a hair-cut, at least, and a respectable lunch, if not a bath.

I hope this letter won't give you the idea that I'm down on my luck: I'm not a bit really; now, at any rate. I expect it was simply the reaction from leave. Anyhow this weather is most bracing, like the East coast. I have never seen such a long spell of such hard frost. The lake near here had a most beautiful

surface for skating. I was up in the trenches last night and slept with the machine gun officer, and he tells me that everyone who lives near the lake had sent into the town for skates. Two nights ago, however, the Boche heavily shelled the neighbourhood, and all the ice is spoilt and full of holes. Our 'Heavies' have retaliated on the only lake within reasonable distance of Fritz's front line: I'm afraid this war developes a very nasty vindictive spirit.

I think the only way to keep warm is to go to bed and to drink some grog-rum and sugar and boiling water, which is great stuff. You've no idea what freezing weather it is—but the great point is, there's no longer any mud. All the same, I hope it will get warmer soon.

February 2.

It's several days since I heard from you, I think one of your letters is about due to-night. I hope the mail won't disappoint me.

I haven't much news at present, but I'm more or less writing to let off steam, as I'm very cold and rather bored. I wonder if you are having weather quite like this in England. I've had a pretty slack time for a change the last few days, and two or three days ago I had a day off and rode into the town and had lunch at Skindle (the principal restaurant). After lunch I went to a lecture, which was the reason I'd been sent in. It was on the war loan, and was not bad at all. It nearly persuaded me to buy the extra ten pounds, but I don't quite like to.

I'm about a third of the way through 'Vanity Fair,' and like it very much. I only started two days ago, thank you very much for sending it, Mother dear.

The Major has gone home to-day, probably for about a month, as he is going on a course to Shoebury, so Caithness, the captain, will be taking over this evening. Warden is going to be made a captain I think, and going to C battery, so it looks as if I shall get my section.

Leave is still open, in spite of your letter a little time ago. It stopped for a few days and I was afraid you were right about it stopping, but it's open again now. The longer the better as I get higher on the list for my next leave.

No chance of 'real soldiering' just yet, we seem fairly stuck in this old spot.

What sort of a time are you having, Mother dear? Rather trying, I expect, with the girls all spotty and so on, or are they back at school yet? I hope you are all having very happy birthdays.

Did you see Bairnsfather's picture about the stars? 'Funny things stars, ain't they Bill?' 'Yes —— Funny.' We all thought it very good.

February 11.

My dear Averil,

I'm afraid this letter will reach you very late for your birthday—many happy returns, old girl. I'm very sorry to be late, all I can say is I've not written

to anyone else either for about a week. The truth is I've spent every day of the last five messing about the trenches. It's about three quarters-of-an-hour's walk to our particular bit of line, and when you get home in the evening you feel like having a smoke and some food and then going to bed. Still I've quite enjoyed it, as I've had a good deal to do and we are all beginning to get used to the weather, which might be worse. I hear you've been having a fine old time skating and sliding about. You should have seen me sit down on my tail in the road two days ago, it hurt like anything, so I did not think it funny at the time. I think we are going to have a thaw soon, it was much warmer to-day.

I'm spending to-day at the battery, so I've got the chance to write a letter or two. There is not much doing, though of course we are doing a lot of building and digging as usual You'd laugh to see the little holes and dug-outs we live in. I wish we had one like our A battery. They have got a most splendid stove, and a sort of sofa they have pinched from somewhere.

Well this letter will have to be finished up now or it will be another day late. Best of luck for your next year. I hope I'll get another leave before next winter and see you all again. Give everyone my love.

February 13.

It is quite a long time since I wrote to you last—I've been very busy. I've got three or four of your letters to answer.

I read your last letter at about midnight when I was on night duty: I was very glad the mail arrived just before I set off, so I put it in my pocket and took it along, together with the latest number of 'Truth' which Aunt May is sending me. Thank you for the 'Sandy' book. I liked the 'Strayings of Sandy,' so expect I'll like this one.

I've finished 'Vanity Fair.' I read it all in about a week which is pretty good going, don't you think? But I liked it very much indeed. My taste runs to Thackeray far more than to Dickens; to tell you the truth I find Dickens a bit boresome. Old 'Dobbin' is so awfully well done and 'Rawdon Crawley' is a good sort too. It's certainly a very fine book.

I'm feeling very Wykehamical at the moment. The latest 'Wykehamist' has just arrived, rather a good one. And the latest number of 'Land and Water' has two very good things mentioning the place, and describing it so well, it must have been written by Wykehamists; one is a short story called 'The Lieutenant,' and the other a sort of article describing an Australian who wandered about Winchester. This is very well done really, the point being that Winchester gives him the real impression of England, which he had failed to get from London. You ought to get the thing and read it for yourself. It made me quite home-sick to compare that lovely

place with this—well, 'abomination of desolation.' We all understand that expression now.

It's an animal sort of life, but don't worry about me, as I'm pretty happy. The compensations are the extraordinary pleasure one feels in the 'events' of the day—eating, drinking, sleeping and the mail. One gets a certain amount of exercise messing round the trenches, as it's a good walk there and back.

We have a very fine new gramophone, which Caithness brought back from London with all the latest records. We have a record of all the music of 'Chu Chin Chow,' so you can imagine me listening with rapture in the evenings to the Cobbler's Song and the Robber's Chorus. Caithness is an actor, you know, and the man who does the Cobbler is one of his greatest pals.

Please give the family my love, and thank Jessie for her letter.

Your loving son,

BILLY.

APPRECIATIVE LETTERS

Appreciative Letters

From the C.O.

No doubt by this time you will have heard from the War Office of your sad loss. I am dreadfully sorry to have to confirm it.

Your son was killed this afternoon whilst doing his duty. He is a great loss to me. He was a most promising and trustworthy young officer and I cannot tell you how much it grieves me to have to write of his death to you.

I can only convey to you my most sincere sympathy and regret.

From his Major

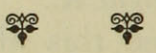
I was very sorry indeed to hear the sad news, and I am sure you have my deepest sympathy. All this happened while I was away from the battery, and it was a bitter blow to me when I heard that I had lost two of my best officers.

During the time your son served under my command he proved himself a very capable officer. On

several occasions he accompanied me on very difficult and dangerous operations. I really cannot speak too highly of his gallantry and untiring work. He died a noble death while performing a very difficult task. He was very popular with the men and I am sure they will miss him very much.

He learnt his work as acting officer very quickly, and I could always rely on him to carry out any task that was given him.

I can candidly say he was a most brilliant officer. We all miss him very much. I am sure you must have been very proud of your son, for he was a real good boy.



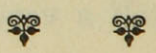
From a Brother Officer.

It is with very deep regret that I write to you concerning the death of your son, who was killed in action yesterday.

He was in the front line observing with the captain when an enemy shell burst in the trench near them.

He was buried this morning in the Military Cemetery by our Chaplain, who knew him at Winchester. The Colonel and as many officers and men of the Brigade as could possibly be spared attended.

My officers and men and myself deeply sympathise with you in your bereavement. We feel keenly the loss of our comrade, who was a most efficient and trustworthy officer, and a great favourite with us all.



From the Chaplain.

I feel that I would like to be allowed to write to you a few lines, as being the Chaplain to the artillery in this Division, in which your son was serving, partly to tell you how very sorry we all are, and also to tell you one or two things which I feel sure that you would like to know.

My own acquaintance with your boy went back to the days before he came out here, when he was at Winchester. I was working at the Winchester College Mission in Portsmouth, and being a Wykehamist myself, and also in College, used very often to see him when I was over at the School. I can't remember now, whether he ever actually came to spend a week-end at the Mission with us; my impression is that he did.

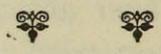
Then he came out here and joined this Division, and it was so very delightful to find him carrying out the same habits and principles which no doubt he had learnt at home and at school. As perhaps you know, it is not easy for those who work with the guns to get many opportunities of Church Services: they are always working, and it is often unsafe to gather the men together for services. But when we did have them, he was always present; and I remember so well, at Christmas, the Holy Communion Service which we held in the loft of a big barn (we were resting for a week before coming into the line here), and he was one of the little group who came for their Christmas Communion. I think that was probably the last chance that he had out

here, as ever since then his battery has been continually engaged.

He was aways quiet and a little reserved; but I have heard so many comments during the last few days with regard to the excellence of his work; and I am sure that his example and influence with the men must have been for good.

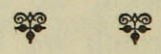
. . . .

I hope you will not mind my writing to you. I would just like to add this, if I may, that there must surely be a great future of usefulness for his gifts and powers in God's service in the new sphere to which he has gone.



FROM HIS SERVANT.

Excuse me these few lines, but I thought that I could not let this pass without sending my personal sympathy in your great sorrow, for as I was packing up his personal belongings I could not help but think of you and the one we both have lost, and I hope and trust you get all his things quite safe. As he was a dutiful son to you, he was a great friend and master to me, and I shall never forget him as long as life lasts.



FROM THE MEN IN THE BATTERY.

I have been in the Mess just about as long as Mr. Mills would have been with us, remembering

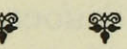
quite well when he joined us. Yes, he was liked immensely, and we often recall many little episodes of his cheery ways and his undisturbed demeanour.

. . . . .

We miss him very much indeed. These times we could well have done with the work of Mr. Mills, I assure you.

. . . . .

All the drivers say how he has been missed by them and also the gunners. He used to break into a song every morning as soon as he awoke, and then the saying used to go: 'Hello, here comes Billy!' (Excuse the familiar word 'Billy'). It was always the same song: 'If you were the only girl in this world and I were the only boy.'



FROM THE HEADMASTER, WINCHESTER.

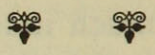
Your boy was such a very gentle, peace-loving fellow that his sacrifice comes with an additional shock. His photo, which you sent me has kept him continually before me and I feel as if I had lost a very near friend. One could not but love the boy —he was so genuine and pure and honourable.

I suppose what struck me most was the way in which he went forward and went out without a murmur of doubt or hesitation. He had lots of grit behind his gentle manner and a really fine-cut character. Assuredly it is well with the child.

. . . . .

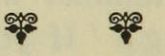
How wonderful and devoted is the service of these boys and how it wins the hearts of all kinds of men.

I do praise God for your boy's good service: such things help us all.



From the Dean of Christ Church, Oxford.

May I take this opportunity of saying how deeply sorry I am that he has not lived to take up his Scholarship here. I did not know him, but I remember that our examiners were well pleased at the election they had made, and would have looked forward to his coming here with great hopefulness.



From the Headmaster of his Preparatory School.

I was very fond of Billy and had the greatest opinion of his ability and of his determined character. I always think he was the ablest boy I ever taught in all my more than thirty years experience. I always like to think of his big strong calm head and face as he took up the points of difficulty and his excellent clear English in which he rendered the Latin authors. I don't know which is the greater grief, to think that I shall never have the pleasure of welcoming him here again, or to think of the cutting off of that brilliant career which I am sure lay before him—a grievous loss to his country, both in public and in private life.

He is very vividly before my eyes as I write and I can hear him speaking quite clearly, making some of his dry remarks.

. . . . .

His was a wonderful life; he achieved so much in the short time allotted to him.

. . . . .

I trust that in the future you and all his family will be consoled, in a measure for his early loss, by the proud feeling that through life, as well as in death, he has done his duty.

. . . . .

I dreamt of Billy a few nights ago and saw him so plainly just as he was last time, and he was very smiling and happy. A life like the dear boy's seems like fresh spring flowers—or lovely new snow—quite unspoilt, and quite unstained—and you know that even on the mountain tops it cannot help getting ever so slightly soiled, and the loveliest flower gets the bloom off later in life—and I do like to think of the lad just as he was—and you will too. There are many sorrows, very bitter sorrows, that people are called upon to suffer, but a beautiful, unselfish death can never rank with these.

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