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" WILL this avalanche of human madness ever stop? One knows it can't go on for ever, but there seems no end in sight. What will be left afterwards for the rising generation? Will the winners come off any better than the losers? Surely there can be nothing but debts everywhere, debts which no one can pay, entangling the world and throttling it."

Reflections of the author whilst engaged on this MS in Poona, 1917

# THE BAR SINISTER

By

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## CHAPTER 1

# WESTON AND JONES

p7 To be a connoisseur of London clubs is an achievement not to be envied, but, unless you are such, you will probably not have heard of the N.R. Club, though it's famous among its own members, who call it by a different name. The term" N.R." was invented by its detractors, and the letters stand for Nouveau Riche: but the appellation has been circulated so widely that many talk glibly of the N.R. Club without an idea of the significance of the name. The building is neither huge like the R.A.C., nor impressive like the Carlton, nor is it famous like the" In and Out." Its members claim that it is select: its critics maintain that it is not. Both are partly correct. To be a member you have to be of considerable means, hence its claim to be exclusive. But the selection committee takes no account of the manner in which a man's fortune was amassed, nor yet of his nationality; wherefore its list of membership contains many names of men who have been rejected from the rolls of other clubs which it affects to despise. It was once described in the " House" as the " Headquarters of the capitalist conspirators," and,

p 8 should England be subjected to an outbreak similar to that of Russia, I pity the man whose money is invested in the premises of the N.R. Club.

In the leather-covered chairs of the smoking-room sat two elderly men. Strangely enough, considering the various nationalities frequenting the building, they were English, but of widely different appearance. They were the two principals of a prosperous firm of wire merchants-Weston & Jones. If you studied the two men sagaciously you might be able to form a pretty accurate idea of the history of their partnership. Weston was a typical Anglo-Saxon: though his hair was now turning white and was very becoming to a man of his years, you could tell that he had once been a blue-eyed, fair-haired youth, with clean, straight features. He now looked both refined and distinguished. The companion, Jones, was an extreme contrast. He was small and rotund. His brown hair had receded on either temple, leaving an isolated peninsula which ended in a love-lock over the middle of his forehead. His round face, thick nose, and coarse

lips gave him the appearance of a pig: and his clothes would cause one to say at first sight, " That man is a bounder." But you could not leave it at that. You could not help taking a good look at the little man's full face. Somehow he would interest you. It was his eyes. The p9 vitality and activity which they displayed were remarkable. Like small, bright beads in his broad face, they flashed here and there; they sparkled and twinkled as he kept up a flow of animated conversation.

The senior partner, from his appearance, was obviously the son of a gentleman, educated probably for a professional career. Possibly he had started in a profession and had thrown it up to fight his way along in the commercial world. He had saved money, and launched out on his own. He had required technical and expert assistance and had come into contact with J ones, a ranker, who had risen by sheer ability, resistless push, and sustained energy. Jones had served under him, and made himself indispensable. Being the man he was, he had never allowed his indispensability to be overlooked, and had forced Weston to take him into partnership or look for someone to replace him. Now he was really the dominating partner, his influence being out of proportion to his share in the capital of the concern.

The junior partner was leaning over his chair and addressing Weston with a cigarette held between two very yellow fingers.

" Well, I think we can congratulate ourselves on a very satisfactory transaction. Of course there was a bit of a risk, but a good risk, because if things went right, profits were bound to be p10 large. I reckon it's the biggest thing we've ever done."

Weston puffed his pipe and took a little time to answer.

"It's right enough now: but, by Jove, it rather shook my nerve. I suppose it's different for a chap like you, with everything to gain. But I've a lot to lose. With three sons at school and a daughter just. out, one looks at things differently. If anything went wrong with me they'd all have to suffer. Still, it's very satisfactory."

" Anyhow, you can safely book that moor all right for August. The year's results are bound to be pretty good now. Where's it to be this

time? "

" Don't know yet. Lord Lupton wants me to take his place in Perthshire. A splendid shoot but he wants a big rent-£2,000. I thought something smaller 'd have to do."

" This has gone through just in time, then? "

"Well, I might think about Lupton's place after this."

Jones gulped some whisky and soda and cast a sly glance at Weston.

" Shooting's getting damned expensive, eh ? "

" It's a splendid holiday for the boys, and a real health tonic for the family, so it's not altogether selfish expenditure."

“ Well, it's very pleasant for the boys as long p11 as you can go on giving it 'em. Not much of a training for earning a living, though. Where would they be if anything happened to you? "

" That's just what I'm afraid of; you can understand why I'm chary of the more risky business. To lose everything after working all these years, would let the whole family in the cart." Weston looked serious and puffed his pipe languidly. Jones changed the subject.

" We shall need an increase in the clerical establishment now. This show has increased our correspondence out of all recognition."

"I'm off to dress. We can discuss that at dinner." Weston rose and stretched himself before the fire. He was an elegant figure. His little colleague sent for another whisky and soda and the latest edition of the *Evening Star.*

Dressing for dinner did not appeal to him,

The dining-room of the N.R. Club is not particularly noted for its cuisine ; but it *is* noted. At no club dining-room in London is English spoken with such a variety of accents. The partners of Weston & Jones were dining at one of its small tables. Over those tables, schemes were set afoot every day, affecting the positions and salaries of countless employees. Many an honest man has been thrown out of a job in consequence of decisions taken between mouthfuls of food at the N.R. Club; a few have been promoted to positions from which they have ultimately p12 soared till they have themselves become members.

Some members referred to their employees by mere numbers, others by names. Many, by the vagueness of their phraseology, proclaimed them-

selves as unworthy to be owners of capital. The decisions of Messrs. Weston & Jones, however, affected no such mass of labour. Being merchants and not manufacturers their employees were mostly clerical.

" We simply must have another clerk," Jones was saying as the waiter left in front of him a well grilled steak and chipped potatoes.

" Old Simpson will go, if we don't; and we can't afford to lose him."

Weston, finishing his last mouthful of sole Colbert, took a moment to reflect.

" I think," he said, " we ought to raise Simpson's salary, too."

"What, raise his salary? He hasn't asked for it."

"Well, he's been with us twenty years, and proved himself invaluable. He's only getting £250 a year. We can easily afford another £50."

The little man screwed up his face into an expression which made him feared by his opponents in the business world, and leant across the table.

"Never give more than necessary, Weston. Supply and demand, that's what regulates business. Simpson hasn't threatened to go yet.

p13 It'll be time enough to consider raising his pay when he tackles us. No good thrusting money on the chap."

"I don't altogether agree with you, Jones. It doesn't get the best work out of a fellow. I think it's consistent with economics to pay the highest wage one can afford; it stimulates the employee, makes him keen to increase the wealth of the firm. The fellow's done us well and we oughtn't to be mean with him."

Jones tapped the table with the point of his middle finger, a favourite attitude of his.

" Do you mean to tell me that we should be where we are to-day, you and I, Weston, if we'd handed out more money than necessary? It's a fallacy."

Jones was laying down the accepted creed of the N.R. Club: There was an advanced party of

extremists in the club, which used to meet once a week, and its farewell toast, at the close of each meeting, used to be "Here's to the war with Labour."

Of this set Jones was a member. Started in 1909 when L.G. produced his famous budget, it's membership was swelled during the railway strike of 1911 by frightened capitalists. At .the .time when Weston and Jones brought off their big deal in copper wire during the summer of 1912, its members were assuming a most uncompromising attitude towards the Labour movement.

p14 Dinner being finished and the argument still unsettled, the two men left the dining-room and appeared in the hall with coats and hats. They both entered Weston's limousine and were carried away, still talking business, to the Royalty Theatre. They continued to talk business as they sat waiting for the play to commence. At the end of the second act, Jones woke up with a start and pretended he had not been asleep. Why he went to theatres no one ever knew. He invariably went to sleep. ", Milestones," the play then running at the Royalty, was the most interesting of contemporary dramatic pieces, but neither the quality of the piece nor the acting could ever keep Jones awake.

Jones was a regular habitue of the N.R. Club, but Weston seldom dined there. He had a house in the West End, and only frequented the club when his family were out of Town. Seeing Jones for the first time, people usually put him down as being a Labour Member. Imagine their surprise at being told that he had risen from the ranks but was now the arch enemy of Labour. Each was typical of a class of London business men, but seldom can a man have severed himself from his previous associations as completely as Jones had done. All his relations and friends who had failed to rise were included among the Labour forces against whom he preached war. He despised them for not rising like himself, and p15 he hated them because they took part in strikes which embarrassed his own designs. When any stranger managed to get into conversation with him, he usually held them spell-bound. He rushed from one point to another before his listeners could collect arguments to answer his

last sally. Talking of L.G., whose name was then on every tongue, an acquaintance once remarked that the people had found a wonderful champion in L.G. and that he was bound to become Prime Minister. He was astounded at the venom Jones poured forth against the Chancellor of the Exchequer. "Why," he said, "the man must be a lunatic or a fraud : to think that he has risen from the ranks and must know the working man as well as I do and can still support Labour! British Labour is pampered. Why, any working man who's worth his salt, soon gets up the ladder. L.G. knows that. The men who are any good don't need him to look after them, and the others are better left where they are. Because a man rises from the bottom people think it's wonderful. I tell you, it's the easiest thing in the world; a working man's son starts at an advantage compared with the son of a gentleman. He's not hampered by precedent, or family tradition, or useless public school education.He's born to the world a free man, with everything to gain and nothing to lose, and if he means to push, nothing can stop him. You say p16 L.G. will be Prime Minister. You can trust us to prevent that."

People never forgot their meeting with Jones ; he was the most extraordinary mixture of irreconcilable qualities. He admired the pusher and the forger, especially if they were better men than himself. He would use anyone to assist him in his progress, and would drop them as useless when he had finished with them. Once he had beaten a rival, he despised him as beneath contempt; but, so long as the struggle lasted, he respected him.

The partnership of Jones with Weston was often a topic of conversation in the N.R. Club. Members wondered how Weston could possibly tolerate Jones as a partner.

Weston was regarded as a very good chap, and quite a clever business man; in fact, it was said that he was one of the shrewdest men imaginable in his younger days.

But as the senior partner: how could he manage to keep Jones in his place?

The answer, of course, was that he didn't. Weston had arrived at the time of life when he didn't want to work too hard himself. Jones had a large enough stake in the business to look after it for his own interests, so Weston gave him

practically a free hand. Weston drew the dividends produced by Jones' enterprise. They'd had five bumper years. So the partnership suited both of them.
P17 It was known that Weston lived at a very extravagant rate and if anything happened to the business he'd be likely to come a cropper.

When Jones broke off the conversation by falling asleep in the stalls of the Royalty, he and Weston had decided to postpone the discussion about increasing their clerical staff till the next morning. Weston was adamant about raising Simpson's salary, but J ones remained unconvinced.

At ten-thirty next day they began the argument over again in the office. Jones was in his element, fighting for one of his strongest principles, but never had he found Weston so firm, and after some strong words on both sides the subject was adjourned.

Half an hour later Simpson appeared in Weston's office. Simpson was a confidential clerk who knew his place; his manner in the presence of the senior partner was always one of deference without servility. Each felt a certain comfortable friendliness towards the other. It was obvious to Weston from the way Simpson approached him that morning that he was uncomfortable. Weston sat quite still and waited for Simpson to speak, a habit of his that often disconcerted his interviewers. If you opened your interview with a statement, Weston would never help you out with a remark: he would go on sitting quiet at the end of your statement and wait for you to make another. The only way to p18 begin an interview with such people is by asking a direct question. Simpson knew this and had carefully prepared himself.

" I wanted to bring to your notice, sir, that my twenty years service with the firm are up to-day, and I want to know whether you can see your way to increase my salary? "

Weston paused: he would like to have sat silent, but the question was there and had to be answered.

"I'm afraid this is a matter which needs consideration, and I shall have to consult Mr. Jones. What is your idea of a rise, Simpson ? "

" Another £100 a year, sir."

"Your present salary is £250; do you mean to

ask us to raise you all at once to £350 ?"

" Yes, sir, I don't think it's a large salary for my position here."

" I think. it is ridiculous to expect us to agree to this."

" Well, I'm sorry, sir, but I've thought it over, and if you can't see your way to it I shall have to sever my connection with the firm."

"I never heard such nonsense, Simpson. I advise you to go away and think it over. I can't possibly mention such a proposal to Mr. Jones. A small rise, perhaps we might manage, but £ 100 a year, absurd ! "

"Perhaps I ought to tell you, sir, that I have an offer of £400 a year with prospects of advance-
p 19 ment but I have to decide at once whether to accept it."

"Accept it, I should. No good staying here if you can do better. I'll talk to Mr. Jones first, though."

Weston went into Jones' office doing his best to conceal an inward feeling of satisfaction. He sat down in an empty chair, facing Jones across the writing desk.

"Simpson's just been in and asked for a rise of salery to celebrate his twenty years service."

Jones lent back in his seat and put his hands in his pockets.

" Didn't think he'd got it in 'im to ask us," he replied " and I've no doubt you dealt with him as the situation demanded."

"No I can't say I did. I think it would be rather serious if we lost Simpson, and he told me that unless we could see our way to raise him £100 per annum, he'd have to leave us."

Jones screwed up his eyes and pursed his lips. " Probably bluffing," he answered, " let's call the bluff and leave him to stew for a day or two."

" No use I'm afraid. He's actually got the offer of another place at £400 a year, and he's got to decide at once whether he's taking it."

Jones reflected for some time without speaking. He did hate being bested by his employees in this manner . As a rule, if a clerk came and demanded a rise, one could afford to be fierce and tell him p20 to go elsewhere if he wasn't satisfied. To have a pistol held to one's head and have to glve way under protest was bad for the discipline of the whole place. Rather than this, it would probably be better to lose even Simpson. And yet he'd

be a difficult man to replace. None of their own clerks could replace him, and yet if they got a good man from outside, they'd have to pay him at least as much as Simpson was asking for, possibly more. And another point, Simpson was honest. One did at least know that. One was regularly hearing of firms being swindled out of large sums by their head clerks or cashiers. There were always opportunities for men in such positions. Yes, Simpson was worth a lot to them; it would be bad business to let him go. All this ran through the little man's brain with great rapidity. True to form, he acted promptly when he had gauged the position.

" We'll have to do the best we can with him. Try him for less than he's asking, but keep him."

" Well," said Weston, rising and moving to the door, " I'll see what I can do."

Simpson got his £350: but Jones, to this day, believes that he was put up to it by Weston. His senior had got the best of him this time, and Jones inwardly admired him for it. A rise of £100 was a bit of a staggerer, more even than Weston had ever contemplated. But both were

p21 well aware that £350 was no large salary for one in Simpson's position.

“We are going to give you an additional clerk," began Weston, after announcing to Simpson the firm's consent to the rise.

" We'll pay £2 a week: you can get a sharp lad for that, I suppose."

" I think so, sir, and I know just the boy, if I may suggest him."

" Well, who is he ? "

" It's one of the office boys, sir, Briscoe."

" What, that impertinent youth! What's he know about clerical work? "

" He can write English, French and German, and he knows as much about our business as I do, sir"

" Well, knowledge isn't everything."

"He's keen, sir, a real pusher, educating himself all the time. He reads all the dinner hour and any other time when he isn't on the run. We shall have to find another in his place whether we promote him or not. He won't stay any longer in his present job."

" But he's so impertinent, Simpson, always answers back when I have to find fault with him."

"He'd answer anyone, sir, but he'll get on for all that."

"All right, send him along to me to-morrow. I'll ask him a few questions. What's his pay now? "

p22 " Fifteen shilling a week."

"A big rise from fifteen shillings to two pounds a week, at seventeen."

" Not much for a smart lad these days." Weston rather sceptically mentioned the idea to Jones. The latter was captivated by the proposal. "What," he said, "seventeen years old, impertinent, a pusher, writes three languages: he's the goods, make a first-rate man on the Anti-Labour League one day." That was Jones all over: he'd sum up a chap in a second, wild with enthusiasm or bitter with contempt. He never could take a middle course. The idea of a pusher always sent him into an enthusiastic frame of mind, except when the pusher took compassion on those he had left behind in his path of progress. The idea of promoting Briscoe thoroughly appealed to the little man. A small thing in the world of commerce, perhaps, but all his principles were involved. It enabled him to indulge his theory that the thruster is the man to choose. "Push and push and push," he would say, "and you can get anywhere."

p23

## CHAPTER II

## JIMMY BRISCOE

JAMES BRISCOE first appeared in a small mining village in the Midlands as a child of four. At least, his biography could be traced back no farther. Whose child he was IS not known. Whether he was the son of a gentleman, or the son of a working man is a question which his friends often debated but never solved, and it was their firm belief that James Briscoe himself would not tell them, if he could. He was brought up in a typical miner's cottage with a miner's children.

Jimmy's story really begins from the time he went to school. From that moment his fame spread steadily. At the age of five years he was playing tricks on the master and fighting his contemporaries. At this period his tricks lacked originality, and were merely cribs of what less intelligent boys of more advanced years have done before and since. His jokes at first varied from frogs in the master's desk to tablets in the ink, but even these pranks were an accomplishment, far ahead of anything usually done by a member of the infants' class. But his great joy was fighting: he was always the aggressor and often got badly beaten for his pains by some dignified youngster of seven or so. Next day p24 he would be at it again just the same. Every night he had a dust up with the other children at the cottage. When he wasn't fighting or playing tricks he was learning to read to himself. At six years old he had the most extraordinary flow of English and could swear like a trooper without repeating himself. Two or three miners would gather at the cottage in the evenings, and all were astonished at the oaths which little Jimmy would utter in their presence. Other children went home to their mothers from school and repeated the words which they had learnt from Jimmy Briscoe. One day the schoolmaster heard him using abusive language to another boy while the lesson was going on, and thrashed him for it. Jimmy never forgot it and declared a vendetta on the master from that day forward. At seven years old he was quarrelsome, rude and unforgiving. The parson called him" a most unpleasant little boy." At eight years old these qualities

were intensified. He was, however, the leader of the boys of his own age and older, and they all looked up to him: he helped them to steal eggs or apples and was ready to take the blamev; he taught them how to make catapults. He was also by far the cleverest boy in the school. Already he knew more than any boy two years older, and used generally to be found in the evening talking to the men who came and gossiped over the cottage gates.

p25 The most noticeable characteristic of Briscoe at this age was his pugnacious aggressiveness : he was always starting a row with someone. Either he would cross some of his elders in arguments over the cottage gate, and become abusive and get cuffed for his pains, or he would be leading a party of his eight-year-old followers in a raid upon some older youths who were playing cricket on a mud patch. He would get the worst of it, but he did not mind that, so long as he was fighting. There were three authorities whom he ran up against in their official capacity at different times; these were the lords spiritual and temporal of his little world, in other words, the parson, the policeman, and the schoolmaster. Each of them had some regulations which they wished to impose upon him, and against which he kicked. The parson and the policeman handed him over for justice to Mr. or Mrs. Tilley, the miner folk with whom he lived. Tilley administered the necessary chastisement with a strap and Mrs. Tilley beat him with the remains of an old broom handle, but they were always friends. Tilley was proud of the boy's success in school and took delight in relating the tales of his escapades over the " pub" bar; the lad gained him a sort of prestige among the local gossips.

Several tales are told in the district about the military successes gained by Briscoe against his various antagonists. His first triumph was over p26 the local policeman. He and the bobby had crossed swords several times, and the result had usually been to the latter's advantage. No one admired Briscoe's pertinacity more than the bobby, and he had always dealt with the miscreant lightly, but Tilley's strap had frequently been applied in answer to his polite request. Briscoe was always on the look out for an opportunity, though he believed in keeping- outside the range of that strap, if possible. The opportunity came

when Tilley sold the constable a very savage bull terrier; it was such a terror among the neighbours that the keeper of the law thought it would be useful to keep watch over his premises, while he was on night duty elsewhere. He had the dog tethered on a long chain which gave him a fair range of activity in the confined area of the garden. One of the few people with whom the dog was on friendly terms was Master James Briscoe, and the sight of the animal tethered in his enemy's garden inspired his fertile brain with a mischievous desire. By casual conversation with Tilley he discovered which nights in the week the policeman was on duty, and well away from his house. On one of these nights Briscoe got out of the cottage after the others were all asleep, and, finding the road clear, made his way to the policeman's house. As he peered over the gate the dog growled, but on hearing the boy's voice he became quiet. Jimmy had brought a p27 long piece of cord in his pocket, and, having unhooked the chain, he fastened one end to the dog's collar and the other through the last link. By this means he so increased the animal's area of operations that it could reach the path past the policeman's gate. The boy hoped his enemy might be bitten on returning home. The result was very different from what he intended. The village grocer, returning from a night out, was just passing the gate, when an infuriated animal dashed through the hedge, and seriously mauled his leg besides ruining his best trousers. The policeman was informed that he must make good the damages or legal proceedings would be taken, and he thought the former course was more in keeping with his position. The constable had to settle in hard cash, but public opinion grew so strong as the result of the stories spread about by the grocer's wife, who was on the scene when the tragedy occurred, that James Briscoe's enemy found it better to get rid of the dog.

The strike which Jimmy organized amongst the school boys is local history: so complete was his authority that not a single boy turned up to school one morning. The master arrived and sat in an empty room for some time, then, he departed to investigate the matter at some of the cottages close by; meanwhile all the boys, who had been hiding in an outhouse, sneaked into the school room and when the schoolmaster returned

p 28 with certain of the irate mothers, who assured him
that they had despatched their children to school at the proper time, he found them all assembled and Briscoe delivering a lecture from his own desk. What the mothers, who believed in the innocence of their young, said to the school-master is not recorded, but women don't mince matters in mining villages.

By the time Jimmy was ten years old, he was a confirmed atheist. All the religious instruction which the school teachers and the parson tried to cram into his skull was as pearls cast before swine. He studied the stories of the Old Testament and knew many of them by heart, but he looked upon them as interesting old tales, and you might as well have asked St. Paul to believe in the mythology of Homer as have tried to force upon this boy a belief in the first chapter of Genesis. Nothing would induce him to go to church after he once felt sufficiently independent to do as he pleased on Sunday. He went to a small newspaper shop, and by offering to take the Sunday papers round to all the customers in the district for less money than they had to pay to the drunken old tramp who was doing this for them at the time, he got the job. It meant a walk of not less than ten miles, and the papers which he distributed ran into several scores. He could not manage the weight of all these himself, but he found another lad whom he dissuaded from
p29 attendance at church; between them they managed the job and shared the proceeds. Jimmy used to take part of his pay in kind, he received one copy each of the *Downshire Weekly Sentinel* and the *Citizen;* sometimes he used to substitute the latter for a copy of the *Observer.* he received a few pence besides, which varied in ratio to the number of papers he distributed. before he had been doing this many months, the shop increased their customers, and he had to take papers farther afield. He undertook to deliver all papers by two p.m., and covered not less than twelve miles. His reward for this was an evening in Tilley's cottage studying the papers he had brought home, learning all about the celebrated people of the day and revelling in the political fights described in the Radical *Citizen* or the Tory *Observer.* He fought the battles over in his own head, and at intervals broke out into

wild enthusiasm or hatred before Tilley and his wife. Every Sunday he became more and more of a Radical and only read the other paper for the purpose of disposing of its Tory views.

One Sunday, as he was taking the paper to the parson's house, he met that gentleman coming out.

" Good morning, Briscoe, you're the very boy I want to see," began the Vicar.

"No time to waste here now, sir. P'raps to-morrow'll do. I've got ter get these papers round by two o'clock," returned the boy.

p30 " That's the very thing I want to see you about. I think you ought to come to church; if you come a few times you might change your mind and get to like it."

" Can't spare the time for church, sir; Sunday's the only day for making a bit of money and reading something good, when a lad's at school."

" I can't understand you, Briscoe, I shall have to speak to Mr. Tilley about you."

When Jimmy returned from his day's work that Sunday wet through and covered with mud, Tilley was sitting over a bit of fire.

" Look 'ere, young 'un," began Tilley. "I'm taking you along to church next Sunday; I've bin 'aving a word with the parson about it, and 'e ses a lad like you ought to come and 'ear somethin' O' God, so I'm just takin' yer there, that's all."

" I've got a job on Sundays and no time fer church," replied the boy.

" Well," said Tilley, "you've just got ter give over this paper business: and you're comin' along wi'me to church next Sunday."

Jimmy knew well enough when it was advisable to resist and when not: he just said nothing and laid his plans accordingly. He got hold of one of his friends to take the papers for him, and agreed to reward him in money, while he himself received the two papers as usual. On Sunday morning Briscoe went to church along with

p31 Tilley, who was a regular churchman and occupied a pew in a prominent position.

All went well, until the parson began to say the Lord's prayer and the congregation followed, when Briscoe in a loud voice began to recite the prayer in French. Everyone stopped and looked round, but Jimmy kept it up and droned it out to the end. Old ladies put up spectacles and looked at the small boy, then at Tilley: and that

worthy man felt so uncomfortable that he swore to himself that he would never bring Jimmy to church again. The following Sunday found him carrying the newspapers as usual.

Before he was twelve Jimmy was easily top of the village school, and the schoolmaster suggested to Tilley that he ought to be sent somewhere else, but when the latter mentioned the idea to the boy, all the answer he got was, " You let me alone; I can educate myself all right now; don't want to learn any of the rubbish they teach in schools."

So far James Briscoe had only been famous in his own village for the wild tricks he played, and for his quarrelsome and argumentative nature. He soon had a chance to win for himself real fame throughout his own county. In 1909 the Lords had thrown out L.G.'s famous Budget, and the political deadlock which ensued was to be decided by the general election of 1910. Jimmy was fifteen at the time. He had followed p32 the progress of the political struggle in his Sunday papers. He had not missed a point. He almost knew by heart L.G.'s speech in defence of his Budget. He longed to take part in the struggle on the side of Radicalism. He could think and speak of nothing else. He remembered but vaguely the 1906 election. All he recollected was a gentleman on a platform being shouted down, and a street riot between the rival parties. Now he was big enough to take part in the real fight.

Many still remember that cardinal folly of 1910, when the Unionist party appealed to the country against L.G.'s Budget, and fought the election on the question of Tariff Reform: one night the small mining village was condemned to listen to the Unionist candidate, supported on the platform by all the eminent gentry of the neighbourhood. Somewhere in a dark corner at the back of the room sat a youth with a slip of paper in his hand. On this paper he had noted five questions for the embarrassment of the candidate. Most of them have been forgotten, but one who was there managed to remember something of what Jimmy Briscoe said: "Are you going to tax food? " he shouted out at the candidate.

" No, I've told you that," was the reply.

" You've just said that the country must be made self-supporting."

" Yes."

" How do you propose to make it self-support-
p33 ing, unless it grows its own food?" Jimmy stood up waiting for his blow to strike home while the room cheered, and laughed, and when they looked round and saw that it was" that lad Jimmy," they cheered still longer. That night Jimmy made his name as a heckler. Next night found him on the top of a wall addressing a gathering of enthusiastic supporters. Hurling catch phrases from the *Citizen,* spitting forth venom against the other side, he soon filled the road up with men returning from the pits.

Jimmy didn't have it all his own way. One night a party from the other side kidnapped him, and put him in a pond to cool his ardour; but he was up again next day, keener than ever, and news of the hostile assault upon him did the Unionist cause more harm than good. The Liberals had decided not to contest the seat so the struggle lay between the Labour and Unionist candidates. So famous did Briscoe become in a few days that he was sent for by the Labour candidate and asked to fire off his venomous phrases in other parts of the constituency. It was during this campaign that Jimmy, for the first time in his life, had a ride in a motor car. Nothing did more to, increase his socialistic leanings than that ride. He was mad to think that some people travelled like that every day, comfortable, warm and dry, while others trudged along roads through rain and mud, and that there
p34 was only one difference between them, the posses-
sion or non-possession of money.

The election ended in a decisive victory for the Labour party and in making the name of James Briscoe famous throughout the constitutency. The Labour committee offered him a clerical post in their offices. It was an easy chance of bettering himself, and would have offered him fair facilities for self-education, since his pay would have enabled him to buy books and papers. It was a wonder that he did not accept it, but the fact remains that Jimmy refused the offer, and a few days later he disappeared.

Mr. and Mrs. Tilley found a letter on the table one morning which read as follows :-

" DEAR MR. AND MRS. TILLEY,

" I am off to London, where I have got a

good job. The Police. will know my address.
Thank you both for all you've done for me.
" Yrs. till we meet again,
"JAMES BRISCOE."

Tilley just remarked, "That lad's all right." Mrs. Tilley said, "Jimmy'll come back a Member O'Parliament some day." Other people asked where he was, and the reply was" Dunno, I suppose 'e's got some political job." None ever guessed the truth. All took it for granted that he had got some" big job," and there the matter ended.

p 35 Jimmy had decided to make off to London, trust his luck, and devote as much time as possible to self education. The recognized forces of education he always despised. He was never envious of those who went to public schools, where, he maintained, they were taught how to hit and kick a ball about, and very little else, and received no stimulus to ingenuity.

On arriving in London he went to a motor garage, and as he knew nothing whatever about cars, he obtained a job as cleaner at ten shillings per week. He afterwards confessed that washing cars on a cold wet winter's morning was one of the most unpleasant occupations, and he could never see a bright limousine gliding through the streets in winter without feeling sympathy for the washer.

Jimmy's object in going as a cleaner was something more than earning his bread and butter. He had to get twelve cars cleaned by eleven o'clock every morning: sometimes one or two were required by six or seven a.m., and they had to be cleaned ready. But those cars were nearly all of different makes, and he set out to get a very good knowledge of each. He worked his way into the good opinions of the drivers, who were usually far too exalted to take any notice of the cleaner, but, when they saw how keen he was, they took an interest in explaining everything. They gave him the booklets issued p36 by the firms on the various makes. These he studied hard by himself, and compared the diagrams, which named all the parts, with the corresponding cars.

Some of you may have been compelled through shortage of cash at some time or another to dine at one of the Soho restaurants off an eighteen-

penny dinner. The frequenters of this feeding place in 1910 and 1911, used occasionally to have arguments about the nationality of a certain waiter there, who boasted a healthy complexion and close-cropped hair. In spite of the fact that he spoke in German he looked unmistakably English, and had the appearance of one living in the open air. He was once questioned on the subject by two young students, who had been spending a holiday on the Continent and fancied themselves a little as judges of national types. Greatly to their surprise he appeared to understand English imperfectly and declared himself a German. Though he looked very young, the most noticeable part of his features was the jaw, which was exceptionally strong and gave him a face of great determination. Altogether it was not surprising that people who noticed him felt that there was something unusual about him. The man in question was none other than Jimmy Briscoe ; he was learning everything he could pick up from the greasy German waiters who infested the London eating houses in those years p37 For something over six months he acted in the dual capacity of motor cleaner and waiter. By that time he had learnt all about six different makes of cars, was fluent in German and had a smattering of Italian, besides being an expert at selecting dishes and wines. That was his idea of self-education. When asked once, in his later years, whether he considered the result worth the drudgery, he laughed.

" That's the very point, where you people are mistaken," he replied. "You always look upon learning as a drudgery, you sit at a desk with a book open and get away from it as soon as possible. I don't wonder you were bored with trying to learn French and German that way. No man who's got any spirit can learn like that. But the practical education, the education by experience, it's the finest thing in the world, and so damned interesting that you don't want to chuck it all your life. If they'd substitute that for your rotten system, if they'd only make a man learn his job by doing it, you'd all be educated by the time you're nineteen instead of a lot of blase louts."

At the end of six months he thought it was time to turn his attention to some new form of education, so he determined to learn something about

business. He also wanted time to read a little more and pick up the thread of politics, which he had relaxed during his labours in garage and restaurant. The second General Election of
p38 1910 was coming on, and Jimmy found himself unable to resist the longing for battle. L.G. was out for the scalps of the House of Lords, and the *Citizen* was urging even more extreme measures than those which were proposed. The articles in the Socialist press expressed sentiments very similar to those which must have animated Henry II when he gave forth the utterance which led to the murder of Thomas a Becket. The chance seemed too good to miss, and the youthful enthusiasm of Jimmy naturally inclined him towards the extremist party. So he decided to hunt for suitable ground in which to sow the seed of murder against those turbulent Lords who had dared to resist the budget which he and his fellows decided to support. It was not until he was required to contribute to the National Health Insurance scheme that Jimmy realized that it would be possible for him to have any quarrel with the radicalism of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Youthful enthusiasm always tends to run to extremes if it be real, and Jimmy's was very real, but he afterwards admitted that if the House of Lords question had been fought out after the introduction of the National Insurance Scheme the result would have been different, and certain bitter fighting speeches of his own would have been undelivered. Be that as it may, the fact remains that Jimmy continually hammered the Lords from upturned soap boxes, and the
p39 steps of taxi cabs. He went round to his old friends at the garage, and persuaded them all to his way of thinking and they, in turn, brought others for him to convince.

Those were days, as Jimmy afterwards remarked, when we believed that the country's salvation depended upon the return of this or that political party to power, while, in reality, each party only stood for the interest of one class against another, and aimed at a class triumph rather than the establishment of a sound political principle.

Jimmy was once more brought into the limelight while the elections were on, but he disappeared just as suddenly when they were over as he had done after the previous occasion. Again he said his education was not complete. "If

you wish to educate others, and do some good in the world, you must educate yourself first." That was his maxim which he was constantly repeating. He was very much inclined to go as a taxi driver, because he thought it would give him a great opportunity of studying the various types of people who travel in such vehicles; he also considered the advisability of going as a bus conductor. On second thoughts, however, he decided to learn something of the business world, and of the capitalists who had become such a power in England, so he became an office boy in the firm of Weston & Jones.

He was engaged by Mr. Simpson, the head p40 clerk, in his peculiarly phlegmatic manner, who proceeded to give details of his day's work, as though he were talking to a machine. As propounded by Simpson it sounded a formidable proposition, but when the details were sifted out, it became evident that it would afford him considerable time for leisure.

Jimmy started well; he entered Mr. Weston's room to hang up his hat, stick and coat, and saw, to his astonishment, that the senior partner was none other than one of the Unionist candidates whose chances he had done so much to defeat.

"Good morning, Briscoe, you're the new office boy, I understand," began Weston. " What were you doing before?"

" The last week or two I've been doing my best to see that you were not returned to Parliament, sir."

" What! Are you an election agent or something ? "

" No, sir, but I do a bit of canvassing, so to speak, when there's an election on. We all did our share to see the Lords defeated. They won't stop any more bills."

" That'll do, send Mr. Simpson here."

When Simpson arrived he found Weston marching up and down the room.

" I think you sent for me, Mr. Weston," said the head clerk.

"Where did you get this new boy from? He seems a most extraordinary youth, a red hot p41 Radical, and rather inclined to air his views."

" I got an excellent character with him; of course, if he doesn't do his work we can get rid of him, but he seems to be a very sharp lad : he's picked everything up right away."

"Do all these youths hold political opinions

now, Simpson?"

" There's nothing unusual in it: it's the new education, sir. Things are altering: all office boys expect to become partners."

" I suppose we shall have to put up with it, but it's a serious matter; all right, then, we'll see how he goes on."

Whilst he was with Weston & J ones, he worked desperately hard. Briscoe had saved a few pounds up-to-date from the money he earned. Every hour, when he was not answering the beck and call of his employers, was spent in studying political, social, and religious writings. Whenever he got a chance for an argument with the clerks he started some controversy. He proceeded on the principle of never agreeing with anyone, which he considered to be the best method of obtaining new ideas. In the evenings he let off his quarrelsome spirits in a boxing school. By 1912 when he was seventeen years of age, Jimmy Briscoe had a knowledge of more languages, trades, and phases of life than ten ordinary Englishmen, and Mr. Simpson had become duly impressed.



## CHAPTER III

## THE CHOICE

ONE afternoon in August 1914, two young men accosted each other across the street of a country market town in the Midlands. Their respective means of transport were a two-seater car, and a bicycle, a fact which fairly accurately represented the difference between their purses. Bunny Fenton and Tony Jackson had been at Oxford together for the past three years. The former owned the two-seater and was a Magdalen man with rooms overlooking the" High," while his less opulent friend belonged to Wadham and had rooms in Beaumont Street. Fenton hunted, led brawls in the streets, and belonged to the Bullingdon, whereas Jackson worked, played games, and debated in the Union. So far apart were their ways set, that they would probably never have known each other, had they not hailed from the same neighbourhood and travelled to and

from Oxford in the same train. From the time they parted on Oxford station at the beginning of each term, to their meeting on the same spot when the term ended, they saw little or nothing of each other. Nevertheless, they were the best p43 of friends and always spent a great deal of the long vac together.

" Hello, Bunny, been wanting to have a chat with you," began Jackson. "A little ale wouldn't do us any harm. What say you ? "

" A capital notion, Tony. I've quite a useful thirst. Let's see what Mr. Bass can do for us.

Car and bike were left beside the pavement, and off they walked.

"What's yours, Bunny?" Jackson said as they sat down at a marble topped table in the King's Arms.

" No, this is mine, Jacker."

" I asked you first, so that ends it."

" You are still a kid at the 'Varsity. I've gone down and can't be stood drinks by one who is still *in statu pupillari."*

" Don't be a fool. I've left too, if it comes to that."

" Since when? Only a week ago you told me you were staying another year."

"There's a lot happened since then. You don't suppose anyone will go back to Oxford now? "

" What, are you chucking up everything just because of this jolly old War? "

He went to the bar and ordered two pints of bitter.

"That," retorted the other, as he sat down p44 again, "is just what I wanted to chat about. What are you going to do, Bunny ?"

"Well, as far as I'm concerned this is the finest thing that could have happened. Here am I, loafing about at a loose end, and this is the very job for me. I shall have the best time in my life for about a year, unless it's over in less. Fine sport, having a dash through the Germans on a good horse."

" A cavalry commission? "

"Expecting it any minute. Three damned good years at the 'Varsity and then the Kaiser kindly gets up a war to keep me from feeling dull. What luck ! "

" Wish I saw it in the same light."

The beer arrived, and they chinked their mugs together and both took a deep draught. F enton offered - a cigarette and lit one himself.

" Of course," he said, as he held out a lighted match, "it's different for you; a clever devil who likes work doesn't want to go messing about with war. His work would be thrown away. What you want to do is to stay up at Oxford, take finals and get a good degree, then you'll be able to get some job in the War Office or something where your brain will be some use; probably the War will be over by then, and you can go to the Bar, or anything else in the normal way."

"Sounds nice and plausible, but you don't really think that."

p45 "Why not? We're not all cut out for the same job. Damned good thing too. You're meant to do something clever, and I'm made for charging Germans."

"Wish I felt like that; don't you think we'll all be wanted?" Inwardly Jackson was longing to clutch at the straw which Fenton had offered him.

" P'raps if the situation gets desperate they'll want you, but not in the firing line. No good throwing away brains as subalterns, or we shall soon run out of them."

Jackson hesitated. Did Bunny really think that, or was he leg-pulling? Surely not; Bunny was too open for that. It seemed then, there was no obligation on him to join the Army, and he certainly didn't want to, if he could avoid it. Tony Jackson was a very normal individual; he wanted a quiet successful career, rather than adventure, his physical courage was normal and no more, he was not lacking in imagination of the horrors of warfare, and he did not want to die. The desire for self-preservation was strongly assertive within him. To such instincts Fenton's arguments made a strong appeal. But, whatever his nature, Jackson was a young man of character. It was the character derived from good health, a sound upbringing, and a public school education; reliance, conscientiousness, and loyalty. Unless p46 he could reconcile Fenton's arguments with his conscience, they must be put aside. And he couldn't.

" Not seen any 'Varsity folk lately, have you? "

said Jackson, by way of changing the subject.

" Having lunch in Coventry yesterday I ran into young Barton. Fancy that little blighter, they've given him a commission in the Flying Corps."

"Damn it all, Bunny. That lad took the finest first in Mods that's been got for years. What about wasting *his* brains? "

"He's an awful little worm. Never played games, never made friends. No one ever saw him except in Schools."

"Bunny," said his friend, thumping his fist on the table, "You are drinking with me now. I've left Oxford. If young Barton can go, I must go-Two more, please," he shouted to the man at the bar.

The drinks arrived; the two chinked glasses together, wished each other the best of luck, swallowed their beer and departed.

There were many hard things said during the first few months of the War. None, save those who had to make them, realized the decisions which many young men were called upon to take. The struggle in many a young man's soul was a desperate one, and each individual case was different. It was very easy for elderly men who p47 had made a mess of their lives to say they wished they were going; it was not difficult for many a middle-aged man, who had contracted an uncongenial marriage, to seek a little freedom in a regimental mess; but, for some of the young men, who had worked hard during the last ten years to fit themselves for a career, especially those who had been tolerably successful, it was a hard decision, a very hard decision. There were some who thought it was only necessary to possess a wife to be able to prate of home ties and consciences and point the "finger of scorn at the unmarried youngsters. They found it easy to justify themselves by saying that they were not called upon to go until the unmarried shirkers went. The truth is that all healthy young men of twenty or so instinctively cling to life, especially if they are ambitious and have attractive prospects before them.

Although he had made up his mind during the conversation with Bunny Fenton, Tony Jackson felt far from comfortable. Perhaps he was one of nature's cowards: at any rate, he certainly did

not want to die, but his logical self-control got over that. After all, he would have to die some time or other. But the thought of giving up his career irritated him beyond measure; like most young men of his age he was somewhat egotistical. Nor did his parents do much to dissipate his mistaken ideas as to his importance to the world at
p48 large. He felt too that if he went, contemporaries and competitors of his would stay behind, and he would find they had outstripped him when the War was over. Like the married men, he wanted conscription, not because he wanted others to go first, but so that his competitors should go along with him.

On the very day when Tony Jackson was making his decision with Bunny Fenton in the bar of a country pub, another scene was being played in the offices of Weston & Jones. Weston was sitting in his revolving office chair, perfectly groomed as usual. The office boy had just hung up his silk hat and was going out of the room.

"Call Mr. Simpson," ordered the senior partner; he always started the business of the day with this remark. In a few moments the head clerk appeared. Weston finished lighting a cigarette.

" Good morning, Simpson. Anything exciting to-day? "

" The War Office have asked us to submit samples and quotations to the board to-day, and there's a 'confidential' from Huerter & Sons." Simpson handed an envelope to Weston, who opened it. He read it two or three times, and then getting up he strolled round the room. Suddenly he decided and made for the door.

" All right, I'll take this to Mr. Jones." He
p49 passed out and left Simpson wondering what was in the air.

On entering Jones's office, Weston closed the door with unusual deliberation. He then took a seat at the opposite side of the writing table and faced his partner.

" You seem to be arranging a big deal with Huerter & Sons."

Jones leant back in his chair and returned his gaze.

" Oh, it's come to you, has it? Is it on? I've been keeping it quiet till I had worked it out.

We've got the final option and it'll be a big coup. We've got to thank young Briscoe partly for this. He gave me the idea."

" Well, you'd better read this," said Weston curtly, handing over the letter.

Jones put it down, leant forward and began earnestly: "P'raps I'd better explain a bit. The beginning of last month that young blighter thought there would be a European war of some sort, and from studying the conditions of modern warfare, he came to the conclusion that wire would be wanted in enormous quantities. I thought at first he meant telephone wire, but no, he meant barbed wire. As you know, this new patent fencing has been boomed a lot lately,and the price of barbed wire has slumped a bit. I know it wasn't one of your deals, Weston, too much on the heavy side, eh! Anyhow, I've been p50 quietly buying up odd stocks of barbed wire where I could get them cheap; we now hold about 5,000,000 yards of the stuff. About a fortnight ago, Huerter's wrote and inquired about it for the French Government. Thinking there would be other competitors in the field I made the price pretty hot. They've been scouring the country since. This letter should show whether they have been successful in finding what they want elsewhere." He picked up the letter and read for a moment; the little eyes began to sparkle and his face twitched with excitement. "Yes, they've had to come to our price. I thought as much."

" How much," began Weston, " do we stand to ... wait a minute, who's there? Come in. Hullo, what is it, Briscoe? "

Briscoe carefully closed the door. He had grown since 1912, he was broad-shouldered and had less of the hungry look, his eyes were bright, and his chin more determined than ever.

" I want to warn you not to carry out that deal with Huerter & Sons." "

" What on earth--" exclaimed Jones, but he checked himself before Briscoe's glance, and rapidly pondered what the youth could be driving at.

" Since we have come into the War, things have altered," Briscoe went on, "that wire "is wanted for Germany."

p51 "How do you know?" This was from

Weston, who always liked a deal once the money was in his pocket.

" Last night I was in Soho, and got in touch with some of the waiters. You see I know the ropes down there. I learnt that Germany was badly in need of wire for entanglements. I casually suggested that Huerter's could find the stuff for them if they were quick, and one of them gave the show away. It's all for Germany. Even before we came in, the Germans thought it better to take no risks, and so they said, it was for France."

Jones threw down the papers and declared it was all rot, and that they as a firm could not possibly be expected to know where the stuff ultimately was meant for. Both partners decided it was a legitimate deal. Weston, being in no mood to lose his share of the profitable coup, was full of arguments to justify the deal, patriotism actually being one of them. Briscoe, therefore, had to face the pair of them, united to an extent never before known by the prospect of profits to be shared.

" You think it's an honest deal then, gentlemen. I call it trading with the enemy. Suppose we ask the law to decide." With this Briscoe turned to leave the room. Jones forestalled him and stood with his back to the door. The little man's mind was working feverishly. If that p52 chap Briscoe blew the gaff, all their wire might be confiscated, and the firm would crash. Briscoe,
he knew, was at least as determined as himself. It would never do to take that risk. Briscoe must be won over or the deal cancelled.

" Huerter & Sons are a neutral firm; surely they can buy what they like, Briscoe," began Jones in a conciliatory voice.

"That's because our government are such a weak crowd, and won't take action to shift these aliens, but they can confiscate that wire before it gets to Huerter, if they decide it is intended for Germany."

Weston decided to throw his weight into the scales.

" You, Briscoe, are a man who is out to make his way in the world. . You have pushed your way along very successfully so far over every obstacle. Without being meticulously scrupu-

lous can't you see that this is an honest business deal, and we've run a great risk by anticipating the market. Suppose we had been wrong, what should we have lost on all this stuff? A big risk entitles one to big profits."

Briscoe thought Weston was about the last person in the world to lecture him on the subject of taking risks, but he controlled the impulse to laugh outright:

" As a deal between two men or firms, this is good and legitimate business, Mr. Weston, but p53 firms can only deal in their own property, and this barbed wire just now is the property of England, made by England's labour, out of materials found in England's soil. It will be wanted in a few days by its rightful owners."

"Will they pay for it, Briscoe? Will they give our price? "

" I should say they'd give enough to leave you with a profit."

"A very bare profit, perhaps," rapped out Jones, with a flash of beady eyes, " but quite incommensurate with the risk we've had to take. You don't appreciate this point, Briscoe, because you're not financially interested. Now suppose we give you a partnership in Weston & Jones. We'll give you something worth toiling for: the profit on this transaction alone will put you on your feet. Now what about it?"

Jones had mentally summed up the situation, and decided that a trump card would have to be played, or the whole deal would be frustrated. That young man would be satisfied with nothing less than a big step up. No time to consult Weston, better take the bull by the horns. He looked keenly at Briscoe to watch the result of his suggestion, but the latter showed no sign of excitement.

Briscoe looked steadily at Jones and shook his head.

“I'm afraid a partnership's no use to me: I p54 came in to tell you that I'm going to join the Army."

This was a staggerer, even Jones was taken aback.

" Army !" he fairly exploded. "Thought you were a pusher, Briscoe; you're not going to chuck up the sponge, and become one of the

ordinary crowd. Impossible. Have half an hour to think it over. A partnership in Weston & Jones, or the other thing."

It was marvellous that Briscoe did not succumb. A partnership in a firm like that, at his age was a mighty big temptation, and just when he wanted money.

"With £10.000" Jimmy used to say, "I should be able to do anything, and I could have saved that in four years."

The low reputation of the British Tommy among civilians before the War was well known. He was regarded as a person of the swearing, drinking and spitting variety, a bit too rough for ordinary society. The city clerk, on the other hand was usually a most eminently respectable individual who could hardly expect to get a direct commission, but could not quite fit himself in with the beer swillers in the ranks. It was hard indeed, in the early days, for men of this type to take a decision which they felt would lower their social status to that of manual labourers. But they did it in their thousands, the more credit

p55 to them, and some of us are not likely to forget, nor are the Germans, the onslaught of a division, known as the "Human Stylos," in May 1915 Some of those who fought so gaily at Festubert were among the men who had found it hardest to make the choice.

How near Briscoe was to giving way it is impossible to tell. He was always a keen conscriptionist, because he believed that a strong British Army would prevent war. Now that war had come he felt that conscription alone could remedy our muddling habit of putting square pegs in round holes. When the passing of the Conscription Act hung in the balance in 1915, there were many who thought that if only they had refrained from joining up themselves, necessity would have brought it about earlier.

Briscoe did not answer Jones's last ultimatum. He turned the door handle slowly, pulled the door towards him and went outside. He had half disappeared when Jones winked at Weston, as much as to say, " I think that'll square him." But before the door had closed he was back again, looking down at the two partners with his lighting spirit up, and his chin thrust out in its most aggressive attitude.

" Mr. Jones," he said, "this wire must be offered to the War Office, and I'll just go and draft you a letter to that effect, if you'll be good enough to sign it." With that he left the room.

p56 " You've met your match this time," sneered Weston, "Uppish young devil. Fancy losing this business. Your fault, Jones, for promoting such a youth."

Jones did not hear. His mind was searching for any possible means of retrieving the situation, but could find none. Briscoe returned with a typed draft and envelope ready, for signature. It informed the War Office that the firm had 5,000,000 yards of barbed wire, and would be pleased to' offer the refusal to' H.M.'s Government. Jones read it and threw it over to' Weston.

" If you'll be good enough to sign, I'll post it on my way to the recruiting station.''

" Suppose we don't," snapped Weston.

"I shall report the firm to' the police, for trading with the enemy. I'll leave you for five minutes to' talk it over.'

Ten minutes later Briscoe left the office with a letter in his hand. That was how he made his choice on August 10th, 1914.

If the sacrifice which Tony Jackson had been called upon to make was a large one, Briscoe's was infinitely greater. In 1912 the latter had obtained the position of clerk with Weston & Jones at £2 a week. In 1913' he demanded another pound a week and got it. In August 1914 he was about to demand another pound when the storm burst. He had not wasted the last two years any more than he had wasted the p57 earlier years in the mining village. He could both speak and write German and French, he was studying law and was ready to join an Inn and sit for his examinations. In the next five years he intended to save enough to risk his chances in that fascinating profession. His self-confidence was superb. "Get me on my feet," he used to say, " before an English jury and I can't fail. I know 'em all too well." The offer of a partnership in Weston & Jones was, of course, unexpected. It now placed independence within his grasp. To join the Army at this juncture meant the jettisoning of all his plans. There was no force which could compel him to do so.

Such action was absurd for anyone who was bent on personal success. But his conscience told him otherwise and Briscoe unhesitatingly obeyed it.

## p58 CHAPTER IV

## THE MOULDING

HAVING taken the plunge, Tony Jackson got into touch with the officer commanding a new Territorial battalion which was in process of being raised. Along with one or two friends he was nominated for a commission and in due course gazetted. The moulding of an army unit out of a mass of raw human material was a most interesting process. Equipment of all sorts was scanty. At first uniforms were not available. Owing, however, to the enthusiasm which pervaded all ranks at that period, the transformation was accomplished in remarkably quick time. Jackson found the life more to his liking than he anticipated. There was none of the boredom associated with peace-time soldiering. There was so much to be done and learnt in a short space of time that body and mind were fully occupied.

The battalion was quartered in the grounds of a country mansion situated not far from an industrial centre of the Midlands. The house itself acted as barracks, and huts were erected to provide the surplus accommodation. The town from which many of the men were recruited p59 was about three miles distant; through it the battalion route marched at weekly intervals. Though it was very pleasant for the men to be able to go home and see relations and friends in the evenings, the keener spirits among them were soon anxious to get moved into another area. When a unit was stationed in the area of its recruitment it was apt to be regarded as something of a joke by the local inhabitants. No. I2345 private" Somebody" was apt to be looked upon as the butcher boy, or whatever he was before he joined up, rather than the soldier which he was aspiring to be. He felt a bit of a fool marching down the street with a swagger stick instead of a meat basket, and sometimes one of his old pals would laugh at him when he was in the ranks, and the company were supposed to be "at

attention." When, therefore, rumours of a move reached the officers' mess they were greeted with no little satisfaction. It was a long time before the rumours were translated into fact, but at last the expected command arrived. Jackson was commanding a platoon in those days, and immediately dashed out of the ante-room, opened his despatch box, and looked through the various books on military training to discover what were the duties of a platoon commander when troops were being moved by train ; nor was he satisfied with this information, but decided to know all about the duties of a company
officer as well. They were all enthusiastic
p60 in those days, and being a new unit, were not bound by any of the absurd rules and precedents which have grown up through the ages and become established as law in Regular regimental messes. They had no law against talking shop. It was highly probable that the colonel would ask the officer who happened to sit next to him at mess that night some questions relevant to the movement of troops, and they never knew who was going to sit next to him. He used to take hold of some officer or other in the ante-room and lead him into dinner, and it might be anyone. Jackson thought it might be his turn, and at any rate, he would be well armed, and even if the question were put to someone else it might be passed on unanswered, and he should score a point if it reached him. As it happened the C.O. did not take Jackson in with him, but during the course of the meal he said to the adjutant, "How many officers can tell me how you proceed to entrain a company on reaching the station?"

" More than half I should say, sir," returned the other.

" Well, look here, Harvey, I am willing to bet you a whisky and soda to a bottle of Bass that one-quarter of them cannot tell us. How many are there? "

p61The adjutant counted heads carefully, and then said, "Thirty-four, sir, including ourselves, the quartermaster, and the doctor."

" I'll bet you there are not eight who can tell us; will you take me ? "

“Yes,Sir.

" Look here," said the colonel, addressing the mess as a whole, " I've got a bet on here, and I want every officer to write down on a slip of paper what he thinks is the proper method to entrain troops on reaching the rail-head. Anyone who does not know need not say anything, and you need not sign your efforts. Just pass them along here when you have finished."

" Harvey, order me a bottle of Bass, please," said the colonel.

" How many have you got, sir?"

"I don't think they are all in yet," replied the other. "Then ask 'em."

" Are there any more theories on the subject of entraining troops? If so hand them in, please," said the adjutant looking round.

" I think we've got 'em all, Harvey."

"how many, Sir .

" Eight altogether."

" Then I've won, sir."

" Oh, no, my boy; only two are right. Whose do you think they are ? "

" Well, I should say the major would be one,Sir" p62"Yes I know by his writing , and the other?" I haven't the faintest , Sir" "take that over to Jackson and ask if it's his" So Jackson earned the reward of his keenness and the Colonel won his beer ,

The battalion had arrived at the country town of Upper Misenden, Essex, and all enjoyed settling down in their new quarters. On the third morning Jackson was sent for by the colonel.

"Jackson," he said when they were alone, " I've got to provide a draft of men for guard-duty at the G.H.Q. of the Eastern Command, situated at Weston Manor, the residence of Lord -. The men will have to be billeted in Mowdon, which is about three miles away. I propose to put you in charge of the party. If should be rather a pleasant and interesting job, and you will have some responsibility. The guard duties at the G.H.Q. have previously been carried out by Regular troops, and you will have to show that you are just as good. On home service, a battalion is largely judged by the manner in which it performs its guard duties, and this is a great chance for us. You will have picked N.C.O.s and men, and will yourself be

personally responsible for maintaining the discipline and efficiency of the men who are off duty.
p63 Any breach of discipline should be dealt with severely. You can have one other subaltern who will bring the men down. You yourself will proceed to-morrow to Mowdon and prepare to .take over everything from the party you are relieving; the men will follow you next day. You will take all your instructions as to guard duties from the D.A.A.G. Eastern Command H.Q."

" I'll do my best, sir," replied Jackson, standing to attention with special stiffness.

"I think you'll like it, Jackson; and I've chosen you because I think you are keen. After all.' it's the first chance we've had of doing something really useful; we are releasing Regulars for the front."

" Who will the other officer be, sir? " replied the subaltern.

" Who would you like? . Of course, he must be junior to you."

Those were the days when a week's seniority - counted for much. Jackson's own commission was not six months old,. and yet he was being given charge over another officer, and a hundred men.

" I should like Bremner to come, sir," he said.

" Very well then, send him to me when you go out."

" I should like my own platoon sergeant Sir, if it makes no difference." ,

p64 On looking back afterwards Tony Jackson often laughed over the manner in which he presumed to dictate terms to the C.0., but both of them were so enthusiastic about doing the thing as well as possible that neither of them seemed to think of it at the time.

" I'll ask the adjutant and the sergeant-major to select twenty-five men from each company. Who is your platoon sergeant? "

On being told, the colonel agreed as to his merits, so he was selected.

Jackson left the colonel, feeling no end of a man, and rushed off to find Bremner. He was even more enthusiastic and whispered that it must mean a captaincy for Jackson and two-stars for himself. They did not learn, till they got to France, that it is the custom in the Army for

junior officers to do senior officers' work and get no promotion. Bremner came back from his interview with the C.0. full of enthusiasm.

" My God, Jacker; it's simply great. You are an absolute blood. You'll have to stay on in the Army; the C.O. must think you the deuce of a man. You'll be a captain in a week or two."

Jackson spent a day in Mowdon making arrangements to take over from the Regulars. At first, they were tempted to treat him rather with scorn; like all Regulars, they affected to look down on the others at the beginning of the p65 War, but the C.O. had armed him with self-confidence, the manuals on infantry training had given him a store of knowledge, which he did not hesitate to apply in front of professional soldiers. The men he was relieving came from one of .our smartest regiments, and his accuracy in details of ceremonial rather won their admiration; though he himself, educated in the Oxford school of thought, inwardly despised such attention to meticulous detail.

During the afternoon he went to the Army Headquarters; he found it to be a typical country mansion, with a splendid park full of very fine timber. It seemed extraordinary to see the tables and coach houses full of soldiers, and sentries in front of all the gates; the house was simply full of generals. The general officers commanding the Army, the Division, and the Brigade in that neighbourhood were all quartered there with their staffs. It was a regular pageant of brass hats and red tabs. Staff officers were taking horse exercise in the park, and a magnificent car was standing at the door which had just brought the Army commander down from London.

Jackson went and looked at the sentry posts. There were ten sentries on at night, and some of them were in very unpleasant places. The house was surrounded on three sides by a dense shrubbery, and rhododendrons were so thick that you could not see through them in the p66 day time. One sentry had to pace up and down a path in between these bushes; any place more creepy and lonely on a cold, dark night, can scarcely be imagined. Every sound in the bushes would have startled many a person out of his life. ,'He felt sure of that another sentry

had a beat along a flag-stone walk in among some monuments, with a fountain in the middle and stone lions at the corners, rather after the style of Trafalgar Square.

A raw soldier, who had drunk a little too much beer, might well feel uncertain of himself on this beat. All these items he took in at the first tour of inspection. He was introduced to the D.A.A.G., who at once said that he supposed some senior officer was coming in charge of the party. Jackson put on his most dignified manner and replied in the negative, but, for all that, he felt that he was unable to conceal the youthfulness of his complexion and the badge of rank on his shoulders. He was given to understand that the responsibility of his post was very great, and that if any German spy inadvertently bagged the G.O.C. either from air or land, the great man's death would be laid at his door. A less enthusiastic person might have been seriously perturbed, but all this only increased Jackson's delight that he was doing the real thing at last; .and he just revelled in the responsibility.

He had billeted himself on the people living p67 at the most pleasant-looking residence in Mowdon, and went to bed that night full of his own importance. The following morning he went again to Weston Manor; intending to inform the D.A.A.G. that he was going to take over next day, and. also to look. at the place more closely, with a view to planning the dispositions of his sentries, and trying to improve upon those ,of his predecessors. However, he suffered one of the most unpleasant shocks of his life, when he was shown into the D.A.A.G.'s· office and informed by that. gentleman that the G.O.C.'thought he was rather junior to be entrusted with the keeping of his life, and that his C.O. 'had been asked to send the Captain in command of the party. 'It was in vain that he pointed out that 'he was an expert upon guard duty, and that the possession of an extra star did not mean' extra'keenness and efficiency. He even expostulated on the present positions of the sentry beats, and proposed improvements. At the 'end of it the staff meerly patted him kindly on the shoulder and said, " It is a capital thing to be keen, my boy; but we must obey the orders of the G.O.C." Then it was that Jackson realized more clearly

than he had yet done that he had ceased to be a civilian.

That afternoon Bremner arrived with a hundred N.C.O.s and men. "I shall not be in command of this show ; they want a captain: G.O.C. says
p68 “I’m too junior” Jackson told him as soon as they met.

“Rot, my dear man, they’ll make you a temporary
captain, that’s all” replied the other .
In the morning a letter arrived for Jackson from the C.O. it ran as follows :

“DEAR JACKSON”
" I am sorry to disappoint you, but they want a senior officer in command of the party. I am sending Captain---- to-morrow. Look after things till he comes.
Yours sincerely, etc."

Jackson did look after things, and looked after them for more than one day; like a sportsman the colonel decided to let him have a small innings, and, for a few days, for reasons best known to himself, it was impossible for Captain -- to get away. For these five days he was king of Mowdon. His sentries were posted, and the guards inspected by day and night; the other men were drilled and taught musketry, and he was in charge. It was the time of his life, and everything was carried out so smoothly that D.A.A.G. and G.O.C. both forgot to ask whether the captain had turned up, and although they required that a captain should be in charge, they were quite content that all the work should be done by Jackson,
p69 On one of these days at Weston Manor, after inspecting the guard, Jackson sat down on the end of a bench in the doorway of what was really a saddle room, but was now given up to the N.C.O.s on duty. He was looking on to the fine old stable-yard, surrounded by buildings of the Queen Anne period. There were some cavalry quartered in the buildings, and while he was sitting there a sergeant of the Hussar regiment was making some defaulters do pack drill, and he got a fair chance to see how they dealt with such offenders in smart regiments of the Regular Army.

Each of the men being drilled was carrying a soldier's kit bag, stuffed as full as it would hold with boots and equipment. With this tucked under one arm, the men were made to march up and down the yard at a pace something between a quick march and a double, and they were kept at it too. It must have been fair hell. He was wrapt in admiration for the sergeant and the brusque comments with which he amplified his monotonous orders. This N.C.O. seemed to make the men fairly jump every time he gave an order. Jackson remarked to his lance-corporal, who was standing by, that it was an efficient way of dealing with defaulters, and that he thought their own orderly sergeants might take a wrinkle rom the Hussars. He would not have made such a remark unless he had known that the lance-corporal addressed was a particularly keen p70 and efficient soldier, and one very unlikely to have been brought before a company officer for any misdemeanour. The retort fairly knocked him out : "Since you have expressed that opinion to me sir I should just like to point out that the New Army are not Regular soldiers, and don't expect to be treated in the same way; they're men who've turned out because the country wants them. They want to learn how to defend this old country as efficiently as possible, but they don't want to become showy soldiers fit for ceremonials."

"But don't you realize, Lance-Corporal Briscoe, that soldiers are useless without discipline ? Undisciplined men are no good."

" If that's what you call discipline, Sir, marching men up and down a yard under a torrent of foul abuse till they can't stand, it's a mistake. It's individuality we shall want if England's to pull through this time."

This was the first time Jackson came into touch with the personality of Lance-Corporal Briscoe. Up to this time the latter had been known to him rather as a number than as an individual, though he had noticed his smartness on parade, and, at the recommendation of the platoon sergeant had put him up for a stripe. This might have been expected, he first came into prommence by reason of an argument. Jackson sat and looked at him. Being an officer it was unseemly for him to be p71 drawn into controversy with a lance-corporal;

such behaviour would be an offence against that very law of discipline which he had just championed so strongly; but Briscoe was one of those who could never be ignored.

"Do you think," he said, "that a mob of undisciplined individuals will be any use in a battle? Don't you, as a non-commissioned officer, expect your orders to be obeyed? "

Briscoe looked up for a second, as though he were mentally summing up his officer, then said very slowly and deliberately, " A good man, sir, an get orders obeyed and still treat those beneath him as though they are men. He can control them without destroying their initiative. I think, ir, that it is our present boast that we are fighting for freedom against autocracy; the army of a free nation will always be an army of men; the army of autocracy must be an army of machines."

He hesitated a moment, and before the other ould reply, completed his remarks by saying: " I venture to predict, Sir, that before the War is over we shall be thankful that our soldiers have retained the individual initiative of their private life."

"Briscoe," said Jackson, "you interest me very much; we shall see."

Jackson went away full of thoughts and speculations; but one thing was indelibly impressed upon his mind-the personality of p72 Lance-Corporal Briscoe. If he forgot the words in the meantime, they were brought back to him some months later on a ploughed field in France, when the battalion were being addressed by the G.O.C. Division, and he said, as many another general probably said: "We have now done everything possible to prepare the ground for your assault; we can do no' more. From the moment when the barrage lifts and you leap from the trenches, upon your own *individual efforts* will depend the issue of the day."

Those five days during which Jackson held command of the party in Mowdon were five days of bliss ; it was his first experience of independent military authority. He forgot all about the responsibility which should have lain heavy on his young shoulders, and was very surprised to notice that the captain who was sent to take command seemed to dislike having the life of the G.O.C. Eastern Command on his hands, though

why anyone should wish to deprive the dear old gentleman of his life appeared to be a secret. The enemy were far too cunning to worry about killing harmless old men, who would be replaced with younger and more energetic ones. Whilst engaged on this duty, Jackson had his first taste of the minor excitements of soldiering; up till now everything had seemed mere routine.
It was the duty of one officer to inspect the guard at midnight, and they used to take it in p73 turns to leave their comfortable billets in Mowdon and proceed to Weston Lodge on a motor bicycle. Jackson arrived one night on the very stroke of twelve o'clock, and was properly challenged by the sentry at the gate. Suddenly he heard a sound as though someone were being murdered behind the house. There were two sentries at this spot, and he felt a little uncomfortable at the thought of what might be going on among the bushes and monuments. However, he put on his most courageous air, and went round the back. He saw several figures on the grass patch as he rounded the corner, and mentally remembered that his only weapon was a useless sword which he had to wear when he was an orderly officer. He seized his electric torch and advanced. A noise was still proceeding from the direction of the rhododendron walk, along which one of the sentries had his beat. The figures on the lawn were jabbering excitedly but stopped on hearing his footstep on the gravel.

" Who are you? " shouted one of them in a Shakey voice

"Visiting rounds," he answered in a tone scarcely less shaky. Then he struck it.

" What the hell is the matter with your confounded sentry? He sounds as though he must have gone mad." The speaker was the G.O.C., who was clothed in his pyjamas; he was surrounded by his staff, who were In various p74 stages of undress, and it was cold too.

" I'll go and see at once, sir," said Jackson, and rushed off in the direction of the noises half expecting to be shot, as although the men had ceased to have a round in the breach because of their frequently mistaking deer in the park for dangerous persons approaching their posts, they still had five rounds in the magazine.

On arriving he saw the most absurd sight

imaginable; there was the sentry half doubled up and prancing about, pointing with his bayonet in a dangerous manner towards another figure, who -seemed to be finding it difficult to elude the weapon. At the same time the sentry was shouting for all he was worth: his general idea seemed to be that he had got hold of a spy and wanted the guard to turn out and arrest him. How it was that he never stuck the other man was a mystery. Jackson's voice brought him to his senses, and much to his relief he brought his rifle to the" slope," but he saw by his electric torch that the sentry was shaking like a leaf, and that there was a mad look in his eyes. The other man was the sergeant of the guard; he had lost his dignity as well as his cap and stick, and presented a rather humorous figure. Jackson inquired into the cause of the disturbance and it transpired that the sergeant had decided to put the sentry to the test in order to discover if he were awake, and had employed a rather idiotic p75 method of doing so. Taking advantage of the splendid cover afforded by the rhododendron bushes, he had crept up behind the sentry and suddenly thrust himself forward with a fearful rustling of leaves and crackling of twigs. No man alive could have failed to be awakened by such a noise, and the sentry who was new to the game, and very nervous, lost his head and shouted like mad, using his bayonet to ward off the sergeant whom he failed to recognize. Jackson hastened to the general, and, without telling him the full story, apologized for the false alarm; the latter found it so cold outside in his scanty clothing that he was ready to accept the explanation, adding: "These new chaps have a lot to learn, but don't put that man on sentry here again." With this, he and the staff hurried off to bed, while Jackson had the sentry relieved at once, and determined to have the sergeant reduced for being a fool. By such episodes as this were men turned from civilians into soldiers.

After being in Mowdon a month or so Jackson and his men rejoined the regiment, which had been transferred to a comparatively large manufacturing town, considered by high military authority to be an important link in the northern defences of London. The chief reason for going to enable them to learn something of

digging, and at the same time to produce something useful from their experiments; they p76 were to dig part of the system of trenches which were the last line of defence round the capital of the British Empire.

The reception accorded to the battalion in the town to which they were transferred was very different to anything they had experienced elsewhere. Hitherto they had encountered enthusiasm and hospitality wherever they went. Here they might almost have been an army of occupation from the ungracious way they were received, Jackson noted particularly the large number of young men, still in " civvies," who made disparaging remarks to some of his own men as they marched up the road, and generally got them returned with interest. In the street where all his platoon were billeted, quite a number of young men were hanging about, apparently loafing. In other places he had found people particularly anxious and willing to do all they could for his men; here he went into some of the houses, and found nothing done to prepare for their reception, although the police had informed every house of the number who would be billeted and the time when they would arrive. The government were paying the people half-a-crown per day for each man, and this always left the householders a comfortable profit after giving the men a bed and food. A cottage with four men billeted would receive ten shillings per day, whereas the inmates had probably never earned p77 more than a pound per week. At Mowdon he was pursued up the street by a woman who was weeping because he had no men to give her, and she was so persistent that eventually he withdrew one from each of three other cottages to calm her. Here he found that in many of the houses the men were expected to sleep on the brick floor, and asked the people if they were not ashamed to treat our soldiers like this. It never seemed to have occurred to them; they thought anything was good enough for soldiers ; but when he threatened to take the men away, they at once promised to put everything right ; they did not want to lose the money. This seemed to be rather typical of the attitude of the people' there. The police said that recruiting was progressing very badly indeed in the district,

and that no one there seemed at all enthusiastic : and the returns showed it to be one of the worst spots in England for recruiting.

A few days after their arrival it became Jackson's turn for orderly officer. As there had been several complaints about the billets, he decided to go and have a careful inspection of these in the evening when the men had finished their day's work, in the hopes of finding some of them inside and having a talk with them. He intended to pay special attention to the billets of his own company. It was about 6.30 p.m. when he arrived in the street accompanied by the p78 orderly corporal. He was oppressed .with the dinginess of the place, and was thinking what an awful thing it must be to be condemned to live in such circumstances all one's life. He noticed a mixed crowd of soldiers and civilians at the other end of the street, and sent the orderly corporal to see what it was, meanwhile he went into one of the houses. In a few seconds the corporal rejoined him. "It's Lance-Corporal Briscoe, sir," he said," 'e' s just a-telling 'em a few things."

Had he been an officer trained to soldiering in the old school of the Regular Army he would probably have at once sent the orderly corporal to bring Briscoe to him, but he did the very opposlte -he went himself to see what was happemng. Jackson had been fortunate enough to listen to nearly all the best political orators of the day, but never had he heard anything really to equal the little harangue which Briscoe was delivering on this occasion for force and effectiveness. He was in the middle of a period when the orderly officer arrived, but there was time to catch the gist of it.

" So you think, do you, " Briscoe was saymg, " that England is not worth fighting for; . you think your homes are not worth defending ; perhaps they're not; but have you ever done anything to make 'em better? You must help to make 'em what you want 'em to be, and if you p79 join England's Army now, you're taking .a step in the right direction. If you help to win this War you'll make your homes worth fighting for ; your services will give you such a claim on the State, that you can't be refused. Your homes are squalid enough now, I grant you. But if you

fight you'll have a chance of making' em comfortable; if you don't, the best you can hope for is to be allowed to wallow in your present squalor, and the worst that may befall you is to be deprived of the shelter of the roof by the burst of the enemy's high explosive. We're not fighting for the old England, or even the present England, at least, I'm not; it's the new England we're fighting for, the England which you and I are going to build when this is over: and we are going to see it's fit to live in: but we shall be mighty jealous and shan't give much away to those who haven't helped us."

A voice came from the back of the crowd. "We're fighting for the gents, mate, that's what we're fighting for."

Jimmy looked round 'till he had spotted the speaker, then, with cool deliberation" he said, " Every man who fights now will have a right to be called a gentleman: we *are* fighting for the gentlemen, it's true, for the new order of gentlemen who shall compose our nation when the War is over, and that order'll not be restricted to men of birth or wealth, it'll be extended to every p80 man who renders public service to the State. Your .time has come now: you can all be gentlemen if you choose to." He looked round him with superb self-assurance to see if anyone else had anything to say against him. "Well now, you chaps," he finished up, "just go away and think about what I've said to you." He got off his perch and the meeting broke up.

. Some of the men who were there rushed up to Jimmy and patted him on the back: but Jackson s presence, which had not been discovered before, rather broke in upon their demonstrations. He sent the orderly corporal to fetch Briscoe who approached and saluted.

"Lance-Corporal Briscoe," he said, "what were you before you joined the regiment? "

" A clerk in the City, sir."

"Have you ever spoken in public before ? "

" Yes, sir."

"Well, if you turn out as good a soldier as you are an orator, the Regiment will have some one to be proud of." Then remembering Bunny s little speech to him on August 10th 1914, he added, " I think the country must have something better for you to do, than to become

a private in an infantry regiment."
" I shall have plenty of chance for that, sir, afterwards.'',
" But suppose you get killed? "
" I shan't get killed, sir."
p81 "How do you know that? "
"I'm destined for something different."
" You are very certain: what are you destined for? "
" I'm going to take a share in the building of the New England."
"Why did you join the ranks so soon Briscoe , surley an O.T.C. , or something "
"I'm only educating myself now, sir, I've done nothing else all my life, so far; but this is the finest chance I've ever had. To help the country when the War is over, one must know all the people who compose it. I knew the life of a good many before the War, but I've learnt more in the ranks of this regiment than I could have done otherwise in half a century. There are all types in this battalion. It's the finest training of my life, sir."
"Good night," said Jackson. Briscoe saluted and turned about in a manner that would have done credit to a guardsman. He seemed to do everything perfectly. Jackson went round one or two of the billets where he had reason to suspect that the men were not being well looked after. He found some of the men inside. They all appeared comfortable enough, and he was surprised to find that there were no complaints. As he was leaving the last house he intended to inspect, he called one of the men outside, and asked him how it was that everything appeared p82 so comfortable when there had been so many complaints the last few days.
"Oh we're all right now, sir," he replied. " Lance-Corporal Briscoe 'as been and told 'em a few things. 'E's that wonderful with his tongue, sir."
As he walked back to his quarters, Jackson cursed himself inwardly for not having joined the ranks.
Some days later the colonel came up to him in the ante-room and called him aside.
" Jackson," he said, " the mayor of this blasted place is arranging for a big recruiting meeting in the Town Hall and asked me to speak; well,

if there's one thing I can't do, it's to speak in public ; so I told him we had got an officer who is a bit of an expert, and thought you'd go for him; will you? "

Jackson hesitated for a minute and then said : "We've got a man in the ranks, sir, who can give me points. I think he would do it much better, and the whole thing would be more effective coming from a man who has enlisted himself."

" Who is this fellow? "

"Lance-Corporal Briscoe,in my platoon, Sir "

" Is he really good? "

" He's the finest speaker I've ever heard."

The colonel always was a bit of a democrat p83 and there was nothing he liked better than praising his own men, sometimes at the expense of his officers. He jumped at this suggestion ,and gave Jackson full instructions to fix it with Briscoe.

The latter was a little against it at first; he thought it was an effort on the part of the officers to obtain for him cheap notoriety, and it was only it was pointed out that he would be culpably acting a public service for which he was particularly fitted, that he consented to take any part.

"Bremner," said Jackson to that irresponsible subaltern next evening, "you're coming down with me to this show at the Town Hall to-night ."

"What sort of show? " he replied.

"It's a recruiting meeting," replied the other, knowing well that he would rise to the bait.

" Do you think I should be likely to come to these damned things, Jacker; do you think I'm going to waste a good evening listening to fools trying talk? God knows what good any of 'em do."

"Well you are coming all the same," Jackson said firmly .

"Who the hell are you talking to, my lad? "

"I'm talking to you and telling you that you're coming with me to this show."

"As a matter of fact, Jacker, I was p84 going to ask you to come out with me: I want to introduce you to a lady friend."

" Oh, my God, not another? "

Bremner was always a one for girls wherever

he was stationed. A few weeks before he had been in a great stew because the mother of one of them wanted to know what his intentions were. It took Jackson two hours hard work on that occasion to find a solution, and he had no desire to be confronted with another such task.

" Well, that settles it," he added, " you've got to come, my boy, if only in self-protection, and what's more, it's up to us both to go because one of our chaps is the. principal speaker."

" Good Lord, who? I didn't know we had got any budding Lloyd Georges in the mess."

" I shall not tell you who it is : you must come and find out."

" What about the lady, Jacker ? "

" You must put her off; say you are on duty."

" Oh, I haven't asked her yet, but it does seem a pity to waste a good evening."

That was Bremner all over, such a contrast to his friend, who took life seriously and couldn't understand 'a man who cared so little about the social and imperial questions of the day. Bremner didn't know in the least what they were fighting about, and didn't care. They Were at war, and there was the chance of something new and exciting; that was quite enough. He was p85 full of life and the joy of living; never still a minute, the sight of a man sitting in a chair and reading comfortably bored him stiff, He was so brimming over with good cheer that he infused it into others round him. He liked one sensation on top of another, and neither thought about nor digested any of them. He had never been to a political meeting except to break it up ; he never went to church because he could not sit through the sermon; and Jackson won more gratitude from him by taking his place at church parades, than by smoothing out his love affairs.

By nine-thirty Jackson had brought Bremner to the Town Hall, protesting all the way. The meeting had been timed to commence at nine o'clock, but he did not want to try Bremner's patience too far, so he calculated to get there about the time Briscoe would be begining, and he had timed it well; for just as they were pushing their way into his reserved seats, the Mayor announced that Lance-Corporal J. Briscoe of the regiment would address the house. Bremner issued a grunt of disgust: "This bloke's in

this bloke's in our company, didn't know he was one of these
infernal windbags; I thought he was a stout fellow" he snorted, and he would have got away then if Jackson had not been between him and the exit.

The house was packed; only the two rows of seats in front were reserved, the others were all
p86 free. It was a large building and took a good voice to fill it.

At the end of forty minutes Bremner was still there, and not only there, but clapping and cheering as Briscoe sat down.

" Now you know something about the social and imperial problems of the day," said Jackson, when the noise had died down.

"Why the hell isn't the fellow an officer, Jacker ? " said Bremner.

" Because he wants to educate himself; aren't you glad I brought you? "

"Yes, I wouldn't have missed it; it does set one thinking a bit when things are put like that. We'll take the girls out to-morrow night, what! "

It was just like Bremner: he couldn't keep his mind on one thing for a minute; but Jimmy Briscoe had accomplished wonders: for he had held his attention for forty minutes on end. Just as they were going in they met the colonel.

" Well, he wasn't bad, sir, was he ? " remarked Jackson.

" Splendid, I'll note him down for a commission."

" I don't think he wants a commission, sir."

"What?"

"No .

"He wants to educate himself," answered Jackson, and watched the colonel pass on up the passage to the mess. He, too, was thinking deeply.
p87 As the winter wore on, and they began to hear more definite news from the front through occaional friends who came on leave, their own training became more and more distasteful. They kept hearing that the British Army were hard pressed, and felt themselves ready to help them; in their ignorance they little knew the ordeal of modern war. They dug trenches which fill in with the wet. They practised drill and musketry; officers and N.C.O.s gave lectures in billets. These lectures, more than anything

brought home to them the quality of the material they possessed in the ranks of the New Army. The old Regular non-commissioned officer made a sorry show when he had to deliver a lecture to the rank and file, whereas many of the new privates could read a thing up and then give an interesting discourse upon it without the slightest difficulty. Jackson used to work out hypothetical difficulties and give them to the men to solve, and they used to answer his and put a poser back at him. When he was away on a special course' once, Bremner was asked to lecture his platoon on a wet day. He told Jackson afterwards that they gave him a dreadful time, they tied him up with questions which he could not answer, and then answered them for him. Bremner had not acquired the gift of making them think he knew when he didn't really. When they had put Jackson a question

which he couldn't answer, he used to say, "That's a good one: well, Briscoe, what do you say? " and by this means often got the answer, and then pretended he knew it all the 'time.

On one occasion he gave them one of his really eloquent lectures on " Discipline" in the course of which he pointed out the danger of troops going too far in disregard of orders. When he had finished, he asked, as usual, whether anyone had any comments to make. One private said :

"I venture to suggest, sir, that before this war is over it will be necessary to train every soldier to become individually interested in the tactics of each battle. I think individual efficiency will take the place of blind discipline, sir."

That was a pretty clever remark from a private soldier. Jackson silenced the suggestion by saying: "That's not your own; you got that from Lance-Corporal Briscoe," and he believed he had hit the mark.

Every week rumours used to reach the mess that they were going abroad and on many occasions the brigade and even the divisional staff seemed just as certain as they were; such occasions were always treated as a fair excuse for an evening in "Town." Wires were despatched to relatives until everyone got so ashamed of creating false alarms, that no notice was taken of

p89 the rumours. Meanwhile they drilled and marched and drilled again, until the more intelligent began to get somewhat stale, and the less intelligent began to get a parrot-like idea of what they were supposed to do on each word of commarid. The two men in the whole battalion who were most sick of it all were Briscoe and Jackson; the monotony of that platoon drill was becoming too much for them. To fill the time they both studied carefully every movement of troops up to that of a complete battalion, each of them inwardly thinking that it might one day happen that he should be left the senior officer with the regiment on the field of battle. Jackson I articularly wanted to get away, because everything pointed to the fact that he would be alled upon to settle another of Bremner's love affairs in the near future.

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## CHAPTER V

## ……THE FIRING

BREMNER and Jackson sat facing one another in opposite corners of a London & South Western first-class carriage.. The former was full of wine and good spirits, the latter was morose and dour. They were off. Their training in England was complete; they were to be put to the supreme test of fire. Jackson's parents did not even know that he was off. He had kept it dark, and intended to send a wire from Southampton. He was one of those who could not stand the parting on railway stations, which was taking place every day at Victoria as if it were a matter of routine. He had happened, a week or two before, to land on Victoria by the up-train, just when the daily "leave" train was about to depart, and it had left an unforgettable impression. The mothers and wives pretending not to weep; the men, too, trying to conceal emotion, all contributed to a picture so terribly inhuman and yet so typically English that it seemed to bring the War right home to him for the first time. He determined that he would not participate in any such scene, though Bremner urged him to

have a bottle of the " boy" and go through it.
p91 Bremner was like a cork and nothing could keep him down for long; but that good-bye on the station dragged his spirits lower than they had ever been since he first learnt to say" Daddy." He was up again now : the bottle of the " boy" had done its work, and he slapped Jackson on the knee with the air of one who is going to give a friend a good "tip" on the way to a race-meeting.

" Soon be into it now, Jacker. I wonder how we shall shape."

" We shall do all right," replied the other, "there'll be some reputations spoilt and others made."

" I wonder if any of us will get V.C.s or anything, and, if so, who?"

" Now don't you go and play the fool trying to get V.C.s, my lad, you're worth more to us alive than you are dead, even if you have got the V.C. ribbon, round your corpse."

" You are much more likely to get the blessed thing than I am. I can just picture you bringing home the C.O. on your back under terrific fire."

"Don't be a fool," snapped Jackson. "I shall take what comes my way, but I shall not go looking for trouble, and anyone who does is not doing his job."

" I wonder what that fellow, Lance-Corporal Briscoe, will be like under fire; he's a perfect
p92 marvel at training work, isn't he? Fancy him not taking a commission."

" He'll be just as good at the real thing, as he has been at the training. There's nothing that chap can't do. He won't take a commission because he says he's still got a lot to learn. He's the most wonderfully educated chap I have ever seen, self-educated too. You know I didn't really realize, before this show, that chaps like that existed."

" What a pity he wasn't at a public school, Jacker ! "

" You tell him that, my lad, and see what he says; he thinks it his best bit of good fortune, and imagines he would have been ruined, If he had been educated as we have been. And yet he says there's a barrier between him and us."

" Well, there wouldn't have been if he'd been to a public school." Bremner was looking extraordinarily thoughtful.

" I know that, but he also says the barrier will be broken down in a few months, and, unless it is, we shall be beaten."

"Do you think it's true, old man? Pretty awful, some of these fellows who haven't been to public schools." Bremner's lips curled as if he had encountered an offensive smell; "they wear such awful clothes and go about with such dreadful-looking women."

" My good fellow, do use your imagination. p93 In a few days we shall have forgotten all about what a man looks like, and only care about what he does."

The discussion had not come to an end, when the train pulled up at Southampton, and their attention was required for more important things.

No one, who took an interest in what he saw and had the fortune to cross to France with a British regiment, could have failed to notice the extraordinary ignorance displayed by the majority of the English in the language and customs of that country. Geographical position always affects the customs and nature of a people, but but it is only when people visit Europe that they realize the isolated sense of superiority which those twenty-one miles of sea breed in the British temperament. Nations on the mainland of Europe have a portion of their population within a certain distance of their artificial frontiers who do not differ materially in their habits and ideas from those who live within a similar distance on the other side. Railways run from one country to the other, and when a passenger crosses the dividing mark he hardly notices it any more than an Englishman does when he passes over the border into Scotland. A Briton, on arriving in a foreign country, Just laughs at everything he sees. He is so ignorant that it appears to him as humorous. He laughs at the way in which a P94 Frenchman talks, without hesitating to think how comical he may himself appear to a foreigner. He has the most extraordinary sense of his superiority, and never thinks of learning from what he sees around him; he takes his superiority for granted. Unlike the German, who writes

books and makes speeches to prove that he is the superman, the Briton tends to accept his superiority as an established fact, without noticing it.

So the regiment landed in France; its officers were primed with a store of French which they had learnt between intervals of ragging the so-called French master at their school, and its men, with one or two brilliant exceptions, knew none at all. Jackson was considered in England to be a well-educated man and yet his knowledge of the language and customs of our neighbour ended with" *Qui,"" beaucoup,"* " *avez-vous,"* and a few other isolated words! When he sat down to lunch in a small hotel in Havre, and the French officers came and talked to him in English, he felt he was about the worst educated person on earth. It was brought home to him at every turn, and his only consolation was the fact that he was no worse than the majority of his fellows.

Bad as he was at the language, Jackson was nothing to the C.O. He was, in fact, sent for by the latter to assist in conversation with the transport officials during the tedious railway p95 journey to Rouen. Outside Rouen were situated large training camps, and it was in one of these that the battalion was quartered. It was, indeed, a pleasant spot to be encamped. . The country was beautiful, abounding with splendid woods through which it was a pleasure to route march, and in the fine old town were excellent restaurants, and opportunities for amusement and dissipation. It was indeed difficult to imagine its proximity to the war area, save for the very large numbers of British troops mustering there. Khaki uniforms were everywhere.

There was, at this time, considerable jealousy etween the Old and the New Army; Regular ubalterns did not like having to say" sir," to New Army majors and colonels; Regular soldiers, through since Mons, sniffed at New Army sargeants. The transition from the old to the new was taking place, but was not complete. Rouen was full of depots, some for Regulars, others for Territorials, and the units of the first hundred thousand were mustering there before proceeding to the fightirtg line. One night the C.O. announced that he had asked some of the officers, who were on the staff of a depot which

sent drafts to certain Regular units, to come and dine with them. It so happened that Jackson was entrusted with the task of of entertaining one of these at dinner. He was a Captain of some ten years service in the Regular
p96 Army, and had been wounded in the battle of the Marne. During the course of the dinner, Jackson asked him about the present condition of his regiment, how many officers there were of the original lot, and how their new officers were shaping. His views on the new officers were pretty scathing. "Some of these new chaps, they've never been to a decent school: you can't lick the beggars into shape; God knows where they were educated." He little thought of the offence his rernarke must be causing to some of those sitting at the table.

"Do you think," said Jackson, "that we shall have sufficient public school men to go round, and supply the officers required to carry us through this war? "

" I'm afraid not," he replied, "but I can't imagine how we shall be able to pull through with officers like some of these we've got out now,"

" What's the matter with them?" interposed his host. "Don't they know their job? "

" Well, it's not altogether that: some do and some don't, much the same as at any other time, but men won't have any respect for fellows like that. There's no one knows a gentlemen quicker than the British Tommy."

" And what is a gentleman?" asked his host.

" Now you have put a stumper," he replied, " it's almost impossible to define; there's always
p97 something about a gentleman which marks him off from the ordinary man."

" It's a very vague and very small class at present," replied the other, "but we shall have to extend the meaning of the term: a man will become a gentleman by reason of his service to the state, and we shall have to accept him whether we like it or not."

" Stow it up, Jacker," it was young Bremner speaking, "we're going to have some cock-fighting now: Captain ----'s had enough of your Jaw." Bremner always brought him back to earth again with a volley of his never-ending, but appropriate, slang. So they got down to cock-

fighting, and threw all their energy into it; determined to show themselves a match for the Regulars. They more than held their own and when their guests left, they flattered themselves that they had done something to dissipate the idea that they were a set of inferior beings.

Training in Rouen at length began to get just as insipid as training in England; they drilled and marched, did physical exercises, practised bayonet fighting, in fact, all the old things they had done before. They went into the town and had dinner in the evenings, and were robbed by the few old men who were left to drive taxis. As young Bremner put it: " If we are going to do this sort of thing we can do it better in England;
p98 one can get away for week-ends there."Anything new was a welcome change from the monotonous routine. Someone in the mess, probably one of those whose feelings had been hurt by the remarks at dinner a few nights before, suggested that they should get up a. trench digging competition against some of the Regulars. It was decided that they should each produce one officer and a platoon, and should be given three hours in which to throw up earthworks for the defence of an imaginary position, and that the brigadier in charge of the camp should be asked to judge the result. The Regulars accepted the challenge, and a platoon was selected under Bremner to compete with them. The judge was not allowed to know who had dug the two sets of earthworks; the platoons were marched up to two positions, some two hundred yards apart, and each was told to throw up a system of defence against. an expected attack from a particular quarter; It was then left to the officer in charge to make the disposition that each thought best. The brigadier gave a decision in Bremner's favour, and the Regulars were amazed at the efficiency of his work. It was a triumph for the intelligence of the New Army, and did much to give the men confidence in themselves.

Jackson spent some of his time learning French from Briscoe. The latter was simply wonderful, and was to be found, when he was
p99 off parade, with a party of French peasants round him on their way back from market, telling him all about their ideas on the War and life in

general. In the evening there used to be a crowd of men round his tent, listening while he translated the War news from the French newspapers. He was for ever looking for something new to learn, and some new people to talk to. When others were drinking in the canteen, he would be down on the quay-side conversing with the French bargees and navvies. He was at home with them all. His personality seemed just as strong in France as it was in England.

When they had been in Rouen a few weeks a large party of Canadians came there, to supply reinforcements to the Canadians at the front; Briscoe soon made himself at home among them. On the whole, they did not get on very well with the men in English regiments; there was something in the independent manner of colonials which made the narrow Englishmen, who had never been abroad, rather look at them askance. But to Briscoe they were just men, and the new ideas which they brought with them acted as food to the hungry soul. Jackson and he were going through some French idioms together in the former's tent one evening, and Jackson had got rather bored with them after about an hour, so asked Briscoe what he thought about
p100 the Canadians. When he was on a subject which really appealed to him, Briscoe would let himself go into fascinating rhetoric and there was nothing to do but sit still and listen. He had evidently been mightily impressed by the Canadians; for he gave one of his most interesting discourses. Many of them must have told him their life secrets for he recited romance after romance about individuals in their ranks. "There are men in their ranks," he said, "who are sons of the noblest families in England. There are cast-offs, sent away by over-righteous parents to prevent scandal; now all of them have come back again to do the old country a good turn. There are many among them who won't be found on any family register. The old country called them and they've come, the unknown lost ones from the darkest corners of the earth; they are all there, in the ranks of the Canadians; deprived of their inheritances, as many of them have been, they've borne no malice, but have come forward when we are in a tight corner.

They are the most wonderful gathering of prodigal sons come back again, and they'll make good. There must be something in our country if all these men will come so far."

"They have rather an aggressive manner which makes them a little unpopular at first," said Jackson.

"Men who've always had to look after
p101 themselves, like they've had to, acquire an attitude of independence, sir; but they're all right once you understand them; there's something in them which appeals to me."

As usual, Briscoe had got right to the bottom of these men, while others were judging on their external appearances.

Since the battalion arrived in France, it had become part of an officer's duty to censor the letters of the men. This duty, which officers found interesting at first while there was plenty of time to spare in camp, afterwards became the most tedious and unpleasant work, especially when they were in the fighting line, and always wanted to snatch whatever rest they could. Jackson always felt that he was unconsciously being prejudiced in favour of or against the ability of certain men from the letters which they wrote, and in this respect the censorship was somewhat undesirable. But it did, on the other hand, give him an insight into the petty interests of the men under his command, and in this way led him to become sympathetic towards individuals and to understand them in a manner which is almost impossible for an officer to do in the ordinary way. When he began this work, Jackson particularly looked for the letters of all the men in whom he was specially interested, and was disappointed when he found none from Lance-Corporal Briscoe. He had quite expected that
p102 he would have written some disparaging remarks
on the censorship, or on individual officers in the open and frank manner which he always assumed, and which always disarmed his opponents. After a fortnight he had been unable to discover a single letter from Briscoe, and began to get a little uneasy. It seemed impossible to imagine that he had never written to England all that time, when everyone was writing almost daily. Jackson

wondered if it were possible that he was cheating the censorship in some way or other, and, though he hated to be suspicious, yet he felt justified in making investigations. After all, it was his duty to see that no one was injuring their interests, and, in those days, when the public was full of spy alarms and other foolish ideas, the extraordinary efficiency of Briscoe at foreign languages went to increase his uneasiness. He did not mention it to anyone, but sent for Briscoe to come to his own tent. When they were alone, he said, " Lance-Corporal Briscoe, how often do you write home? "

"I never write home, sir," he replied. "How's that?" Jackson saw in an instant that he had gone too far. The fire blazed in Briscoe's eyes. "Because, sir, I have no home." All the splendid indifference of which he was capable was contained in those few words. Long afterwards Jackson remembered the picture as Briscoe stood there at "attention" in his tent,

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typical of a man with all the forces of the world against him, and yet absolutely impervious to them in his self-confidence. Jackson had never known what it meant to be without a home. He tried to draw a mental picture of the situation in those few seconds, while Briscoe stood before him. It seemed that it would bring him to physical and moral degradation, he pictured himself the exact antithesis of this man, who was too proud to rely upon the help of others. "I apologize for asking, Lance-Corporal Briscoe," he replied. It was the only thing to say; though he would have liked to hear his story, he refrained from asking ; there was something too forbidding about his appearance. He appreciated Jackson's restraint, and in a moment all the hardness of his expression seemed to be relaxed : " Thank you, sir," he said and saluted; then he turned and went away. That meeting did more than any other to establish the lasting friendship between Briscoe and Jackson. Jackson never learnt Briscoe's secret; he knew it would have been the end of their acquaintance, if he had asked him for it. Some day he hoped to learn it, but meanwhile he often pictured Briscoe's father as one returning from the back of beyond in the cohorts of the damned ones, which make up the rank and file of our colonial troops. He

felt he might be lying in a nameless grave in Flanders, or wandering about our cities, a p 104 cripple for life. One thing he felt certain of- the father of such a son had answered the call ; but whether the son knew any more about his whereabouts than other people remained a mystery.

When they had been in Rouen about a month, the colonel sent for Jackson one day. He was reclining in his hut, composed ,of felt stretched on a wooden framework. He was always a particularly courteous man, and it was characteristic of him that he should get out of the deck chair on the subaltern's arrival, and tell him to sit in it. In spite of protestations Jackson was forced to yield, and the C.O. sat on a packing box while his junior reclined in the chair.

"I've been thinking, Jackson, about Lance-Corporal Briscoe in your platoon. We shall be moving up to the fighting in a few days now, and shall very soon be needing officers to fill the gaps, and I think he ought to accept a commission. We can't afford to have men like that killed in the ranks."

" I'm afraid, sir," replied the other, "that it will be quite useless to ask him at present. He has his own reasons for refusing; and he's not the sort to be persuaded when his mind is made up. "

…" What are his reasons, do you know, Jackson?"

…" Well, sir, I think he feels there is something between himself and us. You see he's not a p105 public school man, and he thinks we are exclusive,
and all that sort of thing."

"Well, it's a pity to waste the services of a man like that: he'll probably get killed as an ordinary soldier."

" I don't think there is any fear of that, sir, he has absolute confidence that he won't be killed."

"I wish I had, Jackson; don't you?"

Jackson didn't reply. Then he said:
"Look here, I don't like the idea of the fellow thinking that we shan't treat him as one of ourselves. You send him to me, and I'll have a talk with him, and see if I can put the matter right." It was just what Jackson expected of the old colonel : he was one of the best, and broadest minded men it was possible to find. As Briscoe

afterwards said: "He was typical of the very best of the old school." A well-bred man, and perfect gentleman, he could unbend to anyone, without losing dignity.

" May I, sir," said Jackson, after reflecting a little, "offer a little advice in dealing with Lance-Corporal Briscoe ? "

" Go on, my boy," replied the C.O.

" Whatever you say, sir, don't give him the impression that you are doing it as a personal favour to himself, or to help him in any way. He has the most peculiar pride I have ever seen, and don't mention his family, sir; there's something mysterious in that direction,"
p106 " All right, Jackson; send him along." Jackson asked the colonel some days afterwards what had been the outcome of his interview with Briscoe. "You were right, Jackson, he was quite incorrigible. He knows his own mind, at any rate. I had never heard the question of our exclusiveness put in quite the same way. It made one think that perhaps we are an out-of-date relic of the past. Does this barrier really exist between the public school man and the other? " " I'm afraid so, sir," was the reply, " but it won't exist much longer." "Don't you think that men like Briscoe would do more to remove it, if they became officers like ourselves?" "Has it been removed, sir, in the case of certain others who joined our mess a month or more ago? " Jackson was referring to Grant and Wilson, two subalterns who had joined the regiment from some obscure O.T.C. just before they left England. They were neither of them " bred in the purple," and their manners had not been kindly received by the other juniors. "No, I suppose he's right, Jackson," said the colonel, "to wait until he's proved himself: then he will face anybody."

The battalion were given two days' notice to proceed to the line: the feverish excitement of those days was unforgettable. Everyone was so taken up with seeing that his own individual equipment was perfect to the nearest detail, and p107 with writing letters to people in England which were not allowed to contain anything more definite than a statement that we were moving somewhere, that everything else seemed forgotten. Jackson had been engaged for over an hour in adjusting pieces of equipment on his belt and then pulling them off again, when Bremner dashed into his tent. "Come and have dinner

to-night at the 'Angleterre'; it's the last chance we shall get before going up; and God knows if we shall ever live to eat a decent dinner again."

" Yes," replied Jackson, "we will, but you shall not pay for *my* dinner." He knew Bremner was already heavily in debt at the time.

" Jacker, don't be a damned fool; you don't want to insult a fellow, do you? "

" No, you ass, I don't, but I know quite well that you can't afford it; and under the circumstances it is not right for me to accept, unless I pay my own way."

" My dear old thing, what does it matter? " he said, producing a bundle of five-franc notes, "I've got the money, and we may be dead to-morrow. What's the good of an advance of pay except to spend before you die? "

" I thought you said you were going to save money to get married when it's all over!" Jackson thought this would touch him on a tender spot.

p108" Married be damned: who knows that I shall ever have the chance; and besides, one hundred and fifty francs won't go far towards getting married, but it will get a darned good dinner."

He was in one of his mad moods, and it was useless to argue with him. But Jackson got his way in the end. They dined at the " Angleterre," and Bremner had so much good drink that he forgot all about the payment. He never discovered it till two days later, when they were travelling to the firing line. He pulled a bundle of notes out of his pocket to pay for a cup of tea, and was surprised to see how many there were.

Just before they left, Jackson's old platoon sergeant went sick and had to be left behind. Corporal Briscoe was promoted to acting rank in his place. The Company Commander was rather afraid that there would be much disaffection about this, as there were several senior corporals in the battalion. But it speaks well for the estimation in which he was held amongst the men that they never objected to his promotion.

All of them felt a sort of lurking uncertainty as to how they would shape when the time came. Jackson remembered experiencing a similar sensation when he listened to the last service in the

chapel of his old public school on the day before he left. He then felt that he was going to be launched upon an ocean of uncertainty, and
p109 wondered whether all the training that had been undergone for the last five years at the school would carry him satisfactorily through the difficulties which lay ahead. On the present occasion, however, there was a little difference; one's concern was not for the success of oneself alone ; one belonged to a battalion of a thousand men, and one's own individual interests were merged with theirs. How would they all stand the test? The example of other battalions of the regiment were before them, they had set a high standard to live up to. On this occasion even young Bremner had some feeling of his responsibility, if only for the first time in his life. Jackson wanted an outlet for his feelings, so he wandered down the lines in search of Briscoe. He was just preparing to translate the war news from the French evening paper.

Jackson took him aside and asked him how the men were feeling about going up, at the same time saying that he was particularly desirous that there should be no element of dissension among them, and asked if there were any complaints which he could do anything to settle.

" You've no need to worry about the men, sir ; you'll find them all right. They are only waiting to get into it," Briscoe said with confidence.

" How do you feel yourself? "

" It will be the entry into a new world for me. The world of artificial class distinctions, cant and
p110 prejudice can now be broken down by physical service. It's the chance I've lived for all my life. If a man comes through this with honour, he can lift up his head with pride amongst any congregation of men. For a man in my position it's the chance of a life. I'm one of those men in the world, and there are many others, who will owe everything to this, if they get through."

"What about myself, Sergeant Briscoe?"

" You've a chance, too, to show that you are not what you are by the accident of birth or money, but by merit."

" I hope so," said Jackson.

As they were being rushed up from Rouen, the War was undergoing one of its most critical phases. The Germans had launched their first instalment of gas and breached the line in front of Ypres, and even while the train was carrying

them northwards the transition period which Briscoe spoke about may be said to have begun. Those wonderful men of the Old Army were mustered together for their last great fight. The remnants who had survived from Mons, the Marne, Ypres, and Neuve Chapelle, were gathered to stem the tide. They were fighting and dying their glorious deaths in a desperate but successful effort. If any period may be taken as the transition period between the Old Army and the New, it is the end of the second battle of Ypres. There were some then who felt p111 misgivings as to the quality of the New; three years of fighting proved they were mistaken. From that day forward a new type of officer and soldier began to appear, and the professional discipline and prowess of thousands gradually made way for the amateur enthusiasm of millions respectmg no class distinctions, and paying homage only to service.

The intimacy between Jackson and Briscoe was typical of the new era. In the Old Army their difference in rank would have made such a thing impossible. Discipline, if nothing else, would have forbidden it. Now it was all in the nature of things and they were as keen on the regiment as the best professional soldiers.

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## CHAPTER VI

## THE GLAZING

AMONG the numerous epistles which Jackson composed during their last two days at Rouen was one to Bunny Fenton. Within a few days of their meeting in the bar of their local pub, when his opposition made Jackson decide to join the Army, Fenton had obtained his commission in the Cavalry Special Reserve. He had proceeded to France in November 1914, and been in action almost at once. He was in the battle of Neuve Chapelle with a party of dismounted cavalry, and there he was wounded; this took him back to England at a time when wounded officers were still treated as heroes; later on they became so numerous as to be regarded with indifference. Jackson felt that Bunny had rather scored off him by getting into it so soon, and

when he heard that he was wounded he felt hardly fit to talk to him : a wounded officer was in an altogether too exalted class. So it was with a certain sense of satisfaction that Jackson announced in his letter that the battalion were " moving from" Rouen, which, to an initiated person, would be liable to only one interpretation -that they were going into the line. Such was p113 the efficiency of the field postal service, that on the very day after they arrived at a forward Rest Camp, and before they had got used to long range shells passing overhead, a reply from Bunny was received. His letter ran as follows :

"My DEAR JACKER,

" Many thanks for yours; I am getting on satisfactorily, in fact, almost too well; I'm afraid there won't be much leave going for me when I come out of hospital. By the time you get this, I expect you will be in the thick of it, and it appears to be pretty awful just now. When one has been out there one learns to read the truth into the official communiques. You ask how I think England has altered since I went out. In one respect it has altered a great deal. All our old friends are either killed or going to be; so, from the personal point of view, it's very different. But, in the broad sense, frankly, old man, I can't see much change. People still have absolutely no idea of what we are up against, and are still squabbling
about petty little individual disputes. But then, the War has not affected the mass of the people yet. The Old Army was not the people ; when the New Armies get into it,
will realize what it means. There are a good many folks who will never want the thing stop. I think you remember coming with us once to the N.R. Club and remarking on p 114 that little beggar, Jones; well, his firm, Weston & Jones, have made more money in the last six months than they made in the previous two years; but I mustn't tell 'you such things when you are out there. One likes to feel that other people are doing their share when one's under fire. Well, best of luck. I shall probably be with you before long. You were right to go, I hear there is no one up at Oxford, except one or two fellows who've not played up, and are looked down on by

everyone.

" Yours ever,

" BUNNY."

It was a wonderfully thoughtful letter for Bunny. "He's changed at any rate," Jackson thought, as he read. it, and pictured to himself Jones swallowing whisky in the N.R. Club, With his little eyes more alert than ever. Jones, he remembered, had tried to break down the social barrier with money and had failed. He was admitted into certain circles, it was true, but he was only tolerated and not welcomed ; he would have been ejected at any moment had his supply of money been cut off; what he had failed to accomplish by the use of cash, others were now going to effect by personal service, at least that was Briscoe's theory. Would they, he wondered, fare any better? That nearly everyone had gone from Oxford he was well aware; their p115 names were already beginning to appear in the casualty lists. It seemed extraordinary now to imagine himself doing anything other than what he was doing. He had quite forgotten that once it had cost him an effort to bring himself to take the plunge ; but there were still a few, and he knew one or two who had decided that their own careers must not be interrupted, and were still studying at the university. While pitying them for the lack of public spirit, he admired them for their callousness and indifference to the surrounding world, but felt that those who used to reckon them amongst friends would find it difficult to conceal an air of superiority when next they happened to meet them.

Some men in the War found it interesting to note the manner in which different individuals were affected by the same circumstances. When they went under fire for the first time, Jackson took particular notice of the effect which the ordeal seemed to have upon two men, the C.O. and Sergeant Briscoe. The colonel was quite outside the ordinary run of men, but he contained the best of those qualities which are associated with the class to which he belonged. He was sporting and he was brave. But courage was intensified in his case to such a degree that it ceased to be courage at all. Instead of possessing

the power to control the human instinct of fear had no such instinct. Self-preservation never
p116 seemed to occur to him; consequences were never given a moment's thought so far as they affected his own safety. He went under fire quite oblivious to. everything. He found it interesting and a little excing ; that was all. His indifference was superhuman, and beyond the comprehension of the ordinary man. The result in Briscoe's case was a certain excessive energy, manifested in the giving of numerous orders, and in a sharp and fierce way of speaking. His jaw was more prominent than ever, and there was a look in his eyes which differed somewhat from the natural. One felt that he was taking' extra precautions to insure himself against any instinctive fear, and he inspired one with the confidence that he held himself under perfect self-control. Jackson wondered what appearance he presented himself ; he pictured himself as looking blue and pinched about the lips, and altogether rather uninspiring; for he certainly felt much the same as he used to feel when going to the start of a race ; at any rate, he thought, he must look serious. He seldom felt like cracking jokes on these occasions, but once he let his tongue go he was most extraordinarily loquacious, and never stopped pouring forth language of a more or less obscene character; the effect seemed to be very satisfactory, and he used to keep the men in continuous laughter; of course, it was due to a subconscious fear of giving himself away.
p117 However, individual appearances don't count for much on these occasions. One seems to know instinctively what another fellow feels like. Jackson always had a very clear brain, and took in everything that was happening around him, as though it might have been a game; but oh, how he prayed that he might run amok or go mad and free himself from the strain !
The battalion had been going into the trenches in batches with other units, to learn the ordinary trench routine and gain a little confidence. During this time they were scattered over a large front, each company being attached to different battalions in the line. Jackson himself, with certain other officers. in the division, was detached for instruction in the art of bombing and left the trenches before the others. The instruction took place at the divisional headquarters, and

they did not see their units again for a fortnight. Nothing was heard from any of the officers during that period, but news was obtained from despatch riders and others, to the effect that they had had some casualties, and Jackson felt a sort of anxious excitcment when he was on his way to join them again. They were in the rest camp at the time, and when he entered the hut which served as a mess " he first felt an impression that he was a stranger. The talk seemed to be something different ; it was new to him. They were talking in a cold business-like manner of the
p118 casualties which had occurred during the tour in
the trenches, and of the precautions which should be taken to prevent a recurrence in the future.
" Old -- would not have caught that one, if the sand bags had been a bit higher down Seaforth Alley," Bremner was saying, "it just took the top of his head off, you see." It seemed extraordinary to hear a fellow he had known alive a few days before discussed in this way, as casually as though he had been bowled out at cricket. This change had been effected by a few days in the firing line; otherwise the officers seemed unaltered. The C.O. was just as unconcerned about personal safety, and the major was just as fond of the whisky as when he left them. But they had not really seen it yet. The one man he did expect to find unchanged was Sergeant Briscoe. But he did not know him yet. He did not know the history of his boyhood among the miners' children, when he exhibited that passion for revenge which nearly caused the policeman to get bitten by his own dog.

Imagine Jackson's surprise when he went on parade and discovered his platoon sergeant giving a minute demonstration of the art of fighting at close quarters, so as to make it as bloodthirsty as possible. The platoon was supposed to be engaged in bayonet exercises, but Sergeant Briscoe was not confining it to that. He had worked himself into a passion, and literally
p119 breathed slaughter upon the parade ground.
" Did you see 'em? " he was saying, pointing at a man in the front rank, as Jackson came up.

" You wouldn't stand there gaping if you had."

" I didn't see 'em, sergeant." ,

" Well, I'll tell you then, and you'll understand

what sort of men you're fighting.

"lying in the bottom of the trench they were, groaning and praying for death amid their convulsions, with faces, purple, green and all colours; Englishmen, my boy ... think of it," and he went on to give the most fearful description of the effects of gas upon our men that was ever heard.

"What are you going to do to the bloody swine, eh ? "

" Kill 'em, sergeant." The men were getting excited now.

"How are you going to kill 'em? That's what I want to know. Are you going to send 'em painlessly to heaven with a British rifle bullet? My God! that's an end for kings and gentlemen not for murderers. I'm here to show how to kill 'em. Everyone of those poor chaps of ours has got to be revenged a hundred times. Would you die as those men have died? "

"NO, sergeant. " It was a roar this time.

" Come on and look at this, then."

He called the men out one by one, and proceeded to give a demonstration of killing, not with a p120 bayonet; but with his bare hands. "There' no room for bayonets in a trench and no pleasure in 'em, if there *is* room. You want to feel 'em, like pulp in yer hands; think of it, squeezing a German's neck till his eyes come out of the sockets: there's some pleasure in a revenge like that." He showed them some grip or other, which he had learnt from some of his Canadian friends in the camp at Rouen, and his eyes were hungry with the lust for blood.

Many men, of less remarkable personality, saw red in this war, and yet did not influence the others round them. Briscoe, in the course of a few minutes, had carried the men away with him, so that they forgot everything else in a mad desire to be murdering German soldiers. The same forceful personality, which had made him such a fierce antagonist on the hustings, carried away his hearers till they had become mere instruments for interpreting his revenge; he had but to give the word, and they would have gone to any extreme. Jackson felt he could well imagine now the Paris mob in the Revolution being goaded to acts of wanton butchery, by the speeches of popular orators. Nothing could

resist the flame of such fiery passion. Given a free hand, a man like Briscoe could be the dictator of any mob inside half an hour. It was wonderful and yet appalling to think what power is given to some individuals,

p121 " Stand the men at ease, sergeant," he said, after he had watched this demonstration of passion. Briscoe had evidently not noticed him before, and his expression of ferocious hate was somewhat abated as he gave the command to stand at ease.

"You've seen what it's like then, Sergeant Briscoe," he said quietly.

" I wish you'd seen what I've seen, sir," he replied, "there'd be no need for conscription in England, if everyone had been with me three days back. I was attached to the 1st battalion of the -- on the scene of the first gas attack, which had taken place two days before. We had retaken some of the trench, lost that day, and found some of the chaps gassed. It'll take us all our time to repay what those men have suffered."

From that day forward Jackson found he was commanding a platoon of very different material from that which he had known before. If any of the men ever showed any signs of slackness or of being disinterested, in the task before them, Briscoe would give them one of his little harangues

and in a few minutes they would all be raving for blood like a pack of wolves. The battalion had been given a line of trenches on their own in a fairly quiet part of the line. At this point the trench systems on either side were so strong that important action by either party was possible.

p122 Every day brought its few casualties from shells and trench mortars, and every night, perhaps, one wretched sentry would take a bullet through the head. Some got to think of the work as useless routine which might last for months or years and possibly death at the end of it. Through those days it was Sergeant Briscoe who kept up the fettle of the men; he never let them think of anything but vengeance. Perhaps he would be patrolling the trench at night and see one of. the reliefs sitting beside the sentry carelessly dozing, or he would find a man with a dirty rifle in the morning. "Do you remember those mates of ours who were gassed?" he would say to the

offending private. "Yes, sergeant." "Aren't you going to get even with the Boches? Aren't you going to pay' em back for their dirty, low down tricks, do you mean to let the murderers escape? " " No, sergeant." "No, I know you don't, but you'll need to look to the work better than this ; where would you have been, my lad, if yonder Hun had come across to-night. You'd never 'ave bin ready to give his throat that little twist I showed you." Through all the various sensations which came upon men while holding trenches opposite an enemy they never saw, sensations of fatigue, boredom, and pessimism, he was never deflected from his one purpose-revenge, and he saw that every man, not only in the platoon, but in the while company, kept this idea fixed before p123 him. It was while they were in the rest camp after a tour in the trenches that the papers were received announcing the torpedoing of the *Lusitania.* Briscoe gave the men a little lecture that day. "You see, sir," he said to Jackson, when the latter disturbed him in the middle of it, " some of 'em don't read the paper; I've just described the scene so as to bring it home to them." He had given an account from his vivid imagination, which, if set down on paper, would have done credit to any leading journalist.

Sergeant Briscoe was not a mere talker all through those weary days. He did all the sordid work in the mud of the trenches like the rest of them, and then when he had finished and everyone else was occupied with thoughts of bodily fatigue or personal despair, he would never let himse~f forget his one object in view, and would keep It before the minds of others.

The C.O.'s only regret during this period was that the fighting was not lively enough, he did not like to hear the guns pounding away round Y pres and to think that his battalion were not in the thick of it; he was an incorrigible optimist, and always expressed a belief that the War would be over before they had done a big thing. The few daily casualties which they were sustaining were restricted almost solely to subalterns and to the rank and file. The colonel hated the juniors taking all the knocks and almost wanted to p124 see some of the senior officers figure in the list.

Bremner felt depressed or elated in accordance with the accuracy or otherwise of the British howitzer fire and he really enjoyed snipmg imaginary Germans in the mist at breaking dawn. But his ardour was damped badly on one occasion, when he was nearly court-martialled for firing excitedly with his revolver at a hare which sprang out of a shell hole on the march back to camp. The bullet passed through the major's field glasses and rendered them a valuable trophy but quite useless for further reconnalssance. Bremner had a habit of getting badly depressed when he was cold, and a shortage in the whisky or rum rations affected his spirits and fighting efficiency very adversely. He used to come round to Jackson's dug-out in the small hours ~f the morning to be restored to his normal condition, and there was one never-forgotten morning When Jackson had to announce the sad tale that the rum carriers had been “strafed” by a heavy shell on the way to the trenches. He felt rather a poor specimen himself ; the whisky had been finished on the day before, and they had had a bitterly cold and wet night. He felt shrivelled up and miserable, but he flattered himself that .he presented an air of cheerfulness compared with Bremner, who looked about half his usual size, and as though his very last day had come ;. he was blue with cold, and his teeth were chattering. p125 But when the sun came out, he recovered his usual cheerfulness, and he was worth a lot then. When he came round for his early morning spot of rum he and Jackson used to discuss things in general and try to think out schemes for annoying the enemy during the next twenty-four hours.

"Do you know," he began one morning, " I've been thinking that that fellow Briscoe is a great deal more useful as a sergeant, than he could possibly be as an officer. He has much more influence over the men than he could possibly have if he were in our position."

" My good man, there's nothing extraordinary in

that; they always say that the non-commissioned officers are the backbone of the British Army," replied the other sharply.

" By the way, Jacker, that fellow was suggesting rather a good stunt this morning; and you're the man to do it."

" Why should I be specially selected? "

" Well, it's a bombing stunt, and you are the battalion bomb expert, or supposed to be. Now, look here: Briscoe says there are two kinds of fuses, ordinary and instantaneous, is that right? "

" Yes, I believe it is."

"Well, now, his idea is to fit some jam tin bombs with instantaneous fuses, and hurl them over to the Boche, unlit. Then he thinks the Boche will jump to the conclusion that we are a lot of mugs and don't understand the damned p126 bombs, he'll then light the bombs with the intention of hurling them back. The fuse being instantaneous, the result may be judged, comprenez? "

" My God, that's a good scheme ; he has got a brain, that chap. He spends his whole day thinking how he can do down our friend over yonder. I'll see if we have got any instantaneous fuse."

Jackson hunted through his bomb stores and managed to find a yard or so of the required fuse. As it was Briscoe's scheme he took him into confidence, and they made up the bombs between them. The length of fuse was sufficient to make about a dozen. These were hurled across at Fritz when he started his evening "strafe." Briscoe's surmise was correct; the enemy got one of the surprises of his life, and within a minute of hurling them over, they heard a series of explosions in his trenches. " We are one up on the Huns this time," said Briscoe, "did you hear the whistle, sir? That means stretcher-bearers wanted," and he smiled with a satisfied air.

There were few chances of personal distinction during the first few weeks, though some of them had their nerves considerably shaken by their proximity on several occasions to bursting shells or trench mortars, and to other forms of death sent over by an invisible enemy. At the end of the period they had suffered six casualties among p127 the officers, and 120 among the rank and file. These were, however, sufficient to bring home to

them the continuous wastage of war. There was no exciteme?t or glamour, just the sordid beastly trench fighting of modern war, with its tremendous nerve strain. All the time a new spirit was gro:ving up in the officers' mess; reputations were being made and marred by the bearing of fellows in an occasional hot corner, or their :esource in difficult circumstances, and seniority In rank began to count for less than personality. But there. was .a general atmosphere of good comradeship which broke down the little cliques which existed among them when they were in training in England. There were three real cliques among the junior and two among the senior officers when they landed in France, but, already their six casualties had torn a gap in each of these, and they saw those of another clique whom they Ignored or almost disliked doing fine things under fire, and over and over again they reversed their previous opinions of each other. Then again fresh officers ilad joined the mess and their presence helped to sever connection with the old days; it was always hard for a new officer coming out, he was scrutinized very carefully and criticized very hardly by those who had been out six weeks, but, if he had the right stuff in him, he had become a veteran himself in a month and was well in the bosom of the mess. But the arrival p128 of these new officers did more than anything else to make Jackson understand that Briscoe had been right when he prophesied the early change of the old order. On the whole, they did not come from the class that are usually termed gentlemen, but when they showed themselves efficient and keen the old hands took them to their hearts as completely as those whom they had replaced.

Bremner and Jackson were having their rum together one morning, when the conversation turned on the subject of individual distinction.

No one gets much of a chance here, Jacker, do they? " the former was saying.

"Well, there's a chance now," replied the other, " H.Q. want to know the name of the unit opposite; what about getting it ?"

" My good man, how the devil am I going to find that out? "

" Capture one of the Boches and bring him

back."

" I've been out on patrol looking for one every night, and never seen one yet."

"The C.O. is dead keen on our battalion getting it; I think he wants us to make a raid, unless someone suggests something."

" A raid would be something like a show ; but I don't suppose the Brigade will allow that ; they don't want us to waste a lot of men simply to get the name of our opposite number."

p129" They won't need to. We shall know this morning."

" How? "

" Briscoe asked me for leave to do it on his own."

" How the devil is he going to find out? "

" He'll do it somehow."

Dawn was just breaking, and in a few minutes it would be time for " stand to "; so they left the discussion and wandered into their various sections of their trench. When Jackson arrived Sergeant Bnscoe was inspecting the sentry posts, and giving a cheery word to each. "Keep awake, lad, we've not paid 'em for the *Lusitania* yet," he was saying to a tired man on duty and the latter pulled himself together at once. " 'Aye, sergeant, and what about that there bloody breakfast the devils spoilt yesterday? "

Jackson thought from Briscoe's attitude that his enterprise must have failed. He expected him to have come rushing to him with excitement. For a moment his confidence in Briscoe was shaken. When he had finished his round of the sentries, Jackson passed word down for the sergeant. ''How did you get on last night, Sergeant Briscoe?" he said.

" I think I can tell you all about the Huns yonder, sir." He said it as coolly as though they were talking over an English breakfast table.

" What," said Jackson in astonishment, " you've done it ?

p130 " Yes sir I said I would get you the information and I've got it, and what's more, in case anyone should doubt it, I've brought a proof."

" How did you do it ? "

" You know that little finger trick I taught the men, sir.

" Yes."

"Well, I got home on the flabby. neck of a

fat Bavarian ; my God, it was great, sir! The thought of his grip on the Bavarian's neck made Briscoe lose his self-composure for a second, and a look of fierce triumph came over his features.

"Where did you find him?" Jackson was trembling with excitement.

" His head was over the top of the trench, on sentry duty. I saw him doze for a second, and it was all over. I've got his shoulder straps and badges."

" My God! " exclaimed the other, "I've never heard anything like it."

" It was only one of the little debts we owe to Germany, here are the souvenirs,"and he produced the badges and shoulder-straps from his pocket.

A feather would have knocked Jackson over, the extraordinarily cool way in which Briscoe announced his achievement made it almost impossible to believe.

" Well, Briscoe," he said, " you must come and bring these to the C.O. yourself, and .tell your,own tale. I feel quite unable to do justice to it "

p131" I don't think there is any need for that, sir : I just saw a German head over the trench, waited till he dozed and killed him, that's all there is to say. If you'd take 'em yourself, sir, I should be grateful."

There was no argument with this extraordinary person, so Jackson took them, but when he thought of the daring and skill required to lie right under the parapet of the German trench, and then to kill a German sentry within a few yards of his friends, he felt that Sergeant Briscoe was little short of supernatural. He handed the trophies to the colonel and explained what had happened.

" We must get him a decoration for that," said the C.O., when he had finished, "it's damned good; when's that fellow going to accept a commission ? "

" That's more than I can tell you, sir; Sergeant Briscoe is rather a puzzle to all of us."

" Well, you might ask him, then."

He asked Briscoe right enough, but never gave his reply to the C.O. He just said, " I have got a great deal to learn yet, Sir, but the time'll come. The New Army and the New England are in the transition stage. For the present I'm better as I am."

Whenever Briscoe made one of his paradoxical remarks Jackson always used to find some proof

of his contention within a few days. On this particular occasion it was a letter from Bunny
p132 Fenton. Ever since his release from hospital Bunny had been on some staff job at home. He had been out in France during the period in which the Old Army made its desperate fight alone. He knew nothing of the new period which was coming. There was a paragraph in his letter on the subject of "damned new officers." "God knows what fellows like that will do when they get into it," he wrote, " the Army will never be a gentleman's job again." "So the old spirit is there," thought Jackson, "but, Bunny, my friend, you'll see a big change when you get out here again"; and he sat out in his dug-out to compose a reply containing a description of Sergeant Briscoe's exploit. He felt that it would do to show Bunny something of the spirit of the New Army, and the more he wrote about it, the more convinced he became that such deeds must break down the wall of exclusiveness with which the public school fellows surrounded themselves.

A few days before they moved from that part of the line Briscoe received the D.C.M., the first decoration bestowed upon any of the battalion. The period of their initiation was over; they were now fairly blooded, and were moved up to relieve the war-worn troops in front of Ypres. It was something of an honour to go to Ypres in those days. It was *the* part of the British line. Men went up into the salient never expecting to come back, and the remarks of officers and
p133 others, whom they met on the march up, made them feel that they were in for the real thing. The colonel was delighted at the thought of real fighting, and the more he heard about the salient the better he seemed to like it. For his own part, Jackson felt a little overcome with the magnitude of the task which they were called upon to face; he felt somewhat uncertain of himself. The men in his platoon, Sergeant Briscoe assured him, were unbeatable, and such was his confidence in the magic of Briscoe's person-
ality, that he felt quite at ease on that point. He felt though, that Briscoe ought to be leading instead of himself, and that he was really leaning on his sergeant for support. Bremner just said that they had better have a good drink before they went, because they would never live to

have another, and there the matter ended, so far as he was concerned. Certain other officers decided that they had already seen enough regimental .duty, and that it was time to get some staff appointment, but the mere mention of the word "staff" sent the colonel into such paroxysms of rage, that they took care not to mention it in public. However, on the whole, the battalion went up into the salient with most of the old gang, and many of the old ideas. Before they came out of it, the old gang and the old ideas had been compelled by force of circumstances to yield to something more up-to-date.

p134

## CHAPTER VII

### THE FINISHED ARTICLE

THINGS were moving rapidly in England during the battalion's first few months in France. In a modern democratic state there is no appreciable part of the population which wants war for its own sake, with the exception of the insignificant few who have no other work in life, and a number of old maids who think that military training is a good cure for the bad manners of the lower classes. Owing, however, to an insular position which prevented the people from seeing an enemy on their territory, and to the smallness of the Army which confined the casualties to a narrow section of the public, the majority in England during the first half of 1915 found the reality of war something far better than they had pictured it to be. The political evils which were obsessing the minds of everyone in the peaceful days of 1914 were, for the moment, in abeyance. The Irish question had sunk into insignificance; the suffragettes had ceased to smash windows and damage churches. Unemployment no longer existed. Jackson used to receive letters telling him of the war work which one or other of his lady friends were doing, and he was expected to gape with p135 admiration. His father dilated on the butchers' or bakers' sons who had received commissions, and wondered what the country was coming to, while his mother harped on the fearful wages which girls were getting in munition factories and kept saying that people would soon be without servants altogether. It all sounded as though

some revolution had taken place and as if England had changed in a day; but those at the front took all this with a pinch of salt. It takes something more than the headlines of the newspapers to change a great nation bred in tradition. Even Jackson himself, with all that he had seen in the last six months, knew that he had not eradicated his old failings, and had not yet been educated to any really new conceptions.

So the men abroad were sceptical about the war work which all the ladies seemed to have taken up. They suspected those whose photographs appeared in the illustrated weeklies of being largely guided by the desire for publicity, nor were they impressed by the extraordinary self-sacrifice of the millionaires' wives who allowed British officers to share their Rolls-Royces in the Park. Even Bremner, that chivalrous ladies' man, was once heard to emit a low whistle of disbelief as he saw the perfectly dressed form of a society beauty on one of the pages of the *Tatler,* with the heading "Engaged on arduous war work," In certain papers the politicians were p136 credited with having suddenly become saints, animated by one thought only, that of saving the Empire; it was announced that " none were for a party, but all were for the state." During those few months of 1915 from Neuve Chapelle to the day before the Battle of Loos, England seemed to have become a nest of self-sacrifice, reform, and successful imperialism; at least the press made it appear so. The future looked bright, and fools talked of the War being over in the autumn ; and even in France there were a few simple-minded people who believed it; the dear old colonel was one of them.

The signs which those on active service saw around them should have been sufficient to dispel any undue optimism that England had become suddenly perfect. Jackson &Co. had not been in the salient very long before they realized what German gunfire was like. Their trenches were subjected to one of the worst bombardments that had ever been seen, many of their best men, and one or two officers were buried in the debris, and, as they struggled hard to dig them out whilst possibly a spark of life remained, it was impossible not to reflect upon the shortage of their own ordnance: they saw men die with expressions such as "Where are our guns? " upon their lips.

Then, a few days later, they received the papers containing a speech from the Prime Minister saying there was no shortage of shells.
p137 These should have been sufficient proofs to show that the self-sacrificing efficiency which they read about had yet to be learnt in England. At the core the old country was just the same. In another part of the world, too, the same bungling was going on, and men's lives were being wasted in Gallipoli in the good old fashioned way.

The one part of the news from home which interested Jackson was that about the officers who were being given commissions, and he was uncertain in his conclusions as to whether it was good or bad. He asked Sergeant Briscoe what he thought about it, hoping that he would have some views on the subject, and he was not disappointed. "You think, do you, sir, that the giving of all these commissions will do much to smooth over the prejudice of your class; I'm afraid I don't agree. You will never be ready to accept these men who have been pitchforked into commissions without a claim, and why should you? You'll only remain more aloof than you are at present. And we men maintain that we must have officers wlfo are efficient. These, except in a few cases, will not suit either of us. You want gentility and we want efficiency; and our point is that you will be ready to accept us, if we are proved to be efficient; and soon you won't be able to help yourselves."

" What do you propose then? " asked Jackson

" We propose that commissions are given
p138 for efficient service, and we think that those of us who get promoted by that means will be accepted by you without reserve."

" Yes, I think there is something in what you say. After all, the old families in England got their position through service to the Crown in the first instance."

" And all they want now is some fresh blood, which will inspire them with vigour and efficiency, while we want that culture which could be gained by association with them."

" And you don't think we shall be ready to accept some of these men who are getting commissions now? "

"Of course I don't. They have neither gentility nor efficiency: how should they appeal

to you? They will do us all the harm in the world."

" How do you propose to appeal to us ? "

" By efficient service."

" We shall accept that, shall we ? "

" You will either accept us on those grounds, or disappear altogether as an important class in the state."

" That would be a calamity ! " said Jackson sarcastically.

"Do you know, sir," retorted the sergeant very seriously, "it would be the worst calamity that ever befell Great Britain."

" Why do you think so ? "

p139"Because culture and courtesy have done more than anything else to elevate our reputation throughout the world."

After they had been a month in the Ypres district the most popular notice that can ever be issued by a G.H.Q. was received by the battalion. It announced that officers and men might be allowed to proceed on leave in certain proportions. By reason of the casualties which they had suffered Jackson found himself some twelve places higher on the list for leave than he would have been before. But though his position was so much advanced, the fourteen officers who still came above him and who could only proceed two at a time delayed the arrival of his turn sufficiently to give him many anxious thoughts as to whether he would ever live to see it. He was highly excited to learn from those returning what England was like. The colonel was the first to go on leave; he went in much the same spirit as, when he took an afternoon off work at home, not as though he were going from death to life. He was oblivious to any fear that he might die before he got away, and he came back without a sign of that depression which characterized the others, after leaving those whom they might not see again. He was not callous or hard; he was one of the best of husbands, but he just did not understand what he was going into. He had seen enough of death since they came to Ypres ; p140 he had read the funeral service over some of his best officers and men, yet he remained personally quite indifferent to it. Whether he was a fatalist no one could say, but his actions were always

" magnificent," though sometimes they were not "war. "

" I went over to see your people, Jackson," he said patting the younger man on the back. "They were awfully keen to hear about you."

" How did you find them, sir? " said the other, feeling that thrill which people always feel when someone meets them in a foreign country and talks of their home.

" Oh, very fit. Your father's doing colonial remounts; got quite a useful lot ; your mother's licking V.A.D.s into shape. Both doing their bit."

"Very good of you to look them up, sir. They're not worried about me, I hope?"

" I told 'em they'd soon be seeing you for a few days. They're looking forward to that. Taking things in the right spirit."

" Hope you found all well at your home, sir."

" Yes, capital. That young boy of mine's as keen as mustard; wishes he was old enough to join us. Afraid it'll be over before his turn comes."

" Aren't you glad?" said Jackson, inwardly shuddering at the thought of it lasting till a boy of thirteen would be ready for the shambles.

p141"I don't know. It's better sport than fox-hunting, and a lot cheaper."

Such a remark from the C.O. was no mere bravado ; he really thought so.

He told some of them afterwards in the dug-out which did duty as a mess that he was really quite glad to be back again because it annoyed him seeing so many eligible men still loafing about at home, and that was really just about the attitude one might have expected him to take. The other senior officers gradually went and came back again, but still it seemed a long way to Jackson's turn; what it must have seemed to the men! It was fairly certain to take at least a year before they could all get a turn, even if leave were not stopped, but then, as Sergeant Briscoe said, they took it for granted that they would get home wounded before they ever went on leave, and there was always the off-chance that they got killed, in which case they improved the prospects of the others.

Bremner got very excited, indeed, when the two last before him departed, and it seemed as

though he enjoyed those few days preceding his own departure almost as much as he did the leave itself. He was always great on the joys of anticipation. The fact that he had obtained his commission a week earlier than Jackson did, threw him several places above his friend on the list. A day in the date of commission often meant a lot
p142 in the War. He and Jackson were having a whisky and soda on the last night but one before he was due to go. He was in splendid spirit s. " Now what are you going to do when you do get there? " asked Jackson when they had chinked their mugs together. "I suppose you've made arrangements to see your lady friends. Who is it going to be ?" Bremner enjoying himself without a girl was unthinkable, and in the normal course of events he would have taken out a different one every day. Jackson wondered if perhaps he had altered in this respect with being out in France. He had, before the War, been rather attached to Jackson's favourite cousin, Joan. She and Tony always took each other into confidence, and he knew that she was very much in love with Bremner. She was one of the finest type of English girls, and might well aspire to capture the heart of any man. Bremner in peace time had seemed hardly a sound matrimonial venture, but her parents' opposition on that account had only made her the more in earnest, and Tony Jackson, who could never refuse anything she asked him, was enlisted on her side. But when he saw the fickleness of Bremner's love affairs whilst they were in training in England, he felt that he had enlisted on the wrong side. Joan was one of those whom he never could resist, and so he remained under her banner, and even the sordid horrors of the battlefield never prevented
p143 him from doing her those little services which he could, and reporting by letter how the, land lay.

Bremner had been forbidden to go to the house by Joan's excellent and thoroughly well-meaning father, and her last letter of two days before, had asked Jackson to concoct some plan for her to meet Bremner when he came on leave. As she was forbidden to write to him, and as Jackson knew him well enough to be quite sure of that, It would be fatal to let him think that she was after him? the matter was not easy, and presented considerable difficulties. He racked

his brains as he sipped whisky with Bremner in a dug-out.

" Well, one may as well have a good time for those few days, Jacker: I shall do the best I can in that time."

" By all means. What form of amusement do you particularly fancy? "

"Well, at all events, I'm going to have a dance; do you know the Coates' of Lancaster Gate? . No, I thought you didn't. Well, they are getting up a party for the first night, and we are going to the Savoy."

" Which night will that be ? " said his friend plotting to do down Bremner all the time.

"Well, of course, I might land in town on Monday night, but it has definitely been fixed for Tuesday to prevent any possibility of going p144 wrong; so it should be all right unless the Germans upset my pans.

It was now Sunday, and the dance was to come off on the following Tuesday week, so there were eight days in which to fix things up. A letter would take two or possibly three days, so there was no time to be lost. As he didn't know the Coates' it was difficult to see what he could do. Joan would not be allowed to go to a dance alone and to think of her people coming all the way from the Midlands for a night at the Savoy was more than idiotic. It was a poser.

Jackson could only think of one solution, which was that he should go himself on leave when Bremner went and invite Joan to come with him. Her cousin Tony was one of those privileged to take her about alone. But how was he to go on leave? His turn did not come till the next batch but one after Bremner came back. He knew that if he went to the C.O. and pleaded special family reasons for going early he would probably have allowed someone else to exchange with him and he felt no doubt that the officer who was going with Bremner would do so. The spirit of comradeship in adversity makes one ready to do such things. But then there was a chance that someone might get killed while he was on leave in his place. In fact, a man's leave might mean the difference between life and death to him. Jackson could not face such a chance as that.

p145 Just as he had decided that it was impossible, a bright thought struck him. "Bunny" Fenton

knew the Coates. They were famous for their wonderful cook; he had often heard Bunny tell about the belshazzars he had enjoyed at their table.

Jackson rushed out of the dug-out leaving Bremner to sip the rest of his whisky, and went to the burrow inhabited by the regimental sergeant-major.

"Have you two telegraph forms for England, sergeant-major "

He was quite excited with his little plot.

" Yes, sir, I think so," returned that gentleman in his deliberate, cold-blooded way.

He sat on a bacon box with a field note-book on his knee, and wrote as follows.

" Ask Joan Elliot to dance with you Savoy, Tuesday night, 21st AAA Myself coming on leave AAA writing."

This was to Bunny Fenton.

"Come to Savoy with Bunny and me Tuesday night-21st ·AAA writing."

This was to Joan.

"Have these transmitted by the telephone orderly, sergeant-major, will you? "

" Yes, sir," he said, and took them off to the telephone dug-out.

As he put his head out of the sergeant-major's dug-out, a party of stretcher-bearers forced their way down the trench bearing a mortally wounded p146 man, mangled and torn indescribably, and he was forced to forget the glitter of the Savoy.

That night when he had finished his tour on duty and had handed over to another, Jackson sat in his dug-out with a guttering candle in an empty whisky bottle and composed two letters.

He told Bunny that he had got to get himself and Joan invited to join the Coates' party at dinner, producing a telegram from France to explain to Joan that her cousin couldn't come at the last minute. Bunny was told that Joan had received instructions to meet them at the Savoy at 7.30, and that he *must* be there, and ready to explain everything, and to say that she was on no account to go back, because, he, Tony, hadn't come. Of course, Bunny had to be told the hidden reason for all this. Jackson tore up the letter three times; it took him two hours to get the desired result, and he had but four hours off duty in which to get a little sleep.

Then he wrote to Joan: and persevered until

he had got the two letters to dovetail satisfactorily. His remarks to her were briefly as follows. He began by saying that he was coming home on leave and simply must see her, after all this time, and that he knew her people would let her come up to Town, as he might never dance with her again: that she was to ask her mother to.get some friends of hers to put her up for one night, and p147 that he would bring her home again on the way to his own home.

"Bunny," he wrote, " is fixing the show up, so you may hear from him as well, and I have told him to let you know what time to be at the Savoy. I shall be there whatever time he says," and he added "you simply must come, or you'll always regret it, as I shall have some news for you.

By the time he had completed this innocent looking letter, it was time for him to be on duty again. He had never enjoyed a night in the trenches before, but he did that one. It was great to think that one could do little services for one's friends, even from that godforsaken hole.

There were no answers to these letters, and Jackson took it as a satisfactory sign. He was surprised to find how interested he could become in other people's affairs, under certain circumstances. He could truthfully say that, from the day when he laid his scheme, he became quite as excited over the prospect of Bremner's leave as he was over his own. It was up to him to see that Bremner did go d'n leave and at the right time. There was one danger-that owing to a momentary shortage of officers, the C.O. might ask Bremner to postpone his leave until the draft, which was expected daily, should come. This was where he, Jackson, would come in, and in the event of such an occurrence, he decided to offer himself as willing to take over Bremner's work, p148 which meant that he would have to be on duty for double the ordinary time. It would be a fearful strain but only for a few days. Here again was where Sergeant Briscoe came in: for Jackson knew very well that it did not matter whether he himself was on duty with the platoon or not. Briscoe would be able to carry on just the same without him, and if he did find the strain of the double work too much he could make Briscoe responsible for part of it, with perfect confidence. All this he thought out but never had occasion to

put into effect; because on the day before Bremner was due to go, the draft of officers arrived. Jackson's last words to him as he marched down the communication trench, covered with mud and a beard of ten days growth were" Mind you have a good time in London, old man ! You will probably meet Bunny Fenton if you go to the Savoy. If you do" don't forget to -give him my love." He was just as glad that Bremner was going as he would have been to go himself. He couldn't help thinking that he must be mighty fond of Joan to have felt like that : for there is nothing in the world about which a man feels so selfish as about leave from the front.

During those few days which were spent by Bremner in England and by the battalion in the vicinity of Ypres, nothing happened beyond the usual shell-fire and bombing activity resulting in a few odd casualties, and Jackson again proved p149 his skill at dodging the fragments and missiles which were steadily depriving them of the old hands and changing the faces of those who were to be found seated on packing boxes 'round the mess dug-out. He heard nothing from Bremner, Joan, or Bunny. No news, he thought, is good news, and he waited patiently for Bremner's return. There was only one unfortunate incident. Jackson got a letter from his people saying that they understood from his aunt that he was coming on leave, and wanted to know why he had not told them about it, and when he proposed to turn up at home. He had not foreseen this contingency, and now hastened to assure them that he had intended his visit to be a surprise, and that he would let them have a wire from London when he arrived there. His father afterwards told him that the non-receipt of the wire had caused them much anxiety and of course attributed the whole affair to Tony's indifference, and the whole position had to be explained before he could get Jackson senior to withdraw the charge that he had neglected his filial duty.

At last they went out of the trenches for a few days in reserve; and having had little sleep for the last ten days they landed at their destination at 8 a.m. after marching all night. Jackson threw himself on his valise as soon as he had eaten a meal, and knew nothing until he was wakened up by the impact of the point of a cane between his

p150 shoulder blades. He turned over and cursed his disturber to eternity, deciding at the same moment that it must be one of those new officers who would have to be taught manners. But the prodding continued, and he was forced to open his eyes and look for the aggressor. It was Bremner, clean, beautiful; and smiling.

" Wake up, Jacker ; they say you've been here ten hours now, otherwise I would have let it wait."

"Let what wait?" grumbled the somnolent Jackson.

" The news."

" What news? The War isn't over, is it ? "

" Next best, old man; I'm engaged."

" You're what? "-and then he remembered all about it.

" It's the funniest thing you ever heard in your life. I've been damned keen on a certain girl a long time: but somehow her parents didn't cotton on to me much, and I got requested to make my presence scarce."

" I don't wonder at that," chirped the recumbent form from the folds of the valise.

" Shut up, Jacker, till I have finished. Well I'm damned if I didn't meet her at the Savoy the night I went with the Coates' and her people weren't there either. Bunny brought her along to introduce her. Didn't know we'd met before. (" Bunny," thought Jackson, "you're a brick p151 even if your father does make some beastly sauce.") She was bowled over and so was 1. Well, you know when a chap's on a few days' leave from this he feels ripe for anything, and so did 1. I got hold of her programme and booked half the dances. Old Mother Coates was damned sick, because it threw her party out. By the end of the evening we were engaged. What do you think of that? Wait a minute, I've not finished yet. I felt bold enough to face the old man next day. I got about half a bottle of fizz on board, and went down home with her; and, my God, I pulled it off. They chucked me out before the War, and now they're delighted to own me as a prospective son-in-law. This War's worked wonders, altered folks altogether. It'll be the making of England. They absolutely wouldn't have me in the house before! What do you think of that? "

" I can't express an opinion until you tell me

the name of the lady, but I'm delighted to hear that you find England so much improved."

" You cold-blooded devil. Is that all you've got to say? Don't you think it's great, and romantic? "

" Tell me her name, you silly ass."

" I think you'll have to guess."

" Do I know her? "

" Slightly."

" A friend of Bunny's, is she? "

" Yes."

p152" That's not altogether a recommendation."

" Buck up and guess."

" Is she a relation of his? "

" Suppose I'll have to teIl you. Your intelligence appears to descend to zero sometimes. It's your own cousin, Joan."

" My God, you don't say so ?" Jackson was more awake now, endeavouring to affect surprise.

" It's a fact, J acker."

"WeIl, all I've got to say is that you are a damned sight luckier man than you deserve to be after your unfaithfulness to half-a-dozen in every town when we were stationed in England. You *are* a lucky devil."

" The War's done me some good, anyway. I roIled up in myoId breeches which got torn in the wire the other night, and a fair amount of dirt on the buttons, and even her father couldn't resist it. "

" You mustn't take unnecessary risks now, you know, with a girl like that waiting for you ; how do you feel about it ? "

" Just top hole, and my advice to you is to go and do likewise."

" Very good of you, old man, but Joan can only marry one of us."

" Oh, there are plenty of topping girls : they've altered since the War."

" You think everything has been altered by the War, Just because you've been set on your feet, p153 but I'm not so sure. The leopard can't change his spots as rapidly as all that. Joan was one of the right sort before the War: and I don't think you'll find the natures of people at home have been changed so very much. Your affair is one of the bright spots on the landscape: it's bucked me up more than anything I've heard since last August."

A fortnight later Jackson went home himself,

and Joan did not meet him at the Savoy, nor did anyone else. He went straight home, his arrival being announced by a wire from London, which only preceded him by a few hours. At every turn he looked for signs of the change which had been incessantly announced by the newspapers during the past month or so, and which had been dilated upon by Bremner on his return. He found signs of war, it is true, all the way from Folkestone to the Midlands, maimed figures, thousands of people in khaki, a shortage of taxi-cabs, a dearth of gardeners and grooms, and complaints from his own mother as to the height to which wages had risen ; but he never saw or heard anything to lead him to imagine that the psychology of the nation had altered. Labour still caIled Capital selfish; Capital still called Labour unpatriotic. The lower middle class was still fighting to gain a footing among the upper middle class, the upper middle class was still bent on securing itself against outsiders. The aim of the p154 many was still an individual happiness, which proved as illusory as it had done before. The same man, who was all for himself in time of peace, was sitting tight now, till he was fetched. The man who had worked for others and helped his friends was now undergoing strenuous military training or dying on the plains of Flanders. The same three elements were governing the state, viz: wealth, birth, and labour, and there was still no compromise between them. There was still no intermediate caste which could combine the best elements of the three. The new class of officers were but ill tolerated by other officers and men alike; for whereas the public school men complained of their lack of gentility, the men in the ranks grumbled at their inefficiency. Instead of narrowing the breach which existed before between the classes, they were well on their way to establish a new class in themselves quite as irreconcilable as the others. Nothing happened as yet to create a radical change in the national psychology. The nation was changed on the surface, but at heart was the same.

He went over to see Joan, who had gathered enough by this time to make her interested in his original motive for asking her to the dance, and wanted to know why he had not repeated the invitation when he really did arrive. He had

to admit the truth before he left her, and she was so overcome with gratitude that she nearly wept. p155 She was so happy over the engagement that she never seemed to realize the danger which beset a subaltern of British infantry in the days when battalions had to do duty in the firing line for weeks
on end, as there was no one to replace them. She was just as delightful as she was in peace time, just as enthusiastic as one would have expected her to be over the engagement, and as he had said to Bremner, not changed a bit.

Jackson noticed from the papers that there was heavy fighting going on in the salient. He could picture it all clearly. From being at the front one learnt to read into the brief and uninteresting communiques the true interpretation of events. So, when his father announced at breakfast that there was no news, Tony explained to him the meaning of the phase " considerable mining and artillery activity in the neighbourhood of Ypres," and what that activity meant to anyone within a radius of a few miles. Inwardly he felt thankful that he had not been called upon to participate in that activity.

He went back from leave with much the same feelings as when he first went out. He had the same blind faith in the law of averages; and, as it happened to the average man, so he believed it would happen to him-that he would get hit, but not killed. He felt certain that the regiment must have been engaged in the heavy fighting which had taken place in his absence, and would probably p156 still be in it when he got back. Through his leave coming round just when it did, he had possibly been spared from inhabiting a nameless grave in Flanders.

When Jackson reached the Divisional H.Q. the gunfire was still very heavy in the salient. The howitzers were barking all round, and the terrifying roar of the German 17-inch showed that the enemy was doing his worst.

" Your battalion came out last night," said the staff officer, when Jackson reported, "You'll find them in billets at Ouderdom. I'll order you a horse and a guide."

" Have they been in action, sir? " he asked.

"They have; at least some of them have ! One company did especially good work," he said,

and walked out to give an order ; he then got on the telephone and Jackson never got another word with him until the horses came round, and he had to go.

He tried to obtain some more exact information from the guide, but he could tell nothing except that he had heard that the battalion had been very heavily attacked and had done well; some sergeant or other had done very well, he believed. Jackson's excitement was intense, - as they rode to Ouderdom ; there was, he felt, a peculiar sensation in rejoining a regiment which has been in action since you've left it. There must be so much to hear, and he wondered so much what P157 had happened to many individuals. Shells were falling round the rest camp when he arrived near Ouderdom and everyone had taken cover in the bolt trenches which had been hastily dug among the huts. He handed his horse over to the guide, and made the rest of the way on foot. Ending his journey with a hasty leap into the nearest trench, as he heard a shell arriving, which he thought would burst close by, he found himself next to the colonel. "Hullo, young feller; you haven't forgotten how to take cover during your stay in England." He felt a little ashamed. He wondered that the C.O. had deigned to take cover in a trench at all, but it was evidently a divisional order which he could not ignore. It would have been much more appropriate to find him strolling about picking up the fuse caps as the shells burst.

" What has happened while I've been away, sir ? " he asked.

" You've missed the chance of a lifetime, my boy."

"Why me specially, sir?" Jackson chipped in.

" Why, your platoon was in it, and did the whole thing. They were on our left flank as usual, and the battalion on our left broke under the liquid fire attack. Your chaps never budged an inch. They stood terrific bombardments and frontal attacks for three days and at the same p158 time cut a trench to link up with the division which had retreated. It was one of the finest things of the War. A Regular colonel of the regiment which came up to reinforce sent word to me that there was a sergeant there in command of a

platoon, who ought to have been a general. He took command of the whole situation, and did more than anyone else to preserve us from a great disaster. The Regulars who saw it all said that the New Armies seemed to contain better men in the ranks than among the officers. I sent for him afterwards and showed him the note that I had received, and he has at last consented to take a commission. We can do with a few in the mess like that, eh ? "

" Who was it, sir? "

" Can't you guess? "

" It was not Sergeant Briscoe, was it, sir? "

" It was, and I only hope his commission comes through before we get into this big show."

" What's that, sir ? "

"Why, the division's going to be reinforced up to full strength, to lead the big attack lower down the line, as a special reward for doing good work up here. Great, isn't it ? "

"Splendid, sir." He answered with all the enthusiasm he could muster. "Have we had many casualties? " he added, affecting an attitude of unconcern.

" Oh, your platoon got knocked about a bit p159 so did all your company. You'll be second in command now. These damned shells seem to have moved a bit farther off. We may as well blow the 'all clear.' You'd have had a big chance if you'd been here to command your platoon."

" Glad I wasn't, sir."

" What ! " he gasped, dropping his whistle as he was in the process of thrusting it between his lips for the " all clear."

" I mean, sir, that I'm glad Sergeant Briscoe had the opportunity of proving his worth. He would never have accepted a commission without."

" He's a wonderful soldier, Jackson."

" He's a wonderful man, sir."

. . .

The next ten days were spent in the Ouderdom rest camp. The gradual wastage during the battalion's period of service in the Ypres salient had been considerable and had been accentuated by the casualties suffered in repelling the recent liquid fire attack. New drafts were on their way sufficient to bring them once more to full strength. The C.O. was mIghty proud of the show which his

men had put up in a tight corner, and was determined to mark his appreciation by making their rest as enjoyable as possible. Discipline was relaxed, the men were given a good deal of leisure and minor delinquencies were winked at. With amusements so limited it was inevitable that p160 food and drink should form a very important part of the pleasures indulged in. But games were organized against other units in the neighbourhood, while expeditions to Bailleul and other towns provided more frivolous amusement. The C.O. used to ask various officers to go with him on riding expeditions and treated them to generous meals in estaminets, where the cooking was good. It was on one of those rides with Bremner as his guest that the colonel proposed a visit to the front-line trenches they had held in the Messines district before going to Ypres. The idea of voluntarily risking death in this way while in rest camp hardly appealed to Bremner, but the C.O. was so keen and regardless of his personal safety that he never ventured to protest. They actually rode their horses to a point where even people on foot were supposed to be visible from the German trenches, and where infantry always took to cover; and, according to Bremner, they then only dismounted because an artillery officer returning from the firing line stopped and told them they were committing suicide and disobeying the brigade orders. They were greeted by the officers holding the trenches with much surprise and cordiality, and quite enjoyed seeing their old haunts.

" Pretty dull work in a quiet place like this," was the C.O.'s comment as they made their way back down the communication trenches. It had p161 certainly been a quiet afternoon compared with their recent experiences in the Ypres district, but even here casualties were frequent and the continual mining operations beneath the front trenches made it quite exciting enough for most people. Bremner felt pretty thankful when they got back safely to their horses and started on their way back to camp.

Now that Briscoe's name had been sent in for a commission, Jackson and Bremner went out of their way to show him that they regarded him as

one of themselves. Hitherto Army discipline had limited their intimacy. Jackson now felt that this tradition could be ignored and on most of the evenings when they were both free, he invited Briscoe to accompany him to an estaminet where they could enjoy discussions and arguments.

Bremner found their discussions rather dull, but he admired Briscoe and sometimes joined them.

In these few days a close friendship was formed between them. Whatever the topic of their conversation, Briscoe usually directed it towards conditions which would rule after the War. His ideas were always original and showed peculiar insight.

" Social civilization," he said, during one of these discussions, "is on trial in every country. Can it survive as it is to-day? I doubt it. The longer the War continues the greater will be the p162 strain on the social fabric. There will probably be some great upheavals. Everything will depend on leadership. If social barriers prevent men of ability from rising and thereby deprive a country of its best leaders, the danger is great. Our country suffers only to a minor extent in this respect. But what of Russia and Germany? Will their narrow ruling castes survive the test? I doubt it. If not the crash will come. Wherever it comes it may be devastating in its effects and it will take us all our time to dam the flood."

Jackson and Bremner were duly impressed, but thought the possibility too remote to worry about.

The ten days in the Ouderdom rest camp passed pleasantly but quickly. Everyone did their best to forget the fact that they were being" fatted up " for an important attack. Their destination was kept so secret that, even when they lined up at the railhead to be entrained, they did not know where they were going. The rail journey was followed by a route march through the greater part of the night, and when billets were reached no one knew what sort of a district they had come to. The next day showed them that they were among mines and slag heaps.

The detailed preparation for the attack now began. Plans of the position to be, assaulted were drawn out on the ground from aeroplane

photographs and each company was shown its
p163 special objective. A number of officers and men
were given intensive instruction in bombing, a type of fighting in which they had hitherto had no experience. Jackson, Bremner and Briscoe, all volunteered for this part of the business and went through the instruction. It seemed the most useful part they could play and offered considerable possibilities for personal skill. The officers' mess was in high spirits. The battalion had been allotted part of the front line in the attack, and the colonel was as pleased as Punch.

In fact, he could hardly restrain himself from crowing over the C.O. of the battalion supporting them in rear. The rest of the mess fell into line with the colonel. On the last night before going into the trenches an excellent dinner was enjoyed, washed down by plenty of local champagne, and the utmost good feeling prevailed. Much to the general regret Briscoe was unable to join them as his commission had not yet been gazetted.

It was a very happy family of officers and men that went into the front line next day to assault what was probably the most cleverly planned section of German trenches on the whole British front.

p164

## CHAPTER VIII

### BROKEN AND MENDED

" Do you feel you can see anyone else this afternoon, Mr. Jackson? "

" Who is it, sister? I had about as much as I could stand this last time," he replied, without raising his head from the pillows.

"Very well. I'll say you can't see them to-day," and as she spoke, the sister went towards the door. Jackson agreed with her; he had been so overcome by the last visitor that he felt he wanted to be alone ; but something checked him. He thought of some wretched officer's wife wanting news of her" missing" husband, and the pain she must be suffering ; how could he refuse

to help her, so long as he had breath? Her husband, his friend perhaps, had gone into action with the rest of them.

" Wait a minute, sister. Don't say I won't see them ; ask them for a card or name."

"No," she replied firmly. "I think you've had enough to-day."

" I must see them; I shall not sleep to-night, unless I do. Think of it, 'refusing to see people one may be able to help! " The sister left the room. In a few minutes she returned.

p165 " It's quite all right, Mr. Jackson, it's not a woman and I told the man you could not see him. He insisted on sending his card, and said he could not come again."

She handed him the card, and he read the name, " Major A. K. Graham," Jackson gasped. . "I *must* see Major Graham. Please have him shown up."

She endeavoured to remonstrate with him, but it was quite useless, and at last he won.

When the sister left the room, he mentally took stock of his surroundings .He had a room to himself. This was the privilege of the serious cases. The numerous operations which were being performed upon his wound, and his sleep-lessness at night owing to the friendly attentions of German H.E. shells, made him eligible for a private ward. It was really a small bedroom on the upper storey of a country residence, but it was one of modern design. A fire burned in the bedroom grate, and, in the gathering darkness of a winter's afternoon made the room look fairly cheerful in spite of the 'bareness of the furniture. There was one uncomfortable chair which he used to press upon his visitors; though. the latter invariably annoyed him either by strolling up and down the room, or by standing with ,their backs to the fire, or leaning on the mantelpiece. His nerves were in a bad state, and little things seemed to irritate him. Through the window he looked p166 upon the sea, which was just reflecting the rays of the setting sun. How cold it looked! How melancholy it sounded, as it washed upon the beach! All this he noticed in the space of a few seconds: then the door opened, and an orderly announced: "Major Graham, sir."

" Well, Jackson," said the major as he closed the door, " it's damned good to see one of the

old crowd alive. Wasn't that an awful day? Only one other officer got through besides you and I. I'm going back from leave to-morrow to take over command of the remnants, and thought I would come and look you up first."
" How many were there left next day, major? "
" The total roll call was myself, one subaltern, and one hundred and twenty-seven men."
" Did you see what happened to any of the other officers ? "
"From the time when we went over in all that cloud of gas and smoke, I never saw an officer until I picked up young Wilson with about twenty men in a German trench next morning; they had consolidated the position and managed to hold it."
"I completely lost sight of everyone. Did you hear anything of Bremner? I've had that wretched girl in here to-day. You know he got engaged a few weeks ago and now he's missing. Major, it's dreadful. I've never had to face anything so hopeless as her pitiful inquiries. I
p167 thought you might know something. Certainty is better than uncertainty."
"Don't say that, Jackson; uncertainty may turn out all right. "
"Do you think yourself there's any hope in this case ? " "No I don't"
" Nor could anyone who saw the thing. The wounded were shot to bits as they lay in the open, then they were shelled so much as to make them unrecognizable for the burying parties. It was one of the worst shows inthe War. "
"However did you escape yourself? I've been thinking that you have some wonderful tales to tell. "
" I had the luck, somehow. I escaped from the very muzzles of the Boche rifles, where I lay wounded all day: but the sights I saw. I can't go over them, now, major, I don't feel up to it. As it was getting dusk, a man came to finish me ; it was touch and go then, but I killed him just in time: His finger was on the trigger, and his rifle pointed at my head, but the Prussian's luck was out and mine was in; my bullet found him first. It got right home ; I saw his face illuminated by the flash of my revolver. My God, it was--"
" Stop it Jackson ; you are getting excited.

I shall get into trouble. Keep your story till you are fit.'

He was right; Jackson felt his face flushing,
p168 and found himself sitting up in bed and waving his fist about. He forgot all about his present position as he told the story, and he lived those moments in the German wire over again. Graham had cut him short just in time, and he pulled himself together.

" Did anyone do anything great? Have any decorations been won by our lot ?" asked the wounded man as he settled down in bed again.

"There was one very fine piece of work. Sergeant Briscoe--"

" Is he alive? " chipped in the other.

"Yes, he's in hospital somewhere."

" What did he do ? "

" Well, it's hard to say what he actually did, but somehow or other he held the communication trench, down which the enemy were attacking, almost single-handed. A private came down to me for reinforcements and I went myself: there was no eye witness to tell me what had happened. This one private had only seen the end of it, but I endeavoured to reconstruct the history of the scene from what I saw. Briscoe alone can tell us, and he wouldn't say a thing."

" What did you see ?" Jackson asked breathlessly.

"There was a spot where the sides of the trench had been all blown in with bombs, and a little barricade across it. Here I found the bodies of five private soldiers, all dead. The
p169 fallen sides had half buried them in the debris. Behind them was an empty bomb store in the side of the trench. Some thirty yards farther up was a similar scene: only the trench was more completely destroyed, and there was no barrier. The corpses were piled higher, and numbered fifteen or twenty. They were the corpses of Prussian Guardsmen. The Prussians were forcing their way over these as I and my men rushed up the trench to meet them. In the middle, between two lots of corpses, was another scene. There were three dead Prussians and Briscoe : I thought he was dead too. His arm was blown to pulp, and his face was covered with blood. After a slight struggle we drove the Prussians back, and I felt Briscoe's heart, and found him to be alive."

"What had happened, major?"

" I think the history must have been as follows. Briscoe and his men installed themselves beside a German bomb store, built a small barricade and successfully held up all attacks until the five men were killed and all the bombs exhausted. Then he must have advanced alone and met the others in the trench. My God, how he must have fought. The first two he had evidently met separately and killed-*with his bare hands.* Their faces showed a desperate struggle, and their eyes were starting out of their heads. Then he had tackled a third, and someone from behind had thrown a bomb; the Prussians don't mind sacri-
P170 ficing their own friends to gain an object. A bomb had been thrown at the two struggling in the trench. It had done its work indiscriminately and blown the German to eternity. Briscoe was frightfully mangled, but not dead. That was how I read it."

" Will he live, major? " Jackson asked, though instinct told him that Briscoe couldn't die yet.

" That I couldn't say : he might not be as bad as he appeared."

" What decoration will he get? "

"Well, I told the G.H.Q. what I had seen, and said that though I had not witnessed the action, I felt he ought to be given the V.C. Whether they'll give it I can't say, because all V.C. actions have to be testified by an eye-witness, but this all seemed so clear and certain. If he was an officer he would be eligible for the M.C., but his commission hadn't come through, although he had been put in for it a fortnight before the battle. However, I explained that to the G.H.Q. and asked them to hold it over till he became an officer. He already has the D.C.M., and as a sergeant they could only give him a bar to that. It's a very fine thing to find an officer with the D.C.M., don't you think? At any rate, it's next best to the V.C."

" So do I, major; it's not given for office work at the base or the War Office, like the D.S.O. and M.C., what?"

p171" Well, I hope they'll see their way to give the V.C. There's many a cheaper one been earned than that."

" If he lives to enjoy it, it will be great. Good to hear of someone getting some real reward for

his services in this bloody show. You don't know what good you've done me, major; you've made me look on the brighter side of things. I feel as though I might like to get back again, when I hear such tales as that."

" I must be off now, Jackson. I'm crossing to-night. I wonder when you'll be with us again. It'll never be the same though, the old crowd has gone. It must be very nice to be in that bed and think you've done your bit."

" Only for a time, major. One's got to go back and back again until either the War or oneself is finished. England is no place for fit men in these days."

" Good-bye; I hope you'll soon be quite fit."

" Thanks very much for coming; and good luck. I suppose you'll be a colonel, soon."

" Perhaps," he said, as he closed the door. Jackson sank back on to his pillows, quite exhausted.

The days passed in hospital, and the events of a few weeks back seemed a long way off, save when Joan came in to see him and pour out some story which she had picked up from some private p172 or other on leave, who assured her that he had seen Bremner taken prisoner. She used to ask her cousin's opinion and then, when he had given it, she demolished it in the true feminine way. She was so beautiful and so pathetic that she nearly drove him mad. At last Jackson was moved out of his private room into a ward with four others, and as she would not face the publicity of visiting him there, they took to corresponding by letter. The last operation had gone a long way to restore the efficiency of his stricken limb, but on the whole the medical experts were disappointed. There was considerable debate as to whether he should be subjected to further surgical experiments. The work done by surgeons in the course of the War was nothing short of marvellous and no praise can be too great for the manner in which the medical profession performed their task. All the same, war wounds offered unique opportunities for practising experiments, and no one likes to be a victim of such. Jackson felt that something of the sort might happen in his case. Probably he owed his immunity to the fact that his nervous condition was still serious, and did not show signs of mending. It was

obvious that his limb would be sufficiently restored not to handicap him seriously. A further surgical operation might cure or cripple him. Eventually it was decided to let things be.

The days went steadily by and the routine life
p173 of hospital began to get boring as all routine will.

No-man can be happy when he has so much spare time for thinking. It was one of these afternoons about tea-time when the sister announced that some fresh cases were expected to arrive that night. There were two beds vacant in Jackson's ward at the time. She showed him the list of five men and asked whom they should like to come to the ward. Last on the list he read the name Sec.-Lieut. J. Briscoe ... Regt. He controlled his impulse to jump out of bed and said:

" Sister, there's one here I know; we must get him in this ward. He's a man from my own Regiment, and we are expecting him to get the V.C."

" Oh, well, he rnaf be a very bad case, Mr. Jackson, and require a private room; but if not, we'll get him in here,"

He felt more excited over the prospect of seeing Briscoe as an officer than he could possibly express. It would be impossible to feel dull or bored with him in the ward. He was always thinking of the future, never of the past or present, and a man who is always full of expectancy and hope cannot fail to be good company.

. It was late at night when the wounded arrived; Jackson had been do:ting, but instantly awoke on hearing the sound of stretcher-bearers carrying their human burden up the bare oak stairs. The knob of the door turned, a shaded electric light was switched on, and a form reclining on a
p174 stretcher was borne to the empty bed in the far corner of the ward. Not a word was spoken, as the perfectly trained stretcher-bearers deposited the patient and withdrew. Jackson had not seen the face of the newcomer; but he knew at once that he was none other than Second-Lieutenant James Briscoe. You couldn't be in the presence of Briscoe without knowing it, there are certain people in the world whose presence one instinctively feels. He was of those people. Anyone else might have uttered a sound or exclamation of pain, as he was handled by the stretcher-bearers,

or might even have issued some instructions as to the nature of his injury. The superior silence maintained by the wounded man, and by the bearers in his presence told Jackson who he was. He heard the sister ask him if he was comfortable, as she put him to bed, and he answered in mono-syllables, though with perfect courtesy; then she left him and came over to Jackson's bed.

" How is he ? " he asked in a whisper.

" He's been very badly wounded, though he'll be all right now ; of course, he's lost his arm, and it must have given him considerable pain moving him here. His face has been scarred, but his features are not spoilt."

" Which arm has he lost, sister? "

"His right arm; it's been taken off at the shoulder."

"Poor fellow; it's damned sad this war, isn't it?"

p175" It is, Mr. Jackson; and for the past year we nurses have never seen anything but the worst side of it.; we see nothing but the pathetic horrible sight of splendid men maimed for life. We never see its glories or heroic deeds. Have you got everything you want? "

" Yes, thanks, sister."

"Good night, then; your friend seems a very quiet sort of man; I expect he's a little overcome with his dreadful injury."

"No, it's not that with him, sister' he's thinking of such big things that he altogether ignores it. You can't overcome him with a mere bodily infirmity; at least I don't think so."

"He looks rather like that. Good night."

She tiptoed out of the room.

Briscoe's case was supposed to be sufficiently serious to justify him being screened from the rest of them, and when Jackson was awakened in the morning by the attentions of a V.A.D. and a basin, he did not utter a sound so as to betray his presence, but just scribbled a note and sent it across to Briscoe, congratulating-him on his commission and his wonderful performances in the recent battle.

He gasped when he read it and asked where it had come from. On being told that the author was an inmate of another bed in the same ward he immediately asked for the screens to be taken away, so that he might have a look at him. Jackson thought it quite an inspiring sight,

p176 Briscoe's face appearing from the mass of pillows at his back, bandaged up as it was, and yet so absolutely the same as when he last saw it. One might have thought he was only acting the part of a wounded man.

" Jackson," he said, " how splendid to see one of the old lot alive. You and I are representatives of two different periods and here we are together! "

" Don't be absurd; there are no distinctions between us now, except those honours of yours."

" Not between you and me, Jackson; we're in sympathy, I know. But what about our class distinction ? "

" That's all washed out. Where were you in hospital before you came here? "

" Southampton War Hospital."

" How did they look after you there? "

" They did everything that they possibly could for us. The British Government seems to have realized that it must treat its soldiers as men. The new era is beginning."

" I suppose there were all sorts of men among the wounded there, navvies and broken down gentlemen, successful business men and lawyers, a regular New Army crowd."

" Yes, plenty of variety among the patients, and among women who were there to nurse them. You know, smart folk doing the most menial work, and so on."

" They were really working, were they? "

p177" Yes, they were; there were a few, of course, who were out for a flare in the limelight, certain condescending ladies, wearing the most becoming quasi-uniform to distribute books or cigarettes, doing it because it was the thing to do, you know."

" They'll always exist though."

"They'll have to become a great deal fewer than they are now ; they'll have to come off their platform of condescension towards us. We don't look upon their recognition as a favour; we look upon it as a right."

" Are you going to make them any different . do you believe that the whole psychology of a nation which has been built up and inherited through thousands of years can be changed in a day? "

" It can be changed when necessity demands it ; and necessity demands it now. It must not be considered to be *condescension* to associate with servants who have given their best."

" The King's commission doesn't seem to have knocked these silly illusions out of your head," said Jackson, "who's going to bring all this about? " "That's for England to decide; it's either going to be accomplished by hosts of Englishmen who feel as I do, or by the Germans."

" Sister," said Jackson, turning to the young nurse who stood helplessly smiling at the two wranglers, " I thought you said the new officer was very quiet."

" You shouldn't have started him going, Mr.
p178 Jackson; you really ought to be keeping quiet yourself. We don't want to have you raving again to-night."

" You'd better take our temperatures and keep us quiet that way. Mr. Briscoe will break the thermometer if he goes on any longer. Will *you* condescend to wash him? "

" Well, after what you have said about some of the ladies, I don't know if I will, but after all, you are soldiers, so I suppose we must forgive a lot. Put this in your mouth, please, Mr. Jackson, and keep quiet."

He did as he was told.

The arrival of Briscoe in the ward altered the whole outlook of life for Jackson. He forgot all about his disability which, after all, even if it became permanent, would be nothing in comparison with the loss of an arm, taken off at the shoulder-and the right arm too. Briscoe never mentioned it, it was quite beneath him to give a moment's thought to it. His mind was all right, and that was all he cared. The scar which remained upon his face gave the firm features a slight appearance of ferocity, but .otherwise made him more distinguished-looking. Everyone liked him. The characteristic which appealed to all was the complete absence of any grumbling whatever, so far as his personal comfort was concerned. He never received a letter from anyone, and no one came to see him. Jackson
p179 thought, while he was writing a letter himself on
one occasion, what a job it would be for Briscoe to have to learn to write with the left hand. One day a document came from the War Office for him to fill in, and, when he asked for a pen, Jackson stupidly offered to write the necessary

information for him.

" Thank you," he replied, "but I can write perfectly well with my left hand; I have not neglected that part of my education."

" I might have known it," said Jackson, with a touch of admiration.

Meanwhile there was no news of the missing officers and men of the battalion and he purposely avoided asking Briscoe any direct questions on the subject. Joan was still corresponding with him about the stories which she kept picking up from various soldiers on leave or in hospital; but she refused to come and see him since he was no longer in a private ward. One day Briscoe and he were talking about the old battalion and what the new one would be like. The latter was pessimistic and the former was the opposite; Jackson asked him casually what it was that made him see so much red in the last battle.

" I always felt far too cold-blooded to fight as you did," he said.

" You didn't see what I saw, Jacker."

" What did you see? "

" I was going along a trench, one of the German p180 trenches captured by the right of our company, and I ran upon two Prussians in the act of killing, no not killing, murdering a British officer. He had been wounded and had dropped into the bottom of the trench, and was lying there unable to rise. The first Prussian drove his bayonet at the officer's stomach, but the point struck his equipment and glanced off. Then the other, swinging his rifle above his head, brought his butt down with all its force on the upturned face of the wounded man, battering his head into the mud of the trench. At that moment a shell from one of our guns dropped short, and the two Prussians literally disappeared. My God! It was too good a death for them. I was robbed of the chance of making them pay for what I had seen. I longed to kill them in the way they deserved over the body of their victim. The shell did its work efficiently, but much too quickly."

"Who was the officer?" asked the other, hardly able to contain himself any longer '.

" I didn't mean to tell you; he was a friend of yours. But you might like to know, in case you get to grips with the Prussians again."

" Tell me," he gasped.

" It was Bremner."

Jackson knew it before he told him; instinct brought home to him the truth. The more .he thought of it, the more the fact seemed to horrify him. There was something so incongruous p181 about it all. One could picture Bremner dying in the middle of an infantry assault from a machine-gun bullet ; one could still more picture him dying in some mad, chivalrous, boyish escapade, which had no military value whatever. But to think of him murdered like a dog, with his face battered into the mud of a German trench was almost beyond one's imagination. It was well for Joan that she could not picture it, and he hoped she never would.

"Look here, Briscoe," he said; after a long silence, " Bremner was engaged to my cousin and she's been nearly mad since he was posted missing. I can tell her now that you saw him killed; but she must not know anything of the circumstances. What shall I say? "

" Tell her that he was blown to pieces by a shell after reaching our objective. The shell which killed the Prussians placed him far beyond the reach of any burying party, so it will be true."

" I've wanted to ask you about Bremner all this time, and never brought myself to do it. We must break the news carefully'and I'm not a good liar."

" May I make a suggestion?" said Briscoe, after reflecting a moment.

" Of course you may."

" Well, I suggest that I send a statement to the War Office, that I understand the officer in question is missing, and that I saw him killed by a shell in the German trench. They will then p182 send an official telegram to the relations, and you need say nothing at all."

" As usual you have come up to scratch. It's an excellent idea."

"When the sister comes in we'll get some paper and I'll concoct a letter."

Two days after forwarding his letter, Briscoe received a form to fill in, making a statement on oath in the presence of witnesses that he had seen this officer killed in action, and three days later still Jackson received a letter from Joan, edged in black, stating that Bremner's people had now received an official telegram from the War Office

to the effect that he had been killed in action. From the letter he concluded that the news had come as a shock to her, in spite of all his assurances that it must be expected. But he supposed all young people were always full of hope, and never liked to come to the conclusion that their aims and ideals can't be realized. She added that she must see him, and felt that he was the only one to whom she cared to talk on the subject; since, however, he had learnt the true circumstances of Bremner's death, he had not cherished any desire to discuss the subject with her.

Jackson had been in hospital nearly three months before it was decided that he might have a medical board and be given leave to go home. He was still suffering from the effects of being too intimate with German high explosive; but the p183 surroundings of the hospital were not helping to improve his condition, and the medical authorities came to the conclusion that the efficiency of his wounded limb could best be got back by using it. Briscoe, too, was considered fit to go. His wounds had healed, and the stump of' his arm appeared to have settled down satisfactorily.

"The sister says we shall both get three months," Jackson said to him one afternoon, " where do you propose to go for yours? "

" I shall go and pick up a little knowledge of a class I know nothing about."

" I thought you numbered friends among every trade and profession."

"No, I can't say that, Jackson: I've learnt nothing of the community which, after all, employs more labour than any single industry in the British Isles."

" What's that? "

"Agriculture. I propose to undertake some labour on a farm."

" What use can a man with one arm be at that job ? " he asked.

" Of course, he can't do as well as a man with two ; but I don't want any wages, and I can lead a horse or drive animals to market, can't I? I can certainly help, and I can pick up the scientific side of it, and study the people."

" Now you are getting on my ground, Jimmy. You can't pick up the scientific side, because p184 there is none. There never has been a vestige of science employed in our agriculture; it's the

most conservative industry there is."

" I can learn all that from experience."

" You wouldn't be able to learn much, if you went in the uniform of an officer ; farmers would look on you with suspicion."

"I never thought of doing any such thing; I should go as a farm labourer, and dressed like one"

" Now I'll tell you what you are going to do, and I mean it: you are coming home with me. You are going to learn two things you don't know: first, what an English country home can be like, which you've never had a chance to study, and second, what the agricultural community is like from an unbiased point of view. You can dress up and go among them, discover what they think and how they live. But you must also do your part and prove what you say, that there must be no distinctions between us, by living with me."

" But--"

" There is no ' but' about it this time. It's up to you to prove what you say, and if you don't, I shall say that the barrier between us is of your own making."

" Jacker, since you put it that way, I'll come. But, please understand that I've never lived in a gentleman's house before."

There were not many men in England who p185 would put the cold truth as straight as that, and it seemed almost impossible to believe. Here was a man whose speech and appearance were those of a gentleman, and yet he admitted that he had never lived as such. Jackson thought of his previous fastidiousness and the manner with which he selected his friends at Oxford, and now he was asking a man to come to his home who had never been in a gentleman's house before. Yet he knew instinctively that he would not regret it.

" You mustn't expect me to dress for dinner and that sort of thing," resumed Briscoe, after a pause, "I shall only have a uniform to wear."

" You can dine with the King in uniform these days; what more does anyone want? What about your farm labourer's suit? "

"I only require a pair of corduroy trousers and an old shirt; I have a pair of private soldiers boots, which are just the thing. Hullo! here's the sister. When is the board going to be, sister? "

" Yes, when is it, sister? " chimed in the other.

" I don't know, Mr. Jackson, but I've brought you the paper and a letter to keep you quiet."

He seized the paper and opened it, to look at the casualty list. Under the heading "Previously reported missing, now reported killed," he saw Second-Lieutenant Bremner of the -- Regt. On the other page facing it was the heading; "More awards for gallantry." He glanced among the sixteen names, There, among p186 the recipients of the Military Cross, he read the name, Second-Lieutenant J. Briscoe of the -- Regt. "For most conspicuous determination in holding a communication trench against enemy counter attacks; when all his men had been killed, and all his bombs had become exhausted, he went alone and met the enemy, killing two with his own hand, and being wounded as he killed a third. His determination undoubtedly saved a serious situation." What a contrast in two pages of war news! Death and oblivion on one, honours and glory on the other ! Just two pages of *The Times.* A year ago they were full of biased Conservative politics; now they brought home the full meaning of the words " Fortune of War." One column of the newspaper separated the announcement of casualties and honours, just as one fraction of an inch in a bullet's flight made the difference between life and death. Two of the best men in the regiment, and both their stories told on the same page ! He said nothing and opened the letter; it was from Major Graham, now acting in command of the regiment. It was just to tell him of Briscoe's award. "The G.H.Q. regret," it ran, "that they cannot recommend the award of the V.C. as the action was not actually seen ; though they do not question my version of the events. It's damned bad luck, isn't it? It would have been a big thing for the battalion to have had a V.C., p187 and I know very well that Briscoe earned it. I'm afraid he'll never have another chance. He'll get the M.C., but what's that? They've just given it to a· fellow on the Divisional Staff, a young devil who never comes near the trenches. The award may be out by the time you get this. Let me know how you are getting on. We are out of the line now, trying to build up the division He put the letter on his bed, and threw the paper across to Briscoe.

" You might like to see it," he said, "your own name is in it. Weare very sorry that they have only given you the M.C. I've got a letter from the major, and he says it is damned bad luck. Anyhow, there'll be another ribbon to put beside your D.C.M."

" I wish you wouldn't refer to the subject at all; bad luck, you say? Why, it's very much more than I deserve. When you think of the number of wonderful things done every day out there, without even being recorded, one doesn't feel one ought to be distiriguished from others by wearing a ribbon on one's breast."

" Very well, we will say no more about it. Bremner's name is in the list to-day."

" When I think of him, I feel I deserve shooting for not having killed a few more of the devils."

The door opened and the M. O. came in. "Y ou can both have your board, to-morrow," he said.

p188

## CHAPTER IX

### THE TRANSITION

IT was an evening in January 1916, and there were four people sitting over the fireside. It was one of those firesides which are only to be found in old country houses, and which more than compensate for the lack of heat given forth by the comfort of their appearance. It was a quaint old room, with walls several feet thick, and recesses on either side of the fireplace containing secret cupboards large enough to hide a man. The wood fire dispersed an air of philosophy. You can just look at such a fire and think. Briscoe sat there as silent as the others, with his right sleeve dangling empty, and his two ribbons on his left breast. There was no other light but the firelight; and Mrs. Jackson looked with admiration at his wonderfully strong, clean features, which were lit up by the sudden blaze of a pine log newly put on.

Jackson's father was one of those contented souls who always took the world as he found it, and made the best of it. He had plenty of ability, but no ambition. He was well read, and exhibited remarkable versatility in conversation. He was always interesting and his opinions were

p189 generally sound. Although he was always short of lno.ney and lived a narrow country life, he kept himself pretty well up-to-date, and, compared with others of his type, he was wonderfully unbiased against novelties. His family had long been known in the neighbourhood and his lack of money never worried him. Tony knew instinctively that his father would put Briscoe entirely at his ease from the time of the first meeting, and he was not mistaken.

He had explained to his father what Briscoe's ideas were, so as to prepare him for many new conceptions, which might, at first, seem to shock his own accepted theories, and the two had enjoyed discussions together without giving rise to any misunderstanding. Briscoe's visit was a great success.

"How did you find Joan to-day?" said Jackson senior, breaking the silence which had hung over them for nearly half an hour.

" She was very sad," replied Tony, "but I think she was glad to see two of us who had been in the action in which he fell. And she was glad to hear of his death first-hand from Jimmy, who could dispel the idea that he lay out and suffered."

" What did you think of Joan, Mr. Briscoe? " asked Mrs. Jackson. She, too, had done her part in making him feel quite at home with them. " She's very beautiful and very tragic," said p190 Jimmy, " and very interesting to me, as she is a type of the new sympathetic women, who will be able to understand the suffering of others through what they have felt themselves."

"But, Mr. Briscoe, she was always the same, she was always one of the sweet-natured ones, and I don't think it is fair to say that she has been reformed by the War. She's just what she always was, isn't she?" Mrs. Jackson said, looking at her son for confirmation.

"Yes, Mother, that's what I'm always telling him. He believes that the War is changing all these people. But none of us are materially changed; the good woman is still good, and the bad one is still bad."

" What do you say to that? " said his father, looking across at Briscoe.

Tony continued, " I can produce you examples of women who have lost just as much as Joan and who are still just as catty and unpleasant as they

were before. So, too, with men ; I can show you fellows who live just as thoughtlessly and selfishly as they did before."

" Jacker," said Briscoe, " there may be something in what you say, but you can't be altogether right. Examples do still exist, of course, but they are fewer. We can't expect everyone to be perfect ; it is just a question of proportion. Has the aim of the majority become less selfish and more patriotic or not? That is the question.

p191 the mind of the nation must be altering in one direction or the other. Upon the direction which it chooses depends our success or failure in the War. You can find examples to support your theory, true: but we are only in the transition period at present and those examples will become fewer; that's what I maintain. We've had a little over a year of war now. In two or three years more the real pinch will come. By that time the transformation will have to be almost complete. We shall have to have learnt to admire unselfishness and public service, or else--"

p194 fellows like him. Look at the upstart manufacturers and financiers who have bought our best country houses. We receive them, and some of them have made most of it in the last eighteen months by a pure fluke."

"Success is achieved in various ways; but Jimmy's compels admiration as well as recognition."

" I wonder what he'll do when it's all over." Mr. Jackson looked at Tony rather quizzically. " What'll you do ? "

"Can't imagine. Depends on opportunity and how long it goes on. Better leave the morrow to take care of itself. We're all doing that."

The two young officers' health soon benefited by their stay in the country. Plenty of fresh air and sleep were just what was wanted after their recent experiences. The food rationing had not begun, and Tony's mother stuffed them with wholesome country fare. Two years later it would have been a very different story. There was no doubt Jimmy enjoyed his stay with them. Standing on the lawn one day, watching the distant hills, he broke into one of his impassioned outbursts.

" No .wonder you fellows turn out to fight

without being conscripted. Something to fight for. Look what you've got to lose." He waved his arm round the expanse of country in front of p195 them, then turned and gazed at the old house with the sun shining on the Queen Anne brick-work.

" It's all very well," he went on, "talking of patriotism amongst the labouring classes. But would a man be as keen to fight for a hovel in the slums of one of our great towns, as he would to fight for a country mansion? Enthusiasm *must* vary with. the position at stake. I've enjoyed staying with you, Jacker, it's been a refreshing revelation to me, staymg with well-bred people who are not snobs. It's a pity there are not more like your father. We should have nothing to worry about, If all your class were like that."

" There is nothing strange about him Jimmy . he is just typical of the type he represents. Those you refer to are not the real thing."

" Well, then, I've learnt all about a class which I never knew before; now I want to learn the life and habits of the agricultural labourer. Our leave will be up in another six weeks. To-morrow, if you don't mind, I propose to dis-appear as a farm labourer." I've had an advertise-ment in the local paper, and offered my services for a month. They've been accepted."

"Where are you going to do this mad busi-ness? " asked his friend incredulously.

" More than twenty and less than fifty miles from here."

More than that he would not say

p196 " Got the clothes? " asked Tony.

"Everything ready, and, if you don't mind, I'll catch the two-thirty-five train to-morrow."

" You really mean this ? "

"Most certainly"

" Of course we don't mind," Tony knew well that argument would be useless. "When will. you rejoin to go up for the next board? You must come with me to London for it, otherwise you'll have to walk to the station to-morrow."

Jimmy laughed and patted him on the back. "I shall be on the station a fortnight on Friday, at 3 p.m. precisely, dressed as a British officer."

"Good, I'll meet you and we'll go by the 4 p.m. to London. I might introduce you to

some other folk up there, and you'll be further on your way to completing your knowledge of the various strata in the English nation."

. . . .

After Briscoe had gone, Tony Jackson went over to stay with Joan and her people for a few days.

" How did you like Jimmy? " he said to her when they were alone the first evening.

"He's charming: he understands everyone. But isn't it tragic to see a man with such vitality and energy mutilated as he is ? "

"No I don't think so. You can't mutilate a chap like Jimmy unless you deprive him of his
p197 mind. He's above the mere animal humanity which can be crippled by the loss of a limb. He'll easily overcome it."

" Such people are beyond my comprehension. What it must be to have a mind like that! "

"I can't tell you what it's like, because I haven't got one. But you can ask Jimmy next time you see him."

" When am I likely to see him again ? "

" That depends upon when and where he puts in an appearance; Jimmy has a habit of disappearing sometimes."

" What do you mean ? "

" I mean that his present idea in life is self-education. He wants to be ready for the days which are coming after the War."

"But surely, he's well enough educated!"

" In the ordinary way which we understand, yes. But he wants to know something of every class in the community. He means to understand them all. He's undergoing a course of instruction at the present moment."

" But how does he do it ? "

" He just goes and lives among the people, whose life he wants to learn, as one of themselves. He's lived in some funny places, too."

" Don't they know who he is ? "

"He can assimilate himself to anyone, the highest or the lowest. All take him as one of themselves. He's not stamped as I and others
p198 are with the hall-mark of the public school. We can't pass for anything but what we are. There are public school men toiling on the trams and taxi-cabs of Canada, but they never lose the stamp; those who work with them always know

them for what they are, however squalid their conditions. Perhaps that's the wonder of the public school-the permanence of its effects. On the other hand, it always prevents one from being accepted by others and assimilated to them as one of themselves. I couldn't do what Jimmy does"

"Douglas and he were great friends weren t they? Can you imagine any two more extreme opposites than Douglas and Mr. Briscoe

"I can't" he said, "but they were two damned fine types, each of them essential in his way. Bremner's light-heartedness makes the world go round, and Jimmy's wonderful phllo-sophic brain will make it fit to live in. He'll do good before he's finished, to many millions of Englishmen.' ,

" Was he very brave? Mr. Briscoe, I mean? " She asked after a moment's pause to reflect upon his meaning.

" He was as brave as a man can possibly be. With all his great intellect and. imagination, which .must have brought home to him the conse-quences of every action, he never hesitated in the face of danger"

p199 " Douglas admired him too, you know."

" Well, Douglas knew the real thing when he saw it."

" I like Mr. Briscoe, and he was with Douglas when he was killed; I'm glad you brought him along. When shall we see him again? There are a lot of things I want to ask him which I couldn't ask the first time I saw him."

" You' can see him next month, if you like. He and I are going to London for our medical boards. Why not go and stay with your aunt. It'll do you good and get you away from your thoughts for a bit."

. . . .

At the appointed hour Jackson met Briscoe on the station. The idea that Briscoe might fail to keep the appointment never occurred. One just took things for granted with him. He was dressed as an officer, and his uniform was spotless.

" How did you get on ? " asked Jackson, as the other rose to greet him from a chair in front of the fire in the station master's office.

" Very well indeed, in fact, better than I

expected. I found that one arm can be very much more useful than you gave it credit for."

" What did you use it for? "

"Well, it did all right for topping turnips, and rolling milk churns."

" And what did you think of the life? " asked Tony after they had taken their seats in an
p200 empty "first" at the Government's expense.

" It's a good life, one which might be made much of: and one which is not understood by ministers and legislators, nor yet appreciated by those whose fortune it is to get their bread by it, instead of by drudgery in manufacturing towns. Jacker, we shall have to do a lot for the farm labourer : he's been a neglected class. He's an awkward customer on the surface, but he wants understanding."

" Well, we are going to see something different now; London's rather nice for a change."

He felt at the time that he would have liked poor old Bremner to be going with them: he was so splendid on these occasions : so full of vivacity and enjoyment: he wondered whether Jimmy might not be a bit of a wet blanket. Although Tony was fairly serious for one of his years he had a lurking love of the gay life, and experienced a desire to let himself go at certain intervals, a trait, no doubt, handed on to him from ancestors more noted for their faculty for amusement, than for work. In all the varied moments of life there are certain friends most people would especially wish to have beside them. Jimmy was suited to a hot corner in the firing line. Douglas Bremner made an evening in "Town" well spent if he graced any party.

Tony took Jimmy with him to the Hotel Majestic, which he considered to be well suited to
p201 the poverty-stricken officer from the country, and sufficiently proper not to offend the taste of certain critical maiden aunts belonging to his own family. Jimmy just didn't care where he went. He had no family to offend, and no precedent to cause him to despise any dwelling which provided the necessities of life at a reasonable price. During the day they went about together, but Tony had to comply with an invitation to dine with some of his relations. He began to get together a congenial party for an enjoyable week. London

in 1916 was still enjoyable to visitors, and none of its pleasures were seriously curtailed. To anyone who could walk sufficiently lame, or could show an empty coat sleeve these pleasures appeared to be legitimate, and, as human nature does not usually permit people to enjoy things by themselves, it was equally justifiable for others to share the enjoyment. At least that was Tony's point of view at the time. What Jimmy really thought about it, it was impossible to say ; but he treated the whole affair as an education, and went into it thoroughly. The word " education" to him justified anything.

The party gradually gathered. Bunny Fenton, who was in a staff captain's billet at Aldershot, managed to wangle a week's leave. Joan Elliot came up to stay with her old aunt. Bunny brought a sister and another girl to act as chaperons to each other; he blandly stated that he p202 trotted out this girl for Tony, though, of course, that meant that he wanted Tony to look after his sister. It was just his way of putting it. Poor Joan came up with a fearful air of depression. Six months had elapsed since Bremner's death and she quite naturally refused to go out anywhere:

" I've just come up because I want to see some more of Mr. Briscoe; you see he was with Douglas when he was killed, and it is nice to talk to him. It is the nearest I can get to seeing Douglas himself."

All the illogical sentimentality of her sex was intensified in the girl, and, such is the way of woman, it appealed to Jimmy's brilliantly sound intellect, while he would have squashed some of the most logical assertions of professors as beneath contempt. Clever and unsentimental where men were concerned, he yet listened to this girl taking in all that she said, while Tony continually expected him to rush into one of his brilliant and concise refutations with which he had heard him disperse the arguments of others. Jimmy and Tony used to take Joan out to a quiet lunch somewhere, and then take part in a more boisterous evening with Bunny and the other girls.

Miss Booth Gravely, who had been brought, as Bunny said, expressly for Jacker's amusement, formed an interesting subject for study, and Briscoe didn't fail to avail himself of the opportunity. Her father had been comparatively poor

p203 in 1914 but was now making a fortune out of a once moribund business converted to munition making, and it was quite obvious that his daughter was making up for the lost time, and was out to live as gay a life as possible. Bunny'S people had also increased their already large income. Meeting him in a ballroom where she would never have been found but for her father's sudden rise to affiuence, this young lady had used her good looks and smart appearance to make herself master of the services of one who, because he had been wounded, could take what amusement he liked, and hardly be critised as an unpatriotic spendthrift. She had chosen her quarry well. She entirely overshadowed Bunny's rather plain sister. Miss Fenton, for all her expensive dresses and careful toilet, could not aspire to open for herself a road into the drawing-rooms of London, and was not unwilling to make the most of the opportunity afforded by her brother's commission in a crack cavalry regiment. The affair suited each of the three parties, and afforded Briscoe and Jackson much room for amusement, and speculation.

"A ranker is he?" Bunny whispered to Tony after the latter had introduced them; he had seen the D.C.M. ribbon on his breast, otherwise Tony felt sure he could not have told that Jimmy had ever been in the ranks; he was sure no one could.

p204"Yes " he answered "he's one of the best , though, and wonderfully clever."

"I'm surprised at you going about London with him, though; you used to be so exclusive in your friends."

" I am still, and I've never been so particular as now; Jimmy is my most exclusive choice of all, the best I've ever had."

" Well, he looks a good chap, and he must be a bit of a fighter; the M.C. and D.C.M. is pretty good."

" He ought to have had the V.C," whispered Tony.

Neither of the girls knew the D.C.M. ribbon; and it was plain that on the occasion of their first meeting they were both attracted by Briscoe's handsome face, and liked to be seen with one who had evidently played such an active part in the

War; they looked upon his ribbons, on his scars, and his empty sleeve as a very suitable setting for their own extravagant clothes. They kept on trying to draw him out with the childish and frivolous conversation employed successfully with other men, and his polite indifference kept whetting their appetite more and more. It was humorous to see these brainless blase girls assaulting the impregnable fortress.

"Do you never dance, Mr. Briscoe?" said Miss Booth Gravely, at length.

"Never , " said Jimmy

p205 " Why? Don't you know how?" retorted, exasperated at his monosyllables.

" I've never thought it worth learning."

"Oh, but you simply must learn," she said arching her eyebrows in a fascinating manner which had won her many an evening's enjoyment in the last six months. "You don't know what you've missed. We could soon get you heaps of dances."

" I'm afraid there are too many things to learn in these days to allow time for it."

"But it's part of everyone's education; at least, part of every woman's."

" That's why women are so helpless at joining in intelligent conversation; of course, I mean English women. French women are different· they can talk on any subject." ,

This went on at intervals through the course of the dinner. Each time they renewed the assault in a different way; and each time he flattened them out. He said things which others could not have said without causing permanent offence. The more he repulsed them, the better they seemed to like it. No doubt his face and his empty sleeve were too much of an attraction to them, and he spoke in such a quiet and decisive way that he was like a very dignified senior talking to refractory juniors. Bunny and Tony just looked on at the drama, and had a little banter on their own, but Bunny was evidently p206 annoyed at the manner in which he had been supplanted for the moment in the estimation of Miss Booth Gravely.

Returning to the hotel after one of these evenings Tony went with Jimrny to his room

before turning in. He closed the door very deliberately, sat on the bed, and motioned his friend to the only chair.

" To what section of the community have you introduced me this time?" he said.

" I don't know what you mean," replied the other alarmed at his attitude.

" We have been at War eighteen months, and you and I dine with two women who never mention anything but dances, theatres and clothes. Do they or do they not represent any serious part of the British public?

" Why do you ask? "

"Because a great deal depends upon the answer. If they do, then all I can say is the game's up. It's the writing on the wall, the sign of decay, the sign that our time has come to make way for another power. "

" And if not? "

" Then they ought to be stopped contaminating the minds of those who are weak-willed, but better inclined."

" How shall they be stopped ? "

" By the degrading but necessary process of sumptuary legislation, curtailing thelr pleasures, p207 curtailing their extravagance in dress, food and drink, and prohibiting them from lolling in luxurious motor cars before the gaze of a suffering public, and-by making them work, infinitesimal though their work might be, in the sum total of the vast effort which we shall be called upon to make, it is the example which counts. The days are past when you can make one law for the rich and another for the poor. The sight of the rich gliding along the park in their Rolls-Royces must undermine the stamina of the nation. It must therefore be stopped."

" Let us presume that the ladies in question do not represent a serious part of the British public," said Tony, affecting as much seriousness as he could.

" What then *do* they represent? "

"They represent the comparative few who have made, and are making profits out of the War. They are the real war profiteers, not the class whose wages have gone up to correspond with the rise in prices, but the makers of vast fortunes, which have opened for them the road into a new society; and they are taking advantage

of it to the full."

" They must be stopped. Can it strengthen the resolution of those who have lost so much to see others piling up fortunes out of their sufferings? Is that a good thought for a man to fight on? Have you read the *Green Curve?* Do you p208 remember the man who failed when he was in a tight corner because he thought of those at home.

" I remember the story; but I don't think the situation is quite as serious as you imagine. We are in a state of upset in England at the moment, but we shall settle down to the business in a few months, and everything will adjust itself:" .

" Adjust itself! " he retorted, that's just like you lethargic public school men. I thought you were above making such a remark as that. Can't you see the enemy won't allow .thmgs to adjust themselves, he's orgamzmg, plotting and planning against us. It's up to us to put our house in order and quick. Inactivity, my God, it's awful' !" He paused and then resumed, " Why we haven't even passed conscription yet! They are still haggling about it in the House, because the magic personality of a great lawyer is opposed to it. They haven't even mobilized our manpower yet; and we shall need to mobilize our woman-power too before we are through. It's a mistake to regard the House of Commons as just a collection of individuals who have no connection whatever with the feelings of the nation. We get into the habit of using the word 'Government' in a vague sense, as though expressing some external being in which we have no share. We forget that the nation has produced the Government, and not the Government the nation. Each generation reflects itself in its p209 Government, and when we say wildly that Government should do this or that, we forget that a country gets the Government it deserves. That's the worst of it, Jacker; the quality of the nation at the moment is reflected in its Government. We allow ourselves to be governed by the platitudes of the Cabinet. We must exchange that for sumptuary legislation, and Spartan living. Then we may pull through."

He was becoming more and more eloquent as he went on, and Tony's disordered brain was beginning to reel with the rapidity from which

he rushed from point to point; so he took advantage of the lull between the storms and got to bed. The following morning Bunny rang up and asked Jimmy and Tony to dine with him and go to the Alhambra.

" Let's make a cheery evening. We mayn't have many more chances," he added.

Tony accepted gladly for himself, but with some diffidence for Jimmy. However, he thought somehow Jimmy would be sure to come up to scratch. Bunny- was living up to his motto. He and his sister and the Booth Gravely girl were staying at the Savoy as though expense was no object, and instructed the others to meet them there for dinner. All sorts of young people in those days believed in having a few days' luxury and spending their last penny on enjoyment while the chance lasted. When Tony p210 told Jimmy what he was in for, he seemed quite
pleased, and thanked him as though it had been specially arranged for him.

" It's wonderful the way you keep on showing me new life," he said.

In the morning they called for Joan and the three of them spent a day sight-seeing. Joan was very keen on pictures and architecture, and was comparatively knowledgeable about them. In the morning they visited the National Gallery and enjoyed themselves examining and criticizing the work of foreign masters. Tony soon found that he was the ignoramus of the party. In his study of languages, Jimmy had picked up quite a lot of information about European artists and their work. He was familiar with names and dates which Tony had never learnt, and his criticism of pictures was sound and in good taste. Tony learnt a lot from listening to the arguments of the other two, and felt himself developing a keenness he had never before possessed. It was interesting to notice quite a number of uniformed men in the gallery obviously eager students of art. What walk of life was not to be found in the Army by 1916 ?

After lunching at a small restaurant, they made their way to the British Museum. There the objects of inspection were the remains of ancient architecture, culminating in the Elgin marbles. Here Tony's education was of more use and he

p211 was able to hold his own with the other two, at any rate, in the historical discussions. Nevertheless, it was amazing to find that anyone with Jimmy's limited opportunities could possess as much knowledge as he had.

Sight-seeing is, perhaps, the most tiring of amusements, and they were all thoroughly worn out by the time they got Joan safely back to her aunt's house in Kensington. The prospect of a cheery evening was the reverse of enticing. However, an hour's rest at the hotel put them both in a better humour, and at seven o'clock they turned up at the Savoy feeling quite adventurous again. Tony felt that something had happened since the night before. There was a different atmosphere and he could only imagine that Bunny, feeling jealous at the interest displayed towards Briscoe by the ladies, must have done something to " choke them off," and incidentally mentioned that Briscoe was a promoted ranker. The girls assumed an attitude of cold superiority towards him, and addressed more of their conversation to Tony. All the same, he could not help noticing an expression of delight upon the features of Miss Booth Gravely when Jimmy started a conversation with her, on some apparently frivolous subject. For the moment she seemed to think that she had conquered him by her indifference. He was really just coaxing her to give herself away. If it was the upholstering of their Rolls-Royce or p212 the colour of the walls in the drawing-room of their new house, the result was the same-a brusque disapproval of the manner in which certain War profiteers were causing labour to be employed on the production of luxuries for themselves. Every subject which he touched led to the same result, until the girl, blushing with indignation, turned to Miss Fenton and began to discuss the merits of the officers of the New Army in a loud voice. Jimmy sat quiet through this, and when Tony asked him afterwards why he did not let himself go on his favourite subject, he said it would have been a waste of breath to expound ideas to such intellects.

Nevertheless, Jimmy obviously enjoyed himself and the dinner was a great success. Their host did not spare the champagne, and Jimmy, though discreet in his drinking, was by no means a teetotaller. In all probability he had a strong

enough head to have drunk the lot of them under the table, if put to the test.

Bunny was out to do the party in princely style and after a magnificent dinner conducted them to a box at the Alhambra. To young officers frequenting that music hall the show was usually of secondary importance, eclipsed by the attractions of the promenade. Having ladies with them, their activities in this direction were somewhat circumscribed. It occurred to Tony that Bunny had figured it out that they two would p213 be able to indulge in a little promenading while Jimmy looked after the girls. He probably thought Jimmy a little too prudish to be at home in the company of *femmes de joie.* If he did, he must have suffered rather a rude shock. For, as soon as the first interval arrived, Jimmy announced that if the others didn't mind he would like to have a walk round as he expected to see some pals. Sensing Bunny's desire to have a look round himself, Tony announced his intention of staying in the box. Hence he had only Bunny's account of Jimmy's demeanour. No sooner had they arrived in the promenade than a couple of women greeted Jimmy by name. He introduced Bunny and ordered drinks for the four of them.

" These ladies and I are old friends; we used to meet frequently when I was acting waiter in Soho. My friend here," he said, indicating Bunny, " has been wounded and is here to enjoy himself. P'raps you can be of service to him." Jimmy gave a hearty laugh.

The ladies smiled at Bunny and sat down. Both were exceptionally beautiful. Bunny noticed with surprise that they spoke with refined voices. Bunny, the "lad about Town" was being shown the ropes by the uninitiated ranker.

" Well, Martha," said Jimmy raising his glass when the drinks arrived, " here's luck. How's this War going? What does our friend the Boche think of things ? "

p214" Thinks he's winning, Mr. Briscoe. Got us held on all fronts and is going to starve us out."

" How's he propose doing that? "

"Submarines. Building submarines by the score, big enough to stay at sea for months."

" Our Admiralty know, I suppose."

" They've been told."

" What about our blockade? "

"Better, but not effective. A lot of stuff going through neutral countries."

" Many spies here? "

" Very few, been rounded up well."

" That's good. Much trading with enemy? "

" Two cases last month, but nothing of consequence, it's getting too difficult."

" Good news; the old country's waking up." Turning to the other woman, he added, " And how's trade in your profession? "

. " Poor. Plenty of trade of a sort, but no money."

" Afraid you've got to do your bit, and accommodate the impecunious officers." They both laughed heartily.

" P'raps your friend here would like a card," Martha dived into her handbag as Briscoe rose to go.

" You bet he would."

" A couple of good lookers," said Bunny as soon as they were out of earshot. " You seem to know 'em well."

"Known ‘em a long time , Martha’s employed in a semi-official capacity , Intelligence work , p215 enemy trading branch. Her husband was an officer in the Indian Army. Drank himself to death. She became the mistress of a politician, the swine married and left her on the rocks. Got in with a bad crowd and sank to this. She's straight enough, though, and brave as they make 'em. Many of these women have a history attached to 'em. Mary's her assistant in the intelligence business, she too has a history. A clever woman, but not quite Martha's guts. Both are well known in Soho."

Bunny was full of the secret service when he returned to the box and was evidently most impressed with Jimmy; all his previous opinions had undergone a drastic alteration. His sister inquired, with a wink, what they had been up to, and he informed them with an air of mystery that they had been hobnobbing with the secret service; more than that he would not reveal.

Bunny was all out to make a night of it and proposed that after the show they should go on to some dancing haunt, but Jimmy and Tony, after their day's sight-seeing, had had enough, and so it was decided to give it a miss. They invited the Fenton party to be their guests for the next evening. Unfortunately, the ladies had already booked an engagement, so Bunny suggested

they should have a bachelor dinner and show Jimmy the N.R. Club. It was to be a further course of education.

p216 Seven-thirty the night following found them in the hall of the N.R. building waiting for Bunny's arrival.

" So this is where the robbers of British labour, and the agents of German commerce congregate, is it?" remarked Briscoe in an undertone.

" What makes you sum the place up so rapidly and so caustically? " asked Tony.

" I've seen enough to tell me already," he replied. At that moment Bunny entered, and, nodding to one or two acquaintances as he passed,joined them.

"Hope you'll be satisfied with the dinner here; it's not quite up to the Berkeley, you know," he said, looking at each in turn.

" We shall be able to put up with it, I expect ; we've all three dined on bully-beef many times in the last year or so, and plenty of folk are doing so to-night," returned Briscoe smiling.

"No use doing that unless one's obliged," said Bunny.

" No, but the thought may help us to be content with what we've got, don't you agree?" said Briscoe.

"Don't start an argument in the hall here, in front of everyone, please," said Tony. "Let's go in, Bunny; I can see you are both dying to discuss the affairs of the nation, and you'll do it more quietly between mouthfuls of food."

Bunny had reserved a round table in a corner of the long dining-room. Briscoe sat in the p217 corner facing the whole room, Tony sat at the side, so that he could see everything with a slight turn of the head, while Bunny had his back to the room. Tony noticed that Jimmy was particularly interested in the occupants of another table somewhere behind Bunny. Though he tried to follow his gaze he was unable for a long time, to discover what it was that was interesting him. At last he caught the eye of another man looking furtively in their direction while Jimmy was looking down. It was the little man with the beady eyes, whose appearance had arrested Tony's attention when he dined there before, and whose story he now remembered.

" Fenton," said Briscoe at last, " do you know

the partners in the firm of Weston & Jones ? "
"Yes, I know something of them."
" How's the firm been doing since the War? "
" Oh, they've done awfully well, made packets. It was rather sad about Weston."
" Why, what happened? "
"Well, both his sons were killed in France, and it broke the old man altogether. He died of heart failure a few months ago."
" Is there a new partner? "
" Yes, but I don't know him to speak to."
"Can you tell me whether he's the man dining with Jones over there ? "
Bunny turned round for a second, as though to give an order to the waiter.
p218 " Yes," he replied, "that's the man."
" Just one more proof that England is not yet in a position to win the War," said Jimmy.
" What do you mean? " asked Tony.
" We don't know how to deal with the enemy within the gates. That man was a German waiter in 1914; he's a partner in an English firm in 1916. The conclusion is that neither he nor the firm are doing the country very much good. What's his name now, Fenton?"
"Donald, I believe," said Bunny.
" Well, it used to be Dernberg and I feel certain he's an equally zealous servant of the Fatherland under either title. I wonder whether we have many of our own agents trotting about loose in Germany. If we don't box theirs up they'll beat us, sure enough."
Tony did not know at the time how Jimmy had come into contact with Dernberg ; it was not till he learnt the story of his service in a Soho restaurant that he understood. But apparently they had served together and Jimmy had learnt much of his German from the man who was now called Donald. The firm of Weston & Jones had been making fortunes out of the War, and it was not until a year later that the truth was discovered by the unsuspecting public.
Through those days, while Jimmy and Tony were on leave after coming out of hospital, they had many opportunities to see the England as it p219 then was. It was a country of contrasts. There were the sincere broken-hearted women like Joan, deprived of all they held dearest, secluding themselves from the public gaze until such time

as they could feel strong enough to apply themselves to useful work. There were the stay-at-home country gentlemen who had given their sons to officer the British Army in the earliest days, and were now, for the most part, in mourning for those sons whom they would see no more; they were spending their time shut up in their own houses, too proud to be seen abroad without having public service to perform, attending recruiting meetings in their local districts, and releasing the bitterness in their souls by appealing for conscription. But their influence on affairs in general was already on the wane.

Then there were the profiteers who were spending money which they had never enjoyed before, and whose wives and daughters were to be found making themselves a nuisance to the shop assistants in Oxford Street and Bond Street; they sheltered themselves for the most part behind the excuse of amusing wounded soldiers and acting for charity. They were responsible for the unprecedented number of motor cars seen joy-riding on the London to Brighton road.

There were War-brides, who had married men for whom they were entirely unsuited, in the excitement of the War, and were even now p220 unfaithful to their husbands who had been absent on service but a few short months. There were enemy agents working steadily and unhampered to undermine the spirit of the people. There were snobs of money and snobs of birth, who made unpleasant references to officers whom they had never seen. There were young men, who had married since the War began, whining about the unmarried slacker who had not joined up, refusing to go themselves till he was fetched.

Finally, there was the great mass of people solid and true, but pricked by all these little thorns in its side, a mass slow to move, lulled into lethargy by many years of peace and national success. This mass was even now beginning to shake itself, and, by its acceptance of the Conscription Bill, to show that it was willing to impose upon itself the discipline necessary to enable it to win through in the traditional manner. It was steeling itself to the trial of endurance before it, the working of its mind was hidden away under the covering of social customs, party politics, and luxury, and was harder to discern

than the outward sores which were troubling the body politic; but it was evidently sounder than it seemed. To have continued in the path which was being followed in 1916 would have brought disaster within two years, but at the very moment when all seemed hopeless to thinking men, the weight of the mass began to make itself felt, and p221 continued to exert its pressure until it effected a change, and finally produced the sumptuary legislation necessary to clip the wings of those who were unwilling to identify their interests with those of the community. Upon this mass of opinion everything depended. As it was the most difficult to move, so it was the most stable when it came to anything like a decision. Ministers, and journalists, generals and admirals, were alike powerless beside it. The English people seemed to need the stimulus of being almost over the abyss, and then performed wonders. It needed an emergency to call forth their latent powers of improvisation. There were to be many instances of this before the War was over.

The decision of the medical board was to give Tony two months more leave, to recover from his concussion and, if possible, for his leg to get more serviceable; while Briscoe was ordered to return to the depot, partly because he wanted to himself, and partly because there was no chance of his condition becoming any different. As they parted on Euston Station, Tony could not help feeling how his mind had been broadened by the experience of the last few months. He stayed two more days in Town and took Joan home with him, and felt singularly lonely after being constantly in contact with a friend who was never anything but interesting.

p222

## CHAPTER X

### KILLING TIME

SOCIOLOGISTS have written many interesting treatises upon the part played by the emotions of the individual in framing the opinion of the mass. They have studied, scientifically, what are the results to be expected from a community composed of such or such members, and have given us many accepted rules for forecasting the probable

effects of different emotions upon society. The general trend of their reasoning has been that society is a collection of the individuals who compose it, save that it is something greater than a mere collection of those individuals just as a man is something greater than the mere addition of the cells which compose him. Little mention has been made, however, of the manner in which a popular emotion affects the individuals. There can be little doubt that the emotion of patriotism in England, which arose out of the War, was more popular than individual in its origin. There were many who acted under patriotic impulses, not because they felt it in themselves but because they saw other people feeling it. Out of the two and a half millions who voluntarily enlisted, there were many who p223 went not because they felt any wild enthusiasm for the country and its cause, but because they saw others going to the recruiting station.
So, too, in each individual case, the desire to serve the state took a widely different form. The popular idea was the same, but it varied as it was put into action by different minds and bodies, tempered by a greater or lesser degree of personal interests and sense of duty. If the state had taken charge and put each man down at his appointed task, people would probably have acquiesced in the role assigned to them without complaint.

As it was, most people decided what they thought to be patriotic themselves and then criticized others. Among the physically fit, there were some who believed their place was in the Army, there were others who thought their brains were indispensable in some special direction, and took every precaution to get into a soft job at home. Acting under these impulses brilliant scholars were to be found among the lists of killed, and brainless idtots were to be seen polishing office stools or signing their names to documents which they made no pretence to understand. Society made no effort to guide the impulses of its individuals into the right channels. Experts at essential industries felt it to be their duty to offer themselves for military service and were accepted ; while others, who were engaged p224 upon producing luxuries only obtainable by the rich, considered that they were bound by the

phrase-" business as usual," and continued to produce their wares. Some believed in economy, and saved up to subscribe to the War Loan, others practised extravagance because they said it was good to have the money circulating in the country. In such diverse manners did the popular feeling of patriotism show itself in the actions of individuals.

After Jackson had returned from his medical board, he sat down quietly at home, and began to think what was in store for him, and what it was his duty to do. Had the State any special call for him? He was unfit for general military service, and, as the medical authorities said, likely to remain so. Being, as Briscoe said, an unskilled man, possessed of no useful education, there was but one service for which he was suited-the Army; from this service he was now debarred. It was, however, taken for granted that he would eventually proceed to the depot and be utilized for training troops at home. Tony was not quite satisfied with this himself. It was sufficiently evident that, as the War went on, many thousands of officers would become available for training work at home, and that ultimately the supply must exceed the demand. In spite of Briscoe's denouncement of his education, he felt that he could do something better than to follow the general crowd; but the main p225 idea which obsessed him was that it was better to do work out of England than in it. Any service abroad seemed more useful to the cause. Possibly the chance of seeing the world was alluring too. Such was the impulse in his case.

Briscoe had quite another idea. He believed in his destiny, and considered that it was his duty, first and foremost to prepare himself for the period after the War. The usefulness of his body had gone, he thought, and it was now up to him to prepare his mind so as to be ready for the task which might be held in store for it. It is not certain whether he had any definite scheme in his mind for accomplishing his purpose when the War was over, or whether he just had but a vague conception of what his aims would be.

Every thought of his was for the future. The past and the present he could dismiss in a single sentence. But the future! He would just rave about it in magnificent language. He believed that it was his duty to dedicate himself to

that and nothing else. *His* patriotism took that line. In each of the" two men the common impulse was modified by individual temperament, and gave expression to itself accordingly.

"We have made many howling mistakes," wrote Jimmy in a letter to his friend, "in the past ten years. They have all done a little towards prejudicing our chances of success in this War and the total of them has placed us in a very p226 critical position. Yes, I repeat it, very critical, more so than appears at present. If we manage to come through somehow, it will only be with a tremendous effort. Granted that we make that effort and that we do come through, what then? Why, it will all have been in vain unless we are ready to see that the old mistakes are not repeated. Everything we do now, we do for the future, and if those of us who are permitted to share in the future do not make the best of it we shall have upon our heads the crime of having wasted the opportunity given to us by the self-sacrifice of the present generation. There will inevitably be a slackening off after the War, a reaction after the period of energy and activity. Some of us must be ready to carry on and to see that our destruction has not merely been temporarily forestalled, but permanently avoided. Look into the require-ments of the Empire and pick up inspiration for the future. That's our job, Jacker."

Jackson kept that letter and often read it afterwards feeling that in it there lay the secret of success. The more he watched events, the more he came to consider that the most important quality in individuals or in societies is the power to look into the future.

" What are you going to do now?" said his father, when the time came round for Tony's next medical board. His son had spent the interval in lazing along the banks of an English p227 trout stream, and lying in bed getting more and more dissatisfied with his prospects in life. There he was,. with his career not yet begun, and nothing definite before him. He could go on soldiering for the period of the War. Then what? He would be unfit for the Army, and have to leave it whether he wanted to or not. But he had no taste for peace-time soldiering. The thought of-twiddling his thumbs on a small stipend in a garrison town did not appeal to him

in the least. Yet It was equally certain that if he did not get into the way of doing some regular work pretty soon, he would never be able to apply his mind to it when the necessity did arise. But he could not do any of these things at home. He felt very decisive on that point. It was his duty to get out of England. It would be more patriotic to clean boots out of England than to train soldiers in it. So he was obsessed with the idea of getting away from home.

"I.'m going to try to get a departmental job," he said, probably in Egypt or India."

His father looked at him with astonishment, and said he would not pass the medical board. He dismissed the matter at that, for the time being·

p228 service who could shower such appointments upon him. Tony replied that as his parents had seen fit to send him to a public school and university, he was determined to see if he could not find some use for this obsolete and now despised education which had cost so many pounds. His father seemed surprised, and assured him that he had never had any idea at the back of his mind beyond making his son a decent member of society.

Tony went to London a second time for his medical board, and immediately proceeded to buttonhole some of his friends in the club, to whom he told the extent of his qualifications and asked if there was a branch of the service in which he could be made use of. He nearly always received disappointing replies. "'Varsity education," said a dear old man, educated at Cambridge himself, " what use is that in these days, a classical one, too. What the deuce is the good of being able to spout Cicero when we want to beat the Germans?"

" I'm afraid it is rather out of place," Tony retorted sadly. But all the same he kept it up. At last he was rewarded.

"Old Peacock," as he was called among regular diners at the club, was sitting in front of the fire in the lounge after dinner ; he had a face like a seared tobacco leaf, and a liver like nothing on earth, and a clump of white bristles stood up island-like in the middle of his shiny bald head. No one spoke to Peacock if they could possibly

p229 avoid it; he was the embodiment of everything that is unpleasant and cynical. Seeing that young Jackson was the only other occupant of the room,

he addressed him and asked him to have a liqueur with him. Tony concurred in the proposal, and they got into conversation. When the spirit had warmed his throat, Peacock became amiable and asked the other what he was proposing to do. Tony poured forth the plaintive tale of his education and requirements, expecting to receive the same cold douche that he had experienced at the hands of others. Imagine his surprise when this sour old man hailed him as a kindred soul and assured him that he was one of the sort the Empire wanted. "Oxford, Honours in Classics, eh ? " he grunted, " that ought to be good enough to carry a fellow anywhere. It always used to be; and it is now, if you know where to go."

" Where's that?" said Tony, nervously sipping at his empty glass.

" India," he replied.

" Are they specially keen on university men there? "

" Of course they are; they can't do without them. India is the country of public school men ; we can't govern it without. The prestige of the British in India would be doomed at once, if one were to run short of sahibs."

" You think I'm specially qualified for service in India, then ? "

p230 "Assuredly I do."

" Do you know anyone at the India Office ? "

"I'm there myself. I can put you on to anything you want."

" Well, I should like to get into a military department. "

" Come round and see me to-morrow my bov " (the old seared countenance was getting amiable now).

" I've got my board to-morrow. I'll come next day, if I may, sir."

Tony went to bed that night thanking the luck which had put him in the way of Sir James Peacock, K.C.I.E., and he decided that the old man's heart was far more genial than his liver.

The board gave him two months extension of leave, which would be ample time to look around the India Office.

As he was walking along Pall Mall, on his way to keep the appointment with Peacock Tony ran into an old 'Varsity friend of his, limping in the other direction.

. "Hullo," he said cheerily, "you've taken one in the leg too, have you; it's not a bad one I hope? "

Might be worse, old man; but I guess it'll last me the rest .of the War," and he hit his leg with his cane; it gave an unpleasant click.

" My God; have you lost it ? "

" Yes, taken clean off by a whizz-bang at the thigh."

p231" Damned bad luck, what are you doing now? "

" Oh nothing, just leave, and when this is up, more leave. I can't get a job anywhere. What a useless crowd we 'Varsity chaps are when it comes to a show like this; we're not wanted anywhere."

" I've just heard that they may find us something to do in India, and am going off to see about it now."

" Don't go there, it's a damned awful place."

"How do you know? "

"Well, I've been to Mespot. stopped this one there. The climate and the flies ! Well, I hope I never see the ast again; and their hospital arrangements! All the wounds were getting gangrene, and medical officers in Bombay are. hopelessly incompetent. Better starve in England than be an officer out there ! "

" But where else is there to go? University men can't be choosers." He shook his head in a hopeless manner, like many another Oxonian who was broken in the War before starting his career.

His words were not very cheering; but it would have taken a great deal more than that to deter Tony Jackson when his mind was made up, as it was at the moment. "There are two things you must do," he said to himself. " You must get a job in which your education can be of use, and you must get it out of England." With this resolution he went to the India Office.

p232 Tony was very much impressed with the courteous manner of officials whom he met at the India Office. He was afterwards told by other members of the Army and Civil Service who had worked there, or had business to transact there, that the India Office maintained a tradition of politeness unrivalled amongst the Government offices of London. Also he found that Sir James was right, and that his educational qualifications were welcomed with open arms. They assured him that they were ready to take disabled officers

of the British service for appointment to their military departments, provided their educational qualifications were satisfactory.

Before he left his name was registered, and he was told that he would receive further notification in due course. With that he went to the club and ate about the best lunch that he had enjoyed since the War began. It was so pleasing to feel that his services were wanted somewhere, that he forgot his inherent contempt for afternoon theatre-goers, and went to a matinee by himself.

His father's face was a picture when Tony told him that he had practically got an appointment in India.

" Can't you stay at home? Isn't there plenty of work to be done in England? "

" There is," said his son, " but I'm no use for it. They want skilled men, experts at something or another. All I could do, if I stayed at home would p233 be to train soldiers, and there are thousands to do that now, soon there will be thousands more. The Government is not out to find us suitable billets, so it's up to each of us to seek them out for ourselves."

"And do you think you are suited to go to India? Will you put up with the drudgery and the climate, when you've been used to an English country life? "

"I'll have a good try "

" Well, you won't like it: by this time next year, you'll be ready to get back, if you can. You seem as though you can't listen to reason just now, and you would never believe me, though I rose from the dead to tell you. I suppose you'll just have to find out for yourself "

Such was Tony's enthusiasm at the moment that he rejected his father's advice as futile and out of date. It was the first time he had ever done so, for he always considered his father's opinion as well worth listening to, and they were always the best of friends. Tony had owed much to his father's discrimination and good advice, and knew it; nothing, therefore, could testify better to the depth of his determination to go to India than the fact that he was willing to ignore him at this moment.

p234 Before he received any further news from the India Office Tony wrote to Jimmy Briscoe, and

And how long do you
there? "
" Till the end of the W
after,
if I like it."

told him that he expected to get the appointment. On the very next morning he heard from Jimmy ; their letters had crossed.

"Jimmy stated that he had decided to learn something of our Eastern empire. If one is going to be useful after the War, one can't afford to miss a single opportunity of picking up information which one has not already got," the letter ran. He said that a garrison battalion was being formed of crocks who were not fit far general service. As he could ride and march, he believed he might be able to get included, and they were geing, he said, to' India. This was not less unexpected than it was welcome. But if any doubts existed before as to Tony's desire to go East, the thought of going there along with Jimmy Briscoe soon dispelled them all.

In due course the India Office offered Tony the refusal of a billet in a military department. Disregarding the final advice of. his father, he accepted it. He failed to realize that Briscoe and he might never meet, even If they did go to' India. Jimmy was going with a garrison battalion whereas he was gaing as an official of the Indian Government. They might be stationed a thousand miles apart, for, of course, he had only a vague idea of the size and distances of India. Just as two people in England can always p235 arrange to meet now and again at week-ends even if they are situated at extremities of the country, so he pictured it to be in India. But Jimmy had exerted a hidden influence over him, and the fact that they were both acting under the same idea, and were both going East, seemed to be a guarantee that he was doing right.

Upon Tony's acceptance of their offer, the India Office had sent word that he must hold himself in readiness to proceed to India at a date to be notified later; so he promptly wrote to Jimmy and told him to get leave at the earliest opportunity, and come to stay with them.

" If you will meet the train arriving 5.30 on such and such a day, you will find me there," he replied in a characteristic note, and named a day three weeks ahead.

If it had been anyone else Tony felt he would have demanded later confirmation before he used his father's meagre supply of petrol to meet any

train. On this occasion he just turned up to time, and found Jimmy already on the station. Tony looked at his watch and the station clock, and apologized fer being two minutes late. .

" You are not late," Jimmy said. " The train has not arrived yet."

" How did you come then? Why didn't you wire if you were coming earlier? "

" Oh, I came down by the 1.30, but I wanted time to change. "

p236 " But surely, you know you need not put on glad rags for us."

" Yes, but, you see, I was covered in oil, and your mother would hardly like it on her chairs."

" What have you been doing? " asked Tony with surprise, though if he had had time to think he might have guessed what his friend had been up to.

"I've had a week's leave which I've spent greasing engines on the railway; they arranged to drop me here at one-thirty to-day, and seemed quite sorry to be losing my gratuitous services, in fact, nearly as loth to part with me as they were to accept me a week ago."

" What do you mean by spending a week like that, when you ought to have been staying with us. "

" Well, I shall want every bit of knowledge I can get after the War, and delightful as it is staying with you, I felt that I had more to learn elsewhere. I sucked you all dry last time I was here."

" Get in the car, and chuck your overalls, or whatever they are, behind; you are mad, Jimmy," said Tony as he started up the engine.

" So you're another of these madmen who want to go to India," said Mr. Jackson as he and Jimmy shook hands in the smoking-room.

" Yes, I'm one of them; but I don't feel any symptoms of insanity, Mr. Jackson:"

p237 " Well, then, why does a boy like you, who has done well in the War, got maimed, and won two decorations, not rest content and enjoy what he's got ? You are one of the few who can conscientiously be seen about England, and can take what enjoyment is going."

"But the future, Mr. Jackson," returned Jimmy, smiling (he loved an argument with Tony's father), "what of the future? An

individual, from his own point of view, may live for the day; he just grows, reaches his prime, then decays and dies and he can do nothing to prevent it. Therefore you may argue that the individual should live for the day. But each individual is also a member of society and society never dies, rather its prospects depend upon the foresight of individuals. As a member of society then one should always live for the future, whatever one's end may be. That's what I'm doing now, finding and storng knowledge which may be useful later on. Foresight is the power to draw inferences from facts. Those facts I am studying now, and I don't want to confine my study to England."

"Stop it, Jimmy, it's time to dress for dinner," Tony interjected, "you forget that my father has not the boon of being in khaki, and has therefore to array himself in black and white, and that my mother will have a few words to say to him, if he's late." He felt that p238 once they let Jimmy get into his stride there would be no stopping him.

Tony had arranged for Joan to come and stay with them while Jimmy was there, and he motored over and fetched her next day.

She was very upset about them going to India, as she said they were the only people she cared about seeing at the present time. All the 'same, she brightened up, and the party was a very successful one. The weather was perfect and they took full advantage of it.

"I shall always remember that week," said Jimmy later, " as typical of perfect life in some of England's best country." He told Tony at the time that he thought the latter ought not to leave England but rather to stay behind and be a 'comfort to Joan.

" But she likes being with you far more than with me," said Tony, "because of the fact that you saw poor Bremner last."

" That's too illogical for words," he replied.

" It may be, but it's true; there's no logic where women are concerned."

The day before Briscoe was due to leave, he was, recalled by a telegram saying that he must join the 1st Gn. Battalion of the -- Regiment, which would be leaving for India at an early date. The telegram arrived on a perfect afternoon, and

found all three of them sitting on a shady bank beside the river. Tony had taken his fishing rod
p239 down, while Jimmy and Joan followed him ready to assist in landing anything, if fortune were to favour them. Tony had taught Jimmy to throw a fly by this time, and after a few lessons he promised soon to eclipse his teacher at the art. They took it in turns to use the one rod, and after an hour or so's fishing had captured three brace of beautiful trout. Jimmy raved about the fishing with just the same enthusiasm as everything else he took up, and that afternoon he had succeeded in collecting a large fish from a most difficult position under bushes which overhung a stretch of very fast water, The difficulty had been increased by Tony's game leg, which prevented him from being able to get a foothold in the easiest position to land the trout, and nearly precipitated him headlong into the river. In the end, their joint efforts had been successful, and they were reposing under the shade of a tall hedge watching another big fish lower downstream swallowing floating flies with a regularity which made them hopeful of another success. A row of alders cast a welcome shadow over the stream where it gurgled over some stones, and then subsided into deeper water as it rounded a bend overhung with bushes; from beneath these came the monotonous flop of the big fish rising, and each flop was succeeded by a ring of ripples which followed each other to the bank. Higher up, some cows were standing in the water, cooling
p240 themselves in a delightfully idle way, and the green all round was perfect. It was England at its very best.

All three would probably have gone to sleep and left the big trout undisturbed, had not a boy with a telegram trespassed upon their solitude. It was Briscoe's recall.

"I don't know whether I like this sort of afternoon," said Jimmy when he had read it. " It is too perfect, one has to come back to the realities of life in the end."

"What is it ? " said Tony.

" I have to go, " he replied, "the crocks' battalion is leaving at an early date. Anyhow, I've had and enjoyed my leave. It's demoralizing, this is: we've been living for the present . to-day. Let's get that big fish. It's your turn.';

" Have you really got to go, Mr. Briscoe ? " said Joan in an appealing voice.

" I have, Miss Elliot. Why?"

"Because the whole world seems slipping away, first Douglas, then you, and then this one" she said putting her hand on Tony's shoulder. " You two are the last links with all I've loved and with my past happiness. I wish I could go too. The whole world seems changing, and I seem left."

" Live for the future, Miss Elliot. You are still young. It May be as sweet or sweeter than p241 the past," said Jimmy, in a manner which Tony had never heard from him before. He was always courteous and pleasant; but this time there was a note of sentiment in his voice.

" Leave me alone, while you two go and catch your fish," she said.

The fish proved to be too much for their combined efforts and after a short struggle, went upstream, taking with it about three feet of cast. All were rather silent as they went home, in spite of their good afternoon's sport. There is something in the atmosphere of perfect English country which makes people sentimental and unfit to face the stern realities of the world. Once they are away from the scenes of human strife, where all the prizes of life are fought for and won, they seem to forget the hard and cold facts which are going on around them in the world. A small thing brings them to their senses, and they feel depressed. This telegram recalling Jimmy, the most ordinary and natural thing in the world to happen, brought these three suddenly back to the cold-blooded fact of war; and their spirits seemed to have disappeared. On reaching home Tony found a telegram for himself. " You will be attached to the 1st Garrison Battalion of -- Regiment, for duty *en route* to India. Report to the O.C. at -- immediately." It was the most startling piece of news imaginable, and neutralized the depressing effects of Briscoe's order.

p242 " Jimmy," he said. "I'm coming with you; read this," and handed him the telegram.

" What, are you off too? " said Joan, rousing herself from her silent meditation.

" Yes, and going along with Jimmy, too, that's the best of it."

" You are the last link with the past; and now

you're off," she said and hurried away to her room.

" She's very cut up about it," said Jimmy, " but she'll be all right. She's got a future like all of us ; and she'll learn to live for it in time."

The evening was spent in preparations for an early departure. Packing in Tony's case was a pretty considerable business, and his mother helped him with it.

Joan offered her services to Jimmy, and they were gratefully accepted. He had a very un-extensive kit, but even this was difficult for a one-armed man to manipulate. Tony had noted with great satisfaction the touch of tenderness that came into Jimmy's voice when speaking to Joan on one or two occasions lately. It was, of course, no use looking for anything more than friendship between them. Joan would quite probably never love anyone again. But it was, at least, good to feel that his two friends were friends of each other.

The packing being over, all reposed themselves on deck-chairs in the garden for a last chat before turning in

p243" How long do you boys think it will be before you're home again? " asked Mr. Jackson.

"Jimmy says the War will probably last another two or three years," interjected Joan. Tony noticed with satisfaction that she had taken to calling Jimmy by his Christian name. So the packing had broken down this formality between them.

"I should think that's about right," said Tony

" We've got to win and we can't do it in less."

" Well, when the time comes, we must all meet again here," replied his father. " We'll keep a bottle or two of the vintage we had to-night for it. You'll get no port like that in India."

" WeIl, Jimmy, that'll be something to come home for," laughed Tony.

" We'll do our damnedest to earn it and appreciate it the more. About three .years should see it through, Mr. Jackson, Jimmy answered.

Mrs. Jackson kept silent with her thoughts.

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# CHAPTER XI

## EAST OF SUEZ

A NUMBER of British troops were disgorged from a very dirty train upon the docks of Brindisi, and a very old colonel was endeavouring to discover what he was to do with them, without result. The 1st Garrison Battalion of the -- regiment was on its way to India, and Tony Jackson was attached to it for duty *en route.* "Can anyone speak Italian?" shouted the colonel to the sergeant-major, who passed it on.

" I 'eard Lieutenant Briscoe talking to one of the Italians just now, sir," replied the old soldier.

" Tell him I want to speak to him."

" Do you speak Italian, Briscoe?" said the colonel as Jimmy walked towards him.

" A very little, sir."

"Then come with me to these embarkation people, please. We are not getting on very fast. "

Briscoe went off to perform the duty which can only be performed by a good linguist- the duty of acting as a connecting-link between different-speaking members of the human race. Jimmy spoke to the Italian officers as though he had been p245 one of themselves, but there was not another British officer with the battalion who could so much as explain what he wanted to eat or drink. As Tony looked over the dark Adriatic, he mentally decided that the public school man was the worst educated soul alive. Ever since 1914 his pride in his own education had continually been suffering these reverses. He had made Jimmy promise to have dinner with him before they went on board, because he knew that he would fare better if he was accompanied by someone who could speak the language. Tony almost felt a peevish jealousy of this man who could speak Italian fluently, while he, with a university education, could only look on. However, when the time came he was glad to have Jimmy's assistance; and together they ate the best dinner that could be procured in Brindisi.

"This war's a big thing, isn't it, Jacker ? " said Briscoe, after having been silent for nearly

a quarter of an hour.

" I've always thought so; have you only just discovered it ? "

" Well, we've just had it brought home to us a bit more. "We've been travelling now for nearly four days, and have seen all sorts of people. We started from the Midlands of England, crossed the sea, passed through France, along the Riviera, and now down Italy. Everywhere men and women are under the same cloud- War. All p246 these millions are struggling and fighting to do one another down. The individual disappears altogether in this vast ocean of humanity."

"Yes, it is remarkable," replied Tony reflectively, "and the quietest spot of all was the one we left first; they know less of the War in the jolly old English countryside than any place I've been."

As they walked towards the docks to join their transport, the harbour was lit up with flashes; all lights had been covered according to instructions, and the darkness was only stabbed by the beams of searchlights from the Italian warships, which scoured the sky. A shower of shells burst somewhere high above them, and people went hurriedly into the houses to take cover from falling fragments. An air raid was in progress. After three and a half days of travelling from the heart of England, they were still in the war-infected area. All mankind were sharing in this great madness.

A week later they were in the Red Sea. The sight of British and French cruisers at Port Said carried on the continuous path of war, which seemed as though it would never cease, and must continue round the entire world. Along the banks of the canal were troops from the yeomanry manning trenches against a possible raid, and so the trail continued all the way to Suez. Then something changed. Whether it was the climatic p247 effect upon their imagination, which dulled them all and made them sink into the lassitude of their surroundings, or whether the momentary absence of warships and trenches from their sight had a reactionary effect upon overstrained minds, neither of them could say, but they seemed to forget the cause which had brought them where they were and to imbibe a new atmosphere.

It had been, as they thought then, a tremen-

dously hot day, and they were looking over the ship's side towards the west, where the sun was just beginning to set. Discipline seemed automatically to have relaxed since passing Suez, though there were no orders to that effect. Tony felt that a delightful sloppiness had come over him, and he just gave himself over to the air of *laissez faire* which seemed to hang about. As he looked over the side at the most perfect evening he had ever seen, he felt that he had come into his own. The air and surroundings seemed suited to the classical education. He could picture Greek dramatists producing their beautiful but useless art, useless at any rate when it came to a nation fighting for existence. Fighting seemed far away from his present surroundings; one could not fight for existence in such air as this ; one just existed somehow, and could not trouble to look into the causes.

He remembered the old man in the London club. "They like 'Varsity fellows in India," he p248 had said; and certainly it seemed to Tony as though he was getting into an atmosphere suitable for the casual manner and the ignorance about the world at large, which was imbued in the alumni of Oxford.

The classics were in their element at last; their antiquated useless culture fitted in with surroundings which seemed to obscure the hard, cold facts of life, and lead one on to doubt their very existence.

Just as he was drinking in his surroundings, and losing himself in them, a hand was placed upon his shoulder. He looked round in a lazy manner, and saw Jimmy standing there, bolt upright, with his eyes as keen as ever. There was nothing of the *neglige* attitude about him.

" Well," Tony said, " come to have a look at the sunset? "

"Didn't come for that, though it's worth looking at; but, I say, I hate this attitude of slackness that's come over everyone since we left Suez. The fellows were quite efficient and smart before we left Italy. I'm orderly officer to-day: just been down to inspect the quarters ; you never saw such a mess in all your life. Neither the C.O. nor anyone else cares a damn. If the fellows are drunk, it doesn't matter. If the

fellows are sick, it doesn't matter.: The medical officer's too slack to turn out unless you make p249 him. Everyone seems to have gone to pieces all at once."

"My dear Jimmy, the effect of the East, haven't you felt it? The hard, pushing life of Europe has been left behind us; I think it delightful to have this feeling of peace for a change."

" You don't mean to say you've succumbed to your surroundings already? That's what all these others have done. Remember you are a European; for God's sake don't become an Easterner the moment you get out East. We are representatives of England, and we shan't govern India much longer unless we keep ourselves as Englishmen, even amidst our new surroundings. We must maintain ourselves superior to the enervating effects of the East, or someone will come along who can, and out we shall go, that's all. "

All Tony's dreams of the classics and Greek theatres seemed to fade away before this vigorous attack, and he looked at Briscoe. The latter stood in the fading light, typical of the successful man, the man that wins all along in the struggle for life, the man who always comes through in the competition with others. There were no other signs of war about them, yet he stood there and reminded Tony of the scene which had taken place in a trench at Loos nearly a year before. They were representatives of Britain in the East p250 and must keep above their surroundings, or other
Europeans would come along who could. That was his idea. The soft culture of Oxford had once more to bow to cold-blooded efficiency.

Then Tony looked back at the sea. The light was fading fast. The orb of the sun had disappeared, and the rosy tints of the sky were fast changing to delicate saffron. There was not a single cloud in sight. The surface of the sea was growing darker. It was turning from blue to black, and its colour was blended with the changing shades of the sunset; it assumed the richest colour imaginable, quite indescribable by any epithet in the English language. As he cast about for one in his mind, Tony recalled Homer's adjective. It was the only one which could

possibly describe it ; of course, it was the" wine-dark" sea.

This brought him back to the classics again. Then he looked at Jimmy beside him. " Would the classics ever be preserved at all, without such men as you? " he thought.

To keep superior to one's surroundings, is a hard thing for most people; but to a man who had fought his way up from a miner's cottage to a British officer, Tony supposed it was nothing out of the way.

. . . . . .

Bombay knew nothing of the War In 1916
p251 except that it was enjoying a period of unprecedented prosperity. Whisky had gone up in price, but then there was much more money to pay for it, so what did it matter? A hospital was being erected to the memory of the Governor's son who had been killed in action, and this brought it home to those who took the trouble to think about what they saw. More British officers required accommodation in Bombay, and there was more opportunity for Parsee landlords to rob them and grow fat; no action was taken to protect the rights of men who were serving the state. The government was made up of men, like Tony Jackson, educated in the classics, who had found it impossible to keep themselves superior to their surroundings. They were scarcely alive to what was going on in Europe; they were sloppiness itself.
Jimmy Briscoe took all this in at a glance, and could have told as much after one day in Bombay as most people could observe after a yeal." travelling throughout India. Neither of them spoke on the subject. After Jimmy’s little outburst in the Red Sea, Tony had taken every precaution to jerk his mind into activity and keenness. He found it singularly hard to do. At home one had never had to worry about this. Everyone was trying to do their utmost, and one did the same as everyone else. He now found himself placed among people who had never been to Europe since 1914,
p252 and who were, in many respects, half a century out of date. Living a comparatively easy life, with ample salaries assured for the time being, they seemed to lack incentive. They had been

men of far greater ability than Tony when they came out, and they came from the same old public school class. They had drifted into this way of living, why should not he? He nearly did but then he always saw the picture of Jimmy on 'that ship, with his empty sleeve, and his ribbons up. He was so terribly efficient, and Tony feebly tried to be the same. But the classical education was not suited to it.

After a day in Bombay, Briscoe had gone with part of his garrison battalion to Agra. Before he went, Tony made him promise that he would write in six months' time and give his views on India.

While these six months were passing, Tony had the opportunity of learning many things about himself, and of shattering many illusions. He had regarded himself as naturally energetic and thorough, more so perhaps than a good many others, with whom he came in contact. These natural qualities would, he hoped, carry him along successfully. He now received a rude awakening. His nature was just the same as, and not superior to, that of others, and if he allowed himself to drift, he should follow the same road. He discovered that nature will p253 always sink to the level of its surroundings ; it is therefore a useless guide for a European in the East. What would keep a man above Eastern influences? He could find nothing for a time, then he remembered Jimmy's remark on board ship about them being the representatives of England. Reason, he thought; scrap Nature and take to Reason; nothing else can help a man to keep efficient and active among demoralizing surroundings.

Six months after his arrival he was lounging in one of the long cane chairs peculiar to India, and his boots were being removed by a dusky servant. He was in the throes of demoralization. He had already come to look upon this servile ministration to his smallest needs as due to him by right. Just picture it in England, he thought; imagine a body servant seated on the floor, detaching your boot and holding your foot at a comfortable angle until he has placed an oriental slipper beneath it to prevent the sacred member from coming into contact with the ground. That was the occupation in which his servant was frequently engaged;

and he enjoyed it; or rather he had ceased to enjoy it, and had now come to regard it as a matter of course. A figure moved silently in the veranda outside, and he would have been unaware of the presence of anyone, but for the shadow which was cast across the doorway.
" Kuch admi bahar hai " (there is a man outside),
p254 he said to the servant. The latter went out and returned with a letter. As he knew few people in India, and only expected letters when the home mail came in, this was a surprise. Then he knew the writing. It was Jimmy's promised letter.

From its bulk he guessed that it contained the accumulated sentiments of the last half year upon things in general. He was not disappointed. It went straight to the point. "The British policy of *laissez-faire,"* it began, "has reached its climax in India. We house our soldiers in badly lit and badly ventilated barracks. We take no adequate steps to see that suitable accommodation is provided for our officers at a suitable price. We send Territorials on tropical service, clothed in European uniform. We cling to everything old and reject everything new, and instead of compelling the men at the head of departments to retire and make way for new blood, we extend their tenure, and allow the affairs of the country to be directed by men just a few years older than usual.

" There are three points taken into consideration when promoting men in the service of the Government of India, (1) Seniority, (2) the man's wife, (3) whether the man is what is known as a 'sahib.' On the whole, appointments are solely governed with reference to seniority, but sometimes the winning graces of a young wife may be able to alter this.
p255 Anyhow, one thing is certain. Few appointments are ever made with due consideration as to a man's fitness for the work he has to do. Success depends upon a passive attitude towards things in general, and particularly upon never disturbing the next above one in order of seniority. You cannot be censured for what you do not do, but you may be dismissed for what you do do. Many a man does as little as he possibly can for fear of worrying someone above him. He gives the state a poor return for his salary and dreams of nothing but his pension.

" The power rests in the hands of a bureaucratic civil service which frames the laws to suit itself, and looks upon the Army as an unavoidable nuisance. We could admire the members of this service if only they were imperialists, for many of them have given the best years of their lives to improve the condition of refractory and lethargic natives, who would readily stick them in the back.

"*But,* they are not imperialists, and that is where the weakness of our position lies. They forget the ideals and aims of the Empire, which called their service into being, the best paid and most influential civil service in the world. They see nothing incongruous in asking British soldiers to hold the frontier against invaders, and yet starving British expeditions in Mesopotamia. They live under the protection of the combined resources of the Empire, and do not compel India p256 to furnish her contribution to the common cause. In fact they forget they are Europeans, and begin to think and act as Indians, and instead of bringing European efficiency into the things they touch, they sink themselves into Asiatic sloth. The effect of India upon our own people is indeed a bad one; its surroundings are too strong for us, and drag us down to their level. "

" So much for the political aspect of our life in India. Now for the social aspect. India is essentially the country of whisky, cigars and clubs; I have no doubt that you agree about that. The life might be a pleasant one, but for the intense officiousness of everyone, and the extraordmary manner in which people inquire into whether one is or is not, a 'sahib.' We seem to be subject to a very inefficient form of German militarism ; the junior man must not address the senior man in a familiar way in the club, whether they belong to the Army, Civil Service, or anything else. The opinions of the junior man are dismissed by the senior as beneath contempt, and the latter will not condescend to improve the mind of the former by discussing his views in front of him. We live in an age where criticism is free and open, at least in Europe. Criticism is not allowed in India, except by Indians.

" I was invited to a dinner party at the commissioner's the other day, and I foolishly went; I got into serious trouble for monopolizing the

p257 conversation with a lady who was intended for the amusement of our senior major. As you know, I am always on the look out for information, and she seemed well able to tell me a few things, so I butted in.

" I suppose you are getting on all right out here ; you are a public school man and all that. As far as I can make out a ' sahib' and a public school man are about the same thing, and I am always getting asked by fellows what my school was. Your old friend was right when he told you India was the place for the public school man.

" I find this soldiering a dreadful job; there is absolutely nothing to do, and the difficulty is to pass the day. I'm studying various languages; it is the most interesting and useful way of spending one's time. It will be a strange thing in England after the War, when a considerable number of men with votes come home, who know something about India. We were all ignorant about it, weren't we ? We don't show much signs of being that great imperial people which we are supposed to be, at least, not so far as our rule in India is concerned. These things worry one now; but the knowledge will be useful after the War. After the War: that is the whole thing as far as I am concerned. I'm not much use to the Empire now, but I'm determined to be when it's over, and I don't regret having come to p258'the East; I have learnt such a lot that I didn't know before.

" Do you remember what you said about Miss Booth Gravely and others not representing any important part of the people in England? Well, you were right, eh! The British public are playing up splendidly, aren't they? They seem ready to submit to anything which will help us to win this struggle. If we had a little of that spirit out here, we should soon make things go. Keep in touch with all things English. England is going to be an interesting place after the War, if the right men come forward to build it up. Nations and constitutions have to be scrapped at intervals in the world's history to give humanity something to do in building them up again. Forget all about the present, and live for the day when the constructional work will begin. A man will be lucky to be alive then. It is no use you

and I having escaped from thousands of flying bullets, unless we are going to make the most of the opportunity of reconstruction."

The letter contained some more allusions to casualties among members of the old regiment and other such things of personal interest, but it was quite sufficient to show that Jimmy was unaltered by his new surroundings. He was keeping himself fixed upon the same object- the future. His hopefulness was unwavering: he was just as immune from the effect of circum-
P259 stances as he had been before. He was a type in himself, and true to that type whether fortune placed him in riches or poverty, in Europe or Asia. Where all of us went under and became immersed in the lethargy of the East, he kept his head up. He never forgot that he was an Englishman. As Tony finished reading the letter, his servant was laying out his dress clothes for dinner, placing the cuff links in a clean shirt, and arranging everything just so that he could slip into it with the least possible amount of trouble. He could not help wondering whether Jimmy refused to have a servant doing these things for him or whether he allowed him to do just the same, and still kept himself undemoralized by such servile attention to his smallest wants. Was he one of those who could live among such circumstances, and yet never let himself expect them as the ordinary course of events? Was he one of the few who could live in the East through his whole career without degenerating and remain a true European in mind and soul? If so, then they could do with more of his type in India.

p260

## CHAPTER XII

### *ARMA VIRUMQUE*

TONY replied to Jimmy's letter, and did his best to refute the theories expressed therein about the East, and about things in general ; but he felt he did not succeed too well. He pointed out that the record of the sahibs in India had been a proud one. The public school men had proved to be the men for the job, and had accomplished far the greatest achievement in governing Asiatics which stood to the credit of a European nation. He told Jimmy that he hoped to meet him in the

course of the next few months, and that he thought they might both take a little leave at the "Same time, and go away together. Tony received no answer to this, and some months later he wrote again, when the heat was beginning to try his liver and temper, suggesting that the time had arrived for a fortnight's casual leave. He still got no reply, and as he knew that Jimmy's regiment was still stationed at Agra, he did not know what to make of it. He felt perhaps that Jimmy was annoyed with him for suggesting such a thing as taking leave in war time; but if that were the case, he felt sure that he would not hesitate to write and say so, A few weeks later Tony ran p261 across a man in the club, who had just come from
Agra, and took the opportunity of asking him whether he had met a certain Second-Lieutenant Briscoe up there. He said he had, but that Briscoe was no longer in Agra, and he did not know where he had gone to. So Tony did the only thing there was to be done when Jimmy disappeared, he just waited.

The hot weather was negotiated without any leave, and Tony did not really feel any the worse for it; the thought of going on leave by himself did not appeal to him, and he gave up the idea without thinking any more about it, with the additional satisfaction of having strengthened his claim to it for the subsequent year. As time went by he got more and more out of touch with the War in Europe. The most he could do was to study the English papers carefully, which arrived by each mail, and to seize upon all fresh arrivals and cross-examine them as to the condition of affairs at home. The whole world seemed to be slipping away from him, and as the mails became more irregular and their arrival was delayed for longer intervals, there was a tendency to feel that he was forgotten, and left unheeded. The battles in which he had taken part seemed like history, and his association with Jimmy Briscoe also seemed to be a thing of the past; for he heard nothing of him, and but for Joan's inquiry after his welfare in letters which he received from her, p262 Jimmy might almost have been forgotten. But the world is too small to hide such men for long. Tony. thought of the days before August 1914, of the dinners and dances to which he used to go

in London, of the games of cricket which he used to play at Oxford, and when he thought of them it seemed to him that it was well to be away from an England which knew them no more. It was the consolation of knowing that England was not what it had been that made him less homesick and more satisfied with his lot. But as with others so with him there lurked some trace of the homing instinct, somethmg which, quite unreasonably, attracted him to the home in which he had been bred and reared, though he knew it to be different from what it was and less comfortable than the surroundings in which he was placed. He heard men lie to themselves and force themselves to believe the contrary. "I don't care for England. It has no attraction for me," he had heard them say, and all the while he felt they were only saying it to console themselves. The very things he despised himself for having done there, he inwardly longed to do again. The old " Freshers' blind" at Oxford, or a dinner with Bunny Fenton at the N.R. Club, all seemed so absurdly trivial now; but, given a chance, Tony would have gone miles to partake of either again. Thus it is that the real psychology of a nation cannot be changed in a day. It has been bred through p263 generation after generation, it has been moulded by circumstances and tradition, and if it be faced with the hardships of a great war, well, the most it can do is to adapt itself to the circumstances, but it cannot be wholly changed till a new generation arises. Just as Tony was unable to shake off his craving for the fields and streams of the English countryside, so others found it to be with reference to their comfortable town houses, their wine, and their women. The signature of the German Emperor to a document declaring war on France could not alter their desires and habits one jot or tittle; these could only become altered in the generation which was in its infancy and about to be educated under the cloud of war.

All this time in India, Tony had much opportunity for thought. He sat down and looked on Europe, as though from a mountain-top, through the English papers and periodicals. Previously he was in the middle of this surging torrent, now he seemed to look on from outside, and his object was to prevent it spreading to the uninfected area under his control. Rumour was persistent in its

stories of European defeats and successes which were often entirely imaginative, and exaggerated beyond all recognition. The home press did nothing much to enlighten people as to the real truth, and one began to see that natives of the Orient were becoming incredulous about the numbers of the enemy which the Allies had
p264 killed, and the defeats which they had never suffered. An Indian clerk said to Tony one day, " Where do all the Germans come from? You claim to have killed more than sixty lakhs (6,000,000) already, but still it makes no difference." He had evidently been studying the calculations of a certain English journalist in a weekly paper, who claimed that the Allies had killed off the whole German Army early in 1915 Tony had to apologize for the inaccuracy of his fellow countryman's figures, and to assure the questioner that they were doing well, although the numbers were incorrect. His apology was accepted, but his assurance was taken with a grain of salt. Tony's feelings towards his surroundings were alternatively those of indifference and contempt. One day he thought" What have I to do with the native of India? What does it matter to me what he thinks or does?" Another day he was full of scorn for this vast population, almost equal to that of Europe, and yet so impotent that it could do nothing to influence the result of the world struggle; there were 315 millions of people without a word to say against the Germans if they crossed the frontier except that which would be said by armies trained by British brains, and financed with British money. Fancy asking the Englishman to interest himself in India, when his interest was centred in a struggle endangering his very home and life !
p265 But India is a large place, and though one has been in the United Provinces or Bengal, one has not seen much of it, and Tony learnt this one evening dining with an old school fellow at the club. His friend had passed into Sandhurst from school, and had obtained his commission the year before the War. Ever since August 1914 he had been detained in India. He was one of the few who were still interested to hear Tony's stories of fighting in France, for though men who had been confined to India picked up plenty of news first hand about Mesopotamia, they did not get many opportunities of hearing the tales of Ypres, Neuve Chapelle, and Loos from one who had

been there. They recalled reminiscences of the old school, and went through all the names of fellows they could both remember, and discussed what had become of them all. After they had finished, and after Tony had told all his adventures in France, he asked his friend how it was that Regular regiments like his own had been kept back from going to the front at a moment when they were so urgently needed.

" Well," he said, " we have been doing a little, though we don't get heard much of; we are kept to hold the frontier. They can't train a regiment to become efficient in frontier fighting in a week, and our battalion had been up there five years when the War broke out; so most of them knew something about it. They kept them there, as p266 they have done two or three other regiments."

" Have you had any fighting? "

"Not much; we've been having a bit of a show the last six months, but it's over now."

" Have you? " said Tony. "We don't hear anything about it."

" No, it's an isolated spot up there; snipers bullets from behind rocks, and all that. A company marches into a gully, and is suddenly fired on by some folks they can't see; men are killed without ever having a chance to kill their assailant. It's a life of uncertainty, but you get used to it the same as everything else, a bit trying to the nerves at first, though. So long as they don't introduce high explosive or gas, it'll continue to be a fine life for a man, a gentleman's job, in fact."

" This wild frontier life really exists then, does it? Plenty about it in Kipling's books, but I thought it was something of an imagination, after being in India a year or so and not seeing anything remotely similar to his descriptions."

" Oh, the frontier is no myth; it's a real outpost of the empire."

" Do you folks live up there away in the hills for years on end without ever seeing civilized life? "

" Oh, it's not like that. You may be stationed in a garrison city. Probably in Peshawar, for instance. You don't know it? Well, there you p267 have a large European community, dancing and dinners at the club, tennis and cricket. Suddenly

one's called out to chase elusive tribesmen over their native hills. A rifle clicks from behind a stone somewhere above or behind you, and it's all over. Perhaps you chase 'em into their country and burn their villages. Then you come back to garrison life and live on until you are called out again."

"Do you never get raids into the garrison town ; are you safe while you are in there ? "

" As safe as anywhere else in India. You may die of plague or fever; possibly some overbold fellow may creep in and shoot an officer in his bungalow. But it's so rare you don't think of it. To all intents and purposes you are in a well-policed community."

" It seems wonderful," Tony said reflectively. "There you live in the very heart of these savages sheltered behind the bayonets of British Tommies; and you can live with your wives in comparative peace and comfort. Venture out-side and you must do s~ with an armed force."

"Aye, and if you are collared alive-well, always have a spare bullet ready for yourself."

" Torture ? "

" Yes ; they carve a white man into little bits if they get him. Their women are the chief exponents of the art."

"Tell me about this little show you've been p268 taking part in up there lately. How is it we hear nothing of these things?" Tony chipped in, afraid that he would go on to describe some ghastly details of torture.

" Well, the numbers engaged are infinitesimal in these days; operations are carried out by a single battalion or even a company, and often the chief exploits to chronicle are those of individuals. Men are sometimes put to very great tests up there."

" How many engaged in the operations this time? "

"Rather more than usual; most of the r st Division were in it at some time or other. They started to blockade the tribes-people in the hot weather. It reaches 120 degrees in the shade up there, and sentry duty in blockhouses is far from pleasant under such conditions. We had live wires running between the blockhouses. Thought this would keep 'em from the plains and starve 'em to surrender. But you never saw such chaps.

They sent and told us that they did not think much of our live wire, and proposed to test it, asking us not to fire. At dawn one morning the men in the blockhouses saw a party of 'em advancing towards the line. A few hundred yards away they halted and prayed to their god, evidently asking him whether the wire was any good. After a few minutes they broke into wild shouts of triumph, having presumably been p269 assured by him that it was not dangerous. Then they formed into line and approached; we did not fire. They halted about a yard from the wire and, at a signal from one who was the leader, they all grasped the top strand. That second everyone of them was dead. It was scientific killing and no mistake. In an hour the bodies were unrecognizable hanging on the strands, and in a day they were charred to bits."

Tony ejaculated "Good heavens!" and the other continued:

"You might have thought that they would have been so impressed with the fate of these men, that they would have given the wire a wide berth. Not a bit of it! A few nights later, a crowd of fellows came down in the dark, armed with long poles. How they knew that wood is a non-conductor, I can't say. Anyhow, they levered up the wire, posts and all, propped it up at a spot equidistant between two block-houses, and got through without being spotted. They rounded up a number of cattle and killed thirty policemen 'on the outskirts of Peshawar, and returned driving the cattle under the wire. Then they let the wire back again. The only trace they left where they got through was the carcases of some cattle which had touched the wire while they were being driven underneath. The sentries in the blockhouses knew nothing about it. That gives you some idea of p270 fellows we have to deal with. Death is nothing to them: they don't care a damn for it."

"Very interesting to hear all this," said Tony. "What about the active operations in that country? "

" Well, we had the usual game. We chased the fellows over the hills, but never caught 'em properly. We burned every village we came to, and all their crops. We had aeroplanes trying to drop bombs on 'em too: as Kipling'd say, 'It wasn't 'ardly fair.' I don't think they worried

much about the bombs, but they didn't like wasting rifle ammunition on the aeroplanes; it's too valuable up there. We only got into touch with 'em once, and then we nearly got a nasty licking, if it hadn't been for that interpreter fellow, but I suppose you know all about that."

" No, what is it ?"

" Well, let's get into some comfortable chairs, and I'll teIl you," said his friend, getting up from the table. They sat down in long cane chairs and ordered two whiskies and soda. His friend lit a cheroot and began.

" I thought everyone knew about this show. Anyway, you must have seen the V.C. announced in the gazette." Tony felt rather ashamed of himself for not having seen it and aIlowed him to proceed.

" We'd driven the enemy out of a series of viIlages, and, as we thought, rounded him up into p271 a corner. A battalion of Gurkhas had been co-operating with us in a sweep across country. The object was to pin the enemy up against the high mountains and hold him there tiIl he gave in for want of food. Owing to the uneven state of the country, the hostile force had become broken up into two parties, and the Gurkhas were confining their attention to one lot, while we rounded up the other. When we thought we had got them all in front of us, we advanced on to the plateau at the foot of the mountains, and surrounded their position with a cordon of out-posts. But it turned out that when we had got separated from the Gurkhas, a strong party of the enemy had broken out between us; these now cut our communication with the rear and closed the pass by which we had entered the plateau. Things looked pretty unpleasant, and the prospect of attacking these feIlows on the hiIls on either side of the pass was not inviting. There was also the additional possibility that they might decide to attack us, and with their advantage of numbers and position they could have made it pretty hot. It was one of those moments in frontier warfare, when you've got to act or go under, and it's long odds you go under either way.

"We were deliberating on the plan of campaign, when the interpreter, who, by the way, had no business to have been up with us at all, but had

p272 obtained leave from the general to go and have a look at the operations, asked the C.O. for a word outside, and apparently said that he would guarantee to dislodge the devils that night, if the C.O. would let him select fifty men, and, if he failed, then we could assault the position or wait for help as we might decide. He was a most extraordinary fellow, this interpreter, he had the most remarkable influence over the C.O., and more still over the men. He was apparently a promoted ranker with the D.C.M. and M.C. up. Only been out in India about a year, but somehow picked up a frontier language. Apparently when he passed the language examinations the examiners had recommended that he should be employed, if possible, in some capacity where he could use his knowledge. He was an officer of a garrison battalion, but they took him away from that and offered him this job as soon as we started operations in the Mohmand country .. He'd been fighting in France and lost an arm, and so we all looked on him as the deuce of a man. "

" Wait a minute, did you say he had lost an arm and had got the M.C. and D.C.M. ? "

" Yes."

" God, I know the man."

" Well, I was telling you all this to explain how it was he came to prevail upon the C.O. to let him attempt the job. We asked him what he p273 proposed to do, and he wouldn't say a thing. He said it depended on circumstances. There was nothing of the orthodox soldier about the chap, but he had a way with him and the C.O. agreed."

" Carry on: I want to hear about this," Tony was getting more and more excited.

" How that chap picked up his knowledge of frontier warfare is a mystery, " he continued, " he'd never been up there before. Anyhow he knew that though the natives up there arc damned good fighters if they get a chance, they are not likely to keep sentry very carefully at night. Half their sentries may be expected to go to sleep, and if they are noiselessly put out of the way, there is a fair hope of success. So he determined to tackle these sentries and took fifty picked men for the purpose.. He had previously been teaching these men a little grip which he said he used in France; though he had only one hand, he took delight in explaining it.

" , You may want it,' he used to say, 'if you

come up against a Boche; it's a fair death for a Boche,' and the men had practised it amongst themselves. He went and asked if any of them would volunteer to use it. As you can imagine, about half the regiment volunteered. Then he made them give exhibitions and selected the fifty most efficient at it. 'You'll have to do it well and neatly to-night,' he said, 'and then you'll have a chance to use your rifles afterwards.'
p274 The men practised it for all they were worth, and
he watched, giving' em little hints. It was very simple once you got into it, but he wanted it perfect, and I think the mere sight of a neck would have made the men do it mechanically by the time he'd done. I've never seen such a chap for getting the men to do a thing, he drew the most vivid pictures of what would happen if we fell into the hands of those tribesmen. 'You know what it means, if we get caught by these brutes, eh? Mutilation, that's what it means, a slow, lingering death, not the sort of death a man likes to die; it's torture, with a crowd of savages jeering at you. Now then, let's see you do that twist again,' and they did it agam and again,. and when he thought they knew it, he dismissed them. 'There are a good many kids who'll be without their fathers if you don't do that well to-night,' he said, when he had finished."

" My God, that's just like him, too," interrupted Tony.

" Well he went and examined the hills at the top of the pass during the day-time ; how he did it without being sniped, I can't say, but he did, and he noted the line upon which they were going to place their sentries, and marked a .spot on the side of the cliff which he could find in the dark. He got his men into position at the bottom of the hill at 10 p.m. We had a company ready behind him who were to work their way up some distance
p275 behind his men, and to do nothing till they heard
from his party. He sent his men in twos, twenty yards apart; every man had his rifle on his back and nothing in his hand, and no round in the breach of his rifle, so that there should be no fear of one of them losing his head and giving the show away by letting it off. He went up

alone in the middle of his party armed with a naked bayonet, as he'd only got one hand. He sent the men in twos to give them confidence, and ordered them to move steadily up, keeping in touch with the pair on either side, until they should see any enemy sentries who would become visible silhouetted against the skyline. Then they were to distribute themselves so as to deal effectively with the number of sentries which they found opposed to them. These were to be noiselessly despatched, and then the party was to advance silently on to the crest. Having got themselves into position, one of them was to be sent down to guide us through the gap in the sentry line. The whole thing depended upon the silent despatch of those sentries. If they gave the alarm, well, it would have been impossible to advance up that slope under fire, one could only go on hands and knees most of the way. His scheme was favoured by the fact that the sentry posts were quite forty yards apart, so his party was able to allow four men for each. The work was neatly and efficiently done, except in one case p276 where the unfortunate sentry began to give tongue, but as his colleagues on either side were being satisfactorily dealt with, he did not manage to raise the alarm before our friend's bayonet disappeared into his neck and shut him up. They reached the top successfully and sent a guide to fetch the rest of us. Just then, one of the men, who was advancing to get in touch with the others who had lain down in line about thirty yards farther on, stumbled over a couple of the enemy lying asleep on the ground; these chaps got up and yelled like hell before anyone could stop them, and that gave the show away. The whole damned camp were out in a minute. Briscoe--"

" I knew who it was," broke in Tony, " without you mentioning his name; never mind, carry on."

"Well, Briscoe gave his chaps orders to get their rifles ready and see that the enemy did not reach the spot where we were going to come up. He knew that it would be all right if only we could once get the crest. We were about half an hour behind him, and it must have been an awful fight while they were waiting for us. I should say the enemy were not much less than a thousand strong. A few of his chaps were caught before

they got their rifles going, and several were overwhelmed by numbers, but the enemy had a job to spot them lying down, and though thousands of rounds were fired at them, most went wide of
p277 the mark. Anyhow, it was a mighty sharp fight, and by the time we got there, Bristoe had only twenty men left, and his last round left in his revolver. It was easy enough when we arrived, but it must have been hell. By Jove the chap deserved his decoration, but he had rotten luck."

" Why? "

" Just after we had got the upper hand of the devils a bullet caught him on the left-hand side of the face just level with the eye, and it has done his eye in, I'm afraid. He doesn't seem to worry about it though."

" You don't mean to say he's lost his eye. "

"No, he's not lost it, but he's blind in it. "

" Eye and arm both gone now; what rotten luck some men have! He's got the V .C., you say. Well, he earned it once before, but only got the M.C."

Before Tony went to bed that night he had to tell Hobson, for that was his school friend's name , the story of Jimmy's other escapades against the Germans.

"What's happened to him now?" said Tony, when he had finished.

" Why, he's coming out of hospital in a week and then he's coming down here on leave ; said there was some pal of his whom he particularly wanted to see, down here."

p278 " I'm the pal; that's the best bit of news I've heard for long enough."

" He's one of the finest men I've ever seen; and not been to a public school either."

" There are plenty of fine men besides public school men, and they make us feel very uneducated sometimes, too."

" I don't think it matters where you educate a man like Briscoe; he's just one in a thousand. He'd be the same under any circumstances."

" He doesn't think that himself; he says that he owes everything to the fact that he had to educate himself, and specially to the fact that he never got chalked down as belonging to anyone particular class. Always says that if he had been

to a public school he would have been the same as any of us."

For a long time the two old public school boys sat silently thinking, until, at last, Tony broke the spell, and suggested that it was time to go to bed. They were patriotic to their old school, and weren't going to admit that its education was a failure, at least not to each other, but who can tell what they thought in their hearts?

. . . . .

A week later Jimmy came down. It was getting dark, and Tony was reclining on the veranda outside his room, watching the sunset and thinking of England, as he often did when he looked p279 towards the west. He heard a firm footstep on the flagstones at the other end of the veranda, and its very firmness made him look round; some men get into the habit of recognizing people's footsteps and Tony knew that this did not belong to either of the occupants of the rooms next to his. He experienced the same sensation which he had felt on board ship in the Red Sea nearly two years before. The figure of a man with an empty sleeve was walking towards him in the same brisk and efficient manner which he had grown to associate with Briscoe in the days when they had been soldiering together. Somehow he looked the same; he always looked the same; that feIIow: nothing seemed to alter him. One would mutilate his body and yet the unconquerable nature of his spirit just patched up the wounds and made it appear unaltered. Briscoe's personality was so much his soul, and so little his body that one had unconsciously been looking upon his soul all the time. Tony hardly noticed the new wound which disfigured his face. There was an ugly scar extending from the corner of his eye till it nearly reached his ear, but Tony hardly noticed it at the time, and only realized exactly what had happened to him after carefuIIy studying his face at dinner. All he saw, as he lay under the veranda, was just Briscoe, and he was the same as ever.

"Is it really you ? "

p280 "You'd better touch me and see, if you are short of faith," he replied.

" Do you know you've not written to me for well over six months? "

" I've had nothing worth writing about, that's why. I thought that budget I sent you had exhausted all there was to be said in general."

" What! Nothing to write about, when you've been doing things, and getting the V.C. ? "

" That's too small to be worth mentioning in these days; you must look at things in their true perspective. We do things out here which really have no effect whatever on the issue of that huge struggle which is being fought out in the West. Things out here are not really worth discussing save when they affect the Empire, and, as for our own little individual affairs, they are not one-millionth part of the human energy which is daily being concentrated on attaining one object along the battle-line in France."

" You estimate yourself and your exploits a trifle too cheaply, Jimmy. From what I understand, you saved hundreds of men's lives by capturing that ridge in the way you did."

" My dear fellow, what if I had even saved the frontier? What of it then? What effect can any of our actions here have on the main issue? There is something bigger than the whole of India at stake. The British Empire, and our ideas of civilization are at stake. If we lose in p281 Europe, what does it matter whether we stopped the Afghans coming over the frontier into India or not? Keep your eyes on Europe, man; don't forget that that is where your fate and my fate is being decided."

" There's something in what you say," Tony admitted. "Now tell me what you are going to do. How are you feeling after this wound of yours? "

" I'm right enough, but the I.M.S. don't think so. The boat leaves a week to-day."

" Are you for England? "

" The board say I must be invalided out, if I stay here; but they recommend me to go home first. "

" And what then? "

" If they like to keep me on for some job or other, they can do so."

" If not? "

"Then I must start to prepare for after the War."

" And what do you propose to take up ? "

" Been considering very carefully what particular profession will be able to exercise the most control over public opinion in the reconstruction period."

"What's your conclusion? Personally, I think the journalists seem to be getting all the power," said Tony after a moment's deliberation. "I think a nation composed of men, who have been drilled into armies, and have been p282 subjected to tests of endurance under trying circumstances, will be particularly susceptible to personal leadership. I propose therefore to study leadership! "

" And to do that you will have to become a politician. "

" Not necessarily a politician. I want to see that the masses are not beguiled by the sweet-sounding words of bogus leaders whose only idea is to provide soft jobs for themselves. I want them to understand foreign politics and imperial-ism, and all those things upon which their security depends. My enemies will be those who conceal the hard facts and necessities of self-preservation beneath the promises of internal social reforms. It'll be my business to see that each case isput fair and square and fought on its merits."

" What right have you to believe you can do such a thing? "

" None; but I can try, and I have the advan-tage of knowing the sort of leadership that men will follow."

Jimmy had remained standing all this time looking out of the veranda towards the west. At Tony's suggestion he now assumed the vacant chair and the two sat some minutes in silence, until Tony broke it.

"Jimmy," he said, looking at his watch, there's just .time before dinner to hear what p283 you've been doing and learning of late, and what
you think of things."

" My doings are of no importanc and not worth recording. In fact, since being laid out three months ago, I've been a semi-invalid and no use to anyone. As regards learning, well, when we got settled at Agra, I thought I'd have a cut at some language or other, and chose Pushtu because there were good facilities of learning it from a native battalion. It came fairly easily and enabled me to qualify for an interpreter's job with one of the English regiments engaged on

this frontier show. It was well worth it too enabled me to see into the mentality of the frontier people a bit. Of course, I've had a fair amount of time for reading, especially of late."

" How do you manage with your reading now? " interposed Tony.

" What do you mean exactly? "

" Well, I mean one eye *must* take a bit of getting used to."

" Quite enough, old man, for bookwork, but not officially recognized. in the Army."

Tony realized that, of course, it was absurd to think such a handicap would mean anything to Jimmy.

" Sorry I interrupted; carry on, Jimmy. What about the reading? "

" Well, I've been digging into finance and economics. You know; 'Lombard Street,' and p284 that kind of thing. Seems a very important aspect of the present situation and will be even more so after the War."

" Don't know much about it, they didn't teach it us at Oxford, but fire away." Tony felt he'd better honestly confess his ignorance, in case Jimmy began to ask him questions beyond his depth.

" No one knows much about it. That's the whole trouble, and it's going to get worse, as far as one can see. As far as I can understand it there are great difficulties ahead, and the financing of this old War may easily turn the world topsy-turvy for years. Take our own country. How are we finding the money? Borrowing more and more. Who is to repay the loans? Future generations ? How will they like the mill-stone we're hanging about them? At first the object for which the debt was incurred will seem to justify patriotic sacrifice. This will fade with time, and the burden of repayment will become intolerable. To start life with nothing is a fine incentive for anyone, but to start loaded with ancestral debts may drive a man to seek relief in bankruptcy. Surely the capital levy is the only sound method of financing war. Con-script one's wealth as one does one's men. If any country can devise a means of doing it, it will start at an overwhelming advantage in the after-war competition. The generation that has p285 caused the war should pay for it, and not lend

it's
money to posterity at an exorbitant rate of interest. Let posterity recreate the wealth that has been squandered, but don't load it with a hopeless debt. Don't you think so ? "

" I've not thought of it before, but there seems a lot in what you say, Jimmy. I think your throat will be wanting a little lubrication ; what'll it be?" Tony shouted" Boy," and an Indian bearer appeared out of the darkness. "A large lime squash and a touch of gin," was Jimmy's selection, and Tony ordered the same.

Jimmy, however, was now warmed up to his subject and in no mood to delay until the drinks arrived.

" Of course," he began, "there is one way of getting over the difficulty of these loans to some extent, and it may be adopted by some countries, but I fancy it will hardly commend itself to London. That is the inflation of the currency thus reducing the amount to be paid to the loan holders. Of course, if such a policy were expected, there would be no voluntary lenders, but it might come later on for all that. Foreign exchanges are bound to be irregular in any case, and the country that maintains its currency at par will have the biggest debt to pay, and will be hopelessly handicapped in export trade."

At this point the bearer returned with the drinks, and Jimmy took a breather and demolished

p286 half his pint of lime squash at one draught.

" Surely, Jimmy, it all depends on who wins the War," put in Tony, lighting a cigarette and then sucking his iced drink through two straws. " I mean, if we win the old Boche will have to payoff some of these loans; and if we don't, the blighters'll be sure to skin us to payoff their debts."

"I suppose that's the sort of popular idea. But let's think how it's going to work out. If the sums involved amounted to a mere hundred millions or so, it would not be too difficult. Payment between the nations could then be made by a few shipments of gold. But by the time this war is over, the sums expended will reach astronomical figures. If the others were to demand payment of their expenses by Germany, or vice versa, how could such payment be made? Certainly not by gold. Germany has no supply

of gold adequate for the task; in fact all the gold in the world would be hopelessly inadequate. Payments could only be made by exported goods. The creditor nations could not accept these without injuring their own industries and throwing their people out of employment; they would have to choose between admitting foreign imports *ad lib.,* or going without payment. So it would probably pay them best to cancel all the debts. Possibly there will be gold movements to begin with, but as soon as the gold supplies have mostly p287 found their way to the creditor nations all sorts of artificial methods of payment will probably be tried before everyone realizes the futility of it all. If all the gold gets into the hands of one or two nations who can say what difficulties will arise? Other nations will be short of backing for their paper currency and will have to curtail their credit. Prices in such countries will probably collapse, and the international trade will be interrupted, resulting in a world-wide economic crisis.

Jimmy paused at this point, and Tony felt his head was in a bit of a whirl, so he decided to change the subject.

" Well, Jimmy, you've certainly not wasted your time out here, and I should think you've done enough studying and are quite well enough equipped for after the War. What about earning some bread and butter? "

" I shall have a pension if they invalid me which will be sufficient to keep me from starvation. "

" But that won't suffice, all your life."

" I've had a little left me since I saw you Jacker, I'm independent now; I've got the greatest chance in the world. An independent fellow at my age, if he can't do anything, well, no one can."

Tony looked at him in silence. He wanted to ask Jimmy the history of his parents, but he p288 hesitated and thought better of it. Another idea occurred to him.

" Heard anything of Joan lately? " he asked.

" Just a card at Christmas," Jimmy hesitated a little. "By the way do you think she'd like me to look her up when I get home? "

" Of course; you know she would." Tony

looked across at his friend, but it was too dark to see his expression, and at that moment the bearer announced that dinner was ready.

THE END

THE BAR SINISTER