

BOOK OF THE WEEK:

"THE RED HORIZON."*

"Is it better to be a living coward

Or thrice a hero dead?"

"It's better to go to sleep, my lad,"

The colour sergeant said.

A realistic chronicle of the life of our lads in khaki, from the moment of enlistment till it reaches the daily, hourly experiences of the trenches. There is something so convincing in the narration, in the absence of emotionalism and sentimentalism. No dramatic force could bring home to the mere reader the awe-inspiring incidents, the marvellous soul-stirring heroism, so effectively as this matter-of-fact description of events, the very consideration of which our mind refuses to grasp. The true Celtic nature of the autobiographer speaks in the mingling of poignant pathos with racy humour, and we close the book with an added sympathy, an added respect, and a more passionate gratitude towards our heroes, though we had felt before that we were full to overflowing.

Somewhere in France the London Irish were first billeted in the rest camp, where the preliminaries were gone through, such as the serving out of the sheepskin jackets. We made our way to the canteen, where soldiers recovering from wounds worked as waiters, and told us when they had a moment to spare of hair breadth adventures in the trenches. Bayonet charges were discussed.

"We've been in three of 'em," said a quiet, inoffensive-looking youth. "They were a bit 'ot, but nothin' much to write 'ome about. Not like a picture in the papers, none of 'em. You just 'ops out of your trench and rush and roar. The Germans fire and then run off, and it's all over."

Our men were wise in selecting only necessities. All took sparingly and chose wisely. Fancy socks were passed by in silence; the homely woollen article was in great demand. Bond Street was forgotten.

The lady of the café where they were billeted lost her *petit garçon*, and he was to have been home on holiday shortly.

"Somewhere," out there, "where the guns are incessantly booming, a nameless grave holds the *petit garçon*, the café lady's son; next Sunday, another mourner will join with the many in the village church, and will pray to the Virgin Mother for the soul of her beloved boy."

How pathetic and terrible is the discovery of the sanitary man.

"He was killed in the winter," said the sanitary man, pointing to the gloves on the dead soldier's hands.

"Who is he?" I asked.

The man with the chloride of lime opened the shirt of the dead man and brought out an identity disc.

* By Patrick Macgill. Herbert Jenkins, Ltd., London.

"Irish," he said. "What's this?" taking a string of beads with a little shiny Crucifix on the end of it from the dead man's neck.

"It's his rosary," I said, and my mind saw in a vivid picture a barefooted boy going over the hills of Corrymeela to morning Mass with his beads in his hand.

"Here's a letter," said the sanitary man. "It was posted last Christmas. It's from a girl too."

How touching this letter, in which the Irish girl, his girl, tells him "Your mother and me is making the Rounds of the Cross for you and I am always thinking of you in my prayers. The socks I sent were knitted by myself, and I've put holy water on them. Don't forget to put them on when your feet get wet. It'll be a grand day when you come back, and God send the day to come soon."

How delightfully natural are the little inconsequent conversations recorded, bringing the very atmosphere of the men out there around one, oddly appealing though. It was here that Bill complained of the scanty allowance of his rations to an officer when the plum pudding was served out at dinner.

"Me and Stoner 'as got 'ardly nuffink," said Bill.

"How much have you got?" asked the officer.

"You could 'ardly see it, it's so small," said Bill, "but now it's all gone."

"Gone?"

"A fly flew away with my portion and Stoner's 'as fallen through the neck of his waterbottle."

We are conscious of great satisfaction in hearing that Bill and Stoner got a second portion.

Here is a glimpse into the inner mind of the author, relieved for the moment from the horror of the trenches.

True there was a barn with cobwebs on the rafters down the road, a snug farm where they made fresh butter and sold new laid eggs.

But there was something in the night, in the ghostly moonshine, in the straight road, in the sound of rifle firing to rear and in the sing-song by the tired boys coming back from battle that filled me with infinite pathos and a feeling of being alone in a shelterless world. "Here we are," they sang, "here we are again." I thought of Mervin and six others dead, of the white crosses, and I found myself weeping silently like a child.

And the happenings in this simple record from a powerful pen are personal experiences!

H. H.

COMING EVENTS.

April 13th.—Meeting Central Committee for the State Registration of Nurses, Council Chamber, British Medical Association, 429, Strand. 2.30 p.m.

April 14th.—National Council of Women: Special Council Meeting on New Employments for Women. Y.M.C.A. Hall, Tottenham Court Road, W.C. 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., and 2.30 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.

April 14th.—Central Midwives Board, Special Penal Meeting, Caxton Hall, S.W., 11 a.m.

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