

CHARLES GORDON JELF

BORN JUNE 8, 1886

KILLED IN ACTION OCTOBER 13, 1915

PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION

1915



Your loving son
Gordon

Art in B

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W. S.

January 1916



INTRODUCTION

CHARLES GORDON JELF, the youngest son of Canon and Mrs. Jelf, was born at The Precincts, Rochester, on June 8, 1886. He was a delicate child, and his life was preserved, humanly speaking, by the devoted care of his nurse. He was educated at Felsted Preparatory School, and at The Grange, Folkestone, from whence he went to Marlborough College as a Foundation Scholar. There he obtained junior and senior scholarships, and in 1905 went up to Oxford, having won an open scholarship at Exeter College. He took a 2nd class in Moderations, and a 2nd class in Literae Humaniores. After taking his degree in 1909, he was attached to the Department of Antiquities in Egypt, under Mr. A. E. P. Weigall, where he remained seven months, managing and superintending a large number of native workmen, and making maps, plans, and inventories of the monuments in the Theban Necropolis. He was deeply interested in this work, and in his visit to Greece on his way home.

For the next year he worked as assistant master at Fonthill School, East Grinstead, and this he looked upon as one of the happiest times of his life.

In August 1911, after a few months' study of German, he joined the staff of the *Times*, and was assistant-correspondent in Berlin until the outbreak of the war. The following account of his work there appeared in the *Times* of October 22, 1915:¹ 'His industry and

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ability soon fitted him for work for which he proved to possess some of the most important qualifications. Although the atmosphere of Berlin was in many ways uncongenial, he studied German life and international relations with an open mind, and his deep patriotism never clouded his judgement. His best work took the form of short sketches. His grandfather, Dr. R. W. Jelf, was tutor to Prince George of Cumberland, afterwards King of Hanover, and married Countess Emmy Schippenbach. Through his grandmother, Jelf was related to many well-known German families, and a visit to a country house in Pomerania was the origin of a brilliant sketch, "The Prussian Nobleman," which appeared in the *Times* in July 1914. He was no less accurate and skilful in describing Berlin "types" and had in him the makings of a sound musical critic. But those who worked with him will remember best his sterling character, his modesty, and his loyalty.

On his return to England, he enlisted in the Public Schools Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers, in which he remained nine weeks; and then, having applied for a commission in a Kentish regiment, he was gazetted to the 6th (Service) Battalion of the Buffs (East Kent Regiment). He went to France with his battalion on June 1, 1915, and was killed in action between Vermelles and Hulluch on October 13. His company commander wrote: 'There is no need for me to tell you that your boy died doing his duty nobly. The only comfort I can give you is the assurance that he died painlessly and without recovering consciousness. As his company commander for the past four months, during which time we lived together, and shared everything in common, I grieve for the loss of a dear

young friend whose cheerful companionship no new arrival can possibly replace.' A brother officer wrote that 'he met his death in a fine way, showing an especial example of bravery to his men in an exceptionally trying moment'. The colonel of his regiment wrote also that 'he had times without number proved himself absolutely fearless, and it was in a most magnificent attack that he was killed'. His body was recovered, and he was buried, with the other officers of his battalion who fell on the same day, in the cemetery at Vermelles.

Extracts from his letters home, while at the Front, are printed for private circulation among his friends, one of whom, after reading some of his first letters, wrote as follows: 'Gordon seems to feel that he is taking part (as indeed he is) in some great *epic* contest, and this feeling inspires and engrosses him, just as I have seen him inspired and engrossed by music.'

His poems and other writings showed literary skill, and his musical compositions were original and graceful; indeed his intense love for and knowledge of music (which earned for him the nickname of 'Bach' among his college friends) were among his most striking characteristics.

The letters received from his friends present a picture of the development of his character from boyhood to manhood. His former housemaster at Marlborough describes him as 'quietly conscientious and obviously destined for literary success'; and an old Marlburian remembers him as 'a little Eton-collared schoolboy in the Marlborough choir, and as the same schoolboy grown older at Oxford, with his love of music and literature, and the sunny temper and good humour

which always kept his rooms wide open, and attracted the right kind of popularity'.

A contemporary at college speaks of him as 'always full of determination—one who sought at all times to carry out to the full the dictates of his conscience'; while a Senior Fellow mentions 'his great gifts which he was fast developing', adding, 'I didn't know any one who was more perfectly true and loyal and lovable'.

His godfather writes: 'We are sure that his candid, unselfish, loving spirit will now have found the Light he sought for, and, I doubt not, had really found, though he feared to be sure of it.'

The late Rector of Exeter College (Dr. W. W. Jackson) writes of him: 'He had developed and was developing so fast that a career of great usefulness and distinction seemed open before him. He had risen to his opportunities in such a striking manner as to show his marked capacity for dealing with men and affairs.'

The Head Master of Fonthill School (Mr. A. G. Radcliffe) writes: 'He had one of the most lovable natures I ever came across, with never an unkindly thought or word for any one. I feel that it is a privilege to have known him.' Mrs. Radcliffe adds: 'He was such a delightful personality, always finding out the best in everybody, and so simple with all his cleverness.'

The Chaplain at Fonthill (Rev. Walpole Sealy) says: 'We shall always be so thankful for that all too short time that he spent here with us—for the way in which he threw himself heart and soul into the life of the boys—and *our* life—for his musical gifts, and for his

quaint absent-minded ways. He had the knack of making the dullest work of interest. He played all the old games with zest, and invented new ones for us. He was a brilliant musician, never tired of playing his favourite music to any one who cared to listen, and teaching us to appreciate its beauties. Many are the stories that show how generous he was to those who asked his help: and most generous of all in friendship. And I personally shall never forget the kind and sympathetic help which he gave me in anything to do with the religious teaching and the conduct of the services in our chapel.'

The correspondent of one of our leading newspapers writes from Petrograd as follows:

'During my last few years in Berlin before the war, there was no one outside my own family of whom I saw more than your son, and my happiest days were passed with him. Especially during the spring and summer of 1914 we spent many Saturdays together on the Havel Lakes. After these outings he generally came home with me, and we used to bang the piano together till midnight. In this way I got to know him well, and the longer I knew him the better I liked him, and the more I respected every feature in his exceptionally sweet, straight, and manly nature. Taking him all in all, he was the finest example of the best that our race produces, with whom I have come in close contact. It is because we turn out men like him that I am convinced that our cause is the right one in this war, and that, as his friend, I am proud that he has died in the defence of it. It is very rarely that a man of his age has been so much with the world and been so little spoiled by it. He

had the rare power of looking life straight in the face without losing the essential part of any of his beliefs or ideals. I know this well, for there is not one of the big questions of life which we have not discussed and wrangled over a dozen times. There were deep differences of opinion between us, but I am especially glad to think now that though we hit out hard at one another, there was never the shadow of a quarrel between us, and that this was mainly due to the singular sweetness and magnanimity of his temper. Nor have I ever known any man of his age who had the same abounding enthusiasm for all the best things of life. I remember that one evening he came in unexpectedly to play, and when the piano was shut at eleven o'clock, asked us if we could give him something to eat. It then turned out that he had had no dinner, but, having a musical fit on him, had come straight to us from his work. And this keenness was not by any means confined to music, but appeared in everything he did.

'One of his most lovable traits was his devotion to yourself, and his deep veneration for the memory of his father. He often talked about you all, especially when holidays were drawing near, when he used to tell me what you would all do together. He left on my mind the deep impression that his home life had been in every respect an ideal one, and that he was filled with a feeling of gratitude to those who had made it so.

'I got to know him—we were introduced to one another by the British chaplain, Williams, who has been doing such heroic work in the prisoners' camps in Germany—at a time when the Berlin atmosphere

was beginning to weigh rather heavily upon me, and it was a great relief to find a friend whose whole character was in such strong contrast to that atmosphere.

'After our parting I had a couple of letters from him, which were the most cheering and stimulating news I had had from England. I showed his letters to several people here as a proof that we still had the right spirit in us. In my opinion his patriotism was absolutely of the finest type. It was a reasoned conviction that we stand more than any other nation for right and light in the world's affairs. And though his loss is really an irreparable one to me, for I can hardly hope to find another friend to mean as much to me as he did, it is some consolation to think that he died the finest death a man can die, giving up his life for a faith he held with such purity and sincerity.'

I THANK MY GOD
UPON EVERY REMEMBRANCE OF YOU.

THE SOLDIER

IF I should die, think only this of me :

That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed ;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.
And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given ;
Her sights and sounds ; dreams happy as her day ;
And laughter, learnt of friends ; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

RUPERT BROOKE, 1914.

(Printed by kind permission of the late Rupert Brooke's literary executor and Messrs. Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd.)

LETTERS FROM CHARLES GORDON JELF

(TO HIS MOTHER, EXCEPT WHERE OTHERWISE STATED)

Aldershot, May 21, 1915.

It has been definitely decided now that I am to go to the front with the Battalion, and I was overjoyed when W. told me the great news. Indeed I wouldn't be out of it for worlds. I believe now that the tide is just on the turn, and that it may be our grand privilege to witness and assist the initial stages of the final triumph. I don't much mind what happens to me—and the care I feel is only for your sakes. I use now, and shall always use, the prayer you have sent me.

I'll try and write again. I feel wonderfully happy, tho' anxious that I should play a worthy part. It is extraordinary to feel that one is called actually to fight for the country ; and at times I can hardly *realise* my good luck, and feel quite unworthy to be really on 'active service'—for England—and to be thus linked up to some small extent with the great ones of our history. Can one ever repay England ? At present how little I've done !

TO A SISTER.

May 30, 1915.

It seems now certain that we shall go on Tuesday. At any rate, we have got to get our valises packed by this afternoon. . . .

We must hope for the best. It is an awful wrench

going away, but there's nothing else to be done, and I could wish for nothing better. The whole thing seems to sum up one's aspirations, and to be that for which one has unconsciously been looking all one's life.

Keep the boys up to the mark, and make them think of their King, first after their God. . . . I shall think of the home party every day. . . .

June 2, 1915.

Here we are at last on 'the other side', enjoying magnificent weather, and a few hours' rest before moving off to more strenuous scenes. It's pretty hot here, without much shade, but it is high up, and there is a cool sea-breeze. You can probably guess where we are!

We left barracks about 6 p.m. and had an uproarious march to the station. The men were in boisterous form and were singing all the way, and much in the train. We got rousing cheers at all the stations, as we whirled through, and it was all a very amusing—and very great experience. We went on board ship about 10.30, and were over by midnight. I wish I could tell you more about the crossing, but I doubt if it would pass the Censor. Sufficient to say that one learnt a good deal about the efficiency (and cunning!) of the Navy, and that all went like clock-work. We were surprisingly comfortable on board, and got plenty to eat, despite all anticipations to the contrary. It was a fine starlight night, and there was much to see and wonder at. On the French side all was still as the grave, and there was nobody about to see us tramp down the cobbled streets. We got

to bed about 3, some blankets turning up, but no valises yet. We shall pick them up in a day or two, and meanwhile carry everything on our backs. I find I have thought of practically everything.

The men are now all strolling about, fraternising with the French, and steeling their hearts against the girls' demands for souvenirs. We are all trying to brush up our French, and the efforts of some of us are very amusing.

Later. I find that we are allowed to say that we are at Boulogne, so there it is. We are encamped above the town, presumably on the historic heights where Napoleon pitched his camp before invading England. There is a glorious view of the sea and the town, and there is nothing to do except sleep on the grass. Off to-morrow. I'll write again soon.

June 3, 1915.

Here I am, comfortably but scantily billeted in a quaint little inn some fifty miles west of the firing line. We rose this morning at 4.30 and marched off at 6 some two miles to a railway-station, whence we had a three hours' slow journey to —, our head-quarters, thence a five-mile march south-west to this little village, which is very charming after the French fashion. The train-journey was good fun, and it was interesting to see the preparations of various sorts. The north-east corner of France seems entirely given up to the English, and what with the British Tommy, who changeth not, the motor-lorries, and notices in English, one could imagine oneself in England, were it not for the straight and dusty roads, and the

undressed-looking children. The Tommies make the place entirely their own, and treat the French as a poor foreigner 'what knows no better', and speaks an absurd language which isn't English.

Yesterday evening, solemnly and for no reason but pure 'side' we marched down into B—— and swanked round the town, with our band. The French were quite nice about it, and turned out to cheer and wave—to the joy and pride of our men. The children marched along with us, and the whole thing was rather a scramble. When it comes to the real work—as on our march to-day, mostly uphill along the usual dull French road—the men are less enthusiastic; although on the whole they show good grit and a stodgy kind of keenness.

The men travelled to-day in cattle-trucks, and the officers eight in a second-class carriage. I was in charge of the guard, with nominal duties. On disembarking, I had to superintend the detraining of a lot of transport. We arrived here, after an exhausting march, about 4.30, and were glad of some eggs and coffee in an inn, as we had had practically nothing since 5 a.m. Here we are in the heart of the country. There is an old grey church, two or three inns, and a pleasant mill-stream, which prattles away outside my window. I'm in a tiny room, sleeping on straw and one mattress, which is a good deal better than the hard ground at B——. The Germans were through here some eight months ago, and a few houses show signs of battering. We shan't move for two or three days.

June 6, 1915.

To-night we are near enough to the firing-line to hear the guns quite plainly and even to see very faintly distant columns of smoke. Otherwise all is extremely peaceful and secure, and it is impossible to realize that a struggle is in progress not so many miles away. We are comfortably bivouacked to-night—as last night—in a grassy meadow, with our company in a barn, and our company mess in a farmhouse, occupied by the Germans last October.

It's terrifically hot, and the two marches these last two days have tried us all pretty severely. We left our little village at 7 a.m. on Friday; it was such a jolly little place, and we were all very sorry to go. We had a very jolly company mess at the large inn, and did ourselves well. In fact as regards both food and change of clothing we have done hitherto remarkably well. The late afternoon and evening of each day has been like a huge picnic. We struggle into our field pretty exhausted, but very soon get a wash—whole or partial—and a change into cleaner under-clothing, and then a comfortable meal, with some white or red wine. We generally get an evening stroll too, into the village ('somewhere in France') and look into the inn. We go to roost about 9, and sleep the sleep of the just *al fresco* until about 5 or 4.30, when we have to make a push to get our valises packed in time for the transport. It is gorgeous sleeping out these hot nights, and I am awfully comfortable in my valise with the sleeping-bag.

The hot marches are the work, and one soon finds out what men have grit. To-day scores of men in the

Brigade fell out, and it was a job to get them on again. Our packs are fearfully heavy, and the men carry in addition a mass of ammunition. We have all been given respirators, and have had practice in putting them on.

The marches are not particularly interesting. It was stimulating certainly to see the roads to our right and left brave with British infantry and to feel all round you the concentrating of the Division. The villages too are amusing, and we have passed some fine old churches, the townfolk crowding out to see us and give us 'bon jour'. But then we emerge again into the straight dusty road, with not a hedge to border it, and with the huge expanse of fields stretching away in all directions. The people seem slightly bored with us, and have got over—as well they may—the first flush of their enthusiasm.

Who do you think was the first person I saw when we passed through — ? Why, dear old S., standing massive, rubicund and very cordial to me. We last met over the whisky and the Beethoven at —.

A pretty tidy artillery duel seems to be in progress, and the rumble of guns is absolutely continuous. We only care about our meals and our bed, and the growling leaves us cold.

— is in tremendous form, and with his kind cheeriness and cuteness in securing eggs, a great asset to our mess. Fond love to all. So delighted with the letters and parcel which came to-day. Send lots of cheap cigarettes.

June 7, 1915.

So many thanks, dear hearts, for your splendid letters, which have bucked me up no end. I hope you will send my letters round the family. I am warmed with your sympathy, and the thought of the children mentioning me in their prayers.

I am very fit, and rejoicing in the warm nights in the open. Not so much in the warm days, as the heat is terrific. On the march yesterday I literally could not see for perspiration. You would hardly think it possible, but the salt sweat poured into my eyes, and the palm of my hand was a pool of water! The sickly smell of the dust—reminiscent of Egypt—is also very trying. . . .

This evening we swooned away placidly on the grass. This farm-house is very comfortable, and it is nice getting chairs and tables. We are doing splendidly in the way of food.

France, June 9, 1915.

Thanks awfully for your birthday letter, which reached me on the day—splendid. I am delighted with my letters.

We are having a slack time now, and shall probably not be in the firing-line for at least a week. Our daily programme is to be a route-march in the early morning about 4 a.m., and various practices in the evening. It's too hot to work in the middle of the day. It's now a little cooler as we had a thunder-storm yesterday—a capital thing, as the drought was becoming a serious problem.

Last night I was the officer in charge of the Brigade

picket, which means that you have to sleep with your boots on and be ready for an alarm at a moment's notice. I'm on this duty until this evening and so cannot leave the bivouac. Not that I want to much. It's a hot walk to our town over a shocking road and down the usual cobbled streets. Everything is very expensive there.

Last night there was more artillery rumbling, and we occasionally saw a star bomb. The fighting is across our whole front, and even a bit behind us on our left and right, so that it encloses us in. But of course it's all at a great distance away, and on a vast scale. It hardly affects us at all, except that we have to place guards, be on our look-out for spies who are said to abound in the cafés, and to wear revolvers. Otherwise, it's a very sleepy existence—enlivened only by meals, an occasional parade, and periodical visits from hawkers. I'm very fit and standing the heat well, but how people fight in it I can't conceive.

We get the newspapers fairly regularly here. Churchill's speech is magnificent, and I think I shall read it to the men.

France, June 14, 1915.

. . . Yesterday — and I rode out towards the German lines, and made a round of about 20 miles, exploring. We got near enough to hear the rattle of musketry and to distinguish the various cannon, but there was nothing to see. But it was a jolly ride, although my horse was a bit slack. Everywhere there were signs of the war. One old church completely gutted, and with the roof off, and here and there farm-houses

wrecked and desolate. Otherwise things very normal. The crops are doing well, and in France every inch of country is under cultivation. The whole ride had a spice of adventure and was a strange experience. We always take revolvers in our pockets now.

On Thursday — and I walked into our town again, and witnessed some gas experiments. I walked past the gas with a new type of respirator which seemed pretty effective. Then to tea in the town, and to purchase more stores. At 7 to church in the big church which is called a Cathedral. There was some beautiful music, which I think was Mozart or Glück. All the women were in black.

I'm reading *Great Expectations*, which is very characteristic, with its strong caricature and its quaint fancies.

This morning we had Church parade in a field — 'Fight the good fight' — 'Jesu, lover of my soul' — and a good sermon on the value of prayer in war-time.

We are a very cheery party in our company, and the five of us get on most amicably together. After supper we usually burst into song (or hymns!).

TO A SISTER.

France, June 16, 1915.

. . . We've had ten days now doing very little. We started off with an early morning march every day from 4.30 to 7, but we've chucked that now, and have various small parades, practising with respirators, loading, &c., and endless inspections of rations and ammunition. Sometimes we are hard put to it for something to do; and this morning, if you please,

I was reduced to playing twos and threes with my platoon, to keep them alert!

Yesterday we had a Brigade march between breakfast and lunch, and banged our way through various unoffending villages. The Brigade, 4,000 strong, as it winds through the cornfields unbordered by hedges, looks like a vast brown river, sluggishly creeping forward.

The guns are very noisy now, and last night, when it was very still, the cannonade and musketry sounded as if it was only about two miles away. But it doesn't disturb us in the least.

Our mess would amuse you; the low ceiling with heavy beams, the litter of boxes, tins, and bottles, and the flickering candles stuck in tins. We are a cheery little party, and have hot discussions on all manner of subjects.

France, June 18, 1915.

. . . It is interesting being here, albeit comparatively quiet. We frequently see aeroplanes being shelled. All we see, it is true, is a black dot high up in a distant white cloud, and little puffs of white smoke (like tiny golf balls) forming and dissolving on all sides of it. We see flashes too, and hear a great to-do of cannon and musketry. . . . Until we get the shells, it looks like small shows for a bit. When we take the offensive—which probably not many of us in this Brigade will see—it will be, I believe, all in one swoop, clearing the blighters clean out of Belgium.

I made a short speech to my men the other day, asking them not to fall out, and telling them that the

Empire was made by the marching of our infantry, and can only be kept going by the same hard work. What we did a hundred years ago on these roads we can do just as well now.

Last night L. and I played rounders with the men, and this morning we had an amusing competition in the shape of a wrestling match, one man mounted on another. Mounted on my platoon-sergeant, I took on G. on his, and was overthrown. This afternoon we shall probably have games of some sort. I'm very fit and have no ailments.

France, June 19, 1915.

Just a line to warn you that it may possibly be some little time before my next letter. We are off to-morrow, and shall probably be so placed that it will be difficult to get a letter off, so don't worry at the silence. To-day is our last quiet day, and we shall be making an early start to-morrow. We are all, very self-consciously, enjoying our last few hours of cleanliness and well-being. This morning I took my men into our town, and we all had hot baths, returning to swoon away into a delicious languor. The best of this life is that one *does* realize when one is physically comfortable, and makes the most of the simple physical comforts.

France, June 20, 1915.

We moved off at 4.30 this morning, and were in our new billets in this town by 10. We are very comfortable. The B Company officers are in a house by themselves, and have only one room, but we sleep out in the garden. The garden is crowded with

bushes and fruit-trees, but underneath a row of apple-trees we lighted on soft grass, where we have spread our valises. It is beautiful weather and not too hot. The march was less trying, although our packs always seem heavier every day. In my pack I carry greatcoat, spare socks, and underclothing, holdall with razors, &c., towel, cigarettes, and so on; in my haversack, maps, books, chocolate, brushes, beef-tablets, Bible, and Father's photograph: hung on to my pack is my canteen, and 'iron ration' in white bag: on my belt is my revolver, and wire-cutter: in my pouches revolver-ammunition and pipe: slung round me, water-bottle and field-glasses. So you can imagine me as I stump along—'stumping' in the fullest sense of the word!—with my knees slightly giving after 10 or 12 miles.

However, to-day it was an easy march, and interesting. There passed us endless processions of motor-lorries, ambling over the cobbled roads. The impression one gets is that things are going well, but slowly. Behind our trenches a vast weight of men and stores is gradually piling up, and we are only awaiting ammunition. In the meantime we hold our own with ease. The trenches, if you please, are only about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from where I'm sitting in this garden, but there is an extraordinary feeling of tranquillity, and none of danger, except by a 1,000:1 chance. Perhaps the Bosches are quiet because it's Sunday. Yesterday they fired 150 shells in here in a quarter of an hour, and wounded one policeman. To-day we have only had one shell overhead. It made a quaint screaming noise (rather like those things you buzz with your lips) and then exploded with a not very alarming fizz

some distance behind us. We were all mildly interested. The main interest is still the anti-aircraft guns. They are frequently banging away. We see a German aeroplane circling above us at a great height, and little clouds of smoke breaking out near it. They never seem to hit, but our own shells, passing overhead, make a great whirr, like a cockchafer.

The town shows many traces of shelling, but they don't strike the eye much. The church clock is in half, and many windows are broken, and there are sometimes holes in roofs, and sometimes tell-tale new repairs. The cellar windows are protected with sacks.

One of our companies is for the trenches to-night—for twenty-four hours. They are attached to the company already in possession, and go mainly for instruction. We don't expect many casualties, as this part has been abnormally quiet for weeks, and—from all I hear—the two sides are mainly occupied in cooking bacon at each other. In the wet weather they had a sort of truce, putting up breastworks. We're going in to-morrow night for twenty-four hours. It's good to be really 'at the front' at last, but things don't look particularly dangerous. This town flows with milk and honey, with English books, clothes, papers and everything, so you needn't send me anything. This evening — and I had in a tea-shop a tea you might have had at Fuller's, with strawberries and cream. We're beginning to feel rather humbugs—if it weren't for that saving shell. . . . This town is quite stylish with Paris shops, &c.—although the bare-legged Scotties give a rougher touch. Still, we shall never dare to carry bread and bottles home through the streets as we used to do at —.

France, June 23, 1915.

We have been one day in the trenches, and had a very quiet time. It was all most interesting, but not in the least exciting. There were a few shells about, and a good many snipers on the job, but the trenches are so safe, and the Bosches on this front so tame, that we went to sleep most of the time. The Germans here are rather a decent lot, by all accounts, and there seems to be a sort of understanding on both sides to 'live and let live' and only to punish those who show unusual daring. In the morning they sent over about a dozen medium shells, which exploded some 300 yards from me, and some 100 yards behind the trench. Then there is the constant crack of bullets—sometimes the noise of the discharge overtaking the noise of friction, and sometimes the thud of the bullet itself into the parapet or roof of the dug-out. The nearest to me was one over my right ear as I explored one of the sapheads. One can walk all through the network of trenches with impunity, and can look over the parapet provided one doesn't do it twice running in the same place. . . .

At night we see the star shells, which throw a bright white light over the fields and trenches. We're up most of the nights, and get our sleep next morning. The trenches are surprisingly comfortable. The — have a regular officers' mess—a sort of log-cabin—and the dug-outs where we sleep are little sunken houses, roofed with corrugated iron, and walled with sand-bags and wooden supports. In mine there were two bedsteads (of sorts), a table, a door, and window. They're warm at night and very cool and dark by day.

There are a good many flies about, but the sanitation and all that sort of thing is pretty efficient. The men give names to the highways and byways of the trenches, and put up quaint notices such as 'Old Soldiers' Corner'—'Road under repair', &c. They've rigged up little curtained niches for spare ammunition, refills for soaking anti-gas helmets in, &c. They sleep in recesses under the parapet.

Belgium, June 27, 1915.

We are having a most strenuous and exciting time, getting very dirty and very tired. But these last two days have been almost the happiest in my life, as I have my own job to run, and the men are buckling to splendidly. We are at one of the most famous points of the British line. A few weeks ago there was seventeen days' continuous fighting here. Thousands of Germans and British lie buried (and unburied) in this wood, and every inch of it was contested. At last we gained and held the corner of the wood, and hurried trenches were thrown up just anyhow, where our line was held. The lines are between 150 and 40 yards apart, and the space between has been left untouched, as it is swept with fire. Many brave men still lie out beyond our trenches, and there are even bodies built into the trenches. There are graves everywhere to 'an unknown soldier' or to a 'Private of the Seaforths, name unknown', and parts of the wood are little cemeteries. We make plenteous use of chemicals, and the health of the men is splendid. I never felt fitter in my life, and feel as cheery and fond of life as possible. I sleep on straw in a low-

roofed dug-out, which is very comfortable, and cover my face against the flies and mosquitoes with some gauze netting. I have got a good supply of eau-de-Cologne and ammonia—which I give also to the men—and have no bites or ailments. I'm up all night till 4 o'clock, sometimes till 6, and sleep before lunch, and a bit occasionally in the afternoon.

I am holding a gap between the trenches, and have got my men in four isolated redoubts just on the outskirts of the wood. I visit them all night, and many times by day, inspecting rifles, carrying round orders, and getting them stores and things. The German trenches are about 140 yards away, well in sight from most points of the wood, and the passage from my dug-out behind and between the various redoubts is full of excitement. There are not many shells to bother us, but the bullets crash about the wood, generally very high up, all day with varying intensity, and certain corners are made very hot by their snipers, who are pretty cute. The noise in the wood is terrific at times, what with the discharge, the concussion, and the echo. Occasionally shells, 'our own and those of the enemy', come bustling overhead, always falling miles away. 'Bustling' is the only word. They hurtle over full of their own importance. The howitzer shells soar high up, their sizzling getting fainter and fainter, until they hang motionless and drop perpendicularly. The anti-aircraft guns, which seem pretty futile, make a dull metallic clang, not at all unpleasant to the ear, and the field gun a clean boom which does not offend. Our own trench-mortars are the noisest.

I feel about this place that, while we can and must

take all precautions about stooping, &c., any place is as safe as any other place, and it's no good worrying.

I have great fun with a listening post in front of one of my redoubts. We crawl out (two on the job) on our bellies, and lie out in the field by night behind two sand-bags, listening, and when necessary pulling a rope which rings a bell behind. We listen for sound of the Germans repairing their trenches after our shell-fire, or for the rustling of their scouts in the long grass. Last night, when the moon was behind clouds, I stole out with three men, dragging barbed wire to repair some entanglements. We were well out, and just standing up at the hedge, when the moon came out bright and full. So we fell on our faces, and slithered back again, leaving it for another darker night. It was like our old games in the garden at Rochester. . . .

. . . Our arrival here was unspeakable. We were dog-tired after a long march through sliding mud, and over wooden paths through the tangled wood, and it was trying work settling our men in. My place, though the most dangerous, is the cleanest, and I haven't got bodies built in round me. The wood is very pretty, but rather full of horror.

This morning I made my rounds between 3 and 6, and thought much of you, as the sun came over the hill for a very fresh and sunny Sunday morning. I went to bed at 7, imagining you preparing for service.

It's very jolly in the regiment now, and all of us—officers, sergeants, and men—are getting to know each other well. The men are awfully cheery and there are no funks.

Belgium, June 29, 1915.

We are having a great time, and we really are 'living' at last. There is adventure everywhere, and one doesn't have to go far to seek it. I have a listening post out in front of one of my redoubts, where I creep about at night with a revolver. We nearly bagged a Hun last night. Our sentry was shot at out of the long grass, and came back rather scared. So — and I slithered out with rifles and lay there for some time, seeing however nothing. It is extremely fascinating out there by night. Every rustle may mean a man, and trees and bushes contain a sniper. Behind one is the long British line, revealed to you in the darkness only by the crack of rifles. In front, 100 yards away, the German trenches, silent save for occasional splutters. The air seems simply *full* of the noise of bullets, but most of them seem to pass overhead, owing to the contour of the ground. A few smack smartly into the trees, and occasionally there is the unmistakable 'drone' of a bullet passing quite close. Periodically the Germans send up star shells, which shows up the white line of their sandbags. At such moments we rush to the parapet, and have a good look round, regardless!

To-night I shall go out with a patrol, as I fancy the Germans are getting into too close touch with my redoubts. They do a lot at night. On Sunday our shells smashed their parapet in various places. We marked the places, and kept them under fire, but they managed somehow to repair the damage, as next morning all was level. They must have worked like blazes. To observe them more closely, I've made

to-day a peep-place, with three loopholes, just under a hedge. I shall also cut grass in front of the redoubts.

I love my job, although much of it is simply routine—viz. going round at night telling off working parties and reliefs, inspecting rifles and gas-helmets, putting up wire—which I did last night in front of our line—collecting sand-bags, and finding employment for the men, or arranging their hours of sleep. From 'stand-down' at 2.30 a.m., they sleep like tired children, wrapped in their overcoats, their legs thrown out everywhere. They are simply splendid now. They do more than they are told to do, and work willingly overtime, and I have hardly had a grouse, and never any insolence. Despite our exertions, and weird hours—we sleep from 3 or 6 till 8 or 11, and are up all night, eat when we can, and are constantly being dragged out for dirty jobs—despite all this, they are awfully cheery, and discipline is better than ever. Trying rules, such as no smoking, and no removing of equipment, are well observed.

The worst of the life is the lack of standing room. In the dug-outs one can hardly ever stand upright. I dress and wash by sections, fitting my body in where I can squeeze it, and sitting on boxes and sand-bags. From constant stooping and crouching we are developing a new kind of trench-tango, which should be popular at the music-halls. In the 'crater', which is forty yards from the Germans, and often under machine-gun fire, you can hardly breathe!

Belgium, June 30, 1915.

We moved back to-day to a farm about a mile behind the trenches, and shall be here 4 days in support, after 4 days in the trenches.

W. has been hit—wounded in the cheek by a spent bullet—as he was standing in the wood just by our company mess, a place where we've all stood and sat casually about a thousand times, and where men have been passing and re-passing the whole day. It just shows that it is no good worrying, and that one is just as safe and just as much in danger in one place as in any other. I hardly worry now, and think of other things! The men soon imitate one's indifference, and think there's no danger if one shows no concern. With *them* I don't care, and I'm only nervous when I'm by myself, and then only slightly. The accumulative strain tells a bit, and after a day out one feels just a little more tired than one would ordinarily.

We were relieved in the trenches this afternoon, and have returned to a more normal world, where we can sit on chairs, stand upright, and take our boots off. I've had a change, and a good wash—the first for five days—and feel as fit as a fiddle. I haven't even got a cold! It's wonderful what one can do, when one is hardened by open-air life. We lie on the wet grass, sit about in draughts, sleep on boxes in the open air, and wash anywhere and in any temperature.

It's much colder now, and I find my flannel belt and cardigan very comforting, especially in the cold hours of dawn about 3 o'clock, and on turning in for a short roost after sunset. The slush in the trenches has been terrible. One slides and flounders about

everywhere. The trenches swarm with frogs and tadpoles, and there are not a few rats (some nearly as large as cats) who do themselves proud.

I am so grateful to the children for their presents. Tell them that I gave the chocolate to the sentries, as I went the rounds last night, and the toffee to the mess. The beef tablets are most welcome, and come in very handy when there is a hiatus of a meal. To-day I got practically no breakfast, lunch, or tea—rubbing along all right with tablets, chocolate, and the ration biscuits—but we got a good solid dinner when we got to our farm-house.

Last night I had my listening patrols out, but didn't patrol moving, as it was a soaking wet night. Instead I fired rockets to illuminate the ground, and superintended the stealthy digging of a new trench, which, we hope, will shorten our line. . . .

I'm so fit and content. . . . Every one is so cheery now, and we have great jokes and gags. Some unfortunates take it all too seriously, and get much worried and worn. I think our company is the cheeriest, and with the keenest sense of humour—Gott sei Dank. The men take everything lightly and are invincible optimists, most of them.

I'm reading a life of Lord Dufferin, full of interesting chapters of diplomacy.

TO A SISTER.

Belgium, July 3, 1915.

. . . I've been twice across the frontier again into France. Yesterday I marched in with 20 men and the Doctor to the old town where we were billeted a few days ago, and cleaned up some mess left by the civilians.

We always leave our quarters absolutely clean, and then these Flemings chuck their rubbish everywhere, knowing we shall be fetched back to make good. . . . This afternoon again I pricked into town on the Captiving's horse, got a shampoo, sought but did not find the field cashier to get money for the men, and brought back a sack of new potatoes and some green peas. I cut a figure rather like John Gilpin, and in the main street of the town the parcel burst, and my potatoes rolled in all directions. A sergeant was passing at the time with a body of men, and of course gave 'eyes left' with all due solemnity.

We're about a mile behind the firing-line, and are rather glad of a rest. It's tiring work in the trenches. You sleep when you can, and get very scratch meals, and after a day or two the dirt, smell, noise, and constant stooping and groping about gets a bit on your nerves.

Hitherto the battalion has been extraordinarily lucky. We only just left one set of trenches, when two men of the next party were killed: and barely left another section, when the trench was blown up and four men of the relieving regiment wounded (not very badly). Some persons were killed by a shell in 'our Village' to-day, but no Buffs. We thank God, and touch wood, every hour of the day.

Next Sunday we hope to get to a Communion Service at 11, at 'Machine-Gun House' of all appropriate places for divine service.

. . . I feel awfully fit, and as happy as possible. Whatever happens, we have lived, by Gad, and shall be a part of the England that will be after the war.

Every one is pretty optimistic. We hope for Lille

shortly, and no one doubts that we shall have them whacked in time. England seems really moving at last, and is just getting keen when the other nations are growing exhausted. Don't worry about the Russians. After all, who ever thought that Russia would have a walk over? As long as they kill Germans, it doesn't matter where they kill them, and the further East the better.

Our guns are more *en évidence* every day here, and we hear promising stories of the new shells. Our men are too splendid for words. They're simply 'all out', and can stick it till Doomsday, if you'll only let them.

All the talk at home is very amusing. But it's now a case of doing and doing, until we come out on top, not only over Germany, but over everybody else. I'm glad we've had checks. It has purged out the dross, and left optimistic only those who have real faith in England and real knowledge of her strength and spirit. There are faint hearts always, but always 10,000 who've not bowed the knee to Baal.

France, July 5, 1915.

We are now having five or six days' rest about four miles behind the firing-line, having arrived yesterday. We had a few days in trenches, a few days in support a mile behind (ready to move at a moment's notice), and are now slacking.

We are glad to be having a short rest. Although we had no fighting properly so called, it was a bit of a strain, what with the smells, want of sleep, &c. I was up all night, and then L. and I divided the watches between 3 and 9 in the morning.

Our last job was to fill a quantity of sand-bags under the supervision of an R.E. officer from 10 to 1 at night—not a very thrilling job. The idea is to build more trenches in that wood, and to connect up the isolated redoubts with breastworks. The wood is supposed to be dangerous, although I never had a man hit there, and we used to stroll about more or less as we liked. One early morning, even, W. and I were out there picking strawberries.

Our billets out of trenches are nearly always of the same kind. The men are herded in barns or lofts, or as often as not simply bivouac in the fields. The officers usually have one dining-room, and sleep in the fields in valises. Our servants make little erections of cloths sometimes to protect us from rain and heat. The heat was terrific yesterday, and rather bowled me over. Fortunately we only had a march of about three miles to these new billets. On these marches we usually go by half-platoons, at intervals of 100 to 200 yards—what is called artillery formation—so that if a shell catches one party it doesn't catch the rest of us. But yesterday we weren't shelled at all. . . .

We're glad to have got through our first trench period with so few casualties, so that we shall be fairly intact for the big scrap we are all hoping for. There are now rumours of the Germans massing in great strength at Lille, and we shall probably be in for real business soon. . . .

I've finished *Lord Dufferin*, and am now reading a quiet novel called *Ordinary People*, which is very humorous.

TO A SISTER.

France, July 9, 1915.

We are leaving these billets to-morrow morning, at 3 o'clock of all times. We've had a very quiet time here. I've done practically nothing, as I've had rather a sharp attack of gastritis, and have spent most of the time in valise. It's been very peaceful, and I've refreshed my mind with the newspapers and a capital novel called *Ordinary People*, which I think Mother would like very much. I've been sleeping hours in an old loft on some comfortable straw. I'm better now, and this morning L. and I rode off to see our trenches, about four to five miles away.

The trenches we're going to seem fairly harmless. The Germans are about 150 to 200 yards away, and fairly quiescent at present, with a calm which may be portentous. Close to the trenches is a dismantled railway, the station wrecked and desolate, but still recognizable as such.

We had a pleasant uneventful ride through the high corn. Nothing happened except a shell, which very much happened in a church about 400 yards away.

Awfully sorry about Balleine. I wonder where he was killed and where he is buried. The graves of our men out here are very carefully tended. It is a pathetic sight, but after all they are buried not here, but everywhere where there are English hearts, and in the woods and fields of England you'll meet with their spirits again. Ballers was a fine chap—a splendid patriot, devoted to the O.T.C. and the cause of National Service.

Best love to Mother and my blessing to you all.

Belgium, July 15, 1915.

It's a long time since I wrote. I hope you received the service postcard. I've been very busy in the trenches, and thank goodness we're going out again in two or three days, after eight days' toil. I am virtually in charge of two platoons (about 100 men), and am responsible for about 120 yards of trench. It's been pretty strenuous, and at times—during the shelling—pretty nerve-racking. But I'm very fit again, and can do any amount of work. I do a good deal of purely manual labour with the men, with the result I expected. They are working splendidly, and the N.C.O.'s, in particular, are buckling to and doing things on their own in the most gratifying way. I'm getting awfully fond of my men, and don't like to think of losing any of them. Up to date I've had two killed. One was out in a —, and was shot through the face. I rushed out with another man and dragged him in. We had an awful time. We got ourselves and him mixed up in our own barbed wire, and the air was humming with stray bullets (not aimed I think) from the Germans and our own lines. In these trenches bullets seem to come from all directions, as the lines are so irregular. Back in our own trenches, we got him on a stretcher, but it was too late, and he practically died in my arms. However, on the off-chance that the Doctor could do something, we took him to the dressing-station by a short cut, across a dangerous bit of road covered by a machine-gun. Four of us seized the stretcher, and, risking everything, ran like blazes. Half-way across a searchlight discovered us, but we got safe across, goodness knows how. The other man

was killed almost instantaneously, shot in the head while looking over the parapet.

Normally, however, this place is safe enough, and I don't anticipate many more casualties. The shells usually drop in the support trenches. One, forty yards behind, which threw a lot of mud over my dug-out, and another about thirty yards behind, which carried away, as it passed, a large piece of my parapet and buried one man in débris, have been the nearest hitherto. They always send a few over about tea-time, and it's alarming rather than dangerous. They hurtle over with a menacing whirr and hiss, and some of the men get cold feet occasionally. As a rule, however, they are very cheery and humorous about it—pretty remarkable, considering that they are raw and young troops.

We have not attacked or been attacked yet, but frequently have alarms, and periods of bustle and excitement. On Tuesday the Huns blew up a mine in front of —'s trench. Two R.E.'s were killed, and half a dozen of our men bruised—not badly. There were two explosions while we were at dinner, and we at once expected an attack. Everybody flew to arms, even the mess servants dashing out armed to the teeth (M., my man, in tremendous form!). I fired off half a dozen flare-lights, distributed the reserve ammunition, called the bomb-throwers to their stations, saw to the gas-helmets, and generally made ready for an attack. Every machine-gun in the place started rattling away, and our heavy guns—well up to time—started firing salvos, the shells booming over our heads. Everybody sent up coloured lights (of which no one knows the meaning!), and our rapid rifle-fire,

starting on the left, gradually woke up all down the line, causing a brisk and cheery crackling, all continuous. This state of things went on for about an hour, and then died away—nothing doing—but at one point the Germans were seen beginning to get over their parapet, until our rifle-fire drove them back. The men enjoyed themselves hugely, and so did I, although it was an anxious time. Eventually we retained all our positions, and have been working like the deuce to repair the damage.

I've had to rebuild all my dug-outs, which were not bomb-proof, to repair the parapet, barricade various points which I can't specify, and put up a little barbed wire myself—choosing a quiet time when the Bosches are sleeping off their Wurst.

We have a comfortable mess here with a courtyard paved with brick. We have no rats or frogs in these trenches, but our full share of flies. The weather has, however, been very cool and pleasant, except last night, when it poured in torrents, filling one trench with a foot of water, and making everything indescribably muddy. The rifles got caked.

Our guns are awfully good, and shell works just in front of us without causing us inconvenience. The Germans use lyddite and a black-smoked shell. The whizz-bangs are the noisiest. They mine a good deal, and I go out in front with an R.E. officer, and listen for noises. But they are not mining opposite me.

France, July 17, 1915.

We left the trenches yesterday, and are back as brigade reserve for about a week, digging, &c. It's not a bad place, although the men are fearfully crowded, and some of them are in draughty barns without sides or roof to 'write home about'. I've managed to squeeze some of them into a cow-shed. All the officers of the battalion mess together in two rooms, and in each 'bedroom' there are two officers.

We've had two days of howling wind and rain, pretty cold, but I like it rather than otherwise, although it is inconvenient getting the men wet so often.

We left the trenches about 11, and got in about 2 o'clock last night. Few things are more maddening than relieving and being relieved in trenches. It was a pitch-dark, howling wet night, and we had to grope our way down a long communication-trench, slithering off the slimy boards into holes and puddles. We then had a stiff march across country, by paths ankle-deep in mud, and hardly able to see a step before our faces. . . .

On the whole we prefer the trenches to 'fatigues', although back here we usually get the morning off, and have more leisure. The trenches are wonderful at night. Beyond sniping and counter-sniping, mining and counter-mining, there is not, it is true, much activity; but the lights are always flashing, and the miles and miles of front are marked by our rockets and the flashes of our rifles.

Monday. Yesterday I took a party of 'fifty picks and fifty shovels' up to the trenches again for four hours' digging, coming back at 9 p.m.

We are, I think, much more optimistic out here than people are at home. Our only fear is that people at home may not 'stick it'. We don't mind what *we* have to do, but it is painful to find that there are so many people at home with minds like hens—croaking over every new check, and getting panicky because things go slowly. We do the fighting, and all of you the mental determination part, and it is our job and your job, *come what may*, to stand like a rock, whatever happens to France or Russia.

Belgium, July 23, 1915.

... The battalion went into trenches again yesterday, but our company is in support; and T. and I are by ourselves with two platoons in an old farm-house behind everybody. The men are in barns again. T. and I are in a substantial farm-house, and use one large room for everything, sleeping in our valises on an extremely hard floor. However, we are much better off than the other companies in the trenches. It's pouring wet again, and we are thankful to have a roof over our heads, and to be spared the tramp down slimy trenches. We keep our boots on, but in general hope for a fairly quiet time, in a good hour be it spoken. Our main job is fatigues and guards. Periodically we send off small parties of patient men to work in the trenches, and we mount and inspect guards at certain intervals. We keep our weather-eye open for shells, and have various signals, which summon the men to take refuge in a line of dug-outs outside.

Our 'rest-week' this time consisted practically of fatigues. Every day except one, when I was orderly

officer, I was out with a party of fifty men for an hour's march, three hours' digging, or carrying wood, and an hour's march back. It is tiring work and wants a lot of organizing. Men lose themselves and their shovels with cheery good humour, and all the work has to be carefully spaced out. . . . I suppose it is not giving State secrets away to say that we are mainly engaged in strengthening the back of our line—making dug-outs, communication-trenches, &c. The line is pretty strong now, and with all our facilities for temporary retirements and reinforcing, I think the Germans will have a tough job to break through.

Later. We've just had a few shells over. I blew my whistle, and we all ran to earth like rabbits. It was great fun, and will amuse little Arthur. We all vanished into the earth, and later on all came up again, like so many ants, emerging from nowhere. The shells were well overhead.

It is bright and sunny this morning after the rain, and we have jolly views from here of dewy fields and hazy woods. Sometimes it's like a dream, from which one is wakened by some ghastly sight or experience. Thank God the war can't come near you, and that where you and the children are things are serene and the air sweet.

Belgium, July 26, 1915.

... We go placidly on in this farm-house, with no worries but the shelling, which yesterday was fairly quiet, though our own guns made a good noise. The contrasts of war are truly amazing. When things are quiet, this is a charming place. The house has a delightful kitchen-garden, with apple-trees, roses,

and tobacco-plant, and by its side an avenue of lofty and magnificent trees. It's perfectly delicious out here, in the sunshine after rain. . . . Yesterday we had a very quiet, restful Sunday, and in the afternoon I had a long walk up to the trenches, through smiling cornfields and meadows of long grass. It was so like England. I wished it *was*.

I had tea with L. and then went on down the trench to take a message to another company, and then right back down the trench to our cemetery, to see the grave of one of my men, as I promised his father. The graves are very nicely kept, and some day the cemetery will be a famous spot, visited by men and women of our race from all over the world.

TO A MARRIED SISTER.

Belgium, July 28, 1915.

We rotate now always between the same set of trenches and the same reserve place—having a week in reserve, and a week in trenches or just behind them, as T. and I are at present. We go off again to-night to our reserve place—a large old farm-house, much dilapidated, about two miles away. It was shelled a bit yesterday—a lively thought. However, the chances are about a million to one against the first shell dropping actually *on* you, and one is almost sure to get a warning. That's been our experience here. . . .

Things are very quiet on this front now, and neither side shows the smallest sign of the offensive. On the whole it's rather boring. We get moments of danger and excitement, otherwise it is a round of routine. I doubt if we have ever had any experience quite comparable, for dramatic interest, to our departure

from Folkestone. I shall never forget the dark night and the huddled men upon the decks—the absolute silence and mystery of the ships of war, the thick smoke of the destroyers, the veiled retreating lights of dear old England and her looming cliffs, the pin-points of fire out at sea, and, last but not least, the appalling language of the embarkation officer! Since then it's been all marching and resting, digging, placing sentries, patrolling the trenches and improving our defences, making reports and maps, ordering and distributing stores, the omnipotent sand-bag pervading everything. We dream of sand-bags. You can do anything with them—make a parapet, fill a puddle, make a pillow, eat and wash upon them, lie behind them in the no-man's land between the trenches, make an altar with them, anything.

We sometimes wonder if the German offensive is broken on this front. We are prepared, however, for anything, and will give them a warm time, I hope, if they come for us before the time is ripe for us to go for them. *Then* our chaps will at last get their chance, and will be hard to hold back.

August 3, 1915.

Just a line before we go back into trenches, which is to-night. We've had a very quiet week in reserve, doing fatigues again, but otherwise not much. We've not been shelled at all.

Last night some men of the A.S.C. gave us an excellent little open-air concert.

On Sunday evening T. and I walked into our village and went to church. We came in for a charming little

ceremony. All the children of the parish—the boys in red cassocks and the tiny little girls in white frocks—processed round the church; at intervals facing the altar and singing a verse. . . .

It's delightful to think of you in the Isle of Wight. Don't worry about me. I'm perfectly happy, and boredom is our worst foe. Horrors aren't frequent, and hitherto things have been much better, not much worse, than I expected. We all get very stodged occasionally, but all the time we feel ourselves ready, if need be, to sit tight here for the rest of our lives—for years if need be.

. . . I'm quite confident about the future. The Germans make a great show, but the real weight is on our side. The German press is now making most curious admissions, and I anticipate a gradual disappearance of their confidence. Their wriggles, and changes of tone, and their constant re-statements of what their objects are, show that they feel a sandy bottom.

We feel that England is now really behind us. We are delighted with the amateur munition-workers, and I should like to shake H.'s hand. What a lot England is doing! Yet how humble and self-critical she is. If any other nation had done what we have done, they would talk about it all day.

Belgium, August 8, 1915.

. . . I've had a most interesting and adventurous time in trenches. This is our fifth day, and we go out to-morrow.

My chief job has been to keep an eye upon a large crater formed by a mine explosion in front of our

lines. The German trenches are about sixty yards away, and the crater about forty, so the reconnaissance has been pretty difficult. It can only be entered by dark, because half of the approach is on high ground, well within sight of the German parapets. From the high ground you slither into a gulley, which leads down until you can peer over the lip of the crater, and see below you the water shining in the starlight. The gully and crater are weird places—utterly desolate and volcanic—and round corners you come suddenly upon boulders which look exactly like crouching men—and might well be! as the Huns have been seen and heard in the crater. The other night I confronted one of these shapes, motionless, for about five minutes, revolver ready, only to find to my relief that it was a boulder when a flare-light was sent up. It's a most jumpy place, and I never go without a well-tryed man.

This crater has been *the great stunt* of the week. The Brigadier comes up every day, and we have a long pow-wow, and a long scrutiny with the periscope. All the senior officers believe in their own periscopes, and no one else's. Yesterday the General lent me his—for a whole day!—a fearful responsibility. I'm almost the only officer who's seen the crater properly.

The General is rather pleased. Yesterday he summoned me, and said, 'I'm very pleased with your patrol work. It's very creditable indeed, and I shan't forget it.'

The crater is important because every one has got mines on the nerves. One day I had to bicycle in some miles to Divisional Head-quarters.

I'm now convinced that there has been too much

fuss, and am rather bored with the whole thing. The danger, too, wasn't so very great.

I'm very fit, and enjoying the game very much. I get enough sleep.

August 10, 1915.

We are back again in reserve, in the farm-house where we've been twice before. To-day we are having a good slack, without fatigues. I'm orderly officer, and most of the others have gone into our large town. . . .

I suppose it's no secret now that we are taking over a fresh section of the French line. I believe this is common knowledge to us and the Huns.

Give me all the gossip you can. I hear from an Engineer that our naval construction is at present something astounding. England herself is as safe as houses now, I think, whatever happens to our armies. Things are much better than they seem on the surface. Never forget that the Huns are past-masters of the art of making a show, and of going hard at it at a feverish rate which can't last (and isn't meant to). They haven't got the stamina to stand repeated checks.

I think it's quite possible (but not probable) that there'll be a sudden collapse before the end of the year. The Huns are very effervescent and fickle, and have sudden changes of mood. They've never faced the worst possibilities—as we have and have got over it. We've sized up the thing now, and though it may be a long job, we shall get through all right and have peace on our terms. I get all the English newspapers here, and read every scrap of foreign news and Balkan news.

Yesterday morning, from 4 to 5, we experienced an 'intense bombardment', but all was well overhead. Every building behind was shelled, and great clouds of thick black smoke rolled up. For us it was simply a great sight and nothing more. We prepared for an attack again. We all rushed to our posts, loaded up our catapults and things, whipped up the bomb-throwers, and stood 'alert and alive'. Nothing happened, so we all went to bed again.

The war is becoming a wonderful drama. In after-years history will know nothing finer than the gradual (but very thorough) uprising of England. The closing phases will be tragedy in the grand style—Germany, blustering and wriggling, and England, sad but very stern, gradually crushing the life out of her, perfectly dense on the subject of compromise. We shan't forget the *Lusitania*, the poison-gas, the women of Belgium, and our murdered fishermen—to say nothing of the rats' filth in South Africa, India, Singapore, and elsewhere. We are bad beginners, but terrible finishers!

Dear old England! she will be better and stronger than ever, the good old land. We must pay our price—we here in lives and wounds—and you all, I'm afraid, in sorrow and straitened means. But we are only *temporary tenants* of England—just one generation, holding her for the next hundred years, or more, and earning the gratitude of our grandchildren and *their* families' families. As Kipling said—'Who dies if England live?' We can't be English without paying coin for it, can we?

Belgium, August 19, 1915.

I should love to be with you in the Isle of Wight, with the sea and the downs. We are all feeling a bit stale, and the men are getting jaded. There are rumours of leave next month—not very tangible—and it may be many weeks before my turn comes. It is at least fairly certain that we shall very soon be going into Corps reserve.

We always alternate now between the same farmhouse and the same mile of trenches, of which one company holds each a third. Our company has held each section in turn, and we are now on the extreme left of the line. This section is not particularly interesting. There is no crater and no mysterious ruins in front to interest us. I've been building various parapets, and putting up some wire, and making emplacements for a catapult—a gorgeous affair, built on mediaeval (or rather Carthaginian) lines! Warfare, nowadays, is very primitive, and we have to learn all about bombs and grenades.

Yesterday the Huns sent over a few rifle grenades, and we replied with a similar 'Straf'. (We call all these little incidents Strafs.) I sent over three rifle-grenades, getting one beautifully into their trench. The Germans are only fifty yards away, and we could hear them all shouting, 'There it is! quick, Hans, out of the way'. We fire ours up into the air like a howitzer, and you can see it high up, turning over and over. Then it was their turn. They sent over half a dozen in rapid succession, coming very low with a flat trajectory. From one I got a slight wound in the cheek. It bled a bit, but was only a scratch, and I just rubbed

on some iodine, without even having to bandage. We then produced our trump-card—a trench howitzer, fired from miles behind—a tremendous thing. It was a most impressive sight. Our shells were dropping into the German trench—beautifully aimed—forty yards and sometimes less (!) from where we were, so that we got much of the concussion, and our full share of the earth thrown up. After the boom of the gun we heard the old familiar sizzle, and looking up could actually *see* the shell (like a small black football) whirling down just in front of us. Then came a deafening explosion, and three seconds later, like the sound of many waters, a fountain of earth and clods, which came pattering down on to our backs. The German trench was a mass of black smoke, and we heard no more from *them* that night. Later on we turned our machine-guns on, to prevent them repairing the parapet. On the whole a good evening's work, but noisy. I'm rather tired, and we are going out of trenches the day after to-morrow, thank goodness.

Our artillery has distinctly got the upper hand here. The German shelling is rather purposeless, but most of ours is at a definite target.

Last Sunday, before we came into trenches, we had a service and Communion, to which I went.

On Saturday B. and I walked into our large town, and had tea and dinner, much enjoying the white tablecloth and china plates. I got a piano, and, discovering to my joy a book of Mozart's sonatas, fell into a trance for the space of one hour.

August 24, 1915.

. . . I don't think Sweden is in the least likely to come in. She is, of course, very pro-German, but Norway and Denmark are so aggressively pro-English that Sweden would be in an awkward position if she helped Germany. Besides the three have engaged to pursue a common policy. I think it's likely, however, that Sweden has taken advantage of Russia's weakness to settle certain outstanding disputes with Russia, e. g. ferry rights, &c. But she has not much to gain by war—still less after this Battle of Riga. That battle seems to me to decide the control of the Baltic, and to be as decisive as regards Sweden's attitude as Nelson's Battle of Copenhagen was as regarded Denmark. Germany's violation of Danish neutrality, by the way (in Monday's paper), is quite one of the most promising things which have happened recently.

It has been a depressing week. But things look healthier again, and I believe we are nearer to decisive success than any one imagines. Anyhow, the weaker Russia is, the greater chance for England to play again the grand rôle of 1805-15. Before the end she may be carrying everybody on her back, and quite cheerfully too.

We came out of trenches to this same old farm last Saturday. We had a fairly quiet time in trenches. I put out some wire again, but otherwise had a slack time. It was awfully wet, and the mud was indescribable. We are now making drains and boarding, and preparing for the winter campaign.

We prepared a great Straf one night. Charlie, my catapult, was put ready, and the grenade-rifles loaded.

Shortly afterwards the Germans dropped a colossal shell about 200 yards away—the biggest thing we've had yet—and we were ordered to lie low and leave it to the artillery.

We had great fun at dawn and at dusk, shooting rats, who swarm round the dug-outs and the kitchens.

TO A SISTER.

August 24, 1915.

. . . I like hearing all about your holiday, and wish often I was with you.

To-day I rode over to a village hard by to lecture about the trenches to a new regiment just arrived from England. We've had them attached to us in the trenches for instruction.

On Sunday and yesterday I dined in our town, yesterday with a large party to celebrate the Riga battle. I got a jolly play on the piano. The town is crammed full of British troops now, and on Sundays it's like Tottenham Court Road or Chatham High Street. There are magnificent men out here.

Compared with my patrolling experiences the week before last, the trenches last week were very dull. . . . At some points of our front the Huns are obviously getting sick of it, and sometimes even chuck over papers and 'do the friendly'—which we do *not* reciprocate. Captured prisoners reveal a state of things among the Huns which is a good deal worse than appears superficially. Our artillery does excellent practice among their working-parties.

Mind you read the 'Watchdogs' in *Punch*. They give an awfully good picture of life at the front, and might almost be written by some one in our Brigade.

On the whole we are more comfortable in trenches than here. In our dug-outs are usually bedsteads of sorts (canvas or wire stretched over wood), but here we simply sleep on the floor. Here we get up late, and have breakfast about 9. We then have fatigue parties in the trenches in the afternoon or evening. They last about five hours, and there is nothing for the officers to do, except count the tools and men at the end, and to worry about shelling! We hate getting casualties on these fatigues, as it seems so useless. A sausage-bomb dropped on one of ——'s men to-day. These things are very painful, but it is consoling to remember that the worse the wounded look, the less pain, as a rule, they are feeling. The shock, too, in itself, usually paralyses the nerves of sense, by a merciful provision of Providence.

We shouldn't mind these things so much if we were fighting in the open. We should then be all worked up, excited, and ready for the worst. As it is, all seems very normal—we are reading newspapers or having tea and feeling peaceful—when suddenly these things break in on us, and every casualty is like a cold-blooded street accident! Still, things are *much* better than I ever anticipated. But as yet we've hardly had the 'real thing' at all.

September 3, 1915.

... I'm afraid there's no chance of my getting leave; it seems rather remote at present. I should think it is possible before the end of October. However, by that time our offensive or 'theirs' will presumably be in full swing, so anything may have happened.

It's very wretched out here now—very cold and wet, driving rain and unlimited mud. The nights are very chilly, but I get along comfortably with my rug and cardigan.

We came out of trenches again yesterday. It was quite an interesting week. L. and I, with 100 men, were in a place called the 'Fort'—an odd jumble of trenches, with curious little nooks and corners. There were three ruined houses in our line, all in the last stages of exhaustion, the roofs sand-bagged up and tottering to their last fall, and on all sides of us mountains of fallen bricks, heaped up into a crude form of parapet. The oddest place you ever saw—the highest place in our line hereabouts, and standing right forward into the German lines, and only twenty-five yards from their trenches. Except against heavy guns, it is a very strong place. Below us was a steep slope towards the German trenches, which we could sweep with our fire, and which we have freely littered with balls of barbed wire.

We had no attack, but were fairly busy with bombs and grenades. Every day the Germans used to send a few over, which were rather a nuisance, and at last we determined on a big counter- Straf. We got the gunners to bring up their trench howitzers and trench mortars, while we ourselves got our grenade-rifles in trim. Punctually at 5.30 p.m. on Wednesday we all loosed off with great success all down our battalion line. There was quite a pretty cackle of sound. —— was in excellent form with his mortars, B., L., and I were all strafing hard with our grenades, while the old trench howitzer was booming all the time. Towards the end the *field* howitzers even chimed in with 60-

pounders, so that there was a useful spitting and crashing. The Germans replied with grenades and sausage-bombs, and then behind us and behind them the field guns of both sides boosted in with percussive shrapnel, flying close over our heads. We got distinctly the upper hand and reduced them to silence.

We were all very pleased with the evening's work, and from that time until we left the Huns have been still as mice.

Their worst things (of small calibre) are the sausage-bombs, which wobble over at a great height and very steep angle, so that the men call them drunken sailors. You can see them coming, and with any luck can easily get out of the way. We rush into our dug-outs in a ridiculous way. They are spotted, high up, rolling drunkenly toward us; there is a cry of 'Heads', and a stampede in all directions, the slow movers being unceremoniously hustled into shelter or sometimes hurried along by their coat collars. There is then a tense pause, followed by a terrific explosion. The sausages are very violent within a small radius, but beyond fifteen yards, and behind even flimsy cover, one is in comparative safety. This high explosive—of which everybody yawns—is good at sending up defence works, but is no use at man-killing, unless it drops on you, when of course it leaves nothing! For killing men, shrapnel, which bursts high up and throws bullets 200 yards forward, is the only thing of any use.

Our head-quarters were badly shelled one day, and the C.O. and all of them had to rush to the cellar. The Huns seem to be waking up a bit now, and could probably flatten out, at any moment when they choose

to use up ammunition, all the large houses and farms of the neighbourhood. Still, I don't think their *main* offensive will be here. Nor will ours, as we are already on a salient pushed far forward.

Very cold now, but I hope it will warm up again. Still, we've seen the last of real summer, and are now fairly 'up against it'.

TO A BROTHER.

September 5, 1915.

Prospects of leave are better now than when I wrote last, and I think I may get it now in the first half of October. We are 'at rest' again now, and return to trenches on Wednesday. Things are very quiet now on this front, except for the shelling, and we deliberately make things lively occasionally to save us from sheer boredom. Last week we instituted a miniature bombardment with mortars and rifle-grenades, in the very best artillery style. I acted as 'forward observing officer', popping my head over the parapet to correct the range of our grenades. The Germans replied with their sausage-bombs—long black things which wobble over at a great height and cause immense damage in a small radius. Imagine us anxiously watching the skies and then running swiftly to ground. We hear the Germans doing the same. They hear our rifle-grenades sizzling away in the upper air—and sounds come to us as of a stampede of heavy bodies, and a trampling of huge feet. We were only twenty-five yards away, and could almost hear them pant!

Apart from these excitements the day drags through wearily enough. We get *very* sick of tinned foods, condensed milk, and the insipid French bread and

beer—and still more tired of sand-bags and the slime of the trenches.

The best time is the very early morning. After a night's watching in the trenches—firing flare-lights, and listening for the Germans—it's delicious to feel the breeze of dawn, and to see the fields growing greyer and whiter. The birds begin to whisper from the trenches, and the rats to squeak and scuttle. The grim line of German trenches is again visible, and the snipers in the high trees behind their lines begin to get busy. About 4 o'clock in the morning, when the rifle-fire has grown sleepy and desultory, and all the men begin to think of frying bacon, we officers brew us a cup of cocoa, and withdraw thankfully to bed. Our 'bedsteads'—so called—are comfortable compared to the hard stone floor or the grass field, which we enjoy when in reserve. We put our muddy legs into sand-bags, and throw planks across the floor, so that we can walk over the water to get our razor and our toothbrush. However, we are now draining the trenches, and things are a good deal better.

I see people are asking in the Press 'What the new Army are doing', and I'll tell them. In a few months we've simply transformed our line, and built second and third lines of trenches, barbed wire *ad lib.*, and as far as can be estimated, made the line a tough nut to crack. All the time we've been holding about half of the German army, and been killing Huns all the time. Our artillery is extremely good. The officers observe German working parties and relieving parties, and get some excellent shooting. But our main work has been to strengthen our defences, and the breathing-space has been invaluable. Most of the real fighting

goes on to the north of us, whence we hear the heavy guns all day long.

I'm looking forward immensely to the Broadsheets. I was on the scent at once.

TO A MARRIED SISTER.

September 7, 1915.

. . . I'm delighted with the Broadsheets, which arrived just after my letter to E. had gone. Ask D. to send me twelve copies for the men.

We go into trenches again to-morrow, but not into the front trenches this time. We've had rather a refreshing time in reserve this time—glorious weather, sunny but cool, with the gentle breath of autumn in the air, and in the late afternoon a fragrant mist creeping over the fields, reminding one of England. How pleasant it was in the old days, hurrying back from dark Cumnor or misty-white Radley to the cheery, lighted streets of Oxford, and an arm-chair and book by the fireside. This farm-house is pretty bare and cheerless, and the monotony of it all is occasionally depressing. There's nothing to 'look forward to', as all the men and officers say—no landmark in time such as used to carry one through the work in civilian days. Still, we've settled into our stride, and can hang on for months (or years!) if we are wanted to. Leave again seems remote, and it's no good making any plans about it.

The other day I went over to Neuve-Église, the scene of the great cavalry charge, whence there is a fine view over the plain. N.-É. is in an awful state. The streets are quite deserted, and the Church—a big sixteenth-century affair—completely gutted out, the

stained glass still dropping piecemeal from the windows, the roof vanished and the tower gaping open, and all the floor a mass of débris. In the wrecked vestry the drawers are pulled out and tumbled on the floor, and the bottles of wine are scattered on the floor. All the houses are battered and scarred. Like most villages in these parts, it was occupied by the Huns for a few days before they were swept back by the British. . .

How are the boys? Very military, I hope and doubt not.

September 10, 1915.

. . . We are having a very lazy week in a support trench. Our company supplies fatigue parties all day to the other companies, and with the remainder of our men I 'pug' about in our own trench with little odd jobs—riveting the crumbling walls, and putting more earth and sand-bags on our dug-outs.

T. and I have delightful walks now in the early morning. . . . The ruins have a weird romance. The roof is nearly always gone, and the tottering staircases sway with every distant explosion. There are frogs in the kitchen, and weeds in the best parlour. The pathetic little gardens are still to be traced out, torn as they are with shell. In the station a train still stands ready to leave, and tumbled and ransacked though everything is by now, one can still picture the state of things on that August morning, when the shells broke its peace, and the people threw down their books and sewing-machines, and left their ploughs and their buckets to flee to France and England.

I can give you no idea how glorious it is in the fields and lanes behind our lines on these bright almost frosty autumn mornings about 5 o'clock. There is nothing to be heard except the twittering of birds, and the scurrying of rabbits, *with* an occasional rifle-shot. — is out at dawn every day to shoot hares, which make a nice change from stew and bacon.

Yesterday no less a person than our Army Commander came round the trenches. The trench was swept and garnished and the men elaborately cleaned and shaved, what time T. and I—well brushed and groomed, and feeling as we agreed much like a Rector and his curate about to meet the Archbishop—stood meekly at the junction of trenches while the *cortège* swept by. There was the Army Commander, the Division Commander, and the Brigadier, each, so to speak, with his chaplain, churchwardens, and rural deans (would *that* work?). T. was asked, 'Are you all right here?' and all was over, the congregation leaving in good order.

September 19, 1915.

We go into trenches again to-morrow.

This week I've been given a job to carry out on my own, to wit, the digging of a 'service trench' behind the firing-line, which is to be used by stretcher-bearers, &c. I took 100 men up two nights running, and bicycled up on Thursday afternoon as well to map out the next bit.

Last night we had a very festive concert. This morning T. and I walked to the village to the French church, where we heard Mass. To-night we are going into our large town to have a civilized dinner.

I've just read a splendid book—*Ordeal by Battle*, by Oliver, which I highly recommend. It is one of the wisest and most absorbing books I've ever read—about the war, conscription, foreign policy, &c. 'Get it *now*.'

Beyond the digging job, I've had a quiet week, spent in the usual inspections of anti-gas helmets and some bombing practice. . . . Our artillery here is now getting very active. From far north and south we now hear tremendous bombardments. The deep boom of heavy guns is very rapid.

Yes, Jupiter is glorious now. I always think of you at nights, and picture you on your knees praying for our safety and the welfare of our cause. . . . I think we all have got dark days still to endure, but I have never had the smallest doubts as to our complete final victory. I think that with National Service . . . we could hasten the end a good deal. Still, deal with things as the need arises, and don't force the pace unnaturally, or break too sharply with tradition.

Belgium, September 27, 1915.

We have been very busy this week, and I haven't had much time for writing.

You see that the 'great push' has at last begun, and we get fresh news every hour of gains here and losses there. We have been engaged in what the General calls 'minor offensive operations', which are primarily designed to chain down the enemy and prevent him sending away reserves to more critical points of the line; but they may at any moment develop into an active attack, certainly so in the

event of the Huns weakening their line here. We have thus had a very amusing and exciting week. On Thursday morning we made a great pretence of attacking, bombarding them moderately, and throwing a lot of smoke bombs over the parapet. I had six men throwing, and I threw about twenty myself, lighting them with a match, and getting rid of them with all possible dispatch! One set fire to my parapet, and I had to go out with three men into a ditch in front, and shovel it all down—a blazing mass which made us cough and sneeze. The bombs made a vast curtain of white smoke, which completely hid us from the Germans, and them from us. The Huns fairly got the wind up. They thought we were attacking, and fired like mad. There was a tremendous rattle of bullets on the parapet, and there was a weird screaming and cracking overhead of bullets thumping on the trees and ricocheting off the brick walls and banks. Soon the field guns—not many—chimed in, and we had the whirr over our heads and the heavy bangs behind us. This went on for about an hour and then died away, the Huns being presumably under the impression that they had repulsed an attack, whereas in reality no one hardly went outside the parapet.

The same night we bombed them heavily from ditches and hollows in front of the parapet. We have got some first-rate bombs now, and have put in some very effective 'frightfulness'. The Huns here are a bit cowed, and take it all lying down. We have, on the whole, regained the initiative at this point, and our men are more imbued with the offensive spirit, which is a good thing. We put up another feint last night, raising a cheer along the whole line at 6.45 to

celebrate our successes in the south. The Huns again fired like mad, and sent up red and blue lights. They got utterly 'ag', while we sat behind the parapet, shaking with laughter. . . . They appear to be in great numerical strength opposite still, but without many guns. They are strong, however, in these beastly trench mortars. Their sausages, which are very deadly within a small area, and make a terrifying din, come lobbing over from all angles, and you have to watch the sky, and then cut for your life. They are wearing things and have done some damage, and much injury to nerves. Most of the men, however, stick it awfully well, good fellows, although they tend to crowd together for comfort! Fortunately, we've just finished digging some deep and narrow slits, where we store the men in bombardment times. It would make you laugh to see them. I can hardly keep a straight face when I come along and find them deep down below me—in each 'slit' a dozen or so of patient, but somewhat pained and surprised faces gazing up at me. As I heard one of them say, 'He is only cruel to be kind'. They don't like the slits as they are very damp and muddy, and very narrow indeed, so that once in you can't move, unless you are the outside-man. There they stand for hours, while shells do fly.

We have had very few casualties indeed, but the men are a little worn, although very bucked with the news, and more confident than ever of smashing the Germans.

We go out for rest to-day. We haven't advanced yet, but may move pretty soon, I think, in which case God help the Huns!

I'm feeling very fit, and not strained. But I got awfully wet. It's been raining hard this week. The trenches are full of mud and frogs again—last night one of our sergeants found one on his face—and the grass and ground outside is simply sodden. Lying waiting with my bombs, I got absolutely soaked, and the phosphorus from our smoke bombs, which was still smouldering and glowing fifteen hours after the 'Straf', got all over my bags and burnt into my knees. I got soaked through, and was reduced to tying sand-bags round my knees over the skin, to keep my wet underclothing off the body. I'm quite dry again now, and none the worse, without even a cold. Wonderful how soon one gets hardened to this sort of thing.

The men are splendid, and some of my N.C.O.'s are full of courage and initiative. We've got heaps of sand-bags and periscopes. I think there are plenty coming out, and it's only a question of transport.

I'm rather anxious in case the girls overwork. I've heard of one or two cases of women working themselves to death—or brain-fever. Everybody now—women especially, with their highly-strung sense of duty—are inclined to do too much. I assure you *we* are very careful, and make a point of not taking everything too seriously. So don't idealize our efforts, and feel that you're bound to go full speed ahead. . . .

This week we may move elsewhere.

France, September 29, 1915.

We are on the move again and all agog. To-day we've been in the train, rushing south, and to-night, utterly weary, we are billeted in a cosy kitchen in a pretty little village, we don't know for how long. We are about six miles from the firing-line.

We were hoiked out of trenches at rather short notice the day before yesterday, and left them to return no more. We had got to know them so well, that we left them with some regret, muddy and rat-haunted though they are. The men were in great spirits, being under the impression again that they were going 'on rest'. Little rest we shall get now, I bet. For all we know, we shall be in the thick of it very soon.

The whole Brigade moved that night to our old large town, where we spent all yesterday, marching away at 6 this morning. We had a good time while there, although we were billeted in a shell-wrecked convent, and came immediately upon a dead horse in the courtyard, which was struck by a shell, together with twenty-five men, of whom three were killed, the very day we entered. The whole building and courtyard was littered with timber and broken glass, but on one side of the building we managed to find a row of rooms undamaged—although almost bare of course—and by dint of much rummaging made ourselves in the end awfully comfortable with bedsteads and weird mattresses. L. and I shared a room. We had no shells. . . .

We had quite a jolly march to the station—the whole Brigade together again for the first time for months. The train journey was interesting too. Behind the

line, a mass of troops is moving up. There are long processions of motor-lorries thumping along. Staff officers dashing about in motors, and strings of French and Belgian workmen struggling along with pick and shovel. Everywhere the bustle and uproar of a great army in the field.

After we had detrained, we had a long time to wait about in driving rain, which was very cold rain. We didn't march off this way for about six hours, but fortunately we discovered an inn, and managed to keep warm by moving about. Once we started, we only took about $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours to reach this place. We were very glad to get to our billet at last, and to eat a solid meal—our first to-day—of fried eggs and chipped potatoes. We have the kitchen between us for everything, and the old people of the house watch us all the time, like dumb animals, before they elect to retire to their bedrooms. The men are in barns, 'close billeting' with a vengeance.

The mud about is something colossal, and I'm afraid the rain has somewhat hampered our great attack. To-day we encountered a lane which was literally a stream of black liquid mud, over the ankles. Fortunately, our valises have arrived, and more important still, M., my excellent servant, has returned from his leave.

We are hard-worked now, as we are short of officers. . . . I'm very fit. Dear old L. works like a horse, so that I don't get too much.

It is very nice and warm here with the kitchen stove, and I am dog-tired in a healthy soothing fashion, so good-night.

France, October 4, 1915.

I hope you have received the post cards. Since my last letter from our kitchen billet we have moved on again into a warmish corner, although we haven't even yet been properly 'in action'. We marched off at half-past twelve noon, and had a short and rather jolly march on a crisp frosty morning. We were passing through the mining country of big slag-heaps and chalk trenches which you have seen described well in the *Daily Mail* this week. We had several of the usual waits—at one point seeing fifteen snow-white aeroplanes pass overhead—and about 6 o'clock arrived about two miles behind the fighting. We slept that night out in the open, near a trench to rush to when shells were falling. It simply poured with rain, but I got right inside my valise, turning the head flap over, so that I kept fairly dry, although about midnight I discovered I was reposing on a somewhat sodden patch! However, I was none the worse. It was a weird show: all night the big guns were thundering and flashing round us. Behind us and to our left were our own big guns—and we *have* got some whoppers now, with, I believe, unlimited ammunition—while on our right, on a huge covered line, were the flashes of the French 75's and 102's. Just beyond the ridge in front of us, across a bare open plain, the shells were bursting and the rockets going up, while the smart crackle of musketry was incessant. The German guns aren't very formidable just at present—as probably most of them are in Poland—but their big Jack Johnsons were dropping about half a mile away, and some behind us. One killed Wing, the General of our Division—a very great loss.

One night we were sent out to dig, and almost got into a good scrap. The shrapnel—our own and those of the enemy—was a wonderful sight. But the R.E.'s decided that no digging could be done, so we were withdrawn.

On Friday I made a reconnaissance with my sergeant into the captured German trenches. We passed over the battle-field, and saw the German and British dead, officers and men, lying where they had fallen. One could almost reconstruct the battle, and see where the defence had been hottest. On the whole, our guns had done their work well. There were good gaps in the German wire, and in many places the German trenches were flattened out level with the ground. The Germans, however, have wonderful dug-outs deep down in the chalk, at the bottom of a long flight of stairs, and they were all hiding in them when our chaps rushed the trenches. Our men bombed them. We gassed them too, and I saw the cylinders.

On our right the French are tremendously strong. We are now holding on tight west of the village, and digging in. Our battalion is at present in reserve behind, we don't know for how long. We may attack soon, when the guns are up. We've got a nice billet here—very bare; but three rooms with doors and windows.

TO A MARRIED SISTER.

France, October 4, 1915.

. . . After some rather strenuous and restless days we are having at last two quiet days behind the battle. We have hopped upon most comfortable billets, by some stroke of luck. We've got three

rooms and the Captain has got a mattress—above all, the doors and windows shut and are complete. To-night we have unearthed and lit a good stove, and are extremely snug and comfortable. L. and I are rather 'making a night of it' with a good supper and a good read and smoke. It's the first fire we've seen (and probably the last), and this is the first house we have occupied where there was anything to return to or to look forward to. So we are making the most of what will probably be our last comfy evening, and may be—as we say sometimes in 'grim jest'—our last on earth! . . . Since we came south we are more in the thick of things, and we are on the look-out now, night and day, for the order to attack. One night we slept out in a plain just behind where the fighting was going on. We never counted on these two quiet days, and we wonder what's been taking place.

The French are now 'all out'. No quarter and all the rest of it. We have taken over some of their line, so that they can mass together in a narrow space, and do the real advance. We draw away the German reserves.

Tell the children all about the war, and make them realize early what England stands for. I think we shall not be forgotten.

France, October 7, 1915.

I hope you received my letter from my last very comfy billet. Since then (the day before yesterday) we've moved up into the captured trenches, about a mile behind the firing-line. Fighting has at present come to a standstill except for the artillery. We

shell and are shelled all day, but not very heavily or skilfully. Nothing (in a good hour be it said!) has yet fallen into the trench, and we have had no casualties in B Company. But the noise is something terrific sometimes. This afternoon we had five great whacking high explosives bursting within a few yards of the trench. No one touched, but 'some' noise.

These old Hun trenches are very interesting and uncomfortable. They are cut rudely in the chalk, with a few very deep but small caves serving as dug-outs. We are 'cave-men', pure and simple, sleeping on chalk or timber floor. There are four of us in here—L. and I sleep in the upper bunk (as in a cabin on board ship), and T. and B. on the ground floor. Half the men simply sleep in the bottom of the trench, for lack of dug-outs.

We are in support. This afternoon I walked forward over the ridge, and looked down into Hulluch, at the fires of the enemy, and an endless vista of pillars of black and white smoke where our shells were bursting. On all sides was the mutter and barking of the guns, and the wail and buzz of shrapnel. At some points here the Germans are on our flank, and almost on our line—a barricade guarded by bombers being the only separation.

Yesterday I was sent on an expedition to learn about gas, but the lecture didn't come off. I had to rush off early without breakfast, and didn't get anything to eat till half-past one! I walked back to our town, and then got a motor-lorry to the Head-quarters of the Guards Division.

We are very cheery here in our cave, and have nothing to do. The men are fetching water, rations, &c., all day.

The town behind us is an absolute city of desolation, as bad, I should think, as Ypres, but more modern and industrial. Hardly a house is inhabited, and there are streets and streets of ruins. The Church, which has a fine Norman West end, is knocked to bits. Everywhere are shell-holes, dead horses, abandoned equipment and boxes of ammunition. We were last billeted S.W. of this town.

S. swept breezily up the trench this morning. I hadn't seen him since Plug Street days. All our friends of — are with us here, and we pass them now and then on the road or in the trench. . . .

I'm reading *Silas Marner*. . . .

The 'push' has been quite a success, although we have had to yield the ground captured far in front. At one time we had a precarious hold beyond Hulluch, but no one hoped to consolidate it. We are ready now for another push soon. The French have done wonderfully.

France, October 10, 1915.

We are moving back again to-night, but only into some more chalk trenches (probably worse than these) about half a mile farther back. We shall probably have no dug-outs and have to sleep in the trench, as many of our officers are already doing in the trenches ahead of us. Here we've been crowded, but fairly comfortable, with a table and chairs and some sand-bags filled with straw.

The Germans attacked the French on our right on Friday, and by way of 'demonstration' to prevent us reinforcing, subjected us to an 'intense bombard-

ment'—our first taste thereof. It was 'pretty useful', as Phil would say. It lasted from twelve to about four, and there was not a second without either an explosion or the swishing of a shell about to burst. We got most of our men underground—and a good job too, as the shells were well aimed on our trench, and knocked it about a good deal. They were bursting all round us, two per second (at least), and earth and bits of chalk were flying everywhere. Everything shook and rattled, and when our guns replied, the noise was terrific, with our old naval gun working like a horse, and Granny and Mother all doing their little bit. The German stuff was mostly light high explosive, with occasional shrapnel, and a good many of what we call 'crumps'—big high explosive shells, which make a large crater, and a whole orchestra of sound in one—an angry screech, followed by a sigh of disappointment as the bits fly off without hurting any one, and the buzz and rattle of the fuse as it comes to ground a hundred yards away.

. . . The redoubt lost the other day is a fearful nuisance, as the Huns enfilade us from there, and we are always getting stray shots from behind.

Balkan news is very weird; I've seen nothing since Thursday's paper, and in those 'comic-opera kingdoms' changes are so rapid that one can predict nothing. It looks as if Ferdinand and King of Greece were risking their thrones, and are certainly against their own people. F.'s position is a blue enough one—with an Allied force in the south, the Russians on his coast, his people semi-mutinous, and most of his generals aloof! It is difficult to conceive a Bulgarian war against Russia!—of all people. The whole

deal between Germany, Turkey, and Bulgaria has a hectic look, and shows the Germans are pretty desperate. But you may by now have got news which puts all this comment out of court.

Heath, Balleine, and Cheesman are a sad loss to Oxford. H. was a great dear, and I saw a lot of him again out here. He was always so amusing.

We get very little water here and the beards about are monstrous.

October 11. We moved in last night to reserve trenches, but subsequently—at noon to-day—were called up again into a trench just behind the firing-line. We have a good large dug-out again. The Huns have built themselves some wonderful underground places, and evidently intended to stop here the winter. In fact the position we have won was evidently intended never to be lost! It was strongly fortified, and had all the advantages of the ground.

Last night L. and I slept cheek by jowl in a narrow slit in the chalk clay. I slept on my macintosh and was very glad of the Elliston blanket which my servant now carries about for me. Our valises are now far behind—in the lost realm of civilization—and we rub along now like beasts of the field. We are very short of water, and haven't washed for three or four days. We eat everything sometimes on one plate.

Relieving in these trenches is a maddening business. In this square mile there are some half-dozen regiments packed together ready to assault or defend, and in the deep narrow trenches the congestion is appalling. It takes three or four hours to get the battalion from one trench to another $\frac{1}{4}$ mile away. The shelling is now absolutely continuous; but the

trenches here are splendid against it, and all day south of us there have been tremendous bombardments. The bombardment inflicted on us which I mentioned is said by the artillery to have been the worst the Germans have yet given the British. If that is the case, we don't mind a bit, therefore so much for that.

'Death has not been suffered to take so much as an illusion from his heart. In the hot-fit of life, a-tiptoe on the highest point of being, he passes at a bound on to the other side. The noise of the mallet and chisel is scarcely quenched, the trumpets are hardly done blowing, when, trailing with him clouds of glory, this happy-starred, full-blooded spirit shoots into the spiritual land.'

(R. L. STEVENSON, *Æs Triplex.*)



PRINTED IN ENGLAND
AT THE OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS