WHISKEY AND SODA: A STORY

BY BOYD CABLE

'FIVE!' said Greenie Buckler as another shell burst down the line in a leaping rush of dirt and black smoke. Next moment he jerked erect and jumped convulsively from where a fragment had hissed down and buried itself with a vicious slap in the mud a bare yard from where he had crouched.

'Keep down there, Buckler; keep under cover!' called a sergeant, and Buckler resumed his crouching position and spluttered angry curses. 'Under cover — where 's the dash cover from stuff that slaps straight down out o' the sky? Dash take ——'

A gust of bullets whewed and whimpered and hissed overhead and another lot pattered and thudded into the earth of the low parapet. A group of light shells snarled over and burst in a series of rending cracks, and the group in the trench bottom crouched lower and glanced up apprehensively. A sharp cry followed close on the cracks, and some of the men stirred restlessly and muttered low oaths. 'Someone else got it,' said one. 'Wonder who this time?' Another grunted, 'Wonder who next?' and the group fell silent again. 'Four together that time,' remarked Buckler. 'But I 've forgotten what I counted to before them.'

'Shut up and quit countin' the cussed things,' he was told. 'There 's too many of 'em for comfort, an' that 's quite enough to know.'

'Want to know what they average out a minute,' said Greenie Buckler. 'I 've a notion this is about as hot a fire as this ol' war has raised, and I want to be able to quote figures at 'em when I come to argue it.'

'Yes — when,' came the retort. 'But it looks like the devil will be the only one you 'll have a chance to argue with before night.'

The battalion was having a bad time, and the men were taking it the harder because it was their first turn in the trenches, because they were suffering rather heavy casualties, and because they had nothing to do, had nothing they could do, except squat in the mud of the shallow and broken-down trenches, and take the punishment that was coming to them. It was dismal weather, with the ground a soaking quagmire and a cold rain sleeting steadily down. The men's coats and clothes were soaked and sodden to the skin, and clothes, hands, and faces were fouled with the chill, slimy, clammy mud which was everywhere, round and under them, and clung to everything it touched. The only landscape visible to any eyes that looked outside the trench was a wet expanse of the same sodden earth and mud, a few shattered stumps of trees standing up gaunt and forlorn, a horizon curtained off by a gray drizzle of rain — all most horribly dreary and depressing and unpleasant. Nothing alive could be seen; nothing moved except the thick black smoke of fresh shell bursts, the slow uncoiling dirty clouds of their dispersing.

The scene and surroundings alone might well have depressed the spirits of the best and bravest; and when you add in the rush and crash of the shells,

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the whistle of bullets, and — worst of all — the occasional sight of a casualty from shell fire, you cannot wonder that the men were in no cheerful mood.

The same battalion — which meantime we may call 'The Greenhorns' — came afterwards to prove itself one of the best and toughest fighting lots in France; but — and it is no discredit to them, and they take no shame in owning to it now — they were going through about the worst of the experiences they were ever to face, and were not feeling good about it. They were picked men, one of the first lots to come in to the relief of the 'Contemptible Little Army,' and every man of them had asked nothing better than to get into action, had been keen and desperately anxious to show what they were made of, and just how good the battalion was.

But this very keenness has its dangerous side, as plenty of old soldiers will tell you, especially in a lot that have not been tried out in action, that have not 'found themselves.' They are well to be proud of a reputation, but not if they get to worry about it, because from worrying they may get to being nervous about it — and the front line is no place for any sort of nervousness. It is worse with new and untried men, because a hot action is so often more horrible than imagination could paint, and men are inclined to think this particular shell or rifle fire or attack is heavier than anything men have endured, to pass on to thinking it is worse than men can endure, and — the last and most dangerous stage of all — come to failing to endure and flinching from the trial. Greenie Buckler was counting the falling shells with just that idea in mind of proving some day that, as he said, 'They say this is the worst war on record, an' I fancy we 're in about the worst bit of it as ever ever was.'

The battalion had been in for two full days and nights and had suffered with great fortitude the grueling process of being under a fairly heavy long-range shell fire, losing a number of men, and having their shallow trenches badly knocked about. But on this, the third day, the shelling had risen to an intensive bombardment, and in addition a heavy rifle and machine-gun fire had swept the ground in steady streams.

When this rifle fire first began it appeared a sound reasoning to our men that if the Germans looked over their parapet to fire, their heads must be presenting a target to be shot at; and greatly cheered by the change from their deadly inactivity, they lined their parapets and opened a rapid fire. But the Germans had the greater number of rifles and a still greater weight of machine guns, and in response to our fire there came from the German trenches a steadily rising full-bodied roar of rifle fire and a sluicing torrent of bullets that swept our parapets from every possible angle, while the rate of fire from the enemy guns also increased and their high-explosives burst in an unceasing storm. At the end of half an hour of this dueling we had so many casualties — most of them killed outright with clean shots through the head — and were so evidently getting the worst of it that orders were passed along to ease off and for the men to keep down and under cover.

This, again, the feeling that they had been fairly beaten in the duel, was not the best feeling for the men to have to sit down and digest through another bout of active shelling, and spirits went down and down, and gloomy prophecies began to pass on the chances of any success attending a move part of the battalion was due to make before dark. Out on their right front and about a hundred and fifty yards away

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there was a slight rise in the ground, from which the Germans were able to bring a half-enfilade fire to bear on part of our line. The rise was to be captured and our line pushed forward to take it in, and the right half of the battalion was to make the attempt while the other half made a demonstration of attacking the trenches opposite them. At first it had not been supposed that the trenches along the rise were heavily held — in fact, official word had been passed round to that effect.

The Greenhorns, and the right half especially, began to hold a very different opinion on the matter after that rifle duel and the weight of fire that came from the opposition. They were ready and willing enough to make the attempt, and were in no sense afraid to die; but they began to feel certain that the attempt meant nothing but death, that none of them could live to come through such a fire and reach the enemy trench. And this, despite any amount of determination, is no healthy spirit for men to take with them into an attack.

The C.O. made a tour of some of his trenches during the afternoon, and spoke to odd officers and N.C.O.'s and men, and tried to gauge their feelings and the situation. He was far from feeling easy at the result, and he went back to the Signals dugout and had a 'phone talk with H.Q. behind — speaking in French to keep his talk private from the signalers. Like his men he was perfectly willing and eager to have the chance to show what they could do and make the little forward move; but thought it no more than wise to warn H.Q. of his opinion that the attack might not live to reach the enemy trench, and so on. In reply he was told to go ahead with the programme, but was promised some reinforcements to make up for the losses he had suffered. The reinforcements could only be few, but they would be good.

This remark on reinforcements — with no word as to their fewness — was allowed to filter out and round the men, and they began to feel a shade more hopeful. But very shortly after there came such a sudden and tremendous increase in the enemy fire that the hopefulness began to die down again. The rush and crash of the high explosives came faster and faster, although this time the most of them appeared to be falling well behind. The rifle and machine-gun fire rose again, too, and the bullets streamed overhead and rapped and thudded along the parapets, until the men, crouched low and listening to the fiendish uproar, began to speculate dismally again on the chances of anyone remaining alive a moment after they left the cover of the trench and faced the storm in the open. A whisper began to go round that the Germans must have heard — those cursed spies again — the attack was coming off, and were trying to break it before it began. And what sort of fire must they expect to meet when the attack began, if before a man showed it was as hot as this? 'This,' the hiss and whisk and thud of bullets, the howl and vibrant rush of the passing shells, the quivering of the ground under the impact of their fall, the riving cracks of the shrapnel's burst overhead, the deep tearing crashes and storm of flying fragments from the ground-bursts, all the clamor of battle that made up the 'this' gave no shade of comfort in the answer to their question. They 'd make the attempt all right, of course — but it was hard luck — not a chance to show the sort of stuff they were, or let the folks back home hear how they could make a charge and clear a position — hard luck, but at least they 'd

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show how the battalion could die, to the last man, if need be, in a desperate charge.

Then, when the feelings of the Greenhorns were at their lowest, when they were coming to the dangerous verge of wondering was it worth while for them to be thrown away uselessly — quite uselessly, since it was plain none could survive that fire in the open and the rise would remain untaken — the reinforcements appeared.

The first sight of them filled the tired men in the trenches with an amazement that changed rapidly to open wrath and disgust. For the reinforcements were advancing across the open in a long widely-spaced line at a steady walk. It was evident that the Germans too had seen them, for the shells began to pitch farther back, and flame and crash down along the advancing line, the rifle fire swelled to a roaring storm. The battalion watched with straining eyes to see the advancing line swept out of existence, to be cut down to the last man in the first hundred yards. It was suicide, it was crazy folly, it was this, that, and the other, to sacrifice the men so. Could n't their officers have seen it was hopeless to come over the open, walking upright, under fire of this sort. And bitter remarks began to pass of unpleasant things they had heard from time to time about the stupidity, the rashness, the thick-headed carelessness of life shown by fool officers.

But the line came on, with maddening slowness, but with the most astonishing steadiness. A group of shells would fall in winking fire and spurting smoke along the line; here and there odd men stumbled and fell and lay still, or staggered up and into place and on again. Another string of shells — heavy ones this time — crashed down, and a half of the line vanished behind the curtain of rolling black smoke; but as the smoke thinned and drifted aside dim figures came in sight again, still in line, and still advancing. The men in the trenches gasped, and held their breath, and waited tense with straining eyes and thumping hearts, to see the end, the moment when the line would thin out and die away under the crashing shells and the drumming bullets that hailed down, flinging spurts of mud and dirt from the ground among the very feet of the moving men. One hundred yards they had thought was the limit the line could cover before they were cut down; and, seeing the tornado of fire, most there began to think the hundred yards an over-estimate.

But the line covered the hundred yards, two hundred, three, four, and began to drop and clamber and jump unhastily down into the cover of the support trench. There were scattered figures dotting the ground behind them, there were a few crawling back, already there were stretcher-bearers doubling out to salve the wounded; but the line had reached cover, still more or less as a line, decidedly and most miraculously without being annihilated.

'By God!' said Greenie Buckler, 'By God ——'

'What lot are they?' asked another man. 'Must be The Guards, or some o' the crack regiments.'

'Not them,' said Greenie. 'They 're the Roughshire Stuffs or the Stuffshire Buffs, or some other crowd I dunno I ever heard the name of. Just one of the ordinary common County regiments o' the line — one o' the old Regular regiments.'

'Well, after this,' said the other. 'I 'm ready an' willin' to believe any sort o' fancy fairy-tale yarn they like to tell me o' the old Regulars. I take off my hat to 'em.'

They were all prepared to lavish

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compliments and comments of amazement on the newcomers when presently they began to filter up by the short communication trench to the front line, but the newcomers received these with such an air of surprise that the comments died away.

'That!' said one of the Regulars. 'Pretty hot, but nothing to shout about. We 've met a lot worse 'n that.' And they dismissed the matter at that.

Not only so, but they appeared to take the situation, which the Greenhorns still considered horribly bad, as a mere matter of course, as something so much the normal as to be worth no special remark. They began to go calmly about the business of settling in and making themselves as comfortable (if the word may be permitted under such circumstances) as possible, scooping out little niches here and there and rigging up waterproof ground sheet roofs to them, taking off overcoats and wringing the water out with one man to the shoulders and another to the skirts, and putting them on again, even, in the case of one little group, producing a handful of dry sticks from somewhere about their packs, lighting a little fire, and boiling water to make tea.

The Greenhorns regarded these proceedings with round-eyed wonder, and for very shame's sake were forced to move and sit about like these others, instead of crouching low and hugging the parapet as they had been doing.

'You 're pretty snug in 'ere,' said one of the tea-makers, looking up at Greenie Buckler. 'Fine deep trenches an' good cover. Feels safe as the Bank.'

This was a new and strange opinion on their trenches to the Greenhorns. They had been thinking them most unsatisfactory trenches, woefully lacking in any good points, shallow, tumbled, broken down, and everything else a trench ought not to be.

'They 're a bit smashed up,' said Greenie, hesitatingly. 'We 've been shelled — er — rather badly the last day or two.'

'They 're still bloomin' trenches, anyway,' said a little Cockney, emphatically. 'You want to lie hout in the bloomin' hopen for a day under a heap worse fire then this, an' you 'd think you was bloomin' lucky to 'ave trenches at all — much less good 'uns like this.'

Conversations of a similar sort were going on up and down the line, and the Greenhorns began to discover that affairs were not nearly as desperate as they had supposed, that their casualties had been comparatively light, that their position was a strong and easily defendable one, and that the expected advance on the rise must end in a no-less-expected capture of it.

The coping stone to this cheerful opinion was put on by the little Cockney. Several remarks had been made by the Greenhorns round him about the position that was to be attacked, the huge number of Germans opposite, and, feeling gently for an expert opinion, on the chances of successfully facing the enemy fire.

'Where is this bloomin' position?' asked the Cockney at last, and when a Greenhorn, without looking out of the trench, pointed the direction, the Cockney stood up and looked out at it. 'You got a good position 'ere, hanyway,' he remarked, hitching himself a little higher to look out. 'Plenty o' wire hout' (there were about six straggling strands) 'an' a fine hopen glassy* for 'em to cross, if they want to try. Not that they 're likely to try. We could shoot 'em into cats'-meat 'fore they come 'arf way.'

'Better keep down a bit,' said

* Glacis.

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Greenie, gently, as half a dozen bullets hissed close over. 'Their trenches over there are stiff wi' rifles, an' if the Germans ——'

The Cockney interrupted. 'Where are these bloomin' Germs?' he demanded, irritably. 'I ain't 'ardly 'eard of nuffink helse but these bloomin' crowds o' Germs since we come in 'ere. Well, where are they?'

'If you don't see 'em you 'll be hearin' from 'em presently,' said Greenie Buckler grimly, 'if you keep on showin' as much of yourself as that. We lost a few this morning that were showin' less 'n half a head over the parapet.'

'Hall right,' said the Cockney, scornfully. 'Let 's see if they 're such bloomin' crack shots, an' if there 's so bloomin' many of 'em.' And without more ado he scrambled up out of the trench and deliberately stood, a clear man-high target, on top of the parapet. Bullets began to whip past in rapidly increasing numbers, and Buckler and the Greenhorns gaped up at him, waiting every instant to see him fall back riddled like a sieve.

'Well,' said the Cockney, 'where are all these bloomin' Hallymands?' He walked half a dozen paces along the parapet and back again. 'Where are hall these bloomin' crack shots?'

His fellows regarded him with mild interest. 'Better hop down outer that,' remarked one casually. 'If the sergeant dekkos* you, you 'll be for it.'

The Cockney condescended to take this advice, and clambered down leisurely, with the bullets still humming and spitting angrily about his ears. 'Rotten shots,' he remarked, and spat disgustedly. 'Rotten bloomin' shots.'

'Is n't that a bit crazy?' said Greenie to one of the other Regulars. 'Don't you fellows have risks enough without going looking for trouble?'

The Regular grinned at him. 'Not as crazy as it looks,' he said. 'They are pretty rotten shots, y' know.'

'But they got a whole bunch of ours, showing no more 'n half a head,' said Greenie.

'Chance shots,' said the Regular. 'But him standing up there a fair target they 'd aim deliberate at 'im. I suppose that 's mostly what they gives us a chance advancin' against 'em over the open. They see us plain and they picks targets to aim at—an' misses as a rule. Now when *we* get a chance of that sort — *ar-r-r!*'

Here again was a new and most cheering version of the business of advancing over the open under fire. The Greenhorns up and down the trench heard plenty of the same sort of talk, and most of them had seen or heard of the little Cockney's exploit. The opinion grew and strengthened that this job of taking the rise was a mere trifle, that they had been needlessly worried about their dangers, that after all they 'd be able to show how they could take a trench and use a bayonet.

They were to make the attack and the reinforcements stay in support. The Regulars were mildly disappointed but properly philosophic, over this arrangement. They 'd never had a fair go with the bayonet, they explained, been in a dozen big battles, but mostly had nothing to do but blaze into the brown of 'em — fair butchery! And what was the good of all the years of training and bayonet exercise they 'd practised if they were never to do more than shoot Germans into ha'penny numbers at anything over two hundred yards. And, besides, when you took a trench there was always all sort of loot — haversacks with tasty snacks in 'em, and helmets, and maybe a few medals and wrist watches. The Greenhorns

*Sees.

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might count themselves in luck. And before they began their advance, the Greenhorns, instead of being desperately keyed up to certain and sudden death, actually began to agree they were in luck.

The attack was made some minutes before the appointed time, because a sudden downpour of rain gave a chance of getting out of the trench and part way across before they were discovered through the gray curtain of the falling torrents. They went forward in better heart and with more confidence than they would have believed possible an hour or two before. Greenie Buckler, indeed, to his own secret amazement, when he came to think it over after, found himself laughing more than half the way over. The little Cockney had climbed out with them, and Greenie was amused to see the way he crouched and ducked and slunk furtively forward, with an apprehensive eye cast constantly behind him. Greenie was tickled at first to think this was the man who had been so contemptuous of bullets a little before, and now apparently was in mortal terror of them. But he was even more amused presently to find what the Cockney was so afraid of was being spotted by his officer or sergeant and called back, because he had no right to be there.

The attack was successful, and the rise was taken. It was not such a tame affair after all, and the Greenhorns had a good many casualties in the crossing, but much more than leveled the score when they got in with the bayonet. They took their trench and held it against a sharp counter-attack or two, linked up their new trench with the old, and settled in with the cheering conviction that no Germans on earth could take it from them.

They were relieved next day, and they were behind the lines when their friends the Regulars came out a few days after. By now they had come to realize all that this handful of men had meant to them, and they turned out of the cellars of the ruined village where they were billeted, and lined the rubbish-strewn street, and gave the Regulars three cheers *and* a tiger as they tramped stolidly through with a mouth organ piping at their head.

'G'blimey,' said the little Cockney. 'Wot's hall the tamasha* about?'

'Gawd knows,' said the man next him. 'Pleased to see us again I s'pose — an' remindin' us they was pleaseder to see us t'other day.'

''Strewth! Fat lot o' good we did 'em,' said the Cockney. 'Just sat in comfortable trenches an' watched them take theirs —'cep' me, that got nothink for my pains but a 'ole in me toonic an' a telling off from the sergeant. Fat lot o' good we did for 'em.'

But therein he was very wrong. They did more than they knew. The Greenhorns knew so by now, and Greenie Buckler spoke for most in what he said of them.

'God knows what we'd ha' done if they hadn't come in and showed us that the worst is only as bad as you think it is. I know they did me good.'

'Me, too,' said another. 'They was like a good long drink to a bone-dry man.'

'They were more,' said Greenie. 'Plain water or straight soda is a good enough drink when you're dry; but, being the old hand Regulars, they were more; they were just the drop o' whiskey in the soda.'

* Performance.

Land and Water

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THE FIRST ENGLISH NOVELIST

BY H. C. BIRON

THE curious will find in St. Bride's Church, Fleet Street, a tablet with the following inscription: 'He enlarged the knowledge of human nature and taught the passions to move at the command of virtue.' It is signed all over. As Macaulay said on another occasion, 'Sam Johnson or the devil.' Although we remember a famous refusal to disgrace the walls of Westminster Abbey with an English epitaph, St. Bride's, Fleet Street, is not Westminster Abbey, nor is Richardson, Goldsmith. Still, no one had a better right than Johnson to provide his friend's epitaph. The sturdy lexicographer's downright admiration for Richardson's novels is one of those stimulating surprises which make his character of such unceasing interest. We can only wonder with Boswell to learn that by comparison Fielding was 'a blockhead' and 'a barren rascal,' and that there is 'more knowledge of the heart in one Letter of Richardson's than in all *Tom Jones*.' But Johnson was always a moralist. In his heart he probably thought with Colonel Newcome, that Tom Jones was rather a low fellow: and though Richardson made the passions move, in his chaste pages Virtue always kept a firm eye on them. In the preface to *Clarissa Harlowe,* Richardson is at pains to point this out:

> But it will be proper to observe, for the sake of such as may apprehend hurt to the morals of youth from the more freely written letters, that the gentlemen, though professed libertines as to the female sex and making it one of their wicked maxims to keep no faith with any of the individuals of it who are thrown into their power, are not, however, either infidels or scoffers.

Seduction tempered by orthodoxy is, it would seem, their lover's creed. And the author points out with pride:

> On the contrary, it will be found in the progress of the work that they may often make such reflections upon each other, and each upon himself and his own actions, as reasonable beings might make who disbelieve not a future state of rewards and punishments and who one day propose to reform.

And one of whom, he points out with triumph, is 'actually reforming.'

Lovelace himself makes an even more singular plea for consideration. He urges in extenuation in a letter to his friend Mr. Belford, that he always wears mourning for his discarded victims when they die. It reminds one of Dr. Johnson's excuse for his pious friend Mr. Campbell, who in spite of his piety had not been inside a church for many years, 'but he never passes a church without pulling off his hat: this shows he has good principles.' Belford, indeed, becomes most edifying as the book progresses — not that this implies any sudden conversion — and is chosen in the end by Clarissa to act as her executor. Under his influence even Lovelace's camp followers, Mowbray and Tourville, reconsider their position and prepare for an old age of comparative decorum, after taking the precaution to make it tolerable by sinking what remained to them of fortune in annuities — a delightful incident showing the man of business was

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