ON ACTIVE SERVICE.

THE MUDLARK

OR

THE BEDFORDSHIRE

GAZETTE.

COLONEL ONSLOW
(Who made some Sweeping Reforms).

The Mudlark

Or, THE BEDFORDSHIRE GAZETTE.

No. 4. ON ACTIVE SERVICE. DECEMBER, 1916.

4TH NOVEMBER, 1916.

THE new censorship regulations just issued may, one fears, lead to the "compulsory liquidation" of *The Mudlark*. The submission of the manuscript for censoring will probably lead to such delays that all topical interest will have vanished. That, however, is a point for its readers to decide.

It is impossible to let this number pass without reference to those we have lost. Individual mention is impossible, but *The Mudlark* certainly could not go to press without a word about its late assistant editor, Lieut. Gerald Sherry. Just as he was the life and soul of everybody with whom he came in contact, so he was the life and soul of this magazine. Anything in the nature of a panegyric is unnecessary. He was known to everybody, and of him it may truly be said that he was a man of whom all men spoke well, and more cannot be said of any man.

R. S. M. Bartlett, editor of "Regimental News" in this paper, Lce.-Cpl. E. G. Harvey, our chief artist, and "Touchstone Junior" are three more who have lost their lives in the "Great Adventure." R.I.P.

[illegible] special correspondents" alleged to be eye-witnesses of the "Greatest battle in the history of the world."

The above was received by a member of the Battalion, from his brother, and speaks for itself.

"Roll on a Blighty One!"

It's easy said in times of peace you'd like
to go and see
Some fighting in real earnest, and to drink
'ot blood for tea.
Remember, round the town of Mons,
when we was on the run,
We 'eard shots fired in anger—Yes,
"Roll on" a Blighty one!

Remember up at Wipers, when the Kayser
unloosed 'ell?
Remember at Givenchy, or the Aisne, or
Neuve Chapelle?
Remember on 'ill 60, when we tasted
Bertha's gun?
Remember in the gas attack?—"Roll
on" a Blighty one!

There isn't much we haven't seen since
turnin' this 'ere leaf,
The same old work, the same old stunts,
the same old Bully Beef;

"HOLE ON THE RIGHT."

The same old tramps, the same old roads,
the same old jobs we've done;
The same old life, the same old death—
"Roll on" a Blighty one!

There isn't much we haven't seen—I
mind at Festubert,
Advancing on a German trench, I felt one
in my shirt.
Though I lay for thirty hours in a shell
'ole in the sun—
I didn't care a damn, because I'd got a
"Blighty one"!

We 'aven't much to grumble at, we
needn't crib and fret,
It's a long way to Berlin—but we aint
down 'earted yet.
When we've cooked the Kayser's goose,
and when 'IS fightin' days are done,
We'll not be fallin' out—not when the
way's a "BLIGHTY ONE!"

STAND-TO.

To the Editor of "The Mudlark."

Dear Sir,—I enclose a few notes telling you something of the doings of the Nth Battalion of our Regiment.

It is with the greatest interest that the officers of this mess have opened this, the first number of your paper. There are times when the war bores us all, but when it is over, and those who have taken part in it are scattered over the seven seas, they will think back upon these days, and will find the hard outlines of our strenuous existence pretty softened in retrospect. Then will be the moment when such a paper as yours will be opened again for perhaps the hundredth time, and scanned once more to recall the "good old days," and half-forgotten names of men and places will crowd back into the new-awakened memory.

I should like to add that in the Nth at present we have former members of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, and 10th Battalions. They have drifted to us through the "usual channels," but the fact makes us, perhaps, an unusual assembly—and one, I assure you, which greatly appreciates your publication, and wishes you every success with it.—We remain, yours etc.,

"NTH BEDFORDSHIRE REGIMENT."

[Will other Battalions please copy the Nth and also send us notes?—ED.]

We have seen the first number of *The Mudlark*. The name itself is refreshing to us, hinting, as it does, at some kind of *terra firma* other than sand. And, having read in it a hope that "notes would be sent in from the other Battalions," we are responding to the best of our limited ability.

We are living—as everyone, in England at least, knows—on the banks of the Suez Canal. Since England has fathomed this secret, despite the eagle eye of the Censor, I suppose there's no harm in letting you know, too.

Many books have been written about Egypt, describing it, its people, history and river, and all the rest of it; but Pte. Smith, though he could not write a book, has adequately described it all from a soldier's point of view, and that in one terse sentence.

"If so be as I owned Egypt and 'ell," said Pte. Smith, with intensity of feeling, "I'd sell this 'ere —— place and go and live in 'ell. I would, straight."

Pte. Brown, sitting opposite to him on the hot desert sand, removed his pipe from his mouth, spat, and replied:—"Then you'd 'ave to tike yer blankets with yer, or you'd lay cold," and resumed his occupation of watching the big black ants.

Then the two rose, and proceeded to the canteen to drown their sorrows in any drink the "gippy" (who ran the show) could provide.

Of course we have our little diversions. The other day we were crossing the desert to a distant post, and were climbing a steep hill of soft sand. A tired voice from the ranks broke out, above the hard breathing of the men:—

"We should strike that —— ark somewhere round 'ere, shouldn't we," it said. Though I must admit that this is the only example I can find of this place being connected with, however remotely, anything like a holy land.

Of course the thing to do is bathing in the Canal—the "Gateway of the East." Not that we care what it is the gateway of, or anything like that. The point is that it is wet and cool, and you can have swimming races across it. One time, while we were thus engaged a troopship came down. We hailed the khaki-clad figures on the deck:—"Hi, 'oo are yer?" A voice floated back to us: "We're 'Derbyites.' How's the war getting on?" One of our men raised his brown hand to his mouth and replied: "What the 'ell's that got to do with you, go and mind your own —— business." The troopship passed silently on to Suez.

We enjoyed "—— the Kayser." It reminded several of us, some from other regiments and some from the 4th Battalion, of a time when we had the pleasure of fighting side by side with the 1st and 2nd Battalions in the winter of 1914. The same cheery spirit which laughed at Minenwerfers and Jack Johnsons then keeps these members of the 4th Battalion smiling now.

It's time this disconnected ramble came to an end, so, to quote your first number,

"We 'opes as 'ow it finds you—
As it leaves us—in the pink."

NTH BATT. BEDFORDSHIRE REGT.

The Anarchist.

BY TOUCHSTONE JUNIOR.

Striding unconcerned into the darkness of "No Man's Land," he has put the wind up the bravest of us. Had we been alone, you and I, we should have circled round that shell hole with our more timid stomachs close to the damp earth. For long, anxious seconds we should have lain quite still and listened, to make sure that that cough came from Pte. Jones on sentry in No. 15 listening post, and not from the Boche whom we imagined nestling comfortably where a 5.9 had come to rest month ago. Finally, you, dear reader, might have put a cautious arm over the edge and prodded with your bayonet the Hun who wasn't there. But, no. To-night we are out with the Anarchist, and we must follow him into the gloom, wondering vaguely whether he intends to walk straight into the enemy's trench at a good four miles an hour, but hoping that, for to-night at any rate, he will be content to end his stroll at their wire.

We feel singularly useless as we stumble along behind over the uneven ground, but we must see it through now, although the moon has come up and shown us a line of chalk none too far ahead. Even the Anarchist feels at last that we had better make ourselves a little less conspicuous, and we start to crawl towards the object of our visit—a listening post—where Fritz is thinking of sausages as big as Zeppelins and whole vats full of Munich beer, while his outward eye searches "No Man's Land" for signs of such wanderers as ourselves.

Father of many little Huns this Fritz may be, and a stout upholder of the Fatherland, and although our Anarchist does not hail him as a friend, he will at least leave his card on him, however much pressed for time. The Anarchist is no snob. The whole German army is on his visiting list. Three cards in all—the kind which the good Mr. Mills brought into fashion—land in or near that little home of kultur, and if Fritz or his fellow-sentries are still alive they are not likely to forget our visit. There is a pretty little firework display in our

honour, and much clapping of hands by the Boche machine guns. Then, while the enemy is still throwing bombs from his trenches, we regain our own parapet, filled with a magnificent sense of duty done, and speculating on the chances of a rum issue; but the Anarchist feels no more proud or elated than a 'bus conductor who comes off duty at Brixton after a safe run through the dangers of the City. A machine gun is still firing single shots at our parapet, and he takes a last look at its flash before lowering himself into the safety of the trench.

A man of blood and iron, you would say, but he is no stranger to finer feelings. He is, in fact, a very gallant gentleman, and no knight of Arthur's Round Table could have given him points either in courage or in gentleness. After the war his spirit of daring may lead him to seek adventures in strange lands, but his passion for bomb throwing will assuredly never bring him to do the violent deeds of the real Anarchist. Yet, perhaps, there will always be a No. 5 grenade on his mantel-piece, to be handled lovingly when the old man tells his stories of the Great War.

[Since writing the above "Touchstone Junior" has, alas! "gone West," like so many others. He has written his own epitaph in the above sketch. "He was, in fact, a very gallant gentleman, and no knight of Arthur's Round Table could have given him points, either in courage or gentleness." *Requiescat.*—ED.]

The "Blighty" One.

As a soldier's wound gets better the more consideration does he receive.

I.

IN THE TRENCH.

Billy! Billy!
Do yer want a drop o' water?
Here's a bottle. No, old chum,
No, you mustn't 'ave no rum.
Don't be silly. Now yer ought'er
Think it lucky that I come
Just in time to see yer fall.
You get back and let 'em dress 'er,
And good-bye, old pal—God bless yer!
(It's a "blighty" one an' all—
Lucky Bill!)

II.

THE DRESSING STATION.

Private Jones!
What d' y' want? Oh! oh! a stretcher!
P'raps you'd like a sofa, mate,
And a cushion for your pate.
Any bones broke? No? You bet yer
Sweet old life you'll have to wait
For a time. There's worse than you.
Go and lie back on that form.
Here's a rug to keep you warm.
(It's a "blighty" gunshot, too!
Lucky Jones!)

III.

THE HOSPITAL MATRON.

Private Bill,
What's the temperature this morning?
Did you pass a pleasant night?
Oh, you're going on all right.
Still, you're ill; and here's a warning.
You're a bit too gay and bright
With the nurses—rather flighty,
And that isn't good—(ahem!)—
For yourself, nor yet for them!
Yes, you'll soon be back in "blighty,"
Private Bill.

IV.

THE FREQUENT VISITOR AT THE CONVALESCENT HOME.

My *dear* Billy!
Why, he walks without his crutches!
Well, I've just come round to see
If they'll let you come to tea.
Will you, Billy? No, the duchess
Won't be there. So come at 3-0,
And I'll drive you round the wood.
If you treat me nicely, Bill dear,
I might kiss you, 'cos you're ill, dear!
(OH, A "BLIGHTY" WOUND IS GOOD—
YOU ASK BILL!)

"Everything all right, sentry?"
"Oui!"
"I said, 'Is everything all right?'"
"Oui!"
"Very well,—14 days C.B. *Compree?*"

Impressions of Early Days in the War.

The first intimation of trouble with Germany came in the shape of a telegram ordering us to move to a position of strategical importance on the West Coast. A long railway journey brought us to our destination. At every wayside station curious eyes peered into the carriages, the general impression generally being that we were on our way to stop gun-running.

On arrival we found a meal previously wired for awaiting the detachment at the local hotel. Full justice was done to this. Then came a march through inky darkness along the coast towards a bright glare in the sky. As we approached, this lighted up the surroundings, and billets among outhouses and strange looking machinery were easily found. Sentries were posted and steps taken to reduce the light.

Next morning defence arrangements were fully gone into.

The local carters, as soon as they heard that a vast quantity of military stores, barbed wire, etc., would have to be brought up, at once went on strike for double wages. A motor tractor was wired for, and as it puffed up the hill on its first journey the carters raced it in to tender their submission.

Going down to bathe one day, a number of youths lounging round some outbuildings scowled ferociously. On my way back they had fallen in, and were being drilled. As I came up the man in charge called them to attention, and in a stentorian voice ordered "Present arms," at the same time giving me a most vigorous salute.

When orders came for us to leave I was told that the local Nationalists would like to form a guard of honour at the station, and would it be convenient if they loosed off a salute in the air with their revolvers?

The latter part of the performance I begged to be excused, but it shows the good feeling which had grown up in the short time we were there.

After a few days of preparation with the Battalion we entrained in the middle of the night, and next morning found us marching through the streets of Belfast. The inhabitants gazed at the long column of men in surprise as they swung past. We were soon on board ship and away. As we glided out great cheering broke out from the ships under construction, and crowds of men rushed to the side to wave us farewell.

The voyage was uneventful, the most surprising feature being the great quantity of shipping on the sea and the total elimination of the Austro-German flag. On landing in France we were greeted with the utmost enthusiasm. Flowers and fruit were offered on every side, both on the line of march and in the trains. We also learnt the meaning of the word "souvenir."

It did not take long for the men to make themselves understood—pantomime often sufficed. A man requiring eggs who sat down and clucked like a hen was immediately successful.

We entered Belgium and passed close to the field of Malplaquet, where in the early days the regiment had gained distinction—an augury for the future.

On Sunday, the 26th August, the Battalion was billeted in a school at ——. All men were suddenly ordered back to billets. Then we heard the sound of guns, and saw the white puffs playing round aeroplanes. Two Companies were moved off at midday just before dinners were up, and a few hours later the other two Companies were called for equally suddenly.

We moved through crowded streets towards Paturages, being told that the Germans were across the canal and only a few minutes up the road. On reaching the station the Cheshires, who were on outpost along the line, reported that they were not in touch with the 3rd Division on our right. A strong patrol was pushed out. Supporting posts were formed at intervals. As we drew nearer to the roar of traffic and shouting on the main road to Frameries, an officer crawled on alone, and was on the point of joining a group on the road when he discovered they were Germans. The news was soon sent back and telephoned to Headquarters, from whom we received the welcome news that the 5th Brigade would move up on our right. Would they arrive in time?

A report came from Lieut. Shearman that the Germans were bivouacking. Various posts were hurriedly prepared for defence. Two barricades of sleepers were placed across the junction of two railway lines. Just before dawn news came of the 5th Brigade. German scouts came into action with ours about the same time.

As it grew lighter we could see the Germans moving across our front. Effective fire was opened from some slag heaps, a row of houses, and our advanced posts, which checked their advance and caused a partial change of front in our direction. They brought up a machine gun, which swept along one of our advanced posts and necessitated its withdrawal down the railway cutting. Their further advance was checked by our fire. Some packs had been placed on the barricades in the cutting. These evidently made the Germans think that the posts were strongly held. Guns were brought up, and the row of houses we were holding soon crumbled under their fire. The men had to be withdrawn. Two other companies were brought up, but the shelling became heavy, and a withdrawal to a row of houses near Paturages Station was ordered. The gardens were occupied as advanced posts, but the Germans made no further advance. The station buildings were shortly afterwards set on fire by shells, and an order came to retire. After moving back about a mile we were directed to try and link up with the 3rd Division. C and D Companies marched back, but after proceeding a short distance D Company, who were leading, came under very heavy fire. It became evident that the 3rd Division had retired, and we were ordered to get back as best we could. The two Companies became separated. The inhabitants reported Germans up every track, and at one point several crossed the road just in front of us. We passed a group of our dead, lying where they had been shot down.

At last we reached the open country, and took up a position to enable some 200 stragglers of other regiments and our own stretcher cases and other wounded to get a start. There was a burst of fire, and a Cheshire Company came out from a side road and joined up. We then moved back, taking up alternate positions until we got clear. A gunner general then told us to march straight on. We found a field, in which the remainder of the Battalion were resting, and two hours later set off again on our weary trek. After about eight miles march we halted about 11 p.m. in a field for four hours. No water was obtainable.

As was pointed out in our last number, the Birthday Honours bestowed upon officers and N.C.O.'s of the Battalion was greater than has already been published. The following is the corrected list:—

Brigadier-Genl. Jebb, D.S.O., appointed C.M.G.

Temp. Lieut.-Col. Edwards promoted Brevet-Major.

Capt. Nicholl promoted Brevet-Major.

Capt. Courtenay awarded Military Cross.

Lieut. Sherry, mentioned in dispatches.

Cpl. Barnes awarded D.C.M.

Sgt. Atkinson awarded Military Medal.

Sgt. King ,, ,,

Sgt. Quince ,, ,,

Pte. Winch ,, ,,

Pte. Cox ,, ,,

C.S.-M. Spicer, mentioned in dispatches.

Heartiest congratulations to the following, who have since received decorations :—

Lieut.-Col. W. Allason, D.S.O., awarded Bar to D.S.O.
Capt. W. H. L. Barnett, awarded D.S.O.
Capt. S. Norrish, awarded M.C.
Capt. H. J. West ,, ,,
C.S.-M. F. Spicer ,, ,,
Sgt. C. J. Atkinson, awarded D.C.M.
Sgt. G. Howlett ,, ,,
Pte. P. F. Lewis ,, ,,
C.S.-M. F. Afford ,, ,,
Cpl. T. J. Harris ,, ,,
Pte. J. King, awarded Military Medal.
Cpl. Pettingell ,,
A./C.S.-M. R. Driscoll ,,
Cpl. F. Bradley ,,
Pte. W. Neale ,,
Pte. C. J. Cross ,,
Lance-Cpl. H. McHugh ,,
Pte. F. W. Payne ,,
Sgt. Hill ,,
Sgt. Stanley ,,
Cpl. Faulder ,,
Pte. Scrivener ,,
Pte. Waldock ,,
Pte. Hills ,,
Pte. Worboys ,,
Pte. Bland ,,
Pte. Dicks ,,

The " Wonuks."

Temporary Second-Lieutenant the Honourable de la Zouche Pilkington drew a sigh of relief and self-satisfaction as he reached the transport lines of his regiment, " somewhere in France." He had every reason to be self-complacent, for had he not escorted a draft of six men all the way from the base to the front without the loss of a single man? True, he had been a little disappointed with that journey. Hitherto his knowledge of the " Western Theatre of War " had been confined to the information he had derived from the perusal of the blood-curdling accounts of " Special Correspondents," and he had pictured this journey from the base fraught with perils—shells bursting round the engine, bullets singing in and out of the ventilators of his compartment, with the possibility of an attack on the train by a party of venturesome Uhlans thrown in. And he had been disappointed. Forty-eight hours in the train, unillumined by either accident or incident, and then a tedious march of seven miles. And that was all! And it was the same during his march up to the trenches in the evening. Everything seemed so prosaic and so practical. The romance of war seemed strangely absent. An occasional motor ambulance would glide by him along the road. Small, blaspheming fatigue parties would be encountered, and every now and again a sentry would pull him and his little party up with a growl of " Oo the 'ell are you?" And his guide seemed utterly blasé of the war, and held on his way, exchanging primitive repartee with the sentries on the cross roads, utterly unconscious of the angry bark of the hidden 18-pounders, the spiteful stutter of the machine guns, or, as they drew nearer the line, of the whine of " strays " passing over their heads. There was nothing romantic in all this; in fact, it jarred on the Hon. de la Zouche Pilkington's nerves. There was nothing romantic either in the struggles up the endless communication trench, and, least of all, was there anything romantic in the appearance or behaviour of his new company commander and brother officers.

The Hon. Pilkington had schooled himself to the thought that he would live a life of rigid self-denial in the trenches, snatching morsels of bully beef and biscuit in the brief intervals between hand-to-hand encounters with burly Huns and leading forlorn hopes against impregnable enemy strongholds. It was something of a shock, therefore, to find his future company commander sitting with two of his subalterns in a cosy little dug-out, the walls of which were adorned with photographs of most of the leading musical-comedy stars, indulging in a supper of tinned salmon, cake, and whiskey and soda.

Now, the Honourable Pilkington was what is commonly described as " all right." That is, he was straight and honest, and afraid of nothing, but he was just a trifle self-important, and he lacked the all-necessary sense of humour. And so it was he came amongst these hilarious young men like a lamb amongst wolves, " ripe for the slaughter."

" How's your father?" enquired the captain at once.

" My father," replied the Hon. de la Zouche, " has been dead some years."

This announcement was greeted with profound silence, but one of the subalterns solemnly winked at the others.

" What did you say your name was?" asked the captain.

" My name is the Honourable de la Zouche Pilkington."

" You must live it down," replied the other sympathetically. " I can do nothing for you."

" That's beyond me altogether," said another. " I shall call you Percy."

" My Christian name is Aubrey," announced Pilkington, a trifle ruffled.

" Serve you right," said the captain promptly. " *Here* your name is Percy, though. Now, what can you do? Know any bombing?"

" Percy " felt himself on safer ground now. He had been through a special bombing course at home, and he told the captain so, adding that he had also been on courses of musketry, Lewis guns, trench pioneering, and military law.

" A proper nut, in fact," said the captain.

" One of the lads of the village," agreed the others, helpfully.

" I'll tell you what," said the captain, " there's a wiring party going out to-night. You might go out with them and give them the latest tips from the school. You did attend a course of wire entanglement, didn't you?"

" I did," said Aubrey. " I passed out first of my class."

" By gad, you are a blood alley," chimed in a subaltern; " but you must look out. Out there in No Man's Land it's rather risky."

" Lots of bullets about?" enquired Percy, trying to assume a matter-of-fact tone.

" Lots, yes; but the worst things are the Wonuks."

" Wonuks," said Percy, helplessly. He had no idea what Wonuks were, but he felt he ought to know. Probably they were a dangerous species of beast known only to the plains of Flanders, but he couldn't remember reading about them. At any rate, he wouldn't show his ignorance, so he said: " Wonuks. Ah, yes, I suppose there are a good many at this time of year?"

" Good Lord, yes," said one of the others. " They swarm. The trenches are alive with them. They come out of the valley, you know, on these misty mornings, and make their nests in the listening posts. Only the other night one poor fellow was bitten. He was dead in half an hour!"

" Good God," said Percy. He looked round. These jolly young fellows looked quite depressed by the recent tragedy. Truly, the unrecorded incidents of the war were even more grim and thrilling than the printed accounts he had read. But he would not appear afraid. He girded on all his equipment, including field glasses, compass, periscope, torch, etc., etc., until he looked like a Christmas tree, and went out with the wirers. One of the other subalterns

accompanied the party. Cautiously they climbed the parapet, and approached the wire entanglement where it required repairing.

The other officer turned round. "Sssh," he whispered, "this is where they usually are."

Percy fell flat on his stomach. "Go very quietly now," advised the other. Percy tiptoed along. Suddenly what looked like a huge rat ran across his boot. Good God! Was that a Wonuk? He broke into a cold sweat. This was too much. Fire, and shells, and bullets, and slaughter he could have stood, but this creeping about in the dark, hunted by these devilish beasts, or birds, or reptiles, whatever they were—creatures whose bite was so venomous that a hardened warrior had died within half an hour of being bitten—was not war at all. He had not bargained for it. He took no heed at all of the bullets that swept No Man's Land, or of the occasional trench mortars the enemy put over. His whole mind was concentrated on avoiding these damnable Wonuks. The rest of the night was torture. It mattered nothing to him that they were not repairing the wire in the way he had been taught to do it at the school. He was too frightened even to correct them, or to argue with the other officer. All he wanted was to escape from the lurking Wonuks. Every light that went up he glanced feverishly round as he lay on the ground, fancying he saw Wonuks behind every tuft of grass and in every shell-hole. He had Wonuks on the brain.

It was only later, when in the captain's dug-out, where he was restoring his shattered nerves with a whiskey and soda, someone took pity on him and told him that a "Wonuk" was a "black cat with a green tail" that he finally collapsed, realising that there was, indeed, more in heaven and earth than what was taught at the schools of instruction at home, and that he had at last had a taste of real war!