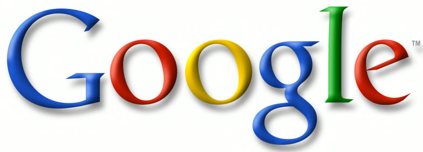

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A Subaltern's Share in the War

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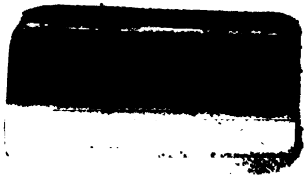

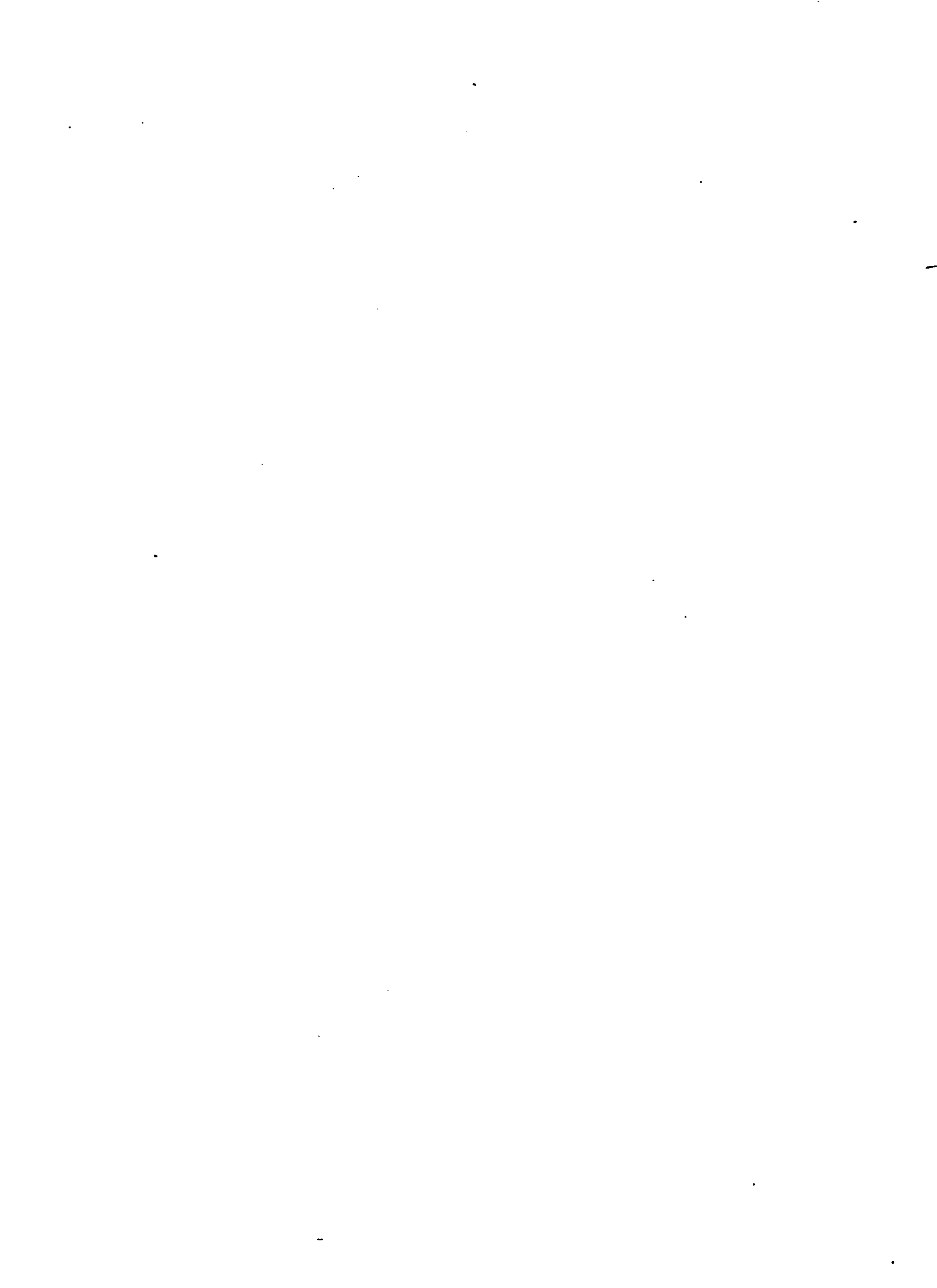

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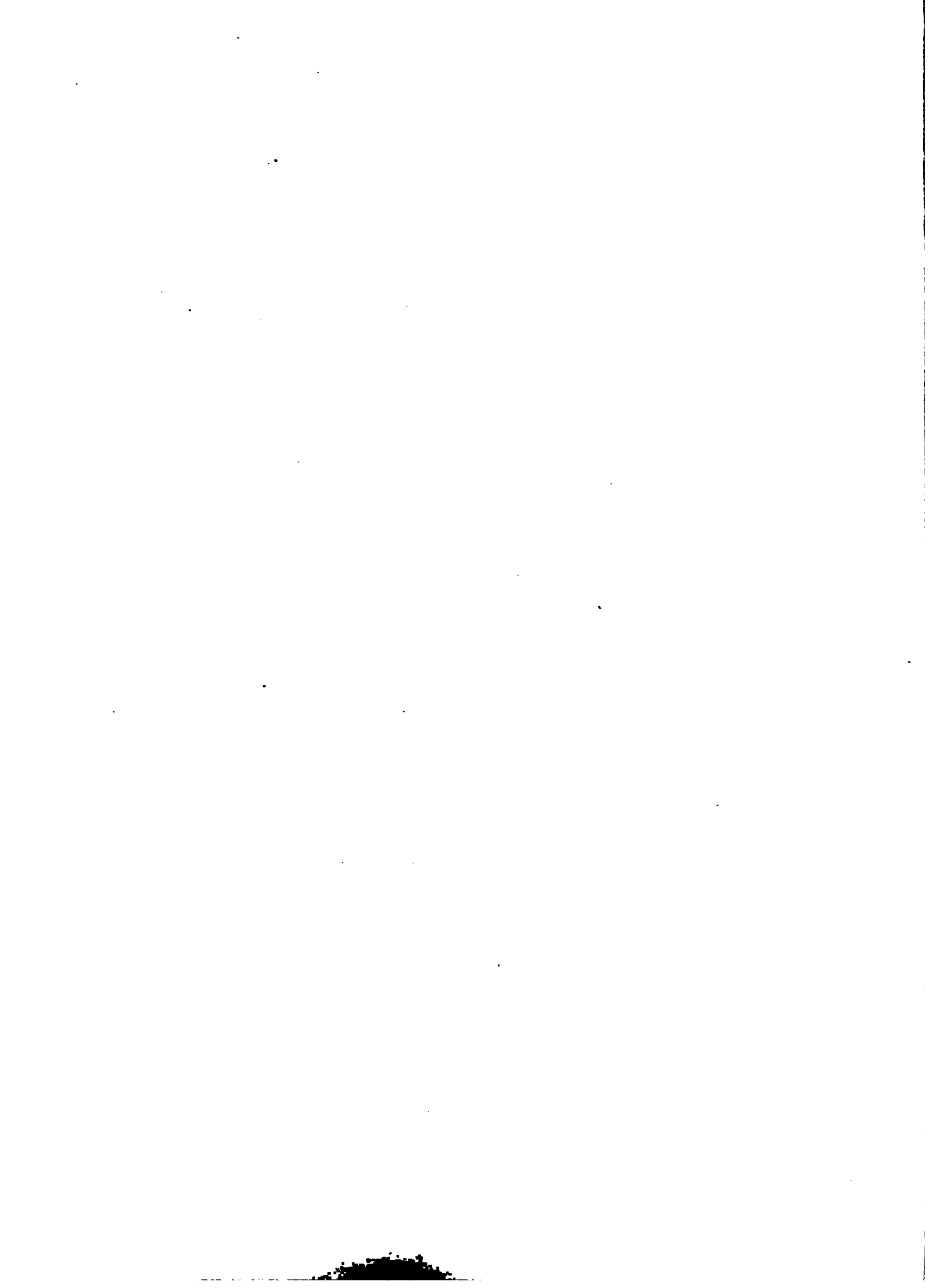

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

George Weston Devenish.
1914.

A

ALTERN'S SHARE IN THE WAR

ME LETTERS OF THE LATE

RGE WESTON DEVENISH

LIEUT. R.A., ATTACHED R.F.C.

WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

MRS. HORACE PORTER

LONDON

CONSTABLE AND COMPANY LTD.

1917

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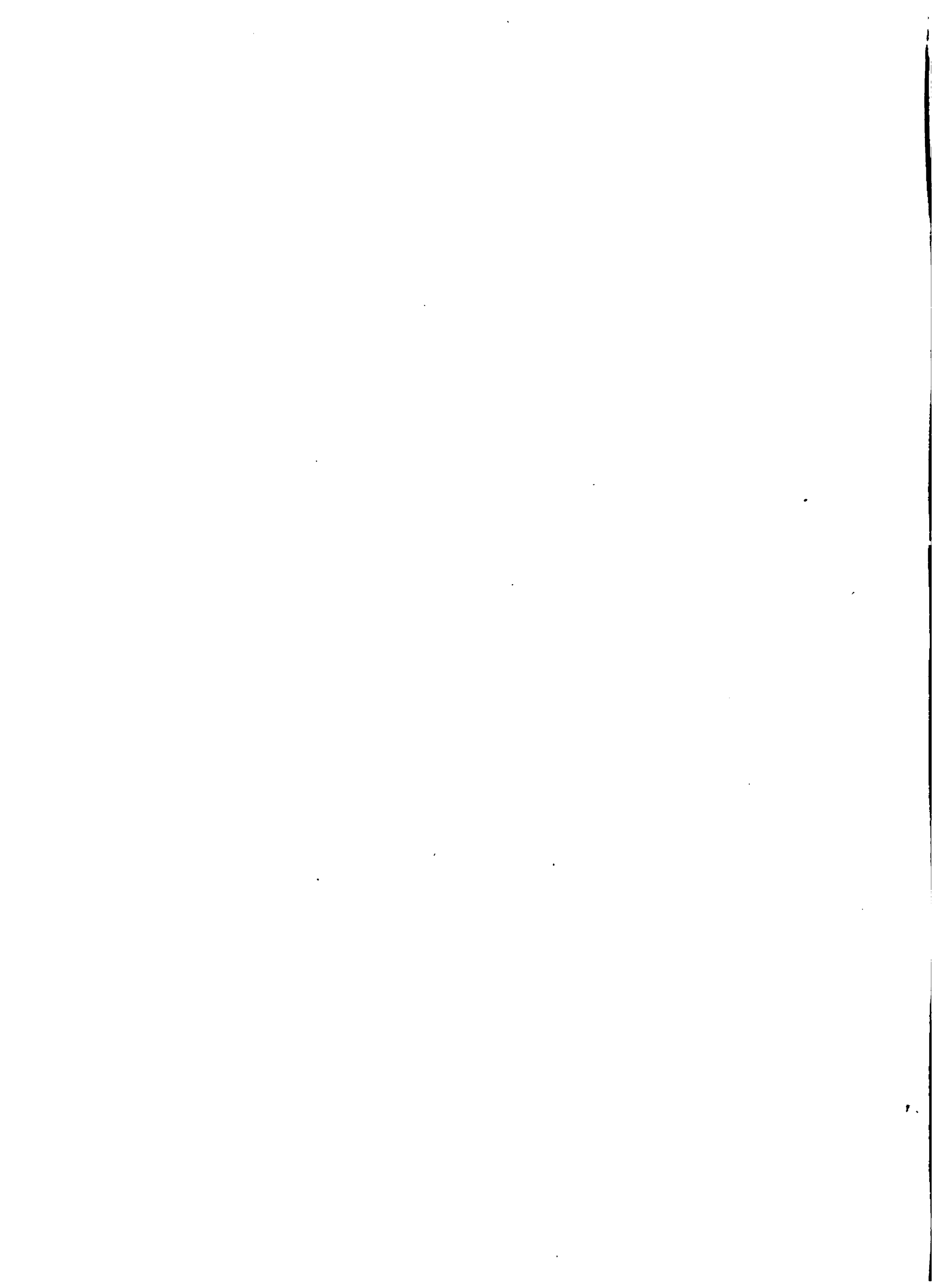

GEORGE DEVENISH, AGED 5

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He was the soul of joy and happiness,
All things he loved, and took them as they came ;
In war, in peace, at labour, or at ease,
He laughed and counted each one just the same.

The echo of his cheery, joyous life—
His memory which nothing clouds or mars—
We hold of him for ever in our hearts,
Tho' he has passed " through hardships to the stars."

—*C. D.*

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INTRODUCTION

AMONG our early memories of George Devenish, there stands out one of him as a sunny-faced, knickerbockered little fellow, spinning one of childhood's interminable yarns for the edification of his nursery companions.

"So then," a fresh episode began abruptly, "a dragon came out of the forest."

"Stop a minute, Georgie!" urged his little sister, following with eager interest. "What *kind* of a dragon was it?"

A difficult question, some of us older listeners thought, but one of George's characteristics was always his imperturbable readiness in facing difficulties.

"Oh!" just an or'nary kind of dragon," came the serene rejoinder, and the narrative resumed its course.

"Just an or'nary kind of dragon," the phrase passed into a household word, and it comes to one's mind in gathering together these few glimpses into what one young officer among

many thousands thought, and saw, and did in the Great War. He would emphatically have summed himself up as "just an ordinary kind of officer," and the whole British Empire has cause to thank God that the phrase is true, and that the strong, keen, gallant young leader in danger, equally free from fear and from self-consciousness, is indeed and in truth the "ordinary" man upon whose matter-of-course self-sacrifice the fate of the Empire hangs.

It is this very fact—that to the wide world outside that home where his place will be for ever empty, George Devenish is only one in the long ranks of brave men who have bravely died—which gives to his impressions of the war their touch of general interest, recorded, as they are in his letters, with the direct simplicity characteristic of him.

Simplicity and directness were the key-notes of his character, producing that utter absence of self-consciousness which showed itself alike in his disregard of danger and in the good-night reminder to his mother, given as openly as his kiss to her, from his earliest school-days, up to his last night at home:

"Good-night, mother! I'll call when I'm ready." The call in question being the signal

for her to come up to his room, when he was in bed, for the brief Bible-reading he never allowed her to forget. It was by his own wish that the boyish custom was continued after boyhood's days were done; and among his mother's most dearly cherished memories is that of the winter's night, in the first days of 1917, when George and his brother slept together for the last time in "the boys' room," and George's cheerful call summoned their mother to read to them, and tuck them up in their beds, and kiss them a last good-night "as usual."

But upon the deepest and most sacred things which belong to the intimacy of home-life this is not the place to dwell. They are most fitly cherished in the hearts of those whose love for that gallant, blithe young life reaches beyond the grave, and who sorrow not as those that have no hope.

All that can be attempted here is to sketch one or two of the more external characteristics of the personality which lay behind George Devenish's light-hearted records of his own small share in the Great War.

That merry heart of his did indeed "go all the way" in meeting whatever dangers or disagreeables fell to his lot. "Still, it wasn't so bad!" was his usual summary of any unpleasing experience. "Extreme cheerfulness in all circumstances" was the "chief characteristic" put down to him in his first Woolwich report.

He was a soldier by profession, and most emphatically by choice. From the day he went to Woolwich, two years before the war, he was repeatedly assuring his parents that in the R.F.A. he had found the most entirely desirable career that the whole world could possibly have to offer. The training met his tastes at every point. During his public-school days at Charterhouse he had already taken every opportunity offered by the gymnasium and O.T.C. to make himself proficient in drill and rifle shooting and physical exercises. A touching little frame, arranged by his mother under his directions, still hangs over his empty bed, displaying the various badges of distinction gained in his Charterhouse military training. He had enjoyed that training with his usual zest, and the life at Woolwich he found still more completely to

his mind. It fell in exactly with two of his most pronounced tastes—his bent for all things mechanical, and his love of animals. Every detail, theoretical or practical, connected with the guns, interested him keenly, and he not only distinguished himself in the riding school but formed friendships with the horses he rode.

That was always George's way with the animals under his care. They were never mere pets to him ; he made them into friends. More than once during his time at Woolwich, on occasions when his people were away, and his home shut up, he has been known to slip down to the dismantled house for an hour or two, on a Sunday afternoon, simply "to look up the dogs," because he felt it must be "so beastly for them," with no one to keep them company.

Side by side with George's sympathy with animals one seems instinctively to think of his love of music, not that there is any connexion to be seen between the two, but because each was so distinctive a part of his sunny nature. He had never yet had time, in his short and full life, to attain any high degree of proficiency with any instrument, but he could make

himself happy with a piano for any length of time; he played the French horn in the Charterhouse orchestra, and was always ready to take his part in the chamber-music which he revelled in at home.

"Could you come and do some music?" was always one of his first requests to either or both of his parents when he got home on leave, unless he had some mechanical enterprise on hand, necessitating the immediate concentration of all available forces upon the scene of action in the workshop where he and his father had passed so many happy holiday hours together.

Ten days before the fateful 4th of August, 1914, George Devenish had his twenty-first birthday, and celebrated it in a manner destined to be strangely dramatic. No one dreamed, when those birthday festivities were so light-heartedly planned and so joyously carried through, that they would prove the ending of an era. The arrangement for that coming of age had been devised, in every detail, with the sole object, on the part of George's parents, of realizing, as nearly as might be, his own ideal

for the great occasion, and that this aim was triumphantly fulfilled was George's own unhesitating verdict. His birthday, July 25th, fell on a Saturday that year, so he elected to have a dance on the Friday evening, to dance the great day in. A real summer dance it was to be, in the beloved home of all his life, with the terrace made part of the dancing room, and seats in the fragrant dusk of the garden, with the tall white lilies as torch-bearers, and the jessamine stars overhead. Rain there simply must be none, according to his plans, and there was none.

Looking back upon that night, memory calls up one brief, joyous pageant of youth and gaiety; of brilliant enjoyment in the present, and yet more brilliant hopes for the future; of young men and maidens with the world before them, dancing together in the lamplight, or flitting out among the shadows, with light feet and lighter hearts. The youngest of young officers were there—George's own friends—and older men who never dreamed of warfare for themselves, and girls to whom life was one long holiday; and as the leader in the revels, the hero of the hour, memory shows George's tall figure in its slim grace, here, there and

everywhere, dancing each dance from the first note to the last, leading the merry scramble to the favourite seats in the gloaming, and slipping off by himself, from time to time, for a brief visit of consolation to the dogs, in the hated retirement to which they were banished for the occasion.

George's mother must forgive the inclusion here of a few sentences from the reminiscences of her first-born son which she wrote down for the home circle only.

"His father and I did so rejoice in his happiness. Neither of us will ever lose the memory of his radiant face—such a handsome face it was, too!—as he sat between us at the supper which was timed to be the beginning of his birthday. It was his own wish to sit between us two; he would hear of no other arrangement, just as he totally refused to let me off dancing one dance with him. It was no good pleading that my dancing days were long since over. 'I *must* dance with my mother on my twenty-first birthday' was his sole rejoinder; and I remember, so vividly, when it was all over, about 4 o'clock in the morning, how he took my arm, and we strayed on to the terrace together, while he told me again and again

how he had enjoyed it, and how everything had been just as he liked it. I kissed him, and wished him again many happy returns of the day, little thinking—ah ! how little thinking ! —that there were to be only two more returns of his birthday for him on this earth.

"The fairy-lights were flickering out among the roses, and the dawn was coming up in the Eastern sky, with threatening bars of dark cloud across the golden background. It was so strange and sinister-looking that we remarked it to each other, and stood for a moment to watch it.

"That dance seems to have been the very last day of real, unclouded happiness that we have had."

On the morrow came the news of war between Austria and Serbia, to cast the first shade over the merry party still assembled at George's home, and two days later the "leave cancelled" telegrams went forth, recalling every officer to the duty which was beginning to take on a graver aspect. George's birthday festivities ended with the end of an era in the world's history, and the happy-hearted hero of

the hour had become the symbol of the whole manhood of the nation suddenly "come of age" to face the stern realities of life and death.

“Deo dante dedi.”—(*Charterhouse motto.*)

“They went with songs to the battle, they
were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and
aglow.”

—*Lawrence Binyon.*

PART I

GOING TO WAR

AUGUST TO NOVEMBER, 1914

IT has been possible to include nearly the whole of George Devenish's home letters for the first three months of the war, supplemented by the diary, which he wrote up in hospital, of the last few days before he was wounded.

The names of places were all scrupulously left blank when the letters were written; he filled them in during his last time at home, two years later.

Sunday, August 2nd. Shorncliffe.

"The dance and week-end were a success, weren't they? I *did* enjoy them! It was annoying, after getting the wire telling me to rejoin immediately, to find there wasn't anything particular to do when I got back. But we're expecting orders to mobilize any

moment of the day or night. It rather reminds me of 'There was a sound of revelry by night.'

"It is rather an interesting contrast, just doing an ordinary day's work, with perhaps tennis or a dance, and at the same time everyone is ordering new boots, valises, etc., and discussing exactly what they are going to take with them."

August 4th.

"It *is* annoying! I got a kick from a horse yesterday, so I shall have to be in bed a day or two. It got me on a muscle of the thigh, so it isn't very serious—just made a small cut. But it makes me fearfully stiff, and I can't get about yet. The horse was taking another horse's feed, so I was going up to him to make him eat his own, when he let fly. He always goes on the principle of eating the next horse's feed first, and then eating his own. I didn't know the horse, so I wasn't prepared for him.

"We have had no order to mobilize yet,

so we can't go for another four or five days if we do go. What a good thing we didn't get called away in the middle of my 21st birthday week-end! It would have been a pity, because it was all so topping."

August 6th.

"My leg is much better to-day, and I ought to be up to-morrow or the day after. At present, if nothing particularly serious happens, we shall probably start on Sunday week—much later than I expected. I have been detailed to remain at the Overseas Base when we get there, in charge of the first reinforcement. I shall be called up as soon as any replacements are required."

August 14th.

"I have received the cases and bags and things you sent me. Thank you most awfully for them. They will be very useful. The bags, etc. are rippingly made, and have a very good selection inside them. Thank you most awfully for all the things and for all

A 2

the trouble you've taken over making my things.

"We've heard no news yet of when or where we have to go. My leg is almost quite right again now."

August 22nd.

"I may have to start to-night with my lot. All the others left a few days ago. I'll write whenever I can.

"Well, good-bye, Father and Mother. I hope to come back covered with medals!"

August 23rd. Southampton.

"We got down here about 1 o'clock to-day, and are going off in the transport this evening.

"Just after I telephoned to you last night, I got a message to say that I had to take all the baggage down to the station immediately, and pack it into trucks. So I had to turn out all the men, get all the kits packed and cart all of them down to the station. It was raining, and we had about 900 kits to take, so we had

rather a cheerful evening! Still, it wasn't so bad, and I slept a lot of the way down in the train . . . . . Good-bye again. Your loving son, GEORGE."

August 26th. Havre.

"We started from Southampton at about 8 p.m. on Sunday. We had to stop about a mile out, and anchor, as a thick mist came up. The ship was an Argentine cattle-boat, so it wasn't the height of luxury, especially for the men. Still, it wasn't bad. I slept out on deck, and the sleeping bag you made was splendid for keeping out draughts.

"We got in next day (August 24th) at about midday."

August 30th. Havre.

"We are still here, and not doing anything much. Yesterday another officer and I were told off to go down to the docks to march some troops up who were arriving there. We went down, but finding no one, went to an hotel and had a bath. It was topping—the first since I left

England. We then telephoned Headquarters and found that the troops were not expected till later, so we had dinner at the hotel. During dinner we saw the transport pass up the river, so we dashed out to get a taxi to go to the docks. We couldn't get one for love or money, but saw a large car outside the hotel. We asked who it belonged to, and found it belonged to an English Admiral who was dining in the hotel. So we tossed up who should ask him to lend it to us. I lost, so, screwing up my courage, I went and asked him. He said he was going to the docks himself in five minutes, so I asked him to give us a lift. He seemed a bit surprised at my asking him for the car, but gave us a lift all right. Rather something to remember, having commandeered an Admiral's car!"

September 3rd, Thursday. At Sea, between Havre and Nazaire.

"We are now on the sea again, moving on to another place. We started yesterday. The boat is not even as good as the last one. We've

got about 3,000 men on board (the normal carrying capacity is 45), and there literally is only just room for everyone to lie down, using all decks, from the boat deck to the bottom of the hold. Still, it hasn't been bad to-day, as it's been toppingly fine. I have put a dodger, of a mackintosh sheet, on the rail, and sleep in a little corner just next to it on the boat deck."

September 13th. Monastery of Le Mans.

"We left St. Nazaire on the 10th and came up inland to an advanced Base. We are now camped at an ancient monastery, with a sort of park all round and a river, which is quite good for bathing in. We're always being told to get ready to move up to the front at any moment, but nothing ever comes of it, as it's always cancelled at the last moment. It's a most nasty job this waiting about, as I have about 200 men under me—raw reservists, with no idea of discipline, who have to be driven the whole time and are always being a nuisance in some way or other.

"I have heard that my Brigade has been doing wonders, and got a special letter from General French."

September 18*th. Monastery of Le Mans.*

"At last I have orders to be ready to move up to join a battery at any moment. I'm afraid it won't be to join my own Brigade, though. By an extraordinary piece of luck I managed to raise quite a decent officer's saddle yesterday. No new officers' saddles have been sent up here, so officers are issued with ordinary N.C.O.s' saddles, which are very uncomfortable and inconvenient. But I happened to go down to the Ordnance Depôt yesterday (before I knew I was going to move) and spotted quite a good officer's saddle under a pile of old saddlery collected at the front. I thought it might be useful, so, after collecting, from all over the place, stirrups, bridle, sircingle, etc., I took it, and now, of course, I'm jolly thankful for it, as it was the only available one in the place. I picked up quite a good hunting saddle at the same time, as I thought it might be useful.

I got a horse this morning—not very beautiful to look at, but strong and serviceable."

September 25th. Headquarters 3rd Division.

"I've got up to the front at last! It took three days in the train to do about 100 miles to get here. On the way we stopped for the night about ten miles out of Paris, so three other officers and I took a train in, and, after a jolly good dinner at the station, started to go round Paris. It was a most extraordinary sight—like London at about 3 a.m. on a Sunday night—everything shut up and hardly anyone about.

"There were searchlights going on all the time, looking out for aeroplanes. Two French aviators passed us in a car, and promptly offered us a lift, and took us to all the important places. Rather a funny way of seeing Paris for the first time!

". . . On the 21st, we got into [Braine] at about 5.30 a.m., on the troop-train, only to find that the tail of our train, with our horses on board, had been dropped off. We therefore

walked into the town, while Welch found out about the A.S.C. transport going back to [Fère-en-Torchon], where our horses were, and I bought some meat.

"The town was full of khaki, and the Market Square full of transport, while the church was a hospital. The Germans had been there, but had not done much damage.

"We then all returned to the station, and I borrowed a car from a French officer there, and we transported our kit to the Market Square. Here we got into an empty lorry, and proceeded to have breakfast of biscuits, bully-beef and jam.

"On the way to [Fère-en-Torchon] we passed an ammunition column consisting of every type of commercial lorry. We found our horses and servants at the station, and then walked up to G.H.Q. in the village. Here we went to the Chief Staff Officer for Artillery, who posted us all to various divisions—myself to the 3rd. We then returned to the station, and had our bit of steak cooked, and had lunch at a house near by, where a funny

old Padre was billeted. After lunch we separated, and I arranged for my kit and my servants to go over to [Braine] in a motor-lorry. I then set out riding there, and on the way I saw my first shell burst (I know now that it must have been an anti-aeroplane shell) just above the ridge, miles in front.

"The distance was about eighteen miles, and I didn't get in till dark, about the same time as my servant and groom, who were put down by a large house at the entrance to the village. I found that some officers were billeting in this house, so I went in and asked the Major (Royal Irish, I believe) if I could stop the night there. He was very hospitable, and said I could. So I picketed my horse in the garden and had my kit brought in. It was quite a large house, and had been turned upside down by the Germans. I actually got a mattress, with sheets and blankets, on the floor (the first bed since England). It *was* luxurious. The dining-room, where we had our meal, was a fine room, oak-pannelled. We had fried bully for dinner, and hot rum after.

"I went up to the 3rd Division H.Q. after breakfast next morning. It was a large country house on a rise just outside the town. Staff officers, orderlies, etc. were all over the place; motor cycles and cars in yard and drive, and horses picketed on the lawn. You could hear our guns firing from the ridge above—about a mile further on.

"After waiting a bit I got hold of a Gunner Staff Officer, and he told me to go down to the station, where I should find the Staff Captain, who would tell me off to a Brigade. So I went down and he told me off to the 40th Brigade, telling me to go up and join them that evening. In the meanwhile I helped to detrain some horses. I returned to my billet for lunch (a piece of steak purchased in the town) and afterwards got my kit packed up and taken round to the billet of the 40th Brigade Ammunition Column, but as they were sending no wagons up to the Brigade, I started off with my valise on my horse up a very muddy and steep road. It had got quite dark by the time I reached the few houses of

[Brenelle], and, on inquiry, I found that the Artillery Division H.Q. was there. It was at a largish farm, belonging to the mayor, so I went there to inquire the way. There I found General W——, who said I should not be able to find the way at night, so had better stop there. He asked me to dinner. Towards the end of an extremely good dinner, the Colonel of the 40th Brigade turned up, so he said I could come back with him, and we set out by a very muddy track along the ridge. When we arrived, I found to my surprise that we were housed in enormous caves, horses included. I slept that night in the Brigade H.Q. cave.

"Next morning the Adjutant took me along to the 6th Battery and introduced me. The guns (only four there, two having been lost) were in position on the backward slope of the hill, which became a plateau, about one mile wide, at the top. Behind the guns, the hill dropped steeply away, into a small, wooded valley running at right angles to the hill immediately below. The guns were on a sort of

shelf, about four yards wide, on to which our caves opened. The officers' cave was a two-roomed cottage, cut out of the side of the hill, with a brick front. It was inhabited by an old man (who slept in a bed in the living-room) and his wife and daughter, who slept in the little room. We slept on the floor of the big room. The battery (horses and men) were in two other large caves, one on each side of the cottage cave. The observing station was a haystack about 150 yards to the right front of the battery.

"After breakfast I was told off to take the horses down to water. There was a path down the little valley in rear, through a small wood, with thick undergrowth. They told me off-hand that the day before the Germans had dropped some 5·9's on to the watering party—luckily without doing any damage. The whole atmosphere of war, as it was fought, struck me as extremely casual. Men were always coming in with stories of odd Huns they had seen in this wood, left behind by the German retreat, so I always made some of the

men take rifles with them. I found that some of them (especially reservists) had very few ideas on the subject of handling a rifle.

"About a week before, when the sergeants of the battery were sitting round, having their dinner, half-a-dozen fully-armed Bosches emerged from the wood, and gave themselves up. We did talk of having a beat for them, but it never came off.

"It was rather like our game of 'Red Indians' in the wood at home, riding down through this wood alone, imagining Bosches behind every tree.

"That afternoon I heard my first 5·9-in. shell. One could hear it coming in the distance, and my first instinct was to creep into a hole in the ground. But I saw a couple of signallers looking on as if prepared to be amused, so I pretended I didn't notice it.

"There are a lot of aëroplanes of both sides about; the Germans are mostly Taubes. . . . I don't know for certain, but I don't believe their aeroplanes had wireless. Never-

theless the German gunners were marvellously quick in getting on to anything spotted by a Hun plane. Sometimes an old Taube, the most sinister-looking of all machines, I think —like a bird of prey—will come over nosing round. Everyone lies low and hopes they won't be seen, as they know now what to expect. You hope he passed you, but no—he turns and circles over you. Suddenly he drops a bright light, or sometimes some tinsel (which shines in the sunlight) over you, and you know you're in for it.

"I don't think I ever saw two aeroplanes fight then. They usually just flew past each other, and pretended not to see each other, so it seemed! They were only armed with rifles or revolvers, I believe.

"The old 60-pounder battery (the heavy battery) did awfully well. They fired as long as their supply of ammunition lasted, and were hated by the Bosches. They were always in action continuously—never a rest. The Huns, of course, had no guns like them, and only the 5·9-in. and 8-in. howitzers. You can hear a

howitzer shell coming, but not a gun shell. That's what makes a gun so unpleasant.

"The Bosches pour over shells all day long into quite harmless spots. There's one place [Chasemy] which they shell all day, but the only damage I ever heard of them doing to it (except knocking down houses) was to rather do in a sapper or R.A.M.C. (I forget which) exercising party, who foolishly went there, and were seen from Condé. The daughter-in-law of the old people we lived with in the cave came up one day quite cheerful, merely mentioning that most of the houses in Chasemy (she lived there) had been hit, but hers hadn't yet!

"Our usual routine for the day is for all to get up as soon as it is light (about 4.30 or 5 a.m.) and stand to, having some tea, dog-biscuits, and jam. Then either to dig or run about to get warm (it's usually too misty to see anything). Afterwards come stables, then we take it in turns to have breakfast (about 8 a.m.), and take horses to water about 9.30. Stables at 11.30, lunch (in turns) at 1 o'clock, harness-cleaning

in the afternoon, supper as soon as it's dark, and bed immediately after (about 9 p.m.).

"I fired my first shot at the enemy on the 23rd.

"The Germans have got some large howitzers, firing 90 lb. lyddite, locally called 'Kerrumps,' on account of the noise they make when the shell bursts. You can hear these shells coming from a long way off, and can judge more or less where they are going to fall by the noise. So you have plenty of time to dive into a 'funk-hole.'"

Sunday, September 27th.

"We are down in the village in rear now [Braine] having a couple of days' rest, and are in quite nice billets here.

"We have a church parade here to-day and an early service. It's very funny to see all the townspeople stolidly going on with their jobs while the guns are booming away on the ridge above all day."

October 6th.

"On Monday, September 28th, we left [Braine] at about 4 p.m., and billeted for the

night at a large Château, which had been deserted by its owners, and rather smashed up by the Germans. We slept on the floor of a sort of library, as all the beds were full up with other officers. It wasn't at all bad, although it was stone. There was a piano there, which, of course, I played. It was very funny going into a private house which appeared quite inhabited, with books, needlework, etc. lying about. It was also rather depressing to see how the garden had been ruined and trampled down. . .

"On Tuesday, September 29th, we started off at 2.30 a.m. to get the guns up into position in the dark, then took the teams and limbers to the rear, and picketed them at the side of a wood to conceal them from aeroplanes. Another subaltern and I stayed with them to look after them, as there was nothing much doing at the guns. We slept in a barn near to the Château, as the latter was full up.

"Great news! On Thursday I had a hot bath in the Château, the first since Havre. Next day (Friday, October 2nd) we left the Château

at about 7 p.m. and got into a small village [Cremaille] at about 10 p.m. We managed to get a room to sleep in, in a small cottage, and put the horses in a farm. We have to conceal the guns and horses as much as possible when halted. The Germans had been in the village, and the proprietress of the local pub. said that they had taken all her wines and spirits that they could and smashed the rest.

"I am running the mess of my battery, so I have to go round and use my best French on the inhabitants and shops (where there are any) to get food. It is usually pretty hard to get anything, as either the Germans have been there and taken everything or our troops have been and bought up everything.

"We left [Cremaille] on Saturday, October 3rd, about 2.30 p.m. After about twelve miles, we halted at a small village to water and feed the horses, and, by a piece of good luck, there happened to be an A.S.C. officer billeted there, who supplied us with hot chocolate and bread and jam, which was very welcome. After about an hour's halt we went on, till we got

in just as it was getting dark, at about 8 p.m. We were just thinking of looking for billets, when we were told we had to go on another eighteen miles that night, to be in a certain place before dawn. We had already done sixteen miles that afternoon, and about thirteen miles the night before, and had only had about six hours' sleep before that, so we were rather tired. We then had a three hours' halt and got some supper. We moved on about 11 p.m., and marched all night, through a large forest among other things. I almost went to sleep sometimes while I was riding along.

"We got into a largish town [Crépy] at about 5 a.m. on Sunday (October 4th) and put the horses and wagons in a long avenue of trees, sleeping ourselves in a small deserted house close by. We had breakfast at about 9.30, and later on in the morning went into the town. There were actually shops open, with a good stock of things to sell, which was not at all like any other villages we have seen. I also was actually able to have my hair cut in a quite clean shop there. We all put in a

couple of hours' sleep in the afternoon. The worst of it is, having horses, you have always to get up early, regardless of what time you go to bed, to see them watered, fed and groomed.

" We started off again about 7 p.m. I went on ahead with another officer to try and get billets. The road lay through a large forest, and was very pretty in the moonlight. On the way we stopped a car to ask the way, and found that one of its occupants was the Prince of Orleans, who has joined the English Army as an interpreter. We found the village we were making for at last, and found that it consisted of a few small cottages and a large Château. The owner of the Château happened to be standing at the gate, so we asked him if he could put us up (thirteen officers in all). He was most awfully kind and said he would. So we went off to find a place for the horses and guns. The two batteries (the other one of the Brigade had gone another way) got in about half an hour later, and when we went to the Château we found that they had got a bed for each of us, with sheets—it *was* a luxury ! We

then had a very pleasant supper (our own food, as they had hardly any, food being very difficult to get round there because the Germans had been there and taken it all, also their horses, so that they could not go into the nearest town to get food very easily). Our host gave us some very good wine—the only lot the Germans had left. They had come and told him that they would burn the Château if he would not give up all his wine. Meanwhile, his wife and daughter had got ready beds for all of us. It was a most awfully fine Château and, incidentally, the smallest of the owner's three, so he must have been rather a big man. After we had drunk everyone's health we went to bed, and had a most luxurious night.

"The Château was in the middle of a beautiful forest, with a funny little village round it. After lunch next day one battery went on, but we were not to move till 5 p.m. So we got up a dance—the dancers consisting of the daughter (who was an extremely good dancer), another subaltern and myself, the orchestra being the

mother at a piano. They had a beautiful parquet floor for dancing. I certainly never expected to get a dance out here !

"At 5 p.m. we went on again for a march of about six miles, mademoiselle accompanying me for the first half mile (I was marching the dismounted party). Before leaving, I took a photograph of the house-party and family on the steps of the Château.

"After a six-mile march we reached the town of Compiègne, where we were to entrain. There were more troops entraining there, so we halted on the south side of the river, to allow the station to get clear. All the bridges had been blown up by the French when retiring, and a German bridge of barges sunk, because, in making the bridge, they had forgotten to unload the barges' cargo first. But another bridge of barges had been made by the French. I went off into the town to forage for the mess and was nobly assisted by two quite nice girls, who volunteered assistance when they heard me asking, in what *I* call French, the way to a certain shop. These

two girls rapidly increased to five, collected as we went along—all sisters, and their chaperon, or governess, or whoever she was, stalking along behind. By their invaluable assistance I was able to get all sorts of things we wanted.

"We got entrained by 9.30 p.m. and started at about 10 o'clock. We were quite comfortable, as we only had two officers in each carriage. We got into [Abbeville] at about 7 a.m. next morning (October 6th). A lot of French ladies were giving away coffee and bread to the men, which was rather nice of them. We managed to get a jolly good breakfast at the buffet (which, for a wonder, was still open) of omelette and coffee and rolls. We sat in the train there all the morning, and, to my great joy, I got my first mail of eighteen letters. They came at a very good moment, as I had plenty of time to read them in the train.

"We detrained that afternoon and marched out of the town, about eight miles, to billet in a large park at [Hautvilliers]. The people of the town were very enthusiastic, and gave the

men apples, pears, cigarettes, etc. That night we slept at the Curé's house, which was just outside the park, where the horses and guns were. The Curé was most awfully kind to us, and insisted on our taking his wine."

October 7th. [*Hautvilliers.*]

"We rested here the whole of the next day. I took a photo of the Curé and the other officers of our battery, and the Curé's old housekeeper (which pleased her enormously). I left a roll of films with the Curé, which he is going to send on to me after the war."

George Devenish's "after the war" visits were never to be paid, but he did return to claim his packet, early in 1917, and the account of this second visit seems most fitly given here.

February 24th, 1917.

"On the way, as we had to pass near the place where we stayed with the Curé, in October 1914, I asked if they'd mind stopping there. We got to the village, and at first I

didn't recognize it and thought it must be the wrong place; but suddenly I recognized the Church as we arrived at it, then everything came back absolutely vividly. I remembered almost every detail of the place. We got to the Curé's house, at first he didn't recognize me. Then I reminded him of five artillery officers who had stayed with him for two nights 2½ years before, and it all came back to him.

"He and his old housekeeper then seemed awfully pleased to see me again, and inquired after all the others—the housekeeper especially about 'le lieutenant qui est appellé "Bébé."' She meant B——, who is about 6 ft. 3 ins., and who so excited them by his size before. I asked for my packet and he said that he had taken it up to the Château for safe-keeping. So we at once went there, I recognizing all the places where we had had our horses, and the Château lady at once produced the packet, and we reminisced about our stay there. It was topping seeing the place again.

"We then went on to Hautvilliers down

the road which we had so wearily marched up the evening we got there, passing a tree which the Curé had told us to make certain and look out for, as Napoleon had once sat down at its foot. He (the Curé) said that he thought we should be very much impressed with it, but it seemed a very ordinary tree!"

October 10th, 1914.

"We stayed at [Hautvilliers] all Thursday, leaving at 2 a.m. on Friday morning. It was pretty cold then. In spite of the earliness of the hour (of course it was pitch dark) all the country people came out of their houses to see us go by, and gave us fruit, and, in one place, hot milk. We got into the next stopping place [Raye] at 7 a.m., went into billets in a farm, with the battery in two orchards. We then had breakfast, and afterwards turned in for an hour's sleep. We got ready to move at 2.30 p.m. that afternoon, but did not actually get off till 5 p.m., being kept waiting all that time. We marched all night, with a half-hour's halt in the middle, getting in at 6 a.m.

this (Saturday) morning, at [Soine]. It was a pretty long march ($25\frac{1}{2}$ miles), and we were very tired when we got in. On the way we saw a whole lot of French transport on another road. They all carried lights (which I should have thought was rather a risky thing to do), and looked in the distance like a moving village. I managed to get some butter, eggs and milk at a farm, so we had a jolly good breakfast at the farm where we were billeted, after which we turned in (at about 7.30 a.m.). We got up again at 11 a.m., and, after stables and luncheon, we went to bed from 2 o'clock to 4 o'clock p.m. We saw a lot of refugees streaming along the road from Lille, which, they said, German cavalry had entered the day before. After this place, on all the roads, there were always refugees carrying what they could in bundles, sometimes wheeling perambulators, on bicycles, driving cows, etc. They are mostly men either under or over age for the army. They also leave the towns, as otherwise they are impressed by the Germans to work for them, or sent to Germany to bring in the harvest. After great difficulty I managed

to get some more eggs that evening, also some quite good vin ordinaire."

October 12th.

"We started off at 7.15 a.m. yesterday morning in a column, with a lot of infantry, who had been fetched up from the last place in motor-lorries. I was in charge of the dismounted party, so had to walk all the way—about eighteen miles. A lot of French cavalry and transport passed us. We heard firing some way away on our right. It was Sunday, so everyone was out in his or her Sunday best, parading the streets of [Choques], and very much interested in us. It is extraordinary how very quickly you pass from war to peace!

"One rather pathetic thing was an old lady refugee, carrying, as her only piece of luggage, her best hat!

"We got into [Huiges] that night at about 7 p.m., and went into billets in a small café, where there were some French refugees staying the night. We were quite comfortable with straw on the floor of one of the rooms.

"We started at 7 a.m. this morning, and marched across the canal bridge. My battery formed part of the advance guard. It was very misty at first, and we halted after about six miles, and put the guns in an orchard in a small village.

"We met some French officers and cavalry there, who said they had been fighting continuously since the beginning of the war. We also saw some mounted Turcos, who were very picturesque in long red cloaks.

"At about 12 o'clock we suddenly heard firing from a wood about three or four hundred yards on our left. Some of the infantry immediately started attacking, and we ordered out gunners with rifles to the gate of the orchard, in case of emergency. It turned out to be some German cavalry—our infantry had quite a job in turning them out. Half our battery went into action that evening, firing almost into the blue, at about five thousand yards. The Germans were shelling a village a bit to the left, and set the church on fire."

October 14th.

"To-day we took two guns up to support the infantry, who were attacking a village [Croix Barbée] at close range. Another subaltern and I had a gun each.

"I came into action at the corner of an orchard (in a ploughed field outside it) at a range to the German trenches of about six or seven hundred yards—an extraordinary close range for guns. One of my jobs was to turn some Germans out of a house straight to my front at about eight hundred yards. It made a splendid target, and I knocked some pretty useful holes in it. Another target was a machine gun (which I could not see, but judged direction by the sound). I think I must have got pretty close, as every time I fired in a certain direction it turned on me. But it was shooting a bit high (I expect they thought we couldn't possibly be so close), and I saw it cutting twigs off the hedge just above.

"The German and English trenches were only about a hundred and fifty to two hundred

yards apart. There were a lot of snipers about, and it was rather exciting going down the road where the Major was observing from in front. It was a rather interesting experience, as I hadn't had rifle fire before. The infantry didn't manage to get into the village that night, and as guns are no good at night, we went back to our billets in the schoolhouse."

October 16th.

"We started out again yesterday morning at 5 a m., so as to be in the same position before it got properly light. During the morning I turned a German machine gun section out of a trench. I got the range to the trench almost exactly, and, after a few rounds, 30 men retired, carrying a machine gun with them.

"I went up later on and observed from the reserve trenches so as to fire in case they returned.

"At about 3 p.m. the infantry made an attack on the village, which I watched from their trenches. It was extremely interesting,

and a thing that, as a gunner, you don't often get a chance of seeing. They got through the village all right, but were held up at the other side, where they lost rather heavily. I went up with the Major later to try and spot the flashes of an enemy battery said to have been seen by the infantry. We saw the flashes, and by timing them found that they were about five thousand five hundred yards away. It was getting dark, and they were shooting over our heads, so we did not bring a gun up. As there was nothing more that we could do, we returned to our schoolhouse.

"The home-made cake you sent was very much appreciated. It happened to be my Captain's birthday, so we had it as his birthday cake. To-day (Friday 16th) I have been temporarily transferred to the 23rd battery, to replace a subaltern who is down at the base."

October 19th.

"We started off on Saturday (17th) at 6 a.m. (as a reserve battery), and advanced

through [Croix Barbé] to a small village the other side, where we remained, in readiness, for the rest of the day. The 6th battery stayed in reserve with us, and the 49th came into action to support some French troops, who were trying to get into a village to our front. We went into billets that night in quite a large house with farm attached near a large distillery. There was a topping grand piano in the house, which of course I played. On the table in one of the rooms was the remains of a sumptuous champagne (and other wine) dinner which the Germans had had there. I had quite a comfortable night on straw, in one of the rooms. Next morning we started off at 6 a.m. and waited in a field for some time. We came into action in the afternoon but did not fire much.

"To-day (Monday) we started out at 6 a.m., and came into action in the same place. I went forward to observe the fire.

"I found the observing station of the day before was not near enough, so, after consultation with the infantry, I decided to move it

up to a haystack, about four or five hundred yards from the enemy, who, at that place, were in a factory. It was rather exciting work laying out the last part of the telephone wire. We got it laid out all right about twenty yards from the farm, when the wire ran out. So I put the telephonist under the shelter of a house, and had to go back myself to lay it across a piece of open as it was shorter that way.

"Just at that moment, the infantry of both sides chose to have a burst of fire, so I got the full benefit of all the 'overs,' to say nothing of not knowing whether they were firing at me or not. Just at the critical moment the wire broke, so I had first to run about to find the two ends and then lie out in the open to join them up. It was rather uncomfortable! As a matter of fact I don't think they could see me, as there was a straw fence between me and where they were firing from.

"We got the telephone working all right, and I turned the battery on to the factory, getting some splendid bursts just over where

the German trenches were, just in front of the factory. It was rather nervous work, as I was always afraid of getting a burst too short and hitting our own men, who were in the advanced trenches comparatively close to the Germans. The wire-cutters Father gave me came in very useful in joining up the wire.

"My fire stopped the snipers for a bit, which was a good thing. A bit later, the Pom-Pom officer came up and said that he had a better observing station, from a house, about fifty yards to the rear. So I decided to move back there."

October 23rd.

"Last Tuesday (20th) we came into action in the same place as the day before, and I went up to observe again. We did not fire that morning, and I was recalled at about 11 a.m., when the battery moved off to another position —about a mile more to the left. Another subaltern and I, and a section of the battery stayed out all night, ready to fire if the Germans opened at all. There was a little firing about

2.30 a.m., so we fired for about five minutes. After that things quietened down, so we went to bed again. We were quite comfortable, as we had a small bivouac, waterproof sheets, a blanket each, and plenty of straw.

"Next morning (21st) we went back half a mile in reserve, near a farmhouse, where we had breakfast. The people were very kind indeed. Later on in the morning we went into action, and I returned to the 6th battery, as another subaltern joined the 23rd that morning. We fired during most of the afternoon at a steady rate. (The 6th battery got through fifteen hundred rounds the day before!) We returned to the same billets that evening, in the château by the distillery.

"Next morning (22nd) we were roused at 2 a.m. and told to be ready to move off at a moment's notice, as the infantry had retired a bit. It proved to be a scare, as we didn't move till 5.30 a.m. At this particular part of the line we had pushed rather far forward as compared with the rest of the line, so it was decided that we should retire here a bit so as to get

into the same line as the troops on our right and left. So we retired about half a mile and went into billets in a small village there. Later on we came into action close to where we were billeting, but did not fire. That night a section was left in action, ready to fire if the enemy did, and another subaltern and I stayed out with it. I used my improvised bivouac for the first time. It was a great success. But at about 10 p.m. an order came round that we must get everything packed up ready to move, so I had to give up my bivouac, and go and sleep with a blanket and waterproof sheet by a haystack.

"It wasn't so bad, as it wasn't a very cold night, and it did not rain. We did not fire during the night, and moved off this morning, at about 5 a.m., to a position about 600 yards in the rear.

"The infantry trenches were now about fifty yards in front of the spot where we came into action the day before. I was sent up to observe from near the infirmary, so I improved one of the funk-pits we had dug for the

guns the day before, and am now sitting in it, writing this, as there is nothing much doing. There is also a dog in with me. He would persist in following me, so I had to take him in to put him under cover.

"He is rather a nice mongrel—a cross between a bull-dog and I don't know what. I spoke to him this morning on the road, and he has followed me ever since.

"I have forgotten to say before how the different animals take the fighting. Cows usually appear quite indifferent, and often you see them wandering about in between our trenches and the enemy's, quite unconcerned. At Croix Barbée one would persist in getting in front of my gun, so we had to drive it off by chucking empty cartridge-cases and clods of earth at it. One dog there was in abject terror, and tried to burrow its way into the ground in a barn.

"The Germans opened fire about 10.30 a.m.—shrapnel just in front and to the left, also H.E. howitzers just over the trenches to the left—extraordinarily accurate, but no one

was hurt. In the evening we went into billets in an old farm at [Le Plouiche]."

October 24th.

"I went out again this morning to observe at the same place as yesterday. A cottage behind us has been burnt down, and I cooked some tea on the smouldering ruins. We shelled the wood for snipers. A battalion of Indian troops had moved up during the night on our left. Everyone is very pleased at their coming.

"There's nothing much doing to-day on my front, only a few snipers and an occasional shell, so I am able to write home. I went to talk to the infantry officers in the trench in front just now. They were very cheery and nice to me.

"There was heavy firing towards dusk, and in the middle of it something went wrong with my 'phone wire. I went back along it, but found no break. I sent a message to the Major by the Royal Scots and returned to the Observing Station. The 'phone was no good, so, at 8 p.m., I went home and turned in, as

B. was on duty with the battery that had to be in action all night. There was very heavy firing just before I went to sleep, and I almost got up to see if the Germans were advancing (as there were wild rumours about), but I was too lazy."

October 25th.

"I went up to [Fauquissart] to observe again, and had the telephone at the same place. After I had deposited my things in the funk-pit, I went along to the Gordons to see how things had been getting on. The Gordon officers (what were left of them) were trying to reorganize their men in the trenches.

"I found that the Middlesex had come up during the night, from where they were in reserve in rear, and had taken over half the Gordons' trenches. (The Gordons had lost pretty heavily during the night in killed, wounded, and prisoners.) It appeared that the Germans had broken a piece of the line about two hundred yards long. Everyone is vague as to what happened after that. But when the

Middlesex came up to retake the trenches, they found that the Germans had already cleared out. The place where the attack had come through was marked out by dead Germans. There were several in the ditches on each side of the road, but it appeared that they did not get much further than the road.

"There were several of our wounded being carried off. The 18th Brigade subaltern came up, and we improved the funk-hole, putting on a bit of a roof, improving the parapet, and putting in a couple of chairs out of the farm (which was practically burnt out by now). We also got some plates, knives and forks.

"The 47th Heavy Battery subaltern came up, and started digging a funk-hole in the orchard, behind the hedge. The 18th Brigade subaltern had his telephonist in the next funk-hole, dug a day or two before for the 6th battery. They shelled the village a bit in the morning, and again in the afternoon. There was a good deal of sniping going on all day.

"I got back to the battery about 7 p.m. and stayed out till supper with a section that

was going to stay out in action all night. After supper, I went out again to stay there with B. till 12 midnight. It was raining, so I had my bivvy up. At about 11 p.m. we heard some pretty heavy rifle-firing, so we opened fire for a bit. The firing soon died down, and we stopped. A heavy gun, somewhere out on our left, kept on firing for some time. At midnight G—— relieved me, and I went in, to sleep till 4 a.m. I had had a lot of trouble with the 'phone all day."

October 26th.

"I went up again to the same place. First of all I visited Col. H——, who now had his H.Q. in a farm in the village. I also visited the Gordons, to see if they had anything they wanted shelling, or had any news. I then returned to my funk-pit, where the 18th subaltern had already arrived. (He went back to his Brigade during the morning, as his 'phone broke down entirely.) 'Crumps' started about 10.30 a.m.—first on the village, setting the house by the cross-roads on fire,

and smashing up one or two others, besides dropping a few in the church. (The latter was always a favourite objective.) They then switched into the trenches in front of us, with 'crumpets.' They gradually reached up to us, and dropped one just outside our funk-pit, covering us with earth. When it had calmed down a bit, I went along to the Gordon trenches to see about a report that a gun had been seen being brought into action there. I saw several cows, which I expect the look-outs mistook for horses (of course they wouldn't admit it), and also several Germans making a trench, and bringing stuff for overhead cover. I tried a few shots, but, as far as we could see, had no luck. The range was about 600 yards; I could see their faces plainly with a telescope.

"They started 'crumpeting' the trench I was in, so I lay low for a bit, sharing an under-cut hole with a sergeant and another man. I gave them each a cigarette, which the sergeant much appreciated, for a wonder—it being Turkish. They didn't get very near with the shells—about 20 yards short most of the time.

After a while they stopped, and I made my way back through the village to my funk-hole. On the way they started shelling with shrapnel, and I saw a house hit about fifty yards in front of me, as I was coming from the trenches to the village. I then went up the trench in front of my funk-pit and tried to put the 4·7 battery on to the German trenches.

"Just as it was beginning to get dark I got a message from the Sikhs that they wanted me, so I went over to them and was directed up to one of the advanced trenches, where an English officer pointed out where he thought a lot of Germans were collecting, near a burning house. So I shelled this for some time.

"I returned to the battery for the night. As I was going back along the village street, a Tommy came up to me and said there was a German 'in that house.' I went in and had a look, and there was one sitting in a chair, with a bullet through his thigh, quite happy. He loosed off a lot of German at me, but I forgot every word I ever knew for the moment."

October 27th.

"I decided to shift my funk-hole to a place just to the right of the church. Here were the remains of some gun-pits made by the 49th about a week before. One of these we improved, and put a large stable-door on, as overhead cover, with some earth on the top of that. Just as we were finishing it (I and my telephonists) they started shelling just over us. So we retired into the funk-hole, and just afterwards they dropped a genuine Crump about 30 yards over, and one piece landed on our roof. We were rather thankful for the latter.

"Incidentally, a day or two before, as I was sitting in my old funk-pit, a bit of one of the German anti-aeroplane shells dropped in, missing me by about four inches.

"As I was walking along the road to see Col. H—— they started on the village with Crumps again. Luckily they were just over, so I only got some bits falling round me. The Colonel sent me along to the Sikhs, who were complaining of snipers in a house about three

hundred yards in front of the trenches. They gave me some very good tea, and I took a photo of some of them. They told me they thought there must be some snipers behind their line; they were sending out parties to hunt for them. They also told me that they had noticed that when the sails of a certain windmill turned, their trenches were immediately shelled, so they were sending a party to the mill too.

"I then went back to my funk-pit and ran a wire up into the trenches, so as to get to work on the cottage. They were rather slow at the battery for some reason, and it was maddening having to keep your head up for ages, waiting for them to fire each time, especially as the Germans started shelling, but luckily not getting very near.

"I hit the house all right, but as no one ran out (I had men with rifles waiting for them) and the shells didn't do much damage, I stopped. There was no more trouble from the house after that.

"In the afternoon I went up into the

Middlesex trenches, to try and spot the flash of a German gun behind [Aubers]. I think I got it once, but it was not definite enough, and appeared to be some way behind [Aubers].

"The Q.M.S. arrived later with my rations and a blanket. I dined with Colonel H—— off German bully-beef (dropped by them when they broke through here). It was rather good. After 10 a.m. fairly heavy firing broke out, and I tried to get through to my guns, but found the wire gone, as usual. (A burning house had fallen on it.) Rifle-firing is quite alarming at night till you get used to it. You can see shells going through the air all red-hot. The firing continued for about a quarter of an hour pretty heavily, but then died down, and we retired to bed.

"Next day (Wednesday, October 28th) I went up first thing to my Observation Post at [Fauquissart]. On the way I visited the Sikhs, and cadged some more tea off them. There was a rumour of a mortar in the enemies' trenches. I went up to our trenches to look, but could see no signs of it.

"The village was being shelled on and off all the morning, and they were also shelling the batteries behind us—we could hear the shells going overhead. I saw a Crump burst inside a house, about thirty yards from where I was standing, and knock the whole thing to pieces.

"I met P—— (a Hodgsonite) in the trenches. While I was talking to some officers there, a Crump burst just behind the trench a bit further along. (It was aimed at the church, I think.) It half buried three men. They came running along to us, in a fearful state of nerves. (I don't blame them !) We tried to calm them down, and in going back with them across a short piece of open, we suddenly heard the 4-in. 'bang-whrrs' of shrapnel—luckily just over. They must have been keeping a pretty sharp look-out.

"I had some lunch at Colonel H.'s house, and afterwards they started shelling with heavy shrapnel—first some trenches in the rear of the village, then the village itself, gradually working along the street towards us. So we put the

men of the Headquarters into the cellar of the house, and were just looking round for some cover for ourselves (Colonel H., two officers of the Middlesex and myself) when they got one on the roof just above us, quickly followed by another which got me in the leg.

"The Colonel helped me into a little room by the gateway and put on my first field dressing, and when the shelling had quieted down I was carried back on a stretcher to a farm about a mile back. There were shells going overhead at the time, but quite safely.

"At the farm (the Middlesex first-aid post) my wound was properly dressed, and a splint put on, made out of a piece of biscuit-box and a bit of an old petticoat. When it got dark I was put into a horse-ambulance and taken further to the rear. On the way I passed the battery, and all of them came out to see me. We got to another farm later on, where I was deposited for the night in charge of a dear old Scotch R.A.M.C. Major. My stretcher was just laid on the floor, and I remained on it.

"In the morning I was taken in a motor-ambulance to Béthune Hospital, and from there, later in the day, to a hospital-train. The train seemed to wander about all over the place, and we didn't get into Boulogne till 2 a.m. next morning (Friday, October 30th), when I was taken in a motor-ambulance to the Allied Forces Hospital (in the Hotel Christol and Bristol)."

So ends George Devenish's record of the opening phase of the war—or, rather, of that small part of it which came within his range of vision during his first period of service in France. The postcript to that record came in the letter which his Major wrote to inform Mr. and Mrs. Devenish of their son's wound :—

"He is a very keen and plucky young officer, and has done very good work, and we are very sorry to lose him."

George remained at the Hospital at Boulogne for three weeks, his parents coming over to be near him. He was kept five weeks more

in hospital in London, getting home just in time for Christmas.

He rejoined the Army in March, 1915, and was stationed at Aldershot until he went out to France again early in June.

" There is a word you often see, pronounce it as you may—
'You bike,' 'you bykwe,' 'ubbikwe'—alludin' to R.A.
It serves 'Orse, Field, an' Garrison as motto for a crest,
An' when you've found out all it means, I'll tell you 'alf the rest.

. . . .

By what I've 'eard the others tell an' I in spots 'ave seen,
There's nothin' this side 'Eaven or 'Ell Ubique doesn't mean."

—*Rudyard Kipling.*

PART II

"UBIQUE"

JUNE, 1915, TO APRIL, 1916

ON June 1st, 1915, George Devenish went back to France again, and for the next ten months he was with his battery, filling up day after day with the organized routine of the second phase of the war. His division was in the northern part of the line, so that, to his frequently expressed disgust, he "missed all the big shows" of this period of the war, although he seems to have come in for what would ordinarily appear to be a very adequate share of considerable and constant activities. Almost every day's work seems to have included some measure, less or more, of "strafing the Gerboys," "loosing off at the Allebosches," together with all the artillery observation involved.

This last-named part of his duties involved much congenial work in the way of constructing observation posts and dug-outs ; tasks after

his own heart, and reminiscent of many holiday enterprises at home.

"It was just like building our workshop," he wrote to his father about the construction of a marvellous dug-out which he named "Artillery Mansions," and fitted up with a lavish expenditure of labour and ingenuity and of such materials as he could "find," or "wheedle out of the sappers." His foraging expeditions in quest of timber or fittings seem to have been uniformly crowned with success, attributed by himself always to the fact that some one or other had been proved "jolly decent," in allowing or ignoring his depredations.

George always found people "jolly decent" to him, and his readiness to recognize and record the fact may well have had something to do with the sunny atmosphere of enjoyment which went with him into even the most unpromising conditions. Each new billet in turn was found to possess some admirable features or possibilities which he speedily set himself to develop, and which he deplored having to leave when the next move came. Every change of surroundings — and, still more, of companions—was a wrench which he dreaded,

even though it might be advantageous to himself, for it always meant parting from friends he had grown fond of, and places he had worked to improve.

"It may be an honour, but I hate leaving the battery!" was his comment upon his appointment, in the autumn of 1915, to be Orderly Officer at Brigade H.Q., but a week or two later he was recording the kindness of the Colonel he was under, and the interesting and "ripping" times they spent together.

Looking through and beyond the brief and simple records in George Devenish's letters to the picture of himself which they unconsciously present, one seems to discern, as one of his chief characteristics, that quick appreciation of other people's good qualities, and the readiness to see things from their side, which made him a staunch friend and generous foe. He freely noted any act of gallantry, or skill in firing, or excellence in organization which he had seen or heard of on the part of the "Gerboys," as he commonly termed the enemies in the opposite trenches.

It was this same habit of seeing things from the "other side" which lay at the root of his living sympathy with animals great or

small. They were always individuals to George, even to the mouse which he found in the captured German trenches, killed by a lyddite shell, and whose obituary he wrote in the brief comment:

"Rather rotten luck on the mouse!"

A trivial tragedy in face of the titanic one that caused it! and many of the duties and enterprises chronicled in his letters may seem trivial, too, compared with the vast issues of the world's greatest war. Yet they represent a few of the myriad unseen individual efforts which lie behind each stage in the war's advance, and they show also the lighter side of the self-same spirit which has carried George Devenish, and the thousands like him, gallantly, readily, simply, to the supreme sacrifice.

His letters in this second and longer period are necessarily more numerous, and less varied in contents, than those of the first three months of the war. The rapidly changing conditions of those early days had been stereotyped, on the Western front, into the routine of organized trench warfare.

"There's no doubt about it," George wrote regretfully, "war is not what it used to be."

The selections from his 1915 letters are therefore a good deal more curtailed than those in the former chapters, in order to avoid repetition. No attempt has been made to piece together a complete record of this one young officer's doings from day to day, but rather to gain a glimpse of the general conditions under which he took his part in the war during this its second phase.

He had been back in England for more than half a year, and the developed organization was what first struck him on his return to the front. In the letter despatched just after his arrival, he wrote:

"This place is absolutely wonderful! Everything is so wonderfully organized, and so complete in details."

Then follows the description of his billet.

June 8th, 1915.

"We live in a cottage about one hundred yards from the guns. It is quite comfortable, and has a lot of little details added by the battery

which was here before us (they were here two months). They've got up a lot of pictures and shelves, and brought two lovely old carved armchairs from a ruined château near."

The title to the armchairs seems, however, subsequently to have been called in question, according to a letter of later date.

"A most horrible calamity came to us this day! I think I told you that we had two very comfortable tapestry armchairs which had originally come out of the château on the hill, and apparently the mother of the owner of the château had been making inquiries all round, and had run the chairs to earth at our farm. She sent someone round for them in the afternoon, and left us armchairless—a perfectly horrible condition! I don't know what we shall do without them. There was a fight for them regularly every day."

The first change of billets came before the end of June, and was recorded with George's customary regret.

"We have heard to our great disgust that we are going to move on Monday. It is sickening, although the next place is quite comfortable. . . . .

"Still, we've all got quite attached to our present place, with the cottage to ourselves, so conveniently near to the guns.

"We had all just begun to know all the various targets, and the 'phone lines, and had been making various improvements, and then we have to leave. I suppose it's rather a bad frame of mind to get into—losing the offensive spirit, etc.

"After a while here, you settle down to the routine of the place, and make yourself comfortable, shoot the daily allowance of ammunition, and, after a bit, almost entirely forget there is a war on, until awakened to the fact by the Germans being vulgar enough to put a shell in an inconvenient spot."

June 21st.

"I went up to the Obs. station at 8.30; very quiet all round. I came back in the afternoon

and spent it getting ready for the move (all moves have to be done in the dark, of course).

"A sapper officer, who had been building up a small house near us for an experiment, came in to tea, and I got a lot of boards, which he had over, out of him. They will be very useful.

"We moved into the new position that evening at about 10.0. It's not at all a bad place, with a largish farm (with inhabitants still there, going about their usual vocations) as a billet. The observing station doesn't seem too healthy, though you can see extremely well from it."

June 23rd.

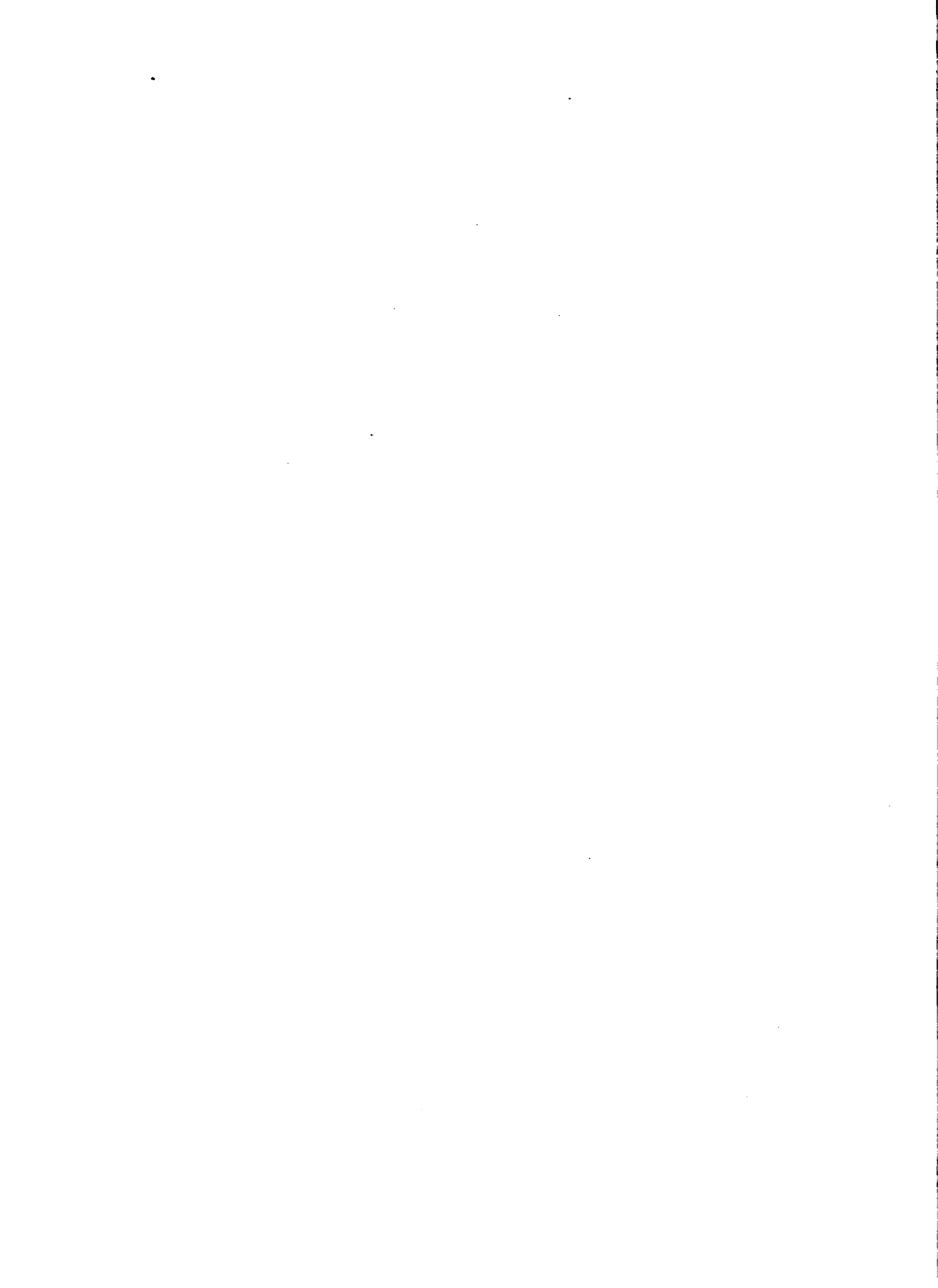
"We had breakfast at about 9.0, and afterwards I spent the morning going round the artillery 'phone dug-outs in various trenches.

. . . .

"Again, after a preliminary burst of M.G. fire, the night went off peacefully. Our people spent part of it in cutting the corn in front of

AN OBSERVATION POST

(Drawn from a snapshot, by I. Kitson Clark)



the trenches, which has grown up so high that in most places here you can't see the German trenches at all. The Germans are, I believe, cutting their half of it. The trenches are here between one hundred yards to three hundred yards apart. I was only called for the 'phone once during the night."

June 24th.

"Breakfast about 7.30. After some 'phoning, I went along the trenches to see about a new wire that was being laid out.

"After a second breakfast with the inhabitants of that trench (who suspect that there is a German mine under their mess !), I was about to return when they started shelling. They weren't particularly good, and didn't do any damage.

"When they had quieted down, I came home to lunch. It's rather a funny life, living perpetually half underground, with the crack of rifles going on at intervals all day and night, occasionally varied by machine guns or shells."

June 26th.

"We spent the first part of the morning looting all the sandbags, planks, wire netting, etc. that had been left about by the sappers, and later H—— and I went over to our new position with a fatigue party to start building emplacements. On the way we managed to wheedle some more timber from a sapper depôt.

"We spent quite an amusing day at it, and got quite a lot done. We are going to make a small shed for each gun, out of sandbags and timber. Rather reminds me of building the workshop.

"I have been designing a patent telephone exchange switchboard, with bullets and cartridge cases as plugs and sockets."

"We seem," he wrote in another letter, "to live in a world consisting mostly of telephones and telephone wires. More trouble comes from them than from anything else, but, on the other hand, it would be practically impossible to run the show out here without them."

Into that world of mechanical contrivances —the "behind scenes" of the fighting— George Devenish's letters of this period carry one, with keen appreciation of the joys of successful construction and reconstruction, and with only the slightest of references to the danger always at hand.

June 30th.

"Yesterday H. and I went out along an old wire with a view to diverting it for use to our Observation Station. On the way we ran across the E. Surrey H.Q., which happened to be only about half a mile from the battery, and found Purcell* there. He was in reserve for four days, and this morning I met him on his way back into the trenches for four days. I was taking a party out to relay the first part of the wire clear of a Brigade H.Q.

"In the afternoon I continued my long wire on to the Battalion H.Q. of the infantry we are supporting. It was a very slow job as

* His only brother, Lieut. H. Purcell Devenish, who took a commission in the 7th East Surrey Regiment in August, 1914.

a lot of the way was through a wood, and I didn't get back till late."

Thursday, July 1st.

"H. and I started out at about 12.40 to tap a wire into the wire I had put down the day before, and run a line on to the Observation Station.

"We got it up there all right through the wood, and then registered the night lines with a few rounds. Then we ran a wire on to the trench in front, where we have to keep a telephonist at night, so that the infantry can ring us up for support at any time.

"The Germans here have some pretty good snipers. They broke a periscope mirror when we were there. We then returned some distance and started to run out an auxiliary wire to the observation station across the open. It was getting dark, but at one place we were sniped a bit, but no damage done. Further on we ran across the path of a fixed rifle, firing up a road, which was rather unpleasant.

"As it got darker, flares started going up,

giving out a weird and brilliant light, and the shooting increased somewhat—we getting the full benefit of the overs.

"We got the wire there all right, and got home at about 10.30, rather tired.

"I don't think I've described our billet. It consists of an ancient farmhouse, built on the usual principle—round the manure heap.

"It is inhabited by an old farmer and his seven daughters (all of whom, except the very smallest, who goes to school, work on the farm). They also make butter and bread, and sell eggs and milk, which is very convenient.

"We have a small room, facing outwards (not towards the manure heap luckily), to live in, with a kitchen opposite for our servants.

"We sleep in a large loft, which is quite comfortable. The telephone exchange is in a small out-house room, and the men sleep in a large barn (except three per gun, who sleep in dug-outs round the guns). The guns are in a field just outside the farm.

"There is a topping black dog at the farm, which is always kept chained up—never been

loose in his life, so, the farmer told us, he would not let us let him loose. His one amusement is a little game he invented himself. There is a long ladder hanging upright on the wall by his kennel, and he solemnly stands in front of this and pats it with his paw so as to make it swing. The ladder is quite worn where he pats its."

July 3rd.

"In the morning I went out on a wire-bagging expedition. There are simply hundreds of yards of wire lying about, old lines not used now.

"I raised quite a lot, which came in very useful, as we can't get any issued.

"I lunched at C. Battery. They have quite a nice billet—a largish house in the village of [Ploegsteert]. The village is shelled most days, but so far they havn't been troubled by it.

"The village becomes entirely depopulated every afternoon by 2.0 p.m., as the Germans have a hate every day after that hour. The

inhabitants return in the evening. Rather a peculiar existence. So far, they have only been known to be shelled in the morning eight times in the last six months."

July 7th.

"There was a show arranged for 8.30 last evening, in the form of a demonstration by artillery and rifle fire to make the Germans think they were going to be attacked, so H. and I had dinner early, and started out immediately after, to the observing station, to watch it. It rather reminded one of dinner early, to rush out to the theatre. We got up there in time to get good seats (which consisted of what remained of the loft of a very much dilapidated roofless cottage, just about one hundred yards behind our trenches) and to get the telephone working in case the Germans were vulgar enough to take the thing seriously and make a real attack on their own.

"Exactly at 8.30 the curtain rose with a round of lyddite from the mountain guns into the Gerboys trench. This was the signal for

a colossal fusilade of rifles and machine-guns, and various howitzer and 18-pounder batteries. It had really rather a fine effect—the brilliant flashes of the bursting shells followed by the noise of the explosion, the almost deafening crackle of the rifles, interspersed with the tap-tap-tap-tap of the machine-guns and the bangs of the exploding bombs and grenades, and, as it grew darker, the brilliant illumination of the Verey lights.

"This went on solidly for about half an hour, but the Germans treated it in the right spirit—*i.e.*, simply as a demonstration—and very soon the fire began to slacken; then there would be intervals of silence, followed by a burst; then fewer and fewer shots, and by 9.20 the night had settled down to its accustomed state, with only the occasional crack of the sentry's rifle to show that there was a war on. I don't believe the Gerboys treated our little effort at frightfulness at all in the way our Staff meant them to; they didn't seem a bit frightened, and only fired as much as they felt in duty bound to.

" When things had resumed the normal calm, H. and I returned home, and after eating and drinking respectively the biscuits and wine of the country left out for us, in the approved after-theatre manner, we retired to bed."

July 10*th.*

" I went up to Observation Station in morning, and then went into trenches in front to see how obvious our Observation Station was. It seemed quite difficult to spot. There was a large hole in the front wall made by one of the shells of the night before.

" In the afternoon H—— and I prospected for a new Observing Station, as the present one obviously would not be at all healthy if the enemy ever meant any serious business.

" After looking in every imaginable place, we decided on building a lookout place in a support trench.

" I started off at about 8.30 a.m., with a fatigue party, to start on the new Observation Station.

" First of all we put in a strong floor, about

four feet from the bottom of the trench, and on top of that built a square room of sand bags.

"We then removed a large H girder from a ruined convent near by. It was rather a job moving it, as it was about 10 feet long by 1 foot deep and ⅝ inch thick, and weighed some. This we put up along the top of the parapet, on edge, and after enormous labour, cut a slot in it with a cold chisel, to look out of. It seemed an almost impossible job at first, but it got finished at last.

"We then put on a roof of planks and sandbags, making a sliding trap-door at one corner near the front, so that you could put your head or a periscope out to get a better view.

"The sniping was rather annoying this day.

"About 5.0 p.m. H—— and I went up to the 1st line trench and the Infs. loosed off some rifle-grenades into the German trenches for our benefit, and we put a dozen shells over and into them for their amusement. A rather

extraordinary thing happened. As I was kneeling behind the parapet observing with a periscope, suddenly a bullet cracked into the traverse just beside me. We decided it must have been fired from a place where the trenches curved round at least 1,500 yards to 2,000 yards away. Jolly good shot it was."

July 13th.

"I worked all day at the Observation Station. Sniping a bit more lively. As the fitter and I were putting sandbags on the roof, one of the Allemands rang the girder about five inches below us. Rather a lucky escape. We put in a speaking-tube between the top and bottom floor, *i.e.*, between where the observer stands and the little rabbit-hutch underneath, where the telephonists sit."

The Observing Station being completed, the next task was the construction, close beside it, of the famous "Artillery Mansions" dug-out, and the fitting of it, inside and out, with every convenience that could be devised, or

looted, and crowded into the very narrow limits of space available.

July 24th.

"I took up a fatigue party yesterday, and after prospecting around decided on a place for the dug-out near the trench Observing Station we made the other day.

"We then got to work on digging out a place in the side of the trench for it and collecting material for building it. The sappers said that we could indent for materials for it, but, knowing all official ways, we decided to find our own stuff, which we did quite successfully. We got the framework up that evening and the roof on, and to-day we got the walls up, and the floor in. Two sides were made of corrugated iron on the outside. The roof was also of corrugated iron (collected from various places), with about two feet of earth on it."

July 25th.

"My birthday.

"I spent a most pleasant day at work on

the dug-out. We have, by the way, a very good fitter, who works nobly at all these works . . . . The fitter is a great man. He goes round all the semi-demolished houses and collects hinges, door-handles, and all things of that sort."

The next letter contains the triumphant announcement: "Finished the dug-out!" followed by a description of the many comforts and conveniences of this palatial abode of 8½ feet by 5½ and under 6 feet in height.

"At the door-end is a locker, which at night serves as a rest for the bed.

"The bed consists of an oblong wooden frame with canvas stretched over it. When in use it rests at one end on the locker, and at the other, and along one side, on a ledge nailed to the wall. During the day it tips up on the ledge, and stands upright on one side against the wall, held there by a turning button at the top.

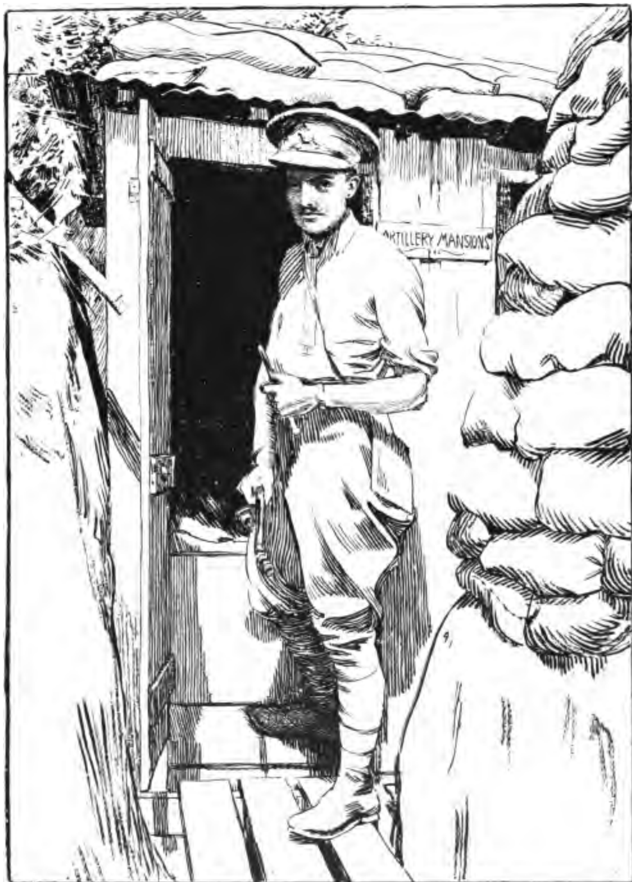
"Just by the head of the bed is a small shelf for the telephone, with a hook just over the bed for hanging up the receiver.

"Under the window (which is a glass open and shut one, looted from a neighbouring house) is a collapsible table, which is hinged to the wall by means of a bar which once belonged to a sewing machine, and a couple of staples; it has a hinged leg at its outer end. It is shut up when the bed is required for use.

"Below the 'phone shelf is a rack for holding a rifle, with a canvas bandolier of ammunition hanging up above it.

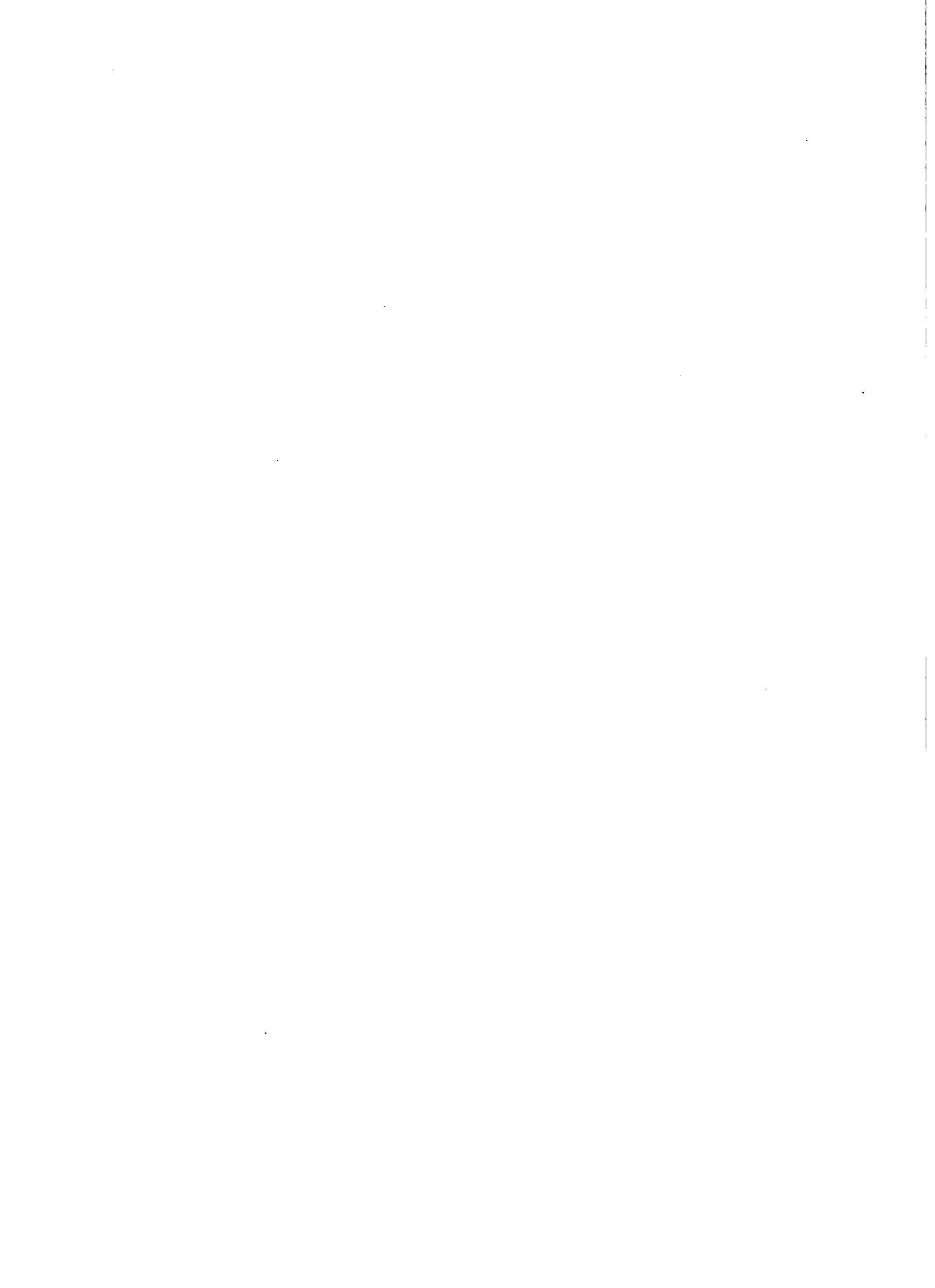
"It really is a most awfully comfortable place. Everyone comes and envies it and admires it, including generals and sappers, etc. I slept in it for the first time that night.

"The luxury of the 'phone again comes in there. From this dug-out, lying in bed at night I can ring up H., also in bed at the battery, or the guns, or our telephonists at the Company Headquarters in the front trench and several other places. I thoroughly enjoyed



"ARTILLERY MANSIONS"

(Drawn from a snapshot, by I. Kitson Clark)



building it. It reminded me very much of making the workshop . . .

"We are thinking of calling it 'Artillery Mansions.' It's getting quite famous as a dug-out. The Divisional General had a look at it the other day. The sappers are putting in for a brass door knocker for it. It certainly is an extremely comfortable place (I'm writing this in it now, on the collapsible table)."

July 27th.

"H. was relieved after lunch, and we both rode into [Armentières] to get a lock for our new dug-out. On the way back we called in on Purcell, and had tea there. Coming out of [Armentières] we saw a most remarkable sight—two officers participating in a mixed tennis double in the garden of one of the larger houses—this in a town shelled regularly two or three times a week or sometimes more. It did take one home seeing it."

August 4th.

"In the morning I started the trench for the buried wire to B. Battery. I went up to

relieve H—— immediately after lunch. It was very quiet all the afternoon. After dining with the Infs. there I went on to Observation farm, where I was sleeping the night. I found that the roof, or rather the upstairs floor (as the roof had been removed by a shell) leaked badly, and that the blanket which I keep there was soaked.

"After reporting to the Inf. Colonel I turned in at about 10 p.m."

August 5th.

"I woke at 5.30 a.m., and as I was feeling rather cold, got up and went down to the trenches. It was a topping morning after the rain of the day before.

"After visiting the Observing Station to see if there was anything worth shooting at, I went up to the front trench. Here one of the sentries reported that he could see a Gerboy working at the parapet of a small salient in their line, so I looked through a magnifying periscope (which has been presented to the Battery and is extremely good) and saw him

quite plainly, appearing for a few seconds and then getting down, apparently building up sandbags. So I dashed to a loophole and waited with a rifle, but he was extremely hard to pick up without a glass. I'd have given anything for a telescopic rifle. But I waited, looking through the glass. After a bit I thought I saw the top of his head with its round cap again, so I had a shot and just skimmed their parapet. I don't think I got him, but he didn't do any more work there. After breakfast, I noticed them working in the salient in front of our line, and put a shell in it to stir them up. We keep a gun always laid on it now, and fire when there is any signs of work there.

"H—— relieved me in the afternoon. Later on he fired two rounds, and he told us that the Germans had put up a notice, '*Warsaw gefallen*,' and he had made them take it down."

August 7th.

"Visited the sappers to find out what they

had in the way of wood, etc., as we are planning to build huts for the men.

"Afterwards went up to relieve B—— at the Observing Station.

"The Huns went in for a bit of shelling at various times during the day—in the afternoon dropping three about fifty yards from the infantry mess where I was naving tea. This was rather annoying, so I turned the battery on to what we think is their Observing Station, and they shut up.

"I slept the night at Artillery Mansions. (Did I tell you the name of our dug-out is Artillery Mansions?)"

August 9th.

"After dinner we went up to the front trench and found the Gerboys very cheery, shouting out remarks, and singing, and one man playing a penny whistle. We sent up a Verey light which dropped in their wire and made quite a bonfire, which they tried to put out. But we got a machine-gun on it, and kept them off. Unfortunately the fire died down and went out.

"We then sent up another flare, and it again dropped in their wire. But I distinctly saw a German dash out and stamp it out and get back before he was fired at. Rather a good effort on his part.

"Then we suddenly spotted a very loud sound of transport moving along a road in rear of their position, also troops going along with it singing.

"So I at once reported to our H.Q., and we turned two batteries on to a road which we knew ran about 1,000 yards in rear of their trenches.

"After firing a few salvos we stopped to listen again. The shelling seemed to have had no effect, except that there was no more singing.

"So we turned on to another road about 2,500 yards further on. At the first salvo we heard an extraordinary explosion and thought it might possibly be an ammunition wagon, but of course we could not tell. We immediately gave them several more rounds. The transport seemed to stop and then go on again,

the tail of the column apparently turning off down another road.

"When we had finished, the Germans retaliated with about half-a-dozen rounds on our trenches, without, however, doing any damage.

"It was quite an amusing evening."

August 17th.

"About 9 p.m. I was just settling down comfortably in Artillery Mansions when I heard the Infs. report on the 'phone that they could hear transport. So I had to put on my boots and splash up to the front trench again.

"We could hear it there very distinctly, so the battery loosed off at it, but I don't think we got it at all. The Germans were very cheery again to-night. Shouting and singing, etc.—one man saying that he wished he was back in the good old Mile End Road.

"One of the Gerboys was getting rather obstreperous, so two of the infantry subalterns and myself got a rifle laid, and next time he

shouted we put a volley in his direction which was greeted with yells of derision."

August 26*th.*

"On getting home [from an expedition to another part of the line] I found that a battle had been raging, *i.e.*, the Gerboys had been shelling [Ploegsteert] with 5·9 and 4·2 H.E., and we had replied with our shrapnel. H——, who had been sleeping in the clover just before the incident, was aroused by a shell bursting about thirty yards away. I went up to the trenches that evening to stay the night at Observation farm. It was a glorious night, the Germans were having a concert of part-songs very well sung."

September 26*th.*

"The other evening, when we were all sitting in our room, we heard one or two bangs outside. It didn't occur to us what was happening till Webb, the immaculate ex-butler, knocked at the door and said in his most precise and expressionless tone, 'Excuse me, sir, but I believe we are being shelled.' We went

out, and found that they were putting them over pretty close, but no damage was done and they soon shut up. . . .

"On Friday (September 24th) I went up to our ordinary Observing Station in the afternoon. The usual peaceful atmosphere was quite disturbed, and the general idea was that we were attacking there first thing next morning. They had orders to be ready to at a moment's notice.

"Great preparations were being made for a huge ruse to be perpetrated on the Huns next morning. Large bundles of straw and tins of water were collected all along the front trench, together with some paraffin. The scheme was to light the straw bundles (after suitably damping them) and, at a given signal, heave them over the parapet.

"The idea of this was to put the wind up the Bosches, and make them think they were being gassed (we were gassing properly further South, I believe).

"Next morning (25th) we all stood to at 4.45 a.m., and at 5.56 a.m. the straw was lit and heaved over.

"It was top-hole—all along the line there suddenly rose (in complete silence) clouds of smoke which rolled gradually across to the Gerboy trenches. It worked splendidly. We heard them ring their gas bell and send up shower of red rockets (signal for artillery support) and then open a terrific fire on our parapet, while we sat and roared with laughter in our trenches.

"Then our guns opened, and sprayed their first line with shrapnel. They retaliated quite a lot, but did not do an enormous amount of damage.

"We have just heard that our attacks at other parts of the line have been quite successful. We are now supposed to be ready to move at any moment; it's an awful nuisance having to pack."

September 27th.

"At last the blow has fallen—we're going to leave our position. It's perfectly beastly—after being here four months we've really got quite fond of the place, and of course know it

inside out. The biggest wrench, perhaps, is leaving Artillery Mansions. It would be rather interesting after the war to come back and see if it's still standing. Our old farmer made us promise to come back and call on him some time. He's always been very nice to us, and I think he's quite sorry we're leaving. We've been packing up hard all day, and it's rather like leaving school for the last time !"

October 2nd.

"This afternoon I had to go up to the trenches as forward observation officer for the brigades. I laid a line up as I went, but it was cut as fast as it was laid and mended, by shells and men tripping on it, etc., and I never got through on it the first twelve hours I was there. After some difficulty I found my way through old German trenches to the Infantry Brigade H.Q., which was in a house which had been occupied by a German battery commander, according to a painted notice on the outside. He had made himself pretty comfortable. I spent that night with the Berks. It was pretty cold, there was only the bottom of

the trench to sleep in, but acting on someone's brilliant suggestion, I got hold of a lot of sand, bags and covered myself with a layer of about twenty deep—it wasn't so bad."

October 5th.

"We are now living in a small cottage, one of a little village of miners' cottages. It is not a bad little place except that when we got into it, it had no doors or windows. But this defect is being remedied by the simple expedient of going round the other houses (which are all made on the same plan) and taking the required door or window.

"Most of the doors have already been bagged for making dug-outs.

"Yesterday I was sent out reconnoitring all over the place with B——, and had a very interesting though rather shelly day. The awful news that our Colonel is leaving us awaited our arrival home. He is to be a Brigadier-General.

"During our wanderings we came across a German gun position which had been captured.

It was very well fitted up—the dug-outs all had beds, chairs, tables, clocks, carpets, etc., and there was a speaking tube to each gun-pit. I noticed in a field a mouse which had obviously been killed by a large lyddite shell! Rather rotten luck on the mouse!

" . . . I came up to relieve H—— to-day at the Observing Post in the reserve trenches. I took our fitter up with me, as he was very keen to see the old German trenches. . . .

" At one place on the main road the Huns had apparently caught some of our transport, as the place is littered with every imaginable store—blankets, picks, sand-bags, bicycles, a Douglas motor-cycle, wagons of every description, etc. On our way, the fitter looted a lot of bike lamps from the transport mess on the road. They will be very useful for lighting up the sights at night.

" He is going to piece together two or three bikes on the way back, also a S.A.A. wagon; also collect some picks, shovels, axes, etc., which will all come in very handy. The motor-bike we decided was beyond us to repair."

The first faint-hearted counsel, however, was subsequently revised, and with the aid of the invaluable fitter the shattered remnants were reconstructed by George and his friend "H.," by whom the machine was still being used in the summer of 1917.

October 7th.

"The fitter, by the way, also collected the remains of the motor-bike I mentioned, and we spent an amusing afternoon to-day patching it up. It is just possible we might be able to get it to go.

"This place was just as cushy as [Ploegsteert], where we were before this strafe was started, so one of its former inhabitants, in the Camerons, told us. He was quite sick with the authorities for disturbing the peace. It used apparently to be quite a pleasant spot with [Béthune] within easy reach for recreation."

October 8th.

"I spent this morning alternating between the motor-bike and the gun-pits, both of which were being reconstructed.

" In the afternoon H—— and I were poring over the bike with the fitter, when we noticed that our eyes began to smart a bit. We were working near a wood fire, and thinking the fire was the cause we moved round the corner. There had been some considerable shelling, by the way, all day, and there was quite a lot going on there, but not very near us, so we didn't take any notice, as we had been told not to fire till we received orders to do so from Headquarters. The smarting got worse and worse, and we were just cursing the cook about the fire, when one of the sergeants came up from the battery (about two hundred yards off), with eyes streaming, saying that the Gerboys were sending over gas shells. So we all stood to, in smoke helmets or goggles, and very soon received the order to fire, which we proceeded to do with varying intensity for about four hours.

" There was a hell of a row going on— every battery, English, French, and German, pooping as hard as they could. The gassing was extremely unpleasant, though the effects were not lasting.

"The Bosches did quite a lot of strafing round us, knocking out a French battery in front, and one behind us, but luckily not touching us.

"The fitter, who went down to the wagon line on a bike for more ammunition, got blown off his bike twice by shells, but he didn't seem to mind. People did look priceless sights in their smoke helmets.

"That night I had to go out to try and relieve the telephonists in the trenches, but, getting hopelessly lost after three hours' wandering, I returned home, and went up next morning."

October 9th.

"In the trenches I heard more about the fight of the day before. Apparently the Germans had made a very strong counter-attack, especially on the chalk pit which was our zone. All morning they shelled our infantry like blazes, but, as a matter of fact, did not do so much damage as might be expected. None of our guns replied at all. The Infs.

couldn't understand it, and we couldn't understand why we weren't allowed to fire. But the Gerboy couldn't understand it either, and thought it meant that we were rather done, and that he had a nice cushy job before him.

"Then in the afternoon they came on. Even then no one fired at first. Then suddenly everybody opened. Infs., field, and heavy artillery. We made a curtain of fire behind the people advancing, so then they were trapped between the infantry fire in front and the shrapnel behind. Only one man reached our parapet, and he only by hiding in a shell hole about thirty yards short of our trench and then coming forward with his hands up. He was, I believe, the only prisoner taken that day. But, on the other hand, mighty few of them ever got back.

"This evening we moved out to another position about a mile further North. We got in, in pitch darkness, after having had some difficulty in finding the way. But the battery next door gave us some supper, so it wasn't so bad when we got in.

"We each had a dug-out to sleep in, made in a bank near by.

"The next day was very peaceful, as we were connected up to *no* one on the 'phone, and as we had only been brought there to be used in our attack which was going to come off, we were not liable to be called upon for S.O.S. or retaliation.

"We spent the next day or two laying out lines to the Observing Station, and making dug-outs there and at the battery, and generally making arrangements for our attack. We got up a lot of H.E. as well as shrapnel, and one brigade of howitzers have been dished out with a lot of gas shells (lachrymal) which they are going to poop off.

"If the wind's all right, we're going to gas too. It'll do the Gerboys a lot of good.

"Our Brigade was complimented on its shooting, as apparently it was where we were firing that the biggest attack was to have come, but was entirely swamped by fire. Did a lot of work on 'phone dug-out this afternoon.

"The new Colonel came over and asked me to be his orderly officer, as the present one

is going. It may be an honour, but I'm awfully sick, as I don't want to leave the battery at all."

October 13th.

"We had a battle all to-day. We started firing at 12 midday, and went on till 6.30 p.m., and then continued at fifteen rounds an hour all night. From our point of view it was very boring. H—— was up at the Observing Station, and saw the whole thing.

"First of all our bombardment, then gas for an hour, then our infantry going forward. He saw them rush into the Hohenzollern Redoubt, which we were trying to take, and then start bombing. After a time he saw them wavering, and starting to go back. Then their officers urging them on again, and running on in front. He said it was madly exciting, watching, and wondering which way the fight would go. After a bit they seemed to go on again, and then towards evening they suddenly all seemed to come back in a mass, this time to our old front-line trenches. So

once more we have taken this redoubt and been driven out of it again.

"You know that advertisement of Sanatogen—a stream of limping, decrepit people walking along a road? Well, I saw that reproduced in the afternoon. As it was beginning to get dark, I could see, walking along a road on the sky-line, silhouetted against the sky, a stream of men staggering along, some helping others who limped; all bandaged; the walking cases of the wounded."

October 16th.

"To-day B—— and I rode down to the wagon-line, the first time I had left the battery since we had been here, except once to make a place for the Observing Station.

"On the way we passed the East Surrey billets, so I asked for Purcell, and found that he was wounded. As far as I could gather it was a Blighty one; so, if it isn't at all serious it's a jolly good thing, as the infantry isn't particularly healthy nowadays especially round here. I hope it isn't very serious.

"I went down the very trench that he was hit in one day about ten days ago, and was warned of the sniper. It isn't much of a trench, only about two feet deep in places. We got a splendid view of the Gerboys from it.

". . . Yesterday I waylaid a motor lorry and got a couple of water-bottles, that I had brought with me, filled with petrol. So in the afternoon the great trial of the motor-bike took place. Enormous triumph! It fired, first go!

"It's extraordinary what a change has been wrought in it since we first got it. Its original defects were as follows:—Front wheel buckled, front forks bent, handle-bars removed bodily, tank split, flywheel bent, gear sprocket bent and cracked, back-stays bent, rear wheel buckled, carrier bent, both mud-guards bent, foot-rests broken, saddle-spring bent, all tools gone, high-tension wire broken, everything full of earth and no paraffin to clean it with—and now it goes, and looks comparatively respectable.

"If you know of anyone who wants a first-class mechanic, builder, painter and general

maker of bricks without straw, let him get our fitter."

October 17th.

"This morning, at 5 a.m., we were aroused to support a bombing attack, so we started firing away. I immediately started out on the motor-bike to get up more ammunition from the wagon-line. I got down there all right although the engine was only firing in one cylinder, and got the ammunition up in time to keep us going, so the bike has been useful already. . . .

". . . We've heard that we're likely to stay here some time, so I took out a party this afternoon to remove all the remaining wood from a neighbouring ruined house for improving our abodes. We're getting quite good at housebreaking. H—— also went off on the motor-bike to rout round the various sappers and squeeze some stuff out of them.

". . . The method, by the way, by which we keep supplied with petrol is easy. One simply sits on the bike on some main road,

stops the first lorry one sees, and asks if the driver could spare you some petrol as you've run out—and there the job is done! The Q.M.S. also has a friend in the A.S.C. who can sometimes get a tin for us.

"It's been extremely pleasant—for the last two days we gave up firing fifteen rounds an hour (also all the other batteries round us), so we had an almost entire rest from noise. It was very funny at first, quite difficult to know what was happening, and then suddenly one realises that one is hearing the silence."

October 21st.

"Yesterday we heard that we shall probably move in two days' time.

"It's rather a nuisance as we had just started improving the place. I had just planned and started a dressing-room (4 feet by 4 feet) to my dug-out, which would have been a great improvement. . . .

"I went off first thing this morning to Guards' Divisional H.Q. on the bike to get orders, which I took to Brigade H.Q. I have

now been taken on to Brigade H.Q. as Orderly Officer, to look after the Brigade 'phones, and assist the Colonel and Adjutant generally.

"In the afternoon I went out on the bike to look for billets for us if we went into rest. . . . After some fruitless searchings I went to our R.A.H.Q., and there found that the whole move had been cancelled. So all my wandering round was wasted.

"But still, I got a promise out of the R.A. Signal Officer to get me a new pair of handle-bars for the bike."

October 30th.

"Been very busy indeed the last two or three days. We changed H.Q., and the batteries changed positions three days ago, and I've been spending all my time sorting out the wires, which are in an awful tangle. I have eight working lines here, and another seven up at our liaison office with the infantry brigade, and there are at least another seven disused wires on this house, so it's rather a job sorting them out and keeping them going. It is quite

a nice house—much more room than our last place. Purcell's brigade are now in the trenches."

George did not long hold the post of Orderly Officer, as three weeks later he was made Adjutant.

November 13th.

"F—— went to-day to command the column . . . so I take on the job of Adjutant, and Cotterill comes as Orderly Officer. I'm going to continue to run the brigade 'phones, Cotterill taking on the returns."

Lieut. Cotterill was one of George Devenish's most intimate friends. They came to be very closely linked together in their work, as they were destined to be also in their death.

George's duties as Adjutant afforded him a fresh variety of experiences, out of which he contrived, as usual, to extract his full share of entertainment. A letter that he wrote, describing some of his difficulties in the matter

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of H.Q. billets, seems worth quoting in full, for the sake of the picture it gives of one of the varied episodes which made up his life at this time.

December 4th.

"Yesterday I rode on here to take over the new H.Q.

"The billet is quite good—two rooms downstairs, one for 'phone and clerks, one for our office and mess—but there has been trouble. This morning the proprietor of the house (he is a horsedealer, and therefore probably a spy) came to interview the Colonel of the outgoing Brigade. He wanted to know if the Brigade who were coming wanted the living-room as a mess, and said that if they did they (that is we) must pay five francs a day for it. The man got very excited, but the Colonel took him very calmly, and said that that was obviously absurd. The room was an office and not a mess, and as such he was only entitled to half-franc. The man went out bursting with fury, and I foresaw that there would be considerable trouble in keeping the room, as the

rest of my H.Q. would not arrive till lunch-time and this H.Q. was going out at 9 a.m.

"Sure enough, I was just outside saying good-bye to them, and on returning found that the family (father, mother, daughter) and two or three friends were sitting round the table in the room drinking coffee (this they continued to do for the rest of the day).

"Luckily I had brought some telephonists with me, whom I deposited in the telephone room with orders not to move out of it under pain of death, so I managed to keep that room all right.

"Well, when I discovered the family thus ensconced, I walked through the room to get something. The man promptly said that I was not to go through the room, and on my remarking that I didn't see any reason why I shouldn't, as it was my office, he replied that I was quite mistaken, but that it was his *salle à manger* (all his remarks were chorused by his family).

"I therefore proceeded to the Mairie and got an order to turn the man and family out

of the room. This was brought along by a doddering old Garde Champêtre.

"When it was handed to the man, he started a torrent of expostulations and refusals, ably backed up by mother, daughter, and friends. After a bit I got rather angry and told him that it was quite unnecessary to have any back-chat on the subject, and that it did not matter a bit what he said, but that I was going to have the room. I then departed, leaving them to think it over. Immediately after, the daughter came out and wanted me to come and have a glass of wine. But I said I hadn't time (I afterwards saw the Garde Champêtre drinking with them), and went off to lunch at A. Battery. After lunch I returned and found them still in possession, and taking no notice of the order of Mairie, so I rode into [Béthune] and got from the A.P.M. a gendarme, and an English M.P. Sergeant who could talk French like a bird, and I rode out with them to interview my people.

"Then started the most wonderful discussion I have ever heard. The gendarme, a Maréchal

de Logis, was a splendid orator. He appealed to their better feelings—where would they be if we weren't here ?—he appealed to them as brothers, Frenchmen ; and mademoiselle, would she like to see us without a place to live in ?

"As they still remained obdurate he would sit down and start writing out an order for them to move out, and then in the middle stop and start the argument over again. This went on for about 1½ hour. Towards the end of the time, wine was produced, and we started drinking to each other, solemnly at first, and then as the question got more settled, with an occasional joke, or praise for the wine, till finally, when it had at last been settled, a bottle of old wine was produced with great ceremony, and we all solemnly shook hands and clinked glasses and made absurd jokes, and mademoiselle showed off her very slight knowledge of English. The last half-hour consisted entirely of bargaining for the price of the room. I think it was money they were out for the whole time."

In December George succeeded, to his great joy, in getting leave for Christmas, which he spent at home, after two or three strenuous days in London, with all the engagements that could by any possibility be fitted in, together with some very complicated shopping connected with a telephone switchboard for the brigade office, which he had set his heart upon constructing during his short leave.

The G.S. one served out to him did not meet with his approval, so he designed another which he considered more convenient, with connections, switches, labels, etc. exactly to his mind. It was an ambitious undertaking, requiring exact measurements and a great deal of very careful work, materially increased by his determination to achieve also a mahogany case to fit the switchboard. He called in the aid of his entire family (his brother happened to be at home on sick leave, so they were all together again that Christmas), and by dint of strenuous exertions the whole was finished by midnight on Christmas Day.

George had to leave for the front next morning, and in his anxious care for the switchboard, he succeeded in leaving his bag behind him, and never realized the fact until his father,

by desperate efforts and great good fortune, succeeded in bringing it to him just before the departure of the leave-train. The matter is disposed of in his diary in one brief sentence:

"Motored to Victoria to catch the 9.50 a.m., and father just got up in time with my bag."

The success of the switchboard is recorded with far more interest a few days later:

"Everyone is very much impressed with the switchboard. To-day the O.C. Divisional Signals' and the R.A. Signals' officers came to inspect it, and were very appreciative."

1916.

The New Year found George Devenish back in the familiar round of moves and telephones, varied with "hates" and "strafings," of which the following letters treat.

January 25th, 1916.

"We've been in the new position four or five days now. It was pretty hard work the first few days—answering the 'phone every

other minute, sending in return after return with intervals of being strafed by the Brigade Major or Staff Captain (a dear old gent from the Stock Exchange) for not getting them in in time. We've got quite a small cottage now (at least two rooms of it and another small one that the Colonel shares with the pig—there is a rather leaky wall between them). I started building operations to-day—a hut outside for use by the servants as a kitchen.

"The Colonel and I went for a stroll down to the trenches the other night, Alice, his dog, of course coming with us.

"There is a most extraordinary mine crater just behind our front line. It is about forty feet deep and one hundred and fifty feet across. It looked enormous in the moonlight. We timed our exit from it quite nicely, as just after we got out they put a very nicely-burst time H.E. over it.

"We then proceeded to stir them up by firing our enfilade gun into their trenches.

"We had quite an amusing night and Alice saw a lot of rats."

February 2nd.

"The Gerboys have been very uppish lately. On the 28th they gave us one of the heaviest bombardments they've ever risen to (except that they hadn't the larger howrs. there). It did extraordinarily little damage to personnel. In one battalion only two shells out of probably over 1,000 being effective.

"There was an awful lot of wind up going round a night or two ago.

"It was probably originated by a nice, gentle, East wind—an ideal gas wind.

"Anyhow the effects were far-reaching.

"We were just sitting down to our evening game of Double Demon, when someone started loosing off, soon to be joined by others.

"After that the Staff started ringing up—what was all the strafing about? was it on our front? could we smell gas? had the Germans attacked? etc., continually interrupting us with some sort of question. Then Corps suddenly rang up (they live, by the way, seven or eight miles behind the line), and told us that we were being attacked by gas.

"Still the only gas that arrived was over the 'phone, so at about 11.0 p.m. we were at last allowed to go to bed. . .

". . . I've been back to my old job all this week—making dug-outs for an O.P. Exchange.

"I got some rather good material for them—sort of sectors made of steel, like a Two-penny Tube is made.

"I put a wire up into one of the biggest of the new craters the other day. It is perfectly huge—about 70 yards across and 40 feet deep.

"The Huns had been making it very unpleasant there for the few days before, but it was quite quiet that morning except for sniping. In this they were very uppish. I looked over with a periscope and saw a couple of Bosches looking over the parapet, and one at once pointed out my periscope to the other, who had a shot at it. We hadn't any place made to reply from, and it wasn't done to look over the parapet with them up first."

The next letter was filled with the complications created by repeated changes of orders from H.Q., in connexion with the brigade's next move, the "conclusion of the whole matter" being, however, summed up with George's usual philosophy.

"Still, as a matter of fact, I believe they have some excuse, there are things afoot down South, so they say. Still there is a silver lining to quite a lot of unpleasant things if you know how to turn them inside out (*see* popular song), and there looks to be a possibility of one here for us personally. We are not to have a group this time, which is something, as it means awfully hard work, and by the original orders we were to have our H.Q. in a beastly little cottage in [Neuville St. Vaast], a rather unpleasant spot near here."

February 27th.

"The move is o'er, the battle done (for the moment at any rate).

"We've absolutely fallen on our feet, and

no question about it. Why on earth this billet (it doesn't seem right to call it a *billet—palace* is more like it) isn't a Division, or Corps H.Q., I don't know!

"It's true only two of us have dressing-rooms, and the water in the geyser bath doesn't come out quite boiling; but apart from that the place is quite bearable. There is a huge room divided by folding doors, with a parquet floor that would make a topping dancing-room! It was rather like leaving school to go home on the holidays coming in here.

". . . It is perfectly delightful to be away from a 'phone. The other day I rang up the Staff Captain from a signal office in Béthune, to see if he had anything to grouse about. He immediately thought that I had got the 'phone in my office, and was awfully pleased, thinking that he'd always be able to get at me. But I soon disillusioned him, and broke it to him that I didn't propose having it on, either now or, if possible, as long as we are here."

The occupation of the palatial billet did not last many weeks.

March 25th.

"Alas, the blow has fallen. We're being turned out of our topping billet in B—— to-day, as it is no longer in our Corps area.

"It is sickening. It's easily the best billet we've struck yet or are likely to strike. Besides it was very nice living in a town again."

April 4th.

"We've got quite a good billet here, L—— Château. I've just finished a new exchange at the batteries. I've been working at it every day since we came here, riding up to the batteries immediately after breakfast and coming back after tea.

"It has been quite interesting work, and seems to be very successful. I've put in quite a lot of patent gadgets."

At the end of March, 1916, George Devenish responded to the call for volunteers

from among the junior artillery officers to act as observers in the Flying Service. He did this, not with any desire for change—his heart was always with his beloved battery — but simply because "some one had to take it on." The fact that the change meant postponement of the promotion which would have soon come to him did not weigh with him in the least, but he hated leaving his friends, and it is pleasant to know, from more than one of them, how sorry they were to lose him. His Colonel expressed himself anything but desirous of sending away so promising a young officer, but he felt bound to recommend him as fitted in every particular for this special work.

Accordingly on March 23rd, 1916, George notes that he "went off to G.H.Q. about being taken on as an observer in R.F.C."

A few days' leave followed early in April, and when he returned to France it was to join the R.F.C.

Up in the air, in the circling sky,
  Here alone am I
Over the sun-lit clouds to fly,
  My engine, wings, and I.
Far below is the warring earth,
  High in heaven the sun :
In a new world I have made my birth,
  A world where is only one.

Down ! Through the clouds to the old, old world
  That is boiling with life and death !
The shrapnel-smoke like wool is curled ;
  I am chilled with an icy breath,
As the air-plane rocks, and the air-plane rolls,
  And the screaming shells explode :
Their bullets fly like new-loosed souls
  To show me the lonely road.

Death is sure if they strike me here ;
  Death is sure below ;
Death in the clouds is very near—
  But I have seen ! I know !—
Back through the teeth of death we tell
  Our tale to the circling sky :
We have saved a brigade from their tangled hell,
  My engine, wings, and I.

—*George Bidder.*

PART III

"PER ARDUA AD ASTRA"

APRIL, 1916, TO JUNE, 1917

GEORGE DEVENISH'S service in the Royal Flying Corps began in April, 1916, and ended on the 6th of June, 1917.

During the first four months of that time he was acting as artillery observer, in France, after which he was sent home to be trained as a pilot.

It is tempting to give all his letters of this period, but the following passages must suffice :—

1916.

April 27th.

"Glorious day. I went to the range with the Lewis gun in the morning; in the evening went up for a joy ride to get my bearings of the country from a new point of view.

"I spotted the —th Brigade, but after that very soon lost my bearings. It is very difficult to find one's way at first.

"It was two years since I had last been up."

April 29th.

"Another glorious day. I went up for a joy ride again in the evening, and this time kept my bearings much better."

May 19th.

"We had quite an exciting time to-day. We were having a long-distance shoot, escorted by two fighting machines.

"We spent an hour getting height round about the aerodrome, and then started off in formation over the lines.

"Archy, of course, at once got to work, but was not very patent at first.

"Well, we flew out over the place, and fired three shots, but could observe none of them, for some reason or other. Then, suddenly, a Fokker shot along a short way below us, loosing off at us as he passed. We immediately

did a sharp turn, and I opened fire on him as he was going away from us. He thereupon dived down steeply, and went off. Later, we saw him dive at one of the other machines (being fired at hard by them) and go straight on down, where I lost sight of him. L——, however, saw him loop twice sideways, and end in a spinning nose-dive.

"The next thing that came on the scene was an Albatross, which we suddenly spotted flying towards us, shooting. But he turned at about two hundred and fifty yards off and started going away, so we dived after him firing, and he went off altogether. It was clearly quite impossible to continue the registration with all these machines about interfering with us, so we set out for home.

"Just as we were approaching the line, we suddenly heard a machine-gun firing at us. I couldn't spot where it was coming from, but L—— saw and swerved. It was a Fokker diving down from the rear. He went straight down past us, putting about twenty bullets through our tail, but doing no very serious

damage and disappeared off home. After turning to see if we could see him, we did likewise. Throughout the whole time there was an old German sausage calmly floating about 2,000 feet below us (we were working at about 9,000 at the time).

"The observers on it must have felt very uncomfortable as any of us could have dived and strafed it! Although we were Archied the whole time (except when we were fighting), about three-quarters of an hour in all, only about two pieces hit us, one of which, which must have been fairly spent, hitting the petrol tank on which I sit, and only denting it. The fighting part was quite exciting."

May 22nd.

"L—— and I were out doing a target to-day some little way over the line. It was rather cloudy, and we had to get well over it. There were two F.E.s about, so we weren't expecting any attack. Suddenly, as I was wirelessing down an observation and L—— was busy dodging Archies, an M.G. started

just behind us. I knew what to do this time, and was kneeling up on my seat, firing over the back mounting, before he'd really got going. It was a Fokker again, but the firing rather put him off, also the proximity of the F.E.s, and he moved away without coming nearer than one hundred yards or so, and made off home to trouble us no more."

May 25th.

"To-day I went up to do some targets with another pilot. He said he'd get the K. out on the aerodrome when he'd got some height, so I left him to his own devices, and spent the time studying the map round where my targets were. After about a quarter of an hour, during which time we had been climbing, I sent a note back to the pilot telling him to fly over the target, as I was then ready. I then saw him looking anxiously round, and he replied that he had lost his way. I looked round and didn't recognize any of the country and had only got a large-scale map showing the immediate neighbourhood. We were obviously off that map.

"At that time we were passing over a large town, which I was certain I did not know (afterwards found to be Hazebroucke), so I told him to steer due East, so as to strike the line, when we should probably recognize where we were.

"After some time, I noticed the ground becoming very pock-marked, and suddenly a very much strafed town appeared with the line just going round one side of it. (Did I say that it was rather misty and one could not see any distance ?) Well, this town was obviously either Ypres or Arras (two towns not far apart !). As it had a canal we decided that it was probably Ypres, so we turned South, and after a time struck a large town. I knew this ought to be Armentières, but it didn't seem to me as if it was, so we decided to land at a place a little further on. This we successfully did, and found that the town was Armentières.

"When coming down I looked very carefully to see if the men walking about were in khaki, and not field grey ! One never can tell.

"Here I went to the nearest H.Q., and got a small-scale map out of them. Then, with the assistance of some men to hold back and with me to swing the prop., we got off all right and home safely.

"It was a most extraordinary thing, getting so hopelessly lost. I'm never going up without a small-scale map again."

June 3rd.

"I went into [Béthune] the other day, and passing the club saw the well-remembered Douglas bicycle outside (the one we got at Loos), so I went in, and sure enough H—— was there.

"He had biked in from where they were back in rest. So we had dinner together there. He was in great form, and is always a tonic.

"I came back here afterwards on a motor machine gun, which happened to come my way."

June 22nd.

"Heard that the division had gone down

to join in the Push. It is sickening. I do wish I could go with them! I've missed every big show in the whole war so far. Still it can't be helped."

June 26th.

"L—— and I were up doing some registrations this evening. I had just finished the last one, and we were some way over the line. L—— was about to drop his bombs (we always take up bombs now a days and drop them whenever we cross the lines). I was hanging over the side, trying to observe the bombs, and L—— had his head in the office, the bomb-gear having jammed, when there was a loud rat-tat-tat-tat, and splinters began to fly out of the side of the fusilage.

"I at once turned round in my seat, in time to see a smallish Hun biplane coming straight up behind us, at about forty miles an hour faster than us, and therefore doing over a hundred.

"He was firing as hard as he could.

"He came straight on until I thought he

must collide with us, but at the last moment he turned slightly and dived under us.

"All this happened so quickly that I hadn't time to get a shot at him.

"He then turned sharply in front of and below us. I think I got a few shots in then, but I can't be certain.

"Then he circled round and came on our tail again. This time I was ready, and I gave him a drum straight off. He thereupon turned off without getting nearer than a hundred yards. But he hadn't quite done, and started to come on again rather half-heartedly.

"So I gave him another drum, and he went off out of sight. Our engine had been hit somewhere and was missing a bit, so we went home. . . .

"The skirt of my leather coat was torn with bullets that came in at the side. We were extraordinarily lucky to get off as we did—not a scratch on either of us."

July 16th.

"Nasty job to-day—C.B. patrol with the

clouds at only 1,800 feet. Meant going up and down the line at anything under that height, while every Hun who felt so disposed, and happened to have a rifle handy, took pot shots at us whenever we came in range, which was pretty often. Still, they only hit the machine twice, which was lucky."

"It's a funny game, this job. One's somehow quite detached from the ordinary vulgar war that's going on between the opposing infantry and artillery and their immediate hangers-on. We've got quite a separate war of our own, and look upon everything from a different point of view.

"Take Archie for instance ; on the ground it used to be quite a pleasant summer evening's diversion to watch him at work, and see the planes dodging about from him ; in the air it's almost impossible to extract any pleasure from him.

"Then take the weather. In the infantry, if it rains, it means twice the amount of work and

about ten times the amount of unpleasantness. With us it means we don't do any work at all.

"We hear a heavy bombardment at night—we turn over in our beds and wish the dickens that They, the ordinary vulgar fighters, wouldn't make such a row. There's not much turning in beds and trying to sleep with those assisting, voluntarily or otherwise, at the said bombardment.

"We've a very limited field of excitement, really, compared with land fighting; very few of its varieties and really very little of the personal element. When a Hun attacks one, I don't think one thinks of the pilot at all (not that one usually has any time to think of anything) as attacking one, but simply of a machine, armed with a machine-gun, which must be hit with one's own machine-gun as often as possible."

"I hate reading about the show down South and being so hopelessly out of it. I'd give anything to be with my battery there—

but still it can't be helped, and this game's quite interesting."

July 18*th.*

"Good news—though I suppose it's selfish to say so—I've just heard that my brigade is not in the show, but attached to the French right South. That quite alters things.

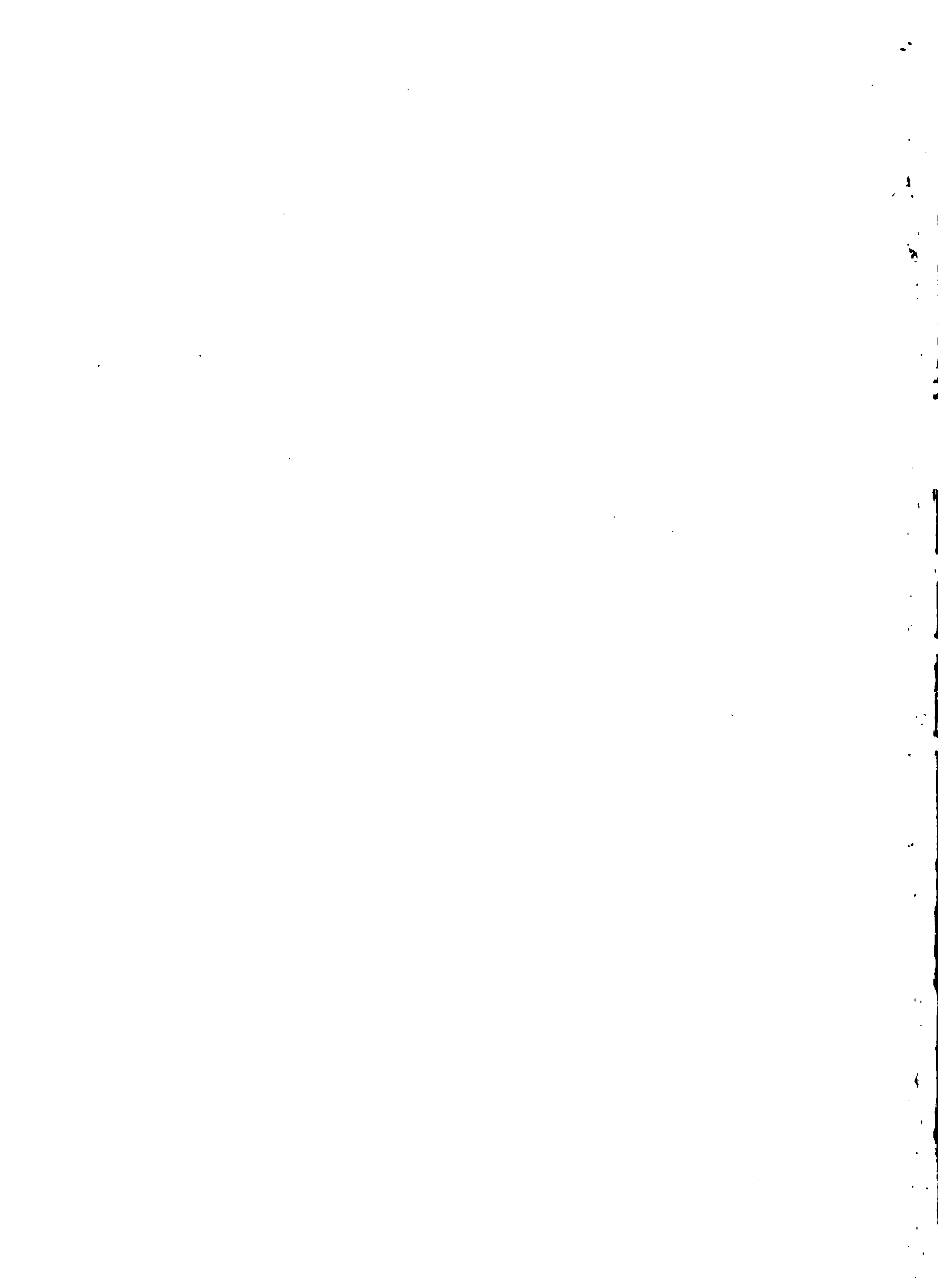
"I heard from H—— and Cotterill. They seem to be having a very pleasant and peaceful time.

"H—— has a position in a forest, and has made a complete colony there. . . . R.E. material is apparently plentiful, and they've made topping huts for themselves. I should like to have been there for it."

August 10*th.*

"Heard to-day that I'm going home to-morrow to learn to fly. Not wildly excited, as I am quite peacefully content here, and am in the middle of a new scheme for shooting 18-pounders with aeroplanes, and I'm afraid it may be dropped now I'm leaving."

GEORGE DEVENISH, 1917



There followed the usual course of training at Brooklands and elsewhere, a brief Christmas leave with his family, a last night at home, early in the New Year, a few more days with his squadron in England, practising combined flights, and waiting upon the weather, and then George flew back to France, as leader of one of the flights of his squadron.

1917.

February 8th.

"Our transport duly departed by road with all our kit (except what we proposed carrying in our machines) on Wednesday morning, January 31st. We were due to start at 10 a.m. on Wednesday morning, February 7th.

"It was a beastly day and we didn't start, which was very lucky, as I, personally, and most of the others weren't anything liked packed and should probably have left most of our things behind.

"Next morning looked almost as bad, but we were told to be ready to start and to see that we got all stuff on our machines all right.

I didn't for a moment think we should go, but I got everything on board, and then suddenly we got orders to get off as soon as possible.

"Just before this C—— had taken his repaired machine up for a test and had crashed it on landing—I think he said the engine conked. I was therefore leading A. Flight over.

"We got off the ground at 11.15 and cruised round the aerodrome for the others to get into formation behind. After a quarter of an hour I found that only three machines were behind me, so I decided not to wait any longer for the fourth. It turned out afterwards that it broke a tail-skid getting off, and had to land again.

"So I told S——, who was my observer, to fire a Verey light, and we started off.

"The clouds were only about 1,800 feet, and just after —— I ran into one lower than the rest, and on coming out found that I now had only one follower, Cr——. . . ."

(Then followed a short itinerary of his flight as far as Folkestone.)

"My engine was not going very well, so I decided to land at Folkestone, which we reached at about 1.30. I found the aerodrome all right, landed and filled up with petrol, and cleaned the magneto.

"At about 2.45 we got off again just as another flight (C. Flight it turned out to be) flew over.

"The clouds were at about 2,500, so I climbed up above them, in the end getting to about 6,500. I wanted plenty of height in case the engine conked, so that I might possibly be able to get to land or at least hit the water near some steamer.

"I found that Cr—— had now disappeared, and the other flight were apparently crossing under the clouds, as I could not see them.

"The engine again started giving trouble, and got steadily worse and worse. The air pressure pump wouldn't work at all, and I had to keep the pressure up by hand, and the engine started missing. I kept my eyes glued to the watch, as I had reckoned that we should get across in about twenty minutes, and never have

twenty minutes gone so slowly. I was expecting every moment that the engine would go.

"Of course, we should have been picked up all right, but it would have been very unpleasant. Then I saw land some way ahead through a gap in the clouds. It seemed to get nearer very, very slowly, although we were doing about seventy.

"At last we got within gliding distance, if the engine were to go, and just at that moment—it went! I knew we should get the shore all right, and all the terrors of a forced landing disappeared when one on the land was possible, as opposed to one in the sea. S——, who'd only been flying for about a week, didn't realise that we could reach the land, and started looking out for steamers, so he told me afterwards. Of course, I should have chosen one heading towards England, if possible!

"I then saw that the pressure had entirely gone, and, pumping it up by hand, to my great joy the engine picked up again! Of course all this happened in a very short time, and I

really got the engine going almost immediately. It only *seemed* a long time.

"So we managed to stagger on, and, at last, to my unbounded joy, I saw the St. Omer aerodrome below me, and landed just before C. Flight (who had come a slightly round-about way) arrived. So I was the first Service machine to land in France, and jolly thankful I was to get down all right! We reported, saw our machines put away, and then betook ourselves to the town in a tender and got rooms at the hotel.

"I had been to the town for one night not quite a year before, when I reported to the R.F.C. the first time. After we had deposited our baggage, we went out and had tea at a pattisserie which I remembered in the town.

"It was an extraordinary feeling getting back to France. It took ages to realize that one was there. There had been none of the usual interminable journey—shoving men and guns and horses from train to boat, to rest camp, etc.

"One had simply had breakfast as usual in the morning, pushed off in a machine for a cross-country flight, and then found oneself in France! It seemed quite unnaturally, yet vaguely familiar, to hear the guns away in the distance (we were about thirty miles from the line there). Then getting down into the town and going out for tea—once more one was in a land where the streets are decently lighted and the shops and houses aren't afraid to leave their blinds up, adding to the natural cheeriness of a French town.

"One noticed a reproduction on a much smaller scale of the same feeling one gets when one steps out of Victoria Station from the leave train. I suppose it is an unconscious pleasure at getting back to surroundings which one connects with pleasure, and, of course, going into a French town usually means that one is off duty for a while, and there for amusement. I found that I was quite fairly efficient in French of the conversational order."

February 9th.

"Next day we went over to see our new

aerodrome, in a tender. It was about fifty miles there and fifty back, and I don't think I have ever been so cold before. Tenders seem to be specially constructed to supply draughts from every possible direction.

"On getting back to our hotel we found that B. Flight had arrived."

February 18th.

"On Friday, February 16th, we flew over to our new aerodrome. Our transport were supposed to be there, but of course they weren't. So we trundled our machines into the sheds, borrowed a tender, and went down to H—— to stay the night.

"We went up to the aerodrome next morning (it's about seven kilos away), and looked round our machines, but still no signs of our transport. So we returned to H—— for lunch.

"After lunch, B—— and I went out to see if there was any available place for skating. After a bit we came across a pond with one Staff Colonel, two Staff Majors, and various

other lesser deities very earnestly and solemnly sliding. Wouldn't it have appeared astoundingly frivolous to a Hun, seeing such a thing!

"On getting back to the hotel we found that the transport and rest of the personnel had arrived at the aerodrome after a most appalling journey of *over a fortnight* (it took us about four hours). They had gone all the way by road and boat, had been three days on the sea, and had been practically frozen most of the time.

"Several lorries had taken the ditch; the petrol, even, had frozen in some of the motor bicycles.

"Still, there they were, and so next day we moved up to the aerodrome. It is right out in the wilds, with no village near it. We live in Nisson huts (semi-circular huts of corrugated iron, lined with match boarding). The huts normally take six or eight.

"I luckily got in a half-hut, sharing it with M—— and B——. I hadn't brought a camp bed, but managed to get some straw from a farm to put under my valise. It's

really warmer than a camp bed, and not very hard.

"There is a stove made out of a kerosene tin, but we couldn't get it to work for the first few days.

"Still, between us we had two oil-stoves and two primuses, so we managed to get a certain amount of heat into it. Still, even then I found that my handkerchief, by my pillow even, was frozen in the morning! On the first day after the arrival of the transport I found that B——, one of our cavalry observers, knew the O.C. of a Field Squadron, R.E., which was not far away. So we went over in a tender, and he very kindly promised us fifty feet of half-inch planking, which I called for next day. With this I made some much-needed shelves. By going round the hut with some paper instead of oakum, and a comb as a caulking iron, I managed to stop some of the draught-producing cracks.

"The next two days were spent in extreme aerial activity on our part. Living so near to the H.Q. our doings are prominent, and the

aforesaid decided that we hadn't been taking the air enough. The result was that we were forced into the air as often as possible, and no time was allowed for much needed adjustments to the machines. Still, it calmed down a bit after a few days, as such outbursts usually do. The squadron is divided into two messes—H.Q. and C. Flights, and A. and B. Flights, each having a room in a farm near the huts (which are about ten minutes' walk from the aerodrome). It's rather a crowd in our mess—about twenty of us.

"It's been most marvellous flying weather, though it is very difficult to keep one's feet warm on long flights.

"I have discovered that G—— is the adjutant to the C.R.E. of the — Corps near here. I must go over and see him at the first opportunity. Quite apart from wanting to see him personally (and I do very much—I haven't seen him since the shop days), he may possibly have some timber to spare."

Apparently he had, for next week George wrote with glee :—

"... I found that G—— lived in the next village, so I took the car on and had lunch with him. It was topping seeing him again. I casually broached the subject of planking, and he said, by all means, so I hope to send a tender over to-morrow for it."

February 24th.

"A really good day's work to-day!

"I started by going round to H.Q., R.F.C., and there found the Major who selects observers for the R.F.C. I asked him if I could get Cotterill (orderly officer of the 64th Brigade) as my observer. He said, certainly, and at once put him down for me. I hope he comes all right."

March 5th.

"A day or two ago I took up a Major in S——'s regiment.

"It was a very rough day, but when I got above the bumps I did a few mild stunts, and then cut the engine down and shouted back to him to ask him how he liked it. I thought

he said 'Very much,' so I did a few more. Then he tapped me on the shoulder, and shouted that he wanted to come down. So down I went. When we landed he was just on the verge of being ill, and it turned out that he hadn't said 'Very much,' but that he wanted to go down, as he was already beginning to feel the pangs! Poor man! I was awfully sorry for him. Fancy when beginning to feel a bit unstable to be stirred up more and more!"

March 17th.

"I had a very interesting trip this morning.

"I flew up the whole line from the Somme to Bailleul, looking up all the aerodromes on the way. The ground in front of Albert is grown over already, and quite different to when I saw it last July. I didn't go up into our salient there, but could see a big fire going on at Bapaume. I then flew on up the line—all new country to me of course. Then suddenly I got into the old atmosphere of the Béthune

district—I could almost feel it—and saw the old view of the Loos salient.

"I then went on North, past the burnt-out church of Vieille Chapelle, which I saw hit in October 1914, and then I saw Armentières away on my right. And there was Plugstreet, and our old farm; the latter still apparently all right, Plugstreet itself rather the worse for wear, or rather for shelling. What an extraordinarily different idea of country one does get in the air and on the ground! Distances seem so much smaller. In the old days we used to think it an enormous journey into Bailleul, but now I look down on one side of the machine and see our old farm, and then look down on the other side and see Bailleul! It shows you, too, what wrong ideas one gets of the relative position of various places on the ground.

"It was a glorious day, and one could see for quite a long way. Messines showed up on the ridge very plainly."

March 13th.

"Cotterill, who was orderly officer to

the 64th, suddenly rang me up yesterday morning. It turned out that he was at R.F.C. H.Q., reporting, on being called up to become an observer, and was on his way back to England for a month's course before coming out here again as an observer.

"I asked him along to lunch, and he gave me a full account of the Brigade's doings. Apparently it was about as ideal a piece of the line as anyone could want. What would I not have given to have been with them!

". . . Their next move was to go up to the Somme about the middle of September. There they had a very unpleasant but very interesting time. It made me very regretful at having missed it all."

March 18*th.*

"A great day to-day! I went to see the War, as carried out on the ground—in this case by the dear old 64th Brigade.

"We had a day off for as many of the squadron as could be spared, and I managed to raise a side-car to take me up to the line. The

distance was about 35 miles, and a side-car is at the best of times not the last word in travelling appliances, and over some of the roads we ran across it was worse than bad. Anyhow it got me there and got me back safely, which was the great thing.

"I didn't manage to get off till 12.0, and we had to stop at a squadron on the way to patch up a broken fork-spring and shock absorber, so we didn't fetch up at the village where the Brigade H.Q. was until about 2.45 p.m.

"Needless to say no one had ever heard of the 64th Brigade. ('Only been in these parts three weeks, sir.') At last I managed to find the orderly room of the Royal Scots Battalion, and there a telephone. I asked the operator to put me on to the 64th. Then followed the good old parley, consisting mostly of 'Hullo' —'Is that the 64th?' 'Get off the line.' 'Exchange,' etc. Then I took it on. Once more I heard the wonderful jumble of sounds only to be heard on a 'phone close up to the line. Distant voices shouting at each other;

three or four buzzers, each emitting a different note, from a high squeak, sharp and clear (usually belonging to 'Signals'), to the low intermittent croak of a badly adjusted buzzer, probably belonging to a battery or a battalion.

"Anyhow I added to this noise by saying, 'Is that the 64th?' 'I say, Exchange, can't you get the 64th?' etc., when suddenly, to my great surprise, a voice said: 'Is that Mr. Devenish?'

"I replied in the affirmative (as they say in Parliament), and it turned out that I had got on to A. Battery by mistake, and the telephonist had recognized my voice. Pretty extraordinary, after being away almost a year, to return suddenly and be recognized on the end of a 'phone!

"Well, he also was fairly vague where the H.Q. was, but gave me a sort of general direction. Then some one, whom I asked on the way, had the brilliant notion of asking the town major (it hadn't occurred to me that there was one), and from him I at last found them. The first man I saw was of course dear

old T—— (my servant), who simply rushed out, even before I had got out of the side-car, beaming with joy (I don't know how he knew I was there). He immediately started fussing round me, pressing food upon me (which I didn't refuse, as I was pretty hungry by then), etc. The Colonel and the others seemed quite pleased to see me again, which was nice of them.

"Then old H—— came in from looking for a new O.P. or something. He was just as cheery and amusing as ever, and worth coming miles to see again !

"After tea we walked up to the ridge in front, where we could see the Hun trenches, and hear machine guns doing their evening hate.

"It was wonderful to be back and hear all the old sounds again. Then I went back to H.Q. for supper, and got off at about 8.30, getting in safely at about 11.45 p.m.

"(I forgot to say that Alice, the Colonel's Irish terrier, is still going strong, and that she remembered me.)

"My motor cyclist was seeing War for the first time. He was very interesting to watch. The look of surprised interest on seeing a shelled-down house for the first time, hearing a gun fired, seeing a shell burst in the distance, and generally realizing that here he was at last near the actual Front, about which he had read such a lot for two years or so, was quite worth seeing.

"His excitement was great when we got to the battery, and one of the gunners offered to take him up to the trenches (reserve trenches about 2,000 yards back—but that didn't matter). The gunner played up well, by making him get into a communication trench just in front of the battery and creeping up it with head well ducked.

"When H—— and I were strolling up there later we came across the two cautiously peeping out of a trench, on the parapet of which you could have sunned yourself all day without danger! Still it helped bring the realities home to him.

"His cup of joy was filled to overflowing

by the purchase (at probably an exorbitant price) of a German steel helmet, which had been captured in a raid the morning before, and which, as my motor cyclist pointed out to me with great pride, had some blood on it!

"War, red War, at last! He is now doubtless the hero of the squadron.

"It was just getting dark as we went from the battery to H.Q., and the wonderful activity which occurs every evening behind the lines was just starting. Strings of ammunition wagons, cooks' carts, G.S. wagons of R.E. material stream up along the roads to the batteries. Small parties of infantry, loaded down till it seems marvellous how they stagger along at all, march slowly by on the way up to the trenches.

"Other parties of men, with picks and shovels and rifles slung across their backs, going up as digging parties. G.S. limbered wagons bringing up rations and all manner of other things for the men in the line, on their way to dump their contents where it will be picked

up by carrying parties. Despatch riders, taking the evening orders, together with an ever-increasing amount of unnecessary paper, to the various H.Q.s, trying to dodge the machines between skidding lorries, jibbing mules, and all the other abominations that infest the road at night.

"(By the way, I notice that it has been decided that type-writers are now contraband of war, as being essential for the carrying on thereof. Quite a lot of people out here seem to think the same, to the great disadvantage of harassed subordinates who have to decipher such things as 'Reference my D/32/M.T./R 1/4/C of 21/4/16,' etc.)

"Then, as one gets on the larger roads, continuous streams of lorries pour along filled with everything, from road material to heavy gun and howiz. ammunition.

"Along the sides of the road run narrow-gauge tram-lines, with large bogie trucks being dragged along by anything up to ten mules all in tandem—an occasional caterpillar bringing a new gun into position. Added to these

are various staff officers driving home in their cars, heavy battery subalterns returning on their motor-bikes from their O.P.s, odd motor ambulances, a few mounted officers riding back to their billets, sapper officers on their way up to the trenches for some job or other, and one thousand and one other odd people.

"And all this on one, not too wide, appallingly cut-up, French road! All round are the flashes and reports of various batteries having their usual evening strafe, probably on some such road as this in Hun-land. East, two or three miles away, the sky is periodically lit up by Verey lights, and the occasional rattle of machine-guns and odd rifle shots can be faintly heard sometimes. Quite close to the road, huge gun-pits loom up; side by side, and close by, outlined against the sky, can be seen a wireless aerial, used for working with aeroplanes.

"The whole thing's rather worth seeing. But, oh! how war's changed! Compare the same place with what it was in, say, summer '15. There would probably have been one or

two odd G.S. wagons, ammunition wagons, and cooks' carts, trundling along. Local inhabitants driving their cows home, and very possibly certain battery officers riding home from tea in the nearest town. There's no doubt about it—war's not what it used to be!

"There is very little human connection and sympathy between the land and air wars.

"Each regards the other as more or less machines, except when they happen to know each other personally, such as a battery shooting with a pilot it knows.

"The people on the ground see an aeroplane getting Archied, and comment on the badness or otherwise of the shooting, or think what a pretty sight the smoke balls are against the blue sky.

"It doesn't usually occur to them that there are two people in the bally machine who can't see anything pretty in it, and object strongly to it; nor do they remember that one can't carry about a pocket dug-out in a machine into which one can retire when shelled! And

vice versâ, especially with people who haven't seen any of the grand side of the show."

March 20th.

"A very sad thing happened on the 16th. W——, a Flight Commander, who was at Charterhouse with me, was killed in a crash —merely a piece of very bad luck.

"He was an extraordinarily nice man, and one of the most efficient in the Squadron, I should think. He had been in the Flying Corps since November 1914, starting as an observer straight from Sandhurst. All the best people always get done in somehow."

April 1st.

"I was sent over to O—— yesterday, to take some new machine from there to F——. . . .

". . . . On arriving back I found that A. Flight was to be ready to move to the new aerodrome at 5.30 a.m.; why at that appalling hour I don't know, as the transport couldn't possibly arrive till the afternoon (it was starting at 9.30 a.m.) and it would only take about 30

minutes by air. Still, there it was. Orders is orders! these being supplied by the Brigade.

"I got to bed as soon as possible, and got up in the dark next morning. At 5.30 a.m. it was still dark, a fact which the Brigade hadn't realized, and we didn't get off till about 7. The clouds were very low, but we did quite a good formation flight, and all arrived intact on the new aerodrome.

"We then proceeded to decide what huts each of us should have. I got an Armstrong, sharing it with S——.

"We spent the day settling into our huts and hangars.

"Next day (2nd) was quite dud, in fact it snowed most of the day. (Each time the snow goes we say, 'Well, anyhow, there can't be any more,' but there always is.) So we didn't take the air at all. We were not allowed to take our machines near the line at all, as they were supposed to be going to give the Huns a shock when loosed on them when the Push came off, so I managed to borrow a dear old 2 C. on Tuesday afternoon.

"On this S—— and I set forth to explore the line and the country we were going to work over.

"It felt almost like flying a scout after air tanks. I hadn't flown one since last October. S—— didn't like it a bit after the palace the observers got on our machines.

"We went up to the line, having a look at the Bde. H.Q. and the batteries. Then we flew over the country the Huns have just been evacuating. It was extraordinarily interesting. It was very hard to spot where the line went, there were no signs of our trenches.

"All the villages were smashed up. There were huge mine craters at all the cross roads and in the village streets, but already we had made roads round them.

"At first I thought that the trees along the roads were throwing extraordinary shadows, then I saw that they were all cut down, probably originally across the roads, but now pulled on one side by our people. Even in the villages all the trees had been cut down.

" Elaborate third lines and strong points, wonderfully wired, had been left behind. . . .

" We got our first Archying, though only one shot was much good. I find I've got quite unused to Archie. I've also come to the conclusion (which I strongly suspected before) that he is much more unpleasant for a pilot than for an observer. As an observer you know that there is nothing that you can do to stop his hitting you if he wants to, whereas it's up to the pilot to dodge the machine in such a way that he can't. The observer has a delightful irresponsibility; at least, I always used to feel that.

" After we had been going round for something over an hour, the engine suddenly conked. We were luckily at about 5,000 feet, and inland a bit, but the country below us looked extremely unpromising for a forced landing—nothing but shell-holes and trenches. I saw a sausage not very far away, and decided to make for that, as they'd be certain to have transport and a telephone. I didn't think I should reach it at first, but I just did. Even

then there were a good many shell-holes, but I chose a field just alongside; and by astounding luck managed to get down into it without straining anything, missing shell-holes by inches, and, as I afterwards heard, the kite-balloon cable (which I didn't notice) by about ten yards, to the horror of the people at the winch, who thought that I was going to hit it. We found that we were at——, just behind the old front line. The balloon people were very hospitable, and asked us in to tea, and I put a call through to the Squadron. It took about an hour to get it, and then we were cut off just as I was telling them what had happened, and I had to start another call.

"I got through again at about 7.0 p.m. I told them that I thought that either a piston or a big-end had gone, so they said that they would send out a new engine.

"So we picketed down the machine, and the Balloon Company Commander, who happened to be at the section, took us along in his tender, gave us dinner at his headquarters, and sent us back to the Squadron for the night."

April 4th.

"Next morning we went back to the machine in a tender. It was only about ten miles direct, but it took about 2½ hours. The roads were awful.

"It was raining or snowing periodically, the mud formed a cream two inches or three inches deep over the surface of the road, and a deep morass each side of it. All the roads were packed with troops and transport of every description. I passed a lot of the old division, but didn't recognize anyone.

"We came through some of the villages which had been close up behind the old line (Purcell probably knows them). They were really very little smashed considering."

April 7th.

"We have been up a good lot for the last three or four days learning the country as hard as we can. This afternoon M——, P——, and I went up to see my battery. There was an absolutely continuous stream of lorries going up the road—probably well over ten miles long,

and as close to each other as possible. We got on one, a Leyland, and went as far as it was going our way, then got a Dennis, and then a Thornycroft, and then, as we were deciding what make to take next, a Staff Major in a Sunbeam car picked us up, and took us right up to the village where my Brigade was.

"As we were going along, suddenly we saw two men jump out of a sausage near the side of the road, in parachutes. Near the balloon, Archie (ours) was bursting; going away towards the Hun lines was a Hun scout.

"The next moment the balloon burst into flames and started coming down. It was an awful sight. For a terrible moment it looked as though it was going to fall on the two parachutists which were slowly descending below it. But it cleared all right, and very soon after the two observers landed quite all right, and a huge cheer went up from all the men round about."

April 8th.

"S—— and I went up at 7.0 a.m. to look

round the country. It was a topping morning. There was a thick blanket of cloud at about 7,000 feet which ended abruptly at the C—— B—— Road, and north of this the air was quite clear. This was very convenient. We got up to about 9,000, and could then go out over the clouds almost as far as C—— without being seen, and then work round up North and see the country splendidly, with the clouds always there to get back over. After about an hour and a half the engine suddenly went, so we glided home. That's the best of this machine—you can glide an enormous distance. We missed the way on the way home, taking the wrong road out of A——, but landed all right at the aerodrome.

"By the way, I don't know how people manage to hear the guns in England on these occasions, as here, about nine miles behind the line, we've heard very little of the bombardments which have been pretty useful (this is a full-sized Push), except when the wind was our way or when it was absolutely calm.

"To-day I flew over to N—— for lunch,

and the Major said he'd like to have me as a Flight Commander at his first vacancy if it could be worked. I wish it could, though I like this Squadron very much."

April 20th.

"Major C—— flew over to lunch here to-day. They are going to get ——, and he is going to ask for me to come and stay with him for a day or two to get them in the way of the peculiarities of flying and maintaining the machines. It rained in the afternoon, so he had to go back by car."

April 22nd.

"Yesterday morning I flew Major C——'s 2 C. back to No. 2, taking B—— with me. We stayed to lunch there. That evening an order came that I was to go and stay there for a few days, so to-day I flew over with my luggage in the back seat (one can take an enormous amount of luggage in these machines).

"It was a very misty morning, but I got there all right after losing my way at first.

"It's always funny going back to a place one has lived at for a time—it seems natural to be there, but at the same time rather unnatural! I talked about the machine to the pilots in the morning, and took one up.

"That evening we had a concert. It was very good, indeed. A lot of the songs were parodies on topical events, written by the Major. They were very clever.

"Quite by chance, it was the anniversary of the day I joined No. 2.

"That night, just as I was going to bed, I suddenly heard a shell come over. I could hardly believe my ears. That place has never been shelled the whole of the war. They only put over four or five, and didn't do any damage. Still, it was awful cheek!

"On the 24th I flew home."

May 4th.

"Since I came back from No. 2 we've been doing defensive patrols every day,

but so far have not met any Huns at close quarters.

"The day before yesterday, my engine boiled, just over L——, and I had to come down, just managing to get into No. 2's aerodrome. I had to stay the night there, and send for and put in a new engine. The Huns had the cheek to bomb us the night I was there, but didn't do any damage.

"I forgot to say that Cotterill of the —th suddenly came here the other day as an observer. It's great luck. He was with me when I landed at No. 2.

"That afternoon, while I was waiting for the new engine, I borrowed a side-car from the Corps Intelligence man there and went into Béthune with Cotterill. (Incidentally the side-car hadn't got a brake, a fact which I did not discover till I wanted to stop it!)

"Béthune is awfully changed. It had been shelled the day before, and six civilians killed. It's beginning to become a dead city.

"A very large proportion of the windows are broken, and there are much fewer people

about. The largest tea-shop has been shut up; the Globe, of oyster and champagne cocktail fame, is shut, also the Hotel de France.

"I went and bought some gloves at the best shop, and was remembered by the occupants, who asked after H——, 'le grand capitaine d'artillerie,' and also 'le petit lieutenant' (B——).

"We also visited the Point de Jour—a sort of officers' pub., complete, with piano, where we often used to look in. The owners remembered us there too. I was awfully glad to be able to get into Béthune, as now I have been there in '14, '15, '16, and '17.

"I wonder if I shall go there in '18!"

May 11th.

"Yesterday Cotterill and I took part in a practice scheme with the ——s. We got on all right, but had a forced landing, with something the matter with the engine. We 'phoned for some mechanics, and lunched with the ——s, who were very hospitable.

"The mechanics didn't turn up till about

5 p.m. We couldn't find anything wrong, but after one or two adjustments we ran the engine up and it seemed all right. It was 8.40 p.m. by now, and rather inclined to rain, so we had a difficult problem deciding whether to start or not, as it was getting so dark. We did decide to, and the engine went like a bird. It was very difficult finding the way home, and we were very pleased to see the aerodrome.

"We got down all right, although I rather misjudged the landing and hit the ground ages before I expected to, as one always does when there's a bad light."

May 12th.

"We moved to-day down to ——. We are only staying at this new place for a few days (it is now about twenty miles behind the line) while hangars and huts are being put up at a new aerodrome about seven miles behind the line. We shall move up there as soon as it's ready.

"We managed somehow to get all our kit

packed into the lorries by 6 a.m., and got off ourselves at about 7.30. It's awful the amount of kit one amasses !

"From a Flying Officer's point of view a move's a very simple thing. The only thing he's responsible for is his machine and his own kit. There's no dusty march—he just gets into his machine, pushes into the air, and gets to the new place in about one-tenth of the time the transport takes, and in absolute comfort.

"We arrived there at about 8.45, and proceeded to spend the rest of the day waiting for the transport. It is a most peaceful spot. No signs of war at all, except the continuous streams of cars of all sorts making for Amiens, the Mecca of the B.E.F. (You probably get a better lunch or dinner there than in town.)

"The aerodrome is quite close to the village, and we all have billets there ; the first time we've had them since the squadron has been out here.

"The weather is still stewingly hot."

May 14th.

"I went into Amiens yesterday. A lot of us went in in a tender at about 4.30 p.m. I had tea and a hair-cut, and we all met for dinner at the famous Godbert's; an extraordinarily good dinner it was too.

"Godbert's is a large private house which was bought and converted into a restaurant by M. Godbert, who then proceeded to make his pile and has now retired, the place being taken on by his chef.

"This is without exception the most civilized town I've come near in France. It's actually got trams running through the streets, you can buy almost anything, and there are various quite respectable hotels where one can feed, instead of the usual maximum of one, and rather indifferent at that. I went and had a look at the cathedral. It's rather a fine one, and at present it is an excellent example of good sand-bag work (presumably as a protection from bombs)."

May 20th.

"I've been employed for the last three or

four days in putting up huts at our new aerodrome, which we are making in the evacuated territory. I usually fly up there after breakfast, and return in time for dinner.

"It's very interesting going up there in a car. You pass through various stages. First the shelled area (none of it very bad) behind the original French line, then the old French front line, then you can just trace the old No-Man's Land.

"From here onwards for three or four miles the country is completely churned up by old trenches, shell holes and mine craters; all the villages are completely flattened—none of the trees have a branch left. In the evening the whole place swarms with rats. In the usual French fashion, there are odd graves all over the place. Then comes the river, with the new bridges the sappers have put up over it.

"It's a funny sort of river, mostly a continuous marsh at the bottom of a fairly deep valley, with various streams running in and out of banks of weed, clumps of trees, and small islands, and a canal running along one side,

with built-up sides and trees along each tow-path.

"For about a quarter of a mile on the other side of it we still get shell holes, but after that the country entirely changes.

"The villages are practically all knocked down, but not by shells (mostly blown up, or burnt) ; all the fruit trees are cut down (but are now blossoming on the ground), and a certain number of other trees also. But with all this it's easily the best part of France I've come across to spend the summer in.

"The Bosches have done for it what no one else could have done ; it's quite difficult to recognize it as France. No longer is it a land of miles of ploughed fields, with someone always on the look-out to claim damages if you even look like getting off the road. Grass has grown up all over, and it's now a land of rolling downs, where you can go anywhere you like, make a camp anywhere you like, can land almost anywhere, and have got an indefinite supply of bricks and rough timber, etc., etc. In fact, quite a Promised Land for the B.E.F.,

with the one exception, that with all the advantages of the absence of the French peasants, there's the very serious disadvantage of being unable to buy milk and eggs.

"Of course all this is merely our very selfish point of view. The poor Frenchman's must be very different. It's bad enough having your house shelled down, but having it deliberately blown up is worse, I think.

"The amount of work the Hun has put in, in destruction, is enormous. All the houses destroyed, and enormous number of trees cut down, all farm implements and machinery smashed up, even down to holes punched in any odd water jugs!

"Seeing former Hunland, too, impresses one with the extraordinary industry of the Hun.

"For miles back every village has a ring of wire and trenches round it, there are deep dug-outs seven miles behind their own line, and all sorts of fortifications everywhere.

"The Cavalry Horse Gunners who were here for the advance said the fighting was

perfectly wonderful—absolutely general open warfare for about ten days. I'd have given anything to have been there in a battery.

"By the way, I forgot to tell you a rather good (and quite true) story about when the Huns evacuated Lievan.

"As usual they left all sorts of booby traps behind. In one house two perfect officers' helmets were hanging up on the wall. All the old hands were not to be caught. They all thought that they were probably connected to some bomb.

"Everyone longed to take them, but didn't dare, so they stayed untouched, the desire of everyone, for three days.

"Then one of our heroic (non) fighting-men who normally lived a secluded life miles behind the line, came up on a jaunt to the latest piece of recovered France. He went into the house and his eyes lighted on the two helmets. Here was what he had always wanted—he could take them home, and show them to an admiring family, and thrill them

with tales of his prowess in capturing them. He knew nothing about booby traps!

"He went up to the helmets and without hesitation took them off the pegs and the next moment—nothing happened; nothing at all! He walked happily home, proudly displaying the helmets, and couldn't understand why all the people round about began violently to kick themselves. Truly, fools rush in where angels fear to tread—and quite often score by so doing.

"A. Flight moved in here yesterday, and everyone is embellishing his hut according to his own taste. A great fight goes on to get materials. The other two Flights are coming in to-morrow.

"I am sharing half a Nisson with Cotterill, who is now my permanent observer."

May 25th.

"The weather has been marvellous—absolutely exactly the right temperature."

June 2nd.

"Yesterday, by the way, was the second anniversary of the 64th Brigade coming out to France. I celebrated it in three ways.

"First—I went for a ride on my mare, which has just been lent to me by General R., and found her an extraordinarily pleasant mount.

"Secondly—I heard the cuckoo for the first time this year.

"Thirdly—I went up in the evening with Cotterill, and met a Hun for the first time in my capacity of pilot. We had just spotted an Archie battery, and wirelessed it down, and were waiting for our shells to arrive on it, when suddenly a Hun scout came past us, turned, and opened fire on us from about one hundred and fifty yards range. Cotterill replied, and we proceeded to wander along, both firing at each other. But the Hun was an exceptionally gutless one, as he never attempted to close in.

"Then I shouted to Cotterill to hold his fire, and at the same time throttled down, in

order to lure him on closer. But just at that moment I saw three other scouts above him, and at once thought that they were brother Huns, and that he had been waiting for them. So I stuffed the nose down to try and get back over the lines before they could close.

"Then suddenly I saw them dive—not on to me, but on the Hun, who turned, dived, and disappeared in the mist. He was a most timid Hun altogether!

"Incidentally, he didn't hit us once. Cotterill fired about 3½ double drums at him.

"To-day we went out as escort to a photography machine. The clouds were too thick, so we returned. Our top plane was holed by Archie."

June 5th.

"Went up yesterday to direct our fire on to a hostile battery. Fired twenty shots, then the wireless key shorted, and our battery could not get our calls. Got two holes in planes from Archie.

"It was a brilliant morning to-day, but

rather a thick haze. We went up on patrol, and saw two Huns."

Other letters were written by George on this same date, and on the preceding days, to his home and his best friends in England, concerning the leave he had just been promised. It really *was* going to come off at last, he wrote, sending pages of detailed exposition of all the things he wanted to do and see, and the friends he wanted to meet, during the precious ten days that were to begin so soon.

On June 9th he was expected at his home, but he never came, and next day brought a telegram from the War Office, to announce that he had been reported "missing" on June 6th.

Another two days of suspense dragged by, and then the letter arrived in which another hand than George's own penned the last record of his Flying Service.

Letter from Major Holt to Mr. Weston Devenish.

June 7th, 1917.

"Dear Sir,

"I am afraid you will have heard that

your son, Lieut. G. W. Devenish, was missing on June 6th.

"It would be wrong of me to hold out too high hopes of his being alive, as one of my other machines saw them attacked by a German machine and go straight down out of control, and, I am afraid, in flames.

"The fact that they were in flames is not in itself enough to make the machine go down like that, so I fear your son must have been hit by the same burst of fire. Cotterill, his great friend from the same battery, was with him.

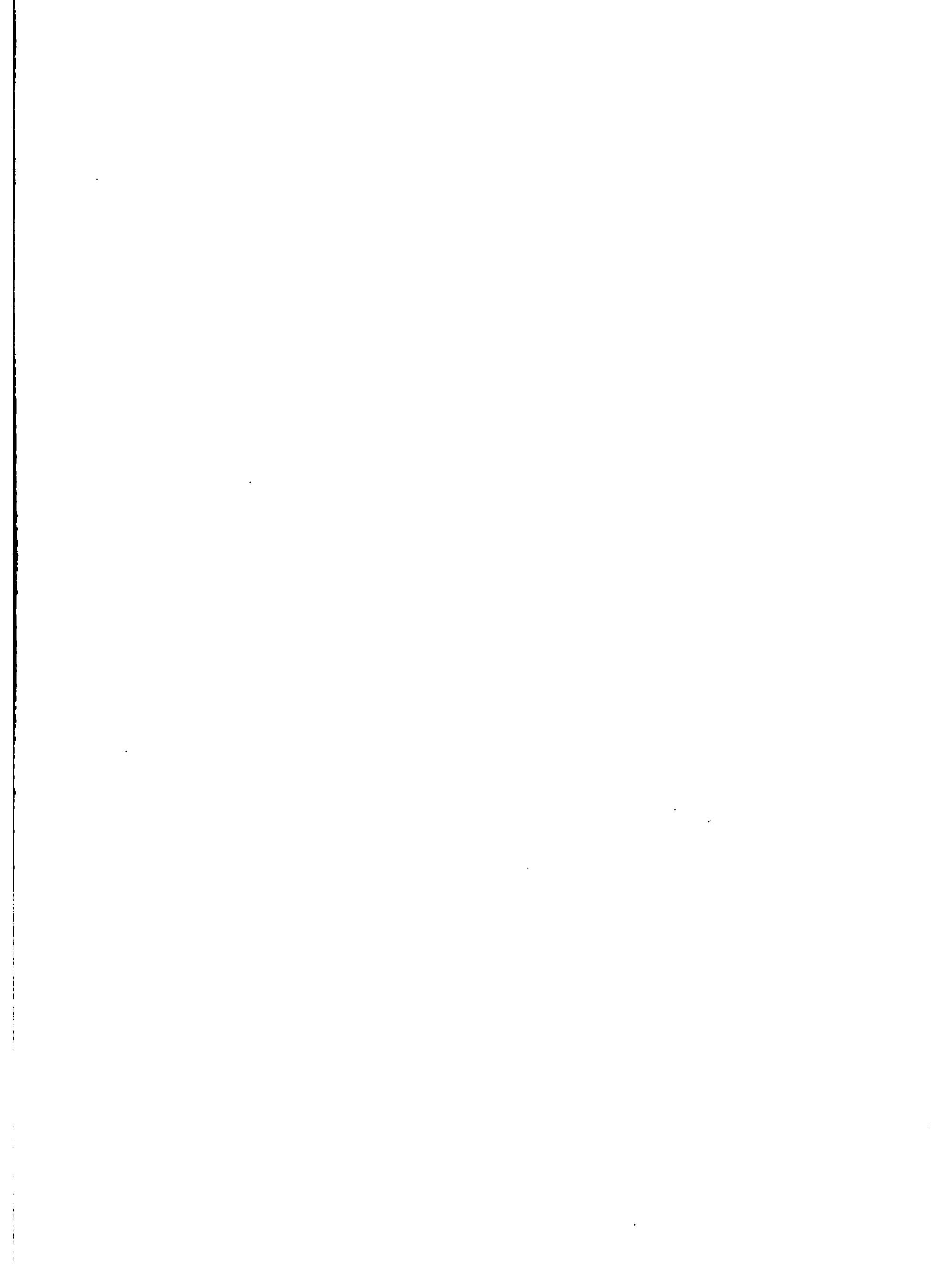
"I can't tell you what a loss he is. Quite fearless, he was a great deal further over the German lines than most people would go on the same job. He had great enthusiasm, and I looked upon him as a perfect type of Englishman, who has made our air service what it is.

"Please accept the sincere sympathy of myself and the whole squadron.

"Yours truly,

"A. W. Holt

"(Major)."



Before the dawn, before the dawn,
Towards the opening gates of morn.
Above the foe he sweeps in scorn
With squadrons of the sky.
To him th' expected challenge came,
That threw him earthward, wrapped in flame.
His fellows pass him by ;
They may not pause, tho' one remain——

The winged warrior is slain,
Can his brave spirit die ?
No ! Night and Death he holds in scorn.
Lift up your heads ! ye gates of morn !
Nor the young soul deny.
Behind the lines of earthly foes
Of earthly follies, earthly woes
Bid him in triumph fly!
He leaves this shadowed world, to see
The glorious dawn of days to be,
Where God's great sun is high.
Though here the battle hides the morn
Before the dawn, before the dawn.

—Ina Kitson Clark.

CONCLUSION

"BEFORE THE DAWN"

GEORGE DEVENISH'S letters have come to an end, and the cheery record of the dangers and difficulties, the work and play, the hardships and interests and enjoyments which made up his share in the war, breaks off unfinished, before the dawn of the victory he helped to win. Before the dawn, too, of so much that life held in store for one whom there were many both to love and praise.

"A fine soldier and a good pal," wrote one of the closest comrades of his fighting days, and the verdict has been endorsed again and again by those who called him friend. To quote the words of just one other among these:—"No one could have taken a more active share in the war, or done it better."

So many, many letters George's death has brought to his home; some from his own contemporaries, some from the superiors who found in him the qualities that make for high achievement. The Colonel under whom he

had served in his beloved R.F.A. battery wrote to his parents :—

"Your son was such a cheery, gallant lad, and a most magnetic personality. He had the right qualifications for flying, and I'm certain he would have gone far."

So that it was not only in the fond imaginations of those to whom George Devenish was dearest that the sun of recognized success seemed like to rise and gild his world when the end came for him, before the dawn.

His birthday has come round again—the dawn of his twenty-fifth year, it would have been—and his father and mother stand together where they stood with him, three years ago, to watch the golden light of the new day deepen in glory behind its bars of heavy cloud. The twilight is closing in upon them now, as they look down upon the silent garden, where the late summer glories of purple and red are fast fading into the dusk. Only the tall white lilies stand out among the shadows, like spirit-sentinels keeping watch through the hours of darkness, and the starry jessamine lightens the gloom, and fills the air with the haunting fragrance that is like remembered joy.

It is all so exactly the same as it was three years ago, yet with so vast a difference. Instead of the echoing laughter there is silence, heavy and chill ; in place of the birthday hero with the world before him there is the bundle of possessions sent home from the front because he will never use them any more.

Very simple possessions they are, and very characteristic of him. There are all the ingenious contrivances that he loved to devise, and to get his mother to make for him, in the way of odd-shaped bags and cases—all to the most precise measurements—for economizing space or time in packing, or for serving the greatest possible number of purposes. There are his notes and papers, untidily written but carefully kept, the shabby little account-book in which he entered his expenditure with the conscientiousness which underlay his casual ways, a packet of paid bills (his parents have not been able to find a single debt left owing by him). There is his flight log-book, too, with its brief entries up to the last day of his life, the 5th of June, and his small Bible, with the daily reading card left in at the passage appointed for that date.

So little they seem, the "things seen"

which remain in place of the blithe presence that has vanished for evermore. Yet the "things unseen," for the which these trifles stand, are not little at all, but very great in all that makes for strength and hope—aye, and for comfort, too, when the first agony of grief is past. Strength, in the resolve which those who love George Devenish best have taken, worthily to bear their part in the sacrifice he made with such a single heart; hope, that this sacrifice shall bear fruit in the future he fought for, in wider and more wonderful ways than our dull eyes can see; and comfort, too—not all at once, perhaps, yet surely, in God's good time—in the thought of the steadfast uprightness, and the simple trust in God, to which that handful of valueless possessions bear their witness.

"*For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*"

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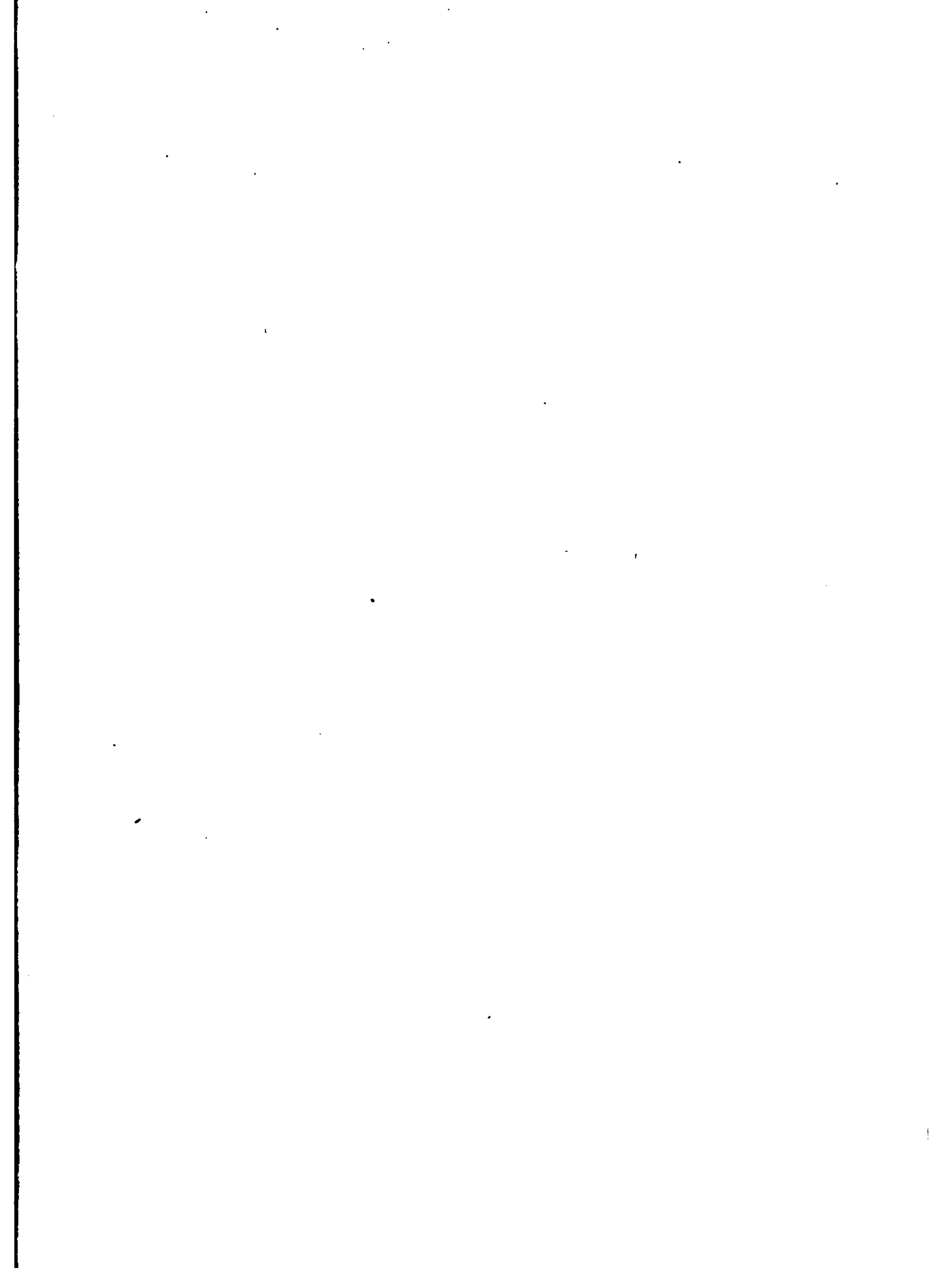

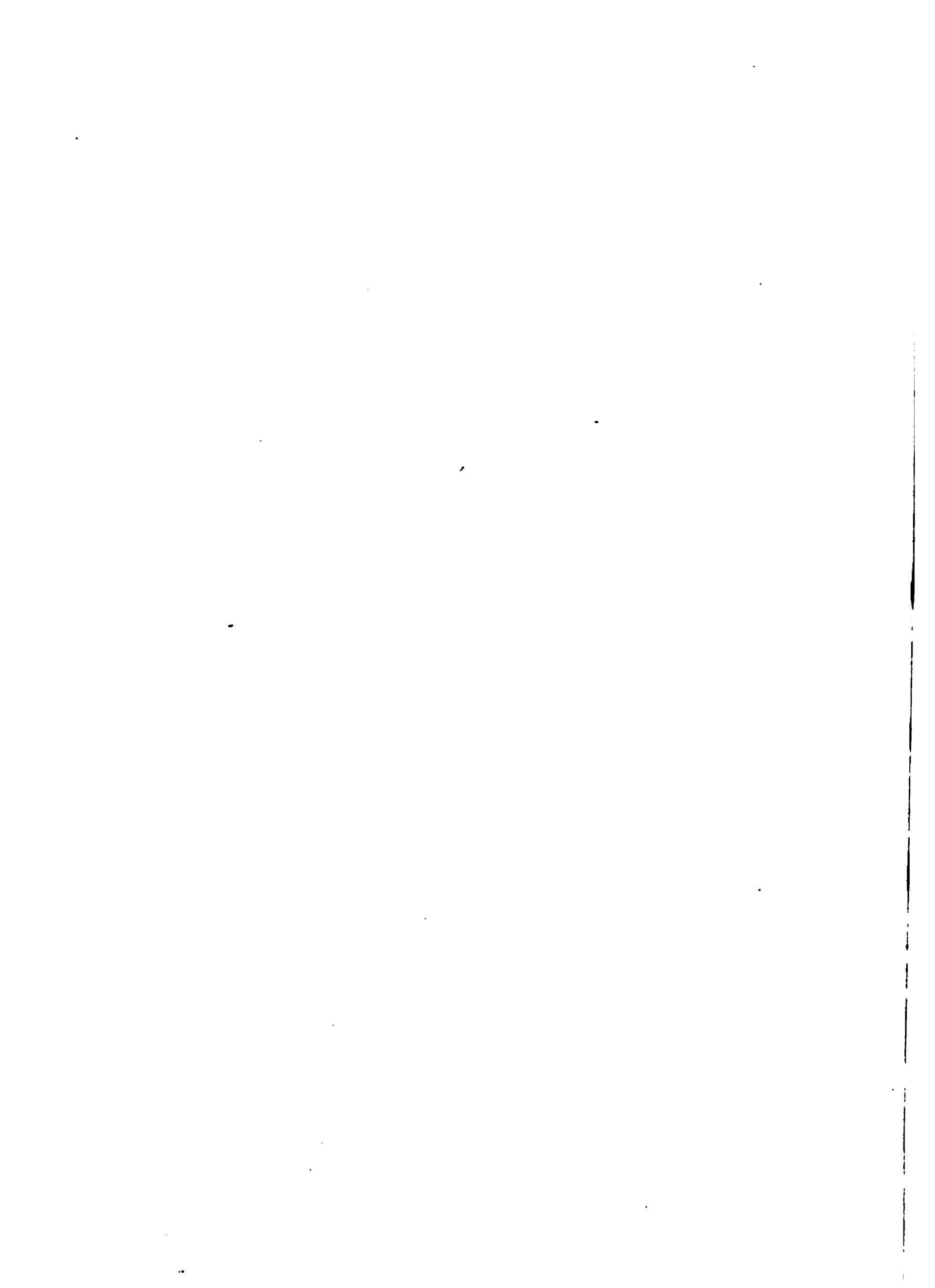

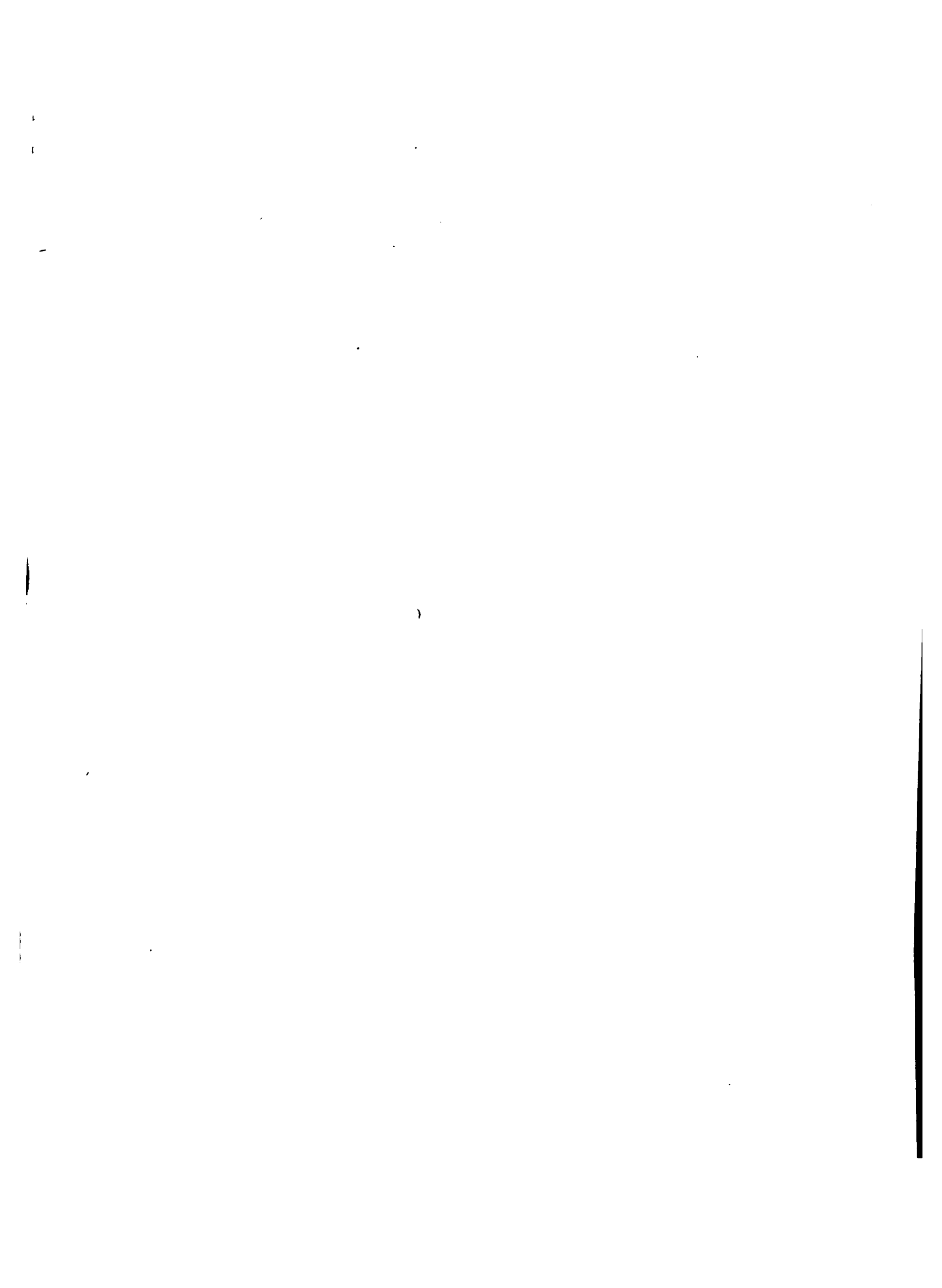

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