

LETTERS  
FROM THE  
FRONT

BY  
Lance-Corporal JOSEPH QUINN,  
KING'S LIVERPOOL REGIMENT.

Enlisted in Kitchener's Army, April 9th, 1915.  
Killed in action, France, July 30th. 1916.

R.I.P.

Liverpool :  
C. Tinling & Co., Ltd., Printing Contractors, 53, Victoria Street.

---

1918

" Simple men with simple motives, the chief one a hate of injustice which grows simpler the longer we stare at it, came out of their dreary tenements and their tidy shops, their fields and their suburbs, and their factories and their rookeries, and asked for the arms of men. In a throng that was at last three million men, the islanders went forth from their island as simply as the mountaineers had gone forth from their mountain, with their faces to the dawn. " - Gilbert G. Chesterton.

" I believe all the nasty things that people are saying about Germany to be true. I believe that she has violated every law of decency—every law of God and of man. But I consider that all these things are the natural outcome of the doctrines of Luther. The materialism and militarism at present dominating Germany spring from the same source. These doctrines which, in other forms, are, in my opinion, responsible for the irreligion of England, are now going to rebound on the people of this country. The War, I think, has a deeper significance than most people consider, and it may be that it will drag on in such a way, and over such a period, that, although Germany will inevitably lose, yet it will be brought home to such an extent to our own people, that its purifying influence will bring England much nearer Catholicism. Of course, this may sound fantastic enough, but I have seriously come to this conclusion since I enlisted, as it has been borne in upon me more strongly than ever, that outside our own Religion there is nothing! "

(From a Letter by Private Quinn, sent from a Home Training Camp, June 9th, 1915.)

\*FIRST LETTER HOME ON ENLISTING

- Camp,

Nr. Liverpool,

14/4/1915

DEAR JIM,

I am sorry I have not had an earlier opportunity of dropping you a note, but the fact is I have had all my spare time occupied in refusing Commissions !

I seem to have been, already, through many varied experiences. After a few particulars had been noted at the Orderly Office on my arrival here, I was taken to the Hut of No. 5 Company, where I waited, un-noticed, for about an hour. I was just beginning to get particularly bored, when

No. 5 Company, with whom I am placed (possibly only temporarily) arrived. They trooped in with full uniform, packs, etc., having just returned from a day in the (improvised) trenches here. They were simply sodden with wet, and gave vent to their disgust at the torrents of rain by the use of torrents of foul language. After a while, a Quartermaster came in, threw a couple of bedcovers with some straw towards myself and another of about six new recruits who had then arrived, and said, "Sew those up, you two, and sleep there!" This, of course, might have seemed disconcerting in the ordinary way, but, as I had half expected to be told that one wasn't expected to sleep in the Army, I completed a fairly good bed with the help of a borrowed needle, and a certain hereditary knowledge of how to use it. I slept just a little during the night. After breakfast on the Tuesday morning (6-15) we were placed right in with a number of fellows who have had advanced training, and we had an alternate march and run for three miles. However, I managed all right, and ate a good breakfast at 8, and at 9 a.m. we lined up for Parade. We then marched about a mile and a half into the centre of the Estate here, and commenced the first drills. I was rather fagged by dinner-time, but felt like eating anything. The afternoon was spent in a somewhat similar manner, with more Company Drill. In the evening I went (with a couple of the fellows whom I got to know, slightly) to a concert in the vicinity of the Camp. This (Wednesday) morning, there was a Battalion march of about twenty miles, but, of course, none of the new recruits were included in it. Still, we have been "going the pace" all day. We have spent most of the time in Company drill, racing, jump-over-back, long jumps, etc., and I feel so stiff that, probably the only things worse at the moment than sitting or standing would be walking or running! Yet I think it has done me good already, and I have, even in this short time, eaten things which I couldn't have touched before Monday last. I really like the actual life very much already, but we seem to have fairly found the rough element there. However, I'll let you know more later. So far, there has been little sign of any uniform being supplied, and one gets muddied to the knees. I may possibly get leave for this week-end, but it will, probably, be for next week. Hope all at home are well!

The following extracts from letters sent home by Private Quinn whilst he was training in England are typical of his general correspondence during this period:—

I hear you were quite shocked on seeing my first photograph in uniform.... Well, the fact is that about ten days ago I managed, with about half a dozen other fellows, to get hold of some bad tinned salmon, which was served to us one evening for tea. This gave me such a bad time for about three days, during which I ate nothing (not even more salmon) that I thought it absolutely necessary to let you have a photograph before I expired.

I even thought of writing my own epitaph, which might have read something like this:

"Here lies a soldier Private Quinn,  
Who ate some salmon — from a tin;  
For King and country both he died,  
From salmon also — found inside!"

Letter from a Home Training Camp, dated 9/6/15.

\*NOTE.—The Letters are addressed to the writer's sisters and brothers, with the exception of the last two, which were sent to friends only a few days before he was killed in action.

"I often wish I had carefully noted many of the humorous incidents which occur here.

"A few months ago a very illiterate Sergeant was getting the Company into alphabetical order for their pay, 'Get fell-in there!' he shouted in a harsh voice, again and again. As some of the soldiers still delayed in taking their places, he fastened on one of them. 'You! What's your name?'

"'Phillips, sir!' was the reply.

"'Well, why the devil don't you get fell in with the 'F's'?', shouted the irate Sergeant.

"Here's another instance:

'We have an enormously big Sergeant—a thorough soldier—late of the Grenadier Guards, and he has, naturally, very big feet. He went to the Army Stores the other day for a new pair of boots, 'What size?' asked the storekeeper. 'Elevens,' he replied. 'Sorry,' said the storekeeper, 'it can't be done—but would two pairs of sevens hearty good to you?'

Letter from a Home Training Camp, dated 12/10/15.

## FIRST LETTER FROM THE FRONT

The British Expeditionary Force,

Infantry Base Depot, France,

16th March, 1916.

MY DEAR JIM,

I am dropping you a hurried line from the Catholic Club here. It is the popular resort of all sorts of "Tommies," and is at present thronged to the doors. I have just been able to squeeze into a seat in order to write this, though a concert is in progress, which is not altogether conducive to letter writing.

Well, Jim, I have achieved my ambition, and am, at any rate, considerably nearer to that strangely fascinating "firing line." We have just met our previous draft here, and they expect to go "up the line" any day now.

We have been lucky so far over weather. To-day, in fact, it was almost uncomfortably hot, and the short march with overcoats and full packs nearly "rubbed us out,"

To my "Home-Defence" foot I shout, "Bravo!" So far, it has stood the test well; though it has been "barred" itself, it has not barred me. The best compliment I can pay my other, or "Foreign-Service," foot is that I never remember I have it!

We expected to have been medically examined immediately, but we hear that this will take place to-morrow.

By the way, I am sorry I had to rush away from you so quickly at the Railway Station last Tuesday evening. I had expected Annie to follow round from the other platform, but evidently she was stopped at the barrier. Tell her that the fruit she so kindly gave me was immense! It was simply "a peach!" As I had not had a great appetite during the day, it supplied both food and drink.

Tell John Baron I was sorry not to have been able to do my "turn" for him at the St. Patrick's Night Concert. I can plead (as a great artiste should) that my profession called upon me to fulfil a more important engagement in France!

I'll give you a more detailed account of the voyage some other time. I'll only say now that my experience up to the moment is one I should not like to have missed.

It's a grand thing to find a Catholic Club here! Though it has not many pretensions as a club in some respects (there is evidence of the usual lack of cash), it has pretensions of a loftier character. At the back of the Hall there is a sliding door which has just opened and revealed an altar! A short service has just been held—a layman reading the prayers. There is a little door outside, which leads right on to the altar, and one can call in at any time of the day, and may also, I hear, receive Holy Communion daily. This is a grand privilege, as the Hut is only a few minutes' walk from our tents.

The discipline here is, of course, much more severe than at home. But here they seem to be more particular only about the things that count. Just before leaving England, we had about half an hour at a certain "rest camp."

There are paradoxes even in the Army—for we never hustled more in our lives than we did in that half-hour!

Well, Jim, I'll write you more fully later.

My best love to all at home! I'll write to Alice at the first opportunity.

## SECOND LETTER

France, 21/3/1916.

MY DEAR ALICE,

I suppose you are already feeling nervous now that you realise I am in France? But whisper it gently! The Kaiser would feel nervous too—if he only knew. But why feel nervous? I am sure if you could only see us all here you would rather envy us as we bivouac under the clear, sunny sky of France. Well, there is a great glamour about going to the front and getting nearer that strangely fascinating firing line. There is a certain romance about it; a certain sense of elation as we march from the camp with swinging step, with the band playing merrily as we pass through the cheering crowds. The sentiment, too, is real on these occasions, and the "

good-byes " are not mere conventionalities. Here, human nature shows both its grave and gay sides. On one hand, one of the soldiers bandies jokes with the crowd as he passes, whilst near by a mother clings to her son and a little girl to her father. Will they be dubbed hysterical in these unemotional days? But away we speed on our journey. By three a.m. we are all asleep in our particular carriage, when our slumbers are disturbed by the sound of music. A band somewhere is playing " Should auld acquaintance be Forgot," but as we stare out into the blackness of the night we see nothing. There is a strange stillness, however, in the carriage as we speed on our way, and the sound of the music grows gradually fainter in the distance. The stillness is at last broken by a remark of one of our party—"Why the blazes do they play a thing like that when you are going away? " said he. Our train journey ended, we make towards the troop-ship. But before boarding- we have about half-an-hour for breakfast at a certain "rest" camp- (the irony of it).

At last on board, a blast of the whistle, and away we go. Soldiers representing every regiment in the British Army seem to be aboard this troop-ship. We rub shoulders with Highland laddies and Yorkshire yokels. What a variety of types! It would require a Robert Hugh Benson to analyse the psychology of such a crowd. Hurrah ! France is sighted- and what think you do we see as we set foot on French soil for the first time ?—a great poster of Charlie Chaplin! Such is Fame! Then away up a great hill to another rest camp, which overlooks the town. Here we shall be till morning, when we depart for the base. How interesting it all is as we look round the camp at night ! In the canteens here there is a curious medley of soldiers. One meets with men of all types and regiments. Men who have been at the front— wounded, perhaps—and now back again. Here we sleep in a great hut, huddled together so closely that there is little room to stretch ourselves without damaging our neighbour's fare. We are up early next morning, and prepare to on train for the base. At last we are off in third-class Continentals, very third-class! But who cares a " continental " for that? For are we not getting nearer the real thing? At last we have ceased to be " show soldiers," and now we can rough it with good humour. So on we speed to the base. As we enter the Base Depot we seem to immediately lose our individuality (so to speak) as a draft. The place positively teems with military life, and it makes us feel as insignificant as, say, a person entering a crowded theatre through a door which, though small, is in a very exposed position. A perfect maze of tents encircles us on all sides as we march through (saluting sentries as we pass) to our own particular depot. Here we meet a few old friends who came out with the draft before us. How we welcome each other ! Towards evening we wend our way to the Catholic Club, which is quite close to us. This is the most popular resort of the soldiers of all denominations. Here they come for refreshments and concerts. As I enter, it is thronged to the door. The brogue is strongly in evidence, and just behind me I hear someone say, " Shure, the Irish are expected to go over the top to-morrow." Then I realise that it is St. Patrick's Day in the morning! Well, good luck, to you my Irishmen ! Wasn't it St. Patrick himself who banished the snakes from Ireland? Perhaps you will be instrumental in banishing the human variety from France and Belgium ! Then a panel door at the end of the club slides back (just as it might do in one of Benson's novels), and behold! an altar. Those who are not Catholics make their exit and short prayers are commenced. Then away to our tents again. Phew ! Fourteen in one tent— yet we manage somehow, and sleep the sleep of the weary if not of the just. The next day away to the training ground, and how interesting the journey is. But at last we are finished for the day, and looking around us, on a beautifully clear evening, we feel that we would not have missed the experience for anything. Here, as I write, a French aeroplane sweeps gracefully like a huge bird over the peaceful valley which lies beneath us. How incongruous war seems now, and how difficult it is to realise that the greatest war in history is raging some miles further up the line. It is great to be here ! Write soon, a letter out here is a godsend !

### THIRD LETTER

B.E.F., France,

27/3/16.

MY DEAR CHARLIE,

We have just been placed under orders to go " up the line" either to-night or to-morrow morning.

Our full fighting kit has been issued to us, and before I take a further dip into the unknown, I am taking this hurried opportunity of writing you.

Let me say, first, that I am now a Lance-Corporal. On the day we left the Depot I was told by the Sergeant-Major that I would go to the Front as an acting Lance-Corporal. I demurred, but he said that I need only keep the

stripes until we got to the Base here— then I could hand it in if I wanted to. At any rate, I did not wear the stripe coming over, and until last Saturday I was still a Private, as far as I knew. On that evening, however, the Orderly Sergeant came into our tent and announced that Lance-Corporal Quinn was detailed for the duty of Battalion Orderly Corporal for the following day. It appears that I had been put through orders here as a Lance-Corporal, and I had then no alternative but to accept a stripe, (I think that promotion like this is only temporary, and probably none of us will hold our stripes " up the line.") However, that is the story of how " greatness was thrust upon me." I'll let the future take its course in the matter, but I think you know that I am not enamoured with the idea of stripes.

After ten days experience of the training at the Base (during which time we've roughed it as we never did in England), I can honestly say that "Active Service Soldiering " has its romance for me. Perhaps, having only as yet tasted its hardships, it is somewhat early to talk optimistically. Who knows? At any rate. I am up to now a " Mark Tapley." In our short ten days we have become acquainted with at least ten different kinds of weather. They treat the weather very simply out here—by ignoring it. Away we swing towards the training ground in all weathers—sometimes without great coats, and with the rain beating down on us and the wind driving into our faces as we plod our way through the mire. Then we go through our five or six hours (sometimes an hour's lecture in the open) under any kind of similar conditions that happen to obtain. We have no change when we return sodden and soaked, and we dry our things the next day— if the sun happens to come out ! However, it is easier to damp our clothes than our spirits, and it all makes us feel more like real soldiers than we were in England.

Then we see the other side of the picture perhaps the very next day, when the weather is delightfully mild; and how interesting it all is as we wend our way to the training ground ! Off we go through a network of camps — away down towards the valley—passing here a Red Cross Hospital where the wounded are being tended in the grounds by Red Cross nurses : and there a hospital train sweeps by carrying its human toll from the battlefield. Here again, alas ! the pity of it ! we see an improvised cemetery with its wooden crosses dotted here and there— men who have died in the hospitals. At last we arrive at the training ground, which is situated on a great stretch of sandhills sloping down to the water's edge. On all sides columns upon columns of soldiers. Away in the distance how tiny they seem ! Here we have rather a gruelling time—days of incessant activity. But how fine the instructors are ! Splendid fellows ! All men who have been through it in the firing line. There is everything that is kind about their methods, and nothing that is bullying. Then we climb up the hill home again. After tea, perhaps we bivouac under the clear sky of France. As the evening advances we look away out over a peaceful valley and see a golden sunset which gradually passes. Then a bright moon appears and seems to light up the whole of France ! The dominating feature of the base depot is the constant hustle. There is absolutely no rest for either the weary or the wicked between the hours of reveille (6 a.m.) and tea (5 p.m.). Even after that hour you are kept going, either cleaning your rifle or getting your pack ready. But the organisation here reaches a very high standard of efficiency. Though men are simply pouring through the depots in great numbers every week, the place seems to run as smoothly as a huge machine, it is simply amazing to see how rapidly such great masses of men can be fed, clothed, and equipped. There is simply no comparison between the methods employed here and those obtaining in the training camps in England. The food, too, is surprisingly good. Of course it is mostly tinned, but it is the very best quality. Bully beef is served out very regularly—too regularly for some. Biscuits like my dog Nigger's—only harder—(Ah, Nigger! how I envy you), plenty of cheese. Stews and roasts for dinners. Good bread (but not quite enough of it) and butter (the very best) twice a week. But it is all very nourishing, and everyone keeps fit on it, despite very hard work. The tea, too, is always good. Being under canvas here is much better than one could anticipate. The trouble is that the tents are rather overcrowded— eleven in a tent—and with some of the wet, gusty weather we have had, it is hard to keep your thing's dry. At times one wakes up in the night to hear the wind howling and the rain smiting your tent like an avalanche ! but it is only very occasionally that one gets blown down. There is no doubt about it—this is the life ! It is real campaigning here! We feel we are now " soldiers of fortune " indeed. And I for one never regret that I have come here. It all has an indefinable fascination for me. My foot has stood the test really well, considering the big-strain placed upon it. If it only serves me as well " up the line " I shall be satisfied. I am not sure whether I mentioned in my previous letter that we had a great sermon by an Irish Chaplain on St. Patrick's night in the Catholic Club. It was a great appeal to Irishmen, and wonderfully appropriate for men who would be perhaps going " up the line " a few hours after his sermon. We heard a great lecture recently by an Irish Captain (a medical officer), on "Sanitation." He had come here with the first Expeditionary Force, and spoke of the conditions in the trenches and elsewhere now as "Paradise" compared to then. He was a fine manly type of soldier, and was loudly cheered at the finish, I saw him at Mass on Sunday, when another great sermon was preached by a young Chaplain just returned from the trenches. He called his sermon "Religious Neutrality," and commenced by saying that there was no such thing! A very stirring appeal and a touch of our beloved G. K. Chesterton about him!

Give my love to pater, Alice, Annie and Jim; and tell Kate [the housemaid] that I will " strafe " the " Kaiser " for her when I see him ! All your prayers at home will keep me safe, I know.

#### FOURTH LETTER

B.E.F. France,

5/4/16

MY DEAR ALICE,

I am afraid I can never thank you adequately enough for your letter (followed a few days later by your parcel), both of which were redirected to me from the Base, and eventually arrived quite safely in my hands. If your letter, so warm, so enthusiastic and so characteristic, proved to be a tonic to my inner self, then your parcel, on the other hand, was no less a tonic to my inner man. It was the kind I would describe as a "duration of the war" parcel. In a war like this you can only afford to send one parcel like that. The fellows were mightily amused when I showed them a list of contents. I think some of them must have got the impression that you were a member of the Army Service Corps who had started a new method of feeding the troops. If so, I think they would regret that they had not sisters in the A.S.C. It was really too good of you. But, nevertheless, like the days of my youth, it is gone! Whilst at the Base I had greatness thrust upon me in the form of a stripe. I have never been enamoured of stripes; but it would take too long- to tell you how it came about. After leaving the Base we came up the line in cattle trucks, which were by no means so uncomfortable as the Continental "no classes" in which we had previously journeyed. We detrained at a certain town which shall be nameless (strafe the Censor!) and then commenced a very heavy march. In addition to one complete fighting kit, which we carry in our packs, we also carried two days' extra rations for the journey; so that, besides the weight on our backs, we seemed to have bags of different eatables—biscuits, butter, sugar, etc.- tied all around our belts. Altogether we reckoned that we were carrying little short, of a hundredweight. At any rate, we had a long, weary march over some abominable roads in a snowstorm. By the time we reached the billet (a stable) in which we were to spend the night we were so physically exhausted that we had just about enough strength to throw off our packs and lie down. But that stable! Speak not to me again of your great hotels. That stable was to us a haven of refuge. We revelled in the luxury of its straw-strewn floor, and after a short half-hour's rest we were completely revived. Very soon we made a raid on a small shop close by. Then the language trouble commenced. There was a mixture of bad French, bad English, and bad language generally; and, curiously enough, some of our fellows seemed to resent the fact that they could not always be understood. It reminded me of the English tourist who, having failed to make himself understood in a Parisian Restaurant, said—"Why can't these d——d foreigners learn to speak English?" Ultimately we managed to secure what we wanted. Personally, I made a good tea of two eggs, followed by sardines, etc. As there were no windows in the stable, it wasn't necessary to open them, and the eggs, at the same time. Then we sought sleep. "To sleep, perchance to dream." But alas! I didn't even manage to dream of sleep, I wonder if those sardines were bad! For presently there commenced in my interior regions a terrific struggle for supremacy between them and the eggs. The sardines had the advantage in numbers, but perhaps the eggs had it in age. At any rate, I lay awake looking through the opening (which had once had a door attached) at the silent stars and listening to the distant sound of the guns.

As we marched on to join our Battalion the next morning it was very interesting to hear the noise of the guns getting louder and louder; to see here and there some relics of German barbarism, such as inns and cottages which had been razed to the ground, and to witness a thrilling duel between a French and a German aeroplane. We heard a good story from one of the boys of our Battalion the other day. Together with two others, he was sitting in a dug-out. One of the party was reading aloud from a copy of "John Bull." He had just quoted a sentence which ran, "It may now be taken for granted that all the light has been knocked out of the Huns," when a German shell fell close by. It was some time after the three had been extricated from the debris that they saw the humour of the situation.

Well, the candle-light in my stable grows dim, and the falling shadows say it is bedtime. Out here's where we smile at you—you who have to waste time making beds. We are nearer to nature than you. We just kick our straw about, then drop into repose. No one suffers from insomnia here; though there was one fellow who suffered so badly from insomnia that he couldn't even sleep when it was time to get up. Personally I feel that when I come home again I will be able to curl up on the doorstep or in the back garden, if necessary.

P.S.—How could I have forgotten what made that pack so heavy on my back? Why, it was those two stripes, of course! one on each arm!

## FIFTH LETTER

B.E.F., France,

8/4/16.

MY DEAR ANNIE,

Let me commence by saying that all at home may put their minds at rest about me at present. Together with the previous draft, we are reckoned to be the luckiest party that has joined the Battalion for some time past. Why? Simply because all the - - Battalions are on rest from the trenches at present, and we may not be called upon to hold the trenches for some time yet. Of course, we never know when the word will come, but the position at present, at any rate, is as I have stated. Coupled with this, we have come here at the very best time of the year. You can hardly credit that, at a time when you are said to be having violent storms in England, we, on the other hand, are occasionally to be seen basking in the sun on the banks of the French river which runs past the very doors of our billets. It is here that we wash in the mornings, and talk bad French in the evenings with some French soldiers who are billeted on the opposite bank. Of course, when I say that we are resting-, I don't mean to imply that we are really doing nothing. There is more than a touch of irony in the "resting" that is done, at my rate in the "Active Service" Army. It means to say that we are doing pretty well what we used to do in England during the course of our training. We spend the days doing our ordinary drills, and sometimes (in fact, very often) the evenings, in digging trenches. From these digging expeditions we return often at only about one or two o'clock a.m., and find them rather fagging in the sense that, apart from a long march both ways, we frequently have to leave the road, and travel over ploughed fields. You can imagine what this means at night-time; you never know if your next step will be into a hole in the ground, or over a small hillock—and it plays the devil with your feet. Still, it is all very pleasant indeed when you compare it with what our fellows who came out here first with the Brigade must have gone through! They had to hold trenches in mid-winter which were never at any time dry, and which were frequently so horribly wet that "the boys" were always standing in water nearly up to their waists. It was impossible to use the communication trenches, and they had to take big risks by going "over the top" to deliver rations.

The trenches are almost thoroughly dry already, so that we may consider ourselves fortunate indeed to have missed such hardships. Even the marching, though it is bad enough at times, can never be as bad as it was about last December, when the roads were a permanent mixture of thick mud and clay. Still, the fellows who have spent the winter here say that they never could have believed when in England that they could have stuck what they have actually gone through; so it might have been the same with me. It is amazing, indeed, what one can stand when really faced with it as something which is inevitable. Tom Lavin\* must be tough indeed to have spent a winter here. I don't think I'll be guilty of offending the Censor if I tell you something about my very first experience under fire. Of course, to those who had previously been under shell-fire in the trenches and villages, this experience would be, no doubt, a very mild and tame affair; but I was the only "new soldier" in this particular party, and consequently, it had much more interest for me.

A small party of our Platoon went out on some night work, to dig trenches only a few hundred yards behind our own front line. To get there, we crossed a white ribbon of road which ran between a long avenue of trees. The trees of France, by the way, seem to be invariably planted in long rows of regular shapes and sizes, and as they stretch away through the villages (which always dip down into valleys), the effect is that of making the surrounding country look like a great garden. At night-time, when you occasionally see a tree looming up in splendid isolation, it seems to stand out like an etching pencilled in rich, dark tones against the sky-line. The road I mention ran along the top of such a valley, and was only about thirty or forty yards down the slope where we worked. The noise of machine-gun fire (which is, for all the world, like a person using a door-knocker very impatiently) and of shell-fire was incessant. How extremely interesting it all is as we witness our own and the German flare-lights shooting up over the trenches, and brilliantly lighting up the sky! And presently we are fascinated indeed! A most powerful German search-light suddenly throws its brilliant rays on to the road above! It slowly and carefully sweeps this road as it creeps along on its weird way; and we can imagine how boldly any moving thing there would stand out in relief—and how quickly a shell would follow! But nothing happens—nothing, at any rate, that I can mention here. This strangely fascinating light would come and go about every ten minutes. Then again we see those flare-rockets as they curl upwards and wind their way gracefully towards the stars!

The sight reminds me very much of a description by G. K. Chesterton in his "Victorian Age in Literature." Speaking of Ruskin and De Quincey, he says: "There are no other writers who employ so well those long rolling sentences which, like a rocket, burst into stars at the end. This has always appealed to me as a most striking

phrase, and, really, these rockets, as they sail up to the sky, recall it quite vividly. Well, we finish our digging, and prepare to cross that very road again. Will that search-light fasten its weird glare on us as we pass? We clamber over the barbed wire as best we can in the dark. A few bullets have been whistling about us from the German trenches, and as one seems to pass just over my head, I nervously whisper a few prayers as we hurry on, and soon we are pretty well out of the danger-zone.

It's not the worst thing in the world to hear those bullets whizzing past you, for, as someone has very aptly put it, it's when you don't hear them whiz past that they generally hit you ! When we reach camp again we have hot tea served out to us, with rum in it.

The small village wherein we are billeted contains no canteens where one can buy anything to eat. There is only one cafe—a dirty little place, where we sometimes spent the evening's with some French soldiers. At this place the most you can get is coffee, cakes or biscuits, and the prices are simply extortionate. You pay five-pence here for biscuits which you could buy in England for about three-halfpence! The greatest trouble is the lack of bread. The ration served out is about a quarter of a loaf per day, and is nothing like adequate enough, though the food in general is good, even if scarce. It is not, however, so good as at the Base, and therefore you have to fritter your money away on biscuits and chocolates. So, when you are sending a parcel, please put a small cob or two in with some butter, which can be put in a tin of some sort. But, really, anything in the eatable line will be always acceptable here. Of course, it may not be like this in our next billets, which may be in some village where one can buy food easily. It is a great sight here to see the rush that is made when a large bale of parcels is delivered ! I am afraid that the life in some ways is not conducive to very delicate habits at meals. In our stable here the bread is usually left on a blanket! In fact, it is delivered that way, and often gets mixed with the straw in the stable where we eat, sleep and live !

It would take too long to mention half the extraordinary things I have seen already in that respect. In this life one certainly gets nearer to nature than is desirable. Sometimes, before you can eat your bread, you have to scrape from it a great deal of dirt and hair from blankets, etc. Yet, if a fellow attempted to appropriate your ration, you would feel like fighting him ! It's surprising what an appetite you get, and everybody looks really fine on it, even if his appetite is not always satisfied. So I have come to the conclusion that we must have all eaten too much when at home, and had not enough exercise ! Otherwise, it must be the tonic air of France that keeps one fit, as I certainly never felt better than at present.

Although I have not seen anything yet of the actual trench work, yet, I have come across many things that would have been altogether too interesting to miss.

As we passed through a neighbouring village on our way to dig the other night, someone (it was probably Teddy Thomas) sang out that Tom Lavin was stationed there, and would like to see me. I haven't seen him yet, however, as this particular village is out of bounds for us, though only a few miles away.

Just as I am finishing this letter, I have received your parcel, for which many, many thanks ! Everything in it will be useful. I have just bought from a French soldier a ring made from a German shell by this soldier, and it has a " four-leaved " shamrock on it. Unfortunately, I cannot send it to you, but will bring it with me. The fact of my having to bring it to you will ensure my coming home safely! Of course, it has no great material value, but is very interesting as a souvenir. The " four-leaved " shamrock, too, is an emblem of luck !

So, au revoir, bonne Annee, for the present :

Thank Jim for the copy of the " Catholic Times " which I received just before we left the Base, and read on my journey "up the line." If he has another Sacred Heart Badge to spare, ask him to send it to me, as I gave mine, just before leaving England, to a fellow who was going out with the previous draft. Tell the pater that I'll drop in at Waterloo and see him some fine day soon !

\* his cousin

## SIXTH LETTER

B.E.F., France,

16th April, 1916.

MY DEAR CHARLIE,

I must thank you all very much indeed for your kindness. Since writing to Annie last I have received all the parcels quite safely. Tell her that the "kitchen outfit," which she was good enough to forward, promises to be quite a success. (The trouble about receiving anything that will cook well for you is the weight. When a move is made (which happens at any moment) every extra ounce you carry in your pack counts). So far, I am sorry to



say that I have not had a chance of hearing Mass since coming "up the line." On my first Sunday here, three of us got special permission to go to the 9-30 Mass at the next village, but found on arrival that the only Mass was at 7-30. On the following Saturday, about half-a-dozen of us received leave to go to Confession. It is interesting to note that here we go to church with equipment, rifle and ammunition, and there is something rather impressive about it, as our small group of soldiers attend during Benediction in a quaint little French Church, with its artistically designed interior. The Chaplain is a fine, enthusiastic young Irishman—a Fr. O'Shaughnessy—and he heard most of our Confessions.

Having about half-an-hour to spare afterwards, I tried to trace Tom Lavin, having heard that he was billeted in the vicinity. I found his billet, but he was out on some night digging.

On the Sunday morning we started out early for digging, so Church was impossible; and this week I am on guard from the Saturday to the Sunday evening—but better luck next time! I must certainly take every opportunity of going when not on duty.

Tom Lavin came to see me, with Jim Thomas, the other day, but as we had a big "fatigue job" of unloading a barge, I could only spend a few minutes with them. We arranged an appointment, however, for the following evening at Tom's place. There, like real "old soldiers," we spent an hour or two, chatting in an old shed round a fire, which was strangely reminiscent of the days of our youth, when we used to congregate round the hut fire of the nearest old night watchman.

But who do you think was a number of this particular "old soldiers'" circle?—none other than Alf Schofield, the old Everton football player, who is now in Tom's Battalion. It recalled to me very vividly my very first football match which Tommy\* (R.I.P.) took me to see.

How well I remember Everton Reserve on that day when, with Kirwan and Schofield on the left wing, and Read as outside right, they completely captivated me! I told Schofield that I was a hero-worshipper of his from that day, and rather amused him by stating that I thought he really looked younger now than then—surely some eighteen years ago!

But, really, you would think it an extraordinary thing to see Schofield looking hardly any different after such a number of years.

By the way, on the night prior to that on which Alice and Annie's parcels arrived, I had a funny experience. I had been expecting these parcels, and was very hungry, having never had such an appetite as here, when a fellow came in and placed two parcels on the shelf over my head. "My parcels have arrived," shouted I, "hurrah!" In the meantime, the fellow who delivered them had gone out again. I opened the first parcel without even looking at the address; they had been put right in my place by the fellow, who had made no comment when I congratulated myself on receiving them. The first one contained sour bread and butter. "We are in Meredith," said I, "I couldn't have bought bread and butter here for five shillings just now!" I placed some of the things on one side, and casually took up a note which had been put underneath them in the parcel. One glance at the address on it immediately disillusioned me! This parcel was for the fellow next to me, and so had the other! I had expected the note was from Alice or Annie. The disappointment made me feel five per cent more hungry! However, I explained the position to the real owner of the parcel when he came in, and like a good Samaritan he gave me a cob and some butter. (The deliverer of the parcels had not done the thing for a joke, but had been preoccupied at the time.)

I think I told Annie pretty well what our programme of work out here is. It has not altered, and I am still enjoying the life, and feeling very fit. Best wishes to all at home!

\* his brother.

## SEVENTH LETTER

B.E.F., France,

April 25th, 1916.

MY DEAR JIM,

I want you to thank the pater particularly for those cigars! I have already smoked one, and mean to lose no time in smoking the others! As I puffed away at it, I was followed by a great crowd of soldiers wherever I went!

They were waiting for me to throw the end away, of course, but the position grew quite embarrassing! When I

actually threw the stump down, the struggle for it was so great that the Authorities thought there was a German attack on. On second thoughts, I have decided not to smoke the others, but to keep them in hand in case of a gas attack, which I think they would disperse very rapidly !

I couldn't get the ring I wanted for Annie, but have enclosed this one for her. It was made by a French soldier here from a piece of German shell. It is of value merely as a souvenir. I hope it will go through all right ! We have been doing some frightfully hard work lately —digging and " fatigue " work—and it certainly wants some sticking. My feet have been pretty sore at times, and, so far, the left foot is sticking it well, despite the fearfully heavy going. The weather recently has been very much like mid-winter.

Sorry for this scrappy letter, written in haste. I'll write you a decent letter at the first opportunity. Love to all!

## EIGHTH LETTER

B.E.F., France,

2/5/1916.

MY DEAR CHARLIE,

Picture to yourself a quaint old French cottage standing on the summit of a hill ! Immediately opposite to this is our present billet—a disused and dilapidated old barn. But, we have a good background, at any rate! Just behind us, towering above both cottage and billet, stands a tall Crucifix ! The image of God upon it is blackened and worn-looking, but, like many of its kind that one sees upon the waysides of France, the whole is still intact. This one looks out with great dignity upon the darkened landscape of the valley beneath ! Just as the Catholicity of France, which it represents, still burns brightly, even though mutilated by the materialism of men, so does this Crucifix still retain its nobility, though it has been subjected to the ravages of the wind and rain, the fury of the storm, and the shrieking of the shells in a fire-swept area ! There is something very impressive and hopeful about it now, as it stands out in bold relief, and the dusk falls gradually over the hillside.

Within the cottage dwells a wrinkled and furrowed old peasant woman. She is often to be seen sitting at her door during the evening, waiting to greet her son on his return from work. To-day, however, something has disturbed the peaceful serenity of her life. Her son, a pale, delicate looking youth, has just been called upon to become a soldier. With a faint smile on his face, and an unconventional looking bundle under his arm, he bids his mother farewell at the door.

There is something really pathetic about the scene, as the old lady seems to break her heart sobbing, whilst the youth looks very self-conscious on account of our presence. Although we have not, up to the present time, been in the trenches, we have had some very varied experiences, and have done some particularly hard work. So you will see that we are having a typical army " rest! " For instance, we have done " barge fatigues "—unloading barges on the banks of the river. Of course, you will probably know that the rivers here take very much the form of canals, as they run through the villages. The one where we were last working (on the banks of which we were billeted) was not unlike the Grand Canal in Dublin, as I remember it. The work we were doing was dock labouring undiluted! The weights we carried nearly broke our backs, and on one occasion we worked from 8 a.m. until 8-30 p.m., with a break of an hour for dinner! We often work with the Royal Engineers. (Some fellows say that we do their work whilst " resting " (!)—at any rate they mark out trenches, etc., and we dig them.) We are quite experts now in planting barbed wire, and I'd be sorry for any poor old "Fritz" who got himself mixed up in the last lot we completed. Sometimes, when we set out we find that the road over which we travelled yesterday has large shell-holes in it to-day ! Occasionally, a shell will fall fairly close to us. Not long ago, some bombs were dropped\* at a certain place, and a bombing " Boche " aeroplane hovered above us very daringly for a time, but was eventually shelled away by our gunners. (The danger from bombs is becoming almost as bad here as it used to be at home (!) ) Except that we kept working hard, we had a rather uneventful Easter. It had been frightfully bad weather up to Easter Saturday. On Good Friday we were out digging during the day (often we dig at night) and towards noon I thought of you all wending your way to St. Francis Xavier's Church for the "Three Hours" Service. I regretted that it was the first one I had missed for about twelve years! Who preached? I recalled, as I thought of the day, a sight I had seen on our way " up the line." It was all a very wet day as we passed some cross roads, in the centre of a great sweep of barren and bare fields. Here there loomed up suddenly on that rain-swept countryside, another of those wayside Crucifixes ! I would like to have seen it on that Good Friday. It would have been an appropriate sight indeed, standing as it did in a sort of spiritual isolation, and showing Our Lord looking down

upon what seemed to be an ungrateful world ! On the following day we returned again from digging, sodden and soaked ! But who shall say that Easter does not bring brightness with it? On the Sunday morning, as I left my billet, the birds sang merrily away up in a great dome of blue sky, and a soldier's chorus was being sung by the boys. Here it is :- -  
" I want to go home, I want to go home,  
' Jack Johnsons ' and ' Whiz-bangs ' come over like rain,  
I don't want to go in the trenches again.  
Take me over the sea,  
Where the Allemands can't get at me.  
Oh my! I don't want to die,  
I want to go home, I want to go home ! "

By the way, I forgot to tell you that all the boys here kept the Fast (very nearly a "black" one) on Good Friday ! The transport had been delayed, so we had to go without bread, butter and a few other things. (I think some of the non-Catholics here are still firmly convinced that the Pope had something to do with it !)  
It was funny some days ago to see men of our own artillery playing cricket right behind one of their guns. It was an improvised sort of game. They had an old tin box for the wickets, a spade for the bat, and a sixpenny rubber ball! (The batsman hit the bowler for six just as we passed.)  
From where we work, it is sometimes a wonderful sight to witness a terrific artillery duel going on, apparently not very far away; and sometimes, away over at the edge of the sky, the shells, as they burst, belch forth black volumes of smoke which mar the beauty of the sunset as it dies.  
Whilst out on some night digging the other week, I found the walking over heavy roads very trying; but, though the hot weather has some disadvantages, I can stand it much better. In the very wet weather the ground gets so bad that you simply can't grip it when walking, and it takes a tremendous lot out of you when you are practically sliding along for miles in mud. (However, the foot is sticking it well up to now, all things considered. The rubber bar is wearing down somewhat with the rough roads, so I suppose it will have to be replaced later.) Just as I write, a few shells have whizzed over our billet, but are bursting so far off that we are not worrying about them. We have moved, of course, from the village in which we were first billeted, and it is from our present quarters that we'll march to the trenches at the end of the week. I know you will all continue to remember me in your prayers. I am somewhat looking forward to experiencing the only phase of soldiering- (the trenches) which I haven't had yet. Will you all accept my best thanks for the parcel, but it took nearly three weeks to arrive ! I notice that you sent it by the——. They are very careful in forwarding parcels—'nothing is ever broken—except the hearts of the soldiers who are waiting for them ! Some of their parcels have been known to take five or six weeks in transit ! But tell Annie it was a really fine parcel, at any rate. It's awfully good of the pater to remember me by those frequent Masses! Tell him I'll get the war over soon in order to come home and see him again !  
Once more, love to all !

A CARD OF GREETING,  
Inscribed in Silk, "To MY DEAR FATHER."  
(His father was then in his 93rd year, and died in the following January. R.I.P.)

France,

8/5/16.

I am now in the front line trenches, so the war will soon be over! Since I have arrived, "Old Fritz" is keeping his head down, but is trying to keep his heart up! Thank you for your good prayers for me.

Encircled with them, the Germans couldn't possibly hit me!

This would be quite a comfortable place but for those " blighters " on the other side of " No Man's Land ! "

There are some splendid fellows out here. Your heart would go out to them—officers and men—if you could see them courting death, often with a careless gaiety. Nevertheless, they would all like to see "Blighty " again—that is human nature ! Please God, I will be home with you again long before you are 93!

If you have anything good for the first " Grand National " after the war, send it along, as the boys here would

be sure to want to have " a bit on "—in advance!  
The best of love to you and all at home !

#### A CARD OF GREETING

(To his little Nephew, aged 5, showing on the reverse side two " Blue Birds" worked in Silk.)

France,  
8/5/16.

MY DEAR WEE CHARLIE,

A great Belgian writer holds that the Blue bird is a symbol of happiness. If so, you will find, on turning over this card, that your happiness is twofold ! So keep happy with your birds and toys, Charlie! You will then be able to say with R. L. Stevenson : —

"When I am grown to man's estate,  
I shall be very proud and great,  
And tell the other girls and boys.  
Not to meddle with my toys."

We used to see little boys and girls like you before we came to the trenches. Some of them had weary eyes. Perhaps it was because they had no toys, and their dadas were at the war. If you were here with me, I would take you for a ride on my back to the German trenches, and you would say to the soldiers there, "Your toys—shells and bullets—hurt too much. Come and play with me, and we'll build things instead of destroying them. You are all fighting, instead of playing with each other. Why ? "

Well, Charlie, the nasty old Kaiser will have to give up some day, and then I'll give you another ride on my back at Waterloo. With great love from " Unkie Joe!"

#### NINTH LETTER

France,

12/5/16.

MY DEAR ANNIE,

It was Patrick McGill, I believe, who said that when the shells begin to burst in France, the men run in for their lives—and the women run out for their washing ! If the phrase implies, as I think it does, that the women, at any rate, do not know what shell-fire really is, then we can welcome it and say, " Thank God ! " Certainly, as far as the spasmodic shelling of villages at long range is concerned, the saying is not very much exaggerated, for occasionally one does see a peasant, with perhaps a few children, passing leisurely by a field in which a shell has just burst. But, generally speaking, then; are very few civilians at all within range of the guns; and they are usually of the " small shop-keeper " type ! They cling to business, and prefer to take the risk of inhabiting a village where the " Boches " may now and again drop a shell in rather than lose an opportunity of making the English soldier shell out ! Well, Nance, here we are in the trenches !

It was with a tinge of regret that I left our last billet,— which was so dignified by its Cross for a background— but I was curious to know something about the trenches, and I thought we looked rather imposing as we moved off in our steel helmets under a darkening sky, looking just a bit like the knights of old. Fortunately, the storm which seemed to be foretold by the gathering clouds, did not mature.

To me there was an amusing paradox about our march to the trenches. I'm not sure if I've ever told you that, whilst training in England, we frequently had night operations, which usually took the form of marches. On such occasions great precautions were taken so that the strictest silence should always be observed. Even the commands to halt or move on were whispered, and anyone who violated the silence of the night by the spoken word or the mirthful laugh, was dealt with severely. There were positively peals of silence everywhere ! It reigned supreme! The object of this, we understood, was to accustom us to marching at the Front without noise.

But mark the " little ways " of the Army ! On our march to the trenches the boys bellowed forth most of the popular songs until within about a couple of miles from the trenches. Even when they had actually arrived there, they were never so quiet as they had been on those night operations in England. As we got nearer, we noticed a beautiful effect on the sky-line, where an otherwise deep black sky was relieved by a shaft of silver. On we went over roads, ploughed fields, and through woods, until we saw the lights going up over the trenches, and soon reached the village which was our destination. How weird it looked in the blackness of the night!—a heap of ruins with, apparently, hardly a house standing. Eventually, we commenced to wend our way through a trench of perennial twists and turns. It was quite different to anything I had expected. When our boys had left the trenches not many weeks ago, they were barren and bare-looking; now the spring had clothed the tops of them in green, and they were all covered with ferns and bracken. They did not look at all uninviting now, by which time a crescent moon had appeared and would show itself now and again, only to be soon obscured by a blot of dark clouds. I'm afraid I cannot tell you very much in a letter about the life in the trenches, but I'll do so when I come home. I can only say that at times it is strangely peaceful, and at other times the reverse. Sometimes you will see the sunrise in a blaze of splendour in the morning, and set in a flame of gold in the evening. Almost always at daybreak, the skylark, that optimist of " No Man's Land," will cheer your heart with its song, and make you almost forget that you are having a big row with " old Fritz " on the other side!

I must thank you so much for your last letter, Annie, I can hardly say how much I enjoyed all the news; and, as for the nice things you said about my letters, I can only apply them all to yours !

I haven't seen Tom Lavin lately, but I've just found out that his Battalion is holding a portion of the line on our right. The other night we came very late to relieve a party of the "Pals." As they were moving past us in a narrow part of the trench, they called out. " Good luck, boys! " The last one, turning to me, said, "I suppose you haven't come across a gas helmet- I dropped mine somewhere in the trench?" "Sorry," I replied, " I haven't seen one ! " " Great Scot ! it's Joe Quinn ! " said Larry Fagan ! Neither of us had known each other in the darkness. We are now nearly through half of our period in the trenches, after which we go back again for a week's rest. Love to all !

## TENTH LETTER

France,

21/5/16.

MY DEAR JIM,

The moon has well been called the " Lamp of Night," and we here are all becoming quite used to the sight of a full moon as it illuminates the sky with the altogether beautiful effect. But we will not always appreciate such sights. When, for instance, we are doing some job " over the top," we sometimes use very bad language about the "old fellow in the moon," as he embarrasses us with his brightness. On such occasions we feel that he is a German asset in the form of a powerful search-light, and we wonder if the Kaiser has won him over to his side by, let us say, an offer to shine " twice nightly "—and once at matinees- each week on Germany after the war. The disadvantages of a moonlight night are shown very humorously, and at the same time very truly, by a sketch in "Fragments from France," which portrays a girl looking from a window at a very bright moon. " To think," says she, " that the same old moon will be looking down on him to-night! " Inset is a picture of him working at the barbed wire in front of " No Man's Land," under a clear moon. "Curse this moon! " says he, "it will be the death of me! " (Out here circumstances certainly do alter one's point of view rather violently.) Many men here find shell-fire rather interesting at first. To hear the curious, singing noise the shells make as they sail high over your head, and to see them burst away over by the sky-line, where, perhaps, a golden sunset is dying, is not without its fascinations. But it requires very little experience indeed to cure you of associating shells with anything beautiful or artistic! You soon think only of the havoc wrought by them, and of the poor souls near to them when they burst. To employ artillery against infantry is certainly the essence and refinement of cruelty. Our period in the trenches has been, in more senses than one, alternately hot and cold. In one particular part of them, where there were no dugouts, we had frightfully wet weather for about four days. Soon the very atmosphere was permeated with wet, slimy clay. It smeared your clothes as you pushed past each other in a narrow trench; it simply enveloped you. You ate it on your bread, and you drank it in your tea ! At night-time we had to try and get some sleep in it in a sitting position, under a shelter which we had improvised with our oil-sheets and a few old rafters, just about the dawn of one miserably wet and cold morning, the improvised roof, together with the water accumulated thereon, suddenly fell in on us ! There was an almost blasphemous silence

for a moment, when suddenly one of the party started off the chorus, "So pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag, and smile, boys, that's the style." Soon we had all joined in, and the situation was saved ! Life in the trenches, like that of the average lift attendant, is one of " ups and downs." Sometimes you get little sleep at all under a nerve-racking fire in, perhaps, wet weather, and another time you sleep comfortably at night in your dug-out. Or perhaps you loll in the sun during a day so quiet that you forget there is a war on at all! For three weeks you get no chance of a wash, and never have your boots or clothes off, just occasionally you may get a spot of water for a shave— there is very little of it to drink ! The old soldiers out here can tell almost immediately what particular brand of German soldier is holding the trench opposite. The Saxons hardly ever fire a shot, and have been known to stand on the parapet of the trench and sing ! They frequently, it is said, shout over friendly remarks, and only fire when fired upon. On the other hand, there is a constant and active fire kept up when the Prussians or the Bavarians are holding the line, and their artillery is always very active. I used to think, before coming out, that these things were mere " paper-talk," but they are really true. There is, too, an extraordinary spirit prevailing amongst our men; or, at any rate, amongst the majority of them. They will come smiling through some really " gruelling " times, and have a certain optimistic way of overcoming difficulties. The only way I can describe it is to say they have the heart for it ! I don't mean that they really like it. No sane person who has seen it at its heart's core does really like the game of war. But our fellows have a knack of forgetting its grim side and turning its personally unpleasant side into a joke. By the way, I am sending you a copy of some verses from a "London Opinion" of last February, which I had cut out and forgotten, and then found in my pocket-book. I consider that they give the most realistic picture of life in the trenches which I have yet read or seen. I'm going to "get them off" as a recital for one of my "turns," and would advise you to do so as well. I've experienced already nearly everything mentioned in them. Here they are :—

MR. ATKINS' PHILOSOPHY,  
(Written in the Trenches, somewhere in Flanders.)

When you're sleepin' on the fire-step in a blanket soakin' wet,  
When the mud is in your eyes and mouth, an' in your 'air, you bet,  
When the rain comes thro' your dug-out's roof, an' drips down on your nose,  
When your feet are blinkin' ice-bergs, an' you 'aven't got no toes,  
When the neighbours in your shirt are dancin' 'ornpipes on your chest,  
When you've dug for fourteen days on end, atv never 'ad no rest,  
When the Corp'ral's pinched your rations, when the Sergeant's pinched your rum,  
Don't curse or swear, but simply smile—remember Bel-gi-um !

When the Alleman' blows off your 'at or 'elmet with a "crump,"  
When the aerial torpedoes scarcely gives you time to jump,  
When you're always in the 'ottest part an' never 'ave no luck,  
When the " whiz-bangs " come so thick you 'aven't got no chance to duck,

When trench-mortars, bombs an' shrapnel seem to 'ave a love for you,  
When, in tryin' to retaliate, your own guns shell you too,  
When you 'ear the bullets singin', an' your 'ead they nearly 'it,  
Never mind, but just remember—you're a doin' of your bit!  
When your billet's in a cow-shed an' the bloomin' roof all leaks,  
When you're only paid five francs for pretty near a dozen weeks,  
When if sick the Doctor gives you " M. & D." an' sends you back,  
When you've lost your iron ration, your gas 'elmet an' your pack,  
When your rifle's choked with mud an' you get " F.P. No. 2,"  
When your pals all go to " Blighty "—every bloomin' one but you,  
When you've got to "pop the parapet" an' courage is at zero, just remember who you are, my boy— a bloomin' British 'ero !

" M. & D."—Medicine and Duty.  
"P.P. No. 2"—Field Punishment No, 2.

Would you mind getting " Fragments from France," by Captain Bruce Bairnsfather, for me? (it's published by " The Bystander ". It is a really fine collection of humorous prints, and gives an excellent illustration of that spirit (amongst our fellows) which I've very inadequately tried to describe to you. If there is a second series issued you might send it on to me. I must thank you for the copies of the " Catholic Times " and " London Opinion " which I receive regularly each week. In the last copy of the " Catholic Times " I read a review by " Papyrus " of Father Martindale's " Life of Monsgr. Robert Hugh Benson." I was somewhat disappointed to find that the biographer seems to lay too much emphasis on the fact of Fr. Benson's charming and fascinating personality, and too little on his literary genius. To me, he seemed to suggest that Fr. Benson was a great man through the first-named fact, and rather discountenanced his literary ability. Perhaps I am wrong, but that was the impression conveyed to me by the review.

It would make you appreciate the facilities for hearing Mass which you have at home, when you realise that I have had only one chance of attending Mass since leaving the Base!

Tell Annie that I received her parcel last Thursday, and everything was great in it, especially the tinned oranges and grapes!

I do hope you are all well, and I look forward to seeing you all again soon ! It's only when you've been out here a short time that you more thoroughly appreciate home. Not that I regret having come, as I consider it to be an experience that must do good to anyone. So that I'm really glad to have gone through it all, and yet would, naturally, be glad to see you all again. My love to you all!

#### ELEVENTH LETTER

France,

29/5/16.

MY DEAR ANNIE,

You will be pleased to know that I've returned quite safely, thank God. From a three weeks' stay in the trenches. In the ordinary course of events, it was expected that we would return there again after a six days' rest, but, greatly to our surprise, we have come a long way behind the firing line, and may be here for a few weeks on some special course. I've just received your last parcel, together with the watch from Charlie. It was really too good of him to send one with an illuminated dial. I'll have to be very careful with it, as they are very breakable with the rough usage they get out here. The parcel was first-rate, and I enjoyed the grapes immensely !

The village just behind our line is a weirdly beautiful one, and must have been a picture in peace time. There are probably no buildings left quite intact there at present. Part of the trench runs through the ruins of what was once a very beautiful church, and a particular portion of it is itself a veritable woodland way. A curious sight it is seen as one sidetracks from the village to one of the trenches. A small portion of a wall, shell-battered into many irregular shapes, is all that is left of one building—whether an ordinary house or otherwise I know not. About the centre of this wall, a fairly-round hole has been knocked out, evidently by a huge piece of shrapnel. Inset, looking as though it were framed there, stands a statue of Our Lady ! Apparently a very valuable one, it looks wonderfully impressive as it stands there in perfect condition. Amidst such a heap of ruins, it gave the impression not of something inanimate, but of something that lived!

It is, I should say, somewhat improbable that it had been placed in its unconventional framework after the building had been demolished, but, on the other hand, it is an extraordinary thing indeed if it were left like that unharmed, whilst almost everything around it had been shattered !

We are now billeted in a rather large village on the outskirts of one of the famous towns of France. Here we are in the midst of the real thing in French life. Right behind our billet (the usual stable) is a very decent little cafe. We have musical evenings there, and a couple of dainty little French girls dance for us. They are very vivacious, very young (hardly fifteen, but matured enough to be twenty-five) and certainly talented. I need scarcely say that we are enjoying it as a contrast to the conditions in the very small villages we had been in hitherto. There is quite a good Pierrot Troupe connected with our Battalion, and I am to appear with them for the first time on Wednesday next.

I heard Mass here yesterday morning in a quaintly picturesque little French Church—the celebrant being a typical old French cure, who preached, of course, in French. It was very interesting to see the costumes of some of the civilians present. There was quite a good sprinkling of French ladies there.

This is only the second opportunity I have had of hearing Mass since leaving the Base. I can assure you that it is

only when you cannot possibly attend Mass that you thoroughly appreciate the privileges you used to have when it was so easy to obtain them.

I did not see our Chaplain whilst in the trenches, and, so far, I've not met anybody who did. I merely state the fact without comment, as there is probably some reason for it. Much love to all!

## TWELTH LETTER

France,

26/6/16.

MY DEAR CHARLIE,

It is only now, after witnessing some of the horrors of war, that I can really appreciate the beauty of ordinary, quiet humanity. How curious it all is! Out here, I find a deep and almost religious significance in the beauty of a sunset, or the sight of a few flowers. It is good, for instance, to wake up on a fine morning in the trenches, and find that a silvery bloom is on the sky; and it makes you almost forget, sometimes, the noise and fury of a bombardment which has filled the air with its deafening roar during the night, and yet continues, unabated, at dawn. Just above me as I write, the sides of the trenches are sprinkled here and there with cornflowers and poppies. You can hardly credit how much they mean to you out here ! When at home I suppose I'd scarcely have noticed them, but here there is a certain solace in the rich red of the poppy growing wild there amidst the grass and fern. There is something peaceful about this little patch of God's freshness and beauty, as it stands there in startling contrast to the din and ghastliness of war. It seems to stand for Peace. Just think of it! This little emblem of Nature stands for Peace, Sanity and God— whilst the mad whirl of shells all about you stands for Twentieth Century Civilisation! Sometimes, when there is a lull of, perhaps, a few seconds in the firing, the tiny note of song from some little bird may be heard very distinctly. But there is, somehow, a splendour in that song—a sort of challenge from Nature for the supremacy of the air ! If, by the help of your prayers at home, I am spared to see you all again soon, I'll be able to tell you a good deal about both the light and the gruesome sides of war. Unfortunately, we are not allowed to keep diaries, but I've made a good many rough notes in the small red pocket book which Jim gave me before leaving for the Front, of course, I cannot send it by post, but I hope to bring it back with me soon.\*

Probably you have heard that, owing to the present great activity out here, letters and cards to home may be stopped so don't worry if you do not hear from me for a time.

We had an amusing instance to-day of the soldier who is completely nauseated (or, to use a colloquialism, " fed up ") with the war. He had been lying on the fire-step for an hour, when he sat up in order to scratch his head. Just as he did so, a bullet fired from an aircraft gun at an enemy aeroplane suddenly buried itself in the soil where his leg had lain. " Curse the thing, " said he, " I'm out o' luck every time—that would 'ave been a fine " blighty " for me ! "

Thank Annie very much for the last two parcels—they were most enjoyable ! Love to you all!

\* As his body was never found, the pocket book has not been recovered.

## THIRTEENTH LETTER

B.E.F., France.

6th July, 1916.

MY DEAR JIM,

My experiences are fast accumulating. Since last I wrote you I have been "over the top," and as a result of the charge (on July 1st)—through which, thank God, I came out unharmed—we took four lines of German trenches. Our own artillery had so effectively battered away Fritz's trenches, that we had hardly an Infantry opposition. Of course there was a perfect rain of shells and machine-gun fire, but we went through it in great style, and had few casualties in the actual charge. When we had dug ourselves in, the casualties in holding the trenches were, of



course, much heavier. I knew you were all praying for me, so felt confident that I wouldn't get hit. Fritz had retired on our approach, and there were only a few wounded and dead Germans in the first three lines. Just before we moved onward from the second line, one wounded man beckoned to me appealingly, but before I could give him water, we had the order to move on. Large numbers of the enemy gave themselves up as prisoners, and we captured one party which included a major and five officers.

One of our Battalions pushed on still further, and had a fierce brush with them, but managed to take possession of an important village; whilst other companies of ours took various strong positions behind the village. I cannot, of course, go into details, but the advance was a wonderful experience. I couldn't tell you beforehand that we would be in it, for obvious reasons; and consequently felt lonely whilst waiting for the word to go over, I was hoping that a letter would come just before we "popped the parapet" of the trenches, and I was thinking of you all very often whilst waiting. We are now at the back of the line again for a few days' rest, but it is rumoured that we shall soon go into the trenches again.

It is a curious thing that ten members of our Battalion Concert Party of fourteen are amongst the casualties, viz., three officers, three sergeants, three privates and a corporal. One of the Concert Party who was killed you will remember. He often appeared at the C.Y.M.S. Bohemian Concerts. I hear that he was blown to bits.

On the night before we went "over the top" it was suddenly announced that the Catholic Chaplain wanted to see all the Catholics in a "dug-out." Whilst waiting for the Chaplain, I noticed the soldier mentioned passing. Something made me run after him and tell him that the priest was expected up. He thanked me, but appeared to be doubtful as to whether he would wait with us, and then passed on, but when the priest came and gave us general absolution—a new privilege under present conditions—I noticed that he was present (I thought of this afterwards on hearing that he had been killed).

Many of our fellows got souvenirs. At one point the Germans made a counter-charge against our fellows, but were simply mown down with rapid fire. In one officer's "dug-out," when the prisoners were captured, it was noticed, whilst the place was being searched, that a young German officer was comfortably sleeping on the floor in a corner. Our fellows had probably thought that he was dead, and he had thus been passed over.

On suddenly awaking, the fright of finding the place in our possession must have been too much for him. He was a big, handsome blonde boy, and he burst into tears, and was apparently hysterical. When some of our fellows were looking for souvenirs, he offered them everything he had, except a pair of Rosary Beads, which he would not part with on any consideration. The prisoners were a very mixed lot—some very boyish, and some quite middle-aged men with beards. Our Division not only took its objective, but pushed further on—and we hear that the French on our left were equally successful.

It is a great experience to have come through, but there were some terrible sights. With an officer and another corporal I went out on a patrol towards the German trenches one night, and in one part you could not pass along without standing on the bodies of the dead.

You will be interested to know that I received your last letter in a very advanced portion of the German trenches, which we now occupy. I am glad to hear that all are well at home, and especially the pater. Tell him he has to be in great form when I come home to him again. I hear that Teddy Thomas was slightly wounded about two weeks ago, and it is rather curious that, although he was the last to come out, I am the only one of the set who has taken part in the Great Advance.

Thank you for the Recitation, strange to say, the fellow for whom it was wanted is now seriously wounded.

Whilst on this short rest, another of our Battalions, which is billeted close by, gave a Concert, which was a good "show." Their Concert Party never goes into the trenches, and spends most of its time practising. Whilst its own Battalion was going "over the top," the Concert Party was giving a show at the back of the line somewhere!

I spent a day with Harry Brady\* (yesterday). His Battalion acted as carriers to the Division—that is to say, they didn't come over till we had taken, and were holding the German trenches. They worked well then, and were, of course, under shell fire, but, on the whole, their casualties were light.

I am writing this letter under most difficult conditions, but I hope you will be able to read it.

I am longing to see you all again now, Jim. I seem to have been out here for ages!

It's rumoured that they are stopping the issue of green envelopes to us, I hope this letter will get through all right. My very best love to all at home!

\* Killed on the same day as the writer.

FOURTEENTH LETTER

France,

15/7/16.

MY DEAR ALICE,

I am so sorry for my long silence. If, as they say, silence is golden, I suppose I may be said to have given you wealth untold. For some time before the Advance began, it was (and even at the present time it is) a difficult thing to write at all. Frequently, letters are not collected, and we have to rest content with the despatch of a "field postcard" to let those at home know that we are quite safe. Under present circumstances, this state of things is quite inevitable, and, owing to the uncertainty of one's whereabouts, it is surprisingly good that one can even get a postcard through when you are "in the line."

I was so sorry to hear about the accident to your hand, and I sincerely hope it is getting rapidly better. It's strange that you, in peaceful England, should be a "casualty," whilst I should be uninjured after spending quite a long time in the trenches which used to belong to "Fritz," but now belong to us!

"Old Fritz" ran back for some miles, and often enough left his coat and other things behind him in his hurry! As our part in the charge has already been given prominence in the Press, I suppose the Censor will not object to my mentioning a little about it here, but, of course, I must not go into details. The extraordinary thing to me is how one can ever come through it without being bowled over in some way. Yet, when you had covered twenty yards or so, and found you were unhurt, you went on with great confidence, and the thing that struck you most was the fact that you were not struck! I think that the greatest sceptic would become a believer in miracles after coming through a charge unhurt. Apart from the fact that shells are falling on each side of you, you will notice sometimes that a big shell has fallen about thirty yards ahead, and just on the spot where you will pass.

Nevertheless, you pass right over this spot a couple of minutes later, and lo! nothing happens! even though the smoke from the last shell has hardly cleared away! But, strange to say, a charge is not nearly so bad as you picture beforehand in your imagination: and when we got the first halt at one of the German trenches, most of our fellows were coolly smoking, and looking at the scene about them in an interested sort of way. It was a funny thing to see in the midst of all the fire a little dog (who might have been as black as "Nigger" only that he was all white gambolling about quite playfully. Just as we halted, he came up, wagged his tail, and then sat down and surveyed us and the situation in general. Taking it all round, we had, not nearly so bad a time in the actual charge as we had in holding the trenches afterwards. Well, thank God, I have come through it all quite safely, and I am sure it is due to the many prayers said for me. Keep on praying, and I'll soon be safe at home with you all again. Poor Jim O'Neill was hit in the arm so badly with a shell, that, I am sorry to say, he will probably lose his right arm. I had been speaking to him only a few days before when I met him at the open-air service which was held for the Catholics. It was a most impressive sight to be present at Mass under such circumstances. An old table covered with a blanket was used for an altar. On each side of it was a candle stuck in the neck of an old bottle. One little white altar-cloth lying between the candles, together with a small wooden crucifix completed the picture! So that there was little pretension to a luxurious setting there! But nevertheless, it had the simple dignity which the Stable at Bethlehem must have had. Everyone present had received the general absolution, and there were great numbers received Holy Communion at the Mass. I came across many old faces there—Dan McCarthy,\* for instance, and several others.

Well, I suppose you are all tired of the war. It is consoling to know that it cannot last long now, at any rate. Tell Annie I received the last parcel quite safely, and it was fine! Best love to all!

\* Since killed in action.

FIFTEENTH LETTER

(To a friend.)

B.E.F., France,

21st July, 1916.

MY DEAR JOHN,

I am just taking advantage of a halt on our way to the trenches—our third visit there since we chased Fritz on July 1st—to exasperate you with a few remarks about the war in general. If, therefore, you have attempted to

forget all about the war by ignoring it in the papers, it is of little avail, for you are doomed to have it thrust upon you in the form of innocent correspondence.

Since the "big push" commenced, great changes have already taken place here. In this valley, for instance, through which we have just passed, a very small group of soldiers could not (before the advance) have walked in daylight without being shelled. Now, nearly every phase of Army life is represented there, and our own Division has just bivouacked for the night under the stars. This sleeping in the open would be ideal, if, unfortunately, the heat of the day in France was not invariably followed by the intense cold of the night. After dusk it was certainly a very picturesque sight to see dotted about the valley the flare of the camp fires which here and there glowed very cheerfully in the darkness. Now, as we are about to move off, this valley (to us who remember it a few weeks ago) is a wonderfully transformed scene indeed, literally packed with troops of every description—Cavalry, Artillery, Infantry, with transport of all kinds sweeping by. You will have heard something about the part we played in the advance, but you may be surprised to hear that our most trying times went both before and after the actual charge. For about 12 days we were helping the R.E.'s in the preparation for the advance—building-dressing stations, carrying trench ladders and bridging. During this time we were working mostly 'on top'—nearly always under observation—and often got shelled, as well as being under ordinary fire. On finishing each day, we had a weary walk back to our billets in a wood behind the line. Here we slept under canvas, and frequently were aroused from a deep sleep at night in order to seek shelter from the German shells.

We understood that it was usual for a Regiment that participated in a charge not to hold the trenches during the artillery bombardment which preceded it, but we went in and were present during the whole stress of it. Some of the R.E.'s, who had been through Neuve Chapelle, Loos, Hill 60, etc., said that the preparations were easily the biggest that had yet taken place. At any rate it lasted weeks, and apart from the deafening noise of our own guns (some of which were very close behind us) we had hardly any shelter against the brisk reply of the German artillery. So that when we stood at the foot of our ladders at dawn before the charge we had been through a gruelling time. We had known what it was to see young fellows with whom we had laughed and joked in training, carried past us in the trenches on stretchers; we had seen strong-nerved men turned into nervous wrecks through shell shock. I can cite you a remarkable case. During my very first period in the trenches, and in fact on a calm Sunday evening, just about the time you would be returning from Benediction at Waterloo, we were suddenly shelled in our front line trench. Quite unexpectedly a "whiz-bang" came over and burst just behind our firing bay. It was followed by a concentrated fire for the next, half-hour of something like 200 shells. How we escaped being wiped out was a miracle, for the soil was going into the air and covering us in its fall. Strange to say the casualties were very small—two killed and two wounded. One of the sentries was killed by a shell bursting on the parapet in front of him. While the strafing was still on, one of our fellows who was near the sentry lifted the body down and immediately took up the dead man's position on sentry. You can imagine the nerve a man would want for that, for the poor dead sentry was literally covered with blood. The point I am coming to is this: that during the recent bombardment I saw the very man who had taken the sentry's place. His nerves had just given way, and he had got shell shock. It was a terrible sight to see him then, crying, shaking and quaking, like a doddering old man, as he was led out of the trenches.

It would be a very difficult thing to adequately describe one's feelings just before the charge. As you stand there with your foot on the ladder, you feel that it will be a wonderful thing indeed if a bullet from one of those machine-guns which sweep the parapet ran miss you as you reach the top, but when the word comes, "up you go" without anything happening. Of course you have had your usual rum ration about half-an-hour before, but I can assure you that you don't get enough to make you feel like telling anybody the history of your past life, let alone getting to the stage of being drunk. At any rate, you push forward until you arrive at the remnants of the barbed wire. There are always portions of it that have escaped being cut, and the thing that struck me most just here was the amount of lurid language used by fellows who happened to get stuck. It was such glowing hot language that the wire should have melted away by itself under it. Through one fellow becoming entangled, he was hit with an explosive bullet which made an awful mess of his arm. On you go amidst the shells (some of which burst dangerously near you) and having advanced some 50 yards or so you become strangely cool and confident. We halted at the first line German trench which had practically been evacuated. The line in front of us had by this time reached the German second line. Whilst at this halt many of us lit cigarettes and viewed the situation generally. We were now in possession of three lines of German trenches and it all seemed so easy—much easier than when we had practised it behind the line. Of course shells were dropping all about us, but we took them philosophically, by this time the —, who were reserve carriers for us, had now come over too, and we watched them from the battered German trench as they came on with coils of barbed wire, ammunition, etc., over their shoulders. Sometimes you would see one of them coming forward laboriously with a big load. Suddenly a "Jack Johnson" would scream over our heads and appear to burst within 20 yards of the carrier. At any rate, the smoke from it would completely hide him from view. But presently it would clear away and you would again see him like the man "off to Philadelphia" striding forward with his "bundle on his shoulder," as though nothing had happened. Of course what made it all seem so easy was that Fritz had made "a strategic

retreat"—that is to say, he had run like the devil a few miles back.

There were great numbers gave themselves up as prisoners, and they did it in anything but a manly sort of way. When our line pushed on further, we found that the German 4th line was too congested, so had to dig ourselves in. The shelling was very bad just here, but not many of our fellows got hit. It was later on, when we were holding the trench we had dug, that we had a hot time, for the German artillery picked up the range very quickly, and were soon dropping shells right over the parapet. Most of us out here have a great respect for their artillery, but so far a contempt for their infantry. I never used to believe that they were merely mechanical fighters, as used to be said early in the war, but now I quite believe it. But they are infernally clever all the same. Personally, I believe they have been holding a great portion (if not all) of their front line practically without men. They have magnificent machine-gun emplacements in their trenches, and with a few of these scattered here and there about their front line, with a couple of men to work them, they keep up an incessant fire, and waste loads of ammunition. But it is all very effective in giving you an idea of their strength. I often used to wonder how it was that bullets were continually pattering away on our parapet. You would have thought that they had so many Army Corps opposite you. The curious thing was that our fellows when holding the trenches in the ordinary way hardly ever fired a shot. It didn't seem much use. You never by any chance saw a German. You could scarcely credit the fact that many of our boys had been in the trenches since last January, and had never fired a shot nor seen a German! I have heard of fellows having a shot at a rat running across "No Man's Land." But there is a certain sporting spirit about our men compared to theirs. For instance, you never by any chance see a German "on top," whereas our fellows almost overdo it. They will sometimes do it to escape walking through a wet and muddy trench, and I have been in a party going for rations, where the leader of the party led the way over the top, in order to avoid the inconvenience of pushing past a party coming in the opposite direction in a narrow trench. Again, we will face a bombardment of shells practically without cover in the trenches, but the Germans will always run, just as they did when our artillery battered their front line so badly that it was simply a collection of shell holes rather than a trench at the finish. Whilst the bombardment was going on, the Germans had retired about three miles back to their dug-outs. Their dug-outs are the last word in construction. We haven't anything like them. In a communication trench just past their fourth line, some of us were exploring on top when we came across two wonderful dug-outs in course of construction; they went down into the ground like mines, and we counted 50 wooden steps. We were going to use them that night if they happened to shell us, but things were quiet, as it happened.

By the way, you may not know that our Company Commander is Captain Whiting, so that Liverpool educational circles are well represented in our Battalion, You have probably heard that our C.S.M. Geller (now slightly wounded) was the Head Master of Clint Road School. Captain Whiting is probably the most popular Captain in the "Pals." He has just the right amount of discipline, as well as that human touch that, in my opinion at any rate, is even more important. He takes his risks with the best of them, and I have seen him walking about amongst the barbed wire very carelessly sometimes, when we have been digging on the top. When we "popped the parapet," he injured the muscle of his leg very badly, and was lame the whole of the time we were in the trenches. Nevertheless, he stuck it gamely right throughout, and amazed everybody by coming in with us again after we had only had a two days' rest,

Of course everybody here is simply sick and tired of it all by now, but they stick it splendidly, and will get a laugh out of the most trying circumstances. Some of us were arguing about the different kind of shells one day in the trenches, "That latest German shell wants licking," said one. "Which shell is that?" said another. "Ah!" said the first, "the Germans have brought out a new shell which has spectacles on—follows you round corners—and what it doesn't kill, it takes prisoners."

If I only had time I could say a lot about comparisons between the Infantry and the A.S.C., R.A.M.C., etc. A little chorus which is sung out here illustrates it to some extent. It runs:

"There's the —th King's in the firing line,  
And the R.F.A. behind them,  
But when you look for the A.S.C.  
I'm \*blowed if you can find them."

\* This word is sometimes varied.

note.—The Captain Whiting referred to was also killed in the action of July 30th. 1916, in which the writer fell.

SIXTEENTH LETTER

(To a friend.)

France,

23/7/16.

MY DEAR JUSTIN,

To understand something of the real ferment of war, you want to wander here and there about a modern battlefield after the fighting for preference. We had such a time yesterday, about three of us, on one of those beautiful evenings that you so often get out here, when a golden bloom is on the sky. It was immediately on the left of our own part of the line that we explored. To say that it must have been hellish there is no doubt hackneyed, but there is no phrase which describes it so well. Here, the Germans and our own front lines were in places only 20 yards apart, and it was a notorious place for mines. It was hard to realise even now that the Germans have been driven a long way back, and you almost unconsciously expected a bullet or a shell to come whizzing by you. Almost on top of our own front line, you come across the curious incongruities of warfare. For instance, you will pass over ground that is battered out of shape by shell fire, and then right next to it, perhaps, a piece of ground that is almost untouched, and upon which grow great bunches of poppies looking very fresh, their deep red showing out in great contrast to the green which surrounds them. You push on a bit further, avoiding shell holes and remnants of old wire, and suddenly you halt for a moment and examine a group of wooden crosses—about 50 of them. Our own men lie there. They have played their part well in the Great Advance, but there is more than pathos in the scene. As you leave it the birds still sing cheerfully in that beautiful sky above you, and you ponder upon the inevitable price of victory. Then you arrive at the old German line—or what used to be their line. It has been battered out of existence by our artillery, and is now a shapeless mass of shell holes. It has truly been said that the German trenches were subjected to a bombardment such as the war has not seen previously. To make it worse, the mines had also been active. Right between our own and their trenches there was a tremendous mine crater. Which side was responsible for it I know not, but if you can imagine that you are standing on the side and looking down into the depths of a deep quarry, you will have some idea of what it is like. It would be " God help " any poor fellows who happened to be holding either trench at the time. It is a wonderful tribute to the German dug-outs that, despite the violence of the bombardment, most of them were still intact when we collared their trenches. Even their mining shafts have electric plants for pumping air into them. But the soundness of their dug-outs did not entice many of the Germans to stay, and though the stench from some here and there told that there were dead inside, the dug-outs had mostly been evacuated. I don't know if you are aware that it is the usual thing for a charge to be made at either dawn or dusk, at which time it is usual to " stand-to." As a matter of fact, I think that a good deal of the success of the charge was due to the brilliant idea of letting the time for " stand-to " pass by, and going over suddenly and unexpectedly a couple of hours later !

I think we got old Fritz guessing, when we suddenly popped over in broad daylight (about 7-30) on a beautifully clear morning. The sight of about four lines of men coming over with flashing bayonets at an unexpected time must have completely upset his mechanical box of tricks —so he ran. Well, the Kaiser will now be able to say again to his troops "Courage, brave Germans. To-day you have been defeated, but not disgraced. To-morrow you must go forward to reverse that verdict." We have now seen pretty well every phase of soldiering out here, and are, not unnaturally, a bit weary of it all. The excitement of the advance has been in many respects a somewhat welcome relief to the weary months of warfare where you are always fighting an invisible foe. Still, the spirit of the fellows (particularly now, when we have such tangible proofs of victory) is wonderful, and they can always manage to see the cheerful side of things. In an atmosphere where one sees men killed with as little compunction as a fly is sent out of life with a flick of the hand; where one has to live for months in discomfort and dirt, it is not surprising that fellows will sometimes sigh for those privileges of home life, which used to be taken for granted, but which, I think, will never be viewed so again. We have come quite a lot into contact with the French soldiers out here, both in and out of the trenches. They are splendid fellows, and the most unconventional soldiers imaginable. They are no believers at all in ceremonial soldiering. You seldom see two of them dressed alike, and they sometimes remind you not a little of our greatest soldier of romance, D'Artagnan; especially when they are trying to convey to you their hatred of the Allemagne. It has been said that whilst they are great offensive fighters, they cannot hold what they win, but I think Verdun has proved whether or not they can fight on the defensive. The R.A.M.C. fellows attached to our Division did some pretty good work in the Advance, but by far the worst part of their work is done by our own stretcher bearers. Unfortunately,

the stretcher bearers haven't got the expert knowledge that the R.A.M.C. men have, and consequently the latter are much missed in the first line. There seems to be some rule which prevents them going in the first line. There are plenty of fine fellows amongst them.

We have a Lance-Corporal Nickle\* here, whom you may know. He is a very decent little fellow, has a good tenor voice, and is a member of our Concert Party, which appears in Pierrot costume.

The Photo of Lil and John has been very much admired out here. I hope that the originals are both keeping well, and that I will soon have the pleasure of seeing them again.

\* Killed on the same day as the writer.

#### THE ATTACK ON GUILLEMONT.

" Old soldiers who have been in action all over the line say our last engagement was the hottest action they have been in. The enemy sent over a lot of tear-shells and gas as we went up. It is horrible stuff, and we had to wear our gas helmets.

" We went ' over the top ' at 4-15 a.m., and advanced on the Germans. There was a very heavy mist, and we could not see more than twenty yards in front of us. We could not see the enemy, but their machine-guns were absolutely raining bullets at us, and it was so hot that we had to creep from shell-hole to shell-hole as we went on. We crossed two German trenches and found them piled up with dead."

(From a letter in the Liverpool Echo of August 11th, 1916, referring to the engagement of Sunday, July 30th, in which Lance-Corporal Quinn fell.)

#### IN MEMORIAM.

My Darling Brother, Lance-Corporal JOSEPH QUINN  
(Killed in Action, France, July 30th, 1916), R.I.P.

Dear Soul, dost thou live in Eternal Light,  
While thy corse lies cold 'neath the sod?  
Brave Spirit, passed from the mire-stained trench  
To the Great White Throne of God !

Great Heart, so spent in the stubborn fight !  
Hast thou ceased to beat for aye?  
O tender eyes with the old lovelight!  
Thou wilt sometimes glance our way ?  
Dear one, thou must know of our loneliness,  
And pity the tears we shed,  
We note no beauty in earth or sky,  
Since thou whom we loved art dead !

Yet brave, true Heart, thou dost bid us hope  
That, when Life's grim fight is done,  
We shall meet at the muster of Christ's array,  
When the final Victory's won !

ALICE.

2 Alexandra Road,  
Waterloo, near Liverpool,  
August 30th, 1916.

IN MEMORIAM.

Lance-Corporal JOSEPH QUINN  
(Killed in Action, France, July 30th, 1916), R.I.P.

On the red field of France, when his courage was high,  
In the drear grey mist of the morning,  
Fie sealed with his blood, when the foemen drew nigh,  
His Sacred Resolve of the dawning.

He thought not of Life when his duty shone clear,  
Though its path loomed up sodden with sorrow,  
But joyously gave all he cherished most dear,  
The Star of his Faith thus to Follow.

O, bury him there where the wild poppies grow,  
Though his grave may be lonely and nameless;  
His purified soul, unslain by the foe,  
Gains the crown of life that was blameless !

September 9th, 1916.

J.Q.

IN MEMORIAM.

For o'er our sun there came a cloud of gloom,  
When shout of War was blown across the lea :  
To thee, my love, it was the trump of doom :  
It was the trump of doom to thee and me.  
Now all return that shared our joy before,  
Of flower and sunshine, bough and singing bird;  
Only thy footstep cometh back no more,  
Only thy voice shall not again be heard.

The Summer has come back, but not for me :  
I do not even know thy place of rest,  
Or useless flowers might win some sanctity,  
By shedding bloom above so brave a breast.  
Somewhere the grass is springing o'er thy head,  
And so I'll love the grass and hold it sweet;  
And when, content, at last I too am dead,  
I'll have no other covering for my feet.

(From After The War, by Rosa Mulholland.)

IN MEMORIAM.

You were young and brave  
And fair in men's sight,  
Your smile was sweet, 'tis said,  
When you were lying dead.

And were you glad to go,  
O my heart, O my dear?  
The North wind brings the snow,  
And Winter's long down here;

And you are very far  
In lands where roses are.

I yearned so for your sake;  
Lying dead in your youth;  
My heart was like to break  
For pity and for ruth;  
    And the world's a changed place  
Without your eyes and face.

(From *In White Garments*, by Katharine Tynan.)

#### OUR STRICKEN BRAVE !

" Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam. — To these brave sons of St. Francis Xavier's College, Liverpool, who in the Great European War, for King and Country fought and died, to their old School brought honour, and claim our gratitude and prayers."\*

(Inscription on the Memorial Tablet in St. Francis Xavier's College.)

" And you, chivalrous, brave souls, we give you greeting to-day ! The tiny wooden cross on the battlefield may mark the resting place of your bodies, or the pathless seas may have opened to make space for them in their waters, or they may have resolved themselves into the elements before the ordinary lapse of time. We assemble you all together to-day in our minds and our hearts and in our loving thoughts. With the most solemn rite that the Church can use we have confided you to her care, and have begged God's mercy for you as we stood in the place of Jesus Christ Himself. Your relatives and friends, your old school-fellows and the boys who are treading in your footsteps, are gathered together to do you honour and to pray for you. Your comrades of the army are here, too, in force to offer their last salute, and all that vast number of your old school-fellows who are still on the fighting fronts abroad and training camps at home will be with you in mind to-day. You will no longer be nameless! Your old College will ever cherish your memory which this Tablet will record for all future students ! The vestibule of the College has now become a sacred spot, and, boys, I would ask you to impress this on your minds. It is consecrated to the memory of your former students — it is a constant if a silent appeal to you to face every difficulty without flinching where honour is at stake. And as you enter by these doors and doff your caps let it be a salute of respect to those who have taught you by their example of life is to be lived with a purpose and even to be surrendered when duty or honour demands. Let their example be enshrined in your memory for all time, and let it be an encouragement to lead you ever only to what is the highest and the best, without counting the cost.

And to you, the bereaved mother, the loving father, and those intimately related to our glorious band of heroes — you will be deeply conscious of the honour with which your boys are surrounded, proud of their actions, grateful for the affection manifested towards them. But this cannot altogether counter-balance the loss yourselves have sustained. In patient endurance show that you too can be as brave as they; and your religion will be a source of strength to you, relying on those beautiful teachings of the Catholic Church, doubting which you could not claim to be amongst her children. You are called upon to make them practical in your lives that they may sweeten the hardship of temporary separation. ' I believe in the Communion of Saints — the Resurrection of the Body — and Life everlasting. ' "

From the Address delivered by the Rev. Father Parry, S.J., February 3rd, 1917, on the occasion of the unveiling of the Memorial Tablet to the memory of the Old Xaverians who perished in the War.

\*Lance-Corporal Quinn was an " old boy " of St. Francis Xavier's College.