"That's one of 'em complaining now. Listen: 'Disheartening--most disheartening.' It's quite pathetic. Have you ever seen a spiritualistic seance? It reminds me of that sometimes--odds and ends of messages coming out of nowhere--a word here and there--no good at all."

"But mediums are all impostors," said Mr. Shaynor, in the doorway, lighting an asthma-cigarette. "They only do it for the money they can make. I've seen 'em."

"Here's Poole, at last--clear as a bell. L.L.L. Now we sha'n't be long." Mr. Cashell rattled the keys merrily. "Anything you'd like to tell 'em?"

"No, I don't think so," I said. "I'll go home and get to bed. I'm feeling a little tired."

THE ARMY OF A DREAM

SONG OF THE OLD GUARD

"And thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold of beaten work shall the candlestick be made: his shaft and its branches, his bowls, his knops, and his flowers, shall be the same.

"And there shall be a knop under two branches of the same, and a knop

under two branches of the same, and a knop under two branches of the same, according to the six branches that proceed out of the candlestick. Their knops and their branches shall be the same."--Exodus.

"Know this, my brethren, Heaven is clear
And all the clouds are gone--
The Proper Sort shall flourish now,
Good times are coming on"--
The evil that was threatened late
To all of our degree,
Hath passed in discord and debate,
And, Hey then up go we!

A common people strove in vain
To shame us unto toil,
But they are spent and we remain,
And we shall share the spoil
According to our several needs
As Beauty shall decree,
As Age ordains or Birth concedes,
And, Hey then up go we!

And they that with accursed zeal
Our Service would amend,
Shall own the odds and come to heel
Ere worse befall their end
For though no naked word be wrote

Yet plainly shall they see
What pinneth Orders to their coat,
And, Hey then up go we!

Our doorways that, in time of fear,
We opened overwide
Shall softly close from year to year
Till all be purified;
For though no fluttering fan be heard
Nor chaff be seen to flee--
The Lord shall winnow the Lord's Preferred--
And, Hey then up go we!

Our altars which the heathen brake
Shall rankly smoke anew,
And anise, mint, and cummin take
Their dread and sovereign due,
Whereby the buttons of our trade
Shall all restored be
With curious work in gilt and braid,
And, Hey then up go we!

Then come, my brethren, and prepare
The candlesticks and bells,
The scarlet, brass, and badger's hair
Wherein our Honour dwells,
And straitly fence and strictly keep

The Ark's integrity

Till Armageddon break our sleep ...

And, Hey then up go we!

THE ARMY OF A DREAM

PART I

I sat down in the club smoking-room to fill a pipe.

* * * * *

It was entirely natural that I should be talking to "Boy" Bayley. We had met first, twenty odd years ago, at the Indian mess of the Tyneside Tail-twisters. Our last meeting, I remembered, had been at the Mount Nelson Hotel, which was by no means India, and there we had talked half the night. Boy Bayley had gone up that week to the front, where I think he stayed a long, long time.

But now he had come back.

"Are you still a Tynesider?" I asked.

"I command the Imperial Guard Battalion of the old regiment, my son," he replied.

"Guard which? They've been Fusiliers since Fontenoy. Don't pull my leg, Boy."

"I said Guard, not Guard-s. The I. G. Battalion of the Tail-twisters. Does that make it any clearer?"

"Not in the least."

"Then come over to the mess and see for yourself. We aren't a step from barracks. Keep on my right side. I'm--I'm a bit deaf on the near."

We left the club together and crossed the street to a vast four-storied pile, which more resembled a Rowton lodging-house than a barrack. I could see no sentry at the gates.

"There ain't any," said the Boy lightly. He led me into a many-tabled restaurant full of civilians and grey-green uniforms. At one end of the room, on a slightly raised dais, stood a big table.

"Here we are! We usually lunch here and dine in mess by ourselves. These are our chaps--but what am I thinking of? You must know most of 'em. Devine's my second in command now. There's old Luttrell--remember him at Cherat?--Burgard, Verschoyle (you were at school with him), Harrison, Pigeon, and Kyd."

With the exception of this last I knew them all, but I could not remember that they had all been Tynesiders.

"I've never seen this sort of place," I said, looking round. "Half the men here are in plain clothes, and what are those women and children doing?"

"Eating, I hope," Boy Bayley answered. "Our canteens would never pay if it wasn't for the Line and Militia trade. When they were first started people looked on 'em rather as catsmeat-shops; but we got a duchess or two to lunch in 'em, and they've been grossly fashionable since."

"So I see," I answered. A woman of the type that shops at the Stores came up the room looking about her. A man in the dull-grey uniform of the corps rose up to meet her, piloted her to a place between three other uniforms, and there began a very merry little meal.

"I give it up," I said. "This is guilty splendour that I don't understand."

"Quite simple," said Burgard across the table. "The barrack supplies breakfast, dinner, and tea on the Army scale to the Imperial Guard (which we call I. G.) when it's in barracks as well as to the Line and Militia. They can all invite their friends if they choose to pay for them. That's where we make our profits. Look!"

Near one of the doors were four or five tables crowded with workmen in the raiment of their callings. They ate steadily, but found time to jest with the uniforms about them; and when one o'clock clanged from a big

half-built block of flats across the street, filed out.

"Those," Devine explained, "are either our Line or Militiamen, as such entitled to the regulation whack at regulation cost. It's cheaper than they could buy it; an' they meet their friends too. A man'll walk a mile in his dinner hour to mess with his own lot."

"Wait a minute," I pleaded. "Will you tell me what those plumbers and plasterers and bricklayers that I saw go out just now have to do with what I was taught to call the Line?"

"Tell him," said the Boy over his shoulder to Burgard. He was busy talking with the large Verschoyle, my old schoolmate.

"The Line comes next to the Guard. The Linesman's generally a town-bird who can't afford to be a Volunteer. He has to go into camp in an Area for two months his first year, six weeks his second, and a month the third. He gets about five bob a week the year round for that and for being on duty two days of the week, and for being liable to be ordered out to help the Guard in a row. He needn't live in barracks unless he wants to, and he and his family can feed at the regimental canteen at usual rates. The women like it."

"All this," I said politely, but intensely, "is the raving of delirium. Where may your precious recruit who needn't live in barracks learn his drill?"

"At his precious school, my child, like the rest of us. The notion of allowing a human being to reach his twentieth year before asking him to put his feet in the first position was raving lunacy if you like!" Boy Bayley dived back into the conversation.

"Very good," I said meekly. "I accept the virtuous plumber who puts in two months of his valuable time at Aldershot----"

"Aldershot!" The table exploded. I felt a little annoyed.

"A camp in an Area is not exactly Aldershot," said Burgard. "The Line isn't exactly what you fancy. Some of them even come to us!"

"You recruit from 'em?"

"I beg your pardon," said Devine with mock solemnity. "The Guard doesn't recruit. It selects."

"It would," I said, "with a Spiers and Pond restaurant; pretty girls to play with; and----"

"A room apiece, four bob a day and all found," said Verschoyle. "Don't forget that."

"Of course!" I said. "It probably beats off recruits with a club."

"No, with the ballot-box," said Verschoyle, laughing. "At least in all

R.C. companies."

"I didn't know Roman Catholics were so particular," I ventured.

They grinned. "R.C. companies," said the Boy, "mean Right of Choice. When a company has been very good and pious for a long time it may, if the C.O. thinks fit, choose its own men--all same one-piecee club. All our companies are R.C.'s, and as the battalion is making up a few vacancies ere starting once more on the wild and trackless 'heef' into the Areas, the Linesman is here in force to-day sucking up to our non-coms."

"Would some one mind explaining to me the meaning of every other word you've used," I said. "What's a trackless 'heef'? What's an Area? What's everything generally?" I asked.

"Oh, 'heefs' part of the British Constitution," said the Boy. "It began long ago when they'd first mapped out the big military manoeuvring grounds--we call 'em Areas for short--where the I. G. spend two-thirds of their time and the other regiments get their training. It was slang originally for beef on the hoof, because in the Military Areas two-thirds of your meat-rations at least are handed over to you on the hoof, and you make your own arrangements. The word 'heef' became a parable for camping in the Military Areas and all its miseries. There are two Areas in Ireland, one in Wales for hill-work, a couple in Scotland, and a sort of parade-ground in the Lake District; but the real working Areas are in India, Africa, and Australia, and so on."

"And what do you do there?"

"We 'heef' under service conditions, which are rather like hard work. We 'heef' in an English Area for about a year, coming into barracks for one month to make up wastage. Then we may 'heef' foreign for another year or eighteen months. Then we do sea-time in the war boats----"

"What-t?" I said.

"Sea-time," Bayley repeated. "Just like Marines,
to learn about the big guns and how to embark and disembark quick. Then we come back to our territorial headquarters for six months, to educate the Line and Volunteer camps, to go to Hythe, to keep abreast of any new ideas, and then we fill up vacancies. We call those six months 'Schools,' Then we begin all over again, thus: Home 'heef,' foreign 'heef,'
sea-time, schools. 'Heefing' isn't precisely luxurious, but it's on
'heef' that we make our head-money."

"Or lose it," said the sallow Pigeon, and all laughed, as men will, at regimental jokes.

"The Dove never lets me forget that," said Boy Bayley. "It happened last March. We were out in the Second Northern Area at the top end of Scotland where a lot of those silly deer forests used to be. I'd sooner 'heef' in the middle of Australia myself--or Athabasca, with all respect to the Dove--he's a native of those parts. We were camped somewhere near Caithness, and the Armity (that's the combined Navy and Army board that

runs our show) sent us about eight hundred raw remounts to break in to keep us warm."

"Why horses for a foot regiment?"

"I.G.'s don't foot it unless they're obliged to. No have gee-gee how can move? I'll show you later. Well, as I was saying, we broke those beasts in on compressed forage and small box-spurs, and then we started across Scotland to Applecross to hand 'em over to a horse-depot there. It was snowing cruel, and we didn't know the country overmuch. You remember the 30th--the old East Lancashire--at Mian Mir?

"Their Guard Battalion had been 'heefing' round those parts for six months. We thought they'd be snowed up all quiet and comfy, but Burden, their C. O., got wind of our coming, and sent spies in to Eschol."

"Confound him," said Luttrell, who was fat and well-liking. "I entertained one of 'em--in a red worsted comforter--under Bean Derig. He said he was a crofter. 'Gave him a drink too."

"I don't mind admitting," said the Boy, "that, what with the cold and the remounts, we were moving rather base over apex. Burden bottled us under Sghurr Mohr in a snowstorm. He stampeded half the horses, cut off a lot of us in a snow-bank, and generally rubbed our noses in the dirt."

"Was he allowed to do that?" I said.

"There is no peace in a Military Area. If we'd
beaten him off or got away without losing anyone, we'd have been entitled to a day's pay from every man engaged against us. But we didn't. He cut off fifty of ours, held 'em as prisoners for the regulation three days, and then sent in his bill--three days' pay for each man taken. Fifty men at twelve bob a head, plus five pounds for the Dove as a captured officer, and Kyd here, his junior, three, made about forty quid to Burden & Co. They crowed over us horrid."

"Couldn't you have appealed to an umpire or--or something?"

"We could, but we talked it over with the men and decided to pay and look happy. We were fairly had. The 30th knew every foot of Sghurr Mohr. I spent three days huntin' 'em in the snow, but they went off on our remounts about twenty mile that night."

"Do you always do this sham-fight business?" I asked.

"Once inside an Area you must look after yourself; but I tell you that a fight which means that every man-Jack of us may lose a week's pay isn't so damn-sham after all. It keeps the men nippy. Still, in the long run, it's like whist on a P. & O. It comes out fairly level if you play long enough. Now and again, though, one gets a present--say, when a Line regiment's out on the 'heef,' and signifies that it's ready to abide by the rules of the game. You mustn't take head-money from a Line regiment in an Area unless it says that it'll play you; but, after a week or two, those clever Linesmen always think they see a chance of making a pot, and

send in their compliments to the nearest I.G. Then the fun begins. We caught a Line regiment single-handed about two years ago in Ireland--caught it on the hop between a bog and a beach. It had just moved in to join its brigade, and we made a forty-two mile march in fourteen hours, and cut it off, lock, stock, and barrel. It went to ground like a badger--I will say those Line regiments can dig--but we got out privily by night and broke up the only road it could expect to get its baggage and company-guns along. Then we blew up a bridge that some Sappers had made for experimental purposes (they were rather stuffy about it) on its line of retreat, while we lay up in the mountains and signalled for the A.C. of those parts."

"Who's an A.C.?" I asked.

"The Adjustment Committee--the umpires of the Military Areas. They're a set of superannuated old aunts of colonels kept for the purpose, but they occasionally combine to do justice. Our A.C. came, saw our dispositions, and said it was a sanguinary massacre for the Line, and that we were entitled to our full pound of flesh--head-money for one whole regiment, with equipment, four company-guns, and all kit! At Line rates this worked out as one fat cheque for two hundred and fifty. Not bad!"

"But we had to pay the Sappers seventy-four quid for blowing their patent bridge to pieces," Devine interpolated. "That was a swindle."

"That's true," the Boy went on, "but the Adjustment Committee gave our helpless victims a talking to that was worth another hundred to hear."

"But isn't there a lot of unfairness in this head-money system?" I asked.

"Can't have everything perfect," said the Boy. "Head-money is an attempt at payment by results, and it gives the men a direct interest in their job. Three times out of five, of course, the A. C. will disallow both sides' claim, but there's always the chance of bringing off a coup."

"Do all regiments do it?"

"Heavily. The Line pays a bob per prisoner and the Militia ninepence, not to mention side-bets which are what really keep the men keen. It isn't supposed to be done by the Volunteers, but they gamble worse than anyone. Why, the very kids do it when they go to First Camp at Aldershot or Salisbury."

"Head-money's a national institution--like betting," said Burgard.

"I should say it was," said Pigeon suddenly. "I was roped in the other day as an Adjustment Committee by the Kemptown Board School. I was riding under the Brighton racecourse, and I heard the whistle goin' for umpire--the regulation, two longs and two shorts. I didn't take any notice till an infant about a yard high jumped up from a furze-patch and shouted: 'Guard! Guard! Come 'ere! I want you perfessionally. Alf says 'e ain't outflanked. Ain't 'e a liar? Come an' look 'ow I've posted my men.' You bet I looked. The young demon trotted by my stirrup and showed me his whole army (twenty of 'em) laid out under cover as nicely as you

please round a cowhouse in a hollow. He kept on shouting: 'I've drew Alf into there. 'Is persition ain't tenable. Say it ain't tenable, Guard!' I rode round the position, and Alf with his army came out of his cowhouse an' sat on the roof and protested like a--like a Militia Colonel; but the facts were in favour of my friend and I umpired according. Well, Alf abode by my decision. I explained it to him at length, and he solemnly paid up his head-money--farthing points if you please."

"Did they pay you umpire's fee?" said Kyd. "I umpired a whole afternoon once for a village school at home, and they stood me a bottle of hot ginger beer."

"I compromised on a halfpenny--a sticky one--or I'd have hurt their feelings," said Pigeon gravely. "But I gave 'em sixpence back."

"How were they manoeuvring and what with?" I asked.

"Oh, by whistle and hand-signal. They had the dummy Board School guns and flags for positions, but they were rushing their attack much too quick for that open country. I told 'em so, and they admitted it."

"But who taught 'em?" I said.

"They had learned in their schools, of course, like the rest of us. They were all of 'em over ten; and squad-drill begins when they're eight. They knew their company-drill a heap better than they knew their King's English."

"How much drill do the boys put in?" I asked.

"All boys begin physical drill to music in the Board Schools when they're six; squad-drill, one hour a week, when they're eight; company-drill when they're ten, for an hour and a half a week. Between ten and twelve they get battalion drill of a sort. They take the rifle at twelve and record their first target-score at thirteen. That's what the Code lays down. But it's worked very loosely so long as a boy comes up to the standard of his age."

"In Canada we don't need your physical drill. We're born fit," said Pigeon, "and our ten-year-olds could knock spots out of your twelve-year-olds."

"I may as well explain," said the Boy, "that the Dove is our 'swop' officer. He's an untamed Huskie from Nootka Sound when he's at home. An I. G. Corps exchanges one officer every two years with a Canadian or Australian or African Guard Corps. We've had a year of our Dove, an' we shall be sorry to lose him. He humbles our insular pride. Meantime, Morten, our 'swop' in Canada, keeps the ferocious Canuck humble. When Pij. goes we shall swop Kyd, who's next on the roster, for a Cornstalk or a Maori. But about the education-drill. A boy can't attend First Camp, as we call it, till he is a trained boy and holds his First Musketry certificate. The Education Code says he must be fourteen, and the boys usually go to First Camp at about that age. Of course, they've been to their little private camps and Boys' Fresh Air Camps and public school

picnics while they were at school, but First Camp is where the young drafts all meet--generally at Aldershot in this part of the world. First Camp lasts a week or ten days, and the boys are looked over for vaccination and worked lightly in brigades with lots of blank cartridge. Second Camp--that's for the fifteen to eighteen-year-olds--lasts ten days or a fortnight, and that includes a final medical examination. Men don't like to be chucked out on medical certificates much--nowadays. I assure you Second Camp, at Salisbury, say, is an experience for a young I.G. officer. We're told off to 'em in rotation. A wilderness of monkeys isn't in it. The kids are apt to think 'emselves soldiers, and we have to take the edge off 'em with lots of picquet-work and night attacks."

"And what happens after Second Camp?"

"It's hard to explain. Our system is so illogical. Theoretically, the boys needn't show up for the next three or four years after Second Camp. They are supposed to be making their way in life. Actually, the young doctor or lawyer or engineer joins a Volunteer battalion that sticks to the minimum of camp--ten days per annum. That gives him a holiday in the open air, and now that men have taken to endowing their Volunteer drill-halls with baths and libraries, he finds, if he can't run to a club, that his own drill-hall is an efficient substitute. He meets men there who'll be useful to him later, and he keeps himself in touch with what's going on while he's studying for his profession. The town-birds--such as the chemist's assistant, clerk, plumber, mechanic, electrician, and so forth--generally put in for their town Volunteer corps as soon as they begin to walk out with the girls. They like takin'

their true-loves to our restaurants. Look yonder!" I followed his gaze, and saw across the room a man and a maid at a far table, forgetting in each other's eyes the good food on their plates.

"So it is," said I. "Go ahead."

"Then, too, we have some town Volunteer corps that lay themselves out to attract promising youths of nineteen or twenty, and make much of 'em on condition that they join their Line battalion and play for their county. Under the new county qualifications--birth or three years' residence--that means a great deal in League matches, and the same in County cricket."

"By Jove, that's a good notion," I cried. "Who invented it?"

"C. B. Fry--long ago. He said in his paper, that County cricket and County volunteering ought to be on the same footing--unpaid and genuine. 'No cricketer no corps. No corps no cricketer' was his watchword. There was a row among the pro's at first, but C. B. won, and later the League had to come in. They said at first it would ruin the gate; but when County matches began to be pukka county, plus inter-regimental, affairs the gate trebled, and as two-thirds of the gate goes to the regiments supplying the teams some Volunteer corps fairly wallow in cash. It's all unofficial, of course, but League Corps, as they call 'em, can take their pick of the Second Camper. Some corps ask ten guineas entrance-fee, and get it too, from the young bloods that want to shine in the arena. I told you we catered for all tastes. Now, as regards the Line proper, I believe the young artisan and mechanic puts in for that before

he marries. He likes the two-months' 'heef' in his first year, and five bob a week is something to go on with between times."

"Do they follow their trade while they're in the Line?" I demanded.

"Why not? How many well-paid artisans work more than four days a week anyhow? Remember a Linesman hasn't to be drilled in your sense of the word. He must have had at least eight years' grounding in that, as well as two or three years in his Volunteer battalion. He can sleep where he pleases. He can't leave town-limits without reporting himself, of course, but he can get leave if he wants it. He's on duty two days in the week as a rule, and he's liable to be invited out for garrison duty down the Mediterranean, but his benefit societies will insure him against that. I'll tell you about that later. If it's a hard winter and trade's slack, a lot of the bachelors are taken into the I. G. barracks (while the I. G. is out on the heef) for theoretical instruction. Oh, I assure you the Line hasn't half a bad time of it."

"Amazing!" I murmured. "And what about the others?"

"The Volunteers? Observe the beauty of our system. We're a free people. We get up and slay the man who says we aren't. But as a little detail we never mention, if we don't volunteer in some corps or another--as combatants if we're fit, as non-combatants, if we ain't--till we're thirty-five we don't vote, and we don't get poor-relief, and the women don't love us."

"Oh, that's the compulsion of it?" said I.

Bayley inclined his head gravely. "That, Sir, is the compulsion. We voted the legal part of it ourselves in a fit of panic, and we have not yet rescinded our resolution. The women attend to the unofficial penalties. But being free British citizens----"

"And snobs," put in Pigeon.
"The point is well taken, Pij------we have supplied ourselves with every sort and shape and make of Volunteer corps that you can imagine, and we've mixed the whole show up with our Odd Fellows and our I.O.G.T.'s and our Buffaloes, and our Burkes and our Debretts, not to mention Leagues and Athletic Clubs, till you can't tell t'other from which. You remember the young pup who used to look on soldiering as a favour done to his ungrateful country--the gun-poking, ferret-pettin', landed gentleman's offspring--the suckin' Facey Romford? Well, he generally joins a Foreign Service Corps when he leaves college."

"Can Volunteers go foreign, then?"

"Can't they just, if their C.O. or his wife has influence! The Armity will always send a well-connected F.S. corps out to help a guard battalion in a small campaign. Otherwise F.S. corps make their own arrangements about camps. You see, the Military Areas are always open. They can 'heef' there (and gamble on head-money) as long as their finances run to it; or they can apply to do sea-time in the ships. It's a cheap way for a young man to see the world, and if he's any good he can try to get into the

Guard later."

"The main point," said Pigeon, "is that F.S. corps are 'swagger'--the correct thing. It 'ud never do to be drawn for the Militia, don't you know," he drawled, trying to render the English voice.

"That's what happens to a chap who doesn't volunteer," said Bayley. "Well, after the F.S. corps (we've about forty of 'em) come our territorial Volunteer battalions, and a man who can't suit himself somewhere among 'em must be a shade difficult. We've got those 'League' corps I was talking about; and those studious corps that just scrape through their ten days' camp; and we've crack corps of highly-paid mechanics who can afford a two months' 'heef' in an interesting Area every other year; and we've senior and junior scientific corps of earnest boilermakers and fitters and engineers who read papers on high explosives, and do their 'heefing' in a wet picket-boat--mine-droppin'--at the ports. Then we've heavy artillery--recruited from the big manufacturing towns and ship-building yards--and ferocious hard-ridin' Yeomanry (they can ride--now), genteel, semi-genteel, and Hooligan corps, and so on and so forth till you come to the Home Defence Establishment--the young chaps knocked out under medical certificate at the Second Camp, but good enough to sit behind hedges or clean up camp, and the old was-birds who've served their time but don't care to drop out of the fun of the yearly camps and the halls. They call 'emselves veterans and do fancy-shooting at Bisley, but, between you and me, they're mostly Fresh Air Benefit Clubs. They contribute to the Volunteer journals and tell the Guard that it's no good. But I like 'em. I shall be one of 'em some day--a copper-nosed was-bird! ... So you see

we're mixed to a degree on the Volunteer side."

"It sounds that way," I ventured.

"You've overdone it, Bayley," said Devine. "You've missed our one strong point." He turned to me and continued: "It's embarkation. The Volunteers may be as mixed as the Colonel says, but they are trained to go down to the sea in ships. You ought to see a big Bank-Holiday roll-out. We suspend most of the usual railway traffic and turn on the military time-table--say on Friday at midnight. By 4 A.M. the trains are running from every big centre in England to the nearest port at two-minute intervals. As a rule, the Armity meets us at the other end with shipping of sorts--fleet reserves or regular men of war or hulks--anything you can stick a gang-plank to. We pile the men on to the troop-decks, stack the rifles in the racks, send down the sea-kit, steam about for a few hours, and land 'em somewhere. It's a good notion, because our army to be any use must be an army of embarkation. Why, last Whit Monday we had--how many were down at the dock-edge in the first eight hours? Kyd, you're the Volunteer enthusiast last from school."

"In the first ten hours over a hundred and eighteen thousand," said Kyd across the table, "with thirty-six thousand actually put in and taken out of ship. In the whole thirty-six hours we had close on ninety thousand men on the water and a hundred and thirty-three thousand on the quays fallen in with their sea-kit."

"That must have been a sight," I said.

"One didn't notice it much. It was scattered between Chatham, Dover, Portsmouth, Plymouth, Bristol, Liverpool, and so on, merely to give the inland men a chance to get rid of their breakfasts. We don't like to concentrate and try a big embarkation at any one point. It makes the Continent jumpy. Otherwise," said Kyd, "I believe we could get two hundred thousand men, with their kits, away on one tide."

"What d'you want with so many?" I asked.

"We don't want one of 'em; but the Continent used to point out, every time relations were strained, that nothing would be easier than to raid England if they got command of the sea for a week. After a few years some genius discovered that it cut both ways, an' there was no reason why we, who are supposed to command the sea and own a few ships, should not organise our little raids in case of need. The notion caught on among the Volunteers--they were getting rather sick of manoeuvres on dry land--and since then we haven't heard so much about raids from the Continent," said Bayley.

"It's the offensive-defensive," said Verschoyle, "that they talk so much about. We learned it all from the Continent--bless 'em! They insisted on it so."

"No, we learned it from the Fleet," said Devine. "The Mediterranean Fleet landed ten thousand marines and sailors, with guns, in twenty minutes once at manoeuvres. That was long ago. I've seen the Fleet Reserve and a few

paddle-steamers, hired for the day, land twenty-five thousand Volunteers at Bantry in four hours--half the men sea-sick too. You've no notion what a difference that sort of manoeuvre makes in the calculations of our friends on the mainland. The Continent knows what invasion means. It's like dealing with a man whose nerve has been shaken. It doesn't cost much after all, and it makes us better friends with the great European family. We're now as thick as thieves."

"Where does the Imperial Guard come in in all this gorgeousness?" I asked. "You're unusual modest about yourselves."

"As a matter of fact, we're supposed to go out and stay out. We're the permanently mobilised lot. I don't think there are more than eight I.G. battalions in England now. We're a hundred battalions all told. Mostly on the 'heef' in India, Africa and so forth."

"A hundred thousand. Isn't that small allowance?" I suggested.

"You think so? One hundred thousand men, without a single case of venereal, and an average sick list of two per cent, permanently on a war footing? Well, perhaps you're right, but it's a useful little force to begin with while the others are getting ready. There's the native Indian Army also, which isn't a broken reed, and, since 'no Volunteer no Vote' is the rule throughout the Empire, you will find a few men in Canada, Australia, and elsewhere, that are fairly hefty in their class."

"But a hundred thousand isn't enough for garrison duty," I persisted.

"A hundred thousand sound men, not sick boys, go quite a way," said Pigeon.

"We expect the Line to garrison the Mediterranean Ports and thereabouts," said Bayley. "Don't sneer at the mechanic. He's deuced good stuff. He isn't rudely ordered out, because this ain't a military despotism, and we have to consider people's feelings. The Armity usually brackets three Line regiments together, and calls for men for six months or a year for Malta, Gib, or elsewhere, at a bob a day. Three battalions will give you nearly a whole battalion of bachelors between 'em. You fill up deficiencies with a call on the territorial Volunteer battalion, and away you go with what we call a Ports battalion. What's astonishing in that? Remember that in this country, where fifty per cent of the able-bodied males have got a pretty fair notion of soldiering, and, which is more, have all camped out in the open, you wake up the spirit of adventure in the young."

"Not much adventure at Malta, Gib, or Cyprus," I retorted. "Don't they get sick of it?"

"But you don't realise that we treat 'em rather differently from the soldier of the past. You ought to go and see a Ports battalion drawn from a manufacturing centre growin' vines in Cyprus in its shirt sleeves; and at Gib, and Malta, of course, the battalions are working with the Fleet half the time."

"It seems to me," I said angrily, "you are knocking esprit de corps on

the head with all this Army-Navy jumble. It's as bad as----"

"I know what you're going to say. As bad as what Kitchener used to do when he believed that a thousand details picked up on the veldt were as good as a column of two regiments. In the old days, when drill was a sort of holy sacred art learned in old age, you'd be quite right. But remember our chaps are broke to drill from childhood, and the theory we work on is that a thousand trained Englishmen ought to be about as good as another thousand trained Englishmen. We've enlarged our horizon, that's all. Some day the Army and the Navy will be interchangeable."

"You've enlarged it enough to fall out of, I think. Now where in all this mess of compulsory Volunteers----?"

"My dear boy, there's no compulsion. You've got to be drilled when you're a child, same as you've got to learn to read, and if you don't pretend to serve in some corps or other till you're thirty-five or medically chucked you rank with lunatics, women, and minors. That's fair enough."

"Compulsory conscripts," I continued. "Where, as I was going to say, does the Militia come in?"

"As I have said--for the men who can't afford volunteering. The Militia is recruited by ballot--pretty comprehensively too. Volunteers are exempt, but most men not otherwise accounted for are bagged by the Militia. They have to put in a minimum three weeks' camp every other year, and they get

fifteen bob a week and their keep when they're at it, and some sort of a yearly fee, I've forgotten how much. 'Tisn't a showy service, but it's very useful. It keeps the mass of the men between twenty-five, say, and thirty-five moderately fit, and gives the Armity an excuse for having more equipment ready--in case of emergencies."

"I don't think you're quite fair on the Militia," drawled Verschoyle. "They're better than we give 'em credit for. Don't you remember the Middle Moor Collieries' strike?"

"Tell me," I said quickly. Evidently the others knew.

"We-ell, it was no end of a pitman's strike about eight years ago. There were twenty-five thousand men involved--Militia, of course. At the end of the first month--October--when things were looking rather blue, one of those clever Labour leaders got hold of the Militia Act and discovered that any Militia regiment could, by a two-thirds vote, go on 'heef' in a Military Area in addition to its usual biennial camp. Two-and-twenty battalions of Geordies solemnly applied, and they were turned loose into the Irish and Scotch Areas under an I.G. Brigadier who had private instructions to knock clinkers out of 'em. But the pitman is a strong and agile bird. He throve on snowdrifts and entrenching and draggin' guns through heather. He was being fed and clothed for nothing, besides having a chance of making head-money, and his strike-pay was going clear to his wife and family. You see? Wily man. But wachtabittje! When that 'heef' finished in December the strike was still on. Then that same Labour leader found out, from the same Act, that if at any time more than

thirty or forty men of a Militia regiment wished to volunteer to do sea-time and study big guns in the Fleet they were in no wise to be discouraged, but were to be taken on as opportunity offered and paid a bob a day. Accordingly, about January, Geordie began volunteering for sea-time--seven and eight hundred men out of each regiment. Anyhow, it made up seventeen thousand men! It was a splendid chance and the Armity jumped at it. The Home and Channel Fleets and the North Sea and Cruiser Squadrons were strengthened with lame ducks from the Fleet Reserve, and between 'em with a little stretching and pushing they accommodated all of that young division."

"Yes, but you've forgotten how we lied to the Continent about it. All Europe wanted to know what the dooce we were at," said Boy Bayley, "and the wretched Cabinet had to stump the country in the depths of winter explaining our new system of poor-relief. I beg your pardon, Verschoyle."

"The Armity improvised naval manoeuvres between Gib and Land's End, with frequent coalings and landings; ending in a cruise round England that fairly paralysed the pitmen. The first day out they wanted the fleet stopped while they went ashore and killed their Labour leader, but they couldn't be obliged. Then they wanted to mutiny over the coaling--it was too like their own job. Oh, they had a lordly timel They came back--the combined Fleets anchored off Hull--with a nautical hitch to their breeches. They'd had a free fight at Gib with the Ports battalion there; they cleared out the town of Lagos; and they'd fought a pitched battle with the dockyard-mateys at Devonport. So they'd done 'emselves well, but they didn't want any more military life for a bit."

"And the strike?"

"That ended, all right enough, when the strike-money came to an end. The pit-owners were furious. They said the Armity had wilfully prolonged the strike, and asked questions in the House. The Armity said that they had taken advantage of the crisis to put a six months' polish on fifteen thousand fine young men, and if the masters cared to come out on the same terms they'd be happy to do the same by them."

"And then?"

"Palaver done set," said Bayley. "Everybody laughed."

"I don't quite understand about this sea-time business," I said. "Is the Fleet open to take any regiment aboard?"

"Rather. The I.G. must, the Line can, the Militia may, and the Volunteers do put in sea-time. The Coast Volunteers began it, and the fashion is spreading inland. Under certain circumstances, as Verschoyle told you, a Volunteer or Militia regiment can vote whether it 'heefs' wet or dry. If it votes wet and has influence (like some F.S. corps), it can sneak into the Channel or the Home Fleet and do a cruise round England or to Madeira or the North Sea. The regiment, of course, is distributed among the ships, and the Fleet dry nurse 'em. It rather breaks up shore discipline, but it gives the inland men a bit of experience, and, of course, it gives us a fairish supply of men behind the gun, in event of any strain on the Fleet.

Some coast corps make a specialty of it, and compete for embarking and disembarking records. I believe some of the Tyneside engineerin' corps put ten per cent of their men through the Fleet engine rooms. But there's no need to stay talking here all the afternoon. Come and see the I.G. in his lair--the miserable conscript driven up to the colours at the point of the bayonet."

PART II

The great hall was emptying apace as the clocks struck two, and we passed out through double doors into a huge reading and smoking room, blue with tobacco and buzzing with voices.

"We're quieter as a rule," said the Boy. "But we're filling up vacancies to-day. Hence the anxious faces of the Line and Militia. Look!" There were four tables against the walls, and at each stood a crowd of uniforms. The centres of disturbance were noncommissioned officers who, seated, growled and wrote down names.

"Come to my table," said Burgard. "Well, Purvis, have you ear-marked our little lot?"

"I've been tellin' 'em for the last hour we've only twenty-three vacancies," was the sergeant's answer. "I've taken nearly fifty for Trials, and this is what's left." Burgard smiled.

"I'm very sorry," he said to the crowd, "but C Company's full."

"Excuse me, Sir," said a man, "but wouldn't sea-time count in my favour? I've put in three months with the Fleet. Small quick-firers, Sir? Company guns? Any sort of light machinery?"

"Come away," said a voice behind. "They've chucked the best farrier between Hull and Dewsbury. Think they'll take you an' your potty quick-firers?"

The speaker turned on his heel and swore.

"Oh, damn the Guard, by all means!" said Sergeant Purvis, collecting his papers. "D'you suppose it's any pleasure to me to reject chaps of your build and make? Vote us a second Guard battalion and we'll accommodate you. Now, you can come into Schools and watch Trials if you like."

Most of the men accepted his invitation, but a few walked away angrily. I followed from the smoking-room across a wide corridor into a riding-school, under whose roof the voices of the few hundred assembled wandered in lost echoes.

"I'll leave you, if you don't mind," said Burgard. "Company officers aren't supposed to assist at these games. Here, Matthews!" He called to a private and put me in his charge.

In the centre of the vast floor my astonished eyes beheld a group of stripped men; the pink of their bodies startling the tan.

"These are our crowd," said Matthews. "They've been vetted, an' we're putting 'em through their paces."

"They don't look a bit like raw material," I said.

"No, we don't use either raw men or raw meat for that matter in the Guard," Matthews replied. "Life's too short."

Purvis stepped forward and barked in the professional manner. It was physical drill of the most searching, checked only when he laid his hand over some man's heart.

Six or seven, I noticed, were sent back at this stage of the game. Then a cry went up from a group of privates standing near the line of contorted figures. "White, Purvis, white! Number Nine is spitting white!"

"I know it," said Purvis. "Don't you worry."

"Unfair!" murmured the man who understood quick-firers. "If I couldn't shape better than that I'd hire myself out to wheel a perambulator. He's cooked."

"Nah," said the intent Matthews. "He'll answer to a month's training like a horse. It's only suet. You've been training for this, haven't you?"

"Look at me," said the man simply.

"Yes. You're overtrained," was Matthews' comment. "The Guard isn't a circus."

"Guns!" roared Purvis, as the men broke off and panted. "Number off from the right. Fourteen is one, three is two, eleven's three, twenty and thirty-nine are four and five, and five is six." He was giving them their numbers at the guns as they struggled into their uniforms. In like manner he told off three other guncrews, and the remainder left at the double, to return through the further doors with four light quick-firers jerking at the end of man-ropes.

"Knock down and assemble against time!" Purvis called.

The audience closed in a little as the crews flung themselves on the guns, which melted, wheel by wheel, beneath their touch.

"I've never seen anything like this," I whispered.

"Huh!" said Matthews scornfully. "They're always doin' it in the Line and Militia drill-halls. It's only circus-work."

The guns were assembled again and some one called the time. Then followed ten minutes of the quickest firing and feeding with dummy cartridges that was ever given man to behold.

"They look as if they might amount to something--this draft," said

Matthews softly.

"What might you teach 'em after this, then?" I asked.

"To be Guard," said Matthews.

"Spurs," cried Purvis, as the guns disappeared through the doors into the stables. Each man plucked at his sleeve, and drew up first one heel and then the other.

"What the deuce are they doing?" I asked.

"This," said Matthews. He put his hand to a ticket-pocket inside his regulation cuff, showed me two very small black box-spurs: drawing up a gaitered foot, he snapped them into the box in the heel, and when I had inspected snapped them out again.

"That's all the spur you really need," he said.

Then horses were trotted out into the school barebacked, and the neophytes were told to ride.

Evidently the beasts knew the game and enjoyed it, for they would not make it easy for the men.

A heap of saddlery was thrown in a corner, and from this each man, as he captured his mount, made shift to draw proper equipment, while the

audience laughed, derided, or called the horses towards them.

It was, most literally, wild horseplay, and by the time it was finished the recruits and the company were weak with fatigue and laughter.

"That'll do," said Purvis, while the men rocked in their saddles. "I don't see any particular odds between any of you. C Company! Does anybody here know anything against any of these men?"

"That's a bit of the Regulations," Matthews whispered. "Just like forbiddin' the banns in church. Really, it was all settled long ago when the names first came up."

There was no answer.

"You'll take 'em as they stand?"

There was a grunt of assent.

"Very good. There's forty men for twenty-three billets." He turned to the sweating horsemen. "I must put you into the Hat."

With great ceremony and a shower of company jokes that I did not follow, an enormous Ally Sloper top-hat was produced, into which numbers and blanks were dropped, and the whole was handed round to the riders by a private, evidently the joker of C Company.

Matthews gave me to understand that each company owned a cherished receptacle (sometimes not a respectable one) for the papers of the final drawing. He was telling me how his company had once stolen the Sacred Article used by D Company for this purpose and of the riot that followed, when through the west door of the schools entered a fresh detachment of stripped men, and the arena was flooded with another company.

Said Matthews as we withdrew, "Each company does Trials their own way. B Company is all for teaching men how to cook and camp. D Company keeps 'em to horse-work mostly. We call D the circus-riders and B the cooks. They call us the Gunners."

"An' you've rejected me," said the man who had done sea-time, pushing out before us. "The Army's goin' to the dogs."

I stood in the corridor looking for Burgard.

"Come up to my room and have a smoke," said Matthews, private of the Imperial Guard.

We climbed two flights of stone stairs ere we reached an immense landing flanked with numbered doors.

Matthews pressed a spring-latch and led me into a little cabin-like room. The cot was a standing bunk, with drawers beneath. On the bed lay a brilliant blanket; by the bed head was an electric light and a shelf of books: a writing table stood in the window, and I dropped into a low

wicker chair.

"This is a cut above subaltern's quarters," I said, surveying the photos, the dhurri on the floor, the rifle in its rack, the field-kit hung up behind the door, and the knicknacks on the walls.

"The Line bachelors use 'em while we're away; but they're nice to come back to after 'heef.'" Matthews passed me his cigarette-case.

"Where have you 'heefed'?" I said.

"In Scotland, Central Australia, and North-Eastern Rhodesia and the North-West Indian front."

"What's your service?"

"Four years. I'll have to go in a year. I got in when I was twenty-two--by a fluke--from the Militia direct--on Trials."

"Trials like those we just saw?"

"Not so severe. There was less competition then. I hoped to get my stripes, but there's no chance."

"Why?"

"I haven't the knack of handling men. Purvis let me have a half-company

for a month in Rhodesia--over towards Lake N'Garni. I couldn't work 'em properly. It's a gift."

"Do colour-sergeants handle half-companies with you?"

"They can command 'em on the 'heef.' We've only four company officers--Burgard, Luttrell, Kyd, and Harrison. Pigeon's our swop, and he's in charge of the ponies. Burgard got his company on the 'heef,' You see Burgard had been a lieutenant in the Line, but he came into the Guards on Trials like the men. He could command. They tried him in India with a wing of the battalion for three months. He did well so he got his company. That's what made me hopeful. But it's a gift, you see--managing men--and so I'm only a senior private. They let ten per cent of us stay on for two years extra after our three are finished--to polish the others."

"Aren't you even a corporal?"

"We haven't corporals, or lances for that matter, in the Guard. As a senior private I'd take twenty men into action; but one Guard don't tell another how to clean himself. You've learned that before you apply. ... Come in!"

There was a knock at the door, and Burgard entered, removing his cap.

"I thought you'd be here," he said, as Matthews vacated the other chair and sat on the bed. "Well, has Matthews told you all about it? How did our Trials go, Matthews?"

"Forty names in the Hat, Sir, at the finish. They'll make a fairish lot. Their gun-tricks weren't bad; but D company has taken the best horsemen--as usual."

"Oh, I'll attend to that on 'heef.' Give me a man who can handle company-guns and I'll engage to make him a horse-master. D company will end by thinkin' 'emselves Captain Pigeon's private cavalry some day."

I had never heard a private and a captain talking after this fashion, and my face must have betrayed my astonishment, for Burgard said:

"These are not our parade manners. In our rooms, as we say in the Guard, all men are men. Outside we are officers and men."

"I begin to see," I stammered. "Matthews was telling me that sergeants handled half-companies and rose from the ranks--and I don't see that there are any lieutenants--and your companies appear to be two hundred and fifty strong. It's a shade confusing to the layman."

Burgard leaned forward didactically. "The Regulations lay down that every man's capacity for command must be tested to the uttermost. We construe that very literally when we're on the 'heef.' F'r instance, any man can apply to take the command next above him, and if a man's too shy to ask, his company officer must see that he gets his chance. A sergeant is given a wing of the battalion to play with for three weeks--a month, or six weeks--according to his capacity, and turned adrift in an Area to make his

own arrangements. That's what Areas are for--and to experiment in. A good gunner--a private very often--has all four company-guns to handle through a week's fight, acting for the time as the major. Majors of Guard battalions (Verschoyle's our major) are supposed to be responsible for the guns, by the way. There's nothing to prevent any man who has the gift working his way up to the experimental command of the battalion on 'heef.' Purvis, my colour-sergeant, commanded the battalion for three months at the back of Coolgardie, an' very well he did it. Bayley 'verted to company officer for the time being an' took Harrison's company, and Harrison came over to me as my colour-sergeant. D'you see? Well, Purvis is down for a commission when there's a vacancy. He's been thoroughly tested, and we all like him. Two other sergeants have passed that three months' trial in the same way (just as second mates go up for extra master's certificate). They have E.C. after their names in the Army List. That shows they're capable of taking command in event of war. The result of our system is that you could knock out every single officer of a Guard battalion early in the day, and the wheels 'ud still go forward, not merely round. We're allowed to fill up half our commissioned list from the ranks direct. Now d'you see why there's such a rush to get into a Guard battalion?"

"Indeed I do. Have you commanded the regiment experimentally?"

"Oh, time and again," Burgard laughed. "We've all had our E.C. turn."

"Doesn't the chopping and changing upset the men?"

"It takes something to upset the Guard. Besides, they're all in the game

together. They give each other a fair show you may be sure."

"That's true," said Matthews. "When I went to N'Gami with my--with the half-company," he sighed, "they helped me all they knew. But it's a gift--handling men. I found that out,"

"I know you did," said Burgard softly. "But you found it out in time, which is the great thing. You see," he turned to me, "with our limited strength we can't afford to have a single man who isn't more than up to any duty--in reason. Don't you be led away by what you saw at Trials just now. The Volunteers and the Militia have all the monkey-tricks of the trade--such as mounting and dismounting guns, and making fancy scores and doing record marches; but they need a lot of working up before they can pull their weight in the boat."

There was a knock at the door. A note was handed in. Burgard read it and smiled.

"Bayley wants to know if you'd care to come with us to the Park and see the kids. It's only a Saturday afternoon walk-round before the taxpayer.... Very good. If you'll press the button we'll try to do the rest."

He led me by two flights of stairs up an iron stairway that gave on a platform, not unlike a ship's bridge, immediately above the barrelled glass roof of the riding-school. Through a ribbed ventilator I could see B Company far below watching some men who chased sheep. Burgard unlocked a

glass-fronted fire-alarm arrangement flanked with dials and speaking-tubes, and bade me press the centre button.

Next moment I should have fallen through the riding-school roof if he had not caught me; for the huge building below my feet thrilled to the multiplied purring of electric bells. The men in the school vanished like minnows before a shadow, and above the stamp of booted feet on staircases I heard the neighing of many horses.

"What in the world have I done?" I gasped.

"Turned out the Guard--horse, foot, and guns!"

A telephone bell rang imperiously. Burgard snatched up the receiver:

"Yes, Sir.... What, Sir?... I never heard they said that," he laughed, "but it would be just like 'em. In an hour and a half? Yes, Sir. Opposite the Statue? Yes, Sir."

He turned to me with a wink as he hung up.

"Bayley's playing up for you. Now you'll see some fun."

"Who's going to catch it?" I demanded.

"Only our local Foreign Service Corps. Its C.O. has been boasting that it's en tat de partir, and Bayley's going to take him at his word and

have a kit-inspection this afternoon in the Park. I must tell their drill-hall. Look over yonder between that brewery chimney and the mansard roof!"

He readdressed himself to the telephone, and I kept my eye on the building to the southward. A Blue Peter climbed up to the top of the flagstaff that crowned it and blew out in the summer breeze. A black storm-cone followed.

"Inspection for F.S. corps acknowledged, Sir," said Burgard down the telephone. "Now we'd better go to the riding-school. The battalion falls in there. I have to change, but you're free of the corps. Go anywhere. Ask anything. In another ten minutes we're off."

I lingered for a little looking over the great city, its huddle of houses and the great fringe of the Park, all framed between the open windows of this dial-dotted eyrie.

When I descended the halls and corridors were as hushed as they had been noisy, and my feet echoed down the broad tiled staircases. On the third floor, Matthews, gaitered and armed, overtook me smiling.

"I thought you might want a guide," said he. "We've five minutes yet," and piloted me to the sunsplashed gloom of the riding-school. Three companies were in close order on the tan. They moved out at a whistle, and as I followed in their rear I was overtaken by Pigeon on a rough black mare.

"Wait a bit," he said, "till the horses are all out of stables, and come

with us. D Company is the only one mounted just now. We do it to amuse the taxpayer," he explained, above the noise of horses on the tan.

"Where are the guns?" I asked, as the mare lipped my coat-collar.

"Gone ahead long ago. They come out of their own door at the back of barracks. We don't haul guns through traffic more than we can help.... If Belinda breathes down your neck smack her. She'll be quiet in the streets. She loves lookin' into the shop-windows."

The mounted company clattered through vaulted concrete corridors in the wake of the main body, and filed out into the crowded streets.

When I looked at the townsfolk on the pavement, or in the double-decked trams, I saw that the bulk of them saluted, not grudgingly or of necessity, but in a light-hearted, even flippant fashion.

"Those are Line and Militia men," said Pigeon. "That old chap in the top-hat by the lamp-post is an ex-Guardee. That's why he's saluting in slow-time. No, there's no regulation governing these things, but we've all fallen into the way of it somehow. Steady, mare!"

"I don't know whether I care about this aggressive militarism," I began, when the company halted, and Belinda almost knocked me down. Looking forward I saw the badged cuff of a policeman upraised at a crossing, his back towards us.

"Horrid aggressive, ain't we?" said Pigeon with a chuckle when we moved on again and overtook the main body. Here I caught the strains of the band, which Pigeon told me did not accompany the battalion on 'heef,' but lived in barracks and made much money by playing at parties in town.

"If we want anything more than drums and fifes on 'heef' we sing," said Pigeon. "Singin' helps the wind."

I rejoiced to the marrow of my bones thus to be borne along on billows of surging music among magnificent men, in sunlight, through a crowded town whose people, I could feel, regarded us with comradeship, affection--and more.

"By Jove," I said at last, watching the eyes about us, "these people are looking us over as if we were horses."

"Why not? They know the game."

The eyes on the pavement, in the trams, the cabs, at the upper windows, swept our lines back and forth with a weighed intensity of regard which at first seemed altogether new to me, till I recalled just such eyes, a thousand of them, at manoeuvres in the Channel when one crowded battleship drew past its sister at biscuit-toss range. Then I stared at the ground, overborne by those considering eyes.

Suddenly the music changed to the wail of the Dead March in "Saul," and once more--we were crossing a large square--the regiment halted.

"Damn!" said Pigeon, glancing behind him at the mounted company. "I believe they save up their Saturday corpses on purpose."

"What is it?" I asked.

"A dead Volunteer. We must play him through." Again I looked forward and saw the top of a hearse, followed by two mourning-coaches, boring directly up the halted regiment, which opened out company by company to let it through.

"But they've got the whole blessed square to funeralise in!" I exclaimed. "Why don't they go round?"

"Not so!" Pigeon replied. "In this city it's the Volunteer's perquisite to be played through by any corps he happens to meet on his way to the cemetery. And they make the most of it. You'll see."

I heard the order, "Rest on your arms," run before the poor little procession as the men opened out. The driver pulled the black Flanders beasts into a more than funeral crawl, and in the first mourning-coach I saw the tearful face of a fat woman (his mother, doubtless), a handkerchief pressed to one eye, but the other rolling vigilantly, alight with proper pride. Last came a knot of uniformed men--privates, I took it --of the dead one's corps.

Said a man in the crowd beside us to the girl on his arm, "There, Jenny!

That's what I'll get if I 'ave the luck to meet 'em when my time comes."

"You an' your luck," she snapped. "'Ow can you talk such silly nonsense?"

"Played through by the Guard," he repeated slowly. "The undertaker 'oo could guarantee that, mark you, for all his customers--well, 'e'd monopolise the trade, is all I can say. See the horses passagin' sideways!"

"She done it a purpose," said the woman with a sniff.

"An' I only hope you'll follow her example. Just as long as you think I'll keep, too."

We reclosed when the funeral had left us twenty paces behind. A small boy stuck his head out of a carriage and watched us jealously.

"Amazing! Amazing!" I murmured. "Is it regulation?"

"No. Town-custom. It varies a little in different cities, but the people value being played through more than most things, I imagine. Duddell, the big Ipswich manufacturer--he's a Quaker--tried to bring in a bill to suppress it as unchristian." Pigeon laughed.

"And?"

"It cost him his seat next election. You see, we're all in the game."

We reached the Park without further adventure, and found the four company-guns with their spike teams and single drivers waiting for us. Many people were gathered here, and we were halted, so far as I could see, that they might talk with the men in the ranks. The officers broke into groups.

"Why on earth didn't you come along with me?" said Boy Bayley at my side. "I was expecting you."

"Well, I had a delicacy about brigading myself with a colonel at the head of his regiment, so I stayed with the rear company and the horses. It's all too wonderful for any words. What's going to happen next?"

"I've handed over to Verschoyle, who will amuse and edify the school children while I take you round our kindergarten. Don't kill any one, Vee. Are you goin' to charge 'em?"

Old Verschoyle hitched his big shoulder and nodded precisely as he used to do at school. He was a boy of few words grown into a kindly taciturn man.

"Now!" Bayley slid his arm through mine and led me across a riding road towards a stretch of rough common (singularly out of place in a park) perhaps three-quarters of a mile long and half as wide. On the encircling rails leaned an almost unbroken line of men and women--the women outnumbering the men. I saw the Guard battalion move up the road flanking the common and disappear behind the trees.

As far as the eye could range through the mellow English haze the ground inside the railings was dotted with boys in and out of uniform, armed and unarmed. I saw squads here, half-companies there; then three companies in an open space, wheeling with stately steps; a knot of drums and fifes near the railings unconcernedly slashing their way across popular airs; and a batch of gamins labouring through some extended attack destined to be swept aside by a corps crossing the ground at the double. They broke out of furze bushes, ducked over hollows and bunkers, held or fell away from hillocks and rough sandbanks till the eye wearied of their busy legs.

Bayley took me through the railings, and gravely returned the salute of a freckled twelve-year-old near by.

"What's your corps?" said the Colonel of that Imperial Guard battalion to that child.

"Eighth District Board School, fourth standard, Sir. We aren't out to-day." Then, with a twinkle, "I go to First Camp next year."

"What are those boys yonder--that squad at the double?"

"Jewboys, Sir. Jewish Voluntary Schools, Sir."

"And that full company extending behind the three elms to the south-west?"

"Private day-schools, Sir, I think. Judging distance, Sir."

"Can you come with us?"

"Certainly, Sir."

"Here's the raw material at the beginning of the process," said Bayley to me.

We strolled on towards the strains of "A Bicycle Built for Two," breathed jerkily into a mouth-organ by a slim maid of fourteen. Some dozen infants with clenched fists and earnest legs were swinging through the extension movements which that tune calls for. A stunted hawthorn overhung the little group, and from a branch a dirty white handkerchief flapped in the breeze. The girl blushed, scowled, and wiped the mouth-organ on her sleeve as we came up.

"We're all waiting for our big bruvvers," piped up one bold person in blue breeches--seven if he was a day.

"It keeps 'em quieter, Sir," the maiden lisped. "The others are with the regiments."

"Yeth, and they've all lots of blank for you," said the gentleman in blue breeches ferociously.

"Oh, Artie! 'Ush!" the girl cried.

"But why have they lots of blank for us?" Bayley asked. Blue Breeches

stood firm.

"'Cause--'cause the Guard's goin' to fight the Schools this afternoon; but my big bruvver says they'll be dam-well surprised."

"Artie!" The girl leaped towards him. "You know your ma said I was to smack----"

"Don't. Please don't," said Bayley, pink with suppressed mirth. "It was all my fault. I must tell old Verschoyle this. I've surprised his plan out of the mouths of babes and sucklings."

"What plan?"

"Old Vee has taken the battalion up to the top of the common, and he told me he meant to charge down through the kids, but they're on to him already. He'll be scuppered. The Guard will be scuppered!"

Here Blue Breeches, overcome by the reproof of his fellows, began to weep.

"I didn't tell," he roared. "My big bruvver he knew when he saw them go up the road..."

"Never mind! Never mind, old man," said Bayley soothingly. "I'm not fighting to-day. It's all right."

He rightened it yet further with sixpence, and left that band loudly at

feud over the spoil.

"Oh, Vee! Vee the strategist," he chuckled. "We'll pull Vee's leg to-night."

Our freckled friend of the barriers doubled up behind us.

"So you know that my battalion is charging down the ground," Bayley demanded.

"Not for certain, Sir, but we're preparin' for the worst," he answered with a cheerful grin. "They allow the Schools a little blank ammunition after we've passed the third standard; and we nearly always bring it on to the ground of Saturdays."

"The deuce you do! Why?"

"On account of these amateur Volunteer corps, Sir. They're always experimentin' upon us, Sir, comin' over from their ground an' developin' attacks on our flanks. Oh, it's chronic 'ere of a Saturday sometimes, unless you flag yourself."

I followed his eye and saw white flags fluttering before a drum and fife band and a knot of youths in sweaters gathered round the dummy breech of a four-inch gun which they were feeding at express rates.

"The attacks don't interfere with you if you flag yourself, Sir," the boy

explained. "That's a Second Camp team from the Technical Schools loading against time for a bet."

We picked our way deviously through the busy groups. Apparently it was not etiquette to notice a Guard officer, and the youths at the twenty-five pounder were far too busy to look up. I watched the cleanly finished hoist and shove-home of the full-weight shell from a safe distance, when I became aware of a change among the scattered boys on the common, who disappeared among the hillocks to an accompaniment of querulous whistles. A boy or two on bicycles dashed from corps to corps, and on their arrival each corps seemed to fade away.

The youths at loading practice did not pause for the growing hush round them, nor did the drum and fife band drop a single note. Bayley exploded afresh. "The Schools are preparing for our attack, by Jove! I wonder who's directin' 'em. Do you know?"

The warrior of the Eighth District looked up shrewdly.

"I saw Mr. Cameron speaking to Mr. Levitt just as the Guard went up the road. 'E's our 'ead-master, Mr. Cameron, but Mr. Levitt, of the Sixth District, is actin' as senior officer on the ground this Saturday. Most likely Mr. Levitt is commandin'."

"How many corps are there here?" I asked.

"Oh, bits of lots of 'em--thirty or forty, p'r'aps, Sir. But the whistles

says they've all got to rally on the Board Schools. 'Ark! There's the whistle for the Private Schools! They've been called up the ground at the double."

"Stop!" cried a bearded man with a watch, and the crews dropped beside the breech wiping their brows and panting.

"Hullo! there's some attack on the Schools," said one. "Well, Marden, you owe me three half-crowns. I've beaten your record. Pay up."

The boy beside us tapped his foot fretfully as he eyed his companions melting among the hillocks, but the gun-team adjusted their bets without once looking up.

The ground rose a little to a furze-crowned ridge in the centre so that I could not see the full length of it, but I heard a faint bubble of blank in the distance.

"The Saturday allowance," murmured Bayley. "War's begun, but it wouldn't be etiquette for us to interfere. What are you saying, my child?"

"Nothin', Sir, only--only I don't think the Guard will be able to come through on so narrer a front, Sir. They'll all be jammed up be'ind the ridge if we've got there in time. It's awful sticky for guns at the end of our ground, Sir."

"I'm inclined to think you're right, Moltke. The Guard is hung up:

distinctly so. Old Vee will have to cut his way through. What a pernicious amount of blank the kids seem to have!"

It was quite a respectable roar of battle that rolled among the hillocks for ten minutes, always out of our sight. Then we heard the "Cease Fire" over the ridge.

"They've sent for the Umpires," the Board School boy squeaked, dancing on one foot. "You've been hung up, Sir. I--I thought the sand-pits 'ud stop you."

Said one of the jerseyed hobbledehoys at the gun, slipping on his coat: "Well, that's enough for this afternoon. I'm off," and moved to the railings without even glancing towards the fray.

"I anticipate the worst," said Bayley with gravity after a few minutes. "Hullo! Here comes my disgraced corps!"

The Guard was pouring over the ridge--a disorderly mob--horse, foot, and guns mixed, while from every hollow of the ground about rose small boys cheering shrilly. The outcry was taken up by the parents at the railings, and spread to a complete circle of cheers, handclappings, and waved handkerchiefs.

Our Eighth District private cast away restraint and openly capered. "We got 'em! We got 'em!" he squealed.

The grey-green flood paused a fraction of a minute and drew itself into shape, coming to rest before Bayley. Verschoyle saluted.

"Vee, Vee," said Bayley. "Give me back my legions. Well, I hope you're proud of yourself?"

"The little beasts were ready for us. Deuced well posted too," Verschoyle replied. "I wish you'd seen that first attack on our flank. Rather impressive. Who warned 'em?"

"I don't know. I got my information from a baby in blue plush breeches. Did they do well?"

"Very decently indeed. I've complimented their C.O. and buttered the whole boiling." He lowered his voice. "As a matter o' fact, I halted five good minutes to give 'em time to get into position."

"Well, now we can inspect our Foreign Service corps. We sha'n't need the men for an hour, Vee."

"Very good, Sir. Colour-sergeants!" cried Verschoyle, raising his voice, and the cry ran from company to company. Whereupon the officers left their men, people began to climb over the railings, and the regiment dissolved among the spectators and the school corps of the city.

"No sense keeping men standing when you don't need 'em," said Bayley. "Besides, the Schools learn more from our chaps in an afternoon than they

can pick up in a month's drill. Look at those Board-schoolmaster captains buttonholing old Purvis on the art of war!"

"Wonder what the evening papers'll say about this," said Pigeon.

"You'll know in half an hour," Burgard laughed. "What possessed you to take your ponies across the sand-pits, Pij?"

"Pride. Silly pride," said the Canadian.

We crossed the common to a very regulation paradeground overlooked by a statue of our Queen. Here were carriages, many and elegant, filled with pretty women, and the railings were lined with frockcoats and top hats. "This is distinctly social," I suggested to Kyd.

"Ra-ather. Our F.S. corps is nothing if not correct, but Bayley'll sweat 'em all the same."

I saw six companies drawn up for inspection behind lines of long sausage-shaped kit-bags. A band welcomed us with "A Life on the Ocean Wave."

"What cheek!" muttered Verschoyle. "Give 'em beans, Bayley."

"I intend to," said the Colonel, grimly. "Will each of you fellows take a company, please, and inspect 'em faithfully. 'En état de partir' is their little boast, remember. When you've finished you can give 'em a little pillow-fighting."

"What does the single cannon on those men's sleeves mean?" I asked.

"That they're big gun-men, who've done time with the Fleet," Bayley returned. "Any F.S. corps that has over twenty per cent big-gun men thinks itself entitled to play 'A Life on the Ocean Wave'--when it's out of hearing of the Navy."

"What beautiful stuff they are! What's their regimental average?"

"It ought to be five eight, height, thirty-eight, chest, and twenty-four years, age. What is it?" Bayley asked of a Private.

"Five nine and half, Sir, thirty-nine, twenty-four and a half," was the reply, and he added insolently, "En tat de partir." Evidently that F.S. corps was on its mettle ready for the worst.

"What about their musketry average?" I went on.

"Not my pidgin," said Bayley. "But they wouldn't be in the corps a day if they couldn't shoot; I know that much. Now I'm going to go through 'em for socks and slippers."

The kit-inspection exceeded anything I had ever dreamed. I drifted from company to company while the Guard officers oppressed them. Twenty per cent, at least, of the kits were shovelled out on the grass and gone through in detail.

"What have they got jumpers and ducks for?" I asked of Harrison.

"For Fleet work, of course. En tat de partir with an F. S. corps means they are amphibious."

"Who gives 'em their kit--Government?"

"There is a Government allowance, but no C. O. sticks to it. It's the same as paint and gold-leaf in the Navy. It comes out of some one's pockets. How much does your kit cost you?"--this to the private in front of us.

"About ten or fifteen quid every other year, I suppose," was the answer.

"Very good. Pack your bag--quick."

The man knelt, and with supremely deft hands returned all to the bag, lashed and tied it, and fell back.

"Arms," said Harrison. "Strip and show ammunition."

The man divested himself of his rolled greatcoat and haversack with one wriggle, as it seemed to me; a twist of a screw removed the side plate of the rifle breech (it was not a bolt action). He handed it to Harrison with one hand, and with the other loosed his clip-studded belt.

"What baby cartridges!" I exclaimed. "No bigger than bulletted breech-

caps."

"They're the regulation .256," said Harrison. "No one has complained of 'em yet. They expand a bit when they arrive.... Empty your bottle, please, and show your rations."

The man poured out his water-bottle and showed the two-inch emergency tin.

Harrison passed on to the next, but I was fascinated by the way in which the man re-established himself amid his straps and buckles, asking no help from either side.

"How long does it take you to prepare for inspection?" I asked him.

"Well, I got ready this afternoon in twelve minutes," he smiled. "I didn't see the storm-cone till half-past three. I was at the Club."

"Weren't a good many of you out of town?"

"Not this Saturday. We knew what was coming. You see, if we pull through the inspection we may move up one place on the roster for foreign service.... You'd better stand back. We're going to pillow-fight."

The companies stooped to the stuffed kit-bags, doubled with them variously, piled them in squares and mounds, passed them from shoulder to shoulder like buckets at a fire, and repeated the evolution.

"What's the idea?" I asked of Verschoyle, who, arms folded behind him, was controlling the display. Many women had descended from the carriages, and were pressing in about us admiringly.

"For one thing, it's a fair test of wind and muscle, and for another it saves time at the docks. We'll suppose this first company to be drawn up on the dock-head and those five others still in the troop-train. How would you get their kit into the ship?"

"Fall 'em all in on the platform, march'em to the gangways," I answered, "and trust to Heaven and a fatigue party to gather the baggage and drunks in later."

"Ye-es, and have half of it sent by the wrong trooper. I know that game," Verschoyle drawled. "We don't play it any more. Look!"

He raised his voice, and five companies, glistening a little and breathing hard, formed at right angles to the sixth, each man embracing his sixty-pound bag.

"Pack away," cried Verschoyle, and the great bean-bag game (I can compare it to nothing else) began. In five minutes every bag was passed along either arm of the T and forward down the sixth company, who passed, stacked, and piled them in a great heap. These were followed by the rifles, belts, greatcoats, and knapsacks, so that in another five minutes the regiment stood, as it were, stripped clean.

"Of course on a trooper there'd be a company below stacking the kit away," said Verschoyle, "but that wasn't so bad."

"Bad!" I cried. "It was miraculous!"

"Circus-work--all circus-work!" said Pigeon. "It won't prevent 'em bein' sick as dogs when the ship rolls." The crowd round us applauded, while the men looked meekly down their self-conscious noses.

A little grey-whiskered man trotted up to the Boy.

"Have we made good, Bayley?" he said. "Are we en tat de partir?"

"That's what I shall report," said Bayley, smiling.

"I thought my bit o' French 'ud draw you," said the little man, rubbing his hands.

"Who is he?" I whispered to Pigeon.

"Ramsay--their C.O. An old Guard captain. A keen little devil. They say he spends six hundred a year on the show. He used to be in the Lincolns till he came into his property."

"Take 'em home an' make 'em drunk," I heard Bayley say. "I suppose you'll have a dinner to celebrate. But you may as well tell the officers of E company that I don't think much of them. I sha'n't report it, but their

men were all over the shop."

"Well, they're young, you see," Colonel Ramsay began.

"You're quite right. Send 'em to me and I'll talk to 'em. Youth is the time to learn."

"Six hundred a year," I repeated to Pigeon. "That must be an awful tax on a man. Worse than in the old volunteering days."

"That's where you make your mistake," said Verschoyle. "In the old days a man had to spend his money to coax his men to drill because they weren't the genuine article. You know what I mean. They made a favour of putting in drills, didn't they? And they were, most of 'em, the children we have to take over at Second Camp, weren't they? Well, now that a C. O. is sure of his men, now that he hasn't to waste himself in conciliating an' bribin', an' beerin' kids, he doesn't care what he spends on his corps, because every pound tells. Do you understand?"

"I see what you mean, Vee. Having the male material guaranteed----"

"And trained material at that," Pigeon put in. "Eight years in the schools, remember, as well as----"

"Precisely. A man rejoices in working them up. That's as it should be," I said.

"Bayly's saying the very same to those F. S. pups," said Verschoyle.

The Boy was behind us, between two young F. S. officers, a hand on the shoulder of each.

"Yes, that's all doocid interesting," he growled paternally. "But you forget, my sons, now that your men are bound to serve, you're trebly bound to put a polish on 'em. You've let your company simply go to seed. Don't try and explain. I've told all those lies myself in my time. It's only idleness. I know. Come and lunch with me to-morrow and I'll give you a wrinkle or two in barracks." He turned to me.

"Suppose we pick up Vee's defeated legion and go home. You'll dine with us to-night. Good-bye, Ramsay. Yes, you're en état de partir, right enough. You'd better get Lady Gertrude to talk to the Armity if you want the corps sent foreign. I'm no politician."

We strolled away from the great white statue of the Widow, with sceptre, orb, and crown, that looked toward the city, and regained the common, where the Guard battalion walked with the female of its species and the children of all its relatives. At sight of the officers the uniforms began to detach themselves and gather in companies. A Board School corps was moving off the ground, headed by its drums and fifes, which it assisted with song. As we drew nearer we caught the words, for they were launched with intention:--

'Oo is it mashes the country nurse?

The Guardsman!

'Oo is it takes the lydy's purse?

The Guardsman!

Calls for a drink, and a mild cigar,

Batters a sovereign down on the bar,

Collars the change and says "Ta-ta!"

The Guardsman!

"Why, that's one of old Jemmy Fawne's songs. I haven't heard it in ages," I began.

"Little devils!" said Pigeon.

"Speshul! Extra speshul! Sports Edition!" a newsboy cried. "'Ere y'are, Captain. Defeat o' the Guard!"

"I'll buy a copy," said the Boy, as Pigeon blushed wrathfully. "I must, to see how the Dove lost his mounted company." He unfolded the flapping sheet and we crowded round it.

"'Complete Rout of the Guard,'" he read. "'Too Narrow a Front.' That's one for you, Vee! 'Attack Anticipated by Mr. Levitt, B. A.' Aha! 'The Schools Stand Fast.'"

"Here's another version," said Kyd, waving a tinted sheet. "'To your tents, O Israel! The Hebrew Schools stop the Mounted Troops.' Pij, were you scuppered by Jewboys?"

"'Umpires Decide all Four Guns Lost,'" Bayley went on. "By Jove, there'll have to be an inquiry into this regrettable incident, Vee!"

"I'll never try to amuse the kids again," said the baited Verschoyle. "Children and newspapers are low things.... And I was hit on the nose by a wad, too! They oughtn't to be allowed blank ammunition!"

So we leaned against the railings in the warm twilight haze while the battalion, silently as a shadow, formed up behind us ready to be taken over. The heat, the hum of the great city, as it might have been the hum of a camped army, the creaking of the belts, and the well-known faces bent above them, brought back to me the memory of another evening, years ago, when Verschoyle and I waited for news of guns missing in no sham fight.

"A regular Sanna's Post, isn't it?" I said at last. "D'you remember, Vee--by the market-square--that night when the wagons went out?"

Then it came upon me, with no horror, but a certain mild wonder, that we had waited, Vee and I, that night for the body of Boy Bayley; and that Vee himself had died of typhoid in the spring of 1902. The rustling of the papers continued, but Bayley, shifting slightly, revealed to me the three-day old wound on his left side that had soaked the ground about him. I saw Pigeon fling up a helpless arm as to guard himself against a spatter of shrapnel, and Luttrell with a foolish tight-lipped smile lurched over all in one jointless piece. Only old Vee's honest face held steady for awhile against the darkness that had swallowed up the battalion behind us. Then his jaw dropped and the face stiffened, so that a fly made bold to explore

the puffed and scornful nostril.

* * * * *

I waked brushing a fly from my nose, and saw the Club waiter set out the evening papers on the table.

"THEY"

THE RETURN OF THE CHILDREN

Neither the harps nor the crowns amused, nor the cherubs' dove-winged races--
Holding hands forlornly the Children wandered beneath the Dome;
Plucking the radiant robes of the passers by, and with pitiful faces
Begging what Princes and Powers refused:--"Ah, please will you let us go home?"

Over the jewelled floor, nigh weeping, ran to them Mary the Mother,
Kneeled and caressed and made promise with kisses, and drew them along to the gateway--
Yea, the all-iron unbribable Door which Peter must guard and none other.
Straightway She took the Keys from his keeping, and opened and freed