"FOR the fourteenth morning in succession I rise to a point of order. Why is there no marmalade?" The Dóctor glared round the breakfast table. "I perceive a pot of unhealthy-looking damson, and a tin of golden syrup, the greater part of which now adorns the infant's face. Why is there no marmalade?"

"Could I remind you that there is a war on, two miles up the road, my splay-footed bolus-booster?" With a grand rolling of his R's, the man who had driven a railway through the Rocky Mountains, and who now boasted the badges of a subaltern in His Majesty's Corps of Royal Engineers, let drive. "Ye come to live with us much against our will, because you're a poor homeless wanderer——"

"All dressed up and nowhere to go," broke in the Doctor mournfully.

"You come to live with us, I say," went

on the Scotchman, " and then do nothing but criticise our food and our morals."

" Heaven knows they both need it. Pass me what's left of the syrup, little one. Scrape the rest of it off your chin, my cherub, and wrap it up in a handkerchief and take it up to the trenches with you."

" You're vewy wude." The junior subaltern adjusted the balance in the matter of the letter R with the Scotchman. Two months ago he had been at home—in peace time he would still have been at school. But of such mixtures is the present British Army made. " It's *my* face."

As a statement of fact, the remark left nothing to be desired; as a statement of expediency, when other infants were present, the same cannot be said. Words, in fact, were trembling on the tongue of a veteran of six months when the C.O. came suddenly into the room.

" Bring me an egg," he shouted to the mess waiter in the kitchen next door. " Listen to this, my bonnie boys." He produced a paper from his coat pocket and sat down at the table. " Secret. A large object has fallen

beside the sap leading out to Vesuvius crater. It is about the size of a rum jar, and is thought to be filled with explosive. It has been covered with sandbags and its early removal would seem desirable, as the sap is frequently bombarded—Damn it, this egg's addled. Take it away, it's got spots on it. Where did I get to? Oh! yes—bombarded with aerial darts and rifle grenades." He replaced the paper in his pocket and reached for the teapot.

"Thought to be filled with explosive!" The Scotchman looked up sarcastically from the letter he was censoring. "What's it likely to be filled with?"

"Marmalade, ducky," remarked the Doctor still harping on his grievance.

"In addition to that the Pumpkin desires my presence at the Centre Battalion Headquarters at 10 ak emma." The C.O. was prodding his second egg suspiciously.

The Pumpkin, it may be explained in parenthesis, was the not unsuitable nickname of the Divisional General.

"Is the old man coming round the trenches?" Jackson, the subaltern in whose tender care reposed the crater of Vesuvius

and all that appertained thereto, including rum jars, looked up with mild interest.

The C.O. glanced at the message beside him. "'The G.O.C. wishes to meet the Engineer Officer in charge of Left Section, at Centre Battalion Headquarters, at 10 a.m., A.A.A. Message ends.' There in a nutshell you have the glorious news."

Breakfast is never a loquacious meal, and for a while silence reigned, broken only by a few desultory remarks as to the vileness of the food produced by the officer responsible for the mess catering, and the exorbitant price he demanded for it—statements which had staled with much vain repetition.

"For Heaven's sake dry up," he remarked peevishly. "You've had sardines on toast twenty-one nights running; what more do you want? Listen to the words of Sapper Mackintosh — the pudding-faced marvel. This"—he held up a letter—"is the fifth which he hopes will find the recipient as it leaves him at present—in the pink, and with the dreadful pains in his stummik quite gone."

"Our Doctor has a wonderful bedside manner," remarked the Scotchman. "Did

ye no hear the story of him and the lady way back by Hazebrook ? "

"That'll do," said the Doctor, rising hurriedly. "She had very bad rheumatism —that poor girl."

"I know she had, Doc," put in the C.O. heartily. "And when I think of the way you eased her sufferings I become lost in admiration over the noble nature of your calling. In the meantime I'd be glad if you'd see one of the men in the Headquarters Section. From the strange explosive noises he made when I spoke to him before breakfast I gathered by the aid of an interpreter that he had somewhat foolishly placed his complete set of uppers and lowers on a truss of compressed hay, and one of the mules has eaten them."

He strolled to the door on his way to the kitchen in the next house that served as his office.

"You'd better be careful with that rum jar, Jacko. Unless you're pretty certain there's no danger, I'd put a slab of gun-cotton against it where it is, and pop her off. No sense in running any risks carrying it back."

"Right-ho! I'll have a look as soon as I go up. Are you coming, Mac?" He turned to the Scotchman.

"In five minutes, my boy. I have to perform a few blasting operations on my pipe before I start and then I'm with you." He pulled a battered veteran out of his pocket, and peered into its noisome bowl.

"Not indoors, man, for Heaven's sake!" The Doctor backed hurriedly out of the room. "The last billet you cleaned your pipe in they complained to the Mayor of the village."

"Go away, Doctor, go away. Go and put chloride of lime round the cook-house," Mac was shouting through the window at the receding medico. "And ask yon woman if she has a hairpin. My pipe . . ." But the Doctor was out of sight.

Ten minutes later the room was empty save for a batman clearing the breakfast table.

* * * * *

Now as a general rule the Sappers do not live in the trenches, but go up there each day and most nights, the remainder of the time

being spent in dwellings of dubious sanitation and indubitable draughtiness a mile or so in rear. To each company a certain front is allotted, and it is their joy and pride to maintain this front and the networkof trenches behind it spotless and untarnished, what time they minister ceaselessly to the lightest whim of its heroic defenders—usually known by the generic term of P.B.I., or poor bally Infantry. Which, of course, is not what really happens, but one likes to think thus beautifully.

In addition to the Infantry, other people thrust themselves forward in a manner which requires firmness and tact to deal with: gunners require O.P.'s or observation posts; other gunners require trench mortar emplacements; dangerous men with machine guns sit up and take notice, and demand concrete and other abominations; while last, but not least, the medical profession demand secret and secure places in which to practise their nefarious trade. Finally, the Ordnance Department is with one always. It was that branch of the great Machine which caused the frown on the face of the Sapper Captain,

hitherto alluded to as the O.C., while next door the batman cleared the breakfast table.

"We're six bicycles short, you say, Quartermaster-Sergeant?" he exclaimed irritably, gazing at some papers in front of him, while he filled his pipe.

"Yes, sir; and two more with wheels buckled, and three that free-wheel both ways."

"What d'you mean—free-wheel both ways?"

"The pedals rotate, sir, with great speed, but the bicycle remains motionless." When a man habitually calls an arm-chair, A chair, arm—Officers, for the use of, one—his conversation is apt to become stilted.

"How were the wheels buckled?" demanded the Captain when he had digested this great thought.

"Two of the officers, sir—playing what I believe they called bicycle polo with a brick and two pick-helves—had—er—a slight mishap."

"When did it happen?"

"Er—after dinner, sir, one night." The N.C.O. looked tactfully out of the window.

The officer did not pursue the topic. "Well, what about these six that have been lost?"

"Completely destroyed by shell-fire," said the C.Q.M.S. firmly. "I have prepared a statement of what happened for your perusal and signature." He handed the officer a written paper and respectfully withdrew a few paces to avoid any semblance of coercion.

"'The six bicycles were placed on the morning of the 10th ult. against the entrance to the R.E. Dump at A.21, C.2.4. It would appear that during the absence of the riders a hostile shell of large calibre fell on the six said bicycles, completely demolishing them, for when the riders returned after the day's work merely a few fragments remained scattered round the shell crater.'"

The Captain read it over slowly, and then, in tones of awe, a murmured "Wonderful" wafted through the office.

"I beg your pardon, sir?" The N.C.O. was again at his side.

"I said wonderful, Quartermaster-Sergeant — quite wonderful. Do you think they'll swallow it?"

"It has been done before, sir." The tone

was non-committal. "And one of the six was undoubtedly badly punctured by a stray rifle bullet before we lost it—er—that is, before it was finally destroyed by shell-fire."

"Right." With the air of a man who communes with great destinies, the Captain signed his name. "Anything more?"

"Nothing at present, sir. The question of the consumption of Candles, Tallow dip, Pounds Twenty-four, stolen from our yard by the 940th Tunnelling Company, has come back again with remarks from the Chief Ordnance Officer at the Base—but it will wait until you come back from the trenches."

"I'm glad of that," remarked the Captain, rising. "I'm not feeling very strong this morning, and candles, tallow dip—especially lbs. twenty-four of them—would cause a relapse. Orderly"—he strolled to the door—"my bicycle, please."

A few minutes later he was riding slowly down the road towards the place where there was "a war on." A cool mist hung over the fields on each side of him, and in the early morning stray cobwebs glistening with moisture brushed lightly across his face.

"*B'jour, monsieur.*" A woman standing in the door of a roadside *estaminet* greeted him as he passed—a woman undisturbed by the guns that at times roared close by; a woman whose house was one concentrated draught, which whistled through what had once been walls and now were holes held together by odd bricks.

He returned the greeting and rode on, while once again the comparison—never far absent from those who live "within range"—came into his mind: the comparison between England and France—between the country which has only learned of war through its soldiers, and the country whose women and children have learned of it first hand, even unto death. All was absolutely silent—the peace and glory of a summer's morning hung over everything, while the smell of the wet clover came faintly to his nostrils. A military policeman at the corner saluted smartly, while a small boy in a little cart drawn by three straining dogs raced him blithely up the village street. At the end of the battered houses still occupied by their owners, and the temporary abode of half a

battalion of infantry resting from a spell in the trenches, progression by bicycle became a little harder. Great branches lay across the road, and pits torn out of the *pavé* by bursting shells made steering a trifle intricate; while occasionally one of the many signal wires which had slipped during the night, and was hanging low above his head, scraped the top of his steel helmet.

Once more the familiar "*B'jour, monsieur*" —this time from an old dame who sat day in day out in a corner under a wall selling chocolate. Just above her head, so that by raising her arm she could have touched it, the nose of a "dud" German shell poked out from the brickwork.

Ruin, desolation—and shrouding it all the cool damp mist of seven o'clock in July.

"The very man!" A voice hailed him from behind, and a gunner subaltern materialised. "Are you going up the line?"

"I am—at once." The Sapper placed his bicycle against a heap of sandbags. "What does my dear one desire?"

"The accursed Hun placed two large

obuses into the Ritz yesterday afternoon. What do you propose to do about it ? " They were strolling slowly through the sopping grass.

" Nothing—if I can possibly avoid it," answered the Sapper firmly. " You select for an O.P. the most prominent house in the locality—put a signaller on the top of it with a large flag—wait till midday, when the sun is at its brightest, and then send a message back that the bully beef is bad. You——"

" Laddie," interrupted the gunner, " desist. All that you say is true and more—but we must stick to the Ritz, if we can. It commands a soul-inspiring view of the trenches behind that new crater in a way we can't get from anywhere else. What I want you to do is to cover the cellar with boards. Yesterday the second shell knocked two men insensible, and they fell backwards into it. As they nearly drowned, it will be obvious, even to your intelligence, that it contains—amongst other things—water. Moreover, the water is deep, and stinketh. If, therefore, my brainy *confrère*, you will authorise me to draw planks twelve, I myself

will cover yon hole with my own fair hands. The cadaverous gentleman at your store, whose face has been passed over by some heavy body, proved both unsympathetic and suspicious this morning when I asked him for them. Wherefore, if you will sign——" He held out a book to the Sapper.

"'Please issue bearer with twelve planks 9 inch by 2 inch; length, 6 feet.'" The Sapper glanced at the page and signed. "There you are, James. Tell him to get them cut for you."

"I was going to, dearie. How marvellously your brain grasps the importance of these trifling details! Are you passing the Ritz by any chance? If so, tell my warriors to come down to the store."

"Aren't you coming up?"

"No—it's too light. I have to be careful whom I'm seen with." He turned back and was quickly lost in the white mist—though for some time afterwards the faint strains of musical items selected from "The Bing Boys" followed the Sapper as he walked on.

Occasional voices came mysteriously from apparently nowhere, as a party of men went

up one of the deep communication trenches close by him—a trench invisible in summer until you actually stood over it, for the long rank grass hid everything: grass splashed with the red of great masses of poppies, and the white of the daisies, with odd little patches of blue cornflowers and borage, and buttercups glinting yellow. • Just rank luxuriant vegetation, run wild—untouched for more than a year.

Suddenly out of the mist there loomed the Ritz—the name of the broken-down, shell-battered house which served his late companion as an O.P. The Sapper gave the message as requested, and stepped down three stairs into the communication trench which passed close under one of the crumbling walls. There was no necessity, as far as safety was concerned, to get into the trench for several hundred yards—the mist effectually prevented any chance of being seen from the German lines half a mile farther on.

But he was mindful to see the condition of the trench—whether the sides were crumbling, and whether the floor was suitably provided with trench-boards and bricks. Twisting,

winding with the poppies and the weeds meeting over his head, and the water brushing off them against his face and coat, he walked slowly on. Seven feet deep, perhaps three feet wide, it might have been a sunken Devonshire lane in model, and a faint tinge in the soil helped the illusion.

Stale as it all was, unprofitable and a weariness to the flesh as it had all become, the strangeness of it still struck him at times. He wondered lazily what the people he knew at home would think if they were following him at that moment on a tour of inspection. Especially his Uncle John. Uncle John was something in the City, and looked it. He lived near Ascot, and nightly slept with a gas-mask beside his bed. He could imagine Uncle John trembling audibly in that quiet model lane, and assuring his faithful wife of his ability to protect her. He laughed at the picture in his mind, and then with a slight frown stopped.

The trench bent sharply to the right, and almost subconsciously he noticed a hole framed in thick wood, half filled in, in the wall in front of him. The top had broken. He

bent and peered through it. It went right through the wall in front, and beyond, the same deep communication trench could be seen stretching away. Just a loophole placed in a traverse through which a rifle could be fired along a straight thirty yards of trench, if the Germans ever got in. But to fire a rifle to any purpose the loophole must not be broken, and so the Sapper made a note before resuming his stroll.

Rounding a bend, a big white board at a cross-roads confronted him. It advertised two or three salient facts written in large black letters. It appeared that by turning to the right one would ultimately reach Leicester Square and an aid post, to say nothing of the Charing Cross Road, which was a down trench. By turning to the left, on the contrary, one would reach Regent Street and a pump. It also stated that the name of our wanderer's present route was the Haymarket, and further affirmed that it was an up trench. For it will be plain to all that, where a trench is but three feet wide, it is essential not to have men going both ways in it—and further, it will also be plain

why the aid posts occur in the down ones.

A further interesting and momentous piece of information was imparted from another board, to the effect that the name of the trench by which one could reach the pump on one hand and the aid post on the other was Piccadilly, and that it constituted the reserve line of the position.

In other words, it was not merely a communication trench, but was recessed and traversed like a fire trench. In very fact, it was a fire trench—the third of the system. In front was the support line, known as Pall Mall, and in front of that, again, the firing line, whither later the Sapper proposed to wend his way. He wanted to gaze on "the rum jar reputed to be filled with explosive." But in the meantime there was the question of the pump—the ever-present question which is associated with all pumps. To work or not to work, and the answer is generally in the negative.

He turned to the left down Piccadilly, wondering what particular ailment had attacked this specimen of the breed and had

caused the Adjutant of the battalion to write winged words anent it. The aspect of the trench had changed; no longer did the red, white and blue of the tangled wild flowers meet over his head, but grey and drab the sandbag walls rose on each side of him. Occasionally the mouth of a dug-out yawned in the front of the trench, a dark passage cased in with timber, sloping steeply down to the cave below. Voices, and sometimes snores, came drowsily up from the bottom, where odd bunches of the South Loamshires for a space existed beautifully.

"Hullo, old man—how's life?" He rounded a traverse to find an officer of the battalion lathering his chin for his morning shave. A cracked mirror was scotched up between two sandbags, and a small india-rubber basin leaked stealthily on the firing step.

"So-so! That bally pump of yours won't work again, or so the cook says. Jenkins, pass the word along for Smithson. He is the cook, and will tell you the whole sordid story."

"Quiet night?" The Sapper sat down and refilled his pipe.

"Fairly. They caught one of our fellows in the entrance to his dug-out up in the front line with an aerial dart about seven o'clock. Landed just at the entrance. Blew the top of his head off. Good boy, too—just been given his stripe. Oh, Smithson!—tell the Engineer officer about that pump. Confound!—I've shaved a mosquito bite!"

The cook—a veteran of many years—looked at the placidly smoking Sapper and cleared his throat. On any subject he was an artist; on pumps and the deficiencies of Ally Sloper's Cavalry—as the A.S.C. is vulgarly known—he was a genius.

"Well, sir, it's like this 'ere. That there pump is a funny kind o' pump. Sometimes it gives you water and sometimes it don't."

"You surprise me," murmured the Sapper.

"Now, if I might be so bold, sir, I would suggest that another well be sunk, sir—starting fresh-like from the beginning. Then I could keep my heye on it, and see that no one wasn't a-monkeying with it. As it is, wot with the stuff we're a-getting and the

shortage of tea and the distance I 'ave to go for water, and——"

"Well, what do you expect?" A bitter voice from round the traverse rudely interrupted the discourse. "We make pumps to pump water—not dead rats. Wasting my time, that's what it is. Where 'ave I put it? In that there perisher Smithson's dug-out, and 'e can 'ave it for his dinner." The plumber previously sent up on receipt of the Adjutant's note came round the corner and, seeing his officer, stopped and saluted.

"That there pump's all right, sir. There was a dead rat in it. They *will* leave the cover off the well." He perceived the horrified Smithson, and fixed him with the frozen eye.

"Right. Then you can rejoin your section." The Sapper rose, the plumber departed, the cook faded away, and for a space there was silence.

"Damn that fellow Smithson—he's the limit." The Infantry Officer laughed. "I'll rend him for this."

"Sometimes it gives you water, and sometimes it don't," remarked the Sapper pen-

sively. "Last time it was a sock. Bye-bye. I hope he'll enjoy his dinner."

He followed the plumber back along Piccadilly, composing in his mind a suitable answer to the message of despair from the Adjutant.

"With ref. to your min. of yesterday I would suggest that a larger flow of somewhat purer water would be available if the practice of inserting deceased rodents in the delivery pipe was discontinued forthwith. I am fully alive to the fact that what the eye does not see the heart does not grieve about, and I realise that, viewed from that standpoint only, the grave of the little animal in question could not well be improved on. I also realise that it adds that flavour to the tea which is so sought after by the true connoisseur. But, desiring to view the matter from the clearer vantage point of an unbiased onlooker I venture to suggest——"

His meditations were interrupted by a procession of gunners each carrying on his shoulder an unpleasant-looking object which resembled a gigantic dumb-bell with only one blob on the end—a huge spherical cannon-

ball on a steel stalk. They were coming from Leicester Square, and he met them just as they turned up the Haymarket. Waiting until they had all gone by, he followed on in the rear of the party, which suddenly turned sharp to the left and disappeared into the bowels of the earth.

"No. 7," murmured the Sapper to himself. "I wonder if the officer is new?" He turned to a bombardier standing at the entrance to the passage. "Is your officer here?"

"He's down below, sir." The man drew to one side, and the Sapper passed up a narrow deep trench and went "down below" to the trench-mortar emplacement, a cave hewn out of the ground much on the principle of an ordinary dug-out. But there were certain great differences; for half the roof had been removed, and through the hole thus formed streamed in the early morning sun. A screen of rabbit wire covered with bits of grass, lying horizontally over the open hole when the gun was not firing, helped to conceal it from the prying eyes of Hun aeroplanes. Let into the ground and mounted

and clamped to a stand was the mortar itself—while beside it sat a very young gunner officer, much in the attitude of a mother beside her first-born. He was obviously new to the game, and the Sapper surveyed him with indulgent eye.

"Good morning." The Gunner looked up quickly. "I'm the Sapper Officer on this bit of line. You've just come in, haven't you."

"Yes, early this morning. Everything seems very quiet here."

"From four till eight or nine it's always peaceful. But I don't know that you'll find this spot very quiet once you start pooping off. This particular emplacement was spotted some two months ago by the wily Hun, and he got some direct hits on it with small stuff. Since then it hasn't been used. There are lots of others, you know."

"I was ordered to come to this one," answered the boy doubtfully.

"Right-oh! my dear fellow—it's your funeral. I thought I'd just let you know. Are you letting drive this morning?"

"Yes—as soon as I get the order to fire."

The boy was as keen as mustard, and, as I

have said, very young—just another infant. He had not long to wait, for hardly were the words out of his mouth when a sergeant came in.

"Captain's compliments, sir, and will you fire two rounds at G. 10 C. 5 4?"

Rapidly and without confusion the men did their appointed jobs; the great stalk slithered down the gun, the bomb—big as a football—filled with high explosive was fixed with a detonator, the lanyard to fire the charge was adjusted. Then everyone cleared out of the emplacement, while the Sapper took his stand in the trench outside.

"Let her rip." The lanyard was pulled, and with a muffled crack the huge cannon-ball rose into the air, its steel stalk swaying behind it. Plainly visible, it reached its highest point, and still wobbling drunkenly went swishing down on to G. 10 C. 5 4—or thereabouts. A roar and a great column of black smoke rose from the German lines.

Almost before the report had died away, the gun was sponged out, and another inebriated monster departed on its mission. But the Sapper was already some way up the

Haymarket. It was not his first view of a trench-mortar firing.

A vicious crack from a rifle now and then broke the stillness, and proclaimed that the sun was clearing away the morning mist, and that rest-time was nearly over; while the sudden rattle of a machine gun close by him, indulging in a little indirect fire at a well-known Hun gathering place a thousand yards or so behind their lines, disturbed a covey of partridges, which rose with an angry whirring of wings. Then came four of those unmistakable faint muffled bursts from high above his head, which betokened an aeroplane's morning gallop; and even as he automatically jerked his head skywards, with a swishing noise something buried itself in the earth not far away. It is well to remember that even Archibald's offspring obey the laws of gravity, and shells from an anti-aircraft gun, burst they never so high, descend sooner or later in the shape of jagged fragments—somewhere. And if the somewhere is your face, upturned to see the fun . . . !

The Sapper, with the remembrance fresh in his mind of a pal looking up in just such a

way a week before, quickly presented the top of his tin hat to the skies, and all that might descend from them. There had been that same swishing all round them as they stood watching some close shooting at one of our own planes. He recalled the moment when he cried suddenly—"Jove! they've got him!" He had turned as he spoke to see the officer with him, slipping sideways, knees crumpling, body sagging. "Good God! old man, what is it?" The question was involuntary, for as he caught the limp figure—he knew.

The plane was all right: the German shells had not got *it*; but a piece of shrapnel, the size of a match-box, had passed through that officer's eye, and entered his brain. He had laid him on the firing-step, and covered his head—or what was left of it . . . .

He reached Pall Mall, to be once again confronted with a large white notice board. To the right were Boyaux 93 and 94—to the left, 91 and 90. Straight on to the front, 92 led to the firing line. With his ultimate destination Vesuvius crater and the rum jar

in view, he turned to the right, and walked along the support trench. It was much the same as Piccadilly: only being one degree nearer the front, it was one degree more warlike. Boxes of bombs everywhere; stands for rifles on the firing-step, which held them rigidly when they fired rifle grenades; and every now and then a row of grey-painted rockets with a red top, which in case of emergency send up the coloured flares that give the S.O.S. signals to those behind. Also men: men who slept and ate and shaved and wrote and got bored. A poor show is trench warfare!

"Look out, sir. They've knocked it in just round the corner last night with trench mortars." A sergeant of the South Loamshires was speaking. "Having a go at Laburnum Cottage, I'm thinking."

"What, that sniper's post? Have you been using it?"

"One of our men in there now, sir. He saw an Allemand go to ground in his dug-out half an hour ago through the mist, and he reckons he ought to finish breakfast soon, and come out again."

The Sapper crawled on his stomach over the *débris* that blocked the trench, and stopped at the entrance to Laburnum Cottage, officially known as Sniper's Post No. 4. In a little recess pushed out to the front of the trench, covered in with corrugated iron and surrounded by sandbags, sprawled the motionless figure of a Lance-Corporal. With his eye glued to his telescopic sight and his finger on the trigger of his rifle, he seemed hardly to be breathing. Suddenly he gave a slight grunt, and the next instant, with a sharp crack, the rifle fired.

"Get him?" asked the Sapper.

"Dunno, sir," answered the sniper, his eye still fixed to the telescope. "Three 'undred yards, and 'e ducked like 'ell. It wasn't far off 'is nibs, but one can't tell for sure." He got down and stretched himself. "I've waited 'alf an 'our for the perisher, too, without no breakfast." He grinned and scrambled over the broken-down trench to remedy the latter deficiency, while once more the Sapper walked on. No need with this particular regiment to suggest rebuilding the broken-in trench; it would be done automatically—which cannot be said of them all.

At last he reached Boyau 94, and turned up towards the firing-line. Twenty yards from the turn, a mass of barbed wire crossed the trench above his head, the barbed wire which ran in front of the support line. For it is not only the fire-trench that is wired—each line behind is plentifully supplied with this beautiful vegetable growth.

The mist had cleared away, and the morning sun was blazing down from a cloudless sky, as he reached the front trench. Just to his left a monstrous pair of bellows, slowly heaving up and down under the ministrations of two pessimistic miners, sent a little of God's fresh air down to the men in the mine-shafts underneath. The moles were there—the moles who scratched and scraped stolidly, at the end of their gallery thirty or forty yards in front, deep down under the earth in No Man's Land.

A steady stream of sandbags filled with the result of their labours came up the shaft down which the pipe from the bellows stretched into the darkness—sandbags which must be taken somewhere and emptied, or used to revet a bit of trench which needed repair.

To right and left there stretched the fire-trench—twisting and turning, traversed and recessed—just one small bit of the edge of British land. A hundred yards away, a similar line stretched right and left, where other pessimistic miners ministered to other monstrous bellows, and Piccadilly was known as Unter den Linden. The strange stagnation of it all!

Look through the periscope at the country in front. Not a sign of life in the torn-up crusted earth; not a movement between the two long lines of wire. A few poppies here and there, and at one point, a motionless grey-green lump close to the farther wire. Impossible to tell exactly what it is from the periscope—the range is too far. But, in No Man's Land, such strange grey—and khaki—lumps may often be seen. The night, a wiring party, perhaps a little raid or an officer's patrol, and—discovery. You cannot always get your dead back to the trench, and the laws that govern No Man's Land savour of the primitive. . . .

The Sapper watched the phlegmatic bellows-heaver for a few moments curiously. His

stoical indifference to any one or anything save the job in hand, the wonderful accuracy with which he spat from time to time, the appalling fumes from his short clay pipe, all tended to make of him an interesting study. Supremely apathetic to friend or foe, Generals or Huns, he did his shift without comment and, as far as could be seen, without thought.

"Where are you putting the earth?" asked the Sapper after watching for a while.

"Round corner, in a 'ole." The speaker pointed with his pipe, and the subject dropped.

The officer turned away smiling slightly, and decided on the inspection of the rum jar. The answer was clear and succinct, even if not couched in the language of the old army discipline. He inspected the hole, and, finding it was at the back of the trench, in a crater that was formed nightly by German *minenwerfer*, and that more earth there not only would not block the trench but, *mirabile dicta*, would be an actual advantage, he passed on and shortly came to a passage leading out of the front of the trench.

The passage was labelled Sap No. 130, and

presented exactly the same appearance as the boyaux which ran out of the support line to the front trench. Only when one got into it did the difference become apparent, for whereas the boyaux had continued until finally opening into a new trench, the sap was a cul-de-sac, and finished abruptly in a little covered-in recess built into a miniature mountain of newly-thrown up earth. And this great, tumbled mass of soil was the near lip of Vesuvius crater—blown up half-way between the two front lines.

Over the top of the mountain there was no passage. A man standing or crawling there in daytime would have been in full view of German snipers at a range of forty yards; while had he accomplished it in safety, he would have slithered down the farther side into a great cavity shaped like an egg-cup, at the bottom of which a pool of dirty, stagnant water was slowly forming. Moreover, if we imagine the man continuing his journey and climbing up the other side, he would run the gauntlet of the English snipers as he topped the farther lip, before reaching the German sap which ran out in just such a

similar cul-de-sac to the one already described.

Thus are craters consolidated; each side holds the lip nearest to them, and hurls curses and bombs at his opponents on the other. The distance between the sapheads is perhaps twenty or twenty-five yards, instead of the hundred odd of the parent fire-trenches; and any closer acquaintanceship is barred by the egg-cup crater, which stretches between them.

"Keep down, sir—well down. Lot of sniping to-day." A sergeant of the South Loamshires whispered hoarsely to the Sapper as he reached the end of the sap—it is etiquette to whisper in a sap. Three men inside the recess were drinking tea with the calmness born of long custom, while lying on his side, with a periscope to his eye, was Jackson, the subaltern.

"Anything fresh, Jacko?" muttered the Sapper, crouching down beside him.

"Yes—I think they're coming closer with their left sap round the crater. Their periscope seems to be nearer than it was yesterday."

"Let's have a look." The two changed position, and the Captain turned the peri-

scope gently round until he got the exact direction. Absolute stillness brooded over the ground he could see ; a few rough strands of wire straggled about, and disappeared into the great mound of earth that formed the *débris* of the crater.

There were the enemies' trenches—a railway embankment behind them with a derelict row of trucks—a great chimney, gaunt and desolate, with the buildings at its foot in ruins. But it was not on these old friends that he was concentrating ; his target was the bit of ground just in front of him that lay close to the thrown-up earth of Vesuvius, along which the German sap was reputed to be creeping nearer.

At last he got what he wanted. Close at hand, perhaps twenty yards away, there stuck up out of the ground a motionless stick with something on the end—the German's periscope. Now it is reputed to be a fact by several people of apparent truthfulness that it is possible, in circumstances such as these, for each watcher to see the other man's eyes reflected from the mirrors of the periscopes ; and it is an undoubted fact that the laws

which govern the refraction of light would allow of this phenomenon. Personally, I am glad to say I have never seen a German's eye through a periscope; but then, personally, I am inclined to doubt if anyone has. It must be quite dreadful to see a thing like a poached egg regarding you balefully from the top of a stick a few yards away.

At last the Sapper got up. "He's no nearer, Jacko. What do you think, sergeant?"

"I don't think they were working last night, sir," one of the tea-drinkers answered.

"There was a party of 'em out, and we bunged some bombs. We 'eard 'em padding the 'oof back."

"Been pretty quiet, then?"

"Except for that there rum jar, sir," answered the sergeant. "We thought we was napoo* when we 'eard that little bundle of fun a-coming."

* *Special note to Lovers of Etymology.*

Il n'y en a plus. There is no more. French phrase signifying complete absence of. Largely heard in *estaminets* near closing time.

Naploo.—Original pure English phrase signifying the perisher has run out of beer.

Napoo.—Vulgar and bastardised shortening of original pure English phrase. Has now been added to B.E.F. dictionary, and is used to imply that a man, thing, person, animal, or what not, is "finished."

"Have you seen it, Jacko?"

"Yes; it rolled into the sap, and I've had it put into the fire-trench. I'm taking it back to blow it up. I think it's a percussion fuse, but it seems fairly safe. I've sent for a stretcher to carry it on."

"Let's go and have a look at it."

The two officers walked down the sap and back into the trench, and started to investigate with a professional eye the object lying on the fire-step. Apparently of steel, and painted a dull grey, it looked harmless enough —but all those little love-offerings of the Hun are treated with respect. About the size of an ordinary rum jar, with a fuse of sorts in place of a neck, it was at the time an unknown brand of abomination, to them at any rate.

"It differs only in appearance, I fear," remarked the Captain, after inspecting it gingerly, "from other presents they give us. Its object is undoubtedly nefarious. Where do you propose to blow it up?"

"In that little quarry near the Ritz. Will that do all right?"

"Most excellently." With a smile he

looked at his watch. "Just set your watch by mine, Jacko—and poop it off at 10.5 ak emma. Do you take me?"

The other looked puzzled for a moment; then his face cleared.

"I'd forgotten for the moment that Centre Battalion Head-quarters was not far from the quarry," he grinned. "Sir—I take you."

"My dear boy, the day is hot, and the Pumpkin is fat, and the flies are glutinous. He doesn't want to see the trenches any more than I do—and one's mission in life is to anticipate the wishes of the great."

It was just as he finished speaking that from up the line in the direction of the Haymarket there came four dull, vicious cracks in succession, and some clouds of black smoke drifted slowly over his head.

"Just about No. 7 T.M. emplacement," he muttered to himself. "I hope to heavens . . ."

"Put it on the stretcher carefully, boys." His subaltern was speaking to the two men who had arrived with a stretcher. "Have you got the slab of gun-cotton?"

"Corporal 'Amick 'as gone to get it at the

store, sir. He's a-going to meet us at the quarry."

"Right-ho! Walk march."

The cavalcade departed, and the Captain resumed his morning walk, while his thoughts wandered to the beer which is cold and light yellow. For many weary months had he taken a similar constitutional daily; not always in the same place, true; but variety is hard to find in the actual trenches themselves. It is the country behind that makes the difference.

Time was when communication trenches existed only in the fertile brain of those who were never called upon to use them; but that time has passed long since. Time was when the thin, tired breaking line of men who fought the Prussian Guard at Ypres in 1914—and beat them—had hard work to find the fire-trenches, let alone the communication ones; when a daily supervision was a nerve-shattering nightly crawl, and dug-outs were shell-holes covered with a leaking macintosh. It was then that men stood for three weeks on end in an icy composition of water and

slime, and if by chance they did get a relief for a night, merely clambered out over the back, and squelched wearily over the open ground with bullets pinging past them from the Germans a few score yards away.

But now there are trenches in canal banks where dead things drift slowly by, and trenches in railway embankments where the rails are red with rust and the sleepers green with rot; there are trenches in the chalk, good and deep, which stand well, and trenches in the slush and slime which never stand at all; there are trenches where the smell of the long grass comes sweetly on the west wind, and trenches where the stench of death comes nauseous on the east. And one and all are they damnable, for ever accursed. . . .

But the country behind—ah! there's where the difference comes. You may have the dead flat of pastoral Flanders, the little woods, the plough, the dykes of Ypres and Boesinghe; you may have the slag-heaps and smoking chimneys of La Bassée and Loos; you may have the gently undulating country of Albert and the Somme. Each bears the

marks of the German beast—and, like their inhabitants, they show those marks differently. Ypres and the north, apathetic, seemingly lifeless; the mining districts, grim and dour; the rolling plains still, in spite of all, cheerful and smiling. But underlying them all—deep implacable determination, a grand national hatred of the Power who has done this thing. . . .

He turned out of the Old Kent Road into a siding which harboured the dug-outs of the Centre Battalion.

"Is the General here yet, Murdock?" A tall sergeant of the regiment—an old friend of his—flattened himself against the side of the trench to let him pass.

"Yes, sir." The sergeant's face was expressionless, though his eyes twinkled. "I think, sir, as 'ow the General is feeling the 'eat. 'E seems worried. 'E's been trying to telephone."

The Sapper, with a suppressed chuckle, went down some steps into a spacious dug-out. The darkness made him temporarily

blind, so he saluted and stood still just inside the doorway.

"Damn you, don't blow at me! What's that fool blowin' down the thing for? I *have* pressed a button—confound you!—and rung the bell twice. No—I didn't ring off; somebody blew at me, and the machine fell on the floor."

"The General is trying to get through to his château." A voice full of unholy joy whispered in the Sapper's ear, and that worthy, whose eyes had got accustomed to the gloom, recognised the Adjutant.

"I gathered that something of the sort was occurring," he whispered back.

But the General was at it again. "Who are you—the R.T.O.? Well, ring off. Exchange. Exchange. It is the Divisional General speaking. I want my head-quarters. I say, I want my—oh, don't twitter, and the bally thing's singin' now! First it blows and then it sings. Good God! what's that?"

A deafening explosion shook the dug-out, and a shower of earth and stones rained down in the trench outside.

"They're very active this morning, sir," said the Sapper, stepping forward. "Lot of rum jars and things coming over."

"Are you the Sapper officer? Good morning. I wish you'd get this accursed instrument to work."

"There may be a line broken," he remarked tactfully.

"Well—I shall have to go back; I can't hear a word. The thing does nothin' but squeak. Now it's purring like a cat. I hate cats. Most annoyin'. I wanted to come round the front line this morning."

"In very good condition, sir; I've just been all round it. Mighty hot up there, General—and swarms of flies."

"And they're puttin' over some stuff, you say?"

"Hum! Well, of course, I fully intended to come round—but, dash it all, I must get back. Can't hear a word the fellow says. Does nothing but play tunes." The Pumpkin rose and stalked to the door. "Well, I'll come round another morning, my boy. I wonder, by Jove! if that last one was meant

for this head-quarters? Devilish near, you know." He walked up the stairs, followed by his staff officer. "Good mornin'—mind you see about that telephone. Cursed thing blows."

"Dear old Pumpkin," murmured the Adjutant as his steps died away. "He's a topper. His figure's against him, but he's got the heart of a lion."

"He has," answered the Sapper, preparing to follow his footsteps. "And the men would do anything for him."

"What price that rum jar I sent in a bird about?"

"That was the last explosion you heard," laughed the Sapper. "I wasn't leaving anything to chance. I am going to go and drink beer—iced beer, in long glasses. *Toujours à toi.*"

He was gone, leaving the Adjutant staring.

A few moments later he clambered out of the trench, and struck out for the crumbling church that betokened a road and the near presence of his bicycle.

A day of peace—yes, as things go, a day

of perfect peace. Away down South things were moving; this was stagnation. And yet —well, it was at dinner that night . . .

"For the fourteenth night in succession I rise to a point of order." The Doctor was speaking. "Why is the lady with the butterfly on her back pushed away into one corner, and that horrible woman with the green wig accorded the place of honour?"

I would hurriedly state that the Doctor's remarks were anent two pictures which are, I believe, occasionally to be found in officers' messes in the B.E.F.—pictures of a Parisian flavour as befits the Entente—pictures which —at any rate they are well known to many, and I will not specify further.

"Yes, the lady with the green wig is dreadful." The boy sipped his port.

"Infant, I'm shocked at you. The depravity of these children nowadays . . ."

An orderly came into the room with an envelope, which he handed to the Captain.

The C.O. spread out the flimsy paper and frowned slightly as he read the message.

"T.M. Emp. No. 7, completely wrecked by

a direct hit 9.30 a.m. this morning, A.A.A. Please inspect and report, A.A.A. C.R.E., 140th Division."

"Delayed as usual," grunted the Scotchman. "I was there just after it happened, and reported it to the O.C. Trench Mortars. Did you not hear, sir, for it's useless repairing it? That position is too well known."

"Were there any casualties?" The Sapper Captain's voice was quiet.

"Aye. The poor lad that was crooning over his gun when I saw him this morning, like a cat over her undrowned kitten, just disappeared."

"What d'you mean, Mac?"

"It was one of the big one's, and it came right through the wire on top of him." The gruff voice was soft. "Poor bairn!"