My story—such as it is—concerns a camouflage tree and Bendigo Jones: both of which—or whom—will require a little more introduction. That Bendigo would indignantly repudiate any such necessity, I am fully aware; nevertheless, even at the risk of offending him, I propose to outline briefly his claims to greatness, before embarking on the incident in his military career which forms the subject of these pages.

First, however—the camouflage tree. It is only meet that the material and sordid details of the stage properties should be given, before branching into any discussion of the capabilities of the actor. The phrase, then, does not imply—as the ignorant might possibly be led to believe—a new type of tree. It does not grow in the tropics amongst a riotous tangle of pungent undergrowth; it does not creak sadly in the north wind on

the open hill. It shelters not the hibiscus anthropoid, it gives not lodging to the two-tailed newt. From a botanical point of view, the tree is a complete and utter frost. It is, in point of hard and bitter fact, not a tree at all.

"Camouflage" is that which conceals: it is a fraud, and speaketh not the truth. I am not even certain whether it is a noun or a preposition, but the point is immaterial. Along with other canons of military matters, its virtue lies in its application rather than in its etymology. What the eye doth not see the trench mortars do not trouble is as true to-day as when Noah first mentioned the fact; and camouflage is the application of this mighty dictum.

The value of any particular piece of camouflage depends entirely on its capability for deceit; but to the youthful enthusiast I would speak a word of warning. I have in mind the particular case of young Angus MacTaggart, a lad from Glasgow, with freckles and a sunny disposition. He was a sapper by trade, and on his shoulders there devolved,

on one occasion, the job of covering a trench-mortar emplacement with a camouflage of wire and grass which would screen the hole in which sat the mortar from the prying gaze of Hun aeroplanes. It was a deep hole, for the mortar was large; and the screen of wire was fastened to a framework of wood. When the gun wished to do its morning hate, a pessimistic individual first scoured the heavens with his glasses in search of Hun planes. If the scouring revealed nothing, the screen was lowered, and the gun was made ready. Then the detachment faded away, and the gun was fired by a man of great personal bravery by means of a long string. Ever since the first trench mortars, which consisted of a piece of piping down which a jam-tin bomb was dropped in the hopes that, when the charge at the bottom was lighted, the bomb would again emerge, I have regarded trench mortars as dangerous and unpleasant objects, and the people who deal with them as persons of a high order of courage. One remembers the times when the bomb did not emerge, but stuck half-way

and exploded violently ; one remembers when the entire gun fell over and propelled the bomb in the direction of battalion head-quarters ; above all, one remembers the loathing and contumely with which the mere arrival of the trench mortar in any part of the trenches was greeted. Then there was no attempt at camouflage ; one's sole endeavour was to avoid being killed by the beastly thing.

To return, however, to Angus. Though of a sunny disposition, as I have said, he was a somewhat earnest individual—and thorough withal. He determined that as a camou-flage, *his* should stand pre-eminent ; it should be the model and pattern of all camouflages. He succeeded.

Labouring at night—largely with his own fair hands—he produced a screen cunningly woven with grasses and weeds which he swore would defy the most lynx-eyed pilot. He even went so far as to place in the centre of it a large bunch of nettles, which he con-tended gave it an air of insouciance and lightheartedness that had been lacking before.

Now, as I mentioned above, the value of camouflage depends on its capability for deceit; and it is by this criterion that I claim his work as a success. It should be added, however, in no uncertain tones, that it is the Germans whom one is desirous of deceiving, and that is where my warning to the youthful enthusiast comes in.

The thing came too quickly for warning. Suddenly from above the inhabitants of the hole, with whom Angus was consuming a midday glass of port, was heard the voice: "It must be somewhere about here, sir, I think." The voice was right—it was.

They came through in a phalanx of five, and descended abruptly on the detachment below. It was a magnificent compliment to the work, but it was unfortunate that the General should have been the one to consume the nettles. However, I have always thought that Angus's voice of disgust as he contemplated the wreckage of his screen did not improve matters.

"The door," he remarked, with painful

distinctness, " is full of possibilities." With that he left.

I trust the moral of my digression is obvious. . . .

Having then, in a few well-chosen phrases, discussed one type of camouflage, I would pass on and lead the thirster for information still farther into the bypaths of knowledge. Just as there are many and divers types of deceit, varying from that which conceals what is, to that which exposes what is not—involved that last, but think it out—so are there many types of camouflage. And the particular one with which I am concerned, deals with a tree.

On a certain slight eminence in what was otherwise a flat and dreary outlook, there stood the stump of a tree. It was a tired stump, strongly reminiscent of the morning after. It had had a hard life, and much of its pristine glory had faded. No longer did the sprightly sparrow chirrup cheerfully to its young from leafy branches; no longer did cattle recline in its shade during the heat

of the day. It was just a stump—a stump complete with splinters.

Its sole claim to notoriety lay in its position. It commanded a view of the German lines which was not to be had elsewhere; in fact, from the eminence on which it stood you could obtain the only good observation of the opposite trenches in that particular sector of the line.

It was the Brigade Major who first suggested the idea in the fertile brain of the C.R.E. of the Division, who happened to be talking to him at the moment. They were in the support line trenches, and close to where they stood, the tree—gaunt, repulsive and toothpicky — raised its stunted head to heaven.

"What a pity that tree ain't hollow!" ruminated the Staff officer thoughtfully. "Splendid view from it of the Huns. Can't do anything in that line, can you, Colonel?"

The C.R.E. thoughtfully considered the proposition. "Afraid not, old boy," he answered after a few moments' deliberation. "Bit of a job hollowing out a tree. All the

same, you're quite right. It would make a great O.P."

"Why not make another down in your yard, and put it up instead?" The Brigadier joined in the discussion. "We must have better observation in this sector if we possibly can."

"Cut this one down one night and put up a dummy in its place." The C.R.E. once again considered the wretched stump. "Not a bad idea, General; the only question is who is to do it. It will have to be a good model, or the Huns will spot the difference; and . . ." Suddenly his face cleared. "By Jove! I've got it—Bendigo Jones. He's the man for the job."

"And who the deuce is Bendigo Jones?" asked the General, as the Sapper rapidly jotted down something in his notebook. "He sounds like a prize fighter or the inventor of a patent medicine."

"Bendigo Jones, General, is my latest acquisition. I have it on no less an authority than his own that he is a very remarkable man. I gather that he is futurist by inclina-

tion, and dyspeptic by nature, which I take to be a more or less natural sequence of events. At present he adorns my office, and looks intense."

"He sounds rather like a disease," murmured the Brigade Major "From what you say, I gather he considers himself an artist."

"He sculpts, or whatever a sculptor does when he gets busy." The Colonel smiled gently. "How he ever blew out here I cannot imagine, but these things will occur. I offended him mortally, I regret to say, the first day he arrived, by confessing that I had never even heard his name, much less seen his work, but I think he's forgiven me. I allowed him to arrange the timber yard to-day more æsthetically, and the Sergeant-Major thinks he is soft in the head, so Bendigo is supremely happy."

"He sounds a perfect treasure," remarked the Brigadier dryly. "However, as long as he models that tree and we get it up somehow, and I never see him, I shall be quite happy, old boy."

"It shall be done," answered the C.R.E., "by our little Bendy himself. A life-size, hollow camouflage stump shall replace the original, complete with peep-hole and seat."

Thus lightly was settled the immediate future of one of the world's great ones. In view, however, of the fact that the world is so often lamentably ignorant of greatness, it now becomes necessary for me to carry out my second introduction and enlighten the Philistines as to what they have missed by their miserable and sordid materialism.

Be it known then that for several years Bendigo Jones had been in the habit of inflicting upon a long-suffering and inoffensive public a series of lumps of material. What these lumps were supposed to represent no one has yet discovered; and I am given to understand that unless the proud perpetrator noted it himself on completion, he too was usually unable to elucidate the mystery. It was not of great account, as he ran not the slightest risk of contradiction whatever he said; and as no person ever willingly went twice to his exhibitions, he

could vary the title daily without fear of discovery. Another great point about his work was its many-sidedness. A lump looked at from one side would perhaps represent "Pelican with young," while on the other "The Children's Hour, or six o'clock at Mud View Villa," would be depicted. This, needless to say, economised greatly in space and matter; and in case any special exhibit failed to arrive in time, or was thrown away by mistake, an old one turned upside down at once remedied the defect.

His nearest approach to fame occurred during the period which followed the perpetration of his celebrated "Mother with her Child." It was announced that the gifted sculptor had worked on it for five years; and a certain amount of light was thrown on his methods by an interview he managed to get published in some obscure journal.

"Rising with a hoarse cry," ran this effusion, "Mr. Bendigo Jones hurled himself at his work. With a single blow he removed a protuberance, and then sank back exhausted.

"'You see the difference,' he cried, 'you see how I have altered her expression.'

"'Whose?' I murmured dazedly.

"'Why, the face of the woman. Ah! dolt, blockhead, have you no eyes—have you no soul?'

"'But you told me that was a church at sunset,' I remonstrated feebly.

"'What has that to do with it?' he shouted. 'It is what I like to make it, fool. What is a name? Nothing—a bagatelle. I have changed my mind every day for the last five years, and now my life's work is done—done.'

"Mr. Bendigo Jones sobbed quietly, and I stole away. It was not for me to gaze on such grief. And as I went through the open window I heard his final whisper.

"'It shall be none of these things. I will pander to vile utilitarianism. It shall be—"A City Magnate at Lunch."'"

It may be remembered that when it was finally put on view in London, enormous interest was aroused by an enterprising weekly paper offering prizes to the extent

of a thousand pounds to anyone who could guess what it was; and though Bendigo Jones's pocket was helped considerably by his percentage of the gate money, his pride suffered considerably when the answers were made public. They ranged from "Model of the first steam engine when out of control" to "An explosion of a ship at sea," both of which happy efforts gained a bag of nuts. The answer adjudged most nearly correct was sent in by a Fulham butcher, who banked on "Angry gentleman quarrelling with his landlord on quarter-day": which at any rate had the merit of making it human.

But I have digressed enough; I will return to my sad story. How our friend ever did arrive in France is as much of a mystery to me as it was to the Colonel; presumably a ruthless Government, having decided it required men, roped him in along with the other lesser lights. The fiat went forth, and so did Bendigo—mildly protesting: to adorn in the fullness of time the office of the C.R.E. of whom I have spoken. And he was sitting there exhausted by his labours in helping

the Sergeant-major rearrange the timber yard æsthetically, when a message arrived that the Colonel wished to speak to him.

"I understand, Jones, that you are a sculptor," remarked that officer genially, as our hero entered the office. "Now, can you model a tree?"

Bendigo gazed dreamily out of the window. "A tree," he murmured at length. "A little, beautiful tree. Green with the verdant loveliness of youth . . . green . . . green."

"It isn't," snapped the Colonel. "It's brown, and damned hideous, and full of splinters."

"Only to the eye of unbelief, sir." The sculptor regarded him compassionately. "To us—to those who can see things as they ought to be—more, as they spiritually are . . . it is different."

A door closed somewhat hastily, and the sounds from the next room seemed to indicate that the Adjutant's cough was again troubling him. The Colonel, however, remained calm.

"I have no doubt, Jones," he remarked dispassionately, "that what you have just

said has some meaning. It is even remotely possible that you know what it means yourself. I don't; and I do not propose to try. I propose, on the other hand, to descend to the sordid details of what I wish you to do. You will commence without delay." He leaned back in his chair, and proceeded to fill his pipe.

"Up the line there is a tree stump standing on rising ground, which I wish you to copy. The model must be sufficiently good to deceive the Germans. It will be hollow, and of such a size as will accommodate an observer. The back will be hinged. When your model is made, the real tree stump will be removed one night and the sham one substituted. Do you follow me?"

It is more than doubtful if he even heard. A slight attack of dyspepsia shook him as the Colonel finished speaking, and he passed his hands twice through his hair. "The thought—the future vista—is beautiful," he murmured. "And think; think of the advertisement. To-morrow, sir, I will gaze upon it, and fashion it in clay. Then

I will return and commence the great work."

He faded slowly through the door; and after a long pause the Colonel spoke. "I wonder," he remarked thoughtfully to the Adjutant who had returned—"I wonder why such things are. . . ."

* * * * *

I am given to understand that the arrival of Bendigo Jones at the scene of his labours the next morning caused such a sensation amongst those privileged to witness the spectacle that the entire trench was blocked for two hours. To only a chosen band was vouchsafed the actual sight of the genius at work; the remainder had to be content with absorbing his remarks as they were passed down the expectant line. And it was doubtless unfortunate that the Divisional General should have chosen the particular moment when the divine fire of genius was as its brightest to visit the support line in company with his G.S.O.I. and a galaxy of other bright and shining luminaries of the military world.

"What is the meaning of this extraordinary crush in the trench this morning?" he remarked irritably to his Staff officer, as the procession was again held up by a knot of interested men.

"I really don't know, sir," murmured that worthy. "It's most unusual; it's . . ."

His words were drowned by howls of delighted laughter from round the traverse in front, and the next moment a perspiring soldier forced his way into the bay where the great ones were temporarily wedged. It was the special runner who was carrying the latest gem from the lips of Bendigo—at work a little farther up—to the expectant and breathless audience.

"Hay! little sandbag! Ho! little sandbag! 'Ow beautiful hart thou in textchah."

"Go on, Bill. Did the perisher say that?" An incredulous member of the group looked doubtful.

"Did 'e say it?" The carrier of news looked scornfully at the doubter. "Did 'e say it? Lumme! 'E said it twice, and then he buried 'is mug in its loverly fragrant

surface, and pricked his nose on Ginger's bayonet. 'E's mad, boys; 'e's as mad as a plurry 'atter; 'e's got bats in 'is belfry."

Now, in spite of what I know of Bendigo Jones, I must admit that this reputed remark taxes even my credulity. Mad he undoubtedly was when viewed by the sordid standards of the vandals around him, but this inspiring ode to a sandbag grew somewhat, I cannot but help thinking, in the transmission. The regrettable thing was that it should have reached this stage when it was unwittingly presented to the Divisional General.

"Gangway!" he roared as the hilarity remained unabated; "gangway!" He elbowed his way through the suddenly silent throng and confronted the special runner. "Now, my man, tell me—what is all this tommy rot about?"

"Bloke farther up the trenches, sir, wot don't seem quite right in the 'ead." Somewhat confused at the sudden appearance of the powers that be, the perspiring harbinger of bons mots relapsed into an uncomfortable and depressing silence.

"Not right in the head," barked the General. "God bless my soul! It must be the heat. Dreadful. What shall we do, Curtis?" He appealed for support to his Staff officer.

"I think, sir, the Doctor might precede us," answered the other resourcefully, "and see if the man is dangerous. If so, no doubt he will arrange for his removal before he does any harm."

The A.D.M.S., or Assistant Director of Medical Services—the official title of the principal bolus booster in a Division—emerged with a sickly smile from behind a corner, and advanced unwillingly to the head of the procession.

"Excellent idea," remarked the Genera affably. "You can prescribe for him when you see the symptoms, old boy. Probably a most interesting case—provided he doesn't stab you on sight."

"Sit on his head, Doc., if he comes for you," remarked the Staff officer, gracefully handing over the position of leader, "and, above all, dear old thing, don't let him bite

you. Give him a Number Nine to chew, and we'll bind him when he becomes unconscious."

"It's all jolly fine for you to laugh," said the Doctor peevishly. "I'm fat and you're thin, and you can hide behind me."

They reached the bay of the trench next to Bendigo, just as a further great utterance was starting on its way. In the excitement of the moment, caused by the General's sudden appearance, much of this gem was lost.

What was heard, however, did not diminish the Doctor's alarm.

"Howls in the leafy verdure," he remarked anxiously. "Good Heavens, General, he must be up the tree stump!"

"That's all right, sir!" remarked a sergeant reassuringly. "'E's quite 'armless. It's his spirit mind, 'e says. He thinks the tree is full of leaves."

"Yes—but who is howling in it," asked the General irritably. "I don't hear a sound."

"It's his spirit mind again, sir," answered

the sergeant respectfully. "There ain't no one 'owling really; 'e means howls wot 'oot."

The procession paused awhile to digest this momentous fact, and the Staff officer seized the opportunity to again comfort the Doctor.

"Get him at once, old sport, before he becomes homicidal. You never know when the phase will change. He may fish in his tin hat with a bent pin first, or he may shoot you on sight, but I'd go at once if I were you. You stand more chance."

Undoubtedly the sight which confronted them rounding the traverse justified their worst fears. The Doctor recoiled with a choking noise and endeavoured to wave the Staff officer forward.

"Not on your life, Doc.," remarked that worthy grimly—"not on your life. Go right in; and with your bulk you oughtn't to feel it much, wherever he kicks you."

Personally, I maintain the whole thing was rather hard on Bendigo. Before sending him up the line he should have been labelled; some warning as to his habits should have

been noised abroad by the town crier. Then the unfortunate episode with the General would never have occurred. He would have made allowances, and withdrawn early for light refreshment.

But when a man whose face is of the type peculiar—the sort that you give the baby to play with—practises the habits of fourteen years' unsuccessful dyspeptic futurism in a support line trench on a hot day, the result is likely to be full of incident. True—the wretched Bendigo knew no better; but no more did the General. And life is made of these trifling misunderstandings. . . .

The entranced spectators stiffened to attention as the procession of great ones—partially hidden behind the Doctor—advanced with due military precautions. Even the phlegmatic and weary Sapper who was assisting the genius, with base utilitarian details, such as the size of the trap door at the back of the proposed model, showed signs of animation. Not so Bendigo. With an expression on his face suggestive of great internal pain, he remained seated on the fire-step muttering

softly to himself and clasping to his bosom a large lump of what appeared to be mud.

Suddenly he placed it on the step beside him and rose with an air of determination. The staff performed two or three nimble steps of the foxtrot variety to the rear, and as they did so Bendigo sprang to the assault. With a sweeping half-arm blow he struck the mud and the mud retaliated. While it lasted the action was brisk, but the issue was never in doubt. After two minutes in fighting, Bendigo withdrew exhausted, and most of the mud went with him. What was left looked tired.

"A clear case of shell shock," muttered the Staff officer nervously in the Doctor's ear. "For Heaven's sake do something!"

"Yes, but what the deuce am I to do?" Perspiring freely the gallant officer advanced slowly in the direction of Bendigo, who suddenly perceived him.

The sculptor smiled wearily and pointed a languid hand at the result of his labours. "A great work, my friend," he murmured. "One of my most wonderful studies."

"Doubtless," remarked the Doctor cautiously. "Don't you think—er—you'd better lie down?"

"The leafy foliage; the wonderful green effect; the tree—as I see it. Fresh, fragrant, superb." Bendigo burbled on, heedless of his mundane surroundings.

"What is the fool talkin' about?" howled the General, who was standing on tiptoe trying to see what was happening.

"Hush, sir, I beg of you!" The Doctor looked round nervously. "A most peculiar——"

"I won't hush," roared his irascible senior. "Why should I hush? Some idiot is standing on my feet; and I'm wedged in here like a sardine. Let me speak to him." The General forced his way forward. "Now, you—my man, what the devil are you doing? And what's that damned lump of mud on the fire-step?"

"I am Bendigo Jones," returned the other dreamily. "Sculptah—artist—genius."

"I didn't ask who you were," barked the now infuriated General. "I asked you what

that thing that looks like an inebriated blancmange is meant to be."

"That model?" Bendigo bent forward and gazed at it lovingly. "That is yonder tree as I see it. The base materialist with the foot rule will inform you of the mundane details."

The Sapper alluded to scowled heavily at the unconscious Bendigo. Somewhat uncertain as to what a base materialist might be, he felt dimly that it was a term to be resented.

"I was sent up 'ere, sir, with 'im to help 'im make a model of that there stump," he remarked morosely. "That's the fifteenth mess 'e's made this morning; and 'e's carried on 'orrible over the 'ole lot. If I might say so, sir, 'e don't seem quite right in his 'ead."

"I am inclined to agree with you," answered the General grimly. "He must be swept up and . . ."

Exactly what fate was in store for Bendigo will never be known. One of those visitations of fate which occur periodically in the trenches

interrupted the General's words, and ended the situation in more ways than one.

"Look out, sir," cried a sergeant, with a sudden shout. "Rum jar coming."

It came: wobbling, turning, and twisting, the little black object descended from the skies towards them, and the crouching occupants of the trench heard it hit the ground a few yards away. Then it burst with a deafening roar: a roar which was followed by an ominous creaking.

It was the phlegmatic Sapper—the base materialist—who broke the news first.

With an expression of great relief on his face he gazed over the top of the trench. "Thank 'eavens! you can't make a sixteenth, mate. The whole plurry tree's nah poo."

"Nah poo," murmured Bendigo Jones. "Nah poo. What is nah poo?" He stood up and peered over the top also. "I see no change. To some eyes it might seem that the tree had fallen; to mine it lives for ever—fragrant and cool." He descended and trod heavily on the General's toe. "To

you, sir, as a man of understanding, I give my morning's labours. I have rechristened it. It symbolises 'Children at play in Epping Forest.'"

Magnificently he thrust the lump of disintegrating dirt into the arms of his outraged superior. "It is yours, sir; I, Bendigo Jones, have given you my masterpiece."

Then he departed.

* * * * *

The only man who really suffered was the base materialist. Two hours later he rolled up for his dinner, in a mood even more uncommunicative than usual.

"'Ullo, Nobby," remarked the cook affably, "you don't seem yer usual chatty self this morning. An' wot *'ave* you got on yóur neck?"

"Less of it," returned the other morosely. "It's Hepping Forest. And that"—he plucked a fragment from his hair—"that is the bally twins playin' 'Unt the slipper.'"

Even the cook was stirred out of his usual air of superiority by this assertion, and con-

templated the speaker with interest. "You don't say." He inspected the phenomenon more closely. "I thought as 'ow it was mud."

"It is." Nobby was even more morose. "It belonged to that 'orror Bendigo Jones, and 'e went and give it to the General." The speaker swallowed once or twice. "Then the General, 'e gives it back, in a manner of speaking. Only Bendy had gone by the time it come, and—I 'adn't. Lumme! wot a life."

THE END