No one who has ever given the matter a moment's thought would deny, I suppose, that a regiment without discipline is like a ship without a rudder. True as that fact has always been, it is doubly so now, when men are exposed to mental and physical shocks such as have never before been thought of.

The condition of a man's brain after he has sat in a trench and suffered an intensive bombardment for two or three hours can only be described by one word, and that is—numbed. The actual physical concussion, apart altogether from the mental terror, caused by the bursting of a succession of large shells in a man's vicinity, temporarily robs him of the use of his thinking faculties. He becomes half stunned, dazed; his limbs twitch convulsively and involuntarily; he mutters foolishly—he becomes incoherent. Starting with fright he passes through that stage, passes beyond it into a condition bordering on coma; and when a man is in that condition he is not responsible for his actions. His brain has ceased to work.

Now it is, I believe, a principle of psychology that the brain or mind of a man can be divided into two parts—the objective and the subjective: the objective being that part of his thought-box which is actuated by outside influences, by his senses, by his powers of deduction; the subjective being that part which is not directly controllable by what he sees and hears, the part which the religious might call his soul, the Buddhist "the Spark of God," others instinct. And this portion of a man's nature remains acutely active, even while the other part has struck work. In fact, the more numbed and comatose the thinking brain, the more clearly and insistently does subjective instinct hold sway over a man's body. Which all goes to show that discipline, if it is to be of any use to a man at such a time, must be a very different type of thing to what the ordinary, uninitiated, and so-called free civilian believes it to be. It must be an ideal, a thing where the motive counts, almost a religion. It must be an appeal to the soul of man, not merely an order to his body. That the order to his body, the self-control of his daily actions, the general change in his mode of life will infallibly follow on the heels of the appeal to his soul—if that appeal be successful—is obvious. But the appeal must come first: it must be the driving power; it must be the cause and not the effect. Otherwise, when the brain is gone—numbed by causes outside its control, when the reasoning intellect of man is out of action—stunned for the time; when only his soul remains to pull the quivering, helpless body through—then, unless that soul has the ideal of discipline in it, it will fail. And failure *may* mean death and disaster; it *will* mean shame and disgrace, when sanity returns. . . .

To the man seated at his desk in the company office these ideas were not new. He had been one of the original Expeditionary Force; but a sniper had sniped altogether too successfully out by Zillebecke in the early stages of the first battle of Ypres, and when that occurs a rest cure becomes necessary. At that time he was the senior subaltern of one of the finest regiments of "a contemptible little army"; now he was a major commanding a company in the tenth battalion of that same regiment. And in front of him on the desk, a yellow form pinned to a white slip of flimsy paper, announced that No. 8469, Private Meyrick, J., was for office. The charge was "Late falling in on the 8 a.m. parade," and the evidence against him was being given by C.-S.-M. Hayton, also an old soldier from that original battalion at Ypres. It was Major Seymour himself who had seen the late appearance of the above-mentioned Private Meyrick, and who had ordered the yellow form to be prepared. And now with it in front of him, he stared musingly at the office fire. . . .

There are a certain number of individuals who from earliest infancy have been imbued with the idea that the chief pastime of officers in the army, when they are not making love to another man's wife, is the preparation of harsh and tyrannical rules for the express purpose of annoying their men, and the gloating infliction of drastic punishment on those that break them. The absurdity of this idea has nothing to do with it, it being a well-known fact that the more absurd an idea is, the more utterly fanatical do its adherents become. To them the thought that a man being late on parade should make him any the worse fighter—especially as he had, in all probability, some good and sufficient excuse—cannot be grasped. To them the idea that men may not be a law unto themselves—though possibly agreed to reluctantly in the abstract—cannot possibly be assimilated in the concrete.

" He has committed some trifling offence," they say; " now you will give him some ridiculous punishment. That is the curse of militarism—a chosen few rule by Fear." And if you tell them that any attempt to inculcate discipline by fear alone must of necessity fail, and that far from that being the method in the Army the reverse holds good, they will not believe you. Yet—it is so. . . .

" Shall I bring in the prisoner, sir ? " The Sergeant-Major was standing by the door.

"Yes, I'll see him now." The officer threw his cigarette into the fire and put on his hat.

"Take off your 'at. Come along there, my lad—move. You'd go to sleep at your mother's funeral—you would." Seymour smiled at the conversation outside the door; he had soldiered many years with that Sergeant-Major. "Now, step up briskly. Quick march. 'Alt. Left turn." He closed the door and ranged himself alongside the prisoner facing the table.

"No. 8469, Private Meyrick—you are charged with being late on the 8 a.m. parade this morning. Sergeant-Major, what do you know about it?"

"Sir, on the 8 a.m. parade this morning, Private Meyrick came running on 'alf a minute after the bugle sounded. 'Is puttees were not put on tidily. I'd like to say, sir, that it's not the first time this man has been late falling in. 'E seems to me to be always a dreaming, somehow—not properly awake like. I warned 'im for office."

The officer's eyes rested on the hatless soldier facing him. "Well, Meyrick," he said quietly, "what have you got to say?"

"Nothing, sir. I'm sorry as 'ow I was late. I was reading, and I never noticed the time."

"What were you reading?" The question seemed superfluous—almost foolish; but something in his short, stumpy, uncouth figure interested him.

"I was a'reading Kipling, sir." The Sergeant-Major snorted as nearly as such an august disciplinarian could snort in the presence of his officer.

"'E ought, sir, to 'ave been 'elping the cook's mate—until 'e was due on parade."

"Why do you read Kipling or anyone else when you ought to be doing other things?" queried the officer. His interest in the case surprised himself; the excuse was futile, and two or three days to barracks is an excellent corrective.

"I dunno, sir. 'E sort of gets 'old of me, like. Makes me want to do things—and then I can't. I've always been slow and awkward like, and I gets a bit flustered at times. But I do try 'ard." Again a doubtful noise from the Sergeant-Major ; to him trying 'ard and reading Kipling when you ought to be swabbing up dishes were hardly compatible.

For a moment or two the officer hesitated, while the Sergeant-Major looked frankly puzzled. " What the blazes 'as come over 'im," he was thinking ; " surely he ain't going to be guyed by that there wash. Why don't 'e give 'im two days and be done with it—and me with all them returns."

" I'm going to talk to you, Meyrick." Major Seymour's voice cut in on these reflections. For the fraction of a moment " Two days C.B." had been on the tip of his tongue, and then he'd changed his mind. " I want to try and make you understand why you were brought up to office to-day. In every community—in every body of men—there must be a code of rules which govern what they do. Unless those rules are carried out by all those men, the whole system falls to the ground. Supposing everyone came on to parade half a minute late because they'd been reading Kipling ? "

" I know, sir. I see as 'ow I was wrong.

But—I dreams sometimes as 'ow I'm like them he talks about, when 'e says as 'ow they lifted 'em through the charge as won the day. And then the dream's over, and I know as 'ow I'm not."

The Sergeant-Major's impatience was barely concealed ; those returns were oppressing him horribly.

" You can get on with your work, Sergeant-Major. I know you're busy." Seymour glanced at the N.C.O. " I want to say a little more to Meyrick."

The scandalised look on his face amused him ; to leave a prisoner alone with an officer—impossible, unheard of.

" I am in no hurry, sir, thank you."

" All right then," Seymour spoke briefly. " Now, Meyrick, I want you to realise that the principle at the bottom of all discipline is the motive that makes that discipline. I want you to realise that all these rules are made for the good of the regiment, and that in everything you do and say you have an effect on the regiment. You count in the show, and I count in it, and so does the Sergeant-Major. We're all out for the same thing, my lad, and that is the regiment. We do things not because we're afraid of being punished if we don't, but because we know that they are for the good of the regiment—the finest regiment in the world. You've got to make good, not because you'll be dropped on if you don't, but because you'll pull the regiment down if you fail. And because you count, you, personally, must not be late on parade. It *does* matter what you do yourself. I want you to realise that, and why. The rules you are ordered to comply with are the best rules. Sometimes we alter one—because we find a better; but they're the best we can get, and before you can find yourself in the position of the men you dream about—the men who lift others, the men who lead others—you've got to lift and lead yourself. Nothing is too small to worry about, nothing too insignificant. And because I think, that at the back of your head somewhere you've got the right ideas; because I think it's natural to you to be a bit slow and awkward and that your failure isn't due to laziness or slackness, I'm not going to punish you this time for breaking the rules.

If you do it again, it will be a different matter. There comes a time when one can't judge motives; when one can only judge results. Case dismissed."

Thoughtfully the officer lit a cigarette as the door closed, and though for the present there was nothing more for him to do in office, he lingered on, pursuing his train of thoughts. Fully conscious of the aggrieved wrath of his Sergeant-Major at having his time wasted, a slight smile spread over his face. He was not given to making perorations of this sort, and now that it was over he wondered rather why he'd done it. And then he recalled the look in the private's eyes as he had spoken of his dreams.

"He'll make good, that man." Unconsciously he spoke aloud. "He'll make good."

The discipline of habit is what we soldiers had before the war, and that takes time. Now it must be the discipline of intelligence, of ideal. And for that fear is the worst conceivable teacher. We have no time to form habits now; the routine of the army is of too short duration before the test comes. And the test is too crushing. . . .

The bed-rock now as then is the same, only the methods of getting down to that bed-rock have to be more hurried. Of old habitude and constant association instilled a religion—the religion of obedience, the religion of esprit de corps. But it took time. Now we need the same religion, but we haven't the same time.

* * * * *

In the office next door the Sergeant-Major was speaking soft words to the Pay Corporal.

"Blimey, I dunno what's come over the bloke. You know that there Meyrick . . ."

"Who, the Slug ?" interpolated the other.

"Yes. Well, 'e come shambling on to parade this morning with 'is puttees flapping round his ankles—late as usual ; and 'e told me to run 'im up to office." A thumb indicated the Major next door. "When I gets 'im there, instead of giving 'im three days C.B. and being done with it, 'e starts a lot of jaw about motives and discipline. 'E adn't got no ruddy excuse ; said 'e was a'reading Kipling, or some such rot—when 'e ought to have been 'elping the cook's mate."

" What did he give him ? " asked the Pay Corporal, interested.

" Nothing. His blessing and dismissed the case. As if I had nothing better to do than listen to 'im talking 'ot air to a perisher like that there Meyrick. 'Ere, pass over them musketry returns."

Which conversation, had Seymour overheard it, he would have understood and fully sympathised with. For C.-S.-M. Hayton, though a prince of sergeant-majors, was no student of psychology. To him a spade was a spade only as long as it shovelled earth.

* * * * *

Now, before I go on to the day when the subject of all this trouble and talk was called on to make good, and how he did it, a few words on the man himself might not be amiss. War, the great forcing house of character, admits no lies. Sooner or later it finds out a man, and he stands in the pitiless glare of truth for what he is. And it is not by any means the cheery, hail-fellow-well-met type, or the thruster, or the sportsman, who always pool the most votes when the judging starts. . . .

John Meyrick, before he began to train for the great adventure, had been something in a warehouse down near Tilbury. And "something" is about the best description of what he was that you could give. Moreover there wasn't a dog's chance of his ever being "anything." He used to help the young man—I should say young gentleman—who checked weigh bills at one of the dock enentrances. More than that I cannot say, and incidentally the subject is not of surpassing importance. His chief interests in life were contemplating the young gentleman, listening open-mouthed to his views on life, and dreaming. Especially the latter. Sometimes he would go after the day's work, and sitting down on a bollard, his eyes would wander over the lines of some dirty tramp, with her dark-skinned crew. Visions of wonderful seas and tropic islands, of leafy palms with the blue-green surf thundering in towards them, of coral reefs and glorious-coloured flowers, would run riot in his brain. Not that he particularly wanted to go and see these figments of his imagination for himself; it was enough for him to dream of them

—to conjure them up for a space in his mind by the help of an actual concrete ship—and then to go back to his work of assisting his loquacious companion. He did not find the work uncongenial; he had no hankerings after other modes of life—in fact the thought of any change never even entered into his calculations. What the future might hold he neither knew nor cared; the expressions of his companion on the rottenness of life in general and their firm in particular awoke no answering chord in his breast. He had enough to live on in his little room at the top of a tenement house—he had enough over for an occasional picture show—and he had his dreams. He was content.

Then came the war. For a long while it passed him by; it was no concern of his, and it didn't enter his head that it was ever likely to be until one night, as he was going in to see "Jumping Jess, or the Champion Girl Cowpuncher" at the local movies, a recruiting sergeant touched him on the arm.

He was not a promising specimen for a would-be soldier, but that recruiting sergeant was not new to the game, and he'd seen worse.

"Why aren't you in khaki, young fellow-me-lad," he remarked genially.

The idea, as I say, was quite new to our friend. Even though that very morning his colleague in the weigh-bill pastime had chucked it and joined, even though he'd heard a foreman discussing who they were to put in his place as "that young Meyrick was habsolutely 'opeless," it still hadn't dawned on him that he might go too. But the recruiting sergeant was a man of some knowledge; in his daily round he encountered many and varied types. In two minutes he had fired the boy's imagination with a glowing and partially true description of the glories of war and the army, and supplied him with another set of dreams to fill his brain. Wasting no time, he struck while the iron was hot, and in a few minutes John Meyrick, sometime checker of weigh-bills, died, and No. 8469. Private John Meyrick came into being. . . .

But though you change a man's vocation with the stroke of a pen, you do not change his character. A dreamer he was in the beginning, and a dreamer he remained to the end. And dreaming, as I have already pointed out, was not a thing which commended itself to Company-Sergeant-Major Hayton, who in due course became one of the chief arbiters of our friend's destinies. True it was no longer coral islands—but such details availed not with cook's mates and other busy movers in the regimental hive. Where he'd got them from, Heaven knows, those tattered volumes of Kipling; but their matchless spirit had caught his brain and fired his soul with the result—well, the first of them has been given.

There were more results to follow. Not three days after he was again upon the mat for the same offence, only to say much the same as before.

"I do try, sir—I do try; but some-'ow——"

And though in the bottom of his heart the officer believed him, though in a very strange way he felt interested in him, there are limits and there are rules. There comes a time, as he had said, when one can't judge by motives, when one can only judge by results.

"You mustn't only try; you must succeed. Three days to barracks."

* * * * *

That night in mess the officer sat next to the Colonel. "It's the thrusters, the martinets, the men of action who win the V.C.'s and D.C.M.'s, my dear fellow," said his C.O., as he pushed along the wine. "But it's the dreamers, the idealists who deserve them. They suffer so much more."

And as Major Seymour poured himself out a glass of port, a face came into his mind—the face of a stumpy, uncouth man with deep-set eyes. "I wonder," he murmured —"I wonder."

* * * * *

The opportunities for stirring deeds of heroism in France do not occur with great frequency, whatever outsiders may think to the contrary. For months on end a battalion may live a life of peace and utter boredom, getting a few casualties now and then, occasionally bagging an unwary Hun, vegetating continuously in the same unprepossessing hole in the ground—saving only when they go to another, or retire to a town somewhere in rear to have a bath. And the battalion to which No. 8469 Private Meyrick belonged was no exception to the general rule.

For five weeks they had lived untroubled by anything except flies—all of them, that is, save various N.C.O.'s in A company. To them flies were quite a secondary consideration when compared to their other worry. And that, it is perhaps superfluous to add, was Private Meyrick himself.

Every day the same scene would be enacted; every day some sergeant or corporal would dance with rage as he contemplated the Company Idiot—the title by which he was now known to all and sundry.

"Wake up! Wake up! Lumme, didn't I warn you—didn't I warn yer 'arf an 'our ago over by that there tree, when you was a-staring into the branches looking for nuts or something—didn't I warn yer that the company was parading at 10.15 for 'ot baths?"

"I didn't 'ear you, Corporal—I didn't really."

"Didn't 'ear me! Wot yer mean, didn't 'ear me? My voice ain't like the twitter of a grass'opper, is it? It's my belief you're barmy, my boy, B-A-R-M-Y. Savez. Get a move on yer, for Gawd's sake! You ought to 'ave a nurse. And when you gets to the bath-'ouse, for 'Eaven's sake pull yerself together! Don't forget to take off yer clothes before yer gets in; and when they lets the water out, don't go stopping in the bath because you forgot to get out. I wouldn't like another regiment to see you lying about when they come. They might say things."

And so with slight variations the daily strafe went on. Going up to the trenches it was always Meyrick who got lost; Meyrick who fell into shell holes and lost his rifle or the jam for his section; Meyrick who forgot to lie down when a flare went up, but stood vacantly gazing at it until partially stunned by his next-door neighbour. Periodically messages would come through from the next regiment asking if they'd lost the regimental pet, and that he was being returned. It was always Meyrick. . . .

"I can't do nothing with 'im, sir." It was the Company-Sergeant-Major speaking to Seymour. " 'E seems soft like in the 'ead. Whenever 'e does do anything and doesn't forget, 'e does it wrong. 'E's always dreaming and 'alf barmy."

" He's not a flier, I know, Sergeant-Major, but we've got to put up with all sorts nowadays," returned the officer diplomatically. " Send him to me, and let me have a talk to him."

" Very good, sir; but 'e'll let us down badly one of these days."

And so once again Meyrick stood in front of his company officer, and was encouraged to speak of his difficulties. To an amazing degree he had remembered the discourse he had listened to many months previously; to do something for the regiment was what he desired more than anything—to do something big, really big. He floundered and stopped; he could find no words. . . .

" But don't you understand that it's just as important to do the little things? If you can't do them, you'll never do the big ones."

" Yes, sir—I sees that; I do try, sir, and then I gets thinking, and some'ow—oh! I dunno—but everything goes out of my head like. I want the regiment to be proud of me —and then they calls me the Company Idiot." There was something in the man's face that touched Seymour.

" But how can the regiment be proud of you, my lad," he asked gently, " If you're always late on parade, and forgetting to do what you're told. If I wasn't certain in my own mind that it wasn't slackness and disobedience on your part, I should ask the Colonel to send you back to England as useless."

An appealing look came into the man's eyes. " Oh ! don't do that, sir. I will try 'ard—straight I will."

" Yes, but as I told you once before, there comes a time when one must judge by results. Now, Meyrick, you must understand this finally. Unless you do improve, I shall do what I said. I shall tell the Colonel that you're not fitted to be a soldier, and I shall get him to send you away. I can't go on much longer ; you're more trouble than you're worth. We're going up to the trenches again to-night, and I shall watch you. That will do ; you may go."

And so it came about that the Company Idiot entered on what was destined to prove the big scene in his uneventful life under the eyes of a critical audience. To the Sergeant-Major, who was a gross materialist, failure was a foregone conclusion ; to the company officer, who went a little nearer to the heart of things, the issue was doubtful. Possibly his threat would succeed ; possibly he'd struck the right note. And the peculiar thing is that both proved right according to their own lights. . . .

* * * * *

This particular visit to the trenches was destined to be of a very different nature to former ones. On previous occasions peace had reigned ; nothing untoward had occurred to mar the quiet, restful existence which trench life so often affords to its devotees. But this time. . . .

It started about six o'clock in the morning on the second day of their arrival—a really pleasant little intensive bombardment. A succession of shells came streaming in, shattering every yard of the front line with tearing explosions. Then the Huns turned on the gas and attacked behind it. A few reached the trenches—the majority did not; and the ground outside was covered with grey-green figures, some of which were writhing and twitching and some of which were still. The attack had failed. . . .

But that sort of thing leaves its mark on the defenders, and this was their first baptism of real fire. Seymour had passed rapidly down the trench when he realised that for the moment it was over; and though men's faces were covered with the hideous gas masks, he saw by the twitching of their hands and by the ugly, high-pitched laughter he heard that it would be well to get into touch with those behind. Moreover, in every piece of trench there lay motionless figures in khaki. . . .

It was as he entered his dugout that the bombardment started again. Quickly he went to the telephone, and started to get on to brigade head-quarters. It took him twenty seconds to realise that the line had been cut, and then he cursed dreadfully. The roar of the bursting shells was deafening;

his cursing was inaudible; but in a fit of almost childish rage—he kicked the machine. Men's nerves are jangled at times. . . .

It was merely coincidence doubtless, but a motionless figure in a gas helmet crouching outside the dugout saw that kick, and slowly in his bemused brain there started a train of thought. Why should his company officer do such a thing; why should they all be cowering in the trench waiting for death to come to them; why . . . ? For a space his brain refused to act; then it started again.

Why was that man lying full length at the bottom of the trench, with the great hole torn out of his back, and the red stream spreading slowly round him; why didn't it stop instead of filling up the little holes at the bottom of the trench and then overflowing into the next one? He was the corporal who'd call him barmy; but why should he be dead? He was dead—at least the motionless watcher thought he must be. He lay so still, and his body seemed twisted and unnatural. But why should one of the regiment be dead; it was all so unexpected, so sudden ? And why did his Major kick the telephone ? . . .

For a space he lay still, thinking ; trying to figure things out. He suddenly remembered tripping over a wire coming up to the trench, and being cursed by his sergeant for lurching against him. "You would," he had been told—"you would. If it ain't a wire you'd fall over yer own perishing feet."

"What's the wire for, sergint ?" he had asked.

"What d'you think, softie. Drying the washing on ? It's the telephone wire to headquarters."

It all came back to him, and it had been over by the stunted pollard that he'd tripped up. Then he looked back at the silent, motionless figure—the red stream had almost reached him—and the Idea came. It came suddenly like a blow. The wire must be broken, otherwise the officer wouldn't have kicked the telephone ; he'd have spoken through it.

"I wants the regiment to be proud of me—and then they calls me the Company Idiot." He couldn't do the little things—he was always forgetting, but . . . ! What was that about "lifting 'em through the charge that won the day"? There was no charge, but there was the regiment. And the regiment was wanting him at last. Something wet touched his fingers, and when he looked at them they were red. "B-A-R-M-Y. You ought to 'ave a nurse. . . ."

Then once again coherent thought failed him—utter physical weakness gripped him—he lay comatose, shuddering, and crying softly over he knew not what. The sweat was pouring down his face from the heat of the gas helmet, but still he held the valve between his teeth, breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth as he had been told. It was automatic, involuntary; he couldn't think, he only remembered certain things by instinct.

Suddenly a high-explosive shell burst near him—quite close: and a mass of earth crashed down on his legs and back, half burying him. He whimpered feebly, and after a while dragged himself free. But the action brought him close to that silent figure, with the ripped-up back. . . .

"You ought to 'ave a nurse . . ." Why? Gawd above—why? Wasn't he as good a man as that there dead corporal? Wasn't he one of the regiment too? And now the Corporal couldn't do anything, but he—well, he hadn't got no hole torn out of his back. It wasn't his blood that lay stagnant, filling the little holes at the bottom of the trench. . . .

Kipling came back to him—feebly, from another world. The dreamer was dreaming once again.

> "If your officer's dead and the sergeants look white,
> Remember it's ruin to run from a fight."

Run! Who was talking of running? He was going to save the regiment—once he could think clearly again. Everything was hazy just for the moment.

> "And wait for supports like a soldier."

But there weren't no supports, and the telephone wire was broken—the wire he'd tripped over as he came up. Until it was mended there wouldn't be any supports—until it was mended—until——

With a choking cry he lurched to his feet:

and staggering, running, falling down, the dreamer crossed the open. A tearing pain through his left arm made him gasp, but he got there—got there and collapsed. He couldn't see very well, so he tore off his gas helmet, and, peering round, at last saw the wire. And the wire was indeed cut. Why the throbbing brain should have imagined it would be cut *there*, I know not ; perhaps he associated it particularly with the pollard—and after all he was the Company Idiot. But it was cut there, I am glad to say ; let us not begrudge him his little triumph. He found one end, and some few feet off he saw the other. With infinite difficulty he dragged himself towards it. Why did he find it so terribly hard to move ? He couldn't see clearly ; everything somehow was getting hazy and red. The roar of the shells seemed muffled strangely—far away, indistinct. He pulled at the wire, and it came towards him ; pulled again, and the two ends met. Then he slipped back against the pollard, the two ends grasped in his right hand. . . .

The regiment was safe at last. The officer would not have to kick the telephone again.

The Idiot had made good. And into his heart there came a wonderful peace.

There was a roaring in his ears; lights danced before his eyes; strange shapes moved in front of him. Then, of a sudden, out of the gathering darkness a great white light seared his senses, a deafening crash overwhelmed him, a sharp stabbing blow struck his head. The roaring ceased, and a limp figure slipped down and lay still, with two ends of wire grasped tight in his hand.

* * * * *

"They are going to relieve us to-night, Sergeant-Major." The two men with tired eyes faced one another in the Major's dug-out. The bombardment was over, and the dying rays of a blood-red sun glinted through the door. "I think they took it well."

"They did, sir—very well."

"What are the casualties? Any idea?"

"Somewhere about seventy or eighty, sir—but I don't know the exact numbers."

"As soon as it's dark I'm going back to head-quarters. Captain Standish will take command."

"That there Meyrick is reported missing, sir."

"Missing! He'll turn up somewhere—if he hasn't been hit."

"Probably walked into the German trenches by mistake," grunted the C.-S.-M. dispassionately, and retired. Outside the dug-out men had moved the corporal; but the red pools still remained—stagnant at the bottom of the trench. . . .

"Well, you're through all right now, Major," said a voice in the doorway, and an officer with the white and blue brassard of the signals came in and sat down. "There are so many wires going back that have been laid at odd times, that it's difficult to trace them in a hurry." He gave a ring on the telephone, and in a moment the thin, metallic voice of the man at the other end broke the silence.

"All right. Just wanted to make sure we were through. Ring off."

"I remember kicking that damn' thing this morning when I found we were cut off," remarked Seymour, with a weary smile. "Funny how childish one is at times."

"Aye—but natural. This war's damnable." The two men fell silent. "I'll have a bit of an easy here," went on the signal officer after a while, "and then go down with you."

* * * * *

A few hours later the two men clambered out of the back of the trench. "It's easier walking, and I know every stick," remarked the Major. "Make for that stunted pollard first."

Dimly the tree stood outlined against the sky—a conspicuous mark and signpost. It was the signal officer who tripped over it first—that huddled quiet body, and gave a quick ejaculation. "Somebody caught it here, poor devil. Look out—duck."

A flare shot up into the night, and by its light the two motionless officers close to the pollard looked at what they had found.

"How the devil did he get here!" muttered Seymour. "It's one of my men."

"Was he anywhere near you when you kicked the telephone?" asked the other, and his voice was a little hoarse.

"He may have been—I don't know. Why?"

"Look at his right hand." From the tightly clenched fingers two broken ends of wire stuck out.

"Poor lad." The Major bit his lip. "Poor lad—I wonder. They called him the Company Idiot. Do you think . . . ?"

"I think he came out to find the break in the wire," said the other quietly. "And in doing so he found the answer to the big riddle."

"I knew he'd make good—I knew it all along. He used to dream of big things—something big for the regiment."

"And he's done a big thing, by Jove," said the signal officer gruffly, "for it's the motive that counts. And he couldn't know that he'd got the wrong wire."

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"When 'e doesn't forget, 'e does things wrong."

As I said, both the Sergeant-Major and his officer proved right according to their own lights.