

THE other morning was not one of my best. Somehow, in the days of peace I had always laboured under the delusion that, if ever we did go to war, we should at any rate enter simultaneously into an era when the ordnance cease from troubling and the doctors are at rest. So having found how great the delusion really was, my heart yearned for Sergeant Cassidy. His views on life in general, especially with regard to those branches of the Service whose mission in life is the annoyance of everyone else, would, I thought, be as balm to my anguished soul.

I found him in bed. His foot had relapsed. "Cassidy," I said, as I handed him my cigarette case, "I am in trouble. A doctor has just inspected us, and was very put out to find the ration meat for the men floating in the soak-pit of a neighbouring ablution bench. It was not put there by my instructions, as I told him, but he was unappeasable. Again,

a Board Inventory, the property of the Army Service Corps, has been defaced, in that false figures have been added by some person or persons unknown. Personally I suspect the solicitor, who is at present doing cook-mate, of having feloniously inserted the figures 94 opposite the item 'Shovels, coal, ordinary. Mark 6A.' We have not, as you know, got 94 shovels, coal, ordinary, Mark 6A. We haven't got one. It has been lost, and personally I again suspect the solicitor: but the stout gentleman who was making his weekly or yearly inspection has already reported it to the Army Council. He gave me to understand that if we do lose the war, it will probably be owing to that Inventory Board." I sighed deeply and relapsed into silence.

" 'Tis always the same, sir," he answered kindly: I needed sympathy. " 'Tis always the same. The great thing is to discover their little weaknesses before they come round to see one. Of course the circumstances you mention are peculiar. I doubt me that, even had you discovered their peculiarities, so to speak, you would have escaped entirely—for as you say, sir, the soak-pit is no place for

the meat to rest in at all. Still, 'tis a most important thing, and should be looked into on all occasions of that nature.

" I mind me now of a thing which took place some fortnight before I got the little souvenir in my foot. We were in billets ; 'twas the billet of which I have already spoken, where the barn was burnt down. One day the doctor comes to me and says, ' Cassidy,' he says, ' it's inspected we'll be.'

" "'Tis not the first time that same thing has happened,' says I, ' and we will survive. Do not be uneasy, sir. 'Twill be all right.'

" I should tell you that our doctor was not a soldier at all : one of those civilians, he was, who came in at the beginning. His principal duty when we was resting in billets was the obtaining of food and drink for the officers, at which same game, so I heard, he was hard to beat. One of them gentlemen who has a way with him : he would coax a bottle of the stuff out of a lime-kiln, and most of them cafés were worse than that after the boys had been there for a bit. A cheery gentleman he was, who always got mistakes in his returns. You mind them returns, sir

—in triplicate they are generally, and he could not abide them same. Oh! there was a terrible box-up when he made a mistake on one occasion, and mixed up the number of orderlies that he had with the number of men that had been inoculated for the enteric. For he had but two orderlies, and one hundred and sixty of the boys had the inoculation taken.

“Of course he was not used to inspections, but I told him ’twould be all right. ’Twas the chief of all the doctors was coming, he said, and as he always got his returns wrong, he was anxious that all should be well. So we went round together, and he poked his nose into all the places where the men slept, and the cook-houses, and the like. I turned them on to the cleaning up, and soon the smell was not quite so bad as usual. We had everything ready the night before, and the men had knocked off, when the doctor comes to me in a terrible state.

“‘Cassidy,’ he says, ‘we have the bath forgot.’

“‘Bath,’ says I, ‘what will we be wanting with a bath? Have not the boys their

buckets? And it is not the Hotel Cecil that we have.'

" 'Cassidy,' he says, 'the chief doctor is the devil on a bath for the men. That and a tub in which to wash their clothes we must have, or it's lost I am. I heard just now 'twas the first thing he'd look for.'

" 'Bedad,' says I, 'if 'tis the peculiarity of the chief doctor we will get a bath, or my name is not Michael Cassidy.—O'Toole,' I shouts, 'you lazy blatherer, I'm wanting you.' 'Twas the scheming malingerer that had been excused duty for the gout in the foot, and had us all beat when we ran to the burning barn, to save his peppermint bull's-eyes. You mind I told you of that same O'Toole. I says when he comes, ' Hunt round and find a bath.'

" 'A bath!' says he, 'and where will I be finding that same?'

" 'Is it me that would be saving you that trouble?' I cries. 'The doctor wishes a bath; do not let me see your ugly face till you have one found.'

" 'I'm thinking,' says I, when he had gone, 'that if we cannot get a bath, it is a hole we might dig in the field, and line it with

the waterproof sheets. They did that same, the squadron in the next farm, but owing to the difficulty of seeing which was hole and which was not when they had it filled with the water, the old sow fell in at the same time as the sergeant-major, and there was a terrible commotion.' :

“ ‘ ’Tis something better we must have, Cassidy,’ he says. ‘ The chief doctor is a terrible man, and he has it against me that I told him in triplicate that I had one hundred and sixty orderlies.’

“ At that moment back comes O’Toole, ‘ I have it found,’ he cries. ‘ There is a big tub yonder of metal, that they use for the pig-wash, and empty it is.’

“ ‘ It will serve,’ says I when I see it. ‘ Can ye paint, O’Toole ? ’

“ ‘ I can that,’ he says.

“ ‘ There is a man with some whitewash,’ I says, ‘ painting the farm. Get that same and write BATH upon that tub.’

“ ‘ But the wash-tub,’ cries the doctor. ‘ We have it forgot.’

“ ‘ Is there another of them tubs, O’Toole ? ’ I says.

“ ‘There is not,’ he says. ‘I have the farm searched.’

“ ‘What will we do?’” cried the doctor. ‘The chief doctor is a devil for wash-tubs; and, Cassidy,’ he says coaxingly, ‘there’s that matter of the orderlies.’ Oh, he had a way with him, had the doctor!

“ ‘’Tis not I that will be failing you,’ I cries, and I thinks for a moment. I looks at the tub, and then sudden-like I gets the idea. “ ‘’Tis big enough,’ I says, ‘’tis plenty big. O’Toole,’ I cries, ‘O’Toole, ye blackguard, you will paint BATH as I have told you on this side of that tub, and on the other you will paint WASH-TUB. Do you follow me, O’Toole?’

“ ‘I do that,’ he says, and goes off for the whitewash.

“ The doctor was gazing at me. ‘What is the notion?’ he says, ‘for the chief doctor will not be deceived.’

“ ‘Leave it to me, sir,’ I says: ‘leave it to me,’ for I had the scheme in my mind.

“ The next day I sent for O’Toole. ‘You have it marked,’ I says. ‘That is good. Now listen while I tell you, you dirty malin-

gerer. The chief doctor is inspecting us this day, and the devil he is on baths and wash-tubs. You will place the tub against the wall in the barn with the word BATH outwards. The chief doctor is coming at eleven, but it's late he may be. On the other hand he may be early. So at a quartèr to eleven you will remove your clothes, and stand by the bath.'

“ ‘ But, Sergeant ! ’ he says.

“ ‘ There is no but,’ says I. ‘ When the chief doctor appears you will receive the signal from Angus MacNab, who will be at the door, and you will get into the water. You will get into the water, I say, and when the chief doctor comes in at the door you will pretend that you like it.’

“ ‘ But it's dead I shall be ! ’ he cries.

“ ‘ 'Twill be no loss,’ says I. Then I sends for six of the boys. ‘ The chief doctor is coming,’ I says, ‘ and the devil he is on baths and wash-tubs. I have the bath fixed for O'Toole ; but when I shall give the signal for which you will watch, you will rush in and seize the tub and carry it round to the other side of the barn, and put it against the wall with WASH-TUB showing. I will see the



chief doctor goes round the other way ; then when he appears you will be washing your socks. There will be water in it from the bath of O'Toole.'

" "'Tis only one pair of socks that I have,' says one.

" 'Then 'tis high time they were washed,' says I. 'Be off, you blackguards, and may Heaven help you if you have the doctor let down.'

" At eleven-thirty the chief doctor arrives. ' 'Tis the bath I would see,' he says.

" "'Tis occupied, sir,' says I, giving the sign to Angus MacNab. 'Twas high time, too, for O'Toole had been dressed only in his shirt for three-quarters of an hour.'

" When we got to the barn there was O'Toole standing in the water. He was blue with the cold, and shivering like a leaf in the wind.

" 'Ah! my man,' says the chief doctor, ' 'tis a bath you're having, I see.'

" 'Sit down, you varmint,' I whispers, 'sit down and splash. It's enjoying yourself you are.'

" 'And how often do you take a bath?' says the chief doctor.

“ ‘Every day,’ mutters O’Toole, when he could speak for the chattering of his teeth, for I had my eye fixed upon him.

“ ‘Very good indeed,’ says the chief doctor. ‘A most satisfactory arrangement,’ he remarks to our own doctor. ‘And now I will inspect the place where they have the clothes washed.’

“ ‘Get out,’ I says to O’Toole as they goes out.

“ ‘’Tis dying I am,’ he says, as the six men rushes in for the tub.

“ ‘Step it, you blackguards!’ I cries. ‘I will keep them diverted till you have it in place.’

“ With that I catches up the party, and asks the Colonel concerning one of the cook-houses near by. The doctor keeps him occupied inside, I having given him the wink, and then out come the boys with the tub. They stuck going round, as the passage was narrow, but I had them fixed with my eye, and they suddenly fell through together. The tub upset and the water was received by Angus MacNab. There was a terrible noise as it fell on the bricks, but they was out of sight when the doctor appeared.

“ ‘ And now the wash-tub,’ he says.

“ ‘ Round here, sir,’ says I, and with that I leads the party to the other side of the barn. They had it fixed, as he comes up.

“ ‘ But it is empty,’ says he. ‘ You cannot wash clothes without water. And what is that at the bottom ? ’

“ He pointed to a watery-looking grey object at the bottom of the tub.

“ ‘ ‘Tis the shirt of O’Toole,’ whispers one of the men to me, “ that slipped in by mistake.’

“ ‘ ‘Tis a shirt,’ says I, ‘ the owner of which has been in contact with a horse with the ringworm.’ At that moment I heard the voice of O’Toole from inside as he looked for his shirt, and I went on a little louder, the better to drown his horrible language. ‘ I have the men instructed that they are to empty the water away after washing any of his garments.’

“ But why does he not wash his own ? ’ asks the Colonel.

“ ‘ In this unit, sir,’ says I, ‘ the medical officer is that particular that we has a special squad trained in washing.’

“ ‘ Indeed,’ says he, and looked at me close. ’Twas a mercy he did not look at our own doctor, for he was purple in the face, and unable to speak with ease. ‘ Indeed,’ says he, and fixes his eye on the one sock which was all the whole six could muster between them for the washing. ‘ I trust they are not overworked.’

“ I have since wondered whether he suspected anything,” murmured Cassidy, as he took another of my cigarettes.

I left the great man smoking reflectively, and as I reached the front door the sense of my inferiority descended like a pall. What would he have done had the meat been found in the soak-pit? But at this moment I was nearly run over by a motor omnibus.