

Wallace Edgar

Writ in Barracks



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WAR

I

A tent that is pitched at the base:
A wagon that comes from the night:
A stretcher – and on it a Case:
A surgeon, who's holding a light.
The Infantry's bearing the brunt —
O hark to the wind-carried cheer!
A mutter of guns at the front:
A whimper of sobs at the rear.
And it's *War!* 'Orderly, hold the light.
You can lay him down on the table: so.
Easily – gently! Thanks – you may go.'
And it's *War!* but the part that is not for show.

II

A tent, with a table athwart,
A table that's laid out for one;
A waterproof cover – and nought
But the limp, mangled work of a gun.
A bottle that's stuck by the pole,
A guttering dip in its neck;
The flickering light of a soul
On the wondering eyes of The Wreck,
And it's *War!* 'Orderly, hold his hand.
I'm not going to hurt you, so don't be afraid.
A ricochet! God! what a mess it has made!'
And it's *War!* and a very unhealthy trade.

III

The clink of a stopper and glass:
A sigh as the chloroform drips:
A trickle of – what? on the grass,

And bluer and bluer the lips.
The lashes have hidden the stare...
A rent, and the clothes fall away...
A touch, and the wound is laid bare...
A cut, and the face has turned grey...
And it's *War!* 'Orderly, take It out.
It's hard for his child, and it's rough on his wife,
There might have been – sooner – a chance for his life.
But it's *War!* And – Orderly, clean this knife!'

ARMY DOCTOR

Army Doctor! Army Doctor!
'Ere's some 'cruities for inspection, —
Some in rags, an' some in cuffs.
Some in shirts, an' some without 'em,
Wot a blessed strange collection!
Served before? You needn't doubt 'em,
Bloomin' muffs!

Army Doctor! Army Doctor!
Take your sword, an' drop your lancet,
Teach your nurses 'ow to fight!
'Ow to march the dead march – solemn!
'Ow to route march – an' to dance it!
Teach 'em 'ow to march in column,
By the right!

Army Doctor! Army Doctor!
Gold an' velvet! 'broidered lacin's,
'Oldin' 'igh your bloomin' 'ead!
'Seen you peel that coat so winnin',
'Seen you stain them pretty facin's,
'Seen your 'ighly glossy linen,
Splattered red!

Army Doctor! Army Doctor!
'Sun is 'ot – an' we are learnin'
Lessons in the cholera school,
We're fear-sick, an' mad as 'atters,
Throat a-parchin', 'ead a-burnin',
Seems to me, *you're* takin' matters
Rather cool!

Army Doctor! Army Doctor!
Spurs and swagger! Cuff an' collar!
Up to ev'ry bloomin' trick!
'Seen you – as I've seen none other —
Go to – where *I* dursn't foller!
'Seen you act the man and brother
To the sick!

Army Doctor! Army Doctor!
Things by Engineers forgotten,
You 'ave got to recollect.
Tho' you're such a gilded dandy,
When the meat is goin' rotten,

Chances are, *you're* somewhere 'andy
To inspect!

Army Doctor! Army Doctor!
Where the firin' never ceases,
Where the 'uddled soldier lies,
Where the Mauser bullets shave 'im,
Gawd! they're chippin' 'im to pieces!
Git 'im out of fire an' save 'im...
Well done, Guys!

NICHOLSON'S NEK

*They gave their best at Waterloo,
For the honour of England's name;
They threw their best on a hundred fields,
To put our foes to shame.
'Tis good that England's soldier men
To-day can do the same.*

They have proved their worth,
To the ends of the earth.
They have striven and won, – and failed!
They have shown their might,
On the Dargai Height,
When the *mollah's* bullets hailed.

They have laid their dead,
In the river bed,
On the site of their last brave stand.
They have buried at night,
By a lantern light,
In a grave that they scooped in the sand.

And far and wide,
They have done and died,
By donga, and veldt, and kloof.
And the lonely grave,
Of the honoured brave,
Is a proof – if we need a proof,

They won – and died,
And we glorified
The men of the barrack schools.
They died – and failed,
And in wrath we railed
At the fault of the bungling fools!

And perhaps it is good
That we change our mood,
And perchance it is well to blame,
And to seek elsewhere,
For some men to bear,
The weight of our foolish shame.

But the fight hard fought,
Must it go for nought
Because of its hapless turn?

Must we then withhold,
For the life hard sold,
The Honour it died to earn?

When hot and tired,
With the last round fired,
And never a ray of hope —
What then the shame?
They were just the same
Who charged Talana's slope!

You may give and take,
As the shrapnels rake,
When your batt'ry has replied;
But you cannot live
When there's too much give,
From the guns on the open side.

Good men are they,
Who gain the day, —
And victory is sweet, —
And just as brave
Who do not rave
At every small defeat.

For the fight hard fought
Must not go for nought,
Because of its hapless turn;
Nor we withhold,
For the life hard sold,
The Honour it died to earn.

*We gave our best at Waterloo,
For the honour of England's name;
We threw our best on a hundred fields
To put our foes to shame.
'Tis good that England's soldier men
To-day can do the same.*

MY PAL, THE BOER

We met without appointment on an 'ill,
I comed upon the beggar without warnin';
Layin' down be'ind a boulder,
With 'is rifle to 'is shoulder,
He sent along wot's Dutch for a 'Good-mornin'.
'E missed me with a fair amount of skill,
An' 'fore 'e'd time to mount, an' get from danger,
I was takin' of my rest,
By a sittin' on 'is chest,
An' a sayin' to the welcome little stranger: —

'My pal, the Boer!
You're a prisoner of war'
('E tried to break my jaw, but that's a trifle);
'You can't escape me, can yer?
In the name of Rule Britannia,
I commandeered your 'orse an' Mauser rifle!'

You wouldn't call 'is manners over bright,
An' you wouldn't term 'is disposition sunny,
An' 'e 'ad a silly notion
That the cause of the commotion
Was Chamberlain a-fightin' for 'is money;
An' 'e fancied that the British flag was white —
'Twas a silly fancy — still we must excuse it,
When the Lancers came along
'E felt a trifle *bong*!
'E soon found out the proper way to use it!

My pal, the Boer,
Ain't used to proper war,
But tho' 'e scorns the flag an' does the grandy,
The 'igh an' mighty scorners,
When we get 'im in a corner,
'E FINDS A FLAG OF TRUCE IS MIGHTY 'ANDY!

SONG OF THE FIRST TRAIN THROUGH

Line Clear to Witteputs! I wind around the guarded hill,
And thunder o'er the lean long bridge that spans the sombre stream;
No upturn rail to devastate, no culvert gap to fill,
And where the outpost feared to ride, I gather up my steam.

*(I passed a little mound of earth that bore the cross's sign, —
A Colonel, and a dozen men, who fell to clear the line.)*

Line Clear to Belmont: and I feel the ballast shaking down:
My flanges bite the new-laid rail and prove the new-thrust pin.
On either side the purple ridge, the veldt land sickly brown,
The 'distant off' says 'Welcome,' and the 'Home' says 'Come ye in.'

*(Two thousand guardsmen rushed the Kop — a score are buried here,
And here are laid some Fusiliers — they fell to give Line Clear.)*

Line Clear to Graspan: so I run adown the gentle grade,
Nor notice in my joyful haste the kopje stubble grown,
And wildly bouldered foot to crest where fell a half brigade,
What time the bristling mountain-side with segment shell was sown.

*(The mess-deck and the ward-room thinned to give the line pratique
Line Clear from Graspan — so, half-mast the Ensign at the Peak.)*

Line Clear: along the new-spliced wires that droop from pole to pole,
By Enslin, where the helio glared fitfully and fleet,
The word is passed across the plain to where the rivers roll, —
To where, tree-fringed in eddying swirls, the Modder meets the Riet.

*(In heat and thirst and weariness a hundred dying lay,
A hundred bloody forms grew stiff to give me Right Away.)*

Line Clear: I face the grim gaunt range that stretches east and west
('Twas by its base, near Magers farm, that Wauchope's men went
down):

I skirt the ridge that hid the guns, and gleefully I breast
The easy rise that brings in view the long-beleaguered town.

*(Line Clear: o'er blood, and sweat, and pain, and sorrow's
road I ran,
And every sleeper was a wound, and every rail a man.)*

THE NAVAL BRIGADE

When you're pickin' your men for a fight,
When choosin' the corps that'll serve,
It's only quite proper an' right
To fix upon muscle an' nerve,
An' so, to your heavy Dragoons —
Your Granny-dear Guards an' their band —
To your Sappers with bridgin' pontoons,
You can buckle the Lower Deck Hand!

*(The Lower Deck Hand
Doesn't want any band;
He's grit, an' he's sand
Is the Lower Deck Hand.)*

His march is a go-as-you-please;
He most keeps step with hisself!
For his boots ain't conducive to ease,
Bein' mostly kept packed on a shelf!
Tho' he isn't so span or so spic —
Tho' his marchin' ain't what you'd call grand —
He gets to the front just as quick
Does the elegant Lower Deck Hand!

*(The Lower Deck Hand
Wasn't reared in the Strand;
But he's good to command,
Is the Lower Deck Hand.)*

You may swear by the jolly marines,
'Per marey, per tarey' they fight —
Not speakin' for them in their 'teens —
I don't mind admittin' your right.
But all that the Joey has got,
As I'd have all the world understand,
He's learnt – well, he's learnt quite a lot
From his tooter – the Lower Deck Hand!

*(The Lower Deck Hand
Is a mine that's unpanned;
An' he's yours to command,
Is the Lower Deck Hand.)*

He doesn't shape well at Reviews,
I've known him to spit in the ranks;
But we've never been asked to excuse

A fault, when he's guarding the flanks.
An' when there's a break in the square
Or a place where the Line cannot stand,
I'll tell you the chap to put there —
'Jack Mulloy' – the Lower Deck Hand.

*(The Lower Deck Hand
Will die as he 'll stand;
He's tempered an land,
Is the Lower Deck Hand.)*

When you're hemmed in a tight little hole,
By a greatly outnumbering foe,
It's a matter of stokin' an' coal
How far we're away from the foe.
When the Infantry's needin' some aid,
When the 'tillery gets under-man'd, —
Make way for the Naval Brigade! —
His Highness the Lower Deck Hand!

*(The Lower Deck Hand
With his guns he can land,
An he'll kick up some sand,
Will the Lower Deck Hand.)*

THE ARMoured TRAIN

There's risk on the ballasted roadway,
There's death on the girdered bridge,
Red ruin from sleeper to sleeper,
And wreck on the bouldered ridge.
No signal to herald my coming,
No whistle to waken the plain;
Stand clear – I am out for patrolling!
Make way for the Armoured Train!

I run not to time, nor to table,
I'm neither an 'Up' nor a 'Down,'
But 'Full speed ahead' is my order,
When skirting the enemy's town.
My mails have a backing of cordite,
My luggage is powder and shell,
With smoke-stack a-blazing I thunder,
A traveller's sample of Hell!

They have laid me a mine by a culvert,
They have loosened a bolt by a curve,
But thrice-tested steel is my muscle,
And thrice-tested brass is my nerve.
A curse for their bungling folly,
A laugh for the death-trap that fails,
A hang for the enemy's miner,
So long as I keep to the rails.

A cheer – and I pull from the township
To spy out the enemy's line;
A plunge – and I rush into darkness
As reckless of wreckage as mine.
And what if a rail has been lifted?
And what if a river's unspanned?
I fail, but I know in the failing
I strove at the Empire's command.

They were men who at Badajos conquered,
They were men who for Wellington struck,
And a Man is the Man at the Throttle,
And a Man is the Man on the Truck.
Undismayed I may go to destruction.
For I know at the end I may feel
I die with the men on the footplate,
I pass with my brothers in steel.

MAKE YOUR OWN ARRANGEMENTS

When the dépôt soldier's dinin' on three-quarters of a pound,
If there's too much bone to please 'im, or the meat is extry tough,
'E 'as got a chance of grousin' when 'is orficer goes round,
'E can draw upon the mess-book, if 's rations ain't enough.
But it's make your own arrangements! Make your own arrangements!
When you're cut orf from the column, an' supplies are runnin' low,
It ain't no 'too much fat, sir!'
But it's bread – an' glad of that, sir!
O it's *bake* your own arrangements – out of flour – as you go!

When the dépôt soldier's on parade 'e sparkles an' 'e shines.
When the dépôt soldier's drillin' 'e must make each motion 'tell.'
When the dépôt soldier's marchin' 'e must march on drill-book lines.
'E 'as got a drill-instructor, an' 'e does it very well.
But it's make your own arrangements! Make your own arrangements!
When the camp is rushed at midnight, an' you're fallin' in – to die!
O there ain't no drill-rules set there,
But it's take your gun – an' get there!
When you make your own arrangements, you must grab your belt an'
fly.

The dépôt soldier's grounded in a systematic drill;
'E also knows wot's 'rendezvous' an' what is 'bivouac.'
'E knows the use of rifle-pits, the proper way to kill —
'E understands the principles an' the'ries of attack.
But it's make your own arrangements! Make your own arrangements!
When you're dodgin' tons of boulder, climbin' mount'ins under fire,
An' the drill-book won't assist you
Till the fallin' rocks 'ave missed you!
So you make your own arrangements – an' you climb a little 'igher!

When the dépôt soldier's wantin' with 'is orficer to speak,
'E must 'alt two paces from 'im, an' salute before the start.
An' 'e mustn't try to argue, an' 'e mustn't give no cheek;
An' if 'is Captain slangs 'im – 'e must take it in good part.
But it's make your own arrangements! Make your own arrangements!
When you see 'im lying wounded, all the circumstances change.
An' you don't 'eed no instructions;
An' you don't need introductions;
But you make your own arrangements – an' you get 'im out of range.

When the dépôt soldier sickens, when the dépôt soldier dies,
'E is buried by 'is comrades in the regulation style.
'E is covered by an ensign of the regulation size,
An' 'e gets a firin' party made of thirteen rank an' file.

But it's make your own arrangements! Make your own arrangements!
When the Colonel reads the service by a guard-room lantern light.
When in silent rows you've laid 'em
In a trench your bay'nets made 'em,
O, it's make your own arrangements when you bury in the night!

GINGER JAMES

A spell I 'ad to wait
Outside the barrick gate,
For Ginger James was passin' out as I was passin' in;
'E was only a recruit,
But I give 'im the salute,
For I'll never git another chance of givin' it agin!

'E'd little brains, I'll swear,
Beneath 'is ginger 'air,
'Is personal attractions, well, they wasn't very large;
'E was fust in ev'ry mill,
An' a foul-mouthed brute, but still
We'll forgive 'im all 'is drawbacks – 'e 'as taken 'is discharge.

'E once got fourteen days,
For drunken, idle ways,
An' the Colonel said the nasty things that colonels sometimes say;
'E called him to 'is face
The regiment's disgrace —
But the Colonel took 'is 'at off when 'e passed 'im by to-day.

For days 'e used to dwell
Inside a guard-room cell,
Where they put the darbies on 'im for a 'owlin' savage brute;
But as by the guard 'e went
They gave 'im the present,
The little bugler sounded off the 'General Salute.'

The band turned out to play
Poor Ginger James away;
'Is Captain an' 'is Company came down to see 'im off;
An' thirteen file an' rank,
With three rounds each of blank;

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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