

THE PROMOTION OF PUDD'N.

I suppose that in some dim recess of my mind I must have known that he bore some other name. But I never heard it, and having no curiosity in the matter I never enquired. I was quite satisfied—and so apparently was he—with the name by which he was known to his platoon mates. “Pudd’n”—pronounced to rhyme with “sudden”—has many good qualities to commend it as a cognomen. It is instinct with poetry—it is live and tremulous with association—it is close-clustered with sweetly poignant memories. Moreover, its syllable and a half contain no stumbling-block for the untrained or the unwary tongue. It is easily said, and has unwonted possibilities of varied expression—especially of emphasis and of gusto. Anyhow, I think it a name quite as suitable for a man as Johnny, or Willie, or Bobby.

To the platoon, then, Pudd’n is just Pudd’n—that and no more: Gussie alone affects a different appellation for our messmate, and calls him “Pooding”—carefully stressing the

final "g." But that is only Gussie's Kelvinside facetiousness.

Pudd'n, I may say, hails from a district of Glasgow which he calls "the Pos'l," and previous to August 4, 1914, he justified his claim to existence by selling boots in a city warehouse. To-day Pudd'n is a soldier—and one to whom any man might be proud to doff his hat. During the seventeen months that he has served in France he has played the game to the top of his bent. His hands have burned and his back has ached hundreds of times from his zealous toil with the pick and shovel; there has never been an occasion when volunteers were asked for a dangerous job that Pudd'n has not offered himself; as a cool and skilful bomber he has been "over the parapet" more times than are generally permitted to the majority of his kind; once he was wounded in the head by a German bullet, and a month later he was in the trenches again, ready as ever to play a hazardous part.

No amount of German strafeing or of Army stew can serve to alter Pudd'n's ineradicable good nature or his habitual calm. To quote but one instance—I remember a day when a heavy shell landed immediately in front of our trench, and brought down a goodly part of the parapet. Three of us, who were in an adjacent part of the

trench, ran round the traverse that separated us from the scene of the disaster. But we did not find what we had fearfully expected. Pudd'n was there certainly—but Pudd'n very much alive. He was partly buried beneath sandbags and earth, but with his free limbs he was making frantic endeavours to extricate himself. By a miracle he was unhurt, and when we had set him free his only remark—delivered in the most casual tones—was, “ Well, to hell wi' that for a pantomime ! They nearly did the dirty on me there. Ah wunner if ma smoke-helmet goggles are broken.”

In the same circumstances another man would probably have had to retire behind the lines for a day or two to recover from nervous shock. But not so Pudd'n ! A half-hour later he took his spell of look-out duty, just as though such things as nerves didn't exist.

Gussie was holding aloft a candle, and by its light the Orderly Sergeant was reading aloud the battalion orders for the following day. The rest of the platoon—some of us already outstretched on the floor, others unfolding ground-sheets or unbuckling kilts—listened attentively from the shadowed recesses of the stable that was our billet.

The Sergeant's voice was loud as he read—

“4. The Commanding Officer is pleased to make the following appointment, with effect from this date :—

“No. 1234 Pte. A. B. Brown, D Coy., to be Acting Lance-Corporal (unpaid).”

Amid the buzz of conversation that followed the Sergeant's departure, the voice of the Sanitary Man of the platoon was heard asking, “Wha's Private Abey Broon, the new Lance-Jack? Ah never heard o' um afore.”

And a Lewis Gunner replied, “Oh, some nut in another platoon that's been sucking in with his Sergeant.”

Whereupon the voice of Pudd'n resounded—“Awa' an' raffle yersel'! It's me 'at's got the stripe.”

And then, as one man, the platoon arose from its several beds and showered congratulations upon Pudd'n. It cost us nothing—and, besides, we all liked Pudd'n.

Next morning, as I was greasing my boots with the fatty remnants of the ham which had been issued to me for a breakfast ration, I heard a shrill voice piping—“Dilly Mile, Ker-r-roneecal, Aikspraiss, Nuyorkee-rald,” and I knew—though one unaccustomed to the sounds cer-

tainly would not—that a French newsboy was outside selling English papers. Gussie and I subscribed a penny each, and the combined sums sufficed to buy one halfpenny paper. Erchie also got one in exchange for a tin of plum and apple jam which he commandeered from another mess—without that mess's knowledge or sanction, of course.

Gussie opened the sheet and ran his eye over the headlines.

“Tut, tut!” said he a minute or two later. “Most extraordinary thing! Not a word about it.”

“About what?” I queried innocently.

“Why, about the important change in the Western Command—elevation of a humble private to a position of commanding eminence—the amazing and romantic story of Private Pudding—how he had greatness thrust upon him!—starting to take off his clothes one night as a private, ere he had reached his shirt he had blossomed into a full Unpaid Acting Lance-Corporal—jumped from the ranks to fame and fortune and influence at a single bound! Think of the emotional possibilities in a story like that!—the human appeal! And then to think that Lord Northcliffe missed it! Huh! after this I'll go to the pages of the 'Expositor' or

the 'Hibbert Journal' when I want real yellow sensationalism!"

Pudd'n was operating on his rifle with a "pull-through" during this oration, and his smiling mouth was like a slice of water melon for shape and size.

"Aw, chuck it, Gussie," he expostulated with the utmost good humour. "Ah didna waant the stripe. It wisna ma faut I got it."

And Erchie said, "Here, that's yesterday's paper so the news couldna be in it. Wait till the morn's mornin' an' we'll see Pudd'n's fotey—bokoo foteys o' him at different stages o' his life—and we'll hae Horatio Bull prophesyin' that the war's boun' to en' noo by the Glesca Fair."

That afternoon Pudd'n "put up his stripe."

Sitting upon the edge of the manger in the billet he, with the aid of his "housewife," adorned each sleeve of his tunic with a "dog's leg"; thereafter he, with modest pride, wrote an account of his sudden elevation and of the additional and brain-wearing responsibilities which it entailed, to that fair charmer of "the Pos'l" whom he was pleased to designate "the tert."

In the evening he swanked it mightily in an estaminet that was a favourite haunt of the

members of his platoon—stood treat to all his pals in the matter of *pommes de terre frites* and *vin blanc* (after having borrowed ten francs from Gussie to defray the costs)—and was asked by no fewer than fourteen jealous privates if the Quartermaster was now issuing stripes with the daily rations.

For the next few days Pudd'n attended a N.C.O.'s class presided over by "The Big F'lah"—as the Regimental Sergeant-Major is quite accurately and not disrespectfully designated by the men. While the battalion perspired—or as Erchie succinctly expressed it, "nearly knocked its pan oot"—in the pleasing diversions of platoon drill or Swedish "jerks," a score or so of young N.C.O.'s were stationed in a corner of the field yelling themselves hoarse. They weren't yelling at anything or anybody in particular—they just bayed the moon, as it were; while the Sergeant-Major aided, abetted, and discouraged them in especially piquant phrases that are the copyright possession of the Warrant Officers' Trades Union. What it was they were shouting I don't know; the chorusing voices produced such a strange and inharmonious medley of sound that no words were distinguishable, but it was generally supposed among the privates

that the N.C.O.'s were practising those words of command and exhortation especially in favour with their class—such as “Spar about, you fullahs!”—“Show a leg there!”—“Corporal to you, please!”—“Buzz off!”—“And the time is one—one, two!” etc.

It was also conjectured that the S.-M. was instructing his class in the judicious selection and employment of those adjectival phrases which are the peculiar property of N.C.O.'s—the hallmark of their calling—and which are never seen in print, the presumable reason being that type melts when subjected to too great a heat.

Anyhow, Pudd'n made one of the noisy, shouting mob, and on his return to the billet his voice was a mere husky whisper.

“An' they ca' this 'restin',” he croaked, as he sat down violently on his pack and leaned his head on his hands in utter fatigue. “Ah'd a stricken sicht sooner be in the trenches.”

At tea-time Erchie reported that in a quiet street of the town he had come across Pudd'n practising the tricks of his new rank—that he had distinctly heard him adjure a post lamp to “spar about and don't come the 'old soldier' game with me!”

“An' Pudd'n,” said Erchie in tones of admiration, “man, ye did it fine! If Dougie Haig

could juist ha' heard ye he'd hae fair rummelt in his shoon, for he'd hae seen himself oot o' a job in a wee while. An' efter the war it's the rare an' smert manager o' the shop you'll mak'. Ah think ah can juist hear ye orderin' about the salesweemen.—'Hi, Miss Robison, show a leg there! Here's a customer in!'

For one brief week Pudd'n maintained his equilibrium on the dizzy height to which the fortunes of war had thrust him. And then——!

Well, it was like this. A few weeks previous to the events hereinbefore chronicled, there was a certain private in the platoon to which Pudd'n lent distinction. And there was a good deal of the "old soldier" about this private—he had a conscientious objection to doing any work if another fellow could do it instead. He scamped, he dodged, he shirked—and he kept religiously for his own sole enjoyment the butter which came in his parcels from home. Wherefore he was not a popular personage with his platoon-mates. But inasmuch as his father pulled certain wires, the private was duly gazetted and appointed to a commission in the battalion in which he was already serving. Thereafter he departed unto a school for officers, conducted a few miles behind the lines — and soon after

Pudd'n's promotion he returned to the battalion, with his single star in the ascendant. And two days later Pudd'n's blaze of glory was suddenly snuffed out.

To go into the detail of the incident—Pudd'n was on Quarter-Guard; and as he stood outside the door of the guard-room aimlessly watching the sentry on duty, a crisp voice sounded behind him—

“Corporal, go over and tell that sentry to straighten up. He's slouching.”

And Pudd'n's reply was, “Awa' an' tak' a runnin' jump to yersel'! The man's fine.”

Next morning the Sergeant-Major piloted him into the Orderly Room in this breathless fashion—“Prisoner and escort, Quick March! Right Turn! Left Turn! Halt! Right Turn!” And Pudd'n found himself, bareheaded, facing the Colonel, while the other Officers stood ranged around the room.

When he quitted the Orderly Room the sleeves of his tunic were bare of any adornment—he was no longer of “the backbone of the British Army.”

He explained the matter in the billet. “Ah clean forgot he wis an officer noo, an' ah clean forgot ah wis a Lance-Jack. When ah heard his v'ice ah thocht he wis juist kiddin' me, so

ah yapped back at 'um. Ah weel! Ah've lost my stripe, but it saved me a' the same. If ah hadna had a stripe to lose ah'd likely have got 21 days F.P. Number One f'ae the C.O. Ach, ah'd raither be a private, onyway!"

Thus it was that Pudd'n renounced his dreams of military fame and glory, and resigned himself to the obscurity of the ranks.