(*November 27th, 1916.*)

The Human Side of Trench Warfare

By Ian Hay.*

AT a regular luncheon of the Club, held on the 27th November, Captain Beith ("Ian Hay") said:

Mr. President and Members of the Canadian Clubs of Toronto,—First let me say to you how very proud I feel to be your guest to-day. And let me thank your President for the very generous remarks with which he introduced me, for his kind reference to certain mutual friends of ours whom I left behind on the Western front, but whom I hope to rejoin ultimately and find still going strong. I may mention that Private Mucklewame is now a full Corporal.

Let me say secondly how glad I am to be back, even for a short space, under the Union Jack. The Union Jack means very much more to us to-day than ever before. Not that I have any complaint to make about my treatment under the Stars and Stripes. I have just come from the United States, where I have been treated with the greatest kindness and consideration possible. I have discussed the war with, I suppose, hundreds of Americans, and I have come back with this feeling in my mind, that every genuine American is pro-Ally through and through. They were so ready and willing to hear about the war, and what it means to us, that my chief worry was whether I should get to Canada on time. I have spent four nights this week in the train. One night, as I paced the platform of a remote and extremely well-ventilated railway junction near Pittsburgh, I was reminded of a story, not new, not true, one of the stories grandfather used to tell—of a man who when traveling in Scotland came to a station where he found a number of gentlemen, clad in long coats and wearing black hats with crape around them. He asked one:—"I beg pardon, but is this a funeral?" "Weel," was the reply, "you could not rightly call this a funeral, for the corp has missed his connection." Now, gentlemen, there were moments on that platform when I began to feel I was emulating the "corp." However, I outstripped him, and here I am.

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My little excursion to Canada is in the nature of a holiday. Not long ago I was experiencing trench warfare on the Western front; and I was sent to the United States to endeavor to interest the people there in the war from the more intimate point of view, and at the same time to endeavor, by methods of peaceful persuasion, to enlist their sympathies in our cause. That is why I am here on this side of the Atlantic. It would be superfluous to attempt anything of the same kind in Canada, for Canada's contribution to our cause, our crusade —for this is a holy war if ever there was one—will never be forgotten throughout the British Empire while the words British Empire and patriotism stand for anything at all. I say this with deeper feeling because I have had the honor for some months of fighting shoulder to shoulder in the front line trenches with a Canadian Division.

I don't quite know why I was selected for the pleasant task of visiting the States; what peculiar qualifications were supposed to be mine; except, perhaps, that I had succeeded for a period of twelve months in dodging the missiles of the enemy. Anyone in this war who performs that feat of agility may regard himself as in some sort a veteran. Also I had had the opportunity of studying the development of the campaign with a certain degree of continuity.

The Scottish Division, the 9th, with which I had the honor to serve from its earliest beginnings, was the first of the Kitchener Divisions that went over seas; its arrival in France coincided with, perhaps you might say ended, the first period of the war.

The first period consisted entirely of a period of desperate resistance by the little British Expeditionary Force, the original regular army, never at any time exceeding 120,000 men, who through the autumn and winter of 1914 maintained a desperate resistance against immensely superior odds—superior in numbers only—until spring arrived. And with the arrival of the spring, when the long heroic period of resistance came to an end, the second period began. The arrival of those countless legions, raised and equipped in a few short months by the genius of Lord Kitchener, stiffened and thickened that wofully thin line, held by the remnants of the British army and by the Imperial troops which had hurried from all over the world to the Mother Country's assistance.

The tide of invasion was stopped, and held up forever, but we could not begin to roll it back. We had the men, but not the munitions. All we could do was to hold on, harass the enemy and keep him busy, to make time,

while back at home the forges were roaring, the machines were clicking, and the men and women—especially the women —turned out the pile of munitions necessary for our needs, till at last we got the welcome word, "We are ready; full speed ahead!" We had to wait a long time for that message. All last summer the line was held, by men who a year previously had been artisans, riveters, plowmen, shepherds—with no great military traditions to live up to, and with not much in the way of big guns behind them. If one of our guns put a shell over into the enemy trenches, a whole salvo came back; munitions were strictly limited, and the best we could do was to save up for perhaps a week, and indulge in one great outburst of artillery retaliation, perhaps every Saturday. Between times we sat upon the floor of the trench and wished for better days. It was not altogether exhilarating.

Things were not going too well on the Eastern front, either, and whenever the Russians lost ground there would be a burst of cheering in the trenches opposite, and the enemy would put up a notice board announcing the news. In fact, both sides were extremely helpful and obliging in furnishing information of this kind to one another.

Talking of notice boards, I may mention one incident. At the time of the Sinn Fein riots in Dublin, the enemy had particularly early—suspiciously early—information of all that was going on. A notice board was put up opposite an Irish Division, saying: "Irishmen, the English are shooting down your wives and children in the streets of Dublin!" That intimation was not greeted with the success it deserved. All the Irish Division did was to ask its Commander for permission to "attend to the matter." This permission was granted, and they promptly left their trenches, raced across No Man's Land, to the German trench opposite and captured it; they have got that trench still, and they hold the notice board as a trophy.

Well, gentlemen, that was the second period of the war. We went on and on. We were learning, learning, finding our feet. We were acquiring the priceless art of playing a poor hand well. The matter of saving up for a burst of artillery became a thing of the past; gradually we drew level.

I shall never forget the day when it was brought home to us that we were fairly and squarely on a level with the enemy at last. This day our Division was on the great salient at Ypres—or, if you prefer it, "Wipers"—which stretches like a great bow around the little city of Ypres,

which the Germans tried so hard successively to capture but have never succeeded. Last December things were blowing up for a great storm, another attack on the little city. Every day bigger and bigger guns were brought up against us. The bombardment became almost continuous, in preparation for an advance all around the salient. Our own guns made little reply, so little that anybody less self-satisfied than the Bosches might have smelt a rat. On the 20th of December, about dawn, the bombardment switched off with uncanny suddenness. We knew that it would begin again presently, in the form of a curtain of fire behind us, to prevent supplies or reinforcements from coming up. At the same time gas was liberated at various portions of the salient, and we put on our gas helmets. Then suddenly our guns spoke. There were six hundred of them in the salient which had been brought up quietly day by day; they all spoke, and all spoke together and they spoke several times. Within a period of three minutes 30,000 shells burst in and around the German trenches, which were crowded with men waiting to take part in the great Christmas attack, which never was made. A few men got over to our lines, but they were wiped out. That was the first official intimation to the enemy that the balance of men and munitions had come down at last with a bump on the side of law and order!

I had the honor of serving with Canadian troops this time last year. Our own Division touched the left of the Canadian Division in the Ypres salient. The Brigade, I think, with which we touched, was the Brigade then commanded by that very gallant Canadian soldier, General Victor Williams. By the worst of luck, entirely owing to his devotion to duty, he is now wounded, and a prisoner of war; but I am very glad to hear that he is progressing to recovery.

We saw a great deal of each other, and were extremely happy together in a little village behind the lines. I think both Divisions had a mutual admiration for each other's fighting qualities. The Canadian troops are particularly good in raid work; they are everlastingly devising some method of tantalizing and harassing the Bosch. They are always rivalling one another in it, and are as keen as mustard. I met only one man who was dissatisfied; he was a Highlander, and he said to me, "I don't like wearing the kilts, and between ourselves I am going to try to get exchanged into a pants battalion." But, gentlemen, that is a digression.

The second period of the war came to an end, and the third period came on. I am very often asked in the United

States of America, where, as you know, they are always out for early and accurate information,—I am constantly asked this question, "When is the war going to end?" and I say, "Well, I can't tell you when the war is going to end; but I can tell you when it began." They say, "Thank you very much. We are painfully aware of our lack of knowledge of some things, but we do know when the war began. It began on the 4th of August, 1914." I say: "No, it was on the 1st July, 1916. That was the first day when we were ready for a grand and prolonged offensive. On that day, as you know, our and the French troops went over the parapets and advanced on a front of fully sixteen miles in the valley of the Somme. That was a very critical day for the British army. They had to answer this question. Up to this day they had been fighting uphill and shorthanded in both men and munitions. Now they were as ready as they were likely to be. Is this army, now it is given a fair and square chance, as good as, is it better, regiment for regiment, than the iron-bound army of Germany? I need not tell you, gentlemen, the answer our boys gave to the Germans that 1st of July. That long ridge crowned by Thiepval, Courcelette, High Wood, Grandcourt, and other points, is now in British or French hands. Since that advance began we have taken 500 guns, 1,000 machine guns, a great quantity of stores, and 84,000 unwounded prisoners. Beyond the ridge this ground slopes away for fifteen miles, which means that we have now that priceless asset, direct artillery observation. So you may be tolerably certain that the great push will be undoubtedly continuous, especially since our output of munitions at Christmas is going to be exactly double what it was in July.

I think it must be extraordinarily galling to our enemy, the Germans, especially to those at the top, to see that great military machine, which they had been polishing and perfecting for forty years for the conquest of Europe, unable to stand up before that first fair and square blow given by an army of men who were practically amateurs, and who go into action singing the choruses of comic songs and kicking a football. As you have perhaps heard, one company actually went over the parapet at Contalmaison, headed by its Captain, and kicked a football all across No Man's Land, then captured the trench. It is this revolting frivolity on the part of our troops which really offends the German's sense of propriety. He takes the war and the business of slaughter so seriously, so sacredly, whether he is emitting asphyxiating gases or sink-

ing a hospital ship, that to encounter troops who regard war as a great game, a clean game, a great adventure, pains him; and to be beaten by them shocks him to the roots of his being.

Thus began the third period of the war—to end, please God, with the relegation of barbarism and bestiality to the place where they came from; and the restoration of the whole of Belgium and northern provinces of France, after many days, to their rightful owners, to be held by them in peace and security to the rest of time!

Well, gentlemen, I could give you many anecdotes. Possibly you will let me give you two, one abroad and one at home. Last September, at Vermelles, just opposite a particularly unpleasant locality, known as the Hohenzollern Redoubt, which was an underground dugout thrust forward towards our lines, it was extremely important for us to find out how far this connected with the main German trenches. A young officer suggested that the best way to find out would be for somebody to go and look, and he offered himself for the purpose. There was a certain amount of method in his madness, because while the artillery bombardment was going on, and we were bombarding every day, the German retired to his deepest dugout and stayed there. Therefore if you went at such time into No Man's Land it was largely probable that no one would see you;—of course there was always the chance of a sniper. However, this officer was allowed his own way. He walked forward, and had a good look into the Hohenzollern Redoubt, making valuable observations. He discovered one communicating trench had been completed, of which we knew, as our aeroplane observers had seen it, and the cartographers had named it "Little Willie Trench." However, we wanted to know about the "Big Willie Trench." We found it was not completed, and we wanted to take it before it was completed. However, this young officer had not reckoned on one thing, our artillery, which did not know of his expedition. The result was that one shell fell fifty yards behind him, and a clod of earth hit him in the back of the neck and sent him back to our own trenches rather dazed and considerably annoyed. However, after having a cup of tea, and having despatched an exceedingly comforting and edifying message to the artillery, he went forward once more, completed his observations, and came back with a most satisfactory map. I am glad to say he got the Military Cross.

However, life at home just now it not altogether without its incidents. Here (holding it up in his hand) is a small square of aluminum, a piece of the first Zeppelin brought down

on British soil. The Zeppelin, I may add, is our best recruiting agent; in fact, I should like to have a Zeppelin go to one or two of the more remote parts of our country to get in a few more recruits. I had the great good fortune to see this Zeppelin descend. I was staying in a house, which was pretty high for that city, and at 2 o'clock Sunday morning, when the alarm was given, we went to the roof and saw the whole sky as far around as you could see, filled with bursting shells from our anti-aircraft guns and the interlacing of searchlights. Above that was the Zeppelin, drifting about in a most uncertain fashion. Finally we saw it had gone down towards the north. There was a great number—I suppose a million people—to see it, because London, instead of obeying the orders of the police and retiring to the cellar, was all on the roof enjoying the sight. There was the Zeppelin, drifting to the north, turning from silver grey to blood red, and finally it went down in one mass of fire to the earth, having been brought down by an aeroplane manned by Lieut. Robinson, who got the Victoria Cross. It was certainly a historic spectacle, and it had a historic sequel, because the population of London, having got up out of bed at 2 o'clock Sunday morning, was in no great hurry to return. Suffering from a delusion common on these occasions, they thought that the Zeppelin had fallen in the next street and started off to have a look. But that Zeppelin had fallen twelve miles out of London. The result was that by 8 o'clock in the morning every country lane was filled with people half dressed, half starved, almost barefoot, hunting for souvenirs. They never got near the Zeppelin, and as the railway service is not a conspicuous feature of English country life on Sunday morning, special rescue parties had to be sent out to bring them in!

If I might turn to another topic,—if I am not keeping you —I am immensely impressed with the work our women are doing for their country. They realized the actual situation more quickly than the men. While the men were still handing out heavy talk about the economic and industrial aspects of the situation and not depriving our industries of their needed man power, the women were mobilizing. They simply said to the men:—"You go to the war! We will look after the industrial output!" And they do.

Last July I saw a procession in London showing what the women are doing in the war. These workers come under two heads: one is of the women engaged in direct war work, such as Red Cross, hospital, and munitions work; and the second comprises those women, each of whom has liberated

a man for the service of the colors by taking over his work for the duration of the war. I think that procession would have interested you. One part of the procession was composed of Red Cross nurses, hospital nurses, ambulance workers; there was an enormous number of women serving as waitresses; then there were elevator tenders, bell boys,—or rather, girls—cab drivers, letter carriers, car conductors, car cleaners, and others. Each one of those women had liberated a man to serve his country. Then stretched the long line of women employed in munitions work. There were many young, attractive girls, whose faces and arms were stained a bright orange color from the effects of the picric acid used in the manufacture of lyddite shells. They had deliberately sacrificed their good looks for the duration of the war. But they did not mind: they laughed, and waved their hands to us—it was their contribution to the cause of their country!

There was a great army of women who had never been classed as workers at all: they had not needed to do anything for a living. Of course it is always easy to collect a body of so-called workers for a fashionable charity, where the limelight is plentiful and the work not long or too hard. But there is no limelight here, and the work is hard! There are three classes: one class is that of those who have devoted themselves to the work of making munitions, to let the regular workers rest at night, or over the week end; another class is those who serve in hospitals. There are thousands of these, for practically every big house is a private hospital. These women are not employed upon the romantic task of nursing wounded heroes back to life—they never see the wounded in the ordinary way—the regular nurses attend to that,—no! their work is in the basement, washing, scrubbing, cooking, with sometimes an occasional treat of answering the street door bell. That may not be important and interesting work, but the question with the women was: "What can we young girls do, to liberate stronger women for the work of munitions?" That has been answered.

Further, they are managing canteens and rest clubs for soldiers on leave and for munition workers. I know a girl—to obviate any misunderstanding I may say she is my wife—who works in a great London Club which has been turned into a club for overseas soldiers. Any soldier from overseas or of the Imperial army can walk into that club and order a meal, which is served to him gladly, proudly, by volunteer workers. My wife's proudest possession is the sum of five pennies, given her as a tip by a Canadian private—you observe, gentlemen, he was faithful to the decimal system even three thousand miles away. Well, he slipped these five pennies into her hand with a friendly smile, and said, "Here, get yourself some candy with it!" I don't think she will, because she is going to cherish those five pence; first, because it is the first money she ever earned in her life, and will probably be her last—because she has a very indulgent husband—and secondly, because of its very romantic and gallant associations.

This, gentlemen, is the kind of work that is going on all over England, Scotland and Ireland to-day. You here know, better than anybody else, the influence of that; you know the strain, the intensity of all. But while to outward appearance there is strain and intensity, there is an inner peace: they hold up their heads proudly, and carry on!

This war, terrible though it is, will confer untold benefits upon the Empire. No nation can engage in it and endure the task and strain without emerging from it all a bigger minded, wider minded, more united nation and Empire.

One other word I should like to add if I may. Arising out of all this, in the United States just now there are strong rumors of an early peace. I think there is no difficulty in tracing these rumors to their source. They are put into circulation by a nation which is discovering that a people who wantonly draw the sword are liable to perish by the sword. And great though our sacrifices must be, and hard though the struggle is,—I know we are all at one on this—there is only one way to end this war, and that is, to go and finish it, and fix it, in such a way that it never can happen again!