

## Pen Pictures of the War.

### SERIES III.

#### PHILIP GIBBS ON THE AUSTRALIANS.

Philip Gibbs evinces the greatest admiration of the Australians, with whom he usually couples the New Zealanders. The following description will probably kindle reminiscences in the mind of the Digger who has mixed up with the Australians:—

#### THE SALUTE.

"Everywhere on the streets and on the esplanade there was incessant saluting. The arms of the men were never still. It was like the St. Vitus disease. Tommies and Jocks saluted every subaltern with an automatic gesture of convulsive energy. Every subaltern acknowledged these movements and in turn saluted a multitude of majors, colonels, and generals. This thing became farcical, a monstrous absurdity of human relationship yet pleasing to the vanity of men lifted up above the lowest caste. It seemed to me an intensification of the snob instinct in the soul of man. Only the Australians stood out against it and went by all officers except their own with a careless slouch and a look of 'To hell with all that hand wagging.'"

Australians slouched up the street of the Three Pebbles with a grim look under their wide-brimmed hats having come down from Pozieres, where it was always hell in the days of Somme fighting. I liked the look of them, dusty up to the eyes in summer, mud up to their ears in winter—these gipsy fellows, scornful of discipline for discipline's sake, but desperate fighters, as simple as children in their ways of thought and speech (except for frightful oaths) and looking at life, this life of war, and this life in Amiens, with frank, curious eyes and a kind of humorous contempt for death and disease, and English Tommies, and French girls, and "the whole damned show," as they called it. They were lawless except for the laws to which their souls gave allegiance. They behaved as the equals of all men, giving no respect to generals or staff officers, or the devils of hell. There was a primitive spirit of manhood in them, and they took what they wanted, and were ready to pay for it in coin, or in disease or in wounds. They had no conceit of themselves in a little, vain way, but they reckoned themselves the only fighting men, simple, and without boasting. They were as hard as steel, and finely tempered. Some of them were ruffians, but most of them were, I imagine, like those English yeomen who came into France with the Black Prince, men who lived "rough," close to nature, of sturdy independence, good-humoured though fierce in a fight, and ruthless. That is how they seemed to me, in a general way, though among them were boys of a more delicate fibre, and sensitive, if one might judge by their clear-cut features and wistful eyes. They had money to spend beyond the dreams of our poor Tommy, six shillings and sixpence a day and remittances from home. So they pushed open the doors of any restaurant in Amiens and sat down at tables next to English officers, not abashed, and ordered anything that pleased their taste, and wine in plenty.

In that High street of Amiens one day I saw a crowd gathered round an Australian so tall that he towered over all other heads. It was at the corner of "the street of the Naked Body without a head," and I suspected trouble. As I pressed on the edge of the crowd I heard the Australian ask in a loud, slow drawl whether there was any officer about who could speak French. He asked the question gravely without anxiety. I pushed through the crowd and said, "I speak French. What's the trouble?"

I saw then that, like the French poilu I have described this tall Australian was in the grasp of a French agent de police, a small man, of whom he took no more notice than if a fly had settled on his wrist. The Australian was not drunk. I could see that he had just drunk enough to make his brain very clear and solemn. He explained the matter deliberately, with a slow choice of words, as though giving evidence of high matters before a court. It appeared that he had gone into the estaminet opposite with four friends. They had ordered five glasses of porto, for which they paid twenty centimes each, and drank them. Then then ordered five more glasses of porto and paid the same price and drank them. After this they took a stroll up and down the street, and were bored, and went into the estaminet again, and ordered five more glasses of porto. It was then the trouble began. But it was not the Australian who began it. It was the woman behind the bar. She served

five glasses more of porto and asked for thirty centimes each.

"Twenty centimes," said the Australian. "Vingt, madame."

"Mais non! Trente centimes, chaque verre! Thirty, my old one. Six sous, comprenez?"

"No comprenez," said the Australian. "Vingt centimes, or go to hell."

The woman demanded the thirty centimes; kept on demanding with a voice more shrill.

"It was her voice that vexed me," said the Australian. "That and the bloody injustice."

The five Australians drank the five glasses of porto, and the tall Australian paid the thirty centimes each without further argument. Life is too short for argument. Then, still without words, he took each of the five glasses, and broke it at the stem and dropped it over the counter.

"You will see, sir," he said gravely, "the injustice of the matter was on my side."

But when they left the estaminet the woman came shrieking into the street after them. Hence the agent de police, and the grasp on the Australian's wrist.

"I shall be glad if you would explain the case to this little Frenchman," said the soldier. "If he does not take his hand off my wrist I shall have to kill him."

"Perhaps a little explanation might serve," I said.

I spoke to the agent de police at some length, describing the incident in the cafe. I took the view that the lady was wrong in increasing the price so rapidly. The agent agreed, gravely. I then pointed out that the Australian was a very large-sized man, and that in spite of his quietude, he was a man in the habit of killing Germans. He also had a curious dislike of policemen.

"It appears to me," I said politely, "that for the sake of your health the other end of the street is better than this."

The agent de police released his grip from the Australian's wrist and saluted me.

"Vous avez raison, monsieur. Je vous remercie. Ces Australiens sont vraiment formidables, n'est-ce pas?"

He disappeared through the crowd, who were smiling with a keen sense of understanding. Only the lady of the estaminet was unappeased.

"They are bandits, these Australians!" she said to the world about her.

The tall Australian shook hands with me in a comradely way.

"Thanks for your trouble," he said. "It was the injustice I couldn't stick. I always pay the right price. I come from Australia."

I watched him go slouching down the Rue des Trois Cailloux, head above all the passers-by. He would be at Pozieres again next day.

\* His comment on the staff of the Fifth Army, which met with much disaster at St. Quentin, will prove of interest:—

I found a general opinion among officers and men, not only of the Irish Division, under the command of the Fifth Army, that they had been the victims of atrocious staff work, tragic in its consequences. From what I saw of some of the Fifth Army staff-officers I was of the same opinion. Some of these young gentlemen, and some of the elderly officers, were arrogant and supercilious, without revealing any symptoms of intelligence. If they had wisdom it was deeply camouflaged by an air of inefficiency. If they had knowledge they hid it as a secret of their own. General Gough, commanding the Fifth Army in Flanders, and afterwards north and south of St. Quentin, where the enemy broke through, was extremely courteous, of most amiable character, with a high sense of duty. But in Flanders, if not personally responsible for many tragic happenings, he was badly served by some of his subordinates, and battalion officers, and divisional staffs, raged against the whole of the Fifth Army organisation, or lack of organisation, with an extreme passion of speech.

Here are two samples of Gibbs's many excellent stories:—

In one section of trenches the men made a habit of betting upon those who would be wounded first. It had all the uncertainty of the roulette table. . . . One day, when the German gunners were putting over a special dose of hate, a sergeant kept coming to one dug-out to enquire about a "new-chum" who had come up with the drafts.

"Is Private Smith all right?" he asked. "Yes, sergeant, he's all right," answered the men crouching in the dark hole. "Private Smith isn't wounded yet?"

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asked the sergeant again, five minutes later.

"No, sergeant."

Private Smith was touched by this interest in his well-being.

"That sergeant seems a very kind man," said the boy. "Seems to love me like a father!"

A yell of laughter answered him.

"You poor, bleeding fool," said one of his comrades. "He's drawn you in lottery! Stood to win if you'd been hit."

One tale most popular, most birth-arousing in the early days of the war.

"Where's your prisoner?" asked an intelligence officer waiting to receive a German sent down from the trenches under escort of an honest corporal.

"I lost him, on the way, sir," said the corporal.

"Lost him?"

The corporal was embarrassed.

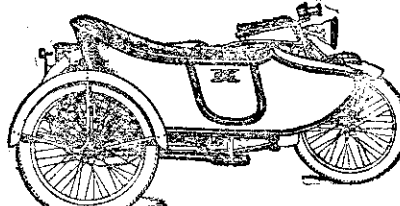
"Very sorry, sir, my feelings overcame me, sir. It was like this, sir. The man started talking on the way down. Said he was thinking of his poor wife. I'd been thinking of mine and I felt sorry for him. Then he mentioned as how he had two kiddies at home. I have two kiddies at home, sir, and I couldn't 'elp feeling sorry for him. Then he said as how his old mother had died a while ago and he'd never see her again. I have an old mother at home, sir, what may never see me again. When he started cryin', I was so sorry for him I couldn't stand it any longer, sir, so I killed the poor blighter."

### NOT OFFICIALLY ACCEPTED.

#### PROFESSOR BICKERTON'S THEORY.

Professor A. W. Bickerton writes to "The Times" on one of his pet themes—the Theory of Solar Grazes. Many explanations of the phenomena of the new star have been given, among them being that of the collision of suns, which the New Zealand astronomer characterises as "probably the only intelligent suggestion ever made." The Astronomical Correspondent of "The Times" suggested that, in addition to collisions of suns, the new star may have been caused by a sun having been struck by a comet or by meteors. But it is Professor Bickerton's belief that neither of those alternative theories "would give us the inconceivable amount of energy required. Solar collisions are the only occurrences yet conceived of that could produce such phenomena. But many astronomers say the stars are so thinly spread that random solar encounters could not be numerous enough to account for the number of novae. This is quite true of random encounter, but there are a score of agencies that tend to produce stellar collisions that must increase the probability of solar grazes over random encounters many millions of times. The studies of dynamics of solar collisions shows that grazes would be much more numerous than direct collisions between similar stars. A graze of two suns makes two stars into three, and the new third body is an exploding sun, and it is this exploding sun that is the temporary star. It can be deduced that it will be 10,000 times as brilliant as the passing pair that have struck off this stupendous cosmic spark."

For the last 40 years, he says, he has been trying to get this original theory of the third body seriously considered by northern astronomers, but without avail. "The theory was first published in N.Z. by the N.Z. Gov. in 1878. The original papers were sent abroad then, and recently because of the accumulation of evidence the New Zealand Government has again sent out the original transactions to northern astronomers. At the present time every current theory has been rejected or demolished, whilst the mass of evidence has not only established the truth of this induction, but has actually demonstrated all the anticipations then made. Nevertheless the theory is not yet officially 'accepted' in England—presumably because it was first thought of in New Zealand!"



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### TAKE LIFE EASY.

#### STRAIN OF MODERN LIVING INCREASES CANCER DEATHS.

Cancer is spreading at a startling rate in the British Isles. The London Cancer Hospital is formulating plans for a thorough review of the existing cancer peril, and the all too insufficient knowledge with which it is compelled to fight it.

Its terrible rate of growth may be illustrated by a few figures. In 1864, there were 8117 deaths from cancer in England and Wales. By 1874 the number had increased to 11,011; and in 1884 to 15,193; and in 1890 to 19,433. The rate per million of population was, in 1864 only 385; in 1874, 461; in 1884, 560; in 1890, 676; in 1901, 842; and in 1917, the last year for which figures have been issued, the rate per million was 1210. With a slight and temporary decrease in 1865 every year has seen a steadily progressive augmentation in the death-rate. The same sad story comes from every part of the civilised world for which statistics are available.

Moreover, as every doctor knows, the figures which the States issue rather understate the case than otherwise. A good many internal cancerous growths in the old people pass unnoticed; their deaths are assigned to other causes. Also there is a desire to spare the feelings of royal and distinguished persons, a class which furnishes its quota to the death rate, yet shrinks from the unpleasant notoriety attaching to the phrase "cancer in the family." I could mention rather numerous royalties, from the great Napoleon down to the Kaiser's father and mother who have succumbed to this curse in the last century, along with one illustrious British premier.

The causes of cancer are supposed to be unknown, but nothing could be more remote from the actual truth. The immediate causes of cancerous growths have long been recognised and more or less precisely stated by every doctor of eminence who has written on the subject. But in order to discuss scientifically the causes of cancer, it is necessary to place each variety of the scourge under a separate heading, and not to lump them all together as simply "cancer." Every case of cancer has its own distinct rise. Cancer is not one malady; it is a host of maladies. There are ten primary kinds of cancer, and at least twenty secondary kinds.

The reasons for the continued increase of cancer turn mainly on the fact that women are the principal sufferers from it, and the special causes which prevail in their case are accelerated by trouble, anxiety, worry, and general wear-

and-tear. Men are not exempt from cancer, but suffer in a far minor degree.

Increasing civilisation has for the last 70 years or more denoted enormously increased worry, and sorrow and augmented mental and physical friction of all kinds, felt most heavily by the poor and toiling classes, but also in a heavy degree by the ranks above. The upper ranks, being more sensitive and more apt to give way to brooding sorrow, often create unnecessary troubles for themselves and so increase their liability to cancer.

This yearly increase in cancer is no more than a measure of the annually augmented wear-and-tear which modern civilisation involves, and which nearly all of us, under modern conditions, have to undergo. It will not entirely cease until the conditions of life become far easier than now—say in another 500 years, if all goes well. But even as matters stand now, much can be done to lessen and to prevent it. For instance, cancer among women may be prevented by greater equanimity and cheerfulness. Commonly it is easier to preach this doctrine than to practice it. But for all that the effort could often be made with complete success. Doctors here at the London Cancer Hospital have told me of cases in which a cancerous seizure has been brought on by a casual bother about servants.

Further than this everything that tends to sustain physical health and well-being materially aids in preventing the onset of cancer. People don't need to be flying always to the doctor. On the contrary, all they need study is the general laws of health which are largely individual, and which vary in different cases. The forms of cancer which attack men are usually due, in the first instance, to some very palpable breach of Nature's laws, such as chronic alcoholism, to say nothing of unsavory maladies which might easily have been prevented, and for which the patient is culpably responsible.

### SECTS IN HEAVEN.

Unconventional views of heaven were expressed in a sermon at St. Anne's, Soho, on Sunday, by the vicar, the Rev. Clarence May. They would find all sects in heaven, he said—the Church of England, the Roman Church, the Protestants, the Wesleyans, and the Baptists. They would continue in their separate bodies for some time, but their method of communion, which here was so difficult, would be different there. They would pass on from stage to stage till they became one celestial body working for the great union of Christendom, the union of saints, even as we were working for the union of Christendom on earth.