

DECORATIONS FOR VALOR

CROSSES AND MEDALS FOR SOLDIERS.

Since men have fought in the wars of the world and rulers and nations have summoned mighty armies to do their bidding either for conquest or defence, tokens of valor and sacrifice on the field of battle have had their shining place. The badge of bravery, the mark of distinction above his fellows, has been the goal of the soldier. For an emblem of gold, silver, bronze, or even of iron, or a bit of ribbon to be worn on the breast, men have gone forth to suffering and death, 'seeking the bubble reputation even at the cannon's mouth.' All nations have their decorations for soldierly courage. In the present great European war the despatches almost daily make mention of the awarding of these coveted distinctions for some act of heroism. Several of these military orders, well nigh forgotten during the years of peace, have been revived by the nations engaged in the great conflict. Therefore their history and the events associated with them are peculiarly interesting and pertinent at the present time.

History of Iron Cross.

Of all the military orders, probably the most interesting is the history of the Iron Cross, the most coveted distinction in the German Empire. This badge of courage, which is woven into the military history of the Empire, has been revived since the beginning of the present great war, and already the news of despatches have mentioned a number of instances of its award. The Iron Cross is bestowed on all ranks of the German army for valorous services on recommendation of an officer or an eye-witness. The order of the Iron Cross was originated by Frederick William III. of Prussia in 1813. After the battle of Jena in 1806, when the Prussians suffered a final great defeat before the armies of Napoleon Bonaparte, Prussia sank to the lowest depths of national degradation. Its king was little more than the royal slave of the great Corsican.

For several years Prussia groaned beneath the heavy hand of the oppressor. But in 1813, when the armies of Napoleon, beaten and broken, made their disastrous retreat from Moscow, all Prussia rose against the French tyrant. Every able-bodied man rushed to arms at the call of his king. Then it was that William III. conceived the idea of founding the military order of the Iron Cross for valor on the field of battle. The final list of the possessors of the original Iron Cross was drawn up on June 18, 1816, the anniversary of the battle of Waterloo, and then the awarding of the distinction practically ceased.

The order of the Iron Cross was revived with the beginning of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. France declared war on July 1, 1870, and the proclamation of the German Emperor reviving the Iron Cross immediately went forth. Up to 1872 nearly 50,000 Iron Crosses were awarded, or one to approximately every twentieth soldier in the German army. Again the award of the distinction was practically abandoned until revived within the last few months.

The Victoria Cross.

What the Iron Cross means to the German the Victoria Cross means to the British. This British military service order was founded by Queen Victoria in 1856. It was decreed that it should be awarded to all ranks for individual heroism, and was inspired by the Crimean war. The order was inaugurated at a great parade and review in London on June 20, 1856. Since that time in all the wars in which Englishmen have engaged the attainment of the Victoria Cross has been the ambition of every soldier and sailor, the prize to gain which life itself is held cheaply.

The first act of heroism for which the Victoria Cross was given occurred during the bombardment of the Russian fortress of Bomarsund, on the Baltic Sea, by the British fleet. A live shell from the Russian guns fell on the deck of the British warship *Hecla*. Mate C. D. Lucas sprang forward, and before the shell could explode he picked it up in his arms, ran to the side of

the ship, and tossed it overboard. His promotion to lieutenant followed immediately, and soon after he was awarded the Victoria Cross. He later attained the rank of Rear Admiral.

Until the present war only 522 Victoria Crosses had been awarded—111 in the Crimean war, 182 in the Indian Mutiny, 78 in the Boer war, and the others in thirty-seven minor wars. Seven crosses were won in the Charge of the Light Brigade at the battle of Balaclava, but only one of them went to a commissioned officer.

The Legion of Honor.

The Legion of Honor is one of the crowning distinctions which a Frenchman may attain. Unlike both the Iron Cross and the Victoria Cross, the French distinction is awarded from both military and civic considerations. Under the Monarchy France had several military orders, but the founders of the Republic would have none of decorations which might tend to create caste. The Legion of Honor was founded by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802. It was granted somewhat indiscriminately after 1815, but the order was reorganised by Napoleon III. in 1852, and since has been awarded both for deeds of valor and for signal accomplishments in civil life and in the paths of peace. The Legion of Honor decoration was bestowed on the city of Liège in August by the French Government for the heroic resistance which the Belgian city offered to the invading German armies.

An honor even more highly prized by French military men, but one which rarely is given, is the *Medaille Militaire*. It is conferred only for military and naval service in war time so great that the Legion of Honor is an inadequate expression. The decoration was created by Napoleon III. on February 29, 1852, and carries a pension. Only a few times has it been awarded. In September it was conferred on King Albert of Belgium in grateful appreciation of his nation's stand against the Germans.

The Order of St. George.

The decoration of the order of St. George is the highest aspiration of the Russian soldier. Unlike the Iron Cross, the Victoria Cross, and the badge of the Legion of Honor, the Cross of St. George is attainable only by officers of the Russian army and navy. The cross of the first class is bestowed only on successful commanding generals, and this rank has been awarded only twenty-two times. But the order of the fourth class may be attained by any officer for extraordinary heroism.

The order of St. George was founded by the Empress Catherine II. on November 26, 1769. It is purely military, and confers hereditary nobility. It has its own hall in Moscow, where an imposing ceremonial is held each year.

The order of St. George was little used from 1769 until it was restored by ukase of Alexander I. on December 12, 1801. In gratitude the Chapter offered the insignia to the Czar, but he modestly declined the honor until after the campaign of 1805, when he accepted the cross of the fourth or lowest grade. This act on the part of Czar Alexander served to increase even more greatly the esteem in which the distinction was held. The fourth class of the order was won by the present Grand Duke Nicholas, Commander-in-Chief of the Russian armies in the field against Germany, Austria, and Turkey. He won the decoration as a young cavalry officer for heroic conduct in the war with Turkey in 1877.

Austria's Military Decoration.

The most coveted decoration of Austria-Hungary is the order of Maria Theresa. It was founded in 1757 by the Empress Maria Theresa in honor of the victory of her troops over Frederick the Great at Kolin. It is purely a military order, and is awarded for personal merit shown by extraordinary exploits or skill, irrespective of birth, duty, favor, or family connections. The grand master of the order must be an Emperor of Austria-Hungary, and the grand cross is awarded only to commanders of armies attaining victory against great odds.