

YARNS OF THE ARMY.

All About Our Life Guards.

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ONE of the striking features of London is the glitter of scarlet and steel, and white plumes whisking above the German-silver helmets of the Household Cavalry, as a squadron of the Life Guards jingles through the West End. If it should happen to be the Horse Guards, then the plumes are scarlet and the tunics blue; but the effect is the same—a splendid body of stalwart troopers, mounted on black chargers shining like satin, the sun catching on a thousand points of polished metal, as the traffic draws aside to let them through.

How different the dress, and how altered beyond all recognition the streets, when the Gentlemen of the Life Guards of Horse, as they were then styled, escorted George II. at the period of our first illustration. It was only six years before, that the Young Pretender had burst upon us with his bare-legged Highlanders, getting as far south as Derby—and no farther, thank goodness; else you and I had not been enjoying one tithe of the liberty and freedom that is now our birthright!

A trooper of the Household Cavalry had superior pay and many privileges then, and the position was obtained by purchase, costing at least £100.

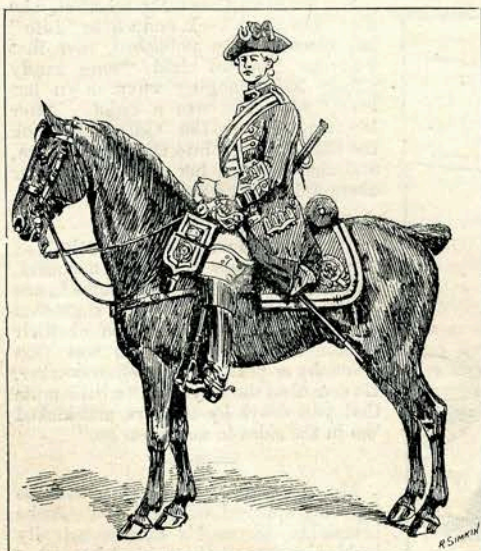
Many a poor Jacobite going to his doom on Tower Hill or Kennington Common must have gazed on the nagtailed horses and longed for an hour's start on the back of one of them.

Some thirty odd years after, the different troops were amalgamated into two regiments, called the "First" and "Second" Life Guards, and were contemptuously known in their new guise as the "Cheesers," from the number of wealthy tradesmen's sons who entered them, many of the old "gentlemen" declining to serve, and exchanging for commissions in the line.

Although the Household Troops had made most of the eighteenth-century campaigns with honour, they eclipsed all their former triumphs at the Battle of Waterloo, where, as an officer remarked, "you would have thought so many tinkers were at work," as the long swords rained a hail of blows on the steel-clad French Cuirassiers. Captain Kelly, of the 1st Lifes, engaged in single combat with an officer of the 1st Cuirassiers, killed him, dismounted and took his silver epaulettes as a trophy, and then went in again.

Corporal Shaw, of the 2nd Life Guards, killed nine of the enemy, although our Household Cavalry were not cuirassed at that period, and the French, encased in steel, like a lobster in his shell, presented only two vulnerable spots—the neck and the armpit. Even then, Shaw met his death by a carbine-shot, not by the sword!

Another gallant man, Colonel Ferrier, led the 1st in eleven charges, although badly wounded, his head being laid open, and his body pierced by a



A PRIVATE GENTLEMAN OF THE LIFE GUARDS OF HORSE (1751).

lance-thrust. Those were the type of warrior to whom the Life Guards owe some of their brightest and best traditions. There is a good story, very little known, of the assistance rendered to George IV. in a trying situation by a Lieutenant of the Life

Guards, who brought his schoolboy knowledge to good account.

In the early days of the present century, there stretched a district round and about Westminster known as Tothill Fields, a species of semi-suburban "Seven Dials," where bull-baiting, cock-fighting, and a host of worse things took place, and where the boys of Westminster School disported themselves in their spare time.

It was a network of slums and alleys, with here and there a miserable meadow intersected by a dirty brook, and possessing a disreputable population, frequently raided by the police.

At the Coronation of the "First Gentleman in Europe"—save the mark!—Queen Caroline was excluded from any participation in the ceremony, which so enraged the people of London against their new king that his life was decidedly in danger at the hands of a furious mob.

How to get the sacred person back to Carlton House without bloodshed was the difficulty, when Lieutenant Lord de Ros, one of the officers of the escort, volunteered his services to pilot the royal chariot through the Tothill Fields, which, from the fact of his having been a Westminster boy, he knew perfectly.

Accordingly, avoiding the surging crowd that thronged the route to Carlton House, the cortège set out from the Abbey and plunged into the labyrinth of squalid streets and lanes, where Belgravia now stands.

By Halfpenny Hatch and Millbank, past the "Seven Chimneys,"—a veritable sink of iniquity—in and out the Life



AN OFFICER OF THE SECOND LIFE GUARDS (1834).

red trousers when in undress, of a colour known as "claret mixture," and I am afraid that in those hard-drinking days the claret mixture was not always applied externally!

When, a few years later, they mustered for a very different escort duty—namely, on the Coronation of her Majesty the Queen—they had been wearing magnificent bearskin head-dress for a few years, similar to that of the Scots Greys, with a huge hackle plume passing over the top, as you see it in our second illustration, which represents an officer of the 2nd Life Guards, with jack-boots, sabretache and large gold epaulettes.

In 1856 the swallow-tails, shown in drawing number three, disappeared, and they adopted the tunic as we see it now, the bearskin having given place before that to a white metal helmet.

I remember a curious little incident, not many years back, which now sees the light for the first time. I wonder if it will meet the eye of the principal actor concerned!

There was a public procession—I fancy the Lord

Mayor's Show—and, as the "unemployed" were expected to make a demonstration, large bodies of troops were drafted into the City—among them the Blues, a squadron of whom was drawn up near Blackfriars Bridge.

The men were dismounted, standing by their horses. Helmets were off, legs were stretched, and here and there a pipe was in full blast.

Down a side street I saw the flash of armour, and a little crowd of loafers looking at something; and, going to see what it was, I found a very tall officer regaling himself on the cheer-



A TROOPER IN EGYPTIAN UNIFORM (1882).

ful sandwich before the admiring group who were watching "the lion feed."

As I reached them the officer replaced a long silver-mounted cut-glass "pocket pistol" in a secret nook in the black fur that covered the saddle, and, gathering up the reins, put his foot in the stirrup.

He was a very tall officer, and it was a very tall horse. One of the onlookers—a pany, undersized Londoner—ran forward, and, with the best intentions in the world, threw his arms round the glittering waist of the Horse Guardsman, and tried to hoist him into his seat!

Everyone recognised the absurdity of the situation

—none more than the officer, who laughingly disengaged himself from the affectionate embrace, and vaulted lightly into the saddle.

Our eyes met as he trotted up the street to join his men, and I could not help wondering what a Prussian or a Russian officer of the Guard would have done under similar circumstances.

In 1882 there was great excitement in London. The Household Cavalry was under orders for Egypt, the first occasion on which they had left England on active service since Waterloo.

Loose jackets of red serge and white helmets were donned; polished boots were laid aside, and blue bandages, called "puttees," wound from ankle to knee. The long swords were sharpened, haversacks slung across their shoulders, and away they went—a squadron of each regiment—to add Kassassin to the list of their achievements!

With my back propped against a church railing, between a fat policeman and a drunken Irish apple-woman, I watched them return. Euston Road and Albany Street were packed with a dense crowd, and when the white helmets came plunging down the centre of the throng, officers and men bending from their saddles to shake hands right and left, a mighty roar of welcome went up, and the little band of gallant fellows received an ovation that will linger long in the memories of all who witnessed it.

I remember how bronzed and thin the faces were; how gaunt and emaciated the "black Durhams"; how the storm of cheering followed them on their triumphal progress, and how it lasted after they had ridden under the barrack-gate and were "home again."

They were the Blues I saw; and similar scenes took place at Knightsbridge and Windsor when the Lifes returned to their old quarters.

Each regiment contributed to the Camel Corps that accompanied the Gordon Relief Expedition; and on August 20th, 1885, Trooper Grubb, of the 2nd Life Guards, rejoined at Windsor (the last of them to come back), having unfortunately lost his way up-country and been left behind.