

## OUR RIFLES.

I AM a tradesman—a grocer, carrying on a considerable business in the loyal and respectable town and borough of Bungay-super-Mare, that “delightful and fashionable watering-place,” as the houseagents’ advertisements have it. My name is John Raisins, and my establishment is situated in the middle of the High Street, where I have conducted my business to the satisfaction of my customers, and my own individual profit, for nearly twenty years. I am married, and have a family of three small children—two boys and a girl—and am besides a freeholder, with the privilege of recording two votes for the representation of the county, and the same number for the borough of Bungay.

I am on the shady side of forty, stand five feet ten in my boots, am somewhat inclined to be corpulent, but of a tolerably good figure nevertheless, and I flatter myself I am not altogether of an unprepossessing countenance: a very full pair of auburn—yes, auburn—whiskers imparting a decidedly martial character to my appearance. My wife, *Jemima*, is about ten years my junior: a comfortable-looking little woman, with an understanding beyond her years, and a spirit which is absolutely Spartan. Poor *Jemima*! until within the last three or four months our wedded life had passed serenely enough; but “a change has come o’er the spirit of the dream,” and “thereby hangs a tale.”

Bungay-super-Mare has never been behind-hand when any occasion has arisen to call forth demonstrations of patriotism on the part of its burghers. We flatter ourselves we may refer to our annals for the truth of this assertion; for when, in the early part of the sixteenth century, our Gallic foes, under Prior John, made a descent upon our coast, did we not drive their hosts into the sea? And thirty years later, when their Admiral, Claude d’Anneballe, hoisted sails and came forth with his whole navy, and set his soldiers to burn and spoil the country, did not the inhabitants of Bungay and its neighbourhood come down so thick that, to quote the words of an old chronicler, “the Frenchmen were driven to flee with loss of diverse of their numbers, so that they did little hurt there?” Still, as a community, in the present day we are generally very peaceably disposed; our tradesmen, for the most part, contentedly minding their shops and attending to their accounts, and the nobility and gentry, residents and visitors, devoting themselves to the usual occupations and amusements of fashionable watering-places. We are *vis-à-vis* the coast of France, however; and if anything should unfortunately occur to sever the alliance which at present subsists between the two nations, we are fully alive to the importance of being prepared to defend our shores against invasion.

Being naturally of a domestic turn of mind, and disposed to rest contentedly in the bosom of my family, I have generally taken little interest in political matters, especially as regards our relations with foreign countries. Latterly, however, a martial spirit has arisen, which seems to prevail all over the country, and Britons are called upon

unanimously to volunteer for the defence of the nation. “Let us arm ourselves!” has become the almost universal cry; “our regular military forces are required for service abroad, in India and elsewhere. Let us protect our own homesteads, then. Let us make ourselves ready for the defence of our beloved isle, and let our shores be guarded by bands of rifle volunteers.” The suggestion being approved by the Legislature, the formation of volunteer corps very soon became a national movement. Every town in the country proceeded to the enrolment of members willing to devote time and money to the furtherance of this grand scheme for the improvement and extension of our defences, and of course it was not likely that Bungay-super-Mare would be outdone in this respect by any community of compatriots elsewhere.

One evening in September last, business being over and the shop shut up, I retired to enjoy my supper in the society of Mrs. Raisins. The children had gone to bed, for I am obliged to keep my establishment open until rather a late hour. I had scarcely seated myself, when Mrs. R., handing me a copy of that day’s “Bungay Guardian,” directed my attention to the following:—

“NOTICE!  
A PUBLIC MEETING  
WILL BE HELD IN  
THE TOWN HALL,  
TO-MORROW (WEDNESDAY) AT NOON,

To take into consideration the most desirable means of organizing a corps of volunteers, consisting of residents of Bungay-Super-Mare and its vicinity, in compliance with the rules and conditions authorized by her Majesty’s Secretary-at-War, to be called ‘The Bungay Rifle Volunteers.’

The Rt. Hon. SIR PAUL PALAVER, M.P., will preside.”

“Of course, my dear,” insinuated Mrs. Raisins, “you will attend?”

“Attend!” I echoed, rather astonished at the idea; “what for?”

“It’s your duty as an Englishman and the father of a family,” said *Jemima*.

“But, my dear,” I urged, “consider—the middle of the day—business, my dear—”

“Fiddlesticks! Mr. R.,” persisted my wife; “your assistant can mind the shop, and I shall be at home to answer inquiries. I have been talking to Mrs. Glasshouse, and she says her husband intends to have his name enrolled as a member; and you know how his time as an artist [photographic] is occupied, especially during the day-time.”

“Well, my dear,” said I, “if my presence at the meeting will in any way conduce to your peace of mind, I will go.” And, accordingly, the next day at noon I went.

There was a goodly assemblage of my brother tradesmen and fellow burghers present, and a good many sons of tradesmen, ambitious youths in peg-tops and fancy shirts, with souls considerably above buttons and by no means behind counters. A number of gentlemen of various ages and fashions of apparel occupied the platform, the chair being taken, according to announcement, by our worthy county member, Sir Paul Palaver.

I am unable to transcribe even the substance of



Sir Paul's lengthy and eloquent speech, but it was fully reported in the local journals, and may be regarded perhaps as a sort of summary of everything that had already been said in favour of the volunteer movement by other orators at other public meetings, garnished with a good many flowery allusions concerning the happy land we live in, and the devotion, courage, and patriotism of Britain's free-born sons. Of course the honourable member was tumultuously cheered. His address was followed by one from the Worshipful the Mayor of Bungay, who, amidst thunders of applause, announced his intention of entering as a private immediately on the proposed corps being formed.

Here my friend Mr. Greengage, the fruiterer, who lives next door to me, got up to put a question to the chair:—

"As this here is a public meetin'," said Greengage, "I wants to ask our worthy cheerman a simple question. As volunteers perwides their own riggimentles, what'll be the cost of the corses in the haggregate?" *Hear, hear!*

The Mayor replied that he could not state exactly what the precise cost to volunteers would be for uniforms, caps, and accoutrements; but he had been confidently assured that three pounds ten would be the maximum.

Mr. Cabbage, the tailor, of Tidy Street, here interposed, remarking that he was justified from his experience in declaring that it couldn't be done at the figure.

The Mayor, in great indignation, said Mr. Cabbage had no right to assume that, because his charges were exorbitant, other tradesmen's charges would be similarly high; when the chairman remarked that the discussion was premature.

Mr. Greengage thought differently. "I've got a wife and large family," said he, "and I must look at home. If you says the sum total as I shall have to pay will be three pun ten, or even four pund, I'll jine the corps. But I want to know what the expenses is to be afore I engage to pay 'em."

"Well, gentlemen," said the Mayor, "I do not apprehend that volunteers will be subjected to any expenses beyond the cost of uniform and accoutrements, and if you go properly to work in obtaining these, you will not certainly be at greater expense than four pounds."

A good deal more speechifying followed, and several resolutions were proposed and finally carried, having reference to the immediate formation of the corps (residents being urged to enrol their names as privates forthwith), the election of a committee to carry out the intentions of the government, and the appointment of competent drill instructors, Lieutenant-Colonel Namby being nominated captain commanding. I left the hall when the thanks went to the chair.

"Well, John," said Mrs. Raisins, immediately on my entrance into the back parlour, "have you joined?"

"Joined!" I exclaimed in consternation; "why, surely, my dear, you wouldn't have *me* become a volunteer?"

It was in vain I protested against what I considered, at my time of life and with my responsi-

bilities, such a manifest absurdity. In vain I urged argument upon argument in opposition to the new and strange conceit which had taken possession of my wife's mind. She had had more time to read newspapers than I, and had taken advantage of her leisure to devour, word by word and line by line, all the glowing orations and vigorous leaders that had been delivered and written in support of the noble national movement, so that now the dear little woman was warmed into following the subject up with an enthusiastic loquacity of which I had hardly deemed her capable. For my part, I was overwhelmed by her eloquence, and eventually, I believe, caught something of the martial ardour of her own spirit. Be that as it may, not wishing to appear a poltroon or a coward in the eyes of my better half, I found myself, a quarter of an hour after our conjugal discussion, once more in the Town Hall, affixing my signature to a document whereby I became a rifleman, and surrendered from that moment my domestic peace and mental equanimity.

Prints of the costume to be adopted by the Bungay riflemen were furnished to the tailors of the town, and certainly it appeared to me to be becoming, if not handsome. Mrs. Raisins was in raptures, and insisted that I should go to Smith's at once and get measured for my uniforms. As I knew that I should be obliged to procure my equipment shortly, I thought I might as well get the thing done out of hand and please my wife; so I followed her directions. Smith couldn't exactly tell me what the price of the suit would be, as he thought the extensiveness of the demand for the material might affect its cost, but he would do it for me as cheaply as he could; and with this assurance I was obliged to be content.

Drill commenced immediately after the enrolment of a hundred volunteers, and three days a week were appointed for this purpose, the large hall of our municipal edifice being selected for our exercise ground. Colonel Namby met us on the first night of drill and delivered an address. He didn't appear before us in uniform, but was dressed in a jacket, vest, and trowsers of shepherd's plaid. His age appeared to be about forty; he spoke with a very aristocratic drawl—I thought with a good deal of indifference and superciliousness—and seemed to have habituated himself to the use of an eye-glass. His address was brief. He was glad, he said, to see so many persons assembled, and expressed a hope that we would "attend to the directions of the experienced men who had been appointed our instructors;" and he trusted that, "when the officers of the corps came to inspect the men, they would be found to have profited from their lessons."

Our instructors were men who had been non-commissioned officers in the regular army; and directly the colonel left the hall, they commenced to arrange us for drill. By some fatality which I couldn't comprehend, I was selected as a right-hand man, and was accordingly placed first, the others falling in one after the other; then we were numbered off and formed into right and left files.

"Now, then," said Sergeant Pennewissle, who appeared to be our principal instructor, "you will



observe my motions, gents, and endeavour to imitate them. Attend to my directions for positions!—Observe! shoulders square to the front; heels together—toes turned out similar to mine—form about the same hangle as you see mine—'ang the harms straight down from the shoulders, palms of the 'ands flat to the thighs, body straight, but inclining for'ard, so that the weight of it may bear principally on the fore-part of the feet—in this way, gents—this way, 'old your 'eads up—not thrown back—and let your eyes, gents, look straight to the front."

Being right-hand or pivot man, I became the especial object of Sergeant Pennewissle's attention, and when he had made me perfect in acquiring the "position," I had to stand in that attitude, with my "eyes looking straight to the front," during the whole time that officer and the other instructors were perfecting my brother riflemen in the same lesson—which wasn't pleasant.

"Now, then," said Serjeant P., "observe! when I give the word 'march!' the right files will take one pace to the front, and the left files one pace to the rear, both with the left feet, and then stand still. Now! right files one pace for'ard; left files one pace step back: march!"

Simple as the above instructions may appear, the practice had to be repeated at least a dozen times before anything like a unanimous understanding was arrived at, and then, the hour being up, we departed to our homes.

Before the next drill meeting, Mr. Smith sent home my uniform, and Mrs. Raisins and the children were quite delighted with my appearance, of which indeed I was not a little proud myself.

At our next lesson we were taught to "stand at ease," and to respond to the word "Attention!" and then the instructors put us through our "facings," a task which appeared by no means easy of accomplishment. How the instructions of Pennewissle and the words of command even to this day ring in my ears! "Now, then, gents, nothing can be heasier; remember the left 'eel should not quit the ground, but the body should turn on it as on a pivot, the right foot being drawn back to turn the body to the right and carried for'ard—so, to turn it to the left. Now then, to the right face, two! Left face, two! Right about face, two—three! Right half face, two! Squad front! Eyes right! Dress! Stand at ease! Break off!"

For how many drills consecutively we practised these manœuvres, I forget; but I know that my military anxieties began to prey upon my mind. Sergeant Pennewissle haunted my dreams, and one night I awoke Jemima by repeating, in imitation of his manner: "On the word 'eyes right,' turn the 'ead and eyes slightly to the right, in this manner, gents; and on the word 'dress,' shuffle up or back with very short steps—so far—there—at the same time touch very lightly towards the flank on which you are dressing—that's the way—now—eyes right—dress!"

"Raisins," said Jemima, "dress, indeed! What gibberish is this you're talking?"

"That's right," I continued, unconscious of her question. "Left files one pace for'ard—march!"

We progressed slowly, and were practised in file

marching, counter-marching, diagonal marching, double marching, and wheeling, after which our swords and rifles (provided by government) were served to us, and we proceeded to exercise with those implements of warfare. It took us a long time to accomplish our manual exercise to the satisfaction of our instructors, to handle our weapons properly and to order arms, fix swords, shoulder arms, present arms, slope arms, carry arms, port arms, trail arms, pile arms, stand clear, stand to, and to unpile arms in true military fashion; and the more perfect and intelligent of the squad, amongst whom I may without much self-flattery reckon myself, found it excessively tedious and distressing to be obliged to stand still with their rifles in uneasy positions while their more stupid co-members were being drilled into understanding.

It was very seldom that Colonel Namby took the trouble to ascertain our progress by personal inspection; and his lieutenants were apparently equally indifferent. This became the subject of discussion amongst many of us, and our comments upon the matter were usually delivered after drill in the parlour of the "Royal Oak"—a house of entertainment much patronized by members of our corps. We expressed ourselves somewhat indignant at the evident lack of interest on the part of our officers, who, even when they did come to witness our efforts, seemed to come chiefly for the purpose of laughing at our blunders, and otherwise amusing themselves at the expense of our inexperience.

One evening, during the manual exercise, a friend of the colonel's, and I suppose one of our officers, came to me (as right-hand man), and addressing me with a swaggering assumption of superiority, accompanying his remark with an offensively insolent stare, said, "Are you aware, my man, that you look supwemely widiculous in that position? keep the bawwell of your wife closer to the body, and bwing your wight heel further up."

To be called "my man" at my time of life, and to be addressed in such a manner by a fellow my junior by some dozen years, was something more than I could comfortably stand. I said nothing then, however, but became eloquent at the "Royal Oak," and, by the time I got home, indignation and brandy-and-water had altogether deranged my ordinary placidity. I inveighed against rifle corps in general, and the Bungay corps in particular; denounced Mrs. Raisins as my evil genius, for having urged me to place myself under subjection to such insults, and vowed I would in future attend to my business, and give up volunteering for ever.

Then Mrs. Raisins began to recriminate. She believed I had got into bad company at the "Royal Oak," for which I had latterly neglected my home and family; that, probably, I had had some liquor there with some of my tipping associates before going to drill, and that my unsteadiness had attracted attention, and called forth rebuke. Finally, we got to very high words; then she went into hysterics, upon which I went up-stairs to bed, leaving her to come to herself in the ordinary course of nature.



Next day, Smith's bill came in for uniform, cap, belt, and accoutrements, and the belt-plate of the corps in silver, amounting in all to £7 10s. Mrs. R., to whom I had not spoken since the quarrel of the previous night, the remainder of which she had passed in the nursery with the children, placed the envelope in my hands, not knowing what it enclosed.

"Behold, madam!" I said, in a tone of severe displeasure, "at what cost I have ministered to your absurd fancies!" Then ensued another tornado, from which I fled for refuge to the "Royal Oak," where I obtained a copy of the Rules of the Bungay Volunteer Rifle Corps, just published, for circulation amongst its members, by which I saw it announced, for the first time, that every member of the corps would be required to pay annually the sum of 10s. 6d. for the privilege of belonging to that patriotic body.

"And not only that," said Robbins, the landlord, and a fellow-rifleman, "it seems an order has come for our equipment in undress, at our own expense, for summer out-door service, consisting of blouse, leggings, and other things, and for military great-coats for winter campaigning. I'll not spend any more of *my* money."

"Now," said I to Mrs. Raisins, when I got home, "let us talk this matter over, my dear, calmly and dispassionately. When I attended the public meeting at the Town Hall, I was assured I should be at no greater expense than four pounds. I shouldn't much have cared, to have pleased you, to have gone as far as five or six; but after I have been enrolled some time, I find I am required to find a silver badge to wear on my cross belt, which has cost two guineas, and in regard to which the subordinate members of the corps, I believe, were never consulted; at least, I never was. I learn, also, that we are to be subjected to further expenses for additional articles of clothing, and to the annual charge of half a guinea. For these expenses I have the privilege of being allowed to learn a variety of military movements and positions, in order to qualify myself to be a defender of my country, should occasion require such service at the hands of our citizens, which occasion I trust and believe will not arrive in my life-time, and this at hours which trespass upon the time most required to be devoted to my business. I should not, however, complain of simple inconvenience; I would be willing to sacrifice something of time, study, and labour, by way of example, in furthering a movement which I dare say is calculated to effect some good, if only in the way of prompting young men to healthful exercises, and evoking a universal feeling of national independence and security. But I cannot forgive the bad faith of those who have the control and direction of such movements; and still less, I imagine, will respectable tradesmen like myself brook the supercilious insolence of young men, who think themselves privileged to be rude and offensive to persons in my station, because they hold a royal commission. I shall certainly not incur these additional expenses, and shall therefore forward to the commanding officer my notice of withdrawal; after which I shall discontinue my

visits to the 'Royal Oak,' and shall relapse once more into the sober citizen and domesticated *pater familias*."

I have acted up to my resolution. I have exchanged my uniform and military trappings for a sober suit of broadcloth for myself and a couple of tunics for my little boys; but I have not yet lost the sound of Sergeant Pennewissle's voice of command, and Mrs. Raisins is beginning to recover from her disappointment at my retirement from the Bungay corps of Rifle Volunteers.

## THE GIGANTIC SALAMANDER OF JAPAN.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "CURIOSITIES OF NATURAL HISTORY."

WE Londoners are indeed fortunate as regards seeing living specimens of rare and curious animals from all parts of the world, and for this privilege we may thank the Zoological Society and their energetic secretary, Mr. Slater, whose senses seem to perceive from afar off the whereabouts of any curious beast; he hovers, hawk-like, over the victim, and rarely fails to pounce upon it and secure it for the Regent's Park Gardens. Within the last few weeks there has arrived a living specimen of a creature never before seen alive in this country. Everybody has heard or read about that wonderful country, Japan. Among the basaltic ranges of mountains in that country there are lakes and pools of stagnant water. Should the traveller happen to be gazing into one of these pools, he might (if fortune favoured him) observe crawling lazily along the bottom, or else coming up to the surface to get a gulp of air, an enormous monster—not a fish nor yet an eel, for neither of these animals have four legs—but a veritable Salamander. In our own favoured country we have in many stagnant pools and ditches, little reptilians known by the name of water-lizards, newts, efts or effets, or salamanders; these little harmless animals are not above three or four inches long; but their relation in Japan, which is a true water salamander, or monstrous newt, becomes relatively to them a giant. The specimen now in the gardens is about thirty inches long, and thick in proportion.

Some two years ago, when Captain Taylor, who commands a merchant ship, was walking round the market of the town of Nagasaki, in Japan, he saw this specimen exposed for sale, as they are curiosities and rare creatures even in their own native country. He bought it, and made a sort of pet of it: it has been in his ship nearly two years. He fed it with eels and fish, and when these could not be procured, with flesh and the intestines of animals and birds. It is at the present moment surrounded with a host of small fish and eels, which swim about him quite unconscious of the piscivorous monster with whom they are in such close proximity. I don't wonder at their familiarity; for how could Thames fish ever possibly dream of the existence and the murderous propensities of this great Japanese monster?

A new tank is in process of construction for the special abode of this new creature; at present he is in the reptile house (in the first apart-