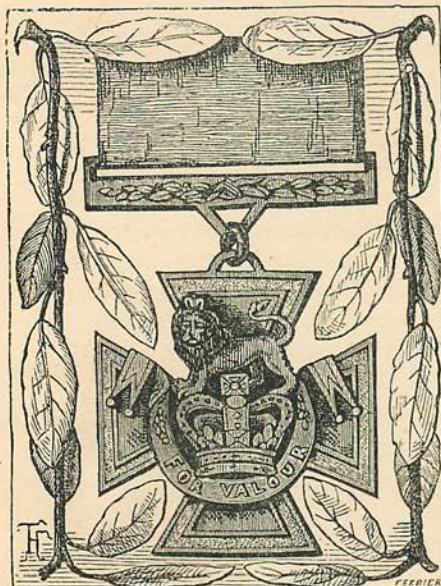


SOLDIERS AND THE VICTORIA CROSS.

BY AN ARMY CHAPLAIN.



It has been our lot in life to live very much among soldiers, and we like to write and talk about them. We hope that our readers will not be averse from hearing something of a class in whom we have all a common interest. It is true that English boys are not quite so warlike in their tendencies as French; they neither worship *la gloire* nor dress like *manikin soldats*. Swords and guns are not their only playthings, nor are feeble imitations of sanguinary contests their only pastimes. We here delight in all manly games and sports, for which French men and boys have no taste, and we thus acquire a muscular development and hardiness of frame which enables us to bear any amount of fatigue. It was a saying of the grand old Iron Duke that all his battles were won

on the playground at Eton, by which we suppose he meant that his officers, most of whom were Eton boys, received there such a physical training as fitted them to be heroes in the strife. Still, it is one of those epigrammatic sayings in which truth is sacrificed for effect; for what could the Duke, with all his officers, have done without the brave privates who composed his forces, and to whom he rendered justice on another occasion by saying that with such an army he could go anywhere and do anything?

A chaplain belongs, of course, to the non-combatant class in the army. It is not his duty to appear in the field, or to take part in battles. He has to remain at the hospital, and to administer the consolations of religion to the wounded and the dying; but he is precluded by his profession from being present at, or taking part in, any battle.

It is for this reason, perhaps, that we have always had a certain pleasure in listening to soldiers as they fought their battles over in hospital, and recounted their experience to one another. It was all strange and new to us, as, we dare say, it will be to most of those who read this paper.

The soldiers of whom we speak all took part in and survived the Crimean war.

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Their manly breasts are all adorned with the different medals awarded to them, two of them wear the Victoria Cross. One early object of our curiosity was to ascertain what are the sensations or feelings of a soldier on entering battle, or being exposed to fire for the first time. Now, the answer we invariably received will, perhaps, take some of our readers by surprise. They felt nothing of that warlike intoxication ascribed to the old Vikings on the eve of the combat; they had none of that strange joy ascribed by the patriarch to the war-horse at the sound of the trumpet, nor were they exactly afraid; but there was a certain uneasy sensation experienced by all as the bullet whizzed past the ear, and comrade after comrade dropped, sometimes with a sharp cry of pain, sometimes giving no sign.

This feeling some of them graphically described as similar to that which a bather experiences before plunging into the water; *ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte*; after the first dip Richard is himself again. But our readers are not to suppose that the soldier shows the same hesitancy in advancing to charge as the bather on the brink of the stream. If he did he would be a coward, and be scorned by all his comrades. To make the two cases parallel, we must suppose a thousand bathers rushing forward to the stream at once. Now, though an individual bather standing alone might stop short on reaching the water, and pause before taking a header, a thousand bathers rushing forward at once would plunge into the water without hesitation. The dread of shame, of exposure, of ridicule, would nerve the least courageous for the final leap. There is, moreover, such a strong feeling of sympathy diffused among large bodies of men acting in concert, that the strength of the stronger is imparted to the weaker. Now, it is the same with soldiers advancing to the charge. All of them feel the cold shiver like that of the bather approaching the water, but they march shoulder to shoulder, and with them are some old soldiers who have been under fire before. The younger ones are encouraged by their example, and many a lad who has trembled on first smelling powder has proved himself a hero in the fight.

We have read in books that soldiers sometimes weep while fighting hand to hand and sorely pressed—not tears of cowardly terror by any means, but such tears as the strongest of men will shed in hours of fierce excitement. Wellington wept as he embraced Blucher after the Battle of Waterloo. This, indeed, has been denied, but it is not difficult to believe it true. There are moments in the lives of all men, even the most reserved and self-contained, when the hidden fountains of feeling well over and find an outlet through the eyes, and we should not think a whit less highly of our soldiers did they shed a few tears of valiant rage while victory was still doubtful. But these tears, we suspect, are purely imaginary. For ourselves, we never met with a single soldier who confessed that he had shed tears himself, or seen others weep. We are sure that they would not have denied it if they had yielded to any such weakness, for, as a class, soldiers are the most truthful of men. All with whom we conversed agreed in affirming that our men were very quiet while fighting hand to hand with the enemy. There would be occasionally a shrill cry of pain from the wounded, or a short cry of triumph from the man who struck down his opponent, but, generally, all the dread work of the battle-field was done in silence. All admitted that the most fearful sound during a battle was the cry of a wounded horse; it was so like that of a human being in his death agony—shrill, piercing, heartrending. The horses seem to

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become almost human in the hour of battle, to share in all the wild passions of the combatants, and to exult equally in the hour of victory.

But while our men fought in silence, the Russians were very noisy both in advancing and in fighting. They uttered the most savage yells, as if they thought to inspire our men with terror by the mere noise they made. They soon discovered that Englishmen are not so easily frightened; but they still continued to shout from mere habit. Their officers also encouraged them in this custom, giving them, moreover, drink to make them pot-valiant. Notwithstanding this, we have always heard our soldiers frankly speak of the Russians as "foemen worthy of their steel." Brave men, we know, learn to respect one another even in the field, and the Russians are certainly one of the bravest nations in Europe. They still retain, however, many of the characteristics of savage life; they have not yet learned to act on the old Roman maxim, "*Debellare superbos, parcere victis.*" They often bayoneted our men when left defenceless and wounded. It is but just to add that they expected no mercy when left in the same condition, and seemed overwhelmed with surprise when our men treated them with the same generous tenderness as though they had been comrades instead of foes.

There are sometimes strange traits of character exhibited during the excitement of battle. Men may have been living under restraint for years, and come to believe themselves to be very different from what they are. Xenophon relates a story of a Greek soldier who, in consequence of a wound which had affected his brain, forgot the language he had spoken for many years, and began to express himself in his native tongue, which, before this accident, seemed to have entirely faded from his memory. Something analogous to this occurred at the Battle of the Alma, in the case of a sergeant of the Guards. He had once been much addicted to swearing, but had been enabled to vanquish this and other evil habits, and for many years had been looked up to by his comrades as a man of exemplary character. His company, while charging up the heights of the Alma, was surrounded by the enemy, and, after suffering severe loss, was obliged to retreat. In vain the poor sergeant endeavoured to rally them. He was borne along with the current. Overpowered with shame and rage, he gave way to a sort of madness, and swore such fearful oaths that we have often heard the men of his company say that it was something awful to hear him. Those who occupied the same tent with him relate that he spent most of the night after the battle in prayer, and was often heard sobbing like a child. He never spoke of the strange outburst of that day to any of his comrades, and they had the delicacy to avoid all allusion to the subject; but it was observed that he was more humble, kind, and considerate in his bearing towards them than he had ever been before. He survived the war and returned to England, where he enjoyed the respect of all who knew him, and was never known to indulge in the habit which gained the mastery over him at the Alma. He is now dead, but his surviving comrades speak with a sort of awe of the incident we have related.

One soldier of the Guards became raving mad at the Alma. It happened in this way:—The Russian fire struck down several of the men as they were advancing. The soldier of whom we speak was a young lad who had never smelt powder before. By his side was a comrade who belonged to the same district, and had enlisted at the same time. The latter was hit by a cannon-ball, and his brains were bespattered over the face of his friend, who became frantic, roaring and shouting

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like a madman. He imagined that his comrades were the enemy, and that he was fighting hand to hand with them. The whole company was thrown into confusion, and he wounded some of his comrades before he could be disarmed. He was conducted to the rear, fighting and struggling the whole way. The surgeons pronounced him to be a dangerous lunatic, and he was strapped down upon one of the beds in the hospital, with a sentinel to watch over him. That sentinel told us that he was never intrusted before or since with such an unpleasant duty. Owing to the shock which the brain had received, the poor madman could not rest for a moment. He fancied himself in the thickest of the combat, fighting with all the energy of despair, and swearing that his comrade should be avenged. He continued in this raving condition for about twenty-four hours, when, with the exultant cry of "Victory!" he expired. A similar incident occurred at Inkermann: in this case, also, the soldier survived only twenty-four hours.

Soldiers rarely feel much pain at the moment they receive their wounds, unless these be very severe, in which case they suffer much from thirst. There is one very gallant friend of ours—a non-commissioned officer—who was shot through the ankle in crossing the stream at the Alma. He knew not that he was wounded till the battle was over, but thought that his foot had got entangled among the vines in crossing the valley, and that he had sprained the joint. A good soldier never likes to go to hospital when there is any hard fighting, and our friend kept "a quiet sough," as they say in the North, about his wound, and marched at the head of his company as if nothing had happened to him. His courage and endurance were rewarded: he was present at, and took part in, the Battle of Inkermann, where his gallantry attracted the notice of the commanding officer, on whose recommendation he obtained the medal and pension for distinguished conduct in the field. He was wounded also on this occasion, but his hurt was of a far more serious character. He was shot through the head: the bullet literally entered at one side, and came out at the other. He felt a sharp, stinging pain, and remembered nothing more till he regained his consciousness in hospital, and was surprised to learn that he had been some weeks under the doctor's hands. He suffers no inconvenience from his wound now, except occasional dizziness and half-blindness after any excitement or exposure to the sun. Such a man in the French service might have risen to the rank of field-marshal, and obtained a name in the page of history. Well, after all, the great thing is to do our duty well in the position we occupy; and our friend, as sergeant-major of his distinguished regiment, is happier, probably, than if he had had greatness thrust upon him.

Though soldiers recover from their wounds at the moment, they are often very dangerous afterwards. The brain is often injured, and the disease goes on till the man loses his reason, or drops down dead. A poor fellow was hit on the crown of the head by a piece of shell in one of the trenches before Sebastopol. He was stunned at the moment, but thought so little of it that he did not even report himself wounded. For eight years he felt no pain, but the other day, while on guard, he was seized with a sudden giddiness, and became insensible. He was conveyed to hospital in a cab, and on recovering his consciousness he found that he was suffering the most intense pain on the crown of his head. His sufferings were very great; the only relief he could obtain was through the application of chloroform.

We write all this knowing that English boys feel deep sympathy with, and

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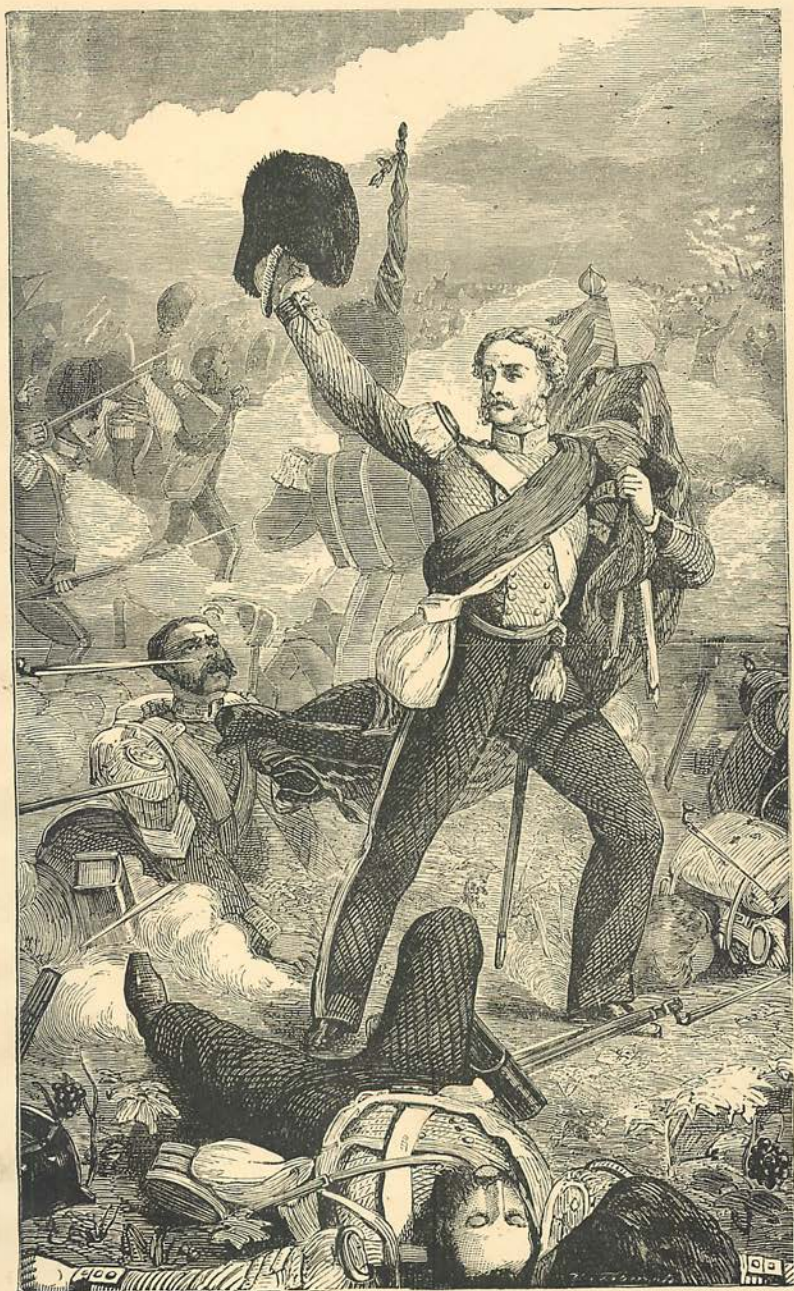
profound admiration for, our soldiers, and to show that their powers of endurance, when disabled, equal in heroic worth their gallantry upon the field.

Not all our readers, perhaps, have seen the Victoria Cross. It is not very beautiful nor very valuable in itself. A fac-simile of it appears at the commencement of this paper. It is a simple piece of bronze, shaped like a cross, and its intrinsic value may be about threepence. Its intrinsic value! but who can tell the price a soldier puts upon it? He had rather have that piece of bronze on his breast than be made a Knight of the Garter, and have his banner hung up with those of the other K.G.'s in the Chapel of St. George at Windsor. To obtain that small piece of bronze of the value of threepence he will lead the forlorn hope, be the first to storm the breach, and ever ready to expose his life to any danger. The Victoria Cross is as much to a soldier as the *gage d'amour* the knight-errant in the days of chivalry received from his lady-love, and swore never to part with. The pledge of her affection might be a soiled and tattered glove, worth even less than the cross "For Valour," but it was dearer to her lover than life itself. O that the day may never come in this country when we shall judge of things by the Hudibrastic principle—

"The price of anything
Is just as much as it will bring!"

for badly then will it fare with Old England. When our soldiers come to value their crosses at threepence each, the price they will fetch at a marine store, we shall not long survive as a nation. But there is little danger of such an eventuality. There are things—God be thanked—which we *do* love and value more than life itself—things which gold can *not* purchase. The Victoria Cross is one of them; and we are about to relate how three gallant officers of one of our most distinguished regiments came to be decorated with the priceless meed "FOR VALOUR." One was an officer; the other two were sergeants. Though different in rank, they were equal in bravery: their bravery was equally rewarded. Most people—thanks to Mr. Kinglake's history, and other sources of information—are now tolerably familiar with all the details of the Battle of the Alma. They know how the gallant Welsh Fusiliers, after forcing their way to the heights, and seizing the colours on the Russian battery, were so cut up by the enemy that they were forced to retire. They fell back in obedience to orders. It so happened, however, that as the word, "Fusiliers, retire!" was given, the Scots Fusilier Guards were charging up the heights, and the officer in command of them, hearing the order, thought that it was intended for his own men, and commanded them to fall back. This fact is not mentioned by Mr. Kinglake, but there are many witnesses still alive who heard this second order given, and acted upon it. Now, it is very difficult to retire before an enemy without falling into confusion; and it so happened that the Welsh Fusiliers came rushing down like a torrent. One gallant regiment opened their ranks, allowed them to pass through, and then closed again; but the Scots Fusiliers were not so fortunate. They did not open their ranks, because they received no order to do so, and were already falling back, when the crowd of Welsh Fusiliers came rushing upon them, broke through their ranks, and threw them into disorder; and, in the midst of this, the Russians made a dash at the colours of the regiment.

Now, it is not needful to dwell on the fact that it would be as disgraceful for an English regiment to lose its colours as it would have been for an old Roman centurion to have lost his shield. The colours are usually intrusted to one or two



CAPTAIN LOYD LINDSAY, SCOTS FUSILIER GUARDS, SAVING THE REGIMENTAL COLOURS AT THE ALMA.

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subalterns and several sergeants, who form a sort of guard of honour over them, and are held responsible for their safety. When they are in danger the bravest men in the regiment rally round them, and it is held unworthy not to follow them wherever they are seen. They are the same to our soldiers as the white plume of Henry of Navarre was to his men, or the bronze eagles to Rome's Tenth Legion. Knowing this, officers have sometimes thrown the colours into the very midst of the enemy, sure that their men would die rather than lose them. No sooner, therefore, was it known that the colours were in danger than the bravest men of the regiment tried to reach them, but only a few succeeded. They did not come too soon; the men intrusted with the colours fought like lions, but one officer was struck down, and only two sergeants survived the fearful contest. But the colours were safe, and the men might proudly say, with Francis I. after disastrous Pavia, "*Tout est perdu, hors l'honneur.*" The regiment wiped out the memory of the misfortune at the Alma (it was no disgrace to obey orders) on the bloody field of Inkermann, and a grateful country did not forget the men who loved their colours better than their lives. The officer who was struck down died of his wounds on the voyage home; Death was envious of the honours that awaited him. The other officer still survives, and wears on his breast the cross his sovereign bestowed upon him. He is, or will be, one of the wealthiest men in England, but we are sure that he values that small piece of bronze of the value of threepence more than all the money he has at his banker's.

"Money is round, and rolls away,"

but the memory of a brave action has never perished.

But gallant deeds are the same whether they be done by officers or by men; and the two sergeants demand notice who were also, for the part they took in this affair, decorated with the Victoria Cross. We should not dwell upon their history if it were not that it points a moral, though it does not adorn our tale. Both of these sergeants were fine, handsome fellows; one of them is six feet two inches in height. When they returned to London, and walked forth in the streets, decorated with the memorials of their bravery, their appearance naturally attracted much attention. Foolish people stopped them in the street, and invited them to drink. Now, no man of sense or good-breeding will drink in this way with soldiers, and no man of good feeling will tempt soldiers to drink. Those who thus invited our sergeants, we believe, meant no harm, but only wished to give the sergeants a cheerful glass, and to make them fight their battles o'er again. But soldiers who know how to resist the enemy in war are not always proof against temptation in times of peace. These two Victoria Cross men fell into irregular habits, such as could not be tolerated in the case of non-commissioned officers; every effort was made to save them, but in vain; their irregularities became so glaring that they were reduced to, and have ever since remained in, the ranks. They are steady enough now, but it is felt that they cannot be trusted, and they are not likely ever to regain their former rank. It seems very hard that brave men should lose their position through the mistaken kindness and thoughtlessness of their admirers, and we hope that those who feel sympathy with soldiers will find some better way of expressing it than by giving them drink. These two men, though serving in the ranks, have still much influence over their comrades, and that influence, we are glad to say, is generally exercised for good. The possession of the Victoria Cross carries with it a pension

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of 10*l.*, which cannot be forfeited through misconduct; the pension for distinguished conduct in the field is 15*l.* per annum.

Many small pledges of affection were found on the persons of our soldiers who fell on the battle-fields of the Crimea. Sometimes a lock of hair, or a photograph, or a last letter from home, or a small Bible or Testament, was found concealed beneath the tunic of a dead soldier. Many of them carried their Bibles with them to the field as a sort of talisman to protect them from danger; and there is a well-authenticated case of one soldier having had his life saved from the bullet, which would otherwise have reached his heart, having lodged in his Bible. We should think that book would become a precious relic in his family, ever to be prized, never to be parted with, for it was literally the Word of Life to him. Another was found with his right hand so firmly clenched that it was difficult to open it. He had allowed the blood from his wound to flow upon his hand, so that, on closing it, his fingers became, as it were, cemented together. Inside the hand were found several sovereigns he had saved from his pay with the intention of remitting them to his wife at home. His last thought was, probably, of her, and her heart must have been touched when she received the money he had saved for her with his heart's blood. Another man, who died of his wounds in hospital, had recourse to a singular expedient to save his watch, which he wished to be sent to his father in some remote country village. It was known that he was possessed of a watch, and there was no small uneasiness among the hospital orderlies when it could not be found after his death. Search was made for it in vain, and suspicion naturally fell upon the orderly who had been with him when he died. As this man, however, had always borne a good character, and there was no direct evidence against him, he was allowed to retain his situation, which must have been anything but a comfortable one. About ten days after the death of the soldier the mystery was cleared up. The effects of a dead soldier are usually sold by auction, and the proceeds, after paying all demands, remitted to his relations at home. It so happened that this man was possessed of a pair of good boots (a rare piece of good fortune in the Crimea), and these were purchased by a comrade for a few shillings. The purchaser, in trying on the right boot, found some obstacle in the toe which he imagined to be a pebble; on shaking it out he discovered the missing watch. The dying man, in the delirium of his last struggle, had contrived to secrete it in the place where it was found. It would be difficult to assign any reasonable motive for such an act: it was probably done in a moment of unconsciousness.

Commodore Wilmot has been telling us a good deal lately about the King of Dahomey's Amazons. These female warriors form his body-guard, and are three times as numerous as the men, whom they surpass in strength and bravery. They are very skilful in the use of fire-arms, and carry gigantic razors for shaving off heads—a very unladylike amusement, as all will allow. Now, in this country we have no regularly organised army of Amazons, though there is no saying what we may soon have in these days, when there are so many suggestions for the employment of female labour. It may be a prejudice on our part, but we confess we should not like to see nice young ladies firing off blunderbusses, or shaving off people's heads. Still, women have been found serving in the ranks, both in France and in England, without their sex being discovered, and a good many soldiers' wives accompanied our forces to the East. It is painful, but truthful, to add that

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most of these adventurous females had to be sent home, for reasons which we had rather not specify; four only were allowed to remain. These well-conducted Amazons weathered all the dangers of the campaign, watched over their husbands in the field and the hospital, did all the marketing, without knowing a word of "the foreign lingo" spoken by the natives, passed through many perils, and returned to relate their "accidents by flood and field" to their admiring friends.

Soldiers, as we have said, are very patient while enduring physical pain. A hospital presents a fearful scene on the day after a battle. It is surprising that no artist has selected such a subject to illustrate the horrors of war. Our army surgeons are brave men, or they would lose their presence of mind amid such scenes, for it requires less courage to kill than to heal. Every form of physical suffering is to be seen there; but a groan is rarely to be heard. It is only during the amputation of a limb, or the probing of a wound, that a sharp cry of pain is sometimes wrung from the sufferer, who generally turns aside his head, as if ashamed of such unsoldierly weakness. Wounded and dying soldiers like to be visited by their chaplains; they often say, "We have led a bad life; can there be any hope for us now?" They may have been bad men, but they are always truthful: they never try to make themselves out to be better than they really are. Their last thought is generally of home. Often in India and the Crimea a dying soldier has said to his chaplain, "You will write and tell them all about it. I hope I have done my duty, and nothing to disgrace my name." If our chaplains did nothing but soothe the last hours of our soldiers, their mission would not be altogether in vain; and no class of men are more grateful for kindness, as our nurses in the East will testify. And here we detract not from the excellent intentions of those ladies in saying that, from want of previous training, they were, as a class, disqualified for the work they undertook; yet we have always heard them spoken of by the men with the deepest respect. We have baptised many a Florence Nightingale, and the feeling cherished towards this lady in the army is almost analogous to the Mariolatry of the Italian peasantry: it borders on idolatry. "Shure she is not a woman, but an angel of mercy," said a poor Irishman whom she had nursed. "I could kiss the very earth she threads." There are many others equally grateful, though less demonstrative and poetical in the expression of their gratitude. Florence Nightingale and the Queen are the two patron saints of the British Army. Our soldiers have not yet forgotten how her Majesty visited them in hospital on their return from the Crimea, and showed her sorrow and her sympathy as a woman best can show it—by her tears. And, after all, be we queen or soldier's wife, drummer-boy or commander-in-chief, we are all members of the same family, with the same great heart beating within our breasts. One touch of nature makes the whole world kin. Our Queen wept for her wounded soldiers, and there was many a soldier wept for our Queen when the great sorrow overtook her. Such tears are not lost; they bind us all together, and give us a deeper insight into that great law of love taught by Him who did not esteem it a weakness to weep at the grave of a friend.

We hope this brief gossip about soldiers has not been distasteful. They are just the same as other men: they have many faults, but they are not without virtues, and we pity the man who can be officially connected with them without liking them. Perhaps we shall have something more to say about them soon.