

Young Tommy Atkins.

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.

"**H**ULLO, Dapper," said I, "what's up with you?"

"Same to you, Tommy, old boy. I'm down in the dumps, and am going to enlist. I hear good accounts of the army now, and they say that anyone who knows his drill, and is steady and well educated, is pretty sure of a commission. I've had a shindy at home, and I think a few years in the army would suit me down to the ground."

"Well, I'm reduced to my last shilling," said I.

"And I to my last sixpence," said Dapper, "so let's go and get another shilling at once."

I suggested a little more deliberation, and we sauntered into St. James's Park, sat down and discussed the situation. And at last I agreed to enlist with Dick Dapper.

We strolled leisurely through the Horse Guards and conned the bills headed "recruits wanted," and we were not long before a smart recruiting sergeant accosted us, and we walked with him to a public house called I think the "Blue

Pig." The sergeant took us to a quiet corner in a big room where there were other sergeants, and eight or ten young fellows woe-begone, but none of them so completely down in the dumps as Dapper and me.

"All found and a shilling a day," said the sergeant, smiling, "and the Government puts by £3 a year for you, till, at the end of seven years, you have £21 to receive for deferred pay. At the end of seven years with the colours, you will be drafted into the Reserves, and receive sixpence a day, and do twenty drills

a year. Now, that's all you want to know at present, so come with me to the barracks and see the doctor."

We got there with several other recruits, most of whom were required to have a hot bath; we were not, but we had to strip, and, in "our birthday suits," as Dapper described it, were ushered into the doctor's room.

"This regiment must be the First Buffs," said Dick to the doctor.

"Well, you're all in uniform, anyhow," said the doctor, laughing.

We were thoroughly examined, and I fancied that the doctor was entering in a book any particulars he could see, like mole

marks, tattooing, and so forth. Dick and I were both fairly developed for young men of eighteen, and passed the doctor all right. Dick's chest measured 35 inches, mine 36; the minimum accepted was 33 inches. The minimum weight was 115 lbs.—8 stone 3 lbs.—and we were both nearer 9 stone.

Our eyesight was tested by the hospital sergeant putting his hand over our left eyes, and asking how

many spots we could see on a board some paces off. Dick was a little doubtful when his left eye was covered, but the considerate sergeant opened the fingers, so that Dick could see with both eyes, and the doctor passed us as physically fit. Indeed, I heard that there were no rejections that day, though two recruits at least were not up to the standard of height, weight, or chest; but as they were promising lads who were likely to grow, they got their certificates.

Having been duly attested before a magistrate, we received, I think, 1s. 6d.



TRIMMING UP.



POST ORDERLY.

each, and were drafted off to the depôt of the Royal Wessex Regiment.

I sold my watch and chain to Sergeant Snapcap, and Dick disposed of a couple of pawn-tickets in the same way.

"You won't want watches in the army," said Snapcap, "and if you do you can buy a cheap one, and you won't be so likely to lose it."

This put nearly six pounds into my purse, and Dick got a sovereign for his two tickets.

At the barracks our first business was to dispose of our civilian clothes, about which there was no difficulty. Most of the recruits got rid of theirs to Jew dealers, but Sergeant Trail, who took us in tow to show us over the place, hinted that

he could make more of anything that we had to sell than we could get out of the old clo' man, so we both parted with our belongings to him, realising about three half-crowns each.

We were then entered in the brigade book and received our regimental numbers.

We then received our kits, which consisted of scarlet tunic, and navy blue trousers and a serge frock or jacket, a dark grey great-coat and cape, and short leather leggings; two grey flannel shirts, three pairs of socks, and a Glen-garry cap; two pairs of "Cossack" or "ammunition" boots; a set of blacking brushes, a clothes brush, and a tin of blacking. The small kit, as it was called, consisted of a knife, fork, spoon, razor, lather brush, hair brush and comb and button stick, and a hold-all to put them in.

We then received from the paymaster-sergeant our "ration money," and were marched off to our room in barracks. We got into our regimentals, and were introduced to one of the regimental barbers, who gave us the real "Royal Wessex cut." He told us that beards were only worn by the pioneers. We could, of course, shave ourselves. I fancied I saw Dick busy with a bit of pencil and a small card making a sketch of me, and he seemed awfully amused. It certainly was a close crop, but I never saw hair better cut.



THE KITCHEN—SERVING OUT BREAKFAST COFFEE.

Dick quite disconcerted the barber by saying: "Look here, Snipper, don't cut me as close as you have my chum, for I've got a scar I don't want seen."

"Oh, sir," said the barber, "soldiers' scars are honourable. Don't hide one if you have it."

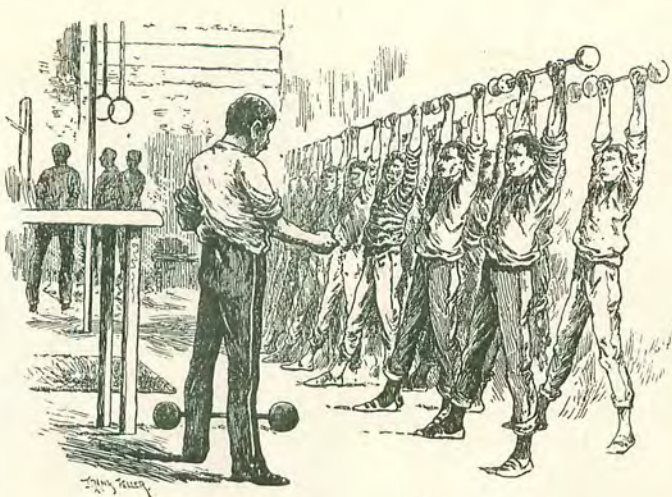
"But I didn't get it in a war," said Dick.

"Who's to know that?" said the barber. "Ah, I see it. Lots of our men would give a penny a day for a scar like that; it's a beauty."

Dick Dapper roared with laughter, and caused the barber to stick the point of his scissors in his head.

"Hold hard!" said Dick. "I don't want you to make any more scars; one's plenty for me."

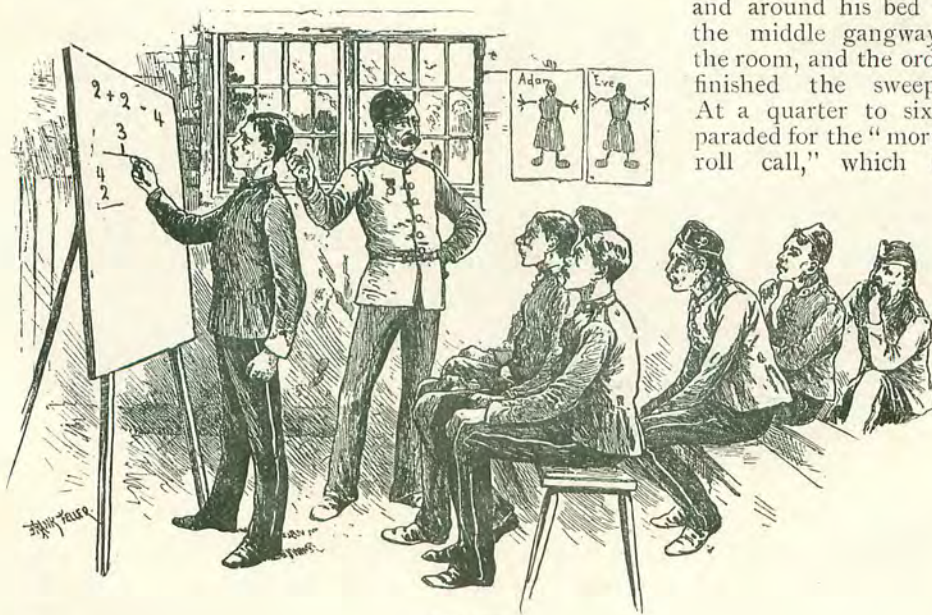
Dick said he did not want any of the patent pomatum recommended by the barber, but was told that he could not wear his cap properly without it, and the "love lock" must be greased.



THE GYMNASIUM.

We were glad to get to bed, and delighted to find that, after the lights were out, there was none of the larking and tale-telling that Dapper and I were looking forward to. One man began singing a loose song, but the sergeant shut him up sharp with a threat of the guard-room.

The bugles woke us up at five, and we turned out sharp. It was a glorious morning, and we followed the example of our comrades by putting on "fatigue" dress. We packed up our beds like the rest, and each one swept beneath and around his bed into the middle gangway of the room, and the orderly finished the sweeping. At a quarter to six we paraded for the "morning roll call," which took



THE SCHOOL.

about a quarter of an hour, and from 6 o'clock to a quarter to 8 we were furbishing up our uniforms, and paring the potatoes for the mess, the allowance being a pound for each man. We found this work rather irksome, and would have shirked it. Dapper wanted to know why they could not be cooked with their jackets on. Our sergeant was most sympathetic, and generally called one or both of us off to send us on some errand like fetching the letters, which was more to our tastes, and Dick was able now and then to add to his miniature sketch book—he was very clever with his pencil.

We had breakfast at a quarter to 8. The orderlies went to the kitchen and fetched



SENTRY GO.

The orderly afterwards put the meat into a twine net, if for boiling, and if for roasting, into a baking tin. The cook put a number on the joint, which varied in weight according to the number of men in the mess to which it belonged.

We paraded in drill order at a quarter to nine, and had an hour's drill under the sergeant-major, a good-tempered but blustering Irishman. It was his privilege to pick out the men for promotion, and both Dick and I did our best to gain his good opinion. We found our volunteering experience a wonderful help, and we were not long before we were promised promotion.

The commanding officer's parade was



KIT INSPECTION.

the coffee in pails. They also drew the day's rations, consisting of 1lb. of bread, three-quarters of a pound of boneless meat, and potatoes for each.

from 11 till 12, and all fell in in full dress and the bands attended.

At 12.45 the dinner bugle sounded, which seemed to be better understood than many



AIMING DRILL.

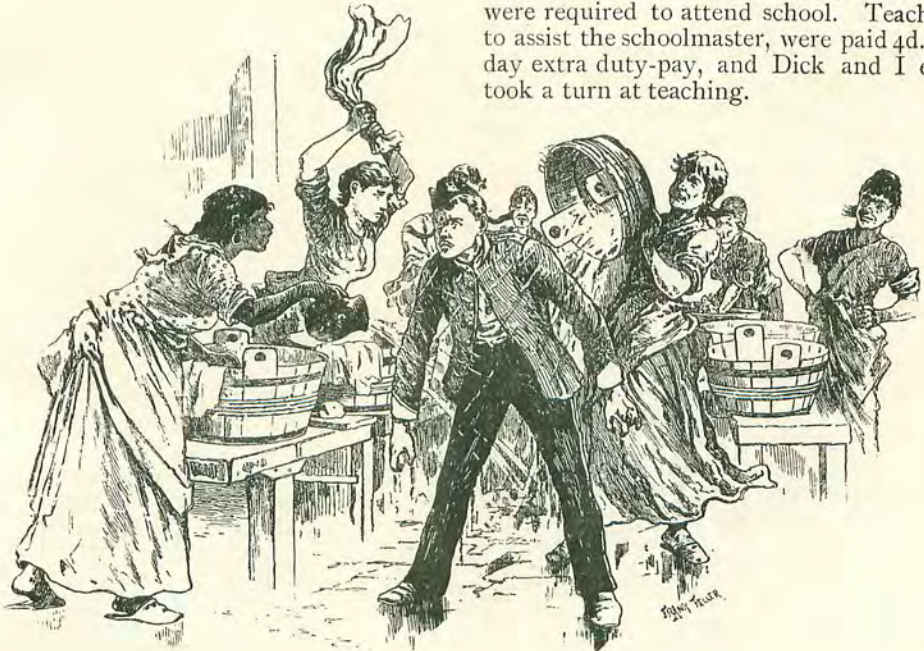
of the other "calls." There was very little variation in the daily *menu*, unless the "grocery book" showed a balance in hand of the paymaster-sergeant, which sometimes permitted of the addition of soup, which was brought in in pails like the coffee. We occasionally got pudding and "greens" in a similar way. No beer was allowed in the barrack-room, and as soon as the food was finished, there was a stampede to the canteen, where a pint of good beer could be had for three

halfpence. I ought to add that there were two canteens—the "wet" one and the "dry." The dry canteen supplied groceries, pickles, jams, sauces, and so forth, and was always open; the wet one was only open from 12 till 2, and from 6 till 9.30. Dæmper declared he could not understand the distinction, for he always went to the wet canteen when he was dry.

During the dinner-time an officer looked into each room, and in-

quired if there were any complaints. I never heard any made, though some discontented grizzlers were always threatening what they would say when they got a chance. But they had no encouragement from any of us, and were systematically "sat on" or cold-shouldered.

The sergeant-major had another parade from 2 till 3. After that time till 5 we were free to do what we liked in barracks, but some who wanted setting up had to go to the gymnasium, and others who had not reached a certain standard of education were required to attend school. Teachers, to assist the schoolmaster, were paid 4d. per day extra duty-pay, and Dick and I each took a turn at teaching.



RUNNING THE GAUNTLET.

We were soon qualified for sentry duty, and at first found it pleasant enough, especially when we were supplied with fruit and a smile "over the garden wall." "Sentry go" meant two hours on duty and four off for twenty-four consecutive hours.

Tea was served at a quarter to four, and consisted of tea and bread and butter, with "snacks" for those who could afford to buy them.

From 5 till 6 the sergeant-major had another parade, and we were dismissed till 9.30, when "First Post" sounded, "Second Post" at 10, and "Lights out" at a quarter past 10.

This was the general daily routine, but on certain days it was varied. I was much struck with the appearance of the rooms when the officers made the "kit inspection" on Saturdays. Then every article of Government property comprised in the soldier's kit had to be neatly arranged on his bedstead so that their condition could be readily seen, and the soldier stood at attention at the bedside ready to answer any question. One day Dick at kit inspection got into

momentary trouble. "No blacking tin here," said the officer, pointing to Dick's kit, but he took no further notice. The sergeant, however, gave Dick a rare



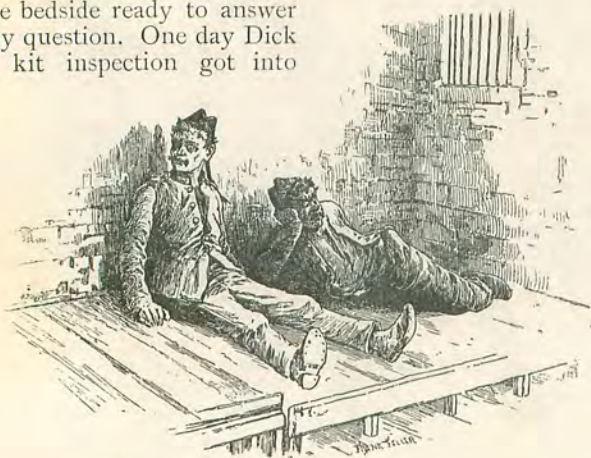
BARRACK TAILORS.

wigging, and wanted to know where it was. Dick had mixed the blacking with water in a jam jar, and was only waiting till he could get a brush, when he purposed ornamenting the barrack room with some startling design of his own.

We looked forward eagerly to the time when we should be able to get to the butts and have some shooting. The ordinary recruit had to go through a careful training before he was allowed to shoot, but Dick and I soon showed our proficiency in musketry, and were glad enough to be told after one lesson in aiming drill that we could begin class-firing at once.

Dick was delighted, and in a merry mood made for the laundry, as he said he had a grievance in that quarter. I give his version of what happened:—

"Serve me right," said he, "I deserved all I got. I pushed the washhouse door open, and chucking one of the women under the chin, I said, 'Look here, Lady Soapsuds, don't you scrub the buttons off my shirt like you did last week.' For which I got a spank on the face with a wet shirt, and a jug of water from a negress, and a



IN THE CELL: "TWO LOVELY BLACK EYES."



CONVALESCENT.

tub of suds from another woman. 'Let's show Mr. Cheeky our new wringing machine,' said one. 'Do, do,' they shouted, and I was soon surrounded by a dozen or more nymphs of the tub, one of whom dropped down behind me, and another pushed me backward over her; and amid shouts of laughter, they took me, head and heels, like a sheet ready for wringing, and gave me a twist, head one way and heels the other, and then dropped me. 'Now rinse him,' they shouted, and I was nearly drowned. One of them then dabbed my cheeks with the blue bag, and suggested that the sheet should be hung out to dry, but I managed to get to the door, and took to my heels." These laundresses are generally the wives of the married soldiers, and each man contributes a halfpenny per day to the laundry fund, and there is no limit to the clothes he likes to send to be washed.

Trades were not taught in our regiment, but there was a tailor's shop, a boot shop, and a carpenter's shop, in which soldiers who were qualified and were inclined that way, could earn extra pay. It was only repairing and altering that was done in these shops.

The evenings were very enjoyable. In the summer we had cricket, and for those who thought this too hard work or not to their taste, there was a skittle alley attached to the canteen.

Some went into the town, and often got into trouble through stopping too long and drinking too much at "The Swiggers' Arms." There was an awful

shindy there one night, which ended in a free fight between the "Dare Devil Dicks" and the "Bangshire Bucks," in which belts and fists were freely used, and we had to send out an extra strong picket and the ambulance to bring home our wounded. The guard-room was full to overflowing, and some of the more obstreperous had to be put into the cells, Dick, I am sorry to say, amongst the rest. He heard a call for "Dare Devil Dicks," and

joined in the scrimmage when he saw some of our men being badly mauled, and he let out right and left, to the astonishment of the "Bangshire Bucks."

Some of our men had been so badly hurt that they were sent into hospital.

I found that all sick soldiers were attended to with the greatest care. Anyone who wanted advice reported himself at nine o'clock in the morning, but urgent cases were sent to the hospital at once. The best of advice, medicine, and nursing were available, and the convalescents had a pretty



"A GOOD CONDUCT BADGE."

garden in which they could enjoy the fresh air and sunshine.

The prospect of promotion or the right to wear a good conduct badge was a great incentive to the recruits, and there was always great excitement when a new batch of promotions was issued. Dick and I were much amused one morning when we happened to peep into one of the huts and saw a two-year-old soldier trying to get a glimpse of himself in a small piece of broken looking-glass. He had just got his good-conduct badge, but, in the excitement of the moment, had pinned it on point downwards. This badge carries with it an extra penny a day. When a lance-corporal gets his stripe he gets an increase of 3d. per day; when he gets his second chevron his pay is 1s. 8d. per day; and the third, or sergeant's stripes, carries 2s. 4d. per day. Colour-sergeants get 3s., and staff-sergeants from 3s. 6d. to 5s. per day.

We were only in the ranks a few weeks before we got to be full corporals, and so got off the fatigue duty; but our last bit of fatigue work was amusing. We were both on fatigue duty, and the regiment had gone off early to take part in a field day some distance off; and Dick and I were left behind, and, amongst other things, had to whitewash the room. It was a fine summer day, and the work was

soon done, with the only discomfort of aching wrists and a plentiful sprinkling of whitewash over ourselves. When it was dry, Dick said: "Now for a little adorn-

ment. I'm going to put this sketch life-size over the mantel, and give the dado a frill"; and he showed me a little sketch of the canteen, with himself at the piano—he could play a breakdown, or vamp an accompaniment fairly well—and one of the men was dancing a jig.

"There will be a shindy," said I.

"Never mind," said Dick, "they can but make us wash it over."

He fetched his jam-pot with the blacking in ready mixed, and, producing two brushes, he set to work, while I did the dado edging. I was not very successful, so Dick said, "You rough it out and leave the finishing to me."

It was tea-time before we heard the regimental band playing "When Johnny comes marching home again," but we had finished our work and cleared all away.

The men roared with delight when they



SKITTLES.



"A SKETCH OF THE CANTEEN."

saw the picture and recognised the portraits, and their shouts of laughter brought in the sergeant.

He stood petrified for a moment, and then burst out, "Divil fly away wid me, and who's been damaging the barrack walls like that? Fetch the whitewash and clear it out before the colonel and his ladies come."

But the sergeant was too late, for the colonel and his visitors at that moment entered the room, and the sergeant called out "'Tention."

"That's capital," said one of the ladies, going straight to the fireplace to get a close view of the sketch. "Now that's what I've always been advocating—making the barrack-rooms as bright and cheerful as possible." All the visitors admired the picture, and the colonel's wife thought the ornamental dado a decided improvement.

The colonel said he supposed that it was Dapper's doing, but who gave permission to do it? Dick came forward rather sheepishly, and said he thought it would do for the Christmas decorations. "Long time to Christmas," said the colonel, "but let it stay till then. You must not do things—even good things—in the army without permission."

Dick touched up and improved his picture from time to time, and every visitor

to the barracks was taken to see it. The frilled dado, however, did not go down with the authorities, and Dick and I had to paint it out and make it match the other rooms.

Sunday was always a delightful day, for after church parade we were comparatively free.

It struck me that some better plan might be adopted for soldiers seeing friends who call at the barracks. Instead of getting leave to go out, and then adjourning with their friends to the nearest publichouse, there should be a spacious waiting-room near the entrance gates.

There was great excitement when it became known that the Royal Wessex Regiment was ordered off for service abroad at very short notice, and word was passed round that every man should make his will and declare his proper name before leaving England.

Dick and I were in great demand as will-makers, but most of the men copied out one of the simple forms set out in the little pocket-book which is given to every recruit, and sent it off to some relative with a good-bye letter.

The news that our regiment was going abroad woke up the friends of some of the men, who were bought off at, I think, £18 each, but Dick and I go with the regiment.



SUNDAY AFTERNOON.