

## A KNIGHT OF THE RED CROSS: SIR JOHN FURLEY AND HIS AMBULANCE WORK.

BY LEONARD W. LILLINGSTON.

**T**HERE are incidents in Sir John Furley's life sufficient to supply half a dozen shilling "shockers" with thrilling situations. He spent some weeks with the Danish army during the Schleswig-Holstein war of 1864; he went through the Franco-German war, through the still more terrible conflict that followed—the war of the Commune—and he was in Spain during the last Carlist rebellion. Finally he was the special commissioner to Montenegro for the British National Aid Society during the Russo-Turkish war of 1876. Yet Sir John is always the first to tell you that he is not



SIR JOHN FURLEY.  
*Photo by Bassano, Old Bond Street, W.*

1869, he was vice-president at that of Vienna in 1857, and at Rome in 1892. His life has been devoted for more than a quarter of a century to the succour of the sick and wounded. Sir John's knighthood was recently conferred upon him by her Majesty in recognition of these his services to humanity. He has, too, a genius for organising; he was one of the founders of the St. John Ambulance Association. He is a thoroughly practical man, he is the inventor of the stretchers and two-wheeled litters known as the "Furley pattern," several thousands of which are in use at the

present time at hospitals, mines, railway stations, and other public institutions throughout the country. Sir John Furley declined to retain any pecuniary interest in his inventions—he has given them, as he has given his services in many a sanguinary fight, in the cause of humanity.

The French Government made him an officer of the Legion of Honour for his heroic conduct at the Bridge of Neuilly in 1871, the French Red Cross Society presented him with a gold medal in recognition of his "indefatigable and courageous devotion." A complimentary dinner was given in his honour in this country a few years ago, when an address was presented to him bearing the signatures of a representative body of distinguished men, both civil and military. Sir John has both spoken and written on the care of the sick and wounded. He has delivered more than one lecture on the subject at the Royal United Service Institution; he is also the author of the "Struggles and Experiences of a Neutral Volunteer," and "Among the Carlists," and much Red Cross literature of a more technical character.

Sir John has all the reticence of the brave man. His *sans froid* is impenetrable. He appears to regard bullets at close quarters as quite everyday affairs. He speaks of passing through the zone of fire as though it were merely a question of crossing the street.

It was as commissioner for the British National Aid Society that he was in the thick of the Franco-German war.

"I soon saw that it was not going to be all plain sailing," he said. "My friend and colleague, Admiral de Kantzow, was arrested as a Prussian spy. The prevailing impression appeared to be that everyone who was not a Frenchman was a spy. I was not surprised to be told myself that I had 'a very Prussian cast of countenance.'"

"It did not end there, I suppose?"

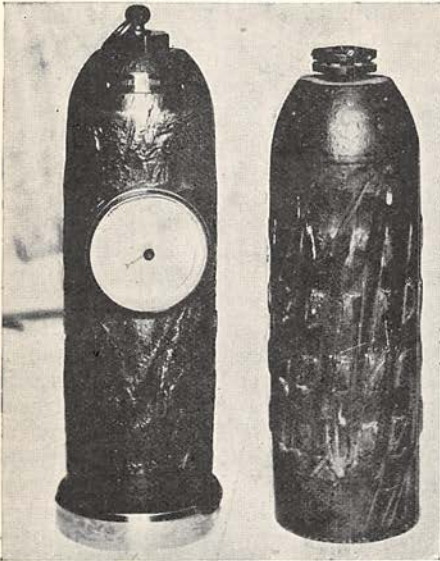
"Oh, no; I was made a prisoner at Conches by some *francs-tireurs*. They decided that I was a spy and must be shot out of hand. I asked to be taken before



the mayor. He declared that my papers were satisfactory. But that was not enough for the mob, and I was obliged to point out to his worship that he would be held responsible for my safety. So I was sent a prisoner to Evreux, to the *préfet*. He was a sensible man—he liberated me and apologised."

"Were you again captured?"

"Yes; Sir Henry Havelock and I were stopped by *francs-tireurs* at Houdan. The authorities approved our credentials, but meanwhile a crowd had collected round the carriage. They insisted on examining our baggage. Clothes, books, papers—everything was thrown into the road and closely overhauled by men, women, and children. A homœopathic case was regarded with



SHELLS FROM THE SIEGE OF PARIS, ONE CONVERTED INTO A BAROMETER.

considerable suspicion. After a great deal of abuse we were allowed to proceed."

"Did you find any difficulty in dealing with the claims for relief?"

"Sometimes. Both belligerents were naturally inclined to take very broad views as to their right to assistance. When Paris was invested, and I was at the German headquarters at Versailles, I remember receiving an application for some porter for a Royal Highness. I refused to supply it without a medical certificate. I got that certificate—I have it now."

"You saw a great deal of the fighting there?"

"Yes; but there was something very

artificial about war as practised at Versailles. We would go out to see a sortie as though we were going to a race-meeting. You could ride out after luncheon, assist at an engagement, and get back to dinner at seven!"

"With this qualification—that there was a tolerable chance that you might not get back at all?"

"Well, we got our share of any risk that was going. There was a particularly lively trip which we took to Écouen, for example. We started with a wagon-load of stores. For about half a mile the road was very much exposed and there was a brisk fire going on. I saw one fellow deliberately pot at us at a distance of four or five hundred yards; then, small arms having no effect, a big gun was brought into position. Fortunately the shot missed; before there was time to fire another we were hidden by the houses of the town. But perhaps the excursion to Beaugency in the winter of 1870 is the one I remember best. Here were terrible scenes. The theatre had been converted into a hospital; the scenery used in the last performance still hung upon the stage. In the passage, as I went in, lay a corpse upon a stretcher with a sheet flung over it. The *salle*, from the stage to the back of the pit, was full of wounded, maimed in every conceivable way. Crouched round an iron stove were a few men able to crawl."

During the armistice the French authorities declined to allow Sir John to enter Paris, though he was bent on rendering assistance to the beleaguered citizens and ascertaining the state of the hospitals. The German authorities facetiously told him that he might try to get in if he liked—but he would not get very far.

"Having made up my mind to go into Paris, I went," he said. "I borrowed the livery of a well-known diplomatist's coachman and drove in on the box-seat of his carriage. Privileged persons occasionally obtained leave to pass through the lines."

Sir John Furley, amongst his many relics of those stirring times, has in his possession a portrait of himself in the part of the coachman. He subsequently met with copies of this photo on sale in Belgium under the title of "Le Cocher International." The end justified the means; he was able to give invaluable assistance to the unfortunate Parisians. Sir John went into Paris again with the German troops. He returned to England soon after for a few days, but was back again to participate in the struggle with the Commune.



"I went one evening on a tour of exploration with Mr. Lawrence Oliphant, then correspondent of the *Times*," he said. "I had thought it well to warn one of my friends not to approach me in a new hat, or to be surprised if he saw me in the midst of a crowd, shouting '*A bas les aristocrates!*' We saw that night three poor wretches more dead than alive, supposed to be agents of the police, dragged along to summary trial and execution."

Sir John interviewed the Communal authorities. He gave me a very graphic and amusing account of his visit.

"Seated at the tables," he said, "talking, sleeping, or eating, were men of all grades. A very talkative sentry, who frequently refreshed himself from a tin bottle, kept the door. We were presented to a Citizen - General, who gave me the idea of a non-commissioned officer deprived of his stripes for intemperance. He welcomed us warmly; his eloquence brought tears to his eyes. I was informed subsequently that the

tears were the result of absinth, to which the citizen was much addicted, and under the influence of which, on one occasion, he broke a chair over the head of a colleague."

Sir John narrowly escaped being a victim during the



MEMENTOES OF THE CARLIST WAR.

*Shell converted into an inkstand; a Carlist badge; a bullet which struck a stone upon which Sir John Farley was leaning; a Red Cross flag taken by him at the battle of Estella; and a crucifix from a wrecked church at Somorrostro.*

great demonstration of the Friends of Order. He was sitting at breakfast in the *Restaurant de la Pair*, when he noticed that the iron shutters were being put up. He hurried out into the street, where the Friends of Order were assembling, and joined Mr. Lawrence Oliphant upon the balcony of his apartments.

"From 1,500 to 2,000 of the 'Friends' had met in front of the Grand Hotel. They made a move towards the *Rue de la Pair*, but were stopped by the Communists posted at the top of the street. Oliphant and I went to the Washington Club, where we thought we should get a better view. The unarmed Friends of Order continued to press on,



A LEAF FROM THE TREE BENEATH WHICH THE FIRST SHOT OF THE FRANCO-GERMAN WAR WAS FIRED; ALSO A BALLOON LETTER SENT FROM PARIS DURING THE SIEGE. The letter is one of those sent out by balloon. The first page is a newspaper, and the letter is written on the inside.



forcing before them the line of sentries. Oliphant proposed that we should go down into the street. We did so and went with the crowd. I saw the defenders struggling to lower their rifles, whilst their opponents were trying to force them up. I confess I began to have serious misgivings. We made a strategic movement to the right. I pulled at the bell of Blounts' Bank as I had never pulled at bell before. We were admitted and witnessed the scene from one of the windows. It was a deliberate massacre. As we

looked out a shot passed between us, sending splinters of stone and glass into the room. Meanwhile nothing could be done towards helping the wounded; any person showing himself in the street was at once fired upon.

"Oliphant, by the way, who at that time was under the domination of the prophet Harris, regarded this shot as a message summoning him to America. It was suggested to him by Sir W. H. Russell that he should take me with him, for it was quite as likely to have been intended for me as for himself. Oliphant went to America, but returned within the month."

Sir John passed through the Republican and Communist lines sixty-five times. This

"Pray, Sir John," I said, "how did you manage it?"

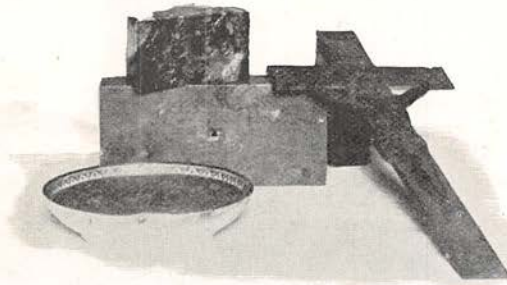
"That is a curious story," he said. "One example will be sufficient. I had issued some circulars as chairman of the Paris Committee of the French Peasant Farmers' Seed Fund. By mistake they were issued on huge yellow posters, the official colour of the Commune, and stuck about the streets. They bore my name, to which was attached, *Président du Comité de Paris*. The effect of this title was tremendous. It

sounds incredible—but I was even able to sign passports for friends working for me. In one instance, at least, my signature was accepted, when a passport visé by the British ambassador was rejected, greatly to the amusement of Lord Lyons, when I told him."

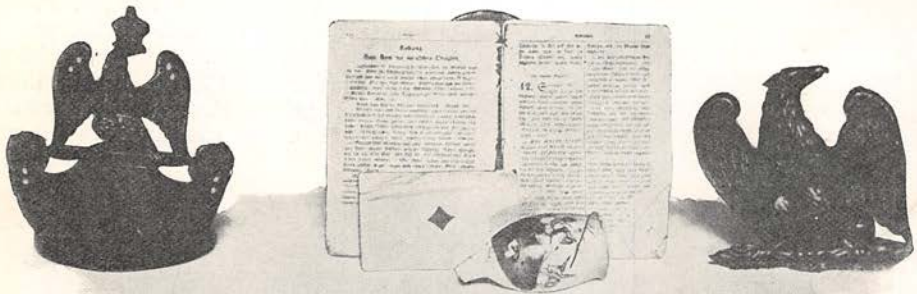
Sir John, with his friend the Vicomte de Romanet, was joint director of the *Ambulances Volantes* with the army of Marshal MacMahon. He was in every engagement fought during this period.

"What were your impressions at the Bridge of Neuilly?" I asked.

"There was little time to note facts," he said. "De Romanet and I went out accom-



PAPER-WEIGHTS MADE OF MARBLE FROM THE CHATEAU OF ST. CLOUD, AND A CRUCIFIX WHICH BELONGED TO THE EMPRESS EUGENIE.



BROKEN PIPE, PRAYER BOOK, AND ACE OF DIAMONDS, FOUND LYING BY THE SIDE OF A DEAD GERMAN ON THE FIELD OF SEDAN; FRENCH EAGLES FROM THE SAME PLACE.

is a record performance. Hundreds of people attempting to leave Paris were turned back by the Commune. Many were forced against their will to serve in the ranks of the revolutionists.

panied by two labourers. Just as we turned a corner into the main avenue a shell burst, bringing down the cornice of a house about our ears. A vigorous fire was being directed upon the bridge. A shot struck the parapet,





SHELL WHICH BURST CLOSE TO SIR JOHN AT NEUILLY; ALSO A BULLET FROM A COMMUNIST'S POUCH.



and the heavy stones fell, smashing two soldiers who were crouched behind them. A man near us was hit, his heart torn out with his side, and I was splashed

with his blood. Further on were others, some dead, others dying; and still the horrible

hail of lead and iron went on. Looking on this awful scene, and finding myself almost alone, I candidly confess to a moment of hesitation. As I gazed up the avenue and saw the guns belching fire, and heard the shots flying, I was almost paralysed with horror. However frivolous it may seem,

being compelled to force my thoughts into another channel, I concentrated them upon a cigar. I stooped down behind a heap of sandbags and asked a soldier for a light, and, having set the weed going, I stuck it in my mouth and determined to keep it a light. A few seconds later we had on our stretcher a marine who had been shot through both thighs."



A SOUVENIR OF THE BRIDGE OF NEUILLY.

*Unexploded shells converted into candlesticks and presented to Sir John Furley by Dr. Funck. Inscribed "To my stretcher-bearer and the signer of my passport."*

Sir John Furley, by the way, possesses a

curious memento. It is a shell which burst near him when out reconnoitring. A friend of his had the fragments collected and fitted together in a network of wire. Also upon the mantelshef in his study stand two unexploded shells which have been converted into candlesticks. They were presented to



SIR JOHN FURLEY IN THE DISGUISE OF A COACHMAN IN WHICH HE GOT INTO PARIS.

him as souvenirs of the Bridge of Neuilly. When the Government troops entered Paris, Sir John Furley, as usual, was at the front. When Anteuil was taken, he, with other members of the French Red Cross Society, had a temporary hospital going before the military surgeons came up. And the Red



Cross helpers did not go unscathed during the war. On this occasion one *infirmier* had both his legs shot off, whilst another was killed by a bullet through the body.

Sir John saw the death as well as the birth of the Commune. "I looked down," he said, "in one place upon the bodies of hundreds of dead Communists laid in long parallel trenches."

His recollections of the Franco-German War and the Commune are practically inexhaustible. But I wished to know something about his campaign in Spain during the Carlist insurrection. The position of a "benevolent neutral" in time of war is always a dangerous one. In civil war, however, the risk is trebled.

"If you are not shot," said a friend, "you will be received as a Providence; if by any chance you are shot, *au revoir dans l'au tre monde.*"

Sir John was at Bilbao, and went from there to Castro Urdiales.

"Here," he said, "occurred one of the most flagrant violations of the Geneva Convention I have ever met with. The

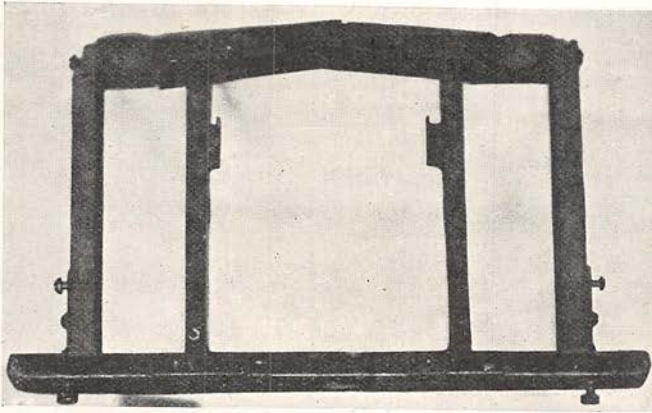
church and cloisters, protected by the neutral flag and used as a hospital, contained tons of Remington cartridges, some pieces of artillery, and a guard-room!"

It was Sir John who rescued from a Carlist prison O'Donovan, the celebrated and ill-fated war correspondent, who perished later in the Soudan with the army of Hicks Pasha. The British Government could do nothing without recognising the Government of Don Carlos. So Sir John obtained credentials from Dona Margarita, wife of Don Carlos. He learned from her that O'Donovan was charged with having come to Spain with the intention of poisoning Don Carlos. He found O'Donovan imprisoned in a loathsome hole at Estella, having been a prisoner for more than six months, under the most wretched conditions.

Sir John's luck was again to the fore.

"I was received with much attention and exceptional politeness at Estella," he said. "I did not understand it until I was informed that an English milord had presented four small steel guns to Don Carlos. It was rumoured that I was the milord! One morning, as a column of prisoners was passing through the streets, I thought I saw my man. I ascertained by a cautious word or two that it was he. I obtained access to the prison that night. After much trouble I got an order for O'Donovan to be transferred to me, and, still as a prisoner, to be taken in my charge to the Carlist headquarters, where the question of his liberation was to be settled. We rode over the mountains to Durango. Here my servant mounted guard over the prisoner, while I interviewed the Carlist ministers and, finally, Don Carlos

himself. The *dénouement* was comical—whilst the negotiations were proceeding the enemy swept down on Durango, and the 'King,' his ministers, his court and his army skedaddled, taking with them nearly all the means of transport. By dint of



BED OF A CARRIAGE BELONGING TO THE TOY RAILWAY OF THE PRINCE IMPERIAL IN THE CHATEAU OF ST. CLOUD.

bribery I procured horses, followed, and caught them up in the middle of the night. Believing it was now best to ask no more questions, we started off again early in the morning, and did not stop until O'Donovan was safe on the other side of the frontier."

Sir John values very highly a letter which he received some time after from Sir H. Layard (who had been British ambassador at Madrid), congratulating him upon the conduct of his mission. It was performed, by the way, entirely at Sir John's own cost. Upon his return to England, a certain noble lord called upon the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and suggested that the least that could be done would be to recoup Sir John his out-of-pocket expenses. The Secretary of State replied that he regretted that there was no fund available for such a purpose!