A Bad Shilling.

My day's work was done, properly speaking; but Bad Shilling was sinking, and the nurses on duty were too busy to spend much time on hopeless cases, so I thought I would sit a little while with him.

"Evenin', miss," he said, with a faint smile. "Knewed you'd come."

"Did you ?" I arranged his pillows, and gave him some brandy-and-water. Strong drink had done him all the harm it could do, the doctor said.

"Captain Mortimer ain't gittin' back his mem'ry, is 'e ?" he inquired, when I had finished and taken a seat.

"Not yet, but I hope he will."

Bad Shilling moved a little, and winced with the pain. He was wounded in half a dozen places.

"I 'ope 'e won't !" he stated emphatically.

"Surely, you don't wish him any harm." I could not understand anyone disliking Captain Mortimer.

"Wish 'im 'arm ? Not me !"

"There is something you do not want him to remember ?" I suggested.

"That's it, miss." He smiled feebly. "There's lots of things best forgotten." The statement was, unfortunately, true of his own career.

"If he does remember," I said, consolingly, "he will make allowance, I am sure."

He laughed a queer, hoarse laugh. "Yer think I done somethink bad, in course. Well, it's nat'ral." There was a wistful note in his voice.

"I am quite sure you have done good things, too."

"Not much," he confessed slowly. "But I done one thing orlright, an' that's wot nobody ain't got to know." He turned away a little, and I drew my chair closer.

"Would you like to tell me ?"

He brushed his hand across his eyes and nodded.

"Seems as I want somebody to think of me kind."

I touched his arm gently.

"Of course I shall. You know, you have been my favorite patient."

He flushed with pleasure.

"Gospel truth, sister ?"

"Yes." I declared unfalteringly. It was the truth, with an exception.

"Well"—he hesitated—"you're a woman—that is, a lady ! Can you keep a secret ?"

"I have kept a great many." How many only a nurse can guess.

"You promise faithful ?"

"I promise."

"Wait while I think." He closed his eyes for a minute. Then began : "I dessay you'd suppose they called me Bad Shilling 'cause of somethink I done. Wasn't nothink of the kind. I done wot I done 'cause they called me Bad Shilling."

"I understand."

"It was all through the bloomin' recruitin'-sergint, wot give me a bob I could double up in my fist ! Bein' young an' 'ot-tempered, I raised Cain about it till I got another. So they nick-named me Bad Shillin'. A red-'aired chap named Wilkins it were as started it. I give 'im somethink; but there wasn't no stoppin' 'em."

"It was very hard on you," I sympathized.

"'Avin' a name like that, I was boun' to go crooked. Not that I need 'ave gone so crooked as I done." He drew a deep breath. "Any'ow, I went crooked mostly. When I didn't, they alwus thought I did, an' nobody never give me no credit for nothink—'ceptin' one."

"You mean Captain Mortimer ?"

He nodded.

"A gen'l'man he was, if ever there was one. I alwus said I'd pay 'im back if I got the chanst. An' that's wot I done." He stopped for breath.

"How ?" I asked.

Bad Shilling laughed softly till the pain stopped him. "Got 'im the Cross. That's wot I done !"

"Ye'es ; if you look at it in that way."

The general had recommended Captain Mortimer "for going back under a very heavy fire, to rescue 4823 Private Nicholls, who was wounded." He had also recommended Private Nicholls, otherwise known as Bad Shilling, for the medal for distinguished conduct, "for assisting in a gallant attempt to rescue the guns."

"An' 'e don't remember nothink about it, does 'e ?"

"No," I agreed.

He had been struck on the head, and his memory of events just before the accident was gone. It might come back, or it might not the doctors said.

"'E don't remember," repeated Bad Shilling, "an' 'e won't remember. Well, I do." His eyes glittered.

I went hot and cold in turn. Captain Mortimer was the one patient whom I liked even better than the poor fellow who was dying.

"What do you mean ?"

"You promised not to tell."

"I shall keep my promise."

"It was 'arf an hour or thereabouts arter we 'ad news of them 'ere guns. Our company was one of those wot 'ad a try for 'em. But we couldn't git near, no more'n the others done. Fair rainin' lead, it were !"

"Horrible !" I shuddered.

"As it 'appened, about twenty of us got a bit too near, an' was caught in the open w'en the smoke lifted. We took shelter behind a bit of a bush an' two small boulders—wot was left of us. There were Sergeant 'Arris, Teddy Nolan, Young Cooper, Frank King, an' the cap'n an' me." He paused for breath.

"Yes," I said; "I know." Everybody knew so much.

"We 'eard the shots spatterin' against the stones an' snickin' bits off the bush. An' Nolan rolls over sudden, shot clean through the 'ead, an' never knewed wot 'urt 'im. So the sergint crawls out from the bush, an' sits jest back of me. 'Bit too 'ot !' 'e sez, careless like, as makes me larf. 'Yer cool enough, ain't yer ?' I sez. An' 'e nods an' grins ; but the others didn't think it no fun at all."

II.

"I am sure Captain Mortimer was not afraid," I protested.

"Afraid ? Lor, no ! Nobody wasn't ; but they couldn't joke on it, like the sergint an' me !"

"I don't see anything to make a joke of."

"Likely not. Some people doesn't. That's where it is. Well, we seed the companies in the rear drawing back, an' enough of 'em left behind, too. Pretty soon there wasn't a man wot could crawl left near. Then the firin' stopped a bit, and the smoke blew over again, till we couldn't see the guns, though we knew right enough where they were. The cap'n looks round an' sighs. 'It's no use, men,' 'e sez. 'We'd better take the chanst an' git away.' An' Nokes an' King picks up their rifles an' bolts, but I looks at the sergint, an' he looks at me. 'We're very comfortable 'ere, sir,' 'e sez, salutin'. An' the cap'n frowns. 'There's no use in stoppin',' 'e sez."

"He was quite right," I declared.

"Maybe; but me an' 'Arris thought different, 'avin' seed a couple of loose 'orses loomin' up through the smoke. 'Let's ketch 'em an' 'ave a go for the bloomin' guns !' 'Arris sez. The cap'n shakes 'is 'ead. 'A useless waste of life !' 'e tells us. 'The smoke will lift in a moment.' 'Then we'll run, sir,' I tole 'im. 'E 'esitated for a moment an' yer could see as 'e didn't like it. Mind yer, I don't mean as 'e was afraid."

"I am sure he was not !" I asserted.

"Only 'e'd got more sense than us, an', like enough, more reason for takin' care of 'isself. Yer see, 'Arris was disappointed over a gal, and as for me——" He laughed scornfully. "Well, any'ow, the cap'n said as we was a pair of fools, but if we'd try 'e'd try. So we caught the 'orses, an' orf we went, slap up to the guns. Just as we got there, orf drifted the smoke."

"He knew," I said.

Bad Shilling laughed softly.

"So did we, if yer comes to that. Well, in course, they blazed away at us again. Down went the 'orses an' down went 'Arris. The cap'n went to pick 'im up, an' saw he was done for. Then 'e turns to me. 'Now p'r'aps yer'll run, yer something fool !' sez 'e. Did me good to 'ear 'im talk like that, an' 'im always apeakin' so soft. Afraid, d'yer say ? Not 'im !"

Bad Shilling shook his head as vigorously as he was able.

"I'll race yer to cover, sir,' sez I, as cheerful as I could. Mind yer, I felt it about 'Arris, wot was a good sort at 'eart if 'e were a bit down on a chap. So orf we went. Jest a wee drop more drink, sister, an' not too much water ; 'tain't wholesome, they say."

I gave him some brandy, almost neat, but he seemed doubtful about continuing his story.

"What happened next ?" I asked.

"Wot 'appened next everybody seed," he said slowly, "the smoke 'avin' cleared away. An' if they didn't, they thought they did. An' wot they thought they seed yer've heard."

"Thought they saw ? What do you mean ?"

He looked at me over the counterpane.

"Wot did they see when yer come to it ? Two fellers in khaki, runnin' as 'ard as they could go, an' the bullets pickin' up the ground all around 'em ! Two fellers, an' one outrunnin' the other. An' one was an officer, with a career before 'im; an' the other was a common sojer, wot 'ad be'ind 'im two court-martials an' thirty-seven entries in the defaulter-sheet. S'welp——"

"Hush !" I touched the counterpane softly.

"Any'ow, they were both dressed alike, under orders, an' w'ich was w'ich nobody couldn't see."

"What ?" I cried. "You mean—"

"Suddin the one as was be'indmost fell. The feller in front—whichever 'e were—didn't notice. Dessay 'e might 'ave been excited. 'E run on fifty, or, maybe, a 'undred yards. Then 'e stopped an' looked round, an' see the other feller down—whichever it were. 'E could hear the bullets buzzin' round 'im, an' see the dust that they kicked up where they 'it. An' there was dead an' wounded. wot lay all over the place; an' some of 'em was groanin', an——"

"Don't !" I cried—"don't !" I seem to see these things now.

"'E looked round careful, an' took it all in. Yer needn't ask if 'e was afraid, 'cause 'e were. But 'e clenched 'is 'ands an' 'is teeth, an' back 'e went—whichever 'e were !"

"For Heaven's sake——"

He held up his hand.

"'E got back to the other chap, an' slung 'im over his shoulder, an' stumbled along with 'im. Then it may 'ave occurred to 'im as the chap 'e was carryin' was coverin' 'im. Any'ow, 'e shifted 'im into 'is arms, an' carried 'im in front, an' faced the music with 'is back, as yer might say." He chuckled grimly at his wit.

"Presently 'e lost 'is wind, an' sat down on an anthill. They were firin' orl the time, yer mind. Then 'e got up again, an' went on. Then 'e began to stagger, as if 'e might 'ave been 'it; wot them as saw only guessed, an' didn't know. Then 'e stumbled orl over the place, as if 'e might be 'it again ; wot they didn't know neither. Then 'e come to the boulders, an' fell down behind 'em, an' didn't try to git up. That's wot they seed."

"Go on !" I begged huskily.

"When it got dark, a party came out to fetch 'em. The first one they found 'ad been 'it in the 'ead, an' was jabberin' arf silly, an' didn't know who 'e was, or 'ow 'e got there, an' 'e were an orficer. 'Nothink serious,' the doctor sez, in a whisper. 'E'll lose memory of the las' few hours, most like, that's orl.' The other chap 'eard wot they said. Then they come to 'im. 'This pore fellow's done for,' they sez. 'E 'eard that, too." He stopped to cough. "Wot was the good of a Cross to 'im ?"

"Oh"—I clasped my hands—"you don't mean—surely you can't mean that it was you !"

"Sure as I'm going where I'll 'ave to answer for my words, it was me !" he said solemnly. "An' that's wot I done !"

I put my head in my hands and cried.

"You—you," I said, "are a very brave man !"

He lay back, with a satisfied moan.

"Mind yer," he said feebly, "if I'd fell, 'e'd 'ave done the same for me, for certain."

He closed his eyes, and I wiped mine. When I looked at him again he was very pale and gasping for breath.

"Let me give you some brandy," I begged; but he shook his head.

"I've had my share," he told me with a vain attempt to smile. "Think of me kind."

He struggled for breath for a moment; then he muttered something that I could not hear, and then he died.

* * * * * *

I lay awake all night wondering how I should break the news to Captain Mortimer; for, of course, I was bound to tell him. He was not quite so well the next morning, as it happened, and I did not think him able to bear the shock.

"I've got the Cross, anyhow !" he said once. And I could scarcely keep back my tears.

The next morning I was suddenly ordered to the West Camp Hospital, nearly ten miles away. The work was very heavy there, and the sister in charge had broken down. So I made up my mind to write to him. I was doing double duty, but I should have made time, only I shrank from the task. Much as it would pain me, I thought I could break the news better by word of mouth. To be frank, although Captain Mortimer had not proposed to me, I knew he would as soon as he was well. So I naturally supposed I could comfort him as much as anybody could.

When I had been away nearly a fortnight, a message came by the field telegraph that the general wanted to see me at once, so I drove over.

When I arrived the general was in his tent, frowning over some despatches ; but he put them aside at once, and motioned me to a chair.

"There is a patient whom I particularly want cured," he said abruptly.

"Yes, sir ?"

"The doctor tells me there is only one remedy."

"What is that, sir ?"

"You !"

"I—I don't understand. You mean——"

"Captain Mortimer !"

"Is he worse ?" I trembled so that I surprised myself. "What has happened ?"

"He has recovered his memory."

"Oh !" I cried. "Poor, poor fellow !"

The general raised his eyebrows.

"Then you knew ?"

I tried to tell him, but the tent was swimming round. He was very kind, and gave me a glass of water, and looked out of the opening till I recovered. Then I told him poor Bad Shilling's story.

"Did you intend to tell me ?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"I intended to tell Captain Mortimer as soon as he was strong enough to bear it."

"You thought he would tell me ?"

"I knew he would !" I said firmly.

The general nodded slowly.

"He did." His eyelids flickered. "He feels it very much." He balanced a penholder thoughtfully. "If you had told him, you might have made it easier."

Add Bad Shilling.

"I should have tried," I said faintly.

The general put his big hand on my shoulder.

"Go and try now !" he commanded.

"But," I stammered, "we—I—he hasn't——"

"I'm afraid he won't. He holds himself too cheap to offer just now." The general looked at me very hard.

"You don't expect me to propose to him ?" I said.

The general gradually smiled.

"Upon my word," he said, "I believe I do !"

I almost made up my mind that I would, but it was, fortunately, unnecessary. When I got to the tent he was asleep, so I sat beside him, holding his hand. When he woke and saw me, he just smiled, and drew me towards him.

"I am no longer a hero," he said faintly.

"Yes, yes," I whispered. "You are mine !"—London Answers.

SUPERSTITION IN ARMIES.

CHARMS AGAINST STEEL AND BULLET.

Amulets Carried by British Soldiers and the "Friebreife" of the Germans.

During the South African war a number of instances have cropped up showing that the idea still prevails that there are such things as charms and spells against wounds and death. Not long ago a paragraph appeared in some of the papers to the effect that a soldier's watch, with a charm attached to it, had been found on one of the battlefields, and was being held for a rightful claimant. Earlier in the war a private's letter told how a comrade had come in safety through a hot engagement, by virtue, as he thought, of an amulet he wore, to be mortally wounded in a subsequent skirmish, when, by the merest chance, he was not wearing his charm. A relative's letter from the front tells the writer of a young fellow who wore a charmed ring suspended from his neck. The wearer had it from his sweetheart; he placed the most perfect faith in it, and, though he had been in several hot corners, he had hitherto always come out scratchless.

Although this kind of belief is of very ancient date, it is curious as well as interesting to find it still in existence in the British army. Perhaps we ought to say "traces of it," for it is hard to believe that it is widely prevalent. And yet it would not be very surprising if it were so, seeing that a certain portion of the rank and file are illiterate, and come from a stratum of society which is largely superstitious. It is curious to compare our army in this respect with the German. Those who happened to be in the Fatherland during and immediately after the war of 1870-71 must have been struck by the amount of superstition that, hidden under ordinary circumstances, in the then excited state of the public mind, made its way to the surface, much as the mud of a stagnant pool floats to the top when the water is agitated. Nothing seemed too absurd to be believed. Portents and warnings were seen everywhere. Black crosses, observed for the first time in window panes of the houses of the peasantry throughout Baden and the South generally, were held to be signs of Divine wrath against the turn things in general had taken in the Fatherland, especially in regard to the church. The excitement touching this phenomenon became intense, and was only allayed when a Baden glass manufacturer came forward and demonstrated that the warning crosses were marks imprinted on the glass in the process of making.

LETTERS OF EXEMPTION.

But some of the most curious instances of the revival of old-world superstition were brought into prominence by the Franco-German war itself. The most striking had reference to the fancied preventability of death and the rendering invulnerable of the human body. The superstition was widely prevalent among both the French and the German soldiery, but seemed to be more common with the latter. Thousands of the doomed sons of the Fatherland were found to have carried with them reputed charms against steel and bullet. The most common form of the charm was what they themselves called "Freibriefe" (that is, "letters of exemption" from death or injury)—the survival of a superstition that may be traced among nearly all peoples, and mention of which may be frequently met with in German records of the sixteenth and later centuries. In the early days of its use, powder was considered the invention of the devil, and the soldier, who had death constantly before his eyes, was ready to resort to any charm to protect himself against the missiles of the enemy, or to impart to his own weapons a supernatural power. Thus the magical art of taking aim was a peculiar branch of education, with the soldiers of the Emperor Carl, and we read that a worthy named Punker won a great reputation and much money by furnishing charmed bullets to the soldiers. These bullets were reported to carry certain death to the enemy. But it was not sufficient for the soldier to carry these death-dealing bullets; he must bear upon him also charms for the preventing and for the healing of wounds and spells for the stilling of blood. Salves, too, were sold for rendering the body invulnerable.

That such superstition should exist in the Dark and Middle Ages need surprise no one, but that they should have retained their hold on the human mind to the end of the nineteenth century, and in Germany, too, the land of popular education, par excellence, was a surprise to everybody who gave any thought to the subject. Public attention was first directed to the subject by an eminent naturalist, Dr. Karl Russ, and at once a mass of information in regard thereto came to light. An officer, in giving his experience in the "Gartenlaube," asserted that he had noticed this superstition among the soldiers during the Austro-Prussian war of 1866, and related a striking incident which came under his own immediate observation. On the evening before the storming of Koeniginhof, while his regiment was bivouacking at the edge of a wood, and the men were engaged in preparing their supper, he overheard two grenadiers conversing together. One said to the other: "Have you not got the letter which makes its bearer invulnerable?" The second man said that he had not, and his comrade bade him to be sure and get one quickly.

TALISMAN WHICH FAILED.

Dr. Russ told the story of an officer who was severely, though by no means mortally, wounded on the field of Sadowa. He was fast bleeding to death, however, when the surgeon reached him, but might have been saved had he not obstinately refused all aid. The surgeon noticed that he had something in his hand, which he pressed convulsively to his breast. Presently he began to tremble violently, and, crying out, "It has done me no good!" threw away a piece of paper, and the next moment expired. The paper was found to be a talisman, bearing some written characters which were quite unintelligible. Many a similar agonizing discovery was made during the war of 1870-71, too late for the learner to profit by the experience. After the battle of Woerth, in particular, a great number of talismans, charms, and the like were picked up close to the corpses of those who had clung to them, until in their last agony they had lost faith in their healing virtue and had flung them away. It was found on investigation that those provinces which were in the lowest condition as regards education gave the largest contingent of men who were thus credulous. Talismans, charms, letters of exemption, etc., were found in the largest number among recruits from the Polish provinces, and in that district education was the least satisfactory. While in the least educated portions of the Fatherland the percentage of recruits who could neither read nor write stood at 0.5, in Posen it was 14.73. No wonder the recruits from Polish provinces put faith in amulets and charms, and carried on them "letters," to protect them from hostile sword and bullet.

The commonest form of "Freibriefe" was a single slip of paper, bearing a prayer in Latin, or a petition for the protecting grace of "Mary, the Mother of God," or of some local saint. Some, however, were of modern form. One such talismanic scrap of paper found on the person of a dead Posener, contained in Latin characters the scarcely cabalistic words, "Nur immer zu, du ochse!" ("Go at it, thou ox!"). Genuine "Freibriefe" are rarely made public, their owners preserving them with the greatest secrecy for fear of ridicule, and those who make money out of them for an equally obvious reason. The "Freibriefe" most frequently found among German soldiers was the "Blessing of St. Columanus." Another common form of charm found during the Franco-German war was the "letter from Holstein," the most potent form of which was in MS.—London Standard.

THE PRINCE'S REASON.

A few years hence the little prince who figures in the following story from the London Express will hear of the Nile and Trafalgar and the great victories won by the British merchant seamen, and will know that to be a sailor requires skill and heroism; but just now his view of this noble profession—and of his royal father as well—is refreshingly natural and boyish.

Not long ago the Prince of Wales went, unexpectedly into the royal nursery, and found his little son busily engaged drawing on a bit of scrap paper the picture of a ship.

"Well, laddie," said the prince, quite proud of his son's creditable performance, "I'm very pleased to see that you are fond of ships and sailors. I am a sailor, you know."

"Yes, daddy," cried Prince Edward, excitedly, "and I want to be a sailor, too, when I'm grown up!"

"Ah," said the Prince of Wales, smiling, "and you want to be a sailor, do you? Because daddy's a sailor, I suppose?"

"Not because of that, I think," said the young prince, thoughtfully, "because I don't like doing my lessons always, and you needn't be clever to be a sailor, need you, daddy?"

INSECTS AS FOOD.

A French entomologist recommends insects as an article of food. He speaks with authority, having not only read through the whole literature of insect eating, but having himself tasted some hundreds of the species raw, boiled, fried, broiled, roasted and hashed. He has even eaten spiders. However, he does not recommend these. He states two objections to spiders—they are not insects, and they live on animal food. He says : "Pound your cockroaches in a mortar; put in a sieve and pour in boiling water or beef stock."