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Letter From Lieut. Atkinson

Edinburgh, Scotland,

Oct. 30, 1917.

The following interesting and unique letter, dated Edinburgh, Scotland, Oct. 30, 1917, was received by Mrs. W. D. Atkinson from her son, Lieut. W. D. T. Atkinson, serving in the 123rd Battalion:

As I told you in my last, Braemar is right among the hills. It is one of the beauty spots of Scotland. It is about 60 miles due west of Aberdeen, and is on the River Dee, which empties into the North Sea at the latter town. It is said to be the most expensive summer resort in Scotland.

There are all kinds of castles in the vicinity. Balmoral is about six miles along the road to Aberdeen. It was, as you remember, the favorite home of Queen Victoria.

About six miles the other way you come to Mar Lodge, which is the home of the Duke of Fife. It is about this that I want to tell you, because I was given a very fine opportunity of seeing it. The late Duke of Fife, if you remember, married the Princess Royal, the eldest daughter of King Edward VII. One of their daughters is married, I believe, to Prince Arthur of Connaught. The other, Princess Maud, is at home with her mother.

Mrs. MacDonald, our hostess, has become very well acquainted with their Royal Highnesses. Her hotel, the Fife Arms, is upon the Fife Estate. On Sunday the Princess Royal phoned down to Braemar, asking Mrs. MacDonald and her daughter, Flora, up for tea. Now, Mrs. MacDonald, should have been a general. She went up and had tea at Mar Lodge, and in the course of her conversation, told Her Royal Highness of the four nice Canadian officers who were her guests. By all accounts she lauded us clean up amongst the Milky Way and Venus and Adonis and Herpicide and the rest of the stars. Anyway, she stimulated a very wholesome curiosity in the Princess Royal's heart to see these boy wonders, and the result was a most cordial invitation to spend the afternoon at Mar Lodge on Tuesday. As I said before, Mrs. MacDonald is a general; she is also a wonder. So is her daughter. But this is neither here nor there.

There are four of us paragons of wisdom and beauty, as I said before. There is Capt. Hudson, M. P. P., of Wainwright, in the Provincial House. Like all politicians he is full of much breeze and tact. There was Groen, a Norwegian, who lost his leg on the Somme last year; there was Crawford, son of the Hon. Thomas of the same name, Speaker in the Ontario House, and there was yours truly, of whom enough has been said.

And so we prepared to go. Crawford filled up on beefsteak and potatoes, as he might be too shy to eat; Hudson filled up on atmosphere and statistics about Canada to beguile the Princesses with; I doffed, with the aid of the barber, a lot of my superfluous capillary vegetation on the apex of my cranium; and Groen donned his little old cork-tree foot, and away we went in Mrs. MacDonald's car, with Mrs. MacDonald, Miss Flora and many, many misgivings and sinking of heart. The Princess Royal had phoned Mrs. MacDonald in the morning to say that she would receive us at the Royal entrance. Some class to us, eh?

Princesses! Gee!! I suppose we all have preconceived notions of Princesses, either from Alice in Wonderland, or Anderson's Fairy Tales, or from a fleeting glimpse of Princess Patricia when she was in Toronto. But I tell you what I expected: It was (1) silk, (2) more silk (3) still more silk.

I expected to see much silk, followed by more silk rustle down the stairs, and it would be up to us to salaam and murmur words of adoration into our whiskers. The Princesses would condescendingly bow, and we would very self-consciously enter the tea-room and essay the impossible, by performing the acrobatic stunt of balancing a tea cup, a plate, a sandwich, a cream puff and a knife and fork on one knee, trying at the same time to think of something else, wishing that we were better looking and that our feet were smaller, and wondering if the war were still going on. Then some one would stand up, we would kow tow again, bow ourselves out backwards, bumping the door en route, a bobbing flunkey in pea-blue or sea-green livery would gently but firmly push us into our car and away we'd go. But—we arrived about three. A very trim servant met us and told us to wait in the reception room. He was the only servant we saw in all our visit.

After a while we noticed two drab figures coming up the path outside. The most noticeable features of their attire were dark grey rain coats, and very simple hats. In they came, Mrs. MacDonald curtsied, and Miss Flora made a gesture like a Presbyterian hunting for a Psalm on a dark Sunday morning. Then Mrs. Mac said: "Your Royal Highnesses, let me introduce," etc., etc. I was third on the list, and was just wondering whether to let my knees sag the way they wanted to, or

to stand rigidly to attention, when I noticed a hand held out to me, and I grabbed it like a sixteen year old girl grabs a naval officer's. It was the Princess Royal's. She gave me a very cordial shake and I murmured something, I don't know what. I think I tried to say, "Your Royal Highness," and "I'm pleased to meet you," at the same time. Then followed the Princess Maud.

She is hard to describe. In the early twenties, her dark hair well down on her forehead, short and inclined to be stout, but one of the most charming girls I have ever seen. Her mother is quite tall and fair. She looks quite like her mother, Queen Alexandra, and she put us at our ease in about two minutes.

After passing the time of day H. R. H. suggested a walk around the grounds. So she and Hudson led the parade and off we started; Groen followed with Princess Maud, and then we lesser lights. The Princess is quite reserved, even shy.

We went first to the ball room. It is a large barracks of a place, quite simple and unadorned, except for three thousand skulls and horns of three thousand deer, not to mention about fifty deer. Three thousand skulls, understand, with no flesh on them, just the white bone and dark horns, and the arrangement was absolutely wonderful. By careful selection they had brought together those horns which most closely resembled each other. By setting the skulls up irregularly they had made it into a sort of weird pattern. But it simply defies description. We took our hats off on entering, but H. R. H. made us put them on, saying we'd catch cold.

Then we swapped partners and went on through the gardens to their private chapel. Princess Maud and I walked together this time. The Princess Royal had designed the whole chapel, and believe me, she was no mean artist. The color scheme was perfect, and the windows magnificent. Princess Maud showed me around it herself. Her father, the Duke of Fife, is buried there, and there are tablets designed by the Princess Royal to King Edward, the Duke of Clarence and Queen Victoria.

Then we walked to the larder and saw there venison, which they send to Military Hospitals, and to their stables and saw their carriages; their horses, all but one team, they gave to the Guards at the outbreak of war.

We strolled back to the house and let ourselves in; there wasn't a servant in sight. Tea was on the table in a large, dingy room. H. R. H. sat down by the tea pots. Princess Maud faced her. Mrs. MacDonald sat two seats from H. R. H. on the right; Miss MacDonald faced her. We men sat in between. All which showed more art on H. R. H.'s part. The sexes were beautifully shuffled, and each of us mere men had the honour of sitting next to Royalty. My own seat was between Princess Maud and Miss MacDonald, which was highly reasonable I thought.

There was absolutely no formality. We chatted away as the spirit moved us, which was often, and in sundry places. No, girls, I'm not going to forget that little tea party for a while.

After tea we were shown the drawing room—a magnificent place, show-

ing further touches of the Princess Royal's artistic taste. It was done in rich green and red. The most prominent picture was a Landseer, of which they seemed very proud.

Then they produced cigarettes and invited us to smoke. I wonder just how many vulgar Canadians from the land of Indians, log cabins, bears and real estate booms have been invited to smoke in the presence of Royalty!

Then we returned to the reception room and the Princess Royal presented each of us with a lucky coin to wear with our identity disc, and a book—a sort of comic, illustrated one of trench life. I got my Canadian nerve into play and asked for an autograph in it. I was not refused. Princess Maud followed suit. Believe me, children, that little libretto is going to occupy a prominent position in the centre of my study table when once again I am a poor pedantic pedagogue. At present it is in Mrs. MacDonald's fire proof safe, and will be brought to Canada by me personally, if I don't die of old age before the war is over.

We were asked to sign the visitor's book. I had a squint back over the preceding pages. Most people sign only one name—Dukes, Kings and such folk. I suppose I might have signed my nickname. Then we signed our names twice more on sheets of paper, one for each of the Princesses, as they graciously said they wished to preserve them in remembrance of the first Canadian Officers they had met. They saw us to our car.

No caerulean flunkey bowed us out. We shook hands all round again. We thanked them for their kindness. They made light of it and hoped we really enjoyed ourselves.

The car was a closed one. I rode outside with the driver. So I hauled off and did a rigid military salute and clambered aboard, and just get this, they waved at us till a turn in the drive hid us from view.

Say, girls, is it any wonder we are wearing 8½ hats, all of us? We are abso-bally-lutely unbearable with conceit ever since.

Honestly, it was one of the finest times I ever had. I felt just like I would in any one else's home. A close-up view like this reveals them to be just as human as the rest of us; in fact a little more so.

We certainly were wonderfully lucky. We were, as I have said, the first Canadian Officers that their Royal Highnesses had met, and were the first Canadians to have been in Mar Lodge, and you bet we appreciate the honour, and when "old age has seamed our cheek, and our joints begin to creak, and our teeth are made of asphalt and cement," and when our hypothetical grandchildren foregather on our decrepit knees, and ask us to tell 'em a story, I fancy that the wondrously interesting tale of the aged lady who dwelt in a shoe, will be often left unsaid, and that the burden of our song will be our little old afternoon's doings at Mar Lodge.

But I have prated enough and more than enough.

As I said at the start, I trust all is well at home.

Yours conceitedly,

Don.

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