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THE DRUMS OF THE FORE AND AFT.

By RUDY RD KIPLING.

moved about and begins to feel cold at the pit of the stomach and in that crisis is badly mauled and hears orders that were never given, he will break, and he will break badly, and of all things under the sight of the sun there is nothing more terrible than a broken British regiment.

A powerfully prayerful highland regiment, officered by rank Presbyterians, is perhaps one degree more terrible in action than a hard bitten thousand of irresponsible Irish ruffians led by most improper young unbelievers.

Jakin was a stunted child of 14, and Lew was about the same age. When not looked after, they smoked, and drank. They swore habitually after the manner of the barracks room, which is cold swearing and comes from between clinched teeth, and they fought religiously once a week.

The other drummer boys hated both lads on account of their illegal conduct. Jakin might be pounding Lew or Lew might be rubbing Jakin's head in the dirt, but any attempt at aggression on the part of an outsider was met by the combined forces of Lew and Jakin.

On this particular day there was discussion in the camp. They had just been convicted afresh of smoking, which is bad for little boys who use plug tobacco, and Lew's contention was that Jakin had "stunk so orrid bad from keepin the pipe in pocket" that he and he alone was responsible for the birching they were both tingling under.

"You're a bloomin liar!" said Lew without heat. "You're a bloomin little bastard!" said Jakin, strong in the knowledge that his own ancestry was unknown.

Now there is one word in the extended vocabulary of barracks room abuse that cannot pass without comment. You may call a man a thief and risk nothing. You may even call him a coward without finding more than a boot whizz past your ear, but you must not call a man a bastard unless you are prepared to prove it on his front teeth.

"You might ha kep that till I wasn't so sore," said Lew sorrowfully dodging round Jakin's guard. "I'll make you sorer," said Jakin genially and got home on Lew's alabaster forehead.

"What's that to you?" said Jakin with an unpleasant dilation of the nose. "Oh nothing to me. You'll get into trouble, and you've been up too often to afford that."

composition of the average drummer boy. He fights as do his betters, to make his mark. Ghastly was the ruin that escaped, and awful was the wrath of the bazaar sergeant. Awful, too, was the scene in orderly room when the two reprobates appeared to answer the charge of half murdering a "civilian."

"Beg your pardon, sir. Can't we say nothin in our own defense, sir?" shrieked Jakin. "Hey! What? Are you going to argue with me?" said the colonel.

"No, sir," said Lew. "But if a man come to you, sir, an' said he was goin to report you, sir, for 'avin a bit of a turn up with a friend, sir, an' wanted to get money out of you, sir?"

"What sort of characters have these boys?" he asked of the regimental sergeant-major. "Accordin to the bandmaster, sir," returned that revered official—the only soul in the regiment whom the boys feared—"they do everything but lie, sir."

"Is it like we'd go for that man for fun, sir?" said Lew, pointing to the plaintiff. "Oh, admonished—admonished!" said the colonel testily, and when the boys had gone he read the bazaar sergeant's son a lecture on the sin of unprofitable meddling and gave orders that the bandmaster should keep the drums in better discipline.

"If either of you comes to practice again with so much as a scratch on your two ugly little faces," thundered the bandmaster, "I'll tell the drum major to take the skin off your backs. Understand that, you young devils."

Then he repented of his speech for just the length of time that Lew, looking like a seraph in red worsted embellishments, took the place of one of the trumpets—in hospital—and rendered the echo of a battle piece. Lew certainly was a musician and had often in his more exalted moments expressed a yearning to master every instrument of the band.

"There's nothing to prevent your becoming a bandmaster, Lew," said the bandmaster, who had composed waltzes of his own and worked day and night in the interests of the band. "What did he say?" demanded Jakin after practice.

"Said I might be a bloomin bandmaster an' be asked in to 'ave a glass o' sherry wine on mess nights." "Lot! Said you might be a bloomin noncombatant, did 'e? That's just about wot 'e would say. When I've put in my boy's service—it's a bloomin shame that don't count for pension—I'll take on a privit. Then I'll be a lance in a year—knowin what I know about the ins an outs o' things. In three years I'll be a bloomin sergeant. I won't marry then, not I. I'll old on an learn the orficers' ways an apply for exchange into a regiment that doesn't know all about me. Then I'll be a bloomin orfcer. Then I'll ask you to 'ave a glass o' sherry wine, Mr. Lew, an you'll bloomin well 'ave to stay in the hanty room while the mess sergeant brings it to your dirty 'ands."

"S'pose I'm goin to be a bandmaster? Not I, quite. I'll be a orfcer too. There's nothin like takin to a thing an stickin to it, the schoolmaster says. The reg'ment don't go 'ome for another seven years. I'll be a lance then or near to."

but they had no knowledge of what war meant, and there was none to tell them. Wherefore they cheered lustily when the rumor ran, and the shrewd, clerly noncommissioned officers speculated on the chances of batta and of saving their pay. At headquarters men said: "The Fore and Aft have never been under fire within the last generation. Let us, therefore, break them in easily by setting them to guard lines of communication."

The colonel wrote with delight that the temper of his men was excellent, that the regiment was all that could be wished and as sound as a bell. The majors smiled with sober joy, and the subalterns waltzed in pairs down the messroom after dinner and nearly shot themselves at revolver practice.

"Then let's go an' make Tom Kidd so bloomin sick 'e can't bugle no more. You 'old 'is 'ands an' I'll kick him," said Lew, wriggling on the branch. "That ain't no good, neither. We ain't the sort o' characters to preeson on our rep'tations. They're bad. If they have the band at the depot, we don't go, an no error there. If they take the band, we may get cast for medical unfitnes. Are you medical fit, Piggy?" said Jakin, digging Lew in the ribs with force.

"Yus," said Lew, with an oath. "The doctor says your 'ert's weak through smokin on an empty stomach. Throw a chest, an I'll try yer." Jakin threw out his chest, which Lew smote with all his might. Jakin turned very pale, gasped, crossed, screwed up his eyes and said: "That's all right."

"You'll do," said Lew. "I've 'eard o' men dyin when you 'it 'em fair on the breastbone." "Don't bring us no nearer goin though," said Jakin. "Do you know where we're ordered?" "Gawd knows, an 'e won't split on a pal. Somewher's up to the front to kill Paythans—hairy big beggars that turn you inside out if they get 'old o' you. They say their women are good lookin too."

"Any loot?" asked the abandoned Jakin. "Not a bloomin anna, they say, unless you dig up the ground an see what the niggers 'ave 'id. They're a poor lot." Jakin stood upright on the branch and gazed across the plain.

"Lew," said he, "there's the colonel comin. Colonel's a good old beggar. Let's go an talk to 'im." Lew nearly fell out of the tree at the audacity of the suggestion. Like Jakin he feared no God, neither regarded he man, but there are limits even to the audacity of drummer boys, and to speak to a colonel was—

But Jakin had slid down the trunk and doubled in the direction of the colonel. That officer was walking, wrapped in thought and visions of a C. E.—yes, even K. C. B., for had he not commanded one of the best regiments of the line—the Fore and Aft? And he was aware of two small boys chatting down upon him. Once before it had been solemnly reported to him that "the drums were in a state of mutiny." Jakin and Lew being the ringleaders. This looked like an organized conspiracy.

The boys halted at 20 yards, walked to the regulation four paces and saluted together, each as well set up as a ramrod and little taller. The colonel was in a genial mood, the boys appeared very forlorn and unprotected on the desolate plain, and one of them was handsome. "Well!" said the colonel, recognizing them. "Are you going to pull me down in the open? I'm sure I never interfere with you, even though"—he sniffed suspiciously—"you have been smoking."

It was time to strike while the iron was hot. Their hearts beat tumultuously. "Beg your pardon, sir," began Jakin. "The reg'ment's ordered on active service, sir?" "So I believe," said the colonel contentiously. "Is the band gone, sir?" said both together. Then, without pause, "We're goin, sir, ain't we?" "You!" said the colonel, stepping back the more fully to take in the two small figures. "You! You'd die in the first march."

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