

THE SILENT MAN IN RED.

Tommy Atkins as Pictured in Verse by
Rudyard Kipling.

The despatches from London telling of the tremendous enthusiasm of the crowds which madly cheer the troops departing for South Africa, tell also that the troops march in perfect silence says a writer in the St. Louis Globe-Democrat. Even when the bands play "Soldiers of the Queen," and the mob in patriotic frenzy, press upon the ranks, holding out friendly hands and roaring out good wishes and benedictions, the silent troops move onward, face forward, eyes turning neither to the right nor left, and with a precision of step never for a moment interrupted. This is the English soldier on parade.

Next to the picturesque Boer there is no figure in all the world so interesting in all the world as this silent man in red. People want to know more of him. Although much has been written of the British army, all of it, practically, has been about the officers in the higher grades. Mr. Kipling was the first to tell us something of the life of the common soldier. He has done it well in romantic prose narrates of fictitious adventures, but in none of these do we get such an insight into the real field and barrack life of the troops, now bound for a new war, as he has given us in the "Barrack Room Ballad." There we see the life of the soldier. In almost the first of these Kipling explains what, to Americans, is incomprehensible, how soldiers, marching to the wars, can remain silent and immovable in the midst of great popular demonstrations. This is fully explained in the poem, "Tommy," in which Kipling tells of the soldiers' degradation, his resentment of his treatment, and his perfect understanding of what will work a change in his case. The poem is so apropos at the present moment that it is not too long to run in full. It is a soliloquy by "Tommy Atkins," who says:—

I went into a public house to get a pint of beer,
The publican he ups and sez, "we serve no red-coats here."
The girls behind the bar they laughed and giggled
fit to die,
I outs into the street again an' to myself sez I:
Oh, it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' Tommy
go away,
But it's "Thank you, Mr. Atkins," when the band
begins to play,
The band begins to play, my boys, the band
begins to play,
Oh, it's "Thank you, Mister Atkins," when the
band begins to play.

I went into a theatre, as sober as could be,
They gave a drunk civilian room, but adn't none
for me,
They sent me to the gallery or round the music
halls,
But when it comes to fightin', Lord, they'll shove
me in the stalls.
For it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' Tommy
go outside,
But it's special train for Atkins," when the drums
begin to roll,
The troopship's on the tide, my boys, the troop-
ship's on the tide,
Oh, it's "special train for Atkins" when the
troopship's on the tide.

Yes, makin' mock 'o uniforms that guard you
while you sleep,
Is cheaper than them uniforms, an' they're starva-
tion cheap,
An, hustlin' drunken soldiers when they're goin'
large a bit,
Is five times better business than paradin' in tulle
kit,
Then it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an'
Tommy 'ows yer soul?
But it's thin red line of 'eroes," when the drums
begin to roll,
The drums begin to roll, my boys, the drums
begin to roll,
Oh, it's "thin red line of 'eroes," when the drums
begin to roll.

We aren't no thin red 'eroes, nor we aren't no
blackguards, too,
But single men in barracks, most remarkable like
you,
An' if sometimes our conduct isn't all your fancy
paints,
Why, single men in barracks don't grow into
plaster saints.
When it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that; an'
Tommy fall be'ind,
Oh, it's "Please to walk in front sir," when there's
trouble in the wind.
There's trouble in the wind, my boys there's
trouble in the wind.
Oh, it's "Please to walk in front, sir," when there's
trouble in the wind.

You talk o' better food for us, an' school, an'
fires, an all,
We'll wait for extry rations if you'll treat us
rational:
Don't mess 'bout the cook-room slops, but prove
it to our face,
The Widow's Uniform is not the soldier man's
disgrace.
For it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an'
"chuck him out, the brute."
But it's "saviour of 'is country" when the gun
begins to shoot,
An' it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' any-
thing you please,
An' Tommy ain't a bloomin fool—you bet that
Tommy sees.

After reading this, it is easier to under-
stand the silent soldiers in London streets.
Kipling knows the heart of a real soldiers
when he says: "Don't mess about the cook-
room slops." There is not an odour of the
cook-room or the mess stew anywhere in the
"Barrack Room Ballads." He doubtless
voiced the sentiment of the British army in
"Fuzzy-Wuzzy." This poem extols the
fighting qualities of the men of the Soudan.
Tommy Atkins, again soliloquizing, says:—

We took our chanst among the Kyber 'ills,
The Boers knocked us silly at a mile;
The Burman gave us Irriwaddy chills,
And a Zulu impi dished us up in style;
But all we ever got from such as they
Was pop to what the Fuzzy made us swaller;
We 'eld our bloomin' own, the papers say,
But man for man the Fuzzy knocked us 'o ler.

'E rushed at the smoke when we let drive,
An' before we knew 'e's 'ackin' at our 'ead;
'E's all 'ot sand an' 'ringer when alive,
An' 'e's generally shamin' when 'e's dead.
'E's a daisy, 'e's a ducky, 'e's a lamb;
'E's an injia-rubber idiot on the spree,

'E's the only thing that doesn't give a damn
For a regiment o' British infantee.

So 'ere's to you, Fuzzy-Wuzzy, at your 'ome in
the Soudan;
You're a poor, benighted 'eathen, but a first-class
fightin' man;
An' 'ere's to you, Fuzz-Wuzzy, with your 'ayrick
'ead 'o air,
You big, black, boundin' beggar—for you broke a
British square.

In the "Barrack Room Ballads" you get
all there is in the British army; all the de-
spair and all the glory. And you get them
in about equal measure. The soldier who
has been long in the East sometimes sur-
renders himself to the surroundings, and after
his discharge and return to Great Britain,
finds life rather dull and uninteresting. One
of these is celebrated in "Mandalay," in
which, after the expression of his longing for
the "Burma girl" he knows is waiting for
him, he cries out:—

Ship we somewhere east of Suez, where the best
is like the worst;
Where there aren't no ten commandments, an' a
man can raise a thirst;
For the temple bells are callin' an' it's there that
I would be,
By the old Moulmein Pagoda, lookin' lazy at the
sea.

verse of which is horrible in its suggestions
of moral ruin. After reciting in verse the
progressive steps of their fall, the "Gentle-
men-Rankers" complain:—

We have done with hope and honour, we are lost
to love and truth;
We are dropping down the ladder, rung by rung,
And the measure of our torment is the measure of
our youth.
God help us, for we know the worst too young,
Our shame is clean repentance, for the crime that
brought the sentence;
Our pride it is to know no spur of pride,
And the curse of Reuben holds us, till an alien
turf enfolds us,
And we die, and none can tell them where we
died.
We're poor little lambs, who've lost our way;
Baa, Baa, Baa,
We're little black sheep who've gone astray,
Baa-aa-aa.
Gentlemen-rankers out on the spree,
Damned from here to eternity,
God have mercy on such as we,
Baa, Baa, Baa.

It is something of a relief to turn from such
moral wrecks in the ranks to pictures of war.
And here the British soldier comes out at his
best. Kipling has interpreted him fairly and
fully. In the famous poem of "Snarleyow"
he has put into the picture all that bulldog
tenacity which the world knows. Heretofore
we have heard only from the officialdom of
the army. Kipling tells us how the men in
the ranks feel about it, and nowhere does he
do this better than in "Snarleyow." A
British battery was going into action when
"Two's off lead," a horse called "Snarleyow"
was shot, and fell with "is 'ead between 'is
'eels" in front of the battery. The driver's
brother, both of them being in the battery,
called on him to pull up, but the driver
grunted back that not even for his brother
himself would he pull up at that crisis. A
moment later he was put to the test, for
'E 'adn't hardly spoke the word before a droppin'
shell
A little right the battery an' between the sections
fell;
An' when the smoke 'ad cleared away, before the
limber wheels,
There lay the driver's brother, with 'is 'ead be-
tween 'is 'eels.

Then sez the driver's brother, an' his words were
very plain:
"For Gawd's own sake get over me, an' put me
out o' pain."
They saw his wounds was mortal, an' they judged
that it was best.
So they took an' drove the limber straight across
his back and chest.
The driver 'e 'gave nothin' 'cept a little couchin'
grunt.
But 'e swung 'is 'orses 'andsome, when it come to
"action front."
An' if one wheel was juicy, you may lay your
Monday head,
'Twas jucier for the niggers when the case began
to spread.

The moral of this story, is is plainly to be seen:
You 'aven't got no families when servin' of the
Queen.
You 'avon't got no brothers, sisters, wives or sons;
Black Death an' has quickness, the depth and the
thickness,
If you want to win your battles, take 'an work
your bloomin' guns.

The "bloomin' guns" are the main reliance
of the British against foes who must fight at
close quarters if they fight at all. The Boers
who, the English admit, "knocked us silly at
a mile," are another proposition, but still it
has always been the contention that the Boer
victory at Majuba Hill could never have been
won if the British artillery had been brought
up. This time Great Britain is sending bat-
tery after battery to the front. We can see,
then, that Kipling is expressing the opinions
of the headquarters as well as of the camp in
"Screw Guns," a poem with a peculiar inter-
est at this time. The old gun captain glori-
fies himself and his guns to the extent of half
a dozen verses, in one of which he tells the
whole story by saying:

They sends us along where the roads are, but
mostly we go where they ain't;
We'd climb up the side of a signboard an' trust to
the stick of the paint;
We've chivied the 'Naga and Looshai, we've give
the Afreedeman fits,
For we fancies ourselves at two thousand, we guns
that are built in two bits.

To which the chorus, sung by the whole
gun crew, is about as boastful and arrogant
an assertion of the power of batteries against
foes not well provided with them as could
well be conceived, but Kipling is doubtless
expressing all of British military opinion
when he puts into the battery's mouth:
For you all love the screw-guns, the screw-guns
they all love you;
So when you call round with a few guns, of course
you will know what to do—hoo! hoo!
Just send in your chief an' surrender—it's worse if
you fights or you runs;
You may hide in your caves—they'll be only your
graves—for you can't get away from the guns.
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or-



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is that of the old, disabled, and discharged
soldier, whose miseries are told in "A Shillin'
a Day":

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From Burr to Bareilly, from Leeds to Lahore,
Hong Kong and Peshwur,
Lucknow and Etawah,
An' fifty-five more all endin' in "pure."
Of sorrow and sickness I've known on my way
But I'm old and I'm nervous,
I'm cast from the service,

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