

Slaney's Night of Glory.

(Chambers' Journal.)

Corporal Slaney sat under a furze-bush rubbing a bruised ankle. In the valley below lay the camp he was leaving; an isolated light, twinkling from the window of a white-washed building which half-an-hour ago, had been his abiding place, marked the guard-house.

Corporal Slaney had been in the army five years; and the second-lieutenant, who had called him a unmannerly hog, had held his commission rather less than four months. The fault had been the lieutenant's, and Corporal Slaney had a temper. There had been a certain amount of plain and personal language. The face of the lieutenant changed from pink to purple, and he had reported the matter to the colonel. Slaney, for the first time in his career, found himself a prisoner, sentence postponed for consideration.

That it would involve the loss of his stripes he had no doubt whatever. His wrath smoldered fiercely. The guard was being changed, and the Fates ordained that only M'Vane standing sentry in the doorway, should be in sight. M'Vane and Slaney had terminated a long friendship with a quarrel, and M'Vane had commented freely on his prisoner's prospects. Corporal Slaney, deciding that he might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb, had knocked M'Vane's helmet over his head with one terrific punch, and, realizing that the British army was no longer the place for a man of proper spirit, stepped over his plunging body into darkness and freedom.

He reached the crest of the hill, found that the ground on the farther side rose and fell in a succession of smaller hillocks, and pushed on. He had gone a mile in the profoundest silence and solitude, when he noticed two lights on his left. They shone like the eyes of some big animal. Since the General commanding does not confide his more intimate plans to his corporals, Slaney had no idea as to whether the lights belonged to advanced outposts of the Allies or to the Germans. With excessive caution he edged near enough to see that the lights came from the high windows of a dilapidated shed. He could not look in, but he could hear the mutter of voices. Acute and consuming curiosity possessed him. He had crawled round three sides of the shed in search of a door, and had begun the fourth, when something hit him an excruciating blow on the temple, and he dropped backwards into black unconsciousness.

From this he emerged slowly, to discover that he had been carried off or dragged into the shed and was now lying propped with his back against the wall.

At a table in the centre three men were seated, talking in undertones. A lamp with a tin reservoir stood in the centre, revealing the remains of a hasty meal, together with various scattered plans and documents. The rest of the place was in complete darkness. None of the men took the slightest notice of Slaney. His head still swam. Investigating gingerly, he found a large and contused wound over his right eye.

A fattish man, vaguely suggestive of Mr. Pickwick, got up from the table and came forward. "Better?" he inquired.

"Still groggy," said Corporal Slaney. "Feel down a bloomin' well, didn't I?" The fattish man laughed. "On the contrary, you came into contact with a brass knuckle-duster welded by myself. It is a pity that so useful a weapon should have gone out of fashion. We are an intimate party which does not desire uninvited guests."

Corporal Slaney's gaze wandered dully to the others. One was a tall officer, with an upstanding gray moustache and fierce eyes; the other a young man of about thirty, with a thin, pale face, a retreating chin, and an air of intense impatience. All three were in uniform. Corporal Slaney realized that he had fallen into the hands of the enemy. It seemed a tame and stupid ending to the night of enterprise and glory which had begun so promisingly. The Pickwick-like person spoke again. His accent left nothing to be desired.

"You come from the English lines?" "That's so, sir." "And being a spy?" "Spy?" Slaney's indignation was too immense to be anything but genuine. "Not me! Silly blighter of an officer

got me shoved into the guardroom, and I looked it same as you'd 'a done."

"Doubtless. You have been for some time in the army?"

"Five years."

"Then you may be useful to us. There are certain particulars which—"

"Meanin' that I'm to turn traitor."

"My good imbecile!"—it was the elderly officer who spoke, and his voice had a flat metallic note which jarred on Slaney's nerves and made him shiver—

"believe me, you will either tell us the things we wish to know this evening, or you will be given no opportunities of telling anything at all."

The young man with the retreating chin intervened. He addressed the others in German, waving his hands imperiously. He made Slaney feel that he was accustomed to being obeyed implicitly, and in a hurry.

"So!" apologized the fattish man when the young man ceased. He turned to the prisoner again. "You are still dazed—ill. I forgot." He took a flask from his pocket, uncorked it, and pushed it into Slaney's hands.

Slaney swallowed a generous mouthful. It was heady stuff, that stung his throat and brought tears into his eyes; but it made him his own man again. "Thanks!" he said, returning the flask.

Slaney wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Talkin' dry work, gents."

"You forget your position," began Von Blum angrily.

The pale-faced young man leapt to his feet. "Give the fool enough wine to flood Paris; it will loosen his tongue," he said impatiently.

From a wicker basket at his feet the fattish man took two square stone-ware bottles.

"Let us," commanded the pale young man, "drink to the eternal confusion of the enemies of Europe!" He filled four glasses.

"Ear! ear!" said Corporal Slaney. But his hand shook, and a good deal of the wine found its way to the floor.

"To the day when her fleets may be a legend, her army the laughing stock of the world!"

"Ear! ear!" said Corporal Slaney.

Again they all drank heartily, all but Slaney. "To the day when the half-fed, white-faced rabble she breeds may back to sweep to their hovels!"

"Ah," said Slaney, "now you're talkin'! I'm rabble, right enough; a bloomin' conscript." The memory of his wrongs burned in his eyes.

"Let him speak," said the young man. "Let him tell us from the beginning—the very beginning."

The grey-moustached colonel growled object. He was silenced with a gesture. Corporal Slaney found himself with a flushed, attentive audience.

"It's this way," he said confidently.

"In the blighted 'ole of a country I come from things ain't nothing like what they're made out to be. Kitchen says, 'I want men—three million of 'em; but what 'e don't explain is that if the men don't come of their own free will 'e 'll make 'em. Consequently'—Slaney sawed the air to give his words emphasis—"when the response ain't up to expectations there's armed parties go out of a dark night, and when mornin' comes the barracks is full, and 'ole streets of 'ouses is empty."

The pale young man glanced at the other with bright eager eyes.

"I am not surprised. Go on."

"Bout a mile off Margit," pursued Slaney, warming to his work, "you'll see a row o' penny steamers, same as used to potter up an' down the Thames before you fellows sowed it with mines an' hung up navigation. In them steamers is the recruits, guarded by a Japanese contingent. They daren't trust white men for fear they'd—they'd—"

"Fraternalise?" suggested the fattish man.

Fraternalise is the word, sir, with the prisoners as 'ave been carried off from their 'omes to learn their drill. When they know enough to avoid killing one another they're transhipped in what merchantmen we can rake together."

"I understand," said the young man. "It is plain—quite plain—why we have been able to advance so far with so little opposition. And now?"

"Concerning the range of those field-guns on your right?" said the colonel.

But Corporal Slaney did not appear



to hear him. His eyes had grown dreamy and reminiscent.

"There was me, makin' two quid a week, drivin' a motor-bus!"

"But—but you said you had been in the army five years."

"Beg pardon, sir. Territorial called up for service." Slaney thanked Heaven that the colonel did not look at his shoulder strap, and went on, quickly. "Now we're 'arf-starved, 'arf-clothed an' 'knocked about by drunken swines that ain't fit to take a bullock-wagon into action. Lor, the things I could tell you!"

He nodded his head with the solemnity of one anxious to prove that he was entirely sober.

"Give him more wine," said the pale young man. His voice was high and very eager. "This—this scum interests me. I suspected a good deal, but not so much as this."

Slaney's glass refilled, rose to his feet. The movement showed him that both the elder men carried revolvers. The pale-faced young man had only a sword.

"Ere's luck!" said Slaney; "best o' luck! Grand German army; may it get all the victories it deserves!"

Again they all drank solemnly, all except Corporal Slaney.

"Now for the guns!" said Von Blum. "Explanations concernin' artillery," Slaney said, sententiously "is like matrimony, not to be entered upon lightly. If you've penicil an' paper!"

They gave him both. Three heads bent forward. Slaney put his hand on the nearest stoneware bottle.

"This," he said, "stands for the main German army; this—he took up the second bottle—for a mobile strikin' force."

Of the three the pale young man was the only one who had anything like a clear impression of what followed. Even that was momentary. He saw the bottle rise and fall with two lightning-blows, one fairly upon the skull of the fattish man, the other upon Von Blum. The fattish man dropped with a faint grunt, and received a second blow on the temple which sent him headlong and smashed the bottle off short at the neck. Then the pale young man perceived the figure of this mad English corporal leaping at him panther fashion and prudently ducked. The table and everything upon it shot over sideways, the lamp providentially went out, and Slaney landed awkwardly on his hands and knees. The only consolation—from the Slaney point of view—was that the pale-faced young man was underneath.

"If you shout," said Slaney—for his prisoner was making strange, atrangulated noises—"I'll bash your silly face inside out, so that the tip of your nose'll tickle your tongue. Get up!"

The pale young man, feeling his way uncertainly, in the darkness, got up.

"Put up your hands."

He put them up, and Slaney, gripping him by the collar, steered him outside to where an uncertain moon was climbing above the clouds. There he removed his prisoner's sword and belt—his own belt was in the guardroom—jerked down the rigid arms, and with great efficiency and thoroughness bound the wrists of the pale young man behind him.

"Wait 'ere," he commanded. He plunged into the building and emerged with a handful of papers.

"All quiet 'ere, peaceable," he reported, secured the door with a conventional iron staple. The papers he stowed in an inner pocket. The prisoner watched him dazedly.

"Now then," said Corporal Slaney, "by the right; quick march."

The words galvanized the other into speech.

"I—I will not go."

"There," said Slaney, "we bloomin' well differ. I've met your 'igh-spirited kind before. Gen'rally they ends with blubberin'."

"Let me free, I tell you!"

Slaney took a pace forward. The pale young man gave a shout and tried to run. Five seconds later he was lying breathless, and his head was being systematically and steadily bumbled up and down on the unshaken earth.

"Jay when," said Corporal Slaney

invitingly. His arms were beginning to ache.

"I—I die!" "Not yet! Get up, an' be 'ave decent an' we'll push on. It's a long way to Tipperary."

He helped the prisoner to his feet. For some moments they walked in silence, Corporal Slaney a trifle in the rear. Suddenly the pale-faced young man came to a halt, again.

"What will you take to let me go?" "Alasce, and any old colonies you've got left over," said the flippant Slaney. "Tehh, you are chiltish! I will give ten thousand marks."

"An that's more than I ever got at school!"

"Twenty thousand, and a safe conduct to your own lines."

"That there fizzy stuff," said Slaney severely, "as been and got into your alleged brain. You'll be offerin' a million next, with a seat in the 'ouse of Lords thrown in. An then I shall lose my temper, an' there'll be an accident."

"But—but do you know who I am?" "Not me. No-don't want to. We're all inco' ere. Chase yourself—quick!"

So they journeyed by stages that seemed endless to where the first of the khaki-clad sentries faced the coming dawn—a lonely little figure on the crest. At the sharp challenge the torpor which had fallen on the prisoner vanished, and he plunged violently and broke away. He and Slaney came to the ground together. The sentry challenged a second time, and then fired. Luckily for the pair of them the shot went wide.

"Old 'ard!" shouted the exasperated Slaney. "It's only me an' a young fool I've been dinin' wiv. Come up, unless you want me to sit on your 'ead!"

Five minutes later they stood, desperately dusty and dishevelled, in the presence of the sergeant. He listened to Slaney's story with obvious disbelief and marched the pair of them to the captain, who could speak German with an Oxford accent. The captain gave most of his attention to the pale-faced young man, and fetched the colonel. This, to Slaney, was manifestly absurd. A prisoner was merely a prisoner all the world over. Immediately afterwards the pale faced young man's wrists were unfastened, and he was escorted to a separate tent.

He did not even glance at Slaney as he passed.

"As for you," said the colonel blinking at the backslider, "I gather that you broke out of the guardroom to commit this—this escapade. Taking the full facts of the case into consideration it had not been my intention to punish you further. Even now, if you were to apologise—"

Slaney fidgeted with his feet and avoided the colonel's eye. He was back among his own people again; already his night of glory had begun to seem a dream, an incredible dream. Indubitably he had behaved like a fool. The second lieutenant was newly joined and raw. It was the duty of old soldiers to teach the young ones manners.

"I am sorry, sir."

"Very good. You will be glad to hear that Private M'Vane is none the worse for his—er—fall. I shall consider the matter closed. Go to your tent and get what sleep you can."

Slaney fumbled with his tunic. "The papers, sir."

"Ah, thanks. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

Thereafter for three hours Corporal Slaney slept the sleep of one who has squared accounts with his fellow-men and whose conscience is clear. He saw nothing more of his prisoner.

For two days the machinery of camp life ran as usual. Then, late in the afternoon, his sergeant appeared.

"You're wanted, Slaney."

Slaney reluctantly abandoned his tea and stood up.

"Why by?"

"Gen'ral commandin'. Brush them crumbs off your coat and look slippy."

Corporal Slaney looked slippy. He was ushered, somewhat breathless, into the presence of a short sturdily built, grey-haired man, who regarded him with twinkling eyes.

"So this is the redoubtable corporal? Dear me, but some people are born lucky! Ever occurred to you to qualify for a seat at the sergeants' mess, Slaney?"

"N—no, sir—yessir!" The turf seemed rising and falling under Slaney's feet. "Because I've asked Colonel Hipwhite to see to the matter. I think you deserve a place there. And that's all."

Slaney saluted and reeled out into the sunlight again, drunk with unanalysable emotions.

M'Vane overtook him. "Ere," said M'Vane, who bore no malice, "this is



Coffee—

that will make your household happy; your guests grateful; yourself enthusiastic.

In ½, 1 and 2 pound cans. Whole—ground—pulverized—also Fine Ground for Percolators.

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something that might interest you."

It was an advance copy of the official news sheet which circulated among the troops. M'Vane, who had been a compositor, had a hand in its production.

"His Imperial and Royal Highness Prince Albert Fritz of Prussia," read Slaney, "was, on the 5th inst, making a midnight reconnaissance, in company with two members of his staff, when he encountered a British patrol of the Allies. He is at present a prisoner in the British lines."

The paper slipped from the nerveless fingers. "Golly!" said Corporal Slaney.

Turkey Anxious Over Situation

Geneva, via Paris, July 30.—Telegraphing from Saloniki the correspondent of the Tribune says:

"An important conference was held at Constantinople, July 27. Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, Field Marshal von Dergoltz, the German commander of the Turkish forces, the Turkish Grand Vizier and the Ottoman cabinet being represented. Field Marshal von Der Goltz and the Grand Vizier were present in person.

"The question of the Dardanelles situation was discussed, and also Italy's presence there, which the Turks now consider inevitable. A Greek and Turkish conflict was considered as a possible eventuality. The conference was some what stormy, as the Grand Vizier and the Turkish cabinet openly expressed great anxiety over the present situation."

Athens, July 23.—Enver Pasha issued an extraordinary message to the troops on the Gallipoli Peninsula before they marched to the attack, thus:

"Soldiers, you will fight with all your strength. At least you will resist as long as possible, for I can promise you that within a month's time I shall be able to send you to your homes. The life of Serbia cannot now last longer than a month. Within that time the German army will crush her and will come to your aid."

I learn that great pressure has been put on the Germans by the Young Turks to fulfil their promise to send a German army through the Balkans to the assistance of the Turkish forces. The Young Turks regard the achievement of that plan as the only hope for the old Turkish Empire in Europe.

A prominent military expert, who has just completed a tour of the Balkans, and who has been in Austria expresses to me the belief that such an effort will be the next great move on the part of the Austrians and Germans. Should this cross move be made it will have immediate and important results in this corner of Europe. It would be unwise to give details which are within my knowledge, but I think I may be permitted to say that the counter-balancing events are moving rapidly, and that the enemy's plans may be quite possibly nipped in the bud by a surprising move, of which the public should hear at an early date.