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THE SCOTCH PIPES.

Morning upon morning for weeks, the very earliest sound upon the veldt was the opening groan of a piper beginning, the reveille of one of the Highland battalions.

Do you know that first note of the pipe when the is beginning to rush out of the bag and through the 'chanter' even before the bag is filled, and when the piper is adjusting the bag to his body and and his fingers to the stops?

It is a weird, long-drawn, shapeless note, a nasal groan, a chord of agony wrung from the nose of barbaric harmony. It always precedes a tune as the piper tries himself and his instrument before launching into his flight of melody. Every morning it was that protesting note of the pipes next door which roused the Wessex Fusiliers and me. It was like the snoring of the Scotch elder during church service, of which the whole congregation complained because it wakened us all.

And yet it was different, for, once the pipes began, they never had a rest the live-long day and part of the night. As far into the night as nine o'clock and later, long after we of the Fusiliers were put to bed by General Orders, the pipes still wheezed and groaned, or—as a Scotchman would say—frollicked with or wept out their gay or their plaintive airs.

The pipes put me through several moods and changes of mind in those long weeks of waiting.

At first, the abundance of their queer music—of which I had but little up till then—came as a novelty. Next, they roused my curiosity as to how a piper could have either the will or the strength to play for sixteen hours on end without a longer pause than the minute it required to change from one tune to another. And, next, the unceasing noise annoyed until it maddened me, and I cursed the pipes as an instrument of torture. The piper walked to and fro, the length of the regiment's lines, and at a distance the air was full of a 'zizz-zizz-zizz,' like the note of a demon bee, while the nearer it came the more its nasal chords mastered the neighborhood and quivered in my very bones.

At last (I cannot tell why or how it came about) I grew to like the sound, and to miss the melody when the piper was afar and only the buzzing came to my ears. When he was near he played upon my body and my senses. My pen raced with the purple music of the reels, my blood warmed under the defiant, challenging, scarlet chords of the battle songs; a pleasant sadness possessed me when the tunes were plaintive and grey.

Without a drop of Scotch blood in me, I yet began to love the Scotch, and to take interest in all that I could see and learn of them. With nothing to connect me with their land—except that my father attended a course of medical lectures in Edinburgh—I yet could feel the pipes move me and my heart go out toward their players.

In time I used to leave my camp and cross the narrow lane to the canvas village of the Highlanders in order to watch a piper at his work.

And lo! I discovered that instead of one man being the sole piper a score of men shared his work. These stood in line silently listening and watching as the musician of the moment strode jauntily up and down, giving to his hips that swaggering, boastful, swaying movement which your true master of the bag and reeds never fails to practice. They looked at him for hours, now hungrily, now cloatingly, as he stepped to and fro, just touching his toes to the veldt like a man practicing to walk on eggs—like one whose body is lifted like his soul by the music he creates. For hours, I say, but in every hour at least two different men were the players. Those who watched were waiting their turns, and ever and anon the moment halted, the flying ribbons fell behind the 'drones,' and the pipe was passed to one of the men in the patient line.

Then off strode the fresh player with the streamers floating from his pipes, with his hips swaying, his head held high, and his toes but touching the

earth. Once I heard a man say, 'Gie me the pipes, Sandy; I can tell ye what naebody has said'—at least, those were the strange words I thought that I distinguished.

What I was certain of was that I had discovered why it seemed that the regimental piper played steadily for sixteen hours a day.

I learned that there are other things about the Scotch which mark them apart from the English. For instance, their regimental discipline has not yet transformed the Scotch 'T. Atkins' to an automaton. He thinks undisciplined thoughts and then speaks them aloud, for one thing. Strong traces of a feudal relationship between the officers and men lead them to speak to each other with some freedom—and even to converse. And on St. Andrew's Day, I am told, the men go the round of their officers' tents, visiting, to remind them of the hallowed day, and to be asked to drink in honor of it.

I even heard of the men of one Highland regiment calling upon an officer whom they detested, rather than mar the custom or lose a drink. 'Good evening to you, Captain MacTavish,' said the spokesman of one convivial band; 'we maun tell ye that none o' us like ye—in fact, ye're detested by nearly every one, for ye're unco' hard—and ye're a dour man—but we'll take a wee bit drink wi' you—on account o' the day.'

But all this is digression. We were dealing with the pipes.

I fell to studying the Scotsmen and their music after a battle in which the Highlanders had met with a great calamity. For weeks they were low-spirited and unsocial, even with one another. Such is their temperament—a brave and gay one, but with a substratum of melancholy which will, at times, come uppermost.

'I should not like to crack a joke at our mess,' said to me at this time an officer of theirs who was not wholly Scotch. 'It would sound profane, and my fellow-officers would surely think me mad or idiotic. I suggested champagne the other night at dinner, and I'll not do that again until we get back our spirits. The men are in the same mood as the officers. It is the pipes that make them so. The pipes are keeping them a great deal resentful, and still more melancholy.'

'The pipes?' I echoed, enquiringly. 'What have the pipes to do with their feelings?'

WHAT THE PIPES ARE SAYING.

'Eh, man? Don't you know that the pipes can talk as good Scotch as any man who hears them? Surely 'tis so—and 'tis what the pipes are saying, first in one player's hands and then in another's, that keeps the men from forgetting their part in the last battle.

Once as the days passed, when I saw this officer again at leisure, I went to him for an explanation of his surprising disclosure. I had been trying to learn the language of the pipes in the meantime, but I acquired no more understanding than a dog has of English when he distinguishes between a kindly human tone and a cross one. I could tell when a tune

was martial and when another was mournful. When a gay one rang out—if any had—I would not have mistaken it for a dirge. To some this may seem a very little learning, but I had begun by thinking all the tunes alike.

'Yesterday,' said my friend the officer, 'we'd a little match between men who had some skill at embroidering the airs of the old ballads with trills of those grace-notes that they call "warblers," but this contest was broken up by a rugged son of the hills who, after asking for the pipes, flung from them a few strong, clear notes which gained the attention of all who are born to a knowledge of the music that speaks. I am not one of those, but I called my soldier-servant up and asked him what was being played. "Well, sir," said he, "that's MacCallum—a great musicean he is. And hark, sir; he has the right of it and boldly he is telling every one his thoughts. He says that every man kens that the yon' general who's dead was as cunning and skilfu, in war as ony man above him, and 'tis late in the day—now that he's laid away and dumb—to put blame on him as if he were an ignoramus and a butcher, like some others. And now, Oh! brawly ye're tellin' it, MacCallum—he says there may be scheming and plotting in high places, but no skulduggery o' any sort, however it is gilded, will ever deceive ane single true chiel o' the Highlands."

'And then,' said my gossip, 'the pipes passed to the hand of another man, and my servant—seeing me about to move away—touched my arm and bade me wait, as this new player was another adept with the pipes. "He's grand at it," said he; "well done, Stewart. He's saying, sir, that the reason none will heed those who blame our grand leader that's gone is that there's men of rank among us—and of proud blood—that'll stand up to any man at home and swear that when our fallen chief came back with his orders for the battle he complained of them sorely, but he said, "No better could he get," and when he lay down in his blanket his head was full of trouble that was coming on him—he not being able to learn what he needed to know against the morrow."

There was more of this recital of what the pipes had spoken to the regiment, but it would only be irritating a sore to repeat it. The pipes spoke even more plainly as the bold out-pourings of one incited bolder from another. At last there were suggestions, by pipes grown mutinous, of sentiments which, happily, have seldom been spread within the British army. But what I have told suffices to illustrate my sole point, which is that the gift of eloquent speech in chords and trills is born with the master-pipers.

THE NEW CHIEF'S WELCOME.

I never saw my officer-friend again for more than a nod or a word in passing. But on one day the pipes next door rang jubilantly, and man after man applied himself to them with ginger in his touch. Each blew triumphant thrilling, heart-stirring chords, and every piper swaggered at his work with such a will as to send his aproned, kilted and tro with what seemed a double swing to each beat of the 'time.'

I said to myself, 'They have learn-

ed that Hector Macdonald is coming to be their new brigadier, and the pipes are assuring them that every Highlander may be himself again, certain of victory and new glory under a leader second only to the one they have lost.' I still believe my conjecture was right.

And I know from living next door, as it were, that the cloud of gloom that had hung over the brigade was dispelled almost with the suddenness of its horrible appearance.

After that 'the kilties' began to make in this war a continuation of their glorious record in so many lesser wars in the time that was.



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