

**WILLIAM
WYMARK
JACOBS**

BEDRIDDEN AND THE
WINTER OFFENSIVE

William Wymark Jacobs
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Winter Offensive

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Bedridden and the Winter Offensive / Deep Waters, Part 8.:*

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BEDRIDDEN and THE WINTER OFFENSIVE

BEDRIDDEN

July 12, 1915.—Disquieting rumours to the effect that epidemic of Billetitis hitherto confined to the north of King's Road shows signs of spreading.

July 14.—Report that two Inns of Court men have been seen peeping over my gate.

July 16.—Informed that soldier of agreeable appearance and charming manners requests interview with me. Took a dose of Phospherine and went. Found composite photograph of French, Joffre, and Hindenburg waiting for me in the hall. Smiled (he did, I mean) and gave me the mutilated form of salute reserved

for civilians. Introduced himself as Quartermaster- Sergeant Beddem, and stated that the Inns of Court O.T.C. was going under canvas next week. After which he gulped. Meantime could I take in a billet. Questioned as to what day the corps was going into camp said that he believed it was Monday, but was not quite sure—might possibly be Tuesday. Swallowed again and coughed a little. Accepted billet and felt completely re-warded by smile. Q.M.S. bade me good-bye, and then with the air of a man suddenly remembering something, asked me whether I could take two. Excused myself and interviewed my C.O. behind the dining-room door. Came back and accepted. Q.M.S. so overjoyed (apparently) that he fell over the scraper. Seemed to jog his memory. He paused, and gazing in absent fashion at the topmost rose on the climber in the porch, asked whether I could take three! Added hopefully that the third was only a boy. Excused myself. Heated debate with C.O. Subject: sheets. Returned with me to explain to the Q.M.S. He smiled. C.O. accepted at once, and, returning smile, expressed regret at size and position of bedrooms available. Q.M.S. went off swinging cane jauntily.

July 17.—Billets arrived. Spoke to them about next Monday and canvas. They seemed surprised. Strange how the military authorities decline to take men into their confidence merely because they are privates. Let them upstairs. They went (for first and last time) on tiptoe.

July 18.—Saw Q.M.S. Beddem in the town. Took shelter in

the King's Arms.

Jug. 3.—Went to Cornwall.

Aug. 31.—Returned. Billets received me very hospitably.

Sept. 4.—Private Budd, electrical engineer, dissatisfied with appearance of bell-push in dining-room, altered it.

Sept. 5.—Bells out of order.

Sept. 6.—Private Merited, also an electrical engineer, helped Private Budd to repair bells.

Sept. 7.—Private Budd helped Private Merited to repair bells.

Sept. 8.—Privates Budd and Merited helped each other to repair bells.

Sept. 9.—Sent to local tradesman to put my bells in order.

Sept. 15.—Told that Q.M.S. Beddem wished to see me. Saw C.O. first. She thought he had possibly come to take some of the billets away. Q.M.S. met my approach with a smile that reminded me vaguely of picture- postcards I had seen. Awfully sorry to trouble me, but Private Montease, just back from three weeks' holiday with bronchitis, was sleeping in the wood-shed on three planks and a tin-tack. Beamed at me and waited. Went and bought another bed-stead.

Sept. 16.—Private Montease and a cough entered into residence.

Sept. 17, 11.45 p.m.—Maid came to bedroom-door with some cough lozenges which she asked me to take to the new billet. Took them. Private Montease thanked me, but said he didn't mind coughing. Said it was an heirloom; Montease cough,

known in highest circles all over Scotland since time of Young Pretender.

Sept. 20.—Private Montease installed in easy-chair in dining-room with touch of bronchitis, looking up trains to Bournemouth.

Sept. 21.—Private Montease in bed all day. Cook anxious "to do her bit" rubbed his chest with home-made embrocation. Believe it is same stuff she rubs chests in hall with. Smells the same anyway.

Sept. 24.—Private Montease, complaining of slight rawness of chest, but otherwise well, returned to duty.

Oct. 5.—Cough worse again. Private Montease thinks that with care it may turn to bronchitis. Borrowed an A.B.C.

Oct. 6.—Private Montease relates uncanny experience. Woke up with feeling of suffocation to find an enormous black-currant and glycerine jujube wedged in his gullet. Never owned such a thing in his life. Seems to be unaware that he always sleeps with his mouth open.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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