

**IN THE FIRING LINE,
STORIES OF THE WAR
BY LAND AND SEA**

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In the firing line, stories of the war by land and sea by A. St. John Adcock

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A. ST. JOHN ADCOCK

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The Daily Telegraph

WAR BOOKS

IN THE FIRING LINE



Drawn by Philip Dodd,

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CHARGE OF BRITISH HUSSARS AGAINST GERMAN CUIRASSIERS IN A VILLAGE
OF NORTHERN FRANCE.

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A. ST. JOHN ADCOCK

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IN THE FIRING LINE

I

THE BAPTISM OF FIRE

*"E'en now their vanguard gathers,
E'en now we face the fray."*

KIPLING.—*Hymn before Action.*

THE War Correspondent has become old-fashioned before he has had time to grow old ; he was made by telegraphy, and wireless has unmade him. The swift transmission of news from the front might gratify us who are waiting anxiously at home, but such news can be caught in the air now, or secretly and as swiftly retransmitted so as to gratify our enemies even more by keeping them well-informed of our strength and intentions and putting them on their guard. Therefore our armies have rightly gone forth on this the greatest war the world has ever seen as they went to the Crusades, with no Press reporter in their

ranks, and when the historian sits down, some peaceful day in the future, to write his prose epic of the Titanic struggle that is now raging over Europe he will have no records of the actual fighting except such as he can gather from the necessarily terse official reports, the published stories of refugees and wounded soldiers that have been picked up by enterprising newspaper men hovering alertly in the rear of the forces, and from the private letters written to their friends by the fighting men themselves.

These letters compensate largely for the ampler, more expert accounts the war correspondent is not allowed to send us. They may tell little of strategic movements or of the full tide and progress of an engagement till you read them in conjunction with the official reports, but in their vivid, spontaneous revelations of what the man in battle has seen and felt, in the intensity of their human interest they have a unique value beyond anything to be found in more professional military or journalistic documents. They so unconsciously express the personality and spirit of their writers; the very homeliness of their language adds wonderfully and unintentionally to their effectiveness; there is rarely any note of boastfulness even in a moment of triumph; they record the most splendid heroisms casually,

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sometimes even flippantly, as if it were merely natural to see such things happening about them, or to be doing such things themselves. If they tell of hardships it is to laugh at them; again and again there are little bursts of affection and admiration for their officers and comrades—they are the most potent of recruiting literature, these letters, for a mere reading of them thrills the stay-at-home with pride that these good fellows are his countrymen and with a sort of angry shame that his age or his safe civilian responsibilities keep him from being out there taking his stand beside them.

The courage, the cheerfulness, the dauntless spirit of them is the more striking when you remember that the vast majority of our soldiers have never been in battle until now. Russia has many veterans from her war with Japan; France has a few who fought the Prussian enemy in 1870; we have some from the Boer war; but fully three parts of our troops, like all the heroic Belgians, have had their baptism of fire in the present gigantic conflict. And it is curiously interesting to read in several of the letters the frank confession of their writers' feelings when they came face to face for the first time with the menace of death in action. One such note, published in various papers, was from Alfred