

TROOPER
8008 I Y

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Trooper 8008 I Y by Sidney Peel

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SIDNEY PEEL

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BY THE

HON. SIDNEY PEEL

BARRISTER-AT-LAW

LATE FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, OXFORD

FIFTH IMPRESSION

LONDON

EDWARD ARNOLD

37 BEDFORD STREET, STRAND, W.C.

1901

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Dedication

MY DEAR —

I have, without your permission, taken the liberty of dedicating this volume to you. In my brief military service I always found it better to do what I wanted without asking leave. It is very much easier to forbid a thing beforehand than to punish it afterwards, and if I had asked and you had refused, as I think you would have, I would have done it all the same, and then what becomes of discipline?

My Company was the 40th (Oxfordshire) Company, forming part of the 10th Battalion of Imperial Yeomanry. I remain inwardly convinced that it was the best Company of all the Yeomanry, though, unfortunately, I did not witness its best performance when it formed the van of the party that carried the hills at Hartebeestfontein against much superior forces in a strong position. But however that may be, and I would not think of openly insisting on the point, I suppose our experience is typical of the kind of work that the Yeomanry as a whole performed. Possibly other people writing

of the same events might give a more interesting and exciting account of them, but, after all, with very few exceptions, war is very interesting and exciting when you are going to it, and perhaps when you are talking about it afterwards, but not when you are there

I might have been less diffident about asking your leave if I had been able to boast of ever having distinguished myself in the least. But I began and ended as nothing more than an ordinary trooper, and never attained to so much as the rank of lance-corporal. As for distinction, you must not judge hastily from the lists in the papers of "mentioned in despatches" and other honours, that the undistinguished were few in numbers; they were at least a sufficient multitude to make it no disgrace to be among them. As for rank, you must have privates; even in the Haytian army, in which they used to have two generals besides other officers to each man, there were at any rate some privates, and I know from my own experience that, when an order was given, no matter where it started, and through however many grades of officers, commissioned and non-commissioned, it was passed down, it was always the private who had to turn out and do something in the end. Collectively, indeed, privates are of the utmost importance.

I suppose that when we enlisted there were few

of us but had at the back of our heads some kind of visionary dream of an incredible transformation out of our ordinary selves, by virtue of which we should do heroic deeds upon the field of battle. If anything could effect such a transformation it would be fighting in line with such good comrades as I had. But, although such aspirations never came within a long distance of being realised for most of us, I hope you may be interested by this account of what we saw and did on the windy plains of South Africa.

To have been able to go at all was the most extraordinary piece of good luck that ever was. I would not have missed the months during which I wore her Majesty's uniform for anything in the world. When I think how many people have been drilling all their lives and could not go, while I, a mere civilian, with many others, went on active service without any of the bother of military education and peace training, I realise that we are much to be envied.—I am, yours,

S. P.

