he fact remains that up to the end of 1917 I had never been to Ireland. Outwardly it was a dismal journey, for I left Liverpool late at night and the weather was wintry. Crewe station at midnight was positively Plutonian. Waiting for the Holyhead express to come in, I listened to echoing clangour and hissing steam; people paced the platform with fixedly dejected faces, while glaring lights and gloom and vapour intermingled above them. Crewe station and everyone inside it seemed to be eternally condemned to the task of winning the War by moving men, munitions, and material to the places appointed for them in the outer darkness of Armageddon. This much I observed as I stood with hunched-up shoulders, feeling somberly impressed by the strangeness of the scene. Then I boarded the Holyhead train, remembering how I used to ride along the Watling Street with the Packlestone Hounds and see “Holyhead, 200 miles” on a signpost; this memory led me to wonder whether I should get a day’s hunting in Ireland. After that an “inevitable sequence of events” carried me across to Dublin, and thence to Limerick. There was snow on the ground and the Emerald Isle was cold and crunchy underfoot.

By the time I had been at Limerick a week I knew that I had found something closely resembling peace of mind. My body stood about for hours on parade, watching young soldiers drill and do physical training, and this made it easy for me to spend my spare time refusing to think. I felt extraordinarily healthy, and I was seldom alone. There had been no difficulty in reverting to what the people who thought they knew me would have called my “natural self”. I merely allowed myself to become what they expected me to be. As someone good-naturedly remarked, I had “given up lecturing on the prevention of war-weariness” — (which meant, I suppose, that the only way to prevent it was to stop the War). The “New Barracks”, which had been new for a good many years, were much more cheerful than the huts at Clitherland, and somehow made me feel less like a temporary soldier. Looking at the lit windows of the barracks square on my first evening in Ireland, I felt profoundly thankful that I wasn’t at Slateford. And the curfew-tolling bells of Limerick Cathedral sounded much better than the factory hooters around Clitherland Camp. I had been talking to four officers who had been with me in the First Battalion in 1916, and we had been reviving memories of what had become the more or less good old days at Mametz. Two of them had been wounded in the Ypres battle three months before, and their experiences had apparently made Mametz Wood seem comparatively pleasant, and the “unimaginable touch of time” had completed the mellowing process.

Toward the end of my second week the frost and snow changed to soft and rainy weather. One afternoon I walked out to Adare and saw for the first time the Ireland which I had imagined before I went there. Quite unexpectedly I came in sight of a wide shallow river, washing and hastening past the ivied stones of a ruined castle among some ancient trees. The evening light touched it all into romance, and I indulged in ruminations appropriate to the scene. But this was not enough, and I soon began to make enquiries about the meets of the Limerick Hounds.

No distance, I felt, would be too great to go if only I could get hold of a decent hireling. Nobody in the barracks could tell me where to look for one. The genial majors permanent at the Depot were fond of a bit of shooting and fishing, but they had no ambition to be surmounting...
tide walls and big green banks with double ditches. Before long however, I had discovered a talkative dealer at "foxes", and returned from my first day's hunting rather that I had heard than m. money's worth. The whole thing had been most exhilarating. Everyone rode as if there wasn't a worry in the world except hounds worrying foxes. Never had I sampled such richly verdant fields or seen such depth of blue in distant hills. What could be more difficult than a thing as 'troublesome' existed in Ireland, or that our majors were talking in apprehensive undertones about being sent out with mobile columns — the mere idea of our mellow majors going out with mobile columns seemed slightly ludicrous.

But there it was. The Irish were being troublesome — extremely troublesome — and no one knew much more than that, except that our mobile columns would probably make them worse.

Meanwhile there was abundance of real dairy butter, and I sent some across to Abergavenny. But there it was.

At the end of the third week in January my future as an Irish hunting man was conclusively foreshortened. My name came through on a list of officers ordered to Egypt. After thinking it over, I decided, with characteristic imbecility, that I would much rather go to France. I had got it fixed in my mind that I was going to France, and to be informed that I was going to Egypt instead seemed an anticlimax. I talked big to myself about Palestine being only a side-show; but I felt that I should put up a better performance with a battalion where I was already known. So I wired to the C.O. of our second battalion asking him to try and get me posted to them; but my telegram had no result, and I heard afterwards that the C.O. had broken his leg the day after it arrived, riding along a frost-slippery street in Ypres. I don't suppose the War Office would have posted me to him in any case; and I only record it as one of life's little contrasts — while I was enjoying myself with the Limerick Hounds, one of our most gallant and popular senior officers — himself a fine horseman — was being put out of action while riding quietly along a road in the town which held the record for being knoced to ruins by crumps.

A day or two later, greatly to my disgust, I was despatched to Cork to attend an anti-gas course. I didn't take my remarks very seriously, as I'd heard it all before and there was nothing new to learn. So on the fourth and last day I cut the exam. and had a hunt with the Muskerry Hounds. I had introduced myself to a well-known horse-dealer in Cork who hunted the hounds, and the usual story was sitting down along some woods above the river which flowed wide and rain-swollen down long glens and reaches in a landscape that was all grey-green and sad and lonely. I thought what a haunted ancient sort of land it was. It seemed to go deep into my heart while I looked at it for a moment, and time when I last gazed at the castle ruins at Adare.

In the county club that evening I got into conversation with a patronised face old parson. We were alone by the smoking-room fire, and after he'd been reminiscing delightfully about hunting it transpired that he had seen his son in the Camerions. And I discovered that this son of his had been one of the officers in the headquarters dug-out in the Hindenburg trench while I was waiting to go up to the bombing attack in which I was wounded.

We agreed that this was a remarkable coincidence. It certainly felt like a queer little footnote to my last year's experience, and the old gentleman laughed heartily when I said to him "if life was like Alice in Wonderland, I suppose I should have said to your son — not I think I once met your father in Ireland" but I think in nine months' time I shall be talking to your father in the county club at Cork." We then decided that on the whole it was just as well that the Almighty had arranged that homo sapiens should be denied the power of foreseeing the future.

Next day I was back at Limerick by the middle of the afternoon. Going into the ante-room I found no one there except Kegworthy. It was Sunday, and the others were all out or having a bit of extra time. "There's been an old boy up here asking for you. He said he'd come back again later", said Kegworthy, adding as an afterthought, "Have a drink".

I mentioned the afterthought because it was a too-frequent utterance of his. Kegworthy was one of the most likeable men at the Depot; there were only two formidable things about him: his physique — he was a magnificent heavyweight boxer — and his mess bill for drinks. I had seen several fine men trying to drown the War in whisky, but Kegworthy, I believed, was one of the most likeable men in the world. There were no half-measures about him, however, and it was really getting rather serious. Anyhow the mess-walter brought him another large one, and I left him to it.

On my way across the barracks square I passed a gate which is the gateway. He approached me. He was elderly, stoutish, with a pink face and a small white moustache; he wore a bowler hat and a smart blue overcoat. His small light blue eyes met mine and he smiled. He looked an extraordinarily kind old chap, I thought. We stood there, and after a moment or two he said: "That was Harnett". Not knowing what he meant, I remained silent. It seemed to be a sort of Irish interjection. Observing my mystification, he amplified it slightly: "I'm Harnett", he remarked serenely. So I knew that much about him. His name was Harnett. But how did he know who I was? But perhaps he didn't.

I have recorded this little incident in its entirety because it was typical of him. Mr. Harnett was a man who assumed that everyone knew who he was. It seldom occurred to him that many things in this world need prefatory explanation. And on this occasion he appeared to have departed, having told the word Harnett automatically informed me that he had seen me out hunting, had heard that I was very keen to come out again, that the hounds were meeting about four miles away to-morrow, that he had come to offer me a mount on one of his horses, and that he would call for me at the Barracks as punctual as the Sun. The word Harnett was, in fact, a key which unlocked for me the door into the County Limerick hunting world. All I had to do was to follow Mr. Harnett, and the camaraderie of the chase made the rest. I have recorded this little incident in its entirety because it was typical of him. Mr. Harnett was a man who assumed that everyone knew who he was. It seldom occurred to him that many things in this world need prefatory explanation. And on this occasion he appeared to have departed, having told the word Harnett automatically informed me that he had seen me out hunting, had heard that I was very keen to come out again, that the hounds were meeting about four miles away to-morrow, that he had come to offer me a mount on one of his horses, and that he would call for me at the Barracks as punctual as the Sun. The word Harnett was, in fact, a key which unlocked for me the door into the County Limerick hunting world. All I had to do was to follow Mr. Harnett, and the camaraderie of the chase made the rest.
stimulated, it was easy to persuade him that he would enjoy every minute of it, and it was obvious that a day in the country would do him no harm at all. I told him that I'd already hired a wild Irishman with a ramshackle Ford car to take me to the meet, so he could go in that. I assumed that Mr. Harnett and his horses would call at the Barracks, as he'd said nothing about any other arrangements. So the next morning I was waiting outside the gates in good time. After forty minutes I was still waiting and the situation looked serious when Kegworthy joined me — the Ford car being now just about due to arrive. Shortly afterwards it did arrive, and Mr. Harnett was in it, wearing a perfectly cut pink hunting coat, with a bunch of violets in his buttonhole. He looked vaguely delighted to see us, but said nothing, so we climbed in, and the car lurched wildly away to the meet, the driver grinning ecstatically round at us when he missed a donkey and cart by inches when swerving round a sharp corner. Mr. Harnett did not trouble himself to tell us how he came to be sharing Kegworthy's conveyance. With top hat firmly on his head and a white apron over his knees to keep his breeches from getting dirty, he sat there like a child that has been instructed to keep itself clean and tidy until it arrives at the party. And after all, what was there for him to explain? We were being bumped and jolted along a rough road at forty miles an hour, and this obviously implied that the horses had been sent on to the meet. We passed them just before we got there, and Mr. Harnett revealed their identity by leaning out of the car and shouting "I have me flask" to the groom, who grinned and touched his hat. The flask, which had been brandished as ocular proof, was very large, and looked like a silver-stoppered horse trough at Mrs. McDonell's house
It was a fine morning and there was quite a large crowd at the crossroads, waiting to see the hounds clustering round the hunt servants on a strip of grass in front of an inn.

Having pulled up with a jerk which nearly shot us out of our seats, we alighted. Mr. Harnett, looking rather as if he'd just emerged from a cold dip in the ocean, and asked, "With your officer friendly?" A formal introduction followed. "My friend Kegworthy is riding one of Mike Sheehan's horses. He's having his first day's hunting," I explained, and then added, "His first day's hunting in Ireland," hoping thereby to give Kegworthy a fictitious advantage over his total lack of experience.

Mr. Harnett, in a confidential undertone, now asked, "Will you take something before we start?" Powerless to resist, we obeyed. The hounds, among whom were a lordly air and the landlord kept the apron he looked happy with a jerk which made people love him and treat him a's a kind of innocence which caused us to forget that there was a war on. We had the hounds, and the landlord kept the apron he looked happy with a jerk which made me feel that I'd known her all my life and could rely on her assistance in any emergency. It may have been only her Irish exuberance, but it all seemed so natural and homely in that solid plainly-furnished dining-room where everything was for use and comfort more than for ornament.

The house was a large villa, about a mile from the barracks — just outside the town. There I sat, laughing and joking, and puffing my pipe, and feeling fond of the old Mister who had reached an advanced stage of cromdom with Kegworthy, while between them they diminished a decanter of whisky. And then Mrs. McDonnell asked me whether I played golf; but before I could reply the maid called her out of the room to the telephone, which enabled the word "golf" to transport me from Ireland to Scotland and see myself cleaning my clubs in my room at the hydro, and then Mrs. McDonnell asked me whether I played golf; but before I could reply the maid called her out of the room to the telephone, which enabled the word "golf" to transport me from Ireland to Scotland and see myself cleaning my clubs in my room at the hydro, and deciding that the only thing to do was to go back to the War again. How serious that decision had been, and how bilthely I was oblivious to it, the visualized memory evoked by the mention of "golf" had startled me into awareness of the oddity of my surroundings! 

As I have already suggested, there was something mysterious about The Mister — a kind of innocence which made people love him and treat him as a perennial joke. But, so far, I knew next to nothing about him, since he took it for granted that one knew everything that he knew; and the numerous hunting people to whom he'd introduced me during a rather dull and uneventful afternoon's sport took everything about The Mister for granted; so on the whole very little definite information about anything had emerged.

"How the hell did he make his money?" asked Kegworthy, as we sat after dinner comparing our impressions of the day's sport and social experience. "Men like The Mister get rid of their money quick enough, but they don't usually make any", he added.

"He certainly gives one the impression of being 'self-made'," I remarked. "Perhaps he won fifty thousand in a sweepstake. But if he'd done that he'd still be telling everyone about it, and would probably have given most of it away by now."

"Perhaps he's in the hands of trustees," suggested Kegworthy. I agreed that it might be so, and nominated Mrs. McDonnell as one of them. Of Mrs. McDonnell at any rate, we knew for certain that she had given us a "high-tea" after hunting which had made dining in the mess seem almost unthinkable. It had been a banquet. Cold salmon and snipe and unsurpassable home-made bread and honey had indeed caused us to forget that there was a war on; and for forty minutes I can only say that in the next forty minutes I can only say that it all seemed so natural and homely in that solid plainly-furnished dining-room where everything was for use and comfort more than for ornament.

I had been by myself I should have been sitting on my hir ing in a state of subdued excitement and eagerness, scrutinizing the hounds with a pseudo-knowing eye, and observing everyone around me with the detached interest of a visiting stranger. But I was with The Mister, and he had made it all feel not quite serious and almost dreamlike. It couldn't have been the modicum of cherry brandy I'd sipped for politeness' sake which made the proceedings seem a sort of extravaganza of good-humoured absurdity.

There was The Mister, solemnly handing his immense flask to the groom, who inserted it in a leather receptacle at the back of the saddle. And there was Kegworthy, uniting the strings of The Mister's white apron; he looked happy and rather somnolent, with his cap on one side and his crop projecting from one of his tanchise boots.

Even The Mister's horses seemed in a trance-like condition, although the bustle and flutter of excitement was full swing around them. The Mister having hoisted himself into the saddle, I concentrated on launching Kegworthy into the unforeseeable. I had ridden the hirings before and knew it to be quiet and reliable. But before I had time to offer any advice or assistance he had mounted heavily, caught the horse by the head, and was bumping full-trot down the road after the rest of the field. His only comment had been: "Tell Mother I died bravely."

"You'll be following to bring him home", said The Mister to our motor-driver, who replied that sure to God it was the grandest hunt we'd be having from the Gorse. We then jogged sedately away.

"Will you be staying long in Limerick?" he asked. I told him that it was to be ordered off to Egypt any day — perhaps to-morrow, perhaps not for a couple of weeks. That seemed to surprise him. "To Egypt? Will you be fighting the Egyptians then?" No, it was the Turks, I told him. "Ah, the Turks, bad luck to them! It crossed me that it had wrong about the Egyptians."

A quarter of a mile away the tail end of the field could be seen cantering up a green slope to the Gorse. It was a beautiful still morning and the air smelt of the earth.

"Ark!" exclaimed The Mister, pulling up suddenly. (Dropped aitches were with him a sure sign of cerebral excitement.) From the far side of the covert came a long-drawn view-hallows, which effectually set The Mister in motion. "Go on, boy, go on! Don't be waiting about for me. Holy Mother, you'll be getting no hunting with them Egyptians!" So I went off like a shot out of a gun, leaving him to ride the hunt in his own time. My horse was a grand mover; luckily the hounds turned toward me, and soon I was in the same field with them. Of the next forty minutes I can only say that it was all on grass and the banks weren't too formidable, and the pace just good enough to make it exciting. There was only one short check, and when they had marked their fox to ground I became aware that he had run a big ring and we were quite near the Gorse where we found him. I had forgotten all about Kegworthy, but he now reappeared, perspiring freely and considerably elated. "How did you manage it?" I asked. He assured me that he'd shut his eyes and seemed to at-tend; while as for Mrs. McD.

...
stone walls and big green banks with double ditches. Before long however, I had discovered a talkative dealer out at Groom and I returned from my first day's hunting feeling that I'd had more than my money's worth. The whole thing had been most exhilarating. Everyone rode as though there wasn't a worry in the world except hounds worrying foxes. Never had I galloped over such richly verdant fields or seen such depth of blue in distant hills. It was difficult to believe that such a thing as 'trouble' existed in Ireland, or that anyone could be comprehensively underclass about being sent out with mobile columns — the mere idea of our mellow majors going out with mobile columns seemed slightly ludicrous.

But there it was. The Irish were being troublesome — extremely troublesome — and no one knew much more than that, except that our mobile columns would probably make them worse. Meanwhile there was abundance of real dairy butter, and I sent some across to Aunt Evelyn every week.

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Next day I was back at Limerick by the middle of the afternoon. Going into the ante-room I found no one there except Kegworthy. It was Sunday, and the others were all out or having a bit of extra sleep.

"There's been an old boy up here asking for you," he said, "and he said he'd come back again later." said Kegworthy, adding as an afterthought. "Have a drink".

I mention the afterthought because it was a too-frequent utterance of his. Kegworthy was one of the most likeable men at the Depot; there were only two formidable things about him: his physiology and his mess bill. I had seen several fine men trying to drown the War in whisky, but never a more good-humoured one than Kegworthy. There were no half-measures about him, however, and it was really getting rather serious. Anyhow the mess-waiter brought him another large one, and I left him to it.

On my way across the barrack square I saw someone coming through the gateway. He approached me. He was elderly, stoutish, with a pink face and a small white moustache; he wore a bowler hat and a smart blue overcoat.

His small light blue eyes met mine and he smiled. He looked an extraordinarily kind old chap, I thought. We stood there, and after a moment or two he said: "Harnett". Not knowing what he meant, I remained silent. It sounded like some sort of Irish interjection. Observing my mystification, he amplified it slightly: "I'm Harnett", he remarked serenely. So I knew what he was. His name was Harnett. But how did he know who I was? But perhaps he didn't.

I have recorded this little incident in its entirety because it was typical of him. Mr. Harnett was a man who seemed to everyone knew who he was. It seldom occurred to him that many things in this world need preatory explanation. And on this occasion he apparently took it for granted that the word Harnett automatically informed me that he had seen me out hunting, had heard that I was very keen to come out again, that the hounds were meeting about four miles away tomorrow, that he had come to offer me a mount on one of his horses, and that he would call for me at the Barracks as punctual as the sun. The world of hunting in Ireland, in fact, was a key which unlocked for me the door into the County Limerick hunting world. All I had to do was to follow Mr. Harnett, and the camaraderie of the chase made the rest of it as easy as falling off a log, or falling off one of Mr. Harnett's horses (though these seldom "put a foot wrong", which was not gone of a man who seemed to ride by balance and appeared to remain on the top of his horse through the agency of a continuous miracle, being a remarkably good bad rider). He departed, having communicated all that was necessary, and nothing else.

"Here are the words your father in Ireland said out to me" — and he read out to me:

"What's that? Are you telling me I'm nervous? Show me the something you were so nervous about horses".

"Oh, I'm sorry, old chap, I'd no idea you were so nervous about horses".