



THE LIBRARIAN IN UNDRESS

Note:

The following essay was written by **Francis (Frank) Josiah Hudleston** (1869-1927) C.B.E., Librarian at the War Office, Chevalier of the Legion of Honour.

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MANY hard things have been said, many unkind stories told, of the harmless, necessary librarian. Perhaps the unkindest is the tale of the eminent American bibliographer who was going the round of the book collections of London. It is told of him that on visiting a well-known West End Club, and on asking to see the librarian, he was led deep down into the bowels of the earth until he found himself in a large and steaming kitchen. "But where," asked the bewildered bibliographer, "is the librarian?" "That's 'im," was the reply, "cutting the jint."

Can you beat it? As, no doubt, the bibliographer himself inquired.

But *cet animal est méchant: quand on l'attaque il se défend*. For example, we have it on the authority of the Head of the British Museum that "the first duty of a librarian is to suffer fools gladly." And it is said of another librarian, who did not, it is to be feared, act up to Sir F. Kenyon's *obiter dictum*. that, driven to exasperation, possibly by an inquirer asking for a book, author not known, title forgotten, but "probably bound in red", he replied, truly, perhaps, but with a certain lack of consideration, "What you really want is a Child's Guide to Knowledge."

On the other hand, there are amenities in the life of a librarian, which fact, no doubt, accounts, the world over, for, as Mr. Micawber might have said, "the comparative exiguousness of their emoluments." Books are pleasant companions: the

very smell of old leather bindings has something attractive in it. (1) Just as to George Dyer every poem was a good poem, so to a librarian all the books in his charge should be of interest, even the *biblia abiblia*. And, after all, a dull book can be shut up, which is more than one can do politely, anyhow, with a dull fellow.

In a large departmental library like that of the War Office, the knowledge of the librarian and his staff of the contents of the books contained in it has to be extensive and peculiar. The oddest questions may be asked. Many of them are, of course, of the nature of the "What did Mr. Gladstone (2) say in 1885?" kind of question, and perhaps, of no special interest, although certainly on one occasion the query, "What did the Home Secretary, as reported by the Times, say in January, 1882?" led to an amazing and horrifying discovery. But the really interesting questions are those which involve more research than the turning over of the pages of Hansard, not one of the most lively of publications. Some of the inquiries put to the War Office Library and answered, taken haphazard, may be of interest.

What was the population of London in 1500 When was the phrase "Balance of Power" first used officially? What historical instances are there of the drawbacks of soldiers being allowed to elect their officers? Instances of indiscretions of the Press in time of war? Amount of powder used in the Petersburg Mine in 1864? Authority for the statement that Abraham Lincoln declared medicine contraband? Organization of the Portuguese troops under Beresford? (3) Who has won to-day's Hunt Cup? (This, which I hastily add was from a military branch, was over the telephone, and the answer - a very unusual occurrence in the Library - "gave grave dissatisfaction.") Value of inundations in Marlborough's campaigns in Flanders? What is the French term for "sound-ranging?" Instructions given to the Duke of York when he went to the Low Countries? Who, where, what, and how many are the Sarts? What are Dellis? Why has the baton of a British Field-Marshal eighteen lions on it? Was George Washington (4) "a most immoral man?" Who made the statement that Sir Robert Walpole "always talked bawdy at his table, because in that all could join?"

In any library, to be able to answer questions of this nature it is, of course, at first necessary to have a subject index, *i.e.*, a catalogue which tells you what books are possessed on any given subject. In addition it is necessary to have a good memory. Indeed the ideal librarian should "forget nothing", like the Bourbon, or, as an Australian paper once happily misprinted it, "the Boubong." And, finally, one should have a card index of items of out-of-the-way information. The writer has for many years kept an index of this nature, consisting largely of cold, hard facts of a nature to satisfy a General Gradgrind, but also containing a certain amount of quaint and whimsical information; as he has found that items of this nature are frequently asked for, and it is difficult to trace them at a moment's notice.

Under the name of the greatest soldier in history it is curious to find that Napoleon was struck off the Army List no less than five times; when a student, the report on him was "*sera un excellent marin*"; his handwriting was shocking - other military men have shared his fault, as the writer knows to his cost; his spelling was indifferent; only Lannes was allowed to address him as "thou"; at Waterloo, at which battle he is stated to have sat on a chair, he had with him his travelling -one might say circulating -library (5) of four hundred volumes; he was a bad horseman; on one occasion he was invited by Berthier to a "*chasse au lapin*" which had a most

unfortunate issue; the Marshal, to make sure of good sport, had his park stocked with some thousand rabbits, which, unfortunately, were of the tame variety, and, cherishing the delusion that the Emperor was going to feed them, swarmed around him and fairly put him to flight; Chambertin was his usual wine; he had four illegitimate sons, of whom, by the way, the most famous, Walewski, was, from his portraits, save for an appalling beard of the kind known in the Victorian era as a "Whitechapel fringe", the living image of his father; he gave the advice, long before the late Lord Salisbury: "use large-scale maps"; he was a great believer in propaganda, (6) and even went so far as to have inserted in the *Moniteur*, the equivalent of our *London Gazette*, an anti-English poem briefly and pleasantly entitled "Goddam"; and, finally - an agreeable touch - when at St. Helena, he would play Blind Man's Buff with little Miss Betsy Balcombe.

Of his rival, the Great Duke, the notes in the index have little of a genial nature; one cannot, for example, imagine Wellington pulling Picton's ear, or even his leg, nor indeed would Picton have liked it. There are several instances of his harshness; he "never visited the hospitals in person, and his General Orders were almost always the reverse of complimentary", on the other hand, there are instances of his generosity to Alava and Hill; he was really fond of music; he was averse to any display of sentiment; (7) he never read Napier's "Peninsular War", he did not want his own life written. Possibly the reason why there has never been a really good life of the Duke, is, that while he excites the deepest admiration as a soldier, it is difficult to pump up any enthusiasm for him as an individual. He, himself, had little enthusiasm in his nature. Nelson must have done and said many things that would have tempted the Duke to exclaim, as he did to the unfortunate citizen who was so proud to give the great man his arm across Piccadilly, "I Don't be a damned fool." It will be remembered that the only time the two greatest English warriors of the period met, the Duke, describing it, remarked of Nelson, "He entered into conversation with me, if I can call it conversation, for it was almost all on his side and all about himself, and in, really, a style so vain and so silly as to surprise and almost disgust me." But great men do not always take to each other. When Doctor Johnson met Adam Smith at Glasgow - their first and only meeting - the Great Cham of Literature answered an argument of Smith's with the brief phrase, "You lie," and, in his turn, was answered, "You are a son of a ----."

Of Napoleon's and Wellington's contemporaries Blücher was, like the Emperor, and Marshal Saxe also, an indifferent speller. Although Napoleon called him "*cet ivrogne de hussard*", and Denon "*un animal indécrottable*", one must always remember that, having given his word, Blücher unlike the modern Prussian, kept it. It was at St. Helena that Napoleon made this uncomplimentary remark, on the same occasion when asked by Admiral Malcolm, "*Que pensez-vous des Prussiens?*" he briefly summed them up, "*Ce sont des coquins.*" Gneisenau, on whom Blücher relied implicitly, just as in most wars, ancient and modern, General X would be helpless without General Y, spent some months in the United States with a Jäger regiment in 1782-1783, and learned there the value of sharpshooters and the necessity of universal military service; Bernadotte, when Minister of War, in 1799, drew his sword and threatened to kill the Minister of Finance for cutting down his estimates - how often other Ministers of War must have wished they could do the same! Mack (who, like General Trochu, "had a plan") is damningly described by Lord Rosebery as "a strategist of unalloyed incompetency"; Schwarzenberg - who now remembers him? -

would sometimes lay down three different dispositions of his troops in one day, and then alter the third on the following day; Daddy Hill, who bore a remarkable facial resemblance to a benevolent contemporary, Mr. Pickwick, at a review in Hyde Park, in 1814, was mobbed by an enthusiastic crowd of Londoners and nearly had his clothes torn off him; Picton, at Quatre Bras, where he fought in a beaver hat, had his ribs broken by a musket ball, but kept it secret, and it was not discovered till after his death at Waterloo; Mr. Huskisson, who was killed at the opening of the Manchester and Liverpool Railway, and whose statue at Chelsea is, with the exception of that lasting joy, the Cobden statue in Camden Town, the most grotesque in London, when Private Secretary, in 1792, to the British Ambassador in Paris, so bullied an unfortunate young waiter at a cafe he patronized that the youth gave up his job and enlisted. The young waiter's name was Murat, later King of Naples.

These anecdotes about individuals may be ended with a pleasant story of the Duke of York, who has never, except by Mr. Fortescue, been given by historians the great credit due to him as Commander-in-Chief. (8) This is probably due to the fact that as a nation we are severe judges of moral lapses in public characters. The Duke of York and Albany certainly was not, although, in early life, Bishop of Osnaburg, "insensible to female charms" as they would have said in his day. After all, who is? And one might quote in his defence the authority of the more or less eminent divine who exclaimed in a kind of ecstasy -

What Lasting joys the Man attend
Who has a Faithful Female Friend!

But the story is as follows: Once, when at his Surrey estate, Oatlands, he observed the housekeeper sending away, with some asperity, a poor woman from the door, and, his curiosity excited, asked the reason. "It is only a soldier's wife who has been begging." "A soldier's wife?" exclaimed the Duke, "And pray what is your mistress but a soldier's wife? Call the poor creature back and give her some relief." A very human touch this, like the remark of Miss Nightingale, of a later Royal Commander-in-Chief, "George's oaths are popular with the Army."

There are many entries under the heading "Mistakes." Lord Lucan's mistake in the Crimea, which led to the charge of the Light Brigade, has become history. Perhaps the most whimsical error I have noted is the story of an American officer in the Civil War, who, in a crisis, gave the command, "Lie down"; a sergeant in a Texas regiment, Murphy by name, yelled out, "And did you hear the Gineral say, 'Light out'?" - and the regiment lit out. But officials and even ministers make mistakes, as well as soldiers. Croker, in 1812, wanted to send a frigate up the Falls of Niagara. He also committed the error in judgment of lecturing the Duke of Wellington on his tactics at Talavera, and ended the lecture by saying, "Well, Duke, you may say what you please, but if history should fail to do you justice, you will live for ever in my poem as the hero of that day."

This must have astonished the Duke almost as much as the question from a casual acquaintance as to whether he was surprised at Waterloo, "No," replied the Duke, "but I am now." As a matter of fact, Croker's "Talavera" is probably about as familiar to the present generation as the cricketing ballads of the late Mr. Craig, the Surrey poet. Pitt, in 1792, expected fifteen years of peace, and, in 1793, said, "The

war will be over in a twelvemonth.” Castlereagh gave up Java to the Dutch, and, according to Talleyrand, was utterly ignorant of military topography and continental geography. Counsels of perfection are always gratifying to those who give them, although not very helpful to those who receive them.

Under the heading “Women” find amongst many anecdotes, slanders no doubt, not entirely suitable for publication, a note of an Austrian General, who, in 1859, was savagely denounced by a French newspaper, because he had put in an application to headquarters for *belladonna* for the use of his men. The heroine of Saragossa, Agostina, who rallied the besieged troops was given a commission in the Spanish Army, just as in the Portuguese Army, St. Antony was officially entered, in 1668, as having enlisted in the Lagos regiment, and, in 1836, was promoted to the rank of Captain. Let us trust he was as successful as a spiritual soldier as he was as a mortal, in resisting those temptations to which, according to the gentleman in blue, anybody who wears “a good uniform” is particularly exposed.

Turning to the less cheerful subject of drink and drunkenness there is a curious story of a Peninsular veteran who kept a careful log of the wine shops he had encountered with such valuable entries as “right strong vino”, “good akedent” (*i.e.*, *aguardiente*), “horrid rotgut stuff.” Marshal Canrobert, speaking of the Crimea, used to tell a good story: “*Un jour, dans une revue, remarque un légionnaire dont les chaussures me paraissent bizarres; je regarde plus attentivement et je vois qu'il est sans souliers, mais qu'il a passé ses pieds au cirage pour faire illusion; interrogé il m'avoue avoir vendu ses godillots pour acheter de l'eau-de-vie.*” But one must give the devil - in this case the “Demon Rum” - his due, and mention the case of General Hooker (“Fighting Joe”) of whom some said that he lost, or did not win, the battle of Chancellorsville, because he “missed his drink.” A famous military historian once remarked in a lecture, talking of eighteenth-century dispatches, that it was of the greatest importance to consult, in the Public Record Office, the actual dispatch itself, because, if for no other reason, one could tell from the handwriting if the General, when he wrote it, was sober or not.

To turn to the third item, an absence of affection for which is, according to that great and good man, Luther, the sign of a lifelong fool, to wit, Song, (9) the value of military music, originally intended to frighten the foe, has long been recognized. “It's a long way to Tipperary” should have an honourable mention in the history of the European War; and it is much to be regretted that it appears to be impossible to get an authentic version of the moving ballad of “Mademoiselle of Armentières.” It is sad to think of the scholiast of a hundred years hence worrying himself with futile conjectures as to the *faits et gestes* of this remarkable lady.

To revert to serious military matters, under “Strategy” is a brief but excellent definition of it – “Strategy is horse sense” - and a somewhat cynical remark, also of American origin, to the effect that “when practised by Indians, it is called treachery.” The principles of strategy are eternal, but perhaps it is as well that one principle believed in by the Portuguese High Command in 1640 is dead: “*Certains officiers-généraux réglaient les manœuvres de guerre sur des horoscopes tirés de l'astrologie judiciaire.*” “Sorcerers, G.H.Q.,” would be a curious appointment nowadays.

Under "Discipline" the index has a story told by Carl Schurz, who, during the American Civil War, on asking a sentry guarding his tent why he had not presented arms to a General who had just left it, received the answer, "Why, sir, that General was never introduced to me." Which sounds more like the "Bab Ballads" than warfare. But, in connection with discipline, in an older Army than that of the United States, Louvois, in 1672, reduced three Marshals of France to the rank of Lieutenant-General for the space of a fortnight for refusing to serve under Turenne.

The name of Louvois, one of the greatest of war ministers, suggests the subject of the relations between the Minister of War and the authorities at home and the commander in the field. Montecuculi would not open letters from the Emperor, an example followed by Péliissier in the Crimea. The trouble Marlborough had with the Dutch deputies is well known: the commissaries of the French Revolutionary Armies were worse. As Pascal Vallongue forcibly put it at the time in a memorandum to Carnot, *"Les Représentants du peuple, sans connaissances militaires., voulaient diriger l'armée; ils ne doutaient de rien parce qu'ils pouvaient tout; ils écrasaient les généraux du poids de leur pouvoir et du fardeau de leur ignorance."* Small wonder that Lafayette arrested the commissaries sent to advise him, and immured them in Sedan. It is always interesting to see what Napoleon has to say. In this connection he wrote, *"Le ministre, le prince, donnent des instructions auxquelles il [le général en chef] doit se conformer en âme et conscience, mais ces instructions ne sont jamais des ordres militaires et n'exigent pas une obéissance passive."* One might say, in effect, from this, that the minister gives the general idea, but if it is not the General's idea, the latter is justified in not following it too slavishly, especially as such instructions sometimes tend, necessarily, to be rather in the "go in and win" manner.

"Red tape" is supposed by many people to be peculiarly British. But this is not so. Napoleon spoke, at St. Helena, of *"notre effroyable administration paperassière"*, and Austria, before the war, appears to have known it. Still. General Galgotzy's way of dealing with it, as related by Mr. Steed, in his "Hapsburg Monarchy", appears to have been somewhat drastic. The General, it appears, reported with reference to a road that had to be made in a hurry in Bosnia-Herzegovina: "Road built: twenty-thousand florins received, twenty-thousand florins spent: nothing remains." Shocked by, so terse a statement the military audit official demanded of General Golgotzy a detailed account of florin and kreutzer, with vouchers. He ignored the demand, which was presently repeated in peremptory tone. Then he rejoined: "twenty thousand florins received: twenty thousand spent. Whoever doubts it is an ass." This is calculated to make the hair stand up with horror on a bald accountant's head.

Nor is red tape unknown across the Channel. The War Office Library possesses a stout volume of four hundred pages whimsically entitled "Chinoiseries militaries", by C. Humbert (1909) devoted entirely to it. But red tape is not confined to War Departments. One sees, from time to time, posted up in London, notices prohibiting the shooting of birds that are as likely to be seen in the Metropolis as a covey - or should we say dollop? - of dodos: railway passengers, if they study the by-laws carefully, will note with interest that they are forbidden to travel upon the roof of the carriage. According to the Post-Office Guide one may send "persons" to an address by an express messenger, and all of us know "persons" whom we would like to dispatch express to a certain address. On the other hand, one is forbidden to send "Rough on Rats" to Trinidad, which seems to hint at some dark and sinister secret. In

pre-war Germany, where they used to have horrid little signposts pointing out the "beautiful view!" and where "the leaning of the body out of the railway carriage window is, on account of the therewith involved danger to life, most strongly forbidden", the writer, travelling to Hanover, was once asked on the train by a ticket collector where he was going: on giving his destination he was told, much to his joy and enlightenment, "So, well then at Hanover must you get out." No doubt it was the same meticulous care and thoroughness which, during the war, evolved the first German word for "tank," viz.: "*Schützengrabenvernichtungsautomobil*" (10) - how different from the spirited French word "*char d'assaut*."

But, when all is said and done, a certain amount of red tape is indispensable. It is a kind of red tape, the doing of things in an orderly and correct manner, which prevents us from going to bed without first removing our boots, an act that is apt to lead to misapprehension; from which we see that domestic happiness, or at all events, tranquillity, depends largely on red tape. In short, red tape is only a vulgar phrase for method and order.

(1) Mrs. Micawber would probably here remark "It is difficult to nurture twins on smells." [Return](#)

(2) Who "looked like a fraudulent bankrupt" (W. S. Blunt). [Return](#)

(3) "A low-looking ruffian" (Creevey). [Return](#)

(4) Like a less distinguished commander, General Bangs. [Return](#)

(5) He preferred to read lying down. [Return](#)

(6) And so were we also at this period. In 1813, Wellington's Vittoria Gazette was sent broadcast "in French, Dutch and German to all corners of Europe." [Return](#)

(7) Craufurd had intrigued with Charles Stewart against the Duke in the Peninsula, "I believe he pushed it to a very blameable extent, for when he was mortally wounded he sent for me, and there, in the way one has read of in romances, he solemnly asked my forgiveness." (The Duke, in conversation with croker, *alias* Mr. Rigby, *alias* Mr. Wenham.) [Return](#)

(8) I have endeavoured to do so elsewhere, in "Frederick, the Soldier's Friend." [Return](#)

(9) Wer liebt nich Wein, Weib and Gesang
Der bleibt ein Narr sein Lebenlang.

-pretty good, for a Reformer. [Return](#)

(10) Possibly the painful scribe who invented this word was paid by the line. [Return](#)