



Best of Fragments from France

Capt. Bruce Bairnsfather, Valmai Holt

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"Bruce Bairnsfather (BB) was the most famous cartoonist of the First World War and his soldier characters Old Bill, Bert and Alf, faced with sardonic good humor everything that the Germans, the mud and their officers could throw at them. However, Bruce (known by some as 'The Man Who Won the War') never received the acclaim that he deserved for the morale boost that his cartoons gave to the troops at the front and to the people back at home. The 50th Anniversary of Bairnsfather's death on 29 September 2009 offered an opportunity to redress the balance, and acknowledging it in combination with raising funds for Help for Heroes (H4H) seemed to be most appropriate.

The cartoons reproduced in this collection were originally drawn for *The Bystander*, a popular weekly magazine, in which they appeared each Tuesday throughout most of the Great War. Their effect on the public was totally unexpected, and so dramatic that *Bystander* sales soared. The organization, with unerring good judgement, decided it had a winner in Bairnsfather, and published the first 43 of his cartoons in an anthology. It was produced in February 1916, given the name *Fragments from France* and sold for 1s. On the front cover was a colored print of *The Better 'Ole* which soon became, and was to remain, the most loved of all Bairnsfather's cartoons. The authors own the original. Sales quickly reached a quarter of a million and a second anthology was published, *More Fragments from France*. It was described on the title page as 'Vol II' and the price was still 1s. The cartoon on the cover was 'What time do they feed the sea lions'?

In this volume *The Bystander* launched the first of a series of imaginative marketing exercises, similar to modern promotional methods. The full extent of the proliferation of the cartoons on all manner of products, from playing cards to pottery, is described in our Bairnsfather biography. Soon *Still More Fragments from France* were clamored for, and, with an eye to the future, the booklet was labeled No. 3 on the cover, Vol III on the title page. The success of the *Fragments* magazines was such that edition followed edition in rapid succession and at least eleven editions were published. The covers retained the same cartoon but were reproduced in different colors, both of board and ink — green, blue, red, grey, fawn and mauve. In America Putnam's issued Nos. I-IV as one volume and parts V and VI separately. Various hard and leather-bound collections were offered for sale by *The Bystander*, and the drawings were sold separately as prints and "Portfolios" for framing. They were also printed in color as giveaways for *Answers* magazine. Leafing through these pages, the reader will soon understand their tremendous popularity and success which have withstood the test of time."

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