THE STORY OF A BATCH.

By COLONEL S. F. CLARK.

With the retirement of Major-General E. G. Browne on June 1, 1922, the curtain was rung down on the batch of February 5, 1887, for he was the last of that company to remain on the stage of the Active List. It has put up a very fair performance during a long run, and it may be worth while to bring together some facts as to what befell it from first to last, the dramas in which it took part, its losses and its rewards, and the places in which its members appeared. This may stimulate young officers of our Corps to follow more closely the career of those who join the Army with them, and it may interest the older men by focusing at short range the corporate work of an average batch.

The "Vision of Mirza" tells of an endless stream of people passing over a great bridge which crosses a wide river, and, as they move along, units of the crowd fall into the water below through holes in the planking—some sooner and some later—until none of those who started together are left. Newcomers take their places, so that those who fall out are not missed in the multitude. This is an allegory of human life, but it can be used to illustrate the passage of a batch of our Corps along the bridge of the Active List, until the holes of retirement, of half pay, or of death, have accounted for all its members.

The batch that this note refers to joined at Netley Hospital on September 30, 1886, forty-one in number, but only thirty-nine were given commissions on February 5, 1887, so that two were unable to overcome the obstacles which studded the approach to the bridge itself.

In the next twenty years only six men dropped out, two of whom failed to last the twelve years which gave field rank to the others. The first to go died of enteric in India at three years' service, four others went down in war, and one retired at eighteen years. Eight then took the pension that became available, but of the twenty-five left only one retired (1911) before age or Royal Warrant claimed him.

When the Great War broke out, nearly twenty-eight years had passed since the batch had first met together, and, as more than half of the men (twenty-one) were still moving, it may be said that so far they had negotiated the dangers of the way very well. Of those missing eight were dead, while the ten who had retired were recalled to service. Those who were still on the Active List had been made lieutenant-colonels in 1911, and in March, 1915, all of them except one, who was on his death-bed, were promoted to be colonels.

As the war went on the members of the batch gradually approached the age limit obstacle, and by Peace Day (June, 1919) only nine were still on the bridge. Three months later all of these had fallen to the four years in
the rank rule, except four who had been promoted to the rank of Major-General. The first of these retired in 1920, the next in 1921, and this year (1922) the last two have dropped through, so that the batch, which was represented on the bridge for nearly thirty-six years, has now been completely engulfed by the river below. As the last man splashed into the water, he had the satisfaction of knowing that he had outlasted every one of the 934 men who were already on the bridge when he stepped on to it, as well as the thirty-eight of his own batch who accompanied him. Twelve of his comrades are now dead, and the survivors are all round about the three score years mark.

The Army List for April, 1887, was the first one in which the batch appeared, and from that time onwards it saw much service in many lands. The pre-war history of its doings shows that up to August, 1914, no fewer than 35 men out of the 39 had served in India, 22 had been to South Africa, and one of these in addition to Mashonaland and another to Matabeleland, and both Egypt and West Africa had seen eight of them. Seven had been stationed in Malta, four in Jamaica and four in Mauritius, while China and Bermuda had each sheltered three. Singapore and the Sudan accounted for two a-piece, while only one man had gravitated to Gibraltar, Ceylon, Crete, and the Egyptian Army respectively. Excluding those who left England for the South African War direct, members of the batch had left home 122 times on tours of foreign service. Each man averaged about three tours abroad, but one of them left England on six occasions, and several went to India every time.

During this period the batch was represented in fifteen recognized military expeditions and campaigns by the undernoted numbers:—

Zhob Valley (1890) 1, Burmah (1891-92) 4, Iszaai (1892) 1, Chitral (1895) 3, Ashanti (1895) 2, Sudan (1896) 2, Sudan (1898) 2, Matabeleland and Mashonaland (1896) 2, North-West Frontier, India (1897-98) 6, Lagos Hinterland (1897) 2, Sierra Leone (1898-99) 5, South Africa (1899-1902) 20, China (1900) 2, Mohmand Expedition (1908) 1, and in them gained 61 medals, 2 Ashanti stars, 122 clasps, 3 C.M.G.'s, 3 D.S.O.'s, 1 Osmanieh, 1 Medjideh, 1 promotion to Major, 1 brevet lieutenant-colonelcy, and 16 mentions in dispatches. The price paid was two killed in action in South Africa, and two dead from disease (one of enteric in Ladysmith and one of malaria in Lagos Hinterland), while one was severely wounded in Sierra Leone. In addition two brevet colonelcies were awarded for scientific work before the outbreak of hostilities in 1914—unconnected with any campaign.

It has not been possible to follow the movements of the batch during the Great War, but nineteen of the available twenty appear to have served overseas in various theatres of operations, while the twentieth, in addition to flying visits across the water, was head of arrangements for defence against poison gas—a truly great and responsible position. No records of medals or clasps gained are available, but 12 1914 stars were awarded, and...
approximately 9 1915 stars, with 21 General Service and Victory medals. One retired officer served in South Africa. The honours obtained included 1 K.C.B., 2 K.C.M.G.'s, 1 K.B.E., 6 C.B.'s, 8 C.M.G.'s, 2 C.B.E.'s, 1 O.B.E.; 3 Legion of Honour (1 commander, 2 officers), 1 Order of St. Sava (Serbia), 2 Order of Avis, both commander (Portugal), 1 Order of the Redeemer (Greece), 1 Star of Roumania (Grand Officer), 2 Croix de Guerre (France), and 49 mentions in dispatches. These, "mentions," were spread over 19 different dispatches and included 16 of the batch, ranging from one with 9 appearances to two others with only 1 each, but they were both in the first dispatch of the War.

During its career two of the batch were made K.H.S., one K.H.P., and two V.H.S. One was a temporary brigadier-general and Director of Hygiene at the War Office, another was P.M.O. of the Egyptian Army, one was D.M.S. in Salonica, and another D.M.S. in Mesopotamia, three served on the War Office staff, and one became editor of our Journal.

The record of one officer seems worth noting, as he had his services rewarded eighteen times by his own countrymen, and by at least three of our Allies, thus: C.B., K.C.B., C.M.G., K.C.M.G., D.S.O., K.H.S., V.H.S., one brevet, and ten "mentions," with the Legion of Honour, Star of Roumania, and Order of the Redeemer.

It would appear, then, that the record of the February 1887 batch is one that its members may regard with satisfaction and pride.