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| **PRIVATE JAMES MILLER V.C. LATE OF THE KING'S OWN ROYAL LANCASTER REGIMENT, DIED OF WOUNDS IN FRANCE, JULY 30th, 1916 AGED 26 YEARS The Story of 'the Message' By ELLIS WIIIIAMS (Hon. Sec., The King's Own Comrades's Association.)** |
| Now put away your books, my lads; come sit you by my side. And I'll tell you the glorious story how Miller, of Withnell, died. I've told you oft of the Spartan boy; how Spartans nobly bore Themselves to guard the narrow pass, in the grand old days of yore. You've read great Nelson's story, of Trafalgar 'cross the foam. And also of the dauntless three who kept the bridge at Rome. I've told you, too, of Gordon's death: the bravest of the brave. And of the noble Kitchener, now in his ocean grave. But none fell nobler than this lad, of Lancashire the pride. So let your children's children tell how Jimmy Miller died. We had shelled the Hun from his dug-outs, our guns had smashed him in style, We had hurled the foe from his trenches; driven him back for a mile. But many a hero had fallen, and many a husband and son. Who'd gone to their rest, left us weakened; could we hold that which we had won? So our Captain cried out "Here, Miller! a message to Company D. I know you, and trust you, brave Miller, so bring back tho answer to me. You never have yet shirked a duty, you never have reasoned why; For God's sake do not fail me now, but bring me the reply. I hate to ask you risk your life, but it's the only way; If you but get the answer back, you'll save some lives to-day." A brief salute to his officer, he cleared the trench at a bound: He dashed out into the open, out on the shell-swept ground. With a hearty cheer from his comrades, and-the rest is hard to tell- But with scarce a score of paces gone an angry bullet fell. And struck him through from back to side. He halted for a span (Ye shut not well. O marksman! to slay so brave man). Then, with hand pressed upon his wound, he struggled gamely on. And got his message through at last, his short life all but gone. "Now, stay you here, good Miller; you have nobly run your race; And you ere sorely wounded, lad, let another take your place." "Don't ask it, sir; why waste a life? You're open to attack. I've brought this message right through hell - I'll take the answer back." Then brave men sobbed as ha started back across that danger zone. They could not, dare not "queer his pitch," that's a creed in the old King's Own. Now he reels along in his agony, now on his knees he crawls. With his lifeblood ebbing drop by drop; a dozen stumbles and falls. And the goal is reached as he murmurs, "Relief - sir - all - is - well." Then he dropped at the Captain's feet, and died. So Miller of Withnell fell. His name is off the roll - call now; so brave where all were brave; He's laid by gallant soldiers in his lonely, honoured grave. He saw his duly plain and straight, and he went for it there and then. And I think our Saviour won't be hard on a man that died for men. Cheer up, ye hearts of England. Cheer up, ye Britons all ! Bear up, ye wives and mothers, so sick at duty's call. The soul of our race lies in men like these, who fight to their latest breath. And, like the sentinel of old, stand faithful unto death. But this deed stands aloof from all; heroic, grand, alone; The pride of all of British race: the pride of the old King's Own. So, when you hear folk talk of heroes, tell this story far and wide: The story of the message, and how Miller of Withnell died.  September, 1916. ELLIS WILLIAMS. |