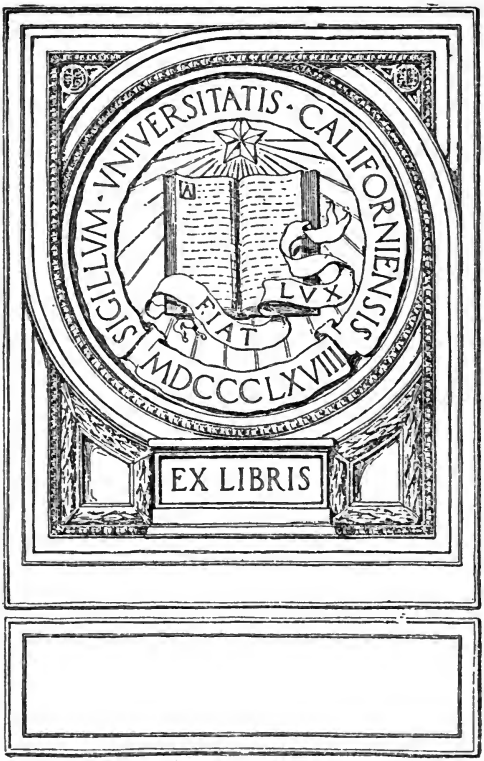
TALES OF TALBOT HOUSE

P. B. CLAYTON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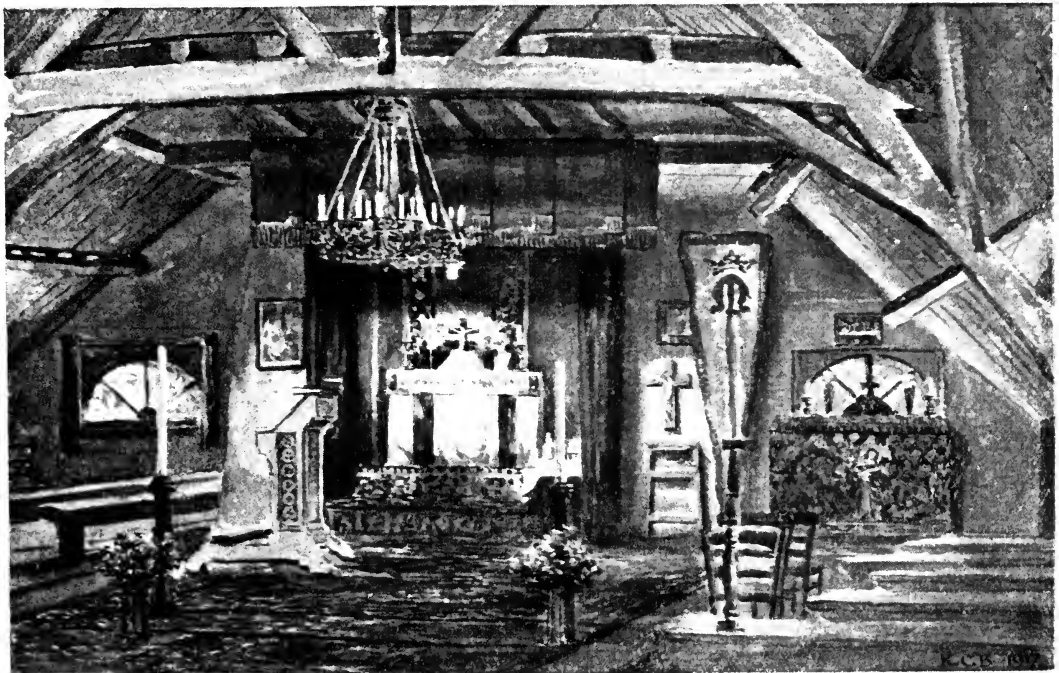
TALES OF TALBOT HOUSE



THE CHAPEL IN THE UPPER ROOM, 1917

TALES OF TALBOT HOUSE

EVERYMAN'S CLUB IN POPERINGHE & YPRES 1915-1918

BY

P. B. CLAYTON, M.C., F.S.A.
SOMETIME GARRISON CHAPLAIN AT POPERINGHE

'Yborn it was in fer contree
In Flandres, al biyonde the see
At Popering, in the place."
CHAUCER'S *Sir Topas.*

LONDON
CHATTO & WINDUS
1919

FOREWORD

BY

THE EARL OF CAVAN, C.B., M.V.O., K.P.

I FIRMLY believe that the greatest secret of our success in the war was the spirit of helpfulness. With very few exceptions, I think, every Commander was anxious to help his subordinates, and without exception, every man helped his fellow-man.

The opening of Talbot House, Poperinghe, was one of the best examples of helpfulness, for which many thousands have been and many hundreds are intensely grateful.

This little book tells its own story. I can only say from experience that Welcome met me at the door, Happiness lived within, and the Peace that passeth understanding could be found by those who sought it in the Upper Chamber.

CAVAN.

INTRODUCTION

In writing some words of introduction to this little book I must point out how misleadingly Talbot House was named. I did nothing but get hold of the house, into which, as into a mud hole, I drove a perfectly round peg—viz., the author. I knew that if I could find a parlour he would prove the most Christian spider in all the world (though the metaphor is wrong, for the House was nothing if not a "liberty hall"). And so it proved. When we got the house we proposed to call it Church House. But the staff of our Division saw a scarecrow in the name and smelt tracts. So they changed it from Church to Talbot House. For the rest I might expatiate on Mr. Clayton, but he would prefer that I did not. It is unnecessary for me to commend him to those who know him, and to those who do not I think the following pages will themselves

reflect something of the wit, the laughter, the friendship and the love which radiated from his great heart into the wilderness of war round Ypres and "Pop." As I claim no credit for the House, and but gladly attribute it to one to whom, under God, it is due, I can say that I think Talbot House was the ideal Church Institute. Though it was "dry," it suggests a future for Christian public-houses. It was open to all the world, was full of friendship, homeyness, fun, music, games, laughter, books, pictures and discussion. And at the top, in the loft, obtruding upon no one, but dominating everything, was the Chapel—a veritable shrine, glowing with the beauty of holiness. Thus above and below, the House was full of the glory of God. I predict that thousands will be glad of this little record as a souvenir of many happy hours, and that to not a few it will recall a turning-point in the history of their souls.

Let us one and all think how the spirit of Talbot House and the things for which it stood may find expression in Blighty.

NEVILLE S. TALBOT.

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TALES OF TALBOT HOUSE

CHAPTER I

SOMEWHERE in Stevenson there stands the fine simile of a shipwrecked sailor, who, telling his tale far inland, hears again in his soul, as in a sea-shell, the confused tumult of the great waters; whereat his narrative dies away into silence, for the very vividness of the echo deafens and defeats him.

So, I suppose, it must be with most personal recollections of the war, and it is certainly true of the highly domestic chronicle I am now set down to write. Here is no conjuror with words, who can trick you into watching the brave gaiety of a Flanders town in war-time, or give you to breathe again the already twice breathed air of the scarred poplar avenue that leads to what once was Ypres. If this is what you seek, you will be well advised to lay

this little book down at once; for it contains merely the memoirs of a parson-publican, written as a peace offering for those who have visited his inn. If others there be who persevere, it will be those who cherish some letter of the million written therein, that told perhaps of a meeting with a friend, or of a Receiving of the Sacrament—which is the same thing in another sphere. Even within the Army at the close, the old house became rather a back number in the back area, and the Armistice generation had Meccas of its own. Yet their elder brothers cheered the sign-board

TALBOT HOUSE.
EVERYMAN'S
CLUB.
1915– ?

as they marched down the street, and Second Lieutenant T. Smithkinson-Browne in 1917 would hark back half shyly to the haunts of Rifleman Tom Brown of 1916, with the loyalty

of an old schoolboy revisiting those grey towers that nursed him in his teens. Divisions trekking northwards from the Somme were known to count proximity to Talbot House as some measure of compensation for a return to the Salient, for the boredom of the Somme wilderness was a more fearful thing than fear itself. The Englishman, mainly town-bred, loves light, noise, warmth, overcrowding, and wall-paper, however faded. He is of Alexander Selkirk's opinion concerning solitude, and John the Baptist in person would not have attracted him to cross the Somme country out of curiosity, after he had had to do so once on business. Our wall-paperdom, therefore, was half the secret of the drawing power of the Talbot House. It was a house proper—not one large bare hall with a counter at one end and a curtain at the other, but a house, like home, with doors and windows and carpets and stairs and many small rooms, none of them locked; so that you never knew whom or what you might find next. Obviously the place belonged to you in a home-like way, and relied on your being kind to it in return. There were pictures in frames, not patriotic

prints either; and vases full of cut flowers; and easy chairs; and open fireplaces, with a tabby cat to teach you how to see what you wanted most by blinking into the golden glow. Bother! who was this coming in? An officer of some sort! I thought a padre ran the show. What is this chap? A Northumberland Fusilier captain. Have we got to stand up? No! He says he's been sent round that floor by the padre to see if the nibs are up to scratch! One fellow at the table says that's just what his is, and indents on the captain for a new one. Queer place this. *Mem.* Must be looked into more closely to-morrow night. *Mem.* Wash out that estaminet crawl. That captain with the nibs was a bit of a nib himself. Wish he was in our Batt.

CHAPTER II

"ONCE upon a time," began Wendy.

"That means it never," said Peter caustically.

"Well," replied Wendy coldly, "to be exact——"

In December, 1915, the old Sixth Division, which had trekked up from Armentières in the end of May and had gone out to a so-called rest in November, came sadly to the conclusion that they were in for a winter round Ypres. The division, however, had a tradition that compelled them to make the best of a bad business, and faced the inevitable with that cheerful grousing over minor points which in their philosophy obscured the main misery of the outlook.

While speaking in a black-edged tone, I had better introduce you to the Church of England chaplains of the Division at the time. Neville Talbot, the senior chaplain C. of E., who had taken over some months before, was then busy breaking up the con-

centration camp of chaplains* which had been bequeathed to him, and in marrying off the eligibles into various battalions of their brigade. The exception was H. R. Bates, who was retained at the old chaplains' headquarters,† to continue his amazing pioneer work with Church Army Huts. Several of these he built near the camps, largely with his own hands; while forms and tables, stoves and fuel, canteen stores and games, he juggled with to such purpose that it seemed as if two huts a mile apart shared without knowing it a tea-urn and a table on the same day and on the same side of it.

Meanwhile, Jimmy Reid was adopted by the Queen's Westminsters, Hamer by the Durhams, Wheeler by the York and Lancs., and Kinloch-Jones by 71st I.B., while P. B. Clayton was foisted on to the Buffs and Bedfords, the latter being then out of the line and at rest in Poperinghe.

Even at this stage of the B.E.F., the attach-

* The beloved Chaplain Doudney, of 16th Infantry Brigade, had been killed at Ypres, November 2, 1915. Rupert Inglis, who succeeded me in the same brigade, was killed on the Somme in September, 1916.

† Where our horses lived in the farm and we in the stable, to deceive the Boche.

ment of chaplains to battalions was still a novelty. At first, all chaplains were attached to medical units only; and those who reached the fighting line were truants from Field Ambulances. Even when there, their task was at the outset confounded with that of an undertaker, and the minister of life was chiefly called upon for burials. Meanwhile, in hospitals, his sole obligation beyond this function was the visiting of those on the daily D.I.* List. Gradually the outlook widened, an amelioration due in no small measure to the example and idealism of Bishop Gwynne, D.C.G.; and the Brigade Chaplain made good. He became at least connected in men's minds with more cheerful rites, and a trench-going padre made a church-going battalion. What nobler definition of his place could there be than that enshrined in the code of the Senior Service—"the Chaplain . . . the friend and adviser of all on board."

* * * * *

"Shall I fetch Crockford?" said Peter with a yawn.

"Rude boys go '  .'" said Wendy.

* Dangerously ill.

CHAPTER III

POPERINGHE, so the only guide book that troubles itself with the little town tells us, contains some 11,000 inhabitants, and no features of interest for the visitor. The war modified the accuracy of both these statements. The population of the town and its immediate environs has risen at times to a quarter of a million, and has fallen to less than fifty. As for features of interest, the orderly room clerks could give the evidence of tens of thousands of passes to the contrary. The name of the town might as well have been printed in, for all the correction it was likely to require.

The secret of this was that Poperinghe was without a rival locally. Alone free for years among Belgian towns, close enough to the line to be directly accessible to the principal sufferers, and not so near as to be positively

ruinous, it became metropolitan not by merit but by the logic of locality. In migrant and mobile times, its narrow and uneven streets filled and foamed with a tide-race of transport. Year in, year out, by night and by day, the fighting troops, with all the blunter forces behind that impel and sustain their operations, set east and west, with that rhythm of fluctuation that stationary war induces. Until the great switch road was opened, and the railway track was doubled, every man and every mule (whether on four legs or closely packed in a blue tin) came up by one pair of rails or one narrow street.

Moreover, before the camps were built, troops billeted in the town itself in huge number, prudently decreased as the thing called bombing grew in ease and frequency of performance.

Poperinghe itself consists of a *Grande Place* preternaturally broad, and five streets preternaturally narrow. You could scarcely shout across the Square: you might all but shake hands across the streets. The only road of any breadth—the Rue de Boeschepe—came to a dead end twenty yards from the Square.

The most vital thoroughfare (as in the Gospels) was the narrowest; and the lion in the way, by no means chained, was an amphibious civilian train that exhausted its steam by an incontinent use of its whistle. Under such provocation nearly every horse became a biped.

We must not forget, in describing the amenities of the town, the system of half-sealed streams, which, having lost all sense of purpose or direction in the dark, devoted their powerful energies wholly to the cultus of fever germs and mosquitoes. Out of these pure sources was pumped the brown bath-water wherein we wallowed; and several experts aver that the resultant fluid was drawn off into casks and sold as Belgian beer. Other authorities deny this insinuation hotly, on the ground that the beer was far the lighter of the two in texture; in which case, the confusion must have arisen through a similarity in taste alone.

My only previous acquaintance with this metropolis had been unpropitious. I had arrived there one rainy autumn night, fresh from a hospital chaplaincy at Le Tréport, and "never having witnessed any military operation

more important than the relieving of the Guard at Whitehall." The dismal train had crawled cautiously into the much shelled station at 2 a.m., depositing me with a plethora of luggage at the R.T.O.'s office. Leaving my baggage there in a hideous heap, and disdaining offers of assistance, I had started to walk, as I thought, into Poperinghe with a hazy notion of finding some hotel. Outside, the night was inky overhead and the road deep in mire. Following the crowd of foot-passengers back from leave, I had turned in the wrong direction and stepped out along the famous pavé causeway* that leads to Vlamertinghe and Ypres. After half an hour's splashing, I began to think the town a myth, and upon confiding my doubts to two men in front was much humbled to discover (1) that I was walking away from Poperinghe, (2) that there were no hotels anywhere, (3) that I had better go back, and ask R.T.O. to take great care of me till called for. This I sadly did, and the R.T.O., a most kindly man (how is it that occasional 5·9's so stimulate the lacteal duct of human kindness ?),

* This was before the grand old navvies of the 4th Labour Battalion rebuilt the road.

telephoned to such good purpose that before daybreak some London Field Company folk arrived with a mess-cart and removed me to the Chaplains' Camp.

My chief memory of the R.T.O.'s office during the waiting was the odd sight of a boy with a military medal marched in as a prisoner under escort for return to England, having so falsified his age that he had enlisted at sixteen, and had been fighting for six months; which misdemeanour, as the younger Mr. Pepys says, "was very strange."

When I returned to Poperinghe, and joined the Bedfords, the town was in a typically 1915 condition. There was a canteen in the Square, run by a splendid Wesleyan chaplain, but beyond this nothing but refugee shops, bright behind their rabbit-wire windows, with their eternal display of "real Ypres lace," untrustworthy souvenirs, and still more untrustworthy wrist-watches. Of course there were estaminets everywhere, good, bad, and of all intermediate complexions. The "Fancies," a great divisional show, justly celebrated for Fred Chandler's tenor voice, Dick Horne's "Rogerum" (a coon-song version of the Parable

of Dives and Lazarus, with a magnificently onomatopœic chorus, which lifted the Sixth Division along over many miles of mud), and two Belgian ladies known respectively as Lanoline and Vaseline,* who could neither sing nor dance, but at least added a touch of femininity, provided the sole real recreation for officers and men. They lent us their hall on Sunday nights, where, in front of a drop scene painfully reminiscent of the Canal bank in November, Neville preached the Gospel of Faith and Freedom.

The town at the time was intermittently shelled, but "nothing to write home about." Some very heavy "stuff" had come in during the early summer, when the fashionable area of the town was in consequence continually changing. One large shell had utterly demolished the original English Church house, near the Square, and a brace had landed in the orchard at the back of what was afterwards Talbot House. One of these immigrants had created a pond, in which its brother, a dud, was committed to rest in a frivolous funeral.

* Subsequently there was added, I think, a third artiste, known as "Chlorine," and a fourth called "Glycerine."

The wealthier civil population had moved into France, and the remainder, chiefly refugees, were busily engaged in amassing wealth under circumstances adverse to the prosperity of their insurance companies. One combined pastry-cook and brewery concern was said to have made £5,000 clear profit during four months.

Two of the four chief restaurants were already in full swing, the best, cheapest, and oldest, being that in the Rue de Boeschepe.* Very much second came À La Grande Poupée, behind a shop in the Square, where the thirteen-year-old schoolgirl "Ginger" had already established her fame. Any defects in the cuisine or in the quality of the champagne were more than compensated by the honour of being chosen as her partner in the exhibition dance which she gave with the utmost decorum as the evening drew on. Skindle's was not yet in being, so far as I can remember, nor the ill-fated Cyril's.

It was an odd, but not an evil, atmosphere which prevailed in Pop. Every week some shells landed somewhere, and some lives were

* The British Officers' Hostel, the proprietress being Madame Camille Laconte Devos.

lost; but the spirit of lightheartedness was never quenched, nor was there, on the other side, any outbreak of vice behind the gaiety. In spite of the gigantic accumulation of troops, rape was almost unknown, and seduction extremely rare—to the amazement, I believe, of the Belgian authorities. War was still a sporting event, and "living dangerously" was salutary, as Nietzsche taught. The ethics of home were not blurred by long absence, and the Russian "steamroller" was not yet ditched. No prospect pleased, but man was perfectly glorious.

CHAPTER IV

It was plain that it was up to the chaplains to open a place of their own, an institutional church, to provide happiness for the men, and also, if possible, a hostel for officers going on leave. This trouble, like all our troubles, was taken to Colonel, now General, R. S. May, then "Q" of the 6th Division. Aided wholeheartedly by him, we approached the Town Major, who introduced us to M. Coevoet Camerlynck, a wealthy brewer of the town, who in turn led us to his great empty mansion, the back part of which previously had been struck by a shrapnel shell from the Pilkem Ridge direction. We accepted this tenancy joyfully at a rent which was subsequently fixed at 150 francs a month, undertaking as the conditions of our lease (1) to make the house weather-proof, and (2) to remove from

RUE DE L'HOPITAL, POPERINGHE, BEFORE THE WAR. TALBOT HOUSE IS THE THIRD ON THE LEFT HAND

the small front-room a large safe, which, on account of its immobility, had remained when all the other furniture had been taken away.

Strong in the consciousness of the British Army at our backs, we made no bones about the conditions, but took over the house forthwith. Bowing the owner out, we started on our inspection of the premises. The large entrance hall was flanked on the left by a highly decorative drawing-room with a dingy dining-room beyond, and on the right by a small office, the staircase, and the kitchen. The conservatory beyond lay sideways along the whole breadth of the house at the back. It was in a bad plight, for the shrapnel had gashed its leaden roof and brought down the plaster ceiling in a melancholy ruin upon its tiled floor. The plate-glass was broken in all the windows, and the rain came in freely both sideways and from above. However, it's an ill shell that blows no one any good, and this had blown us a house which would otherwise have been occupied as a billet. Upstairs, on the first floor, reached by an elegant painted staircase in white and gold, was the landing,

four bedrooms, and a dressing-room; on the second floor, a large landing, one huge nursery, and three small bedrooms; above this, reached by a difficult companion-ladder, a great hop-loft covering the whole area of the house. One corner of this attic and the bedroom below it had been knocked out by a shell.

We then descended to consider our other liability. The safe was in the little front office, and presented the appearance of a large brown painted cupboard against the wall. Neville gave it a friendly push, with no result whatever. My assistance made not the slightest difference. I stepped round the corner for the Bedfords. About sixteen of them came in an S.O.S. spirit. As many as could do so got near the safe and pushed perspiringly. The faintest sign of motion was now visible. Determined to see the matter through at once, lest it should breed in us some craven superstition, we suborned certain transport folk to send round their heaviest waggon and a team of mules. Meanwhile we got ropes round the safe, and some logs, as for launching a lifeboat. With sixteen men on the rope the safe fell forward on the rollers with a crash comparable

only with the *coup de grâce* the Australian tunnellers gave to Hill 60. Crowds gathered in the narrow street, and the waggon and mules made heavy weather of backing into the entrance of the house. Meanwhile we piloted the safe into the hall. The mules were taken out and led away that they might not see what they were doomed to draw. The back of the waggon was let down, the stoutest planks were laid leading up to it, and the drag-ropes were handed freely to all passers-by. Vaguely it was felt by all who had no precise knowledge of the situation that a successful tug would in some way shorten the war, and the traffic, now completely blocked, added those homely criticisms for which the British driver is justly notable. Even the safe felt moved in its rocky heart, and, surrendering to the impulse of a hundred hands, found itself installed in the waggon. It was no time for hesitancy now. Pressing ten francs into the hands of the muleteers, we told them the desired destination and saw them and the safe no more.

Next day, about December 10, a party of male housemaids from the Bedfords put the

inner house in order, while the London R.E.'s repaired the outer wall and roof.

In the garden we found a carpenter's bench, which was set aside at once as our altar for the worship of the Carpenter, and carried up to the first chapel, which was the big landing on the second floor. This was our altar always, whence tens of thousands have received the Sacrament, many making their first Communion, and not a few their last.

A table-top was also forthcoming from the garden, apparently the floor-boards, in two sections, of a small tent. These on some solid legs with a wallpaper covering made our first piece of domestic furniture, and lasted all our time. Then Harold Bates arrived, and casting his business eye upon the premises, made a list of necessaries, and supplied them without more ado. We borrowed a small staff from the 17th Field Ambulance, and on December 15 the House opened.

Æsthetes of a later generation would have smiled superciliously at our primitive efforts at furniture and decoration, but they served their turn well, and it was not a

time when much was expected. Tables and chairs and forms were readily if roughly made. Cups and saucers and a few household utensils could still be bought in Poperinghe in a half-ruined shop opposite, where a Belgian boy named Gerard and his mother and sister carried on their business, though the staircase and most of the first floor had succumbed to a shell. Climbing one day on to what was left of the second floor, I found and purchased for three francs a crucifix, the figure (as often locally) of white clay, with a hand splintered by a fragment of the shell. This went to the Chapel, and looks down in the post-card picture from the loft.

On the following Sunday night we led the congregation from the "Fancies" round to the new House. Fortified by an "agape" of cocoa in four cracked cups, three basins, and some jam-tins, we toured the House, and the bold imagination of the conductor won sympathy and assistance beyond his expectations. It was a bad, wet night, and a quiet figure in a Burberry went unnoticed, until pressed to stay to supper. The Burberry removed, Major Edmond Street of the Sherwoods, a Loos

D.S.O., and one of the most gallant Christian gentlemen a man could meet, began his friendship for the House, which continued until his death on the Somme. Colonel Buchanan-Dunlop of the Leicesters, who organised the carol-singing to the Boche on the first Christmas Day, and Major Philbey of the York and Lancs, were also great quiet helpers of the infant House; but for the most part we had not many mighty nor many noble. It was on the simple loyalty of the ordinary officers and men alike that the House was proud to lean.

Wait a moment. On that same Sunday night we petitioned the congregation for a piano, and as they passed out an unknown gunner major volunteered the remark: "Padre, if you want a piano, Lieutenant Robinson of the 47th Battery has three at least. Try and scrounge one off him." Making a mental note, on pre-Pelmanistic principles, of name and number, I proceeded on the next day to attempt to get in touch through Signals. I also incited Kinloch-Jones, chaplain of the 71st Brigade, to try his luck as well, two wires being better than one; with a result that on Tuesday night a reply came through to him saying, "Meet me at

41st I.B.H.Q., 11.30 a.m., Wednesday." We had not dared to mention a piano in our wire, so that our victim was plainly unaware of the purpose of our approach. Now 41st I.B.H.Q. were on a part of the Canal Bank, outside our divisional area, and Kinloch was going up the line elsewhere that day. Armed, therefore, only with the wire to him, and omitting the pass then recently necessary, I went up alone to the Canal Bank next morning in search of one at least of the three pianos. At that time, be it understood, pianos were lightly come by, for Ypres was still standing, and the Ramparts rang with the internal discord of thirty or so played capriciously, each louder than the last, so that the request was not so preposterous as it would be now, when ownership is again a commercial conception. Reaching the Canal Bank I found the headquarters concerned, and made bold to enter the mess. Here at first I was made welcome, but on disclosing my business was met with a request for a pass. The fact, also, that I had no batman with me told against me, this being a double infringement of orders, which were at that time in the rigidity of recency. Producing my pink wire,

I handed it across thoughtlessly, forgetting it was addressed to Kinloch-Jones. The reassurance which this flimsy credential should have brought was more than counterbalanced by my obvious confusion when addressed as "Mr. Kinloch-Jones." Moral weakling that I was, I felt this further explanation would undo me wholly. The total result was that when I suggested telephoning to the still absent Robinson, the Brigade Major significantly detailed a subaltern to look after me. Here again the atmosphere is lost to the Army of to-day; but then spies were far from mythical. Of that era are the two stories, one of the soi-disant officer who always replied, when challenged, "Major Black, 49th Battery." He was so important a person that, when finally caught, he was sent down to Corps Headquarters in a car. Secondly, there was the picturesque legend of the spy so well concealed in Ypres that he blew a bugle nightly with impunity as the head of the transport column reached Suicide Corner. As for the stationmaster of Poperinghe, was he not shot a hundred times? Behold me, therefore, struggling in the Signals dug-out to get in

touch with my errant and overdue assignee. Communication between an infantry brigade and a battery was always difficult, but at last we learned that Lieutenant Robinson had left an hour back to keep his appointment, but as there had been some shelling had probably walked by byways. In point of fact, he was at that very moment reaching the dead end of the Canal, whence he came down towards the rendezvous, bleating for a padre as he came. Now it happened that Jimmy Reid and his Westminsters lay thereabouts. To him, therefore, Robinson was led, Jimmy appearing (as he afterwards said) in no very Christian frame of mind after a punishing night up yonder, and saying beneath his breath: "Bother, another funeral." Relieved humanely and professionally to find it was not so, he accompanied Robinson on his search, and when I heard his voice, I leapt out only to be greeted by my proper name. At this point the subaltern, my guardian, intervened with, "Excuse me, not Clayton, but Kinloch-Jones, I think," whereat we left him thinking. To cut the story short, Robinson gave me not one piano, but two, and I handed one over to

Bates for a hut at Peselhoek—the worst one, of course. The best was very good indeed, and even in its old age, after three years of constant strumming, retained its tone. Moreover, it had learnt things. If you so much as sat down before it in 1918, it played "A little grey home in the West" without further action on your part.

CHAPTER V

"GIVE me the luxuries of life, and I care not who has the necessities," was the motto of the young House. We had a piano, but no dishcloths, to the great scandal of a visiting A.D.M.S. But by degrees we accumulated even these. A lady bountiful in Scotland sent us crates of furniture without number, and provisions without price. It is hard to remember the days when dainty food came pouring out from home. A lady in Bristol (with whose gardener I was fortunate enough to strike up a friendship in hospital) showered other good and useful things upon us. A third in Brighton, and a fourth at Teddington, found us in books and pictures. Curtains and tablecloths, pots and pans, even waste-paper baskets and clocks and flower-vases arrived in illogical sequence. On the first night (December 15) I find by the visitors' book that one

officer* going on leave, stayed with us and from then onwards the doors were open day and night. Men swarmed about the place from ten a.m. to eight p.m., and officers flowed in from seven p.m. till the leave trains came and went. From each officer we demanded five francs for board and lodging, on the Robin Hood principle of taking from the rich to give to the poor. For this sum the officers secured on arrival from the leave train at one a.m. cocoa and Oliver biscuits, or before departure at five a.m. a cold meat breakfast. The bedrooms were communal, save for the dressing-room, which we turned ambitiously into the "General's bedroom," on account of a bed with real sheets. For the rest, stretcher beds and blankets provided more facilities for sleep than a leave-goer required, or than a returning officer expected. Those were the days of simplicity; and I can see now officers waiting semi-somnolently in chairs until their luckier brethren got up for breakfast and the leave train, to play Box to their Cox, so that Rev. Mrs. Bouncer had a grateful though

* Curiously enough a namesake—Lieutenant Clayton of the West Yorks.

a sleepless task. The House was always what the Canadians called a "soft drink" establishment, but no one resented this, lapping up tea or cocoa or Bovril with thanksgiving. True, they were mostly infantry officers, who had learned such thankfulness in a rough school. One noticed, moreover, the meticulous care with which the old officer looked after the needs of his servant and his horse before his own. At no period of the war, I suppose, were the officers of any army up to our standard early in '16, when the flower of our amateurs stood side by side with those regulars who had survived both the hazards of war and the temptations of tabs. The fact that the House was, financially considered, a gift from the officers to the men was characteristic of the unity of spirit which possessed them both.

By a fortunate coincidence, no sooner was the House established than it became customary for one company of the Queen's Westminsters to be billeted in rotation next door. The alliance thus formed was never wholly lost. The class upon which that great regiment chiefly drew is that of the suburban type, partly public school and partly

the bank clerk world; and however great the alienation from the Church elsewhere, it was not so with these. Critics truly of the Donald Hankey school, philosophers who found churchmanship too shallow, and athletes who found it too deep, were plentiful among them; but with a great number, startled by their terrible experiences out of a superficial apathy, religion, and especially sacramental religion, stood as a need confessed. There must have been quite 200 Communicants in the battalion at this time, and in the case of the 1st L.R.B.'s, who were in Poperinghe that Christmas, over 500 made their Christmas Communion. The Westminsters really adopted the House as their own, producing debates and concerts with astounding facility. Their machine-gunners (who at that time were only specialists within the battalion) were the prime movers in the transformation of the big hop-loft into the Chapel, being quick to grasp its artistic possibilities. I can see them now fixing the great red hangings which the Bishop of Winchester had sent us from the old private Chapel at Southwark. This accomplished, our altar was removed upwards, and around it

gradually gathered many memorial gifts of exquisite taste, and many still more sacred associations. It was a signaller of the Westminsters, now an officer on the Army Staff, who first sketched the Chapel. This sketch I sent home to my friend Mr. E. W. Charlton, R.E., who made from it the etching* that has often been produced without acknowledgment in illustrated papers under such absurd titles as "a Chapel in the front line trenches."

On December 19, four days after the House was opened, the company of the Westminsters which had just gone up into the support at Potizje, having had their Christmas party, and crackers to boot, in Talbot House the day before, met a crisis characteristically. That night a gas attack and a heavy bombardment broke suddenly on our local lines. Things looked quite dirty, and a message got through to the company in support to hold not only their support line but the Potizje Road itself. For the latter task seven men were all that could be spared. Five of these crouched on the road itself, with one in the

* Unfortunately, owing to its size, this cannot be reproduced here.

ditch each side. Beyond their rifles they had one machine-gun, which they trained to sweep the road. They wore stuffy P.H. helmets with good cause, for that night the gas cloud travelled further back than Vlamertinghe. Here comes the inimitable Westminster touch. They wore on the top of their masks their paper caps out of the Christmas crackers, and one rifleman insisted on brandishing a toy water-pistol, which he was at pains to fill at an adjacent shell-hole. This I heard at 2 a.m. on the 23rd, when a company that had been badly cut up came down to rest next door, waking the sleeping street with their indomitable "Rogerum."

I have not yet explained the House's name. It was Colonel May's doing entirely, and nothing delighted me more than to find that Neville also was a man under authority. We had, after many wild suggestions, agreed on some tame and non-committal title, and having contrived six feet of stretched canvas, were busy on the first letter of "Church House," when Colonel May arrived and announced that the House should be closed there and then if we did not call it

Talbot House. Despite Neville's protests, the name was fixed forthwith. It had about it the homely flavour of a village inn, and for its deeper note there was the thought of the commemoration of Gilbert Talbot, whose grave in Sanctuary Wood held the body of one who would have been to English public life what Rupert Brooke began to be to English letters.

CHAPTER VI

During the spring and early summer of 1916 the young House throve greatly. The old division at last went out, after keeping the flag flying in the salient for a whole year on end, and trained intensively for the Somme. Just before they went, on April 19, the Bedfords had a company blown to bits on the northern sector, and K.S.L.I. had to re-establish the so-called line. It was in the counter-attack that my old school-fellow, Alec Johnston, was killed, whose articles "from the front" in *Punch* helped thousands to laugh when else they would have cried. The night before he had come into Talbot House with a half humorous solemnity.

That was always one of the strange realities of life at the House: you never knew whom you would see again. Harold Bates left the door one Sunday morning, and had his leg shattered when just across the Square.

THE BACK OF TALBOT HOUSE FROM THE GARDEN, IN MARCH, 1916

Major Street arrived to go on leave with ten inches off his walking-stick, and his two brother officers wounded by the same shell as they were walking down through Vlamertinghe. In the early summer, boastful of the beauty of the garden, we put up a notice saying: "Come into the garden and forget about the war," and almost the first acceptance of the invitation was intimated by arrival of a 5·9 which blew sideways into the House, mortally wounding a Canadian who had come in with his brother to write a joint letter home. In point of fact, this was the only fatal casualty within the House. During the varying fortunes of the salient shells have crossed and recrossed the roof from three points of the compass at least. Bombs have landed in the garden, in the street, in the Magazin next door. One bright afternoon in the summer of 1917, when there were close on 700 men in the House and garden, a big naval shell blew the house next door into a cocked hat, but only slightly wounded one man on our veranda. I do not comment on this, but I have heard older soldiers than I ever want to be say what they thought about it.

It is not to be supposed, however, that shelling was a daily affair. Until the Somme battle began the town got something once a week on an average. During the "third battle of Ypres" it was bad enough to be closed to troops for four days. During 1917 the pressure on it was greatly relieved. Of more recent days I may speak later.

But so far as possible, the House took no interest in the war. On its walls were great maps, not of the front, but of England, Canada, and Australia. On the great map of England, London and Liverpool are worn away by much digital discovery, and a scientific spy could tell the territorial locality of the successive divisions by the superimposition of the finger-prints. In all things so far as possible the House maintained a civilian standpoint, not out of any disloyalty to the Cause, or to the distinguished soldiers who made the House possible, but because its whole *raison d'être* was always to be an Emmaus Inn, a home from home where friendships could be consecrated, and sad hearts renewed and cheered, a place of light and joy and brotherhood and peace. The discipline of

the House was therefore not enforced by Army orders, but by light-hearted little notions, that arrested the reader's attention and won his willingness on the right side, *e.g.*:

"IF YOU ARE IN THE HABIT
OF SPITTING
ON THE CARPET AT HOME,
PLEASE SPIT HERE."

"The waste-paper baskets are purely ornamental.
"By Order."

"This is a library, not a dormitory."

"No AMY ROBSART stunts down these stairs."

TO PESSIMISTS, WAY OUT ☞

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or by use of the old advertising dodge of mis-spelling:

"Down these stairs in Signal phial."

"No swaring aloud hear."

or to keep the billiard cloth from being cut more than essential to enjoyment:

"The good player chalks his cue before he plays;
The bad player afterwards."

Over the door of the chaplain's room was a legend, invented by a beloved physician who for more than a year was treasurer of the House. This scroll ran: "ALL RANK ABANDON YE WHO ENTER HERE." Under its ægis unusual meetings lost their awkwardness. I remember, for instance, one afternoon on which the tea-party (there generally was one) comprised a General, a staff captain, a second lieutenant, and a Canadian private. After all, why not? They had all knelt together that morning in the Presence. "Not here, lad, not here," whispered a great G.O.C. at Aldershot to a man who stood aside to let him go first to the Communion rails; and to lose that spirit would not have helped to win the war, but would make it less worth winning. There was, moreover, always a percentage of temporary officers who had friends not commissioned whom they longed to meet. The padre's meretricious pips seemed in such cases to provide an excellent chaperonage. Yet further, who knows what may not be behind the private's uniform? I mind me of another afternoon when a St. John's undergraduate, for duration a wireless operator with artillery, sat

chatting away. A knock, and the door opened timidly to admit a middle-aged R.F.A. driver, who looked chiefly like one in search of a five-franc loan. I asked (I hope courteously) what he wanted, whereupon he replied: "I could only find a small Cambridge manual on palæolithic man in the library. Have you anything less elementary?" I glanced sideways at the wireless boy and saw that my astonishment was nothing to his. "Excuse me, sir," he broke in, addressing the driver, "but surely I used to come to your lectures at —— College." "Possibly," replied the driver, "but mules are my speciality now."

This play-acting was of course to be expected when the H.A.C. and the Artists were in the neighbourhood, but there is scarcely a unit that has not cases of it to smile at. A battery was sent to the House one day to borrow some prayer-books of sorts. I asked whether they wanted to borrow a padre of sorts as well. A chit from the adjutant came back: "No, thanks all the same. The Rev. and Hon. Bombardier L—— always takes our services for us." As this is not yet another book on Christianity in the Army, the com-

batant priesthood cannot be here discussed, beyond stating (1) that the soldiers' sentiment seems strongly against it—*e.g.*, a debate in which only two padres and two men voted for it, and 200 against it. This may be mere sentiment, but it is true. (2) None the less, a combatant diaconate conferred on active service would be, in the writer's belief, a really prized position, and one invaluable as an adjunct to the work of the brigade padre. But the Church will never experiment until its heart is set at liberty.

In point of mere financial standing, the number of men in the ranks who own cheque-books that do not run dry as quickly as Cox's is a continual source of amusement. Talbot House has, for instance, received quite £50 in donations from one R.A.M.C. sergeant; and another who took a leading part in our debates took a triple first at Oxford in his time.

This mention of debates leads on to a word or two about those that used to be held at Talbot House, and, knowing as I do the suspicion with which they are regarded in some quarters, I affirm the more gladly that if rightly shepherded, they are far from being

subversive of discipline. The Englishman at least is innately conservative, and the acme of progress in his thought is the steam-roller which has slowly reached the further edge of a new layer of flints on a road, and then proceeds majestically backwards. Given a couple of men with a red and green flag, and a horse that has to be led past on its hind-legs, and his vision of Reconstruction is complete. Extremists of course there are, but the very fact of freedom of speech robs them of the atmosphere of martyrdom which they love to breathe ; and the playful badinage with which the robust common sense of the majority meets their propositions tends to tarnish their denunciations. After much experience, I am profoundly convinced that if put in possession of the real facts, a British jury more nearly approaches infallibility than any College of Cardinals. The only trouble is that their standard of general education is so low. Put the product of the old elementary school side by side with the men from overseas, and his mental equipment is pitiful. He is perhaps most conscious of this himself, and a sense of ignorance is far more widespread than a sense

of sin. The overseas man with his freedom from tradition, his wide outlook on life, his intolerance of vested interests, and his contempt for distinction based on birth rather than worth, has stirred in the minds of many a comparison between the son of the bondwoman and the son of the free.

But the sense of justice is deep-rooted in them both, and hardships only deepen the comradeship between those who are mutually affected by them. In really grim situations, if shared in common, it is part of their code to grouse only about the trivial inconveniences, and to remain dumb as to the horrors. But glaring inequalities of distribution, whether of safety, leave, or pay out here, or of wealth in secular or ecclesiastical life at home, provoke them to a sustained indignation; and the fact that within its own household the Church fails in equity as conspicuously as the State is a running sore to the consciences not only of many keen Churchmen, but also of many bystanders as well. The Englishman with a grievance makes a volcano out of a molehill.

Debates had rigidly to eschew all Army topics—except that there was always a hardy

annual on the progress of the war. The voting on this was generally more instructive than the speeches, so I tabulate the results as follows:

January, 1916. That this House is decidedly convinced that the war will be over this year. Carried by 150 to 8.

„ 1917. That this House is firmly convinced that the war will be over this year. Carried by 200 to 15.

„ 1918. That this House is profoundly convinced* that the war will be over this year. 80 to 80. Carried by casting vote.

which record provides the philosopher with one more instance of the futility of prophecy, though it must be remembered that the voting was more an indication of *morale* than of reasoning faculties. In 1916, all the speaking practically was against the motion. It was listened to with amused toleration, but when it came to voting, the silent optimists stampeded the House.

* Compare Mr. Ronald Knox's *mot* concerning the current ecclesiastical synonyms for "I think"—(1) *The Curate, "Men, I know."* (2) *The Bishop, "We are profoundly convinced."* (3) *The poor old Vicar, "One does feel somehow, doesn't one?"*

More serious debates were concerned with the Economic Position of Women, whereat there was no trace of sex hostility, the Nationalisation of Railways, the Drink Problem, the Ethics of "Scrounging,"* Ireland, Federation, etc. A debate most interesting, both in its matter and its spirit, was on the Colour Problem in the Empire, at which two British West Indian sergeants made excellent speeches in English to an audience largely composed of Ausies and Canadians. Beyond the formal debates, the House ran in 1916 and 1917 a series of lectures on Town Planning, the Housing Problem, Back to the Land, etc., when officers with professional knowledge of the questions received the keenest and closest appreciation. Such enterprises, again, have their pitfalls, and I remember my qualms at one of these meetings when a man I knew to be bitter got up in question-time. He said, however: "I like the Army even less than most of you here" (awkward pause), "but I can't go away to-night without telling the

* A word of unknown origin, commonly in use among regular divisions, for which Territorials employ "winning" or "making" as a synonym.

officer that it has made all the difference in my outlook from henceforth to see he is ready to come here at the end of his day's work and put in an hour or so helping us to understand rightly things we have so much at heart."

This, by the grace of God, is an earnest of the spirit of unity that the Army is bringing home with them, and I was not less delighted to find the obverse of it in a Hampshire village I know well, where dwells in his old age a staff colonel of the old school. He had, last time I saw him, been reading Gerard's great book on Germany. This had been subsequently lent to the blacksmith, who, while politically pestilent in the colonel's eyes, has redeeming features as a village cricketer. The upshot of the loan was not one but a series of confabulations, which resulted in the verdict: "A damned socialist he is, padre, but upon my word there's sense in some things he says."

So the great need of England—a unifying principle based on a mutual appreciation—is less far from attainment than it was before the war.

CHAPTER VII

THE STAFF

THE heading of this chapter sounds an ominous one; but the word is here used in its civilian, not its military, significance, and my purpose is to give a glimpse of the various crews and complements who signed on and off the House. Only one besides myself has been with the House from the beginning, and I reserve what I dare say of him to the end of this chapter.

At first the House was excellently staffed by an N.C.O. and four men of 17th Field Ambulance, but after four months these were withdrawn to their units and replaced by Guardsmen under Sergeant Godley of the Coldstreamers. Some humourist on G.H.Q. had arranged at the time—April, 1916—that the Guards and the Canadians should occupy the town together, and the result was as instruc-

tive as it was amusing. In the Guards' area, to a civilian encountering them for the first time, the first feeling was one of dismay. N.C.O.'s and privates were unable to share the same rooms, and when one returned from shopping in their quarter of the town, the problem of returning salutes while leading home a primus stove, however lawfully purchased, was harassing to the last degree. Ultimately I became so nervous of these ordeals that I walked only by night in the Guards' area, and then said "Friend" hurriedly in the dark to the buttresses of the church. In the Canadian area there was no such shyness, though in their later days saluting became, I believe, quite in vogue with them as well. It was a liberal education as well as a privilege to walk the Rue de Boeschepe in company with Canon Scott, though his extraordinary popularity made progress slow. "Well, I'll be damned! it's Scott," an old friend greeted him with. "Sure, and I hope you'll be no such thing, Jim. I don't know what the Government pays me this enormous salary for if you are," replied the canon. One April day a popular Canadian major burst in upon "a bunch of boys" in their billet with:

"Boys! get a move on; the Guards are drilling in the Square. It's a sight worth coming over the water to see." A few minutes later, in the midst of a happy crowd smoking and laughing, he stood and pointed out the most salient features of that majestic spectacle. I can yet see that living study in contrasts, and thank God that the Empire is wide enough to hold them both together. Yet the Guards were not only admirable—they were actually lovable. In no division that ever came our way was there so strong a family feeling. There was rivalry, but it was a rivalry towards a common ideal. There was hard and minute discipline, but the task was hard before them. The officers would do anything for their men, and the adjutant knew them and their home circumstances sometimes to the third generation. Even the R.S.M. would unbend enough to ask of a man returning from leave when Jim would be ripe for Caterham, and how the old man was doing. Of surviving Guardees who were true Talbotousians I cannot speak freely, but one of our best friends was Lieutenant Guy Dawkins, of 2nd Scots Guards, who had taken his commission thither from the London

Scottish. A critic of men better qualified would have been hard to find, for his reputation stood high before the war in the L.A.C., and he was so deeply possessed by the fighting spirit that he died more of disappointment than of his wound early in the Somme offensive. It was he who discovered to me the fact so hard for the civilian mind to grasp—that in the very fixity of the gulf between each grade of command lay the scope for an intimacy and mutual understanding impossible otherwise. Elsewhere the younger officer might feel that too much solicitude for his men might prejudice his caste; but here, where he was almost of another clay, he could, and indeed must, take their comfort and welfare as his supreme concern.

Of the many conquests of the Guards in this war, none was more complete than that of Talbot House. We dreaded their arrival, but longed for their return. The House was never so musical as when Quarter-Master-Sergeant Reynolds brought in his glee-party of Welsh Guards, so numerous that there was scarcely room for the audience; nor, in domestic matters, were the floors ever so spotless, the

lamps so well trimmed, or the garden so neat, as under the régime of Sergeant Godley.

A few weeks before the Somme began, it became clear that the House could no longer stand the strain of its double obligation both to officers and men; so we bombed the officers out, and, with the modesty characteristic of padres, took over for the exiles the premises of "A" Mess of the Guards' Division in a house hard by. Here and thus the Officers' Club, Poperinghe, began under the control of Neville Talbot. Subsequently, to meet the manifold problems of catering, etc., in view of the tremendous concentration in 1917, it was handed over to E.F.C., who maintained it until the evacuation in the spring of the following year.

Scarcely was this new House opened than the Somme swept Guards and Canadians alike southwards, and the salient became for the first time in its history a quiet spot for weakened divisions to maintain. Hitherto the average number of daily casualties passing through the Casualty Clearing Stations in the district had been seldom less than 200. From that time till the following February even Ypres was a

THE LOUNGE BUILT BY SOME CANADIANS IN 1917.

place comparatively well suited for open-air exercise.

The Somme brought us an unexpected blessing in the persons of two old Q.W.R. friends, who, after their contribution to the regiment's costly participation down south, came up to recuperate in what was then known as an entrenching battalion. By the courtesy of the C.O., the House was allowed to attach them to its staff until they were fit to rejoin the regiment—they are both now commissioned. Needless to say, their presence cemented the old associations and reintroduced the original atmosphere. The library grew prodigiously, so that the catalogue was always inferior to the reality. Debates, whist-drives, classes, and the standard of musical taste, leapt up as if by magic. This was our happiest winter, for the divisions in occupation at the time included 38th, 39th, 47th, and 55th, and among them many enduring and undeviating friendships were discovered.

With the coming of the spring, 1917, the preparations for the Messines offensive brought the House new friends as well as old. The 23rd Division, which subsequently went to

Italy, counted its Talbotousians by hundreds; and in the ominous interval prolonged past all endurance, while the Fifth Army and the French came up for July 31, and everyone said "Hush" at the tops of their voices, the House reached the zenith of its activity. In a single day 500 francs was taken in 1d. cups of tea alone. Meanwhile the 8th Corps had built us a concert-hall, ingeniously contrived out of an adjoining hop-store. The lawns of the delightful garden were brown with men basking like lizards in the sun; the staff of the House was augmented to seventeen — its maximum strength. The 18th Corps appointed a committee of management, which did yeoman service, under Major Bowes of the Cambridgeshires; and the 19th Corps headed our subscription lists with 1,000 francs. The House was repapered at least twice a week, and repainted on alternate Tuesdays. A test tally of ten minutes' duration at the front door revealed the entry of 117 men; and thus we lived through the summer, during which so many of our best friends died, and came with set teeth to that unforgettable autumn when division after division went forward

almost to drown, that those eternal slopes might at last be won, which, had the weather held, might have been ours in the first week of August. With the late autumn there came upon the spirit of the men a darkness hitherto unknown, and the winter did not dispel it. The Italian disaster, though spoken of with a bluff humour which I cannot quote, had its commensurate effect; only the fact that the desperate fighting of the spring was directed, for the most part, against ourselves saved us. Had the German really understood our psychology, he would have then struck at the French. Further inaction would have shaken us more than anything else. If anything would have unmanned us utterly it would have been the spectacle of a French débacle. As it was, we had no time to think; and it is thought which unnerves the British, as it inspires the French.

This chapter began as a history of the staff of the House, but seems even more unfaithful to its title than the rest. It had therefore best be brought to a close with some account of the one permanent member of the staff besides myself. This can be done the more

readily in that he is not one much given to literary tastes, and I can thus sing his praises more freely than I should else dare to do. Permit me, therefore, to introduce you to a real old soldier — "the General," as he was universally known to three generations of Talbot House clientèle, and to all the children of the neighbourhood. On and off the Army has known him for thirty-one years as No. 239, Pte. Pettifer, A., 1st The Buffs; and though now attached on grounds of debility to what is vulgarly known as an Area Enjoyment Company, the peak of his cap retains the dragon that no right-thinking man would desire to see replaced. He has refused to put up his proper array of good-conduct badges, as they would interfere with the set of his sleeve over his elbow. For chest protection he wears a Military Medal, an Indian Frontier ribbon, the South African, and the so-called Mons. He is sagacious past belief in the ways and byways of the Army, which he entered as a band-boy in the year of my birth. A certain faded photograph of a cherub incredibly pipe-clayed, and of a betrousered young warrior with an oiled forelock emerging beneath a

hat like an inverted Panatella box, repose in his wallet, and may be seen by diplomatic approach on the general subject of Brodrick caps. Long ago he might have put up sergeant's stripes; yea, and have been by now Q.M.S., or even R.S.M.; but he would not. Uneasy lies the arm that wears a crown, and to be "the General" is honour enough in his honest old eyes. There is, indeed, a matter touching his proficiency pay concerning which he does not rest content. The correspondence whereby it is finally to be exacted, as it has long ago been deserved, now travels to and fro by parcel-post, and at the time of writing* lies heavy on the conscience (let us hope) of the instructor in musketry at the depôt, whose apostolic predecessor should long ago have testified to Pettifer's proficiency with a Lee-Enfield.

In the intervals of civilianism which he has experienced "the General" has adopted a mode of life as modest as any affected by the great staff officers of *la Grande Armée*. One is given to understand that, if country-bred,

* This part of the narrative was written in May, 1918. Hence various painful inconsistences in these fitful pages.

they have the habits of Cincinnatus; if town-dwellers, they have a penchant for the trade of tobacconist. Pettifer, for his part, lives in South Hackney, and drives a capacious cart. Trust an old infantryman to find something in peace-time which keeps his feet off the ground! I wonder whether the demobilisation authorities realise this deep-rooted desire for an antithesis, illustrated in the other sphere by the story of the Navy man who proposes to march inland carrying an oar until he reaches a spot where he is challenged with: "What in hell is that thing on your shoulder?" Then, he says, he will plant the oar, and settle down for life.

Pettifer's only walks abroad are with "the Nibs"—young Arthur in particular—on Sundays, when Hackney is left far behind. Times are when Arthur is weary, whereupon the following dialogue has been known to ensue:

P. "'R'you tired, Art?"

A. "No, daddy, not tired; but, daddy, do carry me."

This anecdote, forthcoming at the end of a long and rather rough journey near Ypres,

breathes a philosophy of religion identical with Herbert's:

> "If goodness lead them not then weariness
> Will toss them to my breast."

One might suppose that so old a soldier could have no illusions left. But if, as some would have us think, faith in human nature is so to be classified, then is "the General" the most offending soul alive. To him all men are as incapable of sustained deceit as he is himself. I have known him, however, wildly deceitful for a whole half day on end—*i.e.*, the morning of April 1, when it is prudent to avoid him. One day in Hackney he took a stranger home to share—or rather not to share—his dinner. After which, the problem arose as to the means whereby their guest might best return to South Australia, whence he had mysteriously been spirited to South Hackney. Seeing perhaps incredulity in the face of Mrs. P., "the General" proceeded to lend his guest five shillings towards the inestimable expenses of the voyage; and further recommended, with much sagacity, a visit to the neighbouring Home and Colonial Stores, who were persons,

from their very title, obviously capable of advising upon so Imperial a matter. "And d'you know, sir," said Pettifer, when we had reached this point, "I'm sure that young fellow sailed on one of them ships that was never heard of again? I giv 'im my address, and everything, but I never once had a line from 'im from that day to this. An' the missus didn't 'arf strafe, neither!" When this particular war broke out, Pettifer got down from his cart, left the missus with one less dinner to see to, and the nibs without their Sunday escort, and rejoined the Buffs. In November they arrived in France, and wintered in the bracing locality of "Armonteeres," coming to the salient in May, 1915. A year after his landing he was told to report as batman to a new and unknown chaplain; but even this was better than the listening-post job that he had "clicked for" (and volunteered for) again and again. Nothing had really impressed him during the first year, except the occasion when he had halted and refused passage to his brigadier. What that distinguished officer said, what the sergeant said, and what the sentry triumphantly replied, must be lost like the grouse

in the gun-room. But by November, 1915, there were only some twenty-eight of *the* Buffs still with the regiment. A big new draft, five hundred strong, had reached them, selected, so the story ran, by the following process. Some nine hundred would-be Hussars were paraded somewhere at home; and the following commands were given:

"Roman Catholics, one pace to your front."
"Church of England, stand fast."
"Other religions, one pace to the rear."

The Roman Catholics were drafted into some Irish regiment, the Non-Conformists into a Welsh formation, and the five hundred who stood fast found themselves in the Buffs. I cannot say that the ecclesiastical gain was such as to recommend the revival of the Test Acts. There is a story of a certain inebriate, who, upon being thus reproached; "I thought you were now a teetotaler," replied: "So I am, ma'am, but not staunch." Though the gallant five hundred stood fast for their faith on that question, they evinced no remarkable churchmanship on their arrival. But they were staunch enough in face of Fritz. It was

one of their lieutenants, I think, who retailed conversation overheard on a very bad black evening: "Well, if we're winning this —— war, God 'elp the losers."

Pettifer, having at the first interview characteristically announced his inability to meet any domestic requirements, soon developed unique capacities in that direction. Shortly after we fetched up at Talbot House, his powers of acquisition made themselves only too visibly felt. Like Horace in the "Brass Bottle," I became afraid to mention a need lest its fulfilment should bring disaster and disgrace. I was, for instance, overheard to say that a carpet for the Chapel was most desirable. Within an hour the carpet had arrived. Enquiry revealed the painful fact that it had come from next door. "They won't be wanting it, sir; they *do* say the family are in the sou' of France." It is incumbent upon the clergy to take their stand at such moments upon bed-rock principle. "General, I can't say my prayers kneeling on a stolen carpet." Silence hereafter for a space: then a bright idea. "Well, sir, if yer won't 'ave it in the church, it'll do lovely for yer sitting-room."

When even this brilliant alternative is dismissed as Jesuitical, and the carpet restored to the place it came from, a few days elapse tranquilly. Then "the General" scores heavily one morning: "Yer remember that carpet, sir?" I admit it. "Well, the A.S.C. 'ave scrounged it now."

But God forbid that "the General" should be thought anti-social or unneighbourly. Nothing could be further from the truth. This jackdaw trait is only in relation to things lying useless and idle, which none will miss; and it is more than outweighed by a willingness to give of his own cheerfully, whether or not it can easily be spared. He is withal the most adaptable of companions, and will find, in the most unlikely places, neighbours from Hackney who deal with the very same tradesmen. Failing this, he will inaugurate a discussion on that unfailing "Ruy Lopez" of the Contemptibles' conversation—what is the oldest regiment in the Army? He is never at a loss in any British atmosphere, and in an incredibly short space of time will effectively "smarten up the parade." In foreign society he is equally at his ease, largely because he has eschewed all attempts at their methods of

speech, and continues, like so many of the best Englishmen, to regard their inability to understand him as a species of chronic deafness, to be overcome by slower articulation, sedulous repetition, and a raising of the voice in utterance. It is certainly amazing what excellent results may be thus obtained. There is, moreover, not a child in Poperinghe whose face does not light up at his approach. It is they who have conferred upon him the title of "le Général,' by which he is greeted in every narrow street. And to many of the old folk as well he has been a benefactor in dark days; wheeling their "sticks" away to safety, or greatly concerned for the still more difficult removal of the bed-ridden. Fancy bed-ridden old in such a town as this has been!

On March 23, 1918, just after midnight, a great crash woke me. Before we had turned in several heavy shells had landed somewhere in the town, but none really near the House. This one was, however, obviously fairly close, and I lay unpleasantly half awake, waiting for the next one to decide me on my course of action. As yet we had no dug-out worth going to, and I was trying to summon up courage to go to

sleep again when Pettifer entered, candle in hand, *à la* Lady Macbeth. The old man was more moved than I had ever seen him.* "There's a woman screaming somewhere, and I can't-a-bear it," he said. With that he turned, and I heard him go downstairs and undo the front door. I got the staff into the dug-out, such as it was (bad policy this), while another landed—farther away this time. Then I went out and found the street twenty yards away blocked with débris. It was Cyril's restaurant, which had been blown bodily into the street. Up among the wreckage, which was momentarily threatening to subside still further, Pettifer, assisted by Jimmy, another "old sweat," our cook, was busy. A child, a man, and a woman came out by some miracle alive and uninjured. These were the only survivors from among the eleven inmates, though at the time we had hopes for more, as there were still groans to be

* On a previous occasion, when I had dared to leave my bed and suggest to Pettifer some precautionary move downstairs, I had been soothed with the reply, "You just stay where you are, sir. What I say is, if it's got yer, it's got yer."

heard. The man came down in his shirt only, and besought me in a dazed way for leg covering. I had a greatcoat over my pyjamas, so he had my pyjama trousers then and there. Recouped with a pair of drawers, and sending across, as Pettifer required, the carpenter with a saw to work up the staircase from below if possible, I went to the Club and telephoned for the fire-escape ladder, to reach the parts of the house still standing; and thence to the A.P.M., our good friend Captain Straughan, who dressed and came on the scene with his men. Meanwhile the shelling had apparently ceased for the night, but our increased resources and the early morning light only revealed the completeness of the catastrophe. Madame Cyril was alive when reached, but died shortly afterwards. Her husband's head could nowhere be found until the following day, when it was discovered in the house opposite—blown by a grim jest of death across the narrow street and through a broken window. But these dark details are only permissible if they serve to set forth the profile of my hero the more distinctly.

If, indeed, no man may be "a hero to his own

valet," yet the converse is a proved event; and "A Dream of Honest Men-Servants, from Saul's Armour-Bearer to Sancho Panza, from Slop to Samuel Weller," would furnish a noble theme. For if, on the one hand, the plush Jeames descends from the melancholy Jaques, Old Adam and Mark Tapley, on the other hand, would acknowledge as heir to their spirit many a humble batman who has loved his officer like his own son—yea, and, if need be, has proved it by the most incontestable of evidence.

CHAPTER VIII

It is one thing to trade in light reminiscence, and that upon the friendliness of a voluntary audience. It is another for a parish priest to dwell openly on memories that do not grow less sacred, as they recede into the background of time. Truly, Talbot House had "a great altar to see to," and no Chapel in B.E.F., joyous and noble as some were, can have witnessed so many vicissitudes without, and such continuity of worship within.

Let me try, then, to tell the story of the Chapel in such sequence as is possible, interrupting the recital only with reflections that cannot be withheld; and if the narrative grows tedious, or begins to savour of the Cathedral verger's "We releads the roof once every hundred years, we does," then—break gently

with your guide, but only that you make your pilgrimage in silence.

For the first fortnight, the Chapel of Talbot House was on the floor below the attic. It was Padre Crisford, of the L.R.B., who insisted on its exaltation to the big hoploft above. The difficulty of this step lay in the fact that one wall of this attic had been holed by a shell; and even when this damage was repaired, the R.E.'s entered their caveat against the soundness of the floor. There ensued a series of consultations which grew gloomier in ascending ratio of rank. First, two London sappers danced on it, and assured us cheerily that it would stand anything. So far so good. But the lance-corporal in charge of them shook his head with the pregnant pessimism of Lord Burleigh himself. An appeal was lodged with the sergeant over him, who expressed the gravest doubts. Next, the lieutenant immediately concerned tapped and condemned the joists. His captain came in one day, and verbally countersigned this adverse verdict. The major of the Field Company trod as delicately as Agag, and left us a prey to an hourly expectation of spontaneous

collapse. In despair, we appealed to Colonel Tannet-Walker,* who, after personal inspection, had the details of the floor worked out and presented in triplicate, proving conclusively that the attic was wholly unsafe. After this we asked no more questions, but opened the Chapel therein without more ado.

Times were when it repented us of our rashness, but we lived to repent of our repentance. On Sunday nights, for years on end, with a hundred and fifty full-grown men squeezed in somehow, and twenty more upon the stairs, the Chapel rocked like a huge cradle; until we were fain to ask a congregation drilled into habits of simultaneous movement to kneel and stand in lingering succession. On occasions of shelling or bombing, or (once) of both these amenities together, the Chapel might readily have carried the congregation with it. On one Sunday night in July, 1917, there were nearly a hundred casualties at Poperinghe Station during Evensong in the Chapel. On March 18, 1918, a Quiet Day conducted by Archdeacon Southwell was held

* The originator afterwards of the elephant dug-outs in the Asylum and on the Canal Bank.

in spite of a slow methodical shelling. Several "obus" landed within fifty yards of the Chapel, but the Quiet Day went on. I can recall Celebrations and Confessions with similar accompaniments.

There was at such times a curious feeling of comfort and peace in the complete impotence which threw the mind wholly upon the unknown will of God. It was so utterly impossible to foresee the immediate future that it ceased to be a matter of great concern;* and, for the rest, the tiny light that burned above the altar shone with so tranquil a significance that some men (and real men too) preferred to go upstairs rather than down, when the neighbourhood was unhealthy.

Be all this as it may, in the attic our altar was builded, at the close of 1915. The Bishop of Winchester sent us out some splendid old hangings, dark red and dark green, which had once been in use in the private Chapel at Southwark. These were hung so as to form a baldachino, beneath which was set the carpenter's bench, raised on a rough dais.

* I speak as the most timid civilian that ever took shelter in khaki.

Perugino's "Crucifixion," cunningly framed by a Queen's Westminster in the broken top of a wicker table, with a lick of gold paint round the bamboo edging, formed the altar-piece. Subsequently this was replaced by a splendid crucifix made and presented by 120th Railway Construction Company. An exquisite silver-gilt chalice, also a memorial, with a veil of perfect Flemish lace from 6th London Field Ambulance, came later, but may be mentioned here; as also may be the gift of a Guards' officer, an altar-frontal of green and gold, the noble work of the Sisters of Hayward's Heath.

The weakness of the central space was so pronounced that we left it carpeted, but open; thus bringing the sanctuary down into the midst of the congregation, who were benched on either side. From the king-beam of the loft there hung a great gilt candelabrum, which bathed the whole Chapel in a warm glow of light, with sconces from the side walls to complete the illumination. We avoided that painful obsession of the modern church furnisher, the handsome communion rail; and a strip of carpet, flanked by two black candle-

sticks, emphasised the unity between ministrant and recipients. With a similar conception, many offers of R.E. Companies to construct a pulpit were firmly set aside. All through the three years gifts to the Chapel came in. A Confirmation chair was given in memory of a wonderful boy, Lance-corporal Archie Forrest, who was baptised and confirmed and received his Communion in the little Chapel all in six short weeks, before he and many of his comrades * passed from war to peace in the terrible summer of 1917. The great standard candlesticks made out of old carved bedposts were the gift of a Canadian gunner, in memory of the Australians and Canadians who worshipped with us. An oval silver wafer-box, commemorating Rifleman Newton Gammon, Q.W.R., supplied the bread of blessing for those who knelt where he had knelt before them. A beautiful old *prie-dieu* bore the names of Arthur Mayhew (6th London) and William Wellings Locke (133 Field Ambulance). Many other dedications on pictures and on candlesticks, Bible † and Missal, spoke of the

* P. Special (*i.e.* Gas) Company, R.E.

† The experimental experience of Talbot House found

saints that had been of Cæsar's household, and lifted the hearts of those that came after out of the loneliness of their discipleship into a fellowship with many witnesses.

This inventory of ornaments is, perhaps, a tale of little worth in the judgment of those who are accustomed to the lavish elegancies of a home parish. Yet such will bear with me, when they remember how far a little beauty went amid such surroundings as ours. To live day after day not only in danger but in squalor; to be gipsies in season and out, in a nightmare fit for Cain; to be homeless amid all that is hideous and disheartening, habituated only to a foreground of filth and to a horizon of apparently invincible menace; to move always among the wreckage of men's lives and hopes, haunted not only by a sense of being yourself

that Church notices, put together with forethought, were valuable as an occasional alternative to a first lesson; and that the New Testament lesson gained greatly by a distribution of books to all the congregation, "Weymouth" then being read aloud and followed intently. Half the difficulties of the use of the Prayer-book are overcome, if the number of the page is given out clearly. The unfamiliar are thankful for this guidance; and those offended are worth offending.

doomed to die, but by an agony of mind which cried out at every step against the futile folly of the waste of time and of treasure, of skill and of life itself—this is what war meant to a soul sensitive to such impressions. Those at home, who were sympathetic to such information, heard with imaginative ardour of services held in strange places, and from their cushioned pews sighed for experiences so unconventional and uplifting. But crudity, especially when muddy, is a tonic that can lose its stimulative value, and become merely repulsive. Thus it was that the homely beauty of the Chapel, with its inward gift of hope and fellowship, drew many who learnt their hunger in the grimmest school which the spirit of man has yet experienced; and eyes, hardened by indomitable will to withstand the brutalising obscenities of war, softened to appraise our simple seeking after sweetness and light.

How far this contrast exists in civil life, and whether its operation is likely to be similar in effect, I cannot here inquire. Yet my rede would be that the Church is indeed lacking in a wise and wide conception of its task, if it fails to employ its heritage of beauty in ceremony

and ornament, in the midst of a civilisation so squalid and so drab as ours. Yet it must always be remembered that the task of the Church is not completed, until this contrast ceases to exist; and that it is in the clubs, in the schools, in the streets and homes themselves, that we must no less be lovers of the beautiful.

Certain other relics there were in the Chapel that had a pathos all their own—a figure of the Virgin brought down triumphantly by a tired man from a German dug-out beyond Pilkem, early in August, 1917; a linen streamer (visible on the picture post-card) that came from Ypres Cathedral; a wooden carving of a monk, found in the ruins of Vélu on the Somme, and brought as a gift to the Chapel by a delightful gunner,* who was killed before he could deposit it in the place whither he had brought it with such loving care. Even the small semicircular windows were transformed by the ingenuity of the 14th Motor Machine Gunners into a passable semblance of stained glass, and when the rest of the windows of the house were blown in these remained intact.

Church music was an early problem of

* Corporal Charlie Payne, 18th Siege Battery.

pressing urgency; and in January, 1916, Major Street arrived back from leave with a portable harmonium somehow blended with his kit. This groan-box, though much given to weakness at the knees, served us faithfully for six months. In Holy Week, 1916, I managed to borrow Godfrey Gardner,* then lieutenant in the Suffolk Regiment, for a week's duty at Talbot House, and his skill on this tiny instrument was a miracle of adaptation.

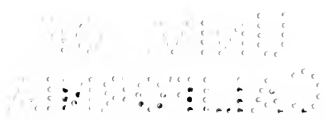
That first Holy Week, observed as it was with a completeness never before attempted in a place so near the line, taught us all much. The daily services were full, and the Three Hours Service conducted by Neville drew together a cluster of about fifty Christian men,† intent upon a common homage to One whose way of suffering they themselves now approached with a sympathy and admiration born of their own experience. Only the day before there had been bloody doings near the Canal at Boesinghe, when a company of the Bedfords had been blown by a whirlwind con-

* Killed on the Somme in July, 1916. He was organist of the Royal Philharmonic Society.

† Among them the Corps Commander, seated between a lieutenant and a private.

centration out of a miserable travesty of a trench—E.35, I think—and the tale of the Agony and the Darkness fell upon our ears with a new sense of kinship; while the Easter message in its turn lifted our hearts to the note of a redemption of the world accomplished only through sacrifice human and divine. Easter Eve brought us gifts of spring flowers not only gathered in the ruined gardens of Ypres and Goldfisch Chateau by our own men, but also great bunches of bloom from some Belgian Nuns hard by. As an earnest of the morrow, there also came large numbers of officers and men eager to make their Confessions. Trained as I had been to regard this practice as exceptional, nothing impressed me more than the intense relief with which, throughout the three years, hundreds of the most manly and noble-minded came thus to the feet of Jesus; and the voluntary humiliation, which is there sustained, was not the penitent's alone; for the glimpse of lives plunged into realities else overwhelming, yet conscious more than ever of the dominating reality of God Himself, could but move the human assistant to a sense of awe and self-reproach. It were easier not to say

"A NIGHTMARE FIT FOR CAIN." THE MENIN ROAD, WITH HELL FIRE CORNER ON THE EXTREME RIGHT.



these things at all in the publicity of print, but this omission would be false stewardship on my part; and I feel that it is the wish of those who went thence, as some did, to their immediate death, that the secret of their spiritual strength should thus be known.

Easter Day, 1916, I shall always regard as the happiest of my ministry. We had no past evidence to assist in estimating the number of Communicants to be expected, or the times most convenient for their coming. Therefore, as an act of hope, the Holy Week and Easter Service list, printed long before in England, announced ten Celebrations from 5.30 a.m onwards. It was quite possible, especially in view of the lively state of the line, that only a few would be able to attend. The event far surpassed our hopes. Not only was every Celebration furnished well with joyful guests, but so great was the throng, and so divergent their estimates of time, that the whole of the floor below the Chapel was full of congregations waiting to replace that already above. Singlehanded as I was, I could do no more than Lift and Break and Give without pause from 5.30 until after noonday, those that

were fed being above four hundred men.* At 11.30 we sang Merbecke, greatly aided by Godfrey Gardner in the further loft, and by some of the Welsh Guards' choir. The congregation had long ago overflowed its benches, and men knelt where they could. Englishmen are awkward and self-conscious, as a rule, in worship, but there was a spirit there which set them at ease. Hymns, during the long silences of the administration, came with a quiet spontaneity, as though a voice had said "It is I: be not afraid. Handle Me, and see."

At 12.30 Colonel Hutchinson carried Gardner, myself, and the little groan-box off to lunch at his group headquarters on the Elverdinge Road. After an Easter service there, we went on to one of his batteries at Fantasio Farm. The afternoon was spring-like, and a Boche aeroplane was directing some target practice on Hale's Farm a few hundred yards away, which was used as a storehouse for the hand-grenades of that name. The farm was alight, and its

* At Easter, 1917, these numbers grew to five hundred; at Easter, 1918, on account of the military situation, only a hundred and sixty were able to come.

contents were detonating in a staccato manner. Our car swung round the narrow corner beyond the brewery at Elverdinghe, and awakened the malicious interest of the observer, who bracketed on the road behind and in front of us. By this time we were almost alongside Fantasio Farm, and the Adjutant ordered us to tumble out with the harmonium, and make our way to our destination, while he piloted the car out of danger. This we did, and, after a short respite in a friendly ditch, proceeded towards the ruin previously pointed out to us, carrying the harmonium, hymn-books, and Communion case. The farm looked deserted in the extreme, but we were not a little cheered by a notice-board on an adjacent tree-trunk displaying the following, or something like it:

FANTASIO FARM. "B.21.d.5·9."

LOST TRAVELLERS CARED FOR.
LONELY SOLDIERS CORRESPONDED WITH.

TEAS FOR TOURISTS AT SHORT NOTICE.

YOU MAY TELEPHONE FROM HERE.

We were welcomed, first into the mess, and then for reason of policy into the dug-out; for our arrival with the harmonium had apparently been marked by the cherub up aloft. When he gave over and went home to tea we also emerged, to find that the battery cow, already entitled to three gold stripes on its foreleg, had qualified for a fourth. After our two services had been triumphantly held we sped back to Poperinghe, arriving on the stroke of half-past six. Pettifer met me at the door with the news that the Chapel was packed for Evensong, and that Colwell, a dear old orderly of the House, had been badly hit in the lungs, and was anxious to see me at No. 17 Casualty Clearing Station on (or rather off) the Abeele Road. With a heavy heart I went to Evensong, asking the Motor Machine Gun captain who was there to send me down to see the boy at once after conclusion of the last Celebration.* By 8.30 we were storming

* I cannot raise here, nor indeed would I wish to do so, a discussion of the great problems of Reservation and Fasting Communion. Talbot House began with a bias against the first practice, and in favour of the second.

along the Abeele Road, but neither of us knew the exact position of the hospital. I was, however, certain that the switch railway-line led to it; so, leaving the Clyno where the railway crossed the road, I walked along the track in the dark, only to find a train drawn up on it, and that across a bridge so narrow that the coaches overlapped it on either side. It was no time for hesitation, so I crept in under the train and so along across the sleepers, a distance relatively short, but rendered interminable in imagination by my ignorance of the engine-driver's intentions. Had I known my Belgian trains then as I know them now, my fears would have been

After a while, and guided solely (as I believe we should be) by the principle that no rule, however cherished, should stand between the lay Communicant and a devout and frequent Reception, these judgments were reversed in our use. Reservation, for purposes of administration, links the tired and lonely worshipper, deterred from attendance in the morning by duty, to those who then remembered their brotherhood with him. Evening Communion, from the Sacrament thus Reserved, can come with a great silence and peace, which the haste and bustle of the morning often invade. The mere physical fasting is as nothing in comparison with the preparatory vigil of the mind and soul.

dispelled. Once across the bridge, I crawled thankfully out between two wheels, and found the tented hospital, and the patient doing better than I had dared to hope. When I got back to Talbot House I was more than grateful for my Sunday supper.

This rambling reminiscence must once more suffice where deeper thoughts lie hidden. The story of other Festivals would differ only in detail, and of every Sunday only in degree. For more than a year the little Chapel had seldom less than a hundred Communicants each week, and when London Divisions were near at hand these numbers almost doubled. Certainly more than ten thousand officers and men have received the Sacrament in that Upper Room. Some eight hundred have been confirmed there, and nearly fifty baptised. Some who read these lines will remember witnessing a scene, like that in the last chapter of "The House of Prayer," when three men of the British West Indian Regiment, sponsored by three of their own sergeants already Christians, received the sign upon their foreheads. The congregation at the time—a weekday Evensong—included

Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, as well as men from the Old Country ; and a few Chinese coolies, who had found their way into the Chapel, watched with amazement actions so simple yet so profound.

Canadian churchmanship impressed me not a little. For six months in 1916 a Canadian sergeant-major was the Vicar's warden ; and it was he most appropriately welcomed the Archbishop of Canterbury * on his memorable visit to the House early that summer. Almost the first Canadians I saw were two tunnellers, who on a weekday morning set out from the old French dug-outs beyond Vlamertinghe at 5 a.m., and arrived at the Chapel for the Celebration (then at 6.30 on weekdays), having heard that the service was held daily, and being quite prepared to forego their chances of breakfast at the end of a ten-mile walk. The first Australian that came my way turned up on a Saturday night, and, having consulted the service-list, reproached me with having no Celebration he could attend : " 7.30's no good to me, Padre ; I'll be on duty by then."

* Cosmo Ebor also honoured the House with a visit on the eve of the 1917 offensive.

I offered to have a special Sunday Celebration at 6.30 for him. "Now you're talking, Padre; I'll be there, and I may bring a bunch of boys along." Next morning, at 6.30 a.m., behold twenty-seven Communicants from one Australian Field Ambulance! Most overseas men regarded their young countries as backward only in religion — "You see, Padre, Australia's a godless place compared to the Old Country." I hoped not: then there came a little flood of light—"Bill, now; why, he's not much of a Churchman. Pays his church-rate and mission-money, and it about ends there with him." With how small a proportion of C. of E. in England does it get as far as that double free-will offering!

In justice, however, to the home Church, and to the ministry of other denominations as well, it may here be added that there were very few men who did not know at home one parson whom they liked. True, they often regarded him as an exception to the general rule, but that is the English way. Some made delightfully naïve comment on their clergy, such as, "Our Vicar, of course, doesn't have much time for us. He has to

go a lot into society"; or, "Our Vicar's very High Church, and doesn't hold with open-air preachings"; but for the most part, the work of the old black-coated guard accomplishes more than they ever know.

By an order or equivalent tradition of the Regular Army, offertories are only of exceptional occurrence. But the Army, as it was in Flanders, contained many who were rich, either positively or by comparison, and generous alike beyond all control. It was largely upon the gifts of these, not forgetting the continual help of some benefactors at home,* that the financial credit of the House reposed. For three years the House collected more than the yearly maintenance of an adopted child for the Waifs and Strays Society. This little girl, whom none of us had ever seen, was the object of the most affectionate solicitude among small and great. The Military Police in the Prison at Ypres

* Parents, on the spontaneous recommendation of their boys, or in memory of sons "gone west," sent us monies for the welfare of the House; while publishers, such as the Cambridge University Press and Dent's, supplied us freely with invaluable reinforcements for the Library.

collected eagerly on her behalf even during the exceedingly rough period of April, 1917. Major Harry Jago, D.S.O., M.C., of 2nd Devons, asks anxiously for her in the last letter before his death. One Lancashire lad, than whom no more loyal friend could be met with, told me for three Sundays in succession how his officer was giving a prize for the best-kept mules. And it was not until one night, when he came in triumph and laid the prize-money in my hand for the little girl, that I knew the secret of his ambition. Yet another, having lost his sole chance of leave, through its closing down for the fighting time ahead, paid in the hundred francs which he had saved to spend at home. If any endowment ever carried blessings with it, Hannah Mitchell was blessed indeed.

But the Belgian children also profited by the same spirit; and on three occasions we fêted them with incredible energy. Their great day was always December 6, the Feast of Saint Nicholas, on the eve whereof the carrot is well and truly laid at the foot of the chimney to win the favour of his donkey at the conclusion of its precipitate downward

De H.H. Voorzitter en Bestuurleden van Talbot House, bestaande uit Officieren en soldaten van het Britisch leger, begeerende hunne kleine Belgische vriendjes als naar oude gewoonte de feestdag van St. Niklaas vreugdevol te zien doorbrengen, hebben de eer.

M.....

uit te noodigen tot het Kinderfeest, welk zal gegeven worden op 6 December om 1.30 Uuren namiddag in Talbot House, 85 Gasthuis straat.

Het feest zal bestaan uit allerhande spelen, verfrisschingen, uit deelen van speelgoed en Cinema Vertooning.

Voor de kleinen welk op heden niet uitgenoodigd zijn wordt een tweede feeste op 1 Januari.

Het spijt ons dat de geringheid van plaats waarover wij beschikken ons niet toelaat de ouders uit te noodigen. Degenen die hunne kleinen na het feest willen naar huis leiden kunnen ze om 4.30 Uuren namiddag komen halen.

THE INVITATION TO THE CHILDREN'S PARTY

career. Our parties took a prodigious amount of organising, and for weeks beforehand both the A.M.F.O. and the post corporal had their endurance greatly strained. Our first fête nearly broke down at the outset, for on the arrival of the school I approached a dismal little boy, and asked him in French what he would like to play, to which he responded with a sad philosophy: "Belgian children have forgotten their games." Sure enough, an attempt at "hunt the slipper" was a miserable failure; but the happy inspiration of an apple, smeared with ration jam, and dependent on a string, between our pensive philosopher and a rival, both blindfold, quickly attained international celebrity. Five hundred cups of tea, after they were made, proved a novelty not so palatable; but the memory of this false step was drowned in Fry's Cocoa, brewed in supplementary buckets. After this, a Pathé film of a real Belgian pre-war fête (happily, yet honestly, come by) brought the schoolmaster to his feet with a speech more eloquent than intelligible. How is it that all our Allies are born orators, and we so slow at the uptake?

The last children's party almost ended in

tragedy, for before its completion bombing began. No harm was done, and the children were imperturbable—far more so than their parents and their hosts. A rumour, however, reached Blighty, with the result that some melancholy Jaques in the House of Commons starred a question as to the number of Belgian children who had been massacred at a party in Poperinghe by bombs dropped from an English aeroplane!

Chief among other objects for which Talbot House appealed was the Service Candidates Fund, which indeed was opened by large offertories from Talbot House, the first donation being from Major Street's family. And as the whole scheme for Service Candidates, as it is now called, originated in Talbot House, and some two hundred of the original candidates enlisted there, some sketch of its inception and ideals may well conclude this chapter; for there is no movement in the Church to-day fraught with greater possibilities for good, if led with vision and practical wisdom. On the other hand, if through lack of these, through class prejudice or inadequate financial support, the movement is paralysed, then the

Church will lose its hold on the loyalty of men confident in the sincerity of its attitude towards them; and the memory of the failure will darken all our days.

When it became obvious in 1915 that the war was destined to be prolonged, the future recruitment for the ministry of the Church was a matter calling for considerable foresight. Even before the war both the number and the quality of the candidates for Orders had caused grave misgivings. This was not due, as the R.P.A. imagined, to a general intellectual defection; but rather to the miserable penury which the richest Church in Christendom was contented to consider adequate for the bulk of its ministers, and to the narrow class of society from which they were mostly drawn. Now, every year of war meant a loss of at least five hundred men to the ministry, and though in some cases that loss was only a postponement, in many more it was final. The temper and tradition of the Church of England are patriotic* to a fault. Both the

* It is interesting incidentally to observe that in the first Canadian and Australian forces the Anglican percentage was out of all proportion to the relative denominational strength.

old and new armies drew thousands of their officers from the parsonage, and every column of obituary notices contained one or more instance of the death of a young aspirant to Holy Orders.

Now, a study of the aftermath of England's last three wars showed that numbers of surviving officers in each case came subsequently into the ministry. But in armies such as we now possessed the class distinction as such ceased almost to exist; and in view of the industrial outlook it would be folly indeed if the ministry, alone among the professions, refused to recognise the justice of the principle of equality of opportunity. God forbid that His Church should cling to a fallacy so crude and so snobbish as virtually to deny that His Call can come to men of other than public school training; and when we remember that the oldest among these schools, and the senior Universities into which they flow, were first established not for the rich but for the poor (and that by the Church's own generous wisdom), the need for the reassertion of a principle as old as the Christian ministry itself, in a manner striking and unhesitating,

becomes vitally important. The conception of a Levitical tribe is purely pre-Christian; and the custom of the celibacy of the clergy, though more questionable on other grounds, at least prevented the stale inter-breeding of a small class of the community which is partly responsible for so much clericalism being co-existent with so little vital religion.

The war, with its reassertion of the vertical divisions between nations, erased, or at least softened, the horizontal divisions of class; and the time was ripe for a great forward movement on the part of the Church itself towards the ideas already seen in the working at Kelham and Mirfield. In the *Challenge* in April, 1915, the vision of a great recruitment from all ranks of the Army, resulting in colleges of men of every type and social standing, united by the experience of war, and called so as by fire, was first set forth. And in Talbot House the men were first enrolled. Later the lists grew beyond the scope of private responsibility, and were transferred to Headquarters. Bishop Gwynne consulted the Archbishops on the whole problem, with the result that the authoritative sanction of the Church was given

to the scheme; and to-day over 2,000 officers and men are candidates for preliminary training and selection.*

It is the very reverse of our aim to produce an ill-equipped ministry, and the candidates themselves are eager for a real and liberal education. But the verdict on this vital point rests with the financial authorities of the Church, and behind them in the last resort with the sympathy and steady assistance during these ensuing years of Churchpeople at large. No inanimate memorial can compare in the sight of God with a living witness, trained and equipped, and eager for his share in the task of reconciliation both of man with God and of man with man.

I cannot leave the old Chapel thus. I must climb once more the steep and narrow stairs, and find the lamp glowing above the altar in that Upper Room. It is empty else, but indeed I can people it at will. Here are many dear friends and brave hearts. Arthur Cole will be my Server, and Charlie Williams will lead the singing. Bernard Stenning, Alfred Atkinson,

* At the amazing school for Service Candidates, now established in the Prison at Knutsford, this dream is coming more than true.

Fred Burrows, Bertie Hoptrough, Cyril Russell, Basil Laurence, Arthur Aked, Landels Folkard, Percy Cooper, Bill Ogden, and a hundred more will draw near to kneel where He, who is invisible as they, may minister to them the medicine of immortality. Here, in the times of prayer, hearts have been open. Here the blind have received their sight, the lame have walked, and the lepers been cleansed indeed. O ye spirits and souls of the righteous; O ye holy and humble men of heart; O ye of the furnace seven times heated; bless ye the Lord. For it was with Him that ye walked unharmed in the midmost of the fire.

POSTSCRIPT.—On reading this chapter in proof, I find that it conveys too rose-coloured an impression of the state of religion, which those who had a finger on the spiritual pulse of the Army for any length of time were far from feeling. A League of the *un*spiritual War, had it ever existed, would have mustered a large and influential membership.

Secondly, there is no mention of party terms, an omission I do not regret. As the thing was, the open Prayer-meeting was as natural a part of Sunday worship as the Eucharist; and the House was Evangelical to the core, whatever else it added. Many Nonconformists were members of our congregation, for we all agreed to hold by our affirmative principles, and the "yeas" of religious experience do not conflict. Besides, what faith we found was Galilean, and had the gift of dawn.

CHAPTER IX

1918

THE story of the House in 1918 must be told with considerable restraint; for in the two most critical moments of that year it found itself in the bad books of certain local military authorities, and it would be ill to use demobilised freedom as a cloak of maliciousness. It was not, of course, to be expected that those concerned with issues then so vital could always permit the individual to do what he thought his duty; nor, on the other hand, was I, who had always regarded the Army rather as a sphere of work than as a school of unquestioning obedience, an individual worthy of such consideration. The humorous element in the situation is that from the point of view of Talbot House the tremendous tides of the year's campaign are chiefly memorable in their domestic results, much as in "The White

Company" the old bowman's tale of Poictiers leads his audience to doubt whether it was his looted feather-bed or the kingly crown of France that was most notably at stake.

The winter of 1917-18 was supremely wretched. The defeat of our summer hopes, and the full extent of our autumn losses, were common, though whispered, knowledge. An evil spirit for the first time troubled both officers and men; and in the inevitable stagnation the phantom of failure, ridiculed before, walked grimly abroad, and was not always challenged.

Carlyle construes man's unhappiness to come out of his greatness, and certainly this sense of failure wounded most deeply where there was most depth to wound. The Army, so Roman in its outlook and traditions,* gave under pressure of circumstance a certain attention to this phenomenon, and treated the decline in *morale* with a massage of entertainments and longer canteen hours. A bolder policy would have succeeded better, for the soldier with a mind (and in this Army such

* I am not referring to the Royal Army Chaplains' Department.

men were no negligible number) needed rather light and leading. Desertion—that most pitiful tragedy of active service—while always mercifully rare, became during these months less rare than usual, so far as my experience went. Four men in a single week gave themselves up in Talbot House in the childish hope that I could in some way undo what they had done. Rancour and ill-feeling between officers and men first then forced themselves upon my attention; and, with a sufficient audacity, we instituted, to counteract some of these poisons, a series of informal meetings called "grousing circles," to which a nucleus of trustworthy friends brought men with grievances, while a few splendidly helpful officers dropped in to listen and occasionally to advise. These meetings were so manifestly good that, when reported to the Army Staff, they were not only sanctioned, but several local troubles were quietly adjusted. The chief causes of complaint were simple in the extreme—the admitted injustice of the distribution of leave, the inequitable distribution of the bread and biscuit ration, in which the infantry (as usual) came out the losers, the absence of restaurant accommodation for men,

the grotesque inequalities of pay, and so forth. In the suburbs of war, where Poperinghe now found itself, the pulse of brotherhood beat far more slowly than in the slums—that is, in the line itself; and throughout the world of auxiliary forces (mechanical transport, etc.) the strain could indeed be severe, but the spirit of unity and sacrifice was lacking. As for the West-End of Warfare, it was, from the point of view of men who had experienced it for a short while, conducted in the manner of a mixed workhouse; where the sins of the worthless were visited upon the respectable, as a deterrent which should reduce their visits to a minimum. Even the cleavage between the temporary and the time-serving Army was now more marked than hitherto. The two variant attitudes of mind may be summarised in two sentences: the civilian soldier said: "I don't mind the war so much, but I can't stick the Army"; the regular replied: "When can we finish with this beastly war and get back to real soldiering?" It is partly the distaste for this "real soldiering" that emptied the Army so early and so fast after the armistice. A great exodus from an ancient fraternity is always a melancholy

spectacle, and impoverishing in the double loss that it entails. The Church, after the death of Wesley and the secession of his followers, found its life for a generation bound in shallows, while the seceders for their part have grown to feel a sense of loss not the less real because so difficult of definition. So the great man-slide of these last few months from the B.E.F. discovers, perhaps, already in many hearts feelings of a mutual understanding which in the time of union were as hotly repudiated.

All this, while we stand still on the threshold of the 1918 campaign! I kept a diary of sorts during this last year for the first time; but its entries are often irrelevant, as the patient reader of these chapters has cause enough to conjecture. Notes of engagements and précis of meetings are most strongly in evidence; but even these have interest. By example, on January 17 Colonel Bushell,* of 7th Queens, arrived to beg for waste-paper and sandbags of sufficient quality, if possible, to make gaiters and snow-boots for his depleted battalion. He and his major were both great friends of the House, and we strove to meet his requirements

* A famous commander and posthumous V.C.

with two or three bundles of sandbags, which we had acquired by private influence from a certain dump with a view to a dug-out of our own. For the paper, several bundles of highly patriotic leaflets which had recently arrived seemed admirably adapted for the purpose, being both hot and strong.

Other entries show the House proceeding normally with not more than the customary series of crises in each twenty-four hours. Chaplains' conferences, journeyings to outlying parishioners, daily services, concerts, debates, whist-drives, etc., stretch out like the line of spectral kings before Macbeth. All the winter we were hard at work on education both civic and scholastic, and, indeed, quiet talks on housing drew more men than many a noisy game of "House." We had, moreover, at this time a dramatic party of our very own, which acted, with amazing éclat, "Detective Keen" and similar dramas, complete to the last revolver and the dumbest telephone. As a spring pantomime, we rose to "The Critic," in which I regret to recall that I doubled the parts of the Beefeater and Tilburina, an arrangement at which Sheridan would have shuddered.

On March 19 we even gave a performance in the Y.M.C.A. just inside the Lille Gate at Ypres, being (I think) the only theatrical party that accomplished this. The New Zealanders there paid courteous attention for a while; but the noble work of the master wit might have found no purchase on their Caledonian souls, had not the whispering whine of several gas-shells without caused the heroine suddenly to dart into the wings, reappearing thence with a "boxspirator" at the ready. This quite broke the ice, and all went merrily henceforth. The next day, I believe, a gas-shell pitched on the billiard-table there, and a few days later the hut itself was wrecked. Even as we spoke the mocking lines, "England's fate, like a clipped guinea, trembles in the scales," the fact indeed was so.

Thursday, 21st (Vernal Equinox), is full of notes of a conference on moral education, one of a series we were holding in the House on Thursdays. Down south the storm was then bursting in its full fury, and locally we had cause to guess as much, since the whole area had been painfully lively for a week past; and long-range guns were distributing a daily massage

of peculiar potency upon our back areas. Both Cyril's crash and the Quiet Day elsewhere referred to occurred in this week.

On Sunday, 24th, small congregations ruled —only twenty-six making their Communion. The Sunday night was highly electric, and Pepys refers to rats in the kitchen—which means, I think, that he moved his bed downstairs. On Lady Day a confidential letter came through from A.H.Q., conveying with characteristic kindness a word of warning from *ipsissimus ipse* against any concentration of troops in Talbot House. "Ypres," so the letter runs, "may soon be a far safer place than Poperinghe." Two days later my beloved Conductor for the Three Hours was prohibited from coming; the good reasons underlying this bad news being inculcated during the day by a tremendous daylight pounding of the switch road near the Proven junction. Pettifer and I came in for a pinch of this, as we went down to scrounge lunch off the Area Commandant of S. Jans der Biezen.*

* Colonel Lord Saye and Sele. It was said that an M.F.P. once asked him in Poperinghe for his pass, and upon its presentation asked hesitatingly: "Excuse me, sir, but which of these gentlemen are you?"

A road normally more peaceful it would be hard to imagine, and we began to bowl along it, congratulating ourselves on the lorry that had picked us up, when we ran into a heavy entanglement of signal wires lying athwart the road. Thinking no evil, we dismounted; when a roar like an excursion train full of shouting holiday-makers, followed by a black volcano of earth, opened our eyes to the reason why H.M. Signals were awry. There is no loneliness so depressing and yet so stimulating as that of a road deserted on account of shelling.

The bombardment continued throughout the whole of the next day, being Wednesday in Holy Week. On Maundy Thursday it was intermittent; and I see that the Education Conference tackled "Lessons in Biology." On Good Friday there were only twenty at the Three Hours Service, and, mindful of warnings, we avoided a big evening lantern service in the House. On Saturday, among other things some Easter offerings of timber for the dug-out are noted; and on Easter Day at all the services only a hundred made their Communion in the House. Our Easter Sunday supper

was a merry meal to which about ten, both officers and men, sat down. These small and wisely mixed Sunday suppers had become by this time a regular institution, the founders of the feast being chiefly a Norfolk major, Harry Jago of the Devons, and myself.

Jago was a great joy to us all at this anxious time; indeed, it is impossible to imagine him anywhere at any time without the same thing being truly said of him. He had come in first as if by accident; and from that time onwards leapt by sheer splendour of character into a great place in our common life. I remember well one afternoon when the Devons, down from Passchendaele the night before, announced their return first by the visit of two young West-Country lads, who arrived with a present of books from a faithful sergeant. A few minutes later they were at tea, when the door of my room again opened to admit their major. Seeing their awkwardness, nothing would content him but that he should seat himself between them and draw them out both as their share in the past week's work and their Devonian lore. Beneath

a manner so young and irresistible there lay a nature deep and clear as crystal, with great selfless ambitions, and a latent reserve of strength such as is seldom encountered. Talks far into the night let me see something of this depth and intensity; and when, later in the summer, the news came of the day when "the whole battalion, colonel, 28 officers, and 552 non-commissioned officers and men, isolated and without hope of assistance, held on to their trenches north of the river, and fought to the last with unhesitating obedience to orders,"* we knew that all the trumpets had sounded for them on the other side.

Concerning the lives of such men I know no better epitaph than the great saying of Sir John Smyth to Lord Burghley on the men in Flanders (1589-90): "Consider the thousands of brave English people that have been consumed by sea and land within these few years; which have not been rogues, cut-purses, horse-stealers, committers of burglary, nor other sorts of thieves, as some of our captains and

* Citations from Orders of the Day, No. 371 of the Fifth French Army.

men of war, to excuse themselves, do report. But, in truth, they were young gentlemen, yeomen and yeomen's sons, and artificers of the most brave sort, such as went voluntary to serve of a gaiety and joyalty of mind ; all which kind of people are the flower and force of a kingdom."* " Gaiety and joyalty of mind . . . the flower and force of a kingdom "—of a truth these are riches which constitute the true wealth of nations ; and they who speak only of the loss of life fail to realise how the examples thus set of constancy and noble love sweeten for ever the spirit of the country that has bred them.

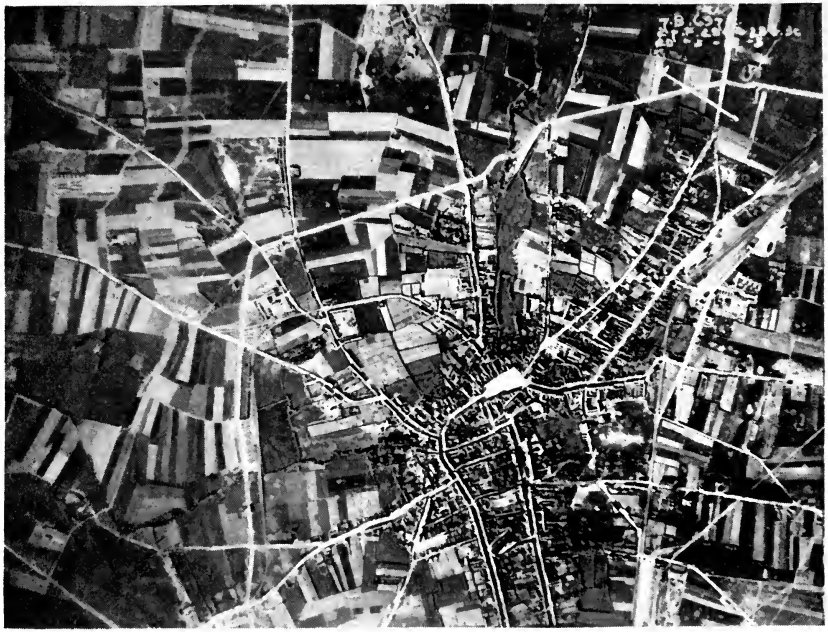
From Easter onwards the sky darkened as the spring came in. But the spirits of the Army rose to meet the emergency. Divisions, weary and depleted, held grimly on. Training-schools were broken up and their staffs reinforced their old battalions, or, merged into some new and strange formation, stopped the gaps. My old friends from Leamington,†

* I am indebted for this citation to a W.E.A. pamphlet by R. H. Tawney.

† 213 (A.T.) R.E. Company, under Captain Pengelley, M.C., who himself was killed.

who for years had formed the choir, fought as infantry in Tupper Carey's force at heavy cost. Locally, as yet, the storm had not broken; but Poperinghe became less and less attractive. Casualties in the little town increased daily, and rumours of a general retirement preyed upon our spirits. But even in the very gravity of the situation certain elements of humour were discovered. The numbers selected by fancy for the rafts on which we spoke of embarking, when our flight reached the coast, and the imaginative information as to pleasant moorings for the summer months, became the fashionable talk. Details of delightful billets, hastily vacated by units of a retiring disposition, formed a second topic of cheerful badinage.

On the night of April 12 some enormous shells dug craters the size of cottages at the junction of the Rue de Pots and the switch road. On the following day the Proven Road became impassable for hours on end. On April 16 our line was withdrawn closer to Ypres than ever before, dug-outs and roads being blown up before abandonment. On the 26th Kemmel fell, and the great wave of



POPERINGHE FROM ABOUT 2000 FT. IN 1918.
(NOTE THE SHELL-HOLES, AND THE SWITCH-ROAD.)

battle surged against the foot of the chain of low hills that had hitherto scarce heard an echo of the war. Around Poperinghe, and far back into the hinterland, lines of defence were dug and even manned. An immense engineering feat, no less than the construction of a big strategic railway from St. Momelin to Bergues, was swiftly and silently completed. Great tracts of country between Dunkirk and St. Omer were inundated, and the young crops stood like slender bulrushes amid the rising floods. The calamity of war fell lightly, however, on peasants, who lost their labours only for a season. Its full force came upon those who now filled every road with a throng, hapless and homeless, of every age least fitted for such experiences, and contriving with a dogged despair to burden themselves yet further with belongings that none but the poorest would thus essay to preserve. Hideous and detestable as trench warfare was, a war of movement, so glibly desired by the critics on both sides, has for the civilian population the terrors of a tornado, and tenfold its precipitancy and power. Yet even here there were flashes of fun to be had, as, for instance, in the story

of the doings of a Scotch officer who received an appointment with the unique title of Official Persuader to the Corps. It was his diplomatic task to persuade those peasants who clung to their menaced homes that, while the British Army was invincible, they would themselves be wise to retire forthwith into France.* Rumour said—obviously untruly—that, finding the Scots tongue useless in this labour, he had recourse to more subtle means; and that the children were bribed with centimes to cross the barrier into France in search of hypothetic sweet stores. Once there, their inability to return brought their parents after them.

Poperinghe was now systematically evacuated. Civilians were evicted as the casualties among them were daily increasing, and institutions such as cinemas were closed down. The Officers' Club, to the great distress of Sergeant-Major Hutton, its manager, was closed, and the doors of Talbot House alone remained open. Already we had received notice to quit,

* This crossing of the frontier just beyond Proven entailed exclusion from repatriation during the rest of the war.

but this order had been postponed in operation through the kind offices of the A.P.M., who, knowing the situation on the spot, saw that the existence of Talbot House was at this juncture essential from a provost point of view; for, with all the doors shut, troops still entering the town would be driven to disorder, and for the matter of that the closing of an institution so well known as Talbot House was in a real sense harmful to the general morale. Our staff was, however, reduced, and with those left to us we prepared to stand a siege.

On Sunday, April 14, my opposite number from Little Talbot House in Ypres arrived late at night with his two orderlies and a strange miscellany of sacred and secular salvage. A few days later Dr. Magrath, of Y.M.C.A., Ypres, who longer than any living man survived residence in that amazing city, joined forces with us also. Between us we reorganised the House's work to meet the new conditions. The chapel was moved downstairs, entrances and cellars were heavily fortified—again the patriotic pamphlets were admirable for filling sandbags. One shell carried away the stage of the concert-hall, and two more landed in

the garden; a bomb penetrated the water-conduit; but the House continued in the greatest happiness to administer comfort, natural and supernatural, to troops still moving through the deserted town. The most valuable fittings had already been removed into safety, thanks to our friends in the Railway Operating Department; so that if the Kaiser had succeeded in reaching the town suddenly one morning for breakfast, according to his announced intention, Talbot House would scarcely have provided him with suitable accommodation.

During these weeks the orders for our closing were frequently repeated, but we put the telescope to the blind eye. To close, when there was still much to be done that there was no one else to do, was a tragedy which only the soul of a hireling could sustain. We took every possible precaution for the safety of our customers, whose gratitude increased as their numbers grew less. Finally, on Whit-Tuesday, May 21, we received imperative orders to leave at once; and so, with great sadness, the doors of the dear old House were closed for the first time in their happy history.

And since this tale is of the House alone, or at least desires to be so, there is no need here to follow the fortunes of the exiles.

Of our subsequent re-opening on September 30, and of certain storms in certain tea-cups which ensued upon our civilian habit of acting for the best without orders in writing, the tale need not be told. In October the House was left almost high and dry, and though its work continued till January of this present year, when its lawful owner re-occupied it, those in whose service it had laboured and whose love it had claimed were either far beyond a border so long unbreakable, or across a bourne whence no traveller may return. Yet that they loved it is enough; and that it is true that they did so many letters witness, and memories more than life-long.

To have known these men, to have thought their thoughts, to have ministered in any way to their few necessities, to have stood to them as a symbol of home and joy in hours when they else had neither—this it was given in a measure to the old House to do, and to be for three dark years a pupil-teacher in the school of love.

CHAPTER X

THE INNKEEPER

By L. F. BROWNE, Captain R.A.M.C.

"A semely man our hoste was with-alle

* * * * *

Bold of his speech and wys, and wel y taught,
And of manhood him lakkedè right naught,
Eek therto he was right a mery man."

CHAUCER.

But what of Boniface himself? The good Prince of innkeepers would recognise mine host of Talbot House as not the least among his children. A history of the House would be incomplete without some delineation of the characteristics of the publican himself, so a physician has taken up the task, despite the objections of Boniface.

My only qualification for the task is that for almost a year I was in daily contact with the subject of this chapter. Having a practice of a very suburban character among R.E.'s who

THE INN-KEEPER.

were building broad gauge railways, I had a certain amount of spare time which was devoted to various forms of labour in connection with the House.

My first sight of Boniface was early in September 1916, when a little bowed old figure celebrated the Eucharist in the Upper Room. It was new to me to find one so absorbed in his great task that he was obviously oblivious of his congregation.

He had just returned from a few months' convalescence at the Base, during which Talbot House passed through many vicissitudes.

I had visited the House in August and found it practically empty. Then Neville Talbot appeared one Sunday and announced that a most wonderful padre was soon to return to the House which he had helped to create.

At that Communion service Boniface appealed for helpers. So I went and routed him out in the Officers' Club next morning. There I found that the little bowed old figure was really a juvenile like myself. We sat in the garden behind the Club and talked for hours. I discovered very soon that the situation was rather serious, for a fiat had gone forth that Talbot

House was to be closed unless audited accounts were produced within a fortnight. Apparently Army Headquarters had different ideas about finance from those which held sway in Talbot House.

But who was to do this auditing of accounts? It seemed a simple undertaking at first sight, so I offered my services. Investigation showed how rash I had been; I had rushed in where any sensible angel would very carefully have refrained from treading. The account book was exhibited to me with pride, not unjustifiable so far as its size and material went. Within, it was ruled after the approved fashion of the modern account book. But there the resemblance ceased. Genius had ignored the fettering lines and columns which bind and hamper ordinary mortals. There were five or six headings written across the page—"Furniture," "Garden," "House Expenses," "Entertainments," and one or two other items which I have now forgotten. Then there was a column for receipts. In this column there continually occurred the item "Found in officers' box," 20 frs. or 100 frs., and so on. At first sight it appeared that a dishonest innkeeper was

brazenly entering the results of his midnight researches in the baggage of his guests. Enquiry, however, showed that this really referred to the money placed in a box by the officers who used to stay the night at Talbot House in early days. This formed a considerable source of revenue.

A glance at this amazing book was followed by the enquiry, "I suppose you have got receipts corresponding to these entries?" "Oh yes," replied Boniface, "there is a whole cupboard full of them," and he flung open a cupboard in the wall as he spoke. Truly the cupboard was full—full of scraps of dirty paper with inscriptions in French and Flemish and English. Old receipts from Hazebrouck, St. Omer, Dunkirk, Bailleul, and Boulogne showed how far the range of purchase had spread. But there was no order or system in the whole.

Anyhow, Army Headquarters was informed that the accounts were being audited and that was the main thing.

A fortnight's work showed that the receipts produced did not approach the expenditure by some thousands of francs. A good many transactions had evidently taken place by cash alone.

Audited accounts could not, alas, be produced, but fortunately the financial conscience at Army Headquarters had gone to sleep again, so all was well. Audited accounts were *not* produced and the House was *not* closed. Most satisfactory.

But, strangely enough, further probing after several months revealed the fact that the House had been the gainer to a large extent by the "defalcations" of the innkeeper.

While I am on the subject of finance I must mention that bogey which constantly haunted us when a full blown Committee came into being, presided over by a Quartermaster-General. Large purchases were constantly being made from Gamages, and their bills were frequently coming in. I would question P. B. C. very sternly, "Are you sure this is all we owe to Gamages?" An affirmative reply would send me to the Committee with the assurance that £30 would clear us entirely of debt so far as Gamages was concerned. The Olympians would agree to this payment, with the severe proviso that no more purchases should be made without official sanction. I was so reduced in morale that I was willing to promise anything. P. B. C. was always kept out of the way of this Committee,

as his life was not considered safe at the hands of such dangerous men. A week or ten days would elapse, when a plaintive voice would greet me with: "Here's another bill from Gamages, but it's only a small one, £20." "But I thought the last bill brought us up to date?" "Yes, but this is for things which I ordered just before the Committee meeting."

The old account book frequently contained the entry, "Taken from cash box, 400 frs." This meant that P. B. C. had managed to get a lift to Boulogne one fine day. The correct procedure on these occasions was to empty the cash box, and sally forth to make purchases for the House—the joy of acquisition was always worth experiencing. The results of these expeditions were always exciting, both from the point of view of the wrecked accounts and from the point of view of the wonderful things produced.

Talbot House presented a most perfect illustration of "a round peg in a round hole." Those who know our innkeeper in the flesh have realised how round the peg was. But rotundity was no bar to activity: while activity was no bar to rotundity.

A pair of spectacles with large black rimmed glasses; a short substantial figure; a rather innocent expression on the kindly face—all these combined to make a living embodiment of Mr. Chesterton's famous Father Brown.

Clothing was always a trial—buttons *would* persist in coming off, breeches *would* gape at the knees, shirt cuffs *would* wear out—but after all an innkeeper of the highest order has no time to dally with such details of artificial civilisation, so my efforts to secure some sort of average tidiness were in vain.

The House was generally a scene of great hilarity, for Boniface was always full of fun. At our tea parties in his room he would offer some nervous youth a box of matches, in which all the matches were stuck to the bottom of the box. Another man would strike a match which was only intended to smoulder. Concerts and debates showed the innkeeper at his best, when his deep voice sang rollicking songs, or his quaint repartee rendered the House weak with mirth. Always ready for a rag, he found kindred spirits in many men who felt the need of letting off steam in practical jokes. I remember going with him on May-day 1917

to Bergues, where he ran riot in the quiet old town, and might have been seen walking through the streets carrying a wooden horse which he was taking back to Poperinghe.

Some of the notices of the House have been mentioned, but I must add one which is well worth recording. A sapper had been helping him with some job in his room one day, and by mistake had left his own penknife behind and had taken that belonging to Boniface. Next day a notice appeared:

"If the Sapper who helped me yesterday, and left his penknife in my room, will apply to me he will receive two apologies—

1. An apology for the trouble I am giving him.
2. The apology for a knife which he left behind."

His energies and activities were so great that he never rested. Whether he was making his weekly pilgrimage to the "slums" to visit his beloved batteries, or whether he was actually in the House, his work never ceased. Occasionally disaster overtook him in the shape of "a temperature," and then my turn came. There would be a battle from which I emerged triumphant, while Boniface retired to bed. Our great dread was "evacuation to the Base,"

so every endeavour was made to prevent his being sent to a Medical unit. On two or three occasions I looked after him myself, but once the kindly C.O. of a Field Ambulance, which was billeted close by, lent us a nursing orderly twice a day. But Boniface could never understand why the stream of visitors should not continue even though he was in bed. "Gunner Smith is coming down from Ypres and I shall be very disappointed if I do not see him; and there is that splendid Sergeant Jones of the R.E.'s who is coming in to tea." In the end I had to put a notice on his door forbidding anyone to enter. Then Boniface turned his face to the wall in anguish of spirit, and I, feeling that it had been better if I had never been born, sat in the next room and read Macbeth.

To make quite sure that no one could disturb him when his temperature was about 105, I put the old "General" on duty at his door to keep out anyone who might ignore the notice. On returning in the evening I was touched to find the General "asleep at his post" in a chair. He had probably been up all the night before, but he wakened up covered with confusion,

rather feeling that he had let down the tradition of The Buffs. However, when I came back at the same time next evening I was seized by the arm in the dim light, while a hoarse voice whispered: "You can't go in, Sir; it's the Doctor's orders." It was flattering to feel that my instructions were being so faithfully carried out after the lapse of the previous day.

During one of these spells in bed the Corps Commander of the period arrived on a surprise inspection. He was an officer of sanitary instincts, and I had the pleasure of taking him round. He made scathing remarks on the insanitary condition of the House, as evidenced by an empty matchbox lying in the garden. I sympathised with him most heartily, and experienced all the delights of being "Army" and not "Corps," so that my connection with Talbot House was entirely unofficial and irresponsible. Then I suggested that he might visit the patient, and the thrilling spectacle was witnessed of a very self-possessed publican being visited by a rather bashful Corps Commander whose bedside manner was a trifle stiff.

Only one who had no idea of time or space

or money could possibly have carried on at Talbot House. P. B. C. regarded time as an arbitrary division of the day; space was better ignored. One of his favourite dicta, on which he acted with great fidelity, was "the only way to arrive in time is to start out late: if you start punctually you will probably never arrive." Occasionally he actually proved this by experience.

But it was this spirit which enabled him to cope with hundreds of men without ever making anyone feel that he was *de trop*. Many a time I have sat in that room of his at Talbot House and watched a succession of men coming in, many of them tired and jaded after a tramp from "Wipers." "My dear old man, how ripping to see you." Boniface had the true spirit of hospitality which put the most awkward man at his ease, and made him feel that here was one who really cared nothing for a man's stripes but would be the same to all. Many a man sore from some injustice, or homesick and weary, has received the cup of cold water in "His Name" in that lower room, just as thousands received the "Cup of Blessing" from the same hands in the Upper Room.

How much this welcome was appreciated by those who received it is well shown by the thousands of men who flocked to the House every week. Shy lads from Devon and Somerset, men from Northumberland and Durham, awkward, but keen and intelligent, self-possessed Londoners, men from Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, all fell under the same spell. Truly love is all powerful, and it was the power of an unselfish love for them which brought these men back to the House over and over again. I remember one hot Sunday afternoon in June while a lot of us were sitting at tea in the House, a great burly, red-haired Australian gunner arrived on a push bike from Armentières. He had only come to see the padre for a few minutes. As a matter of fact he had exactly half-an-hour, which he had to share with other people, but he went away with a light in his eyes which mirrored the feelings within.

It is wonderful how the childlike spirit appeals to men—or at any rate to the best men. It seems to have the power of drawing out the very best that every man possesses. An infinite belief in human nature, especially in

the men of the B.E.F., enabled P. B. C. to get into the real "back-shop" of most men's minds. He was able to lift them up out of the sordidness of their surroundings and set them on their feet again. He was able to take them to the top of the House as the sisters did to Christian in "the Palace, the name of which was Beautiful," and show them "the most pleasant country called Immanuel's Land." Indeed, Talbot House was to the B.E.F. in the Salient what the House Beautiful was to the pilgrims in Bunyan's wonderful "Similitude of a Dream."

From the House many a man, after resting awhile in the chamber which is called Peace, went on his way ready to fight victoriously against Apollyon, the Prince of the Powers of Darkness.

The B.E.F. rightly inculcated in men the idea of caution, but at Talbot House we transliterated the familiar French warning and wrote up: "Plaisez-vous, confiez-vous, les oreilles de l'Ami vous écoutent."

And Boniface followed his men about and visited them whenever he could. He felt that his work at Talbot House was too safe, so he

did what he could to share the hardships and dangers of his customers.

The spirit of laughter and prayer filled the House, and the innkeeper showed to his guests the qualities of the Friend and Lord of the House.

Is it too much to hope that London may have its Talbot House with Boniface to welcome all comers and cheer them on their way?

FOOTNOTE BY BONIFACE.—Confusion covers my face as I read Chapter X. for the first time in proof. It found its way in unknown to me by a kindly conspiracy between Dr. Browne, Lieutenant E. G. White, and the publishers; and it would be churlish to eject it now. But that fisherman deserves to fail who allows his eager shadow to stand between the sunlight and the stream.—P. B. C.

APPENDIX I

SOME RELICS OF THE NOTICE-BOARD

Most of the notices that at various times disfigured the board in the hall of the House have very properly perished. Here, however, are a few survivors.

P. B. C.

UNWELCOME VISITORS.

Welcome yourself to Talbot House. We don't put "salve" mats on the doorstep, but have a salvage dump next door to make up for it. But we want you to feel it is true of your arrival just the same. For you are surely not one of those who—

(1) Imagine the House has an off-licence for magazines, stationery, etc.—*e.g.*, I put a current number of Nash's magazine in a cover, heavily stamped, on the first floor last week. In twenty-four hours the cover was empty. This is how misanthropes are made.

(2) Imagine we have the Y.M.C.A. or some unlimited

funds at our back. At present we are trying hard (like my Sam Browne does) to make two ends meet. Three noble Divisions (55th, 39th, 38th) help us from their funds. But otherwise we are in a bad way. My tie-pin was in pawn long ago: and even the House is in Pop.

Writing materials for use in the House cost some £6 a month, so that he who departs with his pockets full of envelopes is guilty of what Mr. Punch calls "Teuton conduck."

(3) Woe worth the imbecile, who begins three letters one after another on three sheets of paper, with a fourth to try nibs and fancy spelling on; and with one large boot on a fifth sheet, and the other on a pad of blotting-paper, splashes ink about like a cuttle-fish (is it?), and draws a picture (libellous, we hope) of "my darling Aggie" on a sixth sheet, and then remembers that he really came in to play billiards.

* * * * *

The House aims at reminding you a little tiny bit of "your ain folk." Hence pictures, flowers, and freedom. Help to strengthen the illusion of being of a Club-able spirit.

This is not a G.R.O., but just a G.R.O.U.S.E. by the poor old Chaplain.

NATIONAL SYMPTOMS ON SICK PARADE.

1. *The Irishman:*
"Och, docther dear, I'm kilt intoirely."
2. *The Scotchman:*
"Ah'm no varra weel the s'mornin'."
3. *The Englishman:*
"I don't know what can be wrong with me. *I can't eat.*"

NOTICE.

In honour of the return of Paddy (Pte. Flynn) from leave to his post on the staff of the House, the following chestnut is issued to all concerned:

SCENE: *Irish parade-ground.*

DRILL SERGEANT: "Now then, Rafferty, get those big feet of yours in line, can't you!"

PTE. RAFFERTY: "Arrah! Sergeant, they're no my feet at all, at all. They're Pte. Murphy's in the back row."

OUR ANIMAL KINGDOM.

Have you been formally introduced to—

Kitten, one, white, camouflaged. Belgique by parentage, but British (as the catechism says) by adoption and grace. It enjoys the war enormously, and is far too busy getting dirty to have time to spare for getting clean. It has a limited but vivacious repertoire of performances and has betrayed several Scotsmen into forgetting themselves so far as to smile.

The Love Birds. Their names "Hunter" and "Bunter" are, as Sam Weller said of the sausage, "wrapt in mystery." Hunter is plain in appearance; Bunter is spot. They came from Boulogne in a five ton lorry, and do nothing in particular, but do it very well.

The Jackpie or Magdaw. His name is Jacko; and his diet bully beef and collar studs. He came from a reserve trench at Elverdinghe: we clipped his wings on arrival, since when he flies much better than before. No! we decline to slit his tongue, in the hope that he will talk articulately. He talks Welsh perfectly at present.

April, 1917.

RATS!

On the literary principle by which Mrs. Beeton is said to begin her chapter on the cooking of apples with a brief reference to the Fall of Man, this notice should open with some reference to the anti-episcopal tendencies displayed by rats in the lamentable food-hoarding case of the late Bishop Hatto.

But our need is too urgent for literary allusions.

What the House has to face is a plague of rats, all of them heavy or welter-weight, against Don Whiskerandos, our cat, who is featherweight only, so can't be expected to make good.

Wanted therefore; *the loan of a good ratting terrier, ferrets*, or other rat strafing rodent. A rat seen last night measured about four feet from stem to stern.

EXCHANGE AND MART.

A handsome, kindly, and middle-aged individual, who prefers to remain anonymous, finds that his neck is growing thicker during long years of warfare, with the result that seventeen-inch shirts and seventeen and a half collars produce a perpetual strangulation. If this should catch the eye of any gentleman, upon whose neck the yoke of the Army life is producing the contrary effect, an exchange of wardrobe would be to the welfare of both. Address, P. B. C. F., The Office, T. H.

HOW NOT TO WIN THE WAR.

Scene 1: Half way down the garden. Two chairs and garden table; with tin board and draughtsmen thereon; also a rubbish box in foreground.

Enter two gunners with two mugs of tea and a paper bag of fruit. One gunner upsets draughtsmen on to the grass, and deposits mug on table. The other amends this procedure by seating himself on the ground, turning the half-full rubbish box upside down, and placing his mug thereon.

Finally, enter Padre: tableau vivant.

Scene 2: The first floor writing-room. Both windows tightly closed. Various literary gentlemen busily engaged in caligraphy.

Enter two R.A.M.C. representatives, afraid of too generous a supply of fresh air on the balcony. Each carries three magazines, and two books from the library. These they deposit among the inkpots, pens, and blotting-paper, and proceed to absorb in a slow but expansive manner.

Enter more persons desiring to write letters. (Curtain.)

HOW THE WHEELS GO ROUND.

By "I" o "U" Corps.

For the next few days, the total staff of the House is five, including Jimmy, the presiding magician of the maconachie. A reasonable complement for the House,

hall, and garden is eleven, including the canteen. So, if the antimacassars aren't watered, or the asphidistras dusted, or the pot-pourri jars distributed for a few days, don't think "there's something rotten in the state of Denmark."

STOP PRESS.

A tidy draft of reinforcements in woolies—*i.e.*, socks, etc.—has reached T. H. from the ever-generous Mrs. Fry of Bristol.

Applications for the same should be made to the Chaplain. All queues prohibited by Sir A. Yapp. Allotment, one sock per battalion.

January 14, 1918.

NOTICE.

UNSOLICITED TESTIMONIALS FROM PUBLIC MEN TO TALBOT HOUSE.

THE KAISER WIRELESSES:

As our good old German Shakespeare says, in the "Merchant of Vienna" (*sic !*)

"A plague on both your Houses."

HILAIRE BELLOC REMARKS, in his monumental work "The War Hour by Hour, from every Possible and Impossible, Human and Inhuman Standpoint." (Vol. 666, p. 999.)

"The psychological reasons which led to our long tenure of the Salient are now increasingly apparent to all soldiers; they were not merely international, but *highly domestic.*"

HENRY V. (per the late Lewis Waller) DECLAIMS: "Talbot . . . shall be in their flowing cups freshly remembered."

LORD NORTHCLIFFE DICTATES:

"Whatever sinister influences may operate at home, patriotic ardour is, as ever, the temper of our vast Armies. So eager are our gallant men to meet the foe, that I myself have seen great queues of men formed up in communication trenches, unable to find room in the front line. The fierce light of Mars gleams in every eye. Thus it has been found necessary to establish counter-attractions to counter-attacks behind the lines."

HORATIO BOTTOMLEY SPEAKS OUT:

"When I left the shell-swept area of General Headquarters, the dull reverberation of machine guns made me, like an old soldier, wrap my gas helmet closer round my knees. Haig—you may trust him—I say, you may trust him—said to me: 'Keep your napper down, old man; think what your life means to England.'"

"On our way back, we motored through a small town, which the General beside me especially asked me not to specify to my two million readers. We flashed past the gloomy doorway of a miserable House in a narrow street. A smug and sour-faced parson stood in the doorway of this so-called Soldiers' Club, with a bundle of tracts in one hand and a subscription list in the other. Mark my words. You know the type. The so-called Church has not stirred a finger anywhere in the war-zone for anyone."*

FROM THE ASSOCIATION OF LICENSED AND UNLICENSED ESTAMINETS:

"We deeply resent the ruinous competition of this detestable House, which wounds our tenderest susceptibilities. The place must be put Out of Bounds at once. Verboten Engang."

FROM AN AMERICAN ALLY:

"Gee. Some shanty. What? If we'd only known, guess we'd have chipped in three falls back."

FROM { A STRAY OFFICER: / A SHY PRIVATE: } "Isn't this an Officers' Club?"

January 25, 1918.

* A fortnight after this was posted, the great Horatio unwittingly avenged himself by a painfully laudatory article on the work of Army Chaplains.

SCENE: *The Wipers' Road: any time after dark.*

ENTER WAYFARERS (1ST) and (2ND).

1ST W.: "Bill, 'ere's a riddle for you. What is a lorry?"

2ND W.: "Give it up."

1ST W.: "A lorry 's a thing what goes the other way."

NOTICE.

Owing to the descent of a meteorite* upon the electric lighting plant, the House is temporarily reduced to the oil and grease expedients of a bygone age. In regard to the former, gentlemen will please desist from turning the wick upwards, as the augmentation of the illumination thus secured is extremely temporary, and results in a soot bath and a cracked chimney. In regard to the latter, remember what Shakespeare says about its illuminant attractiveness, and please draw the blinds.

October 2, 1917.

* Our electric light engine had bad luck in the winter of 1917-18, and was hit by two shells and a bomb successively within two months.

HOW TO FIND YOUR BEARINGS ON A DARK NIGHT WITHOUT A COMPASS.

THIS IS AN OLD SCOUT'S TIP:

Take a watch, not your own, tie a string on to it, swing it round your head three times, and then let go, saying to the owner: "That's gone West."

The points of the compass being thus established, you proceed rapidly in the safest direction.

P. B. C.

HOW TO CHECK BAD LANGUAGE.

This is a splendid story, really requiring a Scotch accent.

Once upon a time, Doctor GEIKIE, of Edinburgh, was crossing the Atlantic on the same ship as a loud-voiced, foul-mouthed American. One rough day, when everyone was confined to the smoking-room, the American told a series of filthy stories, and then turned insolently to the old Doctor and said:

"I just reckon you haven't added much to our fun, Doctor."

"A'weel," said Doctor GEIKIE, "I'll tell you a story the noo. Once upon a time, there was a puir wee birrd that had his nest in a tree by the roadside; and one fine day, after a horse passit by, he came to feed on the droppings. An' when he had his fu', he just skippit

back to the tree and began to sing. But a boy came by wi' a wee bit gun, and shot him i' the lug as he sang."

Dead silence, broken by the American.

"Waal, Doctor, if that is the best you can do, I guess we don't think much of it. None of the boys see any damned point in your tale at all."

"A'weel," said Doctor GEIKIE, "the moral, sir, is surely plain enough to you. If you're full of s—t, dinna brag about it."

A. C.
per P.B.C.

NOTICE.

EXCELSIOR!

The number of otherwise intelligent human beings who hang about the hall, reading silly notices, and catching well deserved colds, is most distressing.

An occasional straggler drags himself up the staircase, generally in futile search for the canteen, which confronts him in the garden.

Otherwise oil and fuel upstairs waste their sweetness, and the rooms and pictures their welcome.

COME UPSTAIRS AND
RISK MEETING THE CHAPLAIN.

As Kipling so finely says:

"What shall they know of Talbot House
Who only the ground-floor know?"

NOTICE.

"TO MOVE OR NOT TO MOVE, THAT IS THE QUESTION."

Owing to the inconsiderate retirement of our old neighbours, the Boche, Toc. H. is in a pretty fix. If we move—*e.g.*, to Courtrai—we may be high and dry by the time we have reached it with all our lorry-loads of belongings. Also, if the period of demobilisation is really at hand, this may be an important salvage centre. And once we vacate the House, we shall never get it again.

Briefly, therefore, T. H. will remain here for the present.

For if the Boche goes to Brussels, we shan't cut any ice in Courtrai.

Or if the Boche goes to Blazes, we shall be wanted here.

Q. E. D.

But we expect you to get down here somehow, and see us sometimes. You really must try.

October 20, 1918.

Five thousand of these whizzbangs were sent out in December, 1918.

ANYTHING may be written on this side, the other, by the law of Ancient Lights, is the private playground of the long-suffering A.P.S.

I vote the proposed booklet on Talbot House a {sound / rotten} scheme.

I will {pay / borrow / scrounge} 2/6 to {get / get rid of} it.

{By all means / On no account} T.H. should be set up in Town.

I won't {stir a finger / leave a stone unturned} to help.

You've got my RANK {exactly right. / unutterably wrong.

I am now a {Lance-Corporal / Field Marshal} and hope to be discharged soon.

This address will find me {till / after} the {cows / boys} come home.

Road ———————

Town———————

County ———————

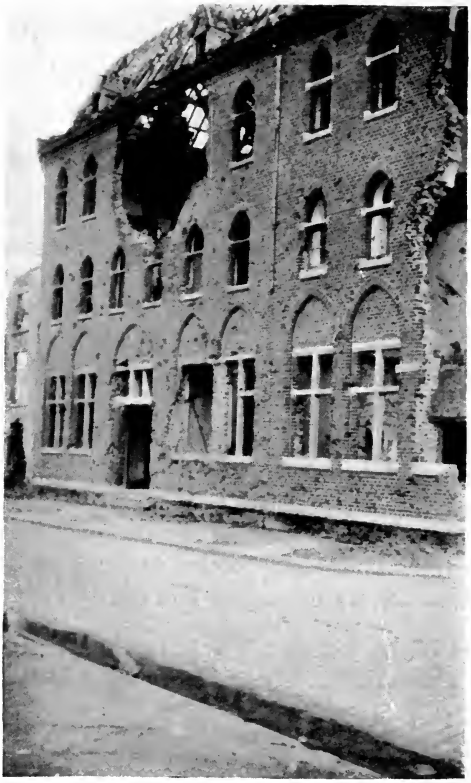
Yours {ever / never}

Sig.———————

APPENDIX II

SOME COROLLARIES BY TALBOTOUSIANS

A FEW words of explanation must introduce the article by Dr. Magrath on Little Talbot House. The establishment of this daughter house in Ypres was the tardy fruit of a hope we had long shared; and he, with his unrivalled knowledge of the town, in which he managed to live longer than even Town-Major Scott, did more than any of us to make the dream come true. The old House had always a number of faithful friends in Ypres, and early in 1916 the Military Foot Police on No. 10 Bridge ran a kind of cocoa tavern for sundry wayfarers, for which a generous friend of the old House provided the raw materials. Divisional chaplains held services in the Infantry Barracks, in a cellar in the Rue de Dixmude, and in the house which subsequently became ours; and in '16 and '17 I held weekly services on Fridays in the Prison, where the Town-Major's headquarters were. But co-



LITTLE TALBOT HOUSE, RUE DE LILLE.
YPRES.

ordination was difficult, and concentration in any one spot was plainly inadvisable. In the autumn of '17, however, the town—or what was left of it—became comparatively healthy, and the following notice appeared on Talbot House board:

LITTLE TALBOT HOUSE

Was born yesterday in Ypres. It stands (more or less) in Rue de Lille, and was once a large lace factory. The red brick frontage on the road is quite imposing, but the back premises are not quite what they were. However, there are six rooms upstairs, and a convenient and capacious cellar.

We are sending up some stuff from the old House, and passers-by must look in and see Mr. Goodwin, the chaplain in charge.

Church tithe for the present may be paid in kind, the kind being roofing-iron and sandbags.

Gas and water already laid on.

14/11/17.

The house we secured was one of the only two still standing in the Rue de Lille—the Post Office being the other. The first lorry load of furniture we brought up was blown to bits by a direct hit on the room in which we had dumped it, a few hours after its arrival. We

moistened the lips, and brought up a second load. With this the House opened, and from November to April fulfilled its task ideally, under conditions increasingly dangerous. One morning, when I arrived on a visit, the House was literally ringed with new shell-holes; and even as Pettifer and I approached it, part of the outer wall, weakened by continual concussions, fell of its own accord. Yet within, the work went on uninterruptedly. A few days before the evacuation we were still hopefully building and sandbagging the new hall. Then came the withdrawal from Paschendaele, and the front line was drawn closer to Ypres than ever before. With machine guns posted in the streets, the town billets were evacuated by order; and Goodwin and his staff arrived at Poperinghe late on one Sunday night. Afterwards, he went to Arras, to be chaplain of St. George's Club.*

P. B. C.

A.—LITTLE TALBOT HOUSE

It was somewhat cheerless in Ypres in August, 1917, and on one of the most cheerless days at the end of that month I was introduced by the 146th Battery to a padre who had just arrived. He looked cheerful; that was my first impres-

* Now (September, 1919) St. George's Club in Paris.

sion: he wasn't a non-smoker or a temperance fanatic; those were my second impressions: he seemed to fit in; that was my third impression. I didn't know I was meeting Little Talbot House in embryo; in fact, I had never heard of it, nor had anyone else, though a few people had been interested in getting something of the kind going. But Ypres at the moment was not propitious. Later on the padre—his name was R. J. Goodwin—after migrating to various dug-outs—began to talk about Little Talbot House, and as a preliminary step came to live with me in a vast underground fastness under the Lille Gate Cemetery. Negotiations for a suitable place resulted in getting the Lace-School in the Lille Road allotted, and the business began. Heaven knows—I do not—whence came the furniture. Some was pinched from the parent House: the canvas, the chairs and tables, the paint, the doors, the electric light fittings (oh yes, we were civilised before the war stopped; now we use candles!) *et tout ça.* I only know that they did come, that they got sorted, erected and fixed. I remember as in a dream, one or two hectic afternoons divided between bumping one's head on the beams in the cellar, and standing perilously on a rickety ladder trying to reach something which one obviously couldn't reach. This consumed most of the month of November; in December R. J. G. "moved in" (*i.e.*, his valise was carried down the road).

Little Talbot House was a going concern,

and it did go. The rooms upstairs were canteen and reading rooms; downstairs in the "catacombs" were the chapel—it took one right back to Rome in A.D. 70—and the sleeping billets and kitchen. (Later on, when things were quieter, the new chapel got going upstairs, but that was not till March, 1918). At night the chapel was curtained off, and part became a reading room.

Of those who found comfort—spiritual and mental—there, of those who came with troubles, who came to ask questions on every conceivable subject, who fed, read, and even slept there, R. J. G. could tell you himself. Let this only be recorded by one who was a "gadget," that there was not a man who came there who did not go away cheered and brightened, not one who did not love R. J. G., not one who did not return when he could.

It was (as time goes) a brief episode; three months almost covered it; Low Sunday, 1918, saw the House empty, Paschendaele evacuated, and the Bosches advancing fast on Ypres. Yes, brief but bright; and only the God in Heaven knows what fruit that three months sowing produced.

R. J. G., here's luck to you now and always. As a helper of lame dogs over stiles, you were one of the best; I and hundreds more shall never forget you and that little oasis in the Lille Road.

C. J. M.

B.

Early in the second year of the war, when the Ypres salient had settled down to what, for it, was comparative quiet after the great battles of October, 1914, and the following April, the little Belgian town of Poperinghe became the hub of that part of the universe. Here the battalions, resting after their turn in the trenches, sought their recreation, did their shopping, and were cleansed from the mud and grime of the trenches in one or other of the various divisional baths.

The town catered for a great number of troops; for, in addition to the battalions and batteries from the firing-line of the Salient and to the south of it as far as Messines, there were, billeted and camped in or near it, the various departmental corps, hospitals, aircraft and anti-aircraft units, with most of the Brigade, Divisional and Corps Headquarters. Besides all these, the station was rail-head, which ensured a floating population in addition to what we might term its permanent military inhabitants.

The soldiers' recreation was well looked after —we had a cinema, a pierrot troupe (the famed Sixth Division "Fancies"), a canteen, football grounds, etc.—yet a need was soon felt for an institution which would cater for officer and

soldier alike; which would also serve as a parish church and institute where quiet times as well as cheery ones could be enjoyed; and also where those who felt their need of that help and comfort, which, above all, can sustain and hearten in the day of battle, as well as during the dreary and comfortless round of trench duty, could find a place set apart for quiet prayer and communion.

One of the Sixth Division chaplains set himself to the task of satisfying this need. He had himself, in former days, held a commission and seen active service in one of our most famous regiments, and therefore knew the soldier and his kind better than most. The result was that, through his efforts, aided by the military authorities, a large house was acquired in the Rue de l'Hôpital, Poperinghe, which was suitably fitted up, and where a resident chaplain and staff were installed. It was named "Talbot House" after its originator, and opened on December 15, 1915. It at once became one of *the* institutions of the B.E.F., and its hospitable doors were never closed from the date of opening until after the conclusion of hostilities.

Many are the officers and men—the writer among them—who can look back with gratitude and deep appreciation to the happy times spent at Talbot House—the concerts, tea-parties, cheery gatherings, jolly talks, and Christmas carols—and the memories of the peaceful early morning services in the beautiful

little chapel, the upper room under the roof, will remain a lifelong happiness.

A. H. B.-D.

Once commanding First Battalion Leicester Regiment.

C.—AN OUTPOST OF TALBOT HOUSE.

The bounds of Poperinghe were not the bounds of Talbot House.

It would, perhaps, be accurate to say that the T.H. atmosphere was strongest in and around the ancient town, but wherever one might be in the salient a man, if he so desired, could get a whiff of its healthy gas.

The writer and his battery were first subjected to an attack of T.H. gas on a certain Sunday in September, 1916.

That well-known figure, the incumbent of Talbot House, in the course of his wanderings, had buttonholed a gunner Q.M.S. in a waggon line near Vlamertinghe. "Would the Q.M.S. get a few men together for service on the following Sunday—just a voluntary service to be held under the lee of a hedge. He knew what was meant, didn't he?"

The Q.M.S., being a man of action, went to the adjutant of the brigade, with the result that at 2.30 p.m. of a hot Sunday afternoon a brigade church parade of "all ranks that could be spared" was held in the waggon lines.

For nearly an hour we waited in the hot sun

until, patience exhausted, we became more and more un-Christian in our thoughts, and our attitude, from being at least neutral, became distinctly hostile towards all padres, and to this one in particular.

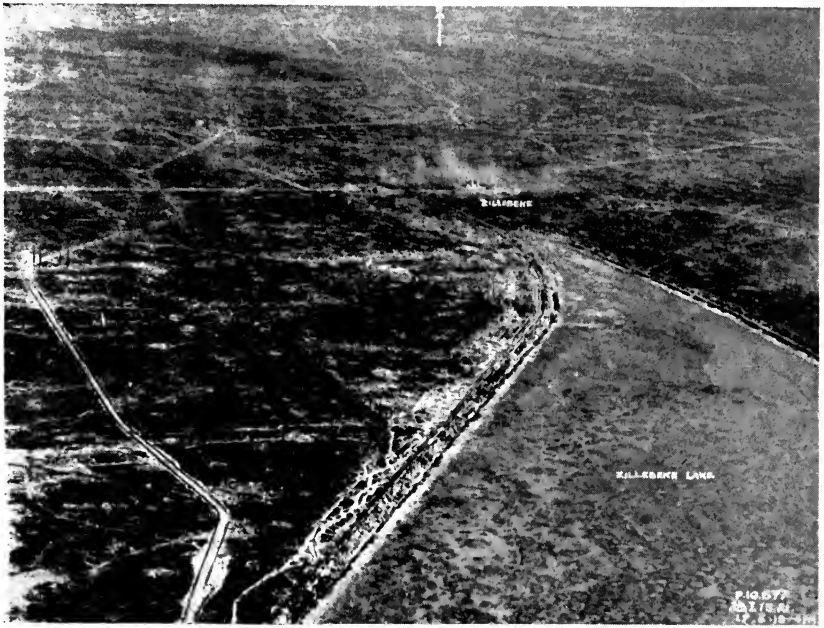
About 3.25 a perspiring, rotund, and somewhat confused cleric arrived—cheerful in spite of the black looks of the congregation—and the service began.

As it proceeded, most of us felt that there was something about this service that one too often misses in the ordinary church parade—an indefinable homeliness, a sort of genuine friendliness—and we wanted another, but *not* a compulsory service.

No more parade services were held, but from that Sunday onwards for the better part of a year the batteries of that brigade received the help and felt the influence of Talbot House even to the furthest limits of the parish, and, if the truth be told, outside the parish altogether.

If you wend your way down the Vlamertinghe-Ypres road for about three-quarters of a mile and then look to your left, you will see in the middle of that dreary wilderness a cluster of farm buildings in tolerably good repair. This is or was "Cat Farm," the then habitat of the H.-Q. of the 141st (East Ham) Heavy Battery.

There, every Thursday night, P. B. C. held a church service in the old barn and afterwards talked to the men, and every Friday morning



ZILLEBEKE DURING A STRAFE. 1918.

he held a Communion service in a wonderful little chapel fitted up in the granary; and from thence he went to the Ypres asylum (then tenanted by a detached section of the battery), where another short service took place.

Who can tell the value of those simple and homely services? I am sure few of us will forget them.

From this battery P. B. C. gradually extended his sphere of activity to other units in the brigade, and, though it was seldom that the gunners could get back to Poperinghe, when they did have the opportunity of a visit to Talbot House, they all felt sure of a warm welcome and a kind word from a true friend.

Several of the officers of 141st Battery went off to take command of other batteries, and wherever they went, provided they remained in the salient, there the indefatigable padre was sure to follow them, and their new batteries were gathered in to the ever-increasing flock of Talbot House.

In May, 1917, after thirteen months in the line, 141st Battery went out to rest at Wissant, near Calais—thither we were followed by P. B. C.—back again to the salient at the end of May, in action at Reigersburg Château, thence to Kruisstraat, and finally to Dormy House at Zillebeke for the July 31 "push." Wherever we went we never lost touch with our padre.

Towards the end of September, 1917, the battery, after considerable rough handling by

the Boche, left the salient, and, except for a few days at the end of the summer of 1918, did not return; but many of its members have kept up correspondence with our wonderful little chaplain. They still feel his influence, and remember with gratitude his visits—visits made unfailingly, sometimes under shell fire, sometimes during a gas bombardment; services held now in a barn, now in a dug-out, once on the sands at Wissant, and occasionally in a gun-pit.

To those of our readers who, glancing through the above article, and who never having come under Clayton's magnetic influence would think the article to be more of the nature of a biography than an account of an institution—to these I would say that, although the bricks and mortar might bear the name "Talbot House," the soul and spirit of the institution was and always will be Philip Clayton.

"UBIQUE."

D.

To many of those who in the years 1915-1919 perforce sojourned a while, more or less prolonged, in the Ypres salient, and to others whose war service took them to the little town familiarly known as "Pop," one memory will often recur—of a stately mansion in the main street, whose doors were open to all in khaki. And inside the weary wayfarer from perhaps

the Canal Bank or "U" camp, or Dickebusch, or back from "Blighty," found a real "home from home," and a welcome from that best of pals whose spirit suffused all the place. Were we famished, the tea-urn and those perennial cakes of M—— saved our lives; did we want "fifty up," the miniature table was seldom idle; did we remember that letter home which hadn't been written, here, in the language of the French reading-book, were "the pen, the ink, and the paper"; if we thirsted for literature, the library (when it was not crowded out) bade us come and choose, but not forget to inscribe in the "lent, not lost" book. Some of us waxed eloquent in debate on every subject under the sun save those forbidden by immemorial usage or "K. R.," and for many the rafters of the recreation-room rang with the echoes of "Good-bye-ee" and a host of other tunes. Which of us will ever forget those cheery tea-parties, when, no matter how full the room, there was always space for new-comers; when we ate and talked and smoked and chaffed, for was it not written over the portal, "All rank abandon, ye who enter here"! And then at the top of the House, the apex of the life, as of the visible building, of Talbot House, the little chapel where we met, whether just "two or three gathered together" or crowding the room to overflowing, for the simple service.

May the spirit of comradeship which grew and throve within those walls long continue,

whether in the new Talbot House, of which we dream in London, or wherever Briton and Anzac, Canadian and South African, meet in the years to be.

G. Brimley Bowes, *Major.*
Chairman, Talbot House Committee, 1917-18.

Cambridge, *May,* 1919.

E.—IN SPITE OF HIMSELF.

One of the jolliest feelings I know is to find that you haven't utterly forgotten how to do something you've not done for years. There's a subtle moral value, for instance, in the discovery that you can still play indifferent billiards; your very miss-cue has a precious personal flavour. You remember that, somewhere tucked away under the everlasting khaki and the eternal sameness of badges and numerals, is a thing called "me," which is somehow different from all the other things called "you." One of the best turns you can do for a man is to give him a chance of experiencing this feeling. It keeps him alive.

That is what Talbot House was always doing. Books once familiar nodded from their shelves, reminding you, with comforting flattery, that you were still part of their world. A deep chair almost embraced you—and you woke with a start, rubbing the dreams from your eyes. There's a wealth of solace for the

mind in a real chair, a sense of possession which is almost regal. These things are symbols. They were a real part of the scheme; they helped you to feel that you were not just a cog in the machine of war, but a person with likes and dislikes, a standard of comfort, and, oddest of all, a mind! In their degree they, too, ministered consolation.

There's nothing like a debate for shaking off mental cramp. To an old hand, condemned for years to the silence of the ranks or the boredom of shouting phrases which you mayn't vary by a hair's breadth, it is almost a fierce joy. There's a moment of horrid trembling at the knees when you first rise, and then you plunge headlong. Happy is he who, after a few fumbling sentences, falls unconsciously into his stride, and dear to his heart is the applause with which a generous audience rewards the effort, however "footling." This, too, we owed to Talbot House.

My excuse for the following story must be that, if I had the wit to do it justice, it holds an element of humour. It was not of set purpose that I found myself pledged to stop a gap. I had been gazing absent-mindedly at the announcement of a debate, on which the opposer's name had been newly erased—even debates must yield to the necessities of war. Suddenly I felt a pressure on my arm, kindly, persuasive, but infinitely compelling. Someone suggested—oh! so tactfully—that I was exactly the person he was in search of, and

hinted that I might yet save a difficult situation. It's horribly "intriguing" to be wanted as an individual and not just as "one other ranks." There's a subtle flattery about it which scatters objections and modesties, like the paving-stones of the Grande Place before the snub and solid nose of an 8-inch "A. P." Of course, I yielded. Can you show me a man who didn't?

Two days later, as I crawled self-consciously through the ever-open door, I'd have given a week's pay to get out of it. My head was spinning like a top; my knees were a striking illustration of the "make-and-break" action of the armature of a Service "buzzer." Thoughts I had none.

It consoled me a little to find that the debate was in the open air. The chairman's "Order! order!" produced a horrid silence. My opponent, calm, confident, persuasive, piled up argument upon argument. My brain reeled. I covered an old envelope with frenzied jottings in a vain attempt at coherence. All too soon he sat down, smothered in applause. I heard my own name. I rose, clutching the arm of my chair.

The imps that had taken possession of me did a war-dance on my brain—a crew of merry rebels. I swallowed vigorously—and plunged. I shall never know what I said. My opponent afterwards compared my effusion to "a séance by Mrs. Besant"! I don't know whether that was meant as a compliment or a protest. . . .

The war-dance stopped, and I sat down. The rest of the evening is indistinct. I have a vision of a hundred men, at a word of command from the chairman, flocking over to my side of the House, whether with intent to mob me, or to give me much-needed support, I could hardly say.

I reached home safely. Next day people came and asked to borrow books about it. I assured them that for years I'd read nothing but *London Opinion* or at best *John Bull.* They looked a little hurt. I hope I was nice to them. They wouldn't tell me what I had said. That, patient* [impatient] reader, is the most accurate account I can give of an event which will always be a mystery to me. On one point I am clear—in my immeasurable debt to Talbot House, I must include a most remarkable experience.

* * * * *

Perhaps, for the honour of the House, I should add a word of explanation. I had not tasted that evening of the waters of forgetfulness, but the night before I had unexpectedly been treated to a double dose of T.A.B.

JOHN H. NICHOLSON.

* Strike out word inapplicable.

F.—THE WITNESS OF A WAYFARER TO TALBOT HOUSE.

(Reprinted with permission from "The Direct Hit.")

FIRST GLIMPSE.

Voices of many soldiers,
And plenteous light;
Warmth, comfort and a shelter
Out of the night.
How everyone seems happy,
And all their faces bright.

THE STAIRWAY.

Oh, pretty painted lady
That looks out from yon frame,
You're more to me than canvas;
More than an artist's name.

There's something in your smile, dear,
That calls to me to come;
You grace my mother's table
At home! at home!

THE BALCONY.

There is no balcony above the blue
Soft lapping waters of a still lagoon;
Where maidens wonder if their lads be tru ,
And will come soon.

Nor from the ground does Romeo's loving song
Thrill the night air to tell his Juliet
That though true lovers' paths be hard and long,
He'll not forget.

More beautiful is this. Those few green trees,
Among whose branches vagrant breezes roam,
Tell of grey towns, green fields and sparkling seas,
That men call Home.

THE LIBRARY.

Behold! all ye who want companions fair
For half a day, a day, perhaps a week,
Enter and take your choice, for here you find
The very book (or books) your soul doth seek.
Love you far shores? here's tales of distant lands;
Or incident? here's history to your hands.
Or do you love the men who nobly live?
Biographies shall satisfaction give;
Fiction, to lose yourself a quiet hour;
Training, to give your body grace and power;
Poetry, with her poppied embrace;
Religion, to give your spirit grace;
Oh! all you men who recreation seek
Come, choose your boon companion for a week.

THE CHAPEL.

Here is a quiet room!
Pause for a little space;
And in the deepening gloom
With hands before thy face,
Pray for God's grace.

Let no unholy thought
Enter thy musing mind;
Things that the world hath wrought—
Unclean—untrue—unkind—
Leave these behind.

Pray for the strength of God,
Strength to obey His plan;
Rise from your knees less clod
Than when your prayer began,
More of a man.

FINIS.

Refreshment, rest and cheer for all those men
Who hapless roam,
And over all—a touch of sanctity—
A breath of home.

DONALD COX.
A London Division.

APPENDIX III

TALBOT HOUSE FOR TRAFALGAR SQUARE.

(Reprinted from "St. Martin's Messenger," April, 1919.)

POPERINGHE TO TRAFALGAR SQUARE.

DEPOSE Nelson, remove the column, ungum the lions, deduct the fountains, wash out the National Gallery, and cease to visualise Whitehall; then roll the surface flat (except for execrable pavé), and, with these trifling alterations, Trafalgar Square becomes the Grande Place of Poperinghe.

You must also, by-the-bye, rebuild St. Martin's, and put a shell-hole through its tower, and a clock that declares for years on end that it is always half-past five, thus reminding us of human fallibility in high quarters.

The real similarity between the two places is, however, more readily realisable, for Poperinghe Square was for four years to the B.E.F. what Trafalgar Square is to London—a big

place through which well-nigh every man must pass on his pilgrimage; an open place wherein he takes his first or last or intermediate breather before getting to business; near enough to the scene of work to warrant and to provoke a pause; remote enough to make the pause a pleasure reasonably immune from accident.

Thus it comes that I, who was for the most of that time vicar of the Poperinghe St. Martin's (or rather of the dissenting chapel adjacent), find myself writing for the real *St. Martin's Messenger*.

Talbot House (so called after Gilbert Talbot, who died at Hooge) was set up in Poperinghe in December, 1915. It had been the large house of a wealthy—need I say?—brewer, to whom we have now handed it back more or less intact. It became a happy, homely household of faith—a kind of Emmaus Inn, whence drooping spirits, revived by processes natural and supernatural, went back to face whatever might befall the bodies that contained them.

Come along in and have a look round.

Don't dally with the doormat; it is accustomed to neglect.

Here is the entrance hall. On the left hand its walls are covered with maps, not of the war, but of Blighty. See how the London we

love, without knowing it, is worn away by the faithful fingers of your fellow-citizens. Here is another, of Canada this time, and another of Australia, with a knot of students in slouch hats. Here, beyond, is a Madonna, painted on latrine canvas by a gunner artist. Beyond, a rendezvous board, where you put your envelope which serves as a visiting-card, and hope some other hero from Prangley-on-the-Marsh will find it there and make an assignation accordingly.

On the right there is a notice-board, which is different in its outlook on life to the one outside your orderly-room. Beyond, a staircase, and beyond that a gorgeous, framed artist's proof of Wyllie's "Salient." Looking straight through the hall you catch a glimpse of a well-kept garden, where men bask, as in St. James's Park, and a snug concert hall in a hop-store lies out beyond. But the hall has other doors. Here is a shop, which has a "merry Christmas" atmosphere all the year round, and a music-room beyond it, with an irresistible old piano, not likely to be come by honestly!

Now upstairs! Quite homey this! Carpets, flowers, and pictures—not patriotic prints, either. Lord! what a library! These people,

obviously, think we've got minds worth feeding, as well as bodies and souls. Four thousand books, and most of them presented by old Talbotousians. Who were they? Look at the photographs round the walls.

Writing-rooms, games-rooms, and, upstairs again, billiards! English billiards, too—not that foreign cannon-ball game. Who expected to find English tables so near the line as this? Over there lie two lecture-rooms, with a large class on housing reform and a smaller one on French—one taken by an R.E. captain, the other by an intelligence sergeant.

Excelsior! once again! A companion-ladder this time, leading to a loft. Not likely to be furnished? Isn't it, though? Here's a chapel, full not only of exquisite simple majesty, but of an atmosphere like nothing else we have ever experienced in France. There's a young Devon major (with an M.C. and bar) playing the organ, and a few kneeling figures. Daily evensong is not yet, but the chapel of St. Martin "in the Field" is, like its prototype, never without its worshippers.

Hence, during the whole three years, some 20,000 men communicants have gone not empty away; and at Easter He has here been seen by "above five hundred brethren at once, of whom

the greater part remain unto the present, but some are fallen asleep."

* * * * *

What, then, is to happen to the fellowship of Talbot House? It is plainly too great to lose. Its lovers have a dream of finding some house—say in Duncannon Street—a difficult task; and the rent thereof, a task not less difficult; of hoisting the old sign-board there and taking the consequences.

The one great fault I find, as a parson, with London is that there aren't nearly enough public-houses in the place. There are places so-called, no doubt, but they are tied to one tradition as well as to one brewery. The innkeepers are all too humble to approach you or too proud to be approached. Where is the bustling Boniface of literature? He is bedimmed by a guinea-pig directorate; he is dehumanised by the shadow of shares-cum-dividends.

Our fancy leads us to a cosy house with a good A.B.C. downstairs, and, upstairs, lecture-rooms, library, games-rooms, and "grousing"-rooms, together with a London Territorial Lethé chamber, where warlike reminiscences may merge wholly into imaginative art—in short, a junior Cavendish Club, though not

quite so serious. Its membership (at 10s. shall we say?) would be the 4,000 already on the Communicants' Roll of the old House (of whom some 500 are in London), reinforced from the Civil Service and Territorial world—a class who, among the faithless, were surprisingly faithful to Mother Church, in inverse ratio, perhaps, to the care she has bestowed upon them.

An inn without beds is like a song without a chorus, therefore we must have a hostel in our hostelry; for in London men are even more homeless than they were in Flanders. The only financial detail yet decided upon is that, when the water-rate question becomes acute, we are going to draw water in a dixie from the fountains in the Square.

You see, we are practical prophets, and the smallest detail is thus completely envisaged.

All this is not yet. First, there is a sentence of six months' hard labour to run; "shades of the prison-house begin to close" about Talbot House and its *dramatis personæ*—in other words, the Service Candidates' School, now opening in Knutsford Prison, is too great a harvest to admit other sowing yet. Secondly, there is the book on Talbot House to emerge, and its sale will be a wise barometer to tap.

Meanwhile, will St. Martin cover the beggar with its ample cloak, and seek God's will concerning Talbot House in town?

* * * * *

Since this article appeared in the spring, the idea of reopening the old house in London has gone far forward; and in January, 1920, with this purpose in view, Pettifer and I report (with unexpired portion of rations) to O.C., St. Martin's in the Fields. After that, we begin to begin, which is all man ever does. No doubt there are lions in the way less benignant than Landseer's; yet it is heartening to remember that lions do not bar blind alleys. So far no great patron has made us free of his cheque-book, but St. Martin's has promised to stand our godfather. One pitch already has been both found and lost. Supported as the house was by a bank and a cable company, this double temptation to high crime is perhaps well avoided. Other sites are in prospect, and it is at least plain that there is room enough for the experiment we contemplate London is too full of stinging-nettles for a dock-leaf to spend time arguing its right to live.

P. B. C.

APPENDIX IV

SOME CONUNDRUMS FROM THE ROLL

IT is plainly impossible to print here the whole current address-book of some 3,500 Talbotousians. The most we can ask the publishers to do is to give space for the list of those on the roll whose Christmas cards have been returned undelivered. It is as follows:

Captain A. D. Aldred, R.E., Scaftworth, Yorks.
Corporal F. Barnes, 2*a*, Cross Street, Islington, N.
Lieutenant A. H. Borger, 54, Russell Street, Manchester.
Lieutenant F. H. Bourton, 1, Park View, Cheltenham.
Captain Frank Bramwell, 11th Garrison Oxford and Bucks.
Lieutenant Bromley, Bentley Rectory, Farnham.
Private W. Brown, 58813, 71st Field Ambulance, Lingfield, Surrey.
Lieutenant T. W. Burgee, 19th Cheshires (Labour Company), B.E.F.
Pioneer H. S. Carfeu, 167402, The Cottage, Chorley, Bolton.
Gunner W. Cassee, 154 N. Battery, Stevenage, St. Albans, Herts.

Lieutenant W. J. Charsley, 1/6th West Yorks, 3, Pemberley Crescent, Bedford.

Lieutenant H. E. Crossley, K.L.R., 64, Arnold Avenue, Liverpool.

Private G. F. Crowson, A.O.C., 39th Division.

Private P. Deverill, 194774, 70th Company, H.S.P., 38th Division.

Lieutenant Dryman, 13, Charlemen Crescent, Edinburgh.

Second Lieutenant T. G. Dunkery, 2/6th Battalion Manchesters.

Sapper Forster, R.E. Signals.

Private Green, Birley Mount Villas, Birley, Canada.

Corporal A. T. Hardy, 31, West Cliff, W.F.T., Preston, Lancs.

Corporal D. R. Johnson, R. 1512, 1/17th T. F. Brigade, Lancs.

Major C. Jones, R.A.M.C., 4th Stationary Hospital, B.E.F.

Private G. Jones, 341680, R.A.M.C., 56th Field Ambulance, B.E.F.

Second Lieutenant H. Knight, C Company, 12th Battalion Royal Sussex.

Lance-Corporal S. H. Law, M.G.C., 12th West Yorks, B.E.F.

Lieutenant Guy Laly, 7th D.C.L.I.

Lieutenant T. W. Martin, 1st Queen's Westminster Rifles.

Captain A. Macready, 3rd Canadian Infantry, Wagewich, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Second Lieutenant A. W. Metrall, 217 A.T., Coy. R.E.

Rifleman V. Modder, B Coy. Bombers, 8th Battalion Rifle Brigade.

Private Munn, Cleander, Hulme, Cheshire, also Church Farm, Corton, Lowestoft.

Drummer A. Naysmith, 20th Division Band, 20th D.H.Q.

Sapper S. R. Oliver, R.E. Signals, 118th Brigade.

Private H. A. Patience, 35652, 1st Border Regiment.

Second Lieutenant R. J. Payne, 2nd Hampshires, Alton.

Second Lieutenant T. Railton, 54, Arey Street, Liverpool.

Private A. Randall, R.A.M.C., 45th Field Ambulance.

Gunner T. Randall, attached 25th Division Trench Mortars.

Lieutenant T. G. Reed, 15th Hants, attached 228th Field Coy., R.E.

Second Lieutenant A. Relton, Maybank, Brickhurst Hill, Essex.

Lance-Corporal S. J. Richardson, 12th Platoon, D Coy., Yeo Street, Chester.

Lieutenant L. K. Robinson, 5th Yorks and Lancs.

Private K. L. Ross, 91, Boulevarde, Westmere, Nottingham.

Private P. G. Shields, M.G.C., Norfolks.

Corporal S. Lesinger, 9th Field Ambulance, Marston, Doveridge, Derby.

Private J. C. Stebbing, 22, East Durrants, North Havant, Hants.

Captain H. L. Stokes, Welsh Guards.

Private A. Summers, King's Warderbury, Hitchin, Herts, or c/o Mrs. H. Street, 113, Barkston Gardens, Earl's Court, S.W.

Corporal S. Symans, 10th Signal Coy., R.E., 8, Mutley Plain, Plymouth, Devon.

Captain A. W. Taylor, 5th K.O.Y.L.I., Junior Army and Navy Club.

Captain A. Waters, 3rd Coldstream Guards.

Sapper S. V. Wright, D Coy., 8th Bedfords (? 4th Bedfords).

Corporal McFall, 47 Street, Marks Street, Montreal, Canada.

Sergeant A. D. Kelly, attached 57th Coy., Canadian Forestry Corps.

Sergeant C. N. Mayoss, 9th Canadian Field Ambulance.

Private A. D. Harvey, 3rd Battalion Toronto Regiment, C.E.F.

Private J. Arkell, 7th Australian Field Ambulance.

100744 Private F. C. Beaver, attached 41st Canadian Forestry Corps.

If readers of this book can help by putting us in touch with any of these, or with other old Talbotousians, the keeper of the Roll is Lieutenant E. G. White (287, Milkwood Road, Herne Hill, S.E. 24), who answers letters with a paralysing promptitude. The address of the poor old padre is Service Candidates' School, Knutsford, Cheshire; and (after Christmas) c/o St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, W.C. 2.

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