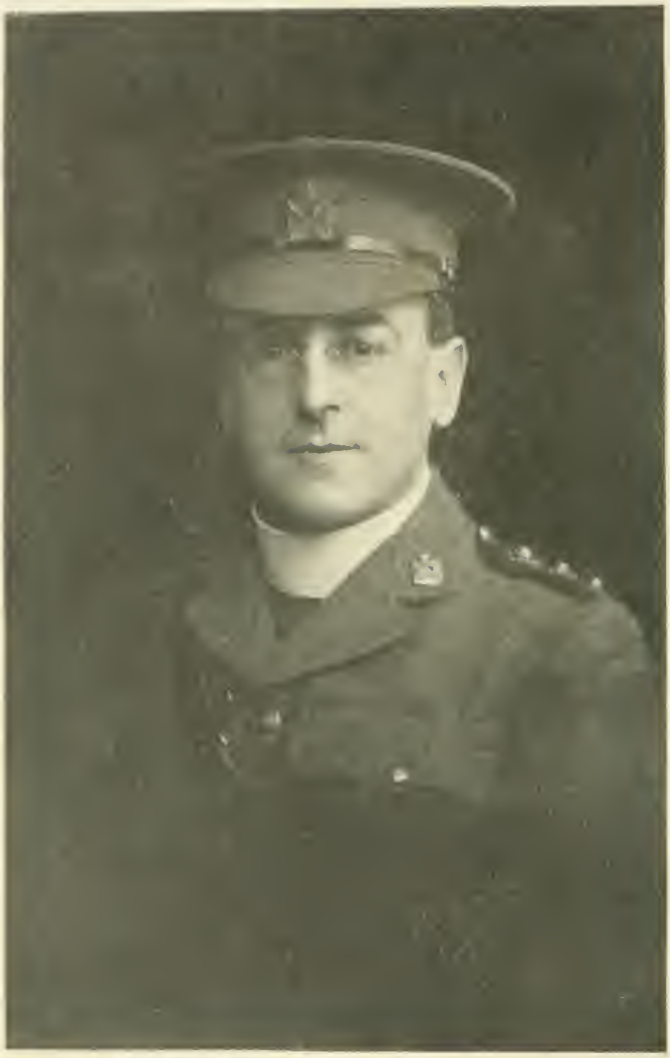
THE CHURCH IN THE FIGHTING LINE

DOUGLAS P. WINNIFRITH
M.A.



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Douglas P. Winnifrith.

THE CHURCH IN THE FIGHTING LINE

WITH GENERAL SMITH-DORRIEN AT THE FRONT

BEING THE EXPERIENCES OF A CHAPLAIN IN CHARGE OF AN INFANTRY BRIGADE

BY

DOUGLAS P. WINNIFRITH, M.A.

CHAPLAIN TO THE FORCES

WITH A FOREWORD

BY THE

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TO THE MEMORY OF THE OFFICERS, NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS AND MEN OF THE 14TH INFANTRY BRIGADE AND ATTACHED UNITS, WHO IN THE GREAT WAR HAVE LAID DOWN THEIR LIVES FOR THEIR NEIGHBOURS, THE BELGIANS AND THE FRENCH, AS WELL AS FOR KING AND EMPIRE, I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

August 4th, 1915.

FOREWORD

This is a most interesting book. It ought not to need even a Foreword, with such a Preface to it as has been written by one of our greatest soldiers—Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien; but, as the author is anxious that I too should write a word, I add this Foreword to say that readers will find here a plain, unvarnished account of a Chaplain's experiences during the early part of the War.

Those who think that a Chaplain's work is "an easy job" will find their mistake, but, on the other hand, they will find that it is a glorious bit of work to be called upon to do. Even as I write this, I see in the evening paper this sentence from a

corporal's account of the recent battle: "The bravest were the Chaplains, who were with the boys all the time"; but what the Chaplains feel is what the writer of this book feels, that nothing too much can be done, and no sacrifice too great can be offered, to stand by the glorious men who are fighting the greatest War in the world's history in the spirit described in this book.

The writer brings out vividly also the courage and the devotion of the whole Surgical and Medical Staff, and not the least of the Stretcher-bearers, who never flinch from their dangerous work under the worst fire.

I look upon it as an honour to have my name associated, in introducing this book to the public, with Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's. The last time I saw him was sitting on Easter Sunday at the head of the Army he commanded, surrounded by Generals and officers at the largest Church

Parade of all those which I addressed at the Front, not many miles from the German lines; and I shall not soon forget his encouraging words to me both before and after the service.

I know that he will be glad if our joint appeal should make many read a book which is a tale of simple heroism not often surpassed in history.

A. F. London.

Fulham Palace, S.W.
October 1st, 1915.

PREFACE

A SHORT time ago I received a letter from the Rev. D. P. Winnifrith, asking me to write a preface to a brief account he was compiling of his experiences in France, in which he particularly hoped to describe incidents which would give some small idea of the arduous and fearless work performed by the Medical Services in this War.

I would gladly do anything which would help to bring before the public the gloriously heroic work performed by all ranks of the Medical Services, and as Mr. Winnifrith was with the 14th Infantry Brigade Field Ambulance from the commencement of the War, and was present

with it at the Battles of Mons, Le Cateau, the Marne, the Aisne, La Bassée, Ypres, and Armentières—covering a period of eight months' continuous fighting—and was mentioned by Sir John French in his Despatches, I feel sure that there is no one better placed than he is to convey to their fellow countrymen some idea of the sort of stuff of which the Medical Officers and all ranks of the Army Medical Corps are made, and I therefore strongly recommend the public to read this book when it appears.

It is probable that, from a sense of modesty, the account will not dilate to any great extent on the work of the Army Chaplains, and so I will myself testify to their splendid services.

It is true that they were not tested so highly as the skilled Surgeons, who, day after day, under a deadly fire in close proximity to the enemy, with unshaken nerve tended the wounded and performed

delicate operations; but they were always near at hand, and showed such devoted indifference to danger and hardship in their ministrations to the sick and wounded as to place them on the highest level of those heroes who are fighting that our Empire may prevent all that counts for Truth, Righteousness, and Honour from being ground in the dust.

H. L. Smith-Dorrien,
General.

July 31*st*, 1915

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CHAPTER I

MARCHING ORDERS

In August 1914, when Great Britain declared war upon Germany, I was stationed in Dublin, where I had charge of the 1st East Surrey Regiment, the 2nd Duke of Wellington's (West Riding) Regiment, and the 2nd King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. All formed part of the 5th Division, commanded by Sir Charles Fergusson, K.C.B., M.V.O., D.S.O., the last two being included in the 13th Brigade (Brigadier-General G. J. Cuthbert, C.B.) and the first in the 14th Brigade (Brigadier-General S. P. Rolt, C.B.).

I shall never forget the last Sunday, August 9th, these Regiments spent in Dublin. At the special celebrations of the Holy Communion large numbers of the officers and men attended. Though we knew it not at the time, many of those

then present were, within a few days, to be summoned before Him Whom they were for the last time worshipping sacramentally. The morning being beautifully fine, a combined open-air parade service was held; there was a full muster of the Regiments, and a large concourse of relatives and friends. I gave a brief address on the words, "The Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Joshua i. 9). The reminder of the promise of Divine presence with them was, I was afterwards told by many, a great inspiration and comfort in the days of stress and trial that followed.

During the early days of mobilization I was constantly being asked by my men, "Well, sir, are you coming out with us?" I could, at first, only reply "I hope so." On August 7th, however, I learned with great pleasure from the War Office that I was to accompany the British Expeditionary Force, and to be attached to the 14th Field Ambulance, which was then mobilizing in Phœnix Park. Though I

Photo by Lafayette, Ltd.

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL G. S. CRAWFORD, C.M.G., OFFICER COMMANDING 11TH FIELD AMBULANCE.

had no definite knowledge, I suspected, as afterwards proved to be the case, that I should have charge of the 14th Infantry Brigade. I was very glad, therefore, not to have to bid good-bye to my Regiments, but to be able to tell them, at their last parade service in Dublin, that on active service I was to have charge of one of them and should generally be very near the other two.

During the week August 9th to 15th I saw my Regiments march away amid scenes of great enthusiasm, and embark on the Transports. On Sunday, the 16th, I reported myself, in obedience to orders from the War Office, to the Officer Commanding the 14th Field Ambulance. It was a great pleasure to find he was an old friend of mine with whom I had served in Aldershot, Malta, and Dublin, Lieutenant-Colonel (then Major) G. S. Crawford, R.A.M.C. He had seen war service in India and South Africa, and, while I was in Malta, had been selected for the command of the British Field Hospital which was

hastily despatched from that station to Messina for the relief of the sufferers from the earthquake. For his splendid work on that occasion he wears decorations bestowed upon him by the King of Italy, and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. His services in this campaign have been recognized by the award of the C.M.G. The other medical officers of the Ambulance, I found, were Majors G. M. Goldsmith, F. G. Richards and R. F. M. Fawcett, Captains Kelly and Crymble, Lieutenants J. H. Bell, Danks, and T. W. Clarke. Major F. G. Richards was another friend with whom I had served at Aldershot ten years ago. Lieutenant and Quartermaster T. Grenfell completed the establishment of officers. Attached to the unit, like myself, I was glad to find the Rev. O. S. Watkins, Wesleyan Chaplain, for, while I had not had the pleasure of meeting him before, I knew him well by name and had read of his good work in the Egyptian and South African campaigns.

I held a parade service for the Field

Ambulance, and then, no definite orders as to the time of our embarkation having been received, I was allowed to return to my barracks in Dublin. I found them already filling with new troops, some of whom were billeted in the nave of the church. Pontoon sections of the Royal Engineers were busily engaged in completing their preparations for departure on the morrow. The old faces were sadly missed, and upon those of the wives and children who remained anxiety and grief were unmistakably written. But all were wonderfully brave. "I'm so glad you are going with the Regiment, sir," and "Look after my husband," were typical remarks made to me after the evening service that day by the brave women, who had assembled to pray for their loved ones who had marched away and who were now they knew not where. Monday, August 17th, my birthday, I was able to spend quietly with my wife and friends, and then on Tuesday, the 18th, my own turn came to march away.

CHAPTER II

WE SAIL FOR AN UNKNOWN PORT

THE work of embarkation was so expeditiously performed that by 6.30 p.m. on August 18th the equipment of a General Hospital and two Field Ambulances (the 14th and 15th), as well as part of a Bridging Train of Royal Engineers and an Ammunition Column of Royal Artillery, had been put aboard the S.S. *Benares*. At 7 p.m. we weighed anchor, waved our last adieus to relatives and friends on shore, and slowly made our way down the Liffey amid the cheers of the crowds assembled on the quays and every point of vantage. Even the lighthouse-keeper at the end of the long mole, where the river joins the open sea, clanged his bell as a farewell greeting. So far none of us knew for what port we were bound; but, when we

were well out into the bay, the sealed orders were opened and we learned that Havre was our destination. Soon afterwards all the officers on board were ordered to assemble on the upper deck, where the senior officer read to us the following greeting from our King-Emperor :

"Buckingham Palace.

You are leaving home to fight for the safety and honour of my Empire. Belgium, whose country we are pledged to defend, has been attacked and France is about to be invaded by the same powerful foe. I have implicit confidence in you, my soldiers. Duty is your watchword, and I know your duty will be nobly done. I shall follow your every movement with deepest interest and mark with eager satisfaction your daily progress ; indeed, your welfare will never be absent from my thoughts. I pray God to bless you and guard you and bring you back victorious.

George R. I.

August 9th, 1914."

This was afterwards read to the non-commissioned officers and men, and the hearty cheers with which, on each occasion, it was received must have been heard in "dear dirty Dublin," and were an earnest of our determination to do, and die if necessary, for the cause espoused by our Empire.

We steamed quietly down the Irish Channel, and, as a precautionary measure, all lights were extinguished or shaded, but we slept well and soundly, feeling confident that the eyes of the Navy, as well as He Who never slumbers nor sleeps, would watch over us.

Wednesday morning, August 19th, found us off the Cornish coast, and we sighted a small British cruiser which had been acting as our escort. She presently hove to, and, as we passed her, the members of the sister services greeted one another with hearty cheers. Henceforward we came under the protecting care of the French Navy, and steamed up the English Channel within sight of the Devon

coast. The weather was glorious and the sea as calm as a duck-pond. At 5.15 p.m. the three Church of England Chaplains on board, F. A. Hill, J. Burrough, and myself, together with O. S. Watkins (Wesleyan) conducted a united service on the lower deck. Though we knew it not then, we were not to have another opportunity of corporate worship for many days to come. Later in the evening a most enjoyable " Sing-song " was arranged by Sergeant Plume, R.A.M.C., of the 14th Field Ambulance. I had known him in Malta and Dublin as a good member of the C.E.M.S. and of our Garrison Church choir in both these stations; I was glad, therefore, to find he was to be our Orderly Room Sergeant. His assistant clerk was to be Corporal Burdett, another member of the C.E.M.S., the son of a Church of England clergyman. Both these have done excellent work in the clerical branch of the Field Ambulance, among other things keeping a very accurate record of the regimental number, rank, name, and

regiment of all the sick and wounded cared for by the Ambulance. This alone has involved most strenuous work, but both made time to perform many acts of kindness, *e.g.* the distribution of parcels of clothing, tobacco, cigarettes, soap, note-paper, etc., among the personnel of the Ambulance and the patients, as well as to organize concerts and dramatic performances for their benefit. To both I am most grateful for the help which, as members of the C.E.M.S., they gave me in my work.

Early on Thursday, August 20th, we sighted Havre and soon after the breakfast-hour came alongside the quays and the work of disembarkation commenced. The horses, of which there were about 200 on board, seemed very relieved to be on terra firma again; the majority of them had suffered badly from *mal de mer*. The disembarkation completed, the two Field Ambulances marched to a rest-camp on the high ground behind the town.

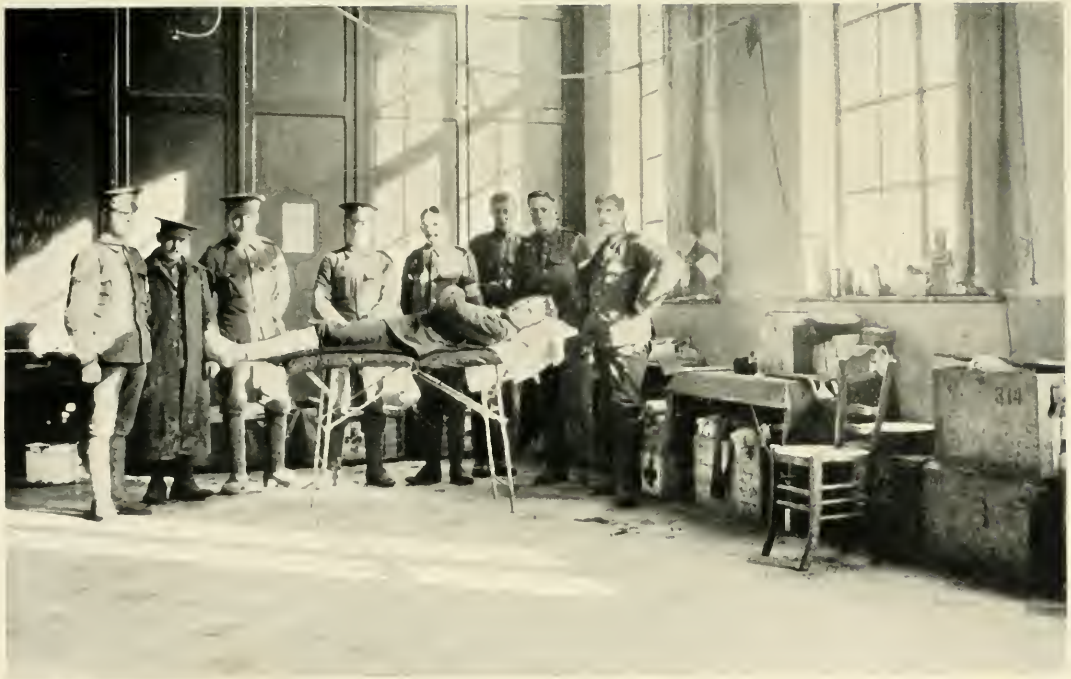
It was just over a hundred years since

a British Army had landed in France; then the British had come as foes, now as friends. Their landing in Havre and other ports awakened wild enthusiasm and joy, and though the people of Havre must, by August 20th, have grown quite accustomed to the sight of the khaki-clad men who had come to fight by the side of their countrymen, they gave us a splendid welcome, and greeted us with the cry "Vive l'Angleterre!" to which our men replied as heartily "Vive la France!"

CHAPTER III

A FIELD AMBULANCE

A DIGRESSION from the narrative may well be made here to give a definition of a Field Ambulance, of which frequent mention will be made in this book. It is really a mobile hospital which accompanies the fighting troops. Its personnel consists of nine medical officers, a Quartermaster, and 242 non-commissioned officers and men. These last include men of the Army Service Corps, who act as drivers of the ambulance waggons, etc., and men of the Royal Army Medical Corps, who perform the duties of stretcher-bearers, nursing-orderlies, and specially trained theatre attendants. Its equipment, so complete that its work could be efficiently performed in a country, or locality, where it was



"IN SOME SUITABLE BUILDING AN OPERATING THEATRE CAN BE SET UP" IN A FEW MINUTES.

impossible to utilize houses, includes the following : 10 ambulance waggons, 3 water carts, 6 waggons and 2 carts for stores and baggage, 14 riding and 68 draught-horses. A proportion of motor ambulances now replaces some of the horse-drawn vehicles. Both are equally necessary ; the horse-drawn ambulance is best for work near the trenches, while the motor ambulance is best for conveying the sick and wounded from the dressing-station to the clearing hospital, or " rail-head."

Its organization is so perfect that, on the occasions when the troops are followed into action, in a few minutes, either in one of the special tents carried for the purpose, or in some suitable building, an operating theatre can be set up with all essential equipment. Then, either in bell-tents, or in rooms or sheds upon the floors of which straw, when procurable, is laid, the sick and wounded are cared for by the doctors and orderlies, who do their utmost for their patients till they can be removed to a clearing or general hospital. By

day the Field Ambulance, or "the hospital" as the soldier generally calls it, is distinguished by two flags, the Union Jack and the Geneva Red Cross on a white ground, which are hung side by side on a horizontal pole; at night, by two lamps giving a white light.

The Field Ambulance maintains constant communication with the regimental aid-post in front and the clearing hospital in rear. When a man is wounded in the firing-line he is carried by his regimental stretcher-bearers (the majority of whom are bandsmen in peace time) to the regimental aid-post, which may be a "dug-out," or a house, or merely a place of natural and comparative shelter. Here he receives first aid from his regimental doctor. As soon as possible an ambulance waggon, accompanied by a medical officer and a squad of four or six bearers, comes out from the dressing-station, to which it conveys the wounded man. Here any operation, which the urgency of the case may demand, is performed, and wounds

are re-dressed. Twice a day at least motor ambulances come up to the dressing-station and convey the sick and wounded to some clearing hospital.

Every morning batches of sick, who have generally first been seen by their regimental doctor, report themselves to the Field Ambulance. Some are detained for treatment, the remainder are sent down to the clearing hospital. Another very important work done in the Field Ambulance is the inoculation of the troops against enteric. Some four or five thousand men were thus treated by my Field Ambulance in a few weeks. The following table shows the numbers treated by the 14th Field Ambulance during the first three months of this campaign :—

	Sick.	Wounded.
Officers .	48	68
N.C.O.'s and Men . .	1,773	1,572
	1,821	1,640

These numbers were, of course, very considerably surpassed later on during the severe wintry weather and the heavier fighting in Flanders. Of the work done by the officers and men of the 14th Field Ambulance it is impossible to speak in too high terms of appreciation. They are heroes every one, and I count it a privilege to have been associated with them.

In this campaign, with its artillery duels between long-range guns, the Field Ambulance has been constantly under shell-fire, and the journeys between the dressing-station and the regimental aid-posts have always been perilous. But, whether it was across the open plain on the north side of the Aisne, upon which the shrapnel was constantly bursting, or along the cobbled roads of Belgium studded with "Jack Johnson" holes, they were always performed readily and cheerfully. Frequently in our mess at night when, in answer to the announcement "The waggons and squads are ready, sir," the

Colonel would ask, "Whose turn is it to go out to-night?" have I heard several officers answer together, "I should like to go out to-night, sir." I often accompanied these expeditions, and have, therefore, first-hand knowledge of the difficulties and dangers they involved.

My admiration for our fighting men, than whom there are no finer in the world, is equalled only by that which I have for these men of peace who so well deserve the motto of their Corps, "In arduis fidelis."

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE OF MONS

At midday on Saturday, August 22nd, we entrained at Havre. The men of the R.A.M.C. worked with a will and soon had horses and waggons on board our special train, for we were all eager to leave for "the front" as early as possible. Of what was happening there we knew little or nothing beyond the bare fact that somewhere in Belgium the allied British and French armies were coming to grips with our common enemy. We now know that on this day "French's contemptible little army" was entrenching itself along a front of some twenty-five miles extending from Binche on the right to Condé on the left, with the historic town of Mons in the centre, to await with confidence

"Old One O'clock's" attempt to "walk over" it with a force four times as numerous.

We knew that our Field Ambulance would be needed, and were all anxious to do our bit, hence we chafed at the tediously slow railway journey which had to be accomplished ere we could take our place on the field. By 11 p.m. Rouen was reached, and here hot coffee was served to us by the French. How glad of it we were! Breakfast, consisting of "bully" beef and biscuits, on Sunday, August 23rd, was partaken of in the train. The Rev. O. S. Watkins, an old campaigner, made us an excellent brew of tea. At noon we reached "rail head," Valenciennes, and immediately commenced to detrain. We all lent a hand, and by working hard in the heat and dust the task was accomplished in about two hours. Horses and men were fed, and we then anxiously awaited marching orders.

Some of us, in the interval, went into the town and sought refreshment at the

Hôtel du Commerce ; the delicious omelet and coffee provided are things to be remembered. Here in a backyard closely watched by the civil guard we saw our first German prisoners, an officer and five men of the Uhlans. The poor beggars looked very dirty, and were all sleeping heavily.

Simultaneously with our rejoining the Ambulance orders arrived, and at 6 p.m. we marched off in an easterly direction towards Bavai, which was reached about midnight. A distance of eighteen miles had been accomplished, a good performance for men the majority of whom were unaccustomed to marching. I shall never forget my introduction to the roughly paved roads, which my horse evidently disliked as much as the men, nor the hearty reception accorded us in the villages through which we passed. The children pressed upon us bunches of flowers, fruit, and picture postcards. The women would run into the road with fresh bread, and drinks of water for horse and man. The

old men, for all of a fighting age had gone, would hand us gifts of their home-grown tobacco. The peasants usually hailed the Field Ambulance as "La Croix Rouge," and the Padres seemed always to occasion them wonderment. They would look at our clerical collars, at the red cross upon our left arm, and then address us as "docteur" or "pasteur" according to the decision at which they had arrived.

While we had marched on this memorable Sunday our comrades in front had been heavily engaged with the enemy. The first shots of the battle of Mons were fired at forty minutes after noon. Our men soon settled down to their work, and wrought terrible havoc among the dense masses of German Infantry which were flung again and again, but always in vain, against our position. Not infrequently, too, the Germans were given a taste of the bayonet and made to run like rabbits. The Second Corps, commanded by General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, with our own Division, the 5th,

on its extreme left, more than held its own, successfully defeating every attempt of the enemy to cross the canal. One of my Dublin Regiments, the 2nd Battalion the Duke of Wellington's (West Riding) Regiment, suffered heavily; the commanding officer, Lieut.-Col. J. A. C. Gibbs, was severely wounded and taken prisoner, Major Strafford and Captain Denman-Jubb were killed. The tidings of the death of these two good friends of mine almost staggered me; it was difficult to realize we were not to meet again, and I wished so much I could have been with them at the end.

When darkness fell most of our line stood on the ground held at dawn. We had not suffered any great losses, numerically, while we had inflicted very severe ones on the Germans. The men had acquired confidence and eagerly looked forward to the renewal of the battle on the morrow. But the retirement of the French on our right, and the overwhelming numbers of the enemy which threatened our

left flank, made the British retirement inevitable.

Before leaving Bavai, on Monday, August 24th, I was called to the civil hospital to minister to a man of the Dorsets who was seriously ill with pneumonia. The nuns who were acting as nurses ushered me into a room where there lay a man of the Royal Engineers who had been killed accidentally the previous day. By their request I said prayers by the side of the body, for the man was to be buried that day and I could not remain to conduct the funeral service. Even now, at 5.30 a.m., the Field Ambulance, having bivouacked but a few hours in the public square, was moving off. Not having had any breakfast, I remember how much I appreciated the coffee which the nuns made for me. Without a halt we pushed on, for tidings had reached us of yesterday's big fight and already we could hear the distant rumble of our guns. By 9 a.m. we reached a small hamlet named La Rosine near Dour, and could go no

farther, because we were now in close proximity to our batteries which were in action.

The British had taken up a new line at dawn some five miles south of the Mons canal. General Smith-Dorrien had received a useful reinforcement to his command in the 19th Brigade, which had detrained at Valenciennes the previous day, and his task on this Monday morning, August 24th, was to hold the enemy while the First Corps retired to the Maubeuge position, and then to break off the fight and fall back to the new position, showing a bold front the whole time and striking back at every attempt of the enemy to interrupt it. This, the most difficult of movements an Army can be called upon to execute, was most successfully carried out, thanks to the skill of Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien and the dauntless spirit of the troops under his command.

This was the general situation when at 9 a.m. we parked the Field Ambulance in a field and prepared parts of a large sugar

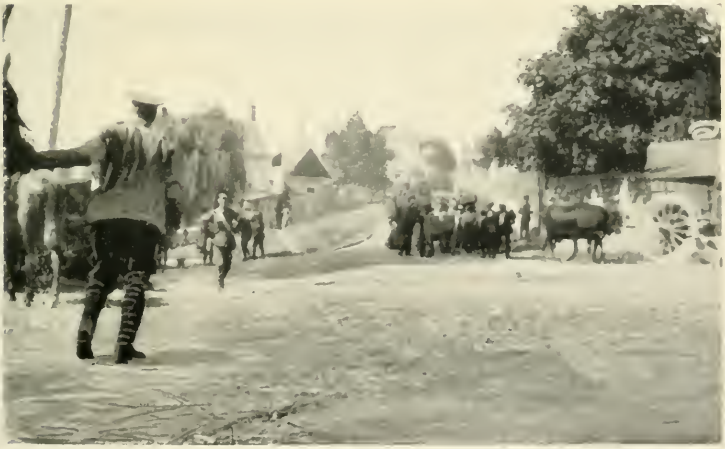
refinery close by for the reception of the wounded. The first to come under our care was Captain Buchanan-Dunlop, of the Royal West Kent Regiment. He had been struck by a bullet which had entered his cap in front and come out at the back, making a nasty wound across the scalp, but, providentially, not deep enough to prove fatal. His wound having been dressed, he was intensely anxious to return to the fight; but this the doctors decided he was not fit to do. I then helped to make him a comfortable resting-place on some straw in the building above named. Many other wounded were brought in during the morning.

Here I first saw shrapnel bursting, and we received our baptism of fire. What were my feelings on this occasion? The novelty of the experience, thoughts of our brave lads meeting the onslaught of the foe, the desire to do what one could to help the wounded, entirely possessed me. Here, too, one first saw the pitiable sight of Belgian villagers hurriedly leaving their

homes with a few treasured possessions, varying in their nature and number, and carried either on their backs, in wheelbarrows or waggons, according to their status. Their dogs were invariably included in the party, and how I blessed them for this! Many of the refugees would appeal to us to direct them as to the best route by which to escape: poor souls, how our hearts bled for them! They had trusted the British would secure the safety of their homes, and now we seemed to have failed them. But we had done our best, and an astonishingly good best too, with the small force then at our disposal. What a different tale there would have been to tell if, at this stage, we could have opposed the invader with not merely seventy but seven hundred thousand men! Brave and honourable little Belgium might have been saved incalculable misery and spoliation.

As it was, about noon on this day, we received orders to take our part in that great retirement which was to last,

THE 11TH FIELD AMBULANCE MARCHING THROUGH A FRENCH VILLAGE.



"BELGIAN VILLAGERS HURRIEDLY LEAVING THEIR HOMES."

though we didn't know it at the time, for twelve days. The wounded were placed in the ambulance waggons, all equipment was hastily packed, and we moved back through some of the villages in which but a few hours earlier we had been welcomed by a grateful and confident people. Now one could see upon their countenances anxiety and fear clearly written. Oppressed though they were by a dread of the oncoming foe they would, however, momentarily forget their troubles and leave their preparations for departure to do everything possible for the troops marching by. Many a prayer did we put up that these generous, thoughtful, and unselfish souls might reach a place of safety.

The heat on this afternoon was intense, but on and on we marched with never a halt till dusk, when the Field Ambulance was turned into a field that horse and man might be given food and rest. We had partaken of the former, and were about to lie down among the shocks

of corn to enjoy the latter, when we were warned that the Germans were close upon us. I need hardly say that it didn't take us long to pack up on this occasion! We owed our escape to one of the motor-bicycle despatch-carriers, a Corps, consisting very largely of University men, which has done such valuable service in this campaign. A few weeks later we again met our cyclist friend, and it was a joyous surprise to him to find our Field Ambulance had eluded capture. It transpired that he had been instrumental in saving on this occasion not only ourselves, but an Ammunition Column and a squadron of Cavalry.

We pushed on again, weary though horse and man were, till near the village of Villereau, just after midnight, it was deemed safe to call a halt. The waggons were drawn up by the roadside, the horses fed and rested with harness on, and we lay down fully clad so that, in the event of an alarm, no time might be lost in continuing our retreat. I, and a few of

the officers, had just found a comfortable bed among some sheaves of corn in a field close by, and were falling asleep, when I was conscious of many dusky figures moving about the field. It was reassuring to hear them speaking in the French tongue and to discover they were troops of our Ally, and not of Von Kluck.

At dawn on August 25th we were roused and, without waiting for breakfast, trekked away again. How precarious was the position of the British at this time we now know. The enemy had been making very determined attempts to get around our left flank and surround us. Our Commander-in-Chief saw that no time must be lost in retiring to another position, an operation which he describes as "full of danger and difficulty" not only owing to the very superior force on our front, but also to the exhaustion of the troops. From 4 a.m. till 1 p.m. we marched, with only very brief halts, under an almost tropical sun, on the western outskirts of the big forest of Mormal,

passing through pretty villages nestling among orchards, and scenes of pastoral beauty and smiling prosperity—so soon, alas! to be despoiled by the enemy.

During the morning I saw for the first time on this campaign our Corps Commander, General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien. Always courteous and smiling, on this occasion he alighted from his motor-car, held up for the moment by a congestion of traffic, and chatted with us. We saw him frequently after this, and his face always bore the same confident smile. "Things can't be too bad, sir, for the General is smiling," the men would remark to me; and we all felt the same. Sir John French speaks of the "rare and unusual coolness, intrepidity, and determination" of Sir Horace, but it was his evident cheerfulness on these dark days which helped to inspire those under his command, as well as the mutual confidence existing between leader and led. "You know, sir, it was Smith-Doreen who trusted the soldier at Alder-

Photo by Lafayette, Ltd.

GENERAL SIR H. L. SMITH-DORRIEN, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., D.S.O.

shot; we didn't disappoint him then, and we don't mean to now," was a remark made to me, and one which I believe to summarize the attitude of the troops generally towards the Commander of the Second Corps.

By noon we passed through Le Cateau, famous as the meeting-place of Henry VIII and Francis I of France, and halted in a corn-field about two miles west of it. A march of considerably over twenty miles had been accomplished; a splendid performance for "exhausted" troops. I rode into the nearest village, Troisvilles, and begged fresh bread, milk, and eggs for the wounded. Several of the villagers willingly assisted me to carry these commodities to the Field Ambulance. Upon my return I found the doctors busy dressing wounds and performing minor operations. This duty having been accomplished we sat down to the first good meal we had had since Sunday. We had never gone short of food—the splendid work of the Army Service Corps had ensured that—

but we had been obliged to content ourselves with biscuits and cheese, which we ate as we rode or marched along. Frequently, during the brief halts, we had lit fires by the roadside and set about making a "billy" of tea, and then, before the water had boiled, would come the peremptory order to march. How much, therefore, we appreciated the fresh bread, fried bacon, jam, and steaming hot tea of which our meal consisted that evening! We were warned that we should have to be astir at dawn, so we lost no time in seeking sleep. By the invitation of two wounded officers, for whom a bell-tent had been erected, I shared their shelter; and very glad I was of it, for the drizzling rain, which had commenced to fall while we were having supper, soon changed to a downpour.

CHAPTER V

SMITH-DORRIEN'S GREAT STAND AT LE CATEAU

The morning of August 26th broke fine and bright, a pale blue sky and thin mists rising from the wet ground giving promise of a hot day.

About midnight on the 25th the enemy had heavily attacked the exhausted troops of the First Corps at Landrecies, and the Commander-in-Chief arranged that during the 26th this Corps should continue the movement to the southward, while the Second Corps, with the Fourth Division of the Third Corps (which had detrained three days ago at Le Cateau), and Cavalry should follow the retirement and hold back the enemy. The second part of this plan proved impossible, for at daybreak it had

become apparent that the enemy was throwing the bulk of his strength against the left of the position occupied by the Second Corps and the 4th Division. In face of such an attack General Smith-Dorrien saw that it was not possible to continue his retirement at daybreak, and he decided, therefore, to stand and face the enemy.

The odds against him were overwhelming; the Germans must have had 250,000 men, while the British, making deductions for the First Corps, which took no part in the fight, and for the losses sustained at Mons, could not have numbered much more than 50,000. In the opinion of the German Generals the British had come to their hour of doom. They held on, however, for eight hours, and every attempt to break them failed. As an epic of resistance it was a feat of arms inferior to nothing in British military history. Our losses were necessarily heavy, but General Smith-Dorrien attained his object, and, as General Joffre gratefully recog-

nized, skilfully saved the whole Allied left.

Soon after dawn the 14th Field Ambulance moved from the scene of last night's bivouac and marched two or three miles in the direction of Honnechy. My horse had gone sick, so this morning I marched on foot. I mention this fact because, later in the day, the loss of my horse nearly proved my undoing. As I trudged along I passed the 108th Battery Royal Garrison Artillery, with its long 4·7 guns cleverly concealed by sheaves of corn, which soon commenced to work awful havoc among the enemy. I greeted two of my old Dublin Regiments, the Duke of Wellington's and the Yorkshire Light Infantry, as they were taking up their positions in the hastily dug shelter trenches. From the cheerfulness of the troops one might have thought they were entering upon a sham fight on Salisbury Plain. An officer friend shouted to me, "Good morning, Padre; this is no place for you and the hospital. It will be a warm spot soon."

I assured him that the Padre and doctors were not going to desert them and would be close at hand when needed. I watched, too, with admiration my own Brigade (Suffolks, Surreys, Cornwalls, and Manchesters) led by General S. P. Rolt, C.B., going into action, and often, as the brave lads passed by, did I re-echo the psalmist's words, "We wish you good luck in the name of the Lord."

Behind a hillock, on the crest of which we flew the Red Cross flag, our Field Ambulance took up its position in close proximity to the 14th Brigade. An operating tent was at once pitched and every preparation made for the reception of the wounded. About 7 a.m. the roar of the guns and the rattle of rifle-fire told us the fight had begun, so, from the Ambulance, the bearer divisions of all three sections were despatched in charge of Major Fawcett, Captain Kelly, and Captain Crymble to bring in the wounded. In response to their urgent request, which soon arrived, several ambulance waggons

went out to them, and it was not long ere they returned laden with wounded. Having deposited their burdens with us, they returned again and again to the field, where the above-named officers and stretcher-bearers pursued their work of picking up those whose injuries required their removal from the firing line. I went to the nearest farm-house and assisted to convert several rooms and barns into temporary wards; straw was laid upon the floors, and hither the wounded warriors were borne as soon as they had been attended to by the doctors. A word of prayer here and there, the heating of water, making of beef-tea, and holding of a limb while a doctor bandaged, kept me fully occupied.

Soon after midday all accommodation for the wounded was overtaxed, and precautions had to be taken lest, a sudden retirement becoming necessary, we might have more patients on our hands than the waggons would carry. Colonel Crawford decided, therefore, to

despatch such as could walk to Busigny railway-station, from which, we were told, a train would take them to a Base hospital. The Rev. O. S. Watkins volunteered to take charge of them. We heard afterwards that he safely accomplished his task, but, before he could rejoin us, we had moved off and saw him no more till next morning in St. Quentin.

About 3.30 p.m. there came the order to retire, for overwhelming numbers of the enemy were working around on our left flank and threatening the three British Divisions with annihilation. The wounded were placed in the ambulance waggons, all equipment was hastily packed, and, last of all, our hospital flag was struck and we left the field. And not a moment too soon, for shrapnel, intended for one of our Batteries, was bursting in close proximity to us.

We had not gone more than half a mile when shrapnel began to fall upon the road by which we were retiring. The Field Ambulance, that the wounded might

be got out of danger as quickly as possible, galloped off, and, being on foot and at the rear of the column, I was left behind! I had sheltered for a few minutes only behind a railway embankment when, luckily for me, a mounted man leading a spare horse came along, and I availed myself of this means of escape. I galloped between our Artillery, which was in action, and the Cavalry, waiting to cover the retirement of the former, and soon overtook the Field Ambulance near the village of Busigny.

Here we halted for orders which did not arrive,[1] and should probably have been captured had not some of our Cavalry passed that way. The officer in command informed us that our Infantry and Artillery had all left the field, that the Cavalry were being withdrawn, and he suggested we should follow him as quickly as possible. I need hardly state the

[1] Major Brunskill, R.A.M.C., the D.D.M.S. of the 5th Division, who would have given us orders, we now know, had been taken prisoner.

suggestion was promptly acted upon! As it was, two of our medical officers, Captains Kelly and Crymble, were taken prisoners while they were caring for our wounded in the church of a neighbouring village.

About 6 p.m. we hastened away, determined that our waggons laden with wounded should not fall into the enemy's hands if we could help it. The farther we went the denser did the stream of traffic grow and the slower did our progress become. To add to the unpleasantness of the situation a drizzling rain commenced to fall at dusk, and later, in the inky darkness, we found ourselves in a confused tangle of guns, ammunition waggons, motor-lorries, Cavalry and Infantry. Progress was painfully slow; often we were compelled to halt for twenty, thirty, or forty minutes, and then could advance only a few yards. Fortunately, the enemy had himself suffered too heavily to engage in an energetic pursuit. The exhausted Infantry lay by the roadside, and often

on the road itself, and had to be roused before we could get through. The whole of the night I sat on the box seat of our foremost waggon and held in my hands the only lamp which would burn. In the awful darkness it was impossible for the other ambulance waggons to keep in touch with us. To have dismounted would have been to court certain disaster from wheels or horses; I could, therefore, only stick to my seat, prod the driver, who invariably slumbered during the long halts, in the ribs, and, by dint of shouting "Please make way for the wounded," get my waggon on a few yards at a time. Many times during the night I pulled aside the curtain at the front of the waggon, from the interior of which the sound of intermingled snores and groans constantly issued, to inquire how the wounded were getting on. The wakeful invariably answered, "All right, thank you, sir." One man, doubtless thinking of his less fortunate comrades, replied, "I reckon we're in clover, sir." What

wonderful patience and contentment were theirs! Packed like herrings in a barrel, covered with ugly wounds, hungry, dirty, weary, they sat in that waggon for sixteen hours without a murmur or complaint. And ever as I looked in upon them I saw the faithful waggon-orderly keeping watch over his charges.

About 1 a.m. we saw ahead lights moving in the fields, and fondly hoped we should soon be able to rest. But it proved to be a bivouac for the Infantry, and at the entrance, lantern in hand, stood General Sir Charles Fergusson, busily engaged in sorting the men out by Regiments and directing them to their respective resting-places. He bade us, and all the wheeled traffic, push on as quickly as possible.

When dawn broke on August 27th the 14th Field Ambulance, as far as I saw, consisted of Colonel Crawford, myself, and one ambulance waggon! Our anxiety as to the fate of our comrades was not to be removed till some hours later

when, in St. Quentin, there was a great reunion, stragglers coming in from all directions, each with a tale to tell of thrilling experiences on that never-to-be-forgotten night.

By the time we reached St. Quentin we had covered considerably over twenty miles, and on the way I had often feared the horses might not last out. They were overloaded and badly needed food and water, especially the latter. As soon as it was light, seeing clover growing in a field by the roadside, I dismounted, plucked an arm-full, and ran after the horses and fed them with it as they trudged along. Being wet with the rain, it was for them both food and drink, and if ever animals looked their gratitude those horses did that morning. Dear, faithful beasts, they, and others of their kind, had done good work in saving men's lives.

I had been too occupied to feel hunger or thirst; my water-bottle, therefore, contained a goodly store, and from it I

was able to give a welcome and refreshing draught to a great friend of mine, a young staff officer whom I came across. But how terribly he had changed in a few days! I scarcely recognized him in the hollow-eyed, unshaven individual who rode along slumbering fitfully as he rode. He greeted me with "My dear Padre, I am glad to see you, for I heard you had been taken." From him I heard some details of the fight, and, in answer to my anxious inquiries, learned the loss of many a friend.

I deeply regretted that permission could not be given me to remain behind to bury our comrades who had fallen at Le Cateau, and I know all chaplains felt the same. Had we remained to perform this duty we should have been taken prisoners and for many days to come, in consequence, the hale and hearty, as well as the sick and wounded, would have been deprived of a chaplain's ministrations. As a matter of fact, the Reverends J. T. Hales and B. G. O'Rorke, C.F.'s, were taken prisoners on

this day and were not released from captivity till ten months later. However, we consoled ourselves with the knowledge that our dead lay in a friendly country, and we felt confident that the French priests and villagers would reverently bury them. We know that this was invariably done. I myself on many occasions have witnessed the genuine grief and loving sympathy displayed by the peasants when they stood with me beside the graves of our comrades. They would cast flowers into the grave, plant others upon the mound, and promise to faithfully tend it, as, with eyes dimmed by tears, they expressed their thanks to those who had crossed the sea to fight and die for La belle France. The following tribute by a French priest, and one probably typical of many others, was paid while he buried some British soldiers, and reported by one who heard it. It proves that our confidence was not misplaced, and should comfort those who, like ourselves, regret that the British soldiers could not, in

every case, be buried by their own chaplains. He said:—"We are defending our soil, our homes, our wives, our churches, our children, all we hold dear and sacred to us. But with the English it is not the same. For them, they have no need to leave their sweet home, their green Ireland, their glorious Scotland, their grand and ancient England. Why have they left everything, sacrificed everything? Why do they descend upon our shores every day like a wave which nothing can stop? Why are they now at our side, armed, calm, intrepid, happy, and singing? Because they are men of honour. Honour was violated, the liberty of the people of the Continent was in danger. May the God of Honour and Right watch over their bodies. May He take care of their souls. May He give them what they deserve, having done their duty—eternal rest; because you, like us, believe in the immortality of the soul. Blessing upon them. Their memory will live among us. We will take care of their graves."

The whole of the 14th Field Ambulance had reached St. Quentin by 8 a.m. on August 27th, and no time was lost in moving the wounded from the waggons into one of the large public buildings, where they received much-needed attention at the hands of the doctors. I went around and said a word to each, distributed among them the last of my cigarettes (which were now almost as precious as gold!) and then assisted in taking them to the railway-station, from which they were despatched in a special train to a Base hospital. This done, we had some breakfast in a café, and soon afterwards continued our march, for the town had to be evacuated by noon, beyond which General Smith-Dorrien could not guarantee its safety.

Once more we were an ordered force, and, while we had lost at Le Cateau 10,000 of our best in killed and wounded, we talked with pardonable pride of the splendid achievement of the Second Corps assisted by the 4th Division of the Third.

Were we "downhearted"? I say emphatically, No. The troops were footsore, weary, dirty, and war-worn, but absolutely undaunted. "Tommy" may be a "grouser" at home, but he is cheerfulness and contentment personified on active service. If he had any complaint to make now it was that he was not allowed to face the Germans again at once, to get, as he expressed it, a little of his own back. The fights at Mons and Le Cateau had increased his confidence; the small British Force had held the huge German army, inflicted upon it enormous losses, successfully extricated itself, and pulled itself together. All ranks now confidently felt that, though they might continue the retirement, the day would come when they would turn and rend the Germans again. Subsequent events justified this confidence.

CHAPTER VI

END OF THE RETIREMENT ON PARIS

On Thursday, August 27th, we left St. Quentin at 11 a.m. and marched for eleven miles in a south-westerly direction as far as the village of Cugny, where we halted, about tea-time, all very tired, hungry, and dirty. I remember having a most refreshing wash in a bucket of water under a hedge, and my first shave since Sunday. As I looked into the small hand-mirror I could scarcely believe that the reflection was that of myself. Several of us were hospitably entertained at a farm ; the fresh bread and delicious coffee they gave us were a most welcome change from the hard biscuits and water on which we had existed almost entirely since Sunday. Colonel Crawford was given the

only spare bed, and four of us shared an empty room, on the bare wooden floor of which we placed our valises.

At 1 a.m. an alarm was raised; we hastily packed up, and "stood by" till 3 a.m., when orders came to march. On we went, through Berlancourt and Guiscard to Noyon, where I met the 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment doing duty on the Lines of Communication; it afterwards formed part of my Brigade.

In Noyon we evacuated by train our sick and wounded, of whom we got a goodly number each day. We crossed the river Oise and saw the arrangements made by our Engineers for blowing up the bridge. During the retirement, as the last of our troops crossed the Oise, the Aisne, and the Marne, the bridges were invariably destroyed and thus our pursuers were delayed.

We found a most delightful resting-place among the orchards near La Pommeraye, just beyond Pontoise. Here we received our first mail from England, and

BRIDGE OVER THE OISE DESTROYED DURING THE RETIREMENT.

"WE FOUND A MOST DELIGHTFUL RESTING-PLACE AMONG THE ORCHARDS."

what pleasure and excitement it occasioned! My Brigade followed close upon the Ambulance, and bivouacked in cornfields. I visited Brigadier-General Rolt, and then each of my four Regiments in turn. Having asked for the officer commanding the Suffolk Regiment, imagine my surprise when a junior subaltern appeared, and my sorrow as I heard from him that he, the transport officer, and the Quartermaster were the only surviving officers after our fights at Mons and Le Cateau. Among the rank and file, too, this Regiment's losses had been very heavy; in a few days it had been reduced from 1,000 to 180 men. I found the troops busily engaged in cooking a meal and making beds for themselves with the sheaves of corn. Tired though they necessarily were after having marched thirty miles in twenty-four hours, they were in excellent spirits, and were proud to tell of the stand made by their respective Regiments. They spoke of the loss of their officers and pals, and expressed

the desire for an early opportunity of avenging their deaths. "Give us a good feed and a good rest, sir, and we'll take on the whole blooming German army," one man said to me. The lads, I'm thankful to say, had both that night. How they had fought and marched under the burning August sun, with so little sleep or rest, was well-nigh miraculous.

Under the star-lit sky, wrapped only in my great-coat, I slept the clock round! Rumours reached us the next day, August 29th, that the retirement was over, and that the Allied Forces would give battle to the advancing enemy on the line where they now stood. It was a glorious day, and my servant, Trooper Williams of the 11th Hussars, availed himself of the opportunity to have a washing day! The non-arrival of marching orders in the afternoon gave promise of my being able to hold services for my Brigade on the morrow. Arrangements were made, therefore, by which all the Units under my charge would have an

opportunity of attending divine worship. The promise, however, was not to be fulfilled, for at 7.30 that evening we were again on the march. By 11.30 we had reached Carlepont, where Mr. Watkins and I slept in a hay-loft.

On Sunday, August 30th, we moved off at 3 a.m. and trekked all the morning, crossing the Aisne at Attichy and pushing on to the village of Croutoy. Here we halted for some hours awaiting instructions, in accordance with which, about tea-time, we retraced our steps and bivouacked by the river at Attichy. Those of us who could swim enjoyed a dip in the stream, and I again visited my Regiments when they arrived and bivouacked near us.

Again our hopes of a stand were disappointed, and on Monday the 31st we were off early, doing one of our hardest marches, more than twenty miles, over indifferent roads, under a burning sun. We halted for the night at Crepy-en-Valois. Mr. Watkins and I slept in a cart; we welcomed the friendly shelter which it

afforded from the cold wind, but agreed that we had slept on softer beds!

Early on September 1st, at the time we were due to move off, some excitement was occasioned by the discovery of Uhlans in the woods on our left. A handful of Gunners, acting as Infantry, crept through the intervening mangold fields in extended order, and then searched the wood. They soon returned and reported having driven off the enemy; so we commenced our march. For the rest of the day we were unmolested, but there was some sharp fighting in the woods of Compiègne and Villers-Cotterets. At Nery "L" Battery R.H.A. was attacked by two German Batteries and Maxims at close range. It put up a magnificent fight, but was soon reduced to one gun and three men. In a few minutes all would have been over, but the opportune arrival of some of our Cavalry and Infantry turned the tables on the enemy. "L" Battery was saved, and the twelve German guns were captured. The three men, Captain E. K.

Bradbury, Sergeant-Major Dorrell, and Sergeant Nelson received the Victoria Cross for their bravery.

Having spent the night at Ognes, we marched on September 2nd, at 3.30 a.m., passed through Oissery and St. Soupplette, and reached Montge in the afternoon. The heat was again almost overpowering. We saw large numbers of French Cavalry during the day, and very reassuring the sight of them was, for we knew they would be protecting our flank, around which the enemy was constantly doing his best to pass. At 7 p.m. Major Fawcett, in charge of four ambulance waggons containing sick and wounded, left for Lagny. By the wish of Colonel Crawford, I accompanied him and drove, in a two-wheeled spring cart, a senior officer of the Artillery who was suffering from a complete nervous breakdown. I remember the night so well; there was a brilliant moon, and we passed many street-barricades erected and guarded by French soldiers. As there was little or no traffic

we made quick progress, and at 10.30 called a halt in Annet-sur-Marne, where we were given refreshment in the house of Monsieur La Roche. Tidings of our arrival soon spread, and we were visited by the Mayor, Monsieur Gabriel Chamon, who informed us with pride that he had fought in 1870, and much regretted not being able to do so now.

At midnight we reached Lagny, on the Marne, parked in the station yard, and removed the sick and wounded to the waiting-rooms. Having ascertained that there would be no train for Paris till 4 a.m., I lay on a stretcher in an ambulance waggon and sought some sleep, but in vain, for the cold was intense. The Paris train arrived at 5 a.m. crowded with refugees, but we succeeded in getting all our sick and wounded aboard, and right glad we were to see them safely on their way to hospital. By the time we had had some coffee and visited the two bridges, which were mined ready for blowing up, the rest of our unit had arrived,

"ONE MAN IN HIS TIME PLAYS MANY PARTS."

and with them we pushed on to Mont Richet, a small village about five miles south of Meaux.

Friday, September 4th, was very hot, and thankful we were to be able to rest all day, seeking some shade in a field of "mealies." "One man in his time plays many parts"; to-day I filled the rôle of a barber. My subject was the Rev. O. S. Watkins, who placed himself in my hands with complete confidence, although the photograph suggests misgivings on his part. My work was voted so satisfactory that I was there and then appointed honorary barber to the officers' mess. At 10.30 p.m. we were off again, and, marching through Crécy and its dense forest, early on Saturday, September 5th, reached Tournan. We had some sleep during the day under an avenue of trees, and learned with joy that at last our retirement was ended.

During the past week we had often wondered whether we were going to find ourselves in Paris, participating in another

siege. We were glad to be spared that experience, while we were disappointed not to see the city after being within fifteen miles of it.

Our retirement from Mons will go down to history as one of the finest achievements of the British Army. Frederick the Great said that the most difficult of all the operations of war is a successful retreat. Ours was an unqualified success; the troops preserved their excellent discipline and *morale*; I estimate they must have covered at least 190 miles, pursued by a relentless foe at whom they frequently struck back, always inflicting heavier losses than they suffered; and, now that they learned that they were to cease to retire, they were as eager and confident as on the first day of battle.

CHAPTER VII

THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

The German Staff never made a greater mistake than in the first week of September by imagining that the British were demoralized and might, therefore, be regarded as a negligible quantity. They were soon to give Von Kluck a rude awakening and make him pay dearly for his mistake. On September 6th our Commander-in-Chief appealed to us to show now to the enemy our power and "to push on vigorously to the attack beside the 6th French Army." He expressed his confidence that the British, "by another manifestation of the magnificent spirit which they had shown in the past fortnight," would "fall on the enemy's flank

with all their strength, and, in unison with our Allies, drive them back."

A splendid response was made to this appeal. The troops were in the highest possible spirits; they whistled and sang their "Tipperary" and other popular airs and cracked their jokes. "We'll soon pull old One O'clock's whiskers for him," I heard one man say; and many, as I greeted them, remarked, "We're going in the right direction now, sir."

At the very hour when our friends in the home-land were wending their way to the House of God for their early Sabbath morning sacramental worship, the British army was commencing its forward movement. Our thoughts were with them; it was inspiring to know that before many an altar that morning, in the Church's great intercession service, we and our cause would be remembered. We regretted that again we were unable, on the Lord's own day, to offer Him corporate worship; but we felt that if *laborare est orare*, then we too, by our efforts to drive back the

apostles of hate, were offering the God of love an act of worship. "Good-morning, sir; no church again to-day. Well, never mind, I says me prayers as I marches along," one lad said to me; and I know his attitude was typical of the men generally, of whom it could truly be said "they walked with God." Their quiet confidence, their splendid heroism, were the outcome of strong faith in the God of all the earth.

The sun shone with blistering heat, and we welcomed the shade afforded by Crécy's forest, through which at first our route lay. I went on in advance of the Field Ambulance to take a sick officer to the headquarters of the 5th Division. My servant drove him in our spring cart, and I rode in front on my horse. We left him safely at Villeneuve, and I went off to do some foraging for fresh bread and eggs. Riding up the street, I saw a "Tommy" advance into the road with a broad smile on his face and glad I was to see one of my old Church orderlies from Dublin. "Is it

eggs you're looking for, sir? Come along with me, and I'll put you on to some!" If anything is to be found you may trust "Thomas Atkins" to find it.

Having successfully accomplished my "shopping," my servant and I went off in search of the Field Ambulance, which we found parked for a midday rest near La Pilloneries. Our march to-day ended at Dammartin, near Mortcerf, where we bivouacked in the grounds of a beautiful château. Here an incident occurred which caused some amusement to those who witnessed it: in the darkness one of our officers fell into the moat, and, as he was dragged out covered with green slime and wet to the skin, he remarked, "Well, that's an experience." Some one described the mildness of his language as nothing less than "a miracle of grace." Poor fellow, we were really very sorry for him, and hung him out to dry in front of our camp fire! The Transport Sergeant, whose duty it was to superintend the care of the horses, hearing the splash in the

water, ran to the moat and exclaimed, "Oh, it's only a man; I thought it might be a 'orse!"

We had slept that night but a short time when we were aroused by two of our Infantry, who asked, "Have you any sentries? because we've just seen, in the next field, some suspicious figures who did not answer our challenge." We replied that we were a Field Ambulance, and, consequently, had no sentries. We assured them we were not in the least alarmed, and bade them return and shoot or capture the suspicious figures, should they prove to be enemies. Knowing, as we now do, how little respect the Germans have for the Red Cross, we were, perhaps, too optimistic. However, we were well protected, for next morning we heard that these self-same sentries had captured some stragglers of the enemy during the night.

Our march on Monday, September 7th, took us as far as Coulommiers, out of which the enemy had been driven by our troops at 5 a.m. that day. Near Voisins

we passed the scenes of several German bivouacs, unmistakable from the large numbers of wine-bottles with which the ground was littered. Wherever these bivouacs were in close proximity to a village invariably we found on the ground tables, chairs, and bedding which the cultured foe had carried out from the ransacked houses of harmless villagers. Some of the inhabitants had remained; these now crept forth from their hiding-places, and, as they told of the dastardly deeds of the enemy, our blood boiled. The men, too, could see for themselves the many proofs of senseless and brutal devastation. Henceforward they had not only their own losses to avenge, but the wrongs of these innocent victims of the French countryside. They now realized that they were up against no ordinary foe, but Huns who must be crushed at all costs. Hence they pushed forward with new vigour and increased determination.

Early on September 8th we pushed on through Boissy and St. Germain till, in

the village of Doue we came up with our Batteries, which were in action. The bearer divisions of all three sections of the Field Ambulance went forward under Majors Goldsmith, Richards, and Fawcett. An empty cottage, prepared as a dressing-station, was very soon the scene of considerable activity. Hither the ambulance waggons bore the wounded, and, when they had discharged them, returned again and again to the field. By noon our Infantry had progressed so far that it became necessary to form an advanced dressing-station, which was done at a farm-house, Major Fawcett being left in charge. The wounded at the main dressing-station in Doue were evacuated to rail-head by some of our ambulances and supply lorries which, otherwise, were returning empty. In the meantime I had ridden on to do what I could at the advanced dressing-station.

Late in the afternoon the whole Field Ambulance re-formed here and we marched on after our victorious troops through St.

Ouen. Here, in a cottage to which his regimental stretcher-bearers had carried him, we found Captain Whish, of the 1st East Surreys, mortally wounded. The doctor did everything possible for him, but it was seen that his case was hopeless. Those standing around having bared their heads, I commended his soul into the hands of his Creator, and he was then tenderly lifted into one of our ambulance waggons and watched by a nursing-orderly. We continued our march, and in the darkness reached Rougeville.

During the day our Corps had encountered considerable opposition, but had driven back the enemy at all points with great loss, making many prisoners and taking several guns.

Arrived at the scene of our bivouac, I went in search of my friend Lieutenant-Colonel (now Brigadier-General) J. R. Longley, officer commanding the 1st East Surreys, to report to him the death of Captain Whish, and to ask that the

LIEUTENANT G. D. ECCLES, MEDICAL OFFICER OF THE FIRST EAST SURREY REGIMENT, AND STRETCHER-BEARERS.

pioneers of the Regiment might dig a grave early in the morning.

About 4 a.m. on September 9th I met my friend Pioneer Sergeant Fisher, of the East Surreys, a regular communicant and a good soldier who has since won the D.C.M., and we selected a site for the grave in an orchard, where we laid the fallen officer to rest: representatives of the Regiment who could be spared were present, and several villagers cast flowers upon the body, and promised to tend the grave. The pioneers erected a wooden cross, and I made a sketch of the location of the grave, which I sent to his relatives.

My sad task accomplished, I rode after the Field Ambulance and overtook it as it was descending the steep hill into Saacy on the Marne. Here we halted for some hours, and had a splendid view of the fierce engagement which was taking place on the north bank of the river, the crossing of which had been forced by our Infantry some hours earlier in face of a terrific cannonade.

Soon after noon we were allowed to cross the Marne, and followed our fighting troops up a hill so steep that we had to seek the aid of the Gunners' horses to get our waggons up it. We found ourselves in a wood with three of our Batteries in close proximity to us, but they were so cleverly concealed that we and they enjoyed immunity from German shells. Along the crest of the opposite hill we could locate the enemy's Batteries by the flashes of their guns and the bursting of our shells. Our Gunners did magnificent work, of which we found many proofs next day; in one case a whole German Battery was destroyed; guns, carriages, and limbers lay in a confused heap, and only one German Gunner, out of about ninety men, survived to tell the tale. By nightfall our troops had won a great victory, and were encamped several miles north of the Marne, with the enemy in full retreat.

All day long our stretcher-bearers worked hard and with a fine disregard for

danger. I was thrilled with admiration as I watched their devotion to duty. They would come into the wood where the Field Ambulance had its dressing-station in comparative shelter, deposit their bleeding burdens, give us a word or two about the progress of the fight, wipe the sweat from their brows, and then willingly and eagerly return to pursue their work of mercy where the bullets were falling like rain. If there are degrees of bravery, then, surely, theirs was bravery of the highest order.

At the dressing-station we were fully occupied all the afternoon and long after dusk. When the bearers' work was completed I mounted my horse and took a convoy of wounded to a neighbouring village, from whence they were removed in motors to rail-head. Then I returned with my commando to the Field Ambulance, and we all lay down after our exhausting day to seek some rest; of sleep we had little, for it rained heavily.

At dawn next morning the Rev. O. S.

Watkins and I decided to go over the field in different directions and to bury any dead whom we found, irrespective of their religious denominations. Through the wet corn-fields I rode accompanied by three or four men of the Royal Army Medical Corps, and whenever we found a fallen comrade we bore his body to a corner of the field, to secure as far as possible its never being disturbed, and there we dug a shallow grave. Often, of course, more than one, sometimes three or four, and in one case eighteen men and two officers did I bury in one grave. Always I carefully located the grave by a rough sketch, and kept a record of the names and Regiments of those whom I buried. Whenever possible I made a rude cross, by tying two sticks together with string, and set it over the grave. Once or twice I came upon burying parties from the Regiments, and one said to me, "Please, sir, we have just buried two chaps over there: maybe you would come and say a prayer over them."

BRITISH AND GERMAN WOUNDED BEING SENT TO HOSPITAL AFTER THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE.

While one of the party held my horse, I said parts of our beautiful Service for the Burial of the Dead, and it always seemed to comfort those who were mourning their pals. What a multitude of thoughts passed through my mind as I laid the brave lads to rest: I thought of the splendid fight they had put up, of the pain and agony which it was evident some of them had endured, of their mothers and wives who would look upon their loved ones no more in this life. Whenever I could find the address of any such I invariably wrote them a word of sympathy, and in reply have received some treasured expressions of gratitude, and often the promise of their prayers. Brave women; God comfort and bless them.

In one part of the field I saw striking evidence of the fierceness of yesterday's encounter. I came across a small wood from which we collected twenty of our dead, and in another wood, separated from the former by a field only eighty yards in width, we found many German

dead. Imagine what it must have been like while opposing forces were blazing away at one another with hundreds of rifles at such close range. The marvel is that so few were killed. I also saw a dummy Battery with which, for a while, the enemy had drawn the fire from our guns. The real one had eventually been discovered, and we saw the results of our Gunners' good marksmanship.

Soon after noon the Rev. O. S. Watkins and I met, and, by comparing notes, concluded we had covered the whole of the ground over which our Brigade had fought. As a matter of fact, I buried a considerable number belonging to another Brigade of our Division as well.

We hurried away, for our Field Ambulance had gone on some hours ago. We had not ridden far when we came upon Lieutenant Grenfell, our Quartermaster, with part of our transport in difficulties. A wheel of one of the waggons had sunk deeply into a hole in the road and was defying all efforts to get it out. As the

waggon contained rations, the Quartermaster was getting anxious. Most opportunely some Gunners, whom I knew, were passing with their ammunition waggons. In their hearing I said, "If anybody can get the waggon out the Gunners will," immediately there came the cheery response, "We'll have a try, sir." No sooner said than done: the waggon was hauled out and sent on its way. These same Gunners had yesterday helped us up a hill, now out of a hole, and a few miles farther on some of them dismounted and dug a grave by the roadside in which I buried a Sergeant of the West Kents who had been killed accidentally as the Regiment marched along. Not without reason, I knew, have the Gunners as part of their regimental motto the word "ubique"; they seemed to be everywhere and able to do anything.

As we rode on I heard that a friend of mine, Captain the Hon. A. R. Hewitt, of the 1st East Surreys, had been severely wounded, and that Lieutenant Danks,

one of our doctors, who had remained with him in a cottage, had been taken prisoner. The former was too ill to be moved, so the Germans took his doctor! I learned, too, with great pleasure of the conspicuous bravery of my friend, Sergeant-Major Hyson (now Quartermaster) of the 1st East Surreys, in rescuing wounded under fire. For his conduct on this occasion he has since received both the D.C.M. and the Military Cross.

The battle of the Marne, or the Battle of the Rivers as it is sometimes called, which had commenced on the morning of the 6th was now on the 10th really over. The Allies had scored a great victory, large numbers of prisoners and guns, as well as a vast quantity of stores, falling into their hands. Von Kluck paid dearly for his mistake in placing such a low estimate upon the fighting powers of the British Force. Five Divisions of British Infantry drove before them a greater number of the enemy in spite of their being on the defensive and often in strong

positions on the rivers. The Germans were now in full retreat to the Aisne, and the operations during the next two days partook of the nature of a drive. The British pursued as relentlessly as they had before been pursued: at last "Tommy" was "getting a little of his own back."

CHAPTER VIII

THE BATTLE OF THE AISNE

During the next two days we followed hard upon the Germans, who had made off in a north-easterly direction. Unfortunately, the weather now changed from almost tropical heat to heavy rain and cold winds. The roads soon became a sea of mud, and our transport was often in difficulties. Marching and riding were most unpleasant, but even those who were drenched to the skin maintained a wonderful cheerfulness. If we were having an unpleasant time ourselves we knew the Germans must be having a much worse; they dared not halt, for we were close on their heels; they were dejected by their defeat at the Marne, our troops were victorious, and neither rain nor

mud could damp their enthusiasm. They pushed the enemy hard, and many were the signs we saw of the hastiness of his retreat. Their unburied dead lay by the roadside and in the fields; in the hedgerows lay articles of equipment abandoned by desperate men to expedite their flight from the British. Many prisoners fell into our hands, some surrendering even to our Field Ambulance. And, as the enemy fled, the Allied Cavalry pursued and cut them up, and our Artillery wrought awful havoc among their battalions and convoys. Thus the Kaiser's hosts, which were to shatter France and march triumphantly into Paris, fled precipitately across the plain of Châlons to the banks of the Aisne, where their Engineers had for many days been preparing the defences of a position which is one of great natural strength.

Friday, September 11th, found the Field Ambulance at Billy-sur-Ourcq, where we spent a wet night in the fields. Our Brigade found billets in the village,

and I'm afraid, as we lay awake and thought of them, we came very near to breaking the tenth commandment. I crawled under a waggon, where I rested if I could not sleep; it was far too wet and cold to get much of the latter. From 5 a.m. to dusk on the next day we marched in a pouring rain and were very thankful to secure billets in the village of Chacrise. The sons of our host and hostess were away fighting in the ranks of the French Army, and doubtless this fact made them take the more cheerfully the crowding of eight or ten of us into their small cottage. They did everything they possibly could to secure our comfort.

One incident of our stay here I must note. Late in the evening, as we marched, there had been brought to us Trooper Marsh, of the 4th Hussars, severely wounded in the abdomen. He had been entrusted with an important message, and, while in the act of carrying it, had been shot by the enemy. Bleeding though he was, and faint, he had clung to his saddle

and faithfully discharged his duty; but, of course, by so doing had considerably aggravated his wound. His case was seen to be very serious, and I was called to see him as he lay in one of our ambulance waggons. "Thank God, sir, I did my duty," the brave fellow said to me, "and, having done that, I am quite ready to die, if it's God's will." He had sacrificed himself for his chums, and "greater love hath no man than this." Soon afterwards he was borne into our cottage for an operation which, the doctors said, was his only hope. In spite of the cramped space and other difficulties, the operation, a most delicate one, was successfully performed; but the young hero died a few hours afterwards, in spite of every care and attention. Next morning I remained behind to bury him. I called upon the Mayor, and he directed some of the villagers to prepare a grave in the cemetery. I remember I had some difficulty in explaining that no coffin was required, for, on active service, the best we

can do for our fallen comrades is to sew their bodies into a blanket. In the presence of a few villagers I laid the trooper to rest at 6.30 a.m. and then rode after the Field Ambulance, which I overtook as it was descending the steep hill into Serches, a pretty village nestling at the head of a valley which runs at right angles to, and, at a point three miles farther north, joins the valley of the Aisne.

The Germans had taken up a strong position on the north bank of the Aisne, and had destroyed all the bridges behind them. The British Force had reached the south bank on September 12th, and now occupied a front of some fifteen miles, extending from Soissons eastward to Villers. Early on the morning of the 13th the battle of the Aisne commenced, the whole British Force advancing to force the passage of the river. The enemy's position was such as to make it impossible to accurately gauge his strength, but there is no doubt that there were overwhelming numbers opposed to us, with a

HORSES AND AMMUNITION BEING FERRIED ACROSS THE AISNE.

PONTOON BRIDGE OVER THE AISNE NEAR ST. MARGUERITE.

preponderance of Artillery skilfully concealed. In spite of this, by nightfall our troops had secured a footing upon the north bank at various points along the whole of our front. The British had forced difficult river-crossings before at the Modder and Tugela, but never so quickly, nor against stronger opposition. Their success was due very largely to the daring work of the Royal Engineers, who constructed rafts, built pontoon bridges, and repaired, under heavy fire, those which had been destroyed by the Germans.

Captain Johnston, R.E., attached to our Division, worked with his own hands two rafts at Missy, where our Brigade crossed, and for this service was awarded the V.C.

Our stretcher-bearers, in charge of Majors Goldsmith, Richards and Fawcett, had gone out from the Field Ambulance at Serches early in the morning, following close upon our Brigade as it advanced to the attack. Late in the evening an advanced dressing-station was formed at the farm Rapreux, about five hundred

yards south of the river, and the whole Field Ambulance moved forward two miles and established itself in the village of Jury.

All night long the Engineers worked incessantly at their pontoon bridges, and the stretcher-bearers passed to and fro between the advanced dressing-station and the firing line. They were accompanied in turn by Majors Richards and Fawcett, of whose devotion and bravery it is impossible to speak too highly. These two officers and their stretcher-bearers continued this devoted work during the whole time we remained in this locality. When the enemy retired next day to the heights and a regimental aid-post was established in a farm near St. Marguerite their work became even more arduous, for the wounded had then to be carried a distance of quite a mile and a half across an open plain, consisting of ploughed fields sodden with the heavy rain, which was frequently swept by shrapnel.

Equally good work was done, though under less trying conditions, at the headquarters of the Field Ambulance in Jury. Colonel Crawford gave himself no rest in superintending the many excellent arrangements made for the reception, the treatment and the evacuation of the wounded. During these days many men owed their lives to the surgical skill of Captain Lindsay, and Lieutenants Clark and Tasker. On one occasion they worked in the operating theatre, a room in a farm-house, from 7 p.m. until 2 a.m. incessantly. One night we were especially busy, the ambulance waggons bringing us in as many as a hundred and fifty wounded. As they lay on straw in the rooms of the farm-house, in barns and in outhouses, I went around and did what I could, taking a message from one, writing a card for another, giving drinks of bovril, helping some to move into a more comfortable position, saying a word of cheer to all, and having prayers with the most serious cases.

The fortitude of these wounded was

magnificent, not a word of complaint did one of them utter, though many were suffering from ghastly injuries. This has invariably been my experience, and one of our doctors bears the same testimony: "Believe me," he says, "the Victoria Cross is won over and over again in a single day. They are brave! What if you were to see how the wounded act after the excitement of battle! They suffer their wounds, great and small, without a murmur; they get their wounds dressed, take chloroform, give consent to have their limbs amputated, just as if they were going to have their hair cut. They are gloriously brave."

As I went my rounds I was told a wounded officer would like to see me, and among other things he said to me was this: "Remember, Padre, I want to wait till all the men have been attended to before they operate on me." This splendid unselfishness is one of the characteristics of the British officer which endear him to "Tommy." I gave him a drink, covered him

ADVANCED DRESSING-STATION 500 YARDS SOUTH OF THE AISNE.

A FARM, NORTH OF THE AISNE, USED AS A REGIMENTAL AID-POST.

with blankets, and then he said, "Don't let me keep you, for others will need you." He waited till the very last, though his wound was a most serious one, and I was very glad to hear, some weeks afterwards, that he had made a marvellous recovery.

"Tommy" always had a great admiration for his officers, but this campaign has increased it. "Our officers are grand," one man said to me, "if there is dangerous work to do, they wants to do it and they always takes more than their share of the risks." I am reminded of a night when I was talking to a Sergeant as he lay on a stretcher badly wounded. He was making many anxious inquiries for the officer who had been wounded as they fought together, and, at that very moment, the wounded officer was carried in and placed on the floor beside the Sergeant, whose face was swathed in bandages which covered his eyes. The latter heard the officer's name mentioned, and asked, "Are you there, sir?" stretching out his hand to clasp that of his officer. "Are

you all right, sir?" The anxious inquiries, the clasp of the hands, were eloquent tributes to the devotion of the soldier to his officer. This is a typical instance; and as we watched the scene our eyes were dimmed with tears. With such a splendid spirit of good comradeship existing between officers and men, it is not to be wondered at that the men need no driving, like the German soldiers, but will follow anywhere, through anything, those whom they love, admire, and trust.

Whenever I could be spared from the Field Ambulance I rode around to visit the outlying Batteries, the advanced dressing-station, and the regimental aid-post. To reach the last-named, I crossed a pontoon bridge and then over the open plain where I knew I was in full view of the enemy. I never hesitated to do this because I felt that a single horseman wasn't worth firing at, or that, if the enemy thought otherwise, the chances of his hitting me were very small. Evidently

my first conclusion was justified, for I enjoyed my rides unmolested. The regimental aid-post, a farm used also by General Rolt as his headquarters, was a "warm spot." It could be approached only from the back with any degree of safety; the front entrance was covered by the enemy's snipers. Here I found the regimental medical officers busy rendering first aid to the wounded and then handing them over to the stretcher-bearers from the Field Ambulance. In the corner of an orchard I saw the graves of an officer and two or three men who had been buried on a night when I had been too occupied with my ministrations to the wounded to get over there to conduct the service. One of the regimental doctors had, on this occasion, read the prayers over the graves. I buried our dead whenever possible, but on the occasions when my duty to them and to the living clashed, I felt it was more important that I should be with the latter. Now that each Brigade has two Church of

England chaplains this difficulty has, of course, been removed.

On my way back, taking a slightly different route, I came upon two of my Regiments, the Suffolks and the Cornwalls, in their shelter trenches. Suddenly heads appeared from holes in the ground, and I was greeted with "Good-morning, sir; come in and see our 'appy 'ome." Having dismounted and tied my horse to a tree, I accepted the invitation. The "home" was, indeed, a happy one, for a cheerier lot of fellows I've never met. They had plenty to eat and smoke, so were perfectly content. The floor of their "home" was mud, the roof leaked, but these things mattered not. They had marched and fought in the soaking rain for days, they were now living an unnatural existence more like moles or rabbits than men, and yet never a word of complaint did I hear. They were cheerfulness personified. Truly "Tommy Atkins" is a marvel. They welcomed me most heartily, and as I rode away they

shouted, "Goodbye, sir; take care of yourself."

Another day I accompanied the Rev. O. S. Watkins when he rode off to visit the 13th Brigade, for the Wesleyans in which he was responsible as well as for those in the 14th and 15th. I did so the more gladly because there was the prospect of my meeting some of my old Dublin friends. We climbed a steep hill, at the top of which we found a squadron of the 19th Hussars billeted in a large farm. As a matter of fact, they occupied chiefly some natural caves in the rocks, which were entered from the farm-yard; the French peasants are said to have used them as hiding-places in their last great war. Our road to Sermoise lay now on the sky-line, and we had a splendid view of the German position. Suddenly from his observation post an artillery officer called to us, "You're two brave men; but don't stop, or you'll give us away." We shouted a cheery reply, and continued to trot our horses as we had been doing when he

addressed us. Alas, only a few days later the enemy spotted this observation-post, and one of his shells killed two and wounded several of our Gunners here.

Having safely crossed the plateau, we descended the steep hill into Sermoise. We found part of the 13th Brigade dwelling in caves and dug-outs on the hill-side. In the village, occupying the only house which was undamaged by shell-fire, we visited my friend Lieutenant Helm, the medical officer of the Yorkshire Light Infantry, whom I had last seen on the other side of a tennis-net in Dublin. His dwelling owed its safety to the shelter afforded by a higher building, the church, which had been very badly damaged. This was a "warm" spot, but he was to occupy "warmer ones" later on. For his conspicuous bravery he has been mentioned in Despatches, and awarded the Military Cross. We saw the whole country-side studded with enormous holes made by the shells from the German big siege-guns, to which, on the Aisne, we had our

first introduction, and for which "Tommy" soon found the nicknames of "Black Maria" and "Jack Johnson."

By September 18th the worst of the fighting was over, and the battle of the Aisne, in the strict sense of the word, ended, for the Allies abandoned the idea of carrying the German position by a frontal attack. The fighting of the past five days had unmasked the enemy's strength, and proved that he was not merely fighting a delaying action, preparatory to a further retirement to the Sambre, but was making a serious stand in a strong position of his own choosing. The only thing to be done was to dig ourselves in and hold the enemy while the French developed a flanking movement on our left. The battle of the Aisne now became a siege.

September 20th I shall always remember as the first Sunday, in this campaign, on which I was able to hold divine services. I celebrated the Holy Communion at 7.30 a.m. in one of the farm buildings

on the floor of which clean straw had been laid. A good number of officers and men of various units attended. At the door knelt our hostess, the farmer's wife, a reverent, though necessarily a silent, worshipper. For my own Brigade I could, on this Sunday, do nothing, as they were in the trenches, but, with some hymn-books in my saddle-bags, I rode around to, and had brief services with, some of the outlying units. In the evening the Rev. O. S. Watkins and I conducted a united service, of which one of the officers present wrote home the following description: "In the evening we had another service in a barn, conducted by the chaplain and the Wesleyan Minister. A great crowd of officers and men collected. The scene was very impressive, with the room lit with only camp candles, the soldiers rough and dirty with the work of war, some of them just returned from the trenches, and others going there the same night—some who in all probability would be dead before another night came along. The

men sang heartily, but when the prayer for the dear ones at home was being offered there were few dry eyes among those brave men who faced death daily; and all through the service we could hear the roar of the cannon sending forth their messages of death and sorrow. It was terrible in its impressiveness."

The arrival of the 6th Division from England enabled a system of regular relief from the trenches to be established, and the Field Ambulance was moved back to Serches, that the whole of the village of Jury might be available for the resting Brigade. When the time came for my own Brigade to come back into reserve my days were fully occupied in visiting my Regiments and holding informal meetings and services for them. On Sunday, September 27th, for the first time I got the whole of my Brigade together for a parade service. It was a novel experience for me to see my congregation with rifles as well as side-arms. I have never heard the hymns, "Jesu, lover of

my soul," " Oft in danger," and " O God, our help in ages past," sung more heartily. On the hill, not half a mile from us, the Germans were bursting their shrapnel with disastrous results, of which I have already spoken, to some of our Gunners near their observation-post. Captain T. Lindsay and our stretcher-bearers very gallantly removed the wounded under a heavy fire. Tidings of the disaster reached me, and I rode up, immediately after my service, to make arrangements for the burial of the dead, but the officer in charge of the Battery said it would not be possible to perform this duty till after dusk because the place where the bodies lay was constantly being shelled. I promised to go up again after my evening service. The early celebration and morning service which I had arranged had to be cancelled at the last moment in consequence of my Brigade being called out to assist in repelling a threatened attack by the enemy. However, the parade service was held in the afternoon instead of the morning, and

in the evening I conducted a voluntary service which was well attended.

For us at Serches the monotony of the remaining days on the Aisne was relieved by camp-fire concerts arranged by Sergeant Plume, and the spectacular fights between our aeroplanes and the German Taubes, of which we saw one brought down and others go limping home. One day I joined our mess president in a ride to Soissons, whither he went to replenish our store of provisions. We saw the terrible havoc wrought by the enemy's guns upon the beautiful twelfth-century Cathedral and the ancient Abbey of St. Jean des Vignes; some of the streets were actually blocked by the debris from demolished houses. Many of the townspeople had remained during the bombardment, others were now returning, and business was being resumed.

The men in the trenches very soon found ways and means of relieving the tedium of their new kind of existence. In many places their trenches were separated from

those of the Germans by not more than 50 yards, and the occupants would shout their jibes and jokes one to another. I have been told how, at first, in response to our men's call of "Waiter," several heads would appear above the parapet of the opposite trench. I say at first advisedly, for the Germans quickly learned that what "Tommy" sought was not a drink but a target. In our quarter the opposing forces would mark or signal each other's shots as if they were on a rifle-range. In two cases the Cornwalls saw Germans fall hit when the bull's-eye was signalled. Often the two sides would unite in singing the same songs or hymns, and the Germans were always glad to hear the latest football results. Tobacco and cigarettes were flung from one side to the other in exchange for food, and news of the latest success by land or sea was invariably shouted for the information of their opponents. These truces never impaired the constant vigilance, and neither side dare take great liberties with the other;

but in these and other ways the tedium of trench life was relieved and the days were helped along.

And then the day came when the British troops marched away from the Aisne, where, under the trying conditions of heavy rain and cold which had prevailed most of the time, subjected by day and night to Infantry attacks by superior numbers and the fire of guns of a calibre never used before in field operations, they had stood their ground, and "once more demonstrated the splendid spirit, gallantry, and devotion which animates the officers and men of His Majesty's Forces." Our losses in killed, wounded, and missing of 561 officers and 12,980 men testify to the severity of the struggle in which we had been engaged. The stale-mate had become chronic, and less seasoned troops might be trusted to hold the position. The Allies' line was daily stretching farther north, and, if it was eventually to reach the sea, it would be advantageous that we should again be on its left where we could

draw our supplies through the Channel ports which were so near home. A still more weighty reason for our transference lay in the discovery of a new German offensive aimed especially at the British, and which had as its objective Calais and other Channel ports. It was most fitting that we should be there to meet it. The story of the part we played in the race for the sea, in the closing of the door to Calais, and in holding it against the German assaults will be told in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER IX

THE RACE FOR THE SEA

In the evening of October 1st I had walked over to Couvrelles, where the 13th Field Ambulance was billeted, to visit my friend the Rev. T. S. Goudge, C.F., and upon my return to Serches at 7.30 I found the unit, to which I was attached, ready to march off. This was a great surprise, because, when I had left two hours earlier, there had been no intimation of a possible move. What could it mean? Were we advancing or retiring? The former possibly, the latter we would not believe. Soon we were informed that neither the one nor the other was happening. Were we, then, to be given the rest spoken of frequently by many and even dreamed of by not a few? The arrival of other

Regiments to relieve us lent colour to the last conjecture, and, as I watched my Regiments passing through the village on their return from the trenches, I the more heartily wished it might be even as we hoped, for the men badly needed rest and sleep after their almost ceaseless vigil on the Aisne. We now know that before us there was not much rest, but that we were then beginning the race for the sea which involved long marches, a railway journey, and then still more marches.

The Rev. O. S. Watkins, Lieutenant Grenfell and I volunteered to form the billeting party, and rode off in the darkness to Nanteuil, where we were told to report to the Brigade billeting officer, Captain Dorling. By him we were assigned a large farm, near the little Norman church, as our billet. All the French farms we saw seemed to be built on much the same plan. The yard has on one side of it the dwelling-house, the other three sides are formed by barns and sheds for the cattle, carts, and implements. The entrance is

usually by heavy iron gates or high wooden doors; on this occasion we were confronted by the latter and found them securely fastened on the inside. Our repeated shoutings and bangings having failed to arouse the occupants of the house, the Rev. O. S. Watkins climbed over the doors, like some professional burglar, and opened them from the inside. Luckily for him the ferocious dog was chained up! Very soon the farmer appeared on the scene and we explained the object of our coming. He seemed anything but pleased to see us. Perhaps in the darkness, and from the method of our entrance, he judged us to be Germans; but I don't really think this could have been so, because he, his wife and daughters, were just as disagreeable and disobliging next day, when any doubts they may have had about our nationality must have been removed. No, they were just a churlish, ungrateful lot, the like of whom we never met again. Their behaviour was the more noticeable because it was in such

striking contrast to that generally shown us by those in whose houses we found shelter.

The sick and wounded whom the Field Ambulance brought along were placed in the little church, and the 1st Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment, which had joined my Brigade the day before in relief of the Suffolk Regiment, bivouacked in the fields around the farm. My service in the 4th Volunteer Battalion of this fine old Regiment from 1893 to 1904 had given me a peculiar interest in it, and made me welcome the more heartily its 1st Battalion to my Brigade.

We now commenced to observe a new order of things, marching by night and resting by day. Waggons and guns, etc., were secreted under trees, and the men were bidden to keep to their billets or to hide themselves whenever an aeroplane was sighted. It was, we were told, of the very essence of the movement in which we were now engaged that it should not be discovered by the enemy. This

helped us to a solution, and we concluded that we were being taken around to the enemy's flank. In this conjecture we were quite correct ; now the only question was, should we be in time to cut off the Germans from the sea ?

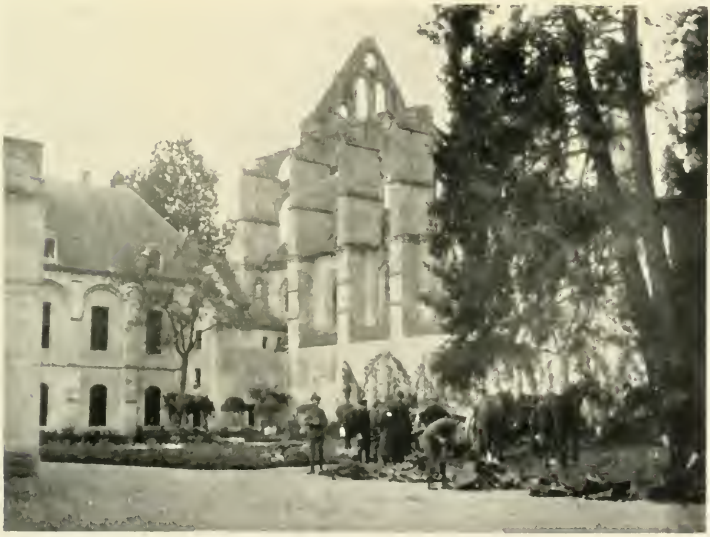
Having rested all day, at 6.30 p.m. we, the billeting party constituted as before, met representatives from the other units of the Brigade, and rode off due west. On this and succeeding nights we had the benefit of a full moon and perfect weather. We passed through the villages of Muret, Droizy, Hartennes, Tigny and Villers-Helon ; most of these places possessed a church of exceptional architectural beauty, and in many of them we met French soldiers, as we were now intersecting our Ally's lines of communication. Our route next took us through a very pretty neighbourhood, beautifully wooded, with picturesque villas, lovely gardens, and orchards. Descending a steep hill, we found ourselves in the old-world town of Longpont, with its city-gate, fine châ-

teau, and ruined twelfth-century abbey, all objects of great interest.

Here the billeting officer awaited us; the Gunners got the château, the Infantry found accommodation in the town, but the Field Ambulance had to be contented with an avenue of trees for its bivouac. Hither we repaired about 11.30 p.m., tied our horses to trees, gave them a feed, collected sticks, made a brew of tea, and dined off "bully" beef and biscuits. We sat around the fire and yarned till 1.30 a.m., when the Field Ambulance arrived, all very tired after their eighteen-miles march. I'm afraid the billeting party was not in very high favour on this occasion!

We who had been living in the constant din of battle, with the enemy's shells bursting over our billets, and our own Batteries around us shaking the earth and filling the air with a deafening roar, thoroughly appreciated the restful quiet of these days. Had we not occasionally heard the distant rumble of the French guns it would have been difficult to realize

CITY GATE AT LONGPONT.



RUINS OF ABBEY AT LONGPONT.

we were on active service, and as we passed through the beautiful country we could now enjoy it to the full, for there was no foe at our heels. We knew not what experiences lay before us; that there was work, and strenuous work, to be done we felt certain; but no anxious forebodings marred the enjoyment of these peaceful days which did so much to reinvigorate the troops, upon whom a great demand was to be made a week later in front of La Bassée.

I spent Saturday, October 3rd, in visiting the men of the Devonshire Regiment in their billets, and in viewing the ruins of the one-time magnificent abbey. At 6 p.m. I again accompanied the billeting party, and our ride through Corcy, Fleury, and the forest de Retz was the most pleasant of many delightful ones we had. The effect of the moon shining through the trees was grand. These rides were the more enjoyable because, being a small party, we could vary our pace, as and when we liked, to the mutual advantage

of man and beast. A column of mixed troops on the march must necessarily observe the pace of the Infantry, and this is very trying for those who are mounted; and the clouds of dust raised by wheels and the tramp of many feet poison the air and detract from the enjoyment of even the most beautiful scenery.

In Villers-Cotterets, the scene of some spirited fighting during the great retirement, we called a halt. We watered our horses and gave them a nose-bag feed in the public square, and refreshed ourselves with coffee. The splendid condition of our mounts and the fitness of our troops filled the townspeople with admiration; and I remember a Sergeant of the French Aviation Corps showing me, with great pride, a Mauser pistol which he had taken from the person of a German officer whom he had shot down in flight. The town was full of French troops, and many were the friendly and enthusiastic greetings which they exchanged with us.

Through the town, out on to the

moonlit road bounded (as one so often finds the roads in this country) on either side by tall trees, on through Largny and Vez we rode to Fresnoy la Rivière, where we met Captain Dorling, who assigned us as our billet a farm in the hamlet of Roequigny, about a mile and a half farther on Thither we rode, and, as it was now past 11 o'clock, we found the occupants had retired for the night. Our bangings at the iron gate soon brought to one of the bedroom windows a man, who, at the announcement of our mission, said he welcomed us and would have great pleasure in offering us hospitality. What a different reception from that accorded us at the last farm in which we had stayed! Here the occupants, a postman and his wife, relatives left in charge by the farmer who was absent fighting in the French Army, could not do enough for us. They were not in the least perturbed when we broke it to them gently that twelve officers, two hundred and fifty men, and an unknown number

of sick must find accommodation there. Madame, who wished to prepare beds for the officers, actually wept with disappointment when we informed her that we had our own valises and merely required floor-space on which to place them. Was there nothing she could do? she asked; yes, she might give us some refreshment, we told her. Again she was perfectly happy, and soon set before us delicious coffee, butter, and home-made bread.

The hours of waiting for the Field Ambulance passed very pleasantly in conversation with our host and hostess. Among other things, they told us that the Germans had occupied the farm on the night of August 31st. We remembered that on this self-same night we had, during the great retirement, bivouacked at Crépy only three miles away! I have already mentioned the fact of our being harassed by Uhlans as we were leaving Crépy on the morning of September 1st.

It was 4 a.m. on Sunday, October 4th, before the Field Ambulance and Infantry

arrived after their march of twenty-two miles. Under the circumstances an early celebration was out of the question, and the troops could not be massed in the open for a parade service. The best I could do was to hold a voluntary service at dusk in the shelter of the farm buildings; the troops turned up well to this.

Two days later we continued our trek westwards through Saintimes, Verberie, and Pontpoint to Pont St. Maxence, an old-world town on the Oise, which we crossed by a pontoon bridge constructed by the French, who had destroyed the fine stone one during their retirement. At the railway-station our march ended, and we were informed that in a few hours we were to entrain for a destination known only to the Staff. Never shall I forget the long wait in the station yard that bitterly cold night; we dozed before a huge log fire, we walked about, we helped to man-haul our waggons on to the trucks: at last, dirty and tired, we got away about 8 a.m. on our ten-hours railway journey.

Of this I don't remember much, because I slept most of the time, but I know we went through Clermont and Amiens.

I believe the original intention had been to take us much farther north, but a change in the military situation made it necessary to detrain at Abbeville, at the mouth of the Somme, and only forty-five miles from Boulogne. Farther north the Belgian Army and British Marines were heroically holding on to Antwerp and engaging the attention of large forces of the enemy, while the Allies hurried up troops from the south. The Seventh Division, under Major-General Capper, and the Third Cavalry Division, commanded by Major-General the Hon. Julian Byng, were landing at Zeebrugge and Ostend and were soon covering the retreat of the brave defenders of Antwerp.

The night of October 7th was spent by us in the village of Montfliers, where there is a beautiful little church built to contain a figure of the Virgin and Child which is said to have been hidden in the trunk of

a tree still standing close by. Next day we rode through Vauchelles, St. Riquier, with its fine abbey, Oneux, Yvrench, and Vitz-Villeroy to the hamlet of Neuville, which we found bolted and barred against us, and in which we secured billets only after great difficulty in consequence of our being, at first, mistaken for Germans. It was a grateful countryside through which we had ridden, and once again we heard those shouts of welcome with which we had been received in the early days of the campaign. Many of the villagers stayed up all night to preside at tables, which they placed in the streets, spread with cakes, bread and butter, chocolate, apples, tea, and coffee. These were pressed upon the troops with lavish hospitality as they marched through. Again the British were acclaimed as deliverers, for bands of German Cavalry had been seen in the neighbourhood.

A day's rest, after this twenty-five miles march, was much appreciated, and then we moved on through La Ponchel,

Genne-Ivergny, Willeman, Oeuf, Siracourt St. Pol, and Brias to Dieval. The Infantry and the dismounted personnel of the Field Ambulance were conveyed in motor lorries, and the distance covered that day was quite thirty miles. The heat was intense, and the dust blew in clouds; we reached our billets looking like millers!

The nature of the country through which we passed on Sunday, October 11th, on the last day of our trek to the north underwent a complete change. Smiling hillsides now gave place to a flat, uninteresting neighbourhood intersected by dykes and canals; factory chimneys and the head-gear of collieries disfigured the landscape; the pretty cottages covered with creepers were left behind, and now one passed nothing but rows of ugly dwellings. Except for the absence of hills, we might have been in Yorkshire. Camblain, Chatelaine, Marles and Lapugnoy were all of this nature. We halted for the night at Chocques, three miles west

of Bethune, and established ourselves, by the Maire's permission, in a fine château near the railway. The occupants were away, but the caretaker did everything possible for our comfort. A glorious fire soon blazed in the drawing-room, where the discovery of a grand-piano rejoiced the heart of Captain Bell. We had come through a somewhat depressing neighbourhood, it had commenced to rain as we arrived in the darkness, we were tired and none too cheerful. The music and the warmth restored our good spirits, and oh—the joy of sleeping on a thick, soft carpet after bare boards and stone floors !

We were told that on the morrow our Brigade would probably be engaging the enemy ; that during this day our Second Cavalry Division, under General Gough, had come in contact with the enemy's Cavalry on the north of the Bethune-Aire canal and driven them from the forest of Nieppe. The enemy Cavalry were merely a screen for large forces of

Infantry and Artillery which were advancing from the east in an attempt to turn the Allied left, which rested upon the main road from Bethune to Lille, and, if possible, to force a way through to Calais. The British were just in time to defeat both these objects; they had won the race by a narrow margin. Our Second Corps was even now linking up with the French, the Third Corps was detraining at St. Omer farther north-west of us, and the First Corps was working up from the Aisne. In a few days, holding the line from La Bassée northwards in the order mentioned, the three British Corps, with the gallant little Belgian Army on their left, would close all the roads to Calais and the Channel ports.

The transference of the British Force from the Aisne to Flanders without friction or mishap was a brilliant piece of transport work which reflects the highest possible credit alike upon those who conceived it and upon those who carried it through. That a "delicate" operation

of this nature was performed so successfully is speaking testimony to the excellent feeling which exists between the French and British Armies. The whole thing was a great triumph for every one concerned therein.

CHAPTER X

THE SECOND CORPS BARS THE WAY TO CALAIS AT LA BASSÉE

The task assigned to General Smith-Dorrien at this time was to seize the Aire-Bethune canal, pivot on the latter place, and then to march due east, get astride the La-Bassée-Lille road near Fournes, and so to threaten the flank and rear of the enemy's position. From October 12th to 18th the Second Corps was engaged in this offensive movement, but the arrival of large reinforcements for the enemy compelled it to act on the defensive from the 19th till the end of the month, when it was relieved.

The Field Ambulance followed close upon the 14th Brigade when, on the morning of October 12th, it won its way

across the canal. We met about 2,000 French Cavalry, which had been engaging the enemy on our right while our Division connected with the French left. With their plumes of varied colours, their cuirasses of polished steel, and their coats of red and blue, they presented a very imposing appearance. The thick mist of early morning developed into a heavy rain, the roads were narrow and deep with mud, the fields were marshy and intersected by deep ditches, the Germans were strongly entrenched and well served by their Artillery; but in the face of every difficulty the Second Corps made good progress. Doors and planks were flung across the ditches, and over these the British rushed at their foe with the bayonet, and that night our Brigade occupied his abandoned trenches. The enemy was pushed farther and farther back on succeeding days till on the 17th the left of the Second Corps rested in the village of Herlies only a mile and a half from Fournes.

During the heavy fighting in this advance the 3rd Division lost its commander, Major-General Hubert Hamilton, who was struck by a shrapnel bullet as he was directing operations on our left. He was buried in the churchyard of Lacouture by the Rev. E. G. F. Macpherson, C.M.G., C.F., and one who was present has given the following graphic description of the solemn service:—"Just at the moment when the priest was saying the last prayers the guns began to roar again, and projectiles whistled over the heads of the mourners. The German attack was directed from a distance of a few hundred yards. The moment was well chosen, for the volleys fired by the troops of the Allies in honour of the dead, gloriously fallen for the common cause, were at the same time volleys of vengeance. Crackling reports of rifles continued round the ruined church, but the voice of the priest, reciting the last words of the Requiem, lost nothing of its calm and clearness."

As the Brigade advanced so the Field

Ambulance was pushed forward first to le Touret, then to Richebourg l'Avoue, and finally an advanced dressing-station was established in a house half a mile from Neuve Chapelle. The dead cattle which we saw lying on the road and in the fields, the trees decapitated, and houses demolished by shell-fire, the marks of rifle-bullets upon walls and doors, and the graves of friend and foe dotted about were speaking testimony to the severity of the fighting in which our troops had been engaged. Among the graves of Germans I found one of a doctor which bore upon a cross this inscription :—

Leutnant A. R. Dr. Riese — 14 Oct. 1914
Kurmärk Dragoner Reg. No. 14.

and another, over which was written :—

Hier ruhtin Gott
1 Ulan 2 Husaren
gefallen 13.10.14
Ruhe Sanft.

During these days it was my sad duty to lay to rest the bodies of many of our comrades. At the headquarters of the

Field Ambulance in Richebourg l'Avoue I chose a corner of a very pretty garden for a cemetery. I buried many here, at the advanced dressing-station, and behind the trenches. One Sunday morning the Gunners carried the body of Lieutenant Pollard, R.F.A., to the churchyard at Lacouture and we buried him near General Hamilton. One of the saddest funeral services I took was that over the grave of Sergeant Willie Macdonald, 2nd K.O.Y.L.I. He and his brother were killed on the same day; both had displayed conspicuous bravery, and been recommended for rewards. Willie was brought back to the Field Ambulance in a comatose condition and died soon afterwards. A few of his comrades from the Regiment were present at the grave, over which, in spite of a lump in our throats, we managed to sing the beautiful hymn "On the resurrection morning." He had been a member of my voluntary choir in Dublin, and we all felt, therefore, it was fitting to pay him this small tribute.

One morning I received a telephone message to go out to Lorgies to bury two officers of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. I went off at once, but, arrived at Brigade headquarters, the acting-Brigadier would allow me to proceed no farther because, he said, I should be courting almost certain death. Having given me permission to go out after dusk, I did so in company with our bearers, whom I joined near Neuve Chapelle. The darkness was intense, the mud awful, and shells from our Howitzers flew over our heads with weird shrieks. Numerous sentries challenged us as they stood in the shelter of some dismantled buildings. No smoking was allowed, lest the striking of a match might draw the enemy's fire. Lorgies was but a heap of smoking ruins, the outer walls alone of the church remained, and the light from blazing corn-stacks and burning dwellings revealed to us the awful devastation of the place. Silent figures moved about carrying rations and ammunition, and the regimental

stretcher-bearers passed to and from the trenches on their hazardous work of bringing in the wounded. One house alone in a long row of dwellings still boasted a roof, and here we found Lieutenant G. D. Eccles, the medical officer of the 1st East Surrey Regiment, busy with the wounded. He looked very weary after his almost ceaseless vigil and constant labours, but cheerfully he addressed me with, "Good evening, Padre, glad to see you; what do you think of our quarters? We had a bullet through the back window this afternoon, which passed through a door and landed on the mantelpiece there. In front the road has been shelled most of the day. However, we are fairly safe now as long as we show no light at the back." With admiration I watched him a while as he went about his work, deftly bandaging the wounded and saying a cheery word to all.

I found Lieutenant J. B. Matthews, medical officer of the D.C.L.I. similarly engaged in a ruined house nearer the church. "The C.O. would like to see

you, Padre," he said to me ; "you'll find his headquarters down that road by the burning farm." Following his directions, I found myself in some of our reserve trenches, where the men bade me exercise care because the Germans were less than a hundred yards distant; and, finally, I discovered the C.O., who thanked me for coming and bade the adjutant show me where the graves had been prepared for Captain Passy and Lieutenant Elliott. In the middle of the service heavy rifle-fire commenced, and the bullets whistled about us ; but I went on with the prayers, and most fortunately none of us were hit. By this time our ambulance waggons, which had been compelled to make a second journey, were having the last of the wounded, of whom there were more than a hundred, placed in them, so, after bidding Eccles and Matthews good-night, I returned with our bearers, and reached my quarters about 1.30 a.m. to find good thoughtful Major Fawcett waiting up to give me some hot tea.

For the regimental medical officers especially I have a great admiration based upon first-hand knowledge of them and their work acquired on many visits to their aid-posts such as the one just described. The heavy casualties among them testify to the dangers they face in their devotion to duty. Not the least trying feature of their work is its isolation; then they are on duty practically day and night, and can only snatch brief and uncertain intervals for sleep in a building out of which they may be shelled at any moment. Captain T. W. Browne (Manchesters), Lieutenant G. D. Eccles (Surreys), Lieutenant J. B. Matthews (D.C.L.I.) and Lieutenant N. F. Hallows (Devons), medical officers in my own Brigade, I count among the bravest of the brave. Then there was Lieutenant Helm, medical officer to the K.O.Y.L.I., who, about this time, had a most trying experience. The farm-house he was occupying as his aid-post was demolished by shell-fire. He stuck to his patients, took them into the

cellar, and was afterwards imprisoned there by the bursting of another shell which killed those whom he was devotedly tending. He was afterwards dug out, though with great difficulty ; but what an awful experience ! This is but one example, of many which might be given, of the devotion to duty shown under great dangers and difficulties, by the brave men of whom the Regiments affectionately speak as their " doctor."

While we were in the neighbourhood of La Bassée a good many German wounded passed through our hands, and they invariably seemed surprised at the kind treatment they received. I suppose they had been taught to expect otherwise. As I gave a cigarette to one who lay on a stretcher, he looked up and said with a smile, " English very good." Unfortunately our wounded were not always treated so well, as the following stories prove. One, who had had part of his face blown away, was sitting in his trench when some of the enemy gained temporary

possession of it. One of them, seeing him, took up a clod of earth, and, exclaiming "You English dog," threw it in the poor man's face. Another was bidden, by a German more humane than the rest, to lie down at the bottom of the trench and feign death lest he might be shot. I have these stories on the authority of one of our stretcher-bearers, who, when the trench had been regained, helped to bring in these two wounded, from whom he heard the facts.

How splendid our own wounded always were! There was the man with his jaw blown away who, unable to speak in consequence, made signs that he wished to write. When paper and pencil were brought it was no selfish request he had to make, no message even for loved ones at home he had to send, he simply wrote, "My captain is a brave man, and deserves the V.C." Another, who had one side of his forearm torn away by shrapnel, in answer to my inquiry as to how he felt replied, "I'm all right, sir, 'ecpt for a bit

of rheumatic in me leg." Then there was the officer of the Dorsets who, as he was being carried away from the field on a waterproof sheet by four men, sat up and shouted "Stick it, Dorsets." The wounded were invariably cheery, but one night they were particularly so. I soon discovered that this was accounted for by the fact of their having got into the enemy with the bayonet. "Tommy" dearly loves a hand-to-hand scrap. These were Lancashire lads who had driven the Germans out of Violaines and helped to hold the right of our line against one of those many fierce counter-attacks which the enemy was now launching against it. A few days later Second Lieutenant Leach and Sergeant Hogan of this splendid Regiment, the 2nd Manchesters, did a superb bit of work at Festubert, recapturing a trench by themselves, killing eight of the enemy, and making sixteen prisoners. For this they have both been awarded the V.C.

About this time my Brigade lost its commander, Brigadier-General S. P. Rolt,

C.B. The strain of the last few weeks especially had told heavily upon him, and he was now stricken down by a severe attack of influenza which necessitated his being invalided. All ranks bade good-bye to him with great regret. He was succeeded by Brigadier-General F. S. Maude, C.M.G., D.S.O., a very keen soldier and capable leader whose excellent work has since won for him the C.B. and promotion to the rank of Major-General.

My ministrations to the wounded, of whom, consequent upon the severity of the fighting, we had great numbers here, occupied the greater part of my time, but whenever I could be spared from the Field Ambulance I visited such troops as I could reach. These duties, added to the censoring of letters, correspondence with the relatives of the fallen, funeral and other services, and the distribution to the troops of gifts sent by friends at home, kept me busy. Through the medium of Lady Arnott and Mrs. Westby, members of an Association of Irish ladies formed for

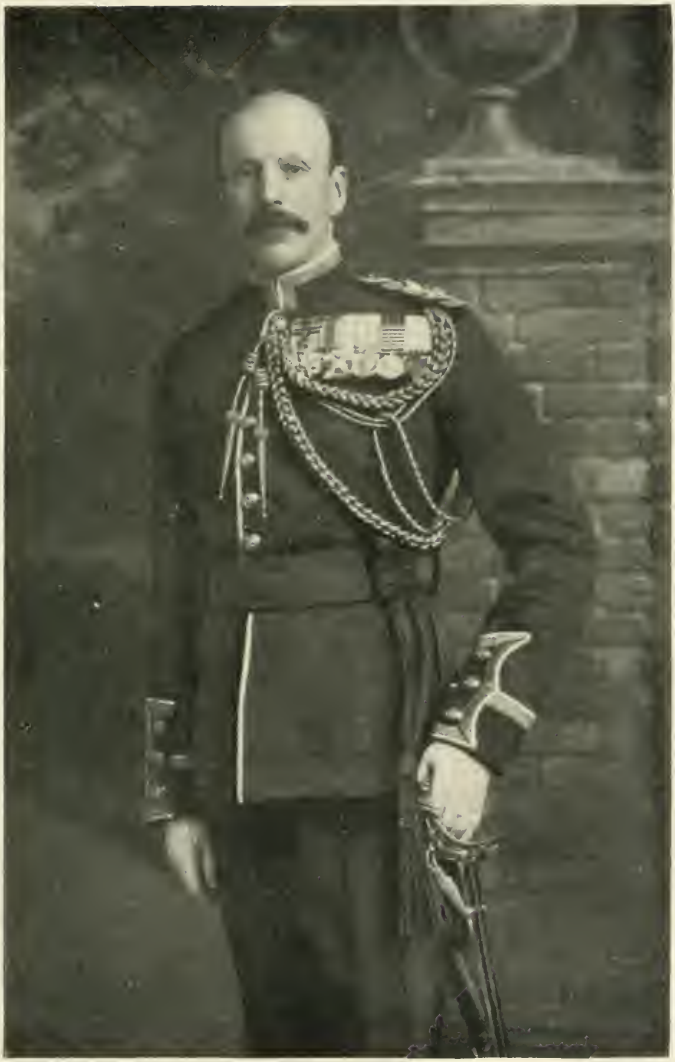


Photo by Elliott & Fry.

MAJOR-GENERAL F. S. MAUDE, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

the purpose, I, as well as others, received large consignments of tobacco, cigarettes, writing materials, tooth-brushes and powder, soap, and other most acceptable articles. The distribution of these opened up many an opportunity for quiet talks to the men on more serious and important subjects. If only the many kind friends who send out gifts for the brave men at the front could see the pleasure which they afford to the recipients, they would be amply repaid.

Few of us will ever forget the anxious days spent before La Bassée. There were no Regiments in reserve, and the question we frequently asked ourselves was, would our men, weary after thirteen days in the trenches and sadly depleted in numbers, be able to hold on against the enemy, who, with superior numbers, was launching against our line, with ever-increasing vehemence, constant attacks in his determination to hack a way through? Would not mind and body fail under such an awful strain? It was the most terrible

ordeal, the greatest test of endurance, which these troops had, so far, been called upon to undergo; but their indomitable pluck triumphed. The Second Corps held on to its position with grim determination, and, by so doing, prevented the German advance upon Calais by the La Bassée gate.

This achievement must rank as one of the finest in the campaign. But the cost had been great, the losses were enormous, and the remnants of the Corps were exhausted. This was the situation when, on October 24th, supports arrived in the shape of the Lahore Division of the Indian Corps. How we welcomed them! Before us there passed Sikhs, Pathans, Baluchis, and the little Gurkhas from the Eastern Himalaya, hillsmen who could shoot marvellously and wield the ruthless kukri with unerring accuracy. They seemed intensely eager to get to grips with the enemy, pointing in his direction, scowling as they muttered the word "Jarmans," and drawing their hands

across their throats, with a gesture of disgust, to show what the Huns might expect from them. They soon struck terror into the Germans who, they knew, had spoken of them as "niggers." Of their ultimate objective these warriors from our Eastern Empire stood in no doubt, as the following story proves. A Gurkha lost his way in Marseilles and those who found him received, in reply to their many questions, the oft-repeated answer, "Berleen, Berleen, Berleen." May they not be disappointed of their goal! The initiative and resourcefulness of these new troops soon made a most favourable impression, and, in spite of the unfamiliar type of warfare and the trying climate of a European winter, they have continued to be a most valuable asset of the British Expeditionary Force.

The arrival of the Meerut Division on October 30th made it possible to withdraw the Second Corps partially into reserve. The men of my own Brigade had been in the trenches for twenty days

consecutively, they were necessarily exhausted by lack of sleep and almost continuous fighting, and yet, believe me, they marched back in the rain, to their badly needed rest, whistling and singing! Such men command the highest admiration. The Germans must have had a special grudge against this Brigade, for that very night to the village of Lacouture, where we had hoped to enjoy a peaceful rest, a "Jack Johnson" pursued us. The East Surreys were the sufferers on this occasion, having one man killed and several wounded. We moved farther back next day and found a most comfortable billet, which we would feign have occupied for the remainder of our rest period; but we were shelled out of this at 2 o'clock on a Sunday morning. Some spy must have given us away; we did hear that one had been caught in the church tower signalling to the enemy by means of the hands of the clock: such things were done.

With the whole of my Brigade out of

the trenches I had looked forward with pleasure to a busy Sunday; but, alas! "the best-laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft a-gley." The early celebration was held at headquarters, but when I turned up to take the first parade service I found the Brigade, acting on sudden orders, moving off to another area. I arranged to go over there to hold evening services for the Regiments; but again I was to be disappointed, for we were all on the march by tea-time. My programmes for Sunday work were so frequently disturbed in this way that probable moves came to be associated with them, and often I have had it said to me, "Now, Padre, don't fix up services for next Sunday, or we shall be moved!"

Having for one week acted as part of the Corps reserve to the Meerut Division, my Brigade took over part of the line near Laventie to give some relief to the Lahore Division. The Field Ambulance was billeted in a farm near Estaires, to which the late Lord Roberts came at

this time on his visit to the Indian troops. The advanced dressing-station, in charge of Major Fawcett, was a very "unhealthy" spot; the fields all around, and the road leading to it, were studded with "Jack Johnson" holes during his tenure of it. But this brave officer and his assistants remained at their posts, and, most fortunately, suffered no casualties.

The work of collecting the wounded from this point was rendered more hazardous by German snipers. The usual procedure of these men is to leave their lines with a big supply of ammunition, and then, under cover of darkness, to get through our own and hide themselves in some building, or even in a tree. They sleep by day, and with the return of darkness recommence their low-down game of potting at the road or path used by our stretcher-bearers and others on their way to the trenches, whenever they hear upon it the noise of any movement. Their rifles are, of course, in most cases previously trained

upon the road in the daylight and then securely fastened in position; so all the snipers have to do in the darkness is to pull the trigger and reload when necessary.

We at headquarters, too, came under the fire of the enemy's guns. One night we were awakened by the sound of shells bursting around our farm. The farmer and his wife were for a hurried flight, but contented themselves with the cellar when we assured them that the bombardment would soon cease. We found that many of the shells had gone to earth without exploding; one, however, had burst only five yards from the door of a cottage, very near us, in which some of our men were sleeping. The windows and door were smashed, but no further damage was done. Truly "a miss is as good as a mile," but one doesn't care to contemplate what the results of hits would have been.

On another occasion I myself had a narrow escape when out riding. Five shells fell in the garden of a house which

I had left only a few minutes earlier, and, on my homeward journey, others exploded quite near to the road, causing my horse to take fright.

The desolation in this part of the country was appalling: farms burnt to the ground, with the remnants of waggons and implements and the charred remains of animals lying about; other dwellings battered beyond the possibility of repair; factories and mills, the source of livelihood for thousands, razed to the ground; gardens and vineyards hopelessly trampled; the churches heaps of ruins. It was inevitable these last should suffer, because their towers and spires are the only landmarks in this monotonously flat district; and it is not just to attribute it, in every case, to wanton destruction. I often wondered whether these churches would ever be rebuilt. The French, with whom I discussed the subject, invariably expressed the opinion that they would, and predicted that the war would result in a great religious revival in their country.

In districts out of which we had driven the enemy we often witnessed heart-rending scenes as the inhabitants returned only to find their homes pillaged or destroyed. On one occasion we were billeted in the house of a wealthy mill-owner. His cotton-mill, which had given employment to most of the villagers, had been completely destroyed. For several days his house had been occupied by a German General and his staff; the condition in which we found it almost defies description. Broken wine-bottles, crockery and ornaments, remnants of food, and the contents of cupboards were strewn about the floors. The beds had been slept in by officers who did not think it desirable to take off their muddy boots. The chests of drawers were emptied; some of their contents we found in the German trenches, many lay trampled upon the floor. Imagine the owner's grief when he returned to find his home in this condition! If a German General countenanced such wanton destruction, can similar and

even far worse crimes committed by the rank and file be wondered at ?

On the Sunday within the octave of All Saints the celebrations of the Holy Communion were well attended. This Festival appeals to men on active service with additional force, and, as we prayed "We also bless Thy holy name for all Thy servants departed this life in Thy faith and fear," our thoughts very naturally were first with our comrades who, laying down their lives for the brethren, had died in God's "faith and fear" as true saints of His. Among other services I remember a very hearty one held for the Manchester Regiment in a barn near the reserve trenches. The General, from whom I always received the greatest possible encouragement in my work, came over from headquarters and read the lesson. I have very happy memories of services such as these and of others held in billets and in the fields. Rarely was it possible to have any instrumental music, but the singing was none the less

hearty in consequence; I sometimes thought it was more so. A great earnestness seemed to pervade one's congregations; how could it well have been otherwise, surrounded as we were by death and destruction?

The services which, perhaps, impressed me as much as any were those conducted for the men in the billets. They would crowd in and sit upon the floor, and one was able to give them a straight heart-to-heart talk in a way that is not possible at a more formal service. It was then that the men would unburden themselves, produce from their pockets a New Testament, or some small book of devotions, from which they said they had derived much comfort and help, and speak of their Sunday school and choir-boy days, and of the old church at home. The soldier may sometimes display a rough exterior, but his heart is a heart of gold, and I have found few upon whom religion has not taken a strong hold, though, ordinarily, they do not speak of it.

The work of evacuating the sick and

wounded was from now onwards considerably expedited by the employment of motor ambulances. The majority were supplied by the British Red Cross Society, but in not a few instances private owners had had their cars converted for the purpose, had lent them for the work, and now drove them themselves. The introduction of these vehicles has resulted in the journey from the Field Ambulance to the Clearing Hospital being performed both more quickly and comfortably. To the wounded no better service has been rendered by voluntary agency. The excellent Society to which I have just referred is doing another good work by supplying substantial wooden crosses and placing them upon graves which have no mark of a permanent nature.

When, at the end of October, the troops of the Second Corps had gone into reserve, they received from Field-Marshal Sir John French a message in which he expressed his admiration of their tenacious stand before La Bassée, and spoke of

their courage and endurance as being "beyond all praise." At the same time he stated he was about to make another "call" upon them, and knew he would not do so in vain. The "call" came to eleven Battalions of our Corps on November 5th, when they were hurried away to strengthen the line further north in relief of the Seventh Division which, in the desperate fighting east of Ypres, had been reduced from 12,000 men to 2,336. There, insufficiently rested though they were after their trying experiences in the southern part of the line, they rendered conspicuous service and gallantly maintained their positions against the violent assaults of the enemy. To my own Brigade there came now the "call" of which the Commander-in-Chief had spoken, and on November 15th it marched straight from the trenches near Laventie to participate in the final stages of the first great battle of Ypres which lasted for three weeks, and ended in a decisive victory for the Allies.

CHAPTER XI

THE WINTER CAMPAIGN 1914—1915

AGAIN we cross the Belgian frontier, but under very different conditions from last time. Then the enemy was at our heels, but now, having been foiled in his attempts in turn upon Paris and Calais, he was tied down to his trenches, where he has been compelled to remain ever since. The latest attempt made at this time at Ypres, with vastly superior numbers, ended in a dismal failure; his losses, estimated at three times as many as our own, were appalling, and he achieved nothing. To have held our positions against forces which outnumbered us by five to one, and indeed by as many as eight to one in some parts of our line, is a victory the greatness of which is not, I

fear, generally appreciated. Judging from innumerable remarks which I have heard made by gloomy critics, it would seem that it is only by an advance that so many measure success. The advance will come, of this I feel confident, but, in the meantime, we score a great success each time the enemy makes a futile attack and, in so doing, loses more heavily than we; we become relatively stronger, and do much to ensure that, when we assume the offensive, the enemy will have been so weakened that we shall push him back not a few miles only, but as far as it suits our purpose.

The weather was now about as bad as it could be: a piercing east wind, snow, and then a deluge of rain welcomed us as we crossed the frontier. The troops, however, were in excellent spirits; a good night's rest near Meteren, a wash, and a shave had worked a transformation. It was difficult to believe that these were the same men who yesterday had come out of the trenches plastered with mud and

weary from lack of sleep. His powers of recuperation are not the least wonderful characteristic of the British soldier.

Through the town of Bailleul we reached the little Belgian village of Dranoutre, where the Field Ambulance found quarters in the school. An *estaminet* was utilized as a dressing-station and operating theatre, and accommodation for the sick and wounded was provided in the church. Straw was laid upon the floor of the north aisle and there the wounded were carried to await the motor ambulances which would convey them to hospital. And all the time the services of the sanctuary went on as usual.

Many of our comrades lie in the north-west corner of the churchyard, and on Christmas Day I buried Lieutenant H. R. Farrar, Sergeant H. Williams, and Private G. Robinson, all of the 2nd Manchesters, near the south transept, at the end of which there is a beautiful calvary.

The village had been untouched by

WOUNDED SOLDIERS IN THE CHURCH AT DRANOUTRE.

THE GRAVES OF LIEUTENANT FARRAR, SERGEANT WILLIAMS, AND PRIVATE ROBINSON.

shot or shell, but there was just the possibility that it might receive attention from the enemy's long-range guns. The Field Ambulance, therefore, was ordered to construct a "dug-out," or, as "Tommy" facetiously calls it, "funk-hole," sufficiently large to shelter its personnel of 250 men. Under the superintendence of Captain Lindsay the men of the R.A.M.C. expeditiously performed the work, proving themselves as skilful in using picks and shovels as in handling the wounded. None of us, however, regretted that there was no need to occupy the "funk-hole," for it was dirty and very wet, and couldn't exactly be called comfortable!

Our Brigade now held a somewhat extended line, the roads leading to which from Dranoutre were few, indirect, and very bad. The journeys each night to collect the wounded were, in consequence, long and arduous. I will try to describe one which is vividly impressed on my memory. A telephone message had come saying that my services were required at

the aid-post of the Manchester Regiment. At 9.15 p.m. I joined two of our medical officers and three squads of bearers, who, with three horsed ambulance waggons, were just setting off for the same destination. It rained heavily, and "there was a thick darkness" which considerably increased the difficulties of those who drove the waggons. The centre of the road was paved to little more than the width of the wheel-track, and the slightest deviation involved the waggons in difficulties. The wheels would sink down into the deep mud, and it required great efforts to lift them on to the paved track again. All went well till we reached the village of Neuve Eglise and met ammunition and ration waggons returning, when, of course, there was nothing for it but to pull into the mud and wait till the road was clear. Later on we met troops returning from the trenches, from which they had just been relieved. Poor beggars, plastered with dirt and drenched to the skin, how we pitied them as they

stumbled along in the darkness and floundered in the mud!

As we neared our destination, the village of Wulverghem, the bursting of star-shells illuminated the sky and a terrific fusillade from rifles, maxims, and field-guns disturbed the silence of the night. We halted for a while behind the shelter of some buildings, for this bit of road was none too "healthy" during an attack. We were soon able to proceed, and safely reached the farm which Captain Browne, the medical officer of the 2nd Manchesters, was using as his aid-post. "Glad to see you," Browne said; "we've had an awful time to-day. Poor Nicholson has been killed, we've got him here, and two men also, for you to bury. Now I hear they have another dead officer in the trenches, and probably more men, but it will take some time to get them all brought down. Can you wait?" Having told him that I would, and seen the wounded sent away in two of our ambulance waggons in charge of a medical officer, I sat down with

Browne till the graves had been dug and all the dead brought down from the trenches. "'We've had an awful business getting the wounded in to-night," he said. "One of their beastly snipers has potted at my bearers every time they went up to the trenches. Listen; you can hear him now." Yes, I could distinctly hear the crack of a single rifle, and it was repeated at intervals during the whole time I remained there, from 11 p.m. till 5 a.m., when, with the breaking of dawn, I suppose the sniper crept away to his lair to await the return of darkness.

At frequent intervals Browne would go to the door, look out into the darkness, and listen for the return of his stretcher-bearers. Brave fellows these! Bandsmen most of them in peace time, on active service their work is to carry the wounded from the firing line to the regimental aid-post. Only those who have seen it can fully appreciate the arduous and hazardous nature of the work performed by these devoted men.

A few days later, near this very village of Wulverghem, a regimental stretcher-bearer in my Brigade, Bandsman Rendle of the 1st Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, won the Victoria Cross for his conspicuous bravery. The parapet of a trench had been blown away and wounded men were lying in the open exposed to shell and rifle fire. With a splendid courage and scorn of death, Rendle went to their rescue and carried them one by one to a place of shelter. With none of the excitement which stimulates combatants, but facing the dangers of fighting all the same, stretcher-bearers, both regimental and those attached to Field Ambulances, have done some of the bravest deeds of the war. In their case especially do I share the regrets expressed by Field-Marshal Sir John French, "that circumstances have prevented any account of many splendid instances of courage and endurance coming regularly to the knowledge of the public."

At last, after one of his many visits to the door, Browne came in and announced,

" The bearers have just brought in young Caulfield's body. Poor boy, it's awfully sad about him. Only a few days ago he transferred from the Army Service Corps to the Manchesters because he wanted to do some fighting." It was now about 1.30 a.m., and as we sat and talked we were joined by the second medical officer of the Field Ambulance, who, with two squads of bearers, had made a perilous journey to the aid-post of another Regiment. Having left the third ambulance waggon with us, they had made their way in the darkness across ploughed fields and dykes and then carried two seriously wounded men a distance of over a mile. At one place a broad dyke had to be negotiated by means of a tree which had fallen across it. But this difficulty, like many others, was surmounted by the undaunted bearers. The medical officer had fallen into a " Jack Johnson " hole, and now appeared before us smothered in liquid mud. Quietly and unobtrusively, but with splendid courage and patient

endurance, this work of collecting the wounded goes on night after night.

After a few moments' conversation, during which the two wounded men were transferred to the waiting ambulance, we bade the medical officer good-bye and went out to the little cemetery to give instructions about the preparation of the graves. The work of digging these had necessarily to be performed in the darkness, because the showing of a light might have drawn the enemy's fire.

About 4.30 a.m. Browne announced, "Everything is ready at last, Padre; there are two officers and four men for you to bury; all Manchesters." I accompanied him to a barn where our fallen comrades lay. Picture the scene if you can. The medical officer walks by my side, the six stretchers, each carried by two men, follow, and, as we wend our way through the farm-yard between waggons and machinery, there fall upon the stillness of the night the glorious words, "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the

Lord." Having groped our way to the graves, the bearers reverently lift the lifeless forms from the stretchers and at once lower them into the ground. Then the prayer of committal and the rest of the Church's beautiful form of service for the burial of the dead are recited from memory. What a multitude of thoughts rushed through our minds as we stood a while beside the open graves! On the morrow loving hands would place above them wooden crosses, and successive Regiments will keep the mounds green.

My sad task accomplished, as the first streaks of dawn appeared in the sky, I said good-bye to Browne and set out on my solitary four-miles tramp to Dranoutre. The only living souls I saw during the first two miles were the sentries, one of whom appeared with startling suddenness from apparently nowhere, and, with his bayonet at my breast, made many inquiries as to my identity.

Having reached " home " about 6 a.m. I lay down fully dressed, for I had to be

up again by 8 o'clock to visit the sick and wounded before the motor ambulances bore them away to hospital.

While the fighting on our front was now much less desperate, the troops were subjected to a trial of another nature arising from the severity of the weather. The snow, hard frost and periods of almost continuous rain, combined with the necessity for standing many hours waist-deep in mud and water, imposed a very searching test upon the men's physique and powers of endurance. Fur coats were served out to them by the authorities, and warm clothing was provided in abundance by generous friends at home. Their rations, which were always good, were increased to a scale never known before. Braziers were supplied for the trenches, which were kept as dry as possible by the resourcefulness of the Royal Engineers. But, in spite of every expedient being adopted which science could suggest, many of the troops suffered severely, the most common forms of

sickness being rheumatism and frost-bite. The health of the troops generally was, however, surprisingly good, the sick-rate being no more than 3 per cent. This excellent result is due very largely to the untiring zeal, skill, and devotion with which the Royal Army Medical Corps performed its work. Colonel Crawford and the other medical officers of the Field Ambulance, as well as those in charge of Regiments, spared neither time nor labour to keep the men fit. Great attention was paid to sanitation, and in this sphere Lieutenant Cooper, R.A.M.C., a graduate of the Lister Institute, assisted by his "sanitary squad," toiled unceasingly with skill and energy. Similar good work was done throughout the Army, with the result that the troops were kept free from any epidemic. The regular periods of rest, which the arrival of additional Regiments now enabled the troops to be given, was another contributing factor to their health. Beyond the reach of the German guns they could now have

adequate and undisturbed sleep; and excellent arrangements were made by which all could have a hot bath, combined with a complete change of underclothing.

Not a little credit is due to those, too, who helped, by the organization of games and entertainments, to maintain the excellent spirits of the troops. In my own Brigade an Association Football League was formed, the four Regiments, the Field Ambulance, and the attached Company of the Divisional Train each entering a team. An appeal to friends at home brought a liberal supply of footballs, and hop-poles served as goal-posts. One of the competing teams always wore broad red sashes as a distinguishing mark. Many of the matches were necessarily played under very unfavourable conditions; often it rained heavily, and much of the ground was under water. The "gates" were invariably good; sometimes whole Regiments would combine a route-march with attendance and come on to the ground, under arms, to encourage

their teams. The General "kicked off" at the first match, and was always present when his duties would allow. It had been decided that each team should play each of the others twice, but unforeseen circumstances intervened, and the competition concluded with the completion of the first round, in which points were gained as follows. 1st D.C.L.I., 10; 1st Devons, 8; 14th Field Ambulance, 6; 1st East Surreys, 4; 2nd Manchesters, 2; 3rd Co. 5th Divisional Train, 2. The competition excited keen interest, afforded great pleasure to players and spectators, and did much to divert the men's thoughts into more cheerful channels.

Perhaps even greater pleasure was afforded by the entertainments which it was now possible to organize. Thanks to the efforts of Sergeant Plume, R.A.M.C., the personnel of the Field Ambulance had often enjoyed a "sing-song." This energetic non-commissioned officer now made himself very largely responsible for two entertainments each week, to which

MEN OF THE 14TH INFANTRY BRIGADE PLAYING FOOTBALL.

SOME MEMBERS OF THE 11TH FIELD AMBULANCE DRAMATIC PARTY.

it was possible to invite each night four hundred and fifty men from the Brigade and attached units. In one village in which we were billeted for three or four months an excellent room with permanent stage and proscenium was available. At first the R.A.M.C. contributed the programmes almost entirely, but later on the various units made themselves responsible in turn. The friendly competition among them to produce the best "show" was very keen. Several most amusing farces, from the pen of Sergeant Plume, were performed by himself and the talented dramatic party of the Field Ambulance, who also gave a very laughable production of Harry Tate's motoring scene. A mouth-organ band, composed of men from the same corps, rendered selections of music with great precision under the conductorship of Private Vick, R.A.M.C., who had trained them. Privates Wright and Prager of the East Surreys were inimitable in their duets and patter; while Lieutenant Martin Row, with his

amusing stories, and Lieutenant Grenfell by his recitations, gave great pleasure to their audiences. These are but a few of the many excellent items contributed at these entertainments. The preparation of the programmes helped to occupy the performers in their spare time with healthy diversion. "Tommy" displayed great resourcefulness in securing his "props."; apparently he could make anything from a footlight to a motor-car out of empty biscuit tins. The pleasure afforded to the crowded audiences by these entertainments, and the beneficial effect they had upon the spirits of the troops, it would be impossible to assess. The "Tommy" who was heard to say, "I wouldn't have missed the show for a tanner," probably represented the appreciation of his fellows; while the officer who said, "These concerts are jolly good things; my men always return from them very happy, whistling and singing," did, I know, voice the approval of other commanding officers.

At the end of November, when the long and arduous battle of Ypres-Armentières had ended in a great victory for the Allies, His Majesty the King arrived in the field to visit his army. He carried out numerous inspections, and presented V.C.'s, D.S.O.'s. and D.C.M.'s, being everywhere received with tremendous enthusiasm by the troops, to whom his visit was the greatest possible encouragement.

From now onwards to the time when, some four months later, the enemy made his second attempt at Ypres there was nothing in the nature of a general engagement on the front of the Second Corps; but German guns and snipers continued to take their toll, and there were few days on which I was not called upon to minister to the wounded and the dying.

During these months my work varied little, and consisted largely of a repetition of that of which I have already written. The addition of a fifth Battalion, the 5th Cheshires, to my Brigade, coupled with the fact that there were now always two,

and often three, of my Regiments in reserve, gave me greater opportunities for personal visitation. Week-night meetings for Bible study and intercessory prayer were tried with considerable success. My Sundays now were especially full days; an average one would include an early celebration, two parade services, and evensong in the village in which we were billeted. In the intervals, having filled my saddle-bags with hymn-books, I rode around to outlying units, and had short services in barns, and more often still in the fields. It was not unusual in this way to get in as many as six or seven services during the day.

Of the Christmas Festival I have very happy memories. In the early morning of Christmas Day, while it was still dark, I went to a farm-house situated under Mount Kemmel, where, in the kitchen, a celebration of the Holy Communion was attended by about fifty Gunners, many of whom had walked nearly two miles in order to be present. At the second cele-

bration, held in a room at Brigade headquarters, the communicants overflowed into the passage and into the room on the other side. Men came in straight from the trenches, fully armed and plastered with mud, eager to worship at the manger throne. I was reminded of those who, saying one to another "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass," hastened away from the fields to do homage to the newborn King. The other celebrations were equally well attended. Two parade services, necessarily shorter even than usual because of the intense cold, were held in the snow-clad fields. As we sang the old favourite hymn, "While shepherds watched their flocks by night," we could realize, as perhaps we had never done before, the loving condescension of the announcement of the Saviour's birth first to simple men doing their humble duty out in the fields.

Everything possible under the circumstances was done to celebrate the festive season in the time-honoured way. On

Christmas Eve the various billets in the village received a most welcome visit from a party of carol singers organized by Corporal Burdett. On the day itself every member of the British Expeditionary Force received a much-treasured card from their Majesties the King and Queen, bearing autographed portraits of themselves and conveying their good wishes. From Her Royal Highness the Princess Mary there came a very thoughtful and much-prized gift in the form of a brass tobacco box, tobacco, and cigarettes. Plum-puddings and other appropriate fare arrived in abundance, and in the evening we did our best to be mirthful and happy.

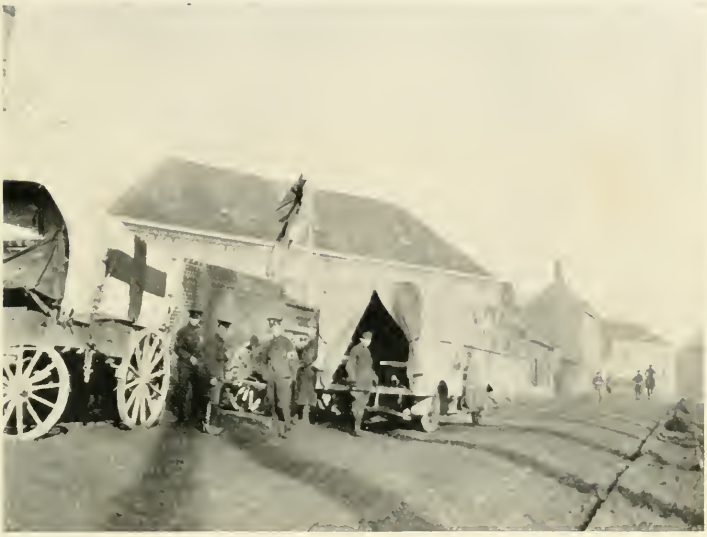
The spirit of Christmas spread even to the men in the trenches, and in many places informal truces were arranged. The opposing forces left their trenches and fraternized on the intervening ground, exchanging gifts and good wishes! For his enemy individually "Tommy" has no hatred; he only wants to meet and beat him on a purely sporting basis. He is goodness

itself to German wounded and prisoners, to whom I have seen him give the last of his precious "Woodbines." One was not, therefore, surprised to find him prepared to shake hands with his foe on Christmas Day. It was good to know that some at least of the Regiments opposed to us were untainted by that childish venom of hate which the enemy as a whole evidently regards as the proper spirit in which to fight. Both sides were equally glad to avail themselves of the opportunity afforded by the truce to improve their trenches and to bury their dead.

"*A day of comparative quiet along our whole front.*" In some such words ran the official report of a day, March 5th, which brought a sad disaster to the 14th Field Ambulance. For two months we had been stationed in a village which the Germans shelled at intervals. Little harm was done as long as they confined themselves to shrapnel, but as time went on they bombarded the village with high explosive shells, which knocked the houses

down like packs of cards and caused many casualties among the troops and civilians.

I had paid my morning visit to the sick and wounded, and the worst cases among these had been sent to hospital by motor-ambulances, when, without the slightest warning, a six-inch shell came through the roof of our dressing-station and burst in the middle of the building. Captain Bell and Lieutenant Clarke, R.A.M.C., as well as several patients and orderlies, were wounded. One orderly and three patients were killed. There were many in the building at the time, and the wonder is that any escaped. At the moment, I was on the outskirts of the village superintending the preparation of a field for a football match. Seeing the shell burst in the dressing-station, I immediately ran there to do what I could to help with the wounded. However, before I could get there a second shell burst in the yard by one of the doors leading into the dressing-station, mortally wounding Major F. G. Richards, who was superintending the



DRESSING-STATION OF 14TH FIELD AMBULANCE BEFORE BOMBARDMENT.

AFTER.

removal of the wounded. We carried him to a cottage on the edge of the village, where everything that love and skill could suggest was done for him by Lieutenants G. D. Ferguson and R. Hay, R.A.M.C.

"Dear old Richards," as we who knew him so well always called him, was one of the best; with the heart of a child and the bravery of a lion, he was both a good soldier and a fine Christian. He made no display of his religion, but his life was rich in its best fruits. Sympathetic with his patients, most conscientious in the discharge of his duty, a strong disciplinarian, and yet absolutely just to those serving under him, unselfish, thoughtful, and courteous, it was little wonder he was a universal favourite. A private, with tears in his eyes, said to me, "We all loved him, sir," and this remark does indeed sum up the feelings we all entertained for him. I had known him well for ten years, we were great "pals," and even now, after an interval of four months, I find it hard to realize we shall not meet

again in this life. He was conscious almost to the end, and often murmured his thanks to the doctors and orderlies. About an hour after receiving his injuries, he died very peaceably in the faith and love of God Whom he had served so well. We carried him that night to the churchyard, and buried him with four others who had met their deaths in the same disaster. As part of the inscription which the cross over his grave bears, I chose the words "Faithful unto death," for if any one ever earned them he did. For lives like his we thank God, and, though his body rests in Belgian soil, his memory lives and his good works will not be forgotten. *R. I. P.*

A few days later a letter appeared in a London paper in which the writer quoted this disaster to the 14th Field Ambulance as an instance of the enemy's disregard of the Red Cross flag. Knowing all the facts, I must acquit them of the charge of having, in this case, deliberately fired upon the wounded and

non-combatants. They probably knew fighting troops were quartered in the village, or they may have been searching for one of our batteries near us which frequently gave them trouble. In any case, it would be quite impossible for the German gunners to see our hospital flag.

* * * * *

Now my story is done. It has been written in response to many requests, and claims to be nothing more than a faithful account of the life lived and the work done in "the fighting line" by one priest of the Church of England, who is fully conscious of his many failures as well as of the fact that his experiences were in no way exceptional ones. Of the work done by the chaplains generally it would have been presumptuous for me to have spoken. One who is qualified, however, to judge of that work has borne generous tribute to it. Field-Marshal Sir John French, in his 5th Despatch, said, "I cannot speak too highly of the devoted manner

in which all chaplains, whether with the troops in the trenches or in attendance on the sick and wounded in casualty-clearing stations and hospitals on the line of communications, have worked throughout the campaign." Further, of the chaplains he said: "The number with the forces in the field at the commencement of the war was comparatively small," and expressed the hope "that the further increase of personnel may be found possible."

This hope, which I know was shared by the Church generally, has been realized, and there are now seven chaplains to each Division where before there were only three. Will the Church now pray unceasingly that "the labourers" sent may be given wisdom, love, and strength to gather in the rich harvest which undoubtedly is ripening among the souls of men in our army? On behalf of myself and brother chaplains I feel confident I shall not ask in vain,

"Brethren, pray for us."

APPENDIX

NAMES of Officers, Warrant Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and Men of the 14th Infantry Brigade and attached units to whom Decorations and Medals have been awarded for distinguished service and acts of gallantry and devotion to duty during the present campaign.

V.C.

Lieut. G. R. Roupell, Lance-Corpl. E. Dwyer } 1st E. Surrey Regt.

Bandsman T. Rendle, 1st D.C.L.I.

2nd Lieut. J. E. Leach, Sergt. J. Hogan } 2nd Manchester Regt.

C.B.

Brig.-Gen. F. S. Maude.
Lieut.-Col. H. L. James, 2nd Manchester Regt.
Lieut.-Col. M. N. Turner, 1st D.C.L.I.

C.M.G.

Lieut.-Col. E. G. Williams, 1st Devon Regt.
Lieut.-Col. G. S. Crawford, R.A.M.C.

Major H. T. Cantan, 1st D.C.L.I.
Major R. S. Weston, 2nd Manchester Regt.

D.S.O.

Staff Captain G. F. Phillips.
Lieut. R. E. Hancock, 1st Devon Regt.
Capt. the Hon. A. R. Hewitt, 1st E. Surrey Regt.
Major J. H. T. Cornish-Bowden ; Capt. W. P. Buckley ; Capt. C. B. Scott ; Capt. C. B. Woodham, 1st D.C.L.I.
Capt. W. K. Evans, 2nd Manchester Regt.

The Military Cross

1*st Devon Regt.*

Capt. P. R. Worrall ; Lieut. W. A. Fleming ; Lieut. G. E. R. Prior.

1*st E. Surrey Regt.*

Capt. M. J. Minogue ; Lieut. E. G. Clarke ; Lieut. T. H. Darwell ; Lieut. G. E. Hyson ; Lieut. R. A. Montenaro.

1*st D.C.L.I.*

Capt. A. N. Acland ; Capt. M. Crawley-Boevey ; Capt. T. A. Kendall ; Lieut. A. J. S. Hammans.

2nd Manchester Regt.

Capt. J. S. Harper; Capt. C. D. Irwin; Capt. A. J. Scully; Capt. G. W. Williamson.

A.S.C.

Lieut. M. Burke; Staff Sergt.-Major G. White.

R.A.M.C.

Lieut. W. McM. Chesney; Lieut. T. W. Clarke.

DISTINGUISHED CONDUCT MEDAL

1st Devon Regt.

Comp. Sergt.-Major E. Tabb; Sergt. H. Webb; Corpl. C. Jeffery; Lance-Corpl. W. Simmons; Lance-Corpl. W. Tremlett; Lance-Corpl. W. Webber; Pte. R. Ball; Pte. W. Dunster; Pte. J. Searle; Pte. W. Worsfold.

5th Signal Company, R.E.

Corpl. J. E. Adams; Pioneer F. Keevill.

1st E. Surrey Regt.

Sergt.-Major G. E. Hyson; Q.-M.-Sergt. W. Fisher; Comp. Sergt.-Major A. Reid; Sergt. A. Edwards; Sergt. P. Griggs, Sergt. M. Hill; Sergt. J. Packhard; Corpl. R. Williams;

Lance-Corpl. W. Harding; Pte. F.Grimwood; Pte. A. Hotz; Pte. F. Martin; Pte. J. Wilkins.

1st D.C.L.I.

Comp. Sergt.-Major W. Dingley; Sergt. H. Byard; Sergt. J. Roberts; Sergt. J. Wise; Corpl. G. Dagger; Lance-Corpl. J. Denton; Lance-Corpl. W. Stoneman; Pte. B. Barlow; Pte. H. Cox; Pte. J. Pennycock; Pte. A. Rex.

2nd Manchester Regt.

Comp. Sergt.-Major J. Lemon; Sergt-Major J. Parker; Sergt. A. Harrison; Sergt. H. Waters; Corpl. A. Bloor; Pte. A. Shalliker.

5th Cheshire Regt.

Pte. L. Pollitt.

R.A.M.C.

Sergt.-Major A. E. Spowage; Acting Corpl. J. Cartwright.

FOREIGN DECORATIONS

Légion d'Honneur

1st E. Surrey Regt.

Capt. E. M. Woulfe Flanagan.

1st D.C.L.I.

Lieut. A. J. S. Hammans.

MÉDAILLE MILITAIRE

1st E. Surrey Regt.

Sergt. R. Hunt.

1st D.C.L.I.

Comp. Sergt.-Major J. Woolcott.

2nd Manchester Regt.

Comp. Q.-M.-Sergt. J. Morris.

A.S.C.

Staff Sergt.-Major M. Burke.

5th Signal Company, R.E.

Sergt. W. R. Carvell.

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