

"THE GREAT WAR AS I SAW IT."

By Canon F. G. Scott, C.M.G., D.S.O., of Quebec, Senior Chaplain of the First Canadian Division.

Rumours were abroad that with the opening of spring we were to begin offensive, and it was generally believed that towards the close of the next year we might hope for the end of hostilities. Our men were being trained, when weather permitted, in open warfare, and the time of so-called rest was really a period of constant activity. The chief hotel in the place became an officers' club, and very pleasant were the reunions we had there. I was glad we were going to spend Christmas out of the line, and determined to take advantage of the theatre as a place for Christmas services. The 8th and 14th Battalions were quartered in the town, besides some similar units, so we had a good many men to draw upon for a congregation. On Christmas Eve at half-past eleven I had a celebration of the Holy Communion. We had a splendid band to play the Christmas hymns, and a large number of men attended. The stage was made to look as much as possible like a chancel, and the service was very hearty. Many made their communion. I also had a watch-night service on New Year's Eve. The theatre was almost filled with men—there were rows of them even in the gallery. It was an inspiring sight, and we all felt we were beginning a year that was to decide the destinies of the Empire. I told the men that somewhere in the pages of the book which we were opening that night lay hidden the tremendous secret of our success or failure. At ten minutes to twelve we sat in silence, while the band played Chopin's Funeral March. It was almost too moving, for once again the visions came before us of the terrible battle-fields of the Somme and the faces that had gone. Then we all rose and there was a brief moment for silent prayer, at midnight the buglers of the 14th Battalion sounded the Last Post, and at the close, the band struck up the hymn "O God our hand struck up in ages past," and a mighty chorus of voices joined in the well-known strains. After the Benediction, I went down to the door and shook hands with as many of the men as I could and wished them a happy New Year. No one who was at that service will ever forget it. As we found out, the trail before us was longer than we had expected, and the next New Year's Eve found many of us, though alas, not all, in that theatre once more, still awaiting the issue of the conflict.

Round and Round and Round. In January, I paid a flying visit to the Canadian Cavalry Headquarters at Tully near Abbeville, and saw many old friends. On my return, I had a curious experience which throws a light upon railway travelling at the Front. A friend had motored me to Abbeville that afternoon, just in time to catch a leave-train full of men returning from England. I only wished to go as far as St. Pol, about thirty miles off, where I hoped to get a car for Bruay. I got into a carriage with four other officers, one of whom was a chaplain who had just been decorated with the D.S.O. I had crossed the Channel with him once before, so was glad to renew old acquaintance. The train left Abbeville about four o'clock. We found ourselves in a second-class compartment. The windows were unglazed, the floor was dirty, and there was no lamp to lighten our darkness. By pulling down the curtains we tried to keep out the cold wind, but the draught was very unpleasant, and we had to try to accumulate warmth of our bodies to keep from freezing.

Instead of going direct to St. Pol, for some reason or other, the train started off to the South. We travelled on and on at a snail's pace, and had frequent and lengthy stops. When the light died away, we should have been in complete darkness if one of the officers had not brought a candle with him. Hour after hour passed by and we began to get hungry. Somebody had some sandwiches and a piece of cake, and this was shared by the company. It served to stimulate rather than soothe the appetite. About midnight, to our astonishment we found we had got to Canaples, where I had stayed when we were going to the Somme. Someone said there had been a railway accident and we had to travel by branch lines. In spite of the cold, we tried to sleep. I sat between my parson friend, who was inclined to be stout, and another officer who was remarkably angular. When I leaned my head on my companion's friend, his frequent fits of coughing made it bounce as though it were resting on an air-cushion. When I got tired of this and leaned against my angular friend on the other side, the jolting of the carriage scraped my ear against his ribs. I spent the night leaning first on one companion, and then on the other. The morning found us still travelling, and finally at half-past ten the train drew up once more at St. Pol.

DO YOUR BOWELS MOVE REGULARLY, OR DO THEY Become Constipated

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our starting point in Abbeville station. Having been eighteen hours without food or drink or the opportunity of a shave, I thought it was about time to retire, and told my companions that life was too short to spend it in railway journeys of that description. So, with a feeling of superiority and independence which made them green with envy, I bid them good-bye. I never heard any more of my friends, but, although the war has long since ended, I have a sort of dim impression in my mind that they are still travelling round and round again. I went over to the officers' club and had a good wash and luncheon, and there meeting a very nice engineer officer, I asked him if he could tell me where I could find any lories going North. I told him my railway experience, and it so moved him that he very kindly sent me off in his own car to St. Pol, where I was picked up by one of our staff cars and taken home in time for dinner. Railway journeys in France were not things to remember with pleasure, and they were bad for the officers, who must have been for the poor men in the crowded third-class carriages?

Part of the Game. At the end of January, our pleasant life at Bruay came to an end, and we moved off to Barlin, which was to be our headquarters for a month and a half. It was while we were there that I had an attack of trench-fever, which, like being "crummy," is really part of a complete war experience. Barlin was not a bad place of residence. There were many men within easy reach, and I had an upper room in the Town Hall which was a chapel. The presence of a well equipped British hospital also gave one opportunities of seeing our wounded men. We had come to know by this time that the first task which lay before us in the opening of spring was the taking of Vimy Ridge, and our life became filled with fresh zest and interest in view of the coming attack.

On the 15th of March our Division moved up to place called Ecoivres, where we were billeted in the old Chateau. The Count who owned the Chateau kept some downstairs rooms for himself, but we occupied all the rest of the building. In the hall upstairs we had a large model of Vimy Ridge, which all the officers and men of the battalions visited in turn, in order to study the character of the land over which they had charge. In the garden were numerous huts, and in a large building in a street to the right of the Chateau was a billet which held a great number of men. It was almost entirely filled up with tiers upon tiers of wooden shelves, on which the men made their beds. They were reached by wooden stairs. Nearly two battalions were crowded into the building. On the ground floor beside the door, there was a high platform which commanded a view of the whole interior. On this, one of our bands lived, and gave us music in the evening, every night after dinner, I used to go to the cinema, as we called the place, and have either a service or a talk with the men on general subjects. At such times outsiders would crowd in, and we have had very hearty singing when the band struck up a hymn. I always tried to have some piece of good news to announce, and would get the latest reports from the signallers to read aloud. The men were in splendid spirits, and we were all buoyed up with the hope that we were going to end the war. I used to speak about the war outlook, and would tell the men that there were only two issues before us: Victory or Slavery. When I asked them one night, "Which will it be, boys?" a loud shout of "Victory" went up.

When Will it be Over?

News was not always plentiful, and it was a little bit hard at times to find anything particularly interesting to say; so, one night I determined to make a variation. I told the men that on the next evening, if they would bring in questions to me on any subject which had been troubling them, I should be very glad to try and give an answer. I thought that an entertainment of that kind might be both attractive and helpful. On the next evening, therefore, I ascended the platform as usual and found the place crowded with men. I found my acetylene lamp with me to furnish light for reading any questions that might be sent up. I called the meeting to order, and then asked if any man had any questions to ask. To my great delight, someone at the back held up an envelope above the crowd, and it was passed up to me. I tore it open, and holding my lamp in one hand, without looking over the letter first, I read it aloud to the men, who were hushed in the silence of anticipation. I give it just as it was written:—

Somewhere in France, 3.4.17.

Dear Sir:—I am going to ask you a question which has been a load to my little bit of mental capacity for a period of months. Often have I stood up in the old dugout, my hair standing straight up and one eye looking straight into the eyeball of the other, trying to obtain an answer to this burning question. I have kept weary vigil over the parapet at night, with my rifle in one hand and a couple of bombs in the other, and two or three in each pocket, and still I am pondering over this burning question. I will now ask you the question. When do you think this God damn war will be over, eh?"

I never was so completely taken back in all my life. A roar of laughter burst from the men in which I joined heartily. From the tiers of bunks and every part of the building, cheers went up, and we had one of the pleasantest evenings in that old cinema that we had ever experienced. I do not know who the boy was who sent the letter, or whether he is alive now. If he is, I wish he would write to me. I want to thank him for giving us all a good laugh at that time of preparation and anxiety. I keep the letter among my most treasured war souvenirs. The winter rains had not improved the roads, but still day and night, through mud and water, a constant stream of vehicles of all descriptions passed up towards the front carrying ammunition. Ammunition was stacked where. At certain places it was stacked along the roads. The strain upon the horses was very great, and many of them died, and their bodies lay by the

roadside for many days, no one having time to bury them.

A Chapel Altar.

It was perfectly impossible to get any place in which to hold Communion services, so, with the permission of the family who owned it, I made use of a little Gothic shrine near the church, which stood over a family vault. It was a miniature chapel, and had an altar in it. The glass in the windows had been broken, but we replaced it by canvas. I hung upon the wall outside the board which I carried with me, with the words "St. George's Church" upon it. In this little building every morning at eight o'clock I had a celebration of the Holy Communion, and I always had some to attend.

Our trenches were tolerably quiet, and lay beyond the Arras-Bethune road. At a place called Maison Blanche there was a large cavern, which was used as a billet for one of the battalions in Reserve. I went down into it one evening when the 16th Battalion was there. It was a most picturesque place. The walls and roof were white chalk, and the place was cut up by passages and openings which led into other caves. The atmosphere was smoky, and a multitude of candles lit up the strange abode. The men were cooking in their mess tins, some were playing cards, and some were examining the seams of their shirts. I told them I was going to have a service at one of the caverns, and I proceeded thither with a good number following. Some of the card players seemed too interested in their game to care to attend, so I called out to the men in a loud voice, not to make too much noise, lest they should disturb the gamblers. One of the men who was playing cards responded, "If you will wait till we have finished this hand, Sir, we will all come too." So I made the announcement that the service would not begin till the players were ready. The result was that in a very little while all the men came and joined in the service. Some strange stories were told about the fighting that had gone on in that cave between the French and the Germans at the beginning of the war.

The possession of the Ridge gave the Germans a great advantage, because it commanded a view of a very large piece of country and several main roads. Further up the road from Maison Blanche there was a place called Arraine Dump, where the Engineers had stored material in preparation for our attack. A long plank road connected it with the Anzin-St. Eloi road. On a dark and rainy night, that plank road was an unpleasant place for a walk. Lorries, wagons, limbers, transports, horses and men crowded it, and the traffic every now and then would get blocked. No flashlights could be used, and it was hard to escape being run over. Yet to step off the plank road meant to sink almost to your knees in mud. The language that one heard at such times in the darkness was not quite fit for ears polite. It is well that the horses were not able to understand the complimentary speeches that were addressed to them.

There was a tremendous concentration of artillery in the back area. The town of Anzin, on the bank of the River Scarpe, was filled with heavy artillery. It was through it that we ran the risk of many unpleasant surprises from the sudden firing of big guns by the wayside. Once, I was approaching an apparently harmless hole in a brick wall, when all of a sudden Dandy and I found ourselves enveloped in flame and almost stunned by a huge report. When we passed the hole, I saw a large gun moving up and down under the force of its recoil, and with smoke still curling out of its mouth. The siege battery in which my third son was a gunner had now arrived and taken up its position in a field behind Anzin, where a 15-inch howitzer sent forth its deadly missives to the Germans every fifteen minutes, and in return drew their fire. One day a shell burst in a hut used by some Railway Troops. A large number of them were wounded and eleven killed, whom I buried in a row on the hillside.

America Comes In.

On the 4th of April we received news that America had declared war upon Germany. I thanked God in my heart that at last the English-speaking world was being drawn together, and I knew that the effect upon the Germans would be disastrous. I rode out that afternoon to give the good news to our men, I met a British battalion coming out of the line, looking very tired and hungry. They were resting by the roadside, and I passed along and cheered them by telling them that the United States had now come to definitely aid one of our Allies, and that I thought the effect would be the shortening of the war. America's decision could not have come at a better time. The year was opening out before us, and the initiative was coming into our hands. The prospect was bright, and our men were keen for the encounter.

April 6th was Good Friday. It was impossible to have service at Ecoivres, everyone was so busy, so I rode over to Anzin and had service for the 7th Siege Battery in a Nissen hut. Most of the battery were present, and I had forty communicants. The place was lit by candles, which every now and then

were extinguished by the fire of the fifteen-inch gun near by. Easter Day was originally intended to be the day for our attack, but it had been postponed till Monday. We could not do much in the way of observing the great feast. Every room and shed in the town was filled, and men were lying out under the rubber sheets in the fields. I had two Celebrations of the Holy Communion in the Y.M.C.A. hut, the floor of which was covered with sleeping men. I managed to clear a little space on the stage for the altar. Of course, not many attended, but at one of the services was an officer who had won the V.C. and the D.S.O., and had a foreign decoration as well. In the afternoon I visited and gave an address to one of the battalions moving up the line. It was a time of mingled anxiety and exhilaration. What did the next twenty-four hours hold in store for us? Was it to be a true Easter for the world, and a resurrection to a new and better life? If death awaited us, what nobler passage could there be to Eternity than such a death in such a cause. Never was the spirit of comradeship higher in the Canadian Corps. Never was there a greater sense of unity. The task laid upon us was a tremendous one, but in the heart of each man, from Private to General, was the determination that it should be performed. On that Easter night, the battalions took their places in the line. The men at the guns, which had hitherto been concealed and kept silent, were ready to open fire at zero, and all along that front the eager heart of Canada waited impatiently for the dawn.

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At Perth Road.

Perth Road, April 4.—Many have taken advantage of the late snow in hauling logs to the mill. E. Stokes hauled on Monday the funeral of his sister-in-law, the late Mrs. Chas. Stokes, Glenburnie. Mrs. Boyer who has been the guest of her daughter, Mrs. A. E. Duffell, has returned to her home at Bracebridge. Rev. Mr. Duffell is writing his examinations at Queen's, Kingston. Miss R. Buck spent Sunday afternoon with Miss Jamieson. Mr. and Mrs. F. Lake were the recent guests of Mrs. R. Ritchie. The M.L.M.C. meets at Mrs. W. Emms' this week. Miss Winifred Wallace was the recent guest of Mrs. J. Middleton. Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Sears spent Sunday recently at J. Guthrie's. Mr. and Mrs. R. Guthrie entertained a number of friends on Friday evening. J. Middleton has been adding to the appearance of his residence. The cheese factory will open this coming Monday.

Adolphustown News.

April 6.—The snow storm of last week rendered the roads almost impassable in places, but the bright sun of the last few days is drying them up nicely. The sugar season is ended after a lengthy run. Mrs. H. Gallagher continues quite poorly. Stephen Mack is confined to the house and under the care of the doctor. All are glad to see Robert Foster out again. The baseball boys held

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FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY PUBLISHERS

NEW YORK November 25, 1921.

Canadian Daily Newspapers Association, 902 Excelsior Life Building, Toronto, Canada.

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mother, Mrs. A. Ryder, one day this week. Mrs. S. B. Merrill, who has been very ill for the past three weeks is able to be around again. F. Pepper, painter and decorator, has changed his mind about leaving the village and intends to remain with us for some time yet.

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