



THE RED TRIANGLE



THE LAST OF ENGLAND.

By Maple Leaf.

With excited anticipations, with fondest hopes and pictures of his coming months as a fighting man, the Canadian soldier landed in England. How the realisation has measured up to his anticipations is a matter of personal opinion.

He may have been disappointed in the English winter. He may not have found the life in the trenches quite up to the requirements of a summer holiday jaunt. He may have been forced to eat "bully" when he wanted turkey, to smoke "fags" when he wanted a real Turkish, to bathe in a dixie when he hungered for the "old swimmin' hole" at home.

But anything that interferes with pleasant remembrances of the Motherland, at least so far as his last days in it are concerned, is outside the power of the authorities to prevent.

Rhyl is a camp in a thousand. Rhyl, in North Wales, from which he will probably bid farewell to English winters and English ways, is not those long bleak slopes out before Arras, for instance, or the rest camps back of Ypres, where "rest" was relative in its meaning. It is not sandy, straggling, misshapen Etapes. It may not be billets in four-story mansions on the Rhine, with coffee in bed, a maid to shine your shoes, and a dignified host to remove his hat in your presence as a mark of homage to the conquerors. But it is the best substitute in England.

There are well-made drives and walks that are as near to mudless as climate permits. There are trees that never heard a gun. There are parks and villages, sightliness everywhere, and days of comparative leisure.

And there are evenings of entertainment de luxe. I dropped into the camp one early February afternoon, unheralded. There was no reason why I should be heralded—no good reason. I just wanted to see what was doing—how these final few days before HOME were filled for the impatient Canadian. As elsewhere in the Canadian camps, entertainment was in the hands of the Canadian Y.M.C.A.

Could Sing and Dance.

The first hut was a large one—indeed, a very large one. In its 250 feet of length it included a whole community. There were the offices in front, then a canteen with a writing room off it, afterwards a large quiet room with easy chairs and lots of reading matter, and last of all a large theatre. At 2.30 was the first "show." It consisted of entertainers from Liverpool—one a tried old comedian who could play on anything from a gut-covered tin can to the feelings of his audience. He could sing a song whose chorus threatened the roof, or dance more spontaneously than the soldier to whom two weeks' leave has come unexpectedly on top of a cheque from home. The others completed a program of music, elocution and laughter.

It was a popular "show." When it came to the National Anthem there was such persistent applause that the customary conclusion had to be postponed for a number

or two. It was very gratifying to the entertainers—except that they had another show to put on in another hut after only a short interval for dining. An hour later the movies were filling the same house.

That was in Number 4 Y hut. Down in Number 13 hut shortly after six I enjoyed a different kind of show. It was local talent—that is, camp talent. It was none of your amateur reciters, interspersed with pseudo-darkey songs and unpracticed instrumentals. The men who are in the ranks are artists, many of them.

Buckwing Dancers.

This was in the form of a contest. The Y had offered money prizes to the three best "stunts," and the stunts were there with all their paraphernalia and art. There were the strong men, the baritones, the buck-and-wing dancers, the monologists, the tumblers. "Shea's," in Toronto, could find places for many of them to its improvement. If the Coliseum, in London, knew its crowd it could satisfy it better at less cost if it signed contracts with some of these "amateurs."

The decision was left to the audience—and the camp had crowded in with such determination that only "pull" found me a place to stand behind the canteen. The first prize went to a pair of colored gentlemen who had a patter of feet and tongue that brought down the house. Primrose and West, or Dockstader, never had better end-men or specialties. The audience went on the basis that any man can develop a muscle to break a logging chain on his chest—but nobody but a real "coon" can buck-and-wing with more beats than a jazz pianist can squeeze out of his instrument. So it was the colored gentlemen unanimously. There were three dusky men near me who wanted to vote six times.

Then, to show that its tastes were not vulgar, the second prize went to a baritone who hadn't an art but his voice—who didn't sing a single song anyone else would have chosen for a soldier audience. There wasn't even a chorus—which is directly contrary to every axiom of khaki entertainment.

I tried to count the crowd, but after I had reached 800 the mass at the back became so packed that distinction was difficult. And I was told that most of the crowd had been there for the lecture on Russia that preceded the concert—a rather surprising characteristic of camp attendance that would disconcert theorists.

There was a canteen at the back of that hut. By all the laws of soldiers' appetites the canteen service would have disorganised the concert. As a matter of fact I stood on the cash desk, and I was in a position to know there wasn't a cent spent.

But after the show—ah, that was different. Quietly something close to 800 boys lined up in their turns and passed along the counter for the good night-cap of coffee and piece of cake. And at ten the Y sergeant simply shouted the time, and every soldier buttoned his coat and went out to bed.

That was one of the things that surprised me. Two soldiers wandered into the hut a half minute after the signal had been given. They were told of the hour, and without a word they turned about and disappeared into the rain.

During all this amusement number 1 hut was passing through a different experience. It had acquired something of a reputation as the "quiet" hut. And there scores of soldiers were writing home. Women had special charge of that hut, under the Canadian Y, and their touch was manifest in the flowers on the tables and the general freshness mere man cannot obtain.

Motoring back to Rhyl, I entered a Canadian Y club for soldiers that would make a respectable one for any town. Three women did all the work—even to preparing the special sandwiches sold with the coffee and cake and candy and tinned goods. Small tables covered with chintz were filled with boys drinking from hot cups and eating pastry. Upstairs were other tea-rooms, a writing room, a reading room, a billiard room, and a music room. Not a male official went near the place, except as was necessary in connection with the Y control. The Canadian boys so respected the type of service provided by three women, one of them a mother to them, that the silence about the place was almost oppressive—yet they came and went in crowds.

There was still another, less ambitious, club in town. A large modern castle near the camp was being fitted up by the Y as an officers' club. A Canadian Y man was secretary of the committee that controlled the camp sports, and the Canadian Y provided all the athletic equipment. Six football grounds formed part of the camp conveniences.

In addition there was a N.A.C.B. theatre where admission was cheap, and two or three other organisation huts and several regimental canteens where the Y was putting on programs.

That is why I am prepared to believe that, whatever the disappointments of the army life, the Canadian soldier will leave England with fond memories of his last few days—and with some misgiving as to who is to provide all this entertainment for him when he gets back home.

SHAKESPEARE FOR THE CANADIANS.

Princess Helena Victoria and Princess Marie Louise will be present at the special performance of Shakespeare's "King Henry VIII," at the Beaver Hut, Canadian Y.M.C.A. (Little Theatre) on Monday evening, March 17th, at 8 o'clock. The play, which will be represented by a company of well-known actors, under direction of Mr. Acton Bond, who is Canadian born, will be similar to the performances already given to large audiences of British soldiers in England. Mr. S. R. Littlewood will talk on the play and customs of the period.

This performance is being given on the eve of their departure for France under the auspices of the Canadian Y.M.C.A. For a period of six weeks the entire company will tour the Canadian camps in France presenting "The Merchant of Venice" and "Henry VIII."

This is the first time a Shakespearian repertoire has been presented in France.

BROWN BEARS INCREASING.

Under Government protection the brown bear has so increased in numbers in Alaska that cattle and sheep are safe only in strong buildings. The bears demolish fences and they swim the channels in the smaller islands where settlers have sent cattle and sheep in the belief that they would be safe. The bear, too, is a great destroyer of salmon. It is so fastidious that it will eat only the salmon cheeks, and will consume one-third of its weight in this delicacy every day.