

"Laddie's" Letter---In the Convalescent Army

By Bonnycastle Dale

A QUANT old place Godalming is on some sunny mornings, with its ivy clad homes and clean white village houses, these are all blocked off and cut up by strips of painted wood, its excellent roads and firm pavements. On the former a rustic big wheeled old cart may be rumbling and rattling; on the latter a group of merry red-cheeked English children at play. One would never think this was in the very heart of a world's war, yet within a certain number of miles of it are huge camps of warriors, training as did the warriors of old when this same quaint village town was a name celebrated in English history, to defend this tight little isle.

I came here via Moor Park Hospital in the North of England, on the banks of a beautiful river, then to a huge convalescent camp in Southern England, and now into the Paymaster's Office in the region of the above quaint old town. My "floating rib" is considerable bother. I am well enough to help in such work as I am now on but not fit for the trenches. I am class B, even if Canada did vote for conscription that class C was not reinstated, but one can be as low as 3B, as I am, this should mean a trip home for nursing and full recovery, but I guess not. The air is full of German drives in rumors, and often full of actual raiders. Say! there is a merry hail of shrapnel when all our "antis" get firing. It is truly a wonderful sight to see a flock of these warbirds dipping and curving, dodging the "archies" as we call the "antis" at the front, but the cowards do take their dreadful toll. They might as well try to shoot us with peashooters for all the effect these raids will have on the English people, it just makes the waverers join up.

There comes a crowd of newly returned men, visitors here, singing "Blighty." This is a word cribbed from India, means "corner of home" in the native lingo, and they are certainly letting this corner of home know they are here. If they are not careful with those high notes they will burst something.

Here's the way it runs:

"Please take me home across the sea,
Where the old Alleymonds can't get me.
Cause my, my, my,
I don't wanna die,
I wanna go home."

And it gets you, I tell you, to hear the quaver in this when the boys are singing it under the whine of the shells.

It's wonderful to compare notes with your pals. The chap with shrapnel in the right arm came from a skirmish below Jerusalem; he worked his way from far off Tasmania to join up in Vancouver, B.C. He was on a "reconnaissance in force" over the desert sands, detailed to act as cavalry escort to a bally old cable wagon troupe. They were going single file in the dark when up pops the moon and off pops a lot of Turkish rifles. The escort charged; he tells me he can hear yet the soft throw of the horses' feet and the clatter of the horses' bits and stirrups. Just after the order "Stand to your horses! Mount! Charge!" Away they went right into the low sand trenches of the Turks, a hundred British to a swarm of dark faces, they rode through the line once, then back again, and were just going to clear them, up sideways when his arm "flew away" so he described it. He heard the "crump" when the shell struck, and that was all until he awoke in hospital. He says the heat is worse than the wounds and the flies worse than either.

Here is a boy (come for an hour's chat) from central Canada. He was flying six thousand feet up when "snap" goes a wing. He brought that mad thing down, he does not know how, and bumped on the earth, with his life in, but all shocked up—six months' leave.

There, passing, is a young captain. You and I remember him as a wee bit kid without much fat or muscle, grown too fat as so many of us do. He was hit losing his men, ankle gone. Did he see another chap to help him? Not much. He dragged himself three miles. Say! these heroes here by the company, battalion, brigade, any quantity you like.

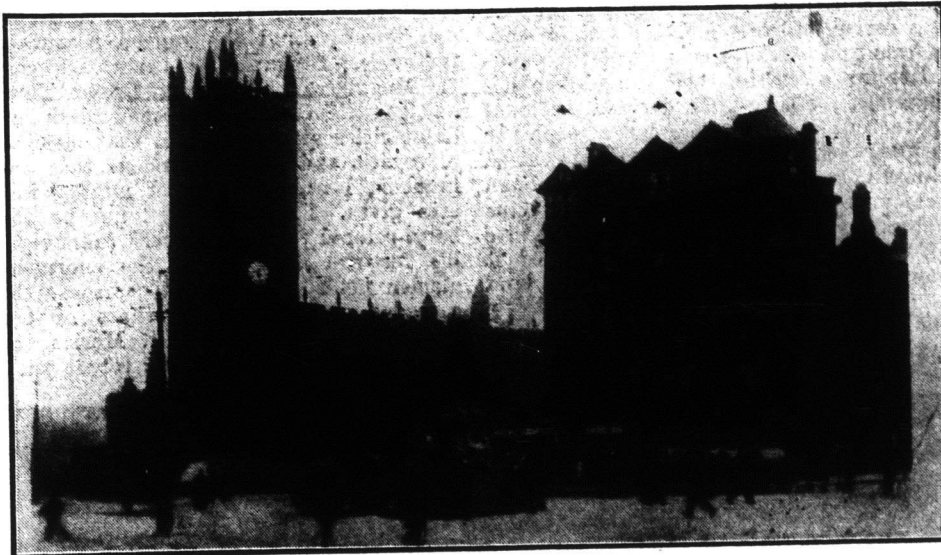
Perhaps they can't be busy in a Paymaster's Office! Work every night, stoves for gluttons for coal and misers for Canadian Reserve Artillery, to

pay off to-morrow; on top of that a draft from Canada, ledger sheets, pay books all to be fixed, so as to get them off on their "landing leave." I suppose us two-year-old wounded men are ancient ones to them. It's good to hear their merry chatter, and each one is anxious for fear they will not send him over before the war ends!

They are giving medical boards to all B men now, combing the ranks of convalescents for more men for the trenches. I'll be called again soon. If they leave me in this low category I will be here "for duration" unless I get moved up to the London Pay Office. Although there are rumors of mailships being sunk your number 115 arrived O.K. How little I have lost in two years. What are the subs doing?

I don't know if I will ever get this letter done. My speed is so wonderful on this typewriter. I'll be able to beat you

and our wings were cut up in no time, our armor plated seat 'tapped' hard once, if it hadn't been there we would have been goners. Off goes the engine and we climb away up again. We had mistaken the group of trees in the dark; again we make a big, long diving circle, and I could hear our squadron overhead hitting up, evidently to cover any noise we might make, or they may have been off on their own, as Karlshue got it hard that morning. Twenty bombers emptied on it and the squadron had the fight of their lives, 'two of ours' are missing, as the censor puts it. I could see the forest now, we dusted the tops of the trees, shot upwards and I got my signal to prepare to drop. The plane was tilted now and I had my parachute grasped, my carrier pigeon all safe on my breast. Up shot the plane, down I sped like a bullet, then the 'top' filled and I swung steady and got aground with only a few bumps. I buried the chute, and never felt lonelier in my life. Talk about carrying your life in your hand; any German sub officer can stand a spy



Cathedral and Cromwell Statue, Manchester



Fishergate looking East, Preston

when I get back, if I am here about twenty years. I think I can do fully two words a minute now. Well, here comes the stenog. I'll have to get out.

Later I met an old friend of ours. I dare not mention names, even Canadian prairies are not far from Berlin in this aggressive age. He certainly had an experience. You may guess who it was as he was always good at languages. Well, one day he was sitting in his gun pit quite comfortable, and the next he was in a birdcage in Germany. His two years there read vividly, three times he escaped, twice he was re-captured and did hard C.B. for his daring; dark C.B. too, he told me, on high rations, acorn coffee and black bread. He swears some of it grew in Canada, he could taste the Douglass Fir wood in it.

Anyhow, the third time he escaped he dug under the wire into Holland and was a free man once more. As soon as he was fit he joined up again and offered to go ahead for the British, by the "air route," too. It reads like a fable now.

"We went up somewhere near Mars in the darkness and then 'goggle eyes' shut off the engine and began to glide. We evidently came down in the wrong box as an 'archie' group began to sing

against a wall. I got the spire and the woods in line in my mind for to-night's escape and started off to locate batteries.

"I ran bump into a German, God knows if he was or not, anyhow we both were very brief in our 'goot nobben,' and I heard him walk a bit faster when he got further away. I wish I had dared to ask if he had any peas for his pigeon; I feel sure he was one of ours. I crept down a bush covered hill almost right on top of a concealed battery. I heard the voices of the men right beneath me and I got back up there like a ghost. In one hour I had found the wasps nest I was looking for, and within another my carrier was off with a map bound to her body. Now I wanted to see the fireworks, so I climbed into a thick fir tree across the valley. It smelled just like those in the foothills of the Rockies. I made a bit of a nest for comfort, pulled out my glasses and searched that western hill slope in the grey dawn for that battery. No, I could not find it, wait a bit until 'Col. Sam' seven miles away finds it for me—we called our biggest, noisiest gun after the bluff old colonel. I had just finished my chocolate when 'zing' went a shell across the valley in front of me. 'Not bad,' I said. I looked up, and there was

our ship floating above, spotting. Telegraphing back, so many yards over, as this shell was, the next gun sang out, then the next, now number four. Many the time I have broken my back and strained my muscles feeding that old pet. Well, she dropped her shell right into a shell hole in front of the pit, enough water flew up to make me a nice wee rainbow. Now the first gun, evidently corrected by the spotting airplane splashed one right into that gunpit, men and timbers and boughs and material went sky high, and right on top of that another of the guns—I had lost all track of the numbers now—smashed one right on to the bull's eye; then I saw our machine diving right down to observe. She came just as I have seen a fish hawk dive, hovered a moment, got her game and climbed, in a shower of white puffs; after that all the guns made close hits until, from where I sat, nothing showed but a scar of yellow clay where so lately a battery had been hidden. Our guns ceased after the next observation and I tied myself firmly to a branch, took a few sips out of my flask and just managed to get in forty winks, so it seemed, before the big red sun went down behind the shattered buildings in the old French village. I finished my chocolate, put my irons on, descended, dug up my flashlight and a bit of extra food, and crept in under a bush within a few hundred yards of my taking off place.

"It was a nice clear bit of meadow once, but the shells had spotted it here and there, not by any means a fair landing place. I woke about every hour. Midnight passed, one o'clock, our appointed time, two, and no airplane. I got nervous and sneaked down to the middle of the field, in my field grey German uniform almost undistinguishable. There was not a sentry within earshot the night before, now I heard a human whistle, I'll bet it was some French peasant boy trying to cheer himself up in this land of horrors; anyhow I took to another bush, then I heard our big bird. Did you ever hear one volplane? Big bird just hits it. The lieutenant ran her along the ground silently and safely, I climbed into the bus, we made a horrid racket getting above those woods, and we woke up some 'archies' on the ridge, and one lucky gunner got me through the chest. When I woke I was in the base hospital. I'll bet that lieutenant had some work getting back as he told me later I flopped all over the bally ship."

To Egg Buyers

Candle all eggs and buy only on "loss off" basis.

Return all bad eggs to the farmer. Encourage him to produce good, clean eggs by paying less for the other kind.

Store eggs in a cool, sweet and dry place.

Use only clean, dry fillers for packing. Forward eggs to commission men as often as possible.

Do not deliver to railway until shortly before train time.

Keep eggs out of the sun. Do not buy "case count." Have a standard for quality and refuse all eggs not up to the standard.

Do not deal in "spots" and "rots."

Arrange separate refrigerated rooms for storing eggs.

Do not allow eggs to remain in a hot car any longer than is necessary.

To Retailers—Buy only properly graded eggs. Do not misrepresent them to purchaser. Buy in small quantities unless you have separate refrigerator for storing them. Keep them away from all odorous substances, particularly kerosene oil, fish, decaying vegetables, etc.

To the Housewife—Buy only candled and properly graded eggs.

Keep eggs in a cool, sweet and well-ventilated place.

Eggs for Home Use

April, May and June are the months when the housewife should "put down" eggs for winter use.

Earthenware crocks are good containers. The crocks must be clean and sound. Scald them and let them cool completely before use. A crock holding 6 gallons will accommodate 18 dozen of eggs and about 22 pints of solution. Too large crocks are not desirable, since they increase the liability of breaking some of the eggs and spoiling the entire batch.