

Nearer to the Boys

An Interview with Ralph Connor
By PETER McARTHUR

When I was told that if I went to a certain office at a certain hour, I would have the pleasure of meeting the Rev. Charles W. Gordon (Ralph Connor), I accepted with joy. I wanted to meet him for two reasons. I wanted to meet him because he is our most distinguished Canadian novelist, and also because in my boyhood I wriggled on hard, uncompromising benches, listening to the same stern ministers that he "sat under." I had listened to them in both Gaelic and English, and wondered if he would have a fellow-feeling for one who had gone through the same boyish experiences. As my eagerness had brought me early to the place of appointment, I had a few minutes to wait, and fell to wondering what he would be like. Unconsciously I associated him with those old-time Free Kirk ministers and wondered if he would be like the Rev. John Ross, of Brucefield, or the Rev. Lachlan MacPherson, of East Williams. So my surprise was complete when a brisk man in khaki uniform stepped into the room. He did not look enough like those old ministers to make my heart come into my mouth with terror as I faced him. Neither did he look enough like a military martinet to make me click my heels together and come to "attention." And there was absolutely nothing to suggest the producer of "best sellers." It took less than a minute to discover that "Ralph Connor" is, first of all, a fellow-human being, who is ready to take a glance at anything from any man's point of view.

A reference to the old ministers gave us an instant point of contact, and with much laughter—kindly and reverent—but still laughter—we compared notes and exchanged reminiscences of the good men who made the Scotch settlements where we had both been brought up, the places of stern discipline we remembered so well. The hour that had been promised to me was gone and part of another hour with it, before I remembered that the man who arranged the meeting had not done it out of pure kindness. He wanted me to interview Ralph Connor about the war work of the Y.M.C.A. By the time I remembered my duty we had reached a point where I felt that I could ask him about it from a rather daring point of view. I began with a straight question:

"What do you think of the work of the Y.M.C.A. in the war?"

He hunched his shoulders slightly and slipped down a trifle in his chair. From the expression on his face I was afraid that he was going to offer an unfavorable criticism. But his answer made it clear that that was not what disturbed him:

"It is doing a lot of work that the church should be doing."

Now you can understand why my question caused him a shade of discomfort. The minister in him—a touch of the old Free Kirk spiritual guide that made him feel the responsibilities of his calling—made him regret to confess that a purely lay institution is carrying practical Christianity to a point that is as yet impossible for the churches—"beating them to it," as the soldier boys would say.

"Don't misunderstand me," he protested. "The churches and their chaplains are doing a wonderful work, but the Y.M.C.A., being without a propaganda or dogmas, is able to adapt itself instantly to any needs that may arise either at the battle-front or wherever the boys may be located. It meets them at all hours and in all places with a spirit of good cheer, comfort and helpfulness."

"Then you are of the opinion that the man who supports the war work of his church is not doing all he can to help the boys?"

"Assuredly. The Y.M.C.A. is able to go a little farther. Though the work of the church may be nearer to the ideal of what I want to see done, the Y.M.C.A. gets nearer to the boys."

"That struck me as a very important point, and I decided to question him from an angle that might not be pleasing to a clergyman."

"You know," I intimated, in a spirit of half confession, "that there are a lot of boys who would be inclined to look at a Y.M.C.A. at home as a sort of simplified institution, beneath the notice of young men of the world who like to affect a sort of manly wildness. Does the Y.M.C.A. get near to them?"

"Yes. The helpfulness of the Y.M.C.A. has won out, over every obstacle. In the beginning, the officers of the

High Command had something of the attitude you suggest. But whenever there was anything to be done to help the boys the Y.M.C.A. was there to do it and do it well. By its spirit of unassuming helpfulness the Y.M.C.A. has won the hearts of both the officers and men, no matter what their church connections may be or may not be. It gives and it does not ask anything in return. Its sole reward is that it helps freely all who need help. The thing to emphasize about its work is that it gives—it is an organized spirit of giving, and it gives without a string to the giving."



RALPH CONNOR

"But I often hear comments, not always friendly—about the prices that the Y.M.C.A. charges for some of its supplies."

"Such comments have no justification. The prices are as near right as they can be made. If there is any profit on the sales to the boys in the camps or back of the lines, every cent of it goes to provide things free—absolutely free—to those who are in the front line trenches. As a matter of fact, the canteens and other organizations under the control of the churches and chaplains have pretty much the same schedule of prices as the Y.M.C.A."

I could not suppress a smile at finding my ancient enemy the trust or "Gentleman's Agreement" appearing in so admirable a form. But I made no comment. Instead, I asked a concluding question:

"Then I may tell the people that in its war work, especially in the matter of creature comforts, the Y.M.C.A. is nearer to the boys than anyone else?"

"Yes. It stands nearer to them than anything else except the military organization under whose discipline they live—and die. You see they are specially organized, trained and outfitted for this kind of work—and they are a mighty spiritual force, too."

When leaving him, I stopped to talk to several other clergymen who appeared in the office—it was a place of clergymen—and he stepped from the room. Shortly afterwards he returned with a copy of his latest book, on the fly-leaf of which he had written in memory of the men we had known in our boyhood: "There were giants in those days."

It will be cherished as one of the most prized of a little collection of autographed first editions. And with it I shall cherish the memory of having spent a couple of hours with a well-known man who is doing a noble work himself and is not afraid to give the fullest credit to other men who are doing a noble work—such as the officers and field-workers of the Y.M.C.A., "who play such a great forward line to the Church's backing in the great, great game," as Connor said.

Cotton on the Battlefield

A twelve-inch gun disposes of a half bale of cotton with every shot fired. A machine gun in operation will use up a bale in three minutes. In a naval battle, like the one off Jutland, from five to six thousand pounds a minute are consumed by each active warship. It takes more than 20,000 bales a year to provide absorbent cotton to staunch and bind the wounds of the injured. One change of apparel for all the troops now engaged in the war represents more than a million bales. One hundred thousands bales will be required to equip U. S. proposed aeroplane fleet, if cotton, as may be necessary, supplants linen for wings.

The United States is now turning nearly a million bales a year into explosives alone.

For Farmers Only

A handbook for farmers is a very useful booklet that has just been issued by the Commission of Conservation. It treats of tillage, use of measures, seed selection, clover growing, the farm garden, weeds and insect pests, and other farm topics, in an informative as well as popular manner. The quantity is limited and the booklet will be supplied on request only to bona-fide farmers.

Vancouver barbers charge 50 cents for a hair cut and 25 cents for a shave.

Baroness de Rothschild, one of the wealthiest women in France, labors from dawn to dark as a nurse.

ROLL OF HONOR

Men From Watford and Vicinity Serving The Empire

27TH REGT.—1ST BATTALION
Thos L Swift, reported missing since June 15th, 1915
Richard H Stapleton
Bury C Binks
Arthur Owens
L Gunn Newell, killed in action
F C N Newell
T Ward
All Woodward, killed in action
Sid Welsh
M Cunningham
M Blondel
W Blunt
R W Bailey
A L Johnston
R A Johnston
G Mathews
C Manning
W Glenn Nichol
F Phelps
H F Small
E W Smith
C Toop
J Ward, killed in action
C Ward
F Wakelin, D C M, killed in action
T Wakelin, wounded and missing
H Whitsitt
B Hardy
PRINCESS PATRICIA'S C. L. I.
Gerald H Brown

15TH BATTALION
C W Barnes
Geo Ferris
Edmund Watson
G Shanks
J Burns
F Burns
C Blunt
Wm Auterson
S P Shanks
Walter Woolvett

2ND DIVISIONAL CAVALRY
Lorne Lucas
Frank Yerks
Chas Potter

33RD BATTALION
Percy Mitchell, died of wounds Oct. 14, 1916
Lloyd Howden
Geo Fountain, killed in action, Sept. 16, 1916
Gordon H Patterson, died in Victoria Hospital, London

34TH BATTALION
E C Crohn
S Newell
Macklin Hagle, missing since Oct. 8, 1916
Stanley Rogers
Wm Manning
Henry Holmes, killed in action Sept. 27, 1916
Leonard Lees
C Jamieson

29TH BATTERY
Wm Mitchell
John Howard

70TH BATTALION
Ernest Lawrence
Alfred Emmerson
C H Loveday
A Banks
S R Whalton, killed in action Oct., 1916
Thos Meyers
Jos M Wardman
Vern Brown
Alr Bullough
Sid Brown, killed in action Sept. 15, 1916

28TH BATTALION
Thomas Lamb, killed in action
MOUNTED RIFLES
Fred A Taylor
PIONEERS
Wm Macnally
W F Goodman
ENGINEERS
J Tomlin

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When you do paint use Martin Senour "100% Pure" Paint. It spreads easier, covers more surface, and protects longer than most other makes.

Ask for copies of "Farmer's Color Set" and "Town and Country Homes". Many good painting hints in each.

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PHONE 39

ARMY MEDICAL CORPS
T A Brandon, M D
Norman McKenzie
Allen W Edwards
Wm McCausland

135TH BATTALION
Nichol McLachlin, killed in action July 6th, 1917

3RD RESERVE BATTERY, C F A
Alfred Levy

116TH BATTALION
Clayton O Fuller, killed in action April 18th, 1917

196TH BATTALION
R R Annett

70TH BATTERY
R H Trenouth, killed in action on May 8th, 1917
Murray M Forster
V W Willoughby

142ND BATTALION
Austin Potter
GUNNER
Russ G Clark

R N C V R
John J Brown
1st Class Petty Officers,
Elgin D Hicks
H D Taylor

ARMY SERVICE CORPS
Frank Elliot
R H Acton
Arthur Mc Kercher

98TH BATTALION
Roy E Acton, killed in action Nov. 3, 1917

64th BATTERY
C F Luckham
Harold D Robinson
63RD BATTERY
Walter A Restorick
64TH BATTERY
Romo Auld

ROYAL FLYING CORPS
Lient M R James

If the name of your soldier boy does not appear in this column, kindly notify us and it will be placed there.

Made the Supreme Sacrifice

WATFORD AND VICINITY
Lt.-Col. R. G. Kelly
Capt. Thos. L. Swift
Sergt. Major L. G. Newell
Pte. Alfred Woodward
Pte. Percy Mitchell
Pte. R. Whalton
Pte. Thos. Lamb
Pte. J. Ward
Pte. Sid Brown
Pte. Gordon Patterson
Pte. F. Wakelin, D. C. M.
Pte. T. Wakelin
Pte. G. M. Fountain
Pte. H. Holmes
Pte. C. Stillwell
Pte. Macklin Hagle
Sergt. Clayton O. Fuller.
Gunner Russell Howard Trenouth.
Pte. Nichol McLachlan.
Corp. Clarence L. Gibson
Signaller Roy E. Acton.
Bandsman A. I. Small

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