

# A Padre in the Great War

(Continued From Page 9.)

went over to rescue him. The men jumped down into the trench and moved him very gently, but his legs were so numb that although they were hit he felt no pain. One of the men asked him if he was only hit in the legs. He said "Yes" but the man, looking at me and pulling back the boy's tunic showed me a hideous wound in his back. They carried him off happy and cheerful. Whether he ever recovered or not I do not know. If he did, and ever sees this book, I wish he would write and tell me how he is.

That was our last attack at Passchendaele. Our Division had taken the final objective. The next morning the infantry were to come out of the line, so in the late afternoon I returned with some stretcher bearers. Several times shells came near enough to splatter us with mud, and here and there I turned aside to bury those for whom graves had just been prepared.

At the front that day, a runner and I had joined in a brief burial service over the body of a gallant young officer lying where he fell in the side of a large shell hole. As I uttered the words: "I am the Resurrection and the Life," saith the Lord, it seemed to me that the lonely wind bore them over that region of gloom and death, as if it longed to carry the message of hope far away to the many sad hearts whose loved ones will lie until the end in unknown graves at Passchendaele.

### CHAPTER 13

#### VICTORY YEAR OPENS, JANUARY AND FEBRUARY 1918.

Victory Year, though we did not know it by that name then, opened with fine bracing weather, and there was the usual round of dinners and entertainments with which we always greeted the birth of a new twelve month. We had several Canadian-like snowstorms in the middle of one I met a former despatch rider coming up the main street on his wheel with his blinding snow in his face. I stopped him and asked him if he wouldn't like to have some dinner and I took him into the hotel. He had been to Bethune to buy some V.C. ribbon for one of the men of his battalion who was going to be presented with it on the following day, and was so proud of his mission that he made no complaint about the long and tiring journey through the snowstorm. The country he had seen was broken up into pleasant valleys and there are plenty of trees on the hills, so the winter aspect of the district made me feel quite at home. I used to give many talks to the men on what I called "The war outlook." I thought it helped to encourage them, and I was perfectly sincere in my belief, which grew stronger as time went on in spite of notable setbacks, that we should have victory before the end of the year.

We had a visit at this time from Bishop du Penier, who came to hold a confirmation for us at Division. There were forty candidates, nearly all of them being presented by chaplains of the 1st Brigade. It was a solemn service and made a deep impression upon the men. The hymns were sung very heartily and the Bishop gave a most helpful address. I remember specially one young fellow called Vaughan Groves who came to me for the preparation. He was a small rather delicate young lad about nineteen years of age, and was a runner in the 2nd Brigade. He had a fine open face and had the distinction of having won the V.M. and bar. To have won these honours as a Brigade runner was a mark of rare courage. I felt the deepest admiration for the boy, who was the only son of a widowed mother in Canada. He never touched liquor and had lived a perfectly straight life, as his was just the type of character which found scope for great deeds in the war. After confirmation I lost sight of him, until months afterwards, when, as I was going through Arras one night, I looked into a cellar near the 2nd Brigade Headquarters

and seeing a number of men in there, went down to have a talk. I found they were the Brigade runners, and so I at once asked for my young friend. They told me that he had been wounded in the arm and when he came to the dressing station, finding there a man who was dying from loss of blood, had at once offered his own blood for transfusion into the veins of the sufferer. They took so much from him that the poor boy got very weak and had to be sent back to England to recuperate. The need added that it was just the thing that little Vaughan would do. He was the finest, cleanest little chap, they said that they had ever met. It was always delightful to hear such testimony from men to the innate power of human goodness. I have never seen or heard of Vaughan Groves since, but I hope that someone may read this book who will be able to tell me how and where he is.

I was not sorry when our rest was over. There was more time to get home-sick when we were out of the line. If we had to be at war at all the happiest place was at the front. So when on January 23rd I left Bruay for Bracquemont, I did so with little regret. My billet at Bracquemont was the same which I had occupied in the previous September and it seemed quite like home. Once more our men held the trenches on Hill 70 and the battalions in the back area were billeted in Mazingarbe, Le Brebis, and Sains-en-Gohelle.

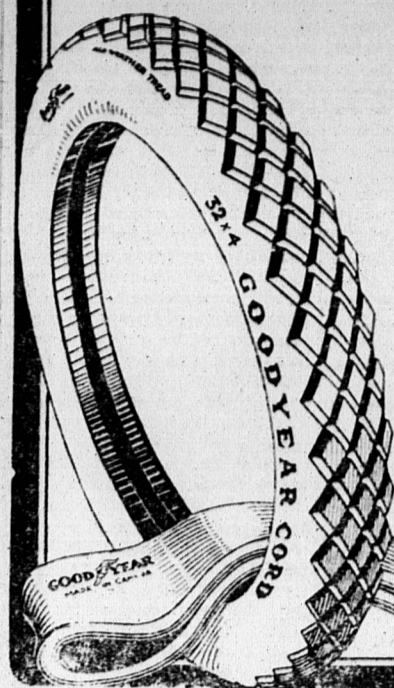
### PARISH VISITING

The day after I arrived I determined to do some parish visiting in the division. I started off in my old trench uniform and long habitant boots, carrying with me a supply of bully beef, tinned milk and hard-tack. I went through Bully-Grenay and then out through Maroie to Loos. Here once again the dressing station at Post 62 was occupied by a doctor and staff from one of our ambulances. I spent a little while there and then continued my journey up the road past Crucifix Corner to the trenches. The 7th and 8th Battalions were in the line. The day was fine and the warm sunshine was hardening the mud, so things did not look too unpleasant. I went to the 7th Battalion first and found the gallant men carrying on in the usual way. Hugo French was very quiet about it, one could obtain a good view of the German lines and Leds beyond. It was great fun to go into the saps and surprise the two or three men who were on guard in them. The dugouts were curious places. The entrance steps were steep, and protected by blankets to keep out gas. At the bottom would be a long timbered passage, dark and smelly, out of which two or three little rooms would open. The men off duty would be lying about on the floor sound asleep and it was often hard to make to make one's way among the prostrate bodies. The officers' mess would have a table in it and boxes for seats. On a shelf were generally some old newspapers or magazines and a pack of cards. In the passage, making it narrower than ever, were a few shelves used as bunks. At the end of the passage would be the kitchen, supplied with a crude stove which set its smoke up a narrow pipe through a small opening. In the trenches the cooks were always busy, and how they served up the meals they did was a mystery to me. Water was brought in tins from a tap in one of the trenches to the rear and therefore was not very abundant. I have occasionally and against my will seen the process of dish-washing in the trenches. I could never make out from the appearance of the water whether the cook and his assistant were washing the plates or making the soup. The liquid in the tin dish was so thick with grease. However, it was part of the war, and the men were doing their best under most unpropitious circumstances.

I had come prepared to spend a night in the trenches, and had decided to do so in large German-made dugout in the chalk-pit which was held by "D" Company of the 8th Battalion. The officer on duty with the 7th Battalion kindly acted as my guide. The day had worn away, and the bright moon was lighting up the maze of yellow trenches. We passed along exchanging many greetings at different places until we came to the outpost of the 8th Battalion at the top of the path which leads down into the chalk pit. Here four men were sitting keeping guard. They gave me a warm greeting, and I told them that if I were not in a hurry to let my guide go back to his lines, I would stop and recite some of my poems in the moonlight. It struck me that they seemed more amused than disappointed. So wishing them good luck, we started onward down the slippery path which led into the pit, where many shells had torn up the ground, and where were remains not only of uniforms and mess tins and rifles but also of German bodies. We had hardly reached the entrance to the dugout when two or three of these shells which the men called "pineapples" arrived in quick succession, they sounded so close that we dived into the place of refuge. We found the O. C. of the Company inside, and he very kindly arranged to give me a large bed all to myself in one of the chambers of the dugout. Suddenly a runner appeared and told us the pineapples had hit the outpost, killing not only some of the men to whom I had just been talking but also the Adjutant of the Battalion. I at once got up and went back to the place. The line was quiet now and the whole scene was brightly lit by the moon and looked so peaceful that one could

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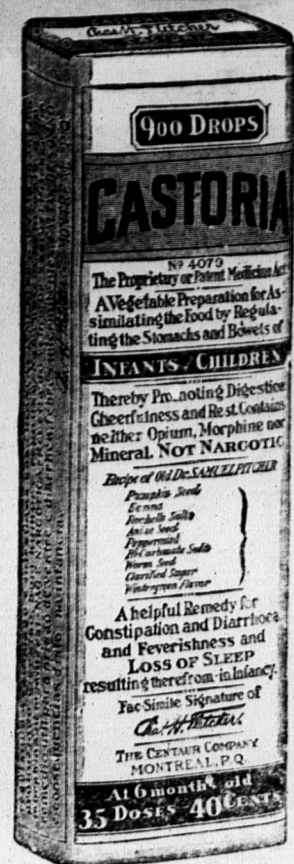
HEAVY TOURIST

hardly imagine that we were in the midst of war, but lying in the deep shadow of the trench, with its face downwards, was the body of the Adjutant. He had been killed instantly. In the outpost beside the trench, were the bodies of the poor lads who had been on duty when I passed a few minutes before.

I stayed with man guarding the bodies until a stretcher party arrived and carried them away. Then I went back to the dugout and visited the men who were crowded into its most extraordinary labyrinth of passages and recesses. In the very centre of the place, which must have been deep underground, there was a kitchen and the cooks were preparing a hot meal for the men to eat before "stand to" at dawn. The men of course were excessively crowded and many of them were heating their own food in mess tins over smoking wicks steeped in melted candle grease. All were bright and cheerful as ever, in spite of the stifling atmosphere, which must have been breathed by human lungs over and over again. It was quite late when I stretched myself on my wire mattress with my steel helmet for a pillow. Only a piece of canvas separated me from the room where a lot of men were supposed to be sleeping. They were not only not asleep but kept me awake by the roars of laughter which greeted the stories they were telling.

Howe I managed to dose off in the morning by the metallic thud of pineapples on the ground overhead. I was wondering what it meant when a man came down to the O. C.'s room, next to mine, and roused him with the somewhat exciting news, "Major the Germans are making an attack." It was not long before the Major was hurrying up the steps to the passage above, and it was not long before I followed, because I always had a horror of being bombed in a dugout. In the passage upstairs all the men were "standing to" with fixed bayonets, and plenty of Mills bombs in their pockets. They were a most cheerful crowd, and really

(Continued on page eleven)



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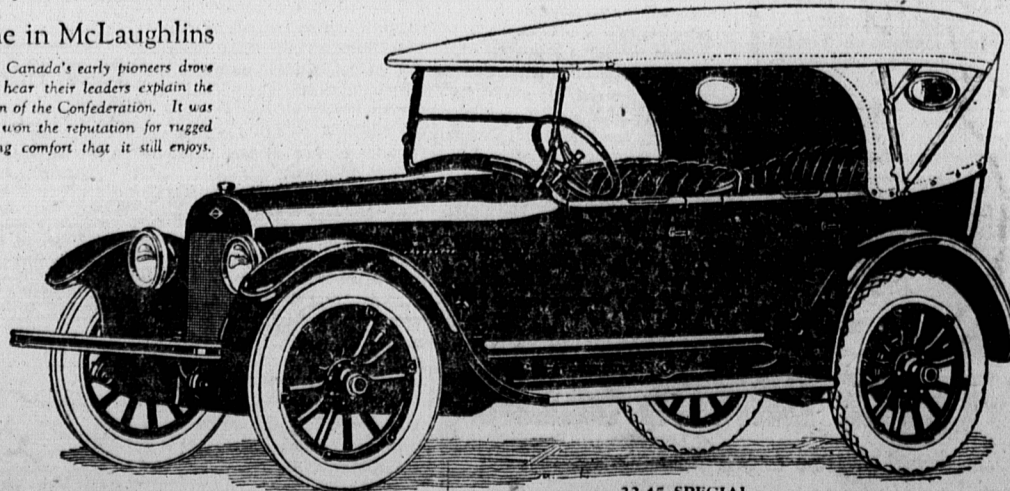
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