

“TOMMY”

**An appreciation of the Life of 2nd Lieut. Arthur H. Thompson.
17th Battalion Regiment.**

**by
His friend and Bible Class Leader,
M. G.
(Montague Goodman)**



SOME time in the year 1906, he "arrived." He has actually commenced life thirteen years before, but so far as we were concerned, his career dates from his walking into Merleswood one Sunday afternoon, in company with his elder brother, and taking his place among the crowd of schoolboys gathered there for a Bible-class. From that day, he took possession of us, and for the following ten years, Merleswood was his natural home of a Sunday afternoon. He was always with us, either in body or in spirit, until that last Sunday afternoon when, during the old class-hour, his spirit left the battlefields of France to meet his Lord.

It is Impossible to describe Tommy the schoolboy, as it is to portray adequately Tommy the soldier. He was inimitable and lovable in both capacities. Who of us will forget the slim, quiet-faced boy with twinkling dark eyes, who won our hearts ten years ago and kept them to the end?

The merry pranks before and after class, played upon some elder boy, and then, when vengeance followed, the cry of "Mr. G—! H— is bullying me!" a wiggle, an escape, and more tricks?

And during class, the quiet, sober face and earnest look, marked him among the crowd of half a hundred boys present as one, at least, who was receiving the message with "ears to hear."

Tommy's conversion to God was a real one. It was like him, quiet and deep and without much outward demonstration.

The first sign of spiritual concern came in the earliest days, when, staying with his brother to tea after the class, he was spoken to concerning the claims of the Lord Jesus, and though he said little, the tears flowed.

Shortly afterwards, he joined our Christian Fellowship in connection with the class, and became perhaps its keenest member to the end.

He was, indeed, one of the few Christian boys one has known, who never wavered or hesitated in his Christian course, even through the difficult days of adolescence. A boy's prayers reveal him unerringly. The prig, the hypocrite, the "soft," the mimic, and the "real thing" are laid bare when boys pray together. Every month, our Christian Fellowship met for devotional talk and prayer. Tommy's prayers were unforgettable: healthy, sane, intelligent and tremendously real and fervent. His greatest distress and concern were at the news of any member growing cold or turning aside from Christ. It seemed a terrible thing to him, and one will never forget his anxiety over one

friend in particular, nor how he went to fetch him to the class and Fellowship meetings, insisting on his coming and praying daily for years for his spiritual recovery.

Tommy developed "all round." He was a true sportsman, and he had a clever brain. He passed his final examination as a chartered accountant with honours, and there lay before him a promising career in many directions, when the war came and changed for him, as for so many more, the whole course of life.

None of us will forget the re-assembling of the Merleswood class after the Summer Vacation of 1914. The thrilling story of the opening weeks of war fired every brain, and those elder members who arrived clad in khaki uniforms, were the pride and envy of the class. Each Sunday saw some boys on leave from camp, bronzed and changed almost beyond recognition, sitting in their old places, singing the old choruses as in former days, yet conscious all the while that the old times were gone forever and a new, strange life lay before them with its results hidden in mystery.

Hardly persuaded to wait for the Chartered Accountants' examination in November, Tommy at length achieved his heart's desire and arrived one Sunday afternoon, clad in the now famous kilt of the London Scottish Regiment, which he joined as a private in December, 1914.

Thereafter, his visits to Merleswood were few and far between, and save for some rare occasions of week-end leave, and a most precious visit from the Front, Tommy became real to us only through the post and in our prayers.

Fortunately, he was a generous correspondent, and his letters, simple and boyish and candid, if somewhat tinged with the prevailing slang of army life, came freely and told us many things that filled his mind in his new and strange conditions. Best of all, they showed us "Tommy," the same as in the old days—unchanged and totally unspoilt in an atmosphere which has, alas! proved spiritually fatal to many.

The following extracts from letters written to the writer of this memoir, if read in the light of the conditions under which they were written, and bearing in mind the withdrawal of godly influences and home restraints, the materialism and animalism of army life surrounding the writer, speak volumes for the true Christian spirit and devotion to his Lord of the young soldier.

Writing on Easter Monday, 1915, from Watford, whither the London

Scottish had removed from Dorking, he tells his experiences as follows:

"It is four weeks ago that I arrived at Dorking, and we were billeted in empty houses. Phillips, myself, another Woodford chap (Mitchell), and two others shared one room, sleeping on straw with four blankets apiece.

We had previously arranged our friends for billeting purposes, and regularly each night we read a chapter of the Bible together and said our prayers. I suppose it is rather cowardly sticking together like that, but it was jolly nice. The food was pretty good for soldiers, except that we had stew every day while we were there! . . .

My brother tells me you are once more taking an 'unearned rest,' and so shut up shop at Merleswood for Easter Sunday. I should have been disappointed if I had had leave over Easter. I suppose you will start again next Sunday week. I am going to try to get leave over that week-end, so I may see you then, as I shall make a point of coming up to Merleswood. I hear you are still in the fifties; I do think it feeble, but there, of course, all the good men have now gone away. As you probably assume, I am continually thinking and praying for Merleswood and all the chaps there, that they may be saved. For nearly a year now, I should think I have been specially praying for —, —, and —, and it has just been ripping to see them gradually getting keener and keener, and I am now just waiting to hear that one, if not all of them, has decided to take Christ for his own personal Saviour, as I find my prayers for Merleswood and the chaps there, are continually being answered. If ever I see an extra nice chap up there, I always pray that I may get to know him, and I always do, too, after a short time, and so, if possible, get them to like me and so to like Merleswood. I was just happy at Christmas to get to know —'s little mob, and I think they like Merleswood now too.

If Merleswood re-opens when I am not there, please give my love to all the chaps, and please do urge them to take Jesus for their own. If only they could see some of the chaps down here—all decent chaps, just like them once, perhaps better than some—and realize that without Jesus, they may someday be just like them—nothing but swearing and simply revolting filth at times—I really think there would be no more hesitation."

Yours very affectionately, Tommy.

From Watford, the regiment moved to the quaint country town of Saffron Walden, where the summer months were spent in training. The writer made an attempt to pay him a surprise visit one Saturday in August, motoring over, only to find his billet vacated, he being away on a firing course. The old lady who kept the little sweet-stuff shop which formed his "home," spoke quite regretfully of his absence, and it was easy to see he had won her heart. From a first-floor window, a head protruded, and a voice called, "Do you want Tommy?" It was his billet chum, who explained his whereabouts. He was just "Tommy" everywhere.

This abortive visit produced the following letter:—

Saffron Walden, Sunday.

"I am so sorry I was not in when you and your sisters called to see me last Saturday, but, unfortunately, I was miles away at the time, for besides being at Welwyn, firing my course, I had also got a week-end leave and so was at home. I am now a first-class shot. . . .

On Friday last, at six o'clock in the morning, I had the rotten job of seeing a draft of 200 go off for France; this is the first draft that has included any real number of my friends, and it was pretty sickening, and so was the sight the night before, as quite a number got blind drunk on their last night before going to possibly get killed. It was hellish, and I don't want to see such a thing again, but I suppose it is the same everywhere.

As —, —, and myself are trying for commissions, we were left out, but we felt rather 'rottters,' seeing the others going to do their bit, although we are not anxious to go really, but it's rotten leaving our friends.

Seeing them off made me think what it will be like when my time comes. Of course, I can get but wounded or killed once, and then for something oh, miles better, to what have I to fear? But how I can say good-bye to the Mater [mother], and with my brother in Paris too, I don't know. It will be hell for her at home all by herself with nothing to do, but pray for me, her son. May God give her comfort and strength through Christ Who died for us all.

I don't know whether I told you, I am trying to get a commission with

Glan Smith's lot, the 17th City of London.

I have interviewed his Colonel, who does not seem to think I am too big a fool for the game, and asked me to get all my papers filled in and signed, and then to see him again, when he will finally decide, which, I presume, means that he will probably take me.

Both — and — have obtained commissions in the 7th Essex for certain now, so I suppose we shall all get separated in the near future. Anyhow, all this time we have had together has had the effect of making me considerably more indifferent to what other people think and say.

I have recently joined the Signalling Section of the Scottish, which makes life here considerably more interesting and a good bit slacker. I can now signal at least two letters in both semaphore and Morse!

In the Signalling Section, I met Eadie—son of Brigadier Eadie of the Salvation Army. He is a jolly keen chap of about my age or a little older.

There were several Christian fellows who went out in that last draft. May God be with them and protect them!

How are Merleswood and Cranfield progressing? The former seemed pretty all right when I was there last, and the members of the latter were warbling right cheerfully somewhere in the garden at the same time. I am so glad that Merleswood has stuck it so well, and I think there are hundreds more to find their Saviour in that room yet. Why not?

My prayers are continually with you at Merleswood, and with your sister at Cranfield, that it may be the same to the girls of Woodford as Merleswood is and always will be with many of the boys."

Yours in Christ, Tommy.

It should be explained that the allusion here and elsewhere to "Cranfield" refers to a school-girls' drawing-room class conducted in the house adjoining "Merleswood," brothers and sisters in some cases attending the respective classes, thus forming a sympathetic link, which accounts for Tommy's interest in both.

While at Saffron Walden, he distinguished himself in the realm of sport to no insignificant degree. Writing to his brother, in a letter dated August 1915, he says:—

"I was chosen to represent the Scottish in the Marathon yesterday at Bishops Stortford. The course was about eight miles and very hilly

too. We ran and walked partly (in ordinary uniform and carrying rifles), taking 80 minutes altogether, winning easily by 15 minutes at least. I was carrying someone else's rifle besides my own for quite a long time and was quite fresh at the end."

II.

IN August, 1915, Tommy received his commission in the 17th London Regiment, and the rest of the year was spent in training in the new role of 2nd Lieutenant.

Then came orders for the front and finally leave-takings. To the dullest youth, such an occasion must provoke emotion. Tommy's condition of mind is described in a letter written from Winchester while awaiting embarkation orders:—

23rd December, 1915.

"I am certain to go out sometime within the next few days, but the date is not fixed yet. I must say I am mighty glad to get out, but it wanted all my grit to say good-bye to the Mater this morning; but she took it simply rippingly, although I know she felt it pretty badly.

Of course, for my own sake, I do not care a bit, for, as the Rector told me when I said good-bye to him, 'it was the only course a Christian and a gentleman could take'; and besides, if God has anything for me to do later, I am as safe as houses, and if not, well, what's the use of staying down here? Thank God, I am prepared to die if necessary, as I have nothing to lose and everything to gain thereby, but for the Master's sake, I do hope I get through, and I am absolutely convinced I am going to.

I don't know to what extent of slackness as regards religion one gets out there, but you may rely on my prayers for Merleswood and Cranfield right through.

If only those chaps could see what it means to trust to Jesus for everything and realize just how all panic of dying just disappears with Him as a Saviour, oh! they would not hesitate any longer. Please do preach Jesus to them this coming year as you have never done before, so that they must just hand over their lives into His keeping. You may rely on my praying that you may be able to do this anyhow. Yours affectionately, Tommy.

On New Years Day 1916, Tommy left England, and his first letter from France, was to his mother. In it he says:—

"Cheer up, mother, the time will soon fly by to my next visit, and my life is in the keeping of One Who knows what best to do with it, and if there is anything useful for me to do down here after the war, I shall get through alright, and if I'm not wanted here, I am quite prepared for the next world, thank God!

May God help you to keep happy and cheerful all the time I am away, as He is going to keep me; but then, of course, it is much worse for you at home than it will be for me.

From Havre, he writes:—

B. E. F. 6-1-'16

"On my way over, I had Friday evening to waste at Southampton, so I managed to discover — [another Merleswood boy] and we spent a jolly evening together. Poor beast! How he would have liked to have come too, and how glad I should of his company also. He has turned out an awfully ripping chap, hasn't he? I do hope and pray he may continue true to Christ right the way through.

At present, I am in huts, and as there is but one other chap in my hut—a very nice chap, and not far from a Christian—I can read and pray without any opposition still . . . I had such a ripping straight letter from the Mater—the most precious letter I have ever received from her. If boys, while young only knew just what their mothers did for them, and prayed for them, and how it almost breaks their hearts when they go wrong, there would be less of this cursed "big man" touch knocking about, I jolly well know."

Yours very affectionately, TOMMY.

The first few weeks were spent at the base and shifting by stages nearer to the scene of action.

Writing to his friend G. A. P—, he says:—

B. E. F., 17-1-'16

"On Sunday evening, I went into a fair-sized town near here, with two or three other chaps, and had quite a good time. I had a dozen oysters, then half a dozen fancy pastries and tea, and immediately after, walked back to the mess and had dinner. I think this speaks wonders for the army training, don't you? Now, I am quite sure your "little Mary" would not have stood all that.

Yesterday morning being Sunday, there was a Holy Communion service at our H.Q., conducted by a combatant Major who is a parson in private life. He is an awfully nice chap, but only seven officers and men turned up. It was one of the nicest services I have been to, and I

was jolly glad I got up for it.

People say that when you go to the firing-line, you are too much fed up, etc., but up to now, I must say that the nearer I get (I am not there yet) the more precious it is to have a Bible to read and to be able to pray."

At last, early in February, he found himself in the trenches, which do not seem to have inspired much awe in him.

To his brother he writes:—

B. E. F. 18-2-'16

"Luckily, I find that shells do not very much upset me. . . . I volunteered for a patrol. . . . you go on your "tummy," and it's really great sport. Personally, I quite enjoyed it, and am looking forward to another trip later on."

And to his mother:—

"I expect you are fed up with me going on patrols, etc., for, of course, I volunteer for it and enjoy it; but it's really not dangerous, besides, God takes care of me just as much there as anywhere else, and I am quite willing to die if He so desires, not that I have any anticipation of "snuffing it" just yet. But really, that is how I feel out here; whatever is the danger, He will protect and does."

A more detailed account of his first escapade is contained in the following letter:—

B. E. F. 22-2-'16

"As I told your sister, we had a pretty quiet time in the trenches; the only bit of real fun I had, was that one night I volunteered for a patrol and took two sergeants and one rifleman with me, all of them picked daredevils. We got within 20 yards of the Bosch trench and could hear them working and talking, and it was great fun. I am quite looking forward to going again. Unfortunately, the next night, a patrol of another regiment went out in the same place, and the officer got one through the leg, and it was over four hours before we could get him in, poor beggar. Two of our sergeants were out nearly the whole time looking for him, but my Company Commander would not let me go out myself. It was awfully "feeding" waiting about with a chap lying wounded in the pouring rain.

On Sunday, three of us hired a buggy, horse and driver, and drove over to where our Battalion are resting. The horse was quite frolicsome at times, and I don't think I've laughed so much since I arrived in France. On starting back in the evening, the dear old nag

insisted on going backwards for 30 yards, running into another horse and cart, and then, of course, both horses started to dance, and we finally finished up on the pavement against a wall, which the horse could not shove over, so had to stop. We tried to start again, and the horse did the same and then suddenly did a complete circle in the road and then started quite peaceably. The whole village turned out to see the fun. Then the horse would suddenly make a dash, and you should have seen them scatter. He repeated this all the way back whenever he thought fit, and had a jolly good prance in the middle of a railway track. Finally we had to drag him off. I was glad no train appeared.

I am so bucked about the old class. It does worlds towards cheering me up out here.

My loving remembrances to all the Merleswoodites. I thought of you that first Sunday afternoon I had in the trenches, praying for us all. It was a terrific comfort to think of all the prayers at home."

Yours affectionately, TOMMY

Feeling that to a high-spirited boy, the temptation was great to indulge in such escapades as the patrol above described to an extent beyond what was really necessary, a word of warning was inserted in the next letter out, which called forth the following defense:—

B. E. F. 7-3-'16

"I am feeling very fit now, and far happier than ever I was in England. I like the officers here much better and am quite enjoying myself, so please don't pity me just yet anyhow.

Now to criticize your lecture. To start with, some officers from my Company had to go out, so why not me? I also wanted to test my nerve, and as we were in an easy bit of line, what better place to do it in? Thirdly, someday I should have to go on patrol very possibly in a tight place, and if I were not used to it, I should possibly muck it, not having been out before. Of course, besides all that, it was quite good sport. Did I tell you the officer who was wounded is dead now from the wound and exposure? The sergeant who was out searching for him has been recommended for a decoration."

A few days later, he wrote his friend G. A. P.:— B. E. F., 11-3-'16

"For the last week, we have been on trek, and it has been pretty awful marching about in snow, rain and mud. We spent about four days on

maneuvers (I'm sure I've left out a "n" somewhere in this word) I fear I've sadly fallen during this trek, as three times I have partaken of alcoholic liquors. Sad, but true. I was so cold one night, I drank some brandy, which I carry in my flask for emergencies. (Don't like it, but it is nice and warming.) Secondly, I had a whisky and a little water after standing in the snow for two hours on end. (Also objectionable, but warming.) Thirdly, some sparkling wine, when the water was not fit to drink. All excusable. I think, don't you? And at present, I am a teetotaler once more. Of course, rum and such stuff is absolutely indispensable for the man in the trenches, but last time I didn't want any personally. Those people at home who shout about this rum issue should stand to their knees in water for a few days and nights on end, just to see what it's like."

Re-doing mad things unnecessarily, see Mr. M's letter of a few days back.

And again on the 31st of March, a long letter, of which the following is an extract:—

"Thanks for your description of the Y. M. Hut at High Beach, and am so glad it is proving such a huge success. I think it is the best chance Mr. M—— has ever had, and may God enable him to make the greatest use of it. I have prayer for it every day since I first heard of it. . . .

The knowledge of Jesus, however precious at home, is far more precious out here to us who believe, and it is a sure method of keeping happy and "non-wind-up-y."

III.

TOMMY was not very communicative as to what may be called his professional progress. Two of his letters to his brother, written about this time, however, are of interest in this respect.

B. E. F., 6-4-'16

"The Major was very decent to me last night and spoke very decently to me about his and the Colonel's opinion of me, and I am feeling quite bucked, but still that doesn't compensate for being out all night! Owing to my football, etc., I get on awfully well with all the men, N. C. O.'s and officers out here and never have any bother at all, and

so of course, am thoroughly happy."

B. E. F., 11-4-'16

". . . On Friday morning, my Company Captain went on leave, leaving me alone and in charge of the Company. . . . It is a distinct compliment being left in charge, as they usually transfer an officer from another Company to take charge in such a case. On two occasions, the Major has told me how pleased he is with me, etc., and that he would report the same to the Colonel, which he has evidently done."

An added responsibility fell to him later, when his Company was being bombarded at a time when he was in command in the absence of the Captain. He describes his experience in a letter dated:—

B. E. F., 29-5-'16

"The night I got back from my bombing course, I found the Battalion going up to the trenches, and also that my Company Commander was away ill, leaving me in charge of the Company, and I did not relish the job, seeing what happened subsequently. The very first morning, they blew a lot of my trench in with minenwerfers (German short range mortar shells) and then subjected us to a terrific bombardment lasting six hours (the worst the Battalion has ever struck after fifteen months out here).

Of course, we knew the Bosches were coming over, and so we prepared; but they left us alone, the flank of their attack being the Battalion next to us.

The casualties have been beastly heavy, but we have not suffered anything like so badly as we might have done, as shrapnel was absolutely all around us. My Company was really awfully lucky and I think would have welcomed the Bosch, but it was a little bit too anxious a time for me personally to be very enjoyable, especially as I knew there was a mine waiting to go up, but luckily it did not.

We were relieved a day before our time and are now some miles back in perfect safety and happy once again, and I hope we shall stay here for some time.

Some of those Psalms are great things to read when you are really in danger and anxious, are they not?

Yesterday morning I attended a ripping little Communion service and

am learning to value those services above all others. They will have quite a different atmosphere to me now if ever I get home again to enjoy them. . . .

Why do you ask? Of course I pray for you always in all you are doing, as I know you are all praying for me and the others out here. It makes a difference to a chap out here to know people are praying, and evert night, I can always picture the dear old Mater on her knees for me; for her sake, may her prayers be answered. How I am longing to see her and you all once again! You talked about the Second Coming; there is one sentence in our Lord's Prayer—"Thy kingdom come"—which I think I say more earnestly every day than any other part of it. How glorious it will be to meet all the dear old chaps who have gone before, both through this war and previously. Much love to you all."

Yours very affectionately, TOMMY

Tommy himself, followed close upon the heels of this letter, and for a few short hours, we had him amongst us. The same quiet, modest, handsome boy as ever, yet with a sober manliness, the outcome of experience and responsibility; he sat in our family circle and chatted through the evening. Then he rose, said farewell, and went his way, and we never saw him again.

A few hours later and he was in the midst of that "hell" of war which has made the whole world shudder.

It was on the 1st of July that the British "Big Push" commenced that resulted in such splendid captures of German trenches, together with thousands of prisoners and many guns. Tommy's part in opening offensive is told in a letter dated:—

B. E. F., 4-7-'16

"When I got back, I found the Battalion was going up to the line the next day, so up I had to go, of course, and with the exception of five days' rest, I have been up ever since.

We have been in a 'cushy' part of the line, but have livened it up considerably since we went in. Our Brigade took part in one of those numerous gas and smoke raids on the Bosch trenches. Our Battalion was not in it, but I was luckily detailed to direct the smoke operations on a part of the front, and had a great time, though had to work awfully hard preparing, and was wet through most of the time.

Of course, while it was on, we were heavily shelled, but I only had one man hit. The trench was blown in, in several places, but we all survived, I am glad to say. The men were simply ripping, and I have recommended four of them, but don't know whether they will get anything for it.

These Cockney chaps are simply topping where there is any fun knocking about. I also managed to get one patrol in the first night, but have had no opportunity of another since. You see, I have to go on these patrols as there are a lot of chaps who want to come out with me, and I don't like to disappoint them. Besides, God takes care of me there just as much as anywhere else, and somebody has got to do it, so no lecture from you, thanks very much!"

A similar account of the same event was contained in a letter to his brother, in which he adds:—

"I was not bound to come up again this tour, as I had the option of staying back, but I much prefer being up with the rest; besides, Captain Downes, I know, was very glad when I said I would come up. I think I have the reputation here of being always 'merry and bright,' and it is the best thing to be out here; besides, I am really quite happy and get on awfully well with all the officers of my Battalion, senior and junior, and also with the men."

Fighting now became general all along the line, and Tommy's life grew full of activity either in the trenches or behind the line, training and preparing for the next attack.

Writing to his brother on the subject, on the 24th August, he says:—

"Of course, it is quite obvious what we are training for, but when and where we shall have our bit of fun, I do not know, but the sooner the better."

Alas! when the time arrived, it proved far other than "a bit of fun," but it found him prepared. He had indeed been "training" for the unknown future in more than a military sense, and for a far longer period than his soldier-training had occupied.

IV.

PERHAPS the most remarkable letter Tommy ever penned was written at this time, just three weeks before the end came. It is printed here

almost in extenso:—

B. E. F., 9-9-'16

". . . To start with, if there is one thing that I do never forget to pray for, it is for Merleswood, and all the dear chaps out here, and for the Leader at Salisbury Plain.

Of course, as you must yourself realize, it is mighty hard to keep keen out here, but it is only under very exceptional circumstances that I ever go a day without reading a portion of the Bible, and, of course, never without my prayers to God.

As I have tried to make the dear Mater understand, I don't care a 'cuss' for anything that happens to me out here, so far as I am concerned, but only for her sake, for, as both you and she know, although a helpless, hopeless sinner, and I seem to get more hopeless every day, yet I am absolutely convinced of the saving power of Jesus, Whom I decided to rely on some years ago, as you know, and I have found that He does indeed 'stick closer than a brother.'

There is one thing I am beginning to realize out here, and that is not to judge others too harshly for certain filth and swearing, etc., because the more I think about it and examine myself, the more do I see in my own life, that is filthy and vile to God; and then how much worse it is for me 'saved by grace' than it is for a chap who does not pretend to be a Christian! . . . but please don't think from the foregoing that I am 'falling away,' for I am NOT.

I know that some of my keenness is going, but on the other hand, I find that I grow less and less ashamed of my faith every day. And I do want to let you know that if at any time anything should happen to me, I am perfectly content and ready to meet my God, thanks to the blood of the Lamb, and only through Him, for without Him, what could I say at the Last Day?

. . . I think the above truly represents my feelings at present.

We have got an awfully decent Padré now. High Church, but awfully keen on the real thing, and I have had several decent talks with him. . . . that is another thing I am learning out here; if a man believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, he shall be saved, notwithstanding whether he wants candles, etc., etc.

For myself, I am very fit, but a wee bit 'fed' at present for some reason or

other, I don't know why.

By the way, it may interest you to hear, we get some awfully nice Communion services out here every Sunday. I have never before realized the preciousness of this service.

At present, I am getting plenty of footer and fun at odd times, and also plenty of hard training. I am Scout Officer now, I don't know if I told you. Please reply shortly."

Yours affectionately, TOMMY

The simple candour of these lines, written after two years of army life and severance from home influence, in the midst of men of every type, speaks perhaps better than anything else could do of the deep spiritual life of this young soldier; the daily Bible reading and prayer, the humble sense of self-deficiency, together with the clear assurance of salvation and forgiveness "through the blood of the Lamb"—all this below the surface and mingling naturally and without incongruity with "footer and fun" and "hard training."

A fortnight later, he was thrown into the midst of "battle and blood" on a scale which he had not before experienced. He tells his story modestly enough.

B. E. F., 26-9-'16

"As you probably gathered, or possibly you didn't, our Division was in the latest little push, and my Battalion went through High Wood. I was extremely lucky (perhaps it wasn't luck only) the whole way through; I had a huge dent in my shrapnel helmet, three bits of shrapnel bounded off my chest, and I was partially buried by a 'heavy' once, and here I am, still fit. . . . We expect to go back to the line very shortly now, having been out nearly a week.

Heard from our Padré a day or two ago, that he had been talking to some of the wounded, and everyone owned to saying a little prayer before he went over. Some things do stick when it comes to the pinch, don't they?

I must say, I really don't care a hang (at least not very much) if I get 'pipped' now, but my constant prayer is, 'Preserve me for my mother's sake.' The thought of what it would mean for her is too awful to think of. What a terrific blessing it is to a chap to have a really good mother, as, thank God I have. If only some of those chaps you talk to

could only first realize how one thinks of home folks out here, and what a help it is to keep one straight!"

Further details were contained in a letter to his brother:—

"Some of us got partially buried once, and a little less seriously a second time.

I also had my collar torn by a piece of shrapnel and three bits hit me in the chest without going in, so I was very lucky. . . . It is really the worst period I have ever spent in my life, but I would not have missed it.

As Scouts' Officer, I was not supposed to go over the top, and I did not the first time, but someone had to lead the next time, and afterwards, I kept with the Company in the line . . . I have absolutely nothing to fear. 'Not one sparrow falleth to the ground without your Heavenly Father,' as Henwood [another Merleswood boy recently reported missing] said in his last letter home, poor old chap.

Anyway, I know you are always praying for me, and please 'carry on.' I need it and for Mater's sake, may I come through.

I love that text in Proverbs, 'There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother,' and that must be pretty close, mustn't it, old chap?

P.S.—Without wishing to be morbid at all, please remember that if anything should happen to me, I finished up game and happy, trusting to the Lord Jesus always, Who is the same yesterday, today and forever and ever.

V.

HARDLY had these last two letters reached their destination, than suddenly and gloriously, on October 1st, the end came.

The story can best be told in the words of his close friend and fellow-officer (as well as fellow class member), Glanville Smith, who writes in great grief, the following lines:—

B. E. F., 2-10-'16

". . . Tommy's sudden and early call has been a tremendous blow to us all, but we can only look on it as God's perfect will, that he has been called to a greater service, which God had in store for him. As you say, we have the memory of him left with us to carry us on till our next meeting. . . .

Before the attack, Tommy was Battalion Scout Officer, and was responsible for all the intelligence and patrol work of the Battalion, and acting in this capacity, he went through the attack of September 15th, when our Division took High Wood.

He was not allowed to go over in the front of the attack, but was kept back or near Battalion H.Q., but even from here, he did some very good work.

It seems however, that he didn't like being 'out of it,' and so he asked to be returned to one of the companies, and he went back to D Company in time for the next attack.

This was on Sunday, October 1st, and the objective was the village of Eaucourt L'Abbaye with two lines of German trenches. The distance from our front line trenches was about 700 yards, which as distances go nowadays is a long way.

At 3.15 p. m., Tommy led a platoon of D Company across this ground toward the German lines and managed to get half-way across with very few casualties.

They were then met with a very heavy machine gun fire, but the platoon pushed on till when within 50 yards of the German trench, Tommy was hit by two bullets and fell at once, death being instantaneous.

He died leading his men, which is the greatest honour an officer can have.

Isn't it strange, Mr. M—, that he should receive this call at the same time that he probably received his first call, on a Sunday afternoon between 3 and 4, and what a reward for you to know that he 'finished up game and happy, trusting to the Lord Jesus always.' as he said in his last letter home.

His life out here was the same as his life in England, and active service did not alter him in the least. His clean Christian life was an example to us all, and I feel personally as if I have lost one of my greatest mainstays.

He was always playing jokes on everyone, and if ever there was a 'rag', Tommy was in it. I can truly say that there was no officer so generally liked, and now none so generally missed as 'Tommy,' as he was known to everybody.

The keynote of the whole of Tommy's life was his desire to serve his Lord and Master, and his every word and action seemed to say, 'I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.' We must try not to grieve, and

our faith should be increased by such a life of devotion to the Lord Jesus."

Somewhere in a shell-strewn spot by High Wood, may be seen four humble graves with rough wooden crosses erected over them. They bear the names of four British officers who fell on the same day, and who lie side by side on the field of battle. On one of the crosses is inscribed the name so dear to the writer and many others who cherish his memory:

2nd Lieut. Arthur Herbert Thompson.

Let us add for the benefit of him who writes and all who read, the simple comment:

"Whose faith follow, Remembering the end of his conversation, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever."