

SIDELIGHTS ON THE WAR

PROTESTANT MINISTER'S TESTIMONY.

Preaching at a Protestant church in Birkenhead on Sunday evening, February 21, the Rev. Mr. Chavasse, a son of the Protestant Bishop of Liverpool, who has been at one of the base hospitals in France since the beginning of the war, said that along the French roads were many graves and Calvaries. The war was the crucifixion of our manhood. A singular thing he saw were the uninjured figures of Christ. One church which had been demolished contained the figure of the Saviour untouched. Near by was a monastery also in ruins. In a corner stood the figure of Christ without a mark on it.

PRINCE OF WALES HONORS BRAVE ABBE AND NUN.

The Prince of Wales visited the commune of Bethisy St. Pierre in the Senlis district, and thanked those who had cared for the British wounded during the German occupation in September. His Royal Highness, accompanied by the local notables, proceeded to the Marie, where he decorated among others, with the insignia of the Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem the Abbe Brizard and Sister Benoit.

THE CLERICAL GUN-CAPTAIN.

A pathetic story of a priest's appeal for prayers for the enemy comes from the *Courier du Centre*. 'On the French front a detachment of French colonial troops had suffered severely from the German guns, when timely aid came from a battery of French "seventy-fives." The battery was commanded by a captain of enormous build and clean-shaven, who climbed a tree and made such exact observations that his gunners speedily annihilated the two German batteries that had been causing all the trouble. The captain of artillery was a priest, and after the engagement celebrated Mass in an adjacent ruined barn, preaching a stirring sermon to his men. He exhorted them first of all to pray for all those for whom he was going to say Mass. "Especially do I ask your prayers," he added, "for the German gunners whom we have just exterminated." Then, with the guns still booming near at hand, he recited the *De Profundis*.'

IRISH GUARDS AND THE BAYONET.

Private Ballantine (Irish Guards) is at present enjoying a brief rest at his home in Rannamoot, near Roscommon, preparatory to again taking his place in the firing line. Private Ballantine, previous to the outbreak of war, was a member of the police force, being stationed at Newmarket, County Cork. When war was declared he rejoined his regiment, and was some time afterwards drafted to the firing line. He writes as follows regarding his experiences:

On the 25th November, as the result of an engagement, we had 250 men left out of 1800, and with us were only two officers out of 32 who left with the battalion. I have seen three officers fall victims in succession to a German sniper. The same night the sniper was caught and shot. For the most part the German trenches are scarcely one or two hundred yards away from ours.

I took part in several bayonet charges. The Guards shine particularly with the bayonet; they never leave a job undone. It is usually during the night that the Germans attack, and they always do so in big numbers. We were chiefly engaged in forest fighting. It was pretty hard work. At La Bassée we went through some terrific engagements. The enemy possess fine artillery, but of late the English and French are getting the

upper hand in this respect. I really believe that it is only a question of time, and the Germans will be ultimately defeated. The coming fine weather is likely to be accompanied by big developments. There are a very large number of police in the Irish Guards. Hundreds of them have already taken part in the fighting.

I consider it is the duty of every man who is fit, physically and otherwise, to take his place in the firing line. We are all fighting for a common cause. If Irishmen could only realise what the Germans have done and are capable of doing—if they could fully realise the awful desolation and wanton destruction caused as a result of the German invasion—there would not be one of them who would not willingly enlist to-morrow.

CRUCIFIXES IMMUNE FROM DESTRUCTION.

The curious fact that crucifixes and statues of our Lady seem to be immune from the general destruction in France and Belgium makes a great impression upon the British soldiers. One of them, Lance-Corporal J. H. Morgan, of the East Lancashire Regiment, writing home, says:

It is very queer that when the Germans shell these Roman Catholic churches the crucifix and the Virgin always remain safe.

The Rev. Van Laeren, O.S.B., who is working among the refugees in the Exeter district, tells of a marvellous escape of a crucifix in a presbytery near Alost. One morning after Mass the villagers were alarmed by the booming of cannon on either side of them—the place being between the conflicting armies. Father Van Laeren found shelter in a cellar. After his incarceration he discovered that a shell had struck the presbytery wall, entering the priest's bedroom, where it exploded. Although the mantelpiece and the other contents of the room were completely wrecked, a crucifix which had stood upon the mantelpiece remained undamaged.

CARDINAL MERCIER'S PROPOSAL TO THE GERMANS.

Cardinal Mercier still awaits a reply to a letter he sent in response to a German proposal, according to the *Daily Telegraph's* special correspondent at Havre. On January 20 the Kreischeff, a kind of district commissary at Malines, Colonel Wengersky, addressed the following letter to Cardinal Mercier:

'According to a statement published in a newspaper many priests have been killed, though innocent, in the diocese of Malines. With a view to opening an inquiry I beg your Eminence to be good enough to inform me if any and what innocent priests were put to death. I should like very much to know the circumstances in which the acts took place, what troops could be charged, and at what dates the offences were committed.'

Immediately Cardinal Mercier replied, citing a number of cases, and adding that the figures given in his Pastoral must be increased—in the case of Aerschot, from 91 to 143. He welcomed the idea of an inquiry, but observed:

'It is essential that the results of this inquiry should appear to everyone to rest on indisputable authority. I have the honor to propose to you for transmission to the German authorities the suggestion that the Commission should be composed in equal numbers of German delegates and Belgian magistrates, presided over by a neutral representative. I have pleasure in thinking that the American Minister would not refuse to accept the post or to delegate it to someone chosen by him.'

The Germans seem to have been thinking the matter over for some time without arriving at a satisfactory conclusion.

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