

# THE ARMY CHAPLAIN

## Carrying Out A Noble Task In France

### PHYSICAL STRAIN.

The great physical strain of all this is so severe that it has automatically settled a controversy as to whether men over forty or under 40 makes the best chaplains (writes E. A. Montague, special correspondent with the British forces in France, to the Manchester Guardian). Other things being equal, the older men, particularly those with past war service, would probably be the better, but it has been found that they cannot stand the strain. Of all the Anglican chaplains in the forward areas to-day only two are over thirty.

There are now 207 chaplains in France, of whom half are Church of England and a quarter Roman Catholic, and the other quarter represent the remaining denominations. There are no Jewish chaplains, but the others have copies of the Jewish burial service, which they lend to a Jewish officer or man to read if necessary. They also try to put Jewish soldiers in touch with local synagogues. Steps are now being taken to find out how many Jews are serving with the Expeditionary Force, so that the chaplain-general can judge what is the best method of serving their spiritual needs.

### Long, Arduous Work.

The work of the chaplains is long and arduous, but it has its compensations. Those of them who served also in the last war say that on the evidence of the letters which they have to censor the average soldier is more religious now than he was then. The number of communicants has increased tremendously, more so than it did last time. Men are coming forward to be prepared for confirmation, and confirmation services will be taken in due course by visiting bishops all over our area, even in the front line, wherever there happen to

be enough candidates. More and more men, nauseated with politics and their effects, are beginning to feel that only a great spiritual change can save the world from a recurrence of these present miseries. War has brought more than its usual opportunity to the chaplains, if they have the wisdom and energy to take it.

It is Sunday morning. Outside my warm room the wind is howling and the rain is pouring down. I am thankful that I do not have to go out. But there are others who are not so lucky. All over the forward areas at this moment men in officers' uniforms with black buttons and white stiff collars are hurrying through the rain, sometimes in cars, sometimes begging lorry rides or splashing through the fields on foot—the chaplains, making their way from one service to another, doing their duty by the men of the Expeditionary Force.

Hard things have been said about chaplains, and will be said again. Once in a hundred times the Chaplain-General's Department picks the wrong man, and his failure is the more conspicuous because the soldiers' expectation of him is so high. The ceaseless devotion of the other ninety-nine is less advertised.

### One Padre to 1100 Men.

The official ration of chaplains is one to every 1100 men. That is not enough, particularly in these days when troops are more widely scattered than they were in the last war. The chaplains have to serve large areas, and about one in four of them has to do it on foot. It is common for Anglican and Nonconformist chaplains to take five or six different services every Sunday morning. The Roman Catholics take only

two, but they have to hear confessions as well. They must hold their services in any building they can find; the other day a chaplain was taking a service in a barn, and was somewhat interrupted by noises from the other end of the barn, but his congregation told him to carry on—it was only a cow calving there.

On weekdays the chaplain is just as busy. He must help the soldier to fight the evils of boredom and homesickness. For that purpose he must, among other things, organise entertainments for the men until the more highly publicised professional entertainers arrive, and some chaplains have been running concerts every night for the past month. He censors letters, and encourages the men to write and so keep open the channel of communication between home and France. He must go about among his scattered congregation and talk to them individually. He provides an unofficial means by which soldiers may express their dissatisfaction. He must be constantly traversing a big area in the vilest of weather, for he serves not one unit but several, sometimes many.

### CORRESPONDENCE.

#### The Melanesian Mission.

May I remind friends of Melanesia of the annual tuck boxes for the Melanesian Mission field? It is hoped to supply about fifty individual white mission workers with a gift box, which we hope to send by the Southern Cross next month.

The generosity of subscribers is appealed to in order that well-filled boxes may be sent to those working under difficult conditions in the tropics. Subscriptions of money, interesting modern books and old white linen will be welcomed by the secretary.

Yours faithfully,

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