

The Boys' Brigade Hut at Rouen.

IT was Sunday morning and very hot, and the Hut four miles away. Better to walk than to share, and thereby intensify, the sufferings of the packed crowds upon the tram-cars.

As we lingered on the great bridge that spans the Seine, a half-company of red-faced, perspiring lads in khaki swung across from the quay. They were men from the Five Towns, but though their hands had been delivered from making the pots, their shoulders were by no means eased from the burden. We followed leisurely, and presently passed them squatting unconcernedly on the broad footpath of a crowded street. An hour later we entered the Camp and discovered the Hut.

The Hut Leader welcomed us graciously, and in a few well-chosen words intimated that we might jolly well put our backs into it and begin to work. Though not of great stature he has a compelling eye, and we judged it best to obey. Having taken the oath of allegiance we rose, dusted our knees, and set to work.

The Leader, having "weighed up" his new assistants with a practised eye, selected the scribe as the one who might be entrusted with the cash, and, arming him with rolls of 1d. and 2d. tickets, placed him in the pay-desk. Cash is not taken at the counter. The men purchase tickets to the amount that they intend to spend, and exchange these for "refreshments." The British Expeditionary Force is paid in 5 franc notes, and the Huts have great difficulty in supplying change. On one occasion a newly-arrived Scottie handed me a 5 franc note and demanded two penny tickets. As change he received a franc note on the Ville de Rouen, a half-franc note on the Ville de Boulogne, an English shilling, a postal order for 6d., a Swiss half-franc piece, two penny stamps, a 25c. nickel, two French pennies, and seven sous of assorted nationalities. He stared indignantly at the change and demanded English money. I invited him to "search me," and as he grasped the situation the suspicious frown slowly melted into a pleasant smile.

As a rule the English and Irish lads take their change with the casual nonchalance that distinguishes them, and sometimes move away before they have received the half of what is due to them, and have to be called back. But Jock blocks the way until he has counted his twice over!

The Refreshment Room, or Canteen, contains sufficient tables and chairs to seat 150 men. Nearly half the room is, however, clear of tables, though there are seats along the walls. A broad counter runs breadthways across. On this counter are displayed in the order named: two small urns of Horlick's milk, a great basketful of pint mugs with the handles chipped off, a large urn of tea, trays of buttered rolls, sliced current cake, sponge-cake, jam sandwich-cake, gingerbread-cake, and assorted packets of biscuits. Then a big urn of coffee or cocoa, more mugs, two urns of lemonade, a gramophone and records. On shelves below the counter are draughts and chess boards and men, dominoes, and other games, 15 dozen pint pop-bottles, and a case of match-boxes. On shelves behind are displayed tobacco and cigarettes, chocolate, toffee, throat-lozenges, tooth-paste and brushes, soap, buttons, bootlaces, candles, and picture-postcards.

All drinks (except Horlick) and all articles of food are retailed at the price of one penny. The tea-urns vary in size and hold from 50 to 80 pints, and about 1,000 pints will be served on an average day in addition to lemonade, "pop," and Horlick. 500 rolls are cut and buttered daily, and there is never one left. From 30 to 40 large currant-cakes are each day cut into 36 penny slices, for this is the most popular of the cakes supplied. On an average day 800 packets of woodbines are sold—that is, 4,000 cigarettes of this make alone. The day's takings average

from 500 to 600 francs—though more than 1,000 francs have been taken in a day, and as nearly all the sales are on penny articles, it will be seen that on this day about 9,000 were sold.

At a smaller counter at the far end of this room, writing-paper, envelopes, and postcards are given to applicants, and a vast quantity is disposed of. The Canteen is open from 12 noon to 2 p.m. and from 4.30 p.m. to 8.45 p.m.

The Concert Room is not quite so large, but it has as many exits and entrances as a stage drawing-room. At one end are tables for games, for writing, and for daily and weekly papers. At the opposite end is a good platform. Some 300 chairs are set between.

The Concert Room is open during practically the whole of the day, and there is generally a small group at the piano. On Sunday afternoons the men will sing hymns continuously. Every evening at 7 o'clock there is a concert or lecture. The B.B. Hut has its own orchestra, mainly string and reed, and our proud boast is that it is the finest orchestra in the British Expeditionary Force; and so it should be, for the members consist almost entirely of Band-Sergeants. On Sunday evenings a service is held in this room, and on Sunday mornings there is a service here for all the Y.M.C.A. workers in the Rouen district.

A Billiard Room containing three new three-quarter size tables has been added as an annexe. Other rooms are the "Quiet Room," used for the daily Bible-Class at 6 p.m., the Mess Room, the Kitchen, a most inconvenient structure, the Lavatory, Stores-Room, Office, Ladies' Room and five cubicles. Between the two large halls is a strip of garden, which extends also along the front of the building. On the platform of the Concert Room, and suspended above the counter of the Canteen, are a number of fine plants in pots, and one of the staff is detailed to water and tend the plants every evening.

The soldiers' love of flowers and their attempts at decoration are rather touching. Poppies, cornflowers, and yellow toadflax abound, and round many of the tents little gardens have been made, and sweet peas and geraniums planted among the wild flowers. A strip of gravel from two to three feet wide encircles the tents, and this is frequently bordered with white stones, and in it the regimental crest is artistically worked in bits of coloured glass, with the motto in white pebbles or shells. Some of these are crude; others are works of art.

The staff of the Hut consists of four or five B.B. Officers. In addition, three ladies come from Rouen daily between 11.30 and 2 and from 5 to 9 p.m. They preside at the refreshment and stationery counters. A fatigue squad is detailed twice a day to sweep or swab the rooms and carry the refuse to the incinerator. An A.S.C. water-cart comes round three times a day to fill our huge barrels. There is no difficulty in finding lads willing to work in the kitchen; the trouble is that there is a prevailing impression that military duties must come first, so there are times when we have no kitchen hands until late afternoon. The kitchen work includes lighting the fires and keeping them alight, breaking coal—in the kitchen itself!—chopping up empty cases until the kitchen is strewn with snake-like lengths of iron bands, armed with scores of two-inch nails bent to catch the unwary foot; cooking breakfast, making porridge, peeling potatoes, and preparing dinner, brewing tea, coffee, and cocoa, opening tins of Nestlé—or, as it is termed, "Swissle"—carrying some 300 gallons of water daily from the barrels outside to the boilers inside, washing the staff's crockery and cutlery four times a day, collecting 250 mugs from the two halls and the garden, and washing the same a dozen times a day, mending leaks in the boilers and urns, disposing of refuse and waste water to the satisfaction of the sanitary authorities, and trying in vain to keep the place tidy.

The Officer detailed as Cook must be up early to light the fires, clean the mess crockery, make porridge and boil eggs. It was found that the clergy of the Episcopal Church develop a peculiar aptitude for this kind of work, and their porridge met with the approval even of the Scottish members of the staff. Another Officer is appointed as Fly-Destroyer-in-Chief. He fills with some fly-attracting fluid a number of little tins nailed to the walls, rubs window-frames with paraffin, scatters Jeyes fluid around, suspends a dozen fly-papers each morning, takes them down at noon black with hundreds of victims, and puts up another dozen. There is "infinite torment of flies." Men who have lived in the Hut in summer will retain a lasting impression of "Swissle" and flies, alive and dead, especially dead or dying, in which condition they drop on one's head in sticky bunches of half a dozen from the overcrowded tenements above.

At 9 p.m. the rooms are cleared, and the contents of the shelves and counters taken into the Stores Room, where a rough and ready stock-taking takes place. There are many odd jobs to be done before and after supper. The day's takings are counted and checked, the various accounts balanced, and the cash parcelled up for removal to the Y.M.C.A. Headquarters. About midnight—sometimes much later—the Leader gives the order *Lights Out!*

It would be out of place to do more than refer to the work of the ladies in charge of the stationery counter, the library, and the sale of refreshments. Thoroughly efficient, their sympathy, their interest, their very presence in camp, make a wonderful difference to the happiness and cheeriness of the men, whose appreciation is very evident.

This sketch deals with the material side of the work and the methods of carrying on. I hope to be allowed to say something about the men in a second article. Suffice to say now that no one can live there for a month without being filled with pride in the British soldier. This description should, however, make it clear that Officers who go out to work in the Hut will have little leisure, little comfort, little opportunity to give addresses, or sing to the soldiers, to practise their French or to see France. They are there to do odd jobs and do them at the double, to open many tin-lined cases without shedding much blood, to raise blisters by much cutting of bread and cake, to sally forth in their pyjamas before 7 a.m. to carry heavy cases from the supply lorry in the road a hundred yards away, and in the same garb at 1 a.m. to shift half the heavy stock in the Stores Room because the rain is coming through in half a dozen places.

But all this makes it the more enjoyable and interesting.

Four-Minute Talks.

By *AYES WRIGHT.*

I.—HOW TO MAKE SURE OF A STRIPE.

"ANY stripes going, Captain?" and the hand flies up as the heels go click. I knew the speaker well—a Boy who would be none the worse of another kind of stripe now and then! My reply, however, is evasive—"Time enough, sonny. It's only the beginning of the Session. You stick in and do your best, and you never know what may happen."

Some of you Boys may say to yourselves—"What a prig, to go and ask for a stripe!" And yet, to tell you frankly, the Boy's request has left its good impression on me. At least it shows that he *wants* a stripe. And that is my first hint to you—to make sure of a stripe, first show the Captain that you want it. I ought rather to put it negatively—never give an

Officer the impression that you don't want promotion. That is my first hint, and it is the most important.

At the same time, don't be in a hurry to approach the Captain as this Boy has done. For it does not always work. Why? Some Boys will tell you it depends what mood the Captain is in. "Don't speak to him at the end of a long parade. Wait and get him in the right cut, and then—!" But well you know that he is not such a creature of whims. And besides, the other Officers are always consulted about promotions, and you cannot fool them all. The truth is—ambition for stripes is only one factor.

And what are the other factors? I can easily tell you the secret. It is summed up in two words—*know* your work, and *do* it. To begin with, if you really want promotion, you must take pains to understand things. For whether in drill, or Bible-Class, or any other department of work or of play, everything is capable of explanation. And once you see the reason of a thing and the right way to do it, then practise and practise till the right way comes easy to you. And again, don't allow others to draw your thoughts from the main thing. Don't be a mere log floated along on every current, and blown about by every wind. Have a mind of your own, not content to follow every suggestion that comes from the Boys beside you. That is what I mean when I say—"Do it."

Perhaps you will tell me that the Boys who get the stripes are not always the Boys who know it and do it. And I am open to confess that here and there a "rotter" may slip into non-commissioned rank; and nobody sees such a blunder more clearly, and pays for it more sweetly, than the Officers! But that is the exception: your safest line lies in following the rule.

And again, perhaps you say you have honestly tried it; you have done your best to learn, and to practise, and to focus your attention: but you are still a Private. I quite understand. Every Boy can't get stripes. Every good Boy can't get stripes. But go on as you are doing. Your Captain's Captain knows it all. He makes no blunders. Get to know His will, and train yourself to do it. And He will not fail to promote you to all that is brave and manly, and your prize is Eternal Life.

The Company Bible-Class.

SYLLABUS FOR SESSION 1915-16.

THE Bible-Class Committee has been carefully considering the subject of a more detailed and comprehensive study of God's Word in our Bible-Classes, and as a result a new Course of Lessons, which will extend over four years, has been prepared. It is divided into four main sections—(1) The Story of God's people; (2) The Story of God's Son; (3) The Story of God's early messengers; and (4) The story of God's later messengers. In response to a widespread desire, each Section covers a period of twelve months. Daily Bible Readings, bearing on the Lessons, have also been arranged, and it is hoped that this arrangement will add greatly to the interest of both Officers and Boys. The Syllabus and Readings begin with the first Sunday of October, by which date all Companies should be in working order.

As interest in Missionary Work is largely increasing among our Companies, greater prominence has been given to it in the Syllabus. "The Heroes of China" will afford ample scope for impressing this important subject on our Boys.