

PLAGUE AND PESTILENCE AT CAMP CUSTER

By CHAPLAIN WINFRED H. ZIEGLER

Headquarters Fourteenth Division, U. S. A.

FROM plague, pestilence, and famine; from battle and murder, and from sudden death, good Lord, deliver us."

Sometimes we find we have to explain to the soldiers of the Fourteenth Division, so restless, so disturbed lest they be not ordered overseas, so anxious to get into the battle, that we are praying the good God to deliver us victorious after a well-fought battle. Sometimes we find we have to make clear that we are praying the good Lord to deliver us from an unprepared death when we say "sudden death". Never, particularly after the month of October, 1918, will we have to make clear to any person who has one bit of faith in the power of prayer the reasonableness of praying to be delivered from plague and pestilence.

On the last Sunday of September, after having celebrated the Holy Communion at early hours in two "Y" huts and in the Red Cross building, the chaplain, arriving in the Church War Commission "Ford" driven by Secretary C. J. S. Williamson of the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, was alarmed at seeing his whole prospective morning prayer congregation piling out of "Y" 445. Presently a hastily written notice was posted: "No meetings. Quarantined." In the Seventy-eighth Infantry, close by, three cases of pneumonia had been discovered. By night all Camp Custer was under close quarantine, and all the ambulances in the camp, and many other conveyances requisitioned for the emergency, were going at top speed westward to the base hospital carrying scores and hundreds of young fellows touched by the plague and pestilence, pneumonia and Spanish influenza. From a sick population of four hundred the base hospital sick, in a few hours, grew to number as many thousands. Wards were filled, then corridors, then "Y", K. of C., and Red Cross buildings. Field artillery battalions were hastily driven from barracks to tents in order to provide the base hospital with an annex.

At Camp Custer the disease did not start in one place, and like a foul breeze touch here, then beyond, and so gradually spread through the whole camp; but, like the lightning and the tempest, it burst with destroying fury upon the whole camp, units miles separated making their fever-stricken contributions to ambulance and hospital.

The medical officers, the army nurses, the ambulance drivers, and the men of the medical detachment were all splendid. They seemed tireless. From morning till night, and all night, there they were, receiving the patients, making beds, examining and caring for the constantly growing stream of sick. How wonderfully well they did it all! And, oh, so

soon the reports came in growing numbers, and Lieut. Col. Irons, commanding officer of the base hospital, would authorize telegrams to parents and wives, close by, or in far distant states, that their dear son or husband was "critically ill, you may come".

Brigadier General Laubach, commanding general at Camp Custer, had from the first taken personal charge of the whole situation. He arranged with careful detail the quarantine, the keeping of records, the recruiting of volunteer medical men and nurses, and he arranged that relatives summoned by telegram be met and taken to the camp and hospital by the Red Cross Women's Motor Corps. Some chaplain was on duty day and night and early morning to examine the telegrams, fit masks on the frightened arrivals, and guide them to their sick boys. There were many tragedies, such as the arrival of parents too late by minutes to make their farewells. For the poor boys died in greater and greater numbers, "on the field", as one editor put it, "of the Battle of Eagle Lake". The hospital is beautifully located over the shores of that peaceful little body of water.

Our chaplain was of course at the base hospital, morning, afternoon, and night, preparing many to die, giving courage to live to very many more, and giving help and Christian comfort to distracted and bereaved parents. He baptized some dying fellows, gave the viaticum to many, many of them; and ahead of the chaplain, and behind him, and beside him, Mr. Williamson was doing favors, saying cheering things, bringing papers and magazines, fruit, treats of other kinds, writing letters, and making all know that the Church serves all men, with prayer, and sacrament, and faith, and works. The Church War Commission made possible the work that was done at Camp Custer. Without the slightest delay every request for help was answered, and the material assistance was reinforced by kind and generous and encouraging letters from Bishop Reese and Dr. Washburn. Moreover, Bishop McCormick showed his generous interest in some substantial manner almost every day.

The skill, the endurance, the patience, and the faithfulness of the army nurses, medical officers, and enlisted men of the Medical Corps, and their accomplishment, excites the admiration of every one in this great camp. Camp Custer, of all the army camps having a great number of sick during this epidemic, has the lowest death rate—only 5.95 per cent. of the number of men taken ill. Camp Custer had 10,828 sick men, of whom 645 died. Other big camps had death rates of 8.6 per cent., 11 per cent., and even 13.14 per cent. The morale of the men throughout Camp Custer was splendid, largely because of their well-placed confidence in the skill and tenderness and devotion of army nurses and doctors.

O Lord, wash and receive the souls of nurses and men who have passed away from us, and from further plague and pestilence, good Lord, deliver us!

THE DYING CRUCIFER

Lord, Lord of Love, how can I lift my hands
To you? How dare I lift my face again?
I nestle deeper in the mire and pray
For death to come and end my guilt—and pain.
These hands, dear God, which carried high the cross
Before your sacred altar, and this face
Which must have beamed with light—so glad was I
As I marched, singing songs of happy praise!—

These hands have taken life! Now red with blood,
Warm blood—(how like my own which trickles here!)
My lips have breathed a curse of foulest hate!
(The men said cursing made them lose their fear.)
They taught us we *should* kill, taught us to hate,
Said this was war, and *this* the way to win
"For God and King". They called the battle Yours—
I cannot—quite—believe. Was it a sin?

Has this sword been, perhaps, Your crucifix?
(They cited me for bravery in the fight.)
If this be so, I kiss its blood-stained hilt
With lips that smile, and wait my coming night.
Lord, Lord of Love, accept this sacrifice
From hands that loved to serve Thy fellow-men.
Forgive me if I erred, and take my soul
Into Thy keeping, Loving Christ. Amen!

DORA H. MOITORET.