

THE CHAPLAIN SAYS

**"BEFORE THE
WHISTLE TOOTS"**



The Chaplain says:

BEFORE the whistle toots on that train that's taking you back home, I'd like to say just a final word to you, if you don't mind. No, I'm not going to fall on your neck with any "sob-stuff." We've been together from start to finish in this U. S. Army and we're not going to say good-bye just because you are going to put on a suit of "civvies" and I'm to stick to O. D. for a while. But you've taken what I've had to say before so decently that I'm going to say one thing more and it's this—*when you get back home tie up to the church.*

Now, you needn't hold up your hands in holy horror! I'm not asking you to hitch on to any pink-tea-church-sociable-Ladies'-Aid affair, though the Ladies' Aid have been putting in a lot of work on socks and sweaters and such for us. I'm not even going to tell you to go to church every Sunday, though it's a mighty good habit and there are few services out of which a man can't get something for himself and his life if he looks for it. What I really want you to do is to go back into your church and *get busy.*

Of course, the chances are that I don't know your particular church at home,

and so don't know what kind of church, you'll find. It may be a fine, active busy church with its doors open wide—especially to the man or woman who needs companionship, inspiration, and a chance to help the next one. I know many such churches. There isn't a good thing going on in the community that they're not interested in and in many affairs they're setting the pace. Not that such a church has a committee to reform everything in town, but that the people who are backing the best things in town and are working for them seem somehow to be most at home together when they are in church. They find themselves brought together there each Sunday to learn more of what Christ means to them and to the world. They learn some of it out of what the preacher says. They learn some of it out of what the hymns and prayers and responses mean. They learn more of it out of the meditation that a good church service sets going in the mind of any thoughtful fellow. Seeking God's forgiveness for their failures to live up to His will, they make new starts, find God more and more their Great Self-sacrificing Comrade, and go out to do His will.

When a fellow finds a church like that he finds plenty of places to fit in. It may be that there is a class or that there ought

to be a class of boys or young fellows who need the leadership of a good, fine clean man, not only in Sunday school but in a club or scout-troop. It may be that there is worth-while work to do in one of the young people's societies, or in the choir, or in a responsible position among the officers of the church. Perhaps—and often—it won't be as a sergeant-major or a corporal or a member of the band in any of the church organizations, but as an everlastingly-at-it private with his eyes open to the thousand chances a man finds—whenever he looks for them—to fight or help someone else fight God's battles and say a good word for Jesus Christ.

On the other hand it may be that you will find a church that's all ingrown on itself, a sort of private club, seeming to care nothing for the people outside. Or it may be haughty and aristocratic. Perhaps it's simply a quiet sleepy, "saints' rest." Churches get that way sometimes—they're made of human beings and like human beings they don't always catch up to their ideals. Now—and this may be a new idea to you—that's just the kind of a church that needs you! It needs your energy to stir it up. It needs your brotherliness to make it more Christian. It needs your ability to get

along with all kinds of men to show it how to reach out and help men. It needs your readiness to sacrifice everything for what you believe to be right and true to lead it anew into the self-sacrificing spirit of Jesus Christ. It will take a lot of quiet pushing and persuading and patience, but some day folks will sit up and say "What's come over the old church? It's the liveliest place in town." And you'll know why. No doubt you'll find some people stubborn or hard to get along with. But though you thought that the "Lieut" was snappy and that the supply sergeant played favorites, that didn't prevent you from sticking by your outfit and making it the best you could. Moreover the fact that you've been in the army and in the fight gives you a great opening. The church folks are expecting you to come back and stir them up. They're "sounding off" that way in the church papers I read. Go to it—be bold—and also wise!

I've been talking as if you had a home church with which you've been connected. Possibly you haven't any. If you haven't, *get one!* Don't try to go it alone. To be sure a man never knows what's in him until he's out "on his own"—and that every man who's anything of a man ought in some way to do. But an army in which everybody was on detached.

duty wouldn't win any battles. Tie up to the church outfit that best represents your convictions and in which you can do the most for the winning of the war against the devil. You're needed.

The church all over the world has always stood—though once in a while not very boldly—for the very things we have fought for in this war. We have staked our lives and our possessions that greed, cruelty, and lust for power as actively incarnated in Germany should not rule the world and the people in it. Ought we to quit fighting greed, and cruelty, and lust for power just because we have licked Germany? *I should say not.* And there's plenty of it yet to be fought—child-labor, graft, commercial competition on the principle of "the-public-be-damned," exploitation of the weak for the benefit of the strong, organized vice, ordinary dishonest dealing between man and man, and the "I'll-have-my-fun-I-don't-care-whom-it-hurts" policy. Add to this the fight that every man has within himself. It's a big job. No slacker need apply. Take it as a whole there's no outfit more committed to the fight than the Christian church. That's why I say "Tie up to it."

There's no outfit *more* committed to

the fight for righteousness than the church, there's none committed to it in just the same way—and the reason is one simple fact. The God whom the church worships and whose will it seeks to do and who puts power into every fighter for righteousness is a righteous God. We must join in the battle for righteousness because it is God's battle. He is striving to set men free from the mastery of greed and cruelty and lust for power which they have put on themselves and their fellows. He summons men to build His Kingdom of righteousness, mercy, and unselfishness. That's the job the church has tackled. Not that the church has any patent on righteousness, but that it's out to follow God wherever He leads. Every now and then, when it or some part of it or somebody in it becomes lazy or careless or bad, it suddenly finds itself looking into the blazing eyes of Jesus Christ and sees the marks in His hands that show how He fought to the bitter end to set men free and to show them how much God cared for their freedom. If any man wants to show which side he's on in the fight for righteousness, to show whether he is for Jesus Christ or against Him, he'll find no better way, next to the kind of a life he lives, than to line up with the church.

And I take it *that* will have some effect on the kind of a life he lives. There isn't a man, who, down in the bottom of his heart doesn't crave the companionship, the joy, the power, that comes to him when he makes Jesus Christ his Commander-in-Chief.

That's all. You know whether this is straight talk or not. If it is, I know you'll do the straight thing. Remember me to the folks.

ERIC M. NORTH,
Chaplain, U. S. A.