



with **MERCY** *and with*
JUDGEMENT

Strict Baptists and the First World War

by Matthew J. Hyde

With Mercy and with Judgement

With Mercy and with Judgement: Strict Baptists and the First World War

With mercy and with judgement
My web of time he wove,
And aye the dews of sorrow
Were lustered with his love;
I'll bless the hand that guided,
I'll bless the heart that planned
When throned where glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land.

Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661) in verse, by A. R. Cousin

... Dear Parents, may God bless you both. I long to see you all again, but *I have proved France to be Immanuel's land*, and if it had not been for his holy appearance, at times I should have sunk, but 'such a prop can hold the world and all things up' ...

Sapper Alfred M. Dye, in a letter written from the front

By Matthew J. Hyde

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For Kennedy

and all who, without living witnesses to the events described in this book, have to rely on records such as those preserved in this book for a testimony to God's mercy and judgement during the First World War



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Abbreviations used in this book

CP	<i>The Christian's Pathway</i>
FC	<i>The Friendly Companion</i>
GH	<i>Gadsby's Selection of Hymns</i>
GS	<i>The Gospel Standard</i>
LG	<i>The Little Gleaner</i>
ZW	<i>Zion's Witness</i>



Introduction

What pen will be able to describe the extent, the depth of the woe created by the war in which we are parties? Lands drenched with blood of men; rivers reddened with human gore and choked with corpses; cities and villages heaps of blackened stones and charred timber; the seas turned into graves for ships that floated as so many cities; widows and fatherless children numberless, whose hearts are throbbing with helpless, hopeless anguish; the financial world full of confusion, ruin, and misery, the world's wealth wasted in the combatants' fierce attempts to annihilate each other. Oh woe! enough to make the sun blush that ever he shone on men so vile as to make the fair creation groan in desolation! For a few miles of territory, for a day's power over men, a man will plunge the whole world into a black night of sorrow.

J. K. Popham¹

The people described in this book, called to serve their country, witnessed in the war itself, in their comrades and in their own lives and souls' experience, both the mercies and the judgements of God. That it

was a painful and yet in its way a blessed experience comes across clearly in the memories that they recorded in later life, and with more immediacy in the diaries and letters they wrote home from the battlefield, which are

collected together in this volume. The aim of this book is to preserve these records of God's mercies and judgements manifested to Strict Baptists during the First World War. This is not so much for the glory of those whose testimonies and letters are published here, as for the glory of the God who sustained them under every load.

In the first part I have endeavoured to give a brief background to the war and Strict Baptist involvement in it. In the second part of the book I have let those who were involved in the First World War speak for themselves. It is hoped that the introduction will serve to set their writings in context and to draw together some points and common themes for the reader to bear in mind as they progress through the book.

The material published here is both spiritual and natural. Although it may seem that there is less soul profit in what is not purely spiritual, I have taken the view that the preserving mercies of the Lord in keeping the souls of his people are set in their fullest glory against the contrast of those who lived the war in a careless, unregenerate state. It has been a surprise to me just how few men could tell of the experiences of war being blessed to the awakening of their soul, and a seeking of a Saviour. The accounts testify to the truth of the fact that:

Law and terrors do but harden,
 All the while they work alone.²

They also confirm that, ordinarily, it is the means of his Word that the Lord uses in calling sinners to himself. Furthermore, unless the Holy Spirit blesses and sanctifies people's providential circumstances to their souls, it is solemnly true that:

Judgements nor mercies ne'er can sway
 Their roving feet to wisdom's way.³

Some may feel that the focus of this book is too narrow. Strict Baptists were certainly not the only people to see the mercies and judgements of God in the war. However, from the volume and quality of material available from solely Strict Baptist sources, it became pragmatic to limit the scope of the book to the experience of Strict Baptists alone. It is hoped that this will not prejudice readers from other denominational backgrounds from reading the book and finding profit in it. No doubt similar records could be drawn together from many other church backgrounds. It would be a source of pleasure and thankfulness to the publishers if this book were to act as a stimulus to any other denomination to research and publish records of the Lord's goodness to them during the Great War, in a similar manner.

Conversely, some may be inclined to think that the definition of Strict Baptist used in this book has been too broad. Indeed, several of the men, ministers and churches mentioned did not remain associated with the 'Gospel Standard' group of Strict Baptist churches in the years after the First World War. It is right to acknowledge up front that this book has not been confined to providing an account of men associated only with churches currently adhering to *The Gospel Standard*. However, the material has largely been confined to what could be gleaned from four magazines circulating within the homes of Strict Baptists attending 'Gospel Standard' churches at the time – *The Gospel Standard*, *The Friendly Companion*, *The Christian's Pathway* and *The Sower*.

Although the search for material was originally confined to these four magazines, a number of friends, hearing of the project, have very kindly provided unpublished material for possible inclusion. This material has added greatly to the value of this book, and the generosity of those who have given it freely for this purpose is much appreciated. However, the amount of material has been overwhelming. It was initially the intention to publish all available material, but, given the size of the final manuscript, some of the letters and accounts have had to be edited. Material has been selected for inclusion on two grounds: firstly and primarily its spiritual content, and secondly its value as a historical source. Indeed, this book contains important eyewitness accounts of the war, including the first use of tanks and of lethal gas, and of service in some of the lesser known arenas of war, such as North Russia during the Russian Civil War of 1918-19, and Ireland in the aftermath of the 1916 Easter Rising.

In producing the book I have become increasingly aware that, despite the extensive amount of material available to draw on, what has been left on record to be gathered together represents only a small portion of the Strict Baptists who served in the war, or who lost loved ones in the war. Most of the men who served in the war have already passed forgotten into the mists of time, or what is known of them is fragmentary at best. My maternal grandfather, James Field, lost two uncles to the war.⁴ Both were brought up to attend the Strict Baptist Chapel at Blackboys, East Sussex. I have visited their graves in France, but with the exception of a few photographs that exist within family collections, we know little about them and they are virtually forgotten. This is the case with the vast majority of young men

who went to fight in the war, and Strict Baptists are no exception. The reader should bear this in mind when moving through this book; it is by no means a comprehensive record of the impact the war had on Strict Baptists.



David Field (left) & Edward O'Kill Dadswell (right), uncles of the author's grandfather, both killed in the war

However small or imperfect a record, I nevertheless hope that the primary end of this book might be the glory of God, who was, in Isaac Watts' timeless words, 'our help in ages past,' and must be 'our hope for years to come.'⁵ Therefore, above whatsoever natural interest in the war may be aroused through reading this book, it is my desire that the Lord might bless its contents to the spiritual good of souls, and that readers might be enabled to join wholeheartedly with the sentiment expressed by Joseph Hart:

Thy mercy, Lord, we praise;
Of judgement too we sing;
For all the riches of thy grace
Our grateful tribute bring.

Thy mercies bid us trust;
Thy judgements strike with awe;
We fear the last, we bless the first,
And love thy righteous law.

Who can thy acts express,
Or trace thy wondrous ways?

How glorious is thy holiness;
How terrible thy praise!

Thy judgements are too deep
For reason's line to sound.
Thy tender mercies to thy sheep
No bottom know, nor bound.⁶

**A detachment from the Middlesex Regiment.
Arthur W. Pither, who attended Providence Chapel, Ponsard Road, London, is second from the left (see p. 68)**



Services at Brockham Green Chapel, Surrey, shortly before the outbreak of the First World War. The four men in the centre of the photo are (from left to right), Richard Shillingford (Guildford, chairman for many years of the Gospel Standard Societies), James Dickens (pastor at Rotherfield), Henry Haddow (pastor at Brockham Green and secretary of the Gospel Standard Societies), and Peter Wadey (Horley, supply minister)



Overview

Overview

When the year 1914 opened on Europe, political storm clouds had been gathering thickly for some time. The nations of Europe, driven by rampant imperialism, had been building their military might, and the peace which existed had a definite air of fragility. Britain, while not foremost in the arms race, had not been idle in this contest.

Among Strict Baptist churches the year started uneventfully. William *Gadsby's Selection of Hymns*, the hymn book used among most Strict Baptist congregations, marked the 100th anniversary of its first publication in the summer of the year. The churches continued as they had for many a year, meeting week by week for worship, and uniting together for mutual benefit around monthly spiritual magazines and charitable funds for the relief of the poor. But by the end of the year Europe and her subjects, Strict Baptists among them, had been plunged into a war which changed the face of Europe dramatically.

Mr Walter Croft, the pastor of West Street Chapel, Croydon, described the events which led to the war in the following piece, published in *The Friendly Companion* in 1921.

✎ In June, 1914, there occurred an event on the Continent of Europe serious indeed, but not serious enough in itself to produce a world-wide catastrophe. The state of the nations of Europe, however, at that particular time, was one of formidable armaments on every hand, and only a spark was needed to set Europe ablaze. The assassination of the Austrian Crown Prince and his wife at Sarajevo was the spark

which fired the powder magazines of Europe. Austria charged Serbia with plotting the murder of the Archduke and his wife, and demanded reparation for the crime, together with many internal reforms of government within a short time limit, under the threat of war if she failed to comply. Serbia replied that she was prepared to hand over for trial any Serbian subject, without regard to his situation or rank, of whose complicity in the crime of Sarajevo proofs were forthcoming; also she offered to comply with practically all the requirements of Austria. Austria declared that Serbia had not answered in a satisfactory manner her note of July 23rd, 1914, and immediately declared war.

At the critical moment, when the question of peace or war between Austria and Serbia was hanging in the balance, everything depended on the attitude of Germany. Germany assured Austria of her whole-hearted support in any action she proposed to take against Serbia, and at the same time declined to take any part in the proposed conference in London to try and settle the matters in dispute between Austria and Serbia.

Russia declared that if, in spite of all her efforts to avoid bloodshed, Serbia was not successful in doing so, she would lend Serbia what support she could. Whereupon Germany addressed a note to Belgium stating that the German Government would be compelled to carry out by force of arms measures considered indispensable to her safety. The King of the Belgians instantly appealed to the King of

England to help him in defending his kingdom against invasion, and the British Government sent a strong note to Germany asking her to refrain from violating a treaty to which she herself had subscribed. As no satisfactory answer was returned to this appeal, England, France and Russia, under Treaty obligations, declared war on Germany, and on August 4th, 1914, German troops entered Belgian territory, and summoned the town of Liège to surrender.⁷



Walter Croft

It is our intention in the following pages to gather together what we know about Strict Baptists during the four years of war which followed, in order to set the scene for the diaries, letters and poems written by Strict

Baptist men and women during the war, which together comprise the larger part of this book.

The Strict Baptist response to war

When Britain declared war on Germany on 4th August, 1914, there was little active protest from Strict Baptists against the war. The almost universal view amongst Strict Baptists appears to have been that this was a just war, that it was according to the sovereign purposes of God, that it was a judgement on the nation for her backsliding, and that the root cause of the war was sin.⁸

One personal Strict Baptist expression of this is found in the obituary of Henry Wiles, brother of Joseph P. Wiles,⁹ and a Strict Baptist minister.¹⁰ It records: “With the clear and unsophisticated vision of faith, he [Henry] found that the patent facts of human life corroborated only too clearly the Scripture record of the fall of man, and the Great War was to him but one more clear evidence of the sinful man’s dire need of a Saviour.” It continues:

✂ He perceived great spiritual forces in the unseen world behind the death-dealing inventions of the Great War, 1914-1918. At the same time, he accepted with clear common sense the teaching of the Apostle in the Letter to the Romans in regard to ‘the sword’ and ‘the powers that be,’ holding the defence of the realm to be a clear bounden duty, and repudiating the reasoning of the conscientious objector in general, though he admired the sincerity and courage of some individuals in their ranks.¹¹

Although in 1914 there were various religious denominations who *en masse* conscientiously objected to

warfare, the Strict Baptists, as a denomination, were not among them. Nevertheless, the question of the justice of the war did of course arise, and there are a few reports of Strict Baptists taking the part of conscientious objectors and refusing to join up, or refusing to bear arms.

The Strict Baptist arguments against the war can be summarised into three themes. *Firstly*, the war was said to be the fruit of a haughty imperialism, of which Britain was as guilty as Germany, and for which there was no Scriptural basis, particularly in the New Testament. *Secondly*, Britain's opponents were felt to be our kith and kin, Britain being a nation of Germanic descent. *Thirdly*, the Germans were a Protestant nation, and Protestant Britain was thought to share more religious interests with Lutheran Germany than with Romanist France and Orthodox Russia, the nations with whom Britain united against Germany.¹²

With the benefit of hindsight, we may well feel that the majority of Strict Baptists may have been swept along by the prevailing sentiments of the day and did not properly consider these objections. Certainly, Britain's opponents in the First World War never posed the same threat to her liberties as did Hitler, Nazism, and her other opponents in the Second World War. It would, however, be unwise to sit in judgement, either on those who willingly joined up to fight, or on those who conscientiously objected. Thoughtful and exercised Christians took both lines, and neither the decision to sign up, nor to conscientiously object, could have been easy, or taken lightly.

Certainly, objections to the war gained little hearing in the country at large. After all, at the time tremendous social stigma was placed on conscientious objectors,

there was a strong and carefully choreographed propaganda machine which was designed to encourage enlistment, and conscription eventually made signing up compulsory.¹³ Yet, despite these pressures, some of the objectors held their position very passionately. One young Strict Baptist who appeared before the courts for refusing to sign up, exclaimed in court, "I'd rather be shot, sir, than shoot another man."¹⁴

Four young Strict Baptist brothers from the Birkenhead congregation refused to fight.¹⁵ According to the newspaper report, "Applicants believed that war was contrary to the teaching of Christ, and they would have nothing to do with either saving life or taking life in connection with war." They went so far as to refuse the proposal that they should serve on fishing trawlers in order to provide for the food needs of the country, because they regarded that as aiding and abetting the cause of war. In the arguments they put, they even said that they would not rescue men who had fought in the war from a sinking ship. While these arguments might appear extreme, they were responses given to the provoking questions asked at these tribunals, which often asked the objectors if they would kill anybody attempting to kill their parents, or violate their sister. The men lost their case before the magistrates, and it is assumed they were compelled to sign up or imprisoned.

Not all objectors to the war among Strict Baptists objected on religious grounds – one man objected because he was a piano tuner by occupation, and refused to fight on the grounds that shell and gun fire might damage his hearing, resulting in loss of livelihood. His appeal stood, and he was excused from combative duties, although he was required to join the Royal Army Medical Corps.¹⁶

Some, while deciding they would rather not personally bear arms, actively chose to join the stretcher parties of the Royal Army Medical Corps, offering humanitarian support to the forces. Of course, serving in the Medical Corps was in no sense the coward's choice. Lance Corporal John Parsons, a stretcher-bearer from the congregation at South Chard, wrote home to his parents from Gallipoli:

✂ ... In the early morning, a party of forty of them [*the 32nd Field Ambulance*] advanced too far with their stretchers, and got cut off by the Turks. At least five of them were killed and five wounded, and about ten are missing ... The Lord has once more been very, very merciful to me and been indeed a shield to guard me from danger ... I saw my poor comrades shot dead beside me; another was dying for hours beside me as I lay all that day behind a stone, not daring to move, for the Turks were only 100 yards away. I was in the rear of our line as we advanced along the ridge, and, with another man, dressed a poor comrade whose leg was shattered, while another dashed off for a stretcher. He did not return, so the two of us made a dash to get one, and my comrade was shot through the lungs, dying seven hours later. I got a bullet through the fleshy part of the upper part of my left arm, and managed to crawl back to safety fifteen hours later.¹⁷

Many men expressed gratitude to the brave stretcher-bearers from the Royal Army Medical Corps. One example is Private A. G. Ord, from the Hartlepool congregation. He wrote of his wartime experience:

✂ It was about six o'clock on Sunday night, July 25th, 1915. I was sitting in the trench talking to my mates about a German airman that had just been

brought down, when suddenly there was a thud and I saw a shell lying at my feet; I could not get up and run. Then there was a bang, and I felt myself lifted off my feet and up, up in the air, wondering when I was coming down again, and I called as I have never called upon the Lord before to help me, a sinner. 'Lord, have mercy on my soul! Lord, have mercy on me! Lord, help me!' and I cannot thank him enough, for he heard my cries and brought me safely through. For as I stopped shouting, somebody got hold of me and said, 'Let's have you out of this,' but I could not move, my legs were doubled up under me and peppered with bits of shell. Then began the journey out to headquarters, and I will never forget it. It is only those that have to go through it that know what it is; but God bless those brave chaps that are never heard of in the papers, 'the stretcher-bearers.'¹⁸

Mr John H. Gosden, who would later become pastor at Maidstone and editor of *The Gospel Standard* magazine, refused to bear arms, serving instead in the Royal Army Medical Corps as a stretcher-bearer, ministering to wounded soldiers. It is known that Mr Gosden disagreed with his pastor, Mr J. K. Popham, as to whether the war was just.¹⁹ Despite finding himself in the position of being compelled to serve in a war which he could not conscientiously support, Mr Gosden speaks of blessings in this time in his life: "I shall never forget, I hope, when walking across a parade



A. G. Ord

ground in the north of England, on the eve of proceeding to France, during the First World War, feeling an inkling of that word in the midst of chaos and trouble: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” For his bravery on the battlefield, when, under heavy fire, he went alone to tend to a young wounded soldier, and was himself wounded in the act, Mr Gosden was awarded the Military Medal.²⁰ Mr S. F. Paul, his biographer, says that during Mr Gosden’s war service, “There is no doubt, he used every opportunity of speaking to the wounded and dying soldiers.” Ultimately, it was in that war service, that the Lord opened the door to Mr Gosden to the work of the ministry.²¹

Whether the war was just or not was not the only consideration that weighed with the Strict Baptists. Whatever the view held as to the rightness of the war, the Strict Baptists universally believed that the war was according to the sovereign purposes of God. As Mr Popham wrote in *The Gospel Standard*:

✎ ‘Without cause’ God was moved against Job, and permitted a fourfold evil to befall him. And to Job there were no Sabeans, no fire, no Chaldeans, no wind, but only God. Shall not we, against whom God has many things, acknowledge him the author of this present calamity?²²

They also universally agreed that the root cause of war was sin, as Mr Popham also stated in *The Gospel Standard*:

✎ We must begin with that which is the cause of all trouble and suffering, and punishment – SIN. It is against God’s nature and revealed will. No sin, no divine displeasure, no outpourings of wrath. So no

sin, no wars. ‘God is angry with the wicked every day.’ As with individuals, so with nations that forget God. ‘Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup’ (Psalm 11: 6). Man was made for God, but he disbelieved, disobeyed, and revolted. For their sins he said of Israel, ‘Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this’ (Jeremiah 5: 9). This is a universal rule.²³



Cornelius Midmer and his wife

Preaching at Ebenezer Chapel, Clapham, less than a month after the declaration of war, the pastor, Mr

Cornelius Midmer said:

☞ Then we look at ourselves under these terribly sad and solemn circumstances, and what do we see here at home? Nothing very cheering, much to make us sad, especially the apathy of so many around us; what multitudes still pursuing their foolish, carnal pleasures, totally indifferent as to whether it be peace or war, with no fear of God before their eyes. Thus the voice is not heard, the chastening and judgement upon us are not regarded. We see the hardening effects of sin, and when the Lord's hand is lifted up, when he comes out of his place to punish the nations for their iniquity, they will not see.²⁴

In a previous generation, at the height of the Crimean War, J. C. Philpot (1802-1869) had written at length on the topic of war in *The Gospel Standard*.²⁵ He concluded with the following practical points for consideration:

☞ Suffer us, Christian readers, to add a word of *instruction*, and to point out how these events should be viewed in harmony with the revealed will of God and the spirit of faith in a believer's heart, as well as what is the becoming path of those who fear the Lord at this eventful crisis.

1. The first grand point is to view them as *all working out God's decreed purposes* and bringing about the plans and designs of the Most High. Whilst the unbelieving world sees nothing in these events beyond the hand of man, let the Christian see behind the cloud the directing, controlling, overruling hand of God. This will enable us to look at them with a degree of calmness not otherwise attainable, and preserve us from being elated or depressed by every gust of prosperous or adverse tidings. 'The LORD

reigneth' is or should be sufficient to still every fear and remove every doubt as to the eventual issue. That issue, beyond all doubt, must be the glory of God and the good of those who fear his great name.

... We may be sure that the events now on the wheels are full of importance both to the church and the world. Their ultimate effect none can foresee, but few can doubt that the intervening period will be marked with suffering and blood. The latter we may not be called upon to spill or witness; the former we may have, in some measure, to endure. So great a calamity as war cannot occur without seriously affecting all classes of society. Heavy taxes, commercial embarrassments, serious losses in trade and business, and general rise of prices, may press deeply on those of our readers who have a little measure of this world's goods; and dear provisions, failing employment, and scanty wages may sorely try those who have to live by the skill of their fingers or labour of their hands. But let us only believe that the Lord holds the reins of government, and must reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet, and it will be like oil on the troubled sea, stilling every wave into a calm.

2. Now what we would desire to feel in ourselves and to see in our Christian friends, is what will certainly flow from such a believing view as we have just spoken of, *a patient submission* to what we may be called upon to endure. We cannot alter matters. The war may be a great evil, and we may be ready, under the pressure it may bring, to murmur against our rulers for plunging the nation into it. But there it is; and all our murmurings and frettings against heavy taxes and dear provisions will not put an end to it.

The load, however, which cannot be shaken off, may be made lighter by submission under it.

3. The last point to which we would direct the mind of our readers is the desirableness of *bringing these matters before the throne of grace*, especially in the assembling of ourselves together. We have of late felt ourselves reprov'd in conscience as guilty of having too much neglected the apostolic injunction (1 Timothy 2: 1, 2). Afraid of formality, and chiefly pleading for spiritual blessings, we have most commonly closed our public petitions without dropping a word of supplication for our Queen and 'for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.' In so doing we have neglected that which the Holy Spirit declares is 'good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.' Without falling, then, into that dry and formal round of praying for everything and everybody which characterises the congregations of the dead, we would press on those who are mouth for the people, whether ministers or private Christians, in our public assemblies, that they would put up a word for our beloved country, and for those who sit at the helm of government. And why should not a word be dropped for our poor soldiers, among whom there may be some who fear God? To this and every other thing really needed in providence and grace, the good word of God fully encourages us; for if we are invited 'in *every thing* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God,' we have a full warrant to ask of him who alone can make 'peace in our borders,' to put a stop to this horrid bloodshed, and grant us a secure, lasting, and honourable peace.



J. C. Philpot

The fact that Strict Baptists were directed back to this article written by Mr Philpot, and particularly so by Mr Kirby in the pages of *The Christian's Pathway*,²⁶ suggests that the sentiments of Strict Baptists during the First World War were in accord with it.

Reasons given for joining up

Despite occasional instances of opposition to the war, the evidence suggests that most Strict Baptists of the time willingly joined up, placing themselves at the

disposal of the country in fighting against Germany and its allies. From 1915 to 1919, *The Christian's Pathway* ran a feature called 'The Muster Roll.' For a small fee, people could send in photos of those serving in the war, along with a few personal details. Although some accused it of being a gallery for boasting, it served a useful purpose at the front, providing those serving in the forces with details of peers whom they might meet during their service (with a photo to aid recognition).²⁷ Over 600 pictures and accounts were published, hinting that a considerable number of Strict Baptist signed up, although it is impossible to give a precise number as to how many actually did. Of the churches contributing to 'The Muster Roll,' we know their submissions did not include every man who signed up from their congregations. There are records of many from Strict Baptist chapels who served in the war, and who do not appear on 'The Muster Roll.' Only 87 churches are represented on 'The Muster Roll,' from an estimated 550 Strict Baptist congregations at the time.²⁸

Some men, of course, had less than noble reasons for joining up. Andrew Woodford, who in later life was a church member at Downton, Wiltshire, wrote:

✎ I decided to join the army and get to France where I might have a 'good time.' What grief this caused my wife and dear mother! But the Lord's hand was in it all. I had to be shown and made to bow at the feet of a mighty God, and cry for mercy and pardon for past and present sins. I could see that I was to face death, and after death the judgement; which made me cry for mercy, knowing and feeling myself to be a hell-deserving sinner. What I thought would be a time of enjoyment in worldly pleasures, turned out to be three years of prayer. I can truly say

that I was brought as Paul says to 'pray without ceasing.'²⁹

Similarly, William Swan, who would later become a minister of the gospel, and pastor at Haywards Heath, joined the army in 1917, "intending to have a good time."³⁰



William Swan

Thankfully, however, this was not the case with all. Before conscription was introduced, it was, of course, a matter of choice whether or not to volunteer for the armed forces. The strong feeling of duty to king and country shines through in numerous accounts.

There are records of many who joined up during this period only after a great deal of consideration and prayer. For instance, Reuben Paul of Brighton searched the Scriptures and prayed for guidance. He was killed in France in 1918, aged 25. His parents wrote in his obituary:

✎ We trust that this our great loss is our dear

boy's eternal gain ... We believe the Word of God was his guide in every difficulty, and he searched it to find direction and guidance. His nervous temperament naturally shrank from joining the army, and in this the latter part of Numbers 32: 6: 'Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here?' helped him to decide; also 1 Peter 2: 17: 'Fear God. Honour the king.'

In 1912 he obtained a situation in London, and from that time frequently wrote home expressing his anxious desires that he might find Divine guidance in every step ... He was much affected by witnessing a bad air raid in London in September, 1915,³¹ and in October wrote, 'I suppose you have seen the King's letter this morning; I think that should appeal to everyone; it made me think of the scripture, "Fear God. Honour the king."' This led him to volunteer, and on November 20th, 1915, he entered the 18th King's Royal Rifle Corps.³²

Another young man who volunteered was John Woodfield. He is an instance of someone who, faced with the enormity of the decision to volunteer, was driven to prayer in making this decision, even though in his case this prayerfulness was unexpected by his parents. John Woodfield's father recorded:

☞ One morning, after talking with his mother about the matter, he came to me and said: 'Dad, what do you think about me joining up?' I said, 'Well, I do not know what to advise for the best; but do not be in a hurry, consider it well first.' But although never before anxious to enlist, his mind seemed set upon it, so that I did not dissuade him further. When leaving home, he said, 'Mother, you know I am not doing this without prayer,' which surprised her, as he had never

before said anything as to prayerful exercise of mind.³³

During the first 18 months of the war, voluntary enlistment to the army provided sufficient manpower. However, with the death toll rising, and as voluntary enlistment dropped off, the Military Service Act was passed in January, 1916, to introduce conscription for all single men aged 18-41 years. A few months later, in May, 1916, this was also extended to married men. Once conscription was introduced, men found themselves without any choice in whether they joined the forces or not. This providence could be very hard to understand, yet unusual submission often seems to have been given. This was so in the case of Joseph Brooks of Bexley:

☞ In another letter, speaking of the trial in having to join the army and leaving home and friends, he says, 'I know not the reason now, but am content to stand and look on like Manoah and his wife while the angel of the Lord works wondrously.' Again, writing from France he says, 'I am now in a position I did not want to be in, but still it is only my duty, and by God's help I will endeavour to do it; I feel I can say, with the poet,



Joseph Brooks

Where is death's sting? where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if thou abide with me.³⁴

Life in the forces

In the early part of the First World War, those signing up had some liberty to choose which service they joined, whether army, navy, or air force. However, as the war wore on, there was less choice, and those signing up were placed wherever they were needed.

Strict Baptists appear to have been represented in each of the forces, perhaps predominantly in the army, although this is unsurprising, as the army was numerically the largest of the services. There are letters and reports of Strict Baptists serving all over the world, including in France, Belgium, Ireland, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, Palestine, and India.

We will briefly survey the forces in turn, giving a few biographical extracts from men serving in each of them.

The Army

The vast majority of Strict Baptists serving in the army joined the ranks as privates.³⁵ A few of these earned promotion through the ranks of corporal, sergeant, and a couple even held the rank of sergeant major (the highest non-commissioned rank). There were a few who entered the army as commissioned officers, generally because of their position in society, or their education. Of these, perhaps the most notable Strict Baptists were Lieutenant Grey Hazlerigg and Captain Thomas Maynard Hazlerigg, the two sons of Grey Hazlerigg, the pastor at Leicester, and for a time editor of *The Gospel Standard* magazine.³⁶ Before joining the Strict Baptists and becoming a minister, their father, Grey Hazlerigg, had himself held office in the army, joining the 48th Regiment of Foot in 1837.³⁷ His brother

was the 12th Baronet Hesilrige, and his great nephew, Arthur Grey Hazlerigg, became the 13th Baronet in 1890. Captain Thomas Maynard Hazlerigg had a distinguished military career in the Royal Army Service Corps, being awarded the Military Cross for bravery on the battlefields of France, and later serving with the British forces in the Russian Civil War in North Russia and the Black Sea area. After the war he was appointed Crown Solicitor in Hong Kong, and in recognition of this service he was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire.³⁸ Sadly, it does not appear that either of Grey Hazlerigg's sons followed their father with regards to the things of grace.



Lieut. G. Hazlerigg (left) & Capt. T. M. Hazlerigg (right)

Rank, however, did not protect the men serving in the army from the worst of the war. The sights these men saw and experienced are difficult for us to relate to today.

Not long after he was sent to France, Samuel Saunderson, from the congregation at Southill Chapel, had a comrade die in his arms. As the weeks passed and conditions deteriorated, he wrote to his mother to tell her that he did not expect to survive, and that consequently she must consider the money he had

saved prior to being called up as her own.

Shortly after writing that letter, the verse by Joseph Hart came powerfully to him:

But they that in the Lord confide,
And shelter in his wounded side,
Shall see the danger overpast,
Stand every storm, and live at last.³⁹

Very soon after, he was shot in the knee and returned to hospital at Poole, in England. Mercifully, healing was granted, and he was restored to health.⁴⁰



Samuel Saunderson

Henry Julyan served in the Royal Engineers. He could recall an occasion when he was sent to the front with a dispatch, and set off amidst heavy shelling. He came to a point where he feared to go on because of the shelling, but, in answer to prayer, the shelling stopped, and he went on. After delivering the message he returned, and when he came to the same place where he had been when the shelling stopped on the outward journey, the enemy shelling recommenced, but he was enabled to return to the camp in safety.⁴¹

In the face of these terrible conditions, men showed remarkable bravery, and this was acknowledged with the award of medals, or mention in officers' dispatches. A number of Strict Baptists were decorated for their bravery. One example of this is Lance Corporal William Wylde, a member of the

congregation at Bolton, who served with the 2nd Battalion, Loyal North Lancashire Regiment in East Africa. He was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for "conspicuous bravery and coolness under very heavy fire in the action at Tanga, German East Africa, and on



William Wylde

several occasions rallying together parties of men, and thereby checking the enemy's fierce counter-attacks."⁴² To our knowledge, the most decorated Strict Baptist was Reuben S. Paul, of Brighton, who received the Distinguished Conduct Medal, the Military Medal, and, posthumously, the French Croix de Guerre.⁴³

Some spent only an extremely brief time in the trenches. Private John Luther Walton, West Yorkshire

Regiment, who was a member of the congregation at Zion Chapel, Siddal, was sent out to the front in April, 1916. He served just two days in the trenches before being killed on 19th May, 1916, aged 25 years.⁴⁴ He is buried in Tranchée de Mecknes Cemetery, France.



John Luther Walton

For some, the Lord used their war experiences as the means to call them by grace. Albert Wilson, later deacon at Ebenezer Chapel, Luton, wrote,

☞ I became morally corrupted, and when I joined the army at seventeen years and four months, I tried to throw all religion off, though I used to pray at times. At the Battle of Messines in 1917, the Lord touched my heart and made me happy though in danger. In July, 1917, I was deeply convicted under hymn 1050:



Albert Wilson

Then may I sin forsake,
The world for thee resign;
Gracious Redeemer, take, O take,
And seal me ever thine!

From then on I was a seeker, hanging on the Word to see if there was any hope for me. In 1919, when I was demobbed, I came to Luton. One Sunday morning Mr Kemp preached from: 'The fruit of the Spirit is faith,' and I trembled how it would be with

me, but instead of condemnation I had consolation, and the closing hymn of the service was on repentance:

Nor is it such a dismal thing
As 'tis by some men named;
A sinner may repent and sing,
Rejoice and be ashamed.⁴⁵

I walked then for a short time in gospel liberty, and I remember the Scripture flowing into my mind when viewing the beauties of nature, 'And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.'⁴⁶

Of the many accounts of men serving in the army, nearly all of them make reference to the blessing, help and encouragement they found in the couplet from John Ryland's hymn (Gadsby's Hymns, number 64):

Not a single shaft can hit,
Till the God of love sees fit.

One such example is as follows:

☞ Charles Hubbard joined the army, beginning of September, 1914. He first joined the Warwicks, but the company being too rough for him, he exchanged into the 2nd Wiltshires, and was made corporal. He was sent to the front last spring. Fearing, however, the responsibility of a corporal, he gave up his stripe.⁴⁷ He was in the dreadful battle of Neuve Chapelle. When he and six of his company were advancing quite near the



Charles Hubbard

German trenches, they were all cut down and killed but Charles, who, while bullets were whistling all around, got back a distance into a hole made by a 'Jack Johnson.'⁴⁸ After he crouched down in this hole the firing ceased, the Germans apparently thinking they had killed him. Then he found he was lying by the side of a dead man, but there he kept until darkness came on, when he succeeded in creeping back to the British lines unhurt, thinking much upon the two lines of Dr Ryland's hymn, which I quoted in one of my letters to him (so he wrote and told us):

Not a single shaft can hit,
Till the God of love sees fit.⁴⁹

Another example is that of Private Henry Job Stubbs, Leicestershire Regiment, who attended Providence Chapel, Oakham. In his diary for 1st and 2nd July, 1916, he wrote that what he saw of the dead and wounded unnerved him; but while thinking over his narrow escape from death, the words came to mind,



Henry Job Stubbs

Not a single shaft can hit,
Till the God of love sees fit.

Just two days later, on 4th July, the 'shaft' was to hit him, and he passed away in a casualty clearing station the next day, aged 25 years.⁵⁰ He is buried in Warlincourt Halte British Cemetery, France.

For some, when the 'shaft' hit, they plainly saw God's love in it. This was the case with George Relf,

who had been baptised at Biddenden Chapel just before joining the army, and would later be sent into the ministry.

✂ Joining the army at the close of 1915, he saw active service in France, and experienced many remarkable deliverances. For 16 months he faced death every day; there were many errands to the throne of grace. Wounded in 1918, he was sent back



George Relf and his wife

to England, never to return to the fighting line. This remarkable deliverance proved to him the truth of the lines:

Plagues and deaths around me fly,
Till he bids I cannot die;
Not a single shaft can hit,
Till the God of love sees fit.⁵¹

For the battle was very fierce just after, many of his fellow soldiers being killed, so that the wounding was a blessing in disguise.⁵²

The comfort men drew from the hymn was not that they were to be untouched by the fighting, but rather, that if and when they were hit, it was in the loving purposes of a sovereign God. This comes across in a letter written by Corporal Percy Cornwell, from Jireh Chapel, Brixton, to a friend: "I am glad to be able to know that he who has preserved me thus far in this war can keep me under his care *until he sees fit* ..." When the Lord did see fit to take Percy Cornwell home he died from a single wound, on 24th May, 1917, aged 34 years.⁵³ He is buried in Warlincourt Halte British Cemetery, France.

Other hymns were made a particular blessing too. The widow of Joseph Obbard, of Tunbridge Wells, wrote in his



Percy Cornwell



Joseph Obbard

obituary:

✂ His last letters were chiefly upon better things. He seemed to fully realise his solemn position, and he spoke of that verse being so sweet to him only two days before his death:

His love in time past forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink;
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review
Confirms his good pleasure to help me quite
[through].⁵⁴

He hoped he should be spared to come home to his loved ones and his little business, but the Lord willed it otherwise.⁵⁵

He was killed instantaneously by a shell bursting over his dugout on 19th September, 1917. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial, Belgium.

Several of the men also speak about the impression made on them by the promise in Psalm 91: 7, '... a thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.' Some soldiers had remarkable experiences of the fulfilment of this. The father of Trumpeter George Holmes, of the Strict Baptist congregation at Brantford, Ontario, Canada, who served in the Royal Canadian Dragoons during the war, sent the following account of his son to *The Friendly Companion*:

✂ He had been sent with 49 other soldiers to perform some special duty.



George Holmes

We assume the duty had been accomplished and he saw one of his comrades lying before him. He spoke to him and, not receiving any answer, put out his hand and touched him, he found him to have been shot dead, and then he found that all the 49 others were dead in a like manner, and he alone had been spared, having only a bad flesh wound, which healed in due time and he returned again to the front.⁵⁶



Thomas Burfoot and his wife

It is recorded of Thomas Burfoot, later a deacon at Hope Chapel, Blackboys, Sussex: “When in the trenches on the front line, Psalm 91: 1-7 was made very appropriate when many of his fellow-soldiers around were mown down by gunfire while he was spared. He was also favoured at times under these circumstances to feel peace in his soul and communion with the Lord.”⁵⁷ In later life, Mr Burfoot was approached by a young girl doing a school project on the war, who asked about his army experiences. As soon as the trenches were mentioned his eyes filled with tears and all he

could say was, “Ah, sweet times they were! Yes, sweet times, they were sweet times.” He just kept repeating these same words and seemed unable to say anything else. There was no mention of the deprivations, the dead and the dying, and all the other things the young girl expected to hear. The Lord had clearly been very near and dear to him in the terrible experiences of the war.⁵⁸

The words of Psalm 91: 7 could also have been applied to Private Fred Smith, who served in the 1st Battalion, 6th Lancashire Fusiliers. While in Gallipoli, Turkey, he survived three bayonet charges, out of which only 17 of his regiment escaped unharmed (he being one of them). The remainder were either killed or wounded.⁵⁹ Six Victoria Crosses were awarded to the battalion for their bravery on the opening day of the Gallipoli campaign, on 25th April, 1915.



Fred Smith

Today, when we think of the First World War, we generally think of the Western Front, and the terrible scenes on the Somme and at Passchendaele. However, it was not called a ‘world war’ without reason. The conflict spread from the countries immediately bordering Germany, throughout South East Europe, and on to the Asian and African continents. Much of this spread of conflict was driven by the nature of the war – a war of empires. The nations of Europe, which were at the centre of the war, had empires which circled the globe. Additionally, the Turkish (or Ottoman) Empire sided with Germany, formally entering the war

in November, 1914, bringing the conflict to the Middle East as well. Strict Baptists were represented in the army serving in all these various arenas of war. The men fighting in these far off places, no less than the men serving on the Western Front, saw the Lord's preserving mercies in striking ways. A. V. Dougan served in Palestine during the war. He wrote of a deliverance afforded from a sandstorm:

✎ In the early months of 1917, as a unit of the British Army which captured Palestine, after march-

ing over the Sinai desert, we lay encamped at Khan Tunis, a village on the Palestine border. As orders came for an attack on Gaza, a town famous in Old Testament history (you will remember Samson carried away its gates), the writer, along with another soldier, was detailed to proceed to the ration dump ten miles distant to bring back our supply of food, and forage for our animals. Mounted on Bedouin racing camels and armed in case of danger, we set out accompanied by twelve luggage camels and two

The Camel Corps



native camel drivers. All went well for six miles or so of the way, when suddenly grains of sand began to sting our faces, and the camels became restless. Looking towards the south east, we saw approaching us the spiral columns of sand whirling and dancing like the dervishes of the Sudan, and in their train what appeared to be a solid wall of sand. It was the dreaded sand storm. To turn and flee before it with our swift racing camels might have enabled us to reach a place of safety, but with the slow moving baggage animals in our charge, it was impossible. Nothing could be done but to make the camels kneel down and for us to take shelter behind them, hoping that the storm might alter its course. The camels, as though knowing the danger, without their usual grumbling at the command to *barakb* (Arabic: kneel down), at once went down on their fore-knees, and gathering their hind legs under their bellies, squatted on the sand, a living wall, four deep. Seating ourselves with the natives in the shelter of the camels' bodies, we awaited the coming storm. With a noise like an angry sea it it reached us, and with the falling sand the light of the sun was hidden from us. After what seemed like hours, the camels began to move about, and after a heave or two, as if throwing off a heavy weight, arose to their feet, and in the clearance made by them we were able to free ourselves from the sand which from the chest downward held us captive, and rise to our feet also. The sand was clinging to our faces and clothes, but our lives were spared. The camels, in the providence of God, proved to be our safety, our 'hidingplace from the tempest.'⁶⁰

For some serving in Palestine, the war also provided an opportunity to see some of the sites

associated with Biblical history, especially those associated with the life of the Lord Jesus. It is recorded of Mr Frank Hare, who was the deacon at Stotfold for 42 years until his death in 1975:

✎ Feeling it to be his duty to serve his nation, in 1915 he enrolled in the army and saw active service in Palestine. This land of the Bible provided him with much profitable interest in his off-duty hours as he searched the Scriptures. On one particular occasion, he felt a measure of the blessing in Luke 24: 50-51 [*And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from the, and carried up into heaven*] in his own soul, as he sat by the roadside on the Mount of Olives near to Bethany reading that portion.⁶¹



Frank Hare

Perhaps one of the more unexpected spheres of service during the war was Ireland. The war produced serious discontent in Ireland, especially when there appeared to be a threat of conscription of Irish men to join the British armed forces. In response to this, the Irish Nationalists, who were seeking independence for Ireland, rose up against the British rule, taking the opportunity of the distraction to the British Government offered by the First World War. The resulting Easter Rising of 1916, led, among others, by Padraig Pearse, a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, was quickly overpowered and put down by the British Army. Mr Reginald Morris, who would

later become pastor at Clifton Chapel, Bedfordshire, was sent to Dublin on 27th April, 1916, to help quell the Irish rebellion. He then spent six months stationed in The Curragh, till his regiment was called back to England in January, 1917, to head for the Somme a month later.⁶² Mr Morris sent back a number of postcards to his family showing the damage done by the Easter Rising, and some of these are reproduced in this book.



Reginald Morris



John Pack

During this period, the situation in Ireland became quite dangerous for the British troops stationed there. John Pack, the son of Seth Pack, and brother to J. Oliver Pack, both successively pastors at Irthlingborough, kept a diary, detailing his stay in Ireland while in military training. He records some interesting eyewitness accounts of the effect of the discontent on the British Army:



Postcard sent home by Mr Morris showing the damage caused from the Easter Rising

Since the outbreak of the Sinn Fein rebellion we had been confined to barracks [in Ballincollig], as in the region around Bandon and all this southern part of Ireland, the sympathies of many of the people were with the 'Sinn Feiners.' I had been receiving letters from Bandon; there was a little battle there between some and they used the [Presbyterian] Manse as a first aid post for the wounded ... During this time we heard of the landing at Dingle Bay of a man from a

German submarine (I have forgotten his name). He was to lead the rebellion, but was captured, and I believe later executed for treason ... Early in the spring of 1916 I got a pass for home leave ... We went to Cork, then got the first train we could to Dublin where we arrived in the evening. We found out it was several hours before our boat sailed, so three of us took a walk down Sackville Street to see the damage, as the fighting there had been so severe.⁶³



Another of Mr Morris's postcards showing the ruins in Dublin

Of course, in order to get to Ireland, or any part of the front line, all had to cross the sea. This had its own dangers, often comparable to fighting at the front. German submarines attacked the ships regularly, and the journey could be terrifying. Private John Parish, the superintendent of the Sabbath School at Rochdale Road Chapel, Manchester, sent the following letter recalling his journey from home to fight at the Dardanelles, in Turkey:

✎ No doubt you will have read in the papers of the terrible disaster which befell our ship the *Royal Edward* on Friday last. I hasten to let you know that I was among the rescued, and now am safe at Alexandria ... I was in my cabin at the time the submarine attacked us and fired the torpedo which struck us amidships, so that the ship sunk in less than five minutes ... and just had time to fasten on my lifebelt and walk to the side down to the next deck lower; and seeing the water rising rapidly I plunged into the sea and swam away from the ship out to a lifeboat, which had got well away. This boat contained about 28 men, and was so full of water that it was entirely submerged, but did not sink ... After four hours in this boat we were picked up by a French minesweeper.⁶⁴

The precise death toll of the sinking of the *Royal Edward* is unknown, although it is generally given as being about 1,000 men.

One mother wrote describing a remarkable account of preservation granted from a submarine attack:

✎ I thought you would like to know and rejoice with me at the Lord's goodness and preserving mercy to our dear Ernest up till the 21st of last month. It seems they were going to A— when they saw a

submarine coming toward them. The captain told them nothing but a fog could save them; when, to their surprise, a dense fog came over them in three-and-a-half minutes, which lasted three-and-a-half hours, which hid and shielded them from the sight of the enemy. When the fog passed away and they saw they were safe, the captain called them together on deck, and held a thanksgiving service for their deliverance.⁶⁵

The Royal Navy

For the navy, of course, the threat from submarines, mines, and torpedoes was constant, and many men lost their lives at sea.

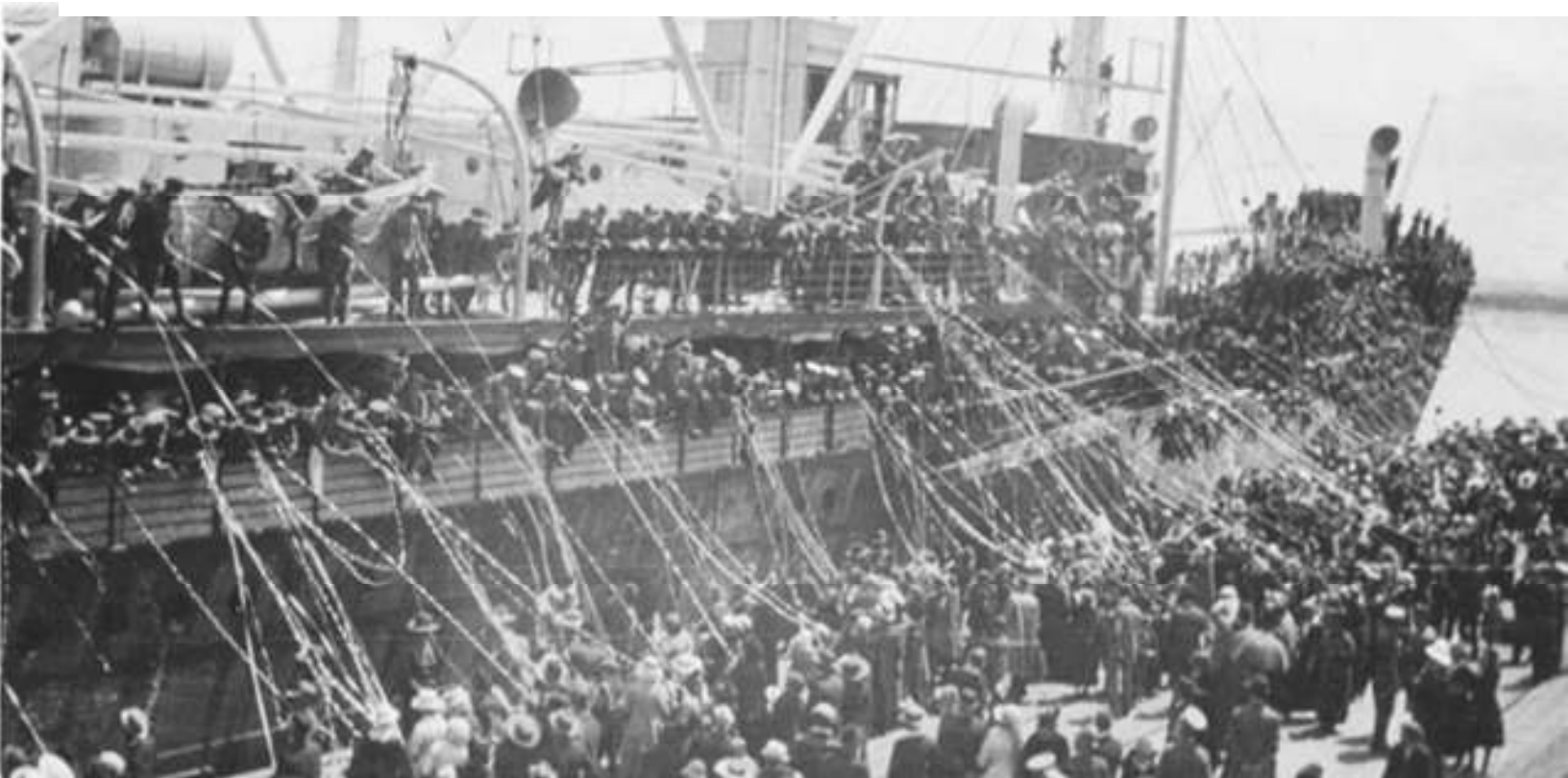
Albert Murray, Officer's Steward on board *H.M.S. Arabis*, was drowned with the sinking of his ship during the Battle of Dogger Bank on 11th February, 1916. He was a member of the congregation at Ebenezer Chapel, Legh Street, Warrington. His father served during the war in the navy too, aboard *H.M.S. Highflyer*.⁶⁶



Albert Murray

John Victor Bear, a member of the congregation at Mount Zion Chapel, Ramsgate, had joined the Royal Navy before the war, in September, 1910, and served as

Troops embarking for France



chief telegraphist on *H.M.S. Hampshire*. From 1915, *H.M.S. Hampshire* had been stationed with the Grand Fleet in Scapa Flow, in the Orkney Islands. On 30th May, 1916, she sailed for the Battle of Jutland, returning safely to Scapa Flow on the 3rd June. On the evening of 5th June, Lord Kitchener, Field Marshall of the British Army, joined the ship. Lord Kitchener (famous for the recruiting posters, which showed him pointing at the reader, with the slogan “your country needs you”) was to sail to Russia for diplomatic talks with the Tsar. However, shortly after leaving Scapa Flow, *H.M.S. Hampshire* struck a minefield laid by a German submarine. The explosion ripped the ship apart. A Force 9 gale was blowing at the time, and the ship sank within 15 minutes. Just 12 men survived the wrecking, and, demonstrating that the ravages of war have no regard to rank or eminence, both Lord Kitchener and John Bear were lost. John Bear was aged 22 at the time. John’s younger brother, Harold Owen Alfred Bear, also served in the Royal Navy, as leading signalman on *H.M. Submarine G12*. He was accidentally drowned on 6th May, 1918. The bodies of both brothers were never



John V. Bear (left) & Harold O. A. Bear (right)

reclaimed from the sea, and they are remembered today on the Naval Memorial at Chatham.

Just as in all the forces, for some men serving in the navy exposure to the death of their comrades was sometimes the means used by the Holy Spirit, either to commence or to advance the work of grace in their souls. It is recorded of Edgar Hargreaves, deacon at Zoar Chapel, Bradford, that: “During the 1914-1918 War,



Edgar Hargreaves

he served in the Royal Navy and passed through many hardships. The washing overboard of one of the ship’s company while he was on watch, created a deep impression on his mind as to his standing and condition had he been in his mate’s place. Although oft in perils on the sea, his life was preserved.”⁶⁷

For others, gentler means in their path of duty were used for the good of their souls. Mr Percy Lodge, who for many years was the deacon at Gravesend, and served on the committee of the Gospel Standard Societies and as chairman of the Gospel Standard Trust, entered the navy on 1st April, 1917. There is no record of his service, except this comment in his obituary: “While stationed at Portsmouth, he attended the chapel there, where the dear Lord used an old sailor, who hobbled about with a wooden leg, to deepen the work of grace in his heart by his simple prayers at the prayer meetings.”⁶⁸

Service in the navy also had the disadvantage that men were enclosed in a small space with worldly company, with less opportunity than on land to find