

# 'TITCH'

of the DIV. CAU.

A MEMOIR OF

L/Serqt. P. L. TITCHENER

2nd N.Z.E.F.





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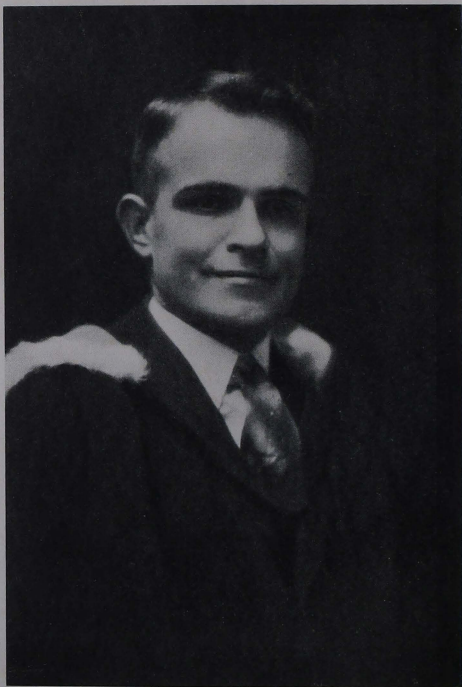
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PERCY LYNDON TITCHENER, B.A.

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## FOREWORD

PERCY LYNDON TITCHENER was a student of whom his university, the University of Otago, was proud. By his personality he stood out among his fellows; and, some months before he enlisted, another Otago student had covenanted to link her fate with his, and they gave promise of making a joint contribution of rare quality at once to the joyousness and fun of the world and to its serious moral and Christian purpose. That was not to be: Titchener is now one of

the inheritors of unfulfilled renown,  
one of

the sacred dead  
Who went and who return not.

But

What happy bonds unite you, ye living and  
dead,

Your fadeless love-bloom, your manifold  
memories!

It is altogether fitting that his friends should unite to produce this memoir, and I thank them for the signal honour of being invited to write the Foreword. Rather unusually, but unavoidably, it is written with only a vague knowledge of what the volume is to contain; but this I know, that if the memoir matches the theme it will be a challenging trumpet-call which must stir the hearts of all who read it. For Titchener, it was plain to see, drew constant inspiration from a source beyond himself which gave direction and momentum to all he did. It gave him the dogged determination by which he won success in university studies for which he had less than the usual foundation but which he joyfully set himself to master. Above all it gave him that personal magnetism which, wherever he went, in Egypt as in New Zealand, made him a presence that attracted and

impressed. And he was as whole-hearted in his fun as in his serious interests: put him in a holiday group and he was the accepted leader in all wholesome frolic and jollity. From all which it emerges that by sheer force of character he was a born leader; and, so far as human vision can see, it was a calamity that one of his type should at his age have been lost to the world. How invaluable he would have been in the difficult days ahead as a leader and also as a conciliator; for his social and intellectual contacts were as diverse as his sympathies were catholic and tolerant.

But now he is with his peers, Mr. Greatheart and Mr. Valiant-for-Truth; and, when he passed over, all the trumpets would sound for him on the other side. He and they

come transfigured back  
Secure from change in their high-hearted ways,  
Beautiful evermore, and with the rays  
Of morn on their white shields of Expectation.

His soul,

like a star,  
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.

And the value of this memoir will lie in preserving his memory for encouragement and for inspiration.

T. D. ADAMS.

## INTRODUCTION

THE purpose of this book is twofold. Those who knew Percy Titchener best, feel that the manner in which he lived his life and made his sacrifice should be known beyond the circle of his loved ones and closest friends.

In addition, there is a message in his letters. While he was overseas, "Titch" had the reputation of writing and receiving more letters than anyone else in his Regiment. He had a list of seventy-five names of people with whom he maintained correspondence.

The letters, covering a wide variety of topics, reveal more clearly than any memoir, the breadth of vision, the courage and the devotion to Christ, which went into the making of "Titch's" character.

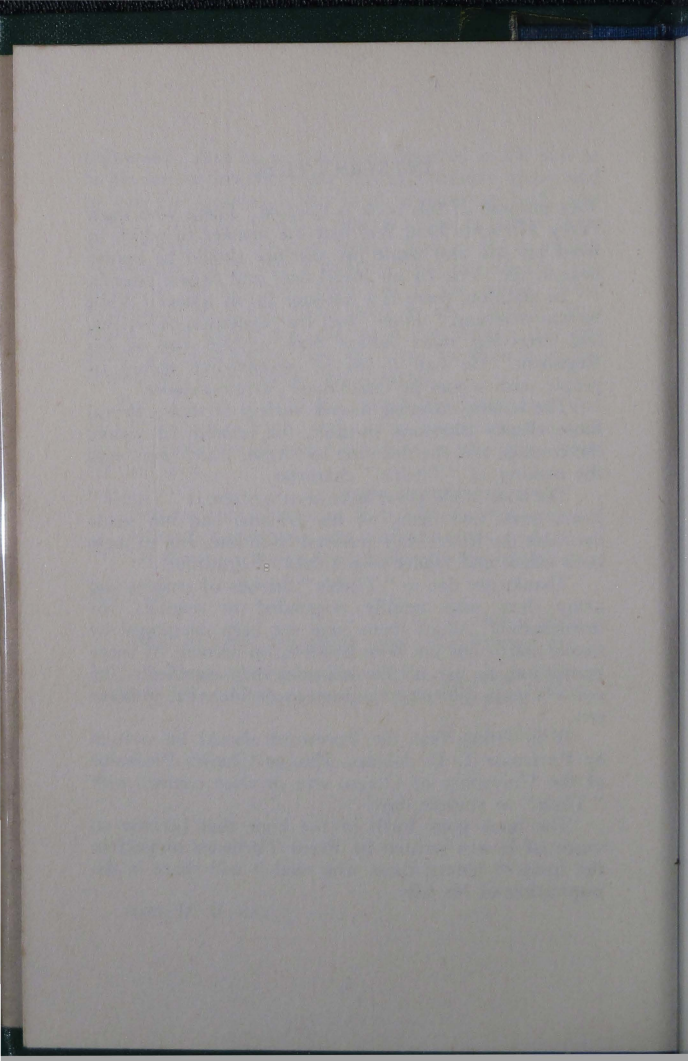
The book could never have been written, if "Titch's" loved ones, and many of his friends, had not made available the letters they received from him, and to them both editor and reader owe a debt of gratitude.

Thanks are due to "Titch's" friends of student and army days who readily responded to requests for information. All of them have not been mentioned by name, and it has not been possible, on account of space restriction, to use all the material they supplied. The editor's main difficulty has been to decide what to leave out.

It is fitting that the Foreword should be written by Professor T. D. Adams, who, as Classics Professor at the University of Otago, was in close contact with "Titch" in student days.

The book goes forth in the hope that because so much of it was written by Percy Titchener himself in the form of letters, those who read it will share in the inspiration of his life.

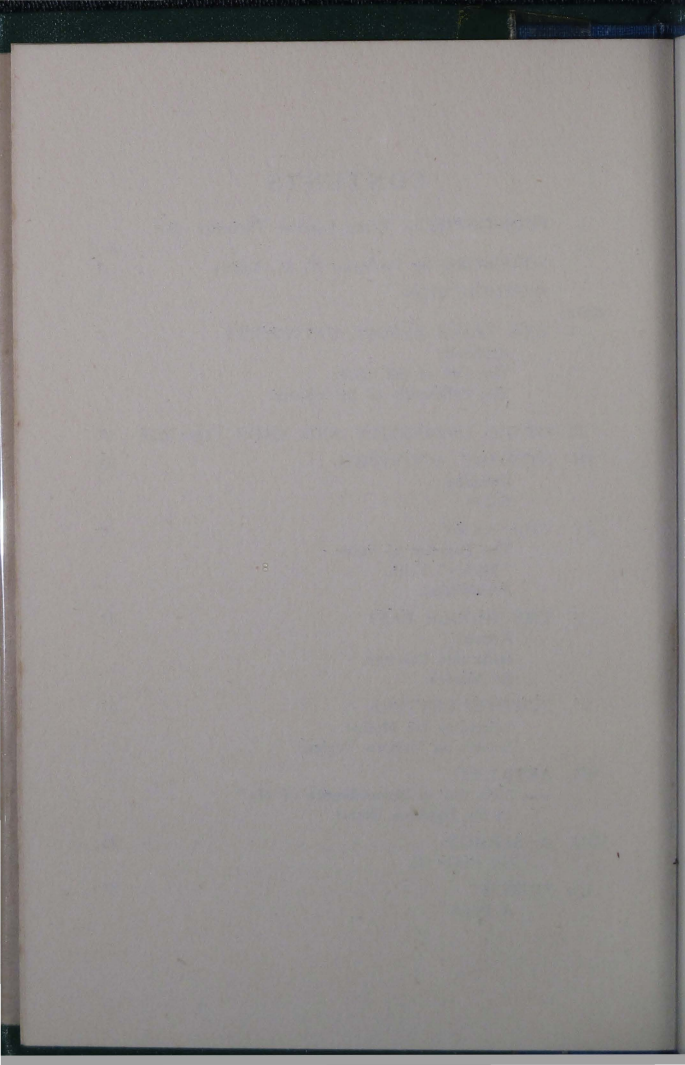
IAN B. WILSON.



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## CHAPTER I

### THE YEARS BEFORE UNIVERSITY

#### BOYHOOD

*"Percy is a bridge between God and the soldiers he is with. He is not a kind of pier of holiness jutting out from God into the world but truly a bridge, with his bridgehead firm on one side in God's territory, and the other deeply rooted in the centre of the lives around him."*

SUCH was the man the Divisional Cavalry Regiment of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force knew as "Titch." His full name was Percy Lyndon Titchener. In his home circle he was known as "Pip," a name he gave to himself when he was very young and unable to say "Percy." He was born at Caversham on July 24th, 1912, the youngest boy of a family of three boys and three girls, two of the girls being younger than he.

He was baptised in the Anglican Church to which his mother belongs. When he was about ten years old, however, he began to attend the Caversham Presbyterian Church, as most of his friends were Presbyterian, and his mother never attempted to influence him away from it.

He received his primary education at the Caversham School. "I'm afraid he was just the average boy in his school days," says his mother, "and as full of mischief as any boy could be. I like to remember how all his fun and nonsense had to be clean and decent, and nothing unworthy was allowed to enter into it."

Full of fun as he was, the studious side of his character developed early, and even as a boy his chief hobby was reading. He was usually to be found in his spare time engrossed in a book, and at an early age he was interested in the forms of Church worship.

Having passed the sixth standard at Caversham, he was enrolled at the Otago Boys' High School. But after little more than a year the death of his father

made it necessary for Percy to leave school. For a time he worked as office boy for a Dunedin firm, but with the removal of his family to the Taieri, Percy found employment there, and his farming days began.

#### THE CALL OF THE LAND

Keen student though he became, Percy never lost the love for the land and especially for the Taieri Plains which developed while he was farming.

Thorough and painstaking in all that he did, Percy became a good farmer, and several men for whom he worked pay tribute to his ability. "He was a good, tidy, and conscientious worker," writes one, "and nothing was too much trouble for him. . . . He was a man of many parts and could turn his hand to any work and make a success of it. He would have made a successful farmer and a good blacksmith. He was particularly interested in good horses. He was in his element getting horses ready for agricultural shows and ploughing matches, and he was a first-class ploughman himself. I could go for a week's holiday and leave him in charge. I have not had a holiday since Percy went to College."

Another writes, "He had a great notion of horses, and was very fond of handling and educating young horses. We had several boys of our own younger than Percy and they got on well together. I sometimes let them go to shows on their own as far as Invercargill, as we knew that when Percy was with them they would not go far astray. He was just one of ourselves, and as keen on his job as any of us."

Those who knew him on the Taieri remember how he was willing to take risks. "In my opinion Percy was too venturesome. He did not know what the word 'fear' meant, and he would venture and go ahead when another man would hesitate."

"Our steadings is on the river-bank, and the river is a very popular place in summer-time. . . . Percy was very fond of diving, and seeing how long he could stay

under water. Often it was long enough to make you wonder if he was coming up at all."

"One New Year's Day he asked to stay at home as he 'wanted off' another day, and the rest of us went to Brighton, leaving Percy in charge. After dinner he jumped on his bike to go somewhere and the forks broke and he came on his head. It was a very hot day, and knocked out by the fall he lay in the sun for some time. When he came to, he got the cows in, milked, separated and washed up, and never knew he was doing it. When we came home one of the boys found him on his bed in the hut with his face all skinned and not feeling too good. He took him home, and Percy had to have a few days off, to get over his New Year's head. But that was his style—always taking chances and sometimes coming to grief, but he still carried on. I think he would fight as he worked and played, and I for one would rather be with him than against him."

During his University and Theological Hall vacations Percy always went back to farm work, and some of his letters reveal how he revelled in it.

"I had a break from the usual work to-day to help break in a young horse; a very interesting occupation."

"I burnt hedge clippings when I arrived here—kept going till dark. It was great in the dusk, watching the flames leap and jump and wondering where they were going. And the places where the fires had been came to life again in the darkness, big red heaps, looking as though they were asking for more to burn. I like to make the smoke rise up in huge billows with green macrocarpa. . . . It's just as well to have an imagination with some jobs, otherwise they get tedious."

*Written from the Taieri, 29/7/40.*

"Being in town is all right, but you have to come out here to get the real beauty of the day. Only twelve miles out to Wingatui, yet when I arrived there everything was different."

"TITCH" of the Div. Cav.

Some of Percy's letters from the Middle East show that his love for the land remained the same.

12/10/42.

"I have seen something of Palestine—sufficient to make me want to see more. The first thing that impresses me, apart from the Holy Land associations, is the work done by the Jews in their settlements. The places are veritable gardens of Eden."

*Written when N.Z. Division went to Syria. 23/3/42.*

" . . . And so on into the Holy Land. It's hard to describe how one felt. First of all there was the strange sight of fertile grounds, cultivation in evidence everywhere and everywhere one sees oranges, the fruit almost ripe. You wouldn't believe the number of oranges the people of Palestine eat. The general price is about six for threepence, and they were *oranges*, great big juicy ones.

"One thought of the Israelites of old. If they saw Palestine as we saw it, just newly arrived from Egypt, no wonder to them it was the Promised Land: green fields after sandy wastes, cultivated fields after the barrenness of the desert, all these things must have seemed beyond belief."

*From Syria, 21/5/42.*

"The most common method of harvesting round here is to pull the grain by hand. That may not convey much, but if you could see the acres and acres sometimes stretching as far as the eye can see, and realise it's all pulled by hand, each stalk of wheat, you would wonder how on earth they do it. Everyone is out, men, women and children, and they pull all day, leaving the pulled wheat in little bundles. Then at the end of the day they load these bundles on donkeys, and the loads these donkeys can carry is simply amazing. I hope to send you some snaps. You'll have a job at times to find the donkey, the load is so big! There must be a terrific drain on the soil the way they harvest here, for they pull

everything up by the roots and nothing goes back to the ground to make up for what has been taken away."

*From Syria, 26/3/42.*

"Over a little gully about 400 yards away a ploughman is at work. His plough is drawn by two donkeys, it should be oxen, but donkeys are more common up here. They are half-starved and can hardly manage their work. The plough is as old as time. I have had a look at it. It is made of wood except for the iron 'share' as we would call it. The ground is not ploughed as we plough. Our plough turns the soil over as far as you wish. This plough rather stirs it up and pushes it aside, that seems to me to be the best way of describing its work. The ploughman grasps a single wooden handle and with this steers the plough and controls the depth. The donkeys have no reins, they just work by word of command, but as most of the time they stop, there is not much danger of their running away."

It must have been during his farming days, in close touch as he was with nature and God's care of all His creatures, that Percy came to love the thought of God as the Shepherd. "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd" was the part that meant most to him in the "Messiah." The 23rd Psalm was his favourite passage of Scripture. Through his experiences as a farmer, his years of struggle as a student, the strain of parting from his loved ones and the bitterness of warfare, he came to an ever deeper understanding of the message of this Psalm. Time and again in his letters, there are references which show what this Psalm came to mean to him, the assurance and comfort that his loved ones and himself were in the eternal keeping of the Shepherd God.

*7/7/41.*

"I have just been looking at my diary and in the first page there is a telegram pasted, part of which is 'Remember the shepherd.' I always do . . . it brings great comfort to me."

*"TITCH" of the Div. Cav.*

30/10/41.

"I think of the 23rd Psalm with its exquisite simplicity. It means more to me week by week than it ever has before."

31/7/42.

"We saw some beautiful country in Syria, vineyards, crops, orchards, all at their best, a marvellous green. It was a picture. The boundary between the two places is wild and rugged country. Once again the nature pictures in the Bible took a fresh life for me, looking at the rugged hills and deep jagged valleys, with here and there a trickle of water, and a patch of green. You can see the Psalm of which I am especially thinking."

Keen and able student though Percy became, he remained very much a farmer at heart. Being in the army meant for him a break with his study and absence from his loved ones. But it had certain compensations, and not the least of these was a return to life in the open and an opportunity to observe other methods of farming both old and new. Wherever he went, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, he revelled in his observations of the pastoral and agricultural methods of the people.

His mind was taken back to the days on the Taieri when he walked behind the plough himself, and those days were among the happiest of his life.

#### THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE CHURCH

It was while he was farming on the Taieri Plain that Percy became a communicant member of the Presbyterian Church at Outram. Transferring his membership later to the East Taieri parish, he made a fine contribution to the life and work of the Allanton Church, as a youth worker and a Deacon.

He was an enthusiastic Bible Class member, "and was always getting in touch with new arrivals in the district and gathering them into the fold. He was no strait-laced or long-faced Christian, but could mix with all sorts of people and enjoy life to the full."

*A Memoir and Letters of L/Sergt. P. L. TITCHENER*

Percy became a sub-leader of the Allanton Bible Class, but his Bible Class fame spread beyond the local Church. He was a well-known figure at Tirohanga Camp, where the Otago Bible Class District Committee has a permanent camp site. Bible Class camping days gave ample scope for fun and pranks, but Percy also played a big part in the serious side of camp life, and his Christian friendship will live in the memory of many Bible Class men. His Bible Class interest and activity continued right through his student days. After he left Allanton, he played his part in the youth work of the Caversham parish, where he had first attended Presbyterian services.

Percy always loved children. In his letters from overseas, there are several references to contacts he made with children in Egypt and Syria. "On the station we had a long wait for the train, and I amused myself with a lad, Yussif Habib, by name, a Coptic Christian who was looking for 'backsheesh.' I promised him half piastre when the train came in if he was good, and the news evidently spread, because we were absolutely surrounded by kids in about five minutes. What a crowd! The station-master tried to clear them away with a broom; *he* wanted to earn 'backsheesh' from us by stopping the children annoying us. I took the broom away from him, and the children thought this was great fun, and back they came. Yussif told me I was 'Good Man,' because I had plenty of money. He had seen my purse. Anyway he got his half piastre and then wanted to come on the train with us. But I wasn't having any. I think Rosie and Doug thought I was a bit cracked encouraging the children, but you can't help it. It's so easy to be friendly with them, and if you forget about their dirt and smell, they're not very different from the children at home.

29/5/42.

"What I'm going to say I'm not quite sure because there's still a combination of feelings chasing through

*"TITCH" of the Div. Cav.*

me. This afternoon up at the village (Syria) I had the marvellous privilege of nursing a six month's old baby! We were in a house and a very nice looking woman came in with the kiddie in her arms, a little dark-haired, dark-eyed baby, dressed in a little silk dress embroidered at the edges and little blue panties. She came to me right away, and I couldn't tell you all the feelings that went through me. It was a strange mixture of pain and joy, envy and regret. And all the time I nursed the kiddie, she never cried a bit. She played with my watch, and I played 'little pigs going to market' with her toes, till she laughed like any N.Z. kiddie. It was a thrill, and this afternoon will stay in my mind a long time."

In a letter written from Burnham in October, 1940, he says, "After the service at St. Paul's this morning there was a baptism. After the general atmosphere of camp life, one seemed to be standing in a very holy place. . . . In these days the baptism of a little child is so significant—Ailsa Jean—what will life hold for her? Given to God, and solemn vows taken by the parents, what does the future hold? Whatever it holds, at least once in her life, unwittingly, she has made me, and probably many more, realise in a simple little service, that the things we believe are precious."

It is not surprising that in the Allanton Church, in addition to Bible Class work, Percy was a Sunday School teacher. For a time also he acted as Sunday School Superintendent.

"I am sure his pupils would never forget the lessons he taught them," writes a member of the Allanton Church. "He was always so thorough in everything he undertook to do. How he found time and energy to do half the things he did, was always a mystery to everybody."

He found time to teach the children because he loved them, and because he loved them he made a good teacher. Even after he began his University work, and when he could no longer attend Deacons' Court meetings and Bible

Class at Allanton, he came out from Dunedin each week-end and taught the children until someone was found to take his place.

It was not until early 1939 that he finally severed his connection with the Allanton Church and became a member at Caversham, and even then he continued to take the keenest interest in the Church he had served so well, and which meant so much to him. At the close of an afternoon service he received a presentation in recognition of his work. Replying, he made feeling reference to the Church's influence on his life. He disclosed that during a service there he decided to obey the call he had received and to serve his Master in the Christian Ministry.

## CHAPTER II

### OTAGO UNIVERSITY AND KNOX COLLEGE

*"I came in from the country pretty green and raw. I shall never forget the mental agony of those first few days."*

"TITCH'S" student days began in March, 1935, when, having received a call to train for the ministry of the Presbyterian Church, he left his farm work and began to study for matriculation, eight years after leaving school.

The "call" was a clear cut and definite experience. The grounding he had received in the Christian faith from his mother, and in his own Sunday School and Bible Class work, must have prepared him mentally and spiritually for the decision he was to make, and the thought of devoting his life to the work of the Church was not new to him. But one day, while he was out ploughing and walking behind his horses, he was suddenly aware of the Voice of God speaking to him and calling him to preach the Gospel.

He never spoke much about that experience. He knew that many people did not believe that a call could

*"TITCH" of the Div. Cav.*

be so real and definite. Years later, writing from overseas, he said, "I have no doubt at all that it is my job to translate my experience here into service for the Church. I was definitely 'called,' in spite of all the abuse heaped on that word, and to that call I intend to remain faithful."

To this call, which changed the whole course of his life, he was faithful from the beginning. It meant that he must leave farm work, his horses and his ploughing, and begin the totally different life of a student, for which his one year at High School was such an inadequate preparation. But Percy never hesitated to obey. And once his decision was made, he began his new work with the same enthusiasm and vigour that he had given to work on the farm.

For several months in 1935, he lived in a hut in the grounds of the East Taieri Manse, helped and encouraged by the minister, the Rev. S. C. Francis. He worked at his books early and late. During the day his study time was broken by the necessity of travelling to Dunedin for coaching in matriculation subjects. But in the evening, as soon as tea was over, he settled down to steady work. About ten o'clock each night he went to the house for supper. Then, after a short break, he went back to his books, and the Manse folk would see his lamp burning in the early hours of the morning.

Despite the fact that much of the work was new to him, Percy passed matriculation in 1935 with ease, gaining very high marks in Latin, which had been an entirely new subject to him at the beginning of the year. As one who helped him through that difficult year has said: "Determination and application were the secrets of his success."

With the matriculation hurdle passed, Percy was able in 1936 to begin his University work in earnest, and the way opened up financially, to enable him to board in Dunedin and give full time to his studies.

Despite his many other interests both inside and out-

side the University, Percy's scholastic work for his Bachelor of Arts Degree was consistently good. The majority of his Terms passes were First Class, and in his Degree examination his marks, especially in languages, were unusually high. His ability in languages had become apparent in his matriculation year, and for his Degree he took both Latin and Greek to three stages, a course necessitating mental discipline that few New Zealand students are prepared to face.

A good deal of his "swot" was done in the "small" hours when there were no distractions. His room-mate at Knox, waking in the region of eight o'clock, would find that Percy had already showered and shaved, done an hour's Greek, and had a game of fives with some other early riser.

After a busy day he would work late into the night, long after most people had gone to bed. One of his first reactions to army life, when he went into camp in 1940, was a complaint about the restriction of working hours. "Do you know that in the army they make the lights go out at 10.15 p.m., but they won't let you get up before 6 a.m. It's the first time I've been anywhere where they wouldn't let me get up when I wanted to rise early."

His favourite subject at University was Greek, in which he won the James Clark Prize in 1938. He would spend hours of his time looking up Greek notes and comparing passages to clear up some small point. The New Testament he took to camp was in Greek. That was no vain show of learning. His knowledge of ancient Greek enabled him to read his Greek Testament with ease and to profit from the reading.

In the army, whenever possible, he continued to study. In a letter to his mother, after describing how a Greek youth had taken him and a friend to visit an Orthodox Greek Church in Cairo he said, "And more, the young Greek, Michael by name, is going to teach us modern Greek, and we are going to help his English, although

"TITCH" of the Div. Cav.

he's pretty good now. It's a great opportunity and I'm grabbing it with both hands."

In 1942 Percy attended a Padre's refresher course at Beirut in Syria, and an enthusiastic letter reveals how delighted he was to get some intellectual food in the midst of his soldiering. "Best of all," he wrote, "was the feeling of once again being back in an academic atmosphere where one could *think*."

The only failure Percy had in his degree course at University was in 1938. That year he was sitting Greek III, Latin III, and Education I. By accident he mistook the time for the first Latin paper and was absent from the examination. When he realised his mistake it was too late for anything to be done. It was a great blow to him, for having worked well he could have gained a good pass. It meant also that the completion of his Degree was postponed until 1939, when he sat his Latin III papers at the end of the Theological Hall session. He passed easily and was capped in May, 1940.

In 1939, Percy began the three year course at the Theological Hall. He lived at Knox College, sharing a room in the attics with George Dallard.

This course of study was soon to be interrupted by the war, but in the year he spent in the Hall he won the friendships and esteem of professors and students alike. "He impressed me very definitely," writes Professor J. A. Allan, "as a man of ability, but above all as a forceful, independent, virile type, who was sure to make a real contribution to the life of the Church. Nothing that I have heard of his influence in the army comes as any surprise. It was only what I fully expected."

A strong friendship sprang up between Percy Titchener and Principal John Dickie. Dr. Dickie admired his forthrightness and his manly courage. When Percy went overseas they corresponded regularly, and Dr. Dickie used to read Percy's letters to his students in class. Dr. Dickie died not long before Percy was killed.

Writing of Percy, Mrs. Dickie said: "I have often thought how distressed Dr. Dickie would have been. He liked and esteemed Percy so much . . . and he would have felt that it is so hard that the Church should lose its best and most promising young men. He would have written a comforting letter to you out of the depths of his deep belief, and he would have spoken as he so often did to me, of Percy's great and outstanding goodness." Dr. Dickie's youngest son, writing home from the Middle East, said: "Wouldn't it have grieved dad, that the best of his students was taken."

Knox College, of course, provided ample scope for Percy's fun and high spirits. He was in the centre of every "hoolie," and if he felt that a "hoolie" was overdue, he would see to it that one was organised. In Percy's day, the Knox College Students' Association annual meeting was an event to be reckoned with. It meant bombs and crackers, and plenty of water and flour, and everyone took good care to wear old clothes. It was definitely *the* "hoolie" of the year.

By the time the 1940 annual meeting came round Percy had enlisted, but he appeared at the meeting dressed as a Nazi Storm Trooper and anxious to provoke a riot. Someone suggested that he was probably a spy, and the riot began. When it had died down a little, someone else moved that Titchener be ejected from the meeting, a motion that was seconded and carried. A vain effort was made to put the motion into effect, Percy standing his ground. The impasse was then overcome by someone suggesting, in typical student style, that as Titchener had already enlisted, the previous motion be rescinded and he be elevated to a place of dignity. Accordingly he was hoisted on top of the book shelves, where he remained for the remainder of the meeting.

That story is only one of many which gave Percy the reputation of being boisterous. It was a reputation which he earned over again in the army. "Why do I

get the reputation of being noisy?" he asked in a letter from overseas. There is no gainsaying the fact that at times he *was* noisy—noisy to the point of rowdiness, and some folk who did not know the other aspects of his character were apt to be critical of his hilarity. Partly his boisterous pranks can be explained by his strong physique—he had a super-abundance of energy which had to find an outlet. Partly also, it was due to his temperament. Everything he did had to be done properly—whether it was a practical joke or a "hoolie" or a devotional service. These factors, together with an amazingly strong sense of humour, made Percy at times one of the rowdiest and most boisterous persons you could meet anywhere. His hilarity was like a tempest, gathering tremendous force with little warning, and seemingly uncontrolled. But in the middle of a "hoolie" or a "rag" of any kind, he could call a halt at a moment's notice. Quite suddenly the storm would cease and he would be quiet and thoughtful—full of kindness and understanding and helpfulness. For those who knew him, therefore, his fun and vitality became a tonic which chased away dull moods and morbid tempers. It was a tonic he could use deliberately and with good effect. "I met Doug. C—— and we had a great day. At Maadi tent I deliberately set out to make him laugh, he was looking so serious. I succeeded too. We acted the goat to the very limit. Doug. said he hadn't laughed for months."

Percy's student days were very busy ones—full to the brim with fun and laughter, hard work and serious thought and a fine influence on the lives of others. This influence for good extended beyond student circles. While he was in the Theological Hall he endeavoured to interest other students in social work, which he regarded as a necessary antidote to the academic bias which tends at times to dominate all theological students. "Percy himself," writes a friend, "was pretty well occupied with work which we knew little about."

No finer tribute to Percy Titchener the student has been paid than that by Miss I. M. Turnbull, Lecturer in Classics at Otago University. "I shall always feel honoured and proud to have known Mr. Titchener. I cannot think of any other student who had a finer influence than he, both in his immediate circle, and in Christian work in the University."

### CHAPTER III

## STUDENT ACTIVITIES

### DEBATING

DURING his student days, Percy became well known as a debater. He took a very active part in the debating circles in the University and in 1939 he was selected to lead the Otago team in the Joynt Scroll University contest. He was President of the Arts Debating Society in 1939, and in 1940 was elected President of the Union Society, which controlled all the debating activities of the University.

"My first contact with Percy," writes another University debater, Harry L. Gibson, "was in 1938 when he was an executive member of the Otago University Union Society which had been formed two years previously to control debating in the University. At this time my impression of him, which was strengthened by the passage of time, was of his tolerance. Percy was a man of principle, but never in my experience did he allow his own convictions to colour his arguments, nor did he ever attempt to force his personal opinions upon the other members of the executive. One illustration will, I am sure, serve to illustrate my point. In 1940 the Union, of which by this time he was President, was approached by the Catholic Students' Club challenging us to debate the question, 'That the Use of Contraceptives be Condemned'—we to take the negative side. I well remember how furiously we argued as to whether

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or not we should accept the challenge, involving as it did a public debate upon a subject which, although it was of vital importance, could if improperly treated, become a vehicle for vulgarity and sensationalism. Percy was adamant in the view that the University stood for freedom of speech, and pointed out that we would be failing in our duty if we did not exercise our prerogative. The debate was held. Percy was in the chair, and the canteen was packed with students, attracted I fear, by the possibility of 'fireworks.' Never once in the course of a hotly contested debate, could it be said that the speakers exceeded the bounds of good taste, a fact which substantiated Percy's faith in the students and confirmed the confidence he had in their good sense.

"The outstanding impression I have of him as a speaker was his deceptive style. He would begin by academically dividing up his subject, concise, even dry, then as he came to the 'meat' of his speech, what a change! His voice took on a new timbre, and his gestures, although not frequent were neat and exceedingly effective. Opponents, lulled into a sense of false security by his dispassionate opening remarks, could be seen taking a new interest, and writing busily, as they amended their policy towards this speaker."

Percy continued his debating activities overseas when opportunity occurred, being leader of the "C" Squadron debating team in his Regiment. On one occasion with no preparation he spoke on the negative side in an inter-squadron debate, the subject being "That it is desirable both for the troops and the V.A.D.'s and Tuis, that the V.A.D.'s and Tuis should be in the Middle East." As he modestly puts it himself, "We managed to put it across our opponents." The next day, travelling into Cairo by bus, he became involved in further discussion on the subject of the previous night's debate. One soldier was using Percy's negative arguments of the night before. So using his ability to argue both sides of a subject with equal ease, Percy took up the

positive position, and before long had convinced the soldier that the arguments he was using were wrong!

"The community lost a great man in Percy," Harry Gibson goes on. "He loved his fellow men and his fellow men could not help loving him. Forthright in argument as he was, determined, even stubborn as he could be, beneath it all he was a man, honest, courageous and loyal, to himself, his friends, and as he so gallantly proved, to his ideals and his country."

#### THE STUDENT CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT

While he was at University Percy became an enthusiastic member and leader of the Student Christian Movement.

For the first two years of his University life, the S.C.M. did not interest him. He was a keen Bible Class man and he thought he should continue to devote all his energies to the Bible Class Movement. A threatened breakdown due to overwork made him realise, however, that there is more in University life than grinding "swot," and in 1938 he joined the S.C.M. In 1939 he was co-opted for the S.C.M. Executive at Otago, and in 1940 he was elected Vice-President. Other regular S.C.M. activities included the leading of University study circles in 1939 and 1940; taking a weekly devotional circle at All Saints' Church in 1939; leading an S.C.M. study circle at the Boys' High School in 1940; and managing the S.C.M. Book Exchange at the University in 1940. For the Book Exchange he was an indefatigable worker, being responsible for evolving a new system of operation which proved highly satisfactory.

The different facets of Percy's character are nowhere better illustrated than in his S.C.M. activities. "There was always the most fun, the best fellowship and the most serious talk where he was." The fun, of course, was bound up with his amazing energy. "It's strange to think that Percy has gone," said one of his friends after

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he was killed. "He was always so very much alive." "Early one morning at a Pounawea camp, when the frost lay thick upon the ground," writes another, "I was dragged forcibly from my bunk more than an hour before dawn, in order that I might join him, and a few others, anxious to row down to the Heads to see the sunrise. That was typical of his tireless energy in everything he undertook." "At Wanganui Conference," writes a third, "we were quite a lot together; mad times like New Year's Eve when we beat up Wanganui for a pie-cart at midnight, with serious moments to lend a kick to the fun. You will remember he combined the country habit of early rising and early morning walks with the town one of late nights."

As a song leader at S.C.M. gatherings, Percy was superb. "He couldn't sing for nuts himself," said a Div. Cav. man from overseas, "but he could make other people sing," which, of course, is the first and foremost attribute in a good song leader. An exuberance of energy always characterised his song leading. He waved his arms, jumped about, and used to the full grotesque facial contortions to such an extent that a man overseas, after watching him conduct a sing, asked if "that bloke Titchener was haywire." He liked nothing better than to caricature his idea of a very studied and over-fanciful conductor, and the only danger was that "while Percy was in front of us we ran the risk of dissolving into laughter at any moment."

In sharp contrast to his fun and bounding energy was Percy's interest in the spiritual side of S.C.M. activities. His heartiness was a cloak that covered a very sensitive spirit. At one S.C.M. camp at which he was particularly rowdy, he earned the strong disapproval of some of the other campers. Opposition and disapproval did not generally worry him in the least, but this time he heard a suggestion that he did not value the spiritual side of camp life, and that criticism cut him to the quick. In very real distress he said to a friend, "You

know these things mean much more to me than they think. But a chap can't wear his heart on his sleeve." Those who knew Percy at all well and his work in the S.C.M. were under no illusions about the reality of the spiritual side of his life. "I heard him lead devotions at various times. You couldn't help feeling that the God whom he was worshipping or speaking about was very real to him."

On the S.C.M. Executive he held the office of Devotional Secretary, which meant organising devotional circles and seeing that prayer and meditation got their rightful place in the Movement's activities. In an address on "Prayer" to an S.C.M. gathering, he left his listeners with no illusions as to what prayer meant to him. "For the full expression of religious life vital prayer life is essential. If you doubt that, make this test. Think of the times when your religious life was on a low level, I don't mean morally, I mean when the things of the spirit meant very little to you. Try to remember your prayer life at that time. It is only too true that the two go together, a weakening prayer life inevitably leads to a weakening of the religious life. . . . To take time to put ourselves right with God at the beginning of the day is to put ourselves right with the world."

"In whatever way you seek a clue to the secret of his character," writes an S.C.M. friend, "there is no getting past the influence of Christianity on his life. He lived Christianity. He was keenly interested in Bible study and Christian doctrine, but I shall always remember him primarily as one who applied these teachings to his ordinary life and showed what a natural and victorious way of living this is. Here we have the explanation of his happiness and vitality, his good influence on all who knew him, his confidence in his ideals, and his courage both here and in the Middle East."

"Percy was a great source of strength to individual

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members of the S.C.M. as well as to the Movement as a whole." This tribute by a prominent S.C.M. leader is amplified by letters from a number of the students who received the help and encouragement of Percy's friendship.

One writes: "The first time I met him was in the Book Exchange at the beginning of the 'Varsity year. He knew my brother, and he picked who I was by the name written on an exercise book I was carrying. We chatted for a time and I formed the impression that he had the happy gift of making a stranger feel as if he were talking to an old friend—all the more remarkable as I was a rather fresh sort of fresher and he was beginning his second year at the Hall. This knack of making friends was noticeable at Burnham also where he seemed to know a great number of the chaps around the camp."

From another: "Percy was one of the first people I got to know at 'Varsity. . . . I think that the way I came to know him was typical of the way he influenced most people; first by his interest, unselfishness, jollity and his wide interests; and secondly by the depths of his spiritual life and experience."

From a third: "I owe much to Percy's influence and friendship in the days gone by . . . Without his guiding hand when I first went to Knox feeling very strange and lost, I don't think I would ever have come to feel properly at home there."

From a fourth: "The loyal friendship which he gave will remain with many of us to our life's end. Wherever Percy went he represented the highest ideals of manhood, and reports that have come from overseas reveal that he adhered to this in the most difficult sphere of all."

"Percy came to the notice of most members of the S.C.M. who did not belong to Otago, chiefly through the Annual Conference held at Knox College in December-January, 1940-41," says the Rev. Herbert Newell, Chairman of N.Z.S.C.M. "It was a memorable Con-

ference in many ways. Pacifist feeling ran high among many of the younger members present. We had all been deeply stirred by what Nessie Moncrieff told us about China. With many the pacifist issue admitted of no argument, others were deeply perplexed."

"Rightly or wrongly, we had taken the attitude that the subject had been discussed threadbare, and that the best way was to stick to fundamental things that we all hold in common, cherishing our splendid tradition in the Movement of frankness in love. But the perplexities and the dilemma were so real that we decided to include at the shortest notice in the programme two addresses in the Chapel from two different standpoints. I approached Percy to ask him to be one of the speakers. I remember how he instantly agreed. I have a feeling that he saw instantly what he should do. It was a terribly difficult thing to do, but he regarded it all as a part of the sacrifice he was paying. And it was a moving thing to see him in the pulpit in his battledress, hating the war as much as anybody there, and expressing the tension that every Christian feels not merely by his words, but still more by the strain under which he spoke. He very simply told us that he had joined the Army, and that he was going overseas, in order to preach Christ, if he might be permitted to do so."

A friend who also heard him speak on that occasion says: "The man outwardly so light-hearted revealed the depth of his convictions and the secret of his tenacity and purpose. He was in the Army, he said, because evil must be brought down by a power greater than itself. The need was a challenge to him, and in the strength of his Master he went forward. Later he wrote back from the Desert that he was among men who thought deeply about ultimate things. He was glad God had entrusted him with a humble ministry to such men."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ARMY

#### THE DECISION TO ENLIST

*"He left New Zealand voluntarily when he knew that as a divinity student he could have stayed quietly behind to carry on his work in the Hall and then as a Minister. He took the step of enlisting, conscious of the danger, and certain that he was doing what God would have him do. I know he kept that attitude while he was in Egypt, and would not have chosen otherwise if he could have foreseen the result."*—Tribute of one of Percy's friends.

THE thought of enlisting came to Percy in the very early days of the war, as it came to many another student, as a kind of temptation. Those who were students in those days know how difficult the matter was. The excitement of war made it hard to settle down to the third term's work. Conflicting loyalties pulled this way and that, and for a man of Percy's temperament the easiest course would have been to enlist immediately.

He waited, however, until he had threshed things out in his own mind. He thought of his mother, to whom he was specially attached. He thought of his duty to the Church that was training him for its ministry. Realising the necessity of the Church's work being carried on, and following the example of the British Government, the New Zealand Government exempted divinity students from military service. All that was necessary was to apply formally for exemption and it would be granted.

But Percy thought, too, of the men in the Army. Discussing the Church and Industrial Workers in the "Christian News Letter" of April 21, 1943, Dr. J. H. Oldham says: "Our witness can make no deep impact on our age so long as it comes out of a sheltered existence which has never been exposed to the pressure, tensions and real problems of an industrial society." Apply that thought to the Army, and you have one of

Percy's main reasons for enlisting. He felt that as a combatant soldier, sharing hardships and dangers with other men, he would be able to offer them the Christian friendship of which they would stand in need.

Another reason, however, weighed with Percy very heavily. He saw the war as a battle of right against wrong. He saw what would happen if Nazism was victorious. And so, believing that Britain's cause was not only the cause of freedom but also of right and goodness—God's cause—there was nothing he could do but enlist and fight. "He went because he felt he ought to go."

Percy enlisted on May 18th, 1940, the day that he returned from a mission which he and three others had conducted in the Mataura Presbytery. Row Rogers, another of the team and a close friend of Percy's, enlisted the same day, but neither of them knew what the other was doing. "On the afternoon I enlisted," Row writes, "I returned to Knox, and finding Percy out, waited in his study until he came in. His first words were, 'Well, old man, I have offered my services to the King.' It was a source of great satisfaction to both of us to know that we had taken the step together."

"It's a step I have wanted to take for some time," wrote Percy to a friend, "but there have been various hindrances."

He had his medical examination almost immediately and passed easily. Impatient to go into camp, and thinking he would be called up at once, he dropped his Hall work and left Knox. Weeks went by, which he spent doing farm work on the Taieri. Then he had an accident which nearly wrecked his chance of the Army altogether. He was riding home when the forks of his bicycle broke, and crashing down, he tore the muscles of one of his legs. He was laid up for nearly three months, and a Dunedin specialist expressed amazement that he ever got into the Army at all.

Eventually he reached Burnham on October 3rd, and

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was quickly singled out to go to the N.C.O. School. Some of his friends expected he would go to the Officers' Training College at Trentham, but at that time only a few were picked and he was not one of them. "I'm not losing any sleep over it," he wrote, "I have determined long ago that I go where I am put, and if it be a humble job—well, that's my job and it will have to be done."

The N.C.O. School having no padre attached, he was soon looked on as the padre by everyone. "Official status may be of some assistance to us," wrote a padre friend, "but a man of his calibre had no need of it."

At the Burnham school dinner, "which was a pretty brisk affair, I had the honour of saying grace." He was very amused at having to say grace over 20 dozen bottles of beer!

Percy was always keen on anything mechanical, especially anything on wheels. He had owned a motor-cycle and liked nothing better than to ride it furiously, especially if he could find a friend brave enough to ride behind him. It is not surprising, therefore, that he volunteered to join the Divisional Cavalry Regiment.

On December 17th, 1940, he wrote: "They asked this morning if any would like to join the Div. Cavalry, a mechanical unit now. I thought it over, and gave my name in to-night. I may not get the transfer, of course, but it is rather interesting work, and a fair amount of mechanised stuff in it in which I have always been interested. I may as well tell you before some 'kind' friend tells you, that it is generally considered a more risky job than the infantry, but don't let that worry you. I think it is viewing the whole thing from too narrow an angle to consider too much the elements of personal safety."

Writing to a friend when he was leaving New Zealand, almost a year after enlisting, Percy said: "For myself I have never regretted the decision that placed me here. . . . It's a great experience and I know it is

my duty. I hope to place what I have learned and will learn at the disposal of the Church in the years to come. That in itself will be recompense for the trials of the present."

"TITCH'S" FAITH

*"This war introduces such complications into life. But what a difference there would be without a belief in a Divine Providence overlooking all things."*—Letter to a friend.

In the Army, just as much as in the University and during his farming days, Percy found his Christian faith to be the "well of living water" from which he drew strength and courage. The first night he was in camp he was faced with the problem of saying his prayers in the presence of some thirty men. He speaks about it in a letter to his mother.

"Do you remember the great fuss Johnny Badcock made about whether you should say your prayers on your knees in the hut at night? I had a feeling it was sometimes a proclamation of 'I'm a Christian,' rather than the contact with God that all prayer should be. Anyway strangely enough, the first night we were here, the padre was on the same theme, and I went to the hut thinking I needn't do it, provided things were right between me and God. Well, that first night there was a fellow in the hut who could talk nothing but absolute filth. After a while I thought to myself, 'If I do nothing else, I'll show these fellows there's another side to the picture.' So I went down on my knees and said my prayers. I'm not claiming that I effected a revival, but I do know this: I was given strength to do it, and every night I've done likewise, until now I go down on my knees and am just as near God as I am when I pray alone."

In addition to his private devotions, consisting of daily prayer and Bible reading, "Titch" found the services conducted overseas by the Divisional Cavalry Chaplain, a constant source of inspiration, and he spoke of them in many of his letters.

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An evening service in the Desert, 14/11/41: "I have just come from an evening Church Service, although it's Friday. I wonder if I am too easily impressed, it seemed a very impressive thing to me. The sun had set and the night had fallen by the time we gathered round. The darkness falls very quickly here now, even more rapidly than in the summer. There was no moon at this time, and you could see the dim outlines of men standing round in a semi-circle. I think most of the squadron must have been there. The padre opened with 'Abide with me.' I had the privilege of holding the torch for him. I wonder what it sounded like a few hundred yards away. I know that it was rather wonderful to hear that old hymn sung unaccompanied, the singers all hidden from one another in the darkness. And it was sung very well. I think I realised more clearly than ever before what that last verse means, 'Hold thou Thy Cross before my closing eyes,' because in the darkness one could more easily picture the writer's thought. It's a marvellous old hymn, and has now gathered another memory round itself as far as I'm concerned. After that there were more short prayers, then the Padre spoke on the first petition of the Lord's Prayer, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' He spoke very simply, and just for a few minutes, then pronounced the Benediction. It all turned my thoughts to home, to all you dear people, what you are doing, the thousand and one things we think out here."

Sometimes the services had a touch of humour, which "Titch" was not slow to appreciate. 2/4/42: "At Church Parade we have to sing our hymns unaccompanied, and I generally have to start them. It has become a regular thing nowadays: the Padre says, 'Corporal Titchener, will you commence,' and Corporal Titchener clears his throat and trills (!!!) forth, followed by the rest. It's a bit of a strain, but I generally manage, except that one I don't like beginning is 'Holy, Holy, Holy.' Once it was my favourite hymn, but it is

rapidly falling from favour because the Padre is keen on it, and causes me much mental anguish. Last Sunday we had Church Parade outside, and I could hear the Padre calling on someone, but as he was near the Colonel I thought it was he whom the Padre was asking. Sometimes the Colonel starts up, but as the Padre says, you can never tell what tune he will begin with. Anyway I played safe and kept dumb. Wouldn't dream of butting in on the Colonel. After Church Parade the Padre asked me where the deuce I was. He thought I must have been away."

In addition to the Army services and Church Parades, "Titch" never missed an opportunity if duty permitted, to attend Public Worship in Church. Letters written during the campaign in the Desert, and while he was in Syria, reveal how he missed regular attendance at Public Worship.

*28/8/42. Written after the return to the Desert.*

"Do you know it is almost six months since I have been in Church. Of course we have had our Army Church Parades, but at times I just long for a real Church service. There was no opportunity in Syria, and of course none since being down here."

Considering the tensions of Army life, and the high task "Titch" had set himself as a Christian soldier, it is not surprising that beneath a surface calm there was sometimes a troubled spirit. In a letter to his mother written from Burnham, he says: "There are aspects of my life here over which I ponder greatly. How evident is my Christianity? How does it affect other people? I am in a hut with a lot of fellows at present who all, I think, respect and like me, but what more? It is just a bit too easy to live like that. They know I say my prayers, read my Bible, was a div. student, don't swear, etc., but what of it? At present I'm satisfied because I think a way will be opened up. I have something to do and God willing I'll do it."

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Overseas, the strain of campaigning and the loss of comrades touched him deeply. After he had conducted the funeral service of a friend, he wrote, "We had no padre, and the task of burying him fell to me. It was one of the hardest things I have ever done."

Confident as he was in the over-ruling Providence of God, "Titch" found it difficult to accept the death of men who were his friends. He was dismayed at the wastage of young life, so full of promise, and after Sidi Rezegh, he was restless in spirit until he reached the hills of Syria. "Up here, in Syria, I can't help feeling more at peace with the world. In Egypt I never settled down properly. Here I am more certain that Hugh, Doug, Ernie and 'Doc' are at peace. Somehow one can't help feeling that in the hills. Out there in the Desert I could not feel that they were properly at rest. To-night, watching the sun set, I found a new peace, and a new feeling in my thought for them. Of course it is inevitable that the passing of time should make one feel so, but there is something over and beyond that. . . . They are at peace, and it is good to remember them and to look forward to meeting them again as we surely will."

Whatever the burdens of Army life, sense of responsibility for his fellows, concern for loved ones at home, loss of friends, "Titch" never failed to find peace of heart, and strength to endure, as he joined in the central act of Christian worship, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. As Padre Taylor of the Divisional Cavalry was Church of England, it was usually the Anglican form of the Sacrament that "Titch" attended. But whether Anglican or Presbyterian, he found that at Communion, he drew very close to the Friend and Master whom he loved and served. This is clearly shown in the following letters. There are more references to Communion in his letters than to anything else.

*A Memoir and Letters of L/Sergt. P. L. TITCHENER*

*Written from Burnham after his first Communion in the Army.*

"On Sunday there was a Communion Service after Church Service. Fergus McLaren and I were asked to hand round the bread and wine respectively. It was rather wonderful, about twenty-two there, privates and two lieutenants. We were told that no matter who came into the room we were not to stand, as around the Table all are one. After ten days of military camp, one realised that it was only such a one as Jesus Christ through whom this could be accomplished. Respect for rank is so emphasised here, but in that little room all that was swept away because two thousand years ago a Galilean peasant, as so many thought, died on a Cross."

6/6/41.

"... I find the Communion a constant source of strength. ... There's a calm and a quiet round the Lord's Table which I do not find anywhere else. Memories crowd in on one and yet they are orderly. And always those words, 'The Lord Jesus the same night on which He was betrayed,' seem to be a never-ending source of power. ... There is no doubt that it is at the Communion that one is brought into His Presence and endowed with His Power. And out here, one is somehow impressed with the exquisite simplicity of the act: breaking of bread and drinking of wine, so simple and yet so tremendously significant."

July, 1941.

"There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that the celebration of Holy Communion is the most significant part of our Christian life. Of course one agreed with that as a theological student back in New Zealand, but I affirm it here as an ordinary soldier playing a very unimportant part in the conduct of this war; that there as nowhere else, one finds the strength to carry on, the sense of meeting with God in Christ. Army life does not tend towards diligent observance of one's duties to

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God, but present at the Lord's Table one knows that all the past week is seen in a new light, that there is a grace sufficient to pardon and forgive, and strength more than sufficient to equip one for a new week of work. I could never willingly miss attendance at Communion at least once a week under the conditions here, and never will."

It is quite evident from his letters that "Titch's" faith was not of the superficial kind that knows all sunshine and no shadows. There were times when he walked in the valley of deep gloom and bitterness of soul, and the foundations of his faith were tested. But through it all, even in the darkest hours, he was conscious that "underneath are the Everlasting Arms."

A month before he was killed he wrote, "It is a great thing at such a time to have a Christian faith as a guide. I don't know how I would have come through some of the last few months without it. . . . Time and again over here I have been reminded of those at home, thinking and praying; perhaps a letter, or a parcel, or just a memory, revives the thought of one's friends, and life takes on a new colour and meaning.

"And through it all, because of love and friendship, one is brought to a clearer knowledge of the divine Love and Friendship, and the way is made lighter and clearer. Sometimes when you people over there wonder what you can do to help, remember that you and others have done a great thing in sending the boys away with so many happy memories, and you are doing a great thing in keeping them in mind in your thoughts and prayers."

"I have never known a time when I was more able to thank God for faith. He will suffice whatever the future holds. I think I said in a letter home that this war does one of two things, it destroys faith or it simplifies it. The old unnecessary things seem to fall away. . . . There is one thought that is always with me, the thought of the Shepherd: the Shepherd as taught in the 23rd Psalm is something worth having to-day."

ARMY FRIENDSHIPS

Tribute from H. T. Drury who first met Percy Titchener in the Div. Cav. in Egypt and became a close friend:—

“I first met Percy Titchener five days after we arrived in Egypt. The army threw two strangers together and from it grew one of the greatest friendships born of the war. Army life gave me the opportunity of living closer to him than is naturally possible in civilian life, and it was not long before I felt the force of his personality and soon began to realise I had been given a friend whose generosity and unselfish devotion to God and man is equalled only in the lives of the Saints. He was a friend whose equal is seldom found.

“He made me the possessor of all his confidences during our life together and of all his hopes and plans for the future. With this knowledge I know how great is his loss to the Church. At all times during his army career he remembered his high calling and never failed in his unassuming manner to give help and advice to his comrades. The whole Regiment loved and admired him and none knew better than I of the great work he did in his quiet way. He could not have done more had he been given a padre's position, and he told me himself how pleased he was to be just one of the boys.

“His every thought was for the welfare of others. In action he was an inspiration, and his cool courage and disregard of danger was something to marvel at. His happy laugh and ready wit increased as the situation became more desperate. Early in his career he earned the title of ‘The Fighting Parson’ and he had dedicated his life so completely to God it was apparent he had no fear for himself; although inwardly he always feared for his men. I am proud of the place he gave me in his life, which gives me the enviable distinction of ‘Titch's Best Friend.’

“The Percy Titchener I knew was even wiser than the young student who sacrificed everything to join the

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ranks of the 2nd N.Z.E.F. to proceed overseas to serve as a link between God and his fellow men. The army throws men of all types and creeds together, to live their lives as they choose or to be led by stronger wills. 'Titch' found himself living among, and part of, that largest section known as 'other ranks.' He first bent himself to the task of studying life in its various forms and types and soon gained a greater wisdom and understanding than could ever be gained in all the classrooms of the world. That understanding and advice were continually sought after, and nothing was too much trouble for him—he was a model of generosity and unselfishness. Memories of our life together will always be my most treasured possession."

One of "Titch's" main reasons for enlisting was the need and opportunity he saw of living as a Christian among his fellow soldiers. It was never his intention, however, to enter the Army in order to "preach" at the men.

"We have in our hut at present twenty fellows," he wrote from Burnham in 1940, "all of them good clean types, but religion in our sense doesn't mean anything to them. There's one thing I won't do, and that is "evangelise" them. I believe in the force of example, and a willingness to seize an opportunity with both hands and let God do the rest."

He wanted first of all to understand his fellow soldiers, to see their point of view, and to find out why they lived and acted as they did. He was impatient with those who criticised a soldier for getting drunk. "I am concerned rather to understand why men get drunk. It is sheer presumption to try and correct the fault without understanding."

Never a man to compromise his principles, he was wise and courageous enough to see that the spirit of a principle is the thing that counts. Soon after he went into camp, one of the men in his hut who was organising a sweepstake on a race meeting, asked him to be "in on

it." "Titch" refused point blank. Hearing later, however, that his refusal was attributed to meanness, rather than principle, he went to the organiser of the sweepstake and handed him the money he had asked for. "Perhaps that will show you why I refused before," he said. "I don't want any share in the takings, but I don't want you to misunderstand my motives." After that the others appreciated his point of view, and he was never asked to take part again.

In a letter written 17/6/42 he says, "I have learnt that understanding takes me a long way along the road. That is what I try to do here, to understand why the ordinary man, turned soldier, does such extraordinary things, some of them sufficient to make me despair of the human race. But it is my conviction that it is only along the lines of understanding that one can get anywhere. My faith in mankind viewed as the sons of God is far from being shattered, there is so much that is good."

At first the fact that "Titch" had been a divinity student was not a help. Occasionally, when even his forbearance and patience wore thin, he would tell men what he thought of their swearing and "smutty" stories, and in return he was dubbed by some of the older men "Psalm Singer" and "Bible Banger."

Then, too, "Titch" was a sergeant. "Everything had to be military," said one of his troopers. "He certainly had the Army at heart. He used to stir us out in the mornings, and saw to it that we toed the mark." In Egypt he dropped to the rank of corporal, and this handicap disappeared. "All sergeants came down one stripe as soon as we arrived. It's a bit of a change to be in with the boys. Actually I'm enjoying life very much. The boys seem to make a big distinction between sergeants and corporals. They regard a corporal as one of themselves, but a sergeant is a matter for suspicion."

"Titch," like many another soldier, proved himself

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in action. "He was like a big kid when he went into action, singing to himself and perfectly cool." Under fire he showed his courage, his ability as a soldier, and his desire to help his friends at whatever cost to himself. After they had seen him in battle, the doubts of those who had misunderstood him vanished completely. They christened him "The Fighting Parson," and from that time on he was held in high regard by everyone. In the eyes of his fellow soldiers he acquitted himself in the midst of danger. Thereafter they understood him as he had learned to understand them.

With understanding comes friendship. Some of "Titch's" friendships in the Army began in Burnham, others developed overseas, but all who came to know him as a friend pay tribute to what his friendship meant.

"The fond memories of 'Titch's' friendship I shall cherish always," writes Brian Wright, Percy's corporal in Burnham and companion overseas. "He was the whitest man I've ever known, and though he has passed from this world, he will always be with us in spirit to strengthen us in whatever we may be called upon to face. The memories we have of one so noble and unselfish can never die."

"Percy meant a lot to me, and he helped me greatly in student and Army days," wrote Watson Rosevear. "And his influence among the fellows in his unit was also great. For instance, a missionary lady at Assuit asked Padre Jim McKenzie if he knew a man in the New Zealand 'Black Berets' called 'Titch,' for some New Zealand soldiers there were constantly talking of him. That helps to show what an impression he made in the Army."

Writing when "Titch" was posted "missing," Basil Potter, Y.M.C.A. Secretary, says: "In some measure, your anxiety for Percy is shared by a larger number of people than most of us could muster as nodding acquaintances. In his Regiment he was beloved by all. 'Titch' was known everywhere, and from my infrequent visits

to his Regiment I became known as 'Titch's cobbler,' and I was proud of that."

At the same time, Padre Harry Taylor wrote, "There are many in this Regiment who are more than anxious for news. . . . Percy was a figure in this Regiment, and was looked to by many."

There is ample evidence that in one of his aims at least, "Titch" succeeded beyond measure—he got alongside his fellow soldiers as very few others in a similar situation have been able to do. But in the many tributes to "Titch" that have reached New Zealand from men who served with him in the Army, it is obvious that he was more to them than a good comrade. He may not have led many to stand where he stood, and to believe as he believed. But his deep faith in the "Good Shepherd," his example of unselfish and courageous Christian living were sufficient to bridge the gap "Between God and the soldiers he was with."

"Others are able to write more effectively of his outstanding influence in his own unit," writes Padre S. C. Read. "I can only say that whenever I have spoken of 'Titch' to a Div. Cav. man, his face has glowed with pleasure and words of deep appreciation have followed."

## CHAPTER V

### THE MIDDLE EAST

#### ACTION

"TITCH" first went into action in November, 1941, in Libya. In extracts from letters to his loved ones, he speaks vividly of incidents in the Sidi Rezegh area, and reveals his thoughts and reactions during hard and bitter fighting.

23/1/42.

"We used to talk airily about the horrors of war. I can hear myself now, saying, 'There's no glory in war,'

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and I turn away with a sigh, because I spoke so readily with so little knowledge. Thank God that in the future I will be able to speak with *some* knowledge at any rate. There is a glory—though that is hardly the word—in the close bond that comes between man and man in the sharing of danger, and the sharing also of the things that belong to one another. There are times when during a watch in the night one man speaks to another of things about which under ordinary circumstances he would not utter a word, and finds that a gulf he imagined existed between himself and his companion does not exist at all. And there are the mornings when we set out going our different ways, an unspoken question in our eyes, 'who would return that night?'"

19/12/41.

"Early in November we left the camp which we had established in the Desert. I was in No. 1 Troop, and we were in tanks, small ones, three to a troop. We came up, a long trek, to near the Libyan-Egyptian border and camped there. On the way the preparations for an advance were obvious. Every place we passed fairly buzzed with activity. We camped there some time, living as we would on active service, asking ourselves all the time, 'When does The Day come?' It came on November 18th, and we moved over the Libyan border, the Div. Cav. being the first N.Z. unit to cross 'the wire,' this being a fence built by Musso of barbed wire and heavy stakes, a really substantial job. I'm afraid the gap which we passed through would have hurt Musso's dignity. After that we had patrol jobs for a while, which took us here and there, very interesting, but not very exciting. Do you remember the description of tank battles on the wireless? We were fortunate enough to see the start of one of the first, and I can tell you that everything that has been written about the likeness to the battles of prehistoric monsters is absolutely correct. The first morning we took up a position on a slope, and away across the plain there was a vast concentration of

tanks. Artillery shells (Jerry) started to fall among them, but there was never a move. It was a magnificent sight to see them all standing waiting for the word of command. They were heavily shelled but stood like rocks, till, just as though they had been impelled by the touch of a button, all the tanks moved forward, and the battle was on. They were just like monsters in the early light, and soon dust and smoke from their guns hid them from view. An occasional flash of a gun was all that could be seen; gradually like all tank battles, the battle moved away in ever widening circles. As the dust and smoke cleared, we could see here and there, a burning wreck, impossible to tell which it was, Jerry's or ours.

"The next day we were in a different place and saw another battle, this time in the afternoon. . . . That same afternoon we were strafed by German planes, the first and only time. It was rather a fearsome experience, our first under fire, especially as we were caught unawares. It taught us a lesson. There was no harm done fortunately, but Jerry caught us just walking round outside our tanks as though we were back in Maadi. Five out of seven planes let us have it. There was a hasty scramble, I can tell you. The great feature of this campaign has been our dominance of the air. I have seen Jerries bombing only once, and that was the only time we were machine-gunned. It has made a tremendous difference, of course, and is just Greece and Crete reversed.

"After this we had a sudden order to move and did a long dash one day which ended when we reached an escarpment looking down on the sea, somewhere near Bardia. Our troop was on its own and our officer went forward to have a look over the edge. We hopped out and proceeded to do some work on the tank, when suddenly he came running back to tell us the Jerries were about 300 yards away! By some miracle they evidently had no machine-guns, and were as puzzled as we were

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to know who it was had arrived there. We thought they were Tommies!

"One jump pretty well saw me back in my tank and we opened fire, the first shots we fired in the campaign. I am still trying to find out if we fired the first N.Z. shots in the campaign. Such things are the soldiers' boast! All the more glory to the Div. Cav. and to our squadron and troop.

"The next day we were back at the same place. Opposition was stiffer, but we put up quite a good show, scared Jerry along a bit, and unfortunately had our first casualty, a man wounded. After that it was again a case of 'move on,' and day by day we contacted Jerry transport and soldiers, occasionally getting in a smack at him, but he's clever.

"... And now we come to that part of the campaign which was terrible for me personally, and for the New Zealanders as a whole. We gradually moved into the Sidi Rezegh area; that name must be familiar to all people in New Zealand. In this area we again did patrol work, going out in the morning and returning again at night, watching Jerry's movements. One night we came in at dusk and found tremendous excitement. We were ordered to follow a lot of mechanised vehicles which were going out at full speed, we didn't know what for. On the way up we heard various stories, the main one being that Jerry was trying to break through, and we had to stop him.

"After travelling about five miles at full speed, we slowed down and found ourselves in some sort of action. Everyone was firing up a hill, so we proceeded to fire there also. Then I saw a thing done which I shall never forget, an act which merited the V.C., and I suppose will never be heard of again. A man came walking down the hill in the face of all that fire, and turned out to be one of our officers. He warned us that the enemy were over the hill, and that we were in danger of firing

on our own infantry. How he escaped being shot down I don't know. That in my opinion is bravery."

That same night one of the crew of another tank, and a great friend of Percy's, was killed.

" . . . War is rather grim, and the preparations for the burial had to go on immediately. Nic, Ernie and I dug the grave in the moonlight, the burial was to be in the morning. Our S.M. came to me and asked if I would officiate if no padre could be obtained. At first I refused. Then I thought it over and realised that it was perhaps my duty, as well as being, I think, an act which Hugh would have appreciated. So I consented though it was with a heavy heart, at the thought of burying a friend.

" I went back to the tank and was sitting there, when suddenly someone called out that we were to shift immediately. I did not know what to do, but Nic, Ernie and I agreed that we would not move until Hugh was buried. While we were making the arrangements, the 2 I/C of our squadron came along, and when we referred the matter to him he said that the whole army could be held up, but Hugh would be buried. I shall always honour him for it. It was a serious decision to make as it meant delaying a large convoy of vehicles, but he never hesitated. So the four of us went over and performed the last duties humanly possible. I repeated the words of the 23rd Psalm, the Resurrection verse from St. John's Gospel, and part of the words of the Committal of the Burial Service. Then after a short prayer, we placed the body in the grave, and covered it over. At the head we placed a large stone, and on the grave a large number of smaller stones in order that it should be clearly marked. The whole thing was a heart-break and I suppose was compassed in about three hours. It was lifetime for us.

" So then we moved on. If only we had seen what the morning would bring forth! We camped for the night a few miles away. In the morning we were

ordered out on an eastern patrol, the three tanks of No. 1 Troop, together with three other tanks from an English Regiment, much heavier tanks than ours. The dawn had not broken when there was a strange incident. About a quarter of a mile away, we could see a fairly large concentration of transport, due east, which we took to be ours, although it was strange that they were not with us. All of a sudden a truck came away from it towards us, came up to the far end (from us) of our vehicles, and ran straight down about 200 yards away. Some said, 'Iti or Jerry,' and others said it was one of our own. In the confusion, the truck kept going, until he reached the end of the line just opposite us, when he turned east again, and showed what he was, by opening fire with a machine-gun. And what was more, he got away! He had actually come down, as we realised afterwards, to have a look at us and find out what was there.

"Even then, no one seemed to realise that the transport which we could see was Jerry stuff. We were told that it was ours, and ordered to advance. So away we went. With the sun just rising shining right into our eyes, we couldn't see anything. We advanced a little in line, then all of a sudden we were in the middle of a veritable inferno. The Jerries (for they were Jerries) realising that the sun was in our eyes, had held their fire until we were at point blank range, and then they opened up. Well, we kept going, firing our little guns. I realised it was hopeless, and watched the others to see if they would turn back, but they kept going.

"So on we went, when all of a sudden there was an awful crack, the tank stopped, and the gunner fell down, wounded in the legs. The driver had been hit. I am afraid he was killed but of that I can never be certain. I tried to get down to the driver in order that I might see what I could do, but could hardly reach him for the gunner, who was lying over him. The lights were all gone and in the tank it was quite dark. You have to see a tank to know the difficulties in which an accident

places you. I then climbed out and endeavoured to help the driver from the front, but it is quite impossible to open the tank without assistance from the driver. I knew he was badly wounded, but whether fatally or not I could not say for certain. The gunner then managed to scramble up his turret, and I assisted him to the ground, behind the tank. It was comparatively sheltered there, and I was prepared to wait for our forces to come up, when I realised they were withdrawing.

"The most difficult decision I have ever made confronted me; whether to leave the driver and help the gunner out, or to wait with the tank which would have meant being taken prisoner of war. I was quite prepared for that, but what was the best thing to do? It was quite impossible to lift the driver out on my own, and probably he was dead. My decision was finalised by the gunner, who told me he would have to get moving, as his legs were gradually stiffening, and soon he would not be able to move.

"This sounds drawn out. Actually it was a matter of a few minutes. So we left the shelter of the tank and made a dash for it. The thought of deserting the driver is always with me. I have been told the decision I made was the right one.

"The next few minutes were the most hectic I will ever know. How we passed through that hail of lead unharmed was a miracle. It was round us, above and behind, striking the ground where we had just been, but never seeming to hit us. The first hundred yards or so we ran, but by that time, I don't know what it was, some sort of calm settled on me, that I will never explain. I said to the gunner that as we had come so far unharmed, I refused to run any more. So I took hold of him and we walked out. The last hundred yards or so a Tommy came out and assisted me. The chap I was helping was going pretty heavily, and it was hard work. No matter where I am placed I will never be in greater bodily peril. I do not feel that God took a special interest

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in me or my welfare, but I have thanked Him again and again for my deliverance, and for the sense of security that He gave me, for that indeed was certain.

"When we arrived back I got the gunner on to a car, and then looked round for the rest of the troop. What a disaster! Two killed, five wounded. Out of the nine of us there were two who were not casualties. After the previous night it was just about too much. We all moved back a bit and I'm afraid I sat down and just about 'caved in.' However, there was too much going on to sit for long, and I had the chance to make up one of a crew of a larger tank, with a crew of four men. I jumped at the chance, and so became one of the crew of the 'Yankee' tanks of which we are very proud. We had only four at the time, the only four heavy tanks in the N.Z. Division. And that afternoon we had a grand hit at Jerry. He attacked with tanks and we went out with our solitary four, and held him up for an hour and a half. I'm afraid I wasn't very Christian at that time. All I wanted was to hit back, and hit back we did with a vengeance. We had to fall back again but only after he had felt our presence, and we had no support to help us on the flanks. This all happened in the Sidi Rezegh area."

SYRIA AND PALESTINE

After the desert campaign the New Zealand Division moved to Syria. Writing on 23/3/42, after they had reached Syria, Percy said:

"We had known for some time that we were heading in this direction, and were looking forward to the change very much, especially as the summer was just beginning in Egypt, and we had already had a taste of the heat. So there were no regrets in particular when our train was pulling out.

"In Cairo we had a typical experience with the Wogs, a sort of parting gesture. While the train was standing in the station yard, one of our lads bought a paper, and

when he opened it discovered it was about a month old! The Wog who sold it was silly enough to come back after about half an hour. The boys just grabbed him, took all his papers, helped themselves to the daily ones and threw away the ones printed in Arabic. Rather severe, but he deserved it.

"However, there was a sequel. The train was moving backwards and as I didn't have a paper I leaned out to buy one off another lad. I watched him carefully and he took my money, then swiftly changed the paper and handed it to me. I took one look at the date, saw it was about a month old, and was off the train with a rush. I ran only about fifty yards and the lad dropped a paper and ran about twice as fast as I was doing. The paper was the correct one, so I didn't bother him any further. There's no doubt they are a great crowd. It was a typical thing to happen as we left Egypt.

"Anyway we were away at last, and in a short time were passing places, the names of which brought the Bible to mind. We gazed with something of awe at de Lessep's masterpiece, and so on into the Holy Land. For me the land was the place where Jesus had walked and spoken with people. I looked up at the hills, and tried to picture a band of people gathered round One who expounded to them a new and better way.

" . . . And so we went on, until eventually we left the train and changed to bus—real buses too, not lorries. The second day of our trip we started a long climb, the longest I have ever done. It was really terrific. We started at sea level and climbed until we were up among the snow, passing great drifts, some 7,000 feet high. The cold was pretty intense, I suppose we felt it after Egypt. We eventually reached the top, and came down into Syria and to our camp."

"Titch" found in Syria much more to interest him than there was in Egypt, and his Syrian letters are full of description of the country, the people and Biblical associations.

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30/3/42.

"We are now at the close of another glorious day. The sun, still shining brilliantly, is moving over to the hills in the west, and the darker colours of the early twilight can be seen in the villages among the hills. To me those hills are a never-ending source of wonder. 'I to the hills will lift mine eyes,' will always have a new meaning for me now, something richer and deeper, because I have been in Syria. I am thinking of reading the Psalms through and finding how much more they mean in the light of even a few days' life in this land. 'The Lord is my Shepherd' was in my mind the other day when we were out on a march. We went past a large herd of goats, and sitting on top of a hill was the goatherd, playing a reed instrument, low plaintive music. The goats were all spread out over the hill, the goatherd watching. It just wanted a wolf waiting in the background and the picture was complete. Actually there are quite a few wolves in this area.

"This country is full of new beauty each day. Sometimes I wonder if it is because we have come from Egypt. It may be so. At any rate, it is a good thing that we should be made to realise the beauty of God's handiwork, because for a time we have been denied the sight of beautiful things."

26/3/42.

"... A large herd of goats has just passed this way. I only wish I could have reproduced the tinkling of the bell on the leading goat; just a gentle sound borne on the breeze. In the herdsman one sees the epitome of centuries, his outer garment a long black robe reaching to the feet, over his head a white head-dress, and coiled round it three times a length of black cotton rope. And of all things, in his hand a real shepherd's staff, with the crook on the end."

The stay in Syria was further enhanced by a visit to Beirut where he attended the Padres' Refresher Course, and a trip to the old Roman ruins at Palmyra, "easily

the most interesting ruins I have seen." "Everywhere we were conscious of the ghosts of Rome, that here the Romans of old walked and talked, that soldiers like ourselves were garrisoned in this desert outpost."

"... To my regret I missed Damascus. I should have liked to have gone there, even if only to see the Street called 'Straight,' and the reputed place in the wall where Paul was let down in a basket."

But Syrian days came to a sudden and unexpected end, when the New Zealand Division was rushed back to Egypt, to help meet Rommel's threatened attack.

\* \* \*

Once again Percy passed quickly through Palestine.  
31/7/42.

"The Jordan Valley! Passport to Hell, that's what that place is. 138 deg. with a blistering wind. The skin on one's face just seemed to lift and burn off. Never have I felt such heat.

"I saw Tiberias, a beautiful little place with a temperature of 125 deg., and bathed in the Sea of Galilee, a lovely stretch of water, though why a 'sea' is hard to say. To-day, of course, it is the Lake of Tiberias, which seems more fitting. How does the idea of first seeing the Sea of Galilee just as a large flying boat touches down appeal? It was rather strange, I can assure you. One had the idea these places were set apart, something like a Church building, but there they were, people living in them and around them, all the flow of modern traffic; it's hard to describe one's feelings.

"One place I should say has not changed is the Gadarene Country. Viewed from the Capernaum side of the Lake, the hills are stern and forbidding, bare of all life, in some parts sloping steeply to the water. The whole scene is another reminder of the descriptive truth of the Gospels."

"... We passed through a lot of good country yesterday, including some Jewish settlements. They are

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marvellous places, hives of industry, and their productive capacity must be terrific. Every inch of the ground is used to the full. The children going to school are very healthy looking. The girls are dressed very neatly in little white blouses and blue shorts.

"The Jewish community system of living is worthy of the close attention of sociologists. Everyone works. The children are reared in community centres to which the parents have access, but community nurses rear them while the parents work. All money is in a community pool. A small amount is available for recreation, etc., but the community good comes first and last.

"You may be interested to know that some of the communities are almost irreligious, being neither of the Synagogue nor the Church. I wonder what some of those who hail the Zionist Scheme as the fulfilment of prophecy would think of that aspect. Certainly some of the Jewish people themselves don't view it in the light of fulfilment of prophecy. It remains to be seen whether this community way of living will be a success. In many ways it reminds one of Plato's model state as outlined in the 'Republic.' The members of many of the present communities claim that they have offered freedom to some members, to go out into the world and make their own living, and so far all who have availed themselves of the opportunity have returned. Whether that is due to love of community life or the fact that to anyone so brought up the world must have seemed a rather harsh place is open to question, but it is interesting that they should return."

"... We called at Gaza, recalling Samson. It is a town with a beautiful beach.

"... The Sinai Desert? Well, the less said the better. Just a vast expanse of sand, real sand this time, with a heat so intense that at midday heavy traffic cannot use the bitumen road. Even at 1000 hours it was soft enough.

"We passed through Ismalia and the Canal. I had a swim in the Canal, in order to say I had more than any other reason. And so on to the Desert."

EL ALAMEIN

*"After another hectic night, daylight found us without some of our vehicles but most of the crews were saved. Sad to say, among those missing was our good friend 'Titch.' Somehow it was not a bright morning for us, as inwardly, though we did not show it, most of us felt the loss of some good pal. Titchener, of whom I made reference in other letters, was a friend of everyone in the Squadron. This morning everyone was making enquiries about him. Other times, when we had chaps killed in the Troop, 'Titch' was always the one to write home to their people, and when possible, he used to see to it that they got a religious burial. In the absence of the Padre, he would himself conduct the service."*—Tribute from a soldier in a letter home.

Back in Egypt, with General Montgomery preparing for the advance which was to take the 8th Army right across Africa to Tunisia, the days passed rapidly. The story of the last few weeks, up to the fateful night of October 23rd, when Montgomery's great drive began, is told by "Titch's" friend and comrade, Harry Drury:—

"The last few weeks were spent behind the lines on manœuvres and in preparation for the great offensive of October 23rd, 1942. For the most part our time was spent in resting and preparing our vehicles for what we knew was to be the greatest of all our campaigns. It was during this time that 'Titch' received his promotion to sergeant, and although it meant he had to leave his closest friends of No. 1 Troop we were all greatly pleased with his promotion which everyone agreed was long overdue. He took up his position as Sergeant of No. 3 Troop, and this meant he had to forsake his tank for a bren carrier. He had been a tank man from the beginning of his service, but nevertheless he took up his new duties with a smile and was soon taking a leading part on the side of the carrier troops in the inevitable ragging between tanks and carriers.

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"There is little to say about those few weeks except that at all times 'Titch' was his usual happy self and undoubtedly the most popular man in the Squadron. We spent a considerable amount of time together, and at no time did he ever hint that the least knowledge of his fate entered his thoughts. He had given his life so completely to God he was content in his trust of Him. During the last week we moved each night towards our sector of the El Alamein line.

"On the morning of the 23rd 'Titch' went to Communion and all that day his joking and joviality were even more apparent as we quietly made final preparations for the big attack that night. We moved up quietly after dark and by 9.30 p.m. we were waiting in our position. Our job did not start till after the infantry had gained their first objective. So for the whole of the great barrage, we were privileged in having a grandstand seat with only occasional shelling returned in our direction. For most of that four hours 'Titch' was at our tank where quite a number of the Squadron had gathered, eating biscuits and cheese. Even when I was in the tank working on the wireless, his hearty laugh penetrated gaily above the thundering crash of the 500 Artillery pieces. We moved forward about 4 a.m., and dawn found us in rather a bunched position, halted before a newly laid enemy minefield. It was our turn then to take our share of the enemy's return fire, from his hastily prepared new position.

"During this barrage 'Titch's' gunner, Fred Haleis, was wounded. By 8 a.m. we were forced to withdraw from our position, and for the rest of the day we rested behind a ridge waiting for an attack we were to lead that night. For the most part men tried to sleep. Continued erratic shelling made it unwise to venture unnecessarily from our vehicles. However, late in the day 'Titch' visited me, to tell me he intended to accompany us that night in spite of the fact he could not get a gunner to fill Fred's place. He went in that night with

only his driver. Nothing could have induced him to miss the greatest of all our jobs. That was the last time I saw him.

"We moved forward about 9.30 p.m., and shortly after 10 p.m. we were over the ridge and advancing into solid raking fire. It was a hopeless task for such thin-skinned vehicles as ours, but our job was to prepare the way for the heavy tanks of a British Brigade; so it was necessary for us to advance in order to leave the gap in the minefield clear for our supporting tanks. About 11.30 p.m. we got the order to retire, as it was then apparent we were unsupported in any way. Of what took place during that hour and a half, I can tell you very little, as being closed down inside a tank, with guns and wireless to attend to, gives one no opportunity of witnessing outside happenings. However, as near as I can ascertain, 'Titch's' carrier received a direct hit about the time we turned to come back. I knew nothing of this till the following day, for about the same time our tank also received a direct hit which set it on fire, causing us to abandon it and go to the safety of a depression on another tank. Here about half the Squadron collected for the night, some with vehicles and some without.

"We returned to our own lines about dawn. There we learned for the first time that 'Titch' was missing. I checked with everyone to try and find what had happened to him. Unfortunately it was dark that night and it was difficult to recognise any carrier. However, several chaps saw one carrier receive a rather crippling hit in the front which caused extensive damage, leaving little doubt as to the fate of its occupants. There is no doubt that this was 'Titch's' carrier, because the crews of the other knocked out carriers reached safety and could tell me in what way their carriers were damaged. The enemy fought hard to hold his positions and even three days later when we shifted to a different sector, we had not been able to reach our knocked-out vehicles

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to find what had happened to those of our comrades who were still missing. We were well in among enemy infantry the night of the 24th, and we had to content ourselves with hoping and praying that those who were missing had only been wounded, and having been taken care of by the Germans, would later be reported P.O.W."

With no definite news of what had happened, "Titch" was reported missing. Weeks passed into months, until in March, 1943, word came through that he had been killed on the night of October 24th, 1942. His body was found buried on Meteryia Ridge, El Alamein, by the New Zealand grave registration unit and was transferred to a New Zealand War Cemetery in Egypt.

On October 20th and again on 23rd, the night before he was killed Percy wrote to his fiancée letters which bring to mind the letters Dr. Edward Wilson wrote to his wife, as he lay dying with Scott in the Antarctic.

Writing on the 20th, he said: "To-night at 6.30 there will be a Church service, and to-morrow morning at 0700 hours Communion. It will be a time for thought of the past and the future. It is over two years since I joined the Army. Sometimes I try to collect my thoughts, and get something concrete out of my experiences. But the present always seems so unreal. When one views it calmly, this is not the time to make judgments, or even to try and estimate what changes have been wrought, and what change will be made. This much remains clear, that there are no regrets for the time out of my life in the Army, except the natural one at absence from loved ones, the anxieties they might have been spared, and the postponements of one's hopes and plans. 'God works in a mysterious way,' and this I am certain, that the decision that brought me here was the right one. . . . A discussion arose this morning regarding the most important thing that can happen to one here, and the general consensus of opinion was that the most important thing was to get back to New Zea-

land in good health bodily, secondly to get back perhaps wounded, thirdly to get back anyway. That is quite reasonable and easy to understand, but also a reflection on our sense of values. In one sense I am as keen as anyone to get back to New Zealand, but is that the supreme aim? What is the greatest thing in life? That's what it comes to. And then one has to think carefully and remember the Christian view of life and the hereafter."

Then on the 23rd, he wrote:

"The great thing for both of us to know and for all Christian people, is that we can render service here and beyond, otherwise the stress laid in the New Testament on the other side of life would be meaningless. The ties of earth are very precious. . . . But if one can think that the best can be carried over, the best memories, hopes and aspirations, then everything that has happened and will happen, will have been for the best.

"To-day at Communion (we had it this morning just as the sun was rising at 7 a.m.) I thought of that 23rd Psalm that has come to mean so much to both of us, 'The Lord is my Shepherd—Yea though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of death'—they are great words. Remember the prayer of R.L.S. you wrote out for me long ago? I know you do, but it helps to write it down here. 'Give us courage and gaiety and the quiet mind. Give us the strength to encounter that which is to come, that we may be brave in peril, constant in tribulation, temperate in wrath, and in all changes of fortune and down to the gates of death loving and loyal the one to the other. We beseech of Thee this mercy and help for Christ's sake. Amen.' . . . Now, as ever, God be with you and me, the peace of God which passeth all understanding."

Percy Titchener died when he was thirty. It is a temptation to think of a life cut off in its beginning, of the loss to the Church, of all that he would have done and the influence for good he would have been had he

lived. But to yield to that temptation is to miss the significance of his life and his Christian faith. During his student days he wrote a sermon just before Easter, taking as a text the words of Christ from the Cross, "It is finished." After speaking of Christ's "finished work," he went on, "No one of us can do more in this life than the task God has given us. God has something for each of us to do no matter where we are situated. But let us realise that the task will never be finished as we would like it finished. As we grow in grace and strength, knowing we are doing God's will, we realise more and more that these words of Christ, 'It is finished,' are words which only He can utter. The task which we perform in this life is to fit us for the great life beyond. When we face the task in this way we will realise that death is but the crossing between the two, not a gulf which cannot be bridged."

It is given to few men to see the task of life as clearly as he saw it. It is given to fewer still to devote themselves to the task as he did. He heard a call to preach the Gospel, not merely in words, but in the spirit in which he lived his life and followed Christ. He gave his answer to the call out on the farm, on the playing field, in the University and Knox College, above all in the Army.

"I know what those two years of his company did for me," said a fellow student. "One couldn't be smug, or complacent, or indulge in negative theorising when he was about. . . . I shall never forget the happy way in which there was united in him a high purpose with an infectious buoyant spirit."

"Percy learnt a secret about living and applied it," writes a friend from the Middle East, "a secret that most of us just have an inkling of. He lived, a man . . . a great man. His example is an inspiration and challenge to me."

Percy Titchener was a man who believed in God. His belief was something far more than assent to a

creed; it was the complete giving of his life in God's service at whatever sacrifice to himself. And through the dedication that he made there came to him the assurance and peace of the Psalm he loved. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil: for thou art with me . . . Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me . . . and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

## CHAPTER VI

### FURTHER LETTERS AND WRITINGS

#### LETTERS TO HIS MOTHER

BETWEEN Percy and his mother there was a very close spiritual bond which is clearly shown in the letters he wrote to her. In a letter to someone else he said, "Between Mum and myself there exists a bond . . . which is hard to describe, a bond of sympathy, but more than that. I think it is because in many ways we are alike. . . . She said to me in a letter just before I left New Zealand that with my going she felt the breaking of a bond which had something of the 'spiritual' in it, and that she had been helped by my faith and was strengthened now by the common faith we have in the Fatherhood of God."

*To his mother, after final leave.*

" . . . And I want to say here, Mother, how much I appreciated how you faced last week right to the very end. I know perhaps even more than you think how much this war is costing you, and I know that there are many more mothers who, in the sense of numbers, are even harder hit. But not one of them will part with her sons with more anxiety and a deeper sense of loss. Whatever we are, you have made us, and given to us the meaning of the word 'Mother,' and that word for us is one of the greatest, because it symbolises you.

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"Whatever happens in the future, Mum, I can never forget all you have done and said for me. The worst that can happen is that I should depart from your teaching and precept, not that I should come to bodily harm, or even perhaps give my all in this struggle. I know how much value we place on the things of time and sense, but after all they are not the greatest. And in the days to come I want you to remember that. Make your prayer for me that I should remain true and faithful to the best that can be, and if that comes to pass, then the best has happened."

*To his mother, undated, after speaking of her anxiety for him and an elder brother also in the Middle East, he goes on:*

"But there is something great behind all this as well. Did you ever see a letter written by a young pilot to his father, and posted after his death in battle? He spoke of the 'privilege' of taking part in the events of this generation and there's a tremendous lot of truth in what he said, more so, I think, to those who have faith in God, and in Jesus Christ the Revelation of God. It is a privilege to stand here and take part, and hold what the future may, nothing can deprive us of that. And you, and hundreds of mothers share in that privilege, although it is one that costs tears and pain. There is nothing that can nerve us more to do our utmost and live up to what you think of us than that thought."

*To his mother, 9/11/41. Written when his mother was feeling the strain of his absence.*

" . . . The best that is in me I owe to you. I sometimes wish I had been more worthy of the ideal, consciously and unconsciously you have always set before us; I could never aspire to what you think we are. One could not be alive if he were not willing to bear the responsibilities of these days, and mine have brought me here. And if in following what I believe to be my right course, I have brought pain to you at a time in your

life when you have earned peace, remember, Mum, it is pain which can always be alleviated with the knowledge that I am trying to do my duty; that it was not an easy step, but one neither of us would retract.

"I think often of you over here, and wish I could take the whole of your burden on my shoulders, but such cannot be. I can share it with you, however, and I share it most in those times you find peace in the Church across the road. It is then that we are more closely united than ever in a bond beyond distance as the world knows it, our common faith in God our Heavenly Father."

*Written to his mother from Egypt.*

"At night the desert is rather good. The sky is wonderfully clear always, just ablaze with stars, and the northern hemisphere has its own 'milky way' just like ours. Everything becomes soft. In the bright sunlight during the day, the outline everywhere you look is so hard and rugged, with long wastes of sand. But at night there is a softness about everything like velvet. I used to lie up there in a small dug-out of our own, but I could look straight up to the sky and see the blaze of stars. As you will know, my mind wandered back to the land of the Southern Cross. I thought of a Mother of mine, I know anxious and worried for her sons, like so many other mothers, and I hoped that from such nights as these her soul gained that calm that came into mine. I said 'I hoped,' I meant 'I prayed.' We weren't so very far apart after all, Mum, we never are, because our common faith in God unites us over the distance no matter how great, and in Him we find the peace and rest we seek."

*To his mother from Egypt.*

"A reflection of the suffering of mothers has been given me in letters I have received from the mothers of fellows we have lost. With what pride and yet what a depth of sadness they clothe their words. It is a privilege to receive such letters. I always write when any member

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of the Troop is lost. It's such a little thing to do, and people are so grateful."

*To his mother, 26/3/42.*

"And for us this is the close of a Day of Prayer. No one knew much about it till yesterday, the news apparently had not reached these parts. I have made it a day of remembrance of New Zealand, of home, you, and all the dear people back there. At Church service we remembered you all, and then at Communion afterwards. I came very close in Communion. There is no doubt that in that service, the very centre of Christian Faith, those of us who are separated in the flesh are united by the power of God. . . .

"One could write more on a Day of Prayer. It is good that people should be reminded of the Divine elements in the world to-day, but one feels, too, that there should be no need for a special reminder—that the power of God is always manifest."

*Last letter to his mother, 18/10/42. A tribute to New Zealand nurses.*

"There's no doubt the Hospital work over here is wonderful. The nurses are a great crowd. New Zealand people owe them a lot. They do everything they possibly can for the boys. You never hear anything but praise for them from the chaps who have been in Hospital. . . .

"Both now and in the days ahead I pray that you may have the peace of God which passeth all understanding, and the blessing of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be with you now and always. Amen."

#### LETTERS ON VARIOUS TOPICS

*On the general apathy in face of world events. Written from Burnham, 10/12/40.*

"One thing that has surprised me, moving about among people, is their refusal to understand the present situation. Several times now I have met people who resent the attempt to make a war effort.

"It makes me feel a little despondent sometimes. We look forward to a 'brave new world,' and yet in the face of a great peril the people are in many cases totally apathetic.

"I don't want to stir false emotion, nor do I want the patriotism that results in jingoism and the despatch of white feathers, but I would like to feel that people realised the need and the gravity of the world situation to-day. You know there's a note of prophecy in:

'If ye break faith with us who die

We shall not sleep, though poppies grow

In Flanders fields.'

"We did break faith, and one feels that the disunion of the present time is another breaking of faith. It's a matter I feel concerned about, I met so much of it during the week-end."

*The Task of the Church, 15/1/41.*

"A thought very much in my mind these days is the great gap that exists between the Church as we know it, and the people of to-day. It is one of my deepest impressions after three months in a Military Camp, how far the Church has failed. Don't think I'm adopting a gloomy outlook, all that has happened to me is that my own faith has been simplified and deepened, or rather strengthened. But you can't help seeing how little the Church or Christianity means to most of those fellows. . . . One hears it said time and again that the great enemy is indifference. Some of the men who say it, would say it with a great deal more feeling if they knew just how big a thing it is. We think these are tremendous days, but how about when this is all over and we have peace? It won't be peace for the Church, whether we win or otherwise."

*The University and Reconstruction, 18/3/41.*

"Why should 'Varsity students concentrate solely on the 'Varsity? . . . Actually the war situation opens up totally new fields and makes others more difficult,

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but it does not for a moment restrict the activities of 'Varsity people. There was a time when the 'University' worked with something of the meaning of its name, when it touched all the elements of community life; now the emphasis is all the other way, and 'Varsity students live only for the 'Varsity.

"It makes me feel sick sometimes to see the absolute lack of appreciation of what we are involved in. For it is a big thing, the greatest thing in its way that the world has ever known, but it is only a prelude. I sometimes feel like shrinking into myself when I think of the work that will have to be done afterwards. That, if it's done properly, will be the greatest achievement of all time, and it will only be done properly by people led by God.

"There is a combination of words I am beginning to avoid: 'Christian men and women,' because of the weakened significance of that word 'Christian.' What we want to do is to lock away the word 'Christian' for a while, then take it out, realising anew that the true meaning of the word is 'Christ's people.'"

*Before leaving New Zealand, 5/4/41.*

"Never refuse to contemplate the thought that in God's Providence I may not come back. One of my most earnest prayers for all those I leave behind is that if that happens, the day will dawn when you can say without bitterness and with true resignation, 'Thy Will be done.' Remember that we have had a privilege given us in serving God in times such as these, and finally His Will will be done."

*On the voyage to Egypt "Titch's" ship called at Colombo. Here he describes a tea factory he visited.*

"Half way we stopped at one of the most interesting places of the whole day, a tea factory. It was great to see the tea going through from the green leaf to the finished article. There are three grades—first from the

buds, second from the top leaves, and third from the bottom leaves. They are first placed in a sort of crushing machine which squeezes the juice out and leaves the tea-leaves looking like mint waiting for the vinegar. After two hours of this it passes into the drier, which is very hot, and from this it comes out looking like tea, but a lot of little sticks and dust in it.

"This is then held up high and tipped slowly out of a basin through a current of air set up by a fan. The last process is the picking over by the women, of whom there were a lot—they picked out the sticks and rubbish. It was one of the most interesting things we saw all day. I know a lot more about tea now than I used to, and incidentally that little trip was worth a dozen geography lessons."

*Pacifism, 9/7/41.*

"I seldom express myself on Pacifism, because I sympathise with the genuine pacifist; life is often difficult for him, and I should imagine doubly so to-day. But there are sterner issues to be fought to-day than the question as to whether war is acceptable in God's sight or not, and therefore those who call themselves God's servants should fight. I have not the slightest doubt that war is contrary to God's will, but I also know that it is a penalty exacted by sin, just as sin exacts penalties in every walk of life. It is a terrible penalty, but I find that sin has brought me to this pass, that involved in the world as I am and must be, I must take part."

*To a Young Minister, 30/10/41.*

"My advice is learn all you can about the families who have sons over here; the ministry of consolation will be sorely needed, and if you can go with some knowledge of the people to whom you minister, your message will be all the more acceptable."

*Christian Life in the Army, 14/7/41.*

"Life is not difficult for a professing Christian in the Army; it may be that we tend to let the other ele-

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ments set the tempo of our lives. Still, one gets little distance here with an aggressive approach. I have found that just waiting quietly, one gets some wonderful opportunities.

"I don't know how far one has to blame the Church for the kind of religion one meets here. One chap said to me last night, 'Religion is the kind of life you lead,' hopelessly inadequate from our point of view, but very prevalent here.

"One can't help noticing the outlook which says that what counts is what a man is. Even those who call themselves Christians, in many cases seem to have no adequate conception of what has been done for us 'in Christ.' That to me is the central fact to which we must go back before we can get anywhere."

*"Titch's" Trust in God, 3/9/41.*

"Just two years ago war was declared. Looking back on that day and seeing how much has happened the thought comes to my mind, 'What of the future?' . . . Much more than in the past, I am content now to walk one step at a time, and let God take care of what is His affair. Thank God for the faith that enables one to do so, although one often falters and stumbles. In spite of all the darkness of the last two years, the sorrows they have brought, separation, anxiety and care, over and above all this is now written the love of God. For me at any rate, He has given far more than He has taken away."

*"Titch's" handwriting was the despair of those who tried to read it. The following story in a letter to a friend is told against himself:*

"Before getting down to business I shall relate a tale which may resign you to my writing. Recently, while in Alex. I left some films at the Y.M. there to be sent up to me, and I addressed the envelope myself. The other day a letter with strange hieroglyphics arrived, and after an earnest endeavour to identify the writing, I

turned to the boys and said, 'Well, I've been called the worst writer in the Middle East and here's a bird writes a darn sight worse than I ever did.' Then I opened the letter and discovered the one I had addressed to myself a week or two previously! And I'm not allowed to forget it either!"

*Rehabilitation, 28/3/42.*

"The problems of Rehabilitation of Servicemen after the war are very real. So many have lost the sense of the value of human life and other values, and for that this training and life is responsible. I wonder if people realise how difficult and unreal civilian life is going to appear to these men, trained to break every law, to have no regard for their own safety, or the life of their foes. These are serious problems and must be met. And the greatest issue for me is how the Church is going to meet those days. I hope and pray she will be adequate, but to be so she must be in line with the thoughts of these men, not standing back with 'No, thou shalt not!' as her message."

*The Church's Message, 27/5/42.*

"Listening and watching, doing a spot of reading now and again, I wonder more and more at the relevance of the Church's message to-day, or rather its presentation. Can we meet the challenge that faces us? It is possible, but we must be alive to every opportunity and ready to translate the Gospel in the terms of to-day's thinking. So far I have always felt that one must be careful what concessions one makes, but I begin to feel that while the message we seek to preach is unchangeable, its method of presentation must be adequate to the thought of the people to-day. What satisfied the intellectual outlook of 2,000 years ago may not, indeed does not, satisfy to-day.

"... We have a lot to learn from the New Testament. Paul going into Athens is a classic—an entirely different approach to his entry into Corinth. Then there is Christ's approach to people. How can

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we expect people to come to the Church building on Sunday, if we don't meet them elsewhere on their own ground."

*"Titch" was passionately fond of music, and often expressed regret that he played no instrument, and made a poor attempt at singing. 20/4/42.*

"Do you remember my telling you that the Padre generally calls on me to begin the hymn at Church Parade? Well, the Sunday before last he suggested that one of the Squadron form a band of singers; it was a bit optimistic to call it a choir. Anyway I dashed round and found about ten chaps who were willing to start together and do a spot of singing. So we had a practice on Saturday night. Imagine me trying to get them to sing! Well, it went off fairly well except for the opening; you see we have no sort of instrument at all, and one waits for the other. Anyway we practised away at 'Eternal Father,' and 'Fight the Good Fight,' and they had them off fairly well, so we left off 'till the morrow."

"On Sunday at Church Parade the Padre tips me the wink and away we go, not too good but still, passable. But the final hymn, well, some didn't start, others started wrongly, and things were a bit out. Then 'God Save the King,' and the choir, evidently 'troubled in spirit' laid low like Brer Fox and left yours truly to trill out on his own. Oh my, what tribulations! I feel quite desperate, but we'll see what next Sunday brings forth. If it's not better the choir collapses. . . .

"While I'm on the subject, I was on leave on Sunday and dropped in at the Y.M. I was sitting in one of the rooms when all of a sudden the strains of the 'Hallelujah Chorus' came through. I thought it was the wireless, and traced it down to its source, a gramophone. I was thrilled to the boots and stood there for about an hour waiting for the chaps round the gramophone to move away so that I could have it all over again, but they took it with them. It belonged to them. I was nearly heartbroken, and didn't have the nerve to

ask them to play the 'Hallelujah Chorus' again. . . . I think someday we may try and make a decent collection of records; say the 'Messiah' and others. The wireless is all right, but it is liable to have Bing Crosby following 'Largo' or something similar. It just makes me want to scream."

## CHAPTER VII

### ARTICLES

#### "DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME"

"The Regiment has hardly adjusted itself to life in the Desert, the accustomed routine of the Base Camp is broken, and among the questions on the Saturday for some of us is whether Holy Communion will be celebrated as usual early on Sunday morning. All doubts are resolved by the Padre himself, as he moves about the Camp, a familiar and well-loved figure, leaving word that Communion will be held as usual at 0700 hours, the phrasing a reminder of our army life. And so that night, before rest is sought in the desert sand, our prayers and thoughts are for the morning when a few will meet round the Lord's Table, of the loved ones at home, and there is an earnest prayer that we may find that need satisfied, the longing of the soul for communion with God and the spiritual strength found in the presence of our Lord. In the morning one has to be about fairly early, for the Padre is located some distance away. This is a time when the desert has an air of mystery and a beauty and calm all 'its own'; it is too early yet for the sun to reveal the harsh outlines of rocky escarpment and the long sandy wastes, wrapped about as they are by the dim light of the dawn. In this atmosphere of peace and quiet one goes through the same routine of preparation as for the parade ground, only now there is an added ground for that attention to detail which the Army demands. Neatness and cleanliness during the week bring credit to one's arm of the

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service, now one goes to stay awhile in the presence of the King of Kings, and anything less than the standard of the Army would be unworthy.

"During the walk down I wonder where Communion will be held, so many places crowd into the memory where I have attended Communion during the past year. Especially clear is the recollection of those held in the Padre's room at the Y.M.C.A. Hut at Burnham, where I often had the fellowship of one, a fellow student and well known in our Church, who was soon to give his life in following the path of duty. There was the memory of Communions held in Barracks huts, in a picture theatre built according to the Egyptian style, mostly matting and wood, with no roof, and most precious of all is the memory of Communion at home in New Zealand with my own people. The question in my mind is soon answered, the Padre is located in a 'dugout,' a word which will bring back vivid memories to old soldiers of the last war. Probably they will think of France and dugouts half full of mud and water, one discomfort which we are spared in Egypt, although there are others. This dugout is simply a room dug under the level of the ground, sand rather, the walls built up with sandbags, the roof of galvanized iron covered with sand, and rather a luxury, a concrete floor. At one end is a table covered with the Union Jack, and resting on it an altar, the Cross made simply of wood, its shape the symbol of our faith, on either side a plain brass candlestick holding a lighted candle. In spite of their simplicity these things have a value which cannot be expressed; they were with the Padre through Greece, and in spite of the difficulties of retreat and evacuation, by his own efforts they were brought back to Egypt, to be used once more and take their place perhaps in another campaign. The dugout is not large, 14 feet by 8 feet, there are no seats, but blankets folded in order that the communicants may kneel. The rising sun pierces a ventilator with one of its beams, and a ray of light is

thrown right on the altar so that the shadow of the Cross is reflected on the wall, and the altar itself stands clearly defined. It seems as though it is thus illumined that its outline may be etched on our minds for ever.

"The Communion is to be celebrated according to the rites of the Anglican Church, but here there is no distinction of denomination, the Padre is Padre to the Regiment, it is indeed a body of believers round their Lord's Table. The gathering is not very large, the Padre looks over the little assembly, and then turning to the altar begins the service. The consciousness of nearness to God is with each one, for a while we are on the mountain tops. In these circumstances how pregnant with meaning those words, so familiar, 'The Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread,' what memories they wake. We are in the Presence of Him Who loved us and gave Himself for us; through His power the distance between ourselves and our loved ones is gone, especially as we remember that in the coming day, for them a day now almost past, they may have heard these words, and broken the Bread and drank the Wine, which is our Lord's Body and Blood. With these thoughts and others too deep for expression, we receive the elements in this act uniting us with all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ. For a space we remember the loved ones in prayer, and then the closing words are being said. The beautiful phrases of 'Lord now lettest Thou thy servant depart in peace,' enter into our very souls, followed by the Benediction. A pause, and then we rise refreshed and strengthened by this coming together in the Presence of our Lord.

"The day now calls with its accustomed round of duties, slightly altered if possible because it is Sunday. I have time to share with some of you at home in far off New Zealand my first Communion in the desert. My main thought has been to try and reveal to you as it was revealed to me, how closely we are united by this bond, a bond between fellow Christians as long as they

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remember and obey their Lord's command, 'Do this in remembrance of Me.'"—*Outlook*, 5/11/41.

#### IN THE EGYPTIAN DESERT

"Some months ago when we had just gone to the Western Desert I wrote my impression of the first Communion we celebrated there. That campaign is now well past, and once more after a break spent in the hills and plains of Syria, we are in the Desert with a difficult task confronting us, nevertheless one to which all go forward with grim resolve and determination that the ultimate outcome will give us back all we have lost. The past week has been difficult, with thoughts of comrades who have paid the supreme sacrifice, some who have been wounded, others who are missing, all the pain and sorrow that war brings; so that most were glad to hear there would be a service on the Saturday evening, and it is of this service I wish to write.

"The time, 9 p.m., will sound strange, but it is necessary to wait until darkness has fallen before troops can gather in numbers, a very unwise proceeding during daylight hours. As twilight deepens, the Padre moves about from vehicle to vehicle, a smile and a word of encouragement for each one, no hint in his bearing of the strain of the previous day spent at Medical Dressing Station. At all times he is the 'Padre,' cheerful and ready to help, carrying on the great tradition established by the Padres who have come over here from New Zealand. As darkness falls, the vehicles move a little closer, preparations are made for the night, then there is a gradual move from all sides towards one centre, the Padre's truck. Away on the horizon the crescent of a new moon gleams faintly with only light enough to show the blurred outline of a group seated in a semi-circle, talking in low whispers of the day past, while the Padre arranges for a well-known hymn to be sung. It will have to be sung from memory, for, of course, all light is strictly forbidden. What better choice could

there be than 'Abide With Me,' and soon the strains of that familiar and well-loved hymn rise from the gathering, unaccompanied, weakly at first, but gradually rising in volume as confidence passed from one to the other. How real to many of those there, are the words of the closing verse, 'Hold Thou Thy Cross before my closing eyes,' with the triumphant assurance of the last line. These men with their comrades have passed through deep experiences, and while perhaps the theological problems may have little meaning for them, yet they know the inward reality of trust in God. 'In life and death, O Lord, abide with me.'

"The Padre, now in the semi-darkness one of the group, offers prayer, remembering the needs of his men, asking that they may know the guidance of God, also remembering those at home, never very far from our thoughts. He then briefly and simply addresses a few words to the gathering, illustrating from Paul's letters the utter dependence on God in times of trial and adversity which the Apostle encouraged and strove to attain among the people of the Churches which he established, using these illustrations as an example to us.

"How I wish I had the ability to picture the scene! A dimly outlined group, above them the vault of heaven a blaze of stars such as one can only see in these latitudes, a few miles away the occasional flare of a Verey light, at irregular intervals a burst of gunfire or the deep note of a heavy gun, the flash of which would be seen seconds before the sound was heard, and through it all the quiet voice of the Padre encouraging to strength and fortitude, proclaiming the Gospel of One Who 2,000 years ago taught the Way of Life in a land only a day's journey distant: these are some of the things to which an abler pen could do justice. For myself I can only say the scene is etched in my mind for ever, thoughts crowded into my mind, of home, of loved ones, of old comrades, of other services one had attended, but none under quite the same circumstances. The service was soon ended and

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we parted with the words of the Benediction, 'The peace of God which passeth all understanding.'

"The following morning (Sunday) Communion was celebrated at 5 a.m. but space does not permit me to write of this, save to say that there in the dim light of early morning we knelt and received the Bread and Wine, as we looked at the little wooden Cross, the symbol which has gone with the Regiment through Greece, Libya, and Syria. Immediately behind it in the heavens the morning star, at first bright and clear, gradually waned with the coming day. It brought to one's thoughts another star which guided those who followed, to the Saviour of the world. From this thought we could take new courage, finding for ourselves strength and inspiration for the days that lie ahead.

"It is my hope that this impression of a service near the front line may be of some interest to those at home; and also that the knowledge that in the midst of war our thoughts are turning to the things that belong to God by such services as we can manage, may be of some comfort to those who daily commit their loved ones over here to the care of that same God before Whose mercy seat we gathered. And to His name be the glory."—*Outlook*, 7/10/42.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A SERMON

#### ON PSALM 23

*Percy Titchener preached this sermon at Waikaka, where his mother was living, on March 2nd, 1941, when he was on final leave. From the point of view of style it is not the best of his sermons, but dealing as it does with army life and his own attempt to live as a Christian in the army, it is fitting that it could be included in this book.*

*The poem which follows it was written by a friend of home and college days who was present when the sermon was delivered.*

"May I express briefly my pleasure in being here to-night assisting in this service. My first thought when

your minister extended the invitation to me to take part in this service was 'What shall I say?' I realised that there would be some here who are about to enter Camp, some who have been in Camp the same time as myself, and also the people whom we usually term the 'congregation.' To prospective soldiers I could not speak as one knowing all, my comrades would be aware of the omissions, and besides I have so much to learn myself that the position of the mighty and learned is not for me. Then, too, much of what I might say would be more suitable for a meeting of a more general nature than this. But one thing I can speak about and illustrate from this Book, is my own experience.

"First of all, speaking as one who tries along with others to live as a Christian, let me say that life in Camp tests one's old beliefs and convictions, and in the course of time much is rejected. One is forced to live on a simpler but deeper faith. That is why I want first to speak on the Psalm we read to-night, the 23rd, called by one writer, 'the Pearl of the Psalms.'

"And with truth, for here we have expressed in simplest terms the deepest and most abiding faith man could have. Let us briefly look at this Psalm in its three main divisions.

"(1) In the first division the Lord is spoken of as the Shepherd who leads. 'The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake.' This is a simple picture, yet one that breathes infinite trust in a real and a living Shepherd. Notice the close intimacy of the 'my Shepherd' and then think of the words used by Christ, 'I am the good Shepherd.' By his emphasis on the pronoun 'my,' the Psalmist expresses his deep and abiding hope in the Shepherd. Would to God we could all speak in the same voice and say with perfect trust 'my shepherd' also.

"(2) And then we have the future, with God as the guide. 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.' Often, as the Psalmist made his way homewards, his path led down from the hills to the valley, where the lengthening shadows of evening hastened on. Here of all places he was exposed to attack and peril, but as weapons he had his rod and staff. Now that picture comes to his mind and he uses it to illustrate the deep and abiding trust in God as his guide. Alas! for some shepherds the valley at eventide had meant death; but the Psalmist is ready to pass through the Valley of Death, with this supremely confident prayer on his lips. It is not the vain boasting of one grown careless of the world, but the full and abiding trust of one for whom not even death has terrors.

"(3) And then the picture of God as the Eternal Provider, 'Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.' And closing this exquisite 'Pearl of the Psalms' the Psalmist is forced to cry, 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.' Was ever faith and trust more implicitly expressed, more simply and yet more beautifully.

"Why have I chosen this message to-night? First of all let me speak to you as a congregation. Some of you have already sent loved ones in the service of their country to camp and overseas, and for them you have anxious thoughts. I can only speak for our own Camp in North Canterbury, but this I can say, that as far as we in Burnham are concerned we are well cared for, especially as regards the spending of our leisure time. Here I want to say that the Church as a whole is doing a wonderful work. And may I tell you that in supporting Patriotic efforts you are helping the work of the various huts. I cannot adequately convey to you what

these huts mean, and how much more they must mean to the lads in Egypt and England. So much for the comforts provided.

"Let me also speak of letters. Already one realises the longing with which mail is awaited in Egypt, because in Burnham its arrival is awaited eagerly enough. If any of you feel that there is something active you wish to do and you are looking for a field of endeavour, then write a letter to some fellow who has gone from this district. Don't worry overmuch whether he belongs to this Church or whether you know him very well. Regard it as a service.

"To those who have been touched very nearly by this war, by the departure of loved ones, I commend the words of this Psalm with all its comfort and trust, 'The Lord is my Shepherd. . . . Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil.' Christian friends, it is much more important that your loved ones should be kept true in life to God's Eternal Purpose, than that they should be preserved in body and mind. This is, I know, a hard thought, but we cannot go beyond it. And I trust that none in their prayers will ever forget it. It is only in such abiding hope and trust as the 23rd Psalm expresses, that we will be able to say to God in prayer, 'Thy will be done.'

"For those who are with me in camp and those about to go to camp, I can also commend the spirit of this Psalm. I have learned this from camp life, that what your minister told us some months ago on the eve of my departure for camp, is the absolute truth. Not all the professions we make will have an effect at all if they are not borne out by our lives. The man who is prepared to show his fellows he is a Christian by leading a straight life, by reading the Word of God, by committing himself to God's care in prayer at night, this man I say, and I know it from experience, has the responsibility laid upon him of proving these things in his work and spirit during the day. He need fear no

interference in his devotions. Such a thing I think I can say is unknown, but he can expect that watchful eyes will regard his actions, and then the real test comes. All this he must do without in any way separating himself from his fellows. They will accept him for what he is and make their judgments accordingly.

"To such a one constant comfort will come from the words of this Psalm, 'The Lord is my Shepherd.' On one occasion in a hut one night I heard two fellows talking, and one said to the other, 'I saw a fellow saying his prayers last night. I wish I had his courage.' You know, I think that if a few fellows said their prayers at night everyone in the hut would follow suit.

"Well, friends, whether that is true or not, there is a tremendous pile of work to be done in our camps. The encouragement of the good example of a Christian life, is needed not because there are many who are not Christian, but because of the many who have become indifferent. They are a challenge and a reproach to us as a Church, these men whom the Church has almost lost. It is for you to do what you can to win them back, for me, and each of us who follows Christ. And the first step will be the witness of a life lived by each one of us in the hope and trust that 'The Lord is my Shepherd,' that glorious hope which came to fulfilment in Christ himself when He said, 'I am the good shepherd.'

"Let us leave this House of God to-night with this thought in our minds, let us lighten the clouds that linger because of the anxiety of separation from loved ones, of dangers to be faced and difficult days to be lived, in taking this promise and hope to our hearts, 'The Lord is my Shepherd.'"

## "TITCH"

*Some thoughts on the passing of L/Serg. Percy Lyndon  
Titchener, killed in action, October, 1942.*

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My friend  
They told me you were dead,  
Killed in action—now there was no hope.  
The news knocked at my soul, quite stunned and dulled.  
It could not pass. Then slowly, hour by hour,  
There dawned upon me truth so stark and cold,  
That you were gone.

I mused—  
And memory took me back  
To former years, those years of work and fun;  
I saw you, nay, can see you even yet  
Preaching in that little country church  
So dear to you and me; with humble folk,  
And God was there.

You stood,  
In sombre khaki dressed  
(For even then you heard your country's call)  
And this the burden of your message there:  
"It matters little what you say or think  
In Christian things, unless your life runs true  
To word and thought."

I knew  
You spoke no empty phrase,  
For you yourself had witnessed every day  
Of God that lives. You knew just what it meant  
To stand the scoffing while you knelt at prayer;  
Thus through it all you gained esteem of men  
And praise of God.

Then, too,  
I thought of College days,  
Those days of fellowship and converse sweet,  
Of supper-times, of jokes and arguments,  
Of books and sport, exams. and hours of ease—  
And through it all you kept a cheerful smile  
To help us on.

But now,  
Alas, you smile no more,  
For Death has laid his all-victorious seal  
Upon those lips, those eyes, that very life  
That we held dear, and leaves us memories  
Which crowd at times upon our waking thoughts  
And start a tear.

And yet  
Can you be really dead?  
Yours was the hero-heart that never dies,  
That lived in faith, and held the promise firm  
That "Death is swallowed up in Victory."  
How could the grave be victor over you?  
And where's Death's sting?

I know  
That once again we'll meet  
In that great Land which waits beyond the grave  
For those who know your Saviour as their Friend,  
And hand will clasp with hand, and fellowship,  
Now broken for a time, will be restored  
For evermore.



'Titch' of the Div. Cav.

A Memoir of L/Sergt P.L. Titchener

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