

**THE BELOVED CAPTAIN:
THE HONOR OF
THE BRIGADE. AN
ENGLISHMAN PRAYS**

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The Beloved Captain: The Honor of the Brigade. An Englishman Prays by Donald Hankey

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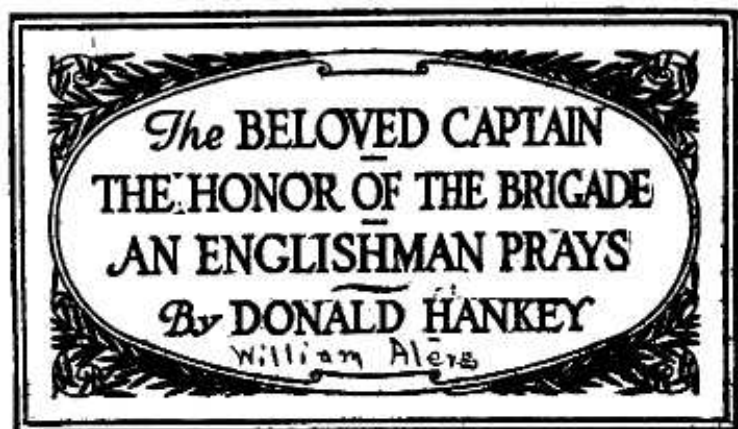
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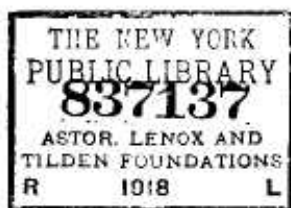
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The Beloved Captain

He came in the early days, when we were still at recruit drills under the hot September sun. Tall, erect, smiling: so we first saw him, and so he remained to the end. At the start he knew as little of soldiering as we did. He used to watch us being drilled by the sergeant; but his manner of watching was peculiarly his own. He never looked bored. He was learning just as much as we were, in fact more. He was learning his job, and from the first he saw that his job was more than to give the correct orders. His job was to lead us. So he watched, and noted many things, and never found the time hang heavy on his hands. He watched our evo-

lutions, so as to learn the correct orders; he watched for the right manner of command, the manner which secured the most prompt response to an order; and he watched every one of us for our individual characteristics. We were his men. Already he took an almost paternal interest in us. He noted the men who tried hard, but were naturally slow and awkward. He distinguished them from those who were inattentive and bored. He marked down the keen and efficient amongst us. Most of all he studied those who were subject to moods, who were sulky one day and willing the next. These were the ones who were to turn the scale. If only he could get these on his side, the battle would be won.

For a few days he just watched. Then he started work. He picked out some of the most awkward ones, and, accompanied by a corporal, marched them away by themselves. Ingenuously he explained

that he did not know much himself yet; but he thought that they might get on better if they drilled by themselves a bit, and that if he helped them, and they helped him, they would soon learn. His confidence was infectious. He looked at them, and they looked at him, and the men pulled themselves together and determined to do their best. Their best surprised themselves. His patience was inexhaustible. His simplicity could not fail to be understood. His keenness and optimism carried all with them. Very soon the awkward squad found themselves awkward no longer; and soon after that they ceased to be a squad, and went back to the platoon.

Then he started to drill the platoon, with the sergeant standing by to point out his mistakes. Of course he made mistakes, and when that happened he never minded admitting it. He would explain what mistakes he had made, and try again. The result was that we began

to take almost as much interest and pride in his progress as he did in ours. We were his men, and he was our leader. We felt that he was a credit to us, and we resolved to be a credit to him. There was a bond of mutual confidence and affection between us, which grew stronger and stronger as the months passed. He had a smile for almost everyone; but we thought that he had a different smile for us. We looked for it, and were never disappointed. On parade, as long as we were trying, his smile encouraged us. Off parade, if we passed him and saluted, his eyes looked straight into our own, and his smile greeted us. It was a wonderful thing, that smile of his. It was something worth living for, and worth working for. It bucked one up when one was bored or tired. It seemed to make one look at things from a different point of view, a finer point of view, his point of view. There was nothing feeble or weak about

it. It was not monotonous like the smile of "Sunny Jim." It meant something. It meant that we were his men, and that he was proud of us, and sure that we were going to do jolly well—better than any of the other platoons. And it made us determine that we would. When we failed him, when he was disappointed in us, he did not smile. He did not rage or curse. He just looked disappointed, and that made us feel far more savage with ourselves than any amount of swearing would have done. He made us feel that we were not playing the game by him. It was not what he said. He was never very good at talking. It was just how he looked. And his look of displeasure and disappointment was a thing that we would do anything to avoid. The fact was that he had won his way into our affections. We loved him. And there isn't anything stronger than love, when all's said and done.

He was good to look on. He was big