

C. H. GOW
MEMORIAL
LIBRARY

"Out of Strength, Sweetness"

A MEMOIR
E. G. C.H.G.

The C. H. Gow Memorial Library.

FOUNDED BY

EDITH GOW,

BORN MAY 16, 1865,

DIED AUG. 10, 1924,

IN MEMORY OF HER SON,

CHARLES HUMPHRY GOW,

SURGEON R.N.

BORN MAY 26, 1891,

KILLED AT BEAUMONT HAMEL, NOV. 13, 1916,
whilst tending his wounded in the open, after
service in the North Sea in the T.B.D. "Lafitey,"
and at Gallipoli and in France, as Surgeon to the
Anson Battalion, Royal Naval Division.

"A man to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others . . . the great instrument of moral good is the imagination."

SHELLEY.

"When one gets to the other side pain does not matter; even bad pain."

EDITH GOW.

EDITH GOW was born at Gee Cross, Cheshire, the sixth daughter and youngest child of Dr. Charles Beard the well-known Unitarian preacher and writer, a man of unusual Catholicity of spirit and insight. Her mother, of Scotch descent on the maternal side, was a woman of remarkable charm and force of character, uniting great capacity for affairs with a tenderness which brooded like an embodied love over her family and friends. In 1867 Dr. Beard removed to Liverpool, where his work for the foundation of Liverpool University, and for countless good causes in that city is incorporated in its history.

In such a home atmosphere of "plain living and high thinking" Edith grew to young womanhood. She was a somewhat delicate child, now dreamy and nervous, full of imaginative fancies alternately her delight and her fear, and again bubbling over with sparkling fun and epigrammatic humour, which added many catch-phrases to the family vocabulary. Her sisters always remember her bedtime stories, which kept them awake into uncanonical hours, and her contributions to a family Magazine, the earliest manifestation of a devotion to literature and the arts which was her delight and solace through life.

Courage and sincerity were integral qualities in her nature, leading her to welcome fresh

experience, to test all sanctions and loyalties before affirming them, and to meet the results without alarm. Even as a child she would retire into a corner to brood and dream, emerging often with some searching question which her elders were hard put to it to answer.

A personality so brilliant and interesting, with the added charm of beauty, attracted many friends, to whose devotion she was apt to give an almost too quick response, the very depth and sincerity of her nature leading her to seek in each friend the highest values. Disappointment often followed, with consequent blame for instability or fickleness. But to those friendships which survived the test she was almost fantastically faithful.

She married in December, 1889, the Rev. Henry Gow, for sometime her father's assistant in his Ministry, and then just appointed to the Church and Mission in Mansford St., Bethnal Green, where they settled in a small house next door to the Church. There her great desire to live and work among the poor was realized, and, in 1891 her son was born. Her beautiful hopeful presence and influence at this time will not soon be forgotten; she was never at her best in organized work for so-called charity, preferring always to lavish individual love and devotion on the one "fallen among thieves," who came to her for aid; one of these hearing many years after of her hopeless illness exclaimed with tears "I would willingly die that she might be left to help those in need."

4

In 1893 Mr. Gow accepted a call to Leicester where a daughter was born to them, and in 1902 he removed again to London as Minister of Rossllyn Hill Chapel, Hampstead.

This was in many ways a happy time for his wife. She was again able to work for her poor friends, and found the opportunity at Hoxton. She also threw herself whole-heartedly into the movement on behalf of Woman's Suffrage but, characteristically not content with propaganda, attached herself to the crèche work of Sylvia Pankhurst. Ireland too, found in her a warm partisan, (she even went the length of taking lessons in Erse!) and during the terrible war years she interested herself in the needs and sufferings of German wives and children in England.

This devotion to unpopular causes brought her much pain, by reason of the misconception of those unable to appreciate the purity of her ideals, or the fine courage of her absolute devotion to what she thought to be right. She bore it, for the most part, very cheerfully, secure of the comprehension of those for whose approval she most cared. Of these were men and women of similar tastes and opinions with whom her work brought her into contact; many bearing well known names, in whose company her brilliant social and personal gifts assured her always an honoured place.

At this time the country cottage at Whiteleat began to take its place in the family plans. To

5

it they turned from the busy London life, and when finally in 1913 Dr. Gow acquired the little property it became a second home; a centre of mutual friendship and loving service, where every one found, in the pleasant Bucks country, rest and refreshment.

Of the home life it is perhaps enough to say that the mother was its centre and inspiration; outside interests never loosened its hold on her spirit; she was equally at one with her children when in their childish days no family pet could receive a name without her suggestion, and in their manhood and womanhood when they turned naturally to her, their intimate confidante and adviser.

Between herself and her son the bond was peculiarly close; he inherited from her the artistic imaginative nature which was for both their joy and their pain, with a sensitiveness and passionate tenderness of heart which, in childhood and early youth needed the screen of his mother's sympathy as a protection from the buffeting of the world; a dangerous illness when he was 14, following an operation for appendicitis only cemented this tie more closely. The long weeks of convalescence which followed he bore with a fortitude and patience very noticeable in one so young, and he came back to active life with a deepened character and purpose which, as the years passed, gradually replaced the timidity of sensitive boyhood by a serene courage and power of endurance. "After this illness," he

said, he "could never again fear death." A friend writing years later to his father, speaks of his beautiful expression in very early boyhood. This he never lost for he carried always on his face the light of his fine purpose and high ideals.

He was entered at Westminster School as a Town Boy and was as happy there as such a nature could be in the rough and tumble of school life. Though always liked he did not make any very close friends, but his influence on his fellows was deservedly much valued by his teachers. He left in 1908 to take a year's science training at University College after having Matriculated at London in the 1st Class, and in the Autumn of 1909 went to Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Here he spent three happy years. He knew now the joy of intimate friendship, and the little circle of companions who met in each others rooms and discussed "heaven and earth and all philosophy," though they were probably labelled "serious" were full of the joy of living. He rowed in his College boat and rambled on the Gogs and to Ely and the neighbourhood, to satisfy his constant craving for country life.

It is indeed impossible to over estimate the influence of his deep love of nature upon his character and development: no one who knew him could ever think of him apart from it; from earliest childhood his devotion to all animals was intense and, as he grew to manhood, nature study in all its aspects was to him as natural and

inevitable as breathing. Side by side with this was an unbounded tenderness for all forms of suffering, out of which grew his determination to enter the medical profession, which became his settled purpose while at Cambridge. His scientific knowledge and power of concentration seemed to point to research work, but the human side of his profession attracted him still more strongly. "I want to help poor people," he said, and that he might bring practical knowledge to aid professional attainments he joined, while at Cambridge, the Foresters' Benefit Society, and spent much of his leisure taking sick pay to the houses of its members. Entering St. Bartholomew's Hospital in 1912 he quickly became engrossed in his training and in the sufferings and needs of the patients committed to his care. His tender love of children in particular induced him to follow his little patients to their homes, endeavouring to ameliorate conditions and thereby to ensure their better health for the future. On such visits no task was too menial for him if by doing it his end could be served. Well might one poor sick woman whose neglected room he had swept and tidied say afterwards, "God sent me an angel from Heaven when He sent me Mr. Gow." His younger patients he gradually formed into a very unconventional troop of Scouts and on them he lavished leisure and money; planning expeditions for them to the Parks and Zoo or taking them for holidays to the Whiteleaf Cottage, or to suitable camping grounds, where by example rather than by precept, he taught them lessons of manliness and

brotherhood which have never been forgotten. At the outbreak of war his one thought and regret, after his mother and home, was leaving "the Boys."

He volunteered to the Admiralty during the first days of August, 1914, and after a few weeks on the Hospital Ship "Plassey" where the want of work greatly tried his active, impulsive nature, he was appointed Surgeon Probationer to the T.B.D. "Laforey" and sailed on her to the North Sea, rejoicing to have obtained what he called "the chance of a life time."

The following letter from Gunner E. Roper, late of the "Laforey," tells what use was made of this "chance." Writing to Dr. Gow Gunner Roper says, "Will you please accept my deepest sympathy for the loss of your dear son. I felt it very much for we were such dear friends. It's a loss to the Service, such a brilliant young officer. Some of the 'Laforey's' ship's company who are serving in this ship have expressed their sorrow. I might tell you now some of the little acts of kindness, by medicines out of his own pocket that he could not get in T.B.D., but he would have his own prescriptions, give men singlets, and many a nice parcel of clothing he has served out to the men. Provided himself with material so that he could do small operations painless. I have seen him carry nearly dead prisoners down awkward hatches to the engine room where it was warm, and bring one back to life. The same night he carried a German officer to the Ward room to do things one would hardly credit. He was

true to his profession ; friend and foe got his full professional treatment. Many evenings we have spent pleasantly conversing on service, etc. I got to know his inner self. I trust you will be sustained and comforted in your great sorrow and that you will derive much consolation from the thought that your son gave his life a willing sacrifice to a great cause. "Greater love hath no man than this."

With much sympathy,

Yours faithfully,

E. ROPER.

In the spring of 1915 Humphry Gow came back to London by advice, and passed his M.R.C.S. Examination, obtaining special commendation for his knowledge of obscure heart conditions. He then went back to the Admiralty and begged for a more dangerous job, as he dreaded being sent again to the North Sea where there was "nothing doing." In consequence he was transferred with the rank of Captain R.N. to the Royal Naval Division and after a month's service at the Royal Naval Hospital, Plymouth, for which he was warmly thanked by the authorities, was sent out in October to Gallipoli as Surgeon to the Anson Battalion. After the evacuation of Cape Helles in January, 1916, he went with his Battalion to Stavros and on to France, where in November, 1916, at the battle of the Ancre, he met his death from machine gun fire. Of his stretcher-bearers he wrote at the time, "Here

in the trenches it is possible to be real ' pals.' We live and sleep together, cakes are easily got rid of while we are in the trenches, as they all offer me bits of their cakes. Its not discipline . . . but what can you expect of a Socialist? and, I maintain, real discipline, i.e., willingness to work suffers not a whit—" and again of his thoughts about the war he wrote, "I cannot understand a C.O. anymore than I can understand Christ. They both seem much before their time, and indeed the first is the logical outcome of the second. I would sooner never get home again than be at home now, fit—in uniform or out of it."

In "On Four Fronts with the Royal Naval Division" page 177 are these words, "how Surgeon Gow of the Anson dressed his wounded under a murderous fire and after he himself was fatally wounded spent his last hours on earth writing a report on the brave conduct of his stretcher-bearers" and what his work and life had meant to his Battalion cannot be better told than in the letter sent to his father by his Commanding Officer which follows :

"Dear Mr. Gow. I am more sorry than I can say to have to inform you of the death, of your son, Surgeon C. H. Gow of this Battalion, who was killed in action on the 13th inst.

He accompanied the Battalion in an attack on the German trenches and did splendid service attending to the wounded all day long. At dusk he went out from a captured German trench to look after wounded lying in the open

and there he was hit by machine gun fire in two places. He was brought in and died of his wounds not long afterwards.

We have lost our C.O. and many Officers in this action but the loss of your gallant son grieves me far more than any of them. I knew him pretty well as you know and admired him intensely. He was so upright, honest and fearless. His last actions were very typical of him for when he was dying he wrote three notes thinking entirely of others and not at all of himself. One note I believe has been sent to your wife, another was to direct that his medical staff should have his things and any parcels coming for him, the third was to recommend two of his staff for their devotion to duty, their names have been sent in for reward. I think your son was one of the finest men I have ever known and I offer you and your wife my greatest sympathy in your loss. All the officers of the Battalion unite to praise him and his own medical staff were quite devoted to him.

Yours sincerely-sorrowfully,

BERNARD N. ELLIS.

From France too came letters from humble folk upon whom he had been billeted, telling of his tender care and help to their children who wept and mourned for his death.

So ended the brilliant promise of a life which he himself would probably have described as in many ways, a failure; but which those who

understood and loved him knew to have been, through its beneficent service and self-sacrifice, one of supreme attainment.

His mother met her loss in the heroic spirit of her son, "Grief is the price we have to pay for love," she wrote afterwards, "and who would not count such payment just," and as the years went by there was noticeable in her a larger tolerance, a sweeter courage, and a more certain reliance on the unseen realities.

But she never recovered from the blow, which aged her, physically, beyond her years.

A few months before her fatal illness developed she decided to found at Whiteleaf, on the spot her son had so loved, and where happy holidays had been spent, a Memorial Library for the use of the neighbourhood, having for its nucleus a small collection of books he had gathered together for his Boys. These, afterwards, increased by many gifts, were arranged in the old barn next to the Cottage and opened in October, 1922. Her interest in it, and delight in its success were unabated when, a year later, she was taken from it and from those devoted to her by the illness which only ended in her death.

If getting to the "other side" involves living consistently in touch with the Eternal Values we cannot but believe that Mrs. Gow and her son attained it; they, indeed, would disclaim any unusual virtue ^{or} effectiveness, possessing as they both did, that deep humility and sincerity of soul, which, purged of self,

measures attainment by the light of high ideals. They chose deliberately the harder side of life that they might share, through love and friendship, the disabilities and sufferings of mankind. They knew great joy by reason of this bond but also, in consequence, struggle and self-sacrifice in no common measure. For those who knew and loved them no written words are necessary to keep their memories green, but as the years go by there may be some who will use and value the Library, who are ignorant of its origin, and of the story of heroism and hallowed sorrow which consecrated it. For such, especially, has this short memoir been put together, in the hope that by its means "they being dead may yet speak."