

The Late Lieut. W. R. Clarke

(Gravesend),

R.F.C.

ACCIDENTALLY KILLED.

Lieut Wilfrid Randall Clarke, R.F.A., attached R.F.C., who was accidentally killed whilst flying at Grantham (as briefly announced in our last issue), was the elder son of Mr. R. Feaver Clarke, J.P., Gravesend. He was educated at St. Lawrence College, Ramsgate, and on leaving was entered as an engineer apprentice with Messrs. Vickers, Ltd., Erith, his services being retained by the firm at the termination of apprenticeship. Soon after war was declared Lieut. Clarke resigned his appointment at Erith, and enlisted in the Public Schools Battalion at Epsom. On November 20th, 1914, he was gazetted Second Lieutenant, Royal Field Artillery, and after several months' training he went with his Battery to Flanders in October, 1915. During the winter of that year he was at Ypres and Arras. Early in 1916 he was transferred to the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, in the Inspection Department (Carriages). Desiring more active work, he succeeded in getting accepted in the Royal Flying Corps, the branch of service in which he was most interested. He made good progress, and was working hard to secure his "wings" and so become a qualified pilot. On 1st February, 1918, he came home for 48 hours' leave, returning to Grantham on Monday, February 4th. In the afternoon of that day the accident occurred which terminated at such an early age a very promising young officer. Mr. R. Feaver Clarke has received numerous letters of sympathy, from which we are permitted to print the following extracts:—

His Squadron Commander, R.F.C., writes: "If sincere sympathy can take any weight off such a blow, then the sympathy that the whole of my Squadron has for you may help, for we all loved him. He was my own pupil, and I have often remarked that if all pupils were as keen and hard-working as your son was, our work would be much easier. Always cheerful, always ready for any work, he set a fine example, and his death was a great shock to us all."

The Chaplain, R.F.C., writes: "It is with the greatest regret that I have heard of your son's death to-day, and I should like to send you and his family my deepest sympathy. I hear on all sides what a good fellow he was, keen and plucky. . . . It is a heavy price we have to pay for the training of the men, who serve their Country in the air."

The Bishop of Chelmsford writes: ". . . I know how poor human words must be at such a time as this, but you have his memory, which must be of great value to you now. I well remember his visit to me at Bethnal Green, and how he delighted us all, by his clean and wholesome life. You must thank God for what he was, and what he is; for surely he is in the Service above."

A Friend, who has known him from birth, writes:—"Poor Will! So splendid in physique, so courteous, so tender, so genuine, so clean. The world is a loser, when such as he are taken, for to know him, was to love and respect him."

CANON GEDGE'S TRIBUTE.

The Rector of Gravesend (the Rev. Canon Gedge), preaching at St. George's Parish Church on Sunday morning, made touching reference to the late Lieut. Clarke. He said: I am thinking of one whose sudden death has set its mark upon the passing of the last week. Only last Sunday morning, in the prime of life and flush of youth, he was with us. He would come to the early Communion, saying he must always remember that with him it was one moment in the air and the next in eternity. The words were singularly significant. It was so with him within a few hours. He left us next morning to go straight back to Grantham. He ascended to a height of 1,500ft., and then—fell like a stone! Faintness must have prevented his releasing the controls, which would have automatically righted the machine. He went to death absolutely unconscious. Very early in the war, the Canon continued, they lost one well-known to them there, by disease—then little understood. Since then again and again they had had to face what war was costing them—their young. That was the tragedy of war—it took the young. They felt that to-day—they were actually conscious of the cost of war. But who would have it otherwise than it was—if the cause was sacred? They were giving to God their best, strongest and bravest. Service—that was what their young souls rendered. They served alike in life and death. The supreme test of service was unto death. The term, "he would have got his wings," had been much repeated. Only a week or two ago it was said of another that he would have had his wings. And he had them. He had wings which had lifted him high. God seemed sometimes to snatch away the young as though He would have them to himself, in their bloom. He took them, young, bright and buoyant, before time had had its way. From the contagion of the world He had secured them. Suddenly dashed to the ground and broken up like a potter's vessel! Yes, it might well be that they might almost cry like the great Russian novelist: "Fly on, my soul." Yes, "fly on my soul," the body's work done, the service rendered. The soul flies on in the service of God, set free on some errand of God's device.