Articles by Brian Tatford

Brian Tatford

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Report From France (June-July 1967)

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La Pluie - Ou Le Beau Temps?

Rainy Lille or Sunny Nice? Which would you choose? The answer, humanly speaking, is a foregone conclusion, but spiritually speaking?...

And so it was that five and a half years ago, we packed away baby Laurent's sunhat and beachball, got out our boots and umbrellas, turned our backs on the sunshine and moved to the dark, industrial North, in order to prepare the way for the One who is "the Sun of Righteousness to rise with healing in His wings" in so many sick hearts.

Challenged by its tremendous needs, we settled in the densely populated city of Lille, nerve-centre of the "Black Country" with neighbouring Roubaix and Tourcoing. A traditionally damp area, by reason of its proximity to the North Sea and the flat plains of Flanders, it was something of a desert from a spiritual point of view. So it was with those needed Living Waters in mind that we gave the name "l'Eau Vive" to the house God so wonderfully provided for the work of the local assembly.

"l'Eau Vive" … four floors, cellar, garage and attic! "What great possibilities … and what a lot of work!" were our predominating thoughts as we moved in, somewhat frightened. Today we don't say "cellar" but "club room" for children on Thursdays; instead of "attic" we say "girls' dormitory," while the so-called "garage" now proudly bears the name "Tiberiade."

“Tiberiade” — the young people’s own evangelistic coffee-bar, product of months of sawing, hammering, painting, and PRAYING! “Tiberiade” whose homely, friendly atmosphere draws in all kinds of unwanted youngsters branded “Teddy Boys” — sad results of alcoholism, immorality and broken homes. One now finds them smoking in odd corners all over the house, often standing lonely, hidden behind doors in the most unexpected places…and how greatly we feel the need of love and of wisdom in dealing with these souls for whom Christ died.

After a busy Saturday evening at “Tiberiade,” the doorbell rings and in comes a young Christian husband burdened with the problems of his wife’s unconverted family. Late as it is we pray together, committing the situation to Him who alone can intervene.

Next morning, en route before the service we collect our elderly friend Monsieur P. at the City Old People’s Home, an austere, prison-like institution. Quite alone in the world, and suffering from Parkinson’s Disease, how much he appreciates his one day a week in a Christian atmosphere! Back at the meeting, several people are away for the Easter holidays and there is a majority of sisters present, so how glad we are of the presence of Theo, on holiday from Rheims where he is doing a year’s qualifying course as Maths’ teacher in High School, and proving a real help in the new assembly there (born of the “Rheims for Christ” Campaign 1966).

No time for lunch; it’s raining hard so off we go to Clairmarais (70 km. away) to pick up four young people camping under canvas for three days — a very optimistic venture in this climate! After a hasty campfire meal with

them, down comes the tent and back we come to Lille for a meeting with Swiss missionary Roger Cretegny serving the Lord in French Guiana.

A young couple are waiting for us at the house. We knew the husband N. well, as he used to attend meetings regularly with his brother before going out with an unconverted girl. Then, finding their marriage on the rocks just three months later, N. came back and accepted the Lord, and this particular evening we have the tremendous joy of seeing his wife do the same! Praise God with us and please keep on praying. We should so much like to see them and other interested young couples, join the ten-day house-party for families at Corny (French Christian Guest House) in July with Herbert Beattie as speaker.

It's late again, but along comes R. who has run away from Remand Home 59 times and is now on "liberte conditionnelle." His greeting is "I've come to say evening prayers with you" — and this is his fifth visit to us today! We covet him for the Lord in order that a strong witness may be rendered among these tough youngsters in the quarter.

Finally, tired and hungry but rejoicing in the Lord, we sit down to a late supper with all in the house: visiting missionaries, team members, young people and not-so-young … until in comes little Laurent, with enthusiastic cries from baby sister Nathania, to tell Daddy that the sanitary accommodation is once again blocked up — so, last job on Sunday night… !

Are we sorry we left the sunshine and white beaches of Nice for the grey climate and flat plains of the North? To this question we would say an emphatic "Non, non,

non!” Our wonderful Lord Jesus left the glory of Heaven to come down in His spotless righteousness, live among sinners, share their burdens and problems and show them the way to Heaven. Could we do otherwise? “For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19 v. 10).

As the little assembly slowly gets on its feet, we ask for your prayers. It might not be long before the day comes to enter more fully into the young people’s camp and Bible Training work to which we believe the Lord has called us. Do pray that His will alone might be made known and obeyed.

“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye, through His poverty, might be rich.” (2 Cor. 8:9).

Brian and Helen Tatford and the “Eau Vine” (Living Water) team, 63 rue St. Gabriel, 59 LILLE France.