

# HIBBERT HOUSES

## A Record

COMPILED BY  
R. H. MOTTRAM

*from material supplied by the  
Director and others*



DIVISIONES SENTENTIARUM, SPIRITUS IDEM

THE LINDSEY PRESS  
14 GORDON SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.1

# HIBBERT HOUSES

A RECORD

COMPILED BY  
R. H. MOTTRAM  
*from material supplied by the  
Director and others*



Christmas Dinner 1945 at H.H. 1 (Cairo).



THE LINDSEY PRESS  
14 GORDON SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.1

[Frontispiece.]

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
CHRISTMAS DINNER 1945 AT H.H. 1 (CAIRO)	
<i>Frontispiece</i>	
THE DIRECTOR IN HIS TRUCK . . . . .	16
A HALT IN THE DESERT . . . . .	16
SUDANESE COOK PREPARING TURKEY . . . . .	16
SERVICE IN THE CHAPEL, H.H. 1 . . . . .	17
LIBRARY, H.H. 1, SHOWING MISS ABEL . . . . .	17
LOUNGE, H.H. 1 . . . . .	32
MEN'S BEDROOM, H.H. 1 . . . . .	33
RECEPTION OFFICE, H.H. 2, SHOWING MR. AND MRS. LEONARD OF THE AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIA- TION . . . . .	36
CHAPEL, H.H. 3 (CAIRO) . . . . .	36
TEA IN THE GARDEN, H.H. 12 (RAMLEH) . . . . .	37
WOMEN'S ROOM, H.H. 12 . . . . .	37
LOUNGE, H.H. 6 (ALEXANDRIA) . . . . .	44
EXTERIOR, H.H. 8 (ALEXANDRIA) . . . . .	44

*First published 1947*

### This is the story of Hibbert Houses.

Even if the recorded achievement were not so impressive in hard statistics, or the gratitude of those who used these establishments so touching, it would still be a story worth telling for its extreme improbability, one might almost say, its romance. For, while a certain not negligible section of the public knows that Hibbert, an eighteenth-century worthy, left funds to be administered on a very broad basis, out of which his trustees assist the *Hibbert Journal*—perhaps the best known of their activities—few of those who had intimate knowledge of the uses of Hibbert funds could have conceived of the name becoming known throughout the fighting services of the Middle East as the title of a group of welfare centres. That is what has happened. Here follows the story, which plainly needs to be told, of how and why.

Its telling imposes the greatest difficulty on the teller. Though most of the Hibbert trustees, if closely questioned, would call themselves Unitarians, and are members of the General Assembly bearing that name, there is a much larger body, including many who use Hibbert funds, and a majority of those who at one time or another used Hibbert Houses, who would much rather not be known by that, or indeed by any other label. It is impossible to set out the remarkable history of Hibbert Houses without recording that many a good person who had bed and breakfast at one of them, and perhaps only realised later how wrong were his preconceptions of the place that sheltered him during his all-too-brief "pass". This is not new. All of us who remember the First World War can recall grim jokes about the Fundamentalist who was the only person available to say the burial service over Indian casualties, or of the strictly Orthodox padre who found he had been giving the Benediction to thousands of ribald boys, not five per cent. of whom asked or cared what he called himself. That is history. But it is not easy to impress on the general, or even the avowedly Unitarian, reader that every Hibbert House had a chapel in it that laymen and religious of every conceivable Christian belief could use for their own rites, if they wished to do so, but attendance at which was never made a condition of staying in the House. Few could escape knowing that the place was Unitarian in conception and material basis, but no one was obliged to

keep away on that account. Total war makes hay of our exclusiveness, and the fact has to be faced. The only thing to do is to tell the factual story.

On the contrary, in practice very prominent orthodox figures might be found availing themselves of Hibbert hospitality, almost as if they enjoyed a spiritual rest as much as a physical one. Their testimony is recorded here.

### First of all, how did the venture start?

At the beginning of the war some Unitarians, who were anxious that Army chaplains of their own denomination should be appointed, approached the War Office officially with that suggestion.

A Committee was formed of which Col. Sir W. P. Colfox, Bt., was Chairman and Mr. Herbert Gimson Secretary.

They were met very fairly by the authorities, who said that certainly there should be Unitarian Army chaplains, provided that one condition could be fulfilled. That condition was that at any one place, at any one time, there could be collected a substantial number of Unitarians to whom these chaplains might minister.

Of course it was impossible for our small community to give this undertaking, and so the plan to appoint Unitarian Army chaplains had to be abandoned.

But the Unitarians who had moved in the matter were not to be deterred from their main purpose, which was to demonstrate that as a community, though a small one, we have a vital message for humanity, and that we intended to seize the opportunity given us by the war to attempt to put Unitarianism across to those to whom it had meant little or nothing. These prime movers were themselves old soldiers of the earlier world war, and had known and valued the original Toc H at Poperinghe.

This house we saw in imagination as a small, dilapidated, and shell-torn building, housing its chapel, its ante-room-cum-coffee-bar, and its Spartan living quarters for its hard-worked padres. At that time no visions of hostels or of comfortable clubs rose before our mind's eyes.

Again the War Office was approached, and again we were met more than half-way. It was agreed that we should send out two padres as soon as arrangements could be made; and

that in the meantime the military authorities should engage and allot to us a suitable building.

All the negotiations—which included the collection of a substantial sum of money and the finding and choosing of suitable padres, and much else besides—occupied a very long time. And when Messrs. Sparham and Bone were finally ready to sail, the Mediterranean was closed, and to reach Egypt entailed many months of travelling round the continent of Africa. Accordingly, it was not until the late spring of 1941 that they reached Cairo, and were met at once with a dilemma and the necessity to take a great and most important decision.

They found on arrival that there was a very big difference between the work they had been sent out to do and the work which the Army authorities had planned for them in the light of existing conditions.

They were not expected to carry on their work like ancient prophets in their caves.

They were confronted with a large and commodious building, and told that the Army needed a comfortable hostel for service-men.

It was impossible for Messrs. Sparham and Bone to refer home for guidance, as at that time all communications took many weeks and months. So they had to reach their own decisions by interpreting in the spirit, and not merely literally, the instructions they had received at home. And in so doing they vastly increased the scope and importance of the work they had been sent out to do. Their original instructions had been that a Hibbert House must contain three essentials, and there were a great many other desirable features which should be added if circumstances allowed. The essentials were and always have remained,

(1) A Chapel, devoted solely to religious services and prayer and meditation, and not to be used for any secular purpose (the only exception to this rule—if, indeed, it is an exception—has been that serious music, as opposed to ragtime and jazz, has been permitted in the chapels);

(2) a club sitting-room of cheerful and restful appearance; and

(3) a warden's study-office, where those who sought advice and comfort could be seen and helped in private.

It was thus that H.H. 1 in Cairo came into being—a very

No.	Name.	Denomination.	Date of arrival.	Date of departure.	Remarks.
1	Rev. G. J. Sparham	Unitarian	1941	Still working	Director, mentioned in Despatches.
2	Rev. W. Bone	Unitarian	1941	Died 1944	Assistant Director and Field Accountant.
3	Miss E. V. Abel	Congregationalist	1941	Still working	As Rev. G. J. Sparham was asked to head the venture and the Rev. Walter Bone was appointed his colleague, Miss Abel was frequently left in sole charge of H.H.1 and G.H.Q. contacts while Mr. Sparham was on tour in Palestine and Syria. Thus, though not holding any official position in H.H.'s, she has, in fact, done a work of importance for the Society, in addition to her work at H.H.1. It will be noted that she is also one of the three founders of the work in the Middle East.
4	Rev. D. Lawson	"	1942	1946	Senior Representative for Palestine. Succeeded Rev. Bone as Assistant Director and Field Accountant.
5	Mrs. W. Bone	Unitarian	1942	1944	Over three years good work in Cairo.
6	Rev. R. Mitchell	"	1942	1945	
7	Mrs. Mitchell	"	1942	1945	
8	Rev. J. Martin Hall	"	1942	1943	Did much for H.H. in Palestine.
9	Mrs. M. F. Lee	Church of England	1942	1946	
10	Rev. W. Walsh	Unitarian	1943	1943	

11	Rev. J. H. Lewin	Unitarian	1943	1943	Left for Y.M.C.A.
12	Rev. J. R. F. Todd	Congregationalist	1943	1945	
13	Rev. F. Burman	"	1943	1945	Senior Representative for Alexandria. In charge of H.H.'s largest centre for two years.
14	Rev. G. J. Evans	Unitarian	1943	1945	
15	Mr. T. McLeod	"	1944	1945	
16	Rev. P. E. Canham	"	1944	1944	
17	Rev. R. C. Leonard	American Unitarian Association	1944	1946	
18	Mrs. Leonard	American Unitarian Association	1944	1946	
19	Mr. T. I. Mardy-Jones	Congregationalist	1945	1946	
20	Mrs. H. R. Sewell	Church of England	1945	1946	
21	Mrs. E. Emsall	"	1945	1945	
22	Miss E. Cave	"	1945	1945	
23	Miss A. V. Jones	"	1945	1947	Senior Representative for Palestine. Joined H.H. by special release from Army. Co-warden with Miss Abel Did an excellent job at Haifa.
24	Capt. E. L. L. Webb	"	1945	1946	
25	Capt. A. C. Matthews	"	1945	1945	
26	Mr. S. Summerfield	Methodist	1945	1945	
27	Capt. R. V. Bellamy	Church of England	1945	1945	
28	Capt. A. Dishington	"	1945	1945	Still working Transferred from Toc H.
29	Mr. D. A. Rennison	Methodist	1946	1946	
30	Miss A. D. Muir	Church of Scotland	1946	1946	

different undertaking from the one we had imagined; but one much better suited to our purpose, and offering much greater scope and opportunity for all we had set out to accomplish.

If Hibbert Houses could have a device, it would be "Christianity in its most simple and intelligible form." The first wardens went out, in the words of the Charter of the Missionary Society of the Congregationalists, "to preach not Episcopacy, or Presbyterianism, or Independency but the glorious Gospel of the Blessed God."

It would be an idle paradox to say that "the most simple and intelligible form" of Christianity is very difficult to explain. But the reader who was not aware beforehand of the only possible basis on which such an institution as Hibbert Houses could be set up, is now in possession of the facts.

Let us next take the Houses, as they were established, beginning with the names of the devoted workers and their means of communication, in the order of their coming and going (see pages 6 and 7).

In addition to the above-named workers, who have all been H.H. representative workers, in full status, Hibbert Houses has had help from two other people:

Rev. A. J. Bayliss, C.F., a Methodist Army chaplain, who by special arrangement between Mr. Sparham and the Deputy Chaplain-General, was posted to Nathanya when H.H. was desperately short of workers, and acted as Warden there during 1943, for about a year.

Mrs. S. Ison, a locally engaged Englishwoman, who when again H.H. was suffering from acute shortage of workers, was engaged to assist the Society in Hibbert House No. 8, Alexandria, in 1944 and 1945.

Sergt. Roberts, Pte. Goddard and L.A.C. Giles have at various times been loaned from the Army and R.A.F. Welfare Pools to assist H.H. Sergt. Roberts' help was of the highest order. It could not have been better had he been a fully instated worker.

#### *Cars employed on the Job.*

1. W.D. 28206: Ford V8 utility staff car, known as "Tubby", because fat and burly. Now scrapped.
2. W.D. 1164: Ford station van, also V8, known as "Slim Jane", because sly, temperamental and thin. Still running.

3. W.D. 28770: Morris 8 saloon, bought from civilian sources, known as "Tiny" because so small by comparison with "Tubby" and "Slim Jane". Still running.

4. W.D. 29091: Standard 9 saloon, bought from civilian sources, known as "Robin", because bought from a friend of ours called Robinson, but always called by Leonard, who usually drove it, "Whimpie". Sold back to a civilian.

5. W.D. 29103: 4 x 2 Army Pick-up, Hillman 9, known as "Pixie", from Pick-up. Still running.

6. W.D. 72953: Ford V8 Saloon, known as "Christopher", because bought from the Christian Scientists. This now, in place of "Tubby", is the staff car. Still running.

Now let us glance at the distances between Houses, the miles to be travelled and the nature of the intervening country. Here is Mr. Sparham's personal narrative:

"The distance from end to end of the Hibbert Houses area of Middle East: Starting at Alexandria and proceeding via Cairo to the extreme limit reached, when we operated near Damascus, in 1943.

Alexandria to Cairo	. . . .	130 miles
Cairo to Tel Aviv	. . . .	345 "
" Rameh	. . . .	345 "
Tel Aviv to Nathanya	. . . .	25 "
Nathanya to Haifa	. . . .	50 "
Tel Aviv to Damascus	. . . .	140 "
Tel Aviv to Jerusalem	. . . .	40 "
Total greatest length:		
Alexandria to Damascus	. . . .	615 "

"This journey would normally be done by road—*i.e.*, by car. Railway connections exist, but beyond Haifa consist of the old Turkish narrow-gauge line, taking a prodigious time, and leaving a final portion to be covered by road. What these facts mean is that whenever I went from Cairo to Damascus, I almost invariably drove the whole distance in my car, either single-handed or with some companion who could share the driving. From Cairo to Damascus was a drive of from 485 to 500 miles, according to the route taken.

"The first Hibbert House to be opened in the Middle East was called:

"**H.H. 1, Cairo**: situated in a city block, with National Bank of Egypt, Marconi's offices, Shell offices, and Stock Exchange on various sides. H.H. 1 comprises the third floor of the block, giving accommodation for fifteen bedrooms, most with several beds, dining-room, kitchen, bathrooms, lounge, Chapel, writing-room, library, table-tennis room, staff rooms, including one room in which to house the Director's bedroom and H.Q. On the roof terrace is another flat used for dormitory purposes only. Total accommodation is thus provided for seventy men. This hostel was opened in *June* 1941. It is still doing a good job. In the course of its nearly five and a half years of existence it has provided a home, during leave or transit, for not less than 36,000 men. This House opened under the wardenship of the Rev. G. J. Sparham, Rev. W. Bone and Miss E. V. Abel. Miss Abel, who from November 1941 to June 1945 had the partial assistance of Mr. Sparham only, is still Warden, with Mr. Stuart Summerfield, who joined us at a later date. It continues to be, as it has been from the beginning, the Middle East Headquarters of all our work. We came into possession of the property by direct act of the War Office, which had instructed G.H.Q., M.E.F., to retain suitable premises for the 'Unitarians' who were sending out representatives to 'commence welfare work in the Middle East'. The Army's intention had been to use the block for officers' messes. This plan was abandoned, and we came into the reversion of it. Hence we were able to open our first House within three weeks of landing, and to change a bug-ridden block into the cleanest and one of the most popular hostels in the Middle East.

"Bed and breakfasts supplied from 5th June, 1941, to 10th August, 1946, in H.H. 1 numbered 109,051.

"N.B.—In all H.H. hostels *all* meals—breakfast, lunch, tea, dinner—are provided, but bed-and-breakfast figures give nearest approximation to number living in a hostel.

#### Nature of Road Journey. Cairo to Alexandria—130 miles.

"The road surface is tarred; condition, fair to indifferent. Route: via Pyramids of Gizeh, approx. 10 miles, then away

across the eastern end of the Western Desert, North-North-West some 100 miles, and finally turn East then North, to negotiate the saline Lake Mariut, into Alexandria.

"Desert mostly soft, undulating sand, featureless. A hotel (civilian) half-way, and two small frontier posts (Egyptian), each about half-way between the Half-Way Hotel and either end of the desert section of the journey, constitute the only variants.

"The petrol supply for military vehicles (such as H.H. cars, other C.V.W.W. societies, and, of course, Service transport) at Cairo, is at Kasr-el-Nil Barracks; kilo 10 from Gizeh (in the desert); and Amrya, near Lake Mariut, on the farther side of the desert, about 100 miles farther on. This lead to:

"**H.H. 2, Alexandria**: situated in a city block, next to the Jewish synagogue of Alexandria, to which the property belonged, within five minutes walk of the Corniche and the sea. H.H. 2 comprised two complete floors of one block, and one floor of the next block, occupying the upmost floors of these blocks. Subsequently, the next floor down, in one of the blocks, was added. As in the case of H.H. 1, the accommodation had to be converted and adapted to our requirements. Walls in some cases had to be pierced to throw two flats together, or for doors, original kitchens changed into bath and shower-rooms, etc. Thus all the usual amenities of a Hibbert House were provided. A feature of H.H. 2 was its size. Its rooms were larger than those of H.H. 1. An outstanding feature was what was afterwards known as its 'Walter Bone Memorial Library', mainly collected by Mr. Bone before his death, containing some 4,000 volumes. The House was opened by Mr. Bone, who, later with Mrs. Bone, was its Warden till he died in April 1944. The Rev. R. C. and Mrs. Leonard, of Northeaston, Mass., U.S.A., then (after a short interregnum under the Rev. Denis Lawson), with the assistance of the Rev. F. Burman, took it over and improved it. Accommodation for nearly 150 men was provided in this House. It opened in *November* 1941, and when closed in *April* 1946, 201,691 bed-and-breakfasts had been supplied.

"**H.H. 3, Cairo**: was situated in a central part of Cairo—a complete house (not merely an aggregation of flats). After numerous and ingenious structural alterations, accommoda-

tion for eighty men was afforded, with amenities similar to those mentioned in the cases of H.H. 1 and H.H. 2, plus a small garden at the back. The House was opened in *March* 1942, in response to a request from the Army authorities for the provision, by our Society, of a further hostel in Cairo, because we 'seemed peculiarly capable of that kind of work'. The relative costs of opening H.H. 1, H.H. 2, and H.H. 3 illustrate the progressive rise in prices of commodities experienced in Egypt at this period of the war. They rose still more steeply later. The initial capital involved in establishing H.H. 1 was £E.850, H.H. 2, £E.1,100, H.H. 3, £E.2,050. With the exception of £300 sent from England towards the cost of establishing H.H. 1, the money necessary for founding these Houses was borrowed free of interest from the British Community War Fund, a civilian fund administered by a Co-ordinating Council of representatives of the three Services, the Council of Voluntary War Workers (C.V.W.W.), local Service welfare clubs and institutions, the British Chamber of Commerce, etc. The General Commanding British Troops in Egypt was its chairman, and the D.A.A.G. H.Q. B.T.E.\* its secretary. Hibbert Houses were represented by their director, the Rev. G. J. Sparham. With one exception, every Hibbert House established in Egypt was assisted by this fund, and the money loaned was repaid out of earnings by the Houses. The first wardens of H.H. 3 were the Rev. Robert and Mrs. Mitchell. When they left the Society in 1945 their places were taken by Captain E. L. L. Webb and Mrs. H. R. Sewell. The House in the course of its existence gave a home to about 32,000 men. From March 1942 to April 1946 when it closed it provided 96,634 bed-and-breakfasts.

#### "The Road Journey : Cairo to Tel Aviv, 345 miles.

"The road surface is tarred; condition good to poor. Route: across the delta through fertile country, following the Sweet Water Canal to Ismailia, ninety-five miles, through the Biblical 'Land of Goshen'. Across Suez Canal by chain-ferry or pontoon bridge, then out across complete desert. This is the Sinai Desert.

"The road is undulating for the greater part of the distance, though straight and flat at some points for many miles. Many are the dangerous bends in certain stretches.

\* B.T.E. = British Troops in Egypt.

"The desert is not featureless. Mountains rise out of it, in some cases near to the road, and in certain instances attaining a height of 3,000 feet. If the northern theory of the Exodus be accepted, one of these mountains—Jebel Hilla—was possibly the Mount of the Law (which is signified by its name). It attains a height of about 2,800 feet, and is situated near the Palestine border, though in Egypt, not far from the Military Police post at Abuawageila, located on the bank of the Wady-el-Arish, which Jeremiah knew as the River of Egypt.

"The road proceeds thence, via El-Auja, where a desert track runs south to the Gulf of Akaba, and via Asluj, to Beer-sheba. From Cairo, thus far, its general direction has been East-North-East. At Beer-sheba it turns left-handed West-North-West to Gaza, across the Plain of Philistia, leaving the desert behind and passing through increasingly fertile country.

"At Gaza it turns again mainly North to Rehoboth; thence to Tel Aviv.

"At Beer-sheba one approaches within a few miles of the outlying foothills on the mountains of Judæa. From Beer-sheba to Gaza one turns away from the mountains towards the sea. From Gaza to Tel Aviv one has the sea (though not in sight, owing to sand-dunes and hills) on one's left, while the mountains of Judæa are distantly visible on the right.

"The mountains of the Sinai Desert region are utterly barren, vast rock formations rising abruptly out of the Desert sands. Probably they were islands when the Desert lay at the bottom of the sea. Their stratifications are remarkable, often shooting up vertically, then plunging downward with great suddenness, indicating their volcanic origin. The laminations of Jebel el Moghara—the first mountains one passes, on the left, in the course of this journey—resemble two packs of cards stacked against one another.

"Petrol supply on this journey: Cairo, Ismailia, Asluj—Cairo to Ismailia, ninety-five miles, Ismailia to Asluj, 186 miles.

"H.H. 4, Tel Aviv—is situated towards the northern end of Tel Aviv, a city of over 200,000 inhabitants, all Jews, so near the sea that men could undress for bathing in the House, having to cross only one road to reach the beach. H.H. 4 was our most ambitious venture, materially and financially speaking. It had been a hotel, was constructed for this purpose, and stood in an ample garden of its own, in a quiet yet easily accessible road. It cost approximately £3,000



(rather over) to set up, half of which amount was provided from the funds sent from home and half from funds accumulated out of our collective earnings in the Middle East. No money was borrowed. It was opened under the wardenship of the Rev. Denis Lawson (Congregationalist) and Mrs. M. Lee (C. of E.), in *November* 1942, and continued under their joint wardenship till it closed, owing to the riots and disturbances in Tel Aviv, in *February* 1946. A feature of this House, which otherwise repeated the usual Hibbert Houses amenities, with the addition of a special room set aside for music, was the fact that, having been a hotel, its rooms were smaller than those of the earlier Houses. No room slept more than four men, and several rooms, three, two or one. And nearly every room contained a fitted basin with hot and cold water. Winter accommodation ran to eighty-five men; summer accommodation, when the terrace roof could be pressed into service, 115. Just as H.H. 1 provided us with a Middle East H.Q. in touch with G.H.Q., M.E.F.,\* and H.Q. B.T.E., both of which were in Cairo, so H.H. 4 provided a headquarters for our work in Palestine and Syria, in touch with H.Q. Palestine and Transjordan, and H.Q. 9th Army, the former at Jerusalem and the latter near Beirut. Before the House closed, thousands of men had passed through it, no fewer than 31,000. It was one of the best philanthropic, or C.V.W.W. hostels in the Middle East. From *November* 1942 to *February* 1946, 95,331 bed-and-breakfasts were provided.

**“The Road Journey: Tel Aviv to Damascus, via Tiberias, 140 miles.**

“The road, which is similar in nature and condition to those described immediately above, tends mainly in a North-North-East direction. After Nathanya it pierces the Carmel range, coming out on the Plain of Armageddon at Megiddo, where the ancient tumulus of the former cities of Megiddo still remains (Judges, v. 19; 2 Kings, ix; xxiii, 29, 30)—cities that became ruins before the history of England began.

“From Megiddo straight across the Plain of Armageddon, or Esdraelon, to Nazareth, up to which one climbs steeply 1,600 feet.

“Then through Cana, across the high moorland of Galilee,

\* M.E.F. = Middle East Force.

for twenty miles, till one drops sharply into the hollow of the beautiful hill-surrounded Sea of Galilee, to Tiberias, 680 feet below sea-level.

“The Sea of Galilee is fourteen miles long by seven miles in breadth.

“From Nazareth to Tiberias the road runs mainly East, after that it turns North-North-East, climbing up some 4,000 feet, crossing the Palestine frontier at Roshpina, on to the high moorland of Southern Syria.

“The Antilebanon Mountains lie to the left, about five miles distant. At their southern extremity lies their highest point, Mount Hermon, 9,166 feet.

“After Kuneitra, about half-way across this moorland, one runs by and across the ancient River Pharpar, till, dropping gently mile after mile, one reaches Damascus itself.

“Damascus lies 2,260 feet above sea level. This fact is almost unbelievable, because it is situated on a vast plain made fertile by the combined waters of the Pharpar (from South) and Abana (from West) canalised through the city in seven streams, and flowing North-East into a region of abundant fruit trees, till they lose themselves in an extensive lake from which there is no outlet, and beyond which reaches to boundless horizons the immense, hard Syrian Desert.

“From Tiberias to Roshpina one travels through the Gospels. Journeying North one passes through the sites of the ancient Magdala, the Plain of Gennesaret, Dalmanutha. One leaves Capernaum ruins on the distant right located on the North shore of the Lake, and climbs up through the location of the ancient Chorazin and perhaps Bethsaida (Matt. xi, 21).

“At Roshpina, and just before, one passes Lake Hula, probably the Biblical Waters of Merom, which lie, like a large mere, below one, to the left, stretching North to Mount Hermon and the head-waters of the Jordan, among which on the lower slopes of Hermon is Baniyas, the ancient Cæsarea Philippi, where Peter made his great confession.

**“Journey from Tel Aviv to Damascus, via Beirut, 150 miles.**

“The road runs North through Haifa, Acre, Sidon, Tyre and the ‘coasts of Phœnicia’, to Beirut. Then East over the great Lebanon range, rising at the pass, with great heights

above, and often snow on either hand, to an altitude of 5,000 feet.

"It then drops into the Bikr Valley some 2,000 feet, making its way across the valley till it rises again to negotiate the Antilebanon range, the pass over which lies 4,000 feet above sea-level.

"This range is very wide, but eventually, through a deep gorge cut by the Abana River, the road twists and winds as if into the heart of the wild. Then suddenly the gorge ends and the mountains cease and there is Damascus.

"The city lies, thus, immediately to the East of the Antilebanons, on its plain.

"**H.H. 9, Damascus** was opened in *April 1943*. It might have met a great need had not the war turned in favour of the Allies, or United Nations, more rapidly than at one time appeared possible. As it was, the need for it happily quickly passed, but while it lasted it served a diminishing number of men in a useful way. It was housed in a simple Army hut, in a dun-coloured desert camp, six miles north of the city, located under the eastern outliers of the Antilebanon Mountains, some 2,500 feet above sea-level, open to the scorching rays of the sun during the summer and to the chill of the Antilebanon snows during the winter. It offered but simple amenities—just a couple of rooms, a snack-room and a lounge, simply furnished, with a tiled floor, rough stone walls and a barn-like roof. But the whole camp was of that nature. It had been built for purposes of camouflage, to resemble as nearly as possible a native Syrian village. Therefore H.H. 9 had to be judged rather by its own surroundings than by the standard of the remaining Hibbert Houses of the Middle East. Its first Warden was the Rev. J. H. Lewin, who endured these rough conditions during most of its existence, at any rate until he fell ill in the September of 1943. By that time the whole camp was declining in numbers. The Revs. W. Walsh and G. J. Evans took his place, and in *October 1943* the House was closed. It never did big things, but it was distressful to have to pull out, because the men who used it, though a mere handful towards the end, were a very isolated community, to whom even a rough hut, in the form of Hibbert House, was a Godsend. Shortage of suitable staff and the development of work elsewhere, however, made closure inevitable. It was with reluctance that, as the sun rose over the Syrian



The Director in his truck.

A halt in the desert.



Sudanese cook preparing turkey.



Service in the Chapel, H.H. 1.



Library, H.H. 1, showing Miss Abel.

Desert on that day of October, Mr. Bone, who accompanied me on that occasion, and I finally closed the doors of this venture, and drove away the two workers who succeeded Mr. Lewin.

**“The Road Journey : Cairo to Jerusalem, 335 miles.**

This route is the same as to Tel Aviv as far as Beer-sheba, then continues East and later North-North-East.

“Distance from Beer-sheba to Jerusalem, fifty-five miles. Road tarred and good. First across plain, then climbing up through the Shaphela, or foothill country of the Mountains of Judæa, into the mountains. These are all fertile, with multitudinous outcroppings of limestone.

“One passes over the wilderness of Ziph, where Saul hunted David, via Hebron, where Abraham lived, Sarah died, the twelve spies reconnoitred (Numbers xiii, 21-25) and David settled as king for the first seven and a half years of his reign; then on, skirting Bethlehem, which lies on the East, or right, of the road, into Jerusalem, approaching the city from the South.

“Jerusalem lies 2,500 to 2,600 feet above the Mediterranean, or nearly 4,000 feet above the Dead Sea.

**“The Road Journey : Tel Aviv to Nathanya.**

“Road tarred, condition good, undulating.

“Direction North, up Plain of Sharon, with Mediterranean out of sight on left, and mountains of Samaria, including Mount Gerizim (the ‘this mountain’ of the fourth chapter of St. John’s Gospel) in the distance on the right.

“Country very fertile, cultivated in regions by Jews, and in regions by Arabs. Citrus plantations and arable land.

“H.H. 5, Nathanya : This House was opened very soon after the Damascus hut closed, by the Area Commander, Northern Palestine (then 15 Area M.E.F.), in December 1943. Through an error of judgment on the part of Mr. Bone, who was then our Field Accountant, and myself, it was decided to transfer the number of the Damascus House, which had closed so prematurely, to the new House at Nathanya, in order to keep the numbering of the Houses consecutive. This was found, however, to lead to no small confusion, so the

numbering of the Nathanya House was kept at '5', while that of the Damascus House was changed for clarity's sake to '9'. In this way the total number of Hibbert Houses in the Middle East was made correct. 'H.H. 5' is the most beautifully situated of all our Houses. Nathanya stands on the Palestine coast about twenty-five miles north of Tel Aviv. The town, as such, is still undeveloped. It consists of one main street (resembling some new American 'Main Street') thinning off towards and along the seashore into a district in which isolated houses are dotted about the countryside from the earth cliffs, that at this point fringe the Mediterranean, to a distance of about a mile inland. At the northern end of this coastal district of Nathanya is the Nathanya (Army) Leave Camp. At the southern end, about three miles down the coast, is the Convalescent Depot (R.A.M.C.), also a Remounts Depot. Hibbert House stands about one mile south of the Leave Camp and two miles North of the Convalescent Depot, within half a mile of the sea, beside an excellent road that runs north and south from end to end of the district. The House, once again, is a complete house or villa, Jewish built, modern, white, of two storeys, and the usual Levantine roof-terrace. It contains four maisonettes, two on the ground floor, and two on the first floor, also one room on the roof. Each maisonette comprises two living-rooms (or one living-room and one bedroom), kitchen, bathroom, lavatory and store-room. This gives four larger and two smaller rooms, two kitchens, two bathrooms, etc., on each floor, and one room on the roof level. None of these is very big, but by building on a large kitchen at the back of the house on the ground-floor level, and adapting the other rooms to Hibbert House needs, H.H. 5 offers two dining-rooms and two very comfortable lounges on the ground floor, four larger and one smaller bedrooms, and a Chapel, on the first floor—together with bathrooms, storerooms, etc., on each floor, and one room for the servants on the roof. In the back garden also is a covered snack pergola. The front garden is kept bright with flowers. The House has been used as a club with accommodation for three married (Service) couples and the Warden, or if the married accommodation is not required, for Service bachelors. From the roof a magnificent view is obtainable. To the North, Mount Carmel stretching away along the coast in the distance; to the East, across some fifteen miles of the finely cultivated Plain of Sharon, green and lovely, especially in the spring,

the mountains of Samaria, with Mount Ebal as an outstanding summit; to the South, the green countryside and long coastline of Palestine trailing away towards Tel Aviv and Jaffa; and to the West the green strip of country reaching to the cliff top, and then, to the horizon, the ultramarine expanse of the Mediterranean Sea. This House has, often under great difficulties of staffing, done a quiet, beneficial work. It was opened under the wardenship of the Rev. F. Burman, a Congregationalist worker, and continued for some time, when, at the height of the war, workers were almost impossible to obtain from England, under the direction of a Methodist Army chaplain, who by arrangement with the Deputy Chaplain-General was appointed area chaplain, with 'permission to live at Hibbert House'. It then passed under the wardenship of a kindly and much-liked Unitarian layman, Mr. T. McLeod, from our Church at St. Helen's, who helped us in many of our centres. It is still running under the wardenship of one of our lady workers, Miss A. V. Jones. One of the most successful periods of H.H. 5 was when the presiding Warden was assisted by Gunner, later Sergt. Roberts, who was lent us from the Army. His ability was great.

"Now, to keep our chronological order, let us hark back to **H.H. 6, Alexandria**: This House was situated in the flat immediately below the two storeys occupied by the Men's House (H.H. 2). It was an entirely self-contained House, except that it shared a common library and a common dining-room, and so a common kitchen, with H.H. 2. The Chapel for both Houses was also shared in common, but under the Leonards' wardenship it was arranged that the Chapel should occupy a room opening off the big stairway of the block, hence outside both Houses. Under able supervision, first by Mr. and Mrs. Bone, then by Mr. and Mrs. Leonard, assisted by two locally engaged Englishwomen, it was possible for a very happy and natural association to exist between the men and girls staying in the two Houses. In circumstances when it was exceedingly desirable that such association should be possible between men and women from the U.K., rather than that men, or women, should be forced into often deplorable associations and marriage with local nationals, H.H. 2/6 did an excellent piece of work for welfare. There was no other similar hostel, or welfare centre, in the Middle East. The House was opened in *September 1943* by Mr. Bone. Hibbert Houses did not plan to go into women's work. It was generally conceded

that such was the province peculiarly of the Y.W.C.A. But at the height of the war the Women's Services approached the philanthropic societies with a request to provide increased accommodation for girls, at prices within the means, primarily, of the lowest-paid personnel. Hibbert Houses took up the challenge. The result was H.H. 6. The sleeping accommodation thus afforded was between thirty-eight and forty. The charges were purposely pitched low. And breakfast in bed was the rule and not the exception. The lounges were furnished very tastefully. In one, the girls could entertain their male friends. Another was reserved for residents in the House. The House served the women of the Forces for three years. It closed in *April* 1946. To initiate this House the Co-ordinating Council advanced a loan of £E.1,100 (slightly over £St.1,100). But about this time it became known that Hibbert Houses had been accorded recognition as a member society of the C.V.W.W. in London. Immediately, according to custom of the Co-ordinating Council in relation to C.V.W.W. bodies, the loan was converted into a grant. About 6,000 girls used this hostel. 18,540 bed-and-breakfasts were supplied.

**“The Road Journey : Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (Ramleh and Wadi Sarar), 40 miles.**

“Road good. It passes across plain, direction East twenty-five miles. Region of Philistia on the right, *i.e.* South; Plain of Sharon, left. Region all abundantly fertile—citrus plantations, arable land, bee-culture; Jew and Arab threshing-floors and petrol-driven water-pumps.

“RAMLEH. For the R.A.F. Station, beautifully situated among trees and H.H. 12—fifteen miles from Tel Aviv—which will be described in its place, turn right at Ramleh village, identified with Arimathea.

“Past El Bariya, the ancient Gezer, mentioned in Tel el Amarna tablets, captured by the Pharaoh whose daughter married Solomon, and given to Solomon by this Pharaoh as a wedding dowry.

“Latrun, twenty miles from Tel Aviv. Here Jerusalem-Gaza road turns off on right. Proceed ten miles down this road to Wadi Sarar, the ancient Valley of Sorek, Samson country, home of Delilah. All this region is in the Shephela, or low hill-country.

Mountains of Judæa begin just East of Latrun. Proceeding East, one climbs twisting up, down, and round for fifteen miles, past Kirjath-jearim (1 Sam. vi, 21); near Kubeibeh (probably Emmaus); by Kalonia, where once, in the time of Christ, was a camp of the Roman tenth Legion; and within sight of Nebi Samwil (traditional burial-place of Samuel) and said to be whence King Richard beheld Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem itself.

“H.H. 7, Wadi Sarar : It is at or near the place described by tradition as the site of the defeat of Goliath the Philistine champion by David the shepherd boy. This House was founded in *December* 1943 within a few days of H.H. 5 at Nathanya. It was our second ‘hut’ venture, being situated in what was at the time a base ammunition depot, and was an immense advance on our earlier ‘hut’ venture at Damascus. For the excellent furnishings of this hut, as well as for those of H.H. 4 and H.H. 5, our Society owes a debt to the artistic ability and personal hard work, even to painting walls and scrubbing floors, of the Rev. Denis Lawson and Mrs. Lee. In December, in Palestine, torrential rains are falling, and the mud in a camp is appalling. But despite great difficulties, thanks to Mr. Lawson and Mrs. Lee, the hut was opened on the date planned, in spite of the thirty or so miles to be travelled each way by car when Palestine roads are at their worst. H.H. 7 was a building about 70 feet long by 20 feet broad, divided so as to give a large lounge, with, at one end of the hut, a small kitchen, Warden's office and a small bedroom for the Warden. The lounge was furnished with occasional tables, armchairs, a fireplace put in by the Royal Engineers, pleasant, home-like pictures, shelves containing a small library, and rugs on the tiled floor. At the end farther from the kitchen and Warden's rooms was added a small Chapel. The hut lay approximately east and west. A veranda, and beyond it a garden, stretched along the south side. The camp in which H.H. 7 was located lay off the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, among the Shephela, or low hill-country of Palestine, between the mountains of Judæa and the region of ancient Philistia. In ancient time the valley in which it lay was known as the Vale of Sorek, famed through the Book of Judges for the activities of Samson and Delilah. Along the track that passed by the camp, had passed, centuries before, the Hebrew Ark of the Covenant, when it was returned

to the Israelites by the Philistines, and taken to Kirjathjearim, now Abughosh, on the Jerusalem road among the Judæan mountains. But the men in the camp did not know this till they were told of it by Hibbert House Wardens. To them Wadi Sarar was a bleak, heartless spot out in the wilds, out of reach of any homely amenity, except our hut. The principal Wardens of the hut were the Rev. J. R. F. Todd (Congregationalist), Mr. McLeod (Unitarian) and Mr. T. I. Mardy-Jones (Congregationalist). It was the one social centre of the camp. Unhappily it came to a premature and disastrous end because having been, like much of the rest of the camp, built of brick with insufficient footings on what is known in Palestine as cotton-soil, which swells in the winter rains and turns to a friable powder in the summer, it first began to crack and then to fall down, and so had to be abandoned. But this misadventure might have been a greater evil than it proved to be. Owing to changes of high policy, the number of men in, and the status of, the camp were drastically reduced, so that when Hibbert Houses had to abandon Wadi Sarar they were offered the opportunity of opening two new centres at Haifa. The hut at Wadi Sarar closed in *November 1945*. This House was established entirely from our own resources.

“**H.H. 8, Alexandria** : This House was a testimony to the good work of H.H. 2/6 and to the regard won for Hibbert Houses from the military authorities. It grew out of a visit paid by Brigadier Foster, then D.A. and Q.M.G. at H.Q. B.T.E. and the G.O.C-in-C. Middle East, to our work in Alexandria. In view of the success attained at our joint men's and women's centre at Alexandria, when the Army decided that leave and transit hostels were required for married personnel in the Middle East, we were asked to undertake the first. The request came in *February 1944*, and Mr. Bone was asked by me to look for premises. He died in *April 1944*, before any adequate premises had been found. The search, however, was not abandoned, and so keen was the Army on our doing the job that Brigadier Foster advised me that we need not worry about finance. Initial capital would be provided, as well as guarantee of a subsidy, if we could not make the place pay, from Army funds. Eventually we discovered and took a hotel of moderate size, and Mr. Lawson and Mrs. Lee temporarily left their House at Tel Aviv to open it. Difficulties regarding personnel were now acute. Mr.

Bone's death had left a prodigious gap. But the House was opened, attractively furnished, in *July 1944*, and ran purely as a married personnel House till *April 1946*, when, owing to the closing of H.H. 2/6, it was converted into a hostel for married couples and service men. The House is situated within sight of the sea and the site of the ancient Pharos of Alexander. We occupy the whole building, except the floor at the street level, which is devoted to shops. We have thus the upper three storeys and the roof terrace. A feature of the House is its large balconies, accounted for by the peculiar structure of the building, which is erected on the basic plan of a flat-iron! It cost the Army £E.2,000 to get us into it, but we have never had to ask for financial help. Indeed, at the moment it is the only House that is paying sufficiently well to contribute to the Hibbert Houses Middle East Central Fund. It has been under the wardenships successively of Mr. Lawson and Mrs. Lee; Mr. McLeod assisted by Mrs. Ison, an Englishwoman locally engaged, and lastly of Miss Cave, assisted by Mrs. Finch—again a locally engaged Englishwoman. The House is now closed.

“**The Road Journey : Nathanya to Haifa, 50 miles.**

“Road, tarred, condition good, undulating. North up Plain of Sharon. Last twenty-five miles, sea visible on left, and Mount Carmel rising sharply immediately on right. On the left of the road and near the sea at Athlit a few miles before reaching Haifa are the imposing ruins of the last crusaders' castle in Palestine. Country arable, mostly cultivated by Arabs.

“**H.H. 10, Haifa** : As one enters Haifa from the south one rounds the northern end of Mount Carmel, and comes into a narrow, long plain between it and the Bay of Acre. Haifa is situated on this plain. Before Haifa proper is reached, on the left of the road, by the seaside, is a little suburb of Bat Galim (pronounce ‘Galeem’). In this suburb is a group of military installations. Hibbert House No. 10, in the midst of these installations, serves this group. It is a pleasant three-storey house, with basement of which H.H. 10 occupies the two middle storeys, the landlord occupying the top. The building, constructed by Arabs, is of stone. Its front door lies opposite the main camp of the place, and the unit commander has placed Hibbert House in bounds, as if it were actually within the

perimeter of the camp. The lower part of the House is given over to games rooms, dining-rooms, kitchen and the Warden's office, the upper part to a most pleasant lounge, Chapel, Warden's bedroom, writing-room for service men, and stores. The House faces east. At the back, on each floor, are large balconies, looking over an Arab fruit-garden, to the sea. The Club thus constituted is under the wardenship of its first, and so far only, Warden, Capt. R. V. Bellamy. It is kept in excellent condition, clean, bright, attractive, and is deservedly popular, especially now that Palestine is once more passing through troubled times. It was opened, thanks again to the efforts of Mr. Lawson in addition to those of Capt. Bellamy, in *December* 1945. It is still in being. Expense in opening this Club was saved by transferring furniture from Wadi Sarar, and no money was derived from outside sources. The initial capital expenditure nevertheless was just under £P.1,000, provided from our own Middle East Central Fund. There is one guest room, but the House is run on club, as opposed to hostel lines.

“**H.H. 11, Haifa** : Proceeding in an easterly direction into the town from Bat Galim, one comes to a central part of modern Haifa, near the lower end of the road that leads down from Mount Carmel. H.H. 11 consists of two parts. A stone-built Arab house, fronting on Jaffa Road, and a brick-built social hall, put up by the Army, behind it. The real Arab house is often constructed on an inverted principle. If it is of two storeys, as is H.H. 11, the lower storey is built on the pattern of a half basement, and one enters the house through the upper storey by a flight of stone steps leading up, and on, to a veranda, direct from the street. This is the case at H.H. 11. Thus the office, Warden's rooms, kitchens and dining-rooms are all on the top floor, while the lounges, Chapel, library, writing-room, and quiet room are all underneath. This is the Arab way of providing a cool part of the house into which to retire in the heat of the summer. Even in hot weather the lower part of H.H. 11 is cool. This House was opened in *March* 1946, as the Tel Aviv House closed in February. So with much of the H.H. 4 furniture, Mr. Lawson and Mrs. Lee transferred to Haifa, and began the work there. From the commencement of its activities the House has been most active, men coming in from 7 a.m. to 10.30 p.m. without cessation. H.H. 11 is intended as a club and social centre.

It is both, but is not a hostel. It is at present under the joint wardenship of Capt. A. C. Matthews (who since Mr. Lawson's and Mrs. Lee's departure for England, has acted also as our senior representative in Palestine), and Miss Muir, who has recently joined us, having been a hospital matron, and having done welfare work in the Church of Scotland Huts. This House is still open, and apart from the most serious troubles arising in Palestine (as is possible), it should continue its work for an indefinite time. This House, having been urgently asked for by the Army, its initial finance, apart from the cost of building the social hall at the back, was borne by the Army and Hibbert Houses. Our contribution amounted to about two-thirds of the whole, and was provided from our Middle East Central Fund.

“**H.H. 12, Ramleh** : through which one passes on the way to Wadi Sarar, is identified with the Arimathea of the New Testament, and lies between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, about fifteen miles out of Tel Aviv. The R.A.F. Station in which H.H. 12 is situated is just outside the village, to the South-East. H.H. 12 is a hut, located in the middle of the camp and surrounded by eucalyptus trees. When the bells ring from the steeple of St. Nicodemus' Church in the village on a Sunday morning, one could almost mistake the place for England. H.H. 12 was opened in *June* 1946. All the initiatory work, undertaken on the spot, goes to the credit of Mr. D. A. Rennison, a young Methodist layman, who came out, after serving many years in the R.A.F., in Toc H, just as Toc H had decided to close 50 per cent. of its work in the Middle East. Mr. Rennison joined Hibbert Houses at the moment when we were in vital need of someone to take up the job of opening at Ramleh. The House does him very great credit. It is easily the best of our hut efforts. It is a real hut, made of wood, with a tiled floor. It is divided into four rooms: a good lounge, a dining-room, a kitchen, and a Warden's room. The station Chapel is very near at hand, so we have in this one instance no chapel of our own. It is tastefully furnished with easy chairs, occasional tables, rugs, etc. It lies North and South. Along the East side is a pleasant veranda looking out on to a carefully tended garden. It has been attractively painted in primrose and green. It boasts a refrigerator from which the personnel of the station get the only cold drinks obtainable in the camp. The lounge

is used for hymn-singing and prayers on Sunday evenings. A feature of the House that is most encouraging is the extent to which Mr. Rennison has won the affection and assistance of the personnel of the station, men and women. Parties of both give him a great deal of personal voluntary help. One man, just before the date of opening, forewent his leave in order to get the hut all ready for the opening date. It is still busily at work. Except for £50 given from R.A.F. Welfare, the total expense of initiating this House was borne by H.H. Middle East Central Fund—viz. £600."

To summarise this account, here is a table of the scope and personnel of H.H.

House.	No. of guests accommodated.	Local staff.		H.H.
		Clerical.	Domestic.	Admin. Workers.
H.H.1	Hostel: 70 men	3	11	2
H.H.2	Hostel: 145 to 150 men	7	20	3
H.H.3	Hostel: 80 men	3	12	2
H.H.4	Hostel: 85 to 115 men	4	15	2
H.H.5	Club or Hostel: 3 married couples or 12 men	1	6	1
H.H.6	Hostel: 38 to 40 girls	2	2	(Under No. 2)
H.H.7	Hut	—	2	1
H.H.8	Hostel: 13 married couples or 60 men	3	7	1 or 2
H.H.9	Hut	—	2	1
H.H.10	Club	1	6	1
H.H.11	Club	2	10	2
H.H.12	Hut	1	6	1
		<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
		27	99	17 or 18

Local employees: 27 + 99 = 126

H.H. admin. workers: 17 to 20, at any one given time, when H.H. in full work.

*Note.*—It should be pointed out that the needs of Houses in administrative and other workers vary greatly. Some Houses are easier to work than others; also local employment conditions differ. Ideally every House of the hostel type, or large club, should have two admin. workers, or wardens. (Alex. H.H. 2/6 was so big as to need three.) But owing to shortage of such workers, Houses were often under-staffed. An outstanding case of this kind was H.H.1, where from the time that Mr. Bone went to Alexandria in November 1941, to the arrival of Mr. Summerfield in June 1945, Mr. Sparham and Miss Abel were supposed to be joint Wardens of the House. But Mr. Sparham was also Director of Hibbert Houses, and was often away. At such times Miss Abel ran the House single-handed. It was not till Mr. Summerfield's arrival that Miss Abel had full help, or the House was fully staffed.

Here is another personal narrative, entitled:

### A Lady Warden's Day (as Miss Abel experienced it):

"Mr. Sparham has asked me to write an account, or give an idea of a day in the life of a Hibbert Houses Lady Warden, or Matron. I have been with Hibbert Houses nearly five and a half years, and the following may be taken as any day of my life during that time.

"I arise at 6.30 a.m., and inquire whether the native servants have arrived, or how many have failed to arrive, and see them started on their various tasks. Every Serviceman has a cup of tea taken to his bedroom by 7 a.m., and as we have seventy beds in this hostel, that is quite a big job. I then have my own early tea, after which I start the day in earnest.

"Having prepared the day's menu overnight, I proceed to the kitchen to interview the cook and explain the menu to him, prepare the market list and arrange with one of the kitchen staff to go to the 'sook', or native market, to buy the vegetables and fruit necessary for the day's meals. It is quite impossible for the English staff to do this. We should be charged at least three times the correct price. Having done this, I give out the other items of foodstuffs needed for the day from my store-room, because everything has to be kept under lock and key.

"By this time it is 7.45 and breakfast time for the staff. Prayers take place every day at 8.15; so, breakfast over, we proceed to the Chapel, and for about fifteen minutes shut out the busy whirl outside, and spend those few precious moments in prayer and meditation, usually also singing a hymn which Mr. Summerfield, my co-Warden, plays. I personally leave the Chapel feeling refreshed and able to cope with another day. It is now about 8.30, and the majority of the men are taking their breakfast, though some have had to leave early and have breakfasted at 7, or even before, and a few will slip in just before 9, which is the latest time breakfast is served. We chat with any who may have attended prayers and get to know them individually. But, as may be imagined, the House is very busy at this time of day, so one cannot confine one's attentions to any one person for very long. Someone needs first aid. Can I attend to his needs? Or must he go to the Medical Inspection Room? We are not allowed to keep really sick men in the House, but if it is a case of what is known as 'Guppy tummy', or a cold, or some minor ailment, I



attend to such, for which the men are very grateful. They hate going sick when on leave, if they can help it. It upsets all their plans. Then perhaps someone else wants a button sewn on. I sew it on for him, if I have time, or, if not, I give him a needle and cotton to do it with. Or someone else wants advice about buying shoes for his small boy or wife in England; or it may be he wants to buy a length of material for his wife or mother. How many yards will he need? What material would I recommend? Where should he buy it? And there is the man who simply wants to talk. He is miles away from home and is probably lonely, and it helps him along the way just to talk to a fellow-countrywoman. One is shown all the family snaps that he always carries with him, and in quite a short time one knows all about the family. How often men have said to me, 'Are you really English?' And how pleased they are when they find one is! Then there is the man who has applied to the office for a bed, only to be told that we are 'full up'. He demands to 'see Miss Abel', because he 'always stays at Hibbert House, and she will find a bed for me'. I do my best for these. At the same time I must see if the kitchen staff are going on with their work. Perhaps I discover that the eggs have not been sent, or the egg-man has sent the wrong number, or that all the milk has been used up and nobody has thought of sending for any more, since it is clearly the will of Allah that the wrong amount has been sent; or some other calamity has befallen them. I must put that right. The servants are for the most part Sudanese. They are like children—often naughty children—and because they are so, they need a lot of patience and guiding. They have a persistent hope that they will be able to skip something and get away with it. They have their own code, also, as to what is and what is not stealing, and quarrels may flare up between them over the most trivial things. But on the whole they are very likeable, and I have a warm regard for them. When they settle down to a household they will frequently stay for years. A firm, but not unkind, justice wins their lasting regard.

"The morning passes very quickly. There are flowers to buy and arrange. Hibbert House No. 1 has always been noted for the 'lovely flowers you have about the House and the nice pictures on the walls'. Among the hundred and one things one has to do there is always the question of linen, sheets, tablecloths, and so on. Do they need repairing?

Have we enough? Or must we buy more? I must also make a tour of the House to see if the bed- and club-rooms are being cleaned properly.

"Lunch is at 1 o'clock. Sometimes we have our meal in the men's dining-room. At others, when we have visitors, perhaps friends staying in the House, or passing through Cairo, or when the men's dining-room is too full, we lunch in the staff room. After lunch I follow the custom of the country and retire to my room until tea-time.

"Four o'clock and tea-time. This is the part of the day when people are inclined to drop in to see us. Some are old guests, or friends, passing through Cairo; while others are going home to England on release, and have looked in to say 'good-bye'. During the five and a half years of Hibbert House No. 1 many men have come to stay with us so often and have grown to know us so well that this House has become their home in the Middle East. So, although one is always pleased for their sakes to know that they are going back to their own families, it gives one rather a pang to feel that they are leaving, and that almost certainly one will never see them again. There are, of course, too, the old friends who come back again, after serving in distant parts of the Middle East, or perhaps India, or perhaps after having been to England and having wandered out to Egypt again by way of the B.A.O.R.\* and the C.M.F.† So the day goes on. Tea is served from 4 to 5.45 p.m., followed by dinner at 6.30. I must keep an eye on the waiters, also on the kitchen, just to see that everything is going as it should. We, on the staff, usually dine when the rush of the men's dinner is over. After dinner there may be men wanting to chat, or to be entertained. When the War was on, and men were on leave from the fighting areas, we often had a musical evening, either serious music, or a sing-song, followed by a cup of tea for those present, 'on the House'.

"On Sunday evening we have a service in the House Chapel, followed by tea and a chat in our staff-room. The men enjoy this. It gives them a feeling of home and being cared for. I have many letters of appreciation written by those who have joined us in this way, as well as in other ways, after their return to New Zealand, or Australia, or South Africa, or, of course, Great Britain. We say 'Good-night' on

\* B.A.O.R. = British Army on the Rhine.

† C.M.F. = Central Mediterranean Force—mostly in Italy.

such occasions at about 10.30, and before turning in I must have a word with the night-clerk to tell him how much milk to take from the milkman in the morning, or bread to order over the phone, or give him other similar instructions. With this my work for the day is finished.

"It is a busy life, and every day brings its problems. Sometimes, I must confess, one gets rather tired. But I feel that it is a job that is, and has been, very worth while, and when one feels that the Cairo summer is trying and sticky, one realises how much worse it is for the men camped out, even yet, in the sand. When I first found Hibbert Houses I knew nothing about Unitarianism. I had heard of it, but thought it was some kind of 'American religion'. But having worked with Mr. Sparham so long, and having studied it and heard so many discussions in our staff room between chaplains of many different denominations, I have come to feel Unitarianism really is Christianity, in what the Hibbert Trust, for example, calls, 'its simplest and most intelligible form'. It seems such a pity that it is not more widely known among people. I think it would answer a great many of their needs. But I also think that Hibbert Houses have at least helped to express it through these war years, and that there are at all events some who understand more of it through their agency, to whom it has been a great strength."

Next, as contrast, let Mr. Summerfield describe—**A Warden's Day** :—

"Although there are several duties which must be carried out each day, each day brings such a host of new situations that it is impossible to describe a day which could be taken as a pattern from the daily life of a Warden in Hibbert Houses. But the day of which I write did actually happen a short time ago, and may be taken as a general example.

"6.30 a.m., and my morning tea arrives to help me rise from my bed, and by 7.15 a.m. I am taking the cash from the night-clerk, who will be relieved at 8 a.m. by the day-clerk. Breakfast, with the Director of Hibbert Houses, and my partner, the Lady Warden, is over by 8.10 a.m., and by 8.15 a.m. we are in Chapel for our short daily service; which quarter of an hour, by the way, is the only time during the day when we are not available to the world outside. The local staff have been threatened with dire consequences should they ever commit the offence, which otherwise they would do

with the utmost equanimity, of disturbing us at our morning devotions.

"After Chapel the day really starts. Guests staying in the House usually deposit sums of money—some quite large—with me in the safe for custody, and at this time of the morning many of them wish to draw out some portion of their deposits for use during the day, so I am busy for the next half-hour at least. When all are satisfied I must take myself off, with a servant, to Kasr-el-Nil Barracks, on two errands—one is to post the letters which we collect from our guests, and to fetch our own mail; the other to buy a supply of meat, 30 to 60 lbs., according to our requirements, from the N.A.A.F.I. Butchery, for the day's meals. If I collect the meat myself, I can be fairly sure of getting some good cuts, and having performed this duty for the past fifteen months, I am becoming quite expert, although I must confess that my lady partner sometimes wrings her hands in despair when I have not been quite as successful as could have been desired.

"Whilst I am out I remember that I need some more table-tennis balls. These I collect from the Army Welfare Stores, also in the Barracks, together with a large parcel of new magazines, which will help to make the reading-room look gay. It is almost 10 o'clock by the time I arrive back at the House and am ready to make up my account-books for the previous day; and when these are finished I must go to the bank to pay in some cash and cheques, also draw some petty cash. I generally draw £50 at a time. Mercifully the bank is but three minutes away from the House. Having endured the ordeal of an Egyptian bank, where it always takes three men to do one man's work, and each man three times as long to do his part of any operation as it would take his opposite number in England, I come back to find that the Lady Warden has found time to prepare a cup of tea, which is most welcome, and which we gulp down together. Looking at my watch, I can't believe that it is 11 a.m.

"This afternoon I am giving a radiogram recital—we have a splendid radiogram—and I must collect the necessary records from the R.A.F. Welfare Record Library, which, being situated some ten miles away, on the outskirts of Cairo, it will take me nearly two hours to do. To-day I am lucky. Without any delay I obtain the records I require, so I am back in time for lunch at 1 o'clock. I am also lucky, in that I do not have to leave my lunch more than twice in order to help out

the desk-clerk, who cannot quite understand what some new arrivals want.

“After lunch I am foolish enough to hope that I can rest for half an hour before I give the radiogram recital. This vain hope is soon shattered by some men who wish to borrow a chess set, some more who want ‘Monopoly’, and a party of new arrivals who have had no lunch, have no Egyptian currency, and who wish to ‘book-in’ for ten days; also the ‘potato-man’ arrives for payment for potatoes delivered that morning, some of which were bad. By the time all these people have been satisfied it is time to play the radiogram. The recital is very informal—no introductory talk—and all the works are ‘requests’. This is the programme. Vivaldi—Concerto Grosso in D Minor; Beethoven—Piano Concerto in G Major; and Tchaikovsky—Symphony in B Minor. All glorious music, but the Symphony is rather long in a temperature of ninety-eight in the shade, or thereabouts, and everyone is ready for tea at the conclusion of the recital.

“Before I can reach my own cup, however, I am ‘nailed’ by a group of men arrived from England only a week ago, and in Cairo for the first time. What a lot of advice they need! Feeling very sorry for them, in a moment of weakness I offer to accompany them to the bazaar quarter to-morrow morning. This will be rather difficult, but I hope to manage it somehow.

“Whilst I am drinking my tea someone comes to me for some light music records, to play himself. The men like playing the radiogram themselves, and as the House owns a fair collection of records, we are able to allow this. The games which I gave out earlier in the afternoon are returned to me, and someone else wants the table-tennis equipment. Three other men come to me and remind me that I promised to play and analyse for them a Beethoven sonata. I had hoped they had forgotten this. But no such luck! So I take them along to the Chapel, where we allow sacred and classical music to be played, and where we have a very good piano, and have hardly sat down to play when I am called to the telephone: ‘Can I accommodate a cricket team for the next week-end?’ I can, and I make the booking; then go back to the Chapel to play through Beethoven’s ‘Pathetique’, without further interruption. At the last bars I am sitting in a literal puddle of perspiration, and give a very definite ‘No’ when I am asked to play another work. Also it is 6 o’clock, and I must take the day’s cash from the day-clerk and hand over to



Lounge, H.H. 1.

the night-clerk, and provide him with the supply of cigarettes and coca-cola needed for his evening's duties.

"At 6.30 p.m. the dinner gong is sounded. We seem to have sold lots of tickets for dinner this evening, and I can hear my lady partner directing operations in the kitchen. Sudanese servants—as ours are for the most part—can be very good, but they need an enormous amount of supervision, and all meals are watched very carefully. We have a high reputation for food.

"Men from various parts of the Middle East are still arriving, and I must have some extra beds put up in the lounge. We always do this when the demand for beds is in excess of our normal supply—which is a thing that happens often night after night. With a regular 'bed-strength' of seventy, we have, even lately, frequently squeezed in eighty and over, and all of them in beds. All this arranged, and put into operation, it is 7 o'clock, and time for us—the Wardens—to sit down to dinner, which we get through, miraculously, without interruption. We do not hurry over our coffee and at 8 o'clock I am reminded by the desk-clerk that it is the fifteenth of the month, and I must pay the servants their mid-month wages. Having completed this task, I decide to look through the House accounts and reply to some letters of application for accommodation. This done, I have a chat over the day's events with my partner, who has ready once more one of her ever-welcome cups of tea.

"Ten o'clock, and a last look round the House, switching off unnecessary lights, giving instructions to the night-clerk that as the House is full to overflowing we can accept no more that night, and so to bed.

"1.30 a.m. The night-clerk calls me, because a man with nowhere to sleep wishes to sleep on the floor, which he, the night-clerk, has been told, on pain of death, must never happen. I telephone to various local pensions and welfare hostels, without success, so I make up a bed for him on a settee in the reading-room.

"At 1.45 a.m. I crawl back to bed and rest in peace, until '6.30 a.m. and my morning tea arrives to help me rise'—but I've said that piece before! Yes, that's what it's like!"

#### The Religious Significance of Hibbert Houses.

But the foregoing record, of which any Unitarian may be proud and in which any non-Unitarian may be interested,



Men's bedroom, H.H. 1.

does not altogether express the fact that Hibbert Houses were not merely clubs, or hostels differing only in name and appearance from others. As the illustrations show, attached to every House was a "Chapel"—a room, of course, not built for any religious purpose, but consecrated by the use to which it was put. As far as the exigencies of war permitted, a daily service was held. On Christmas and Easter Days, V.E. or V.J. days, Chapels were filled; at other times—well, fairly or scantily attended, like Chapels nearer home. Absence of the "troops" never caused the service to be discontinued. Attendance was never made a condition of staying in the House. The services were open to all. No one was asked to change his faith through worshipping in them. All that was asked was that he (or she) should be loyal to his conscience and respect the convictions of others. Normally services were conducted by one of the staff, usually, not always, a Unitarian minister. Unitarian literature was on tap, correspondence arose on the usual lines as to what Unitarianism was, or was not, sometimes leading to promises to contact the nearest Unitarian Chapel at home or overseas. If a padre or welfare worker of some other society was staying in the House, sooner or later he was asked to lead the worship in his turn. Anglicans, Congregationalists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Salvationists, Quakers, Baptists led, or joined in the services. One member of the R.A.F. who was being shown round the Chapel at H.H. 1 let out the time-honoured: "Of course, you aren't Christians!" and had to be enlightened. He never failed to attend our Chapel. Again, a senior Anglican Chaplain to the Forces felt obliged to decline to open our first Cairo Chapel with prayer. He quoted the Liverpool Controversy, and pointed out that he was under authority. A year later, however, at the opening of the second one, he took the initiative, saying, "If you wish me to assist, as a priest I might say, 'No!', but as a D.C.G. I can and will say: 'Yes! What form of prayer do you wish me to use?'" The answer was "Your own!" The prayer he offered was so expressed that it could have been offered in any Unitarian church. Yet another Anglican priest asked the Chief Warden: "What is the difference between us? It seems to be largely a matter of words. . . . I used your Order of Worship for the C. of E. Chaplains' devotional hour this morning, and found it very helpful. It even includes the Pauline Benediction!"

Or the R.A.F. padre, and Baptist C.F. who said to the Senior Warden: "Don't worry about prayers while you are

away. We will keep them going!" But is religious significance confined to what is said or sung in Chapel? Does it not sometimes lie in a less obvious influence? Once, a rowdy crew of men on leave invaded one of the Houses, perhaps less than sober, and hauled the receptionist—an elderly Maltese—round the place by his scarf, demanding beer, whisky and other delights. At length they came to the Chapel door and saw the notice posted on it. Here they pulled themselves into self-control and left quietly. Again, one lonely little sailor always came to H.H. quietly but profoundly drunk. At length a Lady Warden asked him: "If you want to spend your leave like that why don't you go to a pension where you can get what you want without going out for it, and be drunk all the time?"

"Go to one of them places? No!" he replied. "When I'm like that I can't look after myself. If I didn't come here who would look after me?"

Has that any religious significance? Or is there more in the testimony of Miss Margaret Ashton of the Young People's League, that it is now welcoming back to its ranks members who have been kept in touch with Unitarianism during the war, by having stayed with us, here or there, in our Hibbert Houses. But why search for examples? The letters hereafter reprinted from writers of every shade of religious opinion show that the Unitarian inclusiveness of Hibbert Houses was as great as their capacity for ignoring rank.

Dickens advocated the religion which has sympathy for men of every creed and ventures to pass judgment upon none. One would have liked to hear him retell the story of the Alexandrian-born Jew who joined the R.A.F. and developed a desire to become a Unitarian.

His station padre was not able to help him much, and he made his way to Jerusalem, in the sure faith that he would find a Unitarian Church there. However, a little later, at Tel Aviv, he found Hibbert House and Unitarian literature on the table. This led to a visit to Cairo and talk with the Warden, worship in the Chapel, finally all the information he wanted about England, Oxford, and the Unitarians. The religious significance of Hibbert Houses then is—what? Can it be summed up by saying that it is Unitarian Christianity in practice, seeking to express itself in social service, going out in friendly help to men and women in the Services, its own people, or those who differ from them. They came,

jaded, hot, "browned off" by the clamour and importunity of station or street touts in wait for Service people on "short pass". They might even have been robbed or swindled on the way. They might be suspicious, resentful, aloof, when an English voice would greet them. Courtesy persuaded them. In a few moments they realised the difference. Then, as they began to feel at home, they found the Chapel, the simple, non-exclusive worship. "Christianity in its most simple and intelligible form." Such was the religious significance of Hibbert Houses.

Here follow a handful of letters, that have been received when it was known that this record was contemplated. They speak for themselves.

**From Miss Olive Webber (a Liverpool Unitarian serving with the Dispersals Board) :**

"I feel a little presumptuous in trying to tell people outside the Middle East something of what Hibbert Houses have meant to Service men and women during the past six years.

"My life in Cairo has just passed the six months mark. What months they have been! Perhaps Cairo has seen as much 'action' during that time as it did throughout the war. The newcomer to Cairo in 1946, imagining that he had escaped from the austerity of the United Kingdom with its war-weary people and endless queues, to a land of peace, plenty and perpetual sunshine, was not allowed to cherish that idea for very long. There was an atmosphere of unrest, and we were not very far into the New Year before rioting broke out and Cairo 'is out of bounds' became as familiar as 'Air Raid Warning Yellow' had been a few months before. It is at times such as this that a stranger in a strange land looks for somewhere to escape to in his leisure hours: somewhere where there is a friendly atmosphere where he can feel completely at home and forget for a while the troubles of the world around him.

"In Hibbert House No. 1 in Cairo I found a Services hostel which really understood the needs of the Serviceman off-duty. My first visit was a special call on Rev. G. Sparham, as I had been asked by friends in England to make myself known to him. During that visit I realised how ignorant I was of the work that was being done on behalf of the Unitarian Churches



Reception Office, H.H. 2, showing Mr. and Mrs. Leonard of the American Unitarian Association.



Chapel, H.H. 3 (Cairo).



Tea in the garden, H.H. 12 (Ramleh).



Women's room, H.H. 12.

at home. My ignorance was probably partly my own fault, although these hostels, which are so admirably organised in the Middle East, seem to have been given very little publicity at home. The fact that people are catered for as human beings was the thing that most impressed me about Hibbert House. So many welfare institutions spoil good work by doing jobs half-heartedly and forgetting that Servicemen want to get away from Service life whilst they are on leave. They earn their creature comforts, and the atmosphere of contentment that pervades Hibbert House is a sure indication that men who are used to 'roughing it' appreciate spotless table-linen, well-polished knives and forks, tastefully decorated rooms, easy-chairs, and music and literature.

"All these the hostel provides. There is a minimum of supervision and a maximum of comfort, freedom and means of recreation.

"I have a suspicion that N.A.A.F.I. would be agreeably surprised if they saw the delectable dishes prepared under the supervision of Miss Abel, the Lady Warden. I must confess that after dinner on Sunday evenings I sometimes find the most interesting service fails to hold all my attention! Perhaps the Chapel which is within the House is unique. It claims to have been used by almost every denomination.

"A friend and I have appreciated the hospitality extended to us since we have been in Cairo; how much more must the men who fought in the Western Desert and manned the ships in the Mediterranean have been thankful for the comparative luxury offered them by Hibbert Houses on their well-earned respite from the battlefronts. Many people feel grateful, but I venture to voice their gratitude and mine in saying 'Thank you for an excellent piece of work' to all those who have done so much so unobtrusively."

**From the Rev. W. Portsmouth, C.F. (Anglican) (Commissioned Army Chaplain) :**

"Hibbert Houses! I had a lot to do with them while I was in the Middle East. Rather, I should say, that they had a lot to put up with from me. For, whenever I could, I preferred to stay with them, while on leave or on duty, and always descended on them, usually without warning and expected courteous hospitality, good food, comfortable sleeping, a

friendly welcome and a low tariff, all at short notice! And I always got it all.

"Now, whether this was due to the system on which Hibbert House was run or to the personality of Sparham, at whose House I stayed most often, I don't know. In any case, Sparham was the system, and without him the Houses could never have been what they were to thousands of young men and women.

"My personal acquaintance with H.H.'s was confined to No. 1 at Cairo and No. 4 at Tel Aviv, but in them I suppose I met as representative a type of Serviceman as one would meet in any of the others, and I would say that these Houses attracted men of all classes and tastes—and nationalities. What is more, they came back again and again, which is enough to show that they catered well enough for our material needs, as well as any other, and better than some. And for the most part of the campaign they were never empty.

"I think the attractiveness of the places was due to the homely, friendly atmosphere always to be found there. They really were oases without the palm trees! Perhaps they ought to have called them 'Hibbert Homes', were it not that that might have made us feel too much like lost dogs.

"Though if a dog could not wag his tail when leaving Hibbert House, then he must have been a dead one. In a word, they made us happy, and that is sufficient indication of the Christian spirit which inspired Hibbert Houses. We felt at home there, and that is something to a man who is thousands of miles away from home.

"We were able to doff our khaki, in a sense, and leave the Army behind us in those places—and that's a good feeling, too.

"Rank counted for nothing there, neither did your particular brand of Christianity. If I hadn't read it in a leaflet, I should never have known what particular Church—if any—was running Hibbert Houses, certainly not from anything one saw or heard in them. There was no 'Thou shalt have none other Gods but mine' sort of thing, and I never yet heard Sparham trying to convert anyone to Unitarianism! There was a perfectly free spirit there, and consequently we called each other the most outrageous things with the utmost friendliness! The Chapel was open to all comers on no kind of condition whatever, and the freedom with which it was offered to, and accepted by, a wide variety of religious allegiance is tribute enough to the tolerant policy which was in

great measure the cause of the friendly atmosphere which meant so much to us.

"I do not know if anyone ever thought to ask what this Unitarianism was which created Hibbert Houses, but none who stayed in them could doubt the Christ-likeness of their work, and I only wish I could say that I had gained as many friends as Sparham and his happy company must have done by reason of the happy homes they created for us out there."

#### **A letter from Senior-Commander Hellyer, Army Welfare Services, G.H.Q. :**

"Hibbert Houses was one of the smaller of the societies operating in the Middle East, and their work was concentrated on the provision of hostels in the towns and leave centres. . . . The hostel amenities included lounges, quiet rooms, a very good library in some cases, games rooms and so on, also a Chapel, which I believe was really valued by a number of the men. Our naturally reserved Englishman recoiled from a society that, so to speak, offered him religion with a cup of tea, and hymn-singing for supper; but I think many were glad of the opportunity of attending the undenominational services at the Houses and of using the Chapel privately.

"One of the difficulties of Service life is, of course, the impossibility of obtaining either privacy or quiet, and although it was still impossible to ensure much privacy in hostels providing accommodation for large numbers of leave personnel, the atmosphere of friendliness, and particularly the personal interest and lack of regimentation, were very much appreciated by many of the men. Particularly in the Middle East, where there are few civilian facilities for spending a leave week-end off duty, and where prices in any case put them out of reach of the ordinary other rank, it is a joy to get away from the Army for a while; and these hostels were filling a very real need. Many of the men were stationed in the desert and in isolated localities, and were able to spend leaves in these hostels at a reasonable cost in a friendly and, as far as possible, home-like atmosphere. I always asked any soldiers with whom I came into contact—drivers, clerks and so on—what were their impressions of the various societies; and almost invariably they spoke well of Hibbert Houses.

"The following does not, of course, apply only to Hibbert Houses, but throughout my service in the Middle East I was



tremendously impressed by the way in which the philanthropic societies were prepared to tackle any job where they felt there was a real need for their work, regardless of the difficulties or the long hours and hard work involved (putting to shame many of us who worked to comfortable office hours!). Mr. Sparham himself was always anxious to continue work wherever it was most required; and during these last months he and his staff were working at great pressure in order to hold on to the last possible moment, only closing a House when it was impossible to keep it running any longer, owing to staff shortages, political disturbances or other difficulties.

"The work of all the societies was co-ordinated by the Council of Voluntary War Work, and must therefore be looked upon as a whole. . . . For my own part, my contacts with Hibbert Houses were always very happy. Mr. Sparham was very good to me, and I am glad to be able to count him as a personal friend, and hope to keep in touch with the continued work of Hibbert Houses through him."

**A letter from the Rev. E. J. Baker (a Congregationalist)  
(Commissioned Army Chaplain) :**

**"An Outside Testimony to Hibbert Houses in the M.E. :**

"There are some societies upon which the light of publicity shines continuously. So focused upon these societies does the public become that the work of other not-quite-so-well-known societies passes almost unnoticed. To so many people at home the name Hibbert Houses means nothing; they never heard of them. To thousands of the men and women who served in the M.E. that name meant 'a home from home'; a joyful period of rest with comfort, care and companionship; an oasis in the desert of their exile.

"It was my pleasure and privilege to stay for some time at the Hibbert House No. 1 at Cairo, and while there I was able to be witness of the fine work done by that House and by H.H. 3, also at Cairo. I visited H.H. 2 and 6 at Alexandria, and made personal contact with the Wardens of Tel Aviv and Nathanya; so that the picture I have of the work of the Hibbert Houses is a fair and full one. And here I beg to bear testimony, as an Army chaplain, to the really fine work done by every House under the first-class direction of the Rev.

Griffith J. Sparham, to whom Unitarian circles should indeed be most grateful.

"I pay testimony and tribute to the atmosphere of the Houses. Physical comfort in the form of good food and clean beds were truly seen to, but there was that 'plus' to be felt. The man and the woman felt 'at home'; and it is only those who have been away from home that can fully appreciate what a homely atmosphere can mean.

"I pay tribute to the interest of the Wardens—male and female—in the welfare of those who came under their care, and to the guidance and encouragement which they gave to so many. The many touching little tributes paid by the men themselves to the Lady Wardens would emphasise my words.

"I pay tribute to the emphasis placed in each House on the religious side of life. It is so easy to satisfy the cravings of man's body. Hibbert Houses went farther, and gave to many of our men the satisfaction of being fed spiritually. The Chapel, with its quiet, solemn dignity, was the focal point of each House, as well as being a haven of rest. I still can see in my mind's eye a number of men worshipping of a morning at H.H. 1. Who were they, and of what denomination? English, Welsh, Scots, New Zealanders and others, and they ranged from High Churchmen to Quakers; but there in that Chapel all one at the feet of the Master. Hibbert Houses stood for religion *in* life.

"I pay tribute here to the kindness which I received personally from Miss E. V. Abel, the Lady Warden at H.H. 1. And I am but one of thousands. Most of all do I thank the Rev. G. J. Sparham for his labours for the men and women abroad, for his clear vision in choosing key spots, and for his determination to make Hibbert Houses not just ordinary welfare, but truly, religion in action.

"You, at home, may often have wondered about the value of Hibbert Houses. Believe me when I say that to so many of us, exiled as we were, they were blessings of God."

**A letter from the Rev. D. Lawson (a Congregationalist  
Minister and a fully-accredited H.H. Warden) :**

"After four and a half years in the M.E. with H.H., and now having returned home, I can reflect upon my association with the Society with real satisfaction. H.H. has been a job worth doing, and, all in all, a job well done.

"The hostels set up by the society in Egypt and Palestine have provided clean, comfortable and reasonably quiet living accommodation for men and women on leave or in transit. The amenities—lounges, writing-rooms, libraries and music-rooms—provided in H.H. bear comparison in comfort and taste of decoration and furnishing with anything I saw in welfare or commercial enterprise throughout the Middle East. No H.H. Warden need feel ashamed of the accommodation or meal service he or she has had to offer Service men and women—and that at rates much lower (sometimes even by half) than those of hotels and cafés catering for the troops.

"The character of a House depends so largely upon its Wardens. As they have not been limited, beyond the provision of the three essentials for a H.H. (Chapel, spacious reading-room and Warden's study-office), so the Houses have expressed the feeling of Wardens for what quiet, home-like surroundings should be. There has been a great deal of 'the personal touch' about the whole thing. Many men I know come again and again to stay with *people* they know and like, not simply because they have decent accommodation and good food.

"Our guiding principle on the financial side has been that income should cover running expenses and, where possible, repairs and renewals. Wardens' salaries and capital expenditure are borne by the Central and Home Funds. Where Houses have been so situated that, because of local labour conditions and a measure of inflation, the income could seldom cover even running expenses without charging prices to the Service-folk above their means, then the deficiencies have been made up from the Central Fund. Wardens have been told 'If you cannot tick over, then make the smallest loss you can without lowering the H.H. standard'.

"Have H.H. been of help to the spiritual life of the men? I am certain they have. Apart from the provision of the Chapel with its services and the Warden's study-office, which has had its serious visitors, there has been a ministry to the *whole* man in the friendliness of people on the look-out for the need of sympathy and help. I personally have had more real contact with men since I have been with H.H. than ever in my life before."

### Flying Officer Cro's Letter :

"I can only write of H.H. 1 from personal experience. I knew it from January 1942 to end of December 1944.

"*How were they run?*

"In Mr. Sparham as Warden and Miss Abel as Matron, H.H. could not have had better-qualified staff. Besides many visits of a few hours, I stayed as a guest for a fortnight, including Christmas, and so got to know them well. They were always cheerful, friendly and enthusiastic. I was amazed that Mr. Sparham and Miss Abel could display the same amount of energy and vitality at the end of 1944, after four more summers in Cairo and the responsibilities of their jobs.

"It was a residential hostel catering for men on leave, and set out to provide as much comfort and homeliness as possible.

"Comfortable and clean beds (bugs and fleas are found almost everywhere else in Cairo); good food, tastefully served; the minimum of restrictions and rules needed for efficiency and common welfare; writing-room, ample and comfortable lounge, library, piano, ping pong, etc., and Chapel. Of course there were several beds in most bedrooms.

"Miss Abel was an ideal Matron. Everywhere was spotless—a wonderful tribute to her ability to control the native servants, who were a problem in themselves. The meals were just what the Englishman wished for, as far as Egypt and N.A.A.F.I. could supply.

"She has very often earned the deep gratitude and thanks of the troops from the desert, especially for her kindness and help.

"Mr. Sparham was an exceptional man, in that he combined in his capacity of Warden the spiritual qualities needed to help those who come to him for guidance, the benign geniality of a host, capacity to cope with the unpleasant emergency, organising and financial ability and capacity to give those in authority confidence in him. In addition to all of which, he has a vast knowledge of the history, geography and literature of the Middle East and the Holy Land.

"*What did H.H. 1 look like?*

"After climbing the many steps to the third floor (the lift was temporarily out of action), I entered what was a typical

Cairo flat, with a short passage leading into an open space used as a dining-room. At the far right corner was a passage which continued for a few yards, and then turned, and finally widened into a second open space. These formed approximately three sides of a square. On the inner sides were the bathroom, showers, etc., while on the outer sides were the kitchen, Chapel, waiting-room and lounge. All had lofty ceilings, and were decorated in light colours. The lounge was large, and comfortably and pleasantly furnished. The waiting-room also contained the library. But the room which I remember most clearly was the Chapel. When I first knew it, it was very plain, but suitable; and had little more than a few chairs, piano, lectern and table. Additions have given it character, warmth and attractiveness. The plaque over the table, the cross on the side wall, the two photos of Jerusalem and vases on table, have all increased its appeal.

"The troops found comfort and a quiet home for a few days, where there was a friendliness and a desire to help. Consideration for their well-being, and tolerance, did not mean laxity and lack of firmness if needed. Freedom from rowdiness and drunkenness appealed to so many, but not to the exclusion of healthy, good-humoured liveliness. Good food, well cooked and served tastefully, was a great pleasure to the man from the rough life of a desert camp and the O.R.'s mess. Need I mention the scrupulous cleanliness?"

"While I was visiting a friend in Jerusalem, some other people called, and these included a sergeant in the R.A.S.C. who had stayed at Nathanya—the leave camp in Palestine—and had been in the M.E. a few years. He gave, during the conversation, an unsolicited opinion of hostels, and said that of all of them he considered H.H. easily the best. They catered for the few, and those few found there what they wanted. I had no chance to get more of his reasons, but did get a special mention of Nathanya H.H.

"To stay at H.H. No. 1 among the men was to know they were happy there. To see them and to join them in the Christmas festivities there, as I was twice privileged to do, and to feel that true Christmas spirit round you, gave me two of the happiest days of my overseas tour.

"I saw Unitarian literature displayed; and with the exception of one early occasion, I was able to get some on inquiry. I think that probably more can be achieved by



Exterior, H.H. 8 (Alexandria).



Lounge, H.H. 6 (Alexandria).

showing the minimum of literature and letting him who is interested make the request for information.

“ I know that I am not alone in feeling that for me the heart of H.H. was the Chapel. What I loved most were the short morning prayers, which were taken during my visit by Unitarian, Anglican and Methodist padres. Few attended; but those who did enjoyed what a Service life overseas so often deprives a man of, spiritual sustenance.”

**From Major Norman Odgers, “Memories of H.H.” (a Unitarian and a combatant army officer) :**

“ A *khamsin* had almost blown itself out, and the hellish cacophony of empty petrol tins rolling madly across the desert had ceased. One emerged from one’s hide-out and surveyed the desert to see if the wind had made any difference to that interminable landscape. It never had. On this occasion, however, the wind had brought a scrap of paper to within fifty yards of our mess tent. I noticed the word ‘Hibbert’ on it, and, having been brought up to respect Hibbert Trust, I stooped to pick it up. It was the notice of the address of Hibbert House No. 1, with a map of Cairo streets provided. Only those who knew 1941 in the Western Desert can know what civilisation Cairo meant then, and with what affection many of us will still think of it when we realise that its civilisation is of the cheapest, tawdriest and most garish. My batman, a Cockney, knew Hibbert House, and he called it ‘a nice place’. ‘They don’t muck you about’. Such was my first introduction to H.H.

“ On my first visit, not long afterwards, I can remember well being very patronising to Sparham and Miss Abel. I took the attitude that they were merely workers in an affair which was supported partly by my family, and of which I knew far more than they. ‘They’, at least, convinced me that they had heard of my family before. How wrong I was! They knew infinitely more about the ‘affair’ than I did; they were so very much more than ‘workers’, and on their attitude should be modelled any welfare hostel. We despised, as members of the Army, welfares as a whole in those days. We thought they knew very little about human nature and were inefficient, insignificant and inept. Such was my attitude on my first visit.

"How humbly I crept out, and how much I lived to repent of my thoughts and of the 'Army' attitude I dare not now recall! One could not, after visiting H.H., maintain any attitude but one of admiration. To begin with, I never thought you could get very far in a hostel without serving drinks. The numbers who came, and continued to come, will show how wrong I was. I was wrong; and I now admit that you can run a really good hostel without dispensing drinks. I flatter myself I am still right in the case of bad hostels.

"This is only a small point, but it is brought back by a memory of Sparham telling of an amusing eviction of a 'drunk'. There are countless other memories. Old friends dropping in to the Warden's sitting-room on a Sunday evening to see the Warden or Miss Abel—Sunday evening services attended normally by only a few, but touching and strengthening by their simplicity and sincerity—the selling of N.A.A.F.I. goods by a Levantine night-porter in the hall of H.H. 1—the constant approachability of the staff—suppers being eaten in the dining-room—a confused tea at Nathanya where everybody was trying to tell the Warden about their impressions of the Middle East—the informality—the lack of routine, of orders, of time-tables, of notices and notice-boards—the ghastliness of modern architecture in Tel Aviv—and the gigantic suppers sold to the inmates of H.H. 4.

"I observed all this, and yet none of these things bring out what lay behind. To begin with, there was abundant keenness in the face of trying details and major catastrophes, a far-sighted knowledge of what was wanted; hence there was no thought of condescension, of being a busybody, an unobtrusiveness and a modesty which seemed to say 'Ours is not a spectacular work—it does not compare with great battles. We have but a small part to play.' This attitude was present among all the staffs of H.H. that I knew, and because they had this attitude they succeeded. They had a fight sometimes to get going and to keep going; yet the man with the right point of view, who did not think himself there to be a martyr, got on and did well. He made his particular H.H. a real place of unhurried rest, unfussy comfort and unassuming hospitality.

"An Australian sergeant once said to me, 'Up there you will find the nearest I'll get for a while to my wife and kids'; and a Cockney, usually sceptical and suspicious of new things, volunteered this to me after a spell of leave spent at one H.H., 'It's the best place to stay in town. It's not Ritz, but who

wants to stay at the Ritz? I'll take the Old Kent Road.' You can easily see what he meant. Yet those of us who knew Cockneys in the war will think the greatest and most fitting tribute, 'They don't muck you about.'"

**Such is the record of Hibbert Houses.** Some of those here described are already closed, H.H. 1 will be closed by the time these words are in print, and remain but as a memory. The fate of the others is undecided. A new house is being opened at Ismailia. But the reader can hardly close this record without feeling that the whole venture merited a permanent history.