

THE FAITH HE BRINGS

By H. F. Gadsby
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What religion will the returned soldier bring back? Has he any religion at all?

The classic story at the front is that Bill says to Tom: "If your number's on it you get it, and that's all there's to it. You don't die before your time." To which Tom replies: "Well, if that's so, and bring in that German helmet out there in No Man's Land."

Of course Bill reneges. He does not spring over the top and say: "Here goes nothing." His fatalism does not take him that far. Predestination has its limits. One's doom overtakes one. One does not go out to meet it.

As a matter of fact, Bill's fatalism is a bluff. So are his ribald songs, his loose stories and his sanguinary language. With them he masks his great faith and a firm belief in the virtues. He has spent many an honest hour questioning his soul with Death only a dozen steps away, and he has come to certain inevitable conclusions. These conclusions are his religion—they bring him peace, touching distance of the Sermon on the Mount. His religion is not one of metaphysics and dogmas—it is one of deeds. Service is its root.

Out of all this welter of hate and blood Bill has formed his idea of God—and that God is a God of love, not the German God who is the slaughter-stained Odin, renamed for advertising purposes, the State. Bill's God is not the Kaiser's God—not the God of that blasphemous allocution "Me und Gott"—nor yet of that equally blasphemous attitude "You know me, Allah." Bill's God is the good, kind, fatherly God his mother taught him to pray to, the God who moves in a mysterious way, which is sometimes hard to explain, but who in the long run takes care of his children.

Bill himself, being for the most part inarticulate, may not be able to define what his God is, but he knows Him and feels His presence. This God of his may not be on Bill's lips—but he is in his heart of hearts. He is much too sacred to be talked about.

Bill understands God better than he did before the war. He understands God because he has put himself on God's plane—by the greatness of his sacrifice. God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son to save it. These boys of ours so loved the world that they gave their own lives for it. Bill's faith and his work go hand in hand. Greater love than this hath no man that he lay down his life for his friend.

We were in the habit of complaining that courage and chivalry and the other flowers of the noblest virtues had perished in this mercenary and unspiritual age, and yet when Calvary became worth repeating for the first time in two thousand years, Bill and millions of obscure saviours like him took up the cross to rescue and confirm the Brotherhood of Man. They loved us so much that they submitted to be crucified for us. Crucified? Yes, a thousand times—with wounds, pains, torments, manglings, such as Christ himself did not suffer. And they were crucified for like reasons—for love. Love of mankind, of freedom of home, of kin, of country.

All the padres whom I interviewed at the front were of the opinion that the soldier's religion was broadly speaking "more tolerance." They themselves had experienced this strange new religion of pardoning the other fellow's mistakes because his heart was right. Some of them even said that when they come back to Canada they would think less of creed and more of conduct than had been their custom. One of them indeed an active member of the Lord's Day Alliance, told me that his mind had been opened and that he now saw no harm in Sunday baseball and other recreations, so long as they were not pursued for gain and one had gone to church in the morning. Thus do Bill and the padre get together at long last—Bill as human before, the padre has become so—but it took a war to do it.

Talking of padres I want to say that Bill has always preferred the old or middle aged padre to the young ones. The young ones he did not feel at home with—they were too much of his own age to have earned a title to reverence. The old ones he respected on account of their years, their good advice and their worldly wisdom. Good advice and worldly wisdom are the fruits of experience and naturally the older padre had the edge on the younger one when it came to talking to Bill like a father.

"What they say or me," said one of the most loved and venerable of all the chaplains, "is sympathy with their home affairs—a parting letter to the mother or the sweetheart they have left behind. Just a note to say that Bill was thinking of them when he passed out. No death-bed heroics. Not a bit of it. They had lived their religion. Dying was just part of the day's work."

long as it means doing what is honest and right. The vestige of sword and doctrine is of small importance—it is the spirit that counts.

This tolerance for all believers, which is brotherly love based on close inspection under trying circumstances, should take much of the bitterness out of our party politics. It should sweeten our patriotism—which is another form of love—namely that of country.

The outstanding fact of Bill's religion is that he has conquered fear. He has conquered fear for a very good reason. Perfect love casts out fear and Bill's love, which led him to risk his life for the freedom and happiness of humanity, is as well-nigh perfect as earthly love can be. Having conquered fear, Bill is not to be frightened by those old bogies Death and Hell. He has fought Death a dozen, yes a hundred times. Every time he went over the top he tweaked Death's nose. Every day he spent in the trenches he chal-

lenged Death to come and have it out with him.

The possibility—the high probability indeed—of Death was his hourly portion. In the midst of Death he was in life. And so he ceased to fear it. After all it was the pain of dying, not death, that he had dreaded, and even that was staled by custom. With thousands all around him sustaining their last agonies with fortitude who was he not to play the man? As for Hell he had been with it for four years, had gone up to its mouth, had been in its very jaws, and had come out again and again. And no Hell the theologians can invent can be worse than the Hell the Hun created.

All of which goes to show that if Bill needs leading upward it is not Death and Hell that will scare him to the road of righteousness. If the preacher wants to reach Bill he will talk to him not of Death, Hell and Hereafter, but of Life, Heaven and Here. Having seen so much Hell on earth for the last four years, Bill will naturally want to see a little Heaven in the same place. In fact, he can stand all the Heaven a good government can crowd into the remainder of his natural life in Canada. And he will want a Government that starts that way—an honest, fearless, independent government that says what it means and does what it promises. Used as he is to the frank conversation of the guns—which did not dissemble their sentiments—Bill will expect no less can-

did from the public man of the day. Straddlers and side-steppers will get short shrift from Bill, who has been trained for four years in open argument.

Hansard will be a lively book to read when Bill's religion begins to have its effect on party politics. The naked truth, only slightly fattened for public appearance, will be the order of the day, and shuffling, quibbling and wind jamming will be the exception. Say what you have to say and quit—as the guns did—that will be Bill's rule of debate. The member of Parliament who uses the last half of a sentence to balance the first—the idea being to preserve a stable equilibrium which will offend nobody—becomes a dwindling figure as soon as the returned soldier vote gets its work in. The church too needs to see that its sheep's clothing is not used by rich wolves in sheep's skins. Church membership will not be the fashionable cloak for greed and hypocrisy that it was before Bill came back. The war did one great service for Canada—it classified the members of Parliament who were bad, brave or coward, selfish or generous, we will not forget for many years to come.

We have most of the profiteers spotted. Bill will not be long home before he will get wise to them too. As a working man who has worked, at a pinch, twenty-four hours a day and seven days at a time—and no chance to watch the clock, or strike for higher pay—Bill will have

the right sort of sympathy with labor. I think he will favor co-operation—co-operation in love affairs, hard-ship, work and pleasure, having been his long suit for four years. Co-operation means unselfishness; it means sharing. Under the stern tutelage of war, Bill has learned to share every thing with his comrades except perhaps his love affairs.

I do not believe that he will clamor for the socialization of industry in Canada. That is not his idea. His notion of co-operation is a lively sympathy between employer and employee—a considerate task master who will assign a fair task, and pay a fair wage, which will include a margin for old age and unemployment. An understanding co-operation as between man and man—not a sullen truce as between satrap and serf. There will be masters and men, of course—but the men will claim the right to an old age, free from the shadow of the poor house. The wages will have to take care of that. There is no Bolshevism among the soldiers at the front—they are too good Canadians for that—but this does not mean that Bolshevism is lacking if they receive unfair treatment.

Bill's religion gives a great place to freedom and democracy. He has seen so much of the bad, mad work of kings that he will fling all of them—except such as are hereditary presidents, into the bottomless pit. The next addition of the Bible—if it is to meet Bill's views—will speak not of

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the Kingdom of Heaven, but of the Democracy of Heaven, which Heaven really is. The war has taught Bill a great deal about freedom. He understands that freedom to be effective must be accompanied by order and authority. There must be leaders or there can't be followers. For four years war has plowed, harrowed, cross-harrowed and generally cultivated Bill's soul. It has

made him a full man. The cynic has disappeared and in his place is a new being with reverences which he did not suspect before, and which, even now, he may not acknowledge. But the reverences are there, just the same, and will go much to glorify and enlighten his citizenship.
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