

I had made up my mind not to enlist. I was afraid of being killed—a sort of moral coward, as it were.

It wasn't that I minded death itself—it was the "Afterwards" that frightened me.

I was not a good man—I knew the inside of three jails. I wasn't fit to die, and I knew it. So I kept on dodging the recruiting officer.

Then, there came, in my father's stiff handwriting: "Your mother is dead. You have now added murder to your other crimes. I hope you are satisfied."

WOULD YOU CALL HIM A COWARD?

He Said He Was—Do You?

By BESSIE F. WALLACE

Illustrated By GEORGE H. CHARLES

"Why do you wait, dear brother?" My singer sang the old song as it had never been sung before.

Then the minister spoke. I don't know what his text was, but he spoke of Him who had given His life for others and of His great love.

It wasn't a recruiting sermon exactly, but he said we might now atone—

I went straight to the nearest recruiting office and signed up.

Was there a chance in the "Afterwards" for a fellow as bad as I had been? Could I ever hope to atone—?

I MET him just after he had returned to Canada in one of the earlier parties of soldiers invalided home from the great slaughter-fields of Europe. I was attracted to him by the pathos that I knew lay behind the pink shield that covered one eye, even before I had seen the medal that Royal hands had pinned on his breast. Of his experiences on the battlefield, even of how he had won The Victoria Cross, I found him reluctant to speak; but he told another story, a more personal story, that thrilled my heart with pity for this big, stalwart, world-wise, yet boyish, man of thirty-five years.

Here is his story, just as he told it to me and to my companion, a young woman, whom I had accompanied to the Convalescent Hospital:

"My name is George Wharton, at least, that is the name I've been known by for the past two or three years. I've had several names in my time, but this last is the one I've disgraced least of all, I guess.

"No; I didn't go Overseas with the First Contingent. At that time, I had no intention that I would ever enlist. When the recruiting officers first began looking for volunteers, I would slink down the side streets to avoid meeting one. Course, I could have adopted a limp, or rheumatism in my shoulder, or my eyes might have suddenly gone bad on me, in the same way that I knew lots of other fellows to have become suddenly affected, so soon as their duty seemed to point Overseas. But with all my faults—and the Lord knows there's plenty of them—I never became an adept at lying. I've done lots of things worse, but, somehow, my tongue seemed to get sort of paralyzed whenever I tried to tell a point-blank lie. I guess it's remembering the lessons on lying that my mother used to teach me.

"But I had made up my mind not to enlist. I was afraid of being killed—a sort of moral coward, as it were. It wasn't that I minded the thought of hard work, or suffering, or privations. It was not that I minded death itself; but it was the 'Afterwards' that frightened me. You see, I had not been a good man; I was familiar with the inside of at least three jails, and while I was not afraid of any amount of pain, or even of being through with this life, I was frightfully scared of the 'Afterwards.' I wasn't fit to die, and I knew it. So I kept on dodging the recruiting officers.

"My father was a good man; too good, I used to think. At least he was so good, he never could understand how I could be so bad; for I was bad even as a boy. He never had patience with me. As for Mother, she was the sweetest mother a boy ever had, and she shielded me all she could. And my little sister Alice—she was only five, but the loveliest little girl that ever lived—I believe I might have been different if I had not lost her. I was barely sixteen when I got into my first real scrape, and Father ordered me from the house and told me never to come back. I wanted to say good-bye to Alice and pleaded with Father not to let her know how bad I had been, for I wanted her to remember me as kindly as she could. I shall never forget my father's stern answer:

"Alice is very young. She will soon forget, I hope, that she ever had a brother."

"I can see Mother yet, throwing out her arms as though to shield me from a blow. As for me, I knew there was no appeal from my father's verdict, and I hung my head and slunk from the house.

"From that day I rapidly became worse. There was no incentive to try to keep straight. I was bitter toward my father, for I thought he had been too severe. I never went back to the house, for I knew it would mean trouble for Mother if she or Alice saw me.

"I shall always remember my first term in jail. I had plenty of time to think; I became frightened at where my course was leading me, and I made up my mind that as soon as I got out I would quit my old life and do the Prodigal Son act. Then, one day, a newspaper came to me addressed in my father's stiff penmanship. I opened it eagerly. There was a blue pencil mark opposite a name in the Deaths column—my mother's name. Underneath was written, 'You have now added murder to your other



"Why, are you here, too? When did you die?" "You have been dreaming," she smiled. "Do you mean that I did not die, after all?"

crimes. I hope you are satisfied.' It was a cruel punishment, that. My gentle little mother had died of the disgrace of having a son in jail. All this happened nearly twenty years ago, but it is as vivid to me as if it had been only last week.

"When I got out of jail, I determined to do better. But I was branded. An ex-jailbird hasn't much show anywhere, or hadn't in those days, and I soon went back to my old pals and my old life. I'm not going to trouble you with the history of my misdeeds, but I'm just letting you see why I was so much afraid of what death might mean to me.

"Then, about two years ago, I was standing, one evening, at a corner waiting for a street car, when I suddenly heard some one begin to sing. I looked around and found I was in front of a lighted church. I was always passionately fond of music, but I had never listened to anything before like that song. I hesitated a moment and then went inside the church, thinking that there was an entertainment. I sat down near the door and listened, spell-bound, till the singer was through. It was only then that I realized it was merely a choir practice I had been listening to and that I had no right to be there. I slipped out quietly, but I had heard enough to know that the practice was for the regular services on the following Sunday. I went to hear her again on Sunday, and the Sunday after that, and soon I was attending the church every Sunday, and hanging around outside during the weekly practices, listening for her voice. At first, I did not always wait for the full service on Sunday; I would slip out after her solo was over. Gradually, though, I began to sit through-out the service, just to look at her. I had found out her name from a program—Alice Ferguson—and it pleased me that she was called Alice, for somehow she made me

think of my little sister. Sometimes I would imagine that she knew I was watching her, and would even fancy that she looked right at me and sang especially for me.

"This went on for about three months, and gradually I had begun to wonder if there were any chance in the 'Afterwards' for a fellow who had been as bad as I had been. Then one Sunday my singer sang that old song, 'Why do you wait, dear brother?'—sang it as I believe it had never been sung before. After that the minister spoke. I don't know what his text was, but he spoke of Him who had given His life for others, and of the great love that prompted the act. It wasn't a recruiting sermon especially, but he referred to the opportunities for atonement that might be seized at the present time.

"When I left the church, I went direct to the nearest recruiting office and signed up. The corps I joined left for Overseas very soon afterward, and my only regret at going was that I should no longer be able to hear my sweet singer.

"Of the year I spent in the trenches I will not speak. It is all too near and clear to me yet, for me to be able to speak of it calmly. Only my last day there will I mention. When I got the wound that shattered this eye, I felt a sudden severe pain, and a great weakness overtook me. I believed it to be the approach of death. But I braced myself. I was going to die, but I was going to die fighting till the very last second of time. How long it lasted I do not know, but it seemed an eternity to me. My captain passed me. He was in a great hurry, for our trench was in dire peril. When he saw my wound he insisted that I go and have it dressed. I just laughed and told him

it wasn't worth while. I believed I was dying, but I fought on and on—for hours it seemed. When the weakness seemed about to overcome me, I would grip afresh and still fight on. Suddenly a great blackness enveloped me, and out of it a sweet voice sang, 'Why do you wait, dear brother?' I felt it was death, no longer to be defied.

"THEN I knew no more, until, gradually, out of a vast silence, I heard the singer again. I was strangely comfortable and content and lay without opening my eyes. I believed myself in Heaven, and as I listened to the singing, I remembered how I used to doubt that it could be possible for angels to sing more sweetly than Alice Ferguson. I knew then that I was right. This heavenly singer, I thought, was no better than she had been. Had I not believed I was dead, I would have thought it was her voice I was listening to. When the song was ended, I lay still, with closed eyes, wondering what would happen next. Feeling a soft touch on my wrist, I looked up, straight into the eyes of Alice Ferguson.

"'Why,' I said wonderingly, 'are you here, too? When did you die?'"

"She smiled as she answered understandingly:

"'You have been dreaming, I think.'"

"'Do you mean,' I exclaimed, 'that I did not die after all?'"

"'You came pretty near it,' she answered; 'but you will be all right now, I hope.'"

"She gave me a soothing drink and would not let me talk any more just then, but later we saw a great deal of each other.

"She seemed attracted to me, just as I had been to her. Perhaps it was the way my eyes constantly followed her about the room that brought her first to talk to me. I learned that she was a nurse as well as a singer and had volunteered for service some months before.

"One day she said to me, 'You remind me so much of some one I have seen before. There was a man I used to see attending the same church I did at home. I never knew his name, but you look so much like him.'"

"Then I blurted it all out—how I had first heard her sing and had gone to church merely to listen to her; how her voice came back to me in the trenches, just as I sank into the unconsciousness that I thought was death; and how it was her voice that had recalled me to life from the very brink of eternity. But I was surprised that she should have noticed and remembered me.

"'Oh,' she explained, 'I saw (Continued on page 32)

YOUR BOY AND AGRICULTURE

"Will My Boy Be An Agriculturist?" is the subject of Professor Farmer's article in the July number of EVERYWOMAN'S WORLD.

This article is of vital importance in view of the food famine which we are facing, and the Dominion-wide crusade for increased production. Professor Farmer gives much valuable information in regard to Agriculture, and the qualities and abilities that go to the making of a successful farmer.