

## II. Unsafe Generalizations

Both of these conceptions of the religion or irreligion of the soldiers are untrue to facts; untrue because they are exaggerations or generalizations which will not fit all, or even a majority of cases. In the first place the thought of death, the probability of death in a few hours, does not necessarily make men change their ways, or even incline them to forsake the habits of a life-time. To men who are face to face with it all the time, death becomes a common-place; a disagreeable one, it is true, like the mud, or the wet dug-outs, or the vermin which inhabit them; but a common-place just the same, because they are meeting it every day. There is always the chance, even in a big show, that a man will come through all right. If he is hit, the chances are five to one that he will not be killed; just be wounded enough to make Blighty, and be nursed and perhaps lionized a bit, and before he is fit again probably the war will be done. It is easier to take any of these chances than it is to repent and change the whole manner of his life. The prospect of death is not of necessity an effective agency in conversion, any more than the attendance of the men at a compulsory church parade is an evidence of their interest in religion.

Fortunately no more true is the generalization of the combatant officer or medical officer or newspaper correspondent, who depicts the soldier as having no use for religion. An officer may know a lot about his men as fighters; he may be thoroughly efficient and entirely capable of leading them in action or teaching them all the details of trench warfare. But he may never have come close enough to them to be made their confidant; he may never have had them bring their little valuables and keepsakes to be sent to a mother, a wife or a sweetheart in case they did not come out, or been given the message of comfort they wanted delivered. Naturally he judges the men by the side he sees and has to deal with. He scarcely knows of the existence of this other side. And when ever and anon it crops out, he is surprised to find that it is there. One day in an officers' mess after the chaplain had gone out, the adjutant, who has since been killed in the Somme, said:—"Do you know that old Padre of ours who has been with the battalion only a few months, knows the men better than we do, who have been with it from the beginning? And the men will go to him when they want anything, rather than to any of us." It was because the chaplain had recognized this other side of the men's characters, and had appealed to it.

In the same way a medical officer knows the inner history of five or more per cent. of his battalion who may have had