

Canadian Churchman

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Editorial

The Returned Soldier

HIS RELIGION.

"He hasn't any," say some. "He has the only kind that counts," say others. This disagreement shows up the fallacy of the expression. We speak of the Returned Soldier as a class and a unit. There is no such class. The unit breaks up automatically. From a variety of motives men enlisted to serve King and country. They have lived together, fought together and suffered together. But on their discharge, differences of education, vocation and inclination break up the group. The tie is only one of sentiment, powerful to bind against common injustice, but powerless to dominate the opinions of the individual. So when we use the expression "Returned Soldier," we must remember that it represents not men who are of a particular type, but men who have shared a common experience.

Don't imagine that a man is automatically made religious because he has had to live under the uncertainty of shell-fire or to charge against a withering fire. You can't shoot religion into a man at the front any more than you can starve a man into religion at home. The fear of death may be a strong motive, but we can be thankful that it is not the strongest one. Some men have found God in the trenches. Just as many have lost Him. Numbers of men never thought of Him, in or out. Some got their first contact with religion when the Padre carried them in. They realized for the first time that Christianity stood for something. They came back prejudiced in favour of the Church. What did they find when they got back? The same old thing which they dodged before going overseas. A service and a sermon in a strange language! An organization that boasted of a connection with Almighty power and showed none! A community that has talked of eternal life and was half dead! A society that prated of Love and did not know the meaning of Brotherhood!

Action is the first thing the Returned Soldier demands of the Church. They have come from a realm where men do things. The Church must act on its environment. It is not sufficient to declaim against the wickedness of big interests or individuals who have stolen God's sunshine and fresh air from one-tenth of our population—men, women, and children. What is the Church going to do about it? She has an inexhaustible supply of grenades and bombs. The explosive and expulsive power of the principles of Jesus she has never tried. Why? Because she is afraid of getting blown up herself. If she were to throw some grenades from the Sermon on the Mount with the safety-pin of "ifs and ans" taken out she might lose her reputation for impartial viewpoint, sanity and conservatism. She would lose her grip on the moneyed people (and loosen their grip on her). She might lose her bread and butter.

The man from the front has risked death to gain his point. He has a right to demand that the Church take her life in her hands, too. Nobody and no Church has a right to say that their life is the most valuable thing in the world. That was not the Master's way. The Resurrection to a new life can come only to a Church that is willing to die. The

Church's evangel is worth more than her organization. The Resurrection of the Church would mean more than her respectable senility. Action is wanted, not pious sighing or folded hands.

Sympathy the Church of the Returned Man must have. Out there the men shared their choice bits and last crusts. They shared the last drop in the water-bottle. They did better—they gave it. Need meant relief. The relief was spontaneous and instant. But some say, "Is not charity a feature of the Church?" Yes, and often charity is twice cursed. It curses him that gives and him that takes. Charity is not sympathy. Too long the Church has handed out her doles to the poor relation whose presence is so inconvenient. Sympathy would mean that she take up the cause of all who need help, not as a hired advocate, but as making that cause her own. Sympathy will mean, too, that we develop the *esprit de corps* of our Churches as social units. The polite reserve which regards a fellow-worshipper with mild curiosity has excellent cooling qualities, but a Church is not really supposed to be a refrigerator. That atmosphere is not what the Returned Soldier has been used to, and he is not compelled to endure it.

Reality is the ultimate test of value. Out there most unlikely men proved themselves white clear through. A man who has been willing to risk life itself for the sake of others does not need any testimonial to certify to the good in him, even if it does come to the surface only at times. Such Reality is a true criterion, more infallible than church-going and psalm-singing. To use the Thirty-nine Articles as a test of a man's work and position in the Kingdom of God is arbitrary, to say the least. They are good milestones, but some people come near to making them tombstones by using theory to test practice instead of the reverse.

Action, sympathy, reality the Church must have if she is to keep the Returned Soldier. Before she complains of his negligence she must show herself to be truly possessed of her Master's spirit, willing to risk all, to give all for the sake of others.

IN HIS STEPS.

Feet that would climb up into heaven must bend their way thither by treading in Christ's footsteps. Now, to walk in His incomparable steps is both easy and difficult. The easiness lies in our surroundings, the difficulty in ourselves. Flesh is weak, and spirit is too often unwilling; otherwise any neighbourhood might become to us as holy as Palestine. There waits in every direction abundant good to be done if only we have the will patiently to do it, first counting the cost. For though no literal mountain obstructs our path, mountainous opposition may confront us; and if it please not God to remove it, then in His strength we may surmount it, "looking unto Jesus."—C. G. Rossetti.

Church music, while its artistic qualities ought not to be made the chief thing, ought to be good music, even the best. There is no more virtue in poor singing than in poor preaching. The singing should be congregational. We cannot praise the Lord by proxy.—Presbyterian Banner.

The Christian Year

The 11th Sunday After Trinity, Aug. 19, 1917.

THE POWERFUL PITY OF GOD.

The Collect has in it a surprising expression: "God, Who declarest Thy almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity." Who would think of associating mercy and pity with power? And yet that is what the Collect does, for it declares that God shows His power by exercising mercy and pity. The mercy of God is practical. It is not merely an emotion, but it has passed into action. It goes out to the weak and sinful. It is a mercy which cleanses and strengthens. The God revealed to us by our religion is not only a God Who sits on the throne being sorry for us in our poor state, but the God we know and worship is the God Who came down here and in His powerful mercy and pity has lifted us up and embued us with His Strength. When we come under the mercy and pity of God we come into contact with power.

The Epistle gives us an illustration of this *Powerful Pity*. St. Paul tells of its mighty operation in his own life. The mercy of God had been extended to him. It had sought him out and lifted him up. "And last of all, He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." His life had been touched by that *Powerful Pity*. To him, the persecutor, it had come, and his life had been filled with its power. It is the secret of his successful work. "For I am the least of the Apostles, that am not meet to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

And in the Gospel we have another illustration of God's *Powerful Pity*. It is extended to the outcast Publican. The Lord Jesus shows us God looking down in pitying love upon the man who "would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'" And the mercy of God in all its power enfolds him. The Hand of Mercy, which is the Hand of Power, touched him, and he "went down to his house justified." We are shown what it is that lets loose this powerful mercy and pity. It is the humble cry for mercy, "God be merciful to me a sinner"; then at once the mercy and pity are in action in our hearts, and we come under the influence of their power.

It gives new meaning to the Collect to offer it in the light that comes from the Epistle and Gospel for the day. As we remember St. Paul and God's mercy to him, and the Publican who had nothing to offer but simply cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner," this little prayer has a new significance. "O God, Who declarest Thy almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity; Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace, that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure."

To love abundantly is to live abundantly.—Drummond.