

hand in the discussion while we were in billets, but for the life of me could I tell you now what he said. It was so mighty little. It was more what he *did* that got us chaps. Wasn't it, Ginger?

"Ginger" and his mates nodded an emphatic assent.

No sir, I never was what ye might call an atheist. The biggest fool and the wisest guy living know very well that there's an O.C. somewhere on top of this world who keeps things goin' and everything on time, too.

When I was a kid, old grannie sent me to Sunday school, rain or shine, and when the roads were blocked she gave me a solid hour's pack drill with the shorter catechism.

There was an awful lot of it I couldn't understand and never will be able to square with my humble horse sense. But if it was that dope that made the old lady what she was to me, she's welcome to it (rest her worthy soul) and maybe I'll get the lay of it some day.

D'ye know, sir, Billy said something of the sort to me one day when we were discussin' "Predestination." He said it beat him to see how the God that made his mother could treat anyone worse than she did Billy.

Good old Billy! I'll never meet another pal like Billy. By gosh! he was a clean sport and played the game if ever a man did. Yes, sir, I'd rather take my chance in the hottest corner of hell with Billy than share a front pew in the gallery of Heaven with some sky pilots I have known.

Thank God! I haven't met any of that sort up the line. They couldn't stand it, and the boys wouldn't listen to their gag. Our padres are all men and talk to us chaps as men, but, like Billy, they *do* a darned sight more for us than talk. Yes, sir, you could take our chaplain at his face value any day, whether it was preaching or digging in, or lending a hand with a stretcher.

You know, sir, we miserable hoo-dos need something we can see, an' feel; something *reasonable*, so to speak. We are simple chaps on the whole. Few of us know much or anything of theology and Greek, but we can spot a straight proposition put up by a straight man.

If your doctrines line up with the horse sense the Almighty gives to every sane man—we're right with you. What we can't understand, we can take on trust if we *find it delivers the goods*. I don't believe there ever was a mystery that had anything to it that did not at the same time carry some samples of its real goods.

Now there's where our Billy came in. Give us a chap we can bank on like Billy and I'll begin to understand what you mean by "the Lord's handiwork." Billy told me one night up the line that he never found his mother out with a lie; that she never forgot anything or any soul but herself, and that she never failed if he promised a thing.

Lord, sir—what a record! I could say the same o' Billy. And so could you, Ginger. Did I tell ye, sir, that the shell that laid out Billy would have done for Ginger, there, if Billy hadn't blocked the way when he was fixing up Ginger on a stretcher?

The preachers tell us sometimes about the Lord never being without a witness anywhere. Billy and his sort are the only "witnesses" that will ever get a hearin' in the trenches, and for that matter from me for the rest of my natural life.

What's the use o' sendin' "theological students" to a gang of men who have tasted more of hell in their teens than the whole outfit of grey-beards who invented the doctrine of predestination by which the Lord (according to Burns)

"Sends ane to Heaven and ten to hell
A' for His glory?"

I tell ye, sir, if your "professors" and preacher chaps had turned out more "Billys" and fewer theological wind-jammers, there would have been no war.

Funny thing, sir, the night Billy went west I had a wonderful dream about him. I thought one of our chaps was facing a court-martial for getting drunk. He was one of the few black sheep we had in our company, but he had a wonderful crime-sheet record.

The O.C. was giving him hell and I could see the poor fellow getting the worst that was coming to him. Billy was principal witness; in fact, it was he who brought the drunk into the guard room.

When the O.C. asked if he had anything to say before sentence was passed, the poor beggar collapsed and cried like a kid. Then, sir, Billy saluted and asked if he might say

joy-rides on all sorts of wagons, gun-limbers and bikes, and there was Billy in the centre of a full score of them with a little dot on each knee. I couldn't hear what he was telling them, but they all seemed to understand him, although I knew our Billy couldn't parley-vo more than six words in French.

Of course we actually saw that sort of thing very often in course of the advance, but d'ye know, sir, the sight of Billy with the kiddies in that dream was the greatest sight I saw in the war. Whatever I have suffered or lost by going into the scrap, that was worth it all. If ever a mortal got a peep through the gates of Heaven, to me that was it.

I remember the first Sunday I spent in France, one of our haw-haw chaplains down at the base was telling us chaps the story of the fiery serpent and "explained" the meaning of the text: "*I will draw all men unto Me.*" We knew as much about it when he was done as we did before he started, but (dream though it was) that picture of Billy and the kids was the last word I needed as an "explanation."

No man in our crowd needed any help to understand how Billy was such a drawing card. He wasn't the biggest man nor the "smartest alick" in our bunch by a long bit; but he was the best man in the show: You could see through him; he had all his cards face up on the table; he was the simplest kid and the one honest man we could bank on: no, sir, you couldn't trip up Billy.

The first sight we fellows got of those wonderful French seventy-fives working, we thought they were the most complicated bits of gun machinery "on the market," as the tool catalogues say. But when you "get" their *working principle*, the very simplicity of the thing beats anything I have ever seen.

Yes, sir, there's one thing this war has taught us chaps: that it is the simple things that win out. We saw it in those famous seventy-fives; we have seen it time and again in the great headquarters plan of attack when we were able to figure it out at the end of a show.

Why, sir, do you know the simplest man I saw out there was our O.C. He never let us a dance, and whether we were going in or coming out he was

always around to give us a word of cheer. I even saw him hand round his packet of whiffs to Ginger there and a bunch of hooligans like him when they were taking cover one day.

And it's the same with the higher command. One day we saw the great chief himself, and talk about simplicity—man, I've seen a grander looking floor walker many a time in a cheap boot store in Winnipeg! No, sir, there's no useless trimmings about these boys.

But oh! Sir, Billy was the prince of the lot! The simplest, kindest, straightest pal God ever gave to a man.

I never saw him in a temper, but by heck there was none of the milksop about Billy. You ask that red-headed giant there who it was that took him by the hand one day, when time was up, and he was in a blue funk that nailed him to the trench floor.

Billy is sleeping on the banks of the Somme; but, bless you, he isn't dead. No, sir, Death can't give our Billy the knockout. He'll "carry on" while one man who knew him is left to tell his story.

Meanwhile, we boys are going to find Billy's mother.



"Thrice Noble Souls! Spirits that would neither bend nor break against any odds; and yet their chief care was the Women and Children"—The Heroes of Vimy Ridge

a word on behalf of the man. Dream though it was, there was Billy as plain as I ever saw him, with a quarter section of Flanders "real estate" on his feet and puttees.

He told the Colonel that only the night before the prisoner had led a raid, corralled nine prisoners, and afterwards went back into no-man's-land for a wounded Hun he had heard groaning in a shell hole as he came back with his bag of prisoners.

That settled it. The fellow was given another chance. But that wasn't the end of the dream. The Colonel at once recommended that same old booze-artist for the Military medal and placed him in charge of a big rationing party. That's our Colonel's way, sir.

Next thing that is clear to me—we were passing through the wreck of what had once been a village. Never saw such a crowd of happy folk in my life as the civilians we found after the Boche had cleared out—chiefly kids and old women.

There was our old drunken pal, as sober as the chaplain, handing out grub to everybody like a great, big, mud-caked Santa Claus. Our boys were giving the kiddies