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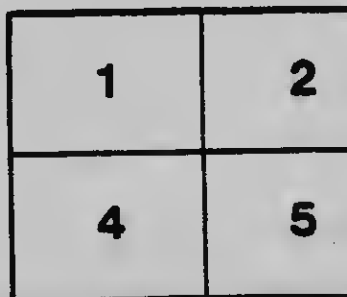
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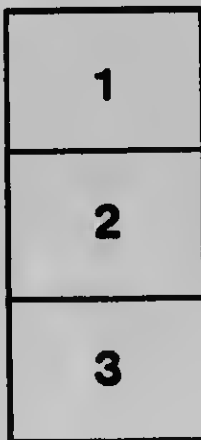
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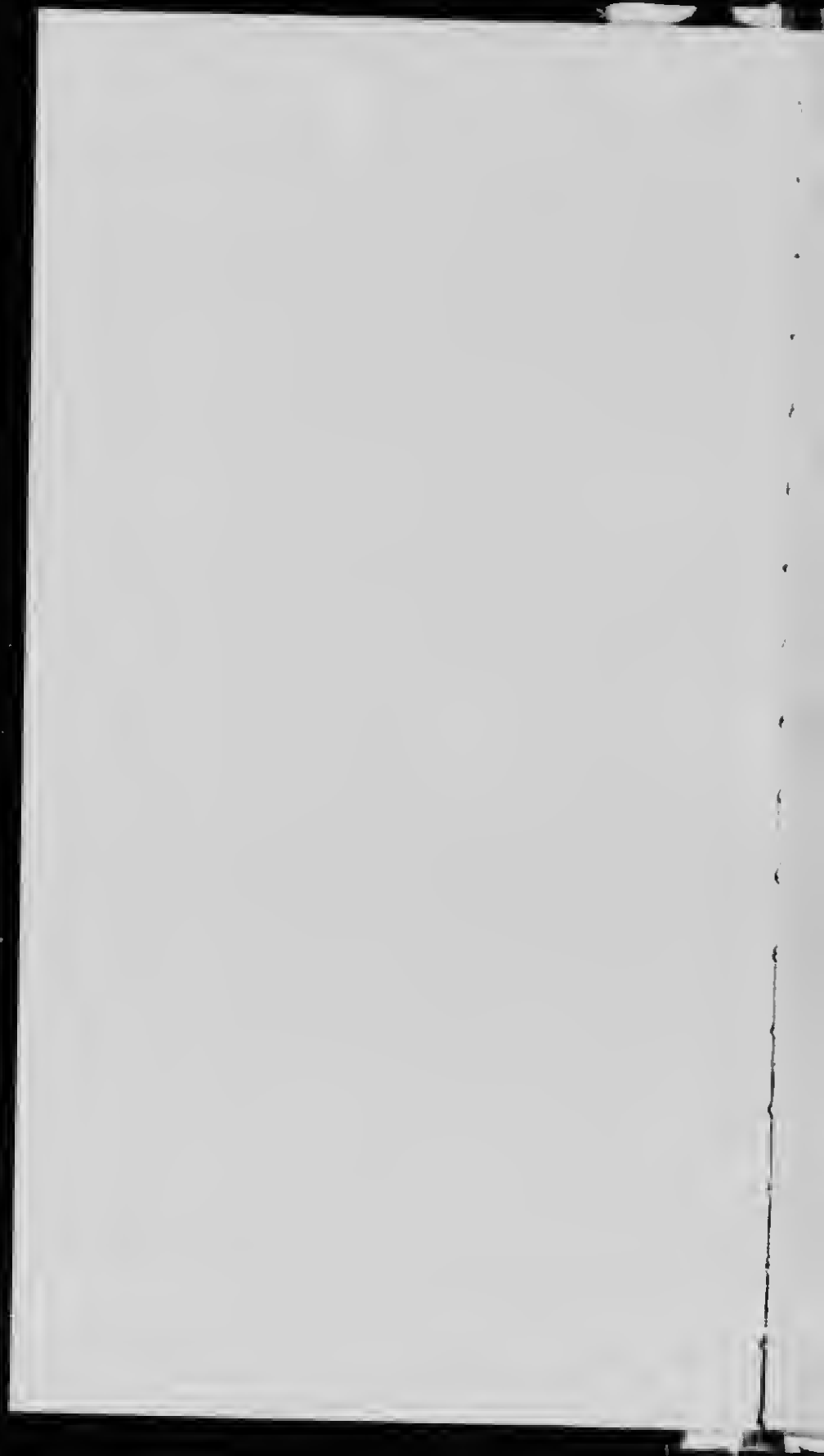
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The
Unreturning Brave

An Address

by

The Rev. R. G. MacBeth, M.A., D.D., L.L.D.
(Formerly Lieut. No. 1 Co'y W.L.I.)

In Memory of

THE MEN WHO FELL IN THE GREAT WAR

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The Unreturning Brave

(JOHN XII, 24): *Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.*

THE Bible is so wonderful in great texts for all occasions that one who looks for a suitable verse on which to base a special study will find himself embarrassed by riches. But for our present purpose of paying tribute to the gallant men who have fallen at the battle-front in the course of their duty, there is no more fitting word in Holy Writ than that which heads this address. It is found in the apparently paradoxical but, in reality, the marvellously luminant, statement made by Jesus Himself, and it speaks of death as widening the influence of the life which it seems outwardly to be bringing to a close. Here as elsewhere Jesus is Himself the highest evidence for the truth of what He asserts, for His sacrificial death distinctly and profoundly widened the power of His life. This is so historically true that even the cynical Talleyrand, who had no Christian affiliations, but who was a shrewd observer of human affairs, emphasized it. For when a man who claimed to have discovered a better religion than Christianity, which, however, he said he could not get the world to accept, asked the cynic how he could succeed, i.e. got the startling answer, "Get yourself crucified." Stephen, the first martyr in the Christian Church, by his death helped to bring about the conversion of Saul, who became the greatest man the world has seen since the day of the Cross. The saintly Latimer was right when he said that every persecuting flame kindled on the bodies of the faithful, lit torches of liberty in England that would never be extinguished. Cairns around the graves of Covenanters, slain on the moors of Scotland, have been more influential for good than the colossal pyramids of Egypt. And the passing of a little child has redeemed many a household from infidelity and sent men out on new crusades for freedom. Thus many, who will not return, went forth into this present war—mere lads, some of them whose powers gave great promise of usefulness in the country. But who shall say that they did less splendid service for their Empire when they crowded a life-time into one tremendous moment of sacrifice which must tell tremendously on the future of the world?

In graves, marked or unmarked, in graveyard or in crater, the bodies of these men, far away from their kindred, lie buried fittingly in the land in which they gave their lives. Sentimentally, some say we would rather have them resting in the old familiar family plot, but where could such a fit

couch be found for their broken bodies as in the place of their sacrificial efforts on the distant fields that were rocked by the thunders of war? In this west land of ours we had some years ago a seer and prophet, in a great missionary, James Robertson, who gave his life as distinctly for the country he loved as any soldier in the day of battle. And when that great missionary, worn out by his toil for the West, died in an eastern city and was buried in a beautiful cemetery there, friends who knew his life felt it was more fitting that his body should rest amid the scenes of his sacrifice on western plains. An so it was exhumed and brought back to the land of the setting sun, to be laid in a grave that might be a sort of a shrine and an inspiration to coming generations. So let our lads rest yonder in France and in Flanders and the ends of the earth till the trump of the archangel calls them to the last Grand Review. Does some one say a word about unconsecrated soil? Nay, verily, for we hold with Lincoln, who at the meeting for the dedication of the National Cemetery at Gettysburg, said in his great way: "We have come to dedicate a portion of the battlefield as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that the nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But in a larger sense we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it far above our power to add or detract." And so we say, let our men rest in the ground that they consecrated by their superb and victorious battle against the enemies of human freedom. Some day the world will gather new inspiration from those fields of sacrifice.

In one sense the thing that strikes us most about war is the appalling wastage, beyond all computation, of life and substance. But there are wars and wars, and we must distinguish between loss and waste and sacrifice, now as in the days of the Alabaster Box of Ointment. A maimed soldier back from the conflict was commiserated, somewhat superficially, by an onlooker, who said, "I see you lost an arm at the Front"; but the lad, erect in his uniform, answered, "I did not lose it; I gave it." And of countless men who have fallen with their faces to the foe, the same may be said. "They did not lose their lives; they gave them." It was not loss or waste, but sacrifice. And it was sacrifice exultantly rendered, because of the far-reaching results that would be thereby achieved. A grizzled old Highlander, coming back to the dressing station, wounded for the fourth time, was seen to be far spent—"fey" as the Scotch would express it—and some one expressed the hope that he would soon be about again. He replied, "No, it will soon be all over with me; but, never mind, this will be a safer world for the bairns after this war," and he went his way contentedly to die.

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Upon the mind of many a lad who had gone forth in a spirit of adventure the real significance of the conflict dawned when he saw the brutality of our enemies and the unparelleled devastation, physical and moral, which those enemies were working upon the regions they had invaded. So it was that a chaplain tells of our Canadian lads, gasping under the deadly gas launched upon them so foully at Ypres, that one and another who was nearing the end, he relates that the first question they articulated was, "Did the Huns get through?" And when he answered "No," they smiled in the joy of having blocked the road to Calais and the Channel and home. "Tell the folks at home," the men used to say to others who were coming back inviolated, "tell them we are eager to go home, but that we are going to fight it out to the end, so that our sons will not have it to do over again." There can be no misunderstanding here—the fallen brave and the broken in body saw far ahead and were willing to pay the supreme price for the world's freedom.

Let us not forget that a military victory is built upon the graves of those who have given their lives for the nation's existence. If Britannia rules the waves, as was never before so evident as now, when the once proud squadrons of the enemy have come, white-flagged, to surrender to the silent Navy of the North Sea, it is because:

"We have straved our best to the world's unrest,
To the shark and the sheering gull."

And if victory has perched upon our banners in this fiercest struggle of the ages, it is because men have piled their bodies like a bulwark against the progress of the hugest war machinery our world has ever seen.

In many respects the most remarkable and inspirational literary product of the war has been the short poem "In Flander's Fields," by Colonel John McCrae, the beloved and versatile physician, who, worn out by his efforts for the wounded, died at the base hospital in Boulogne. The poem is only a few lines, but these lines are so vivid and so full of appeal that "In Flander's Fields" aroused the Empire to fresh endeavor, and was used with wonderful effect by all the nations of the Allies in crisis hours during the war. The poem is the appeal of the dead to the living, and there is thrilling urgency in the adjuration,

"If ye break faith with us who die,
We shall not sleep."

There are countless ways in which we may fail to keep faith with the dead, and there is no better time to guard ourselves against such treason than when the names and deeds of the sacrificed are fresh in our memory. Those who think that John McCrae, in that brief but profound poem, was only

urging us on to win victory over the enemy in the field when he said,

"Take up our quarrel with the foe;
To you from falling hands we throw the Torch,
Be yours to hold it high."

do not know the depths of the poet's strong and clear-visioned nature. No one knew better than he that the war was a conflict of ideals even more than it was a struggle of armies one against the other. The Torch that was held up by the men who fell was the torch which lit up the gloom of despotism that was settling down on the world. And so it is for us to keep alive the ideals of freedom and remember the obligations under which the nation rests to those who died.

Keeping faith with the dead will imply at the very threshold that we must have generous regard for the families and the dependents of those who have paid the full measure of devotion to their country. The nation must not fail here. This land has been saved from devastation by the valor of men who gave all they possessed, even life, itself, to the Cause of Freedom. It would be a lasting blot on the fair name of our country if it did not "visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction" and see that they have a fair opportunity to make their way in the world, unbroken by the carking care and disabling handicap of privation. It is not specially the function of the church to say in detail how this should be accomplished, but it is the duty of the church to emphasize in this connection what the Apostle James sets forth in the above quoted words as the essence of true and undefiled religion before God the Father.

And it is further true that to keep faith with the men who fell, we must make this country a safe place for those to live who have lost their natural protectors and guardians. Doors of vice ought to be closed and ambushes of temptation ought to be rooted out of every community. When we lift up our voices against the evils that prey upon the innocent and the unwary, we are assailed by the vampires that thrive in substance by the degradation of others, but we must not allow ourselves to be frightened away from the sacred duty of guarding the children of the men who fell in service abroad.

Hence we must make this unequivocally a law-abiding country, where properly constituted authority is recognized and obeyed. The tendency of many in our day is towards irreverence and refusal to receive instruction or direction from any one, and this grows in proportion as individuals or people obscure the idea of God. Atheism is the seed of anarchy, while the background of all authority is God and the Moral Law. If any human government is wrong, let men change it by the peaceful and effective way of the ballot;

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but government of some kind we need as long as the elements of sin and selfishness are in the world,—governments to be a terror to evil-doers and a praise to them that do well.

And this implies that we must keep our land free from the irreligion and infidelity which will sap the foundation of any country and send it toppling into hopeless ruin. Righteousness exalteth a nation, and we are breaking faith with those who died if we do not stand inflexibly for righteousness in the conduct of human affairs. The corruptionist or the reckless industrialist who holds human life as less important than business profits should be ostracized till he learns to deal fairly with his fellowmen. Human society must be lifted up to a higher level. A chain is no stronger than its links, and human society is no purer than its units. Hence the enormous need of the church emphasizing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. Human society can only be regenerated by the regeneration of the individuals composing it. This is the plain teaching of the parables of the leaven and the mustard seed, and must not be obscured by human devices. This way alone lies safety. The path of irreligion is the direct road to anarchy and chaos and ruin.

And, strangely as it may sound when we are commemorating soldiers, we must see to it that the land for which our gallant dead fought so valiantly must be kept free from the withering curse of militarism. They went out yonder, not as men who had given their lives to military training and who desired an opportunity to put it to active use, but as citizens from every walk in a free country who were willing to die that their sons and brothers might never have to throw themselves into the furnace of war. This war became inevitable because a huge nation had a policy of compulsory military service which produced machinery in men and guns that had to find an outlet towards destruction. Any peace arrangements worthy of the name must make it impossible for any nation to claim the power to dominate the world, either by land or sea. Every compulsory military system is charged with the dynamitic possibilities of war and should be smashed beyond all hope of recovery. Some international police force or league of nations can keep the world in order, and the nation that wishes to maintain sufficient armament to dominate over and terrorize other nations should be sternly dealt with in the great court of universal human opinion. There is a better way than force, or else our dead have died in vain and the whole programme of slaughter and suffering must some day be gone through with again, submerging the earth once more in a tide of blood and tears.

We must work and pray for the great Conversion, when weapons of destruction shall be turned into implements of

industry and production—swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks—and God shall be the Arbitrator of all disputes. To that end the commission of Christ must become the passion of all His disciples throughout the world. And the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord even as the waters cover the face of the great deep. Then shall the kingdom of God come. Then shall His will be law and wars shall cease to the ends of the earth.

Meanwhile the clouds over those battle burial grounds and the vapors above the wandering graves of the ocean are spanned with the rainbow hope of the endless life. Of that life we have the utmost assurance, not only from the ineradicable instincts of our own hearts, but from the indubitable fact that Christ is risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that sleep. Back from the places of conflict during all these fearful years of war there has been a constant stream of letters, in which, to their loved ones, men have revealed an often unexpected power of visualizing their new sense of the presence of Jesus Christ amid the carnage of the field. Somewhere, in spots unknown to us, many of these gallant men rest far away from their kindred, but the Angel of the Resurrection has marked the place of their encampment and they will answer the roll when he sounds the last Rally.

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