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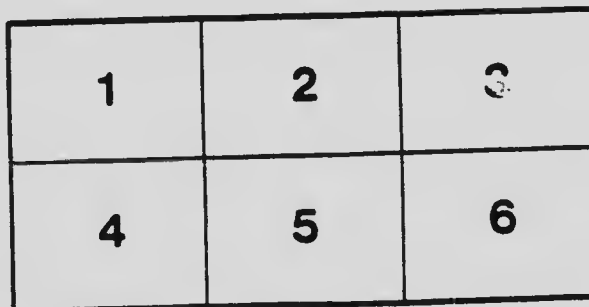
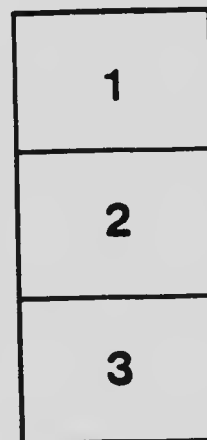
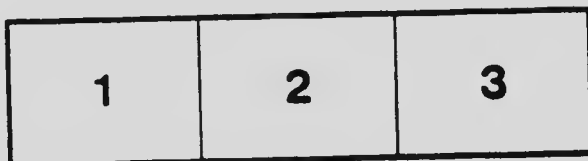
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*“A Student
in Arms”*



W. H. Sedgewick, B. A.

Name of Work)

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“A STUDENT IN ARMS”

An Address Delivered in the

Central Presbyterian Church

HAMILTON, ONTARIO

—ON—

SUNDAY EVENING, APRIL 29th, 1917

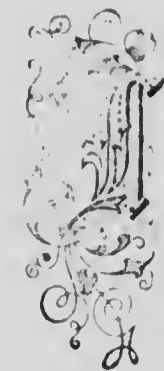
By the Minister of the Church

REV. W. H. SEDGEWICK, B. A.

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N ALL the waste of this most wasteful of wars there is nothing more appalling than the waste of genius, the premature quenching of God-lit lamps of genius. How many young doctors serving in the various branches of the service, has the wastefulness of war thrown upon the scrap heap just when long years of patient study were beginning to bear fruit! What breaches have been made in all departments of science! What a toll the war has taken from the ranks of literature! I think, for example, of Rupert Brooke, "England's poet soldier," who sleeps well in an Aegean Isle, that "corner of a foreign field that is forever England." I think especially tonight of Donald Hankey, whose genius gave us "A Student in Arms," and who sleeps tonight with so many others, of whom the world was not worthy, beneath the flowers of Flanders.

One for whose literary judgment I have high regard, one of the best bookmen in Canada, writes of "A Student in Arms" thus: "It is always dangerous to prophesy, but one can hardly be wrong in saying that unless another miracle happens, this is the one permanent book which the war has given. Donald Hankey will take his place along with Mark Rutherford, chiefest among the chief." It was Mr. J. St. Loe Strachey, Editor of the London Spectator, who rescued this prince of men from comparative obscurity, and permitted the world to enjoy the fruits of his genius. "I looked with love and admiration on a genius," says Mr. Strachey, "for genius it was in the true sense—an inspiring spirit, an invisible flame, that burned in the presence of a lamp lit by the hand of God."

I

It all began with a Quest"—thus Hankey describes the experience out of which his book was born. "It is quite legitimate to call it a Quest. It was the Romance of the Unknown that enticed us, just as it enticed necromancers and alchemists and explorers of old days. Only, our unknown was quite close to our hand. It woke up faces from the faces that we passed in the street. It frowned from the embankment it frowned at us

from across the river, from that black mass of factories and tenements and narrow, dismal streets that crowns the Thames' Southern bank. The very air that we breathed was pungent with it. It was this very humanity that was our unknown—the part of humanity which earns its daily bread hardly, which knows what it is to be cold and hungry and ill, and to have to go on working in spite of it."

Hanker's career, like his book, is full of interest. He was all through a man of education, culture, and social position. First, an officer in the artillery, then a student at Oxford, and a candidate for holy orders. He was never ordained. He feared lest ordination might be a barrier between himself and men, and he wanted, above all else, to be a man among men. He sat where they sat. Therefore, he declined ordination and took up work as a layman in a London parish. Just as the Buddha left the sheltered life of his father's palace to become a vagabond in the quest of truth, so he, who had been guarded from hardship, went down into "the darkness of the terrible streets" of London that he might gain a truer perspective, by mingling with men whose minds had not been confused by artificial complications, and whose philosophy must have grown naturally from their naked struggle with the elemental realities. He thought that he could learn from them: what were the truths that really mattered, what was the relative value of the material, the intellectual and the spiritual.

He went and lived in a mean street, opened clubs where he could meet the working man or boy, enticed him to his rooms and regaled him with blas and Egyptian cigarettes, and did his level best to understand his point of view.

The venture was not a complete success. "We did get some value out of our experiences. . . . But all the time we had an uncomfortable feeling that we only knew a very small part of the lives and characters of the men whom we were studying. They came to our clubs and played games with us, until suddenly the more vital matter of sex took them elsewhere, and they were lost to us. They came to our rooms and talked football, but when we got on to philosophy, they merely listened. I think that we mystified them a little, and ultimately bored them. We did not seem to get any real grip on them."

Then came the war, and for a moment it seemed as if the quest would have to be abandoned. The men enlisted and the clubs were emptied. Then our student had his inspiration.

The war was not the end, it was the beginning. Hankey realized that he had failed because he had not gone deep enough. He had only touched the surface. To understand the working man one must know him through and through. Live, work, drink, sleep with him. And the war gave a unique opportunity of doing this. "We knew that we could never become working men: but no power on earth could prevent us from enlisting if we were sound of wind and limb. And enlisting meant living on terms of absolute equality with the very men whom we wanted to understand. Filled anew with the glamour of our quest, we sought the nearest recruiting office." The "Student in Arms" enlisted as a private in Kitchener's army; he rose to be N. C. O. and Second Lieutenant, and was killed in action on the Western Front on October 12, 1916. He died too soon, but not before he had given his message and fulfilled his task.

II

What was his task? Consciously or unconsciously it was this: to interpret the British soldier to the nation he has served so splendidly, and for which he has sacrificed so nobly for which he has dared and done deeds to which the history of war affords no parallel. That was the task that Hankey fulfilled in the Sovereign purpose of Him in whose great designs all of us blindly labor. For this task he was finely equipped, and he fulfilled it with a justice, a humour, an insight, a charm that are beyond all praise. One passage which I shall give myself the pleasure of reading to you will be the abundant evidence of all this:

"Once more the Lord has walked our streets. Once more He has called to the lost sheep to follow the Good Shepherd along the thorny path of suffering and death. As of old, He has demanded of them their all. And as of old, He has not called in vain. Whatever their faults, these beloved lost sheep do not lack courage. When they give, they give recklessly, not staying to count the cost. They never bargain, estimate the odds, calculate profit and loss. With them it is a plunge, a blind headlong plunge. They venture 'neck or nothing, Heaven's success found, or earth's failure.' When the call came to face hardship and risk life itself in the cause of freedom, we stolid respectable folk paused. We waited to be convinced of the necessity. We calculated the loss and gain. We sounded our employers about the keeping open of our job. Not so they. They plunged headlong. It was their chance. For this, they

felt, they had been born. Their hearts were afire. They had a craving to give their lives for the great cause. They had a hunger for danger. And what a nuisance they were in that first weary year of training!

They plunged headlong down the stony path of glory; but in their haste they stumbled over every stone! And when they did that they put us all out of our stride, so crowded was the path. Were they promoted? They promptly celebrated the fact in a fashion that secured their immediate reduction. Were they reduced to the ranks? Then they were in hot water from early morn to dewy eve, and such was their irrepressible charm that hot water lost its terrors. To be a defaulter in such merry company was a privilege rather than a disgrace. So in despair we promoted them again, hoping that by giving them a little responsibility we should enlist them on the side of good order and discipline. Vain hope! There are things that cannot be overlooked, even in a Kitchener battalion.

Then at last we 'got out.' We were confronted with dearth, danger and death. And then they came to their own. We could no longer compete with them. We stolid respectable folk were not in our element. We knew it. We felt it. We were determined to go through with it. We succeeded; but it was not without much internal wrestling, much self-conscious effort. Yet they, who had formerly been our despair, were now our glory. Their spirits effervesced. Their wit sparkled. Hunger and thirst could not depress them. Rain could not damp them. Cold could not chill them. Every hardship became a joke. They did not endure hardship, they derided it. And somehow it seemed at the moment as if derision was all that hardship existed for! Never was such triumph of spirit over matter. As for death, it was, in a way, the greatest joke of all. In a way, for if it was another fellow that was hit, it was an occasion for tenderness and grief. But if one of them was hit, O death where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory? Portentous, solemn death, you looked a fool when you tackled one of them! Life? They did not value life! They had never been able to make much of a fist of it. But if they lived amiss they died gloriously, with a smile for the pain and dread of it. What else had they been born for? It was their chance. With a gay heart they gave their greatest gift, and with a smile to think that after all they had anything to give which was of value. One by one Death challenged them. One by one they

smiled in his grim visage, and refused to be dismayed. They had been lost but they had found the path that led them home; and when at last they laid their lives at the feet of the Good Shepherd, what could they do but smile?"

Concerning that passage the Editor of the "Spectator" says—and I think justly—that a Commander of today might, with all sincerity parody Wolfe and declare that he would rather have written it than win a general action. One rises from reading that passage,—and the effect is the same wherever you open the book,—feeling that man is, after all, a noble animal, that human nature, despite all its falls and its failures, has in it that which demands and deserves our reverence. The British soldier is human, very human, and he has his faults; but he has also his great and redeeming virtues,—his ability to endure without complaint, to be unselfish without "making a song about it," to risk life itself for the good of the world, the honour of the regiment, and the safety of his comrades. What is there higher than this? He that ruleth his own spirit is greater than he that taketh a city; and noble indeed is he of whom it can be said that he so loved that he was glad to give his life.

III.

But our Student, as we have seen, went into the ranks of Kitchener's army, not primarily to interpret that army to the nation—though that was the outcome of his going—but to find, if he could, a working philosophy of life. He had emerged from college, like so many others, confused in his thinking. He wanted nothing so much as guidance in the business of living. And he got what he wanted. Experience is, after all, the raw material of the philosopher, and Hankey learned in the camps what he had sought in vain on the campus. A man can easily sit through a College Session without once being disturbed by a single thought. I can imagine nothing more discouraging to thought, more soporific indeed, than lectures I have sat through in College—except it be some sermons that I have preached. But a man cannot sit in a trench, hour after hour, and day after day, with shells whizzing through the air over his head, or bursting thunderously ten yards from him, without trying to get some grip of his mental attitude toward them. He cannot see his comrades killed and maimed and mutilated without in some way defining his views on life and death and duty and fate. He cannot shoot and bayonet his fellowmen without trying to

formulate some justification for the strange business in which he finds himself engaged. His mind is bound to re-act to the new and extraordinary situations with which it is confronted.

Our Student, I say, went out in search of a philosophy and he found it, and he has set it forth for us in one of his most gripping chapters. The chapter is headed, "An Englishman Philosophizes"; let me read from it:

"One afternoon he was in a support trench, and the Germans had got the direction pretty right, and were enfilading it at a long range with their heavy guns. The shells began by dropping at the far end of the trench, which they blew to pieces most successfully. They then began to creep up in his direction the range lengthening about twenty-five yards after each half-dozen shells. Would they reach him? Would he be at the end or in the middle of this beastly interval of twenty-five yards? In short, would the shells drop on top of him or about ten yards short or ten yards over? It was an agonizing half hour, and in the course of it he nearly became a Mohammedan. He didn't call it that. But he tried to read a comic paper, and told himself that it was simply a question of fate. "I can't do anything about it," he said to himself. "If this—thing drops, it drops; I can't stop it by worrying." Fate, that was the solution. "Kismet!" he repeated to himself. As a matter of fact the enfilade was not perfect, and as the shells crept up the exact direction was lost, and they burst harmlessly about fifteen yards behind the trench instead of in it. The Average Englishman murmured, "Praise be to Allah!" and re-lit his pipe which had gone out."

There you have the first article in the fighting man's philosophy of life,—submission to fate. His is a noble sort of fatalism and he possesses all the courage and calmness which that stern philosophy breeds.

"Then a day or two later his company was moved up to the firing trench. Somehow the "Kismet" formula did not seem so effective there. The Germans were only about twenty-five yards away, the barbed wire had been badly knocked about, and the beasts had an unpleasant habit of creeping up at night through the long grass and throwing bombs into the trench. It was no longer a question of sitting tight and waiting; one had to watch very carefully, and the element of retaliation came in, too. He found himself sitting up half the night with a pile of

bombs on the sandbags in front of him, watching the grass with straining eyes. It was nervous work. He had never thrown a bomb. Of course it was quite simple. You just pulled a pin out, counted four, and let fly. But supposing you dropped the beastly thing! Though it was a cold night, he sweated at the thought. Self-confidence was what he wanted now—self-confidence and the will to conquer"

Here you have the second article in the fighting man's philosophy of life—self-confidence, self-reliance, that iron string struck with so firm a touch by Ralph Waldo Emerson—"Trust thyself!"

"But the next morning it rained. The trench being a brand new one, there were no dug-outs, and he had to stand in water and get wet. It was horrible. "Kismet" irritated him; "the will to prevail" did not help. Yet it was no use grouching. It only made matters worse for himself and the other fellows. Then he remembered a phrase from a boys' club in poorer London; "Keep smiling" was the legend written over the door, and he remembered that the motto of the Club was "Fratres." Those kids had a pretty thin time of it! But yet, somehow, when all the "Fratres" had made a determined effort to keep smiling, the result was rather wonderful. Yes, "Keep smiling" was the best motto he could find for a wet day, and he tried hard to live up to it."

Cheerfulness—"the Khaki virtue,"—that was the third article in the fighting man's philosophy of life as Hankey came to know it. "Then pack up your troubles in your old kit bag, and smile, smile, smile!"

"At last the battalion went into reserve, and was unutterably bored for a week. By night they acted as ration carriers, and improved communications. By day they endured endless inspections, slept a little and grumbled much. Our Average Englishman tried hard to keep smiling, but failed miserably. This made him wonder whether, on his return to the trenches, his other formula would also fail him. But on the day before they went back into support one of the corporals fell sick, and much to his surprise he was hurriedly given one stripe and put in command of a section.

This promotion pleased him. He took the responsibility with extreme seriousness, and became quite fatherly in his attitude towards his "command."

We do not propose to describe his experiences minutely. Much the same thing happened as happened before. They were shelled while in support, and he walked up and down his section encouraging them and calming them down.

At length the battalion was relieved, and marched back to a rest camp, where it spent three weeks of comparative peace. In the intervals of presenting arms and acting as orderly the Average Englishman thought over his experiences, and it suddenly struck him that during his fortnight as a section commander he had actually forgotten to be afraid, or even nervous! It was really astounding. Moreover, his mind rose to the occasion, and pointed out the reason. He had been so anxious for his section that he had never once thought of himself! With a feeling of utter astonishment, he realized that he had stumbled upon the very roots of courage—unselfishness. He, the Average Englishman, had made an epoch-making philosophical discovery!"

Submission to fate, self-confidence, cheerfulness, unselfishness—these are the four fixed points in the fighting man's philosophy of life. What think you of them? Is it not a noble philosophy? Is it so very far removed from the philosophy of our Christian religion? If for "submission to fate," which is perhaps somewhat pagan in appearance, you substitute Christ's loftier idea of "trust in the all-knowing Father," I think you will have a philosophy with which the Master will find little fault, a philosophy, too, that will prove greatly sufficient for all the exigencies of life.

IV.

After Philosophy comes Religion. And the transition is not difficult in the case of "The Student in Arms," for in truth there is much that is religious in the philosophy he has just outlined.

Donald Hankey kept a note book in which he jotted down from time to time what he considered the chief truths which his study and his experience of life had impressed upon his mind. From this "Book of Wisdom" he culls for us a few pages. Let me quote for you some of his thoughts on religion:

"Religion means being aware of God as a factor in one's environment: perfect religion is perceiving the true relative importance of God and the rest."

"For most men the world is centered in self, which is misery to have one's world centred in God is the peace that passeth understanding."

"This is liberty: to know that God alone matters."

"Optimism is the condition of successful effort: belief in God is the only rational basis of optimism."

"True religion is betting one's life that there is a God."

"Religion is feeling and aspiration"

"Christianity is a way, and not an explanation of life: it implies Power and not dogma."

A sane conception of religion utters itself in these snatches from a soldier's note book—and thoroughly Christian withal. One defines religion at his own risk. In this it is a case of "many men, many minds." But this may be said to be the common denominator of all the definitions, religion is a conscious relation to God. In the first place in which the word occurs in Christian literature, religion is defined as "the link which unites man to God." That is what religion is for "A Student in Arms"; "religion means being aware of God as a factor in one's environment." But a relationship is worth as much as the feelings it evokes, and the actions which these feelings impel. Therefore, our Student says again: "Religion is feeling and aspiration." When he writes his chapter on the religion of the soldier, he heads it, "The Religion of the Inarticulate." Hankey found the soldier, as he had found the workman, inarticulate; he was unable to open his mouth on religious questions. But Hankey rebukes those—Chaplains and others—who see the inarticulateness and assume a lack of religion. It does not follow that because a man is inarticulate he, therefore, has no religion. "Religion is feeling and aspiration," not knowledge and eloquence. Though a man speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, he is nothing, so far as real religion is concerned. Hankey finds evidence of a man's religion, not in what he says, but in what he is and what he does. And one has only to read the Gospels to discover that he has high precedent for so doing. "Not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord. . . . but he that doeth the will."

Hankey found the soldiers inarticulate, but he found them believing whole-heartedly in unselfishness and in charity and in

humility and in courage, and living, for the most part, in the power of these beliefs. He found all about him in the camp what John Kelman calls an "unconscious Christianity"—strong men whom God had girded though they knew Him not, and quiet men who did not profess to be following Christ, and yet unquestionably were casting out devils. And Hankey saw these men go out into the dark unknown with no misgivings. "The death of a hero convinces all of eternal life: they are unable to call it a tragedy." So he writes in his note book. And this is how he concludes what is, perhaps, the most beautiful chapter in his book, the chapter entitled "The Beloved Captain": "A torpedo fell into the trench, and buried some of our chaps. The fellows next to them ran to dig them out. Of course, he was one of the first. Then came another torpedo in the same place. That was the end.

But he lives. Somehow he lives. And we who knew him do not forget. We feel his eyes on us. We still work for that wonderful smile of his. There are not many of the old lot left now: but I think that those who went West have seen Him. *When they got to the other side I think they were met. Someone said: "Well done, good and faithful servant."* And as they knelt before that gracious pierced Figure, I reckon they saw nearby the Captain's smile. Anyway, in that faith let me die, if death should come my way: and so, I think, shall I die content."

One is reminded irresistibly of the ballad of the steamboat engineer on the Mississippi, a far from perfect character, and how at the last he put a magnificent finish to a marred and chequered career by saving the lives of all the passengers at the cost of his own:—

"A kecerless man in his talk was Jim,
And an awkward man in a row;
But he never lied and he never funk'd,
I reckon he never knowed how.
He weren't no saint, but at jegment
I'd run my ehancee with Jim,
'Longside of some pious gentlemen,
That wouldn't shook hands with him.
He seen his duty, a dead-sure thing,
And went for it there and then;
And Christ aint going to be too hard
On a man that died for men."

Believe me, brethren, that is very good gospel, if it isn't exactly expressed in the language of the Conventicle.

V.

"There has been a great deal of talk since the war began of the Church's opportunity. It is one of those vague phrases," Hankey says, "which are the delight of the man who has no responsibility in the matter, and the despair of those who have." But, though he speaks of vagueness, our Student is perfectly clear where the Church's opportunity—and therefore duty—lies. He uncovered a terrible tragedy among the soldiers. It was not drinking, it was not swearing, it was not lewdness—it was something worse than these. He found the soldier believing, as we have seen, in great Christian virtues—unselfishness, generosity, charity, humility and the like. But never in the least did he connect these things in which he believed with Christianity. He thought that Christianity consisted in believing the Bible and setting up to be better than your neighbours. By believing the Bible he meant believing that Jonah was swallowed by the whale. By setting up to be better than your neighbours he meant not drinking, not swearing, and preferably, not smoking, being close-fisted with your money, avoiding the companionship of doubtful characters, and refusing to acknowledge that such have any claim upon you.

Here is the tragedy. That men should believe absolutely in the Christian virtues without ever connecting them in their minds with Christ: and that what at the same time they did associate with Christianity should be just on a par with the formalism and smug self-righteousness which Christ spent His whole life in trying to destroy.

The only possible conclusion is that the Church has grievously failed in her witness to Christ,—that professing Christians have cruelly misrepresented Him. There must be something radically wrong with the Church and with Christians when it is possible for men to trace no connection between Christianity and unselfishness, between Christianity and charity, between Christianity and generosity, between Christianity and humility. Surely if the Church were what she ought to be,—if her witness to Christ were what *it* ought to be, then all good thoughts and deeds would be laid at the feet of the Lord of all good life, and all good men and women would find their spiritual home in the Church which is called by His blessed Name.

What, then, is the Church's opportunity? The opportunity of repentance and reformation! To show by the one demonstration that will be accepted, even by a pure and surrendered and humble life, that Christianity stands for all these things which the soldier—and the soldier here means the workingman—so whole-heartedly believes in—unselfishness, charity, generosity and humility.

VI.

This brings up at once the social question. And for nothing is this vital book more worth studying than for its light and leading on the many and difficult after-the-war social questions.

"A Student in Arms" sees in Kitchener's army a great and successful experiment in democracy. For once a national ideal has proved stronger than class prejudice. "Duke's son, cook's son, son of a gambolier" all surged together outside the recruiting office, and in the army were welded together into the closest comradeship by dangers and discomforts mutually shared. They learned to trust one another, and to regard the essential qualities rather than the accidental graces. Rank and reputation, knowledge and ignorance, wealth and poverty, manners and uncouthness—these are not seen in the new army.

One of these days the war will be over, and the men of the citizen army will return to their homes and their civil occupations. Will they remember the things that they have learned? Will national ideals continue to triumph over class prejudice? In those days will petty strife between class and class again disturb social life or will it be gone forever, because all have learned that they are one nation, and that public weal must have supremacy over every sort of individual claim? Will those who have material possessions which distinguish them from their brethren remember the lessons of the war and forget their false pride forever? Will men continue to be prized for their courage, their honesty, their charity, their practical ability, their manhood? In those days will charity and brotherly love prevail mightily because all have learned mutual understanding and respect?

If so, there will be a new and better Britain, a new and better Canada, a new and better world. Would that it might be so! One would like to prophesy great and glowing things!

One would fain believe that in this time of trouble and good-will we have learned lessons that will not be forgotten and laid the foundations of a nobler, saner, more generous future.

But there are so many things that enter into the question! Everything depends upon the spirit of the men that come marching home again, and the spirit of us who have stayed at home. Everything depends upon how far the war has put the fear of God and the love of man into the hearts of men and women. "Much depends," Hankey thinks, "upon the women If they carefully guard the ancient ruts against our return, and if their gentle fingers press us back into them, we shall acquiesce; but if at this hour of crisis they, too, have seen a wider vision of national unity, and learned a more catholic charity, the future is indeed radiant with hope."

Hankey is not without hope touching the spirit of the men who will come marching home again. "There is hardly a man who will not return from the war bigger than he left home. His language may have deteriorated. His 'views' on religion and morals may have remained unchanged. He may be rougher in manner. But it will not be for nothing that he has learned to endure hardships without making a song about it, that he has risked his life for righteousness sake, that he has bound up the wounds of his mates and shared with them his meagre rations. We who have served in the ranks of 'the first hundred thousand' will want to remember more than the ingloriousness of war. We shall want to remember how adversity made men unselfish, and pain found them tender, and danger found them brave, and loyalty made them heroic. The fighting man is a very ordinary person, that's granted; but he has shown that the ordinary person can rise to unexpected heights of generosity and self-sacrifice."

Will he be met with equal generosity when he returns? That is the vitally important question. The workingman has shown his ability to rise to unexpected heights of generosity and self-sacrifice on the field of honour. Will deep answer to deep? Will height answer to height? Will captains of industry prove *their* ability to rise to heights of generosity and self-sacrifice on the field of industry?

It is too much, perhaps, to expect that the *system* of industry will be changed. Competition will, doubtless, continue to exert its ruthless pressure on employers, and, through

them, on the employed. Perhaps it is best that competition, in some sort, should continue to be the watchword of the industrial world. But is it too much to hope that the *spirit* of industry should be changed as a result of the war? Is it too much to hope that the old and ugly spirit of suspicion and distrust shall disappear?

Perhaps the most to be hoped for is that here and there a better spirit will prevail. "Here and there an employer will have learned a better way of handling men, and will be able to inspire them with respect and loyalty and to make them feel that they are more than servants of the firm—rather partners, jointly responsible for its credit, and participating in its successes. And he will succeed where others have failed, because the workers, too, will have learnt a better day of work. They will have learnt that loyalty does not demean a man, and that not every olive branch need be mistrusted."

The future is big with possibility, both of weal and woe. He would be a bold man that would prophecy what it holds for us. But amid much that is uncertain, one thing is crystal-clear: "The soldier who has fought for his country has earned the right to be treated as a man." This, Hankey affirms, is all that he wants. "He doesn't want to be petted. Heroics nauseate him. He is not a child or a hero. He is just a man who has done his duty, and he wants a man's due." And he will get it! Surely, he will get it! If, indeed, it be possible ever to give it to him! He may not regard himself a hero; his modesty may be equal to his bravery. But his proud and grateful country counts him a hero, and, if she is to be true to herself, she must see to it that he receives a hero's reward.

