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YOUR BOYS  

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GIPSY SMITH





# YOUR BOYS

*Rodney* BY  
GIPSY SMITH

WITH A FOREWORD  
BY THE BISHOP OF LONDON



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## FOREWORD

I AM writing this during an air raid at 12.30 at night, and I have just finished a Foreword for the Bishop of Zanzibar's new and tender little book. He has been a water-carrier for the British force in German East Africa, and Gipsy Smith has just come from the trenches in France.

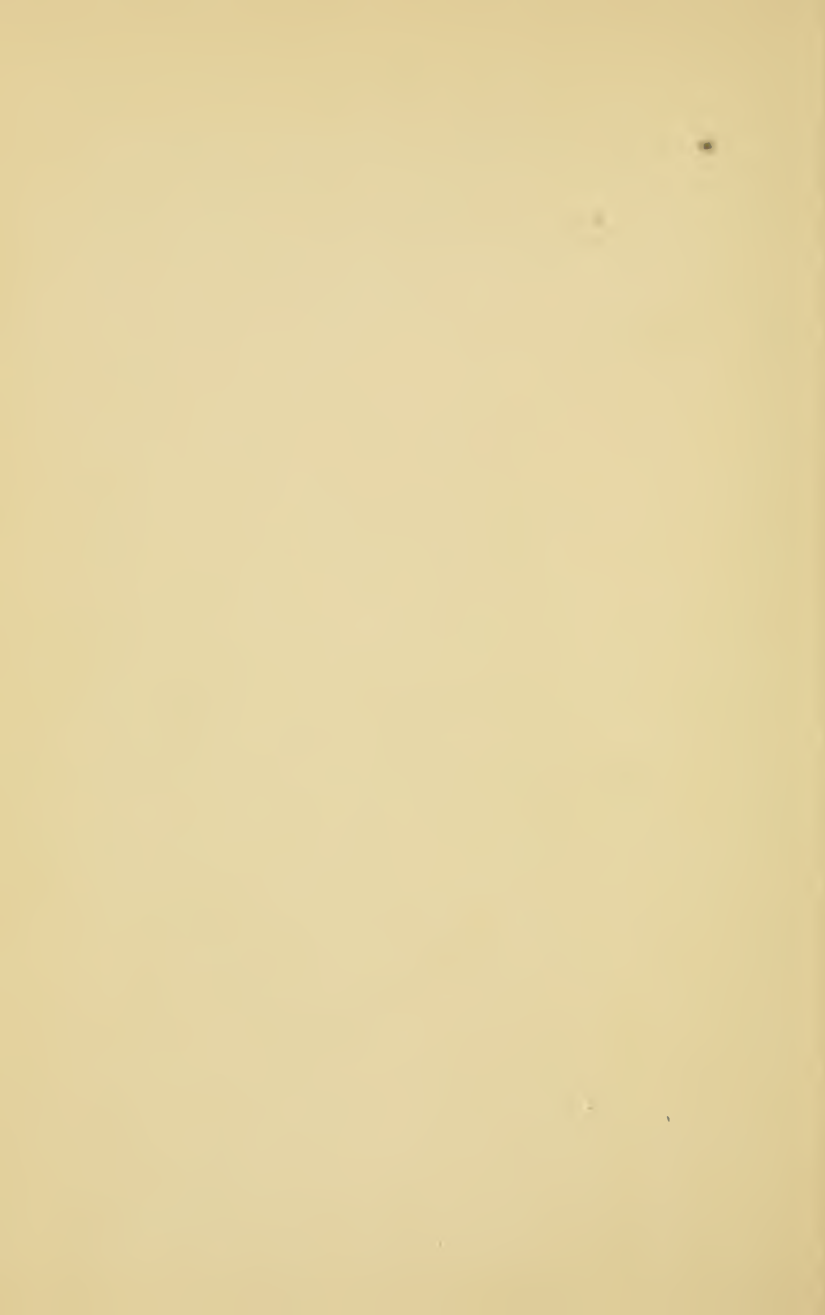
You would not expect the two books to be similar, but they are: they are both about "Jesus." This devotion to "Jesus" binds all time Christians together, and one day will bring us all more visibly together than we are now. I love this breezy little book of Gipsy Smith's; it is not only full of the love of "Jesus," but love of our "our boys." They *are* splendid. I spent the first two months of the war as their visiting chaplain—went out to give them their Easter Communion the first year of the war at the Front. Gipsy Smith and I made friends together, speaking for them at the London Opera House on the great day of Intercession and Thanksgiving we had for them when the King himself called us all together.

Then I like the common sense of it! You must have robust common sense if you are going to win

“our boys.” Anything unreal, merely sentimental, washy, they detect in a moment. You must draw them “with the cords of a man and the bonds of love,” and those who read this book will find many a hint as to how to do it.

A. F. LONDON.

YOUR BOYS



## YOUR BOYS

I HAVE just come back from your boys. I have been living among them and talking to them for six months. I have been under shell fire for a month, night and day. I have preached the Gospel within forty yards of the Germans. I have tried to sleep at night in a cellar, and it was so cold that my moustache froze to my blanket and my boots froze to the floor. The meal which comforted me most was a little sour French bread and some Swiss milk and hot water, and a pinch of sugar when I could get it.

There are Y.M.C.A. marquees close to the roads down which come the walking wounded from the trenches. In three of these marquees last summer in three days over ten thousand cases were provided with hot drinks and refreshment—free. And that I call Christian work. You and I have been too much concerned about the preaching and too little about the doing of things.

A friend of mine was in one of those marquees at the time, and he told me a beautiful story. Some of the men sat and stood there two and three hours waiting their turn, and the workers were nearly run off their feet. They were at it for three nights and three days. There was one fellow, a handsome chap, sitting huddled up and looking so haggard and cold, that my friend said to him,

“I am sorry you have had to wait so long, old chap. We’re doing our best. We’ll get to you as soon as we can.”

“Never mind me,” said the man; “carry on!”

As the sun came out he unbuttoned his coat, and when the coat was thrown back my friend saw that he was wearing a colonel’s uniform.

“I am sorry, sir,” said my friend. “I did not know. I oughtn’t to have spoken to you in that familiar way.”

“You have earned the right to say anything you like to me,” said the Colonel. “Go right on.”

And then my friend said, “Well, come with me, sir, to the back, and I will get you a cup of coffee.”

“No, not a minute before the boys. I’ll take my turn with them.”

That’s the spirit. Your boys, I say, are great stuff. They have their follies. They can go to the devil if they want to, but tens of thousands of them don’t want to, and hundreds of thousands are living straight in spite of their surroundings. They are the bravest, dearest boys that God ever gave to the world, and you and I ought to be proud of them. If the people at home were a tenth as grateful as they ought to be they would crowd into our churches, if it were for nothing else but to pray for and give thanks for the boys.

They are just great, your boys. They saved your homes. I was recently in a city in France which had before the war a population of 55,000 people. When I was there, there were not 500 people in that city—54,500 were homeless refugees, if they weren’t killed. I walked about that city for a month, searching for a house that wasn’t damaged, a window that wasn’t broken, and I never found one. The whole of that city will have to be rebuilt. A glorious cathedral, a magnificent pile of municipal buildings, all in ruins; the Grande



Place, a meeting-place for the crowned heads of Europe, gone! "Thou hast made of a city a heap"—a heap of rubbish. *Your* city would have been like that but for the boys in khaki.

I was saying my prayers in a corner of an old broken château, the Y.M.C.A. headquarters for that centre, with my trench-coat buttoned tight and my big muffler round my ears. Presently I heard some one say—one of the workers—"A gentleman wants to see you, sir," and when I got downstairs there was a General, a V.C., a D.S.O., and a Star of India man—a glorious man, a beautiful character. He was there with his Staff-captain, and he said,

"I've come to invite you to dinner to-morrow night, Mr. Smith. I want you to come to the officers' mess."

"What time, sir?" I asked. "I cannot miss my meeting at half-past six with the boys."

"Well, the mess will be at half-past seven. We will arrange that."

"Before you go, sir, I should like to ask why you are interested in me."

"Well, I'll tell you, if you wish," he said. "Men are writing home to their wives, mothers, sweethearts, and they are talking about a

new power in their lives. 'We have got something that is helping us to go straight and play the game,' they write. And so," said the General, "we should like to have a chat with you."

I went the next night, and for an hour and a half I preached the Gospel to those officers. It was a great chance; and it was the result of the note-paper which I have sometimes given out for an hour and a half at a time to your boys.

There are lots of people think you are not doing any spiritual work unless you are singing, "Come to Jesus." Put more Jesus in every bit of the day's business. Jesus ought to be as real in the city as in the temple. If I read my New Testament aright, and if I know God, and if I know humanity, and if I know Nature, then that is God's programme. God's programme is that the whole of life should be permeated with Christ.

God bless the women who have gone out to help your boys. Women of title, of wealth and position, serving God and humanity behind tea-tables.

In one of our huts I saw a lady standing beside two urns—coffee and tea. She was

pouring out, and there were 150 or 200 men standing round that hut waiting to get served. The fellows at the end were not pushing and crowding to get first, but waiting their turn. They are more good-natured than a religious crowd waiting to get in to hear a popular preacher. I have seen these people jostle at the doors.

But your boys don't do that. They just sing, "Pack up your troubles," and wait their turn.

Well, these boys, wet and cold, were waiting for a cup of coffee, and one of those red-hot gossellers came along, and he said, "Sister, stop a minute and put a word in for Jesus. This is a great opportunity."

"But," she replied, "they are wet and tired; let me give them something hot as soon as I can."

"Oh! but let's put a word in for Jesus," urged this chap.

Then a bright-faced soldier lad called out, "Guv'nor, she puts Jesus in the coffee." That is what I mean when I say you have got to put Jesus into every bit of the day's work.

. . . . .

I have never once been asked by your boys to what Church I belonged. They don't stop to ask that if they believe in you. They want the living Christ and the living Message. It isn't creed; it's need. And don't you get the notion that the boys can't be reached, and don't you think that the boys are hostile to Christianity. They are not. I won't hear it without protest. The best things that the old Book talks about are the things the boys love in one another. They don't always think of the Book, but they love the fruits of the Spirit in one another. They love truth, honour, courage, humility, friendship, loyalty. And where do you get those things? Why, they have their roots in the Cross—they grow on that Tree.

. . . . .

I had a dear friend who won the M.C.—a young Cambridge graduate. He was all-round brilliant. He could write an essay, preach a sermon, sit down to the piano and compose an operetta. The boys delighted in him. He would always be at the front. He would always be where there was danger. I was talking about him one day in one of the convales-

cent camps, and two of the boys said to me afterwards,

“You have been talking about our padre. We loved him. We were with him when he was killed, for the shell that killed him wounded us. Every man in the battalion would have laid down his life for him.”

This old world’s dying for the want of love. There are more people die for the want of a bit of it than with overmuch of it. Don’t stifle it—let it out.

. . . . .

“I am afraid,” said a padre to me once, “the boys are sceptical.”

“Come with me to-morrow,” I answered. “I’ll prove to you they are *not* sceptical.”

We were half an hour ahead of time and the hut was crowded with eight hundred men. They were singing when I got in—something about “an old rooster—as you used to.”

Do you suppose I had no better sense than to go in and say, “Stop this ungodly music?” You can catch more flies with treacle than with vinegar.

I looked at the boys and said, “That’s great, sing it again.”

And I turned to the padre and asked, “Isn’t that splendid? Isn’t that fine?”

While we were waiting to begin the meeting, I said, “Boys, we must have another.”

“One of the same sort?” they shouted.

“Of course,” was my reply. And they sang “Who’s your lady friend?” and when they had sung that, I called out, “Boys, we will have one more. What shall it be?”

“One of yours, sir.”

I had not trusted them in vain.

I said, “Very well, you choose your hymn.”

“When I survey the wondrous Cross”—that was the song they chose.

And they sang it all the better because I had sung their songs with them. Before we had got to the end of the last verse some of those boys were in tears, and it wasn’t hard to pray. It isn’t far from rag-time to “When I survey the wondrous Cross.”

When they had finished the hymn I said, “Boys, I am going to tell you the story of my father’s conversion.” For I had to convince my padre friend that they were not sceptical. I took them to the gipsy tent and told them of my father and five motherless children, and

of how Jesus came to that tent, saving the father and the five children and making preachers of them all.

I said, "Did my father make a mistake when he brought Christ to those five motherless children?" And the eight hundred boys shouted, "No, sir."

"Did he do the right thing?"

"Yes, sir."

"What ought you to do?"

"The same, sir."

"Do you want Jesus in your lives?" and every man of the eight hundred jumped to his feet.

You say they are sceptical where Jesus is concerned. I'll tell you when they are sceptical—when they see the caricature of Jesus in you and me.

. . . . .

I was, as I have said, under shell fire for a month in one place—night and day for a month—and never allowed out without a gas-bag round my neck. I slept in a cellar there at night when I did sleep—only 700 yards from the Germans—and, as I have said before, it *was* cold.



When the thaw set in, I put a couple of bricks down and put a box-lid on top, so that I could stand in a dry place. We had two picks and two shovels in that cellar in case anything happened overnight. I have been up against it. Whenever I talked to the boys there they sat with their gas-bags round their necks, and one held mine while I talked. It was quite a common thing to have something fall quite close to us while we were singing.

Imagine singing "Cover my defenceless head," just as a piece of the roof is falling in.

Or— In death's dark vale I fear no ill  
With Thee, dear Lord, beside me—

then another crash! That makes things real. Every word was accompanied by the roar of guns—the rattle of the machine gun and the crack of the rifle. We never knew what it was to be quiet.

A shell once came and burst just the other side of the wall against which I was standing and blew part of it over my head. I have suffered as your boys have, and I have preached the Gospel to your boys in the front line. I long for the privilege of doing it again.

. . . . .

If I had my way I'd take all the best preachers in Britain and I'd put them down in France. And if the church and chapel goes grumbled, I'd say, "You're overfed. You can do without a preacher for a little." And if they were to ask, "How do you know?" I should reply, "Because it's hard work to get you to one meal a week. You only come once on a Sunday and often not that. That's how I know you are not enjoying your food."

I love talking to the Scottish boys—the kilties. Oh! they are great boys—the kilties. When the French first saw them they didn't know what they were, whether they were men or women.

"Don't you know what they are?" said a bright-faced English boy. "They are what we call the Middlesex."

You can't beat a British boy, he's on the spot all the time—"the Middlesex!" Some of you haven't seen the joke yet.

. . . . .

I once went to a hut just behind the line, within the sound of the guns. Buildings all round us had been blown to pieces. The leader of this hut was a clergyman of the Church of

England, but he wasn't an ecclesiastic there, he was a man amongst men, and we loved him.

"Gipsy Smith," he said, "I don't know what you will do; the boys in the billets this week are the Munsters—Irish Roman Catholics. You would have got on all right last week; we had the York and Lancasters."

"Do you think they will come to the meetings?"

"I don't know," he replied; "they come for everything else! They come for their smokes, candles, soap, buttons—bachelor's buttons—postcards, and everything else they want. But whether they will come for the religious part, I don't know."

"Well," I said, "we can but try."

It was about midday when we were talking, and the meeting was to be at 6.30.

"Have you got a boy who could write a bill for me?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, "I've got a boy who could do that all right."

"Print it on green paper," said I.

Why not? They were the Munsters. Why shouldn't we use our heads? People think

mighty hard in business, why shouldn't we think in the religious world?

"Just say this and nothing more," I said.

"*Gipsy Smith will give a talk in the Hut to-night at 6.30. Subject—Gipsy Life.*"

I knew that would fetch them.

At half-past six the hut was crowded with eight hundred Munsters. If you are an old angler, indeed if you know anything at all about angling, you know that you have got to consider two or three things if you are to stand any chance of a catch. You have got to study your tackle, you have got to study your bait, you have got to study the habits of your fish. When the time came to begin that meeting, one of the workers said,

"Shall I bring the box of hymn-books out?"

"No, no," I replied; "that's the wrong bait."

Those Munster boys knew nothing about hymn-books. We preachers have got to come off our pedestals and not give our hearers what we want, but the thing that will catch them. If a pretty, catchy Sankey hymn will attract a crowd, why shouldn't we use it instead of

an anthem? If a brass band will catch them, why shouldn't we play it instead of an organ?

“Keep back those hymn-books,” I said. “They know nothing about hymn-books.” I had a pretty good idea of what would have happened if those hymn-books had been produced at the start.

I got on that platform, and I looked at those eight hundred Munsters and said, “Boys, are we down-hearted?”

“No,” they shouted.

You can imagine what eight hundred Munsters shouting “No” sounds like. They were all attention instantly. I wonder what would happen if the Vicar went into church next Sunday morning and asked the question, “Are we down-hearted?” I knew it would cause a sensation, but I'd rather have a sensation than a stagnation.

Those boys sat up. I said, “We are going to talk about gipsy life.” I talked to them about the origin of my people. There's not a man living in the world who knows the origin of my people. I can trace my people back to India, but they didn't come from India. We are one of the oldest races in the world, so old

that nobody knows how old. I talked to them about the origin of the gipsies, and I don't know it, but I knew more about it than they did. I talked to them about our language, and I gave them specimens of it, and there I was on sure ground. It is a beautiful language, full of 'poetry and music. Then I talked about the way the gipsies get their living—and other people's; and for thirty minutes those Munsters hardly knew if they were on the chairs or on the floor—and I purposely made them laugh. They had just come out of the hell of the trenches. They had that haunted, weary, hungry look, and if only I could make them laugh and forget the hell out of which they had just climbed it was religion, and I wasn't wasting time.

When I had been talking for thirty minutes, I stopped, and said, "Boys, there's a lot more to this story. Would you like some more?"

"Yes," they shouted.

"Come back to-morrow," I said.

I was fishing in unlikely waters, and if you leave off when fish are hungry they will come back for more. For six nights I told those boys gipsy stories. I took them out into the



woods. We went out amongst the rabbits. I told the boys the rabbits got very fond of me—so fond that they used to go home with me! I took them through the clover-fields on a June day and made them smell the perfume. I took them among the buttercups. I told them it was the Finger of Love and the Smile of Infinite Wisdom that put the spots upon the pansy and the deep blue in the violet. And then we went out among the birds and we saw God taking songs from the lips of a seraph and wrapping them round with feathers.

And the boys saw Jesus in every buttercup and every primrose, and every little daisy, and in every dewdrop, and heard something of the song of the angels in the notes of the nightingale and the skylark. Oh! Jesus was there, and they felt Him, and they saw Him. I took them amongst the gipsy tents, amongst the woodlands and dells of the old camping-grounds. They walked with Him and they talked with Him. I didn't use the usual Church language, but I used the language of God in Nature and the boys heard Him.

Towards the end of the week one of those Munster boys came and touched me and said,



"Your Riverence! Your Riverence!" he says.

"You're a gentleman."

I *knew* I had got that boy.

Now, if you are an old angler you know what happens if you begin to tug at the line the first time you get a bite. When you hook a fish, if he happens to be a Munster, you have got to keep your head and play him, let him have the line, let him go, keep steady, no excitement, give him play. I gave him a bit of line, that young Munster. I thanked him for his compliment and then walked away—with my eyes over my shoulder, for if he hadn't come after me I should have been after him.

Presently he pulled my tunic and said, "Won't you give me a minute, sir?"

"What's the trouble?" I said.

"Sir," he said, with a little catch in his voice that I can hear now, "you've got something I haven't."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"It's like the singing of a little song, and it gets into my heart. I want it. Won't you tell me how to get it? I want it."

"Sonny," I said, "it's for you. You can have it at the same price I paid for it."

“Begorra,” says he, “you will tell me to give up my religion, you will!”

I said, “If God has put anything in your life that helps you to be a better and a nobler and a braver man, He doesn’t want you to give it up.”

“He doesn’t?” he asked. “What am I to give up, then?”

And I replied, “Your sin.”

The boy said again, “You’re a gentleman.”

If I had said one word about his religion or his creed, my line would have snapped and I would have lost my fish.

That night, when all the boys had gone, we got into a corner and we knelt down, and when he went he said, “I’ve got it, sir. I’ve got the little song—*and it’s singing.*”

. . . . .

At one of my meetings the boys were four thousand strong and the Commandant of the camp was to preside. As they say in the Army, he had got the wind up. He did not know me. When he saw the crowd there he began to wonder what was going to happen. He called one of the officers to him, and said,

“I don’t know what he’s going to do. I hope

he's not going to give us a revival meeting or something of that sort. I hope he knows that one-third of these fellows are Roman Catholics."

Well, of course I knew, and I was laying my plans accordingly. What right have you or I when we have got a mixed crowd like that to try to cram our preconceived programme down everybody's throat? The officer, who was one of my friends, said to the Colonel, "I don't think you need trouble, sir. He's all right, and knows his job."

When we were ready, I went to the Colonel, and said, "We are quite ready to begin, sir."

The Colonel rose and announced, "Officers, non-commissioned officers, and men, I now introduce to you Gipsy Smith, who will perform."

Now, the first thing I wanted to do was to disarm all prejudice in the mind of both officers and men. So I said, "Are you ready, boys?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, we'll have our opening hymn, 'Keep the home fires burning.'"

And didn't those boys sing that! Some of them were smoking, and I wasn't going to tell

them not to smoke. That would have put their backs up. They were British boys and they knew what to do when the right moment came. And so I said, "Boys, you sang that very well, but you were not *all* singing. Now, if we have another, will you all sing?" And they answered, "Yes." I knew if they sang they couldn't smoke. So we had "Pack up your troubles," and this time every smoke was out and every boy was singing. "We'll have another," said I, when they had finished; "we'll have—

'Way down in Tennessee  
Just try to think of me  
Right on my mother's knee.'"

I knew if I got them round their mothers' knees I should be all right.

"Now, boys," I said, "what am I to talk to you about?" I let them choose their subject very often.

"Tell us the story of the gipsy tent," they called out.

And there I was at home, and it was all right, and for an hour I told them the story of how grace came to that gipsy tent—the old romance of love.

“Now, boys, I’m through,” I said when I had spoken for an hour—and they gave me an encore. When I had finished my encore, the dear old Colonel got up to thank the “performer”—and he couldn’t do it; there was a lump in his throat and big tears were rolling down his cheeks.

“Boys, I can’t say what I want to, but,” said he, “we have all got to be better men.”

The Gospel was preached in that hut in a different way from what we have it preached at home, but we got it in, and the thing is to get it in.

. . . . .

I was talking behind the lines to some of your boys. Every boy in front of me was going up to the trenches that night. There were five or six hundred of them. They had got their equipment—they were going on parade as soon as they left me. It wasn’t easy to talk. All I said was accompanied by the roar of the guns and the crack of rifles and the rattle of the machine guns, and once in a while our faces were lit up by the flashes. It was a weird sight. I looked at those boys. I couldn’t preach to them in the ordinary way. I knew and they

knew that for many it was the last service they would attend on earth. I said,

“Boys, you are going up to the trenches. Anything may happen there. I wish I could go with you. God knows I do. I would if they would let me, and if any of you fall I would like to hold your hand and say something to you for mother, for wife, and for lover, and for little child. I’d like to be a link between you and home just for *that* moment—God’s messenger for you. They won’t let me go, but there is Somebody Who will go with you. You know Who that is.”

You should have heard the boys all over that hut whisper, “Yes, sir—Jesus.”

“Well,” I said, “I want every man that is anxious to take Jesus with him into the trench to stand.”

Instantly and quietly every man in that hut stood up. And we prayed as men can pray only under those conditions. We sang together, “For ever with the Lord.” I shall never sing that hymn again without a lump in my throat. My mind will always go back to those dear boys.

We shook hands and I watched them go,



and then on my way to the little cottage where I was billeted I heard feet coming behind me, and presently felt a hand laid upon my shoulder. Two grand handsome fellows stood beside me. One of them said,

“We didn’t manage to get into the hut, but we stood at the window to your right. We heard all you said. We want you to pray for us. We are going into the trenches, too. We can’t go until it is settled.”

We prayed together, and then I shook hands with them and bade them good-bye. They did not come back. Some of their comrades came—those two, with others, were left behind. But they had settled it—*they had settled it.*

. . . . .

Two or three days after that I was in a hospital when one was brought in who was at that service. I thought he was unconscious, and I said to the Sister beside me, “Sister, how battered and bruised his poor head is!”

He looked up and said, “Yes, it is battered and bruised; but it will be all right, Gipsy, when I get the crown!”

One night I had got about fifty boys round me in a dug-out, with the walls blown out and



bits of the roof off. I had taken some hymn-sheets, for I love to hear them sing. I never choose a hymn for them—I always let them choose their own hymns. There is wisdom in that. If they have asked for something and don't sing it, I can come down on them. Among the great hymns they choose are these:

“Jesu, Lover of my soul,”

and I have heard them sing,

“Cover my defenceless head,”

with the shells falling close to them. I have heard them sing,

“I fear no foe . . .”

with every seat and every bit of building round us rocking with the concussion of things. And then they will choose:

“The King of Love my Shepherd is,”

“The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want,”

“Abide with me,”

“There is a green hill far away,”

“Rock of ages, cleft for me,”

and the one they love, I think, most of all is,

“When I survey the wondrous Cross.”

Those are the hymns they sing, the great hymns of the Church—the hymns that all Christian people sing, about which there is no quarrelling. It’s beautiful to hear the boys.

That night I said, “I have brought some hymn-sheets. I thought we might have some singing, but I’m afraid it’s too dark.”

Instantly one of the boys brought out of his tunic about two inches of candle and struck a match, and in three minutes we had about twenty pieces of candle burning. It was a weird scene.

After the hymns I began to talk, and the candles burnt lower, and some of them flickered out, and I could see a boy here and there twitch a bit of candle as it was going out.

I said, “Put the candles out, boys. I can talk in the dark.”

It was a wonderful service, and here and there you could hear the boys sighing and crying as they thought of home and father and mother. It isn’t difficult to talk to boys like that.

. . . . .

There is no hymn of hate in your boys' hearts. I have known them take a German prisoner even after he has played the cruel thing; but there! he looked hungry and wretched, and in a few minutes they have shared their rations and cigarettes with him. I call that a bit of religion breaking out in an unlikely place. The leaven's in the lump, thank God!

. . . . .

I was speaking at a convalescent camp. Every one of the boys had been badly mauled and mangled on the Somme. This particular day I had about seven or eight hundred listeners. It was evening, and when I had talked to the boys, I said,

"I wonder if any of you would like to meet me for a little prayer?"

And from all over the camp came the answer, "Yes, sir; yes, sir; yes, sir."

There was a big room there—we called it a quiet room—and so I asked all the boys who would like to see me, just to leave their seats and go into this room. I went to them and said,

"You have elected to come here to pray, so

we will just kneel down at once. I am not going to do anything more than guide you. I want you to tell God what you feel you need in your own language.”

The prayers of those boys would have made a book. There were no old-fashioned phrases. You know what I mean—people begin at a certain place and there is no stopping them till they get to another certain place. One of these boys began, “Please God, You know I’ve been a rotter.” That’s the way to pray. That boy was talking to God and the Lord was very glad to listen.

. . . . .

I was talking to one boy—an American; he was a little premature, he was in the fight before his country.

“Sonny,” I said, “you’re an American?”

“Yes, sir. I was born in Michigan.”

“Well, what are you doing, fighting under the British flag?”

“I guess it’s my fight too, sir. This,” he said, “is not a fight for England, France, or Belgium, but a fight for the race, and I wouldn’t have been a man if I had kept out.”

I told that story to one of our Generals who died last September.

“Ah!” he said, “that boy got to the bottom of the business. It’s for the race. It’s for the race.”

“Are you a Christian?” I asked.

“No,” he answered; “but I should like to be one. I wasn’t brought up. I grew up, and I grew up my own way, and my own way was the wrong way. I go to church occasionally—if a friend is getting married. I know the story of the Christian faith a little, but it has never really meant anything to me.”

Then he continued slowly, “On the Somme, a few hours before I was badly wounded”—he put his hand in his pocket and drew out a little crucifix—“I picked up that little crucifix and I put it in my pack, and when I got to hospital I found that little crucifix on my table. One of the nurses or the orderlies had put it there, thinking I was a Catholic. But I know I’m not, sir. I am *nothing*. I have been looking at this little crucifix so often since I was wounded, and I look at it till my eyes fill with tears, because it reminds me of what He did



for me—not this little bit of metal, but what it means.”

I said, “Have you ever prayed?”

He replied, “No, sir. I’ve wept over this little crucifix—is that prayer?”

“That’s prayer of the best sort,” I said. “Every tear contained volumes you could not utter, and God read every word. He knows all about it.”

I pulled out a little khaki Testament. “Would you like it?” I said. “Would you read it?”

He answered, “Yes,” and signed the decision in the cover.

When I shook hands with him there was a light in his eyes. Have you ever seen the light break over the cliff-tops of some high mountain peak? Have you ever watched the sun kiss a landscape into beauty? Have you ever seen the earth dance with gladness as the sun bathed it with radiance and warmth? Oh, it’s a great sight; but there’s no sight like seeing the light from Calvary kiss a human face as it fills the heart with the assurance of Divine forgiveness.

. . . . .

One hundred and fifty-two thousand cups of tea and coffee are given away monthly at one railway-station. I once happened to be at a railway-station on the main lines of communication. There are women working there, women of position and means, working at their own expense. I have seen rough fellows go up to a British woman behind a counter—the first time they have seen a British woman for months—and I have heard them say, “Madam, will you shake hands with me?” I saw an Australian do that. He got her hand—and his was like a leg of mutton—and he thought of his mother and his home-folk. He forgot his tea. It was a benediction to have that woman there.

Well, on this occasion two of these ladies said to me, “Gipsy, we’re having a relief train pass through to-morrow, and one comes through up and one comes through down.”

“I’ll be there,” I said.

The train that was coming from the front we could hear before we could see it. And it wasn’t the engine that we heard, because that came so slowly, but I could hear the boys singing as they came round the curve,



“Blighty, Blighty is the place for me.”

We served them with tea and coffee, French bread a yard long, and candles and matches and “Woodbines,” and then we got that crowd off—still singing “Blighty.”

They had been gone about five minutes when the other train *from* Blighty came in. We couldn't hear them singing. They were quiet and subdued. We served them with coffee and tea, candles, bootlaces, and smokes, and then, as they had some time, they started having a wash—the first since they left Blighty. The footboard of the train was the washstand, the shaving-table, and the dressing-table. But they didn't sing.

I saw in a corner of that little canteen a pile of postcards, and I said, “Who says a postcard for wife or mother?”

Somebody asked, “Who's going to see them posted?”

I said, “I am. You leave them to me.”

They said, “All right,” and I began to give out the postcards.

I started at one end of the train and went on to the other end. In the middle I found two carriages full of officers.

“Gentlemen,” I said, “will you please censor these postcards as I collect them, and that will relieve the pressure on the local staff, for I don’t want to put any extra work on them?”

“Oh, certainly,” they answered, and I sent a dozen or twenty up at a time to them, and in fifteen minutes that train was steaming out of the station and the boys were singing, “Should auld acquaintance.”

When they had gone I collected the postcards that had been written and censored—and there were 575. To keep the boys in touch with home is religion; to keep in their lives the finest, the most beautiful home-sentiment that God ever gives to the world is a bit of religion—pure and undefiled.

. . . . .

How gloriously brave are the French women and Belgian women! I was talking to one in London—a young girl not more than eighteen or nineteen. She was serving me in a restaurant, and I saw she was wiping **her** eyes, so I called her to me and said, “**What’s the matter, my child?**”

She answered, “Sir, I came over on the boat from Belgium early in the war, and my

mother and sisters got scattered, and I have never seen or heard of them since."

And the Madame of the restaurant came to me a little while afterwards, and said, "We dare not tell her, but they were all killed."

Many people at home don't realise what is going on. Some are in mourning, some have lost boys, some have lost husbands, brothers, but we have not suffered as others have suffered. I was riding in a French train a few weeks ago. Beside me sat a lady draped in mourning. I could not see her face, it was so thickly veiled with crape. Beside her was a nurse, and the lady wept, oh, so bitterly! I cannot bear to see anybody weeping. If I see a little child crying in the street I want to comfort it. If I see a woman crying in the street I want to comfort her. God has given me a quick ear where grief is concerned—and I am thankful. I wouldn't have it otherwise—though I have to pay for it.

That woman's tears went through me. Every little while she was counting in French, "*Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq,*"—then she would weep again and then she would count.

I said to the nurse, "Nurse, what's the trou-

ble?" and she said, "Sir, her mind has given way. Before the war she had five handsome sons, and one by one they have been killed, and now she spends her time counting over her boys and weeping."

And all that is for you and for me! What sort of people ought we to be, do you suppose? Are we really worth—*that*?

. . . . .

I was talking to some Canadians one night—and the Canadians are fine boys. I was putting my foot on the platform, just about to begin, when a bright young Canadian touched me and said, "Say, boss, can *you* shoot quick?" and I replied,

"Yes, and straight."

"Well," he said, "you'll do."

I had a great time with those fellows. Hundreds of those Canadian boys stood up to say, "God helping me, I am going to lead a better life!"—hundreds of them. And then I put another test to them. "I want you all to promise," I said, "that you'll kneel down and say your prayers to-night in the billet, and those of you who will promise to do that come up

and shake hands with me as you go out." I was kept one half-hour shaking hands.

Now, there were nine fellows sleeping in one billet and not one knew the other eight had been to the meeting. They all got mixed up, but all the nine came up to shake hands, and the one that got back to billets first told the story afterwards. This one had made up his mind he would kneel down and say his prayers, but when he returned he found there was no one there. Somehow he felt different then—he felt he couldn't do it. He was more afraid of nobody than he would have been of somebody. Then just suppose the others came back and found him kneeling there!

"I funked it," he said. "I got under the blanket, and tried to say my prayers under the blanket, but it wouldn't work. Then I heard one man come into the room, then two, three, four, five, six, seven, and eight. And the eighth man was the champion swearer of the company."

"Boys," said this man, "did you hear him?"

"Yes," they said, "we heard him."

And the little chap under the blanket said "Yes" too.

“Well, I shook hands with that man, and I promised him for my mother’s sake that I’d kneel down and say my prayers to-night.”

And the little chap under the blanket jumped up, blanket and all, and said, “So did I. I’m with you.”

And the others said, “So did we.”

“Well,” the last comer said, “the best thing we can do is to kneel down now and say a little prayer.”

So they all knelt down, and they each said a little prayer—I wish I had a record of those prayers—and they finished up with “Our Father.”

Then the champion swearer said, “Boys, I’ve cut it all out: no more drink—not another drop.”

And they said, “All right, we are with you. We’ll cut it out.”

Then he said, “I’ve cut something else out. No more swearing.”

Eighty-five times out of every hundred that the boys in France use a swear-word they mean no more than I do when I say, “Great Scott.”

“Do you, boys?” I ask them.

“No, sir,” they invariably reply.



“Well, then, why do you use these swear-words?”

And then I’ve got them and, out of their own mouths, they are condemned. I tell them it is bad form, and I say, “Cut it out.”

These boys made a solemn compact that night that the first man who swore should clean all nine guns, and before the week was out my champion was cleaning nine guns.

But those eight boys didn’t go back on him. They were sporty.

I have seen a little bird’s nest all broken with the wind and torn with the storm, and two or three little eggs, with a few wet leaves over them, addled and cold and forsaken, and my little gipsy heart cried over those poor little motherless things, for I was motherless too. And up in a tree I have heard a thrush singing the song of a seraph and I have said, as I looked at the eggs, “You would have been singers too, but you were forsaken.”

These boys—they did not forsake their chum. They said, “Buck up, old boy. We’ll help you.”

“No,” he said. “This is my job.”

So they stood by him and cheered him on.



People, I say again, don't die of overmuch love, but for the want of a bit of it. These boys stood by my champion swearer, and when he was putting the polishing touches on the last gun he stood up, his face radiant, like a man that has fought a battle and won: "Boys, this is the last gun I shall clean for anybody under these conditions, because, God helping me, I'm going to see this thing through."

And he *is* seeing it through.

. . . . .

I was at a home for limbless men the other day—there are over one hundred and eighty of them in that home. I held my hand out to shake hands with the first two men I met, and they laughed at me. I looked down for their hands—they hadn't got one between them! I took the face of one of those dear boys and I patted it. I wanted to kiss it with gratitude. I wonder how you feel!

I walked round amongst those boys—one hundred and eighty limbless! I found one boy without legs and without an arm. He was just a trunk, and his comrades, those who could, were carrying him around. He was the sunshine in the whole place—not a grouse.

They are doing no grouching—your boys there. When they see you they just say, “Cheerio.”

A friend of mine, a minister, went to see one of these boys, and he was wondering what he could say to him; he thought he had got to cheer him up. The boy looked at the padre and said,

“Guv’nor, don’t get down-hearted. I am going to make money out of this job. Why, I shall only want a pair of trousers with one leg, and I shall only want a coat with one sleeve, and I shall only want a pair of boots with one boot.”

It reminds me of the question I once asked: “Sonny, what struck you most when you got in the trenches?” and the reply came sharp,

“A bit of shrapnel.”

Another of your boys, just picked up in the trenches by those tender fellows, the stretcher-bearers, those men with the hands of a woman and with the heart of a mother—God bless them!—called out as they came to him, “*Home, John.*” And when he was passing the officer and they were carrying him into the Red Cross train, he cried, “*Season.*” He had two gold stripes already. That’s the spirit of your boys.

. . . . .

There was a dear old Scotchman from Aberdeen. A telegram had come to that granite city to say that his boy was badly wounded, and he ran all the way to the station and jumped into a train without stopping to put on a collar. You don't think of collars when your boys are dying. I saw him when he landed. It was my job to help him. The dear old fellow was just in time to see his boy die—and afterwards he came and laid his head on my shoulder and he sobbed. And I wept too. He was seventy.

Presently he said, "It will be hard to go home and tell mother that her only boy has gone, but I've got a message for her. 'Father,' my boy said, 'tell mother I am not afraid to die. I have found Jesus. Tell mother that.'"

There are some people who think you are not doing Christian work unless you have a hymn-book in one hand and a Bible in the other and are singing, "Come to Jesus." I am glad I haven't to live with that kind of people. I call them the Lord's Awkward Squad.

If you take "firstly," "secondly," "thirdly," out to the front with you, by the time you get to thirdly the boys will be in the trenches. I

never take an old sermon out with me to France. I write my prescription after I've seen my patients.

I was talking to a thousand boys one day. "Boys," I said, "how many of you have written to your mother this week?"

Now, that's a proper question. I wonder what would happen if the preacher stopped in his sermon next Sunday morning and said, "Have you paid your debts this week?" "In what sort of a temper did you come down to breakfast this morning?"

If a man's religion does not get into every detail of his life he may profess to be a saint, but he's a fraud. Religion ought to permeate life and make it beautiful—as lovely as a breath of perfume from the garden of the Lord.

The boys have given me the privilege of talking straight to them. "If you don't write, you know what you'll get," I said, and I began to give out the note-paper. I can give boys writing-paper and envelopes and sell them a cup of coffee or a packet of cigarettes with as much religion as I can stand in a pulpit and talk about them. Why, my Master washed peo-

ple's feet and cooked a breakfast for hungry fishermen. He kindled the fire with the hands that were nailed to a tree for humanity. There are no secular things if you are in the spirit of the Master—they are all Divine.

I went on dealing the note-paper out, and presently a clergyman came to me and said, "Gipsy Smith, a man in my room wants to see you."

When I got there, I saw he was crying, sobbing.

"I am not a kid," he said; "I am a man. I'm forty-one. You told me to write to my mother. Read that," he said, throwing down a letter; and this is what I read:

"MY DEAR MOTHER,

"It's seven years since I wrote you last. I've done my best to break your heart and to turn your hair grey. I've lived a bad life, but it's come to an end. I have given my heart to God. I won't ask you to believe me, or to forgive me. I deserve neither. But I ask for a bit of time that I may prove my sincerity.

"Your boy still,

"JACK."

“Shall I put a bit at the bottom for a postscript?” I asked. “But first of all, let us pray.”

We got on our knees, and I said, “You begin.”

“I’m not used to it,” he replied.

“Begin; never mind how. Did you ever pray?”

“Yes,” he said; “I prayed as a child.”

“Start with that, then—He loves cradle faith.”

It took him some time, but presently he began with his mother’s prayer, “Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me.” When he got to the third line there was a big lump in his throat and one in mine, and then he gave me a dig with his elbow and said, “You’ll have to finish”—and I finished.

I put my postscript to that letter. “God has saved him,” I wrote. “Believe him. Write and tell him you forgive him.”

And when that mother got that she knew that giving out note-paper was religion.

. . . . .

I was in a cemetery just behind the lines, walking among the graves of our dear lads who have fallen, and weeping for those at home



who weep over graves that they will never see. There I found an old soldier who had been to the woods and had cut a big bundle of box trimmings. He was setting a little border of box round the graves.

“But,” I said to him, “they won’t strike. It’s not the right time of year—and the ground’s too dry.”

“I know, sir,” he said, “but it will look as if somebody cares.”

God’s jewels lie deep, and if you will dig deep enough you will find them—so I took the trouble to dig a little deeper. I said, “Nobody will see them here.”

“Yes, sir, the angels will. You taught me to think like this in one of the meetings in the huts, and since I can’t do any more in the fight”—for he was disabled—“I am putting in my time caring for the boys’ graves, and if the wives and mothers don’t see them—well”—and his face lit up with a radiance that I can’t put into words—“the angels will, sir.”

. . . . .

I have had your boys say to me, “Gipsy, does it mean Blighty, or does it mean West?” I



have had to say to some of them, "It doesn't mean Blighty."

A sister took me to see one dear fellow. He was blown up by a mine, both his legs and his arm were broken.

"I was lying out there, after the mine blew up, for twenty-four hours, and I was half buried," he told me.

Fancy lying out there in No Man's Land for twenty-four hours with both legs broken and an arm!

I said, "Sonny, you have had a rough time."

And this was his reply: "They copped me, worse luck, before I had a pot at them."

You can't beat these boys of yours, the nation's boys, the best boys of our homes, the flower of our manhood, the noblest and the dearest that God ever gave to a people. These boys, they are worth everything in the world, and there is *nothing* you and I can do will ever repay them for what they are doing for you and for me.

. . . . .

When the great end of the day comes, the greatest joy of all will be the joy of knowing you have tried to make somebody else's life

happy. It is the flowers that you have made grow in unlikely places that will tell—not how much money you have made, not how big a house you have lived in, not how popular you were in the world of letters, of science, of finance, but—how many burdens have you lifted? How many dark hearts have you lightened? You can't do too much for your boys. Remember what they are doing for you. Remember the lives that are being laid down for you.

I shook hands with a boy a little while ago in Scarborough, and he said, "I believe I hold the record for having lost most in the war. I have lost five brothers, my sister was killed in the war, and my mother died of a broken heart through grief, but," he said, "I'll give my next week's pay, sir, towards this new hut."

Another boy, when I was making my appeal, said, "I've been wounded and I am discharged. I'll give my next week's pay," and up jumped a war-widow and she said, "I'll give my next week's pension."

I was talking in Doncaster, and I had a batch of wounded men from one of the local hospitals—a batch of twenty dressed in blue—

and every one of them gave something; and when I looked round and said, "Boys, why are you giving?" one said, "Well, sir, we're grateful for what it did for us when we were there."

People say, "What are you going to do with the huts after the war?" We want to pick them up, and bring them back to this country and put one down in every parish in the land, so that when the boys do come back they will still have the Y. M. C. A. hut to go into, so that they can still keep up the spirit of unity.

Woe be to the man who goes into the hut and tries to preach sectarianism. The Y. M. C. A. is creating a spirit of unity amongst the boys, and that is going on all the time. I want the limitations to vanish at home. I want the ecclesiastical barriers to go. When you get to Heaven the Lord will have to give Gabriel a job to introduce many Christians to one another. You should see your boys, how they mix up. They come in—the Roman Catholics, the Church of England, and the Nonconformists and Plymouth Brethren and Salvation Army, and all sorts—you don't know who's who. We are not quarrelling over religions at

the front—we are fighting and dying for the folks who are doing that at home.

Let's stop our religious nonsense. Religion's too big to be confined within our four little walls. If our Church rules are so rigid that they won't let us come together, then our Church rules are wrong. God never made rules which divide men—all God's laws unite. Christ died that we might be one, and it is time we got together. Your boys are bigger than your Churches. You and I have got to rise to the opportunity. God help us to do it!

. . . . .

Somebody asks, "Why does the Y. M. C. A. always want more new huts? Why not move the old ones?" What will the boys do who take the places of those who have gone forward? When the line goes forward, it does not come back—not in these days; it abides—and the boys who come up as a support, they take the huts the other boys leave.

The Y. M. C. A. stands for everything to your boys. It is their club, their church, their recreation-room. It is their canteen—dry canteen, you may be sure—it is their reading-room, it is their smoking-room, and why should

not the Church of Jesus Christ provide places of recreation for its own people? Why should it leave the public-house and the theatre to do it all? We have lost lots of people because we have been so slow—we have lost them, you and I, but we are learning sense in these days, and the Y. M. C. A. has come to the help of the Churches, to be the communication-trench between the Churches and the people.

It is doing magnificent work.

As I write these lines I think of one dear boy, a young sergeant, a Public-School boy. I had watched him grow up. I knew his home, and as he leaned against me he said, "Gipsy, I'm homesick; I want my mother," and then, with a sob, he said, "Tell me more about Jesus."

I was able to talk to him about his mother because I had lost mine, and just because I love Jesus I was able to talk to him about the blessed Jesus Who comes into a man's heart when he is sad, lonely, and homesick, and helps him.

He was lying on a stretcher, and it was my privilege to hold his hand and to kiss him for his mother.

“Gipsy,” he said, “does it mean West?”

I said, “Sonny, it means West.”

As I held his hand it flickered for a moment and he said, “I am not afraid to go. I know Christ. I found Him in your meetings, and—it’s great to die, for freedom.”

And it was a great thing for me to be with your boy then.

. . . . .

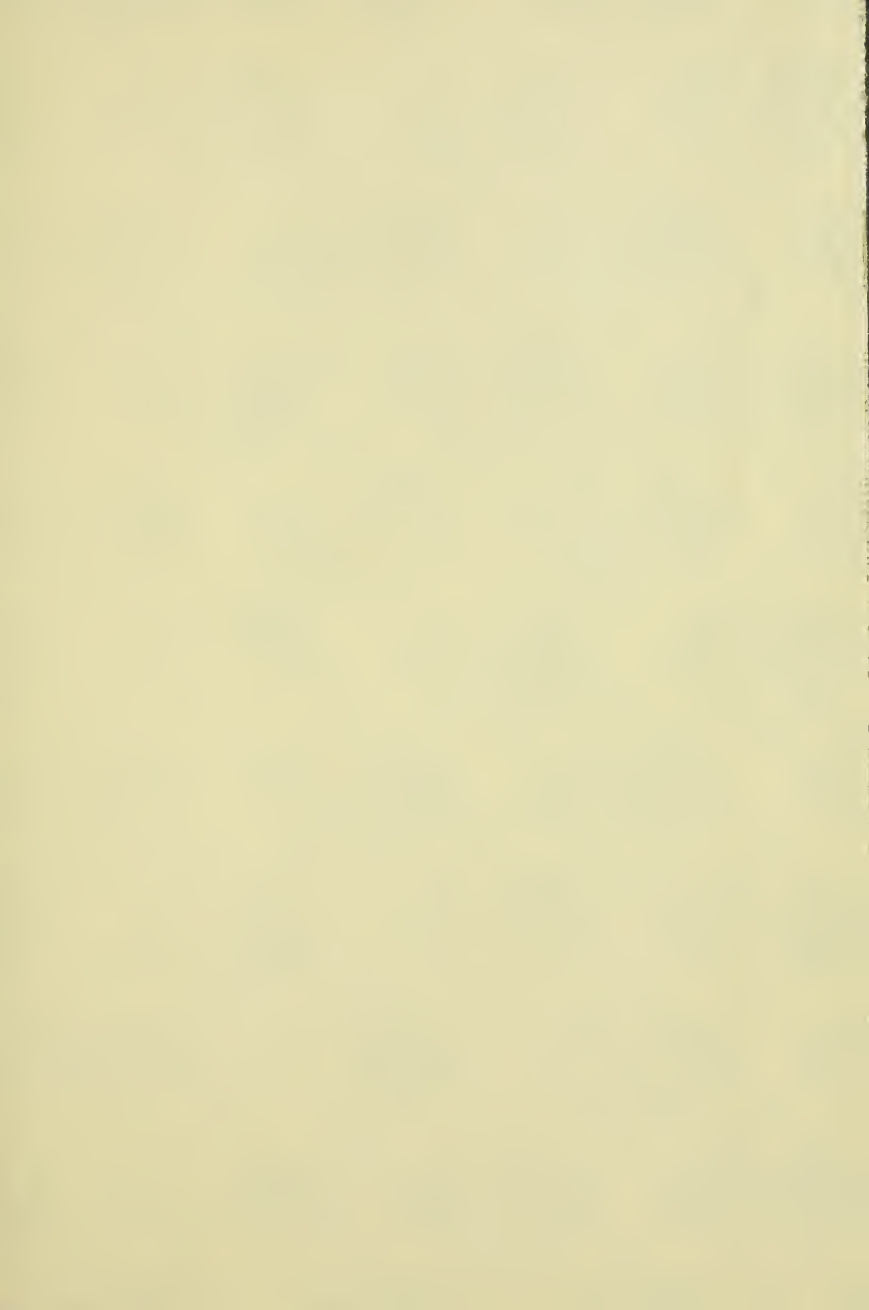
*I thank my God upon every remembrance  
of your boys.*

THE END

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