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## A Ministry of Conviction

WE ought to be dead certain about a few things, at least. Some preachers are dead (in earnest), and others are dead-in-earnest. It makes all the difference where you put the pause. We must not meet the returning soldiers with an "if." They don't want to hear our doubts. They have been up against stern realities over there—such real things as pain and death and immortality. They don't want a religion with strings tied to it when they come back. They will want to hear a man who has the courage born of conviction. They will demand what they call "the real thing." The late Dr. Halsey, of the Presbyterian Foreign Board, tells of an incident of the war in which groups of mutinous soldiers seized women and girls and bore them off to their villages to lives worse than slavery. In one case after a number of women had been seized, the Captain cried out: "Are any of you Christians? If so, stand out and we will shoot you, that we may have no trouble with the missionary." One brave young girl stood out from the line and said, "I am a Christian." "Go back," said her captor, "you are the real thing." And she was. Our soldier boys have risked their lives and jeopardized themselves unto death for America. They will expect a ministry which will risk itself to the death for Jesus Christ. If we are not prepared to adventure all for him, we had better get out of the job.

My point is that we ought to be definitely certain about a few essential things, and minimize the rest. We must have a creed, but let it be as simple as possible. One of the fallacies which the war has exploded is the old axiom that "It makes no difference what a man believes; only his actions count." The war has shown that it makes all the difference in the world what a man believes, for a real man will act out what he thinks in. Creed and conduct are closely related. The New York Peace Society some time ago published "*The Creed of the Huns*" in words quoted entirely from the Germans themselves,

even the title. Germany had a creed. She had certain convictions which she cherished all through the years. And the most flagrant acts of the war were the cold working out of creed into conduct, of belief into action. If the Germans were willing to die for their convictions, ought not the ministry of Christ to be willing to live for theirs?

I love to hear men preach who seem to be standing on the solid rock of a few great truths. It is much more inspiring to hear a man say "I know whom I have believed," than to hear him say, "I have a suspicion that critical investigation will yet authenticate the historicity of Jesus Christ." It is surely more heartening to hear a sermon on the text, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church," than to listen to a discourse on "Will there be any churches ten years from now?" I love to see a man standing foursquare to all the winds that blow, even if I cannot stand by his side. I can well appreciate the attitude of Hume, the great skeptic, with regard to Whitfield. Hume, on his way to hear Whitfield preach, was stopped by a friend on the street. Learning where Hume was going, the friend naturally expressed great surprise, and exclaimed: "Why do you go to hear him? You do not believe what he preaches." The answer of the skeptic was significant: "No, but he does, and that is the reason I like to hear him." So I suggest, my brethren, that we have an intellectual house-cleaning, and that we take stock of ourselves and our beliefs, so that we can meet the years of Reconstruction unafraid and say: "Here are the things that have come through the fire. They still hold. You have read them by the watch-fires of the camps in the glare of the war-light, and I have read them in the headlines of the extras and in the good old Book. Come, let us get back to where we believe something, and where we believe it terribly—terribly enough to live for it, terribly enough to die for it if need be."—THE NEW EARTH AND OTHER SERMONS. By Herbert Booth Smith. \$1.50 net.