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"I'LL BE SEEING YOU"

by **THE REV. DANIEL A. POLING**

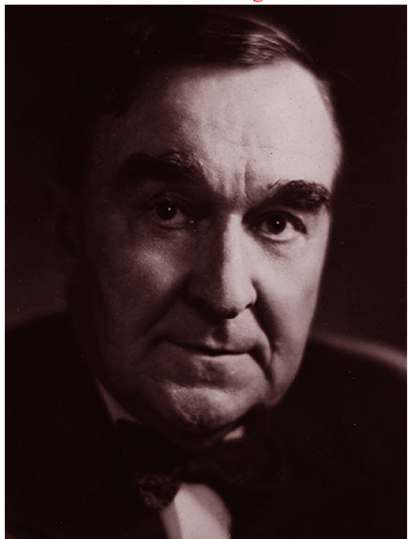
IT WAS IN A general hospital in France in 1944 that I sat by the bed of a boy from Georgia. The chaplain had said, "He wants to talk to you. He remembers when you spoke in his home town. He was just a kid then and went to hear you with his father, and he's been waiting for you ever since he heard you were coming."

The medical major nodded assent and added, "It's all right; he's dying, and knows it. It won't hurt him to talk."

The boy's shaven head was bandaged. There had been a head wound, as well as others, and deep burns when his tank was blown up under him. His eyes were dark and sunken. His lips were cracked and fevered. Now and then a nurse came and moistened them with cotton dipped in a solution. He always smiled and turned his head to thank her.

"Sir," the boy began, "I'm not afraid to die. I have settled that. But one thing keeps coming up to bother me—all that I'm going to leave behind. I've had a lot of time to think about that, and I can't get away from it. I guess you'd call it feeling sorry for myself." He smiled so infectiously that I smiled back at him.

"Sir, did you ever feel that you just couldn't get over losing some things—even for Heaven?" And the boy smiled again, only now there was an infinite hunger in the strong face.



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"Yes," I said, "I know the feeling. I knew it first when they spoiled the old swimming hole. They put in locks on the Yamhill River in Oregon and sank the 'lower landing' under six feet of water. I just couldn't get over it, John. The channel where we dived for mussels and the sandbank where we lay in the sun were gone forever."

The boy from Georgia turned his head with understanding. "You make me think of my catfish lines in the river," he said, and seemed eagerly waiting for me to go on.

"Well," I continued, "I was in the East when it happened, and a few years later when I went back I thought that I couldn't look at the place, but my curiosity took me right there. And then everything was different. I had the old swimming hole, John—had it forever."

The boy was breathing faster, and his eyes were intense.

"It was like this," I went on. "The channel where we dived for the mussels and the sand where we lay in the sun were not under the water. They were in me! I hadn't left them behind; I had brought them along! They—and a thousand other memories of beautiful things—are all with me. I can never go back to them, but I have brought them all along."

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The boy from Georgia waited and then said, "But—" And I knew what he would have said.

"I've thought of that, too," I continued. "I used to fear death, not because of what I knew about it but because of what I didn't know. It was fear of the unknown, and that fear is the only final and baffling fear, John."

He nodded assent.

"In 1935 I was in Singapore," I went on, "when I received word that my father was seriously ill. The 12,000 miles that separated us were the most appalling reality that I had ever known. To be 12,000 miles away and helpless! . . .

"But a few years later, when my mother died, I suddenly discovered there were now no separating distances and no dividing oceans. Ever since she died, we have been together. And now it is like that with my son, who died in this war.

"As I think of those whose physical presence I shall never know again, always I think of them as with me, and there is no interference, no interruption."

John was listening, though his eyes were far away. Then he said something I shall never forget. "I've had that same feeling about Ray—my buddy—who was killed by an anti-personnel mine on Utah Beach the day I was first hit. He died without saying a word. Just before it got him he yelled to me, 'Down! Machine-gun nest!'—thinking of me, sir. I crawled to him but there was nothing I could do.

"His head wasn't hurt. I put my face against his, and then I knew that Ray wasn't there. But I knew something more, sir; I knew he was somewhere! His body was smashed, but he wasn't. I can't tell you why I knew it, but nothing else made sense. Every day now, that feeling becomes stronger. Ray isn't dead. He's around.

"Tell me—" his voice rose—"am I kidding myself? Am I crazy?"

I shook my head. "No, you're not kidding yourself, and you're

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not crazy. Ray is somewhere. Either the Power that began Ray's life and carried him from under his mother's heart to Utah Beach was willing to see him end like that, or the Power that could create was helpless before that exploding mine. John, either of those alternatives doesn't make sense."

The boy from Georgia strained to lift his head from the pillow. "Then you believe," he whispered, "that they wait for us and that we shall know them?"

"Yes," I replied. "I believe that, because I believe that it is after what we call death, John, that life—your life and mine and Ray's—really begins. I believe that this life is but our childhood. And, of course, if you and I live beyond the grave, then that which makes it possible for us to know each other now—the 'you' of you—goes on, too. Just as we remember here, we shall recognize each other there. I can't prove it, but I believe it—I am very sure about it. John, it is as real to me as your bed!"

He turned his head a little. "I believe it, too, sir, and it makes God very friendly—just like your own father."

There was an almost supernatural intensity in the boy's gaze, and so I went on and told him the story of my mother:

"A month before my mother died, I flew out to Oregon to spend a few days with her in the old home. She had been an invalid for several years, but her mind was alert, and when I left her she said, 'My son, if when you come again I am not here to greet you as always—then, my son, you will know where to find me!'"

Now I knew that I had finished my hospital visit. The face of the boy from Georgia was more beautiful than any sunset. He pushed his burned right hand across the sheet and I reached out my hand and steadied it. Then he said, "Sir, please pray."

I do not remember my words in

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the prayer, only these words that are not mine: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God; believe also in Me . . . I go to prepare a place for you."

The boy did not open his eyes as I stood up to go, but he said, "I'm taking them all along, sir, and I'll be seeing you!"

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