

THE BIBLE IN THE MUD

Ivor Hodgson*

The story of this Holy Book is one of death and blood,
A tale of two brave soldiers and the Bible in the mud.
They never met, these defenders of the Crown,
A soldier from New Zealand and one from London town.

They rushed to join the battle with a loyalty inbred,
To fight for King and Country, just as the posters said.
The Empire's men responded as alarm bells briskly rang;
Their kitbags packed with troubles, they marched and smiled and sang.

But the battlefields of Europe were soon a sea of blood,
As waves of men were slaughtered into a human flood.
The Kiwi soldier lost his book in nineteen seventeen,
It fell into a shell hole near the battle of Messines.

For months it lay, in weary clay, amidst the killed elation
Of shattered dreams and final screams, this book of revelation.
The Kiwi fell in battle, from wounds he later died,
Because he'd lost the Bible, its comfort was denied.

The British Tommy found it whilst going o'er the top:
He fell into the shell hole and quickly tried to stop.
With arms spread out to ease his body's thud,
He fell upon the word of God, the Bible in the mud.

He put it in his pocket, before a shell nearby,
Exploded with a vengeance that made his senses fly.
He woke up in the hospital, a little worse for wear,
But relief soon overcame him to find the Bible there.

He showed it to an officer – after cleaning off the muck,
The man said, "Better keep it, it might even bring you luck".
The Tommy took the book and carried it with pride,
He made it through – to the end, the Bible by his side,

Was this just luck, a mere coincidence,
Or the unseen hand of God, an act of providence.
The Tommy brought the book back to London town;
He tried to trace the owner from a number written down.

But it's secret stayed a mystery for ninety years or more,
Until another Englishman decided to explore.
His labours were rewarded through trawling through the 'net',
He found the Bible's owner in army records set.

The soldier was the Kiwi from far across the sea,
A world away from battlefields, death and misery.
Could it be that now we see God's message all too plain,
That the life he took stayed in this book for another soldiers gain.

So rejoice in this their story and proudly hand it down,
Of the soldier from New Zealand and the one from London town.
Though strangers in the battles, through death and holy blood,
Are comrades now forever, through the Bible in the mud.

* One of the sons of Herbert Hodgson, who found the Bible in the trenches in 1918.