

With the Colors

With the colors, I found excerpts of letters from the boys over here, touching upon the many points of soldier life, all of which were filled with things of keen interest to those back home. And like many other press clippings and notices that come to my hands, I take with considerable impatience the persistent attack and ridicule heaped upon the Y. M. C. A. I wonder if you would tolerate me taking the liberty of expressing my viewpoints, as I find the issue after having met with the Y. M. C. A. in the States, in England, and in France. Frankly, unless I deliberately should become an ingrate I can never feel anything but kindly toward the Y. M. C. A., the "Red Cross," the K. of C., or any other institution that came across the sea for no other purpose than to be home to the boys and render aid in whatever way might come within their reach.

I ask this in the sense of fairness word for word, as you might know to the ones who are interested in my surrounding conditions, as well as defending the issue which I believe is being misrepresented and treated unfairly, perhaps not intentionally, but because in many instances the one who does not know whereof he speaks.

The Y. M. C. A. is what I would like to give my opinion of as far as my limited experience of it and as work over here goes, and something of the personal help it has been to me and others, and I think it only fair to the cause and to a large number of loyal, conscientious workers.

In setting forth my views, I do not seek to deprive the other fellow of his right to think in the matter, but rather I can make allowance in many instances for his attitude and opinion of the Y. M. C. A., because he has no personal knowledge whereof he speaks; his opinion is formed by what others may say and for those "who say" I can only think that they have never made a careful study of the situation of the Y. M. C. A. in its every relation to the soldier. If they judge from the surface alone, then they do themselves harm and work an embarrassment upon the Y. M. C. A. and its workers.

Frequently you come across a crowd of boys talking and the question is raised, what has the Y. M. C. A. ever given you, and if you listen long enough you will find the worth of the Y. M. C. A. is being weighed and measured in many a fellow's mind by the amount of cigarettes, chewing gum, tobacco and hot chocolate and candy that the Y. M. C. A. has given away, or did not give away. That is one of the grossest. Another grudge is "The Y. M. C. A. robbed us."

If all reports are true and most certainly some of them are, the Y. M. C. A. has been unfortunate in being made the victim of the situation by clever crooks, but most certainly the Y. M. C. A. can not be held all bad because of what two or three men have done that was both morally and criminally wrong. If any man insists that it is, then he must bring the ridiculous charge that the Y. M. C. A. is stealing itself away, and what man is there, especially an American who would say that the Y. M. C. A. is endeavoring to push itself out of existence.

As for the "robbing," the high prices paid at the Y. M. C. A. can't be denied. It is government statistics that the Y. M. C. A. was to conduct these campaigns at sufficient profit to assure their upkeep. That added a slight increase to the original wholesale cost of the article in question. Then add to this the high cost of transportation across the seas, plus the high rate of insurance, and look carefully over the situation, and you can see where the robbing process dies away, and that it is easy for the average soldier to rain the wrong opinion.

Next follows the question, "Where was the Y. M. C. A. up from?"

It was not my privilege to be "up front" but men have told me the Y. M. C. A. served them hot chocolate gave them chocolate and cigarettes

before they went over the top, but whether they covered every foot of space behind the lines I don't think so, and what's more, I don't think any other organization did either. But I am not evading the issue, no, am I trying to chase from my mind the fact that the great brilliant work done behind the lines in the trenches was done by the Salvation Army, for such was surely the case. I am merely pointing out the fact that as I can learn and know, the Y. M. C. A. happened to be just nearly on hand whenever you might happen to look or have need for it.

I am ready to agree that on every occasion I was glad when the Red Cross, K. of C. or any other organization came around with an issue of candy, or tobacco. And just now I don't recall when or what it was the Y. M. C. A. did give me along those lines, excepting the fine and generous Christmas presents, which in the instance of a friend of mine, had it not been for the Y. M. C. A. he would not have received a box, as his from home was lost in the mail, and then added to what the Red Cross gave him, his personal loss was not felt so keenly.

But, Mr. Editor, I can tell you a host of other true things that the Y. M. C. A. gave me, that are not to be mentioned in the same breath with candy, cigarettes, etc.

You know, Mr. Editor, a fellow when he gets started in this war game, when he hits the big pond, and knows that death is staring him in the face, when he feels that ship slipping away from the dock of the home land, and he knows that every foot of the way disaster or death may be lurking, as I recall it, it was a Y. M. C. A. man who talked to me about something that wasn't to be measured by giving me candy and cigarettes, but what he did talk to me about was to make me safe in the world to come in case death overtook me. Yes, there was a chaplain, chaplains on board, but there were many men on board, too. Then there was a Y. M. C. A. room, a library on board that ship, and a staff of men to be of service to the men, the boys, and I have never appealed to the Y. M. C. A., but what they more than responded and rendered me every possible service here and at home.

At the Y. M. C. A. at Bordeaux there is everything at your disposal, excellent meals, at a very low price, American meals, too.

Again, the finest entertainers that the country can produce have come to me through the Y. M. C. A., educational advantages, unlimited and upon almost any subject in which you might be interested.

In whatever town you may go you will find a Y. M. C. A. and its every department eager and ready to serve you.

Again I remind you that you may not find a reception committee waiting outside the door to lead you up with a lot of candy or cigarettes, free of charge, but you will find a bunch of men ready to serve you in any way within their power.

You are always sure of an opportunity to attend church, to really come in contact with things that

make life worth living back home. That's my idea, the Y. M. C. A. as I see it, and know it to be in "keep home as near as possible," helping us to live our better selves, being just where temptation may come up the keepest.

And Mr. Editor, if that is what the Y. M. C. A. stands for over here, and if that is what it means to me, is it fair for me to say its worth is to be measured by the candy and cigarettes that it gives away? Are you in the right if I let the impression go that such is the case? Haven't I the right to place my own value on the Y. M. C. A., instead of having others express my opinion back home, as they go back and as they write?

I am not assailing others' viewpoints; they may have theirs, but in all fairness why do they not say that such is their view points, and not the boys' over there.

And in closing let me say that I am not endeavoring to blind your eyes nor any one of your readers to the worth of any other institution over here; far from it. Each and every one of them endeavors to help the boy over here in every way and they all have, every one of them, what ever the name may be. My hat is off to every one of them, and I don't presume to measure their absolute worth, by what they give me to eat or drink. If I did I would feel that I was offering them an insult in return for their kindness. I wouldn't do myself that injustice.

The above facts are mere intimations of what I know personally the Y. M. C. A. to be to me and to others as well. It doesn't begin to tell all the story. But, Mr. Editor, does it not change the general complexion and the tone of the situation as you begin to dig the situation up a bit as a whole?

Tell any one who disputes my statement to get into communication with the government direct, ask for a complete statistical report; let them go to the service department of the Y. M. C. A.; let them look up the religious end of the work.

And then let's all sit down when we meet some day and talk about the Y. M. C. A. in a sane and understanding way.

And in the mean time, if some of us persist in thinking that the Y. M. C. A. is all wrong, let's take off our coats and lift it right side up again. That is the issue before us—not to kick a good thing to pieces because there is a lost bolt or two from a perfectly good machine.

Let's get under the surface before we sling any more mud at least let us know what we are talking about as a whole.

Mr. Editor, I owe you an apology. I don't expect you to allow me to monopolize your next issue entirely, but I trust and hope that you will be able to see one or two good points in my letter, written sincerely in behalf of the Y. M. C. A. and every other institution that came across to lend us their aid, to give us of their cheer, who have made many sacrifices to be with us, to talk to us pleasantly in our own tongue as we passed along a foreign thoroughfare. I thank you, Mr. Editor, and very sincerely yours,

PVT. LACY D. REECE



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