

# NEARER THE

## An Interview with Ralph Connor

By PETER McARTHUR

I began with a straight question: "What do you think of the work of the Y. M. C. A. in the war?"

He hunched his shoulders slightly, and slipped down a trifle in his chair. From the expression on his face I was afraid that he was going to offer an unfavorable criticism. But his answer made it clear that that was not what disturbed him.

"It is doing a lot of work that the Church should be doing."

Now you can understand why my question caused him a shade of discomfort. The minister in him—a touch of the old Free Kirk spiritual guide that made him feel the responsibilities of his calling—made him regret to confess that a purely lay institution is carrying practical Christianity to a point that is as yet impossible for the Churches—"beating them to it," as the soldier boys would say.

"Don't misunderstand me," he protested. "The Churches and their chaplains are doing a wonderful work, but the Y. M. C. A., being without a propaganda or dogmas, is able to adapt itself instantly to any needs that may arise, either at the battlefield or wherever the boys may be located. It meets them at all hours and in all places with a spirit of good cheer, comfort and helpfulness."

"Then you are of the opinion that the man who supports the war work of his Church is not doing all he can to help the boys?"

"Assuredly. The Y. M. C. A. is able to go a little farther. Though the work of the Church may be nearer to the ideal of what I want to see done, the Y. M. C. A. gets nearer to the boys."

That struck me as a very important point, and I decided to question him from an angle that might not be pleasing to a clergyman.

"You know," I insinuated in a spirit of half confession, "that there are a lot of boys who would be inclined to look at a Y. M. C. A. at home as a sort of sissified institution, beneath the notice of young men of

the world who like to affect a sort of wildness. Does the Y. M. C. A. get near them?"

"Yes. The helpfulness of the Y. M. C. A. has won out over every obstacle. In beginning the officers of the high command had something of the attitude you suggest. But whenever there was anything to be done to help the boys the Y. M. C. A. was there to do it, and do it well. By its spirit of unassuming helpfulness the Y. M. C. A. has won the hearts of both officers and men no matter what their Church connections may be or may not be. It gives, and it does not ask anything in return. Its sole reward is that it helps freely all who need help. The thing to emphasize about its work is that it gives—it is an organized spirit of giving, and it gives without a string to the giving."

"But I often hear comments—not always friendly—about the prices that the Y. M. C. A. charges for some of its supplies."

"Such comments have no justification. The prices are as near right as they can be made. If there is any profit on the supplies, it goes to the boys in the camps or back of the lines, every cent of it goes to provide them with free—absolutely free—to those who are in the front line trenches. As a matter of fact, the canteens and other organizations under the control of the Churches and chaplains have pretty much the same schedule of prices as the Y. M. C. A."

Here I asked a concluding question:

"Then I may tell the people that in the war work, especially in the matter of creature comforts, the Y. M. C. A. is nearer to the boys than anyone else?"

"Yes. It stands nearer to them than anything else except the military organization under whose discipline they live—and the Christian Church as well as normal. You see, they are specially organized and trained and outfitted for this kind of work—and they are a mighty spiritual force too."

The following reference to its relation to the rector of St. Paul's Church, Toronto, is from the Red Triangle, an efficient instructional church. Innumerable envelopes bearing the Red Triangle, testify to the humanitarian service

Rev. T. T.

Rev. T. T. Shields, Baptist Church, Toronto, states:

"I visited all the prisoner camps in England, 1915, and again in 1916. It is a ministry in every way to spirit, so 'Under its auspices the most effective plan of all denominations, a message of salvation to every soldier who was sent to the front. The value of the work provided and organized on in the camps. In view of the life and the ter

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Rev. Dr. W. H. H. writes:

"The amazing record by the Young Men's Christian Association overseas is the best example of the rapid growth of the Christian Church as well as normal. The Christian Church has the best traditions of the world for our soldier. As everybody knows