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London Armistice Celebration

How it Looked to a Canadian Y.M.C.A. Worker
Overseas—By W. E. McTaggart

LONDON was gloriously happy Armistice week. Happy that the war was over; happy that our armies had been victorious; happy that the men would soon be home. Not for four years had the Londoners let themselves go. Is it any wonder that everyone celebrated? The city was literally a city of flags; everyone carried flags. It did not matter what flag of the Allies one carried as long as one had a flag. London was different in every way. It was as if a heavy dark veil had been lifted from the city. Gladness was in the air. The whole city seemed a fairy land of enchantment.

The spontaneous outburst of joy could not spend itself in one day so the celebration lasted Monday and Tuesday. Soldiers and sailors were stopped just for a handshake. All the soldiers' hostels were crowded during the week. The Canadian Y.M.C.A. Beaver Hut sheltered hundreds. The men slept in chairs and on the floor. All the huts were the same. Everyone within easy reach of London crowded there as it was the centre of rejoicing. Taxis and motors were loaded with shouting, cheering soldiers. All the men from the convalescent hospitals who could possibly get out were down town to celebrate. Every taxi, wagon, lorry, push cart, bath chair and cart seemed to be requisitioned by the merry-makers. A taxi could not be hired for love nor money; they were all engaged for the day.

As the good news spread the noise and excitement increased. Dinner gongs, bells, hooters, bugles, tambourines and motor horns were all screeching weird noises. Everyone smiled at everyone else. People, who the day before were most sedate and set, were boys and girls again. The crowds sang patriotic songs, helping to keep up the merry din.

Supplying Their Own Excitement

It was a pleasure just to watch the crowd. Coming up from Whitehall was a great motor lorry loaded with cheering munition girls, sailors and soldiers. It was decorated with flags and the driver honked the horn vigorously. Next came a taxi. On top were two V.A.D. girls with an officer sitting between them, his arms around their waists—to keep them from falling off. Next came a number of motor lorries filled with shouting and singing Italian officers, waving flags of all the Allies. The people cheered as they went by. Just following was a procession of munition workers and soldiers. Procession after procession passed us, all led by singing men and women.

About every hundred feet or so impromptu dances were held. Choose your partners from where and whom you like was the rule and into the ring arm in arm step the couples. Then like one of the sets in the lancers everyone would swing in to the centre and back again in true ball-room style. The music and the time were supplied by the dancers singing some of the popular songs. In front of one of the theatres the crowd enjoyed the dancing of a girl. A ring was made for her and with a broken tambourine she danced to the delight of the crowd. On the other side of the street an Australian Tommy and a British officer were both speaking at the same time from the top of a captured German gun. Suddenly the crowd hit up Rule Britannia, and a beautiful girl dressed as mistress of the seas, with helmet, sceptre and wand, stepped up on the gun.

Regent Street was crowded. Overhead a low flying airplane did stunts at a tremendous speed. Everyone stopped and with heads thrown back gazed into the sky. The airman only stayed a little while, then off he flew to entertain other portions of the city. In one

of the streets we had pointed out to us one of the big buildings which had been the prey of a German bomb. For a moment we stood silent thinking of those times—but today we were happy and the raids were now history.

A Tribute to Absent Workers

The restaurants and hotels were crowded at meal times. Thousands who never lunched down town did not go home as they might miss some fun. On Monday night in one of the largest hotels as cheer after cheer was being given for the Allied leaders, a nurse in the dress of her profession stepped on one of the tables. With her hand extended beckoning quietness, a hush fell over the whole room, for everyone suddenly thought of the nurses. "To our absent friends," she said, as her glass held aloft touched that of her friend. Everyone drank to the health of those who were absent at the various theatres of war. Quietness reigned only for a moment. Five or six of the officers immediately hoisted the pretty nurse on their shoulders and marched around the room, she bowing to the cheers for the nursing sisters.

Armistice week was "kissing time now," there's no doubt, for kissing was—well anyway everyone, nearly, was kissing and being kissed. Pretty girls and officers all came in for their share.

At the base of Nelson's statue huge fires were burning merrily. Fuel for the bonfires was provided from the cloth signs which adorned the statue and which had been used as recruiting advertisements. Planks and paving blocks helped to keep the fires ablaze. But still more fuel was needed and some of the more adventuresome onlookers set off to the Mall and recaptured some of the German guns on display there. These were thrown into the blazing fires to the cheering of the throng.

The average Englishman took the Armistice news in a wonderful way. There was little excitement beyond the type that I have attempted to describe. There was no wanton destruction and with all the celebrating of the younger folk there was an undercurrent which made one feel that everyone was thinking of the home-coming of the men and of those who would never come home. The whole celebration is aptly described in the words of an Australian Tommy, who, while perched on the top of a bus, was trying to describe events of Monday evening to some Canadian soldiers.

"My word," he said, "I never saw such a night in all my life. People went clear balmy. Trafalgar Square was the happiest place I've ever seen. Fair Dinkum! but we had a high old time."

London with Lamplight

And as the evening advanced we stood in that noted spot in London and gazed in wonder. It was different somehow than it had ever been before to our Canadian eyes. It wasn't the crowd, nor it wasn't some new buildings which had been erected recently.

It was the lights. For over four years no lights had shone in this renowned centre of the Empire. That was it—the lights. Under the glare of the lights men and women danced arm in arm around the square.

The celebration lasted to the early hours of the morning and we wended our way back to our hotel and

were soon in bed. As quietness reigned we were awed by the wonder of it all. The fighting was over; we wondered what the fellows in France were doing and when they would get home. These thoughts all went through our minds, but we were too tired and too happy to give them much thought—the war was over and that was the important thing.



Building Army Huts in France