

Moral Conditions

Among

Our Soldiers Overseas

*Official and Other
Reliable Evidence*



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Moral Conditions Among Our Soldiers Overseas

SO much has been said and written regarding conditions as to drink, vice and disease among our soldiers overseas, that the Social Service Council, representing the religious and moral forces of Canada, felt it wise and necessary, in the interests of all concerned, and especially of the parents and friends of our splendid soldier lads, that a statement not open to question should be obtained and published, that *the truth* should be ascertained and made known.

The following correspondence speaks for itself:

1. This letter of inquiry was sent by Drs. J. G. Shearer and T. Albert Moore, Secretaries of the Council, on October 29th, 1917.

"Mr. William Alexander Coote, International Committee for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic, 2 Grosvenor Mansions, 76 Victoria Street, London, S.W., England.

Dear Mr. Coote,—

We in Canada are receiving so many and such serious reports of the temptations to social vice to which our Canadian soldiers are exposed—

(a) In, or in the neighborhood of, the various camps in England—

(b) In London, when on leave—that widespread and very serious concern and dissatisfaction has resulted, and the matter has been taken up by the Social Service Council and the National Committee for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic. We have been instructed to write and ask you if you will kindly report to us by return mail:

First, as to present conditions in the camps where Canadian soldiers are; and

Second, as to London itself.

We desire to know—

(a) Whether there has been any legislation, and what, since the war began, making the law in regard to social vice, soliciting, prostitution, etc., more stringent, or more easily enforced.

(b) Whether, and to what extent, there has been improvement in the enforcement of the law by the responsible authorities.

When the Right Hon. Sir Robert Borden, K.C., M.G., Prime Minister of Canada, returned from the Old Land, he said on the floor of the House of Commons, and thus to the country at large, that he had found conditions very bad, and that he had protested with great earnestness, and that the authorities had promised improvement. We have been unable, thus far, to get any reliable statement indicating any serious or effective effort to implement this promise.

As this is a matter of vital concern not only to Canada, but to the Empire, we shall greatly appreciate your very careful and prompt report. If it should be possible for you to personally visit the camps concerned, it will, in our judgment, be worth while.

Greatly appreciating your kind co-operation, and with kindest regards to you personally."

Mr. Coote's reply is of date December 15th, 1917, and is as follows:—

"Dear Dr. Shearer and Dr. Moore,—

I have for some time been familiar with the reports in circulation concerning the temptations to all soldiers when in camp, and also when on leave in London. Very strong statements were made by some of the friends of Canadian troops, and especially by several of the Canadian Army Chaplains, and quite eighteen months ago I took the matter up. I visited some of the Canadian camps, and had others visited by special officers, with the result that I found, while every effort was made by those in charge of the camps to keep the soldiers from harm, there were a number—far too many—who would neither listen to the appeal of their officers, nor to the entreaty of their Chaplains, to abstain from going either to the nearest village or town to have what they were pleased to call 'a good time.' The same applies to those men who come to London on short leave. But from my observation I should think they furnish a comparatively small percentage. Let me tell you what is done to protect the men located in camps. There are always Y.M.C.A., Church Army, or Roman Catholic huts, in which all kinds of social inducements are held out to the men to make use of them and to enjoy the entertainments provided. In the case of the camp being within easy walking distance of a town, the men are urged to be most careful to avoid the many pitfalls often laid for Overseas soldiers. Connected with the camps are reading and writing rooms, and non-alcoholic liquors of all kinds are served. Apart altogether from the provision made for the soldiers in camp, there are a number of outside agencies at work for the express purpose of safeguarding the Canadian

soldiers from the temptations to which they are unfortunately subject when on leave.

On the arrival of the Canadian soldier in London he is immediately met by a special corps of military men and women, including some of our lady workers, and is offered every possible assistance. Close to Victoria Station, where most of them arrive from the front, are several most comfortable Canadian clubs, to which they are taken. We in London feel that every effort is made to protect the Canadian and other Overseas soldiers, as well as the national troops. Religion and philanthropy have concentrated their energies in order to save the men from the temptations of the streets, which, in London, are not more numerous than in other large towns. Let me here set out what agencies have been and are at work in that direction.

Clubs have been established by the authorities and various voluntary associations, to which the men can go in the evening, and where they meet ladies and gentlemen ready to entertain them and, as far as possible, make them feel at home and among friends. The Canadians are also offered hospitality in a large number of private houses. There are also the Church Army, the Roman Catholic, the Salvation Army, the Young Men's Christian Association and other institutions, which have provided huts of a most comfortable character, where the men are supplied with refreshments, games, lectures, entertainments, writing material, and many comforts not common to their ordinary life. All these huts are staffed by voluntary workers, ladies and gentlemen, who place themselves at the service of the soldier, to prevent that feeling of loneliness to which the Overseas man is liable, and which portends trouble to certain men if they brood too much upon it.

In the streets of London, both night and day,

there are a large number of men and women ever on the look-out for the soldier who is stranded or in the midst of temptation, ready to take him out of it to a place of safety.

Since the war the women patrols, the women police, our own association, and other organizations, have been devoted to this special work. In spite of all these efforts on the part of the community the answer of some of the Canadians, when appealed to in the street or in the public-house, is: 'Leave me alone. I know what I am doing. I mean to have a good time.' That so-called good time means, in a percentage of cases, that he is ultimately assaulted and robbed.

Religion and philanthropy, you will admit, have risen to the occasion and have, in a large number of cases, met with a measure of success; but, as I have said, there are some—far too many—who will not accept help, who will not even listen, and who meet the kindness of the worker with insult and even with threats. Humanly speaking, if men and women determine to go forward in that direction, how is it possible to interfere?

You further ask whether the promise made to Sir Robert Borden by the Government to improve the laws relating to this matter has been fulfilled. Naturally it is not easy to carry legislation at the present time. The Government have passed a measure, The Venereal Disease Act, a copy of which I enclose, and it came into operation on November 1st. They have also prepared and have before the House of Commons an amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act, one section of which deals with the young girl in the street, and another section with the communication of venereal disease. A copy of that bill I also enclose. This seems to me to carry out the promise made to Sir Robert Borden. I ought to add that the Chief Commissioner of the

Metropolitan Police, Sir Edward Henry, who has charge of between thirty and forty thousand policemen, has his heart, as well as his experience, ever devising methods of dealing with the condition of the London streets. He has done, and is doing, his utmost to protect the soldiers against the temptations to which you refer, and to that end he has a body of picked officers ever on the alert. He has himself established two large clubs, where the Overseas men are cared for from every point of view. Here again I think you will admit that the Government has done something in the direction promised.

What the Government has not done, and what so many of us deeply regret, is to close the public-houses and so stop the sale of alcoholic liquors. There has been much talk about it, but public opposition to such a measure was too strong. At least that is the answer. They have, however, shortened the hours during which the public-houses are open for the sale of intoxicating drinks, and have also made treating a legal offence. I enclose a copy of the Order.

The above will give you some idea of what our people and Government have done in the direction upon which you ask information.

Having admitted the condition of things in London to be bad and to call loudly for remedial measures, I have not been able to find, except in certain areas, that the moral condition of things is worse. In my opinion it is better than in pre-war times. There is no doubt but that great, very great, exaggeration has been used by certain sections of the public when calling attention to the moral condition of the Metropolis.

As an association, finding our investigations did not justify such statements, we called a public meeting on the subject, at which the Bishop of London took the chair, and I am

enclosing you a verbatim report of that meeting, in which you will be able to read the statement made by Sir Edward Henry, which applies equally to Canadian soldiers. We have received no contradiction to those statements, and they are generally admitted to be nearer the truth than the exaggerated ones formerly made.

We are living in abnormal times, and considering the millions of men who have been called from far-off lands and from distant parts of the United Kingdom to become fighting soldiers, I think we can congratulate ourselves upon the comparatively—I would emphasize comparatively—small number of moral and social failures among them. The Canadian officials of every rank are doing their utmost for the welfare of their men, and with results that, I think, are most encouraging. Take the following as an illustration. Last week, at one of the Canadian clubs, the captain was paying out £4,000 to the men, many of whom had only just arrived. Some were receiving large sums of money, and the captain urged them to leave the greater part in the care of the officials, with the result that £3,000 was returned by the men. Notwithstanding all the persuasion that was exercised there were some, however, who insisted on taking the whole of their money with them. They went out, got drunk, were robbed, and brought back to this club penniless. Such men always act in that way, and bring discredit on their fellow countrymen. It would not be fair to charge the Canadian soldiers with drunkenness, although one has, alas! to admit that there are drunkards among them.

This is what we have done, and if you will tell me what more we can do, either as philanthropists or as a Government, on behalf of the Canadian soldiers in London, I will see that

your suggestions are brought to the notice of the Government.

In the meantime you must keep on praying, as we are doing, that the kingdoms of this world may soon become the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Until the dawn of that day we must do our best to prepare the people for it.

The following is a schedule of the enclosures to this letter:

- A. Defence of the Realm Act (Liquor Control).
- B. Venereal Diseases Act.
- C. Vigilance Record, July.
- D. Reprint of Vigilance Record, August.
- E. Vigilance Record, September.
- F. Criminal Law Amendment Bill, 1917.

With very kindest regards to you both."

The legislation to which Mr. Coote refers, covers the following ground in brief:

1. The Liquor Control Order, under the Defence of the Realm Act—

- (a) Shortens the hours of sale.
- (b) Prohibits treating.
- (c) Prohibits giving credit on sales.
- (d) Limits the quantity to be sold.
- (e) Limits the alcoholic strength.

2. The Venereal Disease Act—

- (a) Forbids the treatment of such disease by "quacks" and the advertising of patent remedies.
- (b) The penalties vary from a fine of £100 to imprisonment for two years.

3. Criminal Code Amendment Bill (still in Parliament) proposes *inter alia*—

- (a) To raise the age of consent for certain purposes from 16 to 18.
- (b) To care for prostitutes under 18 at discretion of magistrates in industrial schools, instead of ordinary prisons.
- (c) To make it a crime for any person afflicted with venereal disease to cohabit with any other person.

VENEREAL DISEASES AMONG CANADIAN SOLDIERS.

Many wild statements have been made in public by certain people in Canada and the States regarding the prevalence of venereal disease among our soldiers, especially in England and France, and among returned men, that the Canadian public will appreciate the following official figures, brief and decisive.

In official letters from the Medical Service Department at Ottawa to the Secretaries the following statements occur:

- (1) The percentage of venereal disease cases among our soldiers is "decidedly lower than among the civilian population."
- (2) "You may officially state that the percentage of venereal cases developing in troops recruited in Canada has been less than 2 per cent.; in England less than 2 per cent., and in France far less than this."
- (3) "That the percentage among Canadian troops is decidedly lower than for other troops in Britain similarly situated."

From these official statements it is clear that, in spite of conditions admittedly bad, and of consequent temptations greater than men ought to be exposed to, our splendid boys are, with few exceptions, "keeping themselves unspotted from the world" of fleshly appetites and lusts, and living lives worthy of their mothers, wives, sisters, sweethearts and of their country—yea, and (many of them) of their God!