

# What the Army Did to Them

## The Present State of Young Men in America Is Discussed With Mixed Emotions by Some of Their Women Folk

THEY were talking about the boys who are coming back out of the army. What was said in the first instance was apt to take the form of a sweeping generalization. When the generalization was challenged, particulars were confidently produced. Most of the talkers were women, and as each of the women had a son, a husband, or a brother in or just out of uniform, the step to the particular was naturally never very long. It seemed, in fact, that a very sweeping generalization often sprang full-armed from one particular—or two. For that reason what was said must be taken as evidence only as far as it is concrete.

The woman who had lived in New York for the best part of twenty years started

should be. She had met him again after he came back from overseas, and he had said things to her that she had never in her life before had said to her in polite society. Army life had done that to him, she insisted with some vehemence. And it wasn't only those that had gone overseas and picked up things from the French. Among the men who had stayed home in uniform a similar backsliding was evident. The restraints of the American home had been taken from around all of them. And they had lost, or anyway dimmed, precisely those qualities which American mothers had always been most jealous of in their boys and their men folk generally.

There was a man in the company. He interposed at this point. He said he

said, there had been a lot of drinking among young men before the war. Prohibition by constitutional amendment was an impressive tribute to the public's realization of the extent of the evil. And perhaps the nearness of prohibition had its effect in a certain added recklessness or abandon in the way young men took their drinks just now. It was now or never.

Maybe so, some of the women admitted. There might lie a responsibility at least contributory. But the more earnest souls among them had evidently made up their minds to regard a proneness to public alcoholism as a direct result of army life and to put it down definitely as evidence of the general vulgarizing tendency of going soldiering.

"Why you, yourself," said a quiet little person suddenly bursting into vivacity and turning sharply on the devil's advocate—the one man present who had dared to put in his oar—"why you, yourself, told me how tough Jack Smith looked when you met him on the street just after he got back with the Rainbows. And Jack always had such beautiful manners, and you know Jack's mother is just the loveliest woman."

"I only said Jack looked tough," the man urged. "A certain roughening of the exterior at least was inevitable in the case of a pampered youth who had served eighteen months and more as a private soldier in an active fighting unit. Jack was a doughboy, you know."

The perfectly ready answer was that Jack was back in civs clothes, had his bath handy and had no business looking tough. If he'd still had his uniform on there might have been some excuse. But he didn't.

In fact, Jack outside of his mother's drawing room and among his boon companions had always been hardy, to say the least of it. The truth may be set

seeing a patriotic duty bravely done—then it was a heavy price to pay. It was not the less a heavy price because no woman would for the world have had the men do otherwise. What these instinctive champions of American homebred behavior evidently felt was that the men who went out to do their country's share of the world's dirty job of giving the Hun his lesson had risked in the hurly-burly of war not merely their lives and limbs, but something besides.

One incorrigible idealist in the group went so far as to say that she thought the men who had lost their lives had really lost less than the others who had come back safe. That was an extreme view, and very likely the incorrigible idealist didn't mean to be taken quite literally. But her words gave a vivid idea of the value all these women attached to this something—in their minds a something peculiarly American—which had suffered incidental damage in the course of making the world safe for democracy.

They were women of various ages and occupations and widely different dispositions and experiences. They came from different parts of the country. Usually they had behind them a childhood and girlhood in some small town. In other words, they were as nearly as possible representative women of the older American stock. One of them, who said very little, had been a canteen worker with the army in France. In spite of the fact that she had shared to a certain extent the experience of the men themselves, it was clear that the instincts of her upbringing had persisted. And she confessed to feeling with the others that something had been lost or damaged.

Whether the something is a real thing or a cherished figment of a provincial imagination is a question which might be argued. It was evident, for instance,



it by saying that while the men who came back—or came over to tell us about it—in the earlier part of the war had upon them the marks of a great and transfiguring experience, it seemed to her that the men who were coming home now had been too often merely coarsened and vulgarized.

The glow of victory was there, but not the chastened spirit which war with victory a long way off had seemed to give those others.

Promptly another woman (with a brother in the A. E. F.) took up that challenge. She got down to cases at once. Her brother had not come back vulgarized. On the contrary, he seemed to have got a lot of things cleared up in his young mind. To be sure, he hadn't ever gone in for any rarefied form of idealism, but he had been a very decent chap. He was just as decent as ever after doing his share of the fighting. She added valiantly that among all the young men who had got back from France she hadn't met a single one that had been vulgarized.

Naturally that sweeping generalization was challenged in turn. A woman from a far Southern city spoke up. A good many nice boys from her own town had gone away to France, she said. And they had come back not nearly as nice as when they went. They were, in fact, spoiled to a quite provoking degree. How serious the damage was she couldn't say, but you missed something—and whatever it was it made you sorry not to see it.

After that a tone of acrimony frequently invaded the discussion. The original troublemaker, the well-acclimated New York woman, called her first witness—a youth well born and bred, and one whose home-made manners, she said, had been a model of what such manners

knew the polite young man who had offended. Though he was still a boy in years, he had spent a year in France, much of the time as commanding officer of a company of infantry—250 mountaineers, most of them much older than himself. A well-mannered schoolboy's conventional attitude toward things and people could not possibly survive such an experience.

"You fancied you were still talking to the schoolboy who went away," the man said, "and the schoolboy, too suddenly grown up for his taste and judgment to keep step, very likely talked to you as an equal—that is, more or less as if you'd been simply another schoolboy. Speaking so, he might easily seem both coarse and vulgar. That wouldn't mean at all necessarily that war had vulgarized the youth. It would only mean that war had not had time in the forcing process of making a man overnight to polish him nicely."

"Exactly what I said," the woman retorted tartly. "It rubbed off what polish he had and left him a little ruffian. It's no use. No man-made argument can remove the fact that this boy, to whom his mother had taught the manners of a gentleman, was able after a few months of military associations to say to a lady what he said to me."

The man let it go at that, but another good woman in the group suggested that maybe the poor young man had been drinking. It seemed to her, anyway, that there was a lot of drinking among the boys just out of the army. Of course, they had had to do without it while they were in—except the ones in Europe—but that was no reason for behaving as they were doing now. They seemed to forget themselves as boys didn't use to do—at least not in company.

The man tried again. Of course, he



down here, even though for obvious reasons the man did not thrust it into that conversation.

What emerged from the talk of which these samples have been reported was that at least half the women present were aware—or thought they were aware—of the lowering of the quality of young American manhood—or perhaps of a dulling of its fineness—growing out of military service, whether at home or abroad. If this was the price paid for becoming heroes—and none of the women failed in proper pride that way, none was a pacifist, none was tainted with any sort of pro-Germanism, all had their own man or men in the service and were glad of it—if this was the price their country and their womenfolk had paid for

that the one man who joined in the conversation did not have at all the same feeling about the returned soldiers. He said afterward that what impressed him about the men of the A. E. F. was a certain simplicity. They came back, he found, with an extraordinary and surprising trick of saying right out exactly what they thought.

The disposition to say the expected or proper thing, which is so marked a characteristic of people in general, was conspicuously lacking in their case. Perhaps, he said, that characteristic was confused in some minds with good manners and good morals and American traditions. And perhaps the extent of

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# Army Tuberculosis Sanatorium

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his progress. These letters usually bring a hearty response and the active cooperation of the family is secured.

The Red Cross has furnished an elaborate program of entertainment. The Field Director, A. W. Popper, a retired business man of New York, has enthusiastically devoted his entire time to the work. A portable moving picture machine shows the latest released films in one or more of the infirmary wards every evening, and groups of entertainers visit the wards in the afternoon. The citizens of nearby and even distant communities have vied with one another in showing their appreciation of the soldiers' services to their country. These activities cover a wide range, such as gifts of phonographs with records, pianos, pool and billiard tables, games, books, and many delicacies to the infirmary patients.

The Young Men's Christian Association has a fine hut, the Knights of Columbus have built a large gymnasium. The Jewish Welfare Board representative likewise is doing excellent work at

the hospital. The American Library Association has established a library.

The results of treatment have been gratifying, as the great majority of patients have been admitted with mild symptoms, and with the elasticity of youth in their favor their recuperative powers are more easily developed than in elderly patients. A large number of patients, with the activity of the disease arrested, have been returned to nearby camps for subsequent honorable discharge from the service.

The soldier, on leaving the hospital, has learned to recognize the value of rational living habits and the importance of maintaining his vitality at a high level in order to prevent a possible future breakdown. He has also become convinced to his surprise that tuberculosis is not only a preventable disease, but also one that is curable if nature is given a reasonable opportunity and if he cooperates with his physician. He returns to his family and friends as an advocate of the out-of-door life, and thereby aids greatly in enlightening the community about the benefits resulting from the observance of a hygienic mode of life.