

Frederick P. Keppel

SOME
WAR-TIME
LESSONS
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Some War-time Lessons

**The Soldier's Standards of Conduct, The War As a
Test of American Scholarship & What Have We
Learned**

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THE AMERICAN SOLDIER AND HIS STANDARDS OF CONDUCT¹

Perhaps the greatest laboratory experiment in human conduct in the history of the world has been the development of our Army during the past two years. Under the provisions of the Selective Service Law, this Army has represented a cross section of American male humanity—even more representative indeed than was intended; for in the efforts of the Local Boards to send men who could best be spared, many found their way into the ranks who were handicapped from the start by low mentality or disease. What were the guiding forces which operated upon this body of nearly four million men?

In the first place, our country entered the war with a great moral purpose, untinged by any trace of national or individual selfishness. We really have to go back to the Crusades to find the like. And, as then, each man supplemented this great basal impulse with whatever was to him the strongest incentive—religion, patriotism, pride of family or state or regiment, the desire to excel in what all were attempting.

In the second place, thanks primarily to the vision and determination of one man, the individual appeal to each soldier as to his personal share in the great enterprise was upon the highest plane. We were fortunate in having at the head of the War Department a man peculiarly sensitive to

community problems and with no small experience in their solution. Through the centuries men had come to the belief that if their soldiers were only valiant and disciplined in arms, it would not do to inquire too curiously into their personal standards of conduct in other matters—that a considerable wastage in military strength from drunkenness and disease was inevitable. And as we all know, this wastage has in the past sapped, not only the strength of the Army, but afterwards the very life of the nation to which the soldier must sooner or later return.

The Secretary of War and his lieutenants, chief among whom in this field should be placed the Chairman of the Committee on Training Camp Activities, Raymond B. Fosdick, approached this problem neither in the fatalistic spirit that what has always been must continue to be, nor in a spirit of what, for want of a better term, I may call doctrinaire idealism. They faced the fact that among the hundreds of thousands of young men who were to be called to the colors, there would be many whose ears would be deaf to any abstract appeal, and many others to whom such an appeal might be made under normal conditions, but who in fatigue or the let-down following the strain of conflict, could not be depended upon to stand in the hour of temptation. As a result the whole field of preventive measures was thoroughly studied and vigorous treatment was applied. The Army regulations as to prophylaxis and the introduction of intoxicants into camps were strictly and honestly enforced. The Army saw to it that state and local laws as to liquor and prostitution were properly carried out, and if these were lacking, they were promptly enacted. The so-called Zone

Law was adopted for the purpose of placing the immediate vicinity of camps under Federal control. In some cases where the community showed signs of regarding the Army policy in this regard as a *beau geste* and nothing more, it was made to realize that while the War Department could not compel the community to mend its ways, it could and would move the camp in twenty-four hours to a more wholesome environment. I am proud to say that it was necessary in only a very few instances to bring forward this aspect of the situation, but when it was necessary the Department spoke in no uncertain tone.

As a result of this general policy, in which the Navy shared, many a wide-open town received a thorough house cleaning for the first time in its career; in all between 120 and 140 red light districts were closed and kept closed; and the underlying sordidness of many a smug self-satisfied village was brought to light and remedied.

The men who came to the camps tainted with venereal disease or broken by drink or morphine—and the number of these was great enough to shock our national complacency (and incidentally to explode the national assumption that the country is primarily the abode of virtue as the city is of vice)—these men were salvaged by the tens of thousands and turned into useful self-respecting soldiers and citizens.

The lesson of clean living was taught by the spoken word, by the moving picture, by the printed page, by the doctor with a scientific thoroughness and by the layman with a frankness and sometimes a colloquialism which would for once have rendered Mrs. Grundy speechless. As an instrument of virtue, the tract is, of course, of time-honored

usage, but the name of George Ade in the list of tract writers is a new and significant one.

More important than all this, however, in my judgment, was the realization by the Army of the great truth that the soldier—or any one else for that matter—goes astray in only the rarest instances from innate depravity. What he seeks primarily is relaxation and amusement. And so wholesome relaxation and amusement were placed at his disposal to take the place of the unwholesome. The whole nation rose to help in this work of substituting the clean for the unclean. It poured its money by the hundreds of millions into the coffers of the great welfare societies, the Red Cross, The Young Men's Christian Association, Knights of Columbus, Jewish Welfare Board, and later in recognition of its work abroad, the Salvation Army. All of these vied with one another in a rivalry which was sometimes embarrassing in its intensity. The American Library Association supplied books and other reading matter, and the War Camp Community Service made sure that, to the towns and villages surrounding it, a cantonment presented an opportunity for service rather than for exploitation. Not the least important factor in the superb showing which our troops made in France was the spirit with which the men and women of these same towns inspired the men from the training camps whom they took into their homes and their hearts.

Within the fabric of the Army the chaplains were doing their share, as were the athletic leaders and song leaders and dramatic coaches. They were seconded by the officers of the line, most of whom, it should be said, saw the military