

THE BOOKMAN

A MAGAZINE OF LITERATURE AND LIFE

FEBRUARY, 1918

THE DRAFT ARMY OF BOOKS

BY MONTROSE J. MOSES

It is difficult to imagine a soldier in a dug-out "somewhere in France," reading Milton's *Comus*; it is incomprehensible to believe that a private, trying to rest in the dank depths of a trench, should be able to lose himself in the pages of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. But such instances of the fighting man's craving to read have come to my attention. I see the picture of a sentry pacing his lone round and chanting bits of verse that help to recall brighter and happier times; I conjure up some private in Mesopotamia tearing into four or five sections a magazine that has fallen into his hands, that his comrades may have the same chances as he to read. Nor does it take too much imagination to reason why soldiers, crossing the desert and being parched in mind as well as in thirst, should send home wild appeals for books, books and still more books.

Out of such a necessity arose the widespread campaign that has been conducted in England for reading matter to send to the British army at the different fronts. It was an appeal that instantly struck a responsive cord in the hearts of all the British authors, and news comes to us of Miss Beatrice Harraden and Miss Elizabeth Robins working night and day in a hospital, noting down the wants of the wounded soldiers on whose hands time hangs heavily; of

Mr. Ernest Rhys inventing methods of forcing the public to come across with contributions; of Mr. Dent, the publisher, giving copiously of his *Everyman* series. There is an army in Flanders to be catered to; there are cries from Egypt and Palestine. And it is not for the cheap book they are asking. There is a record somewhere of a regiment commander in Gallipoli begging for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Do you not recall Hugh in *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* writing to his father that while Park wants Metchnikoff's *Nature of Man* he hankers after Spencer's *The Faerie Queene*? One need show no surprise as to what the soldier reads. He is, after all, trying, in the midst of the hideousness of war, to recall that there is still beauty in the world. He believes that a line or two of Shakespeare will be able to calm shattered nerves. There are records, since August, 1914, of many a fighting man who has had time to go through a volume of Keats and Wordsworth, where in the ordinary routine of life he would never have had the time. You can find, among the trench-diggers around Constantinople and Palestine, men who have discovered relics of a past age, and who have thus become fired with a longing to dip into archæology. How often does one meet with requests from New Zealanders for bush-

ranger stories? even as the soldier from Indiana reads Riley and Tarkington, how many of the Indian troops long for a volume of their mystic philosophy?

This is catering under new and stressful conditions. But the Library Commission in England in each and every case has so organised the work that no request is left unheeded. Then there is the added strain of caring for the mental wants of the wounded—men too weak to hold a book, too relaxed to concentrate on a long story. To these are given scrap-books filled with pictures and short stories and jokes—large scrap-books of only sixteen or twenty-four pages, with enough on a page to last the patient until the nurse in her rounds comes back and turns the page for him. This scrap-book campaign has given many a British girl the opportunity of doing her bit.

Since our declaration of war, we, in America, have been confronted by a problem somewhat different from that in England. We learned, while our men were at the Mexican Border, that they craved magazines, and these were supplied through the agencies of the Y. M. C. A. and the Knights of Columbus. But since we have drafted an army, the Government has realised its paternal responsibility to these men, suddenly drawn away from their ordinary pursuits. And so the President appointed a Commission on Training Camp Activities, to look after the welfare of the soldier in his spare time. The camp reading fell within their province just as surely as did camp athletics, camp movies or camp theatres. It was found that the farmer, now turned into a soldier, still wanted to keep in touch with the latest methods of intensive farming; that the teacher, now in the cavalry, demanded educational nourishment for his mind; that the majority of the men, untutored in a foreign tongue, wished to study French and to know something about French geography. So the Commission asked the American Library Association to tackle the problem—a big problem indeed when one

considers the scope. For whoever undertook the work would have to care for sixteen cantonments, each containing over thirty-five thousand men, to say nothing of the other camps and naval and aero-training stations.

These are the days of slogans. The pocket-book of the average citizen is worn out by the countless “drives” and “calls.” The A. L. A. raised the cry, “A Million Dollars, for a Million Books, for a Million Soldiers.” So energetically was the campaign conducted that when it ended there were over a million and a half dollars to be spent, and the Carnegie Corporation—ever to the fore where a library is to be built—donated \$320,000 for housing the books in thirty-two buildings.

Give an American librarian a problem like this to solve, and he is happy. But the soldier's reading is not alone a mixture of book selection and decimal classification. This was discovered as soon as Dr. Herbert Putnam of the Library of Congress got his associates together in a sort of Book War Cabinet. Here, they rightly argued, is just where the public can help us. We will issue an appeal for people to give books out of their own homes. We will have a book week in every town. You can see right away what a temptation this was for a general house-cleaning! Tons of novels and nondescript reading-matter poured in—some of it splendidly fit, but some of it shocking! The library board should have taken warning from the experience of England. A similar appeal was made to the British public, and the response brought such books as *Advice to Mothers* and the out-of-date telephone directory! Nevertheless, from this mixture of material, literally dumped into the library bin, some wheat was separated from the chaff. There was the “discard” sent to the factory to be ground into pulp for paper in a day when paper is scarce; there was the mountain-high pile of semi-damaged books, suitable for contagious hospital wards; and finally there were the slightly used books, quickly selected, dex-

terously stamped with the A. L. A. War Commission's bookplate, and then assigned to empty boxes waiting to be packed for the different cantonments and for the transports to go overseas.

And while the books were flowing in, the cantonments were being built,—which meant that, at the same time the Y. M. C. A. and K. of C. halls, the barracks, the theatres, and the hostess houses were being erected, the libraries were likewise rising up as part of the sixteen lumber cities Uncle Sam was organising. This is the time when everyone in service wears a uniform. The librarian assigned to his camp has an insignia on his sleeve as significant as that of the commanding general. He is the custodian of from ten to twenty thousand books, as truly as the general is the custodian of forty thousand men selected from out the citizen body to fight for democracy. Acting upon the advice of the Library Commission, he has drafted his books into the service, a manual of instructions being handed to him, consisting of a list of titles found to be approximately in accord with the tastes of soldiers, and of male citizens who heretofore have been accustomed to buy books at the stores.

One has found, since the soldiers have assembled at the different cantonments, that, though they have a man's duty to perform, when off-guard they are merely boys. Some of them are seen jumping rope, playing tug-of-war; while others, in their bunks, have lost themselves in Henty's numerous historical stories. The librarians are right, therefore, in believing that it is not only the mess-boy, but the younger drafted soldier, who wants to read football and baseball stories by Barbour, Heyliger, and Stratemeyer. It may be that some of these men turn to the simple book because it is difficult for them to read. Statistics show that in the draft army there is a goodly percentage of illiteracy. But I believe,—and I have followed the trend of juvenile literature for many years,—that this tendency on the part of the soldier to read boys' books is

only another evidence of the fact that juvenile literature, since it has come under the influence of out-door sports and modern inventions, has in it a degree of expertness which appeals to *no* age and to *all* interest. However that may be, there are soldiers now in our drafted army who are reading the same sport books and are pouring over the same manuals descriptive of ships, wireless, and aeroplanes, used by the grammar and high-school boy.

It may be argued that after a day of intensive training the soldier is only too glad to hear the "lights out" of the camp. But that is not generally so. He craves recreation. One of these recreations is reading. It will be found six months from now that military taste is not so different from that of the average citizen. But this war has raised certain questions for the librarian to solve. Never before in the history of modern warfare has the individual soldier been brought so closely in contact with the actual scientific accessories of the army: he wants to read up on these. Never before has the soldier been so constantly subjected to nervous strain, from the sky above or the earth beneath, as now: this has not made him want to forget by steeping his mind in mediocrity, but has made him want to cling to things of permanent worth. Never before in modern military history has inactivity in the trenches played so important a part in defensive warfare: the soldier, therefore, must have some semblance of home life, even behind the first line trenches. All of these considerations are certain to have an influence, even indirect, on his taste. The French soldier resented the degraded type of amusement sent him by the Parisian theatrical manager. Fire had somehow purified his taste.

At a glance it will be seen that the same book policy agreed upon for the soldiers at the front will not do for the men assembled at the different cantonments for six months' instruction. In the latter camps there must be more of the permanence of the home. For

the cantonment is a city, and if there is a central library with a reading room accommodating two hundred and fifty readers, there must likewise be branch libraries for the barracks. The librarians will probably modify their ideas as they proceed with the work. In the manual of instruction given to every camp librarian, the Commission of the A. L. A. has written its belief that the nearer a soldier gets to the front, the farther off the war book should be kept from him. But that is not so on this side of the water. I looked into many of the packing boxes filled with books about to be distributed to the camps—and these books were not gifts, but represented purchases made on the strength of requests. What did I find? Bernhardt and Treitschke, Empey and Hugh Gibson, war maps and war history—a technical array of books. The soldier knows what he wants, and the splendid spirit in the different camps shows me that he is going to get it if Uncle Sam has his way. In one place I was told that the newly drafted Sammie often waits in line for three hours before the victrola until his turn comes and he can play the record he covets. In another place I saw a man waiting patiently for a magazine being read by someone else. Such scenes are common occurrences.

It is hardly time to judge what the camp libraries mean to the drafted man. When statistics are compiled, the diversity of taste will be about the same as that in any library under normal conditions. One librarian writes me: "The last four requests to-day were for Ian Hay's *All In It*, George Meredith's *Richard Feverel*, a book on the repairing of locomotives, and the poems of Robert Burns." Any branch library in New York City would show the same diversity. In England they have found that side by side with the man eagerly devouring the novels of Nat Gould—an author little known in this country,—there will be another reading Bunyan, Shelley or Conrad. All the world over, men are of the same variety and

inconsistency. A pamphlet recently issued by one of Dr. Herbert Putnam's assistants, Mr. Theodore W. Koch, will be of inestimable interest. It is entitled *Books in Camp, Trench and Hospital*. It is semi-technical in character, and because of that will, I fear, have but a limited circulation. But it is filled with human interest—just the evidence needed to impress the public with the importance of the library to the soldier. Veterans of former wars will argue that they were not taught to sing, as the drafted men are now being taught by the official song leaders. When the time came they just sang. They had no books to keep them amused. This latter fact, the Government now argues, is the reason there were so many desertions from the army in the Civil War. Mr. Koch brings back from England a host of stories which lead to the conclusion that this chautauqua movement on the part of all governments tends toward sanity, and keeps the soldier mentally alert, against the time when he shall return home to his normal pursuits. But where one soldier reads *Pickwick Papers* and another ponders over Plutarch's *Lives*, Mr. Koch found abroad many instances of soldiers cleaning their guns with parts of *Swiss Family Robinson*, or lighting their pipes with leaves from the *Meditations of St. Ignatius*. One is sure to meet such incongruous instances, just as one finds human divergence in a city block. For Kitchener's army and our draft forces are not soldiers in the professional sense. They consist of citizens brought into service for one purpose.

The American Library Association has its overseas duty also. In view of the stringencies of transportation, it requires some planning to house boxes of books in the transports. But books are implements of war these days. It is now found advisable to give to each man as he goes up the gang-plank in the first stages of his trip to France some book that he may read aboard ship and pass along to his neighbour when he is through. When the ship reaches a port

on the French coast, the books are left aboard, and are gathered by officials of the Y. M. C. A., who proceed to forward them to the trenches, where they do additional service.

The cry is still for books. The soldier can use as many as the public and the publisher will give. Think over what you like best, what you have most enjoyed, and send it "Somewhere in France," or to the cantonment library nearest you. A librarian told me that he thought the newspapers through the country, which made it a rule to review

the latest books, should print on the fly-leaf of each book sent from the office, "To be returned to the A. L. A. for Government service." There are khaki bibles as well as khaki men; Red Cross poetry as well as Red Cross nurses. Side by side, in the stronghold, shrapnel and Browning; "Jack Johnsons" and Samuel Johnson. Such mental high-explosives as Treitschke and Nietzsche and Bernhardt we handle with care. They must be discounted along with the present German Government.

THE PEACEMAKER—AUGUST, 1914

BY HENRY BRYAN BINNS

THE nightmare that was once Napoleonism
Stalks now the harvest-ready, unharvested
Fields at high noon, to blast them with his red
Laughter, loosing a final cataclysm.

We boasted him a dream, while he was whetting
His belly's hunger, for he never ceased
Behind the years to gloat on the fair feast
Preparing—all the births of our begetting!

Is there no spear with which to slay this Slayer
Of nations, this Dragon of massacre, this
Viceroy on earth of the Monarch of the Abyss?
Is there no Champion against Life's Betrayer?

There is a hand that yet shall stay the slaughter,
A brand that yet shall smite to the death Love's Cheat!
Ringing across the world the hills repeat
Liberty's challenge, that the mountains taught her.

And she shall not withhold her hand for sorrow,
Or pity, or prudence that counts up the cost:
Either the day is Freedom's, or we have lost
Peace, and the Spectre walks again to-morrow.

She shall make peace, but never with oppression:
Hallowed her pitiless sword that it may clean
The whole earth utterly of the obscene
Presence that holds the folk in his possession.

O, she shall make an end of war for ever:
Victress, she shall make peace, a radiant-browed
Splendour of fear-defiant Faith, endowed
With all the heart of passionate endeavour.