

WITH THE "Y" AT THE FRONT

I—WITH THE WOUNDED FROM THE MARNE

THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF ONE Y. M. C. A. MAN

BY ROGER GILMAN, A. E. F., Y. M. C. A.

"HERE you are, fellers, what'll you have? New York 'Herald' or Chicago 'Tribune'?"
"Say, man, what's that? Sure, a New York one for mine."

What wouldn't you give to be handing these out to those boys in pajamas, with heads or hands wrapped in bandages, sitting in the door of a French box car? So I thought yesterday as I walked along the train or clambered into other cars where there were no grinning boys in the doorway, only quiet figures on stretchers, each with the inevitable big white bandage.

It was July 17, the third day of the great drive on the Americans at the Marne, and our first big fight. All the night before in [deleted by Censor] ambulances had rolled through the stariit streets from the front, huge hospital supply trucks had stopped me at two in the morning to ask the way, and the courtyard of the Army hospital had been filled with a steady stream of limping figures and groping stretcher-bearers. No lights showed anywhere, for the hospital [deleted by Censor] at Jouy had just been heavily bombed.

Then came a blazing day in the freight yards, where a superb Red Cross train had loaded and pulled out in the early morning. From ten o'clock on, the ambulances were busy filling a French hospital train, on which I had been asked by the anxious doctor to act as interpreter.

By four the cars were furnaces; everybody was begging me to take his blanket off, and the gas cases in the doorways were rolling up their pajamas and dangling their bare feet. The French doctor in charge came up with his coat unbuttoned and even his hat on the back of his head.

"You go to Paris, monsieur? You can assist us much! It is very painful to have no one with us who can speak their language. Yes, we go to Paris. It will take four hours."

Of course I did not have the safe-conduct so much insisted on for moving about in the war zone—only strict instructions not to leave my post; and there was every prospect of losing days in Paris when the battle was on. But here were over two hundred wounded Americans, many just off the operating-table, a French medical staff, and in this first great rush no one but myself to speak for them. Well, naturally, there was nothing else to do, and I never climbed on a train more gladly.

Finally the last four litters were gently lifted out of the ambulances; for ambulance men, even after two nights and two days of driving and unloading, are as gentle as ever you mothers could be; and the train, with the pitiful burden, moved out.

Immediately the blessed breeze began to blow through the open door and sift in through the vestibules between the cars, and the whole train sighed its relief. The country, seen in great pictures, looked almost like "God's own"; whiffs of hay blew in from the broad meadows; white clouds drifted by in the sun. War seemed impossible. And yet here were these stiff figures, swollen eyes that could not open, blood-stained hands fumbling at their bandages, and the excited talk of battle and death.

"My captain, he died right in my arms, all shot to pieces."

"Say, I don't mind seeing men killed—men like ourselves; but when I saw in that village little children with their heads blown clean off by shells—God, it's awful!"

"Gee, I won't be worth a damn back home like I am now! I hope I don't go."

And what could one do for them so? Oh, just the littlest things that seemed so futile, but were accepted with such pathetic thanks. For instance, you got a huge tin pitcher of water and a little hospital cup with a spout—a "chick" beak," the French orderly called it—and went down the line. Everybody

took it, and everybody said, carefully, "I thank you," or, better still, just smiled.

"Say, Y. M. C. A. man, I don't suppose you've got a cigarette?"

You say, "I'm sorry, old man," but tell him that you'll "bum" one for him, and two beds away you ask a boy with some color left under his three days' beard.

"Sure, there's some 'Lucky Strikes.' Aw, take him some more."

"What's your name and outfit? I'll tell him who it is."

"Naw, naw; just Sixth Artillery, that's all."

Next there is a big boy with bandages who has to be propped up with blankets and turned just a trifle, so slowly. And again a poor head has lost its pillow and is tipping away back, till you find the pillow on the floor and softly put it right again. And another wants you to look for a little map knotted up with all his worldly goods in a wet bath towel.

About half-way down the train you suddenly see in the narrow passage between the litter frames a huge perspiring face grinning delightedly under its cropped hair. It's the gassed man who offered to go into the town, just before we started, to get some fruit.

"Say, I got 'em, but I had to run for it. The first woman, she wanted too much, and I went clear to that kind of a market they have at the other end of the place. But they're good little plums, all right."

And so "Doc," as kind-hearted as a father and as merry as only a red-headed American private can be, went through the train with his big basket. No Apostle curing a lame man at the gate of the Temple was ever more happy than he.

But what sort of cases were they? And how did they stand it, poor boys?

The gas cases ran all the way from simple weakness and burns, slight or terrible, to those who had got the gas into their throats and could not drink or speak. The wounds were mostly from shrapnel or shell, sometimes two or three or five, and some were from machine-gun bullets. There were scarcely any gunshot wounds, and not one from a bayonet.

And stand it? I can't tell you how fine they were! Not one moaned, only two asked for help. From the young captain whose head and neck were strapped with bandages, lying with set face and hands crossed, like a marble image, to the tousled-haired boy who spoke with an Italian accent, they just lay still and stood it. At first I could hardly realize what they were going through, but a clear-skinned fellow whom I started to jolly a little answered with such a piteous crumpled-up smile that I knew once for all. After that one I was very careful.

But the two who did ask for help? Well, I'll tell you about them. One was so swathed in bandages from his hips up that I had asked if he ought to go with us, but the doctors thought he might. He kept saying that he couldn't breathe. When I was away, he got up twice, somehow, till the others put him back. So I told him he mustn't move, and he said, "Just stay with me." We tried to talk about Brooklyn and Coney, but he was always putting his arm around my neck to lift himself and saying, "Oh, please, mister, please let me sit up!"

Well, he had two drainage tubes, so he couldn't, but finally neither the French soldier-orderly nor I could stand it any longer. So the broad-backed little *poilu* lifted him slowly on his feet and we steadied him along to the car door and laid him in the draught on a fresh stretcher, and somehow his poor body felt better and his moaning stopped. All the farther end of the car asked in awestruck tones, "Is he dead?" No, thank Heaven, he wasn't. Just content.

Presently we stopped at a junction where some of our newly

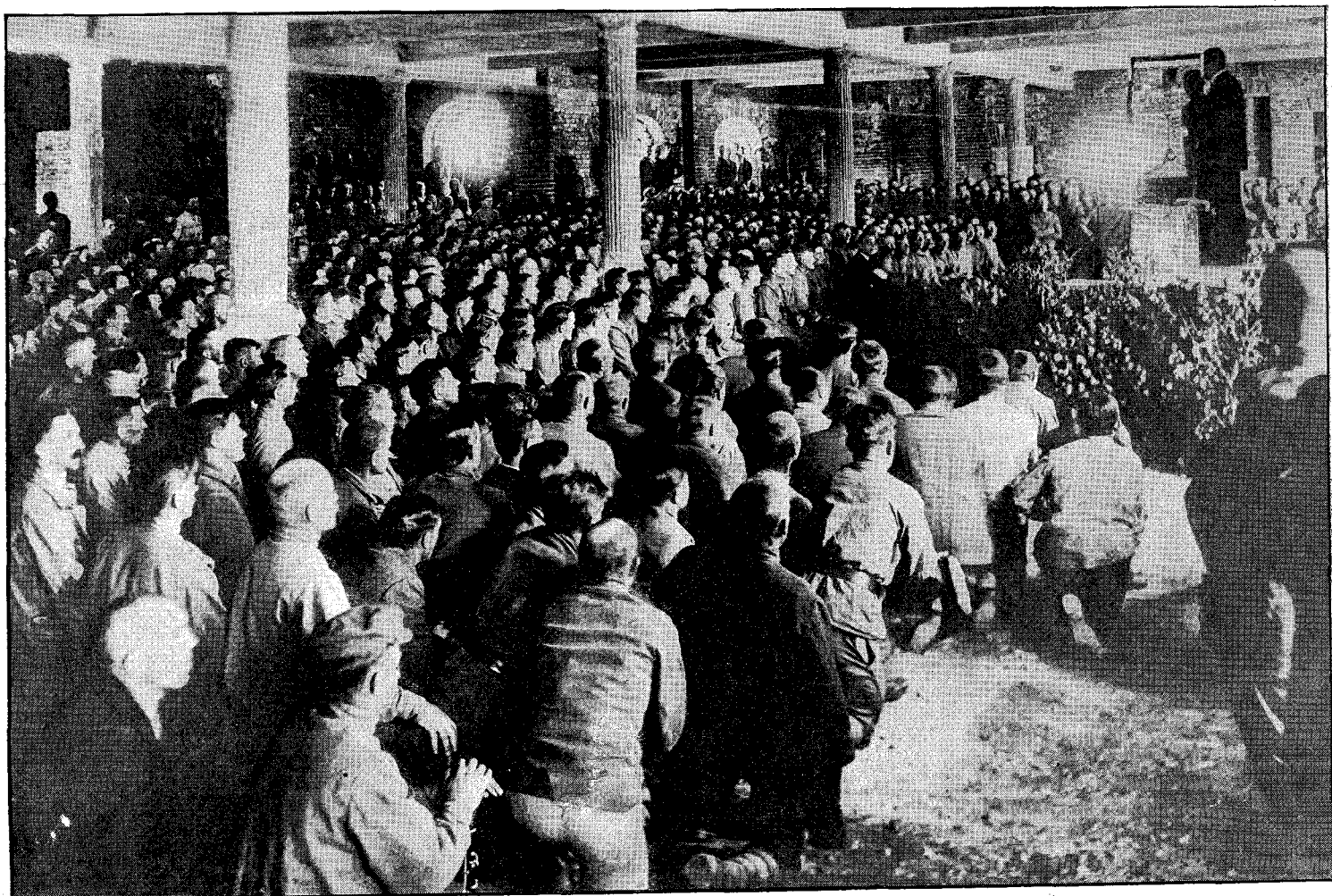


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JOHN R. MOTT, DIRECTOR OF THE CAMPAIGN TO RAISE
\$170,000,000 FOR THE Y. M. C. A. AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS



A Y. M. C. A. HUT ON THE FIRING LINE—NOTE THE SEAT FOR
THE THIRSTY AND TIRED PATRON



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A "Y" HUT IN VLADIVOSTOK, RUSSIA—FORMERLY A THEATER

One of the Y. M. C. A. lecturers is giving a talk on the gyroscope to some of the Czechoslovak troops; men in the foreground are kneeling so that others may see

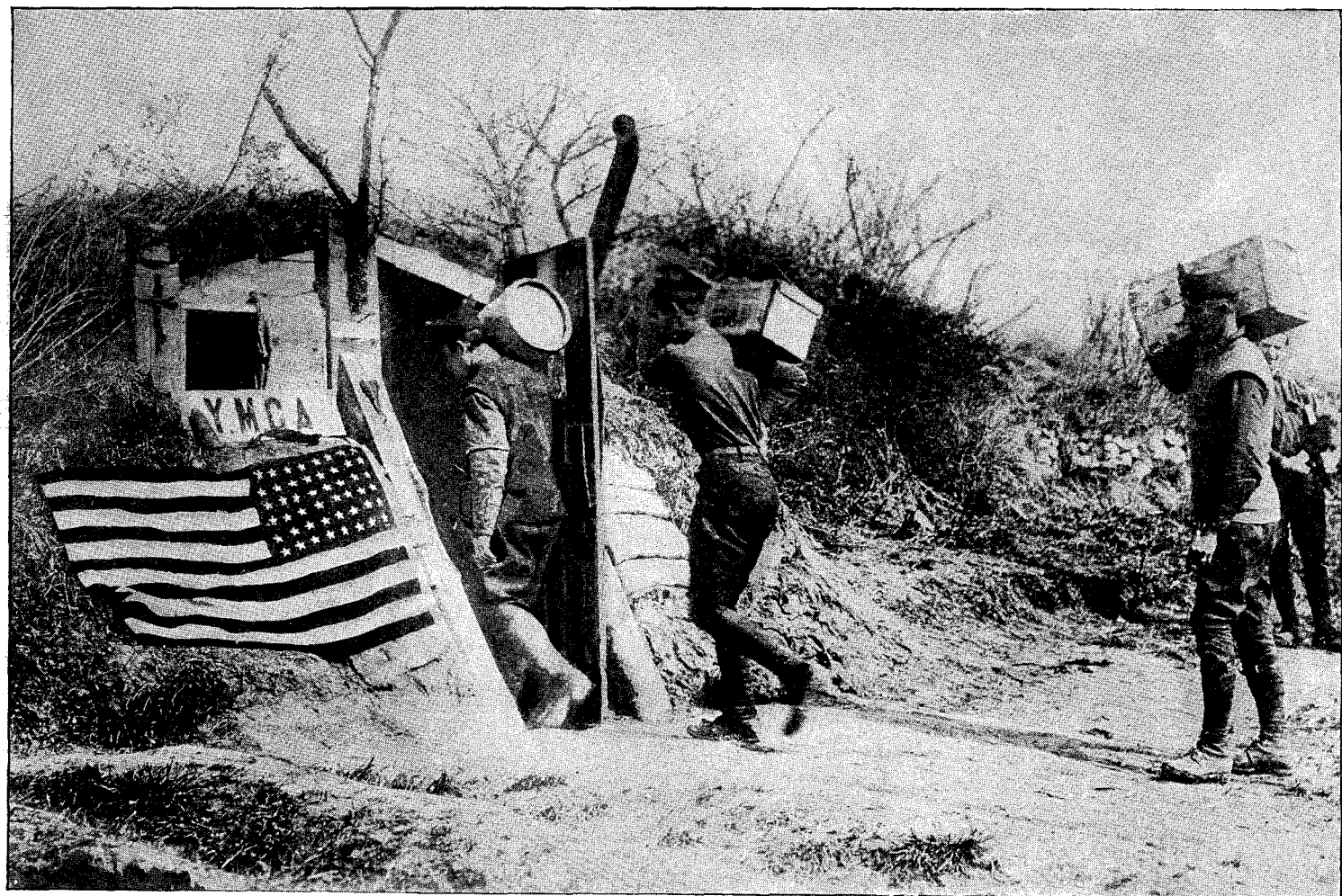
HELPING TO WIN THE WAR BY SERVICE TO THE SOLDIERS—



BOXING AT ARMY CORPS UNDER DIRECTION OF
Y. M. C. A. ATHLETIC DIRECTORS (AT EXTREME LEFT)



AN AUTOMOBILE LOAD OF Y. M. C. A. SPORTING GOODS
ON THE WAY TO MEN BACK FROM THE FRONT



BRINGING SUPPLIES TO THE Y. M. C. A. IN FRANCE

On the door is a large Y made from a piece of shell which landed near the door when it was under fire

YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION WORK AND WORKERS

arrived men looked in, and then there was real interest. No veterans ever regaled their listeners with more easy confidence than did these boys of five days on the line. And they got it across. Wonder and envy were in every open mouth on that platform.

And then, although the train had merely crept on its way, the long four hours of jolting began to tell. They asked more often what time it was, they wanted more water but drank less at a time, the white bandages began to show spots, and the air grew heavier.

At this time the one other complaint began. It came from a little fellow with anxious, white face. "Couldn't you give me something to relieve my pain? Just to relieve my pain."

So I picked out a man who could move around and told him to reassure the sufferer and stay there right by him, so that I could find him again. Then I went off and hunted up the doctor. When we returned, the boy said little, but his eyes were full of tears. The kind old Frenchman gave one look and said he should have an injection, but before he could return the train grew suddenly dark, and we rolled into an immense barn-like station. In the confusion I lost the patient for a little, but presently found him again, and got the stretcher-bearers to take him out among the first. Then an ambulance man stayed by him and talked to him while we hunted up the station doctor and a nurse, and then they hunted up some tubes and needles. It all took a long, long time, but there was only the same anxious whisper: "Oh, give me something to relieve my pain!"

The next time I passed it had been done. He was even smiling a bit, and he answered, "Oh, yes, I feel just fine."

Then there came along a dark young fellow, painfully hobbling down the platform. As he put a heavy arm over my shoulder he began to talk:

"Glad I'm here, all right. They had me prisoner for a while

the first afternoon. There were three of us wounded in a shell hole, and the squareheads came along and pinched us and put us in a barn. And they had a little machine gun, and every time one of the boys would come along they'd get him and put him in there. And then they went off and left us for a little, and I said, 'Come on, fellers, let's beat it,' and I got another one that was wounded on my back, and so we did. Me? I'm from Louisiana. Good-night."

In the station everything seemed dim and huge under the blue-shaded arc lights—vast spaces filled with little frames, long canteen counters, endless ambulances rolling in, army doctors, shouting traffic officers, and a group of kind-faced Red Cross women. The wheels had scarcely stopped turning before they were in among the boys, fanning some, taking addresses for others, offering them cool milk.

In the midst of it all I came upon a figure in a damp flannel shirt, hunched up in the door of the car. It was "Doc," all in from his trudging to and fro with his basket of plums and the heat. So a limping boy still wearing a helmet and a gassed man and I got him off to a cool corner of the baggage platform. The last I saw of him he was lying on his back with his legs crossed in the air, half asleep, but smoking a Fatima.

An hour later, rolling along on the front seat of an ambulance in the blackness of the outer boulevards, the driver and I got to talking. He told me a story of a boy in a field hospital just coming out of the chloroform. The boy thought he was a prisoner in German hands, and he began to fight. It took eight men to hold him. Then he gradually heard their voices, but he couldn't see. So he reached up and got hold of their caps, and pulled them down to him one by one. And when his fingers touched the American rank insignia, he smiled and just said, "Thank God!"

Somewhere in France, August 12, 1918.

II—THE Y. M. C. A. WORK IN FRANCE

BY HÉLÈNE VACARESCU

The writer of this article is among the best known of Rumanian poets. In the "Anthologie des Écrivains Français Contemporains: Poésie" will be found two fine poems from her pen. Mademoiselle Vacarescu, as stated in the "Anthologie," belongs to one of the most illustrious families of the Rumanian nobility. It is interesting to note that one of the members of this family was the first of a long line of Rumanian scholars and poets and author of the first known Rumanian grammar, printed in 1789. The Vacarescus have long been known as patriots and enthusiasts for national independence. This description of the Young Men's Christian Association work in France and of our soldiers there is a spontaneous tribute from a Rumanian to Americans.—THE EDITORS.

I HAVE spent eight days among the American troops in work with the Young Men's Christian Association and have spoken in the Y. M. C. A. huts to thousands of American soldiers. These experiences have proved a pleasure and a revelation. Never before during the course of the war had I met with such a thrilling and intelligent audience. The boys seemed most anxious to hear more and more about our unfortunate and heroic country, Rumania. After the lecture, talking to these extraordinarily clever and kind allies of ours, I discovered how greatly the feeling that their people at home must be so proud of American successes on the battlefields of France renders them happy and keeps them lively; liveliness and activity are in part their characteristics.

There they were, the dear boys, after a day's good work, applauding and laughing at the many items I could relate of my personal acquaintance with the Kaiser, and the absurdities of the petty German courts I have seen. The Y. M. C. A. is doing marvelously for the moral welfare of the United States zones in France. Everywhere the Y. M. C. A. huts are to be seen among the picturesque hills of Champagne and Touraine, in the thoroughfares of the quaint old French cities. And many a French officer or soldier peeps in to see his *splendides alliés* (as they now call the Americans) occupied with reposeful tasks: letter-writing, reading, or listening to some lecture concerning present events.

I wish I could find the translation for the French word *épatant*, because it is the term the French use when they refer to the Americans: "*Ils sont épatants*" (they are—well, they are ripping—topping, although *épatant* means even more).

General Pershing is very popular in France. "*Leur général est charmant et parfait*" (Their general is perfect and charming) is the formula, and they also say: "*Leur Président vaut leur général*" (Their President is as good as their general).

But you should see them fight! They do it incredibly well. We never could look forward to such a piece of luck! American heroism is even beyond what we had expected from them.

The Americans are beginning to speak French and the French to speak English. They are mutual professors to each other. Everywhere in the streets, in shops, lessons are given and with gratitude received, and compliments paid by one ally to the other:

"You splendid at the assault of —," says the Frenchman.

"*Vous bien à*—what do you call that—a river?—*rivière* Marne."

"*Vous Américain*; what city?"

"Boston; and *vous, poilu*?"

"I, La Rochette, *tu* knows, a port on ocean. Wilson *cher à* Frenchmen." And so on.

For poor Rumania my American audiences are full of admiration and pity. When I called them what they are—the crusaders of a new and saintly crusade for the deliverance of oppressed and martyred nations—they all shouted: "We will serve you; we shall fight till suffering Serbia, poor Belgium, and unfortunate Rumania are free and come into their own." Oh, I could have wept with gratitude and joy! One boy said to me: "Oh, you speak well; you deserve to go to Congress!"

The American soldiers are loved and admired in France,