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Organised 1885.

"For God and Home and Humanity."

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The White Ribbon.

For God and Home and Humanity.

WELLINGTON, MARCH 18, 1918.

A RETURNED SOLDIER SPEAKS.

Miss Rout's letters have roused indignation among the soldiers themselves. Mr Burnet, who was badly wounded at the Somme, and has returned to this Dominion unfit for further military service, voices the feeling of many of our young soldiers. We know that there is disease among our soldiers. The position is bad enough, but it is unnecessary and unfair to make it out worse than it really is. Mr Burnet is a fine type of the thousands of our boys who went from good homes, from our churches and our Bible Classes; boys who went at the stern call of duty, and whose ideals were too high to allow them to sink to the low level which Miss Rout thinks all soldiers live upon. We are proud of these boys who have kept their ideals, "our white knights." We feel deep indignation for the many who have fallen because of strong drink. May the day speedily come when an equal standard of morality may be demanded from both sexes.

As a returned soldier, may I be allowed to say a little about Miss Rout's letter. There seems to be an idea abroad that that letter gives a fairly accurate picture of the condition of things among our soldiers.

Yet who is Miss Rout, that her words should carry such weight? It may be said she is on the spot; she has opportunity of seeing just what is going on, but it is possible to be too near a thing to see it clearly. Miss Rout has evidently specialised on the question of immorality among our soldiers, and for that very reason her pictures are almost sure to be too highly coloured. It may be right to warn the people of New Zealand that immorality is a bigger problem than is generally realised; but it is wrong, it is wicked, to paint the New Zealand soldier as so absolutely immoral that the only thing to do is to give him a prophylactic packet in the hope of saving the race from extermination by venereal disease. I think of my old company—some two hundred strong, men of all sorts and conditions. I did not join them till after they landed in France, yet I know that when they left Egypt, after about a couple of months there, they did not leave half a dozen men behind, and of that half-dozen, only one or two, if any, were suffering from venereal disease. Then again, during four months' campaigning in France, I know of only one man who left us through venereal disease. Then when I come to think of my own particular mates, I can pick out half a dozen men who would be terribly tempted if they failed to treat any woman as they would their own sister. And these were men that I just fell in with by chance. Perhaps had I been there longer I might have found cause to alter this picture a little, but even then the contrast with Miss Rout's would be sufficient to give us pause before accepting all she says.

It may be somewhat difficult to determine the extent of this evil, but surely there can be no difficulty in coming to a decision about Miss Rout's proposal for remedying matters. It comes as a shock to find that the issue of a prophylactic packet to every soldier could ever be suggested; but to find it definitely proposed, and by a woman at that, is simply revolting. The military standard is low enough, but it has never yet come down to that, and surely it never will. No one who has not been in

the Army can realise how degrading is even the present moral standard. In the Army every man is treated alike—as possibly immoral. Every now and then he is ordered with the rest to parade before the Medical Officer, and the mere fact of attending such a parade tends to lower the moral tone of his life. And if he be not strong upon his feet, it were an easy thing for him to become actually immoral. If immorality is anywhere near as ripe among our soldiers as Miss Rout makes out, is it not time that we raised our standard instead of coming down yet lower? There is every reason to believe that the present low standards and unworthy ideals of the Army system are responsible for much of the evil. In the Army the young man finds that immorality is looked upon as practically a necessary evil. The medical staff sorts out the victim of venereal disease, but no authoritative voice condemns the thing itself. Occasionally perhaps a medical officer speaks, but his chief cry is, "Be careful where you go." The natural implication is, "I know you must go somewhere, only be careful." In such an atmosphere, is it any wonder that the high ideals of the dear old home fade away into a thin and distant unreality?

Now, as a remedy, Miss Rout actually proposes that the medical authorities put into every boy's hand a prophylactic packet! Just imagine a soldier on leave in London with such a packet in his pocket! He did not sneak into a shop and buy it himself, stealing out with a shifty, guilty look in his eyes. It was given to him—given by the highest medical authority of the land. Just when he needs a little extra help, when the path is a bit slippery and steep, Miss Rout proposes to give him a shove down the slope. For that is what it amounts to. The medical authorities do occasionally hold out a helping hand, generally very neat and shaky, but for pity's sake do not ask them to withdraw what little moral support they do give, and deliberately give the soldier a shove down the hill.

Even if the issue of a prophylactic were to reduce venereal disease a hundred per cent., it would be too cruel a price to pay. It might save the boy from one of the consequences of his sin, but it would deliver him over bound hand and foot to the sin itself. No man yields to immorality without in the beginning feeling that