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FOR PUBLICATION ON

REGIMENTAL YOUNG MEN.

GEN. O. O. HOWARD SAYS OUR REGIMENTS ARE NOT FANCY SOLDIERS.

A Foreign Criticism Answered—Do Young Men Join Regiments for Social Purposes?—Fascinations of Camp Life Overdrawn—Dress Parades Not Such Pleasures as they Look—City Regiments Analyzed—In Case of War, Who Would Be Our Leader?—Would Sherman Take the Command?—What Makes a Soldier?—Qualifications of a Military Life—Drunkenness and Immorality in the Army—Some Military Criticisms Forcibly Met.

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Is it true, as foreigners freely assert concerning us, that the regiments of our cities that make up our National Guard, are composed, to a great extent, of those young men who would be incompetent to act in case of peril? It is further asserted that they chiefly join regiments for social purposes and for the recreation given them during their summer vacation in camp life and in city parades. Can this be so?

In answer to the first question, the writer having had a wide experience, asserts without hesitation, that the declaration is not fair. There are doubtless some young men who would not prove hardy enough in case of action or continued exposure such as a lively campaign would bring upon them, but some of the weakest in constitution are ardent and ambitious.

Two regiments with which I am well acquainted, in the city of New York, are filled with vigorous and hearty youth, most of whom represent good American families of good social position, and they are as competent physically, mentally, and morally as any of the Volunteers which at the time of the War of Rebellion belonged to the same organization. Then they sprang into service upon the shortest notice, marching to Washington and were on hand for defensive or offensive operations, according to the desire of the President or General Scott.

I remember distinctly a beautiful New York regiment (having at that time a fancy uniform) that encamped not far from my own. The first few days of June, 1861, the colonel sat with me on the first court-martial that he and I attended at Washington. He was afterward ordered with his regiment to General Patterson in Western Virginia, while mine went with other regiments to the first Battle of Bull Run. Out of that regiment came majors, generals, brigadiers, colonels, and officers of every grade, as they came from the regular army to officer new regiments, and to have a large leavening influence in making up a vigorous army to meet and withstand the solid forces embraced in the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia.

True, I have taken but two regiments as samples, but from observation of others there is no reason to believe the young men to be incompetent. Surely they are not so physically, in any regiment from New York, Philadelphia, Boston or other city whose ranks were carefully observed as they passed in review last Centennial Day on Broadway, and if any are incompetent physically, surely they are not drinking men, and why should we suspect them to be morally inferior to their gallant fathers, who never hesitated even to carry the rifle and the cartridge box at the time of the nation's greatest peril?

There is one allegation that has some show of truth in it—it is that city regiments are unfit to cope with city riots. This is often true, but not because young men composing these regiments are incompetent, either physically, morally or intellectually. This arises from personal relationship with those who make the trouble. Sometimes in these riots, the men in the ranks are constantly called upon to fire upon fathers, brothers, and members of their own households. Of course such a state of things can always be remedied more or less in an emergency by calling for distant regiments, or better still by asking the President for regular troops, which in our country, recruited as they are, have never faltered in their duty upon any field of action.

Indeed, it would be better, as our cities are

growing in population, for the purpose of keeping in check the criminal class and the terrible Anarchists, who would break all law and destroy all human social organizations, to increase the regular forces of the United States and have a reasonable body of men in or near every large concentrated population. The very presence of two or three companies or batteries in perfect condition is a menace to corrupt combinations and a strong preventive of difficulties, which all good men deplore. Such ounce of prevention is worth a good many pounds of cure, in point of fact, before riots are suffered to go too far.

All city riots, however circumscribed beget difficulties which are irremediable, losses which are irrecoverable, broken hearts which cannot be repaired, and lives lost which cannot in this world be resurrected.

In regard to the second point, to wit: the assertion that young men chiefly join regiments for social enjoyments, the fascination for camp life, and for city parades.

We answer there is no harm whatever in such a motive, even if that motive be the chief one. From inquiry and personal knowledge, however, the enjoyment is not the bottom motive. There is a patriotic feeling in the heart of most young men; they read the history of their fathers with pride, and they wish as far as they can to fit themselves to take their places. Many wish to be promoted to non-commissioned officers or officers of different grades. They see in this present advancement of present esteem and a fitness for useful work in case of difficulty within or without our ports. Many believe the exercise of drill and discipline healthful and invigorating, not too violent, like that of football, nor too exciting, like that of base ball, nor too absorbing of time, like that of boating. It appears to them the least expensive, and at the same time most useful of any social combinations found within their reach.

Again, as to the fascination attached to camp life. To learn guard duty, to be willing to be drilled hours every day and to accomplish all that an army camp demands, will produce weariness, sometimes depression, but in the end develops strength and fortitude and fits those subjected to it for the actual camp life of a hard campaign.

With reference to city parades, I believe they are never coveted by soldiers. The arms and the shoulders often ache and the limbs become weary it is no idling operation, and there appears even to the young men hardly a *quid pro quo* for the long exposure and the extreme fatigue. The fascination is for the lookers-on, the crowds who cheer them and the ladies who compliment them, but it is veritable work, this call to make an extended city parade. These parades are endured, because it is part of the obligation into which the city regiments enter; it is duty—often a thankless but a patriotic duty.

Surely it is a beautiful object lesson to younger men who behold them, to see these fine regiments swinging the glorious old flag and tramping on to the sound of national airs; and many a veteran sheds tears as he beholds the new boys doing the work and making the show that he did and made but a few years before.

Let not foreigners or pessimists discourage us in our work of developing a good, strong, patriotic, devoted National Guard. The cities, having more facilities to come together without detriment to business, will always lead in the race of national defence.

I am asked a further question by my friend, who proposed that I should write in answer to the foregoing objections. It is this: In case of war, who would be the leader should General Sherman be no longer eligible?

General Sherman is past seventy-one (71), and already upon the retired list of the army. There was upon him during the war a strain both mental and physical that was extraordinary, and to which few men have been subjected, yet, with his vigor of intellect as yet apparently undiminished, and his strength quite equal to an active campaign, he might be called again to the head of the armies of the United States in case of war with a first-class foreign power.

Next to him would naturally, among the living generals, come General J. M. Schofield, who is the present Commander-in-Chief of the Army. General Grant loved him, first, because he so cheerfully co-operated with Grant's own field operations, even to the stripping himself of needed forces. General Sherman trusted him, because he not only had the heart to help, but as Sherman always said, "an ability never disputed to make large combinations."

One more question—What are the real qualifications for a military life?

They do not differ from the qualifications essential to any sort of outdoor work. We have over six hundred thousand men on our railroads; they are under the best possible discipline; never did an army obey with more promptitude than does the railway subordinate. I can conceive of no better fitting for all the hard work of an active campaign, than that of the great mass of railroad workingmen from conductors to switchmen, from the mechanics to the constructors and repairers of the track.

Notice again the vast armies of men working in the mines—coal, copper, iron, gold, silver, and so on. Their muscles have developed, they are capable of endurance, and they are well fitted for a hardy life, for such is their own.

We found many regiments during the war made up of men who were accustomed to too great regularities in their eating and sleeping, always having had three meals a day and always sleeping in a bed at night. These men were not, if I may so speak, acclimated to their new life when they came into camp or devoted themselves to the activities of a military campaign. Many of them became ill and were particularly open to prevailing diseases; if anybody had the measles, they were the first to catch them; pneumonia and typhoid fever often tripped them up. But city men, who were accustomed to all sorts of irregularities as to sleeping and dieting, did much better. Western men, who in planting new farms had been called to endure all things in the way of privation, exposure, and hardship, made up regiments of magnificent health and strength and fitness.

Even the bravery of our young men is called in question by some writers. There is no reason whatever for such an asseveration. Young men of different races, as a general rule, are about the same in this respect; cowards are an exception.

I never have any fear of a regiment made up of young men, white or black, who are born and bred in this country; if their officers have reasonable courage and good sense, their men will go where they will lead.

With regard to drunkenness and immorality charged against soldiers. I have seen no signs of it to any extent in our National Guard. There is some wine drinking at the festivals of the officer, but I do not think that there is any more of wine drinking among military men than among the other social organizations which I have chanced to observe.

Drinking is a bad thing; it is always a hindrance in any company, regiment or brigade. A head clear of all confusion, able to take in the situation, give the proper commands, and exact the proper obedience to orders, is much the best head for anything touching military life. Drunken leaders, drunken engineers, drunken artillerymen or drunken cavalrymen bring only confusion and loss. It is as necessary to be free from all the excitement and depression of strong drink in the army as elsewhere.

In the regular army a few, a very few officers and soldiers, who occasionally become intoxicated, being seen by multitudes of our fellow citizens, bring disgrace upon the uniform, but the majority are as well behaved and as sober men as those are with whom they have to do in civil life.

It is a great mistake to impute drunkenness or immorality to a man because he is an American soldier. We have tried hard to be rid of all such blots upon our escutcheon.

OLIVER OTIS HOWARD.

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