

I desire to mention particularly the good work of the Y.M.C.A. in the Esbekieh Gardens in Cairo. There many hundreds of soldiers from all parts of the Empire congregated during the day and in the evening. I cannot do better than quote the following brief account of that work supplied to me in March by Mr. J. L. Hay, the popular and hard-working representative in Egypt of the New Zealand Y.M.C.A. :—

“It is now some six months since the Y.M.C.A. commenced its work for soldiers in the Esbekieh Gardens, Cairo. Beyond the work of the British Soldiers' Café, which is situated in the same gardens, nothing of any importance had up to that time been attempted to cope in any adequate manner with the urgent need of providing some suitable place for rest and amusement for the thousands of soldiers that daily frequented Cairo. Assisted by the military authorities and the Government, a piece of ground, about an acre in extent, in these public gardens was taken over by the Y.M.C.A. On this there existed a skating-rink, refreshment-buffet, and a theatrical stage. These were made use of, and in addition a building large enough to provide every facility for reading, writing, games, &c., was erected. Adjoining this piece of ground was a restaurant, and arrangements were made with the proprietor to supply lunches and dinners exclusively to soldiers at reduced rates.

“Within a few weeks of its inception the Soldiers' Recreation Club, as it was named, soon became a very popular rendezvous for soldiers when on leave in Cairo. The strategic position of the gardens, right in the heart of the city, combined with delightful surroundings, no doubt accounted for the club's popularity. Here the soldiers were away from the somewhat objectionable Native element so apparent in the streets of Cairo, and this, together with the coolness and the comfort the club provided, was in itself a source of much attraction. Besides doing everything to make the club comfortable for the men, however, one of the main objects was to provide some form of amusement every night—something to be a counteracting agency to the evils that exist in Cairo, as perhaps in no other city. To this end concerts, athletic events, moving-picture shows, lectures, &c., were arranged, the aim being to have some form of amusement running every night of the week. In some measure success has been obtained in this direction, and large numbers of soldiers are to be found nightly at the club interested in whatever is going on. Skates for rinking may be had at low rates, and the rink is used largely for skating events, such as hockey, racing, &c. Admission is always entirely free, and every endeavour is made to make the men feel that the club is their own. The latest papers and magazines are always available, and upwards of thirty thousand letters are written every week. The men are cared for spiritually, bright attractive services being held every Sunday.

“Some three months ago an important innovation took place. Hitherto the refreshment-buffet had been under the control of a private company, but on the arrival of a number of lady volunteer helpers from England and New Zealand a rearrangement was effected, and now the men are served with refreshments that are handled exclusively by ladies. That the men appreciate the change is evidenced by the remarkable development of this department, necessitating extensive alterations and additions. It is estimated that on an ordinary Saturday over seven thousand men are served with refreshments. The ladies give their services gladly and freely, and the men are loud in their praises of what they are doing for them.

“At the present moment hot baths are being installed, and extra buildings are being erected to make things as comfortable as possible for the approaching summer.

“Every assistance has been given by military and civic authorities alike to make the club a success, and whenever they have been approached their hearty co-operation has been forthcoming.”

On the arrival of the New Zealand lady volunteer helpers referred to by Mr. Hay, two of their number interviewed me and informed me that so far they had met with no success in their efforts to obtain work in hospitals or other institutions established in the interests of the sick and the wounded, but that they had been offered employment in the Y.M.C.A. canteen in the Esbekieh Gardens. Having heard from the authorities that there was little prospect of employment in military hospitals for women other than trained nurses, and there being also many trained nurses out of employment in Egypt, I strongly advised the deputation to accept the offer of the Y.M.C.A. This they did, entering into their work whole-heartedly, and being cordially welcomed not only by New Zealand soldiers, but by soldiers from all other parts of the Empire. I heard nothing but appreciation of their work.

CHAPLAINS.

With regard to the organization of Chaplains, I found on inquiry that Chaplain Luxford had acted as Senior Chaplain, but that after he was wounded no one had been appointed in his stead. After consultation with Colonels Esson and Charters, I was of the opinion that it would be desirable not to appoint a chaplain of any denomination to have control of the others, but that the Commandant at the Base Headquarters should organize the service and allot the Chaplains to where they were wanted.

On the occasion of my visit to Gallipoli only two of our Chaplains were then left on duty there. These two were doing excellent work, as the others that had left owing to illness and wounds had done, but finding the strain on them to be very great I advised the Commandant to make frequent changes, and to give each Chaplain in turn a chance of doing duty at the front.

At Mudros the hospitals in which our men were located had no New Zealand Chaplain attached to them. I therefore arranged for Chaplain Ross, who was available but who was about to