

# The Fruitarian Society

## Vegetarianism in the Army

"In an interview with a representative of the VEGETARIAN MESSENGER Lieut. - Col. Josiah Oldfield, who is commanding officer of the 3rd East Anglian Field Ambulance (2nd Line), was good enough to give his views.



*Group of vegetarian soldiers, Col. Josiah Oldfield centre, bottom row.*

"If there is one thing more than another which has struck me in the administration of this War," the Colonel led off, "it is the great respect which is being paid to conscience and conviction. The Sikh, who will only eat the flesh of goats killed under his own supervision, is supplied with flocks for his use. The Hindu asking for special rations for himself, 'for conscience sake,' is not laughed at, but is fed according to his rule of life. It is by this generous spirit of the recognition of conscience that such a happy, contented and enthusiastic Army is being trained to the highest perfection."

"One of the best tests of conscience over faddism," continued the Colonel, "is the willingness of the man of conscience to bear hardships without a murmur, while the faddist is always selfishly complaining if his own petty habits are not provided for."

"Will you tell me what happens to a Vegetarian who enlists in your command?" I asked.

"If a Fruitarian enlists," he answered, "he must be prepared, like every good soldier, to suffer hardships. The rations of an Army cannot be altered to suit an individual. So a man must take what he can get, and, if need be, must live on bread and butter and potatoes, with a piece of cheese occasionally! He must be willing to work as hard and as keenly as his fellows, and not grumble. Before long he will find everybody willing to help him. His pay of 10/6 per week - with no expenses - permits him to supplement his rations with dried fruits, dates, and nuts and cheese; also fresh fruit occasionally, a bunch of watercress, or a tin of pine chunks. After a man has passed his examination in anatomy, physiology, and First Aid bandaging and nursing, his pay is increased by 4d. per day. So soon as he has proved that he is not a faddist, but a keen soldier with a conscience, which will not allow him to eat meat, the Quartermaster will be found only too willing to put an egg on his plate when others are having bacon, and to see that butter, cheese, wholemeal bread, figs, apples, and such like find their way to him whenever possible."

I asked, "Many people do not quite know what is meant by 'a Field Ambulance,' can you in a few words tell me about it?"

"Certainly," replied Colonel Oldfield. "When I was given this command my duty was to select and train nine officers, of whom at least seven must be doctors, and two hundred and nineteen soldier-nurses, and to take charge of and train the transport section. The transport of a Field Ambulance includes ten officers' chargers, ten ambulance wagons, six ordinary wagons, three carts, three water carts, and about thirty horses."

"What class of men join a Field Ambulance?"

"Men who take up the nursing side of war are, as a rule, men of character and attainment. It takes a distinct type of character, with a definite type of courage to enable a man to endure all the dangers and exhaustions of the battlefield without any of the animal passion of fury to stimulate him and without any of the lust of battle to dull his sensations of fear.

The R.A.M.C. stands for Courage without Passion, Patriotism without Hatred, and Humanity without Creed."

"Now what about the men in the photograph?"

"The photograph gives a picture of the Fruitarians, who were at the moment available, but they do not by any means represent all under my command who have abstained from flesh-food or who now abstain. They have all *proved themselves* during this War, and whatever the other men may have thought about Fruitarianism or Vegetarianism aforesaid, they have now learned that those who abstain from flesh-food are amongst the keenest, the most intelligent and the hardiest. They are most ready for work of any that have enlisted in defence of their King and country."

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\*In the same year, Lieut. - Col. Oldfield accepted the position of President of *The Vanguard Society* which was formed "...to look after the interests of Vegetarians in His Majesty's Forces."

However, within a year it was reported that:

"The Society ran a Fruitarian Canteen, gave advice to those about to enlist, and arranged for the despatch of parcels of food to isolated Vegetarians. This food-reform effort was only secure so long as Lieut.- Col. Oldfield remained in command of the unit. Following on his transfer from the 2/3rd at Peterborough to the 5th Provisional Field Ambulance at Norwich the *menu* ceased to be vegetarian, men were drafted to other units, the Committee became scattered, and eventually this useful Society had to be disbanded."

*The Vegetarian Messenger and Health Review February 1916*

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