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A Voice From the Tomb

In replying to some of his critics, Mr. Alger made a judicious selection of critics to reply to. As chief of these he chose the London Times. The censorious voice of that journal is imperfectly heard in this country "across waves' tumultuous roar," and for the matter and manner of its remarks on Mr. Alger the American people have to depend on Mr. Alger himself, who is apparently more sensitive to British opinion than to that of his countrymen. Quite a number of American journals of repute, many of them belonging to his own political party, have for a long time manifested a strong sense of Mr. Alger's moral and intellectual delinquencies without evoking a "reply." Perhaps he did not know where to begin.

In replying to his overseas critic Mr. Alger confines himself almost wholly to two points—appointment of incompetent military officers from civil life and misappropriation of money by officers of the supply departments. As to the latter nobody, I believe, has made any specific accusations; and the general ones have not been very insistently urged. If Mr. Alger had affirmed himself and his heads of departments guiltless of cheating at cards his "reply" would have been quite as interesting and enlightening.

Nor need we especially concern ourselves about the other matter. It is obvious without demonstration that a volunteer army of more than two hundred thousand men could not be officered altogether, or even mainly by graduates of the national Military Academy, even if the Secretary of War had a free hand in selections, which he had not. It was already known that officers of state volunteer regiments of the several states were appointed by the governors.

Of the 1,032 volunteer officers appointed by the President, 591 were taken from civil life. It is with regard to these that most complaint has been made. That a majority of them were "somebody's sons" having a political pull has been shown many times by publication of their names and family connections, and no attempt at refutation or justification is recalled. Perhaps Mr. Alger had little to do with it; perhaps nothing better could have been done; but at least the facts of their appointment are not altered, nor the charges of their incompetence met, by pointing out that there were less than six hundred of them. There were always one too many, and it was the one that was attempting to perform some kind of military service. When doing nothing for their keep they were redundant but not insupportable.

Mr. Alger knows well enough that what has chiefly stirred the country against him in the matter of appointments is not the selection of incapable civilians to be soldiers, but of incapable soldiers to be commanders of armies and heads of departments. It is interesting to observe that in his defense against a less grave accusation he makes much of the fact that of thirteen Colonelcies (three of Engineers and ten of "Immunes") no fewer than eleven were given to graduates of the Military Academy. This is a distinct admission of the value of the education given at that great school. Why, then, was not its value recognized in appointing officers to high authority and command? Why is it that the Chief Commissary of Subsistence, an officer charged

with duties of capital importance at such a time, was not a West Point man, but an Eagan? Why was the army of invasion in Cuba entrusted to Shafter the Fat? Why was Merritt removed from Manila before he was permitted to strike a blow and replaced by Otis the Odious?

We need not ask why Miles, who also is not a graduate of the Military Academy, headed the war in Porto Rico; as senior Major General he had a right to be there and has now a right to be at Manila. If not in Manila he has a right to control, under the president, the army of which he is titular commander. He is the only one of our major generals not educated as a soldier who has shown marked ability; and in that is found, doubtless, the reason why his energies are in arrest, while in his name, but without his assent or knowledge, the fussy Corbin issues orders governing the army. Corbin is civilian-bred, as is Wood, who without even military experience was set over so many gray-headed West Point campaigners at Santiago, where he still commands. In short, of all the administration's military pets not one is a graduate of the Military Academy, and not one has done creditable service; while the only non-graduate of whom creditable service could be confidently predicted, and who as head of the army has a natural right to perform it, is kept under the slab. In the face of such facts as these Mr. Alger's defence of himself by showing that the right thing was done in eleven minor matters out of thirteen is no less than impudent. If henceforth he employ any part of his well earned leisure in "replying" it is to be hoped that he will not overlook the sins that he is seriously accused of committing. He might properly enough manifest his memory of them if, only to throw the blame upon the wicked president, who is culpable enough, God knows.

Mr. Alger is no longer of national importance, but the evil that he has done lives after him as a warning to his successor, and he cannot be permitted to thrust his decaying pate out of his political tomb with a mouthful of denials that do not go to the heart of the matter.