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*Memoirs of a Private*

As I understand it, the American public is now going about with a club crying: "Where is he? Where is he?" The American public is now about to chastise the one who can be proven responsible for the general incompetence and idiocy existing in several departments of the army during the last war.

I don't want to startle or anger the American public, but I feel impelled to point out to it that during the last few weeks it has caused a certain number of men in the regular army of the United States to laugh hoarsely and bitterly.

So you are looking for the responsible party, are you? You want to discover the culprit, do you? You want to visit dire punishment on him, do you?

Well, excuse the blunt language of a soldier, but you really strike me as being about the most comic spectacle that has yet crossed my thrilling journey toward a Soldiers' Home. Why, you are the culprit. You are responsible. Put up your searchlights and your bludgeons and merely ruminate quietly and see if you can't get something into your peculiarly ingenuous head.

Here is the first test. Go out into the street and ask any person to name the secretaries of war of the last five administrations. The citizen will tell he doesn't know. Try another citizen; he won't know. There you are! Nobody knows; nobody cares. That is exactly the case. Nobody cares who is Secretary of War. It has been accounted—since Lincoln's time—a highly honorable post which is the proper loot of some faithful partisan. It goes to this man or it goes to that man, and in any case nobody makes any row or conceives the event to be of importance save those gentlemen who wished the post for themselves.

Then suddenly there comes on a war, and—behold—you find the chair occupied by a doddering feckless old man who can't even defend himself by remaining silent. You talk about mismanagement! You talk about incompetence and gross criminality! Why, you are to blame! You are the criminals! You have for years persisted in raising monuments to your own incapacity for knowing anything about the army; for years you have conscientiously and steadfastly ignored every detail of it. What then, in the name of God, did you expect?

Every four years in our luxurious posts in Arizona or Wyoming we watched with feverish interest the appointment of the new Secretary of War. It was a solemn event always, for us. We cared who would be Secretary of War. But you never cared. You never gave three whoops in Hades. In the first place you always proceeded on the stupid assumption that the country would never become involved in another conflict, and so you were constructively willing that any fool should be Secretary of War.

But the war came, my brothers, and found you dwelling in the midst of your blind idiocy. And now you are beating the tom-tom and screeching for somebody's blood. You know a real soldier always regards the civilian as an aimless, hapless, helpless blockhead, who tries to go

three ways at once and say three things with one tongue, and the idea never strikes me with such force as when I contemplate the frantic revolutions your belated conscience is now making.

Why, we knew all this long ago, and we cried out to you, we begged you to heed us, and you were deaf; you would not listen, and now you have paid for it—paid with the blood of your best beloved; paid with your dead, God pity you!