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***The Pleasures of Peace***

Hostilities with Spain having ended, the Secretary of War can give his undivided attention to fighting. Matters military are thrusting themselves upon him with a deadly insistence that promises to test his qualification for the office that he holds and his ability to hold it. The Quartermaster's department has gone up against him, the Subsistence Department is moving upon his works, the Medical Department has a pill in pickle for him. The press is up and doing, still achieving, still (as usual) pursuing, and from a score of fever-stricken camps rises a moan

More fierce and more inexorable far  
Than empty tigers or the roaring sea.

It thunders everywhere, and on the heights, dimly discerned against a lowering sky, looms the figure of general Miles, armed and on horseback! And this is what we are pleased to call peace—wherefore the Spanish man-and-brother, the insupportable visage of him fitly fashioned to a sentiment of hilarity, signifies with both lungs his cheerful view of the situation whereof he is no longer a part. His supersession as “the enemy” by the Secretary of war is a phenomenon evoking his approval. Exit the Yanko-Spanko war, with all its delicious absurdities; enter the war with Alger.

Some results of this contest can be easily foreseen. There will be, for one thing, such an exposure of rascality and incompetence as will call blushes to the cheek of apathy and tears to the eyes of hope. That the rascality and incompetence will be found adorning the characters and guiding the fortunes of but one party to the quarrel is not to be expected; there is commonly enough of these vices to go round. It is not, for example, Secretary Alger's fault that sickness, as the result of defective sanitation and civilian discipline, was rife in all the camps of instruction. The scope of his duties, as he rightly explains, does not embrace the policing of company kitchens and the digging of sinks. Matters of that kind are provided for in the army regulations, and an intelligent understanding of the laws of health and the duty and methods of enforcing them, are supposed to be an elementary part of an officer's education. For every needless death from typhoid fever, pneumonia, or other preventable disease, there is an unbroken chain of responsibility in which the company commander, the regimental commander, the brigade commander, the division commander and the corps commander all are links. Each one of these worthies has the authority, and it is his duty, to make and enforce all necessary regulations for the health of his men, and he is accountable unless he can show that he was specifically deprived of this authority by authority superior to his own. This, of course, does not apply where, as in this city, camps were established on unwholesome sites selected by the directors of street railways. But even at Camp Merritt a great deal of the disease and death was due to faulty sanitation and

slack discipline. Many cases of pneumonia, for example, some of which had fatal results, were caused by the men getting drunk and lying out all night in the park or elsewhere, when they should have been in quarters. In any well disciplined regiment the first offense of that kind would have been the last, for before it could have been known that the offender had been fitly punished by nature he would have been made into a warning for others. It was not necessary that the man's officer should know even so much as that the man had been drunk; it was enough that he was "out all night"—without leave, for under no circumstances should leave have been given. The talk of unwholesome campsites outside San Francisco and Cuba is mostly nonsense. With regard to the camp at Chickamauga, it is nonsense of a particularly handy and impenitent kind. In dimensions Chickamauga is a province; it has room for all the armies of the United States. It is well watered, well wooded, well drained, with as wholesome a climate as can be found in all the South. If the men there died "like rotten sheep" they died by visitation of their commanding officers.

For the awful mortality in the camps at Santiago de Cuba—for that part of it not justly chargeable to hard service by unseasoned troops in a rascally climate—it is impossible at present to fix the responsibility. A deal of blundering seems to have been done in the matter of landing and forwarding medical supplies, but as far as concerns medicines merely, failure to get and take them was doubtless a "remedial agency" of great value. But privation of surgical assistance, of litters, tents, bedding and food fit for invalids—that is another and more serious matter. It looks as if the Secretary of War and the administration generally were at fault here, through the commissioning, as quartermasters, commissaries of subsistence and so forth, of men with a political pull, civilian kinsmen of senators and personal friends. By some strange fatuity these incompetents are commonly put where they can do the most harm. In the fighting line they would not be half so pernicious. They appear to be put in the staff departments, not because less technical knowledge is required there, for more is, but because it is thought they will be safer, and safety is what they are great in. (Quartermasters and commissaries can fight if they want to. In the civil war I knew a brigade in which they not only wanted to but would have had to whether they wanted to or not, as had every man that wore a sword; and twice I was qualified by events to answer "I" to the popular question, "Who ever saw a dead quartermaster?") To the administration's disgraceful practice of charging ignorant civilians with the difficult and important duties of ministering to the needs of the soldiers' bellies and backs must be ascribed the greater part of the suffering and death in the camps at Santiago.

Withal, there seems to have been an abounding lack of military discipline. General Shafter, who certainly ought to know, has the candor to say:

The blame for the suffering on board the returning transports lies with the men themselves. Every one, as soon as the order for home was given, wanted to get out. It was like a stampede of cattle. It was the worst kind of homesickness with all the men. They overcrowded the ships against the remonstrances of the surgeons and other officers, but said they were willing to stand any little hardships if they could only get home.

Secretary Alger could hardly have provided against that: human provision could not have foreseen that in its anxiety to get home Gen. Shafter's army would be suffered to become a struggling mob deaf to the "remonstrances" of its officers. It could hardly have occurred to any

civilian official that in the embarkation of troops the rule would be, Every man for himself and devil take the hindmost. But even if Gen. Shafter's candid confession that his army was an uncontrollable mob is true—though I for one do not believe it—the blame for the suffering on the transports does not lie with quite all the men; some of them must have been on board legitimately—say those carried on in litters. It is a fair field for inquiry; let us know if there was an American army in which the insubordination that found expression among the general officers in a “round-robin” took the form, among the men, of mob rule and mutiny. It has been a mooted question who commanded the army in Cuba—Gen. Shafter, Gen. Miles, or Secretary Alger. All doubts and uncertainties seem now to be resolved; apparently it was not commanded.

The accusations against the War Department that have been made in the name of Gen. Miles, and up to the time of writing now disavowed by him, are too grave to be disregarded. If the secretary is content to overlook them the president should not be content to overlook the secretary's contentment. I have not the distinction to be an admirer of Gen. Miles, whom I think to be the work of John R. McLean and created in the image of his maker. But compared with Secretary Alger he is an intellectual giant armed with a mastodon's femur. If he shall say to either of the secretary's faces what he is said to have said in Puerto Rico the country will believe him. For that matter, it believes him now, though certain pillars of the Republican church, “whose war it was,” are counterfeiting the symptoms which distinguish induration of the understanding from mere callosity of the tympanum. It happens that the sins of which Gen. Miles accuses Mr. Alger are precisely those of which one having knowledge of the accused would have expected him to be guilty. When one is feeble yet ambitious one is cunning. The wisdom of fools is deceit, and double-dealing commands itself in him who is appalled by the difficulties of simplicity. The ass would be a fox, unaware that the fox is an ass. If Reynard Alger's skin is not soon at the furrier's appearances are as tricky as he.

The horrors of war are upon us here in California as well. The gallant colonel of the sanguinary Seventh is at daggers drawn with his men, and neither side will do anything to stay the effusion of words. The quarrel is a pretty one. Some malign influence, the nature of which appears to be unknown to anyone but the persons exerting it, has kept this regiment in San Francisco while many others, junior in service and inferior in fitness, have departed this port in the sure and certain hope of harps and crowns to be had in Manila. Disappointed in their just expectation of service in partibus infidelium, and suffering “afflictions sore” incurred at Camp Merritt, some of the men (it is said a majority, but this is denied by the colonel) are clamoring to be mustered out. This is deprecated by the colonel, who, naturally, is accused, not only of a base motive in resisting the demand, but of conniving at the regiment's retention and at its ill-health too. As to that, he seems to have been merely a good soldier who disdained the wire-pulling methods of the civilian politician and thought it no part of an officer's duty to cadge for assignments. If his men all had the same high conception of dignity and duty they would better perform their contract with their country. Their term of enlistment was for two years or during the war. The war is not known to be over, and if it were the government has the right to their services for the full two years. There was no agreement to send them abroad, and while their disappointment is natural their protestations are unsoldierly and discreditable. If disease is rife among them, as they say, every officer or civilian having knowledge of the matter should do his utmost to fix the responsibility and punish the guilty; but if disease is to be fought, not by sanitation and medicine, but by disbanding, armies are impossible and a nation's power is a

dream. A soldier who shrinks from duty however inglorious through fear of death in whatever shape it threatens is not a good soldier. If the men of the Seventh enlisted for adventure and glory it should have been “so nominated in the bond”, if for duty and service let them remember that the highest duty is obedience when obedience is least agreeable and the most honorable service is forbearance when it is hardest to forbear.

In refusing to have his regiment “polled” on this question, or any question, Col. Berry is altogether right; in affirming a “majority” in favor of continuing in service, or in favor of anything, he is altogether wrong. In matters military the word “majority” signifies the office and rank of major, and is without other meaning. Whether one thousand men, or only two men, favor continuing in service, the fact has no value. Nothing in an army is determined by counting noses except the fighting strength. An army is an autocracy and can be nothing else; introduction of democratic methods is infinitely mischievous and destructive. If I commanded a regiment and a newspaper man, taken red-handed in the act of counting their noses, were brought before me I should say to him: “Respected representative of an honored profession, I appreciate your enterprise, intelligence, championship of the public welfare and high personal character. The tender interest that you take in the affairs of this regiment touches me deeply and inspires a warm and elevated sentiment. Would that you might be always with us, but the inexorable moment approaches when you must away—most of you—when I must give myself the sorrow of saying farewell to the greater part of you. Go, my friend, and Heaven prosper you, but”—with a meaning look at the regimental barber—“as a souvenir of this visit I shall retain your left ear.” With that organ suitably displayed and labeled no further attempt would be made, it is thought, to “poll the regiment.”