

America and Her Soldiers—A Grave Question of Justice and Honor

WE APPEAL FROM THE NATIONAL TO THE STATE GOVERNMENTS

CHATTERING mediocrity" will be the verdict of history upon our political leaders, who, only after three years of war and frightful wastage of human life and treasure, partially comprehended their duty and with poor grace saved in part our national honor.

What the verdict of history will be upon the capacity of those same leaders as revealed in the face of equally needless and equally scandalous after-the-war problems at home, grave elementary issues of food, work, the simple right to the pursuit of life and happiness, may be guessed by a perusal of the extraordinary proposals recently made public by the Secretary of the Interior and endorsed, just before his departure for Europe, by President Wilson. On another page we give extracts from the Secretary's report.

NOT CHARITY—NO INDEED!

The proposals concern the return of our own soldiers and their absorption into the economic life of the nation, in whose defense they had risked their all. The occasion, however, instead of being a cause of rejoicing at Washington, appears to be a cause of dismay and profound mental confusion. Official Washington, through Mr. Lane's Report, informs an amazed nation that we have nothing to offer the returning heroes but the breadline or a job in reclaiming the swamp or the desert. Out of the swamp or the desert they may be permitted to make a home and such a life as may be had there, the cost of same to be scrupulously debited against them, lest it might seem like charity. Charity would blush at such a caricature of her benign self.

A SMIRCH ON OUR HONOR

This is the final smirch on America's honor. It makes us the laughing stock of the world. It is our punishment for our betrayal of civilization during three shameful years, for our shallow sentiment, false heroics and theatrical posturing. Our own brave lads, whose splendid manhood was our sole redeeming grace abroad, come back to us with an immeasurable wealth of human potentialities of life and joy and power; and *this* is our reception, the real reception, behind the grand stand and the fluttering flags of a day.

Are we going to accept such a situation? Have we not residual manhood enough to sense the moral failure and shame, as well as the supreme unreason, of such an epilogue to our great European adventure?

BEWARE THE WRATH OF JUST MEN AROUSED

To judge by Washington's enthusiasm over its convict-settlement scheme for our fighting men, it may be that it represents the standard of many who stayed at home,

of those to whom the war was an opportunity of enrichment and of entrenching themselves securely in every stronghold of economic advantage. To that extent Washington may be right. But we very much doubt if our soldiers, who have lived a larger life and risked larger stakes and learned more of the big things that are worth while, will accept such a scheme as fairly representing the mind and purpose of their America, the land whose service and latent ideals inspired their own high mission. Others may have muck-raked and plotted to corner life's best opportunities at home; but the returning soldiers, we are sure, will be as little willing to uphold or endure injustice at home as they were in Europe. Certain things there made them "fighting mad," and the wrong-doers were made to feel the wrath of clean men in a just cause.

THE BREADLINE AND THE SWAMP

It is hard to say which of the home events to meet the returning soldier will most rouse his ire,—the bread-line, or the degrading proposal of the national administration. Both are the result of the same lack of vision and unfitness for government. The statesmen who can think of nothing better than to consign our war-worn veterans to the swamp and the desert, are of the same timber as those who allowed the doors of opportunity to close in the rear of the recruits as they left home to defend their country, our own and civilization itself.

GIVE THE ANSWER THE CANADIAN SOLDIER MAKES TO THE SAME INSULTING PROPOSAL

We invite the Government at Washington to put into the hands of every American soldier,—not merely of those whose material needs are desperate, but also of their more fortunate comrades,—a copy of the Report of the Secretary of the Interior, to which we are alluding, and extracts from which we reprint. We feel certain that the American soldier will give the same indignant answer as has his Canadian brother to a similar scheme across the border. We feel certain, too, that the civilian worker for whom, under our strange economic system, the return of his soldier comrade means keener competition for jobs and lower pay, will nevertheless realize his essential solidarity with the soldier. The struggle for life is growing harder. The fear of want enters more and more homes. The weakening and wastage of life, already fearful, is increasing. What is wrong with America? Has she shrunk, that she will no longer hold us? Have her breasts run dry, that she can not feed her children? Cannot our wise men answer? Should the soldier have stayed under the sod over there?

Do not enough of our babies die every year? Do our old live too long? Why is it there is so little room in this vast continent of ours? Is it ours? Who is withholding from our grasp the opportunities of life? By what right is the fertile land, lying there unused, denied us?

ALL ORATING, NONE DOING

These are grave questions. Have we no clear-visioned, courageous statesman to give the true answer and save the people from blind counsels of despair?

There is little hope for rational answer and action from Washington. The whole course of its procedure in fiscal and economic issues reveals total mental obfuscation. In Congress and Senate pigmies are orating, while the task of giants awaits the doing.

FROM WASHINGTON WE APPEAL TO THE STATES

Never in all our history has such an opportunity been afforded to an American State to advance its own wealth and power and at the same time render a signal service to the Nation. Which State in the Union will be the first to declare against the local slacker and for the soldier? Which State will be the first to declare, and make it law, that ownership of land within its borders shall be conditioned by adequate use of same, and that the use of land shall involve no greater tax burden than its non-use? Which is only the equivalent of saying that no useful activity shall be the subject of taxation, and that the tax burden shall be distributed in strict accord with the potential value of the land held in title. Is not that, after all, the democratic doctrine of equality of opportunity brought from the political and applied to the economic, field? Is it more than fair play? Does it infringe at all on the finer graces of hospitality? Viewed in the cold light of facts, the wild Indians were more truly hospitable to the first invasion of the white man, than we are proving ourselves, in real essentials, to our own kind and kin. Like a meatless bone to a dog, our national government flings them the leavings of our economic store,—a precarious footing on the very fringe of opportunity,—the swamp and the desert! Let us give our men a square deal first, and then, only then, offer them the hospitality due to equals.

NEW YORK RICH IN UNUSED RESOURCES

The State of New York, larger in area than England, has room and abundant natural riches for four times its present population. To fail to invite our vigorous, loyal soldier youth to an equal share in the natural opportunities contained within New York State,—on the terms and in the form above named,—would be nothing short of an economic and, under the special circumstances, a political crime. Because, however, New York has claimed the title of Premier State of the Union, is no guarantee that she may not lose both title and position to some actually smaller or less populous State, where the political and economic vision may be clearer and the will to action stronger. The programme of economic justice,—of equal

rights to access to the soil, asserted and established by rational fiscal legislation,—is, indeed, the monopoly of no political party. Far from being necessarily the slogan of radical politicians, it might well be the watchword of the best conservative elements, those who believe in order and fair dealing as the only basis of a stable social structure.

THE PALSIED HELMSMEN AT THE NATIONAL CAPITAL

The heart and the pride of the common people are deeply stirred by the heroic and enduring sacrifice of our boys over there. The National Government might easily and most worthily have interpreted and satisfied those feelings by a simple yet sufficient act of justice, and of an historic significance worthy of the occasion. The magnificent youth of our nation, returned from great achievements for Democracy and Right in foreign lands, might have been received at the landing stage with a Magna Charta of their own, won for themselves and their country,—the equal right of all,—not of a few only,—to the soil of America. That opportunity of a century was lost by Washington, through incompetence or design. A belated opportunity is still open to the State governments. That perhaps may be the last chance for reason. The execrations of posterity will weigh heavy on the memories of those who, with their hands on the helm of state, failed in capacity or duty and guided her upon the rocks.

Lane's Land Settlement Scheme

EXTRACTS FROM THE SECRETARY'S REPORT

REVIEW readers are asked to draw their own conclusions from the following extracts. They are asked to note that the Secretary is not blind to the vast tracts of desirable land held out of use everywhere. Notwithstanding he directs the soldier in search of a habitation and a farm to the arid deserts and pine barrens of distant states.

They are also asked to note, as pointed out in a recent issue, that the returned soldiers are to be subject to a variety of discriminations which they should properly resent as insults to their intelligence and their status as citizens—discriminations which are defensible only as they are universally applied, to the land speculator as well as to those who have offered their all in defence of their country.

THE SOLDIER'S QUESTION:—"I am back now, back for a man's life. This America that called me out has called me back, and it will have something for me to do. Now, what is to be my chance?"

THE GOVERNMENT'S ANSWER:—"America offers you a farm, if you will help in its making and pay for it out of what you make out of it."

THE MEANING OF IT:—"We have a full 200,000,000 acres which may be converted into farms, either by irrigation, drainage or clearing. These lands in greater part