

THE WIDOW IN ARMS.

[Town Topics War Correspondent.]

A senator—one of the biggest of 'em—came into one of the general departments the other day with a civilian captain that he had created. He said:

"General Blank?"

"Yes sir," said the white-haired military chief.

"I want to introduce you to Captain —, of your department," said the pleasant senator.

"How do you do, sir," said the general.

"Captain — has not been assigned to duty as yet, General, and he would like to go to Porto Rico."

The General listened respectfully in cold, military silence, which was emphasized with a colder bow as the senator paused. The great politician, a little disconcerted by the silence, but encouraged by the bow, went on:

"The — sails in two days, and if you will—"

"Pardon me for interrupting," said the suave General, "but I have not looked the matter up. I will send Captain — where he is most needed."

"But he prefers Porto Rico," replied the Senator.

"Pardon me again, but I am in command of this department. Good morning."

And the General turned to his desk.

I had happened into this department just then to ask the General to tell me from his standpoint some differences between the volunteer army and the regular army. I decided it was not a good time for the question. Instead, congratulated him on the wonderful success his department had had in getting supplies to the front. He replied:

"Yes, there was never a war where there was such a luxury of expenditure."

"And never a war where there was more cry of distress in general, and of hunger in particular," I answered.

He looked at me with his eyebrows knitting and waved his hand in the direction of the departing senator and his political captain.

Really, if it did not sound so unpardonably slangy, I would say that this present end of the war criticisms, this shifting of blame from one to another makes me tired! Why ask questions? Why criticize? It is all as plain as day. When you have made all deduction, where things have gone wrong, one of the greatest causes for it are these sons of political somebodies who wanted, and still want, something for themselves out of this war instead of wanting something for soldiers, something for the country, something for humanity.

And now these people—I will not call them soldiers—these undisciplined men who were not fitted for the positions they filled, assisted by a howling public, are the first to criticize the heads of departments here in Washington for the conditions, many of which they have themselves created.

When one sits down to write between the two sides of a story—you know every story has two sides—then comes the "tug of war." I have done some criticizing—if telling facts which exist is to criticize. I have not, however left my facts floundering. I have then and there found causes, and I have yet to discover that I was wrong in my deductions. A clamoring public wanted war, a short war, a successful war, and war at once. Military heads—generals who understood that to bring together a mass of undisciplined people meant to gather a mob—wanted time to make soldiers, on the lines of a system that has been handed down from war to war; they

wanted time and climate, lest our men die, like dogs, in a foreign country. The clamoring public have had the war. The military men have seen the slaughter. But the cities and public are clamoring still; they ask why our men are dead, dying, sick, hungry? The clamoring public, the critics, are a part of the mob—pure and simple—without knowledge, without system, without discipline. They would give a typhoid fever patient a big meal because he said he was hungry. Yet system in the army medical department, as in the department of the family physician, tells them that to give a typhoid fever patient solid food means death. They make a big howl because some regular army soldiers—soldiers from the frontier—who have slept on the ground for years, sleep one night more on the ground at Montauk. Then there come the parents, the women. I think I said before somewhere that women were "playing the deuce with this war." I said it, and then apologized for the word "deuce." I say it again without apology.

"My boy is hungry! My boy is hungry!" Of course, my dear mother, your boy is hungry—boys are always hungry. There was never a time at home when he could not eat a square meal just after he had one. I know boys.

Unfortunately, while there are regiments and regiments in our volunteer army, it is really full of boys—boys who need nursing bottles instead of Red Cross nurses. I sat down by the bedside of one baby-faced boy in the hospital, who said indignantly he was "seventeen years old!" when I accused him of being nothing but a child. But the tears came to his eyes when he spoke of his mother. If parents allow these young boys to go to war, boys without physical endurance, and without teaching them the first principles of being a soldier—which means, when summed up, knowing how to take care of themselves physically—then the parents must come in for their share of criticism.

I have seen some mighty hungry soldiers—men—since I started out on the warpath. I have fed them out of my own pocket. It was not their fault that they were hungry. It was the fault of inefficient quartermasters, subsistence captains and volunteer officers who knew no more about taking care of men than the men individually knew how to take care of themselves. I have seen soldiers—volunteer soldiers—give away their rations for souvenirs. I have seen officers—volunteer officers—to save the trouble of going daily, draw ten days' rations ahead and allow their men to live on hard tack, canned meat and coffee, and go without the fresh bread and fresh meat and bacon lying exposed to sun and flies—the one becoming tainted, the other melting, because no one had the thrift to protect by covering, and no officer of the day called around to see that it was done. And all this time our men in the army—our "boys"—were hungry.

I have eaten with colonels and staffs where the table was covered with table cloths, where there were blue and white "delft" dishes of paper mache, attendants to brush away flies, and where clean napkins were a part of the regulation as much as the good food. I also have "messed" with a troop of cavalry company where the table was supplied with food that surpassed the table of its colonel's staff. All this means simply a difference in management, individually; a difference in intelligence and knowledge. The "troop" took its rations and exchanged them for radishes and luxuries. But outside of the inefficient intermediate officers at the front, lost



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lighters, rolling seas, no piers—who shall be blamed? Certainly not heads of departments, who, it seems to me—judging from the two sides from which I am viewing today—have been the victims of this public of ours, politics, and the ignorance of some of the National Guard.

If I were to ask today, here in Washington, the heads of our great military system—the generals who stand at the helm—how to have a campaign, a war without faultfinding or criticism, they would say, "Have in the field no politics and no National Guard. Have the military discipline to carry out the systems which have been the study work of great generals in great wars since the beginning of the world to the present day. Have one army; an army of men who recognize instantly that the first duty of a soldier, in his duty to himself, is to obey." In asking for time to make soldiers this was what was meant. Our volunteer army, who came at the president's call so grandly, could not tell what all of being a soldier meant. It felt itself higher up in the social scale than the regular army. It fell far below, in many instances, in dignity.

Our war is ended in 113 days. Our brothers, sons, fathers and husbands have been sacrificed to America's honor. They have suffered necessary and unnecessarily. Yet our men have had no Libby prison, no Andersonville prison, no Florence prison. Their

deaths have been merciful in comparison, their present sufferings can be remedied and we could not have war without some homes being broken. We must bear it.

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