

THE WIDOW IN DOUBT

[Town Topics War Correspondent.]

I hope that the investigating committee appointed by the president to unearth mistaken war methods will not turn out a white-washing committee. To me it looks bad for exposes when a man, a dyed-in-the-wool politician like Colonel James A. Sexton, of Chicago—the commander-in-chief of the Grand Army of the Republic—is to be one of the nine. Colonel Sexton has the reputation of being a "square man;" but "square" with him signifies to stand firmly by his constituents. Like the Chicago Inter-Ocean of other days, he will escape lies, but avoid the truth if truth will in any way reflect upon the integrity of the man who chances to belong to his party.

This investigation committee should be composed of men who want nothing of this administration, and expect nothing of the next. Politics have knocked the foundation pins out from under all military management from the time the war began, and politics alone stands responsible now for the suffering of our soldiers. In June from Tampa, I said this:

"While these army officers are saying nothing, it looks to me as if many of them feel keenly the position they are in. They are humiliated before these military attaches who are here to represent different countries. They seem like children at school, who are being punished for something they do not deserve. While our regular army is equipped and ready for everything our volunteer army is not ready, is suffering, and these time-honored officers, who love all soldiers, suffer, because they, too, are helpless. Their hands are tied. Their judgment ignored. Smiles do not often light up their faces. There is care and anxiety in their expression, and the character lines are gradually becoming drawn to a tension. Why? Because politics continually reach in to interfere and to slaughter good sense, and directly our soldiers. Things go wrong because at present there is no real head—political heads have not the ability and our military heads are given no opportunity."

I hate to say "I told you so," but a little further along in that same letter I asked: "How long will it be before our able military men will be left to work out this conflict in their own way without interference?"

All this, mind you, was early in June. It may not be plain in Washington, where the blame lies for all that has come to the army since then, or understood fully by the people, but to those in the field, so far as these three departments that are to be investigated—the quartermaster, the medical and the commissary—it needs no investigation to discover what is the matter. It is summed up in a nutshell: Civilian appointments of incompetent men.

Civilians, however, are not altogether alone in the falling down. One of the greatest crimes of the war was when General Brooke allowed the only pure drinking water at Chickamauga to be cut off. Because of that alone, we have now to contend with the "Chickamauga typhoid," which is considered the worst of all the camp fevers. The owner of Crawfish Spring wanted \$10,000 from the government for this spring. It was a question whether or not it belonged to the Leiter hospital property, anyway; but the man, like everybody else in that thing out of Uncle Sam, and threatened to cut it off unless he received his price. The water was cut off. Many of the soldiers never knew why

their four mile trips for drinking water stopped, nor why it was suggested—not ordered—that they boil the water from the hydrants. There were not facilities in camp for boiling water, and no way of cooling it after it was boiled.

Anyway, what was \$10,000 to our government when fifty thousand lives were at stake.

One great reason for neglect of fine detail, for oversight in keen management of General Brooke and other commanding officers at Chickamauga, was the number of women demanding attention at all times. Officers' wives were in such evidence, in camp and out of it, that many times reports were not properly made, and complaints were nipped in the bud; there was eternally the wife to hear what was to be said. Nothing could be confidential; nothing could be sacred. If an officer, in making a report, chanced to have an opinion of his own, and the wife of the superior officer thought differently, the wife won out. A lot of good work was handicapped in this way, and commanding officers were left many times in ignorance of things that should have their attention.

It sounds far fetched to say that a few women interfered in the welfare of thousands of soldiers, but a general has one wife, and that wife never feels quite in the swim until war comes, and war does not come often. Her day was short in this war, but she was there. If you wanted to know the president's innermost thoughts and the next move of the secretary of war, all you had to do at Chickamauga was to sit down among these "army women." There was never but one great general, but one real commanding general, and that one, of course, the woman's own husband, and he in the most sacred confidence of the administration.

A thing that would amuse me if it did not appear so woefully absurd, is the hint thrown out at various times about General Miles wanting to be president of the United States. Why, that man is so much of a soldier that I am sure he would not leave the army if England's throne were offered to him. One paper—an organ of course—will say that he wants to be a democratic candidate, and another, or the same paper at a different time, will claim that he desires to be a republican candidate for the presidency. Bless you, General Miles does not want to be anything of the kind. I am sure. I don't believe he knows anything about politics, aside from the serious difficulties he has encountered in the carrying out of his military ideas. As a looker-on it has seemed to me that the heart and soul of the Indian fighter are in the army, and that his highest ambition would be satisfied if he could see himself in a position to care for the soldiers from a military standpoint without the interference of political power. At Tampa I saw him grow heartsick, and ready to sacrifice himself and the dignity of his position as a figurehead in Washington to go with the army and protect it in Cuba from what they were suffering there, and what he foresaw they must suffer in a foreign country under the management of ignorant civilian appointments.

Nothing was right in the very beginning, and from Tampa our army started with everything wrong. The jealousy existing between the innumerable major-generals and brigadier-generals—and incidentally their wives—will preclude an honest endorsement from them for any one major-general being placed in the fullest command of all military departments; but this is what should be done to insure, for the future, humane treatment for the

army. Politics should, in this instance, stand aside and give full power to military heads. As it stands today, war systems are ruined and politicians are cursed.

What has become of the sons of somebody, the nephews of politicians, the civilians with shoulder straps? Have any of them distinguished themselves? I had my eye on a few, and thought to let them out of the war in a blaze of glory from my pen. I could not follow them into Cuba, but I remembered them affectionately, and had my blaze ready to touch off with accounts of their bravery. I made of myself an investigating committee, and desisted after the second name on my list. My blaze would not burn. My first son was rescued from a perilous position under a freightcar, where he was hiding, and my second one succumbed to the first ache in his little toe as an excuse to stay in the hospital or be carried about on a stretcher. I decided it would never do to hunt up the rest of them. If these two flunked, all hope for the others was gone.

The punishment of Cadet Sheldon at West Point for refusing to salute a civilian fencing master recalls to my mind some salutes that went amiss at Chickamauga. Shoulder straps in this war have put many a "beggar on horseback." One day in the street at Chattanooga a private met a second lieutenant. Standing near was a first lieutenant from General Wade's staff. The second lieutenant said to the private:

"Why don't you salute me?"

The private, a refined looking volunteer, looked astonished and finally said: "What is the matter with you, John?"

"Don't you dare to call me John, and if you don't salute me I will have you placed under arrest," answered the lieutenant.

The private gave the salute with a cynical smile and passed on. Just then the second lieutenant met the lieutenant from General Wade's staff. He did not salute.

"Why do you not salute me sir?" said the first lieutenant.

Eh—sir—what? stammered the second.

"I am your superior officer. You should practice what you preach. I expect you to salute me," replied Lieutenant H—

The salute was given surily, and the second lieutenant went his way as Lieutenant H— called the private to him. He said:

"Are you personally acquainted with that lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "I have known him eleven years. Seven years of that time we were schoolmates, and for four years we have been privates together in state militia. He has just received his commission."

On General Grant's staff was, or is, a man by the name of Levey. He is a lieutenant. He was sitting on the piazza of Lookout Inn one morning, when a little smooth-faced private came his way. The little private seemed not very used to uniform or salute, but he was out for Uncle Sam and for war, and for all there was in it and he watched his opportunity to salute this lieutenant, who did not return the salute, but said:

"Where is your blouse?"

"They have not been issued to us, sir."

"Then get off the piazza," said the officer of General Grant's staff.

The young soldier was dressed with blue flannel shirt and belt, a perfectly proper uniform, and was visiting his mother at the inn. There was a howl of indignation from the ladies on the piazza, but the little private stepped

out of the presence of his superior officer.

A few days after this a special correspondent for a New York publication was coming from General Sanger's headquarters. It was raining and the curtains to her carriage were down. The driver was stopped by an orderly, who requested that an officer from General Grant's staff be taken to the station. The driver said the carriage was engaged, but the orderly insisted that all carriages in the national park were public conveyances. The correspondent said:

"I have hired this carriage for the day, but I have no wish to be unaccommodating. Who is the officer?"

"Lieutenant Levey," replied the orderly.

"Lieutenant Levey is not a gentleman and he cannot ride in this carriage," said the war correspondent.

The orderly looked astonished, but said loyally—by the way the orderly was a member of the Fourteenth New York—

"I have always found him gentlemanly."

"He is a cad just the same, and cannot ride here—wait a minute. On second thought I will allow it. I want to tell him what I think of him," replied the Chickamauga warrior.

Lieutenant Levey took a seat with the lady and the orderly, with satchels, piled in with the driver. The correspondent said:

"I did not at first consent to extend the convenience of my carriage to the station."

"Why not?" said the lieutenant, with an insinuating smile and a willingness to continue conversation.

"Because I do not like you."

"Not like me—me?"

"Yes, you. You treated a little private shabbily at Lookout Inn. All ladies there dislike you."

"He was drunk," said the lieutenant. "Oh, no. He was not drunk. He was there on a pass to visit his mother."

"No, he was drunk, and asked me the way to the bar," insisted the lieutenant.

"To say a soldier is drunk seems to be a favorite way some of you officers have of defending yourselves. That little private was not drunk, and was only learning how to make a military salute. I am afraid you have discouraged him in further attempts. You know he was not obliged to see you."

"Well, he was drunk, and I told him to get off the piazza, so he would not disgrace himself."

The correspondent looked at Lieutenant Levey silently, and then said: "It will make an excellent story for my paper."

"Good heavens! Do you write?" asked the startled lieutenant.

"Sometimes."

"That was not me at all—I really remember nothing about the circumstances."

"But you just said the soldier was drunk."

"Well, it was not me. I know nothing about it. It was somebody else."

"A man who would do a thing like that would be an awful cad, wouldn't he?"

"It was not me—I tell you if was not—"

"But a man who would do a thing like that would be a cad, would he not?"

"I tell you it was not me—"

"But a man who would do a thing like that would be a cad, would he not?"

"Yes, but you are mistaken—"

"He would overreach his authority, would he not?"

"Yes, but really now, you must not think it was me."

They were at the station. Lieutenant Levey was going to Washington to try to get a promotion to major if possible.

Another day an officer met a private who had both arms full of packages. The soldier stood still for the officer to pass, but the officer stopped.

"Why don't you salute me, sir?" roared the shoulder strap.

The soldier commenced to put down packages. I stopped also. The officer looked at me and mumbled something which sounded like "Never mind," and walked on.