THE WIDOW IN PEACE

[Town Topics War Correspondent.]

Surely someone was wise in selecting Montauk Point as a camping ground. It is ideal; sea breez, sea bluffs, salt air and ocean on one side, lake and fresh water on the other, rolling hills, rocky and dry soil and a fine harbor, and an opportunity for perfect sewerage.

Its only drawback is the lack of preparation. This is appalling. If it be true that it was thought out and selected as a place for our home-coming soldiers to rest and recuperate long before the arrival of the Round Robin petition asking to nave our army brought away from Cuba, then this neglect to prepare for them is even a greater crime tnan appears on the surface. God knows the surface is black with crime.

Long Island railroad officials tell me that ten days before the arrival of troops not a contract for transportation had been made, and they knew nothing officially of the demands so soon to be made upon them. The road itself is a one track road, and trains are side-tracked for the passing of other trains. The trip from New York is scheduled for four hours. The time to go back and forth is always from five to nine hours—never less—except by accident. You drag along in stuffy old cars—quite as bad as those running between Chattanooga and Chicamauga. You are fed on candy, fruit and newspapers. When you reach Montauk you strike a pandemonium that makes a wild western town civilized in comparison. And this within a short distance of great, Greater New York.

Wooden sheds make waiting rooms; a long rough-board building makes a lunch-room. Down the dusty road are coming army ambulances bringing sick soldiers to the station and taking to the different camps incoming passengers. Around the station are army wagons, buckboards, dilapidated carriages, milk cans empty, milk cans filled, protected with ice, and souring without ice, and hucksters and intolerable heat and thick, stifling dust and people—people!

In it all, filling all space, are our weary sick soldiers; soldiers coming to the station to leave on furlough. Some too weak to walk ride over the rocky roads in jolting wagons; others crawl along on legs that are so feeble a halt is made every few steps; again, pale and sick looking ones support weaker ones, and then there are stretchers on which rest almost lifeless ones who are carried the three or four miles by the well ones. They, getting to the station, rest in the shade of the sheds, wait for their transportation, and, then, if still alive, take the first outgoing train after they receive this precious paper—many of them without money and all of them without attendance—going home, or somewhere, out of this work of theirs for glory and country.

As I hung around the station an hour or so waiting for some kind, any kind, of a conveyance to bring me up here to the general hospital, I could but wonder why these honor-saving heroes of ours, with suffron-colored and skin-drawn faces and almost impossible step, some of them with a vacant stare in their eyes, were allowed to go away.

Three more were alighting from a high lumber wagon. Their haversacks were too heavy—they could not lift them down. There was no one to help them. I collared an idler and enlisted him into service. The three boyish faces lighted up. With wan smiles they told me they belonged to the First Illinois infantry and were going home to Chicago. As they spoke of home a look came into their eyes and a tremble into their smile that would have reminded their mothers of their babyhood. But these boys in the early twenties were bent; their faces were yellow and there was a look of age, death-cold, in their faces that come sometimes in the infirm sixties. They had their furloughs and they were to get their transportation here at the station. I told them I would watch their haversacks while they attended to this. In a few minutes they returned with the light all gone from their countenances and with it their superficial strength. The despair of disappointment was with them; they would not be able to get transportation for several hours, there were so many ahead of them, and perhaps then all the trains would be gone and they would have to wait into the night and possibly all night. They sank down on the ground. I asked them why they had started in such feeble condition. One of them said:

"They told us in the hospital we were able to go, and there was no room for us—so many more sicker than we were, waiting to come in. We are all right. Some of the boys were brought down on stretchers—I am afraid they will never see home."

I went to the department in one of the wooden sheds where transportation was being issued, to see if in some way these three who were so anxious could get the next train, which left in an hour. I found a man standing on a box or barrel in the centre of the one large room. Soldiers were packed in around him without moving space, waiting for their names to be called. My three soldiers who were resting in the shade seemed better off than these. Every face had a piteous hope that his name would be the next one called; every face had that same look of ghastly death infection. I had not the heart to ask that any wait. I turned back to my Illinois boys. They were sleeping, with their heads resting on their haversacks. A man stood near, watching them. His face was pale, with a suppressed emotion. As I looked at him he said:

"If my boy could only have been one of these"—he did not try to hide his tears. "I have a furlough in my pocket for him, but he died this morning."

He said he would help those boys to get their transportation and their train.

A woman passed me on the platform. She was supporting a young soldier, a head taller than she. He had that vacant, dazed look in his face and was deathly white. They were mother and son. She had found her boy—for whom she had been hunting a week—and was taking him home.

All the steps to this platform, every bit of shade, all waiting rooms, lunch-room, baggage-room, every available spot was filled with soldiers, waiting, waiting, waiting for transportation home and to hospital. I could not understand. It looked as if someone were trying to shirk responsibility—to get rid of them. If this Camp Wikoff was theirs to rest and to recuperate, why were they being sent away?

I finally succeeded in getting a seat in a wagon, and was brought to the general hospital. Here I found that 150 soldiers had been taken from their cots, and told to dress to make room for others, some of the nurses and doctors said, while others, more indignant, said it was to get ready for the president's coming, and to hide from him all it was possible to hide. On further inquiry, I found that 500 sick had been sent away before the coming of the president, and they were still being forced to leave their cots and dress. In making the effort to rise and dress they would fall back fainting, and one poor fellow, after three attempts, fell back unconscious. He died this morning. As I saw and understood these things, I looked at the blue sky above, and I wondered if it really could be our own beautiful land where such barbarism is existing; if it was God's own country, that we profess to love, where dying soldiers are ordered to move, to make ready for others to come or for the coming of the president. I worked diligently to discover who gave such an order. It was impossible to find out. I only know the order was given.

A great deal was done to get ready for the president. It was surprising, the amount of work that can be done in two days. If work for the home-coming soldier had been done on the same scale, there would not be these horrors to tell now. The president and the poor soldier are the innocent victims of—of—much!

The last one thought of in this war of ours—after he is set to fighting—is the poor soldier. He says nothing complainingly. He tells you facts without comment. Two things, however, are very plain. His hatred and contempt for General Shafter, and his dead patriotism. If this war against Spain's inhumanity should chance not to be quite ended, it would be wise not to muster out too many of our volunteers. Where should we get our next ones?

It is not the ignorance of volunteers and their officers that has caused the most of this suffering—Senator Hanna to the contrary. In a recent interview he is quoted as saying "the illness among troops comes from the volunteer ranks." It is a very small per centage of volunteer troops at Camp Wikoff, and the illness is the same among the regulars. The glorious "Fighting Seventh," United States infantry, are encamped on a bluff overlooking the ocean. Out of the 900 left 300 are ill. They were entirely without hospital accommodation, and without one drop of medicine. All hospital room being filled to overflowing, the regiment's sick were lying in their own tents and lying on the ground. Bags for straw had been given to them, but they were too ill to fill them. Proper requisitions had been made by the officers for flooring for tents, for quinine and other medicines and necessities, and red tape was probably unravelling. Mrs. Ellen Harden Walworth, who represents the Wowan's National Relief association, heard of the distress in the "Seventh" and started immediately with immense baskets of delicacies and ganger ale in her carriage. Following were two carpenters and a wagon full of "2x4's" for flooring. On the way she stopped at Major Brown's, had a requisition signed, then at the pharmacy, where the order was filled, and in two hours the "Fighting Seventh" was beaming with gratitude, and the government could have all the time it wanted for tape work.

The government, in the course of

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