

TOPICS OF THE TIME.

Soldier and Citizen.

GENERAL J. D. COX, in writing of the policy of the War Department in 1861 of retaining the old organizations of the regular army instead of assigning its officers to command volunteer regiments, has recently said :

“Less than a year afterward we changed our policy, but it was then too late to induce many of the regular officers to take regimental positions in the volunteer troops. I hesitate to declare that this was not, after all, for the best; for, although the organization of our army would have been more rapidly perfected, there are other considerations which have much weight. The army would not have been the popular thing it was, its close identification with the people's movement would have been weakened, and it perhaps would not so readily have melted again into the mass of the nation at the close of the war.”*

Herein is recorded one of the chief glories of the Union veteran. Like Grant, he was without any liking for war. His enlistment was for a definite purpose and as a solemn duty, its term being in most cases for “three years or during [not *after*] the war.” He never had any doubts as to what he was fighting for, and when that object was accomplished, so far as it could be accomplished by his musket, he came home rejoicing as from exile and without resentment, and looking upon himself *not as a soldier whose duty it was to vote, but as a citizen whose duty it had been to fight*. His theory was that he came back to be part of a restored civil government, and not of a perpetual standing army. Valuing peace thus highly, it is natural that he should have become the chief of peacemakers. The distribution of the military element into the employments of ordinary life was a hardly less wonderful phenomenon than its composition from the farms, offices, and workshops of 1861. In a few months these men became again an integral part of our civil life, abreast of their fellows in the pursuits of peace. This recuperation from the ravages of war and absorption into the life of the citizen, was naturally even more noticeable in the South, which has since given not inferior evidences of forbearance and good citizenship.

Since the war the country has owed much to the Union veterans for services in many capacities—as Presidents, Governors, Senators, Representatives, and in other stations to which a grateful people has elevated them. It was natural that they should receive honor and distinction; moreover, so long as there could possibly be any doubt of the faithful acquiescence of the South in the results of the war, it was natural that, in a political point of view, they should receive special consideration and exercise special influence as a class. Individually, such will doubtless be the case for years to come, but there are distinct evidences that as a factor in the politics of the future the “soldier vote,” in the mass, is likely to play a less important part. Such an event will be fortunate for their fame and for the country. The traditions of the veteran will always be held in honor, and the story of his deeds in the greatest war of modern times—one of the few moral and necessary conflicts of arms—will never cease to be a cherished part of our

* Article on “War Preparations in the North,” in “Battles and Leaders of the Civil War.”

literature. But it is as true as the equation of action and reaction, that the soldier vote must disappear with the conviction on the part of the veterans that their cause, the cause of national unity,—which all now clearly see to have been the cause of human progress,—is no longer in danger. Many came to this conclusion years ago; the man who does not admit it now must be deficient either in intelligence or in candor. For what sentiment of alarm can exist in the presence of the reiterated expressions of loyalty and patriotism which have been heard from all parts of the busy South within the past three years,—a sentiment which even the burning discussion of the disposal of the battle-flags has not served to diminish in the least! With some opportunity of knowing the feelings of Southern soldiers on this subject, we believe that they are expressed in the fullest measure by the speech of Colonel Aylett of Pickett's division at the memorable meeting of Union and Confederate veterans on the battle-field of Gettysburg last July. “The flags which have been won,” said he, “are yours, and what is yours is ours; we have made them lustrous with American heroism. Keep them, return them, destroy them, as you will.” The cordial feeling on the Union side was not less noticeable. To take a true measure of the importance of such reunions (and this is but one of scores) the reader has but to fancy how impossible their counterpart would be twenty-five years after the battle of Sedan between survivors of that memorable field. No, it would be unwise to send back the flags in a body so long as their voluntary return by the separate commands who took them thus widens the area of inter-sectional good feeling.

In the face of these multiplied evidences of a Union restored in sentiment as well as in fact,—and it was surely for the larger and truer Union that the Northern soldier fought,—we hold that the man who attempts to revive or trade upon the dead issues of the war should be regarded as a public enemy, to be held in deeper contempt than an ordinary disturber of the peace as his offense is more far-reaching and his motives more deliberate. There can now be no motive for sectional feeling that is not personal, partisan, or mercenary, and we believe that recent events indicate that the public is in no mood to tolerate its revival, whether exhibited in the cant of ambitious party leaders, in the public bad manners of political boycotters, or in the adroit and interested flattery of pension agents. Not the least of the reasons why the veteran should disavow this misuse of his honorable history is that the ultimate object of all such class movements is to distract public attention from the evasion by political parties of their real business and their only reason for existence,—namely, to take a definite stand on questions of the day, to the end that the public will may have through them an unmistakable expression in the guidance of the government. Any other conception of party is a farce and a delusion, under which the purposes of the party managers and not those of the voters become successful. This tergiversation of parties can measurably be reduced by the completer fusion of the soldier element, as well as of every other class,

with the great body of citizens. The endeavor to play the veteran as a pawn in the political game is one which may well excite his indignation, since it degrades that which should be his highest honor.

It would result in an enormous service to the country if the men who fought for the preservation of the Union would ask themselves whether their work is complete,—whether, unapproachable as is our system in theory,* it is, as administered, the model which they would be satisfied to hand down to posterity. Let veterans who are properly sensitive in regard to the *emblems* be sure that also they do not fail to cherish the *substance*, of their victory. Many evils menace us—far too many for us to waste our energies in combating fancied ones. What has been preserved by the war, fundamental as it is, is merely the possibility of a continuously great and happy nation. Constitutions and laws “can only give us freedom”; it is the use we make of this freedom that will determine the value of our national life and its place in history. The Union, therefore, will have to be saved over and over again, first from one danger and then from another. Just now it needs very much the help of the best thought and energy to save it from “the mad rush for office” which has wrung despairing cries from our later Presidents. At this most critical stage of the Merit System,—the stage of partial success,—and when special efforts are making to array the veteran element against it, one may bespeak for it the thoughtful consideration of those who gave their best years that “government of the people, for the people, and by the people should not perish from the earth.” We regard the complete reform of the civil service as the cause of the people, and as the reform before all others, since it is the reform of the machinery by which other reforms are to come. So long as the personnel of the executive and legislative service is in the control of party workers, the expression of the people’s will is in the control of partisan conspiracies, backed, as they always are, by the capital of vested interests. Have our people not already suffered enough on this score? Let veterans consider whether they will lend their influence to the impairment (even, apparently, in their own favor) of a system which substitutes for the will of the party henchman an equitable test of fitness for that part of the civil service which properly has no more relation to party policy than has the regular army.

Personal Records of the War.

ANY one who has attempted to settle a disputed point of war history or to construct a map of an engagement knows how desirable it is to have the fullest consensus of evidence in order to establish the smallest circumstance. The official records are invaluable and in themselves compose a large part of the history of the war. But they are far from justifying the blind faith with which they are appealed to in some quarters. Who, from the unassisted reports, would be able to reconstruct the character, the *eidolon*, of Grant, or McClellan, or Hooker, or Lee, or Jackson, or Hood?—and yet, in war, the personal equation is everything. Moreover, the official records are often inconsistent with themselves, because they are not free from human imperfections and the bias and exaggerations of the moment; and they will therefore acquire a larger

* Lord Salisbury is said to have called it recently the most conservative government in the world.

value as time goes on from comparison with the often more candid and circumstantial diaries and letters of the time and even with general recollections. In the preservation of extra-official history much has been done by the veteran organizations and historical societies—on the side of the South (where many data remain to be supplied) by the Missouri and Virginia Southern Historical Societies, among others; in the North notably by the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Historical Society of Rhode Island and by the Boston, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and other Commanderies of the Loyal Legion. It would be well if these bodies could add the important function of editing to those of collecting and publishing historical data. This could often best be done locally, by comparing the concurrent testimony of the survivors of each regiment in the neighborhood in which it was recruited. In this way it may yet be possible, by the aid of letters from the field, to sift out errors and to establish a body of historical evidence concerning the regiment which will have authority in the verdict of the future. The regimental record is, after all, the unit of army history. Happily regimental and State pride have produced a considerable body of this writing. But no veteran should consider himself released from the service until he has made the most accurate record possible of what he saw and knew. The large number of such manuscript narratives which we have received in the past three years, and which lack of space and the topical plan of our series have made unavailable, have included many of importance as cumulative or direct evidence. This material, carefully edited, and prefaced by a schedule of the subject-matter, may well be deposited with the archives of some historical society where in years to come it will be accessible to those students who will take the trouble to examine and weigh it. We have already presented to our readers many important narratives of the military events of the great struggle, written by privates and officers on both sides. We are now about to take a broader look at the War for the Union from another point of view,—through the kindly eyes of him who wisely directed its policy, and whose principles triumphed to a fuller nationality. From the story of the man in the ranks to that of Abraham Lincoln let no true record of the contest perish and no lesson of it be lost to the new, united nation.

The Last Hope of the Mormon.

THERE comes a time, in pitched battle, when one of the two opposing lines begins to show those signs which, to a military eye, indicate failing energy and a readiness to give up the struggle. The charges which have hitherto been rapid, successive, and resolute are succeeded by an inexplicable pause and a wavering of the whole line; or the crowning charge, on which the eyes and hopes of the whole line have been fixed, becomes slower and slower in its advance until it halts irresolute; or the last reserves are hurried into action, without increasing the energy of the defense. It is at such an instant that Waterloos and Gettysburgs are lost and won; and the indications are that such an instant has come at last to the Mormon hierarchy.

No warfare has been more intolerable to the American people than that which its Government has been compelled to wage for years past on the so-called re-