The President and the Soldiers

By W. E. BURGHARDT DUBOIS

It is a curious fact that in matters concerning the Negro-American opinion—and bitter and almost vindictive opinion—usually precedes any careful knowledge of the facts. For instance, in the recent matter of the dismissal of certain companies of Negro soldiers I find myself very much unsettled in mind as to just what the real facts are. Nor is this altogether my fault. Instead of giving to the country a careful statement of the facts, the administration has been willing to let the country know simply the punishment with a general and rather hazy statement of what really took place. I am therefore not sure at all what I ought to say about the trouble. If, however, the facts as I gather them are true, then I and every other American must condemn the president's act.

I understand that out of 170 soldiers, twenty or fewer have been guilty of serious misdemeanor and in punishment for this all of the 170 are dismissed without honor from the army. Now if this is true, then the first thought of any American is that those 170 soldiers must contain three distinct sets of men: twenty guilty men, some number of men who know who the guilty men are and certainly some number who do not know. The twenty guilty men should be punished; the men who know who those guilty men are and refuse to tell ought to receive some less severe punishment. But out of that 170 men there must be a considerable number, fifty, perhaps a hundred, who do not even know the guilty ones. Certainly that they should be punished, is absolutely wrong. Moreover, civilians understand that soldiers are under strict discipline, that there are certain persons who are responsible for what they do. If this is so, then the officers and under officers, who are responsible for the government and for the actions of these soldiers, also deserve punishment, even though they happen to be white. Especially ought the punishment to fall upon them if they are unable to give an account of their men. So much for the situation if the facts are as stated.

But, and here comes the more puzzling part of the whole story, there is alleged with certainly an appearance of truth, long continued abuse and even disgraceful treatment of these soldiers by their fellow citizens in this Texas town. The country already knows how ready Mr. Roosevelt has been to defend the uniform of the United States when it is simply a matter of skating rinks. It is rather surprising therefore that something has not been done to punish the disgrace put upon the uniform in the matter of ordinary civil and personal rights. Certainly it would look as though the United States uniform might protect a man even though he were colored. If it is true that these soldiers were treated in the public streets of this Texas town with the sort of indignities that are reported, then retaliation, even though riotous and wrong, is not completely without excuse. How far then the outbreak was retaliation depends of course upon the facts of the case of which again I am largely ignorant. But further than this there comes a story, with how much truth back of it, I am unable to say, which alleges that it is not certain that the outrages committed, were committed by these soldiers at all. It is alleged with some appearance of truth that the soldiers had nothing to do with the shooting and that it has never been proven to the satisfaction of any ordinary court of law that any of these 170 soldiers did the shooting. Now even at this, if this story is not proven, yet the very doubt in the case makes the action of the president all the more extraordinary and makes the demand on the part of Negro-Americans and on the part of the whole American people for a thorough investigation of the affair imperative and not lightly to be passed by. This affair like others will soon be a matter of history; justice or injustice will be done the soldiers. But the net result, even if the facts are as first related, will leave in the minds of fair Americans an unpleasant estimate of Mr. Roosevelt. My impression of Theodore Roosevelt first when he came to the presidential chair was that of an honest man determined to do his duty in spite of all opposition. I have striven to hold that estimate—but I must say that as things go on I find it more and more difficult. I find myself more and more coming to look upon the man as impulsive, not only in bravery but also in cowardice; as a man who will stand up for a thing when he is right and will stand just as stubbornly when he is wrong. Moreover, so far as my own people are concerned, I am asking myself what after all have we to thank
The emblematic good of knowledge great,
Within the reader's marble-circled room,
When
In mouldering and gray magnificence
And through the darksome passages shall flow
Among the mellow archives shall resound
Too, all the lovely forms of fabled realms.
Ah! now for some enchanted Byron's pen
In many a silent beam, the silver flood
A splendid palace for the living dead!
The peerless image of the old Shakespeare wise,
— Then generations, yet unborn will view
On this as on the Coliseum scene,
And in the lucid mellowness is seen,
With all his lofty compers gathered 'round.
Ah! but the period now distant will exist,
To trace another few immortal lines;
The crowning labor of a sleeping age.
The vivid light from heaven soften'd is,
From Cynthia's high roving ancient keep.

Lines to the New Congressional Library
By MAXWELL HAYSON

Oh! mighty edifice of quarried stone,
What sacred treasures numberless are thine,
There seeks his level on the sheeted dome,
The lavished glory of a nation strong,
The golden sun in central lucent bloom.
In simple wonder in his fertile fields
Along suburban banks of flowing streams,
And driving cityward his laboring team,
The farmer this majestic structure sees
Abundant with the toil of vanished years.
Those men who wrote, unconscious of their fame,
In this new world review the home of man
Again in peaceful bust on honored throng;
Lo! Dante from a quiet granite nook
His silent glance cast on the open world,
As if to breathe upon his slumbering time,
The life and spirit of these alien days:
— Amid impressive chimes of noonday bells,
Which bring melodiously on iron tongues
An incantation as the thoughts rove back.
Huge Neptune, stern in mythological calm,
The towering symbol to the fountain place,
And everywhere displayed by hand of art.
The emblematic good of knowledge great,
Too, all the lovely forms of fabled realms.
Within the reader's marble-circled room,
The vivid light from heaven soften'd is,
From Cynthia's high roving ancient keep.

The farmer this majestic structure sees
Abundant with the toil of vanished years.
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