

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

Theodore Roosevelt for? So far as I see we have to thank him for three things: for asking a man to dine with him, for appointing another man, quite worthy of the position, as collector of the port of Charleston, and for saying, publicly, that the door of opportunity ought to be held open to colored men. On the other hand we have growing and serious charges against him. The door once declared open, Mr. Roosevelt by his word and deed since, has slammed most emphatically in the black man's face; we have effort, plain and almost frantic effort, to show the South in later years that the dinner and appointment did not in any way show that Theodore Roosevelt differed in his estimation of black men from most people in the white South; representatives of some of the worst elements in the South have had effusive welcome at the White House. He has written letters expressing great sympathy with the South and great friendship and very little to show that that friendship was extended to the black South. Above all we have had repeated presidential messages which stated and reiterated two things which colored people regard as untrue, libellous and dangerous: first, that in some indirect way the best class of Negroes were responsible for Negro crime, a thing which the Negroes emphatically and repeatedly deny, and secondly, that a restricted sort of education is best for black people. No public person in the United States for years

has played upon these two allegations more frequently and more generally than Theodore Roosevelt, and in return for it he has earned the distrust and disapprobation of the best class of black men. It is no excuse for these shameful utterances to allege that they were edited and approved by certain Negroes. They are not approved by the black race—they are bitterly resented. That this opposition is going to injure Mr. Roosevelt is doubtful; undoubtedly he could be re-elected to the presidency without the help of black folk or he can reach other goals in his ambition; but certainly it cannot be to the credit of any man who at bottom wants to do the right thing or desires in any degree the approbation of his fellowmen and of a good conscience to go from high office with the consciousness that he has deliberately and repeatedly wronged the most helpless eighth of his country. Under such injustice, we as black men have but one duty; to insist continually upon the doing of justice to the soldiers. If this is not done, to punish with our vote, so far as we can, those men who refuse to do it and always and ever in a quiet and manly and insistent way to insist that the responsibility for Negro crime lies primarily upon the injustice done black men in the South and that no nation or race can righteously or justly be restricted to the career of making themselves footstools for their enemies.

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,
 And in the lucid mellowness is seen,
 Complacent in the burnished tranquil bronze,
 The peerless image of the old Shakespeare wise,
 With all his lofty compeers gathered 'round.
 A splendid palace for the living dead!
 Ah! but the period now distant will exist,
 When the owl's doubly melancholy song
 Among the mellow archives shall resound
 Prolific with the notes of grand decay
 And through the darksome passages shall flow
 In many a silent beam, the silver flood
 From Cynthia's high roving ancient keep.
 Ah! now for some enchanted Byron's pen
 On this as on the Coliseum scene,
 To trace another few immortal lines;
 Then generations, yet unborn will view
 In mouldering and gray magnificence
 The crowning labor of a sleeping age.