

Army Reforms

A Letter from Governor Roosevelt

[At our request Governor Roosevelt has given us in the following letter his opinions concerning Secretary Root's recommendations as to the army. Governor Roosevelt's experience as an executive officer of the Federal Government in Washington, his service in actual warfare, and his expert knowledge of political and National history, lend positive authority to what he thinks and says on this subject.—THE EDITORS.]

To the Editors of The Outlook :

All patriotic Americans should feel very proud of and very grateful to Secretary Root for the way he is handling his office. His report is as able a document as we have had from a Cabinet officer since the days of Alexander Hamilton ; it is the report of a far-seeing, constructive statesman. It is admirable throughout ; but, at the moment, I want to call your attention to that part of it advocating a reorganization of the army. The Crimean war taught England the terrible shortcomings of her military system. She profited by the teaching. Our Spanish war was so much easier a task that at one time it seemed likely we should not learn the lessons it ought to teach us. Thanks to Secretary Root, there is now a chance that we shall learn them, that we shall profit by the mistakes. After the close of the campaign in Cuba, the bitterest attacks were made upon almost all the high officials in the War Department and almost all the leading Generals in the army ; yet the real responsibility lay with the people and their representatives, who, during over thirty years of peace, had resolutely refused to prepare for war, and, as Secretary Root aptly puts it, had proceeded upon the theory that the real object of having an army was not to provide for war, but to use it in time of peace so as to secure economy of expenditure, occasional scientific work, and efficient police duty.

Nothing was done to provide for the effective organization and training of the army, as a whole, for purposes of war, in spite of the army's earnest desire for such organization and training. The staff was kept wholly separate from the line, and, indeed, the word staff was used in an entirely false sense to designate something different from what is known as the staff in all other countries. The higher officials in the quartermaster's and commissary's departments had either never, or at least

not for an indefinite number of years, served as line officers, and had no active, living knowledge of the line's needs. The ordnance, quartermaster, and commissary supplies were provided and handled by men who were utterly out of touch with the men who were to do the actual fighting ; all this being the very reverse of what occurred under our efficiently organized Navy Department. The confusion in Washington at the outbreak of the war, and the confusion worse confounded at Tampa and outside of Santiago during its continuance, were absolutely inevitable under the then existing system—a system which can be properly changed only by legislation.

But we cannot expect legislation unless there is leadership ; and this leadership Secretary Root has given. All that he says on the subject of the reorganization of the army deserves the most careful consideration of every good citizen who wishes to see our army put upon a satisfactory basis. With his usual grasp of a subject, the Secretary clearly shows that the army must be kept in a condition which will permit its being turned into an efficient instrument of war as soon as the occasion arises ; and that, moreover, there should be a comprehensive scheme of organization in outline, which will permit the raising under the best conditions of a first-class volunteer army to act with the Regulars in time of need.

The Secretary points out that in order to prepare an army for war there must, in the first place, be a systematic study by responsible officers not only of the larger problems of military science, and of all the information available as to the state of the art, but of all contingencies of possible conflict. This need can be met only by the establishment of an army war college, modeled somewhat on the lines of the naval war college founded by Captain Mahan, which has done such

admirable work. It would include the present service schools, which already do excellent work, and would provide a means by which all officers would be trained in the higher duties of their profession.

In the second place, and almost equally important, is the preparation of the material of war. We must keep pace with the progress of military science. It seems incredible that a nation which prides itself upon its mechanical ingenuity should have permitted, or, to speak more accurately, have deliberately insured, such military backwardness as was shown in the Ordnance Department at the outbreak of the Spanish-American war. Our volunteers went into the field with a weapon which was almost as inferior to a first-class modern rifle as it was superior to an old flint-lock musket. The regular artillery was just as backward; while not a few of the so-called experts were still solemnly stating that black powder was better than smokeless—which was about as sensible as if they had championed muzzle-loading smooth-bores, or, for the matter of that, arbalests.

In the third place, the Secretary advocates a process of selection, according to merit and effectiveness, among the officers of the army, so that the men of superior ability and power may as rapidly as possible be put in the important positions of responsibility and trust. This is, of course, a dangerous step if political considerations, or any considerations save those of military merit, are to be taken into account; but it is a necessary step if the army is to be brought to a high pitch of efficiency. The Secretary outlines a method which would, so far as possible, secure for each officer the consideration of his ability, faithful performance of duty, and gallant conduct, and the exclusion of all social and political influence.

Again, the Secretary recommends that

all staff appointments should hereafter be made from the line of the army for a fixed period of four or five years, the holder to return to the line at the end of the period. This is one of the most important recommendations that he makes. One great cause of the trouble with our army at the outbreak of the war with Spain was the fact that the so-called staff positions were held by elderly men who were completely out of touch with the line. Every first-class fighting army in the world is modeled on the system suggested by Secretary Root.

Finally, the Secretary recommends the continued exercise and training of the army in large bodies of troops, under conditions as nearly as possible approaching those of actual war. This means expense, but it is the indispensable prerequisite to efficiency. It is criminal folly for the Nation to keep the army so split up during long years of peace that no officer ever has command of so much as an entire regiment, and that none but the juniors see anything approaching to active service, and then to expect that, in the event of war, the aggregate of all these isolated units can act harmoniously together or can be efficiently commanded by a man who, however good, has rusted for long years without even performing the work he did in his days as a junior.

Not merely inertia, but the malign influence of officers who have procured soft places at Washington through social or political influence, will be against Secretary Root in his efforts to secure this reorganization. It is proper that every patriotic American should, accordingly, give him the support to which he is entitled, and that our representatives in Congress should realize that the adoption of his plan for the betterment of our military conditions is of grave moment to the honor and interest of the Nation.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

