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LONE FARMS BE HANGED! HE WANTS TO BE WITH THE CROWD *The Mental Attitude of Returned Soldiers*

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Illustration by Estelle M. Kerr

THIS is what we read:

The C. P. R. liner So-and-So arrived at Halifax this morning. Among her passengers were two hundred returned soldiers proceeding to their respective districts to be treated in the convalescent hospitals, and to receive their discharge papers. Among them was—and so on.

This is what we see:

A gloomy giant in a baggy khaki uniform with blue shoulder straps, or blue tie, hobbling sturdily along the street with a cane, or with crutches. He may be one of a group idling down the sidewalk. He may be mooning on the front steps on one of our local hospitals, looking about as merry and bright as a chained black bear.

This is what we think:

Dear me! Poor fellow! Wonder how HE got hurt. Hope he's a real hero! Wish I knew all about him—it would be so interesting to hear him talk. How glad he must be to be back!

This is what we are told:

That the returned soldier is "a grave problem." That he must be "properly rewarded for his sacrifices"; and that he must be put "back on the land"—you'd think the land was a crübbage board and a sick soldier was a peg that you stuck wherever you pleased. Unless we are lucky we read also Sir Rider Haggard's pleasant little talks about how eager the returned fighting man will be for "an outdoor life," which is rubbish!

And this is what we don't read, don't see, don't think and aren't told:

That our returned soldier doesn't give a hoot about an outdoor life.

That he's keener for any job than for farming.

That if he was a farmer before the war he wants to be something else to-day.

That he isn't glad he's back.

That he hates the word hero and dreads being asked to "Tell us all about it."

That he isn't eager to shed the khaki for his "civies."

— and that the passion of his life is "comp'ny." He is the loneliest man on earth. He has tasted life as none of the stay-at-homes may ever taste it. He has rubbed shoulders with death and tossed dice in the face of Gehenna. He has known friendships that make the piffling friendships of nice clean people in nice, safe places, look like tin cannon on the nursery floor. He has seen things in the way of brotherly love—the kind of brotherly love that will get itself mussy for YOU, and crawl through filth and unspeakable terror for YOU—and he comes back to civilization, first of all expectant, second of all disappointed. If he is one of a certain class of unscratched sick-men he is horribly afraid of the quiet and afraid of the tick of the clocks of civilization or the shadows of civilization, and afraid to be alone! Say what you will of war, it has given millions of men a glimpse of the unsuspected possibilities of brotherhood, and the returned soldier won't be without it—not for all the acres between Rat Portage and Grouard. This is what we fail to count on when we talk of dumping him on the prairie. In short, the handling of the returned soldier is going to be as much a factory problem as a farm problem. And if even a percentage of men is to be settled in agrarian occupations, our common notions of farm life will have to be changed.

THERE may be, as Colonel Bruce says, grave inefficiency in the Canadian hospital organization in England. But one of the most cheerful things about the whole Canadian military system is the way the Military Hospitals Commission in Canada works. The usual Ottawa commission never works; it merely collects evidence and dumps it in a blue book, any old how. The Military Hospitals Commis-



department. When the convalescent soldier reaches Halifax or Quebec, whichever his point of debarkation, agents of the Commission take him in hand. He is marked as "Class One," "Class Two," or "Class Three," according to whether he is recovered sufficiently to be

discharged immediately back into civil life, or whether he is still a convalescent. Classes Two and Three are both convalescents, but class Three men are those needing special attention. Class One man is given fifteen days' pay, free transportation and free meals to his home town. Classes two and three are passed along to the Central Depot in whatever area the men originally came from. That is to say, a man who came from a point say one hundred miles from Toronto, is sent to the Central Depot at Toronto and placed in whatever convalescent home can best handle his particular needs. After the convalescent home has done all that it can do, the man is discharged. But if he is unable to resume his old occupation before the war he is taken in hand by the Vocational Training department of the Commission. Whether he is able to resume work at once, or later after he has had sufficient special education to be able to work at a new trade, the Soldiers' Aid Commissions in the various provinces—all of them co-operating with the Military Hospitals Commission find the man a position.

BEFORE the Military Hospitals Commission was formed, and even in its very early days, the newspapers were filled with sob-stories concerning men who had been discharged when only half well, or whose pensions had not been forthcoming, or were inadequate. To-day such complaints are rare and are only to be accounted for by the supposition that the returned man has misunderstood the questions asked him. From the time a returned soldier reaches the shore of Canada until he is well enough to work, he is looked after. And not only that: as soon as he is able to work there is work waiting for him. Such, at least, has been the case thus far. He has been given an application card in the hospital. This is filled out stating what kind of work he wants and what his qualifications and disabilities are. The card is sent to the Provincial Soldiers Aid Commission and is compared with the list of "men wanted." And no shyster employer is allowed to take advantage of the fact that a soldier has a pension, either. The commission finds out first what the employer proposes to pay for the work he wants done. Then it sends the soldier, or as soon as he is able, to deal with the employer. So far, in the older provinces, there have been more employers offering than there were soldiers applying for work. In Ontario, the Soldiers' Aid Commission has handled 3,036 men. Of this number, one hundred and fifty have been absorbed in guard work; three hundred have returned to their old positions; 1,497 have been placed in new positions, and the balance have been disposed of according to their disabilities. It is some comfort to find that the need for vocational training is not yet as acute as in England and France. Up to a recent date the total number of blinded soldiers returned to Canada was only seven, and the total number of men minus limbs was one hundred. The great majority of the ailments come under the

sion seems nearer to being a really co-ordinated system than we have yet been able to get in any government