

# THE CANADIAN THRESHERMAN AND FARMER

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Johnny Canuck's "Initiative"

1919

### OUR GUARANTEE

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**W**OULD any reader of this magazine care to prescribe a standard of value to the services of the returned soldier in civil affairs? We ask the question because a certain "authority" has recently given wide publicity to the opinion that the man who has been in the army, especially the private soldier, has depreciated greatly by reason of his "loss of initiative." In the nature of things, while he has been under military discipline, he has had to do what he was told, without reasoning, to the end that in-so-far as fitting himself again into the machinery of industrial or business life is concerned he has got an obvious leeway to overhaul. So reasons this "Authority."

That cannot be the considered opinion of anyone who knows anything of the character of the rank and file of the British or the American army, least of all that portion of the grand alliance known to all the world by that imperishable title: "The Canadians." But the most ardent admirer of that magnificent fighting unit will acknowledge that even in the Canadian army there

have appeared outcroppings of bums and misfits. These, however, were misfits and bums before they enlisted or were drafted into the army. The real men, the fellows who had initiative and demonstrated it before they went overseas, will come out of it with that great quality intensified, not impaired; and we make no distinction here between the volunteer and the drafted man.

This of course refers to the men who have not been disabled by wounds or shell shock. As to these, no one will dare to generalise. There can be no two opinions here. Every individual case of the kind must be handled according to its special needs, with infinite patience, at whatever cost to the State, until that man is in a position to help himself. He is no object of charity. This much is due to him from the public treasury for services rendered just as surely as the weekly pay of any public servant is due to him on pay-day. But this is not the category we have under review. The men whose value in civil life is being depreciated are the men who in the Providence of God have passed unscathed through the awful ordeal.

Surely the pragmatist is confounding our "Contemptibles" with those goose-stepping marionettes who had their last memory of initiative whipped out of them by the Prussian junkers long before they could draw the trigger of a rifle.

As to these he might be right, but of the great mass of our Canadian boys, a thousand times no! The very reverse is the fact, and when the men do come home and start in, there will have to be "another guess." On what evidence can any one size up and arbitrarily dispose of these men in this wholesale fashion?

The physically fit Canadian army is still in France or somewhere else on its way home, so it hasn't been seen or heard from yet, far less tried out in civil life. When it or any man of it reaches his home town, is there the Hun amongst us who would introduce the lad to his old machine tool on the very day he steps into the arms of his family and friends? Not on your life! No regular subscriber to this paper needs coaching as to what is due to these men on their arrival and forever afterwards. Initiative! In all its splendid work, if there is one thing more than another that has accounted for the amazing success of the Canadian army, it was the outstanding initiative of the non-coms and the men.

When the leadership has been good, the private who did what he was told had a wonderful example of what could be done with brains and courage. When the leadership was bad or indifferent, the men, if they dared not act on the initiative, got it in their heads all the same and carried away for further use as a tragic lesson in "how not to do it." An experience of that kind is often of far greater value than if the man had really acted on the impulse with complete success. Then what of those thousands of recorded not to speak of many more thousands of unrecorded instances in this war in which the leaders have been shot down at a critical moment?

There are two words which have lost much of their hypnotic influence on the Canadian soldier since he came to close quarters with the Hun. These are "Efficiency" and "Initiative." The Hun's efficiency had been the world's nightmare for a quarter of a century, and to-day or in all history, is there a more sorry looking scare-crow than the Hun and his "efficiency?" And Johnny Canuck says that, the fellow who is everlastingly talking about "taking the initiative" is rarely equal to the business of following it up or taking anything else. So till J. C. gets home, we prefer to continue to regard him as of the salt of the soil; to see him actually "on the job" before we dock one dime's worth from his efficiency or make him second fiddle to any initiative on earth.

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