

CHAPTER III

THE RETURNING SOLDIER

The returning soldier may be unwilling to go back to the mill, mine, factory, office, or store. He has lived in the open. He has been trained along mechanical lines, to build trenches, to look out for himself. He has acquired self-reliance, and along with it a feeling of equality which has come from common service under a leader dedicated to a common cause. The psychology of the returning soldier must be borne in mind in the working out of projects for his rehabilitation. He may be restless, possibly undisciplined. He may resent private employment. In addition, a new sense of public service has been born in the non-profit-making, non-capitalistic devotion to the state.

Trench warfare, gas, shell-shock, create new and baffling diseases. They linger. They re-appear after cure has apparently been effected. A considerable percentage of the men may be

afflicted with some weakness or disease that requires continued observation.

The methods of warfare employed have increased the number of disabled soldiers. Surgery saves large numbers of men who under former conditions would not have survived. All of these men will have a proper claim upon the nation for consideration.

Invalided Soldiers.

Pensions, hospitals, sanatoriums, will involve a heavy financial burden. The government can greatly lighten this burden by offering a great variety of activities, such as forestry, reclamation work, and, in the States of the West, where open-air life is possible, and where men can work in groups rather than as isolated farmers, a new kind of agriculture should be provided. From the point of view of economy, as well as consideration for the men themselves, there should be a big-visioned programme of open-air life and agricultural reconstruction after the war.

Even were we disposed to do so, there is no public domain to distribute to the soldier, as there was after the Civil War, though the

policy then pursued was wasteful in the extreme, both to the soldier and to the nation as well. Nor would the soldier go to the land as he did two generations ago. Then we were an agricultural people. Practically everybody was familiar with farming. We were accustomed to the idea of breaking the land. We were still pioneers. Even as late as the eighties men looked upon homesteading as the natural thing for an American to do. This state of mind is gone. We are no longer a pioneer or an agricultural people. We have become industrial. The great majority of the men who have gone to the front have no agricultural traditions, training, or inclinations.

Canadian Experiences.

Moreover, the experience of South Africa after the Boer War, and of Canada in her experiments in sending the returned soldier to the Northwest, indicate that the soldier will not go to the unbroken land. He fears isolation. He is accustomed to group action. He has been speeded up to a high state of nervous tension. There is no lure to the soldier in the gift of 160 acres of land, unimproved and re-

quiring years to bring it into cultivation. Rather than accept such payment from the state he will drift to the city.

This state of mind is a reflection of a universal attitude. Changed economic conditions are attracting boys and girls from the farm. They are reducing the farming population of all countries. For the farm has failed to keep pace with the advance of the world. It is in a state of arrested development. It is archaic, unorganized, uncertain. It is unsocial, lonely, poor in the things that all normal-minded men and women want.

It is necessary to recognize that the old type of farming is at an end. It cannot compete with the city. Even from an economic point of view it does not offer the same chances of reward. The income of the average farmer is pitifully low. And it is almost as uncertain as the wage of the unskilled worker. Farming, in a large part of the United States, has almost as many uncertainties and disadvantages as a city job. And it has few of the compensations. Certainly this is true of tenant-farming. And the returning soldier who goes to the land must be a tenant or an agricul-

tural drudge, for he is not in a position to buy land.

The Trade and Labor Congress of Canada, after considering the question of unemployment in connection with the returning soldier, concluded that the present system of homesteading was useless as a solution of the returning-soldier problem. The settler had insufficient capital and experience. He either could not or would not take up a homestead or a clearing. As an alternative the congress recommended "that the government should select land for the proper carrying out of a scheme, and be requested to offer as an option to discharge from the army further enlistment for a period of five years to such men as would be willing to undertake agricultural work under the direction of qualified experts from experimental farms and agricultural colleges; that such men receive the regular army pay and allowances, with rations on the same basis, suitable accommodations to be provided, with quarters for married men and families. After such period of enlistment has expired, the men who have thus served should have the option of settlement upon suitably sized allotments of the land so im-

proved, the same to be held on leasehold terms from the Dominion government.”

The Ontario Commission on Employment unanimously voted to support the above resolution.