

PRESIDENT TAFT'S LETTER.

President Taft's letter to the Chairman of the Republican Congressional Committee is not, it must be confessed, of a sort to raise the hopes of a despondent and apprehensive party. There is nothing "ringing" about it. It has not a single touch of the 'Ercles vein—no shouts, no loud summons to battle, no shrill defiance of the enemy. The document is long and not the easiest of summer reading. It is also frankly partisan, being nothing less than the President's argument for an endorsement of his Administration, and for the election of a Republican House of Representatives next November. Nevertheless, the letter deserves serious attention, not simply because it comes from the President, but because it is a serious discussion and contains a serious programme.

Foremost in the letter stands Mr. Taft's proposal for a speedy re-opening of the tariff question. This must have required courage and firmness on his part, for it is inconceivable that the high-and-dry protectionists of his party could have consented to what they would doubtless call this playing with dynamite. And it must be set down as a notable event that a Republican President goes so far as Mr. Taft now does in admitting that the spreading discontent with the tariff is justified—justified as respects the way in which the tariff bill was log-rolled into shape, and as respects many of the excessive and burdensome duties which it contains. There is no more of the former talk about the Aldrich-Payne law being the best ever enacted by the Republican party, or of appeals to rest and be thankful. The impatient voice of the West has made itself heard at Beverly, and a Republican President has been forced anxiously to consider how to remove Republican tariff grievances.

His plan is explicit and logical and could be made feasible, so far as it goes, if the Republicans in Congress really desired to make it so. Mr. Taft would attack the schedules in detail. He would get from the experts of his tariff board a complete and scientific investigation into the need and the incidence of any given set of tariff taxes, and then, declares Mr. Taft, "I expect to bring the matter to the attention of Congress with a view to its amendment of the tariff in that particular." In order to facilitate such piecemeal revision,

he hopes that Congress will adopt a rule shutting out all amendments to a proposed change in one schedule, designed to add changes in others. It must be admitted that if a Republican Congress truly wished to move forward in a swift and business-like way to correct one tariff injustice after another, President Taft has shown how the thing could be done. But it would mean a political revolution.

In this connection, one part of President Taft's argument against the election of a Democratic House shows, rather amusingly, how little attention he has given to the political history of the tariff. He declares that a Republican majority is essential to the success of the method of revision schedule by schedule, since the Democrats would be opposed to any step of that kind. We fear that the President must have forgotten what happened in 1892. In that year a Democratic House did precisely what Mr. Taft now asserts that only a Republican House can be depended upon to do—namely, it passed several bills repealing or amending separate clauses of the tariff. By a large majority it voted to put binder twine on the free list; to remove all duties from cotton bagging; to abolish the protective rates on wool and woollen goods. This last ought especially to interest Mr. Taft, as he has declared that the woollen schedules of the Aldrich-Payne bill are "indefensible."

But what became of those bills to revise piecemeal? They were contumeliously rejected by the Republican Senate. Furthermore, they were covered with ridicule by protectionist orators and the protectionist press. The whole thing was just a piece of Democratic ignorance and folly. It was the policy of pin-pricks. The tariff was a beautiful artistic creation, from which you could not remove one part without destroying the whole. Speaking more frankly and brutally, the spokesmen of protected interests said that they had secured their favors as a matter of bargaining with others, and would not yield a stiver of what they had got without upsetting the entire division of the spoils. A favorite simile was that of conceiving a protective tariff as an "arch," from which you could not take out one stone without pulling all down in ruin. These notions will inevitably return to plague Mr. Taft if he sets

about doing what all his party laughed at the Democrats for their trying to do, and he will be accused of taking up with a discredited Democratic plan. That ought not to deter him, and we do not imagine that it will; but it does put in a queer light his present contention that no help in tariff revision could be expected from a Democratic House.

For the rest, the President's letter is a sober account of what his party and his Administration have been able to accomplish in keeping the pledges made two years ago. His review of the legislation enacted cannot be challenged as unfair; and he adds to it a list of the promises which are yet to be fulfilled, and which he says a Republican Congress will be able and willing to fulfil. How great the immediate political effect of this will be, it is impossible to say with confidence. Except for his plan for further tariff revision, for which the President should have praise, he simply tells people "that which you all do know." That its inclusion in the Republican "campaign-book" will win thousands of votes, we greatly doubt. The old query, "Who reads an American book?" has been answered; but to the question, "Who reads a campaign-book?" we have never seen a satisfactory reply.

THE NEW TEST OF ROOSEVELT.

The speaking tour on which Mr. Roosevelt has now set out will furnish a test of his quality more searching, in some respects, than any to which he has ever submitted. We do not refer to the question of his personal bearing. His standards of good taste have become fixed; the country knows what they are, and does not expect him to alter them. He will doubtless go on doing things which in another man we should call shockingly indelicate or vainglorious. If he assumes that he is the most important figure in our public life, and that the nation and the whole world are waiting to be instructed by him, that is only what he has long done, and the people show no signs of being disposed to quarrel with him on that account. Anyhow, he will not change in that particular. Nor can we look for the revelation by him of any new gifts of oratory. His speeches will read very much as before in point of style. There will be the old verbose energy of dictation. But what we are curious to know

is if he will have anything new to say, whether his addresses will come to a public that is confused, politically, and in a time of hesitation, with a sense of their having struck out guiding principles and provided a lead.

It is frankly admitted that the ordeal is severe. For any other man than Mr. Roosevelt we should say that it would be impossible to pass through it successfully. Consider for how many years he has been incessantly speaking in public. Every thought that he ever had he has dragged from the recesses of his mind and uttered again and again. In an ordinary mortal this would mean that he had hopelessly talked himself out; and that, in any new exertions he might make, he could hope for no more than to display the contortions of the Sibyl without her inspiration. But Mr. Roosevelt is the eighth wonder of the world for activity and fertility and supple turning, and it is possible that he may succeed in catching the ear of his countrymen, if not by novel phrases or epigrammatic expression, by marking out a line of policy and effort which would turn confusion into clear purpose, and give men something not only to think about but to translate into political action.

For such a task, we must remember, Mr. Roosevelt has certain advantages. He has been for a year and a half out of the hurly-burly. He has had time, if not for intense reflection—we can scarcely associate that with his character—at least for observation, for detachment, for seeing American politics in just perspective. Since his return, moreover, he has had wide and varied sources of information put freely at his disposal. The symptoms of our political disease have been placed fully before him; the question is whether he is able to diagnose them. As he made deep studies of Africa before setting out to shoot there, so he has been carefully scanning our political map before starting on his present journey. Unless his former acute instinct for what is popular, for what is the rising political star to which to hitch his wagon, has grown dull with disuse, he must be in a position to know with much accuracy what are the thoughts and discontents that are to-day stirring in the hearts of his fellow-countrymen. What we must now await is the discovery whether Mr. Roosevelt is able to an-

swer back to the deeps that are calling.

It will not be enough to succeed merely in evoking great popular enthusiasm for Roosevelt himself. That will be easy. He knows how to strike the old chords. We have already heard them humming again: "I am against the crooked man whether he is rich or poor." "I will bring the corporations to time." There will be no difficulty in setting the crowd to shouting for "Teddy" and crying out that it must have him again in 1912. But all this is on the surface and ephemeral. It does not mark off the claptrap demagogue from the weighty statesman. Is Roosevelt capable of showing himself the latter? Can he go before audiences that are vaguely dissatisfied and querulous, and with sure vigor strike his hand upon the spot and say: "Thou ailest here, and here"? To be specific, take the matter of the tariff. Mr. Roosevelt is to speak in a part of the country where protective duties have awakened an entirely new spirit of resentment and revolt. Is he going to show himself capable of dealing with that great moral question as a real moralist? Will he, bravely recanting his former words and admitting that his previous lethargy in the face of a great national evil was blameworthy, put himself at the head of a movement to strike down this form of embodied injustice? Such are the questions which thoughtful friends of Col. Roosevelt are necessarily asking themselves as he travels West. His opportunity is great. The test to which he voluntarily subjects himself is severe. How will he emerge from it?

That Mr. Roosevelt is himself fully aware of the significance of his coming series of speeches, there is good evidence. He has not left his intimates in ignorance of his intention to strike out for himself, and to blaze new paths. What is to be thought of them, we must wait till we see before judging. It is one thing to furnish catch-words and party cries; it is another to send men to their homes with new and thrilling aspirations kindling in their breasts; so that they will ask only how to work and how to vote in order to compass the national good upon which their eyes have been fixed for the first time. A political orator who can point to the latter result, and can truly say that the impulses he has quickened are in the

line of the great democratic movement which now enfolds the world, may justly claim to be a leader, as well as a speaker. The next two weeks will tell us which Roosevelt aspires to be.

ARMY DESERTIONS.

That army circles are deeply stirred by the appearance of a muck-raking article on desertions, in the current *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, entitled, "The Shame of the Army," appears from the prompt and bitter criticisms of it which have appeared in one of the military weeklies. From the pen of Bailey Millard, the *Cosmopolitan* article is of the superficial hap-hazard order, touching in a sensational way the gravest problem the military service has to confront, and offering no really constructive suggestions of any kind, save that the severity of the present sentences for desertion should be decreased. The facts he brings out are not new, and have already appeared in official reports. Yet they are obviously serious enough, for there have been over 50,000 desertions in the decade from 1900 to 1910. Last year there was an increase of 498 over the deserters in the fiscal year 1907-08, the total number of deserters being 5,030, or 4.97 per cent. All of these deserters are branded as criminals, \$50 reward is offered for the apprehension of each one, and 4,000 printed descriptions and pictures of the absconders are sent broadcast to the police of the various cities. With probably 40,000 of these unapprehended, it is plain that there are far more criminals of this kind at large than of any other.

But the country, as a whole, does not consider them criminals—there is the rub from the army point of view. The old prejudice against military mercenaries persists; the average American laborer, too, considers it no serious wrong to violate a contract; and there is in many communities, notably in the West, a marked prejudice because of the frequent misbehavior of enlisted men. The standard of the latter has indubitably been raised, but the old frontier soldiers were a rough lot. In 1876, for instance, after the Custer massacre, a batch of 600 "soldiers" was hastily enlisted in the Bowery and sent West, fully half of whom are said to have deserted without loss of time, while few