

The Debate on the Brownsville Affray

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*The Debate on the
Brownsville Affray*

The useless debate
on the Brownsville
incident continues in

the Senate—useless because it is morally
certain that the Senate will not come
to any unanimous decision upon the
case, and any judgment which lacks
unanimity will have less influence on

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public opinion than the unanimous reports of the two investigations which have already taken place and the judgment of the Secretary of War based upon the evidence therein given. It is only for its effect on public opinion that the Senatorial investigation is proposed. The Senate has no Constitutional right to interfere with the action of the President as the Commander-in-Chief of the army. If he has exceeded his Constitutional powers, the only remedy is impeachment; and the Senate cannot initiate impeachment. Senator Foraker's opposition to the President's action is based on the false assumption that a soldier's position in the army is a right of which he can be deprived only as a punishment after trial. It is on this ground that he insists that the investigation should have been a public one and the witnesses cross-examined. In fact, if complaint is made against an Indian agent, a postmaster, or other subordinate official, the usual course is to send an inspector and investigate the case, and if, on the report of that inspector, the President is satisfied that the good of the service demands a discharge, the discharge follows. It would be impossible to conduct even the civil administration of the country if the head of the Government could never discharge a subordinate except upon legal evidence of crime and a formal trial. One aspect of the President's order gave to it an appearance of punishment—that which debarred the discharged soldiers from employment in the civil service, and this portion of his order the President has rescinded in the following words: "I am now satisfied that the effect of my order dismissing these men without honor was not to bar them from all civil employment under the Government, and therefore the part of the order which consisted of a declaration to this effect was lacking in validity, and I have directed that such portion be revoked." We do not say that this Senatorial debate has been provoked by the desire to gain a factional advantage in the Republican party, but it has had all the disadvantages it would have had if this had been the animating purpose. A tournament involving the

race issue between two knights errant of the character of Senator Foraker and Senator Tillman is of distinct disadvantage to the negro race and of no advantage to the rest of the people.

