

Senator Foraker on Brownsville Case

THE mysterious Brownsville case, with respect to which little has been absolutely proved on either side, was last week the subject of an exhaustive and lawyer-like review by Senator Foraker, whose speech in the Senate, in general defence of the colored soldiers, was received with hearty and long-continued applause from the galleries. He began by disclaiming any intention of denouncing the President or the Secretary of War. During the reading of his three hours' speech the utmost silence prevailed—a compliment rarely paid to a speaker either in the House of Representatives or even the United States Senate. Senator Foraker reviewed the various incidents and orders that led to the discharge “without honor” of the colored troops, some of them non-commissioned officers with long and creditable records. Most of the witnesses against the soldiers, he said, testified four different times concerning the trouble. Their testimony so given, the Senator claimed, is sufficiently contradictory to show that it is unreliable, and, moreover, “aside from the contradictions on account of the darkness of the night, many things that were testified to by these witnesses could not have possibly been observed by them.” The circumstantial evidence against the soldiers concerning the shells and bullets found after the shooting, he affirmed, turned out to be favorable to them because of the impossibility of their having had such ammunition without that fact being developed in the examinations that were made. No adequate motive for an assault upon the town was shown. The evidence shows that the soldiers frequented the saloons very little, and that they never made any complaint to their officers or to anybody else on account of their being debarred by some of the saloons of Brownsville from drinking at the same bar with white people. Senator Foraker declared, too, that the vilest criminal would not be required to submit to a trial before a judge who had even in the most casual way expressed the opinion that the defendant was guilty. The speech closed with a very hearty tribute to the colored soldiers, who were declared to be “typical representatives of a race that has ever been loyal to America and American institutions—a race that has never raised a hostile hand against the country's flag, but that has contributed tens of thousands of brave defenders.” The Brownsville defendants, declared the eloquent and patriotic Senator—himself a gallant soldier and defender of the country—“ask no favors because they are negroes, but only justice because they are men.” Senator Foraker's bill, which he so vigorously supported in his speech in the Senate, would provide for the restoration to the army, in their former rank, on making oath of their innocence, of all the men discharged under executive order. Senator Warner's bill, which has failed of passage, but which was favored by the Administration, would have authorized the President to permit the re-enlistment of the Brownsville soldiers of whose innocence he was satisfied. The Brownsville case, while its ethics remain the same under whatever venue it may be considered, has been greatly complicated by a mixture of civil and military methods of procedure.