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# THE NATION UNDER ORDERS

"Some Impressions Burnt Into My Soul by a Month at the Front—for the Day are Critical."

A Letter Addressed to The London Times by Michael Furse, Bishop of Pretoria.

(To The Editor of The Times.)

Sir—I have just returned from the front, where I have spent the last month in giving what help I could to our chaplains and troops in Northern France and Flanders. It was the most glorious month I have ever spent, and I want, if I can, to pass on to others a few of the impressions which were burnt into my soul during that time—for the days are critical.

I have never doubted that the spirit of our troops was as fine as men could be, but I never realized how fine it was until I had lived in it and with it. It beggars description; it is amazing. It is all the more so when you realize, as you do when you are at the front that this spirit is there in spite of the fact that the men who show it feel it in their bones that somehow the nation is not backing them as the nation could and would. That, I am convinced, is the real thing through the Army in France and Flanders; and the reason for it is not far to seek.

**At The Front.**

After fighting desperately day and night for days and weeks, with frightful losses, the men who are left are dog tired and need a rest. When they are "pulled out" to get this rest, and after three days are sent back into the firing line again, the only consolation they can draw from the fact that the troops available to take their places. When battalion after battalion of infantry—and, as recently the case in the Ypres salient, regiment after regiment of cavalry, too—have to sit in trenches after day and night after night, being pounded by high explosives and enemy machine guns and being unable to keep down the enemy's fire, then the consolation they draw is obvious—namely, that the nation has failed to provide sufficient guns or ammunition to meet those of the enemy. When, night after night and day after day, the men in the trenches keep up for every one of us a private bombardment which they throw at the enemy they will get back in answer anything from five to ten, then this consolation they draw is also obvious—namely, that the nation does not somehow realize the situation, or, if it does, has not made it its business to supply what is necessary. Man for man they know that they have nothing to fear either from German infantry or cavalry; they have proved it again and again. But they know also that it is little short of murder for a nation to ask men, however full of the right spirit, to face an enemy army equipped with big guns and the light kind of ammunition, unless they are at least equipped with equally effective munitions of war.

There can be only one impression left on the minds of men in such a case, and that is, that somehow or other the nation does not know the truth, does not understand, and is not looking them, for knowing the old counts as they do, they have no doubt that if Germany can produce these things we can, if we will. And yet, in spite of it all, they carry on, they keep cheerful, they do their best, they die gallantly. The fact is that as a nation we are just gambling on this. We know it to be there; we recognize it as the finest thing in the world; we believe it is unconquerable, whatever happens. So it is; but it will not win the war alone. It is this spirit, backed by guns and high explosives—legitimate munitions of war—which is going to smash the enemy, and nothing else. Let no one think that we are going to do it by depending on the level of the German Imperial Staff and using any sort of gas. This talk of reprisals by gas perhaps next we shall hear of reprisals by poisoning water supplies!

Simply another method of choking the nation and blinding its eyes to the real issue—the adequate

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will ever lose one iota of the glorious spirit which, in spite of lack of guns, has so far kept the enemy from our gate. They will wait, and wait gladly, for what they so sorely need, if only they know that at last this business is being taken seriously in hand.

2. It is the only way, for only so can our Commanders-in-Chief at sea and in the field lay their plans of campaign with any certainty that they will be able to carry them out. As it is now, it is simply a matter of fighting as best you can from hand to mouth. When the Government know that they can call on all the resources of men and material, then, and then only, can they lay their plans for certain success at definite times. Only so can they be able to tell the Commanders-in-Chief what they can expect, and when.

3. It is the only way, because it is the height of impudent folly to imagine that we are as a nation so miraculously endowed by the Almighty that we, and we alone of all nations in the world, can prosecute such a war as we are engaged in to a successful issue without calling on the whole resources of the nation. At present we are treating it as a sort of "side show" to the real business of life, which must be kept going "as usual." Besides, it is not playing the game by our Allies. They are keeping nothing back; we are.

4. It is the only way, because only so will the nation get the greatest efficiency out of its individual members. As it is, many men are now serving at the front who ought to be serving at home, and vice versa. The present method of "go or not as you please" is utterly haphazard and unbusinesslike, and therefore hopelessly inadequate.

5. It is the only way, because an essential factor in the successful prosecution of the war is that the right spirit should animate not only the men at the front, but the nation at their back. It is not only the right spirit which will be able to bear the strain, and see this thing through to a finish.

To-day the right spirit is lacking because the conscience of the nation is uneasy. As individuals we do not know whether we are doing the right thing or not—whether we should go on with our ordinary work or offer to go and fight. We are afraid of indulging in wholly innocent amusement. We are afraid of having a really healthy laugh—somehow we feel it would not be right. People are getting gloomy and depressed, not because they have any fear as to the ultimate end of the war (they do not know enough about the real situation for that), nor because they are not ready to back, and face gallantly the sacrifices which war has laid upon them to make, but because their consciences are not at rest. You cannot have the right spirit if your conscience is uneasy.

**A Nation Under Orders.**

That is why the men at the front have the right spirit. They are so gloriously cheerful because their consciences are at rest. They know they have done and are doing the right thing. They have made the great surrender. They have burnt their boats behind them and put themselves under orders. Nothing but the order "to do their bit" when they are told to. When they are not wanted they have no silly scruples about enjoying themselves the best they can. When the whole nation knows itself to be under orders, and knows that it is doing the right thing, we shall see the same spirit of self-surrender at home; and this spirit is essential. All we want is a lead, and a strong and fearless lead.

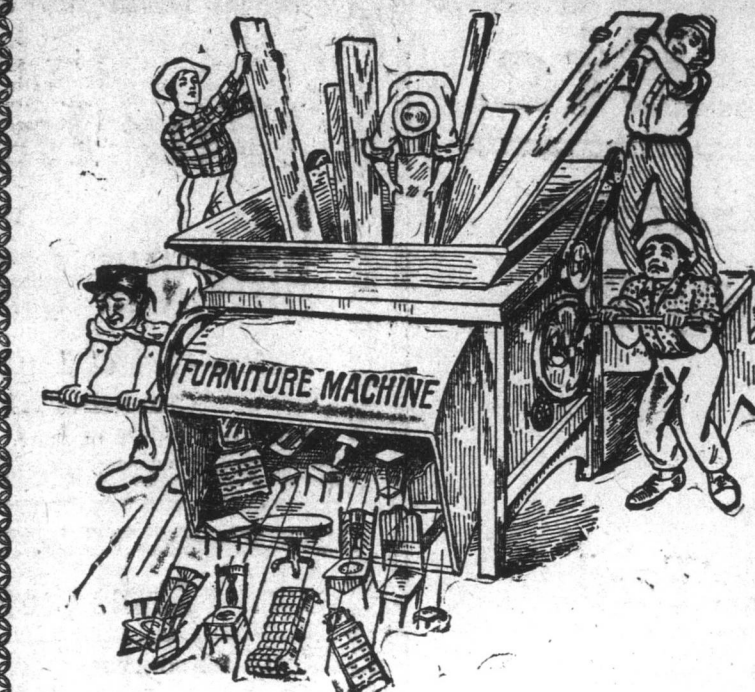
But will the nation stand it? Politics again! Well, if it won't, it will have to stand something infinitely more distasteful before very long. But, of course, the nation will stand it. The nation will welcome it with both hands, once it is given a lead. Once all are treated alike, once it is told the truth—not half-truths, which are worse than lies, but the real truth—that though we are holding the enemy through the indomitable spirit and the reckless self-sacrifice of our troops, we cannot and never shall be able to crush them until we provide our fighting men with a preponderance of munitions of war over and above the apparently ample and undiminished supply of the enemy. Advancing a few yards, or retiring a few yards, or merely holding the enemy—this is not going to win the war. It may produce a peace in the long run; but it will be a peace made in Germany and not in British manufactures.

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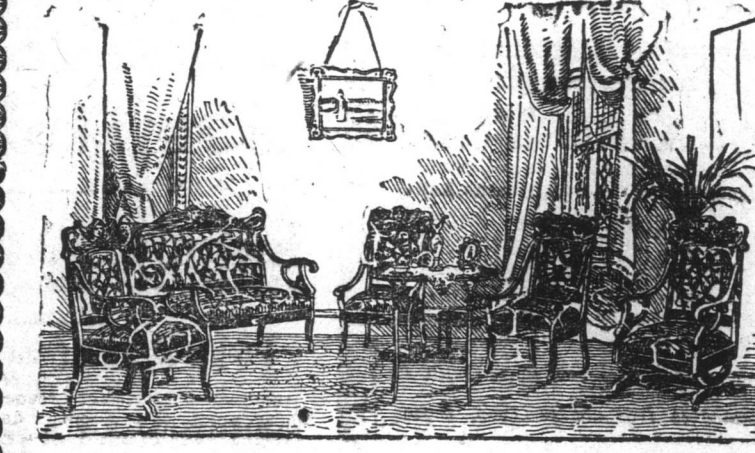
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