

A Threatened Deluge.

The Great War Literature—Shall We Have to Store Our Libraries in Grain Elevators? Sinbad Discusses Some Startling Possibilities.

IT is somewhat painful in these days of civilization and enlightenment, when we have societies covering every field of philanthropy from the conversion of Tammany to the nursing of destitute oysters, to have to confess that we have unconsciously, but none the less deliberately, added a new horror to warfare by our encouragement of what is playfully called "war literature." And yet we dare not deny it. With every succeeding war of modern days has come a corresponding increase in the volume of the literature arising from it, until the time is not far distant when every soldier in the ranks, and every mule in the transport train, will publish a volume of reminiscences, and we shall have to store our libraries in grain elevators or stack them up in vacant lots, if we wish to keep abreast of the times.

It was not thus in the old days. When the costume of our ancestors in Britain consisted of a coat of blue paint, with a collar and cuffs of real dirt, and the warriors carried a club with more knobs on it than their enemies considered strictly necessary, the magazines of the period were full of something else besides war stories and corset advertisements. What literature they had was limited to engraving on the rocks short sentences accompanied by illustrations which look something like the things a man sees just before the doctor puts ice upon his head. Even when Helen of Troy discovered that Menelaus was not the only pebble on the beach, and thus got the Trojans into trouble with all her husband's relations, the amount of war literature put on the Grecian market consisted of one solitary poem. And fortunate, indeed, was it for the youth of Canada that it was so. For if there had been more than one Iliad to wrestle with, even the comforting fact that it only mentions a bath once—and then in the light of a calamity—could hardly have reconciled them to the task of worrying through more than one history of the destruction of Troy. Julius Caesar, too, was commendably brief in his remarks upon the policy of extermination he found so successful in extending the civilization of Rome. A few casual paragraphs as to whether his opponents were clothed in sheep skins, like a barbaric version of Mary's little lamb, or whether they attired themselves only in a chastened smile and a coat of machinery oil, were all he troubled his readers with before he announced the glad tidings that he had run a mowing machine over so many of them that a census was entirely unnecessary. Nor have we had much inconvenience from the historians of the wars of the Middle Ages. Warriors encased in boiler-plate overcoats had very few chances of jotting down a few notes on the backs of their sheet-metal cuffs. Apparently, when they were not engaged in battering their opponents, they were being blasted out of their own mail clothes with dynamite—a process that must have been attended with inconveniences in the days when a gentleman's dress-suit case weighed nearly a ton and his laundry came in carlots at pig-iron rates. No one could write despatches when a council of war made as much noise as a boiler factory. And, consequently, what records we have of their prowess were either compiled by monks or minstrels—two classes of historians who relied on their imagination for their facts and on their memories for their jokes. Thus the wars of the Middle Ages merely annoyed the participants. The general public bothered themselves very little except over the results, so that "bulletin week" was unknown.

But, with the invention of printing, there came a change over the spirit of our dreams. The war historian, like the circus, was in our midst. But at first he was a snuffy old

gentleman, who wrote comfortably in a coffee-house, about half a century after the trouble was over. Hence, the public were hardly more troubled with war literature than they were in the days when the generals wore dress-coats of black tin and the privates were blacklead like a new stove. It was not until the Crimean War that we were first bothered with any literature from men who were actually at the seat of war. And then it was only from newspaper correspondents, whom nobody believes. As yet, the soldier-scribe had not put in an appearance. The soldier of our daddies was buckled into a uniform that was too tight to permit him to display any emotion. It was all he could do to breathe, without endeavoring to think. And thus, although a little cloud, about the size of a war bulletin, had appeared on the public horizon, no one dreamt of the deluge that was to come.

The war of 1870 first opened the eyes of the civilized community to the calamity that overhung them. When the German staff put on the market a military history of the war in 200 volumes, without a single word in them under 14 syllables, people began to feel as uneasy as a small boy who has swallowed a thermometer for the sake of the warmth. But fortunately, it was in German. And the only man who ever tried to translate it got chilblains on his intellectual faculties, and spent the balance of his life trying to set it to rag-time music and play it on a bassoon. So the public breathed easily again, and congratulated themselves that the worst was over. Alas! They little knew what was before them! They had not yet realized the extent of American enterprise!

With the funny little tin-pot war in Cuba the cloud burst. There was not enough fighting to go around among the 200,000 heroes, who needed some glory to carry their elections with when they got home. So they had to manufacture it. And they did. Exclusive of magazine articles, and the miles of correspondence in the newspapers, the official count shows that 670 books have been written on the Spanish-American War to date, and they are still pouring out of the press like matinee girls from a Paderewski concert.

Now, if this be the result of a war in which the casualties were fewer than those of an intermediate hockey match, what shall we have to face when the South-African War draws to a close? What shall we do when that procession of a quarter of a million heroes returns to its native land, and each individual starts to publish his particular reminiscences, impressions, or history? What shall we do when Oom Paul writes his views on "War and Whiskers" when Cronje pens a little volume on "How it Feels to Retreat," and when Buller prints his impressions of the gentleman with the face like Casey's goat who kept him dodging to and fro across the Tugela like the "growler" at a Grillintown social? What shall we do when every returning soldier resembles a pug-dog in the fact that he can a tale unfold? We cannot all emigrate to the North Pole. It would not be fair to the landlords. The capacity of Verdun is hampered by limits. Who, then, will step into the breach and head off the approaching deluge of war stories? Here is a grand chance for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. If they seize it, their names will be engraven on our hearts in letters larger than are allotted to Buller on the bulletin boards. If they fail, let them hide their diminished heads. A suffering public will be too much occupied with wading through pages of gory literature to bother its head about their existence. SINBAD.

"An Honest Politician" was the heading in a contemporary, to an obituary notice of the late Mr. Schnadhorst. The inference is not very creditable to those M.P.'s who have the misfortune to be alive.

The mania for naming children after celebrities appears to be spreading. The latest official information regarding this form of disease comes from Devonshire, where a farmer's wife has recently christened her baby "Long Tom."