

WHY I AM AN OPTIMIST.

Germany—Not Britain—Has Cause For Despondency.

By HORATIO BOTTOMLEY (Editor of "John Bull.")

Serious as the military situation undoubtedly is—and as it always must be in a great war until victory is finally accomplished—Mr. Bottomley sees no cause for despondency, but rather for pride, hope and confidence in our achievements. No public character commands a greater following than Mr. Bottomley, and his inspiring article will put new heart into the nation for the stern task that still lies before it.

I confess that it makes me ill to meet so many of my countrymen with long faces. For heaven's sake let us buck up. Are we downhearted? Now, altogether—"Not likely," or, if you prefer it, "Not 'arf.'" Imagine the British Empire being wiped out by the base and brutal half-bred Teuton—for the German is only that at the best. He is the Unclean Thing of Europe—hopelessly depraved, beyond all redemption. An we will wipe him out. There shall be no German Empire on the new Map of Europe; no Austro-Hungarian Empire—and no Turkey. France shall have back her lost provinces, and so shall Italy. Poland shall be a free kingdom—and Belgium shall have whatever she like. Heligoland will, of course, come back to Britain; and the Kiel Canal will be denationalised. Of course, there will be many other points to settle; but these are already decided. Talk about being despondent and low-spirited—we ought to be so full of elation that we'd dread to go into St. Paul's for fear of pushing the dome off with our heads. We've shown the world that hearts of oak still grow on British soil. So, when the next sad-faced son of sorrow comes walling to you about what may happen next week or next month, slap him on the back and tell him of Neve Chapelle, of the struggle between Mons and Compiègne; of fights in the air and fights by sea. Tell him how young Warneford lived and died; how Mike O'Leary won his V.C. Tell of the splendid pluck of our men, the dauntless patience and fortitude of our women. Tell of our boundless wealth in money, and of our endless wealth in men, of the ten or fifteen million more warriors we can raise if need be overseas; and if that won't make him proud and hopeful and con-

dent, tell him to go to Hades and herd with the other sad lost souls. Did you ever hear that splendid definition of a Pessimist—"one who has lived with an Optimist"? Well, I am going to reverse the words and say that an Optimist is one who has lived with a Pessimist. I have always lived with Pessimists, and that may be the explanation of why I am, instinctively, in all things, optimistic. But although when I sit down quietly and think matters out I rather lean to the idea that Instinct is a surer guide in human affairs than Reason, I do not base my optimism in regard to the war upon Instinct alone. I believe I know a few things, and I still say that if our army had not been held up for six months by want of shot and shell, and if something else which the Censor would not allow me to publish had not also happened—something which never ought to have happened—something which we shall hear a lot about when the war is over—we should to-day be discussing the Terms of Peace. Even as it is, the time when we shall be doing so is nearer than most people think.

It is, indeed, remarkable to what an extent the ordinary citizen has been driven into "the blues" by the politicians and the Press. The frantic methods of placing the new Loan, which could have been raised, FREE OF INTEREST, ten times over by a plan which I shall venture on another occasion to unfold; the constant reiteration of the platitudes that we are in "for a long and desperate struggle"; the ostrich methods of the Press Bureau; the panic legislation about munitions; the violent onslaughts upon the social liberties and habits of the people—and a score of other things, have all tended to make the poor Man in

the Street believe that the end of the world is near. And yet what, after all, is the problem before us?

Germany, a great military Power—with a fleet, which, in the circumstances, does not count, assisted by anything but enthusiastic co-operation of bankrupt and half-civilized Austria-Hungary, and the bought supple of the Sick Man of Europe—the corrupt and effete Sultan—is waging war—against what? Against the British Empire, the richest in the world—richest in money, richest in men, richest in ships, richest in martial pride and tradition; against France, second only to Germany itself in military strength, in naval power—which added to our own, does indeed count—and, probably, second only to Britain in wealth; against Russia, with her almost inexhaustible population, her dawning dream of freedom and enlightenment, her illimitable resources, and her unconquerable fighting spirit; against Italy, with a fine and splendidly-equipped army, a useful fleet, and inspired, withal, by a fierce burning desire to wipe off old scores with Austria; against Japan—the "Land of the Rising Sun"—and no words of mine could improve that grand phrase; against Serbia, a nation of fierce fighters, with whom the business of bloodshed is second nature; against Belgium, who has already shown what a small nation is capable of accomplishing when sustained by a sense of cruel wrong perpetrated upon it. And who shall say how long, or how soon, it may be ere the list is extended? Now, are you down-hearted, ye melancholy mumpers?

Ah, I see. You wonder why in these circumstances so little has yet been accomplished. Of course you do; but

cannot you understand that not one of the Governments of the various nations I have mentioned ever dreamt that there could be in the world a monarch so mad as to be capable of embarking upon such a crusade? True, some of us, not of the Government, thought otherwise, and raised our feeble voices in warning; true, dear old Lord Roberts for years called in vain to the nations to be ready; true, Edward the Peacemaker, of glorious memory, knew his demented nephew, and counselled his Ministers to be on their guard. But the horrible fact remained that our rulers (as, indeed, the rulers of all our Allies) were taken by surprise. One of them told us a few weeks before the war began, that never was there such a propitious time for reducing our naval and military expenditure; another, that never had our relations with Germany been so friendly; another, that there was not a member of the Government who regarded war with the Kaiser as even a remote possibility. And only on Tuesday last we had the Prime Minister—the Prime Minister, the man of all other, who is supposed to be in the secrets of public affairs—telling a City audience that "there has suddenly descended—for we did not anticipate it, nor prepare the way for it—the thundercloud of war." Wherefore, you will see, my good, but timid, friends, that there is nothing surprising in our requiring a few months to catch up the nation which has been preparing for this war for the past thirty years.

I want the public to stop looking at this war through yellow goggles; I want them to be clear-eyed and stout-hearted. Look at the mighty deeds done by our own boys and our Australian sons in the Gallipoli Peninsula; talk about the siege of Troy and all the heroic things that old Homer wrote his long-winded epics about—why, those lads in khaki have done more wonderful things than Homer could have invented if he had sat up all night working overtime. Think of the way our Colonial troops stormed up the heights near the sea on their first landing and remember that they had never been under fire before. Into the sea they plunged from their boats; over the beach they rushed in the face of a tornado of lead, and then, like wild tigers, up the rough, steep, giant cliffs they went, hanging on by their eyebrows in places, but always hanging on, whilst the Turks, led by their German officers, made the air ring with a rain of bullets—but they won. When in all the war did the Germans ever perform a feat equal to that? Then tell me, why all this babble that has been running loose of late? If anybody ought to be down-hearted, it's the Germans; they are bleeding to death.

Well, then why worry? True, Germany is in possession of Belgium and of Northern France—but what is the good of them? Every day they remain there means an expenditure of several million pounds—and a strengthening of our position. And we are at length learning how to conduct the war. We are making the right kind of shells; we are sending two million fine fellows out to France; we are lending our weaker Allies all the money they want; we are building a mighty fleet of air-craft; we are grappling with the submarine peril—and our chemists are busy, and we are getting through the Dardanelles. Do you really think that the Germans are happy? Do you imagine for a moment that they would have started the war if they had known we were coming in? Our spiritual lawyers, and our Peace delegates and the rest of them, at least did us a service by misleading the Kaiser in that respect—just as his own Secret Service agents were all at sea in thinking that Irish, Indian and industrial revolution would break out in the event of war. Poor chaps, they didn't understand the British race and the British Empire!

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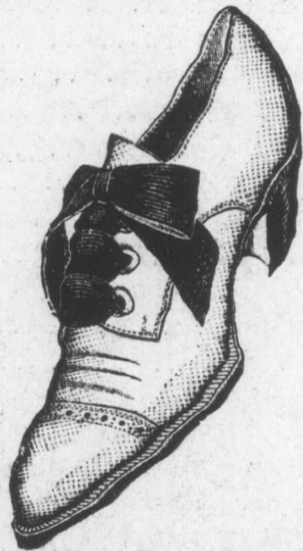
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