The Colonist.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 1899.

THE WAR.

Yesterday's news from Natal was very encouraging. Both Thursday and Friday witnessed hot fighting with conspicuous British success. The sentence in the official report to the effect that Ladysmith is now regarded as safe, is the best possible testimony to the good work done. It is true that the official despatch does not fully bear out the unofficial tidings; but this is not the first time such a thing has occurred. For example, last Friday we heard of fierce fighting and a brilliant victory for our arms. Much as we all wished to believe the report, the absence of official corroboration made every one hesitate to believe it at first and finally conclude that it was an invention. We know now that it was correct. In like manner we received two days in advance of official news the story of the capture of the Fusiliers and Gloucesters. The first account of the latter was greatly exaggerated, but the affair was sufficiently serious. So it may be that the story that came forward yesterday of a great British victory, with the capture of 2,000 Boers, may be founded in fact and may relate to something subsequent to Friday's fighting. We mention these matters only in order that Colonist readers may be the better able to form their conclusions from the fragmentary despatches received. We are certainly not being told everything that is going on in South Africa.

It is pleasant to read of our fellows carrying a Boer position at the point of the bayonet. Nothing fires the British heart like that sort of thing. Standing off and shooting at each other at long range may do for other nations, but we Britishers like to see our men "up and at 'em," and to their everlasting honor be it said that they never miss the opportunity. When the theorists said that the days of the bayonet and fighting at close quarters were over they did not count on Tommy Atkins and his kilted brother from the North. The British infantry soldier dearly loves to be in the very heart of a scrimmage. He is built out of stuff that will stand it, and when he starts for the enemy the latter generally finds it good policy to put as much distance between himself and Tommy as nature will permit. Bayonet charges are something that the Boers did not count on.

The introduction to last night's despatches was disgusting. British contempt of the "burghers," they said, "has been chastened by defeat." When did the defeats occur? They did not happen at Mafeking, nor at Kimberley, nor at Glencoe, nor at Elandslaagte, nor at Bester's Hill. Moreover, the British have never expressed contempt for the Boers. They have on the contrary given them quite as much credit for fighting qualities as they deserve. The fact is that the Associated Press despatch correspondent is doing a little invention. He is also behind the times with his surmises. Yesterday morning the Colonist suggested editorially that possibly Gen. Joubert had drawn off some of his troops in order to make a demonstration in some other quarter, and Pietermaritzburg was spoken of as his possible objective point. Last evening the same thing came to the Times in the form of a London despatch. We mention this not to cast discredit upon our contemporary's telegrams, which are what they purport to be, but simply to show Colonist readers that much of what is sent out as news is only what any person, whose duty it is to keep track of what is going on, would naturally surmise. To make the point clearer, we quote from the Colonist editorial of yesterday:

"It is possible that Gen. Joubert has despatched a portion of his command through Zululand with the object of occupying Pietermaritzburg."

The Associated Press despatch to the Times last night said:

"But the mere fact that Gen. White is enabled to undertake a series of successful reconnaissances is taken as indicating that the grip of the Boer investment has been relaxed by the withdrawal of a portion of Gen. Joubert's forces southward."

We repeat that we mention this only to indicate the value of some of the alleged news and to show that it is only an expression of opinion.

A PATRIOTIC CONCERT.

The generally expressed desire of the public, to contribute something towards the fund for the support of those who may be left widows or orphans by the deaths among our troops in South Africa, has led to arrangements being made for a grand patriotic concert in the Drill hall on Thursday (to-morrow) evening. The money realized will be forwarded to the Mansion House Fund, London, through the Governor-General, and it is hoped that this will only be a beginning of Canadian contributions to this laudable object. The concert is to be given on the evening of H. R. H. the Prince of Wales' birthday, a fact which will of itself lend special interest to it.

The attendance ought to be limited only by the capacity of the Drill hall. In no better way can the public generally contribute to this most worthy fund. If the people turn out as they should, a thousand dollars ought to be realized. The concert will be on patriotic lines, and if, as is hoped, the co-operation of the band of the flagship with the Fifth regiment band can be secured, the instrumental part of the programme will be something out of common.

The songs and recitations will all be of a patriotic order, and in fact the whole programme is devised to give expression to the universal sentiment of the community. It is hardly necessary to do more than mention the matter to secure a great concourse of people.

It has been proposed that a contribution box should be placed in a conspicuous place, where those who wish can supplement the price of their ticket. The committee might consider this.

ADVERTISING VICTORIA.

A public meeting is to be held shortly, at the request of the advertising committee of the board of trade, for the purpose of discussing the ways and means of advertising this city. The subject is of very considerable importance, and if good judgment is exercised excellent results may be looked for. In the interval before the meeting it would be well for those who take an interest in such matters to give the subject some thought, so that the result of the discussion may be the evolution of some well-considered plan. One cause why many public meetings in this city fail to accomplish much is that everything is left to the spur of the moment, which leads to hasty conclusions being reached.

It is very easy to say that Victoria ought to be advertised, but when we come to talk about how it should be and what points ought to be given prominence, there will always be found not only a wide difference of opinion, but many, perhaps the majority, will have only the most general ideas on the subject. There are those who will scout the idea of doing any advertising. They will tell you that it is better to trust to the slow and steady growth now in progress than to seek to create anything at all resembling a boom. Such people will point out that after the effect of the smallpox epidemic passed away, Victoria began to gain in population, and that one has only to go around the city to observe marks of permanent improvement on every side. We are glad to be able to admit that this is so; but as one of the oldest residents of the city remarked yesterday: "It is true that Victoria is growing, but it is also true that other cities on the Coast are growing faster." This sentence contains the true key-note of the situation, which is how Victoria shall keep its relative place in the progress of the Pacific Northwest.

It is unfortunately too true that among the cities on the Coast Victoria receives about as little public notice as any of those aspiring to a first place. There are natural reasons why this should be so. Victoria is populated to a less degree by Eastern people than any other place in either this province or the state of Washington. A very large element of the population is native-born. Another large element is from the Mother Country. The Eastern Canadian element is growing steadily stronger but it has not the relative prominence here that it has elsewhere. Take Vancouver, for example. There is somebody in Eastern Canada who is interested in one way or another in practically the whole population. Consequently anything affecting Vancouver finds hundreds of readers in the Eastern Provinces where anything affecting Victoria might not find a score. Victoria and its concerns do not excite the same degree of interest because so many Eastern Canadians are not personally interested in those who make up the population of Victoria. Doubtless if we should apply the same test to the relative standing of the two cities in Great Britain we would find conditions quite reversed; but on the other hand the British interest in Victoria is associated more with social and family considerations than with business matters.

Then we have the very important fact that Vancouver, Seattle and Tacoma are invariably associated with great transcontinental railway systems. Victoria is usually thought of as a place that is off the main line of travel. This will not read pleasantly, but gradually we are getting down to a business basis in this city and a newspaper can afford to tell the people just what the facts are. There is no use in treating a patient until you know something of the nature of his disease, and there is no sense in disguising what every one who keeps in touch with what is going on in the world recognizes as true, namely, that Victoria, while one of the most delightful places on the whole Western Continent is generally regarded as being just a little out of the way. We who live here know that this is not the case, and one of the things that we ought to make people everywhere understand is that it is not the case.

Very little is known abroad of Vancouver Island, and there is not much cause for surprise on this score, for most of us know very little about it ourselves. It is not necessary to go outside of the city limits to find a plentiful ignorance on this subject. To many people Victoria is a place with no "Raison d'etre" except that it happened to be located here. They know nothing of the vast wealth of Vancouver Island, nothing of the advantages of the city's situation in respect to Coast commerce, nothing of the adaptation of Victoria to become a headquarters for mining and trade. There are matters that ought to be placed before the public in other parts of the world.

Perhaps the most immediate results would be felt from the proper advertising of the city in the Northern goldfields. In this respect the people of this city have been extremely backward. It is a fact that the business men of Victoria are not as a rule good advertisers. Many of them look upon an advertisement as something they are doing in order to support a newspaper. Sometimes you will hear a business man say that he will not advertise in such and such a paper because he does not like its politics. Now a man has a right to prefer his politics to his business if he wants to, but if he does so, he must not complain if the latter suffers. A city is largely judged by its commercial advertising. If the business houses show that they are awake to the demands of trade by printing abundant and attractive advertisements in their city papers, they will do more to build up the business of their city and therefore enhance their own prosperity than they can do in any other way. Compare a Victoria paper with a Seattle paper in regard to advertising and the difference will strike you at once. Suppose you were a stranger to both places and you were to pick up the Post-Intelligencer and the Seattle Times and also the Colonist and the Victoria Times, for the purpose of determining where you would go to buy goods. Would you not find yourself influenced in favor of the Sound city? Compare the ability of Seattle to handle the Northern trade with the ability of Victoria to handle the same trade and see if you think the showing of commerical advertising which the Victoria papers make is in keeping with the relative strength of the two cities in that particular.

Such are a few of the thoughts to which the proposed public meeting gives rise. Others will be mentioned later, but these will give food enough for reflection for the present.

LOCAL POLITICS.

These are quiet days among the local politicians. One would never know that the province had a government or that we were within two months of a session. The government press is absolutely silent. The members of the government themselves seem to have been stricken dumb. There is not a suggestion of anything that will be proposed to benefit the province in any way or relieve it from the mischievous consequences of the legislation of last winter. The Colonist is in no great hurry to precipitate discussion anew on the several subjects which occupied so much attention earlier in the year, for it is never good policy to attempt to force public attention away from a subject which engrosses it as completely as the war now does, and it seems as though when the Colonist leaves politics alone no one thinks it worth while to take the subject up. We are reminded of the extraordinary apathy prevailing in political circles at the close of the last session of the house. Men quite prominent in public life said then that there was not much that could be done, because they thought the Semlin-Martin-Cotton combination was one that could not be broken. The Colonist let them think so for a while and then began the work of smashing the combination, which was soon accomplished with the aid of several contemporaries. The result of that short and very warm campaign, which was a battle of the newspapers for good government, with the politicians looking on, has been to leave the government in a far weaker position than it was when the house was prorogued. Logically there is no reason why the members of the house who supported the government as constituted last session should give it their support now, and we are very greatly mistaken if anything like enough of them do so to give Mr. Semlin a majority. Our opinion, almost amounting to certainty, is that the government will be defeated on the address.

One reason which the friends of the government advance for thinking that Mr. Semlin can hold on is that the members will not desire to have a new election, or rather that a sufficient number of them will not, to keep the opposition in a minority. This idea is, we are satisfied, without good foundation. There would certainly be an election next summer if Mr. Semlin were sustained. There need not necessarily be one, if he is defeated. A new government can be formed out of the present house. Some people say that Mr. Semlin is entitled to a dissolution. He is entitled to nothing of the kind. It rests solely with the Lieutenant-Governor to say whether or not he shall have a dissolution. If His Honor believes that a new government can be formed out of the present house he will be perfectly justified in inviting some one to form it. The notion that every defeated government is entitled to a dissolution is a myth. Popular opinion upon a change can always be tested at the bye-elections rendered necessary by acceptance of office by the new ministers.

DAYS THAT TRY MEN'S SOULS.

These are tremendous days in South Africa. The souls of men are being tried as gold is tried in a furnace. At Mafeking, at Kimberley, at Ladysmith, men of our race, outnumbered by a brave and tactful foe, are standing up for the honor of the flag and the prestige of the Empire. The deeds of valor that have been done are countless, and most of them will never be known except to those who did them. Every day has its own heroes. The world is learning that long years of prosperity have not dinmed British courage or lessened British endurance.

What is it all for? This is an important question. We should support our soldiers in the field even when they wage a war which we may not be able wholly to justify. But happily in this case we have no occasion to resort to fine distinctions to make the position of Great Britain towards the Transvaal tenable. If ever a nation stood as the champion for freedom, democracy, equal rights and impartial justice, Great Britain has so stood during the whole controversy. The fogs of diplomacy have been cleared away by the battle echoes and we are able now to understand far better than we could even a month ago what the real nature of the conflict is. We know now that Great Britain has from the beginning supporting the rights of the majority against the oppression of the minority. The Boer government of the Transvaal, though a republic in name, is in point of fact an exclusive oligarchy. There is no more exclusive oligarchy in the world. This oligarchy is composed of a few people, comparatively speaking, who became occupants of one of the most valuable portions of the earth's surface, a region that can support a great population in prosperity. Thousands of immigrants have entered the territory. They had just as much right to go there as the Boers themselves had in the first place. After they got there, they did what the Boers did not—they made the country the scene of an advanced modern civilization, an up-to-date land in every respect, save that the people who made it worth living in, who paid nearly all the taxes, who employed nearly all the labor, who made the property of the Boers of any value whatever, are deprived of the right to have a voice in the government, and are treated as no other free people are treated anywhere on earth. So much for the Transvaal. Besides these facts, it is now well known that the dream of the Transvaal oligarchy has been to employ the immense wealth of the country in the establishment of Boer supremacy all over South Africa.

Great Britain sought to meet the case by peaceful means. She asked for the enfranchisment of the Uitlanders, believing that this would settle everything in the course of time. The request was not that aliens might vote, but that aliens might acquire the full rights of citizenship on terms that were not a practical denial of them. Given an electorate representative of the whole population, and Great Britain could safely trust that nothing would develop in South Africa prejudicial to her interests, which we can truly claim are the interests of humanity in general. But nothing could be done with the truculent Boers. They fancied that they were able to defy the British Empire, and with an impudence unparallelled in history gave the British what was substantially notice to quit South Africa, for a compliance with the Kruger ultimatum minion in that part of the world, if not would have been the end of British do- of the Empire. Upon the top of this ultimatum came the invasion of British territory. What was the object of that invasion? Only one answer can be given to this question, that is assuming Kruger to be governed by the rules which influence men of ordinary intelligence. He must have hoped that he would be able by prompt action to wipe out the British garrisons, and then with an army flushed with victory to prevent the landing of any further troops. If he could do this, he would have made a Boer South Africa possible within a very short time. That is, Kruger started out on a war of conquest. It may seem an absurd thing to say of so comparatively small a nation; but just look at the facts. Suppose that Mafeking and Kimberley had fallen. Would not Bechuanaland have passed into the possession of the Boers, and would not the Boer population have risen to their support? Would this not have released all Gen. Cronje's force to go down to Ladysmith, there to overwhelm Gen. White? And with White overthrown and Bechuanaland in the hands of the Boers, they would have been masters of the whole territory from German West Africa to the coast of Natal. Possibly the Afrikander party in Cape Colony would have remained loyal under such circumstances, but the chance would have been a risky one.

This view of the case shows the immense importance of the gallant work done at Mafeking and Kimberley, and the splendid resistance offered by Gen. White to a force greatly outnumbering his own. The value of these first few weeks of the war to the Empire cannot be well over-estimated. They have been trying weeks to the valiant corps which have held out so well and inflicted such severe damage to their foes, but they mean everything in so far as the future goes. President Kruger must realize that his expectations have failed, and that defeat is now inevitable. He may be able to prolong the struggle, but he cannot hope for success. British reinforcements will soon be on the ground; the offensive will be taken by our troops, and the end of the drama will then be in sight. Meanwhile, here's to the fellows who hold out in the name of the Empire against great odds.

THE WAR.

There is not much war news to report but what there is is highly satisfactory. The stories that have been told during the last few days and the comments of correspondents upon them have created the impression that the position of Gen. White was something like that of a rat in a trap. He has been cut off from rail connection with Durban and the wires are down so that no telegrams come through, but the position of a general who is in a position to sally out and inflict severe punishment upon the enemy need not be the cause of any great degree of alarm at present.

The Boers are clearly no match for our troops in action. Let it be supposed that conditions were reversed and that Gen. White had Gen. Joubert surrounded with a greatly superior force. Does any one imagine that he would permit days and weeks to pass without bringing matters to a climax? It is, of course, possible that the strength of Joubert's force may be over-estimated. Yesterday's despatches spoke of the difficulty of accounting for the large bodies of Boers reported from so many different points. The explanation may be that Joubert's army is smaller than has been thought, although much larger than that commanded by Gen. White.

A few days ago we suggested in these columns that the object of the evacuation of Colenso might be to concentrate all available forces for the defence of Pietermaritzburg. The Associated Press advanced this theory yesterday. It is a plausible explanation, and may be accepted in the absence of any other. It is possible that Gen. Joubert has despatched a portion of his command through Zululand with the object of occupying Pietermaritzburg. He had men enough at his disposal to do this without reducing his force at Ladysmith below that of Gen. White. We think that this would be a great tactical blunder, unless his intention is simply to destroy the railway before reinforcements can get in from the coast. We cannot see how he can hope to carry out a successful campaign now. Every day shows the value of good work done at Glencoe and Elandslaagte. These two brilliant victories checked Joubert's advance and what is better still they made him very careful of attacking our position at Ladysmith. In the course of a few days the whole situation in Natal will be changed, and when the British force is in a position to take the offensive, we will hear very much less than we now do about Boer courage and Boer strategy.

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