

THE STORY OF THREE DAYS

How War Brought an Amazing Vindication of Liberal Principles

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THE complete collapse of the German resistance in South-West Africa rouses a variety of reflections in a variety of minds. To some it is rejoicing at the first great triumph acquired by the British arms in a ten-months' war. To others it will be satisfaction at the addition of vast territories to the British Empire—much of them uncertainly productive, but others full of wealth in minerals and agriculture, and providing an opening for Back Veldt Boers who desire trekking into wide pastures, or for locations for natives, whose increasing birth-rate is continually pressing against the boundaries of their present domains. But to some at least, the whole story which culminated in the vote of thanks of Parliament to General Louis Botha and his commandoes on Tuesday will evoke feelings in which the soil or diamonds of the actual conquered territories bear but little part in the completion of one of the most remarkable human dramas the world has ever seen.

A volume would be required to tell even the outline of that amazing episode whereby, not only has an individual soldier passed to almost dizzy heights of fortune, but Liberalism has been vindicated in a manner which must have exceeded its wildest dreams. Let it be sufficient here to notice the incidents of three widely separated parliamentary days.

The First Day—A Liberal Protest.

The first is the House of Commons on August 16th, 1901—almost fourteen years ago. The Colonial Secretary, Right Hon. Jos. Chamberlain, had just instructed the British Commander-in-Chief in the Transvaal to issue a proclamation which, amongst other penalties, decreed that all commandants and leaders of the forces still resisting should, failing surrender before a short time, be 'permanently banished from South Africa. The proclamation is challenged by Sir William Harcourt, then leader of the Liberal Opposition. 'If you are dealing with belligerents, you have no right to banish them. If they are not belligerents, you cannot by proclamation banish them.' Mr. Chamberlain replies, to the satisfaction of the great majority, with the analogy of Alsace-Lorraine. Did not Germany banish from Alsace-Lorraine all disloyalists; and cannot the British Empire do to those who are 'banditti guerillas' in South Africa what Germany has done so successfully in Alsace-Lorraine? An unchanging Tory press weighs in with unchanging Tory doctrine. It sneers and jibes at those who criticize the proclamation. It is only a little discontented at the mildness of the measures adopted against (in the language of the London 'Times') 'a system of desultory fighting, bearing scant resemblance to legitimate warfare.' It consoles its followers (as to-day in debate on the National Register), with the promise that his is only

a beginning—the 'first turn of a new screw which is capable of putting on severer pressure.' **The Liberal protest is, of course, helpless and vain. The time limit expires. Permanent banishment from South Africa is decreed by the British Government against Louis Botha and his followers.**

The Second Day—A Liberal Experiment.

The second scene, in the House of Commons, is almost exactly five years afterwards—July 31st, 1906. The war has been fought to an end. The end has been a Treaty (despite the protests of Lord Milner) instead of unconditional surrender. The country has been ruled as a conquered province by young men fresh from the University of Oxford. Fancy schemes of Government all designed to keep the Dutch in a permanent minority, and hence in permanent hostility, have been devised by Prussianized minds. Finally, the whole crew have been swept out of power by the British people, and a Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, who knew the ways by which the British Empire has been created and maintained has been returned triumphantly to power. **The discussion is on a settlement which will give complete power to the inhabitant of the Transvaal to choose their own rulers. Amid gathering excitement it is denounced in fierce terms by the leader of the Tory Party, Right Hon. Mr. Balfour. It is a 'most dangerous experiment.' 'No human being ever thought of such an experiment before—that of giving to a population equal to, and far more homogeneous than our own, absolute control of everything.' 'There is nothing to prevent the country making every preparation, constitutionally, quietly, without external interference, for a new war.' 'I am astonished that any Government or any party that cherished the British connection in the Transvaal should desire so audacious an experiment should be tried.'** He sees no security that 'this absolute power given to the Transvaal will not be used to establish a condition of things which may make some future action against this country (he is thinking of the opportunity of a European war) possible, probable, and dangerous.' Hence he will not accept the invitation that both parties shall join together to make this gift of freedom 'the gift of England.' Upon the Liberals alone must fall the responsibility for 'what I regard as the most reckless experiment ever tried in the development of a great Colonial policy.' And Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, Liberal Prime Minister, in reply, has only opportunity for the beginning of a sentence: 'Never in the course of my Parliamentary career have I listened to a more unworthy, provocative, and machievous'—when the Tory Opposition howls him down in one wild roar of fury. And the House