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## The Criticism of British Leaders.

The statesmen who at the present time are at the helm of affairs in Great Britain must be much less impressed with the honors attaching to their exalted positions than with their difficulties and responsibilities. It is doubtless an indication of the health and vigor of the nation's life that the people at large are feeling so deeply, thinking so earnestly and expressing their thoughts and feelings so freely in reference to the present war and the method of its management, however silly and ungrateful much of the faultfinding may sound in the ears of men who are seeking to give to their country the best service of their large and disciplined powers. The men who are serving the British nation at this trying time as ministers of the State or as commanders of her armies need and deserve the prayers and sympathies of the people. These we may believe are not withheld, but it is evident that, in many quarters at least, criticism is much more in evidence than prayers and sympathy. There are no doubt some grounds for adverse criticism, and the censors are by no means confined to the ranks of the party opposed to the present Administration. The London Times and other standard Conservative journals have become very outspoken in condemnation of the methods of the War Office. Some recent speeches of the Hon. Mr. Balfour, leader of the Government party in the House of Commons, intended as a defence of the Administration, have tended to increase rather than diminish the volume and virulence of the criticism. Probably when the present crisis in South Africa is past, and the nation shall have resumed a calmer temper, it will be recognized that much of the faultfinding which has been indulged in, both in respect to the Generals in the field and the authorities of the War Office at home, has been undeserved and ungrateful. It is hard, indeed, for the British people to bear with equanimity the repeated reverses which the nation's troops have suffered, and the general lack of success that has so far characterized the present war. But it is puerile to demand impossibilities or to ignore the very grave difficulties with which the government and the army have had to contend. It must be admitted, however, that, considering the disturbed condition of affairs in South Africa for years past, and the grave contingencies of the situation, it does seem strange that the British authorities should have been so poorly informed as they evidently were, in respect to the great military strength of the Transvaal, and the immense preparations for war which the Boers had been so industriously making. It would seem therefore, to be a just ground of criticism that the Government had so little idea of the military force which it would be necessary to employ in order to bring the war to a successful conclusion. But on the other hand, this ignorance and unpreparedness of the government seems to be an effective refutation of the charge, which the enemies of the nation have been making so loudly, that the subjugation of the Dutch republics was a definite part of British policy in South Africa, and that it was the intention from the first to force the Boers into war in order to effect their subjugation. The facts which have been coming gradually to light since the war began point rather to the conclusion, that the present conflict is a result of a determined and long cherished purpose to make the Dutch power supreme in South Africa, and if that purpose is likely to fail of realization, it is probably only because the men of the Afrikaner Bund were disappointed in their intention to bring on the war at a time when the military strength of the British nation would have to be employed elsewhere.

## The Heliograph.

It appears that the efforts which have been made to turn wireless telegraphy to practical account in the South African war have not been successful. Whatever its range of application and its utility may prove to be when thoroughly tested by continued experiment, there is no doubt that for the present it is a far less practical means of communication on land under conditions where connection by wire is impracticable than the ancient heliograph which has proved of so great service in enabling the beleaguered towns of Ladysmith and Kimberly to communicate with the outside world. Our word *heliograph* is compounded of two Greek words, *helios*, the sun, and *graphein*, to write. A heliographic message is simply a series of sun flashes arranged according to an understood code. The apparatus for sending the message consists of a mirror mounted on a tripod and hung on both horizontal and vertical axes, with adjusting screws admitting of minute changes of plane. By this means the sun's rays are directed by careful adjustment of the mirror within the field of vision of a receiving telescope several miles away. In sending despatches long and short flashes are the equivalents of dashes and dots in the Morse system of telegraphy. The heliograph apparatus possesses the great advantage of lightness and portability. It also admits of messages being sent with entire secrecy. In cloudy weather heliographic communication of course becomes impossible, but the prevailing clear skies of South Africa are favorable to its use. In the campaign of 1883-85, it is said, a heliograph signal service extended from Orange River to Molopole, a distance of 429 miles. This would require repeating stations, but there are records of heliograph despatches sent a distance of nearly 50 miles directly in India, and in 1897 a despatch was flashed from Mount Wilson in California to the Island of Santa Catalina, 75 miles distant. Messages are also sent by means of searchlight signals. This method has the disadvantage of a shorter range and less secrecy, but there is the advantage that it can be used at night, when communication by heliograph is of course impossible.

## Seizure of Neutral Vessels.

The seizure and search by British cruisers of certain vessels belonging to neutral powers upon the suspicion that a part of their cargoes consisted of contraband of war destined for the Transvaal, has called forth a good deal of discussion, and some of it, especially that in which the German press is concerned, has been bitterly denunciatory of Great Britain's action. Inquiries into the matter have been made by the representatives of the American and German governments in London, and so far as those Governments are concerned there is nothing to indicate that they are greatly disturbed over what has occurred. The German press, however, would seem to have seized eagerly upon these incidents with the purpose of embittering popular feeling in that country toward Great Britain. Probably, too, the German press understands that the Emperor is not unwilling that the popular mind should be stirred up on this subject, not indeed with the purpose of putting the nation into a hostile attitude toward Great Britain, but in order to secure popular endorsement for his expensive scheme of doubling the present strength of the German navy. There is no doubt but that the Emperor desires for the present to maintain friendly relations between his own Government and that of Great Britain. It may be doubted, however, whether it is a great object with him to promote a feeling of warm friendship between the peoples of the two nations, and it may therefore fall in quite nicely with his plans if the people of Germany are made to believe that because of her superiority as a sea power, Great Britain is exercising rights in the seizure of German ships, which she would not venture to assert if the German navy were as formidable as her own. The rights of search and seizure ought certainly to be exercised with due caution, but that such rights exist under the recognized conditions of civilized warfare no one can pretend to deny. The British navy cannot be expected to stand idly by while the ships of neutral powers are carrying aid and comfort of various kinds to countries with which the nation is at war. German papers have sought to make much of the fact that the manifest of the *Bundesrath*, a steamer seized by a British cruiser, does not show that anything contraband was in-

cluded in her cargo. But this is no sufficient proof that the seizure was unjustifiable, since the British contention is that the contraband articles were shipped under fictitious labels. Arms and ammunition, though shipped in piano cases, would not on that account prove less effective in the hands of the Boers against the lives of British soldiers. The facts of the matter in the case of each seizure which has been made will of course be carefully enquired into. If on such enquiry it shall appear that the British officials have over-stepped the bounds of international law, the Government which is responsible for their acts will have to make restitution, and so far as other Governments are concerned in the matter, it does not appear that they are in any doubt as to Great Britain's intention to act an honorable part. . . . Since the above was written dispatches have stated that statements relative to the seizures referred to have been received from the British Government in reply to enquiries on the part of the German and American Governments, which statements are considered at Washington and Berlin as so far satisfactory. In replying to the United States, it is understood the British Government declares that foodstuffs which cannot be shown to be destined for the use of the Boer forces in the field will not be considered as contraband of war.

## The War.

At present writing there is not very much new to report respecting the situation at the seat of war, though it is believed that there has been severe fighting in Natal during the past few days, and it is possible that important news may be received within a few hours. General Roberts is now at the head of military operations in South Africa; he and General Kitchener having reached Capetown on Wednesday last. So far as the despatches have informed us, the beleaguered towns of Ladysmith, Kimberly and Mafeking are still holding out against the enemy, but the latest news from Mafeking is dated Dec. 28, when the report was "all well." The list of casualties on the British side in the assault upon Ladysmith on Jan. 6, as given out at the War Office, was 135 killed and 242 wounded. This is heavy enough, but it is much less than was at first reported, and the loss of the Boers was probably far heavier. General Methuen continues to hold his position on the Modder River. Portions of his command have been active, and, having made reconnaissance into the Free State for a distance of 20 miles; report that the country for that distance was clear of Boer troops, except patrols. Generals French and Gatacre appear to be somewhat more than holding their own, in the parts of Cape Colony in which they are operating. But for the present all eyes are turned toward Natal, and to the result of General Buller's efforts to relieve Ladysmith. Almost nothing has been learned definitely as to General Buller's movements since Thursday last. At that date a part of his force had moved westward from Frere and had occupied a position at Potgieter's Drift, near Springfield and on the bank of the Tugela river, while a force of 11,000 men under General Warren was reported to have moved eastward by way of Weenan and approached the banks of the Tugela at a point some 20 miles from Colenso. As Potgieter's Drift is 15 miles westward from Colenso, the extreme positions of General Buller's army would be some 35 miles apart. The plan of attack would therefore appear to be, to force the Boer wings, while an attack would of course also be delivered at the centre. There were reports on Monday that General Warren had crossed the Tugela, and occupied a strong position on its northern bank, but the reports remain unconfirmed at the time of our going to press. There are rumors also of the Boers having withdrawn from the vicinity of Ladysmith and having evacuated Colenso, and it is concluded in some quarters that they are about withdrawing their forces from that part of the country. What is probably true is that the Boers, aware of General Buller's plan of advance, have been redispersing their forces with the purpose of offering the most effective resistance to his intended attacks. It seems impossible that we shall be much longer kept in suspense in reference to what has been taking place in Natal during the past week, but at present everything is in cloudland. We can but hope and pray for the success at this juncture of the British arms, for a decisive victory for General Buller and the relief of Ladysmith would be an important step toward the end which we all desire.

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