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The Situation in South Africa. It is natural that at the opening of the year the situation in South Africa should be passed under review by war correspondents and other writers. That situation upon the most favorable showing, it must be acknowledged, is serious enough for British interests. But in spite of the reverses which have been suffered and the very formidable problem which the war now presents, there are forces at work which may be expected before long to put a different face upon affairs. The checks and reverses which the British arms have suffered have certainly not resulted from any lack of courage or soldierly qualities on the part of the troops and the subordinate officers. Never have the British regulars evinced greater gallantry in the field, and the Colonials have shown a courage and efficiency which has elicited the highest praise. In spite of all differences of opinion as to the wisdom of the diplomacy which led up to the present war, it is evident to the world that the loyalty of the British people to the Crown and to the Empire was never so strong and intelligent as it is today. Through all the arteries of the nation's life are felt the strong pulse beats of the heart of the empire, and colonists in Canada and Australia vie with home-born Britons in their zeal to defend the honor of the nation's flag. The British authorities of the War Office and the generals in command of armies are learning lessons in the sharp school of experience. Mistakes, and consequent disasters, which have resulted from underestimating the strength and prowess of the enemy, and from the lack of sufficient equipment, are not likely to be repeated. With the nation's most trusted military leaders in South Africa and the Empire's resources at their command, the war will doubtless be prosecuted with all the energy and effectiveness that British determination and military science can lend to it. There will be some hard fighting no doubt; but unless there shall be an armed intervention on behalf of the Boers by the nations of Europe—of which there is now no prospect—the conflict must end in the Boers learning that they are not in a position to dictate terms to the British people in South Africa. Great interest at present centres in the fate of Ladysmith. If General White who has made so gallant a defence is unable to hold out until relief shall come, the fall of the place will be felt as a serious, though of course not fatal, blow to the British cause. But with the Boer army in Natal defeated and Ladysmith relieved, the backbone of Boer resistance will be broken, and though there may be much hard fighting after that, the rest of the war will be rather a matter of detail.

General French at Colesburg. During the week some successes have been achieved by British forces operating in northern Cape Colony which, while not of a very important character, have been grateful reading to the British public in contrast with the prevailing reports of reverses or of failure to advance, and which also, it is believed, will have important results in checking the growing disaffection and disloyalty among the people of that part of the colony. On Monday General French carried out successfully a well-planned movement against the Boers about Colesburg, which is situated some fifteen miles, we believe, south of the Orange river and the borders of the Orange Free State. By a rapid detour General French succeeded in surprising the Boers by employing for the purpose a force of cavalry and mounted infantry, with ten guns, leaving a force at Rensburg, a few miles to the south, to hold the enemy in front. The Boers were taken completely

by surprise. Their laager was shelled, their position enfiladed, and their artillery silenced. They were reported also to have evacuated Colesburg and to be in retreat toward the Orange river. But during the night they returned to the positions from which they had been dislodged, and General French found the force at his command insufficient to drive them from the kopjes in the vicinity of Colesburg. General French's success is therefore less significant than was at first supposed, but he believes that with reinforcements, which it is reported are being forwarded to him, he will be able to dislodge the enemy and occupy Colesburg.

Canadians Under Fire.

On Tuesday of last week a part of the Canadian contingent in South Africa was under fire. A force consisting of 200 Queenslanders, 200 of the Cornwall Light Infantry, 100 Canadians of the Toronto Company, with two guns, a horse battery and forty mounted infantry, the whole commanded by Colonel Pilcher, left Belmont at noon on New Year's day for a reconnaissance in a westerly direction. Marching rapidly, they reached Cook's Farms—20 miles from Belmont—the same night, and at six o'clock the next morning they surprised a force of Boers, defeating them and capturing 40 prisoners, besides taking possession of the enemy's laager, including a number of tents, wagons, great store of ammunition, forage, saddles, etc., and numerous incriminating papers. Colonel Pilcher's attack upon the Boer camp appears to have been very skillfully delivered and was attended with complete success. The Colonial troops, both the Queenslanders and the Canadians, behaved finely, showing a steady and prompt courage in action, which has won for them high praise. There were no casualties among the Canadians, but the Queenslanders lost two men killed and had an officer wounded. The Boer's loss in the action is stated at 6 killed and 12 wounded, besides those taken prisoners. The movement in which Col. Pilcher's force was engaged is understood to have been in connection with a more extended reconnaissance under the direction of General Methuen, with a view to finding a suitable crossing of the Riet river—which is an extension of the Modder river—with the purpose of effecting a turning movement on the right flank of the Boer army and so opening up a way to the relief of Kimberley.

Newfoundland.

An international difficulty which it is possible may assume an acute stage during the present year is connected with the claims of the French to fishing rights on the coasts of Newfoundland. For many years past the powers and privileges exercised by the French have excited much dissatisfaction and protest on the part of the people and the Government of the Colony. The *modus vivendi* in reference to these claims, which has been in force during the past ten years having now expired, there is naturally some anxiety as to what may be the result. It appears to be quite certain that the fishing privileges have become quite valueless to France. The business has so declined that it is costing the French Government more to maintain it than it is worth to the nation. But French national pride and anti-British feeling would probably protest against any surrender of their ancient fishing rights though the *quid pro quo* offered should make it an excellent bargain for France. It seems likely, however, that the French Government will agree to an extension of the *modus vivendi* for a longer or shorter period, and that probably, is the best that can be expected at the present time. To the people and Government, who have been fretting and protesting for years past at the existing arrangements, this will be anything but satisfactory. But considering the exigencies of the war in which the Nation is now engaged, it is to be expected that the people of this ancient Colony will show a patient disposition and refrain from adding to the embarrassment of the Imperial Government by pressing for the immediate removal of the grievances of which they have so long and justly complained.

The sudden death of Hon. L. E. Baker of Yarmouth, has removed a gentleman long and honorably connected with the interests of that town. Mr Baker was born at Yarmouth in 1831 and received his education there. In 1855 he entered into business as a member of the firm of Young and Baker. Later Mr. Baker conducted business by himself, carrying on an extensive business in shipping, banking &c., and becoming the most prominent business man of the western part of the Province. He was president of the Bank of Yarmouth, the Yarmouth Steamship Company, the Yarmouth Agricultural Society, the Yarmouth Marine Railway Company and a number of other enterprises. In 1878 Mr. Baker was appointed a member of the Legislative Council of the Province. A free public library and museum which he founded in his native town constitutes a worthy monument to his public spirit.

From the War.

Among the more important news from South Africa during the week is a more specific account of a sortie from Mafeking on December 26. The object of the sortie was to dislodge the Boers from a strong position at Gametree, two miles from Mafeking, from which for several weeks they had been maintaining an annoying artillery and rifle fire against the fort. The sortie appears to have been skillfully organized and the attacking force exhibited the most desperate courage, but the Boer position was evidently much stronger than had been supposed, and the assault failed with lamentably heavy loss of life in officers and men on the British side. Several officers and twenty men were killed in the sortie, besides a large number wounded. Generals Gatacre and French, in the central part of northern Cape Colony, have accomplished something in driving back the enemy's forces, and with comparatively small reinforcements their successes would doubtless be much more decisive. General French, who is operating in the vicinity of Colesburg, has evidently employed his cavalry and mounted artillery with good effect against the enemy. He is obliged, however, to report a "serious accident" to a body of the First Suffolk regiment, by which about seventy British soldiers were cut off from the main body and fell into the hands of the enemy. It appears evident that General French requires considerable reinforcements to make him master of the situation in the district in which he is operating. The vicinity of Ladysmith and Colenso still continues to be that part of the scene of conflict to which attention is most strongly attracted. That the situation for General White has become a most serious one is plainly evident from the despatches. The Boers have been gradually drawing their entrenchments closer to the beleaguered town and their bombardment of it has become more determined. Heliographic communication with Ladysmith was interrupted at the close of the week by cloudy weather, but enough is known to show that the Boers are making a determined attempt to take the town, and that although General White has so far succeeded in repelling their assaults there is felt to be reason for the gravest concern respecting the ultimate result. What makes the situation so serious is that General Buller, with all the force at his command, does not appear to be able to advance to the relief of Ladysmith. The naturally very strong position which the Boers occupy on the banks of the Tugela has been so strengthened by the construction of bomb-proof trenches that apparently General Buller's artillery can make but little impression upon them, while recent heavy rains, which have swollen the Tugela, render the Boer position still more secure from attack. It does not appear that Ladysmith is in pressing need of provisions, and it is possible that General White may still be able to repel the attacks of the enemy and hold the place until stronger reinforcements or more favorable conditions shall enable General Buller to advance, but plainly the situation is now such that the news from Natal must be constantly awaited with the gravest anxiety.