

THE SITUATION IN SOUTH AFRICA.

(Some Refreshing Reading.)

The position of Great Britain in South Africa to-day has been likened to her position in India in 1857. The comparison is, no doubt, the most appropriate that the history of the Empire provides; but the conditions that prevail hardly warrant the pessimistic simile, or justify the despondency which undoubtedly prevails. The special correspondent of the London "Financial News," writing from De Aar, under date of 24th ult., says:—"The fact that the colonists are of the most despondent and most given to speaking of "another '57" is interesting and instructive, but not conclusive. It is true that the last fortnight, which everyone expected would bring with it the simultaneous advance of the victorious British forces, has, instead, resulted in a simultaneous series of reverses. It is not so much the political conditions of the Cape as the military incidents of the present campaign that have turned the thoughts of the loyal colonists to the dark days of Indian Mutiny. Two months have passed since President Kruger, with that extraordinary political wisdom and foresight which he has always shown, but which we English have been too proud to acknowledge, suddenly declared war, and launched his well-equipped and continentally-trained commandos across the defenceless frontiers of Natal and Cape Colony. It is two months since Laysmith, Kimberley, and Mafeking were cut off and besieged, and to-day (Christmas Eve) they are still unrelieved. The similarity of their position to that of Cawnpore, Lucknow, and Delhi is so apparent that it appeals to everyone. For days past Colonel Kekewich and Sir George White have been listening to the booming of the cannon of the forces that will bring them relief; but, like Havelock at Lucknow, they have strained their ears and held their breath in vain for the welcome sound of the British bugle which will prove that relief is not only coming but has actually arrived. Add to these facts the recollection that General White was in the Indian Mutiny, that Lord Roberts fought his way with the relieving and avenging forces to Delhi and to Lucknow, and the simile is completed.

Here, however, it also ends. South Africa is not India, and if there be more Dutch than British in South Africa the preponderance is not great. Again, I venture to doubt whether the disaffection among the Dutch is so great as the street-corner politicians in Cape Town or the jingo journalists of London make out. Undoubtedly the situation is serious. The sympathy which the Dutchman of the colony has with the Boer of the Free State is certain to be fanned by the victories of the Burgher forces; but those victories must be something greater than attacks repulsed—must, indeed, be something more important than the fall of Kimberley and Mafeking—before that sympathy will take the form of open rebellion. Pompey declared that everyone worshipped the rising sun; but the rays of the Transvaal power must permeate farther south than the Orange River before the slow-thinking and

discreet Colonial Dutchman will run the risk of openly avowing a change of worship.

In the course of a slow railway journey up here from Cape Town I had frequent opportunity of ascertaining the feeling of the Cape Dutch. I do not hesitate to say that any combined or concentrated movement of the Dutch of Cape Colony against British power is improbable, if not impossible. The Bond is the only organisation that could produce such a movement; but, except in their allegiance to Mr. Kruger, the Bond leaders are not united. Their counsels are known to the Governor, and though a hundred determined Boers might easily, by raising the standard of revolt at Paarl, Stellenbosch, or some other township close to Cape Town, cause a diversion and a political panic, the movement would have no military importance, and little effect upon the outcome of the campaign. The truth is that our present parlous condition is due to military blunders, and those military blunders are due to political exigencies.

It is of no use repeating the early mistakes and incidents of the war; the delay in sending out troops, the hampering of the hands of the Government by a fractious Opposition, the occupation of Dundee and Glencoe, and the use of the Cape Government railways for the conveyance of war supplies to the Republics. When all is over the responsibility will be apportioned, and it is hoped that the punishment will be duly meted out. The pity of it all is that with these blunders military science was not allowed full play when hostilities actually commenced—that our Generals were hampered by the necessity of relieving Kimberley, instead of being allowed to at once effect a strong movement upon Bloemfontein. In the hope of speedily removing from jeopardy the diamonds of De Beers, Lord Methuen adopted the tactics of the Dervishes, and attempted by sheer animal courage to relieve the city in eight days. In order that the Natal farmer might quickly get back to his plough, and that General White might the sooner be relieved from idleness, General Buller threw his men on the Boer rifles in the fond hope of carrying a strongly-entrenched position with the bayonet. Our Generals—and not our Generals only, but all of us practically, home-born and colonist, regular and irregular—have made the mistake of not only underestimating the strength of the enemy but of underestimating his intelligence. The Uitlanders of the Transvaal have always been fond of talking of the "ignorant Boer;" but they have chosen to forget that, notwithstanding his home-spun suit and his veldschoen, he has sprung from the most intelligent type of the European race, and that all his life he has been fighting against fearful odds, and only survived owing to his ability to combine intelligence with courage.

Experientia docet! Our Generals have learned their first lesson. They now know that they are not fighting half-civilized savages on the frontiers of India, or fanatical Dervishes in the deserts of the Soudan. The