

THE CRISIS IN GREAT BRITAIN.

BY THE EDITOR.

AMONG the great nations of the world England is the pathfinder of constitutional government, and historians therefore frequently regard her as an ideal country, the prototype of liberal government ; and rightly so, for she has discovered the method by which in administrative affairs liberty may be combined with law and order.

In her political and diplomatic career England has been neither more nor less blameable than other nations. She has time and again been guilty of high-handed procedures, especially in dealing with weak peoples and savage tribes ; and there obtains a feeling of bitterness against the English which is most strongly marked on the European continent. Nevertheless, the sober, liberal-minded element of Germany, Austria, the United States, and even of France, Italy, Spain, and the Latin republics of Central and South America, has always given credit to England for her fairness and love of liberty, as promoting everywhere the liberal cause and progress and peace. The situation has gradually been changed, and England has entered a crisis through which she can pass unscathed only by great circumspection and moderation. Her conquests and her power being upon the whole based upon the development of her industries and the expansion of trade, her wars were incidents only, partly due to adventitious conflicts which perhaps could not be avoided, and partly to bungling diplomacy. But the balance of England's greatness and good qualities was quite sufficient to compensate for occasional mistakes, and so she increased in power and was regarded, together with the United States, as the hope of humanity, the refuge of liberty, and the support of progress.

During the last decade a reaction has set in all over the world, which threatens to turn the wheel of progress backward. The

Dreyfus affair in France is a symptom of it; Germany shows her mailed fist; and even the United States have taken an attitude in their conquered provinces which makes the world suspect the honest intentions of the great Republic of the West; but the most lamentable affair has been the war in South Africa against the Afrikaners. Much has been written for and against England, for and against the Transvaal; a justification of the war on moral grounds has been attempted with quite plausible arguments for both sides. And no doubt, attorneys on either side can make a fair showing on the basis of reliable statistics, so long as they restrict themselves to pointing out the faults of the other party and its lack of consideration for other people's rights.¹ Upon the whole, the people almost everywhere are upholders of the Boers, while the governments stand by the British. The hostile feeling toward the Boers is no more than lukewarm, while the enemies of England are in the habit of condemning indiscriminately every step of the British government, even though they themselves would have done the same thing if they had been in England's place.

The moral question of the Boer war is an intricate problem, and we do not propose to touch it; but it seems advisable to point out that as a rule the fundamental question is usually left out when critics of either party deal with it. It is this. At the bottom of right and wrong lies the possession of power, which should never be lost sight of. Right is not based upon priority of ownership, for possession itself constitutes a right only on the supposition that the possessor is in the position to maintain his possession. In this sense the proverb of Latin law holds good, *beati possidentes*, happy are those in possession, which means, "possession is nine points of the law." He has the right to govern a country who has the power to keep order and preserve the peace. He who has no power has forfeited his title. The Hottentots may be the aboriginal inhabitants of the Cape land, but not having the power to protect themselves, let alone peaceful settlers who pursue a legitimate trade in their territory, they have forfeited their right to government, and the party that is able to maintain order without friction is by the law of nature entitled to rule.

The conflict in Africa is ultimately a conflict of might. The Boers have failed to take into due consideration certain rights of both their black subjects and their white guests. They provoked a

¹ See, e. g., *Selected Official Documents of the South African Republic and Great Britain. A Documentary Perspective of the Causes of the War in South Africa.* Edited by Hugh Williams, M. A., B. L. S., Library of Congress, and Frederick Charles Hicks, Ph. D., Library of Congress.

war the consequences of which have proved woful and disastrous. But let the worst be said against the Afrikanders, it does not as yet justify the English cause. England can justify her policy only by establishing law and order and showing that she is capable of maintaining it. One element, however, of maintaining a good government in a civilised country is the consent of the governed, which again is a question of might, not of right in a technical sense, i. e., being in agreement with some written statute. It is the unwritten law of nature that the nation which is strong enough to resist foreign invaders, even though it be a nation of brigands, is entitled to its liberty. No one doubts the right of Abyssinia to freedom, because they drove the Europeans out and slaughtered a whole army of invaders.

Now it appears that the war in South Africa is a very unfortunate affair, because it was undertaken frivolously and without considering the consequences. Whatever legal title England may have had to interfere in the Transvaal, the step she took was, considered solely from the standpoint of British interests, most unwise, and she has had to pay dearly for the lesson. It has been calculated that fifteen British soldiers perished to one Boer killed, and the expenses are incredible. Mr. Chamberlain comforted the members of Parliament with the thought that the subjected territory is immeasurably rich, and that it will pay the war indemnity as soon as order has been restored. That may be true, but the prospect of a restoration of order is very poor.

The English are in a desperate position. They have taken the capital of the country, and driven the president, poor old Oom Krüger, into exile; they hold the open field and have disbanded and disorganised the Afrikander armies. But scattered Boer forces are still in the field and prevent the restoration of order. No train can run without being exposed to attack or being in danger of being derailed and wrecked. And this condition of things has become chronic. How is it possible to develop the country, establish industries, work the mines, if a handful of unruly marauders have the sympathy of the population, while the authorities in spite of their best intentions are hated as foreigners, invaders, conquerors, and usurpers?

The British government ought to have foreseen the difficulty of the situation and the temper of the Dutch settlers before venturing into the war. But they, like Napoleon when marching against Russia, cherished the fond illusion that the whole affair would be ended within a fortnight; for they thought all would be over when

they had taken the capital of the country. They should have listened to the warning voice of some of their prophets at home who pleaded for peace. A few of them went even so far as to openly advocate the cause of the Boers. It is now too late, and it seems that England must wade through blood to fulfil her destiny. Whatever the final outcome may be, the situation is critical, and a clear-headed, wise man at the helm is the first desideratum to steer the ship of state past the cliffs and rocks that threaten her destruction.

How many soldiers have bled to death on the battle-field, how many officers have fallen! There is scarcely a family in the three kingdoms that has not suffered from the loss of a brother, or son, or cousin, or nephew in South Africa. And even that might be passed by if there were only an end of the affair now, or if the prize were worth the sacrifice. But there is not even the bubble reputation in it, and it seems as if even now after having gained an apparently complete victory the best course would be to grant self-rule to the subject Afrikaner republic; for, indeed, *the easiest way to govern a country is by giving it home-rule*. It does not pay to rule a people with guns and bayonets.

England's power has, upon the whole, been built upon peace and liberty. She learned a lesson when trying to bring her American dependencies into submission, and thenceforth made it a rule to grant independence to all her colonies. The question is now whether by a bellicose policy she will be able to maintain the acquisitions of the past. It seems that there is no nation in the old world that ought to fear a disturbance by war more than England, and the situation is extremely complicated. England has great interests at stake in India and in China, and while she is engaged in a desperate struggle in South Africa her hands are not free to wage a war against Russia either in Afghanistan or in Manchuria.

In the Transvaal the difficulties would have adjusted themselves peaceably in favor of the English. It would have taken some time, but the result would have been unfailing. The Uitlanders outnumbered the Boers in the proportion of three to one before the war, and would after twenty years, if peace had been preserved, presumably have been ten to one. At the same time, the English language had begun to supplant the Dutch taal and the final result would have been that city interests would have come into collision with the prerogatives of the farmer aristocracy. The settlement of their disputes would have become a purely local affair and the colossus of the British Empire would not have been obliged to risk its reputation in a warfare of such strange odds that

no laurels could be plucked and where even a brilliant victory would have been devoid of honor.

Why was not the peaceful course pursued? Heaven only knows; but the people say that Cecil Rhodes had no patience. He wanted the control of Africa during his life and did not care to leave the completion of his grand enterprises to his children and grandchildren. He gained the confidence of Chamberlain, and Salisbury does as Chamberlain wishes. Thus the British interests were actually jeopardised by the war and the prospect of a slow but certain conquest of the country was surrendered for the doubtful hope of bringing it at once to subjection by force of arms. The probability at present is that the country will remain in an unsettled condition and whatever its natural resources may be, the former flourishing state will not be re-established, for the necessary confidence in England's fairness is lacking. The Boers are to be pitied, but it seems as if the British were in no less pitiable a plight; and at any rate have not gained anything.

The sentiment in England seems to be divided. The Unionists have their way and run the ship of the government. They are supported by two elements, by the old-fashioned Tory of the proud old English aristocracy, and the rabble. The rabble are always for war. They have nothing to lose, they can only gain, or at least they think so. They have no property and are not worried with the idea of an increase of taxes. If they have relatives in the ranks, they do not mind whether they are dead or alive. If men are needed in the army, they can enlist or expect that wages at home will rise. The rabble in England have helped to make sentiment; they have shown their force in riotous demonstrations and have broken up the meetings of the friends of peace.

The middle classes have not shown any great enthusiasm in the present war. The last elections resulted in favor of the Unionists because the war was in progress and it seemed the best policy to let the government finish what it had begun. The time seemed least appropriate for making radical changes in the administration, for in a critical situation it is always better to have a bad government, that is assured to be constant, than a succession of good governments each of which follows a different plan. Therefore we must not assume that all who voted the Unionist ticket were advocates of Chamberlain's policy. There are many who went to the polls with heavy hearts and thought it best, *under the circumstances*, to let the government have a free hand.

When the writer travelled in England last October, he was im-

pressed with the fact that though English sentiment is very strong in condemning Oom Krüger and the policy of the Transvaal, the people by no means feel sure that the course which the British government has taken is the best and wisest. That the Irish are openly avowed friends of the Boers is well known. But there are quite a number of Englishmen who do not hesitate to denounce British politics in the severest terms.

Many bitter words were written and said of the English on the European continent, mostly in France, but the hardest things I have heard were uttered in London. One of the Irish members, I believe it was Tim Healy, used the expression "John Bull, Thieves, and Co." in Parliament and his remarks passed without a rebuke from the chair; there was not even a ripple of indignation among the conservative members of the House. The Irish members have blunted their weapons by using them without discrimination. The House no longer listens to their invectives because they have become monotonous, and they speak now to the galleries only. Their speeches are read by their constituents in Ireland who take delight in the strong language of their representatives, and their re-election can be assured in no other way.

One evening the writer of these lines attended a meeting of the Pharus club, consisting of liberals, perhaps radicals, and other dissatisfied elements of London and its vicinity. The speaker of the evening had just returned from Africa where he had served as a reporter for one of the great English dailies. He was not Irish, but purely English, but the tales of woe he told were heartrending and not to the credit of the English administration of the Transvaal. The remarks and questions made after the lecture indicated the prevalence of an unusual indignation against the British government which was denounced as the most tyrannical government on earth. As a guest from beyond the sea, I ventured to make a few comments on the subject under discussion and tried to say that though the English government had made some grievous mistakes, the English nation had yet some great redeeming features which ought not to be lost sight of; there was in England a love of liberty which made a meeting such as that of the Pharus club possible where English people would grant justice even to an enemy. But I was interrupted and voices from the audience shouted that I could not have been long in England, otherwise I ought to know that there was more freedom in any other country than in Great Britain. Several persons spoke of peace meetings that had been broken up and other methods by which free speech had been suppressed. It

was an interesting experience to find myself, a foreigner, isolated before an English audience in saying a good word for England. I was far from defending Chamberlain's policy; I only insisted that England was a country where love of liberty prevailed as in no other European state, except perhaps Holland and Switzerland.

The boldest advocate of peace is Wm. T. Stead, the well-known editor of the *Review of Reviews*. He has fearlessly written and spoken on the subject and has expressed his opinion without reserve. But he is so severe that his countrymen will not listen to him, and he is commonly characterised as an unbalanced man without any influence. Nevertheless his position is well known all over England and may in time become a factor that has to be taken into consideration.

When the Peace Conference met at the Hague, Mr. Stead on some occasion said that, being an Englishman, he would have to apologise for the atrocities of the British government—a speech which was at once misrepresented in the English press as if he had apologised for being an Englishman. The truth is that Mr. Stead's feelings as to the criminal mistakes made by the British government are so intense because he is a good Englishman, and, whatever erratic notions he may otherwise cherish, he is certainly carved of the same wood as Hampton who resisted the government when infringing upon the rights of the people and preferred to bankrupt himself rather than submit to the payment of an illegal tax.

Mr. Stead, whatever his antagonists may say against him, is a man who has the courage of his convictions. He is not afraid to call a spade a spade. He has been called unpatriotic, but at heart he is a good Briton. He is as truly British as Junius was in the days of the revolution of the American colonists. His patriotism is different though from the common type: it is no jingoism. His patriotism rebels at the thought of having a blot on the escutcheon of England, and he insists on having it removed.

Some speak of the decline of England; and undoubtedly English prestige has suffered greatly of late. But so long as England breeds a Junius *redivivus*, such as Stead, we need not despair. Mr. Stead represents the national conscience, and though he may be a voice crying in the wilderness, still his voice is heard and may be regarded as a symptom of the health of the national life and as an indication of the strong reserve of moral power. The British government may forbid Mr. Stead's writings to circulate in South Africa, but they would not dare to suppress them in England.

In order to appreciate the truth of this observation we must

bear in mind how vigorous and how uncompromising is Mr. Stead's criticism of his own country. He does not hesitate to warn his countrymen of the danger they are running in South Africa by quoting Bismarck's prophecy that South Africa will be the grave of English power. He went so far as to publish a paper entitled *War Against War in South Africa*, bearing the motto "Deliver us from Bloodguiltiness, O Lord!" and his programme was formulated in the following six propositions, printed in bold capitals in large type legible at a long distance :

PROGRAMME.

1. What do you want to do? Stop this war!
2. When? Immediately!
3. Why? Because we are in the wrong.
4. How? By confessing our sins and doing right.
5. What sins? Lying to cover conspiracy. Fraud in making false claims. Bad faith in going back on our word. Wholesale slaughter.
6. And to do right? Expose and punish criminals. Compensate their victims and make peace!

Mr. Stead's peace-propaganda made no impression upon the leading men of the British government. His programme was read in the House, not for considering it but for denouncing him.

In the meantime the war was waged first with fluctuating success until at last the Boers were outnumbered by the British. The capital was taken and the country annexed for the sole purpose of having the legal title of calling the Boers in the field rebels. All organised resistance is broken, but scattered forces remain in the field and it is extremely difficult to suppress them. We need not wonder that the British commander is in despair, for the enemy's appearance and disappearance has become a matter beyond the possibility of computation. The Boers come and vanish like ghosts; and a small number of men can do enormous damage before they are caught. The natural result is that the British resort to desperate means, and have begun to burn farm houses and commit other outrages which are usually condemned by civilised nations as barbarous. We must not blame the British commander too much, for he is driven to despair; and the method pursued by Weyler in Cuba is the sole remedy that is left to him. It is the inevitable policy of an invader who tries to maintain himself against the wish of the large masses of the population. But of this policy the natural result will be that in the long run either the whole population will be wiped out and the end of hostilities will be the peace of the church-yard, or the invader will by and by learn that the

cost of his conquest is higher than the booty, and the losses which he endures bleed him slowly but surely to death. This is the alternative of the present state of things.

Mr. Stead has denounced the methods of the British commanders vigorously, calling it "Hell let loose." Here are some comments on the subject :

"Any house in which a gun is found is given over to the flames. But every white man's house in that wild black man's country needs a gun as part of its indispensable equipment, and they are specially needed when only women are left in charge. But wherever a rifle is found the house is burned.

"What does this mean ?

"Levying war upon women and little children. Mr. E. W. Smith, correspondent of the *Morning Leader*, writing before this last Draconian order was issued, gives a terrible picture of the kind of work we have been doing in the Orange Free State, even before this savage order was issued. He says :

"The column commanded by General French, with General Pole-Carew at the head of the Guards and 18th Brigade, is marching in, burning practically everything on the road. It is followed by about 3500 head of loot cattle and sheep. Hundreds of tons of corn and forage have been destroyed. They have seized over 1000 rifles at various farmsteads and destroyed thousands of rounds of cartridges. I hear, too, that General Rundle burnt his way up to Dewetsdorp. Some painful stories are told of the march of the devastating armies by officers in charge of the execution. At one farm burned yesterday only women were left at work upon it. The troops were told that the owner had been captured with Cronje. Still, rifles were found hidden under the mattress of the bed. So the place had to go. Orders were inexorable in all cases where arms came to light. The woman, who swore that her husband had been in commando for four months, threw her arms round the officer's neck, and begged that the homestead might be spared. It had to go. When the flames burst from the doomed place the poor woman threw herself on her knees, tore open her bodice, and bared her breasts, screaming : "Shoot me, shoot me. I've nothing more to live for now that my husband is gone, and our farm is burnt, and our cattle taken !"

"Another officer told me of a similar case. 'I am a hard-hearted fellow,' he said, 'but I couldn't stand the women crying, and in one instance I did leave a farm standing that I ought to have destroyed.' A third case has been related to me of a farm where the property was confiscated while the owner was lying dying in another room. As the soldiers ransacked the place they heard a pitiable voice crying from an inner room : 'What are they doing ? What are they doing ?' and as the firing parties withdrew from the ruined homesteads they were frequently followed by groups of weeping women and children, who covered them with epithets of bitter complaint and denunciation. I hear that Lord Roberts had given preliminary warning that any burghers not found on their homesteads would be treated as hostile, and their property dealt with accordingly. The execution of a whole district was, of course, accompanied by strange scenes, some of bloodthirsty violence."

These are the sentiments of an English officer who is a gentleman and may be accused of sentimentality. But the rank and file of the men, although they may by nature be kind-hearted, are nec-

essarily brutalised by a war of this kind. One brief instance must suffice, for it would smack of sensationalism to enter into details:

"Mr. C. Williams, the *Morning Leader*, quotes from a sergeant's letter from Norval's Point:—"It is a splendid sensation to know that one can help himself to anything that is worth looting."

The British government might have suppressed the rebellion of the American colonists if it had limited its methods of warfare to attacks upon General Washington's army. But unfortunately for the British authorities the English commander lost patience and began to make war upon the inhabitants themselves. The burning of farms and the punishment of peaceful citizens, not excluding women and children, simply because they sympathise with the enemy, is a symptom not of strength, but of weakness, not of energy but of despair, not of victory but of a final defeat; it is the external expression of a presentiment dimly dawning upon the invading party that their position has become untenable.

Mr. Stead sees the situation in this light, and in one of his publications, entitled *The Candidates of Cain*, he says, p. 108:

"What is the best that can be hoped for?"

"If the present policy is not reversed, and the policy of absolute coercion replaced by one of absolute conciliation, the best that we can hope for is that in ten or twenty years we may be able to maintain our hold upon Capetown, and Simon's Bay, as a naval base of the Empire, in the same way that we hold Gibraltar as a naval base at the extremity of Spain. We shall be lucky if we can save that from the general shipwreck of British interests that has been brought about by the statesmanship of Joseph Chamberlain."

It is a grave mistake to think that Mr. Stead is not a good Englishman because he opposes the policy of the present ministry. He claims to be, and I do not hesitate to say that he is, at least as good an Englishman as are his opponents. He claims, with a show of good argument too, that neither the Boer nor the friend of the Boer is a rebel, but Chamberlain, for he violates the law of the land and opposes the most sacred principles of English traditions. Mr. Stead says:

"Every one recognises to-day that it was George Washington and the American colonists who last century vindicated the true principles of English liberty against the Tory Ministers of George III., who were the rank rebels of last century, as Mr. Chamberlain and his friends are the rank rebels and traitors of to-day."

In calling Mr. Chamberlain a rebel Mr. Stead follows no less an authority than that of Edmund Burke, who says:

"We view the establishment of the English Colonies on principles of liberty, as that which is to render this kingdom venerable to future ages. In comparison of this, we regard all the victories and conquests of our war-like ancestors, or of

our own time, as barbarous, vulgar distinctions. This is the peculiar and appropriated glory of England. Those who have and who hold to that foundation of common liberty . . . we consider as the true and the only true Englishmen. Those who depart from it, whether there or here, are attainted, corrupted in blood, and wholly fallen from their original rank and value. They are the real rebels to the free constitution and just supremacy of England.'"

The present situation becomes more complicated by the crisis which has come over the affairs of China. England suffers Russia to take Manchuria because she needs her armies in South Africa and could not leave India exposed to a Russian attack. Yet there is more at stake in China than in the Transvaal, and Russia will have her way unless she be checked by the bold attitude of Japan, which has the advantage of being on the spot and may be willing to fight for the great prize that may be gained by an increase of her power in Eastern Asia.

Would Great Britain lose in power if she gave back to the Transvaal her independence? Certainly not. She would gain in power; she would fortify her position in South Africa, and would have her hands free to assert her influence in other quarters of the globe. Besides she would rehabilitate her credit as a liberty-loving nation, and the precedent of the victor voluntarily rendering justice to a conquered adversary would redound to her glory for ever.

What England needs is a new man at the helm. Lord Salisbury has given Mr. Chamberlain too much rope, and considering the many former mistakes he made during his administration which have been too easily condoned by the English voters, such as his protection of Dr. Jameson and his blunder in the Venezuela question, he ought to be replaced by a man who is at once firm as Lord Beaconsfield and considerate as Mr. Gladstone. When Edward VII. mounted the throne he had a good chance to make a change without doing any harm to the dignity of Great Britain, and the opportunity has not yet slipped away. The sooner it be done the better, for the time will come when the voters in England and Scotland will resent the great sacrifices of precious lives as well as the enormous drain on the pecuniary resources of the people, and then the British government will be compelled to do what it might do now voluntarily and graciously.

But where is the right man to take the helm?