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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD

SOME
REALITIES
OF
WAR.

READERS of Russell's or Forbes's or Dr. Ryan's descriptions of the battlefeld, the captured casemates of a besieged town, or the horrors of the military hospital will rise from their perusal with at least a sneaking sympathy for the Peace Society and a strong contempt for Lord

Kames's dictum that an occasional war is a real blessing, because of the valour and endurance that it stimulates. 'A fire,' said gruff old Dr. Johnson to the noble Lord, 'might as well be considered a good thing. There are the bravery and the address of the firemen in extinguishing it; there is much humanity exerted in saving the lives and property of the poor sufferers. Yet, after all this, who can say that a fire is a good thing?' Some of the most atrocious agonies of the battlefeld fall to the lot of the wounded who are left unaided to drag the slow hours of suffering under beating rain or freezing blast or burning sun or through the lingering watches of the night. The story told by the *Times* correspondent of a wounded officer at Elandslaagte lifts a little corner of the curtain and gives us a sufficiently heartbreaking glimpse of the horrors of war. This officer was, says the account before us, 'badly wounded at the close of the fight and lay on the ground between the two forces when a Sergeant Murphy pluckily picked him up and rallied the men, who were suffering from a momentary panic. A doctor dressed his wound and, putting his helmet under his head for a pillow and giving him a blanket taken from a dead Boer, left him to attend to others. Night came on, and he is not likely to forget that night whilst he lives. In addition to the agony which his wound gave him, he had two sharp stones running into his back. He was soaked to the skin and bitterly cold, and he had an awful thirst. The torrents of rain never stopped. On one side of him was a Gordon Highlander in raving delirium, and on the other side a Boer who had his leg shattered by a shell and who gave vent to the most heartrending cries and groans. At daybreak the wounded officer was taken to the nearest railway station on a "doolie," was dropped twice on the way, and fainted each time. His wound was dressed seventeen hours after he had been hit, and the beet tea then given to him was the first food he had tasted for twenty-seven hours.' Here is, indeed, a lurid little picture of the barbarous realities of war which outivals the painted horrors of Wiertz's pictures in the famous Musée at Brussels. The Peace Society might do worse than have *Times* story of the wounded British officer entered among its stock of leadlit literature.

DR. LYSTER, Bishop of Achonry (Ireland), deserves well of humanity if there is any truth in Ruskin's motto that a man who sees a thing clearly and tells it to others in plain terms is a benefactor of his kind. Speaking

THE CATHOLIC
TOMMY
ATRINS.

at Wolverhampton (England) recently he drew a forcible contrast between the attitude of the present English Government towards the Catholic body in Ireland and that of the Irish Catholic soldier towards the British flag in South Africa. He referred to the refusal—at the clamour of a noisy minority in the north-east corner of the country—of a University in which young Catholic Irishmen might graduate without shipwreck to their faith or danger to their religious principles; and this, too, at a time when two costly and worthless and inoperative State-supported colleges cumber the ground at Cork and Galway, and are being maintained in luxury for the benefit of a small clique by money drawn from the pockets of the taxpayers. 'Even Mr. Balfour (said Dr. Lyster), and he has been our best friend, has admitted that it is to the fact of our being Catholics he attributes the failure to give a University to the Irish race. Over there on the African veldt, on the 20th of October, the Dublin Fusiliers—a band of beardless boys—sturdily stormed the fire-swept hillside at disastrous Glencoe, and while the dying General was borne away on his litter, as

his life-blood welled from his mortal wound, his dying ears were roused by a ringing Irish cheer, his mist-covered eyes were gladdened as they looked their last on those Irish soldiers boys scaling and carrying the hill. And these were Irishmen, and these were Catholics; and England points to them as her glory with one hand, while with the other she crumples and crushes the charter that would give justice to their brothers in their far-off motherland. A few weeks have passed since the Irish Fusiliers stepped on the African coast. They numbered more than 1000 strong; only 300 now remain—"all that is left of them, left of ten hundred." All the rest are gone—killed, wounded, captured, after their last cartridge was fired—all gone down—the brave boys of the "Faugh-a-ballaghs," fighting for the English flag, battling for England's name. And these are Irishmen! And these are Catholics! And while their shattered corpses are mouldering shroudless and collarless in African graves, and while their wounded bodies are tossing in camp beds in African hospitals, and while they sit grimly, without arms, prisoners of the Boers, the Empire for which they fought and suffered and died is denying to their comrades and their countrymen, not merely some paltry privilege, but the God-given right which every other nation under God's blue sky gives to and provides for its humblest citizen and its lowliest child.'

* * *
'My sympathy (he said) is for the poor Dublin boys, for the hardy heroes of our Rifle Brigade, for the shattered survivors of the Irish Fusiliers, fighting fiercely amidst the foremost at the front. My sympathy is with our own faithful lads of the Connaught Rangers, most of whom were summoned suddenly from their Connaught firesides, many of whom shall never see their Connaught hills. My sympathy is for that poor widow whom I looked upon last night as I hastened over here, when I saw her wan and worn and wistful face, and loosened, dishevelled hair lifted by the wind, when I saw her wringing her poor, thin hands in the agony of her agony; when I heard her shriek, wild, weird, and woeful, go up to the blackness of the night because they had told her her only son was missing—her only son was gone, stretched upon the African hill-side, with a bullet through his heart.'

AN
EXPLANATION
THAT
EXPLAINS.

SOME explanations don't explain—to any great extent. Mark Twain, for instance, once went to witness a Thibetan dramatic performance. A Chinaman explained the piece to him in 'pidgin English' as it went along. 'The play,' said Mark, 'was obscure enough without the explanation; with the explanation added it was opaque.' It is a pleasant, though by no means very usual, experience to alight across an explanation of things which makes them clear in a brief, practical, and business-like way. We have seldom seen more of meaning compressed into a brief compass on a point of Catholic ritual than in the following excerpt from the *Catholic Watchman*, a weekly paper published in Madras (India):—

'See those two little Tamil-speaking boys on either side of the priest. Transport them to another altar, in any part of the globe, and they are ready to serve Mass in Latin. Transport the priest himself to some alien land, where his fellow-priest lies sick and lonely. In Latin will he console, help, and absolve his brother. We once made part of a large congregation in a cathedral in Burmah—a congregation composed, in great part, of Burmese, but with a sprinkling of English, French, Italians, Portuguese, natives of India. We should have been unable to converse with each other outside the church, but once before the altar all joined in the Benediction service, ending, with a glorious chorus, in the *Laudate Dominum omnes gentes*. It was a thrilling proof of the unity of the Church. Supposing Mass had been said in English in England. How it would have been altered! We can hardly understand the English of a few centuries ago. Spelling and meaning have alike changed. English varies even in different parts of England; and Londoners find it hard to understand the dialect of the shires. Had the Church made use of living

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