

Current Topics

War Names in the East End

A representative of the War Office who has had occasion to visit in portions of East London some of the homes of the heroes at the front, reports, in a contribution to the *Spectator*, that his experiences in chatting with the inmates were not by any means without their humorous side. The humor was not the less entertaining because it was unconscious. In some cases it was associated with a little confusion in the minds of the mothers and wives as to what their men-kind were actually doing at the war and with their attempts to give a dashing and graphic description of what they imagined it to be—such as 'quelling them Turks,' or 'following up the Indians and Russians,' while another said her son was 'driving a motor in the mountainous parts of Paris.' Naturally, the place names in the war proved a heavy hurdle to the East Enders—as they have done to more pretentious people. Even the easy ones were occasionally found to be a stumbling-block. The writer avers that one individual said he 'heard 'ow as our Bill is in the Sewage Canal, because o' them turkeys'—but this looks rather like one of the 'well-found' order of stories. In regard to the Continental names, the East Enders made free use of the phonetic principle, and on the whole it answered well enough for all practical purposes. In view of the facts of the case, what could be better than 'Dick's Mud' for Dixmude; and 'Nervy Chapel' for Neuve Chapelle strikes one, as this chronicler truly remarks, as 'pathetically apt.'

War Trenches at Nazareth

The following cablegram from Paris, dated August 24, is printed in American papers just to hand: 'It is learned that the Turks, preparing for an invasion of Palestine, are digging trenches around Nazareth and other places famous in Scriptural history. They also are drawing away the water from the River Jordan in the vicinity of Tiberias, but whether it is for defence is not clear. Historic buildings have been razed to make way for artillery fire, among them being Terra Santa (Holy Land) Convent near Tiberias. All inscriptions engraved on walls have been erased for fear they might afford useful information to the enemy.'

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No such cable was sent to New Zealand papers. The message has a rather improbable look, and we can hardly bring ourselves to believe that the statements made are reliable. If, however, the information is authentic, the item certainly constitutes a distinct shock to Christian feeling and sentiment. Even for its natural beauty, Nazareth has some claim to be spared the horrors and ravages of war. The spot where our Lord grew up is, indeed, one of the most beautiful on the face of the earth. It is situated in a secluded, cup-like valley amid the mountains of Zebulon, just where they dip down into the plain of Esdraelon, with which it is connected by a steep and rocky path. Its white houses, with vines clinging to their walls, are embowered amidst gardens and groves of olive, fig, orange, and pomegranate trees. The fields are divided by hedges of cactus, and bedecked with innumerable flowers of every hue. Behind the village rises a hill five hundred feet in height, from whose summit there is seen one of the most wonderful views in the world—the mountains of Galilee, with snow-covered Hermon towering above them, to the north: the ridge of Carmel, with its many reminders of Elias, the coast of Tyre, and the sparkling waters of the Mediterranean, to the west; to the east, the wooded and verdure-clad dome of Mount Tabor, and the deep river-bed of the Jordan; and to the south, the plain of Esdraelon, with the mountains of Ephraim beyond. But it is, of course, for its spiritual history and associations that Nazareth has become such hallowed ground. It was here that the Son of God, the Saviour

of mankind, spent nearly thirty years of His mortal life. It was, in fact, His home, His native village for all but three or four years of His life on earth; the village which gave its then despised name to the scornful title written by Pilate upon His cross; the village by which He did not disdain to describe Himself when He spoke in vision to the persecuting Saul. And along the narrow mountain-path to which we have referred, His feet must have often trod, for it is the only approach by which, in returning northwards from Jerusalem, He could have reached the home of His infancy, youth, and manhood. Surely, surely, the Christian world will be spared the horror of hurtling shells and high explosives crashing destruction and desolation into this peaceful and so sacred spot.

The German Problem

Vilna has at last been occupied by the German troops—at a terrific cost if the cable is to be believed—and, as we write, the Russians are being slowly forced further and further back, counting themselves lucky, indeed, to have got their army away at all from the jaws of von Hindenburg's latest trap. The escape seems to have been a narrow one; but the important point is that they got away, and that the real objective of the German movement—the putting out of action of the Russian field forces—has once again failed. The Russian armies are still intact; and the Russian view of the military significance of these victories is that which has been already outlined in these columns. The German advance, which is being carried out at such a heavy cost, must stop somewhere, and then, after the necessary time for recuperation, it will be Russia's turn again. The Russian view as to the never-ending task which confronts Germany if she persists in her offensive campaign in the east, and as to what will happen 'when she can do it no more' is tersely expressed by Mr. Stanley Washburn, the special correspondent in Galicia of the *London Times*. 'At the moment of writing,' he says, 'Germany faces the identical problem that she did two months ago, excepting that she now occupies extra territory, for the most part in ruins. The task before her is to repeat the Galician enterprise against an army infinitely better than the one she broke in May. If she can do this she will have the same problem to meet on some other line in another two months, and after that another and another. It is simply a question of how much in time, men, and resources Germany has to spend on these costly victories. She may do it once, she may do it twice, but there will come a time when she can do it no more, and when that time comes Russia will slowly, surely, inexorably, come back step by step until she regains her own, her early conquests, and has Germany on her knees in the East.'

The Russian Revival

Meanwhile the testimony is widespread and conclusive that the only effect of the German successes has been to weld the Russian nation into an absolutely solid and united people, and to make them more than ever determined to see the thing through to a definite and successful issue, no matter what sufferings or how many months or even years of struggle it may entail. The Russian armies are undaunted as well as unbroken, and the whole people are now with them in spirit as never before. Mr. Washburn, in his Galician narrative to the *Times*, dwells for the hundredth time, upon the stoicism of the Russian private soldier. The people of Russia, he tells us, are behind this war, and they have 'not the vaguest idea of a peace without a decision.' Germany has won back Galicia for the Austrians, and she has seized Warsaw, but 'she has not destroyed the armies, she has not discouraged the troops.' 'The retreat from Mons will remain an imperishable page in British history, and it lasted twelve days. The Russian equivalent of the retreat from Mons has lasted three months, and is not yet over. Its scale has been infinitely vaster, its trials far more intense, and the Russians have had to face again and again a concentrated fury of big gun fire such as even