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ONE SHILLING NET

# HUSHED UP:

A CASE FOR INQUIRY INTO SOME  
SUPPRESSED FACTS CONCERNING  
THE CONDUCT OF THE WAR IN  
SOUTH AFRICA

BY

CHARLES WILLIAMS



LONDON  
GRANT RICHARDS



HUSHED UP

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“The Truth, the **WHOLE** Truth, and Nothing but the **TRUTH**.”

*Extract from the oath administered by Law.*

“Behold, Thou desirest Truth in the inward parts: and  
in the hidden parts Thou shalt make me to know Wisdom.”

*Psalm 51.*

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## A FOREWORD

*When, by the mouth of the present Prime Minister, a "child in these matters," the Government of Lord Salisbury light-heartedly promised the House of Commons an inquiry into the conduct of the War in South Africa, there fell on certain circles both in this country and in the field a sense of awe and apprehension. It was not long before the promise was discounted by the representations that such an inquiry could lead to no good, and might lead to a great deal of mischief. Ministers began to realize slowly but surely that they ought to have relied on their majority to back them in refusing inquiry; and then they set to work to devise means by which the inquiry, if any considerable party was inconsiderate enough to remind them of their promise, should be limited, cramped, rendered abortive. Lord Goschen, to the astonishment of a country that had not forgotten he was as responsible as anybody else for the war and the first year's conduct thereof, was indicated, in the usual way, by tentative paragraphs in complaisant journals, as chairman of a Commission, and, when that was seen to be impossible, the name of Lord Elgin was put forward as a substitute,*



*forgetful, or hoping the public would be forgetful, that his lordship had been associated, on very intimate terms, with some of those whose conduct of the war had to be challenged. Then, on the plea that there must be a limit to an inquiry, it was proposed that the Commission should be muzzled as regards anything but contract work after the fall of Pretoria, when, in point of fact, the necessity for inquiry was not smaller but greater in proportion as the newspaper correspondents had been withdrawn from the field and the public was left to the official dispatches for information as to what was occurring or had occurred, though indeed the way in which the exercise of the censorship had been strengthened provided from the beginning an excellent means of burking any information that it was desired to keep from the country at home, and official "economy of truth" did the rest. In the following pages an attempt is made to show up some of the material points which have been either partially or wholly suppressed in dispatches and Ministerial statements, and to indicate matters which the Commission cannot pass over, when they have once been mentioned, without thorough investigation.*

*C. W.*

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# HUSHED UP

## CHAPTER I.

### A SERIOUS PLEDGE.

**W**HEN, in the summer of 1899, the Government of Natal, with a truer insight or instinct than the Home Cabinet had, realized that war with the Transvaal was imminent, it applied to the High Commissioner for an assurance that its interests would be safeguarded, and it received from the Secretary of the Colonies a promise that it would be defended with all the strength of the Empire. It was a pledge to which every part of the dominions of Queen Victoria had as much right as the Birthday Colony, the Cape no less than Natal; but the exceptionally dangerous position of the latter obtained for it special consideration. Probably, when the pledge was given,



neither the Colonial Office nor the War Office appreciated the extent to which it would affect the coming campaign. Had this been understood, the pledge might never have been given or, in popular language, a boy would not have been sent on a man's errand; adequate forces would have been provided for the redemption of the solemn undertaking of the Government of Downing Street. Yet every factor of the situation was as clear then as now. Natal, as the Natalians at least knew, was certain to be attacked in the event of hostilities not only from the Transvaal but from the Free State, and lay almost at the mercy of the enemy if so attacked. London, realizing to some extent the facts of the case, deliberately imperilled an inadequate force, largely from India, and the boy was not equal to the man's job. Had it done nothing, it would have been possible to say that it did not believe a war was coming on such a question as was in dispute with Pretoria.

## A PROVOCATION.

But it did just enough to provoke the danger it did so little to avert. By moving troops from India it directed the particular attention of the Boers to the fact that it considered Natal to be the weak point of our position. By gathering so few troops it invited the attack upon that weak point. It offered the Boers the prize of the equivalent of a British division as *hors d'œuvres* for the banquet of blood. It could do no less than it did, having regard to Mr. Chamberlain's pledge. It did nothing by any contention adequate if it were to move at all. It did not even provide for links of communication between the bodies of troops it exposed to a double flank-attack in the north of Natal and their base at Durban. It accumulated its stores not in guarded camps along the line of communication but at two exposed points near its frontiers. It behaved with an imbecility which would have discredited a lieutenant of a year's standing. Why?

## GOVERNMENT AMPLY INFORMED.

It threw every chance away because it cherished the hope, rather than the belief, that the Boers would not dare to take the initiative, though its own Intelligence Office had told it that the Transvaal and the Orange Free State had been arming with the latest weapons, and drilling as they had never drilled before, from the time of the Jameson Raid. It knew as well then as now the force that the burghers were able to put in the field at once, and it had an estimate of the numbers likely to join from the blood-brotherhood of the Dutch in our colonies. With all this information, in the hands of Ministers in print three months before the first sign of actual hostilities, they miscalculated every element in the situation and ran the risk with their eyes as fully opened as it was possible for their military subordinates to open them. The politicians paralyzed the preparations that were indispensable even to firmness in negotiations. Yet not one of them has suffered the inconvenience of going a single

day without that quarterly stipend which is, they tell me, payable in advance as if to remove the smallest fear of actual responsibility.

#### THE RESPONSIBILITY.

Still the responsibility was theirs. They informed us, later on, of mistakes made by the General in Natal. But they knew daily what he was doing, and the cable was completely at their service to overrule aught that he ordered amiss. Will the Royal Commissioners drive that responsibility home? single out the culprits by name and pronounce them unfit to control a parish pump? render them incapable of further muddling in public affairs? Yet, if not, where is the boasted public responsibility of a British Government!

#### THE ARMAMENTS.

And, let there be no mistake about it, their military advisers warned them that if they sent any troops they should send sufficient troops. They had been told that the Boers had got large supplies of quick-firing



and far-reaching artillery, much superior to any we possessed, even though I had brought pressure upon them by publicity in February, 1898, when I showed that Germany was nearly, and France was about one-half re-armed with these guns such as the Boers had, that could beat us in speed of fire, in range of fire, in quality of fire. Instead of being thanked for helping the Government to arouse public opinion, I was menaced under the Official Secrets Act and threatened that I should not again be licensed as a correspondent in the field if I gave the War Office away any more. That threat was bunkum, as I knew, and influenced me just as much as any Minister's uncorroborated reply on behalf of any Cabinet to an inconvenient question. But this brings home to Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Brodrick the fact that they knew the Boers could beat us at artillery, and yet they took no steps whatever to provide our soldiers with adequate guns. Will the Royal Commissioners investigate that point thoroughly ?

## THE WEAK POINT.

One word more on the situation in Natal at the time. Further proof that the War Office knew Natal was not the weak only but also the dangerous point is to be found in the fact that although they occupied De Aar junction on the western railway in Cape Colony, they did not reinforce it or present any real obstacle to an advance by the Boers on Cape Town. As many troops as were sent, were sent to Natal, and this furnishes irrefragable evidence that they believed Natal would suffer the first brunt of any operations.

## WHITE'S INSTRUCTIONS.

What, I must here ask, were the representations made and the instructions given to General Sir George White, V.C., when he left Southampton for the Cape? It will be remembered that he had been Commander-in-Chief in India, where, just before he sailed, he had a serious fall from his horse which left him long an invalid; that, although he was incapacitated, he had been

appointed Quartermaster-General at Army Headquarters, Major-General Charles Burnett being chosen to act for him until his recovery; that a few weeks after he was able to attend in Pall Mall, he resigned on being appointed Governor of Gibraltar; and that, while he was waiting to go to the "Rock," he was chosen, still somewhat lame, for the active duty of saving Natal in case of war. All this was the work of the Marquis of Lansdowne, Secretary of State for War, who had appointed Sir George to the Indian command, and who stuck to his old friend as though there were no physically sound general in the British army. Everybody knows Sir George is a good man; I, as one born within three miles of his birth-place, and remembering well when he got his first commission in the regiment now the Inniskilling Fusiliers, am bound to assume he was the best available, and certainly there were not many better. But the best of men and the most trusted must have instructions. A curious reticence has been preserved as regards those instructions.

When they are produced to the Commissioners, who, I must believe, will call for them, they will be found, I understand, clearly to contemplate a war, and a war in which Natal would bear the first burden. They also contemplated some kind of co-operation with General Sir Redvers Buller, V.C., who had been already designated to the command-in-chief in South Africa, but whose start was as much delayed as Sir George White's was expedited.

#### A FREE HAND.

They gave Sir George a free hand in Natal, subject only to co-ordination with troops west of the Drakensberg, when the latter bodies should make their movement in accordance with the general plan of campaign which had been already decided upon, and the outline of which I published as soon as, but not until, it had broken down. It is of the most vital consequence to a comprehension of the course of the war that these instructions given to Sir George White should be known and mastered. But they

have been kept back, and kept back for a purpose. They would reveal the fact that at least some of the Ministers immediately concerned in their preparation had made up their minds that a war was inevitable, while pretending it would be avoided, and that greater preparations were known to be necessary than the majority of the Ministers were willing to undertake.

I close this chapter with an extract from Mr. A. M. S. Methuen's admirable little book, "Peace or War in South Africa." I cannot hope to improve upon, or even rival, the perfect lucidity of its statements.

#### WILFULLY BLIND.

Mr. Balfour at the end of November, 1899, stated that if he had been asked two months ago whether it was likely that they would be at war with the Orange Free State, he would have answered, "You might as well expect us to be at war with Switzerland." The little book of the Intelligence Department issued in the previous June would have instructed his amiable simplicity. Here it is distinctly stated :

"There can be no question that if war ensues between the Transvaal and the Suzerain Power

as a result of the differences made apparent at the Bloemfontein Conference (1899), the Free State, who has already declared by the mouth of her Raad that she entirely approves of President Kruger's proposals, will undoubtedly throw in her lot with the sister Republic."

What an Iliad of woes sprang from the neglect of this plain warning!

Mr. Balfour, in January, 1900, described the entanglement of Ladysmith as being beyond the reasonable calculations of the Government. The Military Notes would have given him definite warning on this point, for in them it is distinctly stated that the Transvaal Boers intended to concentrate with the Free State force west of the Drakensberg and to advance on Ladysmith through Van Reenen's Pass.



## CHAPTER II.

### BOER PROMPTITUDE.

**W**HEN Sir Redvers Buller was at last allowed to go out, he arrived at the Cape, as has been well said, "a general without an army," and with the circumstances utterly changed since he left Southampton. For, instead of waiting to be attacked, the Boers acted upon one of the fundamental maxims of war, that attack is the best defence. They were in Natal ; they were threatening Cape Colony ; and there were not, to oppose 50,000 of them, more than 20,000 troops, including the contingent from India and the local militia and volunteers, many of whom were of Boer blood through at least one parent. Sir Redvers, I have said in the last chapter, and hold written proof of the statement, had been chosen nearly three months before the

date at which he was nominally appointed, and he had even earlier concurred in the advice given by Lord Wolseley as Commander-in-Chief that, if any troops were to be sent to South Africa as reinforcements, at least the equivalent of an Army Corps should go.

#### OUR DELAYS.

But Buller was not intrusted with his task until October 9th, two days before the time named in Mr. Kruger's fatal ultimatum. All the commissions were dated at the same time, "9 October, 1899," except that of Sir A. Hunter, who was to be Buller's Chief of the Staff, but got "entangled" in Ladysmith and never took up his appointment. He, Haig (7th Hussars), the most promising young cavalryman, and one or two Intelligence officers, had been nominated in the third and fourth weeks of September. A few, a very few, but men with significant reputations or employment, had been sent out as from July 1, which is really the date of the beginning of things, the Conference

at Bloemfontein having begun May 31 and ended June 5.

#### HESITATION.

Thus the resolve to send a force to South Africa was made as soon as the actual text of the High Commissioner's Report on the Bloemfontein Conference had reached the Cabinet. But that body, by a majority, "let I dare not wait upon I would, like the poor cat i' th' adage." It had promised to defend Natal with all the strength of the Empire. The Boers in a week overran half Natal. It was bound, without any pledge, to defend Cape Colony.

#### BULLER'S ARRIVAL.

When Buller arrived at Cape Town there was nothing between him and the Boers who had invaded the Cape but a force which could not have stayed the Free State Boers alone for a week in their march on Cape Town. Symons was defeated and dead, Yule had fallen back on Ladysmith, White was virtually shut up there, when Buller as

one of his first acts ordered French out of Ladysmith to take the command of a potential cavalry division, which, outside Ladysmith, did not exist in South Africa; and we can all remember how French got out, in the immortal words of Job, "with the skin of his teeth," after he and Ian Hamilton had shown the closing enemy at Elandslaagte what British soldiering might be.

#### HIS ACTION.

What were the messages that passed between the Government and Buller and White at this time? The public has not been informed what the Government thought or said, but it knows what Buller did. He left everything to stand on the defensive in Cape Colony until troops could arrive, when the offensive was to be taken without delay, at three or four points, and he threw himself, with a division which had been intended for operation from Cape Colony, to the desperate but obviously pressing duty of relieving White. If the Commission wants to get at the bedrock of the facts (though

this may be what Mr. Balfour would call "detail"), it will insist on the production of every message cabled during this crisis. I have reason to believe the publication would show the Executive to have been already half paralyzed at the contemplation of the necessary results of its own imbecility. But it was "paralysis agitans." It found expression in jerky attempts to overcome time and space, to do the impossible in transport, and thus to make up for some of the time and opportunity that had been wantonly thrown away lest the Boers should be provoked to do the very thing the Boers were provoked to do.

#### HIS FORCES.

A Parliamentary Return just issued shows that, though some effort was made to make things safe in South Africa, it was just enough to "rile" the Boers, and not to influence them for prudence. The garrison upon August 1st, 1899, was 318 officers and 9,622 men. By October 11th the reinforcements dispatched, but not all arrived,

were 6,600 from home and 5,900 from India. Thus, at the expiration of the ultimatum, we had in South Africa something under 22,486 men to protect a line from Rhodesia to the Orange River, thence to Basutoland, and in Natal from Mount aux Sources up to Charlestown, then down nearly to Ekowe, then up again to the Mkusi River, and so to the head of St. Lucia Bay. Some 12,000 of these troops constituted Sir George White's "Natal Field Force," as it was called, leaving roughly 10,000 men to hold Bechuanaland, including Mafeking, Griqualand West, including Kimberley, and the Orange River line; and so, at the outbreak of hostilities, we had altogether about one-third of an Army Corps in Natal, another third in Cape Colony, instead of the Army Corps, at least, which the military advisers of the Government wanted to be sent in support of the garrison of 10,000 men already, in July, in South Africa. In other words, we had about half the force on the ground that our military heads thought indispensable three months before.



### THE ENEMY'S STRENGTH.

It was with such a force, widely distributed, that Sir Redvers Buller was expected to overwhelm some 50,000 or 60,000 Boers, armed better and knowing every mile of a country upon our ignorance of which we seemed to set great store, seeing the troops went out without maps, and the enemy had new maps as well as intimate personal knowledge. Driblets followed, until at length Buller thought he had gathered enough men to make an attempt upon the main Boer position which barred his way to Ladysmith.

### A CONTRAST.

The country should be allowed to see, has not yet been told anything of, the messages demanding reinforcements between Buller's landing and his check at Colenso, and the tardiness with which his indents were responded to in comparison with the rapidity reinforcements were thrown south when Lord Roberts at last, after weeks of delay, made up his mind they

were indispensable. Why was Buller kept so short of the troops that the Government were soon after more anxious to send Roberts than he was to have them?

#### COLENZO.

Buller believed then, and believes now, he would have got into Colenso on December 15 but for Colonel Long's disobedience of orders and singular loss of guns, to say nothing of the imbecile performance of Major-General Fitzroy Hart in taking his brigade in very dense formation under Boer Mauser fire at close quarters. The great blot, as it seems to me, on Buller's scutcheon in the war was his consent to intrust any portion of his troops to a man who had just made such an exhibition of sheer incapacity as Hart did against Hildyard in August down by Woolmer. But Buller is too good-natured, and Hart's undoubted personal pluck gained him admiration that was not greatly diminished even by the silly sacrifice of precious troops at the moment when we had not a man to spare.

## LIGHT NEEDED.

What were the confidential reports about Colonel Long at Omdurman fight? What were the reports of Hart's continuous defeats by Hildyard between Aldershot and Petersfield? If there were none, why not? The Commissioners will do well to probe this matter to the utmost.

The check sustained by Buller at Colenso threw the inner Cabinet into a panic. From a demigod Buller became accursed. There was only one possible saviour of the country, "the ever-victorious Field-Marshal," as Graf von Waldersee has recently comically called the present Commander-in-Chief of the British army.

## ROBERTS TO THE RESCUE.

He and the "great organizer" were sent in a hurry. The Cabinet and the country palpitated with anxiety till they were got off, one from Southampton, the other via Gibraltar from Khartoum. Never was there anything so certain as that the Boers would collapse the moment they knew of the ad-

vent presently of Roberts and Kitchener. Special steamers, endless telegrams, feverish excitement, until the meeting—what a meeting it was! detailed for us with particularity of the most spying sort—away there beyond Trafalgar's Bay; and then almost content, relative happiness, absolute confidence before a night at sea had given so much as an opportunity for consultation!

## CHAPTER III.

### A LOST MONTH.

**F**EVERISHNESS again when the great pair reached Cape Town; they would rush up, take command, see, conquer, come home, and we should wonder why we had been anxious! But a day passed, and days lingered into weeks, and still the great men did not rush up, did not even crawl, to the front, but stayed at Cape Town, studying the situation for a lunar month and misapprehending it entirely, as was soon apparent. For when Lord Roberts did at length get to the Modder River, it was only to announce his complete reversal of the advice he had given the Government from Cape Town. This will bear a bit of looking into.

### AMPLE INFORMATION.

Lord Roberts arrived at Cape Town on

January 10, 1900. He found there Sir F. W. Forestier-Walker, commanding the line of communications, who was necessarily furnished with all the details of military import. Sir Alfred Milner was bubbling over with information regarding the feeling in the Colony and the apprehended rising of the Dutch element. There was positively nothing in the situation in Cape Colony that could not be apprehended and judged of in forty-eight hours. Yet no move was made till February 6. What were the communications made to the Government during this long interval? We know what their result was from the dispatch of February 6, and even that displays a vacillation of opinion which is singular and something more. Lord Roberts was "reluctant" to ask for an eighth infantry division and another cavalry brigade. Why, if they were necessary? So he ordered out a battalion from Malta and another from Egypt, two companies of mounted infantry all the way from Burma (!), and thirteen militia battalions from home for the communications.



## VACILLATION.

It was not until the 28th of January that he changed his mind and applied for a cavalry division and another infantry division. The former was at once given him, the latter was not, the Government at home suspending its dispatch, and thus showing how little it, even then, realized the task to which it had set itself. There were 10,000 men cooped up in Ladysmith; Buller had between Durban and Colenso, including the communications and the sick, 27,622 men; and Lord Roberts had in Cape Colony 33,781 men, including 2,118 sick. Thus, by the end of January there were some 60,000 men and 150 guns available against the enemy, and outnumbering him. Nevertheless there was still delay.

## MOVE AT LAST.

At length, after rather futile operations on his left between February 6th and 8th, Lord Roberts sent French to relieve Kimberley, and then Kelly-Kenny was ordered to join French. The dispatch of the 16th

is disingenuous. It conceals the fact that Buller's declaration of doubt about the next move for the relief of Ladysmith was in answer to a suggestion from Roberts himself that no avoidable risk should be run; and it distorts the story of the loss of a big convoy at Waterval. This convoy had been protected by the Ninth Division, under Sir H. Colvile. Before he moved off, in accordance with orders, to Wegdrai, Colvile's Staff became anxious about the convoy, and sent to headquarters to say so. They were rather curtly informed that 200 men would be sufficient protection (see Colvile's "Work of the Ninth Division," p. 26).

#### 1,000,000 RATIONS LOST.

As soon as Colvile had gone, the Boers attacked the convoy, beat the too small escort, and, says Lord Roberts, "did a good deal of injury to the oxen and wagons of the supply column," which is a remarkable way of prefacing the fact that the Boers held on till driven away by two batteries, two battalions and 300 mounted infantry

sent to deliver the precious convoy. Even this, however, did not save it, for Lord Roberts at nightfall "abandoned" the million of rations, the consequences of which will be seen later, or, as Colvile puts it: "After we left they were attacked in force, and all the wagons captured." But let us leave it that Lord Roberts light-heartedly abandoned a convoy and its million rations. And the only explanation he has vouchsafed is that to set the convoy in motion again would have involved delay. What it did involve was the careful preparation by starvation of a seed-bed of weakness among the troops ready for the enteric poison that was avoidably introduced among the forces engaged in and around Bloemfontein.

#### CONFUSION.

So thorough was the understanding at this time between Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener as his Chief of the Staff, that when the Commander-in-Chief ordered Colvile's division to Kimberley, the fact was not known to Kitchener until he met Colvile

by accident, whereon he ordered him to Koodoesrand Drift! It was probably about this time that the story originated how the Field-Marshal said, "I want Lord Kitchener and everybody else to understand that I command this army."

#### THE FIELD-MARSHAL'S PAST.

Now, before we go on to consider the confusion and worse that ensued at Paardeberg, it may be well to take a short retrospect of some of Lord Roberts's achievements in warfare. Space will afford but a glance at some of the incidents of this career. When the silly Abyssinian campaign was decided on, an estimate was called for. Colonel Frederick Sleigh Roberts, V.C., R.A., was Acting-Quartermaster-General in India. He had the duty of drawing up the estimate and a vote was consequently taken in the House of Commons for two millions sterling. Colonel Roberts had the handling of the arrangements for the campaign, which, I believe, sooner or later worked out at a cost of

thirteen millions. All the responsibility for expenditure fell upon Lord Napier and his Quartermaster-General, and when all was over and the bloodless campaign ended a Commission reported on gross and scandalous waste, and said other nasty things which, if said of officers of the English army, would have resulted in a certain number of vacancies on the Staff. But the expedition was in the hands of Indian officers, from whom censure ran like water off a duck's back, as they cared about Simla opinion and not a whit of that at Westminster. Moreover, all this was in accordance with the best Indian usage. For when, before the Afghan War of 1878-80, Roberts himself asked Sir Henry Strachey, then Finance Minister, for some money for preparations, he was told he could not have a rupee, "though when the war begins, my dear fellow, the money will flow out like water," as it did. This little light on Indian methods was afforded me in Bombay by Sir Richard Temple on our return from the Kandahar side.



## FORGOTTEN FACTS.

This Afghan War redounded greatly to the credit of the V.C. gunner. There seems to be an ingrained notion in the British mind that if a man gets the V.C. in early life he is sure to make a good general in his old age. And certainly the operations which Archibald Forbes described were well and even brilliantly done. But later on there was not quite so much sterling merit about them. Graf von Waldersee may be surprised if he reads a little further in this connection. Be it known to him, then, that Lord Roberts, so far from being "ever victorious," was badly beaten by barbarians at the game he is understood to be best at. There is extant a comment of F.-M. Sir F. W. Haines, then C.-in-C. in India, upon a certain operation which excited some surprised attention at the time, but then we have such short memories nowadays that more important things than this are speedily forgotten. I do not think Sir F. W. Haines wrote what I am about to cite, but he had a very clever Chief of the Staff in the person of Sir George



Greaves. At any rate, observations on certain achievements of Sir F. Roberts appeared in the "Gazette" of India, which was as promptly as possible suppressed by Lord Lytton, the Viceroy, who claimed to have given Roberts his chance. The C.-in-C. in India said about the defence and evacuation of the Bala Hissar and the city of Kabul, in a memorandum addressed to Sir F. Roberts:

#### POLITE CENSURE.

The condition in which you were placed, owing to defective information as to the extent of the combination against you, in having your forces scattered in various directions, was most serious. . . .

Sir Frederick Haines can quite understand the reluctance with which you surrendered the Bala Hissar and the city of Kabul to the enemy. . . .

He thinks you acted quite rightly, under the circumstances, in not destroying the villages, though their destruction, so as to make a clear space round the cantonment, was, as a military precaution, desirable. . . .

You left standing villages and walled enclosures from which considerable trouble resulted during the defence of the cantonment.

And so on, in a fine vein of sarcasm.

## THE RENOWNED MARCH.

The name of Lord Roberts is so much fetish with a portion of the British public—far more than with the Army—that it may sound almost blasphemous to recall these little matters. But there is something more to be told before we return to Paardeberg. It is not too much to say that with nine civilians out of ten Lord Roberts's reputation before the recent war rested on the march from Kabul to Kandahar. Folks have forgotten, if they ever knew, that a few weeks before, with the snow barely off the ground and no forage as yet on it, Sir Donald Stewart had marched a body of worn-out troops, with broken-down transport, through a hostile country, with two considerable engagements and a running fight most of the way, from Kandahar to Kabul. Many a day after, I was talking to Sir Donald on the steps of the United Service Club about the march and ventured to tell him in one respect he had made a great mistake. Naturally astonished, he asked for an explanation. I replied, "Well, sir, you

forgot to take a tame special correspondent with you, and so few know about your march except readers of dispatches!"

#### PROTECTED BY THE AMIR.

Roberts marched with rested and, in some cases, fresh troops, with new transport, with the incline of the country as much in his favour as it had been against Stewart, and with ripening forage on the way. Mr. Hensman told the story to the world. In his dispatches and his "Forty-One Years in India" Lord Roberts has told it as he would wish it to go down to posterity. But neither in the correspondent's letters, the dispatches, nor the autobiography is there the slightest hint that the expedition was, like one of Cook's tourist parties, "personally conducted." Yet, if there be the slightest truth in the autobiography of the late Amir of Kabul, this strange thing happened—and Mr. John Murray is not in the habit of publishing books that are bogus or untrustworthy—so that we are left rather puzzled between the two stories, the latter of which

has been ignored by the British press with one consent. This is an extract from page 198 of the late Amir's volume :

Griffin Sahib requested me to go to Kabul to wish the British officials "Good-bye" before they marched out of the country. He also asked me to make such arrangements as were necessary for their safety, and also to supply the provisions for the British army which was marching under General Roberts to Kandahar, and under Sir Donald Stewart to Peshawar. I undertook to do my best in this matter, and gave him every possible satisfaction and assurance as to the safety of the British as far as the frontier. I told him that it was my opinion that General Roberts should start for Kandahar as soon as possible, and after his departure I would go to wish Sir Donald Stewart "God-speed." On 8 August General Roberts started from Kabul *en route* for Kandahar, with a portion of the army, and I appointed Sirdar Mahomed Aziz Khan, son of Shams-ud-din Khan, with a few other officials accompanying General Roberts's force as far Kandahar, to see that the people on the road did not oppose them, and to provide food for themselves and for their transport animals. The tribes on the road obeyed my commands conveyed to them by my above-mentioned officials, and did not offer any opposition on the road. Consequently

General Roberts reached Kandahar in safety, and Ayub, being defeated on 1 Sept., fled towards Herat.

No comment is needed on the "consequently."

## CHAPTER IV.

### KITCHENER'S PAARDEBERG DISASTER.

IT is quite impossible to make head or tail of the first part of the story of Paardeberg from Lord Roberts's dispatch of February 28. The most remarkable thing about it is that the name of Lord Kitchener, who played the principal *rôle*, is not once mentioned. But this is the plain case. General Kelly-Kenny was senior officer, and the movement enveloping Cronje was made under his direction. French prevented the Boer general from falling back on the reinforcements that were coming up to him from Natal and the south of the Free State; Colvile pressed him from the west; and Kelly-Kenny held him safe on the south of the river. Lying low in the Modder banks he could not be got at without much sacrifice of British life; but then he could not get



away. The obvious thing was to draw the lines closer around him, and to "put the fear of God in his heart" by incessant shelling. This was the situation when Lord Kitchener arrived. Though Chief of the Staff to Lord Roberts, he was junior to Kelly-Kenny, and by the rules of the service could not take the command without a special order to that effect from the Field-Marshal. He had provided himself with such an order, but did not at once produce it. Kelly-Kenny seems to have resented an order to attack given by Kitchener, and was continuing his command when the letter from Lord Roberts was brought to light. Kelly-Kenny at once obeyed it, and from that time on Kitchener took charge of the movement. At any rate, we know from Colvile that all subsequent orders he got were from Kitchener.

#### ANSWERS IN PARLIAMENT.

Yet when, in the House of Commons, it was asked who was in command, the answer was Kelly-Kenny, who gave no further

orders outside his own division. As very often happens in Parliament, half informed questions gave a Minister ample opportunity of misrepresentation. But as the inquirers got more upon the spot the answers became more absolute that Kelly-Kenny and none but he commanded in a disastrous attack made on Cronje's position by the direct order of Lord Kitchener, an attack of which Kelly-Kenny disapproved. This attack failed; and the Field-Marshal stated in his dispatch that our loss was killed 183, wounded 851, missing 8, prisoners to the enemy 9.

#### LOSS MINIMIZED.

In very truth the loss was 1,300, all due to Lord Kitchener's lack of technical skill, and his rush to attack before he had time to realize the difficulties before him. A massacre of Canadians and Britishers was the result, a massacre for which there has never been adduced the smallest reason, and it is obvious the attack was seriously disapproved of by the Field-Marshal, for

when he came up next day the first thing he did was to revoke an armistice that had been granted to Cronje—it was subsequently denied that it was granted!—and the second to forbid a proposed renewal of the attack on the explicit ground that it was “not warranted by the military exigencies of the situation,” which was a pretty severe snub for Lord Kitchener. The subsequent shuffling that occurred to prevent the public at home from realizing that the massacre was the act of Kitchener was far from creditable.

#### REWRITING DISPATCHES.

A little later on Sir Redvers Buller refused to rewrite dispatches and became a marked man from that moment. Other officers seem not to have been so particular, and it would be well for the Commissioners thoroughly to satisfy themselves how many times this correspondence was touched up before it was presented to the world. It is as certain that Lord Kitchener and none other sent those men needlessly to their

death as that infinite pains were taken and equivocation indulged in to prevent the blunder or, as an old-fashioned authority like Field-Marshal Sir Neville Chamberlain put it, crime being brought home to the shoulders on which it should have rested. Surely the Commissioners, notwithstanding the expressed wish of one of their number not to rake up things unnecessarily, will not leave this wanton sacrifice at Paardeberg in oblivion? And they may take it as a test case of the good faith with which they will be met in other and later developments of the same obscurantism, which it is the purpose of this opuscle to help them to clear up. Let me say this further, that they will never get at the truth of the matter if they do not investigate it before Lord Kitchener leaves for India. If they want to get at the truth, a pretty exposure awaits all concerned from the Minister who gave the answer in Parliament to the man who did the deed and has never owned up.

The world knows that in spite of the excessive haste which was the only excuse for

abandoning a million rations at Waterval the troops did not leave Paardeberg for a week, the horses being done up. But the world does not know that, the night after Kitchener's malfeasant attack at Paardeberg, Lord Roberts contemplated a retirement on Modder River Station.

#### A VERY STRANGE STORY.

I am even told that the order for such a retreat was issued, and that it was only stopped by the representations of the senior Army Service Corps officer that he could not move back his supply of food for several days for 50,000 men as he had sent all his teams off to bring more up. Thus unless Cronje was to be further enriched with our commissariat provender the retirement could not be carried out, and it was not. I confess this is to me almost incredible, but it comes to me from a source that must know, and in any case the Commissioners can find out if they will, whether it is the fact that the great advance on Bloemfontein, delayed as we know it was, was on the point of aban-



donment by that line of country, and whether a supply officer was the means of saving the nation from such humiliation? That officer is in England, knighted as he could not be promoted, and he can tell if these things be so.

#### DISINGENUOUSNESS.

Let us turn for a moment to Buller. I have shown that his reply about the cost of the later operations for the relief of Ladysmith was given in direct response to an order from the Field-Marshal not to risk any great loss. Subsequently, of course, Lord Roberts ignored his own observation, and did the patriotic swagger that, no matter what it cost, Ladysmith must be relieved. But later on Buller was blamed for not following up the Boers into and through the Biggarsberg. From the Field-Marshal's dispatch of March 15 it is clear Buller wanted to move by a circuit on Newcastle, and at the same time clear the passes of the Drakensberg, for all which he wanted all the troops he had got and could not spare a division to reinforce Roberts. What



was the latter's order? That he had no objection to Buller doing anything in Natal, but that he must not attempt "to force the passes of the Drakensberg" until Roberts was able to co-operate from the west of that range. In other words, Buller was invited to make an ass of himself by operating in the Biggarsberg while leaving his left flank open for many miles of difficult country to incursions from the enemy who were swarming there. The Commissioners may see that had Buller been allowed to carry out his plan he would have relieved the pressure on the Field-Marshal's front and right flank, but then that would have given credit to Buller, which would never do.

#### BULLER'S ENFORCED IDLENESS.

It is therefore plain that Buller was kept idle in Natal just when he could have done excellent service, first, in making his way to the Vaal valley, and secondly, by threatening the left of the Boer force in front of Roberts. It is true we know now that there were not more than a couple of

thousand Boers holding Roberts in front just then, but whatever number there were would not have stood for a day if Buller had been allowed to force the Drakensberg. I can also say that at one time the Field-Marshal was inclined to let a division join him by this way, but some malign influence caused him to forbid this most natural and effective movement.

#### ROBERTS'S STRATEGY.

Nothing need be noticed for a bit after Paardeberg except that the Field-Marshal's force was daily weakened by want of food, wantonly thrown away—given to the enemy—at Waterval. To French, in spite of the bad condition of his horses, all the success was due, mainly in movements made independently. And when at length the march to a flank was over and the Free State capital was ours, in what position did the Field-Marshal find himself? He had no effective line of supply across the district he had just passed. He was for weeks unable to get any supplies up from the south

because the bridges over the Orange River had been destroyed and the Boers, who had fallen back north of Bloemfontein, had been allowed to work back round our right flank and threaten our communications. The force was weak for lack of food, and it had to be content to get along on very short commons. But if it had no food it had at least good water. Only a few weeks before the war Bloemfontein had completed and opened a fine group of waterworks a little to the east of the city. All the surface supply had been abandoned and become infected by the drainage.

#### THE WATER SUPPLY.

Of course, in accordance with the most elementary principles, means were at once taken to insure the security of the waterworks and the ample supply. Nothing of the kind. The great strategists had their minds on far superior things. Half a company or so was all that was afforded to the protection of the most vital necessity. Half a brigade of mounted troops was dispatched

to watch the Boers, who were going where and when they liked along our eastern flank and towards our new line of communications that was to be. Of course, had a line been drawn and fortified at once from Bloemfontein right over to the Basuto border the enemy could not have got back on our communications, but no such common-sense plan was thought of. The enemy laid a trap for the half brigade ; Sanna's Post was the consequence ; a number of guns (such a dreadful thing in the case of Buller) were lost, and, what was worse, so were the waterworks. The consequence was our troops had little but the contaminated well supply, and, being already weakened by semi-starvation, enteric fever became endemic, and the worst enemy an army can have was, by our own blundering, established in our midst. In what respect does gross palpable neglect of this sort differ from constructive murder ? If it differs materially, then countless parents have been wrongly punished for neglect of sanitary precautions for their offspring.

**FEEDING AND FIGHTING.**

The soldiers are the children of the generals; and to starve them on general principles and neglect their necessaries of life while framing schemes is as great a fault as can be laid at the door of a general. Sir Redvers Buller said before he went out that he would never make a man fight unless he had been fed, and that is one of the many reasons why his troops were and are so devoted to him. The men who survive from the Bloemfontein columns are not so enthusiastic for Lords Roberts and Kitchener.

**CONTRADICTORY ORDERS.**

The absolute absurdity and irreconcilability of the orders given by Lord Kitchener to the headquarters Staff in the attempt, made, of course, too late, to recapture the seven guns lost at Sanna's Post is manifest from General Colvile's most readable book, and, as a damning proof of Staff incapacity, may be commended to the consideration of the Commissioners.



## GATACRE SACRIFICED.

While headquarters was lingering at Bloemfontein, General Gatacre had crossed the Orange River and got speedy hold of the junction between the Port Elizabeth and the East London Railways. Perceiving that the country about Dewetsdorp, towards Wepener, was a likely place for the enemy to establish in a difficult country a camp that would be a serious annoyance to us, he sent a small column with guns to prevent the enemy's occupation by a prior fortification. As soon as this movement was known at Bloemfontein it was countermanded and the little column ordered to fall back upon the railway. While it was moving back, it was surrounded and captured by the Boers, and Sir William Gatacre was sent home. Now I lay this down as a proposition which will command the universal adhesion of soldiers: If a superior authority countermands a movement and orders its reversal that superior authority takes the responsibility for the troops so dealt with and is bound to protect them. When Gatacre's



orders were reversed his responsibility for the half-battalion column ceased and it was the business of the Bloemfontein Staff to make arrangements for the safe withdrawal of the little force. As a matter of fact the column was much nearer headquarters than it was to Gatacre, but in any case it was the clear duty of the headquarters Staff to hold it safe. As a matter of fact also, Gatacre's foresight was almost immediately justified by the establishment of a Boer centre in this district, from which we were harried, in which we lost a good many lives, and through which our ultimate advance was made with a quite unnecessary danger left on our right rear.

#### SHIRKING THE BLAME.

It was intended to ruin Gatacre, so as to divert attention from the blundering of the Field-Marshal's headquarters, just as Colville was afterwards sacrificed to conceal the blundering and contradictory orders issued by Lord Kitchener. Happily, however, for Gatacre there was then in the War Office a

court of appeal which had some sense of justice and which, after inquiry, restored Sir William Gatacre to his old command at Colchester, thus clearing him of all blame. And, indeed, on the evidence, Lord Wolseley could come to no other decision. Will the Commissioners think this gross piece of injustice on the part of Lord Roberts and his Staff worthy of inquiry? If so, it will reopen many another similar shameful incident in the war, during which it was the deliberate policy of the headquarters Staff to shunt its own blame upon the shoulders of subordinates who were commoners, however distinguished, and to condone anything, however monstrously indefensible, that was done by a peer who condescended to be a soldier.

#### WANT FOUND SURPRISING.

Lord Roberts's dispatch of May 21 is thoroughly disingenuous. It is in effect one long and by no means frank apology for want of foresight. It attempts to show, in paragraph 4, that it was altogether surpris-

ing, on arrival at Bloemfontein, that there was no food except meat to be found in the district, that the Boers had cut the communications by destroying the bridges over the Orange River, and that every mile advanced took the army away from the only base from which food-stuffs could be obtained. But there was not one of these things which could not have been foreseen before the movement on Bloemfontein, which was not foreseen by many officers in Lord Roberts's own force, and by the War Office and independent military critics at home.

#### ON THE HAZARD.

There was no element of surprise in the matter; and the movement was undertaken with a full knowledge of these facts and on the gambling principle that it was worth trying whether the Free State could not be detached from the Transvaal by the occupation of its capital. Only complete ignorance of the Boer character could have permitted this idea to be for a moment entertained, and so it came about that the blow which

was to paralyze the Free Staters was a *coup manqué* and not only so, for it inspired the people of the Free State with an impassioned resolve to fight to the last. Will the Commissioners think all this involves too much "detail" for the scope of their inquiry? Because, if so, the inquiry will assuredly turn out to be the farce that it is only too clearly indicated it is intended to become.

## CHAPTER V.

**A**FTER some seven weeks' "rest" at Bloemfontein, contrasting curiously with the feverish excitement shown during the gamble anent Free State sentiments—a further advance was made. Those who remember the newspaper telegrams at the time will easily recall how this movement was puffed as being almost Heaven-inspired and the dominating feature of the campaign. Lord Roberts's own dispatches make the most of it.

### EXAGGERATION.

"The Boer forces under General Delarey making but a feeble resistance as soon as their right flank had been turned by Hutton's Mounted Infantry" . . . "the junction of the two Boer forces was frustrated by a well-executed movement" . . . "the

Vet River, the north bank of which was held by the enemy in considerable force” . . . “On the morning of the 10th May the enemy could be seen holding the north bank of the Zand in considerable strength” . . . and so on. Now it is thoroughly well known that the Boer force opposing Lord Roberts in his advance to the Vaal did not exceed 2,000 men! And there was no attempt on the part of the enemy to do more than delay the advance of three complete British divisions and four brigades of cavalry besides mounted infantry!

#### DEPRECIATION.

It is worth notice, too, how systematically Buller is depreciated in this connection. It is said in the dispatch of May 21, paragraph 23.

Nothing calling for special notice occurred in Natal. The Boers continued to intrench themselves on the Biggarsberg, and held the Drakensberg passes, but they attempted no offensive action. Sir Redvers Buller remained at Ladysmith, and beyond keeping the enemy under observation, did not risk any serious engage-



ment. In this he was acting in accordance with my wishes, for, as he did not feel himself strong enough to force the Drakensberg passes, he could not afford me any material assistance until I was in possession of Kroonstad and prepared to advance on the Transvaal.

And why did Buller not feel strong enough to do what he had volunteered to do weeks before? Simply because the Field-Marshal had taken away from him a whole division which was brought round by sea under Sir Archibald Hunter and had been broken up partly to help Methuen, partly for other work. The insinuation that Buller was not able to do in May what he had been willing to do in March is characteristic, but happily the removal of Hunter's division from Natal was on record.

#### FALSE PROPHECY.

Under the same date we were told of a rising in the Prieska district of Cape Colony, and no one but Lord Kitchener himself was equal to the task of putting it down, though a number of tried and capable officers were on the spot.

“The pacification of the Prieska district has been completed . . . Kitchener with characteristic energy . . . Tranquillity has been restored in the Northern districts of Cape Colony, where a large number of rebels had joined the Boers.”

The reader who can carry his mind forward for a very short time from this boast will say whether it was justified. We know now that the Boers in the Cape simply lay low until they got their opportunity, and then even French himself could do little to restore order for months, and the Boers had not been driven out of the Colony up to the Peace of Vereeniging!

#### AN OLD TRICK.

There was a ten days' halt at Kroonstad in spite of the object being “to push forward with the utmost rapidity,” the Boers having in the most criminal manner destroyed the railway on which the Field-Marshal “depended” for his supplies, the railway, it will be noticed, being the Boers' own property. The whole story of the

advance on the Vaal is marked by the same exaggeration of the numbers and resistance of the enemy. It is now perfectly apparent that the Boers were adepts at the same trick Colonel Norton (of the Turkish Gendarmerie and formerly of the 23rd Welsh Fusiliers) played General Skobelev at Kamarli, when, with a dozen Arab spearmen and as many half-disbanded Turkish dragoons, he made such a show as to delay Skobelev's advance two whole days, as the general admitted to myself, Baker Pasha, and Norton in the Club at Constantinople after the "Peace" of San Stefano. In like contumelious manner did the naughty Boers make great preparations to deter Roberts from advancing, even going the length of excavating works which, all the time, they knew well, they had neither the strength nor the intention to hold. Yet it was all taken *au grand serieux* and recorded accordingly, with many compliments addressed to "self and co." Lord Roberts's narratives of his own achievements are never, as Buller's sometimes are, spoiled in the telling, unless

there is, as occasionally happens, a reason for it.

#### SHORT COMMONS.

The Boers' plan at this time was to draw Lord Roberts on, away from his advanced base, thus increasing his difficulties of supply, which in any case were considerable. They had put just enough men in front of him to provoke him to energy, and they were in much greater force on his flanks and on his rear. They smote his railway line several times, captured provisions, of which his troops, especially those under Colvile and Ian Hamilton on his right, were greatly in want, and even the main body on reaching the Vaal had only one day's supply. One more successful attack on the railway, which was to Roberts what the portal vein is to the human body, and the grand British army would have had to fall back. But Lord Roberts has confessed that he ran the risk for moral effect, in getting to the gold mines of the Rand and then on to Pretoria. And the Boer plan of cutting the line and

seizing trains began to fail in operation owing to the greater and greater numbers of troops brought up for the protection of the railway. So the second gamble turned out more lucky than the first, and the gold city and the Transvaal capital fell in rapid succession. But still the supply was not safe, and it was on several days a question whether a retirement, or "concentration" backwards, would not have to be made to secure food for the men and forage for the animals.

#### BULLER TO THE RESCUE.

As it was, Buller had to be permitted to come on, fighting his way through and past the Biggarsberg, and so opening up a new supply line for the Field-Marshal's troops at Pretoria, without which they must have starved, so completely had the Boer pertinacity, even in the face of superior numbers of men on the line of communications, rendered Roberts's own supplies doubtful or worse.



## THE COLVILE SCANDAL.

Meanwhile, on the right of the advance, was brewing one of the greatest scandals of this or any other British war. Sir Henry Colvile was placed with a division on the right, and, without telling him he was being superseded, a junior officer was sent with a larger force to do the same work. Colvile was, indeed, not only prevented from carrying out his plans, but he had half his division taken away from him and his strength reduced to that of the Highland Brigade commanded by Hector Macdonald. Thus there was a divisional general and a brigadier general in charge of one brigade. But that is not all. For some time, Lord Kitchener, as Chief of the Staff, had been issuing orders in Lord Roberts' name, and so had the Military Secretary, these latter probably coming from the Field-Marshal himself. Confusion became badly confounded.

## CONTRADICTORY ORDERS.

Orders of the most contradictory sort were sent flying about, and because this



caused a loss of some Irish yeomanry, Colvile was relieved of his command and sent home. He was not a peer, and he did not belong to the Simla gang, therefore to perdition with him! But when he got home, he, like Gatacre, found a Commander-in-Chief at the War Office who had a sense of justice, and who, after full consideration of his case, sent him to resume the command of the brigade at Gibraltar, whence he had been taken to command the Guards' brigade in South Africa. The case was heard and decided in his favour by the supreme authority, with the full consent of the Secretary of State.

#### TWICE TRIED.

Yet when Lord Roberts himself became the supreme authority he reopened the case, condemned Colvile, was accuser, witness, judge and executioner all at once, and got rid, for good or evil, from the army of a man who had done the State some service in ways as difficult and as trying as any that Lord Kitchener had ever encountered.

From that time a reign of terror has existed in the British army, a reign of terror not even redeemed by efficiency of administration, as it is notorious that the office work has been more neglected by the present Commander-in-Chief than ever before. As it was put the other day by a major-general, "the tyranny of Mr. Brodrick is tempered by the inefficiency of Lord Roberts," whose business habits are conspicuous by their absence.

#### SOLACE.

I have not touched on two cases of two other general officers who were equally sacrificed to the manes of headquarters inefficiency, first because their cases are not so clear, and secondly because I have not the space to explain them at length. But the Commissioners can easily find out all about them, though perhaps the generals are not now willing to speak, as they have both received appointments over sea.

## CHAPTER VI.

**D**URING the advance on the Vaal and Pretoria, as we have seen, the Boers, exercising their full rights as belligerents, continued their efforts to break the British lines of communications. This quite legitimate warfare (provided for in our military manuals) seems to have always acted on Lords Roberts and Kitchener like a blister. In dealing with it they completely lost their heads. They took to revenge of the meanest sort.

### DESTROYING PRIVATE PROPERTY.

They began to destroy private property generally, not even because it afforded sustenance to the enemy or was used by him for warlike purposes, but because it belonged to men who were defending their country against our invasion. All the tendency of

modern thought has been towards the exemption of private property from needless injury in war ; but the case was now all the stronger because it had been laid down by the Hague Conference that civilized warfare should respect private property. And this resolution was actually arrived at on the motion of Major-General Sir John Ardagh, with the full approval of Lord Pauncefote, our chief representatives at the Conference. The blackest instance of our violation of the rule laid down at our own instance was in the case of the justly renowned Christian De Wet, the general in charge of the defence of the Free State. He had captured our guns, he had swooped down on our trains, he had worried us in every way ; he proved as elusive of Lord Kitchener as Osman Digna had done in the old Sudan days (when it came to native wits the "great organizer" was never in it either in the north or in the south of the Dark Continent), and he did infinitely more damage.

## KITCHENER AND DE WET.

Hence Lord Kitchener destroyed his farm and property, for which the British taxpayer has now to pay. Soon afterwards a Parliamentary Return was issued stating, more or less completely, the instances of farm-burning or wrecking and the reasons assigned for the destruction in each case. In about a moiety of the instances tabulated the reason assigned was that the buildings had been used as temporary fortifications or as depots for hidden arms. It was only natural the Boers should now and again use farm buildings as strongholds (how about Hougoumont?) just as they used kopjes and the high banks of streams. It was also natural enough arms should be concealed where there were landmarks to trace them by, but we never waited to ascertain whether this use was made of the farms by the authority of their owners. No matter; *delenda est* was the order. Now comes the damning proof that De Wet's farm was maliciously destroyed, merely because he was doing his duty as a soldier

and a patriot against us in the field. In the Return no reason whatever is, or could be, assigned for the ruin of De Wet's private property. The farm had not been used for martial purposes, but it belonged to the man who was giving Lords Roberts and Kitchener most trouble! A blacker stain rests on no British soldier. And the man who did this vile thing was shortly after to express his squeamishness about meeting De Wet until the latter had cleared himself of the suspicion of murdering a spy.

#### A CHANGE OF FRONT.

He never condescended to clear himself, and Lord Kitchener was only too glad to meet him and treat with him and make much of him when it suited his purpose and he found himself, for all his unprecedented strength, unable to corner him in the field. It is also, perhaps, worth noting that this squeamishness was pleaded by the man who had dug up the body of the leader of his former enemies, desecrated his tomb, and mutilated and made away with the senseless



corpse. All this the wise British public now condones because, after all, Lord Kitchener, moved thereto by his own inability to conquer the indomitable enemy, obeyed the direct wishes of his Sovereign and made peace with the man whom, but a few weeks before, he declared, like an Irish apple-woman, "he wouldn't be seen spakin' to!" But it was not all Lord Kitchener's doing.

#### THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF'S RUTHLESSNESS.

It has been said that Lord Roberts, too, lost his head with chagrin. Never can be blotted out the infamous order he gave that when an attack was made on the railways every farm was to be destroyed within ten miles of the spot, whether it was occupied or deserted. The soldiers did not always obey this monstrous edict, and if they had no blame could attach to them; but history will mark the name of the modern Attila who issued it, and whose only plea for thus violating the agreement of the Hague, arrived at on the motion of

his own country, was that the Boers were not a party to the Conference, from which they had been, indeed, excluded on the motion of England.

The practical operation of this ruthless order was thus described by a returned yeoman in the "Warwick Advertiser," a pro-war organ after Mr. Chamberlain's own heart:

#### THE ORDER IN THE EXECUTION.

"What farms did you burn?" this Yeoman was asked. Not understanding the question, it had to be explained to him that the English at home had been told that only those farms on which concealed Boers or arms were found had been subjected to this unpleasant treatment. He was surprised at these statements, and, as his reply shows, failed to acknowledge their accuracy. "I don't know," he says, "about finding Boers or arms. All I know is this, that some days we would start off early in the morning, and try during the whole day to burn as many farms as we could. I never saw one in some districts that was spared. We used to ride up—half-a-dozen of us—to the door, dismount, and rap loudly with our rifles on the wood. We didn't wait for an invitation. In we went with a rush and said to the woman,

‘Come on, pack up, missus; there’s a cart waiting for you.’ And we gave her ten minutes to get a few things together, and then, with the youngsters, she was packed into the open wagon and driven off to the nearest camp.”

“Did you ever find Boers or ammunition hidden away?”—“Never, during the whole time, except a few loose bullets lying about in different rooms.”

“Then why did you burn the farms?”—“By the General’s orders. We used to have plenty of fun. All the rooms were ransacked. You can’t imagine what beautiful things there were there—copper kettles, handsome chairs and couches, lovely chests of drawers, and all sorts of books. I’ve smashed dozens of pianos. Half-a-dozen of us would go up to as fine a grand piano as ever I’ve seen. Some would commence playing on the keys with the butts of their rifles. Others would smash off the legs and panels, and finally completely wreck it. Pictures would be turned into targets, and the piano panels would be taken outside and used as fuel to boil our tea or coffee. And then we would enjoy ourselves if it was cold, but,” he added ruefully, “it was generally hot—boiling hot. After this we would set the building on fire, and as we left, riding together or detached over the sandy waste, we could see the flames rising up, and soon there would be nothing left but black, smouldering embers. We would do the same with the next farm we came across.”

## THE WAR FINISHED.

To this period belongs the Field-Marshal's invention that the war was finished. A young friend of mine lying out on the veldt under the stars, watching at the side of a drift, overheard his men telling the news to one another.

"Well, if it's finished," said one, "when are we goin' home?"

"Oh, old 'Bobs' is to go home," was the reply, "and tell 'em it's finished, or else p'raps they won't berlieve it, and we're to stay out and round it up treatin' the Boers like goorillas."

"But if the Boers treats us like goorillas what——"

"Oh, don't ye see they can't treat us like goorillas, 'cause we's the sojers of the Queen."

"But what's fair——"

"Less noise there, you men, and keep a sharp look out on the drift."

It was all of a piece, anything to serve the purpose of the moment and make an excuse for the return of the Field-Marshal to

an earldom, £100,000, and the command-in-chief—for what? Not for finishing the war, but for bringing it to almost a dead-lock.

#### GOING ON AGAIN.

And the way of it was this. Another Heaven-sent idea came to hand. But we trespass, my reader; nobody is to be allowed to look into the events that followed the surrender of Pretoria! However, as we have begun, let us venture on.

The Boers had been freely getting up supplies from Delagoa Bay, and were continuing to do so in the teeth of the vigilance of British ships. More, the Boers, “estimated” at 12,000, were pressing, well supplied, close up to Pretoria as well as on the lines of communication both with the Cape and with Natal. If we cut off their supplies they must give in, opined the great geniuses at Pretoria; besides, if we don’t drive them off here we shall find ourselves cut off from our base and virtually besieged in the enemy’s capital, and then what would the War Office say? So a great effort was made



to shake off the Boer grip, and Buller was once more called to the rescue.

#### BULLER TO HELP AGAIN.

He was told to move across the Eastern Transvaal, where there was no railway and not much in the way of roads, while the Field-Marshal's columns marched along the railway which would feed the troops nicely, and if Buller's men should starve for lack of a railway, why—that was Buller's business. And Buller made it his business, and made a most successful march, during which his men were well fed and kept admirably in hand, so that the hovering enemy could make nothing of them and scattered before them. But they did not scatter before the Pretoria column. They fought it here and they fought it there, and delayed it, and generally annoyed it, when they might have had respect for Lord Roberts' years. A rendezvous had been given Buller near Belfast on the Delagoa line. He kept it to an hour. But where was the other party to the agreement? A day passed, two days,



three, but still the Field-Marshal was like Mariana's young man,

“He cometh not,” she said.

#### BULLER WAITING A WEEK.

A whole week passed, and then one morning a number of starving men rushed into Buller's camp and begged for some food for the love of God. It was the head of the column which the great Field-Marshal had just joined, and which was supplied along the railway by the care of the great organizer who stopped behind in Pretoria. The men who marched across an unknown country and had to carry all their own rations and forage for their animals were well fed all the way and kept tryst; the men who had the railway by their side all through a thoroughly well-known and surveyed country were a week late and were half starved to boot! A wondrous performance truly when the Field-Marshal had the enemy outnumbered in the district by three or four to one! When the forces met, the hard work was thrown upon Buller. He was put in charge.

He was successful, he was complimented by the Field-Marshal for the work so well done under Roberts' own eye which did nothing but look on. Success after success was achieved. The Guards went forward and took the frontier station, thus cutting off the Boer supplies, which Buller could have cut off weeks before had he been allowed to move ; and when he had driven the enemy up north on to their richly cultivated tropical valleys, whence they could obtain their simple rations, he was not allowed to finish his task by following them up. Oh, no ! The Field-Marshal wanted to get home. But Buller must go home first.

#### BULLER AND ROBERTS HOME.

It would not do to leave him in the land, for Kitchener could not be put over his head. As to anybody else it did not matter what their feelings or their claims might be. So Buller was got rid of, with a great flourish of trumpets. An Army Order praised him in the heights, not without an insinuation that he might have done worse

if the Field-Marshal had not been there to look on. And presently the Field-Marshal came home too, the war, save the mark, finished! Finished used to be a great word in the native mouth up the Nile. None of us ever knew what they meant by it. And nobody knows to this day whether Lord Roberts believed the war was finished—if he did, his judgement is not trustworthy—or whether it was a merry jest in which he had the laugh all to himself. Perhaps the Commissioners will be permitted to ask him whether it was in earnest that he was joking?

## CHAPTER VII.

### RECOGNIZING THE FACTS.

“**R**EGRETTABLE Incidents,” which had been frequently acknowledged, and still more frequently minimized to the verge of suppression, did not cease with the departure of Lord Roberts from Cape Town. In course of time it came to be publicly acknowledged by Lord Kitchener’s warmest admirers (see the “Pall Mall Gazette” among others) that he is “no tactician,” as though one should cheerfully remark of a doctor of divinity that he is no theologian, of a fellow of the College of Physicians that he is no doctor, or of a schoolmaster that he cannot parse; and the facts were brought home to the public in many and curious ways. The more active exercise of the censorship suppressed a few of them. More were recognized in the strangely new budget

telegrams that were sent home on Mondays. Yet more were heard of through the post in private letters which had somehow escaped the rigid censorship.

#### POSTAL ESPIONAGE.

It is, maybe, no harm now to tell how the official spies of the Field Post Office were frequently balked of their prey. There was a continual flow homewards of invalids. The soldier, well knowing that his letter to his father or mother or sister or brother would be suspected of containing news, confided his epistles to the invalids to be posted out of the jurisdiction of the censors, or, sometimes, a hospital orderly, for a consideration, took charge of a missive which would be posted on the transport, or at Southampton. And the soldier was wise. For not only his letters but those of his officers were ransacked for anything that could throw light on the events shrouded in mystery by Lord Kitchener's orders. I received one letter from a general officer which could not have been more skilfully treated

in the Moscow Post Office ; and, having "been there," I saw the trick at once. The left-hand edge of the envelope had been most delicately cut off with a sharp pair of scissors, and then reunited by "stickphast," so that it looked as though it had not been tampered with. Luckily it contained nothing worse than a rather belated acknowledgement of a Christmas card. Another, from an officer of colonel's rank on the Staff, had been steamed open and closed bunglingly, gum of a different colour from that originally on the flap having been stupidly used. If the correspondence of highly placed officers was treated in this way, that of the non-commissioned officers and the men seldom escaped the censure. But frequently, of course, a letter did pass a careless or tired spy.

#### STORIES FROM THE RANKS.

By one way or another plenty of news came home in the post that was not allowed to pass over the wires. And the ubiquity of the local reporter, or the desire of the



family to see Tom's letter in print did the rest. No one knows better than I that much of this sort of correspondence has to be discounted, especially when the soldier indulges in the "Ercles" vein. Moreover, however truthful a man means to be, the extended movements of modern fighting and the ceaseless "shaves" of camp-life make accuracy a difficulty. Still, the soldier does not wholly invent; he bases his narrative upon something he knows, and in this way we get at elementary facts. Nor is there any reason why such letters should not be allowed through the post, considering the interval that elapses before their arrival, if there were not the desire to conceal something that, if known at home, would be contrary to the tales made up at headquarters for British consumption. It is laughable enough to hear that volunteer officers and raw lads from Sandhurst, put to work as censors, frequently set themselves up as judges of the style of newspaper correspondents. "Linesman," in "Blackwood," is surely very right when he says this has,

with small exception, been the worst reported of all our modern wars, but that comes of sending untrained men to the front in an emergency.

### THE CENSORSHIP.

Yet there is a serious side to the suppression of news, and it is that by impunity of statement official telegrams propagate fables which, taking hold of the memory, make the truth distrusted when it does come along. So women, wearing cheap jewellery at first, come in time to adorn themselves with gew-gaws that deceive nobody and would be considered coarse by many savage tribes. The deterioration is quite of a piece in the two cases; and, under Lord Kitchener, the suppression by censure reached lengths never dreamt of by British officers before. Moreover, the War Office took to keeping back news that was in any way disturbing until it had leaked out in some other way, or there was a fear that it would. Then thousands of telegrams were sent that were never published, and it is suggested that

the Commissioners should call for all these, especially those passing at the time of the first negotiations with Botha, when Mr. Chamberlain again wrecked the prospects of peace just as Lord Roberts, with his "unconditional surrender," had done when Buller and Botha met on the Natal frontier.

#### KITCHENER OF KHARTOUM'S TACTICS.

But our present business is with Lord Kitchener's manifestations as a soldier. It can be confidently stated, and the Commissioners can easily satisfy themselves on the point if they are allowed to inquire into it, that no single tactical plan of his, from the moment he became Commander-in-Chief in South Africa to the date of the Peace, worked out as a success. The Boer leaders, not the big men only but all sorts, simply played with his overwhelming forces, evading them when they would, surprising them frequently. This is not to say there were not some successes achieved during this time, but they were small ones, arising out of the circumstances of the moment and due to

the smartness of some subordinate, from a colonel downwards. On the other hand, "regrettable incidents" multiplied, and to the last, though we wore the enemy down by sheer weight of numbers, Lord Kitchener had no one solitary success that he could call his very own. At least twice he travelled some distance to see the culmination of a movement he had planned, but the anticipated success was to seek, and if he did twice both plan and carry out a line of operations the failure was conspicuous. It may here be parenthetically explained that the three years' Nile campaign was planned and superintended by Lord Cromer, who was once a major of artillery and had not forgotten it, while the tactical work was done by Sir Archibald Hunter.

#### THE BLOCKHOUSES.

Oh, but the scheme of the blockhouses succeeded, says some simple-minded one. In the first place there is reason to doubt whether the blockhouse and barbed wire plan was his; in the second, it could not have

been worked at all without prodigious numbers of men, to be isolated and locked up in a sort of martello towers ; in the third, it did not enable Lord Kitchener to carry out his drives successfully, since more of them missed than succeeded, and in the attempts to bring the troops together to make them "regrettable incidents" were of almost daily occurrence. It has been stated that Botha and De Wet have said that the blockhouse system did not hamper them at all. I do not know what they have said, but I do know that the officers whose judgement I have learnt to trust, and with whom I have had an opportunity of converse since their return, have no high opinion of the scheme that has been held out to public admiration as the all-conquering.

#### TO KITCHENER'S CREDIT.

The one point on which full credit must be given to Lord Kitchener is one which will not commend him to the out-and-out Chamberlain-Roberts party, the party of "unconditional surrender," the party that



demanded extermination of the Boers. It is that he discovered, before he had been six months in charge, that the game he was playing was not worth the candle, that we were spending millions a week and hundreds of lives to reach an unattainable object, that we could get all we really wanted by terms of accommodation with our gallant foe, and that it was better to sacrifice a small portion of an impossible programme in order to reach a *modus vivendi*. Hence the eagerness to consider the offers the Boers were quietly inspired to make. That the negotiations came to nothing at the time only shows Mr. Chamberlain had not learnt, as Kitchener had, with his nose to the grindstone. In fine, Lord Kitchener, once more as at Fashoda, proved himself much more of a statesman than a soldier. The influence of Lord Roberts—whose taste in voting in the House of Lords against his predecessor on a question of administration I will not stoop to characterize even in terms I have heard applied to it by both peers and general officers—was again thrown into the



hard and fast scale, the scale of unconditional surrender, and the consequence was another year of war and its accumulating miseries, its extravagant expenditure, its drafts on the best blood of our country, its too frequent humiliations as when, repeatedly, "regrettable incidents" turned up, and well-provided large columns of British troops were beaten and captured by handfuls of Boers who continued to practise to the end the great test of generalship, the employment of a momentarily superior force in a practical way upon a weak point. It was a lesson they had given us from the beginning, and one which we never learnt or practised save by accident.

#### KITCHENER'S TENACITY.

When he could not get the Colonial Office, inspired by Lord Milner and Lord Roberts, to work with him in bringing about terms of compromise, giving us really all we needed, Kitchener manifested his very best quality, tenacity of purpose. "It's dogged as does it." And when the nation had

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thoroughly wearied of the prolonged war upon brave foes, when we had thrown some 450,000 men into the field against those whose utmost numbers at the end were estimated to be no more than 12,000, though they turned out to be larger than any Englishman had suspected, when even higher pay and better treatment were failing to bring us enough recruits to repair the awful waste, and, above all, when the King insisted on Peace as a preliminary to his Sacring, Kitchener did not lose the first chance that presented itself of pleasing his Sovereign and relieving his country and carrying out his purpose. He jumped at renewed overtures from the enemy, which, this time, do seem to have originated with Louis Botha, though it is a question that might well be thrashed out by the Commissioners if they were not both muzzled and tied by the leg.

#### ONE ASSURED FACT.

Let the Empire take this fact to its heart of hearts. It owes the Peace upon Condi-

tions agreed to at Vereeniging—not the unconditional surrender desired by the Chamberlain - Roberts - Milner group — to King Edward VII. in the first place and in the second to the general who knew how to meet the wishes of his Sovereign, to Lord Kitchener, whose gall in the fire-raising, farm-burning period had turned into honey when it became, in the remarkable language of the old paraphrase of the Hundredth Psalm, “expedient so to do.”

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## CHAPTER VIII.

**A** RETROSPECT of the War shows nothing more discreditable than the ingratitude shown by the Ministry and Lord Roberts to the soldiers in the War Office who enabled the Field-Marshal to do as much as he did. Lord Wolseley, Sir Evelyn Wood, Sir Mansfield Clarke, and the devoted soldiers under them, though they had seen their advice ignored and the consequences thereof, though they were snubbed by the Inner Cabinet, though the Secretary of State did not shrink from the attempt to sow dissensions among them by calling in the counsel of now this one, now that, secretly, and then quoting isolated bits of advice given by one against the advice of another, and playing fast and loose with them all, worked as hard and

did just as good service as any of those that went into the field.

#### PLENTY AND WANT.

They even gave the latter more material than they knew how to use. When our men were starving at and beyond Osfontein, the railway stations for hundreds of miles were blocked with tens of thousands of pounds' worth of vivres Lord Kitchener did not utilize, perhaps could not, though whether a few thousand men went on half or quarter rations, marched or slept in rags and shelterless, and toiled over rocky ground without shoe-leather never seemed to give him much concern. The plight of the "Ancient Mariner" was as the plight of our soldiers under Lords Roberts and Kitchener, though curiously enough never under Buller, only that for "water, water, all around, and not a drop to drink," we must read provision in abundance, but no food to eat or raiment to wear. The long delay at Cape Town before trying conclusions at all, the seven weeks' delay at Bloemfontein, follow-

ing on feverish rather than rational activity, the halts on the road to the Vaal, saw provender and gear of all kinds poured into South Africa, only to be stacked at roadside stations or brought up so ill-guarded that for months we fed the Boers better than their own commissariat, and far better than our own men, and yet there has never been an acknowledgement of the services of the men who did the Home work, except a step of knighthood thrown to the Q.M.G., and perhaps he owed that to the fact that he served in Madras! The very things on which Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Brodrick are for ever pluming themselves, the stores, the men, the horses sent to South Africa in numbers unknown in any campaign since those of Xerxes, were all provided by the military side of the War Office, though the civilian side did its fair share below the level of those capacious rooms in which puzzle-headedness struggled with natural incapacity for the mastery.



## FRICTION IN PALL MALL.

The friction between the secretariat and the soldiers was pitiful, but the soldiers stuck to their work and sacrificed, out of a sense of duty to their country the feelings that many a time and oft prompted them to throw up their appointments out of sheer disgust with meddlesome and treacherous muddlers. Not one word of thanks, of recognition even, came to these quiet toilers often through the watches of the night, and Lord Roberts, in particular, has never allowed himself the luxury of a word of tribute to those who organized such victories as he obtained, and who thoroughly knew the ground he was ignorant of, and the people who were withstanding him and taking advantage of his lack of knowledge.

## ROBERTS AND BULLER.

So, in the case of Buller. When he had to praise him, the commendation was given haltingly and with a jealous parsimony of phrase, and the first opportunity, even at the risk of self-contradiction, was taken to

eat up again what had been said. He was supposed to belong to the hated "Wolseley set," against which, for reasons not so obscure to others as Lord Roberts may suppose, he has habitually, in the phrase of Isaiah, set his face like a flint. But there never was a greater delusion than to imagine that Redvers Buller is a mere follower of anybody. And the same may be said of Sir Evelyn Wood, of whom Lord Wolseley has declared that he has done more than any other man for the British Army, and who has said of Lord Wolseley that he stands head and shoulders above any other soldier with whom he has had to deal. Nor are these mutual compliments, for each paid them without the slightest idea the other would ever hear of them. But Buller came within the idea of this man and that as a Wolseleyite, and that was enough for Lord Roberts.

#### THE SACRIFICE TO DISEASE.

I have touched upon the scandalous waste in the field. And the waste of men was the

most scandalous part of it, since, while deprecating sacrifice of men by Buller (emphasizing the main fault of that general that he thinks sometimes more of his men than of his palpable object), Lord Roberts was subjecting thousands of men to a fate in comparison with which death in action is an apotheosis. His indifference to the feeding and clothing of his men and his neglect of sanitary precautions were the main causes of the loss of life and strength arising from enteric and dysentery. Men starved and then put on bad water, because good water has not been guarded or it is too much trouble to have it fetched from above a contaminated reach, cannot fail to get and spread the great diseases of modern wars, as those of old campaigns were plague and typhus. Had anything been gained by the hurry that caused the neglect of sanitation and of the hospitals on the West of the Drakensberg there might be some plea in abatement possible. But there was nothing gained.

## EARLY PEACE POSSIBLE.

Much was lost from the unreasonable attitude of "unconditional surrender" which neglected a clear opportunity to offer peace on easy conditions that offered themselves after the simultaneous capture of Cronje and relief of Ladysmith. Then the Boers were open to an arrangement which would have given us all we asked (and more) at the Bloemfontein Conference, and would have secured us the paramountcy of South Africa while leaving the Boers the limited local self-government we now talk of securing to their native land as soon as possible. But no! Lord Roberts made up his mind to listen to no terms until he was in possession of both the capitals of the Republics. Except for this the war might have been finished in six or seven months, though I admit Mr. Kruger's obstinacy would have been an obstacle to a peaceful conclusion as difficult to overcome as that of the Field-Marshal who was actuated as much by the desire to win more glory for himself as to staunch the wounds of the Empire.

## TOO MUCH "DETAIL."

There are many points which the Commissioners appointed on September 10 ought to insist on investigating. Space prevents me from naming more than one or two. And one is—Why did Lord Methuen refuse to receive Colonel Gough's report on the Boer position after a reconnaissance made by the 9th Lancers, and why did he make his dispositions for the fight in ignorance of what that refused report would have told him, namely, what he found out when he attacked like a bull at a gate, that the fire of the Boers, themselves hidden, swept every particle of the ground over which he ordered his advance? And was Colonel Gough sent home for having made a reconnaissance resulting in such valuable information without orders from Lord Methuen?

## A COUNCIL OF WAR.

Why was not the relief of Mafeking attempted early in March, when Lord Roberts, leaving Lord Kitchener to contemplate his murderous field at Paardeberg before start-



ing for Osfontein, rode over to Kimberley to "discuss with Lieutenant-General Lord Methuen the measures to be taken for the relief of Mafeking," not attempted until the middle of May? To any other general an order would probably have been issued, but Lord Roberts was too deferential to one who was a peer and eke a Guardsman to take such a rude measure. In the course of about three weeks, I remember, on information received from Kimberley through a traveller thence, I took the liberty of stating that such arrangements had been made, and I was naturally chagrined when action did not follow the consultation that was not admitted till a dispatch of March 15, 1900, was published in the "Gazette" of February 8, 1901. The reason appears to be that, as usual, a council of war never fights, and that Baden-Powell's force was deliberately imperilled for two months longer than was necessary in order to keep the Boers employed at Mafeking lest they should descend on Kimberley again and on the communications which, within a few days,



Lord Roberts was to abandon as useless with Modder River station and Kimberley. Altogether this is a very curious phase of the War, which requires both a search-light and a microscope !

#### THE FUTILITY OF LIMITED INQUIRY.

The Ministry seems to have unwittingly given Earl Roberts something of a back-handed slap in the face in limiting the powers of the Commissioners to an inquiry as to the conduct of the War while he was Commander-in-Chief, and freeing Lord Kitchener from any responsibility for his continuance of the campaign. Why should Lord Roberts be considered peccable and Lord Kitchener impeccable? There are several reasons that occur to the critical mind. One is that, after the fall of Pretoria, Buller had lived down all the injury that insinuation and balking orders had done to his reputation in Natal, and it would never do to give the Commissioners an opportunity of showing how admirably he did his work. Another is that it might be

awkward if the Commissioners were to insist on knowing why Buller was not allowed to go and close Komati Poort before he had opened up completely the second line of transport through Natal and the Standerton district, which alone kept Roberts's main force from starving and having to fall back in search of supplies. A third is that the murders by Colonial officers in the veldt, though we do not say they were not adequately dealt with by Lord Kitchener when he found them out, showed too much of the "go as you please" sort of discipline to be quite fragrant in the nostrils of the British race. And yet another is that the boasted drive and barricade system will not bear calm investigation.

Indeed anything like thorough investigation has been made almost impossible by the advice given to the Commissioners not to go into details. Under these circumstances it might be as well and shorter to leave the story to the telling of the Oxford don to whom Buller was brusque in Natal, and to the ex-indigo planter who has attained

to such a knowledge of Army matters that he has to be enlightened as to differences of rank ! Then only a newspaper and not a nation would be made ridiculous.









