

Current Topics

The New National Temper

Mr. Asquith is nothing if not an optimist; and there is a cheery note in his recent speech in the House of Commons which is distinctly reassuring and impressive. To us at a distance, with the echo of the South Wales strike still in our ears, it has been difficult to believe that even yet the English people realised the magnitude of the task which confronts them and the gravity of the issues that are at stake. But competent observers on the spot judge differently; and Mr. Asquith's notable declaration as to the spirit with which the "nation generally is now facing the crisis is endorsed by such a shrewd and practical man of affairs as Mr. T. P. O'Connor, M.P. "I think," he says, in a recent article in an English paper, "I note a very real change in the temper of our own people. The movement against racing is one sign of this change. The impatience with which the public view any strike is another. The readiness of all classes to apply to their daily habits, even to their daily meals, the same stern self-control which other nations have already exhibited: all these things, I believe, indicate a greater seriousness of soul, a fuller realisation of the bigness of our job, and also grimmer determination to make any and every sacrifice rather than that we should allow our liberties and our civilisation to go down. . . . I am sure that we can safely trust to this spirit to bring us all the additional men and every penny of the money, however gigantic may be the sum, which will be required to push this enterprise to its destined and only possible end. Talking about this war in its early stages to Mr. Lloyd George, I said, "We must set our teeth." "Yes," he answered, "and it needs be, we must tighten our belts."

Speeding Up the Munitions

Whether Warsaw is held or evacuated, whether Russia makes a stand or is beaten still further back, it must be admitted that the present round in the great fight is a finish is Germany's. As it would be expressed in prize-ring parlance, Germany is doing all the leading. She rests wherever she chooses to rest, and by land, at least, forces the fighting when and where she wills, without let or hindrance or interference of any kind from the Allies in the West. The do-nothing policy in France and Flanders is doubtless for the moment inevitable, and it is even possible to accord a measure of admiration to Generals Joffre and French for refusing to be hustled, even by Russia's desperate plight, into a momentary or sporadic offensive which could not be maintained, and which could have no definite or tangible result except a useless sacrifice of life. At the same time the present situation is, to put it mildly, disappointing.

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The sky, however, is not all grey, and there are patches of blue that give promise and hope for the future. In the first place, there is the indomitable spirit and splendid tenacity which is being shown by the Russian people. In spite of all the gruelling they have got—through no failure of their own but through default of the Allies, largely due to the bungling of the British War Office—there is neither whine nor whimper, nor wavering of purpose. So far from talking of a separate peace, as the Germans appear to have hoped, they are calmly discussing the conditions which will enable them to resume the offensive. An army which, after being driven from pillar to post as the Russians have been, instead of contemplating its losses is quietly looking forward to taking the aggressive again, is a factor to be relied upon and to be reckoned with. In the second place, there is the cheering intelligence that the supply of ammunition has really been appreciably speeded up, both in England and in America, and particularly in the latter country. Last week we gave particulars of the number and extent of

the foreign orders for war material which had been placed with the leading American firms. There now comes the welcome news that several of these concerns are filling and forwarding their orders nearly a month ahead of contract time. It was not expected that shells in large quantities would be ready for shipment before the end of July or early in August; but we learn from American papers that the Bethlehem Steel Company has been sending out 35,000 loaded three-inch shrapnel shells for the British field artillery every day since Monday, June 21, and it is expected that this daily average will be increased in the near future. The du Pont Powder Company is also delivering considerable shipments of raw explosives, and it is understood that the Stevens Arms Company, whose plant was bought by the Westinghouse Electric Company for the purpose of turning out Lee-Metford rifles for the British army, is beginning to deliver guns for export. The *New York Evening Post*, in the last week of June, gave the following pleasing picture of what is taking place: "The shrapnel and explosives have been going aboard vessels lying in Gravesend Bay, about three miles offshore, for about a week now. Every day huge lighters, flying the red flag, denoting that they carry explosives, may be seen going down the harbor, and as they pass out of the Narrows and head over into Gravesend Bay, the waiting steamers also haul up red flags to warn all shipping to keep away. Sometimes as many as three lighters are lying around one vessel at once, all busily discharging shells and cases of cordite, dynamite, or melinite into the gaping holds. The ammunition now being delivered is all for the British troops, and is being sent to France, so that no time may be lost in getting it to the firing-line of Field Marshal Sir John French's army." So it is evidently all a question of holding on, and possessing our souls in patience; and in the meantime it is satisfactory to know that things are really moving.

Mr. Winston Churchill and the Dardanelles

Whenever, in any war, things do not turn out as successfully as was anticipated, there is an immediate hunt for a scape-goat; and in the case of the unexpectedly protracted operations at the Dardanelles Mr. Winston Churchill was selected, by almost unanimous consent, as an easy and handy victim. He was abused, denounced, and finally driven from a position in which he had shown singular prescience and administrative capacity of the very highest order. By the brilliant stroke just before the outbreak of hostilities by which he had the British Fleet already mobilised, and was thus enabled to bottle up the German Grand Fleet at Wilhelmshaven, he may be said, without any figure of speech or exaggeration, to have saved the Empire. Through an unexpected turn in political affairs in Greece, which could not have been foreseen and for which he was in no way responsible, an unanticipated hitch occurred in the early operations at the Dardanelles; and the fine service he had already rendered was promptly forgotten by an ungrateful nation. Every one, from the press military expert to the street corner strategist, agreed in declaring that whatever might be said, in a general way, in favor of the enterprise, at least he had committed a palpable, glaring, and unpardonable blunder in attempting to carry it out without arranging for a land force to cooperate with the naval effort. It is only fair to Mr. Churchill to say that when the inner history of this daring and dramatic undertaking comes to be written, disclosures will be made which will show that no such course had ever been planned or contemplated by him. An entirely satisfactory arrangement had been made with another Power in regard to this matter, particulars of which are quite well known to our men in the trenches at Gallipoli; and but for the unforeseen defeat of the then Premier of that country, the adventure would have taken from the first a very different course from that which we have witnessed. In this matter Mr. Churchill was entirely blameless, and in no way deserving of the censure which has so freely—and in ignorance of the facts—been bestowed upon him.

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