The Examiner.

A WEEKLY JOURNAL OF POLITICS, LITERATURE AND NEWS.

"This is true Liberty, when Freeborn Men, having to advise the Public, may speak free.'---Euripides.

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Aug. 22, 1870

Miscellany.

THE BATTLE OF DORKING.

[Our readers will thank us for digesting and abridging this tremendous satire, which is the literary sensation of the day in England. The plan of the author is simple enough. Professing to speak as a grandfather, about the year 1921, he relates the invasion of England by "the two great Powers," as an event happening close upon the actual present time, followed by Britain's sudden and utter collapse.]

THE GRANDFATHER BEGINS.

You ask me to tell you, my grandchildren, something about my own share in the great events that happened fifty years ago. 'Tis sad work turning back to that bitter page in our history, but you may perhaps take profit in your new homes from the lesson it teaches.

Fools that we were! We thought that all this wealth and prosperity were sent us by Providence, and could not stop coming. In our blindness we did not see that we were merely a big workshop, making up the things which came from all parts of the world; and that if other nations stopped sending us raw goods to work up, we could not produce them ourselves. True, we had in those days an advantage in our cheap coal and iron; and had we taken care not to waste the fuel, it might have lasted us longer. But even then there were no signs that coal and iron would soon become cheaper in other parts; while as to food and other things England was not better off than it is now We were so rich simply because other nations from all parts of the world were in the habit of sending their goods to us to be sold or manufactured; and we thought that this would last for ever.

I need hardly tell you how the crash came about. First, the rising in India drew away a part of our small army; then came the difficulty with America, which had been threatening for years, and we sent off ten thousand men to defend Canada—a handful which did not go far to strengthen the real defenses of that country, but formed an irresistible temptation to the Americans to try and take them prisoners, especially as the contingent included three battalions of the Guards. Thus the regular army at home was even smaller than usual, and nearly half of it was in Ireland to check the talked-of Fenian invasion fitting out in the West. Worse still—though I do not know it would really have mattered as things turned out—the fleet was scattered abroad; some ships to guard the West Indies, others to check privateering in the China seas, and a large part to try and protect our colonies on the Northern Pacific shore of America, where, with incredible folly, we continued to retain possessions which we could not possibly defend. America was not the great power forty years ago that it is now; but for us to try and hold territory on her shores which could only be reached by sailing round the Horn, was as absurd as if she had attempted to take the Isle of Man before the independence of Ireland. We see this plainly enough now, but we were all blind then.

ENGLAND FEELS HUFFED, AND DECLARES WAR

It was while we were in this state, with our ships all over the world, and our little bit of an army cut up into detachments that the Secret Treaty was published, and Holland and Denmark were annexed. People say now that we might have escaped the troubles which came on us if we had at any rate kept quiet till our other difficulties were settled; but the English were always an impulsive lot: the whole country was boiling over with indignation, and the Government, egged on by the press, and going with the stream, declared

WAR.

There was a Ballot Bill passed for adding 55,000 men to the militia; why a round number was not fixed on I don't know, but the Prime Minister said that this was the exact quota wanted to put the defenses of the country on a sound footing. Then the shipbuilding that began! Ironclads, despatch-boats, gun-boats, monitors—every building-yard in the country got its job, and they were offering ten shillings a day wages for anybody who could drive a rivet. This didn't improve the recruiting, you may suppose.

THE POWERS PREPARE TO INVADE.

An embargo had been laid on all the shipping in every port from the Baltic to Ostend; the fleets of the two great Powers had moved out, and was supposed were assembled in the great northern harbor, and troops were hurrying on board all the steamers detained in these places, most of which were British vessels. It was clear that invasion was intended

DEFEAT OF THE BRITISH NAVY.

The fatal announcement of the loss of the fleet was telegraphed from Portsmouth.

The panic and excitement of that day—how the funds went down to 35; the run upon the bank and its stoppage; the fall of half the houses in the city; how the Government issued a notification suspending specie payment and the tendering of bills—this last precaution too late for most firms, Carter & Co. among the number, which stopped payment as soon as my father got to the office; the call to arms, and the unanimous response of the country—all this is history which I need not repeat.

THE VOLUNTEER GOES TO BATTLE.

A train full of Guardsmen was just starting for Guildford. I was told it would stop at Surbiton, and with several other volunteers, hurrying like myself to join our regiment, got a place in it

I wanted very much to run home and get my great-coat and knapsack, which I had bought a few days ago, but feared to be left behind. A good-natured recruit volunteered to fetch them for me; but he had not returned before we started, and I began the campaign with a kit consisting of a macintosh and a small pouch of tobacco.

THE STATION AT DORKING.

Our regiment was drawn up on the extremity of the ridge which runs from Guildford to Dorking. This is indeed merely a part of the great chalk-range which extends from beyond Aldershot east to the Medway; but there is a gap in the ridge just here where the little stream that runs past Dorking turns suddenly to the north to find its way to the Thames. We stood on the slope of the hill as it trends down eastward towards this gap, and held our bivouac in what appeared to be a gentleman's park.

AN OFFICER OF THE GUARDS EXPRESSES HIS ESTIMATE OF THE VOLUNTEERS.

While we were talking a third officer came up; he was a dark man, with a smooth face and a curious, excited manner.

"You are volunteers, I suppose?" he said quickly, his eye flashing the while 'Well, now, look here. Mind I don't want to hurt your feelings, or to say anything unpleasant; but I'll tell you what, if all you gentlemen were just to go back, and leave us to fight it out alone, it would be a devilish good thing; we could do it a precious deal better without you I assure you. We don't want your help, I can tell you. We would much rather be left alone, I assure you. Mind, I don't want to say anything rude, but that's a fact!"

Having blurted out this passionately, he strode away before one could reply, or the other officers could stop him.

A TEMPORARY ADVANTAGE ON BOX HILL.

Once the mist lifted, and I saw for a minute an attack on Box Hill, on the other side of the gap on our left. It was like the scene at a theatre—a curtain of smoke all round and a clear gap in the centre, with a sudden gleam of evening sunshine lighting it up. The steep smooth slope of the hill was crowded with the dark-blue figures of the enemy, whom I now saw for the first time—an irregular outline in front, but very solid rear: the whole body was moving forward by fits and starts, the men firing and advancing, the officers waving their swords, the columns closing up and gradually making way. Our people were almost concealed by the bushes at the top, whence the smoke and their fire could be seen proceeding: presently from these bushes on the crest came out a red line, and dashed down the brow of the hill, a flame of fire belching out from the front as it advanced. The enemy hesitated, gave way, and finally ran back in a confused crowd down the hill. Then the mist covered the scene. But hardly a minute could have passed in thus looking over the field, when our brigade-major came moving up the lane on foot (I suppose his horse had been shot), crying "Stand to your arms, Volunteers! they're coming on again;" and we found ourselves a second time engaged in a hot musketry fire. How long it went on I cannot now remember, but we could distinguish clearly the thick line of skirmishers, about sixty paces off, and mounted officers among them; and we seemed to be keeping them well in check, for they were quite exposed to our fire; while we were protected nearly up to our shoulders, when—I know not how—I became sensible that something had gone wrong. "We are taken in flank!" called out some one; and looking along the left, sure enough there were dark figures jumping over the bank into the lane and firing up along our line. The volunteers in reserve, who had come down to take the place of the Guards, must have given way at this point; the enemy's skirmishers had got through our line, and turned our left flank. How the next move came about I cannot recollect, or whether it was without orders but in a short time we found ourselves out of the lane and drawn in a straggling line about thirty yards in rear of it—at our end, that is, the other flank had fallen back a good deal more—and the enemy were lining the hedge, and numbers of them passing over and forming up on our side. Beyond our left a confused mass were retreating, firing as they went, followed by the advancing line of the enemy. We stood in this way for a short space, firing at random as fast as we could. Our colonel and major must have been shot, for there was no one to give an order, when somebody on horseback called out from behind—"Now, then, Volunteers! give a British cheer, and go at them—charge!" and, with a shout, we rushed at the enemy.

HAND-TO-HAND.

Some of them ran, as me stopped to meet us, and for a moment it was a real hand-to-hand fight. I felt a sharp sting in my leg as I drove my bayonet right through the man in front of me. I confess I shut my eyes, for I just got a glimpse of the poor wretch as he fell back, his eyes starting out of his head and, savage though we were, the sight was almost too horrible to look at But the struggle was over in a second, and we had cleared the ground again right up to the rear hedge of the lane. Had we gone on, I believe we might have recovered the lane, too; but we were now all out of order; there was no one to say what to do; the enemy began to line the hedge and open fire, and they were streaming past our left; and how it came about I know not, but we found ourselves falling back toward our right rear, scarce any semblance of line remaining and the volunteers who had given way on our right had mixed up with us, and adding to the confusion.

DEFREDATION.

It was nearly dark. On the slopes which we were retreating to was a large mass of reserves drawn up in columns. Some of the leading files of these, mistaking us for the enemy, began firing at us; our fellows crying out for them to stop, ran toward their ranks, and in a few moments the whole slope of the hill became a scene of confusion that I cannot attempt to describe—regiments and detachments mixed up in hopless disorder. Most of us, I believe, turned toward the enemy and fired away our few remaining cartridges; but it was too late to take aim, fortunately for us, or the guns which the enemy had brought up through the gap, and were firing point-blank would have done more damage. As it was we could see little more than the bright flashes of their fire. In our confusion we had jammed up a line regiment immediately behind us, and its colonel and some staff-officers were in vain trying to make a passage for it, and their shouts to us to march to the rear and clear a road could be heard above the roar of the guns and the confused babel of sound. At last a mounted officer pushed his way through, followed by a company in sections, the men brushing their way past with grim-set faces, as if on a desperate task; and the battalion, when it got clear, appeared to deploy and advance down the slope. I have also a dim recollection of seeing the Life Guards trot past the front, and push on toward the town—a last desperate attempt to save the day—before we left the field. Our adjutant, who had got seperated from our flank of the regiment in the confusion, now came up, and managed to lead us, up to the crest of the hill in the rear, to re-form, as he said; but there we met a vast crowd of volunteers, militia and wagons, all hurrying rearward from the direction of the big house, and we were borne on the stream for a mile at least before it was possible to stop

For myself, I had found out for the first time that, besides the bayonet-wound in my leg, a bullet had gone through my left arm, just below the shoulder and outside the bone. I remembered felling something like a blow just when we lost the lane, but the wound passed unnoticed till now, when the bleeding had stopped and the shirt was sticking to the wound.

This half-hour seemed an age, and while we stood on this knoll the endless tramp of men and rumbling carts along the downs beside us told their own tale. The whole army was falling back. At last we could discern the adjutant riding up to us out of the dark.

The army was to retreat and take up a position on Epsom Downs, he said Presently we were ordered down to occupy the railway station on our right rear.

I should have liked to wash my wounds, which were becoming very offensive, but I dared not take off my coat, feeling sure I should not be able to get it on again It was while we were eating our bread that the rumor first reached us of another disaster, even greater than that we had witnessed ourselves. Whence it came I know not; but a whisper went down the ranks that Woolwich had been captured. We all knew that our only arsenal, and understood the significance of the blow.

No hope if this were true of saving the country. Thinking over this, we went to the station.

Just as the firing began, our gallant adjutant looked in to say that we were as sure as in a church, that we must be sure and pepper the enemy well, and that more cartridges would soon arrive. There were some steps and benches in the luggage-shed, and on these a part of our men were standing to fire through the upper loop-holes, while the line soldiers and others stood on the ground, guarding the second row. I sat on the floor for I could not now use my rifle and besides, there were more men than loop-holes. The artillery fire which had opened now on our position was from a longish range, and occupation for the riflemen had hardly begun when there was a crash in the shed, and I was knocked down by a blow on the head. I was almost stunned for a time and could not make out what had happened. A shot or shell had hit the shed without quite penetrating the wall; but the blow had upset the steps resting against it, and the men standing on them, bringing down a cloud of plaster and brick-bats one of which had struck me. I felt now past being of use—I could not use my rifle, and could barely stand; and after a time I thought I would make for my own house, on the the chance of finding some one still there I got up, therefore, and staggered homeward.

AN ENGLISH HOME DESOLATED.

It was about a mile to our house, and I was thinking how I could possibly drag myself so far, when I suddenly recollected that I was passing my friend Travers's house—one of the first of a row of villas then leading from the station to Kingston I would go in and rest a while, and see if I could be of use

The little garden before the house was as trim as ever (I used to pass it every day on my way to the train, and knew every shrub in it) and a blaze of flowers, but the hall-door stood ajar. I stepped in, and saw little Arthur standing in the hall. He had been dressed as neatly as ever that day, and as he stood there in his pretty blue frock and white trowsers and socks, showing his chubby little legs, with his golden locks, fair face, and large dark eyes, the picture of childish beauty in the quiet hall, just as it used to look—the vases of flowers the hat and coat hanging up, the familiar pictures on the walls—this vision of peace in the midst of war made me wonder for a moment, faint and giddy as I was, if the pandemonium outside had any real existence, and was not really a hideous dream! But the roar of the guns made the house shake, and the rushing of the shot, gave a ready answer. The little fellow appeared almost unconscious of the scene around him, and was walking up the stairs holding by the railing, one step at a time, as I had seen him do a hundred times before, but turned round as I came in.

My appearance frightened him, and staggering as I did into the hall, my face and clothes covered with blood and dirt, I must have looked an awful object to the child, for he gave a cry and turned to run toward the basement-stairs. But he stopped on hearing my voice calling him back to his god-papa, and after a while came timidly up to me.

Papa had been to the battle, he said, and was very ill; mama was with papa; Wood was out; Lucy was in the cellar, and had taken him there, but he wanted to go to mamma. Telling him to stay in the hall for a minute till I called him, I climbed up stairs and opened the bedroom-door. My poor friend lay there, his body resting on the bed, his head supported on his wife's shoulder as she sat by the bedside. He breathed heavily, but the pallor of his face, the closed eyes, the prostrate arms, the clammy foam she was wiping from his mouth, all spoke of approaching death The good old servant had done his duty, at least—he had brought his master home to die in his wife's arms! The poor woman was too intent on her charge to notice the opening of the door, and as the child would be better away, I closed it gently and went down to the hall to take little Arthur to the shelter below, where the maid was hiding. Too late! He lay at the foot of the stairs on his face, his little arms stretched out, his hair dabbled in blood. I had not noticed the crash among the other noises, but a splinter of a shell must have come through the open door-way; it had carried away the back of his head. The poor child's death must have been instantaneous. I tried to lift up the little corpse with my one arm, but even this load was too much for me, and while stooping down I fainted away.

When I came to my senses again, it was quite dark, and for some time I could not make out where I was; I lay, indeed, for some time like one half asleep, feeling no inclination to move. By degrees I became aware that I was on the carpeted floor of a room. All noise of battle had ceased, but there was a sound as of many people close by. At last I sat up and gradually got to my feet. The movement gave me intense pain, for my wounds were now highly inflamed, and my clothes sticking to them made them dreadfully sore. At last I got up and groped my way to the door, and, opening it, at once saw where I was, for the plain had brought back my senses.

I had been lying in Travers's little writing-room, at the end of the passage, into which I made my way. There was no gas, and the drawing-room door was closed; but from the open dining-room the glimmer of a candle feebly lighting up the hall, in which half-a-dozen sleeping figures could be discerned, while the room itself was crowded with men. The table was covered with plates, glasses and bottles; but most of the men were asleep in the chairs on the floor; and one or two, with their helmets on, were still engaged at supper, occasionally grunting out an observation between the mouthfuls.

'Sind wackere, dies Englischen Freiwilligen,' said a broad-shouldered brute, stuffing a great bunch of beef into his mouth with a silver fork, an implement, I should think, he had been using for the first time in his life.

'Ja, ja!' replied a comrade, who was lolling back in his chair with a pair of very dirty legs on the table and one of poor Travers's cigars in his mouth; 'Sie so gut laufen konnen.'

'Ja wohl,' responded the first speaker; 'aber sind nicht eben so schnell wie die Franzosischen Mebloten.'

'Gewiss,' grunted a hulking lout from the floor, leaning on his elbow and sending out a cloud of smoke from his ugly jaws; 'und da sind hier etwa gute Schutzen.'

'Hast recht, lang Peter,' answered number one 'wenn die Schunken so gut exerciren wie sentzen konnten, so waren wir heute nicht hier!'

'Recht! recht!' said the second, 'das exerciren macht den guten Soldaten.'

What more criticisms on the shortcomings of our unfortunate volunteers I did not stop to hear, being interrupted by a sound on the stairs. Mrs. Travers was standing on the landing-place; I limped up the stairs to meet her.

Among the many pictures of those fatal days engraven on my memory, I remember none more clearly than the mournful aspect of my poor friend, widowed and childless within a few moments, as she stood there in her white dress, coming forth like a ghost from the chamber of the dead, the candle she held lighting up her face, and contrasting its pallor with the dark hair that fell disordered round it, its beauty radiant, even through features worn with fatigue and sorrow. She was calm, and even tearless, though the trembling lip told of the effort to restrain the emotion she felt

"Dear friend," she said, taking my hand, "I was coming to seek you; forgive my selfishness in neglecting you so long, but you will understand" — glancing at the door above, "how occupied I have been."

'Where," I began, 'is ——'

'My boy?' she answered, anticipating my question. 'I have laid him by his father. But your wounds must be cared for; how pale and faint you look!'

While tending me she explained in broken sentences how matters stood. Every room but her own, and the little parlor into which she, with Wood's help, had carried me, was full of soldiers. Wood had been taken away to work at repairing the railroad, and Lucey had run off from fright; but the cook had stopped at her post, and had served up supper and opened the cellar for the soldiers' use. she did not understand what they said, and they were rough and boorish, but not uncivil. I should now go, she said, when my wounds were dressed, to look after my own home, where I might be wanted; for herself she wished only to be allowed to remain watching there—pointing to the room where lay the bodies of her husband and child—where she would not be molested.

A LIVING STREET-LAMP.

Outside the house there was a good deal of movement and bustle; many carts going along, and wagoners, from Sussex and Surrey, evidently impressed and guarded by soldiers; and although no gas was burning, the road toward Kingston was well lighted by torches held by persons standing at short intervals in line, who had been seized for the duty, some of them the tenants of neighboring villas. Almost the first of these torch-bearers I came to was an old gentleman whose face I was well acquainted with, from having traveled up and down in the same train with him. He was a senior clerk in a Government office, I believe, and was a mild-looking old man, with a prime face and long neck, which he used to wrap in a wide double neckcloth, a thing even in those days seldom seen. Even in that moment of bitterness, I could not help being amused by the absurd figure which this old man represented, whith his solemn face and long cravat, doing penance with a torch in front of his own door, to light up the path of our conquerors.

DISGRACE.

Why speak of this insult, in particular? Had not every man who lived then his tale to tell of humiliation and degradation? For it was the same story everwhere. After the first stand in line, and when once they got us on the march, the enemy laughed at us. Our handful of regular troops was sacrificed almost to a man in a vain conflict with numbers; our volunteers and militia with officers who did not know their work; without ammunition or equipment or staff to superintend, starving in the midst of plenty, we had soon become a holpless mob, fighting desperately here and there, but with whom, as a manœuvring army, the disciplined invaders did just