

THE "SILENCE AND DARKNESS" POLICY.

Some Drawbacks of the Censorship at This Time of Crisis and Anxiety

BY BECKLES WILLSON

FOR the past month Canada has been stirred as she has never been stirred in her history. At last our nerves have become so connected and intercentralized with the Imperial organism as to throb and quiver under the most distant impulse. In every town and village we await feverishly tidings of the war and the consequences of the war. I have just returned from a journey of nearly two thousand miles, from the Maritime Provinces to Ontario. In even small villages it was pathetic to note the tense anxiety, the eagerness and ardor of a people hitherto but little exposed to the strain of great national emotion. Far into the night a clump of farmers, artisans and laborers will stand around some remote railway telegraph office waiting for the expected war bulletin, drinking in its meagre and too often ambiguous message, thirstily. I have seen crowds in the cities, Halifax, St. John, Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto remain steadfast for hours during a downpour of rain, thrilling visibly at every paltry item of "news" as it is flashed on to the bulletin board.

No; decidedly our country has never been moved like this before. The dullest of us is beginning to see that if Britain goes down: not even the American Navy can save us. As Sir Rider Haggard told the people of St. John the other day, "If Germany prevails 'Good night' to Britain and 'Good night' to all of you who are of Britain." Our thoughts now lie too deep for cheering. On most occasions we are a demonstrative people; and what now strikes an observer everywhere is the silence of the multitudes. One hardly ever hears a cheer.

The very intensity of this emotion makes it impossible that it should endure unrelaxed and without solace. The people of Britain are, like ourselves, shut off from the theatre of events by the impenetrable iron curtain of the censorship. They, too, are doubtless the prey of innumerable and unscrupulous scare-mongers who batten on the susceptibilities and credulity of the public. But this war has not lasted a month—it had not lasted a day—to demonstrate a difference in our situation as compared to theirs. The edict has gone forth from the Imperial head, Lord Kitchener, that this is to be a "silent war." It is to be a war fought so far as the millions of citizens in the Empire is concerned, in the dark. It is to take no account of the feelings of the nation, of the fathers, mothers, wives and relatives of the men actually in the field. It is to consider the fighting men mere automata without bowels. It is to take no account of the military glory, of personal heroism; it is to banish one of the great, perhaps the only virtue of war that is deep and widespread, lies in its appeal to the heart, to national pride, to our innate love of the martial and the nobly picturesque. We are all henceforth to sit at home in silence, a prey to every nameless fear that can infest the bosom of the loyal and the loving.

The reason vouchsafed for such a policy is that nothing must be betrayed to the enemy; not a single British private must send a brief message to his wife in England or in Canada, for fear that the Kaiser and his staff may learn something they did not know before. Newspaper correspondents are to be expelled or shot. Nothing—or as little as possible—is to be permitted that can comfort the heart, stimulate the courage or allay the anxiety of the nation. War is to be ruthlessly shorn of its poetry, its enthusiasm, and heroic British battalions are to stumble on blindly to slaughter like sheep to the abambles.

Well, military rigor may exact this; but if it does so to the end, better reasons will have to be forthcoming than have yet been explained to our people. For our case, not further to beat about the bush, is that the curtain has gone down on the heroic in actual war to rise on a phantasmagoria of the fabulous. The press of our American neighbor has in many instances behaved with conspicuous friendliness and moderation towards us, more becoming a tacit ally than a temperate neutral. But it, unlike our own press, is gagged by no domestic censorship. More than any other in the universe the aim and purpose of the American newspaper is to satisfy the imperious needs of its readers for sensation. Its correspondents have gone abroad in hordes. They are hiding in every large European seaport, lurking even in unsafe places, running the gauntlet of death itself in an inveterate resolve to "get news through" at any cost, the cost of money, of hard-

ship, of suffering—but chiefly at the cost of truth. A small army of those enterprising journalists is overseas and their efforts, checked and hampered at every turn, are supplemented by another army, not less fertile and resourceful and far more numerous at home—an army of unconscionable journalistic liars. Between them both, the American newspaper reading public, as any chance perusal of their productions will convince, is being led on imaginary battles on land and sea, sieges, massacres and deeds of daring to their heart's content. And what our American neighbors feed upon is passed on over the boundary to us in Canada. We still read about the war—no detail of strategy or bloodshed is withheld from us—but it is a phantom war, a Munchausen war, which unsteadies our nerves and weakens our fibre. Human nature in Britain may be different from human nature in Canada; but to us this is intolerable.

"The situation," said an eminent leader of public opinion to me yesterday, after glancing at the headlines of half a dozen Dominion newspapers, "cannot endure. Even the War Office must realize that the people must know what their instruments are doing or what they have done. A nation cannot go on living in such an atmosphere of lies and rumor."

Reticence and restraint are mighty virtues. If anyone could convince us that by thus dwelling in suspense, and enduring this perpetual agony of doubt; of being ignorant whether our attacks had failed or succeeded; whether our soldiers were alive or dead; whether the Germans were advancing or retreating, whether we were crushing them or they were crushing us, was indispenably, nay of material assistance to our strategy, then we would summon all our fortitude, clench our teeth and pre-

pare to suffer. But is it? The morale of the nation is undoubtedly being weakened: is there any real compensation?

Unhappily the opinion is prevalent with us and perhaps is not unknown in Britain, that this War Office policy of secrecy is part and parcel of the old time-dishonored official attitude toward the public press. The army officer detests and has always despised the journalist—except when the latter can be employed in the specific character of trumpeter or apologist. Patriotic and gallant as our British army officer is he has never pretended to any belief in the virtue of publicity. Things must get done and not talked about. What he does not realize is that the present unanimous patriotic public temper—here, and I doubt not, in Britain—is the work largely, chiefly, of the press. In time of war, it is to the war correspondent that we must credit a mitigation of the horrors and ferocity and sacrifices of war.

We would be the last to demand that this war should be fought "in the limelight." But some of us do demand and fervently, that a little wholesome daylight should be infused into the scene of conflict. No war in history needs it more. We do demand that the meanest tribute to our manhood be paid and that the lists of our killed and wounded shall be issued promptly. To do less than this is to exhibit a craven caution and an exaggerated opinion of the foe's sagacity that a Red Indian would mock at. If there is anything to tell us: tell us: we can bear it, and the enemy is welcome to it. Whatever Oriental strategists may say, this policy of "silence and darkness" at home is a bad policy; it dampens our zeal, weakens our nerves, and is contrary to the moral and the fighting instincts of our race.

BECKLES WILLSON.

CASTLES OPEN FOR WOUNDED

British Authorities Overwhelmed With Offers of Historic Mansions and Yachts for Use as Hospitals

LONDON, August 29—Historic castles, country mansions and luxurious yachts are being turned into hospitals, convalescent homes and Red Cross depots. The authorities are overwhelmed with offers, and the owners in most cases are providing a full equipment of the houses and crafts and paying for their maintenance. The Duke of Devonshire has lent Devonshire House a famous palatial old mansion in Piccadilly for the headquarters of the British Red Cross Society. The great hall is filled with tables, desks and inquiry counters, and an aristocratic staff is working on the plans of organization. The dual reception room in the mansion is a vast workshop, in which Queen Mother Amelie of Portugal, Princess Christian and many other titled and society women are engaged there daily in office work.

Marlborough House a Workroom

The dining room of Marlborough House, the town residence of the Dowager Queen Alexandra, has been converted into a workroom, where prominent society women, under Princess Victoria, cut out garments for soldiers and sailors. Princess Marie Louise has equipped her club house for factory girls as an hospital. The Empress Eugenie has given \$1000 to the Red Cross funds and also fitted up a wing in her house at Farnborough for the reception of the wounded officers. The Duke of Sutherland has offered Dunrobin Castle, the family's ancient seat in the Scottish Highlands, for hospital purposes. The Duke of Norfolk is fitting out fifty beds in Arundel Castle, his beautiful Sussex seat. Mortimer Singer, an American, has offered his newly built mansion in Berkshire as a convalescent home. It will be equipped for 200 patients and Mr. Singer will defray all the costs of maintenance.

Wanamaker Opens Premises

Rodman Wanamaker, who gave the silver altar, costing \$40,000, to the Sandringham Church in memory of King Edward, has placed his extensive premises in Pall Mall and its entire staff at the disposal of the Red Cross Society. The Archbishop of Canterbury has offered Lambeth Palace, the picturesque ancient Lon-

Men's Christian Association are being used by the army in the mobilization movement throughout England. Thousands of Boy Scouts are being used for despatch riding. At one time eight hundred soldiers were billeted in the Great London Central Association building. The Y. M. C. A. tent has been recognized as part of the regular army equipment, being used for writing, reading and postal facilities. The association has already placed tents at 106 mobilization points, with 1000 secretaries and volunteers serving 300,000 soldiers.

TEA EMBARGO REMOVED PRICE DROPS FIVE CENTS

Salada Tea Company Announces Reduction—Will Buy Tea Back From Grocers.

The Salada Tea Company announced Tuesday that they had reduced the prices of their teas five cents a pound. They make the following announcement:

The embargo on tea has been definitely removed in England, and however temporary this may be, we have taken advantage of it to immediately reduce our price five cents per pound.

This is in spite of the fact that war risk insurance and freights are still abnormally high, and no shipments have yet been made from Ceylon or India.

All these conditions in the tea situation, while relieved somewhat from last week, still in very difficult condition.

We are undertaking to take back all the tea we shipped last week from the grocer, and pay him for it exactly what he paid us. The cost of this will be very large, but we know this is the only way in which the interests of both the consumer and the grocer can be safeguarded.

PLUMBERS DISPUTE HAS BEEN SETTLED