

THE CARLETON SENTINEL



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"OUR QUEEN AND CONSTITUTION."

[By JAMES McLAUCHLAN.

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Interesting Extract.

THE PAST YEAR.—Dark indeed, and discouraging, were the prospects of the nation at the beginning of the year which we have just concluded.— We had been nine months at war. We had entered upon the struggle full of the glorious memories of the last five years of our late contest with France, and in deep forgetfulness of the long course of mistakes and disasters which preceded them. We had won two great battles, but generalship had nothing to do with them, for in the first we walked directly into the snare which had been prepared for us, and in the second we laid open the most vulnerable point of our army, so as to offer to our enemy an irresistible temptation to all but an irresistible attack. Together with misgivings as to generalship, we were just beginning to entertain other doubts. Together with the letters of our correspondent, thick and fast came the news of that neglect, disorder, and incapacity under which our army was perishing before we, and possibly before its own General, were fully apprised of its danger. Day by day the truth became better known, till towards the dreary month of January we awoke to the conviction that our men were overtasked from want of calculation, and underfed from want of foresight—that Balaklava was a cemetery and Scutari a pesthouse. The nation was fearfully excited, and in the midst of that excitement parliament re-assembled. Notice was given of a committee of investigation, and as soon as that notice was given Lord John Russell fled from the impending storm, leaving his colleagues to shift for themselves as best they could. The motion was carried, and brought with it the first great event of the year—the dissolution of the coalition ministry, just two years after its completion.— Looking at it with the knowledge we have since gained of its constituent parts, we can only wonder how it came to pass that it lasted so long. With the leadership of the House of Commons in the hands of a statesman so slightly united to his colleagues, with so strong a peace party engaged in carrying on the war, its destruction at no distant period could not have been doubtful. We need not here recapitulate the unsuccessful attempts of Lord Derby and Lord John Russell to form a Government; or how the task of filling up the offices of state was at last accomplished by Lord Palmerston, in whom the nation, guided by an unerring instinct, reposed its confidence at a time when no one seemed left to confide in. The first two months of the year were away in England in this protracted ministerial crisis, and in the Crimea witnessed the destruction of those old and well-disciplined troops whose loss we are now striving to replace. The first days of March startled all Europe by the intelligence that the cause and moving spirit of the sanguinary contest then about to recommence was no more. His spirit striven to the quick by the reverses that had tarnished the glories of his arms; his mind shattered by the conflict of pride and shame, self-will and despair; his gigantic frame enfeebled by incessant application and imprudent exposure to the cold of a Polar winter—the Emperor Nicholas sank under the news of the repulse of his attack upon Eupatoria, and the seventh part of the globe received a new master. Thirty years of prosperity had been effaced by a single year of adversity, and the most powerful and successful Prince of his age died of a broken heart. The first impression that this event produced on the public mind was an expectation of peace, founded on the milder and less ambitious character of the Emperor Alexander; the second was a conviction that peace was further off than ever. Concessions that an old and successful sovereign might

have ventured to make could not be offered without peril by his successor, and it was therefore without surprise that Europe found the new Czar pledging himself to walk in the steps of Peter, of Catherine, and of Nicholas. The sincerity of these professions was speedily put to the test. At the end of the month of March a Congress assembled at Vienna to deliberate on the four bases of negotiation, already accepted by Russia, which it soon appeared that, although Russia had promised to put an end to her supremacy in the Black Sea, nothing was further from her intention than to put that promise into execution. It was at this Congress that Lord John Russell, who had rejoined the colleagues he had deserted, and accepted the office of Envoy to Vienna as well as that of Secretary of State for the Colonies, gave a favourable ear to propositions made by Austria which were not within the scope of his powers, which had not been assented to by Russia, and which assuredly would not have been assented to by the government or people whose Envoy he was. The negotiation was not persisted in on this basis, and in an unhappy moment for his own reputation Lord John Russell, in addressing the House of Commons on the subject of his mission, suppressed all notice of the terms to which he had been willing to accede. Defection and exposure followed, and Lord John Russell was driven from an office which he had not held six months by the almost unanimous reprobation of his former friends and supporters. In the meantime the war in the Crimea had recommenced in good earnest. A bombardment took place in April, without producing sufficient effect to warrant an assault; the besieged in their turn became besiegers, and, instead of retreating from our lines, threw up fresh works, which brought them continually nearer to our lines. When the House of Commons adjourned for the Whit-tide recess, in the middle of a debate on the war, nothing could be more gloomy than our prospects, but during that brief recess news arrived which greatly altered the aspect of affairs. The Allies had forced the Straits of Yenikale, taken Kertch, and spread terror and devastation along the coasts of the Sea of Azoff, destroyed enormous stores of corn, of fish and of hay. Possibly this success, considerable enough in itself, was at the time overrated. At any rate, it came to this country like the first beam of drawing day. Its effect on the House of Commons was manifest and immediate. The great debate on the war terminated prosperously for ministers, and the authority of Lord Palmerston's government was from that moment firmly established. The capture of the Mamelon and the Rifle Pits on the 7th of June followed, and the nation began to believe that it was about to reap the fruit of all its labours and all its sacrifices, when the disastrous repulse of the 18th of June followed, and was almost immediately succeeded by the unexpected death of Lord Raglan. However little there might be in his career of the shining talents of a General or the providence and foresight of a great administrator, the country felt that he had worthily closed in her service a life which he had always been ready to lay down on the field of battle, and that his errors and disasters were to be attributed rather to those who sent him to fulfil duties for which neither his time of life nor his previous experience fitted him than to any faults which could be properly called his own. The regret for Lord Raglan was increased by the choice of his successor, to whose lamentable incompetence we owe regrets that poison the joy of triumph, and force us to regard a most substantial victory with little more complacency than a decided reverse.— Still the siege advanced; the French drove their approaches every day nearer and nearer to the walls, and the English made some progress but not

such as enabled them on the 8th of September to shorten by a single yard the distance that divided them from the Redan. The fire became every day more terrible and more effective, and had destroyed, one by one, Korniloff, Istomine, and Nashimoff, the victors, or rather executioners, of Sinope. The Russian commander saw that the place he had so obstinately defended would in a short time be no longer tenable, and began with admirable coolness and forethought to prepare a bridge for the evacuation which he saw impending. Yet before the city bowed to its fate he determined to make one desperate effort for its relief, and attacked the French and Sardinian lines on the banks of the Tchernaya in great force and with the most determined resolution. The signal repulse of that attack left him no other choice but to await his fate; nor was he destined to await it long. On the 8th of September after a furious bombardment of three days, the Allies assaulted the town in five places, and, though repulsed in four, the assault of the French attack on the Malakoff completely succeeded. The Russians withdrew across the bridge, leaving the wounded, the town, their stores, and their artillery in the hands of the Allies. The victory was great and grand; it saved the honor of the Allies, it destroyed the Russian fleet, materially reduced the force and cowed the spirit of the Russian armies, and produced a moral effect all over the world of which we can hardly yet estimate the results. Nor was it brought at a higher price than we must expect to pay for such successes over a brave and resolute foe. But Englishmen felt, and felt justly, that by leaving to them the attack of the Redan, to be made from the very same trench as the unsuccessful assault of the 18th of June, and giving to the French exclusively the attack on the Malakoff, which was within 15 yards of their trenches, they were deprived of the glory, while compelled to share heavily the loss, of the day. It would have been only reasonable that the chances of success and of failure should have been impartially divided among the Allies, and not that the one should have been sent to a highly probable success, the other to almost certain repulse and defeat. On the 29th of the same month of September the Russians sustained before the walls of Kars the most sanguinary defeat that has been inflicted on them in the war which until the 29th of November was nothing but a succession of disasters. Bent upon retrieving the credit of the Russian arms, General Mouravieff ventured a premature attack upon the half-starved garrison of Kars, which ended in total defeat, and inspired the besieged with an unfounded, though not unreasonable, hope of deliverance. Doubtless, they thought that a vast army, just delivered from the drudgery of the trenches, occupying an impregnable position, and confronting a beaten dispirited enemy, might have spared something from its ever whelming force for the relief of men who had fought as bravely and as successfully as themselves. They could not believe till taught by bitter experience, that Ministers, Generals, and Ambassadors, with men, with transports, with stores at their disposal in boundless profusion, could leave a whole army and its victorious Generals to beg their lives from an enemy who had starved those he could not conquer. But it was even so, and on the 28th of November Kars surrendered and the Turkish army of Anatolia ceased to exist. The occupation of Kinburn and the bombardment of Sweaborg make up the brief catalogue of naval success for the year, and the perfidious attack on the Crew of the Cossacks at Hango is almost the only other naval event worth chronicling, except the sudden and unexpected death of Captain Lyons, at the moment when the distinctions he had obtained

pointed him out as one on whom the fairest hopes of the country rested. The land operations closed with the fall of Sebastopol, and the allied Generals, plunged in an inexplicable lethargy, suffered the Russians to recover from the tremendous blow they had received, and to assume an attitude more menacing than that which they ventured to assume while Sebastopol was yet standing. The diversion attempted by Omar Pasha at the foot of the Caucasus and the plundering operations of admiral Stirling in the North Pacific, complete the military events of the year. We have accomplished much, yet not so much as seemed at one time to be within our power, and the war has failed as yet to give us that great General whom we still hope to find, as we found in our utmost need in the last war. A deep distrust of our military system has taken possession of all minds, and, although the inherent difficulties of the investigation, together with a striking want of skill and method, in those who conduct it, rendered the researches of the Sebastopol committee far less full and satisfactory than the nation had expected, a feeling is abroad which will never be satisfied until the soldiers be treated with the same liberality and fairness as other servants of the public. The absence of a military education among our officers, and their inferiority, as a class, to those of the semi-barbarous Power to which we are opposed, are painful to a nation not wont to yield to any foreign competitor, and the invidious privileges attached to wealth, to birth, and to interest, which have recently been so publicly and so injudiciously paraded are assuredly not destined long to survive the general condemnation of the people. The Administrative Reform Association sought to place itself at the head of a movement which should give effect to these sentiments, but partially from the unwillingness of the nation to embarrass government in the time of war by a course of domestic agitation, and partly from the extreme indiscretion of some of its members in the House of Commons, it fell into premature decay. The excitement of men's minds has, however, not been wholly without its fruit, and the year will be remembered as the first in which the principle of ascertaining the fitness of candidates for public office by examination was fairly tested. The medicine has produced an effect far more violent than was anticipated. Instead of securing a better class of candidates, the examination has proved that it is impossible for the present corrupt system of patronage and the most leniently applied test of qualification to co-exist, and that we must either go back to the practice of nominating persons, however incapable, or forward to free and unrestricted competition. In taking a general survey of a year which has added 16,000,000 to our national debt, and exposed our troops to two bloody repulses, we cannot speak with unmixed pleasure, but it were unthankful not to admit that the good far exceeds the evil. Whatever be the losses and disappointments we have undergone, whatever the reverses of our arms, whatever the drains upon our Treasury these evils have been as nothing compared with the tremendous visitation that has fallen on our stubborn and overbearing enemy. While our trade has undergone no diminution, her's is almost annihilated. If we have felt a little tightness in the money market she has been driven to suspend specie payments. If we have increased our debt by £16,000,000, she would esteem it the greatest good fortune to borrow half that sum on the most unfavourable terms. If we have lost a few thousand men, she has sacrificed whole hecatomes of thousands. If we do not recruit as fast as we would wish, Russia has already drained the classes of men from which she can renew her armies. Despondency and terror, we