

ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 1899.

## WAR AND ADVENTURE.

The indications are that the most interesting accounts of the progress of the war in South Africa will come in the old-fashioned way—by mail. Each correspondent or rather each newspaper, has been limited in the use of the cable to 200 words a day, and even with this restriction the blockade upon the cables at the present writing imposes a delay of three days upon all despatches, except those of the Government. The most ingenious condensation (no cipher telegrams are permitted) will not enable a correspondent to crowd a longer narrative of more than, say, 500 words of ordinary English into the prescribed limit. So it happens that the history of events in South Africa as told by the cable is a very bald chronicle, and the world must wait for the mail bag to supply the picturesque details of the campaign.

News down to Oct. 18 has already arrived by steamer from the Cape, and it includes some interesting and important information, which perhaps will prove even more entertaining than the fragmentary despatches which are forwarded from day to day. A letter from a Times correspondent, who spent a week with Gen. Joubert in the Boer camp after war was declared, is one of the most graphic yet at hand. It is fair in spirit, and gives an excellent idea of the Boer situation at the outbreak of hostilities. The following extracts will be found of interest:

'Gen. Joubert's headquarters in the artillery camp was about half a mile from Sandspuit Station, and I betook myself there on arriving to renew my request for leave to stay. After some cross-examination as to the object of my coming, the General finally relented and issued a permit authorizing me to stay with the burghers and move about freely from camp to camp. He bound on me very strictly the duty of speaking the truth, and told me not to disbelieve straight away everything I was told by a Boer, as was the habit of most Englishmen. I met the General several times after this first interview, as a rule in connection with the censoring of my telegrams to the Times, which he usually did himself. Gen. Joubert is a painstaking censor and objects to any expressions of opinion with which he is not in full agreement, which, if I had stayed, might afterward have become somewhat of a difficulty. On one occasion I wished to express the opinion that the Boers were in excellent spirits, impatient to fight, and confident of success, but the General made me erase the whole passage, declaring that they had not the least desire to advance, but humbly confided in God to assist them to defend their country and their homesteads from unprovoked attacks. I am afraid that my impressions as to the state of mind of the majority of the burghers were more accurate than the version which Gen. Joubert wished me to substitute. He can hardly have been describing his own frame of mind, for he knew quite well even before leaving Pretoria that the Government had decided to send in its ultimatum to the British agent, and that it was only delaying a few days for its commissariat and transport arrangements to get into working order and for the Free State burghers to get to the Natal border before giving the signal for action. Slim (wily) Piet Joubert is an interesting character study, not without contrasts, as the Times recently indicated by publishing side by side his appeal to the Queen with his letter to Lobengula. As is no popular commander like Piet Cronje—he is too cautious and hesitating for that—but the Boers have great confidence in his skill and experience.

'The first day or two after arrival the confusion had been very great. There were no tents and no provisions or forage. Some things had been forgotten by the Field Cornet, others were delayed by the general block of all traffic on the Netherlands line. The real Boers were not so badly off. They are accustomed to camping out, and besides most of them had come up before with their own waggons and provisions. But the well-nurtured lawyers and shopkeepers of Pretoria, who relied on the commissariat and the railway, were in a sorry plight, and spend their first days in the field very uncomfortably, with little

to eat or drink and with no shelter at night against the cold and the rain. By the time I came down, however, things were settling down. Many people on arriving had telegraphed home for tents, provisions and servants, and these various comforts were now coming in together with the Government stores.

'The arrangements of a Boer laager are very different from those of an English military camp. The chief difference lies in the fact that among the Boers every man is supposed, as far as possible, to look after his own affairs, to bring his own wagon and horses, and to some extent, his own provisions. The Government provides tents, blankets, mackintoshes, forage and provisions for distribution to those who want any of these things, but no one is obliged to take them. On the other hand, there is no limit to what any individual may choose to bring for himself. There are no fixed regulations as to messes, but friends club together and have meals when they like.

'There were no drill or field exercises, except a parade on the President's birthday, and even by his attendance was by no means obligatory. Guards, however, were put round the camp regularly every night, and from each of the camps a detachment of twenty or thirty horsemen was sent every twelve hours to relieve the patrols stationed along the Natal frontier. There was very little discipline or method in the camp, but plenty of wiliness, and a natural instinct for doing the right thing, which served very well in their place. After I had been there two or three days the whole camp was broken up and shifted a couple of miles to bring it near better drinking water and to find new grass for the horses. The whole operation went off perfectly smooth without a single order being given except the order that the camp was to be moved. Every man looked after his own affairs, and in three or four hours from the time that the order to break up was given the new camp was complete and cooking was going on busily. In actions the operations of a Boer commando are directed by the commandant and the Field Cornet or Field Cornets, but in camp the chief work devolves upon the corporals, of whom there were perhaps half a dozen in our laager. The corporal looks after the stores, distributes forage, rations and ammunition, supervises the removal of baggage, the erection of tents, the drawing up of the wagons on the sides of the laager, the tethering of the horses, in fact most of the operations in camp life. He has also disciplinary power to the extent of imposing small fines or strokes with a stirrup leather for contravention of his orders, though the power is not often exercised.

'Many too, among the Pretorians in the camp were English-born burghers who had been commanded and could not well refuse and still more were originally from Cape Colony. The ordinary language of conversation in the town half of the camp was English, though efforts were made by many to keep up Dutch for patriotism's sake, especially when some of the real Boers were near. At night while the Boers chanted interminable psalms in Dutch, the Pretorians wiled away the time by singing comic or sentimental songs in English. Many of the younger men among the Pretorians are fine athletic fellows and reputed to good shots, but the real strength of the Transvaal lies not in them or in any of the miscellaneous Hollander, and German or Irish volunteer corps, but in the old back-country Boers, the men who took part in the rising of 1881 and who learned their shooting in the days when game was plentiful and cartridges too expensive to be lightly wasted.

'The whole force in the laagers dotted about within a few miles of Sandspuit, amounted to between 8,000 and 10,000 men, comprising the Pretoria, Heidelberg, Middleburg, Krugersdorp, Standerton, Walkerstroom and Ermelo commanders, Germans and Irish. This is the body of troops that has now advanced into Natal over Laings Nek and will defend that position when the British troops begin their advance. The State Artillery detachment consists of 16 Krupp guns of the latest pattern, and some three hundred men. The Boers have taken some trouble with their

artillery since the Jameson raid. The artillerymen are certainly a fine body of men and excellent riders. They themselves are convinced that they will do great execution and very much surprise the British. But the older Boers look upon artillery as dangerous innovation which might seriously hamper the freedom of their movements. There was great grumbling even in the Pretoria camp when it was heard that in the event of a pitched battle the Pretoria commando would be required to assist the artillery. Besides the Krupp field pieces there were two heavy Creuzot siege guns, which by dint of great efforts the artillery had succeeded in getting dragged up to the top of Mount Pogweni opposite Majuba whence they can command Majuba, Laings Nek, and the approaches to it within three or four miles. The Krupp will, no doubt be placed on the Nek itself and make the position an extremely difficult, perhaps almost impossible one to take.

'The various corps of foreign volunteers may perhaps number 1,200 in all, and not 4,500 or 6,000, as was generally represented in the press. There was a German corps of 600 men or more under Col. Schiel on the Free State border by the Kip river, the large part of which has now marched into Natal with the Free State commandos. A considerable section, however, broke off while I was at Sandspuit because they objected personally to Col. Schiel, and marched across to join Gen. Joubert's force. The Hollanders at Sandspuit numbered about 250. Neither they nor the Germans are held of much account by the Boers, and many stories were in circulation in the camps as to their skill in falling off their horses. The Irish—American Irish mainly—numbered about 100 men, and may not amount to double that number, camped under a green flag with the harp on it. They consisted of some of the worst sweepings of Johannesburg, led by an American adventurer called 'Col.' Blake. Their avowed object was loot, and probably that is all they would be any good for. The Boers themselves had the poorest opinion of them, and were very anxious to keep them out of the way to prevent their doing anything disgraceful.

'The confidence of the Boers in the certainty of their success was unbounded. They never doubted for a moment that, having once crossed Laings Nek, they would march straight down to Durban, destroying the mere handful of British in their path. As for Cape Colony, that would rise on every side to welcome them. Only a very few of the more educated among the Pretorians contemplated the possibility of defeat, and even they, after a week in camp, were caught by the general contagion. There confidence was based chiefly on the excellence of their rifle shooting and on the enthusiastic spirit that animated the whole country. As to the former I had no opportunity of judging though I confess to feeling a little doubtful about it, when I heard them quoting the events of the Jameson raid as an evidence thereof. On one occasion I tried to test the Boer's capacity for estimating distances, for which they are so celebrated. I took a distance I guessed to be 700 yards, and asked perhaps a dozen Boers and Pretorians to tell me what it was. I was surprised to get every possible estimate from 350 to 700 yards, the majority judging the distance to be about 500 yards. On stepping it I found it to be about 655 yards. It is quite possible that if any very heavy engagements take place in which the Boers are themselves exposed to a severe fire the quality of their marksmanship will fall very much short of their reputation.

'The reception I met with both from the Pretorians and from the regular Boers was in every way friendly and hospitable, and I had nothing to complain of while I was in the camp. Every consideration, too, was paid to my somewhat unusual position, and nothing was even said that could in any way have been construed as offensive. But I had not been more than a day or two in the camp before I heard that there was a certain section in our camp and in some of the other camps, who objected very strongly to an English correspondent in their midst, and were determined to get rid of me. Whether anything would really have been done to me I cannot say—for

my own part I did not think it in the least likely—but some of my friends in the camp were very anxious, and adjured me to leave sooner than get shot, which, I was assured, was to be my fate after the first unsuccessful engagement. I was not able to put my opinion of the matter to the test, as on the morning of Oct. 12 just as the whole camp was moving off to Volksrust to cross the border I suddenly received an order from Gen. Joubert to go to Sandspuit station and make my way to Pretoria by the next train. I was told by a friend that the General had been stopped while riding around the evening before by a deputation who informed him that if he and the 'Engelsch gezind' lawyers of Pretoria could stand the presence of a 'rooinek' spy in the camp they could not and that they would find their own means of getting rid of the objectionable intruder unless he was removed on the spot.

The Standard's correspondent arrived at Capetown on Oct. 3, and it seems strange, in the light of later knowledge, to think that on that day, only a month ago, he and a group of men stood in scant attire on the rain-washed deck, eager to learn whether it was peace or war. A few hours in Capetown, however, was enough to bring conviction that though war had not yet come, it could not be delayed much longer. Speaking of the impatience with which the British residents looked forward to war as the only escape from an intolerable position, he writes:

'Even the women are eager, for they suffer more, perhaps, than the men from the arrogance and contempt of the Dutch, who no longer live on neighborly terms. We have already endured half the horrors of war,' was an oft-repeated remark. And one could well believe it after a visit to the railway station, into which thousands of refugees have been pouring every day from the Transvaal. The sight of women and children, after many hours of exposure and hunger—I saw one frantic mother with a dead child at her breast—brought home to me the misery of war more vividly than the heaps of slain on the field of Omdurman.'

Leaving Capetown, with Sir George White, the correspondent went on by train to East London. 'Night and sleep,' he writes, 'hid from us the picturesque scenery through which the line passes, and at daybreak we awoke in the Great Karroo. The Great or Central Karroo is a desert plain extending over 350 miles, at a level of from 2,000 to 3,000 feet above the sea. In many parts it resembles the Soudan, having vast tracks of sand that stretch to the foot of bare hills. But its likeness to the deserts in Beluchistan is even more striking, for the plain is covered with low scrub, and needs only water to make it fruitful. The bush from which the Karroo takes its name has a purple flower, and looks like heather. Upon this aromatic plant sheep and oxen feed, for in the western provinces no grass grows. The camel thorn also flourishes in this wilderness, as well as a species of scrub with a bright yellow flower, which, at a distance, reminds one of the gorse on an English common. Ranges of dark hills, with the flat tops characteristic of the African Continent, bound the horizon and dry nullahs or gullies wind among the kopjes, or hillocks, of ironstone dotted over the plain. Save for a prairie dog and thousands of great ant hills, there is no sign of life from one end to the other of the plain, which, a quarter of a century ago, was teeming with game. Through this barren region the train hurried along, stopping at irregular intervals in order that passengers might snatch a hurried meal. Most of these stopping places are marked in large letters on the map of South Africa, and are described as towns, though some of them consist of not more than a score or two of houses.'

'At Prince Albert Road, 265 miles from Cape Town, we met the train which the Boers held up at Veteenigen, on the Transvaal border, and looted of half million in gold. The story sounded so like a romance of the wild Western States of America that in Cape Town people refused to credit it. But here were the men who had witnessed this highway robbery. Leaning out of a carriage window, and talking as calmly as though adventures were still as plentiful as in the pages of Bret Harte and Fenimore Cooper, a young Englishman told us the circumstances. There was little to tell beyond the fact that the Customs officers boarded the train, and, under the protection of a couple of policemen, carried off the gold. No resistance was offered, and no force was displayed. The Boers commandeered the metal as quietly and as effectively as they commandeered the cigars and wines of the innkeeper at the railway station.'

'From Beaufort West, where we lunch-

ed, the General had an enthusiastic send-off. This eagerness for war on the part of colonists who have property, if not lives at stake was apparent everywhere, and was significant of the insupportable condition to which British settlers have been reduced. During that same day we passed five trains laden with fugitives from the Transvaal. Many of them were miners, who complained of insult and ill usage. The Boer police had chalked the backs of some as luggage, and had whipped them to the train when they went in search of food. One looked with amazement at men who could endure such treatment and live, and reserved one's sympathy for the women and children, whose wan faces were eloquent of misery that ought to have made every man clamor for a rifle and to be led back to the frontier.

'More trains and more fugitives! If the condition of those who had preceded excited sympathy and rage, what were the feelings aroused by the sights of this sight? Hitherto the refugees had arrived in covered vehicles, and though packed like herrings in a barrel, were protected from the rigors of the night on the Great Karroo. Now they began to come in open trucks. Burning hot in the day, at night the temperature of this elevated plateau often falls below freezing point. Even in a saloon carriage and under a load of blankets one awakens chilled to the bone. And here were hundreds of tender women and children who for three nights had been exposed to these terrible variations of heat and cold, without food and without adequate clothing. They lay like cattle in the bottom of the trucks. Cold and hunger had chilled their very brains. In listless manner, as though misery had robbed them of capacity for indignation, some of them told me how the Boers had taken first class fares and sent them scud in open trucks, reserving every covered coach for men on their way to the Natal border. Train after train passed during the night with its burden of misery.'

It is possible that the war in the Transvaal might have been postponed for a time, but not for long, I am afraid, said a young American mining engineer at home on a visit from South Africa. 'The Boer and the Outlander misunderstand each other so much that a clash was bound to come, sooner or later. One illustration will show you what I mean.'

'I went to the Transvaal in 1894. In the following year President Kruger appointed a day when government licenses to examine and preempt certain gold-bearing lands would be issued to applicants. The short-sighted policy was adopted of selling the licenses on the ground; and a corrugated iron house was erected, in advance, to serve as the Boer commissioner's office. All who wished to stake mining claims were officially notified to appear at a window in this office, at nine o'clock in the morning, and pay fees—first come, first served!'

'The experienced miners present knew what would happen, for the attempt to sell claims and lands in that way had been tried on many occasions in the United States, Australia, Canada and elsewhere, until a better way was learned. The Boers, being new to the business, did not probably foresee that the rich companies would hire gangs of 'hustlers' to crowd up to the front and grab the best claims.'

'As fully twelve thousand miners had been awaiting the sale for weeks, and as the choice claims would go to those who got to the office first, it can always be imagined that there was going to be pulling and hauling around that window when nine o'clock struck! A plan more certain to result in riot could hardly have been devised.'

'For five days previous the plain about the office was covered with tents and wagons, and all manner of projects were hatched for getting in ahead. As it was evident that one man, unaided could do little, the miners began banding together. The Consolidated Gold-Fields Company organized a species of regiment of a thousand of its men, who at a signal were to rush forward and push every one else away.'

'To thwart this scheme several other companies sent men in advance to set strong posts in the ground near the window, with intention of lashing their agents to these posts during the night before the day appointed for selling licenses. Not less than six of these 'man posts' were planted directly in front of the office-window. The notorious Barney Barnato was one of those who adopted this plan. Alfred Beit also had a post set for his agent; and the Joel

(CONTINUED ON PAGE FOURTEEN.)