

ECHOES FROM THE SOUTH AFRICAN STRUGGLE.*

The two books just issued from the hands of President Paul Kruger and General Christiaan Rudolf de Wet serve to accent the evils of the censorship enforced by Great Britain during the recent war in South Africa. For Americans they contain little that is new or unexpected, while they seem to have been in many respects a revelation to the British reading public. It is readily conceivable that the conditions would be directly reversed if, say, President Aguinaldo and General Luna were to publish their version of the war for conquest in the Philippines in Great Britain and America. In either event it may be said that the people of the United States and of Great Britain respectively have been informed concerning the two wars in inverse ratio to their direct interest in them — not the most reassuring element in free government, nor one to make either nation welcome militarism with any joy.

Because the American newspapers have been able to print news from South Africa denied to the British press there is, therefore, little of novelty in the volumes under discussion, nor do they alter in any respect the opinion of their authors generally held by American newspaper readers of intelligence. Mr. Kruger is seen to be of a type little known in the United States, though his combination of evangelical religion and personal valor would not have seemed so strange to those of our ancestors who took part in King Philip's war, for example. Indeed, the fighting with the Kaffirs in the years following the Great Trek, in which the youthful Kruger, though little more than a boy, took a man's part, is often reminiscent of the dealings of the Puritans with the Wampanoags and Narragansetts. General de Wet is more modern in every respect, but still with that touch of fanaticism which Calvinism, like Islam, breeds in its devotees. Both of the men tell their stories in Dutch, and both have had their writings translated into English by an anonymous hand. Mr. Kruger's narrative is evidently one of selection, much of the material at his disposal being put aside to keep his

narrative within compass. It is better ordered, and written in a better style, than General de Wet's. On the other hand, the soldier's story of incessant fighting, though written with a disregard for English idiom which often impresses the reader as a foreign accent might a listener, is easier to follow and more immediately interesting, in spite of its not containing the ample material for thought which inheres in the other.

Perhaps the most impressive feature of Mr. Kruger's memoirs is his unflinching belief, from the first knowledge he obtained of the British nation, that England coveted the territory of the burghers and would stick at nothing to obtain it. In General de Wet's story one is continually struck with the feness of the men composing the burgher commands; and with these men, little disciplined as they were, ran an unexpressed contempt for the British as equal foes, much more galling, of a surety, than open boasting could be. Curious reflections arise, too, when one reads in both books the constantly recurring citations of the Scriptures and the unflinching belief that the fighting men of the two Republics were under the particular care of Jehovah — thus for once surpassing the British in one of their most salient characteristics.

Mr. Kruger's book is a sad one, — the reflections of an old and disappointed, but not embittered, man. His arraignment of his enemy is not wholly candid, but is quite as honest and fair as any presentation made against his people and policy. His life has been that of a pioneer, with savage men and savage beasts to conquer from the beginning, and the result shows itself in self-centering and self-sufficiency, the words being used in no invidious sense. His was a hard school, but it cannot be said to have hardened his nature, or divested him of human sympathy. On the contrary, the tone of sorrow pervading the book shows how deeply he has felt. It is not from these memoirs, of course, that the reader can learn how greatly indebted Mr. Kruger has been to the interferences of Great Britain for his prominence in the South African Republic, except in the information conveyed between the lines. One discovers that every time the element in the Republic which believed in progression made substantial gains in public favor, some act of the British took place at a time suitable to throw popularity once more into the hands of the reactionary element of which Mr. Kruger was the natural leader. The figures given in the elections which elevated him to the presidency of the nation, too well known

* THE MEMOIRS OF PAUL KRUGER. Four Times President of the South African Republic. Told by himself. With portrait. New York: The Century Co.

THREE YEARS' WAR. By Christiaan Rudolf de Wet. With portrait. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

to require citation here, are abundant proof of this, and support the contention of the English Liberals that a more conciliatory policy would have resulted in the elimination of Mr. Kruger and his fellow-pioneers from the politics of the Transvaal. The charge against Sir Alfred (now Lord) Milner of deliberately suppressing the portions of the conference of May 31, 1899, which made for peace, are repeated and reinforced by documentary evidence, but this is already an old story to Americans. So, too, is the presentation as a judicial farce of the trial of Doctor Jamieson and his companions in the raid, though this could have been drawn more strongly. The statement that it was this raid which led to the armament of the Transvaal is plain and indubitable. A minor detail, that it was the refusal of the Americans among the Uitlanders to coöperate with Doctor Jamieson under the British flag which brought about the failure of the daring scheme, has neither confirmation nor denial. Throughout the book there is complete reluctance to state anything not personally within the knowledge of the writer, leading to a marked narrowing of the discussion.

General de Wet, also, keeps within his own personal knowledge of events, and has nothing to say of any of the causes that brought about the war. He entered his country's service as a simple member of his commando, was elected to his first military office while absent from his fellows, and won his way by deeds rather than words. His language has not the restraint of Mr. Kruger's, and he frequently denounces those among his countrymen who failed in their patriotic duty. He is proud of the fighting qualities shown by those burghers who did fight, and he constantly bewails the lack of military discipline and knowledge in his forces. A more skilful writer could have made this story one of the most engrossing ever told, but the natural modesty of the man and his eagerness to award credit to others divest it of much of its interest. Setting forth his admiration for General Cronje and his unwillingness to criticize him, he is none the less plain in his statement that Cronje could have made his escape had he not thought, along old-fashioned lines, that it was disgraceful to abandon his wagon train. After the gain in mobility due to the inhibition of wagons as part of the burghers' military equipment, such victories and reprisals as de Wet's own became fully possible for the first time.

Mr. Kruger's book leaves him unreconciled

to the British conquest — less than that could not have been expected. General de Wet dedicates his work to "my fellow-subjects of the British Empire," and concludes it with a prayer to his countrymen to be loyal to their new ruler. Neither expends any thought on the future; but both quote Bismarck's apothegm that Africa is to be England's grave, and there is nothing to indicate that they do not believe it. Certainly the admiration both express for Gladstone does not indicate too much confidence in those who have rendered his policy nugatory.

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