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War Topics

If there is any truth in the statement that the president has decided to prosecute the war with greater vigor and vivacity it is to be hoped that he will season these admirable military qualities with a dash of discrimination. "When you see a head hit it" may be an excellent rule in a barroom fight open to all, or a neighborly ruction at a wake, but it is not a sound principle in war. A good many visible and accessible heads may advantageously be ignored in order to hit all the harder the head that is plotting the most imminent and poignant mischief. Success in war is not to be had by hammering away at every part of the opposing line, but by such intelligent concentration as will assure superiority at decisive points. It will be of no advantage to us to engage every insignificant battery that happens to be sighted on the Cuban coast, even if we "silence" it—which, with the friendly cooperation of night—as at Matanzas—we can easily do. Under all ordinary circumstances it is merely a waste of ammunition for ships to fight earthworks. The chance of dismounting a gun is about the same as that of having a gun dismounted; the men ashore are better protected than those afloat; the damage done by day can be all repaired by night, and the fortification has this distinct advantage" it can be neither set on fire nor sent to the bottom. The saying that a gun on land is equal to four at sea is not uniformly true and never accurate, but it denotes, well enough, a real disparity. Interchanges of military incivilities between ship and shore, even with the "destructive" weapons of today, are commonly attended with so few casualties as almost to merit the approval of physicians as sanitary measures promoting longevity. Sampson's powerful fleet and the forts of San Juan blazed away at each other for three hours the other day. Nine men were killed and fewer than forty wounded—about as many as might be expected to fall (at one ten-thousandth part of the expense) in a skirmish between two regiments of infantry. The fact that the enemy's ramparts and a castle or two were observed (with telescopes from the press boats) to "dissolve" under the monstrous buffets of our big projectiles appears to have made little difference. The number of dead Spaniards was hardly worth thanking God for. The truth is that modern "destructive" weapons destroy no more lives than did the old blunderbores of our fathers. The size, power and precision of the guns now in use has brought into favor and fashion the long-distance fight, in which they are no better than the old-style pieces were at the short distance compelled by their inferior range. Battling ships used to lay themselves alongside each other, sometimes were even lashed together. That is no longer necessary, for they can damage each other when miles apart. So they remain miles apart, each commander hoping to win, as Dewey did at Manila, by superior accuracy of fire—at seven hundred and fifty dollars a shot—not by superior courage and endurance. It is the same way in battles on land: the long range "arms of precision" kill no more men than fell before the old smoothbore musket; and that had no more lives to its credit than its primitive predecessors, the bow-and-arrow, the spear and the short sword. Indeed, there is no reason to doubt that as "destructive" a weapon as any was the club of the swart cave-dweller. In

brief, modern nations get no advantage whatever from the tremendously expensive armaments which they compel one another to adopt, and which ingenious blackmailers force upon Nation A by threatening to sell their inventions to Nation B. And—strange infatuation!—governments give these gentry the power to rob them, by granting letters patent for man-killing devices and by recognizing letters patent granted by other governments.

To return to our mutttons, ships have usually no legitimate business with land fortifications, excepting in assistance to attacking troops. It is to be hoped that with the promised “energetic prosecution of the war” we may hear an end of the reasonless and futile “bombardments” which so tickle the civilian ear and necessitate so lofty lying about results. The right and professional way to prosecute this war is to forget the Cuban insurgents as a negligible factor and send one hundred thousand men against Havana as soon as we conveniently and safely can. We conveniently and safely can as soon as we have destroyed every vestige of the Spanish fleets that are paralyzing us with possibilities that it would be madness to ignore. Until that is done this is a sea war. If the president will call to Washington the senior rear admiral, investing him with such powers as Lincoln gave to Grant, dissolve the Board of Strategy, return the Secretary of the Navy to the Peace Society whence he sprung, and take himself out of the way, too, there will be woe in Spain right away. And if woe is not the purpose of war pray what is the purpose of woe?

From that disseminating center of veracity, Madrid, it is reported that a telegram from Havana contains news of supreme significance. A German warship arriving at the latter city did not salute the American blockading squadron which let her in! That is grave indeed. It calls for nothing less than retaliation; when the German warship sails out let the American blockading squadron cut her dead!

No matter “where rolls the Oregon,” the famous Seventh Regiment of New York is indubitably safe. And despite the lapse of time and mutations in its personnel, it is the same old Seventh Regiment of the Civil War period. True, it did not then unanimously resolve to merit the Humane Society’s great leather medal for saving life, as virtually it has now done; but as a matter of fact it then did save many lives, and all were lives of its own members. This noble benefaction it accomplished by governing its own temper—and he that subdueth his spirit is greater, and as a rule safer, than he that taketh a city. If the Seventh of that far day had suffered itself to fall into anger and uncharitableness offended Nature, who

“hides hr lash
In the purple-black of a dyed mustache.”

Might have sentenced that impetuous organization to be shot at and, if overtaken, hit. As it was, the Bloody Seventh advanced upon Washington, then held by a superior force of the regular army, captured and occupied some of the strongest hotels in the place, and after several weeks of brilliant and startling dress parades returned as grizzled veterans in New York without the loss of a man.

The regiment did not re-enlist, but in Central Park a costly monument to its valor, “Like a tall bully, lifts its head and lies”; for it is inscribed with names of “members of the Seventh” who fell in battle. There is nothing to show that, righteously disgusted with their

own regiment's policy of peace on earth and good will to men, they had left it, and that they feel as members of less pacific organizations. It is not so very bad to be "dead upon the field of honor" if one have the good luck to be counted twice—a double patriot with twin renowns. In unanimously voting to remain at home while Spain is abroad, and thereby drawing upon themselves a hot fire of patriotic reprobation, the star-spangled Quakers of the Seventh are especially blamable, for they compel many a war-willing patriot to remain at home also in order to deliver the fire. As members of the firing squad some of us are withholding from the service of our country military abilities of the highest order.

Loud sang the Spanish cavalier,
And thus the ditty ran:
"God send the Yankee lassie here.
But not the Yankee man!"

When a man writes on military matters without some degree of special training, study and the technical knowledge so obtained, he makes a fool of himself in the first sentence, in the last and in all the intermediate sentences. No subject, not even art or literature, is beset with so many pitfalls for the confident ignoramus—the layman happy in unconsciousness of his own fallibility. Our newspaper artists who draw forts, guns and warships without having observed them, and battles without having seen one, are no more conspicuously ridiculous than the writers who in equal ignorance tackle these subjects by way of meeting a supposed public demand for "something about it in the paper." Of all these misguided mortals the most fatuous is the editorial strategist who undertakes to criticize a campaign or a naval movement with no knowledge that there is much an art as strategy having laws and principles as imperative as those of any art—as needful to be known to him who would intelligently discuss these matters as in the musician the chromatic scale, or to the chess player the powers of his pieces. A technical knowledge of the art of war is of course not possessed by one civilian in ten thousand; so "the mob of gentlemen who write with ease" instead of sense may flatter themselves that their blundering, if they are conscious of it, will escape attention; but God sees them, and it were better that they had died when little. And for my part, I am unable to comprehend the mental make-up of a man who for approval of the public is willing to incur the contempt of one capable critic. If I knew that by my plain, unpretentious comments on this present war I had compelled the applause of all "The Examiner's" readers except one, and that he, an instructed strategist and tactician, despised me, life would seem to me so dismal that I could find it in my heart to advise Gen. Dickinson to commit suicide.