

VARIOUS

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WAR AND TELEGRAPHY

It is vexing, even saddening, to think how large an amount of discovery, invention, and skill is applied to the murderous purposes of war. As we advance in civilisation, armies become larger and larger, and more abundantly supplied with agencies we would willingly see devoted to more peaceful purposes. Whether wars of race, wars of creed, wars of ambition, or wars of national vanity, the result is much about the same in this respect. Some consolers tell us that wars by-and-by will become so terrible as to check the desire to wage them: let us hope so, despite present symptoms.

Science has unquestionably rendered a vast amount of aid to attack and defence in war within the last few years. Gunpowder, gun-cotton, dynamite, and other explosive substances for fire-

arms, torpedoes, and military mining have had their properties and relative powers investigated with remarkable completeness. Gun-carriages have been so vastly improved, that by Captain Scott's contrivances a six-hundred-pounder can be managed as easily and quickly as a thirty-two-pounder could in the days of our fathers or grandfathers; while by Major Moncrieff's automatic apparatus a gun lowers itself behind the screen of a parapet or earthen battery for loading, and then raises itself twelve or fifteen feet to fire over it.

Photography, again, is applied in a great variety of ways to aid warlike operations. At the office of the Ordnance Survey, or under the supervision of the Director, an amazing number of such photographs are taken, enlarged or reduced from the original dimensions according to circumstances, and multiplied or prepared for printing by a very rapid process of zincography or some other kind of electro-engraving. One of the Reports issued by the Director tells us that he supplies the War Office with photographs of plans of battles, important fortified posts and their surrounding districts, barracks and forts in all parts of the British dominions, &c. All the equipments of troops for the field are similarly photographed or zincographed, as unerring patterns for reference. For such wars as we have been engaged in during the past five-and-twenty years (happily few in number), such as the Crimean, Abyssinian, and Ashanti campaigns, photographs and zincographs have been supplied in large number to the officers, illustrating all details which the home authorities have

been able to ascertain, and which are likely to be useful in the intended operations.

What are we to say of the *torpedo*, and its management by electricity? This is really a wonderful subject, the influence of which on future naval warfare even the most skilled and experienced officers can only dimly surmise. We know that during the civil war in America, the Federal torpedoes wrought more destruction on the Confederate ships than all the guns in the Federal fleet; that, on the other hand, the Confederate torpedoes so effectually guarded the approach to Richmond up James River, that a hostile flotilla was compelled to retire baffled and disappointed. One unlucky Federal ship unwittingly passed over a submerged torpedo at the moment of explosion. And with what result? 'The hull of the ship was visibly lifted out of the water, the boiler exploded, the smoke-funnels were carried away, and the crew projected into the air with extreme velocity. Out of the crew of one hundred and twenty-seven men, only three remained alive – the vessel itself being blown to atoms.' The arrangements have been so much improved since that time, that messages can be sent across a river or estuary from shore to shore through the very wire which is to discharge the torpedo! In every naval war during the last few years, torpedoes have been more or less employed. In what way the weaker Russian fleet has been able to baffle the stronger fleet of the Turks in the struggle of 1877, the newspapers have told us in full detail. There is no necessity for pursuing this part of the subject further, seeing that

it was lately treated with some degree of fullness in our pages.

But the greatest marvel of all, in regard to the application of electricity to warlike purposes, is the *electric telegraph*. We know what service the lightning-messenger renders to society generally in the peaceful daily maintenance of commercial and social intercommunication; and military men now know what a potent instrument it is in the conduct of field-operations and siege-works. An officer well qualified to judge affirms that the memorable Franco-German War, so disastrous to France, could not have been carried on without the aid of the electric telegraph by the German forces. The warlike struggles engaged in by various European powers in the Crimea, in India during the Mutiny, in China, in New Zealand, in the Austro-Italian provinces, in Morocco by the Spaniards, in America by the Federals and the Confederates, in Holstein during the brief Dano-German War, in Bohemia during the still briefer Austro-Prussian War, in Abyssinia, in France during the struggle against the Germans, in Ashanti – all these were marked by the adoption of the electric telegraph to a greater or less extent.

Many of us remember, from the vivid descriptions written by the special correspondents of the daily newspapers, how terrible were the sufferings of the British troops in the Crimea during the winter of 1854-5, engaged in trench-work and other siege-operations under almost every kind of privation. But we also know how impossible it would have been to learn the news quickly in England and to send instructions, without the

aid of telegraphy. An electric cable was for this very purpose submerged in the Black Sea from the Turkish mainland to the Crimea; while on land, wires were set up from Balaklava to the headquarters outside Sebastopol. Thus it was that daily messages could be exchanged between Lord Raglan's headquarters and the War Office in London – also between the special correspondents of the daily papers and their employers in Fleet Street or Printing House Square. So in like manner, during the struggle arising out of the Indian Mutiny, the advancing British columns contrived, wherever possible, to maintain unbroken telegraphic communication with Calcutta, whereby the viceroy was kept informed of what was going on. Of course the mutineers or rebels destroyed or disrupted the wires wherever and whenever they could; and to repair the damage thus inflicted formed no small part of the arduous duties of the British officers.

Our little but expensive war in Abyssinia in 1868, marked by a less shedding of blood than almost any other war in modern times, was an engineers' war from first to last. A wild and unknown country was surveyed and accurately mapped out, four hundred miles of road constructed, tube-wells sunk, photographs of various useful kinds taken, and a telegraphic system established. The telegraphic arrangements first made had to be abandoned, owing to the scantiness of the facilities for transporting the necessary materials. The more restricted plan actually adopted was difficult enough, so limited were the means of obtaining wood for telegraph poles. On approaching Magdala,

however, Captain St John (who had the management of this part of the engineering) succeeded in laying down from five to ten miles a day. Short as was the war, this telegraph conveyed more than seven thousand eight hundred messages during the five months of its working, and aided most materially in giving effect to General (now Lord) Napier's well-planned and successful scheme of operations.

Our strange Ashanti War gave further evidence of the formation of a telegraph line through a wild country inhabited by a barbarous people. Lieutenant Jekyll, who had the management of this work, has given a lively account of the difficulties that beset him, and his mode of overcoming them. It was at first intended to fight the war with native levies and to lay down a railway; but Sir Garnet Wolseley, on landing to take the command, soon found that the natives were not sufficiently reliable, that the country was almost impracticable for a railway, that he must have English troops, and that an electric telegraph would be a highly useful aid. Lieutenant Jekyll, with a small staff, went inland and bought bamboo canes of the blacks, set them up as posts, and laid his wires from Cape Coast Castle to Coomassie at the rate of about two miles a day. A gang of fifty natives helped him. Of these worthies he says: "They were not promising in appearance, and I was compelled to dispense with the services of those who were *less than four feet high!* (We italicise these words to shew what pigmies many of the West Africans are.) But they had with them an intelligent headman; and by dint

of supervision, supplemented by a little flogging once now and then, turned out a tolerably useful body for light work, as niggers go.' The line was extended by degrees as far as Accrofumu, about a hundred miles from the coast. An amusing proof was afforded of the tendency of the natives to regard the telegraph as a kind of fetich, charm, or spell. The English one day saw bits of white cotton-thread suspended from tree to tree for several miles, as if to obtain thereby some of the mysterious benefits which the white man evidently expected from the wire. When the native helpers received small electric shocks occasionally, consequent on the testing or using of the line, they made sure that a charm was at work; and the lieutenant was half afraid his men would run away in terror. The climate was very trying to the English, who, lying ill with fever, got the natives to rouse them when any movements of the receiving apparatus were observed. Nevertheless, this telegraphic line rendered services much more than compensatory for the expense, difficulty, and anxiety of laying, maintaining, and using it.

The truly wonderful and eventful Franco-German War of 1870-1 exhibited the value of electro-telegraphy with a completeness never equalled before or since. A foretaste had been given in the Austro-Prussian or 'Seven Weeks' War' of 1866; when four complete and distinct telegraphic organisations were adopted – one with Prince Frederick-William's fine army; one with that of Prince Charles; one at the king's headquarters; and one in reserve. Each could lay down wires as fast as the

headquarters could advance. The speedy termination of the war averted the necessity of constructing field-telegraphs, such as those about to be described.

When the German forces advanced to Paris in the closing months of 1870, the plan pursued with the telegraph was as follows: The ordinary commercial and railway telegraphs were gradually extended over the frontier into France, as the German armies advanced. The field or *étappen* telegraphs maintained communication between the base of operations, the ammunition dépôts, and the advanced columns of the various army corps. When the sappers and miners had pushed on to the vicinity of Paris, the ubiquitous wire travelled with them. The materials used were light and simple; the operators employed to transmit and receive messages had been trained in the state establishments; and headquarters were kept instantly informed of any observed movements on the part of the French. The telegraph was indeed in constant use by the Germans – for arranging the transport of ammunition; for hourly communication with the commissariat; for directing the conveyance to Germany of sick and wounded, as well as prisoners; for regulating the traffic on the field railways; for maintaining unbroken connection between the troops, which formed a belt of ninety miles' circumference around Paris; for summoning reinforcements to any point where suddenly needed; and to send news of any gap in the continuity of the immense ring of soldiers encircling the beleaguered city.

If any evidence were needed of the invaluable services rendered by the electric telegraph in the war just noticed, it was furnished by M. Von Chauvin, who attended before a Committee of the House of Commons on Postal Telegraphs in 1876. He stated in distinct terms that the war could not have been carried on without this potent aid.

Our own English system of war telegraphy, organised at Chatham, has been improved from time to time. Light iron telegraph poles are provided, to support insulated wires. There is a travelling office on wheels for the operators; while the materials are carried in specially constructed wagons. So strong is the wire that wheels may go over it; and therefore the line is laid above ground or *on* the ground according to circumstances. Spikes of peculiar form enable the wires to be hung on trees or walls to meet the contingencies of towns and villages. The nucleus of the staff of operators is a small body of Royal Engineers, under their own officers, comprising about fifty military men, with occasional assistance from others – well organised into superintendents, inspectors, clerks, linesmen, storemen, artisans, and labourers. The wagons for materials contain drums on which the wire is coiled; this is unrolled as the wagon moves on, which is as fast as the operators can lay the line. At the present time, ten thousand miles of prepared wire are said to be kept in store, ready for any exigences.

We might go on to notice the aid furnished to warlike operations by the electric light; as for instance, at Paris in the

closing weeks of 1870, when such a light on Montmartre enabled the Parisians to gather some knowledge of what the besiegers were about at night. But enough: the brief summary above given will suffice to shew how electricity is used in war.

NEARLY WRECKED

CHAPTER III. – WILFRED'S LETTER

Time went by, and nothing happened to justify Mabel's fears. Wilfred seemed to be working hard and getting on well. His talent was pronounced unmistakable by the master under whom he was placed, and he himself was in good spirits about his future. But before very long matters began to change. His letters to Mabel were less frequent and shorter than they had been; he spoke with less openness and frankness of his doings; and it was evident to her that there was a *something* which he was careful to keep from her.

She longed to see Mr Merton, to hear from him what news he had of his son, and whether his ideas about Wilfred corresponded with her own; but she dared not speak to him about it. She knew how hard he had always been to Wilfred, how intolerant of all his faults; and she knew well there would be little mercy to be hoped for him at his father's hands if, as she suspected, he had been taking more to pleasure and less to work lately. She dared not even speak to her father of what she feared, for could she expect even him to think as leniently of her dear one as she did? So she had to go on from day to day keeping her trouble – which was not less difficult to bear because it was only suspected – to herself.

At last, when Wilfred had been about nine months in Paris, but too certain proof arrived of how true her suspicions had been. Mr Colherne was staying away from home – a very unusual proceeding, and Mabel was left alone. He had gone to pass a few days with a friend in Scotland, whither it had been impracticable for his daughter to accompany him.

The morning after his departure, Mabel came down to breakfast rather later than usual, singing a snatch of one of her favourite ditties, and burst open the dining-room door in a way that was indicative of her lively feelings. Her eye lighted upon a letter that was lying in her plate; the writing was that of Wilfred Merton. The missive was almost illegible and very brief, and acted upon her gay spirits like a sudden freezing. It ran as follows:

My darling Mabel – I must write a few words, the last you will ever have from me, to tell you that whatever may appear, however any one may try to persuade you, I still love you; love you, as I have done all my life, with all the best part of my nature. Believe that, Mabel, my own, always. I write to say good-bye, for I shall never see you again; and yet I never longed to see you as I do at this moment. I feel half mad now, and hardly know what I am writing. How shall I say it; I have nothing to live for, except disgrace, and I will not live for that, I am resolved. Once more, good-bye, dearest and best. Try to forgive me, and then forget me, as every one else in the world will soon do.

Wilfred Merton.

For an instant Mabel sat quite still, gazing straight before her

with one expression, that of blank despair, upon her face. This sudden fearful shock had quite stunned her. But she was not a girl to remain inactive, simply grieving over misfortune, when there was anything to be done. Her resolution was promptly taken. She rang, and a servant appeared.

'Tell Hawkesley to bring the brougham round as soon as he possibly can,' she said; 'tell him not to mind how it looks, but to be at the door as soon as possible.'

'Is anything the matter, miss?' said the man, astonished at this order.

'Yes. I have no time to lose.'

'Is it master, miss?' he asked, with that dreadful habit of his class of questioning instead of doing what is wanted.

'No; papa is quite well. But don't stop now; go yourself to the stable; I haven't a minute to waste.'

In a few minutes more she was seated in the brougham which was fast making its way to Mr Merton's bank in the City.

CHAPTER IV. – THE JOURNEY

Mr Merton was sitting in the private office of his counting-house with a large book open before him. Just as he was in the middle of some calculation which, to judge from the expression of his face, was pretty abstruse, the door opened and a clerk entered. The banker looked up with no appearance of being pleased at the interruption.

'What is it, Mr Chester?' he said, rather angrily.

'There is a young lady, sir, who says she must see you as soon as possible, and alone.'

'O nonsense. I can't possibly attend to her. Don't you know who she is?'

'No, sir; she wouldn't give me her name, nor tell me her business. I said that I was sure you couldn't see her; but she said it was absolutely necessary that you should do so, and that you would know her directly.'

'You must tell her that it is out of the question for me to see her, if she will not send word who she is, or what she wants.'

'There's no good, sir; I have told her so. But she is quite determined to come; and I thought I had better speak to you, as it seemed so strange to have her waiting about there.'

'Well, in that case I suppose you must shew her in.'

The clerk withdrew, and in an instant returned with a young lady who had a thick veil over her face. Having ushered her into

the room, he withdrew and shut the door, leaving Mr Merton and his visitor alone.

No sooner was the door closed than the lady put up her veil and disclosed the features of Mabel Colherne.

'Why, Mabel!' said Mr Merton, appearing considerably more surprised than pleased at finding who his visitor was; 'what in the world brings you here?'

Mabel for her only answer put Wilfred's letter into his father's hands. He read it through without shewing any signs of either surprise or regret, and when he had finished it, handed it back to her without speaking.

'Well, Mr Merton?' she said, feeling impatient at his silence.

'Well, Mabel?' he returned.

'Have you read the letter?'

'Most certainly.'

'And have you nothing to say?'

'What *am* I to say?'

'Mr Merton,' exclaimed Mabel, hardly able to control herself, 'can you read such a letter from your son, and not care about it?'

'I have given up thinking of Wilfred as my son at all, Mabel. I gave him the chance of rising in his odious profession by sending him to Paris, and what has been his conduct in return for my kindness? He has done nothing but amuse himself, and get into all kinds of disreputable mischief. I should have told you all this before, and tried to persuade you to break off with him; but I did not do so; in the first place, because I was sure you would not

listen to me; and in the second, because I did not want to be the means of cutting him off from your affection, and thus rendering his amendment impossible.'

'I have been afraid that something has been going wrong with Wilfred lately. I wish you had told me before; I might have been able to influence him for good.'

'I don't believe that any influence in the world would be useful to him; he is a thoroughly worthless fellow. I paid his debts once upon condition that he would contract no more, but I might have saved myself the trouble; within a month he wanted more money. I was not going to be guilty a second time of the weakness of saving him from difficulties he had brought upon himself, in spite too of all my warnings; so I wrote back to say that I would have no more to do with him.'

'Mr Merton, you will not keep to such a cruel resolution now, with such a letter as this before you?'

'Are you so weak, Mabel, as to be taken in by such nonsense as this? Don't you see that being unable to get at me, he is simply trying what he can do with you?'

'No, Mr Merton; I don't believe that, and won't for a moment. I trust my own instinct, which is a woman's natural guide, and generally a very sure one, and I am certain that Wilfred intends doing something desperate.'

'I have told you before now that my son is a foolish weak fellow, and not worth anybody's love.'

'What is that to me, Mr Merton?' exclaimed Mabel,

exasperated beyond endurance. 'I love him, and I can hardly be expected to stand quietly by and let him be ruined, because the affection you ought to bear your son is wanting in your nature. Who knows but that the treatment he thus received under his own father's roof may have' —

'What do you wish me to do? What is there that *can* be done?' cried Mr Merton, interrupting the girl's impassioned burst.

'I want you to go with me to Paris to see Wilfred, that we may take him away from harm, if it be not too late. If papa had been at home now, he would, I am sure, have gone with me; but I could not wait till he comes.'

'You can hardly be serious in proposing for me to go on such a wild expedition as that, I think?'

'Mr Merton, I am quite sure that that letter means more than you think; and I am determined that he shall not be left to be ruined without an attempt to save him. If you will not come I must and will go alone.'

'You are mad, Mabel! Go to Paris alone, and to see this worthless fellow! What do you suppose the world would say of such conduct?'

'I can't think of that when the person I love best on earth is in such danger, as I am sure Wilfred is now, and there is a chance, however faint it may be, of my saving him. I can answer to heaven and my own conscience for what I am going to do, and I must brave the world. I shall write and tell papa what I have done, and I am sure that he will follow me as soon as possible. Good-bye,

Mr Merton; there is no use in my stopping here longer.'

'Stay, Mabel!' he began, detaining her as she rose. 'I cannot possibly allow you to go alone, and I have of course no power of interfering with your actions. If you really are bent upon this scheme, which I still think an utterly mad one, I must, for the sake of my own reputation as much as for yours, accompany you.'

'Believe me that my fears are not uncalled for. I am sure something dreadful is going to happen to Wilfred, and I only dread being too late even now. I am very thankful you are going with me; and am certain that you will never repent it.'

'No thanks: it is only necessity that makes me do it. When do you start?'

'To-night, if possible.'

Mr Merton looked into a Bradshaw that was lying upon the table. 'The train to meet the night-boat leaves London at half-past eight; to catch that you must start from your house at half-past seven.'

'I will do that. Will you meet me at the station?'

'Yes; I will be there at a quarter past eight.'

'Good-bye till then; and thank you again a thousand times.'

Mr Merton attended her to the outer door of the office, and she drove home well satisfied with her mission. Writing to her father, to tell him everything, and what she was going to do, she packed a small box to take with her, and then did little else but wish the day, which seemed interminable, gone. Long before it was necessary, she was at the station; and punctual to the

appointed minute, Mr Merton appeared.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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