

# THE EDITOR'S COMMENTS.

## BRITAIN VS. RUSSIA.

The war clouds will not disappear. The war dogs are at the doors of their kennels tugging at their chains and seeking to be unleashed that they may spring upon each other and begin the ghastly carnival for which they have been yearning so long. The appearances are that their brutish appetites are not much longer to be unappeased, but just when or exactly where the sanguinary saturnalia will begin is still to some extent a matter of conjecture. The spirit of deadly contention is in the air, it has entered into and taken possession of the souls of men in high places, and while there is now and then a subsidence in some measure of the feeling, it is by no means dissipated, only held in check for a more favorable opportunity to give it expression.

A week ago, and for some weeks previously, it looked as if the British channel and the French Atlantic coast were to be the storm center, but the scene has shifted, at least temporarily, and presented northeastern China as the most likely field for the commencement of the great struggle. It may be that this also will be changed, for the reason that since Russia began preparations for seizing more Chinese territory the events which were expected to mature have, as previously suggested, experienced at least a temporary subsidence, these events being the breaking out of hostilities between the English and French. Acting upon this probability, it seems that a Russian force had already taken possession of the town of Niu Chang in the province of Leo Tong, together with the forts at the mouth of the river Liaou, and was not resisted by the Chinese troops. This is a valuable treaty port through which a great volume of British trade passes, and its possession by Britain's chief rival in that part of the world means a great deal more than can be conveyed in a few words. It means so much that all the British warships in Chinese waters, amounting to two first-class battleships, two first-class cruisers, one second-class cruiser, three first-class torpedo boats and one first-class gunboat are being cleared and made ready for action. This is ominously significant.

It is now quite apparent to those who keep a close watch, that all the European powers are playing a waiting game, the chief ones simply holding back for an opening. The circumstances herein spoken of disclose this to some extent at least. They are looking for two or more of their number to become embroiled, and then if either of the others has any movement in contemplation which would or might have been resisted but for such embroilment, the forward step will be taken. It seems that Russia, pursuing this plan, has made a mistake which could not to be foreseen, because it seemed as certain as any undeveloped thing could be that France and Great Britain would come to blows. It also shows that there must have been voluminous mental reservations in the mind of the czar when he sent out his peace encyclical.

It is a peculiar as well as a dangerous prospect that is taking shape among the European powers. When such a condition of things exists as each wearing an appearance of peaceful intent merely as a mask, while all the time watching but for a favorable opportunity to take the field and fight, but careful not to unduly precipitate matters by lending aid or encouragement to others, it

is a time to be prepared for startling events on very short notice.

But for the unshaken attitude of Great Britain during our troubles with Spain, the whole world might by this time have been a seething caldron. It therefore becomes noteworthy that that nation alone is entitled to the measureless honor of having preserved the nations' peace for a time at least, but we all know that she will not continue in that attitude at the expense of losing her own prestige and rights. Russia knows this full well, and with the "ruler of the waves" free from entanglements of a grave character, would scarcely care to become involved in a fight to a finish with such a ruler. Russia isn't ready for it; her trans-Siberian railway is not yet completed, without which she can scarcely hope to cope with Britain in a war in Asiatic territory, if indeed she can well afford to do it then. As it is, the Russians may already have gone too far, and may have to retrace their steps or fight. It is a situation which will undoubtedly be solved one way or another without great delay.

## FOR THE BOYS AT MANILA.

There is just one more chance to reach the boys at Manila with Christmas presents and such delicacies as will be most acceptable to them. The steamer sails from San Francisco in about a week, and all packages, subject to rules previously stated in these columns, that are received there within three days more will be forwarded. In all cases the charges up to delivery at San Francisco must be fully prepaid, and will now, to insure such delivery, have to go by express. They should be addressed in care of the depot quartermaster, 28 New Montgomery street.

It begins to seem more and more certain that the boys are hooked for a long stay in the islands. In fact, many of them have already taken up an abode there which will end only when they are "called forth from the quivering ground" and others are going the same way every day. We cannot reach them nor administer any other comfort or consolation than written words or the little tokens which relatives and friends are now permitted to send there. The opportunity has not been neglected, and already thousands of tons of good and useful things are on the steamer consigned to the valiant and enduring men who wear the uniform and maintain the flag of our country in the far-away land. This may be the last chance for a great while, and those who have not already availed themselves of it have no time to lose.

## EIGHT HOURS A DAY, OR LONGER.

There are a great many people who disagree as well as a great many who agree with Mr. Samuel L. Gompers of the American Federation of Labor in the arguments he puts forth for the various claims of his order; but there is one thing that his fair-minded though radical opponents will admit readily, and that is that when he advocates an eight-hour day he presents his arguments and facts in a most telling manner. His latest action in this regard is told of in Tuesday's dispatches from Washington. Mr. Gompers points out that while the workmen at shipyards in France worked longer hours and for less wages than do the men in the American shipyards, yet

the Cramps at Philadelphia could build Russian warships for less money and in half the time the Frenchmen could do it.

The point that Mr. Gompers makes is that the long work-day is not the most profitable to the employer, in the amount of labor obtained from his employees. The conclusion upon this point is inevitable to those who will make actual investigation. The human frame, under our methods of living, is capable of a certain amount of exertion. As to whether the maximum returns from this can be attained in eight or ten hours may be a disputed point with many, but to the careful student of conditions, it is within the latter period and not far above the eight-hour limit. Men may crowd under "full steam" for eight hours, or perhaps nine, but when it comes to keeping them at work eleven or twelve hours, as is noted in the French shipyards and is the rule in many branches of trade in Europe, the employee is impelled to put in time rather than work and energy, to the detriment of both employer and employee.

This is the very point that Mr. Gompers turns so cleverly against Mr. Cramps, when the latter objects to an eight-hour day. The shipbuilder, however, yet has his leeway between an eight and a ten-hour day, since the illustration quoted goes beyond the last named period. But these leading representatives of opposing forces on the work-day question at least meet on common ground that once was denied to the labor advocates, namely, that while men may be "pushed" successfully up to eight hours at least, when the time passes ten hours the effect is to compel employees to be indolent out of sheer self-defense or inability to keep up, and therefore is unprofitable to employers according to the proportion of the hours of labor.

## A NEW UNITED STATES.

The list of new republics in the New World has received the name of another government, that of the United States of Central America. By the compact creating this new United States, the nations of Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras go out of existence, and each of those countries assume the role of a state in the federation which began operations under a provisional government on November 1st. In due course of time, under the compact entered into, a permanent general government will be formed, republican in character, and the country will be governed by a president and congress, much the same as this nation is, while the trio of states composing it will stand in the same relation to the general government as do the various states in the American Union.

In the United States of Central America there should have been five states, and there probably will be in the course of a few years. The two that now stand aloof, Guantamala and Costa Rica, are impelled by petty jealousies and quarrels which are a bar to their progress in civilization and will be a thorn in their side until they are willing to step up to the higher plane occupied by their neighbors.

The inauguration of the new government is a long stride towards the pacification, enlightenment and civilization of Central America. The small republics that have existed there seem destined never to succeed as independent nations. The opportunities for dispute are so many and the revolutionary tendencies of certain classes of the people, so marked, that it is impossible for them to keep out of trouble for any extended length of time. But with a greater community of interest represented in