

# JAPAN ASKS ONLY JUSTICE

## One of Her Citizens Tells the Truth About Port Arthur.

### SOME DISTORTED NEWSPAPER STORIES

#### Straining After Sensationalism Which Reflected Unjustly on a Civilized Nation.

#### MR. CREELMAN'S DISPATCHES UNRELIABLE

#### Evidence to Prove that Both He and Mr. Villiers Misrepresented Facts to Secure Sensational Effects.

To the Editor of *The New-York Times*:

The story of the regrettable occurrences at Port Arthur at the time of its capture by the Japanese is no longer new to the reading public. It has been told and retold with a minuteness of detail and a wealth of grisly embellishment which have lost nothing in the telling. To several representatives of the press who were present when Port Arthur was occupied by the Japanese the story seems to constitute a species of journalistic capital useful for the delectation of those who have an appetite for the gruesome. Perhaps some reason for this may be found in the fact that there are a great many people in this world whose literary tastes are not altogether dissimilar to those of that sanguinary young person in "Helen's Babies" whose interest in Bible narrative centred in the fact that Goliath's head was "all bluggy." There has certainly been a great deal of Goliath's head in this business, so much so that it would almost seem that even the most morbid appetite for the horrible might by this time have been amply satiated.

It may be, however, that there is another reason for the constant elaboration of this twice-told tale. Wars, happily, are not of frequent occurrence, and the opportunity for displaying qualities that rank high in modern journalism, which war especially affords, is not often to be had. It is only natural, therefore, that when such an opportunity comes it should be availed of to the fullest extent. The enterprising war correspondent has his chance; the reader revels in glowing descriptions of march and bivouac and battle, and if, in the rush and hurry of the moment, the actual reality is somewhat distorted, time is almost certain to cure the harm, and the truth does not suffer in the long run.

Some degree of the sensational and of inaccuracy is no doubt inseparable from descriptions, especially newspaper descriptions, of the stirring incidents and the shifting phases of war. The discriminating reader will understand this, and the writer will be pardoned for overcoloring his picture. But when to be sensational is the sole object, when more important things are sacrificed for the sake of heightening the picturesque, or the grotesque and horrible, details of the narrative, it is time to call a halt. Especially is it so when an isolated case of excess on the part of some of the soldiery of a nation is made the foundation for a sweeping indictment against the character of all their countrymen, as cruelly unjust as it is illogical and untrue.

This is what has happened as regards the alleged atrocities at Port Arthur. Immediately upon the receipt in this country and in Europe of the first news of the capture of that stronghold, before there had been time to investigate the facts or to hear the other side, it was charged that what had occurred at Port Arthur showed that the civilization of Japan was only a "thin veneer," and that the Japanese people had "relapsed into barbarism." The persistence with which this charge has been repeated, and the exaggerated importance which has been given to the whole subject, are all that entitle it to notice.

Taking into account the course of the Japanese throughout the whole of this war it might be thought that any defense of their conduct is superfluous. No fair-minded person would condemn them for a solitary lapse, which their Government has done all in its power to show that it deprecates and deplores. If things happened at Port Arthur not in harmony with the rule of action which Japan laid down for herself, and has consistently followed during the whole course of hostilities with China, it ought to be sufficient to clear Japan's fair fame from wholesale aspersion to show that those acts are not approved by the Japanese Government or people, and that they have no parallel in what went before and none in what has occurred since. That this is the case may be seen from a recapitulation of the facts.

#### The Distorted Story Printed.

On the 12th of last December *The New-York World* published the following telegram, dated Yokohama, from Mr. Creelman, its war correspondent:

YOKOHAMA, Japan, Dec. 11.—The Japanese troops entered Port Arthur on Nov. 21 and massacred practically the entire population in cold blood.

The defenseless and unarmed inhabitants were butchered in their houses, and their bodies were unrestrainedly mutilated. There was an unrestrained reign of murder, which continued for three days. The whole town was plundered with appalling atrocities.

It was the first stain upon Japanese civilization. The Japanese in this instance relapsed into barbarism.

All pretenses that circumstances justified the atrocities are false. The civilized world will be horrified by the details.

The foreign correspondents, horrified by the spectacle, left the army in a body.

CREELMAN.

On the 17th of the same month *The World* published another cablegram reading as follows:

TOKIO, Japan, Dec. 16.—The following statement is authorized for publication in *The World* by Mr. Mutsu, the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs:

"The Japanese Government desires no concealment of the events at Port Arthur. On the contrary, it is investigating rigidly for the purpose of fixing the exact responsibility and is taking measures essential to the reputation of the empire.

"From the beginning of the war every conceivable precaution has been taken to guard against excesses. The discovery that discipline was unavailing in this single instance shocks and grieves both the civil and military authorities.

"The facts thus far gathered show conclusively:

"First—That the Japanese troops, transported with rage at the mutilation of their comrades by the enemy, broke through all restraints.

"Second—That, further exasperated by the wholesale attempts at escape of Chinese soldiers disguised as citizens, they inflicted vengeance without discrimination.

"Third—That the detection on successive days of repeated Chinese atrocities rekindled the fury and provoked fresh acts of violence.

"The Japanese Government deprecates as a national misfortune the unexpected transgression of the principles to which it was and always will be pledged. It feels bound, nevertheless, to protest against exaggerations calculated to present the affair in a distorted and misleading aspect.

"Proofs have already been received that the victims, almost without exception, were soldiers wearing the stolen clothes of citi-

zens, who had fled in a body long before the assault, and are now returning, trustful and contented.

"While offering no palliation of what actually occurred, the Japanese Government holds to the conviction that there was absolutely no intention to molest non-combatants.

"The truth, the whole truth, shall be reported as soon as practicable. Meanwhile the Government hopes that public opinion will be guarded against extreme recitals."

There is certainly nothing doubtful in the tone of this communication. It is frank, explicit, and to the point. It does not contain a word of which the Government and people of the most enlightened nation might not feel justly proud. Among the headlines under which *The World* published it, however, were the phrases "Japan Confesses" and "Confirms Creelman's Report of Butchery at Port Arthur." These expressions are a fair sample of *The World's* methods. There shameless mendacity is apparent upon the most cursory comparison of Creelman's report with the telegram of the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, which, it should not be forgotten, were the only statements which *The World* had received up to that time concerning what really happened at Port Arthur.

The use which *The World* made of Viscount Mutsu's candid, straightforward utterances was thoroughly characteristic. It had no use for any facts which did not heighten the effect of its "scoop," and, following the scent of blood with cheerful alacrity, it disregarded all else, while it rolled each loathsome detail of the ghastly story as a sweet morsel under its tongue. It did not wait for further evidence or for confirmation of the sensational charges in Mr. Creelman's story, but hastened to attack the Japanese in every direction, clamoring, among other things, for the rejection of the new Japanese treaty which was then before the Senate. There is also serious reason to believe that it dishonestly added to the telegram a statement intended to heighten the sensational effect.

#### A Deliberate Falsehood.

Mr. Creelman, it will be noticed, is quoted as saying that the foreign correspondents, appalled at the atrocities committed by the Japanese at Port Arthur, left that place in a body. That was ridiculously untrue, since the foreign correspondents left Port Arthur, as every one on the spot knew, because they considered their work at that place completed. The foreign military attachés remained, and it may be taken for granted that the correspondents would have done so had there been anything left for them to report. Fancy, if you can, the feeling of the proprietor of *The World* if a subaltern of his left a place where there was still material left for sensational "scoops." It is extremely probable that Mr. Creelman, if he had really allowed his personal feelings to get the better of his professional instincts in that way, would have had another Pulitzer precept to quote, not precisely in harmony with the soulful "do right" with which his chief had sent him rejoicing upon his mission.

But it is superfluous to say that he did no such thing. When his telegram was repeated in Japan, he himself being at the time in Yokohama, the statement was greeted with derision. It was quoted by *The Japan Mail* as good reason for doubting Mr. Creelman's other statements. Upon that, another foreign newspaper published at Yokohama immediately retorted that Mr. Creelman was not responsible for the statement: that it had, in fact, been added to his dispatch in *The World's* home office. Mr. Creelman did not deny this statement, publicly at least, so that the paternity of this deliberate falsehood is still in doubt. It does not much matter, perhaps, for not even Mr. Gilbert in his moments of quaintest exaggeration could ascribe to *The World* a taste for truth so exact that it amounts to a disease. The incident is only of value in so far as it illustrates *The World's* way of "doing right."

Mr. Villiers's article in *The North American Review*, "The Truth About Port Arthur," is the latest addition to this chamber of horrors. The form in which it appears entitles it to more respectful consideration than anything published in *The World*. Mr. Villiers is an experienced war correspondent, and is not given to verbal hysterics. He treats the Japanese as naughty children, and in a somewhat patronizing manner tells them, in substance, to go and sin no more. Yet even in his narrative there are inaccuracies and significant hiatuses which show that he has not allowed facts to interfere with tragic effects. "Not only the soldiers," he says, "but also the armed coolies, took a share in the bloody work. These gentlemen were all of the famous samurai sect, and practically the bashibazouks of the army. The order of the Mikado that the samurai, or two-handed swordmen, (sic) were not to serve in the army for fear of excesses had been evaded by these gentlemen enlisting as coolies."

#### Correspondent Villiers Corrected.

The army of Japan is recruited by conscription from every class impartially; the ancient samurai, the military class at one time entitled to wear two swords, (a distinction which has totally disappeared,) is obliged to serve the same as other classes of the population. Mr. Villiers's mistake is trifling in itself; it is only useful in so far as it shows that his knowledge of things Japanese is not yet complete.

In another way, however, it is of value. It has been stated that some of the excesses committed at Port Arthur were due to the action of the large undisciplined force of coolies which accompanied the army as bearers of burdens. This statement has been strenuously denied, but Mr. Villiers now confirms it.

Mr. Villiers states in another place that at the end of the "three days' slaughter" the only Chinese left alive in Port Arthur were about thirty-six, employed as water carriers and to bury the dead. "Their lives were protected," he adds, "by a strip of white paper stuck in their caps bearing the following inscription in Japanese characters: 'This man is not to be killed.' The best that can be said of this statement is that Mr. Villiers does not understand Japanese characters. No such inscription was ever placed upon any Chinaman at Port Arthur. Moreover, it is an indisputable fact that more than 300 Chinese prisoners were captured, and, with the wounded, were subsequently sent to Japan.

Mr. Villiers says that the Japanese are like most young children, "very sensitive at being found out," and "telling the most deliberate and unblushing falsehoods to shield themselves." This charge finds ample refutation in the statement of Viscount Mutsu, quoted above. Let me ask Mr. Villiers whether his Government was equally frank at the time of the Sepoy mutiny? He may be old enough to remember what the civilized world had to say then of certain actions which have never yet been officially disclaimed.

He may also have read Trevelyan's "Cawnpore," and may remember what that gentleman has to say about the indiscriminate slaughter of the natives of India. A tu quoque proves nothing, and the Japanese are certainly not justified in whatever wrong they may have committed at Port Arthur by the fact that Englishmen did something very similar in India. Still the argument is one which irresistibly asserts itself when one notes the complacently patronizing manner in which some people—and, with due deference to Mr. Villiers, Englishmen in particular—hide the rest of the world for their frailties and their faults. A modest silence would be more becoming in such mentors, notably as regards China, where the memories of the opium war still linger, and where the charred and blackened ruins of the Summer Palace long bore evidence to the excesses of Englishmen, whose countrymen would probably be indignant if, for example, a Japanese were to say that this act of ruthless van-

dallism proved that England had "relapsed into barbarism."

But the most noticeable feature of Mr. Villiers's narrative, as also of Mr. Creelman's, is what it leaves to the imagination. It is a fair inference from both that the indiscriminate slaughter of the Chinese, men, women, and children, continued uninterruptedly for three days, but neither says so except in the most general way. Each gives instances to prove the charge, but it is quite consistent with what both of these gentlemen allege to suppose that after the night of the 21st and the morning of the 22d of November the killing, instead of being continuous, was sporadic. Viscount Mutsu says that "the detection on successive days of repeated Chinese atrocities rekindled the fury [of the Japanese] and provoked fresh acts of violence." This is very far from being an indiscriminate and uninterrupted slaughter of the people of Port Arthur, regardless of age or sex.

#### Evidence in Refutation.

As regards the killing of women and children in particular, we have positive evidence. Mr. Creelman says that "women and children were hunted and shot at as they fled to the hills with their protectors." Mr. Cowen, the correspondent of *The London Times*, whom Mr. Creelman certainly cannot regard as an unfriendly witness, said in an interview in *The Japan Mail* that a few women and children had been killed, but that he believed that it had been done accidentally.

One of the most damaging statements which Mr. Creelman makes is that torpedo boats outside the harbor had, while the massacre was going on in the town, "sunk ten junks loaded with terror-stricken people." The statement appeared in this form in *The World*, which treats the omniscience of its "representatives" as a matter of course. The trifling circumstance that several miles of land and sea lay between Mr. Creelman and the scene of this "atrocious" not to mention the fact that he must have been very busy, indeed, noting all the other horrors which he records, apparently did not matter.

The same allegation appears in another of Mr. Creelman's letters in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* in a different form. Here it is stated that "when Port Arthur fell, torpedo boats were sent through the waves of the harbor to sink junks loaded with men, women, and children endeavoring to escape."

Physically this last statement is more comprehensible than the other. Morally it is equally untrue, that is to say, it is absolutely false.

When this charge was called to the attention of Admiral Kawamura, who was with the fleet during the whole of the Port Arthur affair, and perfectly cognizant of all its movements, he sent the following statement to a Japanese newspaper, from which it was translated by *The Japan Mail*:

On the day of the battle our fleet came round from the left of Port Arthur and was nearing Chiu Bay, when we suddenly observed a small steamer approaching the place from the west. It flew no flag, and its behavior on sighting our ships being evidently suspicious, the flagship signaled to intercept it. Then, for the first time, it ran up the British flag. Having been conducted by a torpedo boat to the neighborhood of the flagship, a boat was lowered from the latter, and the steamer, having been boarded, proved to be the *Kinriu*. Nothing questionable was found on board, and presently the British man-of-war *Archer*, which happened to be in the vicinity, sent an officer to explain that the steamer was, in truth, an English trading vessel. She was accordingly released.

Our ships now steamed round outside Chiu Bay. At about 4 P. M., as we were heading to the east of Port Arthur, we observed two small steamers leave the port and steer westward. Our immediate impression was that the Chinese commanding officers were escaping in these steamers. One of the two presently turned back to Port Arthur, apparently apprehensive of being struck by the missiles that the forts were firing, but the other held her course, and was pursued by one of our torpedo boats. Unable to escape by sea, she was run ashore at the base of Laotieshan by her crew, and every one on board landed and escaped, the steamer falling into our hands. That night the wind grew so boisterous and the sea so rough that the flagship signaled the squadrons to return to Talien Bay. The above is an exact statement of the doings of the ships on the day of the battle. No cruelty or excess of any kind was perpetrated. The correspondent of the American newspaper was with the army on shore; he was not with the fleet, and it is evident that he could not see what the fleet did. For what reason has he invented the story that Chinese junks were sunk and men and women, old and young, barbarously killed? Did he expect to enhance the fame of his own newspaper by defaming other people? Or did he look to achieve some other object of ambition by such fabrications? I am at a loss to conceive.

Admiral Kawamura is a man whose services are a part of the history of his country. As Minister of Marine and in other high offices he has played a distinguished rôle in the affairs of Japan ever since the first days of the restoration. His word needs no support against that of Mr. James Creelman.

Mr. Creelman's statements are probably equally wide of the truth when he alleges that Mr. Ariaga explained to the correspondents that the Japanese "were taking practically no prisoners, having found them a troublesome incumbrance at Ping Yang." Leaving out of account the absurd improbability of such an admission from a Japanese official, no allusion is made by Mr. Villiers to any such statement, although he mentions the same official and quotes what he evidently regards as significant in his remarks.

#### Japan Only Wants Justice.

One point upon which especial stress should be laid is the fact that most of the Chinese who were killed at Port Arthur were soldiers in disguise. Some of the inhabitants of the town were undoubtedly killed, but the great majority of the dead were clad in some part of the military dress. The shoes which Chinese soldiers wear are peculiar and cannot be mistaken. Most of the corpses had on such shoes. Here is what Mr. Cowen says about the actions of the Chinese soldiers after their defeat:

I saw scores of Chinese hunted out of cover, shot down, and hacked to pieces, and never a man made any attempt to fight. All were in plain clothes, but that means nothing, for the soldiers flying from death got rid of their uniforms how they might.

I would not have it understood that I seek to defend any wrongful acts that may have been committed at Port Arthur. I only deprecate the exaggeration, the misstatements, and the cruelly unjust inferences of which this deplorable affair has been made the vehicle. The Japanese Government has not sought to conceal the truth and has frankly expressed its regret for what occurred. It did not need this Pellon piled upon Ossa, this cumulation of horrors, to give the world the truth about Port Arthur. Least of all was it worthy of any self-respecting journalist deliberately to distort the truth, as the truth has been distorted, in the telling of this story.

All that Japan asks is the fair play which Occidental nations show to each other. Her course hitherto has earned for her the praises of those who now blame her. She has taken her place among the little justices of the earth, and there is as little justice in attempting to thrust her thence on account of what occurred at Port Arthur as there would be in condemning the United States or Great Britain or Germany or France for acts that their people have committed in the heat and anger of foreign war or civil strife. The nation that can look back upon its history and not recall such an act is the only one fairly entitled to cast reproach upon Japan.

A JAPANESE STUDENT.

New-York, March 18, 1895.