

CAUSES OF THE FRENCH DEFEATS.

The *Revue des Questions Historiques* contains an article by Leon Gautier, in which he examines the cause of the French defeats with much ingeniousness and good sense. They are to be ascribed, he says, not to the good luck of the enemy but to the internal decay of France. The victories of Germany were owing to the unquestionable genius of General von Moltke, but the incredible ignorance of the officers opposed to him rendered his task comparatively easy. "Our young men," he continues, "came from the Polytechnic School or St. Cyr full of fire and intelligence, but their brilliant qualities were almost immediately extinguished by the atmosphere of garrison life. A junior lieutenant of twenty-five years was soon as completely used up as the oldest captain in his regiment and that is saying a great deal. Almost everywhere our officers spent seven-eighths of the day in the *cafés* and the theatres. Absinthe before breakfast, coffee with its concomitants after every meal, lounging, billiards and ennui between breakfast and dinner, and the theatre in the evening; such, with a few brilliant exceptions, was the life of the officers whom we opposed to Prussia.

"In the Polytechnic School the young men were stimulated by the hope of getting good marks, so it was the fashion to work there; but at the *Ecole d'Application* in Metz the old zeal soon cooled down. I believe I do not err in saying that the German officers who were sent to Metz to attend the courses were the most diligent students. The state of St. Cyr was no better; those who aspired to some post or other worked diligently till they had gained it, but then their diligence ceased. Some of the cleverest who hoped to reach the general staff, exerted themselves, it is true, to retain their position among the thirty best scholars, but that was the utmost. Geography and literature were more especially despised and hated. The highest officer set the worst example in this respect. The ex-emperor was himself distinguished by his gross ignorance of geography. For the truth of the following anecdote I can vouch: Some time after the commencement of the Mexican war, Napoleon III. requested to have Vera Cruz and Puebla pointed out on the map.

"Too many of the generals treated science with utter contempt. When General Frossard visited the archives of the Haute-Marne in his capacity of president of the Council-General, he inquired, in my presence: 'Why are not half of these old papers burned?' Now, the archives of Chaumont are extraordinarily rich in documents illustrating the ancient history and geography of France, and General Frossard was an officer of engineers, and afterwards appointed tutor to the Prince Imperial. The war of 1870 was a terrible lesson to these generals, who were beaten although they were as brave as they were ignorant. Opposed to us was a nation which makes war scientifically. The Prussian fights with the same precision and method as he criticises a text. We said: 'Bah! we have our mitrailleuses, and our zouaves, and we shall be in Berlin on the 15th of August.' Every one knows what followed. On the 4th of August the unfortunate General Douay died at Weisenburg. It was only the day before that he for the first time consented to look at the map.

"A short time before Sedan one of our generals was walking with a friend of mine on the bank of a large river, and asked: 'What is the name of this water?' It was the Meuse. He knew nothing about it. Another asked about the same time how far

Metz was from the frontier; another whether Thionville lay on the Rhine. Another asked his soldiers at Neuville the name of the place which he had heroically held against the enemy for the whole day. The Prussians, on the other hand, know geography. They jerry their maps in their heads as well as in their pockets. One of my friends told me the following incident: In the neighbourhood of Amiens the Prussians entered a small village with only a single street. They searched up and down, and at last the leader said to one of the inhabitants: 'There must be a footpath here which will save us a part of the distance. You have obliterated every trace of it, but we must find it.' He was right. I do not know how things were managed at Brussels during the peace negotiations, but I tremble when I think of the line of demarcation. I am convinced that in the Vosges the Prussians have sought out all the strategical points and high table lands which form the best military positions, and our scandalous ignorance must have furthered their intentions. They know these mountains as if they had possessed them for a thousand years, and they have cast their eyes on the natural fortress which they consider almost impregnable." M. Gautier adds that the only cure for the evils he has pointed out is hard work. He also insists on the necessity of reforming the whole educational system of France. It must, in his opinion, be decentralized. "We must change our whole university system," he continues, "or we are lost. The universities are the strength of Germany, and the secret of her triumphs. We ought to have twenty universities in France and we must have them soon. There are also abuses of which we must free ourselves. The most dangerous of these is the rhetoric so fashionable in all the faculties of the *College de France* and the Sorbonne. In France the lectures are only displays of eloquence. The lecturer desires to have a brilliant audience of ladies and gentlemen. If he does not enjoy the privilege of having ladies sitting at his feet, he appeals to the political opinions of the young men who listen to him. He studies closely the turns of his discourse; he overflows with wit, satire, and covert attacks. His discourse is charming but un instructive. We leave the hall ignorant though delighted. All this must be abandoned. The gates of our universities ought to bear the inscription; "No admission for brilliant lecturers."

A writer in *Maximilian's Magazine* adds his testimony to the same effect:

"Of the French commissioned officers I shall say but little, since both in their virtues and their vices, they differ slightly from the common soldiers; while the non-commissioned officers are virtually identical with the mass of the army. The French officers certainly did not strike one by that intelligence and good breeding which is so obvious amongst the Germans. Many of them have been promoted from the ranks more from courage than for ability or knowledge. They are all brave, some of them models of courtesy and generosity; and there are not wanting those that are well-informed and earnest, and worthy of comparison with the best of the Germans. But it must be confessed that the mass of them, having been brought up in garrison and ruined by *café* life are incapable of performing the functions which fall to the lot of an officer in a great war. Their ignorance of geography surpasses anything that one can conceive of. The day before the battle of Patay, a colonel passed through Ouzouer in command of a brigade. The enemy was at that time four leagues distant. He break-

fasted with us, and during dessert he said: 'And pray what may be the name of the village where I have had this excellent breakfast?' It is said that at Sedan MacMahon did not know where to look for the fords of the Meuse, and had never heard of the Martee. It was a common thing to find officers who did not know the difference between the Meuse and the Moselle; and I remember one who was not aware of the existence of such a place as Caen. And all this with an air of the greatest self-satisfaction. They know nothing and therefore, they had no doubts, but were always ready to swagger, and to the end persisted in their lazy and careless ways. Those who know our officers will find it difficult to believe that in Prussia they would have behaved better than the Prussians have in France. I myself saw the Chateau of Ecomans absolutely stripped by the officers of the French staff, while a few kilometers distant was the Chateau of Lierville, which had been occupied three times by the Prussians, and had hardly anything in it disturbed. Had our officers but known their profession! But the most tremendous blunders were constantly committed, especially towards the end of the campaign, and in the *Camp Mobile*. Observe, I am not speaking of military blunders; but I cannot forget the numbers who fell victims to the mania for authority which possessed our newly-made officers, and to their absurd habit of suspecting every one to be a spy. I grieve to say it, but it is the fact that we of the ambulance suffered much more from the French than from the Germans."

THE VOLUNTEER MILITIA SYSTEM.

The Militia authorities as well as the press and public, must we think, be now convinced by the experienced-gained in the several Brigade Camps this summer, that the volunteer system will not stand the critical test of duration for a series of years and that it can only be maintained in a declining state of non-efficiency by extraordinary efforts on the part of the officers of the Battalions. That in point of fact the enthusiasm evoked by any critical emergency gradually but surely fades away, except amongst the comparatively few, who regardless of all considerations of loss of time and expense, are enamoured with a soldier's life or so intensely patriotic that they cannot be tempted or coerced to swerve from the path of duty.

Lord Aylmer, at Laprairie, brought before the notice of the Minister of Militia the difficulty he had experienced in keeping up a country battalion to its proper strength, and we are convinced that the case is not more hopeful with the urban battalions, as the discouraging influence which create the difficulty complained of are equally potent, if not in reality more so in the cities and towns than in the rural districts. His lordship appeared to rely upon the establishment of Camps of Instruction every year, which, he felt confident would help to fill up the battalions very much, and he moreover said, that if the battalions were only once filled the present volunteer system would be perfect. The suggestion of the noble lord is certainly worthy of consideration, and we believe that as a novelty they would help to fill up the ranks of the battalions temporarily, but the remedy would only be partial. It would not attack the root of the evil, which is to be found in the contemptible, sordid, money-grabbing spirit which prevades the minds of the great mass of property-holders and business men, whose vocation is money making in this Dominion