

VON MOLTKE'S PLAN FOR THE WAR OF 1870 '71

(From the *Pall Mall Gazette*)

The first volume of the "History of the Franco-German War," prepared by the historical section of the Prussian general staff, has just appeared at Berlin. It contains a very interesting memorandum drawn up by General Von Moltke in the winter of 1868, setting forth a complete plan of campaign in the event of a war with France, and this plan was carried out in its main features when the war actually broke out in 1870. The memorandum begins by an estimate of the relative strength of the two armies. At the beginning, says the General, North Germany would only, in consequence of difficulties of transport, and perhaps also of political difficulties, dispose of ten corps, amounting in all to about 330,000, while France would bring into the field a force of 250,000, which would be increased, after calling in the reserves, to 343,000. The proportion between the opposing armies would be altered considerably in favor of Prussia if the South German States also took part in the war, or if the three reserve corps and some of the landwehr divisions were brought up in time. "It is evident," says the memorandum, "how important it is to take advantage of the superiority we should enjoy at the very beginning, even if the North German troops only were employed. This advantage would be still further increased at the decisive point if the French were to send expeditions to the North Sea coasts or to South Germany. Sufficient means would still remain for defending the former." As for South Germany, conferences had already been held at Berlin with the representatives of the South German contingents. It was ascertained that North Germany could not efficiently protect the Upper Rhine and the Black Forest by sending her troops there, and that the South would be much better defended by a union of all the German forces on the Middle Rhine, whence they could attack the invaders in flank either on the right or the left bank of the river, and speedily compel them either to stop or to retire. The South German sovereigns agreed to this, and the whole weight of the responsibility of defending the Fatherland was then thrown on the North.

"The neutrality of Belgium, Holland, and Switzerland," continues the memorandum, "confines the theatre of war to the space between Luxemburg and Basle. We may therefore assume that the French will first concentrate on the line of Metz and Strasburg, in order to turn our strong position on the Rhine, advance on the Main, divide North and South Germany, come to an agreement with the latter, and then proceed to the Elbe. The most effectual way of opposing this plan would be to concentrate all the troops at our disposal to the south of the Moselle, in the Bavarian Palatinate. The

prospect of an easy success might induce the French to push into South Germany with part of their forces from Strasburg, but an operation carried out along the line of the Upper Rhine would strike them in flank, prevent their proceeding any further into the Black Forest, and compel them to seek an outlet on the north. If the corps of Baden and Wurtemberg form a junction with our left wing, we shall be enabled so to strengthen it by reinforcement from the Palatinate that a decisive battle might be expected on the heights of Ristatt, which, if in our favor, would make the enemy's retreat a disaster. For such a purpose we might detach a force from our main army without danger, for the enemy will in this case have become weaker on our front. If the French wish to make the most complete use of their railway system for the rapid concentration of their forces, they will be compelled to advance in two principal groups, by Strasburg and Metz, separated by the Vosges Mountains. If the first, and probably the smallest, portion is not destined for an invasion of South Germany, its junction with the main force on the Upper Moselle can only be effected by marching. Our army on the other hand, is posted in the Palatinate on the inner line of operations, between the two groups of the enemy. We may attack either separately, or, if we are strong enough, both simultaneously. The concentration of all our forces in the Lower Palatinate protects both the Lower and the Upper Rhine, and permits an offensive movement into the enemy's country, which, if entered upon at the right time, will probably anticipate any invasion by the French of German soil. The only question therefore is whether we could push forward our army without danger across the Rhine to the Palatinate, and thence close to the French frontier; and this question, should, in my opinion, be answered in the affirmative. Our preparations for mobilization are complete down to the smallest details. Six uninterrupted lines of railway are at our disposal for the transport of troops to the district between the Moselle and the Rhine. The tables routes which show the day and hour of leaving and stopping for each detachment of troops are ready. On the tenth day the first detachments may alight near the French frontier, and on the thirteenth day the combatants of two corps d'armee may assemble there. On the eighteenth day the numbers of our army in the field would be raised to three hundred thousand men, and on the twentieth day they can be provided with all the means of transport.

"As for the French army, we have no reason whatever to assume that its mobilizations, and on these occasions the vacancies in the field army were filled from that which remained at home. It is true that, by collecting garrisons and corps in the north eastern part of the country, and by means of the complete railway system and abundance of

transport materials, the French might assemble an army of 150,000 men in a very short time on the frontier. This rapid initiative would be in accordance with the national character, and is spoken of in military circles. Supposing that an army thus improvised, which could in any case be assembled around Metz, and cross the frontier of Sarrebourg on the 5th day, we should still be able to prevent them in time from using our railways and to disembark our main force on the Rhine. The invaders would require six marches to reach that river, and on the fourteenth day they would be stopped by overwhelming forces. Being in possession of the bridges, we should, a few days later take the offensive with an army double the size of that of our aggressors. The disadvantages and dangers of such a course on the part of France are so evident that she would not lightly adopt it. If, then, a march to the Palatinate and the Moselle is recognized as practicable, no objection to the assembling at that point of all the forces at our disposal could arise from the apparent uncovering of our front on the Rhine. It has already been pointed out that our front is protected by the neutrality of Belgium, and, if this is violated, by the distance of the enemy, by our own strength, and by our military operations. But above all, the main object of the operations is to be "the seeking of the principal force of enemy, and attacking it wherever it may be found," and throughout the memorandum especial stress is laid on the necessity of cutting off the French army from its communications with Paris, and driving it to the northern frontier.

THE GREAT SEA TUNNEL.—The tunnel under the Straits of Dover, from England to France is at length to be commenced, a joint-stock company, for the purpose having been organized and registered in London. Two millions sterling will be required for the experimental driftway, and the tunnel can be finished in five years for five millions sterling, working day and night from both ends. The distance is twenty two miles, and as no shafts for ventilation are spoken of, it is understood that the plan includes two parallel tunnels with trains running only in one direction through each so as to keep up a constant current of air. We entertain no doubt of the ultimate success of this; and when it shall have been accomplished there can be little doubt that it will be the progenitor of other great works of the same character under the sea, just as the short submarine cables were the beginning of the great Atlantic cables. Applying this to the great problem of shortening the time occupy the transit between Europe and America, we find that if a tunnel were driven under the channel to Ireland, and steamers run from Galway to the coast of Newfoundland, and a tunnel connecting the latter with the mainland, via Cape Breton, the sea voyage might be reduced to three or four days, and the whole time between London and New York, traversed by sea and rail in about a week.