

THE THREATENED WAR.—MILITARY FEATURES OF THE FRENCH AND GERMAN FRONTIER.

We are indebted for the following to the *Standard*:—"Lavallée's famous work on the French frontiers, which achieved the rare honour of being *couronné* by the Academy, commences with this definition, "Gaul or the French region, has for its natural boundaries on the west the Atlantic, on the north the German Ocean, on the east the Rhine and the Alps, on the south Mediterranean and the Pyrenees." "It seems," says Strabo, "as though a tutelary deity has raised these mountain chains, brought these seas together, and traced the course of so many rivers, that Gaul may one day become the most flourishing portion of the earth." But from the time when the battle of Fontenay and the treaty of Verdun dismembered this great Gaul—when, in fact, Gaul became France—these so-called natural frontiers were lost; and from that day to this, through the long space of more than ten centuries, the struggle to recover the Gallic frontier has never ceased. More than once regained, it has more than once again been forfeited by the ambition which overleaped the mark; and the successive defeats which the First Napoleon sustained at the close of his career contracted more and more the boundaries of the French Empire. Even his selfish heart was moved by the spectacle of her boundaries thus trampled down; and in the last few hours of his sojourn at Fontainebleau, before the departure for Elba, there was wrung from him the cry, "*La France sans frontières, quand elle en avait si belles!*" Worst of all the humiliations that fall upon my head, is to leave her so small when I received her so great." But there came even greater humiliations on the head of France, when the die had been cast for the time by the Emperor, and the treaty of 1815 took from her still further portions of her frontier lands. There are few Frenchmen who will not echo the words that this treaty left France "*garrottée, surveillée, menacée*;" and there are still fewer who would not cast their whole strength into a war which should have for its object the restoration of the old frontiers of Gaul. Such is the dream of all patriotic Frenchmen; such the well-known aspirations of the present Emperor. Already since 1815 France has made one step in this direction. By the annexation of Savoy and Nice in 1860 she has gained, not only territories peopled by 7,000,000 inhabitants, but increased strength on her southern frontier. The Var, of old so weak a frontier, is covered by the Alps; a new port is gained in Villafranca. The great road of Mont Cenis is in French hands; the defiles of the Jura are closed. "France has, then, says Lavallée, "recovered her natural frontier in the south. Will she recover it in the north? Undoubtedly she will. She must have the boundaries traced by the hand of Providence, which she held in her Celtic and Roman days, which she reconquered in her regeneration of 1789. She must enclose in her territory the battlefield of Tolbiac and the tomb of Charlemagne, she must have, as Vauban said to Louis XIV., her "*pre carré*." The natural frontiers of France have become part of the international law of Europe; they are a fundamental necessity of modern times; they are a guarantee of the peace of the world."

"Such, then, is the acknowledged aim of

France under her present rule. But to gain the Rhine as a frontier she must take territory from four several kingdoms—Belgium, Holland, Prussia, and Bavaria, and from the Duchy of Hesse-Darmstadt. If the reader will take a map—and we can recommend none cheaper or better for ordinary purposes than the 1867 edition of Stieler's Map of Germany—he will see how the French frontier, after following the Rhine in its downward course from the junction of the Swiss and Baden frontiers at Basle for about a hundred miles, stops short on the right bank of the river Lauter, and there turns abruptly to the west, and runs with but slight inclination northwards for sixty miles along to the south of Rhenish Bavaria, till, a little to the east of the river Saar, Bavarian territory ceases, and Rhenish Prussia begins. Here the Prussian territory dips slightly downwards into France, running nearly parallel too, but some eight or ten miles below the river Saar, so as to leave Saarlouis and Saarbrück in Prussia. For about fifty miles the French and Prussian territories are contiguous; but just above the French town of Sierck the Prussian frontier turns directly northwards, and for five-and-twenty miles or so that portion of Luxemburg which belongs to Holland abuts on French territory, to be succeeded in turn by the Belgian frontier, which runs contiguous to France for not less than 250 miles. Thus then there lies between France and the Rhine, north of the River Lauter, portions of Bavaria, Prussia, Holland, and Belgium; while behind Rhenish Bavaria a portion of Hesse-Darmstadt is interposed, and between Northern Belgium and the mouth of the Rhine is another portion of Holland. It remains to be noticed that the entire territory on the right bank of the Rhine from Basle to opposite the River Lauter, where France possesses the left bank, belongs to Baden, while beyond it again lie Wurtemberg and Bavaria.

"Now, if France declares war against Prussia, we may assert with tolerable certainty that she will endeavour to take the initiative, and to throw her armies at once into the enemy's country. We will suppose, for the sake of argument, to commence with, that the neutrality of Belgium and of Holland will be strictly respected, and that the only countries to be involved in the quarrel are Prussia, France, and Spain. When, however, we say Prussia, we do not mean Prussia alone, but with her the countries over which she holds military sway. These include the whole of the states of the North German Confederation—namely, the two kingdoms of Prussia and Saxony; five grand duchies, including Hesse-Darmstadt; five duchies and seven principalities, which it is unnecessary to mention in detail, and the three free towns of Lubeck, Bremen, and Hamburg. But this is not all, for Bavaria, Baden, and Wurtemberg are bound to Prussia by treaties, which place their armies, in the event of war, at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief of the forces of the Northern Confederation, and that Commander-in-Chief is the King of Prussia. The existence of these treaties being no secret, but being well known to France, it follows that, if she goes to war with the King of Prussia, she goes to war with the whole of the North German Confederation, and also with Bavaria, Wurtemberg, and Baden. Thus it is not only the fifty miles of actual Prussian frontier which lie contiguous to herself that France would be at liberty to invade, but her neighbours along her entire German frontier would be enemies, from where the Prussian frontier commences at Sierck on the Moselle, along the Bavarian frontier to Lauterbach, and thence along the

Rhine, which separates her from Baden, to the confines of Switzerland at Basle.

"There exists among a certain class of military writers a theory that the enemy's capital is the objective point of every advancing army; but the theory is not one which will hold good in the face of facts. The real object of every true strategist is the destruction of his enemy's army, by bringing a superior force against it, and by forcing it to fight in a position where, if it be defeated, it cannot fall back upon its magazines and depots for fresh supplies of men and of material. Under certain conditions, however, the capital is of great value, if it can be seized; but not always. Napoleon's occupation of Madrid for four years did not put a stop to the fighting in Spain; neither did his seizing Vienna, either in 1805 or in 1809. Of the other hand, the occupation of Paris in 1814 and 1815 put an end to those wars. It would, we believe, be generally admitted that the effect at this day of a Prussian occupation of Paris would be more fatal to France than would a French occupation of Berlin to Prussia. Berlin does not represent Northern Germany, or even Prussia, as Paris does France. And, inasmuch as the Prussian frontier at Saarlouis is within half the distance of Paris that the nearest point of the French frontier is from Berlin, it is evident that any operations of the French must be conducted with a view to preventing a Prussian army from passing it by the French forces, and striking directly at Paris.

"The most direct road from Berlin to Paris is that which passes through Cologne, and thence by Liège and Charleroi through Belgium. But on the supposition with which we have started—that Belgium and Holland will be neutralised (and we believe their neutrality would be respected if England shows any firmness)—this route through Belgium will be closed alike to French and Prussians. And it is not difficult to show that, strategically speaking, it is a great advantage to France that this neutrality should be maintained. At once she is secured from attack on that portion of her frontier nearest to Paris, and she may make Metz, Nancy, and Strasbourg her base for operations against Germany, without fear of her left flank being turned, and her capital exposed. Thus she gains the advantage of being able to concentrate her troops near her German frontier; and her railway system will allow her in a very short time to mass the greater part of the twenty-two divisions of which her army (exclusive of those in Algiers) is composed, on the line joining Metz, Nancy, and Strasbourg. Between Metz and Strasbourg, both containing large depots of supplies, there runs a railway which can convey troops from the one place to the other, a distance of a hundred and twenty miles, in a few hours. From Paris and from Lyons, the great railway centres of France, there is communication by which the divisions in the south, north, and west could be brought to these two points—Metz and Strasbourg—with little delay. France has had experience of moving large bodies of troops by rail in 1859, and her system is organised for action. In that war, the one line from Paris to Lyons conveyed daily over that distance of more than 300 miles, for ten days, an average of 8421 men, and 512 horses. On one day more than 12,000 men and 650 horses were despatched, and for no less than eighth-six days thirty trains, each of about thirty-three carriages, were dispatched with troops and material of war, at an average speed of fifteen miles an hour.

"It may fairly be assumed that in a week France could concentrate an army of 100,000