

RIGA A Political VICTORY

WE have reached a point where battles must be considered not so much for their effect upon the purely military situation as for their influence upon the disposition of the belligerent governments. The victory of the Italians, for example, is important as marking a further invasion of Austria-Hungary, and a successful blow at the Austro-Hungarian armies, but it is much more important as an additional proof to the Austro-Hungarian government that it has lost the war and that nothing but further ruin can follow its continuation. If there had been such a victory as this a year ago, it would have presented itself as a military problem and nothing more. It would have been a question of remedies, reinforcements, and new dispositions of troops. It would have been a matter for the military commanders rather than for the statesmen. But its military importance has now been submerged by the political. We no longer ask ourselves what Austria can do to ward off the blows of General Cadorna, but rather to what extent will this fresh calamity intensify the despair of the Austrian government, and hasten its steps toward some definite peace proposal. Austria would, of course, have relinquished the war long ago but for the compulsion of Germany, whose avowed domination of the Austrian armies is scarcely less real than her domination of Austrian politics. It is hardly a speculation to say that the Papal proposals are an expression of the Austrian mind, and perhaps of the German mind, too. Certainly those proposals would not have been made without some reasonable certainty that they would be acceptable to the Central Powers, at least as a basis for discussion. But the situation has substantially changed since those proposals were made, and General Cadorna has changed it. He has broken the Austrian armies on the east bank of the Isonzo. He has pushed his own forces more deeply into Austrian territory. He has established the fact of Italian superiority. He has brushed away whatever supposition of a deadlock may have existed. Austrian defeat has been made more unmistakable by what he has done. And so we may reasonably ask ourselves, not what Austrian generals will do, but what Austrian statesmen will do, and what effect the Italian victory must have upon the approach of peace and upon the attitude of the various belligerent governments. This is not the place where such questions should be answered, but that they are now the most important of all questions is significant of the new phase into which the war as a whole has entered.

THE last great Italian offensive brought the Italian armies within twelve miles of Trieste and to the northern waters of the Gulf of Trieste. The reason for the arrest of the Italian armies at a point so close to their goal is visible enough. They are stretched out in long undulating formation running north and south like a ribbon, and immediately to their east were the masses of the Austrian forces. The Italian armies were already extended almost to the danger point, since extension means also a thinning of the lines. It was impossible still further to extend, and therefore to thin, those lines by advancing on Trieste until the threat to the flank had been removed by a sweeping back of the Austrian armies. It is still by no means certain that the Austrians have been pushed back far enough to enable the Italians to advance on Trieste in entire security. The average retirement at the moment of writing is about three miles over a length of about twenty miles, and this would be little enough but for evidences of Austrian demoralization, and a possibility that the retirement may be turned into a rout. It is to be remembered that all Austrian troops of Slav origin are unreliable. When opposed to Russians or Serbians they are a source of positive danger, since they are always ready to desert and to join the enemy. They are somewhat less unreliable when pitted against Italians, but they have little or no feelings of patriotism for Austria. Their sympathies are nearly unanimously with the Allies, and this is especially true of the Czechs, who have been steadily alienated by misgovernment, oppression,

GERMANY must get so-called successes just where they are easiest in order to keep her own people bulldozed. The only place to get these grandstand victories is along the weak Russian front. Victories of this kind are not military, but political, successes. The war bosses are fighting, not to win the war, but to avoid being beaten by forces inside Germany.

This article was written before the capture of Riga. But you'll find that it carries on the Coryn common-sense size-up of the struggle with remarkable consistency. You may not agree with all the details of Coryn's war comment. But you can't get away from the big sane outlines of his main ideas.

By SIDNEY CORYN

and cruelty. So far as Austria has been able to do so she has withdrawn her Slav troops from the eastern front and employed them against the Italians, but even here they are a source of profound anxiety to her. They are not likely to bear up in the face of defeat. If we find now that the Italians are making a definite move southward toward Trieste it will be evidence of a final Italian victory over the Austrians to the east of their line. But it may still be necessary to do a good deal of hard fighting before the head of the Italian line can move southward. Moreover, there would be no definite military advantage in the capture of Trieste, which is said already to have been evacuated. On the other hand the moral advantage would be very considerable. It would be the passing of a milestone. It would be an Italian grasp of a position that Austria has never intended to relinquish.

The announcement of the capture of Riga was premature, although the defending Russian force has admittedly fallen back a little. The advance of the Germans in the south seems to have been stopped, or nearly so, by the energies of the Russians and Roumanians, and also by the difficulty of still further extending a German line in the face of the imminent needs of the western front. The Russian situation is so obscure that it is by no means easy to interpret its military aspects. Undoubtedly it would be of enormous advantage to Germany either to seize the wheat stores at Odessa, or so to discourage the Russians as to compel a separate peace. But Odessa is a long way off, and the chances of a separate peace are even farther off. We can hardly suppose that Germany is counting very confidently either upon the one or the other. The probable solution of the whole problem is to be found in the fact that Germany must win victories somewhere, or at least the semblance of victories, in order to stimulate the hopes of her own people. This view is somewhat confirmed by the preposterous bulletins that are issued day by day, bulletins that admit the most serious reverses while proudly labelling them as triumphs. It looks very much as though the German advance at the southern end of the eastern line was at an end, seeing that large numbers of her troops are being switched from there to the western front. At the same time she snatches at an opportunity to employ her northern garrison in an advance upon Riga and so to find some basis for a claim of victory.

The French success at Verdun was of so definite a nature that it is conceded by the German bulletins, but with the announcement that the position was very lightly garrisoned. Why a position of such dominating importance should be lightly garrisoned we are not told, and we may doubt the truth of the statement, unless it may be explained by a diminution of the German forces to meet the greater emergencies to the west and to the north. But at least we may regard this French victory as putting a definite end to the pretense that Verdun is still besieged, and that its reduction is "following its normal course," which was still being offered for the consideration of the German public as lately

as two months ago. Verdun is now largely freed from a directed artillery fire, and its defenders may enjoy a greater security than has been their lot for two years. We may also note that the French forces are not showing any of that exhaustion that has been so graphically depicted by those to whom the wish was doubtless father to the thought.

THAT the German forces around Verdun should be depleted for use elsewhere is likely enough. The German armies around Moronvilliers, along the Chemin des Dames and toward Rheims have now been trying to dispossess the French from their elevated plateau positions for many months, and practically without any success whatever. The German losses in this field have been staggering. The Crown Prince has been employing his forces in a relentless and nearly continuous attack upon the French lines, and the importance of the operation from the German point of view may be measured, not only by the ferocity of the assaults, but by the prodigal expenditure of lives in their support. An occasional trench line has been the only German reward.

The strategy of these unavailing attacks upon the French entrenchments to the west of Moronvilliers seems obvious enough. So long as the French are able to hold these positions it will be impossible for the German forces holding the Hindenburg line to fall back toward the Belgian frontier. Place a rule along that line, say from the North Sea to Laon or Rheims. It is a curved line, and the rule will not fully cover it, but it will do so sufficiently for illustration. Now move the rule eastward in the direction of the Belgian frontier and note the position that its southern extremity will occupy toward the French forces running from Rheims eastward toward Verdun. It is evident that the southern extremity of the line would be exposed to damaging attack from the south, that is to say from the French positions that the Crown Prince has been assaulting so ceaselessly. Moreover, that line would be extraordinarily vulnerable. It would be in the open. It would be encumbered with its heavy artillery, munitions, wounded, and hospital equipment. It would move very slowly, and it would be in the worst possible position for defence. It is true that the armies of the Crown Prince would to a certain extent cover the flank of that moving line if they were then strong enough to resist a French attack, but it is by no means certain that they would be. If the Hindenburg line should now begin to move eastward we may be sure that the French would instantly make a tremendous effort to break through the lines of the Crown Prince and to attack the retreating forces to their north.

THAT there is an intention to withdraw the Hindenburg line as soon as the Crown Prince shall make it safe to do so is likely enough. It would be a repetition of that same withdrawal that created the Hindenburg line, a withdrawal necessitated by the British pressure during the battle of the Somme. There is good reason to believe that Hindenburg intended at that time to withdraw his forces still further eastward, but that he was prevented by the rapidity of the pursuit, and so entrenched himself where he is now. But the British pressure is even more severe now than it was during the Somme fighting. German retirements at the northern end of the line are of almost daily occurrence. The Allied artillery is proving itself to be irresistible, and is in fact much more powerful than during the earlier battles of the campaign. If the former Hindenburg retirement was necessitated by direct pressure we may be reasonably certain that the present fighting is compelling still another withdrawal, and that it can not for very long be delayed. It would be a repetition of the previous movement, but upon a somewhat larger scale. German armies are therefore in a peculiarly difficult position. They are rapidly approaching the point where a retirement can no longer be delayed, and at the same time they are unable to force the French from the positions that would so gravely imperil that retirement.