



The Volunteer Review

AND MILITARY AND NAVAL GAZETTE.

A Journal Devoted to the Interests of the Military and Naval Forces of the Dominion of Canada

VOL. IV.

OTTAWA, CANADA, MONDAY, AUGUST 15, 1870.

No. 33.

"THE OPERATIONS OF WAR EXPLAINED AND ILLUSTRATED."

(CONTINUED.)

THE SELECTION OF AN OBJECT.

It is clear that offensive operations cannot be conducted with unity, or directed with precision, unless the object to be gained by them is kept distinctly in view by those who plan and execute the campaign. Where territory easily accessible to the power that assumes the offensive is the subject of dispute, the object will generally be to occupy the country in question. Thus Louis Napoleon rested satisfied with driving the Austrians beyond the Mincio, and adding the country westward of that river to the dominions of Sardinia. But whether in such a case hostilities will terminate with the occupation of the province, must depend on the ability of the other belligerent to continue the struggle. Frederick II. began the Silesian wars by seizing Silesia, the primary object of desire; but the conflict that ensued thereupon lasted twenty years. Whenever the *causa belli* is something less definite and tangible than disputed territory, the undeniable superiority of one belligerent and the acquisition of some material guarantee can alone be expected to bring the adversary to terms. That guarantee is generally sought in an enemy's capital. The occupation of its chief city paralyzes a civilized country. As all great roads meet there—as it is the centre of trade, the focus of wealth and of civilization, and the seat of government—its occupation by an enemy is so ruinous that any terms he may impose will generally be less pernicious than his presence.

But it is not sufficient to enter the capital unless possession of it can be maintained. In 1757 an Austrian general of hussars entered Berlin and levied a contribution on the city, but being forced to quit it on the approach of the Prussian King, the incident produced no result. Napoleon held Madrid for four years, and set up his brother as king of Spain, yet the Peninsular war went on in half the provinces of the kingdom. He seized Vienna in 1805, and again in 1809, yet in each case a great subsequent victory was necessary to the overthrow of the enemy's power. The mere possession of the capital, then, is not final so long as the enemy can still make head in the field. It is when the seizure of the capital is coupled with such ascendancy over the defensive armies that they can never hope to retake it, that further resistance is felt to be hopeless, as leading only to national extinction and that any terms not absolutely unendurable are accepted by the vanquished. Recognizing

these truths, Napoleon's first efforts were directed to disorganize and ruin the enemy's armies in the field; his next step, when the way was clear, was to seize the capital, and then, with his clutch on the heart of the country, with the public opinion of all nations strongly influenced by his commanding attitude, and with the opposing armies, disheartened by misfortune, he advanced to deal the stroke that was finally to lay the antagonist power prostrate.

It sometimes happens that a point may assume an adventitious importance, sufficient to make it the object of the campaign. Sebastopol is a remarkable instance. Situated at the extremity of an obscure and unimportant province, the conquest of which would be no step toward the invasion of Russia, this city, formidable by reason of its docks and arsenals, was, from its proximity to Constantinople, characterized as a standing menace to Turkey, and as such was of sufficient importance to the object of the vast efforts made in that war by France and England.

Such cases are, however exceptional, and the general course of a campaign between two great powers is a series of manœuvres and engagements for the possession of the capital or other specially important town of the power that stands on the defensive. And it is evident that the course of the war must vary with the distance of the invader's frontier from the menaced point. If France were to make war upon Italy, the invading army might, as soon as it had secured the passage of the Alps by the Mont Cenis, reach Turin in a single march. But if Austria were at war with Italy, the Italian capital is much more secure from an adversary whose armies must traverse the breadth of North Italy to attain it. The proximity of Richmond to Washington caused the Federal Government in each campaign in Virginia to base its calculations on the assumption that the operations of a few days, or at most a few weeks, must wrest from its adversary's hold the city from the possession of which it expected such decisive results. And no doubt early in the war, before the capital was fortified, a single crushing defeat sustained by the Confederates in the field would have given Richmond to the Federals. But in cases where a great distance separates the invader from his object, he cannot expect to attain it in a single effort. Thus, if France were at war with Austria, she could scarcely expect, in the most favorable circumstances, to reach Vienna in one campaign. Her first object would be to attain a position in Austrian territory which would form a secure starting point for a fresh effort. If she were aiming at Vienna through Germany, and a

French army could advance between the Danube and the Tyrol, securing the passages of the Danube on the one side and of the mountains on the other, till it could rest on one of the great streams flowing across the space between, such as the Iser or the Inn, it might establish itself there, and collect its strength for a fresh effort in another campaign. If France were at war with Spain, the first object of a French army might be the line of the Ebro, the next the line of the Douro or of the Guadarama mountains—then Madrid and the Tagus. Thus the object of an invading army may be either a point from the possession of which it expects decisive results, or a strong defensive line such as will be an important step toward that point.

THE SELECTION OF A THEATRE OF OPERATIONS, AND LINE BY WHICH TO OPERATE.

Many considerations will constantly enter into this question of selection. The convenience and security of the base—the position of the enemy's forces—the facilities in the shape of good and practicable roads, for reaching the object—the proximity to the object—the fitness of the topographical character of the theatre to the army destined to operate in it—will all be elements in the problem. If that portion of the invader's frontier which is contiguous to the territory occupied by the main army of the defensive power be impregnable, that will be good reason for making some other region the theatre of war. If, on the contrary, the invader's be extensive and open, it will generally be expedient for him to base himself on that portion of it which will be covered from a counter invasion by his advance. Thus the most vulnerable part of the French frontier in 1815 was opposite Belgium; and had Napoleon crossed the Rhenish or Alpine boundary, making Germany or Italy the seat of war, Blücher and Wellington could have marched on Paris; whereas, by advancing into Belgium, and trusting to the strong natural boundaries to keep the enemy from invading France at other points, the Emperor covered with his army, so long as it remained undefeated, the otherwise exposed part of his territory.

The power meditating the offensive must also consider the fitness of the theatre to its own army. If that army have a preponderating strength in cavalry, an open country will suit it best; if infantry be its chief reliance, a hilly or wooded region, which may neutralize the enemy's superiority in the other arms; if artillery, good roads and positions which command sufficient expanse of country, will be indispensable to its most effective action. To determine this point a