

# MAKING THE BEST OF RUSSIA

**T**HERE should be no disposition either to minimize or to exaggerate the defeat suffered by the Russian forces. It is all the more serious because it was due to insubordination and mutiny. From the purely military point of view, Russia seemed to have the ball at her feet. Her armies were in a position of peculiar strength with a disheartened and weakened Austrian enemy in front of them. The hands of the Germans were tied in the west, and there was nothing to prevent a Russian advance that might well have been irresistible and decisive.

This is proved by the events of the first few days fighting, when it seemed likely that Brusiloff would be able to repeat his great achievements of last year. We do not yet know the full extent of the Russian reverse, nor indeed does it very much matter in view of the causes of that reverse which show how deeply the morale of the troops has been corroded by theories of democracy, carefully fostered by German agents, and destructive alike of discipline and self-control. The Russian soldier has a certain childlike susceptibility to plausible blandishments and clever appeals to sentiment. His enthusiasms wax and wane under the spell. The intoxication of a misunderstood democracy had already made his gait an unsteady one, and it was rash to assume too quickly that he would henceforth keep to the straight and narrow path of military duty. We have now to see if the rigorous efforts to establish discipline will succeed. If Kerensky is allowed a free hand we need have no doubt that they will succeed. But Kerensky's power is a delegated one. It depends upon the committees and leagues that are now ruling Russia. It may be taken from him as quickly as it was conferred. On the other hand, the glance into the abyss may prove sufficient to silence the demagogues, and to strengthen the central authority without which Russia is lost. We can only hope and believe that it will be so.

Reading this article by our War Man you will notice how aptly things are coming true now that he wrote about when as yet there were only signs and symptoms. And the moderate common sense of the views here set forth will appeal to anybody who wants to avoid hot-weather hysteria on the war.

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*Written Especially for the Canadian Courier*



Another straw in the long German wind is the recent suppression of Max Harden's paper, Die Zukunft. Max is now a war clerk.

of a victory at a time when a victory was so badly needed. Indeed, it is better off from the mere fact that Teuton troops are being employed here that would otherwise be in the west or on the Italian frontier.

**N**OTHING of great importance has happened in the west, but we may confidently believe that something is about to happen and that the Germans know it, as is shown by the immense efforts of their airmen to observe the movements behind the British lines. General Haig must be nearly ready to strike again in view of the heavy bombardments and the raids that are reported from various parts of the line, and that have always hitherto been the preliminaries to an assault. When it comes, it will probably be in the direction of the coast line, since a success here would have the double advantage of turning the German line and also threatening Zeebrugge, which is the submarine base. But the Germans have been extraordinarily and aimlessly active on the southern lines, along the Chemin des Dames and in the vicinity of Verdun. There may, of course, be some reason for this constant flurry, but it appears to be a sort of insensate desperation. That the Germans should be anxious to ward off any blow that the French may be contemplating against Laon is reasonable enough, seeing that the capture of Laon would be their deathblow in France, but that they should be willing thus to incur defeat after defeat, and at such fearful losses, looks more like a military dementia than anything else. And this impression

is increased by the new attacks upon Verdun, also repulsed with heavy losses, but renewed again and again. If these activities are intended to forestall a French offensive the strategy seems still to be poor enough, seeing that the results must be highly encouraging to the French and equally disheartening to the Germans. The main explanation is probably to be found in the inexorable need for a victory of some kind that shall serve to allay the discontent at home, even though it have no other value whatever.

The same theory will hold good for the aeroplane raids upon England. If they furnish the basis for inflated bulletins of successes they may be considered to serve their purpose, since it is highly unlikely that the British would starve their air service in France for the purpose of home protection. To attempt to separate the operations of the German armies from the state of German public opinion lands us in an impasse, because the nature of the fighting in the west can be explained in no other way than as desperate and despairing efforts to quiet the misgivings at home, as snatches at any and everything that can pass muster as a victory. Undoubtedly the Germans have a belief that the strength of the French has been strained almost to the breaking point, and that a steady succession of heavy blows may win them some sort of success that shall justify the usual flourish of trumpets. But there can be no other justification, certainly no purely military justification, for these costly assaults that can have no definite objective equivalent in value to their cost, and that seem to indicate not so much a military energy as a military despair.

**T**HIS is not the place for a discussion of German politics, but their present bearing upon the war situation is now so close and intimate that it can not be ignored. Bismarck said once—and he never spoke more wisely—that the next war would be decided by the imponderables, that is to say, by public opinion and by the pressure of home populations. Within the last few days we have seen an expression of public opinion in Germany, not the tawdry and blatant expression coercively dictated by the government to its servile newspapers, but voiced by the Reichstag. It leaves much to be desired. It is still tainted by the egotism that poisons the German mind with the conviction that it will be for Germany more or less magnanimously to announce her terms, and that it will be for the Allies to accept them. But none the less we may find a startling significance in the fact that the Reichstag, undoubtedly expressing public opinion, has declared itself in favour of a peace without annexations or indemnities. The Reichstag has, of course, no power to put its resolution into force, nor indeed to do anything else but debate, but we may be sure that the public is thinking what the Reichstag is saying. The peace resolution was undoubtedly inspired by Erzberger, and Erzberger was inspired by Austria, who, since the Russian revolution, is finding that her Slav regiments are more difficult to handle than ever. Who can doubt that Germany is now dethroning her military idols, or that she is in search of the real facts as to the situation at the various fronts? Who can doubt that a process thus startlingly begun will be continued? The people of Germany would be less than human if they were not at last deeply suspicious of the sedatives that have been handed to them so copiously. The many and fervent assurances that America need not be feared are evidences that America actually is feared. Count Reventlow's idiotic denial that any American soldiers have been landed, his assertion that the whole story is a piece of American bluff, prove how real is the fear. The German people can not be wholly unaware of the war loan, or of the fact that ten million men have been registered, practically without resistance or complaint. They must have some recognition of the contrast between the early assurance of an almost immediate and final victory for the submarines, and the later and very much diluted announcements that the under-sea war is an embarrassment and a hindrance to their enemies.

**B**UT the situation is by no means so black as a glance at the newspaper headlines would indicate. It involves not the whole of the Russian front, but a small part of it only. The Russian lines in Europe are eight hundred miles in length, and stretch from Riga to Roumania. The Russian advance that has now been turned into a Russian retreat covered a length of about thirty miles, and the disaffection seems to have been confined to this area. Indeed we are told that the Russians to the north and to the south of this area are fighting bravely and with success. A distinct advance is recorded in Roumania, and the bulletins that come from the immediate north of the present retreat are decidedly favourable. The Russians were advancing toward Lemberg in the form of a wedge. The wedge has now been turned inward and backward, and it is a German wedge instead of a Russian wedge. But a German advance of this kind must necessarily have its limitations. It constitutes a great salient, and a salient is vulnerable because it can be attacked on three sides at once. If the Russians to the north and south of the affected area continue to hold fast they will constitute a threat to the advancing Germans that can not be ignored and that must bring them speedily to a standstill, and before they reach the point where they are threatened with a hostile movement in their rear.

It is, therefore, much too soon to speak of Russia being once more out of the running. She has met with a calamity, but it is by no means an incurable one. It is quite possible that the disaffection is local and not general, and if this should prove to be the case by the staunchness of the Russians immediately to the north and south we shall find nearly at once that the German advance has been stopped, not necessarily by a direct resistance, but by the threat to their rear or rather to the sides of the wedge that they are driving eastward. But whatever success the Germans may now meet with in Russia we may usefully remember that the Allied cause in general is no worse off than it was before the Russian offensive began, except for the moral effect in Germany