

WAR IS POLITICS NOW!

A EUROPEAN statesman is said to have remarked, a few days ago, that if the continuation of the war depended upon military measures it would last another ten years. Presumably he meant that there was nothing in the field of war to indicate a victory so definite that further fighting would become impossible, and to this extent he was probably right. A war that involves the whole manhood of the nations concerned and that continues for years is not likely to end in a catastrophe so sudden and so complete as to prohibit further fighting. A war such as this does not culminate in actual surrender. The armies are too large and too numerous for this. They can not be brought to the point of actual military incapacity, nor reduced to such a plight as that of Napoleon at Waterloo or of Bazaine at Metz. In these cases the fate of the war depended upon single armies. To overwhelm these armies was to end the war. They could not be replaced, nor were there other fields in which the balance of fortune might be redressed. The wars of the past were settled by military victories, and not by national exhaustion, but a world war such as this is more likely to be terminated by the popular will evoked by weariness, hardships, and starvation than by the incapacity of the armies to continue the struggle.

There can be no doubt that the attention of the world is now focused upon the belligerent governments rather than upon their armies, and this fact has been strengthened by the papal note. Strategy and tactics have momentarily receded into the background. We are beginning to consider battles from the standpoint of politics rather than of war. If the Italians win a victory on the Isonzo we wonder what effect this will have upon pacific tendencies at Vienna. If the Germans are driven back in the west we speculate on the state of mind that will be induced at Berlin, and to what extent it will react upon the German political parties that are now making so clear an appearance. Rightly or wrongly, we have begun to expect some decisive word from the capitals rather than some decisive blow in the field, and to count upon discouragement rather than defeat. Everywhere there is something almost like conviction that the statesman is about to speak more loudly than the soldier, and that the diplomats are fencing for their opening positions. There is hardly any conceivable military disaster that would necessarily bring the war to an end, that would be a decisive bar to further fighting. But a succession of minor disasters might easily produce that feeling of hopelessness that would be the prelude to some open peace effort.

If Austria, for example, cannot hold her own against the Italians, and it is evident that she can not, she must certainly be asking herself if there can be anything but increasing ruin in front of her, and how much may still be saved from the wreck that has become a demonstrated fact. Austria has not been governed by an insolent military caste as has Germany, a caste that is fighting for its own status, and not for its country. If Austria should throw up her hands it would be impossible for Germany to face so grave a defection, and if Austrian interests were the inspiration of the papal message we may say that Austria has already thrown up her hands.

OF German psychology it is impossible to speak with certainty because here we have a governing class that is determined to rule or ruin, and that is indifferent to everything so long as it can hold down the forces of insurrection. In Germany we have something like a race between the war and democracy, with some indications that democracy may win. The rulers of Germany must be aware that their hopes of victory have dwindled to the vanishing point, and that even the chapter of accidents can contain nothing of solace.

Small wonder that there should be some lessening of interest in the ebb and flow of battle, and that attention should be directed to the foreign offices rather than to the armies. This is by no means to

THE war is more likely to be ended by popular will evoked by weariness, hardship and starvation than by the incapacity of the armies to continue the struggle. At the same time shell crater defence by the Germans slows up Allied advance, because a shell crater is a devil of a hard thing to hit; Austria gets no more German troops and must hoe her own row against Italy; the French advance at Verdun. As to Russia, the situation is undeniably bad, but a separate peace will be impossible so long as even a phantom of power remains in the hands of her present leaders.

By SIDNEY CORYN

say that there will be no more great battles. Undoubtedly there will be, but they are not likely to result in such a paralysis or destruction of armies as to render further fighting impossible, as was the case in the Franco-Prussian war and at Waterloo.

The small progress that is now being made on the western front is due partly to adverse weather and partly to a fundamental change in the German tactics of defence. While it would be an exaggeration to say that the trench system has been abandoned, it has at least been so far modified as to increase the difficulties of an advance. The trench system supplied definite objectives, a rigidly marked area for artillery fire and for the assault of infantry. But just as the old-fashioned fort had to succumb to the modern gun, so also the trench has lost much of its value, and for the same reason. It became a target for a gunfire so destructive as to obliterate its formation and to bury its defenders in the ruins. A bombardment of sufficient intensity made its capture almost a certainty. But a position that is defended from shell craters is much more formidable. Its area is only vaguely defined, and it provides no definite target against which the artillery fire can be directed. Even the prying aeroplane can hardly detect the particular shell craters that are occupied by the machine gunners, and as a result the advancing infantry is liable to a damaging fire at short range, and from unsuspected quarters. It may even pass an occupied shell crater, and leave it in its rear, with still more damaging results. An area that is defended in this way is therefore both elusive and elastic. It needs fewer men for its defence than the trench. The defenders are difficult to find in time to destroy their effectiveness, and they are able to fall back from crater to crater without those limitations to their movements that are inseparable from the trench. Every one of the innumerable shell craters may be said to be a miniature and ready-made trench, but without the regularity or formation that makes the trench so distinguishable. It demands a minimum of spade work for its occupation, and it can easily be connected with other craters in any desired direction.

At the moment of writing, the Italian offensive to the east of the River Isonzo has produced no decisive result, although the balance of advantage is strongly on the side of the attackers. The Austrian armies have been pushed back along the whole length of the line, but apparently not far enough to justify a direct advance upon Trieste. The Italians are making their way also northeast in the direction of Telmine, and while this can hardly be described as a threat against Vienna, it must have an unpleasant suggestiveness to the Austrian government. We may note with some interest that the German attack upon Riga is supposed to menace Petrograd, which is four hundred miles distant and therefore quite unapproachable before the advent of winter, while the Italian advance toward Vienna, which is only half the distance away, is regarded as insignificant. But there is no need to consider a very hypothetical danger to Vienna. It is sufficient to note the obvious fact that the Austrian armies have been

unable to resist the Italian attack, and that they have lost heavily in men and guns. The Austrian armies since the beginning of the war have won practically nothing without a stiffening of German troops, and it is now extremely unlikely that such aid can be given to them from German forces already hard pressed to hold their own. Indeed we are told that Von Hindenburg has already refused to send reinforcements, and that he has advised the Austrians to fall back to other positions more easily defended. The persistent bad fortune of the Austrian armies carried with it no reflection on the bravery of the Austrian soldier, but it does carry with it a reflection upon the wisdom of the Austrian government, which has preferred to make enemies of its Slav subjects rather than to enlist their sympathies by conciliation and political justice.

PERHAPS one of the most significant features of the Italian success is the proof that it furnishes of the cessation of Teutonic attacks in the Trentino. Until now this has always been the reply to an Italian offensive on the Isonzo, and a very effective reply. So long as Italy herself was in danger of invasion from the north, so long as her eastern army was thus in peril of being cut from its base, she was unable to do anything until she had first guarded her northern frontiers, and driven her assailants back into the mountains. Not long ago a million Teutons were assembled in the Trentino, and they would certainly have struck some hard blows against Italy but for the Allied offensive in the west that called away every man and every gun for the support of the hard-pressed German lines. It is evident that Italy now feels herself secure against a northern attack, seeing that in the presence of such a danger there could have been no forward move on the Isonzo. Here we see the absorption by other fields of an army of a million men, and it is extremely unlikely that they can again be spared for service against Italy in the Trentino. Austria, unaided by Germany, must now do what she can in the way of direct resistance, and it does not seem that she can do very much.

THE significance of the present peace talk is unmistakable. The Central Powers are trying to avoid the knock-out blow that they know to be the only alternative to a conference. The Chancellor, having said that Germany will make no more peace offers, is now intent upon finding someone who will make them for him without betraying the actual military situation to the people at large. So long as there was an expectation of a French collapse the Chancellor was willing enough to maintain his tone of vaunt and menace. With the waning of that expectation come the manoeuvres of Erzberger and the Centrist party, manoeuvres that can easily be repudiated if the military horizon should brighten, and avowed if it should grow darker. It is now the accepted opinion among the Allies and neutrals alike that the Vatican message was practically an expression of the German official mind, and this may be said without any failure to appreciate the lofty and beneficent intention of the Pope. Messages of this kind are not launched without some intelligent effort to foresee their fate and to forecast the nature of their reception. And that the Central Powers should acquiesce in the presentation of such proposals—and certainly they did acquiesce—is evidence of their desperation.

The Germans have undoubtedly believed that the French were near collapse, and in so doing they have given one more proof of their surprising capacity to believe in the things that are not so. Germany has the most expensive secret service in the world, and the most incompetent. She has been systematically misinformed upon every vital issue since the beginning of the war and for long before. Her conviction that the French were at the end of their resources is proved alike by her newspapers and by the nature of her military operations. But she has discovered not only that the French armies are not near collapse, but also that they are immovable.