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THE INFLUENCE OF OBSTACLES.

GENERAL TOPOGRAPHY OF A THEATRE OF WAR.

From "the Operations of War explained and illustrated by COLONEL HANLEY."

The first requisite for following Military Operations is a good map of the theatre. It is not often easy to find one that is at once minute in necessary particulars and compendious enough to bring the essential features before us at one view. But any good map however general (sometimes indeed the better for being general as giving the main facts unconfused by secondary particulars) will afford a great deal of important information. For example—North Italy is seen at once to be a basin almost entirely surrounded by mountains. From these great watersheds a multitude of streams pour down to the plain along the central depression of which the great main drain of the Po collecting them in its channels conducts their waters to the sea.

Therefore belligerents operating from the east and west like Austria and France will find their paths crossed by a multitude of streams running north and south, while a great river traverses the theatre from west to east. North of the Po the mountains leave a wide plain traversed by many great roads; but south of the Apennin the hills crowd upon the river leaving space only for a single great road which lies in a narrow defile between Piacenza and Voghera. On the seaboard are Geneva, which was the chief base of the French in 1859, a great Port opposite a gap in the mountain barrier and giving access to the valley of the Po; and Venice, where the presence of a hostile force would seriously affect the position of the Austrian army on the Mincio, an element which proved to be of great importance in the negotiations of Villafranca.

In Spain we see a theatre the very reverse of North Italy in its essential features: for here the land rises from the coast towards the centre, and the line of the watershed traverses the country from the south-west in Andalusia to the north where it merges in the western extremity of the Pyren-

ces. From this spiral ridge ribs of mountain ranges extend east and west—between these run the great streams thrown off by the watershed mostly to the westward.

A French army entering Spain would therefore find its path crossed by barriers of mountains and rivers, which, when mastered, would become successive lines of defence against an enemy coming from the south. But they would form obstacles of a different character if an enemy should operate from Portugal in the direction of their length, and this was a mainly important feature in the Peninsular.

In the theatre of war in America the great feature was the line of the Alleghanies intersecting the Southern States, and passing its streams right and left into the Atlantic and the Mississippi—thus rivers crossed the path of a Federal army operating from the Potomac in Eastern Virginia and the mountains lay on its flank—circumstances, the significance of which was exemplified at Bull Run.

If we know then the precise nature of the difficulties offered by river or mountain barriers both when parallel and when perpendicular to the fronts of armies, even this cursory survey of a theatre will supply much matter for consideration respecting the chances of a campaign. The influence of these obstacles under different conditions will therefore form the chief subject of subsequent chapters.

More detailed maps and topographical descriptions will afford other important particulars. Respecting North Italy we shall learn from these what are the passes of the mountains into the country—what fortresses guard them—which are the great roads and railways, and where they cross the principal rivers that is in fact the relations between the avenues and the obstacles of the theatre of war.

As to Spain we shall find that the Pyrenees form a barrier between it and France, forbidding the supply of great armies except by roads which lie between the extremities of the mountains and the west on each side—that the great rivers far from marking the lines of the great roads (which in other countries so frequently lie along the banks) flow

in broken rocky channels difficult of access; that the cultivated districts are few and small compared with the extent of the country; that the frontier of Portugal is so rigid as to admit of only two roads by which Lisbon can be reached from Madrid; and we shall then comprehend the situation of the French armies in Spain, how dependent they were on the one great road on each side of the Pyrenees, how disjointed was their front when it faced towards Portugal, how difficult it was to subsist on the resources of the country, and how perilous to draw together the scattered parts of the army separated by rugged defiles which were held by Guerillas. We see also the importance of the Fortresses of Badajoz and Ciudad Rodrigo—the doors between Spain and Portugal and Burgos on the main line back to France. To see and provide for such circumstances imparts vigor and unity of action to a campaign—not to see and provide for this is to carry on war by compromises and make-shifts and to end in disaster.

In England the country is so generally cultivated and the arable and pasturo lands are so intermixed that the fields are fenced on every side to keep the cattle from the crops, and it would be difficult to find spaces of any extent where armies would not be restricted to the road while marching, or where they could easily form front for battle. But in large districts of the Continent cattle are kept in stables and the crops are not separated by fences, while the chief causeways are thrice the width of our roads. In such countries armies move on a large front, the columns of Infantry and Cavalry in the fields in dry weather, the Artillery and trains on the roads.

Thus Belgium and the East of France are a succession of rolling plains where the streams and ditches are the only impediments. In other parts of Europe whole districts are devoted to pasturo as in Hungary and parts of Spain, and those great plains are equally free from obstacles. On the other hand North Italy is highly cultivated and scarcely any plains are to be found there.

It is evident that a careful and sagacious reading of the map of the theatre will reveal