

THE ROBINS HAVE COME.

There's a call upon the house-top, an answer from the plain,
There's a warble in the sunshine, a twitter in the rain.

And through my heart, at sound of these,
There comes a nameless thrill,
As sweet as odor to the rose,
Or verdure to the hill;
And all these joyous mornings
My heart pours forth this strain
"God bless the dear old robins,
Who have come back again."

For they bring a thought of summer, of dreamy,
luculous days,
Of kingcups in the meadow, making a golden
haze;

A longing for the clover brooms,
For roses all aglow,
For fragrant blossoms, where the bees
With droning murmur go,
I dream of all the beauties
Of summer's golden reign,
And sing: "God keep the robins,
Who have come back again."

ARTILLERY RETROSPECT OF THE LAST GREAT WAR.

By LIEUT.-COL. T. B. STRANGE, DOMINION AR-
TILLERY.

"*Pends toi, Francois; nous n-us sommes
battus et tu n'y etais pas,*" was the laconic
letter of the royal soldier *Henri Quatre* to his
comrade—the same soldier king who gave
the right royal response, when asked for a
standard:

"Where'er you see my white plume shine,
"Amid the ranks of war,
"There be your oriflamme to-day
"The helmet of Navarre."

A great war—alas! I fear, by no means
the last great war—has passed into history;
and as I was not there to see, how can I ven-
ture on a retrospect without craving your in-
dulgence?—which you may be more likely
to give when I tell you that, to gratify no
idle curiosity, but simply as a soldier to
learn, I asked and obtained the sanction of
H. R. H. the Duke of Cambridge to join ei-
ther of the contending armies, but was given
to understand that political reasons forbid
me or any of my brother-officers availing
ourselves of the permission, even at our own
risk and cost.

Permission was subsequently granted to a
few as newspaper correspondents; but no
English artillery officer was present at the
great drama of the Prussian siege of Paris.
We were disappointed; but, not inclined to
follow the advice of *Henri* to his friend, we
did not hang ourselves. At the conclusion
of peace I visited the remains of both armies
and many of their battle fields. Had some
friends among the officers of the French ar-
tillery, acquaintances made in happier days
at Chalons. I never saw them again; and
in spite of the contempt heaped upon the
unsuccessful by the unthinking, I cannot
but feel, from what I saw and heard from
their enemies, that they did their duty.

Without further apology, I will aim at my
object, and try, like a good gunner, to hit it.
My subject divides itself into—

1st. Salient artillery operations in the
field, and the lessons we may draw from
them;

2nd—The sieges and their lessons;

3rd—The artillery personnel and materiel
of the contending armies;

4th—The general deductions we may
draw;

SALIENT ARTILLERY OPERATIONS IN THE FIELD.

It is commonly supposed that the superi-
ority of the Prussian artillery was the princi-
pal cause of the German success and, in
deed, the Emperor Napoleon himself attrib-
uted his final disaster at Sedan to the pre-

ponderating influence of the German field
artillery; but it was not altogether so; the
artillery was but the keystone of that arch
of triumph under which the German Emper-
or marched to victory.

It is easier to blame the grooves of a gun
than the heart of a great nation. The
French people (for I hold people responsible
for their government) preferred a standing
army and a system of substitutes to a nation-
al force and universal service; therefore
they were utterly outnumbered; and their
centralized system of dealing with war ma-
terial, of which the English controls a copy,
rendered it impossible for them to equip
and mobilize their armies as quickly as the
Germans, who habitually decentralize and
delegate the responsibility of equipment to
the commanders of their local *corps d'armee*,
and lastly, they were out-generalled, be-
cause their *etat Major* and system of military
instruction was inferior to the Prussian.
Notwithstanding the war-cry, "*à Berlin,*"
they found themselves on the defensive, ex-
tended over a long arc from Thionville and
Metz to Strasbourg; while the Germans
operated on the shorter chord of that arc by
the valley of the Saar and the Wissenburg.
The French advanced posts, too far from
their supports, hugging the frontier, yet
not feeling beyond it, knew not of the vast
German concentration in the wooded coun-
try close to their front. It is very difficult
to unravel the thread of artillery action
from the tangled web of battle, because ar-
tillery plays a double part in the great game
—1st, divisional or merely supporting and
acting with the other arms; 2nd, concentrat-
ing and striking terrible and decisive blows
as a separate arm. Moreover, the first ac-
counts of battles reach us from the pens of
journalists, generally men of great energy
and ability; but tall talk is their metier,
and they are obliged to supply the public de-
mand for blood and thunder at so much a
line; even soldiers themselves engaged are
the poorest narrators of the outline of an ac-
tion, being so entirely engrossed with what
passes in their immediate front. Waterloo
veterans still wrangle as to whether the
final repulse of the last French column was
due to the advance of the 52nd or the
Guards. Comparing small things with great
I have been unable to recognize the official
accounts of actions in which I had the honor
to be engaged.

The first great battle of the last great war
was at Wissenburg. We cannot linger over
the historic reminiscences of the old fortress
that once rolled back the tide of war under
Marlborough.

In the same locality, the Crown Prince of
Prussia, with more than forty thousand men
surprised and destroyed the corps of General
Douay, only 8,000 strong. While the French
were cooking their morning soup, the mass
of Prussian guns having gained the heights
of Schweigen, suddenly opened a heavy fire
on the enemy's camp and the village of
Wissenburg; with the old impetuosity of
their race, the French sprang to arms, but
were ordered by General Douay to remain
as much as possible behind Wissenburg.
The precaution was useless; the Prussian
guns, from their commanding position rained
death upon them, whether they advanced
or sought shelter. The French artillery con-
sisting only of three light field batteries and
one of mitrailleurs, was soon overwhelmed;
and, according to an official account, "the
mitrailleurs fired only a few rounds, and
were easily silenced by the Prussian guns."
The overwhelming numbers of the Crown
Prince outflanked and took the hill of Geis-
burg; the outnumbered French, still pur-
sued by the deadly Prussian shells, and har-

rassed by the Black Brunswick Hussars,
turned retreat to rout. Wissenburg was
quickly followed by Wörth. The French
position was salient, almost semicircular;
thus offering to the Prussians the opportu-
nity over coveted by artilleryists, *viz.*, the
chance of enfilading both wings from a point
nearly opposite the centre. The Prussian
guns were thus massed on the heights south
of Gorsdorf and north-west of Gunstadt,
and, as usual, they were felt before they
were seen. Those on the Gorsdorf heights
commenced the action by enfilading the
whole French left, and compelling Marshal
MacMahon to change the front of the first
division; the manoeuvre was brilliantly ex-
ecuted by the French. Later in the day,
fourteen German batteries (84 guns) near
Gunstadt, were launched upon the French
right wing, enfilading it in the line of its
greatest depth; and not only the fourth di-
vision, but also the unfortunate second,
which stood behind them, and had already
borne the brunt of battle at Wissenburg. A
battery of the 5th corps, north of Spachbach
occupied the French guns; these latter are
said to have been well served but poorly
handled, for the gallant French artillery
seem to have forgotten the tactical lessons
of their great artillery chief, Napoleon I.;
they, however, nobly sacrificed themselves
at the close of the action in endeavoring to
save their broken infantry. At this battle
also the French were greatly outnumbered,
and failed to receive assistance from De
Faily's corps. MacMahon's position was
strategically good, as fairly covering the two
important railway communications with
Strasbourg through Hagenu, and with
Metz via Bitsche. On the same day that the
Crown Prince thus severed the French
army and cut off its right wing, some forty
miles distant, in a north westerly direction
from the field of Wörth, the first Prussian
army, under Steinmetz, assisted by part of
the second, also cut the French line at
Spichern, thus hopelessly dividing MacMahon
and Bazaine. The ridge of Spichern over-
looks the village of Saarbrück, the scene of
the *baptême de feu* of the Prince Imperial.
As usual, the French were surprised by the
opening of the Prussian artillery six batter-
ies, from a hill overlooking the valley from
which a part of Frossard's force had not
been withdrawn. The leading artillery fea-
tures of the battle are the rapid bringing up
and concentration of guns, in some instances
galloping along the roads to the front, while
the infantry of their divisions were partly
sent by rail. This mobility of field artillery
is possible only to the Prussians—not to the
French, from a defective system on which I
shall touch. It is said that the Prussian
guns, after advancing over the plain, pro-
duced little impression, firing up hill on the
French infantry extended on the ridge, from
the fact that shells fired with percussion
fuzes either buried themselves in the face of
the abrupt slope, or flew harmless over the
heads of the defenders.

The French guns massed on the left to op-
pose the flanking movement on Sterling, dis-
lodged the mass of Prussian cavalry, who
were sent under cover to the other flank,
this should have been a great gain, because
the road to Forbach was the strategic line of
French retreat and support. But the crow-
ing artillery achievement was the daring
advance of two batteries of German
guns up a steep mountain track, on the
summit of a ridge on the French right,
where they enfiladed the whole line. I was
informed through a Prussian general, that
the French line, who had resisted so gallantly,
were first shaken by the fire, which drove
them from their entrenchments, and ren-