

SUPERIORITY OF THE PRUSSIAN ARMY.

From Baron Stoffel's Reports on the Military Forces of Prussia.

MORAL ELEMENTS OF SUPERIORITY

Whatever defects one may discover in the Prussian military organization, it is impossible to suppress one's admiration for the people who, understanding that the first condition of happiness for nations as well as individuals is to be independent, resolved that the army should be the first and the most honoured institution; that every available citizen should share the duties and honor of defending the country, or of extending its power and dominion; and that they should above others be honored and esteemed.

Taking account only of the officers, what a brilliant example they give to the other classes! The high-born and wealthy do not live as elsewhere in a deplorable state of idleness and self-indulgence. Far from it. The members of the richest families, of the most ancient houses, become officers, and submit to the labor and hardships of a military life. They set the example; and beholding such a sight, it is impossible to restrain one's admiration for that rough and philosophic nation; but one cannot help a feeling of awe when thinking of the nation which possesses in its army such unparalleled advantages.

The system of compulsory education has been adopted in Prussia for thirty years, and one may almost say from the time of Frederick the Great; thus the Prussian nation is the most enlightened in Europe, owing to the education so thoroughly distributed among every class of society. The Polish provinces alone are somewhat inferior in an intellectual point of view.

In France one is so completely ignorant of all that refers to foreign countries that nothing is known of the vast school of learning so firmly rooted in Northern Germany. Large schools abound in great numbers, and, while in France the seats of learning and intellectual development are confined to a few great cities, Germany is covered with such institutions, and to enumerate them it would be necessary to include towns even of the third and fourth order.

I will not dwell on the advantages which an extensive education affords in the composition of an army. But is it not somewhat strange that in France, men who have reputation for ability and clearness of mind refuse to believe in them? Is it not tantamount to denying that instruction and education develop the faculties of man and elevate his ideas, by giving him a greater sense of his own dignity? Those *sarans* innocently affirm that an army of rough uncivilized soldiers, but accustomed to warfare, will defeat an army composed of well educated men, who, however, have no warlike experiences.

I simply ask what general would hesitate in choosing between the command of two armies each consisting of one hundred thousand men, the one composed of pupils of the Ecole Polytechnique and St. Cyr, and the other composed of uncouth peasants from Limousin and Berry; both armies being equal in point of discipline, physical force and length of service? If he took but one consideration into account—the rapid training of his recruits—it alone must instantly determine his decision. But there are other moral advantages which he could not ignore, and which make the one army worth ten times as much as the other. I can further bring the experience I acquired in

Bohemia in 1866 to bear on this subject, for Prussian officers and sergeants, proud of their victories, ascribed them in a great measure to the intellectual superiority of their men.

I cannot omit to call attention to a quality which particularly characterizes the Prussian nation, and which serves to increase the moral value of its army, namely the sense of duty. It is so extraordinarily developed in every section of the community that the more one studies the Prussian character the more one marvels at it. As, however, it is not in my province to search for the root of this sentiment, I content myself with stating it as a fact. The most remarkable proof of this devotion is shown by the employees of the various civil departments of the government, men paid with surprising parsimony, generally burdened with large families, but who slave all day with an indefatigable zeal without a murmur or giving evidence of discontent or of a wish to rise into a more comfortable position. M. de Bismarck, said to me a few days ago:—"We take good care to leave this class as they are; this *bureau cracy*, hard working and ill paid, do our work admirably, and constitute one of our principal supports.

MATERIAL ELEMENTS OF SUPERIORITY.

Among the principal material advantages possessed by Prussia, the facility which its military organization gives it of creating special services, such as railway and telegraphic companies, companies of bearers of wounded, is one of the most important. In my reports of 1866 I dwelt on the most important details connected with these services. I described the numbers, composition and duties of each service, so that it only remains for me now to add that, by means of the *Landwehr*, these services are maintained without deducting a single combatant from the active army; and, moreover, in time of peace, they are on a permanent footing.

(Colonel Stoffel adds some details here of the Prussian system of gathering the wounded, and an account of their infantry rifle practice, which last has been sufficiently presented in Colonel Church's address on rifle practice published recently. Coming to artillery practice, Colonel Stoffel continues.)

If war were to burst upon us, we would have to take pressing and stringent measures to counteract the vast superiority of the Prussian artillery over the French. I do not deny that our gun carriages are far lighter than the Prussian, and that our field pieces are more moveable; but the 4-pounder and 6-pounder Prussian field guns shoot with far greater accuracy, and have a longer range than ours. The German work on this subject, which I annex to my report, leaves no room for doubt. Moreover the Prussian field guns fire with far greater rapidity than ours. But what is the argument of the large number of artillery officers in our service who deny that this is an advantage, and contend that the rapidity of fire of our field guns is sufficient for all practical purposes? One would think that it was a moral impossibility for an occasion to arrive in action when it would be of paramount importance to hurl in a given time, the greatest number of projectiles, either against the enemy's columns or against his artillery. The advantage of the force capable of firing with the greater rapidity would then be evident.

With regard to the greater accuracy of the shooting of Prussian field guns, I consider it so important a point that I shall make a special report on the subject.

Respecting the drill of the *personnel* of the Prussian artillery, it is in no way superior to

ours, for the gunners serve barely two years in the active army. As to the officers, in stead of enjoying as in our service, a higher reputation than those of the other arms of the service, it is rather the contrary; but in point of scientific education they by no means yield the palm to France.

PRUSSIAN AND AUSTRIAN ARTILLERY.

I may here perhaps be permitted to digress a little in reference to a popular error, existing since the campaign of 1866. It has been frequently asserted, verbally as well as on paper, that the Austrian artillery is superior to the Prussian. This verdict emanates from Austria, which alone should have made one mistrust the truth of the assertion. For those who wish to ascertain the true facts of the events of the Bohemian campaign the error is complete. If it had been only said that during the war of 1866 the Austrian artillery did more damage to the Prussian artillery than *vice versa*, none could have contested the fact; but an explanation is necessary.

1st. As Prussia has not completed the armament of her field batteries with the 4 and 5-pounder steel breech-loader, she was obliged to enter on the campaign with a third of her artillery composed of bronze pieces; but not a single opportunity occurred for using these guns, or where it was possible for them to oppose the rifled long-range cannon of the Austrian artillery. Every Prussian artillery officer that I spoke to on the subject said that these bronze pieces were a constant source of hindrance and annoyance throughout the campaign.

2ndly, Owing to the strategical operations of the war, the offensive was generally taken by the Prussians. At Nachod, at Skalitz, at Trautensau, the Prussian division debouching from the mountain passes found the Austrians drawn up ready to receive them. It is thus apparent that it was far more difficult for the Prussian artillery to choose an advantageous position, especially as they were unacquainted with the nature of the ground. The battle of Koniggratz (Sadowa) furnishes though, the most striking example. The Austrian artillery, covered by epaulments, took up its position beforehand on all the commanding points of the range of hills which stretch from Maslowed to Prim, whilst the Prussian artillery, which attacked had to overcome the dangers of hastily choosing positions on a commanded ground.

Thus the Prussian artillery was unable throughout the Bohemian campaign, to utilize a third of its effective strength, and upon that arm, nevertheless, devolved the most important duties on the various battle-fields. Such is the double reason for which the Austrian artillery was actually able to do more damage to the Prussian artillery than itself sustained. But I again repeat, it is a false statement that the former is superior to the latter; in reality the Prussian material is superior to the Austrian, as will be seen by the German report I forwarded on February 20, and the Prussian artillery officers are better educated and more instructed than the Austrian. I am unable to state whether the training of the men differs.

A Minnesota backwoodsman has a library of 2,000 volumes.

An anti-infallibility journal has been started in Rome.

The Mahomedans have occupied parts of India for upwards of a thousand years.

For the future the passage of the Straits of Dardanelles will be open to all nations.

Californians are enjoying strawberries and cream.