

SOMETHING MUST BREAK SOMEWHERE

DURING the last few weeks we have been invited to consider the opinions of various authorities, named and unnamed, as to the campaign plans of the Allies in the west. However willingly and even respectfully we may listen to these views we can hardly hide from ourselves the fact that they are not in agreement, and therefore that they do not emanate from the high sources claimed for them. The Allied commanders may have their faults like the rest of us, but garrulity is not among them, and we can hardly suppose that General Joffre, for example, babbles of his plans to persons who proceed forthwith to publish them in "special dispatches" to their favourite newspapers. We may usefully remember that there can be no military plan that does not necessarily depend upon the unforeseeable movements of the enemy, and that may not instantly be changed in obedience to circumstances. There can be no military plan that does not rest somewhat upon conjecture and upon the opportunities of the moment. The element of the unknown is a large one, and there are psychological factors that can not be measured. Napoleon said once that the duty of the commander was to consider every possible eventuality and to be ready instantly to meet it. And the complexities of the Napoleonic wars were trivial in comparison with those of the present struggle.

A few weeks ago we were told in a dispatch that was widely circulated and that reached this country by mail that a new plan of campaign had been formulated, and that it would be "steadily adhered to." Aeroplane observations had disclosed the existence of eight miles of German trenches, massively fortified, and consisting of at least sixty parallel rows. Since it would be impossible to carry these works without an unbearable loss of life there would henceforth be no attempt to do so. The French and British would now content themselves with driving triangular wedges into the line wherever possible, not with the intention to break through, but rather to increase the length of the line to be defended, and so to place the utmost possible strain upon Germany's man power. In this way the work of attrition would be hastened and large numbers of troops would be held in the west that would otherwise be sent against Russia and Roumania. Doubtless this dispatch was as authentic as any of a like nature. It may even have stated a partial truth, but none the less it rests upon the supposition that the Allies have hitherto been unaware of the number and strength of the German lines, and that a sudden discovery of these factors had compelled a change of plan. But there could have been no concealment of such fortifications. Nothing of such a nature can escape the ubiquitous aviator and his camera. The trenches upon both sides have been mapped and charted by their enemies with the accuracy of a city plan, and these maps have in some cases been published. We know also that the Allied advance, small as it has been, has disclosed the inferiority of the rear trenches to those in the front line. Structurally they are much more simple, however gallantly they may be defended. Even a mere gash in the ground, or a shell crater, can be formidably defended by machine guns, but the more easterly trenches that have been taken show nothing like the steel and concrete work that distinguished the front line, nor the underground labyrinths that made it so formidable. And it may be said, moreover, that the methods of attack have shown no change during the last few weeks. The plan seems to be the same—to push forward in the shape of a fan that opens steadily wider, and so to create a great blunt salient that shall be a threat to the lines that run north and south. And we may believe that there is always the hope that a weak point may be discovered through which a great army of reserves may be poured like a flood. Such at least is the German interpretation of the Allied efforts, and the only interpretation. The British assault on the Ancre carried out on November 18th covered a front of seven and a half miles, and certainly this bears no suggestion of a change of method nor of an effort to drive mere triangular wedges into the German line.

MR. FREDERICK PALMER, who has been at the front continuously and who has just arrived in New York, has heard nothing of any new plan. On the contrary, he says that the area of the attacks is becoming greater, and that the assaults upon a

A weak point may be discovered through which a great army of Allied Reserves may be poured like a flood. French success at Verdun is a threat on Metz

B Y S I D N E Y C O R Y N

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few hundred yards of front have gone out of fashion. This is just what we should expect on what may be called the "salient and weak point" theory. Mr. Palmer speaks of the elasticity of the German line and confirms the views often expressed in this column that the Germans intend that it shall be elastic, and that they are willing to fall slowly backward so long as they can exact a sufficient price from their enemies in casualties. But, says Mr. Palmer, there is something more than elasticity in the loss of Thiepval, Douaumont, and Vaux. Certainly such reverses as these were not part of the plan and they "can not endure." Something, he says, must break somewhere if the present successful attacks are continued. And this is evident enough. No army can maintain its position, no matter how strong its fortifications, if its enemy reaches its rear. The Somme advance may seem to be very small if it is measured from west to east, but it is not so small if we adopt the north and south point of view, if we consider its effect upon those long lines to the North Sea, and to Noyon in the south. The French gain at Verdun can doubtless be measured with a yardstick, but it is not so easy to measure its threat upon Metz, and we may be fairly sure that it was achieved with that end in view. And incidentally Mr. Palmer says that the French army is in no way exhausted, and that it is better and stronger than it was a year ago, as indeed seems to be the case if we may judge of it by its achievements. We may therefore reasonably believe that we shall see a continuation of the present attacks without any modification in their present methods. There will be a succession of tremendous bombardments in which no expenditure of ammunition will be considered excessive for the purpose of silencing a single machine gun. And there will be continuous snatches at whatever territory is believed to be within reach. And we may also say with every confidence that if the present rate of advance should be maintained, every yard so gained brings the Allies nearer to that point when "something must break."

The French success at Verdun constitutes, as has been said, a threat upon Metz. As a matter of fact, Metz has been within range of the French heavy

guns for a year or more, and perhaps it would be well to keep a heedful eye upon possible developments in that quarter. Metz would have been safe if Verdun had been in German hands, and doubtless this was a factor in the German attack. There could be no assault upon Metz so long as there was a possibility that the Germans could break through at Verdun and so cut off the assaulting army. But that danger has now been removed. Verdun is secure, and we may doubt if there will be any further attempt to take it or even to

recover Vaux and Douaumont. If the French intend to attack Metz they will do so with the army of Verdun, but such an army must have room to deploy and it must also feel that it is safe against all attacks from the rear. If we wish to appreciate the importance of Vaux and Douaumont we have only to refer to what the Germans said about these positions when they fell into their hands. They said that they were the keys to Verdun, in which, as it happens, they were mistaken, but they were certainly a deadly menace to the central positions. Now Vaux and Douaumont are just as vital to a French attack upon Metz as they were to the German attack upon Verdun. They were essential in both cases. Therefore we need not suppose that the French in seeking to regain them were actuated by sentiment, or even by a desire to clench their defence of Verdun. They must have had some definite object in view, and that object could hardly have been anything else than to threaten Metz and to sustain their Lorraine forces in some new objective. The policy of the Allies is obviously to maintain continuous fighting over as wide an area as possible on the theory that the German lines are undermanned and in order to prevent a German concentration upon specific points. The army that defended Verdun and that has just retaken Vaux and Douaumont is evidently capable of just as vigorous an offensive, and it is probable that we shall see the prelude to this at an early date and that it will be directed eastward toward Metz.

THE fall of Monastir became certain with the practically unchecked advance northward of the reconstituted Serbian forces. But it comes late in the day. Two months ago we might have believed that it heralded a movement northward upon Nish and a determined attempt to cut the international railroad. But winter intervenes. North of Monastir there is a wild and inhospitable country without railroads and easily defended by inferior forces. It is practically impossible that there should be any advance much to the north of Monastir before spring, even supposing that this should be the route selected, which is hardly likely, seeing that the Vardar Valley route with its railroad from Saloniki to Nish is so much preferable in every way. We must look elsewhere for the advantages accruing to the Allied cause from the taking of Monastir.

There are various material advantages and one that may be called moral, and perhaps the latter is the most important of all. First of all we have the straightening of the Allied line which lay in crescent formation to the northward of Saloniki. Secondly, we have the establishment of contact between the Serbians and the Italian forces in Albania. Thirdly, there is the fact that a portion of Serbia has been snatched back from the Teutons, and by the Serbians themselves, who are thus once more established upon their own soil and in possession of a city that to a peculiar extent was the bone of contention between themselves and the Bulgarians.

But the moral effect is the most important of all. If the German withdrawals in the west have to a certain extent been voluntary and strategic we can not say the same of the relinquishment of Monastir. Here we have a deadly blow struck at Bulgarian ambitions, a blow that they certainly tried to evade by every means in their power, and aided by their allies to the limit of their resources. The taking of Monastir means that it was physically impossible to save it, that neither men nor munitions could be spared from other fields. And so we have one more illustration of the fact that the Central Powers can not now win at more than one point at a time, that they can not concentrate anywhere without disclosing a damaging weakness somewhere else.

The Bulgarians who should have been defending Monastir are, of course, engaged in the attack upon Roumania, although they must now be feeling some

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WINTER'S COMING

THE Autumn leaves go swirling past,
And Winter's coming all too fast,
The fragrant flowers, the scented hay,
Alas, alas, have had their day,
The Autumn tints now hold full sway.

The Summer sun has gone to sleep,
And leafless trees their vigil keep,
The frosty dew is on the ground,
And song birds sweet cannot be found,
And with "Good-bye," are southward bound.

The butterflies have gone to bed,
The hawthorn trees are dripping red,
The south bound geese are flying high,
The sullen pines, which moan and sigh,
Proclaim that Winter's drawing nigh.

To choose the leaders for their flight,
The chattering black-birds meet at night,
While icy north winds fiercely blow,
If they mistrust the silent snow,
It does its best to make things grow.

And then you know, the Earth must rest,
The North, the South, the East and West,
It's Winter here, and Summer there,
But what is best is everywhere,
So leave it in His holy care.

—T. H. Litster.