

SOME LESSONS FROM THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR.—I.

By John Buchan.

WE have all been taught that history is philosophy teaching by examples, and that if we are to get the value of the past we must be quick to seize its lessons for the present. But we must set about the task cautiously, for nothing is easier than to mis-read history. We find a fancied resemblance between some old event and an incident of to-day, but too often the resemblance is trivial and superficial.

During the summer many honest souls were greatly depressed about Gallipoli, because they could not get the Syracusan Expedition out of their head. That was a case where you had an amazingly close surface parallel. The chief sea power and the chief democratic power, Athens, was at war with Sparta, the chief land power and the exponent of oligarchy. Athens, under the influence of a brilliant but erratic politician, Alcibiades, undertook a divergent operation in the shape of an expedition against Syracuse. It was commanded by a general who was much under the influence of politicians at home, and Lamachus, the ablest practical soldier, was not listened to. It was an amphibious expedition, an attack by a landing force with the support of the navy. At first it won some small successes, and then the thing fell into a stalemate and the besiegers became the besieged. Presently a Spartan army, under Gylippus, arrived to help the Syracusans. And so matters went from bad to worse, till that disastrous autumn when Nicias laid down his arms, and the flower of the youth of Athens perished in the quarries. The expedition was the death-blow of the Athenian Empire.

It was very easy to read modern names into the story—Britain, Germany, Turkey; Mr. Churchill, Sir Ian Hamilton, von Mackensen. It was easy, but it was quite misleading, for there was no real parallel between the two enterprises. Happily the issue of Gallipoli has stultified the prophets.

After the brilliant success of the German armies in 1870 it was the fashion for many years to regard the Franco-Prussian war as the most illuminating subject for a soldier's study and as the type to which all successful campaigns must approximate. The Napoleonic wars were neglected as out of date, and the American Civil War was contemptuously dismissed by the German staff as a struggle of mobs of skirmishers. The view was scarcely sound, for the Franco-Prussian war was by no means the only or the most fruitful object for a soldier's attention. Its conditions were abnormal, and, though nothing can detract from the merits of Moltke's strategic plan and the perfection of his preparations, it was a war in which the victors made countless mistakes and followed many false doctrines. The surprising success of the German invasion was due less to any great brilliance on their part than to the hopeless disorganisation of the French.

During the last twenty years the study of the Napoleonic campaigns has come to its own again under the guidance of many distinguished French officers, such as Colonel Colin. The military student will still find in the operations of the greatest of all soldiers the most useful guide to his profession. And for British soldiers the story of the American Civil War is not less important, for it was a war fought under the kind of conditions which Britain must necessarily face in any great struggle.

I propose in the following notes to collect some of the parallels to the present case which we may find in the American conflict, and to suggest a few of the lessons to be learned from it. You will get little identity as to incidents, or striking likenesses as to persons, but in the case of the North you will find many of the essential difficulties with which Britain was confronted in August, 1914. It is an inquiry which should make for encouragement rather than for depression, for after every kind of mistake, and after a most desperate and heart-breaking struggle, the North won a complete victory.

The causes of the quarrel need not detain us. The

North stood for the larger civic organism, the nation; the South for the smaller organism, the State. Slavery, we know from Lincoln's own words, was not the main issue. It was the immediate cause of the conflict, but the real causes lay deeper. It is fair to say that the Civil War was a genuine conflict of idealisms, of theories of Government, each in itself reasonable, and each forming the highest allegiance for the men who had been brought up under a particular kind of tradition. We may say, too, that the ideals of both North and South were necessary to the creation of a complete national life. Because each side stood for no mean cause it was one of the cleanest and most chivalrous, as well as one of the most heroic campaigns ever fought. The North won and deserved to win, for its creed was more in unison with the main march of humanity. But there is no honest American of to-day who would not rejoice to claim kinship with the great men who led the Confederate armies.

Assets of the Combatants.

The North started with all the advantages but two. It had a population of 20,000,000 whites, while the South had only a little over 7,000,000. It had the great industries, the mineral fields, the big shipbuilding yards. It had practically all the navy there was. It had great wealth, far greater than the South, and was not only more self-supporting, but owing to its ships could import what it did not produce from overseas. It had all the rank and file of the regular army, and four-fifths of the officers. The South, on the other hand, had few industries and few ships. It was mainly agricultural, a land of vast estates worked by negro slaves, with only a scanty white population. It was poor, in the sense that, if driven back upon itself, it had within its own borders only a limited number of the necessaries of life and of war.

I have said that the North had all the advantages except two. But these two were vital. They made the South triumphant in the first phases of the war, and more than once almost gave it the victory. The first was that its aristocratic squirearchy could be more easily adapted to military organisation and discipline than the Northern democracy. The vast majority of its citizens were countryfolk who could march and shoot and were better natural material for making soldiers from than the townsmen of the North. It was a nation, too, of horsemen and horse-masters. Obviously such a people, if armies have to be improvised, have less to learn than men who come from a different kind of environment. This advantage was a real one, but, of course, it was terminable. In time the South had to recruit townsmen, and the North enrolled the hardy pioneers of the West. Besides the townsman when he was trained, made as good a soldier as the countryman.

In the second place, it was the fortune of the South to have fighting on its side by far the abler generals. Lee and Stonewall Jackson have had few equals in the art of war. The North produced many competent soldiers, such as Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, and Thomas, but no one of them reaches the small and select brotherhood of the greatest captains. If, taking the whole of history, you limit that brotherhood to five names, you must include Lee; if you extend it to a score you will scarcely include Grant.

Problem of the North.

Now wars are won by superior strength—by weight of numbers, if the numbers are properly trained and supplied and decently led. Military history shows no exceptions to this maxim. A splendid genius or some extraordinary initial advantage may give to the weaker side an immediate victory, which paralyses and disintegrates the enemy. But if the enemy refuses to be paralysed, if he still fights on, if he develops a stubborn defensive, if he

learns his lessons, and if he has greater resources than his antagonist, in the end he will win.

Against material preponderance, if it be reasonably handled, the most inspired generalship will beat ineffectual wings. Hannibal in the long run is worn down by the much inferior Scipio. Napoleon falls beneath the accumulated weight of the Allies. But—and it is a vital proviso—the nation which is strongest in human and material resources must learn to use these resources. Until it learns to use them it will go on being beaten.

That was the fate of the North. It had to assemble its greater man-power, it had to train it, it had to find a Commander-in-Chief who could use it reasonably well, it had to discover how its greater wealth could be best applied to cripple its adversary. It took it four years to learn these things, and when it had learned them it won. There was a time when it looked like never learning them, and in consequence it was very nearly beaten.

Is that position so remote from our own? We and our Allies have greater reserves of man-power than the Teutonic League, but at the beginning of the war it was not organised in armies. Like the North, Britain, and to a large extent Russia and France, have had to improvise their armies, and Britain, like the North, had not only to do this but to improvise more or less an army system. Again, we and our Allies, like the North, have greater wealth, but we have had to learn how to mobilise that wealth for war. We and our Allies have command of the sea, as the North had, and we have to learn how to use that command of the sea to the uttermost so as to stifle the enemy. Lastly, we have to find the leaders—admirals, generals and statesmen—who can so use our strength in *personnel* and *matériel* that we get the good of it. These were the problems of the North and they are ours. When we solve them, as the North did, we shall be victorious.

Let us look a little more closely at these urgent questions. Abraham Lincoln was beyond doubt one of the two or three greatest men ever born of our blood. He seems to me to be in many respects the foremost statesman of our race—foremost in courage and in the essentials of wisdom—since Chatham. But as a war minister Lincoln had his job to learn, and he took a long time learning it. If he had died before Gettysburg history would have recorded that he was a great leader of his people, a great inspirer, a great prophet, but it would also have recorded that he was one of the worst war ministers that ever lived. He had no natural aptitude for the task, except an iron courage, exhaustless patience, and a calm belief in God. He was a man of peace, as remote as John Bright from any dreams of military glory. But he had that complete intellectual honesty which can look squarely at facts, even unwelcome facts, and after many ups and downs he led his people to victory. Let us see how it was done.

How the Armies were Raised.

His first business was to raise the men. He had about 18,000 regulars, most of them serving on the Western frontier, and he had four-fifths of the regular officers. A good many of these officers had had experience in the Mexican war fourteen years before, just as many of our officers in 1914 had had South African experience. Lincoln showed how little he appreciated the magnitude of the coming conflict by asking for only 75,000 volunteers, and these to serve for only three months. Then came the battle of Bull Run, which opened his eyes.

He was empowered by Congress to raise 500,000 volunteers for three years' service, and a little later the number was increased to 1,000,000. Recruits came in magnificently. If we remember the small population of the North I think we must rank the effort as among the most remarkable ever made by a system of voluntary enlistment. The President began by asking for 600,000 men, and he got 700,000. After Fredericksburg he asked for 300,000 more and he got 430,000. Then he asked for another 300,000, of which each State should provide its quota. But he only got 87,000, a little more than a quarter of his demands. The South, it should be remembered, had for many months before this adopted conscription. It was now a year and a half since the first battle, and the campaign had entered on that period of drag which was the time of blackest depression in the North. Then Lincoln took the great step. The North was,

of all parts of the world at the moment, that in which the idea of individual liberty was most deeply implanted. It was a country which had always gloried in being unmilitary, in contradistinction to the effete monarchies of Europe. The American Constitution had shown the most scrupulous regard for individual rights. The mode of political thought which we call democracy—for democracy is rather a mode of thought than a system of government—was universally accepted. The press was unbridled, and the press was very powerful. The country, too, was full of philosophic idealists who preferred dogmas to facts and were very vocal in the papers and on the platforms. Moreover, there was a General Election coming on, and, since the war had gone badly, there was a good chance that Lincoln might be defeated if he in any way added to his unpopularity.

Lincoln and Compulsion.

There were not wanting crowds of men—some of them very able and distinguished men—who declared that it was far better to lose the war than to win it by transgressing one article of the current political faith. There were others, Lincoln's friends and advisers, who warned him solemnly that no hint of compulsion would ever be tolerated by free-born Americans, and that if he dared to propose the thing he would have an internal revolution to add to his difficulties. Again and again he was told—in language familiar to our ears—that the true friends of the enemy were the Compulsionists. Remember, too, that Lincoln was in the fullest sense of the word a democratic statesman, believing that government must not only be *for* the people, but *by* the people. When he was faced with the necessity of finding some other way of raising men than as volunteers, he was faced with the task of jettisoning—I will not say the principles, for they are hardier plants—but all the sentiments and traditions of his political life.

But Lincoln, being a very great man, knew that it was the business of a statesman to lead the people, to act, to initiate a policy, and not to wait like a dumb lackey in the ante-chamber of his masters. He knew that politics should be not an abstract dogma, but a working creed based upon realities. He knew also that in a crisis it is wisest to grasp the nettle. He saw the magnitude of the crisis, that it was a question of life or death, whatever journalists or demagogues might say. So he took the plunge, and on March 3rd, 1863, a law was passed to raise armies by conscription. He answered those who met him with the famous "thin edge of the wedge" argument in words which should be remembered: that "He did not believe that a man could contract so strong a taste for emetics during a temporary illness as to insist on feeding upon them during the remainder of a 'healthful life.'" There was some resistance at the start. There were violent mass meetings and much wild talk, and there were riots in New York, where a number of lives were lost. But the trouble soon passed and the good sense of the country prevailed.

It was one of the two greatest acts of Lincoln's life; the other was when he decided to fight for the integrity of the nation. And like all great acts of courage it had its reward. Four months later Gettysburg was won, Vicksburg surrendered to Grant, and the tide turned. Recruits came in—300,000 in October 1863, nearly 1,300,000 in 1864, and the curious thing is that 85 per cent. of them were volunteers. The effect of conscription was to revive voluntary enlistment. The total number of recruits in the North from first to last was 3,000,000, and that out of a population of 20,000,000 is surely a remarkable figure. The men had been found, the resources of the North were fully mobilised, and two years after the passing of the Act came that April day when Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomatox.

Photograms of the Year (Hazell, Watson and Viney, 2s. 6d. net) is a literary and pictorial record of the best photographic work of the past year, sumptuously produced as regards its portfolio of representative photographic studies, and authoritative as regards its literary section. Such a volume is enlightening with regard to the artistic value of the camera, and many of the studies reproduced are of such quality as to suggest the artist rather than the craftsman. The views and portraits reproduced are revelations of the possibilities of photographic work.