

THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR.—III.

Some Lessons to be Learnt from it.

By John Buchan.

[Mr. John Buchan in these admirable articles points out the parallels that exist between the North in the American Civil War and Great Britain in the present conflict. Some of these are extraordinarily exact, notably the lack of trained men and the engrained objection to compulsory service which President Lincoln in face of great opposition passed into law and which once it was law the country readily accepted.]

THE North found the men; after many months it found out the way to train them; it had also to find the right kind of leadership. Strength, even disciplined strength, is not enough.

Lincoln, as we have seen, began the war without any kind of aptitude or experience. His Cabinet was in the same position. It contained several able men, such as Seward, Chase, and Stanton, and of these Stanton did his best to make it impossible for the President to continue in office. Lincoln's most dangerous foes were those of his own household. It was not the first time in history that a great war had revealed members of Government intriguing against each other. Moreover, the North had no generals of such commanding ability and experience that they could safely be trusted. Again, the President of the United States was in a peculiar position. Under the Constitution he was the chief executive officer of the country, and performed many of the functions which elsewhere belonged to the monarch. Lincoln, therefore, whether he wanted it or not, had to assume the direction of the war.

We sometimes talk lightly as if the only thing in war was to find a good general and give him a free hand. Unfortunately in a modern war, in which the existence of the nation is at stake, the matter is not nearly so simple. To beat the enemy you have not only to win field victories; or rather to win the right kind of field victory you must do more than turn out good troops and good generals. You have to use the whole national strength against your opponent, military, naval and economic, and therefore, unless the great soldier is also, like Napoleon, a great statesman, the supreme direction of the campaign must lie in the hands of a civilian Cabinet. That is to say, the Cabinet decides upon the main strategic plan, which involves all kinds of questions of policy, and having so decided it chooses the best men it can find to carry out the military and naval parts of it. Once these commanders have been chosen they should not be interfered with. Till they have failed they should be trusted.

Now to discover and apply a continuous strategic policy you need a Cabinet loyal within itself, and a Cabinet instructed by the best expert advice which can be procured. Lincoln had an extremely disloyal Cabinet. All its members wanted to beat the South, but they all thought that they could do the job better than the President. They were amateurs, but unfortunately they believed that they were experts. That was bad enough. In addition there was Congress, which was filled with a collection of talkative people who did their best to hamper the Government. Rarely has any representative assembly cut such a poor figure in a great crisis as Congress did in the American Civil War. Artemus Ward said the last word on the subject. He observed that at the previous election he had deliberately voted for Henry Clay. It was true, he said, that Henry was dead, but since all the politicians that he knew were fifteenth-rate he preferred to vote for a first-class corpse.

There was also the Press, which was quite uncensored, and which spent its time in futile criticisms of generals and statesmen and in insisting upon policies which would have given the enemy a complete and speedy victory. It was always trying to make journalistic reputations for generals and so foist them upon the Government. But the worst thing of all was that there was no body of experts to advise the Cabinet. There was no General Staff at

Washington. The good soldiers were all in the field. There had never been any real Staff in peace time and it was impossible to improvise one easily in war. Hence Lincoln had to conduct the campaign himself, with small assistance from his colleagues, with no help from Congress—very much the other way—with no real military expert advice at his elbow, and under a perpetual cross-fire of journalistic criticism.

The First Northern Generals.

The result might have been foreseen. The first generals were appointed largely because of political and journalistic clamour. Indeed it is difficult to see how they could have been appointed in any other way, for there were no real formed reputations. The good men had still to discover themselves. General after general failed and was recalled. Transient and protesting phantoms, they flit over the page of history. Some of them were men of real ability, like McClellan, who was enthusiastically hailed in the North as the "Young Napoleon." He failed, largely no doubt owing to Lincoln's interference, and he disappeared. Others succeeded, some of them competent men like Meade and Burnside, some of them by no means competent like Hooker and Pope and Banks. Lee used to complain in his gentle way that the North always dismissed its generals just as he was getting to know and like them.

They usually began with flamboyant proclamations announcing that they were going to whip the rebels in a month, and then they were hunted from pillar to post by Lee and Jackson. Pope, for example, declared when he took command that his headquarters would be in the saddle; and Lee, when he heard it, observed drily that that would be a more proper place for his hind-quarters. The chief army of the North, the Army of the Potomac, was commanded by no less than six generals, and all but one were dismissed for failure. But while these unfortunate people were degraded, all sorts of incompetents who had strong political interest were retained in their commands. Most of the generals of the North had one leg in the camp and the other in Congress. It

RAEMAEKERS' CARTOON.

The Prime Minister repeated in clear and emphatic tones in the House of Commons last week the pledge which he had given at the Guildhall on November 9th, 1914, using identical words with one slight addition:—

We shall never sheathe the sword which we have not lightly drawn until Belgium—and I will add Serbia—recovers in full measure all and more than all which she has sacrificed, until France is adequately secured against the menace of aggression, until the rights of the smaller nationalities of Europe are placed upon an unassailable foundation, and until the military domination of Prussia is wholly and finally destroyed.

When this promise was originally made at the Guildhall, the cartoon which is reproduced as our frontispiece was drawn by Louis Raemaekers. It is evidence of the deep impression which the declaration made on the mind of Neutrals—an impression which has been increased by the emphatic manner in which the declaration was restated at Westminster last week. Germany understands its significance.

reminds one of those armies of seventeenth-century Scotland which were directed by the General Assembly or the Scottish Parliament and were terribly harried by Montrose. In Macaulay's phrase, an army is not likely to succeed if it is commanded by a debating society.

Lincoln showed his greatness by living through this dismal period and not losing his courage. Gradually he brought Congress to heel. Gradually he established a dominance over his colleagues, and even the impossible Stanton fell under his spell. Gradually he purged the army of political influence. Above all, as the war advanced, he made a zealous inquest for military capacity, and he began to discover leaders on whom he could rely. He has been much blamed for interfering with his commanders during the earlier campaigns, and the charge is just. But he was in an almost hopeless position. He had the howling politicians behind him and before him generals who showed no real grasp of the situation. He conceived it his duty to interfere, and he often interfered foolishly, for he was still learning his job. But by and by he discovered the true soldiers—men who had fought their way up by sheer ability—men like Hancock and Thomas, Sherman and Sheridan. And above all he discovered Grant.

Grant.

There is surely no romance in all military history more striking than the rise of Grant. At the beginning the North had cried out for brilliant generals, people who made "silver-tongued" speeches, people who could be hailed as young Napoleons. But the Napoleons and the silver-tongues vanished into obscurity, and the North found its salvation in a little rugged homely man from the West, who had done well in the Mexican war, but had failed since in every business he had undertaken and had become a byword in his family for unsuccess. He never spoke a word more than was necessary; he was unprepossessing in appearance and uncouth in manner, but he was a true leader of men. His habits had not always been regular, and the Pharisees of the North cried out against his appointment, declaring that no blessing could go with such a man. Lincoln replied by asking what was Grant's favourite brand of whiskey that he might send a cask of it to his other generals.

If Grant can hardly stand in the first rank of the world's soldiers he was the very man for the task before him. He had iron nerve, iron patience, and an iron grip of the fundamentals of the case. Lincoln interfered with his earlier generals, but he never interfered with Grant. He knew a man when he saw him. There is a pleasant story in Grant's *Memoirs* of his first interview with the President after he took supreme command. "The President told me that he did not want to know what I proposed to do. But he submitted a plan of campaign of his own which he wanted me to hear and then do as I pleased about it. He brought out a map of Virginia and pointed out on that map two streams which empty into the Potomac, and suggested that the army might be moved in boats and landed between the mouths of these streams. We would then have the Potomac to bring our supplies, and the tributaries would protect our flanks while we moved out. I listened respectfully, but did not suggest that the same streams would protect Lee's flanks while he was shutting us up."

Lincoln made no more suggestions. He supported Grant during the terrible days in the Wilderness when the whole North was crying out against what seemed to be needless slaughter. The President had learned the truth of a favourite saying of Scharnhorst's:—"In war it is not so much what one does that matters, but that whatever action is agreed upon shall be carried out with unity and energy."

and a trained Staff is the one thing most difficult to improvise.

We are all too apt to ask from the Staff an impossible perfection. Even the great Berthier nodded, and a volume could be filled with the mistakes of Napoleon's Staff officers. Efficient Staff work in the modern sense really dates from Moltke, and it was efficient simply because his whole Staff had been organised and trained before the war. In a struggle of improvised armies the Staffs will rarely show anything like a high average of competence. There will be some officers of the first quality and very many hopelessly bad. Both North and South suffered in this respect. Hooker's Staff work at Chancellorsville was little worse than Longstreet's at Gettysburg. At the beginning of the war the North made the mistake of ranking Staff duties too low, and it was only much rough handling which drove out this heresy.

Towards the end of the war the Staffs on both sides had enormously improved, and remain to this day examples of what can be done towards training Staff officers in the stress of a campaign. Lee's amazing stand in the Wilderness and Grant's ultimate victory would alike have been impossible with the Staff organisation of the first two years.

Light and most interesting are the "*Prussian Memories 1864-1914*," of Mr. Poultney Bigelow, which Messrs. G. P. Putnam's Sons have just published. These memories go back to the time of the Franco-Prussian War, and they throw many vivid sidelights on Prussian character both in comparatively humble and exceedingly exalted quarters. The Kaiser and Prince Henry were playfellows of Mr. Bigelow in his boyhood; they were Red Indians together, and it is evident that the author has a liking for Wilhelm II. Bismarck he particularly disliked, and the whole atmosphere of the Prussian Court seems to have jarred on him. It is a book to be read by all who wish to gain insight into German character. The experiences described are all first hand; and the general effect which they leave on the mind of the reader is the extraordinary ignorance that has prevailed and that still to some degree does prevail in this country on the true nature of the German people.

The latest addition to Messrs. Duckworth's admirable half-crown Readers' Library is *Life's Great Adventure*, a book of essays by Francis Stopford, which was originally published in 1912. These essays deal lightly with the deeper problems of life—problems which nowadays occupy the minds of so many more persons than they did four years ago. It may be remembered that a favourite topic four or five years ago was England's decadence, mainly the result, as we know now, of German inspiration. The writer would have none of it. "Neither you nor anyone else," he observes to his friend Epicurus, "will convince me that the day of our decline has dawned." The following brief passage reads even more to the point to-day than when it was written. "The true test of right living is not death in the odour of sanctity, but readiness to so fight, to so suffer, and last of all, if need be, to so die, that whatever calamity confronts us, the noblest traditions of our race shall continue vigorous through our actions. This may appear so small a matter, regarded from a personal point of view, that it can well be left to chance; yet the life of the nation must hang on it one day—whether in this decade, or a century hence, who can tell?"

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND AFTER

MARCH.

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