

The New Tactics at Verdun

A FRENCH military critic, after restating the now well-known fact that any front-line trench can be taken, wrote under date of January 29, 1916, as follows:

"La conquête de la seconde position et des suivantes est possible pour les mêmes raisons et par les mêmes moyens que la conquête de la première, mais ces moyens, pour être mis en oeuvre, exigent du temps. La victoire ne sera probablement pas obtenue en rafale, en un jour. Elle resultera d'une série de bonds en avant, séparés par des intervalles suffisants pour permettre aux troupes de se refaire, aux réserves d'arriver, aux liaisons de s'établir, à la préparation d'artillerie de se renouveler.

. . . La problème consiste simplement à reproduire, plusieurs, fois, à quelques jours d'intervalle, les mêmes conditions de succès.

. . . Les Allemands, qui ont étudié de leur côté les conditions de la guerre moderne, le savent aussi bien que nous."

In view of the German offensive in the Verdun neighborhood, these words are prophetic. The armies of the Kaiser are not attempting to swarm through as Joffre tried to do in Champagne last September, as the English tried at Neuve Chapelle and Loos. They are not attempting to advance without proper artillery preparation, without detailed infantry reconnaissance, against partly unknown positions. They are moving forward, just as this critic suggests, by a series of jumps. There is nothing to interfere with the success of this method except a shaken morale or insupportable losses. There is nothing the matter with the morale of the German troops; there never has been. As regards losses, some time will be needed to prove whether or not they are too heavy. Moreover, there is another factor to be counted, the factor of counter attack. For there is nothing the matter with the morale of the French troops, either; and it is upon the morale of the armies that victory ultimately depends. Generals win battles, said Lord Kitchener, but soldiers win wars. No impressive superiority in morale has yet been noted on either side on the West front.

Remain the problems of organization, tactics and material. In organization, in the handling of reserves and in the precision of battalion or division movements, the Germans probably still enjoy a considerable advantage. During a general engagement such as is now taking place around Verdun, two factors of organization are imperative; it is necessary that troops should be reassembled quickly after or during the battle, for which a high measure

of training is required, and reserves must be brought forward, when ordered, without delay. At Loos, according to the *Morning Post*, Sir Douglas Haig had under his command five or six divisions which he was never able to bring into the battle line at all. Reserve troops can only pass through a modern curtain of fire by marching under cover of a communication trench or sheltered road—a road crowded with ambulances, motor trucks, staff motors and artillery supplies. The handling of reserves behind the line, and the keeping intact of active units in the line, are questions of organization. In that the Germans still excel.

In *matériel*—in artillery and its accessories, in field telephones, aeroplanes, etc.—there is no longer much difference between the French and German armies. Possibly the Germans are still slightly superior in these departments, but even that is doubtful. As regards the tactical developments of trench warfare no soldier in all the world foresaw them. The Germans are learning every day, as are the French, new lessons in the field. As to whether Joffre or Falkenhayn has learnt most, time alone can tell.

Any first-line position can be taken; therefore any second-line position can be taken as well. But, says the French critic previously quoted, there is no such thing as a mathematically certain victory. What one can fairly say is that there is nothing to make it impossible or even improbable. One possesses the engines necessary to destroy the artificial defences of the enemy—*chevaux de frise*, barbed wire entanglements, steel or concrete shelters, trenches, etc. For this one needs a hurricane of fire, a spending of munitions which leaves far behind all prophecies of the days before the war, and weapons of a caliber hitherto unthought of. But one has all that. One obstacle alone appears still to be resisting attack, the machine gun, par excellence the arm of the defense, the most to be feared because of its murderous power and the ease with which it can be concealed. We do not know whether the offensive weapon against the machine gun, that is to say, a cannon powerful enough to pulverize a cement shelter, mobile enough to be brought into action under the fire of the machine gun itself, has yet been invented, but there is no doubt that this is one of the essential elements of the problem.

The foregoing was a competent French opinion for the 29th of January. Whether it can be considered a competent opinion on the 29th of Feb-

ruary is another matter. General Joffre tried nibbling, and Falkenhayn nibbled too. Then Joffre tried to win by one tremendous impact. The impact did not succeed in breaking the German line. Now apparently the Germans are attempting a method between the two, the method of a series of jumps. It leaves room for serious counter attacks, as the recapture of positions has already proved. Its success depends on the staying power of German infantry and upon the mobility of infantry and artillery reserves. I have myself seen, at the beginning of the war, soft German troops on a forced march under heavy equipment, and reports to the contrary notwithstanding, their staying power has been proved over and over again. As at present organized, German infantry is the best in the world. But whether the mobility of reserves is sufficient to make this method a success is still in doubt. Last summer the German general staff officially stated, after Joffre's attack in Artois, that they (the Germans) now had it in their power to choose the moment when trench fighting would give place to open fighting. They are trying to-day to prove it. If they break through, they will have proved it.

"Il est bon," says the French critic, "de le dire aux gens qui, ayant une tendance à croire la trouée impossible, risquent de se décourager au premier temps d'arrêt que marquera l'offensive."

He thinks there must be intervals of two or three days to prepare for each new attack. This is probably true. The fighting should continue, off and on, for some time. If the Germans win—if they do actually break through—the French must in all likelihood retire all the way from Verdun to the Swiss border. If the Germans lose, it is not likely that they will make another such attempt, if ever, for months to come.

GERALD MORGAN.

Education in Taste

THERE is a naively systematic way of teaching artistic appreciation to the students of many of our city schools. To each class is allotted a famous painter. The class is then taken en masse to the art museum, and, under the guidance of one of the official show-women, confronted with the masterpieces of its proprietary genius. The children hear the dates of the painter's life, details of his career, the significance of his pictures, the particular beauties of his styles, and any other loose fragments of knowledge that may appeal to their guide. After they have been exposed long enough to the pictures to give confidence that appreciation has taken place in them, they are allowed to exchange painters with another class, and in rigid platoon proceed to appreciate their new idol in the same

way. Presumably their appreciation finally flows over the entire museum, and they take their places among the cultivated of the land.

The other day in a New Jersey school I was shown some wall-paper designs that had just been made in a class of the youngest children. A simple figure had been given them with which to cover a sheet of paper in any pattern they chose. The thirty papers presented the most astonishing variety. They ranged from mere blotches to orderly and regular patterns. Some children had merely reproduced the figure in parallel lines across the paper. Others had alternated their lines and made a more pleasing scheme. Here was a living demonstration of the variety of artistic skill, but I was interested in appreciation. The teacher told me that she had pinned all the designs on the wall, and without any suggestion to the children had asked them to choose which they liked best. There had been a large consensus of liking for the alternate lines, the pattern which was obviously the most regular and the most pleasing.

In my museum system of class-painters who were to be duly "appreciated" I had a perfect example of the old unregenerate cult of the best. But my New Jersey school convinced me that these vestal virgins of the museums were guarding a decaying fane. The young teacher in the classroom had the beginnings of what would be a genuine education in taste. If that same critical and discriminating spirit could be carried forward with these littlest children all through their schooling, most of them would get a robust sense of values that would be spontaneous, that would never have to be cajoled, and that could not be threatened. Might not this process of refining taste be woven into our elementary education? Already we have it in these kindergartens and lower grades. It is a question of emphasis, of making the teachers see that the constant challenge to taste is one of the most important functions of the school. Types of school such as the Play-School make expression and selection the basis of their life. The most valuable feature of the Montessori school is the training of the senses, the quickening of response to sounds and colors and forms. Suppose a child were brought up from his earliest years in everyday contact with forms and colors, without its ever being hinted to him that some were "good" and others "bad." Suppose the child were urged to choose and to express his likes and dislikes, not giving his reasons but merely telling as he could what he saw or heard. Suppose this attempt were made through the course of his school life to clarify his appeals and repugnances, not by rationalizing them but by synthesizing them. Would not something like taste evolve out of it all?

Emphasis on what the pupil likes instead of what