

EDITORIAL

VIEWS OF THE EDITOR ON MATTERS OF CURRENT INTEREST.

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HOW ATTRITION MAY DECIDE THE WAR.

That Attrition will be the deciding factor in the European War, giving the victory at last to the side with the greatest reserves of men to draw upon, is an opinion held in the Allied countries and familiar to all students of the great conflict. But until now the public has lacked any comprehensive estimate of the rate at which this process of attrition is actually going on, and of the results that consequently may be looked for at a definite date in the future. Such an estimate is supplied by Mr. Frank H. Simonds, of the New York Tribune, who reaches the conclusion that by April the Teutonic allies will have only 3,500,000 fighting men in the field without reserves to draw upon, while the Quadruple Alliance will have 5,250,000 in the field and several million reserves. Mr. Simonds simplifies his calculations by ignoring Belgium, Servia, and the French and British colonies on the one hand, and Bulgaria and Turkey on the other, on the theory that "these may fairly be said to balance and cannot affect the main problem." The background of all his calculations is the fact that the total population of Russia, France, Italy, and Great Britain is more than double the total population of Germany and Austria. Applying the rule that one-tenth of a nation's population can be made available for military service, Mr. Simonds finds that, "roughly speaking, the wealth of men of the Allies may be represented as about 27,500,000 against 11,750,000 for the Austro-Germans."

Taking first the case of Germany, he cites an assertion made by the French General Staff a few months ago that "the net German losses a month--that is, the number of men permanently eliminated by death, capture, or serious wounds, together with those rendered unfit by illness--amounted to 250,000." At this rate of wastage, we read, Germany would have lost 3,950,000 men by November 1, and would then have had left only 3,000,000. A later estimate by British experts, based on Britain's own experience that a field-army in this war "loses 10 per cent. gross and 6 per cent. net a month," puts Germany's permanent losses in the first fifteen months at 3,000,000. For the latter figures Mr. Simonds finds some corroboration in Prussia's official casualty lists. He writes:

"The German official statement, showing the Prussian losses for the first twelve months, was 1,920,000, and Prussia has three-fourths of the German population--that is, with the smaller States, who report through Prussian lists. With the losses of Saxony, Bavaria, Wurttemberg, and Baden, which report separately, the German loss would be 2,400,000; but this is the gross, not the net or permanent loss. On the other hand, no report is made of the losses through disability other than by wounds. British experts have calculated that this about balances the gain by the return of the wounded, which would make a loss through disability of about 2 per cent. monthly; not a high figure, considering the strain of the campaign and the inferiority of material, for the armies of the conscript nations are not picked men. Accepting this British calculation, which is wholly reasonable, the British estimate would be corroborated."

On the theory of a "net loss of 6 per cent. a month," Mr. Simonds estimates that on April 1 Ger-

many would have 2,300,000 men in the field. "or a number one-third smaller than the average size of her armies in the first year." Turning to Austria, he finds that the estimates of her losses are "various and highly involved," but that the total for the first year has been generally fixed at not less than 3,000,000, leaving her 2,000,000 available." The 6 per cent. a month rate of wastage would have her 1,200,000 men on April 1. Thus by next spring the Austro-German forces would be reduced to 3,500,000.

Applying the same method to the armies of the Allies, he finds that France, which has averaged 2,000,000 men in the field since the war began, had suffered a permanent loss of 1,800,000 by November 1. By April 1 she will have only 1,550,000 men in the field, and no reserves:

"But the French Army will still have by its side in the West 1,000,000 British, because the British had on November 1 not fewer than 2,500,000 troops available, and this would enable them to maintain an army of 1,000,000 in the West and 500,000 in the East or at home, and supply all casualties. The Anglo-French force in the West would thus be on April 1, when the spring campaign might be expected to begin, over 2,500,000, or more than the whole German force left in existence.

"In the case of Russia, casualties are of less moment. Having at least 17,000,000 men, Russia used in the first year some 5,000,000, and lost, perhaps, 3,500,000. Since then she has lost, perhaps, 750,000; but her problem is not to find men, but equipment. Thus her army may fall to 1,000,000 in times of defeat and disaster, but next spring she will have at least 2,000,000 again, which is about the size that her field-armies are fixed at on a war-footing.

"As to Italy, the situation is quite the same. Italy has only put an army of 750,000 in the field, and she can keep it at this figure for several years, having a reservoir of 3,500,000. Combined, Russia and Italy should have 2,750,000 men on April 1, and behind them very great reserves. This is to be set against the Austrian strength of 1,200,000 and no reserves, just as the German 2,300,000 may be set against the Anglo-French forces of 2,550,000, behind which are considerable British reserves, both of troops already in hand and prospective enlistments. We have, then, according to this estimate for April first, 5,250,000 for the Quadruple Alliance and 3,500,000 for the Dual. In addition, Russia and Italy will have several millions of reserves each and Great Britain at least one million."

According to these estimates, by April 1 Germany will have lost 5,450,000 men, killed, captured, or permanently disabled; Austria, 3,800,000; France, 2,450,000; Russia, 6,000,000; Great Britain, 1,250,000; and Italy, 750,000.

"But the essential fact to recognize is that the weaker alliance, so far as numbers are concerned, will then be hopelessly outnumbered in the field and destitute of reserves, while the opposing alliance will have both larger field-armies and very considerable reserves still available.

"Such troops as the Austro-Germans then have will in the opinion of the Allied experts be wholly insufficient, not merely to take the offensive, but to hold long fronts in the East, the West, and south which will include both the Italian front and the Balkans. By this time the Allies are certain that the retreat from Poland or Belgium will be inevitable, and the first sign of German retreat will be accepted as proof of German defeat.

"All Allied military authorities expect to see the war ended by exhaustion in men by the approach of next autumn, and possibly by midsummer. They find additional support for their faith in the growing difficulties of the German food-situation. There are considerable differences between French and British estimate of German losses; there is no difference, save in time, as to the actual exhaustion of German man-power next year."



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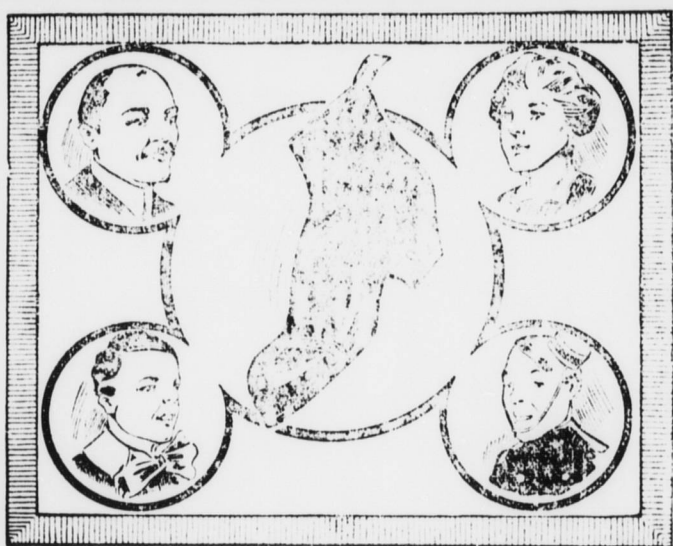
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