

Current Topics

Joffre and His Generals

General Joffre, in a recent friendly chat with the Editor of *La Dépêche* of Toulouse, said some interesting things about his generals. There is a manly frankness about his utterance, and his remarks carry with them the emphasis of sincerity and the ring of truth. The disclosures are not altogether new, some hint of the facts having already leaked out, but the General's definite statement stamps them with the hall-mark of authenticity. Asked about the defeat at Charleroi, or Mons as the British call it, he said:

'We ought to have won the battle of Charleroi; we ought to have won ten times out of eleven. We lost it through our own faults. Faults of command. Before the war broke out I had already noted that among our generals many were worn out. Some had appeared to me to be incapable, not good enough for their work. Others inspired me with doubt. Some with disquietude. I had made up my mind to rejuvenate our chief commands, and I should have done so in spite of all the commentaries and against all malevolence. But the war came too soon. And, besides, there were other generals in whom I had faith and who have not responded to my hopes. The man of war reveals himself more in war than in studies, and the quickest intelligence and the most complete knowledge are of little avail if they are unaccompanied by qualities of action. The responsibilities of war are such that even in the men of merit they paralyse their best faculties. That is what happened to some of my chiefs. Their merit turned out to be below the mark. I had to remedy these defects. Some of these generals were my best comrades. But if I love my friends much, I love France more. I relieved them of their posts. I did this in the same way as I ought to be treated myself, if it is thought I am not good enough. I did not do this to punish them, but simply as a measure of public safety. I did it with a heavy heart. When I have been alone I have wept.'

The Coalition Ministry

The announcement of the proposed formation of a Coalition Cabinet in England has been received in this country without enthusiasm—as well it might be. Apart from the fact that the whole business looks bad, and is calculated to have anything but an inspiring effect either in the outlying portions of the Empire or amongst our Allies, there are no convincing indications that the proposed changes will be accompanied by any real access of strength to the Government. To pretend that such a reconstruction is necessary in order to obtain the best brains of the country for carrying on the present struggle is somewhat transparent humbug. The members of the Opposition Party who have been mentioned as likely to be given a place in the Coalition Cabinet are Messrs. Balfour, Bonar Law, and A. Chamberlain. Mr. Balfour has, admittedly, intellectual ability of a very high order, but whether it is of the practical kind which would, presumably, be most pressing needed in time of war, is very much open to doubt. Messrs. Bonar Law and A. Chamberlain are the merest mediocrities—which would not matter so much, and which might, perhaps, even be a recommendation, if they themselves realised the fact. But both of these gentlemen have an altogether extravagant opinion of their own abilities; and a conceited mediocrity is always liable to be dangerous. There is probably more foundation in the explanation that some change is necessary in order to do away with the recurring friction between Lord Fisher and Mr. Winston Churchill; but surely a solution of that problem could be found by some less violent method than that of a suspension of Parliamentary government. So far as the management of the war is concerned, the Government has, on the whole, an excellent record, and one which, apart from mere party press and politicians, has given general satisfaction. If there were weak units in the Cabinet

they could have been replaced in the recognised constitutional way. We suspect that the *Daily News* is not very far from the truth when it declares that 'the reconstruction of the Ministry has no practical meaning except as a concession to the press,' and when it refers to Lord Northcliffe, owner of the *Times*, *Daily Mail*, and other newspapers, as "England's Dictator." The only thing that is calculated to reconcile the public to this generally-deprecated swapping of horses when crossing the stream is the fact that Mr. Asquith apparently approves and desires it. That being so, it must be judged to be in some sort a necessity—albeit a not very pleasant or reassuring necessity.

Germany and Her Prospects

Worse any day than a defeat in the field is internal dissension and domestic bickering; and the reconstruction of the Ministry—or, rather, the reasons which have given rise to such a proposal—and the attacks which are apparently being levelled against Lord Kitchener, are not exactly exhilarating reading. As a set-off against these somewhat disquieting items of our late news, it is interesting to note that German apologists are beginning seriously to discuss the possibility of Germany's defeat, and the nature of the losses which such an outcome might be expected to involve. Both aspects of the war situation are treated at length, from the purely German point of view, by Frank Koester in the *New York Tribune*; and the article is remarkable for the very unexpected admissions that are made. The two points of special interest in the contribution are the writer's comments on the probable duration of the war, and his anticipation as to the terms which will be imposed on Germany in the event of the Allies' success. He recognises the significance of the failure of the great drive against Paris, and of the fact that after so many months of fighting Warsaw is still unreached; and he admits also the theoretical reasonableness of the assumption that financial exhaustion, if not physical starvation, will force a cessation of hostilities and the capitulation of Germany and Austria. He contends, however, that the notion that such a result can be brought about in anything like a reasonably short period of time is fallacious. He points out that after more than half a year of war, German soil is practically untouched, while large areas of the enemies' territories are overrun. 'Assuming, even, that the fortunes of war go against the Germans, and that they are forced out of France, Belgium, and Russia, the most optimistic of the Allies' sympathisers can hardly expect it until after a year of war has passed. Relative (economic) conditions would then be more favorable to the Germans than at the beginning of the war, for the territory fought over would be ruined. It would then take at least a year, with Germany on the defensive, for the Allies to penetrate as far into Germany as Germany has driven into their territory. Thus, it will require at least two years of war for the Allies to overcome initial German successes and gain a parity with her, even assuming that the German military forces lose consistently, which even the most sanguine of the Allies cannot expect. Assuming that the German forces are gradually pushed back, with fluctuations in the tide of battle, the Allies cannot hope at most to gain a parity with her by the end of the third year of the war. The actual defeat of the Germans could not, therefore, be expected short of four years under the most favorable circumstances. Kitchener, who should be among the best informed of the Allies' leaders, does not promise the British public less than three years of war.' Unless there should happen to be some unexpected break-down on the German side, that is not an unreasonable line of argument; and the indications are that—unless the entrance of Italy should materially expedite matters—Lord Kitchener was not very far wide of the mark when he made his preparations for a three years' war.*

As to the terms of peace, the writer's estimate is based on the expectation that Germany's defeat will not be absolute and complete, but that the war will end in what may be described as a draw in favor of the