

## TOPICS OF THE TIME.

## The American Volunteer.

READERS of the papers on war subjects that have appeared in the pages of *THE CENTURY* cannot have failed to note in them from time to time points bearing upon the topic presented in the articles on the national military system in this number of the magazine, in which General Kautz of the Regular Army and the officers of the State Militia, writing for their respective divisions of the service, call attention to the soldierly qualities of the young men of the nation and their general capacity for a thorough and liberal education in the theory and practice of military arts.

In *THE CENTURY*'s narratives of battles and campaigns of the civil war, distinguished leaders of both sides have laid particular stress upon the character of American volunteers. Grant, McClellan, Longstreet, Beauregard, Sherman, all but one leaders of armies, and that one—Longstreet—the permanent commander of an army corps, have in the course of their articles praised the troops that bore upon their bayonets the fortunes of the respective sections. General Grant in his *Shiloh* paper, contrasting the volunteer with the regular, says that the former system "embraced men who risked life for a principle, and often men of social standing, competence, or wealth." General McClellan in his account of the Peninsular campaign, writing of the Seven-Days' fighting, says, "No praise can be too great for the officers and men who passed through these seven days of battles, enduring fatigue without a murmur, successfully meeting and repelling every attack made upon them, always in the right place in the right time, and emerging from the fiery ordeal a compact army of veterans, equal to any task that brave and disciplined men can be called upon to undertake." General Longstreet in summing up results on the invasion of Maryland in 1862 says, "Our soldiers were as patient, courageous, and chivalrous as any ever marshaled into phalanx." General Beauregard writes of the first Bull Run that "the personal material on both sides was of exceptionally good character," and says that at *Shiloh* his command was "of excellent personality." General Sherman, in "The Grand Strategy of the War," after commenting upon the trained soldiery of Europe, concludes as follows: "Nevertheless, for service in our wooded country, where battles must be fought chiefly by skirmishers and 'thin lines,' I prefer our own people. They possess more individuality, more self-reliance, learn more quickly the necessity for organization and discipline, and will follow where they have skilled leaders in whom they have confidence."

These commanders were all scientifically trained to the profession of arms, and, with the exception of the last, the remarks quoted apply to the volunteers early in the war. It is a fact that some of the best fought battles of the war were those delivered in Virginia and Maryland, and in Mississippi and Tennessee, in

1862, when the troops engaged had been less than a year in service, many of them less than half that time. Though a variety of circumstances are taken into account by a commander who is about to risk all upon one feat of arms, the reader of these inside histories of battle-field events seldom or never finds a general, when writing of such a crisis, betraying a want of faith in his troops. That the troops would do all that men could do under the circumstances seems always to have been a safe conclusion. This was not alone the case where the test was one of brute heroism simply; it was so when high moral courage was needed. If the armies were irregularly rationed because there was no means of transportation, there was no mutiny; the men slung their muskets across their backs, took up tools proper for the work, made roads, constructed bridges, repaired and manned engines, cars, and boats, and when the lines of supply were in order returned to their proper work before the enemy. General Grant states in his story of the Chattanooga campaign, "Every branch of railroad building, making tools to work with, and supplying the workingmen with food, was all going on at once, and without the aid of a mechanic or laborer except what the command itself furnished." Instances innumerable are recorded in these vivid narratives, showing that the American people, in war as in peace, are equal to every emergency. Men bred to the professions, and to the finer callings of art and trade, were both able and willing to handle the shovel and pickaxe whenever it became necessary to the safety of a position to have it intrenched.

But beyond this superb personality of the volunteers,—a quality which is of course of the highest importance,—there is little in these military narratives to encourage the people in a belief that the country is at all times prepared for war.

The energy and versatility that are so invaluable in soldiers and so characteristic of American young men must be guided by scientific methods, and scientific knowledge in military matters is not a mere routine acquirement. There is such a thing as the genius of battle; and genius in war, as in other fields of high endeavor, rests oftenest upon men whose well-trained powers lend them confidence and freedom in the heat of action. Most soldiers, perhaps all, who have the true military spirit are not by nature lovers of strife. Hence the placing of proper knowledge of the arts of war and of the control of implements of war into the hands of men devoted to military life, especially men who, like the American militia, are citizens, having all the interests of citizens in the preservation of peace and of the institutions of the land, would seem to be a wise solution of the military problem.

Germany maintains peace by being always prepared for war. Men like the volunteers who have been described in the recent war narratives, and who are again considered as the proper personnel for the military

system of to-day, in the articles by General Kautz and Colonel Rice, will not under any encouragement seek diversion on the battle-field; but rather, when driven to it, will wage war as a measure that makes for peace. American volunteers will never again be pitted in war against American volunteers. The question seems to be whether American volunteers of the future shall enter upon the campaign against a foreign foe, when it is forced upon them, as an army of well-trained citizen soldiery, or, speaking from a military point of view, as a heterogeneous mob. Conditions have changed since military men now living acquired their experience, and they will continue to change. Unless our methods of preparation are in keeping with the times, we must one day pay dearly for the oversight.

Philip H. Sheridan.

IN the death of General Sheridan the country has lost another of the five soldiers—Grant, Sherman, Thomas, Meade, and Sheridan—to whose directing hands the nation, North and South, is mainly indebted for the successful conclusion of the contest for the preservation of the Union; a man, moreover, whose place as a picturesque figure of the war and whose military reputation were established during his life. There is likely to be little difference of opinion in the historical estimates of so uncomplex a nature—as a man, strong and simple, as a commander, vigilant, resourceful, bold, confident, decisive, and reliable. Probably no officer on the Union side, except Hancock, and none on the Confederate side, except perhaps Forrest, so nearly embodied the instinct of war, the pagan idea of Mars. It speaks much, therefore, for Sheridan's personal character, and much for the American popular ideas which produce such sentiments in our soldiers, that at heart, like Grant, he had an utter abhorrence of war, having been known even to say that the time is coming when the killing of a thousand men in battle will be looked upon as a thousand murders.

In a certain sense it may be said, without derogation, that Sheridan's fame outran even his notable achievements. Brilliant as he was in raid or pursuit, or in the gorge of battle, it was not until the first great raid to Richmond, and in the masterly campaign of the Shenandoah Valley, and in these alone, that he may be said to have exercised anything like the initiative which goes with the responsibilities of a command of the first rank. He did nothing that was not done well; thoroughness was his most conspicuous trait. But the fortune of war did not throw to his lot the solution of the largest military problems. Grant, on the other hand, was prepared for the grand strategy of the last year of the war by having had on every field he fought, from Belmont to Chattanooga, the widest option and responsibility. The most accurate judgment of a man is likely to be found in the consensus of contemporary opinion, and in this light it is a magnificent tribute to Sheridan that most of the prominent officers of the contending armies have thought him fit for greater commands than those which he actually exercised.

This was the judgment of Grant, and we believe is that of Sherman, and of many others only less distinguished.

It is inspired by the fact that Sheridan was, first of all, master of his profession; that he was always ready to give more of service than was expected of him, and that he had not the limitations of petty personal qualities which detracted from the success of so many commanders on both sides. His life was devoted to the service of his country; his action was uninfluenced by animosity; and his death, like that of Grant, is an occasion for considering anew the benefits of the great struggle, and for renewing those pledges of generous friendship between former foes which is the crowning glory of the American soldier.

#### The Amenities of Politics.

OUR country has been peculiarly fortunate in the orderly development of its political history, which has secured at each successive point a clearly marked line of division between the two great forces that have finally made the country what it is. There have been very few periods in our history when the individual voter has not had a clear opportunity of choice between two fundamental and opposing theories of government and politics, while the phases of this opposition have changed as the country and its needs have changed. The one force has had its time of peaceful growth and its time of abnormal development, when it went so far as to strike at the very life of the republic; but it has developed generally in strict accord with the natural growth of the country, and gives us now a system of local and internal government more nearly approaching perfection than any other system has yet provided for its citizens. The national idea, too, has had its period of abnormal development, when it seemed to threaten not only the liberty of the individual, but even the life of the States; but its general course of development has been no more rapid than the highest needs of the country have made imperative. One can hardly follow the constant conflicts and alternate triumphs of these two historical forces without a feeling of special wonder at the definiteness of the issues which they have offered from time to time to the mass of voters, and the general success with which popular government has in every case indorsed with its approval that one of the two whose success at the moment was more important to the general welfare of the country.

Yet he who loves and respects his fellow-man cannot escape a sense of humiliation as he notices the apparent indifference of individual men to the great issues really at stake. The two streams of force are grand, imposing, and impossible to mistake: the individual units whose thought, feeling, and action make up the sum of these forces are apparently actuated by anything but a consciousness of the historical stream of which they are a part. Eighty or ninety years ago, for example, the country's foreign and domestic character seemed to be at stake. It was a question whether the rising republic was to take its place among the nations of the earth as a mere congeries of jarring states, without respect abroad or confidence at home, or as a strong, homogeneous nation, which would not permit other nations even to know officially that there were diversities of interest within the United States. Here, at least, would seem to be an issue which Federalist and Democrat could appreciate promptly and