

A New Use for Central Australia.

ITS "POTENTIALITIES" AS A SCRAPPING GROUND.

It is becoming increasingly obvious that the world made an unpardonable mistake in selecting Europe for a theatre of war. It is true that Germany forced the Allies to fight in that area; but it is highly probable that even Germany now recognises that the disadvantages of such a site overshadow its advantages of propinquity and accessibility. Europe is horribly overcrowded, closely populated, and tremendously built upon. It is cluttered up with cathedrals, factories, town halls, prosperous suburbs, expensive residential quarters, lamp-posts, tramway lines, hat shops, cemeteries, gasometers, and other inconvenient obstacles to modern warfare. And even where there are open spaces in which troops might manoeuvre these are usually occupied by crops. Even on the eastern frontier much land that might have been available for modern warfare is only useless marsh and swamp. To an Australian the choice of such a battleground seems absurd. But then for many centuries Europe has always been the theatre of war; and doubtless, the Europeans have got into the habit of staging their wars in the only convenient theatre available.

This war-stadium suffers, too, from a further drawback. The climate is not at all suitable for wholesale slaughter. Every winter, operations have to be suspended for virtually three months owing to the impossibility of fighting in slush and snow. If it had not been for these unfortunate intervals the war would in all probability have been over by now. There would have been nine months more of indiscriminate murder—three winter campaigns would have been three summer campaigns; and in the next nine months all the experts prophecy a practical ending of the trouble. Thus, owing to the momentous error of selecting the wrong site for the war, we are now compelled to fight nine months extra. It is not a fair thing either to the soldiers or the non-combatants. But doubtless, the managers of the big contest will plead that they had no choice in the matter—that there was no other suitable area on lease.

That may be so; it has always been so in the past; but after this war is over the world will certainly see to it that future combatants will have a fairer fight for their money. One cannot expect an enlightened posterity to put up with such obvious inconveniences. They will insist on fighting somewhere where they will not have to trespass on private property, and where their strategic movements are not liable to be held up by obstacles like cemeteries and canals and suburbs.

It is like asking two football teams to play an important cup tie in King Street, Sydney, or Little Bourke Street, Melbourne, during the lunch hour, and with all the traffic of footpath and roadway going uninterruptedly on, while every quarter of an hour play has to be suspended to allow an Eight-Hours Procession to pass. However brilliantly a team might play, the result would hardly be acclaimed a victory for football tactics. Or is it like suggesting that the next prize fight should take place in the engine room of a ferry-steamer, whence the combatants should be removed every fourth round to a cold-storage vault.

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It is here that Australia's chance will come in. This continent offers every advantage for the stage-managers of the next big war. And it is surely imperative for us to impress this fact upon the world before our possible rivals in providing war-stadiums get busy on the advertising pages of the world's press. To begin with, Australia possesses a huge territory that is eminently suitable for slaughter purposes. In the interior of this continent there is an unused area that is big enough for even the most ambitious war. This can be provided for by proclaiming the empty heart of Australia a perpetually endowed war area. The boundaries could easily be fixed sufficiently far from settlement to preclude any danger to the inhabitants from shell-fire or persons falling out of aeroplanes. The few settlements in the far interior could be erased at a quite moderate cost. The overland telegraph line could be dismantled; since by that time it would have been rendered unnecessary by the improvements in wireless. The two railways that once so bravely set forth from north and south to shake hands with each other in the centre of Australia, and are now both leaning gloomily against posts, not a tenth of the way on their journey, (staring pensively across the desert and waiting for the other



GOTT MITT UNS.

"What would they have left Him if he had not been with them?"
—(*Le Rire Rouge*.)

chap to do his share of the journey) might be made of some use by fixing their termini as goal posts for the antagonists. And there is a possibility of these lost railways earning some revenue at last in transporting the combatants to the starting posts. Doubtless the coming Peace Conference will lay down strict rules allowing each future warring nation unmolested convoy to the starting points; after which, they would be left to their own devices.

The great thing in this suggestion is that the fighting nations would have plenty of space to play about in. The probability would be that they would find our war stadium several times larger than their home countries. There is, of course, the danger that both forces might get bushed and never meet each other at all. But in that case the umpires would call it a draw, and they could all go home happy, having, of course, first tidied up the playground and left it ready for the next leaseholders.

The climate, of course, would do away with any necessity for intervals, or rests between the rounds: It would be a fair test of endurance and perseverance. The transport difficulties would be considerably minimised, since the combatants would require hardly any-kit in the Australian climate. A row of corks on strings round the steel helmets would suffice for the fly pest, and the only blankets they need carry would be made of mosquito netting. Roads would hardly be needed, since there are few large areas that cannot be traversed. True, the provision of water would call for some foresight; but this special worry would be compensated for by the saving that would be affected in bridging trains and pontoon detachments for crossing rivers, since there would be no rivers to cross, and, indeed, no mountains to surmount.

Then, strategy and tactics would be beautifully simplified.

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