

THE WAR IN ITALY, AND ALL ABOUT IT

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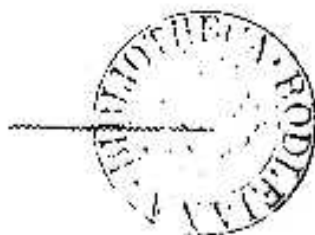
J. H. STOCQUELER

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By J. H. STOCQUELER,

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INTRODUCTION.

THE following sketch appears to be called for at the present juncture.

Rightly to understand the military operations which may follow upon the mutual declaration of war between Austria on the one hand and France and Sardinia upon the other, it is necessary that the reader should have before him a sketch of the topographical features of the country which is likely to become the theatre of strife, and a brief history of Piedmont in its relations to the two greater Powers. I have endeavoured to be concise, for the ordinary claims upon public attention do not allow of the devotion of too much time to one subject.

J. H. S.

THE WAR, AND ALL ABOUT IT.

TOPOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

PIEDMONT and Northern Italy are separated from the rest of the great European Continent by ranges of mountains called the Alps. This magnificent frontier is in the form of a semi-circle, and is divided into three great masses, which are again subdivided into secondary masses. The first great division or Western Alps—called severally the Pennine, Graian, and Cottian Alps—describes a tortuous curve of about 72 leagues in extent, beginning at the Col (or Gorge) de Tenda in the south, and running in a north-easterly direction to Mont Blanc. The several passages through this chain are by the Col de Tenda, lat. $44^{\circ} 5'$, Mont Genevra, Mont Cenis, and the Little St. Bernard. The second division, or Central Alps, extends from Mont Blanc to a lofty peak called the Drey Herren Spitz (the peak of the three Lords), and comprehends the Great St. Bernard, the Simplon, Mont St. Gothard, &c. The third division forms another segment of a circle, running east and south from the Drey Herren Spitz to Fiume, a small port in the Gulf of Quarnero, at the north-eastern corner of the Adriatic, between 45° and 46° N. lat., and 14° and 15° E. long. The Apennines, which divide Italy in all its length, constitute a detached chain of the Alps, beginning on the western frontier, and running down to the south-east.

From these several chains descend innumerable streams, forming, in their course, lakes and rivers of considerable extent, and ultimately losing themselves in the Gulf of Venice, the Adriatic and the Mediterranean seas.

The lakes are four in number, and appear to form great reservoirs of the waters of the mountains. They are severally called the Lago Maggiore, Como, Iseo, and Garda. Lake Maggiore, which is of irregular form, and about 40 miles in length, receives the waters of the Maggia in the north, and distributes them at her southern extremity. Lake Como, which is to the east of Maggiore, is divided into two parts. The most considerable bathes the town of Como, and runs to the south-west; the lesser division, called also Lake Lecco, runs off towards the south-east. Lake Como is about 30 miles in length. Lake Garda, the broadest of the lakes in Italy, 37 miles in length, and lying between the 45° and 46° of lat., receives the Sarca (or Tonà) and the river Toscoloro. It is studded with islets and has several little harbours. Between Lake Garda and Lake Como is Lake Iseo, a small basin of water, about 13 miles in length, north and south.

Numerous rivers find their sources in the Alps and the Apennines. The chief of these is the Po, which, descending from Mont Viso, traverses the magnificent plains of Lombardy, from east to west, and then runs the tortuous, serpentine course, which earned for it, from our poet Goldsmith, the appellation of the "Winding Po." The course is 323 miles in length. The river is navigable throughout, and is the grand commercial channel of the north of Italy. It waters a fertile and beautiful country, and its banks are embroidered by numerous towns, chateaux, villas, and villages. The chief towns are, Turin, the capital of Piedmont; Piacentia, called by the Italians *Piacenza*, and the French *Ploissance*; Cremona, Guastala, Ferrara. Nineteen smaller affluents are upon the left bank of the Po; among which are the two Dorias, the Sesia, the Tesino, the Adda, the Oglio, and the Mincio. The principal affluents on the right bank are, the Tanaro, the Trebbia, the Secchio, the Scrivia, the Panaro, and the Reno.

From its direction and the great volume of its waters, the Po is of the highest military importance; besides that it presents an obstacle to invasion from either side. It forms the defence of the Piedmontese against an attack from the Lombardian side, and equally protects Lombardy from the hostile operations of Piedmont. It is nowhere fordable. Lavallée, describing its strategic value, says, "On the west

the Po is important from its affluents; on the east it is covered by the rivers which fall directly into the Adriatic; on the north it stretches right across the country between the Alps, which prevent any great invasions from that quarter; on the south, if an enemy make good his entrance through the openings of the Alps and Apennines, the river still preserves all its importance, because an army cannot venture to advance into the Peninsula, without having its rear protected by the Po." The fiercest conflicts in the Italian wars have taken place on the banks of this river. The armies of France, Spain, Russia, and Austria have, during the last 200 years, been frequently carried to the banks of the Po, and the issues of their battles have decided the fate of states and empires. It was on the Po, also, that Scipio awaited Hannibal's first attack 2000 years ago.

The TICINO, or TESSINO, is the river next in importance to the Po. Deriving its origin from Mont St. Gothard, it first waters Val Levantina, traverses the entire length of Lake Maggiore, which it quits at Sesto Calende, and then running southerly for 30 miles bathes Turbigo; and passing Vigevano it falls into the Po near Pavia. This river forms the boundary of Piedmont on the one side, and Austrian Lombardy on the other. It offers but an imperfect barrier to Austrian invasion, because the passage of the river at Pavia, near the confluence of the Po and Ticino, enables the Austrians to turn the position of a Piedmontese army, and to separate it from its entrenched camp at Alessandria. It was on the banks of the Ticino (the Ticinus of the Romans), that the first great cavalry action was fought between the Roman and Carthaginian forces. The Numidians, supported by the Gaulish heavy cavalry, completely defeated the Roman horse. Scipio himself was dangerously wounded. Here was first established the superiority of the cavalry of Hannibal over that of the Romans, and to this arm of his force Hannibal owed much of his subsequent success—"the country being level and open, and peculiarly favourable to the action of that arm, in which they were so evidently inferior, the Romans retired behind the Ticino, over the bridge which they had made, and which they soon broke down before them." See Colonel M'Dougall's "Campaigns of Hannibal."

The ADDA rises in the Rhetian Alps at Mont Ortler, and runs N.E. and S.W., watering the Valteline, and, receiving an accession of volume from the Maira, it falls into Lake Como. The valley forms part of the Lombardo Venetian kingdom. In its southerly course the Adda washes Trezzo; Cassano on the road from Milan to Brescia; Agradel; Lodi, celebrated for a battle in 1796, when Napoleon forced the passage of the river; Pizzighittone and Fombio, near which place its course terminates. The Adda is a very rapid and deep river, but fordable here and there. The left bank is skirted by hills; the right is bare and open. General Ulloa, in his *Guerre de l'Indépendance Italienne*, says that there are several *têtes de pont** along this line. There are such defences at Lecco, Brivio, Cassano and Lodi. The *tête de pont* at Lecco is of great importance: it commands the road from Bergamo to Lecco, the only one that is practicable for artillery. In like manner the *tête de pont* at Lodi commands the two roads from Brescia to Lodi, and Pavia to Lodi. At Pizzighittone and Cremona there are likewise good defences of the Adda, but these will be spoken of hereafter.

The TANARO, the third in importance among the rivers of Northern Italy, unites with the Po near Cambia, to the east of Valenza. It has its source in Monte Tenda at the southernmost extent of the Maritime Alps, and, in its course to the N.E., it laves Ormea, Ceva, Asti, Cherasco and Alba, and joins the Bormida at Alessandria.

The SESIA is a larger river than the Tanaro, but it is of less importance, strategically considered, because it opens no roads to the Alps. Descending from Monte Rosa, its course lies through a wild and winding valley, watering Romagnano, a spot hallowed by the death of the gallant Bayard, to whom Bonnavet, at the eleventh hour, committed the command of the French army, on its retreat (in 1524) before the forces of the Emperor Charles. The Sesia then flows through a level country much intersected by canals, passes Vercelli—the *Vercellæ* of the Romans, where Marius, by a splendid victory, effected the deliverance of Italy from the barbarian Cimbri—and loses itself in the Po, a little below Casale.

* Head of a bridge,—fortification to prevent the passage of a river by an *ennemy*.

The **MINCIO** flows out of Lake Garda, at the fortified position of Peschiera. After washing Mozambaro on the right bank, it passes by Borghetto-Pozzolo and Evito, and soon afterwards forms two or three small lakes, one above and another below the fortified city of Mantua, and, leaving these, joins the Po at Governolo. The banks of the Mincio are of unequal height; sometimes they rise on the right, sometimes on the left bank. At certain bends of the river a good defence may be made. The hills of Monzabano and Volta overawe the left bank; those of Salionza and Valeggio command the right bank. Of the eight points where the river must be crossed to attack Verona the chief are Monzabano and Molini. The divided course of the river at this point admits of a cross-fire from batteries which sweep over an unbroken space.

The **OGLIO**, rising in Mount Tonai, runs towards Lake Iseo, flows past Chiari on the road from Brescia to Milan—takes a course parallel to the Po and terminates between Guastalla and Borgo Forte. It is a broad river and intersects the expanse between the Adda and the Mincio, but it constitutes only a feeble line of defence against an attacking army.

The **ADIGE** finds its source in the gorge of Rescha in the Tyrol on the frontiers of Germany. Flowing south it bathes Trento, the capital of the Italian Tyrol; then Calliano, “a formidable position in a frightful pass;” Roveredo, where Napoleon gained a victory over the Austrians in 1796; Verona; Legnago, a fortified town; Carpi, and so on to the Adriatic at about 3 miles from Chioggia. It is navigable from Trento to the sea, although the navigation is occasionally interrupted by natural obstacles. The main course of the river is protected by the strong fortress of Verona; and its inferior course can be rendered impracticable as far as the sea, by an inundation effected by opening the dykes and uniting the waters of the Melisella and the Po with those of the Adige. Colonel Jackson writes—“The Adige is the best line of protection of the Po and of Italy: it is broad, deep, rapid, never fordable, easily defended, provided one is master of Lake Garda and the Rocca d’Anfo.”

The **Trebia**, or **Trebbia**, runs from the gorge of Monte Bruno, a little north-east of Genoa, up to Placentia. It is