

Nelson's History of the War

Volume II

John Buchan
1915

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NELSON'S HISTORY OF THE WAR

VOLUME II.

NELSON'S HISTORY
OF THE WAR. By
John Buchan.

Volume II. From the Battle of Mons to the
German Retreat to the Aisne

THOMAS NELSON AND
SONS

LONDON, EDINBURGH, DUBLIN, AND NEW
YORK

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NELSON'S HISTORY OF THE WAR.

CHAPTER IX.

CHARLEROI AND MONS.

Position of British on August 23rd—Mons—
Battle of Charleroi—Position on Central Meuse
—French Armies fall back—Beginning of the
Battle of Mons—Isolation of the British—
General Joffre's Messages—Retreat ordered.

On Thursday, 20th August, the Germans had entered Brussels. For two days an endless stream of men, horses, and guns poured through the city and its suburbs, and marched to the south. A force of at least one army corps had been pushed out to the northward, to keep touch with the Belgian army in its retirement on Antwerp, while masses of cavalry, supported by detachments of infantry and machine guns, conveyed by motor cars, were speeding westward. But the main stream of the German advance was southward towards the French frontier. It was von Kluck's army, moving to attack the Allied left round Mons and Tournai.

The second great army, under von Buelow, had marched by the uplands of the Hesbaye district, between the marshy hollow by which the Dyle winds its way towards Louvain and the line of the Belgian Meuse between Namur and Liège. The heads of its columns were directed towards the crossings of the Sambre. Von Buelow's army, forming the left of the long German right that was pivoting to the south and west, had a shorter distance to cover, and would come in contact with the Allies some twenty-four hours before von Kluck. On the extreme left of the advancing flank the German howitzers were already thundering against the forts of Namur.

In front of this swelling tide of invasion the 5th French Army held the line of the Sambre. Its headquarters were at Charleroi, the little town of ironworks and mines, where Napoleon crossed the river on his march to Waterloo. Every village in the district recalled memories of the closing scenes of the Hundred Days. The French cavalry patrols skirmished with Uhlans about Gembloux and Ligny, and von Buelow was marching on the very ground over which another Buelow had led

Bluecher's 4th Army Corps in the Waterloo campaign. The Allies of those famous days were now enemies, and Frenchmen and Englishmen were friends.

To the left of the 5th Army the British were in line from Binche to Mons: then westward along the line of the canal to Condé, just inside the French frontier. Condé ranked as a fortress until a few years ago, when it was recognized that its forts would be useless against modern artillery and high explosive shells, and the works were disarmed and dismantled. Behind the British line and the fortress of Maubeuge lay General Sordet's cavalry corps, and away to the westward, at Arras, was a force of French Territorials, under General d'Amade, which had pushed forward a brigade to Tournai, inside the Belgian border.

Sir John French, as we have seen, had with him on the Mons position only two of his three army corps, the First and Second, and Allenby's cavalry division.^[1] The mission assigned to him was to protect the left of the general French advance to the north. The first of his troops had crossed the frontier on 21st August, and during the whole of Saturday, the 22nd, the remaining battalions and batteries were coming into line. As they reached the Mons position the men were at once put to work to entrench the ground, for it had already been recognized that the first fighting must be upon the defensive. The exact force of the enemy was not known, but the French and British Flying Corps had seen enough of the German advance to make it clear that the attack would be made in considerable force, though they were still ignorant how great that force would be. The plan of the French Staff was to meet the enemy's onset along the Charleroi-Mons line, and after breaking his first attack, assume the offensive, and advance, with Namur as their pivot. The success of this operation would raise the siege of the fortress, and open the way for the reoccupation of Brussels, and a junction of the British left with the Belgian army advancing from Antwerp.

Aug. 22.

In Britain, in those critical days at the end of the third week of August, all that was known was that the Germans were at last face to face with the Allied armies, and that a great battle was imminent, or had already begun. A successful result was confidently anticipated, and the military experts of the press even wrote of the perilous and almost hopeless position of the German army in Belgium, pushed forward between the fortresses of Antwerp and Namur, with an unbroken Belgian army on its right rear, and the British and French advancing on its front. These sanguine estimates were based on defective information. Few at the time realized the overwhelming force that had been accumulated under the command of von Buelow

and von Kluck, the weakness of Namur, and the deadly effect of the central mass which the Germans had concentrated in the wooded Ardennes.

The line held by the British force had a front of about twenty-five miles from right to left. The numbers available for its defence were, in round figures, about 75,000 men and 250 guns. In modern battles there is a tendency to extend the front, and this is justified by the increased power of quick-firing guns and repeating rifles to hold an attack. Formerly it was considered that to provide an adequate force on a battle line, about 10,000 men should be available for every mile of front. Napoleon at Waterloo had 30,000. On the Mons position Sir John French had only some 3,000 men to the mile. The numbers were sufficient for the actual fighting line, because he could rely upon the steadiness of his men, their good marksmanship, and a training which would make the best use of the ground. But it left no reserves in hand, and in his dispatches he notes that, in the absence of the Third Army Corps, he had to use his cavalry division as a reserve, posting its four brigades in rear of the left, with orders to “move in support of any threatened part of the line.”

The 5th Cavalry Brigade,^[2] under Sir Philip Chetwode, was assigned to the extreme right, near the town of Binche. But during Saturday, the 22nd, this brigade, assisted by a few squadrons sent out by General Allenby from the main mass of horsemen on the left, was scouting far to the front. Along the centre of the position, and about two miles in advance of it, a wide stretch of woodland extended from near the village of St. Ghislain, six miles west of Mons, to a point some three miles east of the town. The cavalry were out to the northward of this screen of forest, and some of the squadrons penetrated as far as Soignies, on the Mons-Brussels road. Early in the morning they came in contact at various points with the enemy's advanced patrols, and all day long there were sharp skirmishes, in which our men everywhere had the advantage. In one of the villages near Soignies a detachment of the 20th Hussars found themselves at a turn of the winding street suddenly face to face with a troop of German cuirassiers. Without a moment's hesitation the light horsemen charged, and the cuirassiers were driven in confusion out of the place. “Men and horses, they were heavier than we were,” wrote one who took part in the fight, “but our men were smarter and handier.” As the day wore on the British patrols found themselves in touch with increasing forces of the enemy. As they drove in the advanced parties of the German cavalry they discovered the presence of large formed bodies. It was evident that von Kluck was advancing in force along every road leading south-westward from Brussels. In what force we

could not know, for the thick woodlands beyond Soignies made the country inscrutable to our air service, and the German van repelled our inquiring cavalry.

During the day the whole of the First and Second Corps had reached their positions, and good progress had been made with the work of entrenching. The centre, Mons, had often in history been the arena of war. Its record in mediæval days has at least one interesting link with our own, for it is a proud tradition of Mons that a detachment of its armed burghers fought on the English side at Crécy. Its Gothic cathedral and town hall are memorials of the time when it was one of the great free cities of Hainault. In later years it was a fortress of the northern frontier of France, and stood many sieges in the wars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The ramparts have long been levelled, and it is now an open town, the centre of the busy mining district of the Borinage. The coal-field extends from west to east, and for some miles on each side of Mons the country is not unlike one of our northern English colliery districts. There is a network of railways, many of them carried on low embankments, and among them stand the miners' villages, with the headgear of the collieries and the tall chimneys of the engine houses towering above the low-roofed cottages. Around these hamlets the accumulations of shale and waste heaps from the pits suggest at first sight ranges of hills, and the illusion is completed by the fact that some of the larger heaps have been planted with little forests of dwarf firs. To the south-west of Mons, amid a tangle of colliery lines, lies the town of Jemappes, which gave its name to Dumouriez's victory over the Austrians when the French Republicans invaded Belgium. A mile or two farther south is Marlborough's battlefield of Malplaquet.^[3]

Mons is linked with Condé by a canal running nearly due west to the Scheldt, a canal made for the coal traffic of the district in the days before railways. It was along this well-marked line that Sir John French posted the Second Corps, under the command of Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien. General Hamilton, commanding the 3rd Division, had his headquarters in Mons, and the town itself was held by the 7th Brigade—Royal Irish Rifles, Wiltshires, South Lancashires, and Worcesters. To their left was the 8th Brigade, with the Gordons and Royal Scots, the Royal Irish, and the Middlesex. The left of the division posted about St. Ghislain was made up of the battalions of the 9th Brigade—Royal Fusiliers, Northumberland Fusiliers, Royal Scots Fusiliers, and Lincolns. Farther west, along the canal, were the battalions of the 5th Division, under Sir Charles Fergusson. Its right brigade (the 13th) was made up of the Yorkshire Light Infantry, the West Kent and West Riding men, and the Scottish Borderers. Then

A detailed map of the battle area around Mons, Belgium, during the First World War. The map shows the positions of the German Army's First and Second Corps and the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). The German Second Corps is positioned to the west of Mons, with its main line of attack directed towards the town. The German First Corps is positioned to the east of Mons, with its main line of attack directed towards the town. The BEF is positioned to the south of Mons, with its main line of attack directed towards the town. The map includes a scale bar from 0 to 12 miles and labels for various locations such as Condé, Mons, Braine-la-Vieille, and others. The map also shows the main roads and railways in the area.

- 1 W. Surrey
2 S. Wales

| | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1 Lincolns | | Borderers | |
| 1 R. Scots Fusiliers | | 1 Gloucester | |
| | | 2 Welsh | |
| 2 Royal Scots | | 2 R. Sussex | |
| 2 Royal Irish | 8th Brigade. Doran. | 1 N. Lancs. | 2nd Brigade. |
| 4 Middlesex | | 1 Northampton | Bulfin. |
| 1 Gordons | | 2 K.R.R. | |
| | | | |
| 3 Worcester | | 1 Coldstream | |
| 2 S. Lancs. | 7th Brigade. McCracken. | 1 Scots Guards | 1st Brigade. |
| 1 Wiltshire | | 1 Black Watch | Maxse. |
| | | 2 Munster | |
| 2 R.I. Rifles | | Fusiliers | |

The right of the line from the eastern suburbs of Mons to the little town of Binche was held by the First Corps, under Sir Douglas Haig. He had six battalions of the Guards in his battle line. On the right of the 1st Division at Binche General Maxse's 1st Brigade included two Guards' battalions, the 1st Coldstream and the 1st Scots Guards, and two famous regiments of the line, the 1st Black Watch and the 2nd Munster Fusiliers. Taking the brigades and battalions in order from right to left, the 2nd Brigade was made up of the Royal Sussex, the North Lancashires, the Northampton, and the 2nd King's Royal Rifles; and the 3rd Brigade of the West Surreys, the South Wales Borderers, the Gloucesters, and the Welsh Regiment. On the right of the 2nd Division was the 4th Brigade, commanded by Brigadier-General Scott-Kerr,^[4] and entirely made up of Guards' battalions—the 2nd Grenadiers, the 2nd and 3rd Coldstream, and the 1st Irish Guards, a regiment that now found itself for the first time in a battle line. The two other brigades of the 2nd Division were the 5th Brigade—Worcesters, Oxford Light Infantry, Highland Light Infantry, and Connaught Rangers—and the 6th Brigade—Liverpools, South Staffords, Berkshires, and 1st King's Royal Rifles.

As the men toiled at the trenches during the long hours of the Saturday, there came from the eastward what sounded like the far-off rumbling of a thunder-storm. Some said it was the distant roar of the German guns before Namur, others that there was a battle away to the right upon the Sambre. Little definite news of what was happening seems to have reached the British line. But from an early hour on Saturday von Buelow's attack was developing against the 5th Army of three corps along the Sambre, and as the day went on there was fierce

fighting about Charleroi. Of the details of the battle we still know little. The French Staff have published no account of it, and the correspondents of the Paris papers, who described it at second-hand, confined themselves to florid tales of the fighting in the town itself. These accounts, vague as they necessarily are, show that the first shots were fired on the Friday morning by an advance body of German Hussars. On the Saturday and Sunday the place was taken and retaken several times, and there was more than once hand-to-hand fighting in the streets, in which Zouave and Turco regiments were closely engaged. Each capture and recapture of the place was followed by a withering bombardment by the batteries of the army that had temporarily lost possession of it. By the evening of Saturday the town was half in ruins, and on fire in more than one place. The river bridges at Thuin and Châtelet were in German hands, and early on the Sunday the crossing of the Sambre was won.

But the loss of the line of the Sambre by the 5th Army was not due solely to von Buelow's frontal assault. In combination with it there was delivered a serious flank attack from the right, which apparently came as a surprise to the French Staff. One of the new experiences of war is that aerial reconnaissance gives poor results over wooded country. French airmen had brought reports of German movements among the forest-clad hills of the Ardennes, east of the reach of the Meuse, where it runs north in a ravine-like hollow from Mezières by Dinant to Namur. It was known that two German armies, those of the Crown Prince and the Duke of Wurtemberg, were massed along the southern border of this forest country in Luxemburg and the Belgian Ardennes, and it was supposed that the troops seen on the move about Laroche and Ciney belonged to the Wurtemberg forces. The French were already in contact with these armies. As the 5th Army moved up to the Sambre, two other armies had pushed forward to the frontier, the 3rd, under General Ruffey, towards Luxemburg, and the 4th, under General de Langle de Cary, from the neighbourhood of Mezières and Sedan, across the little river Semois, with minor detachments on his left watching the west bank of the Meuse and linking his movements with that of General Lanrezac. But behind the German army which met the advance across the Semois, there was, as we have seen, another army massed in the Northern Ardennes, an army which seems to have been created after the date of the first German concentration. It was commanded by General von Hausen, and was made up of the 11th (Reserve), 12th, and 19th Corps, with a division of the cavalry of the Prussian Guard. The 11th is a central German corps, Hessian troops with headquarters at Cassel in time of peace. The 12th and 19th are the two corps of the kingdom of Saxony, and the Saxons have always been amongst the best of German fighting men. In 1866 they

threw in their lot with Austria, and though they shared in the defeat of Sadowa, they only abandoned their position on Benedek's left when the rest of the line had collapsed under the converging attack of the Prussian armies. Four years later they fought on the side of Prussia against France, and at Gravelotte, the decisive battle of the war, it was the Saxon corps that turned the French right, stormed St. Privat, and decided the day. Under the command of their Crown Prince, they marched in the "Army of the Meuse" to Sedan, and bore the brunt of the hard fighting in the Givonne valley in the great battle of 1st September, that ended in the surrender of MacMahon's force. Then they marched southward, and held the northern section of the German lines during the long siege of Paris. It was a record of which any army might be justly proud. The Saxons were now to add to their laurels by making the decisive movement in the battle of the Sambre.

On the Saturday morning von Hausen pushed the Hessians and one of his Saxon corps across the Meuse southward of Namur. Von Buelow already had gained a footing in the sharp angle of ground between the Sambre and the Meuse, and von Hausen's men could therefore cross in safety. Once they were over the river they set about clearing the west bank of the French detachments. The simultaneous collapse of the resistance of Namur gave the Germans a free hand, and in the late hours of the Saturday the French line along the Sambre had von Buelow's army thundering against its front, and von Hausen's two army corps pressing upon its right flank and rear and threatening its line of retreat. Under the stress of this converging attack the 5th Army gave way, and began its retirement southwards. Unfortunately, it would appear that in the confusion of retreat the French Staff work broke down, and no information of the collapse of the Sambre defence was conveyed to General French until the afternoon of the following day. He remained in position at Mons under the impression that the Allied line on his right was still holding its own, and he was thus led into fighting a battle in a most perilous position against greatly superior numbers.

Von Kluck was thus able on Sunday, the 23rd, to bring into action against the British line not only his own army, but also the right of von Buelow's victorious force. The pressure during the Sunday's battle was therefore chiefly against the British right—the First Corps, under Sir Douglas Haig. But though von Kluck's main effort was put forth in this direction, he was strong enough to attack in force all along the line. His strength, allowing for the troops detached to mask Antwerp, and the divisions sent westward towards Tournai and the sea, cannot have been less than four army corps. During the morning he was closing in towards

Aug. 23.

the British position, but he waited to begin the actual attack until von Buelow had driven the last of Lanrezac's troops well to the south of the Sambre.

In order to understand the whole situation on this Sunday morning, we must note what was happening farther to the right in the Allied line. The Crown Prince and the Duke of Wurtemberg had sharply checked the offensive of Langle and Ruffey on the Luxemburg border and in the Southern Ardennes along the Semois, and the two French armies had fallen back to hold the line of the central Meuse. Von Hausen's Saxons, after having struck at the right of the 5th Army on the Saturday, had now turned to deliver a similar flank attack against General Langle's army. When a long line like that of the Allies is broken anywhere, the result is that at the point of rupture two flanks are exposed to attack, and von Hausen's force was used to deliver alternate attacks to right and left. It was the wedge driven into the Allied line, and the decisive factor in compelling the general retreat from the frontier. On this Sunday, therefore, while the British were fighting at Mons, there was another battle along the Meuse, above and below Dinant. The 11th and 19th Corps moved down the west bank against the French detachments holding the river line; the 12th Saxon Corps attacked in front, bringing its artillery into action across the river, and in the afternoon fought its way to the western bank. By the evening the French force forming the left of General Langle's army had been driven back upon Mezières. Two French armies held the line of the river from Mezières eastward; but they had two armies facing them, and a third—von Hausen's Saxon army—across the river on their left. Mezières might have made this flank secure; but, though classed as a fortress, its defences—old forts, dating from 1875—were incapable of resisting modern artillery. The whole French position on the middle Meuse was in deadly peril.

To the westward, between Mezières and Maubeuge, the defeated 5th Army was in full retreat towards the French frontier by the Gap of Chimay. Farther still to the westward, north of the fortress of Maubeuge, Sir John French's army was in a position of dangerous isolation around Mons. It is necessary to understand this wider aspect of the military situation on the morning of 23rd August if we are to appreciate the superb performance of the British force in fighting a hopeless battle, and—in the retreat that followed—extricating itself from the persistent pursuit of overwhelming numbers.

The morning of the battle was peaceful enough in Mons and in the mining villages round it. Work had stopped at the pits for the weekly day of rest, church bells were ringing, and townsmen, miners, and peasants gathering for the morning Mass. Along the British front there

was no holiday. Everywhere working-parties were deepening the trenches and clearing the ground of obstacles that might give cover to an enemy. In the later hours of the morning there was a momentary stir of excitement as now and then a hostile aeroplane—marked by the hawk-like curves of its wings—came droning over the woods, and circled high over the British line. Here and there rose a spatter of rifle fire, as the men tried to bring down the intruder. Then a British aeroplane would shoot up to attack it, and the Taube would turn and disappear in rapid flight to the northward. But beyond such incidents, the morning and the first hours of the afternoon passed quietly enough, though the airmen and the cavalry scouts had brought in reports of masses of the enemy moving into the green woods in front of the centre, and columns on the march eastward towards Binche, and westward towards the Condé canal.

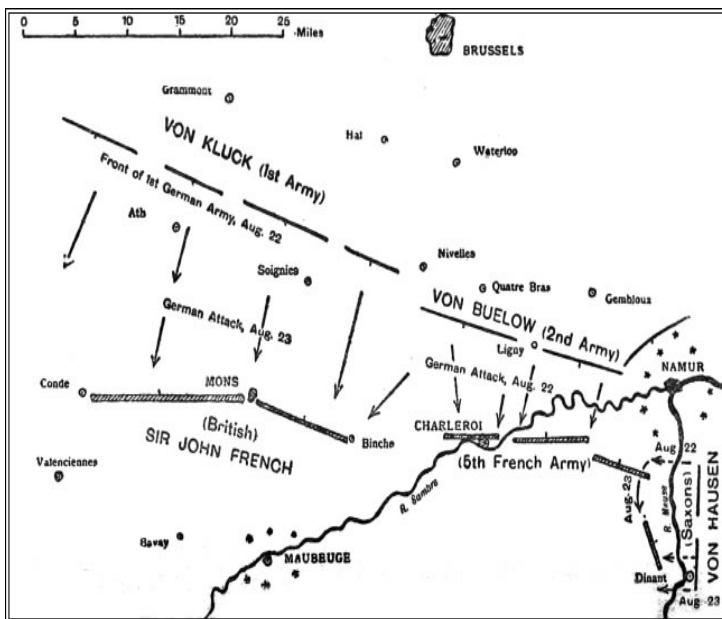
Early in the morning Sir John French had met his generals. He explained to them what he understood to be General Joffre's plan, and discussed the immediate situation. It would appear that during this conference the information available represented the situation as it had been on the Saturday morning, and that the British commander was wholly in the dark as to the change that had come over the position later in the day. In his official dispatch describing the operations of Sunday, the 23rd, Sir John carefully sets forth the estimate of the enemy's strength conveyed to him from the French headquarters, which appeared to be confirmed by his own reconnaissances. His words are:—

“From information I received from French Headquarters I understood that little more than one, or at most two, of the enemy's army corps, with perhaps one cavalry division, were in front of my positions, and I was aware of no attempted outflanking movement by the enemy. I was confirmed in this opinion by the fact that my patrols encountered no undue opposition in their reconnoitring operations. The observation of my aeroplanes seemed also to bear out this estimate.”

Against one or two army corps the entrenched position at Mons would have been absolutely secure. Relying on the information supplied by his Allies, Sir John French therefore waited with confidence for von Kluck's attack.

The first shots were fired exactly at forty minutes after noon, and the attack developed with startling rapidity. In half an hour the artillery was in action all along the front of twenty-five miles. In the

centre the German batteries were massed just outside the southern margin of the woods. In front of the British right the heaviest fire was from batteries in the undulating ground north of Bray and Binche. To the left the artillery fire was at first less severe along Smith-Dorrien's front on the line of the canal. It was the number of guns brought into action which first suggested to some of our officers that the information supplied by the French Staff had under-estimated the enemy's force. Two German army corps would have brought about three hundred and thirty-six guns into action. But at an early stage of the Mons battle it was evident that the enemy had at least five or six hundred in line. On the widely-extended front of a modern battlefield it is only by slow degrees that an enemy's numbers can be truly estimated. A man can only judge of what is happening within the narrow space of his own range of vision; and if the attack develops in unexpected force upon one part of the line, the first conclusion is that this is the place where the opposing general has massed his men for a special effort, and that elsewhere his front is correspondingly weakened. For some two hours even the Headquarters Staff did not realize that in men and guns the British were *everywhere* outnumbered.



Battle of Mons and Charleroi (Aug. 22 and 23).

At first there was that new feature of war which German writers describe as the “emptiness of the battlefield.” In former days of short-range weapons and close-order fighting, the enemy could be seen advancing or in position as clearly as one observes the ordered lines at

some ceremonial review. A battle front was bright with brilliant colours, the red and blue and gold of uniforms, the waving of banners, and the flash of steel. But now war has ceased to be a spectacle, and become a business. Sober uniforms, extended order, and the universal quest of cover hide the ordered or advancing lines, and there are no rolling clouds of smoke to reveal the position of the guns. In the opening stages of a great battle miles of front may appear destitute of men. All that the spectator can see is the long, bright flashes of heavy guns where they are placed against a dark background, and the puffs and rings of white smoke high in air, that indicate the bursting shrapnel.

So at Mons, on this summer afternoon, there was at first no sight of an enemy, but all along the front there was the swelling roar of his cannonade. Here and there one could mark the flash of the guns, but they were mostly well concealed. Batteries lurked along the forest margin, behind railway embankments and the raised towing-paths of the willow-fringed canals—behind the lines of roadside trees and the green hedgerows of farmsteads.

At first the ranging of the enemy's guns was faulty, and many of the shells burst well short of the British positions. Our men were experts in taking cover, and it was hard for the German gunners to distinguish the well-concealed infantry and artillery positions. The fire was in the first half-hour most telling against points which defined themselves, and which the German officers might safely conjecture to be held. There was a rain of shrapnel along the line of the Condé canal; shells burst over the outskirts of Mons and in the villages held by Sir Douglas Haig's brigades on the right. But presently the enemy's aviators came to his aid. Aeroplanes, like hawks, shot out over the forest, swooped and circled in air, and then, emboldened by their escape from our shrapnel, flew high over the entrenched British line, sending down here and there what at first were thought to be explosive bombs. But they fell with a trail of dark smoke marking their course, and burned in a black cloud where they lighted. Almost instantly the enemy's shrapnel found the spot thus pointed out. British aeroplanes rose from behind the position and chased them back, but again and again the intruders returned, and miraculously escaped every effort to destroy them.

In the days of the Franco-German War it was the rule that battles opened with an artillery duel, and that the infantry advance was begun only when the artillery had more or less subdued the hostile gun fire. The practice at German manœuvres during the last ten years and the teaching of the text-books showed that this rule had become obsolete. It was laid down that the infantry must be working forward from the

very outset of the fight. Our officers knew, therefore, that this storm of shell fire was the prelude to an early infantry attack. For some time there was no sign of this advance, for in its first stage the movement was most skilfully concealed. There was abundance of cover, and the German field uniform was well chosen for fighting in a green northern land like the Belgian border. Its greenish-grey melts into the background of a European landscape better than our khaki, which was a colour chosen for operations in the Sudan deserts and among the brown rocks of the Indian North-West Frontier. In the first stage of their onward march the German infantry held its fire. At more than one point its presence was revealed only when at last it brought rifles and machine guns into action, and the whistling of bullets overhead and the direction of their fall gave a clue to those who were anxiously searching the foreground with their glasses. Then our men in the trenches, who had so far been watching the artillery fight, and suffering patiently some loss from the enemy's shrapnel, at last had the relief of action.

The rifle fire began all along the front. The men shot with the cool deliberation of well-trained riflemen, confident in their weapons. There was no flurry or excitement. It was like field firing at targets at Aldershot or Salisbury Plain. And soon they had easy targets, for the German attack was pushed forward with reckless haste. It seems likely that the German leaders had over-estimated the effect of the storm of shells that their field guns and howitzers had been hurling against the British positions. The true theory of the frontal infantry attack is that it can be pushed home if the covering artillery fire is heavy and effective enough not merely to inflict a certain loss on the defence, but so to shake the *moral* of the men that they will no longer raise their heads above cover, adjust their sights, and deliver an aimed fire. But when the Germans made their first attack, the British in the trenches and along the canal had settled down fairly to their work. The first excitement of being under fire had gone. The first tremor at the sight of death and disablement had given way to that strange state of mind that soon comes to men in battle, when the horror disappears, and the brain is absorbed in a succession of tasks which become almost automatic. The special advantage of the well-trained soldier over the novice is that this mental condition comes quickly, and remains unshaken.

There were two surprises for our men. At manœuvre battles in England they had seen the "enemy" coming on in thin and widely-extended firing lines. But here was the real enemy advancing in dense masses, and affording the easiest of targets. The second surprise was to find that the blaze of fire from the German front did comparatively

little harm. Thousands of bullets whistled overhead with a rising roar like a winter's gale, but few found a mark. Soldiers' letters describing the German infantry attack at Mons were full of such expressions as, "They came on in bunches," "It was like a football crowd on cup day," "One could not miss them, they were so packed together," "They could not shoot for nuts," "They could not hit a haystack."

Any one who has seen German troops at manœuvres will readily understand what happened. Though the drill book of the Kaiser's army laid it down that the firing lines were to be in extended order, for years it had been the custom to form shoulder to shoulder for attack. This practice was based on the teaching of Meckel,^[5] that the loss thus incurred was compensated for by the greater volume obtained by putting every possible rifle into the firing line at the earliest stage of the attack. At Mons the infantry had advanced for some distance without incurring any serious loss. They were reaching decisive ranges; some of them were within five or six hundred yards of the British positions, and there must have been among the officers an impression that their immunity was due to their artillery having beaten down the fire of the defence. But they had escaped so far because they had worked forward under cover, in ground where their uniforms made it hard to distinguish them. As they broke from cover and attempted the final advance to close quarters, they were met by an unexpected storm of well-directed fire. Rifles and maxim guns came into action, and battery after battery, neglecting more distant targets, sent showers of shrapnel over the grey lines. Under this hurricane of fire the shooting of the German infantry went to pieces, and even under less difficult conditions they had no easy targets in the well-entrenched infantry before them. Small wonder that our first impression was that, however dangerous the big German guns might be, the German rifle fire was little to be feared.

But through the rain of bullets the enemy struggled on. One line would go down in death, but the supports came up through its broken ranks. Here and there line packed and crowded on line in the desperate effort to push through. There were places where it seemed that this reckless advance might be crowned with success. The Germans were closing on the trenches when a burst of magazine fire from the British mowed them down, and then, with a cheer, our men dashed forward with the bayonet, and the hard-trying enemy broke and bolted for cover, with our pursuing quick-firers and maxims strewing the line of retreat with their dead and wounded.

But the first attack had no sooner died away than the grey lines were seen again advancing, wave after wave. Von Kluck had the advantage of superior numbers. He could afford to waste life freely in

the effort to wear down the defence. Like Grant in his battles with Lee, he used his masses as mere “food for powder.” Along the line of the canal towards Condé the assault was at first intended only to keep Smith-Dorrien’s men occupied, and prevent reinforcements being sent to the right. There were attacks all day against the bridges, and at these points the fighting was sharp. In the earlier stage of the battle the bridges were simply defended against the German attacks, and were kept intact, that they might be used for a possible advance across the canal. But later, when the enemy’s overwhelming superiority in numbers was apparent, all troops were withdrawn to the south side, and bridge after bridge was blown up in the face of the enemy. Here it was that the Victoria Cross was won by Captain Theodore Wright of the Royal Engineers, who fell three weeks later at Vailly. He had been wounded in the head while preparing a bridge for destruction, but he stuck to his work, and when the first fuse failed he went forward again under a heavy fire, set another fuse, and this time succeeded. The same honour was awarded to another officer, who did not survive to receive it. On the canal to the east of St. Ghislain the 4th Royal Fusiliers held the approaches to a bridge. Lieutenant Maurice Dease, the commander of the machine-gun section, though several times hit, refused to leave his guns, and kept them in action till all his men had been killed and wounded. He died later of his wounds. Private Godley, of the same regiment, also received the Victoria Cross. For two hours, though badly wounded, he fought his machine gun under a hot fire.

But during the first stage of the battle the main German effort was directed against the British right. Here von Buelow’s success, and the retirement of the French, had left the extreme flank exposed to an enveloping movement. Von Kluck preluded it by a heavy bombardment of Binche and Bray, followed by a converging attack on the former point. Here it was the overwhelming fire of the German guns that told most upon the defence. Chetwode’s cavalry brigade, which had been guarding the flank, had to be withdrawn. The enemy attacked Binche in front and flank, and the place was abandoned, Sir Douglas Haig drawing in his right, and slowly falling back to a long swell of ground south of the village of Bray. This partial withdrawal of the right altered the general direction of the line, and made Mons the salient of an angle at which the fronts of the First and Second Corps met. This rendered the position of General Hubert Hamilton’s division, which held the town, something more than difficult. Exposed to converging attacks from front and flanks, he was in some peril of being cut off if the enemy broke through the line in the suburbs on either side. Sir John French therefore directed him “to be careful not to keep the troops in this salient too long, but, if threatened seriously, to draw back the centre behind Mons.”

Sir John had hardly dispatched the message when he received a telegram from the French Generalissimo that completely altered his view of the situation. In his dispatch he describes it as “a most unexpected message.” It was news that should certainly have been communicated to him hours before, so far, at least, as concerned its report of the fate of General Lanrezac’s army. General Joffre’s message announced that on the previous day the Germans “had gained possession of the passages of the Sambre between Namur and Charleroi,” and that the French army was in full retreat; that not less than three German army corps were attacking the British front; that another was making a wide turning movement round the left by Tournai. This meant that at least 150,000 of the enemy were attacking the Mons position. It seems all but certain that the numbers were even greater, and that Sir John, with his 70,000 or at most 80,000 men, had 200,000 Germans in his immediate front; a victorious army pushing forward past his right flank in pursuit of the French; and 40,000 or 50,000 more of the enemy sweeping round his left.

Sir John French at once realized that though his little army might hold its own for a time against desperate odds, a prolonged defence of the Mons position would involve the ultimate certainty of being cut off, enveloped, and destroyed. The only course open to him was to hold on until nightfall ended the attacks of the enemy, to give his wearied men a brief rest, and begin a fighting retreat southwards at daybreak next morning. Like a prudent commander, he had already reconnoitred and selected a position to be held in the first stage of retirement, should that be found necessary. Orders were issued for the heavy transport trains of the army to clear the roads, and move back past the new position some miles to the southward. Meanwhile all along the line our troops met the renewed attacks of the enemy with the same stubborn courage. In this final stage of the fight the only ground lost was in the centre. Mons was becoming untenable under the terrific storm of shell fire poured upon it from massed batteries along the forest margin to the northwards, and the position was further endangered by German attacks pushed into the western suburbs between the city and the line of the Condé canal. In obedience to Sir John French’s directions, General Hamilton therefore fell back to the south of the city. Away to the eastward Sir Douglas Haig’s brigades of the First Corps were holding their own. Westward along the canal, between St. Ghislain and Condé, the Germans were losing heavily in a desperate effort to force a crossing; but nearer Mons they had pushed south through the suburbs. Here the Irish Rifles and the Middlesex Regiment suffered heavily. They were temporarily cut off, and suffered severe loss, but extricated themselves with the assistance of the Gordon Highlanders as the twilight deepened into night. In this

last stage of the fight another Victoria Cross was won by Lance-Corporal Jarvis of the Royal Engineers. He worked for over an hour in full view of the enemy under a heavy fire to destroy a bridge at Jemappes, and finally blew it up in the face of the oncoming Germans.

As darkness fell the red glare of burning villages fired by shells lit up the sky. The cannonade had gradually died away, but here and there along the front there was an occasional outburst of rifle fire, for at many places Germans and British had halted in close contact. Orders had been issued for the retirement. Indeed, it was already beginning. But the men felt that it was not a lost battle. Most of the line stood on the very ground it had held at dawn on the Sunday morning. Though exposed to a terrible fire of artillery, the troops had not suffered any very heavy losses. Most of them had no idea a retreat was imminent. They lay down where they stood when the fight ended, in expectation that the battle would be renewed on the same ground at dawn.

It was the collapse of the French battle line to the eastward, along the Sambre and the Meuse, that made the British retirement inevitable. On the morning of June 17, 1815, when Wellington at Quatre Bras heard the news of Ligny, he said to his staff, "Bluecher has had a d——d good hiding, and we must go. I suppose they will say in England that we have been beaten, but that can't be helped." Sir John French "had to go" because Lanrezac and Langle and Ruffey had suffered Bluecher's fate. Almost on the same battle-ground the same history was repeated. It remained to be seen whether this new Ligny would be the prelude to a second Waterloo.

CHAPTER X.

THE BEGINNING OF THE RETREAT.

Battle of Mons, 24th August—Smith-Dorrien's Stand—Charge of the 9th Lancers—British reach Maubeuge—French Defeat at Tournai—Retirement of British Army continued—Night Battle at Landrecies—Smith-Dorrien's Stand at Le Cateau—Gallantry of British Gunners—Retreat to St. Quentin—Behaviour of the Retiring Troops.

At five o'clock on Sunday afternoon Sir John French received General Joffre's message. Presently he obtained confirmation of its statement as to the huge concentration of the enemy from the reports of his aeroplane scouts, and the first orders for the retreat were prepared. The movement was fixed for daybreak on Monday. The position to which the retirement was directed is thus described by Sir John in his dispatches:—

“It rested on the fortress of Maubeuge on the right, and extended west to Jenlain, south-west of Valenciennes, on the left. The position was reported difficult to hold, because standing crops and buildings made the siting of trenches very difficult, and limited the field of fire in many important localities. It nevertheless afforded a few good artillery positions.”

But the first stages of the retirement began on the Sunday evening. All heavy transport was sent to the rear to clear the roads, and a little later the ambulances began to move off, carrying with them as many of the wounded as they could accommodate. The sight of the retiring columns at once conveyed a melancholy warning to the local inhabitants. For three days they had seen the British force moving northward, and had welcomed them as deliverers. At every town, village, and farmstead the people had lavished little kindnesses upon our men. Now, as they saw the transport columns and ambulances

streaming back towards France, the rumour spread that the battle of which they had heard the thunder through the afternoon had ended in disaster. With legends of German cruelty in their minds, the country folk fled from their houses, and the marching columns were encumbered by crowds of fugitives.

Though the general order was that the troops were to march at sunrise, more than one regiment received instructions towards midnight to begin to move. They had settled down to sleep in the trenches, and when the night march started many did not realize that they were moving back towards France. The Germans were close in front of the line, and some small British detachments missed their way, wandered to the enemy's outposts, and were taken prisoners. In the grey dawn of Monday morning, 24th August, the whole British force stood to arms. In order to carry out his retirement in the face of a superior enemy, who would not hesitate to press the retreat, Sir John French had determined to show a bold front. The first German advance was likely to be upon the right, where the First Corps had been hard pressed during the Sunday's battle, and forced to yield some ground. French's plan was to check the Germans on this side by the menace of a counter-attack. While this was in progress, Smith-Dorrien's Second Corps was to fall back some distance from the canal, and then halt during the morning and form a battle-line, behind which the First Corps would retire to the new position. When it was well upon its way the Second Corps would, in its turn, retreat, and form upon its left. A useful reinforcement was, happily, available. The 19th Infantry Brigade,^[6] hitherto on the line of communications, had been brought up during the Sunday by railway to Valenciennes, and early on the Monday morning it marched out to join Smith-Dorrien's command.

Aug. 24.

Thus, in the first hours of the Monday morning, the 1st Division, under General Lomax, supported by all of Haig's batteries—more than one hundred and twenty guns—had the inspiring experience of moving forward against the enemy, who were holding the ground along the Mons road eastward to Bray and Binche. The attack must have come as a surprise to the enemy, and probably suggested to him that the British had been strongly reinforced, and were about to resume the offensive. The main movement was in the direction of Binche, and the heavy fire of our artillery completely checked any German advance against our right. But the attack having served its purpose, was not pressed home. The 2nd Division of the First Corps was by this time well on its way southward, and the 1st began in its turn to retire, acting for the rest of the morning as a rear-guard to the

British right, and, with its powerful artillery, checking any attempt of the enemy to hinder the movement.

Whilst the 1st Division was in action in the early morning, Smith-Dorrien had fallen back some five miles from the line of the Condé canal. He there joined hands with the 19th Brigade, and formed a new battle-line with his right at the mining village of Frameries, and his left among the standing corn round the hamlet of Quarouble, near Valenciennes. It was a good defensive position. Along the right a colliery line on a low embankment formed a ready-made rampart, and the open ground all along the front gave a clear field of fire. Von Kluck's troops, moving across the canal, and pushing southward in pursuit, were unexpectedly brought to a standstill. Smith-Dorrien's task was now to hold for a while an enemy who was being rapidly reinforced, and repel the first attacks; to maintain his ground until the British right was well on its way to the Maubeuge position; to remain just as long as his own retirement was not in danger; and, finally, to break off the fight at the most favourable moment, and fall back to the ground assigned to him between Bavai and Jenlain, showing a bold front during the whole of this rearward movement, and striking back at every attempt of the enemy to interrupt it. There is no operation so difficult as a fighting retreat of this kind in the face of superior numbers. It requires the coolest judgment on the part of the commander, and the utmost steadiness on the part of the men, for at any moment a mistake may give the enemy the chance of using his superior numbers to turn the retirement into a rout. Smith-Dorrien's ability to conduct this most delicate and trying operation was proved repeatedly during the long southward retreat.

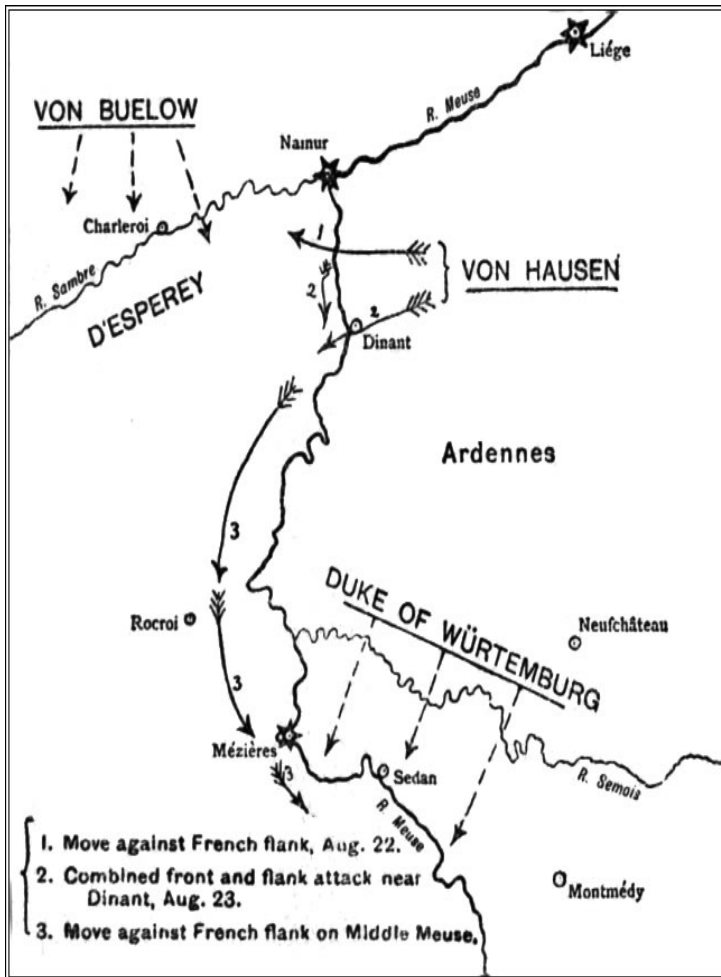
The only reserve that Sir John French had at his disposal was General Allenby's cavalry division. Shortly after 7 a.m. Sir Charles Fergusson, who was holding Frameries with the right of the 5th Division, sent word to Allenby that he was hard pressed and in urgent need of support. The Germans were endeavouring to work round his flank between Frameries and Mons. Allenby brought up his cavalry to the menaced point, and for a little their intervention checked the danger on the flank. The first of the cavalry to go into action were the three regiments of the 2nd Brigade, under General De Lisle—the 4th Dragoon Guards, the 9th Lancers, and the 18th Hussars. They began by a dismounted action with the enemy's infantry at a range of over a thousand yards, close to the village of Andregnies. Then De Lisle ordered the 9th Lancers, with the other regiments as supports, to charge the flank of the advancing masses.

The charge of the 9th Lancers was as futile and as gallant as the other like attempts in history on unbroken infantry and guns in

position. To the opposing armies it proved that the spirit which had inspired the Light Brigade at Balaclava, and von Bredow's *Todtenritt* at Mars la Tour, was still alive in the cavalry of to-day. The ground had been poorly reconnoitred, and the Lancers found themselves brought up against double lines of wire within five hundred yards of the enemy. "We simply galloped like rabbits in front of a line of guns," ran one account, "men and horses falling in all directions." There was no question of reaching the enemy; the tornado of shell and rifle fire was too fierce and incessant. A moment's shelter was found behind a house, but the house was speedily blown to pieces. The remnant of the regiment finally took refuge in the lee of a light-railway embankment. Captain Francis Grenfell, who had kept his squadron together by giving the order to trot, found himself the senior officer in command. In the shelter of the embankment was a battery commandant and some dozen gunners, whose battery—the 119th of the Royal Field Artillery—had been put out of action by the German shells with the loss of most of its men. Captain Grenfell, though severely wounded by shrapnel in the hand and leg, determined to save the guns, and rode out to see if there was an exit for them in the direction of the British main position. Beyond the derelict guns he discovered a way of retreat, and was compelled to return at a walking pace through an inferno of shot and shell, that the risk might be minimized in the eyes of his men. Once under the embankment again, he called for volunteers from the Lancers, and reminded them that the 9th had saved a battery at Maiwand, and in South Africa had never failed the gunners. Every man responded to the call. Leaving their horses behind them, the Lancers and the survivors of the battery went forward and man-handled the guns into safety, pushing them over the dead drivers. More than one journey had to be made under a merciless fire, and when the last gun was out of the range of the German shells the German infantry was almost upon them. For this deed Captain Grenfell received the Victoria Cross.

Towards midday Smith-Dorrien began his retirement. By this time he was being attacked by two German corps in front and another on his flank, and must have been outnumbered by not less than three to one. But he had held on long enough to secure the retreat of the First Corps, and the time had come for his own withdrawal. Allenby's mounted division successfully protected the endangered flanks. Early in the afternoon the whole British force, still intact and in good heart, was reassembled on the Maubeuge position. The First Corps held the ground from Maubeuge to the little town of Bavai; thence the Second Corps prolonged the line westward to the village of Bry, with the fresh troops of the 19th Brigade on its flank between Bry and Jenlain. The fortress of Maubeuge, on the Sambre, made the right of our line

relatively safe. The left was now the exposed flank, and Allenby's cavalry were sent to the rear of Jenlain, to guard against a possible turning movement.



Sketch Map showing the general direction of the Flank Attacks of the Saxon army on the Sambre and Meuse.

Von Hausen adopted the strategy which in this campaign has proved most effective—a piercing movement against the enemy's front, followed up by attacks upon the exposed flanks so created. On August 23rd-24th he was engaged both with Lanrezac's right and Langle's left wing, and his success drove Lanrezac south-west, while his assault upon Langle, combined with the frontal attack by the Duke of Wurtemberg, completely dislodged the 4th French Army from the line of the Meuse. This strategy was used by Foch at the battle of the Marne, and by Ruzsky at Lemberg.

The position thus occupied had been selected with a view to fighting a general engagement, provided the whole position warranted

a British stand. Had the 5th Army on Sir John French's right been able to prolong the line eastwards beyond Maubeuge, there might have been a second battle. At the time in Britain the newspapers spoke of a stand along the French frontier supported by the fortresses, and it would seem that the first plan formed by the French Staff included a project for offering battle on that line. Now it had become impossible. The 5th Army was in full retreat southward, protected by its cavalry. The German armies were already on French soil from Maubeuge to Mezières. To the left of the British position the enemy had crossed the frontier. The 2nd German Army Corps, which had been reported by General Joffre on the Sunday afternoon to be pushed out on von Kluck's right in a turning movement, had fiercely attacked Tournai on the Monday. The town was defended by a French Territorial Brigade, under the Marquis de Villaret, which tried to hold it by street fighting. The result had been disastrous, for the Germans cut off its retreat by sending a brigade into the southern suburbs, and the whole of the force was captured. On the same day a British battery, which, with a small escort, had moved out towards Tournai—for what purpose has never been explained—was attacked by the Germans, and after a gallant fight, in which most of the guns were disabled, the battery was captured. Von Kluck was thus master of the country to the left of the British position, and could use his superiority of force to outflank the British line, roll it up from the left, and drive it back under the protection of the Maubeuge forts. Von Buelow held, or would soon hold, all the country to the eastward. The experience of many wars proves that an army which once allows itself to be shut up in a fortress is doomed, and this was the fate which Sir John French would have risked if, isolated as he was, he had fought a battle on the Maubeuge-Jenlain position.

On the Monday evening, he therefore gave orders for the retirement to be continued at 5 a.m. next morning to a new position about the town of Le Cateau,^[7] east of Cambrai. It was believed that the enemy's pursuit was becoming exhausted, and that the movement next day could be made with little risk of German interruption. The men expected that they would await the enemy on the Tuesday morning on the Maubeuge position. Some of the battalions had even begun to entrench their front, and there was something like disappointment when they learned that the march to the southward was to continue. One of the army chaplains notes in his diary of the retreat that early in the morning Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien rode up to the ambulance to which he was attached, and stayed for a few minutes, exchanging cheerful words with officers and men. As he rode away, one of the latter said, "Things can't be bad, or the General would be looking more glum than that."

Tuesday was a summer's day of intense and glaring heat, and the wearied troops found the long march in the dust a trying business. The First Corps marched by the roads to the east of the great forest of Mormal, the Second Corps to the west of it. Allenby's cavalry covered the movement, and had some skirmishes with Uhlans, but the Germans made no serious attempt to break through the covering force. A good impression of the day's march is given in the diary from which we have already quoted, the journal of the retreat kept by the Rev. O. S. Watkins, a chaplain attached to the ambulance of the 13th Brigade. In the early morning the ambulance was halted for a while beside the road, waiting to find a place in the marching column of the 5th Division:—

Aug. 25.

“Horses and men, transport and guns, an endless procession they passed, blackened with grime, bearing evident signs of the past few days of fighting. But the men were in good spirits. They were retreating, but this was not a defeated army. ‘Wait till we get to a position we can hold, and then we’ll give them socks,’ was the sort of thing one heard from the ranks as they passed. It was simply glorious country through which we marched—the forest of Mormal, picturesque villages, quaint old farmhouses, and village churches dating from the twelfth century, and everywhere the roads lined with fine avenues of trees—sometimes tall poplars, and, at other times, apple and plum trees laden with fruit. But the country was deserted, crops standing in the fields, the villages empty, the houses locked and barricaded.”

The news of the retreat had preceded the army. It had come with exaggerated tales of utter disaster, and warnings that the dreaded Uhlans would soon be sweeping the land, and the people had fled.

The halt at the end of the day's march was to be on a line running south of the forest from Maroilles to Landrecies, and then by Le Cateau towards Cambrai. The 4th Division^[8] of the Third Corps, under the command of General Snow, had reached Le Cateau in the morning by train, a useful reinforcement of eleven battalions and three batteries. The division had been ordered to take up a position with its right south of Solesmes, and its left towards Cambrai, to protect the flank of the general retirement. Early as the start had been, it was late in the afternoon when the first of the troops from the north reached their positions on the new line, and night had fallen before the last of

them came in. The 1st Division halted about Maroilles, and the 2nd in and around Landrecies. There was a gap between its left and the right of Smith-Dorrien's line at Le Cateau, and in his dispatch Sir John French says that he originally intended to bring the left of the First Corps farther west, so as to fill this gap. But he adds that "the men were exhausted, and could not get farther in without rest."

Tired as they were, the battalions that first arrived had done something to entrench their front. Then they had supper, and lay down to sleep behind the outpost line, hoping for a quiet night. At nine o'clock all was peaceful along the front of the Second Corps, but on the right the men of the First Corps, who had got in later, were still busy settling down in their billets, or in the bivouacs in the fields. Half an hour later came a sudden alarm. From the right of the line there rose through the darkness first the rattle of rifles and then the roar of heavy guns. The Germans were advancing in force on Maroilles and Landrecies.

It was a dark night, with a cloudy sky and a drizzle of rain that presently changed to a downpour. Behind their cavalry screen the enemy had followed up the retirement of the British right. Their vanguard was the 9th Corps, the men of Northern Germany, from the coast lands around Hamburg and Bremen, and the flats of Schleswig-Holstein, the corps which in the 1870 war, under von Mannstein, had engaged the French centre on the great day of Gravelotte. They had marched, during the afternoon and the first hours of the evening, through the woodland roads of the forest of Mormal, which concealed their route from our aviators, and spared the men the fatigue of moving by the sun-baked highroads of the open country. They were fairly fresh after their long march when they formed for the attack along the forest margin which lies close upon the outskirts of the town. Shortly before ten o'clock, without firing a shot, they pushed forward in heavy columns through the rain and darkness, confident that our wearied men, surprised and embarrassed, would never stand against them.

Landrecies was held by the 4th British Brigade, under Brigadier-General Scott-Kerr—the 2nd Grenadiers, the 2nd and 3rd Coldstream, and the 1st Irish Guards. The outpost line on the northern edge of the town had just taken up position, but no patrols had yet gone to the front. Suddenly out of the shadows of the forest, veiled by the rain and darkness, the German columns advanced with a rush. A spatter of rifle fire from the pickets gave the alarm, but the thin line was swept away, and while our Guardsmen in the town were rushing to arms, a dense mass of the enemy was pouring into the main streets. It was one of the most critical moments of the campaign, but the splendid discipline of

our men saved the situation. In the main street the German column found its advance checked by fire from the front and from the houses. They tried to push on, and then a section of Maxim guns opened upon them, and tore a line of dead and wounded through their ranks.

They fell back, rallied, and came on again, while other columns tried to work through the side streets and round the town. Everywhere they found their way disputed. Officers and men, each group acting on its own initiative, improvised a defence at all points, and in many places the British Guards and the Germans crossed bayonets in hand-to-hand fight. German batteries pushed close up to the town, and threw shells into it, and soon burning houses gave light to the combatants, who till now had been fighting in bewildering darkness. The enemy's guns were so near that at one point a party of our men, driving the Germans before them, came under the fire of six guns at a range of less than two hundred yards.

The columns that had been hurled against Landrecies were no more than the vanguard of the German attack. There the enemy had hoped to break through, and had brought masses of men and guns to right and left of the town to follow up what they hoped would be an instant success. These were now coming into action, and the battle developed in the darkness along some miles of front. Sir John French had ridden towards the firing, when he received a message from Sir Douglas Haig, telling him that the 1st Division was also heavily engaged about Maroilles. Happily, he was able, for the first time during the retreat, to obtain some help from the French. Away to the eastward of Maroilles, two reserve divisions belonging to the 5th Army were in bivouac, and the British commander sent them an earnest request to move up and protect his right. The time seemed endless before the sound of firing beyond Maroilles told that they were coming into action.

Meanwhile at Landrecies the Guards held their own among bursting shells and burning houses, and gradually beat off the German assault, while Haig successfully held the long line towards Maroilles. It was after midnight when the Germans at last realized that their surprise attack had failed, and the firing gradually died away along the front. They had paid dearly for their enterprise. In the main street of Landrecies alone there were nearly a thousand of their dead and wounded, and one Jaeger battalion had almost ceased to be.

Long after the last shot had been fired our men still stood to their arms, expecting that at any moment the onset would be renewed. When it was plain that the night battle had definitely ended they lay down where they stood to snatch a brief rest. Before dawn came the order to prepare to march. The men of the First Corps, after two days

of hard fighting, the long march on the Tuesday, and the midnight engagement that followed, were too utterly exhausted to be placed in the fighting line. It was decided that during the Wednesday they should continue the movement to the southward, while Smith-Dorrien with the Second Corps, Snow's division of the Third Corps, and Allenby's cavalry, should follow the retirement and hold back the German pursuit.

This plan proved impossible. Instead of the left of our army continuing the retreat in the early hours of Wednesday, the 26th, Smith-Dorrien had to fight one of the most fiercely contested battles in our history. The night attack on Landrecies was only part of the German plan for the destruction of the British force. Tasking their men to the uttermost, they had marched four corps during the night through the tract of country between the west side of the forest of Mormal and the road from Valenciennes to Cambrai. These were in position before dawn along Smith-Dorrien's front.

The rain of the night had ceased, and a fine summer morning dawned. Bright sunlight, a pale-blue sky, and the thin mists rising from the wet fields gave promise of a sultry day. As the sun rose, the flashes of the German guns tore through the haze, and the first light showed the grey masses of the enemy's infantry pushing forward in dense firing lines. Behind the infantry some six hundred guns were in action on a front of about twelve miles. Smith-Dorrien had been ordered to begin his retirement at daybreak; but he now sent word to his chief that it would be impossible to move as ordered until he had beaten off the enemy's attack. In reply, he was instructed to break off the action and retire at the earliest moment possible, and Sir John French added that he could not send him any support, "the First Corps being at the moment incapable of movement," beyond the slow retreat to the southward.

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At this crisis Sir John endeavoured to obtain some help from the French. In the fighting at Mons a French cavalry corps of three divisions, under General Sordet, had been posted a few miles in the rear of the British right. During the night after the battle Sir John French had visited Sordet, and "earnestly asked for his co-operation and support." The latter promised to ask his army commander for leave to assist in protecting the flank of the British retirement, but added that his horses were too tired to move before next day. Nothing was seen of Sordet's cavalry divisions until the morning of the battle of Le Cateau. They had, apparently, followed the retirement of Lanrezac's army during the Monday and Tuesday. On the Wednesday, early in the day, they came up on the rear of the British. But a second request for help produced no result. "I sent an urgent message to him,"

writes Sir John French, “to do his utmost to come up and support the retirement of our left flank; but, owing to the fatigue of his horses, he found himself unable to intervene in any way.”

Smith-Dorrien’s men had had little time to entrench their position. Along the front line shelter trenches had been hastily dug, and afforded some small cover. The British artillery, though outmatched by at least four to one, made a superb stand, and during eight hours the infantry not only held their ground but made frequent counter-attacks on the enemy, Allenby’s cavalry assisting them by more than one gallant charge. The Germans made repeated attacks, the most dangerous being those directed against our left, on which they had concentrated about half their available force. The ground here was held by Snow’s division, with the cavalry to its left rear, to guard against a turning movement. Once the enemy’s horsemen—the cavalry of the Prussian Guard—actually rode into the British line. Closing up under the cover of their firing lines, they rode at our left, and along the greater part of the threatened front were driven back by our fire. But at one point the German horse broke into the firing line of the 4th Division, and were only expelled after a fierce struggle at close quarters. An eye-witness tells how there was “a desperate bout of hand-to-hand fighting, men and horses mixed up together in a seething, compact mass.” Another onset of the enemy’s horse was repulsed by a charge of the 5th Cavalry Brigade under Chetwode—the Scots Greys, 12th Lancers, and 20th Hussars. The British cavalry in such charges usually went through the enemy, as one officer reported, “like blotting-paper.” The explanation of our superiority seems to be found in the fact that our men were set on getting through their opponents, as a rider in the hunting-field “flings his heart over” a stiff fence. The Germans were big fellows, well mounted, and they entered on a charge at a tremendous pace. But before they came to the shock they seemed unconsciously to “take a pull” on their horses and to slacken, with the result that they were helpless before our impact.

Smith-Dorrien had no reserves available. He could only strengthen a threatened point of his line by taking the risk of weakening another part of it. The gunners had the heaviest task of all. Opposed to four times their number of guns, their losses in men and horses were appalling. In one battery, towards the end of the fight, only a lieutenant and one gunner remained, but they still contrived to keep a single gun in action. Several pieces were disabled by the heavy shells of the German field howitzers. Wheels and gun carriages were so smashed to atoms that they had to be left on the ground.

Von Kluck in the first part of the battle had attempted to break the British stand by a series of frontal attacks, combined with a turning

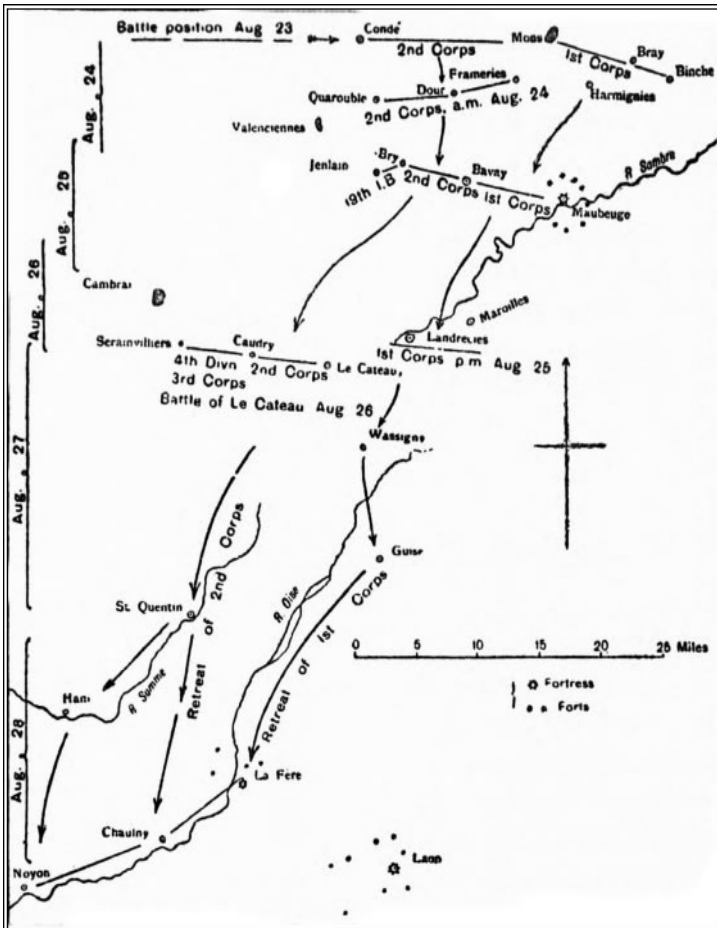
movement against our left. As the day wore on he began to use his superior numbers in a great enveloping movement on both flanks, and some of his batteries secured positions from which they could enfilade our line. How great the peril was is shown by the words Sir John French uses to describe the close of the battle. "It became apparent," he says, "that if complete annihilation was to be avoided, a retirement must be attempted, and the order was given to commence it about 3.30 p.m." The movement was covered by the artillery with the most devoted courage, and at this stage of the fight their heaviest losses were incurred. Here Captain Douglas Reynolds and Drivers Drain and Luke of the 37th Battery, R.F.A., won the Victoria Cross. Allenby's cavalry brigades were flung against the enemy to mask the slow retirement of the batteries. Happily, the German attack seemed to exhaust itself in this final fight with our rearguards, and the pursuit was slackly pressed. So in the late hours of the afternoon Smith-Dorrien was able to withdraw what was left of his three divisions, and the retreat began, which lasted all through the August night. Sir Charles Fergusson's 5th Division seems to have been the last to move, and the second battalion of the Yorkshire Light Infantry suffered terribly. Major C. A. L. Yate, when all the officers of his company had fallen, led nineteen survivors in a desperate charge, and Lance-Corporal Holmes of the same regiment showed the highest gallantry in saving life under fire. Both received the Victoria Cross, but Major Yate was taken prisoner, and died in Germany.

For the services rendered by the commander of the Second Corps at Le Cateau no praise can be too high. Sir John French wrote in his dispatch:—

"I say without hesitation that the saving of the left wing of the army under my command on the morning of August 26th could never have been accomplished unless a commander of rare and unusual coolness, intrepidity, and determination had been present to personally conduct the operation."

The official dispatch tells simply that "the retreat was continued far into the night of the 26th," but the narratives of some of those who took part in it show that it was no less trying an experience than the battle itself. It was pitch dark, and guns, transport, and infantry were hopelessly confused in the narrow roads, for efficient Staff work was impossible. Thus, of the march of the 5th Division we are told how they were first informed that they were to push on as far as the village of Estrées, and bivouac there. The men were tired even at the start, but they marched steadily. "There was never a halt nor a pause, though

horses dropped between the shafts, and men sat down exhausted by the roadside. A heavy gun overturned in a ditch, but it was impossible to stay and get it out, so it was rendered useless, and the disconsolate gunners trekked on. When the horses could draw their loads no longer, the loads were cast by the roadside. There could be no delay, for the spent and weary infantry were fighting in our rear, and every moment's delay had to be paid for in human lives."



The British retreat from Mons to the Oise (Aug. 23-28).

The worst of the retreat was over by the evening of the 28th, when the Second Corps was on the Somme. From the 28th to the 30th, when the British army reached the Aisne, the pursuit was slack. By this time it had French cavalry on its right rear and a new French army on its left flank. Heavy fighting began again on the 1st of September south of Compiègne.

"Darkness fell" (continues the narrator), "and still we marched. I dozed in the saddle, to waken with a start, but still nothing but the

creak and rumble of wagons and guns, and the tramp, tramp, tramp of the men. I cannot give a connected account of that night. The overpowering desire for sleep, the weariness and ache of every fibre, and the thirst! I had forgotten to be hungry, and had got past food, but I thirsted as I have only thirsted once before, and that was in the desert near Khartum. About midnight we reached Estrées, and I asked the Staff officer where the 14th Field Ambulance was camped. 'Camped!' he exclaimed, 'nobody camps here. Orders are changed, and there must be no halt.'"

The column pushed on, but the writer whom we have quoted tells how, after a while, he found it impossible to ride farther, and, sitting with another officer by the roadside, holding the bridles of their horses, slept for a little. Then he continues: "In two hours we wakened. Dawn was just breaking over the hills, and still the column creaked and groaned its way along the road, more asleep than awake, but still moving—a wonderful triumph of will over human frailty. But at how great a cost to nerves and vitality was revealed by one look at the faces of the men. I was noticing how worn and gaunt my companion looked. But the same thought was in his mind, and he said, 'Isn't it wonderful how this kind of thing tells upon a man! You look as though you were just up from a serious illness, and only three days ago you looked as hard as nails.'"

We may quote from the same writer a striking instance of the discipline and self-denial of the men. "Soon after sunrise," he says, "we came up with two of our ambulance wagons, and one of our filter water-carts. The wounded were in such a state of exhaustion with the long trek and the awful jolting of the wagons that Major Fawcett decided to halt and make some beef-tea for them, and rode on ahead to find some farm where water could be boiled. He had hardly gone when a battalion of exhausted infantry came up, and as soon as they saw the water-carts made a dash for them. Hastily I rode up to them, and told them that there was very little water left in the carts, and that it was needed for their wounded comrades. 'I am thirsty myself,' I said, 'and I am awfully sorry for you chaps, but you see how it is; the wounded must come first.' 'Quite right, sir,' was the ready response; 'didn't know it was a hospital water-cart.' And, without a murmur, they went thirsty on their way."

During the night the Germans had pressed closely on the rear of the retiring columns, and had secured numbers of stragglers and some small detachments which had missed their way. They made one important capture. After dark the 1st Gordons became separated from the 8th Brigade, and by some mischance took the wrong direction. Between one and two o'clock in the morning they were marching

down a narrow lane, when they were suddenly fired on from the left. There was a halt, on the outskirts of Bertry, they fell in with a very large force of the enemy. They attempted to cut their way through, and there was a hand-to-hand combat of nearly an hour. The gallant effort failed. Many of the men fell under a rapid fire at close quarters from the front and flanks, and by four o'clock in the morning all were killed, wounded, or prisoners.

Through the long night the British army had been marching over the belt of low upland in which the streams of Scheldt and Sambre take their rise. On the morning of Thursday, 27th August, it came to a halt at last just north of St. Quentin, where the land begins to fall to the green and smiling valley of the Oise. Here for a moment we leave it, to see what was happening elsewhere on the northern frontiers of France.

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CHAPTER XI.

FROM ST. QUENTIN TO THE MARNE.

Siege and Fall of Maubeuge—German Movement on Extreme Right—Fate of French 3rd and 4th Armies—Fighting in North-West France—Fall of Lille and Amiens—Battle of Bapaume—British Army changes its Base—Continuation of Sir John French's Retreat—Cavalry Successes—Position of Allied Armies—The Defence of Paris—The *Falaises de Champagne*—French retire from Rethel—British cross the Aisne and Marne—The Fighting at Compiègne—"L" Battery—The Nature of the Retreat.

During the fighting of 24th August the fortress of Maubeuge had been the support of the British right, and on our retirement southwards to the Cambrai-Le Cateau line the Germans began its investment. Maubeuge was one of the old frontier fortresses which in the eighteenth century guarded the bridges of the Sambre, and fronted the Imperial fortress of Mons, a few miles on the other side of the Netherlands border. Surrounded by low hills, it had little natural strength, but during the wars of the Revolution it was converted into an entrenched camp by throwing up earthworks on the dominating heights. When General de Rivières in 1874 reorganized the defences of France, Maubeuge was a circle of advanced forts and batteries, the northern works lying close to the Belgian frontier, some five miles from the centre of the town. The place owed its fortifications to its position as the junction point of several important railways, including the lines from Paris to Brussels by way of Mons; from Paris to North Germany by Charleroi, Liège, and Namur; a line towards the eastern frontier by way of Hirson, Mezières, and Montmédy; and branch lines to Laon and Châlons.

For the Germans, who now held Liège and Namur, the capture of Maubeuge was a vital matter, as it would give them a good line of communication by railway to Aix, through the Meuse valley. After

their rapid reduction of the Meuse fortresses, they expected that the place would fall in a day or two. It proved, however, to be a more serious task than they had imagined, for Maubeuge was one of the few places that had been partly remodelled since the introduction of high explosive projectiles had made obsolete de Rivières' forts of 1874. The outlying defences had been strengthened with concrete and armour plates, and a number of heavy guns had been mounted in steel turrets. The commandant had also thrown up lines of earthworks between the forts, and had a garrison strong enough to man the extended line of defence. Just before the siege he had been reinforced by detachments from Lanrezac's army, and by a British field battery cut off from the general retirement. The total garrison on the day of the investment numbered over 30,000 men. The vigour of the defence detained a considerable force of the invaders, and the place did not fall until 7th September.

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By that time all the outlying forts had been shattered by the heavy fire of the German batteries brought up from Namur. These guns were not the huge 16½-inch howitzers, but the smaller 11-inch pieces, throwing a 760-pound shell. In this connection a Paris newspaper, famous for its sensational news, published a tale that had some curious results in Britain. It declared that a few months before the war a Belgian financier bought land at Lanières, near Maubeuge, and began to erect there a factory for railway engines. But it explained that the real buyer was Krupp of Essen; that, while the alleged factory was being erected, concrete gun platforms were laid down; and that when the Germans arrived they mounted their siege guns on these ready-made platforms. The story was reproduced in our own newspapers, and immediately there arose a scare about concrete platforms constructed around London and elsewhere by German agents. Garden terraces, cisterns, the concrete foundations of printing-presses, and all manner of likely or unlikely structures were denounced to the police as the work of far-seeing German spies. General Sir Desmond O'Callaghan, an artillery officer, who examined several of these alleged gun platforms, demonstrated their innocent character, and in a letter to the press pointed out that at Maubeuge the howitzers employed needed no concrete bases. The 11-inch howitzer of the German siege train has a quick-firing mounting, and steel plates, or "girdles," on its wheels, giving it a wide support, so that it can be fired from an ordinary road or a platform of sleepers. He might have added that the whole story of the concrete platforms at Lanières was an obvious fabrication. Lanières is to the south-west of Maubeuge. The German howitzers for the attack on the forts were on the other side at Peissant, just within the Belgian frontier. Some lighter siege guns

were used on the west side of the fortress, but there was not a single gun at the engine factory.

From this digression we return to the chronicle of the German advance across the northern frontier. To the eastward of the British line of retreat von Buelow, following up the 5th Army, secured, almost without firing a shot, the little fortress of Hirson, which guarded an important railway junction. The Saxon army, under von Hausen, which had forced the crossing of the Meuse at Dinant on the 23rd by a combined front and flank attack, moved south, driving in the detachments that protected the left of General Langle's army. On the 27th the French defence of the Meuse line collapsed. There was a great battle along many miles of the river valley from Mezières, by Donchery and Sedan, towards Longuyon. Three German armies were opposed to the two armies of Generals Langle and Ruffey. The decisive stroke was on the French left, where von Hausen, moving by the left bank, took Langle in flank, and menaced his line of retreat, while the Duke of Wurtemberg attacked him in front. Part of the fighting was on the very ground over which the German armies had marched in September 1870 to envelop at Sedan the doomed army of MacMahon. The German columns forced the passage at Donchery by the same bridge the Crown Prince Frederick had used on the memorable night of August 31, 1870. Langle fell back hastily towards Rethel.

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His defeat made the position of the French army on his right untenable. Attacked in front by the Crown Prince, Ruffey made good his retreat towards the wooded plateau of the Argonne. Mezières and Montmédy surrendered almost without a shot, for their forts were useless against the new artillery. Next day, 28th August, Longwy capitulated. Though it was an obsolete fortress, feebly garrisoned, it had resisted for twenty-four days under its heroic governor, Lieutenant-Colonel Darche, for its very weakness had led the Germans to attack it only with field artillery. In the western section of the frontier no attempt was made to hold the city of Lille. Its forts had been disarmed, and the neglected earthworks had long been overgrown with weeds, although in the military geographies it was still classed as an entrenched camp of the first rank. By 28th August, of all the northern strongholds Maubeuge alone still flew the tricolour. The Germans held Longwy, Montmédy, Mezières, Hirson, and Lille, as well as Namur and Liège. It was, to use the expression of a French writer, a "*dégringolade de*

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forteresses”—“a clattering down of fortresses.” The world began to wonder if they stood for anything in modern war.

The occupation of Lille was a mere incident in the descent of the German extreme right upon northern France. The force employed on this side was highly mobile, being made up of four divisions of cavalry, which, besides their batteries of horse artillery, had with them machine guns and light quick-firers mounted on motor cars. It was supported by the German 2nd Corps, which sent forward part of its infantry by means of motor transport. The object of the raid was to cut the communications of the British force with its principal bases at Boulogne and Havre.

Moving out on the right of von Kluck's army as it swung southwards from Brussels, this force had swept down on Tournai and Lille, with its right on the line of the river Lys. Panic spread through western Belgium as fugitives carried the alarm towards the seaboard. The panic was increased by scattered parties of Uhlans riding westward over the Lys, and British Marines were hurried across the Channel to save Ostend. But the Germans had at this time no intention of occupying it. They had a more serious purpose in this western raid than to annex watering-places.

At Tournai, as we have seen, they captured a French Territorial brigade and a British battery. Lille was abandoned on their approach. The frontier was passed, and the raiders pushed southward with a reckless daring that led to wildly exaggerated reports of their numbers. Their main line of advance was by Arras on Amiens. At Arras they would seize a junction that controlled the northern lines to Calais and Boulogne, while at Amiens they would be across the main line from Boulogne to Paris, and would cut the chief line of supply of the British force. With the Allied armies in northern France in full retreat, the raiders met with no serious opposition. The country between the Belgian frontier and the Lower Seine had been practically cleared of regular troops when the French army was mobilized. There was nothing in the district but detachments of Territorials guarding bridges and railways, and a few small bodies of British troops employed on Sir John French's line of communications. The French had made no organized arrangements for the defence of the district, since, relying on a victorious advance into Belgium, they regarded the north-western departments of France as beyond the enemy's reach. In every town and village of these departments there was the same sanguine confidence.

In the first days of this last week of August there came disturbing rumours of defeat on the frontier, and stragglers, who had been separated from their regiments and narrowly escaped capture, began to trickle in with dismal tales of the collapse of the whole Allied defence. Soon came the news that German horsemen were pouring across the border on a wide front, and that Lille had fallen.

Then something like panic broke out. There is no complete record of what happened during this sudden invasion of the north-west, but we know that at several points there was fighting. A kind of haphazard defence was attempted, but the parties of French Territorials who stood up to the enemy were beaten in detail. If a detachment of the invading cavalry was checked, it was not for long. Rapidly the supporting troops arrived, and the wide front of the advance swept round the defence on right and left, with the result that numbers of prisoners were taken by the Germans. Since the occupation of Arras threatened the communications with the coast, the British detachments worked day and night to send off to the Seine valley the trains laden with supplies and ammunition, which were either *en route*, or held up at the junctions, or accumulated on the sidings outside Boulogne.

South of Arras, about Bapaume (the scene of a fight in the war of 1870), a French Territorial division tried to stop the enemy's advance on Amiens. It was the nearest thing to a pitched battle in this part of the campaign. The French held their ground for a while, but every moment reinforcements were coming up to the enemy, and the German mounted troops were gradually massed to sweep round to the French rear and cut off their retreat. In the last stage some British troops arrived. Who they were and where they came from no official dispatch has recorded; but they did good service. They must have been line of communication troops from Amiens. According to French accounts, the Germans were driving the Territorials in, two batteries had been captured, and the line of retreat was in serious danger, when the British detachment arrived, saved the French from complete destruction, and extricated what was left of the division.

After this there were only detached skirmishes with the enemy, as their advance pushed on towards Amiens and across the Boulogne-Paris line. Amiens was evacuated, after all the rolling-stock at the junction had been got away, and from the British headquarters orders were sent to abandon Boulogne as the main supply base of the army. So serious was the German menace of invasion that the new base of the British expedition was established in the extreme west of France, at St. Nazaire at the mouth of the Loire, with an advanced base about fifty miles inland at Le Mans.

At this time in both France and Britain, but especially in France, the general belief was that things were going well on the Belgian frontier. The abandonment of the base at Boulogne came, therefore, as an unpleasant shock, and British opinion was further startled by the publication in the *Times* of an account of the evacuation of Amiens and the chaos in northern France. The dispatch was heavily cut down by the Censor, but what was left of it told of the Germans sweeping on like a tidal wave, and all resistance collapsing before them. Most of it was justified by the state of affairs at the time in the district from which it came, but it created unnecessary alarm, because there was no authentic news of the whole situation, thanks to the undue reticence of the British and French Governments. Hardly a line had been published during the week, except accounts of the brilliant exploits of the soldiers of the Allies, the tremendous losses of the Germans, and predictions of the coming collapse of the enemy. In France the fall of Namur had been concealed, though it was known in Britain. The worst of the policy of hiding unpleasant facts, or telling only half the truth about them, is that when a sudden flash of light reveals something of the actual situation there is far deeper discouragement, alarm, and anxiety than if fuller knowledge had enabled the ordinary man to appreciate events at their true value.

Thus, in this instance, the news of the occupation of Lille, Arras, and Amiens, the abandonment of Boulogne, the rush of the German cavalry into north-western France, and the scattering everywhere of retreating and beaten detachments of French Territorials and line of communication troops, conveyed an impression of disaster that was not really justified. All this was a kind of loose fringe of the real fighting. So far from being broken, Sir John French's force was, despite its losses, a solid protection for the general retirement of the French army. And the transfer of the line of communications to another point on the coast was not a serious matter. It is the special privilege of a maritime power that its armies on the Continent can change their base at will, as we learned more than once in the American Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. "He that commands the sea," wrote Francis Bacon three hundred years ago, "is at great liberty."

The critical day for the British force had been that of Le Cateau. Smith-Dorrien's dogged resistance on that day had done more than merely save the army for the moment. It had broken the vigour of the German pursuit. Heavy as

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the British losses had been, both in the battle and in the terrible night march southwards, von Kluck's attempt to envelop and cut off the Second Corps had been foiled, and for the next few days Sir John French had an easier task. On the day of the battle the First Corps had marched southward towards Guise, in the valley of the Oise, without serious menace from the German pursuit.

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Early on the next morning, however, it suffered an unfortunate loss. The Munster Fusiliers had halted for the night on the extreme right rear of the corps. A dispatch rider sent to them with orders for an early march next day lost his way, and was made prisoner. At dawn the Munsters found themselves attacked by several German battalions, and presently realized that their retreat was cut off. They made a good fight for several hours, hoping to hold out till help should come. But all the while their comrades of the First Corps were marching away from them southward, utterly unaware of their desperate position. It was only when they had lost their colonel, most of their officers, and a large proportion of the rank and file, when their ammunition was all but expended, and they were ringed round by superior numbers, that the remnant of this splendid battalion surrendered.

On the 27th and 28th the retreat was continued in two columns. Haig with the First Corps moved along the line of the Oise towards La Fère, and Smith-Dorrien with the Second Corps and a division of the Third marched further to the west by St. Quentin to Chaulny and Noyon. During these days not only had the enemy's pursuit slackened, but our men had for the first time some effective support from the French. General Sordet's cavalry corps came into action on our left rear, relieving for a little Allenby's hard-worked cavalry, and driving the German horsemen back towards Cambrai. General d'Amade, with the 61st and 62nd French reserve divisions, had closed in from the direction of Arras, and, moving a few miles to the westward of Smith-Dorrien, threatened the right flank of the German pursuit. On the other flank the 1st and 3rd French Corps, pushing forward on the right of the 5th Army

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towards Guise, took off some of the pressure of the enemy. On the evening of Friday, the 28th, the whole of the British Expeditionary Force was assembled along the Oise from La Fère to Noyon, weary, indeed, after its six days of fighting and marching, but wholly free from the dispiritment of beaten troops. Though they had been forced from the Belgian frontier, and had retired day after day, even the men in the ranks understood that they had foiled the efforts of an infinitely greater army, which had bent all its energies on their destruction.

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On that very afternoon a real success had been won against two columns of the enemy's horse moving south-east from St. Quentin towards La Fère. Allenby went out to meet them with two of his cavalry brigades. The left column, which included a regiment of Uhlans and the Prussian Guard, was attacked by General Gough with the 3rd Cavalry Brigade—4th Hussars and 5th and 16th Lancers. The Germans were repulsed with heavy loss; while, further to the right, Sir Philip Chetwode, with the 5th Brigade—Scots Greys, 12th Lancers, and 20th Hussars—all but routed the other column. One of its regiments was completely broken up, and left many prisoners in our hands.

After this exploit of our cavalry, the enemy's pursuit slackened for a while, partly because the continual strain of marching and fighting was telling no less upon the Germans, partly because during the last two days our engineers had blown up the bridges on every river, canal, and watercourse behind the retreating army, and partly because a new French army had formed on our left. This was the 6th French Army, composed of d'Amade's reserve divisions and two others, the 7th Corps from the south, and Sordet's cavalry corps. On the 29th it had got into position on the British left, with its right resting on Roye. For the first time for nearly a week all our men save those detailed for outpost duty had a good eight hours' sleep, comfortable meals, and the refreshment of a bath. On the Saturday, to the delight of all, there were no marching orders. Sir John French was giving his men a holiday for rest and reorganization.

Aug. 29.

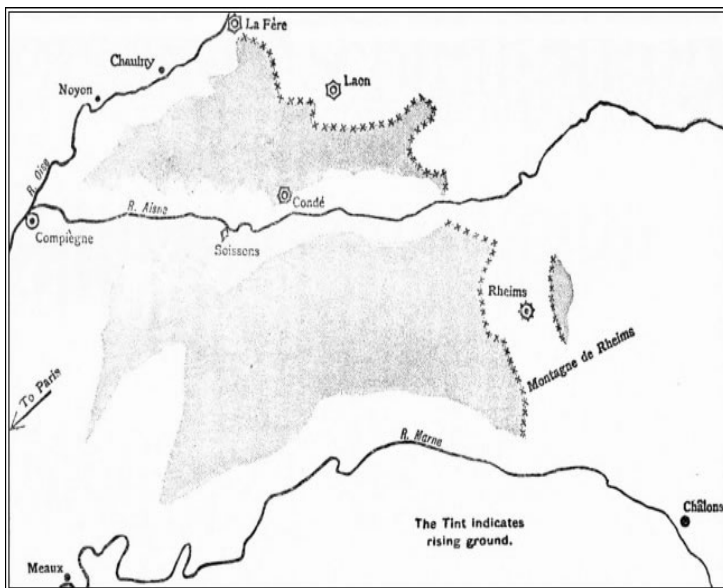
Rumours spread to the bivouacs that the retreat was at an end, and that the Allied forces would offer battle where they stood to the advancing enemy. This seemed more than probable to officers who were familiar with the military history of France; for the position now held by the Allied left was that which had been chosen by the French Staff forty years ago for the final stand against an invader marching on Paris if the frontier defences fell. When, after the war of 1870, de Rivières reorganized the French fortifications, the following plan was adopted. Metz and Strassburg had passed into the hands of Germany, and the eastern frontier was open to invasion, so a new barrier of entrenched camps was constructed to guard it. This line of defences, which has proved of inestimable value to France in the present war, was composed of the four great fortified areas of Belfort, Epinal, Toul, and Verdun, with lines of forts from Belfort to Epinal along the foothills of the Vosges, and from Toul to Verdun along the heights of the Upper Meuse. The northern frontier was defended by the fortresses of

Malmédy, Mezières, Hirson, Maubeuge, and Lille, the line through which the German invasion had now forced its way.

But in the event of either the eastern or the northern line being penetrated by an invader, provision was made for resistance on an inner line. The capital had been converted into a vast fortress; but de Rivières' plan included an elaborately prepared advanced position for its defence. The natural lines of movement on Paris from the east or north-east are by the valleys of two affluents of the Seine—the Marne and the Oise. At a distance of from sixty to eighty miles from Paris a series of heights extends in a long curve from the Oise between Noyon and La Fère eastwards by Laon to Rheims. These heights are the northern and north-eastern escarpment of an undulating plateau that rises gently from the Marne valley, and on its north-eastern front falls steeply towards the plains of northern France. It is traversed by several streams, the largest of which is the Aisne, running from east to west into the Oise at Compiègne. There are numerous clumps and belts of woodland, and, on the western side towards the Oise, wide stretches of forest. The north-eastern front of these uplands, when seen from the lower lands to the north and east, presents the aspect of our Surrey and Sussex Downs. The line of heights is known in France as the *Falaises de Champagne*—the Heights of Champagne.

Such was the position chosen in 1874 as the inner line of defence against an enemy advancing on Paris. On its left, on the Oise, La Fère, an old fortress, was converted into an entrenched camp, with a circle of forts on both sides of the river. Laon, built upon an outlying spur of the plateau, with its ancient citadel and its beautiful thirteenth century cathedral towering over the ramparts on the height, was enormously strengthened till its outlying forts crossed their fire with those of La Fère; while behind Laon the fort of Condé guarded the Aisne valley near Soissons. This elaborate group of fortifications was intended to protect the left of the battle line along the heights. The right was to rest upon another great fortress at Rheims, a city which lies just outside the plateau between the Marne and the Aisne valleys. A bold, wooded spur—the Montagne de Rheims—rises between it and the Marne as it flows towards Epernay. Rheims was defended by the erection of a line of forts on the Montagne, on the spurs of the plateau to the westward, and on outlying hills to the north and east. In the ideal defensive campaign there was to have been a great battle with the right of the French army on the Marne, supported by the fortress of Rheims, the centre along the line of the Falaises, the left supported by the fortress group of Laon-La Fère-Condé, and the left rear protected from a turning movement by a force thrown back along the

Oise by Chaulny and Noyon. This last was the ground now held by the British force.



Sketch of Defensive Line of the Heights of Champagne.

But there was no battle of the Heights of Champagne. At the time it was hard to guess why the position was abandoned without a struggle; but we now know that the reason lay in the immense pressure on the retiring French armies of the mass which the Germans had accumulated in their own centre. In Britain our attention was so riveted on the fortunes of Sir John French that we believed that the Germans were directing all their efforts against him. But it would seem that, just as the thrust of the three armies in the centre—the Crown Prince's, the Duke of Wurtemberg's, and von Hausen's Saxons—largely caused the collapse of the Allies on the Belgian frontier, so now the German Staff aimed at victory by breaching the Allies line with this central mass, as well as by outflanking its left. At this stage, indeed, they hoped for even more. They believed that the Allies, whom they had hustled back from the north, were badly beaten, and they counted upon von Kluck being able to turn and drive in the British left, while he and von Buelow pressed upon the 5th Army, and the central mass broke through what was left of Langle, and then combined with von Kluck and von Buelow to compel the surrender of all the Allied troops to the west of the point when the line was broken. The anniversary of Sedan was approaching, and the German Staff was working for a new and greater Sedan, in which French and Lanrezac should fill the part of MacMahon. This view of the German strategy explains what happened in the following week, without recourse to

the theory that in the first days of September there was a sudden and violent change in the German plans.

The acceptance of this curious view in Britain was partly the result of a misconception as to the aim of the invaders. The whole movement of the German armies in the north of France was described as a headlong dash, a “hussar ride,” for Paris. But it is an elementary principle of war, which admits of no exceptions, that the objective of an army in the field is not this or that city, or this or that district, but the main fighting force of the enemy. If the Allied armies could be broken up, divided, and forced in large masses to surrender, Paris could be attacked with a certainty of easy conquest. Until the Allied armies were so disposed of, an assault on Paris would be sheer folly, for it would detach from the German army of operations a considerable force for a minor purpose. It would involve the risk of sacrificing all that had so far been won by incurring disaster in the open field. If Paris was to be conquered, the Allied armies must first be defeated. This principle was no discovery of Clausewitz and the modern German school; it is as old as the science of war. It was Napoleon who said, “Fortresses are captured on the battlefield”—a saying which sums up in six words the fundamentals of strategy.

Any hope of making a stand on the La Fère-Laon-Rheims position had to be relinquished, because the three armies of the German centre, after forcing the line of the Meuse about Mezières and Sedan, had followed up the retreating French, and after two days of hard fighting on 28th and 29th August, driven them out of Rethel. The town was set on fire during the struggle, probably by bursting shells, and half of it was burned. A Saxon officer, whose diary afterwards fell into the hands of the French, blamed the latter for the destruction of the place. They set it on fire, he says, to prevent the Germans bringing their ammunition columns across its bridges. “It was a dreadful sight. All the little houses with wooden beams on their roofs and their stacks of furniture fed the flames to the full.” The Aisne was only a feeble protection. The sparks were soon carried over to the other side, and next day half the town was nothing but a heap of ashes. The inhabitants fled, and the victorious troops did much wanton damage to the abandoned houses and their contents. “The place is a disgrace to our army,” wrote the Saxon diarist.

*Aug. 28-
29.*

After forcing a way across the Aisne, the German armies of the centre were directed upon Rheims and Châlons. The French in this part of the line had suffered so much in the series of defeats which began in the Ardennes that they could make little stand, and Rheims and Châlons were abandoned to the invader. Long before the enemy's

advance had reached this point it was obvious that the right of the position on the Heights of Champagne was being turned, and the retreat of the Allied left was renewed.

Aug. 30.

Sir John French's force and the 5th French Army were again moving southward on the morning of Sunday, 30th August. On the same day von Kluck's vanguards summoned the fortresses of La Fère and Laon. At neither place were the forts—neglected for years—in a condition to resist even the smaller German field howitzers. Both towns surrendered without a show of resistance, and two more quasi-fortresses were added to the long list of German conquests.

In the afternoon of Saturday, the 29th, General Joffre visited Sir John French at his headquarters, and the two commanders discussed the situation. The information exchanged and the arrangements made at this important conference had best be related in Sir John French's own words:—

Aug. 29.

“I strongly represented my position to the French Commander-in-Chief, who was most kind, cordial, and sympathetic, as he has always been. He told me that he had directed the 5th French Army on the Oise to move forward and attack the Germans on the Somme, with a view to checking pursuit. He also told me of the formation of the 6th French Army on my left flank, composed of the 7th Army Corps, four Reserve Divisions, and Sordet's Corps of Cavalry. I finally arranged with General Joffre to effect a further short retirement towards the line Compiègne-Soissons, promising him, however, to do my utmost to keep always within a day's march of him.”

General Joffre was able to report that part of the 5th Army had successfully encountered the Germans, but he added that he did not intend to follow up this advantage. “A general retirement on the line of the Marne was ordered, to which the French forces in the more eastern theatre of war were directed to conform.” Sir John French in his dispatch goes on to explain the plan of the French Commander-in-Chief as it was set forth in the conference of 29th August.

“Whilst closely adhering to his strategic conception to draw the enemy on at all points until a favourable situation was created from which to assume the offensive, General Joffre found it necessary to modify from day to day the methods by which he sought to attain this object,

owing to the development of the enemy's plans and changes of the general situation."

These are obviously General Joffre's own words, but they give a somewhat diplomatic account of the actual position. The plain fact was, as we have seen, that the French centre was being steadily forced back by the huge masses which the Germans had accumulated against it, and which had heavily defeated it in successive battles on the Semois, the Meuse, and the Aisne, and were now pushing it towards the Upper Marne in the direction of Rheims and Châlons. The Allied left had to conform to this movement, unless it was to risk being enveloped by the enemy's advance.

Accordingly, late in the afternoon of Saturday, the 29th, the retreat of the British began afresh, first towards the line of the river Aisne from Soissons to Compiègne, and then towards the Marne about Meaux. Our retirement was the signal for the renewal of the German pursuit. At first it was not closely pressed, but small rear-guard actions were continually fought.

On Tuesday, 1st September, there was hard fighting in the woods of Compiègne and Villers-Cotterets. "L" Battery of the Royal Horse Artillery was attacked by a superior German force at Nery, and for a little was in grave peril. The attack came as a surprise. The battery had halted and unsaddled to rest the horses, when the enemy suddenly opened a heavy fire from two batteries at close range in front, and a number of Maxim guns on the flank. Three of the British guns were wrecked before they could be placed in position. The other three were brought into action, one gun against four, with the showers of Maxim bullets tearing through the trees, and enfilading the position. Of the 205 officers and men of "L" Battery, only forty survived. Two of the guns were silenced and dismounted. All the officers, all the sergeants but two, and nearly all the men were shot down, and the single remaining gun was served by three men. Two served the gun, and the third, though severely wounded, went on handing them the ammunition. A few minutes more, and the gallant three would have had to give up the unequal struggle. The battery was at the mercy of the Germans, when the cavalry of the 1st Brigade came up with some infantry of the Third Corps, who had been drawn towards the scene of action by the sound of the firing. They not only saved the wrecked battery, but charged the enemy and drove them back, capturing their twelve guns. Sergeant-Major Dorrell and Sergeant Nelson received the Victoria Cross, as did Captain E. K. Bradbury of the same battery, who died of his wounds.

Sept. 1.

On the same day, further to the eastward, in the difficult country of the Villers-Cotterets woods, there was a hard-fought rear-guard action,

in which we won a tactical victory. The brunt of the fighting fell upon the 4th Guards Brigade—Grenadiers, Coldstream, and Irish. They beat off the enemy's attack, suffering heavy losses in the close-quarters fighting among the woods, in which repeatedly they charged the enemy with the bayonet. Here fell Lieutenant-Colonel Morris of the Irish Guards, and the campaign saw no more gallant death.

On the 3rd the British force reached the Marne, and crossed it by the bridges from Lagny to Meaux, blowing them up when the rear-guard had passed the river. The left at Lagny was almost within gun-shot of the eastern forts of Paris. The Allied armies of the left and left centre were now behind the line of the Marne.

Sept. 3.

Sept. 5.

Two days later the British force was concentrated some miles further south on the lower course of a tributary, the Grand Morin. The long retreat from the Belgian frontier was at an end. The last days had been hard and critical, the afternoons a blaze of heat, the nights chilly and often wet. There was no rest, for each day's march was continued late, and the incessant retirement might well have broken the spirit of the best of troops. But the men went through it all with fortitude, even with gaiety, and their only anxiety was to know when they would at length be allowed to stand and take order with the enemy. An officer, in his impressions of the army during these final days of the southward march, tells us something of the talk of the men.

“‘Hang it all, sir,’ one man said to me; ‘if we can do thirty miles a day, without food and sleep, in a retreat, we could do fifty in an advance.’ Constantly the question I was asked was, ‘When are they going to let us halt and have another go at them?’ or, ‘How soon do you think it will be before they let us turn and get a bit of our own back?’ or, ‘I suppose it’s a trap we’re leading them Germans into. We’re the bait, so to speak, and the French all this time are getting in behind them.’ It was fine to listen to and watch them—ragged, footsore, bearded, dirty, and unkempt, gaunt-eyed from lack of sleep, but upheld by that invincible spirit which is the glory of the race.”

In order to realize the full achievement of the British force, we must remember the temperament of the soldier. He was entering on a war against what public opinion agreed was the most formidable army in the world. Partly, it is true, the legend of German invincibility had been weakened by the stand of Belgium; but, as our soldiers understood that tale, it had been fortress work rather than battles in the

field. In such a campaign as the present an initial success, however small, works wonders with the spirit of an army. But there had been no success. The men had gone straight from the train, or from a long march, into action, and almost every hour of every day they had been retreating. Often they were given the chance of measuring themselves in close combat against their adversaries, and on these occasions they held their own; but still the retreat went on, and it was difficult to avoid the feeling that, even if their own battalion had stood fast, there must have been a defeat elsewhere in the line to explain this endless retirement. Such conditions are desperately trying to a soldier's nerves. The man who will support cheerfully any fatigue in a forward march will wilt and slacken when he is going backward. Remember, too, that, except for a few members of the Headquarters Staff, the officers and men knew nothing of the general situation. Had they learned of the fall of Namur it would have explained much, but few of them heard of it till a week later. They fell back in complete uncertainty as to what was happening, and could only suspect that the Germans were winning because they were the better army. Under such circumstances to have preserved complete discipline and faithfulness, nay, even to have retained humour and gaiety and unquenchable spirits, was an achievement more remarkable than the most signal victory.

Not less splendid was the performance of the French. Indeed, in many ways they had the harder task. Though they were less constantly harassed on their retreat than our men, they had begun by a more nerve-shaking experience. Mons was scarcely worse than a drawn battle; but Charleroi, Dinant, and Donchery were unequivocal defeats. Further, the French soldier does not possess the traditional phlegm of the British. He is better at attack than defence, or, rather, his defence must be in itself aggressive. To yield mile after mile was for the French troops of the line, and not less for corps like the Zouaves and Turcos, an almost intolerable discipline. That it was done without grave disaster, and that, after so great a damping of zeal, the fire of attack could be readily rekindled, was an immense tribute to the armies of the Republic. The French have always been famous for *élan* and drive; they showed now that their temper was as good when their business was the anvil rather than the hammer.

For the British troops the ten days of the retreat had been like a moving picture seen through a haze of weariness and confusion. Blazing days among the coal heaps and grimy villages of Hainault, which reminded our north-countrymen of Lancashire and Durham; nights of aching travel on upland roads through the fields of beet and grain; dawns that broke over slow streams and grassy valleys upon

eyes blind with lack of sleep; the cool beech woods of Compiègne; the orchards of Ourcq and Marne, now heavy with plum and cherry. And hour after hour the rattle of musketry and the roaring swell of the great shells, the hurried entrenchments and the long, deadly vigils, or the sudden happy chance of a blow back, when the bayonet took revenge for dusty miles and crippled bodies and lost comrades. On the evening of the 4th the van of the retreat saw from the slopes above the Grand Morin a land of coppice and pasture rolling southward to a broad valley, and far off the dusk of many trees. It was the forest of Fontainebleau and the vale of the Seine. The Allies had fallen back behind all but one of the four rivers which from north and east open the way to Paris. That night they were encamped along the very streams towards which a hundred years before Napoleon had retired before Schwarzenberg and Bluecher.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WEEK OF SEDAN.

The Anniversary of Sedan in Berlin—True Position in France—Galliéni appointed Governor of Paris—Nature of Paris Fortifications—Contrast of Situation with that in 1870—Difference in National *Moral*—Popular Misapprehensions—Did the Germans change their Plans?—Von Kluck's Objects and Mistakes—Limit of Southward Retreat—The Turn of the Tide—The Retreat from Mons as a Military Achievement.

The close of the first month of war brought round the Day of Sedan, that anniversary which for more than forty years has been the great national festival of the German Empire. Berlin witnessed a demonstration that was designed to advertise to the Fatherland and to the world that triumphs were being won no less glorious than the victories of 1870. Escorted by brilliant troops, with bands playing patriotic airs, many captured guns were drawn through the gaily-decked streets. There one might see Russian and Belgian and French cannon, and a few British pieces carefully repaired and remounted, to conceal the fact that they had not been taken by a dashing charge, but picked up shattered and useless on some Picardy battlefield. When the parade was over the guns were parked before the Imperial Palace, and the good folk of Berlin had much pleasant talk of successes already secured, of hostile armies in process of dissolution, and of Paris to be occupied before the week of Sedan had ended.

Sept. 1.

In one of their chief newspapers that morning they had read that words were too weak to describe the magnitude of the German triumph. It was a pardonable exaggeration, for in war time the patriotic journalist does not deal in rigid values, like the military historian writing long after the stress of conflict has become a memory. And the German press had some foundation for its rhetoric. In the eastern theatre of war the invasion of East Prussia by

Rennenkampf had been stayed, and the tide of battle was clearly on the turn. In the west, fortress after fortress had fallen before the shock of the German guns, or had surrendered to the mere menace of their attack. Belgium had been overrun, its capital occupied, its army pent up behind the forts of Antwerp. The Allied armies of France and England had assumed the offensive along the frontier, and in ten days had been driven back a hundred miles to that valley which Napoleon had held to be the last defence of Paris. To the annals of German arms there had been added a new roll of battles won. For the future German historian the names of Morhange and Château Salins, Longuyon and the Semois, Charleroi and Mons, Dinant and Donchery, Tournai, Le Cateau, Bapaume, and Reims would be names of victory. There were the broad, indisputable facts that the Allied armies had yielded ground everywhere day by day; that the German armies had poured into France like a rising flood sweeping over a lowland when the dykes are broken; and, if the dykes were to be represented by the fortresses, it seemed that Germany in her new artillery had an engine that could swiftly and surely level every barrier to her triumphant march.

Such were, in German eyes, the situation and the outlook in the first days of the week of Sedan. At the moment it seemed that this rosy estimate had good warrant, and that the German “plan” was working with mechanical precision. France would be swiftly crushed, and then whole armies, flushed with victory, could be transferred to the eastern battle front for a march on the Vistula. It was a happy omen for Germany when, on 4th September, the anniversary of the downfall of the French Empire, there came the tidings that the French Republican Government had left Paris for Bordeaux. In 1870, as the German armies swung southward after the victory of Sedan, the Government had moved from Paris. But it had gone no further than Tours, on the Loire. Only in the last disastrous days of the struggle had it pushed on to Bordeaux, the city in the far south-west. “They have left Paris,” said the Berlin folk, “and they know that they are safe nowhere except far away in the south.” And there were further encouraging tidings for these patriotic German onlookers. Despite censorship and other obstacles, news sometimes travels fast in war time, and where news is wanting rumour fills in the details. The version of the facts accepted in Berlin was that Paris had neither the determination nor the power to defend her walls, and would prove as easy a prize as Namur—no harder, perhaps, than Lille.

For this view there was a certain foundation. Paris had refused to be alarmed by the exploits of German airmen who made daring flights over the city and dropped bombs into the streets. Curiosity seemed to banish fear. Instead of taking refuge under cover, men, women, and

children stood gazing up at the Kaiser's war-hawks. Their first appearance was greeted by a fusillade of rifle fire, till the authorities promptly forbade irregular shooting, because, although it did no harm to the airmen above, it did much execution among honest Parisians below. But, though forbidden to shoot, the citizens, with admirable spirit, gathered in crowds each afternoon to look out for "Taubes," and were rather disappointed if none appeared. When, in the last days of August, however, the official news at last admitted that the Allied armies were everywhere in retreat, when numbers of strayed and wounded soldiers appeared in the streets, and the distant growling of cannon and the blowing up of bridges could be heard from the north-eastern suburbs, there came a wave of anxiety and alarm. A considerable exodus began of the well-to-do classes, who dreaded a siege, and could afford to make a long journey. There was much movement to England by way of Havre, the trains making their way to the coast by devious roads, mostly on the west bank of the Seine. Some of the steamers that left the ports were so crowded that passengers huddled together in the boats on the davits, and there was only standing-room on the decks. The exodus to the southern provinces and overseas accounted for perhaps one-third of the normal population of the capital.

General Galliéni had been appointed military governor of Paris, and General Michel^[9] had volunteered to serve under him. Galliéni was a veteran of 1870, and as a young officer of marines he had fought in Lebrun's corps in the desperate defence of Bazeilles on the day of Sedan. He was best known in France as the soldier who had completed the conquest of Madagascar, and reorganized the great island as a French colony. It was this talent for organization that marked him out as the man for his new post. The defences of the French capital had been widely extended since the siege of 1870, when the circuit of the outlying forts was about 32 miles. Erected under the defence scheme of Thiers in the days of Louis Philippe, they were planned to resist the attack of the short-range artillery of the period, and in the siege they could not protect the city from bombardment. De Rivières' plans, drawn up in 1874, included Versailles in the region to be defended, and the new fortifications were a second outer circle of forts, redoubts, and batteries covering a circle of more than seventy-five miles, and holding all the high ground on which the Germans in 1870 had erected their siege guns.

newer defences were not of any great strength. They were old-fashioned works of the 1874 type, planned before the days of high explosive shells, and no effort had been made to bring them up to date, for the French Government had come to regard an attack on Paris as outside the range of practical possibilities. The works had even been neglected. They were armed with old guns, and there was a deficiency of stores for completing the defences between the forts. To take one example, the amount of barbed wire for entanglements did not suffice for even one front of the great fortress. Galliéni, on his appointment to the command, did what he could in the last days of August to remedy the neglect of years. Trenches were dug, entanglements constructed, and—most serious task of all—efforts were made to clear the field of fire by demolishing hundreds of buildings that had been allowed to spring up over the military zone of defence. But it was impossible to accomplish in a day or two a work that demanded thousands of hands for many weeks. Paris was not ready for a siege, and the Germans were justified in their view that if it were attacked it would speedily fall. Rightly, therefore, the French Staff concentrated their efforts on making a siege impossible by a counterstroke against the enemy's advance.

That this could be done shows how changed was the situation in September 1914 from the dark days of September 1870. In the month of campaigning that ended at Sedan, France was irrevocably beaten. The first engagement at Saarbruck took place on 2nd August. On 4th August the German armies began to pass the frontier. On the 6th the French right under MacMahon was defeated at Woerth, and the left, under Frossard, at Forbach. Then came Napoleon III.'s first reluctant admission of failure, the telegram to Paris, "*Tout peut se rétablir*"—"All may yet be regained"—a confession that much had been already lost. MacMahon retreated to Châlons; Bazaine, with the "Army of the Rhine," fell back on Metz, and, as the result of the three battles which ended at Gravelotte (St. Privat) on 18th August, was penned up in that fortress. Then came MacMahon's ill-advised march north-eastward, a movement imposed upon him for political reasons by the Paris Regency. It ended on 1st September in the surrender at Sedan. The Germans advanced to the siege of Paris, and the French Government was transferred to Tours.

But France was beaten, not because the invader had marched far into the country and was about to besiege her capital—not even because the Germans had been victorious at Weissenburg, Spicheren, Woerth, Borny, Mars-la-Tour, Gravelotte, and Sedan. She was beaten because her field armies were, in the military sense of the word, "destroyed." About a quarter of a million men had been sent to the

eastern frontier, where they had met some 400,000 Germans. After heavy losses in the field, 170,000 were shut up in Metz, and less than 50,000 reached Châlons, where they were reinforced by about the same number, and marched out to surrender at Sedan. The army of Châlons was thus utterly swept away; the army of Metz was shut up in the fortress, and doomed presently to a like fate. There remained to France only one or two regular units, some improvised armies of depot troops, mostly young recruits, the half-drilled or wholly untrained National Guards and Mables, and a few corps of Volunteers. These raw levies had to be enrolled, armed, and given some rough instruction, and then hurried into action under officers who, for the most part, knew nothing of their business, and soon found to their cost that the most reckless courage was useless without discipline. Bismarck contemptuously described them as “not soldiers, but men with muskets.” The war dragged on till the following January; but every element of success, except devoted bravery, was absent. Improvised armies, directed in their general strategy by a group of politicians, fought in vain against well-ordered forces, more than a million strong, directed by a brilliant Staff and led by veteran generals. They could not secure victory, but they fought on to the end for the honour of France. The fate of the campaign had been decided on two battlefields in the first month of operations—Gravelotte, which doomed the army of Bazaine, and Sedan, which destroyed the army of MacMahon.

Let us compare with this the situation in the week of Sedan in 1914. Once more, within a month of the day when the first shots were fired—nay, within a fortnight of the first great battles—the French armies found themselves defeated and driven from the frontier; the German invaders had marched so far into the heart of the land that again a siege of Paris seemed imminent; and the Government was forced to abandon the capital. But, apart from the fact that France, which had stood alone in the terrible days of 1870, now fought beside powerful allies, the whole situation was radically different, and different in the one great essential. The Allied armies had, indeed, suffered defeat in a gigantic clash of arms, compared to which the battles of 1870 were small engagements; but they had not been “destroyed.” They were still intact, and ready to measure themselves once more against the invader. They had trained men ready to make good their losses. The Germans had failed in their main object—to put masses of their opponents permanently out of action in a decisive battle, so that the subsequent operations would be merely a gathering up of the fruits of victory. Paris was, indeed, menaced, but the threat was more apparent than real, for the invader could not venture to attack the capital till he had disposed of the field armies. After Sedan

the Germans had to face only improvised levies. After the anniversary of Sedan in this new invasion they had still before them the unbroken might of France and Britain.

It cannot be too often repeated that in war partial successes count for nothing except in so far as they pave the way for the “decision”—the definite success that destroys the opponent’s resistance. The mere occupation of ground, the seizure of towns, the overrunning of provinces, may have a useful purpose, but these are not the decisive factors. The one thing that counts is the dispersion, disarmament, and capture of the enemy’s fighting force, or its reduction to such a state that resisting power has gone out of it. Germany’s failure to obtain this result in the first month of war was made doubly important by the fact that she was carrying on the long-expected “war on two fronts,” and that it was vital for her to crush France by a swift blow before Russia could develop her full fighting strength. But France was *not* crushed, and for Germany to transfer any large part of her army to the Eastern theatre of war would be to incur the gravest risk of disaster in the West.

Apart from the military position, the *moral* of the nation was wholly different from 1870. There had been no easy confidence of victory, no boasting, no singing of music-hall catches, when the French armies marched north and east. War had come to France as a solemn duty, long prepared for—a national sacrifice of which the cost had been foreseen and counted. 1870 had been for her a year of crumbling constitutions. The Napoleonic bubble had burst; the “Liberal Empire” of M. Ollivier had suffered no better fate; everywhere there were dissolution, discontent, and distrust. The politicians, not the soldiers, directed the war, and the politicians were cast in a mean mould. The riff-raff of the population was out of hand, and power was passing to the fanatics and mountebanks of the Commune. In 1870 there were parties, but it was hard to find a nation. In 1914 France had forgotten all lesser rivalries, and was united in one grave and inflexible purpose. In M. Poincaré she had as President a man whose brilliant attainments and sober good sense carried on the best traditions of Republican statesmanship. Early in September the Ministry was reconstructed on a national basis—an example which might with advantage have been followed elsewhere. Under M. Viviani as Premier, M. Delcassé became Foreign Minister, M. Millerand Minister of War, M. Ribot Minister of Finance, M. Briand Minister of Justice. The Socialist leader, M. Guesde, entered the Cabinet as Minister without portfolio. The only party unrepresented was the Catholic Right; but a portfolio was offered to its leader, M. Denys Cochin, who declined on grounds which did honour to himself

and his following. M. Clemenceau, indeed, stood outside, but that again was no disadvantage, for the famous “destroyer of Ministries” remained to act the part of a critical but patriotic Opposition. In all the land there was no dissentient voice. M. Jaurès, the leader of the Pacifists, had died by an assassin’s hand on the last day of July, but not before he had blessed his country’s enterprise. Even M. Hervé, the International Socialist, who in the past had talked foolishly of “consigning the tricolour to the dunghill,” now recanted his errors, and volunteered for service in the ranks.

There was thus no comparison between the situation in France on the 5th September of 1870 and of 1914. But there was a surface resemblance which misled those who had not grasped the first principles of war. Clausewitz rightly declared that an understanding of these great principles is important for the civilian as well as the soldier, for opinion influences action, and public opinion is made up of the ideas of the units that compose the nation. That great master of the science of arms insists, in a famous passage, on a truth that is too often overlooked—that one of the chief objects of a nation engaged in war is to bring the enemy’s population into a state of mind favourable to submission, or to negotiations for a settlement. With this in mind, we can understand the importance of a public opinion fully and soundly informed, both as to the course of events and as to the principles that give them their significance.

In those first days of September there was a curious instance of the danger that may arise to a people from ignorance of war on the part of its statesmen. One of the chief politicians in France proposed that the Ministry should negotiate with the German General Staff, not, indeed, for peace or even for an armistice, but to arrange for a convention by which Paris should be evacuated and treated as an open town, in order to spare its vast population the horrors of a siege, and save its monuments and artistic treasures from the peril of bombardment. He was promptly silenced by General Galliéni, who replied that Paris would defend itself, even if it were to share the fate of Louvain. But if the author of this proposal had understood the elements of war, he would have realized that Paris was as yet in no immediate danger of attack.

It was the same failure to grasp the true factors in the situation that led to the erratic talk of a sudden change in the German plan of campaign, when it was reported that von Kluck with his army of the right had altered the direction of his march. His cavalry had ridden almost within cannon shot of the northern forts of Paris. They had occupied Chantilly after a sudden dash, which gave them some good remounts from the racing stables. They had pushed on beyond it till

they were as near to the towers of Notre Dame as is Windsor to the dome of St. Paul's. The assault on the capital seemed a matter of hours.

But hardly had the Government left the city when tidings arrived that instead of marching on Paris von Kluck was heading south-eastward. On the same day came the news that Lille was evacuated, and that the far-flung wave of cavalry and cavalry supports was ebbing back from the north-western departments of France. Amateur strategists began to talk of the German change of plan, and to announce that the dash for Paris had miserably failed.

As a matter of fact, as we have already explained, there was no change of plan. The view arose from a misconception of the first principle, not only of German theory, but of all sound military science. It involved also a misunderstanding as to what is meant by a plan of campaign. As Moltke has pointed out in more than one passage, it is impossible to form any plan of campaign that will forecast the course of the war beyond the opening move. All that can be done is to mass the armies on the frontier, and set them in motion in the direction that will produce contact with the enemy's main fighting force under favourable conditions. In this case the contact had been established along the northern borders of France from Luxemburg to the Sambre. The Allied armies had been forced to retreat by the defeat of their left centre and combined frontal and flanking attacks against the divided portions of their line. For the rest, the only possible plan must be to follow up their retirement, maintain the contact thus established, and endeavour to crown defeat by destruction. For this purpose there must be no divergence of the lines of advance, since the strongest possible force must be brought to bear upon the enemy, and subsidiary enterprises must be avoided until his main armies were finally overthrown. It is obvious that to hurl von Kluck's army against the northern defences of Paris would have been a flagrant violation of these commonsense principles of war. What actually happened was, that as the Allies retreated beyond the Marne and their left drew by Meaux to the south-east of the capital, von Kluck conformed to this movement, closing in his right to maintain contact with the foe and at the same time to keep in touch with his colleague, von Buelow. Meanwhile, the cavalry divisions that had been pushed forward on the flank of the German advance were drawn back to protect the right of the main movement.

But while correct in his general strategy, von Kluck went astray in his reading of his opponents. The German Staff was convinced that the Allied forces were already not only beaten, but demoralized by the ceaseless pressure of the pursuit. So far during the retreat there had

been no sign of any combined counter-attack, or even of an attempt at a general stand along the line, and the Germans did not anticipate any danger from Paris. They thought that whatever troops had been concentrated around the capital—they already knew of the 6th Army—would confine themselves to preparations for defence. Von Kluck, therefore, took the risk of pushing in between the eastern defences of Paris and the extreme left of the Allied line. There is little doubt that his general instructions were to cut the Allies off from the capital, not with any view of an immediate investment, but in order to outflank their left, and either roll up their line or force them to continue their headlong retreat to the south.

But this was not the limit of his boldness. He had come to regard the British army as virtually out of action. The pressure of immense numbers, and these numbers the flower of the German forces, must, on the German theory, have reduced the enemy to a dispirited and panicky mob, to be safely disregarded. No doubt Sir John French's troops had fought gallantly, but it was no better than high treason to the German cause to imagine that less than 100,000 men could be driven for a week by a quarter of a million Germans and still retain any spark of spirit or semblance of discipline. Accordingly von Kluck, who had so strictly respected the first axiom of war, violated the second, and marched his right wing across the British front, hoping to drive a wedge between the 5th Army and French's remnants.

During the retreat the British Flying Corps, under the command of Major-General Sir David Henderson, had rendered invaluable service to the British Staff. They were now able by daring reconnaissances over the German line to bring information of the first importance. It was the aviators who discovered that von Kluck had swung south-eastward towards the crossings of the Marne. On the 4th of September they brought in reports which showed that his army was mostly east of a line drawn through Nanteuil to Lizy on the Ourcq, a stream which enters the Marne near Meaux. Next day they brought detailed information which even the most enterprising cavalry would have failed to obtain. The enemy's vanguards were advancing by Changis, La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, Château Thierry, and Mezy, and the rear-guard was halting along the left bank of the Ourcq, facing the river. By sunset the German advance had so progressed that the airmen located large bodies of troops bivouacking south of the Marne from Coulommiers eastward to Montmirail. One column had pushed as far forward as La Ferté Gaucher on the Grand Morin.

Sept. 4.

Sept. 5.

Further east, the French airmen had intelligence almost as complete as to the positions of the German forces on the long line

now stretching from the lower Marne to the neighbourhood of Verdun. General Joffre had decided that the moment had come to abandon the defensive and attempt a counterstroke against the invaders. On Saturday, 5th September, he asked Sir John French to meet him, and explained his plans. Von Kluck's audacity had given him his chance. The 6th French Army, moving up from the direction of Paris, was to be thrown against the German right on the Ourcq, while Sir John French with the British attacked in front, and the forward movement against the Germans would be continued eastward by four other French armies between the British right and the line of the barrier fortresses at Verdun.

The main masses of the enemy had by this time passed the Marne. They had occupied Rheims without resistance, and pushed on to Epernay and Châlons. Further to the east their progress in the Argonne had been somewhat delayed, but the Crown Prince had at last reached St. Mennehoult, near the southern side of the wooded plateau, and at the western end of the important pass of Les Islettes, on the main Verdun road. So far the German advance had seemed like a triumphant progress, the initiative was wholly in their hands, and the Allies seemed to have lost for good the capacity for the offensive.

But in the last days of the week of Sedan, by one of the mysterious anticlimaxes so common in war, a complete change was coming over the scene. The long retreat had reached its natural end. The moment had come for the Allies to strike back and go forward. With the battles of the Marne—battles to be fought on a front of more than a hundred miles—began a new phase in the drama of the war.

We have the authority of Frederick the Great for saying that the most difficult of all the operations of war is a successful retreat. The retirement of the Allies from the Sambre to the Marne will live among the great retreats in history, and it would be a fascinating study to compare it with its predecessors from Xenophon's Ten Thousand downward. But such a comparison is still impossible, for we do not yet know enough about what happened to three of the Allied armies. Something, however, may be said about the British performance, which from a military point of view was the most difficult part of the operation. Our total losses up to our halt beyond the Marne were returned by Sir John French at 64 officers and 212 men killed, 1,223 wounded, and 13,643 missing—a total of 15,142, not an extravagant number, considering the severity of the ten days' work. In a retreat the duties of the Adjutant-General and the Quartermaster-General become

specially onerous, and it would be hard to overpraise the achievement of Sir Nevil Macready and Sir William Robertson.

Our retirement was a strategic retreat—that is, was undertaken under the pressure of strategic requirements, but not under the compulsion of a defeat. The rarity of such retirements is a proof of their difficulty. In modern history there are only three famous examples. The first is Sir John Moore’s retreat from Astorga to Corunna, a march of 250 miles through wild mountains in a tempest of snow and rain, with Napoleon and 70,000 men at his heels. Moore fell back, as all the world knows, fighting constant rear-guard actions, and losing heavily each day, chiefly from starvation and fatigue. But he preserved his army intact, and on 16th January 1809 could turn at Corunna and beat off his pursuers. That is the most perfect instance in British history, perhaps in any history. A second is Wellington’s retreat into Portugal after his victory at Talavera. “A pretty general,” wrote Cobbett, the eternal type of the ill-informed critic, “who wins a victory one day, and finds he has to run away the next.” A third is the Russian retreat before the French in 1812, which lured Napoleon into the icy depths of the continent. That was a true strategic retirement, for the battle of Borodino was an accident, and Kutusov would never have fought it but for political pressure. Russia’s success lay in drawing on the foe till winter, her ally, could destroy him.

Other modern retreats have not been strategic but compulsory. Napoleon’s in 1812, when Ney proved himself so great a rear-guard fighter, was a retreat after failure. His retreat next year through South Germany was caused by the *débâcle* of Leipsic, as was the retirement through France in 1814 before Bluecher and Schwarzenberg. Of the same type was Lee’s brilliant performance after Gettysburg, when he led his army through the passes of the hills into the Cumberland Valley, and then southwards to the Potomac, the Shenandoah, and Virginia.

Sir John French in the days from Mons to the Marne had an easy country to traverse and perfect weather, as compared with what fell to the lot of Sir John Moore and Napoleon. His supplies did not fail, and his transport problem was not difficult. His special danger lay in the enormous masses behind him, moving at a speed unknown before, and ever threatening to envelop his flanks. The pace, the comparatively small losses, and the excellent discipline and *moral* preserved in his troops were the distinguishing features of his achievement. When the time came to turn and strike, his men were as eager and confident as on the first day of battle.

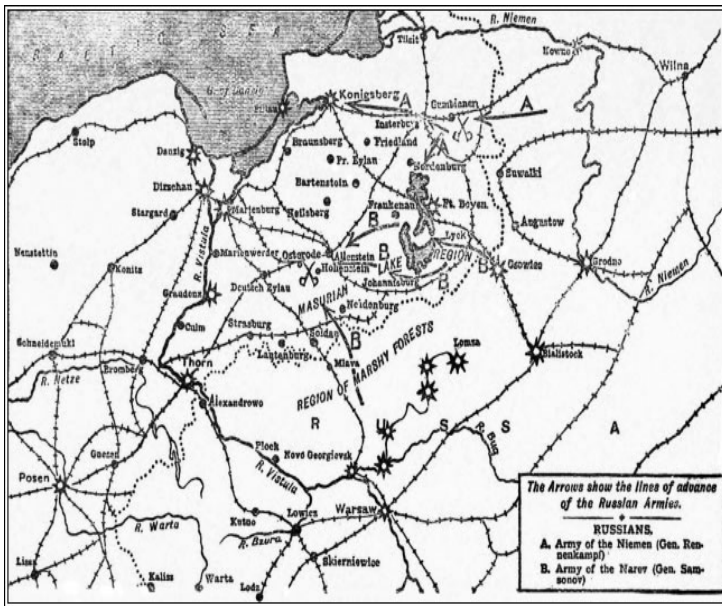
CHAPTER XIII.

TANNENBERG.

The Russians overrun East Prussia—General von Hindenburg—Composition of his Army—Rennenkampf besieges Koenigsberg—Samsonov and the Army of the Narev—His Strategy—The Battle of Tannenberg—Russian Defeat and Death of Samsonov—Von Hindenburg's Achievement—Rennenkampf's Retreat across the Niemen—German Confidence.

On Tuesday, 25th August, the day when the British forces in the West were struggling out of the trap at Maubeuge, the high-water mark of the Russian invasion of East Prussia was reached. Russian cavalry had penetrated almost to the Lower Vistula, driving before them crowds of fugitives. Some of the villages were burned—often by accident, for the wooden huts were like tinder in that dry August weather. In the towns which they occupied the troops of the Tsar behaved with decorum and discretion. But the terror of their name was on the peasantry of East Prussia, who did not realize that the Cossacks of to-day are disciplined regular troops, but remembered only wild tales of the ragged spearmen who had ridden through their land a hundred years ago, and had made little distinction between German allies and French opponents. With stories of universal burnings and slaughters, the peasants and gentry alike fled over the Vistula, and brought to Berlin the news that East Prussia was in the grip of the enemy.

Aug. 25.



Position in East Prussia, August 24.

The reconquest of the country was necessary to the Germans for strategical reasons, for without it any advance from Posen would be caught on the flank. But apart from such considerations, the Emperor had a personal motive in undertaking the work of deliverance. The province was one of the oldest lands of the Prussian monarchy. Königsberg had been the capital of the dukes of Prussia in the days when Berlin was an unknown fishing village among the swamps of the Spree. During every year of his reign the Emperor had spent some weeks in East Prussia, and his hunting lodge amid its forests was now in Russian hands. The invasion and overrunning of the province was to him a personal insult, only less intolerable than a descent upon the capital itself. He therefore directed the concentration of a relieving force behind the Vistula, and he was fortunate enough to find an ideal commander.

Before the outbreak of war there was living in Hanover a certain General von Hindenburg, a veteran of the war of 1870, who had been for some years on the retired list. He had spent much of his life in East Prussia, and had commanded in succession its two army corps at Königsberg and Allenstein. Often in the mimic war of the annual manœuvres he had rehearsed the defence of the forest region against a Russian invasion. He knew every yard of the place as a Scottish ghillie knows his own deer forest, and he would often use his knowledge to drive his opponents at manœuvres into some impossible bog-hole. "Papa Coldbaths" he was called, admiringly and

despairingly, by the troops, when they were kept for hours up to their waists in mud.

When the day of his retirement came he made the defence of East Prussia his sole hobby. He haunted the wildernesses and marshes like an elderly faun, sometimes on foot, sometimes testing the infrequent roads by motor car, and sometimes experimenting with a field gun from a neighbouring garrison. There was a most serious method in all his doings. Some of the lakes were wide, shallow stretches of water, with a hard gravel bottom, and by practical tests he found out where a gun could be driven through them. Others, though shallow enough, had a yard of mud below the water, and these would be impassable for artillery. Sometimes there was a good margin of gravel, but farther out a treacherous under-water bog. Again, the ground between the lakes was of a very varying character. Sometimes what looked impracticable might give good going, and what seemed a grassy clearing among the trees might be really a quagmire. Year after year von Hindenburg explored the countryside, and marked his maps with precise information as to every acre. No charcoal-burner or forest ranger had anything like his local knowledge.

A few years ago there came a great crisis in his life. A business syndicate, which knew and cared nothing about military matters, devised a reclamation scheme for East Prussia. Drainage canals were to be driven through the frontier region. Hundreds of miles of land were to be cleared of forests. The lakes and swamps were to be drained, and the wilderness was to be turned into a rich agricultural district, which would provide high dividends for the syndicate, and homes for German farmers who might otherwise migrate overseas. Von Hindenburg flung himself into the battle against the financiers with the furious energy that he had been reserving for the Russians. He went straight to Berlin and interviewed the Emperor. This Eastern wilderness zone, he said, was worth to Germany many army corps and a dozen fortresses. Why ruin the defence provided by nature itself and lay bare the empire to invasion in its oldest provinces? It would be as reasonable to level the fortifications of Thorn and Posen in order to find room for a few acres of potato fields and cabbage gardens. His arguments prevailed, and the project was abandoned.

With the outbreak of war with Russia came von Hindenburg's chance. Now at last every atom of his knowledge could be pressed into service. Though nearer seventy than sixty, he was a man of rude health and a body as hard as a deep-sea fisherman's. He was a man, too, of a rugged strength of character, the strength that comes from simplicity and singleness of aim. He was to show that he possessed not only an immense experience, but intellectual qualities with which

none of his contemporaries had credited him. It was a happy moment for Germany when he was appointed to succeed von François in the East Prussian command.

Von Hindenburg's army was made up of the troops that had retired south-westward before the Russian invasion, part of von François's army brought by sea from Königsberg to Danzig, and large reinforcements drawn from the Vistula fortresses and the armies concentrated along the Posen frontier. It was believed at the time that he also received troops from the western theatre of war; but this is highly improbable. Reinforcements did come from Germany in the following week, but they went to the hard-pressed Austrians in Galicia. At the time there was no need to dislocate prematurely the general plan of the German campaigns. The German centre at the moment in Posen was unemployed, for there was no considerable Russian force west of the Vistula. In all, perhaps, von Hindenburg had with him 150,000 men.

When he concentrated east of Thorn and Graudenz he had behind him an admirable system of strategic railways which enabled him to bring up the necessary reserves with a speed impossible for his opponents. Never before in war has the mobility derived from a railway system organized for military purposes been used to better advantage. As he advanced into East Prussia he had no less excellent lines of supply provided by the three main railways from the Vistula running towards Allenstein, and the southern line which follows the frontier by Soldau and Ortelsburg to the lake region. As far as a line drawn from Allenstein to Soldau his communications might be regarded as secure.

The easy victories of Gumbinnen and Frankenau had inspired in the Russian high command a confidence which was not warranted by the facts of the case. It was a repetition of the French situation in Alsace and Lorraine of the week before. *Rennenkampf*, after the occupation of Insterburg, had advanced along the railway with the Army of the Niemen down the river Pregel towards Königsberg. Reports of the investment of that city were printed at the time, but they were wildly exaggerated. Königsberg is a first-class fortress, defended by a circle of forts on both banks of the Pregel, forts which were enormously strengthened when Skobelev's activity began to perturb Bismarck. It had a garrison of 50,000 men, and its fifteen forts mounted 1,200 guns. On the eastern side it was further defended by inundations in the swampy river bottom. On the west the forts protected the river mouth, where the Pregel runs into the great land-locked lagoon of the Frisches Haff. A channel dredged through the lagoon from the river mouth to the sea entrance of the Haff at the

fortress of Pillau enabled fairly large vessels to co-operate in the defence. Koenigsberg was thus a difficult place to invest, unless the attacking force had naval co-operation. At that moment the German fleet had command of the Southern Baltic, and there was therefore no prospect of a full investment. Rennenkampf had to base his hopes upon an attack on the eastern defences. On 25th August the assault had not begun; the Army of the Niemen had established itself close to the forts, and was bringing up its siege train.

The Russian forces were dangerously divided. Samsonov with the Army of the Narev had, as we have seen, pushed his vanguard to the north-eastern point of the lakes, and defeated a German army corps at Frankenau, while the remainder of his five army corps were advancing on a wide front between Neidenburg and Ortelsburg. The wise course for him would have been to hold the ground he had won and act as a covering force until Koenigsberg was reduced. But, misled by his success, and dangerously under-estimating his enemy, he conceived an ambitious scheme. Pressing on towards Allenstein, he decided to continue his advance through the western lake region, and seize the crossings of the Vistula, his chief objective being, apparently, the second-class fortress of Graudenz between Danzig and Thorn. He first marched towards Osterode, an important railway junction on the northern margin of the wilderness of forest, lake, and marsh between Allenstein and the Lower Vistula. His right was directed upon Osterode, while his left was farther south along the railway from Soldau to Ortelsburg. His force of five army corps—close on 200,000 men—outnumbered von Hindenburg's; but the nature of the ground made his advance strategically dangerous. He was compelled to move on a broad front, since the roads running between the lakes and the swamps made it impossible to deploy large bodies of men on a single line of march. His columns were thus temporarily divided from each other, but he considered that each of them was strong enough to push aside any force that was likely to attempt to bar its progress.

The Russian intelligence department during the halt at Allenstein was defective in its working. Information from spies was either absent or misleading. In the wooded country aviators could see very little. Samsonov had to depend upon his cavalry, and they reported that the only opposition came from small detachments skirmishing in the woods. There was nothing to show that these guerillas had any great force behind them.

But on Wednesday, 26th August, Samsonov suddenly found a more formidable check. On a front of nearly twenty miles his advance guards were

Aug. 26.

everywhere driven in. During this first day's fighting he was under the impression that the obstacle came from the Allenstein garrison, who were fighting rear-guard actions on chosen ground. As he pushed on, however, he discovered formidable masses of the enemy, and late in the day began to realize that he was in the presence no longer of scattered rearguards, but of a great army challenging a battle.

Von Hindenburg had taken up his position with unerring skill. His left was north-west of Allenstein, astride the railway from Osterode to Insterburg; his centre was about Gilgenburg; and his right wing ran from Usdau to Soldau, and rested on the railway which runs from Eylau—the scene of one of Napoleon's hardest battles—across the Russian frontier to Mława. All access to his front was barred by lakes and swamps, over which his artillery had a perfect field of fire. Between these obstacles he had dug trenches and felled trees, and had formed a line of improvised forest fortifications like those behind which the American armies fought in the Battles of the Wilderness.

But his position was as strong for offence as defence. He had good railway communication behind his front, so that he could reinforce practically any wing at pleasure. From his right ran the only two good roads in these parts, which converged at Neidenburg, and from his left by means of the Osterode railway he could conduct an enveloping movement.

On the 26th he stood on the defensive, and in the first days of the battle the Russians, still confident of victory, made repeated attacks on his long line. In these they had some local successes, though they never made good the ground they had won. On the first day Samsonov even took some prisoners, and prematurely reported a second victory. For more than a fortnight Western Europe heard only of this so-called success; there were rumours that after having defeated the Germans Samsonov was advancing swiftly upon Graudenz, and predictions that within three weeks the Cossacks would enter Berlin. It was not till the middle of September that we had any definite news of the great battle, which continued till the last day of August. It was at first known variously as the battle of Osterode or Hohenstein, but the Germans have adopted the name of Tannenberg, from a village of that name on one of the fir-clad dunes which rise above the marshes.

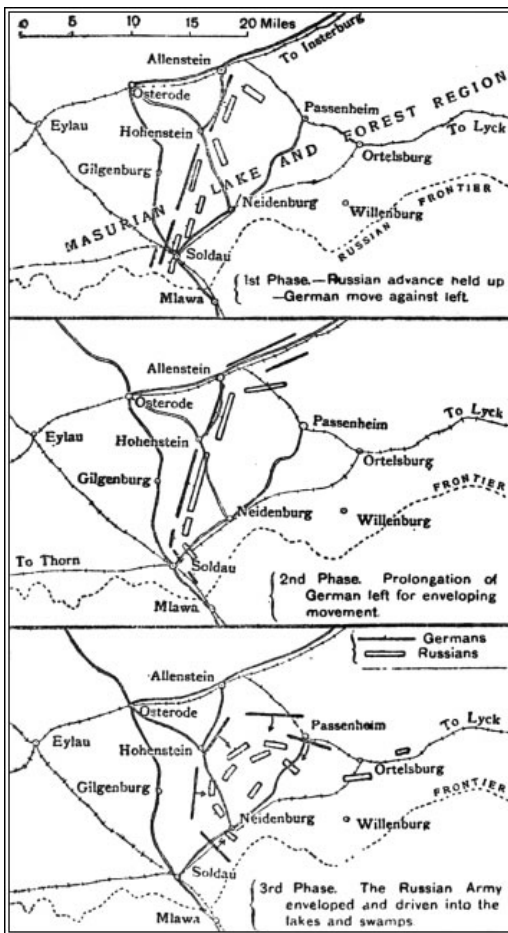
Von Hindenburg made no mistake. Having induced his opponent to commit himself to an offensive in a difficult country, and having worn down the energy of the first Russian assault, the German general counter-attacked. His first movement was on his right. It was a feint, for it was not there he intended to deal the decisive stroke; but, besides leading Samsonov to reinforce his left, it had an important strategical purpose. As the Russians were forced back towards

Neidenburg the German advance overlapped their flank and cut them off from the one good road that led southwards to Mława and Russian Poland.

On the 27th Samsonov made a desperate effort to clear his left flank and regain the road. But the Germans stuck firmly to the position they had gained, strengthened it by entrenchments, and beat off all Russian counter-attacks. At the same time the Russian centre, which had been weakened to support the left, was gradually forced back into the impossible country east of Hohenstein. Meanwhile von Hindenburg was busy with a movement that was to make the battle a second Sedan for the Army of the Narev.

Aug. 27.

By this time the Russians had succeeded in making some reconnaissances over the woods by means of aeroplanes. These brought reports at first that heavy German transport trains of motor vehicles were moving along the good road which runs beside the railway from Osterode eastwards through Allenstein, and that there was incessant traffic on the railway itself. They were mistaken, and it was not till too late that the false impression was corrected. The so-called transport trains on the road were really long strings of lorries, omnibuses, and taxi-cabs, collected from every town in East Germany, and laden with infantry, quick-firers, and machine guns. Before Samsonov had realized what was happening, von Hindenburg had hurried tens of thousands north-eastward to extend his left beyond Allenstein in a great curve round the Russian right flank. With his intimate knowledge of the forest region, he had established a new battle line on ground where miles of front could be easily held by small forces. At a moment when the Russians had sent all available reserves to one flank von Hindenburg was concentrating every man he could spare to turn the other. By the evening of the 27th the German left had extended along the railway towards Wartenburg, and was sweeping southward to the woods, driving in and enveloping the Russian right. The attacking line was now a huge crescent, strongest on the left, and Samsonov was being driven into an almost roadless country, where his difficulties would grow with every hour.



Battle of Tannenberg or Osterode (Aug. 26-31).

It was the very ground where in the old days von Hindenburg had won manœuvre battles, and where in later years he had examined every square mile. He knew that it was all but impassable for an army moving from north to south, and that the one exit to the east was by a defile of solid ground between the marshes leading to the railway line at Ortelsburg. This line bends to the north-westward at that station, and runs through Passenheim to Allenstein Junction. It was now the only line of supply left to the Russians, and the stations and sidings were full of their ammunition and supply trains. The Neidenburg route was closed to them, and the German left precluded the chance of joining Rennenkampf in the north.

On the 28th and 29th there was desperate fighting for the possession of Passenheim, but the big guns from the Vistula fortresses made Samsonov's position

Aug. 28-29.

untenable. There only remained the defile towards Ortelsburg, and on the 30th the Russians were in full retreat along this narrow outlet. Von Hindenburg's left, not less than 60,000 strong, was well east of Passenheim, and the bulk of Samsonov's forces were shut up in a tract of ground where between the clumps of wood lay treacherous swamps and wide, muddy lakes. The Russian batteries as they retired found their guns sinking to the axle trees. Horses struggled in vain through the bogs, and as the circle closed in on the beaten army whole regiments were driven into the lakes and drowned in the water or choked in the bottomless mires.

Aug. 30.

The last day of the battle, 31st August, was an unrelieved disaster for the Russian army. Samsonov was slain that day by a bursting shell, and two of his corps commanders and several divisional generals and brigadiers were killed or wounded. The Army of the Narev had been five corps strong at the beginning of the fight. Little more than one complete corps and a portion of another succeeded in gaining Ortelsburg and retreating eastward by the line of the frontier railway. It was a very complete destruction. The Germans had between 80,000 and 90,000 prisoners in their hands, about the same number that had capitulated forty-four years before at Sedan. Hundreds of guns and ammunition wagons were taken, many of them left abandoned in swampy places, whence it was difficult for the victors to extricate their trophies. Huge quantities of supplies were also captured in the derelict trains on the Ortelsburg-Allenstein railway.

Aug. 31.

Tannenberg was the only battle in the first months of the war that in itself can be considered a complete and decisive victory. The veteran von Hindenburg became the idol of the German people, and his triumph was well deserved. Strategically he had outmanœuvred his opponent; tactically he had shown, not for the first time in history, that with skilful handling a smaller force may envelop a larger. Tannenberg bears a curious resemblance to Mukden, and in his last stricken moments Samsonov may have remembered that the German feint against one wing to hide a crushing attack on the other was the device which Oyama had used on Kuropatkin by means of Nogi's army. Von Hindenburg was to live to fight battles on a far greater scale when, as Field-Marshal of the Empire, he commanded all the German armies of the East. But Tannenberg must have given him a satisfaction which could scarcely be repeated. It was a vindication of the hobby of a lifetime. He had

“wrought
Upon the plan which pleased his boyish thought,”

and his work had been gloriously crowned with victory.

The remnant of the defeated army retired by Johannisburg and Lyck across the frontier towards the Narev, followed up by a strong German pursuit. Without losing a day, von Hindenburg set the main mass of his troops in movement towards the north-eastward along the Allenstein-Insterburg railway, which formed his line of supply. Rennenkampf, whose communications were now threatened, abandoned the attack on Koenigsberg at the news of Samsonov's disaster, and retreated eastward towards the Niemen. He had withdrawn beyond Insterburg before the German advance could come within striking distance. At Gumbinnen he fought a rear-guard action with the German left, but he made no attempt to maintain himself in East Prussia. The invasion of that province had failed disastrously, and the Niemen for the moment must be the Russian line of defence.

It was now that von Hindenburg made his first mistake. Rallying to his side all the German detachments in East Prussia, he crossed the Russian frontier in several columns on a broad front from Wirballen on the left to Augustovo on the right. In the wide forests near the latter place a single corps delayed his advance for a little, and there was much fighting among the woods before the eventual Russian retreat on Grodno. In the German official reports this rear-guard action, which may be described as the first battle of Augustovo, was represented as a victory only second in importance to Tannenberg. It was, however, only a small affair. The Russians had no intentions of doing more than delaying the enemy for a day or two, for their real stand must be on the Niemen.

Von Hindenburg occupied Suwalki, the capital of the Russian frontier province, and installed a German administration, as if he regarded the district as a permanent annexation. It may have been no more than bluff, but there is evidence that he had reached a frame of mind, common to successful generals, which underrates the enemy's power of resistance. He was getting very near to that dangerous attitude which had been Samsonov's undoing, and he was to pay heavily for his confidence. It is strange that the blunder should have been made, for it was obvious that, as Rennenkampf retired behind the Niemen, he must be falling back upon enormous forces supplied by the Russian mobilization. The province of Vilna was as certain to be strongly defended as the environs of Petrograd.

Von Hindenburg's confidence was communicated to his countrymen, and the moral effect of Tannenberg had a lasting influence on the war. Germany had anticipated great and immediate successes in the Western theatre, but no one believed that at the outset much could be done in the East. There the most that was hoped for

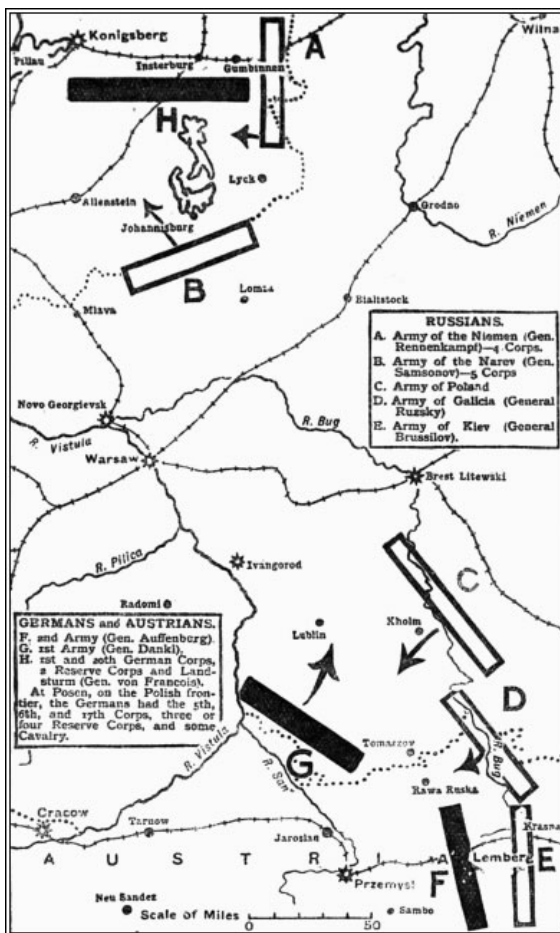
was a defence that should for a time delay the Russian advance to the German frontier. But on the very day that news reached Berlin of the advance of the Germans to the gates of Paris there came tidings from the East that von Hindenburg had destroyed a Russian army, and cleared East Prussia of the invaders. Such a combination of successes might well intoxicate any people. The Austrian failure in Galicia seemed of no account in the presence of such a confirmation of Prussian invincibility. All talk of a mere defence in the East was abandoned; Berlin began to clamour for an immediate advance on Warsaw, and von Hindenburg was hailed as the greatest soldier of the day, who was destined to free Germany for good and all from the menace of the Slav. In popular esteem the laurels of this rugged veteran far eclipsed the modest chaplets of von Kluck or von Buelow. The Emperor raised him to the rank of Field-Marshal, and made him Generalissimo of the Teutonic armies in the East.

CHAPTER XIV.

LEMBERG AND AFTER.

Austria's Military Problem—The Russian
Generals—Radko Dmitrieff—Ruzsky's Advance
on Lemberg—Brussilov takes Halicz—Fall of
Lemberg—Nature of Russian Victory—The
Austrian Position in Southern Poland—Austrian
Left defeated at Opole—Austrian Right defeated
at Rava Russka—Austrian Retreat on Cracow.

The opening of September saw the success of Germany's arms in every area of the European campaign. It was far otherwise with her ally. In the first days of the month the Austrian armies of Galicia suffered a series of disasters which had a material effect upon their future.



Situation in Poland and Galicia towards the end of August.

The military problem of Austria was difficult from the start. She could not look for much aid from Germany till a decisive blow had been struck in the West; but she was expected, having a million men ready and great strength in artillery, to take the offensive from the beginning, and to strike at the imperfectly mobilized forces in Western Poland. She must hold Galicia at all costs, and for such a task an immediate offensive was necessary. Russia might cross the Galician frontier in three places—west of the point where the Vistula receives the waters of the San; between the San and the Upper Bug; or on the east along the line of the river Sereth. The danger lay in a combined Russian movement against the first and third portions of the frontier, which would cut off and enclose the Austrian forces based upon Przemysl and Lemberg. To avoid this danger the boldest, and apparently the safest, plan was to advance northward against the Warsaw fortresses, for such a movement would in all likelihood

prevent the Russian armies from crossing the Vistula, and defer any attack from the east against the Sereth. Austria gambled upon the incompleteness of the Russian mobilization. She knew that the initial concentration had taken place east of Warsaw along the Bug and the Narev. The Army of the Narev was, as she knew, busily engaged in East Prussia, and the Army of the Bug appeared to be inconsiderable. She was aware of armies mustering to the east, south of the Pinsk Marshes, and from the direction of Kiev; but she hoped by a vigorous attack delivered towards Warsaw to compel these armies to reinforce the Russian centre, by which time she trusted to the coming of strong reinforcements from Posen and Germany.

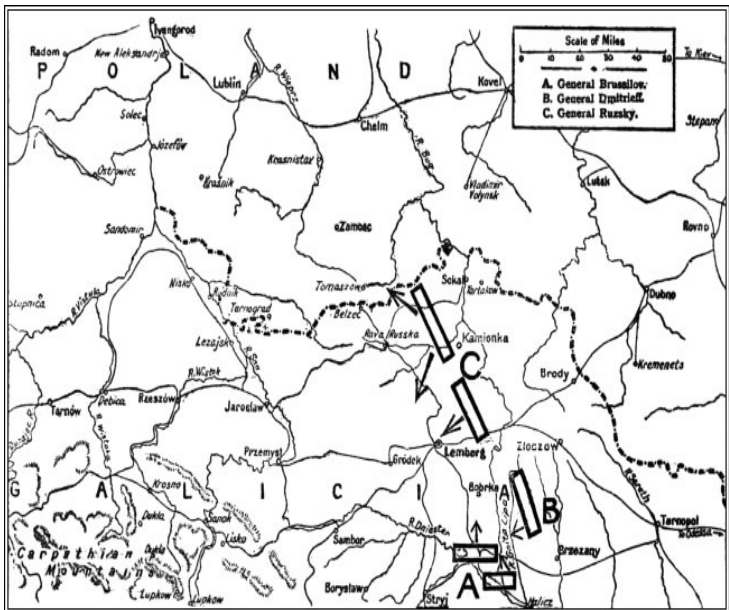
As we have seen in a former chapter, the 1st Austrian Army, under Dankl, had by the last week of August advanced some considerable distance into Poland on the right bank of the Vistula, driving before it the smaller Russian Army of the Bug. The 2nd Austrian Army, under von Auffenberg, was covering Lemberg on the east, and its extreme right wing on the Sereth was engaged with Russian cavalry advancing over the frontier. The number of the 1st Army was seven army corps, a total of a little over 300,000 men. At first von Auffenberg's force had only three corps and five divisions of cavalry; but as the strength of the Russian movement from the east became apparent three further corps were added, bringing the total up to more than a quarter of a million. Against this Austrian movement, as we have seen, three Russian armies were arrayed—the small force on the Bug, which we may call the 1st Russian Army; the 2nd Russian Army, under General Ruzsky, moving on Sokal from the fortresses of Lutsk and Dubno; and the 3rd Russian Army, under General Brussilov, advancing against the Sereth. Each of the two latter forces contained upwards of a quarter of a million of men. The Russian strategy was obvious. Their 1st Army was to fall back before Dankl; their 2nd Army was to menace Lemberg on the north-east, and interpose its right wing between Dankl and von Auffenberg; while the 3rd Army was to advance from the Sereth to the town of Halicz on the Dniester, and complete the investment of Lemberg on the south and east. The Austrian General Staff would appear to have been unaware of the close connection between the movements of Ruzsky and Brussilov. They believed that they had only the latter to face at Lemberg, since the former would be compelled to go to the assistance of the 1st Russian Army on the Bug.

The 1st Russian Army, much the smallest of the three, was under General Ewerts, a corps commander, and its task was to fight a holding battle. Brussilov, whose force contained the men of Southern Russia, was a cavalry general who had seen service under Skobelev in the Turkish war of 1877. Ruzsky was one of the most scientific of

Russian soldiers, a famous professor of the Russian War Academy, who in the war with Japan had been Chief of Staff to General Kaulbars, the commander of the 2nd Manchurian Army. Since then he had been the right-hand man of General Sukhomlinov in his reorganization of the Russian forces. With him was associated a remarkable man, whose name will appear often in these pages. General Radko Dmitrieff was born in 1859, in the little town of Grodez in Bulgaria, then a Turkish province. When his country obtained independence he was one of the first pupils who passed through the new military school at Sofia, and, since the Bulgarian army was then wholly under Russian control, finished his studies at the War Academy of Petrograd. He returned to his native land with the rank of captain on the eve of that rupture with Russia which in one day deprived the Bulgarian army of its staff, its generals, and most of its officers. Serbia seized the occasion to declare war, and Dmitrieff, suddenly promoted to the rank of colonel, brilliantly commanded a regiment in the campaign of Slivnitsa. Later he was implicated in the conspiracy which ended in the abdication of Prince Alexander, and Stambulov forced him into exile. For more than ten years he served in the Russian army, and only returned to Bulgaria after the accession of Prince Ferdinand. In 1902 he became Chief of the General Staff, and commanded the military district on the Turkish frontier. When the war of the Balkan League broke out he commanded one of the Bulgarian armies, won the first victory at Kirk Kilisse, and led the left in the decisive battle of Lule Burgas-Bunarhissar. He was the popular hero of the Balkan War; but weary of the quarrels among the allies which followed it, he accepted an offer to re-enter the Russian service with the rank of general. He was almost the youngest of the great army leaders in the present conflict.

A glance at the map will show how vital to Austria was the possession of Lemberg. It was the key of the road and railway system of Eastern Galicia. It was the administrative capital of the province, and its most important commercial centre. For many centuries it was a strongly-walled city, but of its old defences all that now remained was the citadel, an obsolete fortress without military value. The place was not fortified in the ordinary sense, and its defence depended upon the field army of von Auffenberg. The city was rich in buildings of historic interest, including three famous cathedrals, and the library of its university contained unique treasures of Polish literature and history. When Lemberg fell, the Austrian Government, seeking to minimize its loss, explained that the city had been abandoned in order to save its historical monuments from destruction. As a matter of fact, Lemberg was never in serious danger, for the operations which led to its fall took place many miles to the north and south of it. In any case,

the Russian generals might have been trusted to spare the city from serious damage, since it was to their interest that their armies should appear as the deliverers, not the enemies, of the Polish people.



Russian Attack on Lemberg, September 1-2.

During the last week of August Ruzsky fought his way slowly across the Upper Bug, and found himself facing the entrenchments of von Auffenberg's centre along the Gnila Lipa, a tributary of the Dniester. His right wing was flung out well to the north-west, and was threatening to turn Dankl's right flank in the direction of Tomasov. Meantime the 3rd Army, under Brussilov, had for a fortnight been hotly engaged on the Sereth. He captured the town of Tarnapol about the 27th, and next day he seems to have joined hands with Ruzsky's left. Tarnapol was a heavy engagement, which lasted for nearly three days, and after an artillery bombardment the Austrian entrenchments were stormed with the bayonet. In the town itself the Austrians made a stubborn resistance. They barricaded the streets and mounted machine guns on church towers and the roofs of public buildings, and the place was only taken after hand-to-hand fighting from house to house. The loss of Tarnapol compelled von Auffenberg's right to fall back from the Sereth towards the Lemberg trenches.

Aug. 27.

Brussilov next swept upon Halicz, the ancient town on the Dniester which gave its name to Galicia. It was from Halicz that, in 1259, King Daniel of Ruthenia sent his son, Prince Leo, to found the new city of Leopol, which the Germans call Loewenburg, the

Russians Lvov, and which we know as Lemberg. The surrounding country is largely a series of volcanic ridges and extinct craters, admirably suited for defensive works. After two days' fierce conflict Brussilov carried the Dniester, occupied Halicz, and wheeled northward towards Lemberg.

The battle of Lemberg began on 1st September, and the main fighting lasted for two days. Its chief feature was a fierce attack by Brussilov on the Austrian right, aided by Dmitrieff, who carried the line of the Gnila Lipa, while Ruzsky's right, sweeping round to the north of the city, drove in the Austrian left, and threatened von Auffenberg's communications. By the evening of 2nd September both of the Austrian wings had been driven in, and their line had been forced back into a flattened curve, with its left in imminent danger of collapse under Ruzsky's attack. Early in the morning of 3rd September von Auffenberg decided to abandon Lemberg, although as yet there had been no serious attack on the entrenched positions east of the city. He had secured his retreat by entrenching the town of Grodek, which lies on the railway to Przemyśl, about sixteen miles to the west. By holding this place strongly he was able to cover the retirement of his left, while his right fell back through the wooded country between Grodek and the Carpathians. Several rear-guard actions were fought of an extraordinary type, for, if we may judge from many reports, the Austrians had placed their Slav troops in the rear, in the hope of embarrassing the Russian generals. It is said that this device was countered by high-angle fire which passed over the heads of the Slav rear-guard, and did great execution among the Austrian and Hungarian troops of the line. Presently the retreat became a rout. The Cossacks, who had done magnificent work with Brussilov, showed their old skill in harassing a retirement, and many thousand prisoners and scores of guns were taken. Immense numbers of machine guns were captured at every point where the Austrians attempted to make a stand, and the explanation of this is curious. The Austrians had made a practice of placing such guns on rough improvised platforms among the branches of tall trees. When they were forced to retire it was difficult to get the guns down quickly, and they almost invariably fell into the hands of the pursuit. There was generally a supply of ammunition at the base of each tree, so the Russians could immediately turn the guns upon the fleeing enemy.

Sept. 1-3.

At half-past ten on the morning of Thursday, 3rd September, the Russian flag broke from the flagstaff of the town hall of Lemberg. The population welcomed the conquerors with wild enthusiasm. Huge quantities of stores of

Sept. 3.

every kind fell into Russian hands, and the total number of prisoners taken in the fighting of that week cannot have been less than 100,000. The Russians behaved with exemplary restraint. There was no looting, or any kind of outrage. A Russian governor, Count Bobrinsky, was appointed, and the city was carefully policed. The Grand Duke Nicholas issued a proclamation to the many races of the Dual Monarchy, which was skilfully framed not only for Galicia, but for the discontented peoples beyond the Carpathians.

“Entering at the head of Russia’s forces the confines of Austria-Hungary, I declare to you, in the name of the great Russian Tsar, that Russia, who has time and again shed her blood for the liberation of nations from an alien yoke, seeks but one object—the restoration of right and justice. To you, the peoples of Austria-Hungary, Russia brings freedom and the realization of national ideals. Your Government has for ages past sown discord and enmity among you, for upon your differences depended its power. But Russia has no other aim than that each one of you should advance in prosperity, retaining the precious heritage of your forefathers—your language and your religion—and, in union with your brothers in blood, live in peace and concord, respecting the national habits and ideals of your neighbours.”

The Russian official communiqué did not exaggerate the importance of Lemberg, but the popular press of the Allies did. We were told that the Austrian armies had been annihilated, or that their wholesale surrender was only a matter of days. Such a view was far from the truth. Though the Austrians in Galicia had suffered grave defeats, they were still a force to be reckoned with. An army of nearly a million men with 2,500 guns cannot be destroyed in a few days’ fighting, and can survive the loss of even 100,000 prisoners. According to Austrian reports, the failure was due to the defection of some of the Slav elements of the army, who had abandoned their posts and thrown down their arms at the first favourable chance. It may more correctly be attributed to the defects of the Austrian generalship. Their staff had gambled upon the slowness of the Russian mobilization, and adventured upon what was on the face of it a most perilous plan of campaign. Dankl’s easy advance to Lublin had persuaded them that they had rightly judged the situation, and that Russia was not yet ready to make an effective defence. But the radical

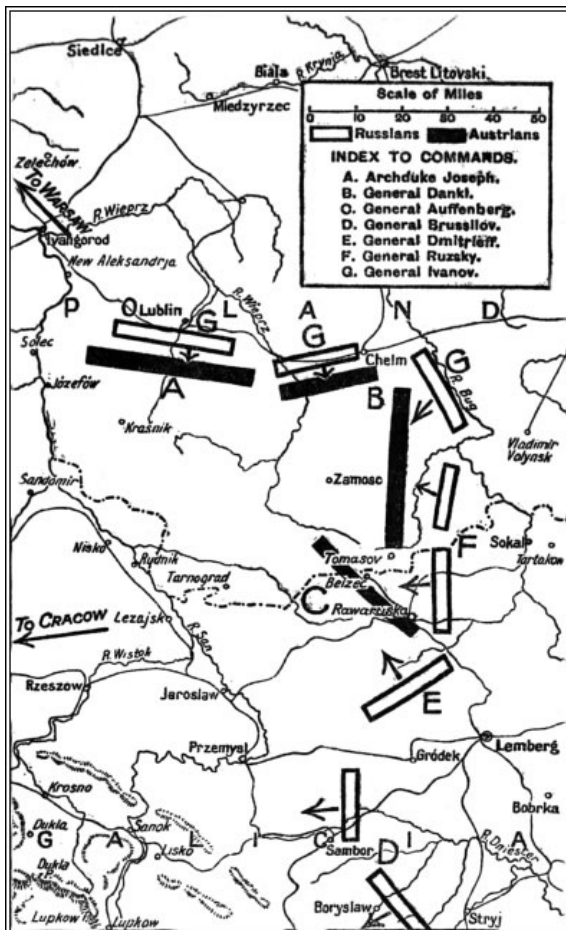
fault of the plan was that the two Austrian armies were moving on divergent lines, so that an initial success must tend to separate them still more and make mutual support impossible. On the Russian side the generalship was at once bold and sound. Brussilov's turning movement was carried out with beautiful precision, and Dmitrieff on Ruzsky's left showed himself an adept in sledge-hammer tactics. But the honours must go to Ruzsky's handling of his right, when he took advantage of the Austrian blunder, interposed himself between the two armies, and threatened in succession the flanks thus exposed. It is interesting to note that he acted on precisely the same plan which was adopted in the Western theatre of war by von Hausen when he advanced with the Saxons across the Meuse from Namur to Dinant on 22nd-23rd August. It was the same plan, too, which on the 9th-10th September Foch was to use with brilliant success against von Buelow. It would seem that in the gigantic battles of to-day, where the fronts extend over hundreds of miles, the deadliest stroke is not an enveloping movement against one of the wings, but the penetration of some point of the long line, followed up by attacks against the exposed flanks so created.

There was no halt after Lemberg. Brussilov divided his army, and sent his left wing into the Carpathian passes. On 4th September he seized Mikolaiev and took forty guns, and within the next ten days had occupied Stryj, a town commanding the approach to the Uzsok Pass, and Czernowitz, the capital of Bukovina. His centre and right advanced due westward along the railway towards Przemyśl, while Dmitrieff with Ruzsky's left wing marched on a line between Grodek and Rava Russka, the railway junction where the line from Lemberg joins the line which follows the Galician frontier. Ruzsky himself moved north-westward with his right to reinforce the 1st Russian Army on the Bug.

Sept. 4-14.

We must now look at the position of Dankl's army. The news of the fall of Halicz and Lemberg had convinced Dankl of his peril, and he had to bethink himself of a way of meeting it. The natural course would have been to fall back and link up with von Auffenberg on the San. A possible course was to attack at once before the 1st Russian Army could be reinforced, disperse it, and take Ruzsky on the flank. This latter and bolder plan was the one adopted. Dankl had now received considerable reinforcements. His left wing was commanded by the Archduke Joseph Ferdinand, and was reinforced by the better part of the German 6th Corps from Breslau. It rested on the Vistula at

Opole, and in case of a Russian turning movement across that river another German force from Czeszochowa moved towards it. The centre, under Dankl, extended just south of the Lublin-Cholm railway, behind Krasnostav, and then bent southward towards the Galician frontier at Tomaszów; the right wing, made up of von Auffenberg's remnants, which had now been largely strengthened, was, in the technical phrase, "refused," and ran from Rawa Russka to just west of Grodek.



Russian Advance after Lemberg. Battles of September 9-11.

The first effort of the Austrian counter-offensive was made on 4th September, against the Russian centre. But that centre was unexpectedly strong, and the attack collapsed. Thereupon the initiative passed to the Russians, and heavy fighting began on 6th September. The Russian strategy in these engagements completely outclassed the

Sept. 4.

Sept. 6.

Austrian. Following the tactics of Mukden and Tannenberg, Ivanov, who now seems to have taken over from Ewerts, feinted against the Archduke Joseph Ferdinand on the Austrian left, while the real Russian strength was being massed for an attack on the Austrian right. Since the Russians were certainly outnumbered, such tactics were the wisest in the circumstances. From 6th-10th September the battle was joined everywhere from the Vistula to the Upper Dniester. On the 10th the Archduke Joseph, on the hills between Opole and Turobin, was decisively beaten by a brilliant frontal attack, aided by superior Russian gunnery, and was driven in ignominious retreat southward towards the San. The German contingent seems to have lost nearly all its guns and five thousand prisoners. On the Austrian centre things went no better. Dankl held on gallantly to the broken country between Turobin and Tomasov, but by 10th September the pressure on his right compelled him to fall back. It was that right under von Auffenberg which had to face the heaviest attack, for against it came the victors of Lemberg, Ruzsky and Dmitrieff. At Rava Russka it met its fate, being taken in flank and in front, and dispersed in utter confusion. When a "refused" flank is turned or broken, it means that the enemy gets well behind the centre of the defeated army. This was what happened now. The whole Austrian force hurled itself southward in acute disorder. The defeated right found sanctuary at Przemysl and Jaroslav; the others fled westward across the San and the Wisloka, and soon the vanguard of the flight was under the guns of Cracow.

Sept. 10.

By the 12th of September a sudden change had become apparent in the Eastern theatre of war. The conquering von Hindenburg was being held on the Niemen. The main armies of Austria had been utterly defeated in four great battles, and were fleeing westward; the Russian flag flew over Lemberg; Russian cavalry were crossing the Carpathians, and the Russian armies were pressing on with their faces towards Cracow. Except for a few German detachments near the Posen border, Poland was clear of the enemy. In the Western theatre by 12th September a no less dramatic change had come over the scene. We must return to the great conflict which had meantime been waged from Paris to Lorraine.

Sept. 12.

CHAPTER XV.

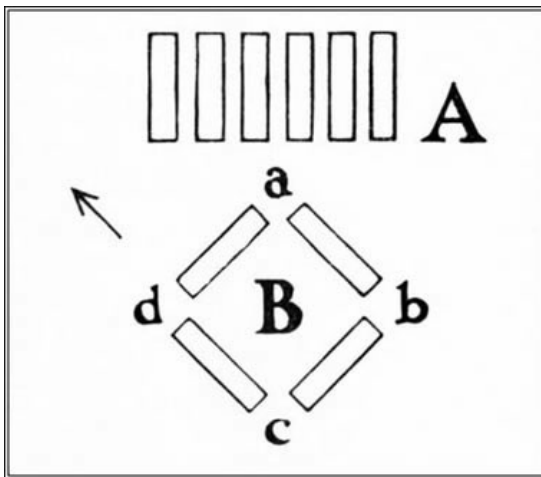
THE BATTLES OF THE MARNE.

The Doctrine of the “Detached Reserves” or “Pivoting Square”—General Joffre’s Main Strategy—His Miscalculation—German Position on 5th September—German Communications—German Strategy—Von Kluck turns South-eastward—Disposition of German Armies on 5th September—Disposition of Allied Armies—Description of Country—The Plain of Champagne—Battle Orders—Battle of 6th September—Battle of 7th September—Battle of 8th September—Von Buelow’s Right uncovered—General Foch’s Movement—The Deciding Movement on 9th September—British cross the Marne—D’Esperey’s Army Order—Foch’s Achievement—Germans fall back from Vitry and Fort Troyon—German Retirement to the Aisne—Summary of Results—Soldiers’ Narratives—Fighting in Lorraine—Battle of Nancy and Recapture of Lunéville.

In every campaign there comes a moment of high tide, when the energy of one of the combatants is stretched taut, and on the fighting of the next day or two depends the success or failure of a great strategical plan. That moment came in the Western theatre of war on or about the 5th of September. The German legions had swept north-eastern France, but they had not yet crushed the enemy. The enveloping attack had failed to envelop, though it had repulsed and taken heavy toll of the Allied ranks. Now was the moment when Germany must strike and strike finally, or the chance of that “battle without a morrow” would have gone for ever, and nothing would be left but the parallel battle of positions, which her General Staff held in special dislike.

But if the crucial moment had come for Germany, it had come not less for France. Now was the time for General Joffre to put into

practice that offensive of the defence to which a generation of French soldiers had looked forward. He had followed the Napoleonic maxim, “Engage the enemy everywhere, and then see.” The Allies had seen only too much, and had fallen back before vastly superior forces. In Lorraine they had been driven across the Meurthe by the Army of Bavaria, and from the Sambre and the Meuse they had retired before von Kluck, von Buelow, von Hausen, the Duke of Wurtemberg, and the Imperial Crown Prince. A retirement somewhere had been foreseen, but scarcely this universal and breakneck retreat. By counting too much upon Namur, and by his under-estimate of the forces advancing through Belgium and the Ardennes, General Joffre had been unable to use the reserves, which are the pivot of French strategy, for the simple reason that they were too remote to be brought up in time. So he had fallen back, and by something like a miracle his retirement had been unattended by grave disaster. Now at last his reserves were within call.



The Lozenge

At this point it is necessary to understand clearly the military doctrine which is variously called the “lozenge,” “the pivoting square,” the “strategical vanguard,” the “mass of manœuvre,” and the policy of “detached reserves.” First let us state it in its most rigid form, as expounded in France by men like Bonnal and Foch, and in Britain by authorities like Colonel Maude. In this form it dates from Napoleon, and was beautifully exemplified in the battle of Jena. Its usual purpose is to permit a smaller force,^[10] against which a larger force is advancing, to feel the enemy’s strength, and wrest from him the initiative; and so it is specially useful for a general who at the beginning of a campaign is compelled by the exigencies of his position to act upon the defensive. Let us assume that an army of six

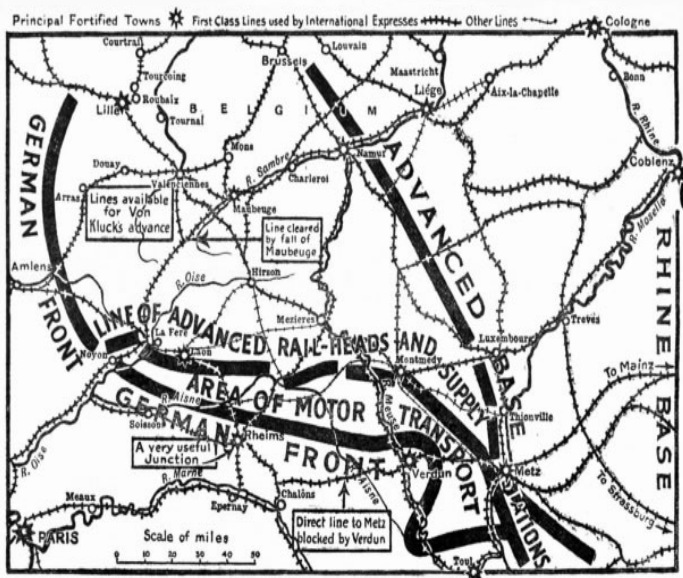
divisions, A, is advancing against B, an army of four. B, under this plan, will be roughly arranged in the form of a square or lozenge, with a point, *a*, facing the enemy. When contact is established the point *a* divides the opposing columns into two parts. Then the square B swings on the pivot *a*; and it has the initiative, since the enemy A cannot tell to which side it will swing. If it swings in the direction of the arrow in the diagram, then the side *a-b* will have to fall back rapidly before a crushing superiority made up of the columns of A to the right of *a*, the point of contact. But the three sides of B, *a-d*, *d-c*, and *c-b*, swinging to the left, will fall upon the columns of A to the left of the point *a*, and in them will find an enemy inferior in numbers, or, at the worst, equal. When they have beaten it, they will continue the wheel, and fall upon the flank or rear of that part of A which is engaged in the pursuit of *a-b*. The square B need not be a square in the linear sense, though the victorious army at Jena made roughly such a figure. It may be a time-square, provided that the sides are so placed that they can be brought into the pivoting movement by road or rail at the appointed hour.^[11]

Such a conception, as we have argued elsewhere, cannot in its rigid form be profitably applied to the general strategy of a campaign involving millions of combatants. But, stated more broadly, it was the basis of the French plan. General Joffre had to face an enemy who might be depended upon for a terrific initial attack, delivered with enormous numerical superiority, but exactly where nobody knew. At first it seemed likely that it would come through the Gap of Metz; then there was some evidence that it would be through the Ardennes and Luxemburg; and later it became obvious that one great attack, if not the greatest, would be through the plain of Belgium. But it was difficult to gamble on any one of these possibilities, and no one could be safely disregarded. Accordingly he waited to secure contact everywhere, and see. His reserves were there—on the Alsace border, behind the Verdun-Toul line, in Paris and south and west of it, in the Seine valley, in and about Châlons and Langres, and Dijon, and Besançon—ready to move to the threatened point when that point should be revealed.

But the danger of the plan was that it demanded exceptional endurance and *moral* in the force which had to feel the enemy and then retreat before him. Would a conscript army show this stamina? Many had doubted, but, as it fell out, their doubts were idle. The three French armies fell back on the whole in fair order, as did the British, who had the hardest task of all. General Joffre took immense risks, and he was on the whole justified by the result; but it is difficult not to believe that, if he had been able to forecast more accurately the events

of the last ten days of August, he would have had his reserves more easily accessible. The line on which he ultimately made his stand was not so good as the Heights of Champagne, and if the German advance had been checked at the Aisne instead of the Marne, Paris and London would have been saved much searching of heart.

Put in its broadest form, General Joffre's plan was to feel the enemy with his necessarily inferior forces, and then fall back on reserves which would move towards the point of danger. Lord Kitchener's phrase in the House of Lords about increasing our strength proportionately to the decline of the enemy describes the policy from another angle of vision. Germany put all her strength into her first blow, because she knew where it was to be delivered. France, ignorant of the direction of the stroke, was ready to parry it—weakly, perhaps—at any point, and, when it had spent its strength, to strike herself with forces which she needed a little time to bring forward.^[12] Germany aimed at an immediate maximum; France began with a minimum which must daily grow.



German Lines of Communication.

On 5th September the German armies had a fortnight of splendid achievement to encourage them, but the General Staff can scarcely have viewed the situation with complete contentment. They knew that their time was fast slipping away. Rennenkampf's raid on East Prussia had sent a tide of fugitives to Berlin, and the Prussian squires were growing nervous

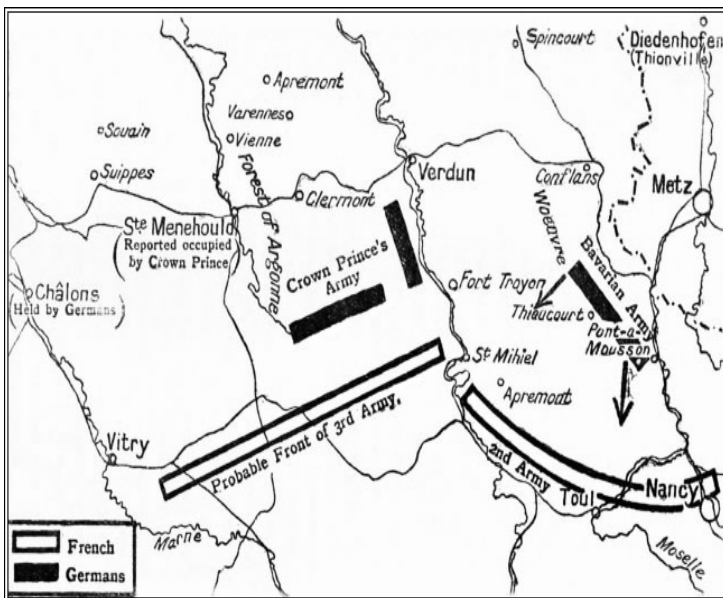
Sept. 5.

about their manors. Supports from the reserve were sent, and von Hindenburg had checked the Russian advance, and was driving Rennenkampf towards the border. So far all was well, but news was arriving of grave disasters to Germany's ally. In the early days of September the Austrian defeat at Lemberg, though denied in the German press, was recognized by German statesmen, and the demand for reinforcements for Galicia could no longer be set aside. First line corps were needed to stop the Russian invasion, and these could only be drawn from the army in the West. There were rumours that the equivalent of several corps was withdrawn—the 11th from von Buelow, and divisions from von Hausen's Saxons and from the Bavarians in Lorraine. This, however, is unlikely, though the possibility of having soon to weaken their line weighed on the German Staff. A gap was left for some reason, probably to be occupied by the new troops from Belgium or Maubeuge, and of this gap later the French 9th Army took swift advantage. Again, the huge front was not in the best position as to supplies. There was no serious difficulty, as the attached map shows, but the best and shortest line was not yet in their control. Maubeuge held out to the 7th of September, and till it fell the Germans could not take advantage of the main line of communications which ran from the Rhine by Liège and Namur down the Oise valley. The army of more than a million men depended for ammunition and food upon the routes from Belgium and Luxemburg by way of Mezières and Montmédy, and the round about and somewhat precarious western line from Brussels by Valenciennes and St. Quentin. Even if Maubeuge fell speedily, the line of communications would still be long and intricate, and it was highly desirable to establish a new and better one. What that should be was not doubtful. From Metz through Verdun ran the main line from the central Rhine, one-third of the length of the line through Belgium, and, once acquired, far easier to hold. The capture of Paris was the next step after the defeat of the Allied armies, and for that and for further operations in the south the Metz-Verdun line would be invaluable.

A further difficulty lay in the news from Belgium. General von Boehn's 9th Corps, consisting of Landwehr troops, had been under orders to occupy the lower Seine and the short routes from Paris to the Channel, and then to reinforce the main German right. But the vigorous offensive of the Belgian armies, which we shall consider later, had held it in Flanders, and the whole position in Belgium was ugly. At one moment there seemed a serious risk of having communications cut with the north-east.

Everything pointed to the need of an immediate and crushing victory. The Eastern frontier was likely to demand further reinforcements, and the army of the West would never be stronger than it was at that moment. The existing communications were not the best, and might soon be worse, and it was essential to open up new and better ones. Lastly, the Allies had been driven from pillar to post for a fortnight, and must now be at their lowest in strength and spirit. One powerful effort, and the field force of Joffre might crumble.

The enveloping attack, the favourite device of the German military schools, was by itself no longer sufficient to secure this result. The Allied front rested securely on Paris in the west, and the fortress line Verdun-Toul in the east. The perimeter of the Paris defences was so large that a sweeping movement round them would thin out the line to an impossible extent. Besides, an enveloping movement on the west would not open up immediately the Metz-Verdun communications. But if by any chance they could pierce the Allied line, split it in two, and roll up each half, then everything would be won. The proper place for the attempt was clearly the Allies' right centre. A wedge driven in there would cut the larger part of the Allied armies off from the Burgundian fortresses, and drive them towards Paris, which would become for Joffre what Metz had been for Bazaine. Meantime the Allied right, small in numbers and isolated from the rest, would be forced against Verdun, and the Imperial Crown Prince from north and west and the Bavarians from the east would send that fortress the way of Liège and Namur. To ensure this desirable end, it was decided that von Kluck, disregarding the British, should strike at the left of the French 5th Army, and envelop it with the assistance of von Buelow; while the armies of Saxony, Wurtemberg, and the Crown Prince should hurl themselves against the wearied troops of Langle and Ruffey.



Situation on Allied Right before the Battle of the Marne.

To understand what followed, it is necessary to observe closely the position of the different forces. On the 4th of September, when the movement began, von Kluck lay with his right at Senlis, and the German front extended eastward along the Marne valley to the upper waters of the Aisne. On that day the German right wheeled south-east, crossing the river Ourcq, which enters the Marne on the north bank. On the next day, the 5th, von Kluck's columns were observed by our airmen crossing the Marne at various points, such as Trilport, La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, Nogent-on-Marne, and as far east as Château Thierry. The British force was meantime lying snugly ensconced behind the forest of Crécy, to the south-west of the Grand Morin river. The French 5th Army, now commanded by General d'Esperey, fell back before von Kluck towards the Seine, and the Germans bivouacked at Coulommiers and La Ferté Gaucher on the Grand Morin. Their cavalry patrols that night and early the next morning even penetrated as far south as the banks of the Seine. But von Kluck was growing anxious. Though he had as yet no exact information of the French reserves which had been accumulating behind the shelter of Paris, he became aware of a sinister activity on his extreme right, which was not the British. His line of communications came down the valley of the Ourcq from Rheims and Mezières, so he left behind him a strong rear-guard facing across the stream to watch what might come from the west.

Sept. 4.

Sept. 5.

That same day, Saturday the 5th, Sir John French met General Joffre, and was informed that the hour for the counter-offensive had arrived. The British commander was instructed to make a half-wheel to his right, to keep in touch with the 5th French Army, and he was informed of the new forces which were now to be flung into the combat.

That evening of the 5th and the night which followed saw the German armies at the extreme limit of their southward march. Let us trace in detail their positions in the long convex arc which stretched from the Ourcq to Verdun. Von Kluck had his right lying north and south along the eastern bank of the Ourcq from its confluence with the Marne. His cavalry divisions were at Cr cy, just north of the British force, and west of Coulommiers; his 4th Corps was at Rebaix, on the Petit Morin, and his two remaining corps, the 3rd and 7th, west of Montmirail, on the same stream. East of him von Buelow held a line on the plateau of Sezanne, south of the upper waters of the Petit Morin and their sources in the Marshes of St. Gond. Von Hausen's Saxons, what was left of them, filled the gap between von Buelow and the Marne a little north of Vitry; while the Duke of Wurtemberg stretched across the whole southern end of the plain of Ch lons to the upper streams of the Aisne south of St. Menehould. The Imperial Crown Prince extended his line over the Argonne to the south of Verdun. Here came a gap in the continuity of the front, caused by the fortified area of the Heights of the Meuse between Verdun and Toul. Well behind this area, in the east of the rough plateau of the Woivre, with its right on the Metz railway and its left resting on the Vosges, was the army of the Bavarian Crown Prince; and farther south, along the mountain crest and in front of Mulhouse, was the smaller and now greatly depleted army of Alsace, under von Heeringen. The total numbers can only be conjectured; but if we assume that the German forces allocated in the first instance to the west were twenty-one army corps of the first line and the same number of reserve corps, and deduct 400,000 men as reinforcements, and troops detached for Belgium and the lines of communication, we shall get a figure of something more than a million and a half for the front running from the Ourcq to Alsace.

Taking the French front from the east, by this time only a small force was left in the Gap of Belfort and in the Southern Vosges. The Army of Lorraine stretched across the Gap of Nancy, east of that city, with its left to the east of the fortified line Verdun-Toul. The 3rd Army, now commanded by General Sarraill, lay with its back to the Upper Meuse, from a point south of Verdun south-westwards towards Bar-le-Duc, facing the Imperial Crown Prince. Langle's 4th Army was

astride the Upper Marne south of Vitry, looking north across the plain of Châlons. On its left came the first of Joffre's new reserves, the 9th Army under General Foch, fronting von Buelow on a position from Camp de Mailly westward past Sezanne to the upper waters of the Grand Morin. On its left was d'Esperey's 5th Army, holding the line from Esternay on the Grand Morin, south-westward to Courtacon, on its tributary the Aubetin. General Conneau's cavalry corps continued the line down the right bank of the latter stream, and was in touch with the British army, which lay from Coulommiers to near Lagny on the Marne. North of the Marne, with its right on that river and its left at Betz in the Ourcq valley, lay the second of General Joffre's great reserves, the French 6th Army, which had formed up on our left on 29th August, and was now increased by large additions from the forces of Paris. This army was under General Maunoury, but it seems certain that during the turning movement in the west General Pau had been summoned from Alsace to take a general superintendence—the same kind of task as was later assigned to General Foch in West Flanders.

The physical configuration of the theatre of the impending battle is so curious as to merit a brief description. Let us imagine a traveller in early September going westward from the Verdun forts. When he has left behind him the narrow vale of the Meuse he will find himself in an upland country of small pastures, diversified by narrow ravines and spinneys choked with undergrowth. He will cross the stream of the Aire, and from any rise will see to the southward the profound woodlands that sweep towards Bar-le-Duc. Presently his road will descend, and he will see before him a long, low ridge covered with dense forests—a knuckle of clay rising from the chalk of the weald. This is the Forest of the Argonne, an old check to the invaders of France, for the paths are few and blind, and only two gaps carry a highroad and a railway. From some clear point in the Argonne, if he looks south-westward, he will catch, far on the horizon, the golden shimmer which tells of miles of ripening wheat. But as he looks westward he will see a plain like a petrified ocean. For forty miles to the west and for more than a hundred from north to south stretch those dreary steppes where heaths and chalky moorlands are broken by patches of crop, by shapeless coppices, and by large new plantings of little firs. It is the Champagne-Pouilleuse, the Salisbury Plain of France, on whose melancholy levels it has for a thousand years been prophesied that the Armageddon of Europe would be fought. Our traveller will cross the infant Aisne, and as he advances will see the gleam of water which marks where the Marne flows north from Burgundy. Crossing that river at Châlons, he will presently have before him a long, low line of cliffs, running north and south—the

eastern front of the Falaises de Champagne. Crossing the highroad from La Fère Champenoise to Rheims, he will ascend three hundred feet to what is called the plateau of Sezanne, through which the Marne runs in a deep-cut vale. He will pass tributaries coming from the south—the Grand and the Petit Morin—each, like the main river, a slow-flowing, unfordable stream, but each well provided with stone bridges and lined with woods and country houses. Then, after fifty miles of the plateau, he will find the land sinking before him, and will look over a rich plain of forests and orchards to the spires of Paris.

Such was the battlefield, a mosaic of almost every type of landscape—the hill glens of the Meuse, the roll of the Champagne flats, the downs of Sezanne, and the shady riversides of Meaux. It was in a special sense the holy land of French arms. In the north the Allies had been fighting in places whose names were famous not less in English than in French history, but the Champagne-Pouilleuse was France's own. From its southern borders Joan of Arc had come to give heroic inspiration to her people. On one of its ridges stood the tomb of Kellermann, to mark where Valmy turned the tide of the Revolution wars. But the great monument of the past was the vast oval mound which catches the eye of the traveller on the old Roman road from Châlons. It is called the Camp of Attila, and the legend is that this uncouth thing, as strange to European eyes as the Pyramids, was a fortification of the Huns when they broke like a flood upon the West. The flood was rolled back there, on the plain of Châlons, by Aetius the Roman, and Theodoric, King of the Visigoths. Once again the Catalaunian flats were to be the arena of strife with an invader from the East.

Both sides recognized the gravity of the coming battle. On the morning of the 6th September the French generalissimo issued the following order to his men:—

“At the moment when a battle on which the welfare of the country depends is about to begin, I feel it my duty to remind you that it is no longer the time to look behind. We have but one business on hand—to attack and repel the enemy. An army which can no longer advance will at all costs hold the ground it has won, and allow itself to be slain where it stands rather than give way. This is no time for faltering, and it will not be suffered.”

More cheerful in tone was Sir John French's order of the same day:—

“After a most trying series of operations, mostly in retirement, which have been rendered necessary by the general strategic plan of the Allied armies, the British forces stand to-day formed in line with their French comrades, ready to attack the enemy. Foiled in their attempt to invest Paris, the Germans have been driven to move in an easterly and south-easterly direction, with the apparent intention of falling in strength on the 5th French Army. In this operation they are exposing their right flank and their line of communications to an attack by the combined 6th French Army and the British forces.

“I call upon the British army in France to show now to the enemy its power, and to push on vigorously to the attack beside the 6th French Army.

“I am sure I shall not call upon them in vain, but that, on the contrary, by another manifestation of the magnificent spirit which they have shown in the past fortnight, they will fall on the enemy’s flank with all their strength, and in unison with their Allies drive them back.”

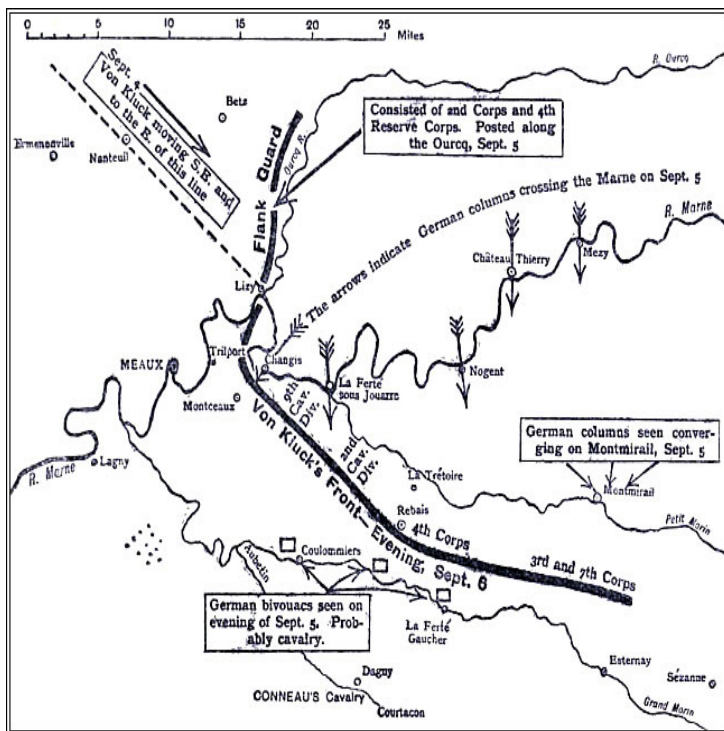
We possess a German army order issued on the following day at Vitry by the general commanding the 8th Corps:—

“The object of our long and arduous marches has been achieved. The principal French troops have been forced to accept battle after having been continually forced back. The great decision is undoubtedly at hand. To-morrow, therefore, the whole strength of the German army, as well as that of all our army corps, is bound to be engaged along the whole line from Paris to Verdun. To save the welfare and honour of Germany I expect every officer and man, notwithstanding the hard and heroic fight of the last few days, to do his duty unswervingly and to the last breath. Everything depends on the result of to-morrow.”

The battle began at dawn on Sunday, 6th September. It was one of those tropical days of early autumn which make France seem no true northern land.

Sept. 6.

At dawn the French 6th Army was stirring, moving slowly towards the western bank of the Ourcq. From the little town of Meaux the ground rises towards the north in a low plateau. Roads lined with tall Lombardy poplars traverse it, and everywhere are fields of wheat and maize, spinneys, and endless orchards. The tableland is sown with villages, most of them now in the hands of German outposts, while between them and the main German rear-guard the Ourcq ran in a deep-cut channel. The French 6th Army consisted of at least eight divisions, four of the first line, while the Germans on the east bank of the Ourcq had three first line divisions of the 2nd Corps and two of the 4th Reserve. That day the work of the 6th Army consisted in hand-to-hand fighting among the villages, during which they were exposed to the long-distance fire of the German batteries beyond the river.



Von Kluck's Advance—September 4-6.

Meanwhile the British army behind the forest of Crécy was moving north-eastward toward the Grand Morin. General Pulteney had now taken over the command of the Third Corps, which was made up of the 4th Division and the 19th Brigade, and our total force therefore consisted of five infantry divisions and five brigades of cavalry. The men were in the highest spirits, rested, refreshed, and aware at last that the forward march had begun. By noon of that

blistering day they had left the cool shades of the forest and arrived at open country, where scattered woodlands concealed the enemy's outposts. Here they engaged a division of his cavalry and his infantry advance guard, which were well supported by batteries. A counter-attack was repulsed, and late in the afternoon the German shelter trenches were carried by a bayonet attack. On the evening of the 6th we held a line extending across and south of the Grand Morin, with our right a little north of Dagny, on the Aubetin stream.

Elsewhere towards the east it had been a day of hard fighting, in which the Allies won little ground. D'Esperey was cutting his way up from the south towards the upper reaches of the Grand Morin, between La Ferté Gaucher and Esternay. He was engaging the bulk of von Kluck's army, and though he forced it back by frontal attacks the ground won was small. Further east Foch, with the 9th Army, was busy with a struggle for the southern edge of the Sezanne plateau against von Buelow, while his right was opposed to the right wing of von Hausen's Saxons. Langle and the 4th Army, operating from the south of Vitry, had to repel a violent attack by the Duke of Wurtemberg, delivered in the hope of piercing the Allied centre. As the fighting rolled eastward it became more desperate in character, and while the Allied left moved appreciably forward, the Allied centre had much ado to hold its own. On the Allied right there was even a slight falling back. Sarraill's 3rd Army was pushed southward under the attack of the Imperial Crown Prince. Its right, moving along the heights of the Meuse, retired south of Fort Troyon, which was now exposed to the fire of the German field howitzers.

To most of the German armies the day must have seemed one of reasonable success. Von Kluck alone had an inkling of what was to come. The danger from the French 6th Army had revealed itself, and he now realized that his right wing was turned, and that he must fight a battle on two fronts. Further, the despised British army had appeared suddenly from the forests, and its three corps, unshaken by the retreat, were playing havoc with the right flank of that movement which he had hoped would shatter d'Esperey. That night the bivouacs of the 1st German Army were the resting-places of uneasy heads.

On Monday, the 7th, there was a desperate conflict along the whole battlefield, but only in the west was any great progress made. Maunoury's 6th Army was slowly driving in the German outposts on the right bank of the Ourcq, and nearing the line of that river. From village to village, amid the smoke of burning haystacks and farmsteads, the French bayonet attack was pushed home. The colours of the Magdeburg regiment were captured after a fierce struggle, and when darkness fell the whole

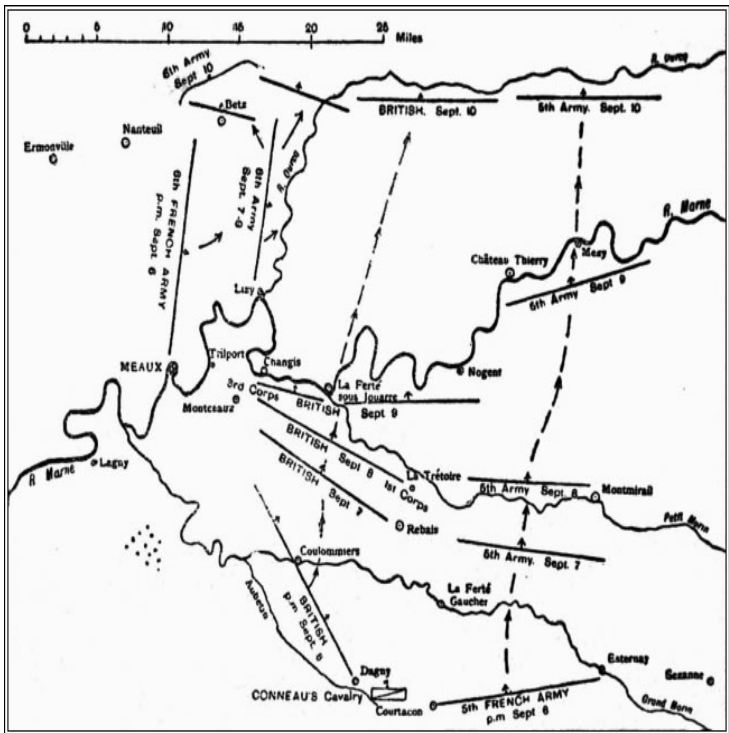
Sept. 7.

plateau, according to the report of an observer, was strewn with German dead and horribly lit up by the glare of flaming villages. At the first light on this day the British advance began, and by 5 a.m. our centre had taken Coulommiers, while our right was moving rapidly in the direction of La Ferté Gaucher. Our infantry drove back the four German divisions opposed to them, and the forty-five squadrons of our cavalry routed the seventy-two squadrons of the 2nd, 9th, and Guard divisions opposed to them. In this, one of the finest cavalry actions of the war, the 9th Lancers and the 18th Hussars of General De Lisle's brigade covered themselves with glory. Across the bridge of Coulommiers the enemy retreated, and every northward road was choked with his columns. This meant that the right flank of von Kluck's main movement had been uncovered by the British attack. Our artillery fire, as we learn from German letters, was deadly, aided by the admirable intelligence work of our airmen. Whole German batteries were smashed to pieces, and the path of the retreat was littered with broken gun-carriages. Taken thus on the flank, von Kluck's corps could not hold the line of the Grand Morin. They fell back behind it, and d'Esperey, who all day had fought a severe frontal action, was enabled at nightfall to advance and hold the position from La Ferté Gaucher to Esternay, with the bridge-heads which enabled him to move forward on the morrow, and his vanguard across the river.

The morning of the 8th saw the German right clearly in retreat. Von Kluck had recognized the impossibility of his position. His stroke at d'Esperey had failed, and Maunoury and French had turned his flank. The 6th French Army was engaged all day in a desperate struggle, in which they fought their way to the brink of the Ourcq. Late in the afternoon, when the British left reached the Marne to the east of Meaux they afforded some relief to Maunoury's right by shelling the Germans on the high ground to the north in the angle of the rivers. Meanwhile the British forces had begun their own fight about 5 a.m. with an artillery duel against the German rear-guard on the north side of the Grand Morin. On this high ground the Germans had heavy artillery, and during the morning hours the British guns were busy searching out and shelling the position. About midday the last of our infantry had crossed the river, and all afternoon we advanced rapidly through the beautiful land of orchards and corn-fields between the Grand and Petit Morin. We pushed past Rebaix, and the hardest of the fighting took place late in the afternoon at La Trétoire, where Sir Douglas Haig's First Corps dislodged the enemy after a hard struggle, repelling a counter-attack and making large captures of guns and prisoners. The Second Corps on our centre had also a heavy task, but they and the

Sept. 8.

Third Corps advanced rapidly, and by the evening the whole of Sir John French's army had won the south bank of the Petit Morin, holding it from Trilport to north of La Trétoire. This meant that our left wing was now resting on the Marne, where it was in contact with von Kluck's rearguards on the Ourcq.



Battle of the Marne—Progress of Allied attack against the German right.

D'Esperey's 5th Army had a long day of constant struggle. Already holding the north bank of the Grand Morin, they fought their way over the eight miles of country to the Petit Morin, and before dark carried Montmirail, on the latter stream, by hand-to-hand fighting. This achievement was of vital strategic importance, because it laid bare the right flank of von Buelow's army to the eastward. Foch, with his 9th Army, had had a day of severe frontal fighting on the plateau of Sezanne, south of the upper streams of the Petit Morin. Some time that night he discovered the exposed position of von Buelow's flank, and, boldly thrusting forward his left wing in the darkness, succeeded in getting well to the west of it. In the evening the weather had broken. The brilliant starry night changed to a torrent of rain, which continued through the following day. The elements conspired with the French general to bring off what, as we shall see, was one of the great strokes of the battle.

Meanwhile the commander of the 9th Army had received intelligence from his airmen which suggested another audacious movement. Foch was of all the French generals the one best known to the world, for his admirable works, *Les Principes de la Guerre* and *Conduite de la Guerre: La Manœuvre de la Bataille*, were military classics in every country. He was now given the chance of showing how brilliantly he could put his unrivalled knowledge of war into practice. It was reported to him that in the alignment of the German armies a gap had been left between von Buelow's left and von Hausen's right. The story of what followed is not clear, but that something disastrous happened to the German line in this section of the field is obvious from the nature of the retreat which followed—a retreat too complete and hasty to be accounted for by the mere necessity of conforming to von Kluck's retirement. During the darkness of that night of Tuesday, 8th September, Foch seems to have pushed his right wing northward through the western part of the plain of Châlons, and at dawn had driven a wedge between von Buelow and von Hausen.

But perhaps the fiercest fighting of the day fell to the lot of the 4th and 3rd Armies. Langle held on desperately against the repeated attacks of the Duke of Wurtemberg. Ground was lost and recovered, and though the Germans scored no real success, it was becoming clear that unless this savage pressure were withdrawn from the French centre there was some chance of the piercing movement succeeding. Meantime Sarraill, in his precarious position south of the Argonne, had to face the repeated assaults of the Imperial Crown Prince. He seems by this time to have received reinforcements, and the German attack on this vital wing was stoutly repulsed.

The next day, Wednesday, the 9th, was the critical moment of the series of battles. It was a day of high winds and drenching rains, which were specially violent in the centre and east of the position. Maunoury, on the west, finally won the line of the Ourcq and cleared the Germans from its right bank. They retreated by pontoon bridges, which were constantly shattered by French shot. On the east bank, von Kluck had strengthened his forces to cover the retirement northward of his main body. The British left—the Third Army Corps—struggled all morning in vain to seize the crossing of the Marne at La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, but an advance party succeeded in crossing lower down at Changis in the afternoon. Meanwhile the Second Corps in the centre and the First Corps on our right had driven the Germans easily from the Petit Morin, and early in the afternoon had reached the Marne at Chailly and Château-Thierry. They forced the passage of the river in spite of

Sept. 9.

heavy gunfire from the opposite bank. At Château-Thierry, the home of La Fontaine and Napoleon's old crossing-place in his march to Craonne, the Germans had destroyed the bridge, and our passage there and elsewhere was effected by pontoons. The town was terribly scarred and broken by shell fire. Here, on both banks, we made large captures of German prisoners and guns. One wounded German officer said, "Our orders were to stay here and fight it out, till we were either killed or captured." The Germans fully accepted the doctrine (laid down also in our own drill book) that guns may be honourably lost in covering a retreat. In the dripping woods around the town the battle soon degenerated into a gigantic man-hunt, and our troops took captives in batches of tens and twenties. By the evening we were encamped several miles north of the Marne, with the enemy in full retirement.

D'Esperey, advancing from Montmirail, after a day of incessant fighting, came in touch with our right at Château-Thierry by nightfall. By that time it was clear that the resistance of the German right was hopelessly broken, and von Buelow, who was further south than von Kluck in the alignment, stood in obvious danger of having his right caught by d'Esperey if he did not fall back. It had already been turned, as we shall see, by another general. That day the commander of the 5th French Army issued to his troops an order which expounded the situation with all the accuracy possible on the field of battle:—

"Soldiers,—Upon the memorable fields of Montmirail, of Vauchamps, of Champaubert, which a century ago witnessed the victories of our ancestors over Bluecher's Prussians, your vigorous offensive has triumphed over the resistance of the Germans. Held on his flanks, his centre broken, the enemy is now retreating towards east and north by forced marches. The most renowned army corps of Old Prussia, the contingents of Westphalia, of Hanover, of Brandenburg, have retired in haste before you.

"This first success is no more than a prelude. The enemy is shaken, but not yet decisively beaten.

"You have still to undergo severe hardships, to make long marches, to fight hard battles.

"May the image of our country, soiled by barbarians, always remain before your eyes.

Never was it more necessary to sacrifice all for her.

“Saluting the heroes who have fallen in the fighting of the last few days, my thoughts turn towards you—the victors in the next battle.

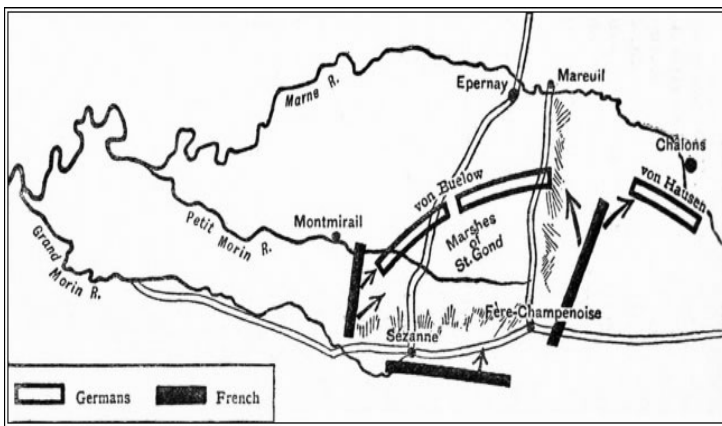
“Forward, soldiers, for France!

“Montmirail, September 9, 1914.

“General Commanding the 5th Army,

“FRANCHET D’ESPEREY.”

We must turn now to the dramatic events which on that Wednesday were happening farther east. General Foch, as we have seen, had used the exposed position of von Buelow’s right for an attempt at a turning movement on the night of 8th-9th September. Early in the wet dawn the two corps which formed the right of the German 2nd Army—one of which was the Prussian Guard—found themselves assailed on the flank, and were compelled to beat a retreat. The Prussian Guard have been the mystery men of the war. They were reported successively at Charleroi, at Le Cateau, and at Guise, which was manifestly impossible, unless their allegiance was transferred to different army commanders. Probably they were, to begin with, part of the army destined for the Imperial Crown Prince; but they were later transferred to von Buelow, as is shown by the report of a speech made weeks later by their commander, General von Plettenburg. He spoke of their victories “from Malmédy to La Fère Champenoise.” Now, La Fère Champenoise was the scene of the strenuous fighting between Foch and von Buelow on the 7th and 8th. As time goes on we hear of them flitting like swallows between the Eastern and Western front. Part of the confusion seems to be due to the use of the term Prussian Guards to cover the Reserve Corps and Cavalry as well as the Guards proper; and it is possible, too, that later they may have been split up and their divisions used in different armies. But on September 9th the main Guard Corps was with von Buelow. They had fought at Charleroi, but not at Le Cateau, though their cavalry had there engaged Smith-Dorrien; they had fought at Guise and had suffered a check; and now they formed the picked troops of von Buelow’s force. They were to suffer during that day and the night which followed a crushing disaster.



Sketch of Foch's Movement September 8th-9th.

The tactical details of Foch's action are still uncertain, but it is clear that it consisted of two parts—(1) a movement of his left against von Buelow's uncovered right, and (2) the advance of his right till a wedge was driven in between von Buelow and the Saxons.

To understand what happened, we must remember the nature of the country. In the chalky soil of the Sezanne plateau lies a pocket of clay, ten miles long from east to west, and of a breadth varying from one to two miles. Through this pocket flows the Petit Morin, now a very small stream; indeed, here lie its springs, and it and its affluents have been canalized to prevent flooding. The clay pocket is called the Marshes of St. Gond; they are now almost wholly reclaimed, and between the acres of rank grass the various rivulets run in deep ditches, as in any marshy English meadow. In fine weather the place is dry enough, but in heavy rains the slopes to north and south send down trickles of water, the canalized streams overflow, and the clay soil of the pocket becomes one vast quagmire. The Marshes are crossed by two notable highroads at each end, leading respectively from Sezanne to Epernay, and from La Fère Champenoise to Mareuil. Between these roads four country tracks cross the bog, none of them engineered or metalled, and likely in flood-time to become as deep in mire as the adjoining marshes.

Into this slough, after a fierce battle during the day, two corps of von Buelow's right were driven late in the evening of Wednesday, the 9th. The Guards were the chief sufferers, for they had the post of danger. In the main they got clear through the Marshes to the higher ground between the Petit Morin and the Marne, but many prisoners were taken, and at least forty guns—the largest capture of artillery so far made by the Allies in the campaign.

But if von Buelow's right was suffering on that day, his left was in no better case. The story of the wedge which Foch's right drove into

the gap between von Buelow and von Hausen is still far from clear. We know that it happened, but we do not know the exact moment in the battle; but the probabilities are that the date was as we have given it—early on 9th September. The French were well supported by artillery, and apparently had their guns in position, facing north-east and north-west, before the Germans discovered what had happened. Now, such a position as was held by Foch's right may be either a wedge driven into the enemy or a dangerous salient exposed to flank attacks, according as the troops are handled. On that day the French Staff work seems to have been perfect, and while the wedge held its ground, Langle's left from the Vitry position attacked the Saxons in front, while Foch's centre held von Buelow's centre. The French 75-mm. guns did terrible execution, and for a moment there was something like a panic in the German ranks. This passed, and a dogged fight was maintained through a long day of driving rain; but by the evening von Buelow had fallen back several miles towards Epernay, while the Saxons had lost so heavily that they were pushed almost to within sight of Châlons.

Von Buelow's retirement was inevitable in any case, but there can be little doubt that Foch's victory of the 9th-10th accelerated its pace beyond what was needed to conform with von Kluck's retreat. By this time the German right had been reinforced by the 40,000 troops that had been left before Maubeuge, and also, apparently, by divisions brought up from Alsace. Such additions to his strength should, under normal circumstances, have enabled von Kluck to make a prolonged stand on the Ourcq, had not von Buelow's catastrophe intervened. The Germans were not broken, but they were heavily defeated, and on that day they suffered losses which were not to be paralleled till two months later in West Flanders. It was reported in France that the 9th Army had buried 10,000 German dead; and though that figure is clearly an overstatement, there can be no doubt that the mortality was exceptionally high. For the rest, Langle had improved his position, and the 3rd French Army had resisted with difficulty a violent assault by the Crown Prince. The latter was making one final effort to drive in a wedge between the French right and the forts of the Meuse.

On Thursday, the 10th, the battle of the Marne had to all intents been won by the Allies, and the engagement became a drive. The 6th French Army, again reinforced from Paris, guarded the line of the Ourcq. The British army, now across the Marne, advanced rapidly, with much severe fighting, against the German rear-guard, in echelon from Château-Thierry, where was the First Corps, to La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, where was stationed the Third Corps. The rain continued in torrents, but in

Sept. 10.

spite of the difficulties of the roads, the German retreat was superbly managed. Artillery and prisoners were lost—Sir John French reported that we took thirteen guns, seven machine guns, about two thousand men, and a quantity of transport; but in the circumstances these losses were small. The German retirement was a retreat, not a rout. All day on the Allied front the forward movement continued. By the evening Foch was close to Châlons, and Langle had occupied Vitry, from which the Wurtembergers had retired in some confusion. Only on the east was there little progress, for the Crown Prince's army was the pivot on which the German lines swung.

On the 11th the French 6th Army was marching north by west from the right bank of the Ourcq towards Compiègne. On the same day the British crossed with some ease the Upper Ourcq where it runs east and west, and that night our cavalry had reached the valley of the Aisne, a little south of a line drawn from Soissons to Couvrelles. That day Foch entered Châlons, making large captures of guns, and followed the retreating von Buelow to the neighbourhood of Rheims, while Langle's right approached the battlefield of Valmy, and his cavalry pushed on to the upper vale of the Suippes.

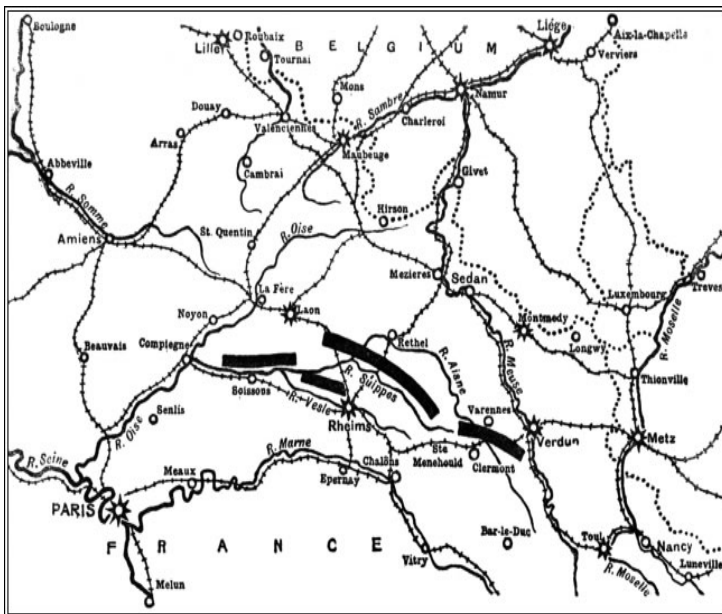
Sept. 11.

By Saturday, the 12th, the Germans had occupied the line of positions on the Aisne and the Suippes which they had previously prepared against such an emergency, a line which is one of the strongest defences in Europe. In the east the Crown Prince had fallen back a little to conform to this wholesale retirement, and his retreat saved Fort Troyon, which had been bombarded for five days, and was now in desperate case. Only forty-four men were left in the garrison, only four guns remained in action, and the fort itself was little more than a heap of dust. He took up a position running from Clermont to St. Menehould, holding the only good pass of the Argonne.

Sept. 12.

The battle of the Marne resolves itself into a number of separate engagements. It embraces, if we go by the rivers, the battles of the Ourcq, Marne, the two Morins, and the Upper Aisne; or we can call the different actions the battles of Meaux, Sezanne, Vitry, and the Argonne. History, whatever name it knows it by, will record it as an indisputable victory for the Allies, won by hard fighting and good generalship. The Germans failed, first, because of von Kluck's arrogant exposure of his right; and, second, because of the heavy defeat on their right centre inflicted by Foch and the 9th Army. Great

credit is also due to Langle and Sarraill, who had to meet the most violent part of the German offensive. The Germans showed themselves no less skilful in a forced retreat than in their great descent from the north. Their losses, when all is said, were surprisingly small. Their armies were no more broken than were those of the Allies when they fell back from the Sambre to the Seine. During the last two days of the battle the world was presented with a new spectacle of how fast an orderly retirement could be. Von Kluck, fighting rear-guard actions, fell back in the time not less than thirty-five miles, and the German centre cannot have covered less than fifty. These were achievements which might well comfort the defeated.



German Position on September 12.

But no tactical brilliance could conceal the fact that the major German strategy had grossly failed. The “battle without a morrow” was now gone beyond hope; the battle had been fought and the morrow had come. Henceforth they were on the defensive—in the enemy’s country, it is true, and with a great slice of conquered territory behind them, but still indubitably on the defensive. The “hussar ride” had miscarried, and they were forced to accept a parallel battle and a war of entrenchments.

No praise can be too high for the dash and drive of the Allies, wearied troops as most of them were, and for the tactical excellence of the leading. Our own men advanced with a fire and resolution which is not to be explained only by the human desire to avenge the long

retreat. Forty-five of our cavalry squadrons drove before them seventy-two German squadrons; four German infantry divisions were utterly beaten by five British, though at Mons four British had repulsed the attack of eight German. A new element had come into the situation, which affected the spirit of all the Allies, and not least of Sir John French's men. The latter for the first time realized the horrors of war in a long-settled land, and the ruthlessness of German methods. In the retirement from Mons they had fallen back through a friendly country not yet devastated by the enemy. They had been oppressed by the panic of the fugitives who thronged the roads; they had heavy losses of their own to avenge; but as yet they knew nothing of the full tragedy of invasion. But as they marched north from Cr cy they entered a countryside ravaged and dishonoured. They found ch teaux burned and gutted, smiling gardens and orchards trampled into mud, little farms and villages laid waste, humble cottages the scenes of senseless and brutal devastation. From homeless peasants they heard of the ways of the conqueror. At such a time a soldier cannot adopt the point of view of the careful inquirer, and tales of outrage, when joined with the sight of so much wanton ruin, were readily accepted. For the first time, as an officer put it, our men began to "see red." They realized that they were pitted against no ordinary foe, but against something which they believed to be the enemy of mankind.

From the many soldiers' narratives of the battle, we quote one which not only gives a good impression of an artillery fight, but chronicles a remarkably bold adventure. It is contained in a letter from a major of the Royal Field Artillery.

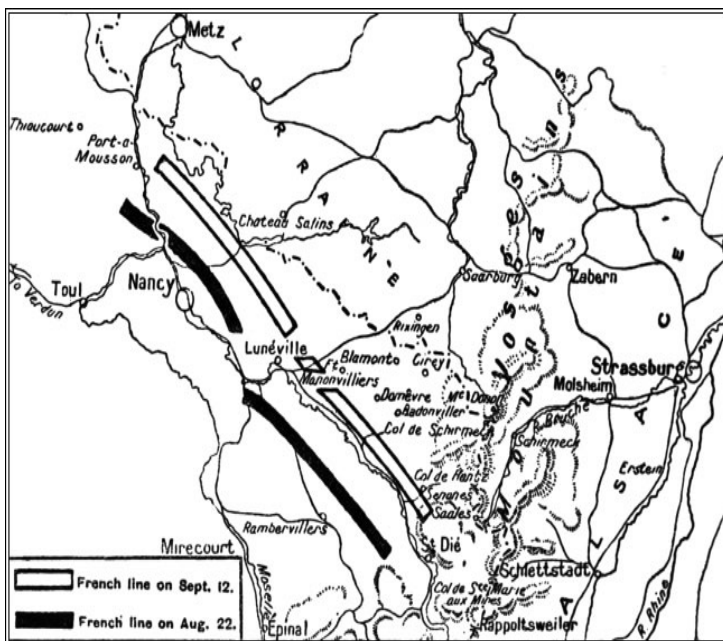
"September 14.

"I determined to get those machine-guns if I could, as otherwise the infantry would. So I left — to command, and got the trumpeter, sergeant-major, and six men with six rifles, and went forward 'to reconnoitre,' as I reported to the Gen. by —, after I had gone. It was a weird ride, through thick black woods, holding my revolver ready, going in front with the little trumpeter behind and the others following some way in rear. We passed some very bad sights, and knew the woods were full of Germans, who were afraid to get away on account of the dreaded shell fire. We got in front of our infantry, who were going to fire at us; but I shouted just in time.

“At last we came to the edge of the wood, and in front of us, about 200 yards away, was a little cup-shaped copse, and the enemy’s trenches with machine-guns a little farther on. I felt sure this wood was full of Germans, as I had seen them go in earlier. I started to gallop for it, and the others followed. Suddenly about fifty Germans bolted out firing at us. I loosed off my revolver as fast as I could, and —— loosed off his rifle from the saddle. They must have thought we were a regiment of cavalry, for except a few they suddenly yelled and bolted. I stopped and dismounted my lot to fire at them to make sure they didn’t change their minds. I held the horses, as I couldn’t shoot them like that myself. I then suddenly saw there were more in the copse—so I mounted the party and galloped at it, yelling, with my revolver held out.

“As we came to it I saw it was full of Germans, so I yelled ‘Hands up’ and pointed the revolver at them. They all chucked down their rifles and put their hands up. Three officers and over forty men to ten of us with six rifles and a revolver. I herded them away from their rifles and handed them over to the Welsh Regiment behind us. I tore on with the trumpeter and the sergeant-major to the machine-guns. At that moment the enemy’s shrapnel, the German infantry who’d got away, and our own howitzers, thinking we were hostile cavalry, opened fire on us. We couldn’t move the beastly things, and it was too hot altogether, so we galloped back to the cup wood and they hailed shrapnel on us there. I waited for a lull, and mounted all my lot behind the bushes and made them sprint as I gave the word to gallop for cover to the woods where the Welsh company was. There I got —— who understands them, and an infantryman who volunteered to help, and —— and ran up to the Maxims, and took out the breech mechanism of both and one of the belts and carried away one whole Maxim. We couldn’t manage the other. The Welsh asked what cavalry we were. I told them we were the staff of the —— Battery, and

they cheered us, but said we were mad. We got back very slowly on account of the gun and the men wild with excitement, and we have got the one gun complete, and the mechanism and belt of the other. The funniest thing was the little trumpeter, who swept a German's helmet off his head and waved it in the air shouting, 'I've got it,' wild with excitement. He is an extraordinarily brave boy."



Fighting in Lorraine (Aug. 22-Sept. 12).

Before we conclude the tale of the fighting which ended on 12th September we must glance at what was happening to the flank and rear guards of the French armies—the 2nd Army in Lorraine. It was under the command of General de Castelnau, whose son, serving under his father, had fallen in battle a fortnight before. It was drawn up across the Gap of Nancy to prevent the army of the Crown Prince of Bavaria from turning the Allied front, and it was now assisted by a second force under General Dubail, a member of the Superior Council. We have seen in a former chapter how the German counter-offensive from Metz, which began on the 20th of August, had driven back the French to a position just east of Nancy. The old capital of Lorraine is not a fortress. The ring of wooded heights which surround it—what is called the *Grand Couronné de Nancy*—is a very strong position, but it was never fortified after 1870, since its guns would

have commanded a large stretch of country across the new frontier. General de Castelnau, however, had erected field works on the heights, and the absence of normal fortifications was probably an advantage, since he escaped the spell which the northern fortresses had exercised on the field armies. The fighting began on the 23rd of August, the day after the German counter-offensive had reached its limit, and it extended on a line from St. Dié at the foot of the Vosges, through the forest country east of Nancy, to Pont-à-Mousson, on the Moselle. The fiercest fighting began on the 6th of September, when the presence of the Kaiser incited the Bavarians to a desperate assault. The battle continued without intermission for three days. The famous White Cuirassiers were repelled with great slaughter, and the French 75-mm. guns did deadly work at close range. The reputation of the Bavarian troops, ever since their desperate attack on Bazeilles on the day of Sedan, had been second to none in the German army. But in this war there were not lacking signs that their heart was not in the struggle. The treatment of Belgium, whose Queen had been their favourite princess, did not please them, and for many years they had been restive under the Prussian hegemony. Rumours were already spreading of serious friction between the Bavarians and the North German troops. But in the fight before Nancy they gave a good account of themselves. On the 9th the French took the offensive, and after a desperate bombardment drove the enemy out of the forest of Champenoux, and took Amance. Farther south in the next two days the Germans were driven out of St. Dié, and evacuated the line of the Meurthe. By the 12th the main fighting was over, and de Castelnau occupied the town of Lunéville, which had been in German hands since the 22nd of August.

On Monday, the 7th, the German Emperor had viewed the fight at Nancy from a neighbouring hill. We shall see him again, in his long cloak and silver helmet, watching the menace of the Russians from a Polish castle, or looking at the desperate charge of his volunteers among the wet fields of Flanders. He flits restlessly between east and west, everywhere making brave speeches about German "culture," everywhere announcing a speedy and final triumph. A melancholy figure he cuts, as he stands on the fringe of the battle-smoke at Nancy, looking west to Burgundy and that promised land which he could not enter. An object for pity, perhaps, rather than commination, for he is the dreamer whose dreams do not come true, and who in his folly has imagined that his caprices are the ordinations of destiny.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE OCCUPATION OF BELGIUM.

German Policy towards Belgium—Belgian Advance from Antwerp—Von Boehn's 9th Army—Belgian Fighting, September 13-17—German Vandalism—Louvain—Malines—Termonde—Looting—German Atrocities—Louvain—Aerschot—The German "Armed Dogma"—French Guerilla War in Ardennes—The Heroism of Belgium—King Albert.

The surge of the great armies southward on 24th August left Belgium in the hands of the invaders, with the exception of the city of Antwerp, Ostend and the coast, and a portion of West Flanders. There is a passage in the Book of Deuteronomy which was quoted at the time by a German newspaper as an encouraging precedent for the doings of this modern Israel:—

"And I sent messengers out of the wilderness of Kedemoth unto Sihon king of Heshbon with words of peace, saying, Let me pass through thy land: I will go along by the high way, I will neither turn unto the right hand nor to the left. Thou shalt sell me meat for money, that I may eat; and give me water for money, that I may drink: only I will pass through on my feet; as the children of Esau which dwell in Seir, and the Moabites which dwell in Ar, did unto me; until I shall pass over Jordan into the land which the Lord our God giveth us.

"But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the Lord thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as appeareth this day. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have begun to give Sihon and his land before thee:

begin to possess, that thou mayest inherit his land.

“Then Sihon came out against us, he and all his people, to fight at Jahaz. And the Lord our God delivered him before us; and we smote him, and his sons, and all his people. And we took all his cities at that time, and utterly destroyed the men, and the women, and the little ones, of every city, we left none to remain: only the cattle we took for a prey unto ourselves, and the spoil of the cities which we took.”

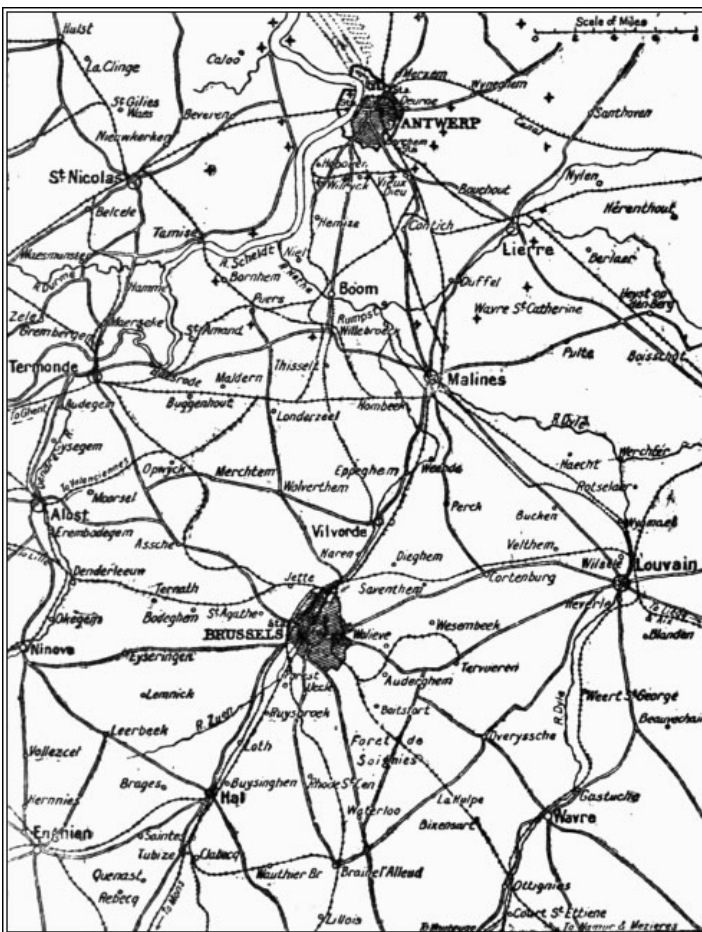
That Belgium should share the fate of the cities of Heshbon was no part of the original German plan. The Emperor and his advisers had sincerely hoped that she would for due consideration sell Germany the right of passage. Had she done that, we may be certain that the march through Belgium would have been a miracle of decorum, that every bushel of oats and peck of flour would have been paid for in cash, and that not a door-knob would have been damaged. German discipline is marvellously perfect when discipline is desired. Failing the right of entry, the German leaders believed that the complete repulse of the Belgian forces, the occupation of her capital, and the sight of the omnipotent German armies would awe her into an abject, if sullen, submission. Belgium would no doubt fall to Germany when the war was over, and this sleek and mercantile little people, the *commis voyageurs* of Europe, would not quarrel with their future bread and butter.

If, on the other hand, the nation should prove refractory, the position might be serious, and would demand stringent measures. For through the plain of Belgium and the hilly Ardennes ran the communications of the great armies now sweeping towards Paris. No first line troops could be spared to guard them; only reserves, and a limited number of these. To waste a field army by using it as an army of occupation was repugnant to the whole German theory of war. The process of Germanization was at once set going. Marshal von der Goltz had been appointed military governor of Belgium; governors were appointed for districts and cities; fines were levied on the different localities, to warn a presumably thrifty race of the folly of resistance; the clocks were changed to German time; German currency was introduced, and German nomenclature adopted. Everything was done to convince the Belgian people that the conquest of Belgium was an accomplished fact.

But the Belgian people obstinately refused to be convinced. Let us deal first with the defeated but unbroken army of General Selliers de

Moranville, now sheltering behind the forts of Antwerp. It numbered, with the new volunteers, probably not less than 120,000 men; it was well found in ammunition; its guns were good and magnificently horsed, though the cavalry mounts, as always happens when an army is confined to a narrow space, were degenerating. But its spirit was perfect, and it was not content with the security of Antwerp. On the 23rd of August, the day of the battle of Mons, it marched south, and next day drove the Germans out of the town of Malines. A glance at the map will show that this feat was of some strategic importance. Malines commands the best and shortest railway communication between Germany and West Flanders, and it is dangerously near Brussels and Louvain. Now, at the moment there was considerable German activity towards the north-west of Belgium and the coast. General von Boehn's 9th Corps, consisting mainly of Landwehr troops, and destined to reinforce von Kluck, was marching towards Bruges and Ghent. A detachment of Uhlans had attacked Ostend and been driven back by the Civic Guards, and on the 24th 2,000 British Marines had occupied that town. These might or might not be the forerunners of a new British army, but they were sufficient to alarm the Germans. With the British at Ostend and the Belgians at Malines, their force in West Flanders might be caught in a trap, and the communications on which the great armies chiefly depended would be in great danger. The Belgian offensive had the valuable result of depriving von Kluck of his reinforcements and bringing von Boehn hurriedly eastward again.

Aug. 23.



Area of Belgian Operations from Antwerp.

The fighting in Belgium of the next three weeks took place for the most part in the triangle of which Antwerp is the apex and a line drawn from Termonde to Aerschot the base. A glance at the map will show how seriously the Belgian attack menaced the subsidiary communications of the German armies. We do not know the details of that fighting, which began with successes and ended in a retreat inch by inch to within the Antwerp lines. Of its desperate character we can judge from the fury it inspired in the German army of occupation. On 24th August the Belgians drove the Germans—two-thirds of an army corps—out of Malines. Next day the Germans retorted by sending a Zeppelin over Antwerp, which dropped bombs on the chief buildings, missed them, but killed a number of civilians. Undismayed, the Belgian field army on a forty-mile front, with its right at Termonde and its left at Aerschot, pushed on and took Alost, and presently laid siege to

Aug. 24.

Cortenbourg, on the railway between Louvain and Brussels. A little more, and the communications of Brussels would be cut on the north, east, and west. The Germans lost heavily, and so did the Belgians, if we can judge by the fact that a week's fighting sent 8,000 wounded to the Antwerp hospitals alone. Undoubtedly, if Britain had been able at this time to land an army corps or less at Ostend, the German occupation of Belgium would have hopelessly broken down.

As it was, the Belgians had to fight their battle alone, and the danger of Brussels brought back von Boehn's 9th Corps, and apparently another reserve corps, which the Germans called the 3rd, and which was on the French frontier near Lille. It also brought up the reserve regiments from the south of Brussels, and presently a naval division of 15,000 sailors and marines was added. We do not know the total German strength, but it can hardly have been less than a quarter of a million, and was probably more. An American correspondent, Mr. E. A. Powell, who fell in with the 9th Corps, records that "for five solid hours, travelling always at express train speed, we motored between walls of marching men."^[13] The chief battle seems to have begun on 13th September, when the Germans held a line which crossed the Antwerp-Brussels line at Weerde, facing the Belgians, who lay to the north-east between Aerschot and Malines. It lasted for four days, and the fiercest fight was on the line of the Malines-Louvain railway, which the Germans eventually carried. From that moment there was nothing for it but a slow retreat upon Antwerp, and the enemy began to close in upon the devoted city.

Sept. 13-17.

The beginning of a Belgian offensive meant the beginning of a reign of terror in Belgium which has no parallel in the history of civilized warfare. Belgium was a good country to sack. The long-descended habits of its people made of it a hive of industry; its fields were tilled like gardens, its little cities were history embodied and visible, full of precious tokens of their stormy past and industrious present. Everywhere was a civilization rich, warm, compact, and continuous. In this most habitable land was to be seen some of the finest stone and brick work of the Flemish Renaissance, and whole streets and towns might have come intact from the fifteenth century. Everywhere were ancient church spires, rising far over the flats, and sweetening the air with their carillons; and in town and hamlet alike were masterpieces of Flemish tapestry and painting—the handiwork of Rubens and Vandyck and Bouts and Matsys. A bull on a common is

a harmless creature, but he will play havoc in the cabinet of the virtuoso.

Let us deal first with the vandalism which is proven and admitted—the destruction of old and beautiful cities. Louvain was the chief university town of Belgium, and one of the intellectual centres of Catholic Europe. Even more than Oxford it whispered from its spires “the last enchantments of the Middle Age.” Its town hall was the most miraculous of the many miracles of Gothic architecture which adorn the Belgian plain. Its university was one of the oldest in Europe, and contained in its library riches of *incunabula* and manuscripts befitting a city which was associated with More and Erasmus. Its Church of St. Peter was full of treasures of painting and carving, and the fabric itself in its solemn simplicity rose majestically above the cluster of ancient dusky streets. On the evening of Wednesday, 26th August, while the Belgian army occupied Malines, there was an outburst of rifle fire in the town, and several Germans were hit. The Germans announced that it was the outcome of a plot among the civilian populace, instigated by the Belgian Government; the Belgians declared that a detachment of Germans, driven back from Malines, was fired upon in mistake by the German troops of occupation. Such are the two tales; we will only add that the first is weakened by the fact that the Civic Guards of Louvain had already been disarmed, and the rifles in the town hunted out and confiscated; while the probability of the second is heightened by the proven circumstance that many of the German garrison were drunk. A certain Major von Manteuffel—an unworthy bearer of a famous name—was in command, and he gave the order for the destruction of the city. It was done as systematically as the condition of the soldiers allowed. Small incendiary tablets and faggots soaked in paraffin were flung in through the broken windows. Houses were entered and assiduously looted, what could not be carried away being smashed and flung into the streets. Presently the city was in a blaze. The university disappeared, and with it the great library; the Halles, with their noble arches, became charred ruins; only the walls of St. Peter’s Church remained; and who shall say how many ancient houses were turned into heaps of ashes. The town hall survived, saved by the Germans out of some sudden compunction, and to-day that gemlike thing stands forlorn among the blackened acres.

Aug. 26.

Malines—the Mechlin which gave its name to the lace collars of our ancestors—was only less famous in the annals of Flanders. The great Cathedral of St. Rombaut, soaring with its unfinished towers above the Grande Place, dated from late in the thirteenth century, and contained the most superb of Vandyck’s pictures. In its Palais de

Justice Margaret of Austria had held court, and no city in the world was richer in ancient and storied houses.

Aug. 27.

We have seen that the Belgian army retook Malines on the 23rd, but they did not hold it, for they were a field army and not a garrison. On the 27th, when the first German bombardment took place, there were probably no Belgian troops in the town. The roof and walls of the cathedral were riddled with shells, and the populace fled from the place in panic. On 2nd September it was again bombarded, and the German fire was directed successfully against the tower of St. Rombaut's. The famous bells, which had rung their carillon for five centuries, were shattered to pieces. Again, on 26th September, when the scared inhabitants had begun to creep back, there was a third bombardment, which issued in a fire that raged furiously for days. Malines had to all intents gone the way of Louvain.

Sep. 2.

Sep. 26.

Termonde, which Marlborough had captured in his wars, was another historic town lying between Ghent and Malines, on the banks of the Scheldt. Unhappily it too had treasures in stone and lime—the Cathedral of Notre Dame, with its paintings by Vandyck and Rubens, and its exquisite town hall. It was the theatre of desperate fighting during the first fortnight of September, but its destruction was not due to any battle. It was deliberately smashed to pieces during the German occupation because the fine levied upon it was not immediately forthcoming. Of all the Belgian cities, its fate perhaps was the direst, for almost literally it was levelled with the ground. Small wonder, for the burning was most scientifically managed. The houses were first sprayed with paraffin by soldiers, who perambulated the streets with oil-carts and hoses.

To cite Louvain, Malines, and Termonde is only to mention the most famous instances of destruction. Hundreds of little villages were laid waste, towns like Alost and Dinant were wantonly bombarded, and scarcely any part of this vandalism was imposed upon the invaders by military needs. Let us be very clear on this subject. War is a stern taskmistress, and will not be denied. If a famous church happens to be in the field of fire of an army in battle, the church must go. No æsthetic compunction can be allowed to interfere with strategical necessities. But only a small part of the demolition of Belgian cities was done for the purposes of military operations. Louvain was destroyed by the Germans at their leisure, while they were the force in occupation. Malines and Termonde were bombarded apparently out of pique, for the Belgians did not defend them. As for Dinant, it is hard to see what purpose was served by the ruin of its pleasant streets and the delicate cathedral which lies in the nook of its

cliffs. The Saxon army, who did the work, crossed the Meuse without difficulty, and did all their fighting on the farther bank. The only apparent motive was the inspiration of terror in the conquered, that the task of the future masters might be easy. Civilized war respects non-combatants, and not less those inanimate non-combatants, the great fabrics of the past. But this was not civilized war.

We come next to the subject of looting. Every town which was shelled or burned, and many which were not, was made the object of a comprehensive robbery. Louvain was plundered down to the last sheet and florin. Here is a sketch of Aerschot by the American correspondent we have already quoted:—

“Quite two-thirds of the houses had been burned and showed unmistakable signs of having been sacked by a maddened soldiery before they were burned. Everywhere was the ghastly evidence. Doors had been smashed in with rifle butts and boot heels; windows had been broken; furniture had been wantonly destroyed; pictures had been torn from the walls; mattresses had been ripped open with bayonets in search of valuables; drawers had been emptied upon the floors; the outer walls of the houses were spattered with blood and pock-marked with bullets; the side-walks were slippery with broken wine bottles; the streets were strewn with women’s clothing.”^[14]

Now, looting used to be an old perquisite of the victors, but it has long been interdicted in civilized warfare. Soldiers, of course, break out occasionally and loot; but they are disobeying orders, and suffer for it. But the German soldier does not break loose and disobey; he is too well drilled by the machine. The looting of the Belgian cities would have been impossible had it not been permitted and instigated by the officers in command. They turned their men free, and human nature, which is eternally acquisitive, did the rest. The plunder of the conquered was part of the German theory of war.

Last comes the subject which has made of this war a nightmare, not to be paralleled in Europe since the days of Tilly and Wallenstein—the murder and outrage done upon civilian non-combatants. The reports to some extent conflict, and it is impossible to hope for the real truth for many a day. A Commission composed of eminent Belgian publicists and jurists has investigated the subject, and has issued five reports, which contain sufficient horrors to justify the most damning judgment. At the same time it should be said that these reports are, as

lawyers say, *ex parte*; the other side of the case has not been heard; and the confusion of a campaign is not the best time for the weighing of evidence. Our South African War was probably the humanest ever waged, but every one remembers the allegations of inhumanity which were made on both sides at the time—allegations which disappeared with the smoke of the battles. But in the case of Belgium we have certain evidence to go upon. In the first place, we have an immense amount of testimony from eye-witnesses, and even if we discount half of it, a weighty pile remains. In the second place, there is a good deal of important outside evidence—also of eye-witnesses, chiefly Dutch and American journalists. Finally, Germany herself admitted many of the charges by the nature of her defence. She did not deny; she justified, and apparently believed sincerely in the justice of her plea.

The bare facts—whatever the condonation—were, roughly, these. At Louvain there was a great deal of wholesale shooting of civilians—men, women, and children. At Aerschot there was something not unlike a massacre. The Germans alleged that one of their officers was treacherously shot dead by the burgomaster's son. One Belgian report admitted the shooting, but added that it was done in defence of his sister's honour; another denied it altogether. At Visé, at Alost, at Dinant, at Tamines, and many little villages, unarmed civilians were shot and bayoneted, sometimes on a charge of having firearms in their possession, sometimes apparently purely as an exemplary measure—*pour encourager les autres*. There were many alleged cases of murder of old people, women, and children by a drink-maddened or panicky soldiery. There were a number of cases—some well authenticated—of crimes against women and young girls. There were also certain instances of the Germans having used non-combatants and women as a screen for their firing lines. One or two horrible stories of mutilation and torture cannot be recounted.

We need not enlarge upon the catalogue, for the types of outrage are fairly clear. One or two things may first be said in mitigation. Sexual outrages, though some have been established, were, according to M. Vandervelde, not very common. They happen in every war, and especially in such a war as this. Then, the using of women as a screen for troops is exceedingly difficult to prove. The terror-stricken inhabitants of a village fleeing before the invader are the first things that the opposing forces see, and may very easily be fired on accidentally. One or two intentional cases of this kind seem to be proved, but it is probable that most arose from mistakes. Again, torture and mutilation are not easy to substantiate. In a sacked and burning city horrible things may well befall without a direct purpose of outrage. Then, the Germans did not choose to treat armed civilians

according to the ordinary laws of war, and they included the Belgian Civic Guard in this category. They simply did not accept the findings of the Hague Conventions on the subject. What their theory of war was we shall consider in the next chapter; but—difficult as it is to understand—it allowed them to do things which other nations choose to regard as monstrous. This is, of course, not a defence, but it affords a partial explanation on other grounds than mere inherent brutality. Finally, there was a great deal of heavy drinking among the troops—an explanation again, not an excuse. German peasants swilled heavy red wine with the same freedom with which they were used to drink light beer, and the results were disastrous.

Having said all this, the fact remains that in many cases there was a carnival of sheer murder which excelled the sack of Magdeburg and other seventeenth century horrors. Let us accept for a moment the German explanation of Louvain and Aerschot, and admit that they were treacherously shot at by one or more of the inhabitants. Did the punishment—the burning and looting of the town and wholesale murder and outrage—show any reasonable proportion to the crime? Surely this cannot be maintained. It may be expedient that one man die for the people, but not that the people die for one or two men. The doctrine of collective responsibility might conceivably, if modestly interpreted, be used in war. The Roman penalty of “decimation” was such a use. It is barbarous and, to modern eyes, unjust, but it might be defended. But a holocaust by way of atonement has no sort of relation to any civilized code of justice. In barbarous armies, like Timour’s or Attila’s, we see how it happens. There you are dealing with elementary beings, savages inflamed and maddened by conquest. But this was the most modern of armies springing from the most modern of fatherlands, which had long vaunted to the world its civilization. Louvain and Aerschot were the fruit not of sudden passion but of a long-accepted doctrine.

A doctrine, let it be remembered, an “armed dogma” of the kind against which Burke warned the world. The ordinary German, especially the Southerner, is not naturally cruel or brutal. He behaved badly in 1814, as we know from Wellington; but he conducted himself well on the whole in 1870. The authors of the atrocities were mostly Landwehr troops, many of them decent fathers of families and respectable *bourgeois*. There are blackguards in every army who now and then get out of hand, but it is impossible to think of the majority of these German troops as naturally blackguards. They carried in their knapsacks letters from their own Gretchens and Gertruds, and had set out with high notions about warring for their land and its “kultur.” Yet

here is the result of their deeds at Aerschot, as chronicled by the first foreigner to enter it after the massacre:—

“We passed a little girl of nine or ten, and I stopped the car to ask the way. Instantly she held both hands above her head and began to scream for mercy. When we had given her some chocolate and money, and had assured her we were not Germans but Americans and friends, she ran like a frightened deer. That little child, with her frightened wide eyes and her hands raised in supplication, was in herself a terrible indictment of the Germans.”^[15]

How are we to explain it? A little, perhaps, by panic, but mostly by the German doctrine of war. Their leaders had evolved an inhuman creed which they practised with the rigidity of Brahmins, and their disciplined troops did as they were bid. Presently drink and bloodshed did their work, and what began as obedience to orders ended as a debauch.

In the villages of the Belgian Ardennes there was a strange frequency of barbarities, which lasted through September, and cannot be explained by any special military need. There is reason to believe that in this district these doings did not pass unavenged. In the retreat from the Meuse a body of 400 French riflemen—probably from Langle’s 4th Army—were cut off on the east bank of the river. They had with them a million cartridges, and with this ammunition they managed to reach a sanctuary in the southern hills. There they remained, and speedily became the terror of the German invaders. Fed by the country people, they waged guerilla warfare upon German detachments, and did enormous execution. With their excellent marksmanship they picked off the enemy at long range, and in spite of a price on their heads and desperate efforts at capture, they lived securely in their mountain fastnesses. Some day, it is to be hoped, a second Michelet will tell the tale of their bold adventure, or a new Dumas weave it into a breathless romance.

What are we to say of the little people who bore the brunt of this savagery? Before the war Belgium had been as sharply divided into parties and races as any nation in Europe. There were deep gulfs between Catholic and Socialist, between the peasants of Flanders and the colliers and factory hands of Hainault, between northern Fleming

and southern Walloon. She had under no conceivable circumstances anything to gain from war. Her laborious population would at the best lose wealth and employment, and her closely-settled land was an easy booty for the plunderer. In such a country the complex industrial machine, once put out of gear, would be hard to start again. From the material point of view Germany was right; it was insanity for Belgium to resist. Moreover, she had never made a profession of romantic adventures. She had been forced into the Congo business a little against her will, and her recent history showed none of the far-wandering restlessness in commerce and colonization which had characterized in different ways Germany and Britain. She was a home-keeping people who believed in attending to the shop.

But when the day of trial came she did not waver. Her armies fought in the last ditch, and never for one moment was there a thought of surrender in the hearts of the nation. The prosperity which had taken generations to build up went in a day; she lost her land and her cities, her Government presently went into exile, and the shores of Britain were crowded with her fugitives. The Germans had tried to wheedle her, but she shook her head; they tried to frighten her, and found only tight lips; and when again they tried cajolery and dithyrambs about the blessings of German rule, they were met with scornful laughter. Belgium replied, like Spain in Wordsworth's poem:

“We can endure that he should waste our lands,
Despoil our temples, and by sword and flame
Return us to the dust from which we came;
Such food a Tyrant's appetite demands;
And we can brook the thought that by his hands
Spain may be overpowered, and he possess,
For his delight, a solemn wilderness
Where all the brave lie dead. But, when of bands
Which he will break for us he dares to speak;
Of benefits, and of a future day
When our enlightened minds shall bless his sway;
Then the strained heart of fortitude proves weak.”

Britain, the old ally and protector of Belgium, did the little in her power to mitigate this suffering. She had already lent the Belgian Government a large sum which was to carry no interest, and at the end of August a private organization—originally destined by the irony of fate for the reception of ultra-Protestant refugees from Ulster—was organized as a relief committee. Presently the Government took over the work, and the Belgian fugitives became officially the guests of

Britain. We wonder if the crowds that stared curiously at the haggard, grey-faced people who arrived by every boat at Folkestone, and soon began to throng the London streets—all classes of society—all forms of raiment—realized that they were looking upon the results of the most heroic sacrifice in modern history. The miracle was all the more wonderful from its unexpectedness. We are ready to cheer Mr. Greatheart when he advances to meet the giant; it is splendid, but we knew it would happen, for after all giant-killing is his profession. But when some homely pilgrim, without shining armour or great sword, seizes his staff and marches stoutly to a more desperate conflict we do not cheer. It is a marvel which dims the eyes and catches at the heart-strings.

Much was due to her King, the most purely heroic figure of our day. To praise King Albert would be impertinence. It is sufficient to say that no monarch of the great ages has more nobly and fully fulfilled the ideal of kingship. He has raised Belgium to the position of a Great Power, if moral dignity has any meaning in the world. There can be no finer tribute to him than some words spoken by a refugee, a quiet little man who had lost family and livelihood, and seemed to peer out upon a new world like a dazed child. “Frankly, monsieur, we did not think we could have behaved so well. You will understand that we are a small people, a people of traders, not greatly interested in high politics or war. We needed a leader, and God sent that leader. We owe everything to our King. He has made of our farmers and tradesmen a nation of heroes. When the war is over he will rule over a broken land and a very poor people, but for all that he will be one of the greatest kings in the world.”

CHAPTER XVII.

GERMAN METHODS AND AIMS.

The German Aim—Alternative Policies—
German Strategy—The Types of “Surprise”—
Entrenchments—Cavalry Raids—German
Tactics—Napoleonic Methods—German use of
Artillery—Spies—Transport and Supplies—
Preparation before War—Espionage in Peace—
German View of Naturalization—German
Breaches of International Law—The
“Frederician Tradition”—Criticism.

We may pause for a moment in our chronicle of the campaigns to glance at some of the deductions to be drawn as to the German objective and the German methods. Every war is a packet of surprises. Secrets, half known already or wholly unguessed at, stand out suddenly as burning facts. The office work of a generation comes into the light, and the revelations are of special interest in the case of Germany, for she had not fought a serious war for forty years.

Her main purpose, it is clear, was to shatter France in the early days beyond possibility of recovery, and then slowly force Russia back behind the Vistula and keep her there. But she had an alternative plan, perhaps a dozen alternatives. If the blow at the French failed, she would hold on to Belgium and to that segment of north-eastern France which she had occupied. Then would come stalemate, and she thought that the German people would be superior in endurance to their enemies. When talk of peace should begin, Germany would have large conquests in hand to bargain with, and since she believed that at the worst the war would end in stalemate, she hoped to retain considerable parts of her annexations. With this in mind we can understand the reason of many of her later moves. These moves were often not dictated by strategy—that is, the design of beating the enemy—but by politics, the desire of encouraging her people, and especially of piling up assets for the ultimate negotiations.

Nothing very novel or interesting appeared in German strategy. Perhaps there are no novelties in strategy. We rediscover principles which were known to Hannibal, and were still at the back of our grandfathers' minds. The essence of strategy is surprise, and the use of air reconnaissance enormously lessens the chance of it. Surprise may be obtained in four chief ways—by having more troops than the enemy knows of; by bringing up troops to a particular point where the enemy does not expect them; by bringing troops to a place where the enemy expects them, but faster than he has allowed for; by taking troops and guns over country which the enemy believes to be impenetrable. The first to some extent the Germans achieved; the numbers they could command was one of their great secrets, and they adroitly concealed the presence of fresh forces by the use of reserve corps numbered in the same way as the first line. One of the first duties of an intelligence department in war is to find out from the badges of the dead and from prisoners the exact corps that are in the opposite front. The very general confusion which prevailed as to the particular corps in different parts of the field was a proof that on this point the German plan had succeeded. The second type of surprise—the sudden pressure at a point of more troops than have been looked for—was not achieved by the Germans except in the first assault on the Sambre and the Meuse. There undoubtedly the French were ignorant as to the strength of von Kluck's reinforcements, and as to the weight of the blow from the Ardennes about to be delivered by the German centre. The Marne was not for the Allies a success of the same type. The Germans were perfectly aware of the French reserves; but they under-estimated their fighting value and that of the retreating armies. Of the third type—unexpected speed of movement—we have a good instance in von Hindenburg's victory of Tannenberg, and also to some extent in the advance of the Russian armies on Lemberg and in the French operations in Lorraine which resulted in the temporary capture of Saarlouis. Of the fourth type—moving over country believed to be impassable—Tannenberg is also a good example. There von Hindenburg won by his minute knowledge of the bogs and lakes, so that he could take guns over what Samsonov thought was a quagmire, but he knew to be a gravel bottom.

But speaking generally, in modern war there is little chance for those sudden and brilliant inspirations which are possible to a general commanding a small army and himself surveying every detail of the ground. Conditions will have to be radically changed before we see again such a battle as Marengo, where Napoleon won by the strategy of genius in spite of inferior troops and more than one tactical blunder.

In certain matters of strategy the Germans showed that care for the morrow which is characteristic of their temperament, though hostile to their theory of war. Instances were the preparation of entrenchments at the Aisne even in the midst of their triumphant advance, in case a retreat should some day be necessary, and the immense array of trench lines in Flanders. They showed a love, too, for cavalry raids supported by infantry and machine guns in motors, whose purposes were to threaten the enemy's communications and intimidate the civilian population. These are old devices in war, but the Germans practised them with special brilliance and assiduity. One other strategical point may be mentioned. They rightly disregarded fortresses *qua* fortresses, partly because of their belief in their siege artillery, and partly from the memory of French errors in 1870. The result is that to-day the poor fortress has suffered a complete loss of reputation. It may comfort those who still believe in them to remember that long before Vauban and Brialmont the same conclusion had been reached. Aristotle in the fourth century before Christ recorded the view that the strength of the catapult of his day had made fortified defences untenable.

Much more interesting and suggestive are German tactical methods. We were told before the war that their main tactical idea for infantry was a thin firing line largely extended and curving inwards on the flanks, since obviously the amount of frontal rifle fire was limited, and effect could best be got by convergence. But we saw little or nothing of this method in the campaigns. Rather they seemed to have fallen back to the Napoleonic practice, as against the British doctrine of the thin line.

The armies of the eighteenth century from Marlborough to Frederick the Great fought, generally speaking, in line, usually three or four deep, and victory was obtained by superior accuracy and speed in fire, or by the smashing of a wing with a flanking movement or a cavalry attack. This era of set battles ended with the French Revolution. The armies of France, having lost their old discipline and their old military theories, could at first hope for success only from their superior numbers. The early battles of the Revolution up to 1793 were little more than a wild rush of undisciplined hordes upon opponents who followed the traditional tactics of Frederick. Gradually, however, the Revolution generals devised tactics of their own, framed to meet the case of large armies of imperfectly trained men. They threw out a very thick skirmishing line, behind which the

rest of their forces advanced in column. At the proper moment the screen fell away and the columns were launched intact at the enemy, and by the weight of their impact not infrequently broke his line. Obviously these columns had the minimum of fire power, and succeeded simply by weight. When Napoleon came upon the scene, he greatly improved these tactics, but he stuck to their main principles. It is true that he preferred, when he could get it, the formation called the *ordre mixte*—that is, drawing up a brigade with alternate battalions in line and in column. But in very many of his battles the column formation was kept throughout.

Wellington, as is well known, met these tactics with their exact opposite. He drew up his men usually two deep, so that the whole firing power of his troops might be concentrated on the enemy. Sometimes, as at Busaco, the wings were flung forward so that the line became almost a crescent, and the enemy were under fire from three sides at once. It was this change of tactics which really broke the French power. In the present war, however, the Germans seemed to have returned to Napoleon's way. The mass tactics appear to be beloved of very large armies, which must ultimately incorporate a great number of half-trained men.

The Germans also closely followed Napoleon in their use of artillery. Bernhardt in one of his military essays suggested to his countrymen that they were exaggerating the importance of artillery, but his advice was not followed. As one observer has put it, there were times when, instead of making the infantry the principal arm, they seemed to be using it as if it were only an escort for their guns. Beyond doubt they showed the highest competence in this branch. Their usual procedure in the attack was to drive in the enemy's outposts by a line of skirmishers; and let it be said that, while the ordinary rifle fire of the infantry was poor, the sharp-shooting of these skirmishers was usually excellent. Then their artillery played upon the opposing trenches with terrific force for perhaps a quarter of an hour. When the attack had thus been duly "prepared" there came the infantry rush, which might or might not drive the enemy from his position.

The German superiority in artillery was at first very marked—not so much in handling as in the number of guns. They had no field guns so good as the French 75 mm., but they had in many places two to one of the Allies'. Their field howitzers, with which the Allies were at first ill provided, were well used, but on the whole their noise was worse than their execution. The Germans showed themselves adepts in the tactical use of machine guns, and frequently in their attacks employed them with success to enfilade their opponents' position. Their artillery

marksmanship was good, and the range finding was brilliantly done. They used a squared map, and their trial shots were directed by aircraft, which by means of smoke balls of different colours signalled “right” or “left,” very much like a marker at a range. Their field telephone system and their use of spies behind the enemy’s lines were also aids to marksmanship. Feats of incredible gallantry were constantly performed by the adventurers sent out in a hundred different disguises to help the guns to the exact range. The only criticism to be made on the German artillery is that it was very expensive. Ammunition was poured out like water, and they were especially fond of taking a piece of ground and “watering” it, as the French say—that is, covering every yard with shells like the spray from a watering-can. If the enemy, as sometimes happened, had evacuated this area, several thousand shells would be wasted. These extravagant habits were to bring their punishment in the later stages of the war.

No army has ever made so much use of spies. Men dressed in the clothes of British or French dead were always appearing in strange places, often talking perfectly the language of their opponents. Local inhabitants were corrupted, and every kind of signal was used—from a washerwoman wringing out clothes to a peasant waving with his whip as he drove his horses. Spying, of course, is done by all armies, but the German methods went far beyond the unwritten etiquette of the thing. We may condemn the minds which directed it, but we are bound to admire the heroism of the men who undertook it. They went out with their lives in their hands, often to certain death. The German system of offering rewards—Iron Crosses and such like—for a particular piece of service (a custom strange to British ideas) may have been partly responsible for the numbers available for forlorn hopes. A British soldier who undertakes a desperate risk knows that, if he survives, he may possibly get the Victoria Cross, but that the odds are that nothing more will be heard of his performance.

In the subsidiary branches of the service there was the highest degree of efficiency. The German soldier was valuable to the fighting machine, and was well cared for. The armies carried with them every conceivable necessary. Their endless supply of motor transport enabled them to make full provision for all details, and the army artificers were at work in their motor wagons while the army was advancing swiftly. Legions of mechanics, electricians, wrights, cobblers, barbers, tailors, and bakers accompanied each corps. There were even travelling printing-presses to print army orders, and a daily paper for the troops. Their field telephone system was the most perfect on record, and did much to facilitate the handling of what would

otherwise have been unwieldy masses. Their medical system was also extraordinarily good, as many of our wounded have cause to remember with gratitude. But admirable as these arrangements for comfort were, the Germans never allowed themselves to rate them too highly. If the necessity arose they would be neglected, and the army reduced to the last condition of discomfort. The men were well fed and well clad, but if military considerations demanded it, they would remain for weeks on scanty rations and in tatters.

More wonderful even than the provision for the field armies was the elaborate preparation for war made in potentially hostile countries. No land in the world in times of the profoundest peace was immune from the attention of German secret agents. A patriotic German, when he went to reside in an alien territory, regarded himself as an emissary of the Fatherland, and placed his leisure at the disposal of the authorities in Berlin. He might be naturalized elsewhere, but this did not alter his allegiance. Article 25 of the most recent German citizenship law enacted:—

“Citizenship is not lost by any one who, before acquiring foreign citizenship, has secured on application the written consent of the competent authorities of his home State to retain his citizenship.”

Such a provision obviously made nonsense of any oath of allegiance sworn to a foreign State. A German might become a subject of King George, and even a member of His Majesty’s Privy Council, and still remain a German citizen, with his first duty vowed to the country of his birth. Not unnaturally France passed an act which allowed her to rescind naturalization certificates at will, and the Powers of the world will be driven in future to adopt a new policy on this question.

The German exile, naturalized or unnaturalized, worked assiduously for his land of origin. Sometimes he secured premises at strategic positions commanding bridges and railways; or he directed his attention to controlling some section of the foreign press; or in a more humble way he simply scouted for information. Exact details on every possible subject that might some day have a military significance were forwarded to his masters in Berlin. Bismarck told his chief spy, Staubier, that much of the success in 1870 was due to him, and undoubtedly the German Staff in 1914 were deep in debt to Herr Steinhauer and his department. This espionage was remarkable in all countries, but it was specially efficient in the probable *terrains* of war. Russian Poland, Belgium, and France were mapped out and studied with the minuteness of a county history. Naturally a crop of

legends grew up round the subject, many of which can be dismissed as incredible; but enough remains to give some idea of the uncanny patience and precision with which the work was done. Here is one story which seems to be well authenticated. At the outbreak of war Southern Belgium and parts of Northern France were plastered with an advertisement of a well-known soup tablet. An acute observer, if he had given his attention to the placards, would have noticed that in the right hand bottom corner stood a row of figures, and that these figures differed in each locality. Suddenly one day in August the French troops were busy tearing down these advertisements, because the French Staff had obtained the key. The placards were in reality signposts for the oncoming Germans. The first two figures, shall we say, gave the position of the village on the German Staff map, the third indicated the nearest billeting quarters, the fourth the nearest strategic point, and so on, till the invaders without trouble would be furnished in three minutes with a complete intelligence officer's report.

We have already, in dealing with the destruction of Belgium, glanced at Germany's attitude towards international laws which she herself had formally accepted. One breach of these, the violation of neutral territory, is beyond doubt; it was admitted by Germany, and defended on the plea of necessity. A second, the destruction of unfortified towns, is more difficult. Vague international precepts have never been subjected to that minute examination in courts of law which befalls domestic statutes, and consequently there is a good deal of doubt about their exact interpretation. What is a fortified town? Antwerp and Paris are admittedly fortresses; was it wrong to drop bombs there, even though they were aimed at buildings which were no part of the defences? Further, a great international lawyer has laid it down that "all devastation is permissible when really necessary for the preservation of the force committing it from destruction or surrender." The Germans were prepared to plead military necessity in answer to every count of the indictment. A third class of offence is the laying of mines at sea. The Hague Tribunal, with Germany assenting, enacted that unanchored contact mines should not be laid down unless so constructed as to become harmless one hour at least after control over them had been relinquished. Were the German mines in the North Sea anchored or floating? They were probably the latter, but may have been the former, which broke loose from their moorings under the pressure of wind and tide. It is probable, too, that the Germans laid mines from ships disguised as neutrals, and laid some before the outbreak of war, but these things are not proved. We can only suspend our judgment. It was further maintained by Germany that the Hague rules were only binding in a war where all the belligerents had

accepted them, and that in this war Serbia and Montenegro were not signatories—an argument which has some legal validity.

The fact is that on these more abstract questions it is not worth while to argue. It matters very little how many of the Hague rules Germany broke, since she altogether repudiated the bondage of international obligations. What is more vital is the alleged German breaches of laws, written and unwritten, which lie at the very root of civilized warfare. It is possible to imagine a Power, with Machiavellian notions about public conduct, and loose ideas about the rights of neutrals and the use of mines, who in the greater matters would fight with reasonable decency. But it is a different matter if she offends against those elementary human conventions which are observed by many savages and by all who claim the title of civilized. Such offences would be to wear the enemies' uniform when advancing, to use civilians to screen troops, to fire on hospitals and ambulances, to abuse the white flag, to murder the wounded, and, above all, to outrage non-combatants, especially women and children.

Has Germany so offended? On the last count undoubtedly, as we saw in the preceding chapter. On the first also beyond doubt, though that seems to us to be morally a less heinous crime. The second, we have seen, is doubtful; it is possible, even probable, but it is not proved. The firing on hospitals and ambulances, and the abuse of the white flag, are proved beyond question, so far as the facts go. But war is a foggy business, and many of the instances may have arisen from a mistake. For example, a German trench shows the white flag, and its occupants offer to surrender. But instead of making them ground arms and advance or file off, an Allied officer may allow his men to rush wildly forward, without hostile intention, but alarming to a shaken foe. The Germans, thinking they are about to be massacred, open fire. That has happened before, and will happen again, in the confusion of battle.^[16] As to the slaughter of wounded, the accounts are conflicting. There are many instances on record of humane and chivalrous treatment accorded by the Germans to our prisoners; there are, unfortunately, one or two well-proven cases of the opposite. Much seems to have depended upon the officer locally in command.

Now, the ordinary German soldier is by no means brutal, except now and then in a panic, when, like everybody else in the same state, he becomes cruel. There are hundreds, too, of high-minded gentlemen in the commissioned ranks. But there are also brutes, and where a brute was in command outrages were bound to follow, because—and this is the vital point—the whole tradition and policy of the German machine did not frown on them. Indeed, it rather favoured them. What was that policy?

We can call it the Frederician tradition; or if we wish a modern peg, we can call it the spirit of Zabern, from its most recent pre-war exemplification. Reasonably stated, as, for example, by Clausewitz, it means simply that war should be waged whole-heartedly, for the more whole-hearted it is the quicker it will be ended. War cannot be made with kid gloves. Loss of life, to your own side or the enemy's, is to be disregarded, so long as your object is attained. There is nothing inherently wrong in this policy. Stonewall Jackson, a humane man and a devout Christian, did not hesitate to sacrifice his troops or to inflict suffering upon the innocent, if relentlessness were necessary for success. But Germany has consistently overstated this truth, until it has become in her hands a fatal folly. We can see the overstatement beginning in Bismarck's famous words, though in practice he was wise enough to temper his heroics with common sense. "You must inflict," he said, "on the inhabitants of invaded towns the maximum of suffering, so that they may become sick of the struggle, and may bring pressure to bear on their Government to discontinue it. You must leave the people through whom you march only their eyes to weep with."^[17] But the full extravagance appears in the speech of the Emperor when he addressed the troops leaving for China in 1900. "Quarter is not to be given. Prisoners are not to be made. Whoever falls into your hands is into your hands delivered. Just as a thousand years ago the Huns, under their king Attila, made for themselves a name which still appears imposing in tradition, so may the name of German become known in China." And he added to this pious exhortation, "The blessing of the Lord be with you."

Such a spirit is in clear defiance of the rules and decencies which must be observed if war is to be anything higher than the struggle of wild beasts. These rules are very old, and have been more or less observed since the days of Alexander the Great. Such things as poisoning wells and slaying prisoners are obviously an outrage upon human nature. All through the Middle Ages the rules of chivalry provided a code of conduct in war, and a few centuries ago international jurists began to collect and expound the rules. Great lawyers like Grotius and Bynkershoek, Vattel and Puffendorf, laid down the customs of war between civilized peoples, and in our day the various Hague Conferences have brought the code up to date, and secured the definite assent of the nations of the world. A Power which assents to and then violates these rules of decency is an outcast from the commonwealth of civilization. In every war these rules are broken, but they are broken against the will of the authorities of the belligerents. In the German case we have the curious result that their observance depends upon the character of the individual soldier; for officially they are disliked and disregarded.

The German answer—always implied and often explicitly stated—is that they do not accept any laws of war which are against their interests. They claim to be a law to themselves, and if other people do not like it it is their business to show themselves stronger than the Germans. To this it may be replied that such anarchism is bad policy, to say the least of it. Clausewitz long ago warned his countrymen that it was “inexpedient” to do anything to outrage the general moral sense of other peoples, and the great men who made the German Empire, Bismarck and Moltke, were tireless in their efforts to keep right with European opinion. For if no law is acknowledged, no conventions and codes of honour, then this lawlessness will certainly be turned some day against the Germans themselves. No land will make an alliance with them or a treaty, if their views on the duty of obligations are so notoriously lax.

But the point we wish to make is that this crude lawlessness illustrates an interesting characteristic of the German mind—its curious immaturity. That mind is like a child’s, which simplifies too much. As we grow up we advance in complexity, we see half-tones where before we saw only harsh blacks and whites; we realize that nothing is quite alone, that everything is interrelated, and we become shy of bold simplicities. The mechanical may be simple; the organic must be complex and subtle. It sounds so easy to say, like the villain in melodrama, that you will own no code except what you make yourself; but it really cannot be done. It is not that the rejection of half a dozen or even the whole of the diffuse findings of the Hague Tribunal matters very much; what signifies is the disregard of the unformulated creed which penetrates every part of our modern life—Germany’s, too, in her sober, non-martial moments. To massacre a hundred unarmed people because one man fired off a rifle may be enjoined by some half-witted military theorist, but it is fundamentally inhuman and silly. It offends against not only the heart of mankind, but their common sense. It is not even virilely wicked; it is merely childish. It lacks intelligence. Nothing can be done with it, any more than with the scorching winds of the desert. “It is a simplifying of life,” in Mr. Belloc’s words, “which robs life of stuff and stifles it; and I shall continue to believe, until the gods prove me wrong, and until it is time, as St. Just said in a famous phrase, ‘to cover our faces and to die,’ that this mere force of calculation is very crude, and that the manifold, the complex, the civilized will always outdo it.”

The same childishness is found in many other parts of the German scheme—their elaborate espionage system, for example. The industry spent on it is more than human; it is beaver-like, ant-like, incredible, like the slavery of some laborious animal; but it, and the hundred

other things like it, will not win battles. Of course it has its effect, but that effect is in no way commensurate with the pains taken. The truth is that human energy is limited, and if too much thought is given to minor things, no vitality will be left for the great things. We see the same weakness in many other activities of the modern German mind—immense erudition which beats ineffectual wings and achieves little that is lasting in scholarship; a meticulousness in business organization which terribly frightens the nervous British merchant, and yet somehow does not do much—nothing, at any rate, comparable with the care taken in the preparation. But it is most conspicuous in war. Frederick and Moltke were military geniuses of a high order; but where is the military genius to-day in these beautifully-thought-out and superbly-provided armies? He has not appeared, for there is no room in them for the higher kind of intelligence. German industry is not mature; it is like the painful, unintelligent absorption of a child.

Let us suppose that a man starts in business with good brains and a reasonable capital. He resolves to be bound by nothing, to get on at all costs, to outstrip his neighbours by a greater industry and a complete unscrupulousness. He will keep within the four corners of the law; but he will have no regard to any of the antiquated decencies of trade. So he toils incessantly; no detail is too small for him; he studies and codifies what seem to him the popular tastes with the minuteness of a psychological laboratory; he corrupts the employees of his rivals; no bribe is too low for him; he buys secrets and invites confidences only to betray them; he is full of a thousand petty ingenuities; he allows no human compassion to temper his ruthlessness; his one god, for whom no sacrifice is too costly, is success. What will be the result of such a career? In nine cases out of ten, failure. Failure, because his eternal preoccupation with small things ruins his mind for the larger view. The great truths in economics are always simple, but they escape a perverted ingenuity. He will not have the mind to grasp the major matters in supply and demand, and the odds are that, leaving the question of his certain unpopularity aside, he will be outclassed in sheer business talent by more scrupulous and less meticulous competitors. Commerce, of course, is different in many ways from war, but the parallel in this case is fairly exact. The German mind cannot see the wood for the trees. It knows the situation, dimensions, and value of every bit of timber; but it has not time to spare for the quagmires on either side, and it has no care for what may be beyond the forest.

The impression left by the spectacle of this wonderful machine, the proudest achievement of the modern German spirit, with its astonishing efficiency up to a point, its evidence of unwearied care

and endless industry, remains oddly childish, like a toy on the making of which a passion of affection has been lavished. The man who can devise the campaign of Trafalgar is not the man who is always busy about the brass-work. Undue care is, not less than slovenliness, a sign of the immature and unbalanced mind. And the profession of a morality above all humble conventions, so far from impressing us as godlike, seems nothing but the swagger of a hobbledehoy. It is not barbarism, which is an honest and respectable thing; it is decivilization, which stands to civilization as a man's senility stands to his prime. In it all there is the mingled petulance, persistence, and absorption of an ill-conditioned child.

Such a child cannot be allowed to play with firearms. It is too dangerous.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I.

SIR JOHN FRENCH'S FIRST DISPATCH.

THE RETREAT FROM MONS.

WAR OFFICE, *9th September, 1914.*

The following dispatch has been received by the Secretary of State for War from the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief, British Forces in the Field:—

7th September, 1914.

MY LORD,

I have the honour to report the proceedings of the Field Force under my command up to the time of rendering this dispatch.

POSITION AT MONS, AUGUST 22-3.

1. The transport of the troops from England both by sea and by rail was effected in the best order and without a check. Each unit arrived at its destination in this country well within the scheduled time.

The concentration was practically complete on the evening of Friday, the 21st ultimo, and I was able to make dispositions to move the Force during Saturday, the 22nd, to positions I considered most favourable from which to commence operations which the French Commander-in-Chief, General Joffre, requested me to undertake in pursuance of his plans in prosecution of the campaign.

The line taken up extended along the line of the canal from Condé on the west, through Mons and Binche on the east. This line was taken up as follows:—

From Condé to Mons inclusive was assigned to the Second Corps, and to the right of the Second Corps from Mons the First Corps was posted. The 5th Cavalry Brigade was placed at Binche.

In the absence of my Third Army Corps I desired to keep the Cavalry Division as much as possible as a reserve to act on my outer flank, or move in support of any threatened part of the line. The forward reconnaissance was entrusted to Brigadier-General Sir Philip Chetwode with the 5th Cavalry Brigade, but I directed General Allenby to send forward a few squadrons to assist in this work.

During the 22nd and 23rd these advanced squadrons did some excellent work, some of them penetrating as far as Soignies, and several encounters took place in which our troops showed to great advantage.

DEVELOPMENT OF GERMAN ATTACK, AUGUST 23.

2. At 6 a.m., on August 23rd, I assembled the Commanders of the First and Second Corps and Cavalry Division at a point close to the position, and explained the general situation of the Allies, and what I understood to be General Joffre's plan. I discussed with them at some length the immediate situation in front of us.

From information I received from French Headquarters I understood that little more than one, or at most two, of the enemy's Army Corps, with perhaps one Cavalry Division, were in front of my position; and I was aware of no attempted outflanking movement by the enemy. I was confirmed in this opinion by the fact that my patrols encountered no undue opposition in their reconnoitring operations. The observation of my aeroplanes seemed also to bear out this estimate.

About 3 p.m. on Sunday, the 23rd, reports began coming in to the effect that the enemy was commencing an attack on the Mons line, apparently in some strength, but that the right of the position from Mons and Bray was being particularly threatened.

The Commander of the First Corps had pushed his flank back to some high ground south of Bray, and the 5th Cavalry Brigade evacuated Binche, moving slightly south: the enemy thereupon occupied Binche.

The right of the 3rd Division, under General Hamilton, was at Mons, which formed a somewhat dangerous salient; and I directed the Commander of the Second Corps to be careful not to keep the troops on this salient too long, but, if threatened seriously, to draw back the centre behind Mons. This was done before dark. In the meantime, about 5 p.m., I received a most unexpected message from General Joffre, by telegraph, telling me that at least three German Corps, viz., a reserve corps, the 4th Corps and the 9th Corps, were moving on my position in front, and that the 2nd Corps was engaged in a turning

movement from the direction of Tournay. He also informed me that the two reserve French divisions and the 5th French Army on my right were retiring, the Germans having on the previous day gained possession of the passages of the Sambre between Charleroi and Namur.

BRITISH RETIREMENT TO BAVAI-MAUBEUGE LINE, AUGUST 24.

3. In view of the possibility of my being driven from the Mons position, I had previously ordered a position in rear to be reconnoitred. This position rested on the fortress of Maubeuge on the right and extended west to Jenlain, south-east of Valenciennes, on the left. The position was reported difficult to hold, because standing crops and buildings made the siting of trenches very difficult and limited the field of fire in many important localities. It nevertheless afforded a few good artillery positions.

When the news of the retirement of the French and the heavy German threatening on my front reached me, I endeavoured to confirm it by aeroplane reconnaissance; and as a result of this I determined to effect a retirement to the Maubeuge position at daybreak on the 24th.

A certain amount of fighting continued along the whole line throughout the night, and at daybreak on the 24th the 2nd Division from the neighbourhood of Harmignies made a powerful demonstration as if to retake Binche. This was supported by the artillery of both the 1st and 2nd Divisions, whilst the 1st Division took up a supporting position in the neighbourhood of Peissant. Under cover of this demonstration the Second Corps retired on the line Dour-Quarouble-Frameries. The 3rd Division on the right of the Corps suffered considerable loss in this operation from the enemy, who had retaken Mons.

The Second Corps halted on this line, where they partially entrenched themselves, enabling Sir Douglas Haig with the First Corps gradually to withdraw to the new position; and he effected this without much further loss, reaching the line Bavai-Maubeuge about 7 p.m. Towards midday the enemy appeared to be directing his principal effort against our left.

I had previously ordered General Allenby with the Cavalry to act vigorously in advance of my left front and endeavour to take the pressure off.

LOSSES OF 2ND CAVALRY BRIGADE.

About 7.30 a.m. General Allenby received a message from Sir Charles Fergusson, commanding 5th Division, saying that he was very hard pressed and in urgent need of support. On receipt of this message General Allenby drew in the Cavalry and endeavoured to bring direct support to the 5th Division.

During the course of this operation General De Lisle, of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, thought he saw a good opportunity to paralyse the further advance of the enemy's infantry by making a mounted attack on his flank. He formed up and advanced for this purpose, but was held up by wire about 500 yards from his objective, and the 9th Lancers and 18th Hussars suffered severely in the retirement of the Brigade.

SUPPORTS BROUGHT UP FROM VALENCIENNES.

The 19th Infantry Brigade, which had been guarding the Line of Communications, was brought up by rail to Valenciennes on the 22nd and 23rd. On the morning of the 24th they were moved out to a position south of Quarouble to support the left flank of the Second Corps.

With the assistance of the Cavalry Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien was enabled to effect his retreat to a new position; although, having two corps of the enemy on his front and one threatening his flank, he suffered great losses in doing so.

At nightfall the position was occupied by the Second Corps to the west of Bavaï, the First Corps to the right. The right was protected by the Fortress of Maubeuge, the left by the 19th Brigade in position between Jenlain and Bry, and the Cavalry on the outer flank.

FURTHER RETIREMENT TO CAMBRAI-LE CATEAU-LANDRECIES LINE, AUGUST 25.

4. The French were still retiring, and I had no support except such as was afforded by the Fortress of Maubeuge; and the determined attempts of the enemy to get round my left flank assured me that it was his intention to hem me against that place and surround me. I felt that not a moment must be lost in retiring to another position.

I had every reason to believe that the enemy's forces were somewhat exhausted, and I knew that they had suffered heavy losses. I hoped, therefore, that his pursuit would not be too vigorous to prevent me effecting my object.

The operation, however, was full of danger and difficulty, not only owing to the very superior force in my front, but also to the exhaustion of the troops.

The retirement was recommenced in the early morning of the 25th to a position in the neighbourhood of Le Cateau, and rearguards were ordered to be clear of the Maubeuge-Bavai-Eth Road by 5.30 a.m.

Two Cavalry Brigades, with the Divisional Cavalry of the Second Corps, covered the movement of the Second Corps. The remainder of the Cavalry Division with the 19th Brigade, the whole under the command of General Allenby, covered the west flank.

The 4th Division commenced its detrainment at Le Cateau on Sunday, the 23rd, and by the morning of the 25th eleven battalions and a Brigade of Artillery with Divisional Staff were available for service.

I ordered General Snow to move out to take up a position with his right south of Solesmes, his left resting on the Cambrai-Le Cateau Road south of La Chaprie. In this position the Division rendered great help to the effective retirement of the Second and First Corps to the new position.

Although the troops had been ordered to occupy the Cambrai-Le Cateau-Landrecies position, and the ground had, during the 25th, been partially prepared and entrenched, I had grave doubts—owing to the information I received as to the accumulating strength of the enemy against me—as to the wisdom of standing there to fight.

Having regard to the continued retirement of the French on my right, my exposed left flank, the tendency of the enemy's western corps (II.) to envelop me, and, more than all, the exhausted condition of the troops, I determined to make a great effort to continue the retreat till I could put some substantial obstacle, such as the Somme or the Oise, between my troops and the enemy, and afford the former some opportunity of rest and reorganization. Orders were, therefore, sent to the Corps Commanders to continue their retreat as soon as they possibly could towards the general line Vermand-St. Quentin-Ribemont.

The Cavalry, under General Allenby, were ordered to cover the retirement.

Throughout the 25th and far into the evening the First Corps continued its march on Landrecies, following the road along the eastern border of the Forêt de Mormal, and arrived at Landrecies about 10 o'clock. I had intended that the Corps should come further

west so as to fill up the gap between Le Cateau and Landrecies, but the men were exhausted and could not get further in without rest.

BATTLE OF LANDRECIES.

5. The enemy, however, would not allow them this rest, and about 9.30 p.m. a report was received that the 4th Guards Brigade in Landrecies was heavily attacked by troops of the 9th German Army Corps who were coming through the forest on the north of the town. This brigade fought most gallantly and caused the enemy to suffer tremendous loss in issuing from the forest into the narrow streets of the town. This loss has been estimated from reliable sources at from 700 to 1,000. At the same time information reached me from Sir Douglas Haig that his 1st Division was also heavily engaged south and east of Maroilles. I sent urgent messages to the Commander of the two French Reserve Divisions on my right to come up to the assistance of the First Corps, which they eventually did. Partly owing to this assistance, but mainly to the skilful manner in which Sir Douglas Haig extricated his Corps from an exceptionally difficult position in the darkness of the night, they were able at dawn to resume their march south towards Wassigny on Guise.

By about 6 p.m. the Second Corps had got into position with their right on Le Cateau, their left in the neighbourhood of Caudry, and the line of defence was continued thence by the 4th Division towards Seranvillers, the left being thrown back.

During the fighting on the 24th and 25th the Cavalry became a good deal scattered, but by the early morning of the 26th General Allenby had succeeded in concentrating two brigades to the south of Cambrai.

The 4th Division was placed under the orders of the General Officer Commanding the Second Army Corps.

On the 24th the French Cavalry Corps, consisting of three divisions, under General Sordet, had been in billets north of Avesnes. On my way back from Bavai, which was my "Poste de Commandement" during the fighting of the 23rd and 24th, I visited General Sordet, and earnestly requested his co-operation and support. He promised to obtain sanction from his Army Commander to act on my left flank, but said that his horses were too tired to move before the next day. Although he rendered me valuable assistance later on in the course of the retirement, he was unable for the reasons given to afford me any support on the most critical day of all, viz., the 26th.

SMITH-DORRIEN'S FIGHT AT LE CATEAU.

6. At daybreak it became apparent that the enemy was throwing the bulk of his strength against the left of the position occupied by the Second Corps and the 4th Division.

At this time the guns of four German Army Corps were in position against them, and Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien reported to me that he judged it impossible to continue his retirement at daybreak (as ordered) in face of such an attack.

I sent him orders to use his utmost endeavours to break off the action and retire at the earliest possible moment, as it was impossible for me to send him any support, the First Corps being at the moment incapable of movement.

The French Cavalry Corps, under General Sordet, was coming up on our left rear early in the morning, and I sent an urgent message to him to do his utmost to come up and support the retirement of my left flank; but owing to the fatigue of his horses he found himself unable to intervene in any way.

There had been no time to entrench the position properly, but the troops showed a magnificent front to the terrible fire which confronted them.

The Artillery, although outmatched by at least four to one, made a splendid fight, and inflicted heavy losses on their opponents.

At length it became apparent that, if complete annihilation was to be avoided, a retirement must be attempted; and the order was given to commence it about 3.30 p.m. The movement was covered with the most devoted intrepidity and determination by the Artillery, which had itself suffered heavily, and the fine work done by the Cavalry in the further retreat from the position assisted materially in the final completion of this most difficult and dangerous operation.

Fortunately the enemy had himself suffered too heavily to engage in an energetic pursuit.

I cannot close the brief account of this glorious stand of the British troops without putting on record my deep appreciation of the valuable services rendered by General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien.

I say without hesitation that the saving of the left wing of the Army under my command on the morning of the 26th August could never have been accomplished unless a commander of rare and unusual coolness, intrepidity, and determination had been present to personally conduct the operation.

RETIREMENT TO THE OISE.

7. The retreat was continued far into the night of the 26th and through the 27th and 28th, on which date the troops halted on the line Noyon-Chauny-La Fère, having then thrown off the weight of the enemy's pursuit.

On the 27th and 28th I was much indebted to General Sordet and the French Cavalry Division which he commands for materially assisting my retirement and successfully driving back some of the enemy on Cambrai.

General d'Amade also, with the 61st and 62nd French Reserve Divisions, moved down from the neighbourhood of Arras on the enemy's right flank and took much pressure off the rear of the British Forces.

This closes the period covering the heavy fighting which commenced at Mons on Sunday afternoon, 23rd August, and which really constituted a four days' battle.

At this point, therefore, I propose to close the present dispatch.

GENERAL REMARKS.

8. I deeply deplore the very serious losses which the British Forces have suffered in this great battle; but they were inevitable in view of the fact that the British Army—only two days after a concentration by rail—was called upon to withstand a vigorous attack of five German Army Corps.

It is impossible for me to speak too highly of the skill evinced by the two General Officers commanding Army Corps; the self-sacrificing and devoted exertions of their Staffs; the direction of the troops by Divisional Brigade and Regimental Leaders; the command of the smaller units by their officers; and the magnificent fighting spirit displayed by non-commissioned officers and men.

I wish particularly to bring to your Lordship's notice the admirable work done by the Royal Flying Corps under Sir David Henderson. Their skill, energy, and perseverance have been beyond all praise. They have furnished me with the most complete and accurate information, which has been of incalculable value in the conduct of the operations. Fired at constantly both by friend and foe, and not hesitating to fly in every kind of weather, they have remained undaunted throughout.

Further, by actually fighting in the air, they have succeeded in destroying five of the enemy's machines.

I wish to acknowledge with deep gratitude the incalculable assistance I received from the General and Personal Staffs at Headquarters during this trying period.

Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Murray, Chief of the General Staff; Major-General Wilson, Sub-Chief of the General Staff; and all under them have worked day and night unceasingly with the utmost skill, self-sacrifice, and devotion; and the same acknowledgment is due by me to Brigadier-General Hon. W. Lambton, my Military Secretary, and the Personal Staff.

In such operations as I have described the work of the Quartermaster-General is of an extremely onerous nature. Major-General Sir William Robertson has met what appeared to be almost insuperable difficulties with his characteristic energy, skill, and determination; and it is largely owing to his exertions that the hardships and sufferings of the troops—inseparable from such operations—were not much greater.

Major-General Sir Nevil Macready, the Adjutant-General, has also been confronted with most onerous and difficult tasks in connection with disciplinary arrangements and the preparation of casualty lists. He has been indefatigable in his exertions to meet the difficult situations which arose.

I have not yet been able to complete the list of officers whose names I desire to bring to your Lordship's notice for services rendered during the period under review; and, as I understand it is of importance that this dispatch should no longer be delayed, I propose to forward this list, separately, as soon as I can.

I have the honour to be,
Your Lordship's most obedient Servant,
(Signed) J. D. P. FRENCH, Field-Marshal,

Commander-in-Chief,
British Forces in the Field.

APPENDIX II.

SIR JOHN FRENCH'S SECOND DISPATCH.

THE BRITISH FIGHTING ON THE MARNE.

17th September 1914.

MY LORD,

In continuation of my dispatch of September 7th, I have the honour to report the further progress of the operations of the Forces under my command from August 28th.

RETREAT TO THE LINE COMPIÈGNE-SOISSONS.

On that evening the retirement of the Force was followed closely by two of the enemy's cavalry columns, moving south-east from St. Quentin.

The retreat in this part of the field was being covered by the Third and Fifth Cavalry Brigades. South of the Somme General Gough, with the Third Cavalry Brigade, threw back the Uhlans of the Guard with considerable loss.

General Chetwode, with the Fifth Cavalry Brigade, encountered the eastern column near Cérizy, moving south. The Brigade attacked and routed the column, the leading German regiment suffering very severe casualties and being almost broken up.

The 7th French Army Corps was now in course of being railed up from the south to the east of Amiens. On the 29th it nearly completed its detrainment, and the French 6th Army got into position on my left, its right resting on Roye.

The 5th French Army was behind the line of the Oise between La Fère and Guise.

The pursuit of the enemy was very vigorous; some five or six German corps were on the Somme, facing the 5th Army on the Oise. At least two corps were advancing towards my front, and were crossing the Somme east and west of Ham. Three or four more German corps were opposing the 6th French Army on my left.

This was the situation at 1 o'clock on the 29th, when I received a visit from General Joffre at my headquarters.

I strongly represented my position to the French Commander-in-Chief, who was most kind, cordial, and sympathetic, as he has always been. He told me that he had directed the 5th French Army on the Oise to move forward and attack the Germans on the Somme, with a view to checking pursuit. He also told me of the formation of the 6th French Army on my left flank, composed of the 7th Army Corps, four Reserve Divisions, and Sordet's Corps of Cavalry.

I finally arranged with General Joffre to effect a further short retirement towards the line Compiègne-Soissons, promising him, however, to do my utmost to keep always within a day's march of him.

In pursuance of this arrangement the British Forces retired to a position a few miles north of the line Compiègne-Soissons on the 29th.

The right flank of the German Army was now reaching a point which appeared seriously to endanger my line of communications with Havre. I had already evacuated Amiens, into which place a German reserve division was reported to have moved.

Orders were given to change the base to St. Nazaire, and establish an advance base at Le Mans. This operation was well carried out by the Inspector-General of Communications.

In spite of a severe defeat inflicted upon the Guard Xth and Guard Reserve Corps of the German Army by the 1st and 3rd French Corps on the right of the 5th Army, it was not part of General Joffre's plan to pursue this advantage; and a general retirement on to the line of the Marne was ordered, to which the French Forces in the more eastern theatre were directed to conform.

A new Army (the 9th) had been formed from three corps in the south by General Joffre, and moved into the space between the right of the 5th and left of the 4th Armies.

Whilst closely adhering to his strategic conception to draw the enemy on at all points until a favourable situation was created from which to assume the offensive, General Joffre found it necessary to

modify from day to day the methods by which he sought to attain this object, owing to the development of the enemy's plans and changes in the general situation.

In conformity with the movements of the French Forces, my retirement continued practically from day to day. Although we were not severely pressed by the enemy, rear-guard actions took place continually.

RETREAT FROM THE AISNE TO THE MARNE.

On the 1st September, when retiring from the thickly wooded country to the south of Compiègne, the First Cavalry Brigade was overtaken by some German cavalry. They momentarily lost a Horse Artillery battery, and several officers and men were killed and wounded. With the help, however, of some detachments from the 3rd Corps operating on their left, they not only recovered their own guns but succeeded in capturing twelve of the enemy's.

Similarly, to the eastward, the 1st Corps, retiring south, also got into some very difficult forest country, and a somewhat severe rear-guard action ensued at Villers-Cotterets, in which the Fourth Guards Brigade suffered considerably.

On September 3rd the British Forces were in position south of the Marne between Lagny and Signy-Signets. Up to this time I had been requested by General Joffre to defend the passages of the river as long as possible, and to blow up the bridges in my front. After I had made the necessary dispositions, and the destruction of the bridges had been effected, I was asked by the French Commander-in-Chief to continue my retirement to a point some 12 miles in rear of the position I then occupied, with a view to taking up a second position behind the Seine. This retirement was duly carried out. In the meantime the enemy had thrown bridges and crossed the Marne in considerable force, and was threatening the Allies all along the line of the British Forces and the 5th and 9th French Armies. Consequently several small outpost actions took place.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE COUNTER-ADVANCE.

On Saturday, September 5th, I met the French Commander-in-Chief at his request, and he informed me of his intention to take the offensive forthwith, as he considered conditions were very favourable to success.

General Joffre announced to me his intention of wheeling up the left flank of the 6th Army, pivoting on the Marne and directing it to move on the Ourcq; cross and attack the flank of the 1st German Army, which was then moving in a south-easterly direction east of that river.

He requested me to effect a change of front to my right—my left resting on the Marne and my right on the 5th Army—to fill the gap between that army and the 6th. I was then to advance against the enemy in my front and join in the general offensive movement.

These combined movements practically commenced on Sunday, September 6th, at sunrise; and on that day it may be said that a great battle opened on a front extending from Ermenonville, which was just in front of the left flank of the 6th French Army, through Lizy on the Marne, Mauperthuis, which was about the British centre, Courtacon, which was the left of the 5th French Army, to Esternay and Charleville, the left of the 9th Army under General Foch, and so along the front of the 9th, 4th, and 3rd French Armies to a point north of the fortress of Verdun.

This battle, in so far as the 6th French Army, the British Army, the 5th French Army and the 9th French Army were concerned, may be said to have concluded on the evening of September 10th, by which time the Germans had been driven back to the line Soissons-Reims, with a loss of thousands of prisoners, many guns, and enormous masses of transport.

THE GERMAN RIGHT WING SWERVES SOUTH-EAST.

About the 3rd September the enemy appears to have changed his plans and to have determined to stop his advance south direct upon Paris; for on the 4th September air reconnaissances showed that his main columns were moving in a south-easterly direction generally east of a line drawn through Nanteuil and Lizy on the Ourcq.

On the 5th September several of these columns were observed to have crossed the Marne; whilst German troops, which were observed moving south-east up the left bank of the Ourcq on the 4th, were now reported to be halted and facing that river. Heads of the enemy's columns were seen crossing at Changis, La Ferté, Nogent, Château Thierry, and Mezy.

Considerable German columns of all arms were seen to be converging on Montmirail, whilst before sunset large bivouacs of the enemy were located in the neighbourhood of Coulommiers, south of Rebais, La Ferté-Gaucher, and Lagny.

COUNTER-ADVANCE OF THE ALLIED LEFT.

I should conceive it to have been about noon on the 6th September, after the British Forces had changed their front to the right and occupied the line Jouy-Le Chatel-Faremoutiers-Villeneuve Le Comte, and the advance of the 6th French Army north of the Marne towards the Ourcq became apparent, that the enemy realized the powerful threat that was being made against the flank of his columns moving south-east, and began the great retreat which opened the battle above referred to.

On the evening of the 6th September, therefore, the fronts and positions of the opposing armies were roughly as follows:

ALLIES.

6th French Army.—Right on the Marne at Meaux, left towards Betz.

British Forces.—On the line Dagny-Coulommiers-Maison.

5th French Army.—At Courtacon, right on Esternay.

Conneau's Cavalry Corps.—Between the right of the British and the left of the French 5th Army.

GERMANS.

4th Reserve and 2nd Corps.—East of the Ourcq and facing that river.

9th Cavalry Division.—West of Crécy.

2nd Cavalry Division.—North of Coulommiers.

4th Corps.—Rebais.

3rd and 7th Corps.—South-west of Montmirail.

All these troops constituted the 1st German Army, which was directed against the French 6th Army on the Ourcq, and the British Forces, and the left of the 5th French Army south of the Marne.

The 2nd German Army (IX., X., X.R., and Guard) was moving against the centre and right of the 5th French Army and the 9th French Army.

STAGES OF THE ADVANCE, SEPT. 7-9.

On the 7th September both the 5th and 6th French Armies were heavily engaged on our flank. The 2nd and 4th Reserve German Corps on the Ourcq vigorously opposed the advance of the French towards that river, but did not prevent the 6th Army from gaining some headway, the Germans themselves suffering serious losses. The French 5th Army threw the enemy back to the line of the Petit Morin River after inflicting severe losses upon them, especially about Montceaux, which was carried at the point of the bayonet.

The enemy retreated before our advance, covered by his 2nd and 9th and Guard Cavalry Divisions, which suffered severely.

Our Cavalry acted with great vigour, especially General De Lisle's Brigade with the 9th Lancers and 18th Hussars.

On the 8th September the enemy continued his retreat northward, and our Army was successfully engaged during the day with strong rearguards of all arms on the Petit Morin River, thereby materially assisting the progress of the French Armies on our right and left, against whom the enemy was making his greatest efforts. On both sides the enemy was thrown back with very heavy loss. The First Army Corps encountered stubborn resistance at La Trétoire (north of Rebaix). The enemy occupied a strong position with infantry and guns on the northern bank of the Petit Morin River; they were dislodged with considerable loss. Several machine guns and many prisoners were captured, and upwards of two hundred German dead were left on the ground.

The forcing of the Petit Morin at this point was much assisted by the Cavalry and the 1st Division, which crossed higher up the stream.

Later in the day a counter-attack by the enemy was well repulsed by the First Army Corps, a great many prisoners and some guns again falling into our hands.

On this day (8th September) the Second Army Corps encountered considerable opposition, but drove back the enemy at all points with great loss, making considerable captures.

The Third Army Corps also drove back considerable bodies of the enemy's infantry and made some captures.

On the 9th September the First and Second Army Corps forced the passage of the Marne and advanced some miles to the north of it. The Third Corps encountered considerable opposition, as the bridge at La Ferté was destroyed and the enemy held the town on the opposite bank in some strength, and thence persistently obstructed the construction of a bridge; so the passage was not effected until after nightfall.

During the day's pursuit the enemy suffered heavy loss in killed and wounded, some hundreds of prisoners fell into our hands, and a battery of eight machine guns was captured by the 2nd Division.

On this day the 6th French Army was heavily engaged west of the river Ourcq. The enemy had largely increased his force opposing them; and very heavy fighting ensued in which the French were successful throughout.

The left of the 5th French Army reached the neighbourhood of Château Thierry after the most severe fighting, having driven the enemy completely north of the river with great loss.

THE BRITISH ON THE OURCQ, SEPT. 10.

The fighting of this Army in the neighbourhood of Montmirail was very severe.

The advance was resumed at daybreak on the 10th up to the line of the Ourcq, opposed by strong rearguards of all arms. The 1st and 2nd Corps, assisted by the Cavalry Division on the right, the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades on the left, drove the enemy northwards. Thirteen guns, seven machine guns, about 2,000 prisoners, and quantities of transport fell into our hands. The enemy left many dead on the field. On this day the French 5th and 6th Armies had little opposition.

As the 1st and 2nd German Armies were now in full retreat, this evening marks the end of the battle which practically commenced on the morning of the 6th instant; and it is at this point in the operations that I am concluding the present dispatch.

Although I deeply regret to have had to report heavy losses in killed and wounded throughout these operations, I do not think they have been excessive in view of the magnitude of the great fight, the outlines of which I have only been able very briefly to describe, and the demoralization and loss in killed and wounded which are known to have been caused to the enemy by the vigour and severity of the pursuit.

In concluding this dispatch I must call your Lordship's special attention to the fact that from Sunday, August 23rd, up to the present date (September 17th), from Mons back almost to the Seine, and from the Seine to the Aisne, the Army under my command has been ceaselessly engaged without one single day's halt or rest of any kind.

Since the date to which in this dispatch I have limited my report of the operations, a great battle on the Aisne has been proceeding. A full report of this battle will be made in an early further dispatch.

It will, however, be of interest to say here that, in spite of a very determined resistance on the part of the enemy, who is holding in strength and great tenacity a position peculiarly favourable to defence, the battle which commenced on the evening of the 12th instant has, so far, forced the enemy back from his first position, secured the passage of the river, and inflicted great loss upon him, including the capture of over 2,000 prisoners and several guns.

I have the honour to be,
Your Lordship's most obedient Servant,
(Signed) J. D. P. FRENCH, Field-Marshal,

Commanding-in-Chief,
The British Forces in the Field.

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FOOTNOTES:

[1] The division was made up of the 1st Brigade (Brigadier-General Briggs)—2nd Dragoon Guards, 5th Dragoon Guards, 11th Hussars; the 2nd Brigade (Brigadier-General De Lisle)—4th Dragoon Guards, 9th Lancers, 18th Hussars; the 3rd Brigade (Brigadier-General Hubert Gough)—5th Lancers, 16th Lancers, 4th Hussars; and the 4th Brigade (Brigadier-General the Hon. Cecil Bingham)—3rd Hussars, 6th Dragoon Guards, Household Cavalry (composite).

[2] Chetwode's Brigade included the 2nd Dragoons (Scots Greys), 20th Hussars, and 12th Lancers.

[3] Malplaquet was fought by Marlborough and Eugene to cover the siege of Mons. It is curious to note that in this British victory over France, Prussian troops fought beside the British regiments in Marlborough's battle line.

[4] He was wounded at Villers-Cotterets, and succeeded by Lord Cavan.

[5] Meckel was the instructor, and in many respects the creator of the modern Japanese army. His views may be gathered from the following quotations from his book "A Summer Night's Dream" (English translation by Gawne):—

"I do not dispute the value of thin lines of skirmishers where no serious engagement is intended, or where you only wish to throw out a veil either for observation or security from surprise; though in such a case I should prefer using patrols. But if you are going to commence your attack with so thin a firing-line as to have five or six paces interval between files, your skirmishers will indeed have smaller losses, but your troops in close order greater losses. The enemy who oppose you with a dense firing-line will have, with an equal front, twice or thrice the number of rifles in action. Your reinforcements, on their way up, will be insufficiently protected by the firing-line, and will be annihilated. You will not, therefore, lessen your losses by such a course, and this great extension of the firing-line will render fire discipline difficult from the outset. The worst of such an attack would be that 'crowding' would become the rule, the mixing of units a system, and the 'mob'—the deadliest enemy to leadership and the greatest friend of skulkers—would be permanently established and habitual. . . ."

"I do not wish to be misunderstood in my use of the words 'close order,' which seem to me the key-words of our future fighting formation. I do not wish to use columns, as we did till very lately, against the modern rapid fire. Neither have I any wish to encounter the fire of an enemy by taking cover, with

the old line. The old line was too clumsy to utilize ground, and too proud to lie down. My close order system is to have engrafted upon it all the artifices for gaining cover which we have learnt from skirmishing. These must be unceasingly perfected. That is, in fact, the great service which skirmishing has rendered to the development of tactics.”

[6] This Brigade included the 2nd Royal Welsh Fusiliers, 1st Scottish Rifles, 1st Middlesex, and 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. It was commanded by Brigadier-General Laurence Drummond.

[7] Le Cateau was formerly known as Le Cateau Cambresis, that is, “in the Cambrai district.” In the sixteenth century it was the meeting-place of more than one diplomatic conference, and it may interest English readers to note that it was at Le Cateau that Henry VIII. met Francis I. of France to conclude an alliance. The famous ceremonial pageant known in history as “The Field of the Cloth of Gold” was held just outside the little town.

[8] The 4th Division was made up of the 10th Brigade (Brigadier-General Haldane)—1st Warwicks, 2nd Seaforths, 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers, 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers; the 11th Brigade (Brigadier-General Hunter-Weston)—1st Somerset Light Infantry, 1st East Lancashires, 1st Hampshires, 1st Rifle Brigade; and the 12th Brigade (Brigadier-General H. F. M. Wilson)—1st Royal Lancasters, 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers, 2nd Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 2nd Essex.

[9] Not to be confused with the Belgian commander at Namur. He was Galliéni’s predecessor at Paris.

[10] Napoleon at Jena, of course, was not in this position, for he had considerable numerical superiority. He used the device to enable him to swing all his army corps into the battle line, as soon as Murat’s reconnaissance told him which of two alternatives the enemy were adopting.

[11] Von Alvensleben’s fight at Mars-la-Tour on August 16, 1870, is not really an instance of this plan, though it is sometimes quoted as such. That was a tactical movement to detain an enemy till the pursuit came up, and it was forced upon the German vanguard owing to their misconception of the numbers opposed to them.

[12] We are dealing here with the general French conception of the campaign. The offensive across the Central Meuse may be regarded as a form of reconnaissance; but the premature advance into Alsace and Lorraine was a complete departure from the main plan, and ended in disaster.

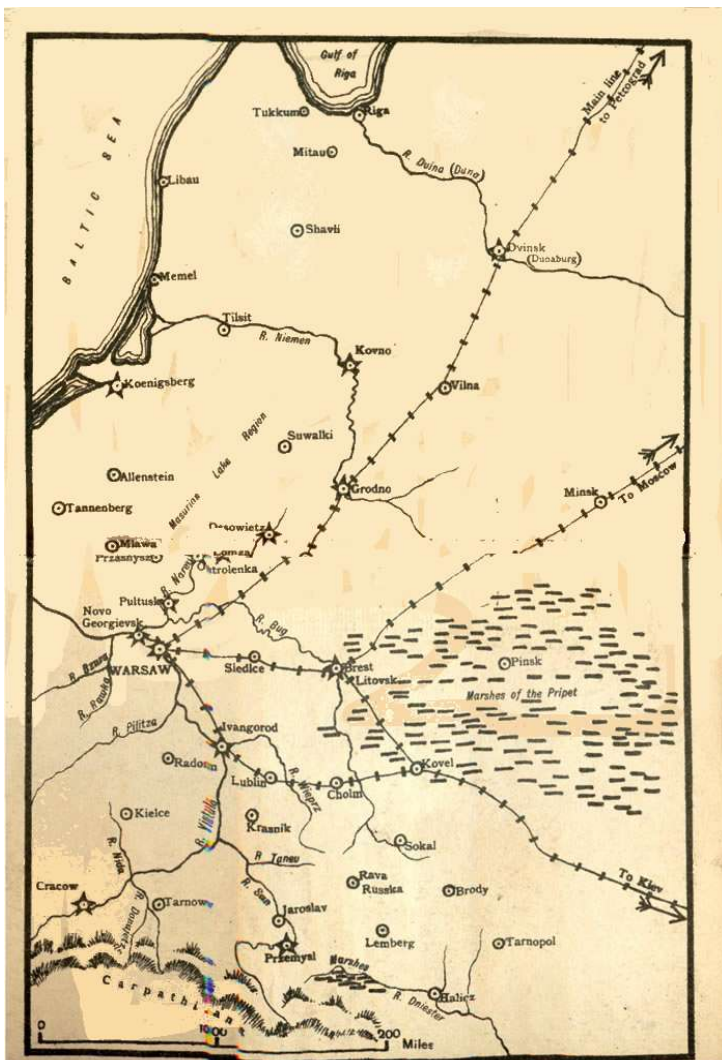
[13] “Fighting in Flanders,” p. 116.

[14] “Fighting in Flanders,” p. 87.

[15] “Fighting in Flanders,” p. 89.

[16] Several instances of this kind of mistake during the South African War will be found in Mr. Winston Churchill’s “From London to Ladysmith.”

[17] He is generally believed to have borrowed this last phrase from the American General Sheridan, who accompanied the German Staff in 1870.



[The end of *Nelson's History of the War* vol. 2 by John Buchan]