Episodes of the Great War

John Buchan

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[*Exclusive News Agency*

KING GEORGE V. AND ADMIRAL BEATTY
aboard H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth* during the Great War

EPISODES OF THE GREAT WAR

by

JOHN BUCHAN

Illustrated

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FOREWORD

This book consists of selections from my *History of the Great War* (Nelson, 4 vols., 1921-2), made without revision or alteration beyond the necessary changes in phrasing. It deals mainly with the "high lights" of the war on the Western Front, but the connecting links are designed to make it a complete and continuous narrative.

I am indebted to Mr. Adrian Alington for making the selection.

J. B.

August 1936.

BOOK I

THE EARLY WAR OF MANŒUVRE

Episodes of the Great War

CHAPTER I

PROLOGUE: AT SERAJEVO

June 28, 1914

On the morning of Sunday, 28th June, in the year 1914, the Bosnian city of Serajevo was astir with the expectation of a royal visit. The Archduke Francis Ferdinand, the heir to the Hapsburg throne and the nephew of the Emperor, had been for the past days attending the manœuvres of the 15th and 16th Army Corps, and had suddenly announced his intention of inspecting the troops in the capital. The visitors drove in motor cars through the uneven streets of the little city, which, with its circle of barren hills and its mosques and minarets, reminds the traveller of Asia rather than of Europe. There was a great crowd in the streets—Catholic Croats, with whom the Archduke was not unpopular; Orthodox and Mussulman Serbs, who looked askance at all things Austrian; and those strange, wildly clad gipsies that throng every Balkan town. But the crowd was not there to greet the Emperor's nephew. It was the day of Kossovo, the anniversary of that fatal fight when the Sultan Murad I. destroyed the old Serbian kingdom. For five centuries it had been kept as a day of mourning, but this year for the first time it was celebrated in Serbia as a national fête, since the Balkan War had restored the losses of the Field of Blackbirds.

The heir to the Austrian throne was not a popular figure, a morose, silent man whose ruling passion was for holocausts of game at shooting-parties; and his federalist politics were anathema to the Austrian governing classes. But he was an intimate of the German Emperor, and only a fortnight before they had pledged their friendship.

The royal party proceeded slowly towards the Town Hall. Motoring in Serajevo is a leisurely business, and there was a great crowd along the Appel Quay. Just before they reached the Chumuria Bridge over the Miliatzka a black package fell on the open hood of the Archduke's car. He pushed it off, and it exploded in front of the second car, slightly wounding two of his suite and six or seven spectators. The would-be assassin was arrested. He was a compositor called Gabrinovitch, from Trebinje in Herzegovina, who had

lived some time in Belgrade. “The fellow will get the Cross of Merit for this,” was the reported remark of the Archduke. He knew his real enemies, and was aware that to powerful circles in Vienna and Budapest the news of his death would not be unwelcome.

Arrived at the Town Hall, the Archduke was presented to the Burgomaster. He was in something of a temper. “What is the use of your speeches?” he asked. “I come here to pay you a visit, and I am greeted with bombs.” The embarrassed city dignitaries read the address of welcome, and the Archduke made a formal reply. He then proposed to drive to the hospital to visit his wounded aide-de-camp. Some small attempt was made to dissuade him, for in the narrow streets among the motley population no proper guard could be kept. But Count Potiorek was reassuring. He knew his Bosnians, he said, and they rarely attempted two murders in one day. The party set out accordingly, the Archduke and his wife in the same car with the Governor.

About ten minutes to eleven, as they moved slowly along the Appel Quay, in the narrow part where it is joined by the Franz-Josefsgasse, a young man pushed forward from the crowd on the side-walk and fired three pistol shots into the royal car. He was a Bosnian student called Prinzip, a friend of Gabrinovitch, who like him had been living in Belgrade. The Archduke was hit in the jugular vein, and died almost at once. His wife received a bullet in her side, and expired a few minutes later in the Government House, after receiving the last sacraments.

The tumult of the fête-day was suddenly hushed. The police were busy in every street laying hands on suspects, and in an impassioned proclamation to the awed and silent city the Burgomaster laid the crime at Serbia’s door.

CHAPTER II

THE BREAKING OF THE BARRIERS

The Immediate Results of the Serajevo Murders—Germany's Council of War on 5th July—Austria's Ultimatum to Serbia—Germany's Proposal to Britain—The Work of Sir Edward Grey—The Ultimatums to France and Belgium—The Invasion of Belgium—The British Cabinet—Britain declares War.

At first the Serajevo tragedy seemed destined to be only a nine days' wonder. The victims were hurried into their graves; the coffins were borne through Vienna by night, the service in the Burg chapel was short and perfunctory, the burial in the rain at the castle of Arstetten might have been the funeral of a minor noble, and the stately ceremonial which marked the sepulture of the Hapsburgs was wholly omitted. The murderers went through a lengthy and farcical trial, as a result of which the two principals, Prinzip and Gabrinovitch, escaped the death penalty, while several obscure accessories were hung. But though the dead Archduke and his wife seemed to be speedily forgotten, the press and the politicians of Vienna and Budapest exploited the murders to the utmost for their own ends. Throughout almost every land they found a ready sympathy. The complicity of the Serbian Government was assumed in many quarters, and even the better instructed, who had no special love for Austria, were ready to admit that she had here a genuine grievance. She might be reactionary and inept, but across the Danube was a movement which threatened the integrity of her dominions and her very existence as a Great Power. The public opinion of Western Europe would have been on her side had she demanded from Serbia the most stringent guarantees.

What the Austrian demands were to be no man outside Austro-Hungary and Germany knew for the better part of a month, though there were ominous signs, such as the inspired truculence of the Austrian press and the cryptic speeches of the German Ambassador in Vienna, who went so far as to declare that Austria must settle with Serbia once and for all. On the 5th day of July a meeting was held at Potsdam at which the situation was discussed and the outline of the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia decided upon. In spite of denials it is beyond question that the meeting took place. We know that the Emperor was there, and we know that an autograph letter from

the Emperor Francis Joseph, presented to the Emperor that morning by the Austrian Ambassador, was discussed, and that the result of the deliberations was to promise German support to Austria in the most peremptory and extreme demands upon Serbia. Next day there was a Cabinet Council in Vienna. The assurance that Germany was behind them in a bellicose policy encouraged the ministers, under the guidance of Count Berchtold, to present to Serbia an impossible ultimatum, and risk the consequences. Only one voice, that of Count Tisza, was raised in opposition, and his moderating counsel was disregarded.

On Thursday the 23rd of July the Austro-Hungarian Government presented its ultimatum to Belgrade. To all the world, except the Teutonic Powers, it came as a veritable thunderbolt. Austria, in fact, asked not for Serbia's co-operation in punishing the assassins, but for her degradation to the position of a vassal state. She had chosen her moment cunningly. While a reply was pending, each capital of the Entente was in the throes of a domestic crisis, and had little leisure to grapple with the new peril in the East. Petrograd was paralyzed by a huge strike, and had barricades in her streets. Paris was in the midst of the trial of Madame Caillaux for the murder of M. Calmette. In Britain the Buckingham Palace Conference on the Ulster question broke down on the 24th, and to many people there seemed no way out of the tangle but civil war.

Faced with this crisis, Serbia appealed to Russia, and, following her counsel, went to the extreme limit of complaisance, accepting substantially all the Austrian demands with two reservations, on which she asked for a reference to the Hague Tribunal. But, in truth, the Note was in the nature of a rhetorical question; it did not expect an answer. Had Serbia yielded on every point, another Note would no doubt have followed in still more exorbitant terms, for Austria was determined to pick a quarrel. At a quarter to six on the Saturday evening, M. Pasitch, the Serbian Prime Minister, delivered the answer in person at the Austrian Legation. It may be doubted whether that answer was read. He had scarcely returned to his office ere he received a message that the reply was unsatisfactory, and at 6.30 p.m., or forty-five minutes after the receipt of the Serbian answer, the Austrian Minister left Belgrade.

Next day, Sunday the 26th, there began that feverish week of diplomatic effort which constitutes as dramatic an episode as modern annals can show. The chief part was played by Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, whose labours for peace up till the last moment were of incalculable value in establishing the honesty of purpose of the Entente in

the eyes of neutral peoples. His first step was to approach Germany, France, and Italy, with a view to calling a conference in London to mediate in the Austro-Serbian quarrel. He met with a cordial response from Paris and Rome, but from Berlin he was informed that Germany would have nothing to do with any conference. On July 28th Austria declared war on Serbia.

It would appear, however, that the rapid action of Austria compelled the civilian statesmen of Germany to pause and reflect. They had determined upon war, but they did not wish to drop the mask of reasonableness, and a lingering prudence made them seek to limit the coming conflict. Above all, they wished to do nothing that might bring Britain into the arena against them. Accordingly they adopted the pose of trying to moderate Austria's precipitation. On the evening of the 28th the Imperial Chancellor sent for the British Ambassador and opened his heart to him. His view was that the quarrel with Serbia was purely Austria's business, with which Russia had no concern; he could not accept the conference suggested by Sir Edward Grey, for that would look like sitting in judgment on sovereign Powers; but a war among the Great Powers must be avoided, and he was very willing to co-operate with Britain to this end. He was anxious for direct negotiations between Vienna and Petrograd, and was advising Vienna accordingly. We know from other sources what this advice was. He told Austria not to refuse further conversations, to seize Serbian territory as a guarantee, but to explain to Russia that she did not intend permanent annexation. In this there was no hint of concession. The impossible Austrian demands remained. The action, in fact, was part of the elaborate hypocrisy by which Germany hoped to mislead Britain. It was not successful. On the afternoon of the 29th, Sir Edward Grey very seriously and courteously warned Prince Lichnowsky of the dangerous waters to which Germany was steering. "The situation was very grave. While it was restricted to the issues at present actually involved, we had no thought of interfering in it. But if Germany became involved in it, and then France, the issue might be so great that it would involve all European interests."

On the 29th too, the day on which the bombardment on Belgrade began, Russia ordered partial mobilization. The news reached Germany, and some time between 8 p.m. and 11 p.m. on the 29th the Emperor met his military and political chiefs at Potsdam. On the strength of Russia's mobilization they resolved on war against Russia and, as a corollary, against France. But before publishing the declaration they decided to make a "strong bid" for British neutrality. The Imperial Chancellor motored back to Berlin and sent for the British Ambassador. Sir Edward Goschen's dispatch gives the gist of the strange conversation which followed:

> “Provided that the neutrality of Great Britain were certain, every assurance would be given to the British Government that the Imperial Government aimed at no territorial acquisitions at the expense of France should they prove victorious in any war that might ensue. It depended upon the action of France what operations Germany might be forced to enter upon in Belgium, but, *when the war was over*, Belgian integrity would be respected if she had not sided against Germany.”

With this amazing proposal the troubled day of Wednesday the 29th closed. Sir Edward Grey was moved to honourable wrath, and early on the morning of the 30th replied in words which could not be misconstrued. He rejected utterly the Imperial Chancellor’s suggestion that Britain should bind herself to a disgraceful neutrality. He appealed once more to Germany to work with him to preserve the peace of Europe, and he concluded with the expression of a hope which at the moment seemed to the world a vague academic idea, but which the rigour of war was to make a living reality.

At this point there appeared to be a certain wavering on the part of Austria. The statesmen of Vienna seem suddenly to have realized that Russia was prepared to fight. Count Berchtold instructed the Austrian Ambassador in Petrograd to open conversations again, and used certain remarkable phrases. Austria, he said, did not desire to “infringe the sovereignty of Serbia,” but to win guarantees for her own future security. This was a very different attitude from anything hitherto revealed.

Sir Edward Grey, though the skies were swiftly darkening, had not yet lost hope. He still clung to his own proposal, that Austria should occupy Belgrade as a guarantee, and then allow Europe to mediate between herself, Russia, and Serbia. To his anxious eyes there seemed even at this eleventh hour a chance of peace. Germany thought likewise, and promptly took steps to shatter it. About midday on the 31st the news reached Berlin that Russia had ordered a general mobilization. It was the cue for which she had been waiting. The Emperor decreed a *Kriegsgefahrzustand*, a “state of danger of war,” which meant the introduction of martial law, and the perfecting of the military machine, so that it only needed Moltke’s famous “Mobil-krieg” to set it in motion. In every other country it would have been understood as in the fullest sense a general mobilization. An ultimatum was at once sent to Petrograd, stating that if within twelve hours—that is, by midday on Saturday, 1st August—Russia did not demobilize against Austria as well as Germany, his Government would be compelled to order German mobilization. At the same time something in the nature of an ultimatum was

sent to France. She was asked whether she intended to remain neutral in a Russo-German war, and a reply was demanded within eighteen hours—that is, by one o'clock next day. It was clearly necessary for Germany to hurry on the breach with France, for all her military dispositions contemplated that the first blow should be struck in the West, and it would be fatal to be implicated in a Russian campaign with France still undecided. She knew very well what answer France would give to her truculent interrogatory. Within a few hours Germany had cleared the air, she had made war with France and Russia inevitable, and had put an end to the temporizing of her Austrian ally.

That day the British Cabinet met. M. Cambon, the French Ambassador, had asked Sir Edward Grey for an assurance that if war came Britain would cast in her lot with France and Russia. The Cabinet discussed this question and decided that they could not yet guarantee the intervention of Britain. M. Cambon was informed that the Government intended to take steps forthwith to obtain from Germany and France an undertaking to respect Belgian neutrality, and must wait for the situation to develop. Sir Edward Grey—reasonably, on the information before him—still clung to the hope which the more pacific attitude of Austria had given him. He was also uncertain about his countrymen, whose long insensitiveness to foreign affairs had unfitted them to read the signs now written large on the skies. High Conservative finance and the extreme Radical press were at one in their determination to avoid war. Again, if the Foreign Secretary was uncertain about his countrymen, he was not less uncertain about his colleagues. Six men in the Cabinet saw where events were tending unless a miracle intervened. These were the Prime Minister, Lord Haldane, Sir Edward Grey, Lord Crewe, Mr. McKenna, and Mr. Churchill. The others were ignorant, puzzled, and angry, and the left wing was making ready, in the event of the six voting for war, to lead a campaign for non-intervention in which they believed they would have overwhelming popular support. In the circumstances Sir Edward Grey could scarcely have done otherwise than he did. His enforced caution had no effect on German policy. Had he published that day the news of a military alliance between Britain and France, Germany would not have swerved one hair's-breadth from her plan.

That day the King of England received two messages. One was from the Emperor William, in which it was made clear that Germany regarded herself as committed to war with Russia. The other was from the President of the French Republic, in which, while admitting that Britain was under no formal obligation, he appealed to her to declare herself on the side of France as the one hope of preserving peace. We know now that that chance had already

gone, but M. Poincaré’s message is proof, if proof were needed, of the earnest desire of France to avert war. King George, after consulting his Ministers, replied on the following morning with the same answer which Sir Edward Grey had given to M. Paul Cambon. There was still a faint hope of peace, and till that had gone the pledge asked for could not be given. But before many hours had passed the hope had vanished even from the mind of the British Cabinet.

That week-end was such as no one then living had ever known. For so widespread a sense of foundations destroyed and a world turned topsy-turvy we must go back to the days of the French Revolution. In Britain the markets went to pieces, the Bank rate rose on the Saturday to 10 per cent., and the Stock Exchange was closed. An air of great and terrible things impending impressed the most casual spectator. Crowds hung about telegraph offices and railway stations; men stood in the streets in little groups; there was not much talking, but many spells of tense silence. The country was uneasy. It feared war; it was beginning to realize the immensity of the crisis; and another feeling was appearing, scarcely reckoned with by the Government—a fear of a dishonourable peace. In Berlin, where the news was no novelty to the inner circle, an interesting performance was being enacted. With adroit stage management the incidents of 1870 were repeated. In the middle of the week the populace had gone mad with war fever, in spite of the famine of coin and the rapid advance in food prices. Wherever the Emperor appeared he was greeted with wild enthusiasm. On the Thursday feeling quieted down when it was believed that Russia had given in, but on the declaration of a “state of danger of war” the fever broke out again. The approaches to the Palace were crowded at all hours, thrilling religious services were held, singing and shouting mobs filled the streets, until the order came after noon on Saturday for the general mobilization. That solemnized Berlin; anxious women took the place of noisy maffickers; and the capital, calming her nerves, prepared for a great struggle. If Germany failed, it was on her gates that the conqueror would beat.

On 1st August the time limit of the ultimatum to Russia expired. At noon war began between Russia and Germany. On the same day France was asked by Germany if she promised neutrality to give stringent guarantees, no less than the temporary cession of the great border fortresses of Toul and Verdun. But the need did not arise for this harsh condition. The course which France would take was not left in doubt. Just before midday Germany issued the order for general mobilization. France followed suit.

On the morning of Sunday, 2nd August, came the first act of war. The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, about the size of an English county, lies at the south-eastern corner of Belgium, between the Ardennes and the river Moselle. On the Sunday morning the advance guard of the German 8th Corps crossed the frontier, and about 11 a.m. the inhabitants of the capital were surprised by the arrival of motor cars and an armoured train containing the officers and men of the 29th Regiment. These demanded a right of passage through the duchy for the German army. A gendarme or two protested, and there was an end of it. Luxembourg was like the nest of field-mice in the path of the reaping machine, and could do nothing to stay the onset. Upon the same day German cavalry patrols crossed the Alsatian border.

At seven o'clock that evening came the celebrated ultimatum to Belgium. The views of Germany on the binding nature of treaties had not been concealed from the world. Sir Edward Grey had already asked both the French and German Governments for an assurance that they would respect the neutrality of Belgium so long as no other Power violated it. He received from France at once the fullest assurance, but from Germany an ambiguous and disquieting answer. Germany indeed said that she considered that certain hostile acts had already been committed by Belgium. The stage was being set for a new version of the fable of the Wolf and the Lamb. The ultimatum which Germany sent upon the 2nd August demanded a passage through Belgium for German troops. If Belgium assented and maintained a benevolent neutrality, Germany undertook, at the conclusion of the war, to evacuate her territory and guarantee in full her independence. If she refused, Germany would be regretfully compelled to treat her as an enemy. The thunderbolt had fallen, and all that night the Belgian statesmen discussed the terms of their reply.

Meanwhile on that Sunday things were moving faster in Britain. The Naval Reserves were called out, and a moratorium was proclaimed for the payment of bills of exchange other than cheques. The Cabinet met in the morning, and with the growth of anxiety about Belgium the pacificist group began to lose ground. That Sunday morning's Cabinet authorized Sir Edward Grey to assure M. Paul Cambon that, if the German fleet came into the Channel or through the North Sea to attack the French coast, the British navy would give France all the protection in its power. The main value of the pledge was that it enabled France to settle her naval dispositions in the Mediterranean, where her fleet had long been concentrated. She had depleted her Atlantic and Channel defences in hope of Britain's alliance; now she was at war and Britain was not yet an ally; at any moment a

German fleet might appear on her western coasts. That day, too, the Opposition took a step, highly creditable to themselves, which greatly strengthened Mr. Asquith’s hands. The Unionist statesmen, collected hurriedly from distant country houses, sent to the Prime Minister a note offering their unqualified support in any measures he might take on behalf of the honour and security of Britain and her Allies.

The battle of diplomacy was nearing its end, and Monday, 3rd August, saw throughout Europe a knitting of loose threads into the web of war. That day the first blow was struck in the East—a skirmish of outposts near Libau. That day Germany declared war upon France. At 7 a.m., twelve hours after the ultimatum was presented, Belgium returned her answer. She intended at all costs to fulfil her international obligations, and would offer vigorous resistance to any invader. “The Belgian Government, if they were to accept the proposals submitted to them, would sacrifice the honour of the nation and betray their duty towards Europe.” This bold defiance, delivered while Britain still seemed to hesitate, was like the sudden wind which sweeps a morning fog from the valleys. At the same hour King Albert telegraphed to King George making a supreme appeal for the diplomatic intervention of Britain to safeguard the integrity of his country. He had still a faint hope that the invader might hesitate if it was made clear that the crossing of the Belgian frontier meant instant war with Britain.

That morning the British Cabinet met. It was a momentous occasion, for Ministers were already in possession of the German ultimatum to Belgium, and while they sat came King Albert’s personal appeal to King George. Mr. Churchill informed his colleagues that he had taken timely steps, and that by that hour the whole sea power of Britain was in readiness for war. An hour before, Lord Haldane, acting for the Prime Minister at the War Office, had ordered the mobilization of the British army—an act of incalculable importance at a time when every hour was vital. The Government were at the parting of the ways. The temper of the people was rising, and the hope of the pacificist section to lead a whirlwind campaign for peace was dwindling. Sir Edward Grey prepared a telegram to Sir Edward Goschen demanding from Germany an immediate assurance that Belgian neutrality would be respected, and informed the Belgian Minister in London that a violation of Belgium would for Britain mean war.

The views of the House of Commons had still to be ascertained. The day was a Bank Holiday, and during the afternoon at every post-office in the country crowds were waiting for the first news of Sir Edward Grey’s speech. When it came the sigh of relief which went up from men who had most to

lose by war showed how deep had been the national anxiety. The Foreign Secretary's statement that afternoon was such as only he could have made. It was the expression, in plain words without rhetoric or passion, of a most honest and peace-loving mind, which had left no channel of mediation unexplored, which had striven against every rebuff to avert calamity, and which now sadly but inevitably was forced towards war. The House of Commons received this declaration of policy with almost unanimous approval.

Next day, Tuesday the 4th, saw the end of those thirteen days when statesmanship laboured to buttress the tottering barriers. That morning Sir Edward Grey advised Belgium to resist by force any German invasion, and promised to join with Russia and France in supporting her. In the early hours the invasion had begun. The Germans crossed the frontier at Gemmenich, and during the day Visé was burned and the first shots were fired on the forts of Liége. At the same time the German Minister in Brussels announced that since Belgium refused to grant her a free passage, Germany would take one by force—the equivalent of a declaration of war.

The last act was played in Berlin. Sir Edward Goschen received Sir Edward Grey's message early on the 4th and at once called upon Jagow. He was told that a passage through Belgium was a matter of life or death to Germany, and that she could not draw back. Then came a second telegram from London instructing the British Ambassador to serve an ultimatum on Germany, and unless a satisfactory reply was given before midnight, to ask for his passports. When the message arrived the Imperial Chancellor was delivering his historic speech in the Reichstag, in which he repeated the familiar misstatements about France's violation of German territory, and defended the breach of Belgian neutrality.

> "The wrong—I speak frankly—that we are committing we will try to make good as soon as our military goal is reached. He who is threatened as we are threatened and is righting for his all can have but the one thought—how he is to hack his way through."

When he returned from the Reichstag he was asked to see Sir Edward Goschen, who had already, about 7 p.m., presented Jagow with the British ultimatum. That final interview with Bethmann-Hollweg sheds so clear a light upon the mind of Germany that Sir Edward Goschen's narrative deserves quotation.

> “I found the Chancellor very agitated. He said that the step taken by His Majesty’s Government was terrible to a degree: just for a word—‘neutrality,’ a word which in war time had so often been disregarded—just for a scrap of paper, Great Britain was going to make war on a kindred nation who desired nothing better than to be friends with her.”

To the British ultimatum no formal reply was given, but before midnight, at which hour it was due to expire, the news had leaked out in Berlin. The newsboys in the street were already shouting war with Britain, and presently the crashing of glass in the Embassy windows told that the Berlin mob had awakened to the fact that the strife was not to be confined to the continent of Europe, but was to rage through the wide world. The disappointment of Germany was deep—deep as had been her blindness. For a moment her zest was a little dashed, for the entrance of Britain brought into that methodical future which she had planned a touch of the incalculable. “The British change the whole situation,” the Emperor told Mr. Gerard a few days later. “An obstinate nation! They will keep up the war. It cannot end soon.”

So closed the feverish fortnight when the dams of war cracked and broke and let loose the torrent. The historian, surveying the facts with all due detachment, can reach but the one conclusion. For more than a year the rulers of Germany had made up their minds for war—war, if possible, in instalments, but war which in the last resort would give them a world hegemony.

Against the conduct of the Entente during those weeks no charge of substance can be made. Russia strove zealously for peace. France laboured till the last moment to prevent catastrophe, and by her scruples gave her enemy an initial advantage. When all hope had gone she faced the crisis with a noble calm, very different from the excited hours of 1870. Nor can there be any serious reflection on the action of Britain. Sir Edward Grey played under supreme difficulties a part which must rank among the most honourable achievements of British statesmen, and for Mr. Asquith and the Ministers who supported him from the first there can be nothing but praise. Yet it must be recorded that it was only by accident that the right course was taken. The tone of the press at the time, and the discussions in the Cabinet up to 3rd August, showed how ignorant and unprepared were our people. But the outrage on Belgium raised a *moral* issue which swept away every doubt. It is not too much to say that the honour and liberty of our race were saved by the martyrdom of their little neighbour.

CHAPTER III

THE BATTLE JOINED IN THE WEST

The New Factors in War—The German Plan—The Attack on Liége Forts—Early French Failures—The British Expeditionary Force —Mons—The Retreat.

I

As the minds of both soldiers and civilians bent themselves to the great contest, it was inevitable that they should be busied with forecasts. All agreed that the war would be of a magnitude never known before in history, and that most of the problems would be different in kind from those of the past. During the last half century revolution had succeeded revolution. The invention of the internal combustion engine had provided motor transport and airplanes. Field telephones and wireless telegraphy had altered the system of communication among troops. The cannon had passed through a series of bewildering metamorphoses, till it had reached the 75 mm. field gun and the mighty siege howitzer. No single weapon of war but had a hundredfold increased its range and precision. The old minor tactics, the old transport and intelligence methods were now, it appeared, as completely out of date as the stage coach and the China clipper.

There was general agreement that the existence of new factors made war a venture into the unknown. Perhaps the chief of these factors was the vast numbers now destined for the battlefield. It was the first instance in history of large bodies of men operating in a closely settled country; it would not be easy to find the wide and open battlefield which it was believed that great masses of men would require. For it was almost universally assumed that the coming war would be a war of movement and manœuvre. The principal reason for this view was that men's minds could not envisage the long continuance of a struggle in which the whole assets of each nation were so utterly pledged. It was believed, too, that modern numbers and modern weapons would make the struggle most desperate but also short, since flesh and blood must soon be brought to the breaking-point. Such a view was possible, because no belligerent had recognized the immense relative increase of strength given by modern weapons to the defence over the attack. Of the impregnability of field entrenchments no combatant was aware till the third month of war.

The gravest of the new problems was scarcely grasped at the outset. What provision could be made for the Supreme Command? Obviously, even in the case of the army of a single nation, the task of the commander-in-chief would be most intricate. But what of the superior direction of the whole Allied strength? There would be national pride to reckon with, and diverse political interests; different Staff methods; different, perhaps conflicting, theories of war. That this problem did not trouble the minds of statesmen more acutely at the start was due to the fact that the contest was regarded as not likely to be a long one. No man foresaw that presently the whole strength of every belligerent would be involved; that scarcely a corner of the globe would be free from the turmoil; and that the supreme need on each side would be some central direction, political, naval, and military, such as in the Seven Years' War the elder Pitt gave to Britain.

All the world in that early stage failed, it may fairly be said, in prescience. Men looked for too little from the new factors in war, and they looked for too much. And yet in other matters they were too ready to believe that the former things had passed away and to assume a breach with the past. Changes in warfare come slowly to maturity, and the mind of man no sooner stumbles on a poison than it discovers the antidote. Each revolutionary device developed an attendant drawback; so that the resultant, so far as it concerned human talent and endurance, was not greatly different from other wars. The eternal principles of strategy, determined by the changeless categories of space and time, had not altered, and, after various excursions into heresy, the war in the end was to be won by sound doctrine. The configuration of the earth, in spite of all the new methods of communication, was to decide the form of the campaigns. The ancient battlegrounds, the ancient avenues of advance—the valleys of Somme and Oise, of Aisne and Marne, of Vardar and Tigris, the Pripet marshes, the Palestine coast road—exercised their spell as faithfully over the latest armies as over Roman and Crusader. The new problems were different in scale and complexity, but the same in kind. Surprise, which was believed to have been banished from war, returned most dramatically in the first three months, and appeared at frequent intervals till the great dénouement; and a system which was assumed to have made the soldier only a cog in a vast impersonal machine was to demand in a dozen services the extreme of initiative and individual valour, and in the long run to give to the major personalities a power and significance not less than that possessed by any of the great captains of the past.

II

The one war plan which mattered at the start was Germany's, as laid down by Schlieffen. This was to hold Russia with small forces, and direct the main weight of her strength to a surprise encirclement of France on the north.

To a German commander-in-chief the general strategy of an invasion of France was determined by two considerations. The first was the nature of the *Aufmarsch* imposed upon him by the lie of the frontier. The second was the necessity for that immediate disabling blow—that "battle without a morrow"—consequent upon a war waged simultaneously in two separate theatres. Germany therefore arranged her *Aufmarsch* in three groups. In the north, moving against the French left was more than one-third of her total forces in the West—her I. and II. Armies, comprising thirteen corps and a mass of cavalry. Directed through the Ardennes against the middle Meuse was the central group—the III., IV., and V. Armies—amounting to fourteen corps. On the left were the VI. and VII. Armies, eight corps strong, based on Metz, and destined for Lorraine. The supreme direction of the Army of the West, as of the whole armed strength of the German Empire, was vested in the Emperor as War Lord, but in practice the command was in the hands of the Chief of the General Staff. At the moment this post was held by Lieutenant-General Helmuth von Moltke, a nephew of the victor of 1870. He was known to the world as a learned and accomplished soldier and a successful commander at manœuvres, while to his countrymen his name seemed of happy augury. The first Moltke had broken the French Empire; the second would shatter the French Republic and the Empire of Britain.

But the peculiar situation caused by the attitude of Belgium compelled Germany to send an advance guard to make ready the path through the northern gate for her great armies of the right. This force was placed under General von Emmich, the commander of the 10th Corps, and directed to seize Liége by a *coup de main*. At the same time the 2nd and 4th Cavalry Divisions, under von der Marwitz, were ordered to the north of Liége, and in the south the 9th, 5th, and Guard cavalry divisions moved into position in the Ardennes and along the Meuse to protect the concentration of the II. and III. Armies from the interference of French cavalry. On the morning of Tuesday, 4th August, Marwitz had seized Visé, crossed the Meuse, and entered Belgium, and late that evening Emmich's scouts came into touch with the Belgian pickets.

The chief routes into Belgium from the Rhine valley are four. There is the ingress through Luxembourg into the Southern Ardennes, and so to the central Meuse valley; there is the route from the German frontier camp of

Malmédy to Stavelot, which would give access to the Northern Ardennes and to the Meuse at Dinant, Namur, and Huy; there is the great route from Aix *via* Verviers, by the main line between Paris and Berlin, down the valley of the Vesdre to Liége; and, lastly, there is the direct route by road from Aix to the crossing of the Meuse at Visé, on the very edge of the Dutch frontier. All four routes were requisitioned. But for Germany's immediate purpose the vital entry was the gap of ten miles between the Dutch border and the Ardennes, the bottle-neck of the Belgian plain, with the fortress of Liége in the gate.

Liége itself lies astride the main stream of the Meuse and the second channel which receives the waters of the Ourthe and the Vesdre. It occupies the flat between the northern plateau and the river, spreading eastwards down the valley, and climbing westwards towards the plateau in steep, crooked streets. Obviously such a position had great capacities for defence, and these were made use of in the series of forts constructed by Henri Alexis Brialmont for the Belgian Government between the years 1888 and 1892. Brialmont's typical fort was largely an underground structure. His ordinary design was a low mound surrounded by a deep ditch, the top of the mound hardly showing above its margin. The mound was cased in concrete and masonry, and roofed with concrete, covered with earth and sods. The top was broken by circular pits in which, working like pistons, the "cupolas," or gun-turrets, slid up and down, with just enough movement to bring the gun muzzles above the level of the ground. Internally the mound was like a gigantic molehill, hollowed out into passages and chambers. The whole fort was like a low-freeboard turret ship sunk in the ground, and it was fought much as the barbettes of a battleship are fought in action. The Liége defences consisted of six main forts of the pentagonal type, and six lesser forts, or *fortins*, triangular in shape. The forts made an irregular circle around the city, the average distance of each from the centre being about four miles. In theory they formed a double line of defence, so that if one fell its neighbours to the left and right should still be able to hold the enemy.

On 4th August the Belgian forces were still in process of mobilization on the line of the river Dyle covering Brussels and Antwerp. The church bells were still ringing their summons at midnight, and the dogs were being collected from the milk carts to draw the mitrailleuses. The 3rd Division was rushed to Liége, and the civic guard of that city took their stand by the side of the regulars. At full strength the force should have numbered over 30,000 men; but as the mobilization was incomplete, it was little more than 20,000. The defenders of Liége were in the same position as the attackers—an improvised force, hastily put together and imperfectly equipped. No stranger

medley of colour could be found in Europe than such a field army which lacked a field dress—the men of the line in their blue and white; the *chasseurs à pied* with their peaked caps, green and yellow uniforms, and flowing capes; and the Civic Guard, with their high round hats and red facings. Little could be done in two days to improvise defences; but gangs of colliers and navvies were set to work to dig trenches and throw up breastworks, and the village of Boncelles and various houses, spinneys, and even churches, which obviously obstructed the line of fire, were levelled to the ground. By the afternoon of Tuesday, 4th August, the Belgians held the line of the south-eastern forts from Boncelles to Barchon, and cavalry patrols covered the gap between Pontisse and the Dutch frontier.

The army of Liége was under the command of General Leman, an officer of engineers and commandant of the Military School, who had worked under Brialmont on the Antwerp and Meuse defences, and was regarded as the foremost living representative of his views. His business was to make such a stand on the line of the southern forts as would delay the enemy for a day or two. Then the city, in the absence of either redoubts between the forts or a strong field army, must inevitably fall, but its fate did not necessarily mean the end of the resistance. The northern forts could still hold out till the enemy should force the plateau from the city, or, advancing from Visé or Huy, should take them on the flank. This meant time, and till they fell there was no progress by rail from Liége towards the Belgian plain. It was Leman's aim to hold on as long as possible to the forts commanding the railway between Liége and Namur, for by that road the French would come. If three days were gained it would be something; if a week it would be much; for daily, hourly, the little Belgian army looked west for the arrival of its allies of France and Britain.

Germany did not rate Belgian valour high, and believed that Emmich's advanced guard had an easy task before them; for in spite of her elaborate intelligence system, she seemed to have no instruments delicate enough to gauge the spirit of a people. She did not realize that Belgium had acquired an army, and something more potent than armies—a vivid national self-consciousness and a stalwart patriotism. When the hour came Belgium was ready, and her faith was found in the words of her king: "A country which defends itself cannot perish."

On the night of Tuesday the 4th, as we have seen, Leman's pickets came into touch with Emmich's vanguard, and about 11.30 that night the citizens of Liége heard the beginning of a great cannonade. The artillery duel went on through the night, and on the morning of Wednesday the 5th a flag of

truce was sent to Leman demanding a passage. The Belgian general refused, and an infantry attack was launched forthwith between Embourg and Boncelles. It was beaten off with heavy loss to the assault. That afternoon the Germans, hard pressed for time and now strengthened by a supply of medium heavy pieces, opened a new bombardment. All night the German infantry attacked, regardless of losses, and by the morning of the 6th had filtered through the circle of forts, and was marching on the city. By that afternoon the Belgian infantry and artillery were falling back on Liége. The retreat was necessarily hurried, and there was no time to destroy the Meuse bridges; but Leman succeeded in his purpose, and himself took up position in Fort Loncin, which commanded the plateau and the railway line to France.

That night the 14th German Brigade encamped on the heights of La Chartreuse, overlooking the city. Its general having fallen, it was led by the deputy Chief of Staff of Bülow's II. Army, who had been sent to accompany Emmich. His name was von Ludendorff. It is a name which will appear many times in the course of this history, and now his quickness of conception and high personal courage were mainly responsible for the German success. On the morning of the 7th he went alone with the brigade adjutant to the citadel of Liége and received its surrender. Terms were arranged with the Burgomaster and the Bishop, and the Germans marched in.

The line of the southern forts had been pierced, though none of them had yet fallen. But it was the forts on the north bank of the Meuse in which lay the chief strategic value; for, so long as they were untaken, the great railway lines could not be used, and for the German advance Liége was a terminus and not a junction. Emmich had had enough of frontal infantry attacks and inadequate bombardments. He suffered Leman in the north forts to remain in peace till he had brought up his siege train. Meantime, to the east and west of the city, the German advance continued. Stores of all kinds poured into Liége, the pontoon bridges at Visé were completed, and the great batteries of Kluck's army were brought on to Belgian soil. Two German cavalry divisions advanced to test the crossings of the Gette, along the western bank of which lay the main Belgian force of five divisions.

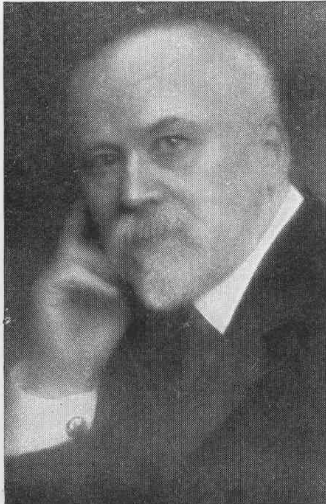
During this time detachments from the II. Army, which had concentrated south of Kluck, were feeling their way up the Meuse valley towards Namur. On Wednesday the 12th its advanced guards seized the town of Huy, which stood half-way between Namur and Liége, and was out of the danger zone of the forts of both cities. The capture of Huy put the invader astride of the

main line from Aix to France by way of Liége; but at present it was of little use to him, since the northern forts of Liége still commanded its most vital point. It gave him, however, a branch line, running directly north from Huy across the plain to Landen and the heart of Belgium.

[*Exclusive News Agency*

KING ALBERT

TSAR NICHOLAS II.



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PRESIDENT POINCARÉ

[*Alfieri Service*

LORD KITCHENER

On the 11th the main siege train began to arrive at Liége. Barchon had already fallen on the 9th, and Evegnée on the 10th, to the German field pieces, and at midday on the 12th the final bombardment began. That day Boncelles was summoned to surrender, and on its refusal was bombarded for twenty-four hours. The electric light apparatus was destroyed, and through the night the defenders fought on in a suffocating darkness. By six o'clock on the morning of the 15th the concrete chambers began to fall in, several of the cupolas were smashed, and shells penetrated the roof and burst inside the fort itself. Surrender was inevitable, and the gallant commander hoisted a white flag, after a resistance of eleven days. Nothing was left of the fort but a heap of ruins.

Meanwhile the bombardment of Loncin, which General Leman stubbornly held for Belgium, was continued without rest. The heavy shell fire, as at Boncelles, smashed the cement framework and the cupolas; and seems to have exploded the magazine, for at 5.20 p.m. on the 15th the whole fort blew up. The few defenders left alive were half dead from suffocation. Only one shot was fired—by a man with his left hand, his right having been blown away. General Leman was found unconscious, his body pinned by falling beams, and his life in grave danger from poisoning by noxious fumes. He was carried to Emmich, whom he had met two years before at manœuvres. His captor congratulated him on his heroic resistance, and gave him back his sword. "I thank you," was the answer of this soldier of few words. "War is a different sort of job from manœuvres. I ask you to bear witness that you found me unconscious."

For eleven days the forts of Liége had stood out against the enemy and blocked his main advance. It may fairly be said that their resistance put back the German time-table by at least seventy-two hours, and by that space of time hindered Kluck from reaching the main battlefield. Of what immense consequence was that delay this narrative will show. On it depended in all likelihood the salvation of the Entente armies and the defeat of the German plan. Without it, the British Army and the French Fifth Army might well have been destroyed. That was a great thing in itself, but those eleven days of fighting made an impression upon the world out of all proportion to their results. The true significance of the Belgian stand was that it pricked the bubble of German invincibility. The triumph was moral—an advertisement to the world that the ancient faiths of country and duty could still nerve the arm for battle, and that the German idol, for all its splendour, had feet of clay.

The war preparation of France began at 9 p.m. on 31st July with the moving of the covering troops, a task completed by midday on 3rd August. The mobilization proper started on 2nd August, and the concentration at midday on 5th August. By noon on the 12th the more urgent transport movements had been completed, and between that day and midnight on the 18th the main work was accomplished. The French forces faced Germany on the ancient frontier line of the Vosges, the Moselle, and the Meuse.

The commander-in-chief was Joseph Césaire Joffre, an engineer officer sprung from bourgeois stock in the Eastern Pyrenees. He was an anti-clerical and a strenuous republican, but he allowed no intrigues of party or sect to bias his judgment. He was not, like Foch, a great military student and thinker. He represented character rather than mind, and, as it happened, it was character which France needed most in the hour of crisis. We shall see him unchanged both by sunshine and shadow, in good and evil report the same bluff, shrewd, wise paternal being—one who, as Bossuet said of Turenne, could fight without anger, win without ambition, and triumph without vanity.

On the 10th August, after an abortive raid in Upper Alsace in the course of which troops from the Belfort Garrison penetrated as far as Mulhouse, preparations began for that Lorraine offensive which was the first step in the French plan. The object of this advance was to turn the left of the main German force advancing through Luxembourg and the Ardennes, to secure the Briey coalfields by the investment or capture of Metz, and by the seizure of the bridgeheads of the upper Rhine to interfere with the communications of the German V., VI., and VII. Armies. The offensive was a costly failure, but Joffre, although he was aware that considerable German forces were moving north of the Meuse, and every argument seemed to point to a strengthening of his left wing, tried the second of his alternatives and gave orders for an advance by his centre into the Belgian Ardennes. The enterprise was short-lived and disastrous. Almost at once the advance came up against strong prepared positions, which in that tangled country were hard to detect, and was at the same time taken in flank by enemy columns marching from the east. There was insufficient connection, too, between the corps of the attack, so that each unit fought a separate battle.

Meanwhile Joffre, aware of the German advance into the Belgian plain, had pushed his Fifth Army into the angle between Charleroi, Namur, and Dinant, on the Sambre and Meuse. Namur he considered to be capable of making as stout a defence as the Liége forts, and he held that it would form a good pivot for an advance into Belgium by Lanrezac, and the British army,

now in process of concentration, which, if successful, would gain the line Namur-Brussels-Antwerp. It was clear to his mind the enemy could not be equally strong in Lorraine, in the Ardennes, and north of the Meuse, and his forward policy would search out the weak spot.

He had miscalculated the speed of the German advance, as he had underestimated its weight. We left the Belgian army still holding the crossings of the Gette against Kluck's vanguards. But once the last Liége forts had fallen, and the trunk line was cleared for traffic, there came the real impact. The invasion swept on like a tide, the cavalry screen fell away, and the Belgian field armies realized what was before them. Their one hope was the French, but the French infantry were far distant, though part of Sordet's cavalry was then across the Sambre and in touch with the Belgian right somewhere near the field of Waterloo. On the 17th, Kluck reached the Gette with three corps flanked by two cavalry divisions. During the morning of the 18th the river was forced at Haelen and Diest, and by the evening its whole line was in German hands. There was nothing for the Belgian command but to retreat behind the Dyle and seek sanctuary. It withdrew, therefore, on the 19th, and by the 20th, as Brialmont had always foreseen, was inside the Antwerp forts, leaving the open city of Brussels to the enemy. On the 20th, M. Max, the burgomaster of the capital, arranged with the Germans for a peaceful occupation.

The occupation in force did not last long, for Kluck had no time for parades. On the morning of the 21st the bulk of the I. Army was swinging south-westwards from Brussels, having reached the line Grammont-Enghien-Hal-Braine-l'Alleud; while the whole of von der Marwitz's cavalry moved westwards in the general direction of Lille, looking for Sir John French. Kluck's huge wheel was behind the German time-table, but far in advance of his opponents' expectation.

Bülow's II. Army had less ground to cover. We have seen that on the 12th he had seized the bridge at Huy, and was rapidly transferring part of his troops to the left bank of the Meuse. On the morning of the 21st he had the better part of five corps north of that river, with their right in touch with Kluck about Genappe, their centre at Gembloux, and their left a mile or two from Namur. Meantime the mysterious III. Army had moved swiftly through the northern Ardennes, where the leafy cover seems to have screened it completely from the French airmen. On the morning of the 21st, therefore, the I., II., and III. German Armies were bearing down on the angle of the Sambre and the Meuse in an arc 70 miles long. Before them lay Lanrezac's Fifth Army, as yet only of four corps, now getting into position on the

Sambre, the fortress of Namur, garrisoned by the Belgian 4th Division, and on Lanrezac's left the British army of two corps, the concentration of which was expected to be completed that day.

Saturday the 22nd saw the main Battle of Charleroi, in which Lanrezac after a gallant fight was defeated. The battle was lost before it was joined through the mistaken theory and imperfect intelligence of the French General Staff, and under no conceivable circumstances could Lanrezac have succeeded. He had to fight before his army was in position, and when his centre was already tottering he found his flank turned.

On Sunday afternoon, the 23rd, the Germans entered Namur singing their part-songs.

We turn now to the doings of Sir John French and his Expeditionary Force. The state of war with Germany, officially declared by Britain on 4th August, did not in itself commit her to sending an expeditionary force to the Continent; but the unmistakable trend of public feeling, and the assurance of France that she counted upon our military co-operation, gave the Government no choice. It was resolved to dispatch four infantry divisions at once, to be followed by two more at short intervals. The people of Britain knew little of the crossing till Monday the 17th, when it was officially announced that it was over. In ten days, by a remarkable feat of transport, more than 150,000 men had been landed at various ports in France.

On 5th August Lord Kitchener, who had been on the eve of returning to Egypt, was appointed, largely by the urgency of Lord Haldane, as Secretary of State for War. He accepted the post with the gravest sense of responsibility. He did not believe in any short and easy contest, or any campaign of limited liability. To the ordinary Briton he was the foremost subject of the King, a man untainted by party politics, aloof from social intrigue, a single-minded servant of the State. He had had a career of brilliant success, and the nation had faith in his star. From the outset he realized that Britain was ill prepared for a great war on land, but he trusted his countrymen and conceived that such preparation could still be achieved. The struggle, as he saw it, would last at least three years, and he laid his plans for an army of seventy divisions, which should reach its maximum strength when the enemy's had begun to decline. Though from his long service abroad he was unfamiliar with European problems, his curious *flair* for essentials made him divine the situation more correctly than the experts of the French Staff. He was convinced that the main German thrust would come through Belgium, and he was anxious that the British army should concentrate about Amiens and not at Maubeuge, for he guessed at the broad

sweep of Kluck's envelopment, and he did not wish the *moral* of his troops to be impaired by beginning the campaign with a compulsory retirement. On this point he was overruled, but his instructions to the British Commander-in-Chief showed how little confidence he had in the initial French plan.

The British Expeditionary Force consisted to begin with of two infantry corps and one cavalry division. The Commander-in-Chief, Field-Marshal Sir John French, had long been considered the best field officer on the British active list. His was, perhaps, the chief reputation made by the South African War. He was a personality rather than a mind—a born leader of men, of tried courage, coolness, and sagacity. The 1st Corps was under the command of Sir Douglas Haig, a cavalryman like Sir John French, and one of the youngest of British lieutenant-generals. To the 2nd Army Corps had been originally appointed Lieutenant-General Sir James Grierson, but he had died suddenly after the landing of the Expeditionary Force in France. He was succeeded by General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, who had done brilliant work in South Africa, and had held the Southern command at home since 1912.

On Saturday the 22nd the British army was a day's march north of the Sambre, getting into position between Condé and Binche. A word must be said of the configuration of this corner of Hainault. West of Mons along the valley of the Haine and the Condé canal lies a country of flat marshy meadows. Mons itself is a mining town, the centre of the Borinage coalfield, an area like any north English colliery district. There was a network of railways, many of them carried on low embankments, and among them the miners' villages, with the headgears of the pits and the tall chimneys of the engine-houses towering above the low-roofed cottages. Around these hamlets the accumulation of shale and waste heaps suggested at first sight ranges of hills, and the illusion was strengthened by the little forests of dwarf firs with which some of the larger heaps had been planted. To the north lay a sandy ridge covered with a wide stretch of woodland, from St. Ghislain six miles west of Mons to a point some three miles east of the town. To the south, after the coalfields were left behind, lay an agricultural region, enclosed on the south by the big wood of Mormal. The place was poor ground for a defensive action, teeming as it was with an industrial population, and endlessly split into enclosures and pockets which gave no observation or free field of fire.

By the evening of the 22nd the British 2nd Corps lay along the Condé canal, while the 1st Corps on its right stretched from Mons to the village of Peissant—a front of about 25 miles, held by a force of some 70,000 men and 300 guns. Sir John French had no general reserve, in the absence of his 3rd Corps, and had to use his cavalry as best he could for the purpose. That day

the British horse had been scouting far to the north, and had come into contact with parties of Uhlans, and, driving them in, had discovered behind them large infantry columns on the march—in what force they could not tell, for they could not advance farther, and the thick woodlands about Soignies made the country inscrutable to the British airplanes. Sunday the 23rd brought a hot August morning, and its first hours passed in a Sabbatical calm, while the bells of the village churches rang for mass. The men in the trenches heard a distant sputter of rifle fire where the German cavalry were feeling at our outposts. Sir John French met his generals, and explained to them Joffre's plan. His information at the moment was that "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 outflanking movement by the enemy." Kluck, though he had not yet half his army in position, did not believe that the main British force was in front of him, and resolved to send his 9th Corps at once into action, and to extend the battle presently with his 3rd Corps. Accordingly, at about 10.30 a.m., he began his artillery preparation, and half an hour later the infantry of the 9th Corps attacked at the angle of the canal north of Mons against Hubert Hamilton's 3rd Division.

The first impression of the British soldier was one of amazement. Instead of the thin and widely extended lines which he had expected he found the enemy coming on in dense masses, which made a wonderful target for his rifle. He found that he could well hold his own, and it was not till the enemy numbers had crossed the canal east of Obourg, and converged upon Mons from north and east, that Hamilton fell back through Mons to a prepared position south of it which linked up with the left of the 1st Corps at Harmignies. But about 5 p.m. the British commander received a message from Joffre which put a new complexion on the affair. He learned of the fall of Namur and the defeat of Charleroi, and that he was not told of these things before shows how feeble was the liaison work between the two commands. He learned, what he had begun to suspect, that Kluck was attacking with two or three times the force originally estimated. He realized that, though his little army might resist for a time against such odds, a prolonged defence of the Mons position would mean that inevitably it would be cut off, enveloped, and destroyed. Already it lay alone in face of an enemy more than twice its strength. The only course was to hold on till nightfall, give his men a brief rest, and begin a fighting retreat southwards at daybreak. Like a prudent commander, he had already reconnoitred and selected a position to be held in the first stage of retirement, should a retirement prove necessary. He issued the order to fall back—to the surprise

of his army, which knew nothing of Namur and Charleroi, and was very certain that it had not been beaten.

Joffre, at his headquarters in Champagne, awoke on the morning of Monday the 24th to confront a falling world. The battles of the frontier had one and all ignominiously failed. His three offensives had been met and broken, and the main armies of France hurled back inside their borders. He had used up his only general reserve. In almost every detail of war he had been outwitted by the Germans. Moreover, the fighting had shown the French inferior in many important details—the use of airplanes, heavy artillery, and wired entrenchments—all matters vital to a war of defence. The Germans were pouring through Lorraine. Great armies were flooding over the Ardennes to the Meuse, and the German right wing, far stronger than his wildest imagining, was swinging round the weak Allied left. Rarely has a general been faced with a bleaker prospect. One plan only gave a faint promise of hope. The eastern front must be held at all costs, and the northern armies must by a breakneck retreat slip out of the noose. The whole battle-line of France must fall back and play for time—time to give it a better alignment—time, above all, to create laboriously and feverishly a new reserve, which could be used to restore the war of manœuvre. Wide regions of France—nay, Paris itself—must be sacrificed, if need be, to keep intact the field strength.

With incomparable courage and patience, and with the mental elasticity of his race, Joffre faced the crisis, jettisoned his cherished preconceptions, and prepared a new plan on the grim facts now at last made plain. We have seen him in his weakness; we are now to see him in his strength.

IV

The retreat of the Allied armies of the right and centre was by the left, pivoting on Verdun. Of the three French armies of the north the Fifth had the longest way to go, and the most difficult task, for at Charleroi it had suffered a defeat, and from first to last it was in peril of outflanking.

But the most critical part of the retreat took place on the Allied left. Kluck's intention was to drive Sir John French into Maubeuge, while his right wing should march rapidly on the west side to cut off his retreat. But the movement did not proceed according to plan, for the envelopers were late, and Smith-Dorrien's 2nd Corps, having fallen back from the canal five miles to the southward, beat off the attack of the German 3rd and 4th Corps. At 7 a.m., being outnumbered by something like four to one, he began his retirement. Haig's 1st Corps had already slipped away, and early in the

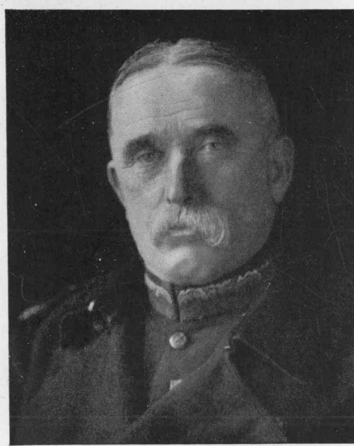
afternoon the whole British force, intact and in good heart, was assembled on the Maubeuge position. Sir John French, fearing to find himself shut up in Maubeuge, decided to halt for the night but no longer.

On the 25th his aim was to put the forest of Mormal behind him. This woodland, ten miles long from north to south and six miles wide, was rough and tangled with undergrowth, and was believed—wrongly—to have no roads fit for an army to travel. But the roads on the east side were too few and too bad for his whole army to travel; while if he moved by the west side only he would leave a desperate gap between himself and Lanrezac, and moreover would thrust his left wing into the jaws of Kluck's enveloping force. Accordingly, he decided to send Haig by the east roads to Maroilles and Landrecies, while Smith-Dorrien kept the west side in the direction of Le Cateau. It was perhaps the only solution of the problem, but it was a solution with its own risks, for a gap of some ten miles separated the two corps on the march.

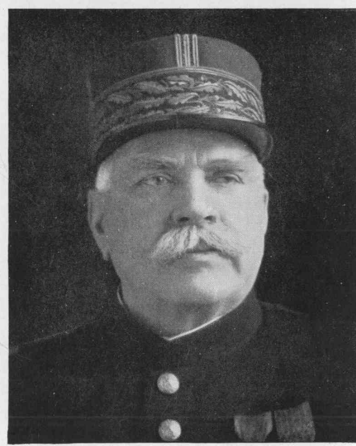
Kluck that day seemed to have the cards in his hand, but he failed to play them. It was a summer's day of intense and glaring heat, and the weary British army found the long march in the dust a trying business. Haig had little trouble on the eastern roads, but it was dusk before the van of the 1st Division reached Maroilles and the 2nd Division the neighbourhood of Landrecies. It had been Sir John French's intention to bring Haig's left more to the west, but the hour was too far advanced and the troops were too exhausted for further movement. It was a dark night with a cloudy sky and a drizzle of rain, which presently changed to a downpour. The advance guards of the German 3rd Corps, which had advanced straight through the forest and so escaped detection by the British airplanes, came into action between 9.30 and 10 p.m. against the 1st Division at Maroilles, and the Guards Brigade of the 2nd Division at Landrecies. The latter assault was gallantly beaten off, and with the assistance of two reserve divisions of the French Fifth Army the situation at Maroilles was saved. When the last shots had died away the men of the 1st Corps lay down where they stood to snatch a brief rest.

But Smith-Dorrien was in worse case. That day he had had no easy march, and his 3rd Division had held and beaten off at Solesmes an attack by Marwitz's horse and part of the infantry of the 4th Corps. Allenby, too, had been in action south-east of Valenciennes. By dusk, however, Smith-Dorrien had reached a position on the left bank of the Selle west of the town of Le Cateau. In the small hours of the morning of the 26th he had to decide whether he dared to retreat then and there, or must first stand and fight. He

had apparently received no explicit orders from Sir John French to retire at once, though he was given the general direction of retirement as the line Ribemont—St. Quentin—Vermand, thirty-five miles away. Clearly instructions as to so distant an objective could not be interpreted by any commander as the immediate orders for his day's work. Smith-Dorrien may well have assumed that the details and the method of retirement were left to his discretion. About 1.30 a.m., having received a cavalry report which warned him of the great strength of Kluck, he learned from Allenby that if a battle was to be avoided the retreat must be begun before daybreak, but that the scattered cavalry could not be got together in time to cover it. Presently he realized that battle was already joined. At or just before dawn the advanced guard of the German 3rd Corps was in Le Cateau, and the 4th Corps was attacking his centre at Caudry. In these circumstances it seemed impossible to begin his retreat till he had checked the enemy; and he believed himself competent to do so, remembering the various occasions in the past few days when he had struck back at and crippled the pursuit. Looked at in any way it was a prodigious gamble, but the hazard of retreating from such a position may well have seemed greater than that of fighting in it.


[*Photo, Reginald Haines*

SIR JOHN FRENCH


[*Exclusive News Agency*

MARSHAL JOFFRE

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. Against Smith-Dorrien's 55,000 Kluck opposed not less than 140,000 men. He was

surprised to find the British in position, and hoped at last to have that decisive battle which he had hitherto missed. His tactics were the same as at Mons—a frontal attack mainly by artillery, to be followed by an envelopment on both flanks. At first the British 4th Division, not having its guns up, fell back a little, but presently by its rifle fire it brought the enemy cavalry to a standstill. This, however, was no more than the prologue, and the battle proper began about 7 a.m. with a terrific German bombardment by the artillery of the 4th Corps, gradually reinforced by that of the 3rd and of the 4th Reserve. The ridge which Smith-Dorrien held was studded with villages, the church spires of which gave good targets for the enemy gunners. The British had had little time to entrench their position, though along the front line shelter trenches had been hastily dug and afforded some small cover. Their artillery, though outnumbered by nearly four to one, made a brilliant stand, and for seven hours checked the enemy's infantry rushes. The two points of serious danger were the right wing near Le Cateau, where the Germans managed to work round the flank of the sorely tried 5th Division, and at Caudry, which formed an acute salient, garrisoned by the brigade of the 3rd Division which had been fighting the night before at Solesmes. Nevertheless at 1 p.m. the British front was still intact, and Sordet and Allenby and d'Amade's reserves had for the moment checked the enveloping movements.

About 1 p.m. Smith-Dorrien realized that it was time to leave. His right flank was getting hourly more exposed by Haig's withdrawal, and Kluck's 9th Corps would presently be arriving. He had persuaded the enemy that he was not to be trifled with, and had beaten off his chief corps with heavy losses. If he was to get away, he must issue the orders forthwith, for to break off a battle with a vastly superior opponent is one of the most difficult of the operations of war. The attack of the 3rd Corps about noon broke the 5th Division on the right and precipitated the retreat. Orders could not reach many of the units, who remained in the trenches and so protected the retirement of the rest, but under cover of the devoted artillery most of the infantry quietly withdrew from the field. The batteries left behind had been so knocked to pieces that it was impossible to move them. Before the sun set the 2nd Corps was tramping over the belt of low upland in which the streams of Scheldt and Sambre take their rise, and on the morning of the 27th it halted north of St. Quentin where the land begins to fall to the bright valley of the Oise. The chief miracle of the retreat had been effected.

On the 28th the two halves of the British force had been reunited, and that evening the 1st Corps lay south of La Fère between the St. Gobain forest and the Oise, while the 2nd Corps was north of the river about Noyon.

The British were over the Aisne on the 31st. On 3rd September they crossed the Marne, and the long retreat from the Belgian frontier approached its 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 last be allowed to stand and take order with the enemy. To realize the full achievement of the British force, which in the retreat had the most laborious task, 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 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 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. 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 more difficult duty. 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.

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 Blücher.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST BATTLE OF THE MARNE

The Defence of Paris—Kluck changes Direction—Eve of the Marne —Battle of the Marne—German Occupation of Belgium.

I

The opening of September brought round the Day of Sedan, that anniversary which for more than forty years has been the 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 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. The momentary depression caused by the entry of Britain into the war had passed. In their chief newspapers they read that words were too weak to describe the magnitude of the German triumph.

On 26th August Galliéni had been appointed Governor of Paris, and his predecessor, Michel, had volunteered to serve under him. The defences of the French capital had been widely extended since the siege of 1870, when the circuit of the outlying forts was about thirty-two miles. The drawback of such a vast entrenched camp was that it required a huge army for its garrison, and though its extent made investment almost impossible, no such operation was required for the attack. Further, it was an open secret that even the outer and newer defences were not of any great strength. They were armed with old guns, and there was a deficiency of stores for completing the defences between the forts.

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 enemy’s war-hawks. 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. Those who were in the secrets of the Government had most cause for alarm. On the 28th it was resolved to declare Paris an open town and abandon it, but on the 30th this decision was cancelled, and Galliéni announced that he had received Joffre's orders to defend the capital against all invaders and would fulfil the mandate to the end—"*jusqu'au bout*," a phrase soon to become a national watch-word. On the night of the 31st it was known that the Government meant to leave the city, and two days later the President and the Ministers departed for Bordeaux. The step awoke disquieting memories of 1870. Already the enemy was as near to the towers of Notre Dame as is Windsor to the dome of St. Paul's.

But in truth there was no parallel. 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. 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 foreseen—a national sacrifice of which the cost had been counted. 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.

In every campaign there comes a moment of high tide, when the strength 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 was now approaching in the Western theatre. By one of the mysterious anticlimaxes so common in war, a complete change was coming over the scene. The time had arrived for the Allies to strike back and go forward. With the battles on the Marne—battles to be fought on a front of more than a hundred miles—began a new act in the drama.

We must first consider the plan of German Great Headquarters. There is no evidence that at any time they regarded Paris as the main object of attack, though all their armies were cheered by the promise of a speedy entry into the French capital. For investment they simply had not the men. By the end of August, when the resolution of the French Government and of Galliéni was apparent, they may well have been convinced that even the capture of Paris would not mean the demoralization of France. On the night of 2nd September Kluck was informed that the intention was to drive the French in a south-easterly direction away from the capital, and was ordered to follow in echelon behind Bülow and make himself responsible for the flank protection of the German front. That he chose to disregard this order was not the fault of Great Headquarters.

But in a sense he was justified in his disobedience. Great Headquarters wished to have both success and security, and the two were incompatible. Their urgent need was a decisive victory. Things were in a perilous state in the East. Austria was stumbling from failure to failure, and would presently need help. Already corps had had to be sent eastward from France, and large bodies of troops were detained at Antwerp, at Brussels, at Maubeuge, and along the ever lengthening communications. Kluck and Bülow, the marching wing of the advance, had been compelled to shed brigades as if there were no armies of France before them. By this time the German forces had lost any chance of superiority in numbers. Their men, who had broken every record for their speed of advance, were, as the daily reports of the army commanders told them, very weary. The German people might be confident and hilarious, but Great Headquarters knew that their fortunes were on a razor edge. At all costs they must bring the enemy to action at once and secure a decision.

The true criticism of Germany is not that out of pedantry she forewent her chance of demoralizing the enemy by the seizure of his capital. Where she failed was far back in her whole conception of enveloping strategy. To envelop great armies without a colossal superiority in numbers was from the start a forlorn hope. It was a plan born of over-confidence and one contrary to the doctrine of Clausewitz, who had always taught that the manœuvre was impossible unless the enemy force was wholly engaged with the attackers' centre. Kluck, on whom the main duty of envelopment lay, fulfilled what he believed to be the spirit of the orders of Great Headquarters, but disobeyed them in detail. He saw Germany's need for a decisive battle, and he was resolved to give it her. For this reason he refused to obey the order of 28th August to march to the south-west, and on the 30th began to turn south and south-east to close in on the II. Army. His object was to find the operative

flank of the enemy, which he conceived to be the French Fifth Army. Such we may assume to have been the reasoning of the commander of the I. Army. His whole thoughts were directed to forcing battle, and with this in mind he deliberately neglected the orders of 2nd September to echelon himself behind Bülow. He pressed on till on the 5th September he was south of the Grand Morin. In about thirty days his army had covered 312 miles without a rest—an achievement of which much of the renown must rest with its dogged commanding officer.

The last stage, presenting as it did a flank to the enemy, has been and must continue to be among the most sharply criticized movements of the campaign. But the failure in which it resulted does not necessarily involve an extreme reprobation of the responsible general. Kluck was left with no other choice. If an enveloping battle was required, it was the only means to force it. He did not hear till the evening of 5th September that the German left wing, which he had believed to be triumphantly advancing, was checked before the eastern fortresses. He thought that the French armies of the centre and right were so closely engaged that they could not spare troops to move to the left behind the French front. He erred, too, in underestimating the British army. He thought that it was broken, demoralized, and out of action.

About midnight on 31st August, Maunoury telegraphed to Galliéni that Kluck seemed to be sheering off from Paris. But it was not until the 3rd that indisputable evidence came. Galliéni issued a note to the garrison warning them of the apparent change in the German march, and at once communicated with Joffre. He received no reply that day, and indeed seems not to have been aware of the orders for the further retreat issued on 1st September. Next morning he took the matter into his own hands. At 9 a.m. on the 4th he warned the Sixth Army that he intended to use it for an attack on Kluck’s flank, and ordered it to be ready to march that afternoon and begin the general movement next day. Then he proceeded to telephone to Joffre, who from captured maps had learned about Kluck on the evening of the 2nd, but who had to wait till the Sixth Army was disengaged, which did not happen till the 4th. At 2.50 p.m. the Commander-in-Chief authorized the advance of Maunoury’s army for the next day. Meantime Galliéni had received orders, issued two days before, directing the British army to go behind the Seine. Such a move would wreck his plans, so he hastened with Maunoury to the British Headquarters, from which, unfortunately, Sir John French was absent. The British retirement, therefore, could not be stayed on that day. At this most critical juncture it is obvious that the machinery of direction was difficult owing to the several semi-independent commands. But Joffre showed no indecision. His mind was made up when the news

about Kluck's march was verified, and he struck as soon as the Sixth Army was ready. During the evening of 4th September he issued his first orders for battle.

II

The main German forces lay in a semicircle two hundred miles wide and thirty miles deep, from Verdun to the skirts of Paris. Against this array the Allied front lay in concave form, from Maunoury west of the Ourcq to Sarrail bent in a coil round Verdun.

It will be observed that the concave arc of the Allied main front rested on 5th September on two fortified areas, Paris and Verdun; that there intervened a tract of difficult hilly country between the Meuse and Nancy; and that its detached right wing held the gateway to Lorraine. It was a situation to cause acute anxiety, for if Castelnau failed to bar the door, the whole line would be turned. But, assuming his success, the position had obvious advantages. Its hinterland was magnificently served by roads and railways, so that troops could be moved easily behind the front. The mass of the Argonne would impede the enemy's lateral communications, while his main line of supply was already desperately long, and seriously congested by the resistance of Maubeuge. The chances of outflanking were declining for him—except in Lorraine—since the sixty miles of upland between Verdun and Nancy made a large operation difficult, while Kluck at the other end was himself outflanked. Moreover, the numerical advantage was clearly with the Allies. Between Verdun and Paris the latter had now a superiority in man-power equivalent to at least two first line corps. Yet, when all has been said, the decision to give battle involved many hazards. The enemy had reserves detained at Maubeuge and in Belgium which might at any moment arrive, and Joffre had none. Could Castelnau hold in Lorraine? Could Sarrail prevent a break into Burgundy? Above all, could Langle and Foch stand against the united assault of the Duke of Würtenberg, Hausen, and Bülow? To these questions a less bold man than the French Commander-in-Chief might well have returned a desponding answer. It is not the least of Joffre's titles to admiration that, having failed once, he had the courage a second time to stake everything on a plan where failure could not be retrieved.

In telling the tale of the Marne it is simplest to group the action under three heads: the fight of the Allied left—Maunoury, the British, and Franchet d'Esperey—in their effort to envelop the enveloper; the resistance of the Allied centre and right centre—Foch, Langle, and Sarrail—against the German attempt to pierce their front; and the stand of the Allied right—

Castelnau and Dubail—against the Bavarians at Nancy. Both sides recognized the gravity of the coming battle. On the morning of 6th September the French Generalissimo issued from the old château of Marshal Marmont at Châtillon-sur-Seine the following order to his men:—

> "At the moment when a battle is about to begin on which the salvation of the country depends, it is my duty to remind you that the time has gone for looking back. We have but one business on hand—to attack and repel the enemy. Any troops which can no longer advance will at all costs hold the ground they have won, and allow themselves to be slain where they stand rather than give way. This is no time for faltering, and it will not be tolerated."

We possess an order issued to the German 8th Corps at Vitry:—

> "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 driven back. The great decision is without doubt at hand."

Upon the 6th, the great day, Maunoury's Sixth Army advanced with hope and resolution. At first it seemed to be succeeding, but suddenly it found the enemy resistance stiffen and the advance came to a standstill. Kluck had been fully warned of the surprise envelopment and had taken steps to meet it. The whole German plan was in process of revision. The old enveloping scheme was now impossible, but another had revealed itself. Kluck would turn and deal with Maunoury, outflank him on the right and drive him back on Paris. If the Allied centre could be routed, the decisive battle would have been won, for French and Franchet d'Esperey would be penned between Paris and the victorious Germans wheeling to the right. The plan involved one immense hazard. Bülow and Kluck would be operating in different directions, one to the south-east and the other to the north-west, and every hour they would feel the "*effet de ventouse*," and tend to draw farther apart. Could the void be filled sufficiently to keep French and Franchet d'Esperey at arm's length?

The day of the 7th was one of long and desperate battle. All possible reserves were brought in, and it became a race who should grow faster. Kluck extended his right with a view to envelopment, and Maunoury duly extended his left, but he was desperately short of reserves. That evening the French Sixth Army, as it clung to the skirts of the blazing hills, might well have viewed the future with dismay. It was the anvil for the hammer, and it

could not see the thrust which was to cripple the hammer arm. Reinforcements were sent from Paris, and since the need was urgent many of them covered the forty miles in Paris taxi-cabs. Maunoury attacked on his wing, but in spite of desperate efforts failed to make way. The old game had been played, and once again the enveloper had become the enveloped. Maunoury and his men were at the very limit of their strength. But French and Franchet d'Esperey were moving fast, and the gap between Kluck and Bülow was widening. A rent of thirty miles stretched between them. If Maunoury could endure for twelve hours more his opponent must retire or be destroyed.

Wednesday, 9th of September, a day of rain and high winds was everywhere the crisis of the battle. For Maunoury it seemed that the crisis had passed, and he was beaten. He was heavily outnumbered; his troops were hungry, ragged, parched with thirst, and bone-weary. For a moment it looked as though all were over and Kluck would soon be hammering at the gates of Paris. Suddenly there came strange news from the front line. The enemy had evacuated their positions! This eleventh hour salvation of the Sixth Army was due to the doings on the 9th of the Fifth Army and the British. Straight through the ever-widening gap, and against Kluck's flank and rear, the British were marching, while Franchet d'Esperey was driving Bülow's right before him like a flock before a shepherd.

By midday on the 9th the left wing of the Allies had won an indisputable victory. But their centre was still hard pressed and on the verge of breaking. But Foch, who had against him Bülow's VI. Army, held firm. The "last ounce of resolution" won. Beyond doubt, Foch's stubborn defence was one of the main causes of the Allied victory. Farther eastward in the battle line the actions of the French Third and Fourth Armies were stubborn pieces of stonewalling against an antagonist slightly superior in numbers. In Lorraine, Dubail and Castelnau held firm against the Bavarians.

On the evening of 9th September, in a gale of wind and rain, the right wing of the German armies was in full retreat before Maunoury and French, Foch and Franchet d'Esperey. On the 11th the Fifth Army was in Epernay; on the 12th it was in Rheims, while Foch entered Châlons. That same day Langle had recovered Vitry-le-Frangois and Revigny, and on the 13th the Imperial Crown Prince had fallen back to Montfaucon before Sarrail, who had now recovered his direct communications with the capital. The Battle of the Marne was over, and a new battle was beginning.

The First Battle of the Marne ranks by common consent as the greatest, because the most significant, contest of the war. In one sense it was not

decisive; it did not destroy one of the combatant forces like Jena, or make peace inevitable like Sadowa and Solferino. The German losses were not overwhelming; they kept their armies in being, and were able to make a masterly retirement. But it was decisive in another sense; for it meant the defeat of the first German plan of campaign, and it utterly transformed the strategical situation. The avalanche designed to crush French resistance in a month had failed of its purpose. The "battle without a morrow" had gone beyond hope; the battle had been fought and the morrow was come. Thereafter Germany was compelled to accept a slow war of entrenchments which was repugnant to all her theories, and every week brought her nearer to the position of a beleaguered city.

She failed, as Marmont failed at Salamanca, because she left a perilous gap in her front, and that gap was due, as we have seen, less to any blunders of individual generals than to the defects inherent in her whole strategy of envelopment. The *causa causans* of victory was Joffre's plan, the Fabian strategy which, in spite of many blunders, was resolved to delay till it found a favourable terrain, a better balance of strength, and the chance of the strategic initiative. The proximate cause was Maunoury's flank attack, inspired by Galliéni, which halted Kluck and opened the way for the British and Franchet d'Esperey. But without the heroic offensive-defensive of Foch, and the stubborn endurance of Langle and Sarrail—above all, without Castelnau's epic resistance at Nancy—the initiative could not have been seized in the West, and the Marne would have realized Kluck's hopes. In the far-flung contest every army of the Allies did its appointed task and earned a share in the triumph. It was the ultimate battle of the old régime of war, a battle of movement, surprise, improvisation; which is to say, it was fought and won less by the machine than by the human quality of the soldier. In the last resort the giver of victory was the ancient and unconquerable spirit of France.

III

As the Allied armies moved forward after the Maine they came for the first time into a countryside ravaged by war, and learned the ways of the would-be conquerors. Everywhere the tale was the same—among the farms of the Valois and the orchards of the Marne, in the skirts of Champagne, in the Meuse uplands, in the Lorraine towns, and throughout the villages which nestled in the Vosges glens. It was a tale of horrors which revealed a new thing in war, and to read the full text of it we must return to Belgium.

The terrorization of Belgium 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. 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. 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. The process of Germanization was at once set going. Marshal von der Goltz had been nominated military governor of Belgium; governors were appointed for districts and cities; fines were levied on the different localities; 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. The field army was not content with the security of Antwerp. On the 24th of August it made a sortie and took Malines, which commanded the best railway connection between Germany and West Flanders. On 27th August three battalions of British Marines occupied Ostend. With the British at Ostend, and the Belgians at Malines, the German forces in West Flanders might be caught in a trap and the communications on which the great armies depended seriously imperilled. The Belgian sortie had the valuable result of depriving Kluck of reinforcements. A second sortie on the 9th September gave the Belgians Termonde and Aerschot, but by the 13th they had retired, when the Germans brought up a fresh division of the 3rd Reserve Corps. Thereafter there was nothing before them but a slow falling back upon Antwerp, and the enemy began to close in on that devoted city.

After this gallant diversion the misery which is inseparable from war increased to something like a reign of terror. Belgium was a most vulnerable land. 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.

The unhappy consequence of those deeds in France and Belgium was to destroy among the Allies the chivalrous respect for their opponents which is one of the antiseptics of war—that feeling which found expression in Whitman's cry, "My enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead." The impression left by the spectacle of the 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, remained oddly childish, like a toy on the making of which a passion of affection has been lavished. It was a perversion, an aberration, not a healthy development from the great Germany of the past. And the profession of a morality above all humble conventions, so far from impressing the world as godlike, seemed nothing but the swagger of a hobbledehoy. It was not barbarism, which is an honest and respectable thing; it was decivilization, which stands to civilization as a man's decay stands to his prime.

What of the little people who bore the brunt of this savagery? Britain, the old ally and protector of Belgium, did the little in her power to mitigate this suffering. Did 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—realize that they were looking upon the results of the most heroic sacrifice in modern history? The miracle was 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 the day. No monarch of the great ages more nobly fulfilled the ideal of kingship. He 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, 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 V

FROM THE AISNE TO THE FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES

Battle of the Aisne—The Race to the Sea—Fall of Antwerp—Fight of the 2nd and 3rd Corps—Battle of the Yser—The First Battle of Ypres—Death of Lord Roberts.

I

The place chosen by the German armies for their stand at the end of their retreat from the Marne was upon the Aisne—not upon the line of the river itself, but the crest of the plateau beyond it, at an average of two miles from the stream's side. A more perfect position could not be found. It commanded all the crossings of the river and most of the roads on the south bank, and even if the Allies reached the north side, the outjutting spurs gave excellent opportunities for an enfilading fire. The blindness of the crests made it almost impossible for the German trenches to be detected. Eastward towards Neufchâtel the position was still stronger. Before them they had a natural glacis, and across the river they could command the bare swelling downs for miles. The line crossed the Champagne-Pouilleuse, with the Bazancourt-Grand-Pré railway behind it, and rested on the Argonne, to the east of which the army of the Imperial Crown Prince was ringing Verdun on north and east from Montfaucon to the shaggy folds of the Woëvre. Germany in retreat had lost the offensive, but had snatched again the initiative; she was about to dictate to her enemies the form of the struggle—to compel them to accept a trench battle, well suited to her own stubborn and mechanical genius.

When the Allied troops on the 13th and 14th of September first became dimly cognizant of the nature of the German position they did not realize its full meaning. They could not know that they were on the glacis of the new type of fortress which Germany had built for herself, and which was presently to embrace about a fifth of Europe. On the 11th and the 12th they had believed the enemy to be in full retreat, and when they felt his strength their generals were puzzled to decide whether he meant to make a serious stand, or was only fighting delaying actions preparatory to a further retirement to the Sambre or beyond. Had Joffre known the strength of the Aisne positions, he would probably from the beginning have endeavoured to turn them on the west, or—what would give far more decisive results—to break through the Crown Prince's army in the east, and so get between them

and their own country. As it was, he decided to make a frontal attack, which would be the natural course against an enemy in retreat who had merely halted to show his fangs. The fighting on the Aisne was to continue for many weary months, and to show a slow and confusing series of trench attacks sandwiched between long periods of stagnant cannonades. But the First Battle of the Aisne in the strict sense of the word—the battle during which the Allied plan was a frontal assault—lasted for six days only, and on the widest interpretation for no more than a fortnight. It represented a delaying action, while Germany changed from her first to her second plan of campaign.

Sunday the 13th was the beginning of the passage of the Aisne. The French Sixth Army constructed pontoons at various places under a heavy fire, and several divisions were got over. To the east the British operations during the day were full of interest. The 3rd Corps attempted the section between Soissons and Venizel. The Aisne was in high flood, and the heavy rain made every movement difficult. Its bridging train attempted to build a heavy pontoon bridge on the French right, but this failed, like the similar French attempt, owing to the fire of the German howitzers. At Venizel there was a road bridge, not completely destroyed, which was mended sufficiently to allow of the passage of field guns. A pontoon bridge was built beside it, and early in the afternoon the whole of the 4th Division were across, and co-operating with the left of the 2nd Corps against the German positions at Chivres and Vregny. Farther east the 2nd Corps had been in difficulties. The open space between the river and the heights opposite Missy were a death-trap from German guns. But crossings were made by means of rafts, boats, and the broken girders of a bridge, with the flooded river rushing over this precarious foothold. On the evening of that difficult Sunday we may summarize the situation by saying that, on the fifteen miles of front allotted to the British, they had crossed the river at most points, and had entrenched themselves well up the farther slopes. High honour was won by our artillery, working under desperate conditions, and most notably by the Royal Engineers, who wrought with all the coolness they had once shown at the Delhi Gate, and went on calmly with their work of flinging across pontoon bridges and repairing damaged girders in places where it seemed that no human being could live.

During the night of the 13th, while the German searchlights played upon the sodden river-side fields, Joffre decided that the following day must be made to reveal the nature of the German plans. Accordingly on the 14th, while the engineers were busy strengthening the new bridges and repairing some of the old for heavy traffic, a general advance was begun along the

whole western section of the front. It was not long before the Allied commanders realized the nature of the trenches which the enemy had prepared. This was no halting-place for a rearguard action, but the long-thought-out defences of an army ready and willing for battle. Everywhere as soon as they felt the enemy they began to dig themselves in on the slopes—their first real experience of a task which was soon to become their staple military duty. By the 18th they had got ready their trenches, and were settling down to this novel warfare. The battle of the Aisne, so far as Maunoury and French were concerned, degenerated into a sullen trench warfare, with no possibility of any great movement.

But if the gravest peril had gone, the discomfort remained. The first two weeks at the Aisne were one long downpour. To them succeeded a week of St. Martin's summer, and then came autumn damp and mist. On the sides of the plateau the chalky mud seemed bottomless. It filled the ears and eyes and throats of the men, it plastered their clothing, and mingled generously with their diet.

The situation demanded a counter-offensive which should promise more speedy results than a frontal assault upon the Aisne plateau. Accordingly, as early as 16th September, Joffre changed his strategy. He resolved to play the German game, fling out his line to the West, and attempt to envelop Kluck's right. The true offensive of the Allies was now on the extreme left, where Maunoury had extended his flank up the Oise, and the armies of Castelnau and Maud'huy were lengthening the line towards the north. In the last week of September, Maud'huy's Tenth Army was engaged in a struggle for the Albert plateau. He never attained it, and when the fighting ceased his line lay well to the west of Bapaume, and behind the upper Ancre—a situation which was to be of vital importance two years later. But, as his divisions came up, his left went on extending till presently it covered Arras and Lens, and on 3rd October his left corps, the 21st, was three miles west of Lille. The French left now ran for seventy miles north of Compiègne, almost to the Belgian frontier. It was a comprehensive piece of outflanking, and it bent back the German right from its apex on the heights above the forest of Laigue in the shape of a gigantic L. A little more pressure, and it looked as if the angle might be made so acute that the great Oise railway would be uncovered and the main line of German communications on the west made untenable. If that happened there must be a general retirement; for, though the Germans had other lines of supply, they had none which could keep their right and right-centre rapidly fed with the vast quantities of heavy ammunition on which the holding of their Aisne position depended.

But presently it appeared that this flanking strategy was being met by another. The Germans were themselves taking the offensive, and stretching out their right, not to conform with, but to outstrip our movement. It was becoming a race for the northern sea.

As early as 16th September, Sir John French had become anxious about his position, and had reached the conclusion that the British army was in the wrong place. At Mona it had been the extreme left, now it was almost the centre of the Allied line. This meant constant difficulties with supplies and communications, for these now ran through Paris to the Atlantic coast, and so crossed those of Maunoury, Castelnau, and Maud'huy. If, on the other hand, the British were transferred once more to the left wing, they could draw upon the Channel ports, and would be within easy reach of home. Above all, the British Commander-in Chief saw the dawning of a dangerous German offensive, directed especially against Britain, and aiming at the possession of Calais and the Channel ports. News was arriving that the great fortress of Antwerp was in extremity, and once it fell a fresh army could be hurled at the gap between Lille and the sea. A campaign is full of surprises, and this one had by now taken on the character of a siege. Germany had been forced to accept the position, and was penned behind a line of entrenchments running in the West from Lille to Switzerland. The one sally-port was West Flanders, and without delay that bolt-hole must be stopped. On 29th September he formally approached Joffre, and on 1st October the French Commander-in-Chief accepted the plan.

The French and British Staffs worked in perfect concord, and the result was a brilliant piece of transport. We won the race to the sea, but only by the narrowest margin. The Germans' sally was stronger than we had dreamed, and a host of new corps, of which the investing force from Antwerp was only a small part, was about to pour westward over the Flanders flats. How the pass was held will be the subject of a later chapter. The movement of the British northward marked the end of the second phase of the war. In the first, which ended before the Marne, the Allies were on the defensive before the great German "out-march." In the second, which included the Battles of the Marne and the Aisne, they had the offensive; but after the defeat of the Marne the Germans regained the initiative, and compelled the Allies to accept the kind of battle they had chosen. Presently the Allies changed their plans, and endeavoured to hoist the enemy with his own petard, the enveloping movement; but, while seeking to envelop him, they found themselves in danger of envelopment. He was soon to possess himself of both the initiative and the offensive, and in the dark winter months his

opponents replied with the very strategy he had practised on the Aisne, and dug themselves into trenches from which he could not oust them.

Sir John French, when he began the march to the sea, thought less of defence than attack. He expected that in a few weeks he would have under him a force of ten infantry and four cavalry divisions with which to turn the German right and swing eastward along the coast. But on 2nd October he heard from Kitchener that Antwerp was in imminent danger, and on the 9th came the news of its fall.

II

With the news of the fall of Antwerp the original Allied plan was replaced by a second. The Belgian army would retire by Bruges and Ghent to the line of the Yser to protect the Allied left. Lille and La Bassée must be held by the Allies, and the British, pivoting on the latter place, would swing south-eastward and threaten the north-western communications of the vast German front, which now ran from somewhere near Tournai southward to the Aisne Heights. In the last resort, if the Allies were forestalled in La Bassée and Lille, the strategy of Marlborough might be used, and, instead of a frontal attack, an enveloping movement could be attempted from the line of the Lys against the right flank of the main German armies. The Germans were from the start well-informed as to the Allied movements, and divined Joffre's intention. By the end of September they had begun the transference of first line corps from the southern part of their front. For them, not less than for the Allies, it was a race to the salt water. To the Allies' scheme they sought to oppose a counter-offensive which would give them Calais and the Channel ports, and ultimately the Seine valley for an advance to Paris. To succeed they must be first through the sally-port between La Bassée and the sea. The forty miles between Lille and Nieuport became suddenly the critical terrain of the war.

On 8th October Foch, who had been appointed to the general command over all the Allied troops north of Maunoury, was at Doullens, some twenty miles north of Amiens. There he was visited by Sir John French, who arranged with him a plan of operations. In all likelihood the Germans would attack the points of junction of the Allied armies—always the weak spots in a front—and it was necessary to determine these points with some care. The road between Béthune and Lille was fixed as the dividing line between the British command and Maud'huy. If an advance were possible it would be eastward, when the British right and the French left would be directed upon Lille.

During the first three weeks of October the British army was coming into line north of Maud'huy. On 11th October Smith-Dorrien, with the British 2nd Corps, had marched from Abbeville to the line of the canal between Aire and Béthune. Sir John French's plan at this time for the 2nd Corps was a rapid dash upon La Bassée and Lille. Smith-Dorrien, however, found that the enemy were in great strength—four cavalry divisions and several Jäger battalions holding the road to Lille. He resolved to try to isolate La Bassée. His object was to wheel to his right, pivoting on Givenchy, and get astride the La Bassée-Lille road, so as to threaten the right flank and rear of the enemy's position on the high ground south of La Bassée. On the 13th the wheel commenced, but it met with strong resistance. On the 15th a brilliant advance drove the enemy off the Estaires-La Bassée road. On the 17th Aubers was taken, and late that evening Herlies was carried at the point of the bayonet. This was the end of the movement of the 2nd Corps. They were now up against the wall of the main German line, the centre of the Sixth Army, and no further progress was made.

The 3rd Corps, under Pulteney, destined for the position on the left of the 2nd Corps, had completed its detrainment at St. Omer on the night of the 11th. It marched to Hazebrouck, where it remained during the 12th, and the next day moved generally eastward. Pulteney's aim was to get east of Armentières, astride the Lys, and join up the Ypres and La Bassée sections of the front. By the evening of the 15th he was on the Lys. Next day he entered Armentières, and on the 17th had pushed beyond it. It was now ascertained that the Germans were holding in some strength a line running from Radinghem in the south, through Pérenchies, to Frelinghien on the Lys, while the right bank of the river below Frelinghien was held as far as Wervicq. As a matter of fact the 3rd Corps was now approaching the main German position as the 2nd Corps about the same time was finding it at Aubers and Herlies. They found themselves firmly held at all points, and their position on the night of the 18th and on the 19th represented the farthest line held by this section of our front. One link was still necessary to connect the 3rd Corps with the infantry farther north. This was provided by the two divisions of Allenby's cavalry corps. By this time the 4th Corps was in Flanders, and the Belgian army, very weary and broken, was in the forest of Houthulst, north-east of Ypres, and had begun to extend along the line of the Yser by Dixmude to Nieuport.

Sir John French was still uncertain about the forces opposing him. He knew of an army on the coast route, and was naturally anxious as to the stand which the wearied Belgians could make on the Yser. But he did not know that the movement on the coast was no more than the outer rim of a

huge serried line wheeling against the Allies from the north-east, and that four new reserve corps had been rushed through from Germany and were on their way westward. On the night of the 17th he decided to put into effect an alternative strategical plan. If La Bassée and Lille had proved too strong for the 2nd Corps, then Marlborough's strategy might be employed against the German right. With Menin as a pivot, commanding an important railway and the line of the Lys, a flanking movement might be instituted against Courtrai and the line of the Scheldt. Accordingly he instructed Rawlinson to advance next morning, seize Menin, and await the support of the 1st Corps, which was due in two days.

Rawlinson had an impossible task. He had to operate on a front at least twenty miles wide, and he could look for no supports till Haig arrived. Moreover, he knew of the four new German corps, which were still hardly credited at headquarters. On the morning of the 19th he moved out towards Menin. The cavalry to the left presently came in touch with large enemy forces advancing from Roulers, while the progress of the infantry was summarily stopped by the advance of enormous masses from the direction of Courtrai. It had to fall back at once to avoid utter disaster, and entrenched itself on a line of eight miles just east of the Gheluvelt crossroads, a name soon to be famous in the annals of the war. The great struggle for Ypres was on the eve of beginning.

On that day, 19th October, the 1st Corps, under Sir Douglas Haig, detrained at St. Omer and marched to Hazebrouck. That evening Haig was instructed to move through Ypres to Thourout with the intention of advancing on Bruges and Ghent. The 1st Corps, however, never approached Thourout, but was detained in front of Ypres, where it formed the left wing of the British in the great struggle.

By the 19th—to continue our course to the sea—the Belgians had fallen back nearly to the line of the Yser from Dixmude to Nieuport. The Belgians were nominally six divisions, but three had been reduced to the strength of brigades, and were in the last stages of exhaustion. For ten weeks they had scarcely been out of action, but their spirit was unconquered, and the gaps in their line—they were no more than 48,000 strong—were filled up by French Marines, while the British and French fleets were waiting to give them support from the sea. But the front was still dangerously weak, and on 18th October Joffre placed at the disposal of Foch the reinforcements which were to complete the French Eighth Army.

The 20th of October saw the whole Allied line from Albert to the sea in the position in which it had to meet the desperate effort of the Germans to

regain the initiative and the offensive. Upon this line, little short of a hundred miles long, they awaited the attack of the enemy, as they had done two months before on the Sambre and the Meuse. Now, as then, they were outnumbered; now, as then, they did not know the enemy's strength; now, as then, their initial strategy had failed. The fall of Antwerp had destroyed the hope of holding the line of the Scheldt; the German occupation of La Bassée and Lille had spoiled the turning movement against the German right; the failure at Menin and the swift advance of the new German corps had put Marlborough's device out of the question. Once more, as at Mons and Charleroi, they waited on the defensive.

III

The map will show that in the Allied battle-line, which on the 19th October stretched from Albert to the sea, two points would give results of special value to an enemy attack. The first was Arras, which was a centre on which lines converged from West Flanders and north-eastern France, and from which lines ran down the Ancre valley to Amiens and the basin of the Seine, to Boulogne by Doullens and by St. Pol, and northward to Lens and Béthune. The second was La Bassée, which gave a straight line by Béthune and St. Omer to Calais and Boulogne. If the Germans sought possession of the Channel ports, then their natural road was by one or the other. A third possible route lay along the seashore by Nieuport, where the great coast road runs behind the shelter of the dunes. If the aim of the enemy was the speedy capture of Dunkirk, Calais, and Boulogne, a successful breach in the Allied front at Arras or La Bassée would enable them to realize it. Possible, but far less valuable for the same purpose, was the road which followed the sea. It was the shortest route to Calais, but it had no railway to accompany it, and it led through some of the most difficult country which a great army could encounter.

In war the shortest way to an end is often the longest. By this time the German Staff, under the inspiration of Falkenhayn, who had succeeded Moltke, had decided that at all costs the Channel ports must be won. Their main reason was twofold. They thought that the capture of Calais and Boulogne would gravely alarm public opinion in Britain, and interfere with the sending of the new levies. In the second place, with the coast in their possession, they hoped to mount big guns which would command the narrows of the Channel, to lay under their cover a mine-field, and to prepare a base for a future invasion of England. Now, with this purpose, the best road was clearly not the shortest. If the Allied front could be pierced at La Bassée, or, still better, at Arras, and a gate were forced for the passage of the

German legions, then two of the Allied armies would be cut off and penned between the enemy and the sea. Further, a magnificent line of communications to the coast would be opened up—communications which could not be cut, for all the Channel littoral and hinterland east of Antwerp would be in German hands. If, on the other hand, a way were won along the shore by Nieuport, all that would happen would be that the Allies' left would fall back to the line of heights which ends in Cape Grisnez, and their front, instead of running due north from Albert, would bend to the north-west in an easy angle. Further, the coast road would be a poor line of communications at the best, and most open to attack by a movement from Ypres or La Bassée.

It is a sound rule in war that strength should not be dissipated. On this principle it is at first sight hard to discover an explanation for the course which the Germans actually followed. For they attacked almost simultaneously at all four points, and for three desperate weeks persisted in the attack. The explanation seems to be that Falkenhayn was imperfectly informed of the position of the Allies. As it happened, their front was more stable than he anticipated, and what were meant for holding attacks developed by the odd logic of circumstance into full-dress battles, so that the action instead of concentrating in the coast terrain became a series of alternating efforts to break the front at presumably weak points. This in turn was an intelligible plan—it was Foch's in 1918—but Falkenhayn had leaned so heavily on the first scheme that his balance was shaken before he essayed the second.

Our first task is to consider the assault on the Yser, and the subsidiary attacks at La Bassée and Arras, before dealing with the supreme effort against Ypres, but it must be understood that all four attacks were to a large extent contemporaneous and merged one into the other.

We turn first to the fighting along the canal, usually dignified by the name of the Yser, where the country is blind and sodden, as ill-fitted for the passage of troops and heavy guns as the creeks and salt marshes of the Essex coast. On 16th October the right wing of the retreating Belgian army had reached the forest of Houthulst, north-east of Ypres, and had been driven out of it by the German movement from Roulers. They now drew in that wing, and by the following day were aligned on the east bank of the Yser, with French cavalry and Territorials connecting them with the British army to the south. King Albert had under 50,000 in his command, and to a man they were battle-weary. But the presence of their King, and the consciousness that they were waging no longer a solitary war, but were arrayed with their

Allies, spurred them to a great effort. The Yser was the natural line for them to hold, for, more than French or British, they were accustomed to war among devious water-courses. The plan was to hold strong bridgeheads at Nieuport and Dixmude, and an advance line covering them on the east bank of the river. Behind this lay the line of the Yser itself, and, should that be lost, the Nieuport-Dixmude railway embankment for a last stand.

By the evening of the 17th, Beseler, to whom the first coast attack had been entrusted, was in position just east of Nieuport. Early on the morning of the 18th he attacked with the object of seizing the Nieuport bridge. The sudden and violent assault of a superior force upon the left wing of a much-enduring army would in all likelihood have succeeded, and if at this date King Albert had been pushed well back from the Yser towards Furnes, Beseler would have been in Dunkirk in two days and in Calais the day after. But at this most critical moment help arrived from an unexpected quarter. Suddenly the German right resting on the sand-dunes found itself enfiladed. Shells fell in their trenches from the direction of the sea, and looking towards the Channel they saw the ominous grey shapes of British warships.

Germany had never dreamed of any serious danger from the sea. She believed from the charts that off that shelving shore, with its yeasty coastal waters, there was no room for even a small gunboat to get within range, and she did not imagine that Britain would venture her ships in such perilous seas. But at the outbreak of war three strange vessels lay at Barrow, built to the order of the Brazilian Government. Broad in the beam, and shallow of draught, they had been intended as patrol ships for the river Amazon. In August the Admiralty, with fortunate prescience, purchased these odd craft, which were heavily armoured, and carried each two 6-inch guns mounted forward in an armoured barbette, and two 4.7 howitzers aft, while four 3-pounder guns were placed amidships. Their draught was only 4 feet 7 inches, so that they could move in shoal water where an ordinary warship would run aground. These monitors were presently joined by other craft, chiefly old ships of little value. French warships co-operated, and the bombardment extended east to Ostend. The Germans, unable to retaliate, were pushed away from the coast. Nieuport was saved.

But the battle for the coast route was only beginning. During the previous days, out of range of the British fleet, the Germans had been struggling desperately for the Yser passage. The Duke of Würtemberg was now in command, and with him were the four new reserve corps. On Sunday the 25th there was a crossing in great force, and for a moment it looked as if the line of the Yser had been lost. But in that country it is one thing to gain a

position on the west bank and quite another to be able to advance from it through the miry fields, intersected with countless sluggish rivulets. As the Germans tried to deploy from each bridgehead they were met with stubborn resistance from the Belgian and French entrenched among the dykes. For three days those ragged battalions fought a desperate action in the meadows. But even in country where the defence has a natural advantage numbers are bound to tell, and the steady stream of German reinforcements was pressing back the French and Belgians. By the 28th they had retired almost to the Dixmude-Nieuport railway, which ran on an embankment above the level of the fields. The Emperor was with the Duke of Würtemberg, and under his eye the German attack grew hourly in impetus. Another day, and the Allied left might have been broken.

In that moment of crisis the Belgians played their last card. Once more they sought aid from the water, and, after the fashion of their ancestors, broke down the dykes. The Yser lipped over its brim, and spread in great lagoons over the flat meadows. The German forces on the west bank found themselves floundering in a foot of water, while their guns were waterlogged and deep in mud. Presently the Belgians prepared a greater destruction. Far and wide, in all the drainage area of the Yser, they had succeeded by now in opening the sluices of the canals. Suddenly on all sides the water rose. Dammed at its mouth, and fed by a thousand little floods, the Yser spread itself in seething brown waves over the whole country up to the railway line. The depth now was not of inches but of feet. The Germans, caught in the tide, were drowned in scores. A black nozzle of a field gun would show for a moment above the current, and presently disappear. The attack had failed finally and disastrously. The Emperor, who had watched the operations through his glasses, shut them up and turned away. The coast road was barred, and he must look for success farther south, at Ypres or La Bassée.

The flooding of the Yser marked the end of the main struggle for the shortest route to Calais. In this section the Germans' main efforts were now directed against Dixmude, which was the only point where a bridgehead, if won, could be maintained. The defence of this town by Ronarc'h's marines and the Belgian 5th Division was one of the conspicuous feats of the war. It was a vital position, for its capture by the Germans at any time before the 1st of November would have meant the turning of the Belgian right. Desperate fighting took place, but the defence held firm until the 10th of November, when its fall gave the Germans no advantage. There was still half a mile of floods between them and the Belgians, and by that date the first fury of their attack had been gravely weakened. For in the great battle of the south, after

three weeks of constant struggle, the flower of their armies had been repelled everywhere from the Allied line.

We pass over the twenty miles which separate Dixmude from the Lys, and which constituted the terrain of the Battle of Ypres. For the present we will consider only the work of Smith-Dorrien's 2nd Corps, which was engaged in repelling the German advance from Lille against La Bassée and Béthune.

On 19th October the 2nd Corps held a line pivoting on Givenchy in the south, and then running east in a salient north of the La Bassée-Lille road to the village of Herlies, where it bent westward to Aubers, and connected with Conneau's cavalry in the neighbourhood of the La Bassée-Armentières highway. But from the 20th onward, as he felt the surge of the great German advance, Smith-Dorrien's whole energies were devoted to maintaining his ground and blocking the passage to Béthune and the west. The main attack at La Bassée lasted for ten days—from 22nd October to 2nd November. The fighting was confused and desperate. On the 27th the Germans got into Neuve Chapelle, and the task of retaking it was given to the newly arrived Indian troops. Gradually during the next three weeks the fighting slackened off, owing to the concentration against Ypres. Ypres was a merciful intervention, for it is difficult to believe that if the attacks had been continued with the violence of that of 22nd October our line could have held its position. As it was, it was slowly forced back till it ran from Givenchy, to which we stubbornly clung, north by Festubert towards Estaires.

The last stroke against Arras, which, properly dealt, would have been the greatest menace of all, was delivered from 20th October to 26th October. Happily for Maud'huy's slender army the attack was not made one of the major operations. It was vigorously pressed, but advantage could not be followed up, because of the growing demands of the northern battles. The German guns were now near enough to bombard the city a second time, and for a week shells rained in its ancient streets. But the destruction of Arras did not give the enemy possession. All attempts to break the French line failed, and by the 26th Maud'huy had begun to retaliate in many places, pushed the Germans out of their advanced trenches, and restored to the French some of the little villages in the flats of the Scheldt. Bit by bit the circle was widened, till Arras was beyond the reach of the German howitzers, and the inhabitants began to return to their ruined dwellings. The enemy held the Vimy Ridge, and his lines lay in a loop round the city, but he was never fated to enter its streets.

IV

The little city of Ypres, now only the shade of its former grandeur, stood midway between the smoky industrial beehive of the Lys and the well-tilled flats of the Yser. Once it had been the centre of the wool-trade of Flanders, and its noble Cloth Hall, dating from the twelfth century, testified to its vanished mercantile pre-eminence. No Flemish town could boast a prouder history.

The town stood on a tiny stream, the Yperlée, a tributary of the Yser, which had long ago been canalized. A single-line railway passed through it from Roulers to the main Lille-St. Omer line at Hazebrouck. An important canal ran from the Yser in the north to the river Lys at Comines, and two miles south of the town, at the village of St. Eloi, turned eastward, bending south again in a broad angle between Hollebeke and Zandvoorde. To the east there were considerable patches of forest between Bixschoote and the Lys valley. A series of slight ridges rose towards the south and east in a curve just inside the Belgian frontier from west of Messines to the neighbourhood of Zonnebeke. For the rest, the country was dead flat, so that the spires of Ypres made a landmark for many miles. On all sides from the town radiated the cobbled Flemish roads, the two main highways on the east being those to Roulers and to Menin, with an important connecting road cutting the latter five miles from Ypres at the village of Gheluvelt.

On the evening of the 19th the Allied offensive had virtually ceased. We were aware that at last we had reached the main German front in position everywhere from Lille to the sea, and daily growing in numbers which threatened to fall in a tidal wave upon the thin and far-stretched Allied line. But Sir John French, though cognizant of the enemy's strength, was not yet fully informed about its details, and he made one more effort to break through with a counter-stroke. Haig with the 1st Corps had, as we have seen, arrived behind the front on the 19th, and had been directed to move to the north of Ypres in the direction of Thourout. "The object he was to have in view," Sir John wrote, "was to be the capture of Bruges, and subsequently, if possible, to drive the enemy towards Ghent." But Sir John had his doubts about its possibility, and Haig was instructed after passing Ypres to use his own judgment. He advanced successfully till about two o'clock in the afternoon, when news came of trouble on his flanks. The French Territorials on the left were driven out of the forest of Houthulst, and they and their supports of the 1st French Cavalry Corps retired across the Yser Canal. At the same time he was informed that the 7th Division and Allenby's 2nd Cavalry Division beyond it were heavily attacked, and it became necessary

to halt on the line Bixschoote-Langemarck-St. Julien-Zonnebeke. That line marked the limits of the last British offensive. Thourout and Bruges were now as inaccessible as the moon.

That evening Sir John French in Ypres had an anxious consultation with Haig and Rawlinson, Mitry and Bidon. It was now abundantly clear that the most they could do was to hold the Ypres Salient from the Lys to Dixmude till Joffre could send help—a length of fully thirty miles. This help could not arrive before the 24th, and for three days the present line must maintain its precarious and extended front.

So began the First Battle of Ypres, on the rim of upland east of the old Flemish city. The great battles of the world have not uncommonly been fought in places worthy of so fierce a drama. The mountains looked upon Marathon and Thermopylæ, Marengo, Solferino, and Plevna; mighty plains gave dignity to Châlons and Borodino; the magic of the desert encompassed Arbela and Omdurman; or some fantasy of weather lent strangeness to death, like the snow at Austerlitz or the harvest moon at Chattanooga, against which was silhouetted Sheridan's charge. Ypres was stark carnage and grim endurance, without glamour of earth or sky. The sullen heavens hung low over the dank fields, the dripping woods, the mean houses, and all the sour and unsightly land. It was such a struggle as Lee's Wilderness stand, where, amid tattered scrub and dismal swamps, the ragged soldiers of the Confederacy fought their last battles. There was no general plan and no central leading. Foch and French rarely understood what was happening, and contributed little beyond an ill-founded optimism; the brunt fell upon Haig, his divisional and brigade commanders, and above all on the regimental officers. There were moments, as on 29th, 30th, and 31st October, and 11th November, when only a miracle seemed to save our thin front from destruction.

Very early on Thursday the 29th, in a sudden spell of clear weather, the first wave broke against the centre of the 1st Corps at the point of the Salient on the Gheluvelt crossroads. The 1st Division was driven back from its trenches, and all morning the line swayed backwards and forwards. The 30th was the day fixed for the main German attack. The Duke of Würtemberg was to press hard on his left against Bixschoote and Langemarck, while attacks were also directed against Gheluvelt and the southern side of the Salient. Daylight had scarcely come when the battle began. Würtemberg took the ruins of Bixschoote but failed to drive the French from Langemarck. Farther south the Germans, who had great weight of heavy artillery, simply blew the British trenches to pieces. The cavalry who held

that part of the line were compelled to fall back a mile. The situation was desperately critical. If the Germans got to the Ypres-Comines canal at any point north of Hollebeke they would speedily cut the communications of the 1st Corps holding the Salient and nothing would lie between them and Ypres itself. The Emperor was with his men and had told the Bavarians that the winning of the town would determine the issue of the war. Farther south the 2nd Cavalry Division had been driven out of Hollebeke, while the 1st Cavalry Division were in heavy conflict round Messine. Pulteney, too, in the south, had his line broken at St. Yves, but the situation was saved by a spirited counter-attack.

Next day came the crisis. The attack developed in great force against Gheluvelt village. The 1st Division was driven back from Gheluvelt to the woods between Hooge and Veldhoek. This menaced the flank of the 7th Division. On the right of that Division the force known as Bulfin's detachment was exposed by its attack on its left-hand neighbours but managed to cling to its trenches till the evening. On Bulfin's right, Mussy, with the 9th French Corps, was struggling hard to keep the line intact towards Klein Zillebeke. At one moment it looked as if he might have to yield, but he saved himself by novel reinforcements. He bade the corporal commanding his escort collect every available man from cooks to cuirassiers. The bold adventure prospered, and Mussy was able to hold his ground.

Between two and three o'clock on Saturday the 31st was the most critical hour in the whole battle. It seemed as if the slightest forward pressure would crumble the Ypres defence. French sent an urgent message to Foch for reinforcements, but Foch had none to send, for his own losses had been greater than ours. It seemed impossible to stop the gap. Between two and two-thirty Haig gave orders to retire to a line a little west of Hooge and stand there, though he well knew that no stand, however heroic, could save the town. And then suddenly out of the void came a strange story. A white-faced staff officer reported that something odd was happening north of the Menin road. The enemy advance had halted! Then came the word that the 1st Division was re-forming. The anxious generals could scarcely believe their ears, for it sounded a sheer miracle. But presently came the proof, though it was not for months that the full tale was known. Brigadier-General FitzClarence, commanding the 1st (Guards) Brigade in the 1st Division, had sent in his last reserves and failed to stop the gap. He then rode off to the headquarters of the division to explain how desperate was the position. But on the way, at the south-west corner of the Polygon Wood, he stumbled upon a battalion waiting in support. It was the 2nd Worcesters, who were part of

the right brigade of the 2nd Division. FitzClarence saw in them his last chance. They belonged to another division, but it was no time to stand on ceremony, and the officer in command at once put them at his disposal. The Worcesters, under very heavy artillery fire, advanced in a series of rushes for about a thousand yards between the right of the South Wales Borderers and the northern edge of Gheluvelt. Like Cole's fusiliers at Albuera, they came suddenly and unexpectedly upon the foe. There they dug themselves in, broke up the German advance into bunches, enfiladed it heavily, and brought it to a standstill. Before night fell the German advance west of Gheluvelt was stayed, and the British front was out of immediate danger.

On Wednesday the 11th came the supreme effort. As Napoleon had used his Guards for the final attack at Waterloo so the Emperor used his for the culminating stroke at Ypres. At first they used their parade march, and our men, rubbing their eyes in the darkness, could scarcely credit the portent. Long before they reached the shock our fire had taken toll of them, but so mighty is discipline that their impact told and at several points they pierced our front, though they were presently driven out with heavy losses. With the failure of the Prussian Guard the enemy seemed to have exhausted his vitality. His tide of men had failed to swamp the thin Allied lines, and, wearied out, and with terrible losses, he slackened his efforts and fell back upon the routine of trench warfare.

V

First Ypres must rank as one of the most remarkable contests of the war; it is certainly one of the most remarkable in the record of the British army. Let us put the achievement in the simplest terms. Between Armentières and the sea the Germans had, apart from their cavalry, which was double that of the Allies, thirty-one divisions and thirty-two battalions, a total of 402 battalions, as against 267 Allied battalions. The greater part of their troops were of the first line, and even the new formations were terrible in assault—more terrible than the veterans, perhaps, for they were still unwearied, and the edge of their keenness was undulled. The immature boys and elderly men, who often fell to pieces before our counter-attacks, came on with incredible valour in their early charges. They were like the soldiers of the Revolution—the more dangerous at times because they did not fight by rule. Against the part of this force which faced them the British opposed five infantry divisions, three of them very weak. In the actual Salient of Ypres they had three divisions and some cavalry. For the better part of two days one division held a front of eight miles against two army corps. At all stages the Germans had an immense superiority in guns. In this mad mellay strange

things happened. Units became hopelessly mixed, and officers had to fling into the breach whatever men they could collect. A subaltern often found himself in command of a battalion; a brigadier commanded one or two companies, or a division, as the fates ordered.

Ypres was a victory, a decisive victory, for it achieved its purpose. The Allied line stood secure from the Oise to the sea; turning movement and piercing movement had alike been foiled, and the enemy’s short-lived initiative was over. He was now compelled to conform to the battle which the Allies had set, with the edge taken from his ardour, and everywhere gaps in his ranks. Had they failed, he would have won the Channel ports and destroyed the Allied left, and the war would have taken on a new character. Ypres, like Le Cateau, was in a special sense a British achievement. Without the splendid support of d’Urbal’s corps, without the Belgians on the Yser and Maud’huy at Arras, the case would have indeed been hopeless, and no allies ever fought in more gallant accord. But the most critical task fell to the British troops, and not the least of the gain was the complete assurance it gave of their quality. They opposed the blood and iron of the German onslaught with a stronger blood and a finer steel.

Within hearing of the guns at Ypres, roaring their last challenge, the greatest British soldier passed away. Lord Roberts landed at Boulogne on 11th November on a visit to his beloved Indian troops. On the 12th he was at the headquarters of the corps, and went about among his old friends, speaking their own tongue, and greeting many who had fought with him in the frontier wars. The strain proved too great for the veteran; he caught a chill in the bitter weather; and while the Indian wounded waited in hospital on his coming, the news arrived that he was seriously ill. Pleurisy followed, and at eight o’clock on the night of Saturday the 14th the end came. Lord Roberts’s death synchronized with the passing of the army which he had commanded and done much to create. First Ypres saw the apotheosis of the British regulars, but also their end. That army was now to change its character in welcoming all classes and conditions within its ranks, and growing from a small professional force to the armed strength of a nation.

CHAPTER VI

THE WAR ON OTHER FRONTS AND AT SEA

The Eastern Front—Invasion of East Prussia—Tannenberg—Austria's Misfortunes—War in the Pacific and Africa—War at Sea—Coronel—Falkland Islands.

By the end of the year 1914 the war upon the Western Front was, as we have seen, rapidly becoming static. It remains to trace the course of events in the other theatres.

I

On the Eastern Front the great spaces and the slower concentration of armies made the first stage of the campaign more tentative and diffused. Russia at once invaded East Prussia. As Commander-in-Chief of all her armies the uncle of the Czar was appointed—the Grand Duke Nicholas—and her invading force consisted of two armies, one under Rennenkampf and the other under Samsonov. At first these armies moved fast, and at the time when the British forces in the West were struggling out of the trap at Maubeuge, Russian cavalry had penetrated far to the west, driving before them crowds of fugitives. The terror of their name was on the peasantry of East Prussia, who remembered wild tales of the ragged spearmen who had ridden through their land a hundred years ago. Peasants and gentry alike fled over the Vistula and brought to Berlin the news that East Prussia was in the grip of the enemy.

But when Hindenburg and Ludendorff succeeded the incompetent Prittwitz the invasion came to a disastrous end. Hindenburg had been living in retirement in Hanover, and though nearer seventy than sixty he was a man of rude health and a body as hard as a deep-sea fisherman. He was a man, too, of a rugged strength of character. He and Ludendorff, who was appointed his Chief of Staff, made a formidable combination of personality and mind. Hindenburg contrived to force his way between the two Russian armies and annihilated Samsonov at the battle of Tannenberg. On the 30th of August the Russians were in full retreat towards Ortelsburg.

The bulk of Samsonov's force was 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. The last day of the battle, 31st August, was an unrelieved disaster for the Russian army. Samsonov died, but how or when no man can tell. The Second Russian army 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 waggons 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.

[*Sport and General*

MARSHAL PAUL VON HINDENBURG

Tannenberg ranks with the later Caporetto as one of the few battles in the war that in itself can be considered a complete and decisive victory. The veteran 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 small force may envelop a larger. In popular esteem the laurels of this rugged veteran far eclipsed the modest chaplets of Kluck or Bülow. The

Emperor raised him to the rank of Field-Marshal, and was soon to make him Commander-in-Chief of his armies in the East.

Meantime Austria had got herself into difficulties. Her invasion of Poland had been checked by the end of August, her right wing in Galicia was threatened, and by the close of September she was in general retreat. With the help of Germany a fresh attempt was made to advance to Warsaw, but it was checked by the movement of a group of Russian armies against Silesia. Hindenburg used his smaller forces to brilliant purpose, and retired —destroying the scanty Polish communications. Intercepting the enemy's uncoded wireless messages, he drove a wedge into the Russian front, forced one half back on Warsaw, and at Lodz decisively defeated the other. The end of the year saw the Russian armies stubbornly on the defensive on the river line west of the Polish capital.

Austria had a luckless autumn. She failed to clear Galicia and relieve the beleaguered Przemysl, and the most she could do was to hold the enemy on the line of the Donajetz and to block the Carpathian passes and the way to the Hungarian cornlands. She was no more fortunate in Serbia. Her first attack had been beaten off, and a later and more elaborate invasion was shattered in a great battle in the first week of December, when her army lost most of its guns and was reduced to a mob of fugitives. Midwinter, which on the Eastern Front meant a certain lull in the fighting, found Austria, with a record of misfortune behind her, on the defensive less than forty miles from Cracow, and Russia, after checks, defeats and confusions, in a like attitude about the same distance from Warsaw. The honours were with Germany.

II

By the end of August the war had spread beyond Europe to every quarter of the globe where Germany possessed a square mile of territory. Britain's Australasian and African dominions were engaged in defending or enlarging their borders, and, though the fighting was on a small scale compared with the gigantic European struggle, it had important strategical bearings, and for Britain was scarcely less vital than the battlefields of France. The oversea German dominions were so widely scattered that they could get little aid from their fatherland or from one another. Each had to fight its battle alone, with such resources as the outbreak of war found in its possession.

In the Pacific, Germany owned a hundred thousand square miles of territory, mainly in New Guinea. Her possessions there, officially known as Kaiser Wilhelm's Land, were in the northern part of the south-eastern section of the island. She owned also a large number of islands lying off the

coast. Chief among those islands was the group known as the Bismarck Archipelago, which included New Pomerania. A little to the east lay the Solomon Islands, that archipelago of high-wooded mountains and cannibal tribes which Germany shared with Britain. North of New Guinea were three groups midway between Australia and Japan—the Carolines, the Pelew, and the Marianne, or Ladrone Islands. Her remaining possession in the South Seas was Samoa.

The German Pacific possessions had long been a source of anxiety to the Australian Commonwealth, and the first blow against them was struck by the adjacent British dominions. On 15th of August a New Zealand Expeditionary Force, some fifteen hundred strong, left Wellington in troop-ships and sailed for Samoa where it took possession of the islands without resistance. Next came the turn of New Pomerania, the Solomon Islands, and Kaiser Wilhelm's Land where, unexpectedly, they again won a bloodless victory. By the end of September, for all serious purposes, the Emperor's dominions in the Pacific had disappeared.

In Africa, where Germany possessed four colonies contiguous to those of France and Britain, the first blow was struck in Togoland. That small colony was in an impossible strategic position, and in the early days of August was captured almost without a blow. A more intricate problem was presented by the Cameroons. Strategically this colony also was hemmed in by the Allies, but the great distances and the difficulty of communication made a concerted scheme not easy to execute. It was decided that two French columns should move from French Congo, while the British columns were to enter at several points on the Nigerian frontier. By the 1st October the Cameroons, so far as it was of any value to Germany in the struggle, was virtually captured. The wireless stations had been destroyed, the coast was ours, and the German troops were reduced to defensive warfare in a difficult hinterland.

The situation in East Africa in the first months of war was the gravest which any British colony had to face. The German province was rich, well-organized, and strategically well-situated, for the Uganda railway, which formed the sole communications between Uganda, the East African plateau, and the sea, ran parallel with the northern frontier at a distance of from fifty to one hundred miles, and offered a natural and easy object of attack. The British forces at the start were preposterously small. The total defence force in the first three weeks of war may be put at under 12,000, much of it of doubtful quality. It was impossible that so small an army could have made a serious stand if the Germans had pushed their northern invasion with vigour.

Early in September reinforcements arrived. An enemy attempt to blow up the Uganda railway failed, and an attacking force which marched down the Tsavo River was driven back. In September other attacks were made on the northern frontier, of which the most dangerous was the advance along the coast from Vanga towards Mombasa. The Germans were 600 strong with six machine guns, and they were met at Gazi by Captain Wavell's Arab company, strengthened by some King's African Rifles. This little force held up the invaders for several days until reinforced by Indian troops. On 1st of November a second Indian Expeditionary Force arrived on the East African coast. Its attack proved a complete failure. The Germans had mastered the art of bush fighting. Ropes were hidden under the sand of the paths, and, when stepped on, brought down flags which gave the enemy the required range. We reached and partly entered the town of Tanga, only to be forced back with heavy losses. There was nothing for it but to retire to the coast and re-embark. Our casualties were nearly 800, and included 141 British officers and men, so that the Tanga reverse was the most costly of the minor African battles. So far the enemy had clearly won the honours.

In German South-West Africa the situation was different from that in the other German colonies of the East and West. There over the frontier lay not a British Crown possession, but a self-governing dominion. Elsewhere a cable from the Colonial Office could mobilize the British defence, but in South Africa there was an independent Parliament and a miscellany of parties to be persuaded. Further, the ground had been carefully baited. Intrigues had been long afoot among the irreconcilable elements in the Dutch population, and the highest of German authorities had not thought it undignified to speak words in season, and to hold out hopes of a new and greater Afrikander republic.

The beginning of September saw scattered fighting in the south-eastern angle of the frontier. General Botha, who had agreed to take command of the army, called for 7,000 men—5,000 foot and 2,000 mounted infantry—and to his appeal there was an immediate and adequate response. With the end of September came heavier fighting. At Sandfontein a small force of South African Mounted Rifles and Transvaal Horse Artillery found themselves in a hopeless position and were forced to surrender. The affair at the time appeared in many ways mysterious, and a fortnight later the treachery of Lieut.-Col. S. G. Maritz, who commanded the British forces, was revealed. Maritz then delivered an ultimatum to the Union Government, declaring that unless Generals Hertzog, De Wet, Beyers, and others were allowed to come and meet him and give him their instructions, he would forthwith invade the Union.

He boasted that he had ample guns, rifles, ammunition, and money from the Germans, and that he would overrun the whole of South Africa.

The immediate result of this discovery was the proclamation of martial law throughout the Union and a general strengthening of the Union forces. The time had now come for every man in South Africa to reveal where lay his true sympathies, and the centre of action was soon to shift from the western borders to the very theatre where for three years the British army had striven against the present generalissimo of the Union forces.

In South Africa there had broken out the only rebellion, with the exception of the Irish affair of Easter, 1916, which the campaign produced within the confines of the British Empire. The rebellion was not long in revealing itself. On 26th October the Union Government announced that De Wet was busy commandeering burghers in the north of the Orange Free State, while Beyers was at the same task in the western Transvaal. Botha at once summoned the burghers to put down the revolt, and to their eternal honour they responded willingly. The magic name of Botha did not fail in its appeal, and in a few weeks he had over 30,000 under arms. He did not suffer the grass to grow under his feet. First of all he smote Beyers and Kemp so fiercely that their commandos were scattered, eighty prisoners were taken, and the leaders fled incontinently to the south-west. On 7th of November he made a speech in Johannesburg in which he announced that the rebellion in the Cape was over, and that in the Orange Free State alone where De Wet was at work had the revolt assumed any serious proportions.

De Wet had only a month of freedom, but he made good use of it so far as concerned the distance covered. Ten years before he would have made a very different fight among those flats and kopjes of the Northern Free State. But now the stars in their courses fought against him. His own countrymen gave information to the Government, and grudged ammunition and stores to the good cause. Once he had had fine sport in that district, slipping through blockhouse lines and eluding the clumsy British columns, but now he found himself being constantly brought up against that accursed thing, modern science. What was he to do when his pursuers took to motor cars which covered twenty miles where the British mounted infantry used to cover five? The times were out of joint for De Wet, and so he went sjamboking and commandeering through the land, perpetually losing his temper, and delivering bitter philippics against these latter days.

By this time Botha, having all but cleared the Transvaal, was on his way south, and on the 11th came in touch with De Wet at Marquard, about twenty miles east of Winburg. De Wet was completely defeated. Botha took

282 prisoners, released most of the loyalists taken by the rebels, and captured a large quantity of transport. De Wet at first fled south, but presently doubled back, and on the 16th was at Virginia, on the main line, aiming at a junction with Beyers, who was in the Hoopstad district at the time. Beyers, however, was in trouble on his own account. On the 15th, Colonel Celliers had fallen upon him at Bultfontein, and had beaten him thoroughly and made large captures. Most of the 1,500 rebels were driven northwards, many across the Vaal. Accordingly De Wet, fleeing from Virginia down the Sand and Vet Rivers, found Celliers ahead of him, and heard of Beyer's disaster. He saw that the game was up, and halted his force near Boshof. There seems to have been considerable disaffection in its ranks, and in a final address to them he advised all who were tired of fighting to hide their rifles and go home. Many took the advice, including two of his sons, many yielded themselves to the Union forces, but De Wet himself, with twenty-five men, made one last dash for liberty. He picked up some fugitives, and the small commando crossed the railway line to Rhodesia twenty miles north of Vryburg. He had, apparently, conceived the bold scheme of going through the Kalahari to German South-West Africa. But he had not allowed for the motor cars of his pursuers. For a day or two there was heavy rain, which made the roads bad and gave the Boer ponies of his party an advantage over any motor. But by the 27th the weather had cleared, the veld was hard and dry, and Colonel Brits, who had taken up the chase, began to capture the slower members of the commando. As the fugitives penetrated into the western desert their case became more hopeless. De Wet was forced by the motors behind him to cover fifty miles at a stretch without off-saddling, a thing hateful to the Boer horsemaster. The end came on 1st December when, at a farm called Waterburg, about a hundred miles west of Mafeking, De Wet and his handful surrendered to Colonel Jordaan. He was taken to Vryburg, and two days later entered Johannesburg a prisoner. He had yielded at the end with a shaggy good humour. Having decided that modern conditions were the devil, he was glad to see his own Afrikanders such adepts at the use of the powers of darkness.

With the capture of De Wet the rebellion was virtually at an end. By the end of December the last embers of disaffection had been stamped out within the Union territory.

III

At sea there had been no surprises. Till the defences of Scapa Flow were ready the Grand Fleet led a dangerous nomadic life among Scottish inlets. Sir John Jellicoe, realizing that the British navy was the main buttress of the

Allied armies, was ready for battle, but was resolved not to imperil the future by unwisely seeking it, since without a battle he was able to reap most of the fruits of victory. But from the first day of war the British navy had its stranglehold upon Germany, to whom only the Baltic was left of the waters of the globe. Opportunities were missed, as when the German cruisers *Goeben* and *Breslau* were suffered to escape, and thereby Turkey's hostility was assured, and at the start there was some fumbling in minor points which led to losses, but in all the greater matters its competence was supreme. The Expeditionary Force crossed to France unhindered. On August 29th our battle cruisers and destroyer flotillas successfully raided the Bight of Heligoland. German warships on foreign duty were hunted down.

Von Spee, it is true, won a success at Coronel against Admiral Cradock on November 1st, but Cradock was completely outclassed, for none of his vessels was strong in speed or armaments. He had in his squadron the twelve-year-old battleship the *Canopos*, two armoured cruisers, the *Good Hope* and the *Monmouth*, the light cruiser *Glasgow*, and an armed liner the *Otranto*. When he learned that there was a possibility of meeting von Spee, Cradock asked for reinforcements, but owing to the bad weather and the pressure of other duties there came no reply from the Admiralty.

Coronel was a conflict like one of the historic naval battles, a fight without mines, submarines, or destroyers, where the two squadrons drew into line, and each ship selected its antagonist as in the ancient days. Cradock had no illusions about the dangers of his task, for he knew that if he met von Spee he would meet an enemy more than his match. In a spirit of devotion to a desperate duty he left the slow *Canopos* behind him, and with his two chief ships, but newly commissioned and poor in gunnery, set out to engage two of the best cruisers in the German fleet.

We can reconstruct something of the picture. To the east was the land, with the snowy heights of the southern Andes fired by the evening glow. To the west burned one of those flaming sunsets which the Pacific knows, and silhouetted against its crimson and orange were the British ships, like woodcuts in a naval handbook. A high sea was running from the south, and half a gale was blowing. At first some twelve miles separated the two squadrons, but the distance rapidly shrank till it was eight miles at 6.18 p.m. About 7 o'clock the squadrons were converging, and the enemy's leading cruiser opened fire at seven miles. By this time the sun had gone down behind the horizon, but the lemon afterglow showed up the British ships, while the German were shrouded in the in-shore twilight. Presently the enemy got the range, and shell after shell hit the *Good Hope* and the

Monmouth, while the bad light and the spray from the head seas made good gunnery for them almost impossible. At 7.50 there was a great explosion on the *Good Hope*, which had already been set on fire. The flames leaped to an enormous height in the air, and the doomed vessel, which had been drifting towards the enemy's lines, soon disappeared below the water. The *Monmouth* was also on fire and down by the head, and turned away seaward in her distress. Meantime the *Glasgow* had received only stray shots, for the battle so far had been waged between the four armoured cruisers. But as the *Good Hope* sank and the *Monmouth* was obviously near her end, the enemy cruisers fell back and began to shell the *Glasgow* at a range of two and a half miles. That the *Glasgow* escaped was something of a miracle. She was scarcely armoured at all, and was struck by five shells at the water line, but her coal seems to have saved her.

The moon was now rising, and the *Glasgow*, which had been trying to stand by the *Monmouth*, saw the whole German squadron bearing down on her. The *Monmouth*, refusing to surrender, was past hope, so she did the proper thing and fled. By ten minutes to nine she was out of sight of the enemy, though she occasionally saw flashes of gun-fire and the play of searchlights, for fortunately a flurry of rain had hidden the unwelcome moon. Cradock, out of touch with the Admiralty and perplexed by contradictory telegrams, could only "take counsel from the valour of his heart." He chose the heroic course, and he and his 1,650 officers and men went to their death in the spirit of Drake and Grenville. The Germans had two light cruisers to his one, for the *Otranto* was negligible; but these vessels were never seriously in action, and the battle was decided in the duel between the armoured cruisers.

The Battle of Coronel was fought with all conceivable odds against us. But Cradock's defeat and death were avenged by Sir Frederick Doveton Sturdee at the battle of the Falkland Islands on December 8th. Tactically this was an easy victory owing to Sturdee's huge preponderance in strength, but it was of supreme importance in the naval campaign, for it gave to Britain the command of the outer seas and enabled her to concentrate all her strength in the main European battle-ground. The German admiral, hopelessly outclassed, did his duty as Cradock had done his, the German sailors died as Cradock's men had died, and there can be no higher praise. They went down with colours flying, and at the last the men lined up on the decks of the doomed ships. They continued to resist after their vessels had become shambles. One captured officer reported that before the end his ship had no upper deck left, every man there having been killed, and one turret blown bodily overboard by a twelve-inch shell. But in all that hell of

slaughter, which lasted for half a day, there was never a thought of surrender. Von Spee and Cradock lie beneath the same waters, in the final concord of those who have looked unshaken upon death.

BOOK II

THE BELEAGUERED FORTRESS

CHAPTER VII

SPRING OF 1915

Winter Stalemate—Neuve Chapelle—Its Purpose and Consequences—The Second Battle of Ypres.

I

At the beginning of 1915 the situation for the Allies was gloomy but not yet menacing. Japan had come in on their side, though she could do nothing except in the Far East. Italy was moving towards intervention on the Allied side. Turkey had joined Germany, while Bulgaria, Greece, and Rumania still remained neutral. On the battlefields the situation was not promising. The so-called steam-roller of Russia seemed inclined to roll in the wrong direction, and in the West the Allies found themselves confronted by an impregnable fortress.

With the coming of full winter both armies were forced into that trench warfare which took the place of the old winter quarters. The shallow shelter trenches of mid-October, hasty lines scored in the mud by harried men, became an elaborate series of excavations to which the most modern engineering knowledge on both sides was applied. At the same time, the enemy had to be kept occupied, and while the bulk of the Allied troops were employed as navvies and carpenters, the guns were rarely silent, and attacks and counter-attacks reminded the armies they were at war. It was a period of temporary stalemate and quiescence, and therefore leisure was given to the Allies to perfect defences, to elaborate fresh schemes of attack, to train their raw levies, and to reconsider weapons and tactics in the light of their new experience.

The Allies were in no condition to institute an immediate offensive. The French since August had lost a million men, and were busy accumulating new reserves and labouring to increase their munitionment. The British losses had also been high, and were partly replaced by adding one Territorial battalion to each brigade—battalions which were presently to be organized in special Territorial divisions and to win fame not inferior to the proudest records of the old regular army. Munitions were still scanty, notably in the high-explosive class, and it was obvious that no serious offensive could be

contemplated till the new factories hastily improvised in Britain began to produce in bulk.

The winter fighting was commonly described as a "war of attrition"—a *guerre d'usure*—but the phrase was a contradiction in terms. It was more correctly a period of waiting, a marking of time till further reserves in men and material were ready. But there was a positive side also to the Allies' plan. By frequent local attacks they kept the edge of their temper keen; they prevented the enemy from concentrating in force against any part of their line; they detained troops which might otherwise have been sent to Hindenburg.

The five hundred miles of the Allied line were held as to one-tenth by the British, and for the rest by the Belgians and the French. It ran from Nieuport generally west of the Yser, along the Ypres Canal, in a salient on front of Ypres, behind Messines to just east of Armentières; then west of Neuve Chapelle to Givenchy, across the La Bassée Canal, east of Vermelles, west of Lens, to just east of Arras. From Arras it lay by Albert and Noyon to Soissons, east along the Aisne to just north of Rheims, from Rheims by Vienne to Varennes, thence, making a wide curve round Verdun, to the west bank of the Meuse opposite St. Mihiel, and so to Pont-à-Mousson on the Moselle. Thence it passed east of Lunéville to just east of St. Dié, ten miles inside the frontier. It reached the crest of the Vosges about the Col du Bonhomme, and then ran in German territory to Belfort and the Swiss border.

When the position was first taken up trenches were shallow and rough, hastily dug with entrenching tools for a temporary shelter. But as the campaign developed and the line held, they were deepened, improved, and connected until they became a vast ramification of ditches and earthworks, defended with barbed wire entanglements and every contrivance that human ingenuity could suggest. They were not a fixed position. Daily, like a glacier, they endeavoured to creep farther forward by means of sap and mine. Both sides burrowed towards their opponent's lines, and when successful a length of trench would leap into the air in a great explosion, there would be a rush of infantry, and a hundred yards of hostile trenches would be won, and, if the gods were propitious, held. If a party succeeded in getting into the enemy's trenches, their first task was to block the communication zigzags to prevent a counter-attack. Every night patrols would creep out into the No Man's Land between the lines, and occasionally fall in with an enemy patrol and rush it with the bayonet, while magnesium flares lit up the darkness, and the guns of both armies awoke. Snipers on both sides were busy all day from

pits and prepared positions, and woe betide the unwary man who lifted his head above the ground. The devices of the eighteenth century campaigns returned. The Japanese had used hand grenades at the siege of Port Arthur, and bombs and grenades, bombardiers and grenadiers in the old sense took their places in our scheme of war. The Germans had for this task the better equipment, and the British soldier fought with bombs made out of jam pots, and every manner of improvisation, till scientists and manufacturers at home turned their attention to his new needs.

The discomforts of trench warfare can never be removed; at the best they can be mitigated. In the early days, before 20th November, when regiments were cooped up with their dead for a fortnight under constant fire in shallow mud-holes, the misery of it beggared description. As the first violence of the attack ebbed and the Allies were given leisure to revise their trenches, many improvements were introduced, battalions were more frequently relieved, and the whole system was regularized. The strain and the *ennui* of the work remained, but the physical hardships grew lighter, the trenches were lined and drained, and the communication network was perfected. The British food supplies were excellent: good feeding will go down to history as a tradition of this army in Flanders, like hard swearing in the case of an earlier expedition. Frequent reliefs and better provision for billets and baths in the rear did much to ease their lot. A battalion which came out of the trenches weary, lame, dishevelled, spiritless, and indescribably dirty, would be restored in a couple of days to a reasonable smartness and good humour. Perhaps the officers in those months had the hardest task. For them war justified its old definition: “Months of acute boredom punctuated by moments of acute fear.” The worst part of the business was the wet, and this was chiefly felt in the north. A dripping winter and the presence of a million men churned West Flanders into a gigantic mud-hole.

For all the ranks of France the war was a crusade, and they moved to it with a consciousness of destiny, and with the high seriousness of Raymond before the walls of Jerusalem. The British soldier was psychologically a world apart. We find him under heavy fire discussing hotly the merits of his favourite football team, and playing games in his scanty leisure, and diffusing over the whole ghastly business of slaughter the atmosphere of a placid English Saturday afternoon. He declined to make much of anything. While fifty miles from the firing line his letters might enliven his relations with accounts of horrors—how he had no candle, but was writing by the light of bursting shells; but when he got into the real business, he wrote that he wanted a new pipe, and hoped “that all are well, as this leaves me at present.”

He was a hopeless puzzle to his enemies. Was he merely a capable hireling, an efficient mercenary? If so, how by all the laws of history should he be able to stand against single-hearted patriots? The answer is that he was the best of patriots; but he was a Briton, and had his own way of showing it. He had found out the best way of keeping nerves steady in a nerve-racking war, and that was to pretend that the whole affair was nothing out of the common. “Cheer up, my lad,” said the sergeant to the anxious recruit in the trenches. “I’ve always ’eard as ’ow it’s the first seven years of war as is the worst.” The British regular’s fighting temper was set for seven years—more if necessary.

II

In the early stages of a campaign certain actions are fought which seem at first sight of small importance. Their scale is such that they would scarcely be noticed among the great battles of the close. But they are none the less epoch-making, for they represent the first step in an experiment which may control the future policy of the war. Of such a type was the engagement at Neuve Chapelle, into which the British army entered on 10th March.

It had been decided as early as the middle of February that an action should be staged to test a new theory of attack. If a sufficiently powerful artillery fire were accumulated upon a section of the front, parapet and barbed wire entanglements could be blown to pieces, and if the artillery, lengthening its range, were able to put up a barrage of fire between the enemy and his supports, the infantry could advance in comparative safety. To ensure the success of such a plan complete secrecy was necessary, and for a surprise the British were in an advantageous position. The ascendancy in air work which they had exhibited made it difficult for a German airplane to show its nose over their lines without being promptly hunted back, while their own airmen were able to make reconnaissances over the German front, and determine where it was most weakly held.

The section chosen for the British attempt was the village of Neuve Chapelle. Our line here represented a re-entrant which might profitably be straightened. It was not so dangerous an angle as that at St. Eloi, south of Ypres; but in the Neuve Chapelle section the war had long languished, and the enemy was less on his guard than in the old cockpit of the Ypres ridges. On 8th March Sir John French assembled his corps commanders and expounded to them the plan of attack. The scheme, which had been worked out by General John Gough, Haig’a Chief of Staff, before his untimely death

was as prudent as it was bold; but it made high demands on our artillery, and it was to some extent at the mercy of accident. It involved an artillery bombardment four times greater than anything we had yet undertaken. First, the enemy's trenches and entanglements must be destroyed; then with a lengthened range a curtain of fire must be hung between him and his supports. It was still the day of comparatively small things, but it is instructive to remember that March saw a British army assembled on the Flemish borders twelve times as large as that which had triumphed under Wellington in the Peninsula, and fifty-five times greater than the force which charged with King Harry at Agincourt.

Very quietly during the 8th and 9th our artillery was brought together into a small area west of Neuve Chapelle. From ten o'clock on the evening of the 9th the infantry assembled in the March night. The men and the company officers did not know when the main attack was to be launched. All they knew was that they were on the eve of a great movement. Dawn on the 10th broke grey and sullen. The clouds hung low in the sky, and there was mist in the distance. At 7.30, punctually to a second, the silence was torn by a pandemonium of sound, a new thing in the experience of the British army. It split the ears and rent the heavens, so that the troops, crouching under cover, were dazed and maddened by the brain-racking concussions. At five minutes past eight our gunners lengthened their range, and the houses of the village began to leap into the air. Huge dust spouts went up to heaven; trees were razed like grass before a scythe; and the cloud grew denser with the débris of brick and mortar. Then the whistles blew along the line. The time had come for the infantry to advance.

Against the south-western corner of the village of Neuve Chapelle the advancing lines experienced no difficulty with the trenches opposite them. When the range of the bombardment lengthened, in order to interpose a curtain of fire between the village and the German supports, they swept forward into battered streets in which every German was soon dead or captured. But on the left of the attack there was a different story. There the artillery preparation had been insufficient, and in the northern corner of Neuve Chapelle, where there was a slight hollow, the German trenches and barbed wire entanglements were still intact. Here our troops came up against unbroken wire and a storm of shot from rifles and machine guns. They tore at the wire with naked hands, but were compelled to fall back and lie in the fire-swept open till one company got through a gap and broke down the defence. Meantime, however, our success to the south had turned the German flank, and presently our line was able to join up in the village. By midday our artillery isolated the village with a curtain of shrapnel fire. No

German counter-attack was possible, for no reinforcements could pierce that screen, and our men had leisure to secure the ground they had won.

Now was the moment, while our enemy were still stupid with surprise, and demoralized by the awful bombardment of the morning, and while our own men were hot with victory, to push on and carry the ridge which dominated the road to Lille. But the scheme had not gone as smoothly as was hoped. All telephonic communications had been cut by our own and the enemy's fire, and it was hard to get orders quickly to the first line. There was also an unaccountable delay in bringing the reserve brigades of the 4th Corps into action. Accordingly, as the grey evening closed in, we devoted ourselves to strengthening our line on the ground we had won. Neuve Chapelle was ours; we had advanced a mile; and we had fully straightened our line. But the wedge had still to be driven into the enemy.

Nothing could be done without artillery, so early on the 11th our fire was directed towards the Bois du Biez and the positions around Pietre. Here and there the Germans rallied and counter-attacked, and here and there we won a few hundred yards. But the enemy had now recovered himself, the asset of surprise had been lost, and our great artillery effort was exhausted. Such a "preparation" as was seen on the morning of the 10th could not be repeated. During the night of the 11th German reserves came up from Tourcoing, and early on the 12th the counter-attack developed in force all along our front. The German counter-attacks were badly co-ordinated and effected little, but our own thrust was now rapidly spending itself. By the evening of the 12th it was clear that a stalemate had been reached.

Considered as a battle by itself, it was for the British a Pyrrhic victory. On a front of three miles they had advanced more than a mile, and the former sag in their line was now replaced by a pronounced sag in the enemy's. But the cost had been high, and the losses of the defence were probably not greater than those of the attack. And the battle was to have an even more serious result. Neuve Chapelle was a test action, and the deduction from it was to have a sinister effect on the Allies' conduct of the war. For both to the British themselves and to the French Staff, who looked on with the liveliest interest, it appeared that, after making all allowances for inexperience and blunders, the new plan was justified. Guns could blast a way for infantry through the strongest defences. Clearly the attack must be on a broader front. On a broad front, granted limitless supplies of guns and shell, it seemed that success was assured. This view, as we shall see, dominated all the plans for 1915, and its many weaknesses were left undiscovered in the obsession which had fallen upon the allied commands.

More serious was the fact that it ossified the study of tactics, and turned the war for long into a contest less of brains than of blind material force. A false step had been taken which for three years was to be left unretrieved.

III

In April the Germans introduced a new weapon by their use of poison gas in the action known as the Second Battle of Ypres.

The evening of Thursday the 22nd was calm and pleasant, with a light, steady wind blowing from the north-east. About 6.30 our artillery observers reported that a strange green vapour was moving over the French trenches. Then, as the April night closed in, and the great shells still rained upon Ypres, there were strange scenes between the canal and the Pilkem road. Back through the dusk came a stream of French soldiers, blinded and coughing and wild with terror. Some black devilry had come upon them, and they had broken before a more than human fear. The rout surged over the canal, and the road to Vlamertinghe was choked with broken infantry and galloping gun teams lacking their guns. No discredit attached to those who broke, for the pressure was more than flesh and blood could bear. But the instant result was a four mile breach between what was left of the French and the left of the Canadian 3rd Brigade. Through this gap the Germans were pouring, preceded by the fumes of the gas, and supported by a heavy artillery fire.

The fighting which resulted from this breakthrough continued until 3rd May, but the Germans having inadequate reserves were unable to exploit their success. Eternal honour was won during those days by the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Brigades. Attacked and outflanked by four divisions, stupefied by a poison of which they had never dreamed and which they did not understand, with no heavy artillery to support them, they endured till reinforcements came, and they did more than endure. After days and nights of tension they had the vitality to counter-attack. When called upon they cheerfully returned to the inferno they had left. If the Salient of Ypres will be for all time the classic battlefield of Britain, the bloodstained segment between Poelcappelle and Zonnebeke roads, where they made their stand, will remain the Thermopylæ of Canadian arms.

The second Battle of Ypres was less critical than the first, for it was not fought to defeat any great strategical intention. It was an episode in the war of attrition in which the Germans, by the use of heavy artillery and gas, caused us severe losses without gaining any special advantage of position. We still held the Ypres salient—a diminished salient; but we had lost so

heavily that, so far as attrition went, the balance of success was clearly with the enemy. On the other hand, the moral gain was ours. The Germans had a wonderful machine—a machine made up of great cannon firing unlimited quantities of high-explosive shells, an immense number of machine guns, and the devilry of poison gas. We had no such mechanism to oppose to theirs, and our men were prevented from coming to grips. The Second Battle of Ypres was the first event which sharply brought home to the British people the inferiority of the machine which handicapped their man-power, and it led indirectly to that reconstruction of the Government with which we shall presently deal.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DARDANELLES

Reasons for the Expedition—Naval Attack on the Straits—Sir Ian Hamilton—The Battle of the Landing—The Battle of Krithia—Landing at Suvla—Its Failure.

I

Early in 1915 began one of the most pitiful, tragic, and glorious episodes in British history.

Towards the close of 1914 the mind of the British Cabinet was much exercised by the deadlock in the West. To some of its members it seemed, in spite of Sir John French's hopefulness, that the German defence was impenetrable except by an attrition so slow that success would entail the bankruptcy of the conqueror. There were no flanks to be turned in France and Flanders, but vulnerable flanks might be found elsewhere. Above all, they desired to make use of all the assets of Britain, and in the campaign of the West, since Sir John French's scheme of an advance by the coast road had been discarded, there was no direct part which the British navy could play. Accordingly, we find during the winter a great scheme-making among Ministers and their technical advisers. Lord Fisher favoured a combined military and naval attack on the Schleswig-Holstein coast. Mr. Lloyd George's fancy dwelt on Salonika, but the scheme was strongly opposed by military opinion. A third alternative remained which, compared with the other two, was sane and reasonable—to clear the Dardanelles and strike at Constantinople. This plan had long been advocated by Mr. Churchill, and in January an appeal for help from Russia added weight to his view. Kitchener resolved that Russia's request must be met, and next day pledged himself to a demonstration against the Turks, telling Mr. Churchill that he considered the Dardanelles the only likely plan.

The strategic importance of the forcing of the Dardanelles in a war with Turkey was clear beyond all doubt. Against a naval Power like Britain or France they were the last defence of the capital, and that capital, more than any other great city of the world, was the palladium of the Power which had its seat there. If Constantinople fell Turkey would fall, and the doom of the capital was sealed so soon as the Allied battleships, with their

communications secure behind them, entered the Sea of Marmora. Its fall would influence, too, the European problem. In the first place, it would to some extent simplify Russia's problem, and release troops for Poland and Galicia. Again, the opening of the passage between the Black Sea and the Ægean would give Russia the means for exporting her accumulated wheat supplies. But the main strategic value of the Dardanelles plan lay in its effect upon hesitating neutrals. Italy at the moment was still in the valley of indecision, and the downfall of Turkey and its influence upon the Balkan States would impel her to action. Turkey's defeat would have an effect upon the Balkan position like the addition of a new chemical to a compound—it would leave none of the constituents unaltered. Greece, Rumania, and Bulgaria would be united on the Allied side. When the Italian guns sounded on the Isonzo and the Rumanian force took the Austrian right wing in flank, the balance against Russian arms might be redressed.

Although accepted doctrine and much high naval opinion were opposed to the scheme, it was proposed to force the Dardanelles by naval attack alone. The battle would be one of ships against forts, and experts had long held that in such a contest the advantage must lie with the forts. But it was argued by the supporters of the plan that new factors had been introduced. Aerial reconnaissance and the increased range of naval guns were believed to put an entirely new complexion on the problem. It would be unfair to say that there was no colour for this forecast. But it erred in strangely neglecting and underestimating other factors in the situation. The defences of the Dardanelles had been organized on a system which took the fullest advantage of natural features, and was based on past experience and a scientific knowledge of modern warfare. It was no improvised Turkish expedient, but the work of the German General Staff. It contemplated an attack, not only by a fleet, but by a large military force acting in conjunction. When, therefore, the Allies, to the surprise of their enemies, decided upon a mere naval attack, the problem of the defence was immensely simplified.

To appreciate the difficulties of the attack we must consider briefly the topography of the Straits. Their northern shore is formed by the peninsula of Gallipoli, a tongue of land some fifty miles long which varies in width from twelve to two or three miles. The country is a mass of rocky ridges rising to a height of over 700 feet from the sea. There was little cultivation; there were few villages, and no properly engineered roads. Most of the land was high, covered with a dense scrub from three to six feet with stunted forests in the hollows. Communications were so bad that the usual way from village to village was not by land, but by boat along the inner or outer coast. At the head of the Dardanelles, on the European side, lay the town and harbour of

Gallipoli. The southern shore is also hilly. Near the entrance on the Asiatic side there is the flat and marshy plain of Troy, which is bounded on the east by hills running to 3,000 feet. On both sides the high ground overhangs the sea passage, and on the north side for about twelve miles the hills form a line of cliffs, with narrow half-moons of beach at the base, and here and there a stream making a gully in the rampart. As everywhere in the Mediterranean, there is practically no tide, but a strong current, rising to four knots, sets continuously down the Straits from the Sea of Marmora.

There were two groups of forts. The first was at the entrance—on the north side, Cape Helles and Sedd-el-Bahr, with one or two adjacent batteries; on the opposite shore, Kum Kale and Orkanieh. None of these forts were heavily armed. The entrance forts were merely the outposts of the

real defence. The second group was at the Narrows. Fourteen miles from the mouth the Straits close in to a width of about three-quarters of a mile. Up to this point their general course has been from south-west to north-east, but now the channel makes a short turn directly northward before resuming its original direction. There is thus within a distance of a few miles a sharp double bend, and guns placed in position at the water's edge could cross their fire against ships ascending the Straits, which would also be brought under end-on fire from guns at the top of the Narrows. At the entrance to the Narrows were the forts of Chanak, or Sultanieh Kalessi, on the Asiatic side, and Kilid Bahr, on the European. But the strength of the defence did not depend only on the batteries. There was first the obstruction of the channel by submarine mines. To get rid of these by sweeping was nearly impossible, for the light vessels, which alone could be employed, had to face not only the fire of the forts but that of mobile guns on the higher ground. Again, the descending current could be used to send down drift-mines upon the attacking ships. The artillery defence was further supplemented by howitzer batteries on the heights, difficult to locate, easy to move if located, and therefore almost impossible to silence. It was clear that a fleet endeavouring to force a channel thus defended was at the gravest disadvantage.

On March the 18th the main attack on the Straits was launched. A considerable naval force, French and British, had been concentrated. The larger British ships were mainly of the pre-dreadnought class, but there were also present the *Inflexible* and the new super-dreadnought the *Queen Elizabeth*. It was a bright clear day with a light wind and a calm sea. At a quarter to eleven in the forenoon the *Queen Elizabeth*, the *Inflexible*, and four other ships steamed up the Straits towards the Narrows, and began a bombardment upon the forts. They were followed presently by a French squadron and a third squadron of six British battleships. Most of the forts were silenced, and the thing seemed to be proceeding well until suddenly three battleships, the *Bouvet*, the *Irresistible*, and the *Ocean*, were lost from drifting mines. Several of the other ships had suffered damage and loss of life from the Turkish guns, and the *Inflexible* had been struck by heavy shells which killed and wounded the majority of men and officers in her fire-control station and set her on fire forward. During the short twilight the Allied Fleet slipped out of the Dardanelles. The great attack on the Narrows had failed—failed with the loss of three battleships and the better part of a thousand men.

At first it was the intention of Admiral de Robeck to continue the attack, and the British Admiralty assented. But on 19th March Sir Ian Hamilton, who had seen part of the action, telegraphed to Kitchener that he had been

reluctantly forced to the conclusion that the Dardanelles could not be forced by battleships alone, and by the 22nd De Robeck had come round to the same opinion. It is idle to discuss whether, had the action been persisted in even at the cost of more ships, the Turkish defence would have crumbled. Undoubtedly the Turks were gravely alarmed, and certain sections of the defence were ready to despair. But it is not less indubitable that, had the fleets attacked again, there would have been a stubborn resistance and such losses as would have left too weak a naval force for the joint operation now under contemplation. It was a gamble which no responsible Government could have justified to its people.

II

Britain was now committed to a joint expedition, for it appeared that there were troops available for an attack by land. But success depended upon the provision of adequate forces, and that again depended upon a temporary defensive on the Western Front and a refraining from expensive assaults. Had the Allies indeed been gifted with supernatural insight they might have followed a different policy: forgone the Western offensive of 1915, for which they were not ready; held that line to the stalemate which Germany's preoccupation in Russia would not have permitted her to break; and concentrated on hacking their way through to Constantinople. They would have succeeded, and the final battle on the Western Front would have come sooner. But this prescience is for the immortals and not for fallible men, and such a scheme would have been condemned as insane—and rightly condemned on the facts before them—by every competent soldier in the spring of 1915. The criticism of the British Government is not that it lacked the gift of second sight, but that it suffered itself to drift into a great venture without duly counting the cost.

The officer appointed to the command of the Gallipoli expedition, Sir Ian Hamilton, had behind him forty-two years of service in British wars. He was a soldier of a type rare in modern armies—a man of wide culture, a poet, an accomplished writer, a brilliant talker, a liberal politician; but he had also proved himself a man of the most conspicuous gallantry, a skilled regimental leader, an able staff officer, and an efficient military administrator. That the venture was desperate and Sir Ian Hamilton's position one of immense difficulty no one can deny. The purpose of the Allies had already been betrayed by the abortive naval attack; he was warned that the whole business was on sufferance, that his troops were only lent to him temporarily, and that his task was a *coup de main*, since a prolonged campaign might well be out of the question. At the same time he

had been solemnly adjured by Kitchener that there could be no retirement. He was given nothing in the shape of detailed instructions by the Government, and no information worth mentioning about the nature of the problem before him. He was left free to make his own schemes, but he had no freedom either in the appointment of his subordinate generals or in the requisition of troops. His objective was fixed for him, and the nature and size of his weapon determined by Kitchener; only the use of the weapon was left to his discretion. Sir Ian Hamilton in his six months' command made no grave mistake; on the contrary, he faced a task of superlative hardness with courage, patience, and a remarkable elasticity of mind, and the ultimate failure can by no means be laid at his door.

In appreciating the situation it seemed to him that the most suitable place for the landing of his army was on the peninsula itself, and it cannot be denied that he was right. There alone he could get the full co-operation of the fleet and protect his communications, and there alone would success give immediately the full strategical rewards. The military elements of the peninsula were simple. To master it involved an assault from the Ægean, and the possible landing places were few in number, small in extent, and clearly defined by the nature of the ground. Gaps must be found in the screen of yellow cliffs which fringed the sea. If we take the peninsula west of a line drawn north and south across the upper end of the Narrows, there were only two areas where troops could be disembarked. One of these was the various beaches round about Sedd-el-Bahr and Cape Helles; the other was on the Gulf of Saros, near Gaba Tepe, where the sandstone hills left a narrow space at the water's edge. Neither was good, and both were believed by the Turkish Staff to be wholly impracticable.

The problem before Sir Ian Hamilton was, therefore, plain enough in its general lines. He must effect a landing at the apex of the peninsula and at Gaba Tepe, in the Gulf of Saros. It would then be the business of the force landed at the first point to fight its way to Krithia and carry the rocky Achi Baba Ridge, which forms a barrier from sea to sea across the narrow western point of the peninsula. The second force would advance from Gaba Tepe against the pass leading to Maidos. It might then be possible for the left wing of the first to come in touch with the right wing of the second, and together to force the Pasha Dagh plateau. If that movement succeeded the battle was won. He could bring up artillery to the plateau, which would make the European forts untenable. Moreover, he would dominate at short range the enemy's positions on the Asiatic side, and a combined attack by land and sea would give the Narrows to his hand.

The first steps were, unfortunately, attended with some confusion. Mudros Bay in Lemnos had been selected as the advanced base, and early in March the first Australian troops had landed there from Egypt. But when the divisions from England arrived it appeared that the ships had been faultily loaded, and it was found necessary to redistribute the troops on the transports if they were to be disembarked ready for immediate action. This could not be done at Mudros, so there was nothing for it but to take the Expeditionary Force to Alexandria—a delay of some weeks, which enabled the Turks to complete their defences on the peninsula. The German Liman von Sanders had been appointed to the chief command, with Essad Pasha as his principal subordinate. Presently he had 40,000 troops there, with 30,000 men in immediate reserve, and had entrenched and fortified all the obvious landing places. By the middle of April the hundred odd transports of the British army were back in Mudros. The force consisted of the 29th Division, the Anzac Corps under Sir William Birdwood, the composite New Zealand and Australian Division, the Royal Naval Division, and a French division. None of these divisions were, as units, experienced in war.

The day originally fixed for the attempt was 23rd April. But on the 20th a storm rose which for forty-eight hours lashed the Ægean. On the 23rd it abated, and that afternoon the first of the black transports began to move out of Mudros harbour. Next day the rest of the force followed, all in wild spirits for this venture into the unknown, so that they recalled to one spectator the Athenians departing for the Sicilian expedition, when the galleys out of sheer light-heartedness raced each other to Ægina.

That morning of Sunday the 25th was one of those which delight the traveller in April in the Ægean. A light mist fills the air before dawn, but it disappears with the sun, and all day there are clear skies, still seas, and the fresh invigorating warmth of spring. The map will show the nature of the place chosen for the attempt. Gaba Tepe, on the north side of the peninsula, we have already noted. Round about Cape Helles there are five little beaches, originally nameless, but now for all time to be known by the letters accorded them by the British army. Beginning from the left, there is Beach Y, and, a little to the south of it, Beach X. Rounding Cape Tekke, we reach Beach W, where a narrow valley opens between the headlands of Gekke and Helles. Here there is a broad semicircular stretch of sand. South of Helles is Beach V, a place of the same configuration as Beach W, but unpleasantly commanded by the castle and village of Sedd-el-Bahr at its southern end. Lastly, inside the Straits, on the east side of Morto Bay, is Beach S, close to the point of Eski Hissarlik. The landing at Gaba Tepe was entrusted to the Australian and New Zealand troops; that at the Helles beaches to the 29th

Division, with some units of the Naval Division. It was arranged that simultaneously the French should land on the Asiatic shore at Kum Kale, to prevent the Turkish batteries from being brought into action against our men at Beaches V and S. Part of the Naval Division was detached for a feint farther north in the Gulf of Saros.

Let us assume that an airplane enabled us to move up and down the shores of the peninsula and observe the progress of the different landings. About one in the morning the ships arrive at a point five miles from the Gallipoli shores. At 1.20 the boats are lowered, and the troops line up on the decks. Then they embark in the flotillas, and the steam pinnaces begin to tow them shorewards in the hazy half-light before dawn.

The Australians destined for Gaba Tepe are carried in destroyers which take them in close to the shore. The operations are timed to allow the troops to reach the beaches at daybreak. Slowly and very quietly the boats and destroyers steal towards the land. A little before five an enemy’s searchlight flares out. The boats are now in shallow water under the Gaba Tepe cliffs, and the men are leaping ashore. Then comes a blaze of rifle fire from the Turkish trenches on the beach, and the first comers charge them with the bayonet. The whole cliff seems to leap into light, for everywhere trenches and caverns have been dug in the slopes. The fire falls most heavily on the men still in the boats, who have the difficult task of waiting as the slow minutes bring them shoreward. The first Australians do not linger. They carry the lines on the beach with cold steel, and find themselves looking up at a steep cliff a hundred feet high. In open order they dive into the scrub, and scramble up the loose yellow rocks, among the purple cistus and the matted creepers and the thickets of myrtle. They have left their packs at the foot, and scale the bluffs like chamois. It is an achievement to rank with Wolfe’s escalade of the Heights of Abraham. Presently they are at the top, and come under the main Turkish fire. But the ground gives good cover, and they set about entrenching the crest of the cliffs to cover the boats’ landing. This is the position at Sari Bair at 7 a.m.

As we journey down the coast we come next to Beach Y. There at 7 a.m. all is going well. The 1st King’s Own Scottish Borderers and the Plymouth battalion of the Naval Division, landing at a place which the enemy thought wholly impracticable, have without difficulty reached the top of the cliffs. . . . At Beach X things are even better. The *Swiftsure* has plastered the high ground with shells, and the landing ship, the *Implacable*, has anchored close to the shore in six fathoms of water. With scarcely a casualty the 2nd Royal Fusiliers have gained the cliff line. . . . There has been a harder fight

at Beach W, between Tekke and Helles, where the sands are broader. The shore has been trenched throughout, and wired and mined almost to the water's edge, and in the scrub of the hinterland the Turkish snipers are hidden. The first troops have landed to the right under the cliffs of Cape Helles, and have reached the top, while a party on the left has scaled Cape Tekke. But the men of the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers who landed on the shore itself have had a fiery trial. They suffered heavily while still on the water, and on landing came up against unbroken lines of wire, while snipers in the valley in front and concealed machine guns and quick-firers rained death on them. Here we have had heavy losses, and at 7 a.m. the landing has not yet succeeded.

But the case is more desperate still at Beach V, under Sedd-el-Bahr. Here, as at Beach W, there are a stretch of sand, a scrubby valley, and flanking cliffs. It is the strongest of the Turkish positions, and troops landing in boats are exposed to every type of converging fire. A curious expedient has been tried. A collier, the *River Clyde*, with 2,000 men of the 2nd Hampshires, 1st Dublin Fusiliers, and 1st Munster Fusiliers on board, as well as eight boatloads towed by steam pinnaces, approached close to the shore. The boatloads—the rest of the Dublin Fusiliers—suffered horribly, for when they dashed through the shallows to the beach they were pinned to the ground by fire. Three lines of wire entanglements had to be forced, and a network of trenches. A bank of sand, five or six feet high, runs at the back, and under its cover the survivors have taken shelter. In the steel side of the liner doors have been cut, which open and disgorge men like some new Horse of Troy. But a tornado of shot and shell rained on her, and few of the gallant men who leaped from the lighters to the reef, and from the reef to the sea, reached the land. Those who did have joined their fellows lying flat under the sand bank on that beach of death. . . . At Beach S, in Morto Bay, all has gone well.

Let us go back to Sari Bair and look at the position at noonday. We are prospering there, for more than 10,000 men are now ashore, and the work of disembarking guns and stores goes on steadily, though the fire from inland is still deadly. The great warships from the sea send their heavy shells against the Turkish lines, seaplanes are "spotting" for them, and wireless stations are being erected on the beach. The Royal Engineers are making roads up the cliff, and supplies are climbing steadily to our firing line. On the turf on the cliff top our men are entrenched, and are working their way forward. Unfortunately, the zeal of the Australians has outrun their discretion, and some of them have pushed on too far, looking for enemies to bayonet. They have crossed three ridges, and have got to a ridge above Eskikeui within

sight of the Narrows. In that pockety country such an advance is certain death, and the rash attack has been checked with heavy losses. The wounded are being brought in, and it is no light task getting them down the cliffs on stretchers, and across the beach and the bullet-splashed sea to the warships. Remember that we are holding a position which is terribly conspicuous to the enemy, and all our ammunition and water and food have to be dragged up these breakneck cliffs. Still, the first round has been won, Indian troops are being landed in support, and we are firmly placed at Sari Bair. At Beach W we have improved our position. We have cleared the beach, and the work of disembarking men and stores is proceeding. As we move down the coast we find that all goes well at Beach X, but that at Beach Y the Scottish Borderers are being heavily counter-attacked and are making little progress. The scene at Beach V is strange and terrible. From the deep water the *Cornwallis* and *Albion* are trying to bombard the enemy at Sedd-el-Bahr, and the 15-inch shells from the *Queen Elizabeth* are screaming overhead. The Trojan Horse is still lying bow on against the reefs, with her men unable to move, and the Turkish howitzers playing on her. If a man shows his head he is picked off by sharpshooters. The troops we have landed lie flat on the beach under cover of the sand ridge, unable to advance or retreat, and under a steady tornado of fire. . . . At Beach S things are satisfactory. Meantime the French landing at Kum Kale has achieved its purpose. Next evening they re-embarked, and joined our right wing at Beach S. They took 500 prisoners, and could have taken more had there been room for them in the boats. As darkness fell on that loud Sabbath, the minds of the Allied Staff may well have been anxious. We had gained a footing, but no more, and at the critical point it was but a precarious lodgment. The complexity and strength of the enemy's defence far surpassed our expectation.

Let us resume our tour of the beaches about 10 o'clock on the morning of the 26th. At Sari Bair the Australians are facing a counter-attack. . . . At Beach Y things have gone badly. Our men there had advanced during the Sunday afternoon, and had been outflanked and driven back to the cliff edge. It was decided to re-embark and move the troops to Beach X, and as we pass the retreat is going on successfully under cover of the ships' fire. . . . At Beach X there has been a hard struggle. Last night we were strongly attacked there, and driven to the very edge of the cliffs, where we hung on in rough shelter trenches. This morning we are advancing again, and making some way. . . . At Beach W, too, there has been a counter-attack. During the night the Turks came on in force, and we were compelled to fling our beach parties into the firing line, blue-jackets and sappers armed with whatever weapons they could find. This morning the situation is easier, we

have landed more troops, and are preparing to move forward. At Beach V the landing is still in its first stage. Men are still sheltering on the deadly beach behind the sand bank. Even as we look a final effort is beginning, and about 2 p.m. it is successful. The main Turkish trenches are carried, the débris of the castle and village are cleared, and the enemy retreat. The landing can now go forward, and the men who for thirty-two hours have been huddled behind the sand bank, enduring torments of thirst and a nerve-racking fire, can move their cramped limbs and join their comrades.

By the morning of Tuesday the 27th all the beaches—except Beach Y, which had been relinquished—were in working order, and the advance could proceed. The flanks were secure, and the front line was now more than a mile in advance of Beaches W and V. The scene on the beaches was like a gigantic shipwreck. It looked, so observers noted, as if an army with its stores had been washed ashore after a great gale or had saved themselves on rafts. That night our position at the apex of the peninsula ran from Eski Hissarlik on the Straits north-west to a point on the Gulf of Saros, 3,200 yards north-east of Cape Tekke. There was too little room for so large a force, and an advance was ordered for the 28th. The main objective was Krithia village, and we found the road stoutly opposed. In such a country a line has a tendency to "bunch" and become too thin in places. The result was that our progress was irregular, and under the strong Turkish counter-attacks we were too weak to hold all we won.

So ended the opening stage of the Gallipoli campaign—the Battle of the Landing. It was a fight without a precedent. Sixty thousand men, backed by the most powerful navy in the world, attacked a shore which Nature seemed to have made impregnable, and which was held by not inferior numbers of the enemy, in positions prepared for months, and supported by the latest modern artillery. On paper the thing was impossible, as the Turkish army orders announced. By the text-books no man should have left the beaches alive. That our audacity succeeded was due to the unsurpassable fighting quality of our men. Looking back with fuller knowledge, it is possible to question the wisdom of some of the details of the plan. But whatever be our judgment on its policy or its consequences, the Battle of the Landing must be acclaimed as a marvellous, an unparalleled feat of arms.

III

For the next months the story of the campaign is concerned with a slow and desperate struggle for Krithia and the Achi Baba heights, which were the first steps towards the conquest of the peninsula. The first advance on

Krithia, on 28th April, came short of success because of the weakness and weariness of the attacking force, worn out with the desperate struggle of the landing. The failure of the landing at Y Beach, which was within a mile of Krithia, prevented Sir Ian Hamilton from undertaking an enveloping movement, and forced him to a frontal assault. Through no fault of his the battle in the butt-end of the peninsula had ossified into an affair of parallel fronts, for the Anzac forces were too precariously situated to turn the enemy defence in flank. Yet it is clear that at this stage, had reserves been present, Krithia and Achi Baba could have been carried by a direct frontal attack. The tragedy of Gallipoli was that when reinforcements came they were invariably too late, and the situation had so changed, that what could have been achieved by their aid a fortnight before was now impossible. On 30th April two further battalions of the Royal Naval Division disembarked, and next day came the 29th Brigade of Indian infantry. The first days of May saw various Turkish attacks which failed, and Allied counterstrokes which were brought to an end by barbed wire and machine guns. On 6th May the first new attempt was made upon Krithia. As the result of three days' fighting our front was advanced a thousand yards, but we had not touched the enemy's main position. We realized its unique strength, and all ideas of rushing it were abandoned. On the night of the 12th the Gurkhas of the 29th Indian Brigade, under cover of a cannonade from the water, rushed the bluffs above Beach Y with few casualties. For the rest of the month the battle languished, while Sir Ian Hamilton was slowly wringing drafts out of the Government at home. All his units had taken the field short of establishment, and he found it impossible to keep them at anything like a normal strength. Some of the divisions were already only divisions in name. His position had become one of tragic difficulty. He could not sit still at Helles under the perpetual bombardment from Achi Baba. The heats of summer were increasing, and in that crowded heel of land his position would soon be one of intense discomfort and danger. A new attempt must be made on Krithia.

The third action was fought on 4th June. The fruits of this third attempt on Achi Baba were an advance of at the most 400 yards on a front of three miles, and the occupation of two lines of Turkish trenches. The Allied casualties were heavy, and the affair cannot be regarded otherwise than as a costly reverse.

It was after the battle of 4th June that the need for large reinforcements became too urgent to be denied. After five weeks' struggle, in which the fighting had been as desperate as any in the war, we had not yet touched the outer Turkish position. The German engineers had turned the ground to

brilliant defensive uses, and even when long lengths of trenches were carried by our infantry attacks, there remained redoubts, like the *fortins* on the Western Front, to make a general advance impossible. Our bombardments had been lavish enough, but they had scarcely touched the enemy. The Gallipoli campaign had revealed itself as a slow and deadly frontal attack, in which yard by yard we should have to fight our way across the ridges. Such warfare was costly beyond all reckoning.

Meantime things were going no less ill on the water. The large vessels of the Allied Fleet, stationary or moving very slowly, were a superb target for underwater assault. On the night of 12th of May the old British battleship, the *Goliath*, was sunk by torpedo fire with the loss of the captain, nineteen officers, and five hundred men. And presently a far more formidable foe arrived whose presence made naval support—so far at least as concerned the great battleships—a very doubtful and costly undertaking. About midday on 26th of May the *Triumph* was struck by a torpedo from a German submarine and sank in nine minutes. Here was an incident to give serious thought. The enemy in broad daylight, in water full of shipping, had broken through all our safeguards and destroyed a battleship. The hunt for the submarine was vigorously conducted, but nothing was heard of it till next day, when the *Majestic*, steaming very close to the shore, was sunk in the same fashion. The Allied Fleets, compelled by the necessities of gunnery to move slowly, were obviously at the mercy of an enemy under water. From this date, therefore, the larger vessels began to withdraw. There remained only a few of the older battleships, a number of cruisers, French and British, and a flotilla of destroyers. In addition we had some of the monitors which had operated in October off the Flanders coast—a type of vessel whose shallow draught made it most suitable for coast bombardment and less vulnerable to submarine attack.

Ever since the first weeks of May the Dardanelles situation had weighed heavily on the mind of the British Government. The hope of an easy success had gone, and Kitchener was faced with a task of which he had not counted the cost—of which indeed the cost was beyond his means. Sir Ian Hamilton needed more troops, more ammunition, more transport, and it was hard to see how his needs could be met without failing in our duty to the Western Front and to France. Withdrawal was impossible; it seemed equally impossible to provide the strength necessary for an immediate decision; accordingly it was resolved on 7th June to continue operations with such reinforcements as could be spared, so as to distract the Turks and keep the door open to Balkan intervention. Three divisions of the New Army not allotted to France would be sent out and two Territorial divisions, and all

five would arrive before the end of July. With such an accession of strength in prospect, Sir Ian Hamilton could prepare his plans.

On 12th July the Allies made their last attempt at a frontal attack on the Krithia position. By nightfall 400 yards of ground had been gained. It was a considerable advance, which brought us very near to Krithia. But the heights of Achi Baba were as far off as ever.

In the old historical novels the hero, when he was not to be observed wending his way on horseback up a mountain path in the twilight, was generally found holding a narrow staircase against uncounted foes. To the Turks had fallen the favourite romantic situation. We had chosen to attack them in one of the strongest natural fortresses in the world. The convex arc of the Achi Baba heights might have been created for a modern defence. Not a yard of it was dead ground; every foot was exposed to bombardment from the well-placed guns and the concentric trench lines. With a base a few miles square, we attempted by frontal fighting to win a step now and then of the staircase. It is true that the Australasian Corps had secured a position on the enemy’s right rear; but that, too, was a step of a staircase, and our overseas troops clung precariously to the edge of the cliffs. Every detail of our position was under fire, and there was no safe hinterland for wounded and reserves except that to be gained by an embarkation and a voyage. The wounded had to go to Alexandria and Malta, and munitions, food, and water had to travel many leagues of sea. Drinking water had to be brought from Egypt, or farther. Such a position would have been grave against a feeble opponent. But the Turk was no despicable foe. He was aided by the best German military skill and the latest German science. He was holding the gate of his sacred capital against the infidel—a gate, like the bridge of Horatius, where a thousand might be stopped by three; but his numbers were greater than ours. He was like a posse of mailed men on the summit of a narrow stairway, with every advantage of ground, weapon, and forewarning.

The discomforts of the life in the peninsula grew as the summer advanced and the heat waxed greater. The whole of our position was honeycombed with trenches and dug-outs like a colony of sand martins in the bank of a river. There was no shade from nature, for the copses were only scrub. The sun beat down pitilessly on the acres of rock and gravel, and was reflected from the blue waters around. Our men were very close together, and the whole earth soon became tainted in spite of all our care. Sunstroke cases were few, for the sun of Gallipoli is not the sun of India; but fevers and dysentery began to take their toll. The scarcity of water, the difficult journeys for the sick down communication trenches and cliff roads,

and the long voyage before hospital was reached, intensified our discomfort. And everywhere fell a plague of flies, Men who had fought in South Africa remembered the curse of the fly on the veldt; but the South African scourge was feeble compared to the clouds which hung over the baked peninsula. Remember there was no movement or chance of movement. The troops had to sit still in their stifling trenches, and every acre of that butt-end of Gallipoli was searched by the enemy's fire. Under such conditions—no movement, grave losses, grave discomforts—it was a marvel that we maintained so high a spirit and so steady a cheerfulness. Men returned to the habits of their first parents. Khaki "shorts," a shirt, and a sun-helmet formed the only wear of even exalted generals.

The three summer months had been among the most costly in our military history. Out of some six British divisions we had lost by the end of May over 38,000 men. By the end of June the total was over 42,000; by the end of July it was nearly 50,000, of whom 8,000 were killed, 30,000 wounded, and 11,000 missing. The French losses were on a similar scale, and the naval losses must be added to the total casualties of the expedition. The results gained were not proportionate to this huge wastage—an advance of two miles on our left and one on our right. But not even at Ypres had our troops shown a more dauntless courage, a more complete devotion, or a more stubborn resolution. Not less splendid was the performance of the French Corps. The newest recruits had fought like heroes, and had shown the Turks that *furia francese* which centuries before had carried the walls of Jerusalem. In this rivalry of gallant men the enemy was not outdone. The Turks fought with all their old patient steadfastness. They advanced to hopeless assaults, and died in hundreds in the open; they clung to ruined trenches when the Allied steel was upon them; but the stolid Anatolian peasants did not waver. To them the war was Kismet, and they obeyed orders uncomplainingly.

By the end of July the complete stalemate had compelled Sir Ian Hamilton to revise his strategy. A certain daring Englishman, who knew Turkey well, contrived to be taken blindfold one night into the enemy's trenches, and for several hours talked to the Turkish officers. He was told on parting: "Some day you may take Constantinople, but Achi Baba—never." This was rapidly becoming the view of those responsible for the expedition. The promised reinforcements were arriving during July at Egypt and Lemnos. To fling these into the congested butt of the peninsula was clearly folly. Had a quarter of the new 50,000 been present on 28th April we should by this time have been in Constantinople. Had a third been there in May or a half in June we should have won Achi Baba. That road was now barred, but

another might be found, and Sir Ian Hamilton examined in turn the possibilities of Enos and Bulair and of the Asiatic coast. He found good reason for rejecting each terrain, and decided that he would use his new reserves in an attempt to break out from the Anzac position, and so turn the enemy in flank and rear. The new landing would be at Gaba Tepe and Suvla Bay.

IV

By the end of July preparations had been made for a final effort against the Gallipoli defences. Three divisions of the New Army and two Territorial divisions had arrived in the Eastern Mediterranean, and a mounted division had been for some months in Egypt. The submarine menace had sent the monsters of the British fleet back to home waters or to the shelter of protected harbours. But in July new craft arrived, specially constructed to meet the case. A strange type of monitor, with a freeboard almost flush with the water, and looking more like a Chinese pagoda than a ship, suddenly appeared in the northern Ægean. They were of different sizes, the smaller being little more than floating gun-platforms; but they were admirably suited for their purpose. Even the little ones, with a crew of seventy, could fling 100 lb. of high explosive twelve miles, and they feared submarines no more than a gull fears a swordfish. There were also cruisers protected by lateral protuberances, which our men knew as “blister ships,” and motor lighters, profanely called “beetles,” for landing purposes. The plan which Sir Ian Hamilton had evolved was bold and ingenious. In the first place, a feint was to be made at the head of the Gulf of Saros, as if to take in flank and rear the Bulair lines. Next, a strong offensive would be assumed by the troops in the Cape Helles region against their old objective, Achi Baba. These two movements would be read by the Turks as the main British offensive and its covering feint, and it was hoped would lead them to send their reserves to Krithia. But in the meantime the Anzac Corps was to advance with its left, and attempt to gain the heights of Koja Chemen and the seaward ridges. Simultaneously, a great new landing would be made at Suvla Bay, where it was believed the Turks would be wholly unprepared. If the Anafarta hills could be taken, and the right of the new landing force linked up with the left of the Australasians, the British would hold the central crest of the spine of upland which runs through the western end of the peninsula. Such gains would enable them to cut the communications of the Turks in the butt-end, the one land route to Maidos would be commanded, and the way would be prepared for an action in open country, when the grim Turkish fortifications of the Pasha Dagh would be taken in flank and in reverse. If the undertaking

attained the most reasonable success, the western end of the peninsula would be ours, and the European defences of the Narrows would be won.

The plan was bold, but entirely legitimate. But at the same time it was attended by many risks. The chief danger lay in the fact that all the movements were so closely interdependent. Exact timing was imperative, since three separate forces were employed, and for this was needed not only a good Headquarters plan, but the most assiduous Staff supervision from hour to hour. Moreover, the failure of any one unit would jeopardize the success of the whole. Such a risk is inevitable in any elaborate movement, but in this case it was accentuated by the fact that a considerable portion of the attacking force was wholly untried. The three new divisions destined for the attempt had never before been in action.

On the afternoon of Friday, 6th August, the 8th Corps at Cape Helles made a general attack upon the Turkish position at Achi Baba. The attack was boldly delivered, but failed to win its objective, and there were many losses among the leading battalions. This engagement was intended as a holding battle, and as such it must be regarded as successful. In the area of the Anzac Corps took place an action which was in many ways the most desperate and brilliant that Gallipoli had seen. This was against the immensely strong position known as Lone Pine, and the high gallantry of the Anzacs' performance may be realized from the fact that of the nine Victoria Crosses awarded for the August battles at Gallipoli seven went to the conquerors of Lone Pine.

On Saturday the 7th, at dawn, the main operation began. The attacking forces had been divided into two columns of assault, one of which was to advance up the gulleys on each side of the Tables Tops Ridges, against the summit of Chunuk Bair, while the other was to make a circuit to the north and move up the Aghyl Dere against the northern flanks of Koja Chemen. The right wing of the new landing force was to link up with the Anzacs' left. But the operation was doomed to failure. On a day of pitiless heat, one of the hottest yet experienced in that torrid summer, the advance began, but the left wing was held up in difficult country, and by the time contact was made both columns were exhausted. On the following day the advance was resumed, but again the left made little progress. On the 9th results were better, and for half an hour our most advanced troops, having scaled Hill Q, looked down on the great white road to the east which threaded the peninsula, and which now was crowded with Turkish convoys, and beyond it to the blue waters of the Straits. It was a sight that no British soldier had seen since that day in April, the first of the landing, when the Australian

vanguard had gazed on the Dardanelles. But the ground could not be maintained. A shower of high-explosive shell descended on the trenches on the summit. It was followed by a rush of Turkish supports, and before our line could be consolidated we had been driven back from the crest. It was not until the 12th that the Anzacs at last obtained touch with the right wing of the Suvla Bay force. The Anzac advance had been a glorious but costly enterprise.

We turn now to the fortunes of the Suvla landing. When the transports set sail after dusk it was to a destination unknown to all save the Staff. About 9.30 p.m. the ships, showing no lights, entered the little bay of Suvla, four miles north of the main Anzac position. The night was dark, for the moon did not rise till two o'clock. The Turks had no inkling of our plan. Three landing places had been selected—A, inside the bay north of the Salt Lake, and B and C, south-west of it. All night long the work of disembarkation went on. By dawn the force was ashore. By two o'clock in the afternoon we held the line running from Karakol Dagh to near the butt-end of the ridge called Yilghin Burnu. So far the operation, though slow, had been conducted without serious hitch.

It was imperative to push on if we were to get the benefit of surprise. But as the afternoon advanced, little progress was made. Two divisions had become intermingled, and this led to confusion. It was very hot, and the troops were weary and tormented with an unbearable thirst. At 4 p.m. there came a thunderstorm and a heavy shower of rain which cleared the air, and at five we managed to advance our front a little under a violent shelling from the guns on Anafarta ridge. Late that night our right won a real success, for two battalions succeeded in carrying the position called Chocolate Hill.

Next day, Sunday the 8th, the day on which the New Zealanders won Chunuk Bair, was the critical stage at Suvla. We had a strength of some 25,000 men. The Turks on the Anafarta heights were, at the start, weak in numbers—no more than 4,000—and an attack resolutely pushed forward must have carried the position. The plan of the Turkish commander was to hold his trenches on the heights very thinly, while he pushed forward a screen of riflemen into the cover of the patches of scrub. This screen was brilliantly handled, and from its mobility and invisibility seems to have given our men the impression that they were facing a huge enemy force. Meanwhile the Turkish guns in the rear bombarded our lines and supports, and searched every road leading from the beaches. And enemy supports were on the road. All through that unlucky day we made sporadic attempts to advance, losing heavily in the process and gaining little ground. A whole

British corps was held up by a screen of sharpshooters, well backed by artillery. In Sir Ian Hamilton's words, "The one fatal error was inertia. And inertia prevailed."

On Monday the 9th our chance had almost vanished. The heart had gone out of the attack, and we were settling down to a war of positions. Sir Ian Hamilton had arrived the night before from Imbros, and had striven to inspire the corps and divisional commanders with the spirit of the offensive. Early on the morning of the 9th an attack was indeed attempted, a gallant endeavour to carry the main Anafarta ridge, and one company actually won the crest. But the effort had been made too late, for the Turkish defence was already thickening. Our difficulties were increased by an event which happened at midday. A strong wind was blowing from the north, and either by shell fire or by Turkish design the scrub on Hill 70 was set ablaze. From that place, henceforth christened Burnt Hill, the tongues of flame leaping with the wind swept across our front, and drove us back. The incident suspended all serious operations for the day. Next day, the 10th, the opportunity had gone for good, for the enemy was now amply reinforced.

It is not easy to see how the second Suvla attack could have succeeded. It was another of those desperate frontal assaults of which, in the Helles region, we had already learned the futility. The Turk entrenched on his hills was not to be driven out by the finest infantry in the world. But no failure can detract from the merits of the performance of the fighting men. Once again the English yeomen had shown "the mettle of their pasture." Had the troops used on the 21st been used on 7th August, the Anafarta heights must have been won.

CHAPTER IX

THE BATTLE OF LOOS

The Russian Retreat from the Donajetz—Spring Offensives in the West—The French at Artois—Festubert—The Summer Stagnation—Loos—Sir John French surrenders his Command.

I

By the end of March the German Command had reached two important conclusions: that their forces in the West, though considerably outnumbered by the enemy, were competent to hold that front against any Allied attack; and that an effort must be made at once to bring about a decision against Russia. The desperate position of Austria, and the likelihood that in the near future Italy and Rumania might be added to the roll of their antagonists, forced the necessity of an immediate concentration of effort in the East upon their minds.

The issue proved that Germany had judged more shrewdly than the Allied Staffs. She alone was fully awake to the precise nature of the war in its present phase. All through the winter, when Britain was speculating how long German stores of food and explosives would last, she had been busy preparing her armoury. She found substitutes for materials which she had formerly imported, and the whole talent of her chemists was drawn upon for the purpose. All the human strength of the nation, which was not in the field, was employed directly or indirectly to make munitions. When we remember that she supplied 900 miles of front (with some assistance from Austria) in the East, more than 500 miles in the West, and equipped Turkey for the Dardanelles campaign, and that her use of shells was five or six times more lavish than that of her opponents, we may get some notion of the magnitude of the national effort. It was more impressive in its way than the muster of her great armies in August.

The decision to concentrate against Russia entailed many risks, but the German generals in the East, and the Austrian Conrad, believed that by a great effort Russia could be finally put out of action. Falkenhayn differed; she would be crippled, he thought, but no more; and he would consent only to a limited operation, which if necessary could be broken off to permit of a transfer of troops to the West. Yet the attack which opened on 2nd May on

the line of the Donajetz was so brilliantly directed and so overwhelmingly successful that at first it seemed as if Hindenburg's dream had come true. It was led by Mackensen, a master of speed and surprise, and his Chief of Staff was Seeckt, who after the war was to rebuild the German army. Tactically it was the forerunner of the method of infiltration. Although outnumbered by nearly half a million, Mackensen in three days was in open country, and in a fortnight had advanced ninety-five miles. By the end of May the Russians were behind the San and the Dniester. In June Lemberg was retaken, and there was no enemy left in Galicia. The task was now to cut off the Warsaw salient, and on 4th August Warsaw fell.

The Russians were desperately short of equipment. Her total of heavy guns was far lower than the enemy's. Her field artillery was poorly supplied with shells; and at various times in the course of retreat its munitions gave out altogether, and it made no attempt to cope with the fire of the enemy. The Russians were terribly short also in machine guns, having at the most one to the enemy's four. As the retreat continued, even their musketry fire was in danger of starvation. Many of the new recruits took their places in the firing line without rifles; and captured rifles, preserved as souvenirs, were collected from the Red Cross detachments and wherever they could be found. Men had to wait in the trenches under heavy fire till they could get arms from wounded comrades. In one army a whole division had to face an attack without a single rifle, and the field artillery of that army was limited to two shells a day. In the words of a Russian private: "We had only one weapon, the living breast of the soldier." The fibre of the Russian soldier seemed a thing beyond the power of mortal calamity to weaken. He might perish in millions, but the survivors took up the weapons of the dead and cheerfully continued. But the effect on the Russian people—the relatives of the dead and missing in a thousand cities and a myriad villages—was tremendous, the more tremendous in that it wrought as slowly as the thawing of the ice in spring. There was as yet no weakening, but everywhere there was perplexity and confusion. In the circles of government the honest men laboured to purge the administration of its infinite corruption; many reputations were dimmed, suspicion fell upon the highest quarters, gossip was busy with all its tongues. The determination of the great people behind the bureaucrats was strong; and when in July, before the fall of Warsaw, Germany made overtures for peace, she was haughtily repulsed.

As the summer wore on Russia was retreating on better communications, and though Kovno, Brest-Litovsk, and Vilna were lost, the autumn saw a definite check in the German advance. For Germany the campaign had been a notable triumph, and Poland was now in her hands. But she had not

attained her chief object. Russia had suffered bitterly between May and September, but the decisive victory for which Germany hoped had not been achieved.

II

In the West an Allied offensive in the spring and summer had been decided upon as early as November 1914. It was more than ever essential now that an attempt should be made to relieve the pressure on Russia, and to assure Italy, when she entered the alliance, of the vigour and resolution of her colleagues. It was true that the new armies of Britain were not ready, and that the munitionment everywhere fell short of what was required. But both Joffre and Sir John French believed that, even so, they had the power to break the enemy front and force a retirement. They conceived that what had been done on a small scale at Neuve Chapelle could be repeated at more vital points with deadly consequences. The result was a series of costly and futile attacks which continued through the summer, attacks based on a mistaken principle, delivered on various sections of a long front, but radically unco-ordinated. They did nothing to relieve the distress of Russia, and Germany was able to repel them without departing by a hairbreadth from the plan of campaign she had devised in March—a remarkable achievement for which she deserved the utmost credit, and a conspicuous example of the value of a unified over a disjointed command.

It was incumbent upon Joffre to develop a strategy which would distract the enemy from the Eastern Front by putting some more vital interest in jeopardy. One section was marked out above all others for such a venture. If the Tenth Army in Artois could advance over the plain of the Scheldt towards Douai and Valenciennes, the communications of the whole of the German front from Lille to Soissons would be in instant peril, and a wholesale retreat would be imperative. Elsewhere a blow might be struck at the local communications of one army, but here a blow was possible against the lines of supply of three armies. The history of the Allied summer offensive is, therefore, the history of the thrust of the French towards Lens and of the British towards Lille.

During the first week of May a huge weight of artillery was concentrated, not less than 1,100 guns of different types, and Foch, the commander of the army group, took personal charge of the operations. The German force opposed was certainly outnumbered by the French, and probably outgunned; but it had the advantage of holding one of the strongest positions on either the Western or Eastern front. We may describe its line as

consisting of a number of almost impregnable fortresses, armed with machine guns, and linked together by an intricate system of trenches. By the end of May the French Battle of Artois had virtually closed. It had been a triumph for the fighting quality of the French infantry, and not less of the French gunners. But as a strategic movement it had failed. Much ground had been won at a terrible cost, but the enemy still held the ridges that commanded Lens. The marvellous artillery preparation had flattened and sterilized the landscape, but it had not overcome the enemy defence in depth. Strangely enough, even so good a soldier as Foch did not make the true deduction, and the underestimate of the German defence system was to continue for the better part of three years.

The British advance in May in the Festubert region was intended mainly as an auxiliary to the French effort in Artois. It was designed in the first place to detain the German forces opposite in position, and to prevent reinforcements in men and guns being sent south to Lens. But it had also a positive if subsidiary purpose. If successful, it would win the Aubers ridge, for the sake of which we had fought Neuve Chapelle, and so threaten Lille and La Bassée, and if the French got to Lens we should be in a position to conform effectively to their advance. The Battle of Festubert, as it may well be called, would in other wars, looking at the casualties and the numbers engaged, have been a major action, but in this campaign it ranked only as an episode—one link in the long-drawn chain of the Allied attack. Ground was won, but we were far short of any real strategic point, and the losses had been out of all proportion to the gains. The British Commander-in-Chief thus summed up the results: “Since 16th May the First Army has pierced the enemy’s line on a total front of four miles. The entire first-line system of trenches has been captured on a front of 3,200 yards, and on the remaining portion the first and second lines of trenches are in our possession.” This epitome is the best comment on the Allies’ failure.

Meanwhile, as May passed into June, there came news from the East of unvarying calamity. The first counter-movement in the West on Russia’s behalf had done little to aid her; was it not the duty of France and Britain to attempt another? Their civilian peoples looked for it; the soldiers on the Western Front expected it daily. The Russian press asked what the Allies were doing, and we may believe that the heroic armies of Russia turned their eyes wearily westward in the hope that France and Britain would soon reap the fruit of their sacrifice. And yet nothing of value could be done. The Allies were not able to make a really effective diversion. Although their numbers were greater than the Germans, they were still behind them in machine guns, heavy pieces, and stores of shell. Against an enemy so firmly

entrenched and so amply equipped mere numbers availed little. Could they have torn a wide rent in the Western Front, pushed their cavalry through, and harried vital communications, then indeed they might have brought great armies hurrying back from the Vistula. But to drive in tiny wedges could have no effect on the death-grapple in the East, any more than to beat a bull-dog with a light cane will make him slacken his grip.

The story of this summer in the West is, therefore, a chronicle of small things—small attacks followed by small counter-attacks, or local struggles for strong points where a week's advance was measured in yards. It was the winter's stalemate repeated, but the balance of the war of attrition was not now in the Allies' favour. Trench fighting had now reached the rank of a special science. The armies had evolved in nine months a code of defensive warfare which implied a multitude of strange apparatus. The intricacy of the science meant a very hive of activity behind the lines. Any one journeying from the base to the first line might well be amazed at the immense and complex mechanism of modern armies. At first it seemed like a gigantic business concern, a sort of magnified American "combine." Fifty miles off we were manufacturing on a colossal scale, and men were suffering from industrial ailments as they suffered in dangerous trades at home. There were more mechanics than in Sheffield, more dock labourers than in Newcastle. But all the mechanism resembled a series of pyramids which tapered to a point as they neared the front. Behind were the great general hospitals and convalescent homes; then came the clearing hospitals; then the main dressing stations; and last of all, the advanced and regimental dressing stations, where mechanism failed. Behind were the huge transport depots and repairing shops, the daily trains to railhead, the supply columns; and last, the hand-carts to carry ammunition to the firing line. Behind were the railways and the mechanical transport, but at the end a man had only his two legs. Behind were the workshops of the Flying Corps and the squadron and flight stations; but at the end of the chain was the solitary aeroplane coasting over the German lines, and depending upon the skill and nerve of one man. Though all modern science had gone to the making of the war, at the end, in spite of every artificial aid, it became elementary, akin in many respects to the days of bows and arrows.

Spring and summer brought easier conditions for the air services of the belligerent Powers; but the comparative stagnation in the Western theatre, where the service had been most highly developed, prevented any conspicuous action by this arm. The work of the winter in reconnaissance and destruction went on, and the story was rather of individual feats than of any great concerted activity. The importance of the air had revealed itself,

and all the combatants were busied with new construction. In Britain we turned out a great number of new machines. We experimented with larger types, and we perfected the different varieties of aerial bomb. The enemy airplanes began to improve in speed and handiness, but where Germany advanced an inch we advanced an ell. Admirable as was the air work of all the Allies, the British service, under its Director-General, Sir David Henderson, had reached by midsummer a height of efficiency which was not exceeded by any other branch of the Army or Navy.

To a student of military affairs it seemed amazing that a department only a few years old, and with less than one year's experience of actual war, should have attained so soon to so complete an efficiency and so splendid a tradition. Young men gathered from all quarters and all professions became in a little while of one type. They had the same quiet voices, the same gravity, the same dulled eyes, with that strange look in them that a man gets from peering into infinite space. The air, like the deep sea, seemed to create its own gentility, and no service had ever a more perfect breeding.

III

In September a man with ample leisure and a passion for discomfort might have walked in a continuous ditch from the North Sea to the Alps. Two trenches, from thirty to two hundred yards apart, represented the first lines of the opposing armies. Behind the British front there were second and third lines, and further positions at intervals in the rear. But the Germans had these, and something more. From the day when their High Command resolved to stand on the defensive in the West, they had expended immense ingenuity and labour in strengthening their position. The ramifications of their trenches were endless, and great redoubts, almost flush with the ground, consisting of a labyrinth of trenches and machine-gun stations, studded their front. The German lines in the West were, in the fullest sense of the word, a fortress. The day of manœuvre battles had for the moment gone. There was no question of envelopment or outflanking, for there were no flanks to turn. The slow methods of fortress warfare—sap and mine, battery and assault—were all that remained to the offensive.

The past nine months had taught the Allies many lessons. They perceived the formidable nature of the enemy's defence. Though much inferior in numbers, his position and his weight of artillery made him impregnable to any ordinary attack. Guns must be met by guns of equal calibre and equal munitionment. Before infantry could advance, a section of the stronghold must be destroyed by bombardment. Further, it was clear that

this destruction must be on a broad front. That was a moral which had been drawn in bitterness after the summer's campaign in Artois.

The plan which matured in September was for the Allies a change of policy. Foch and Sir John French had, indeed, early in the summer contemplated a great autumn offensive, but the battles in Artois had not augured well for its success. In July, Joffre had decided to postpone any forward movement till the following spring. But the situation in Russia suggested that the decision might well be revised, and the unexpected improvement in the supply of munitions strengthened the argument. In September there was for Britain a welcome change from the lean days of the early summer. In one branch of explosives alone the production was thirty times as great as it had been in the end of May. There was also a very clear superiority in numbers. By September Sir John French had nine divisions of the New Army in France, and some had been in training in the trenches since May. But in spite of this apparent strength it is certain that the Allied Staffs, under the influence of the false deduction from Neuve Chapelle, misread the problem before them. They realized in theory that a breakthrough would be a protracted operation, but they did not guess how protracted it would be. The conception of a breach in a sea-wall still dominated their minds, and they underestimated the strength of the enemy system of defence in depth. Their preparation was in reality only for the first assault; beyond that it faded into vagueness and improvisation.

Champagne and the *secteur* of Castelnau was chosen as the scene of the main attack. But to support the grand attack there must be others. The salient must be assaulted on its northern side, and the place chosen was the sector between La Bassée and Arras. Other subsidiary attacks were necessary for the same purpose, and these were entrusted to the British forces. They were strictly holding battles, and it was enough if they distracted and occupied the attention of the enemy.

Early in the month a general bombardment began along the whole Allied front. Its purpose was to serve as a screen behind which the preparations for attack could be made, and to puzzle the enemy as to which section of his line was chiefly threatened. The Allied aircraft were busy, for it was important that no German machines should reconnoitre over our lines. As the 25th of the month approached our airmen went farther afield, and bombed vital parts of the German railways. On Thursday, 23rd September, the main bombardment began. From La Bassée to Arras, and along the Champagne front, hell was loosed from thousands of pieces. At a quarter-past five on the 25th, on a fifteen-mile front, the blue-grey waves surged

from the trenches. At the same moment, at lengthened ranges, the guns flung their curtain of fire between the enemy and his supports. Machine guns took heavy toll of the attack and the German artillery from far in the rear were "watering" the path of the advance. The road was marked by piles of blue-grey dead, but the impetus did not slacken. By the end of the day, on a fifteen-mile front, the advance had been carried forward for an average of two and a half miles. Practically the whole German first line had gone, and the French held parts of the second line. But the enemy battle position was not pierced except in patches too small to be exploited.

The second great French effort was made on the 29th, and the place chosen was to the west of Navarin Farm, where the second position had already been pierced. Such an attack, so soon after the first, could not be delivered with the same vigour. Reconnaissances could not be so complete or the artillery concentration so strong. A gap was made in the last German position, but it was too narrow to use. The French were compelled to dig themselves shelter trenches and cling to their position. With this action the main operation closed.

The attack in the north which was launched on the 25th of September was a movement subsidiary to the great effort in Champagne. While it was under the general direction of Foch, the details were left to two different commands—the French Tenth Army and the British First and Second Armies. These were secondary attacks, designed to distract the attention of certain parts of the German front; and the fact that the Artois attack was not the main movement of the Allies was partly responsible for certain misfortunes in the handling of the troops. For what happened was that by accident the British force did find a real weakness in one section of the German front, and, had it been a major operation and the plans laid accordingly, a comprehensive disaster might have overtaken the enemy in the north. But for this success they were not prepared. Reserves were not ready in time, or in sufficient strength. It was the kind of misfortune which is frequent in an assault upon a long front, and it was made almost inevitable by the fact that the British army formed a quasi-independent command.

Attacks were delivered upon the 25th by the French Tenth Army and by the British at Ypres, Armentières, Neuve Chapelle, and Givenchy. Apart from local failures these may be considered to have won reasonable success. But the main British attack was directed against the German line from the La Bassée canal to the slopes in front of Grenay.

The landscape, as seen from some one of the slag-heaps behind the British front, was curiously open. The opposing trench lines showed up

clearly in the coarse chalk, and the country seemed a dead-flat plain, scarred with roads and studded with the headgear of collieries and mean little red houses. But this openness was deceptive. Every acre was a possible fortress, and the Germans had strongly fortified posts such as Fosse 8 and the formidable Hohenzollern Redoubt, as well as a number of minor positions among the slag-heaps, pits, and other natural features. At 6.30 on 25th September, when the great bombardment slackened, the left of the 1st Corps found itself checked in this desperate country, but by midday it had driven forward in a broad salient and captured the chief works of the enemy. Upon the remainder of its front the 1st Corps had taken the whole German first line, and at three points had broken into the second. But it had used up all its reserves, and for the moment could do no more.

It was farther south, in the sector of the 4th Corps, that the advance reached its height. Here a brilliant advance resulted in the capture of Loos and—for a moment—the shaking of the whole German northern front. The Londoners, on the right, carried all before them. They had prepared assiduously for the day, working out the operations on a big model of the countryside, so that every battalion knew the lie of the land before it. Consequently, when one battalion lost all its officers, the men still carried out the plan with complete precision. As the French gunners watched the start, they were amazed to see one of the London Irish kick off a football from the parapet and dribble it across the thousand yards to the first German line. They learned that day that the stolid British had their own *panache*. Presently they had seized Loos Cemetery, and their left had swung into the outskirts of the village. Before eight o'clock they had joined hands with the Highlanders in the shattered streets beneath the twin Towers of Loos. The clearing of Loos did not take long. Before nine o'clock all resistance was at an end, the battalion headquarters had advanced, and Loos was in our hands.

But the Highlanders were not content. Their orders had been not only to take Loos, but to occupy the rising ground to the east—the broad down marked in the map as Hill 70. But the original plan had allowed for the attack to proceed beyond Hill 70, should circumstances be favourable, and though this had been modified on the eve of battle, the change had not been explained to all the troops, and the leading battalions were in doubt about their final objective. The rise begins just outside the village, and the crest of the flat top is about a mile from the church. The fire from the defence for a moment gave them pause, and the German infantry came out of their trenches as if to counter-attack. The sight spurred the Highlanders to a great effort. They streamed up the hill like hounds, with all battalion formation gone, the green tartans of the Gordons and the red of the Camerons mingled

in one resistless wave. All the time they were under enfilading fire from south and north, but with the bayonet they went through the defence, and at nine o'clock were on the summit of the hill.

On the top, just below the northern crest, was a strong redoubt, destined to become famous in the succeeding days. The garrison surrendered—they seem scarcely to have resisted—but the Highlanders did not wait to secure the place. They streamed onward down the eastern side—now only a few hundreds strong—losing direction as they went. The attack had now passed outside the legitimate operations of war, and had reached a district which was a nest of fortifications. The Germans had a great array of machine guns on a small slope outside the village, and they were busy installing others on the railway embankment north-east of Lens. The Highlanders formed a mad salient, with no supports on south or north. The captured garrison had manned the crest of Hill 70, and assailed them with reverse fire; and from the unbroken positions south-east of Loos came a converging bombardment. The last stage of the Highland onslaught had been magnificent, but it had not been war, for there were no reserves to follow them. Had the supports been there, had their flanks been more secure, the enemy's northern front must have been pierced. In less than three hours the heroic brigade had advanced nearly four miles, and had passed beyond all but the last German trench line. Lens seemed already fallen, the enemy was feverishly getting away his heavy guns, and for one moment the fate of Lille and the plain of Douai trembled in the balance.

Between nine and ten a senior officer of the division took command on the hill and endeavoured to recall the van of the advance, which was lost in the fog and smoke of the eastern slopes, and to entrench himself on the summit. To retire the van was no light task. In the midst of encircling fire it was a forlorn hope, and few returned to the British lines on the hill. All down the slopes towards Lens lay the tartans, Gordon and Black Watch, Seaforth and Cameron, like the drift left on the shore when the tide has ebbed. The day has gone when a handful of men, like Cortes' adventurers, may conquer a kingdom. A modern battle is won by the superiority of numbers at the proper place and moment.

That night German counter-attacks were frequent against the whole of our new line, and upon the 26th we lost the Chalk Pit north-east of Loos and advanced ground towards Hulluch, which caused our line to bend sharply back from Hill 70 to the Loos-La Bassée road. On Hill 70 itself we lost some trenches, and our hold on the place was in jeopardy. It was a critical

moment, for there were no reserves at hand. Had the Germans attacked in greater force we must have been driven out of Loos.

Monday the 27th was a day of cold rain and misty distances. German counter-attacks recaptured ground from which they were able to enfilade our line by machine-gun fire. But the great event of the day was the advance in the afternoon of the Guards Division in the area of the 4th Corps. The line on the Monday morning ran from a point between Hulluch and the Loos-La Bassée road, dipping back to that highway and continuing round the north-east end of Loos, to the western slopes of Hill 70. Nearly three-quarters of a mile of ground had been lost on the left and centre during the Sunday, and it was the business of the Guards to win it back. It was the first time in the war that they had taken the field as a division, and great things were expected of them. These hopes were not disappointed. The ground had been well reconnoitred, and it was obvious that so soon as they crossed the ridge west of Loos they would come under a heavy bombardment. Accordingly the men were deployed in artillery formation. Once on the ridge the shrapnel tornado burst on them, but the Guards advanced with all the steadiness of parade. It was Fontenoy over again, and the wearied infantry and cavalrymen who had been holding the front cheered wildly as the ordered line of the Guards swept inexorably into Loos. Once through the town they had to face a storm of gas shells. When they gained the crest of Hill 70, and were outlined against the sky, they were greeted by a fierce bombardment, and by machine-gun fire from the redoubt. Realizing that the line on the crest was too good a target for the enemy, the brigade entrenched itself about 100 yards to the west of it. Here it had the 3rd Cavalry Brigade on its right; but its left was in the air, since there was a gap in the front between the Hill and the strong point known as Pit 14 *bis*. Next day, the 28th, the 2nd Brigade renewed the assault on Pit 14 *bis*. The place was important, for, being situated on the northern slopes of Hill 70, so long as it was in German hands it enfiladed our whole position east of Loos. At 3.45 in the afternoon it was attacked from the south end of the Chalk Pit, while our guns were turned on the Bois Hugo. Once again the enemy’s machine-gun fire proved deadly, and, though a small party managed to reach Pit 14 *bis*, the place could not be held. We fell back in the evening to the Chalk Pit and the spinney, thus connecting with the 3rd Brigade east of Loos.

The main phase of the battle was now drawing to a close. On the last day of September, Sir John French issued an order to his troops setting forth the details of the action. On a front of 6,500 yards we had everywhere carried the enemy’s first line, and we had broken into his second line in many places. We had captured over 3,000 enemy rank and file and over 50

officers. We had taken 26 field guns and 40 machine guns, besides great quantities of other war material. A substantial success it was beyond doubt, the most substantial the British army had seen since trench warfare began. Yet the exhilaration of victory, the sense that at last we were advancing, was tempered by a profound disappointment. We had had a great chance of which we had failed to take full advantage. There had been somewhere a colossal blundering. It is now clear that the whole offensive was in itself premature and mistaken, but such mistakes are inevitable for mortals who lack the gift of prophecy.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the superb drive and devotion of the troops of attack were frittered away by a certain fumbling and confusion in the mind of Headquarters. They anticipated some sort of success—or otherwise why was the cavalry massed in reserve?—but they had not considered fully the ways and means of it. They took the Germans by surprise, but were themselves caught unawares. They succeeded better than they had hoped, and were not ready to use the gifts of fortune. Of all the British actions in the war Loos was the one which did least credit to the High Command.

IV

As a result of the blunders at Loos Sir John French was relieved of his command. He was transferred to the command of the forces at home, and Sir Douglas Haig was appointed as his successor.

[General Photographic Agency

SIR DOUGLAS HAIG

Haig stood in the very first rank of British soldiers. He had played a chief part in the most hotly contested battles of the campaign—at First Ypres, at Neuve Chapelle, at Festubert, at Loos. Chary of speech, bold in design, resolute in execution, he had raised the First Army under his command to a foremost place among the British forces. He had the confidence of his men, and had earned the admiration of all who worked with him, for he was at once a scientific soldier after the most modern plan, and a true leader. Like Foch, from whom in many respects he was

profoundly different, he was destined to develop through disaster and anxiety into a great soldier.

Sir John French received a viscounty, and took his title from Ypres, before which he had fought his greatest battle—a fitting choice, for his name will always be linked with that most miraculous achievement in the history of British campaigning.

CHAPTER X

RETROSPECT OF 1915

Kut—Italy enters the War—The Overrunning of Serbia—The *Lusitania* sunk—New Government in Britain—Attitude of Labour—Lord Derby's Recruiting Scheme—The Military Service Bill—Edith Cavell—The Evacuation of the Dardanelles.

I

The year closed for Britain in shadows. Nowhere on the globe had the Allies improved their position. The various battles in the West had won little and cost much. Our army in Mesopotamia, having attempted a vain dash for Baghdad, was now beleaguered in Kut. Russia had retreated almost off the fighting map. Italy had entered the alliance, but was making little progress on her difficult fronts, in the Dolomites, on the Isonzo, and Trentino. Indeed, the main interest of the summer months was the curious campaign on the western ridges of the latter front, where fighting became a business of small detachments widely separated by precipitous ravines and snow-clad peaks. Those who have mountaineered in the Adamello and Ortler groups know the strait, steep valleys, with meadows in the bottoms and woods of fir and pine on the lower slopes, and above them the stony heights studded with green alps, and over all the snows and glaciers of the summits. In such country there was room for only small bodies of troops, and the raising of guns to the lofty ridges was a toil which only the hardiest mountain-bred soldiers could accomplish. The Austrians, mountain-bred also, were not an enemy to be despised, and many desperate encounters took place among screes and rock terraces—campaigning only to be paralleled by the exploits of the Gurkhas in the Lhasa expedition. It was a type of mountain warfare far more arduous than the campaign among the low saddles of the Carpathians.

On the rout of Russia there followed the overrunning of Serbia. Bulgaria, at last convinced of where her interests lay, threw in her lot with Germany, and in October German, Austrian, and Bulgarian armies, under the direction of Mackensen, advanced against the little country from north and east. Life in Belgrade during the spring and summer had been curiously peaceful for a frontier city in time of war. Admiral Troubridge's Naval Mission with its armed launches did much destructive work at night against the Austrian monitors, issuing from the river quays as in old days the

Illyrian pirate galleys issued from the screen of the Dalmatian Islands. The city was bombarded methodically at long range from the northern shore, but there seems to have been a clearly defined danger zone, and, while in the river-side streets shells dropped and the houses were in ruins, in the upper thoroughfares life went on and the citizens took the air as usual. In those fantastic days it was possible for a visitor to dine at his hotel, drive in a cab to the quays, embark in a launch, spend the midnight hours in a spirited naval action, and return to his bed before morning.

But with Mackensen sweeping down on her from the north, and with the hostile Bulgaria on her flank, Serbia’s situation was wholly changed. Her great losses in the battles of 1914 had brought down her armed strength, allowing for the use of every available man, to less than 200,000, and her enemies already in the field could more than double her maximum. Then had come pestilence and famine, and throughout the spring of 1915 she had been fighting a sterner enemy than the Austrian. Her peasant soldiers had been compelled to return home to prevent their farms going out of cultivation, and throughout the summer she was singularly unprepared for a state at war with mighty neighbours. The Allies could give no effective aid, though weak British and French forces had landed at Salonika. The Serbs, a race of natural warriors who had few superiors, were driven in retreat through the Albanian mountains, and scarcely 100,000 soldiers reached the coast. British and Italian ships carried them to Corfu, where the remnant was rested and refitted, and next year joined the Allies at Salonika. With the retreat went the aged King Peter, in whose strange soul burned the stubborn courage of his people. “I have struggled a great deal in my life,” he said,

"and I am tired, bruised, and broken. But I shall not die before I see the victory of my country."

II

Throughout the year the German submarine menace continued to grow. Our sailors, looking confidently for German raids which should culminate in the appearance of the High Sea Fleet, were disappointed. The enemy was driven to fight with small arms and not with great guns; the warfare he chose was waged in secret and in the dark. Hence the history of the war at sea was one of losses. The German submarines had some success. The *Lusitania* was sunk, and many merchant vessels. In addition, our coasts were continuously bombed by enemy aircraft.

In Britain there was heard during the year much confused and often unjust criticism. The civilian Government was the first to be blamed. The fighting in the spring had made clear the acute shortage of munitions, and there was much uneasiness. A change of Government was demanded, and on 19th May the Prime Minister announced the formation of a National Ministry, which included Mr. Balfour, Lord Curzon, Lord Lansdowne, Mr. Austen Chamberlain, and Mr. Bonar Law. Mr. Churchill, who in easy-going ministerial circles moved like a panther among seals, was given the Duchy of Lancaster. The reconstruction of the Government awakened little interest among the people at large. The one vital fact to most men was the creation of a new department, a Ministry of Munitions, which should take over all the responsibility for *matériel* which had fallen upon the Secretary for War, and should also assume some of the powers hitherto belonging to other departments. The selection of Mr. Lloyd George for the post was generally approved. His imagination, his zeal, and the seriousness with which he faced the war had profoundly impressed his countrymen.

Nor was criticism aimed merely at the Government. Reasonable men were beginning to look askance at schemes for mere political change, and to direct their attention to some reform of our military machine, especially as concerned its higher control. It had long been evident that the uncertainty in our policy was largely due to the absence of a competent General Staff at home. For fourteen months Lord Kitchener had acted as his own General Staff, an arrangement which was the worst conceivable. As Secretary of State for War he was the sole military adviser of the British Cabinet; and in addition, he had the tasks of raising and organizing the new armies, and for many months of arranging their munitionment—each more than enough to fill the time of the ablest man. There was the further difficulty that Lord

Kitchener's great career had scarcely fitted him for the direction of a European strategy. It was an arrangement which could only end in failure. Early in October a beginning was made with the construction of a better machine. The General Staff at Whitehall was reconstituted, with Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Murray, who had formerly been Sir John French's Chief of Staff in France, at its head, and Sir William Robertson was brought back to the War Office.

There were two other questions which at this time were in the forefront of men's minds. One was the attitude of Labour. Trouble in South Wales and on the Clyde had already caused much tension, which was heightened by the new munitions policy which entirely suspended Trade Union rules. The second question was that of conscription. A vigorous effort was made to solve the recruiting problem without adopting legal compulsion. Lord Derby prepared a scheme by which enlistment should proceed upon a more orderly basis. But it became clear when the Derby Report was finally published that voluntary enlistment would not supply men in the necessary numbers. On January 5, 1916, Mr. Asquith introduced the Military Service Bill into Parliament. The Bill—which was not extended to Ireland—applied to all single men and widowers without children dependent on them between the ages of eighteen and forty-one on August 15, 1915.

In the course of the year there took place one incident which perhaps did more than any other episode of the war to key the temper of Britain to that point where resolution acquires the impetus of a passion. Miss Edith Cavell, a lady of forty-three, the daughter of a Norfolk clergyman, had been since 1906 the head of a nursing institute in Brussels. When the war broke out she was in England, but she returned at once to Belgium, and transformed her institute into a hospital for wounded soldiers. There she nursed without discrimination British, French, Belgians, and Germans. During her year's work she succeeded, with the help of friends in Brussels, in conveying many of the wounded Allied soldiers into Holland, whence they could return to their armies, and also in assisting the escape of Belgian civilians of military age. Her activities were discovered by the German authorities, and on 5th August she was arrested and lodged in the military prison of St. Gilles. Despite the efforts of the American and Spanish Embassies to save her, she was tried on the 7th October—nine weeks after her arrest—and condemned to death. At two o'clock on the morning of 11th October she died, her courage and cheerfulness, on the admission of the German chaplain, being unweakened to the end.

Miss Cavell's execution was a judicial murder. It was judicial since, on the letter of the German military law, she was liable to the extreme penalty. But in the case of a woman and a nurse, who had ministered to German sick and wounded, the pedantry which exacted that penalty was an outrage on human decency. In France and Britain, in Holland and America, the murder woke a profound horror, and revealed as in a flashlight the psychology of that German "culture" which proposed to regenerate the world. Against that dark background the spirit of the lonely Englishwoman shone the brighter. We dare not tarnish so noble a deed with facile praise. Her heroism had led captivity captive, and for her death was swallowed up in victory. She was not the least of the sisterhood of great-hearted women who have taught the bravest men a lesson in courage. M. Clemenceau spoke the tribute of the people of France. "Since the day of Joan of Arc, to whose memory I know that our Allies will one day seek to erect a statue, England has owed us this return. She has nobly given it."

III

The last weeks of 1915 saw, too, the evacuation of Gallipoli.

After the second failure at Suvla on 21st August there could be no question of a renewed offensive, and it became necessary to contemplate an expedition to Salonika. This meant the end of the Gallipoli expedition, and the next step must be a withdrawal. On 11th October, Hamilton was asked his opinion on this policy, and his reply showed that he regarded the scheme as unthinkable. He was accordingly relieved of his command and brought home to report, and Sir Charles Monro, the commander of the Third Army in France, was appointed in his stead.

So ended what may well be ranked as the most tragic chapter of the British chronicle. On 8th December Sir Charles Monro issued orders for the evacuation of Suvla and Anzac. The difficulty of the problem was that it must be lengthy and must be piecemeal. It was not a question of shipping a division or two, but three army corps; it was impossible to move them all at once with our existing transports; there must be a gap between the operations, and this meant that of the later movements the enemy would be abundantly forewarned. Success depended upon two things mainly—fine weather and secrecy. The first was the gift of the gods, and the second was attained by sheer bluff.

From 8th December onward our men, night after night, watched the shrinking of their numbers. There was a generous rivalry as to who should stay to the last—a proof of spirit when we remember that every man

believed that the rearguard was doomed to death or capture. Presently only those in the prime of physical strength were left; all the weak and sickly had gone to the transports, which nightly stole in and out the moonlit bays. Soon it became clear that the heavy batteries had also gone. To the ordinary observer in daylight they still appeared to be in position, but the guns in the emplacements were bogus. Then the field guns began to disappear, leaving only a sufficiency to keep up the daily pretence of bombardment. It was an eerie business for the last battalions as they heard their protecting guns rumbling shorewards in the darkness. The hospitals were all evacuated, and their stores moved to the beach. New breakwaters had been built there, and all night long there was a continuous procession of lighters and motor boats. Soon the horses and motor cars were also shipped, and by Friday, 17th December, very few guns were left.

The weather was warm and clement, with light moist winds and a low-hanging screen of cloud. Coming in the midst of an Ægean winter it seemed to our men a direct interposition of Providence. It was like the land beyond the North Wind which Elizabethan mariners believed in, where he who pierced the outer crust of the Polar snows found a country of roses and eternal summer. Nature had joined the wild conspiracy.

On Saturday, 18th December, only picked battalions held the Suvla front. The final embarkation had been fixed for the two succeeding nights, and it was believed that if the first night was successful the whole enterprise would go through. Evening fell in a perfect calm. The sea was as still as a quarry-hole, and scarcely a breath of wind blew in the sky. At 6 p.m. the crews of the warships went to action stations, and in the darkness the transports stole into the bay. Not a shot was fired. In dead quiet, showing no lights, the transports moved in and out. Every unit found its proper place. By 1 a.m. on the morning of Sunday the 19th the bay lay empty in the moonlight.

That Sunday was one of the most curious in the war. Our lines lay to all appearance as they had been for the past four months, but they were only a blind. We kept up our usual fire, and received the Turkish answer, but had any body of the enemy chosen to attack they would have found the trenches held by a handful. Night fell with the same halcyon weather. The transports—destroyers, trawlers, picket boats, every kind of craft—slipped once again into the bay, and before midnight the last guns had been got on board. At 1.30 a.m. on Monday morning the final embarkation of the troops began. Strange receptions were provided for the first enemy who should enter the deserted trenches in the way of mines and traps and automatic bomb-

throwers. There were messages left, too, congratulating “Johnnie Turk” on being a gallant fighter, and expressing hopes that we might meet him again under happier conditions. By 3.30 the last of the troops were on the beach, and long before the dawn broke all were aboard. One man had been hit by a bullet in the thigh; that was the only casualty.

The operations at Anzac were conducted on the same lines. Some of our gun positions there were on dizzy heights, down which a gun could only be brought part by part. This work was brilliantly performed. Half the guns and half the men of the New Zealand batteries disappeared in a single night. On the Saturday night three-fifths of the entire force were got on board the transports. On Sunday night the rest left, with two men wounded as the total casualties. By 5.30 a.m. on Monday morning the last transports moved from the coast, leaving the warships to follow.

Then on the twelve miles of beach from Suvla Burnu to Gaba Tepe began one of the strangest spectacles of the campaign. All the pieces but four 18-pounders, two old 5-inch howitzers, one 4.7 naval gun, one anti-aircraft, and two 3-pounder Hotchkiss guns had been removed, and these were rendered useless; ammunition and the more valuable stores had been cleared, but there was a quantity of supplies, chiefly bully-beef, which was not worth the risk of human life. These were piled in great heaps on the shores and drenched with petrol. Before the last men left parties of Royal Engineers set them on fire. About 4 a.m. on the Monday morning the bonfires began, blazing most fiercely near Suvla Point. The Australians at Anzac about 3.30 had exploded a big mine on Russell’s Top, and this called forth from the Turks an hour’s rifle fire. As the beach fires blazed up the enemy, thinking that some disaster had befallen us, shelled the place to prevent our extinguishing the flames. The warships shelled back, and all along that broken coast great pharoses flamed to heaven, like giant beacon-fires in some strife of the Immortals. At 4.30 a.m. a motor lighter at Suvla, which had been wrecked some weeks before, was blown up, and added to the glare. Watchers on the Bulgarian coast, looking seaward, saw the peninsula wrapped in flames, as if its stony hills had become volcanoes vomiting fire. It was not till dawn that the Turkish guns ceased. Picket boats at Anzac and Suvla up to eight o’clock were still collecting a few stragglers from the beaches. By 9 a.m. it was all over, and the last warship steamed away from a coast which had been the grave of so many high hopes and gallant men.

We were just in time. That night the weather broke, and a furious gale blew from the south, which would have made all embarkation impossible.

The puzzled enemy sat still and waited. He saw that we had gone, but he distrusted the evidence of his eyes. History does not tell what fate befell the first Turks who penetrated our empty trenches, what heel first tried conclusions with the hidden mines, or with what feelings they viewed the parting Australian message left on Walker's Ridge—a gramophone with the disc set to "The Turkish Patrol."

The success, the amazing success, of the Suvla and Anzac evacuations made the position at Cape Helles the more difficult. The first bluff had worked to admiration; but it is of the nature of bluff that it can scarcely be repeated against the same opponent. As at Suvla and Anzac, two nights had been allotted to the final evacuation, those of 7th and 8th January. Saturday the 8th was calm and fine, the enemy was quiet, and all seemed in train for the final effort. But about four in the afternoon the weather changed. A strong south-westerly wind blew, which by 11 p.m. had increased to thirty-five miles an hour. This storm covered our retirement so far as the enemy was concerned, but it all but made it impossible. In one sense the weather was a blessing in disguise. An enemy submarine had been reported off Cape Helles at 9 p.m., but the seas made its efforts futile. By 2.30 a.m. on the morning of 9th January V and W beaches had been cleared, and by 3.30 a.m. the last troops were on board.

We had upset all precedents. The impossible had been achieved by a series of incalculable chances. But for the two spells of fine weather and the unexplained preoccupation of the enemy the odds would have been crushingly against us. It is true that without a perfect organization and discipline we should not have been able to take advantage of our good fortune, but no human merit would have availed had the fates been unkind. It was an instructive lesson in the folly of dogmatism. In the spring of 1915 our ships had attempted to beat down the forts of the Dardanelles without the assistance of a land army. That effort failed, and it was condemned as contrary to all the lessons of history. The criticism was just; but those who claimed that precedents were not the whole of war were also justified. For in the evacuation of Gallipoli we saw an enterprise as flagrantly heterodox succeed. The "sporting chance" is not as a rule a desirable obsession for any commander. It is his business to use the accumulated experience of his predecessors, and to follow soberly the path of common prudence. But if some great end is to be won or some great misfortune avoided, there may come a day when it is his duty to defy precedents. For it should never be forgotten that the last hope, the desperate remedy, and the outside chance may win.

Across the ribbon of the Dardanelles, on the green plain of Troy, the most famous of the wars of the ancient world had been fought. The European shores had now become a no less classic ground of arms. If the banks of Scamander had seen men strive desperately with fate, so had the slopes of Achi Baba and the loud beaches of Helles. Had the fashion endured of linking the strife of mankind with the gods, what strange myth would not have sprung from the rescue of the British troops in the teeth of winter gales and uncertain seas! It would have been rumoured, as at Troy, that Poseidon had done battle for his children.

CHAPTER XI

VERDUN AND THE SOMME

Reasons for German Attack—French Defence—The Somme Region—Strategy of the Protective Battle—The First Day—The Attack of July the Fourteenth—Crest of the Uplands Won—The Autumn Attacks—The Weather Breaks—Summary of the Action.

I

In January 1916 the Allies seemed in a favourable position for the campaign of the new year. They had considerably increased their strength in men and material. Great offensives had accordingly been planned for 1916 both in East and West: by Russia in the Dvinsk salient, and by France and Britain on both sides of the river Somme.

Faced with such a prospect it was impossible for the Teutonic League to sit still. Germany, in the weeks before Christmas 1915, had to face a problem scarcely less difficult than that which had confronted her after her initial failure at the Marne. She had the prestige of her dynasty to think of, and the whole military and bureaucratic system built round it. She had in her mind two wavering neutrals, who must be constantly presented with new proofs of her might. Above all, she was faced with her dwindling man-power, and an economic stress which could not be indefinitely endured. It was becoming clear that the first great movement of 1916 must be undertaken on her initiative. At Christmas, Falkenhayn had presented to the Emperor a memorandum in which he enumerated cogently and lucidly the factors in the case. A break through in the ordinary sense was not contemplated. He sought to inflict on France the utmost injury with the least expense to Germany, and for this a section at once acutely sensitive and highly embarrassing for the defence was required. Germany must be free to accelerate or draw out her offensive, to intensify it or break it off from time to time as suited her purpose. Two such areas suggested themselves—Belfort and Verdun, and the argument leaned towards the latter.

On 20th February the guns opened. History had never seen so furious a fire. It blotted out the French first lines, it shattered the communication trenches, it tore the woods into splinters, and altered the very shape of the

hills. At a quarter to five in the evening the German infantry moved forward to what they had been told would be an easy and uncostly triumph.

France performed no greater feat in the war than the defence of Verdun. Pétain, and subsequently Nivelle, refused to give way, and for months miraculously held their ground. What shall be said of the soldiers themselves who for these long months rolled back the invader? Not the Ypres salient or the nightmare Labyrinth was more dreadful than those shattered Meuse uplands, churned into grey mud by the punctual shells till they seemed like some lunar desert where life was forbidden. It was a struggle on the defensive, a contest of stark endurance waged with the knowledge that ground must some time be ceded, but with the resolve that the cession should be dearly bought. Such a task puts the sternest strain on human nature. It requires not the exhilaration of hot blood and high spirits, but cold patience and disciplined sacrifice. The glib commentators who before the war praised French *élan* and denied French fortitude were utterly put to shame. It was the fortitude and the stoicism of the French that were their most shining endowments. They showed it under Castelnau at Nancy and under Maud'huy at Arras; but Verdun was the apotheosis of the quality. "*Passeront-pas*" sang the soldiers, and held the gate, a living wall stronger than concrete or steel.

The Battle of Verdun was so far the longest continuous battle in history. It had stretched from the snows of February into the spring sunlight of April. When the first shots were fired the copses of the Meuse heights were brown and leafless, but by its close young green was breaking in waves over the scarred soil, the almond trees were blossoming, and the water-side meadows were gay with marigolds. No less spectacular battle was ever fought. On that arc of thirty miles the better part of a million men stood to arms, but to the observer from any point—from the ridge of Charny, or the southern forts, or the shattered Verdun streets—they seemed to have been swallowed up in the earth. Only the dull unceasing rattle of the guns, the fleecy puffs of shrapnel on the ridges, and at times mushrooms of dark smoke told of the struggle.

II

The summer advances of Russia and Italy did something to relieve the pressure on Verdun, but the real distraction came on 1st July, when the main battle moved from the shattered Meuse uplands to the sluggish Somme and the green downs of Picardy. As the weary French infantry scrambled over the débris of Thiaumont, a hundred miles to the north-west on a broad front the infantry of Britain and France were waiting to cross their parapets.

From Arras southward the Western battle-front left the coal-pits and sour fields of Artois and entered a pleasant region. The great crook of the upper Somme and the tributary vale of the Ancre intersect a rolling tableland, dotted with little towns and furrowed by a hundred shallow streams. Nowhere does the land rise higher than 500 feet, but a trivial swell—such is the nature of the landscape—may carry the eye for thirty miles. There were few detached farms, for it was a country of peasant cultivators who clustered in villages. Not a hedge broke the long roll of cornlands, and till the higher ground was reached the lines of tall poplars flanking the great Roman highroads were the chief landmarks. At the lift of country between Somme and Ancre copses patched the slopes, and sometimes a church spire was seen above the trees from some woodland hamlet. The Somme winds in a broad valley between chalk bluffs, faithfully dogged by a canal—a curious river which strains, like the Oxus, "through matted rushy isles," and is sometimes a lake and sometimes an expanse of swamp. The Ancre is such a stream as may be found in Wiltshire, with good trout in its pools. On a hot midsummer day the slopes are ablaze with yellow mustard, red poppies, and blue cornflowers; and to one coming from the lush flats of Flanders, or the "black country" of the Pas de Calais, or the dreary levels of Champagne, or the strange, melancholy Verdun hills, this land wore a habitable and cheerful air, as if remote from the oppression of war.

Till midsummer in 1916 the Picardy front had shown little activity. There had been local raids and local bombardments, but the trenches on both sides were good, and a partial advance offered few attractions to either. This long stagnation led to one result: it enabled the industrious Germans to excavate the chalk hills on which they lay into a fortress which they believed to be impregnable. Their position was naturally strong, and they strengthened it by every device which science could provide. Their High Command might look uneasily at the Aubers ridge and Lens and Vimy, but it had no doubts about the Albert heights. From Arras southward they held in the main the higher ground. The front consisted of a strong first position, with firing, support, and reserve trenches, and a labyrinth of deep dug-outs; a less strong intermediate line covering the field batteries; and a second position some distance behind, which was of much the same strength as the first. Behind lay fortified woods and villages which could be readily linked up with trench lines to form third and fourth positions. They were well served by the great network of railways. It was a fortress to which no front except the West could show a parallel. The Russian soldiers who in the early summer were brought to France stared with amazement at a ramification of

trenches compared with which the lines in Poland and Galicia were like hurried improvisations.

The aim of the Allied Command must be clearly understood. It was not to recover so many square miles of France; it was not to take Bapaume or Péronne or St. Quentin; it was not even in the strict sense to carry this or that position. All these things were subsidiary and would follow in due course, provided the main purpose succeeded. That purpose was simply to exercise a steady and continued pressure on a certain section of the enemy's front. For nearly two years the world had been full of theories as to the possibility of breaking the German line. Gradually it had been accepted that an attack should proceed by stages, with, as a prelude to each, a complete artillery preparation, and that, since the struggle must be long drawn out, fresh troops should be used at each stage. The policy was that of "limited objectives," but it did not preclude an unlimited objective in the event of some local enemy weakness suddenly declaring itself. A strategical problem is not, as a rule, capable of being presented in a simple metaphor, but it may be said that, to the view of the Allied strategy, the huge German salient in the West was like an elastic band drawn very tight. Each part of such a band has lost elasticity, and may be severed by friction which would do little harm to the band if less tautly stretched.

The coming attack was allotted to the Fourth Army, under General Sir Henry Rawlinson. Behind in the back areas lay the nucleus of another army, called first the Reserve, and afterwards the Fifth, under General Sir Hubert Gough, which at this time was mainly composed of cavalry divisions. It was a cadre which would receive its complement of infantry when the occasion arose. The French striking force lay from Maricourt astride the Somme to opposite the village of Fay.

About the middle of June on the whole front held by the British, and on the French front north and south of the Somme, there began an intermittent bombardment of the German lines. There were raids at different places, partly to mislead the enemy as to the real point of assault, and partly to identify the German units opposed to us. During these days, too, there were many fights in the air. It was essential to prevent German airplanes from crossing our front and observing our preparations. Our own machines scouted far into the enemy hinterland, reconnoitring and destroying. On Saturday, 24th June, the bombardment became intenser. It fell everywhere on the front; German trenches were obliterated at Ypres and Arras as well as at Beaumont-Hamel and Fricourt.

All the last week of June the weather was grey and cloudy, with a thick fog on the uplands, which made air work unsatisfactory. There were flying showers of rain and the roads were deep in mire. As the hours passed in mist and wet, it seemed as if the fates were unpropitious. Then, on the last afternoon of June, there came a sudden change. The pall of cloud cleared away and all Picardy swam in the translucent blue of a summer evening. That night the orders went out. The attack was to be delivered next morning three hours after dawn.

The first day of July dawned hot and cloudless, though a thin fog, the relic of the damp of the past week, clung to the hollows. The British aim, in the opening stage of the battle, was the German first position. The main assault was to be delivered between Maricourt and the Ancre; the attack from that river to Gommecourt was meant to be subsidiary. It is clear that the Germans expected the movement of the Allies, and had made a fairly accurate guess as to its terrain. They assumed that the area would be from Arras to Albert. In all that stretch they were ready with a full concentration of men and guns. South of Albert they were less prepared, and south of the Somme they were caught napping. The history of the first day was therefore the story of two separate actions in the north and south, in the first of which the Allies failed and in the second of which they brilliantly succeeded. By the evening the first action had definitely closed, and the weight of the Allies was flung wholly into the second.

Let us first tell the tale of the desperate struggle between Gommecourt and Thiepval. The divisions in action there had to face a chain of fortified villages—Gommecourt, Serre, Beaumont Hamel, and Thiepval—and enemy positions which were generally on higher and better ground. The Ancre cut the line in two, with steep slopes rising from the valley bottom. Each village had been so fortified as to be almost impregnable, with a maze of catacombs, often two stories deep, where whole battalions could take refuge, underground passages from the firing line to sheltered places in the rear, and pits into which machine guns could be lowered during a bombardment. On the plateau behind, with excellent direct observation, the Germans had their guns massed. As our men began to cross no-man's-land, the Germans seemed to man their ruined parapets, and fired rapidly with automatic rifles and machine guns. Moreover, they had machine-gun pits far in front of their parapets, connected with their trenches by deep tunnels secure from shell fire. The British moved forward in line after line, dressed as if on parade; not a man wavered or broke rank; but minute by minute the ordered lines melted away under the deluge of high-explosive, shrapnel, rifle, and machine-gun fire. By the evening, from Gommecourt to Thiepval, the attack

had been everywhere checked, and our troops—what was left of them—were back again in their old line. They had struck the core of the main German defence.

Farther south an attempt was made to cut off the salient of Fricourt by an advance on the fortified villages of Ovillers and La Boiselle, and up the long shallow depression which our men called Sausage Valley towards Contalmaison. This, if Mametz were carried, would pinch it so tightly that it must fall. Mametz was carried that day, but Ovillers and La Boiselle held out. Fricourt fell on the 2nd, but the struggle for Ovillers and La Boiselle continued. On the morning of the 3rd the situation was that between Thiepval and Fricourt we had not pierced many parts of the German front line, while south of Fricourt we were advancing against the enemy’s second position. Farther to the south below the junction points of Montauban, where on 1st July was seen for the first time in the campaign the advance in line of British and French troops, the French had advanced with lightning speed and complete success.

In the northern sector La Boiselle was finally taken on the 5th, and Contalmaison taken by storm on the 7th, though Ovillers did not finally fall until the 16th, when the gallant remnant of its garrison—two officers and a hundred and twenty-four guards-men—surrendered. In the southern sector the problem was to clear out the fortified woods with which this part of the country was patched, curiously clean-cut woods like the copses in the park of a country house. By the 12th we had taken virtually the whole of Mametz Wood and the wood of Bernafay. They were not acquired without a grim struggle. The woods were thick with undergrowth which had not been cut for two seasons, and though our artillery played havoc with the trees it could not clear away the tangled shrubbery beneath them. The Germans had filled the place with machine-gun redoubts, connected by concealed trenches, and in some cases they had machine guns in positions in the trees. Each step in our advance had to be fought for, and in that briery labyrinth the battle tended always to become a series of individual combats. Every position we won was subjected at once to a heavy counter-bombardment. Meantime the wood of Trônes had become a Tom Tiddler’s Ground, which neither antagonist could fully claim or use as a base. It was at the mercy of the artillery fire of both sides, and it was impossible in the time to construct shell-proof defences.

Meanwhile in the French sector the advance had been swift and continuous. Their artillery, even the heavies, was now far forward in the

open, and old peasants beyond the Somme, waiting patiently in their captivity, heard the guns of their countrymen sounding daily nearer.

The next step was for the British to attack the enemy second position before them. At dawn on Friday the 14th began the second stage of the battle. The day of the attack was of fortunate omen, for the 14th of July was the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille, the fête-day of France. The front chosen for attack was from a point south-east of Pozières to Longueval and Delville Wood, a space of some four miles. Incidentally, it was necessary for our right flank to clear the wood of Trônes. Each village in the second line had its adjacent or enfolding wood—Bazentin-le-Petit, Bazentin-le-Grand, and at Longueval the big wood of Delville. In the centre, a mile and more beyond the German position, the wood of Foureaux, which we called High Wood, hung like a dark cloud on the sky line. At 3.25 a.m., when the cloudy dawn had fully come, the infantry attacked. So complete was the surprise that in the dark the battalions which had the farthest road to go came within 200 yards of the enemy's wire with scarcely a casualty. When the German barrage came it fell behind them. The attack failed nowhere. The great event of the day fell in the late afternoon, when the cavalry came into action against High Wood, the first time our mounted men had been used in eighteen months. The final advance, about 8 p.m., was made partly on foot and partly on horseback, and the enemy in the corn were ridden down, captured, or slain with lance and sabre. The cavalry then set to work to entrench themselves, to protect the flank of the advancing infantry in High Wood. It was a clean and workmanlike job, and the news of it exhilarated the whole line. That cavalry should be used at all seemed to forecast the end of the long trench fighting and the beginning of a campaign in the open.

On Saturday, 15th July, we were busy consolidating the ground won, and at some points pushing farther. High Wood was last under pressure of counter-attacks, but we had by that time consolidated our line behind it. This position was held with extraordinary resolution by the enemy, and it was two months before the whole wood was in our possession. On the right, around Longueval and Delville Wood, was waged the fiercest contest of all. The struggle which began on that Saturday before dawn was to last for thirteen days, and to prove one of the costliest episodes of the whole battle. The situation was an ideal one for the defence. Longueval lay to the south-west of the wood, a straggling village with orchards at its northern end where the road climbed towards Flers. Delville itself was a mass of broken tree trunks, matted undergrowth, and shell-holes. It had rides cut in it, running from north to south and from east to west, which were called by such names as "The Strand" and "Princes Street," and along these were the enemy trenches.

The place was terribly at the mercy of the enemy guns, and on the north and south-east sides the Germans had a strong trench line, some seventy yards from the trees, bristling with machine guns. The South Africans, after desperate attacks, clung to the south-east corner, from where they refused to be dislodged. Their assault had been splendid, but their defence was a greater exploit. They hung on without food or water, while their ranks were terribly thinned, and at the end, when one battalion had lost all its officers, they repulsed an attack by the German 5th Division, the *corps d'élite* of Brandenburg. In this far-flung battle all parts of the empire won fame, and not least was the glory of the South African contingent.

The next step was to round off our capture of the enemy second position, and consolidate our ground. Apart from this general activity, our two main objectives were Pozières and Guillemont. The first, with the Windmill beyond it, was part of the crest of the Thiepval plateau. Guillemont was necessary to us before we could align our next advance with that of the French. On 19th July there came the first attempt on Guillemont from Trônes Wood, which failed to advance. That attack had a wide front, but its main fury was on the left, where Pozières and its Windmill crowned the slope up which ran the Albert—Bapaume road. The village had long ere this been pounded flat, the Windmill was a stump, and the trees in the gardens matchwood, but every yard of those devastated acres was fortified in the German fashion with covered trenches, deep du-outs, and machine-gun emplacements. On 23rd July we attacked from the south and west, but failed owing to the strength of the enemy's machine-gun fire. The French, by the second week of August, had carried all the German third position south of the Somme.

On Friday, 18th August, came the next combined attack. There was a steady pressure everywhere from Thiepval to the Somme. The main advance took place at 2.45 in the afternoon, in fantastic weather, with bursts of hot sunshine followed by thunderstorms and nights of rainbows. South of Thiepval we cleared out the strongly fortified work known as the Leipzig Redoubt, which had been part of the old German front line. Elsewhere we were less successful, but we pushed closer to Martinpuich and advanced in the area of High Wood and Longueval and Delville Wood. Meanwhile the French carried the greater part of Mauripas village, and the place called Calvary Hill to the south-east.

We were now fighting on the watershed. At Thiepval we held the ridge that overlooked the village from the south-east. We held all the high ground north of Pozières, which gave us a clear view of the country towards

Bapaume, and our lines lay 300 yards beyond the Windmill. We had all the west side of High Wood and the ground between it and the Albert—Bapaume road. We were half-way between Longueval and Ginchy, and our pincers were encircling Guillemont. At last we were in position over against, and in direct view of, the German third line. On Sunday, 3rd September, at twelve noon, the whole Allied front pressed forward. Guillemont was at last taken. South of the Somme a new French army came into action and carried the German front line on a new front of nearly three miles. Our advance was continued during the next few days, and though in High Wood and round Delville and Ginchy we made no progress our main object had been achieved.

By the 10th of September the British had made good the old German second position, and had won the crest of the uplands, while the French in their section had advanced almost to the gates of Péronne, and their new army on the right had begun to widen the breach. That moment was in a very real sense the end of a phase, the first and perhaps the most critical phase of the Somme battle. The immense fortifications of her main position represented for Germany the accumulated capital of two years. She had raised these defences when she was stronger than her adversaries in guns and in men. Now she was weaker, and her capital was gone. Thenceforth the campaign entered upon a new stage, new alike in strategical and tactical problems. From Thiepval to Chaulnes the enemy was in improvised positions. The day of manœuvre battles had not come, but in that section the rigidity of the old trench warfare had vanished. Haig’s aim was to push eastward till he secured a good defensive position, and then turn north against the flank and rear of the German positions beyond the Ancre. It looked as if he were soon to attain the first half of his purpose.

III

In the early days of September the Allied Command had evidence that the enemy was in no very happy condition. The loss of Ginchy and Guillemont had enabled the British to come into line with the left wing of Fayolle’s great advance, while the fall of certain vital positions on the Thiepval ridge gave us observation over a great space of country and threatened Thiepval, which was the pivot of all the German defence in the northern section of the battle-ground. The Allied front north of the Somme had the river as a defensive flank on its right, and might presently have the Ancre to fill the same part on its left. Hence the situation was ripe for a further thrust which, if successful, might give our advance a new orientation. If the German third line could be carried, it might be possible to strike out

on the flanks, repeating on a far greater scale the practice already followed. Bapaume itself was not the objective, but a thrust north-eastward across the upper Ancre, to get behind the great slab of unbroken enemy positions from Thiepval northwards. That would be the ultimate reward of a complete success; in the meantime our task was to break through the enemy's third line and test his powers of resistance.

On Tuesday, 12th September, a comprehensive bombardment began all along the British front from Thiepval to Ginchy. The morning of Friday, 15th September, was perfect autumn weather, with a light mist filling the hollows and shrouding the slopes. At 6 a.m. the British bombardment, which had now lasted for three days, rose to the fury of hurricane fire. At twenty minutes past six our men crossed the parapets and moved forward methodically towards the enemy.

It was upon this day that for the first time a new weapon was used. The "tanks," officially known as "Machine Gun Corps, Heavy Section," had come out from home some time before, and had been parked in secluded spots at the back of the front. The world is now familiar with those strange machines, which, shaped like monstrous toads, crawled imperturbably over wire and parapets, butted down houses, shouldered trees aside, and humped themselves over the stoutest walls. They were an experiment which could only be proved in practice, and the design in using them at this stage was principally to find out their weak points, so as to perfect their mechanism for the future. Their main tactical purpose was to clear out redoubts and nests of machine guns which, as we had found to our sorrow at Loos, might hang up the most resolute troops. The things had been kept a profound secret, and until the very eve of the advance few in the British army had even heard of them. The Germans manning their parapets saw through the thin mist inhuman shapes crawling towards them, things like gigantic slugs, spitting fire from their mottled sides. And ere they could collect their dazed wits the British bayonets were upon them.

On the left and centre the attack was instantly successful. The Canadians, after beating off the German counter-attack, carried Courcelette in the afternoon. Farther south there was fierce fighting in the old cockpit of High Wood, but at last the place was swept clear. Flers was taken with little trouble by the New Zealanders. They were preceded by a tank which waddled complacently up the main street of the village, with the enemy's bullets rattling harmlessly off its sides, followed by cheering and laughing British troops. Farther south we advanced our front for nearly a mile and a half. Only on the right wing in the area of Ginchy was our success

incomplete. There, and in High Wood, we incurred most of the casualties of the day. The check was the more regrettable since complete success in this area was tactically more important than elsewhere. But after all deductions were made the day’s results were in a high degree satisfactory. We had broken in one day through three of the enemy’s main defensive systems, and on a front of over six miles had advanced to an average depth of a mile. It was the most effective blow yet dealt at the enemy by British troops.

For the next week there was a lull in the main operations while the hammer was swung back for another blow. On Sunday the 24th our batteries opened again, this time against the uncaptured points in the German third line like Morval and Lesbœufs, against intermediate positions like Gueudecourt, and especially against Thiepval, which we now commanded from the east. By the evening of the 25th the British had stormed an enemy front of six miles between Combles and Martinpuich to a depth of more than a mile. The fall of Morval gave them the last piece of uncaptured high ground on that backbone of ridge which runs from Thiepval through High Wood and Ginchy. The next day Combles fell, while on the British left Thiepval itself was carried, as well as the north-west corner of Mouquet Farm and the Zollern Redoubt on the eastern crest. The German pivot had gone, the pivot which they had believed impregnable.

On the evening of 26th September the Allied fortunes in the West had never looked brighter. The enemy was now in his fourth line, without the benefit of the high ground, and there was no chance of retrieving his disadvantages by observation from the air. A hundred captured documents showed that the German *moral* had been shaken, and that the German machine was falling badly out of gear. In normal seasons at least another month of fine weather might be reasonably counted on, and in that month further blows might be struck with cumulative force. In France they spoke of a “Picardy summer”—of fair bright days at the end of autumn when the ground was dry and the air of a crystal clearness. A fortnight of such days would suffice for a crowning achievement. The hope was destined to fail. The guns were scarcely silent after the great attack of the 26th when the weather broke, and October was one long succession of tempestuous gales and drenching rains.

To understand the difficulties which untoward weather imposed on the Allied advance, it is necessary to grasp the nature of the fifty square miles of ground which three months’ fighting had given them, and over which lay the communications between their firing line and the rear. From a position like the north end of High Wood almost the whole British battle-ground on a

clear day was visible to the eye. To reach the place from the old Allied front line some four miles of bad roads had to be traversed. They would have been bad roads in a moorland parish, where they suffered only the transit of the infrequent carrier's cart; for at the best they were mere country tracks, casually engineered, and with no solid foundation. But here they had to support such a traffic as the world had scarcely seen before. Not the biggest mining camp or the vastest engineering undertaking had ever produced one tithe of the activity which existed behind each section of the battle line. It was not the German guns which made the trouble on the ground between the Albert—Péronne road and the British firing line. Casual bombardments vexed us little. It was the hostile elements and the unkindly nature of Mother Earth.

The country roads had been rutted out of recognition by endless transport, and, since they never had much of a bottom, the toil of the road-menders had nothing to build upon. New roads were hard to make, for the chalky soil was poor, and had been so churned up by shelling and the movement of guns and troops that it had lost all cohesion. There was no stone in the countryside and little wood, so repairing materials had to be brought from a distance, which still further complicated the problem. The problem was hard enough in fine weather; but let the rain come and soak the churned-up soil, and the whole land became a morass. There was no *pavé*, as in Flanders, to make a firm causeway. Every road became a watercourse, and in the hollows the mud was as deep as a man's thighs. An army must be fed, troops must be relieved, guns must be supplied, and so there could be no slackening of the traffic. Off the roads the ground was a squelching bog, dug-outs crumbled in, and communication trenches ceased to be.

Weather is a vital condition of success in operations where great armies are concerned, for men and guns cannot fight on air. In modern war it is more urgent than ever, since aerial reconnaissance plays so great a part, and Napoleon's "fifth element," mud, grows in importance with the complexity of the fighting machine. Again, in semi-static trench warfare, where the same area remains for long the battlefield, the condition of the ground is the first fact to be reckoned with. Once we grasp this, the difficulty of the October campaign, waged in almost continuous rain, will be apparent. But no words can convey an adequate impression of the Somme area after a week's downpour. Its discomforts had to be endured to be understood.

The next advance of the British army had two distinct objectives. The first—the task of the Fourth Army—was to carry the two spurs which ascended from the main Thiepval-Morval ridge behind which the German

fourth position lay. The month of October provided a record in wetness, spells of drenching rain being varied by dull, misty days, so that the sodden land had no chance of drying. The carrying of the spurs—meant as a preliminary step to a general attack—proved an operation so full of difficulties that it occupied all our efforts during the month, and with it all was not completed. The story of these weeks is one of minor operations, local actions with strictly limited objectives undertaken by only a few battalions. In the face of every conceivable difficulty we moved slowly up the intervening slopes.

The struggle of those days deserves to rank high in the records of British hardihood. The fighting had not the swift pace and the brilliant successes of the September battles. Our men had to strive for minor objectives, and such a task lacks the impetus and exhilaration of a great combined assault. On many occasions the battle resolved itself into isolated struggles, a handful of men in a mud hole holding out and consolidating their ground till their post was linked up with our main front. Rain, cold, slow reliefs, the absence of hot food, and sometimes of any food at all, made those episodes a severe test of endurance and devotion.

Our second task, in which we brilliantly succeeded, was to master completely the Thiepval ridge.

On 9th November the weather improved. The wind swung round to the north and the rain ceased, but owing to the season of the year the ground was slow to dry, and in the area of the Fourth Army the roads were still past praying for. Presently frost came and a powder of snow, and then once more the rain. But in the few days of comparatively good conditions the British Commander-in-Chief brought the battle to a further stage, and won a conspicuous victory. The fortress village of Beaumont-Hamel was taken and the naval division carried Beaucourt. It was the last attack, with which concluded the Battle of the Somme. The weather had now fallen like a curtain upon the drama.

IV

Before 1st July, Verdun had been the greatest continuous battle fought in the world’s history; but the Somme surpassed it both in numbers of men engaged, in the tactical difficulty of the objectives, and in its importance in the strategical scheme of the campaign. By what test are we to judge the result of a battle in modern war? In the old days of open fighting there was little room for doubt, since the retreat or rout or envelopment of the beaten army was too clear for argument. Now, when the total battle-front was 3,000

miles, such easy proofs were lacking; but the principle remained the same. A battle is final when it ends in the destruction of the enemy's fighting strength. A battle is won—and it may be decisively won—when it results in achieving the strategic purpose of one of the combatants, provided that purpose is, on military grounds, a wise one. Hence the amount of territory occupied and the number of important points captured are not necessarily sound criteria at all. The success or defeat of a strategic purpose, that is the sole test. Judging by this, Tannenberg was a victory for Germany, the Marne for France, and the First Battle of Ypres for Britain. The Battle of the Somme was no less a victory, since it achieved the purpose of the Allies.

In the first place, it relieved Verdun, and enabled Nivelle to advance presently to a conspicuous success. In the second place, it detained the main German forces on the Western Front. In the third place, it drew into the battle, and gravely depleted, the surplus man-power of the enemy, and struck a shattering blow at his *moral*. For two years the German behind the shelter of his trench-works and the great engine of his artillery had fought with comparatively little cost against opponents far less well equipped. The Somme put the shoe on the other foot, and he came to know what the British learned at Ypres and the French in Artois—what is meant to be bombarded out of existence, and to cling to shell-holes and the ruins of trenches under a pitiless fire. It was a new thing in his experience, and took the heart out of men who, under other conditions, had fought with skill and courage. Further, the Allies had dislocated his whole military machine. Their ceaseless pressure had crippled his Staff work, and confused the organization of which he had justly boasted.

The Battle of the Somme had, therefore, fulfilled the Allied purpose in taxing to the uttermost the German war machine. The place became a name of terror. Though belittled in communiqués, and rarely mentioned in the press, it was a word of ill-omen to the whole German people, that "bloodbath" to which many journeyed and from which few returned. Of what avail their easy conquests on the Danube when this deadly cancer in the West was eating into the vitals of the nation? Winter might give a short respite—though the Battle of the Ancre had been fought in winter weather—but spring would come, and the evil would grow malignant again. Germany gathered herself for a great effort, marshalling for compulsory war work the whole male population between seventeen and sixty, sending every man to the trenches who could walk on sound feet, doling out food supplies on the minimum scale for the support of life, and making desperate efforts by submarine warfare to cripple her enemies' strength. She was driven to stake her last resources on the game.

In every great action there is a major purpose, a reasoned and calculated purpose which takes no account of the accidents of fortune. But in most actions there come sudden strokes of luck which turn the scale. But in the elaborate and mechanical warfare of to-day they come rarely, and at the Battle of the Somme they did not fall to the lot of Foch or Haig. They did what they set out to do; step by step they drove their way through the German defences; but it was all done by hard and stubborn fighting, without any bounty from capricious fortune. Germany had claimed that her line was impregnable; they broke it again and again. She had counted on her artillery machine; they crippled and outmatched it. She had decried the fighting stuff of the new British armies; we showed that it was a match for her Guards and Brandenburgers. The major purpose was attained. Like some harsh and remorseless chemical, the waxing Allied energy was eating into the German waning mass. Its sure and methodical pressure had the inevitability of a natural law. It was attrition, but attrition in the acute form—not like the slow erosion of cliffs by the sea, but like the steady crumbling of a mountain to which hydraulic engineers have applied a mighty head of water. And it was a law of life and of war that the weakness of the less strong would grow *pari passu* with the power of the stronger.

CHAPTER XII

RETROSPECT OF 1916

Brussilov's Summer Offensive—Rumania overrun—Changes in French Command—Joffre surrenders his Command—Battle of Jutland—Death of Lord Kitchener—Fall of Government in Britain—Mr. Lloyd George Prime Minister—War Cabinet—Mr. Asquith.

I

In the course of the year no decisive events took place elsewhere. In the East, Brussilov won much, ground in the course of his great summer offensive, but his losses were very heavy, and he was not able to develop his success. As a result, however, of his success Falkenhayn was dismissed and Rumania brought in upon the Allied side. But Rumania met with early disaster. She was overrun by Mackensen, though this conquest merely served to add 250 miles to Germany's eastern front without corresponding advantage. For the rest, Townshend's army was compelled to surrender at Kut in April, and the Allies could do little or nothing in Mesopotamia.

In France, as a result of the year's events, great changes took place in the High Command. Foch was the first to suffer, and for several months the greatest of living soldiers was unemployed. Then the wave reached Joffre, and that robust figure was swept from his place. His unrelieved optimism had become a mannerism that palled; some said he was growing senile; it was rumoured, too, that he considered that France's great part in the war was over and that the main attacks must now be left to the British. So he relinquished the office of Generalissimo, which he had held since the outbreak of war, and was nominated military adviser to the new War Committee, being at the same time created a Marshal of France, the first holder of that famous title to be appointed by the Third Republic. Thus we must take leave of one of the most honourable and attractive figures that this narrative will reveal. The services of Joffre to his country and to the Allied cause had been beyond all computation, and in the history of the time his is one of the two or three names that will shine most brightly. To his skill and nerve and patience was due the triumph of the Marne, won when the skies were darkest, which destroyed for ever the German hope of victory. He had been, like Ajax, the pillar and shield of his people, and his rock-like figure

had held the confidence of his country since the guns first opened in Alsace. To him more than to any other man was due the superb military effort of France and her unyielding resolution. He had brilliant lieutenants, some of them his superiors in the technical accomplishments of a soldier, but his was always the deciding will and the directing brain.

He was succeeded by Nivelle, a much younger man, who had already won fame at Verdun.

II

On the naval side there befell one event which might have changed the destiny of the world. The British blockade, in spite of difficulties with the United States, had been steadily growing tighter, and the answering German submarine campaign more active. The Grand Fleet in Scottish waters gave little sign of life, nor that hidden behind the bulwark of Heligoland. But the British navy was winning without striking a blow. Besides the army in France, it and our merchant service were providing for four distant campaigns, and at the same time keeping Britain herself fed and supplied.

With the advent of Scheer to high command Germany changed her waiting tactics, and sought to isolate and destroy some portion of the British Grand Fleet. On 30th May it was clear that part of the German fleet had come out of port, and Beatty with his battle cruisers was ordered to sweep the eastern part of the North Sea, and then join Jellicoe, who with the Grand Fleet was moving in the north. A casual Danish merchantman drew out ships from both Hipper’s and Beatty’s battle-cruiser squadrons to inspect it, and so contact between the adversaries was brought about on the afternoon of 31st May.

Sir John Jellicoe, as early as October 1914, had taken into review the new conditions of naval warfare, and had worked out a plan to be adopted when he met the enemy’s fleet—a plan approved not only by his flag officers but by successive Admiralty Boards. The German aim, as he forecast it, would be to fight a retreating action, and lead him into an area where they could make the fullest use of mines, torpedoes, and submarines. He was aware of the weakness of his own fleet in destroyers and cruisers, and was resolved not to play the enemy’s game. A second principle was always in his thoughts, a principle derived from his view of the general strategy of the whole campaign, for Jellicoe had a wider survey than that of the professional sailor. It was no question of a partiality for the defensive rather than the offensive. The British Grand Fleet, in his view, was the pivot of the Allied strength. So long as it existed and kept the sea, it fulfilled its

purpose, it had already achieved its main task; if it were seriously crippled, the result would be the loss not of one weapon among many, but of the main Allied armoury. It was, therefore, the duty of a wise commander to bring the enemy to battle—but on his own terms; no consideration of purely naval results, no desire for personal glory, must be allowed to obscure the essential duty of his solemn trusteeship. The psychology of the Commander-in-Chief must be understood, for it played a vital part in the coming action.

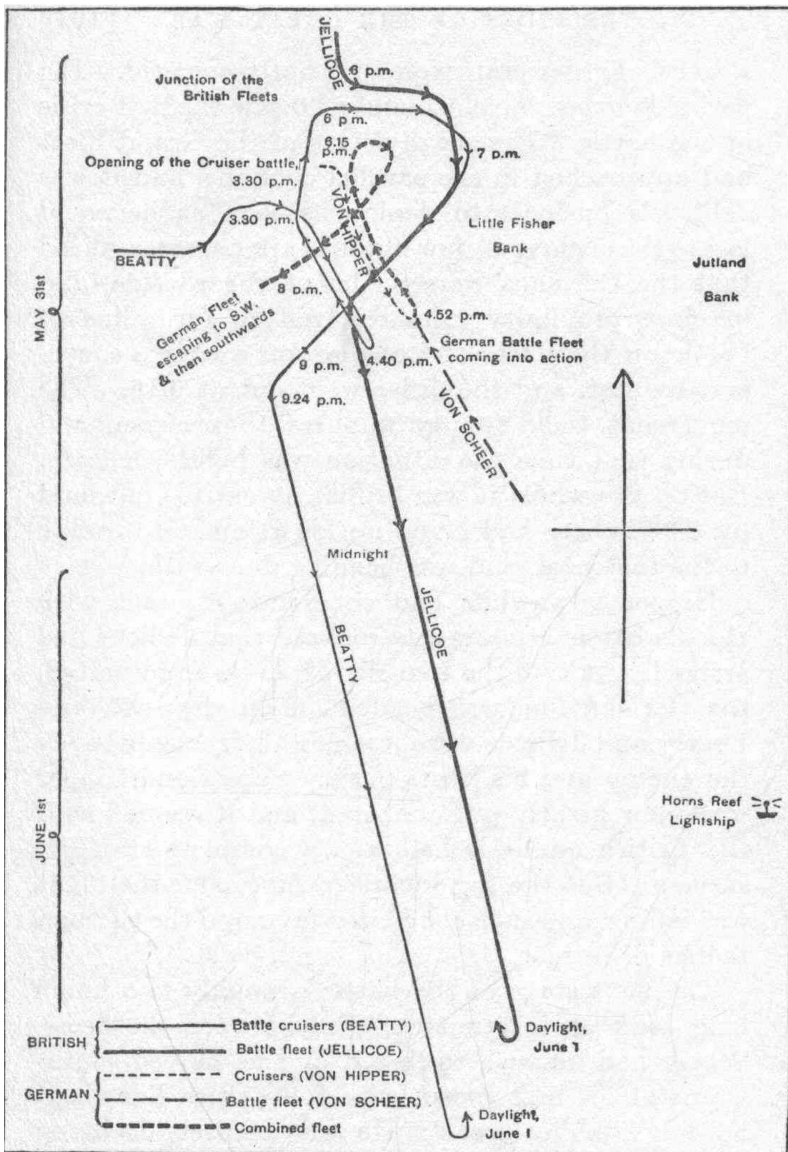
Of all human contests, a naval battle makes the greatest demands upon the resolution and gallantry of the men and the skill and coolness of the commanders. In a land fight the general may be thirty miles behind the line of battle, but the admiral is in the thick of it. He takes the same risks as the ordinary sailor, and, as often as not, his flagship leads the fleet. When Beatty received the signal telling him of Hipper's presence he had to make a momentous decision. The enemy was in all likelihood falling back upon his main Battle Fleet, and every mile the British admiral moved forward brought him nearer to an unequal combat. For the moment the odds were in his favour, since he had six battle cruisers against Hipper's five, as well as the 5th Battle Squadron, but presently the odds might be heavily against him. He was faced with the alternative of conducting a half-hearted running fight with Hipper, to be broken off before the German Battle Fleet was reached, or of engaging closely and hanging on even after the junction with Scheer had been made. He chose the course which was not only heroic, but right on every ground of strategy. Twice already by a narrow margin he had missed bringing the German capital ships to action. He was resolved that now he would forgo no chance which the fates might send.

Hipper was steering east-south-east in the direction of his base. Beatty changed his course to conform. He had at this time ten capital ships to the German's five. The omen seemed propitious. But in all battles there is a large element of sheer luck and naked caprice, and it was during this first stage, when he had the odds in his favour, that Beatty suffered his chief losses. The *Indefatigable* and *Queen Mary* were both lost. Meantime, as the great vessels raced southwards, the lighter craft were fighting a battle of their own. Eight destroyers of the Thirteenth Flotilla engaged the German destroyers in a torpedo attack. The gallantry of these smaller craft cannot be overpraised. That subsidiary battle, fought under the canopy of the duel of the greater ships, was one of the most heroic episodes of the action.

Presently the German Battle Fleet was reported ahead. Instantly Beatty recalled the destroyers, put his helm to port, and swung round to a northerly course. From the pursuer he had now become the pursued, and his aim was

to lead the combined enemy fleets towards Sir John Jellicoe. At 5.50 on his port bow he sighted British cruisers, and six minutes later had a glimpse of the leading ships of the Battle Fleet five miles to the north. He at once changed course to east and increased speed. He was forcing the enemy to a course on which Jellicoe might overwhelm him.

What a spectacle must that strange rendezvous have presented had there been any eye to see it as a whole! Two great navies on opposite courses at high speeds driving towards each other: the German unaware of what was approaching; the British Battle Fleet, mile upon mile of steel giants whose van was far out of sight of its rear, making contact almost by accident in a drift of smoke and sea-haze!



The details of what followed will no doubt be debated for centuries. The Grand Fleet, led by the Third Battle Cruiser Squadron, Rear-Admiral Hood, whose flagship, *Invincible*, was shortly afterwards to be sunk, made contact with the enemy, while Beatty's lighter craft were also hotly engaged. The period between 6 o'clock and 6.40 saw the first crisis of the battle. The six divisions of the Grand Fleet had approached in six parallel columns, and it was Jellicoe's business to deploy as soon as he could locate the enemy. A few minutes after six he realized that the Germans were on his starboard

side, and in close proximity; he resolved to form line of battle on the port wing column on a course south-east-by-east, and the order went out at 6.16. The movement took twenty minutes to perform, and during that time the situation was highly delicate. But on the whole it was brilliantly carried out, and by 6.38 Scheer had given up his attempt to escape to the eastward, and was bending due south.

Hipper meanwhile had come into contact with Hood's battle cruisers and realized that Jellicoe had arrived. At 6.40 the two British fleets were united, the German line was headed off on the east, and Beatty and Jellicoe were working their way between the enemy and his home ports. Scheer and Hipper were now greatly outnumbered, and it seemed as if the British admirals had won a complete strategic success. But the fog was deepening, and the night was falling, and such conditions favoured the German tactics of retreat.

The next stage of the battle—roughly two hours long—saw an intermittent duel between the fleets. Scheer had no wish to linger, and he moved southwards at his best speed, with the British line shepherding him on the east. He was definitely declining battle. Beatty had succeeded in crumpling up the head of the German line, and its battleships were now targets for the majority of his battle cruisers. The visibility was becoming greatly reduced. The mist no longer merely veiled the targets, but often shut them out altogether. This not only made gunnery extraordinarily difficult, but prevented the British from keeping proper contact with the enemy.

Hipper and his battle cruisers were in serious difficulties. From seven o'clock onward Beatty was steering south, and gradually bearing round to south-west and west, in order to get into touch with the enemy. At 7.14 (Scheer having ordered Hipper to close the British again) he sighted them at a range of 15,000 yards—three battle cruisers and two battleships of the *König* class. The sun had now fallen behind the western clouds, and at 7.18 Beatty increased speed to twenty-two knots, and reengaged. The enemy showed signs of great distress, one ship being on fire and one dropping astern. The destroyers at the head of the line emitted volumes of smoke, which covered the ships behind with a pall, and enabled them at 7.37 to turn away and pass out of Beatty's sight. At that moment he signalled Jellicoe, asking that the van of the battleships should follow the battle cruisers. At 7.58 the 1st and 3rd Light Cruiser Squadrons were ordered to sweep westwards and locate the head of the enemy's line, and at 8.20 Beatty altered course to west to support. He located three battleships, and engaged them at 10,000 yards range. The *Lion* repeatedly hit the leading ship, which turned

away in flames with a heavy list to port, while the *Princess Royal* set fire to one battleship, and the third ship, under the attack of the *New Zealand* and the *Indomitable*, hauled out of the line heeling over and on fire. Once more the mist descended and enveloped the enemy, who passed out of sight to the west.

To turn to the Battle Fleet, which had become engaged during deployment with the leading German battleships. It first took course south-east-by-east; but as it endeavoured to close it bore round to starboard. The aim of Scheer now was escape and nothing but escape, and every device was used to screen his ships from British sight. Owing partly to the smoke palls and the clouds emitted by the destroyers, but mainly to the mist, it was never possible to see more than four or five enemy ships at a time. Under the British attack the enemy constantly turned away, and this had the effect of bringing Jellicoe to a position of less advantage on the enemy's quarter. At the same time it put the British fleet between Scheer and his base. In the short periods, however, during which the Germans were visible, they received a heavy fire and were constantly hit. Some were observed to haul out of line, and at least one was seen to sink. The German return fire at this stage was poor, and the damage caused to our battleships was trifling. Scheer relied for defence chiefly on torpedo attacks, which were favoured by the weather and the British position. A following fleet can make small use of torpedoes, as the enemy is moving away from it; while the enemy, on the other hand, has the advantage in this weapon, since his targets are moving towards him. Many German torpedoes were fired, but the only battleship hit was the *Marlborough*, which was, happily, able to remain in line and continue the action.

[Imperial War Museum
ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

[Exclusive News Agency
ADMIRAL REINHARD VON SCHEER

At 7.15, when the range had been closed and line ahead finally formed, came the main torpedo attack by German destroyers. In order to frustrate what he regarded as the most serious danger, Jellicoe ordered a turn of two points to port, and presently a further two points, opening the range by about 1,750 yards. This caused a certain loss of time, and Scheer seized the occasion to turn well to starboard, with the result that contact between the battle fleets was presently lost. Jellicoe received Beatty's appeal at 7.54, and ordered the 2nd Battle Squadron to follow the battle cruisers. But mist and smokescreens and failing light were fatal hindrances to the pursuit, and even Beatty had soon to give up hope of sinking Hipper's damaged remnant.

By nine o'clock the enemy had completely disappeared, and darkness was falling fast. He had been veering round to a westerly course, and the whole British fleet lay between him and his home ports. It was a strategic situation which, but for the fog and the coming of night, would have meant his complete destruction. Sir John Jellicoe had now to make a difficult decision. It was impossible for the British fleet to close in the darkness in a sea swarming with torpedo craft and possibly with submarines, and accordingly he was compelled to make dispositions for the night which would ensure the safety of his ships and provide for a renewal of the action at dawn. For a night action the Germans were the better equipped as to their fire system, their recognition signals, and their searchlights, and he did not feel justified in presenting the enemy with a needless advantage. On this point Beatty, to the south and westward, was in full agreement. He informed Jellicoe of his position and the bearing of the enemy, and turned to the course of the Battle Fleet.

The night battle was waged on the British side entirely by the lighter craft. The German ships made good their escape, but they lost in the process out of all proportion to the British light craft. At earliest dawn on 1st June the British fleet, which was lying south and west of the Horn Reef, turned northwards to collect its light craft, and to search for the enemy. It was ready and eager to renew the battle, for it had still twenty-two battleships untouched, and ample cruisers and light craft, while Scheer's command was scarcely any longer a fleet in being. But there was to be no second "Glorious First of June," for the enemy was not to be found. He had slipped in single ships astern of our fleet during the night, and was then engaged in moving homewards like a flight of wild duck that has been scattered by shot. He was greatly helped by the weather, which at dawn on 1st June was thicker than the night before, the visibility being less than four miles. About 3.30 a.m. a Zeppelin passed over the British fleet, and reported to Scheer the position of the British squadrons. All morning till eleven o'clock Sir John Jellicoe waited on the battle-ground, watching the lines of approach to German ports, and attending the advent of the enemy. But no enemy came. "I was reluctantly compelled to the conclusion," wrote Sir John, "that the High Sea Fleet had returned into port." Till 1.15 p.m. the British fleet swept the seas, picking up survivors from some of our lost destroyers. After that hour waiting was useless, so the fleet sailed for its bases, which were reached next day, Friday, 2nd June. There it fuelled and replenished with ammunition, and at 9.30 that evening was ready for further action.

Jutland, the uncompromising details of which were at once published by the British Admiralty, did us no good, but it also did us little harm. In a fog of uncertainty Jellicoe handled the affair ably, and, if he was also cautious, such was not only the nature of the man but the essence of his policy. He could not have destroyed Scheer without taking risks which might have destroyed himself, and with him would have gone down the Allied cause. It was a war of peoples, and even the most resounding triumph at sea would not have ended the contest, while a defeat would have struck from the Allied hands the weapon on which all others depended. If it be argued that such considerations belong to statesmanship rather than to naval tactics, it may be replied that the commander of the British Grand Fleet must be statesman as well as seaman.

III

Following close upon the greatest naval fight of all history came the news of a sea tragedy which cost Britain the life of her foremost soldier. It had been arranged that Lord Kitchener should undertake a mission to Russia

to consult with the Russian commanders as to the coming Allied offensive, and to arrange certain details of policy concerning the supply of munitions. On the evening of Monday, 5th June, he and his party embarked in the cruiser *Hampshire*, which had returned three days before from the Battle of Jutland. About 8 p.m. that evening the ship sank in wild weather off the western coast of the Orkneys, having struck a mine in an unswept channel. Four boats left the vessel, but all were overturned. One or two survivors were washed ashore on the inhospitable coast; but of Kitchener and his colleagues no word was ever heard again.

The news of his death filled the whole Empire with profound sorrow, and the shock was felt no less by our Allies, who saw in him one of the chief protagonists of their cause. But in a sense his work was finished, for more than any other man he had the credit of building up that vast British force which was destined to be the determining factor in the war.

The last months had not been the happiest of his life. Many of the day by day problems which he found himself called upon to face were so unfamiliar to him that he handled them clumsily. He did not understand, nor was he understood by, certain of his colleagues. For politics in the ordinary sense he had no aptitude. On many matters he spoke with an uncertain voice, for he was not quick at comprehending mere matter of detail, and often his colleagues were driven to a justifiable irritation. But no man of his time enjoyed a completer public confidence, and he had won it without any of the arts of the demagogue. In the dark days of August 1914 he was the one man to whom the nation turned, and without the magic of his name Britain's stupendous military effort could not have been made. His death was a fitting conclusion to the drama of his life, since the great soldier of England found peace beneath the waves to which England had anew established her title. For epitaph let us set down words written of a very different figure, but applicable to all careers of splendid but unfinished achievement. "His work was done . . . all of his work for which the fates could spare him time. A little space was allowed him to show at least a heroic purpose, and attest a high design; then, with all things unfinished before him and behind, he fell asleep after many troubles and triumphs. Few can ever have gone wearier to the grave; none with less fear."

IV

During the autumn it was becoming obvious that the Coalition Government was rapidly sinking in public esteem.

It is probable that for many months the great majority of the people of Britain had been convinced that a change was necessary. Mr. Lloyd George, ever since in the preceding summer he had succeeded Lord Kitchener at the War Office, had been restless and uncomfortable. He found himself a secondary figure at the War Office; in the Cabinet, too, it appeared as if his influence was on the wane. His prestige, still high with the public at large, had sunk low in official and ministerial circles. Apart from the personal question, he was honestly convinced that the war was being ill managed both by the generals in the field and the statesmen at home, and longed to infuse into its conduct a fierier purpose. Mr. Lloyd George's scheme was for a very small War Committee of three members, of which the Prime Minister should not be one—a scheme not devised, as might appear at first sight, to compel Mr. Asquith's resignation, but a quite sincere attempt to get the actual direction of the war into more vigorous hands. But the Prime Minister, while agreeing to the small War Committee, not unnaturally refused thus to divest himself of the main duty of leadership.

But Mr. Lloyd George, and those in his full confidence, were determined that the Prime Minister's supremacy should be purely titular. A Press campaign followed. On the morning of Monday, 4th December, the *Times* printed a leading article insisting that the Prime Minister had to all intents abdicated from the control of the war. This move had an instantaneous effect. The Liberal Ministers rose in arms, and Mr. Asquith was compelled to insist that he must be permanent president of the War Committee. Mr. Lloyd George had therefore to burn his boats, and on the Tuesday announced his resignation. Mr. Asquith now took a step which seemed to be amply justified, but which in truth was fatal to his fortunes. He himself tendered his resignation. Counting on the support of the bulk of the Liberal and Unionist parties, he argued that it would be impossible for his malcontent colleague to form a Government. Fate seemed to have delivered Mr. Lloyd George into his hands. The King sent for Mr. Bonar Law, who, after taking a day and a night to think over it, declared himself unable to construct an administration, and advised His Majesty to summon Mr. Lloyd George. Mr. Lloyd George was accordingly sent for, and on the evening of 7th December kissed hands as Prime Minister.

A Government was formed. Thanks to the patriotic adherents of Mr. Balfour, who accepted the Foreign Office, the rest of the Unionist statesmen were brought in. Mr. Lloyd George's first task was to appoint a War Cabinet. He called to it Lord Milner and Mr. Arthur Henderson as Ministers without portfolios; Lord Curzon, the new President of the Council; and Mr. Bonar Law, the new Chancellor of the Exchequer; while he himself acted as its

chairman. This body of five was entrusted with all matters pertaining to the conduct of the war. Sir Edward Carson became First Lord of the Admiralty, and Lord Derby Secretary for War. All the Liberal Cabinet Ministers followed the late Prime Minister into retirement; but at a party meeting on 13th December, under the direction of Mr. Asquith, they pledged themselves to give Mr. Lloyd George’s administration a fair trial.

It may be thought that the manner of the change was ungracious. But as a race we are magnanimous and not careless of the decencies, and there was certainly an almost universal conviction that horses must be swopped however turbulent the stream. Moreover, a change of leaders in the course of a long struggle is the usual practice of nations, and the feeling had grown up that the old acts of political expertise were not only useless but sinister. The dapper political expert was as much in the shadow as the champion faro player in a western American township which has been visited by a religious revival. It was no question of political creed. It was the reaction of the plain man, plunged into a desperate crisis, against the sleek standards of a vanished world.

Lastly, there was that in the temperament and talents of the Prime Minister himself upon which the nation had begun to look coldly. His great ability no man could question. But he left on the ordinary mind the impression that he thought more of argument than of action. But history will not let his remarkable services go unacclaimed. In August 1914 he had led the nation in the path of honour and political wisdom. No man had stated more eloquently the essential principles for which Britain fought, or held to them more resolutely. And if his optimism had at times an unfortunate effect, there can be little doubt that his steady nerve, coolness, and patience did much to keep an even temper in the people during days of disappointment and darkness. He departed from office with the dignity that he had worn in power, and he behaved throughout in all respects not as a party chief but as a patriot. History will see in him a great debater, a great parliamentarian, a great public servant, and a great gentleman.

BOOK III

THE GREAT SALLIES

CHAPTER XIII

THE OPENING OF 1917

German Manœuvres for Peace—President Wilson’s Note—The New Government in Britain—The Russian *Coup d’État*—Lenin and Others—America declares War.

I

With the coming of 1917 a great change came over the scene. Up till now the campaign had been fought on data which were familiar and calculable. The material and human strength of each belligerent was known, and the *moral* of each was confidently assessed. But suddenly new factors had appeared out of the void, and what had seemed solid ground became sand and quagmire. It was the old Europe which had waged war up till now. But with the year 1917 a new Europe was coming into being, in which nothing could be taken for granted. Everywhere in the world there was the sound of things breaking.

It was in half-conscious realization of this change that Germany made her first clumsy overtures towards peace. Her first motive was prudential. The tide of her success had long ago begun to turn, and she wished to arrest the ebb while yet there was time. Deeply embarrassed as she was, she still occupied much foreign territory, which might be used in bargaining. The Battle of the Somme had shown her that her military machine was being strained to breaking-point; once it broke all would be over, and at any cost that catastrophe must be averted. Her overtures were made also with an eye to the neutral states, notably America. To win the goodwill of neutrals, even if nothing more were gained, would be an immense advantage for Germany, for there lay her one hope of reconstruction. Finally, she was thinking of her own people. Here would be proof, if proof were needed, that the guilt of beginning the war did not lie on Germany; and that, though victorious, she refused to take the responsibility of continuing it. The Emperor was a prince of peace as well as a lord of battles.

Action which proceeds from many mixed and conflicting motives is likely to be a blunder. The German peace offer was no exception to the rule. The impression left on men’s minds by the German overtures was one of maladroitness carried to the pitch of genius. The Note began by emphasizing

the “indestructible strength” of Germany and her allies. It explained that this strength was used only to defend their existence and the freedom of their natural development, and all their many victories had not changed this purpose. They asked for peace negotiations at which they would bring forward proposals “which would aim at assuring the existence, honour, and free development of their peoples, and would be such as to serve as a basis for the restoration of a lasting peace.” No hint was given of what such proposals would be. The design was too obvious to deceive any but the slenderest and most perverse section of Allied opinion. On 30th December the French Government communicated to the United States Ambassador in Paris a formal answer, signed by all the Allies. The document expounded most temperately but most clearly the illusory nature of Germany’s proposal.

Close on the heels of the German overture came another Note of a very different kind. Mr. Wilson, elected President for a second term of office, and with a great majority of the American people behind him, decided to clear up the situation by asking the belligerents to define their war aims. The German submarine campaign was rapidly making the lot of neutrals unbearable. Elected as a peace-President, he must be able to justify himself fully to his people if he were forced into a course which was not pacific. He felt that the compulsion of events was forcing him in the direction of war. He wished to point this out to the world, for it might have a restraining and sobering effect on the combatants. The Note, which was presented on 18th December, had no relation to the German peace proposals. It was written, in part at any rate, before the Emperor’s move, and, as we have seen, was a necessary consequence of Mr. Wilson’s new position. “The President is not proposing peace,” so ran the conclusion; “he is not even offering mediation. He is merely proposing that soundings be taken in order that we may learn, the neutral nations with the belligerents, how near the haven of peace may be for which all mankind longs with an intense and increasing longing.”

The purpose of the Note was not at first detected among the Allied peoples. The Allied Governments judged more wisely. They saw Mr. Wilson’s purpose. They realized that he was being forced towards a breach with Germany, and that he must make certain in his own mind and the mind of his people that the cause for which the Allies fought was consistent with American ideals. Accordingly they received his Note with a true appreciation of its meaning, and patiently and temperately set forth their answer. In the friendliest spirit they declined to state their aims in detail since these could not be formulated until the hour for negotiations arrived. But they associated themselves wholeheartedly with the project of a League

of Nations of which the President wrote. The American Note met with no response from Germany.

There come moments in the middle of any great toil when it is desirable for the good of the toiler's soul that he straighten his back and look round. *Respice finem* is the best traveller's maxim. Without a constant remembrance of the goal the pilgrim may find the rough places impassable, and will be prone to stray from the road. The value of Mr. Wilson's intervention was that it caused the Allies to reflect upon the deeper purpose of the war. It emphasized the essential idealism of their cause, which had become dim in many minds from that preoccupation with detail which a desperate contest induces. For the remainder of the war the question of ultimate aims was to be canvassed unceasingly, and every Ally had to examine herself and discover her soul in the quest for a common denominator of purpose.

II

Britain under her new Prime Minister was the only one of the Allies who had now attained something resembling unity in the direction of the war. The new Ministry entered upon office faced by a host of vexatious and intricate problems. Such questions as the need of men and food supplies required heroic measures. But it had one clear advantage. It had been accepted by the people as a Government of action, and the country at large was prepared to make any effort which it should direct. It was in the eyes of most men a "business Government," an executive committee of the whole nation. Hence when, in his first speech in the House of Commons on December 19, 1916, the new Prime Minister sketched a programme of large and drastic measures, his demands were willingly granted. He asked that every available acre should be used for the production of food, and that the over-consumption of the rich should be cut down to the compulsory level of the poor. He proposed a system of immediate national service for war. He announced that the Government would complete their control over mines and shipping.

The linch-pin of the coach was the Prime Minister himself, and with his accession to the highest place the world became more fully cognizant of one of the most remarkable and potent figures in modern history. His pre-war record had shown that he had unsurpassed demagogic talents, and that rarer gift, a sense of political atmosphere. He might err in his ultimate judgments, but rarely in his immediate intuitions; if his strategy was often erroneous, his tactics were seldom at fault. His interest was not in doctrine but in life, and

his quick sense of reality made him at heart an opportunist—one who loved the persistency of facts, and was prepared to select, if need be, from the repertory of any party. This elasticity, combined with his high political courage, rendered him even in his bitterest campaigns not wholly repugnant to his opponents. He was always human, and had nothing of the dogmatic rigidity, the lean spiritual pride of the elder Liberalism.

In December 1916 Mr. Lloyd George was but partially revealed to his countrymen and to the world, but enough was known to make it clear that he had great assets for the task. He was a born coalitionist, sitting always loose to parties; a born war minister, for strife was his element; and a born leader of a democracy. Of democracy, indeed, both in its strength and weakness, he was more than a representative—he was a personification. He had its fatal facility in general ideas, its sentimentality, its love of picturesque catchwords; and he had also its incongruous realism in action. Perhaps his supreme merit as a popular leader was his comprehensibility. No atmosphere of mystery surrounded his character or his talents. This power of producing a sense of intimacy among millions who have never seen his face or heard his voice is the greatest of assets for a democratic statesman, and Mr. Lloyd George had it not only for Britain but for all the world. He was a living figure everywhere—as well known in France as M. Briand, an intelligible character in America as much as Mr. Roosevelt or Mr. Wilson. A reputation such as Mr. Balfour's or Mr. Asquith's was a local thing which grew dim beyond the seas; but Mr. Lloyd George's was like an electric current whose strength was scarcely lessened by transmission over great distances. When he spoke he was understood by the whole round earth. As the months passed critics were to be found to depreciate his wisdom, his honesty, even his valour, but no man ever denied his vitality. He was exhilarated rather than depressed by misfortunes, even though he might be also a little frightened. His strength was that he overflowed at all times with zest and interest and passion. He was above all things the inspirer and comforter of the nation through the medium of the spoken word. His oratory in an ordinary way was homely, vigorous, and effective, but there were moments when it became poetry, a rare and exquisite music which lingered on the air like an old song, and transformed the dusty arena of politics as a sunset transfigures a dingy landscape. And because it was poetry its appeal was world-wide, for true poetry knows no frontiers of race or tongue.

The machinery which the Prime Minister had announced on his accession to office, the War Cabinet, worked on the whole well. This body of five men, with Mr. Lloyd George at its head, showed courage and energy in dealing with foreign and internal problems. The heaviest tasks fell upon

two men. One was Lord Milner and the other General Smuts, who in a certain kind of informal diplomacy was without equal, and was in consequence sometimes saddled with preposterous missions.

Another of Mr. Lloyd George's first acts was to create a number of new departments—Shipping Control, National Service, Food Control, Pensions—which were not branches of old departments, but directly responsible to the War Cabinet itself. Further—most vital innovation of all—a War Conference of the British Empire was called for the early spring. This conference took the form of a temporary enlargement of the War Cabinet, the Dominions Prime Ministers or their representatives and the Indian delegates being included for the purpose in its membership. Upon the occasion of this conference Mr. Lloyd George said, "Of this I am certain: the peoples of the Empire will have found a unity in the war such as never existed before it—a unity not only in history but of purpose. . . . Do you tell me that the peoples who have stood together and staked everything in order to bring about the liberation of the world are not going to find some way of perpetuating that unity afterwards on an equal basis?"

III

The first of the old things to die was the Tsarist régime in Russia. A *coup d'état*, supported by most of the troops, ended on March 16, 1917, with the abdication of the Tsar and the establishment of a provisional Government.

The fall of the Emperor was received among the Allies with a divided mind. Even those who acclaimed the revolution, and recognized the inadequacy of the Imperial rule, could not view without some natural regret the fate of a man who since the first day of the war had been scrupulously loyal to the Alliance; who, as was proved by his initiation of the Hague conferences, had many generous and far-sighted ideals; and who, on the admission of all who knew him, was in character mild, courteous, and humane. Moreover, in the West there is always a lingering sentiment for disinherited kings—a sentiment sprung of that intense historic imagination which is the birthright of France and Britain. *Il garde au cœur les richesses stériles d'un grand nombre de rois oubliés.* Hence it was with some surprise that Western observers watched the utter eclipse of that Tsardom, which they had been taught to regard as something intertwined with the fibre of Russian folk-thought and religion. But among a people so heterogeneous and so little integrated by a common educational standard, such sudden reversals of thought were not unnatural. The Russian mind remained as before, loyal to its own peculiar mysticism, but the ideal of a thing called liberty could

supplant with ease the ideal of a paternal king. A race which had so little visualizing power among its mental furniture was not the stuff of which impassioned royalists were made. The House of Romanov may be said in one sense to have deserved its fate. It had allowed itself to become an anachronism in the modern world, a mediæval fragment in line neither with the blundering German absolutism nor with the freedom of the Western peoples.

A revolution may at the outset be the work of many; but its establishment is usually the task of one man—a Cæsar, a Cromwell, a Napoleon. Among the extremists there was no such man, for in the nature of things he must not be extreme; he may dream dreams and see visions, but he must have an iron hand and a clear eye for realities. One figure alone seemed to stand out from the others—a young man barely thirty-five, the son of a Siberian schoolmaster, hitherto an obscure Petrograd lawyer, and a somewhat flamboyant orator in Labour circles. His haggard white face and melancholy eyes showed his bodily frailty, and indeed he was one who walked very close to death. In the first stage of the revolution Alexander Kerenski played boldly. As Prime Minister of a Provisional Government he flung all his energies into a great Russian offensive. But he was soon to learn that it was against the war that the revolution was aimed. The last Russian attack of 1st July failed miserably. Discipline had gone from the army, and under Austro-German counter-attacks the front became a rabble.

The tale is too pitiful to linger over. The brethren of the men who had conquered at Rava Russka and Przasnysz, who had carried out the greatest retreat in history, who had fought with clubs and fists and sword-bayonets when they had no rifles—whose resolution no weight of artillery could daunt, and whose ardour no privations could weaken—who had come in their simple hardihood to the pinnacle of human greatness—had now sunk into a mob of selfish madmen, forgetful of their old virtues, and babbling of uncomprehended pedantries. In their retreat they looted, ravished, and murdered with hideous barbarity. Most pitiful was the case of those who still remained true to their salt, and were shot or trodden down by the panic-stricken and drunken horde, and of officers, who loved their men like children, and saw their life's work ruined, and themselves engulfed in a common shame. No great thing, it is true, can wholly fail. The exploits of Russia during the first years of war can never die. Their memory must beyond doubt revive to be a treasure and an inspiration for the Russia yet to be. But at the moment to Brussilov's heart-broken captains, striving during those awful July days to stay the rout in the Galician valleys, it seemed that

a horror of great darkness had fallen upon the world, and that the best life-blood of their country had been idly shed.

After the *débâcle* events moved swiftly. All revolutions have certain, features in common. In all there is the same blotting out of the past, the same confidence that the world can be started anew with a clean sheet. In all there is the same orgy of dishevelled idealism. The future of a revolution depends upon the shaping elements which it may contain of a new discipline. Here lay the fatal weakness of Russia's condition. There was no such discipline, for her Revolution had come not from the burning inspiration of a new faith, but from sheer weariness. She had lost nerve and heart. She was tired in mind and body. Moreover the orientalism which is in the Russian nature revealed itself in a curious bonelessness in the presence of urgent needs. The majority cared too little to exert themselves. They were like Leonidas and his sister in Tchekov's *Cherry Orchard*, always waiting in the face of desperate crises for something to turn up. They might be willing to die for their faith, but they would not act for it.

Obviously there were immense difficulties in the way of producing in Russia, as the immediate child of the Revolution, any kind of constitutional Government, and especially a Government still able to continue the war by the Allies' side. The frontiers were open, and German propagandists in different guises were busy among the workmen and soldiers. They had a simple *rôle* to play, for they had only to tell the people what they wanted to hear—that it was folly to fight longer, and that her Western Allies were the true foes of Russia, since they sought to force her to remain in the war. The result was soon apparent not only in the rapid demoralization of the Russian army, but in the hostility which began to grow up to all the Allies, and especially to Britain.

There had begun, too, to return to their native land a number of outlaws who had long been in exile. These men were assisted by Germany, and among them was Vladimir Ulianov, famous to the world as Lenin, who was to become the outstanding figure of the Bolshevik sect which dominated the Revolution. A portrait gallery of the chief Bolshevik figures would not reveal many examples of manly beauty. Lenin himself was a plump little man, with a high bulbous forehead, a snub nose, and a bald head—the perfect *petit bourgeois* except for his steely grey eyes. He was a scion of a respectable house in the Simbirsk district, who, after his elder brother's death on the gallows for complicity in a Nihilist plot, had become an active leader in revolutionary propaganda. From 1900 onwards he was in Switzerland, where he created the extreme left wing of the Social

Democrats. The others were lesser people, but sufficiently formidable as carrion birds to prey on a dying nation. Trotski, son of a Kherson chemist, had some claim to second place.

What did this strange group of outcasts seek? They were Marxists, but not orthodox Marxists, for they claimed a right to a free interpretation of their master. Capitalism was to disappear, and in the single-class community the co-operation of all would take the place of exploitation by the few. But before the unfeatured desert of their ideal could be attained rough places must be crossed, and the method must be a temporary dictatorship, the dictatorship of the workers, till capitalists and bourgeois were forcibly eliminated—converted or destroyed. Toleration was unthinkable, a synonym for weakness: the majority rule of democracy was equally impossible, for communists would never be a majority till they had purged the State by civil war. They were resolved to simplify society with the knife; a small elect minority, they would force the rest to do their bidding, because they were prepared to go to any lengths of terror and crime. It was class-rule carried to its logical conclusion, and murder exalted to be a normal function of the State. In this nightmare certain categories of Western thought made unholy alliance with the dark fatalism and the ancient cruelties of the East.

IV

Another thing there was that broke—the patience of America.

The initial atrocities in Belgium and France had induced in the greater part of the educated class in America the conviction that Germany was a menace to civilization. But such a conviction was still far removed from the feeling that America was called on to play an active part in the war. Then came the sinking of the *Lusitania*, and the preposterous demand that America should surrender her right of free travel by sea. When on May 4, 1916, Germany grudgingly promised that ships should not be sunk without warning, it seemed as if the controversy was settled. But meantime two currents of opinion in America had been growing in volume. One was the desire to make this war the last fought under the old bad conditions of national isolation, to devise a League to Enforce Peace, which would police the world on behalf of international justice. Of such ideals Mr. Wilson was a declared champion. The second was the conviction that this war was in very truth America’s war; that the Allies were fighting for America’s interests, the greatest of which was the maintenance of public right. When Mr. Wilson cleared the air by his demand for war aims he saw very clearly that America’s hour was drawing nigh. Soon the essential differences between

the two countries was to leap into blinding clarity. For on 31st January Germany tore up all her former promises, and informed Washington that she was about to enter upon an unrestricted submarine campaign. The Rubicon had been reached, and there could be no turning back. The German Ambassador was handed his passports on 3rd February, and Mr. Gerard summoned from Berlin. On the same day the President announced to both Houses of Congress the severance of diplomatic relations with Germany.

What he contemplated was an armed neutrality which should stop short of war. An order was given for the arming of American merchant ships. A week later came overt acts of war on Germany's part. Five American ships were sunk within a short space of time with heavy loss of life. The defiance was flagrant and unmistakable. The feeling against Germany rose to fever heat. At last the country was ripe for the final step. The special session of Congress was advanced by a fortnight, and on 2nd April Mr. Wilson asked it for a declaration of war. Under the American Constitution the right to declare war lay with Congress. The President's message was received with stormy enthusiasm by the audience which listened to it, and a thrill of assent ran through the length and breadth of the land. The debate in the two Houses revealed a preponderant weight of opinion for war.

The entrance of America into the war on the Allied side meant an immediate increase of strength in certain vital matters. She was the greatest workshop on earth, and the high mechanical talent of her people was invaluable in what was largely a war of engineers. She had immense wealth to put into the common stock. She had a powerful fleet. Her army was small, but its officers were among the most highly trained in the world, and her reserves of man-power gave her the chance of almost unlimited expansion. It would be some time before she could make her potential strength actual, but in the meantime she solved the worst financial difficulties of the Allies, and her accession made ultimate victory something more than probable. Like her cousins of Britain, she was a nation slow to move, but on the path she had chosen she would walk resolutely to the end of the journey. Her coming seemed to make victory all but certain, and the right kind of victory. For she entered upon war not for any parochial ends, but for the reorganization of the world's life on a sane basis.

There was, however, a considerable danger during these months which might have condemned the Allies to defeat before the power of America could be felt. The submarine became the most potent single weapon of war. During the summer and autumn of 1916, the range of Germany's underwater craft had been extended and their numbers largely increased. She had made

up her mind that at all costs she must deal a final blow to her main enemy if she were to avoid a general defeat. She believed that the economic condition of Britain was very grave, and that by a mighty effort she might force starvation upon that people, cripple their military effort, and bring them to their senses. The end of April was popularly fixed as the limit of British endurance under this new attack; then it was postponed to August; but May passed and August came, and there was no sign of yielding. To that extent Germany's gamble failed. Nevertheless, the situation was sufficiently grave. From the beginning of the war till February 1, 1917, we had lost some four and a half million tons to the enemy; we lost approximately that amount in the first seven months of the new submarine warfare. At this rate the Allied tonnage would presently be reduced to a point which would forbid not only the decent provisioning of the civilian peoples at home, but the maintenance of the armies at the fighting fronts. To meet the menace, five lines of policy must be pursued concurrently. All unnecessary imports from overseas must be firmly checked. Home production, both of food and of raw materials such as ores and timber, must be immensely increased. New tonnage must be built, or borrowed where it could be had. Existing merchant shipping must be protected as far as possible by escorts and by the organization of convoys. Finally, a truceless war must be waged against the U-boats, in the hope that the point would be reached when we could sink them faster than Germany could build them.

British statesmen made earnest appeals to their countrymen, and met with a willing response. By the early summer of 1917 Great Britain had grown into one vast market garden, and every type of citizen had become an amateur food-producer. There were periodic shortages of certain articles of diet, and the supply of certain imported materials, such as pulp for paper-making, steadily declined. But on the whole the British people showed an adaptability in the crisis with which their best friends had scarcely credited them. The shipbuilding programmes were enlarged and speeded up. The convoy system, opposed at the start by the whole merchant service, was successful, and in the Atlantic presently gave good results. As for our offensive against the submarine, it proceeded slowly but surely, by a multitude of devices the tale of which cannot be told in this place. Our system of naval intelligence was perfected, and our aircraft became deadly weapons both for the detection and destruction of the German craft. The enemy losses increased slightly during the first quarter of the year; during the second quarter they rose more sharply; and after June the curve mounted steeply.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BATTLE OF ARRAS

German Withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line—Battle of Arras—Failure of Nivello’s Offensive—Pétain succeeds Nivelle—French Mutinies.

I

In November 1916 a conference at Chantilly had laid down the French and British plans for the coming year. It was agreed that the main burden must fall on the British Army. The chief effort was to be an attack by it north of the Somme, and by the French south of the Oise, with a subsidiary movement in Champagne, to be followed in the summer by a British advance towards the enemy bases on the Belgian coast. But in the meantime Joffre had been superseded by Nivelle, and Nivelle had other plans. He decided to confine Haig to the Arras region, and to deliver himself a mighty assault on the Aisne plateau. His purpose was not a series of methodical advances, but a complete breakthrough and a limitless pursuit. Haig and Pétain were sceptical, but he secured the approval of the two Governments, for to the civilians this seemed to be at any rate something more hopeful than the weary *guerre d’usure*. For the coming operations Haig and his army were put in a quasi-subordinate position to Nivelle. Such an arrangement had little to recommend it, for Haig could not rid himself of responsibility to his own Government, and the British War Cabinet reserved the right to interfere.

Germany, however, intervened to dislocate Nivelle’s plan. Ludendorff, aware of his diminishing man-power, set himself to reorganize his armies, and to prepare the way for that victory on land which he believed must follow the submarine triumph. Across the chord of his great salient in the West from Lens to Rheims he built a gigantic series of defences, which were named after the heroes of German mythology, and which Britain knew as the Hindenburg Line. Then he withdrew his front towards it, devastating all the area relinquished.

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GENERAL HELMUTH VON MOLTKE

[Exclusive News Agency

GENERAL ERICH VON LUDENDORFF

By the beginning of the second week of March the Allies were conscious of a general movement in the enemy lines everywhere between the Aisne and Arras. On the morning of 17th March the Allied commanders, French and British, ordered a general forward movement on a front of forty-five miles. The movement was, indeed, greater, for it embraced virtually the whole line from Arras to north of Soissons—seventy miles as the crow flies, well over one hundred if the sinuosities of the front trenches were followed. The next few days revealed to our soldiers some of the most surprising sights of the campaign. They were beyond the old tortured battlefield, with its infinite ramification of trenches. Henceforward, up to the new Siegfried Line, there was open country. The fields were not pitted with shell-holes; the trees were not splintered into matchwood; the villages had not been levelled by the Allied artillery. But the enemy himself in falling back had made a great destruction, destroying roads, mining certain areas, levelling buildings which might give billets to the Allies, cutting down woods which could afford cover. Every house in town and hamlet had been looted of all goods that could be removed, and what could not be taken away had been smashed up or defiled. During those days the Allies had literally to grope their way forward. They were advancing, over country in which all means of communication had been destroyed, against an enemy whose armies were still intact. Strong detachments of his infantry and cavalry occupied points of advantage along the line of advance; his guns, which had been withdrawn to prepared positions, were available at any moment to cover and support a sudden counter-stroke, while the broken country made the progress of the Allied artillery slow. He had a most formidable defensive system, upon which he could fall back should his counter-stroke miss its aim; while the

Allies, as they moved forward, left prepared defences farther and farther behind them. The position craved wary walking, and those were anxious days for the Allied High Commands. Their cavalry felt their way gingerly through a country full of unknown perils. The infantry behind them prepared, as they advanced, successive lines of resistance in the event of a counter-attack. Behind them, again, the engineers and labour battalions did wonderful work in restoring roads and bridges and pushing on light railways, so that presently the difficulties of the old battlefield were conquered.

The retreat of the Germans was, all things considered, a brilliant performance; but scarcely less brilliant was the work of the Allies, which nipped in the bud the counter-stroke that had been one object of that retreat. By 5th April the Allies were almost everywhere in front of the Siegfried Line which the enemy believed to be impregnable. It was obvious that he would fight desperately for all parts of it, but especially for the pivots on which its security depended. These pivots were the positions about Arras in the north, and those in the south around Laon and the Chernin des Dames.

II

The eyes of the Allied generals were fixed on the pivots, and Britain’s concern was that northern one where, at the hamlet of Tilloy-lez-Mofflaines, the Siegfried Line branched off from the old front. Between that point and Lens the original lines were very strong, consisting of three main systems, each constructed on the familiar pattern of four parallel lines of trenches, studded with redoubts, and linked up with numerous switches. A special and very powerful switch line ran for five and a half miles from the village of Feuchy northward across the Scarpe to beyond Thelus, and so constituted what was virtually a fourth line of defence. The whole defensive belt was from two to five miles deep; but the German Command were not content with it. They had designed an independent line running from Drocourt, south-east of Lens, to the Siegfried Line at Quéant, which should be an alternative in case of an assault on the Arras salient. But at the beginning of April this position, which was to become famous as the Drocourt-Quéant line, was not yet completed. It was intended as a protection for Douai and Cambrai, the loss of which would have made the whole Siegfried system untenable. But it was designed only *pro majore cautela*, for there was every confidence in the mighty ramified defences between Lens and Tilloy, and in the resisting power of the northern Siegfried sector.

The plan devised at Chantilly in November 1916 had, as we have seen, to be wholly recast, in view of the different policy and the enlarged powers of the new French Commander-in-Chief, and the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line. The position now was that the Arras attack, which Haig had regarded as only a preparation for the main campaign in Flanders, became the principal task of the British army during the first half of 1917. This action, at the same time, was conceived as a movement subsidiary to the greater effort of the French in the south. It was admittedly an attack in a region where, except for an unexampled piece of fortune, good strategic results could scarcely be obtained. The success of the British depended on what the French could do on the Aisne. If the latter failed, then the former, too, must fail in the larger strategic sense, however valuable might be certain of their local gains. If, however, Nivelle succeeded, the pressure from Arras in the north would beyond doubt greatly contribute to the enemy's discomfiture. The danger of the whole plan was that the issue might be indeterminate, and the fighting at Arras so long protracted, without any decisive success, that the chances of the more vital Flanders offensive later in the summer might be imperilled. This, as we shall see, was precisely what happened.

Haig had a formidable problem before him. The immediate key of the area was Vimy ridge, the capture of which was necessary to protect the flank of any advance farther south. It was clear that no strategic result could be obtained unless the Drocourt-Quéant switch was breached, and that meant an advance of well over six miles. But this position was still in the making; and, if the fates were kind, and the first three German systems could be carried at a rush, there was good hope that the Drocourt-Quéant line would never be manned, and that the drive of the British, assisted by the great French attack on the Aisne, might bring them to Douai and Cambrai. It was a hope, but no more. A result so far-reaching demanded a combination of fortunate chances, which as yet had not been vouchsafed to us in any battle of the campaign.

The British front of attack was slightly over twelve miles long, from Givenchy-en-Gohelle in the north to a point just short of Croisilles in the south. In the third week of March a systematic cutting of the enemy's wire began, and our heavy artillery shelled his back areas and communications. About Wednesday, 4th April, the British guns woke along the whole sector. There was a steady bombardment of all the enemy positions, more especially the great fortress of the Vimy ridge. Wonderful counter-battery work was done, and battery after battery of the enemy was put out of action, located partly by direct observation from the air, and partly by our new

device for sound identification. These were days of clear, cold spring weather, with the wind in the north-east, and from dawn to dark our airplanes fought a mighty battle on their own account. In the history of air-fighting that week must rank as an epoch, for it was a last desperate struggle on the enemy's part to defend his side of the line against our encroaching supremacy. It was a week of heavy losses, for at all costs the foe must be blinded, and the British airmen kept up one continuous offensive.

Zero hour was 5.30 on the morning of Easter Monday. At the appointed moment the British guns broke into such a fire as had been yet seen on no battle-ground on earth. It was the first hour of the Somme repeated, but a hundredfold more awful. As our men went over the parapets they felt as if they were under the protection of some supernatural power, for the heaven above them was one canopy of shrieking steel. There were now no enemy front trenches; soon there were no second-line trenches; only a hummocky waste of craters and broken wire. Within forty minutes all the German first position was captured, and our men were moving steadily against the second, while our barrage crept relentlessly before them. On the left wing the Canadians with a bound reached the crest of Vimy, and swarmed on to the tableland from which the ground fell away to the flat industrial area between Lens and Douai. Before nine o'clock all the Vimy ridge was ours, except its northern corner and the high point marked Hill 145. By 9.30 the whole of the German second position had fallen, except a short length west of Bailleul. By the evening the Feuchy switch line had now gone, and the enemy front had been utterly destroyed. He had no prepared position short of the Drocourt-Quéant line, and that was still in the making.

But the weather was on his side. The ground was sodden, and our guns took time to bring up. He was holding it with machine guns in pockets, which prevented the use of cavalry for what was the true duty of cavalry. Had we possessed a light type of tank in reasonable numbers the rout could have been made complete. As it was, there was no chance of a dramatic *coup de grâce*. The infantry could only push forward slowly and methodically, and complete their capture of the German third position.

Altogether in the three days something over 12,000 prisoners and 150 guns were captured, and the guns were speedily turned into British weapons. But no victory can truly be measured by booty, and the essence of the achievement lay in the breach made in the German wall. It was an undeniable breach, the thing we had hoped for at Loos and on two occasions during the Somme. But it was a breach of which full use could not be made. Modern war is so intricate that against an enemy with a proper equipment it

must be slow. The lightning dash is forbidden, since the speed of an advance is the speed of its slowest unit—the guns and their munitionment. Cavalry could not be used as in old days, since a machine-gun outpost could frustrate any cavalry action, and the true weapon, the tank, had not yet been perfected. The first days of the Battle of Arras confirmed in their views those who had always held that on the Western Front there could be no short-cut to success.

Meanwhile, Monday, 16th April, saw the great French attack on the southern part of the Siegfried Line. Its success fell far short of the hopes of its commanders, and it was incumbent on Haig to press his advance towards Douai and Cambrai in order to divert the enemy strength from the Aisne heights. So far as the British armies were concerned, their main task was finished, and their duty now was subsidiary—to distract the enemy from Nivelle rather than to win their own special objectives.

Two tasks now lay before the British Commander-in-Chief. He had to continue his efforts in the Arras area, partly to ease the pressure on the new French positions on the Aisne, partly in order that, when the time came for breaking off the battle in this sector, he should be able to leave his front in a favourable position for future operations. Likewise he had to prepare for that great assault upon the German right wing in Flanders which he had long ago determined should be the main British enterprise of the summer.

The fighting of May was, therefore, in a different category from that of April. The initial impetus had gone, the main strategical end had not been attained, and, as during the last phase of the Somme, it was an affair of local offensives and limited objectives.

Nivelle's plan had been to force the Aisne heights in one bold assault from west, south, and south-east; at the same moment to carry the Rheims heights from the north; and simultaneously to launch his centre through the gap between the two into the plain of Laon. Next day a fresh army would attack the Moronvillers *massif* to distract the German counter-attack, and protect his own right flank. In the centre he would use the new French tanks—machines less stout and solid than the British, but believed to possess greater speed. The plan was doomed from the start. In the first place, it was not the culmination of an arpeggio of attack, as had been proposed; for Franchet d'Esperey, who attacked on 14th April near St. Quentin, failed utterly, being brought up sharp against the strongest part of the Siegfried defences. In the second place, the scheme was known in full detail to the enemy. Never was a defence more amply forewarned. In the third place, the aim which Nivelle set before himself demanded forces in the perfection of

physical and moral well-being—an army of "shock-troops"; and the French armies were weary, dispirited, out of temper, doubtful of their leader, and in the mood to listen to treasonable tales. Small blame to them, for they had been too highly tried. But, even had there been none of these attendant misfortunes, the plans of the French general would still have been open to censure. He proposed to break through a strong enemy defence, but his tactical methods were not different from those already used for less ambitious objectives. His main conception was right: trench warfare could be ended, an enemy front could be not only pierced but crumbled; but he had not discovered the means. The result of his offensive was that though there had been considerable gains of ground, the major strategy had failed. The road to Laon was as firmly barred as ever.

The result was to produce grave discouragement among the French people. Nivelle was invited to resign, declined, and on 15th May was replaced by Pétain, while Fayolle succeeded to Pétain's old group command in the central sector. Foch followed Pétain as Chief of the General Staff in Paris. Pétain on his succession to office found a grim problem before him. The battle had been like a chemical which when added to a compound produces an explosion, and the superb *moral* of the soldiers of France seemed to be in the gravest jeopardy. As early as February Nivelle had complained of pacificist and communist propaganda among his troops. There were evil elements in French life which seized the occasion of the fatigue and disillusionment of the soldier to instill the poison of cowardice and treason. The rank and file had many grievances. Leave was hard to get, and when it was granted the *permissionnaire* found such difficulties in reaching his family that most of his scanty time was taken up by the journey. Intense bitterness was roused by letters from home, which told the peasant of the struggle of his womenkind to keep his farm in cultivation; while the workmen of the towns were exempted by thousands for munition making. There was dire confusion in the medical services during the battle, and wounded were sent all over France to spread despondency by the tale of their needless sufferings.

The first signs of revolt appeared about 20th May, not in the troops fighting on the Aisne, but in corps which had been some months in reserve. The contagion spread to the men in the line, and in certain divisions nearest Paris the mutiny seemed to have something of the character of a first step in political revolution. The crisis showed Pétain at his best. He insisted on reforming flagrant abuses. The penal measures used were few; less than a dozen suffered death as mutineers. But Pétain set himself to a great work of education and exhortation. In two months he visited and addressed the

officers and men of over one hundred divisions, and created a profound impression. He had no tricks to win popularity, no easy geniality, none of the air of the *bon enfant*; he was always grave and dignified, always the general-in-chief. But such was the atmosphere of calm resolution which he bore with him, such the simplicity and sincerity of his voice and eyes, that he moved audiences which the most finished orations would have left untouched. Honestly and gravely he told them of the peril of their country and the cause for which they and their Allies fought. By the middle of June the danger was past. But one consequence remained, which was to affect the whole strategy of 1917. The armies of France were convalescent, but they had still to be nursed back to perfect health. For the rest of the year it was plain that Britain must bear the chief burden.

CHAPTER XV

THE THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES AND CAMBRAI

Haig's Flanders Policy—Battle of Messines—"The Pill-boxes"—British Attacks—The Weather—Capture of Passchendaele—Battle of Cambrai—Enemy Counter-attack—Close of 1917 Campaign.

I

The Battle of Arras had died down before the end of May, and Sir Douglas Haig, having protracted the fighting in that area so long as the French on the Aisne required his aid, was now free to turn his attention to the plan which he had elaborated seven months before. This was an offensive against the enemy forces in Flanders, with the aim of clearing the Belgian coast and turning the northern flank of the whole German defence system in the West. It was a scheme which, if successful, promised the most profound and far-reaching results. It would destroy the worst of the submarine bases; it would restore to Belgium her lost territory, and thereby deprive the enemy of one of his cherished bargaining assets; it would cripple his main communications with the depots of the lower Rhineland. It offered the chance of a blow at a vital spot within a reasonable time. It was true that conditions had changed since the plan was first matured. The two months' conflict at Arras had used up a certain part of the British reserves. More important, the disastrous turn of the Russian situation would enable the Germans to add greatly to their strength both in munitions and in men. Time, therefore, was the essence of the business. The blow must be struck at the earliest possible hour, for delay meant aggrandizement for the enemy.

For twelve months the front between the sea and the Lys had been all but stagnant. It had been for the first two years the chief cockpit of British arms, and the enemy had spent infinite ingenuity and labour on perfecting his defences. In the half-moon of hills round Yypres and the ridge of Wytschaete and Messines he had view-points which commanded the whole countryside, and especially the British line within the Salient. Any preparations for attack would be conducted under his watchful eye. Moreover, the heavy, waterlogged clay of the flats where our front lay was terribly at the mercy of weather, and in rain became a bottomless swamp, so that any attack must be in the position of a horseman taking a stiff fence

from a bad jumping-off ground. Lastly, the Germans were acutely conscious of the importance of the terrain, and there was little chance of taking them by surprise.

The British front was held by the Second Army, which had not altered its position since the spring of 1915. The Second Army was fortunate in its leader. Sir Herbert Plumer, now sixty years of age, had in the highest degree the traditional virtues of the British soldier, and especially of those county line regiments which have always been the backbone of the British army. Moreover, for a year and more he had been making ready for the offensive in which he was to play the chief part. Methodical and patient preparation had been carried by him to the pitch of genius.

The Wytschaete-Messines ridge had seen no fighting since the close of 1914. But for nearly two years an offensive had been going on underground. As early as July 1915 it had been resolved to make use of the clay stratum below our position for extensive mining operations, and in January 1916 we had gone seriously to work. We used in our tunnelling companies some of the best expert talent in the world, men who in private life had received large salaries from mining corporations. It was work attended by endless difficulties and dangers. Water-bearing strata would suddenly be encountered, which necessitated damming and pumping work on a big scale. The enemy was busy counter-mining, and we had to be ever on the watch to detect his progress, and by *camouflets* to blow in his galleries.

From the last days of May a pitiless bombardment had assailed the enemy area, devastating his front line and searching out his rear positions. The last remnants of Wytschaete and Messines villages disappeared. The woods on the slopes ceased to be tattered, and became fields of stumps. Our raiding activity was unceasing, and from dazed prisoners and from many captured letters we learned of the miseries of the enemy. British aircraft spent their days over the German hinterland, and prevented any enemy planes from learning the extent of our preparation. On the evening of Wednesday, 6th June, the weather broke in a violent thunderstorm. Torrents of rain fell, and from the baked earth rose a warm mist which enfolded the ground like a cloak. During the night the heavens were overcast, so that the full moon was not seen, and only a luminous glow told of its presence. But at 2.30 a.m. on the 7th the skies cleared, the moon rode out, and to a watcher on the hills to the west the whole landscape stood forth in a sheen made up of moonlight and the foreglow of dawn. As the dawn broadened our guns seemed to cease, though the enemy’s were still active. The air was full of the hum of our bombing and reconnoitring ’planes flying eastward, and our

balloons were going up—tawny patches against the June sky. Then came a burst of German high explosives, and then, at precisely ten minutes past three, a sound compared to which all other noises were silence.

From Hill 60 in the north to the edge of Messines, with a shock that made the solid earth quiver like a pole in the wind, nineteen volcanoes leaped to heaven. Nineteen sheets of flame seemed to fill the world. For a moment it looked as if the earth, under a magician's wand, had been contorted into gigantic toadstools. The black cloud-caps seemed as real as the soil beneath them. Then they shook and wavered and thinned, leaving a brume of dust, rosy and golden atop with the rising sun. And at the same moment, while the ears were still throbbing with the concussion of the mines, every British gun opened on the enemy. Flashes of many colours stabbed the wall of dust, the bursts of shrapnel stood out white against it, and smoke barrages from our trenches burrowed into its roots. The sun was now above the horizon, and turned the fringes of the cloud to a hot purple and crimson. No battle had ever a more beautiful and terrible staging. And while the débris of the explosion still hung in the air the British divisions of assault went over their parapets. They entered at once upon a world like the nether pit—poisonous with gas fumes, twisted and riven out of all character, a maze of quarried stone, moving earth, splintered concrete, broken wire, and horrible fragments of humanity. In most places the German front lines had been blown out of existence. A few nerve-shattered survivors were taken prisoner in the dug-outs that had escaped destruction, and here and there a gallant machine-gun officer, who had miraculously survived, obeyed his orders till death took him.

It was a day everywhere of complete success. Before darkness fell the whole of the line was in our hands, and Plumer had gained his final objective. During the night we secured our gains, and on the morning of the 8th cleared a few remaining lengths of German trench. Not till that evening was there any sign of a counter-stroke. At 7 p.m., after an intense bombardment, the Germans attacked along nearly the whole length of our new line, and at every point were repulsed. The surprise and shock of the action of the 7th had been too great to permit of a speedy recovery. That evening we attacked again on both our flanks, clearing out some of the strong points north of the Ypres-Comines canal, and forcing the enemy on the south back to the line of the river Warnave.

Sir Herbert Plumer's task had been brilliantly and fully accomplished. In a single day's fighting he had advanced two and a half miles on a front of nearly ten; he had wiped out the German salient, and carried also its chord;

he had stormed positions on the heights which the enemy regarded as impregnable; his losses were extraordinarily small, and he had taken 7,200 prisoners, 67 guns, 94 trench mortars, and 294 machine guns. The Battle of Messines will rank in history as a perfect instance of the success of the limited objective.

II

The preliminary work of Messines was over by 12th June, but it was not till late in July that the day for the major advance could be fixed. The plan, as it was finally put into action, bristled with difficulties which might have deterred a less stout-hearted commander than Sir Douglas Haig. It was in some degree a race against time. If a true strategic purpose was to be effected before winter, the first stages must be quickly passed. The high ground east of the Salient must be won in a fortnight, to enable the British to move against the German bases in West Flanders and clear the coast-line. Moreover, it was now evident that the Russian front was crumbling; already divisions and batteries had come westward, and those left behind had been skimmed for shock-troops. Soon the process would proceed more rapidly, and the British would be faced with an accumulation of reserves strong enough to bar their way. Again, the nature of the terrain made any offensive a gamble with the weather. A dry autumn like that of 1914 would be well enough, but a repetition of the Somme experience must spell disaster. The Salient was, after Verdun, the most tortured of the Western battlefields.

In Flanders the nature of the ground did not permit of a second Siegfried Line. Deep dug-outs and concrete-lined trenches were impossible because of the waterlogged soil, and he was compelled to find new tactics. The solution was the “pill-box.” These were small concrete forts, sited among the ruins of a farm or in some derelict piece of woodland, often raised only a yard or two above the ground level, and bristling with machine guns. The low entrance was at the rear, and the ordinary pill-box held from twenty to forty men. It was easy to make, for the wooden or steel framework could be brought up on any dark night and filled with concrete. They were echeloned in depth with great skill; and, in the wiring, alleys were left so that an unwary advance would be trapped among them and exposed to enfilading fire. Their small size made them a difficult mark for heavy guns, and since they were protected by concrete at least three feet thick, they were impregnable to the ordinary barrage of field artillery. The enemy’s plan was to hold his first line —which was often a mere string of shell-craters linked by a trench—with few men, who would fall back before an assault. He had his guns well behind, so that they should not be captured in the first rush, and would be

available for a barrage when his opponents were entangled in the “pill-box” zone. Finally, he had his reserves in the second line, ready for the counter-stroke before the attack could secure the ground won. It will be seen that these tactics were admirably suited for the exposed and contorted ground of the Salient. Any attack would be allowed to make some advance; but if the German plan worked well, this advance would be short lived, and would be dearly paid for. Instead of the cast-iron front of the Siegfried area, the Flanders line would be highly elastic, but would spring back into position after pressure with a deadly rebound.

Throughout July the preparations for the great Salient battle were being assiduously pressed on. All the month our bombardment continued, till every corner of the Salient was drenched with our fire. We made constant raids and gas attacks, the latter with deadly effect. The front of attack was fifteen miles long, from the Lys river to a little north of Steenstraate, but the main effort was planned for the seven and a half miles between Boesinghe and the Zillebeke-Zandvoorde road. The task of the British Fifth Army was, by a series of bounds, to capture the enemy’s first defences situated on the forward slope of the rising ground, and his second position sited along the crest, and at the same time to secure the crossings of the Steenebeek, the muddy ditch which flows by St. Julien to join the St. Jansbeek, north-east of Bixschoote. If this could be done at once and the weather favoured, a strong defensive flank could be formed for a breakthrough in the direction of Thourout towards the north-east.

On the morning of Monday the 30th came a heavy thunderstorm, and rain fell in the afternoon. All day the Allied bombardment continued at its height, and during the drizzling night. The rain stopped towards dawn, but a thick mist remained, and the ground was plashy and the skies overcast as zero hour drew near. There was a short lull in the firing after three; but precisely at 3.50 a.m. on the 31st the whole Allied front broke into flame. Under cover of discharges of thermit and blazing oil, and a barrage of exceptional weight, the infantry crossed their parapets, and the battle began. *The whole of the German front position fell at once.* According to plan, the next day should have seen a second blow with cumulative force. But the weather had joined the enemy. From midday on 1st August for four days and four nights without intermission fell the rain. Even when it stopped on the 5th there followed days of sombre skies and wet mists and murky clouds. The misery of our troops, huddled in their impromptu lines or strung out in shell-holes, cannot be pictured in words. Nor can the supreme disappointment of the High Command. After months of thought and weeks of laborious preparation, just when a brilliant start had been made, they saw

their hopes dashed to the ground. An offensive was still possible, but it could not be the offensive planned. The time-schedule was fatally dislocated.

For a fortnight we held our hand. To advance was a stark impossibility till the countryside was a little drier, for though we had won positions on the heights, our communications ran through the spongy Salient. In the middle of the month there was a short break in the storms, and Haig took advantage of it for a new attack. He began by a highly successful subsidiary action in the south, designed to threaten an important position of the enemy, and prevent him massing all his strength before the Salient. Next day, the 16th, saw the second stage of the Ypres struggle. The Fifth Army was directed against the German third position, the Gheluvelt-Langemarck line, which ran from the Menin road along the second of the tiers of ridges which rimmed the Salient on the east. The attack took place at dawn, 4.45 a.m., and on the Allies' left and left centre had an immediate success. But north and north-east of St. Julien, and between the Wieltje-Passchendaele and the Ypres-Zonnebeke roads, it came up against the full strength of the "pill-boxes." A number fell to us, and all day we struggled on in the mud, losing heavily from the concealed machine-gun fire. In some places our men reached their final objectives, but they could not abide in them. Enemy counter-attacks later in the morning forced us back, and at the close of the day we were little beyond our starting-point. On the British right the fighting was still more desperate. In the area about the woods, Inverness Copse, Glencorse Wood, and Polygon Wood, we made but little progress. This second stage of the battle was beyond doubt a serious British check. We had encountered a new tactical device of the enemy, and it had defeated us. The Fifth Army had fought with the most splendid gallantry, but its courage had been largely fruitless.

For almost the first time in the campaign there was a sense of discouragement abroad on our front. Men felt that they were being sacrificed blindly; that every fight was a soldiers' fight, and that such sledge-hammer tactics were too crude to meet the problem. For a moment there was a real ebb of confidence in British leadership. Haig accordingly brought upon the scene the man who was rapidly coming to recognition as the most accomplished of army commanders. The front of the Second Army was extended northward, and Sir Herbert Plumer took over the attack upon the southern portion of the enemy front on the Menin road. The better part of a month was spent in preparation, while Plumer patiently thought out the problem. Sorely tried—too sorely tried—divisions were taken out of the line to rest, and the dispositions on the whole front of assault were readjusted.

Especially our artillery tactics were revised, in order to cope with the "pill-boxes." In the early days of September the weather improved, and the sodden Salient began slowly to dry. That is to say, the mud hardened into something like the *séracs* of a glacier, and the streams became streams again, and not lagoons. But the process was slow, and it was not till the third week of the month that the next stage in the battle could begin.

The new eight-mile front of attack ran from the Ypres-Staden railway north of Langemarck to the Ypres-Comines canal north of Hollebeke. On the left and centre our objectives were narrowly limited, averaging about three-quarters of a mile; but Plumer on the right had the serious task of pushing for a mile along the Menin road. The "pill-box" problem had been studied, and a solution, it was believed, had been found, not by miraculous ingenuity but by patience and care. The little fortalices had been methodically reconnoitred, and our heavy barrage so arranged as to cover each mark. Even when a direct hit was not attained, it was believed that the concussion of the great shells might loosen some of the lesser structures, while fumes, smoke, and gas would make the life of the inmates difficult. One famous division followed with complete success another plan. Having located the "pill-box," the field-gun barrage lengthened on both sides of it; which enabled the advancing troops, hugging their barrage, to get round its unprotected rear.

At 5.40 a.m. on the 20th the attack was launched. The ground was knee-deep in mud, but the whole British line pressed forward. This day's battle cracked the kernel of the German defence in the Salient. It showed a limited advance, and the total of 3,000 prisoners had been often exceeded in a day's fighting; but every inch of the ground won was vital. We had carried the southern pillar on which the security of the Passchendaele ridge depended. Few struggles in the campaign were more desperate, or carried out on a more gruesome battlefield. The maze of quagmires, splintered woods, ruined husks of "pill-boxes," water-filled shell-holes, and foul creeks which made up the land on both sides of the Menin road was a sight which to the recollection of most men must seem like a fevered nightmare. It was the classic soil on which during the First Battle of Ypres the 1st and 2nd Divisions had stayed the German rush for the Channel. Then it had been a broken but still recognizable and featured countryside; now the elements seemed to have blended with each other to make of it a limbo outside mortal experience and almost beyond human imagining. Only on some of the contorted hills of Verdun could a parallel be found. The battle of 20th September was a proof to what heights of endurance the British soldier may attain.

We struck again on 26th September. The weather was fine, and for a brief week it ceased to be an element in the German defensive. Our front of attack was the six-mile stretch from north-east of St. Julien to south of the Tower Hamlets. The new advance was as precise and complete as its predecessor of the 20th. The last days of fine weather were employed by the Germans in some of the most resolute counter-attacks of the battle. The last took place on 3rd October, close to the Menin road, but it was broken up by our guns before it reached our lines.

That night the weather broke, and a gale from the south-west brought heavy rains. It was the old ill-luck of our army, for on the 4th we had planned the next stage of the battle. But if the weather was ill-timed, not so was our attack. The enemy had brought up three fresh divisions, with a view to recovering his losses of the 26th. Ten minutes past six was his zero hour, and by good fortune and good guiding six o'clock was ours. Our barrage burst upon his infantry when it was forming up for the assault, and cut great swathes in its ranks. While the Germans were yet in the confusion of miscarried plans our bayonets were upon them. Like Messines and the first day of Arras, that was a day of perfect success. By midday every objective had been gained. The enemy, caught on the brink of an attack of his own, was not merely repulsed: a considerable part of his forces was destroyed.

But October had set in, storm followed storm, and Haig had to reconsider his plan of campaign. Weather and a dozen other malignant accidents had wrecked the larger scheme of a Flanders offensive. Gone was the hope of clearing the coast or of driving the enemy out of his Flemish bases. What had been laboriously achieved at the end of ten weeks had been in the programme for the first fortnight. The weather had compelled us to make our advance by stages, widely separated in time, with the result that the enemy had been able to bring up his reserves and reorganize his defence. Our pressure could not be cumulative, and we had been unable to reap the full fruits of each success. There was, therefore, no chance of any decisive operation in the Flanders area, and it became a serious question for Haig whether the Ypres operations should be continued. If October should bring the kind of weather which it had shown the year before on the Somme, the Salient would be an ugly fighting ground. The extremity of Russia was permitting more and more German divisions to be transferred to the West, which would not make our task easier. On the other hand, we had not won the last even of the limited preliminary objectives; for we did not control the whole Passchendaele ridge, and it might well be urged that, till we did, we had not secured our own position or made difficult the enemy's against the coming winter. Also events of high importance were in train in Italy, and the

attack towards Cambrai in November had been decided upon—which made it essential to fix the enemy's attention on the Flanders front. Balancing the pros and cons of the matter, Haig resolved to continue his offensive on a modified scale till the end of October, or such time as would give our men the chance of reaching Passchendaele.

The last stages of the Third Battle of Ypres were probably the muddiest combats ever known in the history of war. It rained incessantly—sometimes clearing to a drizzle or a Scots mist, but relapsing into a downpour on any day fixed for our attack. Such fighting was the last word in human misery, for the country was now one irreclaimable bog, and the occasional hours of watery sunshine had no power to dry it. On 30th October came the attack on Passchendaele itself. Rain again interfered with our operations but some days of dry weather followed, and on 6th November two Canadian Divisions swept forward again, carried the whole of Passchendaele, and pushed northward to the Goudberg spur. Four days later they increased their gains, so that all the vital part of the main ridge of West Flanders was in British hands. We dominated the enemy's hinterland in the flats towards Roulers and Thourout, and he had the prospect of a restless winter under our direct observation. The Third Battle of Ypres had wiped out the Salient where for three years we had been at the mercy of the German guns.

The great struggle which we have considered was strategically a British failure. We did not come within measurable distance of our major purpose, and that owing to no fault in generalship or fighting virtue, but through the maleficence of the weather in a land where weather was all in all. We gambled upon a normal August, and we did not get it. The sea of mud which lapped around the Salient was the true defence of the enemy. Consequently the battle, which might have had a profound strategic significance in the campaign, became merely an episode in the war of attrition, a repetition of the Somme tactics, though conspicuously less successful and considerably more costly than the fighting of 1916. Third Ypres was the costliest battle up to date fought by a British army, for the casualties from 31st July to 10th November were in killed, wounded, and missing 230,000 men. For the gain of a trivial ridge and a few miles of mud the price might well be deemed fantastic; but such a judgment would miss the true reason of the action. It was fought out of dire necessity, at the entreaty of France, lest a worse thing should befall. One outstanding fact in the struggle was the superb endurance and valour of the new British armies, fighting under conditions which for horror and misery had scarcely been paralleled in war. Ypres was indeed to Britain what Verdun was to France—the hallowed soil which called forth the

highest virtue of her people, a battle-ground where there could be no failure without loss of honour.

The battlefield of the old Salient was now as featureless as the Sahara or the mid-Atlantic. All landmarks had been obliterated; the very ridges and streams had changed their character. The names which still crowded the map had no longer any geographical counterpart; they were no more than measurements on a plane, as abstract as the points of the mathematician. It was war bared to the buff, stripped of any of the tattered romance which has clung to older fields. And yet in its very grossness it was war sublimated, for the material appanages had vanished. The quaint Flemish names belonged not now to the solid homely earth; they seemed rather points on a spiritual map, marking advance and retreat in the gigantic striving of the souls of peoples.

III

But splendid as the record had been, the British High Command could not contemplate the situation with much comfort. Many German divisions had been broken at Ypres, but the stagnation of the winter war would give them time to rest and refit. Already large enemy forces had been brought from Russia, more were on their way, and there were many more to come. If the enemy were left in peace, he had it in his power to create a dangerous situation for the spring. Moreover, Italy, fighting desperately on the Piave, deserved by all the laws of war some relief in the shape of an Allied diversion. Weary as his troops might be, Sir Douglas Haig was not able to grant them the rest which they had earned and most urgently required.

If another blow was to be struck, it must not be delayed. If the British could strike at once in an unexpected quarter, they might have the benefit of a real surprise, and at the moment the thoughts of the Allied Command, like that of the German General Staff, were running on some means of breaking the rigidity of trench warfare and restoring the element of the unexpected. Should such a blow succeed, it would have a real effect upon the *moral* of the enemy, for after Third Ypres he would not anticipate a fresh Allied effort yet awhile. It would give him an uneasy winter, for it would not permit him to reduce the strength of any part of his front, as had been his former practice, and so would cripple that heavy local concentration which might be looked for in the spring. In deciding the question a final consideration affected Sir Douglas Haig. The British tanks had greatly increased in number and efficiency. At Third Ypres ground and weather had prevented their effective use, and decreased their reputation in the enemy’s eyes. But a

terrain might be found where they could work freely, and, if so, they might form a further element of surprise.

A suitable area was found in that section of the Siegfried Line which lay in front of Havrincourt Wood, between the Bapaume-Cambrai road and the Scheldt canal. The merits of this area for a surprise attack were many. In the first place, it was dry, open country, where tanks could operate. In the second place, behind the British lines, notably in the big wood of Havrincourt, there were places where they might be concealed without the knowledge of the Germans. In the third place, the sector was very thinly held by the enemy. Finally, any considerable British advance would endanger a vital part of the enemy's front, and seriously hamper his communications. Cambrai, a main centre, would be brought under our guns, as would the great lateral railway which ran through it. The British tactical plan was conceived on novel lines. There was to be no preliminary bombardment. Tanks were relied upon to break through the enemy's wire, and the six infantry divisions allotted for the attack were to advance on a six-mile front, supported as far as possible by our guns shooting at unregistered targets. The German defences were complicated and very strong. First came certain forward positions in the nature of outposts. Behind lay the Siegfried Line proper. Acres of dense wire lay before it, wire nowhere less than fifty yards wide; it was calculated that to cut it with artillery would take five weeks and cost twenty millions of money. A mile or so behind that lay the famous Siegfried Reserve Line, tunnelled to a great depth and heavily wired. Between three and four miles to the east ran the final German position, covering Cambrai.

Haig's object was not the capture of Cambrai; that might happen, but his advance in the direction of the town was rather to secure his right flank. His main objective was towards the north-east, Bourlon, and the Arras-Cambrai road. He hoped to break through all the enemy's lines of defence on the first day; and, since he believed that no serious German reinforcements could appear before forty-eight hours, he considered that he would have time to exploit and secure any success. The cavalry were to be kept ready to go through and disorganize the enemy communications, and he arranged with Pétain to have a French force of infantry and cavalry within call in the event of fortune providing one of those happy chances which he had hitherto been denied. It may fairly be said in criticism of the Cambrai plan that it contemplated a limited and local operation, which in the nature of things could not be limited and localized, much less easily broken off. It designed a raid with a few divisions; but such a raid must inevitably develop into a

battle and demand supports, and these supports could only come from troops who *ex hypothese* were in no condition for a new and desperate conflict.

Secrecy was vital in the matter, and Byng directed the preparations with consummate skill. Till the very eve of the battle few even in the Tank Corps knew the plan. Tuesday, 20th November, dawned with heavy clouds that promised rain before evening. At twenty minutes past six a solitary gun broke the silence. It was the signal, and from just north of the Bapaume road to the hamlet of Gonnelieu in the south a long line of tanks crept forward into the fog, their commander, General Elles, leading them like an admiral in his "flagship." Gas and smoke were released everywhere from the Scarpe to St. Quentin, and in front of the tanks a dense smoke barrage blinded the enemy's guns. The British artillery broke loose and deluged the German rear with shells, while, behind the tanks, quietly and leisurely moved the six divisions of assault. The enemy was taken utterly unawares. The tanks cut great lanes in his wire, broke up his machine-gun nests, and enfiladed his trenches, while the British infantry followed to complete the work. At once the outposts went, the main Siegfried Line followed soon, and presently the fighting was among the tunnels of the Reserve Line. By half-past ten that also had vanished, and the British troops, with cavalry close behind, were advancing to their final objectives in open country.

The day closed with a remarkable record of success. Sir Julian Byng had carried the outposts, the Siegfried Line, and the Siegfried Reserve Line on most of his front, and had broken into the final line at Masnières. He had won nearly all his objectives; but at three points, and vital points, he had not succeeded. He had not got Rumilly and Crèvecœur, and so had not yet obtained that defensive flank which he needed for his swing to the north. Nor had he won the crossings of the Scheldt canal, and breached the final line widely enough to let the cavalry through. Most important of all, he had not obtained the Bourlon ridge, the garrison of which had by now been reinforced. Only twenty-four hours remained to complete the work before the enemy would have received supports. In that time Bourlon might be won, and perhaps Rumilly and Crèvecœur; but, now that the first shock of surprise had passed, the chance for the cavalry was gone.

With dawn on the 22nd the forty-eight hours of grace ended, the period during which the enemy must fight without his reserves. His reinforcements were hurrying up. Haig had now to decide whether to treat the action as a lucky raid, and hold himself fortunate for what he had already achieved, without risking more; or to regard it as a substantive battle, and press for a decision. Inevitably he leaned to the second alternative. To fall back when

much has been won and still more seems within reach is possible for few commanders, even when they have less weighty reasons for their conclusion than were present to the mind of the British general. The choice which he now made had been really implied in his original plan. He was impressed by the acute significance of the Bourlon ridge. If he could only gain and hold it, the German front south of the Scarpe and Sensée would be turned, and the enemy must be compelled to abandon all the elaborate defences of that sector. It was such a nerve-centre as we had rarely before had the chance of striking at. In the light of subsequent events it is clear that the decision was unwise, since he had too small a force to achieve his purpose and to defend his gains against the attack which the enemy could develop. But to foresee the future with precision is not in the power of the most sagacious commander, and to take risks is of the essence of war.

On the morning of the 23rd came the serious assault on the Bourlon heights. For some days the battle was concentrated in the area about Bourlon Wood and village. The strife was fierce and bloody, and it became gradually clear that the enemy was growing in strength. Upon the 27th we held the salient formed like a rough rectangle, some ten miles wide and six miles deep. It was a salient awkwardly placed, for we had not won either on north or east the positions which would have made it secure, and during that week the enemy, by means of his admirable communications, was hurrying up troops for a counter-stroke.

Cambrai had violently startled the German High Command. They had not dreamed of such an event, and they realized that only by the narrowest margin had they escaped catastrophe. The joy bells which rang prematurely in England woke uneasy thoughts in Germany, and the people for a moment were gravely depressed. It was Ludendorff's business to cheer his countrymen by a dramatic counter-stroke; for, knowing the immense sacrifice he was to demand from the nation in the coming spring, he could not afford to permit any check to their confidence. The British High Command were aware of this activity; and they took measures to prepare for the worst. Nevertheless, the enemy secured a tactical surprise. At 7.30 a.m. on the morning of Friday, 30th November, a storm of gas shells broke out on the ten miles between Masnières and Vendhuille. There was no steadily advancing barrage to warn us of the approach of the enemy's infantry, and the thick morning mist enabled him to reach our trenches when our men were still under cover. The result was that from the north end of the Bonavis ridge to Gonnelieu, and from Gonnelieu to Vendhuille, our line was overwhelmed. Isolated British detachments in advantageous positions offered a gallant resistance. But the advance could not be stayed. The

batteries at La Vacquerie were taken—the first British guns to be lost since Second Ypres—and at 9 a.m. the enemy was in Gouzeaucourt. The situation was grave indeed, for our position in the front of the salient was turned in flank and rear. It was saved by the 29th Division at Masnières. Swinging back its right to form a defensive flank, it clung to Masnières and beat off all attacks. Its heroic resistance defeated the German plan of a frontal assault, and gave Byng time to attend to his broken right wing. Meantime, the other part of the enemy force had hurled itself against the front between Mœuvres and the Scheldt canal. A little after 9 a.m. the German infantry came on in wave after wave, so that as many as eleven waves advanced in one area during the day. *The day was starred with heroic deeds.* German waves broke and ebbed, leaving great numbers of dead, and by the evening the assault had most signally failed.

Little happened for the next two days but local fighting; but it was clear to Haig that, although the enemy’s vigour seemed to be exhausted, the British front was in a highly unsatisfactory state. Either we must regain the Bonavis ridge, which meant a new and severe engagement for which we had not the troops, or we must draw in our line to the Flesquières ridge. He had no other course before him but to give up the Bourlon position for which his troops had so gallantly fought.

IV

With Cambrai closed the campaign of 1917 on the Western Front. The dominant fact at the end of the year was that the enemy was now able to resume the offensive at will. He had some 150 divisions in the West and 79 in the East, for though he had brought westward 23 divisions since 1st October, he had the habit of returning eastward certain worn-out units. But the men he was bringing from Russia were the cream of his manhood, and the business of forming and training new shock-battalions went busily on. Moreover, he was far from having exhausted that source of supply, and presently he could add another half million of men and an infinity of guns to his Western strength. The long German defensive, which had lasted since Verdun, was at an end. Young soldiers and irresponsible civilians professed to welcome a German assault; but wise men were uneasy. They knew that the German Staff would presently make a desperate effort to secure a decision before Russia could recover from her maladies and ere America was ready. The German defence had been conducted in a long-prepared fortified zone; our successes had given us a new line, often only a few weeks old, and we had not the German assiduity in field work; how, it was asked, would we fare against a resolute offensive?

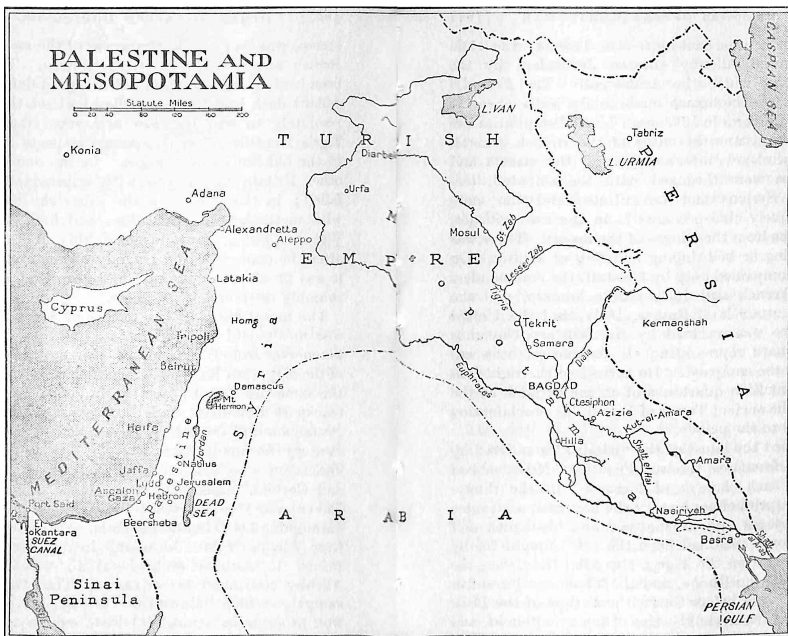
CHAPTER XVI

OTHER THEATRES DURING 1917

Sir Stanley Maude in Mesopotamia—Capture of Baghdad—Allenby captures Jerusalem—German East Africa—The Brest-Litovsk Treaty—Caporetto—The Rapallo Conference—Supreme War Council set up.

I

At the close of 1917 the outline of the War which had seemed clear and firm was blurred again. It had been a depressing year, which, beginning with the promise of a decision, had closed for the Allies in a deep uncertainty. They had won no indisputable successes except in remote lands, such as those of Sir Stanley Maude in Mesopotamia and Allenby in Palestine. Maude, by means of a strategical scheme, brilliant yet simple, captured Kut and afterwards Baghdad. This was an event of the first magnitude in the history of the War. It restored British prestige in the East, which Gallipoli and the original failure at Kut had shaken. It hit Turkey hard in her pride, and not less in her military strength. It cheered and enheartened our Allies, for Baghdad was so far the only famous city won from the enemy. But the chief importance of the success was its proof to the world of the *moral* of the British army and the British nation. They had been beaten, but they had not accepted defeat. The gallant dash had failed, so they had set themselves resolutely to win by slow and sure stages. The Tigris Expedition was in many respects a parallel to the old Sudan campaigns. In the one as in the other Britain had begun with improvisations and failed; in the one as in the other she had ended with methodical organization, and had succeeded. Victory following on failure is doubly creditable, and after the confusion and tragedy of her first venture it was proof of a stout national fibre that she could so nobly retrieve her mistakes.



The moral value of the taking of Jerusalem, too, was incalculable. Sir Edmund Allenby, who had taken over from Sir Archibald Murray the command of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, had somewhat the same problem to face as Maude. Weather and transport difficulties made progress slow. But when Beersheba and Gaza had been taken by methodical strategy he made instantly for the Judean hills. Jerusalem was now directly threatened, and Turk and German alike made frantic efforts to save it. Enver came from Constantinople, and departed after haranguing his defeated generals. Falkenhayn came from Aleppo, found he could do nothing, and returned to Nablus (Schechem) to watch events. Allenby continued his advance. The stage in the campaign which followed was one of slow and hard-won progress in a most intricate country. But by 9th December Jerusalem was isolated and a letter of surrender was sent out. On Tuesday the 11th, Sir Edmund Allenby entered Jerusalem by the Jaffa Gate, which the Arabs call "The Friend." Close by was the breach made in the walls when the German Emperor in 1898 made his foolish pilgrimage. Far different was the entry of the British general. It was a clear winter's day, and the streets and housetops were thronged with black-coated, tar-booshed Syrians and Levantines, and the more picturesquely clad peasants from the near villages, and Arabs from the fringes of the desert. There was no bunting or bell-ringing or firing of salutes. On foot, accompanied only by his staff, the commanders of the French and Italian detachments, and the military

attachés of France, Italy, and the United States, he was received by the Military Governor and a guard representing all the nationalities engaged in the campaign. He turned to the right into the Mount Zion quarter, and at the Citadel, at the base of the ancient Tower of David, his proclamation was read to the people.

So ended the latest of the vicissitudes suffered by the most famous of the world’s cities. No other had endured such changes of fortune. In the thirty-three centuries of her history she had witnessed some twenty sieges and as many more blockades and occupations. She had been the prize fought for by conquerors from the Tigris, the Nile, the Tiber, the Bosphorus, the Rhone, and the Thames. Even five hundred years before Christ the author of the Book of Lamentations could write of her: “Behold, and say if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow!” Her sanctity was as far-reaching as her trials. She was the Holy City alike to Jew and Christian and Moslem, and their devotion was less to the relics within her walls than to the compelling power of the faiths to which she had given birth, and the ideals of which she had been the battle-ground: so that dreamers of every age rebuilt her bulwarks in the heaven of their imagining, and her name became synonymous with that “shadie citie of palme-trees” which is the goal of all human endeavour. Other conquerors had seized her as prize of war or to glorify their special creed, but now she was held in trust for all creeds that did her honour. It is scarcely fantastic to see in the entry of the Allies on that December day a parable of the cause for which they fought. They would recover and make free the sacred places of the human spirit which their enemies sought to profane and enslave, and in this task they walked reverently, as on hallowed ground.

The close of 1917 saw, too, what had once been the colony of German East Africa wholly in British hands. The chief credit belongs to General Smuts, who combined all our assets and all our far-flung detachments in one closely-wrought strategical plan. The campaign must rank as unique in the operations of the Great War. In it the fantastic was of daily occurrence. Outposts driven in by lions, river crossings confused by nervous hippos, engagements with the enemy disorganized by impartial attacks of rhinos against both sides—where else could such incidents be found? And as a background it had the brooding terrors of the equatorial climate, death lurking in pool and swamp, in arid bush and ferny ravine, on mountain lawn and in lush valley. General Smuts, it is certain, could not have succeeded in what he did but for the quality of his army, which adapted itself to these fantastic conditions.

II

Russia in the course of the year had fallen completely out of line. It was not a military defeat which was her undoing. It was not a breakdown from sheer physical exhaustion, for Russia as a whole had not suffered to the degree of France or Germany. It was the collapse of the spirit of a nation, a tragedy which no glozing phrases could conceal. There had been a true brotherhood in the old armies of the Tsar; there was little, save of the lips, in the mob that straggled back to the frontiers. Morally, the Russia of the Revolution, in spite of lofty declarations, was far below the community which it had destroyed. Steel and fire had given place to putty and packthread, and the new vision, which should have been a spur to effort, had become a facile plea for irresolution. That something soft and boneless, oriental and apathetic, which was the flaw in the Russian character, was now acclaimed as virtue.

If Lenin was the Mazzini of the Bolshevik party, Trotski was its Garibaldi, he was that formidable combination, a fanatic in ideals but a *politique* in methods. He began by capturing the Petrograd Soviet, of which he was now President. He then set to work to prepare a kind of General Staff, called the Military Revolutionary Committee, which co-operated with the Bolshevik elements in the army and navy and the industrial communities. He saw that the army was now moribund; he saw that the moderates and the *bourgeoisie* were without cohesion. He observed that Kerenski had no party at his back, and that the apathy and despair of Russia made her an easy prey to even a small body who were armed and resolute. His first business was to make that body dictators; his second to conclude peace with an enemy who would gladly be released for their heavy task in the West; his third to summon the proletariat of all nations to do what had been done in Russia. His creed, one of the stalest and oldest in the world, has in every generation appeared somewhere for a brief season, only to perish by its own weakness. But in this case it had such a field as history had never shown before. In the weary and bewildered circles of Russian statecraft Trotski appeared like a leopard among kine.

The Military Revolutionary Committee organized its Red Guards, who increased steadily in numbers and seized all the strategic points in the capital, including the Winter Palace, Kerensky's residence. Kerensky fled, and the whole of Petrograd was in Bolshevik hands. The government of the country was placed in the hands of a body called the Council of People's Commissaries, with Lenin as President, Trotski Minister of Foreign Affairs, and a half-insane lieutenant, Krilenko, Commander-in-Chief of the remnants

of the army. The new Government, as an oligarchy acting in the interests of a narrow class, proceeded to confiscate all lands not belonging to the proletariat, and to negotiate for an armistice with the enemy. It had, at any rate, the courage of its folly. Russia as a whole had lost all interest in the whirligig of politics. While the Red Guards were battering at the door of the Winter Palace, the people of Petrograd went callously about their ordinary avocations, the trams were running as usual, and in the chief theatre a large audience was being entertained by M. Chaliapin.

The new government was a gamble of supreme audacity. The Bolsheviks had no disciplined military force behind them, save what they could themselves create, and they had the Germans at their door. The railways were in chaos, the rich coal and iron basin of the Donetz was in unfriendly hands, and it was hard to see how the people could be fed or kept in employment. The treasury was empty, and they had vast commitments to meet. Under such conditions they could not hope to endure even for a few months except by a crescendo of violent deeds. Since there was no income they must live upon capital—the gold reserve and private bank balances—and they must keep their followers in good heart by something not distinguishable from loot. Like a drunken man, they could only keep erect while they moved fast, for if they went slowly they would fall. To some minds the ideal world of Communism may seem a thing of beauty, to others a horror of darkness; to one man the Marxian economics on which it is based may have the truth of mathematical science, to another they may appear a self-contradictory folly; one moralist may see in the creed an ennobling, another a degradation, of human nature. To the historian the cardinal fact is that such attempts have often been made and have never succeeded, since there seems to be that in the soul of man which is impatient of a society so monotonous and of an ordering of life so arbitrary and sterile. If he views in this light the Communist ideal he must suspect still more deeply the Communist methods. The Bolshevik sought to make the world a clean slate on which he could write what he pleased, forgetting that nature does not tolerate such convulsions. To that organic thing called human society he applied his crude violence, and the result was a new way not of life but of death. Lenin and his colleagues aimed at establishing a strong, rigid, and narrow government, of whose rules they would tolerate no breach.

The Bolsheviks' first task was to stop the war. They had already destroyed the Russian army; they must now destroy all other armies by appealing to the blind masses behind them. They were pacifists of the most militant brand, for they sought peace not by submitting to the will of a conqueror, but by using negotiations as a means of propaganda among the

conqueror’s own troops and throughout the world. If only they could awake their feverish class mania in Germany they would win from their apparent abasement a lasting triumph. Germany had already accepted the Bolshevik scheme for an armistice, and on the 22nd December began Brest-Litovsk meeting to discuss terms of peace. The scene in the Council Chamber at Brest-Litovsk was worthy of the art of some great historical painter. On one side sat the bland and alert representatives of the Central Powers, black-coated or much beribboned and bestarred, exquisitely polite, but blundering often in giving a needless “von” to some Russian Jew or the title of “Excellency” to some shaggy comrade from Smolny. Behind the Teutonic delegates was an immense band of staff officers and civil servants and spectacled professorial experts. Each delegation used its own tongue, and the discussions were apt to be lengthy. Opposite the ranks of Teutondom sat the Russians, mostly dirty and ill-clad, who smoked their large pipes placidly through the debates. Much of the discussion seemed not to interest them, and they intervened in monosyllables, save when an incursion into the *ethos* of politics let loose a flood of confused metaphysics. The Conference had the air partly of an assembly of well-mannered employers trying to deal with a specially obtuse delegation of workmen, partly of urbane hosts presiding at a village school treat.

The Russian proposals involved the acceptance of the Allies, but the Allies treated them with disdainful silence. The Bolsheviks then considered peace for Russia alone, and made proposals for the evacuation and reconstruction of Russian territory held by Germany. Germany categorically refused and resumed hostilities. Upon February 24, 1918, the Bolsheviks capitulated, and on 3rd March the Peace of Brest-Litovsk was signed. There was no longer any talk of negotiations; the terms, far harder than those put forward at Brest-Litovsk, were now dictated by the conqueror to the conquered. Trotski and Radek might have resisted, but Lenin declared for surrender, and his influence prevailed.

The results were grave indeed for the Allies. By the Peace Germany gained the Ukraine and access to the Black Sea. Thus at a moment when she had limited the active war to one single front in the West she had also won possession of supply grounds in the East, of which the potentialities were unknown. Oil, foodstuffs, and cotton would now escape the mesh of the blockade. She had made conquests which, even conceding a stalemate in the West, would leave her with the most solid and tangible profits from the war. On the other hand, the downfall of Russia had taught the world two facts which might yet be worth all the immediate disasters. It had done much among thinking men to discredit crude and facile schemes of social

revolution. And it had cast a high light upon the policy of Germany, and revealed her as unchanged from the war mood of August 1914. She had annexed shamelessly, and had imposed terms of bitter humiliation and loss upon the unfortunate peoples that had fallen into her hand. Her mind was plain, her purpose writ so large that the most stubborn German apologist among the Allies could not but read it. More than ever did the war appear as a struggle to the death between a free civilization and that which must crush it or be crushed by it, but could not be parleyed with.

III

In the autumn of the year, while our troops were dying in the Flanders bogs, the usual autumnal sacrifice of an ally was all but consummated. On 24th October, on the middle Isonzo, an army of nine Austrian divisions and six German burst in the misty morning through the Italian front, and in a fortnight's fighting forced it back from river line to river line with a loss of 600,000 men.

The Central Powers left nothing to chance. In the German contingent was included the two divisions of the *Alpenkorps*, which had already distinguished themselves in Rumania. Half of the field artillery was replaced by mountain guns, and the whole army was equipped not only for the practice of the new tactics, but for a campaign in a hilly country. For months they had been sowing tares in Italian fields. A secret campaign was conducted throughout Italy, which preached that peace might be had for the asking, and urged Italian socialists to throw down their arms and fraternize with their brothers from beyond the mountains. If Austria attacked, it was said, it was only to enforce the views of the Vatican and establish the brotherhood of the proletariat; let her advance be met with white flags and open arms, and the reign of capitalism and militarism would be over. This appeal, insidiously directed both to the ignorant Catholic peasantry and to the extreme socialists of the cities, worked havoc with the Italian *moral*.

The poison had infected certain parts of the army to an extent of which the military authorities were wholly ignorant. There were strange tales of men running out with white flags to greet their Teuton "comrades," and being shot down or made prisoners. There were tales of troops in reserve who refused to advance. In the great *débâcle* there were many superb feats of heroism, such as that of the Alpini on Monte Nero, who held out for several days and died almost to a man, and the troops on Monte Globocac, who defended successfully the gate of the Judrio till it had ceased to matter. But two corps in the Caporetto section had melted away, and through the breach the enemy poured. The avalanche increased its speed until the battle became a rout, the greatest disaster suffered in so short a time by any combatant in the campaign. The situation was the gravest that Italy had met since she entered the war—the gravest, save for the tremendous days of the Marne and the crisis of First Ypres, which the Allies had yet witnessed in the West. Portions of the army streamed back in wild disorder, leaving the flanks of their neighbours in the air. The suspicion that treachery had in some degree contributed to the disaster was like to make the retreat more difficult, for such news spreads like a fever among troops and saps their resolution. Upon forces wearied with a long campaign descended in a black accumulation every element of peril which had threatened Italy since she first drew the sword. The spirit of the nation rose gallantly to the call of danger. Party quarrels were forgotten, there was little recrimination for past blunders, and the resolution of a united Italy was braced to meet the storm. Only a few extremists, to whom the disaster was not unwelcome, stood aloof.

Eventually standing ground was found on the Piave, which covered, but only just covered, Venice. That this stand was possible was due almost entirely to the Duke of Aosta's Third Army, which delayed the enemy on the line of the Tagliamento. At one time it seemed certain that this army would share the fate of their comrades at Caporetto. A million of men were retreating along the western highways, encumbered with batteries and hospitals and transport, while by every choked route peasants and townsmen fled for refuge from the Austrian cavalry. Units lost discipline, orders miscarried, roads were blocked for hours, and all the while down from the north came the menace of the enemy swooping southward to cut them off. There had been nothing like it before in the campaign, not even in the Russian *débâcle* of 1915, for then there had been great open spaces to move in. Here and there was blind panic; here and there troops, mostly young recruits, made bitter gibes about Trieste, and thanked God for the end of the war: but the majority toiled steadily and silently. If ever panic was to be forgiven it was on those nightmare miles where troops were set a task too high for human valour. But to its eternal glory the Third Army did not fail. With heavy losses, and by the narrowest margin, it won the race. On the first day of November the Duke of Aosta was in position on the western bank, with the river roaring in flood between him and his pursuers. The race had been won, but it was a shattered remnant of Cadorna's armies which drew breath after their week of torment. The enemy claimed 200,000 prisoners and 1,800 guns, and his claim was not far from the truth. He seemed on the eve of a decisive victory.

The Third Army's retreat was one of those performances in war which succeed against crazy odds, and which, consequently, we call inexplicable. It made an Italian stand possible, and deprived the enemy of the crowning triumph which he almost held in his hands. Perhaps the greatest glory of all was won by the cavalry, troops like the Novara Lancers and the Genoa Dragoons, some of the finest horsemen in Europe, who again and again charged the enemy and sacrificed themselves with cheerfulness that the retreat might win half an hour's respite. Said one colonel to his officers: "The *canaille* have betrayed our country's honour; now we, the gentlemen of Italy, will save it," and wheeled his squadrons into the jaws of death.

By the 10th Cadorna was everywhere back on the Piave, and the retreat had ended. It had been conducted wholly by Italian troops, and the credit was Italy's alone. But the first news of the break at Caporetto had brought her Allies to her aid. On 26th October the French and British Governments agreed to reinforce Italy each with five divisions from the Western Front. In the first days of November Mr. Lloyd George left London for Italy, with

General Smuts, Sir William Robertson, and Sir Henry Wilson. They were joined in Paris by the Premier, M. Painlevé—who on 12th September had succeeded M. Ribot—and General Foch; and on Monday, 5th November, at the village of Rapallo, sixteen miles from Genoa, they met Orlando, Sonnino, and Alfieri. That conference was one of the most fruitful of the war. It settled the assistance which France and Britain were to give to their hard-pressed neighbour, and it resulted in vital changes in the Italian High Command. Cadorna was transferred to Versailles, and his place as Commander-in-Chief taken by the Neapolitan General Diaz, who had led with brilliant success the 23rd Corps in the Carso battles. General Badoglio became his Chief of the General Staff.

IV

From the Rapallo Conference sprang, too, the Allied Council at Versailles, and indeed the whole movement for a unified Western Command.

The Conference on 7th November decided on the creation of a Supreme War Council to sit at Versailles—a scheme which Sir Henry Wilson had suggested a month before to Mr. Lloyd George. The Council was to consist of the Prime Minister and one other Minister of Cabinet rank from each of the Allies, with a permanent secretariat on the analogy of the British War Cabinet, and its duty was the co-ordination of national policies. The military side was represented by four permanent military delegates from France, Britain, Italy, and the United States, who attended meetings of the Council, but were not members and had no votes. To this the soldiers naturally objected, and the British Prime Minister produced an alternative scheme. This was to create a general reserve of thirty divisions, and to entrust it to a Committee, with Foch, representing France, at its head, whose other members would be the permanent military representatives. But the experiment was never tried; it shipwrecked upon Sir Douglas Haig, who, when asked to allocate divisions to the reserve, was compelled to refuse, since he had none to give.

Controversy over the question of military representation led to the resignation of Sir William Robertson. Sir William Robertson had for two years laboured incessantly, and, after Kitchener, to him the creation of the new British army was mainly due. He will rank among the greater figures of the war, and no man earned more wholly the respect of his countrymen. His very limitations were an advantage to his popular repute, for they seemed to be added proofs of honesty. The departure of one, whose massive figure had become a popular institution, raised again the cry of “soldiers *versus*

politicians." Undoubtedly the Prime Minister had given ground for distrust in some respects. On the question of the Versailles Executive he was most certainly in the wrong. His Palestine scheme was only prevented by accident from proving a dangerous folly. But on the general issue there was something to be said in his behalf. In a democratic country the relations between soldiers and statesmen must always be delicate, and it may fairly be argued that they were less strained in Britain than in either France or Italy. The War Cabinet had not interfered with Haig as Jefferson Davis interfered with Lee before Fredericksburg, or as Lincoln, with more reason, interfered with every Northern general save Grant.

[*Exclusive News Agency*

SIR EDMUND ALLENBY

[*London News Agency*

SIR IAN HAMILTON

[*Exclusive News Agency*

GENERAL PERSHING
American Commander-in-Chief

[*Exclusive News Agency*

MARSHAL DIAZ
Italian Commander-in-Chief

On the particular matters discussed in February 1918 the Prime Minister was in the wrong: wrong as to the Versailles machinery and the introduction of a dual authority; wrong in his anticipation of Germany's plans; wrong in

his treatment of the British army in France and in the impossible task which he laid upon Haig. But for one of his temperament there were excuses to be made. He saw the danger of disunion and proposed a remedy; it was a bad one, but the soldiers contented themselves with criticizing. If on 1st February Robertson and Haig had demanded a generalissimo, being convinced that such was the right solution, and had proposed Foch, they would probably have carried their point, in spite of the Prime Minister's declaration of the preceding November. He might fairly have complained that he did not get sufficient help from his military advisers in the solution of his problems, and he turned naturally to the fertile, if occasionally fantastic, mind of Sir Henry Wilson. The Prime Minister, again, was flagrantly unjust to the Somme achievement, but he was right in his instinct that the day was past for hammer tactics and in his craving for more finesse and resource in the Allied plan.

Of another change made a little later no criticism was possible. The office of Secretary of State for War existed in order to harmonize the relations of civilian statesmen and military experts. It had been since December 1916 in the charge of Lord Derby, but on April 18, 1918, he succeeded Lord Bertie at the Embassy in France, and Lord Milner went to the War Office. There was need of such a man in such a place, for a month before the storm had broken in the West, the Allies had lost their gains of four laborious years, and the Channel Ports and Paris herself seemed to lie at the mercy of the enemy. The British Commander-in-Chief had told his men that their backs were at the wall, and that each must fight to the end; and Sir Douglas Haig was not prone to emotional speech. We turn now to that struggle of life and death between the Oise and the sea.

CHAPTER XVII

LAST GERMAN OFFENSIVES

Ludendorff's Scheme—New German Tactics—The Attack of March the Twenty-first—The Somme Retreat—Foch appointed Generalissimo—America's Effort—Battle of the Lys—Ludendorff's Last Offensive—Foch's First Counter-stroke—The Raid on Zeebrugge.

I

At the beginning of 1918 the enemy once again took the initiative. The Eastern Front had gone out of existence, and Germany was able to bring westward sufficient troops to abolish the small Allied numerical superiority. Already she excelled their numbers, and she could at will call up a further reinforcement which would give her a margin of more than a quarter of a million men. On the Allied side there was no chance of such immediate increment. The American forces were slowly growing, but at the normal rate of increase several months must still elapse before they could add materially to the trained numbers in the field, and it would be the autumn at least before they could form separate armies. France could make no new effort. There had been as yet no adequate recruitment from Britain to fill the gaps left by Third Ypres and Cambrai. The mind of the Allies had become resigned to a defensive campaign for the spring, till America took her true place in the line, and it was assumed that the task would not be beyond their power.

Far other was the mood of the German High Command. They promised victory, complete and absolute victory in the field, before the autumn. The submarine campaign had not done all that had been expected of it, and it appeared that American troops could land in Europe. But they must come slowly, and during the next six months the Allies would have to fight their own battle. Now, if ever, was the hour to strike. The Reichstag blessed the enterprise. The news of it spread among the German people, and a wave of new confidence surged across Central Europe.

Ludendorff's aim was to secure a decision in the field within four months. To achieve this he proposed to isolate the British army, by rolling it up from its right and driving it into the sea or pinning it to an entrenched

camp between the Somme and the Channel—a Torres Vedras from which it would emerge only on the signature of peace. This done, he could hold it with few troops, swing round on the French, and put them out of action. His first step, therefore, must be to strike with all his might at the point of junction of Haig and Pétain, which he assumed would be a weak point. Such being the general principles of his plan, what advantages could he command in its execution? The first was his powerful army. He had withdrawn six German divisions from Italy and several from the Balkans; he had ready for use half of the 1920 class of new recruits; and he had brought some half-million men from the East. In the second place, his position on interior lines gave him the possibility of strategic surprise.

The conception was bold and spacious, and based on sound principles of the military art. Apart from the strategic advantages we have referred to, Germany relied for success upon new tactics. What that plan was may be briefly sketched. It was based primarily upon the highly specialized training of certain units, and may be described as the system of shock-troops carried to its extreme conclusion. The first point was the absence of any preliminary massing of troops near the front of attack. Divisions were brought up by night marches only just before zero hour, and secrecy was thus obtained for the assembly. In the second place, there was no long artillery "preparation" to alarm the enemy. The attack was preceded by a short and intense bombardment, and the enemy's back areas and support lines were confused by a deluge of gas shells. The assault was made by picked troops, in open order, or rather in small clusters, carrying light trench mortars and many machine guns, with the field batteries close behind them in support. The actual method of attack, which the French called "infiltration," may best be set forth by the analogy of a hand whose finger tips are shod with steel, pushing its way into a soft substance. The picked troops at the fingers' ends made gaps through which others poured, till each section of the defence found itself outflanked and encircled. A system of flares and rockets enabled the following troops to learn where the picked troops had made the breach, and the artillery came close behind the infantry. The troops had unlimited objectives, and carried iron rations for several days. When one division had reached the end of its strength another took its place, so that the advance resembled an endless wheel or a continuous game of leap-frog. This method, it will be seen, was the very opposite of the old German massed attack, or a series of hammer blows on one section of front. It was strictly the filtering of a great army into a hostile position, so that each part was turned and the whole front was first dislocated and then crumbled. The crumbling might be achieved by inferior numbers; the value of the German numerical superiority

was to ensure a complete victory by pushing far behind into unprotected areas.

The position of the Allies in the face of such a threat was full of embarrassment. The credit of foreseeing accurately the coming attack, which Mr. Lloyd George claimed in April, in Parliament, for the Versailles Council, belonged in reality to Haig and to Haig alone. And Haig was acutely uneasy, for the British army now held 130 miles of line, and these the most critical in the West, with approximately the same numbers as she possessed two years before, when her front was only eighty miles long and Russia was still in the field. Clearly this was a wildly dangerous extension for a weak force in an area which was one of the two possible objects of the coming enemy attack. The British Command attempted to atone for its weakness by organizing a system of defensive zones. This was a defence in depth, elaborately wired and studded with redoubts and strong points. But with so few men at our disposal it was impossible to prepare alternative positions in rear.

On 21st March, at precisely a quarter to five, the whole weight of their many thousand guns was released against the British forward and battle zones, headquarters, communications, and artillery positions, the back areas especially being drenched with gas which hung like a pall in the moist and heavy air. The men in the outpost line, beaten to the ground by the bombardment, and struggling amid clouds of gas, were in desperate case. In the thick weather the enemy was beyond the places where the cross-fire of machine guns might have checked him long before the redoubts were aware of his presence. The first thing which most of the outposts knew was that the Germans were well in their rear, and they were overwhelmed before they could send back warning. The SOS signals sent up were everywhere blanketed by the fog. Presently the outposts were gone, and the Germans were battling in our forward zone.

For a fortnight the British army was in retreat, a fortnight of sustained and marvellous heroism—outposts resisting to the last; batteries fighting with only a man or two in the gun teams; handfuls desperately counter-attacking and snatching safety for others with their own lives. After the second day we had no prepared lines on which to retire, and the rivers parallel to our front were useless from the drought. Again and again a complete disaster was miraculously averted. Scratch forces, composed largely of non-combatants, held up storm-troops; cavalry did work that no cavalry had ever done before in the history of war; gunners broke every rule of the text-books. Tanks saved many desperate situations, lying in ambush

till the last moment and then, in the words of their commander, emerging “like savage rabbits from their holes.” The retreat was in flat defiance of all precedent and law, and it succeeded only because of the stubborn valour of the British soldier. The situation was constantly critical. On the first day forty miles of British line were overrun; within a week forty miles distant the enemy were approaching the gate of Amiens. But by 5th April the fighting had died down.

The first bout was over; but there were others to come, and the Allies were far indeed from safety. The gate of Amiens had been shut, but the next blow might shatter it. One thing was already clear—the splendour of the British performance. The fight had begun with an attack by sixty-four German divisions on thirty-two British. By the end of March seventy-three German divisions had engaged thirty-seven British. By 9th April the total British force in action had grown to forty-six divisions of infantry and three of cavalry, and against them more than eighty German divisions had been launched. The disparity was in reality far greater than two to one, for, owing to the German power of local concentration, in many parts of the field the odds had been three or four to one. Whatever discredit attached to the Somme retreat it did not fall upon the British soldier. The cause of the disaster was simply that a long front had been imposed upon Haig, and that he had not been given sufficient men wherewith to hold it.

The ordeal, however, was the source of certain advantages, notably the complete unification of command. The moment was far too solemn for half measures. A divided command could not defend the long, lean front of the Allies against the organized might of Germany, directed by a single brain toward a single purpose. One strong hand must be on the helm, and one only. It is fair to say that the opposition to the appointment of a generalissimo had not come from one Government alone; all the Allied Governments had fought shy of it. But now the iron compulsion of facts had broken down the barriers. On the 23rd Haig, after seeing Pétain, telegraphed to London asking that the Chief of the Imperial General Staff should come out at once. At the request of the Prime Minister Lord Milner also crossed the Channel on the 24th. On Tuesday the 26th, Milner and Sir Henry Wilson met Clemenceau and Poincaré, Haig, Foch, and Pétain at Doullens, the meeting being only achieved with difficulty owing to the confusion of the roads. That conference, held amid the backwash of the great retreat, marked in a sense the turning-point of the war. The proposal for a supreme commander-in-chief, strongly urged by Milner and supported by Clemenceau, was accepted by Pétain and welcomed by Haig. For the post there could be only one choice. Sir Henry Wilson’s first idea that

Clemenceau should be appointed the nominal generalissimo was abandoned, and Foch was unanimously chosen.

Other blessings came out of the ordeal. America increased her recruiting, and strained every nerve to quicken the dispatch of troops, so that she might soon stand in line with her allies. Mr. Lloyd George and M. Clemenceau appealed to President Wilson, and no appeal was ever more nobly met. General Pershing postponed his plan of a separate American sector of operations, and offered to Foch every man, gun, and lorry which America had in Europe to do with as he pleased. France, unshaken by a menace which struck at her very heart, showed that quiet and almost prosaic resolution to win or perish which two years before had inspired her troops at Verdun. In Britain the threat of industrial strikes disappeared. The workers forewent their Easter holiday of their own accord in order to make up by an increased output for lost guns and stores. It looked as if the good spirit of 1914 had been reborn, when men spoke not of rights or interests, but of what service they might be privileged to give to their country. On Wednesday, 10th April, by a majority of 223, the House of Commons passed a Bill raising the limit, of military age to fifty, and giving the Government power to abolish the ordinary exemptions, and to extend conscription to Ireland. Two divisions and other units were transferred from Palestine to France, and a contingent from Salonika. Moreover, the old doctrine of the necessity of keeping a certain force inside our shores to protect them from invasion was summarily abandoned, and within a month from the 21st of March 355,000 men were sent across the Channel.

II

Ludendorff, brought to a standstill on the Somme, prepared to put into effect the second part of his plan—to attack the depleted British front in Flanders, and roll up their line from the north. This had been regarded, in the original plan, as a strictly subsidiary operation. His aim was to push through between La Bassée and Armentières, capture Béthune, and then, directing his main pressure north-west, capture Hazebrouck and the ridge of hills north of Bailleul. This would utterly dislocate the whole British front towards the coast, and compel a general retirement. The British would be forced to fight hard to meet the peril, which directly menaced Calais and Boulogne; and when Foch had flung his last fresh troops into the breach, the time would be ripe for the final thrust for Amiens and the sea.

But the initial attack met with such startling success that the battle developed into a major operation. In three days Ludendorff advanced eleven

miles. He met with stubborn resistance, although Foch delayed—wisely, as the event proved—in sending reinforcements. All available British reserves were hurried up, but with all our efforts we could not be otherwise than outnumbered, and, since the fight had become a major operation, we had to face continued drafts from the great German reserve. On the 11th Haig issued an order of the day in which he appealed to his men to endure to the last. "There is no other course open to us but to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man; there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall, and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight on to the end. The safety of our homes and the freedom of mankind depend alike upon the conduct of each one of us at this critical moment." The British Commander-in-Chief was not addicted to rhetorical speech, and these grave words from one so silent had a profound effect upon the army and the nation.

The battle of the Lys came to an end at the end of April with the British line still intact. It had been for the enemy a tactical success but a strategic failure. He achieved no one of his principal aims, and in the struggle he weakened his chances of a future offensive by squandering some of his best reserves. By the end of April he had employed in that one northern area thirty-five fresh divisions and nine which had been already in action. These troops were the cream of his army, and could not be replaced. Moreover, an odd feature had appeared in the last stages of the Lys battle. The Germans seemed to have forgotten their tactics of infiltration, and to have fallen back upon their old methods of mass and shock. For the weakness of the new tactics was becoming clear. They could be used only with specially trained troops and with fresh troops; they put too great a strain upon wearied divisions and raw levies; therefore, as the enemy's losses grew, his tactics would deteriorate in the same proportion.

Ludendorff realized that he must try elsewhere. He was becoming desperate; his original strategical scheme had gone, and his efforts were now in the nature of a gambler's throw. On 27th May the new storm broke on the Aisne heights, and by the evening the French gains in three great actions had vanished like smoke, and the enemy was across the river. On the second day he was beyond the Vesle, and on the third his vanguard was looking down from the heights of the Tardenois on the waters of the Marne. It was the swiftest advance made in the West since the beginning of trench warfare. The situation was very grave, for the French line had been greatly lengthened, it bristled with vulnerable points, and there was scanty room to manœuvre. Paris was dangerously near the new front, and the loss of Paris meant far more than the loss of a capital. Earlier in the campaign the great

city might have fallen without bringing upon the Allies irreparable disaster; but in the past two years it was in the environs of Paris that many of the chief new munition factories had arisen. If these were lost the Allied strength would be grievously crippled, and after four years of war it was doubtful whether France had the power to replace them. Already the loss in *matériel* had been severe, for the country between the Aisne and the Marne was full of munition dumps and aerodromes. But the stubborn soul of him who was now Premier of France would not admit a tremor. On 4th June Clemenceau told the Chamber: “Je me bats devant Paris; je me bats à Paris; je me bats derrière Paris.”

But Ludendorff could turn his startling success to no account. He tried to press westward but without success. On 9th June he made an attempt to cut off the salient which he had made in the Allied line and again failed. His last offensive, east and west of Rheims, began on 15th July. At midnight on Sunday, 14th July, Paris was awakened by the sound of great guns. At first she thought it an air raid, but the blaze in the eastern sky showed that business was afoot on the battlefield. She waited for news with a solemn mind, for she knew that the last stage of the struggle for her possession had begun. Ludendorff, in fact, achieved nothing. He succeeded in crossing the Marne, but Foch was ready for him. He need no longer now wait on the defensive. Moreover he had his reserve, and the moment had come to use it. On 18th July he attacked the right flank of the new German salient. Ludendorff halted and began to retire. It was the beginning of his long retreat.

Foch at last had freedom of movement, for he had with him now the new American army. Already there were a million Americans in France. At Château-Thierry in June an American contingent had shown its worth, and on 15th July one American division and elements of another had rolled back the German assault. These were the troops who, according to the German belief, would not land in Europe unless they could swim like fishes or fly like birds. Like the doubting noble of Samaria, the enemy had declared, “If the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?” The inconceivable had been brought to pass. Birnam Wood had come to Dunsinane.

The time had now come for Foch’s counter-stroke. When he decided to stake everything on his attack, he took one of those risks without which no great victory was ever won. There were anxious consultations between Foch, Pétain, and Fayolle. But the general most intimately concerned, Sir Douglas Haig, had no doubts. He was prepared to weaken his own line

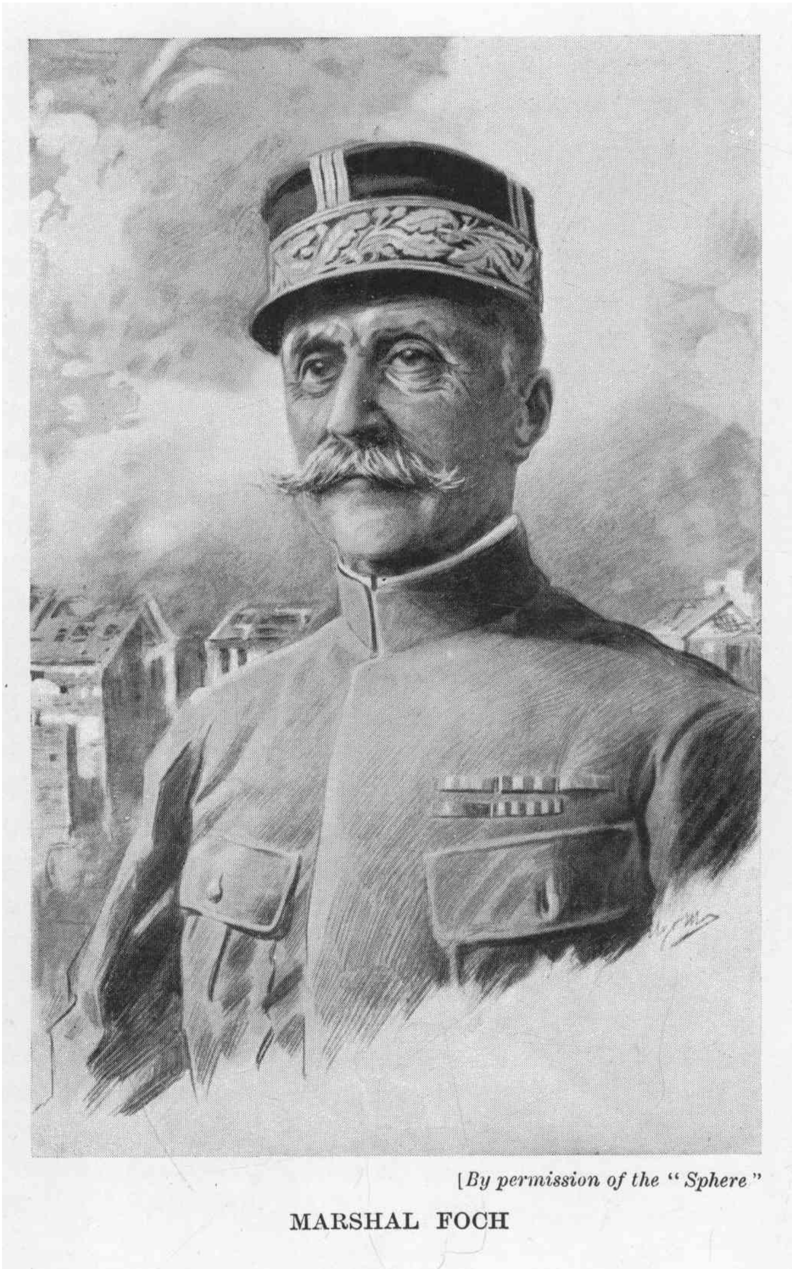
rather than cripple Foch's great bid for a decision, and willingly consented to the withdrawal of the eight French divisions from Flanders. More, with the assent of his Government, he placed four British divisions unreservedly at Foch's disposal for use with Mangin or Berthelot. It was a courageous decision alike for Cabinet and Commander-in-Chief, for so far Foch had been frequently proved in error, and his record was still only of withdrawals and defeats.

On 18th May the French Tenth Army struck, and before the puzzled enemy could realize his danger the French and Americans were through his first defences. The advance of the 18th was like a great bound forward. At one point the advance was as much as eight miles—the longest advance as yet made in one day by the Allies in the West. Foch had narrowed the German salient, crumpled its western flank, and destroyed its communications. He had wrested the initiative from the enemy, and brought the *Friedensturm* to a dismal close.

He had done more, though at the time no eye could pierce the future and read the full implications of his victory. Moments of high crisis slip past unnoticed; it is only the historian in later years who can point to a half-hour in a crowded day and say that then was decided the fate of a cause or a people. As the wounded trickled back through the tossing woods of Villers-Cotterets, spectators noted a strange exaltation in their faces. When the news reached Paris the city breathed a relief which was scarcely justified with the enemy still so strongly posted at her gates. But the instinct was right. The decisive blow had been struck. Foch was still far from his Appomattox, but he had won his Gettysburg. He had paralyzed the nerve-centre of the enemy and driven him down the first stage of the road to defeat. The Allies on that July morning had, without knowing it, won the Second Battle of the Marne, and with it the war. Four months earlier Ludendorff had stood as the apparent dictator of Europe; four months later he and his master were in exile.

III

On St. George's Day of that year, while the night still seemed black with defeat, took place Sir Roger Keyes' notable exploit at Zeebrugge.



[*By permission of the "Sphere"*

MARSHAL FOCH

By the spring of 1918 the submarine menace, which a year earlier had seemed to strike straight at the heart of the Allies, had been conclusively broken. Partly it was done by weapons of offence—the destroyer, the decoy ship, the airplane, the bomb, and the depth-charge, and a new foe of the U-

boat, the American sub-chaser—little wooden vessels, displacing only 60 tons and manned by young men fresh from college. These tiny craft crossed the Atlantic under their own power in the face of fierce winter gales, and in the English and Irish Channels and at the mouth of the Adriatic by means of their listening devices located and hunted many U-boats to their doom. Partly the defeat was due to Allied methods of defence—the dazzle ship, the barrage, and the convoy.

The use of the Flanders ports as German bases remained, however, an intolerable menace, and a plan had long been maturing to get rid of it. Could Zeebrugge and Ostend be put out of action, the German naval base would be pushed back three hundred miles to Emden, and the British east coast ports would become the natural bases from which to deal with the attacks by enemy surface craft on the Channel. It would not cut off the main bases of the U-boats, but it would release the forces of the Dover Patrol to hunt them down, and it would facilitate the construction of a new Channel mine barrage.

On Monday, 22nd April, the eve of St. George's Day, the omens were favourable, and in the late afternoon, three hours before sunset, the expedition started, timed to reach Zeebrugge by midnight. It was a singular Armada. There were five old cruisers to act as block ships—the *Intrepid*, *Iphigenia*, and *Thetis* for Zeebrugge, and the *Brilliant* and the *Sirius* for Ostend. A small cruiser, the *Vindictive* (5,600 tons, with a broadside of six 6-inch guns), was designed for the attack on the Mole, assisted by two Liverpool ferry-boats, the *Daffodil* and the *Iris*. There was also a flotilla of monitors, motor launches, and fast coastal motor boats for special purposes. It was a prodigious hazard to approach a hostile coast where navigation was difficult at the best of times, without lights, without knowledge of what new minefields the enemy might have laid, and at the mercy of a change in the weather which would expose the little fleet to every gun on the Flanders shore. A smoke screen was provided by the smaller craft, but the wind changed to the south-west, and rolled back the smoke screen so that the whole harbour was clear to our eyes and we to the enemy's. Instantly the darkness was made bright with star-shells and searchlights, and from the Mole and the shore an intense fire greeted our vessels. The action had begun, and Sir Roger Keyes signalled "St. George for England," to which the *Vindictive* replied, "May we give the dragon's tail a damned good twist!"

The operation was completely successful. The storming parties landed and moved along the Mole, methodically blowing up one building after another. The viaduct was destroyed by the gallant action of a submarine

commander, and the block ships were duly sunk, the crews retiring in every kind of small craft and being picked up by destroyers sheltering behind the smoke screen. By the morning of St. George's Day the main part of the great venture had been successfully accomplished. Zeebrugge and the Bruges Canal were blocked, and it did not appear how, under the constant assaults of our aircraft, they could ever be cleared. The quality of the British navy had been triumphantly vindicated, and in the darkest days of the war on land the hard-pressed Allies were given assurance that their fleet was still master of the seas, and the final barrier to a German victory. The affair will rank in history among the classic exploits of sea warfare.

The attack on Ostend was less successful, but a second attempt was made on the night of the 9th of May, and in a dense sea fog the *Vindictive* was sunk in the entrance to the harbour. Zeebrugge and Ostend were the last nails in the coffin of the German navy. It seemed all but incredible that along with the great German land attack in France and Flanders there should not be some attempt at action by the ships from Kiel and Wilhelmshaven. If Germany was staking everything on victory, surely she must stake her fleet. It did not come. The British reserves were ferried across the Channel without interference. Britain herself attacked by sea two most vital bases and ruined them irrevocably, and still the great battleships gave no sign. At the moment it was a mystery, but six months later that mystery was explained. The German fleet had ceased to be more than a name. The sleepless activity of Sir David Beatty had paralyzed its heart. Already the British Admiralty knew what the German Marineamt only dimly guessed, that the first order given to prepare a fleet action would for the German navy be the signal for revolution.

BOOK IV

THE SURRENDER

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TURNING OF THE TIDE

Foch's Strategy for Final Battle—The Battle of Amiens—Panoramic View of the War—The Advance to Victory—Allenby in Palestine —Collapse of Bulgaria, Turkey, and Austria.

I

The final battle had been joined, but it must develop slowly. Let us attempt to discover what was in Foch's mind.

The Second Battle of the Marne restored to the Allies the initiative. That is to say, they had now power to impose their will upon the enemy to the extent of deciding the form and the time of an action. Foch had now in addition a *final* superiority in men and material, and had, moreover—what is not necessarily the same thing—this superiority translated into a greater number of reserve divisions. He had, therefore, the means to his hand of using to the full the advantage of the initiative, and nothing but an incredible blunder could have lost him this crowning asset. All former Allied offensives had, after a shorter or longer time, come to a halt for the same reason—wearied troops were met by fresh enemy reserves. The battle became, as it were, stereotyped; the enemy was able to perfect his defence; and the action ended in stalemate. Foch drew the logical deduction from the tactics of surprise. He resolved to make the battle highly mobile. After striking a blow he would stay his hand as soon as serious resistance developed, and attack instantly in another place. His trust lay in a triple combination of which each part hinged upon the other—the weapon of the tank, the tactics of surprise, and the strategy of complete mobility.

But he was not yet ready for the grand climax, the decisive blow. It was still his business to wear down the enemy continuously and methodically by attacks on limited fronts, aiming at strictly limited objectives. The action must develop organically like a process of nature. From 21st March to 18th July he had stood patiently on the defensive; from 18th July to 8th August he had to win back the initiative, free his main communications, and dislocate Ludendorff's plans. From 8th August to 26th September it was his task to crumble the enemy's front, destroy the last remnants of his reserves,

force him beyond all his prepared defences, and make ready for the final battle which should give victory.

By 4th August the Germans had been pressed back on to the line of the Aisne. Mindful of the Aisne defences of 1914 they turned to it as a natural refuge. But 1914 was not 1918; then Germany had had a great superiority in guns, and something not far from an equality in men; now superiority and equality had gone beyond recall. Foch had now a greater mass of manœuvre than his antagonist. Moreover, the disastrous Second Battle of the Marne had played havoc with the German first-line troops. Indeed, so bad was the case that Ludendorff was compelled to appeal to Austria for men, and now for the first time an Austrian division was identified on the front in France.

The dreams of an attack on Amiens and an advance in Flanders were gone for ever. Ludendorff aimed at a winter front, running along the Ypres and Wytschaete heights, continuing on the low ridges between the Lys and La Bassée, and from Arras to the Oise holding the crest of the Bapaume and Lassigny uplands. He had now stabilized the position on the Aisne, and he hoped that the French would break their teeth on his new front, and that the battle would decline into one of those fruitless struggles for a few miles of trench in which the old actions had been wont to die away. He hoped in vain. Foch had no mind to waste one hour in operations which were not vital. It was his supreme merit that he saw the battle as a whole, and he was now preparing his deadly arpeggio on a far broader front. On Thursday, 8th August, Sir Douglas Haig, south of the Somme, flung his Fourth Army against Prince Rupprecht.

The Battle of Amiens, which began on the 8th August, was the true Allied counter-stroke. It was the preliminary to the long battle which was to culminate in the surrender of Germany. The conception and details of the attack were wholly British. During the final stages of the war, indeed, it was the British army which played the greatest part, Foch and Haig working together in perfect unity.

The Battle of Amiens was a conspicuous success. It was, in Ludendorff's phrase, "the black day of the German army in the history of the war." Success was due to the brilliant tactical surprise and the high efficiency of the new tanks which took the place of the preliminary bombardment. At one point the British tanks took captive a German regimental mess while it was breakfasting; at another the whole staff of a division was seized; in some villages the Germans were taken in their billets before they knew what had happened, and parties of the enemy were made prisoner when working in the harvest fields. The battle, the first phase of the Allies' offensive, closed

upon the 12th. For they were in the old battle area, whose tangled wilderness gave unrivalled opportunities for defence, and the enemy had been heavily reinforced. He had a moment of respite; but it had been won at the expense of his waning reserves.

The effect of the Battle of Amiens had far greater importance than the material result. The mental condition of the enemy has been described by Sir Douglas Haig: "Buoyed up by the hope of immediate and decisive victory, to be followed by an early and favourable peace, constantly assured that the Allied reserves were exhausted, the German soldiery suddenly found themselves attacked on two fronts and thrown back with heavy losses from large and important portions of their earlier gains. The reaction was inevitable and of a deep and lasting character." The effect upon their leaders was still graver. Ludendorff tendered his resignation, which was not accepted. At conferences at Spa on the 13th and 14th August with the Emperor and the Imperial Chancellor he urged that peace should be sought at once on the best terms obtainable; but the civilian statesmen did not dare as yet to undeceive their people. Meantime his one hope was a slow and stubborn retreat to the Siegfried system.

Foch had no intention of affording Ludendorff a leisurely retreat. It was his business to hustle him as soon as possible from the line he had chosen for his next stand. He must continue to play his deadly arpeggio along the whole line. Following Napoleon's maxim, he must "keep the battle nourished until the moment came for the final stroke."

II

The Allies were winning the war all over the world. But to appreciate the vastness of the struggle was a task possible only to some such celestial being as Thomas Hardy invented in *The Dynasts*. An observer on some altitude in the north, like the Hill of Cassel, on some evening that September, could look east and note the great arc from the dunes at Nieuport to the coalfields at Lens lit with the flashes of guns and the gleam of star-shells. That was a line of fifty miles—far greater than any battlefield in the old wars; but it was a mere fragment of the whole. Had he moved south to the ridge of Vimy he would have looked on another fifty miles of an intenser strife. South, again, to Bapaume, and he would have marked the wicked glow from Cambrai to the Oise. Still journeying, from some little height between the Oise and the Aisne, he would have scanned the long front which was now creeping round the shattered woods of St. Gobain to where Laon sat on its hill. From the mounts about Rheims he might have seen France's battle line among the

bleak Champagne downs, and from a point in the Argonne the trenches of the Americans on both sides of the Meuse, running into the dim woody country where the Moselle flowed towards Metz. Past the Gap of Nancy and down the long scarp of the Vosges went the flicker of fire and the murmur of combat, till the French lines stretched into the plain of Alsace and exchanged greetings with sentinels on the Swiss frontier. Such a battle-ground might well have seemed beyond the dream of mortals, and yet it was but a part of the whole.

A celestial intelligence, with sight unlimited by distance, could have looked eastward, and, beyond the tangle of the Alps, witnessed a strange sight. From the Stelvio to the Adriatic ran another front, continuous through glacier-camps and rock-eyries and trenches on the edge of the eternal snows, to the pleasant foothills of the Lombard plain, and thence, by the gravel-beds of the Piave, to the lagoons of Venice. Beyond the Adriatic it ran through the dark hills of Albania, past lakes where the wild fowl wheeled at the unfamiliar sound of guns, beyond the Tcherna and Vardar and Struma valleys to the Ægean shores. It began again, when the Anatolian peninsula was left behind, and curved from the Palestine coast in a great loop north of Jerusalem across Jordan to the hills of Moab. Gazing over the deserts, he would have marked the flicker which told of mortal war passing beyond the ancient valleys of Euphrates and Tigris, up into the wild Persian ranges. And scattered flickers to the north would have led him to the Caspian shores, and beyond them to the tableland running to the Hindu Kush, which was the cradle of all the warring races. Passing north, his eyes would have seen the lights of the Allies from the Pacific coast westward to the Urals and the Volga, and little clusters far away on the shores of the Arctic sea.

The vision of such a celestial spectator, had it been unlimited by time as well as by space, would have embraced still stranger sights. It would have noted the Allied line in the West, stagnant for months, then creeping on imperceptibly as a glacier, then wavering in sections like a curtain in the wind, and at last moving steadily upon Germany. It would have beheld the old Eastern Front, from the Baltic to the Danube, pressing westward, checking and falling back; breaking in parts, gathering strength, and again advancing; and at last dying like a lingering sunset into darkness. Behind would have appeared a murderous glow, which was the flame of revolution. Turning to Africa, it would have noted the slow movement of little armies in West and East and South; handfuls of men creeping in wide circles among the Cameroons jungles till the land was theirs; converging lines of mounted troopers among the barrens of the German South-west, closing in upon the tin shanties of Windhoek; troops of all races traversing the mountain glens

and dark green forests of German East Africa, till after months and years the enemy had become a batch of exiles. And farther off still, among the isles of the Pacific and on the Chinese coast, it would have seen men toiling under the same lash of war.

Looking seaward, the sight would have been not less marvellous. On every ocean of the world he would have observed the merchantmen of the Allies bringing supplies for battle. But in the North Atlantic, in the Mediterranean, in the Channel and the North Sea he would have seen uncanny things. Vessels would disappear as if by magic, and little warships would hurry about like some fishing fleet when shoals are moving. The merchantmen would huddle into flocks, with destroyers like lean dogs at their sides. He would have seen in the Scottish firths and among the isles of the Orkneys a mighty navy waiting, and ships from it scouring the waters of the North Sea, while inside the defences of Heligoland lay the decaying monsters of the German fleet. And in the air over sea and land would have been a perpetual going and coming of aircraft like flies above the pool of war.

The observer, wherever on the globe his eyes were turned, would have found no area immune from the struggle. Every factory in Europe and America hummed by night and day to prepare the materials of strife. The economics of five continents had been transformed. The life of the remotest villages had suffered a strange metamorphosis. Far-away English hamlets were darkened because of air raids; little farms in Touraine, in the Scottish Highlands, in the Apennines, were untilled because there were no men; Armenia had lost half her people; the folk of North Syria were dying of famine; Indian villages and African tribes had been blotted out by plague; whole countries had ceased for the moment to exist, except as geographical terms. Such were but a few of the consequences of the kindling of war in a world grown too expert in destruction, a world where all nations were part one of another.

III

The advance to victory, like the Somme retreat, cannot be painted on broad lines, for it was composed of a multitude of interlinked actions. The first stage, completed by the first week of September, was the forcing of the enemy back to the Hindenburg Line, an achievement made certain by the breaking by the Canadians on 2nd September of the famous Drocourt-Quéant switch. In the south the Americans under Pershing cut off the St. Mihiel salient, and prepared for their drive northward. The next stage was

the breaching of the Hindenburg defences, while Pershing attacked towards Mezières, and the Belgians, led by their King, attacked in the north towards Ghent—movements allotted to the last week in September.

On 26th September forty British and two American divisions faced fifty-seven weak German divisions behind the strongest entrenchments in history. By the 29th they had crossed the Canal du Nord and the Scheldt canal, and in a week were through the whole defence system and in open country. By 8th October the last remnants of the Hindenburg zone had disappeared in a cataclysm. Foch's conception had not been fully realized; Pershing had been set too hard a task and was not far enough forward, when the Hindenburg system gave, to pin the enemy to the trap which had been set. Nevertheless, by 10th October Germany had been beaten in a battle which Foch described as a "classic example of the military art." The day of doom was only postponed, and Ludendorff had now no refuge from the storm. Long before his broken divisions could reach the Meuse, Germany would be on her knees.

For she was now losing all her allies. They had been the guardians of her flanks and rear, and if they fell she would be defenceless. On 15th September the Allied armies moved forward at Salonika, and within a week Bulgaria's front had collapsed and she sought an armistice. On 19th September Allenby in Palestine opened an action which must remain a perfect instance of how, by surprise and mobility, a decisive victory may be won almost without fighting. This last crusade would have startled the soul of St. Louis and Raymond and Richard of England could they have beheld the amazing army which undertook it. Algerian and Indian Moslems, Arab tribesmen, men of the thousand creeds of Hindustan, African negroes and Jewish battalions were among the liberators of the sacred land of Christendom. Breaking the defence in the plain of Sharon, Allenby sent his 15,000 cavalry in a wide sweep to cut the enemy's line of communications and block his retreat, while Feisal and Lawrence east of Jordan distracted his attention. The operations moved like clockwork. In two days the Turkish armies west of Jordan had been destroyed, while that on the east bank: was being shepherded north by the Arabs to its destruction. By 1st October Damascus was in our hands, Aleppo surrendered on 26th October, and on the last day of the month Turkey capitulated. Meantime, on the anniversary of Caporetto, Italy had made her last advance, and the Austrian forces, which had suffered desperately for four years and were now at the end of their endurance, melted away. With her gallant army crumbled the country. On 4th November an armistice was arranged, and at the same time the Dual

Monarchy broke up into fragments. The Emperor was left alone and unfriended in the vast echoing corridors of Schönbrunn.

The events of the last week on the Italian front were like the mad changes of a kaleidoscope. On the last day of October two Italian sailors entered the inner roadstead at Pola and blew up the Austrian dreadnought *Viribus Unitis*. It was a theatrical climax, for in that vessel, in June 1914, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand had travelled to the Dalmatian coast on the way to his death at Serajevo. On the evening of 3rd November a detachment of Bersaglieri landed at Trieste, and the city passed under the control of Italy. Meantime the fleet at Pola was surrendered to the Southern Slavs, and everywhere throughout the Dual Monarchy there was revolution. New transient Premiers—Lammasch at Vienna, Michael Karolyi at Budapest—flitted across the scene, to give place to councils of soldiers and republican committees. Agram, Laibach, and Prague became suddenly the capitals of new states and the seats of new *de facto* governments.

The terms of the armistice put an end to Austria's army and navy, and placed all her territories at the disposal of the Allies for military operations. The vast straggling fortress of the Teutonic League had now been shorn of every outwork, and only the central keep of Germany remained. But that keep was already in desperate case, and was on the eve of hoisting the flag of surrender.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SURRENDER OF GERMANY

Peace Negotiations—Correspondence with President Wilson—Continued Allied Advance—Resignation of Ludendorff—Mutiny in German Fleet—German Revolution—Abdication of the Emperor—Last Days on the Western Front—The Armistice Signed.

I

The destruction of the Siegfried defences broke the nerve of the German High Command, and when Ludendorff began to waver it was inevitable that the civilian statesmen should follow suit. The German people were dumbly determined that somehow or other the war should end before the winter. If the army was to be saved, by hook or by crook a way must be found to suspend hostilities, for every day made it clearer that retreat to a line of assured defence was beyond its power. Accordingly the High Command bade the politicians quicken the pace of their negotiations, and, discarding their old line of argument, beg unequivocally for an armistice. They were well aware that such a step would go far to wreck the *moral* of the troops, but they had no other choice.

On 5th October the Note was sent to President Wilson (the draft of which had been prepared by Ludendorff) asking him to take in hand the restoration of peace, and to invite the Allies to send plenipotentiaries to open negotiations. He announced that Germany accepted the President's proposals set forth in his message to Congress of January 8, 1918 (the famous "Fourteen Points"), and in his later pronouncements, as a basis for the discussion of peace terms. In order to prevent further bloodshed he asked for the conclusion of an immediate armistice on land and water and in the air. On 8th October Mr. Wilson replied. He announced that America could not propose to her Allies a cessation of hostilities so long as the armies of the Central Powers were upon Allied soil. As a guarantee of good faith there must first be withdrawal from invaded territory. Germany made haste to answer, for by 12th October, the date of the reply, the last remnants of the Siegfried zone had gone. Their reply stated that Germany and Austria were willing to evacuate invaded territory as a preliminary to an armistice, and suggested a mixed commission to make the necessary arrangements. Small

wonder that Germany assented. To get her troops back intact to her frontier was her dearest wish. She was in truth offering nothing and asking everything. There was nothing to prevent Germany, once safe inside her frontiers, from breaking off negotiations and instituting war on a new plan. It was clear that if an armistice came it must be one which was equivalent to surrender.

On 14th October Mr. Wilson made his reply, and there was no dubiety about the terms.

“It must be clearly understood that the process of evacuation and the conditions of an armistice are matters which must be left to the judgment and advice of the military advisers. The President feels it his duty to say that no arrangement can be accepted by the Government of the United States which does not provide absolutely satisfactory safeguards and guarantees of the maintenance of the present military supremacy of the armies of the United States and of the Allies in the field.”

This was final. Foch, Haig, and Pershing were not likely to fling away the predominance which was now assured to them.

The history of events runs now in two parallel streams, one of diplomacy and one of war. By the evening of 10th October Haig was in the western skirts of Le Cateau, and our troops held the very slopes where in August 1914 Smith-Dorrien had fought his great battle against odds, and bluffed Kluck at a moment when that General had victory in his hands. On the 17th it was found that Ostend had been evacuated. And on the same day it was reported by our airmen that the enemy was retiring from Lille, and had sent out some thousands of civilians towards our lines. A patrol entered the city, to be received with frenzied joy by the inhabitants. Next day Lille was occupied by our troops, and the 15th Corps pressed on to the east, taking Roubaix and Tourcoing. The capital of the north-east was restored to France, and its statue in the Place de la Concorde could once again be garlanded with flowers.

The progress of that week was not less conspicuous farther south. By 23rd October the Allied centre and left were everywhere in open country, and facing hastily prepared field defences; but in the south the French and Pershing had still to carry the final system, fortified on the old enemy plan.

The problem before Pershing had now become the most difficult of that of any army commander. The German position in the Argonne was nearly invulnerable to frontal attack, and the plan of pressing forward on both sides of the wooded ridge was foreseen by the enemy, and made difficult by

prepared defences of the greatest strength and the intractable nature of the terrain. The American First Army was given a task like the British at the Battle of the Somme, and, like the British, suffered from its lack of experience and its too audacious gallantry. It had not yet learned, as the commands of Haig and Pétain had learned, caution and wiliness by bitter experience. Pershing’s front of eighteen miles between the Meuse and the Argonne was miserably supplied with roads—one along the Meuse, one on the edge of the Argonne, one by Montfaucon in the centre, all bad, and too much exposed to enemy fire. The finest transport system in the world must have broken down under such handicaps. But for the engineers to construct a new road system meant delay, and the problem was therefore that, if the war was not to drag into 1919, the splendid fighting stuff of the American infantry must be used in spite of all disadvantages. It was a bold decision for the commander to take, but it was essentially wise, and it was a decisive factor in victory. But the price paid was high. By 28th September the Americans had penetrated seven miles inside the enemy’s lines; it took them eleven days to advance two miles more. They were now in direct contact with the Kriemhilde system, and the attack of 14th October failed to break it. When the second phase of Pershing’s attack closed on 31st October the last Kriemhilde position had not been taken. The American First Army had fought a new Wilderness Campaign which may well rank for valour and tenacity with the old.

Against Haig, now approaching the Mormal forest, the other great German defensive effort was made. The weather was bad, and the misty air made it hard to locate enemy batteries, while the undevastated woods and hamlets gave endless chances for machine-gun resistance. The Mormal forest, too, afforded a perfect screen for counter-attacks. Yet in two days the British Fourth, Third, and First Armies advanced six miles.

The condition of Ludendorff’s forces was becoming tragic. If those of the Allies were tired, his were in the last stages of fatigue. On 21st March he had possessed a reserve of eighty fresh divisions, and during April, May, and June divisions were not sent back to the line without at least a month of rest and training. On 31st October he had but one fresh division, and the intervals of rest had shrunk to nine days—far too short to permit of recovery. Moreover, these wearied units were returned to the front without being brought up to strength, and divisions entered the line numbering less than 1,000 rifles. Ludendorff was fighting with the fury of despair to delay his retirement, so that he might move his vast quantities of material, and consequently he could give his broken troops no rest. The result was that their discipline was breaking, and the whole enemy *moral* was on the brink

of collapse. Prodigies of gallantry and sacrifice were performed by the remnants of the old officer class, and notably by the machine gunners, but no valour could prevail against overmastering physical weakness.

To make matters worse, it was clear that there was no city of refuge in the shape of a shorter line to which he could retreat and find a breathing space. The Meuse was already turned. It needed but a final bound to set the Americans astride the Metz railway. With Haig pressing fiercely in on the centre it was inevitable that the retreat would be largely shepherded northward, with appalling losses, into the gap of Liége, and there, on the scene of her worst infamies, Germany would meet her fate. The men who had outraged Belgium were mostly dead in dishonoured graves, but justice would be done upon their haggard successors. The shadow of a far more terrible Sedan brooded over the proud German High Command.

In such circumstances it was small wonder that Germany strove feverishly for peace. She flung dignity to the winds, blasphemed her old gods, and recanted with indecent haste her former creeds—not as a penitent, but as a criminal who stands condemned and seeks to ingratiate himself with his judges. On 20th October a second Note was addressed to Mr. Wilson, agreeing to leave the conditions of armistice to the military advisers of both sides, and to accept the present relative strength on the fronts as the basis of arrangement, trusting to the President to approve no demand "irreconcilable with the honour of the German people." On 23rd October Mr. Wilson replied. His answer left no loophole of escape. In effect it demanded the abdication of the Emperor and the destruction of all for which he had stood; it asked that the Great General Staff should be deposed from their autocracy and placed under civilian control; it declined to treat save with new men bearing a popular mandate. To accept these demands was tantamount to an admission of final defeat in the field. Germany accepted them on 27th October, declaring that peace negotiations would be conducted by a people's Government to which the military powers were subject.

On Saturday, 26th October, Ludendorff resigned. Few friends now remained to him. The German people at large saw in his military dictatorship of the past two years the cause of their misfortunes, and especially they blamed him for the rash optimism which had led to the March offensive; while the reactionaries reprobated him as the originator of the first armistice proposals, which had taken the heart out of the army. Upon Ludendorff and his world the Twilight of the Gods was falling. In the wild legends of the Northern races the shades of the dead appeared to those on the brink of doom, and the heavens were filled with the Shield-maidens

riding to choose the slain. The superstitious among Germany's rulers had in those days the spectacle of many portents to convince them of approaching calamity. Everywhere the wheel was coming full circle. The Belgians were approaching the dark land where each village spoke of German crimes. The British were almost within sight of the region where they had first met the enemy, swinging south, as he thought, to victory before the leaves fell. The French and the Americans had but a little way to go till their eyes beheld the wooded hills of Sedan. The alliances of which Germany had boasted were now utterly dissolved. More ominous still, that Eastern Europe which had seen her most spectacular triumphs was like to prove her worst undoing. The poison of Bolshevism, with which she had sought to inoculate her opponents, was beginning to creep into her own veins. Whatever crimes she had committed in the long war were now blossoming to her hurt.

II

Ludendorff had gone, and the Supreme Command was in commission. Foch was on the eve of his last step. Pershing and Gouraud advanced to cut the Metz-Montmédy-Mézières line and limit the avenue of German retreat. Haig took Valenciennes and pushed on down the Sambre towards Namur. On Tuesday, 5th November, the enemy's resistance was finally broken. Henceforth he was not in retreat but in flight. Moreover, Foch had still his trump card to play, the encircling swing of his right by way of Metz to close the last way of escape. If a negotiated armistice did not come within a week there would be a *de facto* armistice of complete collapse and universal surrender.

During that week in Germany the mutterings of the storm of revolution were growing louder. Some issued heated appeals for a patriotic closing up of ranks in a last stand against the coming disaster; others attempted to make a scapegoat of the fallen Ludendorff; and everywhere was apparent a rising anger against the Imperial House. The Emperor had fled to the army, but the army was in no case to protect him. Everywhere there reigned a frantic fear of invasion, especially in Bavaria, where the collapse of Austria made the populace expect to see at any moment the victorious Italians in their streets; and invasion was no cheerful prospect to Germany when she remembered her own method of conducting it, and reflected that for four years she had been devastating the lands and dragooning the peoples of the Powers marching to her borders.

Strange things, too, were happening within her own confines. In the first days of November the stage had been set for a great sea battle. Her High Sea

Fleet was ordered out, but it would not move. The dry-rot, which had been growing during the four years' inaction, had crumbled all its discipline. "Der Tag" had come, but not that joyous day which her naval officers had toasted. She had broken the unwritten laws of the deep sea, and she was now to have her reward. On 4th November the red flag was hoisted on the battleship Kaiser. The mutiny spread to the Kiel shipyards and workshops, where there had always been a strong socialist element; a council of soldiers, sailors, and workmen was formed; and the mutineers captured the barracks, and took possession of the town. The trouble ran like wildfire to Hamburg, Bremen, Lübeck, and adjacent ports, and it was significant that in every case the soldiers and sailors took the lead. Deputations of Social Democrats were sent down post-haste by the Government, and succeeded in temporarily restoring order, but the terms on which peace was made were the ruin of the old régime. In Cologne, in Essen, and in other industrial centres there were grave disturbances, and everywhere the chief outcry was against the Emperor and the Hohenzollerns. He who had been worshipped as a god, because he was the embodiment of a greater Germany, was now reviled by a nation disillusioned of dreams of greatness. At the same time the Empire was dissolving at its periphery. The Polish deputies from Posen and Silesia seceded from the Reichstag, and Schleswig demanded liberation.

It was hard to tell where in Germany now lay the seat of power. On the 5th the Army Command invited to Headquarters representatives of the majority parties in the Reichstag to discuss the next step, and search was made for military officers who might be least unacceptable to the Allies. On that day the Government at Washington transmitted to Germany, through Switzerland, the last word on the matter of negotiations. This Note gave the reply of America's allies to the correspondence which had been formally submitted to them. They had accepted the President's Fourteen Points as a basis on which they were willing to negotiate peace—with two provisos: first, they reserved their own liberty of action on the question of the freedom of the seas, since that phrase was open to so many interpretations; second, by the word "restoration" in the case of invaded territories, they declared that they understood "compensation by Germany for all damage done to the civilian population of the Allies, and to their property, by the aggression of Germany by land, by sea, and from the air." Mr. Wilson signified his assent to these provisos, and announced that Marshal Foch had been authorized by all the Allies to receive properly accredited representatives of the German Government, and to communicate to them the terms of an armistice.

At the front during those last days the weather was wet and chilly, very different from the bright August when British troops had last fought in that

region. The old regular forces which had then taken the shock of Germany's first fury had mostly disappeared. Many were dead or prisoners or crippled for life, and the rest had been dispersed through the whole British army. The famous first five divisions of the Retreat from Mons were in the main new men. But some were there who had fought steadily from the Sambre to the Marne, and back again to the Aisne, and then for four years in bitter trench battles, and who now returned after our patient fashion to their old campaigning ground. Even the slow imagination of the British soldier must have been stirred by that strange revisiting. He was approaching places which in 1914 had been no more than names to him, half-understood names heard dimly in the confusion of a great retreat. But some stood out in his memory—the fortress of Maubeuge, on which France had set such store; above all, the smoky coal-pits of Mons, which had become linked for ever in the world's mind with the old "Contemptibles." Then he had been marching south in stout-hearted bewilderment, with the German cavalry pricking at his flanks. Now he was sweeping to the north-east on the road to Germany, and far ahead his own cavalry and cyclists were harassing the enemy rout, while on all the packed roads his airmen were scattering death. On the night of the 7th the line of the Scheldt broke, and on the 9th the Guards entered Maubeuge, while the Canadians were sweeping along the Condé canal towards Mons. Next day the Belgians had Ghent. In the south the Allied advance was even more rapid. Indeed the record of places captured had become meaningless.

These were feverish days both for the victors and the vanquished. Surrender hung in the air, and there was a generous rivalry among the Allies to get as far forward as possible before it came. This was specially noted among the British troops, who wished to finish the war on the ground where they had started. Take as an instance the 8th Division in Horne's First Army. It had spent the winter in the Ypres salient; it had done gloriously in the retreat from St. Quentin; it had fought in the Third Battle of the Aisne; and from the early days of August it had been hotly engaged in the British advance. Yet now it had the vigour of the first month of war. On the 10th of November one of its battalions, the 2nd Middlesex, travelled for seven hours in buses, and then marched twenty-seven miles, pushing the enemy before them. They wanted to reach the spot near Mons where some of them (then in the 4th Middlesex) fired almost the first British shots in the war, and it is pleasant to record that they succeeded. Likewise the 2nd Royal Irish, who had fought with the 3rd Division in the loop of the canal north-east of Mons on August 26, 1914, were, with the 63rd Division, entering the same loop on the last day of war.

Meantime in Germany the conventions which for generations had held her civilian people was patently dissolving. There were few mutinies like that of the northern ports. The old authorities simply disappeared, quietly, unobtrusively, and the official machine went on working without them. Kings and courts tumbled down, and the various brands of socialists met together, gave themselves new names, and assumed office. There was as yet nothing which approached a true revolution, nothing which involved a change of spirit. Deep down in the ranks of the people there was a dull anger and disquiet, but for the moment it did not show itself in action. They stood looking on while the new men shuffled the old cards.

But it was essential for Germany to get rid of the signposts of the old régime. Bavaria took the lead, and on Friday the 8th a meeting of a workmen's and soldiers' council, under the leadership of a Polish Jew, Kurt Eisner, decreed the abolition of the Wittelsbach dynasty. In Frankfort, Cologne, Leipzig, Bremen, Hanover, Augsburg, and elsewhere, similar councils were formed, who took upon themselves the preservation of order, and declared that they held their power in trust for the coming German Socialist Republic. So far there had been few signs of despotic class demands on the Russian model; in most places the change was made decently and smoothly. Saturday the 9th saw the crowning act in the capital. Bands of soldiers and enormous assemblies of workmen patrolled the streets, singing republican songs. There was a little shooting, and a certain number of windows were broken. Soldiers flung away their badges and iron crosses; everywhere the royal arms were torn down, and red flags fluttered from the balcony of the Imperial Palace, whence, in the first week of August 1914, the Emperor had addressed his loyal people.

Yet, orderly as was the first stage in Germany's revolution, and strenuous as were the efforts made to provide administrative continuity, on one side the revulsion was complete. The old absolutism was gone, and monarchy within the confines of Germany had become a farce—hated in some regions, in all despised as an empty survival. For centuries the pretensions of German kinglets had made sport for Europe. Now these kinglets disappeared, leaving no trace behind them. In Bavaria, Saxony, Würtemberg, the Mecklenburgs, Hesse, Brunswick, Baden, the dynasties fell with scarcely a protesting voice. With the lesser fell the greater. On Saturday the 9th it was announced that the Emperor had decided to abdicate, and that the Imperial Crown Prince renounced the succession. With a revolution behind him and his conquerors before him, there was no place left for him in the world. He did not stand upon the order of his going. On Sunday the 10th he left Main Headquarters at Spa, crossed the Dutch frontier, and sought

refuge in the house of Count Bentinck at Amerongen. Prince Rupprecht retired to Brussels to await the victors, and the Imperial Crown Prince fled from his armies, and, like his father, found sanctuary in Holland.

History has not often recorded a fall from greater heights to greater depths. The man who had claimed to be the vicegerent of God on earth, and had arrogated to himself a power little short of the divine, now stole from the stage like a discredited player. Other kings and leaders who have failed have gone down dramatically in the ruin they made, but this actor of many parts had not the chance of such an exit. His light, emotional mind and his perverse vanity had plagued the world for a generation, and had now undone the patient work of the builders of Germany. Tragic, indeed, was the cataclysm of German hopes, and tragic, but in a lesser sense, was the fall of William the Second, King of Prussia, Margrave of Brandenburg, and Count of Hohenzollern. Like Lucian’s Peregrinus, his life had been dominated by a passion for notoriety; but, unlike that ancient charlatan, he could not round off his antics on a public pyre. In fleeing from his country he did the best he could for his country’s interests, and no humane man will wish to exult over the spectacle of broken pride and shattered dreams. In such an end his ὑβρις had received the most terrible of retributions.

III

The German delegates, who left Berlin on the afternoon of Wednesday the 6th, arrived in the French lines at ten o’clock on the Thursday night, and were given quarters in the château of the Marquis de Laigle at Francport, near Choisy-au-Bac. On Friday morning they presented themselves at the train in the forest of Compiègne which contained Marshal Foch and Sir Rosslyn Wemyss. The French Marshal asked, “Qu’est-ce que vous désirez, Messieurs?” and they replied that they had come to receive the Allied proposals for an armistice. To this Foch answered that the Allies did not propose any armistice, but were content to finish the war in the field. The delegates looked nonplussed, and stammered something about the urgent need for the cessation of hostilities. “Ah,” said Foch, “I understand—you have come to seek an armistice.” Von Gündell and his colleagues admitted the correction, and explicitly asked for an armistice. They were then presented with the Allied terms, and withdrew to consider them, after being informed that they must be accepted or refused within seventy-two hours—that is to say, before eleven o’clock on the morning of Monday the 11th. They asked for a provisional suspension of hostilities, a request which Foch curtly declined. The terms were telephoned to Berlin, and a conference of the new Government was held that morning. The hours of grace were fast

slipping away, and Foch was adamant about the time limit. The delegates were instructed to accept, and after a protest they submitted to the inevitable. The terms were so framed as to give full effect to the victory on land and sea which the Allies had won. All invaded territory, including Alsace-Lorraine, was to be immediately evacuated, and the inhabitants repatriated. Germany was to surrender a large amount of war material, specified under different classes. The Allies were to take control of the left bank of the Rhine and of three bridgeheads on the right bank in the Cologne, Coblenz, and Mainz districts, and a neutral zone was to be established all along that bank between Switzerland and the Dutch frontier. A great number of locomotives and other forms of transport were to be immediately delivered to the Allies. All Allied prisoners of war were to be repatriated forthwith, but not so German prisoners in Allied hands. German troops in Russia, Rumania, and Turkey were to withdraw within the frontiers of Germany as these existed before the war. The treaties of Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest were cancelled. German troops operating in East Africa were to evacuate the country within one month. All submarines were to repair to certain specified ports and be surrendered; certain units of the German fleet were to be handed over to the charge of the Allies, and the rest to be concentrated in specified German ports, disarmed, and placed under Allied surveillance, the Allies reserving the right to occupy Heligoland to enforce these terms. The existing blockade was to be maintained. . . . Such were the main provisions, and the duration of the Armistice was fixed at thirty-six days, with an option to extend. If Germany failed to carry out any of the clauses, the agreement could be annulled on forty-eight hours' notice. The acceptance of such terms meant the surrender of Germany to the will of the Allies, for they stripped from her the power of continuing or of renewing the war.

It is necessary to be clear as to the exact significance of the terms of capitulation, for strange conditions have since been read into them by critics of Allied policy. These terms meant precisely what they said—so much and no more. Mr. Wilson's Fourteen Points were not a part of them; the Armistice had no connection with any later treaties of peace. It may be argued with justice that the negotiations by the various Governments between 5th October and 5th November involved a declaration of principles by the Allies which they were morally bound to observe in the ultimate settlement. But such a declaration bore no relation to the Armistice. That was an affair between soldiers, a thing sought by Germany under the pressure of dire necessity to avoid the utter destruction of her armed manhood. It would have come about though Mr. Wilson had never indited a single note. In the field since 15th June Germany had lost to British armies

188,700 prisoners and 2,840 guns; to the French, 139,000 prisoners, and 1,880 guns; to the Americans, 44,000 prisoners and 1,421 guns; to the Belgians, 14,500 prisoners and 474 guns. In the field, because she could not do otherwise, she made full and absolute surrender.

IV

In the fog and chill of Monday morning, 11th November, the minutes passed slowly along the front. An occasional shot, an occasional burst of firing, told that peace was not yet. Officers had their watches in their hands, and the troops waited with the same grave composure with which they had fought. At two minutes to eleven, opposite the South African brigade, which represented the easternmost point reached by the British armies, a German machine-gunner, after firing off a belt without pause, was seen to stand up beside his weapon, take off his helmet, bow, and then walk slowly to the rear. Suddenly, as the watch-hands touched eleven, there came a second of expectant silence, and then a curious rippling sound, which observers far behind the front likened to the noise of a light wind. It was the sound of men cheering from the Vosges to the sea.

After that peace descended on the long battlefield. A new era had come and the old world had passed away.

CHAPTER XX

CONCLUSION

The Aftermath of War—King Albert enters Brussels—French and British on the Rhine—Surrender of the German Fleet—The Allied Leaders—The Offering of Youth.

I

The military terms of the Armistice were intended to prevent any German army again taking the field. The two main means to this end were the surrender by the enemy of military equipment, and the occupation by the Allies of three bridgeheads on the Rhine. The first proceeded slowly and laboriously, as such things must, for the German machine was in dire disorder; the second advanced with steady precision. At first the German retirement beyond the Rhine was chaos—confused columns, a hundred miles long, of stragglers of every arm. Then discipline reasserted itself, and the last part of the retreat was conducted in good order. The defeated armies of Germany marched into their cities with bands playing and flags flying, and there was some attempt made to prepare for them a popular reception. No one dare grudge the effort of a conquered enemy to put a brave complexion on defeat, and those troops deserved a welcome, for they had fought with unsurpassed courage and resolution. But with the Allies following at their heels, it was hard to build up the legend that Germany had not suffered defeat in the field. If proof were needed, it was to be found in the condition of the hinterland of the old German front. Every road was littered with abandoned tractors, lorries, and tanks; every line was blocked with loaded trucks, and every canal with barges; everywhere there were huge dumps of war material, which could neither be used nor removed.

Of the three great bridgeheads, the northern—that of Cologne and Bonn—was to be occupied by the British troops; the central, at Coblenz, by the Americans; and the southern, at Mainz, by the French. The full meaning of victory was scarcely realized by the Allied armies during the week in which they waited quietly in their lines. But when, early on the morning of Sunday, 17th November, the advance began, there came a sudden awakening of all ranks to the tremendous thing that had been achieved. Names long heard of as German headquarters took concrete form as towns and villages; rivers, which once seemed as remote as the moon, were left behind them; and daily

they came nearer that mysterious land from which their enemy had issued. It was a grim business, for the joy of the liberated inhabitants could not disguise the horrors of the enemy occupation, and everywhere our advancing troops met strings of returning prisoners, dazed and emaciated men cast loose by the enemy to find their way back. Yet pride was the dominant note, and the troops swung out on the road to the Rhine with well-groomed horses, polished harness-chains, spick-and-span guns and limbers, and every man smart and trim.

The 19th was an historic date. The King and Queen of the Belgians arrived at Antwerp, and that afternoon attended a *Te Deum* in the Cathedral. Belgian troops had last left it on the night of October 9, 1914, when smoke and flames made a pall as over some city of the Inferno. They returned to streets bright with flags and crowded with the cheering citizens whose days of torment were over. That day Mangin's Tenth Army entered Metz an hour after noon. Pétain, now a Marshal of France, rode at the head of them. Every house flew the tricolour of the Republic, and the roadways were lined by young girls in the quaint costume of Lorraine. On Wednesday the 20th the French reached the Rhine. Five days later King Albert made his solemn entry into Brussels, the capital which he had abandoned in order to save his country. On the 23rd the American Third Army, advancing through Luxembourg, crossed the German frontier. On Monday the 25th the French entered Strassburg, the most dramatic moment of all. Early in the afternoon came Pétain, in his long cavalry cloak, for the day was chilly, and took his stand in front of the Imperial Palace in the Kaiserplatz. Beside him stood Gouraud, with his empty right sleeve, the most romantic figure among the great captains of France; and the three group commanders, Castelnau, Fayolle, and Maistre. Then through the streets, where nearly every name was German and every flag was French, moved the men and guns of the Fourth Army. At first the occasion seemed too solemn for cheering, and there was little sound save from the drums and clarions of the regiments; but presently emotion broke forth, and the city became "one voice" around its deliverers.

If we seek for a parallel in drama to the French entry into Strassburg, we may find it in the passage of the great river by the British Second Army. It took place on 13th December in heavy rain, the weather in which most of their battles had been fought. Six months before, the British forces had been cooped up in a space of forty-five miles, between the enemy trenches and the Channel; now they were 250 miles east of Boulogne. All the marching tunes of the British Empire were heard in the rain—the "Maple Leaf" and the "Men of Harlech," "John Peel" and "Blue Bonnets." There was no

parade, no gaudy triumph, but in the lean efficiency of the men the watching crowd read a grim lesson of power. The handful of British soldiers who had been present at the start of the contest in 1914, and who now witnessed the end of the long road, may well have wavered in their minds between thankfulness and awe. For they were watching the consummation of a miracle, a miracle of patience, courage, and resolution. The little Expeditionary Force, small in numbers and small in the esteem of its opponents, had grown to almost the most formidable army that the world has seen. The words of Jacob might have been theirs: “With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands.”

II

On Tuesday, 12th November, the Allied fleets, under Admiral Calthorpe, passed through the Dardanelles, and on the morning of the 13th arrived off Constantinople. It was the fourth time in a century that a British fleet had entered the Sea of Marmora. Behind them British and Indian troops garrisoned the Gallipoli forts, where so much good blood had been spilled in the enterprise at last concluded. The Black Sea was now under Allied control.

At 2.30 in the afternoon of Friday, 15th November, the German light cruiser *Königsberg* arrived at Rosyth, bringing Admiral Hugo von Meurer to arrange for the carrying out of the armistice conditions. He brought with him three delegates from the Sailors’ and Soldiers’ Council, and three from the People’s Council. Under the terms of surrender all submarines were to be handed over, ten battleships, six battle cruisers, eight light cruisers, and fifty destroyers. These were to be disarmed and interned in neutral ports, or, failing that, in Allied ports; but the neutral Powers would have nothing to do with the business, so it fell to the Allies to receive them. The remaining surface warships left to Germany were to be concentrated in certain German ports, paid off and disarmed, and placed under the supervision of an Allied commission. The terms meant nothing less than the disappearance of German sea-power.

The conference between Admiral Beatty and Admiral von Meurer came to an end late in the evening of the 16th. The affair was conducted with all the punctilios of naval etiquette, and the German admiral departed into the fog which clouded the Firth of Forth with such formal salutes as might have attended a visit of officers of one great fleet to another. The humiliation of Germany was too dire to need expression by word or ceremony; the fact shouted itself throughout all the world. On Wednesday the 20th the handing

over of the submarines began. At a point thirty-five miles from the Essex coast Admiral Sir Reginald Tyrwhitt with five British light cruisers received the surrender of the first twenty U-boats. It was a fine morning, with a quiet sea and the sun shining through the mist, when the British seamen saw the low grey hulls, escorted by German transports, coming from the east. Only one submarine flew the German ensign, and all had their numbers painted out. They were navigated by their own crews till close to Harwich, when British officers took charge, the white ensign was run up above the solitary German flag, and the German sailors embarked on their transports to go home. A grimmer scene could scarcely be conceived. The enemy craft were received in silence by the British cruisers, who had their men at action stations and their guns trained on the new-comers. There was no hint of fraternization, scarcely a word was spoken, and the British sailors looked stolidly at the men who had disgraced their calling. A hiss or a taunt would have been less insulting than that deadly stillness.

Next day, Thursday the 21st, in the same ominous quiet, the German battleships and battle cruisers were handed over to the custody of the British Grand Fleet, which was accompanied by detachments of the French and American navies. Sir David Beatty ordered the surrendered vessels to haul down their flags at 3.37 that afternoon, and not to hoist them again without permission.

In June 1914, a British squadron had been in Kiel Bay, and British guns had hailed the final deepening of the great waterway. The Emperor had visited our flagship, and the flag at her masthead had proclaimed the presence on board of an Admiral of the British Fleet. At a subsequent banquet a German admiral had declared that his Navy sought to model itself upon the great example of Nelson! Such is the mutability of mortal things. The German sea-lords had disappeared into the darkness, and in a Dutch manor their master was waiting impotently while the Allies decreed his fate.

The cessation of hostilities left Germany a seething cauldron of rival factions and immature theories, and it was hard to tell from the froth and bubbles of incipient revolution what might be the outcome. But one fact was clear. Monarchical Germany was gone. On 28th November, from his refuge in Holland the Emperor issued his signed abdication. Fourteen days earlier the Emperor Charles of Austria had bidden farewell to his uneasy throne. The old régime had disappeared in vapour; the old military chiefs had gone; and the decomposing armies were no longer in charge of princes.

Such was the immediate aftermath of war.

III

It would be a task both futile and invidious to discuss the relative contributions of the different Allies to this achievement. All had in it a full and noble share. France took the first shock, and to the end had the largest forces in the main theatre; and if in the closing stages the chief effort was in other hands, that effort was guided by a French general. Russia, so long as her strength availed her, spent herself quixotically in the Allied cause. Italy fought a difficult campaign with unfailing devotion and at a terrible cost. The little nations—Belgium, Serbia, Rumania—gave their all. America, entering late into the strife, made ready great armies at a speed unparalleled in history, and brought about victory before the wreckage of the world was beyond repair. Britain's performance was in harmony with her historic tradition. Her fleet nullified the enemy on the high seas in the first months of war, and conducted the blockade which sapped his internal strength. Her wealth bore for years the main financial burden of the Alliance, and her factories produced the greater part of that mighty reserve of material which ended by far surpassing Germany's long-prepared stores. Her armies, beginning from the smallest numbers, grew to be the equal of any in the world, alike in training, discipline, and leadership.

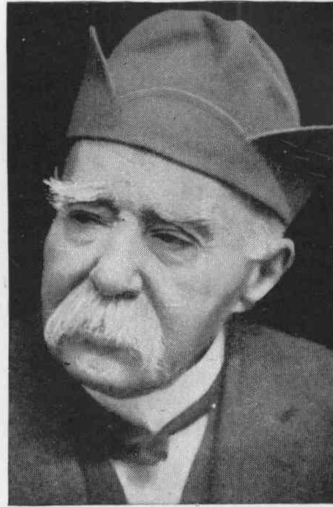
The struggle closed with three men directing the councils of the Allies, and standing forth as the representatives of their peoples, M. Clemenceau, Mr. Lloyd George, and Mr. Wilson. Two of them were in the first order as War Ministers, blending courage and tenacity with imaginative fervour and a sure instinct for essential needs. The third had no special faculty for the task, and he owed his power to the chance which made him the official head of a great people, as a monarch must play a foremost part in his country's wars from the accident of his sitting upon the throne. The same chance made him for a season the apparent arbiter of the world's destinies, and the position placed an undue strain upon a stiff and somewhat arrogant temperament and a powerful but intolerant mind. But as the leader of America during twenty months of campaigning, and as the prophet of certain vital truths which he alone was in the position to formulate, he has an indefeasible claim to the gratitude of mankind.

The war in the field was in the main one of the rank and file rather than of generals, and most of the battles were dependent upon the fighting vigour and endurance of the average soldier rather than upon any peculiar brilliance and subtlety in leadership. This was inevitable, partly because the struggle was so vast and intimate, reaching to the roots of human life; partly because it was full of novelties, and generals as well as privates had their business to

learn. One figure alone among the commanders on any side stands out in the full heroic proportions. By whatever standard we judge him, Ferdinand Foch must take rank high among the world's captains.

[*Alfieri Service*

DAVID LLOYD GEORGE



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GEORGES CLEMENCEAU

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KAISER WILHELM II.

He was not infallible, any more than Cæsar, or Napoleon, but he could rise from his mistakes to a higher wisdom. In a word, he had a genius for war, that rarest of human talents. In the splendid company of the historic French captains he will stand among the foremost—behind, but not far behind, the greatest of all.

He was well served by his colleagues. But if we are to seek for the first lieutenant of the Commander-in-Chief, the choice must fall upon Haig. He more than any other man made the final conception of Foch possible. He had not the great Frenchman's gift for strategy, but he had the scarcely less valuable power of creating the weapons for the strategist to use. He was a master in the art of training troops, the greatest Britain has seen since Sir John Moore, and under his guidance the British army produced most of the main tactical developments of the campaign. He had his failures, as Foch had, but no failures or disappointments could shake his confidence in the ultimate issue. Drawing comfort from deep springs, he bore in the face of difficulties a gentle and unshakable resolution. The campaign—nay, the history of war—has produced no finer figure: great in patience, courtesy, unselfishness, serenity, and iron courage amid reverses and delays.

IV

The short memory of mankind in seasons of peace has tended to exaggerate the beneficence of war, and to assume that a spiritual value is assured by material loss and bodily suffering. Rewards there are, but they are not certain, and the moral disorder is at least as conspicuous as the moral gain. A war does not solve absolutely any problem but the one—which side is the stronger; it may clear the ground of encumbrances and so facilitate the builders' task, but the immediate result is a desperate confusion—that deadly "disordering" which the Greek historian noted as the consequence even of victorious battles. In casting up the accounts of any armed struggle, the debit side must appear the heavier, because the losses are ascertained, while the elements of profit are too often in speculation and the far future.

Let us set down the few items where the gain to the world could not be controverted. In the first place a great arrogance, inimical to humanity, had been overthrown—an arrogance which had been shared in some degree by all nations, but of which Germany had been the extreme instance and the most truculent champion. Its devotees had appealed to force, and force had betrayed them, so that now—for a little—the temple door was closed and the god discredited. The world is at no time safe for freedom, which needs vigilant and unremitting guardianship, but the immediate menace had been

destroyed. Secondly, the riddle which Lincoln propounded had been finally answered, and the democratic nations had shown themselves as able as any autocracy to submit with a whole heart to discipline. It may be read in Tacitus how into the sombre grove of the High God of the Germans none might enter save with a chain round his neck to show his subjection to the divinity. Let the old legend stand as a parable. These gods were tyrants, and their mandate was to enslave. Their votaries, whether they spoke the rhetoric of a mad racialism or the chatter of a bastard science, were serfs themselves and would reduce mankind to their own ignominy, though they called it by noble names. They had challenged the world, as Attila and Timour had challenged it, and the free men had proved themselves stronger than the slaves. Again, the ground had been cleared for a better ordering of the world, much of the débris of past ages was now estimated at its true worthlessness, ancient inequitable frontiers could be adjusted, old wrongs could be righted. Again, the magnitude and the horrors of the contest had gone far to sicken mankind of strife and predispose them to find a more rational way of settling differences. Already the conception of a true internationalism was dawning which should add to the patriotism of races and nations a patriotism of humanity. Lastly, the world had been shaken out of its complacency, and, if not to governments, to hosts of humble folk there had come that self-knowledge which is the beginning of wisdom.

Those who believed that victory would mean a fresh start with high hearts and girded loins and clear eyes in a new world were strangely forgetful of the lessons of history. For war clogs the brain and weakens the nerve, and the heavy burden of settlement falls upon shoulders already wearied and bowed. The task had to be undertaken by statesmen all of whom were tired, and many of whom were unfitted for the work, since the qualities which made them eminent in war were often a handicap in the very different duties of peace. As with the leaders, so with the peoples. Little assistance could be got from the rank and file, who were as bewildered as their masters. When Michelet after the writing of his history fell ill and sought rest, he excused himself on the plea, “J’ai abattu tant de rois.” Like the historian, the world desired above all things leisure and ease, dazed with the long effort and the clattering about its ears of so many landmarks. Men’s minds were relaxed and surfeited, when they were not disillusioned. After the strain of the distant vision they were apt to seek the immediate advantage; after so much altruism they asked leave to attend to private interests; after their unremitting labours they claimed the right of apathy. In short, problems of a magnitude unknown in history had to be faced by jaded

statesmen and listless, confused peoples. There was yet another bequest of war, its natural offspring—

> "Discordia demens,
> Vipereum crinem vittis innexa cruentis."

A lurking madness was abroad in the world. Human life had been shorn of its sacredness, death and misery and torture had become too familiar, the old decorums and sanctions had lost something of their power. The passions of many millions cannot be stirred for four years without leaving a hideous legacy. Men were moved by waves of sheer dementia, relapsing into wolfishness and childishness, and a few score human lives seemed a trivial price to pay for the attainment of some pedantry. Smug revolutionaries would condemn thousands of their fellows to death for a whim, and neither they nor the world at large seemed to realize the enormity of the crime. The crust which we call civilization had worn thin, and beneath could be heard the muttering of the primordial fires.

Therefore those who looked forward to peace with happy dreams were fated to be disillusioned. It was very certain that high hopes would be dashed, and that generous souls would cry out in bitterness that the battles had been fought in vain, and that what began as a crusade had ended in a cynical huckstering. But this pessimism was as unreasonable as the earlier illusions and as blind to the teaching of the past. Peace does not follow naturally upon victory. It is itself a construction, a slow and difficult effort to bridge the chasm between two worlds, and it is inevitably a time of discouragement. It is like a season of thaw. The frosts of January are cruel things, but for the strong they tauten the sinews and stir the blood, whereas in a thaw there is nothing but grey skies and muddy roads and plashing fields. Yet that is the course of nature, and summer cannot follow winter without the depressing stage of early spring. If the winter wheat has been truly sown, there will come in due season the time of harvest.

The gains and losses are not yet to be assessed, but there is ground for humble confidence that that sowing in unimaginable sacrifice and pain will yet quicken and bear fruit to the bettering of the world. The war was a vindication of the essential greatness of our common nature, for victory was won less by genius in the few than by faithfulness in the many. Every class had its share, and the plain man, born in these latter days of doubt and divided purpose, marched to heights of the heroic unsurpassed in simpler ages. In this revelation democracy found its final justification, and civilization its truest hope. Mankind may console itself in its hour of

depression and failure, and steel itself to new labours with the knowledge that once it has been great.

The sacrifice was chiefly of innocence and youth, and in computing it there can be no distinction between friend and enemy. *Hanc ex diverso sedem veniemus in unam.* That Country of the Young knows no frontiers of race or creed. Most men who fell died for honourable things, and perversities of national policy were changed into the eternal sanctities—love of country and home, comradeship, loyalty to manly virtues, the indomitable questing of youth. Innocence does not perish in vain, against such a spirit the gates of death cannot prevail, and the endurance of their work is more certain than the coming of spring. The world is poor indeed without them, for they were the flower of their race, the straightest of limb, the keenest of brain, the most eager of spirit. In such a mourning each man thinks first of his friends; for each of us has seen his crowded circle become like the stalls at an unpopular play; each has suddenly found the world of time strangely empty and eternity strangely thronged. Yet to look back upon the gallant procession of those who offered their all and had the gift accepted, is to know exultation as well as sorrow. The youth which died almost before it had gazed on the world, the poets with their songs unsung, the makers and the doers who left their tasks unfinished, found immortal achievement in their death. Their memory will abide so long as men are found to set honour before ease and a nation lives not for its ledgers alone but for some purpose of virtue. They have become, in the fancy of Henry Vaughan, the shining spires of that City to which we travel.

THE END

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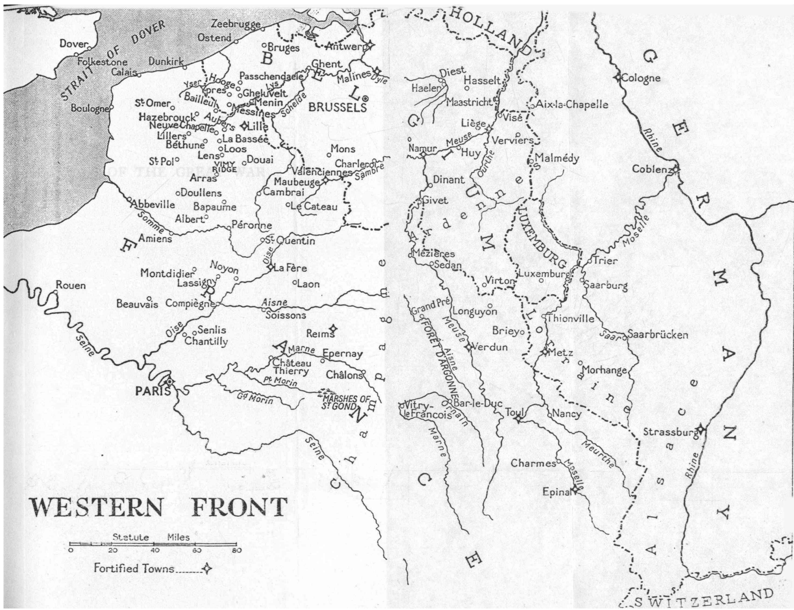
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