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THE BATTLE OF THE RIVERS

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PREFATORY NOTE

On a scale before unknown in Western Europe, and save for the coincident operations in the Eastern theatre of war, unexampled in history, the succession of events named the "Battle of the Rivers" presents illustrations of strategy and tactics of absorbing interest. Apart even from the spectacular aspects of this lurid and grandiose drama, full as it is of strange and daring episodes, the problems it affords in the science of war must appeal to every intelligent mind.

An endeavour is here made to state these problems in outline. In the light they throw, events and episodes, which might otherwise appear confused, will be found to fit into a clear sequence of causes and consequences. The events and episodes themselves gain in grandeur as their import and relationship are unfolded.

Since the story of the retreat from Mons has been told in another volume of this series, it is only in the following pages dealt with so far as its military bearings elucidate succeeding phases of the campaign.

The Battle of the Rivers

CHAPTER I

THE GERMAN PLANS

"ABOUT September 3," wrote Field Marshal Sir John French in his despatch dated a fortnight later,[1] "the enemy appears to have changed his plans, and to have determined to stop his advance south direct upon Paris, for on September 4 air reconnaissances showed that his main columns were moving in a south-easterly direction generally, east of a line drawn through Nanteuil and Lizy on the Ourcq."

In that passage the British commander summarises an event which changed the whole military aspect of the Great War and changed it not only in the Western, but in the Eastern theatre of hostilities.

What were the German plans and why were they changed?

In part the plans were military, and in part political. These two aspects, however, are so

[1] Despatch from Sir John French to Earl Kitchener of September 17th, 1914. For the text of this see Appendix.

interwoven that it is necessary, in the first place, briefly to sketch the political aspect in order that the military aspect, which depended on the political, may be the better understood.

The political object was to reduce France to such powerlessness that she must not only agree to any terms imposed, but remain for the future in a state of vassalage to Germany. Further, the object was to extract from France a war fine so colossal[1] that, if paid, it would furnish Germany with the means of carrying on the war against Great Britain and Russia, and, if not paid, or paid only in part, would offer a pretext for an occupation of a large part of France by German troops, indefinite in point of time, and, formalities apart, indistinguishable from annexation. By means of that occupation great resources for carrying on the war might, in any event, be drawn in kind from the French population and from their territory, or drawn in cash in the form of local war levies.

In a passage quoted by M. Edouard Simon,[2] the late Prince von Bismarck once spoke of the difficulty he met with at the end of the war with France in 1871, in restraining the cupidity of the then King of Prussia and in "mixing the water of reflection with the wine of victory."

[1] The contemplated fine has been alleged to be 4,000 millions sterling, coupled with the formal cession of all North Eastern France. This statement was circulated by Reuter's correspondent at Paris on what was asserted to be high diplomatic authority. Such a sum sounds incredible, though as a *pretext* it might possibly have been put forward.

[2] Simon: *The Emperor William and his Reign.*

There was at the time, in Germany, much discussion as to the amount of the War Fine. The staggering total of 15,000 millions of francs (600 million pounds sterling) was freely asserted to be none too high. Fear of possible war with Great Britain mainly kept within bounds this desire of plunder, and led the Emperor William to accept, reluctantly, the 5,000 million francs afterwards paid.

There can be no doubt, however, that it became a settled opinion with the Government, and also, even if to a less extent, a conviction with the public of Germany that, enormous as it was, the levy upon France in 1871 was insufficient. That opinion was sharpened by the promptitude, almost contemptuous, with which the French people discharged the demand, and brought the German military occupation to an end.

The opinion that the War Fine of 1871 had been too small inspired the political crisis of 1875, caused by a threatened renewal of the German attack. The pretext then was that France was forming, with Austria and Italy, a league designed to destroy the new German Empire. The true cause of hostility was that France had begun to reorganise her army. Intervention by the Cabinets of London and St. Petersburg averted the peril. The German Government found itself obliged to put off a further draft upon "opulent France"[1] until a more convenient season.

This discovery that neither Great Britain nor

[1] This phrase is that of General F. von Bernhardi.

Russia was willing to see France become the milch cow of Germany dictated the policy which led later to the Triple Alliance. Consistently from this time to the end of his life the Emperor William I. assumed the part of guardian of the peace of Europe. The Triple Alliance was *outwardly* promoted by Germany with that object.[1]

Meanwhile, every opportunity was taken to strengthen the German military organisation.

[1] After the Berlin Congress in 1878, Prince Gortschakov mooted the idea of an alliance between Russia and France. In 1879 Bismarck, in view of such a development, concluded the alliance between Germany and Austria. Italy joined this alliance in 1883, but on a purely defensive footing. The account given of the Triple Alliance by Prince Bernhard von Bülow, ex-Imperial Chancellor, is that it was designed to safeguard the Continental interests of the three Powers, leaving each free to pursue its extra-Continental interests. From 1815 to 1878 the three absolutist Powers, Russia, Prussia, and Austria, had aimed at dominating the politics of the Continent by their entente. For many years, however, German influence in Russia has been giving way before French influence. This is one of the most important facts of modern European history. The Triple Alliance was undoubtedly designed to counteract its effect. Germany, with ambitions in Asia Minor, backed up Austria, with ambitions in the Balkans. Both sets of ambitions were opposed to the interests of Russia. Russia's desertion of the absolutist entente for the existing entente with the liberal Powers of the West has been due nevertheless as much to the growth of constitutionalism as to diplomacy. The entente with Great Britain and France is popular. On the other hand, the entente with Germany and Austria was unpopular. The view here taken that one of the real aims of the Triple Alliance was the furtherance of Prussia's designs against France is the view consistent with the course of Prussian policy. For Prince von Bülow's explanations, see his *Imperial Germany*.

Only by possession of an invincible army could the German Empire, it was contended, fulfil its peace-keeping mission.

This growth of military armaments imposed on Germany a heavy burden. Was the burden borne merely for the sake of peace, or for the sake of the original inspiration and policy?

Few acquainted with the character of the Germans will credit them with a tendency to spend money out of sentiment. The answer, besides, has been given by General von Bernhardi.[1] He has not hesitated to declare that the object of these preparations was to ensure victory in the offensive war made necessary by the growth of the German population, a growth calling for a proportionate "political expansion."

Outside Germany the so-called revelations of General von Bernhardi took many by surprise. That, however, was because, outside Germany, not many know much of German history, and fewer still the history of modern Prussia.

It was realised, when General von Bernhardi published his book, that the original inspiration and policy had never been changed. On the contrary, all the efforts and organisation of Prussia had been directed to the realisation of that policy, and the only alteration was that, as confidence in Prussia's offensive organisation grew, the policy had been enlarged by sundry added ambitions until at length it became that grotesque and Gothic political fabric known as Pan-Germanism.

[1] F. von Bernhardi: *The Next War:* see Introduction.

"The military origin of the new German Empire," says M. Simon, "is of vast importance; it gives that Empire its fundamental character; it establishes its basis and its principle of existence. Empires derive their vitality from the principle to which they owe their birth."

The fact is of vast importance because, just as the British Empire had its origin in, and owes its character to, the embodiment of moral force in self-government, so the German Empire had its origin in, and owes its character to, the embodiment of material forces in armies, and existed, as General von Bernhardi says, for the employment of that force as and whenever favourable opportunity should present itself.

The political inspiration and purpose being clear, how was that purpose, as regards France, most readily and with fewest risks to be realised?

It was most readily to be realised by seizing Paris. As everybody is aware, the Government of France is more centralised than that of any other great State. Paris is the hub of the French roads and railways; Paris is also the hub of French finance; Paris is at once the brain and the heart of the country; the place to which all national taxes flow; the seat from which all national direction and control proceed. It was believed, therefore, that, Paris occupied, France would be stricken with political paralysis. Resistance might be offered by the provinces, for the area of France is roughly equal to the area of Germany, but the resistance could never be more than ineffectual.

Such was the plan on its political side. What were its military features?

A political plan of that character plainly called for a swift and, if possible, crushing military offensive. Rapidity was one of the first essentials. That affected materially the whole military side of the scheme. It meant that to facilitate mobility and transport, the equipment of the troops must be made as light as possible. Hence all the usual apparatus of field hospitals and impedimenta for encampment must be dispensed with. It meant that the force to be dispatched must be powerful enough to bear down the *maximum* of estimated opposition, and ensure the seizure of Paris, without delay. It meant again that the force must move by the shortest and most direct route.

If we bear in mind these three features—equipment cut down to give mobility, strength to ensure an uninterrupted sweep, shortest route—we shall find it the easier to grasp the nature of the operations which have since taken place. The point to be kept in mind is that what the military expedition contemplated was not only on an unusual scale, but was of an altogether unusual, and in many respects novel, character.

The most serious military problem in front of the German Government was the problem of route. The forces supposed to be strong enough Germany had at her disposal. Within her power, too, was it to make them, so far as meticulous preparation could do it, mobile. But

command of the shortest and most direct route she did not possess.

That route we know passes in part through the plain of northern Belgium, and in part through the parallel valley of the Meuse to the points where, on the Belgium frontier, there begin the great international roads converging on Paris. All the way from Liége to Paris there are not only these great paved highways, but lines of main trans-continental railroads. The route, in short, presented every natural and artificial facility needed to keep a vast army fully supplied.

Here it should be recalled that two things govern the movements of armies. Hostile opposition is one; supplies are the other. In this instance, the possible hostile opposition was estimated for. It remained to ensure that neither the march of the great host, as a whole, nor the advance of any part of it should at any time be held up by waiting for the arrival of either foodstuffs, munitions, or reinforcements, but that the thousand and one necessaries for such an army, still a complex list even when everything omissible had been weeded out, should arrive, as, when, and where wanted.

Little imagination need be exercised to perceive that to work out a scheme like that on such a scale involves enormous labour. On the one side were the arrangements for gathering these necessaries and placing them in depots; on the other were the arrangements for issuing them, sending them forward, and distributing them.

Nothing short of years of effort could connect such a mass of detail. If hopeless confusion was not almost from the outset to ensue, the greatest care was called for to make it certain that the mighty machination would move successfully.

A scheme of that kind suited the methodical genius of Germany, and there can be no doubt that the years spent upon it had brought it to perfection. It had been worked out to time table. Concurrently, arrangements for the mobilisation of reserve troops had become almost automatic. Every reservist in the German Army held instructions setting out minutely what to do and where and when to report himself as soon as the call came.

Now this elaborate plan had been drawn up on the assumption of an invasion of France by the route through Belgium. That assumption formed its basis. Not only so, but the extent to which the resources of Belgium and North-east France might, by requisitioning, be drawn upon to relieve transport and so promote rapidity, had been exactly estimated.

It is evident, therefore, that the adoption of any other route must have upset the whole proposal. In any other country the fact of the Government devoting its energies over a long period of time to such a scheme on such a footing would appear extraordinary, and the more extraordinary since this, after all, was only part of a still larger plan, worked out with the same minuteness, for waging a war on both frontiers.

The fact, however, ceases to be extraordinary if we bear in mind that the modern German Empire is essentially military and aggressive.

Obviously, the weak point of plans so elaborate is that they cannot readily be changed. Neither even can they, save with difficulty, be modified. Even in face, therefore, of a declaration of war by Great Britain, the plan had to be adhered to. Unless it could be adhered to, the invasion of France must be given up.

Bearing in mind the labour and cost of preparation, the hopes built upon the success of the invasion, and the firm belief that the opposition to be expected by Belgium could at most be but trifling, it ceases to be surprising that, though there was every desire to put off that complication, a war with Great Britain proved no deterrent.

Further, the construction by the French just within their Eastern frontier of a chain of fortifications extremely difficult to force by means of a frontal attack, and quite impossible to break if defended by efficient field forces, manifestly suggested the plea of adopting the shorter and more advantageous route on the ground of necessity. In dealing with that plea it should not be forgotten that the State which elects to take the offensive in war needs resources superior to those of the State which elects to stand, to begin with, upon a policy of defence. Those superior resources, save in total population, Germany, as compared with France, did not possess.

In adopting the offensive, therefore, on account of its initial military advantages, Germany was risking in this attack means needed for a prolonged struggle. It was necessary in consequence for the attack to be so designed that it could not only not fail, but should succeed rapidly enough to enable the attacking State to recoup itself—and, possibly, with a profit.

The conditions of first rapidity, and second certainty, formed the *political* aspects of the plan, and they affected its military aspects in regard to first numbers, secondly equipment, thirdly route.

But there were, if success was to be assured, still other conditions to be fulfilled, and these conditions were *purely* military. They were:—

(1) That in advancing the line of the invading armies must not expose a flank, and by so doing risk delay through local or partial defeat.

(2) That the invading armies must not lay bare their communications. Risk to their communications would also involve delay.

(3) That they must at no point incur the hazard of attacking a defended position save in superior force. To do so would again risk repulse and delay.

Did the plan drawn up by the German General Staff fulfil apparently all the conditions, both political and military, and did it promise swift success? It did.

The plan, in the first instance, covered the operations of eight armies, acting in combination. These were the armies of General von Emmich; General von Kluck; General von Bülow; General von Hausen; Albert, Duke of Wurtemberg; the Crown Prince of Germany; the Crown Prince of Bavaria; and General von Heeringen. Embodying first reserves, they comprised twenty-eight army corps out of the forty-six which Germany, on a war footing, could put immediately into the field.[1]

Having reached the French frontier from near the Belgian coast to Belfort, the eight armies were to have advanced across France in echelon. If you take a row of squares running across a chessboard from corner to corner you have such squares for what is known in military phraseology as echelon formation.

Almost invariably in a military scheme of that character the first body, or "formation" as it

[1] Of the remaining corps, five were posted along the frontier of East Prussia to watch the Russians. The rest were held chiefly at Mainz, Coblentz, and Breslau as an initial reserve.

The now definitely ascertained facts regarding the military strength of Germany appear to be these :—

25 corps and one division of the active army mustering	...	1,530,000 men
21 corps of Landwehr mustering		1,260,000 men
Total	... ...	2,790,000 men

In addition, there were raised 12 corps of Ersatz Reserve, and there were also the Landsturm and the Volunteers, whose numerical strength is uncertain. These troops, however, were not embodied until later in the campaign.

is called, of the echelon is reinforced and made stronger than the others, because, while such a line of formations is both supple and strong, it becomes liable to be badly disorganised if the leading body be broken. On the leading body is thrown the main work of initiating the thrust. That leading body, too, must be powerful enough to resist an attack in flank as well as in front.[1]

Advancing on this plan, these armies would present a line exposing, save as regarded the first of them, no flank open to attack. Indeed, the first object of the echelon is to render both a frontal and a flank attack upon it difficult.

Had the plan succeeded as designed, we should have had this position of affairs: the eight armies would have extended across France from Paris to Verdun by the valley of the Marne, the great natural highway running across France due east to the German frontier, and one having both first-rate road and railway facilities. It was hoped that by the time the first and strongest formation of this chain of armies had reached Paris and had fastened round it, the sixth,

[1] The leading army, that of General von Kluck, consisted of 6 corps; and the second army, that of General von Bülow, of 4 corps. The others were formed each of 3 corps, making an original total of 28 corps.

Following the disaster at Liége, however, the army of General von Emmich was divided up, and the view here taken, which appears to be most consistent with the known facts, is that it was, after being re-formed, employed to reinforce the armies of Generals von Kluck and von Bülow. That would make the strength of the German force, which marched through northern Belgium, 780,000 men.

seventh, and eighth armies would, partly by attacking the fortified French frontier on the east, but chiefly by enveloping it on the west, have gained possession of the frontier defence works.

The main French army must then have been driven westward from the valley of the Marne, across the Aube, brought to a decisive battle in the valley of the Seine, defeated, and, enclosed in a great arc by the German armies extending round from the north and by the east to the south of Paris, have been forced into surrender.

There is a common assumption that the German plan was designed to repeat the manœuvres which in the preceding war led to Sedan, and almost with the same detail. That is rating the intelligence of the German General Staff far too low. They could not but know that the details of one campaign cannot be repeated in another against an opponent, who, aware of the repetition, would be ready in advance against every move.

Naturally, they fostered the notion of an intended repetition. That promoted their real design. The design itself, however, was based not merely on the war of 1870–1, but on the invasion of 1814, which led to the abdication of Napoleon, and the primary idea of it was to have *only one main line of advance.*

The reason was that if an assailant takes two main lines of advance simultaneously and has to advance along the valleys of rivers

converging to a point, as the Oise, the Marne, and the Seine converge towards Paris, his advance may be effectively disputed by a much smaller defending force than if he adopts only one line of advance, provided always, of course, that he can safeguard his flanks and his communications.

Bear in mind the calculation that the main French army would never in any event be strong enough successfully to resist an invasion so planned. Bear in mind, too, that an echelon formation is not only supple and difficult to attack along its length on either side, but that it can be stretched out or closed up like a concertina. To maintain a formation of that kind with smaller bodies of troops is fairly easy. To maintain it with the enormous masses forming the German armies would be difficult. But the Germans were so confident of being able to compel the French to conform to all the German movements, to stand, that is to say, as the weaker side, always on the defensive, leaving the invaders a practically unchallenged initiative, that they believed they could co-ordinate all their movements with exactitude. This was taking a risk, but they took it.

It is a mistake to suppose that they entered on the campaign with every movement mapped out from start to finish. No plan of any campaign was ever laid down on such lines, and none ever will be. The plan of a campaign has to be built on broad ideas. Those ideas, by taking all the essentials into consideration, the

strategist seeks to convert into realised events. In this instance, there can be very little doubt that certain assumptions were treated as so probable as almost to be certainties. The first was that such forces as France could mobilise in the time would be mainly drafted to defend the fortified frontier. The next was that such forces as could be massed in time along the boundary of Belgium would be too weak seriously to impede the invasion. The third was that in any subsequent attempt to transfer forces from the fortified frontier to the Belgian boundary the French would be met and defeated by the advancing echelon of German masses. The fourth was that such an attempted transfer, followed by its defeat, would leave the fortified frontier so readily seizable, that German armies advancing swiftly into the valley of the Marne would fall upon these defeated French forces on the flank and rear. Besides, that attempted transfer would be the very thing that would promote the German design of envelopment.

If Paris could be reached by the strongest of the chain of armies in eight days, then the mobilisation of the French reserves would still be incomplete. Under the most favourable conditions, and even without the disturbance of invasion, that mobilisation takes a fortnight. Given a sudden and successful invasion with the resultant upset of communications and the mobilisation could never be completed. All, therefore, that the 1,680,000 men forming the

invading hosts[1] would have to encounter would be the effectives of the French regular forces, less than half the number of the invaders.

When we speak of twenty-eight army corps moving in echelon, approximately like so many squares placed diagonally corner to corner, it is as well not to forget that such a chain of masses may assume quite sinuous and snake-like variations and yet remain perfectly intact and strong. For example, the head of the chain might be wound round and pivot upon Paris, and the rest of the chain extended across France in curves. This gigantic military boa-constrictor might therefore crush the heart out of France, while the defenders of the country remained helpless in its toils.

Such in brief was the daring and ambitious scheme conceived and worked out by the German General Headquarters Staff, and worked out in the most minute detail.

It will be seen from this summary that so far as its broad military features are concerned, the plan promised an almost certainly successful enterprise. There were concealed in its calculations, nevertheless, fatal flaws. What they were will appear in the course of the present narrative. Meanwhile it is necessary to add that possible opposition from Belgium had not been overlooked; nor the possibility, consequent upon that opposition, of intervention by Great Britain.

[1] A German army corps is made up, with first reserves, embodied on mobilisation, to 60,000 men. Twenty-eight army corps, therefore, represent a total of 1,680,000 of all arms.

From the military standpoint, however, it was never calculated that any British military force would be able to land either in France or in Belgium promptly enough to save the French army from disaster. In any event, such a force would be, from its limited numbers, comparatively unimportant.

CHAPTER II

WHY THE PLANS WERE CHANGED

Let us now pass from designs to events, and, reviewing in their military bearing the operations between August 3, when the German troops crossed the Belgian frontier, to the day, exactly one month later, when the German plans were apparently changed, deal with the question: Why were the plans changed?

The Germans entered Liége on August 10. They had hoped by that time to be, if not at, at any rate close to, Paris. In part they were unable to begin their advance through Belgium until August 17 or August 18, because they had not, until that date, destroyed all the forts at Liége, but in part, also, these delays had played havoc with the details of their scheme.

Consider how the shock of such a delay would make itself felt. The mighty movement by this time going on throughout the length and breadth of Germany found itself suddenly jerked into stoppage. All its couplings clashed. Excellently designed as are the strategic railways

of Germany they are no more than sufficient for the transport of troops, guns, munitions, food-stuffs, and other things necessary in such a case. If, owing to delays, troop trains got into the way of food trains, and *vice versa,* the resultant difficulties are readily conceivable. All this war transport is run on a military time table. The time table was there, and it was complete in every particular. But it had become unworkable. Gradually the tangle was straightened out, but the muddle, while it lasted, was gigantic, and we can well believe that masses of men, arriving from all parts of Germany at Aix-la-Chapelle, found no sufficient supplies awaiting them, and that sheer desperation drove the German Government to collect supplies by plundering all the districts of Belgium within reach. As the Belgians were held to be wilfully responsible for the mess, the cruelty and ferocity shown in these raids ceases to be in any sense unbelievable.

Dislocation of the plan, however, was not all. In the attempts to carry the fortress of Liége by storm the Germans lost, out of the three corps forming the army of General von Emmich, 48,700 men killed and wounded.[1] These corps, troops from Hanover, Pomerania, and Brandenburg, formed the flower of the army. The work had to be carried out of burying the dead and evacu-

[1] These figures are given on the authority of M. de Broqueville, Belgian Prime Minister and Minister of War, who has stated that the total here quoted was officially admitted by the German Government.

ating the wounded. The shattered corps had to be reformed from reserves. All this of necessity meant aditional complications.

Then there was the further fighting with the Belgians. What were the losses sustained by the Germans between the assaults on Liége and the occupation of Brussels is, outside of Germany, not known, nor is it known in Germany save to the Government. To put that loss as at least equal to the losses at Liége is, however, a very conservative estimate.

Meanwhile, the French had advanced into Belgium along both banks of the Meuse and that further contributed to upset the great preparation.

We have, therefore, down to August 21, losses, including those in the fighting on the Meuse and in Belgian Luxemburg, probably equal to the destruction of two reinforced army corps.

Now we come to the Battle of Mons and Charleroi, when to the surprise of all non-German tacticians, the attacks in mass formation witnessed at Liége were repeated.

To describe that battle is beyond the scope of this narrative. But it is certain that the estimates so far formed of German losses are below, if not a long way below, the truth.

There is, however, a reliable comparative basis on which to arrive at a computation, and this has a most essential bearing on later events.

At Liége there were three heavy mass attacks against trenches defended by a total force of

20,000 Belgian riflemen with machine guns.[1] We have seen what the losses were. At Mons, against the British forces, there were mass attacks against lines held by five divisions of British infantry, a total roughly of 65,000 riflemen, with machine guns, and backed by over sixty batteries of artillery.

Now, taking them altogether, the British infantry reach, as marksmen, a level quite unknown in the armies of the Continent. Further, these mass attacks were made by the Germans with far greater numbers than at Liége, and there were far more of them. Indeed, they were pressed at frequent intervals during two days and part of the intervening night. The evidence as to the dense formations adopted in these attacks is conclusive.

What, from facts such as these, is the inference to be drawn as to losses incurred? The inference, and it is supported by the failure of any of these attacks to get home, is, and can only be, that the losses must have been proportionally on the same scale as those at Liége, for the attacks were, for the most part, as at Liége, launched frontally against entrenched positions. Though at first sight such figures may appear fantastic, to put the losses at three times the total of the losses at Liége is probably but a very slight exaggeration, even if it be any exaggeration at all.

There is, however, still another ground for

[1] There are usually two machine guns to each section of infantry.

such a conclusion. While the British front from Condé past and behind Mons to Binche allowed of the full and effective employment of the whole British force, even when holding in hand necessary reserves, it was obviously not a front wide enough to allow of the full and effective employment on the German side of a force four times as numerous. It must not be forgotten that troops cannot fight at their best without sufficient space to fight in.

But to employ in the same space a force no greater than the British, considering the advantage of position given with modern arms to an army acting on the defensive on well-chosen ground, would have meant the annihilation of the German army section by section.

That in effect, apart from the turning movement undertaken through Tournai, and the attempt at Binche to enfilade the British position by an oblique line of attack, was the problem which General von Kluck had to face. His solution of it, in the belief that his artillery must have completely shaken the British resistance, was to follow up the bombardment by a succession of infantry attacks in close formation, one following immediately the other, so that each attack would, it was thought, start from a point nearer to the British trenches than that preceding it, until finally the rush could not possibly be stopped. In that way the whole weight of the German infantry might, despite the narrow front, be thrown against the British positions, and though the losses incurred must of necessity be

severe, nevertheless, the British line would be entirely swept away, and the losses more than amply revenged in the rout that must ensue. Not only so, but the outcome should be the destruction of the British force

That this is as near the truth as any explanation which can be offered is hardly doubtful. The conclusion is consonant, besides, with what have been considered the newest German views on offensive tactics. To suppose that General von Kluck, or any other commander, would throw away the lives of his officers and men without some seemingly sufficient object is not reasonable.

Here we touch one of the hidden but fatal flaws in the German plan—the assumption that German troops, if not superior, must at any rate be equal in skill to any others. The German troops at Mons, admittedly, fought with great daring, but that they fought or were led with skill is disproved by all the testimony available. It is as clear as anything can be that not merely the coolness and the marksmanship of the British force was a surprise to the enemy, but the uniformity of its quality. Of the elements that go to make up military strength, uniformity of quality is among the most important. The cohesion of an army with no weak links is unbreakable. It is not only more supple than an army made up of troops of varying quality and skill, but it is more tenacious. Like a well-tempered sword, it is at once more flexible yet more unbreakable than an inferior weapon.

Against an inferior army the tactics of General von Kluck must infallibly have succeeded. Against such a military weapon as the British force at Mons they were foredoomed to failure. Assuming the British army to be inferior, General von Kluck threw the full weight of his troops upon it before he had tried its temper.

Studying their bearing, the importance of these considerations becomes plain. Powerful as it was, the driving head of the great German chain had yet not proved powerful enough inevitably to sweep away resistance. That again disclosed a miscalculation. It is true that the British force had to retire, and it is equally true that that retirement exposed them to great danger, for the enemy, inflamed by his losses, was still in numbers far superior, and what, for troops obliged to adopt marching formations, was even more serious, he was times over superior in guns. Few armies in face of such superiority could have escaped annihilation; fewer still would not have fallen into complete demoralisation.

The British force, however, not only escaped annihilation, but came out both with losses *relatively* light, and wholly undemoralised. This was no mere accident. Why, can be briefly told. Remember that quality of uniformity, remember the value of it in giving cohesion to the organic masses of the army. Remember further the hitting power of an army in which both gunners and riflemen are on the whole first-rate shots, and with a cavalry which the hostile horse had shown itself unable to contend

against. On the other hand, bear in mind that the greater masses of the enemy were of necessity slower in movement, and that the larger an army is, the slower it *must* move.

Naturally the enemy used every effort to throw as large forces as he could upon the flanks of the retiring British divisions. He especially employed his weight of guns for that purpose. On the other hand, the British obviously and purposely occupied all the roads over as broad an extent of country as was advisable. They did so in order to impose wide detours on outflanking movements. While those forces were going round, the British were moving forward and so escaping them.

The difficulties the Germans had to contend against were first the difficulty of getting close in enough with bodies of troops large enough, and secondly that, in flowing up, their mass, while greater in depth from van to rear than the British, could not be much, if anything, greater in breadth. The numerical superiority, therefore, could not be made fully available.

Broadly, those were the conditions of this retirement; and when we come to examine them, comparing the effective force of the opponents, the *relatively* light losses of the British cease to be surprising. The retirement, of course, was full of exciting episodes. Sir John French began his movement with a vigorous counter-attack.[1] This wise tactic both misled the enemy and taught him caution.

[1] "At daybreak on the 24th (Aug.) the Second Division

It was by such tactics that the British General so far outpaced the enemy as to be able to form front for battle at Cambrai. Here again some brief notes are necessary in order to estimate the effect on later events.

On the right of the British position from Cambrai to Le Cateau, and somewhat in advance of it, the village of Landrecies was held by the 4th Brigade of Guards. Just to the north of Landrecies is the forest of Mormal. The forest is shaped like a triangle. Landrecies stands at the apex pointing south. Round the skirts of the forest both to the east and to the west are roads meeting at Landrecies. Along these roads the Germans were obliged to advance, although to obtain cover from the British guns enfilading these roads large bodies of them came through the forest.

The British right, the corps of General Sir Douglas Haig, held Marailles, and commanded the road to the west of the forest.

Towards the British centre a second slightly advanced position like that of Landrecies was held to the south of Solesmes by the 4th Division, commanded by General Snow.

The British left, formed of the corps of General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, was "re-

from the neighbourhood of Harmignies made a powerful demonstration as if to retake Binche. This was supported by the artillery of the first and second divisions, while the First Division took up a supporting position in the neighbourhood of Peissant. Under cover of this demonstration the Second (Army) Corps retired on the line Dour—Quarouble—Frameries."—*Despatch of Sir John French of September 7.*

fused" or drawn back, because in this quarter an attempted turning movement on the part of the enemy was looked for. In the position taken up, the front here was covered by a small river continued by a canal.

On the British left also, to the south of Cambrai, were posted the cavalry under General Allenby.

These dispositions commanded the roads and approaches along which the enemy must advance in order to obtain touch with the main body, and they were calculated both to break up the unity of his onset and to lay him open to effective attack while deploying for battle. They were, in fact, the same tactics which, in resisting the onset of a superior force, Wellington employed at Waterloo by holding in advance of his main line Hugomont and La Haye Sainte for a like purpose.

Sir John French had foreseen that, taught at Mons the cost of a frontal assault against British troops, General von Kluck would now seek to employ his greater numerical strength and weight of guns by throwing that strength as far as he could against the flanks of the British, hoping to crush the British line together and so destroy it.

That, in fact, was what General von Kluck did try to do. In this attack five German army corps were engaged. The German General concentrated the main weight of his artillery, comprising some 112 batteries of field guns and howitzers, against the British left. The terrific

bombardment was followed up by infantry attacks, in which mass formations were once more resorted to. Evidently it was thought that against such a strength in guns the British could not possibly hold their lines, and that the infantry, completely demoralised, must be so shaken as to fire wildly, rendering an onslaught by superior forces of the German infantry an assured and sweeping victory.

For a second time these calculations miscarried. As they rushed forward, expecting but feeble opposition, the hostile infantry masses were shot down by thousands. The spectacle of such masses was certainly designed to terrify. It failed to terrify. In this connection it is apposite to recall that the destruction of Baker Pasha's army at Suakim by a massed rush of Arab spearmen long formed with the newer school of German tacticians a classic example of the effect of such charges on *British* troops. No distinction seems to have been made between the half-trained Egyptian levies led by Baker Pasha and fully trained British infantry. The two are, in a military sense, worlds apart. Yet German theorists, their judgment influenced by natural bias, ignored the difference.

Nor was the fortune of the attacks upon the British right any better. The defence of Landrecies by the Guards Brigade forms one of the most heroic episodes of the war. Before it was evacuated the village had become a German charnel-house. Hard pressed as they were at both extremities of their line, the British

during these two days fought to a standstill an army still nearly three times as large as their own.

That simply upset all accepted computations. As Sir John French stated in his despatch of September 7, the fighting from the beginning of the action at Mons to the further British retirement from Cambrai formed in effect one continuous battle. The British withdrawal was materially helped by a timely attack upon the right flank of the German forces delivered by two French divisions which had advanced from Arras under the command of General d'Amade, and by the French cavalry under General Sordêt.

Now consider the effect upon the German plans. There is, to begin with, the losses. That those at Cambrai must have been extremely heavy is certain. The failure of such an attack pushed with such determination proves it.[1] We are fully justified in concluding that the attack did not cease until the power to continue it had come to an end. Losses on that scale meant, first, the collection of the wounded and the burial of the dead; and, secondly, the reforming of broken battalions from reserves. The latter had to be brought from the rear, and that, as well as their incorporation in the various corps, involved delay. Again, the vast expenditure of artillery munitions meant waiting for

[1] The reported extraordinary Army Order issued by the German Emperor commanding "extermination" of the British force has since been officially disavowed as a fiction.

replenishment; and though we may assume that arrangements for replenishment were as complete as possible, yet it would take time. For all these reasons the inability of General von Kluck to follow up becomes readily explicable.

Bear in mind that the whole German scheme of invasion hung for its success on his ability to follow up and on the continued power and solidity of his forces. It must not be supposed that that had not been fully foreseen and, as far as was thought necessary, provided for. There is ample evidence that, in view alike of the fighting in Belgium and of the landing of the British Expeditionary Force on August 17, this leading and largest formation of the German chain of armies had been made still larger than the original scheme had designed. Apparently at Mons it comprised eight instead of the originally proposed six army corps. After Cambrai, as later events will show, the force of General von Kluck included only five army corps of first line troops.

To account for that decrease, the suggestion has been made that at this time, consequent upon the defeat met with by the Germans at Gunbinnen in East Prussia and the advance of the Russians towards Königsberg, there was a heavy transfer of troops from the west front to the east. Not only would such a transfer have been in the circumstances the most manifest of military blunders, but no one acquainted with the methods of the German Government and of

the German General Staff can accept the explanation. Whatever may be the shortcomings of the German Government, vacillation is not one of them. What evidently did take place was the transfer of the *débris* of army corps preparatory to their re-formation for service on the east front and their replacement by fresh reserves.

But though the mass was thus made up again, there is a wide difference between a great army consisting wholly of first line troops and an army, even of equal numbers, formed of troops of varying values. The driving head was no longer solid.

In the battle on the Somme when the British occupied positions from Ham to Peronne, and the French army delivered a flank attack on the Germans along the line from St. Quentin to Guise, the invaders were again checked.

From St. Quentin to Peronne the course of the Somme, a deep and dangerous river, describes an irregular half-circle, sweeping first to the west, and then round to the north. General von Kluck had here to face the far from easy tactical problem of fighting on the inner line of that half-circle. He addressed himself to it with vigour. One part of his plan was a wide outflanking movement through Amiens; another was to throw a heavy force against St. Quentin; a third was to force the passage of the Somme both east and west of Ham.

These operations were undertaken, of course, in conjunction with the army of General von Bülow. Part of the troops of von Bülow, the

10th, and the Reserve Corps of the Prussian Guard were heavily defeated by the French at Guise. But while it was the object of the French and British to make the German operations as costly as possible, it formed, for reasons which will presently appear, no part of their strategy to follow up local advantages.

Why it formed no part of their strategy will become evident if at this point a glance is cast over the fortunes of the other German armies.

The army of General von Bülow had been engaged against the French in the battle at Charleroi and along the Sambre, and again in the battle at St. Quentin and Guise, and admittedly had in both encounters lost heavily.

The army of General von Hausen had been compelled to fight its way across the Meuse in the face of fierce opposition. At Charleville, the centre of this great combat, its losses, too, were severe. Again, at Rethel, on the line of the Aisne, there was a furious six days' battle.

The army of Duke Albert of Wurtemberg had twice been driven back over the Meuse into Belgian Luxemburg.

The army of the Crown Prince of Germany, notwithstanding its initial success at Château Malins, had been defeated at Spincourt.

The army of the Crown Prince of Bavaria had been defeated with heavy loss at Luneville.

Divisions of the German army operating in Alsace had been worsted, first at Altkirch, and again at Mulhausen.

Taking these events together, the fact stands

out that the first aim in the strategy of General Joffre was, as far as possible, to defeat the German armies in detail, and thus to hinder and delay their co-operation. He was enabled to carry out that object because the French mobilisation had been completed without disturbance.

These two facts—completion of the French mobilisation and the throwing back of the German plan by the defeat of the several armies in detail—are facts of the first importance.

The aggregate losses sustained by the Germans were already huge. If, up to September 3, we put the total wastage of war from the outset at 500,000, remembering that the fatigues of a campaign conducted in a hurry mean a wastage from exhaustion equal at least to the losses in action, we shall, great as such a total may appear, still be within the truth.

But more serious even than the losses was the dislocation of the plan. The army of the Crown Prince of Germany, which was to have advanced by rapid marches through the defiles of the Argonne, to have invested Verdun, and to have taken the fortified frontier in the rear, found itself unable to effect that object. It was held up in the hills. That meant that the armies of the Crown Prince of Bavaria and the army of General von Heeringen were kept out of the main scheme of operations.

Consider what this meant. It meant that the freedom of movement of the whole chain of armies was for the time being gone. It meant further that, so long as that state of things con-

tinued, the primary condition on which the whole German scheme depended—a superiority of military strength—could not be realised. Not only were the German armies no longer, in a military sense, homogeneous, but a considerable part of the force, being on the wrong side of the fortified frontier, could not be brought to bear, and another considerable part of the force, the army of the Crown Prince of Germany, had fallen into an entanglement. Were the armies of von Kluck, von Bülow, von Hausen, and Duke Albert, the latter already badly mauled, sufficient to carry out the scheme laid down? Quite obviously not.

Obviously not, because on the one hand there was the completion of the French mobilisation, and the presence of a British army; and on the other hand there were the losses met with, and the reductions in the *applicable* force.

Something must be done to pull affairs round. The something was to begin with the extraction of the Crown Prince of Germany from his predicament. If that could be effected and the fortified frontier turned, then the armies of the Crown Prince of Bavaria and of General von Heeringen could make their entry into the main arena; and the primary condition of superiority in strength restored.

Thus it is evident that the events preceding September 3, dictated the movement which, on September 3, changed for good the aspect of the campaign.

CHAPTER III

GENERAL JOFFRE AS A STRATEGIST

FROM the strategy on the German side let us now turn to that on the side of the French. Between them a fundamental distinction at once appears.

Of both the aim was similar—to compel the other side to fight under a disadvantage. In that way strategy helps to ensure victory, or to lessen the consequences of defeat.

The strategy of the German General Staff, however, was from the outset obvious. The strategy of General Joffre was at the outset a mystery. Only as the campaign went on did the French scheme of operations become apparent. Even then the part of the scheme still to come remained unfathomable.

It has been assumed that with the employment of armies formed of millions of men the element of surprise must be banished. That was a German theory. The theory is unsound. Now, as ever, intellect is the ultimate commanding quality in war.

In truth, the factor of intellect was never more

commanding than under conditions of war carried on with mass armies.

Reflect upon the difference between an opponent who, under such conditions, is able to fathom and to provide against hostile moves, and the opponent who has to take his measures in the dark as to hostile intentions.

The former can issue his orders with the reasonable certainty that they are what the situation will call for. Never were orders and instructions more complex than with modern armies numbering millions; never were there more contingencies to provide against and to foresee. To move and to manipulate these vast masses with effect, accurate *anticipation* is essential. Such complicated machines cannot be pushed about on the spur of the moment when a general suddenly wakes up to a discovery.

It follows that to conduct a campaign with mass armies there must either be a plan which you judge yourself strong enough in any event to realise or a plan which, because your opponent cannot fathom it, must throw him into complete confusion. The former was the German way; the latter the French.

That General Joffre would *try* in the first place to defeat the German armies in detail was not, of course, one of the surprises, because it is elementary, but that he should have so largely *succeeded* in defeating them was a surprise.

In these encounters, as during later battles of the campaign, the French troops discovered a cohesion and steadiness and a military habit of

discipline assumed to be foreign to their temperament. But their units had been trained to act together in masses on practical lines. Of the value of that training General Joffre was well aware.

He knew also that success in the earlier encounters, which that training would go far to ensure, must give his troops an invaluable confidence in their own quality.

There were, however, two surprises even more marked. One of these was the quite unexpected use made of the fortified frontier; the other, associated with it, was that of allowing the Germans to advance upon Paris with an insufficient force, in the belief that French movements were being conformed to their own.

Undoubtedly as regards the fortified frontier the belief prevailed that the chief difficulty would be that of destroying its works with heavy guns. It had never been anticipated that the Germans might be prevented from getting near enough for the purpose. But in the French strategy Verdun, Toul, and Belfort were not employed as obstacles. They were employed as the fortified bases of armies. Being fortified, these bases were safe even if close to the scene of operations. Consequently the lines of communication could be correspondingly shortened, and the power and activity of the armies dependent on them correspondingly increased. So long as these armies remained afoot, the fortresses were unattackable. Used in that way, a fortress reaches its highest military value.

The strategy adopted by General Joffre in association with the German advance upon Paris is one of the most interesting phases of the war. His *tactics* were to delay and weaken the first and driving formation of the German chain of armies; his *strategy* was, while holding the tail of that chain of armies fast upon the fortified frontier, to attract the head of it south-west. In that way he at once weakened the chain and lengthened out the German communications. Not merely was the position of the first German army the worse, and its effective strength the less, the further it advanced, thus ensuring its eventual defeat, but in the event of defeat retirement became proportionally more difficult. The means employed were the illusion that this army was driving before it, not a wing of the Allied forces engaged merely in operations of delay, but forces which, through defeat, were unable to withstand its march onward.

It cannot now be doubted that the Germans had believed themselves strong enough to undertake the investment of Paris concurrently with successful hostilities against the French forces in the field. But by the time General von Kluck's army arrived at Creil, the fact had become manifest that those two objectives could not be attempted concurrently. The necessity had therefore arisen of attempting them *successively*.

In face of that necessity the choice as to which of the two should be attempted first was not a choice which admitted of debate. Defeat of the

French forces in the field must be first. Without it, the investment of Paris had clearly become an impossibility. How far it had become an impossibility will be realised by looking at the position of the German armies.

Five of them were echeloned across France from Creil, north-east of Paris, to near the southern point of the Argonne.

The army of von Kluck was between Creil and Soissons, with advanced posts extended to Meaux on the Marne.

The army of von Bülow was between Soissons and Rheims, with advanced posts pushed to Château-Thierry, also on the Marne.

The army of von Hausen held Rheims and the country between Rheims and Chalons, with advanced posts at Epernay.

The army of Duke Albert, with headquarters at Chalons, occupied the valley of the Marne as far as the Argonne.

The army of the Crown Prince of Prussia, with headquarters at St. Menehould, held the Argonne north of that place, with communications passing round Verdun to Metz.

If the line formed by these armies be traced on the map, it will be found to present from Creil to the southern part of the Argonne a great but somewhat flattened arc, its curvature northwards. Then from the southern part of the Argonne the line will present a sharp bend to the north-east.

Now these five armies, refortified by reserves, comprised nineteen army corps, plus divisions

of cavalry—a vast force aggregating well over one million men, with more than 3,000 guns. Powerful as it appeared, however, this chain of armies was hampered by that capital disadvantage of being held fast by the tail. Held as it was, the chain could not be stretched to attempt an investment of Paris without peril of being broken, and the great project of defeating and enveloping the Allied forces was impossible.

No question was during the first weeks of the war more repeatedly asked than why, instead of drafting larger forces to the frontier of Belgium, General Joffre should have made what seemed to be a purposeless diversion into Upper Alsace, the Vosges, and Lorraine.

The operations of the French in those parts of the theatre of war were neither purposeless nor a diversion.

On the contrary, those operations formed the crux of the French General's counter-scheme.

Their object was, as shown, to prevent the Germans from making an effective attack on the fortified frontier. General Joffre well knew that in the absence of that effective attack, and so long as the German echelon of armies was pinned upon the frontier, Paris could not be invested. In short, the effect of General Joffre's strategy was to *rob the Germans of the advantages arising from their main body having taken the Belgian route.*

On September 3, then, the scale of advantage had begun to dip on the side of the defence. It remained to make that advantage decisive. The

opportunity speedily offered. Since the opportunity had been looked for, General Joffre had made his dispositions accordingly, and was ready to seize it.

Let it be recalled that the most vulnerable and at the same time the most vital point of the German echelon was the outside or right flank of the leading formation, the force led by General von Kluck. Obviously that was the point against which the weight of the French and British attack was primarily directed.

To grasp clearly the operations which followed, it is necessary here to outline the natural features of the terrain and its roads and railways. For that purpose it will probably be best to start from the Vosges and take the country westward as far as Paris.

On their western side the Vosges are buttressed by a succession of wooded spurs divided by upland valleys, often narrowing into mere clefts called "rupts." These valleys, as we move away from the Vosges, widen out and fall in level until they merge with the upper valley of the Moselle. If we think of this part of the valley of the Moselle as a main street, and these side valleys and "rupts" as *culs-de-sac* opening off it, we form a fairly accurate notion of the region.

From the valley of the upper Moselle the valley of the upper Meuse, roughly parallel to it farther west, is divided by a ridge of wooded country. Though not high, this ridge is continuous.

On the points of greatest natural strength commanding the roads and railways running across the ridge, and mostly on the east side of the valley of the Meuse, had been built the defence works of the fortified frontier.

Crossing the valley of the Meuse we come into a similar region of hills and woods, but this region is, on the whole, much wilder, the hills higher, and the forests more extensive and dense. The hills here, too, form a nearly continuous ridge, running north-north-west. The highlands east of the Meuse sink, as we go north, into the undulating country of Lorraine, but the ridge on the west side of the Meuse extends a good many miles farther. This ridge, with the Meuse flowing along the east side of it and the river Aire flowing along its west side, is the Argonne. It is divided by two main clefts. Through the more northerly runs the main road from Verdun to Chalons; through the more southerly the main road from St. Mihiel on the Meuse to Bar-le-Duc, on the Marne.

Thus from the Vosges to the Aire we have three nearly parallel rivers divided by two hilly ridges.

North of Verdun the undulating Lorraine country east of the Meuse again rises into a stretch of upland forest. This is the Woevre.

Now, westward of the Argonne and across the Aire there is a region in character very like the South Downs in England. It extends all the way from the upper reaches of the Marne north-west beyond the Aisne and the Oise to

St. Quentin. In this open country, where the principal occupation is sheep grazing, the lonely main roads run across the downs for mile after mile straight as an arrow. Villages are far between. The few towns lie along the intersecting valleys.

But descending from the downs into the wide valley of the Marne we come into the region which has been not unaptly called the orchard of France, the land of vineyards and plantations, and flourishing, picturesque towns; in short, one of the most beautiful spots in Europe. The change from the wide horizons of the solitary downs to the populous and highly-cultivated lowlands is like coming into another world.

From the military point of view, however, the important features of all this part of France are its roads and rivers, and most of all its rivers.

The three main waterways, the Oise, the Marne, and the Seine, converge as they approach Paris. Between the Oise and the Marne flows the main tributary of the Oise, the Aisne. Also north of the Marne is its tributary, the Ourcq; south of the Marne flows its tributaries, the Petit Morin and the Grand Morin. All join the Marne in the lower part of the valley not far from Paris. Between the Marne and the Seine flows the Aube, a tributary of the Seine. The country between the Marne and the Seine forms a wide swell of land. It was along the plateaux forming the backbone of this broad ridge that the Battle of the Marne was, for the most part, fought.

That brings us to the question of the roads.

Eastward from Paris, along the valley of the Marne, run three great highways. The most northerly, passing through Meaux, La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, Château Thierry, and Epernay to Chalons, follows nearly the same course as the river, crossing it at several points to avoid bends. The next branches off at La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, and also runs to Chalons by way of Montmirail. The third, passing through La Ferté-Gaucher, Sezanne, Fère Champenoise, and Sommesons to Vitry-le-François, follows the backbone of country already alluded to. All these great roads lead farther east into Germany, the northerly and the middle roads to Metz and the valley of the Moselle, the third road to Nancy and Strasburg.

Now, it must be manifest to anybody that command of these routes, with command of the railways corresponding with them, meant mastery of the communications between Paris and the French forces holding the fortified frontier all the way from Toul to Verdun.

If, consequently, the invading forces could seize and hold these routes and railways, and, as a result, which would to all intents follow, could seize and hold the great main routes and the railways running eastward through the valley of the Seine from Paris to Belfort, the fortified frontier—the key to the whole situation—would in military phrase, be completely "turned." Its defence consequently would have to be abandoned.

Not only must its defence have been abandoned, with the effect of giving freedom of movement to the German echelon, but, that barrier removed, the German armies would no longer be dependent for munitions and supplies on the route through Belgium. They could receive them just as conveniently by the route through Metz. Their facilities of supply would be doubled.

It will be seen, therefore, to what an extent the whole course of the war hung upon this great clash of arms on the Marne. German success must have affected the future of operations alike in the western theatre and in the eastern.

But there is another feature of the roads in the valley of the Marne which is of consequence. Great roads converge into it from the north. Sezanne has already been mentioned. It is half-way along the broad backbone dividing the valley of the Marne from the valley of the Seine. Five great roads meet there from La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, Soissons, Rheims, Chalons, Verdun, and Nancy. Hence the facility for massing at that place a huge body of troops.

It will be seen, therefore, that in making Sezanne the point at which they aimed their main blow at the whole French scheme of defence, the Germans had selected the spot where the blow would, in all probability, be at once decisive and possibly fatal. Clearly they had now grasped, at all events in its main intention, the strategy of the French general. *They saw that he was*

using the fortified frontier to checkmate their Belgian plan.

Summing up the consequences, had success attended the stroke we find that it would have:

Opened to the invaders the valley of the Seine.

Turned the defence of the fortified frontier.

Released the whole of the German armies.

Given them additional, as well as safer, lines of supply from Germany.

Enabled the German armies to sweep westward along the valley of the Seine, enveloping or threatening to envelop the greater part of the French forces in the field.

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

WHY, then, if it was so necessary and the object of it so important, was the move begun by General von Kluck on September 3 a false move?

It was a false move because he ought to have stood against the forces opposed to him. The defeat of those forces was necessary before the attack against Sezanne could be successful. Conversely, his own defeat involved failure of the great enterprise.

Instead, however, of facing and continuing his offensive against the forces opposed to him, he turned towards Sezanne. By doing that he exposed his flank to the Allied counter-stroke.

This blunder can only be attributed to the combined influences of, firstly, hurry; secondly, bad information as to the strength and positions of the Allied forces; thirdly, the false impression formed from reports of victories unaccompanied by exact statements as to losses; and fourthly, and perhaps of most consequence, the failure of the Crown Prince of Germany in the Argonne.

General von Kluck doubtless acted upon imperative orders. His incomplete information and the false impression his advance had created probably also led him to accept those orders without protest. But it should not be forgotten that the Commander primarily responsible for the blunder, and for the disasters it involved, was the Crown Prince of Germany.

Primarily the Crown Prince of Germany was responsible, but not wholly. In the responsibility General von Kluck had no small share. He was misled. When the British force arrived at Creil General Joffre resolved upon and carried out a masterly and remarkable piece of strategy. The British army was withdrawn from the extreme left of the Allied line on the north-east of Paris, and transferred to the south-east, and its former place taken by the 6th French army. This move, carried out with both secrecy and rapidity, was designed to give General von Kluck the impression that the British troops had been withdrawn from the front. That the ruse succeeded is now clear. So far from being withdrawn, the British army was brought up by reinforcements to the strength of three army corps. Leaving out of account a force of that strength, the calculations of the German Commander were fatally wrong.

Let us now see what generally were the movements of the German and of the Allied forces between September 3 and September 6 when the Battle of the Marne began.

Leaving two army corps, the 2nd and the

4th Reserve corps, on the Ourcq to cover his flank and rear, General von Kluck struck south-east across the Marne with the 3rd, 4th, and 7th corps. The main body crossed the river at La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, and took the main route to Sezanne. Others crossed higher up between La Ferté-sous-Jouarre and Château-Thierry. For this purpose they threw bridges across the river. The Marne is deep and for 120 miles of its course navigable.

These movements were covered and screened by the 2nd division of cavalry, which advanced towards Coulommiers, and the 9th division, which pushed on to the west of Crecy. Both places are south of the Marne and east of Paris.

Writing of these events at the time, Mr. W. T. Massey, special correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph,* observed that :—

The beginning of the alteration of German plans was noticeable at Creil. Hidden by a thick screen of troops from the army in the field, but observed by aerial squadrons, the enemy were seen to be on the move. Ground won at Senlis was given up, and the German troops, which at that point were nearer Paris than any other men of the Kaiser's army, were marched to the rear. Only the commandants in the field can say whether the movement was expected, but it is the fact that immediately the enemy began their strategic movement British and French dispositions were changed.

The movement *was* expected. Indeed, as we have seen, the whole strategy of the campaign

on the French side had been designed to bring it about.

The Germans must have observed that their new intentions had been noticed, but they steadily pursued their policy. Their right was withdrawn from before Beauvais, and that pretty cathedral town has now been relieved of the danger of Teuton invasion. The shuttered houses are safe, temporarily at any rate.

The ponderous machine did not turn at right angles with any rapidity. Its movements were slow, but they were not uncertain, and the change was made just where it was anticipated the driving wedge would meet with least resistance.

In the main the German right is a tired army. It is a great fighting force still. The advance has been rapid, and some big tasks have been accomplished. But the men have learnt many things which have surprised them. They thought they were invincible, that they could sweep away opposition like a tidal wave. Instead of a progress as easy as modern warfare would allow, their way has had to be fought step by step at a staggering sacrifice, and in place of an army which took the field full of confidence in the speedy ending of the war and taught that nothing could prevent a triumph for German arms, you have an army thoroughly disillusioned.

In this connection the service of the British Flying Corps proved invaluable. Covering though they did a vast area, and carefully as they were screened by ordinary military precautions, the movements of the Germans were watched and notified in detail. Upon this, as far as the dispositions of the Allied forces were

concerned, everything depended, and no one knew that better than General Joffre. On September 9 he acknowledged it in a message to the British headquarters:—

Please express most particularly to Marshal French my thanks for services rendered on every day by the English Flying Corps. The precision, exactitude, and regularity of the news brought in by its members are evidence of their perfect organisation, and also of the perfect training of pilots and observers.

Farther east the army of General von Bülow (the 9th, 10th, 10th Reserve corps, and the Army corps of the Prussian Guard), advancing from Soissons through Château-Thierry, and crossing the Marne at that place as well as at points higher up towards Epernay, was following the main road to Montmirail on the Petit Morin.

The army of General von Hausen (the 11th, 12th, and 19th corps), advancing from Rheims, had crossed the Marne at Epernay and at other points towards Chalons, and was following the road towards Sezanne by way of Champaubert.

The army of Duke Albert, having passed the Marne above Chalons, was moving along the roads to Sommesous.

The army of the Crown Prince of Germany was endeavouring to move from St. Menehould to Vitry-le-François, also on the Marne.

On the side of the Allies,

General Maunoury, with the 6th French army, advanced from Paris upon the Ourcq. The right of this army rested on Meaux on the Marne.

General French with the British army, pivoting on its left, formed a new front extending south-east to north-west from Jouey, through Le Chatel and Faremoutiers, to Villeneuve-le-Comte.

General Conneau with the French cavalry was on the British right, between Coulommiers and La Ferté Gaucher.

General Desperey with the 5th French army held the line from Courtagon to Esternay, barring the roads from La Ferté-sous-Jouarre and Montmirail to Sezanne.

General Foch, with headquarters at La Fère Champenoise, barred with his army the roads from Epernay and Chalons.

General de Langle, holding Vitry-le-François, barred the approaches to that place and to Sommesous.

General Serrail, with the French army operating in the Argonne, held Revigny. His line extended north-east across the Argonne to Verdun, and was linked up with the positions held by the French army base on that fortress.

General Pau held the line on the east of the fortified frontier.

Some observations on these dispositions of the Allies will elucidate their tactical intention.

The position of the Allied armies formed a great bow, with the western end of it bent sharply inwards.

The *weight* of the Allied forces was massed round that western bend against the now exposed

flank of von Kluck's army. Here lay the most vulnerable point of the German line.

The tactical scheme of the Allied Commander-in-Chief was simple—a great military merit. He aimed first at defeating the German right led by Generals von Kluck and von Bülow. Having by that uncovered the flank of General von Hausen's army, his intention was to attack it also in both front and flank and defeat it. The same tactic was to be repeated with each of the other German armies in succession.

For that purpose the allied armies were not posted directly on the front of the German armies, but between them. Consequently the left of one German army and the right of another was attacked by the same French army. In that way two German Generals would have to resist an attack directed by one French General, and every German General would have to resist two independent French attacks. Hence, too, if a German army was forced back the French could at once double round the flank of the German army next in the line if that army was still standing its ground.

Choice of the battle ground and command of the roads leading to it ensured that this would happen. As a fact, it did.

Finally, all the way behind the French line ran the great road leading across the plateaux from Paris to the fortified frontier. This, with railway communication, gave the needed facilities for the movement of reserves and the transport of munitions and food supplies.

Now let us glance at the tactical scheme on the German side.

The fact that General von Kluck had left two out of the five corps forming his army on the Ourcq, and was covering his movement to the south of the Marne with his cavalry, proves that he did not, as was supposed, intend to lose contact with Paris. His scheme was to establish an echelon of troops from the Ourcq to La Ferté Gaucher on the great eastern road, believing that to be meanwhile a quite sufficient defence.

With the rest of his force he was to join with von Bülow and von Hausen in smashing through the French position at Sezanne. Against that position there was to be the overwhelming concentration of ten army corps.

To assist the stroke against Sezanne there was a concurrent intention to break the French line at Vitry-le-François. The French line between Sezanne and Vitry-le-François would then be swept away.

Assuming the success of these operations, the German forces would be echeloned south-east from the Ourcq across the valley of the Marne and the plateau south of it to Troyes on the Aube. The Germans would then be in a position to attack in flank the French retreating from the frontier, and ready, when these French troops fell back, pursued by the armies of the Crown Princes of Germany and Bavaria and by von Heeringen's army of the Vosges, to join in the great sweep along the valley of the Seine

and round to the south of Paris. By this time, remember, the long lines of communication through Belgium would have ceased to be vital.

It was a bold scheme.

There are, however, other factors to be taken into account besides tactical plans.

Not less a surprise than the apparently sudden change in the German movements had been, during the preceding week or more, the seemingly hardly less precipitate falling back of the French upon the Marne. All the world believed that the French were "on the run," and all the world thought they would keep on running. Day by day during that exciting time the inhabitants of the valley of the Marne witnessed column after column of their defenders apparently in full retreat. The marching qualities of the French are, as everybody knows, remarkable. They showed the enemy a clean pair of heels. Few could understand it.

Then came the Germans, hot on the scent, confident that the French could never withstand them. From over the highlands by every road they poured into the peaceful Marne valley like a destroying flood. In front of them swept a multitude of fugitives.

"Champagne," wrote a special correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, "is now overrun with fugitive villagers from the neighbourhood of Rethel, Laon, and Soissons. It is painful to see these unfortunate people hurrying away with a few household goods on carts, or with bundles, and walking along the country roads in regular

ragged processions, not knowing whither they are going. Château-Thierry and all the beautiful country of the Marne is by this time in the hands of the Germans. When I last drove through the place a few weeks ago, and lunched with a few amiable French officers at the best hotel in the place, "L'Eléphant," Château-Thierry was teeming with cattle and army horses requisitioned for the campaign. Four times I passed through it, and each time the great assemblage of horses, trucks, and army material had increased, although the horses and cattle were driven away each day, and fresh ones were led in from the great pastoral country round about. Little did I think then that the Germans would now be bivouacking on the great market place and stacking their rifles on the banks of the Marne."

It was by just this over-confidence in themselves that General Joffre had intended the enemy should be misled. He had foreseen that the Germans would come on in a hurry. On the other hand, the French retreat had apparently been precipitous because it was essential to make ready for the rebound. The retreat had rendered the French troops, still unbeaten, only the more dangerous. Describing the effect from his own observation, Mr. Massey wrote:—

The French eastern army has been on the move for days, and if the Germans were not in such strong force they would be in grave danger. The French have made such a strenuous effort to cope with the new condition of things that one of their

infantry brigades marched continuously for three days, the men never resting for more than an hour at a time.

One who has seen only the Allied armies may be a bad judge, and less able to form an opinion than an armchair critic, who sums up the possibilities with the aid of maps and the knowledge of past achievements of German forces. But there is one guide which the stay-at-home strategist cannot possibly have, and that is the spirit of the Allied soldiery. I have seen far more of the French than of the English troops in this campaign, but anyone who has talked to the soldier must be infected with his cheery optimism.

His faith in his country and in the power of the army is stupendous, his patriotism is unquestionable, his confidence grows as the enemy approaches. With a smile he accepts the news of the German march southwards, and tells you nothing could be better; the further the line penetrates the more remote is the chance that it will continue unbroken. He will not believe that the German advance would have got so far if it had not been the plan of General Joffre to lure the enemy forwards, and so to weaken his line. The French soldier to-day is more confident of victory than ever.

These things, which a soldier can appreciate at their proper value, explain why the dash of the French troops has rivalled their attitude in the previous part of the campaign. Reinforced by great battalions, stiffened by reserves composed mainly of men with a stake in the country, and fighting for all they hold most dear—for France, for hearth, and home—they have offered a magnificent, resolute front to the machine-like advance.

General Joffre, therefore, had handled his machine with skill. He had used it for his design without impairing its spirit. On the contrary, he had stiffened its "form." And on the eve of the great encounter on which the fortunes of the campaign, and the future of France alike hung, he issued to the troops his now famous Order :—

At the moment, when a battle on which the welfare of the country depends is about to begin, I feel it incumbent upon me to remind you all that this is no longer the time to look behind. All our efforts must be directed towards attacking and driving back the enemy. An army which can no longer advance must at all costs keep the ground it has won and allow itself to be killed on the spot rather than give way. In the present circumstances no faltering can be tolerated.

That the Germans on their side equally realised how momentous was the impending battle is shown by their Army Order. A copy of it was, after the battle, found in a house at Vitry-le-François, which for a time had been used as a headquarters of the 8th German army corps. In the haste of flight the document was left behind. Signed by Lieut.-General Tulff von Tscheppe und Wendenbach, commandant of the 8th corps, and dated September 7, it ran :—

The object of our long and arduous marches has been achieved. The principal French troops

have been forced to accept battle after having been continually forced back. The great decision is undoubtedly at hand.

To-morrow, therefore, the whole strength of the German army, as well as of all that of our army corps, is bound to be engaged all along the line from Paris to Verdun.

To save the welfare and honour of Germany I expect every officer and man, notwithstanding the hard and heroic fights of the last few days, to do his duty unswervingly, and to the last breath.

Everything depends on the result of to-morrow.

This, then, was the spirit in which, on both sides, the mightiest clash of arms until then known to history was entered upon. Across France the battle front stretched for 150 miles. The fight raged, too, for another forty miles along the frontier, for coincidently with the main conflict from Paris to Verdun, the Germans made yet another great effort to break upon the frontier from the east. Fourteen great armies took part in the battle. They numbered altogether more than two millions of men. Taking the two great hosts each as a whole, the numbers were not very unequal. True, the Germans had but six armies as against the eight on the side of the Allies. The German armies, however, were larger. Their strength ranged from 160,000 to 180,000 men as against, on the side of the Allies, an average strength of 120,000.[1]

[1] The following may be taken as the *approximate* strength of the armies engaged, allowing on the one hand for war wastage, and on the other for a filling up

During nearly six days there was, along that far extended battle line, the flash and thunder of more than 7,000 guns. Shells rose and burst like flights of warring meteorites. Masses of

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from reserves, which on the part of the Allies had been completed :—

GERMANS.

General von Kluck's Army (5 corps, Prussians)	245,000
2nd and 9th Cavalry Divisions ...	23,000
General von Bülow's Army (4 corps, Prussians)	180,000
Cavalry of the Prussian Guard ...	6,000
General von Hausen's Army (3 corps, Saxons)	165,000
Duke Albert's Army (3 corps, Wurtembergers)	150,000
Crown Prince of Germany's Army (3 corps, Prussians)	175,000
Crown Prince of Bavaria's Army (3 corps, Bavarians)	160,000
Approximate total	1,104,000

ALLIES.

General Maunoury's Army (3 corps and reserves)	140,000
General French's Army (3 corps) ...	110,000
British Cavalry Divisions	8,000
General Conneau's Cavalry	23,000
General Desperey's Army (3 corps and reserves)	150,000
General Foch's Army (3 corps) ...	120,000
General de Langle's Army (3 corps and reserves	150,000
General Serrail's Army (3 corps) ...	120,000
General Pau's Army (3 corps and reserves)	140,000
Approximate total	961,000
Grand approximate total of combatants	2,065,000

infantry moved to the attack. Incessant rifle fire accompanied the bolder bass of the artillery. In and through woods, across fields, in and round blazing villages and burning farms and chateaux they fought; an incessant movement to and fro, amid an unceasing roar—the rage of nations locked in deadly embrace. There were bayonet fights on a vast scale; there were charges by clouds of horsemen; there were furious and murderous combats for points of vantage; there was the capture and recapture of towns; the rush of fire-spitting automobiles below, and the flight of bomb-dropping aeroplanes above. There was the hurried movement of troops and the wild gallop of batteries of guns along the roads. There was, too, the ever-changing kaleidoscope of the masses of transport. Along the great road from Paris to Germany a spectator might have travelled from sunrise to sunset during the whole week of battle, and yet still have found himself in the midst of this seemingly unbounded fury of a world at war.

Approximate guns and mortars, Germans	3,610
Approximate guns and mortars, Allies	3,680
Total	7,290

The Allies were superior in field-guns, but had fewer howitzers, especially of the heavy type, and the aggregate *weight* of the German artillery was on the whole greater. The estimate given of the number of combatants is rather below than above the actual.

CHAPTER V

THE GERMAN OVERTHROW

Such were the spectacular aspects of the battle. It remains to sketch its phases as, first sullenly, then swiftly, the tide of conflict rolled backward across the miles of country between Sezanne and Rheims.

These developments can best be followed day by day.

September 5.—General movement of the German armies across the Marne. The troops of von Kluck crossed at Trilport, Sommery, and La Ferté-sous-Jouarre; those of von Bülow at Château-Thierry; those of von Hausen at Epernay, and Duke Albert's at Chalons. Simultaneously columns of von Kluck's 2nd and 4th Reserve corps began to cross the Ourcq.

From the Marne the Germans pushed on without delay to the south. The 3rd, 4th, and 7th corps of von Kluck's army were on the march diagonally across the British near Coulommiers. They were making for La Ferté Gaucher. In face of this advance the 5th French army fell back on the latter place. This move

lengthened the German flank and laid it more completely open to a British attack.

September 6.—General Joffre gave orders for a general advance. Before daybreak the 6th French, British, and 5th French armies began a combined offensive. While the 6th French army advanced eastward towards the line of the Ourcq, the British advanced north-east to the line of the Grand Morin, and the 5th French army north from east of La Ferté Gaucher upon Montmirail.

The 6th French army, driving in the German advance posts, reached Nanteuil.

The British fell upon the flank of the divisions of von Kluck's army still crossing the Grand Morin, and drove them back upon the Petit Morin.

By this unexpected and swiftly delivered blow von Kluck's army, extending from the Marne to La Ferté Gaucher, was cut into two parts.

Coincidently with the British advance the 5th French army had, in a night attack and at the point of the bayonet, driven the leading German divisions out of three villages near La Ferté Gaucher, where they had bivouacked.

In view of these attacks General von Kluck had no alternative save to retreat. To escape the British he fell back on the Petit Morin in the direction of Montmirail.

His retreat was assisted by the right of von Bülow's army, and covered by his divisions of cavalry, reinforced by von Bülow's cavalry of the Prussian Guard. The German cavalry, attacked by the French and British, was cut up with

heavy loss. More than 60,000 horsemen were engaged in this gigantic combat.

September 7.—To assist the retreat, the centre divisions of von Kluck's army opposing the British made a stand upon the Petit Morin, and the army of von Bülow a stand from Montmirail to Le Petit Sompius. Along that line the 5th French army was all day heavily engaged against the left wing of von Kluck's army and the right of von Bülow's.

On the Ourcq the Germans launched a general assault against the 6th French army.

On the Petit Morin they occupied a strong position on the high north bank. This river flows during part of its course through marshes. A frontal attack on the position was out of the question, but the 1st British army corps and the British cavalry found "a way round" higher up stream. Simultaneously the 3rd British corps crossed lower down. Threatened on both flanks, the Germans fled precipitately towards the Marne. Though they covered their retreat by a counter-attack, they lost many prisoners and some guns.

The armies of von Hausen and Duke Albert and the Crown Prince of Germany were now engaged against the armies of General Foch, General Langle, and General Serrail from the north of Sezanne to Sermaise-les-Bains in the south of the Argonne. The fighting north of Sezanne was obstinate, but the Wurtembergers at Vitry-le-François met with a repulse.

On this day the battle extended for more than

120 miles, from the line of the Ourcq across the country to Montmirail, from that place to Sezanne, and then along the plateaux into the Argonne. There was also a German attack upon Luneville designed to aid their operations west of the fortified frontier.

September 8.—Heavy fighting between the 6th French army and the Germans on the Ourcq.

The British attacked the passages of the Marne. At La Ferté Gaucher, where the bridge had been destroyed, the Germans, supported by machine guns, obstinately disputed the passage against the British 3rd corps. The 1st and 2nd corps, however, succeeded in bridging the river higher up, and dislodged them. In their retreat the Germans again met with heavy losses.

At Montmirail the battle was continued with great severity. The French carried several of the German positions at the point of the bayonet. Von Bülow's troops began a general retirement, and were driven over the river.

Taking the offensive, General Foch's army attacked the troops of von Hausen in flank. The left of von Hausen's army north of Sezanne was forced back, but his right at Le Fère Champenoise made an obstinate stand.

To meet this, General Langle also began a general advance, and drove the Germans from Vitry-le-François.

A heavy German attack was directed against Clermont-en-Argonne. Beyond the fortified frontier there was a renewed effort to capture Nancy said to have been watched by the Kaiser.

September 9.—Reinforced, the Germans on the Ourcq made a great effort to break through the 6th French army.

The British, having crossed the Marne, fell upon the Germans fighting on the Ourcq, and drove them northwards. Many guns, caissons, and large quantities of transport were captured.

The 5th French army pursued the defeated troops of von Bülow from Montmirail to Château-Thierry. At that place the Germans are thrown across the Marne in disorder and with huge losses.

The German line had now been completely broken. Between the wreck of von Bülow's troops, north of the Marne, and von Hausen's positions, north of Sezanne, there was a gap of some fifteen miles.

From Sezanne eastward the battle from this time continued with more marked advantage to the Allies.

September 10.—The 6th French army and the British continued the pursuit. On this day the British captured, besides further quantities of transport abandoned in the flight or surrounded, 13 guns, 19 machine guns, and 2,000 prisoners. German infantry, left behind in the hurried march of their army, were found hiding in the woods. There were evidences of general looting by the enemy and of his demoralisation.

In the pursuit of von Bülow's troops by the 5th French army, the Prussian Guard were driven into the marshes of St. Gond.

Covered with tall reeds and rank grass, these marshes, drained by the Petit Morin, are a stretch of low-lying land lying between the Marne and a range of hills. They are probably the bed of an ancient lake. Safe in the dry season, they become in wet weather a dangerous swamp. They were at this time saturated with heavy rains. The Prussian Guards, who had borne the brunt of the recent fighting, had already suffered heavily. They now lost the greater part of their artillery, and a heavy proportion of the surviving force either perished in the quagmires or were killed by the French shells.

An effort nevertheless was made to retrieve the general disaster by a violent German attack from Sezanne to Vitry-le-François, accompanied by an energetic offensive in the Argonne, and by a renewed attempt against Nancy.

In the Argonne the Germans captured Revigny and Brabant-le-Roi, but west of Vitry were forced into retreat. The attack on Nancy was again unsuccessful.

September 11.—The 5th and 6th French armies and the British pursued the troops of von Kluck and von Bülow to the Aisne.

The armies of von Hausen and Duke Albert were now in full flight at Epernay and Chalons. Both incurred very heavy losses. The French captured 6,000 prisoners and 175 guns.

The Germans were driven by General Serrail's troops out of Revigny and Brabant-le-Roi. East of the frontier there was also a general falling back, notably from St. Die and round

Luneville. The French seized Pont-a-Mousson, commanding one of the main passes across the Vosges.

Of the decisive character of the overthrow there could now be no doubt. On September 11, in an Order to the French armies, General Joffre, summing up the situation with soldierly brevity, said:—

The battle which has been taking place for five days is finishing in an incontestable victory.

The retreat of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd German armies is being accentuated before our left and our centre.

The enemy's 4th army, in its turn, is beginning to fall back to the north of Vitry and Sermaize.

Everywhere the enemy is leaving on the field numbers of wounded and quantities of munitions. On all hands prisoners are being taken.

Our troops, as they gain ground, are finding proofs of the intensity of the struggle and of the extent of the means employed by the Germans in attempting to resist our *élan*.

The vigorous resumption of the offensive has brought about success. Officers, non-commissioned officers, and men! you have all of you responded to my appeal, and all of you have deserved well of your country.—JOFFRE.

It had been no easy victory. The huge forces of Generals von Kluck, von Bülow, and von Hausen, comprising the flower of the German first line army, fought with stubborn and even reckless courage. During the opening days of the battle they contested the ground foot by foot. The character of the fighting in which the British

troops were engaged, gathered from men who had taken part in it, was disclosed by the Paris correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* :—

"The more we killed the more they seemed to become," said an officer who described to me some of the earlier phases. "They swarmed like ants, coming on in masses, though rarely seeking close contact, for they have learned to respect our rifles and our bayonets."

On this point there is unprejudiced testimony. A non-commissioned officer of Hussars asked me to translate a letter found on a German officer killed while defending his battery. In the letter are these sentences :—

"German infantry and cavalry will not attack English infantry and cavalry at close quarters. Their fire is murderous. The only way to attack them is with artillery."

Upon this advice the enemy seem to act. They make the best use of their guns, and keep up an incessant fire, which is often well directed, though the effect is not nearly so deadly as they imagine. Their machine guns—of which they have great numbers—are also handled with skill, and make many gaps in our ranks. But the enemy rarely charge with the bayonet. Under cover of artillery they advance *en masse*, pour out volleys without taking aim, and retire when threatened. This is the general method of attack, and it is one in which numbers undoubtedly count. But numbers are not everything; spirit and dash count for more in the end, and these qualities our soldiers have beyond all others in this war. Every officer with whom I have spoken says the same thing. Nothing could be finer than the steadiness and the enterprise of our troops. They remember and obey the order given by

Wellington at Waterloo—they stand fast—to the death. Before this insistent and vigorous offensive the enemy have fallen back every day, pressed hard on front and on flank.

Realising that the whole future of the campaign, if not of the war, hung upon the issue, the army of General von Hausen stood to the last. There was a hope that the German right might yet rally against the staggering attack thrown upon it. Mr. Massey wrote:—

The fighting on the line of the French centre has, from all accounts, been of a most terrific description. Neither side would give ground except under the heaviest pressure. Long-continued artillery duels paved the way for infantry attacks, and positions had to be carried at the point of the bayonet. Often when bayonet charges had cleared trenches the men driven out were rallied and reinforced, and retook the positions. Here was the most strenuous fighting of the campaign, and as the enemy's casualties are certain to have exceeded those of the French, the total of German killed, wounded, and prisoners must reach an enormous figure. The French losses were very heavy.

An infantryman wounded within sight of Vitry-le-François told me that the French bayonet fighting was performed with an irresistible dash. The men were always eager—sometimes too eager—to get to close quarters. The weary waiting in trenches too hastily dug to give more than poor shelter from artillery fire caused many a murmur, and there was no attempt to move forward stealthily when the word to advance was given. Often a rushing line was severely torn by mitrailleuse fire, but the heart's desire to settle

matters with cold steel could not be checked merely because comrades to the right and left were put out of action. The bayonet work of French infantry gave the enemy a terrible time.

Of the struggle on the left of von Hausen's army against the troops of General Langle, a graphic picture is given in the diary of a Saxon officer of infantry found later among the German dead. The army of von Hausen had arrived by forced marches, the left from Rethel, the right from Rheims:—

Sept. 1.—We marched to Rethel. Our battalion stayed there as escort to headquarters.

Sept. 2.—The French burnt half the town, probably to cut our lines of communications. It can't hurt us for long, of course, but it's a nuisance, as our field artillery is short of ammunition.

However, our division advanced. The burning of Rethel was dreadful. All the little houses with wooden beams in their roofs, and their stacks of furniture, fed the flames to the full. The Aisne was only a feeble protection; the sparks were soon carried over to the other side. Next day the town was nothing but a heap of ashes.

Sept. 3.—Still at Rethel, on guard over prisoners. The houses are charming inside. The middle-class in France has magnificent furniture. We found stylish pieces everywhere, and beautiful silk, but in what a state! . . . Good God! . . . Every bit of furniture broken, mirrors smashed. The vandals themselves could not have done more damage.

This place is a disgrace to our army. The

inhabitants who fled could not have expected, of course, that all their goods would have been left in full after so many troops had passed. But the column commanders are responsible for the greater part of the damage, as they could have prevented the looting and destruction. The damage amounts to millions of marks; even the safes have been attacked.

In a solicitor's house, in which, as luck would have it, everything was in excellent taste, including a collection of old lace, and Eastern works of art, everything was smashed to bits.

I couldn't resist taking a little memento myself here and there. . . . One house was particularly elegant, everything in the best taste. The hall was of light oak; near the staircase I found a splendid aquascutum and a camera by Felix.

The sappers have been ordered to march with the divisional bridging train. We shall start to-morrow. Yesterday at Chalons-sur-Marne a French aviator (officer) was taken prisoner. He imagined the village was held by French troops and so landed there. He was awfully disgusted at being taken prisoner.

Sept. 4.—To Tuniville, Pont-Fauerger, where we billeted.

Sept. 5.—Les Petites Loges, Tours-sur-Marne. I never want to make such marches again; simply tests of endurance. We crossed the Marne canal on Sept. 6. On our left the 19th corps marched straight on Chalons. On our right front the Guard corps was hotly engaged. When we reached Villeneuve we heard that the Guard corps had thrown the enemy back and that our division was to take up the pursuit. We were in a wood, which the enemy searched with shell fire.

Left and right it simply rained bullets, but the one I'm fated to stop was not among them.

We could not advance any further, the enemy was too strong for us. On our left the 19th corps came up in time to give us a little breathing space. An infernal shell fire. We had a dreadful thirst, a glass of Pilsener would have been a godsend. . . . A shell suddenly fell in the wood and killed six of my section; a second fell right in the middle of us; we couldn't hang on any longer, so we retired.

We made several attempts to reach the village of Lenharree, but the enemy's artillery swept the whole wood, so that we could not make any headway. And we never got a sight of the enemy's guns. We soon had the answer to the riddle as to why the enemy's shooting was so wonderfully accurate. We were actually on the enemy's practice range. Lenharree was the chief *point d'appui* on the right wing.

The situation was as follows: The Guard corps was on a ground which the enemy knew like the back of his hand, and so was in an extremely critical position. It was just like St. Privat, except that we were all in woods under a terrible shell fire. Our artillery could do nothing, as there was nothing to be seen.

We found an order from General Joffre to the commander of the 2nd French corps, telling him to hold the position at all costs, and saying that it was the last card. It was probably the best one, too. As we knew later, the artillery opposed to us had an immense reserve of ammunition. . . . Absolutely exhausted, we waited for the night. In front of us all was still.

Sept. 8.—We went forward again to the attack against an enemy perfectly entrenched. In spite of his artillery fire, which nothing could silence, we passed through the wood again. As soon as we reached the northern edge, a perfectly insane

fire opened on us, infantry and shell fire with redoubled intensity.

A magnificent spectacle lay before us; in the far background Lenharree was in flames, and we saw the enemy retreating, beaten at last. The enemy withdrew from one wood to another, but shelled us furiously and scattered us with his machine guns. We got to the village at last, but were driven out of it again with heavy loss. Our losses were enormous. The 178th Regiment alone had 1,700 men wounded, besides those killed. It was hell itself. There were practically no officers left.

One word more about this artillery range; there were telephone wires everywhere. It is thought that French officers hidden in trees were telephoning our exact situation in the woods.

Sept. 9.—We marched to Oeuvry. The enemy was apparently two kilometres in front of us. Where was our intelligence branch? Our artillery arrived half an hour too late, unfortunately. The French are indefatigable in digging trenches. We passed through a wood and lost touch altogether. We saw companies retiring, and we ourselves received the order to withdraw.

We passed through Lenharree once more, where we found piles of bodies, and we billeted at Germinon. There was a rumour that the 1st army had had some disastrous fighting. Our sappers prepared the bridges for demolition. We passed through Chalons-sur-Marne. I am terribly depressed. Everybody thinks the situation is critical. The uncertainty is worst of all.

I think we advanced too quickly and were worn out by marching too rapidly and fighting incessantly. So we must wait for the other armies. We went on to Mourmelon-le-Petit, where we dug ourselves in thoroughly. Four of our avia-

tors are said to have been brought down by the enemy.

Finally, when forced back to the Marne, after three days of incessant fighting—pounded by the French guns, broken by the fury of the French infantry, ripped by slashing onslaughts of the French horse—the Germans still made effort after effort to recover and to re-form. Of the struggle on the Marne, Mr. William Maxwell says:—

I was fortunate enough to meet a non-commissioned officer who watched from an eminence the critical phase of the battle which routed the German centre. This is the substance of his story, which has since been corroborated by officers of my acquaintance. The enemy had been driven back fighting for three days, until they came to the river. There they made a desperate stand. Masses of them appeared on the flat and in the undulations of the ground—they seemed like the sands on the sea shore for numbers. They came on in masses and kept up a terrible fire from rifle and machine-gun. But our infantry were not to be denied; they advanced in short rushes and in open order, while shells rained down upon the enemy, and rifles opened great gaps in their ranks.

"I began," said the sergeant, "to count the dead, but I soon found that impossible. Suddenly I heard a great shout, and turning to my left I saw a sight that made my heart stand still. Our cavalry were charging down on the enemy's cavalry."

In the bright sunshine their lances and sabres looked like a shower of falling stars. There was

an avalanche of men and horses and cold steel. Huge gaps were torn in the enemy's ranks—and the whole thing was over in a few minutes. The German horsemen seemed to vanish into the earth.

Stubborn courage, however, was of no avail. In a brief six days that mighty host had been reduced to a military ruin. They had advanced in the confidence that they were irresistible. Down the valley of the Oise, over the highlands of Champagne they had streamed, in endless columns of men and guns. The earth had shaken beneath the rumble of their artillery and trembled under the hoofs of their horsemen; every road had re-echoed the united tread of their battalions; every horizon had bristled with the flash of their bayonets and sabres; every town and village had felt their arrogance as they "requisitioned" its foodstuffs, consumed its wines, slept in its beds, laid hands on whatever they fancied, and summoned mayors and officials before them to learn their will, and collect their "fines." On the substance of this country of the Marne they had revelled, imagining that the world was theirs.

And now they were a battered mass of fugitives, hiding in woods and orchards; littering the roads with the wrecks of their equipment; fagged and footsore; driven by hunger to tear up the crops from the fields, and devour roots and vegetables raw; their discipline replaced by brutal savagery. Not even the liveliest imagination can adequately picture the state of an army

in flight after a heavy defeat. The bigger the army the worse that state becomes. The organisation of food supply is thrown out of gear. No man knows where the supplies may be, or whether they may not be lost. Guns become separated from their ammunition columns. Wagons break down or are disabled and have to be left behind. The horses drop from famine and overwork. Men grow sullen and intractable. The boom of guns bespeaking the pursuit alone gives the stimulus to cover the lengthening miles of weary road.

Without time to bury their dead, yet anxious to hide their losses from the enemy, the Germans, where they could, formed large pyres of timber, which they soaked with oil. On to these they threw the bodies of the slain. Across the country the smoke from such pyramids by day and the glare of flames by night added to the strangeness and tragedy of a scene removed even from what had been thought civilised war.

The sufferings of the beaten host were severe. Starving and depressed, or at the last point of exhaustion, men fell out or hid themselves in the thick woods which clothe the long undulating slopes on the northern side of the Marne valley.[1] Here they were found by the pursuing French

[1] From the Oise to the Seine the general aspect of this part of France is a succession of broad ridges separated by valleys, some of them narrow and deep. One-fifth of the whole surface is covered by woods and forests of oak, beech and chestnut. Many of the forests are of great extent. The main ridge was the site of the battle in its first phases.

and British. Most, when discovered, had been without food for two days. Partly to satisfy the pangs of hunger, partly out of mere senseless revenge, general and indiscriminate pillage was resorted to. Chateaux, country houses, and villages were ransacked, and pictures or pieces of furniture which could not be carried off destroyed. Though their military spirit had been broken, the ruthlessness of the invaders remained. They traversed the country like a horde of bandits.

Loss of horses forced them to leave behind whole batteries of heavy howitzers and trains of ammunition wagons, for these days of the retreat were days of heavy rain. To shorten the length of their columns, as well as to gain time, the hurrying troops plunged into by-roads. These, cut up by the weight of the guns, speedily became impassable. How hasty was the retreat is proved by the headquarters staff of the 2nd army leaving behind them at Montmirail maps, documents, and personal papers, as well as letters and parcels received by or waiting for the military post.

Following the track of General von Kluck's army, Mr. Gerald Morgan, another special correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph,* wrote :—

At Vareddes horses and men littered the ground. Semi-permanent entrenchments had been suddenly abandoned. Alongside the German artillery positions I saw piles of unexploded shells which the Germans had abandoned in their hurry. These shells were in wicker baskets,

three to a basket. The Germans had had there many batteries of field guns, both three-inch and five-inch, and had meant evidently to make a determined resistance. But their artillery positions were plainly so badly placed that the French were able to blow them, literally to drench them, out. An avenue of large trees along the roadside, trees which the Germans hoped to use as a shelter, had been torn to pieces and flung to the ground by the French artillery as by strokes of lightning. The German dead had almost all been hit by shells or by shrapnel. A German aeroplane, brought down during the engagement, lay in the fields like a big dead bird.

I followed the line of the German retreat as far as a village called May. From the number of accoutrements thrown away along the road I judged the retreat was in bad order and greatly hurried.

The scene on the battlefield was rather terrible. There was no one to bury the dead, for the French army had gone on in pursuit, and the villagers had almost all left the country some days before.

The German infantry position was in a valley. The entrenchments had undoubtedly been dug with a view to maintaining them permanently, but the fault lay in the artillery position. The German guns—evidently a large number—had been placed on a ridge behind the infantry position. This ridge was exposed to a fire from the French artillery on a ridge opposite, a fire which completely silenced the German guns, and left the German infantry to its fate. Few of the infantry escaped.

On the day after the Germans had been driven across the Marne, Mr. Wm. Maxwell, driving

into the, at ordinary times, pleasant little town of Meaux, found it deserted:—

Its houses are standing; its churches and public buildings are untouched, yet its streets are silent, its windows shuttered, and its doors closed. It might be a plague-stricken city, forsaken by all except a few Red Cross nurses, who wait for the ambulances bringing the wounded from the battlefield.

Leaving the town with a feeling akin to awe, I came upon a new surprise. Walking calmly along the public road in broad day were men in Prussian uniform, and—more amazing still—women in the dark *gellab* or cloak of the Moors. This was certainly startling, but the explanation was waiting on the road to the east, and it was written in gruesome signs—dead men lying in the ditches—Zouaves in their Oriental dress, Moors in their cloaks, French soldiers in their long blue coats, and Germans in their grey. Every hundred yards or so lay a disembowelled horse with a bloody saddle. This was the ragged edge of the battlefield of the Marne, and the men and women in Prussian and Moorish dress were harmless civilians who had gone to bury the dead and to succour the wounded. It was raining torrents; the wind was bitterly cold, and they had covered themselves with the garments of the dead.

Passing along this road I came to a wood, where one of these civilian burial parties had dug a pit in which they laid the friend and foe side by side. Fresh mounds of earth that told their own story guided me to a path, where the battle had blazed, a trail of splintered shells, broken rifles, bullet-riddled helmets, blood-stained rags, with which the dying had stopped

their wounds, tiny bags in which the German soldier had hoarded his crumbs of biscuit, letters with the crimson imprint of fingers, showing how in the hour of agony and death men's thoughts turn to the beloved ones they are leaving for ever.

Four miles east of Meaux the hills rise sharply to the north, and are covered with trees. Beyond this wood a broad undulating plain stretches northward over cultivated fields dotted with farmsteads. A hundred paces in front, on a gentle slope, the earth has been levelled in several places that are sown with brass cylinders, whose charge sent the shells on their deadly flight.

In these emplacements lie some gunners; their heads have been shattered by shells. Under an apple-tree, laden with green fruit, two livid faces turn to the pitiless sky; one man grasps a letter in his hand—it is a woman's writing. Dark huddled patches among the cabbages and the trampled wheat, brown stains on the path, fragments of blood-stained lint, broken rifles and bayonets, bullet-pierced helmets and rent cloaks —all the *débris* of battle show where the fight was fiercest.

On the crest of the rise are the trenches; they extend for nearly a mile parallel with the edge of the wood, and are thrown back on the west. They are deep trenches, protected with mounds of earth, and were not made hurriedly. About them lie the dead.

The position of the trenches and gun emplacements shows that here the enemy met a flanking attack from the west and north, and covered the retreat of their centre. It is not difficult to picture what happened.

Scenes like these, the aftermath of the storm of war, were repeated up the valley of the Marne

from Meaux to beyond Chalons. Terrific in its intensity the whirlwind had passed as swiftly as it had come.

No estimate has been formed of the loss of life in this vast encounter. It is certain, however, that all the suppositions hitherto advanced have been far below reality. Equally is it certain that this was one of the most destructive battles even in a war of destructive battles. Since the losses on the side of the victorious troops in killed and wounded exceeded 80,000 men, the losses on the side of the vanquished must have been more than three times as great.

That at first sight may appear exaggerated. There exist, nevertheless, good grounds for concluding that such a figure is within the truth. The Germans made a series of grave tactical mistakes. When he discovered the error into which he had fallen, General von Kluck properly decided to withdraw. Had the rest of the German line in conformity with his movement fallen back upon the north bank of the Marne, their repulse, though serious, would not have been a disaster. But it is now manifest that, from a quarter in which the situation was not understood, imperative orders were received to press on.

These orders evidently led von Bülow to attempt a stand upon the Petit Morin. General von Kluck, in face of the attack by the British and by the 6th French army on the Ourcq, realised that retirement on his part could not be delayed. But the retreat of his left from the

Petit Morin exposed the army of von Bülow to an attack in flank. By that attack in flank, as well as in front, von Bülow's troops were forced at Chateau-Thierry to cross the Marne in full flight. Passing a deep and navigable river in such circumstances is, of all military operations, perhaps, the most destructive and dangerous, and this, from the German standpoint, formed one of the worst episodes of the battle.

Again, probably in obedience to the same imperative orders, the army of von Hausen remained before Sezanne until its decisive defeat was foregone, and its escape to the last degree jeopardised. In the retreat, consequently, the losses were terribly heavy. But even these were less than the losses which fell upon the army of Duke Albert. With almost inconceivable obstinacy and ill-judgment that army clung to its positions at Vitry until pressed by the French forces on both flanks. All the way across the valley of the Marne and over the highlands it had consequently to run a gauntlet of incessant attacks.

In the face of these facts, it is no exaggeration to say that the German losses must have been at least 250,000. To that has to be added nearly 70,000 prisoners. They lost also by capture or by abandonment about a tenth part of their artillery, besides masses of ammunition and transport.

CHAPTER VI

HOW GENERAL VON KLUCK AVERTED RUIN

THE German defeat had indeed been decisive. On the other hand, the defeat did not, in the immediate sequel, yield for the Allies all the results which might have been looked for. There have been misimpressions on both points.

Take the first misimpression. A victorious general, it has been well said, rarely knows the full damage he inflicts. Over the wide area covered by the Battle of the Marne and by the pursuit, it was not humanely possible to collect and to collate precise information without some delay. All the same, the French General Staff and the French War Ministry had by September 12 gathered facts enough to form a fairly accurate estimate of advantages won. Beyond vague indications of their nature, however, these facts were not made public. There was at the time a good reason. Situated as the German armies were, and with their intercommunication disorganised, they would take two or three days longer at least to discover on their part the full

measure of their losses, and to judge of the effect. To the Allies, that difference in time was of the utmost moment. Certainly it would have been against their interest by publication of details to tell the German General Staff in effect what reinforcements they ought to send, and where they ought to send them. Why the difference in time was of moment will presently appear.

Again it has been repeatedly stated that the foremost effect of the Battle of the Marne was to confirm to the Allies the initiative which the strategy of General Joffre had so skilfully gained. That was one effect assuredly, and a vitally important effect. Another effect, however, hardly less important, was that, in point of military value and for effective operations, the German force in France was no longer the same. The blow had been too severe. Never again could that force be levelled up to those armies which had crossed the Marne in the confidence of prospective victory.

The effect was not moral merely, though *moral* had not a little to do with it. The effect was in the main material. War wastage arising from fatigue and privation must have reduced the effective strength of the German armies in nearly as great a degree as losses in killed and wounded. If *on September* 12 we put the armies which turned to hold the new line from Compiègne to Verdun at 600,000 men still fit for duty, we shall be adopting probably an outside figure.

Had this force, so reduced, not been able to make a stand along that new line, it must have been destroyed largely through exhaustion and famine. It was saved not, as imagined, chiefly by the defence works thrown up north of the Aisne and across the highlands to the Argonne. It was saved mainly by the tactics and by the energy of General von Kluck.

Rightly described by the British Official Bureau, doubtless on the authority of Sir John French himself, as "bold and skilful," those tactics form one of the outstanding features of the campaign, and they ought justly to be considered among the greatest feats in modern war. They are on the same plane indeed as the strategy and tactics of General Joffre, and these, beyond doubt, rank in point of mastery with the campaign of Napoleon in 1814. In this very area of Champagne on the eve of his fall the military genius of Napoleon was, like lightning in the gloom of tempest, displayed in its greatest splendour. For a thousand years this region of plateaux and rivers has been the arena of events which have shaped the history of Europe.[1] The features it offers for military defence are remarkable. Versed in the campaigns of Napoleon, aware of what have proved to be his mistakes, knowing the country in its every detail, knowing and judging rightly the

[1] The Italian historian, Signor Guglielmo Ferrero, has expressed the opinion that the Battle of the Marne has altered the face of European history. There is little doubt that time will prove this view to be fully justified.

qualities and capabilities of his troops, General Joffre drew the Germans on step by step to overthrow. The great feature of his plans was that this was meant to be an overthrow which would govern the fortune of the war. In great fact that aim was achieved, but in part also its fulfilment was postponed.

On the retreat of the German armies from the Marne there were, in order to bring about the destruction of those armies as a fighting force, three things which the Allies had to accomplish, and accomplish, if possible, concurrently. The first was to cut the German communications with Luxemburg and Metz by barring the roads and railways across the eastern frontier; the second was to push forward and seize Rheims, and the outlet through the hills north of the Aisne at Berry-au-Bac; the third was to force the troops of von Kluck eastward off their lines of communication along the valley of the Oise, and to do that, if it could be done, south of the Aisne.

All three objectives were of great consequence. The third, however, was the most important of the three.

Of the three, the first, the closing of the eastern frontier, was accomplished in part; the second was so far successful that the French were able to seize Rheims without opposition; the third was not accomplished. Had it been the armies of von Kluck and von Bülow forming the German right must both have been severed from the German line to the east of Rheims,

and, with their supplies of food and of munitions cut off, must have been compelled to surrender.

Appreciating the peril, and fully aware that the fate of the *whole* German force hung upon averting it, General von Kluck acted with resource and energy. Probably no commander ever extricated himself out of a more deadly predicament, and the achievement is all the more notable since he was opposed to skilful generals in command of skilful troops, directed by the greatest strategist of the age. The predicament in which General von Kluck found himself was this. If he opposed a front to the army of General Desperey, formed of the pick of the French regulars, he had on his flank both the British and the troops of General Maunoury. In that case, overwhelming defeat was certain. If on the other hand he formed a front against the troops of General French and General Maunoury, he presented a flank to the 5th French army. Not only in such circumstances was a bad defeat almost equally foregone, but, forming front to a flank and fighting along the lines of his communications, he must, in the event of defeat, retire eastward, abandoning his lines of communication and obstructing the retreat of von Bülow.

As events prove, the measures he adopted were these. He recalled from Amiens the army corps sent to that place to undertake an outflanking movement against the Allied left, and to cut off communication between Paris and Boulogne and

Calais. With all haste these troops fell back upon the Oise to secure the German right rear. Coincidently, his two army corps on the Ourcq were ordered to undertake against General Maunoury a vigorous offensive to the west of that river. With the remaining three army corps, which had crossed the Marne, General von Kluck fell back, presenting to the British and to the 5th French army a line protected first by the Grand Morin, and then by the Petit Morin and the Marne. In order to carry out that movement he did not hesitate to sacrifice a considerable part of his cavalry.

The danger-point of this disposition was La Ferté-sous-Jouarre. Into that place, consequently, he threw a strong force with orders to hold it to the last moment. With the rest of his three corps he formed front partly against the British, partly against the left of the army of General Desperey. In these actions, as Mr. Maxwell has pointed out, his troops were swept by the flank attack of part of the 6th French army. There is no doubt they fought, despite cruel losses, with the most stubborn courage. As the 6th French army, who displayed equally unshakable resolution, strove, following the course of the Ourcq, to work round against the German line of retreat, and as their attacks had to be met as well as the attacks of the British, the expedient which the German general resorted to was, as he retired, to hurry divisions of troops successively from the south to the north of his flank defence, and, as the 6th French army

moved, to move his flank defence with it. Not only was the object to do that, but there was, at the same time, an effort to press the 6th French army towards the north-west. This, in fact, General von Kluck managed to do. He did it by extending his flank beyond the left of the French army, and making a feint of envelopment. Imagine a row of coins, each coin a division, and a movement of the row by constantly shifting a coin from one end of the row to the other. That will give roughly an idea of what, on the events, appears to have been the expedient.

The success of such a series of movements depended, of course, on their rapidity, and, considering the severe and insistent pressure from the British on the rear of the line, forming an angle with the flank, the movements were carried out with surprising rapidity. The Ourcq, though not a long river, is, like the Marne, deep, and over more than half its length navigable. It flows between plateaux through a narrow valley with steep sides. The crossing of such a stream is no easy feat.

But General von Kluck did not mind the losses he incurred so long as he achieved his purpose. This was clearly his best policy. In the intervals of desperate fighting his men had to undertake long marches at a breakneck pace. For several days together they were without rest or sleep. To some extent they were aided by the entrenchments already dug to guard against an attack from the west. These positions, prepared to

protect the head of the German chain of armies remaining in contact with Paris, now proved useful in covering the retirement. Nevertheless, the efforts of the Germans must have been exhausting to the last degree.[1]

Despite that, they were successful in reaching the Aisne in advance of the 6th French army. The latter, it ought, however, to be said, had to operate through a difficult area. From the Ourcq to the Aisne there is a succession of forests. Of these the great forest of Villers-Cotterets extends northwards from the Ourcq to within six miles of Soissons. East of the stretch of forests the country is more open. Given these facts of topography, it is evident that on following the line of the Ourcq, with the object of barring its passage to the enemy, the French had in the forest belt a formidable obstacle. Perceiving that in this lay his chance, General von Kluck hurried as large a part of his force as possible across the Ourcq in order to bar the advance of the French by the forest roads through Villers, and by the comparatively narrow break in the forest belt between Crepy and Pierrefond. He was thus able, notwithstanding that the British were hanging on to and harrying his rear, to hold the

[1] An official British note on this retreat stated: "Many isolated parties of Germans have been discovered hiding in the numerous woods a long way behind our line. As a rule they seem glad to surrender.

"An officer, who was proceeding along the road in charge of a number of led horses, received information that there were some of the enemy in the neighbourhood. Upon seeing them he gave the order to charge, whereupon three German officers and 106 men surrendered."

outlets against the troops of General Maunoury until he slipped past them.[1]

And once on the Aisne and in touch with his Amiens rearguard, now on the Oise above Compiègne, he was in a position to initiate a complete change in tactics, and, his force being comparatively secure, the other German armies could again fall into line.

Before dealing with those new German tactics, it is advisable briefly to sketch the defence works thrown up by the Germans along their line, be-

[1] An interesting sidelight on the German movements is afforded by these particulars given on official authority :—

"At Villers-Cotterets, though supplies far in excess of the capabilities of the place were demanded, the town was not seriously damaged. The Germans evacuated the place on September 11th in such haste that they left behind a large amount of the bread requisitioned. It was stated by the inhabitants that the enemy destroyed and abandoned fifteen motor-lorries, seven guns, and ammunition wagons.

"At Crepy, on Sept. 3, various articles were requisitioned under threat of a fine of 100,000f. for every day's delay in the delivery of the goods. The following list shows the amounts and natures of the supplies demanded, and also the actual quantities furnished :

	Requisitioned.	Supplied.
Flour	20,000 kilos.	20,000 kilos.
Dried vegetables ...	5,000 ,,	800 ,,
Coffee	1,000 ,,	809 ,,
Salt	1,000 ,,	2,000 ,,
Oats	100,000 ,,	55,000 ,,
Red wine	2,500 litres.	2,500 litres.

All smoked meats, ham, cloth, new boots, tobacco, biscuits, handkerchiefs, shirts, braces, stockings, horse shoes, bicycles, motor-cars, petrol.	61 prs. of boots. 91 bicycles. 15 motor tyres. 6 inner tubes.

cause both these defence works and the character of the country are intimately related to the tactics.

As already stated, the highlands of Champagne extend north-west nearly as far as Peronne. They are chalk hills and uplands cut by deep valleys. The most northerly of the valleys is that out of which flows the Somme. Then comes the much wider valley of the Oise. Still farther south is the valley of the Aisne. Between the Oise and the Aisne is a roughly triangular tract of country, its apex at the point where the Oise and the Aisne join. Across the broad end or base of this triangle run the open downs. Towards the narrower end of the area the country becomes broken and hilly, and is covered with great patches of wood and forest.

There is along the north of the Aisne a long wooded ridge, which on its northern edge slopes steeply. But the top of the ridge forms a gentle undulating slope to the south. It is not unlike the top of a rough, slightly tilted table. To a bird's-eye view this top would appear shaped rather like a very coarse-toothed comb, with the teeth jagged and broken. The top, that is to say, runs out on its south side into a succession of promontories, each ending in a round-ended bluff overlooking the Aisne valley. Some of these bluffs jut out close above the river. Others are much farther back. Between them are clefts and side valleys, in which the land slopes up from the bottom of the main valley to the top of the plateau. In the longer clefts, of course, the general gradient is much less stiff than in the

shorter ones. Both the tops of the bluffs and most of the clefts are thickly wooded. The bluffs are on an average above 400 feet in height, that in fact being the general elevation of the plateau.

The aspect of the edge of the corresponding plateau on the south side of the valley of the Aisne is exactly similar. Since the bluffs on the opposite sides approach each other in some places and are farther apart in others, the valley varies in breadth from half a mile to two miles. The bottom of the valley is practically flat, and through this flat tract of meadow land the river winds, now near one side of the valley, now near the other. The stream is between fifty and sixty yards wide, but, like all the rivers in this part of France, deep. Where the valley opens out there are villages and small towns. The largest place is the picturesque old city of Soissons.

Now the ridge north of the Aisne extends west to east for some thirty-four miles. At Craonne, its eastern end, it rises to a summit about 500 feet high, and then falls abruptly. There is here, going from the Aisne northwards, a fairly level open gap some three miles wide. South of the Aisne, the same gap extends for about ten miles to Rheims. On each side of the gap rise hillsides clothed with woods. At the crossing of the Aisne is situated the village of Berry-au-Bac. This gap, it will be seen, forms an important feature in the Aisne battle.

Above and behind the hills to the east of the gap, and across the downs, the German entrenchments extended eastward for mile after mile

right away to the Argonne. It is apposite here to note that near Rheims the traverse gap widens out and passes right and left round an isolated, hilly mass, lying like an island in a stream. Up the sides of this hilly mass climb the villages of Berru and Nogent-l'Abbesse.

Undoubtedly, one of the surprises of the war was the discovery that the Germans had prepared the positions just described. The preparation must have involved great labour. But it should not be forgotten that from time out of mind one of the chief industries in this part of France is represented by the chalk quarries, out of which is dug the material, known in its prepared state as plaster of Paris. All through Champagne there was, before the war, a considerable German population. Not a few of the plaster quarries had passed into the hands of Germans. The principal quarries are on the steep north slope of the ridge along the Aisne. Cut into the hill-sides, these chalk pits present a labyrinth of galleries and chambers, where the quarrymen were accustomed to take their meals and even to sleep. These quarries, numbered by scores, might well form the refuge and stronghold of an army. The region is remarkable, also, for its many natural caves.

Even more important, however, from a military standpoint, is the southern side of this plateau. The only means of approaching the plateau from that side is either up the clefts or side valleys, or from the western end where the level gradually falls. But an attack made up one of

the side valleys could be assailed from both sides. In possession of the plateau above, the defence, while keeping its force undivided, could move that force to any point where attack was threatened, having itself no clefts or fissures to deal with. It will be seen, therefore, that the ridge formed a sort of vast ready-made castle, big enough to stretch from London to beyond Oxford, or from Liverpool to Manchester, and that the quarries and galleries made it habitable, at all events on the banditti level of existence.

As Sir John French has pointed out,[1] owing to the patches of wood on the upper slopes and tops of the bluffs, only small areas of the plateau were open to view from the tops of bluffs on the south side of the river. Hence the movements of the defenders were, looked at from across the river, to no small extent concealed.

Two further *military* features of the ridge should be noted. One is the fact that its steep northern slope forms one side of the valley of the Lette, and that, therefore, it is bounded by a river on both sides; the other is, that some eight miles from its eastern end at Craonne the plateau narrows to a mere neck less than a mile wide, and that across this neck is carried the Oise and Aisne canal.

Not relying, however, merely on the natural features of the place, the Germans dug along the plateau lines of entrenchments connected by galleries with other trenches in the rear where

[1] See Appendix, Despatch of Sir John French, Oct. 8, 1914.

reserves, not in the firing line, were held. These back trenches formed living places. The mass of men was too large, for any save the smaller proportion, to find shelter in the quarries.

It will be seen, therefore, that the business of turning the Germans out of such a fastness could be no easy matter.

On the choice of this position two questions suggest themselves. How was it that the Germans came to pitch upon this place—for there can be no doubt the choice was deliberate[1]—and what operations did they intend to undertake on the strength of its possession?

The answers to these questions are in no sense speculations in the secrets of War Offices. Those secrets it would be idle to profess to know. Like the observations made in preceding pages, the answers are deductions from admitted facts and events, perfectly plain to anyone who has knowledge enough of military operations to draw them. Only ignorance can assume that no true commentary can be written concerning a campaign save upon official confidences.

As to the German choice of this position, it

[1] The opinion on this point of the officers who took part in the Battle of the Aisne is embodied in the following official note published by the British Press Bureau :—

"There is no doubt that the position on the Aisne was not hastily selected by the German Staff after the retreat had begun. From the choice of ground and the care with which the fields of fire have been arranged to cover all possible avenues of approach, and from the amount of work already carried out, it is clear that the contingency of having to act on the defensive was not overlooked when the details of the strategically offensive campaign were arranged."

should not be forgotten that the present war represents the fourth campaign which the Prussians have fought in this area of France. In forming their plans they had, we ought to presume, considered—bearing in mind the difference in military conditions—not only the war of 1870–1, but the campaign of Frederick William II., and the campaign of Blucher in 1814. A little earlier it was said that this arena offers great facilities for defence. The reason is that, since there is here a system of rivers flowing to a conjunction near Paris, it is always open to the defence to attack in superior force between any two of the rivers, while the assailant must, in advancing from east to west, have his forces divided by one or more of the streams. The whole German plan was intended to obviate and to overcome that difficulty, and yet the plan came to grief because, at the moment when their forces were divided by the Marne and by the Grand Morin, the defence were able to attack them in superior force on their extreme right—the vital point—and when the crossing of the rivers made it difficult to meet that attack.[1]

[1] The late General Hamley, describing what he considered the most effective lines for an invasion of France from Germany in opposition to the defensive adopted by Napoleon, points out that if the left of the defence threatens the invaders' communications, the invaders, leaving their right on the Ourcq and Marne, march through Sezanne to fight on the right bank of the Seine. Pushing the French right and centre to the Yères with their own centre and left, they fight then the decisive battle. It should be decisive, for the [Germans] on the two rivers, approaching each other in the narrowing

Foreseeing, however, the *possibility*, though not accepting the probability, of having to stand for a time on the defensive, the German General Staff, we cannot now doubt, had formed the subsidiary and provisional plan of concentrating, as far as possible and in case of necessity, between two of the rivers—the Oise and the Aisne—in positions which could be held with a minimum of numbers.

But this concentration was only preliminary. It was intended to aid the massing on their own right flank of an echelon of reserve formations to be thrown against the left of the Allied forces.

Concentration between two of the rivers was, as a defensive, beyond question the best measure in the situation. A mere defensive, however, would be tantamount to a confession that the whole expedition against France had proved a failure. Undoubtedly, therefore, as the later events show, the design was, at the earliest moment, to resume the offensive by means of masses of reserves. These, pivoting upon Noyon, at the western end of the fortified line, might sweep round and, by threatening to

angle can combine in a movement on Paris, holding the passages at Melun and Montereau on the one side, and at Meaux on the other.

"In executing such a plan the weapons of the defender would be in some measure turned against himself. . . . But the assailants in taking these forward steps do so at the disadvantage of attacking a strongly posted enemy and under penalty of exposing a flank to him. This course demands a superiority in numbers of not less than 4 to 3, and probably greater than that."

The Germans had adopted this very plan, but they had not the superiority they imagined.

envelop the Allied armies compel their retirement.

Conversely, the Allied tactic was plainly to envelop the Germans and to threaten their main communications through Belgium. The question now was: Which side could carry out its manœuvre first?

CHAPTER VII

THE OPERATIONS ON THE AISNE

THE battle of the Aisne, destined to develop into the longest conflict on record—it extended over two whole months—began on the afternoon of Sunday, September 13. To follow its complexities it is necessary clearly to grasp, not only the military purposes or objectives the two sides had immediately in view, but the respective situations of the opposing masses as regards fighting efficiency. When operations are on this gigantic scale a certain amount of imagination must be exercised to realise even the barest facts.

From Compiègne eastward to Rheims the Allied line was formed by the 6th French, the British, and the 5th French armies. To the first for the moment was assigned the duty of forcing the passages of the Aisne from below Soissons, clearing the enemy off the western end of the ridge, and pushing him up to Noyon on the Oise.

The business which fell to the British army was that of delivering a frontal attack on this

natural hill fortress from Soissons as far as Craonne.

The 6th French army, which by a vigorous forward thrust had driven the enemy out of Rheims, was to push up through the transverse gap to Berry-au-Bac, and assault the hostile positions on the hillsides along the east side of the gap. Along these hills the Germans had settled themselves in force. Here, too, there were many chalk quarries and caves, which the Germans were using as shelters and stores.

At first sight it might well seem that the frontal attack undertaken by the British was not strictly a necessary operation. Clearly, the feasible way of driving the Germans out of their fastness was to turn the flanks of the position on the west through Lassigny and Noyon, and on the east through Berry-au-Bac. The main operation was, of course, that of turning the position from the west, for the right of the German position remained its vulnerable point. It was essential, however, to the success of that operation that General von Kluck should not be able to meet it in force until, at all events, the Allied troops had taken a firm grip.

Now, if the British army had assumed a merely watching attitude on the south side of the Aisne, and had in consequence been able to extend their line from the south of Craonne down the river to, say, Attichy, some ten miles below Soissons, that, while leaving nearly the whole strength of the 6th French army free to undertake the turning movement, would at the

same time have left General von Kluck also free to throw his main strength against it.

A vigorous and pressing attack along his front was consequently essential, in order to keep his main force employed. Not only was the attack essential, but it had to be launched against him without delay, and before he could recover from the effects of his retreat.

Including the troops recalled from Amiens, Generals von Kluck and von Bülow had under their command, nominally at any rate, ten army corps. If, deducting losses and war wastages, we put their strength in effectives at not more than the equivalent of six corps—it could have been very little more—yet six corps was, *in the positions they held,* a force fully able to cope with the nine corps making up the three Allied armies pitted then against them. Bearing in mind, indeed, the natural defensive advantages of the ridges on which the Germans had established themselves, and their facility for moving troops either for the purposes of defence or of counter-attack, their strongholds could have been held by three corps, leaving the remainder to be used on the flank for active operations.

Intended to frustrate that manœuvre, the British attack compelled the German commanders to await, before they could make any such attempt, the arrival of reinforcements. On both sides there was now a race against time. French reinforcements and reserves had to be brought up and massed against the flank of the German position. Many of those troops had,

however, to cover long distances afoot. The movements of mass armies are comparatively slow. After all, the roads and railways traversing a country have a capacity which is limited. Some idea of what such movement involves may be formed from the traffic on a popular bank holiday. In the case of armies there is, in addition to human numbers, the artillery, the munitions, the camp equipment, the foodstuffs, and all the rest of the transport. No one, therefore, can be surprised that by the time these masses could be concentrated on the German flank, there were German masses who, under the same conditions, had been hurried forward to meet them. From the very necessities of time and space the race resulted to a great extent in a draw.

The Battle of the Aisne is in every respect unique. A battle in the ordinary sense of field operations it was not. It was a siege. Nothing at all like it had ever occurred before in war. There have been many sieges of banditti in mountain retreats. There have been sieges in old times of fortified camps. There had never been the siege under such conditions of a great army.

The operations in this amazing and gigantic conflict, though inter-related, must for the purposes of clear narration be dealt with in sections. The story divides itself into :—

The attack upon the German positions north of the Aisne.

The struggle for and around Rheims.

The operations on and against the German right flank.

In this chapter it is proposed to deal with the attack upon the German positions north of the Aisne. The manner in which the British troops forced the passage of that river and secured a footing on the ridge, and held on to it, forms a particularly brilliant feat of arms.

As stated in the official account :—

The country across which the army has had to force its way is undulating and covered with patches of thick wood.

Within the area which faced the British before the advance commenced, right up to Laon, the chief feature of tactical importance is the fact that there are six rivers running right across the direction of advance, at all of which it was possible that the Germans might make a resistance.

These are, in order from the south, the Marne, the Ourcq, the Vesle, the Aisne, the Lette, and the Oise.

The Lette, it may here be stated, is a tributary of the Oise. Rising just to the north of Craonne and flowing westward through an upland valley, it is used in the lower part of its course as a section of the Oise and Aisne Canal.

On Friday, the 11th, the official account goes on to say, but little opposition was met with by us along any part of our front, and the direction of advance was, for the purpose of co-operating with our Allies, turned slightly to the north-east. The day was spent in pushing forward and in gathering in various hostile detachments,

and by nightfall our forces had reached a line to the north of the Ourcq, extending from Oulchy Le Château to Long Pont.

On this day there was also a general advance on the part of the French along their whole line, which ended in substantial success, in one portion of the field Duke Albrecht of Würtemberg's fourth army being driven back across the Saulx; and elsewhere the whole of the corps artillery of a German corps being captured. Several German colours also were taken.

It was only on this day that the full extent of the victory gained by the Allies was appreciated by them. The moral effect of this success has been enormous.

When the British pushed forward on September 12 to the Aisne, they found that the Germans still held the heights to the south of the river above Soissons. German outposts also held the strip of hilly country between the Aisne and its tributary the Vesle.

The first step was to drive the Germans across the Aisne at Soissons. This was undertaken by the 3rd army corps. Pushing forward to Buzancy, south-east of Soissons, the troops won the heights overlooking the old city and the Aisne valley, which here opens to its greatest width. It was a stiff fight. Despite, however, a heavy bombardment from across the valley, the British, side by side with troops of General Maunoury, swept the Germans down into and through Soissons, and as the enemy crowded over the two bridges the artillery of the 3rd corps poured upon them a rain of shells. Immediately

the Germans had crossed, the bridges, which had been mined, went up in two terrific explosions.

While this action was in progress, Sir John French had thrown the 1st army corps across the Vesle at Fismes. They advanced to Vaucere with but little opposition.

At Braisne on the Vesle, however, the Germans for a time made a resolute stand. They held the town in force, and covered the bridge with machine guns. They were strongly supported by artillery. Notwithstanding this, they were ousted out of the place by the 1st British Cavalry Division under General Allenby. While a brigade of British infantry cleared the enemy out of the town, which lies mainly on the south bank, the cavalry rushed the passage of the river under a galling fire and turned the hostile position. So rapidly did the Germans take to flight that they had to throw a large amount of their artillery ammunition into the river. There was no time to reload it into the caissons.[1] This feat of the British horse ranks among the finest bits of "derring do" in the campaign. The Queen's Bays have been mentioned in despatches as rendering distinguished service. Conspicuous gallantry was shown by the whole division. As a result of these operations from Braisne and

[1] A buried store of the enemy's munitions of war was also found not far from the Aisne, ten wagon-loads of live shell and two wagons of cable being dug up; and traces were discovered of large quantities of stores having been burnt, all tending to show that so far back as the Aisne the German retirement was hurried.

Fismes, the British secured the country up to the Aisne.

Left and right, therefore, the advance had been completely successful. In the centre, however, the 2nd army corps had an exceptionally tough piece to negotiate. They advanced up to the Aisne between Soissons and Missy. The latter place lies on the north bank, just below the junction of the Aisne and the Vesle. Here there is a broad stretch of meadow flats, commanded north, east, and south by bluffs. On the south is the Sermoise bluff or spur; across the flats, directly opposite to the north, stands out the Chivre spur. The summit of the latter is crowned by an old defence work, the Fort de Condé. This the Germans held, and they made use of the spur, like a miniature Gibraltar, to sweep the flats of the valley with their guns. On this 12th September the 5th division found themselves unable to make headway. They advanced to the Aisne, which just here sweeps close under the Chivres spur, leaving between the cliff and the bank a narrow strip, occupied by the village of Condé-sur-Aisne. Across the river at Condé there was a road bridge, and the enemy had left the bridge intact, both because they held the houses of the village, which they had loop-holed, and because their guns above commanded the approach road. It may be stated that they held on to the Chivre spur and on to Condé all through the battle.

On the night of September 12 the British had possession of all the south bank of the Aisne

from Soissons up to Maizy, immediately to the south of Craonne.

At daybreak on Sunday, September 13, Sir John French ordered a general advance across the river. Opposite the places where the waterway could most readily be crossed, the enemy had posted strong bodies of infantry with machine guns. Along the bluffs, and behind the side valleys above, they had disposed their artillery in a range of batteries upwards of fifteen miles in length.

The battle began with one of the most tremendous and concentrated artillery duels that has ever taken place, for the line was prolonged both east and west by the French artillery, until it stretched out to more than twice the length of the British front.

Of the nine bridges over this section of the Aisne, all save that at Condé had been blown up. Near a little place called Bourg on the north bank, some three miles below Maizy, the valley is crossed by an aqueduct carrying the Oise and Aisne canal. This canal passes in a series of locks over the ridge north-west. The canal is much used in connection with the chalk quarries.

Troops of the 1st British division, defying a fierce bombardment, advanced in rushes along the towing path, or crept along the parapets of the aqueduct. Every man deliberately took his life in his hands. Others crept breast high in the water along the canal sides. The German guns stormed at them, and many fell, but foot by foot and yard by yard they crawled on, while

supporting riflemen from the ridges behind them picked off the Germans who strove to oppose their passage. The resistance was furious. They won, however, a footing on the north bank. Once there, no counter-assaults could dislodge them.

This bridgehead formed at the opposite end of the aqueduct, more troops rushed across, covered by a concentration of the British artillery. In this way, at length, the whole division got over, including the cavalry. Forthwith they advanced up the road leading across the ridge from Bourg, along the side valley, towards Chamouille.

While these events were taking place, troops of the 2nd division were, five miles farther down the river, near Vailly, carrying out a feat of equal daring. Just about Vailly, the Aisne is crossed obliquely by the railway line from Soissons. The railway bridge, a structure of iron, now lay in the stream. Most of the confusion of massive ribs and girders was under water, and the deep and smoothly sweeping current, swollen by recent rains, foamed and chafed against the obstacle. One of the long girders, however, still showed an edge above the flood. It was possible for men to cross upon this girder, but only in single file. Not more than two feet in breadth at the outside, not less than 250 feet in length, this path of iron resembled, if anything could, that bridge, narrow as the edge of a scimitar, over which the faithful Mussulman is fabled to pass into Paradise. It was swept by shot and shell.

From the heights across the valley belched without ceasing the hail of death. Wounded or unnerved a man saw his end as surely in the grey-green swirl of waters. But the soldiers who undertook this service did not hesitate. It may be doubted if there has ever been anything in ancient or in modern war more coolly heroic. Here was the spirit which has made Britain the mother of mighty nations. Not a few of these heroes fell, inevitably, but the spirit was in all, and if some fell, others won their way over, and having won it kept their footing against heavy odds.

In sight of this struggle, amid the unceasing roar of the batteries on either side, the 4th Guards Brigade were, a mile away at Chavonne, ferrying themselves over in boats. Notwithstanding the furious efforts to annihilate them, both as they crossed and as they sprang ashore, a whole battalion in this way got across and made good their foothold.

Half-way between Condé and Soissons, at the village of Venizel, at the same time, the 14th brigade were rafting themselves over on tree-trunks crossed with planks, derelict doors, and stairways.

These footholds won, the troops, like the 1st division, lost no time in pushing forward to seize points of vantage before the enemy could rally from his astonishment. The 2nd division advanced along the road from Vailly towards Courteçon; the 12th brigade made an attack in the direction of Chivres, situated in a small side

valley to the west of the Chivres bluff. Slightly higher up this side valley, and on its opposite slope, the Germans held the hillside village of Vregny in force. The cleft at once became the scene of a furious combat.

Coincidently the work went on of throwing pontoon bridges across the river. Under persistent bombardment the Royal Engineers stuck to this business with grim resolve. The battle had gone on without a pause from daybreak. At half-past five in the evening, opposite Bucy-le-Long, three miles above Soissons, the first pontoon bridge had been completed, and the 10th brigade crossing by it drove the enemy out of Bucy. Working right through the night the Engineers completed eight pontoon bridges and one footbridge. On the following day they temporarily repaired the road bridges at Venizel, Missy, and Vailly, and the bridge at Villers. The army had thus twelve bridges connecting with the south bank, and was able to move across in force with a large part of his artillery.

Crossing the Aisne at Soissons, the main road running for about a mile and a half north-east to the little village of Crouy, there divides. On the right is a lower road eastward up the valley of the Aisne, past and under the bluffs on the north side to Berry-au-Bac. On the left is a road which climbs up hill, carried in some places through cuttings and tunnels, at others over short viaducts, until it reaches the summit of the ridge. There, parallel in direction with the lower road three miles away, it continues for some twelve

miles to Craonne. From this summit road there is, between the patches of woods, a wide view of the country—to the north the valley of the Lette, and beyond it the height round which lies the town and fortress of Laon, to the south the rich woodland glimpses of the Aisne valley. This panoramic highway is the famous Chemins des Dames.

It is evident that command of the higher and of the lower roads meant command of all the part of the ridge between Soissons and Berry, and the operations were an effort on the one side to obtain, and on the other to retain, that command.

Already, with the exception of the break at Condé, the lower road, and the villages and the town of Vailly lying along its length, were, as the result of the fighting on September 13, in the hands of the British. The higher road remained in the possession of the Germans. Up the clefts and side valleys are a number of small villages and hamlets, inhabited for the most part by quarrymen and lime-burners, but with, here and there, a small factory. A sprinkling of these civilians were Germans. Most were known to the enemy, and were active spies, and one of the first measures taken by the Germans was to establish at various points secret telephones, forming an exchange of intercommunication with and along their positions. Where telephones could not be employed they arranged a system of ruses and signals. Among these devices was that of smoke from cottage chimneys.

On the morning of September 14, the 13th,

14th, and 15th Brigades, defeating a heavy counter-attack, seized the roads between Condé and Soissons. The object was to cut into the centre of the German defence.

During this day further bodies of British troops crossed the river. The forces already on the north side were heavily engaged. Towards nightfall the Germans attempted a counter-attack. It was beaten off after severe fighting. Three hours later, about ten o'clock at night, they again descended in force against the positions and villages held by the British troops. While the clefts and side valleys blazed with flashing fire of infantry, the valley of the Aisne was lit up for miles with the fluctuating and lurid flare from the heavy guns. Masses of German infantry tried to drive the British troops out of the villages they had seized. It was evidently hoped to prevail by weight of numbers. The onset fell back crippled by the losses sustained.

By this time the fact was becoming plain that the battle was no mere rearguard action. The enemy had manifestly resolved to make a stand. To ascertain the character and strength of his disposition, Sir John French ordered a general advance. It was timed to begin at daybreak.

The dawn broke amid rain and heavy mists, but this, if a disadvantage to the attack, was equally a disadvantage to the defence. One of the leading features of this offensive was what Sir John French has justly called the bold and decisive action of the 1st army corps, commanded by Sir Douglas Haig.

From Bourg, the scene of the crossing on the aqueduct, there runs northward climbing to the summit of the ridge a road to the village of Cerny, about half-way along the Chemin des Dames. The distance from Bourg to Cerny is rather more than three miles. It is, however, a stiff climb. Two-thirds of the way up, where the road bends sharply to the left round a spur, is the village of Vendresse-et-Troyon. The capture of this place was one of the immediate objectives, and the troops told off to accomplish it were the 1st infantry brigade and the 25th artillery brigade, under General Bulfin.[1] At Cerny there is a slight dip on the level of the ridge.

Vendresse is on the west slope of this side valley, and Troyon on the east slope just behind the spur. The Germans held in strong force both the spur and the houses on each slope. At Troyon they had fortified themselves in a factory.

Few operations could be more ticklish than the seizure of such a place. From the spur the Germans came down in a counter-attack like a human avalanche. After stemming this rush by a withering fire the Northamptons were ordered to carry the spur at the point of the bayonet. They did it. As they were chasing the survivors of the counter-attack up the slope there suddenly appeared on the skyline a second mass of German infantry, the reserves supporting the counter-attacking column. In a matter of seconds, however, the fugitives and the North-

[1] This able and distinguished officer has since been promoted for his services.

amptons were on them. Their ranks broken, they also turned and fled in rout across the plateau.

In the meantime the North Lancashires had stormed the factory and cleared the enemy out of Vendresse at the point of the bayonet. Other troops of the 1st army corps pushed on to Meulins, a mile to the south-east, and seized positions along the east end of the ridge. During the fighting the Germans lost 12 field guns and 600 prisoners. Many of the latter were found to belong to the Landwehr, proving that the enemy had already been compelled to fill up his formations from second reserves.

The fury of this fighting was intense. There could be no better evidence of its character than an unposted letter found later on an officer of the 7th German army reserve corps. The letter runs:—

CERNY, S. OF LAON, *Sept.* 17, 1914.

MY DEAR PARENTS,—Our corps has the task of holding the heights south of Cerny in all circumstances till the 15th corps on our left flank can grip the enemy's flank. On our right are other corps. We are fighting with the English Guards, Highlanders, and Zouaves.[1] The losses on both sides have been enormous. For the most part this is due to the too brilliant French artillery. The English are marvellously trained in making use of the ground. One never sees them, and one is constantly under fire.

Three days ago our division took possession of these heights, dug itself in, &c. Two days ago, early in the morning, we were attacked by

[1] Part of the 5th French Army, which was operating on the right of the British from Rheims and Berry-au-Bac.

immensely superior English forces (one brigade and two battalions), and were turned out of our positions; the fellows took five guns from us. It was a tremendous hand-to-hand fight. How I escaped myself I am not clear. I then had to bring up supports on foot (my horse was wounded and the others were too far in rear). Then came up the Guard Jager Battalion, 4th Jager, 65th Regiment, Reserve Regiment 13, Landwehr Regiments 13 and 16, and with the help of the artillery drove back the fellows out of the position again.

. . . During the first two days of the battle[1] I had only one piece of bread and no water, spent the night in the rain without my great coat. The rest of my kit was on the horses which have been left miles behind with the baggage, which cannot come up into the battle because as soon as you put your nose out from behind cover the bullets whistle.

Yesterday evening about six p.m., in the valley in which our reserves stood, there was such a terrible cannonade that we saw nothing of the sky but a cloud of smoke. We had few casualties.

Just to the west of Vendresse the 5th infantry brigade advanced against the part of the ridge where is situated the village of Courteçon. Simultaneously the 4th Guards Brigade, with the 36th brigade of artillery, debouched from Bourg along the Aisne and Oise canal, with the object of seizing Ostel. They had to fight their way, opposed foot by foot, through dense woods. The 6th brigade pressed up farther along the canal

[1] The reference is evidently to the fighting on Sept. 13 and 14.

to Braye-en-Laonnois. It is immediately to the north of that place that the plateau is at the narrowest. Evidently to obtain possession of that neck would be a great advantage. The enemy held on to Braye at all costs.

Further west, again, the British advanced from Vailly to Aizy along another of the approaches to the plateau. The object was to hem in the Germans holding the Chivres bluff and Condé. On the farther side of the bluff from Aizy the division of Sir Charles Fergusson held on to Chivres village in the face of a succession of determined onslaughts.

As the outcome of this day's fighting, which had been very severe, the 1st army corps had won close up to the ridge by Craonne, and held positions extending along the plateau across the canal to Soupir, a distance of nearly nine miles. Concurrently the 2nd and 3rd corps had gained the plateau from Chavonne westward to Croucy, and with the exception of the Chivres bluff all the outer or southern edge of the plateau, as well as the intervening side valleys, were in the British hands, from Soissons to Craonne.

As soon as they had gained these positions the British troops set about digging themselves in, and although the rain fell all night in torrents, and the men had been through a long and fierce struggle since daybreak, they worked magnificently.

Next day (September 15) heavy rain blurred the view. Neither force could see the movements of the other, but when the mists lifted

somewhat the Germans must have been surprised to discover that the foe were already in their stronghold.

On their side they had not been idle. They had brought along from Maubeuge the batteries of heavy howitzers used to destroy the forts at that place, and were putting them into well-concealed positions. Besides this they worked with energy to strengthen their entrenchments. These lines of trenches among and along the edges of the woods crowning the slopes of the ridge were elaborately made, and in general cleverly hidden.

They were so placed as to sweep with rifle and machine gun fire the approaches to the plateau up the various clefts. Lengths of barbed-wire entanglements and rabbit fencing further defended the approaches, both in the woods and across open ground. Where behind or between the lines of trenches the land rose—the top of the plateau had been worn by ages of weather into sweeping undulations—there were batteries of field guns, so arranged that they laid approaches under a cross fire. Round and in front of these knobs of land the trenches swept like ditches round bastions. Everything, in fact, that resource could suggest had been done to make the positions impregnable.[1]

[1] The following descriptive notes on the German positions were made by the official "Eye-witness" with the British forces:—"Owing to the concealment afforded to the Germans' fire trenches and gun emplacements by the woods and to the fact that nearly all the bridges and roads leading to them, as well as a great part of the

In addition to trenches, hamlets and villages were held by the two armies as advanced posts, and had been turned roughly into groups of block houses.

southern slopes, are open to their fire, the position held by them is a very strong one. Except for these patches of wood, the terrain generally is not enclosed. No boundaries between the fields exist as in England. There are ditches here and there, but no hedges, wire fences, or walls, except round the enclosures in the villages. A large proportion of the woods, however, are enclosed by high rabbit netting, which is in some places supported by iron stanchions. The top of the plateau on the south of the river to some extent resembles Salisbury Plain, except that the latter is downland while the former is cultivated, being sown with lucerne, wheat, and beetroot.

"A feature of this part of the country, and one which is not confined to the neighbourhood of the Aisne, is the large number of caves, both natural and artificial, and of quarries. These are of great service to the forces on both sides, since they can often be used as sheltered accommodation for the troops in the second line. Other points worthy of note are the excellence of the metalled roads, though the metalled portion is very narrow, and the comparative ease with which one can find one's way about, even without a map. This is due partly to the prevailing straightness of the roads and partly to the absence of hedges. There are signposts at all cross-roads, whilst the name of each village is posted in a conspicuous place at the entry and exit of the main highway passing through it.

"In addition to the absence of hedges, the tall, white ferro-concrete telegraph posts lining many of the main roads give a somewhat strange note to the landscape."

CHAPTER VIII

WARFARE BY DAY AND BY NIGHT

In three days the British had not only gained the passages over the Aisne, but had won their way to the plateau. Both sides had fought with determination. The German commander knew that if he could not hold this position the whole contemplated strategy of throwing masses of reinforcements against the left flank of the Allied forces must collapse. He was well aware that if he failed, not only must his own force in all probability be destroyed, but the whole German line as far as Verdun must in all probability be crumpled up.

Not less was Sir John French aware that the future success of the Allied campaign hung upon obtaining a purchase on the German position which would force General von Kluck to employ his whole strength in holding on. It is easy, therefore, to infer how fierce had been this three days' struggle.

The Germans had put forth the greatest effort of which they were capable. But despite the natural advantage given them, first by the river

front, and next by the rugged and broken ground in the many side valleys, they had been beaten. Henceforward the struggle was on less uneven terms. The fact had become manifest that without a strenuous counter-offensive the Germans could not hope to hold on.

This counter-offensive was attempted without delay.

Since the top of the plateau sloped from north to south, the positions held by the British were in general on lower ground than the trenches cut by the Germans, and it must have been something of a disagreeable surprise to the latter when on the morning of September 15, the heavy mists having lifted, they saw miles of earthworks, which had literally sprung up in the night. The rain and mist during the hours of darkness had made a night attack impossible, even if, after the eighteen hours' furious battle in the mists on the preceding day, they had had the stomach for it.

They had their surprise ready, however, as well. From well-hidden positions behind the woods on the top of the plateau they opened a violent bombardment of the British lines with their huge 8-inch and 11-inch howitzers, throwing the enormous shells, which fell with such terrific force as to bury themselves in the ground. Giving off in exploding dense clouds of black smoke, these shells blew away the earth on all sides of them in a rain of fragments of rock, masses of soil and stones, leaving the surface filled with holes wide and deep enough to be the burial place

of several horses. This heavy ordnance was kept well beyond the range of the British guns, and employed for high-angle fire. So far as life was concerned, the shells caused relatively little loss. Their flight being visible—they looked not unlike tree-trunks hurled from across the hills—they could be dodged. On realising how little they were to be feared, the British troops nicknamed them "Black Marias," "Coalboxes," and "Jack Johnsons," and shouted jocular warnings. The idea of using these shells was to knock the British defence works to pieces. Some of these works, hastily thrown up, proved to be too slight, and had to be replaced by diggings, which became regular underground barracks.

At this time the British lines were in general more than a mile distant, on the average, from those of the enemy. They followed no symmetrical plan, but, adapted to the defensive features of the ground, were cut where there were at once the best shelters from attack and the best jumping-off places for offence. Describing them, the British military correspondent wrote :—

A striking feature of our line—to use the conventional term which so seldom expresses accurately the position taken up by an army—is that it consists really of a series of trenches not all placed alongside each other. but some more advanced than others, and many facing in different directions. At one place they run east and west, along one side of a valley ; another, almost north and south, up some subsidiary valley ; here they line the edge of wood, and there they are on the reverse slope of a hill, or possibly along a sunken

road. And at different points both the German and British trenches jut out like promontories into what might be regarded as the opponent's territory.

While the British infantry had been entrenching, the artillery, with an equal energy, had hauled their guns up the steep roads, and in many cases up still steeper hillsides, and by the morning of September 15—another disagreeable surprise for the enemy—nearly 500 field pieces bristled from positions of vantage along the front. The reply to the German bombardment was a bombardment of the hostile trenches. The latter were crowded with men. If the German shells did a lot of injury to the landscape, the British shrapnel inflicted far heavier injury on the enemy's force. It swept the German trenches and field batteries with a regular hail of lead. Well-concealed though they to a great extent were, the German positions were not so well-concealed as the British positions. Both armies did their best to make themselves appear scarce, and beyond the deafening uproar of the guns belching from behind woods and undulations, there seemed at a distance few signs of life on either side. But, looked at from behind and within, the lines were very anthills of activity.

The bombardment went on until midnight. Then came a night battle of almost unexampled fury.

From the outline already given of the fighting on September 14 it will have been gathered that one of the most substantial advantages won had

been the position seized by the 4th Guards Brigade along the Aisne and Oise Canal from Astel to Braye-en-Laonnois. At Braye and eastwards over the intervening spur of plateau to Vendresse the British positions were dangerously close to the narrow neck of the ridge. Across that neck, too, following the canal to its juncture with the Lette, and then up the short valley of the Ardon, was the easiest route to Laon, the main base of the 1st German army. Obviously the British must, if possible, be ousted out of these villages.

Bombardment had failed to do it. Soon after midnight, therefore, a huge mass of German infantry moved down against the Guards' entrenchments by Braye. It was a murderous combat. Six times in succession the Germans were beaten off. But for every column of the enemy that went back, broken, decimated, and exhausted, there was another ready instantly to take its place. Advancing over the dying and the dead, the Germans faced the appalling and rapid volleys of the Guards with unflinching courage. They fell in hundreds, but still they rushed on. Machine guns on both sides spat sheets of bullets. At close grips, finally, men stabbed like demons. In and round houses, many set on fire, and throwing the scene of slaughter into lurid and Dantesque relief, there were fights to the death. No quarter was given or taken. The canal became choked with corpses. On the roads and hillsides dead and wounded lay in every posture of pain. Beyond the outer ring of the

struggle, where shouts of fury mingled with cries of agony, the roaring choruses of the guns bayed across the valley with redoubled rage.

Great as it was, the effort proved vain. If the attack was heroic, the defence was super-heroic. When, for the last time, the lines of the Guards swept forward, withering the retreating and now disordered foe with their volleys, charging into them in what seemed a lightning-like energy, terrible alike in their forgetfulness of danger and in the irresistible impetus of victory, the Germans must have realised that their hopes of conquest were shattered.

This was but one out of similar scenes in that fierce night.[1] After it the cold, grey morning broke in strange silence. For a space the artillery had ceased to speak. Many and many a hero, unknown to fame, but faithful unto death, lay with face upturned on those hillsides. Never had duty been more valiantly done.

Sir John French realised the qualities of his soldiers. He had been compelled to demand from them a herculean energy. They had not failed him in any place nor in any particular. They had been in truth magnificent, and he could not but embody his admiration in a Special Order of the Day. That historic document ran :—

Once more I have to express my deep appreciation of the splendid behaviour of officers, non-

[1] The troops of the 5th Division under Sir Charles Fergusson repulsed with equal gallantry a furious attack against their position at Missy, on the west side of the Chivres bluff.

commissioned officers, and men of the army under my command throughout the great battle of the Aisne, which has been in progress since the evening of the 12th inst. The battle of the Marne, which lasted from the morning of the 6th to the evening of the 10th, had hardly ended in the precipitate flight of the enemy when we were brought face to face with a position of extraordinary strength, carefully entrenched and prepared for defence by an army and a staff which are thorough adepts in such work.

Throughout the 13th and 14th that position was most gallantly attacked by the British forces, and the passage of the Aisne effected. This is the third day the troops have been gallantly holding the position they have gained against the most desperate counter-attacks and a hail of heavy artillery.

I am unable to find adequate words in which to express the admiration I feel for their magnificent conduct.

The self-sacrificing devotion and splendid spirit of the British Army in France will carry all before it.

(Signed) J. D. P. FRENCH, Field Marshal,
Commanding-in-Chief the British Army in the Field.

The enemy had been shaken. Of that there could be no doubt. Following his experiences in the battle of the Marne this fighting was beginning to prove too much for him.

A considerable amount of information about the enemy has now been gleaned from prisoners (says the official record). It has been gathered that our bombardment on the 15th produced a

great impression. The opinion is also recorded that our infantry make such good use of the ground that the German companies are decimated by our rifle fire before a British soldier can be seen.

From an official diary captured by the First Army Corps it appears that one of the German corps contains an extraordinary mixture of units. If the composition of the other corps is at all similar, it may be assumed that the present efficiency of the enemy's forces is in no way comparable with what it was when war commenced. The losses in officers are noted as having been especially severe. A brigade is stated to be commanded by a major, and some companies of the Foot Guards to be commanded by one-year volunteers, while after the battle of Montmirail one regiment lost fifty-five out of sixty officers.

The prisoners recently captured appreciate the fact that the march on Paris has failed, and that their forces are retreating, but state that the object of this movement is explained by the officers as being to withdraw into closer touch with supports which have stayed too far in rear. The officers are also endeavouring to encourage the troops by telling them that they will be at home by Christmas. A large number of the men, however, believe that they are beaten. The following is an extract from one document:—

> With the English troops we have great difficulties. They have a queer way of causing losses to the enemy. They make good trenches, in which they wait patiently. They carefully measure the ranges for their rifle fire, and they then open a truly hellish fire. This was the reason that we had such heavy losses. . . .

From another source:—

> The English are very brave, and fight to the last man. . . . One of our companies has lost 130 men out of 240.

From this time the battle took on more and more the features of a regular siege. On the side of the Germans the operations resolved themselves into persistent bombardments by day alternated with infantry attacks by night. Infantry attacks in daylight they now knew to be foredoomed. It is questionable, indeed, if, with the lowered *moral* of their troops, such attacks were any longer possible. To assist their night attacks they rigged up searchlights, and when their infantry advanced played the beams upon the British lines in the hope of dazzling the defence and spoiling the rifle-fire they had learned to dread. These lights, however, served also as a warning. When that was found out the enemy went back to attacks in the darkness, but with no better results.

Sunday, September 20, was the date of another general night onslaught. Just before the attack developed military bands were heard playing in the German lines. After the manner of the natives of West Africa they were working themselves up to the fury pitch. It was to be a do-or-die business evidently. The enterprise, however, again failed to prosper. Against some of the British positions the attack was pushed with dogged bravery; and the scenes of five nights before were enacted again and again with the

like results. Against one part of the line the onset wound up with an extraordinary disaster. Two German columns mistook each other in the darkness for British troops. They had apparently set out from different points to converge upon the same British position. In front of that position they fought a furious combat, and while no bullets reached the British trenches the men in them were afforded the unwonted spectacle of the enemy wiping themselves out.[1]

Between the two armies the country had now become a "no-man's land," deserted by both sides because, in the expressive phrase of the British soldier, it had turned "unhealthy." Over this tract the still unburied bodies of German infantry lay where they had fallen. Outside the village of Paissy, held by the British and near a ridge where there had been some of the severest fighting, the German dead lay in heaps. Lines of German trenches held at the beginning of the battle were by this time deserted.

Reconnoitring parties, says the authorised story, sent out during the night of the 21st–22nd,

[1] In the official account this singular episode is thus recorded :—"Since the last letter left General Headquarters evidence has been received which points to the fact that during the counter-attacks on the night of Sunday, the 20th, the German infantry fired into each other—the result of an attempt to carry out the dangerous expedient of a converging advance in the dark. Opposite one portion of our position a considerable massing of the hostile forces was observed before dark. Some hours later a furious fusillade was heard in front of our line, though no bullets came over our trenches."

discovered some deserted trenches, and in them, or near them in the woods, over a hundred dead and wounded were picked up. A number of rifles, ammunition, and equipment were also found. There were various other signs that portions of the enemy's forces had withdrawn for some distance.

Unable to prevail in open fight, the Germans resorted to almost every variety of ruse. In the words of the official story:—

The Germans, well trained, long-prepared, and brave, are carrying on the contest with skill and valour. Nevertheless, they are fighting to win anyhow, regardless of all the rules of fair play, and there is evidence that they do not hesitate at anything in order to gain victory.

During a counter-attack by the German 53rd Regiment on portions of the Northampton and Queen's Regiments on Thursday, the 17th, a force of some 400 of the enemy were allowed to approach right up to the trench occupied by a platoon of the former regiment, owing to the fact that they had held up their hands and made gestures that were interpreted as signs that they wished to surrender. When they were actually on the parapet of the trench held by the Northamptons they opened fire on our men at point-blank range.

Unluckily for the enemy, however, flanking them and only some 400 yards away, there happened to be a machine gun manned by a detachment of the "Queen's." This at once opened fire, cutting a lane through their mass, and they fell back to their own trench with great loss. Shortly afterwards they were driven further back with additional loss by a battalion of the Guards, which came up in support.

During the fighting, also, some German ambulance wagons advanced in order to collect the wounded. An order to cease fire was consequently given to our guns, which were firing on this particular section of ground. The German battery commanders at once took advantage of the lull in the action to climb up their observation ladders and on to haystacks to locate our guns, which soon afterwards came under a far more accurate fire than any to which they had been subjected up to that time.

A British officer who was captured by the Germans, and has since escaped, reports that while a prisoner he saw men who had been fighting subsequently put on Red Cross brassards. That the irregular use of the protection afforded by the Geneva Convention is not uncommon is confirmed by the fact that on one occasion men in the uniform of combatant units have been captured wearing the Red Cross brassard hastily slipped over the arm. The excuse given has been that they had been detailed after a fight to look after the wounded.

It is reported by a cavalry officer that the driver of a motor-car with a machine gun mounted on it, which he captured, was wearing the Red Cross.

A curious feature of this strange siege-battle was that villages and hamlets between the fighting lines still continued, where not destroyed, to be in part, at any rate, inhabited, and at intervals peasants worked in the intervening fields. The Germans took advantage of this to push their spy system.

The suspicions of some French troops (of the 5th army) were aroused by coming across a farm

from which the horses had not been removed. After some search they discovered a telephone which was connected by an underground cable with the German lines, and the owner of the farm paid the penalty usual in war for his treachery.

Some of the methods being employed for the collection or conveyance of intelligence were :—

Men in plain clothes who signalled to the German lines from points in the hands of the enemy by means of coloured lights at night and puffs of smoke from chimneys by day.

Pseudo-labourers working in the fields between the armies who conveyed information, and persons in plain clothes acting as advanced scouts.

German officers and soldiers in plain clothes or in French or British uniforms remained in localities evacuated by the Germans in order to furnish them with intelligence.

One spy of this kind was found by the British troops hidden in a church tower. His presence was only discovered through the erratic movements of the hands of the church clock, which he was using to signal to his friends by means of an improvised semaphore code.

Women spies were also caught, and secret agents found observing entrainments and detrainments.

Amongst the precautions taken by the British to guard against spying was the publication of the following notice :—

(1) Motor cars and bicycles other than those carrying soldiers in uniform may not circulate on the roads.

(2) Inhabitants may not leave the localities in which they reside between six p.m. and six a.m.

(3) Inhabitants may not quit their homes after eight p.m.
(4) No person may on any pretext pass through the British lines without an authorisation countersigned by a British officer.

On October 23rd six batteries of heavy howitzers asked for by Sir John French reached the front, and were at once put into action. No effort was spared by the Germans to drive the British army back across the Aisne. The quantity of heavy shells they fired was enormous, and they were probably under the impression that the effect was devastating.

The object of the great proportion of artillery the Germans employ (observes the official record on this point) is to beat down the resistance of their enemy by a concentrated and prolonged fire, and to shatter their nerve with high explosives before the infantry attack is launched. They seem to have relied on doing this with us; but they have not done so, though it has taken them several costly experiments to discover this fact. From the statements of prisoners, indeed, it appears that they have been greatly disappointed by the moral effect produced by their heavy guns, which, despite the actual losses inflicted, has not been at all commensurate with the colossal expenditure of ammunition, which has really been wasted.

By this it is not implied that their artillery fire is not good. It is more than good; it is excellent. But the British soldier is a difficult person to impress or depress, even by immense shells filled with high explosive which detonate with

terrific violence and form craters large enough to act as graves for five horses.

How far the colossal expenditure of ammunition was thrown away is illustrated by this description of the effect in a given instance :—

At a certain point in our front our advanced trenches on the north of the Aisne are not far from a village on the hillside, and also within a short distance of the German works, being on the slope of a spur formed by a subsidiary valley running north and the main valley of the river. It was a calm, sunny afternoon, but hazy; and from a point of vantage south of the river it was difficult exactly to locate on the far bank the well-concealed trenches of either side. From far and near the sullen boom of guns echoed along the valley and at intervals, in different directions, the sky was flecked with the almost motionless smoke of anti-aircraft shrapnel. Suddenly, without any warning, for the reports of the distant howitzers from which they were fired could not be distinguished from other distant reports, three or four heavy shells fell into the village, sending up huge clouds of smoke and dust, which slowly ascended in a brownish-grey column. To this no reply was made by our side.

Shortly afterwards there was a quick succession of reports from a point some distance up the subsidiary valley on the side opposite our trenches, and therefore rather on their flank. It was not possible either by ear or by eye to locate the guns from which these sounds proceeded. Almost simultaneously, as it seemed, there was a corresponding succession of flashes and sharp detonations in a line on the hill side, along what appeared to be our trenches. There was then a pause, and several clouds of smoke rose slowly

and remained stationary, spaced as regularly as a line of poplars. Again there was a succession of reports from the German quick-firers on the far side of the misty valley and—like echoes—the detonations of high explosive; and the row of expanding smoke clouds was prolonged by several new ones.

Another pause, and silence, except for the noise in the distance. After a few minutes there was a roar from our side of the main valley as our field guns opened one after another in a more deliberate fire upon the position of the German guns. After six reports there was again silence, save for the whirr of the shells as they sang up the small valley, and then followed the flashes and balls of smoke—one, two, three, four, five, six, as the shrapnel burst nicely over what in the haze looked like some ruined buildings at the edge of a wood.

Again, after a short interval, the enemy's gunners reopened with a burst, still further prolonging the smoke, which was by now merged into one solid screen above a considerable length of trench, and again did our guns reply. And so the duel went on for some time. Ignoring our guns, the German artillerymen, probably relying on concealment for immunity, were concentrating all their efforts in a particularly forceful effort to enfilade our trenches. For them it must have appeared to be the chance of a lifetime, and with their customary prodigality of ammunition they continued to pour bouquet after bouquet of high-explosive *Einheitsgeschoss,* or combined shrapnel and common shell, on to our works. Occasionally, with a roar, a high-angle projectile would sail over the hill and blast a gap in the village.

In the hazy valleys bathed in sunlight not a

man, not a horse, not a gun, nor even a trench was to be seen. There were only flashes, smoke, and noise. Above, against the blue sky, were several round white clouds hanging in the track of the only two visible human souls—represented by a glistening speck in the air. On high also were to be heard the more or less gentle reports of the bursts of the anti-aircraft projectiles.

Upon inquiry as to the losses sustained it was found that our men had dug themselves well in. In that collection of trenches were portions of four battalions of British soldiers—the Dorsets, the West Kents, the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, and the King's Own Scottish Borderers. Over 300 projectiles were fired against them. The result was nine men wounded.

On the following day 109 shells were fired at the trenches occupied by the West Kent Regiment alone. Four officers were buried, but dug out unhurt. One man was scratched.

All through the second week of the battle, from September 20 to September 28, there was a succession of night attacks. Those delivered on the nights of September 21 and September 23 were especially violent. In the fierce bayonet fights—sometimes on the line of the trenches—the British infantry never failed to prove their superiority. The losses of the enemy were punishingly heavy, not merely in the fire-fights, but in the pursuit when the survivors turned to fly. The object of these tactics of bombardment throughout the day, and of infantry assaults at night, kept up without intermission, was plainly so to wear the British force down that in the

end it must give way and be swept back to the Aisne in rout.

For such a victory the Germans were ready to pay a very high price. They paid it—but for defeat. What may be considered the culminating effort was launched against the trenches held by the 1st division on the extreme British right. The division's advanced position close under the ridge near Craonne had all through been a thorn. On the night of September 27 an apparently overwhelming force was flung upon it. Aided by the play of searchlights the German masses strove with might and main. The fight lasted for hours. To say that it was repulsed is evidence enough. The next night the attack was repeated with, if anything, greater violence. It was the fight of the Guards Brigade over again, but on a greater scale. Imagine such a struggle with 50,000 men involved; a fighting mass nearly three miles in extent; the fire of rifles and machine guns and artillery; the gleam of clashing bayonets; the searchlights throwing momentarily into view the fury of a *mêlée* and then shutting it off to light up another scene of struggle. Fortunately for the British, the columns of attack were ripped up before the trenches could be reached. Men fell in rows, held up by the wire entanglements and shot wholesale. This was the enemy's last great stroke.

From that time the British won forward until they gained the ridge, seized Craonne and all the hostile positions along the Chemin des Dames.

CHAPTER IX

THE STRUGGLE ROUND RHEIMS

It will have been gathered from the preceding pages that the tactics adopted by the Germans north of the Aisne were tactics designed to wear down the British force. No troops, it was supposed, could, even if they survived, withstand such an experience as that of the eight days from September 20 to September 28. Their lines pounded during all the hours of daylight by heavy shells, and assaulted during the hours of darkness by masses of infantry, the British force ought, upon every German hypothesis of modern warfare, to have been either driven back, or broken to pieces. The theory had proved unsound. To say nothing of the enormous monetary cost of the ammunition used, the attacks had turned out appallingly wasteful of life. The best troops of the Prussian army had been engulfed. In this savage struggle, between 13,000 and 14,000 British soldiers had been killed or wounded. What the losses were on the side of the Germans we do not know, for their casualties

in any particular operations have not been disclosed.

If, however, their losses were on anything like the same scale as those at Mons and at Cambrai, the casualties must have been severe in the extreme. That they were severe is certain. The tactics adopted on the Aisne were not yet substantially different from the tactics followed in the earlier battles. At this stage of the campaign, the Germans still held to the principle that for victory hardly any price was too high.

Remembering at the same time that neither lives nor money are sacrificed by Germany without what is considered good cause, it becomes necessary when there are heavy sacrifices to search for the most adequate and assignable reason. In this instance, the search need not go far. After the first week of the battle, the enemy were not merely defending their stronghold, they were attempting to carry out an offensive, and that offensive had two objects. One was the scheme of operations against the left of the Allied line. The other was the recapture of Rheims.

Consider how a defeat of the British force must have affected the situation. On the one hand, it would have enabled the Germans to push back the 6th French army upon Paris; on the other, it would have compelled the French to evacuate Rheims.

Now Rheims was clearly at this time the key of the Allied position. The roads and railways

converging upon the city made it an advanced base of the first importance. Driven out of Rheims, the Allies would have found their communications between Noyon and Verdun hopelessly confused. Neither reinforcements, nor munitions, nor supplies could have been brought up save by difficult and circuitous routes. A general retreat must have become imperative, and all the advantages arising from the recent victory on the Marne have been lost.

Why, then, it may be asked, did the Germans not keep Rheims when they had it? To that question there is but one answer. The Germans evacuated Rheims because they had no choice. Possession of Rheims means command of all the country between the Aisne and the Marne, because that possession also means command of the communications. From Roman times the military importance of the city has been recognised. Eight great roads converge into it from as many points of the compass. These are military roads, made originally by the Romans, and mostly straight as arrows. They are now supplemented, but in time of war not superseded, by the railways.

The occupation of Rheims by the Germans, and their forced evacuation of the place twelve days later, are two of the most notable episodes of the campaign. If there was one position where it might have been expected the French would make a stand between Belgium and Paris, it was assuredly here. The Germans looked for that opposition. The city was plainly too

valuable a prize, and too important a military possession to be yielded without a struggle. Yet when the invaders came within sight of it, there were no signs of resistance. As they debouched from the highlands the splendid picture which spread before their eyes to the south-west was touched with a strange peace. Framed in its theatre of wooded hills, and dominated by the twin towers of its peerless cathedral, the lordly city, a seat of civilisation and the arts when ancient Germany was still a wilderness, seemed far removed from the scene of war. No cannon boomed from any of its surrounding forts; no trenches were anywhere visible; no troops could be seen along the distant roads. German officers swept the landscape with their field glasses. They found a military blank. Naturally, they suspected a ruse. Volunteers were called for, and a band of eighteen valiants enrolled themselves. The eighteen rode into the city. They were not molested. At the same time, another band crept cautiously up to the nearest of the outlying forts. They entered it without challenge. It was empty. Both bands came back to headquarters with the same surprising report. The French troops had fled to the last man. What better proof could there be of total demoralisation?

Now, there was a ruse, and if anything could illustrate the combined boldness and depth of the French strategy it was this. Let us see what the ruse was. To begin with, Rheims was supposed to be a fortress, but the forts, situated

on the surrounding hills, and constructed after the war of 1870–71, were mere earthworks. They were not adapted to withstand modern artillery. It was part of the French plan that they should not be adapted. On the contrary, just before the German advance, the forts had been dismantled and abandoned. That measure had been postponed to the last moment, and though the invaders had their spies at Rheims, as elsewhere, they remained unaware of it.

Clearly the effect of the abandonment was a belief that the French were already, to all intents, beaten. In the Berlin papers there appeared glowing accounts of the triumph. Conversely, at all events in England among those who did not know, the French evacuation came as a shock. This was all part of the foreseen result. It not only heightened the confidence of the German armies, but it had no small influence on that fatal change of plan on their part which we may now say was decided upon at this very time. General Joffre purposely misled the enemy, both as to the power at his command, and as to his disposition of that power.

Thus it was that the Germans, unopposed, made their triumphal entry. They swept through the famous Gate of Mars, the triumphal arch built by the then townsmen of Rheims in honour of Julius Cæsar and Augustus and to mark the completion of the scheme of military roads by Agrippa. They parked their cannon along the noble Public Promenade which

stretches beyond this great monument. In the square before the Cathedral, about which at that time German war correspondents went into ecstasies of admiration, the statue of Joan of Arc was ringed by stacks of German lances. Ranks of men in *pickelhauben,* headed by bands playing "Deutschland über Alles," were in movement along the great Boulevard Victor Hugo. The very name now seemed a mockery. Rheims appeared helpless. Taking possession of the town hall, the invaders seized the Mayor, Dr. Langlet, and compelled him to remain up all through the succeeding night issuing the orders which they dictated at the muzzle of a revolver.[1] Nearly one hundred of the leading citizens found themselves placed under arrest as hostages. This was alleged to be a guarantee for the preservation of order. As a fact, it was intended to assist collection, both of the heavy "fine" imposed on the city, and of the extortionate requisitions demanded in kind. With the stocks of champagne contained in the labyrinth of vast cellars hollowed out beneath Rheims in the chalk rock, the German officers made themselves unrestrainedly free. The occupation degenerated into an orgie. Much wine that could not be consumed was, on the advance being resumed, taken to the front, loaded on ambulance wagons.[2] It is alleged that nearly 2,000,000

[1] This incident was narrated by the special correspondent of the *Berliner Tageblatt.*

[2] Letters from the front published in the Berlin newspapers leave no doubt on this point. One such

bottles of wine were either consumed, plundered, or wasted.

Every house, too, had its complement of soldiers billeted on the occupants. When they marched south to the Marne, the Germans had been refreshed with unwonted good cheer and by rest in comfortable beds.

But three days later there began to come in, both by road and by railway, convoys of wounded, and these swelled in number day by day, until every hotel and many houses had been filled with human wrecks of battle. The Cathedral, its floor strewn with straw, was turned into a great hospital. All this, however, was but a presage. Rarely has there been in so brief a time a contrast more startling than that between the outward march of the German troops and their return.

Just ten days had gone by when Rheims witnessed the influx of haggard, hungry, and dog-tired men; many bare-headed or bootless; not a few wearing uniforms which were in rags; numbers injured. The bands had ceased to play. Instead of the steady march and the imperious word of command, there was the tramp of a sullen, beaten, and battered army; a tramp mingled with shouts and curses of exasperation;

account described how a French shell in the Battle of the Marne wrecked an ambulance wagon loaded with bottles of wine—an instance of French contempt for civilised warfare!

In 1870–71 the Germans impoverished Rheims by heavy requisitions.

and the rumble of guns dragged by exhausted horses, mercilessly lashed in order to get the last ounce of pace out of them. All day, on September 12, the tide of defeat rolled into Rheims from the south, and surged out of it by the north; but above the clash and confusion was borne the boom of cannon, growing steadily louder and nearer.

Knowing that the population of Rheims had been driven to exasperation, the Germans feared they might be entrapped in the city by street fighting. An evidence of their panic is found in the proclamation which, on the morning of September 12, they compelled the Mayor to issue. The document speaks for itself. It ran :—

In the event of an action being fought either to-day or in the immediate future in the neighbourhood of Rheims, or in the city itself, the inhabitants are warned that they must remain absolutely calm and must in no way try to take part in the fighting. They must not attempt to attack either isolated soldiers or detachments of the German army. The erection of barricades, the taking up of paving stones in the streets in a way to hinder the movements of troops, or, in a word, any action that may embarrass the German army, is formally forbidden.

With a view to securing adequately the safety of the troops and to instil calm into the population of Rheims, the persons named below have been seized as hostages by the Commander-in-Chief of the German Army. These hostages will be hanged at the slightest attempt at disorder. Also, the city will be totally or partly

burnt and the inhabitants will be hanged for any infraction of the above.

By order of the German Authorities.

THE MAYOR (Dr. Langlet).

Rheims, Sept. 12, 1914.

Then followed the names of 81 of the principal inhabitants, with their addresses, including four priests, the list ending with the words, "and some others."

There was good reason for this German panic. These troops of the army of von Bülow had been completely defeated. Of that no better evidence can be offered than a letter found on a soldier of the 74th German Regiment of infantry, part of the 10th army corps. The letter is of vivid human interest.

MY DEAR WIFE,—I have just been living through days that defy imagination. I should never have thought that men could stand it. Not a second has passed but my life has been in danger, and yet not a hair of my head has been hurt. It was horrible, it was ghastly. But I have been saved for you and for our happiness, and I take heart again, although I am still terribly unnerved. God grant that I may see you again soon, and that this horror may soon be over. None of us can do any more; human strength is at an end.

I will try to tell you about it.

On Sept. 5 the enemy were reported to be taking up a position near St. Prix (north-east of Paris). The 10th corps, which had made an astonishingly rapid advance, of course attacked on the Sunday.

Steep slopes led up to heights which were held in considerable force. With our weak detachments of the 74th and 91st Regiments we reached the crest and came under a terrible artillery fire that mowed us down. However, we entered St. Prix. Hardly had we done so than we were met with shell fire and a violent fusillade from the enemy's infantry. Our colonel was badly wounded—he is the third we have had. Fourteen men were killed round me. . . . We got away in a lull without being hit.

The 7th, 8th, and 9th of Sept. we were constantly under shell and shrapnel fire, and suffered terrible losses. I was in a house which was hit several times. The fear of a death of agony which is in every man's heart, and naturally so, is a terrible feeling.

How often I thought of you, my darling, and what I suffered in that terrifying battle, which extended along a front of many miles near Montmirail, you cannot possibly imagine. Our heavy artillery was being used for the siege of Maubeuge; we wanted it badly, as the enemy had theirs in force, and kept up a furious bombardment. For four days I was under artillery fire; it is like hell, but a thousand times worse.

On the night of the 9th the order was given to retreat, as it would have been madness to attempt to hold our position with our few men, and we should have risked a terrible defeat the next day. The first and third armies had not been able to attack with us, as we had advanced too rapidly. Our *moral* was absolutely broken.

In spite of unheard-of sacrifices we had achieved nothing. I cannot understand how our army, after fighting three great battles and being terribly weakened, was sent against a position which the enemy had prepared for three weeks,

but naturally I know nothing of the intentions of our chiefs. . . . They say nothing has been lost. In a word, we retired towards Cormontreuil and Rheims by forced marches by day and night.

We hear that three armies are going to get into line, entrench, rest, and then start afresh our victorious march on Paris. It was not a defeat, but only a strategic retreat. I have confidence in our chiefs that everything will be successful. Our first battalion, which has fought with unparalleled bravery, is reduced from 1,200 to 194 men. These numbers speak for themselves. . . .

If the defeat had been complete, the pursuit had been relentless. The 5th French army had excelled itself. It comprised the Algerian army corps, and had been reinforced by the Moroccan and Senegalese regiments. Not only along the main roads, but along all the by-roads, and in and among the vineyards and woods, there had been ceaseless fighting. If one side is reflected by the letter of the dead German soldier, that revelation is completed by the Order issued to his troops by General Desperey when they had broken the enemy at Montmirail on September 9.

Soldiers,—Upon the memorable fields of Montmirail, of Vauchamps, and of Champaubert, which a century ago witnessed the victories of our ancestors over Blücher's Prussians, your vigorous offensive has triumphed over the resistance of the Germans.

Held on his flanks, his centre broken, the enemy is now retreating towards east and north

by forced marches. The most renowned army corps of Old Prussia, the contingents of Westphalia, of Hanover, of Brandenburg, have retired in haste before you.

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

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

May the image of our country, soiled by barbarians, always remain before your eyes. Never was it more necessary to sacrifice all for her.

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

Forward, soldiers, for France!

Forward for France they had gone. Thus it was that, shut in their houses throughout the night of September 12, the people of Rheims heard above the uproar of the German retreat the always swelling thunder of the French guns. When morning broke the only German military still left in Rheims were the abandoned wounded, and the main streets echoed to the welcome tread of the war-worn but triumphant defenders of the fatherland.

Through the transverse gap from Rheims to Berry-au-Bac on the Aisne there is one of those wonderful old Roman roads, now a great modern highway. The road runs nearly straight as a ruler north-west to Laon. The first step taken by General Desperey was to secure this road, as well as the railway which on the western side of the gap winds curiously in and out along the

foot of the hills. From Berry-au-Bac north of the Aisne the French lent most material aid to the British attack upon Craonne. South-east of Rheims they were occupied in securing the railway to Chalons, which for some twenty miles runs through the valley of the Vesle. Above Rheims this valley, in character not unlike the valley of the Aisne, but wilder, may be compared to a great crack in the plateau of the highlands. On each side are chalk cliffs, and side valleys of gravel soil covered with woods. Between the cliffs the river winds through flat meadows. Towards Rheims the valley opens out into that theatre of wooded hills in the midst of which the city is situated.

The operations of this part of the great battle resolved themselves partly into a struggle for the transverse gap; next into a gigantic combat waged from opposite sides of the theatre of hills; and lastly, into a fight for command of the upper valley of the Vesle.

Sheltered among the caves and quarries on the north-east side of the gap and of the theatre of hills, the Germans had contrived a scheme of defence works not less elaborate than those along the ridge north of the Aisne, and these defence works extended round the theatre of hills to the outlet from the narrow part of the Vesle valley, blockading both the main military road from Rheims to Chalons, and also the railway.

At the outset their reduced strength limited them to merely defensive tactics, and, as on the north of the Aisne, they steadily, and day by

day, lost ground. But they then began steadily and day by day to receive reinforcements, both of men and of heavy artillery. The reinforcements of men included a reconstitution of the Prussian Guard drawn from its reserves at Berlin.

Before the end of September an immense body of additional troops had arrived at this part of the front. On the side of the French, also, strong reserves were hurried forward.

It will assist to understand the description of the operations to state first their plan and purpose both on the one side and the other, since this formed strategically the critical section of the battle.

At Condé-sur-Aisne, it will be recalled, the Germans held a position right on the river, and that position formed a wedge or salient jutting into the British lines east and west of it.

The fact is recalled here because it illustrates what in this campaign has proved a well-marked feature of German strategy. It has been proved, that is to say, that whenever the Germans found it necessary to resist very heavy pressure they seized some point capable of obstinate defence, and, even if pushed back to right and left, kept their grip as long as possible, using the position as a general hold-up along that section of the front.

Thus their grip on Condé and the Chivres bluff was essential to their retention of the Aisne ridge.

They had a similar position at Prunay on the

railway between Rheims and Chalons. The village of Prunay is at the point where the theatre of hills narrows into the upper valley of the Vesle. The position jutted out like an angle from the German line, and it commanded the valley.

Figuratively taking these positions of Condé-sur-Aisne on the one side and Prunay on the other, we may imagine the German army like a man clinging to a couple of posts or railings and so defying the effort to move him.

That is the aspect of the matter so far as defensive tactics go. For offensive tactics grip on such positions is obviously a great aid to pressure on a hostile line lying between them. A military salient serves exactly the same purpose as a wedge. It is a device for splitting the opposition. Here, then, were two wedges in the Allied front, and the object was manifestly to break off the part of the front intervening. On that part of the front with Rheims as its main advanced base the Allied line, all the way round from beyond Noyon to Verdun, structurally depended.

Such was the German scheme. But the Allies on their part had a wedge or salient driven into the German front at Craonne, and as they were there two-thirds of the way along the road from Rheims to Laon, the main advanced base and communication centre of the German line, that salient was extremely awkward. They were intent, on their part, in hammering in their wedge, because it meant a collapse of the whole

German right flank from the Aisne ridge to the Belgian frontier.

It is not difficult, therefore, to understand the fury of the resulting struggle. The best troops on both sides were engaged. In point of magnitude the fighting round Rheims was hardly less than the fighting which occurred later round Ypres.

The struggle in its acute phase lasted for fifteen days and nights without the slightest pause or intermission. In the tracks of the German retreat from the Marne great gaps among the vineyards, where rose mounds of earth, marked the common graves of the slain. Along the boundaries of woods appeared the blackened sites of the hecatombs. Nevertheless, many of the fallen still lay in the woods or among the vines, unburied and infecting the air. Through this country and these scenes marched the reinforcements of the 5th French army. In the opposite direction flowed a ceaseless stream of civilian fugitives—poor people carrying their few personal belongings strapped on their backs, or pushing them along in wheelbarrows; women carrying children in their arms, and with other children trailing at their skirts; a procession on foot and in vehicles of every sort.

Against Rheims the Germans employed much of the artillery and material and apparatus they had intended for the siege of Paris. On the eastern side of the theatre of hills behind the advanced island mass where stand the villages of Berru and Nogent l'Abbesse, they had mounted

their huge mortars. From these positions and from others to the north-east they threw into Rheims an incessant crash of monster shells. Viewed from any of the villages of its circumference, this theatre of hills ten miles across presented during these days a spectacle at once grandiose and awful. The battle spread out round and below like a panorama of fire. Out of advanced positions among the woods on the south-west, across by Rheims, and to the north, hundreds of the French field guns searched the German positions with their terrible high explosive shells. At brief regular intervals amid the angry roar arose a deep resounding boom—the note of the enemy's great howitzers. The earth shook beneath the salvoes, for the French had also massed here their heaviest artillery. Amid the flash of bursting shells appeared here a village, there a mill a mass of flames, with the smoke drifting above it in a dense cloud. The roar was that of hurricane and earthquake rolled into one. And the uproar went on without ceasing through all the hours of daylight, and far into the night.

Furious and destructive as it was, however, the artillery duel was not the deadliest part. The great slaughter occurred when the armies came to grips. The Germans launched an attack upon Rheims from the north and an attack at the same time from the south-east. Of the first attack the immediate objective was the suburb of La Neuvillette. That place is on the great road from Rheims to Berry-au-Bac, and if it could be

seized the French positions along the transverse gap would be endangered, and their position at Craonne made untenable. The immediate objective of the second attack was the fort of La Pompelle, commanding the great road to Chalons. To the French both communications were vital.

In the attack upon La Neuvillette the troops employed were the re-formed Prussian Guard. Over 40,000 strong, men for the most part in the prime of life, and men who, though reservists, had received the highest military training, they formed probably as formidable a body of troops as any in Europe. Against them were pitted the finest of French regular infantry, including a division 20,000 strong of the Zouaves. Both sides fought with the fury of mutual hate. It was a contest in which race passion had been stirred to its depths. The Guard advanced south along the great road from Neuchatel; descended into the transverse gap; and crossed the Aisne and Marne canal at Loivre. They braved the deadly hail of the French 75-millimetre guns, than which there is nothing more deadly; they fought through the gap against charges of the Zouaves in which there was no quarter; they reached St. Thierry; they reached, after fourteen hours' continuous fighting, La Neuvillette itself —that is to say, a remnant reached it. It was a splendid feat of courage; for more than half the force had fallen. At Neuvillette, however, they were overpowered. The French troops who held that place could not be dislodged. The scenes

in the streets were terrible. Meanwhile, the French had shattered the succeeding and supporting German columns, and had closed in on the rear. The Guards, finding themselves entrapped, had to cut their way out. How many again reached the German lines we do not know. It must have been very few.

At Fort La Pompelle the garrison heroically held out against a vastly superior force. The fort was stormed. Then it was retaken by the French. The order to the officer commanding was, "Fight to the last man." He fought. When the position became desperate he appealed for reinforcements. As he was sending off the message he was killed by a shell. The command devolved upon a sergeant. Relief came while the survivors of the garrison were still resisting.

To throw the relief into La Pompelle it was necessary to attack the tiers of trenches cut by the Germans along the hills as far as Prunay The French had to cross the Aisne and Oise canal, which after passing through Rheims is joined up with the Vesle. This, in face of the German infantry fire and in face of well-concealed batteries of guns, was a desperate business. It was done not only through the dauntless courage of the French foot, but by the terrible effect of their artillery. The Germans, notwithstanding, advanced from their trenches to dispute the passage. There was a hand-to-hand battle in the canal itself—a battle to the death. The French won over; they carried the first line of German trenches; supports, regiment after regiment, were

thrown across; they carried the second line; then the third; at each it was bayonet work, thrust and parry.

But the Germans still clung to Prunay. That place was the real centre of this part of the struggle. The village lies between the Rheims-Chalons railway line and the Vesle. Out of the place the enemy had to be cleared, cost what it might. It was one of those episodes in which an army puts forth its whole strength of nerve. From the wooded heights above the valley a massing of German batteries sought to wither the attack. A massing of French batteries on the nearer side strove to put the German guns out of action. The duel was gigantic. Reports of the guns became no longer distinguishable. They were merged into what seemed one continued solid and unbroken explosion. The French infantry advanced to the assault. Their losses were heavy. Prunay was set alight by shells. Still the attack was pressed. Then the ring of fire round the distant woods which marked the line of German batteries became ragged, and died down. The French guns had proved their superiority. At the point of the bayonet the Germans were driven out of Prunay and across the railway. Here they made a last stand. It was in vain. French gunners were now racing their pieces forward and opening in new positions; German batteries, on the other hand, were seen limbering up and in flight. At last, as night fell, the Germans broke in rout along the road to Beine. Prunay they had lost for good.

These were leading but only typical episodes of those fifteen days. The fighting went on, too, through the night. As daylight faded, masses of Algerian and Moroccan troops, held in reserve, crept forward, and gathered stealthily in chalk-pits or among the woods. They moved with an almost catlike tread. In these secret rendezvous they waited until the dead of night. Then in file after file, thousands of them, they stole up, invisible, to the German trenches; and in the first faint shimmer of dawn launched themselves with a savage yell upon the foe. There was terrible work among those hills.

Do these episodes throw no light on the damage done to Rheims Cathedral? Here round Rheims and north of the Aisne had been the mightiest effort the German armies had yet made. Here was concentrated the full force of their most disciplined and most valiant troops. Those troops had been sacrificed and with no result. Many storms of war had passed by the cathedral at Rheims since it was completed in 1231, and from the time when nearly a hundred more years of patient labour had put the last touches on its marvellous sculptures, and it had stood forth a thing of wonder and of beauty, no hand of violence had been laid on its consecrated stones. At the news that Prussian cannon had been turned upon it to destroy it, and had reduced it to a burned-out skeleton, from which Prussian wounded had to be carried out lest they should be roasted alive, the whole civilised world gasped.

Mr. E. Ashmead-Bartlett, who visited the

cathedral while the bombardment was going on, sent to the *Daily Telegraph* a remarkable account of his experiences.

"Round the cathedral," he wrote, "hardly a house had escaped damage, and even before we reached the open square in which it stands it became evident that the Germans had concentrated their fire on the building. The pavement of the square had been torn up by the bursting of these 6-in. shells and was covered with fragments of steel, cracked masonry, glass, and loose stones. In front of the façade of the cathedral stands the well-known statue of Jeanne d'Arc. Someone had placed a Tricolour in her outstretched arm. The great shells had burst all round her, leaving the Maid of Orleans and her flag unscathed, but her horse's belly and legs were chipped and seared with fragments of flying steel.

"At the first view the exterior of the cathedral did not appear to have suffered much damage, although the masonry was chipped and scarred white by countless shrapnel bullets or pieces of steel, and many of the carved figures and gargoyles on the western façade were broken and chipped.

"We found no one in the square; in fact, this part of the town appeared to be deserted, but as we approached the main entrance to try to obtain admittance a curious sight met our eyes. We saw the recumbent figure of a man lying against the door. He had long since lost both his legs, which had been replaced by wooden

stumps. He lay covered with dust, small stones, and broken glass, which had been thrown over him by bursting shells, but by some chance his remaining limbs had escaped all injury. This old veteran of the war of 1870, as he described himself, has accosted all and sundry at the gate of the cathedral for generations past, and even in the midst of the bombardment he had crawled once more to his accustomed post. As we knocked on the great wooden door, from this shapeless and filthy wreck of what had once been a man there came the feeble cry: '*Monsieur, un petit sou. Monsieur, un petit sou.*'

"Our knock was answered by a priest, who, on seeing that we were English, at once allowed us to enter. The father then told us, in language that was not altogether priestly, when speaking of the vandals whose guns were still thundering outside, of how the Germans had bombarded the cathedral for two hours that morning, landing over fifty shells in its immediate neighbourhood, but, luckily, the range being very great, over eight kilometres, the solid stonework of the building had resisted the successive shocks of these six-inch howitzers, and how it was that ancient and priceless glass which had suffered the most.[1]

"'Monsieur, they respect nothing. We placed 125 of them inside and hoisted the red cross on the spire in order to protect the cathedral, and

[1] The windows of Rheims Cathedral were filled with stained Venetian glass dating from the 12th century and impossible to replace.

yet they fire at it all the same, and have killed their own soldiers. Pray, monsieur, make these facts known all over Europe and America.'

"With these words he unlocked a wicket and conducted us toward the altar, close to which stands a small painted statue of Jeanne d'Arc. The east end of Notre Dame had up to this period suffered but little, and although some of the windows were damaged they were not lost beyond repair. The light still shone through in rays of dark blue and red, broken here and there by streaks of pure light.

"Then our guide conducted us to the great cold stone body of the cathedral, where the Gothic pillars rise in sombre majesty, relieved by no ornamentation[1] until they hold aloft the blue masterpieces of the unknown artist. Here one of the strangest of spectacles met the eye. The whole of this vast vault was covered with dust half an inch thick, with chipped-off masonry, pieces of lead piping from the shattered windows, and with countless fragments of varied coloured glass. In the centre lay an ancient candelabrum which had hung for centuries from the roof suspended by a steel chain. That morning a fragment of shell had cut the chain in half and dropped its ancient burden to the hard stone floor beneath, where it lay bent and crumpled.

[1] The interior of Rheims Cathedral was furnished with sixty-six large pieces of priceless old tapestry, representing scenes in the life of Christ, the story of the Virgin, and scenes from the life of St. Paul, the latter after designs by Raphael. These tapestries had been removed to a place of safety.

"A great wave of sunshine lit up a sombre picture of carnage and suffering at the western end near the main entrance. Here on piles of straw lay the wounded Germans in all stages of suffering—their round shaven heads, thin cheeks, and bluish-grey uniforms contrasting strangely with the sombre black of the silent priests attending them, while in the background the red trousers of the French soldiers were just visible on the steps outside. Most of the wounded had dragged their straw behind the great Gothic pillars as if seeking shelter from their own shells. The priest conducted us to one of the aisles beneath the window where the shell had entered that morning. A great pool of blood lay there, staining the column just as the blood of Thomas à Becket must have stained the altar of Canterbury seven centuries before.

"'That, Monsieur, is the blood of the French gendarme who was killed at eleven this morning, but he did not go alone.' The priest pointed to two more recumbent figures clad in the bluish-grey of the Kaiser's legions. There they lay stiff and cold as the effigies around them. All three had perished by the same shell. Civilian doctors of Rheims moved amongst the wounded, who for the most part maintained an attitude of stoical indifference to everything around them. We moved around collecting fragments of the precious glass which the Kaiser had so unexpectedly thrown within our reach. We were brought back to realities by hearing the unmistakable whistle of an approaching shell, followed

by a deafening explosion, and more fragments of glass came tumbling from aloft. The weary war-worn Teutons instinctively huddled closer to the Gothic arches. A dying officer, his eyes already fixed in a glassy stare on the sunlight above, gave an involuntary groan. We heard outside the crash of falling masonry. The shell was followed by another, and more breaking glass. Our chauffeur came hastening in with the Virgin's broken arm in his hands. A fragment of shell had broken it off outside. We lingered long gazing at this strange scene.

"Outside the guns were thundering all round Rheims."

It was after this that the cathedral was set on fire by the shells.

CHAPTER X

REVIEW OF RESULTS

HAD the fighting round Rheims and the fighting north of the Aisne no result? Were these combats, vast as they were, merely drawn combats? By no means. North of the Aisne the British gained the eastern end of the ridge; round Rheims the French won all the eastern side of the theatre of hills, with the exception of Nogent l'Abbesse, and also the eastern side of the transverse gap. Those results were both decisive and important.

They were decisive and important because they achieved strategical purposes vital to the Allied campaign. Let us try to make that clear.

When after the defeat on the Marne the Germans took up their new line from the north of the Aisne to the Argonne, their utmost energy and resource were put forth to send into the fighting line from Germany fresh reserve formations which would give their forces not only a numerical but a military superiority.

But the effect and value of those fresh masses clearly depended on their being employed at the decisive points. Where were those decisive points?

The decisive points were first the extreme left of the Allied line, where it turned round from the north of the Aisne to the Oise, and secondly Verdun and along the eastern frontier.

Consider the effect had the Germans been able promptly to throw *decisively* superior forces against the Allies at those points. They would have turned both flanks of the Allied line, they would have forced a general retreat, and they would have been able once more to resume the offensive, but this time probably with the fortified frontier in their hands.

There can be no doubt that, broadly, that was their intention; and it was plainly seen by General Joffre to be their intention, because eastward from Rheims to the Argonne in their fortified line across the highlands *the Germans remained from first to last upon the defensive.*

This, however, was the situation the Germans had to meet: between the Aisne and the Oise a new and powerful French army under the command of General de Castlenau; on the Aisne and round Rheims, a tremendous and sustained onset by the 6th French, the British, and the 5th French army; between Rheims and the Argonne, an offensive which pushed them successively out of Suippes, and Souain, and therefore off the great cross-roads; in the Argonne, an offensive which forced them back from St. Menehould and

beyond Varennes, and closed the defiles; round Verdun, and in the Woeuvre, an onset which threatened to cut communications with Metz.

Now the effect of these operations was, among other things, to restrict the German means of movement and supply; and it was a consequence of that restriction that even though there might be two or more millions of men then ready in Germany to be sent forward, there were neither roads nor railways enough to send them forward save after delay, nor roads or railways enough to keep them supplied when they had been sent.

With the means at their disposal—those means were still great, though not great enough—the German Government had to choose between various alternatives. As to the choice they made, later events leave no doubt. They sent forward troops enough to *defend* their flank between the Aisne and the Oise—it was all at the moment they could do; and they employed the best and heaviest of their masses of reserves partly to resist the British attack, but mainly to resist the 5th French army. At this time they had to let the position in the Argonne, round Verdun, and on the eastern frontier go; that is to say, they had there to remain for the time being on the defensive.

The fighting north of the Aisne and round Rheims therefore crippled their operations at what were, in truth, the decisive points—the Allied flanks; and that was unavoidable, because unless the centre of their line remained secure, operations on the flanks would be impracticable.

But these operations in the centre *used up their best troops.*

Conversely, of course, the same operations left General Joffre the more free both to pursue his envelopment of the Germans on their flank northwards from the Aisne towards the Belgian frontier, and to go on with his seizures of positions round Verdun and on the eastern frontier, seizures which pressed upon and embarrassed the German communications, and consequently limited the total strength they could put into the field.

It will be seen, therefore, that the fighting north of the Aisne and round Rheims *was* important and *was* decisive.

The fact must not be lost sight of that the aim of the Germans was at this time, if they could, to re-seize the initiative. Again the fact ought to be kept in mind that the aim of the Allied strategy was not to drive the German armies from France, but both to prevent them from getting out of France and to destroy them as a military force. If we know the governing motive on each side, we hold the key to the strategy adopted. Here the governing motive of neither was a secret.

To show the effect of governing motive, let us in the first instance follow the course of German strategy. We shall find that from the middle of September, during the succeeding nine weeks—that is, until about November 20—they made six great efforts, any one of which, had it succeeded, would once more have given

them the initiative in this western campaign. The first was the effort to break the Allied line at Rheims.

Foiled in their outflanking scheme by the inherent difficulties of the situation, but not less by the powerful Allied attack north of the Aisne and round Rheims, there can be no question that the German Headquarters Staff decided that their best, most direct, and most decisive stroke would be a counter-offensive made against Rheims with their utmost force, and as the situation stood at the end of September, there can be no question that they were right.

Had the effort succeeded both parts of the Allies' line must have been forced into retreat and their communications severed. This success must have changed the entire aspect of the western operations. For the Allies it would have been a disaster of the first magnitude. If in this effort the Germans sacrificed their best troops, it affords only another illustration of the statement that they do not make such sacrifices without what they consider good cause.

But the effort failed, and the German Headquarters Staff, at any rate, must have realised that the failure and the cost of it had imperilled the whole position of their armies in France. Matters of this kind have not to be judged only by ground lost or won. The success or failure to achieve objectives is the true test.

Meanwhile heavy forces of the Allies had been massed against the German right flank. The next effort of the Germans consequently was to

push back those forces. They met the outflanking movement in the way such movements can best be met—by trying to outflank the outflankers.

At this time the Allied forces on the flank extended from near Noyon on the Oise northward to the Somme. The Germans promptly pushed westward in force north of the Somme and across the outside edge of the Allied line to the town of Albert and the heights commanding it.

With notable promptitude, however, the Allied line was extended across the Somme to the north, and by the west of Arras, and the German movement was held. Gradually, after days of obstinate fighting, the enemy were battled out of Albert and then out of Arras; and the Allied outflanking line was stretched up to Bethune and La Bassée.

Night and day, day and night, by railway, by motor-omnibus, on motor-cars,[1] French troops during three whole weeks were rushed up from the south and west of France. This movement towards the fighting line had begun with the pursuit after the Battle of the Marne. It never ceased. First the army of General de Castlenau appeared on the front. Next came the army of General de Maudhuy. Territorials and marines from the fleet were hurried into the service; divisions of cavalry spaced out the line, and defended communications. In Germany as in

[1] Some 70,000 motor-cars and motor-omnibuses are said to have been employed.

France no effort was spared. The issue was momentous. During these first weeks of October the German Government put forth its supreme effort to stem and to turn the adverse tide of war. Hitherto they had found their measures baffled. Two new and powerful French armies had fastened on to the flank of their position. Their own forces had come up just too late. The peril was menacing and it was growing. They redoubled their energies.

Their decision was another supreme effort to outflank the outflankers. With fresh masses of Reservists, sent westward at all possible speed, they pushed behind a heavy screen of cavalry across the Aa and across the Lys at Estaires and threatened the rear of the French troops holding Bethune.

It is probably not realised that this was strategically the most important offensive movement the Germans had made in the western theatre of war since their advance upon Paris.

Yet that undoubtedly was the fact. Had the movement succeeded it must not only have given them control of the north-east coast of France as far probably as Havre, but it must have rolled up the Allied line as far as Noyon. The whole original scheme of turning the Allies' left flank would have been within realisation.

The movement did not succeed. It was met by a counter-move probably as unexpected by the Germans as it was bold. The counter-move was the transfer of the British army from the Aisne.

Recognising the decisive character of these

operations, General Joffre had entrusted the control of affairs on this part of the front to General Foch, not only one of the ablest among the able soldiers whom this war has shown the French Army to possess, but one of the most brilliant authorities on the science of modern military tactics. As he had met the situation magnificently at Sezanne, so now he met it with equal resource under circumstances hardly less critical.

There were now three French armies on the German flank, and they fought as they were led with a skill equal to their valour. Yet the necessity remained for a great counter-stroke. In view of that necessity the idea occurred to Sir John French to transfer the British army, a proposal to which General Joffre at once agreed.

It is beyond the scope of this volume to enter into details of the new great battle which, beginning with the arrival of the British troops, culminated in the heroic defence of Ypres. Justice could not be done to that great and memorable feat of arms in a brief summary.

Suffice it to say that here, on the great coalfield of northern France, in a labyrinth of railway sidings and canals, villages and lanes, pit heaps, and factories, the British troops, helped by the French cavalry, after furious fighting, drove back the Germans from the Aa and the Lys and took up a line continuing the outflanking positions from La Bassée to Ypres in Belgium.

A third effort of the Germans to outflank the outflanking line was directed across the Yser. This was the last attempt of the kind that could

be made. Its success was consequently vital, and its failure equally disastrous. Again it illustrates the fact that the Germans sacrifice neither money nor lives without good cause. The fighting on the Yser was as deadly for the enemy as the fighting round Rheims.

Coincidently, however, with these movements were others of a different kind. The official *communiqués,* covering the two kinds of movements as the evidences of them appeared day by day, have naturally led to a certain amount of mystification—not intentional, but inevitable from the brevity and caution of these statements and the fact that they cover separately only the operations of a few hours.

The movements of a different kind were those designed at one point or another to drive a wedge or salient into the Allied front.

In the operations on the German flank between the Aisne and the Belgian coast there have been two main efforts of that character. The first was the attempt to split the Allied front at Roye and at Arras, and to break up the line between those places; the second was the effort on an even larger scale, and pursued with still greater determination, to split the front at La Bassée and at Ypres, and to break up the line intervening.

It is no mere accident that this latter attempt followed immediately on the failure to cross the Yser. *The attempt arose out of the necessity of the situation.*

On the Upper Meuse, by another great effort,

the Germans had driven a wedge into the French fortified frontier at St. Mihiel, and that wedge appeared to some the prelude of a mysterious scheme. In fact, the intention and the effect of it was to hold off the French advance along the frontier of Lorraine and across the Vosges. Again it is the case of a desperate man clinging to a railing.

We have, therefore, three great efforts to break the Allied front by their wedge tactics, and three to outflank the Allied outflanking development. None of these efforts succeeded.

What was the consequence? The consequence was that the German armies in France and Belgium could neither advance nor retreat. They could not advance because they are not strong enough. They could not retreat, because retreat would mean their destruction.

The retreat of any army—and most of all the retreat of a huge mass army—is not a simple matter. On the contrary, it is a most difficult and complex operation in the most favourable circumstances. Here, however, was not one mass army, but a line of mass armies, occupying a front forming a right angle, and opposed on each arm of that right angle by forces which had proved stronger than they. So situated, they could only retreat with any chance of safety by falling directly back; but either arm of the angle if it fell directly back must obstruct the retreat of the other; and if they fell directly back each at the same time, their movements must become exactly like those of the blades

of a pair of scissors as they are being closed. *A retreat under such conditions is a military impossibility.*

Not a few fantastic motives have been attributed to the Germans, more particularly as regards the terrible struggle in West Flanders, but the plain truth of the matter is that here stated.

Now if we turn to the strategy of the Allies, bearing their governing motive in mind, we shall find that it rested primarily on the attack launched against the German positions north of the Aisne and round Rheims.

That attack wrecked the German scheme for resuming the offensive, and was the most effective means of assuring that end. It is impossible indeed not to recognise that the feat which reduced a force like the German armies to immobility is a masterpiece of strategy wholly without parallel in the annals of war. Whether we look at the breadth and boldness of its conception, at the patience and command of organisation with which it was carried out, at the grasp it displayed of the real conditions governing the operations of modern mass armies, or at the clear purpose and unswerving resolution with which it was followed, the plan equally calls forth surprise and admiration.

From the military standpoint, victory or defeat is the answer to the question: Which side has accomplished the purpose it had in view?

The German purpose of re-seizing the initiative was not accomplished. The German scheme

of turning either one or both flanks of the Allied line was not accomplished. That is military failure.

From the beginning of October, when the struggle round Rheims was at its height, the feature of the campaign broadly was that the weight of the fighting passed progressively from the centre of the fighting front to the wings—to West Flanders on the one side, and to the Argonne and the Upper Meuse on the other. Progressively the Allied forces were placed where it was intended they should be placed. They accomplished the purpose which it was intended they should accomplish—that of keeping the main military strength of Germany helpless while they wasted that strength. That is military success.

To sum up. The Germans entered France with a force of more than a million and a half of men. The like of such a military expedition the world till then had never seen. The plan of it had been studied and worked out in detail for years. On the preparations for it had been bestowed a colossal labour. It appeared certain of success. It was defeated by an exercise of military skill and resource which, however regarded, must stand as one of the greatest records of mastery in the art of war.

APPENDIX

Despatches of Field-Marshal Sir John French on the Battles of the Marne and the Aisne, addressed to Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War.

I.

Sept. 17, 1914.

My Lord—

In continuation of my despatch of Sept. 7, I have the honour to report the further progress of the operations of the forces under my command from Aug. 28.

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

The retreat in this part of the field was being covered by the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades. South of the Somme General Gough, with the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, threw back the Uhlans of the Guard with considerable loss.

General Chetwode, with the 5th Cavalry Brigade, encountered the eastern column near Cérizy, moving south. The Brigade attacked and routed the column, the leading German regiment suffering very severe casualties and being almost broken up.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In spite of a severe defeat inflicted upon the Guard 10th and Guard Reserve Corps of the German army by the 1st and 3rd French Corps on the right of the 5th Army, it was not part of General Joffre's plan to pursue this advantage, and a general retirement on to the line

of the Marne was ordered, to which the French forces in the more eastern theatre were directed to conform.

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

Whilst closely adhering to his strategic conception to draw the enemy on at all points until a favourable situation was created from which to assume the offensive, General Joffre found it necessary to modify from day to day the methods by which he sought to attain this object, owing to the development of the enemy's plans and changes in the general situation.

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

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

Similarly, to the eastward, the 1st Corps, retiring south, also got into some very difficult forest country, and a somewhat severe rearguard action ensued at Villers-Cotterets, in which the 4th Guards Brigade suffered considerably.

On Sept. 3 the British forces were in position south of the Marne between Lagny and Signy-Signets. Up to this time I had been requested by General Joffre to defend the passages of the river as long as possible, and to blow up the bridges in my front. After I had made the necessary dispositions, and the destruction of the bridges had been effected, I was asked by the French Commander-in-Chief to continue my retirement to a point some twelve miles in rear of the position I then

occupied, with a view to taking up a second position behind the Seine. This retirement was duly carried out. In the meantime the enemy had thrown bridges and crossed the Marne in considerable force, and was threatening the Allies all along the line of the British forces and the 5th and 9th French armies. Consequently several small outpost actions took place.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ALLIES.

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

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

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

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

GERMANS.

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

9th Cavalry Division.—West of Crecy.

2nd Cavalry Division. North of Coulommiers.

4th Corps.—Rebais.

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

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

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

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

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

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

On Sept. 8 the enemy continued his retreat northward, and our army was successfully engaged during the day with strong rearguards of all arms on the Petit Morin River, thereby materially assisting the progress of the French armies on our right and left, against whom the enemy was making his greatest efforts. On both sides the enemy was thrown back with very heavy loss. The First Army Corps encountered stubborn resistance at La

Trétoire (north of Rebais). The enemy occupied a strong position with infantry and guns on the northern bank of the Petit Morin River; they were dislodged with considerable loss. Several machine guns and many prisoners were captured, and upwards of 200 German dead were left on the ground.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

including the capture of over 2,000 prisoners and several guns.—I have the honour to be, your lordship's most obedient servant,

(Signed) J. D. P. FRENCH, Field-Marshal, Commanding-in-Chief, the British Forces in the Field.

II.

Oct. 8, 1914.

My Lord—

I have the honour to report the operations in which the British forces in France have been engaged since the evening of Sept. 10.

1. In the early morning of the 11th the further pursuit of the enemy was commenced, and the three corps crossed the Ourcq practically unopposed, the cavalry reaching the line of the Aisne River; the 3rd and 5th Brigades south of Soissons, the 1st, 2nd, and 4th on the high ground at Couvrelles and Cerseuil.

On the afternoon of the 12th from the opposition encountered by the 6th French Army to the west of Soissons, by the 3rd Corps south-east of that place, by the 2nd Corps south of Missy and Vailly, and certain indications all along the line, I formed the opinion that the enemy had, for the moment at any rate, arrested his retreat, and was preparing to dispute the passage of the Aisne with some vigour.

South of Soissons the Germans were holding Mont de Paris against the attack of the right of the French 6th Army when the 3rd Corps reached the neighbourhood of Buzancy, south-east of that place. With the assistance of the artillery of the 3rd Corps the French drove them back across the river at Soissons, where they destroyed the bridges.

The heavy artillery fire which was visible for several miles in a westerly direction in the valley of the Aisne showed that the 6th French Army was meeting with strong opposition all along the line.

On this day the cavalry under General Allenby reached

the neighbourhood of Braine, and did good work in clearing the town and the high ground beyond it of strong hostile detachments. The Queen's Bays are particularly mentioned by the General as having assisted greatly in the success of this operation. They were well supported by the 3rd Division, which on this night bivouacked at Brenelle, south of the river.

The 5th Division approached Missy, but were unable to make headway.

The 1st Army Corps reached the neighbourhood of Vauxcéré without much opposition.

In this manner the Battle of the Aisne commenced.

2. The Aisne Valley runs generally east and west, and consists of a flat-bottomed depression of width varying from half a mile to two miles, down which the river follows a winding course to the west at some points near the southern slopes of the valley and at others near the northern. The high ground both on the north and south of the river is approximately 400 ft. above the bottom of the valley, and is very similar in character, as are both slopes of the valley itself, which are broken into numerous rounded spurs and re-entrants. The most prominent of the former are the Chivre spur on the right bank and Sermoise spur on the left. Near the latter place the general plateau on the south is divided by a subsidiary valley of much the same character, down which the small River Vesle flows to the main stream near Sermoise. The slopes of the plateau overlooking the Aisne on the north and south are of varying steepness, and are covered with numerous patches of wood, which also stretch upwards and backwards over the edge on to the top of the high ground. There are several villages and small towns dotted about in the valley itself and along its sides, the chief of which is the town of Soissons.

The Aisne is a sluggish stream of some 170 ft. in breadth, but, being 15 ft. deep in the centre, it is unfordable. Between Soissons on the west and Villers on the east (the part of the river attacked and secured by the British forces) there are eleven road bridges across

it. On the north bank a narrow-gauge railway runs from Soissons to Vailly, where it crosses the river and continues eastward along the south bank. From Soissons to Sermoise a double line of railway runs along the south bank, turning at the latter place up the Vesle Valley towards Bazoches.

The position held by the enemy is a very strong one, either for a delaying action or for a defensive battle. One of its chief military characteristics is that from the high ground on neither side can the top of the plateau on the other side be seen except for small stretches. This is chiefly due to the woods on the edges of the slopes. Another important point is that all the bridges are under either direct or high-angle artillery fire.

The tract of country above described, which lies north of the Aisne, is well adapted to concealment, and was so skilfully turned to account by the enemy as to render it impossible to judge the real nature of his opposition to our passage of the river, or to accurately gauge his strength; but I have every reason to conclude that strong rearguards of at least three army corps were holding the passages on the early morning of the 13th.

3. On that morning I ordered the British Forces to advance and make good the Aisne.

The 1st Corps and the cavalry advanced on the river. The First Division was directed on Chanouille, *viâ* the canal bridge at Bourg, and the Second Division on Courteçon and Presles, *viâ* Pont-Arcy and on the canal to the north of Braye, *viâ* Chavonne. On the right the cavalry and First Division met with slight opposition, and found a passage by means of the canal which crosses the river by an aqueduct. The Division was, therefore, able to press on, supported by the Cavalry Division on its outer flank, driving back the enemy in front of it.

On the left the leading troops of the Second Division reached the river by nine o'clock. The Fifth Infantry Brigade were only enabled to cross, in single file and under considerable shell fire, by means of the broken girder of the bridge which was not entirely submerged in the river. The construction of a pontoon bridge was

at once undertaken, and was completed by five o'clock in the afternoon.

On the extreme left the 4th Guards Brigade met with severe opposition at Chavonne, and it was only late in the afternoon that it was able to establish a foothold on the northern bank of the river by ferrying one battalion across in boats.

By nightfall the First Division occupied the area Moulins-Paissy-Geny, with posts in the village of Vendresse.

The Second Division bivouacked as a whole on the southern bank of the river, leaving only the Fifth Brigade on the north bank to establish a bridge head.

The Second Corps found all the bridges in front of them destroyed, except that of Condé, which was in possession of the enemy, and remained so until the end of the battle.

In the approach to Missy, where the 5th Division eventually crossed, there is some open ground which was swept by heavy fire from the opposite bank. The 13th Brigade was, therefore, unable to advance; but the 14th, which was directed to the east of Venizel at a less exposed point, was rafted across, and by night established itself with its left at St. Marguérite. They were followed by the 15th Brigade, and later on both the 14th and 15th supported the 4th Division on their left in repelling a heavy counter-attack on the Third Corps.

On the morning of the 13th the Third Corps found the enemy had established himself in strength on the Vregny Plateau. The road bridge at Venizel was repaired during the morning, and a reconnaissance was made with a view to throwing a pontoon bridge at Soissons.

The 12th Infantry Brigade crossed at Venizel, and was assembled at Bucy Le Long by one p.m., but the bridge was so far damaged that artillery could only be manhandled across it. Meanwhile the construction of a bridge was commenced close to the road bridge at Venizel.

At two p.m. the 12th Infantry Brigade attacked in the

direction of Chivres and Vregny with the object of securing the high ground east of Chivres, as a necessary preliminary to a further advance northwards. This attack made good progress, but at 5.30 p.m. the enemy's artillery and machine-gun fire from the direction of Vregny became so severe that no further advance could be made. The positions reached were held till dark.

The pontoon bridge at Venizel was completed at 5.30 p.m., when the 10th Infantry Brigade crossed the river and moved to Bucy Le Long.

The 19th Infantry Brigade moved to Billy-sur-Aisne, and before dark all the artillery of the division had crossed the river, with the exception of the heavy battery and one brigade of field artillery.

During the night the positions gained by the 12th Infantry Brigade to the east of the stream running through Chivres were handed over to the 5th Division.

The section of the bridging train allotted to the Third Corps began to arrive in the neighbourhood of Soissons late in the afternoon, when an attempt to throw a heavy pontoon bridge at Soissons had to be abandoned, owing to the fire of the enemy's heavy howitzers.

In the evening the enemy retired at all points and entrenched himself on the high ground about two miles north of the river, along which runs the Chemin-des-Dames. Detachments of infantry, however, strongly entrenched in commanding points down slopes of the various spurs, were left in front of all three corps, with powerful artillery in support of them.

During the night of the 13th and on the 14th and following days the field companies were incessantly at work night and day. Eight pontoon bridges and one foot bridge were thrown across the river under generally very heavy artillery fire, which was incessantly kept up on to most of the crossings after completion. Three of the road bridges, *i.e.*, Venizel, Missy, and Vailly, and the railway bridge east of Vailly were temporarily repaired so as to take foot traffic, and the Villers Bridge made fit to carry weights up to six tons.

Preparations were also made for the repair of the

Missy, Vailly, and Bourg Bridges, so as to take mechanical transport.

The weather was very wet and added to the difficulties by cutting up the already indifferent approaches, entailing a large amount of work to repair and improve.

The operations of the field companies during this most trying time are worthy of the best traditions of the Royal Engineers.

4. On the evening of the 14th it was still impossible to decide whether the enemy was only making a temporary halt, covered by rearguards, or whether he intended to stand and defend the position.

With a view to clearing up the situation, I ordered a general advance.

The action of the 1st Corps on this day under the direction and command of Sir Douglas Haig was of so skilful, bold, and decisive a character that he gained positions which alone have enabled me to maintain my position for more than three weeks of very severe fighting on the north bank of the river.

The corps was directed to cross the line Moulins-Moussy by seven a.m.

On the right the General Officer Commanding the 1st Division directed the 2nd Infantry Brigade (which was in billets and bivouacked about Moulins), and the 25th Artillery Brigade (less one battery), under General Bulfin, to move forward before daybreak, in order to protect the advance of the division sent up the valley to Vendresse. An officers' patrol sent out by this brigade reported a considerable force of the enemy near the factory north of Troyon, and the Brigadier accordingly directed two regiments (the King's Royal Rifles and the Royal Sussex Regiment) to move at three a.m. The Northamptonshire Regiment was ordered to move at four a.m. to occupy the spur east of Troyon. The remaining regiment of the brigade (the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment) moved at 5.30 a.m. to the village of Vendresse. The factory was found to be held in considerable strength by the enemy, and the brigadier ordered the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment to sup-

port the King's Royal Rifles and the Sussex Regiment. Even with this support the force was unable to make headway, and on the arrival of the 1st Brigade the Coldstream Guards were moved up to support the right of the leading brigade (the 2nd), while the remainder of the 1st Brigade supported its left.

About noon the situation was, roughly, that the whole of these two brigades were extended along a line running east and west, north of the line Troyon and south of the Chemin-des-Dames. A party of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment had seized and were holding the factory. The enemy held a line of entrenchments north and east of the factory in considerable strength, and every effort to advance against this line was driven back by heavy shell and machine-gun fire. The morning was wet, and a heavy mist hung over the hills, so that the 25th Artillery Brigade and the Divisional Artillery were unable to render effective support to the advanced troops until about nine o'clock.

By ten o'clock the 3rd Infantry Brigade had reached a point one mile south of Vendresse, and from there it was ordered to continue the line of the 1st Brigade and to connect with and help the right of the 2nd Division. A strong hostile column was found to be advancing, and by a vigorous counter-stroke with two of his battalions the Brigadier checked the advance of this column and relieved the pressure on the 2nd Division. From this period until late in the afternoon the fighting consisted of a series of attacks and counter-attacks. The counter-strokes by the enemy were delivered at first with great vigour, but later on they decreased in strength, and all were driven off with heavy loss.

On the left the 6th Infantry Brigade had been ordered to cross the river and to pass through the line held during the preceding night by the 5th Infantry Brigade and occupy the Courteçon Ridge, whilst a detached force, consisting of the 4th Guards Brigade and the 36th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, under Brigadier-General Perceval, were ordered to proceed to a point east of the village of Ostel.

The 6th Infantry Brigade crossed the river at Pont-Arcy, moved up the valley towards Braye, and at nine a.m. had reached the line Tilleul—La Buvelle. On this line they came under heavy artillery and rifle fire, and were unable to advance until supported by the 34th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, and the 44th Howitzer Brigade and the Heavy Artillery.

The 4th Guards Brigade crossed the river at ten a.m., and met with very heavy opposition. It had to pass through dense woods; field artillery support was difficult to obtain; but one section of the field battery pushed up to and within the firing line. At one p.m. the left of the brigade was south of the Ostel Ridge.

At this period of the action the enemy obtained a footing between the First and Second Corps, and threatened to cut the communications of the latter.

Sir Douglas Haig was very hardly pressed, and had no reserve in hand. I placed the cavalry division at his disposal, part of which he skilfully used to prolong and secure the left flank of the Guards Brigade. Some heavy fighting ensued, which resulted in the enemy being driven back with heavy loss.

About four o'clock the weakening of the counter-attacks by the enemy and other indications tended to show that his resistance was decreasing, and a general advance was ordered by the Army Corps Commander. Although meeting with considerable opposition, and coming under very heavy artillery and rifle fire, the position of the corps at the end of the day's operations extended from the Chemin-des-Dames on the right, through Chivy, to Le Cour de Soupir, with the 1st Cavalry Brigade extending to the Chavonne—Soissons road.

On the right the corps was in close touch with the French Moroccan troops of the 18th Corps, which were entrenched in echelon to its right rear. During the night they entrenched this position.

Throughout the battle of the Aisne this advanced and commanding position was maintained, and I cannot speak too highly of the valuable services rendered by Sir Douglas Haig and the army corps under his com-

mand. Day after day and night after night the enemy's infantry has been hurled against him in violent counter-attack, which has never on any one occasion succeeded, whilst the trenches all over his position have been under continuous heavy artillery fire.

The operations of the First Corps on this day resulted in the capture of several hundred prisoners, some field pieces, and machine guns.

The casualties were very severe, one brigade alone losing three of its four colonels.

The 3rd Division commenced a further advance, and had nearly reached the plateau of Aizy when they were driven back by a powerful counter-attack supported by heavy artillery. The division, however, fell back in the best order, and finally entrenched itself about a mile north of Vailly Bridge, effectively covering the passage.

The 4th and 5th Divisions were unable to do more than maintain their ground.

5. On the morning of the 15th, after close examination of the position, it became clear to me that the enemy was making a determined stand, and this view was confirmed by reports which reached me from the French armies fighting on my right and left, which clearly showed that a strongly entrenched line of defence was being taken up from the north of Compiègne, eastward and south-eastward, along the whole valley of the Aisne up to and beyond Rheims.

A few days previously the fortress of Maubeuge fell, and a considerable quantity of siege artillery was brought down from that place to strengthen the enemy's position in front of us.

During the 15th shells fell in our position which have been judged by experts to be thrown by eight-inch siege guns with a range of 10,000 yards. Throughout the whole course of the battle our troops have suffered very heavily from this fire, although its effect latterly was largely mitigated by more efficient and thorough entrenching, the necessity for which I impressed strongly upon army corps commanders. In order to assist them in this work all villages within the area of our occupa-

tion were searched for heavy entrenching tools, a large number of which were collected.

In view of the peculiar formation of the ground on the north side of the river between Missy and Soissons, and its extraordinary adaptability to a force on the defensive, the 5th Division found it impossible to maintain its position on the southern edge of the Chivres Plateau, as the enemy in possession of the village of Vregny to the west was able to bring a flank fire to bear upon it. The division had, therefore, to retire to a line the left of which was at the village of Marguérite, and thence ran by the north edge of Missy back to the river to the east of that place.

With great skill and tenacity Sir Charles Fergusson maintained this position throughout the whole battle, although his trenches were necessarily on lower ground than that occupied by the enemy on the southern edge of the plateau, which was only 400 yards away.

General Hamilton with the 3rd Division vigorously attacked to the north, and regained all the ground he had lost on the 15th, which throughout the battle had formed a most powerful and effective bridge head.

6. On the 16th the 6th Division came up into line.

It had been my intention to direct the First Corps to attack and seize the enemy's position on the Chemin-des-Dames, supporting it with this new reinforcement. I hoped from the position thus gained to bring effective fire to bear across the front of the 3rd Division which, by securing the advance of the latter, would also take the pressure off the 5th Division and the Third Corps.

But any further advance of the First Corps would have dangerously exposed my right flank. And, further, I learned from the French Commander-in-Chief that he was strongly reinforcing the 6th French Army on my left, with the intention of bringing up the Allied left to attack the enemy's flank, and thus compel his retirement. I therefore sent the 6th Division to join the Third Corps, with orders to keep it on the south side of the river, as it might be available in general reserve.

On the 17th, 18th, and 19th the whole of our line

was heavily bombarded, and the First Corps was constantly and heavily engaged. On the afternoon of the 17th the right flank of the 1st Division was seriously threatened. A counter-attack was made by the Northamptonshire Regiment in combination with the Queen's, and one battalion of the Divisional Reserve was moved up in support. The Northamptonshire Regiment, under cover of mist, crept up to within a hundred yards of the enemy's trenches and charged with the bayonet, driving them out of the trenches and up the hill. A very strong force of hostile infantry was then disclosed on the crest line. This new line was enfiladed by part of the Queen's and the King's Royal Rifles, which wheeled to their left on the extreme right of our infantry line, and were supported by a squadron of cavalry on their outer flank. The enemy's attack was ultimately driven back with heavy loss.

On the 18th, during the night, the Gloucestershire Regiment advanced from their position near Chivy, filled in the enemy's trenches and captured two Maxim guns.

On the extreme right the Queen's were heavily attacked, but the enemy was repulsed with great loss. About midnight the attack was renewed on the 1st Division, supported by artillery fire, but was again repulsed.

Shortly after midnight an attack was made on the left of the 2nd Division with considerable force, which was also thrown back.

At about one p.m. on the 19th the 2nd Division drove back a heavy infantry attack strongly supported by artillery fire. At dusk the attack was renewed and again repulsed.

On the 18th I discussed with the General Officer Commanding the 2nd Army Corps and his Divisional Commanders the possibility of driving the enemy out of Condé, which lay between his two divisions, and seizing the bridge which has remained throughout in his possession.

As, however, I found that the bridge was closely commanded from all points on the south side and that satis-

factory arrangements were made to prevent any issue from it by the enemy by day or night, I decided that it was not necessary to incur the losses which an attack would entail, as, in view of the position of the 2nd and 3rd Corps, the enemy could make no use of Condé, and would be automatically forced out of it by any advance which might become possible for us.

7. On this day information reached me from General Joffre that he had found it necessary to make a new plan, and to attack and envelop the German right flank.

It was now evident to me that the battle in which we had been engaged since the 12th instant must last some days longer, until the effect of this new flank movement could be felt, and a way opened to drive the enemy from his positions.

It thus became essential to establish some system of regular relief in the trenches, and I have used the infantry of the 6th Division for this purpose with good results. The relieved brigades were brought back alternately south of the river, and, with the artillery of the 6th Division, formed a general reserve on which I could rely in case of necessity.

The cavalry has rendered most efficient and ready help in the trenches, and have done all they possibly could to lighten the arduous and trying task which has of necessity fallen to the lot of the infantry.

On the evening of the 19th, and throughout the 20th, the enemy again commenced to show considerable activity. On the former night a severe counter-attack on the 3rd Division was repulsed with considerable loss, and from early on Sunday morning various hostile attempts were made on the trenches of the 1st Division. During the day the enemy suffered another severe repulse in front of the 2nd Division, losing heavily in the attempt. In the course of the afternoon the enemy made desperate attempts against the trenches all along the front of the First Corps, but with similar results.

After dark the enemy again attacked the 2nd Division, only to be again driven back.

Our losses on these two days were considerable, but

the number, as obtained, of the enemy's killed and wounded vastly exceeded them.

As the troops of the First Army Corps were much exhausted by this continual fighting, I reinforced Sir Douglas Haig with a brigade from the reserve, and called upon the 1st Cavalry Division to assist them.

On the night of the 21st another violent counter-attack was repulsed by the 3rd Division, the enemy losing heavily.

On the 23rd the four six-inch howitzer batteries, which I had asked to be sent from home, arrived. Two batteries were handed over to the Second Corps and two to the First Corps. They were brought into action on the 24th with very good results.

Our experiences in this campaign seem to point to the employment of more heavy guns of a larger calibre in great battles which last for several days, during which time powerful entrenching work on both sides can be carried out.

These batteries were used with considerable effect on the 24th and the following days.

8. On the 23rd the action of General de Castelnau's army on the Allied left developed considerably, and apparently withdrew considerable forces of the enemy away from the centre and east. I am not aware whether it was due to this cause or not, but until the 26th it appeared as though the enemy's opposition in our front was weakening. On that day, however, a very marked renewal of activity commenced. A constant and vigorous artillery bombardment was maintained all day, and the Germans in front of the 1st Division were observed to be "sapping" up to our lines and trying to establish new trenches. Renewed counter-attacks were delivered and beaten off during the course of the day, and in the afternoon a well-timed attack by the 1st Division stopped the enemy's entrenching work.

During the night of 27th-28th the enemy again made the most determined attempts to capture the trenches of the 1st Division, but without the slightest success.

Similar attacks were reported during these three days

all along the line of the Allied front, and it is certain that the enemy then made one last great effort to establish ascendancy. He was, however, unsuccessful everywhere, and is reported to have suffered heavy losses. The same futile attempts were made all along our front up to the evening of the 28th, when they died away, and have not since been renewed.

On former occasions I have brought to your lordship's notice the valuable services performed during this campaign by the Royal Artillery.

Throughout the Battle of the Aisne they have displayed the same skill, endurance, and tenacity, and I deeply appreciate the work they have done.

Sir David Henderson and the Royal Flying Corps under his command have again proved their incalculable value. Great strides have been made in the development of the use of aircraft in the tactical sphere by establishing effective communication between aircraft and units in action.

It is difficult to describe adequately and accurately the great strain to which officers and men were subjected almost every hour of the day and night throughout this battle.

I have described above the severe character of the artillery fire which was directed from morning till night, not only upon the trenches, but over the whole surface of the ground occupied by our forces. It was not until a few days before the position was evacuated that the heavy guns were removed and the fire slackened. Attack and counter-attack occurred at all hours of the night and day throughout the whole position, demanding extreme vigilance, and permitting only a minimum of rest.

The fact that between Sept. 12 to the date of this despatch the total numbers of killed, wounded, and missing reached the figures amounting to 561 officers, 12,980 men, proves the severity of the struggle.

The tax on the endurance of the troops was further increased by the heavy rain and cold which prevailed for some ten or twelve days of this trying time.

The battle of the Aisne has once more demonstrated the splendid spirit, gallantry, and devotion which animates the officers and men of his Majesty's Forces.

With reference to the last paragraph of my despatch of Sept. 7, I append the names of officers, non-commissioned officers, and men brought forward for special mention by Army Corps commanders and heads of departments for services rendered from the commencement of the campaign up to the present date.

I entirely agree with these recommendations and beg to submit them for your lordship's consideration.

I further wish to bring forward the names of the following officers who have rendered valuable service: General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien and Lieutenant-General Sir Douglas Haig (commanding First and Second Corps respectively) I have already mentioned in the present and former despatches for particularly marked and distinguished service in critical situations.

Since the commencement of the campaign they have carried out all my orders and instructions with the utmost ability.

Lieutenant-General W. P. Pulteney took over the command of the Third Corps just before the commencement of the battle of the Marne. Throughout the subsequent operations he showed himself to be a most capable commander in the field, and has rendered very valuable services.

Major-General E. H. H. Allenby and Major-General H. de la P. Gough have proved themselves to be cavalry leaders of a high order, and I am deeply indebted to them. The undoubted moral superiority which our cavalry has obtained over that of the enemy has been due to the skill with which they have turned to the best account the qualities inherent in the splendid troops they command.

In my despatch of Sept. 7 I mentioned the name of Brigadier-General Sir David Henderson and his valuable work in command of the Royal Flying Corps, and I have once more to express my deep appreciation of the help he has since rendered me.

Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Murray has continued to render me invaluable help as Chief of the Staff, and in his arduous and responsible duties he has been ably assisted by Major-General Henry Wilson, Sub-Chief.

Lieutenant-General Sir Nevil Macready and Lieutenant-General Sir William Robertson have continued to perform excellent service as Adjutant-General and Quartermaster-General respectively.

The Director of Army Signals, Lieutenant-Colonel J. S. Fowler, has materially assisted the operations by the skill and energy which he has displayed in the working of the important department over which he presides.

My Military Secretary, Brigadier-General the Hon. W. Lambton, has performed his arduous and difficult duties with much zeal and great efficiency.

I am anxious also to bring to your lordship's notice the following names of officers of my Personal Staff, who throughout these arduous operations have shown untiring zeal and energy in the performance of their duties :—

AIDES-DE-CAMP.

Lieut.-Colonel Stanley Barry.
Lieut.-Colonel Lord Brooke.
Major Fitzgerald Watt.

EXTRA AIDE-DE-CAMP.

Captain the Hon. F. E. Guest.

PRIVATE SECRETARY.

Lieut.-Colonel Brindsley Fitzgerald.

Major his Royal Highness Prince Arthur of Connaught, K.G., joined my staff as Aide-de-Camp on Sept. 14.

His Royal Highness's intimate knowledge of languages enabled me to employ him with great advantage on confidential missions of some importance, and his services have proved of considerable value.

I cannot close this despatch without informing your

lordship of the valuable services rendered by the chief of the French Military Mission at my headquarters, Colonel Victor Huguet, of the French Artillery. He has displayed tact and judgment of a high order in many difficult situations, and has rendered conspicuous service to the Allied cause.—I have the honour to be, your lordship's most obedient servant,

(Signed) J. D. P. FRENCH, Field-Marshal,
Commanding-in-Chief, the British
Army in the Field.

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