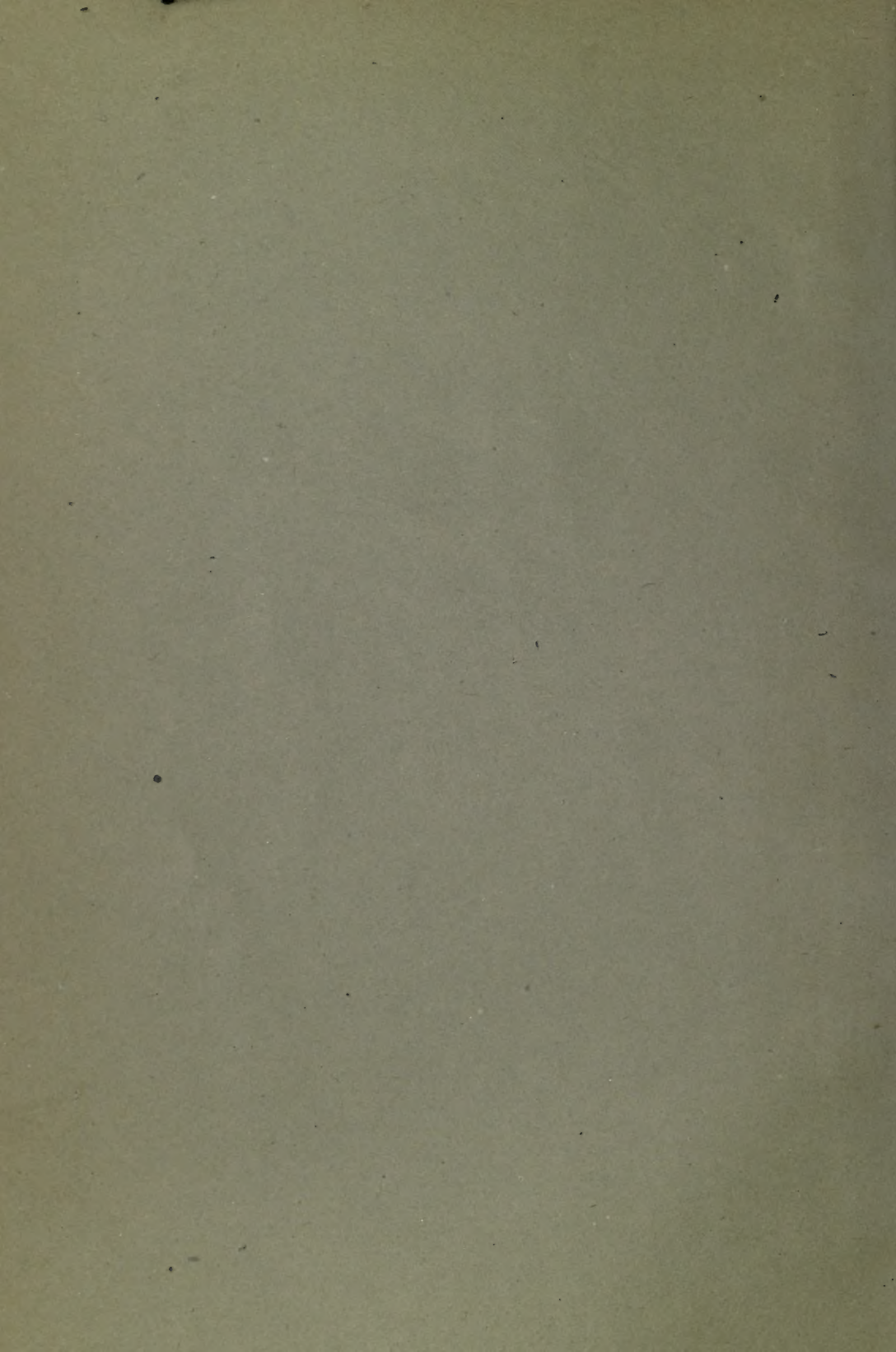


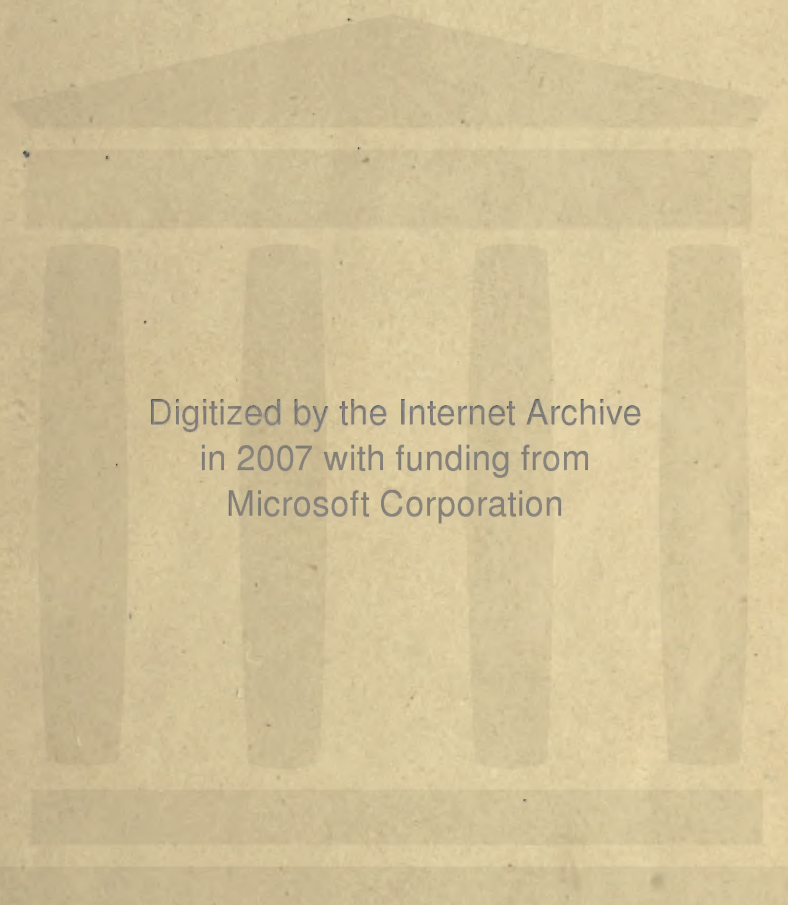
THE CHILDREN'S STORY OF THE WAR

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
3 1761 01326962 6



By Sir Edward Parrott, M.A., LL.D.





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation



The Return of H.M.S. Vindictive from Zeebrugge.

(From a painting by Charles Dixon, R.A.)

“A great black shape, flying a vast streamer of flame as her stokers worked her up to a final display of seventeen knots. . . . Her forward funnel was a sieve; her decks were a dazzle of sparks; but she brought back intact the horseshoe mallet to it which Sir Roger Keyes had presented to her commander.”—*Official Narrative.*

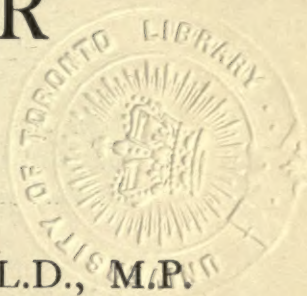
Mod
P.2636c

THE CHILDREN'S STORY OF THE WAR

BY

SIR EDWARD PARROTT, M.A., LL.D., M.P.

AUTHOR OF "THE PAGEANT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE,"
"ALLIES, FOES, AND NEUTRALS," ETC.



From the Battle of Cambrai to the Second Battle
of the Marne

157377
29.11.20

THOMAS NELSON AND SONS, LTD.
LONDON, EDINBURGH, AND NEW YORK

1918

BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord ;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored ;
He hath loosed the fatal lightning of His terrible swift sword ;
His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch fires of a hundred circling camps ;
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps ;
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps ;
His day is marching on.

I have read a fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel ;
"As ye deal with My contemners, so with you My Grace shall deal ;
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel !
Since God is marching on."

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat ;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat ;
Oh, be' swift, my soul, to answer Him ; be jubilant, my feet !
Our God is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born, across the sea,
With the glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me ;
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.

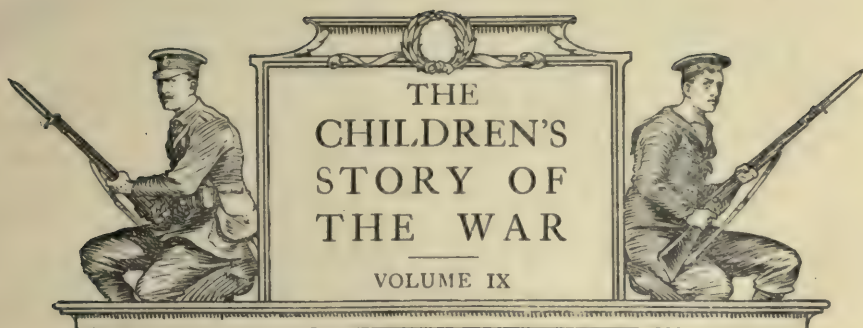
JULIA WARD HOWE.

CONTENTS.

I. The Lowering Sky	1
II. Valorous Deeds and Victoria Crosses.—I.	17
III. Valorous Deeds and Victoria Crosses.—II.	33
IV. "The Boy in the Aeroplane"	42
V. Two Great Airmen	49
VI. The Story of the Dover Patrol	54
VII. Russia's Ruin.—I.	61
VIII. Russia's Ruin.—II.	65
IX. Fighting in Bible Lands	73
X. The First Day of the Great German On- slaught.—I.	81
XI. The First Day of the Great German On- slaught.—II.	97
XII. The German Break-through	102
XIII. Soldiers' Stories of the Retreat	113
XIV. Across the Somme	126
XV. The Battle of Arras	129
XVI. A Tribute from the Enemy	134
XVII. The Thrust at Amiens	145
XVIII. The French Retirement to the Ailette	161

CONTENTS.

XIX. America's First Year of War . . .	165
XX. Heroes of the Victoria Cross.—I. . .	173
XXI. Heroes of the Victoria Cross.—II. . .	177
XXII. Heroes of the Victoria Cross.—III. . .	193
XXIII. The Battle of the Lys River.—I. . .	197
XXIV. The Battle of the Lys River.—II. . .	209
XXV. How we plugged up Zeebrugge Har- bour.—I.	225
XXVI. How we plugged up Zeebrugge Har- bour.—II.	241
XXVII. What happened at Ostend	251
XXVIII. The Last Voyage of <i>Vindictive</i>	257
XXIX. Villers-Bretonneux and Kemmel	261
XXX. Looking Backward	273
XXXI. The Third German Offensive	278
XXXII. Towards the Marne	289
XXXIII. The Americans at the Marne	293
XXXIV. The Fourth German Blow	305
XXXV. The Bravest of the Brave.—I.	315
XXXVI. The Bravest of the Brave.—II.	321
XXXVII. The Bravest of the Brave.—III.	337
XXXVIII. The Italian Front once more	349
XXXIX. The Great Austrian Failure	353
XL. The Second Battle of the Marne	369



CHAPTER I.

THE LOWERING SKY.

“**T**HOUGH the sun was only peeping above the horizon, the sky was already glowing with the promise of victory.” With these cheering words I opened my record of the year 1917. Alas! the year came to a close with the promise unfulfilled, and the sky darker and more lowering than it had been since those early weeks of the war when our fate was hanging in the balance. We looked back on a year which began with radiant hope and ended in bitter disappointment. It was a year in which the Allies were put to a severe test, and were called upon to suffer and be strong. Great and costly battles were fought, and in our own land there was scarcely a household which did not mourn the loss of a dearly-loved son, brother, or father. Food was scarce, prices ruled high, and long queues of women and children besieged shops which had but little to sell. London was raided again and again by hostile aeroplanes, and the “jackals of the sea” took a heavy toll of our shipping.

Worst of all, Russia, our ally with the greatest man-power, brought about her own ruin, and delivered herself bound hand and foot into the hands of the foe. The Muscovite Samson, having shorn his own locks and being thus reduced to the feebleness of the child, lay helpless before the Philistines. There is no sadder story in the whole of history than the suicide of Russia.

As this disaster had such grave consequences for the Allies, I must remind you of the course of events in that distracted

land. In the former volume I described the rising of the Russians against the tyranny which had enslaved them for ages. I told you that on 14th March the Tsar gave up his throne, and a free government was set up under Prince Lvov. Western nations rejoiced that Russia had at last broken her shackles, and had set her feet upon the path of freedom. They hoped and believed that a free Russia would take the field in irresistible might, and fight with all the fervour and self-sacrifice which the French had displayed after their revolution of 1789. Money and munitions were poured into the country, and in July Brussilov and the Cossack general Kornilov began an offensive in Galicia which opened brilliantly. In the course of a few weeks they reached Kalisz, and captured 40,000 prisoners. But when German reinforcements were hurried up and the Russian advance was stayed, the fatal canker began to reveal itself.

Mr. Gerard, the American ambassador in Germany, tells us in his diary that as far back as July 1915 the Germans began sending back to Russia many of their Socialist Russian prisoners amply supplied with money for the purpose of stirring up trouble at home. These traitors went to and fro amongst their fellows, sapping and undermining their loyalty, and persuading them that their best policy was to make peace with the enemy. Had Prince Lvov and the moderate men who formed his Government remained in power, Russia might have recovered herself and played a gallant part in the war. But unhappily the government passed into the hands of wild, unpractical dreamers led by M. Kerensky. He urged the soldiers to continue the war, but could not make headway against the treachery that gained ground every day. Kornilov made an attempt to sweep away Kerensky and his followers, and to restore order; but he failed, and the country continued to slide with ever-increasing speed down the steep road to ruin.

By slow and painful degrees discipline in the army was broken down; generals were removed from their commands, and were either exiled or murdered. Soldiers deserted by the thousand, and made friends with their foes in the opposing trenches. The Russian armies became wrangling mobs, quite useless for the work of war. When, in September and October, the Germans captured Riga and the islands in its gulf, the



An Old Russian Peasant on his Way to Market.

(Photo, The Sphere.)

The peasants form the vast majority of the Russian people. Most of them can neither read nor write, and their ignorance makes them the prey of clever talkers. They are a peaceable people, and their thoughts and desires hardly extend beyond their own villages.

Russians, though superior in numbers, made no sort of stand, but fell back in hopeless disorder.

Early in November one of the sections of Russian Socialists, known as the Bolshevists—that is, those belonging to the Socialist majority—seized the reins of power. They had already undermined the discipline of the army, had stirred up the soldiers against their officers, had urged the people to do what seemed right in their own eyes, and had cried aloud for a peace which would bring the war to an end without the loss of territory or the payment of a money fine.

The leader of this party was a man of Russian and gentle birth, named Lenin. It is said that he set himself to bring about the ruin of Russia in revenge for the execution of his brother, who had tried to murder the Tsar Alexander III. in 1887. He was assisted in this foul work by a man named Trotsky, who made bitter speeches against the Allies, and also by a gang of clever lawyers and dreamers who were lavishly supplied with German gold. They professed that they were anxious only for the happiness of the people, and to further this end they stirred up the peasants and workmen against the rich, and encouraged them to seize land and plunder the houses of the well-to-do. Before long the country was rent with civil strife, and was breaking up into separate republics.

Perhaps you wonder why sober, level-headed Russians did not unite to put down the Bolshevists. You must remember that most of the Russian peasants are terribly ignorant. Probably eight out of every ten cannot read or write, and as they have never known what freedom means, they have not learnt how to combine and work out their own salvation by lawful means. Then, too, we must not forget that they had suffered greatly during the war, and were eager for peace at any price. Further, the Bolshevists had gained control of the State money, and had raised a force of Red Guards composed of the old secret police, mutinous soldiers and sailors, rogues and vagabonds, and criminals of all sorts. These men, who were paid high wages and were given many privileges, set up a reign of terror, and ruthlessly put down every attempt to hand over the government to sane, law-abiding men.

In December the Bolshevists met German representatives at Brest-Litovsk, and there agreed to suspend the war for a period, during which they could discuss terms of peace. Some

of these blind, unreasoning men actually believed that if they talked to their enemies long enough and loud enough the Germans would rise against the Kaiser and bring about a revolution. One of the conditions of this agreement was that the Germans should not withdraw troops from the Russian front for service against the Allies until the armistice, or temporary peace, came to an end. The Germans promised, but they had already sent many divisions to the West, and despite their promise they continued to do so. You may judge of the depth of insane folly to which the Bolsheviks had sunk when you observe that they actually believed the Germans would be bound by their promises.

While the enemy was thus fooling the Bolsheviks to the top of their bent, the people of Finland, the Ukraine or Little Russia, Cossackland, Caucasia, and Siberia cut themselves adrift and set up home rule governments. German agents were probably responsible for the breaking away of Little Russia. You will understand why Germany wished Little Russia to become independent when I tell you that one-third of all the wheat in European Russia is grown in this part of the country. The Germans needed food badly, and they hoped by making a separate peace with the Ukraine to get this rich and fertile land in their own hands. The Romans in the days of old always set themselves to sow discord between the peoples of the countries which they coveted; then when they had brought about hatred and strife they slipped in and ruled. "Divide and rule" was their motto, and the Germans had now taken a leaf out of the Roman book.

In a later chapter you will learn how the Bolsheviks, having brought Russia to a state of awful confusion and bloodshed, were obliged to make peace on Germany's terms. Before the end of the year 1917 Russia had abandoned her Allies. The tower of strength on which we relied in the East had been brought to the ground in shapeless ruin by the treachery and folly and ignorance of those who inhabited it. Russia was to all intents and purposes out of the war. She no longer counted as a military power, and before the close of the year the guns and munitions with which we had supplied her were being used against us on the Western front.

* * * * *

Nor was this the only disaster which befell the Allies in the

course of the year. From May to August the Italians fought with great courage and every hope of success on the Isonzo front. In May they made considerable advances, and captured 23,000 Austrians, besides thirty-six guns. In August they bridged the Isonzo and carried parts of the Bainsizza plateau, 23,000 further prisoners and seventy-five additional guns being taken. When the bad weather of September suspended operations their prospects were excellent. The Central Powers now realized that unless the Italians were checked Trieste must fall.

A great surprise attack was planned. The break-up of the Russian armies had enabled the Germans to withdraw four divisions from the Eastern front. To these they added two divisions from France and four picked Austrian divisions, and thus formed a 14th Army under General von Below. This force, along with forty Austrian divisions, was detailed to fall suddenly upon the Italians and overwhelm them. It was hoped that the Venetian plain, with its glorious old cities and its richly-fertile fields, would be overrun, and that the disaster would so dishearten the Italians that they would sue for peace, and thus weaken the Allies by the loss of another member.

The Germans did not rely upon military force alone; they practised those dark, underground manœuvres which had been so successful in Russia. There is good reason to believe that the Italian troops holding the one good road from the mountains to the plains were corrupted, and played a foul and treacherous part. When the blow fell they offered no resistance; the line of the Second Italian Army was pierced, and the troops composing it were almost destroyed. Then the Third Army was forced to retreat or suffer the same fate.

A period of the gravest anxiety now set in. The Italian Third Army fell back upon the Tagliamento, but owing to the swollen state of the river, many of the troops were forced to surrender before they could cross it. The enemy pressed on remorselessly, and the line of the river had to be abandoned. An attempt was made to oppose the enemy along the river Livenza, but in vain, and the remnants of the defeated armies were forced to retreat again to the Piave, where at last they stood firm. Their losses had been enormous: 250,000 men and 2,300 guns had fallen into the hands of the Austro-Germans. The Allies had suffered a defeat unequalled in the whole history of the war.

At once the British and French strove with all their might to repair the disaster. Sir Douglas Haig began an offensive in Artois in order to relieve the pressure, and troops were sent to the help of the Italians who were struggling along the line of the river and amidst the mountains to hold back the enemy. Happily, the Italians rose superior to their defeat. All attempts to force the line of the Piave failed. Then the enemy took to the mountains, and strove to break through the last remaining barrier, and descend to the plains in the rear of the river. This effort also failed, and when the year came to a close the Italians, under a new commander, had recovered their confidence, and for the time being were safe.

* * * * *

While the Russian horizon was shrouded in gloom, a star of the brightest hope blazed in the Western sky. The great republic of the United States of America, goaded beyond endurance by the treachery and inhumanity of the Germans, determined to throw in its lot with the Allies. The unrestricted U-boat campaign which began in February was the last straw that broke the patient camel's back. The German war lords had persuaded themselves that the Americans were too spiritless to resent any treatment, however faithless or insulting, and by so doing they made the most grievous mistake in the long catalogue of their errors. They brought down upon themselves the wrath of a nation of ninety-two millions of people, renowned for activity and enterprise, and inhabiting a land of wondrous richness. All and more than all that the Germans had won in Russia by fraud and treachery they lost by the same fraud and treachery when they forced the United States to fling down the gage of battle.

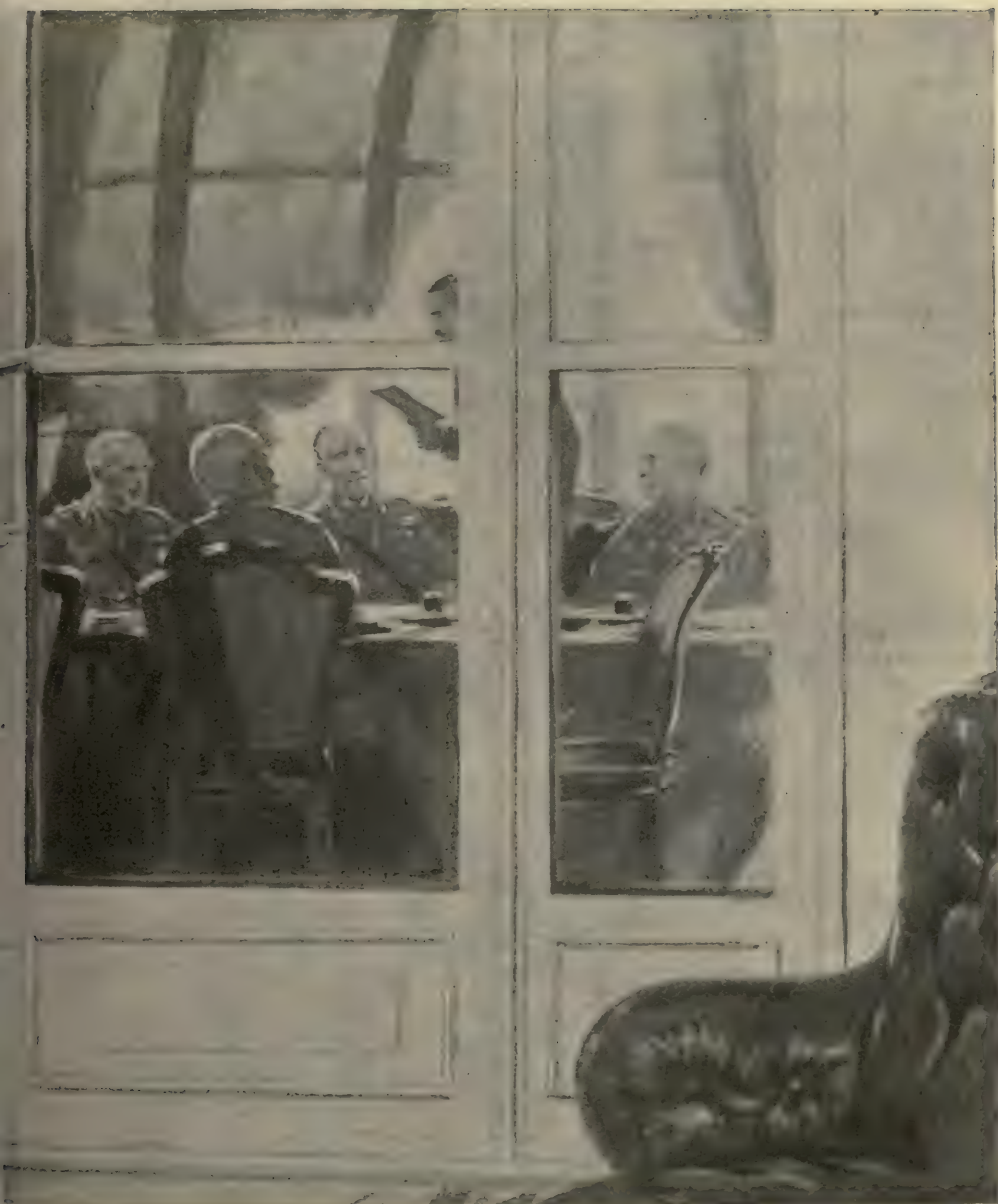
Though the Allies had gained that assistance which was to give them final victory, they knew that many months of peril and deep anxiety lay before them. The United States, with her vast resources, was three thousand miles across the Atlantic. Her man-power was vast, but her standing army was trifling in numbers; and though the Government set about the task of raising armed forces with astonishing vigour, it could give no immediate assistance to the Allies. Not only had the Americans to array and train their men and manufacture weapons of war and munitions in vast quantity, but they had to build the ships which would be required for carrying their troops across the



The Supreme War Council at Versailles :

(From the picture by S. Begg from a sketch made on the spot by

This picture shows a meeting of the Council as seen through the glass doors of the session chamber ceau (France); Baron Sonnino (back to spectator—Italy); Mr. Lloyd George and General Sir W. Robertson an interpreter (standing) and Sir Douglas Haig (Great Britain).



"One front, one army, one nation."

Lucien Jonas. By permission of The Illustrated London News.)

in the Trianon Palace at Versailles. The personages shown are—(left to right) M. Pichon and M. Clemenceau (Great Britain); General Cadorna (back to spectator—Italy); General Sir H. H. Wilson (Great Britain);

seas, and for supplying them with food and other necessities. Meanwhile the enemy's U-boats were destroying the vessels of both Allies and neutrals faster than new ships could be built. It was clear that not until the year 1919 could America be expected to pull her full weight.

Nevertheless the Americans soon had two million men under training. General Pershing, in command of the American Expeditionary Force, reached France in June, and month by month his troops in France increased. Before the end of the year American soldiers had received their baptism of fire. Meanwhile great progress had been made with the lines of communication which were to supply the American armies when they arrived in sufficient numbers to play a large part in the struggle. Less than one month after the declaration of war American cruisers and destroyers were operating in European waters.

Though the Americans could not render much immediate assistance to the Allies, they added great moral strength to our cause. We ourselves had entered the great struggle with the purest of motives. We declared war to help a little friend shamefully assailed in defiance of a sacred promise, to prevent France from being trampled under foot by a fierce and greedy foe, and to establish once and for all those principles of honour and honesty between states without which civilization cannot continue. But unselfish as were our motives, those of the United States were even more unselfish. She had no treaty ties with Belgium, and apparently had nothing to fear from a victorious Germany; though Mr. Gerard believed, even in January 1916, that Germany would "either attack America or land in South America, if successful in this war." The great majority of the American people, however, foresaw no such danger; and if they had done so, they felt sure that they could withstand it. They entered the war simply to support the cause of international righteousness. They could no longer permit murder on the high seas to go on unchecked, and they knew that the world would never be "safe for democracy" until those who trusted in the sword had been overcome by the sword. America's entrance into the quarrel was a testimony to all the world that the Allies were waging war lest the world should become a jungle of ravening beasts, "red in tooth and claw."

Though at the close of the year we British stood in dire

peril, we consoled ourselves with the knowledge that in the long course of our history we had been in even worse case, and had yet emerged victorious. During the great struggle with Napoleon, Britain saw her allies drop off one by one, until she alone was left to maintain the struggle against a conqueror who was master of almost all continental Europe. In the years 1796-1797 we had our backs to the wall. In December 1796 a French fleet with 16,000 troops on board anchored in Bantry Bay, and the Irish were eager to receive them. Six weeks later French troops actually landed in England with the object of burning Bristol. In the same month the Bank of England stopped payment. In April 1797 our fleets in the Channel and in the North Sea were in open mutiny, and throughout June the mutineers blockaded the mouth of the Thames. In May of the same year an Irish rebellion broke out, and in September a powerful French squadron sailed from Brest for the invasion of England.

“ Four times—that is, within less than two years—England was threatened with invasion ; thrice her own fleets broke out into open mutiny ; twice the flames of civil war were kindled. For seven years lean harvests had cursed the fields. And over this whole gloomy landscape of civil strife, revolting fleets, invading enemies, and Europe leagued to overthrow the national existence, brooded the black shadow of national bankruptcy. Where else does history show the spectacle of a nation threatened within a space so brief by perils so deadly and yet surviving them all ? ” *

Despite their anxieties and sufferings during the year 1917, the British people still remained staunch in their determination to carry on the war to a victorious conclusion. The voices that were raised for peace at any price were few, and were scarcely heeded. Though all the world yearned for the end of hostilities, neither in Britain nor in France was there any weakening of resolve. The Allies knew that the war had become a trial of endurance, and that if they could hold on until America was ready to fling her millions into the fray, victory was bound to be their reward.

* * * * *

There were many in January 1917 who prophesied that

* From *How England saved Europe*, by W. H. Fitchett, vol. i., p. 146.

before the year ended the Germans would be defeated, and, sooth to say, they seemed to have good grounds for their belief. Though Rumania had been overrun in the previous autumn and the Russians had failed to make headway, the armies of the Central Powers had been everywhere beaten or checked. At Verdun and on the Somme, in Galicia and on the Isonzo, the Austro-Germans had suffered heavy losses, with no corresponding gain. General Maude had begun his victorious campaign in Mesopotamia, and our troops were invading Palestine. The spirit of the Allies was admirable. As fighting men, both British and French soldiers knew themselves to be superior to either German, Austrian, Bulgar, or Turk. Russia was recovering from her set-back, and seemed to be ready to repeat her Galician victories. The wish was not father to the thought when many prophesied that "the sky was already glowing with the promise of victory."

From the beginning of the campaigning season right down to the last day of November, the Anglo-French forces in the West held the upper hand. An offensive on a large scale had been planned for the early months of the year; but the removal of General Joffre from the chief command of the French armies and the appointment of General Nivelle, the hero of Verdun, entailed a number of changes which were largely responsible for our lack of full success. In February, and more especially in March, the Germans, as a result of the Battle of the Somme, were forced to withdraw their front in the West. This withdrawal, though it upset many of our preparations for the next attack, did not much alter our plan of campaign. The first step in this campaign was the capture of Vimy Ridge, and this was accomplished by our First and Third Armies, under Generals Horne and Allenby, in the early morning of 3rd April. Some 20,000 prisoners were captured, along with 257 guns and over 700 trench mortars and machine guns. The attack had been most carefully planned, and was brilliantly carried out.

Then came the turn of the French to strike. Nivelle flung his troops against the enemy trenches on the Aisne and in Champagne, and carried the first line from Soissons to Craonne, as well as parts of the second line. He was also successful at Moronvillers. But his success was dearly won, and it was clear that France, with her dwindling resources of men, could

not afford the price of such victories. Though 20,780 prisoners and 175 guns had been captured by the French up to 29th April, the results were not equal to the sacrifices involved, and a fresh change in the command took place. General Nivelle gave way to General Pétain. As the situation of the French north of the Aisne was still unsatisfactory, Sir Douglas Haig was forced to continue his Arras offensive, which he had hoped to break off in order to launch a big and early attack against the Germans in front of Ypres.

On 23rd April, Allenby, assisted by a corps on the right of the First Army, led his Third Army forward in the Arras region. The Germans had, however, mustered their reserves, and one of the hardest day's fighting in the whole course of the war took place. Our artillery caused the enemy enormous losses, but we made little headway. The attack continued until 3rd May, when we pushed into a large section of the Hindenburg Line. Again the enemy thrust his reserves into the breach, and the offensive came to an end without much advantage to either side.

The Ypres offensive, which continued from June 7th to October 10th and gave us all the high ground from Messines to Passchendaele, is still fresh in your memory, and so is the story of gain and loss before Cambrai in the closing days of the year. You have not forgotten, I am sure, the French offensive of the autumn. You will remember that in the Malmaison region on 23rd October, at 5.15 in the morning, the French scored a brilliant success. By the 25th they had captured 11,000 prisoners and 120 guns, and had hit the enemy so hard that a few days later he retreated from the whole position on a front of twelve miles. The capture of Vimy Ridge on 9th April, of Whitesheet Ridge on 7th June, of the positions in front of Verdun on 20th August, and of the Malmaison quarries and strongholds on 23rd October, were the red-letter days of the Allies in the West during the year.

* * * * *

Our most brilliant successes, however, were attained on Asiatic battlefields. In Mesopotamia Sir Stanley Maude completely restored the prestige which we had lost by our surrender at Kut and by our failures to pierce the Turkish defences. In January and February he drove the Turks before him, and on 11th March entered Bagdad, where he established himself

firmly, and struck heavily at the Turkish columns to the north. Then when the season for campaigning again came round he brilliantly defeated, surrounded, and received the surrender of a Turkish force at Ramadie. Without delay he then turned upon the enemy on the Tigris, and on 5th November drove him out of very strong positions. This was the gallant general's last fight. The story of how he was stricken down by cholera and died at the very height of his fame was well told by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons on March 4, 1918:—

“ He died a victim to the inbred courtesy of his fine character. I heard a story from a member of his staff the other day. Sir Stanley Maude visited a plague-stricken area at the invitation of its inhabitants. They were anxious to extend to him a welcome for the many kindnesses which he had displayed. They gave him a great one, and they offered him a small act of hospitality. Though he so well knew the peril that he had actually forbidden any soldier in his escort to eat or drink while on that visit, he himself ran the risk rather than disappoint the people who were anxious to give him a welcome. There was cholera in the cup, and he died within a few days.

“ Sir Stanley Maude will always be remembered as one of the great figures of this war, not merely for what he achieved, but for what he was. I know not what destiny may have in store for the fabled land which he has conquered, but of two things I am certain. The first is, that the whole course of its history will be changed for the better as the result of the victory and the rule of Sir Stanley Maude; and the second is, that his name will always be cherished by the inhabitants of that land as that of the gentlest conqueror who ever entered the gates of Bagdad.”

No less successful were the operations of Sir Edmund Allenby in Palestine. He assumed the command in June after two failures to capture Gaza, and five months later brought about a remarkable change in the condition of affairs. While holding the Turks in front of Gaza, he struck at Beersheba, and by capturing it turned the flank of the former town. After a stiff fight Gaza was abandoned, and the Turks retired to the north. They were vigorously followed up, and did not rally until they were twelve miles north of Ascalon. On 13th November they were driven from this position, and six days later our advance guard was only fifteen miles from Jerusalem. On 9th December the Holy City surrendered, and on the 11th the British commander made his formal entry. No event in all the year gave such satisfaction to the British people.

Before I conclude this brief summing up of the year 1917 I must refer to one of the more important results of the Italian



A National Day of Prayer: reading the King's Proclamation in Westminster Abbey.

(By permission of The Illustrated London News.)

"The victory will be gained only if we . . . ask the blessing of Almighty God."

disaster. On 12th November the Prime Minister made a "disagreeable" speech in Paris. It was so unlike the cheering and hopeful messages which he usually delivered that it startled the nation, as it was intended to do. The speech was made immediately after France, Italy, and Great Britain had decided to set up a Supreme Council which should ensure the working together according to one plan of all the armies on the Western front. The Prime Minister pointed out that though the Allies had command of the seas, more men, material, money, and resources than the Central Powers, they had failed to go far along the road to victory. The fault did not lie with the armies. The failure was due to the fact that they did not fight together as parts of one great whole.

Because there was no unity of plan and operation the Allies had suffered gravely. In 1915 Serbia had been overcome, and the gate to the East, with its corn, cattle, and minerals, had been unlocked. While this was happening, France and England were busy in other parts of the world, Italy had her mind on the Carso, and Russia had a thousand-mile frontier to defend. The Allies were waging four wars instead of one. Because it was no one's business in particular to guard the gates of the Balkans, the enemy had gained a great advantage. It was true that we sent forces to Salonika to rescue Serbia, but they were "too late." When Rumania in 1916 was assailed in the same fashion, there was again no authority to prepare beforehand those measures which might have saved her. The same was true when Russia collapsed.

We must, said the Prime Minister, have "unity—not sham unity, but real unity." The French Premier drove home this truth in the following striking sentence: "One front, one army, one nation—that is the programme of the future victory."

The Supreme Council, which was announced in the speeches to which I have referred, was not at first given powers to act promptly. In February 1918 full powers were given to it, and thereafter the Allies were enabled to work together as a team bent on victory. Unhappily, the arrangements which were made for this purpose led to the resignation of Sir William Robertson, who had been Chief of our Staff, and the directing brain of the British armies for two years.

CHAPTER II.

VALOROUS DEEDS AND VICTORIA CROSSES.—I.

JANUARY and February 1918 brought the usual winter's lull in the fighting on the Western front. You must not suppose, however, that calm settled down on the battle-fields. Each side made constant raids in order to feel the strength of the other, and to obtain information. The guns were rarely silent, though there was none of that intense firing which heralds the opening of a big offensive. Leave was granted to large numbers of our men, and many gallant fellows sat once more at their own firesides, thrilling their relatives with the story of fierce combats and hairbreadth escapes. We at home were chiefly interested in the problems of how to secure a fresh supply of men for our armies, how to deal with the shortage of food, and how to overcome the submarine menace, not only by waging incessant war upon the "jackals of the sea," but by building ships in the shortest possible time to make up for those which had been and were being sunk.

A painful interest centred in the peace talk that was going on at Brest-Litovsk, where the Bolshevist leaders were opposing words to the German sword. Russia was in chaos, and it was clear that before the end of many weeks she would be forced to accept the Kaiser's terms. History was about to repeat itself. When we were fighting Napoleon in 1807 Russia, our ally, withdrew from the struggle, and left us almost single-handed to continue the war against the "scourge of Europe." What she had done in 1807 she had again done in 1917.

When Russia committed suicide as a nation, all the world knew that hard times were in store for the Allies. Now that the Kaiser had little or nothing to fear on his Eastern front, he was free to mass the bulk of his forces against the British

and French in the West, and make one last desperate effort to overwhelm them. When and where will Germany strike? This was the question which was anxiously discussed by Britons and Frenchmen during the first two months of the year. On 20th March the great blow fell, with what result we shall learn in later chapters.

Echoes of the fierce strife which had raged during the latter half of the year 1917 reached us from time to time when we read in our newspapers the accounts of those thrice-gallant men who had been awarded the cross of valour for deeds of the highest heroism. Thirty-three Victoria Crosses were awarded during January and February, and I now propose to give you some account of each of the recipients. Our Canadian readers will rejoice to notice that no fewer than eight of this gallant company were soldiers of the Dominion. It will interest you to try to discover from the narratives when and where each particular act of heroism was performed. The first name on my list is that of

MAJOR (ACTING LIEUTENANT-COLONEL) JOHN SHERWOOD-KELLY, C.M.G., D.S.O., Norfolk Regiment, commanding a battalion of Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.

Colonel Sherwood-Kelly's battalion was ordered to cross a certain canal. A party of men of another unit was detailed to cover the battalion while the crossing was being made. This party was held up on the near side of the canal by heavy rifle fire directed against the bridge. Colonel Sherwood-Kelly at once ordered his men to open rapid fire on the enemy, while at the head of the leading company he advanced across the bridge and took up a position on the other side. He then went forward, despite the fire of rifles and machine guns, to spy out the high ground held by the enemy. Meanwhile the remainder of the battalion had crossed, and all was ready for the advance. In the course of it the left flank of the battalion was held up by a thick belt of wire. At once the colonel crossed to that flank, and with a Lewis gun team forced his way through the obstacle, and got his weapon into position on the other side. In this way he was able to keep down the fire of the enemy, and enable his battalion to push through the wire and capture the enemy's trench. Later in the day the advance was checked by heavy fire from Germans sheltering in a number of pits. The colonel rapidly organized a party, and led it for-



Brothers in Arms.

(By permission of The Illustrated London News.)

A true spirit of comradeship sprang up during the war between British and French troops. The above picture shows a British Tommy and a French *Poilu* drinking a health and toasting the Allied cause.

ward against the pits, with such success that he killed large numbers of the enemy, and captured five machine guns and forty-six prisoners. The great gallantry shown by this splendid officer inspired his men to heroic deeds. It does not need a Horace to tell us that "a good leader makes a good soldier."

CAPTAIN (ACTING MAJOR) GEORGE RANDOLPH PEARKE, M.C., Canadian Mounted Rifles.

Just before an advance Major Pearkes was wounded in the left thigh. Instead of giving up his command, he persisted in leading his men forward, and in doing so showed the utmost gallantry. At one stage in the attack his further advance was threatened by a strong point which the battalion on his left was vainly endeavouring to capture. He at once went to the rescue, and seized and held the point, thus enabling his own advance to be pushed forward. When all the objectives allotted to him were taken he saw that it was possible to capture a position still farther ahead. In this advanced post he made a remarkable defence against repeated enemy attacks. He had but few men with him, and both his flanks were unprotected. Though Germans swarmed around him he managed to hold out and to send back such valuable reports that his commanding officer was finally enabled to push forward. He showed, says the official account, "a supreme contempt for danger, and wonderful powers of control and leading."

CAPTAIN JOHN FOX RUSSELL, M.C., R.A.M.C., attached to the Royal Welsh Fusiliers.

This gallant doctor repeatedly went out into the open to attend wounded men, despite the murderous fire of snipers and machine guns. In many cases he carried in the stricken men, and continued in this good work until he was almost exhausted. Even then he did not desist, and while succouring a comrade was killed. I have frequently in these pages spoken of the glorious devotion of our army doctors. Captain Russell was worthy to rank with the noblest and most gallant of his fellows. His was

"High sacrifice, and labour without pause
Even to the death."

LIEUTENANT (TEMPORARY CAPTAIN) ROBERT GEE, M.C., Royal Fusiliers.

A strong enemy attack had pierced our line. The brigade

headquarters and ammunition dumps in a certain village had been captured. During this attack Captain Gee had been taken prisoner. Watching his opportunity, he killed his captor with the spiked stick which he carried, and succeeded in escaping. He then organized a party of orderlies, cooks, telephone men, and other persons attached to the brigade staff, and led them forward with such fierceness that he drove the enemy back and cleared the village. Two companies of infantry now came up in support. With their assistance he established a defensive flank on the outskirts of the village. His position, however, was commanded by an enemy machine gun. Carrying a revolver in each hand, and with only one companion, he rushed and captured the gun after killing eight of the crew. During this exploit he was wounded; but he refused to have the wound dressed until he was satisfied that the post was strong enough to hold out.

LIEUTENANT (ACTING CAPTAIN) CHRISTOPHER PATRICK JOHN O'KELLY, M.C., Canadian Infantry.

This gallant Canadian showed extraordinary skill, daring, and courage at a time when the fortune of war seemed to have deserted us. Our attack had failed, and two companies of the Canadian Infantry were called upon to make another attempt. Captain O'Kelly, who was in command of one of the companies, did not wait for the protection of an artillery barrage, but, calling on his men, advanced at their head through heavy fire against the crest of a hill a thousand yards away. In the most fearless fashion the crest was stormed, and then the daring captain led a series of attacks against the "pill-boxes" behind. His company alone captured six of these little forts, and took 100 prisoners and ten machine guns. Later on in the afternoon the enemy made a strong counter-attack. Wearied as the Canadians were, they nevertheless drove off the enemy and captured more prisoners. During the night an enemy officer and ten men with a machine gun made a raid upon them. The raiders were raided, and next day found a resting-place in our prisoners' cage. The official account tells us that those dashing exploits were chiefly due to the "magnificent courage, daring, and ability" of Captain O'Kelly.

SECOND-LIEUTENANT (TEMPORARY LIEUTENANT-COLONEL) PHILIP ERIC BENT, D.S.O., Leicester Regiment.

Intense gun-fire and a desperate attack by the enemy had

forced back the right of Colonel Bent's command, and had compelled the battalion on his right to retire. There was great confusion in our ranks, and everything pointed to disaster. It was at this critical time that Colonel Bent, by his great coolness and promptness, saved the situation. With a platoon that was in reserve, and reinforced by straggling men collected from other companies, together with odds and ends from the staffs of the regiments concerned, he organized a force, and after giving orders to his officers for the defence of the line, led his motley array forward in a counter-attack. "Come on, the Tigers!" he cried, and his men responded with such spirit that the enemy was checked, and an important part of the line was held. Unhappily he was killed while leading the charge.

SECOND-LIEUTENANT (ACTING CAPTAIN) ARTHUR MOORE LASCELLES, Durham Light Infantry.

Captain Lascelles was in command of a company holding a very exposed position. The enemy bombarded his post very heavily, and during the shelling the captain was wounded. Knowing that the German infantry would follow up the bombardment with an attack, he refused to allow his wound to be dressed, but remained with his men, encouraging them by word and example to strengthen the position. Shortly afterwards the Germans came on in large numbers, but were driven off. Again they made an assault, and this time they captured the trench and took several of our men prisoners. With the twelve survivors of his company, Captain Lascelles retired to another trench some distance in the rear. Seizing the opportunity, he sprang upon the parapet, called upon his dozen followers, and at their head rushed across the intervening space under very heavy machine-gun fire, and drove over sixty of the enemy back. Once more in his old position, he made preparations for resisting the next attack. When it came his little party was overwhelmed, the trench was again captured, and Captain Lascelles with it. Later on he escaped. The official account thus concludes: "The remarkable determination and gallantry of this officer in the course of operations, during which he received two further wounds, afforded an inspiring example to all."

SERGEANT JOHN M'AULAY, D.C.M., Scots Guards.

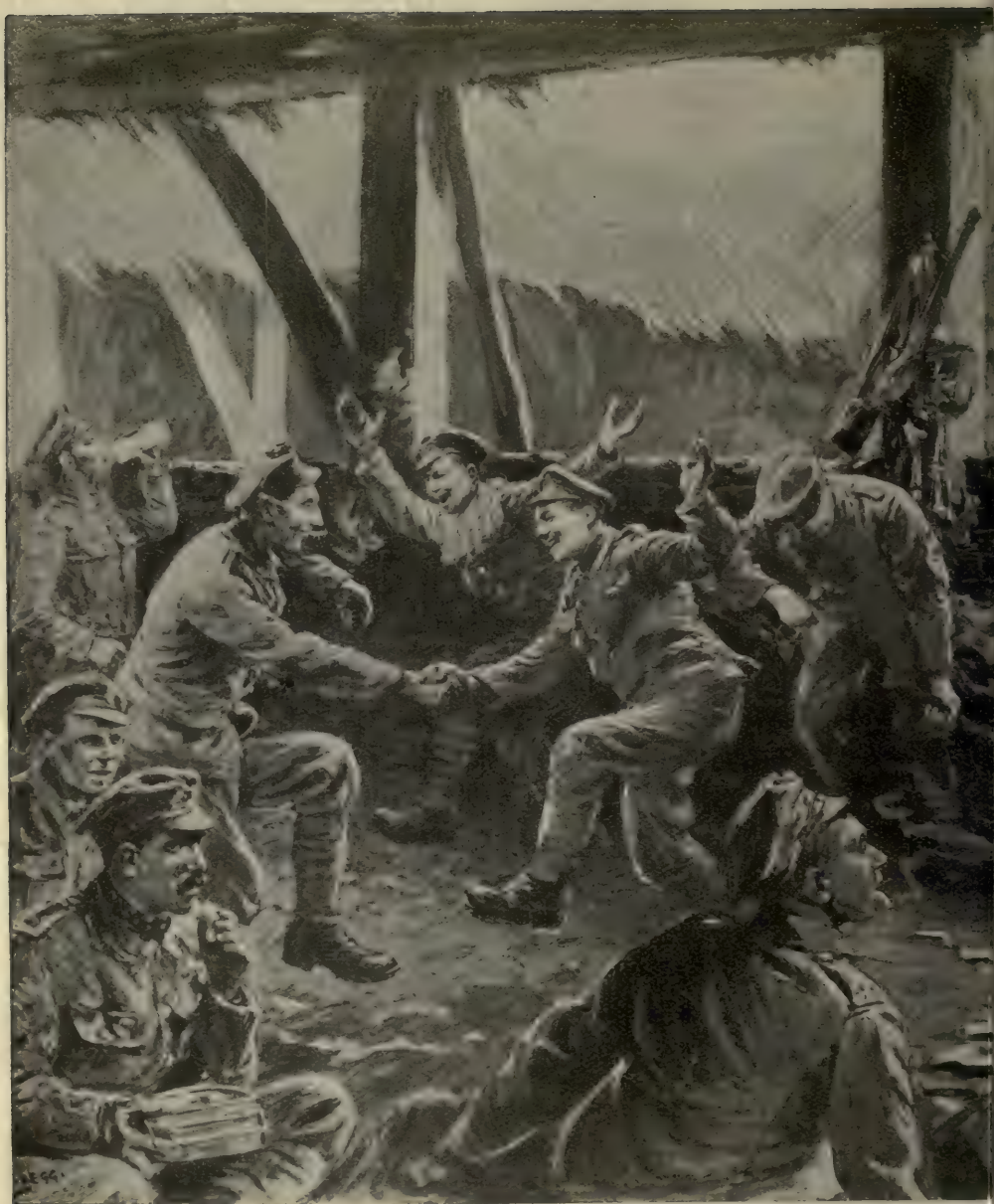
Sergeant M'Aulay, a native of Kinghorn, Fifeshire, was a

Glasgow policeman prior to enlisting in the Scots Guards in September 1914. He speedily proved himself a good soldier, and in September 1917 was awarded the D.C.M. for clearing out two strongly held dug-outs, and bringing down several snipers. On four separate occasions he was recommended for the Victoria Cross. The exploit which gave him the coveted honour is thus described. During an attack, when all his officers had fallen, he took command of his company, and by his dashing and cheerful bearing not only led his men to their objective, but encouraged them to hold it when won. Noticing that the enemy was about to deliver a counter-attack on his exposed left flank, he and two men went out with machine guns, which they plied so vigorously that the enemy was beaten off with heavy casualties. Not only was he the life and soul of the defence, but he carried his company officer, who was mortally wounded, through very heavy fire to a place of safety. Twice during this journey he was knocked down by the air-blast from a bursting shell, and once the heel of one of his boots was blown off, but, nothing daunted, he pressed on. Two of the enemy tried to capture him, but he killed them both.

Sergeant M'Aulay's daring, skill, and coolness were the admiration of his comrades. One of his officers, writing to congratulate him on winning the Victoria Cross, said, "You ought to have got it ages ago." Lady Kinnaird of Rossie Priory, whose dying son he carried into safety, wrote to him as follows: "I cannot tell you how grateful I am to you when I think of your carrying him out of danger, never thinking of your own danger. It would have been so dreadful had he been left, perhaps to suffer more in loneliness. I love to think of the kiss he gave you, and the dear message he sent to me through you."

SERGEANT GEORGE HARRY MULLIN, M.M., Canadian Infantry.

Sergeant Mullin was a "pill-box" hero. One of these concreted forts which stood in a commanding position had withstood a heavy bombardment, and the machine guns of its garrison were taking a heavy toll of our men. The line could not go forward until it was captured. Sergeant Mullin determined to do the deed single-handed. He rushed a sniper's post in front of the "pill-box," and from it flung bombs into the building. He killed some of the garrison in this way.



A "Sing-song" on the British Front

(From the picture by S. Begg. By

The soldier's life is one of sudden changes, from grave to gay and from gay to grave. Though he is picture above shows a company amusing itself during a brief respite from the enemy's attacks. The Other men are cleaning their rifles, snatching a hasty meal, reading newspapers, or patching their clothes. Suddenly the "Sing-song" is interrupted by the appearance of a sergeant (seen on the right background), occupations, snatch up their rifles, proceed to man the trench, and, let us hope, beat off an enemy assault.



interrupted by a Call to Arms.

(permission of The Illustrated London News.)

almost constantly in the presence of death, no man knows better how to enjoy his hours of leisure. The gramophone is going, and a group on the left is dancing and singing in the jolliest fashion possible. The man on the right foreground is writing a letter home by the light of a candle stuck on a steel helmet. who shouts, "Get ready to fall-in in ten minutes! Battle order!" At once the men leave their varied

Then crawling on to the top of the "pill-box," he discovered an opening through which he fired his revolver, and thus made an end of the two machine gunners. Scrambling down with all speed, he rushed to the entrance and compelled the survivors of the garrison, ten in all, to surrender. This daring deed was witnessed by many of his comrades, who marvelled at his escape. Enemy snipers constantly made him a mark, and his clothes were riddled with bullets. Nothing could daunt him, and his fearless gallantry not only enabled the line to advance, but saved many lives. Canada should be proud of Sergeant Mullin.

SERGEANT CHARLES EDWARD SPACKMAN, Border Regiment.

Sergeant Spackman, who hailed from Fulham, London, was going forward with his company when it was held up by the heavy fire of a machine gun so placed that it swept the bare, coverless ground in front. He saw at once that the advance could not continue until the gun was knocked out. Prepared to sacrifice himself in order to ensure the success of the attack, he crawled forward in full sight of the enemy gunners, and, escaping death by a miracle, succeeded in killing all but one of the crew. He then rushed the gun, and captured it single-handed. "The behaviour of this non-commissioned officer was gallant in the extreme, and he set a fine example of courage and devotion to his men."

LANCE-CORPORAL ROBERT M'BEATH, Seaforth Highlanders.

This gallant Highlander, whose home was at Kinlochbervie, Sutherlandshire, nobly maintained the heroic traditions of those who wear "the garb of old Gaul." When his company was approaching its final objective, a nest of enemy machine guns in the western outskirts of a village opened fire. Our progress was checked, and many of our men fell. It was impossible to continue the advance until these machine guns were silenced. A volunteer was called for to go forward with a Lewis gun and shoot down the crews. Lance-Corporal M'Beath at once answered the call. Buckling on his revolver and shouldering his Lewis gun, he moved off on his stalking expedition. He soon discovered the position of one of the machine guns, and working his way towards it, drew so near that he was able to shoot the gunner with his revolver.

Several other hostile machine guns were still in action, so a Tank was brought up to deal with them. The Tank drove

the gunners into a deep dug-out. Then Lance-Corporal M'Beath again appeared on the scene. Utterly regardless of danger, he rushed into the dug-out, shot a man who tried to bar his way on the steps, and drove out and captured the remainder of the garrison—three officers and thirty men. The dug-out was in the middle of a nest of machine guns; no fewer than five of these weapons were mounted round it. By putting them out of action the gallant lance-corporal cleared a way for the advance of his comrades. "His conduct throughout three days of severe fighting was beyond praise."

PRIVATE GEORGE WILLIAM CLARE, Lancers.

A devoted stretcher-bearer now figures in our record. During a most intense and continuous bombardment Private Clare dressed the wounds of many men, and conducted them over the open to the dressing-station about 500 yards away. At one period, when every man had fallen in a detached post about 150 yards to the left of our line, Private Clare made his way to this position across open ground swept by rifle and machine-gun fire. He reached the post safely, dressed the wounds of the surviving men, and then took up a rifle to hold the position until relief arrived. He afterwards carried a seriously wounded man through the fire zone to a place of shelter, and later on succeeded in getting him to the dressing-station.

Here he learnt that the enemy was firing gas shells into the valley below. As the wind was blowing the gas towards our line of trenches and shell-holes, he knew that before long many of our men would be taken unawares, and would suffer seriously. At once he started off, and went from post to post and from shell-hole to shell-hole, warning the men of the approaching gas. All the time he was under shell and rifle fire. He crowned his devotion by the supreme sacrifice, for later on he was killed by a shell.

CORPORAL COLIN BARRON, Canadian Infantry.

Three machine guns held up Corporal Barron's unit during an attack. He set out to stalk them, and reaching a position on the flank, opened fire at point-blank range. Then, all alone, he rushed the guns, killed four of the crew, and captured the survivors. Not content with silencing the guns, he turned one of them on the retreating enemy, and brought down many of them. Thus by his dash and determination he enabled the advance to proceed, and good results to be obtained.

PRIVATE THOMAS WILLIAM HOLMES, Canadian Mounted Rifles.

Private Holmes's exploit resembled that of Sergeant Mullin. The right flank of our attack was held up by heavy rifle and machine-gun fire from a "pill-box." So many of our men fell that the situation became very grave. At this moment, without waiting for orders, Private Holmes ran forward and hurled bombs at the crews of two of the guns. Then returning to his comrades, he secured another bomb, and, dashing forward through the heavy fire, succeeded in throwing it into the entrance to the "pill-box." The result was that nineteen of the occupants surrendered. "By this act of valour at a very critical moment, Private Holmes cleared the way for the advance of our troops and saved the lives of many of his comrades."

PRIVATE CECIL JOHN KINROSS, Canadian Infantry.

An almost similar deed won Private Kinross the premier award of valour. Shortly after an attack was launched, his company was assailed by fierce artillery fire and by streams of bullets from an enemy machine gun. Private Kinross, after carefully examining the situation, took off his knapsack and the rest of his equipment except his bandoleer, and picking up his rifle, rushed across the open ground in broad daylight and in full view of the enemy. He charged the machine gun, killed the crew of six, and then seized and destroyed the weapon. His superb courage inspired his comrades to emulate his example, and they pushed forward 300 yards and seized a highly important position. Throughout the day he showed wonderful coolness and courage, and fought with extraordinary determination against heavy odds until he fell seriously wounded.

PRIVATE HENRY JAMES NICHOLAS, New Zealand Infantry.

Private Nicholas was one of a Lewis gun section which had been ordered to form a defensive flank on the right of an advance. Heavy machine-gun and rifle fire from an enemy strong point checked our men, and no further progress could be made. Grasping the situation, Private Nicholas rushed ahead of his section, shot the officer in command of the strong point, and with bomb and bayonet overcame the garrison, which numbered sixteen. Four unwounded prisoners surrendered to him, and he seized a machine gun. He captured the strong point single-handed. Later on, when the objective

had been reached, he went to and fro under the heaviest fire, collecting ammunition for the defence of the position. His remarkable valour and coolness greatly inspired his fellows.

PRIVATE JAMES PETER ROBERTSON, Canadian Infantry.

Worthy in every respect to rank with Pearkes, O'Kelly, Mullin, Barron, and Holmes was Private Robertson, who, when his platoon was held up by uncut wire and an enemy machine gun was causing many casualties, took upon himself the task of clearing away the obstacle. Finding an opening on the flank, he dashed through it, rushed the machine gun, and engaged in a desperate struggle with the crew. Having killed four of the gunners, he turned the weapon on the remainder, who were running towards their own lines, and shot down many of them. His platoon was now able to advance, and, carrying his machine gun, he led his comrades to the final objective, where he selected an excellent position, and opened fire on the enemy with great effect. While his comrades were putting the captured position into a condition of defence he plied his gun so skilfully that the fire of enemy snipers was kept down. All the time his courage and coolness cheered his comrades, and inspired them with confidence. Later on he saw two of our snipers lying in front of the trench badly wounded. In the face of a very severe fire he went out and brought one of them into safety. While returning with the second man this most gallant Canadian was killed.

LANCE-DAFADAR GOBIND SINGH, Indian Cavalry.

Up to the end of February 1918 nine Victoria Crosses had been awarded to Indians, two of them to the members of the Rathor clan of Rajputs, the chief of which is the Maharaja of Jodhpur, Rajputana. The Rajputs are found not only in Rajputana but all over the north of India, where they form the fighting, landowning, and ruling caste. They are fine, brave men, and are exceedingly proud of their descent. No race in India can boast of finer feats of arms or brighter deeds of chivalry, and they supply some of the best material to our Indian army.

Lance-Dafadar Gobind Singh, the second Rajput to win the Victoria Cross, began his career in the Jodhpur Lancers, but was subsequently transferred to the 28th Cavalry, with whom he was serving when he performed the heroic deed which I am about to describe. During the Cambrai battle his

squadron found itself completely cut off ; it was encircled by the enemy on three sides and by the Scheldt Canal on the fourth. The men dug in, and determined to sell their lives dearly. The officer in command called for a volunteer to carry a dispatch to headquarters. It was clear that the volunteer would have to take his life in his hand, for he would be obliged to brave the enemy's fire over a distance of a mile and a half.

A trooper offered himself and was accepted. Mounting his horse, he dashed off on his perilous mission. He had not gone far before German bullets struck down both him and his horse. Immediately another Indian rode out on the same errand. He, too, fell, as did several others who ventured forth. Then Gobind Singh sought his commander, and begged to be allowed to try his luck. Bestriding his charger, he galloped off at full speed, but before long machine-gun bullets were whizzing around him. They riddled the body of his horse, and actually described a curve the shape of his leg on either side of the animal. The horse fell under him, but the brave Rathor escaped unhurt, and completed the remaining 600 yards of his journey on foot.

He delivered his message and received the reply, which had to be carried back to the trench across a mile and a half of ground raked by German bullets. Nothing daunted, the gallant Dafadar secured another horse and sallied forth on his return journey. Almost immediately he was greeted by heavy machine-gun fire, and only half the distance was covered when his horse fell beneath him. Again he picked himself up, and, taking to his heels, ran for dear life, followed by German bullets, which spattered around him. A few minutes later he jumped into his own trench quite unharmed, and delivered his message.

The dispatch which he carried needed a reply, and the fearless bearer of it once more volunteered to ride through the Valley of the Shadow. He was given permission to choose any horse in the squadron ; and having made his choice, he bade farewell to his comrades, and with their fervent good wishes once more plunged into the death-zone. This time the machine guns were silent ; no bullet came from the German trench. Not till half his journey was over did he discover that they had another method of stopping him. The German



British Soldiers engaged in camouflaging a French Road.

(From the picture by D. Macpherson. By permission of The Sphere.)

To hide the movements of troops, supply lorries, guns, etc., from the prying eyes of enemy airmen, much-used roads are concealed by using overhead screens made of roughly woven material or light matting. This picture shows soldiers at work concealing a road passing through a village. The French roads are white, and unless camouflaged in this manner show up clearly amidst the green fields or brown muddy wastes across which the battle has raged.

guns suddenly began to thunder, and the Dafadar saw before him a wall of bursting shells. A British gunner sheltering in a shell-hole shouted to him to halt, for any attempt to ride through the barrage meant certain death. Gobind Singh replied that he had no fear, and forthwith charged the wall of fire.

He had not gone many yards before a shell fell upon his horse, blowing its hindquarters to atoms, and flinging him heavily to earth.

Happily he was not stunned, but when he picked himself up and discovered that he was covered with blood he made sure that he was mortally wounded. Nothing mattered now if only he could reach his goal and deliver his reply. Convinced that he could not run, he slowly walked on over the two hundred yards or so that still lay between him and safety. Though the Germans still fired at him, he was not hit, and he arrived at headquarters without any further adventure.

Having delivered his dispatch to the general, he sought the nearest doctor, who examined him carefully, only to find that he had not suffered even a scratch. His spirit was as high as ever, and he was quite ready to push into the jaws of death once more. He asked if there was another message to be sent, and declared himself quite willing to take it. Fortunately it was not necessary to risk the gallant man's life a fourth time.

It only remains to add that soon afterwards our troops dislodged the Germans and rescued the surrounded cavalry.

After receiving the Victoria Cross from the hands of the King, the gallant Dafadar attended a reception given by the National Indian Association, and was presented with an address, a piece of plate, and a gold watch. That grand old Indian soldier, Sir O'Moore Creagh, and the Maharaja Sir Pertab Singh, the clan chief, greeted the hero with words of high praise. Sir O'Moore Creagh reminded the company that since the dawn of history Rajputs had shown themselves ever ready to sacrifice their lives for the honour of their king and country.

CHAPTER III.

VALOROUS DEEDS AND VICTORIA CROSSES.—II.

CAPTAIN (TEMPORARY LIEUTENANT-COLONEL) NEVILLE BOWES ELLIOTT-COOPER, D.S.O., M.C., Royal Fusiliers.

News was brought to Colonel Elliott-Cooper that the enemy had broken through our outpost line. Immediately he rushed out of his dug-out, and as he did so saw the Germans advancing across the open. Calling upon the reserve company and every man in the neighbourhood to follow him, he mounted the parapet and made straight for the enemy. His splendid audacity saved the situation. He and his followers fell fiercely upon the attackers, and forced them back some six hundred yards. Then, while still far in advance of his men, he was severely wounded. Realizing that the Germans greatly outnumbered his little company, and that his men would suffer terribly if they advanced any farther, he signalled to them to withdraw, regardless of the fact that when they retired he would be taken prisoner. Though he himself had fallen into the hands of the enemy, his prompt and gallant leading had gained time for our reserves to move up and strengthen the line of defence.

LIEUTENANT HUGH MACKENZIE, D.C.M., Canadian Machine Gun Corps.

Lieutenant Mackenzie, who was born in Inverness, and subsequently resided in Dundee, where he won repute as a wrestler, migrated to Canada some years before the war, and when the call came enlisted in the Canadian Infantry. During an attack, he was in charge of a section of four machine guns which accompanied the infantry. Before long the advance was held up by a nest of enemy machine guns, which from a commanding position on high ground shot down many of our men, all the officers, and most of the non-commissioned officers.

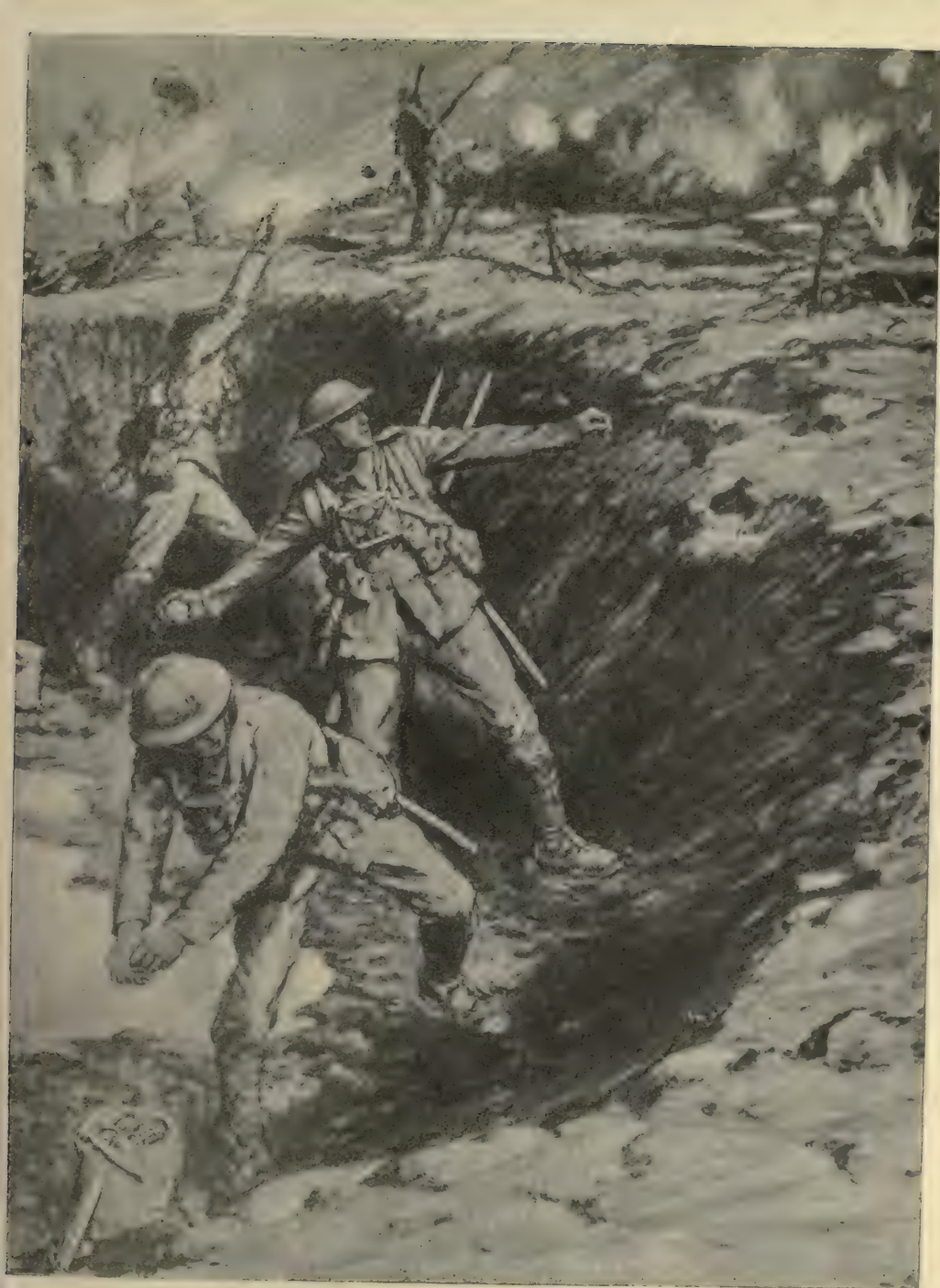
Handing over the command of his machine guns to an N.C.O., he took charge of the infantry, rallied them, formed them up for an attack, and captured the strong point. His position, however, was by no means comfortable. Gun-fire from a neighbouring "pill-box" beat down upon it, and unless the little fort could be reduced, retirement would be necessary. Lieutenant Mackenzie thereupon went out into the open and examined the situation. Then he organized two parties, one to attack in front and the other in flank. Unhappily, while leading the frontal attack he was killed. "By his valour and leadership this gallant officer ensured the capture of two strong points, and so saved the lives of many men, and enabled the objectives to be taken."

LIEUTENANT (ACTING CAPTAIN) GEORGE HENRY TATHAM PATON, M.C., Grenadier Guards.

Captain Paton was the son of Mr. G. W. Paton, managing director of Bryant and May and chairman of the Match Control Board. His mother was a native of Edinburgh, and her son was born in Argyllshire. While occupying a village, a unit on his left was driven back, leaving his flank in the air. Though his company was practically surrounded, he walked up and down his line under a withering fire from the enemy, only fifty yards away, and directed his men in making new defences. Several times he carried in wounded, and was the last to leave the village when it could no longer be held. Again he re-adjusted his line, once more exposing himself to the enemy's fire, utterly regardless of danger. In his new position he was four times counter-attacked, but each time he sprang upon the parapet to give his men confidence. At last he was mortally wounded, but even while his life was ebbing away he continued to encourage his men. After the enemy had broken through on his left he dragged himself to the top of the parapet, and with a few men whom he had inspired by his example, forced the attackers to withdraw, and thus saved the left flank.

LIEUTENANT (ACTING CAPTAIN) WALTER NAPLETON STONE, Royal Fusiliers.

In my account of the battle of Cambrai I told you the story of this gallant officer. He was in command of a company utterly cut off from supports and a thousand yards in front of our main line. His post overlooked the enemy's position, and observing the Germans massing for an attack, he sent back



Bombers at Work.

(By permission of The Sphere.)

These men are engaged in flinging the Mills or pine-apple bomb against the enemy. In the foreground a man is seen in the act of drawing the pin from the grenade. The second man is about to throw a bomb; he holds it in the palm of his hand, with his fingers over the lever. The third man has flung his bomb with a circular sweep of the arm so as to clear the parapet of the trench.

most valuable information to headquarters. He was ordered to withdraw, leaving a rearguard to cover the retirement. As the enemy was even then coming on, he sent back three platoons, and himself remained with the rearguard. He stood on the parapet with a telephone, and though a hurricane of shells hurtled about him, continued to keep his headquarters informed of the movements of the enemy. Finally, when all hope of succour had vanished, he ordered the telephone wire to be cut. The rearguard fought heroically, but at last was surrounded and cut to pieces. The gallant captain fell shot through the head. His work, however, had been done. The information which he sent to headquarters enabled his comrades in the rear to make arrangements just in time to save this part of the line from disaster.

" To every man upon this earth
 Death cometh soon or late ;
 And how can man die better
 Than facing fearful odds,
 For the ashes of his fathers,
 And the temples of his gods ? "

LIEUTENANT (ACTING CAPTAIN) RICHARD WILLIAM LESLIE WAIN, Tank Corps.

This gallant young soldier—he was but twenty-one when he fell—passed direct from St. Bees College, Cumberland, to the Welsh Fusiliers. He was afterwards transferred to the Manchesters, and later on to the Tank Corps. During an attack he was in command of a section of Tanks, in one of which he was stationed. This Tank was put out of action by a direct hit from an enemy gun while it was close to a strong point which was holding up the advance. Captain Wain and one man, both seriously wounded, were the only survivors. Though bleeding freely, Captain Wain refused to have his wounds dressed, and seizing a Lewis gun, rushed from behind the Tank and captured the strong point. About half the garrison surrendered to him. Though his wounds were serious, he still persisted in "carrying on." He picked up a rifle, and continued to fire at the retreating enemy until he fell with a fatal wound in the head. "It was due to the valour displayed by Captain Wain that the infantry were able to advance."

SECOND-LIEUTENANT STANLEY HENRY PARRY BOUGHEY, Royal Scottish Fusiliers.

Lieutenant Boughey was another of the heroic band who

freely gave their lives to stave off disaster. The enemy in large numbers had managed to crawl up to within thirty yards of our firing-line, and with bombs and machine guns were preventing our men from replying. At this moment, when the capture of our position seemed certain, Lieutenant Boughey sprang forward all alone and rushed towards the advancing foe, hurling bombs with deadly accuracy. So fierce was his onset that a party of thirty Germans held up their hands in surrender. As the gallant young officer turned to go back for more bombs he received his death wound, and passed away while his comrades were securing the prisoners.

LIEUTENANT SAMUEL THOMAS DICKSON WALLACE, Royal Field Artillery.

Lieutenant Wallace was in command of a section of guns at the time when enemy artillery, machine guns, infantry, and aeroplanes made a combined assault upon his group of batteries. The commander and five sergeants fell, and the gunners were reduced to five. The enemy infantry had well-nigh surrounded the little band of survivors, and all seemed lost. Nevertheless Lieutenant Wallace determined to fight his guns to the last. He swung the trails close together, and his men ran from gun to gun loading and firing. In this way he covered the other battery positions, and gave assistance to some small parties of our infantry who were holding a position against great odds. For eight hours he and his heroic comrades kept the guns going, and worked great havoc on the enemy. At last his men were too exhausted to continue. Happily at this moment an infantry support arrived. Hastily removing the breech-blocks from his guns, thus rendering them useless, he withdrew, taking with him all his wounded comrades. I am sure you will agree that by this dogged stand he had earned the highest honour that could be bestowed upon him. The story ends happily. A gunner, you know, considers the loss of his guns the greatest dishonour that can befall him. Lieutenant Wallace's lost guns were afterwards recovered.

RIFLEMAN ALBERT EDWARD SHEPHERD, King's Royal Rifle Corps.

Rifleman Shepherd in civil life was a driver at New Monckton Colliery. At the age of eighteen he enlisted, and soon became renowned as an army boxer. He was gassed and twice wounded before the day on which he proved himself worthy

to rank with the bravest of the brave. When his company was held up by a machine gun which was firing at point-blank range, he determined to knock it out. Though ordered not to risk his life, he rushed forward and hurled a Mills bomb into the midst of the gun crew. Two of the gunners were killed, and he was thus able to seize the weapon. The advance then continued, but before long our men were again assailed by machine-gun fire from a flank. All the officers and N.C.O.'s fell, and the survivors were without a leader. Rifleman Shepherd sprang into the breach ; he took command of the company, and ordered the men to lie down while he himself went back some seventy yards under fierce fire to obtain the help of a Tank. He then returned to his company, and when the Tank arrived, led his men forward to their last objective. "The hour finds the man." In the hour of difficulty and danger Rifleman Shepherd proved himself a leader of the highest courage and skill.

LANCE-CORPORAL JOHN THOMAS, North Staffordshire Regiment.

Lance-Corporal Thomas was a native of Higher Openshaw, Manchester. He was a reservist, and when the war broke out was away at sea. As soon as he arrived in England he joined the Army Service Corps, and after three years again passed into the Reserve. He then returned to his former occupation, and was on board the *Lusitania* when she made her last voyage from America to Liverpool. After the liner was foully torpedoed he rejoined the A.S.C. in France, and later on was transferred to the North Staffordshire Regiment. During a period of heavy fighting he and a comrade saw the Germans making preparations for a counter-attack. Without waiting for orders, the pair went out in broad daylight, and under heavy machine-gun fire, to watch the movements of the enemy. The lance-corporal lost his comrade within a few yards of the trench, but, quite undeterred, went on alone. He worked his way round a small copse, shot three snipers who were stalking him, and then pushed on to a building used by the enemy as a night-post. Peeping out cautiously, he saw the Germans bringing up forces for an attack. At once he opened fire on them, and for a whole hour sniped them with great effect. Then he made his way back to our lines, and gave such valuable information to headquarters that the guns were trained on the spot where the enemy troops were massing, with the result

that the remnant which advanced was easily broken up. Thanks to the coolness, devotion, and skill of this enterprising lance-corporal, a dangerous attack was averted.

SECOND-LIEUTENANT JAMES SAMUEL EMERSON, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.

This gallant officer, who unhappily did not survive the day, won the Victoria Cross by repeated acts of the greatest heroism. He led his company in an attack, and cleared 400 yards of trench. Though wounded when the enemy advanced to the counter-attack in great strength, he sprang out of the trench with eight of his men, fell upon them in the open, killed many, and took six prisoners. For three hours afterwards the enemy made attack after attack, and all the time Lieutenant Emerson was in the thick of the fight. He was badly wounded, but he refused to go to the dressing-station, and several times was foremost in repelling bomb attacks. Finally the enemy made a great assault. Once more the lieutenant led his men against the attackers, but this time he fell never to rise again. "His heroism, when worn out and exhausted from loss of blood, inspired his men to hold out, though almost surrounded, till reinforcements arrived and the enemy was dislodged."

SERGEANT CYRIL EDWARD GOURLEY, M.M., Royal Field Artillery.

Sergeant Gourley, a Cheshire soldier from West Kirby, in the Wirral Peninsula, had won renown as a gallant fighter before that terrible day on which he claimed the highest tribute of heroism. He was in command of a section of howitzers when the enemy well-nigh surrounded his guns. Germans in large numbers were only 400 yards to the front of him, and about the same distance on one flank, while snipers were in his rear. In this perilous position Sergeant Gourley managed single-handed to keep one of his guns in action throughout the day. Though frequently driven off, he returned again and again, carrying ammunition, laying and firing the gun himself, and taking first one and then another of his detachment to assist him. When the enemy advanced he pulled his gun out of the pit and engaged a machine gun at 500 yards, knocking it out with a direct hit.

All day he held the enemy in check, firing with open sights on parties of Germans in full view, and only from 300 to 800

yards away. Thanks to his splendid doggedness, the guns were saved, and at nightfall were withdrawn.

PRIVATE WALTER MILLS, Manchester Regiment.

Private Mills, who hailed from the Lancashire town of Oldham, was a hero who sacrificed himself to save the position confided to him and his fellows. Waves of deadly gas rolled over the trench, and while our men were gasping and choking, the enemy tried to rush the position. Mills was badly gassed, and he knew that if his life was to be saved he must lie motionless until the poisonous cloud had rolled by. Without a thought for himself, and intent only on saving the trench, he staggered out laden with bombs, and flung them one after the other at the advancing foe, with such success that this one Lancashire lad held back a multitude. Never was there a greater conquest of mind over body. Though suffering agonies, which increased with every effort he made, he continued to fling his bombs until reinforcements arrived, and the enemy was finally driven off. While the devoted fellow was being carried to the rear he died of gas poisoning. Oldham will never produce a more unselfish and devoted hero than Private Walter Mills.

CORPORAL CHARLES WILLIAM TRAIN, London Rifles.

During an advance Corporal Train's company was suddenly brought to a standstill by a party of the enemy armed with two machine guns, which opened fire at close range. Realizing that the guns must be knocked out without delay if the advance was to proceed, Corporal Train, without waiting for orders, dashed forward, and, firing grenades from his rifle, succeeded in putting some of the team out of action by a direct hit. He then shot down the officer in command, and with bomb and rifle either killed or wounded the remainder of the crew. In this way he enabled the line to advance. He then went to the assistance of a comrade who was bombing the enemy from their front, and killed a man who was carrying off the second gun. His courage and devotion to duty saved his battalion heavy casualties, and greatly helped it to make a successful advance.

LANCE-CORPORAL JOHN ALEXANDER CHRISTIE, London Rifles.

An enemy position had been captured, but barely had our men occupied it when the Germans advanced up the communication trenches with bombs. Lance-Corporal Christie at once

collected a supply of bombs, and, scrambling out of the trench, covered fifty yards in the open, and, in spite of machine-gun and shell fire, reached the edge of the communication trench. He then bombed the enemy, and continued to do so until a block had been made. Returning towards his own lines, he heard voices behind him ; more Germans were moving up the trench. He turned back, and once more flung bombs, with such effect that he broke up the attacking party. By his prompt and fearless action he saved the situation at a very critical time. " He showed the greatest coolness, and a total disregard for his own safety."

PRIVATE JAMES DUFFY, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.

Private Duffy was a stretcher-bearer. While his company was holding a very exposed position, he and a comrade went out to bring in a seriously wounded man. His comrade was wounded, and he returned for another helper. Again he went forward, but a second time his companion was shot down. Nothing daunted, the gallant fellow pushed out under the heavy fire all alone, and succeeded in bringing both his comrades under cover, where he attended to their injuries. His gallantry undoubtedly saved the men's lives.

" Well done for them ; and, fair Isle, well for thee !
 While that thy bosom beareth sons like these,
 ' The little gem set in the silver sea '
 Shall never fear her foes ! "

CHAPTER IV.

“ THE BOY IN THE AEROPLANE.”

IN Chapter XXXII. of our seventh volume I told you how our air service developed from small beginnings into an all-important and very efficient branch of the Army and Navy. You will remember that in July 1917, though some 958 firms and 120,000 persons were employed in manufacturing about four thousand aeroplanes a month, there were many complaints that we had not enough machines to supply all our needs. In the autumn of 1917 it was decided to establish an Air Ministry, and to bring together gradually into one Air Force the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service.

On February 21, 1918, the Under-Secretary of State to the Air Ministry for the first time presented his estimates to the House of Commons. In the course of his speech he gave many interesting details about our flying men. He said that many people were apt to judge the success of a day's operations in the air by the number of machines brought down, and that this was not unnatural, because no one could fail to be thrilled by the thought of the splendid duels fought thousands of feet above the ground. Our fighting squadrons had been described by the Prime Minister as the cavalry of the air. It did glorious and invaluable work. The air cavalry kept up a constant offensive against enemy machines in order to protect our own planes from destruction. They ceaselessly scoured the sky in search of enemy fighters whose task was to prevent out artillery-ranging and photographic machines from carrying out their duties. They formed a screen behind which the other machines did their work.

In the month of September 1917 no less than 139 enemy machines were destroyed by our aeroplanes, thirteen others



Air Attack on the Enemy's Reinforcements.

(By permission of The Sphere.)

The boy in the aeroplane has dived down upon a body of Germans concentrating for an attack, and is lashing them with a hail of bullets from his Lewis gun. In this way he throws the enemy's forces into confusion. Airmen have been known to swoop down over enemy positions and fire upon them from a height of less than fifty feet. Of course, they run great risks, but so rapid are their movements that they frequently escape.

were destroyed by anti-aircraft machine-gun and artillery fire, and 122 more were shot down out of control. Such was the record of one month alone. This air fighting, however, is only a part of the duties which fall to airmen in modern war. They are the eyes of the infantry, the artillery, and the staff. The accuracy and the destructiveness of our artillery fire do not depend merely upon brave and skilful gunners, on good guns, and on a plentiful supply of ammunition. They depend upon a boy in an aeroplane, miles away from the gun, and high up in the skies. There he constantly remains at his post, exposed to the shells of "Archies," and attacks from hostile aircraft, until he has directed the fire of the battery on to the target. This kind of work is not reported, and cannot be reported, in the newspapers, yet it is being done daily and hourly by our gallant boys.

During one day on the Western front no fewer than 127 hostile batteries were successfully engaged for destruction by means of aeroplane observation. Some twenty-eight gun-pits were destroyed, eighty more were damaged, and sixty explosions of ammunition were caused. Nor must we forget the work of the observation balloons. On the same day thirty-four hostile batteries were engaged for destruction by means of balloon observation. "I do not know," said the Under-Secretary, "what is the difference between sitting in an aeroplane and in a balloon, or which observer is the braver man; but the fact remains that this is a most wonderful record of work performed in the air."

Airmen, however, are very much more than the eyes of the gunners. When we talk of batteries being engaged for destruction, we mean that a battery is ranged on to a target, and that it continues to fire until the boy in the aeroplane signals, "You have done it in," or "You have silenced it," or "The gunners have gone away." These boys are not only the eyes of the gunners, but they are the life-savers of the gunners, and the life-savers of the infantry too. Every enemy battery silenced means the end of a bombardment against a particular section of our trenches. It means so many hundreds less high explosives and gas shells bursting among our lines.

The infantry and the staff are dependent upon the daily and hourly work of our airmen both for the preparation of our attack and for information as to its progress after it has been launched.

The airman brings back information as to what the infantry are doing in the most rapid fashion possible. He also renders invaluable help to the staff by the photographs which he takes. In the month of September 1917 some 15,837 photographs were taken in the air on the Western front. These photographers were constantly under fire from anti-aircraft gunners, and were liable to be attacked by hostile machines which might get through our screen of scouts. Imagine what would be the position of the staff which had to plan an attack without the information given by photographs. Imagine also the task of the infantry ordered to assault a tangled system of pill-boxes, machine-gun emplacements, wire entanglements, and trenches of which all that they can see is the front-line parapet. The airmen who day in and day out fly over the enemy's front line photographing his defences render service of the very highest character.

Short-range bomb-dropping, both by night and by day, on aerodromes, railway junctions, billets, batteries, and other military points, has become one of the regular duties of our Air Force. During September 1917, 7,886 bombs were dropped on the Western front, and in the following month 5,113—a total weight of 238 tons. In addition, a good deal of useful work was done in attacking troops from the air. In December 123,000 rounds were expended in this manner, and in January 1918, 209,000 rounds. In addition to firing at troops on the ground, our airmen are in the habit of descending very low indeed, in order to drop a couple of light bombs when they have used up their cartridges.

Another branch of air fighting is long-range bombing. Between December 1, 1917, and the date of the speech (21st, February) we had carried out eleven raids into Germany, and during the same period the enemy had only made eight raids on Great Britain, though this country is much nearer and much more easily reached from their bases than Germany is from ours. The Under-Secretary then paid a tribute to the pilots who teach our airmen the art of flying. He said that these officers had to spend hour after hour in the air, day after day, teaching beginners and running the greatest possible risks from their lack of skill. These instructors would much prefer to be on active service, but they cheerfully gave up the chance of showing their prowess against



Map to illustrate British Bombing Raids on German Towns.

[The crosses on the map indicate the German towns bombed between December 8, 1917, and the end of March 1918. During this period our airmen made more than fifty effective raids into Germany.]

the enemy in order to impart their knowledge and skill to others. He also praised the work of those who had to keep the machines in order, and finally referred to the fact that our flying men come from all parts of the Empire—Australia, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, and India all had their flying squadrons. “The comradeship of the air has indeed spun one more strand in that invisible but unbreakable thread which unites all citizens of the Empire in advancing civilization in time of peace, and in defending it in time of war.”

* * * * *

You will remember that the Under-Secretary of the Air Ministry, in the course of his speech to the House of Commons, said that the enemy had a much easier task in bombing London or Paris than we had in attacking German towns. A glance at the map on page 46 shows you how true this statement was. The enemy, you observe, could easily raid the two capitals of the Western Allies. The distance from his starting-points in Belgium to London was something less than 150 miles, and from his lines to Paris meant a flight of only eighty or ninety miles. Further, the way to both capitals was marked out in clear weather by water which can easily be seen from a great height. After crossing the North Sea and striking the estuary of the Thames, the raiders had only to follow the gleam of the river, and they were bound, sooner or later, to reach the London area. So, too, when they raided Paris, they could follow the course of the Oise or the Marne, which would lead them to the Seine, and thence to the French capital.

Now let us see how we stood in regard to German towns. From behind Cambrai a flight of about 130 miles would bring us into Lorraine, the French province which was lost to Germany in 1871. East of Metz you will notice a shaded region round about Saarbrücken. This district contains a small but very busy coalfield, which works up the iron of Lorraine and Luxemburg. Our earlier raids were made on this region. If, however, terror was to be struck into the German people we had to go farther east and bomb the towns along the Rhine, and this meant a flight of 180 or 190 miles. Perhaps you may say, “Why, this is only thirty or forty miles more than the distance from Bruges to London.” Quite true, but you must remember that on the double journey this difference amounts to sixty or eighty miles, an important fraction of the whole distance.

Look at the heart-shaped region shaded on the map to the north of Cologne, and lying for the most part in the valley of the Ruhr, a right-bank tributary of the Rhine. This river flows through the Westphalian coalfield, which produces more than half of all the coal mined in Germany. It is not far from the iron fields of Lorraine, and has become the most important iron-working region of the country. It is studded with busy towns which stand close together or run the one into the other, so that it resembles parts of Lancashire or Yorkshire. Barmen, the central town of the region, is two hundred miles as the aeroplane flies from St. Quentin. Perhaps the best known place in the coalfield is Essen, which contains Krupp's great armament and munition works.

You can easily understand that if we could bomb these munition-making towns we could do Germany great damage. We could hamper her production of guns and shells, and make her less powerful in the field. We, therefore, aimed at this region ; but by the end of March 1918 we had not reached it. From behind Ypres or Cambrai a double flight of 180 or 190 miles was necessary, and our airmen had to cross the waste and tumbled country of the Ardennes, where there were no land marks to guide them. If they followed the river Moselle until they reached the Rhine and then turned north along that river, they would have to make a long addition to their flight, and this would be no light matter for machines laden with bombs.

Nevertheless we continually strove to reach our goal. In March our airmen were specially busy. Raids, many of them very destructive, were made on Mayence, Stuttgart, Freiburg, and Mannheim, as well as on other places. Between 9th and 12th March we made three raids into Germany, and on the latter date, in broad daylight, bombed Coblenz, at the junction of the Moselle and the Rhine. On the night of the 24th-25th we reached Cologne, and it was hoped that before long our bombs would be falling amidst the iron works and munition factories of the crowded towns in the valley of the Ruhr.

CHAPTER V.

TWO GREAT AIRMEN.

IN the early months of 1918 our newspapers contained an account of two flying men who had won great fame on the Western front, and whose names were household words amongst aviators. One of them was Captain J. Byford M'Cudden, M.M., M.C., D.S.O., V.C.; the other, Captain Philip Fletcher Fullard, D.S.O., M.C.

Let me tell you something about the former hero, who claimed to have the blood of three generations of Irish and Scottish soldiering families in his veins. He was born in the barracks at Chatham, his father being a warrant officer of the Royal Engineers, and was educated at the garrison school. At the age of seventeen he joined his father's regiment, and soon became famous as an athlete. He was described as a slim young fellow of twenty-two, five feet seven inches in height, with a boyish, pinky-white complexion.

He went out as an air mechanic with the original British Expeditionary Force, and during the great battle at Mons was pressed into service as an observer. His reports were so intelligent that he became a regular observer, and soon won great renown as a "spotter" for the guns. His pilot—a major who was afterwards killed—said on more than one occasion: "But for M'Cudden we should never have got our machine back safely. He fought with real genius."

Later on he became pilot of a single-seater scout, in which he had to control both guns and aeroplane. In a machine of this type he had fought up to 13th January well over one hundred fights, and had sent fifty-four German machines crashing to the ground. Three times he fought duels with the celebrated German airman Immelmann, and on each occasion the

fight was broken off before either could claim a decisive advantage. "He tells us hardly anything in his letters about what he has done," said his mother. "Sometimes he just puts in a line, 'Brought down two more Huns to-day, mum,' but nothing more."

In September 1916, when he was a flight-sergeant in the R.F.C., he received the Military Medal for great gallantry, courage, and dash. In February 1917 he won the Military Cross for following a hostile machine down to a height of 300 feet and driving it to the ground. Between August 15 and September 28, 1917, his splendid services in destroying five enemy machines and driving three others down out of control gave him a bar to his Military Cross. The Distinguished Service Order was won on November 29-30, 1917, for various exploits. Between the award of the bar to his Military Cross and his recommendation for the Distinguished Service Order he had destroyed seven enemy machines, two of which fell within our lines. For his skill and courage on 23rd November, when he destroyed four enemy machines and with the help of his patrol drove off six others, he was awarded a bar to his D.S.O. Finally, on 29th March the announcement appeared in our newspapers that the King had been pleased to confer upon him the highest award of valour—the Victoria Cross.

One of his most adventurous mornings is thus described by a correspondent. He was flying at 17,000 feet when he engaged an enemy two-seater at fairly close range. He brought both his guns to bear on the hostile plane, which, in attempting to get away, made a spiral dive. Both right wings flew off, and in a few moments the wreckage crashed to earth behind our lines. Ten minutes later he engaged another aeroplane of the same type, and plied his gun vigorously. The enemy machine suddenly burst into flames, and it too fell like the stick of a rocket into our territory. A quarter of an hour passed, and then he saw, a few thousand yards away, white clouds of bursting shrapnel from our anti-aircraft guns. At once he hurried off to see what the trouble was. Our guns kept up their firing until he was within easy range of the target—an enemy two-seater. They then ceased firing, and left the rest to M'Cudden.

He fired a short burst to force the German to dive, and when he did so swooped after him. At a height of 9,000 feet, when only a hundred yards from his opponent, he turned on



Captain J. Byford M'Cudden, M.M., M.C., D.S.O., V.C.

a stream of bullets, and the German machine burst into flames. From the first it had been doomed. So skilfully had the British fighter handled his craft that the German never had the chance to fire a shot in return. The machine "sizzled out of the sky like a fireball, leaving within our lines the charred skeleton of the plane and the remains of the men who had manned it."

Rising again to a great height, M'Cudden scanned the heavens with his keen eyes for more enemies to conquer. A hostile plane was sighted, and our hero at once made for it, and began his fourth encounter that morning. He got his guns going, and in a short time the enemy machine was on fire. The flames, however, were extinguished, and the German dived away rapidly to the east, and thus escaped. Not having any more petrol aboard, the victor sailed away homewards.

During the Christmas week of 1917 he had a unique experience. A German plane surrendered to him at a height of three miles above the ground. The story of this strange episode is as follows. Leaving the ground shortly before noon and looking about for an opponent, he saw an enemy machine coming up from the east at a height of about 17,000 feet. He gave chase, and caught it up; but the enemy whirred away to the south. Presently M'Cudden opened fire with both guns. The German machine stopped, water spurted from its radiator, and it dived steeply away to the south.

Then came the surrender. The enemy observer raised his right arm and waved it frantically to show that he was ready to yield.* M'Cudden ceased fire, and strove to head the pilot off and force him to turn westward so as to land behind our lines. The pilot, however, continued to dive southward, and our hero was obliged to open fire again, this time at very close range. Before long the enemy machine crashed to earth.

Immediately afterwards this rival of Ball and Bishop was engaged again. He made for a German two-seater, climbing as he charged it. For twenty minutes he rose higher and higher, swerving this way and that, until he obtained a favourable position. Then he set his guns going. His opponent, so we are told, "fought extraordinarily well;" and diving and spinning, charging and firing, the duel continued until the machines were only 9,000 feet above the snow-crueted ground. Then

* A similar incident is illustrated on p. 275 of Vol. VII.

the English airman pumped a short burst with both guns into the enemy, whose right-hand wings dropped off, and thus sealed his doom.

A few minutes later this tireless fighter engaged two enemy planes; but by working together and firing their front and rear guns at the same time they managed to hold him off and speed away eastward into safety.

Captain Philip Fletcher Fullard was described as a fair, curly-haired, good-looking youngster of twenty, clear-eyed and fresh-complexioned, with regular features. He was educated at Norwich Grammar School, and in 1915 joined the Inns of Court Officers' Training Corps. Passing high in his examinations, he was offered a commission in the Irish Fusiliers, but was selected as suitable for flying work, and joined the Royal Flying Corps. At Upavon he was given a post as instructor, and in April 1917 was sent to the front, where he soon became famous as an air-fighter.

By the middle of January 1918 he had brought down forty-two enemy machines and three balloons. His record bag—four German aeroplanes—was obtained in a single day. On another occasion he and a fellow-airman actually brought down seven enemy machines before breakfast—three of them falling to him. The squadron to which he was attached proved very successful, and was able to boast that during the year 1917 it had accounted for 250 German planes, with very few casualties as a set-off. For three months Captain Fullard worked with the same "flight" of six pilots, and during that time he and his companions brought down more enemy machines than any other "flight" in France, without losing a single member of their mess.

Captain Fullard's narrowest escape took place when he was fighting a German two-seater. His goggles were shot away from his eyes, and the Véry lights in his machine caught fire, and set the woodwork alight. He flew the burning machine with all speed towards his own lines, and managed to descend safely.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORY OF THE DOVER PATROL.

ONE of the finest features of the war at sea was the splendid gallantry and enterprise of the fishermen and merchant seamen who manned the small craft which swept up German mines, hunted the U-boats, and kept watch and ward over the Narrow Seas. I am sure that you have not forgotten how dauntlessly British drifters in the Straits of Otranto stood up to the murderous attacks of Austrian cruisers. I am now about to tell you of an even more dastardly attack made by German destroyers on our patrols in the Straits of Dover.

On the inky-black night of February 14-15, 1918, our drifters were engaged in their perilous work of preventing U-boats from entering the English Channel. One of the drifters sighted a submarine which was endeavouring to break through the barrier of patrol boats. Off it went in pursuit, and as it dashed onwards sent up rockets to call upon its consorts to join in the hunt. Suddenly enemy destroyers swept down upon the drifters and opened fire. Ten at least of the largest and fastest German destroyers had been detailed for this work. They had pushed out from their bases with a man at the firing key of every gun and torpedo tube, ready to belch death and destruction on every surface craft which they could see. The German destroyers appear to have worked in pairs; the leading boat of each couple switched on a blinding searchlight for the few seconds necessary to get the range, and then the whole force slowed down and shelled the drifters without mercy.

A young able seaman who survived thus described the attack:—"This is not the first fight of a similar character in which I have taken part during this war, and yet, thank God,

I am unhurt. But it was by far the worst of the four scraps in which I have been engaged. It was a terribly one-sided affair. The only thing I can compare it with is a picture of a man armed, say, with only a revolver or a pop-gun, being expected to do battle in a small boat with an armed cruiser. . . .

"The fleet of drifters to which I was attached was on patrol duty. Shortly after 11 o'clock we received a signal telling us to be on the look-out for submarines. Being then off duty, I went down to my bunk, but before turning in read a book. Suddenly, at about one o'clock in the morning, I was startled by heavy and rapid firing, the noise of hurrying footsteps on the deck overhead, and the issuing of rapid orders. My first impression was that we had seen and were firing at a submarine. Picking up my lifebelt I hurried on deck.

"The noise of the cannonading at this time was almost deafening. The first thing I saw on reaching the deck was the blowing up of one of our drifters, which was not far away on our port quarter. She went up in the air enveloped in a great sheet of flame, in the midst of which I distinctly saw her two masts and her funnel fall with a splash into the water, sending up spray in all directions. For a moment I stood watching the awful sight, and then the thunder of additional guns coming rapidly from various directions at once showed me that we were up against something more than a submarine fight. I ran along the deck aft as my mate shouted, 'There goes another one;' and he had scarcely made the remark before a third boat was blown up.

"Suddenly, immediately astern of us, a searchlight shot out, sweeping the sea for some distance around, and by its light we were surprised to see the big dark hull of a German destroyer. She was bearing down on us at full speed. Had she continued on her course she would have cut us and sunk us easily. She was not more than two hundred yards away from us. It is our belief that we owe our escape to being too close to her. We were sailing away from the destroyer, dodging all the time, and fortunately for us, she missed us as she steamed northwards.

"The noise of the fight was terrible. Shells were falling in all directions. The destroyers kept steaming in and out among the drifters, blowing us up like shuttlecocks. We hadn't the ghost of a chance. The fight lasted for more than half an



The Attack on the Dover Patrol :

(From the picture by Charles Dixon.)

Our illustration shows the drifter *Violet May* after being attacked by a German destroyer. In the clear of the burning vessel, returning to the wreck. They had carried with them the mate, who was *Violet May* is seen to the right, and further on is a drifter blowing up. The story of how the enginemen is told in Chapter VI. The incident is one of many which testify to the splendid pluck and endurance of



the fate of the Violet May.

(By permission of *The Sphere*.)

In the foreground you see Engineman Ewing and Engineman Noble, who had launched the boat and had rowed mortally wounded, and a deckhand, who was badly injured. The German destroyer which had attacked the vessel, turned to the vessel, tended the wounded, put out the fire, and brought the vessel safely into harbour with British fishermen in war.

hour. Our boat was not touched, and fortunately not a single member of our crew received any injury."

In most cases the enemy closed in upon the little ships, poured two salvos of high-explosive shell into each of them, and passed on. One destroyer came so close to the drifter *Cloverbank* that she was unable to depress her guns sufficiently to bring them to bear on the little target. As she rolled, however, she fired, and the drifter at once became a splintered shambles, hidden in clouds of steam and flame. Only one man, Deckhand Plane, survived the first salvo. Single-handed, half-blinded, and dazed by the din, he pushed forward to the gun through the smoke and flame, and finding it loaded, fired point-blank at the destroyer.

Such survivors as there were on the other drifters launched their dinghies, and carrying their wounded with them, paddled clear of the blazing wrecks and the roaring guns. Ewing and Noble, the two enginemen of *Violet May*, lowered the mate, who was mortally wounded, and a deckhand, who had been badly hit, into a boat. The rest of the crew lay torn and dead amidst the blazing wreckage. They rowed for some distance, and waited till the enemy had passed on. Then they returned to their little ship, to find her on fire forward and the ammunition exploding.

"A doot she's sinking," said one of them; nevertheless he made fast the painter and climbed on board. His companion followed him, though the dying mate cried piteously, "Dinna leave me, Jamie; dinna leave me in the little boat." "Na, na," was the reply, "we'll no leave ye;" and shortly afterwards, when they had put out the fire, they hauled him on board and laid him on his bunk down below. - After dressing his wounds they tended the injured, dragged the wreckage off the dead, plugged the shot-holes, and quenched the smouldering embers of the fire. "It's nae guid," said the mate at last; "dinna fash about me, lads. A'll gang nae mair on patrol." And so he died. But the two enginemen saved their little ship, and brought her safely into harbour though she was but a mass of twisted metal and charred woodwork.

Ten German destroyers had engaged the patrol, and had sent a trawler and seven drifters, along with threescore or so of British seamen, to the bottom. "It was a glorious victory." But before the sun was above the horizon next day eight fresh

ships were beating to and fro, and other hardy souls had replaced those of their comrades who had finished their life's trick and had passed to their long watch below.

In the little gray church by the quayside at Dover on the following Sunday the men of the Drifter Patrol mourned for their gallant dead. The sun streamed through the stained-glass windows and lighted up the weather-beaten faces of the skippers and deckhands, the trimmers and enginemen who had escaped the murderous onslaught. When the service was over the captain of the Drifter Patrol marched his men to the base, and there, standing on a drum of paint amidst coils of wire, nets, mine-cases, and the other instruments of their calling, made them a little speech. "Never fear," he concluded; "we'll take tea with the Hun before you're all much older, or I'll eat my hat." The men stumped off to their little craft, quite assured that they would cry quits before long.

* * * * *

Now let me tell you how the captain's promise was fulfilled. Early on the misty morning of 21st March the British destroyers *Botha* and *Morris*, along with three French destroyers, were on patrol on the eastern waters of the Channel, when a sudden outburst of firing was heard to the northward. Vivid flashes of gunfire were seen, and soon it was plain that the enemy was bombarding the crumbling bathing-sheds of deserted French watering-places. Led by *Botha*, the flotilla dashed towards them, sending up star shells in order to get a glimpse of the enemy and obtain his range. This was enough for the raiders: they made off in the darkness, and were lost to sight. The flotilla then searched to the north-westward, still firing star-shells, and presently the shadowy outline of a force of five enemy destroyers and torpedo boats was seen sneaking off through the darkness towards their base. They had been engaged in shelling Dunkirk, and were now on their homeward way.

In a few moments the guns of the Allied destroyers were at work, and a running fight began. No doubt you know that a fight between torpedo craft resembles a battle between scorpions: whichever gets its sting home first has rarely need to strike again. The sting of the destroyer is the torpedo. Should one destroyer torpedo another, its doom is sealed, for the plating of such craft is too thin to resist the explosion. Both sides fired torpedoes as they dashed through the darkness, but

happily none of the German weapons hit their mark. *Morris*, however, emerging from the smoke-screen put up by the fleeing enemy, suddenly saw a destroyer five hundred yards away, and discharged a torpedo. It found its billet, and the enemy craft heeled over and went down stern first in a smother of smoke and steam.

In the meantime a shell from the enemy had severed *Botha's* main steampipe, and she began to lose way. Her commander, realizing that if he was to "take tea with the Hun" he must do so without delay, fired two torpedoes at the leading boats of the enemy's line. Then putting his helm hard over, he crashed into the fourth ship and hit it cleanly amidships. Though he had lost speed, he had still sufficient way on to drive his knife-edge bows right through the enemy vessel and to cut it completely in halves. Nor had *Botha* yet finished her career. She swung round and tried to ram the enemy boat next astern. This vessel, however, managed to slip aside, but before long had fallen a victim to the French destroyers. They closed round her and pounded her with gun and torpedo until she too went down.

Morris by this time had lost sight of the enemy, and had given up the pursuit. She returned to the scene of action and took her lame sister in tow, while the French boats circled round and picked up prisoners. From their accounts it appeared that no fewer than eighteen enemy vessels had taken part in the raid. Three of them had been sunk, but the remaining fifteen had made good their escape, though they did not reach home without further adventure. A squadron of the R.N.A.S. sighted them and immediately dropped bombs on them. The raiders were thrown into disorder, and were scattered in all directions. An enemy squadron of biplanes, which had come out to look for the wanderers, fell in with our own aircraft, and four of the hostile machines were destroyed. Three of the four fell to one British airman. The attack on the Drifter Patrol had been avenged: our men had taken tea with the Huns.

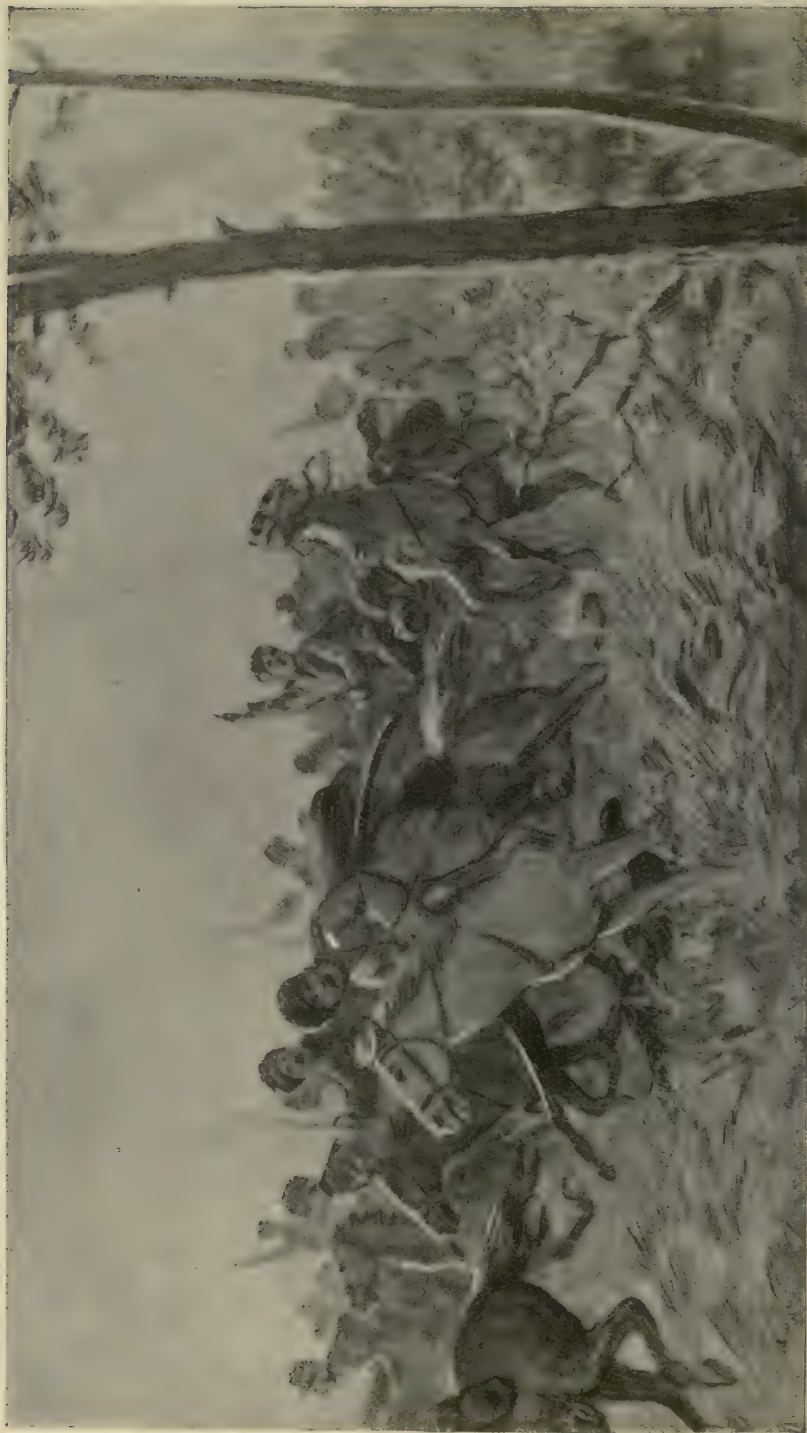
CHAPTER VII.

RUSSIA'S RUIN.—I.

THE month of March 1918 will ever be memorable in the history of the world: it saw the last act of the Russian tragedy and the opening of that terrific onslaught upon the Allies in the West which lost them all the ground they had gained during two and a half years of hard fighting, and placed them in greater jeopardy than they had been in since the dread days of October 1914. As this onslaught was the direct outcome of Russia's betrayal of the Allies, I must tell you how she was forced to make peace with the Central Powers.

March 12, 1918, was the first anniversary of the Russian Revolution. On that day a year previously the revolutionists captured the great prison-fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul—the Bastille of Petrograd—and by so doing made themselves masters of the Russian capital. Before the Revolution broke out Russia stood high amongst the Great Powers of the world. She had at her disposal great and disciplined armies, led by skilful generals, and well equipped with artillery and munitions of war. None of her allies could boast such vast natural resources nor such enormous reserves of men. She had suffered terribly, it is true, but she had shaken off her foes, and her people seemed to be determined to fight out their righteous quarrel to the end.

“Look on this picture, and on this.” One year later Russia was a pitiable spectacle. She stood helpless, hopeless, and dismembered before her foes. Her armies had melted away; her wealth had been squandered, and her credit had been ruined; she was torn with civil war, and she had abandoned her allies. The fanatics who had gained control of the country had utterly destroyed her, and had been forced to sign away



Cossacks making a Charge.
(By permission of *The Illustrated London News*.)

one-quarter of all her European territory, together with one-fourth of her total European population.

" Now lies she there,
And none so poor to do her reverence."

You need not be told that no mighty nation can ever be brought to this pass unless she herself plays the chief part in her own undoing. Before the Revolution we were accustomed to think of Russia as the Hercules of the Nations. The story of her downfall reminds us of the cruel fate of the god of strength, according to old Greek legend. Amongst his many deeds of might and valour was the slaying of the monster Nessus, a creature with the head of a man and the body of a horse. His wife, who had grown jealous of him, steeped his shirt in the poisonous blood of Nessus, and persuaded him to wear it in order that he might be endowed with the wisdom of the monster. He yielded to her wishes and donned the garment, but speedily the poison entered into his veins. So great was the torment that he tore it from his body along with pieces of his own flesh and perished in awful agony.

Russia had her Nessus in the "dark forces" that stood by the throne. Germany had corrupted them, and they were prepared to betray their country to the enemy. They were overthrown by honest, liberty-loving men; but meanwhile a large jealous body of fanatics rose to power, and persuaded the bulk of the nation to abandon their allies, to play Germany's game, and thus to don the shirt of Nessus. Then the agony of the nation began. In its blind torment it tore itself to pieces, and was thus made the instrument of its own agonized ruin.

* * * * *

Let me remind you of the stages in Russia's downfall. The Government which deposed the Tsar was composed of sober, intelligent men, who wished to restore order as speedily as possible and bring about freedom by slow and steady steps. While, however, these men were talking, the Bolsheviks were acting. Two days before the Provisional Government was formed they called together the *Soviet*, or Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' delegates, and drew up a series of orders inciting the soldiers to disobey their officers and to form committees to take all the power out of their hands. In a few weeks this body, led by Lenin, had driven the leading moderates

from power. The only "advanced" man left in the Government was Kerensky, who became Prime Minister, and by July was practically dictator.

For a time it looked as though Kerensky would be "the pilot who weathered the storm." He went to and fro amongst the soldiers beseeching them to fight shoulder to shoulder against the foe. Lenin, who had reached Petrograd with a German safe-conduct, was forced to withdraw from the country. But Kerensky made a fatal error. He abolished the death penalty for mutiny and desertion from the army, and nothing that he could say or do could stop the fatal canker from spreading. Nevertheless, he persuaded the armies under Brussilov and Korniloff to begin an offensive in Galicia, and they pressed forward with such spirit that the Allies for a moment believed that Russia would prove irresistible.

It was, however, only a flash in the pan. When the German reserves were brought up, the Russian armies, which German agents had honeycombed with sedition, gave way. How could it be otherwise? Discipline had been destroyed; committees of soldiers gave orders to their officers, and generals could only persuade and not command. Brussilov begged Kerensky to withdraw the fatal order No. 1, and when he refused, laid down his command. Korniloff, however, as the head of his faithful Cossacks, made an effort to overthrow Kerensky, but failed.

Alexeiev, Ruzsky, and other generals were, however, persuaded to come to the assistance of the country in the hour of its dire peril, and Kerensky made another effort to rally Russia. He reconstructed his government and strove with all his might to bring order out of chaos. He was, however, already doomed. Lenin had reappeared, and Trotsky began for the first time to assert himself. He declared that the Bolsheviks would have nothing to do with the Government, and made it clear that Kerensky must go. On 7th November a band of Bolshevik sailors was brought up from Kronstadt, and next day Kerensky was deposed and outlawed. The Bolsheviks now became all-powerful, and the country began to slide more and more rapidly down the steep road to ruin.

CHAPTER VIII.

RUSSIA'S RUIN.—II.

BEFORE the Revolution had been a month old the Bolshevists were talking of making peace with their "German brothers." By the end of May they had proposed a peace conference at Stockholm. Many of the Bolshevists were foolish dreamers, who said that the war was the work of kings and rich men, and that they would bring it to an end by persuading the German people to rise in revolution as they themselves had done. They actually believed that if a peace conference could be arranged their arguments would inspire the German people to throw off the yoke of the Kaiser and join with them in setting up a reign of brotherly love. They resolutely shut their eyes to the fact that the best observers, such as Mr. Gerard the American Ambassador, felt assured that the German people would not rise against their masters during the war. Never were men so deluded; they thought that their empty words could prevail against the German sword.

Wireless messages were therefore sent out inviting the Germans to cease fighting for a period during which terms of peace might be discussed. The Germans accepted the invitation, and on December 15, 1917, an armistice, which was to last until February 18, 1918, was signed. A week later Herr von Kühlmann, representing Germany, Count Czernin, representing Austria-Hungary, and delegates from Bulgaria and Turkey met a party of Bolshevists in conference at Brest-Litovsk. The Russian representatives thought that they had but to talk and the Germans would give them all that they asked for. They did not seem to realize that they were wholly at the mercy of their foe. Trotsky boastfully told his friends that they had not overthrown the Tsar and the middle classes in order to



The Peace Conference at Brest-Litovsk.

At the top end of the table sits Baron von Kühlmann, the chief German representative.

[Photo, Topical Press.

fall on their knees before the German Kaiser and beg for peace.

The Russian representatives made the following seven demands as conditions of peace :—Neither side was forcibly to take any territory belonging to the other ; the peoples who had lost their independence during the war were to have it restored to them ; the various Russian peoples were to decide for themselves what form of government they would have and whether they would be independent or join with other peoples ; neither side was to claim a money payment from the other ; the war losses on both sides were to be made good out of a general fund ; the colonies were to decide their own future for themselves ; and, finally, neither side was to set up a trade boycott of the other after peace was signed.

It was clear from the first that the Central Powers meant to make the Bolshevists their tools. Kühlmann and Czernin were well aware that Russia was utterly powerless, and that they could impose upon her whatever terms they wished. They hoped, however, to use the Bolshevists in order to trap France, Britain, and America ; so they announced that they were ready to discuss a general peace on the basis of no seizure of territory and no money payments, provided that Russia's allies would within ten days pledge themselves to these principles and declare themselves ready to join the conference. I need not tell you that the Allies sternly refused to be parties to any such agreement.

The Bolshevists now demanded that the Germans and Austrians should withdraw from the territories which they had occupied, and leave the inhabitants of these lands free to decide for themselves what their future government was to be. Of course, the Germans had no intention of giving up a single inch of the ground in their possession. They declared that the people of Poland, Lithuania, Courland, and parts of Esthonia and Livonia had already shown that they wished to live under German protection, and that, therefore, the matter was settled as far as these parts of Russia were concerned.

Trotsky now saw that he was being fooled, and he fiercely denounced the trickery of Germany. He and his friends stormed and raved and threatened to call Russia to arms ; but the Germans paid no heed, for they knew that the Bolshevists had done their work so well that no resistance was possible.

The wretched mob-leaders were now beginning to learn that only the strong man armed can defend his own household. Their rage increased when they were told that, as the Allies had refused to come to the conference, the offer of 25th December to seize no territory and exact no money payments no longer held good.

As far back as 20th November Little Russia, or the Ukraine, had declared itself independent. Delegates from its Rada, or government, now approached the Germans and offered to make a separate peace with them. The Germans were quite ready to come to an arrangement with the Ukraine, not only because of its rich corn lands, but because it would give them the port of Odessa and a footing on the shores of the Black Sea. Trotsky protested against this separate peace, but he was only a voice crying in the wilderness. Civil war broke out, and the Bolsheviks claimed victories. On 8th February they announced themselves masters of the Ukraine. "Nothing," they said, "remains of the Rada but a sad memory." Nevertheless, peace was signed between the Ukraine and the Central Powers next day.

I have now brought the miserable story down to February 9, 1918. Four days later Trotsky sent out a wireless message declaring that the peace negotiations had come to an end. German bankers and landlords had submitted conditions which could not be accepted. The Central Powers wished to possess themselves of countries and peoples as conquerors, and he and his comrades "could not sign a peace which would bring with it sadness, oppression, and suffering to millions of workmen and peasants. But we also cannot, will not, and must not continue a war which was begun by Tzars and capitalists. We will not and we must not continue to be at war with Germans and Austrians—workmen and peasants like ourselves. We are not signing the peace of landlords and capitalists. Let German and Austrian soldiers know who are placing them in the field of battle, and let them know for what they are struggling. Let them know also that we refuse to fight against them. . . . Russia for her part declares the present war with Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, and Bulgaria at an end." At the same time the Russian armies were ordered to demobilize everywhere.

Russia was now unarmed. The fanatics who guided her councils had bared her breast and had dared Germany to

strike. She drove in the knife up to the hilt. On the 18th she announced that the armistice had expired, and next day two of her armies were set in motion. One army crossed the Dvina and marched on Dvinsk; the other pushed into the Ukraine. There was little or no resistance; most of the Russians fled at the German approach. The Bolshevik leaders caved in at once; they sent out a message declaring themselves ready to sign the peace. But the Germans took no notice, and continued their advance towards Reval, Petrograd, Moscow, and Kiev. Every day they harvested thousands of prisoners, guns, motor cars, and great stores of food. They also sent help to Finland, which had declared itself independent.

Trotsky and his comrades, now that it was too late, began issuing frenzied appeals to the people, urging them to begin a struggle which "admits of no retreat, and no other issue but death or victory." They might as well have called upon the wind. Reval was captured, and so was Pskov, the centre of the flax industry, only 150 miles from Petrograd. In the latter town immense quantities of war stores were seized. The capital was now in dire danger, and attempts were made to organize its defence. Not until Narva, 100 miles from Petrograd, had been reached, and German aeroplanes were dropping bombs on the capital, was a halt called. During the new invasion 6,000 officers, over 57,000 men, 2,600 guns, 5,000 machine guns, and 5,000 motor vehicles were captured. In the south, where the Austrians had made an advance, 10,000 Russians laid down their arms.

On 25th February Germany announced the conditions on which she would again discuss peace, and allowed Russia forty-eight hours in which to decide. Before the forty-eight hours had elapsed Lenin and Trotsky had agreed to accept the German terms. "Their knees are on our chest," they said, "and our position is hopeless." They had made Russia powerless, and they had no choice but to accept the conqueror's terms. They did so without even reading the treaty to which they set their hands.

By the terms of this treaty, which was signed on 4th March, the state of war between the Central Powers and Russia was declared at an end, and thenceforward both sides agreed "to live in peace and friendship together." Russia agreed to withdraw from the territories taken from her and refrain from



Map showing Territory ceded by Russia to Germany.

interfering in any way in their affairs. The map on this page shows you the new Russian frontier according to the terms of peace. It ran from Narva through Lake Pskov and Lake Luban to Livenhof on the Dvina. From that point it followed the river for some distance and then turned south-west to Prushany, the northernmost point of the Ukraine boundary, which is shown by the zigzag dotted line running to the Sea of Azov some fifty miles west of Rostov, at the mouth of the Don. Germany thus became master of Finland, Livonia, Esthonia, Poland, and the Ukraine—in all about 435,000 square miles of territory, with a population of between fifty-five and sixty millions. A glance at the map shows you that Russia was left with only one port on the Baltic Sea—"Peter's Window."

In the treaty which was signed on 4th March there appeared an article which found no place in the treaty which the Bolshevist

leaders refused to sign on 13th February. This new article forced Russia to withdraw from Asia Minor, and to give up to Turkey the districts of Ardahan, Kars, and Batum. The railway running from Batum on the Black Sea to Baku on the Caspian Sea, and thence to the Central Asian oases of Merv, Bokhara, and Tashkent to the north of Afghanistan, thus passed into the control of Germany. The oil wells at Baku became hers to all intents and purposes; and the railway beyond the Caspian, which afforded her a "short cut" to the borders of India, was at her disposal. "Thus bad begins and worse remains behind."

Now that Rumania was betrayed by Russia and hemmed in by her foes, she had no choice but to lay down her arms and make the best terms which she could with her conquerors. The Bolsheviks had quarrelled with her, and had actually begun to fight her. Against Austro-Germans and Russians she was helpless, and in surrender was her only hope of maintaining her independence. On 23rd February Kühlmann and Czernin arrived at Bucharest, and proceeded to Jassy, where they met King Ferdinand.

On 2nd March the King held a Cabinet Council at which the enemy's terms were accepted, and three days later peace was signed. Rumania had to give up the Dobrudja to Bulgaria, and the Transylvanian passes, along with the oil-fields of Campina, to Hungary. Further, she had to give Germany a right of way for her troops to pass through Moldavia to Odessa. The little country which had so gallantly thrown in her lot with the Allies had paid dearly for her chivalry.



Map showing Russian Railways under control of Germany after the Peace of Brest-Litovsk.

You are not to suppose that the Allies were prepared to recognize the hard terms which the Central Powers had meted out to Russia and Rumania. Though Russia, by the reckless folly of those who spoke in her name, had invited this disaster and had brought down upon the Allies on the Western front the weight of the forces which had now been released, they uttered no word of complaint, but prepared to shoulder the new and terrible burden which they never thought they would have to bear.

They knew that a hard struggle lay before them, and that until the Americans were ready to fling their millions into the fray their armies would be in grave peril. Nevertheless, relying upon the justice of their cause and the splendid gallantry of their troops, they meant to fight out the quarrel to the bitter end. When victory crowned their banners they were determined to rescue both Russia and Rumania—the one from the ruin which she had prepared for herself, the other from the grievous misfortune which she had so undeservedly suffered.

The Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers of the Allies assembled in London issued a note in which they made this determination very clear. "Peace treaties such as these we do not and cannot acknowledge. Our own ends are very different: we are fighting, and mean to continue fighting, in order to finish once for all with this policy of plunder, and to establish in its place the peaceful reign of organized justice."

CHAPTER IX.

FIGHTING IN BIBLE LANDS.

IN Chapter XXVI. of our eighth volume I told you the story of General Maude's brilliant success at Ramadie on the river Euphrates.* You will remember that, at the end of September 1917, we surrounded the Turkish force after a skilful encircling movement, and captured nearly the whole of it—some 3,500 men in all. This victory was General Maude's crowning feat. After his death no move was made on the Euphrates until the middle of February 1918. On 20th February our troops went forward again. They pushed along the Aleppo road west of Ramadie for some fourteen miles, while the patrols advanced with but little resistance to within ten miles of Hit, which stands in a region of petroleum deposits, and has been famous for bitumen since the days of Babylonia. It is said that Ahava, which is mentioned in Ezra viii. 15 as the place where the expedition from Babylon to Jerusalem was mustered, is the modern Hit.

On 9th March our main forces occupied Hit without opposition, the garrison retreating upstream. During their withdrawal the Turks were attacked by our aircraft, and heavy casualties were inflicted upon them. We had now reached the starting-point of the caravan and post road to Damascus, which stands some 400 miles to the west. This road runs through the ancient Palmyra, and traverses a fairly well-watered region north of the Syrian Desert. It was along this route that Sir William Willcocks proposed to make a railway from Bagdad to Damascus, a distance of 550 miles.

At the close of March, General Marshall, who had succeeded Sir Stanley Maude, had a choice of two routes by which he might proceed to join hands with General Allenby in Palestine.

* See map, vol. viii., p. 267.

He might follow the caravan route to Damascus, or he might continue his march up the Euphrates. His difficulty was not with the Turks, who were no longer a power in Mesopotamia, but with his transport and supply. Every mile he advanced lengthened his communications, which already extended to the Persian Gulf. So far, supplies had reached him by means of the river. Above Hit the stream begins to be unnavigable save for small boats and rafts, and no secure advance was possible until a light railway could be laid down. This meant much time and labour, and it was clear that many months must elapse before Marshall could push on towards the Holy Land.

* * * * *

Now let us turn to the Palestine front and see what had happened since the fall of Jerusalem on December 9, 1917. As might have been expected, the capture of Jerusalem by our forces had a great effect on the native mind. The Arabs were specially impressed when General Allenby walked on foot without show or parade into the Holy City. They said that he came as a pilgrim and not as a conqueror. Strange to say, his name was very much in his favour. The nearest Arabic rendering of Allenby is Alla-Nebi, which means "the prophet of God." When they took this name and read it backwards, after the manner of Arabic writing, it read: "Ibn-el-Alla," or "the son, or servant, of God."

After beating off the Turco-German attempt to recapture the city, General Allenby's forces marked time for two months while the railway communications between Egypt and Jerusalem were completed. In the meantime our Arab allies were not idle. On 26th January they fell in with a Turkish force of eleven battalions, with mountain artillery and machine guns, to the south-east of the Dead Sea. This force was attempting to clear the country between the Dead Sea and the Hedjaz railway, which connects Asia Minor with the Holy Places of Arabia. The Arabs attacked with great spirit and routed the Turks, who lost over four hundred killed and many prisoners, including the commander of the force, together with much war material.

On 19th February General Allenby set his troops in motion again, his objective being Jericho towards the east and Shechem towards the north. I will first deal with the advance on Jericho. The Turks had taken up a strong position on



General Allenby entering Jerusalem, December 11, 1917.

(Official photo.)

General Allenby entered the Holy City by the ancient gate which is known to the Arabs as "The Friend." There was no pomp or show such as marked the Kaiser's entry when he visited Jerusalem in 1898.

the mountain ridges to the east of Jerusalem, and our troops were set a difficult task to dislodge them. At dawn on Tuesday we attacked four important positions running almost due north and south, some five miles east of Jerusalem. El Muntar, a bleak, black hill to the south-east of the Holy City, was in our hands shortly after six o'clock, while another position dominating a wide district was captured by a column which attacked it after a long night march. By nine in the morning the enemy was in retreat, but on the high ground farther east he made a stand. A London battalion at this point had to make three assaults before they could reach the enemy's trenches and get to work with the bayonet. The battle was over and the whole line was in our hands by three in the afternoon. Welsh troops had largely assisted by pushing to the north and preventing the Turks from reinforcing their troops on the east.

During the night the southern column moved forward towards the mountain chain which lies some nine miles east of Jerusalem. At its northern edge stands Talat ed Dumm, the key to Jericho; and winding up over its face is the Jerusalem-Jericho road. On this hill stands what is known as the Good Samaritan Inn, and near at hand is what the Arabs call the Hill of Blood, crowned by the remains of a Crusaders' castle. London troops attacked this hill at daybreak, after a short bombardment during which the enemy trenches around the castle were thoroughly searched. The Turks were seen leaving them and rushing across the broad green patch towards the defile in the rear.

Meanwhile our infantry were climbing the spurs of the hill. Before they reached the top the Turks had rallied and were ready to put up a fight. It was a very brief affair, and again the enemy fled towards the defile. He made one counter-attack, but without result, and the Hill of Blood was ours by eight o'clock in the morning.

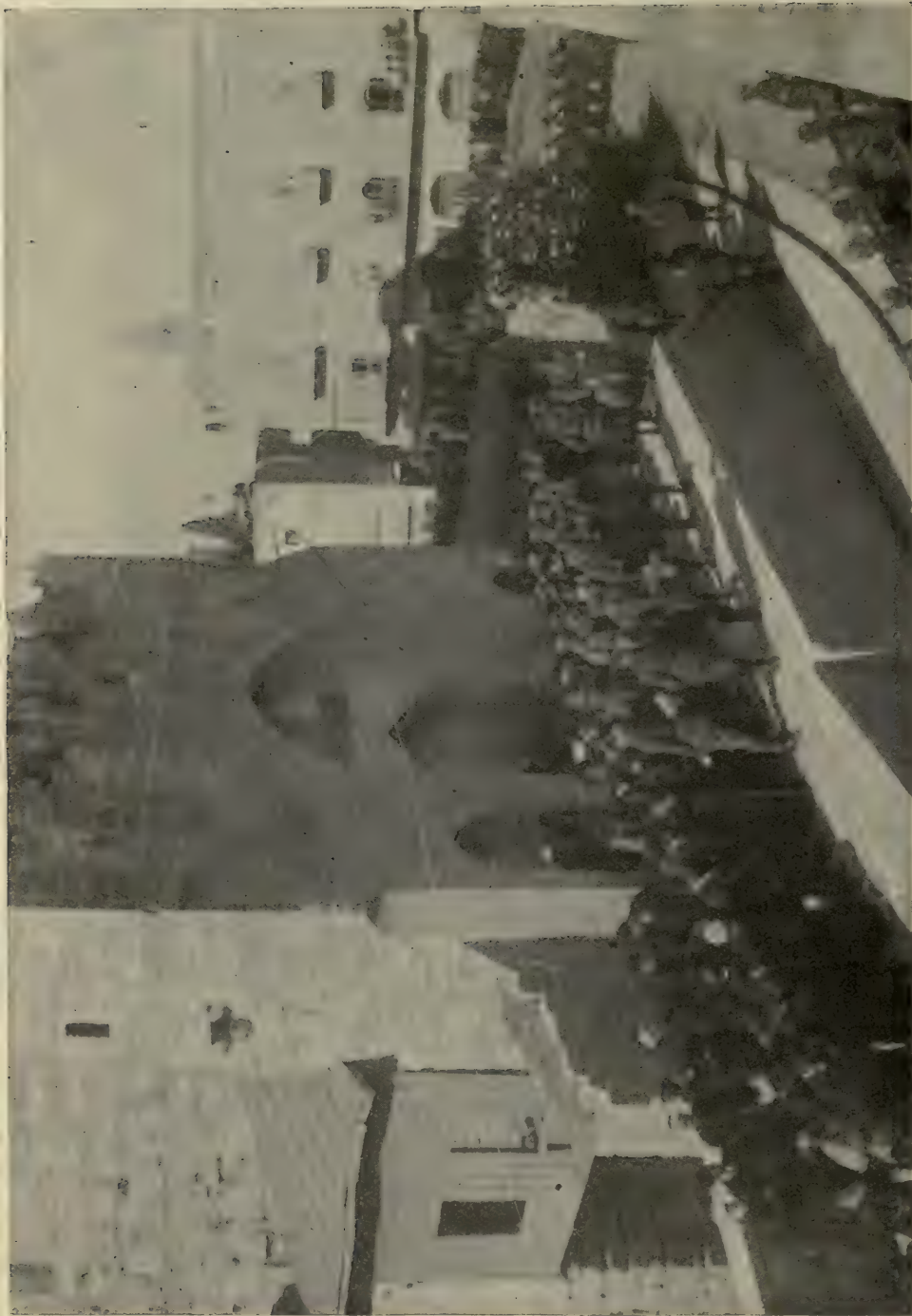
Though I have dismissed these operations in a few lines, you must not suppose that our men had an easy task. For miles they had to scramble up steep mountain slopes, slide down hillsides over smooth, slippery stones, or slither in muddy valleys. They had to haul their guns up to 2,000 feet above sea-level, and when the Jordan valley was reached they were in action 1,100 feet *below* sea-level. Wonderful feats were performed in moving the guns over this terribly difficult country.

While the attack on the Hill of Blood was proceeding, Australian and New Zealand mounted troops were riding over the hills and along the valleys threatening the enemy's rear. They had to traverse a deeply-cleft country in which the narrow defiles were death-traps. Upon one narrow gorge, where only two men could pass abreast, the enemy had trained several guns. Nevertheless, the mounted troops made headway, and on the morning of 21st February entered Jericho. A correspondent was able to write on the evening of that day: "There is not one Turk between Jericho and Jerusalem, and it seems safe to prophesy that the Turks will never again attempt to attack the Holy City from the east."

Jericho, which figures so largely in Holy Writ, has changed its site more than once. The ancient city stood near the foot of the mountains, fifteen miles east-north-east of Jerusalem, on the west side of the Jordan plain. In the time of Christ it was a Roman city, and lay farther south. During the Middle Ages the town stood farther east, where a twelfth-century tower still marks its site. Famous in Bible times for its palms and its gardens of balsam, it is now a wretched hamlet of hovels—a sore disappointment to those of our men who had figured it as a glowing Eastern city.

Allenby was determined to give the enemy no rest. He continued his advance west of the Jordan, and by 9th March his line ran from the grain depot of Rujum el Bahr, at the north-eastern corner of the Dead Sea and along the right bank of the Jordan, to a point north of the Wadi Auja. Then the line struck westward across the main road from Jericho to the north. On the same day an advance was made on a front of thirteen miles astride the Jerusalem-Shechem road. Shechem stands some thirty miles north of Jerusalem, in a saddle between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, and is approached across "most precipitous" country, where concealed machine guns made progress very difficult. Because of the central position of Shechem, Jeroboam, King of Israel, made it his capital; but in later times it was forsaken. When the Romans were masters of the country, Vespasian rebuilt the place and called it Flavia Neapolis; hence its modern name, Nablús. Near it the sites of Jacob's well and Joseph's tomb are still shown.

The battle which began on Saturday, 9th March, was for the possession of a pass leading down to Shechem from the crest



[Official photo.
It was in this square, which stands on Mount Zion, that H. R. H. the Duke of Connaught invested General Allenby with the Order of St. John of Jerusalem.

of the main ridge. For three days there was stern fighting over steep, rocky hills, deep valleys, and watercourses. Though the work was most difficult, it was carried through without a hitch. Our men had to attack up spurs and along stony ridges with concealed machine guns playing upon them. When they were not climbing they were scrambling down slippery hill faces or finding a way into or out of river courses the sides of which were like cliffs. Sometimes there was a sheer drop of ninety feet, as in the Wadi el Jib. Guns had to be lowered into the wadis by means of ropes, and hauled out again by long lines of men. It was almost entirely due to the work of the labour battalions in making motor roads across the mountains that we were able to make headway at all. From some of the hilltops which we occupied at the end of the day our men could see the plains of Sharon and Esdraelon—a green and beautiful prospect.

At the close of the month of March we were about ten miles south of Shechem and twenty miles north of Jerusalem. In the early hours of Friday, 22nd March, some of our troops forded the Jordan in spite of the strong current. The river was then bridged, and our forces having crossed, fought their way eastward through difficult mountain country. During one of the engagements a London battalion, by a dashing attack, captured the whole of an enemy battery. We pushed on, and when this part of our story ends our mounted troops were within three miles of Es Salt, eleven miles east of the Jordan, and only twelve or fifteen miles from the Hedjaz railway.

* * * * *

During the month of March H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught visited the Holy Land to inspect the troops, to thank them in the name of their King and country, and to present them with the decorations which they had won by their gallantry. Parades were held at various points in the line, the most important being that which took place on 19th March. The troops were drawn up on Mount Zion, which overlooks the valley of Hinnom and is within eyeshot of the famous places connected with the history of the Holy City. Twenty-three conquerors have stood upon this hill, but never before had it known victorious legions who so jealously guarded the sanctity of the city and so carefully preserved its temples and shrines.

In the shadow of David's Tower and the old city walls the

Duke invested General Allenby, the latest and gentlest conqueror of the Holy City, as a Knight of Grace of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. Other generals were decorated, and many officers and men received the medals which they had won in battle. From the housetops around the people of Jerusalem witnessed the simple ceremony, and later in the day, when the Duke visited the Holy Places, they flocked into the streets to give him welcome. His guards of honour were furnished by two regiments of which he was honorary colonel—the London Irish and the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. The London Irish, who stood at attention that day, could not fail to recall their hard and bitter fighting on the entrenched hills to the west, when the enemy were beaten back and the city was freed for ever from the Turkish thrall.

* * * * *

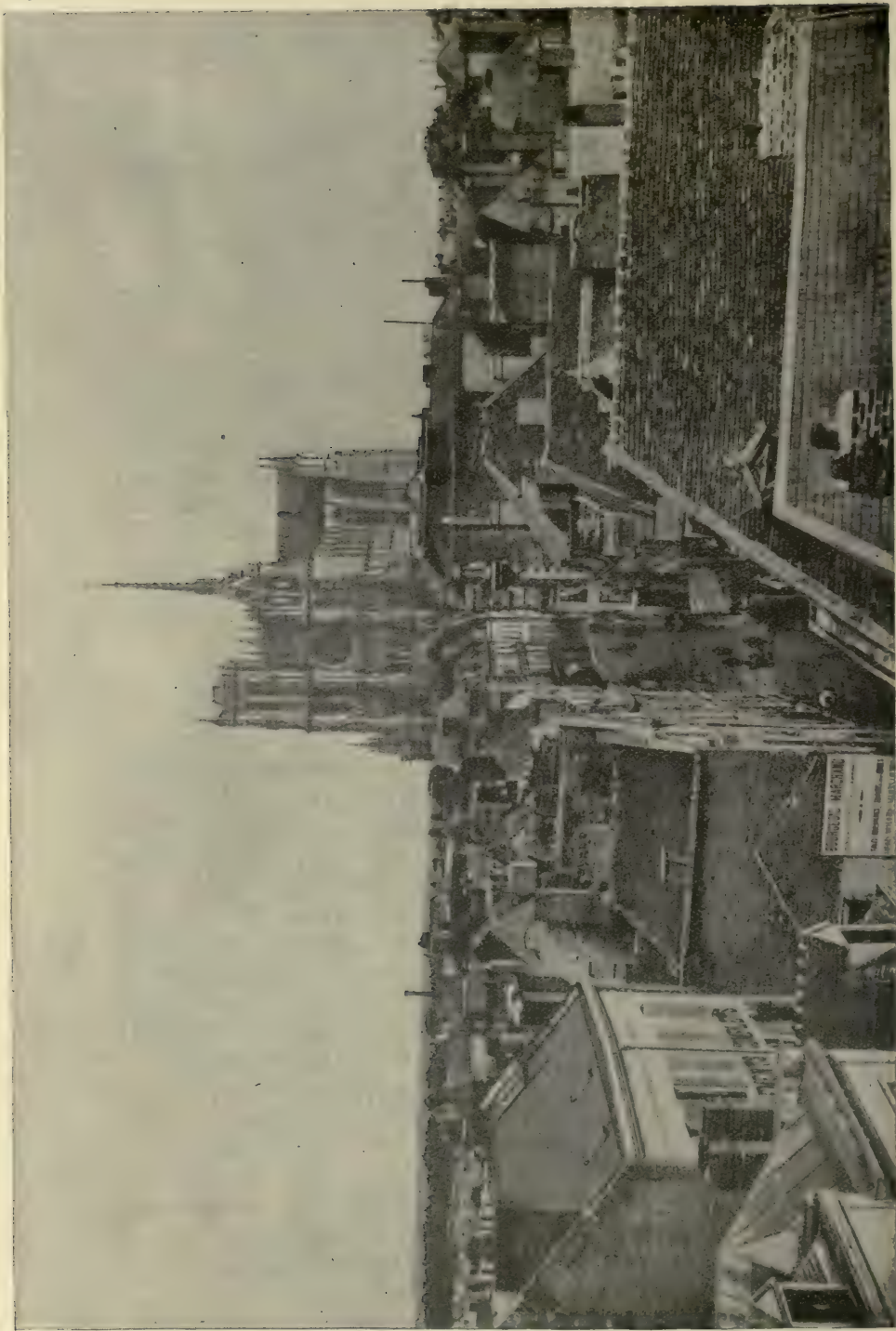
You will be interested to know that the order which General Allenby received takes us back to the days of the Crusaders. It consists of a white eight-pointed star, and was worn on the black robes of the half monks, half fighting men who devoted themselves to the work of succouring and protecting Christian Pilgrims to the Holy Places in Palestine. We first hear of the Knights of St. John in the eleventh century, but they grew to be wealthy and powerful after the conquest of Jerusalem in 1099. Crusading kings and princes gave them lands, and for nearly two hundred and thirty years they defended the Latin kingdom in Palestine against the Saracens. When the Holy Land was reconquered in 1291 they established themselves in Cyprus, and afterwards in Rhodes, from which island they were driven by the Turks in 1523. They then found a refuge in Malta, where they remained until 1798. In later times they entered into hospital service, and now the order is usually bestowed upon those who devote themselves to the welfare of the sick and suffering.

CHAPTER X.

THE FIRST DAY OF THE GREAT GERMAN ONSLAUGHT.—I.

FROM the moment when the Bolsheviks began to talk peace with the Germans it was clear that hard times were in store for the Allies. Russia was utterly out of the war, and any day she might be expected to sign peace. This meant that the Germans would no longer have to fight on two fronts, and that they would be able to give all their attention to the Allies in France, Flanders, and Italy, and fling their whole force against them.

There were many observers who thought that the enemy would make no great assault upon the Allies in the West, even though for weeks past German newspapers had announced that a mighty onslaught was about to begin. The enemy had so openly advertised his intention that it was thought he was merely trying to trick us. His submarine campaign was making headway: he was seriously interfering with our food supplies and our transport generally. He knew that the Americans could not array their armies in France for many months to come, and he knew, too, that the Italians were holding a difficult and dangerous line along the Piave and along the edge of the mountains overlooking the plain. Those who did not believe that there would be a great enemy assault in France and Flanders pointed out that the Germans and Austrians would probably make a big offensive in North Italy as soon as the snow disappeared from the lower hills, and that the result might be to force the Italians to follow the example of Russia and Rumania and make peace. The Germans, it was said, believed that they had only to hold the British and French in the West, and that the submarine campaign, together with the dropping off of the Allies, would give them victory.



Amiens and its Cathedral.

[By permission of *The Sphere*.

Amiens is an ancient Roman city on the left bank of the Somme, eighty-one miles north of Paris and about the same distance south of Calais. It stands on the main railway line between these two places. Its beautiful cathedral is said to be the finest example of Gothic architecture in the world. All round the portals are scenes from Bible history, carved in stone. Peter the Hermit, who preached the first crusade, was born in Amiens.

Though there were many who argued in this way, our soldiers in France were certain that the Germans would before long strike a tremendous blow at them. The military staff at Versailles made a close study of the question, and at the beginning of February came to the conclusion that there would be such an attack; that it would come south of Arras, and be upon the widest front that had ever yet been assailed. Sir Henry Wilson told the Government that the Germans would throw the whole of their strength into the struggle, and that they would aim at cutting off the British from the French and capturing Amiens, the great railway centre of North France. He also said that the enemy would mass some ninety-five divisions for the purpose, and that he would probably succeed in penetrating the British line to the extent of half the length of the front attacked. Strange to say, this forecast turned out to be true in almost every particular.

You know that in modern warfare, other things being equal, success rests with the side that can count upon the largest number of men. Let us see how our numbers stood in relation to those of the enemy at the beginning of the battle. On 9th April, in the House of Commons, the Prime Minister told us that though we and the French had lost heavily during 1917, the armies of the Allies in France were considerably stronger in January 1918 than they had been in January 1917. Up to about October or November 1917 our forces in France outnumbered the Germans by three to two. Then came the military ruin of Russia, and the Germans hurried up their released divisions from the Eastern front and brought them to the West. They also had a certain measure of Austrian support. Nevertheless, we were told that, at the beginning of the great assault which I am about to describe, the whole German army on the Western front was only about equal to the total strength of the Allies. We were slightly better off in infantry, cavalry, artillery, and aircraft. How, then, you will ask, could the Germans provide themselves with masses of troops for the proposed attack? Let me give you the Prime Minister's explanation.

The enemy had organized his troops so as to give him more divisions than we possessed. He had fewer battalions in each division, and fewer men in each battalion. With his divisions thus reduced in strength he proposed to hold his line, and to

fling against us in a mighty assault the extra number of divisions thus created. These divisions consisted of his best troops, and for many months some of them had been practically in rest camps on the Eastern front. All had been specially trained for the great adventure ; they had been exercised in making long marches and in carrying out sham attacks in the rear. The vanguard of each division was formed of " storm troops," soldiers of spirit and mettle who had been fed up, trained, and disciplined to form the spearhead of the assault.

The Germans had several important advantages in the great offensive for which they had diligently prepared all winter. They could choose their own ground and their own time ; they knew the width of the attack, the time of the attack, and the method of the attack ; and, above all, they were under one united command. This meant that they acted as one great team, controlled and guided by one mind. The Allies, as you know, consisted of two great groups of armies, each group having its own commander-in-chief and its own staff. Though British and French were the best of friends, and were in complete harmony with each other, there were, nevertheless, two controlling minds in command ; and this was a great drawback, because it meant that before any combined movement could be made the two commanders-in-chief had to come together and discuss the position. There was thus bound to be delay in taking combined action, and there might be differences of opinion as well. Take one example. Supposing that at the same time there happened to be a serious risk to the British line and also to the French line. Each commander-in-chief would naturally think his own risk the greater, and would provide for his own difficulty ; but if there were a generalissimo he would calculate which of the risks was the more dangerous, and would dispose his troops accordingly. It is said that the Kaiser boasted to ex-King Constantine : " I shall beat them because they have no united command."

The Germans, as you know, did not attempt to conceal their intention. They told us over and over again that they were preparing a big offensive, and that they meant to strike soon. Nevertheless, they did surprise us after all. They moved their troops by night, when our airmen could not see them ; and at the beginning of the battle they were favoured

by thick mists, which enabled them to approach within a few yards of our lines without being observed. They were also favoured by the weather, which constantly fought for them throughout the war. A long spell of dry weather had made the ground between Arras and the Oise, which in ordinary spring conditions would be impossible for troops, quite suitable for campaigning. On that part of the line the ground is usually a quagmire during an ordinary spring. In March 1918 it was dry and firm, and the Germans were able to walk easily across country which in former years was deep in mud.

You already know the main object of the Germans in making the great assault which will be described in the following pages. It was to tear a great gap in the British front as near as possible to the point where the British and French armies joined. They hoped to break through and separate the two forces. If they could do so, they would win a great advantage. They would no longer have to fight one united force, but two fractions, each of which could be dealt with separately. While with comparatively weak forces they held off one of the fractions, they could fling themselves against the other and roll it up. This was precisely what Napoleon tried to do in the Waterloo campaign and failed. He tried to thrust in between the forces of Wellington and those of Blücher, and beat them in detail. At the beginning of June 1815 Wellington's army was scattered in various places from Nivelles westward, while Blücher's was extended from the same place eastward. Wellington's plan was to unite his forces with those of Blücher at Quatre Bras, and block Napoleon's advance. The French Emperor's plan was to fall upon these armies before they could concentrate, and defeat them piecemeal.

Napoleon attacked Blücher at Ligny, and inflicted great loss upon him ; but the Prussian general was still undefeated, and retreated in good order for the purpose of joining Wellington at Waterloo, according to a previous arrangement. On the same day Napoleon's general, Ney, fell upon the British at Quatre Bras, but was beaten off ; whereupon Wellington retreated to Waterloo, where he waited for Blücher to join him. All day Sunday, 18th June, Napoleon made assault after assault on the British ; but, thanks to the doggedness of the "thin red line," they held out until the evening, when the Prussians appeared, and Napoleon found himself assailed on the

flank by another army—with what result every British boy and girl knows.

I want you to notice that the great onslaught which began on Thursday, 21st March, was a sign not of German strength, but of German weakness. We already know that the enemy was not superior in force to the Allies in the West. He had good hopes of detaching another of the Allies by an assault in Italy, and meanwhile his submarine campaign was going well. Why did he strike so early in the season? It is true that the ground across which he proposed to advance suited him well; but the weather might break down any moment, and he might find himself struggling knee-deep in the mire. Further, he knew that he was bound to suffer very great losses, and that if he failed he would never again in this war be able to make a similar effort. It was clear that if he did not succeed in this mighty undertaking he could never hope to succeed. Why was he prepared to stake everything upon this great gamble? The best observers told us that the condition of Germany and Austria was so bad that he dared not delay. Unless he struck quickly and successfully he would never be able to do so, because the German and Austrian peoples would be unable to bear their hard conditions much longer, and would demand peace at any price. A German flying officer who was taken prisoner plainly told his captors that the offensive was the result of desperation. "We must have peace quickly now," he said.

The enemy knew that the offensive which he was forced to make would be terribly expensive. The Prussians, as you are aware, believe in making their attacks with dense masses of men. They know that when their soldiers advance shoulder to shoulder they form excellent targets for the artillery, machine guns, and rifles of the defenders, and that their losses must be enormous. Nevertheless they believe that such a method of attack is worth while. They hold that the sacrifice of large masses of men in the early stages of the battle is cheapest in the long run. It is said that they were prepared to lose 600,000 men in the attempt; and certainly, if success followed, this awful outlay of human life would be justified. In no other country but Germany dare war lords send hordes of men to their death in this way. The German people have long been schooled and drilled and dragooned into complete

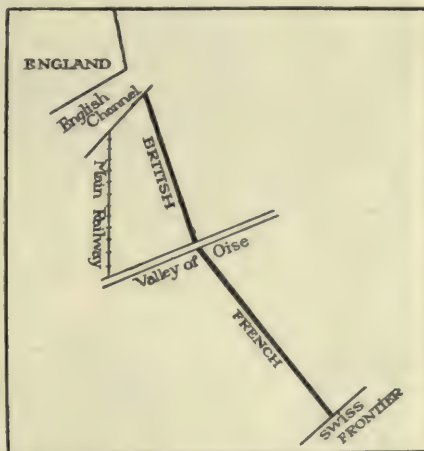
obedience; their masters think of them only as "cannon fodder."

Thus the Kaiser and his military chiefs staked everything on rapid success. There was no other way; they must speedily accomplish our ruin or await their own.

* * * * *

Look carefully at this diagram, which shows you roughly the Allied line from the English Channel to the borders of Switzerland as it was on March 20, 1918. Belgian and British forces held the line from the sea to the valley of the Oise; thenceforward to the Swiss frontier the trenches of the French.

If the enemy was to cut off the British from the French, his blow must be struck as near to the Oise as possible. If he could break through between the Oise and Amiens he would be on the flank of the British, and would be able, before the French reserves could come up, to turn northward and destroy our armies. If he could break through on the Oise, he would have a great advantage. The valley of the Oise at this point is very marshy, and is flanked by backwaters and pools. He could hold this flank with a comparatively weak force of men and guns, and at the same time employ the bulk of his strength in striking hammer blows at the British, and forcing them back on the sea. If the break-through should be successful, it would give him Amiens and the main railway between Calais and Paris. We should lose our great highway of supply, and should be forced to rely upon other lines lying considerably in the rear. The final consequences of such a break through would be terrible to contemplate.



Junction of British and French Armies.

If the enemy was to cut off the British from the French, his blow must be struck as near to the Oise as possible. If he could break through between the Oise and Amiens he would be on the flank of the British, and would be able, before the French reserves could come up, to turn northward and destroy our armies. If he could break through on the Oise, he would have a great advantage. The valley of the Oise at this point is very marshy, and is flanked by backwaters and pools. He could hold this flank with a comparatively weak force of men and guns, and at the same time employ the bulk of his strength in striking hammer blows at the British, and forcing them back on the sea. If the break-through should be successful, it would give him Amiens and the main railway between Calais and Paris. We should lose our great highway of supply, and should be forced to rely upon other lines lying considerably in the rear. The final consequences of such a break through would be terrible to contemplate.

The German High Command had chosen to strike between Arras and the Oise. Turn to the map on page 93, and find Roeux, on the Scarpe. From this place to Vendeuil, on the Oise, is a distance of $43\frac{1}{2}$ miles as the crow flies, or 50 miles



Poison Gas Shells at the Opening of the Battle

(From the picture by F. Matania)

"During the final hour of the bombardment the German big guns poured gas shells in amazing numbers. Our troops had been trained for many weeks to work for long stretches in gas. This picture shows the gunners of a British battery of 18-pounders serving the guns in their masks.



British Gunners working in their Masks.

(By permission of The Sphere.)

timbers upon our batteries and reserve trenches, and upon the cross-roads and the points where our
their gas masks, and this training proved to be of priceless value as the day wore on." Our illustration

if we count the ins and outs of the line. Never had an attack been projected on so wide a front. For the purpose the enemy had massed some ninety or more divisions, forty of which were set aside for the first shock, while ten others were held in hand to replace those that were broken, and to continue the drive. If we suppose each division to consist of 7,000 troops, he was prepared to fling into the battle in its early stages about 350,000 men, and still retain about as many again behind them as reinforcements. In addition, he brought up a greater force of artillery than had ever been massed upon a fifty-mile line. Many of the batteries had been withdrawn from the Eastern front, and others had been borrowed from the Austrians. Arrangements were made to move the guns forward with all speed.

Now let us turn to the first day of the battle. Thursday, 21st March, saw the beginning of the most critical period that Britain has ever known, and ushered in weeks of terrible anxiety during which the fate of the Empire, of Europe, and of liberty throughout the world hung in the balance. Turn again to the map on page 93, and follow the British line as it lay before dawn upon that fateful morning. It curved eastwards from the Scarpe in front of Roeux, through Fontaine and Bullecourt to Ribecourt, the extreme point of the salient which remained after our advance towards Cambrai and our subsequent retirement in November 1917. From Ribecourt the line swung westward to the neighbourhood of Epéhy to complete the salient, and then ran southward roughly parallel with the course of the Scheldt and the canal which connects it with the Somme at St. Quentin. Crossing this canal a few miles to the west of St. Quentin, it proceeded to the Oise just behind La Fère.

Now when you look at the trace of the British trench line from the Scarpe to the Oise, you are at once struck by the bulge which attains its farthest east at Ribecourt. If you were asked to choose the part of the line against which the Germans would be likely to make their greatest effort, you would be sure to point to the Cambrai salient. You would be quite right, for on the first day of the great struggle they strove hard to "pinch" this salient and cut off the men and guns within it. There was a struggle all along the fifty-mile front, but a special effort was made to reduce the Cambrai salient.

At 5.30 in the morning, just before dawn, the German guns

began to thunder. Never had such a weight of artillery been directed against us. Opposite three of our divisions the enemy had a thousand guns, and on most parts of the lines there was one gun to every twelve or fifteen yards of front. Large numbers of long-range guns had been brought up, some of them probably naval guns from the German Grand Fleet, and with these they bombarded our back areas for twenty-eight miles behind our lines. The big guns were not used to cut the wire in front of our trenches; this work was done by thousands of trench mortars specially provided for the purpose.

The bombardment continued for less than four hours, but it was terribly severe while it lasted. A Swiss artillery officer estimated that during the three hours' bombardment on the first day of the battle the Germans flung more than a million and a half shells upon our lines. This means over 8,300 a minute, or, taking the front at fifty miles, over 160 shells a minute for each mile. Actually the Germans fired in three or four hours of their opening bombardment more than twice the total number of shells which they used in the war of 1870-71.

During the final hour the big guns poured gas shells in amazing numbers upon our batteries and reserve trenches, and upon the cross-roads and the points where our troops were assembling. He hoped by such means to stifle our men with poisonous vapour, and render them incapable of resisting when his infantry advanced. He did not, however, succeed. Our troops had been trained for many weeks to work for long stretches in their gas masks, and this training proved to be of priceless value as the day wore on. A soldier told a correspondent that his battalion on the left of the attack wore their masks from four in the morning until midday. Other men wore them for three or four hours at a stretch, and only had them removed when they were wounded and carried far to the rear. Our gunners had to bring up ammunition, lay their guns, and fire them with the nozzles of their masks over their mouths and noses and the goggles over their eyes. The enemy had boasted that he had discovered a gas which would penetrate our masks and render them useless. Happily for us, our box respirators were proof against the deadliest gas that he could invent.

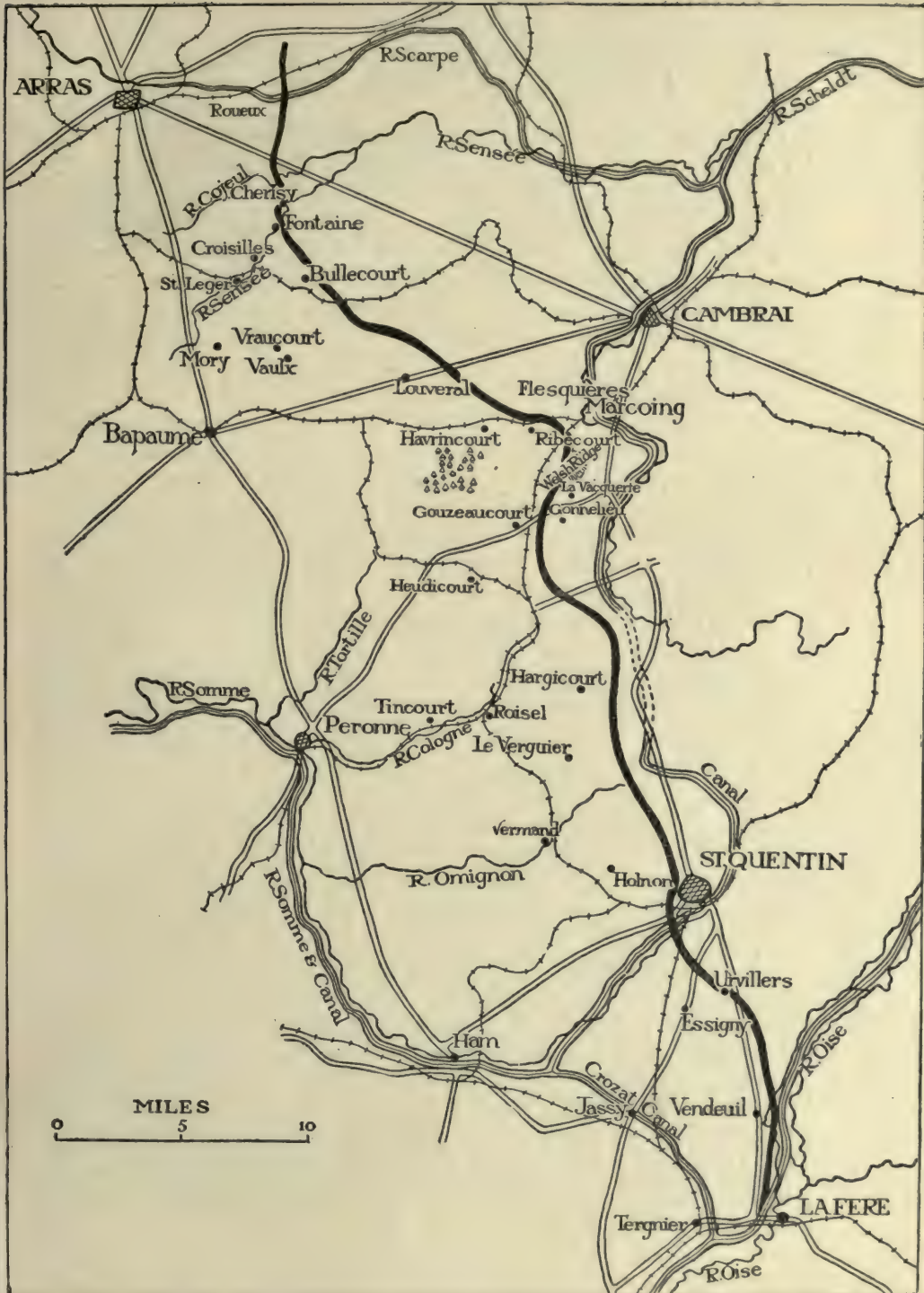
The infantry attack did not begin at the same hour all along the line. The first "storm troops" were seen advancing shortly after five in the morning, but in most parts of the line

the thrust took place from just after nine o'clock till close upon ten o'clock. The enemy pushed forward on a line extending from the valley of the Sensée, three and a quarter miles south of the Scarpe, right to the river Oise; but his chief effort, as you know, was to cut off the Cambrai salient. He attacked it both from the north and from the south. Masses of men advanced against Croisilles, in the Sensée valley on the north, and against Epéhy on the south.

His infantry came on in dense masses with the greatest possible determination. Many of them were in brand-new uniforms, as though they were entering the battle-zone for the first time. The whole countryside seemed alive with them. "They were like bees out of a hive," said a young soldier who saw them crossing the open country within four hundred yards of him. Never since the days of Mons had our men witnessed such a spectacle, and never had our artillerymen and machine gunners been afforded such ideal targets. The first lines were swept to earth, but others immediately took their places, and the advance continued over the bodies of the dead. "The more we shot down the more seemed to come," said a gunner. The carnage was horrible, but still the enemy pushed on. Our aviators, flying very low because of the white mist which was rising from the ground like smoke, reported that immense numbers of German dead lay amidst the debris of our wire and on the open ground.

The German troops which attacked from the valley of the Sensée, near Chérisy, to the neighbourhood of Havrincourt village numbered not far short of half of all the forces launched against us that day. In this part of the line our men were outnumbered by about four to one. The enemy's object was to break through and reach the heights of Henin, to the east of the Arras-Bapaume road, and also those of St. Leger, beyond the Sensée. On the heights of Henin he would find the remains of his old Hindenburg tunnel-trench. Into the sector between Chérisy and just beyond Bullecourt, a distance of less than nine thousand yards, he thrust nine divisions, and with this weight of men hoped to break through completely. Never, except perhaps when the Brandenburgers stormed Douaumont plateau in the early days of the struggle for Verdun, had he crowded so many men into such a narrow space.

At 8.45 a.m. the enemy was reported to be forcing his way



Map to illustrate British Line on Wednesday, March 20, 1918.

through our outpost lines to the north of Cambrai salient ; but he was driven out on the extreme left by an immediate counter-attack. Do what they might, the Germans could make no headway on our extreme left. They were driven back when they attempted to cross No Man's Land, bombed out of our advanced trenches when they entered them, and were held off the whole day. The 40th Division and 3rd Division, which held this part of the line with superb obstinacy, did not lose a foot of ground.

On Bullecourt, a little to the right of them, the enemy flung shells in such numbers that the earth seemed to spout flame and smoke like a volcano. No wire could withstand such a storm of explosives, and no living man could remain in such an inferno. Our outposts had to fall back upon battle positions in the rear, and there rally on a stronger defensive line. They retired in good order and with steadfast courage under the barrage, and the Germans followed them. Our guns at point-blank range swept thousands of them to earth, but still they advanced. In the early afternoon our men were obliged to retire to their third line. At half-past five in the afternoon the enemy came swarming down the slopes of the Sensée valley from Chérisy and Fontaine Wood in a desperate effort to break through. Our gunners fired into them with open sights, cutting swathes in their ranks and checking their assault. Towards the close of the day the fighting died down. At a terrible cost the enemy had gained ground south-east of Bullecourt and at Croisilles, but nowhere had he pressed us back more than a mile and a half.

While our line had thus sagged between Fontaine on the north and Louveral on the Cambrai-Bapaume road, a splendid defence was being maintained south of the road, where the famous 51st Division of Highlanders was fighting. This 51st Division had the honour of being marked down by the Germans as being the most terrible fighting group in the British army. It lived up to its high reputation that day, and received special praise from the Commander-in-Chief. The Seaforths, of the 17th Division, who held the line in front of Hermies and Havrincourt village, did remarkably fine work. Though they had been frightfully bombarded for three hours, they were quite ready to meet the enemy when he advanced against them in overwhelming numbers. Hermies was attacked six times and



British Aeroplanes attacking the Advancing Germans.

(By permission of The Sphere.)

Mr. Philip Gibbs says:—"I know many cases of airmen of ours who, during this battle, have gone behind the German lines flying no higher than 500 feet, and dropping bombs into masses of moving troops. They have scattered large columns, and have chased them with deadly machine-gun fire."

Havrincourt seven times, yet every attack was beaten off with terrible cost to the enemy. At one point the Germans penetrated our trenches, but they were thrown out again by a counter-attack, and at the close of the day the Highlanders had only lost about 150 yards of their defences. On the right of this sector, at Gauche Wood below Gouzeaucourt, the 9th Division, consisting of Scots and South Africans, fought splendidly. All day the Germans kept coming on in waves, and several times they reached the edges of the wood, only to be wiped out or hurled back again. Attack after attack failed, and at night our hold on the wood was as secure as it had been in the morning.

About midway between St. Quentin and Cambrai German divisions drove westward like a battering ram, one division to every fifteen hundred or two thousand yards. Between Hargicourt and Gouzeaucourt they were met by the famous 9th Division and other units. Though opposed by the heaviest odds, our men fought doggedly, and for many hours clung to the fragments of their old defences, refusing to surrender. Only at certain points did the Germans make headway. At Vaucellete Farm, about two miles south of Gouzeaucourt, a party of Leicesters fought with magnificent courage, and held off the swarming enemy until every man of them had fallen. Durhams coming up behind them helped to hold the attack at this point.

A tremendous drive was made at Epéhy, and our troops on the right of the farm were forced back. They yielded ground slowly and stubbornly foot by foot, and inflicted terrible losses on the enemy. It is said that two field batteries at Epéhy fired steadily with open sights at 400 yards for four hours. The swarming hordes of Germans dribbled past them, and they were surrounded. Nevertheless they continued to shoot and to make awful havoc. Round about Epéhy our men made counter-attack after counter-attack, and won ground only to lose it again.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRST DAY OF THE GREAT GERMAN ONSLAUGHT.—II.

GENERALLY speaking, we had held the enemy during Thursday all the way between the Bapaume-Cambrai road and the front of St. Quentin. The falling back of our men between Fontaine and Louveral, however, had indented our line and made it dangerous. Unless we were to invite disaster, we must give up the Cambrai salient and withdraw our troops so as to establish a stronger line in the rear. During the night the units between Havrincourt and Epéhy were withdrawn to new positions, greatly to their disgust. Some of them declared that they could hold on until 1920, if only they were allowed to stay and do so. When the withdrawal was completed we still held on to Havrincourt, Epéhy, and Le Verguier.* At the last-named place the 24th Division had made such a fine stand that it was singled out by the Commander-in-Chief for special mention.

The men who fell back towards Havrincourt retired slowly, disputing the ground foot by foot and taking heavy toll of the enemy. They were in constant danger of being surrounded; but they got away safely, thanks to the stubborn resistance of the rearguards. The lock of the Canal du Nord was blown up, lest it should provide the enemy with a crossing-place. Some of the rearguards were cut off; figures in green-gray were on all sides of them and between them and their comrades. Nevertheless, with wonderful courage they hacked their way through. During the retirement a thousand deeds of the most heroic courage were done. We shall never hear a tithe of the splendid feats of courage and endurance which were done by our men during the dark hours of their terrible trial.

* Pronounce *Le Ver-ghee-ay*.

All the officers, from generals to subalterns, were loud in praise of the men who fought so gallantly in this part of the line. "They were absolutely magnificent," said one general. They had breasted the waves of the German onslaught all day, and night brought them no respite. They were forced to retire in order to conform with the rest of the line; but their spirit was as firm as ever, and their confidence was as unshaken as if they were advancing. One young officer, pale, unshaven, and covered with dirt, stumbled into headquarters to make his report. He could not find words to express his admiration for his men. "You don't know how fine they were, general," he said.

Meanwhile, what had been happening on our right, towards the Oise? Before I tell you let us look for a moment at the country between Le Verguier and the Somme. This district, you will remember, was part of the country across which the Germans retreated in the spring of 1917. During their retirement they laid waste the fields, destroyed the villages, blew up the roads, cut down the fruit-trees, and in some cases poisoned the wells. They were now advancing across a desert of their own making.

The district, you will observe, consists of the upper basin of the Somme, which flows through St. Quentin, and runs south-west to a point some five miles east of Ham, near to which it receives the Crozat Canal, which links it up with the Oise. The river then runs westward past Ham, and bends sharply to the north as far as the walls of Péronne, after which it changes its course to the west. At Péronne the main stream is joined by a right-bank tributary, the Cologne, and five or six miles above the town by an almost parallel stream, the Omignon. Between the curve of the Somme and the Oise is the watershed known as the Ridge of Essigny. Through a hollow at the south-western end of this upland runs the Crozat Canal.

On Thursday, 21st March, the enemy delivered his main thrust in this region just south of St. Quentin. His object was to capture the Essigny ridge. For this purpose he employed six divisions, which were met and held by six of our battalions. The enemy had set himself the task of gaining five miles on the first day (Thursday), six and a quarter miles on the Friday, and twelve and a half miles on the Saturday; and in order to main-



Ferdinand Foch, Generalissimo of the Allied Forces in the West.

(By permission of The Sphere.)

On page 84 I told you that the Germans had a great advantage over us because they were under the control of one general-in-chief. Before the end of March we robbed them of this advantage, for General Foch was made generalissimo of all the Allied forces in the West. General Foch was born in 1851. In 1873 he entered a French military school; his promotion was rapid and regular, and he became Director of the Superior School of War. While occupying this post he wrote two great military works, "The Principles of War" and "The Conduct of War." He will ever be remembered for the part which he played in the Battle of the Marne. From the first he was famous as a thinker, his favourite saying being: "We have been given brains to work with. Otherwise, of what use are we?"

tain the speed of his first drive, he had fresh divisions ready to feed through his advancing line.

After a fierce bombardment which ended in a burst of gas shelling, the whole German line attacked at about nine in the morning. By means of raids across the marshes the enemy had established four bridges above La Fère; but they had been seen, and had been shot away by our guns. Nevertheless, he managed to cross the Oise in two places. As he advanced, our outposts resisted stubbornly, even when surrounded. At Vendeuil the Buffs held out from early on Thursday morning until four o'clock on Friday afternoon.

All day Thursday the battle raged on the downs beside the Oise, and the Germans, perched high in their observation towers on the crest of the hill at Gobain, could follow every movement of their men. Farther north they entered Urville, and pushed on towards the Somme, where they captured a village. They then turned south to seize Essigny. Their artillery fire all the time was very heavy, and numerous Austrian howitzers were employed.

The capture of the village on the Somme had now turned our flank north of the canal, and the Germans on the high ground were able to search the valleys with their guns. In the open country south of St. Quentin we had followed the German example, and had set up numbers of little redoubts in which machine guns were installed. Many of these "pill-boxes," manned by Irish troops, held out until afternoon, and some until dark, though ringed about with Germans. Then, under cover of night, most of the garrisons tried to cut their way out. Some succeeded, but others failed to reach safety. Certain Londoners who held the old keep near La Fère made a specially stubborn stand, and kept up a steady fire long after they were entirely surrounded, and the German line had been advanced for a long distance behind them.

By nightfall the Germans had made such headway along the eastern bank of the Somme and amidst the patches of woodland which dot the country between it and the Oise, that we were forced to withdraw behind the Crozat Canal, which runs from near Tergnier, on the Oise, to a point three or four miles east of Ham, on the Somme.

Now let us sum up the results of the first day's fighting. After a very severe bombardment, beginning soon after dawn,

some forty divisions of the enemy were launched against the whole British front between the Sensée and the Oise, a distance of about fifty miles. The heaviest attack was made on the twelve-mile front between the Sensée and Havrincourt, and in this part of the line the enemy penetrated to our main defences. He occupied a belt of land nowhere more than a mile and a half at its deepest, between Fontaine and Louveral, on the Cambrai-Bapaume road. Our retirement between these two points forced us to withdraw our line farther south, but we still held on to Havrincourt, Epéhy, and Le Verguier. At the same time, between the Somme and the Oise, six German divisions made a fierce thrust against one British division. All day they were held, but at nightfall we were forced to retire behind the Crozat Canal.

* * * * *

That night the British Commander-in-Chief sent the following telegram to the Third and Fifth Armies, which had borne the brunt of the day's fighting :—

“ The Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief sends his congratulations to the troops of your army on their splendid defence to-day.

“ He relies upon their continued steadfastness and valour to crush this new attack, and with it the enemy's last hope of success.”

Our men fully deserved the best praise that could be accorded them. They had fought with the utmost stubbornness, and though they had been forced to give ground, their spirits were high and their courage was unabated. A correspondent says :—

“ The troops I saw going up to the battle were chatting and smiling among themselves with a calm confidence that was wonderful to see. Their bands were playing them up as though on a day of festival, and none but those who know our soldiers in bad times and good could have believed that these lads were going into the greatest struggle of the war. The lightly wounded have only one interest : it is to know how the day has gone ; and when I told them that on balance it was very bad for the enemy, who had failed in all his larger plans, they said, ‘ Thank goodness for that.’ They are all convinced that the enemy's losses are very great. ‘ We were tired of killing them,’ said a gunner who had fired into their masses with open sights. They all believe that the enemy will break himself if he continues at the same rate of loss.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE GERMAN BREAK-THROUGH.

HALF A MILLION Germans had been hurled against our troops on the downs between the Scarpe, the Somme, and the Oise ; our outpost line had been broken through, and in certain places our battle positions had been penetrated. A day of terrible struggle and anxiety had ended, but our armies were still intact. Captured maps showed that the enemy had nowhere reached the points at which he had aimed. So far there had been no disaster. Nevertheless there was not a man in the British army who supposed for a moment that the worst of the shock had fallen. All were aware that on the morrow, and on many morrows to come, the enemy would renew his onslaught with even greater fury.

We had lost ground, and our losses in killed, wounded, prisoners, and guns were heavy. The enemy claimed to have captured 16,000 British and 200 guns. For our part we had inflicted upon him terrible punishment, and it was estimated that we had put out of action some 200,000 of his men. His attacks had been heaviest on the wings—in the north from the valley of the Sensée to Flesquières, in the south from St. Quentin to La Fère. He had bent back our line between Bullecourt and the Cambrai-Bapaume road, and in the south had forced us south-westward to the Crozat Canal. Though our extreme left and centre for the most part had stood firm, we were obliged to swing our line westward from its pivot in front and to the north of Arras, so as to maintain an unbroken wall of defence against the foe. Such was the state of things when the first day of the battle drew to a close.

On Thursday night a dense mist arose, and again our flying men were prevented from spying out the enemy's movements.

Not until between ten and eleven on the Friday morning did the curtain lift. It disclosed the enemy in many places close up to our lines, and ready to assault them. All day there was heavy fighting along the whole fifty-mile front. We shall best form some idea of the varying fortunes of the struggle if we begin at the north and follow the fighting southward.

In the preceding chapter you learned that the enemy made a determined attempt to pierce our lines by way of the Sensée valley, in order to carry the heights of Henin to the east of the Arras-Bapaume road, and also those of St. Leger beyond the little river. He had crowded some nine divisions into a front of less than nine thousand yards, hoping with this enormous weight of men to smash through our line and turn it from the north. Thanks to the superb resistance of General Byng's Third Army, he made no headway on our extreme left, though between Chérisy and Bullecourt he forced us back to our third line.

Before the fog had lifted on the morning of Friday he resumed his effort to reach the heights. Throughout the day the battle raged with scarcely a lull. At six in the morning he fiercely bombarded our lines behind Chérisy, and at about half-past eight sent his storm troops forward in a furious drive towards Henin Hill. Between nine and ten o'clock a second attack was made, and shortly after eleven the storm troops managed to get a footing on the hill. While our men were slowly descending towards the bed of the Cojeul stream, twelve of our machine gunners stuck like limpets to the high ground. They worked their guns with great effect, and swept hundreds of Germans into eternity. Though we had abandoned the hill, the enemy could not hold it. When our observers caught a last glimpse of the hill in the twilight, they saw that it was covered with German corpses. Along the road from Croisilles to Henin parties of British riflemen and gunners lying in the shell-holes stayed the enemy's progress.

By noon waves of Germans were furiously assaulting our line in front of Mory, which was the scene of terrible fighting. Attack and counter-attack followed in quick succession, and there were furious combats in the cellars of the ruined village. The place was held at first by English troops—Staffords, Middlesex, Lincolns, and Leicesters—and was lost and retaken several times. At last most of our troops were driven out, leaving the Leicesters surrounded by enemy troops. Their plight



British Infantry making a Stand. A Thin

(From the picture by Frédéric de Haenen. By

The incident pictured above was a common experience of our troops during the retreat. Sometimes a hordes of Germans. Thanks to Lewis guns and rapid rifle fire, great slaughter was inflicted on the our men sacrificed themselves to permit their comrades to get away. In the right foreground, behind a a signaller, who flags the message back to the battery behind. British shrapnel is bursting over the wood shrapnel.



Saki Line holding up the Germans.

(Mission of the Illustrated London News.)

all body of British infantry lying out in the open, without the protection of a trench, were assailed by a dancing foe, and frequently he was held up for a considerable time. More than once small parties of our men, carrying a part of ammunition boxes, a British artillery officer is seen watching the action and giving directions to the men of which the enemy is pouring. The darker smoke-puffs in the centre are those of German black

seemed hopeless ; but they broke through, and rejoined their comrades. Before morning, however, British valour prevailed. A Scottish brigade of Highlanders and Lowlanders flung the enemy out of the village. None of our troops had a harder time than the weary and overwrought men who fought in and around Mory that day.

Early in the afternoon the Germans entered the village of Vaulx-Vraucourt, which lies in a hollow between bare meadows to the east of Mory. English and Welsh troops, however, made a splendid resistance, and the enemy was held up. Shortly before six in the evening he worked round to the south-east of the village, and our men, thus outflanked, were forced to retire to a prepared position in the rear. Later in the day, when the air was full of biting fumes and the battlefield was clouded over, fresh masses of Germans were seen assembling for another thrust along the Sensée valley. Our guns caught them, and took terrible toll of them ; but by a quarter-past six the survivors had occupied the western bank of the little river from Fontaine to Croisilles.

Another mass of storm troops now advanced, wave behind wave, against the smoking ruins of Vaulx-Vraucourt. They brought up with them trench mortars ; behind them were field guns, and horses carrying mountain guns formerly used in the Balkans. But in spite of all his efforts the enemy could not advance beyond Croisilles and Mory. The hinge of our defensive line still held. Though outnumbered in some places by as much as eight to one, our troops clung to their battered trenches with true British doggedness.

A correspondent tells us that he spent Saturday on the left of our battle-front between Bapaume and the Scarpe. He noticed that the spirit of our men had not been shaken, despite the heavy blows which they had suffered. Our retirement was being carried out in the most orderly way. Stores, equipment, hospitals, ammunition dumps, and all kinds of supplies from the old forward areas were being removed very rapidly but quite coolly to the rear.

“ Transport columns driven by weary, dust-covered men rolled along the roads in perfect order. I came upon troops halted in the fields on the way to the front, breakfasting and even reading yesterday's newspapers. Others, who had been brought out of the battle, were covered with grime and pale from lack of sleep. They lay stretched on the grass smoking and

quietly chatting, even joking with passers-by. At one battle headquarters busy map-makers were grouped around tables in an orchard, while children watched them wonderingly. From the road I saw a distinguished commander and his staff talking quietly over a telegram in front of an old farmhouse, where chickens searched for food among the straw, and the thin, ceaseless voice of a wireless receiver could be heard above the clatter of peasants' carts."

Now let us move further south. There were fierce attacks at Hermies, where a most gallant defence was made, but between Havrincourt and Gouzeaucourt the pressure was not great. Still further south, between Epéhy and Roisel, the attacks were very violent. Epéhy and neighbouring villages were lost, but there was no break-through. At Le Verguier, further south, the 24th Division made a glorious stand, and a body of the West Surreys fought, it is believed, to the last man.

I now come to the sector in which we suffered disaster. You will remember that on the previous day our Fifth Army had held its own manfully against overwhelming odds in the district between St. Quentin and the Crozat Canal, but at nightfall had been forced to retire behind the canal. On Friday morning the enemy hurled fresh divisions into the fight, and made two furious thrusts—the one to the north of St. Quentin, the other to the south of the city. At Jussy, on the canal, there was heavy fighting, and the enemy was repulsed in some disorder. Nevertheless he managed to gain and secure a footing on the west side of the canal.

For the thrust north of St. Quentin the German High Command had reserved several new divisions, including four Guards divisions. As this thrust had such grave consequences, we must pay particular attention to it. To the north of St. Quentin, on the morning of Friday, our trenches lay roughly parallel with the main road from Cambrai to St. Quentin, and covered the village of Holnon, about two and a half miles west of the northern suburb of the city. This village stands on a lift of ground, and behind it is the wood of Holnon, nearly two miles long, and in places about a mile across. The Roman road from St. Quentin to Vermand runs as a green lane through the wood. About two miles to the north-west of the village lies the little river Omignon.

The German thrust at the north end of Holnon Wood was made with a great weight of infantry and artillery. According to the enemy's account, his troops broke through at this point,

and, spreading out right and left, poured through the breach into the valley of the Omignon. His thrust to the south of the city forced us out of certain villages, and enabled him to push along the left bank of the Somme towards Ham. By five in the afternoon that town was cleared of civilians, and shortly afterwards German shells began to fall upon it.

All day our men in this heavily-assailed sector fought stubborn rearguard actions, riddling the advancing columns of the enemy with machine guns and bursts of artillery fire at point-blank range. Their retreat was carried out without panic of any kind. The German advance guards were worn out before evening, and had to be driven forward by their officers. Our men drew them time after time into ambushes, and inflicted awful losses upon them. For instance, when we abandoned one of our camps, our machine gunners took up stations from which they could sweep it with bullets, and then waited. Soon the green-gray hordes swarmed into it. They were hungry and thirsty, and they searched through the rows of huts for scraps of food and for drink. Especially did they crowd into a building which had been used as a canteen. When the huts and the canteen were full of men our gunners opened fire. "We don't know what happened to the Germans," said the officer who told the story, "but not a man of them came out again."

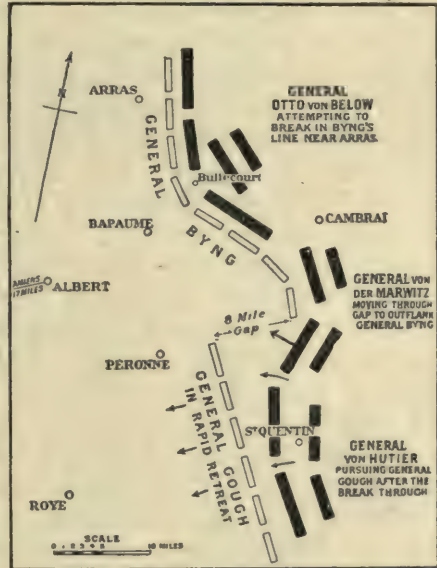
By nightfall our retreating men had reached their new line. It rested on the Somme, near the junction of the Crozat Canal with that river. We were now at the beginning of a retreat which lasted for the next three days. We had lost our old line of strong defensive positions, and had to withstand the enemy in hastily-dug trenches, or in no trenches at all. The enemy had not only driven us back, but had made our task of holding him off doubly difficult.

Now I come to Saturday, 23rd March, the day on which the British army was in dire peril, and on which, according to the enemy, the first stage of the great battle ended. Give your attention to the diagram on the next page. It shows you the position on the morning of the 23rd. Generally speaking, the Third Army of General Byng, extending from the north of Arras to the limit of the Cambrai front, had held its ground, despite the hammer-blows of General Otto von Below, who, as you know, was trying to pierce our defences south of Arras. The enemy, however, had broken through at Holnon, and had

forced General Gough's Fifth Army to retreat. A gap of eight miles yawned between Byng's right and Gough's left, and into this gap General von der Marwitz thrust his troops, in the hope of separating the two British armies. Meanwhile General von Hutier, further south, was pursuing Gough's main force westward. You know enough of strategy to be aware that if once von der Marwitz could outflank Byng, our northern army would be in great danger of being rolled up and destroyed.

The Germans had by this time stormed the heights of Vermand, on the Omignon, and victory seemed to be almost certain. Byng, however, saved the situation. He began to retire his right from the bend south-west of Cambrai, so as to link up with Gough's left. His men gave ground slowly, fighting every step of the way, and by evening the gap had disappeared, and the two armies were in touch once more. The continued retirement of the Fifth Army meant that the whole line had to swing westward like a door upon its hinges. I need not remind you that the hinge lay in front and to the north of Arras, where the Third Army had held fast.

While the left only fell back from two to eight miles, the right had to retreat some twenty-eight miles. Von Below's army was held steadily. It only gained ground because Byng had to retire in order to close the gap and get into touch with Gough's left.



The Germans' Lost Opportunity.

The retreat from the front of Cambrai brought us once more into the old battle ground of the Somme. A correspondent writes:—

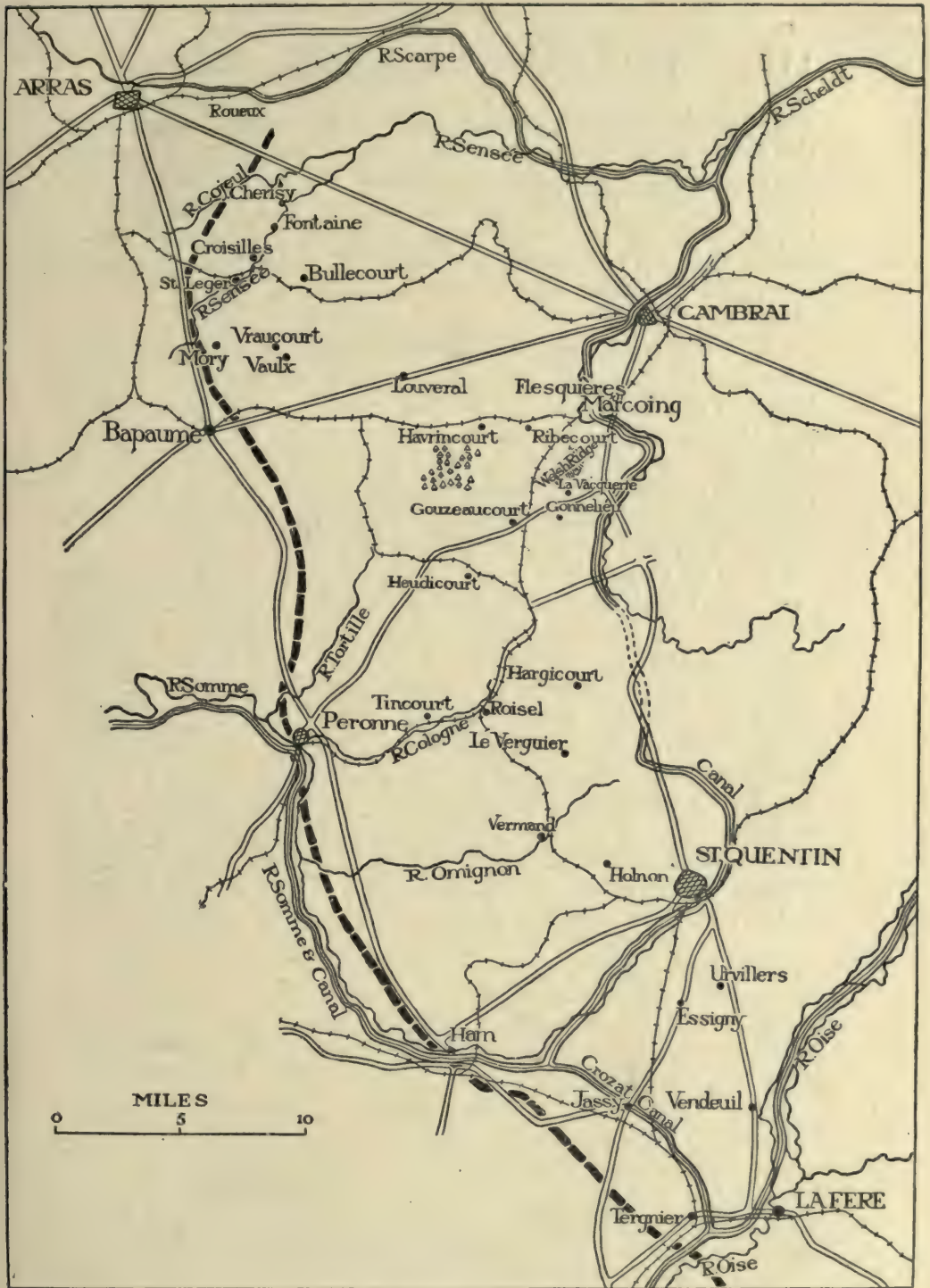
The retreat from the front of Cambrai brought us once more into the old battle ground of the Somme. A correspondent writes:—

“ You cannot imagine the sensations of the troops who find themselves fighting again in the familiar country of the Somme, with German guns thundering in the ravines and sunken roads, as they did so many months ago. The war has developed no more dramatic situation than this—the

battlefield in the open, firing at almost point-blank range from among the old trenches and dug-outs, the infantry pushing its way among cemeteries and weed-grown ruins. A few days ago you could have passed through the dead battlefield without hearing a sound, and could have motored along the smooth straight roadway empty of traffic, without seeing a living thing save an occasional group of labourers digging or building. You could motor from Amiens to Bapaume in fifty minutes, slipping from Albert along the east stretch of glistening road, past our defences of two years ago and the landmarks of our progress eastward from that starting-point, past the blackened embers of High Wood and the rubbish heap at the windmill of Pozières, and the loneliness of the journey would remain a sharp memory for ever."

Now all was changed. The German host was swarming across the old silent battlefield, and our troops were retreating before them past the scenes of their former victories. Here and there heroic rearguards stemmed the torrent, and by desperate counter-attacks restored the broken lines. Behind the enemy infantry his heavy guns followed with great speed. For weeks past the Germans had practised this quick advance of their artillery. Our airmen, high up in the blue, could see howitzers lumbering along the roads, and almost endless columns of motor lorries bringing up shells to the new battery positions. Guns came into action in the open, and field batteries galloped boldly across rising ground less than a mile from our troops. Behind them another army advanced—an army of workmen engaged in repairing the railways and bridges which we had destroyed, and in erecting new hospitals and aerodromes on the ground recently won.

While Gough's army was retiring towards the Middle Somme it lost touch with the Sixth French Army on its right, and an ever-widening gap of open country remained undefended between the left of the French and the right of the British. Through this gap the Germans might have advanced on Paris. It was of vital importance that the breach should be closed, and that the two armies should without delay unite their wings. On Friday afternoon General Fayolle received orders to advance to the support of the British. He began to cross the Oise between Noyon and La Fère, and to move northward. On the 23rd the Germans were in Ham, and Noyon was threatened. Rapidly our Allies took up a defensive position facing northwards, and made a most vigorous resistance. Some regiments of our Fifth Army had fallen back upon Chauny and Noyon, so that a mixed force of French



Map to illustrate British Line on Sunday, March 24, 1918.

and British was now covering the direct road to Paris down the valley of the Oise. For many days thereafter this slender force held the gap which lengthened every hour as the Fifth Army retired. Chauny fell on Sunday, and the French had to retire, still fighting, on Noyon. The story of how the French closed the gap and built up a powerful battle front amidst the confusion of defeat and rapid retirement is one of the epics of the war.

The result of General Fayolle's stroke was to prevent the enemy from carrying out his great object—namely, to slip in between the British and the French and divide them while he had the marshy Oise valley as a protection on his left flank. He was "shepherded" by the French, so to speak, from the point of junction, and his main forces were pushed a little to the north-west. It is impossible to overestimate the value of the services thus rendered by the French.

Now let us return to the Third Army, and follow its fortunes as it rolled back over the devastated country towards the Middle Somme. On Saturday and Sunday there was heavy fighting along the Tortelle rivulet, which joins the Somme a few miles below Péronne. The stream was crossed, and Péronne, now attacked from the north, the west, and the south, had to be abandoned. It was occupied by the enemy on Sunday. So, too, was Ham, which fell after a desperate fight. But, worst of all, the enemy had crossed the Somme by means of rafts and pontoons at several points, and it was clear that the line of the river could not long be held. Before that terrible Sunday was over the Germans claimed that they had captured in the four days' struggle 30,000 prisoners and 600 guns.

CHAPTER XIII.

SOLDIERS' STORIES OF THE RETREAT.

YOU want no assurance from me that in the encounters which I have described our men sold their ground very dearly. The story of every fight in this war is resplendent with the valour and self-sacrifice of our soldiers, but never did it shine so brightly as during the retirement in which we were now engaged. With Spartan fortitude they freely gave their lives to hold up the tidal wave of Germans that flowed over and around them, and thus enabled their comrades to make good their retreat. When, a few days later, his Majesty the King visited the battle-front, he conversed with many of the men who had done deeds of the most wonderful bravery during this time of awful stress. He talked, for example, with Highlanders of the 51st Division, and heard from their own lips the tale of their terrible experiences. Some of the officers told him that during the rearguard actions many of the men were tired to death with days of continuous fighting; yet when called upon to make one last effort, they staggered to their feet and fell upon the enemy once more.

From men of the Duke of Wellington's West Riding Regiment he heard how at Bucquoy they were assaulted five times, through the day and the night, by Prussian Guards, who had been ordered to capture the position at all costs, yet had been beaten off with frightful loss. He heard how a platoon of the Yorkshire Light Infantry had been surrounded but had refused to surrender, and had fought on until every man was either dead or wounded. Similar incidents were quite common during the great battle.

He also heard the story of a gunner officer in an observation post who sent back telephone messages to headquarters during



The Visit of King George to the Troops on the Western Front.

(British official photograph.)

His Majesty the King visited the Western front during the great German onslaught, and greatly encouraged our men by his presence and kindly words. He is here seen in a village behind the lines. As the little royal ensign on his car was seen, the French peasants joined in the cheering.

an attack. "There are Boches in the reserve line," he said; and, after a short pause, he continued, "There are Boches in my trench." At last came the message, "They are bombing my post," after which the brave voice was silent for ever. From men of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders he heard of the German attacks near Hermies, and of the shambles which our men created in the sunken road by Demicourt. The German Guards who were sent against them advanced not in steel helmets, but wearing the "picklehaube," as though on parade. Some of them belonged to the famous "Cockchafers," the regiment which was cut up by Welshmen at Pilkem ridge.

He was also told that there were heavy guns in Beaumetz when the Germans advanced, and that the Highlanders were determined to save them. That night they pushed forward along with steam tractors, and with Germans all round them hitched their caterpillars to the guns and brought them out—every one—under the very noses of the enemy.

Some of the Highlanders of the 51st Division told the King how they crossed the old battlefield of the Somme, with its thousands of little white crosses telling of brave men who had fallen in former battles. They were so weary that they leaned against each other, and some of them held hands like children. At every halt, however brief, they fell into deep slumber. One of them had a strange story to tell. While they were trudging to the rear a small balloon fell amongst them. It came from the enemy, and attached to it was a friendly message: "Good old Fifty-first Division. Sticking it yet. Cherio!" That balloon and the message passed into the possession of a Scottish sergeant, who would not part with it for any gold that could be offered.

Grim accounts of rearguard actions also came from the Manchesters and other Lancashire troops who had won the praise of the Commander-in-Chief for their splendid pluck and steadiness. The names and deeds of all the regiments which covered themselves with glory in the battle would occupy many of these pages. Irishmen—Ulstermen, Inniskillings, Royal Irish Rifles, and others from the Emerald Isle—played their part no less gallantly. Nothing, however, was nobler or more tragic than the last stand of the Manchesters in a redoubt called after their name near St. Quentin. Even when the enemy

was all round them they held on, and their machine guns never ceased to fire. By means of a buried cable they were able to get messages through to the rear for some time. The last words were received from the commander, at about 3.20 in the afternoon. He was wounded, but he spoke calmly and even cheerily, though his message was that his men could not hold out much longer, as nearly every one of them had been hit, and the Germans were swarming around. The last words heard from him just before the redoubt was overwhelmed will for ever be an inspiration to his gallant regiment: "The Manchesters will defend the redoubt to the last moment."

Canadian armoured cars did fine work in delaying the advance of the Germans. Several times cars belonging to the Canadian Motor Machine Gun Corps were found fighting alongside Tanks; and more than once they followed in the wake of the monsters. The Canadian cars were frequently concealed in ruined buildings until sections of Germans had passed by. Then they came out, and drove down on the enemy with all their guns going. They also did useful work in bringing up ammunition and petrol, and in carrying off disabled men. One of those rescued was a badly-wounded British brigadier, who was described by a Canadian sergeant as "the pluckiest officer I ever saw. He had stayed with a little post of about a dozen men right to the last, and when the machine-gun crew were laid out he fired the gun himself until he was badly hit. He made us leave him with a field ambulance, and wouldn't let us take him to a casualty clearing station. 'Go back and give it to 'em hot,' were his parting words to me."

* * * * *

It is said that during the battle German agents in British uniforms managed to slip through our lines, and by means of all sorts of lying reports greatly disturb the minds of the French villagers. As the Germans advanced, many of these poor people were forced to leave their homes and for the second time trek westward. East of Péronne every village had been destroyed by the Germans during their retreat in the spring of 1917; but further south many of the villages had been restored, and the farmers had again begun to cultivate their little fields. All these had now to be abandoned. Some of the refugees were withdrawn by train; others, with their household goods



A Knight-Errant on Wheels.

(From the picture by F. Matania. By permission of The Sphere.)

The poor people who were driven from their homes by the German advance were helped in their flight by French and British troops. A British motor cyclist is here seen giving a lift to an old French lady.

piled upon farm carts, and their wives and children trailing behind, made their way slowly and painfully along the roads to the rear. Amongst all the sad sights of war there are fewer more heartbreaking than to see whole families, deprived of their homes and means of livelihood, trudging wearily away from the guns, and not knowing where to lay their heads.

* * * * * * *

The German Kaiser, who had placed himself in chief command of the great offensive and had declared that it was his battle, sent the following telegram to his Empress on Saturday :—

“Pleased to be able to tell you that, by the grace of God, the battle at Monchy, Cambrai, St. Quentin, and La Fère has been won. The Lord has gloriously aided. May He further help.—WILHELM.”

The same evening another dispatch set the church bells ringing and the flags flying all over Germany :—

“The first stage of the great battle in France is ended. . . . A considerable part of the British army is beaten.”

I need not tell you that the statement in the last sentence was quite untrue. We had suffered a great reverse, but our forces had not been beaten. For an army to be beaten means that it has been put out of action and rendered incapable of fighting again. Our line had fallen back, but it was unbroken, and was ready to continue the fight at any moment. The eagerness of the Kaiser to claim a victory before his work was done could only be explained by the necessity for heartening his own people and preparing them for the awful tale of losses which would soon have to be unfolded.

* * * * * * *

I will conclude this chapter by rapidly summing up the results of the four days' fighting. When the battle opened the Allied armies were facing the Germans along a trench line extending from the North Sea to the Alps. Along this line the enemy had been besieged for more than two years. The northern half of the line was held by British forces, the southern half by French armies, and the junction between them lay along the valley of the river Oise. While the enemy was forced to fight on the Russian front he held his Western line with difficulty, because he had to divide his forces. Constant inroads were made upon his Western front, and though he held

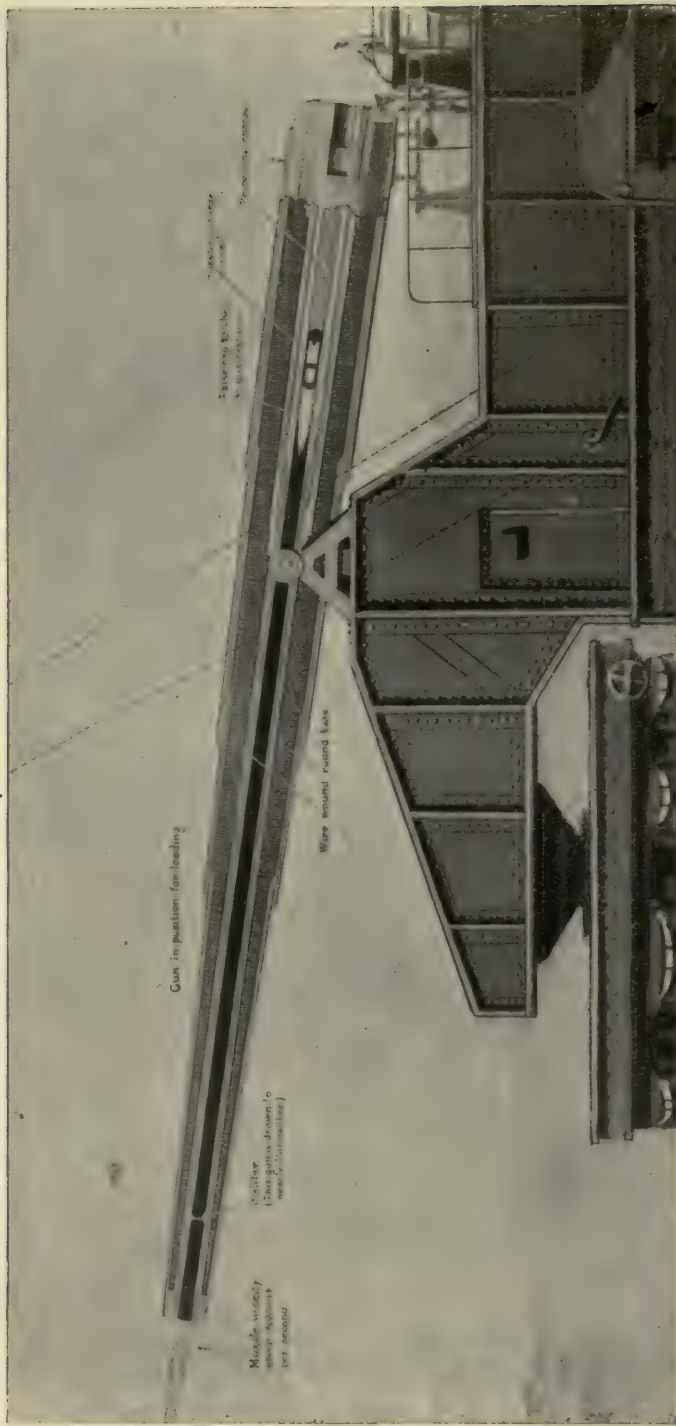
it stubbornly he was obliged to give ground both in front of Ypres and in the region to the north and south of Arras.

When, however, Russia proved faithless and abandoned the Allied cause, he was no longer obliged to maintain his armies on the Eastern front. He was, therefore, able to transfer large forces to the West, and to give his whole attention to the war on that front. How should he use this new and unexpected advantage? Should he strike, or should he simply hold on and, as soon as the season served, assail the Italians on their weak line, and force yet another of the Allies to make peace with him? Delay in the West and an early offensive in Italy seemed to be his best policy. His submarine campaign was going well: he was sinking British and neutral ships faster than they could be built, and was thus gravely hampering his chief opponent in supplying herself with food and in transporting munitions to her armies. Further, he had not much to fear from the Americans for many months to come.

To the surprise of many observers, he decided to strike with all the force that he could muster, and make a desperate effort to force a victorious peace before the spring was over.

We can only guess why he decided to make this great gamble. It may have been that the hardships which his people had been forced to endure, and the terrible losses which they had suffered, had so worked upon them that they were crying aloud for peace at any price; or it may have been that relations with Austria were so strained that she was ready to break away and make peace on her own account. Whatever the reasons may have been, they were evidently sufficient to make the High Command stake everything on a great adventure, the issue of which would be either the speedy defeat of the Allies or Germany's ultimate ruin.

Where should the blow be struck? That was the next question. No student of war could fail to see that a blow upon the right of the British front, as near as possible to the point where the French took over the line, promised the best results. A mighty thrust along the valley of the Oise would, if successful, cut off the British from the French, and at the same time give the enemy a left flank which he could easily defend. If he could smash through and get round the flank of the British army, he would be able to roll it up northward and destroy it. Fortunately for him, the ground over which



Probable Appearance of the German Gun which bombarded Paris.
 (By permission of *The Sphere*.)

The gun is said to be mounted on a triple track railway. It is here shown as in the position for loading. The barrel is drawn in section, in order to show the inner tube. One shell is shown ready for discharge, with its big charge behind it; another shell is seen leaving the muzzle, with a probable velocity of 5,200 feet per second.

he proposed to attack was firm and hard as the result of a long spell of dry weather.

He knew that in sending his troops against the seasoned British he would suffer terrible losses ; but he was ready to make a great sacrifice. He believed that his losses would be well worth while if success crowned his efforts. Never had so much been staked upon a single enterprise. If he won, the lordship of the world was his ; if he failed, he would seriously cripple himself for future operations, and would probably ensure his own defeat.

Soon after the offensive began several German newspapers gave an account of the preparations. It is said that when the decision was made that there should be a mighty onslaught on the British, Hindenburg sent Ludendorff all along the front, from north to south, to find "the best point for a break-through." The preparations were begun at the end of January. They were not easy, because they had to be concealed as much as possible, in order that the British might not suspect anything.

First of all, accurate maps were made on which every road and its condition were shown. Then new roads were constructed and old roads were improved. Cross-roads were made, so that at least two routes were available for every army corps. Most of this engineering work had to be done by night, when the British airmen could not see what was going on. When all was completed a book of one hundred pages was prepared ; it was illustrated with sketch-maps, and gave full instructions as to how the offensive was to proceed. Every company commander received a copy of this book.

Early in March the Germans, so we are told, quietly began bringing up munitions as near as possible to the British lines. At that time our men must have noticed what was on foot, for during the following nights the area was flooded with British airmen, who tried with the help of lights to find out what preparations were being made. Here and there they hit and exploded a munition dump, but most of the stores, according to the account which I am quoting, remained uninjured. Nevertheless, increased uneasiness showed itself in the British camp, and the London newspapers began to publish statements that the enemy was preparing a great attack between Arras and St. Quentin. They thought it would begin on 10th March, and all that night the British guns were busy.

A few days later the real movement of German troops began ; it took seven nights of marching. At this time the heavy guns and bomb-throwers had already been brought up to the front. "The British now understood that we were in earnest, but staff maps which we have captured show that they did not realize the full extent of their danger. They began, however, to withdraw their heavy guns, but were interrupted in this work when the storm broke on the morning of 21st March. This date had been fixed a full month before, and was known to thousands. But they all kept the secret, so that on the historic morning of 21st March the whole enormous machine was set in motion with complete success." A captured officer's diary tells us that the Germans named 21st March Michael's Day, because it was to be the day of Michael's revenge. Michael, you will remember, is the popular name for a German, as John Bull is for an Englishman.

* * * * *

The enemy struck hard along a fifty-mile line from the Scarpe to the Oise, but only at one point did he break through, and even then he could not destroy the unity of the British line. His stubborn opponents, losing terribly but still intact and undismayed, swung back their line like a trap-door on its hinges ; and as it receded the French filled up the gap on the south, and kept contact with it. At the end of four days of the fiercest and bitterest fighting ever known, and after his legions had been mown down like grass before the scythe, his main object was unfulfilled. He had gained ground ; he had thrust his enemy back across bare and devastated country, pock-marked with shell-holes and dotted with the ruins of small towns and villages ; he had captured many prisoners, many guns, and much war material. He had won a great success, but he had not turned the British army, and that was the chief object of his assault. Until he could break through our lines he was only dashing his head against a stone wall.

* * * * *

On Saturday, 23rd March, at half-past seven in the morning, the roar of an explosion brought the Parisians out of their beds in a state of great bewilderment. A huge shell had fallen upon the capital. Thereafter, at intervals of about fifteen minutes, shells continued to fall until half-past two. At three o'clock it was announced that ten persons had been killed and fifteen

injured. Whence had the shells come? The point in the German lines nearest to Paris was about seventy miles away. Surely the enemy had no gun which could carry so far? Before long, however, all doubts were dispelled, and it was clear that the Germans had constructed a gun capable of hurling a shell some 300 pounds in weight for seventy-five miles.

Day by day the bombardment continued, and each day added to the toll of dead and injured. The Parisians, however, were not dismayed. On Good Friday a shell hit one of the churches during the three hours' service, just at the ninth hour of our Lord's agony.

Next day Cardinal Amette, Archbishop of Paris, made the following protest:—

“Yesterday, Good Friday, at the very hour of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, when the faithful were gathered in the churches to celebrate the great mystery, the Germans resumed their bombardment of Paris, after several days' interruption. A shell fell on one of our churches, and the vaulted roof fell in, killing at least seventy-five persons and injuring ninety others, chiefly women and children. Such a crime, committed in such circumstances on such a day and at such an hour, arouses deep indignation in every heart. In an hour of profound grief it is our duty to appeal to the justice of God, and to implore His compassion for the victims.”

A French member of Parliament who visited the church shortly afterwards tells us that he will never forget the horror of the scene. Firemen and volunteers, mostly soldiers on leave, were already at work. The dead and dying, the battered and torn, were being carried out, amidst the cries and tears of their relatives and friends. On the steps of the church there were pools of blood. Yet on that very morning the German Emperor had sent to Krupps, the manufacturers of the weapon that had done the hideous mischief, a letter warmly congratulating the firm on having produced this “achievement of German science and labour.”

The experts at once began studying the new gun, though none of them had seen it, and before long were able to give us some information which may or may not be correct. They told us that the gun was of enormous length, probably about seventy feet or more. As an ordinary gun of such length would not be able to withstand the strain of firing, a tube

8.2 inches across was either inserted into the outer tube, or some other method was adopted to give it the necessary strength. The shell itself was about twenty inches long, but a false conical-shaped cap attached to it increased its length to thirty-six inches. It had a fuse at the nose and another at the base, so that it would be sure to burst when it struck its target. The outside of the shell was rifled so as to add to its velocity when leaving the gun. Its walls were very thick in proportion to the length, and the inner chamber was divided into two compartments, each stored with explosives. The object of dividing the explosive chamber into two was to lessen the risk of an explosion inside the gun, due to the sudden jerk of its discharge.

In former pages I have described the howitzer, which fires at a high angle of elevation and plunges down upon its target. Such weapons do not discharge their shell with a high velocity. The novelty of the new gun was that it applied high velocity to a high-angle gun. Its muzzle was tilted at an angle of about sixty degrees, and by means of a charge of perhaps 400 lbs. of slow-burning powder the shell was hurled out of the gun at a velocity of somewhere about 5,200 feet, or not far short of one mile, per second. The shell rapidly passed upwards through the denser air into the lighter air, where it met with but little resistance, and its remaining velocity was sufficient to carry it over the rest of its long journey. It is said that the shells travelled to a height of about twenty miles, and that they took from two and a half minutes to three minutes to reach the Paris area.

At first the bursting of the shells in Paris caused great alarm ; but before long the citizens became used to the new sensation, and went about their ordinary business just as usual. They nicknamed the new gun "Big Bertha," because it was manufactured by the firm of Krupps, which is owned by Frau Bertha Krupp von Bohlen, "the cannon queen."

You must not suppose that the new guns only gave trouble to the French, or that they were permitted to do their fell work unmolested. One, or perhaps more of them, burst, and killed many of the gunners. Meanwhile French aviators were trying to discover the whereabouts of the monsters, and French artillerymen were turning their weapons on all the places where they were likely to be hidden. On 3rd May, for example, air squadrons were up all day directing the work of the French

guns. Though the Germans fiercely bombarded them, they were able to keep the air, and to regulate the fire. Photographs which were taken that day showed that four large shells made hits and completely shattered the emplacement of one of the huge guns. The railways on which these heavy pieces were carried were also broken up in many places. Writing on 5th May, a Paris journalist said :—

“When the Germans started bombarding Paris they had a battery of three of these giants on the shoulder of the Mont de Joie. The first was put out of action six weeks ago. Another was damaged ten days ago—though not put out of action entirely—and its crew was killed. That left one, and this has now been destroyed (as described above), though, doubtless, the Germans will replace their losses.”

In this country we began to imagine what would happen if the enemy reached Calais or Dunkirk and installed his great guns on the shores of the Straits of Dover. The little map on this page shows you the portion of south-east England which could be assailed by these huge weapons. You will notice that the eastern part of Sussex, nearly the whole of Kent, and the coast region of Essex as far north as Harwich, would be within range, and that at Greenwich shells would fall on Greater London.



Area swept by 75-mile Gun at Calais.

CHAPTER XIV.

ACROSS THE SOMME.

IN a former chapter I told you that retreat was forced upon us by the piercing of our Fifth Army, which had been entrusted with the line extending from the little river Omignon to La Fère, a distance of some 100,000 yards. This was the weakest part of our front. We had only taken it over from the French in January, and its defences were not strong. Further, we could only garrison it with fourteen divisions—that is, with a force of about 126,000 men.

Fiercely assailed from the north by von der Marwitz and from the east by von Hutier, no less than forty German divisions were flung against it. Such overwhelming numbers could not be resisted even by British valour and endurance. The bravest of men cannot oppose an avalanche. The enemy pressed his attack hour by hour, and during the two following days hurled an additional ten or eleven divisions into the fray, so as to maintain the strength of his push. By what is called the “leap-frog” method, he sent these new divisions through those which had gained ground and had grown weary, and thus was able to keep up a ceaseless drive.

I have already brought down the story of our disaster to the evening of Sunday, 24th March. By nightfall of that day the Germans claimed that they had crossed the Somme at many points. While our men were retreating, it was hoped that along this river they would be able to hold up the enemy's advance. In all ages the Somme has been a strong line of defence; it has always been the great military obstacle of North France. Look at the map and notice its course. You already know that it rises to the north-east of St. Quentin, and after flowing past that city curves southward and westward to

Ham, from which it runs northward to Péronne, after which it turns west to Amiens. Its course between St. Quentin and Amiens much resembles a pot-hook. An invader who aims at Paris from the north must cross the river either between Péronne and Amiens, or somewhere between Péronne and St. Quentin. An invader from the direction of St. Quentin who aims directly at the great railway centre of Amiens, must cross the same river somewhere between Péronne and Ham.

Thus the river is the great northern line of defence against an advance on Paris, and a barrier between St. Quentin and the sea. Should the invader, having crossed the river and having made good progress towards the capital, be checked and driven back, he must again cross the river, and, as you know, this is always a difficult operation. Over and over again in the history of France the Somme has proved a most formidable obstacle. From the days of Cæsar down to the war of 1870-71 the Somme has always been a source of trouble to invaders. Let me give you one instance from British history. In the year 1346 our English king Edward III., after advancing on Paris, was forced to retreat.



Diagram to show strategic importance of River Somme.

When he approached the Somme he found the bridges broken down and the crossing-places strongly held. Had not a French traitor led him to a ford, his army would have been trapped.

We hoped, therefore, that along the line of the Somme Gough's army would be able to make a stand. Unhappily, it was not able to do so. We know very little of what happened when the river was crossed by the Germans. We read of the

enemy trying to push rafts and pontoons across the stream, and of our artillery destroying them in the act. On 9th April, in the House of Commons, the Prime Minister told us that the line of the river was held until the Germans brought up their guns; but he also said that our failure to withstand the enemy was due to the fact that the bridges had not been completely destroyed. Whatever may have been the reason, the enemy carried this great military obstacle more rapidly than any other invader of history.

All day Sunday the Germans made rapid progress. General Byng fought hard to keep Bapaume; but after a battle lasting all night, and described by the Germans as "bitter," he was forced to fall back to the Ancre. On Sunday morning the Germans re-entered Bapaume. Farther south Combles also fell, and the enemy was once more in the centre of that Somme battlefield from which we had driven him in the latter half of the year 1916. I am sure that you can realize the feelings of our men as they trudged to the rear and saw one by one the scenes of their former victories fall into the hands of the enemy. The villages which had given their names to famous battles no longer existed; a rubbish heap or a mound or a signpost alone marked the site. A correspondent thus describes the condition of this old battlefield:—

"There were our old deserted trenches, which Nature had filled with long grass and weeds. There were the shell-craters of old strife with wild flowers growing in them; shreds of barbed wire on the edge of belts of ground which had once been No Man's Land; tumbled-down dug-outs and sandbag parapets rotted by the frost; everywhere there were signs of former conflict, and here and there little cemeteries in which slept our dear remembered dead."

Farther south on this black day von Hutier's troops forced a passage across the Somme below Ham, and captured Nesle, three and a half miles west of the river. Still farther south the French infantry, which had been brought up at top speed on the 23rd, were pushed back. Chauny, half-way between La Fère and Noyon, fell into German hands; the latter town was abandoned, and the French took up strong positions on the north bank of the Oise. I have already told you that but for the prompt appearance of the French reserves the road to Paris would have been open to the enemy.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BATTLE OF ARRAS.

MONDAY, the 25th of March, saw no slackening of the German advance. Von Below and von der Marwitz now joined hands, and before the close of the day had reached the line Ervillers-Miraumont-Thiepval. The red-brick town of Albert, with the image of the Virgin hanging from the tower of its church, was now threatened. You will remember this curious sight which thousands of British soldiers had gazed at with wondering eyes. On the top of the belfry stood a huge gilt wooden statue of the Virgin with the Babe in her arms. A German shell had dislodged it, but its fall had been arrested, and for many months it hung at right angles to the spire, looking down on the town below. This curious incident had given rise to a legend: "The day the Virgin of Albert falls the war will come to an end." Alas! the statue fell during the bombardment which began on the 25th, but when it fell the end of the war seemed to be as far off as ever.

West of Péronne the Germans on the same day crossed the Somme from the north, and pushed along both banks of the river. Farther south the French fell back from the north bank to the south bank of the Oise.

Next day, to continue the dismal story, Albert fell, and our line was roughly that on which we stood when we began our Big Push on July 1, 1916. The enemy was still advancing, and he claimed that so far he had captured 963 guns and 100 Tanks.

On Wednesday, the 27th, the German advance began to slacken. Our reinforcements had arrived, and we were no longer fighting against heavy odds. It was clear that the

enemy had been forced by his severe losses to take many of his broken divisions out of the firing line and reorganize them. From that day onward his progress was much slower, and it came to a standstill in this region on 1st April.

Now let us move on to 28th March, when the enemy side-slipped some of his forces northward, and made a terrific attempt to break down the hinge of the British defence. I have likened our retreat to the swinging back of a trap-door upon its hinges. These hinges were our positions in front of Arras, and the jamb of the door was the Vimy Ridge. The Germans had so far failed to accomplish their main object. They had neither separated us from our Allies, nor had they cut off our armies from each other. Though we had yielded much ground, especially in the south, we had practically stood fast in the north, and our line was unbroken. The German High Command now set itself the task of breaking through at Arras. If it could do this, it would be able to turn the Vimy Ridge, which, as you know, was the buttress of our line both to the north and to the south.

The Battle of Arras began at 5.30 on the morning of Thursday, 28th March. At that hour the enemy's storm troops advanced against our First Army, which lay astride the Scarpe, and was under the command of General Horne. Seven divisions were flung against our positions north of the river, and three against those south of the river. For almost the first time during the great offensive we were able to meet the enemy on an equal footing, especially north of Arras. Our trenches lay on the forward slope of the ridge which falls to the plain of Douai, and we had a clear view across the country. We could see every yard of the ground across which the Germans had to advance, and happily there was no mist to shroud them from our view.

Long before the Germans appeared their guns had begun a fierce bombardment, which blew our forward posts out of existence. Gas shells were sent over in great numbers, and trench mortars hurled bombs against our wire. Then our guns began their work. They shelled the assembling stations of the enemy, and did great execution. A correspondent greatly praises our gunners, not only for their work on this day, but for their endurance and devotion throughout the long struggle. He says:—



The Belfry at Albert, with the Virgin and Babe hanging from its Tower.

(Official photo.)

"I have seen some of them in action during the fighting, and have marvelled at their coolness. At times their officers are hoarse with shouting 'Fire!' and dazed from lack of sleep. Nevertheless they are always clear-headed enough to see a S.O.S. signal and get a straight target."

Under the fierce German bombardment our men withdrew to their main line of defence, and soon saw the enemy advancing from the villages of Arleux, Oppy, and Gavrelle. They came on in dense masses, as though on parade, shoulder to shoulder; but there was no dashing forward, as each man was heavily weighted with a pack, and carried six days' rations, two blankets, an extra pair of boots, together with all sorts of odds and ends, and a good deal of ammunition. Loaded like mules, the men could not move easily through the craters and the entanglements. Their officers went forward with walking sticks, and pointed out the gaps in the wire.

Observers tell us that the Germans came over the hill "like a cloud," turning the slopes gray. To the watching soldiers they seemed to be a huge mob. As the shells from British guns burst among them there were movements in this direction and in that, surges forward and surges backward. The day was brilliant, and our gunners had excellent observation. The gray masses wilted down before our rifle and gun fire, and in most parts of our front no Germans reached our main line of defence save as prisoners. An eye-witness writes:—

"We mowed them down like sheep, but fresh waves kept looming behind the men who died. The experience of some London Rifle Brigade lads will show what happened in our forward trenches. They were far quicker in action than their heavily-laden foes. When the flood poured over the first parapet, the Londoners yielded a bit of trench, then blocked it up and fought from the farther side. As the flood extended, so they fell back a yard at a time, throwing bombs and firing rifles point-blank, sometimes so close that they nearly drove scorched cloth into the gray figures tightly wedged along the narrow alleys. Those who fell never got up again. They were held down by the dead and wounded, or trampled upon by comrades pressing forward to meet their doom.

"The officers of the riflemen were as busy as the privates. The commander and his adjutant lay along the parapet beside two machine guns, which were pouring a continuous stream of bullets along the trench. They fired 600 belts of cartridges between them in the first hour of the attack. 'You simply couldn't miss them,' said one of them afterwards. The phrase was common in the mouths of men at other parts of the front."

The failure of the attack was assured in the early morning,

but until nearly sunset the "cannon-fodder" were sent forward to their death. By the time darkness fell upon the field the Germans had advanced barely a mile, at an awful loss of life. The ground which they had won was carpeted with their dead. But even this slender gain could not be held, for from the higher ground behind the shells from our guns crashed among them, while from every crater machine guns continually kept up a death-rattle. "It was like sitting at a window and shooting into a crowded street," said an observer. Broken and dejected, the Germans fell back in the darkness and tried to entrench the ground which they had so dearly won.

The attack made more ground along the Scarpe, but even there the gains were not worth the awful cost in human life. At Rouex a splendid stand was made. We there held the fortified ruins of the chemical works. Seafortths were inside, and though surrounded and out of touch with their brigade for hours, fought on, and at length cut their way through the enemy and joined their comrades. Equally heroic was the defence of troops from Essex. They, like the Manchesters, sent back a glorious message, "We shall fight to the last man."

On the extreme right south of the Cambrai road the struggle was very severe. The Germans swept down upon our lines in such numbers that our outposts were overwhelmed, and there was a deadly struggle round two battalion headquarters. At one of these posts the Germans were thrown back several times, and for nearly eight hours the doubtful battle raged. Not till after nine o'clock was our prepared line crossed. When the fierce day came to an end the hinges were still intact. Though they had been somewhat bent back south of Arras, they were far from giving way. That ancient, war-worn city, with memories of battle going back to Julius Cæsar and to Attila with his Huns, was still ours.

CHAPTER XVI.

A TRIBUTE FROM THE ENEMY.

SHAKESPEARE tells us "thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just," and Tennyson makes his Sir Galahad sing :—

" My strength is as the strength of ten,
Because my heart is pure."

In all their heavy trials and bitter disappointments the British people were nerved to their task by the proud knowledge that they entered into the war with "clean hands and a pure heart." They knew that in August 1914 Britons all over the world were eager to live in peace and concord with their neighbours. They knew that their rulers coveted neither the land nor the gold of any other nation, and they themselves were fully content with their own "fair and goodly heritage." They sought peace and ensued it; and instead of giving occasion for quarrel amongst the nations, went out of their way to settle old disputes with them, and pave the way for a better understanding on all matters which might lead to war.

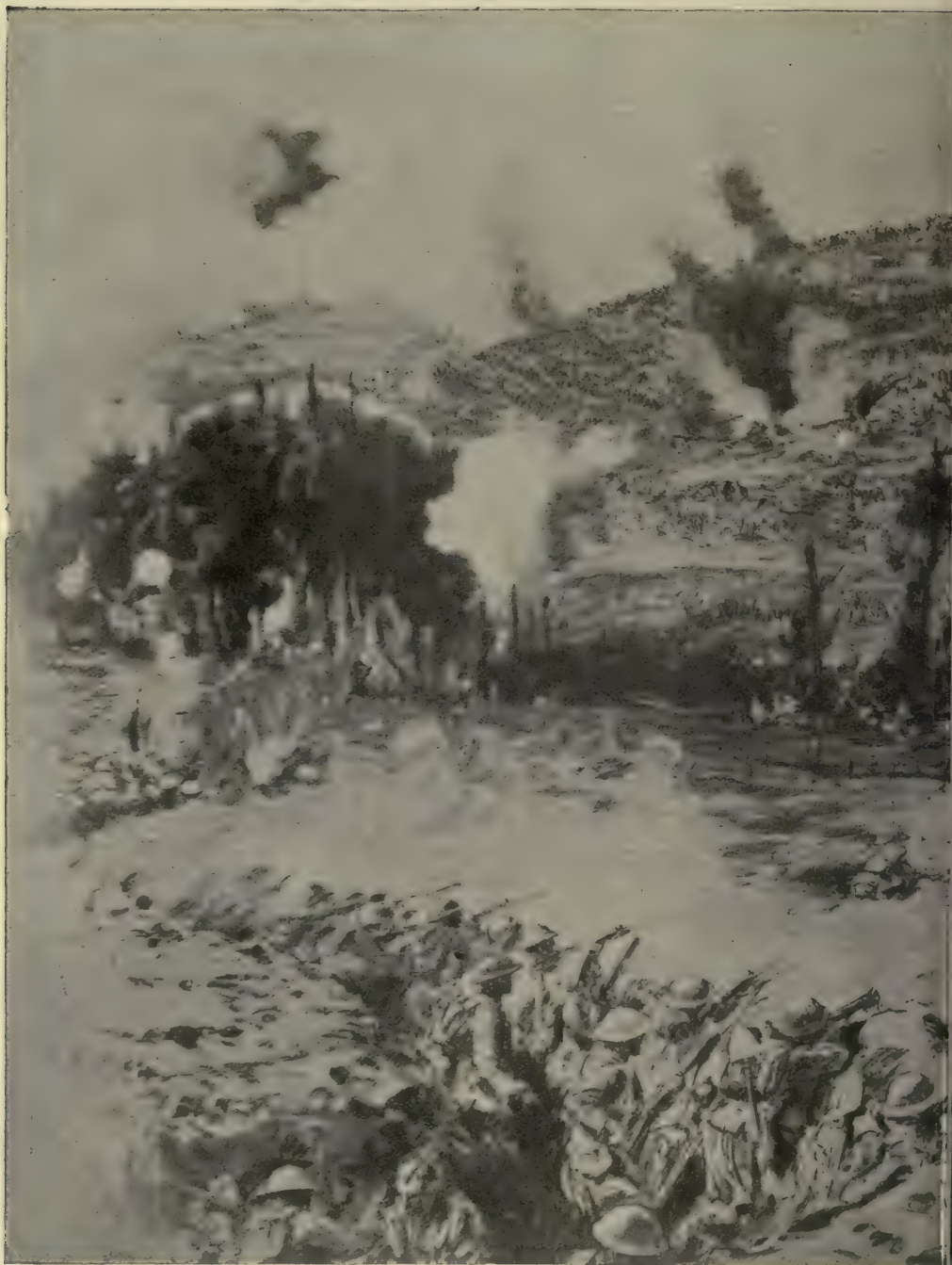
As you know, we threw down the gage of battle with the greatest reluctance. Not until the Germans had proved themselves false to their most sacred promises, and had determined to invade the little state which they had solemnly sworn to protect against all comers, did we draw the sword. Not until it was clear that Germany meant to hack her way through that peaceful and innocent land, in order to beat France to her knees before the Russians were able to take the field, did we decide that the quarrel was ours. It is said that the Prime Minister was moved to tears when he knew that there was no other way. But he was foremost in declaring that if we stood by with folded arms, and thus made ourselves partners in this

tragic triumph of "force over law, and of brutality over freedom," we should be for ever dishonoured. Ninety-nine out of every hundred Britons believed that never in the whole course of their history had they engaged in a more righteous war; that, indeed, it was a Holy War to which they were called. They were not fighting for material things, but were struggling to maintain that good faith amongst the nations without which the world would sink back into barbarism.

Now, strange to say, while the British were certain that they were fighting for honour and freedom and justice, the great mass of the German people had been deluded into the belief that they too were engaged in a righteous war. While their rulers for many years past had been straining every nerve to make their armies invincible, so as to become the supreme Power of the world; while their munition shops were working night and day to pile up armaments; while their spies were going to and fro gathering information which would serve them in time of war; while their officers were toasting "The Day" at their messes, the docile German people were being schooled in the greatest lie of history.

The emperor, the princes, the ministers, the clergy, the professors in the universities, the teachers in the schools—all combined to make the people believe that Britain, France, and Russia were preparing a treacherous attack upon them, and were only awaiting a favourable moment to destroy them. France, they were told, wanted revenge: she meant to recover the provinces which had been reft from her in the war of 1870-71. Russia was a wolf always ready to join in a hunt after prey, and Britain was jealous of the great trade which Germany had built up. "Revengeful France, barbaric Russia, and envious England" were united in a dark, deadly plot against the innocent and peace-loving Fatherland.

The German people were constantly told that the chief villain and the guiding spirit of this wicked conspiracy was Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Minister. He, with deep cunning, had encircled Germany with enemies, and was now prepared to deal her a death-blow. It was quite easy to make the German people believe that Britain was at the bottom of the mischief, for they had long been trained to hate her, and to regard her as *the* enemy. The Germans are a very patriotic race—they dearly love their country—and it is not surprising that, believing the



A Massed German Attack in front

(From the picture by D. Macpherson.)

Observers tell us that the Germans came over the hill "like a cloud," turning the slopes gray. To there were movements in this direction and in that, surges forward and surges backward. The gray the attack never reached a point nearer than from one hundred to two hundred yards from our lines. The



the Ancient City of Arras.

(permission of The Sphere.)

... watching soldiers they seemed to be a huge mob. As the shells from British guns burst among them
... bushes wilted down before our rifle and gun fire, and in the part of the front shown in the above picture
... he was early afternoon, and the whole hillside was lighted up with brilliant sunshine.

Fatherland to be encompassed by foes and in dire danger, they were roused to a high pitch of indignation, and readily pledged themselves to fight to the death to preserve her. No doubt the disgraceful way in which they treated the British and French ambassadors when war was declared, and the awful cruelties which they practised in Belgium and North France, were the outcome of their belief that they were the victims of a dastardly plot to wipe them out of the book of nations. They refused to show mercy towards those who, as they thought, had been guilty of such treachery.

While the German people were thus being fooled by their rulers, and were being led to the slaughter in order to satisfy the world-wide ambitions of their emperor, their princes, their nobles, and their rich men, the Allies and most of the neutrals were well aware that the war had been deliberately engineered; that it had long been prepared for; and that the story of a great conspiracy against Germany had not a shred of foundation in fact. In March 1918, while the great onslaught which I have described in previous chapters was preparing, they were told the truth, not by outsiders, but by one of their own princes—the man who had been their ambassador in London, and had taken part in all the negotiations which led up to the war.

This man was Prince Lichnowsky, a German noble who, after serving in the army, was employed for four or five years at the German Foreign Office, and in September 1912 was sent to London to represent his country at the Court of St. James's. He was an honest, able, agreeable, and popular man, and he formed friendships with most of our statesmen. When war broke out he had, of course, to return to Germany; but in striking contrast with the treatment of our ambassador in Berlin, we sent him away, as he himself says, "like a departing sovereign." He left London with a heavy heart, and went into retirement, where he wrote an account of his "mission to London." This pamphlet was not meant to be published, but was intended to justify his conduct to his private friends. In March 1918 extracts from his little book appeared in a Swedish newspaper, and shortly afterwards the complete work was given to the world.

In this book the Prince tells us that when he arrived in London he found a peace-loving Government in power. Sir Edward Grey, having settled all outstanding points of difference

with France and Russia, wished to make similar agreements with Germany. He wished her to become a partner with the other Great Powers in preserving the peace of the world. The Prince saw clearly that while Britain meant to maintain her friendship with France and Russia, she was eager to arrive at a friendly understanding with Germany. At this time the British people were divided into two groups—those who believed that Britain could form a friendship with Germany, and those who thought that, sooner or later, there was sure to be war between the two nations. Prince Lichnowsky tells us that even those who suspected Germany did nothing to thwart the efforts of those who hoped for and strove for German friendship.

One chapter of the Prince's book is devoted to Sir Edward Grey, for whom, it is clear, he had great respect and liking. He tells us that the simplicity and honesty of Sir Edward's ways secured him the esteem of even his opponents, and that lying and double-dealing were alike hateful to him. He gives us an example of our Foreign Minister's quiet humour. "Once when he was lunching with us and the children, and heard them talking German, he said, 'I can't help thinking how clever these children are to talk German so well.' He was much pleased with his joke." He winds up the chapter with the following striking words: "This is a true picture of the man who is decried in Germany as 'Liar Grey' and the instigator of the world war."

There is no doubt that Prince Lichnowsky, as an honest, straightforward gentleman, was chosen for his post for the purpose of deceiving us. He was put forward as the German representative—a man of charm and culture, amiable and reasonable. Behind him, however, other "dark forces" were at work. He complains that he was kept in ignorance of most important matters, and that the reports of secret agents were never sent to him. The truth is, that he was only a stalking-horse, meant to induce us to believe that he represented the real Germany. The real Germany was represented by the secret agents who were working against us in his shadow.

I now come to the most important part of the pamphlet—the story of the two months which preceded the outbreak of war. The Prince says that he had not been long in the country before he was quite sure that there was no fear of Germany being attacked by Britain. He felt quite certain that Britain

would neither make war on Germany nor help any other nation to do so. But, at the same time, he assured his Government that "*under any circumstances England would protect the French.*" He pointed out that in the event of a war between European Powers, Britain, as a commercial state, would suffer greatly, and would, therefore, do her best to prevent a conflict; but, on the other hand, she would not permit any weakening or the wiping out of France. It is quite evident, from the course which events afterwards followed, that the Kaiser took no notice of this warning. He believed that, come what might, Britain would not fight, and he lent a ready ear to his spies, "who assured him that the troubles in Ulster would prevent Britain from going to the help of France on land."

At the end of June 1914 the Prince visited Kiel by command of the Emperor, and while on board the royal yacht heard the startling news that the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne, had been murdered at Sarajevo. He did not think much about the matter, but he was greatly surprised at the effect which it produced upon an Austrian count who was on board the yacht. He had remained in his cabin suffering from sea-sickness; but on receiving the news he suddenly recovered, and appeared on deck, all smiles. "The fright of joy had cured him." The Archduke, you must remember, was a strong man, and he stood in Germany's way. He was bitterly hated by those Austrians who wished to see Germany supreme. We may, I think, take it for granted that no tears were shed for the murdered Archduke on board the Kaiser's yacht.

Soon afterwards Prince Lichnowsky went to the Foreign Office in Berlin, and discovered that General von Moltke was pressing for war, and that a high official who had advised that Austria should be generous towards Serbia had been reprimanded. Later on he learned that the Kaiser and his generals attended a conference at Potsdam on 5th July, and on that day it was decided to go to war with Russia. "The Day," so long expected, so long prepared for, was soon to arrive.

The Prince was told by his chiefs at the Foreign Office to go back to London and try to get the British newspapers to say that Austria would be quite justified in punishing Serbia for the murder of the Archduke. He pointed out that the

British have always supported national movements abroad; and that the newspapers, while quite ready to see the murderers punished, would be very unlikely to agree that Serbia ought to lose her freedom as a consequence of the crime. He advised Herr von Jagow to counsel Austria to be moderate in her demands, and said that he was quite sure that if war began it could not be confined to Serbia, but that Russia would be certain to join in on behalf of her little ally. To this Herr von Jagow replied that Russia was not ready for war, and that the more firmly Germany took sides with Austria, the more Russia would give way. Indeed, some of his advisers were of opinion that Russia would not move in any circumstances, and that Austria could go to any lengths she pleased.

Then came the famous or rather the infamous "Note" * which made such demands upon Serbia that she could not comply with them without confessing that her independence had vanished, and she was no longer master in her own house. The British newspapers agreed that the murder of the Archduke should be punished, but they would not agree that Austria had any right to rob Serbia of her independence. Most of them counselled Austria to moderate her demands. Sir Edward Grey strongly advised Serbia to come to terms with the Austrians; and, thanks to his good offices, the Serbian minister accepted all the Austrian demands save two, and on these points he was ready to come to some agreement.

Prince Lichnowsky tells us that Sir Edward Grey went through the Serbian reply with him, and that Sir Edward proposed that the French, Italian, and German ambassadors should meet him in conference and try to reconcile the two countries. "Given good will," says the Prince, "everything could have been settled in one or two sittings. . . . I therefore strongly backed the proposal, on the ground that otherwise there was danger of the world war, through which we stood to gain nothing and lose all." His efforts were in vain. His masters told him plainly that any such conference would be degrading to Austria. He was to try to get Britain to agree that the war must be waged by Austria and Serbia alone. A mere hint from the German ministers to the Austrian ministers would have been sufficient to make the latter accept the Serbian

* See Vol. I., pp. 30-32. In connection with this subject, Chaps. I. and II. of Vol. I. should be reread.

reply. " *This hint was not given; on the contrary, they urged in the direction of war.*"

" After our refusal," says the Prince, " Sir Edward requested us to submit a proposal. *We insisted on war.*" The only reply which the Prince could obtain from his masters in Berlin was that Austria had behaved very well in not demanding some Serbian territory. Sir Edward pointed out that even if Austria did not take some of Serbia, her demands would make Serbia a vassal state. Russia would never permit this, and would be sure to fight in Serbia's defence.

Then the Prince goes on to say that he now began to feel sure that the Kaiser and his advisers " wanted war under any circumstances." There was no other way of explaining their action. The urgent requests and the definite promises of the Russian Foreign Minister, " the positively humble telegrams of the Tsar," Sir Edward Grey's repeated attempts to bring the parties together, the efforts of the Italians, and his own strong counsels—all were of no avail. " Berlin stood firm: Serbia must be massacred."

On 28th July Austria declared war on Serbia, and Russia partially mobilized her forces. Next day Sir Edward Grey warned the Kaiser that if France should be attacked he was not to count on Britain standing aside. Then events moved rapidly. The Austrian Foreign Minister, who so far had been guided by Germany, and had stood out for the strict demands of the Note, now gave way, and said that he was ready to negotiate with Serbia and Russia. There was thus a gleam of hope that war might be averted. Germany saw her chance slipping away, and on the 31st sent an impudent message to Russia ordering her to demobilize within twelve hours. This Russia refused to do, and on the afternoon of 1st August Germany declared war on Russia, which meant, of course, war on France as well. The world war had begun.

Prince Lichnowsky has no doubt whatever that his own country was solely responsible for the war. He brings the following charges against Germany:—

1. We (the Germans) encouraged the Austrians to attack Serbia.

2. Between 23rd and 30th July, when the Russians told us that they would not tolerate an attack on Serbia, we refused to help Britain to work for peace, although Serbia was willing



Prince Karl Max Lichnowsky,

German Ambassador to the Court of St. James's from 1912-14, and the author of the book *My London Mission*, which ascribes the outbreak of the world war to the deliberate designs of Germany.

to accept almost the whole of the Note, and the Austrians were prepared to content themselves with the Serbian reply.

3. On 30th July, when the Austrians wanted to come to terms, we ordered the Russians to demobilize, although Austria had not been attacked; and on 1st August we declared war on Russia, although the Tsar pledged himself that he would not order a man to march while the matters in dispute were being discussed. *We thus deliberately destroyed the chance of a peaceful settlement.*

“No wonder,” says Prince Lichnowsky, “the whole of the civilized world outside Germany places the entire responsibility for the world war upon our shoulders.”

He clearly understands why the enemies of Germany declared they would not rest until they had destroyed a system which was a constant threat to them. They were right in believing that the Germans glorified war as such, and did not loathe it as an evil; that the warrior caste was all-powerful in the land; and that the national idea was summed up in the following lines:—

“Dream ye of peace?
 Dream he that will;
 War is the rallying cry,
 Victory is the refrain.”

At the moment when Germany, owing to Russia's betrayal of her Allies, was ready to fling her whole strength against the British in the West, and make a huge effort to achieve victory at all costs, this tribute to Britain's “clean hands and pure heart” came as a cheering ray in the gloom. We knew that we were innocent of any desire to plunge the world into bloodshed, and now the German ambassador, who had been living amongst us right up to the moment when we drew the sword, came forward and denounced his own country as the sole maker of the war. His tribute was a stimulus to us to fight on, no matter what might be in store, and to resist to the death for that righteousness which alone exalteth a nation.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE THRUST AT AMIENS.

IN Chapter XV. I told you how the German attempt to break through at Arras and turn the Vimy Ridge hopelessly failed. The small amount of ground gained was of little or no consequence, and it had been won at a terrible price. The enemy, foiled in his attempt, now followed his tactics at Verdun. You will remember that when the Crown Prince failed to rush Fort Vaux he launched his second wave on the left bank of the Meuse against the Dead Man and Hill 304. The attack on the Scarpe had missed fire, and the enemy now began to prepare for a blow south of the river. He had been balked on the Oise and on the Scarpe, and he was now ready to make a determined effort to cut off Amiens.

You already know that the old city stands on the Somme, and is the most important road and railway junction of North France. The main railway line from Calais to Paris runs through its station. If this railway could be seized, or be so commanded by guns that it could not be used, the enemy would score a real success. He would deprive the Allies of their main line of communication between the Channel ports and all the front south of Amiens, and would force them to use a roundabout route which would greatly hamper the transport of troops and supplies.

Should the Germans succeed in this venture, they would, for the second time during the war, be in possession of the city. No doubt you remember that in September 1914, when von Kluck was making his great drive towards Paris, his troops occupied Amiens for a few days. The Battle of the Marne forced them to leave the city and withdraw to the line of the Aisne.

On 27th March von Marwitz ordered his forces to advance from Albert along the valley of the Ancre towards Amiens. Our guns caught them as they emerged from the town, and drove them back. On the same day an attempt was made to advance along the Somme directly towards the city, but little ground was gained. South of Amiens fierce thrusts were made in the hope of reaching the main railway, which I have already mentioned; and in the course of them Montdidier,* on the Arve, about eight miles east of the railway, was captured. The French, who were greatly outnumbered, fought very gallantly. They had only three divisions with which to withstand thirteen enemy divisions. Nevertheless, with superb courage they charged the enemy again and again; and though they could not maintain their hold of Montdidier, the enemy could make but little progress westward. When Montdidier fell, men began to tremble for the safety of Amiens. General Foch, however, restored confidence by declaring that he was ready to guarantee the safety of the city.

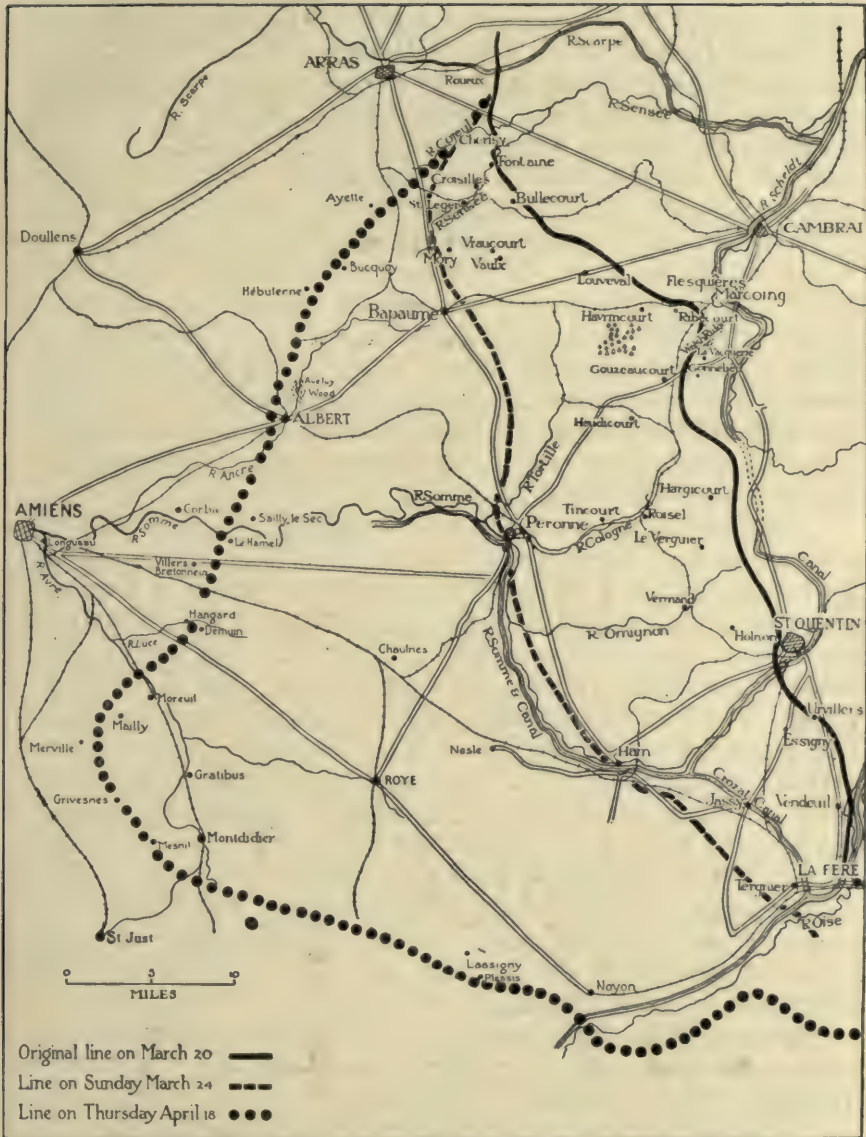
On the 29th the British and the French, fighting shoulder to shoulder, were still holding up the Germans between Montdidier and Lassigny, as I shall describe later on. The Allies fought in the best spirit of comradeship, and the French were much impressed by the contempt for danger and the great calmness of our men. A French writer two days later paid a fine tribute to our soldiers. He says:—

“As to our British friends, we must without delay trumpet the truth, so as to scatter at once the clouds with which the enemy would like to disturb our minds. All who have seen the British in the fight agree that the British soldier has fought with a courage and strength of soul which the sorrows of the hard retreat have in no way impaired. We are told of a British general who so far forgot his dignity as to fight with a rifle himself. This shows that the British withdrawal is not due to moral weakness. . . . Our General Staff trusts them as it trusts our own men.”

On the same day the Allies appear to have almost recovered Montdidier, but later on they were pushed back to the heights on the west of the town, and the Germans seized several villages nearer the railway. Grivesnes,† two and a half miles west of the Arve and five miles north-west of Montdidier, was, however, the scene of a French success. The village is only five miles from the all-important railway, and its capture would mean that the

* *Mon-dee-dee-ay.*

† *Gree-vain.*



Map to illustrate the Retreat of the Allies between March 20 and April 18, 1918.

track could be constantly shelled and made impossible for the steady passage of trains. After a furious struggle, which lasted forty-eight hours, the 1st Guard Division of the enemy entered the village. Two hours later the French counter-attacked with the bayonet. A desperate hand-to-hand combat followed, and at length the Guards were driven back, and in their retirement were swept by the French machine guns. Next day they returned to the charge, but only to register another failure.

A correspondent tells us that the 29th of March "was a truly dreadful Easter day." Bright sunshine had succeeded to storm, the birds were singing, and the signs of spring were to be seen on every hand. In the villages behind the battle-line Easter bells were ringing, and little knots of villagers in their Sunday clothes were on the way to their churches. Yet everywhere in the battle-area the roads were thronged with fugitives, the guns were never silent, aeroplanes buzzed overhead, and men fought to the death.

The greatest pressure was felt in the angle between the Luce and the Arve. The Arve, as you see from the map on page 147, is a tributary of the Somme; and the Luce, which is little more than a brook, is a tributary of the Arve. Between these two rivers is a rolling country of open fields, broken by two large tracts of wood: the larger, on the north, may be called the Wood of Villers; the smaller, on the south, is known as Hangard Wood. The plateau between the rivers is the last high ground directly in front of Amiens. From its western edge the plateau falls to the great railway junction and workshops of Longeau,* which is practically a suburb of Amiens. A couple of miles to the north of Hangard Wood, and about a mile to the east of Villers Wood, is the village of Villers-Bretonneux,† which was afterwards to be the scene of many heroic combats. The enemy's object was to thrust us off this plateau and gain the commanding ground directly in front of Amiens.

Between Montdidier and Moreuil ‡ the battle raged with the utmost fierceness, but the enemy was met with a stubborn resistance. At midnight our cavalry, lying a few miles to the south-east of Amiens, were ordered to drive the Germans from Moreuil Wood, into which they had penetrated. Before morning the cavalry attacked, and the Canadians made a specially fine charge. They rode up, then dismounted and fought on

* Lon-jo.

† Bre-ton-neu.

‡ Mor-eye.

foot. By midday on the 30th they had gone clean through the wood, and had taken up a position on the Moreuil-Démuin* road.

On that day von Hutier returned to the attack, and flung his forces against the thirty-mile front between Moreuil and Lassigny. There was extremely severe fighting, and the enemy only made headway at the price of terrible losses.

A French officer thus describes the famous charge which wrested Moreuil from the hands of the enemy :—

“ We had been in line since the previous night, and had met constant attacks. Twice in the night we had been forced to yield a little ground against overwhelming forces, but each time our counter-attack had restored the situation. At dawn the Germans attacked with ever-growing violence, throwing two new divisions into the battle. Though we did our best to ‘stick it,’ we and our British comrades had to give up one street after another, and finally to fall back 300 yards.

“ Fortunately at this moment two of our regiments joined us to meet the fresh onset and to prepare for a counter-attack. We were also reinforced by a Canadian brigade.

“ At 9.45 the Boches were just about to launch a fresh onslaught ; but we got in first with a tremendous bayonet charge, in which the Tommies and Poilus fought shoulder to shoulder. The shock took place on the edge of the town. It was desperate hand-to-hand fighting, in which we soon got the better of the enemy, though we were one against three.

“ The Canadians fought like lions. I saw two of them at grips with ten Boches. After knocking out half their foes with their knives and bayonets, they seized a bag of grenades carried by one of the Germans and began hurling the bombs among the rest.

“ Two seconds later the ground was clear. In no time we were in the middle of the town again, though the enemy clung desperately to the eastern portion. By a clever turning movement from the south we soon had them at our mercy. While a hot struggle was kept up in the centre of the town, a body of French and British troops made their way round it and attacked the left flank of the enemy. Until then the Boches—they were Saxons—thought themselves masters, but when they saw us coming up on their flank they made off at the double. Very few got away.

“ The British were very cool, and they amply avenged their comrades who fell in the first day of the offensive.

“ I heard a huge Canadian say, as he drove his bayonet into a Boche, ‘Six.’ Then he went on to find a seventh. By eleven o’clock not a living Boche was in Moreuil. The streets were covered with corpses in field grey. The nearest point to Amiens which the enemy had so far reached still remained in our hands.”

It was on Easter Sunday, too, that the Germans made a thrust along the valley of the little river Luce. From Hamel,

* *Day-mew-ung.*

just south of the Somme, to Hangard Wood our front was very weak ; it had to be strengthened at all costs, though troops for the purpose were hard to find. If we had not been so strong in the air that our aviators were able to keep the enemy machines from scouting over our lines, this weak place would have been discovered and the enemy hordes would have poured through it. As it was, the Germans were pushing forward patrols to test our strength prior to making an attack.

At two in the morning orders were issued to make up a force of all available men, and hold on to the line until French reliefs appeared. The command of this force was given to Brigadier-General Sandeman Carey. Before daylight the rounding-up of men for the new force had begun. The labour battalions in the neighbourhood were called upon, and they responded eagerly. In the neighbourhood there was an infantry training-school which furnished officers, men, electricians, and signallers. Royal Engineers and United States engineers also joined up, and so did men engaged in the various duties which have to be performed behind the lines. Some fifty troopers from a cavalry regiment near by also joined the scratch force, which included a number of Chinese road labourers. By noon this strangely varied assortment of men had been organized into companies and battalions, and was ready to march.

A couple of hours later they started digging in and making machine-gun emplacements. Not until the action had begun was artillery brought up. The enemy's attack was very fierce, but the scratch force behaved splendidly, and barred the road to Amiens with the utmost obstinacy. But for the odds and ends of men who took up the rifle that day the enemy might have won the city. In the course of bitter hand-to-hand fighting they were pushed back until their line bent south-westward of Villers-Bretonneux, eight and three-quarter miles east of Amiens. As they were not seasoned soldiers, we could hardly blame them had they given way. But they did nothing of the sort. They had to fall back ; but they did so fighting all the time, and luckily at this moment reliefs appeared, and the line was restored. " Carey's Army," as the force was called, had put up a splendid fight, and by its courage and devotion saved the day.

As a result of the struggle, during which the enemy suffered very heavy losses indeed, he was held along the banks

of the Arve, though he gained some ground along the Luce. On Easter Monday the battle wore itself out, and a lull of two days set in. The 2nd of April was the quietest day since the offensive began, and our line on 3rd April was much the same as it had been on 28th March. The enemy had been held up at Albert, and he had striven in vain to reach Amiens.

The lull was only a breathing space. Ludendorff was preparing for another effort to approach the city between the Somme and the Arve and secure the main railway. Enemy newspapers explained the reason of the lull. They said that the storm troops needed rest, and that time was required in which to bring up guns and supplies. One newspaper announced that the German advance had been so rapid that the various staffs could not move forward sufficiently fast to keep touch with their troops.

I now come to Thursday, 4th April, the day on which the battle blazed up again. The weather was now against the invader. A heavy mist hung over the valleys, and a cold, raw wind whistled over the hills. A bleak, depressing morning broke after a night of constant rain. The German infantry, lying in the mud of the old Somme battlefield, had been in the greatest discomfort. In the first feverish rush they had tossed aside their blankets and extra kit, and were now suffering the penalty. Behind them was a devastated country, deep in mire, and in front of them was a driven but far from dispirited enemy. They dared not light fires, lest they should attract the unpleasant attentions of our bombing parties. Altogether their plight was not to be envied.

The Crown Prince had now taken the field, and an offensive was planned along the twelve-mile front from Saily-le-Sec, on the Somme, to Moreuil. Another effort was to be made to push forward between the Somme and the Arve, and capture the ancient capital of Picardy. At Moreuil the British and the French now linked up. A successful break-through in this region would therefore achieve the main German object, which was to divide the Allied armies. The battle opened with a very heavy bombardment all along the line; but the heavy mist interfered with the observation of the enemy's gunners and airmen, and our defences were not utterly wrecked, as in former battles. Shortly after seven o'clock the Germans poured out of the villages between the Somme and the Arve. They were



French Soldiers defending the Château and Park

(From the picture by F. Matania.)

Grivesnes, which lies to the north-west of Montdidier, was the scene of severe fighting during the blocked the windows of the chateau with mattresses, and himself took a rifle to defend the position. the cream of the German army. The Germans came on in waves, fed by thick columns of men. The his window then gave the order for the counter-attack, and the Poilus, to the cry of "Vive La



f Grivesnes: the Fight round the House.

By permission of The Sphere.)

atter days of March. The village was held by about 500 French infantry, commanded by a colonel, who with his 500 men he repulsed three regiments of the First Prussian Guard Division, usually considered French fought them from tree to tree in the park back to the walls of the château. The colonel from France!" drove the Germans from the park.

instantly caught by our fire, and the first waves wavered and broke.

We had excellent command of the rolling meadows over which most of the Germans had to advance. On both sides of the Amiens-Ham railway, and in the patches of woodland, our machine gunners were posted in great numbers, and they took a very heavy toll of the advancing enemy. All the morning the Germans made fruitless efforts to advance. Fresh troops were thrust in at midday, and a fierce struggle took place in front of Villers-Bretonneux, the last important town on the road to Amiens. Australians were holding the line in front of this much-fought-for town.* In the afternoon the enemy began a terrific bombardment, which tore the streets to pieces. Then he sent wave after wave of storm troops against the right flank of the Australians. The shock overcame their line, which was bent back to the southern edge of the town. For several hours the battle raged among the woods, the copses, the ploughed fields, and along the roads, and once the town was all but lost. At the end of the afternoon, however, a British regiment and a New South Wales battalion arrived to strengthen the Australian right, and the position on the southern end of the town was saved. But for this slight retirement the British line on the right and in the centre remained intact.

Further north, at Hamel, where the woods gave the enemy a footing, we had to fall back from the village. The attackers strove desperately to reach Corbie, an old abbey town at the fork of the Ancre and the Somme; but at night they were still three miles from their goal. The Crown Prince, now in chief command, had suffered terrible losses according to his wont, and had nothing to show for them but slight dents in the British line.

To the north and south of Moreuil the Allies had to withstand very fierce blows, and the conflict did not slacken at any point while daylight lasted. The French were heavily assailed along the nine-mile front from Grivesnes to Hangard by enormous forces, which advanced with the utmost determination, especially against the villages between the Arve and the railway. The shock was sternly resisted, and thousands of the enemy were mown down. Nevertheless, it was repeated no less than ten times, with the result that a few hundred yards of ground were gained. Grivesnes was assailed with special fury, but the

* See illustration on p. 156.

assaults were held, and counter-attacks were made. At the end of the day the enemy had not reached his objective—the main railway between Amiens and Paris.

The Allies fought so stubbornly that “even the ranks of Tuscany could scarce forbear to cheer.” The Germans in their report of the battle confessed that “the enemy showed desperate resistance on the whole front.” They claimed that between the beginning of the offensive on 21st March and the close of the fighting on 4th April they had captured more than ninety thousand prisoners and over thirteen hundred guns.

Next day, 5th April, Sir Douglas Haig reported that the fighting along the whole front was “most severe and persistent.” Attack after attack was made on Villers-Bretonneux, but without success. At the same time a big effort was made north of the Somme. North of Albert, from Alette just south of the Cojeul to Bucquoy and Hébuterne, the Germans attacked with four fairly fresh divisions, in the hope of capturing the irregular plateau between these places.

A heavy bombardment, in which many gas shells were used, opened the engagement. Then storm troops in dense masses were pushed forward. Though they were badly cut up, they forced their way into Bucquoy,* and at the close of the day still kept a footing in one corner of the village. Nowhere, however, did they reach the highest parts of the plateau. Our line in this region still stood firm.

The other thrust was made from Albert along the Ancre. The ground rises from the western bank of the river to a ridge which gives good observation. The object of the attack was to capture this ridge. After a heavy barrage the Germans marched up the exposed face of the slope, and in doing so lost terribly. Nevertheless, by dint of numbers they succeeded in getting a foothold in Aveluy Wood, from which they were thrown back to their old positions by a counter-attack later in the day.

Australian troops lying along the railway and the hills on the north-east side of the river had a severe trial. The fight began about eight in the morning with the usual bombardment. In one part of the line, where many men had fallen under the hail of high-explosive shells, the Germans managed to break through. Advancing wave after wave, they gradually

* See illustration on pp. 184-185.



New South Wales Men at Villers-Bretonneux on the Evening of April 4th.

(From the picture by R. Caton Woodville. By permission of The Illustrated London News.)

During the fighting here shown the Australians killed or wounded about four thousand Germans. They were attacked by odds of four or five to one.

pushed up the hills. Australian machine guns mowed them down, but still the advance continued. The Germans flowed all round the guns, which in some cases were served to the last. The crews of one group of machine guns died at their posts after inflicting awful losses on the German hordes that swamped them.

By midday the enemy in some places was well up the slopes, though South and Western Australians on the one side, and Queenslanders on the other, were still holding out, their flanks being bent round to meet attacks which were coming almost from the rear. About four in the afternoon we launched our counter-attack. Queenslanders, men of New South Wales, South and Western Australians, and others pushed forward with deadly determination. The Queenslanders while advancing met a German wave proceeding to the attack. The two forces clashed, and the Germans were flung back at the point of the bayonet. No sooner was the first wave shattered than a second wave was encountered. This, too, was stemmed in like fashion. Fighting continued until dusk, when the Germans seemed to be too exhausted to continue the battle. The Australians, though outnumbered by four or five to one, held their own most gallantly. In Thursday's fight they claimed to have killed or wounded about four thousand Germans; in the battle of Friday they must have accounted for far more.

On Saturday, 6th April, there was again a lull on the British front. Having failed to advance after two days of hard driving, the enemy paused before beginning a new and greater attack. But while there was comparative calm on the British front, the French on the southern bank of the Oise were forced to retire to the Ailette. Before I tell you the story let me briefly review the work of the French in the Oise sector.

I have already told you that the main object of the Germans in making their advance along the Oise was to thrust in a wedge between the British and the French armies. If they could do this while they had the marshy valley of the Oise on their left flank, they could hold off the French on the south side of the river with a small force of men and guns, and roll the British northward towards the Channel. Probably, too, they had another object in view—namely, to push past Noyon down the Oise and march on Paris. This would not be difficult if the Allied armies could be separated and thrown in different

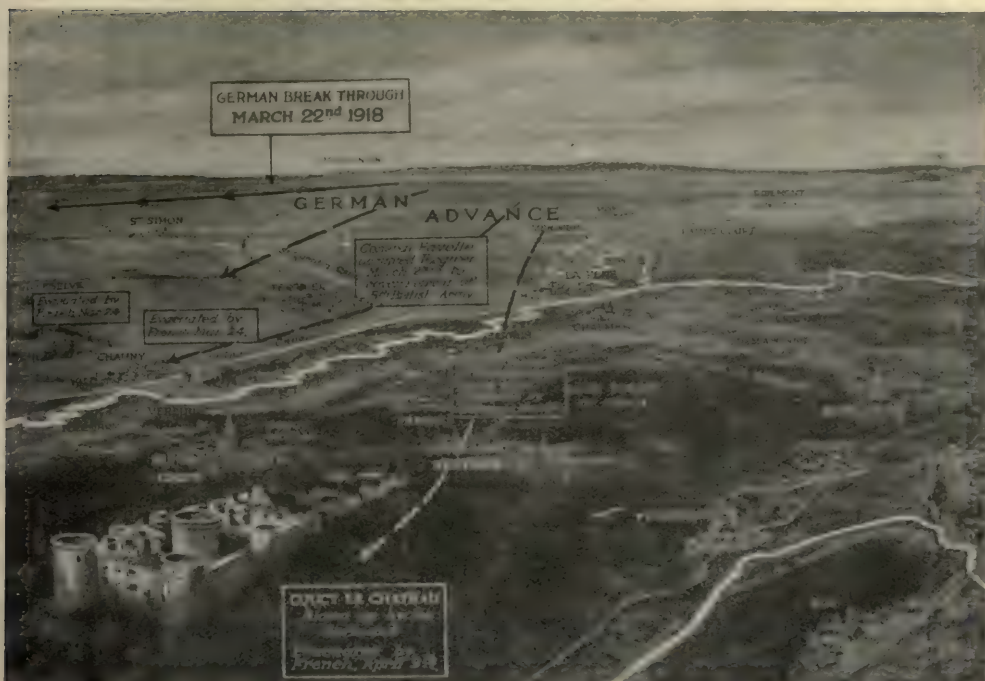


The Battle-front of General Fayolle's Army

This view is taken from a point above Ribecourt on the Oise. On the right is the famous Lassigny should

directions—the French to the south and the British to the north.

The French first came into action on 22nd March, when our men were forced to fall back behind the Crozat Canal. On that day the Germans were close to the canal. The general of the Sixth French Army, leaving some units to guard Tergnier, close to the Oise, crossed the river and deployed in the woods behind the British, facing north-east. On the same day the Germans on his left crossed the Somme at Ham, from which a twelve-mile stretch of straight road runs to Noyon. Fighting rearguard actions, the French fell back step by step to cover this road, their right clinging to the Oise and their front facing north. When on the 24th the Germans crossed the Somme in force, the British Fifth Army had to make a further retirement. This meant that the French had to fall back too, but while doing so they continually made counter-attacks. With their



from Montdidier to the Forest of Coucy.

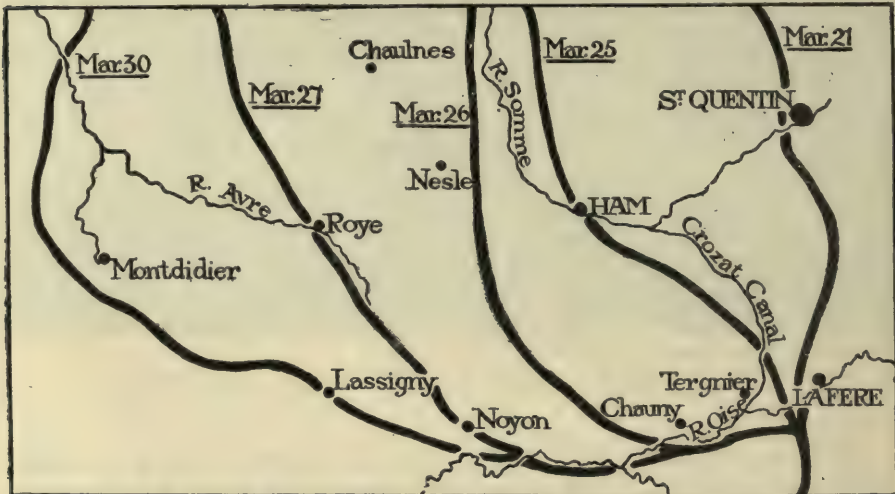
Château of Coucy; in front is Noyon, and beyond it are Roye and Nesle. The position of be noticed.

right moving along the river towards Noyon, which was to be the pivot of their whole front, they drew back their left towards Nesle, in order to join a cavalry force and to resist the German onset with all the guns and cyclists that they could muster. In this way they linked up with the British, and covered the arrival of reinforcements, which were coming up all the time to the west of Montdidier. They checked, though they could not hold, the fierce pressure of the Germans, and meanwhile were able to build up a strong line to hold the breach.

In the evening of the 25th this line extended northward from Noyon in the direction of Chaulnes, and by the close of the next day its right was solidly established close behind Noyon. It was now easy to swing the left round on Lassigny. On the 27th some of the divisions which had been hurried up in motor lorries were brought into the line, and reinforcements were sent to the dismounted cavalry, who were defending the

villages to the west of Lassigny against the furious rushes of the Germans.

Once the French were established west of Noyon, on a line stretching round Montdidier on its left, they were confident that the door to Paris had been bolted and barred. The anxiety, however, was not yet at an end. From the 27th to the 30th the French had to check the beginning of the thrust on Amiens. By making the gatelike movement which I have described they had "shepherded" the German attack from the Oise valley towards Amiens, and the enemy was now making



Map illustrating closing of gap between Noyon and Montdidier.

his main thrust from east to west, instead of from north-east to south-west. On the 30th the Germans made a great assault on the whole line from Noyon to Montdidier. At first they were successful; but afterwards were met by a strong counter-attack, in the course of which the French captured 800 prisoners at Plessis* and Le Plémont, two villages between Lassigny and Noyon. Though later on the enemy made an advance to the west of Montdidier, our allies felt sure that he could be held in this direction.

* *Play-see.*

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FRENCH RETIREMENT TO THE AILETTE.

I HAVE already told you (page 112) that the successful building up of a powerful battle-front while the army to the north was in rapid retreat must be considered one of the finest feats of the French army during the war. The eight days of rearguard fighting, carried on under extraordinary difficulties and against great odds, must ever be regarded as one of the great battle glories of France. Nothing but fine generalship, devoted courage, and skilful organization could have done it. Britons must always be grateful for the unselfish comradeship, the high and dauntless bravery, and the inspiring leadership which enabled a dangerous gap of thirty miles to be closed and a great German design to be nipped in the bud.

I must now describe the French retirement to the Ailette. The retreat of the British right wing on the right bank of the Oise during the first days of the offensive had left the Anglo-French troops holding an awkward salient, the north side of which was formed by the Oise and its marshes. This salient, which is shown on the little map (see page 162), was under German fire from two sides—from the north bank of the Oise, and from the Upper Coucy Forest.

On Saturday, 7th April, the Germans forced the passage of the Oise between Chauny and La Fère, and thus breached the north side of the salient. There was only one course open to the French, and that was to retire upon the Ailette river, and thus force the Germans to emerge from the valley within the woods and engage them in a country across which they had not prepared to advance. When the German pressure began to be felt on the 7th, the order was given to fall back upon the Ailette line. This retirement was made in the face of the enemy,

and cost our gallant allies not a single piece of artillery, not even a machine gun.

Near the middle of the angle which had to be given up stands the village of Barisis,* which was the point of junction between the British and French armies when the great offensive began on 21st March. Standing on the summit of a hill in this sector is the Château of Coucy.† Before the Germans disgraced themselves by blowing up portions of this castle during their retreat in 1917, it was one of the most striking monuments of the Middle Ages in the whole of Europe. The huge stronghold covered an area of 10,000 square yards. It was built in the thirteenth century, and until about 1400 remained in the possession of its founder's family, whose proud motto was: "I am neither king, nor prince, nor duke, nor count; I am the Lord of Coucy." It was dismantled in 1652, and is now public property. Before the war it was open to visitors on payment of a fee. The donjon keep was said to be the finest in Europe; it was 210 feet high, 100 feet in diameter, and the walls in some places were thirty-four feet thick. Four smaller towers, a moat, and high walls also protected the castle, which is approached by long, steep slopes on all sides but one.



Map to illustrate the French retirement.

The castle of Coucy, still imposing in its ruins, was the pivot of the French retreat. Certain regiments were placed in the historic fortress, which had withstood a score of sieges, and were ordered to hold on at all costs until the movement was complete. This they did. The enemy, following his usual custom, sent forward many small parties of men to filter through the French lines before launching his main attack in dense masses. The French lined both sides of the valley with thirty-six machine guns, and when the enemy appeared he was greeted with a hail of bullets. His progress, however, could only be checked; his numbers were too great to be stopped. For eighty-eight hours, ending at midday on 9th April, the thirty-six machine guns fired over a million rounds into the Germans. When the French finally fell back the valley was gray with German dead.

* *Bar-e-sees.* † See illustration on p. 159.



His Majesty the King talking with a Soldier wounded in the Great Offensive.
(Official photograph.)

* * * * *

I have already told you that, shortly after the great offensive began, his Majesty the King, eagerly desirous to be with his soldiers in their hour of trial, visited the front. On 1st April, after his return to London, he wrote a letter to Sir Douglas Haig, in which he paid a high tribute to the courage and doggedness of the splendid troops which had withstood the great German onslaught. He tells us in this letter that he was fortunate enough to see some of the units which had been withdrawn from the firing-line, and that he "listened with wonder as officers and men narrated the thrilling incidents of a week's stubborn fighting." Some of these stories I have told you in former pages.

He was also present at the entraining of fresh troops eager to reinforce their comrades; and he visited a large casualty clearing station, where he saw the wounded receiving prompt and careful attention, and being passed on, when fit to travel, to the base hospitals. "The patient cheerfulness of the wounded was only equalled by the care and gentleness of those ministering to their wants."

"Though," says the King, "for the moment our troops have been obliged by sheer weight of numbers to give some ground, the impression left on my mind is that no army could be in better heart, braver, or more confident than that which you have the honour to command.

"Any one privileged to share these experiences would feel with me proud of the British race, and of that unconquerable spirit which will, please God, bring us through our present trials.

"We at home must ensure that the man-power is maintained, and that our workers, men and women, will continue nobly to meet the demands for all the necessities of war."

CHAPTER XIX.

AMERICA'S FIRST YEAR OF WAR.

APRIL 6, 1918, will be for ever memorable in the annals of the United States, for on that day a year previously the great American Republic took up arms against the nation that had made war its religion and armed force its god. Everywhere in America men observed the day, and renewed their vow never to cease from their efforts until the enemy of mankind had been overthrown. President Wilson, amidst the greatest enthusiasm, addressed 15,000 of his fellow-countrymen at Baltimore.

"This," he said, "is the anniversary of our acceptance of Germany's challenge to fight for our right to live and be free, and for the sacred rights of free men everywhere. The nation is awake. There is no need to call to it. We know what the war must cost—our utmost sacrifice, the lives of our fittest men, and, if need be, all that we possess. . . . The German programme once carried out, America and all who care or dare to stand with her must arm and prepare themselves to contest the mastery of the world—a mastery in which the rights of common men, the rights of women, and of all who are weak, must for the time being be trodden under foot and disregarded, and the old age-long struggle for freedom and right begin again at its beginning. Everything that America has lived for, and loved and grown great to vindicate, will have fallen in utter ruin, and the gates of mercy will once more be pitilessly shut upon mankind. . . .

"Germany has once more said that force and force alone shall decide whether justice and peace shall reign in the affairs of men. . . . There is, therefore, but one response possible from us—force, force to the utmost, force without stint or limit, the righteous and triumphant force which shall make right the law of the world and cast every selfish dominion down in the dust."

It was on April 2, 1917, that President Wilson called upon Congress to declare war upon Germany. You have not forgotten, I hope, the remarkable speech which he made on that occasion. Turn back to Vol. VII., Chapter XVII., and read once more his noble message. I can imagine American



A Recruiting March in the United States.

[By Permission of *The Sphere*.

children learning by heart the concluding words of the President's address as they do the speech of Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg :—

“To such a task we can dedicate our lives, our fortunes—everything we are, everything we have—with the pride of those who know the day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and might for the principles that gave her birth, and the happiness and peace which she has treasured. God helping her, she can do no other.”

Now let us see how America set about her great task. Within a fortnight of the President's speech a bill was passed raising £1,400,000,000 for equipping her armed forces. Some Americans desired to maintain a defensive war only, and merely to help the Allies with loans and supplies. President Wilson, on the other hand, insisted that America should not only give the Allies loans and all possible supplies, but that they should put the navy on a war footing, raise at least half a million men at once, and authorize the enlistment of as many more as might be needed. Such was President Wilson's programme, which soon won the full support of the whole nation.

You must not suppose that it was easy to persuade the American people to take these steps. The population of the United States is very mixed : almost all the peoples of Europe are represented, notably Irish, who have long been unfriendly to Britain ; Russians and Poles, who hated the tyranny under which they formerly lived ; and Germans, many of whom, even in their new, free, and prosperous homes across the Atlantic, were eager for the success of their Fatherland. Then, too, you must remember that the conflict in which they were now to engage was being waged in an old-world continent more than three thousand miles away. The American people might easily have been deceived into believing that no matter what happened in Europe they would be safe. Further, the Americans are a peace-loving people, devoted to commerce. War would mean a great interruption of business, a great sacrifice of men and money, sorrow in many homes, and anxiety everywhere. When we think of these things we are not surprised that it took three years of conflict and every kind of insult and outrage to make the Americans fling down the gage of battle. Nevertheless, we cannot but admire greatly the splendid spirit that was soon evident among them after they had taken the plunge.

They were heart and soul with the President when he declared that they were privileged to spend their blood and might for the principles which gave America her birth, and the happiness and peace which she had treasured. Never did a nation go to war for such unselfish and lofty ends.

I need not remind you that when the United States determined on war the Allies were joined by the greatest industrial country of the world. The area of the United States is over $3\frac{1}{2}$ million square miles, or thirty times that of the United Kingdom. Her population is about 110 millions, and her national wealth is estimated at about 50,000 millions sterling, or about twice as much as that of the whole British Empire. More coal, iron, steel, copper, silver, petroleum, maize, wheat, oats, tobacco, and cotton are produced each year in America than in any other country of the world. You cannot but marvel at the gross stupidity of the Germans in so treating America as to make her devote all this wealth and abundance of natural resources to the cause of the Allies.

America has in her factories more than 50 millions of work-people, and her manufacturers are famed far and wide for their enterprise and skill. When war was declared, the leaders of industry turned their thoughts to the manufacture of munitions and war weapons. They needed time before they could produce war material on a large scale, but there could be no doubt that once the factories were in full swing the output would be immense.

Before war was declared, some regiments of the National Guard—that is, the militia of the various states—were called out; but these, together with the small regular army, were quite unprepared for war. The force consisted of only 130,000 regulars and 150,000 militiamen. Some 35,000 of the former were stationed in the Philippines, China, Panama, Hawaii, and Porto Rico. If we deduct non-combatants, the United States had only about 180,000 fighting men fit for battle. The army was a voluntary one, enlisted as our own army was before the war. At first men were urged to come freely to the colours; but the response was slow, and a new method had to be found. A Conscription Act was passed, and on June 5, 1917, upwards of $9\frac{1}{2}$ millions of men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty registered themselves as ready to take up arms. More than 3,000,000 of these men were medically examined, and 687,000 of them were ordered to join up.

Between September 1917 and April 2, 1918, over 123,800 officers and 1,500,000 men were under training, and preparations were being made to call up another 800,000 men. So that whereas in April 1917 the effective armed forces of the United States were under 200,000, within a year they were nearly eight times as great.

Strenuous efforts were made to put the navy on a war footing, and in May 1917 American warships crossed the Atlantic and joined up with the British and French navies. Their cruisers and destroyers took an active part in hunting U-boats and in convoying troopships and merchant vessels. When the war broke out the sailors of the American fleet numbered only 60,000; in the course of a few months there were 150,000 afloat, and early in 1918 efforts were made to bring the man-power of the navy up to 230,000. The national shipyards soon began to be busy, and they devoted themselves chiefly to the building of destroyers for fighting submarines. In April 1918 it was said that 260 destroyers of the largest type were on the stocks, and were being completed at the rate of six a month. In addition, some 360 "submarine chasers" were being built in double-quick time in the factories of Mr. Ford, the motor-car manufacturer. Twenty great manufacturing plants were set apart for the building of aeroplanes, and it was anticipated in April 1918 that machines would soon be turned out at a bewildering rate.

I have already reminded you that three thousand or more miles of water separate the United States from the battlefields of France and Flanders. America's gravest difficulty was the transport of her men, guns, munitions, and food supplies to Europe. It was estimated that every soldier sent to France required at least five tons of equipment and supplies. This, of course, means that before America could send her millions across "the herring pond" she must build an immense number of transports and merchant vessels.

In the past America has been content to see her ocean-borne commerce carried to and fro in foreign ships. In 1915 the whole of her ships engaged in foreign trade had a tonnage of less than 2 million tons. The United Kingdom, as you know, has the largest mercantile marine in the world. In 1915 the tonnage of her vessels was estimated at about 12½ millions. By May 1918 the U-boats of the enemy had sunk 11 million tons of the world's shipping. Great Britain and the other maritime allies

could, therefore, give but little assistance to their new ally. She had to rely upon herself, and begin to build ships in vast numbers. This was not easy to do, because the industry was at a low ebb. Shipbuilding yards had to be constructed; plant and materials had to be provided; workmen had to be secured and trained. Work was not begun as promptly as was expected; but by April 1918 America had some of the largest shipbuilding yards in the world, and all were crowded with ships rapidly approaching completion.

During the war we in this country suffered from labour troubles. Strikes were not infrequent, and from time to time the output of our yards was gravely reduced. In America, after the declaration of war, labour lent itself readily to the great work of making the nation ready to fight. Many of the workmen who had emigrated from Eastern Europe were unwilling to help the Allies so long as the Tsar ruled in Russia, but after the revolution they were quite ready to put their backs into the great national task. The only people who stood aloof were the sympathizers with Germany. With these the Government dealt firmly and effectively.

While Europe was convulsed with strife, America was the one great manufacturing country which was free to supply the needs of the Allies and the neutrals. The consequence was that her industry developed greatly during the war, and her wealth increased by leaps and bounds. In the four years up to April 1918 it was estimated that the national wealth of America had grown by £100 per head of her huge population. Money, as you know, furnishes the sinews of war; and when America flung herself into the fray all this new increase of wealth, as well as her former savings, was available for the great struggle. Louis XIV., during the European war of his day, declared that the last piece of gold would win. The saying is as true as ever it was, and the Allies took comfort from the knowledge that the coffers of the United States were filled to overflowing, while their own were sadly depleted, and those of Germany were well-nigh empty.

Early in June 1917 General Pershing, who was to command the American army, crossed over to France to examine the situation, and to make arrangements with the French military authorities. On 26th June the first American contingent landed on French soil, and thereafter troops continued to arrive in



American Soldiers in London.

(By permission of The Sphere.)

This picture shows a column of American soldiers passing under the Admiralty Arch, Trafalgar Square, London, on Saturday, May 11, 1918. The troops marched past Buckingham Palace, where the salute was taken by King George.

ever-increasing numbers. Before long the fully-trained men were in the firing-line, where they upheld the honour of their nation right worthily. By the close of the year there was an American army "of substantial size"* in France, and independent lines of communication and supply were under construction. By this time many Americans had made the great sacrifice: in the first year of war their total casualties by land and sea exceeded five thousand.

During the great German offensive of 1918, when the Allies were being tried to the utmost and every man was needed, the American Government gladly agreed that its soldiers in France should play their part in the fighting. It was intended that the Americans should operate as one army; but when the Allies were in great straits, General Pershing made a generous offer to General Foch. At that time the United States had formed divisions of its own, but it had also a considerable number of regiments not yet sufficiently trained to be grouped into divisions, though quite capable of taking their place in the firing-line. These regiments General Pershing offered to the Allies, and agreed that they should be brigaded with French and British troops "until he wished to withdraw them in order to build up the American army." Naturally, the Americans hoped to go into battle shoulder to shoulder, with the Stars and Stripes waving above them. When, however, the Allies were in urgent need of reinforcement, our American cousins, in the most chivalrous fashion, set aside their national pride and thought only of the great issue at stake. The incident showed clearly that they were no whit behind the British and French in their "singleness of purpose," and that they were prepared to set aside their own wishes and fall in with any plan which would help to defeat the common enemy.

* In May 1918 the Prime Minister said that the Americans in France did not equal in numbers the Germans released from the Russian front and available for war in the West.

CHAPTER XX.

HEROES OF THE VICTORIA CROSS.

I MUST now resume the pleasing task of recording the heroism of those who were enrolled amongst the bravest of the brave by the award of that simple cross of bronze which every true soldier covets, but which many fail to win ; not because of any lack of courage or devotion, but simply because their deeds go unnoticed during the hurly-burly of battle. We shall do thousands of brave men a grave injustice if we assume that all who deserve the highest badge of valour receive it. You will notice, as you read the following pages, that the acts of heroism recorded were done during the retreat which I have described in former chapters. All whose names are mentioned received the proud decoration between the beginning of April and the end of May 1918. The first name on the list is that of

LANCE-CORPORAL CHARLES GRAHAM ROBERTSON, M.M.,
Royal Fusiliers.

Lance-Corporal Robertson, with three men, was holding a post when the enemy made an attack in force, and began to surround him and his little band. Sending back two of his comrades for reinforcements, the lance-corporal, with one companion, prepared to make a stand against a host. He soon got his Lewis gun to work, and laid many Germans low on his right. No reinforcements arrived, and he was completely cut off. He and his sole companion now withdrew to a point ten yards farther back, and once more rained bullets on the enemy.

In this position our hero remained for a considerable time, doing great execution on the advancing foe. Bombs were hurled at him, machine guns were turned on him, and his position became so perilous that he and his comrade withdrew and arrived safely at a defended post. Shortly afterwards he

climbed over the parapet with his faithful follower and mounted his gun in a shell-hole. Again he shot down many of the enemy who were advancing along and by the side of an adjacent trench. While engaged in this work his comrade was killed, and he himself was severely wounded. He managed to crawl back to the post, bringing his gun with him, and would have continued firing from his new position had not his ammunition run out.

His undaunted bravery and his determined resistance prevented the enemy from making a more rapid advance. It is impossible to overpraise the enterprise, resource, and magnificent fighting spirit of this gallant soldier.

CAPTAIN (ACTING LIEUTENANT-COLONEL) JOHN STANHOPE COLLINGS-WELLS, D.S.O., Bedfordshire Rifles.

When during a retirement the rearguard which Colonel Collings-Wells commanded was in great danger of being surrounded and captured, he called for volunteers to remain behind and hold up the enemy while their comrades withdrew. Volunteers were forthcoming, as they always are, for this perilous business, in which every man engaged knew that death or captivity awaited him. The little band set doggedly to work, and for one and a half hours stemmed the torrent of the advance. They did not withdraw until they had expended every round of ammunition. During the engagement Colonel Collings-Wells went to and fro amongst his men, guiding and encouraging them. The situation was saved by his great courage and fearless example.

On a later occasion, when his battalion was ordered to carry out a counter-attack, he displayed similar bravery. His men were worn out with six days' fighting, and they sorely needed an inspiring leader. He led the attack, and though twice wounded, refused to leave his men. Struggling onwards, he cheered and stimulated them until the moment when they won their objective. Then he fell dead, having played the part of a fearless and undaunted soldier to the end.

LIEUTENANT (ACTING-CAPTAIN) REGINALD FREDERICK JOHNSON HAYWARD, M.C., Wiltshire Regiment.

Captain Hayward, when his company was in action, displayed the most wonderful endurance and the rarest bravery. On the first day of the operations a bursting shell buried him, wounded him in the head, and deafened him. Nevertheless he

“carried on.” Two days later his arm was shattered, and he received a fresh injury to the head. Even then he refused to hand over his command, and only when consciousness left him was he carried to the rear. Throughout the action the enemy made ceaseless attacks upon the trenches which he was holding. With an utter disregard of danger he went across the open from trench to trench, directing operations and encouraging his men. Never was there a greater triumph of spirit over body. Though racked with pain and disabled by wounds, he thought of nothing but his duty. By his ceaseless energy and fine example he so inspired his men that they beat off the German attacks.

LIEUTENANT GORDON MURIEL FLOWERDEW, Canadian Cavalry.

Lieutenant Flowerdew was in command of a squadron detailed for special service of great importance. On reaching his first objective he saw two lines of the enemy, each about sixty strong and armed with machine guns in their centre and on their flanks. One line was about two hundred yards behind the other. It was necessary that he should reach his final objective, so he determined to try to break through the two lines opposing him. He ordered a troop under Lieutenant Harvey, V.C., to dismount and carry out a flank movement, while he himself led the remaining three troops in a frontal charge. With waving swords the Canadians dashed down upon the enemy, and slew many of them. Then, wheeling about, they formed up and charged again. By this time the squadron had lost 70 per cent. of its members from rifle and machine-gun fire. Nevertheless, the survivors broke the ranks of the Germans and forced them to retire. The victors then took up a position, and after much hand-to-hand fighting were joined by Lieutenant Harvey's party. Lieutenant Flowerdew was dangerously wounded in both thighs during the engagement, but in spite of his sufferings continued to direct operations and cheer on his men. Canadians

“ . . . from Montreal,
From Quebec and Saguenay,
From Ungava, Labrador,
All the lands about the bay
Which old Hudson quested for,”

have every reason to be proud of the valour of this dauntless son of the Dominion.

LIEUTENANT ALAN JERRARD, Royal Air Force (formerly of the South Staffordshire Regiment).

While engaged on an offensive patrol with two other officers, Lieutenant Jerrard attacked five enemy aeroplanes, and shot one of them down in flames. He followed it to within a hundred feet of the ground, and then flew to an enemy aerodrome. Descending to within fifty feet of mother earth, he engaged some nineteen machines which were then landing or attempting to rise. He disabled one of them, and sent it crashing down upon the aerodrome. Then he was assailed by a large number of enemy machines. While fully engaged in beating them off, he saw one of the pilots of his patrol in difficulties. Careless of his own safety, he at once went to the rescue, and immediately afterwards destroyed a third enemy machine.

Fresh hostile planes continued to rise from the aerodrome, and he attacked them one after the other. While engaged with five enemy machines, he was ordered by his patrol leader to retreat. Although he seemed to be wounded, he turned repeatedly, and fell upon the pursuing machines. This he continued to do until he was overwhelmed by numbers and driven to the ground. The gallant young airman had greatly distinguished himself on four previous occasions, and had repeatedly shown bravery and skill of the highest order.

CHAPTER XXI.

HEROES OF THE VICTORIA CROSS.—II.

SECOND-LIEUTENANT ALAN ARNETT M'LEOD, Royal Air Force.

While flying with his observer (Lieutenant A. W. Hammond, M.C.) and attacking hostile machines with bombs and machine-gun fire, Lieutenant M'Leod was assailed at a height of 5,000 feet by eight enemy biplanes, which dived at him from all directions, firing their front guns. By skilful twisting and turning he enabled his observer to fire bursts at each machine in turn, with the result that three of them went down out of control. By this time Lieutenant M'Leod had received five wounds. Nevertheless he "carried on;" but soon an enemy bullet penetrated his petrol tank and set his machine on fire. Nothing daunted, he climbed out on to the left bottom plane, and, controlling his machine from this position, side-slipped steeply, so as to keep the flames on one side. By so doing he enabled his observer to continue firing until the ground was reached. The observer had been wounded six times when the machine crashed in No Man's Land. Lieutenant M'Leod, though suffering agonies of pain, at once dragged his companion away from the flaming wreckage—a work of the greatest peril, as heavy machine-gun fire was directed against him from the enemy's lines. While rescuing his observer he was again wounded by a bomb. Nevertheless he did not cease his efforts until he had placed Lieutenant Hammond in a position of comparative safety. Then he fell, exhausted by his exertions and by his loss of blood.

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL CHRISTOPHER BUSHELL, D.S.O., Royal West Surrey Regiment.

This gallant officer led "C" company of his battalion to a

counter-attack which was made along with a French regiment. Heavy machine-gun fire burst upon them, and before long the colonel was wounded in the head. He did not fall out, but continued to march in front of the troops, rallying them when thrown out of their formation, and cheering them on. He refused to have his wound attended to until his men were in a strong position, and he had formed a defensive flank to deal with a turning movement which the enemy was then attempting. When the position was secure, he went to brigade headquarters and made his report. Then he had his wound dressed, and returned to the firing-line, which in the interval had fallen back a short distance. To and fro he went among his men, careless of the heavy fire, bidding them stand their ground and not waste a shot. At length he fainted, and had to be removed to a dressing-station. The official record tells us that his splendid energy, devotion, and courage greatly inspired his men, not only in the encounter described above, but on the following days of the withdrawal.

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL WILLIAM HERBERT ANDERSON, Highland Light Infantry.

During our retreat the enemy attacked the right front of one of our battalions which was holding a wood. The front was pierced, and as wave after wave of Germans followed close behind, there was the gravest danger that the flank of the whole position would be turned. Colonel Anderson saw at once that the situation was serious, and made his way across the open in full view of the enemy, who were now holding the wood on his right. With great difficulty he managed to collect the survivors of the two right companies, and at their head charged down upon the wood. Thanks to his spirited action, the enemy were driven out, twelve machine guns and seventy prisoners were captured, and the line was restored. He led the charge with splendid fearlessness, and inspired his men with new courage during a most critical hour.

Later on the same day, when he was holding a village, the enemy came within three hundred yards of his position and captured a timber yard, which they garrisoned with a strong force. He rallied his men and again led them in a counter-attack, during which the enemy was driven from the timber yard. While his men were thus fighting victoriously an enemy bullet found its billet, and he fell dead within the enemy's lines.



On the Way to the Firing-Line.

(By permission of The Illustrated London News.)

Relief or reinforcing troops are usually sent up to the firing-line by night, because it is impossible to move masses of men by day within range of enemy fire. The man in the foreground is "the connecting file." His business is to keep his own party in view and yet to remain in sight of those following him. But for this arrangement troops might easily lose their way in the darkness.

The Highland Light Infantry will not soon forget the gallant colonel who so nobly maintained the proud traditions of their regiment on that hard-fought day.

SECOND-LIEUTENANT MATTHEW CASSIDY, Lancashire Fusiliers.

Lieutenant Cassidy was in command of the left company of his battalion at a time when the flank of his division was in grave danger. Prior to the attack he had been ordered to stand his ground and hold his position to the last. He obeyed this order to the letter, though it involved the loss of his gallant life. The Germans came on in overwhelming numbers, and strove hard to outflank the battalion. They turned their big guns on the little band; but Lieutenant Cassidy rallied his men time after time, and led them in attacks which cleared the trench which he was holding. Finally, however, the company was surrounded. Even then Lieutenant Cassidy had no thought of surrender. He fought on, and urged others to do the same, until he fell mortally wounded. He died with the proud knowledge that he had justified the confidence placed in him. He had saved the left flank from what might have been disaster.

SERGEANT STANLEY ROBERT M'DOUGALL, Australian Imperial Force.

The first wave of the enemy's onset had broken our line, and another wave was rapidly advancing. Sergeant M'Dougall, who held a post along with a flank company, saw that unless heroic measures were taken his comrades would be overwhelmed. He therefore charged the second wave single-handed with the bayonet, and succeeded in killing seven of the attackers and capturing their machine gun. Without a moment's delay he supported the gun on his hip, and turned it on the enemy, with the result that many Germans fell and the wave was driven back. He then turned his attention to those who had entered his position, and continued firing at them at close range until his ammunition was exhausted. Then flinging down the useless machine gun, he seized a rifle and charged again, this time killing four of the enemy. One of them—an officer—was in the act of killing an officer of ours when the gallant Australian laid him low. Finally, he possessed himself of a Lewis gun, and helped his comrades to seize thirty-three prisoners. The official record tells us that his prompt

action saved the line, and enabled his comrades to stop the enemy's advance.

PRIVATE HERBERT GEORGE COLUMBINE, Machine-Gun Corps.

The glorious deed which won this hero the Victoria Cross was thus described by Dr. P. G. C. Atkinson, an eye-witness : "The enemy attacked suddenly in great force. They made considerable headway, and from vantage ground on either side started to enfilade our trenches, causing very severe casualties among our men. Part of our defence system included a machine-gun post somewhat in advance of the main trench. The men in this post were all knocked out. Running the gauntlet of very heavy fire, Private Columbine rushed forward and took charge of the gun. He was followed by several comrades. In spite of the fact that the enemy turned his heaviest artillery on the post, which was almost unprotected, the gallant private kept the machine gun going for four hours. During that time the enemy worked round the position with strong forces, and at last cut it off, save for one narrow gap by which it was still possible to communicate with the main position.

"Despite repeated rushes of the enemy Columbine scarcely ceased to fire. In the course of the fight a German officer appeared, and urged his men to carry the post ; but every time they attempted to do so they were stopped in a few yards by Columbine's gun. The heroic gunner by this time was wounded, but he still fought on. Early in the afternoon it became clear that the position was hopeless, so he told his two unwounded comrades that it was folly for them to remain in the post any longer.

" 'Save yourselves,' he said ; 'I'll carry on.' They were reluctant to go, but he insisted. He shouted a few words of farewell, and that was the last his comrades heard of him.

"From where we lay we could see the fight going on, and the swarms of gray-blue infantry round the position. All the time the machine gun, manned by the wounded hero, was spitting out death. In the course of the hour from noon to one o'clock the enemy made eight attempts to rush the post. Every one of them was brought to a standstill.

"New tactics were now tried. Retiring to their positions, the enemy concentrated heavy rifle and machine-gun fire upon the hero and his gun. At the same time a number of hostile aeroplanes appeared overhead. They were promptly engaged

by our machines ; but one of them detached itself from the fighting group and descended to about one hundred feet or so above Columbine's position. We saw it circling about for a few seconds like a great vulture ready to pounce on its prey.

"Columbine elevated his gun in order to attack this new enemy. The fight could only have one ending. A bomb was launched from the aeroplane, there was a sharp report, and gun and gunner were blown out of existence.

"The heroic fight of this noble and determined soldier delayed the enemy attack, and gave us time to consolidate our position. When the Germans at last moved forward they found that the stand made by this one-man army had put their plans hopelessly out of gear."

The inhabitants of Walton-on-the-Naze, the home of Private Columbine, must for ever cherish the memory of this devoted gunner, whose resistance to the death against overwhelming odds is as fine a story of heroic constancy as anything in the pages of history.

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL OLIVER CYRIL SPENCER WATSON,
D.S.O., King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

Another hero who sacrificed himself at the call of duty now engages our attention. Colonel Watson's command was stationed at a point where continual efforts were made by the enemy to pierce the line. They were assisted by the many old trenches which lay in front, and by the constant rifle and machine-gun fire which beat down upon the defenders. A counter-attack had been made against the German position, and at first it was successful. The enemy, however, continued to hold out in two strong points, and Colonel Watson saw that he could not remain where he was unless these little fortresses were reduced. He therefore organized bombing parties, and led the remainder of his small reserve to the attack. This he had to do under intense fire. Before long his men were outnumbered, and to save their lives he ordered them to retire. He alone stayed behind in a communication trench to cover their withdrawal, though he was fully aware that death awaited him. He literally gave his life for his comrades. The assault which he led at a critical moment saved the line, and both in the advance and in the withdrawal he counted his life as nothing. His splendid bravery inspired all the troops in the neighbourhood

to redoubled efforts, which enabled them to save their thin and sorely-tried line from being swept away.

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL FRANK CROWTHER ROBERTS, D.S.O., M.C., Worcestershire Regiment.

During twelve perilous and hard-fought days of retirement Colonel Roberts showed the greatest gallantry, military skill, endurance, and energy. On one occasion, when the enemy had almost driven our men out of a village, he collected soldiers from different units, and at their head won back the position and held it sufficiently long to enable our troops on the flanks to get clear away. But for his valour and skill they would certainly have been cut off. Over and over again during the retreat his courage and resource saved the situation, and in the darkest hours his undaunted spirit gave new heart and hope to his men.

CAPTAIN ALFRED MAURICE TOYE, M.C., Middlesex Rifles.

Captain Toye was holding a trench at a bridgehead which the enemy was very anxious to capture. Three times he was thrust out of his position, and three times he recovered it. In the end, however, he was surrounded and cut off, as were the other three posts under his command. Even then he had no thought of surrender. With one officer and six men of his company he fought his way back to safety. When he had done so, he found that seventy men of the battalion on his left were retiring. At once he rallied them, and led them in a counter-attack, which enabled him to take up a defensive line and hold off the enemy until reinforcements arrived. Had he not done so, the defence of the bridge would have been turned. On two other occasions he showed the same fine leadership, and with a force made up of odds and ends of men covered the retirement of his battalion with rare skill and courage. Later on, during ten days of the hardest possible fighting, he distinguished himself in other encounters. On one occasion, with a party from battalion headquarters, he attacked the enemy in a village, held them up, and covered the left flank of his battalion during its retirement. Finally, on a later day, he led a mixed force which charged the enemy, and recovered a line which had been abandoned before his arrival. During the actions described above he was twice wounded, but refused to leave his men. British soldiers, as you know, always fight best with their backs to the wall. Captain Toye never displayed



At much-fought-for Bucquoy: British Troops

(From the picture by A. Forrestier. By

In the above picture the Germans are seen advancing with the object of enfilading a sunken byroad action. A body of British troops is advancing on the left to repel the enemy at the point of the bayonet.



advancing to meet Oncoming German Masses.

permission of The Illustrated London News.)

held by the British. In the foreground is a barricade across the road, and close to it a machine gun in
To the right of the barricade British infantry supports are waiting in shelters dug in the side of the bank.

such valour and skilful leadership as in those days of constant peril, when the fate of our country seemed to hang on a thread.

SERGEANT HAROLD JACKSON, East Yorkshire Regiment.

This gallant sergeant showed the most striking courage and devotion to duty when he and his comrades were battling against the overwhelming hordes of Germans who strove to break through them. It was all-important that his commanding officer should learn something of the enemy's movements. Sergeant Jackson volunteered for the task. He pushed through the enemy's barrage, and scouted close to the German lines. Then he returned through the zone of fire with most valuable information. Some time later the enemy captured a part of our line. At this juncture Sergeant Jackson rushed upon the invaders single-handed, and bombed them out into the open. Shortly afterwards he set off, still all alone, to knock out a machine gun that was working great havoc. He flung his bombs with such effect that he put the gun out of action. When all the officers of his company had been shot down he took command, and led his men in a counter-attack. Ordered to retire, he withdrew his company successfully through very heavy fire. Still unwearied in well-doing, he went out repeatedly amidst the bursting shells and carried in some of his wounded comrades. Never was the Victoria Cross more nobly won than by this tireless and gallant N.C.O.

PRIVATE RICHARD GEORGE MASTERS, Army Service Corps.

The first Army Service man to win the Victoria Cross in this war now appears in our record. Enemy attacks had severed all communications, and the wounded could not be carried from the dressing-stations to the rear. Had they been left behind they would have fallen into the hands of the enemy, and would have suffered the hardships of prisoners of war. The road that led to the dressing-stations was said to be impassable. Private Masters, however, offered to try to get through. He had to clear a way for his motor, and had to traverse a road that was constantly swept by shell-fire. Nevertheless he made journey after journey through the whole of an afternoon, and brought back to our lines most of the wounded. During one of the journeys he was bombed by an aeroplane, and narrowly escaped destruction. His was the only car that managed to pass to and fro at this very critical time.

PRIVATE HAROLD WHITFIELD, King's Shropshire Light Infantry.

This Shropshire soldier won his Cross in the Holy Land. During the first and heaviest of three counter-attacks made by the enemy on a position which his battalion had just captured, Private Whitfield, without a single companion, charged a machine gun which was harassing his company at short range. He either bayoneted or shot the whole gun team, and then, turning the gun on the attackers, drove them back with heavy casualties. In this way he enabled his comrades to restore their line. Later on, when the enemy had gained a footing in a position close to our lines and was enfilading our men, Private Whitfield led a bombing attack which thrust the attackers from the position. Undoubtedly by his promptness and gallantry he saved many lives, and was foremost in bringing about the defeat of the enemy's counter-attack. When this fine soldier returned home he learned that the city fathers of Oswestry, his native town, had decided to give him and another Salopian hero—Brigadier-General John Vaughan Campbell, V.C.*—a civic welcome.

ORDINARY SEAMAN JOHN HENRY CARELESS, Royal Navy.

A sailor now appears in our record of outstanding heroism. On page 313 of our eighth volume I told you that on November 17, 1917, our light forces made a very gallant raid into Heligoland Bight. Amongst the gallant men who covered themselves with glory on that occasion was Ordinary Seaman Careless. During the fighting he was mortally wounded. Nevertheless he still fought on, though suffering terrible agony. He lifted a shell to the mouth of his gun, and helped to remove the wounded. These efforts, however, were too much for him, and he fainted. A few minutes later he rose, and once more tried to "do his bit" for the honour of his nation and the glory of the Navy. He cheered and encouraged the new crew which had arrived to man the gun, but while doing so fell and died. In the soul of this dauntless and devoted seaman dwelt the unconquerable resolution of Nelson himself.

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL JAMES FORBES-ROBERTSON, D.S.O., M.C., Border Regiment.

On four several occasions when our line was in instant peril of breaking, Colonel Forbes-Robertson, by his quick judgment,

* See Vol. VI., p. 282.

ready resource, untiring energy, and splendid example, saved the situation and prevented grave disasters. On the first occasion our troops were falling back, and it was necessary to find out the exact position of the enemy. The gallant colonel went out on horseback in full view of the enemy, and, under intense shell and machine-gun fire, discovered the whereabouts of the attackers. Then he organized and led a counter-attack, which drove back the enemy and enabled our men to re-establish their line. During the advance the colonel's horse was shot under him, but he sprang clear and led his men on foot.

Later on the same day, when the troops on his left were giving way, he went over to that flank, and by his cheering words, brave presence, and cool conduct gave his men such confidence that they steadied themselves and held on. His horse was wounded three times during this period, and he was thrown from the saddle five times.

On the following day, when the troops on both of his flanks were forced to retire, he formed a post at battalion headquarters, and there made a most dogged stand until the retirement was carried out. During this anxious time he hazarded his life a thousand times. He was utterly careless of his own safety; all his thoughts were for his men.

On the fourth occasion he again saved the line from breaking. When his horse was killed under him he obtained another, but it, too, was shot down. Then he advanced on foot, and did not cease his efforts until he had established a line to which his men could withdraw and there hold up the enemy. I am sure you will agree that no award of honour was too high for this most gallant, most devoted, and most skilful officer.

CAPTAIN THOMAS TANNATT PRYCE, M.C., Grenadier Guards.

Captain Pryce was in command of a flank on the left of the Grenadier Guards when he was ordered to attack a village. He led forward two platoons, and, working from house to house, made a good advance, in the course of which some thirty of the enemy were killed. He himself was responsible for seven of them.

Early next morning, while holding a position with some thirty or forty men—all that were left of his company—he found that his left flank was turned, and that the enemy was enfilading him. During the day four separate attacks were made upon him, but each time he drove back the enemy with great loss.



Lieutenant-Colonel Forbes-Robertson saving the Line from breaking.
(From the picture by F. Matania. By permission of The Sphere.)

Then three guns were brought up to within three hundred yards of his line, and an effort was made to blow him and his men out of existence. By 6.15 in the evening the enemy was within sixty yards of his trench. The situation was now desperate, and Captain Pryce took the bull by the horns. He called upon his men to follow him, and, scrambling over the parapet, they went out into the open and charged with the bayonet. The result was that the Germans were driven back for a hundred yards.

Half an hour later the enemy made another attempt to rush the position, this time with stronger forces. The little heroic band, which had withstood assault after assault for ten long hours of bitter fighting, was now reduced to seventeen, and not a single round of ammunition remained. Even then Captain Pryce refused to surrender. Once again he led his men in a bayonet charge, and when last seen was fighting furiously in hand-to-hand combats with swarming foes. No braver or more determined soldier ever wore the King's uniform or won the proudest award of valour.

SECOND-LIEUTENANT BASIL ARTHUR HORSFALL, East Lancashire Regiment.

Lieutenant Horsfall was in command of the centre platoon during an attack on our positions. The enemy's onset drove in his three forward sections, and he himself was wounded in the head. Nevertheless, he at once organized the remainder of his men, and at their head made a counter-attack which won back the lost positions. He was then told that, out of the remaining three officers of his company, two were killed and one was wounded. In such circumstances he would not listen to those who begged him to go to a dressing-station, though his wound was severe. Later on his platoon had to be withdrawn to escape very heavy shell-fire. Immediately the shelling died down he made a second counter-attack, and once more established his men in their old positions. Here he remained until he received the order to retire. He was reluctant to withdraw, and said that he could have held on had it been necessary. He was the last man to leave the position, and while retreating a German bullet struck him, and he fell dead. We will honour this superb young soldier, not with tears, but with remembrance.

SECOND-LIEUTENANT JOHN CRAWFORD BUCHAN, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

This gallant officer was twenty-four years of age when he

performed the heroic feat which I am about to describe. His father was editor of the *Alloa Advertiser*, and he himself was a reporter on his father's paper. When war broke out our hero was holiday-making in Switzerland, and found himself unable to leave the country. He obtained employment as a book-keeper and interpreter in a large tourist hotel; and, after serving for the best part of a year in this capacity, obtained a passport which permitted him to cross the frontier into France and make his way to England. On reaching London he went straight to a recruiting office and offered his services. A few days later he reached home wearing the uniform of an R.A.M.C. private. In the middle of 1916 he obtained a commission in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and in September of the same year went to France. He had taken part in numerous engagements before the big German offensive of 21st March, in which, as you will hear, he splendidly distinguished himself.

His father tells us that he was a good athlete, and that even as a boy was full of grit. "The following incident," he says, "occurred not very long before the outbreak of war. John and three or four companions belonging to the town planned a little excursion to Fort William. When they arrived John suddenly announced that he was going to climb to the top of Ben Nevis. His pals said, 'Good for John,' and volunteered to make the ascent with him; but when they began to encounter the many difficulties of the rugged path they lost heart, and one of them said, 'Look here, John, we have had enough of this.' John replied, 'Well, boys, you can all go home if you like. I mean to go to the top.' The youngest boy of the company agreed to accompany him, and to the top they went, in spite of the violent gale that was blowing."

Our hero's father also told a good story of his son's firm dealing with a pompous German officer.

"My son," he said, "spoke the German language fluently, and he was therefore engaged at different times in cross-examining German prisoners before they were sent to the cages. On one occasion a swaggering German colonel was brought in. His servant was carrying his belongings. My son proceeded to cross-examine the colonel, but could get nothing out of him. At last the colonel in a very lordly fashion exclaimed in broken English, 'Want motor car—take me to camp; my man can walk.' 'Oh dear no,' replied my son; 'you will have to walk

like the rest of them.' Much to his disgust, the colonel was obliged to tramp to the rear with the other prisoners."

Now let us turn to the story of Lieutenant Buchan's heroism. When fighting with his platoon in a forward position he continually visited his posts, cheering and encouraging his men, and braving the constant shell-bursts. He was wounded, and many of his comrades were killed, but he never for a moment thought of abandoning his charge. Later, when the enemy was creeping closer and heavy machine-gun fire was raking his position, he was unwearied in keeping up the spirits of his men, and in organizing the defence. Once more he was wounded, but he still "carried on."

At last, when the enemy swarmed all around, Lieutenant Buchan collected his men and prepared to fight his way back to the supporting line. At this moment the enemy, who had crept round his right flank, rushed towards him shouting, "Surrender!" "No surrender!" replied the lieutenant, and as he did so he shot the foremost German. Then he rallied his men, and they pushed back the attackers so far that he was enabled to fight his way to a forward position in the supporting line, where he held out until dusk.

When darkness fell he retired, according to orders, and was advised to go to a dressing-station to have his injuries attended to; but he refused, saying that his place was with his men. Owing to the unexpected withdrawal of troops on the left flank his little force was again cut off, and it was impossible to send messages to him ordering him to retire. He was seen fighting bravely to the last.

A comrade thus describes the effect of Lieutenant Buchan's courage and daring upon his men: "Again and again the pressure on us was so cruel that we could hardly stand it; but every time that we heard the voice of Lieutenant Buchan calling to us to 'stick it to the end,' we felt that we had got a new lease of life, and the Germans could not make headway against us. It was not merely words with him. He never asked us to do what he would not do himself; and if he asked us to hang on during that terrible day, it was because he himself meant to hang on."

CHAPTER XXII.

HEROES OF THE VICTORIA CROSS.—III.

CORPORAL JOHN THOMAS DAVIES, South Lancashire Regiment.

Corporal Davies, whose home was at Pensley Cross, near St. Helens, Lancashire, showed remarkable bravery and devotion at a time when his half-company was outflanked on both sides and had received orders to withdraw. The corporal knew that the only direction in which his comrades could retire lay through a deep stream lined with a belt of barbed wire. Unless the enemy could be held off while the retreating party struggled through the wire and swam the stream, they would run a grave risk of being utterly destroyed. Corporal Davies determined to sacrifice himself, if need be, in the effort to delay the advancing Germans until his comrades were in safety. He mounted the parapet in full view of the enemy, and got his Lewis gun to work. Many of the attackers fell, and the rest were checked sufficiently long to enable our men to get away. The official record thus concludes: "When last seen this gallant N.C.O. was still firing his gun with the enemy close on the top of him, and was in all probability killed." Happily it was discovered later on that he was a prisoner of war in Germany.

GUNNER CHARLES EDWIN STONE, M.M., Royal Field Artillery.

For six hours Gunner Stone worked hard at his gun under heavy gas attacks and constant shell-fire. He was then sent to the rear with a message. Having delivered his message, he seized a rifle, and, without waiting for orders, pushed through the enemy's barrage, and reached a forward position where our men were holding up the enemy on a sunken road. He lay out in the open about one hundred yards from the Germans,

and though assailed by machine-gun fire, calmly picked off man after man until ordered to retire. He then took up a position on the right flank of the two rear guns, and again kept the enemy at bay, and prevented them from outflanking the guns. While so engaged one of the enemy managed to break through. At once Gunner Stone ran after him and killed him. Later on he was one of a party which captured four Germans, who with a machine gun had crept from shell-hole to shell-hole in the dusk, and had worked round to the rear of the gun position. By this gallant act he undoubtedly saved the lives of his comrades who were serving the guns. The splendid courage, energy, and skill of this fine soldier deserve the utmost praise that can be bestowed upon him.

PRIVATE JACK THOMAS COUNTER, King's Liverpool Regiment.

The enemy had gained a footing in our front line, and it was necessary that information should be obtained from the men who were struggling to oust the intruders. The only way to reach the front line from the supporting line was to pass along a sunken road and thence down a bare slope without cover of any kind for 250 yards. This slope was literally swept by machine-gun and rifle fire, and certain death seemed to be the lot of any man who attempted to descend it. A small party was sent forward; but the leader was killed, and a comrade was wounded before leaving the sunken road. The officer in command then came to the conclusion that a single man had more chance of getting through than a party. Five men essayed the task one after the other, but each of them was killed before he was out of sight of the position from which he started.

Private Counter, who was standing near his officer, saw these five runners killed, and he knew perfectly well that only by a miracle could any man get through. Nevertheless he volunteered to make the attempt. Shells burst around him and bullets hummed past him like bees, but by the rarest of good luck he reached the front line without being hit. Obtaining the needed information, he turned to make the perilous return journey, and, strange to say, safely arrived in the supporting line, where he was able to inform his officer as to the number of the enemy attacking, the remaining strength of our troops, and the exact position of our flank. Now that his



How Second-Lieutenant J. C. Buchan won the Victoria Cross.
(From the portrait by F. Matania. By permission of The Sphere.)
For an account of this incident see pp. 191, 192.

commanding officer had this information, he was able to launch a counter-attack, and regain the whole of the lost position. Later on, Private Counter took his life in his hands once more. He carried no less than five messages across the open, and each time had to run the gauntlet of a heavy artillery barrage. His utter fearlessness in the face of the most terrible peril greatly steadied his young and untried companions.

* * * * * * *

I will conclude this chapter with a brief account of the gallantry and self-sacrifice of a boy-hero. He was not awarded the Victoria Cross, but nothing could be finer than the manner in which he gave his life for his country. Boy scouts everywhere will cherish his memory, for he was an enthusiastic member of a well-known patrol, and had won many badges. His name was William Gardiner, and his home was in the romantic city of Edinburgh. He was but eighteen years of age when he fell.

Early in 1917 he was appointed wireless operator on board a liner. One morning the liner was attacked by a submarine, which launched a torpedo at it. Fortunately the torpedo missed its mark; whereupon the submarine began shelling the vessel. Young Gardiner, at his post in the wireless cabin, sent out signals of distress for a full hour, though his ship was under heavy fire. Fortunately he flashed a message to a British destroyer. At this moment the captain ordered him to leave his exposed position in the wireless cabin and take shelter. The brave lad replied that he had just established contact with an American cruiser, which was nearer to them than the British vessel, and that he would wait until he had the full message before taking cover. Two minutes later the submarine made a direct hit on the wireless cabin with shrapnel, and the poor lad was killed. He was found dead in his chair, with the almost completed message in front of him.

His self-sacrifice was not in vain. The submarine continued shelling the liner; but the British crew maintained a good fight until their ammunition was nearly expended. At this critical moment the American cruiser appeared, and the submarine promptly submerged, and got away. The officers and crew of the liner were loud in praise of the heroism of their wireless operator. "He died a hero's death," wrote the captain, "that others might live."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BATTLE OF THE LYS RIVER.—I.

IN former chapters I have told you the story of the great German offensive which began on March 21, 1918, and by 5th April, little more than a fortnight later, had come to a standstill. You will remember that the Germans struck their first mighty blow on a fifty-mile front between the Scarpe and the Oise, with the object of separating the British and French armies, and of opening the road to Paris. They failed to thrust in a wedge along the Oise, but succeeded in making a breach in the line of our Fifth Army in front of St. Quentin. Then followed a rapid and very costly retirement; but, as in the case of the break-through in North Italy, the enemy did not succeed in his main object. During the retirement a wall of reserves was built up against him, and though he came dangerously near to the main railway from Amiens to Paris his efforts proved vain. Thanks to some of the most dogged fighting known to history, the Allies were able to retain their hold on the railway, and to bar the way to the French capital.

Foiled between the Scarpe and the Oise, the enemy struck his second great blow between the La Bassée Canal and Ypres. As you read the story which I am about to tell, you will find well-known names of towns and villages cropping up again. You will hear of places which figured in the first and second years of the war, but had long since passed into what we believed to be our permanent possession. You will also hear of other places which have never been for long out of our narrative. It is a story of the direst peril—a peril far greater than that which we had to face south of the Somme.

Between Arras and the Oise we had room to bend for a considerable distance without gravely endangering the unity

of our line, but it was quite otherwise when the blow fell to the north of the La Bassée Canal. Look at the map, and notice that behind our front from Givenchy to Ypres we had only a narrow strip of country. Ypres is less than thirty miles from Dunkirk, and only about fifty miles from Calais. Further, this narrow strip of country was of the highest importance to us, because it contained the railways which enabled us to maintain communication with the coast, and therefore with England. In the small towns between our front and the sea we had established hospitals, rest camps, training schools, repair stations, stores, and offices. You can easily understand that an enemy advance of seven miles north of La Bassée Canal would be far more serious to us than an advance of double that distance south of Amiens.

Now, what was the object of this new offensive? The enemy hoped to capture Bethune on the first day, and soon afterwards the important railway junction of Hazebrouck. He meant to advance so rapidly that before our reserves could come up he would have overrun the country right up to the sea. Had he done this our plight would have been terrible indeed. Pressed back to the sea, we should have had no room to build up our line anew, as we had done further south, and the enemy might have achieved a second Sedan. Wholesale slaughter or wholesale surrender would probably have been our lot.

Suppose, however, the enemy should fail to overrun the coast strip, and yet should capture Hazebrouck and Bethune: what would happen then? We should have to swing our line westward from Arras as a pivot, and take up the position shown by the dotted line on the map. You will observe that the northern part of our line would then stand along the little river Aa. This river flows through a marshy valley, which would afford us an even better line of defence than the Yser. Were we forced to retire to the Aa, we should have to give up Ypres and all the country between the ruins of the old city and the river. This would mean that the Belgians would have to withdraw, and the last few remaining miles of their country would be lost to them. Dunkirk would have to be abandoned, and the enemy would secure a submarine base close to the Straits of Dover. From Dunkirk he could assail Calais with his big guns, and make it impossible as a cross-Channel port. We should only have in our rear a very narrow margin

of country in which to manœuvre. Around Arras a salient would be created which might be reduced before we were firmly established on our new line. To make a long story short, our retirement to the Aa would mean disaster, and would probably be the beginning of the end.

Before I describe the offensive which began on the morning of 9th April, let us follow the Allied line as it stood before the guns began to thunder on that day.* From the La Bassée Canal it struck north in front of Givenchy and Festubert—names of great battle renown—across the dead, marshy flats of the Lys valley. It crossed the Lys to the east of Armentières, and continued north in front of Plug Street Wood and the Messines Ridge to Hollebeke, from which place it ran along the high ground to Passchendaele. Thence it bent westward along the western edge of Houthulst Forest to Merckem and so on, by way of the Yser, to the Channel.

The left wing of our First Army held the ground on both sides of the La Bassée Canal. Between Neuve Chapelle—the village so dearly won in March 1915—and Laventie, our ancient allies, the Portuguese, manned the trenches. Beyond them, as far north as Merckem, the line was entrusted to Plumer's Second Army. The Belgians, as of old, faced the enemy from Merckem to the sea.

There is good reason to believe that the attack which was now about to begin had been planned as part of the great offensive launched on 21st March. On the day when the Germans, according to their time-table, were to be in Amiens, the blow north of the La Bassée Canal was to be struck. With Amiens in their hands, they would have cut us off from the French; and with the line of the Lys in their possession, they

See map on p. 206.





Holding up a German Attack on

(By permission)

A correspondent says:—"Extraordinary scenes took place on the canal bank when the enemy tried to but were seen by our machine gunners, and shot down. Then another body of men advanced, and carried the bridge when fixed did not reach to the other side. Some of them walked on to it, expecting perhaps A corporal of ours went down to the canal edge and flung grenades at the Germans still struggling of the bank." Our illustration shows the canal and Scottish machine gunners holding up the enemy as



the Lys Canal west of Armentières.
(of *The Sphere*.)

cross in the twilight of early dawn. A party came out of the woods and tried to get across the water, with them a floating bridge; but when those who were not hit reached the water's edge, they found that to jump the gap; but they were shot off, and other men on the banks were also caught under our fire. To fix their bridge, and then a lieutenant and a few men rushed down and pulled the bridge on to our side he tried to cross.

would be able to turn their big guns on the flanks of our troops lying between the Somme and the northern river. Happily, however, the enemy failed to secure Amiens, and the northern attack which I am about to describe became a separate venture. It was entrusted to the Fourth and Sixth German Armies—the former, which was to strike north of the Lys, being commanded by General Sixt von Armin; while the latter, which was deployed along the front between Armentières and Givenchy, was led by General von Quast. You will remember that on 21st March the blow was struck near the junction of the British and French armies. On 9th April the Germans made their chief efforts against the Portuguese and the British troops who linked up with them on their right and on their left. You already know that military men usually consider that the weakest part of an Allied line is where the flanks of the different armies come into touch with each other.

In the early morning of 9th April a thick mist hung over the whole of the Lys valley. So dense was it that none of our aeroplanes could ascend to spy out the movements of the enemy. Prisoners afterwards said that their weather prophets had foretold long in advance a misty morning, and that the offensive was timed to take place when Nature would be likely to conceal their onset. About four in the morning a terrific bombardment was directed against the 17,000 yards of front between La Bassée Canal and Armentières, the full weight of it falling upon the Portuguese lines, which, you will remember, lay across the marshy flats at the foot of the Aubers Ridge, in front of Lille. Over sixty thousand shells were hurled upon our defences, and upon towns and villages far in the rear. Bethune, Armentières, and Estaires, on the Lys, were all heavily assailed, and the countryside was thickly strewn with gas shells, which created a poisonous zone, in which men and animals could not live without respirators.

From 4 to 5 a.m. the Portuguese lines were pounded until they were smashed to atoms, and at the latter hour six divisions were launched against the sorely-tried defenders. It is said that General Höfer led the attack in person, marching in front of his men and brandishing a walking-stick with his one arm. The Portuguese fought very gallantly, but they could not stand against the horde of Germans that swooped down upon them in the mist. At several points the enemy had not

only cut the wire, but had crept round the advanced positions before they were seen. The Portuguese, under the tremendous weight of the attack, were obliged to fall back to their second position, where they were furiously attacked between six and seven o'clock. Again, they made a stubborn stand against the fiercest machine-gun fire and streams of blazing oil from flame-throwers. Their artillerymen served the guns up to the last possible moment, then destroyed the breech blocks and attempted to escape. Few of them regained their comrades; the Portuguese losses were heavy indeed.

Before I describe the consequences of this break-through, let me remind you of the character of the country across which the Germans were now advancing. From Lille to Armentières stretches the mining region of Pas de Calais. The country is as flat as the palm of your hand; everywhere it is seamed with ditches and criss-crossed by canals. The roads are lined with houses; factory chimneys and the headgear of collieries rise everywhere; and the whole district resembles the industrial parts of Lancashire or the West Riding of Yorkshire. The Lys, black and foul, flows through this ill-favoured land. Between the Aubers Ridge and this stream there is no natural obstacle to an enemy's advance, and the Lys itself is not difficult to cross.

When, therefore, the Portuguese line was broken there was nothing but the naked valour of our men to delay the enemy until the Lys was reached. British troops were hurried up to form a line behind the discomfited Portuguese, and a cyclist company of 350 men played a heroic part in checking the enemy while a defensive line was formed in the rear. Elsewhere parties of our men made a most gallant stand, and in many places fought to the death; but do what they might, they could not hold back the enemy waves that flowed around and over them. By evening the Lys had been reached between Estaires* and Bac St. Maur, and a crossing had been made in several places. Before night fell almost the whole of the marshy country between our broken line and the river was in the hands of the enemy.

Northumberland Fusiliers, East Yorks, and Durham Light Infantry had been sent up to defend Estaires. The place was smothered with shell-fire, and the enemy, rushing across a

* See map, p. 206.

swing-bridge, gained a footing in the western part of the town. Our men charged down the streets, and created a No Man's Land for fifty yards beyond the bridgehead, which they covered with their machine guns. When, however, the enemy crossed the river higher up towards Armentières, they had to abandon the place.

A story is told of some Durhams who were holding a position on the Lys Canal in front of Estaires and were cut off. In the dusk a German officer with some men stood up on the canal bank and shouted to them, "Are you English?" "We are," replied a young sentry of the Durhams. "Are you wounded?" asked the German. "Not all of us," said the Durham. "Then surrender," shouted the German; but this time he was answered by a rifle shot. Forty men came out of houses along the riverside, and a sergeant of the Durhams, who thought they were Portuguese, called upon them to join him. He went forward to meet them, and was taken prisoner; but our men poured fierce rifle-fire into the advancing enemy. "We killed a good few of them," said one of the Durhams; "but there were always more to come, and our little party had to fall back a bit to escape being captured."

Royal Scots, Scottish Fusiliers, and Gordons who were sent up to strengthen the line in front of Estaires and Laventie were furiously assailed by machine guns in great number, and at the same time were bombed by German aeroplanes, which flew low over their heads with a great roar of engines and a rush of air. In all parts of the line there was the same story to tell—our men were engaged in stubbornly checking the hordes of Germans, but were being overborne by their onward sweep.

* * * * *

Meanwhile, what was happening at Givenchy and Festubert? You will remember that these villages had to be carried before the Germans could advance along the line of the canal and seize Bethune, which they hoped to reach on the first day of the offensive. On this old, blood-sodden battle-ground the 55th (Lancashire) Division made a most heroic stand, and played the part of Byng's army in holding the Arras front during the great assault which began on 21st March. The Lancashire men were outnumbered by four to one, but they refused to give way when the troops on their left retired and formed a defensive flank in that direction. The Germans came on in dense masses. Three

times, at least, they broke into Givenchy—once during the day and twice during the evening and night—but each time they were flung out again by determined counter-attacks. In the course of these attacks 750 German prisoners were taken. On the morning of the 10th, Givenchy and almost the whole of our original line in this district remained intact.

Liverpool men held out nobly in what was known as the "Death or Glory" sap, and in a similar position further north, where they repulsed every attack made upon them. Mr. Philip Gibbs says:—

"The machine gunners of the Liverpools are wonderful fellows, and on the first day at Givenchy, when their guns were knocked out and buried by shell-fire, they dug them up again and served them again. Meanwhile their comrades with bombs and revolvers held off the enemy. A sergeant of their division served a field gun until the enemy was close upon him, and fired 200 rounds at between six hundred and two hundred yards into the waves of Germans. The trail of his gun was broken by a shell-burst, and the breech block was so injured that between each round he had to prise it open with a pickaxe. At last, when the enemy was about to rush him, he destroyed his gun and escaped."

Several times when the enemy broke in at Givenchy the Liverpools worked round them and cut them off. In one trip of this kind they rounded up 300 Germans. They were helped in these manœuvres by their intimate acquaintance with the maze of trenches, which they knew as well as the back streets of their own towns. They crept down alleyways and round corners, and again and again surprised and cut off the enemy. A curious incident happened in one trench. A staff officer with his orderly was going along it when he suddenly encountered an enemy officer. He ordered the German to surrender, and at this moment an enemy private behind raised his rifle to fire. "Tell that man to surrender," said the British officer, and the German immediately gave the order. At once fifty men came in sight with their hands up.

In another place a party of Germans, concealed by the fog, had entered one of our communication trenches. When they were discovered one of our officers said to his men, "Now, boys, get your bombs ready and shout." The rest of the story is told by a man in his company. "We did shout. Then these Johnnies put up their hands and said, 'Kamerad,' just as you read in t' picture papers; and I took ten of 'em, though I'm only nineteen."

Another party of Lancashire men, creeping round by a trench, surprised an Austrian officer who was observing for the artillery with a very fine periscope. He and two telephonists refused to surrender, and were killed. His periscope was handed over to our gunners, and proved to be very useful. Amongst other prisoners who were taken was a commander whose pockets were bulging with biscuits looted from one of our abandoned canteens.

Despite the splendid defence of Givenchy the situation was now grave indeed. The Germans were swarming towards the Lys, and in some places had crossed it. They had again surprised us, and had won a rapid and perhaps unexpected success. You may wonder how it was that we were caught napping a second time. The fact was that the German High Command was now working on a new plan. Behind their lines they had an excellent railway system, which enabled them to concentrate very rapidly at any point of the line. With great secrecy they marched their troops to certain points by night, and then on the eve of the attack hurried them forward by train, bringing them on to the field in relays, one behind the other, during the progress of the battle. It is no easy matter in these days of aeroplanes to conceal the movements of large masses of men ; but the enemy, thanks mainly to the splendid railways behind his lines, managed to concentrate unobserved in places from which he could rapidly convey his men to the north or the south.

The German plan of campaign now appeared to be somewhat as follows. Blows were to be struck, one after the other, at all parts of the Allied line, in the hope that at some point or other it would be breached. If a success was won, fresh troops were to be hurried to the spot, and every effort was to be made to take advantage of the opening thus created. In this way the enemy hoped to smash our lines before our reserves could be brought up. He knew that he had only about five months in which he could hope for victory. If he could win a decisive success in that time he would be saved. If, on the contrary, the Allies could hold him off until the autumn, the rapidly-arriving American armies would turn the scale against him. General Foch knew that the next five months would be full of peril, and that the courage and endurance of his troops would be tried to the uttermost. The fate of

France and Britain, and the future of the whole world, depended upon their capacity to hold out during the summer.

* * * * *

The situation at the close of the first day's fighting may thus be summed up. British and Portuguese forces had been driven back between Armentières and La Bassée on a front of nearly ten miles. The Germans had heavily shelled the Allied lines in this area for some days, and in a thick mist had advanced to the attack. Our lines were first pierced in front of the Aubers Ridge, and the Germans pushed through towards the river Lys. On the flanks of the attack about Fleurbaix and Givenchy the British line held; but in the centre the enemy extended his earlier gains, and by evening Portuguese and British troops were holding the line of the river between Estaires and Bac St. Maur, three and a half miles from their positions at the opening of the fight. During the operations of the day the Germans claimed to have captured 6,000 prisoners and about a hundred guns.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BATTLE OF THE LYS RIVER.—II.

IN Chapter XXIII. I told you that on 9th April the Germans struck their second great blow at the Allied lines. On this occasion they attacked from the La Bassée Canal to Ypres. You will remember that they won what I called an unexpected success. They broke through the Portuguese defence, and by the close of the day had reached the Lys, and were on the flank of our line running northward from that river to the shores of the North Sea. A French writer tells us that the second blow was struck because the Battle of Picardy had resulted in a check. He also points out that the Lys offensive was on a much smaller scale than the Picardy effort. For his blow south of Arras the enemy made preparations which extended over two months, and earmarked seventy-five divisions for the purpose. For the Lys offensive he only occupied ten days in preparation, and did not use more than twenty-five divisions. The French writer supposes that the object of the Lys effort was to make a strong call upon the Allied reserves in the north.

As you know, fortune favoured the attackers, and the breaking of the Portuguese line enabled them to win an important success which might have proved decisive. We were saved from disaster at three points. Our Lancashire troops defended Givenchy magnificently, and this glorious stand enabled us to retain the main railway by which reinforcements and supplies could come up from the south. Then, too, Fleurbaix, which covered the crossing of the Lys near Armentières, was held for most of the first day, and thus the enemy was prevented from making rapid headway to the north of that place. Finally, when the enemy crossed the Lys north of Armentières he



On the Line of the Lys: British First-line Trenches in front of Erquinghem.
(By permission of The Illustrated London News.)
Erquinghem is about two miles west of Armentières, which is seen in the right background.

found himself up against Messines Ridge, which checked his progress.

Now let me continue the story of the battle. On 10th April, while severe fighting continued along the line of the Lys and its tributary the Lawe, the enemy, early in the morning, when again a thick mist covered the battlefield, opened a heavy bombardment of our positions from the north of Armentières to the Ypres-Comines Canal. Our troops, greatly outnumbered, were forced back to the Wytschaete-Messines Ridge, and meanwhile had to give ground along the Lys Canal south of Armentières. As they retired they blew up the bridges behind them, and destroyed the railway bridge at Armentières. That gay little town, with its bright little restaurants and tea-shops, now became a No Man's Land. The enemy smothered it with gas shells until the streets and houses reeked of poisonous vapour. Before midday we were obliged to withdraw from the town, and then we in turn hurled gas shells upon it, and prevented the enemy from occupying it.

Our forces retired from Armentières northward, and thus a dangerous gap yawned on the left of the Northumberland Fusiliers and the Royal Scots, who were holding the line of the river farther west. There was another gap on their right between them and the men of the Middlesex Regiment, who were clinging to the outer defences of Estaires. Royal Fusiliers, South Wales Borderers, and other troops were hurried up, and the enemy was checked for a space. A trench-mortar company made a specially fine counter-attack at this critical time, and played the part of the cyclist company which had reinforced the centre of the broken Portuguese line on the previous day. Meanwhile, by means of temporary bridges, the enemy had got guns across the Lys in the neighbourhood of Merville.

In the afternoon the battle grew fierce in Flanders, and our line almost up to Gheluvelt was heavily bombarded and constantly attacked. There was bitter fighting round the White Château at Hollebeke; and the enemy, who on the 11th had penetrated Plugstreet Wood after a grim struggle for two days and nights against the Wiltshire, Cheshire, and Staffordshire men who held it, began working north. Messines Ridge was stormed, and Wytschaete village was entered; but our men, fighting with extraordinary courage, recaptured the place. There was a terrible battle for the village of Neuve Eglise, which

stands about three miles east of Bailleul. The place changed hands again and again. Men fought with any kind of weapon, and even with their bare fists. All day and night for the next five days and nights there were constant attacks and counter-attacks amidst the broken walls and ruined houses and beneath the stump of the church tower. Mr. Philip Gibbs tells us that the enemy made four separate attacks upon the village, all of which were beaten back.

“The enemy broke into its ruined streets, and small parties of Wiltshires, Worcesters, and others sprang on them and fought desperately in backyards and over broken walls and in shell-pierced houses, wherever they could find Germans or hear the tattoo of machine guns. Several times the enemy was cleared out of most of the little town, and our men held the hollow square containing most of the streets. They defended it as a kind of fortress, though with dwindling numbers, under a heavy fire of shells and trench mortars and machine guns. The enemy was savage in his attacks against these men; and, from behind, the German commanding officers sent up fresh troops with stern orders to have done with the business and destroy the British, whom they vastly outnumbered. But they could not take Neuve Eglise by direct assault, and last night (14th April) our troops made a counter-attack at Crucifix Corner, won ground, and brought back five machine guns, and left there many German dead. It was an astounding feat of grim courage. But Neuve Eglise had to be given up. The enemy, unable to get it by infantry assault, shelled it fiercely by the fire of many guns and made it a death-trap, as it now is for them. Without yielding to a direct assault our men obeyed orders, and stumbling out of the place, silently and unknown to the enemy, took up a line farther back.”

How desperate the situation now was may be gathered from the special order which Sir Douglas Haig issued to his troops at this time:—

“To All Ranks of the British Army in France and Flanders. —Three weeks ago to-day the enemy began his terrific attacks against us on a fifty-mile front. His objects are to separate us from the French, to take the Channel ports, and destroy the British Army.

“In spite of throwing already 106 divisions into the battle, and enduring the most reckless sacrifice of human life, he has as yet made little progress towards his goals. We owe this to the determined fighting and self-sacrifice of our troops.

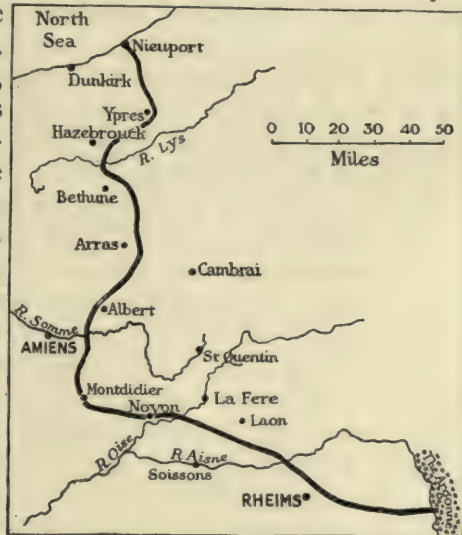
“Words fail me to express the admiration which I feel for the splendid resistance offered by all ranks of our Army under the most trying circumstances.

“Many of us are now tired. To those I would say that victory will belong to the side which holds out the longest. The French Army is moving rapidly and in great force to our support.

“There is no other course open to us but to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man. There must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall, and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight to the end. The safety of our homes and the freedom of mankind depend alike upon the conduct of each one of us at the critical moment.”

On the 12th the situation was as follows. The enemy's

attacks on Messines Ridge were meeting with success. In spite of very heavy losses, he had constantly hurled his troops against this commanding position. After terrible fighting he had reached the village of Messines, but was held up on its outskirts. Everywhere he had failed to carry the main crest, but there was every prospect that he would soon do so. Armentières had been abandoned, because it was so drenched with gas that no living man could remain in it. The crossings of the Lys and the Lawe had been carried, and the enemy had now reached Merville, where he was seven miles from his starting-point. He was within a short distance of Bailleul, near to which ran the important railway which fed our Messines-Wytschaete front. He was also advancing towards the railway centre of Hazebrouck, and had covered more than half the distance between his old line and that place. He was forming, as you will see from the map, a broad flank to the north of the La Bassée Canal, and was creating a new danger for us. Should he be checked to the west, he would be able to strike south and attempt to drive in a wedge between the British armies to the north of the canal and those to the



Map showing Allied Line from Nieuport to the Argonne.

enemy had now reached Merville, where he was seven miles from his starting-point. He was within a short distance of Bailleul, near to which ran the important railway which fed our Messines-Wytschaete front. He was also advancing towards the railway centre of Hazebrouck, and had covered more than half the distance between his old line and that place. He was forming, as you will see from the map, a broad flank to the north of the La Bassée Canal, and was creating a new danger for us. Should he be checked to the west, he would be able to strike south and attempt to drive in a wedge between the British armies to the north of the canal and those to the

south of it. The situation was most perilous; but all was not plain sailing for the enemy. He was advancing across flat country, it is true, but everywhere there were canals and water-courses to impede him. So far he had not obtained a footing in the hills; he still lay on the plain.

During the first three days of the offensive the Germans had the advantage of surprise, and they made serious progress. During the following days their advance slowed down. The Allies were bringing up their reserves, and the enemy was hurrying fresh divisions northward in order to make good the unexpected success which he had won. Before these fresh divisions could arrive, we had strengthened our line and had stemmed the torrent. The enemy succeeded in getting a little nearer Bethune, but he could make no headway in the direction of Bailleul, and the Messines Ridge, though gravely threatened, still held. The first stage of the battle may be said to have ended on Sunday, 14th April.

Look carefully at the map, and notice the trace of the Allied front north of the La Bassée Canal on that day.* From the canal you see the line making a big bulge westward, its southern pivot being at Givenchy, and its northern pivot the northern part of the Wyttschaete-Messines Ridge. A straight line between these two points is about twenty miles in length. On 14th April the greatest depth of the salient westward of the line was between seven and eight miles. From Wyttschaete to a point on the Ypres Canal, about seven miles north of the ruined city, you see a lesser bulge in the contrary direction. Turn back to the map on page 213, and observe the resemblance between the front which I have just described and that south of the canal. You see a very slight bulge east of Arras, and a very large bulge to the south, between Albert and Noyon. In the south we had fallen back some thirty miles from our original line; in the north we had retreated less than a third of that distance. Nevertheless, for reasons which I have already stated, the northern retirement was much more dangerous than the southern retirement.

Before I pass on, let me ask you to notice that the enemy had now created two flanks—the one to the north of the La Bassée Canal, and the other between Montdidier and Noyon. If he could press northward from the latter flank and southward from the former flank, he would compel us to give up all the

* See p. 206.

country lying between Amiens and Hazebrouck. If he could strike northward between Hazebrouck and Ypres, we should be forced to fall back to the line of the little Aa river, and this would mean giving up Belgium altogether and handing over Dunkirk to the enemy. I have already told you that the capture of Dunkirk would provide the Germans with a submarine base at the northern end of the Strait of Dover, and a position from which his big guns could make Calais too hot for us to use as a port.

Now let us see what happened during the second stage of the battle, which began on Monday, 15th April, the seventh day of the Lys offensive. On that day the fighting was almost entirely on the northern face of the salient. Having captured Neuve Eglise, the enemy now made desperate efforts to capture Bailleul. A correspondent says :—

“ There is not a man with any long service out here who has not passed through Bailleul scores of times on the way to Armentières or Kemmel, looking up at its old bell-shaped tower in the great square, surrounded by sixteenth-century houses with Flemish roofs and high dormer windows. Bailleul was a grim old town, with high walls between narrow streets and gray brickwork which looked cold in this northern weather ; but there were friendly people there who knew and welcomed our men, and many of the houses were happy havens in which our soldiers could forget war and enjoy for a little the warmth and kindness of life, while some musician among them, sitting at the piano in a cosy room among a French family, made cheery music. Thousands of our officers who went forward to the lines about ‘ Plug-street ’ or Wyttschaete used to take dinner at the Hôtel du Faucon, an old place, not very comfortable or grand within, but where there were good food and good comradeship. . . . And in old Bailleul there were pleasant little teashops where we could pass a happy hour on the way elsewhere, sitting in the courtyards in summer, where flowering plants grew up walls, and pleasant women waited upon us and became our friends. I remember on one day in one such place a group of officers gathered round a little girl, who was an invalid and could not walk, but whose delight was to play tunes on the gramophone to these tall soldiers with mud on them. They were very kind and gentle to this child with her big blue eyes and waxen face.

“ Always in the Grande Place of Bailleul there were crowds of men. For three years and more I saw them there in all weathers, with snow on their steel hats or the glare of the sun ; and on the days of battle up in Flanders there was a moving pageant passing through the square—a pageant of guns and wagons and mules and men, with pipes for the Scottish troops and brass bands for English troops. The King came here one day, and all the square was lined by fighting men of the Naval Division, and New Zealanders and Australians and Scots, and on the steps of the Town Hall were groups of army nurses. Just outside the town we had an aerodrome



A Glimpse of the Grim Fighting

(By permission

Some of the fiercest fighting in the offensive described in this chapter took place in and about Merville. The Durhams and their comrades dug a line in front of Merville, and withdrew to it under heavy fire, gunner of ours kept his weapon in action until all his comrades had got away and the Germans were them two and a half German divisions."



in the Region of Merville.

(of the Graphic.)

"These men of ours," wrote Mr. Philip Gibbs, "have exceeded all their previous records of valour. . . . firing their own rifles as they went back, step by step, with their faces to the enemy. One machine within seventy yards of him. Then he broke his gun and escaped. These gallant fellows had against

belonging to the Royal Naval Air Service, where in hangars and pavilions were as jolly a set of boys as heart of man could hope to meet about the world."

We are now to hear how this town of many happy memories fell into the hands of the enemy. He flung three divisions, including storm troops and a portion of his Alpine Corps, against the place in the endeavour to envelop it. Staffords and Notts and Derbys fought stubbornly; but the town was smothered with shells, and could no longer be held. At dawn on Tuesday our men slowly fell back. On the morning of that day the German line ran north of Bailleul, along a little brook behind which rises the group of hills which figure so importantly on the map.* On that day, too, the enemy made himself complete master of the Messines Ridge. It was clear that, if he could maintain himself upon the summit of this low rise, we should be compelled to flatten out our salient in front of Ypres.

The Germans were soon firmly established on the ridge, and we began to withdraw from the Passchendaele position, which had been carried so gallantly by the Canadians in the late autumn of 1917. You can imagine the reluctance with which our men retreated from the ground which had been won at the cost of so many brave lives. We carried out the withdrawal in an orderly fashion, without losing a man or a gun, on Wednesday, the 17th. A counter-attack was launched at Messines Ridge, and for some hours we were in possession of its northern end. This was done to draw off attention from our withdrawal.

The enemy was slow to follow up our retreat, and hours passed before their forward patrols were seen. Meanwhile our guns were waiting for them. The ground was swept with fire, the outposts were killed, and the enemy's places of assembly were heavily shelled. One need not wonder that the Germans were slow to advance; for they had to cross a horrible wilderness, pitted with shell craters, filled to the brim with water and liquid mud, and strewn with the wreckage of former battles.

The loss of Messines Ridge not only compelled us to flatten out the Ypres salient, but it gave the enemy an advantage in the attacks which he was about to make on the Kemmel range of

* See p. 206.

hills. From its summit he could overlook the valley and the slopes of Kemmel Hill. He did not, however, attack the hill directly either on Wednesday or on the seven following days, but struck hard north of the Ypres salient. His object was to smash through between Bixschoote and Poperinghe, and turn the line of the Kemmel hills. Had he done so he would also have turned the line of the Yser, and would have compelled us to retire rapidly both north and south of the river. Dunkirk would then have been uncovered, and our northern forces would have been in the gravest peril.

Now let us see what happened on this Wednesday, 17th April. Find the Forest of Houthulst on the map (page 220), and notice that on its western side there is a main road leading past Bixschoote to Poperinghe. The Belgians lay astride of this main road in the swampy fields which they had held for three and a half years. In these pages you have heard but little of their doings during this time; but you must think of them as dourly holding on in spite of almost constant shelling, losing men day by day, yet stubbornly clinging to their positions, almost unnoticed, while battles raged to the south of them. The Germans believed that they could smash through the Belgian line and repeat the success which they had gained against the Portuguese on 9th April. So with twenty-one battalions—that is, about five men to one yard—they made a furious drive against the front of 4,000 yards held by the Belgians.

Our brave Allies were to be taken by surprise, just as the Portuguese had been. In forty-eight hours the assaulting troops were concentrated. They were to carry Bixschoote, cross the Yser Canal, and drive south to Poperinghe. At half-past eight in the morning, without the usual bombardment, the Germans went over the top, and in dense masses swarmed down on the Belgian lines. They broke through to the west of the main road at a point about three thousand yards from the forest, but could make no further headway. Belgian reinforcements were immediately sent up on the right flank of the advancing enemy. They struck up from a place called Luyghem in such a way that the Germans were driven towards a swamp so wet and soft that a man who tried to cross it would sink up to his neck in ice-cold water.

The Germans were trapped, and 700 of them were forced to surrender, while 2,000 others fell never to rise again. The

enemy had failed, and failed terribly. By afternoon the whole Belgian line was restored, and the peril had passed for a time. It is said that our gallant allies went into action singing and waving their helmets to the flying men overhead. When the news of the victory was known there was great rejoicing amongst the Allies, not only because a grave danger had been averted, but because the Belgians, after their long inaction, had proved themselves just as staunch and dogged as of old.

On Thursday, the 18th, after the failure recorded above, the Germans turned their attention to the southern face of the salient. A few miles south of the Lys you will see the village



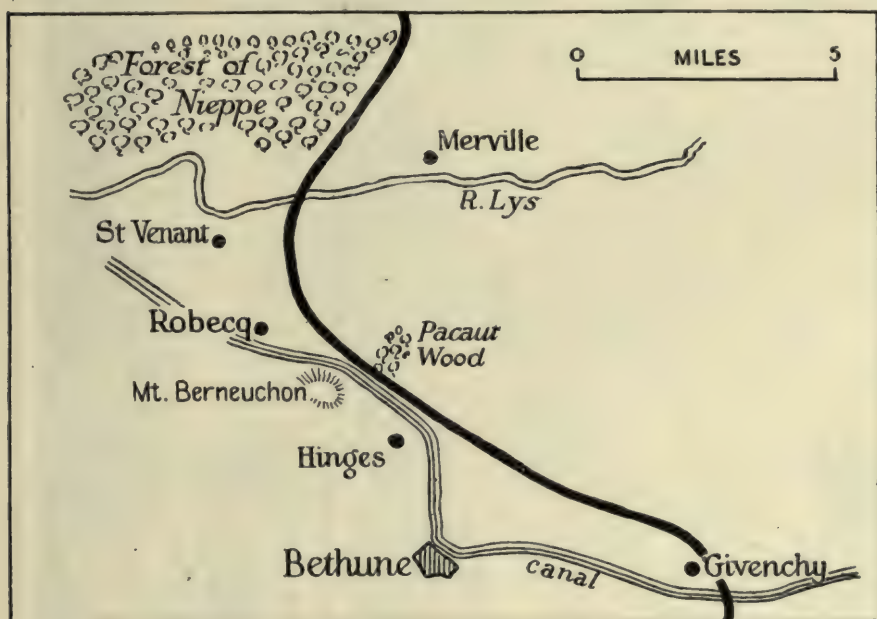
of Robecq. The attack which I am about to describe was made between this place and Givenchy. Our line now lay along the bank of the La Bassée Canal, in front of the village of Hinges. On page 221 there is a little map which will help you to understand the position. You notice that our line touched the canal at a place where there was a wood on the northern bank, and a hill, forty feet above the water, on the southern bank. The wood, which is known as Pacaut Wood, comes within two hundred

yards of the canal; and the hill, which is known as Mont Berneuchon, gives observation over the whole country round about.

Now look at the village of Hinges. It was a mere hamlet on the south bank of the canal. The road from Merville crossed the water by a bridge called Hinges Bridge, and ran on to Bethune. If the enemy could force the canal at this point, he would be able to turn the stubbornly-held pivot at Givenchy, possess himself of Bethune, and cut the important railway which served our front not only northward to Ypres, but southward to Arras. You can easily see that the capture of Bethune would have been a disaster to the Allies, and would

probably have forced them to make a serious withdrawal across the narrow territory between their lines and the coast.

During the night of Wednesday and all day Thursday the enemy kept up a heavy bombardment from Robecq to Givenchy. It was the same kind of bombardment which opened the offensive on 9th April. Gas shells innumerable were flung upon our lines, and dense clouds of poisonous vapour arose. The last five hours of the bombardment proved a terrible ordeal for our men, but they "stuck it" with their usual courage. At four



The Attack on the La Bassée Canal.

o'clock on the morning of Thursday, before the sun had risen, the enemy sent forward his troops in dense masses. No less than six divisions were hurled during the day upon our lines between Pacaut Wood and Givenchy—that is, upon a front of about one and a half miles. At Hinges Bridge the enemy attacked with nine or ten bayonets to every yard. Three divisions assaulted the pivot at Givenchy, on the British right; while one division attacked at Robecq, in order to hold the troops in that part of the line, and prevent them from reinforcing the danger-point in the centre.



The Belgians' Victory amidst the Swamps of the Yser Canal.

(By permission of The Graphic.)

The victory is described on pp. 219-220. The above picture, which is by Mr. Alfred Bastien, the Belgian artist, shows the German prisoners being shepherded across plank bridges.

Before dawn four waves of Germans marched out of Pacaut Wood, which gave them but poor cover. Our machine guns had raked them as they were assembling, and now as they came out into the open in the gray twilight they were met with a deadly fire. Nevertheless, the survivors nearly reached the bank of the canal before they broke. Then came a lull of an hour, during which the enemy was re-forming his divisions among the broken trees of the wood.

The second attempt was made by the 239th Division, along the main road to the rear of the wood. This time the bank was reached, and pontoons were thrown across the canal. A correspondent thus describes the fighting on the canal bank:—

“Extraordinary scenes took place on the canal bank when the enemy tried to cross in the twilight of early dawn. A party came out of the wood and tried to get across the water; but the attackers were seen by our machine gunners and were shot down. Then another body of men advanced and carried with them a floating bridge; but when those who were not hit reached the water’s edge, they found that the bridge did not reach to the other side. Some of them walked on to it, expecting, perhaps, to jump the gap; but they were shot off, and other men on the bank were also caught under our fire. A corporal of ours went down to the canal edge and flung hand grenades at the Germans, still struggling to fix their bridge; and then a lieutenant and a few men reached down and pulled the bridge to the bank on our side.*

“Later this young officer saw one of our pontoons drifting down the canal. He plunged into the water, and swimming to it, made it fast in a position beyond the enemy’s reach. Some of our men ran across it and caught the enemy under their fire on his side of the canal.”

During this critical time there was a moment when it seemed probable that the enemy would get across. The fire of the defenders, however, was too much for them, and something like a panic set in. At seven o’clock in the morning they hoisted a white handkerchief, and 300 of them made signs of surrender. Some of them changed their minds at the last moment and ran away, but 150 gave themselves up. So eager were some of these men to surrender that they swam the canal to our side. As it was now broad daylight, those who fled were nearly all destroyed before they reached the edge of the wood, close as it was. Before eight o’clock this second attempt had failed grievously.

Meanwhile, upon the two wings, towards Robecq on the

* This incident is illustrated on pp. 200–201.

left and Givenchy upon the extreme right, there was a violent struggle which lasted all day. The attack on Givenchy began at four in the morning, and continued until seven, when the Germans drew off after a series of very determined assaults, all of which were repulsed with very heavy loss. In front of Robecq there were similar efforts to advance, but one and all were completely checked.

On Thursday evening, when the fighting died down, the enemy had nothing to show for his heaps of dead. At no point had he gained a yard of important ground along the line of the canal, and neither at Robecq nor at Givenchy had he shaken the pillars of the sector. Equally vain were his attempts to advance on the northern face of the salient. So heavy had been his losses that during the three following days he was unable to make a serious attack. Our men seized the opportunity which this lull afforded to improve their line in front of Givenchy and Festubert, where a couple of advance posts had been rushed by the enemy two days before.

Though a pause had set in, no one imagined that the enemy would long remain inactive. Six days later he began his great thrust against the range of hills which stood between him and the coast, and once more the Allies had to endure a terrible onset and a period of the gravest anxiety.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW WE PLUGGED UP ZEEBRUGGE HARBOUR.—I.

“ Be bolde, be bolde,
And everywhere be bolde.”

SPENSER'S *Faerie Queene*.

EVERY British boy and British girl ought to remember and honour St. George's Day, the feast-day of the warrior patron saint of Merry England. St. George's Day, April 23, 1918, will never be forgotten; for on that day men of the Royal Navy undertook one of the most daring and difficult feats ever attempted, and, what is more, carried it through with complete success. The story which I am about to tell you ought to thrill you with pride, and it will certainly convince you that “never has the banner of St. George floated over more magnificent fighting men.”

Before you can understand the object of the raid which I am about to describe, you must realize that Germany is very badly off for ports on the North Sea. She has, it is true, a coastline on the North Sea extending from the Danish boundary to that of Holland, and she has also access to the same sea from the Baltic by means of the Kiel Canal. Her river Elbe, which enters the North Sea by a wide estuary, has upon its shores the great port of Hamburg and the naval harbour of Cuxhaven, and at the mouth of the Weser is the port of Wilhelmshaven; but along the remainder of the coast fronting the North Sea she has no ports of much use to her. What ports there are lie behind sandbanks, between which the navigable channels are narrow and intricate.

When the Germans began their submarine warfare, they found themselves hampered by the fact that the only bases available on their own coast were those at the mouths of the

Elbe and Weser. These North Sea ports were tucked away, as it were, in the Bight of Heligoland. Fortunately for the Germans, they had almost overrun Belgium, and its two North Sea havens, Zeebrugge and Ostend, were in their hands. Before long they had turned both of these ports into submarine bases, from which their under-water boats could sally forth and prey upon our ships in the Channel, in the Irish Sea, and along the western shores of Ireland. Slinking out of the Belgian bases, they could make their way readily into the Atlantic Ocean, and discharge their torpedoes at all ships making for British ports. When America entered the war the enemy loudly boasted that his submarines would sink all the American transports before ever they reached the shores of France.

As you know, we had suffered greatly from the ravages of the U-boats, and had racked our brains to find methods of fighting them. By the month of March 1917 the First Lord of the Admiralty was able to tell us that if the rate of loss of the world's ships remained the same, and as many ships were built as we expected, we could never be overcome by the submarines of the enemy unless he found some new method of destroying vessels. Nevertheless, the U-boats were still to be feared, and a plan was made for hemming them in, and as far as possible preventing them from leaving the North Sea. A huge minefield, consisting of thousands of mines, covering the northern exits, was nearly complete. It had taken our men nearly a year to lay down.* Then, to make assurance doubly sure, preparations were made for a naval raid on Zeebrugge and Ostend. We proposed to block up these harbours by sinking ships in the only channels by which submarines could enter or leave them. In this way we hoped to deprive the enemy of his southern bases, and force him to use his northern and more out-of-the-way ports.

Naval history tells us of several blocking raids carried out by our seamen. For example, in the year 1794 we tried to block up the harbour of the West Indian island Martinique. According to the plan of attack, H.M.S. *Asia* was to sail into the harbour and blow a breach in the sea-wall, after which bluejackets were to row ashore, make a landing, and storm the citadel through the breach. Unhappily, *Asia* was piloted by a traitor Frenchman, who lost his nerve as soon as the shore

* See map on p. 228.



Captain Carpenter and Commander Osborne with the Mascot Cats of Vindictive.
(By permission of The Illustrated London News.)

batteries opened fire, and gave orders to swing the ship about and sail out into the bay with all speed. He was persuaded to make a second attempt, but again he showed the white feather. Meanwhile our bluejackets in open boats were waiting in the bay until a breach should be blown in the wall, and were suffering greatly from the heavy fire directed against them. Happily, Captain Falknor, of the sloop *Zebra*, was able to assist the boats. He laid his vessel alongside the wall, and with the aid of scaling ladders his crew climbed to the top and stormed and captured



Map showing Mine Areas in North Sea.

the citadel. The men in the boats hurried to the spot, and enabled their comrades to hold the position which had been won. Captain Falknor was rewarded with the command of a French frigate which was seized in the harbour. The Admiral, Sir John Jervis, said to the gallant captain, "She will be named after you—the *Undaunted*."

Before I pass on to the raid itself, let me tell you of the attempt which the Americans made to block the harbour of Santiago, in Cuba, by sinking the collier *Merrimac* in the fairway. The task was entrusted to Lieutenant Hobson, and in the small hours of June 4, 1898, by the light

of the moon, he sailed the collier towards the entrance to the harbour. The Spanish batteries on shore opened fire, and blew away her steering gear and the lashings of her stern anchor just as she reached the spot where she was to be sunk. Something also went wrong with the apparatus for sinking her, and meanwhile she was carried back by the tide towards the mouth of the harbour. She went down at last, but not in the right place; and though Lieutenant Hobson became a popular hero, he did not block up the harbour.

During the Russo-Japanese War the Japanese made three

attempts to bottle up the Russian fleet at Port Arthur. On each occasion ships were sunk; but they were not sufficient in number to block up the wide channel and prevent the Russian fleet from sailing out. We ourselves had far better success when we attempted to prevent the German cruiser *Königsberg* from leaving the Rufiji river in November 1914. Despite the hot fire of the crew, who lined both banks of the river, we managed to sink an old collier, the *Newbridge*, in the only channel by which the German cruiser could reach the sea.

I might give you many more instances of blocking expeditions, but the moral of all of them is the same—namely, that the work is extremely difficult and dangerous, and rarely has it proved completely successful. It is not easy to sink a ship exactly where it is wanted to lie. Unless the ship sinks on an even keel, the end which goes down first is carried out of position by the current or tide, while the other end is above water. The consequence is that the ship finally sinks in the line of the channel, leaving clear water around it, instead of athwart the fairway, so as to block it completely. At Zeebrugge and Ostend the channels were narrow, and one or two large ships sunk in the fairway would be sufficient to bottle up all the craft in the harbour.

On page 230 there is a general view of Zeebrugge harbour, which I want you to study carefully. You see at a glance that the harbour is an artificial one. Built out from the shore, and curving from north to north-east, is a long mole or breakwater, which shelters the exit of the Bruges Canal from the stormy waves of the North Sea. On the Bruges Canal there are several docks, and these formed a base for a flotilla of submarines and destroyers. It is said that some of the submarines were brought to Zeebrugge and Ostend by rail from the Elbe, and that others were put together in the naval yard at Zeebrugge.

You will notice that the entrance to the canal is so narrow that two ships sunk at its mouth would plug it up completely. We proposed to fill several old and otherwise useless cruisers with concrete, and run them into the mouth of the canal under their own steam. When they lay in the required positions, charges would be blown off below the water-line. Down the vessels would go, and the deed would be done. There are only three ways in which such obstructions could then be removed. The Germans might try to blast a channel through them by

means of high explosives; but if they adopted this method and used a heavy charge, they would be sure to do great damage to the canal banks. If they used a light charge they would only break the wrecks into scattered fragments, each of which would become a gathering place for silt, and would form as awkward an obstacle as the wrecks themselves. By means of acetylene gas the metal of the wrecks could be cut through; but this method would be of no avail, for the gas is powerless to cut through concrete.

For many months Vice-Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, the naval commander of the Dover patrol, and his staff had been busy making preparations. From what you have already read, you can clearly understand that the business was risky and dangerous in the extreme. Even under the most favourable circumstances we should be sure to lose heavily, and we might easily fail altogether. Hundreds of precautions had to be taken; wind and weather had to be considered; and all concerned had to be trained to co-operate like clockwork if the plan was to be a success. There were very heavy batteries of not less than one hundred and twenty guns along the coast, and if they got the range of our vessels in the daylight the havoc would be awful. If we were to do what we set out to do, we should have to take the enemy by surprise. Secrecy was, therefore, all-important, and the silent service was never more silent than when preparing for the great adventure.

Six old cruisers, five of them filled with cement, were to be sacrificed. *Vindictive*, one of these cruisers, was to convey men to the Mole, upon which a desperate attack was to be made in order to draw off the enemy's attention, while *Intrepid*, *Iphigenia*, and *Thetis* tried to sink themselves in the narrow channel. Meanwhile a similar attempt was to be made on Ostend harbour, where *Brilliant* and *Sirius* were to be the blocking ships. The Mole at Zeebrugge was worth knocking about for its own sake, because it carried seaplane hangars, stores, guns and ammunition in great number and variety. The attack on the Mole, however, was not meant to be more than *camouflage*. While the assault, with all its daring and uproar, was going on, the block-ships were to be guided into the channel and sunk in the right places, the crews meanwhile being got away in motor launches.

In addition to the cruisers mentioned above, the flotilla

which was to carry out the raid included two Liverpool ferry boats, *Iris* and *Daffodil*, on both of which the writer of these lines has made many a trip. They had been brought round from the Mersey, and when engaged in their perilous mission still bore the familiar labels above the cabins. These ferry boats, along with *Vindictive*, were to boldly attach themselves to the half-moon Mole which guards the entrance to the canal, land bluejackets and marines upon it, destroy what stores, guns, and Germans they could find, and generally create a diversion while the block-ships ran in and sank themselves in their appointed places.

Vice-Admiral Keyes, in the destroyer *Warwick*, was to command the expedition in person. It was by no means his first daring enterprise. During the Boxer Rebellion in China he led his bluejackets against the rebels in the Taku forts; and though they outnumbered his men by thirty to one, he took them completely by surprise and overwhelmed them. Nor had he so far escaped exciting incidents during the present war. He was on board *Lurcher* when the German light cruiser *Ariadne* and her consorts were sent to the bottom in August 1914. He also figured in the famous seaplane raid when bombs were dropped on Cuxhaven as a Christmas treat for the Huns in the same year.

Four times the admiral sailed forth from Dover with his queer fleet of destroyers, obsolete cruisers, ferry-boats, motor launches, and "scooters;" but four times the weather proved unsuitable, and the expedition turned back and waited for a more favourable moment. On St. George's Day the conditions were not quite perfect; but one cannot expect perfection in this imperfect world. On that day Captain Carpenter of *Vindictive* rang up the Admiral, and said that he thought the day would do. "All right," he replied; "off you go."

I have already told you that our only hope of success was to take the enemy by surprise. We meant to attack in the darkness of night; but even so our ships could not approach the harbour without being seen. To shroud the vessels from the German gunners on shore, we adopted an ingenious device invented by Wing-Commander Brock, R.N.A.S. Those of you who have seen the fireworks at the Crystal Palace know the name Brock quite well, for the displays were carried out by that firm. Wing-Commander Brock invented a remarkable smoke-

screen, which formed a cloak of invisibility for the advancing ships. Happily, on the night of St. George's Day the wind blew from the north-east, and carried the smoke shoreward ahead of the ships. Without this screen the operation could not have been carried out at all.

The men who manned the flotilla were volunteers. They all knew the perilous nature of the enterprise, and all were afforded an opportunity of withdrawing when they understood the grave risks which had to be faced, yet not a single man wished to be left behind. Certain men of the *Intrepid* were told that their services would not be required. They went to the captain in an almost mutinous spirit, and said that they absolutely refused to leave the ship. The consequence was that the whole crew went into the canal with *Intrepid*, and happily all got safely away while their vessel was sinking.

It was impossible to practise the men in what they would have to do, because it meant climbing breakwaters in public, and their secret might have been revealed and carried by spies to the ears of the enemy. Nevertheless, the men were diligently trained in night fighting, bombing, etc., and were highly efficient when the day of trial arrived. The sea trip which had to be made was a little over one hundred miles each way, and as many small craft were to be engaged in the operations, a fine day had to be chosen. As you already know, it was necessary, too, that the wind should be in the right quarter. Further, the harbours to be attacked had to be approached at high-water, so that the block-ships could get in. As they would be excellent targets for the shore batteries, they had to make the venture under cover of night. All these conditions had to be satisfied on one and the same day. Captain Carpenter tells us that he and his fellow-officers watched and waited for "the Day" with anxious hearts, realizing that every hour they delayed meant more and more likelihood of the news leaking across to Germany, and thus enabling the enemy to defeat the plan at the outset. Thanks to the ability of our sailors to keep their mouths shut, we were able to surprise the enemy just as effectively as we had done in the Battle of the Falkland Islands.

Now for the story. On the afternoon of 22nd April a British naval force, numbering some seventy vessels of all kinds, steamed out into the North Sea. Every one on board

was in the highest spirits ; and on the way across Admiral Keyes signalled to *Vindictive*, " St. George for England," to which Captain Carpenter replied, " May we give the Dragon's tail a jolly good twist ! " *Vindictive* at this time was towing the Mersey ferry boats ; but *Intrepid*, *Iphigenia*, *Thetis*, *Sirius*, and *Brilliant* were proceeding under their own steam. When the motley fleet was fifteen miles from Zeebrugge, the tows were cast off, and their own engines carried them for the rest of the distance. *Sirius* and *Brilliant*, together with their attendant craft, shifted their course for Ostend, and a swarm of smoke-screening and motor boats dashed ahead at full speed and sent up dense clouds. A fleet of British monitors lying off the coast had by this time begun a heavy bombardment of the shore batteries. The idea was that the two expeditions should reach their objectives at the same moment, so as to prevent a warning from being sent from one place to the other.

The night was overcast, and there was a drift of haze along the coast ; the wind was light, and the sea was fairly calm. Precisely at midnight the ships, steaming through the thick smoke-screen, approached their destinations. I will first describe what happened at Zeebrugge. From *Vindictive's* bridge, as she headed towards the Mole, with the ferry boats at her heels, there was scarcely a glimmer of light to be seen shoreward. Ahead was the town, filled with men who had not the slightest suspicion of what was approaching. Not until *Vindictive* emerged from the smoke-screen, with the lighthouse on the Mole right ahead, did they understand what was on foot.

Captain Carpenter tells us that as he left the smoke behind German star-shells lit up the sky almost like daylight, and that he had a strange feeling of nakedness when he saw how exposed his vessel was, even at midnight. He turned his ship to get alongside the Mole, on the seaward side, where the hull would be protected from the fire of the shore batteries by the solid masonry, and increased to full speed in order to get there as quickly as possible. He had decided not to open fire until the German batteries began the duel, because he wished to remain unnoticed until the last possible moment. Shortly afterwards the battery of five or six guns at the end of the Mole commenced firing, and then the shore guns began their deafening chorus at a range of 300 yards.



"Across the crashing, splintering gangway:" storming the Mole.
(From the drawing by S. Begg. By permission of The Illustrated London News.)

An account supplied by the Secretary of the Admiralty thus describes the scene :—

“ A star-shell soared aloft, then a score of star-shells ; the wavering beams of the searchlight swung round and settled to a glare ; the wildfire of gun flashes leaped against the sky ; strings of luminous green beads shot aloft, hung and sank, and the darkness of night was supplanted by the nightmare daylight of battle-fires. Guns and machine guns along the Mole and batteries ashore woke to life, and it was in a gale of shelling that *Vindictive* laid her nose against the 30 feet high concrete side of the Mole, let go an anchor, and signalled to *Daffodil* to shove her stern in. *Iris* went ahead and endeavoured to get alongside likewise.”

Let me pause for a moment to tell you how *Vindictive* was prepared for the great enterprise. The mast had been cut away, lest it should show above the smoke-screen and give too early a warning to the enemy. The sides of the ship were protected with sandbags and mattresses ; a poor protection against shells, but affording some sort of breastwork against shell splinters and bullets. On the port wing a hut had been erected, and in it was placed a flame-thrower. Above the upper deck had been built a temporary wooden deck, with ramps leading to the main deck. From this false upper deck projected eighteen brows or gangways, which were to be let down on the Mole so as to enable our men to make a landing. Amongst the guns which the old cruiser carried were several howitzers. Probably such weapons were now for the first time in use on one of his Majesty's cruisers.

The fire that beat down upon *Vindictive* and her consorts was terrible. A heavy and unexpected swell caused the vessels to roll and plunge against the foundations of the pier, and as it did so the decks and upper works were swept by machine-gun bullets from the Mole, and by shells from the big guns ashore. Captain Carpenter remained on the bridge conning the vessel until her stern was alongside, when he took up his position in the flame-thrower hut on the port side. This ironclad shelter was simply riddled with shot and shell, and it is marvellous that any of its occupants survived for a minute. Onlookers said that the gallant captain handled his vessel as neatly as though she were a picket-boat.

It was no easy task to get the men ashore. At one moment the gangways would be ten feet above the top of the Mole ; at the next fifteen feet below ; and between the rising and the

falling they crashed into the wall. Nevertheless, the landing parties climbed them with wonderful courage and skill. Captain Carpenter tells us that every moment he expected to see the bluejackets and marines falling off the gangways into the death-trap between the Mole and the ship—a drop of twenty feet. One man did fall, and was probably crushed to death. The others, however, swarmed up the crashing, splintering gangways like cats, and dropped over the parapet on to the Mole, carrying with them Lewis guns, bombs, explosives, flame-throwers, and other weapons of destruction. In a few minutes from three to four hundred men had landed on the Mole, and had forced their way along it under cover of the barrages put down by our guns, howitzers, and pom-poms. Before the word “Go” had been given, Colonel Elliot, who was to lead the Marines, and Captain H. C. Halatan, who commanded the bluejackets, were killed. The shell that killed the latter officer did fearful execution in the forward Stokes mortar battery.

Many men were killed or wounded as they rushed across the narrow planks to the Mole, but our brave fellows “carried on” in the most undaunted and orderly fashion. A lieutenant who had his arm carried away by a shell on the upper deck was trampled by the stormers as they rushed by in the darkness. He was recognized and was dragged aside by the commander. Though he must have been suffering terribly, he raised his remaining arm and shouted to the stormers as they hastened by, “Good luck to you!” Everywhere the same undaunted spirit was apparent. The men were magnificent.

▼ The lower deck was now a shambles; but as the commander made the round of his vessel dying men raised themselves to cheer him. The crew of the howitzer which was mounted forward had all been killed; so had a second crew. In the stern a firework expert—one of Captain Brock’s employees—a man who had never been to sea before, was steadily firing great illuminating rockets, so as to light up the way for the block-ships and their escort of motor boats.

Daffodil, after helping to berth *Vindictive*, should have proceeded to land her own men; but Captain Carpenter ordered her to remain where she was, with her nose against *Vindictive*’s quarter, pressing her into the Mole. Her engines usually developed only eighty pounds pressure of steam per inch; but on this occasion, thanks to the energy of Artificer-Engineer Sutton

and his men, they doubled the pressure during the whole time that the vessel was holding *Vindictive* against the wall.

Iris had troubles of her own. She failed to make fast to the Mole at the first attempt, because her grapnels were not large enough to span the parapet. Two of her officers, Lieutenant-Commander Bradford and Lieutenant Hawkins, climbed ashore and sat astride the parapet trying to make the grapnels fast in the midst of a heavy machine-gun fire. Both were killed, and fell between the vessel and the wall. Commander Valentine Gibbs had both legs shot away, and died next morning. Lieutenant Spencer, though wounded, took command when his chief fell, and refused to be relieved.

Iris was obliged at last to change her position and fall in astern of *Vindictive*. During this manœuvre she suffered severely from gun-fire. A single shell burst at a point where fifty-six marines were assembled waiting the order to rush across the gangways to the Mole. Forty-nine of them were killed, and the remaining seven were wounded. Another shell burst in the wardroom, which was being used as a sick bay or hospital. Four officers and twenty-six men were put out of their misery by this shell. In all *Iris* lost eight officers and sixty-nine men killed, and three officers and one hundred and two men wounded.

Captain Carpenter tells us that some of his men were badly hit three or four times by machine-gun bullets. Nevertheless, they thought only of the task on which they were engaged. "The question I was continually asked by the men—and it struck me at the time as being a peculiar expression—was, 'Have we won?'—just as if it had been a football match. They had no thought of anything else."

Meanwhile, what was happening on the Mole? Our storming parties, though assailed by intense and unceasing fire, found no Germans to oppose them. Every stormer knew the geography of the great Mole, with its railway line, its numerous buildings, hangars, and store sheds, as well as he knew the decks of his own ship, thanks to the many photographs which had been made of it by our airmen. The bluejackets and marines went about their work of destruction in the most orderly and rapid fashion. One after another the buildings burst into flame, or split and crumpled as the dynamite charges went off. A bombing party, working up towards the extension of the Mole, destroyed several machine-gun emplacements, but could find



Blowing up the Viaduct.

(By permission of The Sphere.)

This illustration shows the submarine at the moment when the fuses of the explosives were alight and the six members of the crew, under Lieutenant Sandford, were on the point of escaping.

no prisoners to capture. They afterwards learned that when our ships approached the defenders simply retired, and contented themselves with machine-gun fire from the shore end of the Mole. While our fellows worked and destroyed, the covering party below the parapet could see the shapes of the block-ships stealing in and out of their own smoke and making for the mouth of the canal.

About fifteen minutes after *Vindictive* got alongside, and some ten minutes before the block-ships arrived, a tremendous explosion was heard at the shore end of the Mole. What had happened? An old submarine, commanded by Lieutenant R. D. Sandford, had been loaded with some tons of explosives, and had been run in against the steel piles supporting a jetty or railway viaduct at the shoreward end of the Mole. The explosives had been touched off, and the crew of half a dozen officers and men had dashed away at top speed in a very small "scooter." A few seconds later a huge spout of flame soared up with a roar that seemed to shake the very heavens. When the smoke subsided, a great gap of over one hundred feet yawned in the Mole. At daylight it could clearly be seen for many miles along the coast.

The men who escaped from the submarine had poor luck. The searchlight caught them, and the propeller of their little craft was blown away. They then took to their paddles, and pulled hard against the strong tide, while machine guns belched bullets upon them at close range. Most of the men were wounded, but they stuck to their work, and they were shortly afterwards picked up by a steam pinnace on the lookout for them. Why the Germans did not shell the submarine as she approached the viaduct remains a mystery. Captain Carpenter thinks it probable that they believed the under-water boat was trying to push her way through the piles into the harbour for the purpose of attacking the vessels inside. They knew that it could not get through the narrow gaps between the piles, and very likely they left it alone in the hope that they would be able to capture it intact. "A large number of Germans were on the viaduct a few feet above the submarine, firing with machine guns. It is safe to say that every one of them went up with the viaduct. The cheer from my men on *Vindictive* when they heard the explosion was one of the finest things I have ever heard."

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOW WE PLUGGED UP ZEEBRUGGE HARBOUR.—II.

NOW let us follow the adventures of the block-ships. *Thetis* came first, steaming into a tornado of shell from the great batteries ashore. All her crew, save the handful who remained to steer her in, had by this time been taken off by motor launches. The remnant not only worked the ship, but managed to keep her four guns going. *Thetis* was to show the way to *Intrepid* and *Iphigenia*, which followed. She cleared the string of armed barges which lay at the tip of the Mole for the purpose of defending the channel, but had the hard luck to foul her propeller in a submarine net, and became practically unmanageable.

The shore batteries now began pounding her with an unceasing fire of shells. Finally, she bumped into a sandbank, edged off, and found the channel again; but she was still some hundreds of yards from the mouth of the canal, though in a sinking condition. She immediately signalled to the two following block-ships, and informed them on which side to pass her so as to reach the canal entrance. Then charges below the water line were blown off, and swift motor launches raced up to her and carried off her crew. Her losses were five killed and five wounded. The manner in which the three block-ships worked together was beyond all praise.

Intrepid, smoking like a volcano, and with all her guns blazing, steered straight into the canal. Behind her came *Iphigenia*, so blinded by *Intrepid's* smoke that she went a little wide, and rammed a dredger and barge that lay at the western arm of the canal. She managed to get clear, however, and entered the canal, pushing the barge before her. It was then that a shell hit the steam connections of her whistle, and the

escape of steam which followed drove off some of the smoke, and let her see what she was doing. Lieutenant Bonham Carter, commanding *Intrepid*, placed the nose of his ship neatly on the mud of the western bank, ordered her crew away, and touched off the charges, which blew the bottom out of her. Four dull thumps were heard, and then the engineer who had been in the engine-room during the explosions appeared on deck, and reported that all was as it should be.

Meanwhile Lieutenant E. W. Bellyard-Leake, commanding *Iphigenia*, beached his vessel on the eastern side, blew her up, saw her drop nicely across the canal, and left her with her engines still going in order to hold her in position until she should be well bedded down on the bottom. Aviators afterward reported that the two old ships, filled with concrete, lay across the canal in a V position. On 20th June we were informed by the Admiralty that the success of the blocking operation was greater than had at first been supposed. Twenty-one torpedo boats and destroyers, together with a large number of submarines and numerous other craft, were still penned in the harbour, and were being constantly bombed.

Now I must tell you how the crews of *Intrepid* and *Iphigenia* escaped. A motor launch which had pushed further up the canal lay waiting against the western bank. It darted towards the sinking vessels, and carried off some of the crews. Other men got away in their own boats, and pulled for several miles out to sea before being picked up. Lieutenant Bonham Carter had a wonderful escape. He had sent away his boats, and had prepared a Carley float—that is, a kind of large lifebuoy with a floor of grating—by means of which he hoped to keep afloat until he was seen and rescued.

As soon as the float touched the water it set fire to a calcium flare, which might easily have attracted the attention of the German machine gunners, who were only a few hundred yards away. What saved him was the smoke, which was still blowing ashore from the sinking *Iphigenia*. While on this frail float he managed to catch the rope of a motor boat, and was towed for a while, until he was perceived and taken on board. Another officer of *Intrepid* escaped by jumping ashore. He ran along the canal bank to the waiting launch; but as he did so was hit by a bullet from a machine gun. Happily it did not incapacitate him, and he reached the boat, only to be received by a



"We left the Union Jack flying on the Mole."
(From the picture by F. Matania. By permission of The Sphere.)

sturdy bluejacket, who mistook him for a German and attacked him with a hammer.

As the motor launch from the canal cleared the end of the Mole it saw not far away the destroyer *Warwick*, with Vice-Admiral Keyes on board. The crew of *Warwick* cheered and cheered again as the launch approached the side. While *Warwick* was taking the escaped crews of the block-ships on board, *Vindictive* was being towed away from the Mole by *Daffodil*. She was a sad sight. Her funnels had been shot through and through, and were leaning over as though about to fall. Her decks were a mass of *débris*, and her iron sides were battered and torn by shell splinters. She was almost a wreck; but her stokers worked her up to seventeen knots, and she came out of the fray, terribly bruised and misshapen, but still bearing on her forward funnel the horse-shoe for good luck which the Admiral had presented to her commander.

Let Captain Carpenter tell us himself how his vessel left the Mole :—

“ Just over an hour after *Vindictive* got alongside the position was this :— The blockers had passed on, got to the end of their run, and could do no more; the viaduct had been blown up and the Mole had been stormed; it would have been a needless sacrifice of life for the three boarding vessels to remain alongside the Mole any longer. The signal to withdraw was given by repeated siren calls, and it was not until I was assured that every man that could get off the Mole had reached *Vindictive* that the ship, helped by *Daffodil*, was turned and steered to the north with all speed. She was followed all the way by salvos from the German guns. They had got our range, but not our speed, and fortunately, though the shells seemed to fall around the ships, they missed us. After a short time the ships were clear of danger, owing to the mass of smoke which they left behind them.

“ At daylight we were all very anxious to know how our other ships had fared, because it was practically impossible to see our consorts during the operations owing to the smoke screen. Most of the crew of *Vindictive* thought that *Iris* had been blown up. I was, therefore, especially pleased when we reached Dover to see her steam into the harbour, her crew cheering as she passed on her way to her berth. I have learned since that the people in *Iris* were perfectly certain that *Vindictive* had sunk, and this ignorance of how each ship had fared probably extended to all the various units taking part in the operations. The smoke screens, which were meant to protect us from the enemy batteries and searchlights, also had the effect of hiding us from one another.

“ Every officer and man I saw behaved splendidly.”

The captain then referred to the official report of the affair issued by the Germans, who stated that the harbours had not

been closed, and that the conduct of sea warfare from the coast of Flanders had in no way been interfered with by the British operation. As to this gross lie, Captain Carpenter said that the Germans were suffering "from an extraordinary imagination; but if they ever suggest that *Vindictive* did not get alongside the Mole, I can show them a quarter of a ton of it which fell on my ship, and is here in Dover harbour to-day. I mean to have this piece of Zeebrugge Mole set up as a memorial to the men who have fallen in the fight."

Our loss during the raid was 161 killed, 28 died of wounds, 16 were missing, and 383 wounded—a total of 588 casualties.

* * * * *

Captain Carpenter afterwards told an interviewer that he worked out his plans with the help of a model of the Mole, and that he spent a full six months in making the preliminary arrangements. He showed his visitor a trunk containing a cap, a leather case for binoculars, two pairs of goggles, a broken chronometer, and a roll of tattered charts.

"'Don't shut it for a moment,' I begged.* 'Are these souvenirs?'

"'Well, just one or two little things of personal interest. Care to see 'em?'

"'If you don't mind showing them.'

"'That's the cap I was wearing at the time. It's rather a shabby old thing, but I thought it hardly worth while to put on a good cap for a job of that sort. Good thing I didn't.'

"'It had been perforated from back to front and from side to side with bullets. In each case the bullet had clearly missed the scalp by the fraction of an inch.'

"'Just as well,' I agreed. 'Pity to waste a really good cap on a place like Zeebrugge.'

"'These are my searchlight goggles. Excellent things. You can look right into a searchlight, you know, without the least inconvenience. Makes the beam rather helpful than otherwise. Yes, they got smashed up. And these are my smoke-goggles. They were also smashed.'

"'You were evidently there. What happened to the binocular case?'

"'Well, that's rather interesting. I had my glasses in my

* Quoted from *The Glory of Zeebrugge*, by Keble Howard. (Chatto and Windus.)

hand most of the time, as far as I remember, and the leather case, of course, was slung at my back. A bullet went right through it, and yet I knew nothing at all about it. Wasn't that rum ?'

" 'The gods apparently want you on earth a little longer. The chronometer went as well, I observe.'

" 'It did, all in bits; I don't know how or when. Oh, here are my sailing charts.' He unrolled three large charts that looked as if rats had been feeding on them for six months. From each chart huge pieces had entirely disappeared, and what was left looked particularly mangy.

" Captain Carpenter called my attention to the chart of Zeebrugge.

" 'I had mapped out three courses, you see, to allow for the wind and tide. Eventually I came round here, and the tide carried me alongside the Mole—there. Sorry they're in such a rotten state; but the charthouse was a nasty mess—quite chawed up.'

" Last of all he showed me the flag—the glorious ensign—blackened with smoke and considerably holed. 'We kept it flying all the time,' he explained; 'we thought we might as well.'

* * * * * *

A visit to *Vindictive* showed her a sorry wreck. The great funnels were shell-torn, and the smoke was pouring out at a hundred holes. Only one or two of the famous " brows " by which the men reached the Mole remained intact; the remainder had been smashed and splintered beyond recovery. The false deck, lined with a breastwork of sandbags, was still to be seen, and so were the ruined charthouse, the shell-torn bridge, and the riddled hut in which the flame-thrower was housed. The fighting-top—a circular nest high above the bridge—was completely wrecked. Marines with Lewis guns had been stationed in it, and had done excellent work in shooting down the Germans as they tried to escape into the destroyers under the harbour wall of the Mole. An enemy shell had crashed into that top, and had killed every marine but one.

" Bit knocked about, isn't she ? " said the commander.

" Rather a mess," the interviewer agreed.

Yet, knocked about as she was, her work was not yet done. She had still to perform another feat, as you will learn in the

next chapter, and add a final laurel wreath to her crown of glory.

* * * * *

Captain Chater, who commanded the marines of the landing-party, tells us that the sixteen-foot drop from the "brows" to the Mole was the most awkward part of the business, but that the men didn't mind it a bit. "Yelled like mad all the time, and went for the Huns as though the whole thing was a football match. The marines are rather bucked about the show." The time spent on the Mole seemed very short to him, and he was quite surprised when the siren sounded the recall. "Getting back was the worst part. We had scaling ladders and ropes, but the fire was very heavy, and the men wouldn't go without their pals. They insisted on taking everybody, living or dead. You can imagine that that took time. As soon as I got on top of the parapet I lay flat down to see the men off. They thought I was wounded, and tried to pick me up and take *me!*"

* * * * *

Three German destroyers lay alongside the Mole inside the harbour, and all three of them bombarded *Vindictive* at close range. An officer of marines thus describes our attack upon these vessels:—"From the destroyers a number of German sailors swarmed up to attack us; but they found themselves face to face with British bayonets, and with a shout our men charged them. This was more than Fritz could stand. Clearing a space, we dashed to the first vessel, into which we threw some fifty hand bombs. A loud explosion followed, and the last we saw of the destroyer was that she was on fire and sinking. We were unable to reach the other two destroyers, and what became of them we cannot say."

It will interest you to learn that *Brussels*, the late Captain Fryatt's ship, was lying in the harbour when our men landed on the Mole. A young lieutenant who commanded a motor boat said, "When the big ships burst the boom across the harbour, we dodged in under the shell-fire, and let drive at several of the ships we saw inside. At one end of the harbour we saw *Brussels*. Heading for her, I discharged a torpedo right into her, but I could not wait to see her sink."

* * * * *

An engineer officer bemoaned that he and his comrades



The Bottling-up of Ostend: the Vindictive ramming her

(By permission)

This illustration gives a diagrammatic view of Ostend Harbour, and shows all the points at which the where torpedoes were discharged and the wooden piles were destroyed. In the centre of the entrance lying across the channel at an angle, is seen *Vindictive* laden with concrete. Behind is the town, from while the operation was in progress. The fountains of water which are seen in the harbour and in the fountain is seen rising near the stern of *Vindictive* at the moment when a motor launch was taking off

The failure to block the harbour of Ostend as completely as that of Zeebrugge meant that the latter "the obsolete cruiser, H.M.S. *Vindictive*, was sunk between the piers and across the entrance of Ostend the first attack on Ostend. The weather was fine when the start was made, but as the vessels approached eventually discovered at 2.20 a.m., the programme time being 2 a.m.

"Commander A. E. Godsall was in command of the old cruiser, and, with Lieutenant Sir John was approaching the harbour mouth the fire from the shore was so heavy that the three officers took

"After swinging the ship into the channel and ramming her stem against the eastern pier, Commander vessel. A shell burst outside the conning-tower, and, it is believed, killed the gallant officer.

"The command then devolved upon Lieutenant Crutchley, who, after ascertaining that *Vindictive*

"The crew jumped into two motor boats, '254' (Lieutenant Drummond, R.N.V.R.) and '276'

"One of the motor boats, with Lieutenant Crutchley, Engineer-Commander W. A. Bury, and thirty-board.

"Motor launch '276' brought off Lieutenant Sir John Alleyne and two ratings."



Searchlights following
Allied Aircraft

Stem into the Eastern Pier at the Entrance to the Harbour.

(of *The Sphere*.)

leading incidents of the raid took place. We see the spots at the end of the eastern and western piers to the harbour is one of the daring coastal motor boats which did the deed. Farther up the harbour, which searchlights are seen following the Allied aircraft, which dropped bombs on the harbour works sea on either side of the piers are the result of shells that have fallen short of the target. One such those who had navigated her into her blocking position.

was not effectively sealed until the night of 9th May, when, in the words of the Admiralty announcement, [Harbour." *Vindictive* was chiefly manned by the officers and crew of *Brilliant*, who had taken part in Ostend a fog was encountered, and *Vindictive* had difficulty in finding the harbour mouth, which was

Alleyne and Lieutenant Crutchley, stationed himself at the upper steering position. When the vessel shelter in the conning-tower.

Jodsal left the protection of the conning-tower and went outside in order better to see the position of the

would not turn any farther, cleared the engine-room and stokehole and blew the charges.

Lieutenant Bourke, R.N.V.R.), which had gallantly stood by to rescue the men.

Eight men of *Vindictive*, was sighted by Admiral Keyes's flagship, *Warwick*, which took the party on

saw nothing of the "show." "I was kept below all the time. The Germans began sending over gas shells, and we, the engine-room officers and artificers, had to work like Trojans with gas masks on." Another officer declared that when the expedition left Zeebrugge fires were blazing all over the place, and that the lock gates of the canal had been smashed by scooters or motor boats. It was low tide, and he saw the water pouring out of the canal into the harbour. This made the handling of the boats very difficult. "Still," he concluded, "we got through, and I would not have missed the experience for a thousand pounds."

* * * * *

On July 11th Sir Eric Geddes, First Lord of the Admiralty, exhibited two photographs of the Zeebrugge Canal. These photographs had been taken about a month previously by German aviators, who evidently had made their negatives from a much lower height than was possible for our airmen. An examination of the photographs showed the canal to be completely blocked. The ships were lying right across the entrance. No enemy destroyers had been able to leave the canal. Those which made Zeebrugge their base after the raid had to lie behind the Mole. The First Lord's photographs proved up to the hilt that the Zeebrugge blocking expedition had been completely successful.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHAT HAPPENED AT OSTEND.

I MUST now tell you the story of *Sirius* and *Brilliant*, the block-ships which shifted their course for Ostend when the combined expedition was about fifteen miles from Zeebrugge. Ostend is familiar to many British people, for before the war it was the most fashionable sea-bathing resort of Belgium, and the usual passenger port of entry into that country. The harbour, which was reconstructed in the eighteenth century and largely extended in 1863, has an entrance less than three hundred and fifty feet wide, and is protected by two wooden piers which jut out seaward for about double that distance. There is no solid masonry Mole, as at Zeebrugge. The harbour is connected with the Bruges Canal, and has numerous basins branching off from it. These basins are filled at high tide, and at low tide the water is allowed to escape in order to scour away the sandbanks at the mouth of the harbour. From the top of the New Lighthouse, which stands between six and seven hundred yards inland, there is an extensive view in fine weather. Nieuport, Furnes, and Dunkirk may be seen towards the south-west, Blankenberghe to the north-east, and the towers of Bruges to the east.

The command of the expedition was entrusted to Commander Hubert Lynes. All went well until within half an hour of the attempt to force an entrance into the harbour. The coastal motor boats lighted up the approaches and the ends of the piers with calcium flares, and, as at Zeebrugge, produced a smoke cloud which hid the approaching ships from the enemy. Then the wind shifted, blew back the smoke, and revealed them to the German gunners. *Sirius* and *Brilliant* were close inshore when the wind changed. At once every

piece between Zeebrugge and Ostend began to thunder ; the flares were extinguished, and a terrible fire was concentrated on the blocking ships. Before long *Sirius* was in a sinking condition.

In the darkness of night it was difficult to find the narrow entrance to the harbour. The buoy on the Stroom Bank marking the channel had been displaced, and both the ships ran aground. They were forced to sink themselves in the surf at a point about two thousand yards east of the piers. Both ships suffered heavy losses owing to the intensity of the fire, but the survivors were got away in motor boats. Unhappily, they had not succeeded in their enterprise.

* * * * *

Now for the sequel. The British Navy is nothing if not thorough. Officers and bluejackets alike hate to leave a job half done. Zeebrugge had been effectively blocked, but Ostend was still open. Though the Germans did not believe that the daring attempt would be repeated, they made assurance doubly sure by removing the buoy marking the entrance to the channel, and leaving no guiding marks visible. They also cut gaps in the wooden piers to prevent a landing from being made upon them, and took care that destroyers should be in the offing to attack any flotilla that might make another attempt.

Some writers who commented on the unsuccessful enterprise of 23rd April prophesied that the raid would not be repeated, because it would be impossible to surprise the enemy a second time. Never was prophecy more completely falsified. It was just because no one could believe that a second venture would be made that the chiefs of the Admiralty decided to make it. Because it was unthinkable that the enemy should be off his guard a second time, Vice-Admiral Keyes determined upon the attempt. "Fortune helps the daring, but repulses the timid," says an old Latin proverb.

The evening of 9th May promised well for the adventure. There was little wind ; a light breeze blew from a point or so west of north ; the sea was calm, the sky was lead-blue in colour, the stars shone faintly, and there was no moon. Sir Roger Keyes and his staff had prepared a time-table for every stage of the operation, and precise orders had been given for laying a smoke barrage, no matter what might be the direction of the wind. Monitors, destroyers, motor launches, and coastal

motor boats were to co-operate, and French destroyers were to assist. No doubt Rear-Admiral Tyrwhitt's cruisers and the remainder of the Dover forces were so disposed as to prevent the nine German destroyers known to be at sea from interfering with the flotilla. Sir Roger Keyes, in *Warwick*, was to superintend the operations, and Commodore Hubert Lynes, who had directed the previous venture, was to command the forces which were to guide the blocking ship to its last resting-place.

Vindictive, which had played such a gallant part at Zeebrugge, was to be sacrificed in this second attempt on Ostend harbour. She was filled with cement, and was manned by the officers and crew of *Brilliant* and *Sirius*. They had been baffled sixteen days earlier, and they were now eager to redeem their failure.

As the vessels steamed towards Ostend, observers on the deck of the vessel which served the commodore as flagship could only see swift shapes of blackness, destroyers bulking like cruisers in the gloom, motor launches like destroyers, and coastal motor boats like racing hillocks of foam. From Dunkirk came a sudden and brief flurry of gun-fire, announcing that German aeroplanes were on the wing; and over the invisible coast of Flanders flashes of artillery fire rose and fell like summer lightning.

The monitors, anchored in their firing positions far to seaward, awaited the signal to open fire. Clouds of aircraft, bomb-laden, were now hovering above the port. By the side of the huge guns of our batteries in Flanders stood marines waiting to smother the German artillery along the coast, while destroyers patrolled to seaward of the small craft. "There's *Vindictive*," whispered the bluejackets of the monitors, and they turned from their torpedo tubes and guns to gaze at the great black ship, plodding silently to her goal through the streaming smoke. Ahead of her raced a destroyer, which laid a light-buoy to serve her as a guide. The crews of the monitors and the cruisers saw her pass and disappear. She was now in the hands of the small craft, whose mission was to direct her, light her, and hide her in the clouds of their smoke screen. A flare burnt in her slack and rusty rigging, "and that eye of unsteady fire, paling in the blaze of star shells or reddening through the drift of the smoke, watched the whole great enter-

prise, from the moment when it hung in doubt to its final triumphant success."

Vindictive slowly and solemnly made her way towards the light-buoy, and, passing it, steered for a coastal motor boat which had taken station at the position of the Stroom Bank buoy, and was burning a calcium flare to indicate the entrance to the harbour. Four minutes before she reached the coastal motor boat, and fifteen minutes before she was due at the harbour mouth, the signal was given for the guns of the monitors to open fire.

Two motor boats, under Lieutenant Darrel Reid, R.N.R., and Lieutenant Albert L. Poland, R.N., dashed in towards the ends of the high wooden piers and torpedoed them. There was a machine gun on the end of the western pier, but it vanished in a roar and leap of flame. Over the town a gleam of fire appeared high in the air, and sank slowly earthwards. It was a signal that the aeroplanes saw and understood. They were now free to let go their bombs. As the first of them began to fall, shells came whooping in from the monitors far out at sea.

A moment before all was silence ; now there was a deafening roar of crashing bombs and bursting shells. The Germans, though they afterwards denied it, had been completely surprised a second time. Up to the moment when the wooden piles of the piers were blown sky-high by the torpedoes of the motor boats, no single shot had come from the land, though occasional star shells had soared up, and for a brief moment had made the darkness as bright as the day.

The smoke-producing craft, manned by officers and men of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, were now at work building up a cloud of invisibility for *Vindictive*. The star shells paled, and were lost as they sank in it ; the beams of the searchlights seemed to break off short upon its front. The great batteries on shore now opened fire, but their observers were blinded by the smoke from the sea.

For a while there was a tremendous uproar. The coast for miles on either side of Ostend was studded with groups of great guns, each group being known by name to our men, and consisting of pieces from six inches calibre to great naval guns of fifteen inches. Tirpitz, Hindenburg, Deutschland, Cecilia, and the rest were now belching shells at the advancing

vessels, and meanwhile were being assailed by our artillery in Flanders and by our howitzers on the monitors. The aeroplanes were now showering their bombs upon the port, and anti-aircraft guns were searching the skies for them. Star shells shot up and floated down, lighting the smoke banks with a wondrous glow; and those strings of luminous green balls which airmen call "flaming onions" added their glare to the nightmare scene. Through all this blaze and roar of conflict *Vindictive*, unceasing, unceasing, sailed slowly through the lighted waters towards her last resting-place.

Fortune now favoured her. A wet sea fog suddenly began to drift landwards; it was cold and clammy, and the rigging of the destroyers showed clinging beads of moisture. So thick was this fog that the star shells and searchlights were no longer visible, and the aeroplanes overhead could no longer see their targets, and had to suspend their bombardment. The destroyers had to turn on their lights and sound their sirens in order to keep in touch with each other.

Vindictive had still some distance to go when the sea fog blotted her out from the sight of her consorts. Motor boats on either side of her burnt Dover flares—dazzling lights that are capable of illuminating many square miles of sea at once; but even these failed to pierce the mingled smoke and fog. *Vindictive* had to put her helm over and grope to and fro to find the entrance to the harbour. Twice in her wanderings she must have passed across it; at the third turn there came a sudden rift in the midst of the fog, and she saw the entrance clear, the piers on either side, and the opening dead ahead. A motor boat, commanded by Acting-Lieutenant Guy L. Cockburn, R.N., immediately raced into the opening under fire that grew fiercer every moment, and planted a flare on the waters between the piers. *Vindictive* steamed over it, and passed on. She was now in the harbour.

At once her agony began. The shore guns found her, and rained shells upon her. Every few seconds she was hit, and new scars were added to the old. Her decks and upper works were wrecked anew, and her hull was holed in a score of places. The machine gun at the end of the pier had been blown up by a torpedo; but there were others at the inshore ends of the piers and on land, and these now converged their fire upon her and drenched her with a torrent of lead. Her after-

control was destroyed by a shell, which killed all the occupants, including Sub-Lieutenant Angus N. MacLachlan, who was in command of it. So fierce and unrelenting was the fire that Commander Godsall, R.N., ordered his officers to take cover with him in the conning-tower.

Through a slit in the steel wall of the conning-tower they perceived that the eastern pier had been breached some two hundred yards from its seaward end. In front, as the gun-flashes lighted up the sky for seconds at a time, they saw the buildings of the town; but elsewhere their eyes only rested on a patchwork of fire and darkness. Immediately after passing the breach in the pier, Commander Godsall left the conning-tower and went on deck to watch the ship's movements, and to shout steering directions to his comrades through the slit in the conning-tower. He now gave the order to starboard the helm. *Vindictive* responded, and laying her battered nose against the eastern pier, prepared to swing her 320 feet of length across the channel.

At that moment a shell from the shore struck the conning-tower. Lieutenant Sir John Alleyne and Lieutenant V. A. C. Crutchley were still within, while Commander Godsall was outside. Lieutenant Alleyne was stunned by the shock. Lieutenant Crutchley shouted through the slit to his commander, but receiving no answer, rang the port engine full-speed astern to help in swinging the ship. By this time she was lying at an angle of about forty degrees to the pier, and seemed to be hard and fast, so that it was impossible to bring her further round.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LAST VOYAGE OF "VINDICTIVE."

AFTER working the engines for some minutes, but all to no purpose, Lieutenant Crutchley gave the order to clear the engine-room and abandon ship. Engineer Lieutenant-Commander William A. Bury, who was the last to leave the engine-room, switched on the electricity which was to explode the main charges, while Lieutenant Crutchley touched off other charges from the conning-tower. The old ship shuddered as the explosives tore out her bottom plates and bulkheads. She sank for about six feet, and lay upon the bottom of the channel. Her work was done ; her fame was secure.

It is supposed that Commander Godsall was killed by the shell which struck the conning-tower. Lieutenant Crutchley searched the ship, but failed to find either the body of the commander or that of Sub-Lieutenant MacLachlan amidst the chaos of splintered wood and shattered steel. Commander Godsall had commanded *Brilliant* in the first attempt to block up the port ; and, as you know, he and his officers, along with those of *Sirius*, had volunteered for the attempt which had now proved successful.

By this time Engineer Lieutenant-Commander Bury was severely wounded. He had been in charge of *Vindictive's* engines when she attacked Zeebrugge Mole. After that exploit he went to Admiral Keyes, and begged that the four engine-room artificers who had accompanied him on the former occasion should be his companions during the new venture. The Admiral agreed, and to Engineer Lieutenant-Commander Bury and his devoted comrades must be accorded high praise for their gallantry and skill. Two of the artificers were wounded, and one was missing. The coxswain, First-class Petty Officer

J. J. Reed, had been on board *Brilliant* in the former raid, and he had pleaded hard to be allowed to remain with his commander. The rest of the crew had been selected from a large number of volunteers belonging to the Dover patrol.

Petty Officer Reed found Lieutenant Alleyne in the conning-tower still unconscious, and carried him aft under a storm of fire from the machine guns. The wounded officer recovered consciousness, but was again badly hit before he could be got over the side. He fell into the water, but managed to seize a rope and hold on until he was rescued, along with two other wounded men, by a motor launch under Lieutenant Bourke, R.N.V.R.

The remainder of the crew were taken off under a fierce fire by a motor launch commanded by Lieutenant Geoffrey H. Drummond, R.N.V.R. The launch made for *Warwick* with all speed; but during the voyage her bows were shot to pieces, her commander was wounded, and the second in command and a seaman were killed, while several others suffered injuries. When the launch reached the side of *Warwick* she was in a sinking condition. Her occupants were taken on board with all speed, for the destroyer was within range of the forts, and the day was breaking. There was no time to hoist the launch on board; she was destroyed as she lay at *Warwick's* side.

At 2.30 a.m. red rockets whizzed up from *Warwick's* deck to recall the small craft. One by one the launches and motor boats began to appear out of the fog. They had many wounded men on board, and the work of transferring these to the destroyers and reporting the names of the dead took time. It was clear from the reports that all the men had behaved splendidly, and had shown the same cheery discipline and indomitable courage which had distinguished them and their comrades in the Zeebrugge raid.

So with victory crowning its banners the flotilla steamed back to its base. Two officers and six men had made the great sacrifice; two officers and ten men, all of *Vindictive*, were missing, believed killed; and four officers and eight men were wounded. With this light loss Ostend harbour had been blocked—not completely, but enough to embarrass the enemy and prevent him from using it for large craft for many a day to come.

How successful the operation was may be gathered from



Petty Officer Reed rescuing Lieutenant Sir John Alleyne.
(By permission of *The Sphere*.)

the fact that the enemy at once warned his U-boats by wireless not to return to their bases on the Flanders coast. Of course the Germans made light of the affair. One of their accounts, said to be by an eye-witness, ran as follows:—

“ Suddenly a cruiser, later found to be *Vindictive*, appeared before the entrance of Ostend. Although riddled with holes, new and old—for the injuries which she had received in the attack on Zeebrugge Mole had only undergone the barest repairs—she still appeared navigable, and apparently intended with her last strength to invade the entrance and to sink in front of the lock gates. Now she received such a hail of shells that her breath entirely left her. She struck the piles at the extreme end of the jetty, and there she sank. There she may lie as long as she likes, for she does not interfere with us. . . . Only dead were found on board, while not a plank, rail, or stairway was left. The whole deck was entirely littered with splinters and wreckage. The wheel on the bridge was smashed, and the helmsman lay dead beside it. Here and there were smouldering fires.”

Though the Germans tried to make out that the raid had failed, seamen all over the world knew that for the time being Ostend was closed to big ships, and that the work of removing the obstruction would occupy months. The French admiral, Fournier, spoke the simple truth when he said: “ I consider the recent attack in force against Ostend the finest feat of arms in the naval history of all times and all countries.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

VILLERS-BRETONNEUX AND KEMMEL.

WHILE our naval forces were exhibiting superb dash and resource in their raids on Zeebrugge and Ostend, and Britain was ringing with the praises of her incomparable seamen, our armies in France and Flanders were passing through a fiery ordeal. The enemy was now in overwhelming strength. The Russian treason had enabled him to bring from forty to fifty divisions, hitherto employed in the East, into play on the Western front, and his Italian victory had given him more than two thousand additional pieces of artillery. With these forces he was staking his all upon a speedy overthrow of the Allies. Though he pretended that he had nothing to fear from America, he knew that the U-boats upon which he was relying had failed to check the constant arrival of transports filled with the very pick of American manhood. Every day saw the American forces increasing in number; every day saw them arrayed on French fields in growing strength, and it was clear that by the fall of the year they would be so numerous that the scale would be turned in favour of the Allies. There still remained a few months during which the enemy had a chance of forcing a decision. He was now devoting his whole energies to the task, and the Allies were being subjected to terrible strain and anxiety.

In earlier chapters of this volume I told you how the enemy struck his first great blow between Arras and Noyon, and endeavoured to separate the French and British armies. Though he forced us to make a long and costly retreat, he failed to reach Amiens and the main railway from the coast to Paris. It was the dogged defence made by the Allies at Villers-Bretonneux which prevented him from attaining his objective, and foiled his plan at the very moment when success seemed certain.

Villers-Bretonneux, now a heap of ruins, has already figured more than once in these pages as the scene of violent struggles. Let me remind you that this large village, in which we formerly had a corps headquarters, stands on a hill some three or four miles to the north of the Luce, a tributary of the Arve, and therefore a sub-tributary of the Somme. Between the Luce and the Somme is a plateau which rises about 150 feet above the water-level, and in some places attains a height of 180 feet. The plateau is a bare rolling countryside of open fields, with two tracts of woodland—the one just north of the Luce being known as the Hangard Wood, while the other, to the west of Villers-Bretonneux, may be called the Villers Wood. This upland between the Luce and the Somme is the last high ground directly in front of Amiens, and upon it the British and French forces joined hands. If the enemy could carry the plateau by thrusting us back at Villers-Bretonneux and working round the Hangard Wood, Amiens would be at his mercy, and the all-important railway would probably be lost to us.

On the Wednesday following the glorious Monday on which we bottled up the harbour of Zeebrugge the Germans made a bold bid for the plateau. Early on the morning of 24th April they flung some eight divisions against the Allied line between the Somme and the Luce. Three of these divisions struck at the British positions to the north and south of Villers-Bretonneux, while a similar force attacked the French round about Hangard, and the remaining two began an outflanking movement on the south. The battle opened with the usual heavy bombardment, which continued from three o'clock until 6.45, when the German infantry began to advance.

The 4th Guards Division, which had lost heavily in earlier fighting, but had been renewed in strength by fresh drafts, together with the 77th Division of Rhinelanders, Westphalians, and Alsations, who had been brought from Russia, and other forces, attacked the British. The initial onset was repulsed along the whole line. Then using Tanks for the first time, the enemy advanced again, and was able to get a footing on the eastern edge of Hangard Wood and also in the ruins of the village. This was by no means the sum total of his success. He carried Villers-Bretonneux, reached the edge of the plateau, and, south of the wood, entered the outskirts of the village of Cachy. If you examine this little map, you will see that the position of the

French had now become perilous. Their left flank was turned, and they were forced to withdraw from Hangard.

East Lancashire, Middlesex, Berkshire, Northampton, West Yorks, and other regiments fought heroically to save the village. They were drenched with fire and poison gas, and suffered terribly. Then out of the mist appeared four or five Tanks, accompanied by dense masses of infantry, who crowded the narrow front, and by sheer weight pressed back our men. In the middle the West Yorks fought with extraordinary courage, but they and other units were obliged to fall back and abandon the place.

The enemy filled the village with men and machine guns, and worked hard to put it into a condition of defence. He had won a real success, and he bade fair ere long to capture the whole plateau, from

the western edge of which the main railway between the coast and Paris was only a mile distant. It was clear that once his guns were emplaced on the plateau Amiens would be in deadly peril. We dared not leave him in possession of Villers-Bretonneux; at whatever cost an attempt must be made to recover it.

Up to ten o'clock on the night of 25th April the enemy held on to his gains. At that hour our counter-attack began. The assault was entrusted to the Australians and some British battalions. Happily, the mist which had favoured the enemy on the 24th now came to our assistance: it veiled the moon, and enabled our men to advance unperceived. Three separate forces were sent forward in the attempt to recapture the place. The Australians converged on it from two sides, while Northampton, Durham Light Infantry, and other units swept into the huddle of ruins that once was Villers-Bretonneux.

The troops attacking on the south side went right through the village, and reached the positions which we had held the morning before. Those who advanced on the northern side had a much harder task. The Germans resisted desperately,



Map showing attack on Villers Bretonneux.



When Tank meets Tank: a Battle of

(By permission of The

The first action between Tanks took place near Villers-Bretonneux on April 24th. The result was a our heavy Tanks, which drove them from the field. In the above illustration a German Tank is seen on the the trees British infantry are seen, and to the right, where shrapnel is bursting, German troops are seen machine guns in the rear and at the sides.



Land Cruisers at Villers-Bretonneux.

Illustrated London News.)

victory for the British Tanks. Six of the enemy machines accompanied his infantry, and were met by some of right in the background; a British Tank in the left foreground is firing at it. Further to the left among advancing. The German Tanks were of a somewhat square design, with a quick-firing gun in front, and

and the fire from their machine guns along the railway embankment below the village proved very deadly. Nevertheless, the Australians worked forward in the darkness, and reached a point some five hundred yards short of the flank of the southern force. All through the early morning they held on, though their flank was exposed, and at last fell back some three hundred yards to a defensive position, where they waited while the troops immediately on their left, together with the southern force, were fighting their way through the village. By evening Villers-Bretonneux was again in our hands, and we breathed freely once more.

The fighting was savage in the extreme, and our men were outnumbered; but the Australians did heroic work, and nothing could resist them. As our troops fought their way into the village, batches of prisoners began to surrender, and the remainder of the Germans were forced back to the railway embankment, where for many hours we battled against the nests of machine gunners. Before sunrise the last of them had been routed out, and the village was completely won. It was noticeable that during the struggle the guns of friend and foe were silent. Germans and British were so mixed up in the ruined streets that neither side dared to shell the place, lest they should slay their own men.

The much-talked-of German Tanks came into action for the first time during the second attack on the village. Eyewitnesses said that the enemy Tanks were bigger than ours, and were furnished with large turrets. Some of our Tanks went out to meet them, and a battle of land cruisers followed. One of our Tanks was crippled, but a newcomer knocked out one of the enemy, whereupon the rest made their escape. In other parts of the battlefield our light Tanks did excellent work, and in some cases ran right into clusters of Germans. They were handled with great skill and gallantry, and proved themselves very useful weapons.

During the struggle which I have described we captured between seven hundred and eight hundred prisoners, together with two light guns, some flame-throwers, and twenty-one machine guns. The enemy lost very heavily in dead and wounded, and many of the prisoners were much discouraged. They spoke of the hardships which they had suffered, and complained that they had received no rations for two days. When our men fed them they ate like wolves.

The result of the action was that the enemy completely failed to master the plateau. For the eighth time he had penetrated into Hangard village and wood, and for the eighth time he had been driven out again. He had won the vital point of Villers-Bretonneux, but he had failed to hold it. He had been foiled in the very nick of time.

* * * * *

The scene now shifts to Flanders, where specially fierce attacks began on the morning of 25th April, and continued for two days and part of the third. More than once in these pages I have directed your attention to the group of hills which run from east to west south of Ypres, and form its main buttress of defence on that side. The most easterly of the hills is Kemmel.* Before the war this hill, which rises 512 feet above sea-level, was a place of holiday resort, and was reached from Ypres by a steam tramway. From its top a fine view was formerly obtained of the long avenues of poplars, the red-roofed villages, the neat fields, the church spires, the orchards white with apple blossom, and the old windmills that dotted the flat landscape.

Immediately west of Kemmel rises a second and lower hill, with three summits—the Scherpenburg (“the sharp mound”) on the north, Mont Noir in the centre, and Mont Rouge to the south. None of these summits reach 440 feet. On the top of the Scherpenburg is an old windmill, from which visitors used to watch the panorama of the Ypres battlefield. In March 1915 a group of English officers, including Sir H. Smith-Dorrien, stood watching an attack on the Wytschaete-Messines Ridge, when a young officer appeared and saluted the general. “Who is that boy lieutenant?” asked a bystander. It was the Prince of Wales.

Westward of the triple hill is Mont de Cats, which is about as high as Kemmel Hill. Still further westward the high ground sinks; but in Mont Cassel the highest point of the range rises to 520 feet. A Welsh or a Scottish boy would think these elevations mere hillocks, but in the dead flat country of Flanders they appear as mountains. You know that in modern warfare even a slight elevation in a flat country is difficult to capture, and that its possession is coveted because it gives observation over the surrounding plains. If the enemy could capture the line of hills to which I have referred, he would be master of

* See panoramic view on p. 270.

the narrow strip of country lying between them and the coast of the Channel, and of all the country to the north right up to the Yser. The last little bit of Belgium still remaining in the possession of King Albert's army would then have to be given up, Dunkirk would be uncovered, and the Allies would be forced to retire to the line of the little river Aa.

It was, therefore, necessary that the line of hills should be held at all costs. On the morning of Thursday, 25th April, the enemy began a series of desperate thrusts with the object of carrying Kimmel Hill. For this purpose he struck hard at the village of Dranoutre,* which lies south-west of the hill. He chose this point of attack because it was the junction between the British and French forces. Having carried the place, he pushed up the valley to the west of Mont Kimmel, and at the same time entered Kimmel village. He had now turned the summit both from the east and from the west, and its capture was only a matter of time. The French on the hill made a gallant resistance, and though they were cut off, they held out for seven or eight hours. Surrounded on both sides and overpowered, the few survivors surrendered, and the hill fell into the hands of the Germans. By the morning of Friday, the 26th, they claimed 6,000 prisoners, most of them French.

The capture of Kimmel Hill was a serious blow to the Allies. It gave the enemy an isolated height covered with trees, afforded him good observation to the north, and enabled him to begin a gradual advance westward along the chain of uplands towards the coast. Further, it made the Ypres salient more and more difficult to hold. The enemy now pushed on to the west of Kimmel Hill, and reached the village of Locre, which lies in the depression between that hill and the Scherpenburg. It was now his intention to pinch out the triple hills behind Kimmel, so that he could command the ground south of Poperinghe. If Mont Noir and Mont Rouge could be outflanked, he would be in a fair way to capture Mont de Cats, and by the time that this height had passed into his possession we should have been obliged to give up the northern plain.

The capture of Kimmel Hill forced us to withdraw on the Ypres salient for about two miles, and meanwhile the enemy crossed the Ypres-Comines Canal and carried Hill 60, the

* See sketch map, p. 271.

scene of such fierce fighting during the Flanders battle of 1915-1916. It was, as you know, merely a spoil bank, formed of earth dug out to form the canal; but it was consecrated with the blood of many of our most gallant men, and we yielded it with great regret. Ground was also won at St. Eloi, where the great crater formed by our explosion still yawned.

I want you to examine carefully the little map on page 271. It shows you the 17,000 yards of line held by us on the morning of Monday, 29th. On that day we faced the enemy from the Ypres-Comines Canal to Meteren, as shown in the map. Between the canal and the hamlet of Voormezele our 21st Division held the line. Beyond the hamlet the 49th Division continued the defence up to the Kemmel Brook. You will notice that our trenches ran through what is called Ridge Wood. From the Kemmel Brook to the base of the Scherpenburg the 25th Division was stationed; and immediately on its right, holding the village of Locre and defending the bases of Mont Rouge and Mont Noir, lay the French. Beyond them were the Australians. You will observe that the village of Locre lay almost in the centre of the Allied line, which I have just described. If it could be captured, the enemy would be almost certain to win the uplands behind.

On the 26th there had been a terrible struggle for Locre. Three times, after a terrible bombardment, the Germans had flung their forces against it, and at the third attempt had entered the ruins of the place. A counter-attack, however, had driven them out, and when the story of 29th April opens the French still maintained their hold on the village. Meanwhile our men, though assailed with a rain of shells and a deluge of gas, had stoutly held on to Ridge Wood and Voormezele. German attacks on the 27th and 28th had met with no better success, though shells were now falling on fields and villages hitherto untouched by the ravages of war.

A dense mist shrouded the landscape on the morning of the 29th, when, between half-past five and seven o'clock, the German infantry was launched. Some eleven or thirteen divisions were hurled against the six or seven Allied divisions holding the line. Six enemy divisions were thrust against the French, who were assailed by about eight bayonets to the yard. Following their usual custom, the Germans put all their weight into the first blow. The first attack was made through the

ruins of Voormezeele, between the 21st Division and the 49th, which was holding Ridge Wood. The enemy carried the village, and reached its northern edge, but could go no further. Lancashire and other troops of the 49th Division held off the enemy all morning, while Yorkshire and South Africans, and others immediately on their right, made an equally fine defence. Four separate attacks were made on the 25th Division, but the advancing waves were destroyed every time.

The fiercest attack was directed against the French left, where divisions of Bavarian and Alpine troops advanced in the



Map showing attack on 29th April.

most determined manner. Early in the morning the Germans made a thrust which pushed the French back through Locre, and brought them to what our men called Hyde Park Corner, the meeting-place of five roads in the depression between the Scherpenburg and Mont Rouge.

A wedge had now been driven for a thousand yards through Locre, and the situation was dangerous in the extreme. The Germans were on the southern slopes of the Scherpenburg, and it seemed as though they would soon be masters of the hills on both sides of the wedge. Had the advance been carried forward for an additional

fifteen hundred yards, disaster might have been our portion. The French, however, fought desperately all day and far into the night. On the 29th Loche changed hands no fewer than four times. At Hyde Park Corner a splendid feat of heroism was performed. A French officer rallied his men and cried, "Follow me, my children." Fixing their bayonets, and dashing forward with hoarse cheers, his Poilus advanced with such determination upon the machine-gun outposts, which were holding the cross-roads, that they turned and fled.

From noon onwards fortune favoured the French. Early in the afternoon counter-attacks began, one of which deserves special mention. A French officer addressed his men thus: "Come on, comrades. Let us take Loche before it is too dark." They responded with cheers, and at their head he led them right through the village, on and on towards Dranoutre, until they were stopped by their own barrage. For the rest of the day the German efforts to readvance were fruitless. The masses brought together for the purpose were smashed to atoms by the French 75's, and by dusk, when the fighting died down, the French had not only regained their old line, but had gone beyond for 1,500 yards. The ground recovered included the Loche Hospice, in the grounds of which Major Willie Redmond lay buried.

The Germans had suffered a disastrous defeat. As a British officer said next morning, "Fritz took the knock yesterday." Our men had played their part nobly. Many of them were young drafts, who were in the firing-line for the first time. Though they were subjected to the fiercest strain, and gas shells fell so fast and thick among them that they were forced to work and sleep in their masks, they "stuck it out" like veterans. We shall probably never know the extent of the German losses from the rifles and machine guns of our men. Some writers tell us that more than 20,000 Germans bit the dust that day. The Leicesters at Voormezele stood like rocks. Still further north, where our men had to stem massed assaults, the same splendid endurance was exhibited. The 25th Division, for example, did not budge a foot, and we are told that their fire resembled a garden hose playing upon the enemy. During the fighting the German airmen followed the example of their British rivals. They flew very low, and as they swooped above our trenches, poured steady streams of bullets into them.

CHAPTER XXX.

LOOKING BACKWARD.

THE victory of 29th April closed the second phase of the great German onset which began on 21st March. Thereafter until 27th May the enemy made no attacks in force. He was busy licking his wounds and preparing for his next great onset. The French, however, gave him no rest. On the 15th they retook a hill south of Dickebusch Lake, and five days later they made an advance which improved their positions between Mount Kemmel and the triple hills to the west.

Let me now briefly sum up the results of the fighting during the forty days of incessant struggle and constant anxiety which had elapsed since March 21st. The first attack was delivered on a fifty-mile front with more than forty divisions, and was preceded by the most terrific bombardment so far known. The blow was aimed at the extreme right of the British army, with the object of driving a wedge between it and the French. Aided by the thick mist, the enemy broke through in that part of the line which we had recently taken over from the French and had not garrisoned in sufficient strength. The result was that the southern portion of our line had to make a long and costly retreat. The stout resistance of our troops farther north saved us from disaster. Finally, the force of the blow slackened, and the arrival of French reinforcements prevented the enemy from reaching any of his objectives, though he came perilously near to them.

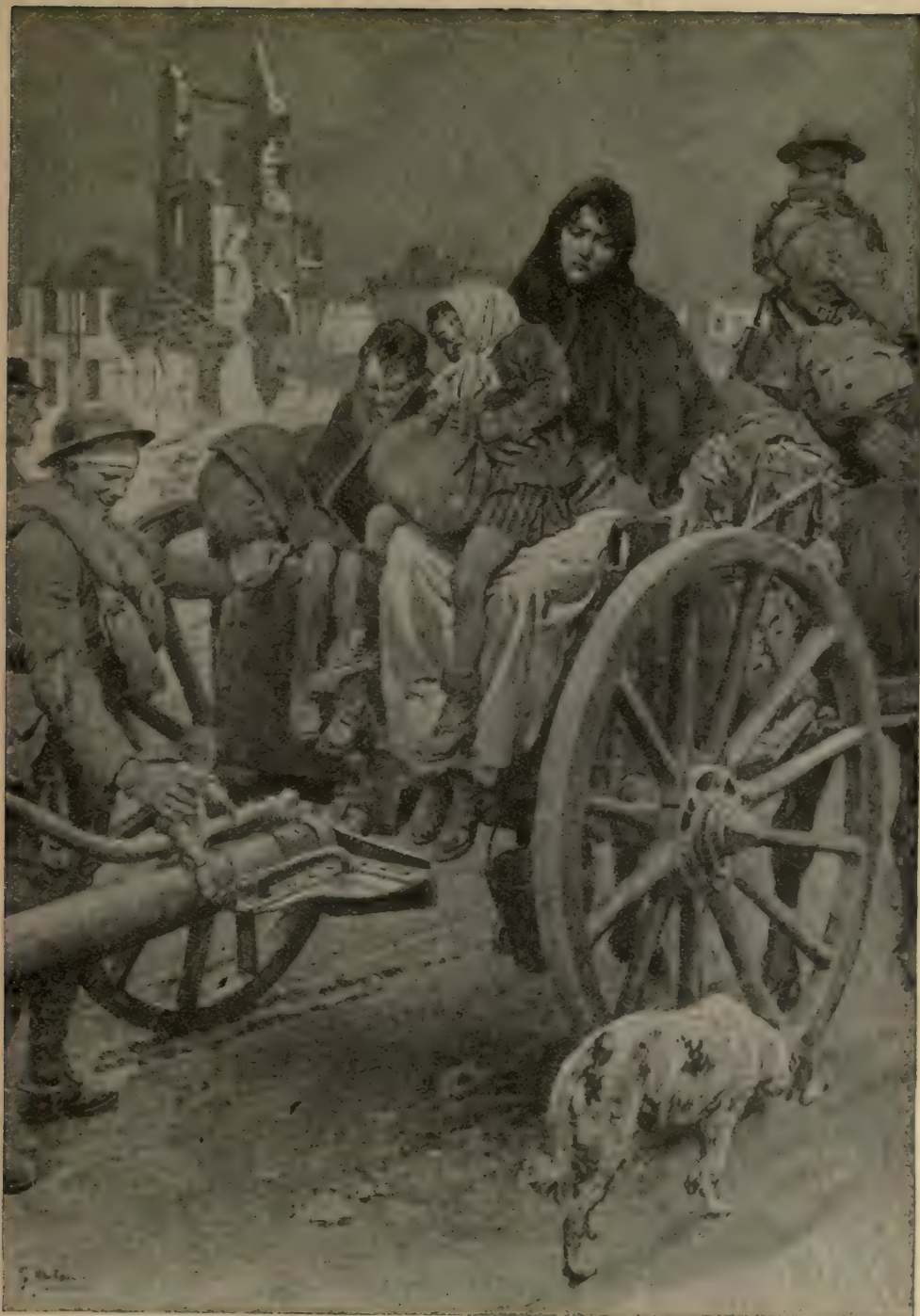
When the enemy saw that this thrust was failing, he flung himself on 28th March against Vimy Ridge and the Arras front to the north and south of the Scarpe. In this attack he failed terribly. He broke off the fighting almost at once, and renewed his effort to break through to Amiens both by way of

Albert and to the south of the Somme. Our resistance had now stiffened, and by the end of the first week of April the enemy made no further gains of consequence.

Again he shifted his battle-ground, and on 9th April, between Givenchy and Fleurbaix, flung ten or twelve divisions against the Portuguese, who held the centre of the line. The Portuguese gave way, but on the wings a fine resistance was made. The Lys was reached, and the attack showed signs of petering out in an ever-narrowing salient, which was dangerous to hold and useless to continue. As soon as the Germans perceived that they were fighting in a blind alley, they struck north of the Lys with three or four divisions. At first they were successful: we had to abandon Armentières, and, after a fierce struggle, Bailleul. On 15th April he strove again to break down our resistance at Givenchy, and to cross the La Bassée Canal at Hinges, but only achieved a costly failure. He then made a separate attack on the Belgian army, in the hope of cutting off the Ypres salient at its base. Thanks to the splendid staunchness of the Belgians, the biters were bitten. The Belgians, you will remember, drove the enemy into a flooded area of swamp and morass. The Germans knew the routes across this dangerous region; but in the panic of retreat they missed their way, and were driven into the bogs, where numbers of them were shot down, and 700 were forced to surrender. Besides winning back all the ground lost, the Belgians captured a field gun, ten machine guns, and other booty. They claimed to have killed over 2,000 Germans.

Then came the attacks on the hills which I have described in the former chapter. You know that they ended in complete defeat. The enemy was fought to a standstill: he did not make the smallest progress on any part of the front. On 29th April our soldiers showed all the valour and doggedness of those who fought and died in the First and Second Battles of Ypres. At the end of the day their confidence in ultimate victory was redoubled.

Though the enemy had failed, he had by no means come to the end of his tether. Before the month of May was out he had begun another thrust, which carried him to the right bank of the Marne and gave him ground over which he had advanced and retired as far back as September 1914. We shall read the story of this great but unavailing onset in later chapters.



Caught by the Tide of War : French Refugees from the Lost Villages.

(From the picture by F. Matania. By permission of The Sphere.)

Homeless, in many cases for the second time, whole families were adrift on the crowded roads seeking refuge from the German guns, and sturdy British soldiers frequently gave a lift to the tired children and their mothers.

* * * * * * *

You will be interested to read the letter which the Queen sent to our soldiers during the days of their terrible ordeal. It runs as follows :—

“ To the Men of our Navy, Army, and Air Force.

“ I send this message to tell every man how much we, the women of the British Empire at home, watch and pray for you during the long hours of these days of stress and endurance.

“ Our pride in you is immeasurable, our hope unbounded, our trust absolute. You are fighting in the cause of Righteousness and Freedom; fighting to defend the children and women of our land from the horrors that have overtaken other countries; fighting for our very existence as a People at Home and Across the Seas. You are offering your all. You hold back nothing, and day by day you show a love so great that no man can have greater.

“ We, on our part, send forth, with full hearts and unfaltering will, the lives we hold most dear.

“ We, too, are striving in all ways possible to make the war victorious. I know that I am expressing what is felt by thousands of wives and mothers when I say that we are determined to help one another in keeping your homes ready against your glad home-coming.

“ In God's Name we bless you, and by His Help we, too, will do our best.”

To this noble and heartfelt letter Sir Douglas Haig responded in the name of the Army :—

“ The message which your Majesty has sent to the Army and the Air Force, in the name of the women of the British Empire, will inspire with new strength and fresh determination all those brave men from every part of our Empire who, on the battlefields of France and Flanders, are fighting so gallantly for all that they hold most dear. They who with their own eyes daily see women and children homeless, once peaceful villages and towns once prosperous ruined and in flames, are resolved that, come what may, their own loved ones and homes shall not share that suffering.

“ No peril can be too great, no sacrifice too extreme, to save their country from such a fate. Side by side with our gallant Allies, whose wrong we feel as our own, and as our own are determined to set right, we will persevere in the fight against all odds until victory is at last achieved. In this great struggle we are heartened by the love and confidence of the women of the British Empire, to which your Majesty's most gracious message has given such moving expression.”

* * * * * * *

I will conclude this chapter by telling you a strange story. On the Mont de Cats, which looks across to Kemmel and Bailleul, is a great monastery of Trappist monks, so called because the order to which they belong was founded at a place called

La Trappe, in Normandy. The rule of the order is very severe. The monks cut themselves off from all intercourse with the world, and impose upon themselves a vow of perpetual silence. To this monastery, in the autumn of 1914, came a column of German cavalry. The officer in command kicked open the door of the chapel, and, revolver in hand, looked within. He saw the monks at their prayers, and he observed that not a head was turned at his coming. Impressed by the sight, he strode away, and all that the monks heard was his heavy foot-fall and the clinking of his spurs as he crossed the flagstones. Other bodies of Germans passed; some of them behaved civilly, others in the usual boorish manner. One night, when the enemy had been driven down to Meteren, they left behind them a wounded boy officer, with many ribbons on his breast. He was Prince Max of Hesse, a cousin of the Kaiser. The abbot of the monastery tended him in his last hours, and ere the prince breathed his last he thanked his host for his courtesy, and sent messages to his own people.

That night his body was carried down into the valley, and was buried secretly by the village priest. Some time afterwards the Kaiser sent word to the priest, desiring to know the whereabouts of his cousin's grave. To this message the brave priest replied, "Tell the Kaiser that I will let him know the prince's burial-place when there are no more German soldiers in Belgium, and when restitution is made for the crimes committed against our people."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE THIRD GERMAN OFFENSIVE.

AFTER the heavy defeat which the Germans sustained in Flanders on 29th April a lull of a full month set in. During this time they were making preparations for their third great thrust. Before I proceed to describe the fighting which began on 27th March, let me remind you once more that owing to the collapse of Russia the enemy was able to reinforce his troops upon the Western front, and mass against the Allies far more men than they could put into the field. All these troops belonged to the same nation, and therefore they formed a much more united and solid force than that of the Allies. They were Germans all, while on the Allied side troops of a score or more nations fought together—Englishmen, Scotsmen, Irishmen, Frenchmen, Americans, Portuguese, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans, Algerians, Senegambians, and so on: men of widely different race, language, and colour. You can easily understand that the Germans were at a great advantage in having armies composed of men of one nation, speaking the same language, living in the same land under the same government, and having the same general aims and ideas.

In addition to this advantage and to that of superior numbers, they were in a better geographical position than the Allies for taking the offensive. They held what are called the interior lines—that is, they were on the inside of a crescent-shaped front, while the Allies were outside. Roughly speaking, their front from the North Sea to the Vosges resembled the letter **D** turned the wrong way about. Along the upright of the **D** the Germans could mass their troops and send them rapidly to any part of the line which they wished to attack. In order to meet

them the Allies would have to convey their troops round the bulge.

There was still another advantage on which the enemy could count. He had discovered a method of collecting troops for an attack in such a way that they were hidden from the eyes of our airmen. When the attacking forces were secretly assembled in villages thirty or forty miles behind the firing line, the Germans, by means of their excellent system of railways, could keep up a continual flood of troops upon the sector marked out for attack. They could thus begin the battle with a certain number of divisions, and while the Allies were in doubt as to whether the attack was real or only a feint, they could send through the night darkened train after darkened train full of soldiers to the desired places, and as the trains arrived march the men on to the battlefield. In this way they were able to surprise us. They had done so twice already; in the thrust which I am about to describe they surprised us a third time. They attacked in deep, dense masses, so that the force of the blow could be sustained by continual pressure from the rear; and they trained their artillerymen to bring up light pieces and use them almost as part of the infantry.

The first blow was struck on a fifty-mile front, from the Vimy Ridge to the Oise; the second, between La Bassée and Armentières, afterwards extending into Flanders; and the third, between Soissons and Rheims. Perhaps you think that by thus striking blows at widely separated parts of the Allied lines there was no method in the German madness, but you will soon discover your mistake. The enemy argued somewhat as follows: "I have more men than the Allies; I hold the interior lines, and I can strike when and where I please. My armies are composed of men of one nation, controlled by one mind, and I can take my foes by surprise. My best plan is to strike heavily, first at this sector and then at that, a considerable distance away from the former sector. I may not be able to separate the Allied armies, but I shall, in time, break down their defensive system, force them to use up their reserves, and by hitting them constant blows where they least expect them, shake their confidence and break down their determination. By smashing their defensive systems I shall drive them from their trenches and make them fight in the open, where my masses of men can overwhelm them. While doing this I shall keep a large striking



How the British helped to

When the third German offensive opened, the British troops in the line before Rheims were stationed full strength by fresh drafts of young troops from home. The Germans attacked in overwhelming strength for the Aisne. Owing to the nature of the fighting, many small parties of our infantry were cut



hold the Line before Rheims.

[By permission of The Graphic.

on both sides of Craonne. Among them was the 50th Division, which had been recently brought up to strength, and used no fewer than a hundred Tanks. Resorting largely to outflanking tactics, they moved off. The above illustration shows such a party, surrounded but making a determined stand.

force ready to fling against any part of the line where I see a promising opening. I must do all this very quickly, for I have only a few months at my disposal. The Americans are arriving fast, and before the campaigning season is over they will probably be in such force that the scale will be turned against me. So my plan is to strike hard and often at widely separated parts of the line, and wherever I see an opening, push heavy forces against it with the utmost speed."

Now it was just this policy which had succeeded against the Russians. You will remember that the Germans broke through on the Donajetz in 1915, and forced the Russians to make a long and costly retreat. Against the ever-withdrawing battle-front the Germans struck blow after blow, and created salient after salient, which they attempted to cut off. They did not succeed in destroying the Russian armies, but they subjected them to such a terrible strain that the Russian soldiers lost heart, and were no longer keen for the fight. In the end, as you know, they went all to pieces. This result the Germans hoped to accomplish in the West. They believed that repeated blows at different sections of the line would weary and dishearten the Allies, and reduce them to such a condition that they would no longer be able to make an effective resistance.

* * * * *

I need not trouble you with an account of the Aisne front upon which the Germans launched their third great attack on 27th May. You will find a full description of it on pages 248-249 of our second volume. On 27th May two armies belonging to the Crown Prince's command were set in motion. One of these armies, the Seventh, under General von Boehm, was assembled in the wooded country north of the Ailette, to which, you will remember, the French withdrew in April. This army was to attack the Ladies' Road between Pinon and Craonne. (See diagram on page 98, Vol. VIII.) On the left of this army lay the First German Army, extending to beyond Rheims. Both armies had been strongly reinforced from the troops with which von Hutier had made his great drive. In all, some forty divisions were detailed for the attack, and on the third day of the battle five more divisions were thrown into the fight.

The long, narrow-topped ridge known as the Ladies' Road is very familiar to you. It is a mere riband of shell-torn sand,

in places only about two hundred yards across, and nowhere more than one thousand yards wide. On either side the ground drops so sharply that infantry half-way up the slope are fairly safe from artillery fire. On the other hand, the defenders of the ridge have no room to manœuvre, and they cannot retreat even for a short distance without losing the crest. I need not remind you of the terrible struggles which have taken place along this famous highway. It is one of the most blood-sodden battlegrounds in all the world. Generals Haig and Smith-Dorrien vainly strove to scale it; but the French bluecoats, creeping forward inch by inch, managed to gain a footing on it in the year 1917. You have not forgotten, I am sure, the terrible scenes which took place at the Dragon's Cave, Malmaison Fort, and the Montparnasse Quarry.*

In the Forest of Pinon the trenches lay on the hills, for most of the ground was too marshy for entrenchments. In this section each side had built blockhouses, and from these they constantly made raids on each other. The kind of fighting that went on resembled frontier warfare in an unsettled country.

At 4 a.m. on the morning of 27th May the enemy flung a terrible barrage, two miles deep, of high-explosive and gas shells, which filled the emplacements of the guns with poisonous vapour, against the six divisions holding the line from the Forest of Pinon to Craonne. The defenders could make no stand against the masses of Germans in gas masks, who soon bore down upon them behind the cover of artificial smoke clouds. They were speedily broken up into groups, fighting to the bitter end in scraps of trench, quarries, or dug-outs. Many of them preferred to die rather than surrender. The battalions holding the Pinon Forest in the valley north of the Ladies' Road could neither be relieved nor reinforced. From the first their position was hopeless. They sent off a carrier pigeon with a message stating that they had fortified themselves as best they could, and would fight to the last. They must have held out for some forty-eight hours, for a second message was received from them at two o'clock in the afternoon of Tuesday.

The Ladies' Road was now lost, but a stubborn stand was made between Craonne and Berry-au-Bac, where four British divisions—the 8th, 21st, 50th, and 25th—were holding the line.

* See Vol. VIII., Chapter IX.

These four divisions had fought almost continuously for two months in Picardy and Flanders, and had been sent to the Rheims sector for a rest. A certain proportion of them were new drafts, young soldiers without any experience of heavy fighting; nevertheless, as we shall see, they fought like veterans, and in every way proved themselves true Britons of the old dogged breed. Against these weary men—reinforced by untried youngsters from the Home Counties—the Germans flung some twenty-five divisions, supported by some fifteen other divisions in reserve, and by a hundred Tanks, the largest fleet which they had so far sent into action. The rolling plain of Champagne was excellent ground for the advance of these monsters. On Sunday evening our men “stood to” in expectation of an attack, and at one in the morning the bombardment began. It is said that the Kaiser was early on the scene, and that he took up his station in a tower from which he could see the swelling Aisne region and the progress of his troops.

The brunt of the attack fell on the 50th Division, holding the left end of the line. Upon this division the bombardment was heaviest, and against it the enemy sent overwhelming numbers. Our men held on until they were submerged by the gray-green avalanche, and then were forced to retire to their second line. The same fate overtook the French division on the crest to their right, and it, too, was forced to retire. Never for more than a moment, however, did these two divisions lose touch with each other as they retreated towards the river. They were harassed by many low-flying aeroplanes, which swooped down upon them with bombs, and by a withering fire of bullets from machine guns.

The enemy pushed rapidly through Craonne, and made for the bridgeheads on the Aisne. According to their custom, they trickled past the groups of defenders, and cut off many small parties. Meanwhile an attempt was made to blow up the Aisne bridges, but so rapid was the enemy advance that all of them could not be destroyed. Unhappily, some of our officers lost their lives as one of the bridges was blown into the air. Those of our men who made their way to the river found the Germans there before them. The Aisne Canal, which runs parallel with the river, proved a serious obstacle to some of them: they were trapped, and many fell or were forced to surrender. A British-French convoy reached at Maizy the bridge which had not been

destroyed, only to find it in the hands of three or four hundred Germans.

Now I must interrupt my narrative to describe the heroism of a British gunner, and another incident of interest. When the Germans drove down upon his battery he made a dash for the canal, dragging along with him a wounded comrade. He looked about for a means of crossing the water, and saw a boat on the other side. Placing his wounded friend in a bit of cover on the bank, he swam across and brought back the boat under heavy fire. He then helped his wounded friend into it, and some thirty other men swarmed on board. Then began a most tragic passage. Before the other side was reached twenty-nine out of the thirty had been killed; only the heroic gunner, his wounded friend, and another man remained alive. When the boat touched the farther shore their adventures were by no means at an end. Between the canal and the river stretched a small strip of land, crossed and recrossed by barbed wire. The gunner dragged his comrade through the wire, waded with him through the river with the water up to his neck, and finally found safety in a wood. Later on this hero handed over his charge to a field ambulance.

A British motor ambulance convoy of five cars had an exciting adventure while retiring with wounded officers and men. A German patrol suddenly appeared in front of it, and the ambulances were forced to turn right about and return. As they rushed at top speed through the German lines they came to a steep hill. This delayed them, and the Germans nearly caught them up. In the very nick of time, however, some French infantry appeared, and the enemy made off. The ambulances then whirled about, and managed to reach their hospital safely.

During the retreat the roads were thronged with transport of every description, and with long lines of villagers carrying with them such household possessions as they were loath to leave behind. A large number of these poor creatures were stopped by the Germans at Maizy, and were forced to return.

By the morning of the 28th the Allied line had been pushed back beyond the Aisne. Our men and the French were now on what is known as the Tardenois plateau, the watershed between the Aisne and the Marne. It is broken country, not too well provided with roads, and open in the centre—a region of scattered hamlets, large farms, and deep, winding valleys. The



General Henri Joseph Eugene Gouraud.

(French official photograph.)

Known as the "Lion of the Argonne" because of his brilliant work in that region in the early months of the war. He commanded the troops holding the line round Rheims. Further details of his career are given on page 292.

Upper Ourcq flows through it on the western side, where there are a number of great woods, the largest of them being the Forest of Villers-Cotterets. On the south it is bounded by the broad valley of the Marne, which, unlike the Oise, flows through hard, firm ground. On the northern bank overlooking the flat river plain are a series of heights which give a great advantage to an enemy advancing from the north.

To those of our men who wore the Mons ribbon the western side of the Tardenois plateau was very familiar. During the retreat our troops marched through the Forest of Villers-Cotterets towards the Marne. At Néry, south of the Forest, L Battery won undying fame; and in the same neighbourhood the 4th German Cavalry Brigade was driven back in rout, leaving eight guns in our hands. In the Forest the Irish Guards, for the first time in their history, engaged in serious fighting.

On the 28th the Germans continued their drive towards the south and south-west. There was fierce fighting between the Aisne and its tributary the Vesle,* and the latter stream was crossed in the neighbourhood of Bazoches and Fismes.† At Fismes a British cyclist battalion earned great praise for its dogged resistance. During the retreat French and British were frequently swept together, and fought side by side. In a wood south of the Aisne, for example, a brigade of one of our divisions linked up with part of a French Territorial regiment, composed of men between forty-five and fifty years of age. Young Britons and elderly Frenchmen, shoulder to shoulder, fought to the last. Of the British practically none escaped. The French Territorials who survived were filled with admiration for the heroism of their young allies. It was noticed that on the roads leading to the rear French and British who were wounded but able to walk helped each other along in perfect comradeship.

* Pron. *vale*.

† Pron. *feem*.

CHAPTER XXXII.

TOWARDS THE MARNE.

AT the close of 28th May the Germans summed up the results of the two days' battle. They claimed that the attack of the German Crown Prince to the south of Laon on the 27th led to a complete success. They said that the French and British divisions there stationed were completely defeated. The Ladies' Road had been carried by storm, and after a tremendous bombardment "our incomparable infantry" at daybreak completely took the enemy by surprise between Vauxillon and Craonne. The Allies, so we are told, offered only a slight resistance, and towards the afternoon, amidst steady fighting, the Aisne was reached between Vailly and Berry-au-Bac. In the afternoon the Aisne was crossed, and the battle was carried into the area which had remained untouched by the war since 1914. The Allies were driven from the fortified wooded heights on the southern bank of the Vesle, and at the close of the day the Germans had captured the southern bank on both sides of Fismes. Some 15,000 prisoners had been taken.

An eleven-mile advance had thus been made, and Soissons had been entered. The old city, with its famous cathedral and great stone mansions, had been fiercely bombarded. On Monday some 1,200 high-explosive and fire-raising shells had been hurled on the place, and now it was a mass of smoking ruins. The French defending the town were worn out with thirty hours of unceasing combat, and were forced to retire to the hills to the west. The Germans, however, could not emerge from the town; for French guns were trained upon it, and every time their troops attempted to leave it they were swept away. Meanwhile, on the Allied right to the north-west of



Panorama from above Château-Thierry showing the Tardenois Plateau.
 (By permission of *The Sphere*.)

Rheims, a strong stand was being made by the British. It is most important to note that this resistance on the right, along with that made by the French holding the heights immediately to the west of Soissons, proved the salvation of the Allies and the undoing of the Germans.

Four hundred thousand Germans were now overrunning the Tardenois plateau. Look at the map on page 284, and find the little town of Fère-en-Tardenois. You observe that it stands on the Upper Ourcq, and on the railway running from the valley of that river through Fismes to Rheims. It is a small country town with an interesting church and a tenth century castle picturesquely perched on a hill. Its main interest for us, however, lies in the fact that it is the junction of many roads, and that the Germans, making for the Marne, intended it to be their main centre of supply.

On Wednesday morning the enemy's advance guard, supported by machine-gun sections, engineers, armoured cars, and squadrons of Uhlans, came swarming towards the town. Already German aeroplanes were flying low over the place, sweeping the streets with machine-gun fire, dropping bombs, and setting fire to the houses. The troops of a French division which had played a glorious part in the Battle of Verdun were entrusted with the task of holding up the German advance in order to prevent the retreat from becoming a rout. For sixteen hours these gallant fellows resisted the furious and ceaseless attacks of the enemy masses. Though outnumbered by eight to one, they refused to be swept aside. Meanwhile their machine guns and armoured cars played havoc with the German columns, and in this work they were assisted by French aeroplanes, which dropped bombs from a height of a hundred feet or less.

Towards midnight the Germans brought up two fresh divisions, and delivered a general attack on the town. All through the night there was desperate fighting from house to house. At dawn the street crossings were heaped with corpses, and still the enemy was not master of the place. At seven o'clock the sorely tried Frenchmen leaped forward in a counter-attack, which pushed back the Germans some five hundred yards from the entrance to the town. This heroism, however, was of no avail; for an hour later the enemy advanced again in such strength that the wearied defenders, in order to escape capture, were obliged to fall back. They left Fère in perfect order, and before

doing so destroyed everything in it that could possibly be of use to the enemy.

By the morning of Thursday German advance troops appeared on the hills above the Marne all the way from Château-Thierry to the neighbourhood of Dormans—a distance of ten miles. In seventy-two hours they had pushed forward nearly thirty miles, and had created a salient or pocket which was soon to prove a trap of their own making. Now that the Marne has again come into the picture, let me remind you that in September 1914 the Germans crossed the river, and pushed southward for more than thirty miles.

On the fourth day of the battle the pocket which the enemy had created was shaped something like the letter V. The apex of the salient lay on the Marne between Château-Thierry and Dormans; the eastern front ran north-east in front of Rheims; and the western front lay along the highroad from Soissons to Château-Thierry. The advance had been forced to take this curious shape because of the resistance made at Soissons on the west and Rheims on the east. The enemy had carried Soissons, but could not advance from it because the French were holding the heights to the west. Again and again he tried to emerge, but again and again he was driven back with heavy loss. Outside Rheims, British and French troops under General Gouraud were making a most stubborn resistance. It is true that they had to give some ground, but they kept the corner firm. Their commander was a man of rare intelligence and firm will, who had the complete confidence of his men. Before the war he had won a great reputation in French colonial expeditions. In the early days of the great struggle he commanded the Moroccans in the Argonne, and later led the French in Gallipoli, where he was wounded by a shell and lost his right arm. Afterwards he was appointed to lead the Fourth French Army.

Held at the two corners, the Germans advanced in the middle along the line of least resistance, with their faces to the Marne. They thus created a long wedge, capable of being attacked on three sides. A terrible mistake had been made, and the Allies had been afforded an opportunity of which, as you will learn, they took full advantage.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE AMERICANS AT THE MARNE.

BY Thursday, 30th May, the German High Command had discovered that the V-shaped pocket which had been created between the Aisne and the Marne was all too narrow for the safety of the troops within it. If you study the map on page 284, you will easily understand how this pocket came into being. By the evening of 28th May the Aisne had been crossed, and the German line ran from Vauxillon to the Aisne at Vailly, thence eastward to Courcy, north of Rheims. A day later it had advanced to Soissons on the west, and to just outside Rheims on the east. The resistance at these two points held up the advance at the sides, but in the centre it made great headway. The German line on 29th May sagged between Soissons and Rheims, and on the following day, when it had reached and passed Fère-en-Tardenois, it sagged still more. On the 31st, while the Allies still held the Germans in Soissons and in front of Rheims, the Marne was reached, and the salient assumed the V-shape as shown on the map.

The two pivot cities, Soissons and Rheims, have already figured many times in our pages as the scenes of struggle. Soissons, you will remember, was occupied by Sir Douglas Haig's 1st British Corps during the retreat from Mons; but was abandoned on August 29, 1914, and was then seized by the Germans. After the Battle of the Marne the pursuing French and British drove the enemy out of the city and across the Aisne. In January 1915 the Germans attacked again in this region, and won some advantage. So heavy was their artillery fire that the city was cleared of its civilian inhabitants. In March and April 1917, when the Germans were forced to retreat from the Somme, ground was gained in the neighbourhood of Soissons. After the

French successes on the Chemin des Dames in April and May of 1917, and again in October of the same year, the enemy was forced to retire still farther. While inspecting the French defences near Soissons in March 1917 von Kluck received the wound which brought his active career to an end.

You already know * that Soissons is a very ancient town which is mentioned by Cæsar, and was a Roman station of importance in the early days of the empire. Under the Franks it was the capital of Neustria. Probably no city of France has had a more warlike history. Indeed, its story is almost a continuous record of sieges. The shoemaker saint, Crispin, is said to have suffered martyrdom in Soissons in 297; and his successor, St. Sinice, is regarded as its first bishop. In 829, and again in 838, Louis the Debonair was imprisoned in the town by his undutiful sons. Its finest building is the cathedral, which dates from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. As you may imagine, it has been much damaged by gun-fire during the present war. In the Place de la République stands a monument erected to the memory of the citizens who were shot by the Germans, when, after a bombardment of four days, they captured the city in October 1870.

Rheims, the other pivot of the Allied defence, is also very familiar to you. Before the war it was a beautiful city, almost as old as France itself. Its great glory was its cathedral, which enshrined memories that French men and women will for ever hold dear. It was the Westminster Abbey of France—the coronation and burial place of kings, queens, saints, warriors, and statesmen. In front of it stood a monument to Joan of Arc, the beloved warrior-maid of France. All round the city, on the hills, are the most famous vineyards of the country. Prior to the war, the vintage time saw peasant men, women, and little children gathering the grapes, and singing and laughing as they threaded the narrow fragrant pathways between the vines.

Such happy scenes are now only memories of the past. A correspondent who visited the city towards the end of April 1918 thus describes its appearance :—

“ As I drove down the long slope from the line of hills dividing Rheims from Epernay, the sun was shining brightly on the wide green plains surrounding the town and lighting up the towers of the cathedral, which stands high above the houses and in the distance looks wonderfully like the chapel

* See page 237, Vol. II.

at Eton as one sees it from the Berkshire meadows. But that is only from far off. When you are close to it, the walls and towers are like the white bones of a skeleton, blackened here and there in disfiguring patches by the flames that long ago cracked and crumbled and ate away the glory of the western façade, through the windows of which on each side of the great rose window you look clear through at the shattered buttresses beyond.

“And yet, after all, the cathedral, like the statue of Joan of Arc in front



The Bravely-held Semicircle round Reims.

of it, which is intact except for the loss of half her sword, is still standing, and some day may even be restored to its former beauty. This time, in their fresh frenzy of fury, the German gunners managed to spare it. But the town is a town no longer. In a week's bombardment the Germans have done more damage than in the whole previous course of the war. How they contrived not to add to the ruin of the cathedral during those seven days and nights of bombardment is a mystery. The houses all round,



The Blowing up of the Old Stone Bridge

"Suddenly, while the bridge was crowded with advancing Germans, a loud roar was heard. The bridges, however, the enemy got across in great force, and the situation was most perilous. The day, points of passage, and during forty-eight hours of grave anxiety they stopped every attempt to cross."

even those like the Lion d'Or which stand not fifty yards away, are wiped out. Over 50,000 high-explosive shells and thousands of gas shells, and, worst of all, of fire-raising shells, were in that time rained upon an area round the cathedral of about three-quarters of a mile by a mile and a half. . . .

"Practically every house is a ruin, and all their contents are burned. Tottering walls, gaping windows, piles of broken bricks and masonry, and charred beams, and twisted ironwork, and broken glass, and crumbling plaster, some of them still mouldering—that is Rheims. This is what the German has left of an old historical French town, which, when war began, numbered 120,000 inhabitants. . . .

"The Germans have had their way. They have made a wilderness. They have scattered far and wide over 100,000 homeless outcasts. Of the cathedral and the Hôtel de Ville they have left only the walls standing, so



at Château-Thierry on June 1, 1918.

[By permission of *The Sphere*.

bridge had been blown up, and hundreds of men had been hurried into eternity. By means of pontoon however, was saved by the American machine gunners. In sheltered spots they commanded all the

damaged that nothing can ever restore their vanished glory. On the old foundations of the rest of the town a new one may be built; but the former things are passed away, and cannot live again. Cruelly and relentlessly they have smitten the French by defacing one of the most sacred monuments of their religion and some of their proudest memories in stone, and they have no excuse."

Into the pocket between Soissons and Rheims the enemy had thrust 400,000 men, accompanied by that host of vehicles conveying stores and ammunition without which a modern army cannot move. The consequence was that he had not sufficient space in which to manœuvre, and he needed elbow-room badly. Further, by creating this long and ever-

narrowing salient, he had exposed three flanks to the attacks of the Allies. He now might have to fight battles on three fronts, and if the salient could be pinched sufficiently, might find the greatest difficulty in withdrawing his troops without disaster.

Perhaps you wonder why the German generals took this grave risk. They had been balked at the outset by their inability to issue from Soissons and to drive back their foes in front of Rheims. They had pushed between these two places to the Marne; but they believed they could do so without danger, because they were convinced that General Foch was so weak in numbers that he could not attack the arms of the salient in any great strength. In this, as you will learn later, they were woefully mistaken. Foch had all along met their thrusts without calling upon the bulk of his reserves, and during the month of May he had received large reinforcements of Americans. Probably before the end of the month there were nearly a million Americans in France.

So far, the thrust had been to the south and the south-west. It was now time to enlarge the salient, so as to secure more elbow-room. On Thursday, 30th May, the German forces were regrouped, and during the three following days they struck westward, almost at right angles to their former direction. On that day the boundary of the western arm of the salient was the highroad from Soissons to Château-Thierry. Before the night of Sunday, 2nd June, the enemy stood in a great bow, extending from a point about four miles south of Soissons to the Marne, at Château-Thierry. Along the Ourcq they had pushed westward for nearly ten miles.

Study the little sketch map on page 311, and notice the line along which the fighting now raged. A little more than midway between Soissons and Château-Thierry you observe that the little river Ourcq runs westward, crossing the highroad almost at right angles. North of this river you notice that a large area is occupied by the Forest of Villers-Cotterets. Between the northern end of this wooded region and the Aisne at Soissons extends a high, almost treeless plateau. In front of the Forest to the east there is a long ravine with steep sides. Along the bottom of it runs the brook Savières, which unites with the Ourcq at Troesnes.* Between Soissons and the Ourcq the French had taken up a fairly strong position, but between

* Pron. *trone*.

that river and the Marne at Château-Thierry the natural features were not so favourable. The French dug their trenches on a series of low detached heights, which included Hill 163 just behind Passy, and a rather steep bank in front of Torcy.* The main fighting during the three days of the western thrust raged about the villages of Longpont, Corcy, Faverolles, Troesnes, Passy, and Torcy.

For twenty-four hours there was very fierce fighting for the possession of these villages. They were taken and retaken several times—a fact which clearly shows that the Allies were at this time bringing up their reserves. On the Saturday the French completely lost their line, but by Sunday night had recovered most of it. The Germans, however, still retained Faverolles, which stands above the deep ravine in open agricultural land just outside the forest. By 4th June they had been held on this sector, and Faverolles had been recovered.

Now while the Allies are engaged in building up their defensive wall on the west, let us see what was happening at the Marne. I told you in the former chapter that on the morning of Thursday, 31st May, the fourth day of the battle, the Germans appeared on the hills above the river all the way from Château-Thierry to the neighbourhood of Dormans, a distance of ten miles. On that day Americans and French colonial troops were quietly resting in billets south of Château-Thierry. They were at once called upon to defend the three-arched stone bridge which crosses the river at this point. While the American machine gunners covered the bridge, the French colonials made a dashing counter-attack, and drove the Germans back. Nevertheless, as Château-Thierry is cut in two by the river, it was decided to abandon the northern part of the town. The Americans covered the withdrawal of the French infantry with complete success.

The next day, 1st June, at nine o'clock in the evening, the Germans took advantage of the darkness to steal up to the bridge through the suburbs on the west side of the town. As they advanced they flung grenades in front of them, and created a smoke screen which completely shrouded them from view, and made machine-gun shooting very difficult. Meanwhile the town was being subjected to a very heavy bombardment. The bridge was still intact, but had been mined by French engineers,

* Pron. *torseé*.

and could be blown up any moment by the pressure of a hand upon a lever. Across the stream the enemy had flung several pontoon bridges.

The first thousand Germans poured across the stone bridge, and other columns pressed forward along the pontoon bridges. So numerous were the attackers that the Franco-Americans in the southern part of the town were very hard pressed. Suddenly, while the bridge was crowded with advancing Germans, a loud roar was heard. The bridge had been blown up, and hundreds of men had been hurried into eternity. By means of the pontoon bridges, however, the enemy got across in great force, and the situation was most perilous. The day, however, was saved by the American machine gunners. In sheltered spots they commanded all the points of passage, and during forty-eight hours of grave anxiety they stopped every attempt to cross, and prevented the enemy from repairing the old bridges and constructing new ones. The Americans fired tens of thousands of cartridges, and the German losses were very severe. A thousand dead bodies were counted by or near the wrecked stone bridge.

The French colonials were full of admiration for the coolness and courage of their American comrades. The work which they had done showed them to be allies worth having. This was the opinion of all who saw the clean, fine, healthy, and cheerful men who had now come into the war from the other side of the Atlantic. "There is not a shadow of a doubt," wrote a correspondent, "that we shall see them do great things."

Now let us move on to 1st June, when once again the Americans covered themselves with glory. If you look at the map on page 284, you will see, about eight miles to the north-east of Château-Thierry, a place called Jaulgonne. At this point the river makes a great bend northward. This bend is about three thousand yards deep by about two thousand five hundred yards across. The southern or defending side is flat, and is overlooked by high hills on the northern bank. Guns placed on these hills can sweep every part of the flat plain within the bend. Across the bend runs the main railway from Paris to the east. In the middle of it stands a railway station. You can easily understand that the enemy had a far better chance of crossing the river at Jaulgonne than at Château-Thierry.

On Monday, 3rd June, the 175th Regiment attempted to make a crossing. The defenders were ready to receive them. The Germans came down to the water's edge with narrow bridges, so made that they could be thrust forward like extensible ladders. The bridges were supported on small floats, and were sufficiently wide for two men to advance abreast. Some twenty-two of these bridges were flung across the stream. When all was ready, the guns on the northern heights began a heavy bombardment, and a battalion was sent across to form a bridgehead in the station. The battalion crossed the river, gained the horseshoe flat, and at once garrisoned the station with machine guns. Under the cover of rapid fire from this fortified bridgehead it was hoped that the remainder of the regiment would be enabled to get across.

At once the French organized a counter-attack. The only troops available were cavalry, who attempted to rush the station, but were badly cut up by the machine-gun fire of the defenders. A small body of French infantry now tried to work round the station on the right, but it, too, was held up. At this moment a company of American machine gunners arrived. The German fire was mastered, and as it died down the French infantry advanced and captured the bridgehead. Of the thousand men or more who had already crossed the river not more than sixty or seventy survived. A few managed to escape by swimming, and two boatloads reached the northern bank without being sunk. Over a hundred men surrendered. The attempt to establish a bridgehead south of the Marne had failed, and again the Americans had come to the rescue of their French brothers-in-arms.

* * * * *

Before I pass on to describe two other incidents of American pluck and promise, let me remark that the Marne is a name of ill omen to the Germans. You have not forgotten that the first great check which the Germans suffered occurred on the Marne during September 1914. The enemy came sweeping on, driving the Allies before him. They retreated some thirty miles beyond the river, and there knitted up their lines anew. Then it was that von Kluck made the mistake which altered the whole face of the campaign, and led to the long trench warfare which you have followed through so many pages. The Germans thought that the main Allied strength lay in the east of France. They therefore left their western flank open, and began a

diagonal march across the French and British front. The Allies at once moved forward, and engaged von Kluck's forces in front, while a new French army thrust at his flank. The consequence was that the whole German line was forced to retreat to the Aisne and on the heights north of that river dig in. At the Marne, in the year 1914, the enemy had met with disaster ; even in the early days of June 1918 it was apparent that once again he would suffer defeat at the same river.

* * * * *

On 29th May the news arrived that the Americans had won a small but useful victory at Cantigny, a little town north-west of Montdidier. Again our gallant allies had given proof of their mettle as cool and steady fighters. Early on Tuesday morning, 28th May, our batteries began to smother those of the enemy. After half an hour of this counter-battery work, a bombardment of the German trenches began, and continued for an hour. Then at 6.45 the Americans, on a front of one and a half miles, sprang from their trenches and, under the protection of a rolling barrage, advanced in two steady waves. In the wake of twelve Tanks they crossed No Man's Land for nearly a mile in exactly forty minutes. When the town was reached there were some sharp hand-to-hand encounters ; 250 dead were counted, and about 200 prisoners, including five German officers, were taken.

A third example of American prowess occurred at Torcy on Thursday, 6th June. Before I describe this affair let me sum up the main incidents on the Oise-Marne front from 4th June onward. It was on that day that the reinforcements of the Allies began to tell and the tide began to turn. The three areas of violent fighting were west of Soissons and north and south of the Ourcq. Between the Oise and Soissons the enemy made furious attempts to capture Choisy Hill, which lies five miles south-east of Noyon, on the edge of Carlepont Wood. Five times the hill was taken and retaken, and finally it remained in the hands of the French.

Upon the high, treeless plateaus, some six or seven miles wide, that stretch down to the Forest of Villers-Cotterets, the enemy strove hard to push his line westward, and at the same time to break into or get round the Forest. The importance of the village of Villers-Cotterets to the enemy was that the road and railway from Soissons to Paris both passed through it.



The Fatal Marne : the Germans' Second Crossing of the River.
(From the picture by F. Matania. By permission of The Sphere.)

At Faverolles the Germans were but five miles from the village, but those five miles they never covered.

The first phase of the battle may be said to have ended on the evening of 4th June. According to his custom, the enemy summed up the results of his great effort. He claimed 55,000 prisoners and 650 pieces of artillery. On the 6th the Allies began to get the upper hand. On the east of the salient the village of Bligny, which had been lost, was recaptured and partly occupied by the British 19th Division, composed chiefly of western county and Welsh troops. An enemy attempt on Champlat, to the south of Bligny, was completely broken.

It was on the other side of the salient that the Americans won their success. At the Marne their machine gunners had done the work; at Torcy, some seven miles north-west of Château-Thierry, their infantry proved themselves soldiers of dash and courage. They advanced with steady coolness down the steep bank which I have already mentioned, and pushed through small woods for nearly a mile. On that day the whole Allied line advanced to the outskirts of Château-Thierry. French and Americans fought side by side in capturing the height known as Hill 204 above the old town.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE FOURTH GERMAN BLOW.

ON the evening of 8th June, the thirteenth day of the battle and the fourth of the Allied advance, the situation was somewhat as follows. The enemy had striven in vain to cross the Oise east of Sempigny; the hill of Choisy overlooking the Oise valley was once more in French hands. From this hill to the Aisne, west of Soissons and then across the high tableland to the Forest of Villers-Cotterets, and along the ravine of Savières to the Ourcq, the enemy had been firmly held. South of the Ourcq, between that river and Château-Thierry, good advances had been made. Along the Marne past Jaulgonne to Verneuil the Germans had been foiled in their attempts to cross the river. From Verneuil the line ran north-east past Champlatt, where an enemy attack had been broken, and past Bligny, which had been recovered, to Rheims. It then turned backward to cover the great forest and hill group known as the "Mountain of Rheims." The French defences were close to the town on every side, but over the ruins of the ancient city the tricolour still flew.

In the former chapter I brought down the story of the third great German attack to the evening of Sunday, 8th June. Next morning a fourth offensive was begun. If you follow the Allied line northward from Soissons, you will notice that on 8th June it reached the Oise at Choisy Hill and then ran westward past Noyon and Lassigny to Montdidier. This stretch of front gave the Germans a flank on the Allied left. They had, as you know, struggled to push back the sides of the pocket in which they were entrapped; but had failed to win any ground on the eastern side, and only some ten miles at its greatest depth on the western side. They were extremely



Union and Strength: a Composite Column of British and French Infantry on the March.

(By permission of *The Illustrated London News*.)

uncomfortable inside the salient, for they had to wage battle on three fronts ; and in such a narrow stretch of country there were bound to be the utmost difficulty and confusion in supplying each of these fronts with ammunition, stores, and food. It was essential to their safety that they should gain more elbow-room.

They had failed to win this elbow-room by pushes from within the salient, and now they set themselves the task of attempting to force back the western arm by outflanking it. Look at the map, and notice that if they could push southward from Lassigny they would take the Allied line in the rear. If the movement should prove successful, the Allies would be forced to retire beyond the Oise, perhaps to the railway line which runs from Amiens to Meaux. This would mean an Allied retreat of forty-five miles behind the Forest of Villers-Cotterets, and complete security for the Germans. No longer would they be in a pocket, but in occupation of a great stretch of country seventy or more miles across.

In order to understand how the outflanking movement, which began in the early morning of 9th June, came to naught, we must study the ground between the Oise at Sempigny and Montdidier. The front between these two places is divided into two almost equal parts by the valley of a little river called the Matz, which falls into the Oise. (See p. 308.) You will gather from the map that away to the west of this stream extend rolling fields and plough land studded by small woods, but having no hills of any importance. The ten-mile section eastward to Sempigny, however, is quite of a different character. On the map you see an irregular group of heights known as the Hills of Lassigny : they take their name from the little town about two miles to the north. These hills form a body of high land rising nearly six hundred feet above sea level, and about four hundred feet above the surface of the water in the Matz river. They are everywhere clothed with woods, especially on their northward slopes, and form a very strong line of defence.

For the greater part of their length they show a ridge which rises higher as one travels from east to west. Near the Matz valley, however, they break off into a separate wooded hill only about three hundred feet above the level of the river. Between this hill and the main mass of high land runs a valley 150 feet deep : it may be called the Valley of Gury, from the name of

the village at its northern end. This valley leads to Reissons, on the Matz river. A thrust along the valley of the Matz and through the valley of Gury would turn the Lassigny hills and enable the enemy to advance towards the Oise in the direction of Compiègne. From captured documents it was clear that Compiègne was his objective. If he could succeed, he would be behind the Allied line between Noyon and Soissons, and would force the troops holding that line to retire.

Now let us see what happened. At midnight on 8th June the Germans opened a heavy bombardment all along the Allied line from Montdidier to Noyon. Gas shells in great numbers were hurled on the trenches and far into the rear. It was clear that an infantry attack was about to be launched. At 4.30 a.m. on the 9th some twelve divisions, with as many more divisions in reserve, began to advance. The French artillery replied



with strong counter-fire, but the infantry were forced to give ground. The whole countryside was shrouded in poison gas, and even in their masks our Allies could not stand firm.

The attack on the Noyon-Montdidier front was no surprise. Any one could see by studying the map that, sooner or later, a blow would be struck on this front. The French were fully prepared; and when the German storm troops advanced, they had to meet a volume of fire very different from that which greeted them during the surprise in front of St. Quentin, on the Lys, and along the Chemin des Dames. The French gunners had thoroughly studied the ground, and were ready to deluge every path of approach with deadly fire.

All the main positions, from close to Montdidier down to the valley of the Matz, withstood the shock; but in the centre, along the valley of that river, the enemy pushed as far as Reissons.

Gury was taken, and the hill between the village and the river ; but the frontal attacks on the heights to the east failed everywhere. Such was the position at the close of thirty hours' fighting. By Monday night the whole group of heights had been turned. The French, however, were fighting with great stubbornness, and were still holding out on the flanks. On the left, at Courcelles, a splendid defence was made ; and a dogged resistance was also being maintained close to Noyon, where Mont Renaud, the scene of so much French heroism in the earlier struggles, was still in the hands of our gallant Allies. All along the front, according to a French officer, the opposing armies were fighting like dogs at close grips with each other.

Let me describe the defence of Courcelles, where the Germans had to pay a terrible toll for the ground which they gained. This village lies astride the main road about two miles in front of the railway from Montdidier to the south, and about nine miles north-west of Ressons. Taking advantage of the cover afforded by broad fields of well-grown wheat, the Germans came up the slope and rushed the village. At 9.5 a.m. the French re-formed, and retook the place, capturing 200 men and four officers. Later, a new wave rushed down upon the village from the north, but was flung back. Some of the storm troops, however, worked round by the rear, but they too were driven off. Several hours passed, during which the French prepared the three streets of broken houses to stand a siege. Then at 3 p.m. came a fresh attack, which also failed. Later in the day the Germans pushed into Belloy and Méry, two villages to the south, and thus beset Courcelles on three sides. The road to the west alone was open, and by that road alone could reinforcements arrive. The defenders determined that, come what might, they would not give up the village. Before long a rain of shells began to fall. When it ceased, the French came out of their dug-outs, ready to repel the infantry assaults. The first was checked at the barbed wire ; during the other three, some Germans got into the village, but were hurled out again.

It was the Eighteenth German Army which made the disastrous offensive which I am describing. After forty-eight hours of furious fighting its centre had reached the Matz, a distance of eight miles from its starting-point. The defence on the wings had produced on a small scale the pocket-like salient which had been created between the Aisne and the

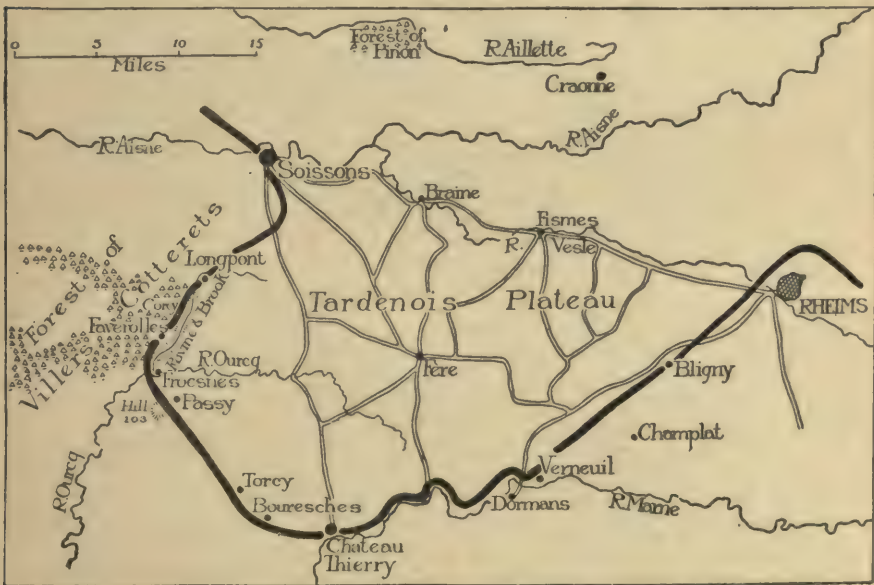
Marne. As, however, its base was narrow, and was commanded by French guns, it could only be pushed deeper at a very heavy cost indeed. By the 10th the German losses were so great that von Hutier had to borrow four divisions from the army of Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria. This new thrust forced the French centre back, and the Germans pushed on until they were only six miles from Compiègne.

Meanwhile on the left the French commander had prepared a strong counterstroke. Late on Monday evening, the 10th June, the village of Méry was retaken; and early the next morning the French advanced from Rubescourt, some three miles south of Montdidier, to St. Maur, on a front of about seven miles. Two specially chosen divisions were launched against the plateau of Méry. Before the order to march was given the army commander addressed the men, pointing out the importance of their task, and begging them to do their utmost. For a quarter of an hour the Germans were bombarded, and then Tanks and infantry went forward in alternate lines. An officer said that the Tanks, rolling over the green wheatfields while shells burst about them, resembled ships engaged in a battle at sea. Allied airmen who accompanied the advance continually swooped down on the Germans, dropping bombs and raking them with machine-gun fire. In several cases they attacked enemy batteries, and by killing their crews put the guns out of action. The result was that the Germans were forced back from Courcelles and St. Maur, and that the plateau of Méry was recaptured. Enemy counter-attacks were made in vain, and nearly two thousand prisoners and twenty-one guns fell into the hands of the French. Thus the enemy was driven back along the whole central front to the line from which he had started. On his left, however, he was able to enlarge the salient, and the French were forced to fall back behind Rubescourt, which stands on the Oise about eight miles east of Reims. A sharp and dangerous angle had now been formed between the new line and Noyon, and this the French quietly abandoned on the night of the 10th-11th June.

On the 12th and 13th neither side could make any headway. The Germans fought fiercely, but all to no purpose. To relieve von Hutier, von Boehm's army was flung against the French line to the west of Soissons. Some progress was made, though every yard was stubbornly contested, and the enemy reached

the northern end of the Forest of Villers-Cotterets, where at last his progress was stayed. By 14th June the fourth great German drive of 1918 had come to an end. Von Hutier, with the picked storming army of Germany, had failed, and his forces had suffered frightful slaughter.

Before I close this chapter let me describe the German failure to capture Rheims. You will remember that a strong defence had been made all along the eastern arm of the salient. The fact was that the natural features of this sector gave the defenders several marked advantages. A writer says: "You can walk



The French Counterstroke.

from Château-Thierry to Rheims and spend more than half your time in the depths of great woods and forests, the chief of which is that vast Forest of Rheims which covers the group of hills known as the Mountain of Rheims. Everywhere along the battle-front from Rheims to Château-Thierry you find these woods present. The gaps between them are the opportunities for an enemy's advance, but the woods themselves are formidable obstacles." You know how gallantly this western arm was held, and you have not forgotten, I am sure, that British troops were prominent in its defence. While the fourth offensive was



Franco-British Co-operation on the Marne:



the Same Aim, the Same Heroism as in 1914.

[By permission of The Graphic.]

in progress, the Germans thought that the Allied line around Rheims had been weakened by the reinforcements which had been sent to assist General Fayolle on the Noyon-Montdidier front. They therefore decided to make a determined attempt to capture Rheims. The possession of this heap of ruins could not possibly bring victory an inch nearer; but its capture would hearten the civilian population of Germany, then badly in need of encouragement.

On the evening of 18th-19th June the French line from Vrigny, west of Rheims, to Fort la Pompelle and Sillery on the south-east, was fiercely assailed. A violent bombardment began along the whole line at about six in the evening, and was continued for three hours, when the infantry waves began to advance. At most points they were met with a withering fire which completely shattered them, and even prevented them, between Vrigny and Ormes, from reaching the French trenches. In the centre three divisions advanced directly against the ruined city; but after fierce fighting they too were repulsed. Only on the extreme right did they gain a trifling success by pushing into the Wood of the Zouaves, north-east of Sillery.

So far, the German offensives of 1918 had everywhere failed to achieve their object. At the cost of some 750,000 casualties the enemy had thrust at Amiens, but had not been able to reach it; he had endeavoured to break through to the Channel ports, but in vain; and had attempted to cross the Marne, only to be driven back. As a result of this great offensive the Germans had placed themselves in such a position that a costly retirement could alone save them from destruction.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE BRAVEST OF THE BRAVE.—I.

*"The gorse upon the twilit down,
The English loam so sunset brown,
The bowed pines and the sheep-bell's clamour,
The wet, lit lane and the yellow-hammer,
The orchard and the chaffinch song,
Only to the Brave belong ;
And he shall lose their joy for ay,
If their price he cannot pay."*

ONCE again I turn to the task of setting before you the tale of those supremely brave men whose deeds of daring and endurance were honoured with the little bronze cross that every soldier covets in his dreams of glory. Many times in these pages, while recounting heroisms which move us to admiration and gratitude, I have reminded you that numbers of men worthy of the proudest distinction went down to their graves "unhonoured and unsung." Indeed, amongst the British soldiers who fought in the Great War it would be hard to find a man incapable of rising to the highest level of courage and devotion. We may say of them as Homer said of his heroic countrymen: "But the common sort could I not number nor name; nay, not if ten tongues were mine and ten mouths and a voice unwearied, and my heart of bronze within me."

In this chapter I propose to tell you the stories of those heroes who won the Victoria Cross during the months of June and July 1918. They number thirty-four, and most of them did desperate deeds of heroism during the mighty onsets which the Germans made upon us, in the hope of overwhelming our forces before the Americans could bring us that assistance which would assuredly give us victory. The list also includes

a chaplain and six of the noble fellows who showed the most magnificent courage during the daring raid which bottled up Zeebrugge harbour.

The first name on my list is that of

CAPTAIN ERIC STUART DOUGALL, M.C., R.F.A.

This gallant officer kept his guns in action for many hours, in spite of the high-explosive shells that continually fell around his battery, and of poison gas that made the air deadly. When our infantry line had to fall back to a crest, Captain Dougall was unable to fire upon the enemy without running the risk of destroying his comrades. He therefore ran his guns up to a ridge from which he could open fire with open sights. Shortly afterwards our hard-pressed men had to fall back in line with his guns. When this happened, the gallant captain took command—rallied and organized the retreating troops, supplied them with Lewis guns, and stiffened the ranks with all the gunners whom he could spare. With this motley array he formed a line in front of his battery, which never ceased to harass the advancing enemy with rapid fire. Despite the bullets which swept the position, he went to and fro in the most fearless manner, calmly giving orders, and cheering every man who showed a sign of wavering. "Stick it, boys," he said. "So long as you stick to your trenches I will keep my guns here." He was as good as his word. Throughout the day he kept his guns going, and for twelve hours delayed the enemy's advance. As darkness fell his ammunition became exhausted, and a message was received ordering the battery to withdraw. His wearied men hauled the guns for 800 yards over ground so deeply pitted with craters that the feat seemed impossible, and all the time machine guns were raking them. But for the skilful leadership and unflinching courage and cheerfulness of Captain Dougall, a serious breach would have been made in our line. Four days later, while directing the fire of his battery, this magnificent soldier was killed.

SECOND-LIEUTENANT ERNEST FREDERICK BEAL, Yorkshire Regiment.

Lieutenant Beal was in command of a company which was ordered to occupy a certain section of trench. When his company was in possession, it was discovered that between the left flank of the company and the right flank of a neighbouring unit there was a gap of 400 yards strongly held by the



A Song from Home: in a British Hospital Train.

(By permission of The Illustrated London News.)

enemy. You can readily understand that the situation was most perilous, and that at all costs the enemy had to be cleared out of the gap. No troops were available for this purpose, so Lieutenant Beal called upon less than a dozen of his men, and led them along the trench against the enemy. Soon they reached a machine gun, which held them up. Lieutenant Beal at once sprang forward, shot down the team with his revolver, and captured the weapon. Advancing further along the trench, he discovered a second machine gun, which he dealt with in the same way. In all, he captured four guns and inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy. Later in the evening he learnt that a wounded man had been left out in the open. Scorning the danger, he went out under very heavy fire, and pushed forward close to an enemy machine gun, where his wounded comrade lay. Hoisting the man on his back, he brought him into safety. On the following morning a shell burst near this most gallant lieutenant, and he fell, never to rise again.

SECOND-LIEUTENANT CECIL LEONARD KNOX, Royal Engineers.

During a retreat it was necessary to destroy twelve bridges crossing a stream. The task was entrusted to Lieutenant Knox, who before the war was a civil engineer. Eleven of the bridges were blown up, but on the twelfth, a steel girder bridge, the time fuse failed to act. Without a moment's hesitation the gallant engineer officer ran out of cover and made his way to the bridge. He was assailed with heavy rifle and machine-gun fire; but by a miracle escaped, and, climbing under the bridge, reached the imperfect fuse. At this time the Germans were actually on the bridge. As they rushed forward he tore away the time fuse and lighted the instantaneous fuse. The bridge blew up with a roar; but, happily, the gallant engineer escaped unhurt. He had taken his life in his hand, fully realizing the risks that he ran; and I am sure you will agree that his devotion and courage had nobly won him the highest distinction which a soldier can receive.

ACTING-CORPORAL ARTHUR HENRY CROSS, Machine-Gun Corps.

Two machine guns of ours had been captured by the enemy and turned upon our men, who were suffering greatly from their fire. The position of the guns could not be ascertained, so Corporal Cross volunteered to go out and discover their

whereabouts. Armed only with a revolver, he made his way to the enemy's trench, discovered the position of the guns, and, what is more, captured them both. Seven of the enemy surrendered to him, and he forced them to carry the guns, tripods, and ammunition to our lines. This sounds like an incident from a boy's book of adventure, but it only serves to illustrate the old saying that truth is stranger than fiction. Having handed over his prisoners, he set to work, collected teams, and turned the recovered guns on the enemy. He was just in time, for the Germans were coming on in great strength. So skilfully did he post his guns, and so accurate was his firing, that every man in the advancing wave fell. The official record tells us that it is impossible to overpraise the gallantry, resource, quickness of mind, and dash of this gallant N.C.O. During four anxious and hard-fought days he displayed magnificent devotion to duty.

PRIVATE THOMAS YOUNG, Durham Light Infantry.

Private Young was a stretcher-bearer who over and over again took his life in his hands in order to succour wounded comrades. On nine different occasions he went out in front of our lines in broad daylight, and in all rescued nine men, who but for him would have died in agony. Snipers tried to "pot" him, shells burst around him, and machine guns were turned on him; but by rare good fortune he escaped injury. Those wounded men who could be brought in at once he carried or escorted to the dressing-station. Those who were bleeding to death received first aid from him out in the open. A hundred times the bullets directed against him missed by the fraction of an inch; nevertheless he worked on calmly, utterly regardless of himself, and thinking only of the sufferers. Never forget that heroism of this character is far more worthy of admiration than a sudden rush against the enemy, no matter how brilliant the result may be. For five days Private Young worked unceasingly, and managed to remove many sufferers from places to which it seemed impossible for a man to penetrate and live.

LIEUTENANT PERCY VALENTINE STORKEY, Australian Imperial Force.

When Lieutenant Storkey's platoon emerged from a wood and advanced towards the enemy's trench line, the German fire was so deadly that he found himself with only six followers. As he moved forward with this little force, a large enemy party,

from eighty to one hundred strong and armed with machine guns, was observed holding up the advance of our troops on the right. Grasping the situation in a moment, the lieutenant decided to attack the Germans from the flank and the rear. While he was moving forward he was joined by Lieutenant Lipscourt and four men. These dozen Australians fearlessly charged an enemy party seven times as strong, and by magnificent bayonet work completely overwhelmed it. About thirty were killed or wounded, while three officers, fifty men, and a machine gun were captured. Many deeds of this kind may be called "magnificent, but not war." Lieutenant Storkey's exploit was not only magnificent, but was of the highest possible value; for it removed a dangerous obstacle to the advance of our troops, and filled every man who witnessed it with a strong desire to play his part in the same heroic spirit. On countless occasions Australians were lions in the fight; but I do not think we have so far met with a case where every man proved to be more than the equal of seven Germans.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE BRAVEST OF THE BRAVE.—II.

SERGEANT ALBERT MOUNTAIN, West Yorks Regiment. Sergeant Mountain's company had hastily dug itself in on a sunken road, and was much exposed to the enemy's attack. Intense artillery fire was directed against the little company, and it was forced to leave the road and fall back; whereupon an advanced patrol of the enemy, about two hundred strong, began to push forward. Behind the patrol dense masses of Germans were seen advancing. The situation was terribly dangerous, and at all costs the enemy had to be checked. Volunteers for a counter-attack were called for. Immediately Sergeant Mountain stepped forward, and such is the force of example when a good leader is to the fore, his ten men volunteered too. Pushing forward on the flank with a Lewis gun, the sergeant enfiladed the patrol, and killed about one hundred of its members. In the meantime his companions had made a frontal attack, with the result that the patrol was broken up, and thirty prisoners were taken. Now the main body appeared; but the sergeant and his ten men stood their ground against the host, and fired so rapidly that the oncoming Germans began to waver. It was, however, quite impossible for this little band to stem the avalanche of Germans; so, forming a defensive position, the sergeant prepared to hold off the foe while his comrades retired. Actually he and four men kept no less than six hundred of the enemy at bay for half an hour. He then retired and joined his company. There was a flank post of the battalion which was "in the air." To this perilous position the sergeant made his way, and for twenty-seven hours forbade the enemy to push forward. Finally the post was surrounded, and only a few of its defenders, including the fear-

less and tireless N.C.O., fought their way back to safety. For thousands of years the Spartans who died almost to a man at Thermopylæ have been the ideal heroes of a hopeless defence. Many times during the terrible onsets of the Germans in the first half of the year 1918 our men fought and fell with an equal courage and for a far better cause than those whom the world has so long glorified in legend and song.

LIEUTENANT ALFRED CECIL HERRING, Northamptonshire Regiment.

After heavy fighting, the enemy managed to gain a position on the south bank of a canal which we were holding. Lieutenant Herring's post was cut off, and he was completely surrounded. At once he led his men in a counter-attack, and not only saved the situation, but captured twenty prisoners and six machine guns. During the following night the enemy attacked his post again and again, but every assault was beaten off. Our men were completely worn out, and many of them fell; but, thanks to the splendid spirit and undaunted cheerfulness of their lieutenant, who went to and fro amongst them, encouraging them to show "the mettle of their pastures," the position was maintained for eleven hours, and during that time the enemy could make no headway. Those eleven hours were priceless, for had the Germans been permitted to push forward unchecked, the story of a terrible disaster might have darkened these pages. The glorious heroism, skill, and spirit of the lieutenant were undoubtedly the means of saving large numbers of his retreating comrades.

PRIVATE ROBERT EDWARD CRUICKSHANK, London Regiment.

Private Cruickshank won his Cross in Palestine, crusading against the Turk. His platoon came under very heavy rifle and machine-gun fire at short range as it was descending a steep bank into a *wadi*—that is, the dry bed of a torrent. Many men were hit before the bottom of the *wadi* was reached. No sooner were the survivors of the platoon treading the bed of the stream than the commanding officer was shot dead. The sergeant took over the command, and sent off a runner to headquarters asking for support; but scarcely had he given the order when he too fell with a mortal wound. The corporal who should now have "carried on" had also been killed, and the only surviving N.C.O., a lance-corporal, took his place. Believing that the first messenger had not got through, the



American Troops charging with the cry, "Lusitania!"
(From the picture by F. Matania. By permission of The Sphere.)

lance-corporal called for a volunteer to take a second message. Private Cruickshank at once answered the call. He rushed up the steep slope, but before he reached the top was hit, and rolled back to the bottom of the *wadi*. Picking himself up, and still suffering from his wound, he made another attempt, only to be hit again. Once more he rolled down to his friends, who dressed his wounds. Then this indomitable soldier made a third rush, but once more a bullet found its billet. He was now unable to stand, and again he rolled back to the bed of the stream. So badly was he wounded that he no longer had the strength to climb the bank, and, to his deep regret, had to abandon the enterprise. He lay on the ground all day, and was a mark for snipers, who more than once hit him. Despite his sufferings, he was cheerful and uncomplaining—the very model of a British hero.

RIFLEMAN KARANBAHADUR RANA, Gurkha Rifles.

The Gurkhas, as you know, are little swarthy Highlanders of India, "blood brothers" to the men in kilts who hail from the "land of brown heath and shaggy wood." The writer of these lines well remembers seeing several Gurkha regiments in Burma, marching behind pipers playing the "Cock o' the North." No Indian soldiers compare with the Gurkhas in desperate valour and devotion to the British cause. The Gurkha whose heroism I am about to describe succeeded during an attack in creeping forward with a Lewis gun team in order to engage an enemy machine gun which was causing severe casualties in our ranks, and had been responsible for the lives of several gallant officers and men who had tried to put it out of action. No. 1 of the Lewis gun team was shot immediately he opened fire. Without a moment's delay Rifleman Karanbahadur pushed the dead body of his comrade off the gun, and kept it going. Bombs were flung at him and bullets were fired at him from both flanks; but he managed to knock out the crew of the enemy machine gun that was doing the mischief. Then he switched his weapon on to the enemy bombers and riflemen in front of him, and succeeded in silencing their fire. For the rest of the day he only ceased to send a steady stream of bullets against the enemy when his gun refused to work. With marvellous coolness he repaired the weapon on two occasions, while a score of rifles were directed at him. Thanks to his covering fire, which he maintained until the Germans were close upon

him, our men were able to make good their withdrawal. Throughout the day this Gurkha hero showed the coolest and most unflinching courage, and rejoiced that the risks he ran meant the safety of his white comrades.

CAPTAIN JULIAN ROYDS GRIBBLE, Royal Warwickshire Regiment.

The enemy was attacking in great force, and Captain Gribble, who was in command of the right company of his battalion, received orders "to hold on to the last." You know what this means: it is tantamount to a sentence of death. Hours passed, and his company, which was holding the crest of a ridge, was completely surrounded. At one period, when the remainder of the battalion on his left had been driven back to the second line of defence, he might easily have withdrawn his men. He would not, however, do so, for he meant to obey his orders to the foot of the letter. Though he was "in the air" and all hope of succour seemed vain, he sent off a runner with a message to the company on his left rear, saying that he did not intend to leave his post until headquarters commanded him to retire. Closer and closer the enemy encircled his gallant company, and when Captain Gribble was last seen he was still fighting fiercely. What afterwards became of him is not known. By his splendid grit he held back the enemy from the crest of the ridge for seven hours, and by his magnificent self-sacrifice he enabled not only the remainder of his own brigade, but another garrison and three batteries of field artillery, to be withdrawn.

CAPTAIN MANLEY ANGELL JAMES, M.C., Gloucestershire Regiment.

Another hero, who by sacrificing his life saved his fellows, now appears in our record. Captain James led his company to the attack with splendid courage and determination. He inflicted severe casualties on the enemy, and captured twenty-seven prisoners and two machine guns. During this attack he was wounded; but he refused to leave his company, and next day so inspired his men that they beat off three hostile onslaughts. Two days later the enemy broke through our line on his right flank. He might have withdrawn, but he had no wish to do so, and he afterwards received orders to hold out to the last. While so engaged he and his dauntless comrades took a heavy toll of the advancing Germans, and

gained valuable time for the guns to be withdrawn and his brigade to be moved to the rear. At one period, when the enemy was pressing forward too hotly, he led his men in a counter-attack, during which he was again wounded. He was last seen working a machine gun single-handed, after having been wounded a third time.

“No praise can be too high for the gallant stand made by this company and by Captain James. His dauntless courage and magnificent example undoubtedly enabled the battalion to be withdrawn before being completely cut off.”

SECOND-LIEUTENANT JOSEPH HENRY COLLIN, Royal Lancaster Regiment.

Lieutenant Collin and his platoon were holding a strong point known as the Keep. It was heavily assailed for many hours on end by swarms of the enemy; but the position was maintained until only five of the defenders were capable of resisting. Then Lieutenant Collin slowly withdrew the survivors, only yielding ground at a great cost to the enemy. All the time the Germans were pressing him hard with bombs and machine-gun fire at close range. Single-handed, he made a most daring attack on the machine-gun crew. After firing his revolver at the gunners, he seized a Mills grenade and threw it amongst the team, with the result that the gun was put out of action, four of the men working it were killed, and two others wounded. When he had disposed of this danger, he saw a second enemy machine gun firing on his position. Taking up a Lewis gun, he climbed to a high point of vantage on the parapet of the Keep, and opened fire to such purpose that he kept the enemy at bay until he fell mortally wounded. The heroic self-sacrifice of this intrepid and devoted young lieutenant was a magnificent example to every man in his regiment.

LIEUTENANT GEORGE BURDON M'KEAN, Canadian Infantry.

During a raid on the enemy's trenches Lieutenant M'Kean's party, which was operating on the right flank, was held up at a block in the communication trench by a shower of bombs and a hail of bullets from machine guns. This block was too close to our trenches for the gunners to destroy it during the preliminary bombardment. It was well protected by wire, and some thirty yards behind it was a well in which a machine gun was concealed. Lieutenant M'Kean soon saw that unless the block was destroyed the raid would prove a failure. He there-

fore determined to make a bold attempt to capture it. Running out into the open towards the right flank of the block, he leaped over it, dropped head first into the midst of the enemy, and lay on top of a man who fell with him. Before he could scramble up a soldier rushed at him with fixed bayonet; but before he was able to make a thrust the lieutenant shot him through the body with his revolver. Meanwhile the man below was struggling violently, but another shot put an end to his resistance. This extraordinary diversion enabled the position to be captured. Lieutenant M'Kean and his companions bombed the enemy vigorously; but after a time the supply of bombs ran out, and it was necessary to send men back to our front line for more. While they were absent on this errand the gallant Canadian engaged the enemy with revolver fire. When the bombs arrived he dashed towards a second block, killed two of the enemy, captured four others, and drove the rest, including a machine-gun section, into a dug-out, which he destroyed, with its occupants.

“This officer's splendid bravery and dash undoubtedly saved many lives; for had not this position been captured, the whole of the raiding party would have been exposed to a dangerous enfilading fire during its withdrawal. Lieutenant M'Kean's leadership at all times has been beyond praise.”

SECOND-LIEUTENANT JOHN CROWE, Worcestershire Regiment.

The enemy having attacked a British post in a village, broke through and reached high and broken ground in the rear, where his snipers took cover and machine guns were established. Lieutenant Crowe, with two N.C.O.'s and seven men, went out in the most daring fashion to engage them, and forced the Germans to withdraw into the village, where he followed them up, and opened fire on them as they collected in the doorways of the houses. A second time, accompanied only by two men, he attacked two enemy machine gunners who were creeping past the post with their weapons, and were making for the high ground. He shot both the gunners with his rifle, and prevented any of their comrades from reaching the guns and bringing them into action. He then turned upon a party of the enemy lined up in front of him, and forming fours ready to rush the post, killed several, and forced the rest to seek safety in flight. The guns which they left behind them included



In the Hands of the Enemy.



A Highlander's Temptation.

[From the picture by F. Matania. By permission of The Sphere.]

a Lewis gun of ours which had been captured by the enemy on the previous day. Throughout seven days Lieutenant Crowe showed the most reckless bravery and the utmost unconcern for his personal safety. His gallant example and unflinching cheerfulness inspired his men to hold out. But for his coolness and skill in keeping back the Germans, who were fast closing in, his comrades would never have escaped from the post. The valour and zeal which he displayed were of the highest order.

SECOND-LIEUTENANT JOHN SCHOFIELD, Lancashire Fusiliers.

A strong point held by the enemy in force had to be reduced, and for this purpose Lieutenant Schofield led a party of nine men forward. As he did so he was attacked by about one hundred of the enemy, armed with bombs. So skilfully did he dispose his men, and so rapid and accurate was their rifle and Lewis-gun fire, that the Germans were forced to take cover in dug-outs. Once below ground, they were easily captured: Lieutenant Schofield's bag numbered twenty. With the help of other parties the strong point was cleared, all the defenders being either killed or captured. He then collected his men, and made their number up to ten. With this little band he proposed to retake the front line, from which we had been driven. As he and his comrades proceeded along a communication trench they fell in with numerous Germans, both in the trench and in a drain on the right and left. Rapid rifle fire was opened at once, and the fearless lieutenant climbed out on to the parapet, despite machine-gun fire at point-blank range, and forced the enemy to surrender. No fewer than 123 of the Germans held up their hands to Lieutenant Schofield and his ten men. Sad to relate, this very gallant officer was killed a few minutes later.

SERGEANT WILLIAM GREGG, D.C.M., M.M., Rifle Brigade.

Sergeant Gregg hailed from Derbyshire. Perhaps you have heard the old saying—

“Derbyshire born and Derbyshire bred,
Strong in the arm and weak in the head.”

At first sight this description of Derbyshire people sounds anything but complimentary. If, however, you remember that *weak* really should be *wick*, the Old English word for quick or

ready, you will see that the rhyme relates to men and women who are strong and alert both in body and in mind. When you have read the following account you will agree that Sergeant Gregg was in every way a good representative of Derbyshire. Two companies of his unit attacked the enemy's outpost position without artillery preparation. Sergeant Gregg was with the right company, which came under heavy fire. All the officers fell, and the sergeant took command. He rushed an enemy post, with his own hand killed all the crew of a machine gun, seized the weapon, and captured four men who were hiding in a dug-out near by. He then rushed a second post, killed two other men, and captured a third. Though his company lost many of its members during the advance, the survivors reached their objective, and proceeded to make it defensible. Later on in the day the enemy advanced in a strong counter-attack, and the sergeant's party was driven back. As soon as reinforcements came up he went forward once more at the head of his men, bombed a machine gun, wiped out the team, and captured the weapon. He then occupied his former post, from which he was again ousted. A second time he led an attack, which drove out the enemy. This time he hung on to the position until ordered by his company commander to withdraw. During the whole operation Sergeant Gregg was as cool as a cucumber and as brave as a lion. He went to and fro in the most fearless manner, encouraging his men by his example and his cheering words. He was true Derbyshire—"strong in the arm and *wick* in the head."

LANCE-SERGEANT JOSEPH EDWARD WOODALL, Rifle Brigade.

Sergeant Woodall, when in command of a platoon, found himself held up by a machine gun. Without a moment's hesitation he rushed forward all alone, captured the gun, and received the surrender of eight men. He then led his platoon on to the objective, but soon found that he was being heavily assailed by gun-fire from a farmhouse some two hundred yards in front. Mustering ten of his men, the sergeant, with the greatest dash and gallantry, rushed the farm and took thirty prisoners. Shortly afterwards the officer in charge was killed, and the command of the two platoons devolved upon the sergeant. He reorganized his men, and handled them so skilfully that the heavy fire of artillery and machine guns could not shift him from his position. He was the very life and soul of the defence, and

while cheering his men, did not neglect to send back valuable information as to the position and strength of the enemy. Those who were with him during the day said that but for his coolness, courage, and utter disregard of his own safety, the objective could never have been won and held.

PRIVATE WILLIAM BEESLEY, Rifle Brigade.

Three members of the Rifle Brigade were gazetted as winners of the Victoria Cross on the same day—a very proud and almost unique distinction for the regiment which boasts a battle record dating from the Peninsular War. When you have read Private Beesley's story you will agree that he was in every way a worthy comrade-in-arms of Sergeant Gregg and Sergeant Woodall. He was with the former N.C.O. when the enemy's outpost position was attacked without artillery preparation. Moving forward with the leading wave of the left company, he saw his comrades go down all around him. A heavy fire from the enemy's front line swept away his platoon sergeant and all the section commanders. Though he was but a young soldier, Private Beesley immediately took command, and led the assault. Single-handed, he rushed a post, and with his revolver shot two machine gunners and an officer who ran out of a dug-out to take their place and keep the weapon going. A few moments later three other officers appeared from the same dug-out. He shouted to them to surrender, and seeing one of them trying to get rid of a map, shot him and seized the map. Six other prisoners were taken from their lurking-places, disarmed, and sent back to our lines. At this moment a comrade arrived with a machine gun, which Private Beesley turned on the enemy. He shot many of them down as they bolted towards their support line. For four hours he and his comrade held on to the position under the heaviest of rifle and machine-gun fire. When his comrade was wounded, Private Beesley "carried on" all alone; and at ten o'clock at night, long after the posts on his right and left had been wiped out or deserted, he was still engaged in holding back the foe. Do what they might, the enemy could not rush the position, and, thanks to the superb defence of this single man, the remnants of his company were able to withdraw without further loss.

When darkness fell, Private Beesley made his way back to the line from which the attack had started, bringing with him his trusty weapon and the wounded comrade who had stuck

by him. Though very weary with his long day's work, he set up his Lewis gun in the trench, and remained in action until things quietened down. His magnificent pluck, skilful shooting, and good judgment marked him out as a born soldier and leader of men.

LANCE-CORPORAL JAMES HEWITSON, Royal Lancashire Regiment.

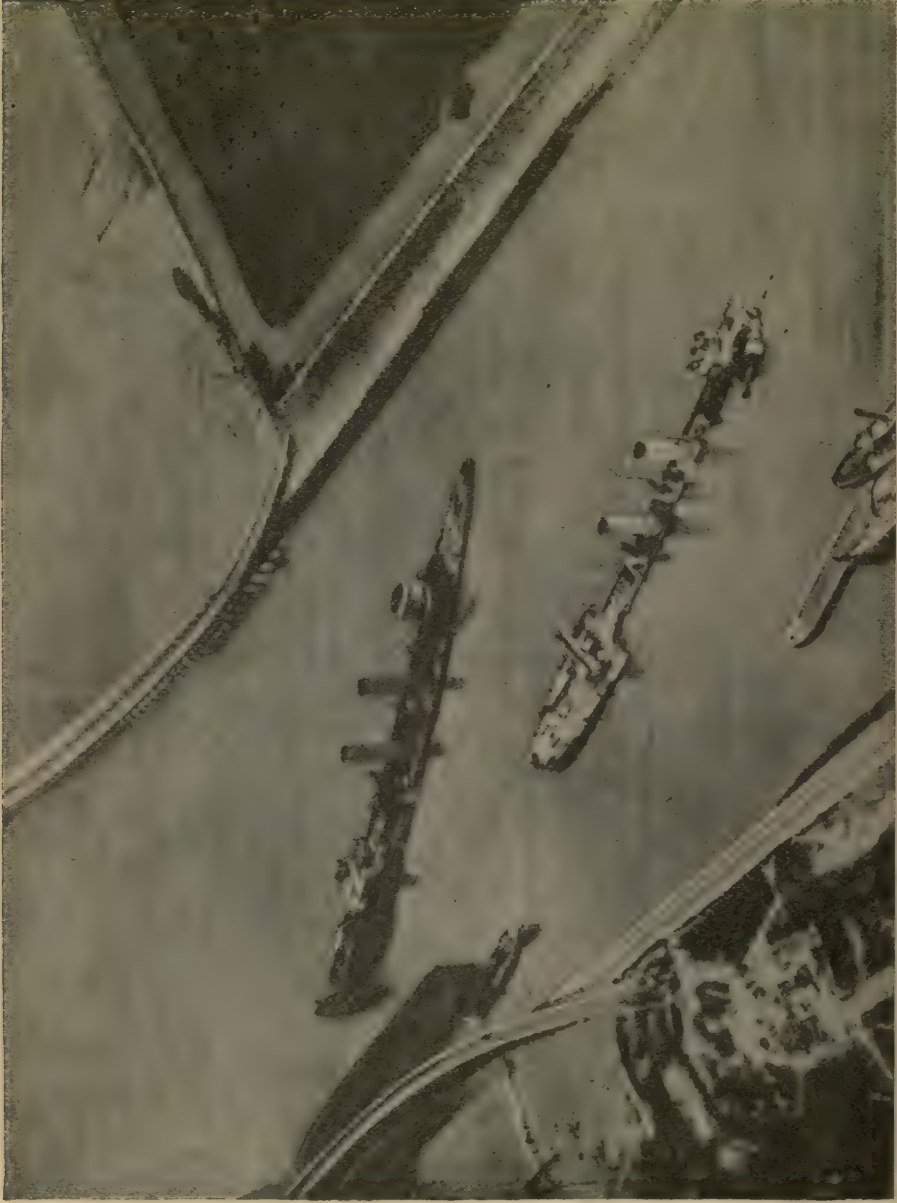
This daring N.C.O. was engaged in making a daylight attack on a series of craters occupied by the enemy. He led his party against the fortified shell-holes with wonderful dash and vigour, and not only cleared the enemy out of them, but out of their dug-outs as well. In one dug-out he killed six men who would not surrender. After the position was cleared, he saw an enemy machine gun coming into action. Working his way round the edge of a crater, he attacked the team, killing four of its members and capturing one. Shortly afterwards he engaged a hostile bombing party which was attacking one of our Lewis gun posts. Again he was completely successful, and six of the enemy fell victims to his dashing attack. Thanks to his Berserk-like daring, the Germans in this part of the field were completely crushed.

PRIVATE ARTHUR POULTER, West Riding Regiment.

Another devoted stretcher-bearer now comes into our roll of glory. On ten occasions Private Poulter went out into the open and carried wounded men into places of greater safety. Every moment his life was in peril from shell-bursts and machine-gun bullets. Two of the poor fellows whom he was carrying in were hit a second time while they were on his back. After a withdrawal over the river had been ordered, Private Poulter returned to the abandoned ground and picked up a wounded man who had been left behind. During the day he bandaged over forty men while under fire, and by his devotion to duty and wonderful disregard of his own safety, set a splendid example to all his fellows. Later on, while attempting another rescue, this very gallant soldier was seriously wounded.

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL CHARLES EDWARD HUDSON, D.S.O., M.C., Notts and Derby Regiment.

Colonel Hudson's battalion was holding the right sector of our front when a fierce attack was made upon it. The shell-fire was so heavy that the trench was destroyed, and many men and all the officers were either killed or wounded. So gravely



Enemy Evidence of the Blocking of Zeebrugge: a captured Photograph taken by a German Airman.

See Chapter XXXVII.

(By permission of the Naval Exhibition and the Department of Information.)

weakened was Colonel Hudson's force that the enemy was enabled to penetrate our front line. The Germans pushed on as far as our support line, and it seemed that our whole defence would have to give way. Colonel Hudson saw that, unless desperate action was taken, disaster would befall us. At once he collected orderlies, servants, runners, and other persons employed at headquarters, arrayed them for an attack, and led them up the hill from which our line had retired. So determined was this advance that the enemy was thrown down the hill to the trench which he had won from us. It was now manned by about two hundred Germans, and these the fearless colonel now proposed to attack with five men! He advanced upon the trench from the flank, sprang into it with two followers, shouting to the enemy to surrender. Some of them held up their hands at once. Shortly afterwards he was severely wounded by a bomb which exploded on his foot. Although suffering great pain, he ordered his men to continue the attack, with the result that about one hundred prisoners and six machine guns were captured.

Without doubt, the high courage and determination displayed by Lieutenant-Colonel Hudson saved a serious situation. But for his quickness in organizing a counter-attack a large number of the enemy would have dribbled through, and a great effort would have been necessary to prevent them from gravely threatening our position.

SERGEANT WILLIAM RUTHVEN, Australian Imperial Force.

During an advance Sergeant Ruthven's commanding officer was seriously wounded, and many men of his company fell. The sergeant took over the command, rallied the men in the neighbourhood, and led them forward to the assault. As the leading wave approached its objective, a fierce fire from a machine-gun post at close range swept down upon it. Sergeant Ruthven at once sprang forward and threw a bomb, which landed beside the post. Before the smoke of the explosion had cleared he was amongst the crew. He bayoneted one of the men, and, having captured the gun, saw some of the enemy coming out of a shelter. He at once turned upon them, wounded two of them, and captured six others, whom he handed over to an escort from the leading wave, which by this time had captured its first objective. Reorganizing his men, he led them on to the second objective, where he established a post. Carefully

scanning his surroundings, he observed an enemy movement in a sunken road near by. At once, all alone, and armed only with a revolver, he went out into the open and rushed the position. Two of the enemy, who refused to come out of their dug-outs, were shot; whereupon some thirty-two others gave themselves up to him. He shepherded the whole of them until comrades arrived to escort them back to our lines. No more daring fighter or more dashing soldier ever came from "down under" than Sergeant Ruthven—and what can one say more in his praise?

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE BRAVEST OF THE BRAVE.—III.

REV. THEODORE BAYLEY HARDY, D.S.O., M.C.,
Chaplain to the Forces, attached to the Lincolnshire Regiment.

The third chaplain to win the coveted cross now figures in our record, the other two being the Rev. E. N. Mellish* and the Rev. W. R. Y. Addison.† The member of the "church militant" whose story we are now to read was born in London over fifty years ago, and was educated at the City of London School and London University. After serving as assistant-master at the Nottingham High School, he was ordained and appointed to a curacy in Nottinghamshire. Later on he became headmaster of Bentham Grammar School, Yorkshire; but in 1913 resigned this post to become vicar of Hutton Roof, Kirkby Lonsdale. In August 1916 he joined the forces as a chaplain. In November 1917 he won the D.S.O. for rescuing wounded men after his wrist had been broken and put in splints. On that occasion he crawled to within seventy yards of the enemy's line, and remained for a considerable time ministering to the fallen under heavy fire. Later on he was given the Military Cross for finding wounded men and carrying them across heavily-shelled ground. His only son, Captain William Hastings Hardy, R.A.M.C., was also on active service; and his only daughter, Elizabeth, was a nurse in a British hospital in France. His Victoria Cross was awarded for great courage and devotion to duty on many occasions. By his fearlessness, his utter unselfishness, and his quiet manner he won the respect and admiration of every soldier who came within the sphere of his influence. His energy and endurance would have been

* See p. 321, Vol. V.

† See p. 279, Vol. VI.

remarkable in a much younger man, as some of the incidents in his career plainly show.

On one occasion an infantry patrol had gone out to attack an enemy post in the ruins of a village. The chaplain, who was then at company headquarters, heard the sound of firing, and, following the patrol, came upon an officer lying dangerously wounded about four hundred yards beyond our front line of posts. He remained with the officer until he was able to get assistance to bring him in. During this time bullets were flying all around, and an enemy patrol passed the spot where the officer and the chaplain were lying, and captured three of our men.

On a second occasion, when an enemy shell exploded in the midst of one of our posts, this fearless man of God at once made his way to the spot, and, though the artillery and trench-mortar fire was very heavy, proceeded to dig out the men who had been buried under the earth flung up by the bursting shell. One man was got out alive; another who was extricated was found to be dead. During the whole time that he was digging, he was in the gravest danger not only from shell-fire but from a tottering wall of the building.

On a third occasion, when our men had been forced to withdraw from a wood which they had won and lost, and all were supposed to have quitted it, the chaplain discovered that one poor wounded fellow had been left behind. Accompanied by a sergeant, he made his way to the spot where the man lay, within ten yards of a pill-box which we had captured in the morning, but which had again fallen into the hands of the enemy. The wounded man was too weak to stand; but the chaplain and the sergeant between them managed to get him through the zone of fire, and to bring him safely into our lines. True, indeed, is it that the good man thinks of himself last of all.

LIEUTENANT CLIFFORD WILLIAM KING SADLIER, Australian Imperial Force.

During an attack by his battalion on a strong enemy position, Lieutenant Sadlier's platoon, which was on the left, had to advance through a wood where two hostile machine guns were making havoc in our ranks, and were preventing his command from going forward. Though the lieutenant was wounded, he organized a bombing section, and led it against the machine guns with such success that the crews were killed and the weapons were captured. By this time all his comrades had



H.M. the King decorating Chaplain Hardy with the Victoria Cross.

fallen, and he was left alone. Nevertheless, armed only with his revolver, he attacked a third machine gun, killed the crew of four, and carried off the gun. While doing so he was again wounded. The very gallant conduct of this officer was the means of clearing the flank and allowing the battalion to move forward, thereby saving a most critical situation. His coolness and readiness to sacrifice himself inspired his comrades with some of his own indomitable spirit.

BRIGADIER-GENERAL GEORGE WILLIAM ST. GEORGE GROGAN,
C.M.G., D.S.O., Worcestershire Regiment.

During three days of intense fighting and grave anxiety, Brigadier-General Grogan was in command of the remnants of an infantry division and of various other troops. Thanks to his magnificent energy, his sound judgment, his coolness, and contempt for danger, he was enabled to stay the onward thrust of the enemy, and prevent a disaster to our main forces. The third day of the operations was the most critical of all. During that day he was under every kind of fire, riding up and down the front line, encouraging his troops, reorganizing those who had fallen into disorder, leading back those who were beginning to retire, and by his own splendid pluck and enthusiasm putting new heart not only into his British comrades, but into the French, who were fighting along with him. Over and over again enemy attacks were repulsed, and our line still held firm. His horse was shot under him; but, until another was brought, he went to and fro on foot, infusing a spirit of confidence and hope amongst those who were being subjected to some of the hardest trials that soldiers were ever called upon to bear. His valour, undying determination, and superb leadership marked him out as one for whom no distinction was too great.

SECOND-LIEUTENANT JOHN SCOTT YOULL, Northumberland Fusiliers.

The patrol which Lieutenant Youll commanded came under an enemy barrage during an attack. Death was raining down upon his men, so he sent them to the rear, but he himself remained in order to spy out the situation. Unable to penetrate the zone of artillery fire, and thus rejoin his own company, he reported to a neighbouring unit; and with several men who were in similar plight, held a position until the troops on his left had given way, and an enemy machine gun opened fire upon him from the rear. He rushed the gun, killed most

of the team, and then turned the weapon on the advancing Germans. By this time some of them had gained a footing in a portion of our front line. With a handful of men he made three separate counter-attacks; and though each time he drove back the enemy, he was unable to maintain his position, owing to the fire of hostile troops who had trickled through and were now firing behind him. Throughout the fighting his splendid devotion and gallantry inspired all who saw him to like deeds of valour and self-sacrifice.

LANCE-CORPORAL JOEL HALLIWELL, Lancashire Fusiliers.

While the remnants of a battalion were being withdrawn under severe enemy pressure, Lance-Corporal Halliwell managed to catch a stray horse belonging to a German officer who had been killed. Springing upon its back, he rode out under heavy rifle and machine-gun fire, and rescued a wounded man who was lying in "No Man's Land." Several times he repeated this merciful feat, and brought in ten men, including an officer. His last desperate attempt failed; for, before he could reach the man he had marked out for succour, the enemy was almost on top of him. Nothing could be finer than the devotion of Lance-Corporal Halliwell. He counted his own life as nothing if only he might be the salvation of his friends.

* * * * *

On 23rd July echoes of the great raid on Zeebrugge reached us. Our newspapers announced that the Victoria Cross had been awarded to four officers and two men who took part in that wonderful feat of arms. If I were to ask you to name the man who above all others deserved the coveted honour, you would reply, with one voice,

CAPTAIN ALFRED FRANCIS BLAKENEY CARPENTER, R.N.

You will remember that he was in command of *Vindictive*, and had been engaged for months in working out the details of the expedition. Nothing could exceed his fearlessness and coolness under the terrible ordeal. He navigated *Vindictive* through waters literally sown with mines, and any moment his ship might have been blown sky-high. He brought his vessel through the darkness to the exact position by the side of the Mole, and when the concentrated fire of artillery, machine guns, and rifles burst upon her, he showed not the slightest concern for his own safety, but went to and fro encouraging his men, and cheering them on as they ascended the crashing and splin-

tered gangways. When the stormers were on the Mole he walked round the decks, directing operations and seeing to the comfort of those who had been wounded. Everybody on board looked upon him as a tower of strength; and when the Admiralty invited the officers of *Vindictive*, *Iris*, and *Daffodil* to choose one of their number for the highest award of valour, they unanimously chose him. The decoration which he was entitled to wear was thus a double honour. It marked him out as a hero approved by heroes.

LIEUTENANT RICHARD DOUGLAS SANDFORD, R.N.

You have not forgotten the blowing up of the viaduct that connected the Zeebrugge Mole with the shore. In Chapter XXV. I told you how an old submarine was filled with explosives and run in until she touched the piles of the viaduct. The man who lighted the fuse, and was the last to leap into the little motor boat which lay by the side of the submarine, was Lieutenant Sandford.* Though he knew that his chances of escape were a thousand to one; though he was fully aware, as indeed were all his comrades, that a shot from the Mole might have exploded the submarine before she reached the desired position, and that violent death was bound to follow; though he realized that if the motor boat should be stove in, or unable to get sufficiently far away before the explosion took place, he could not hope to survive, he was eager for the venture. Though the submarine was fitted with a steering device which would have directed her against the viaduct, and would have enabled him to leave her some distance before she struck, he remained on board until she almost hit the piles. He literally escaped out of the very jaws of death.

LIEUTENANT PERCY THOMPSON DEAN, R.N.V.R. (Motor Launch 282).

Lieutenant Dean commanded the motor boat which was detailed to take off the officers and men from the blockships when they were in position and the moment had come to sink them. He followed *Intrepid* and *Iphigenia* into the harbour, in spite of the constant and deadly fire from machine and heavy guns at point-blank range, and succeeded in taking on board over a hundred officers and men. This done, he was steaming full speed out of the harbour, when he became aware that he was towing the Carley float on which Lieutenant Bonham Carter

* See illustration, p. 239.

had made his escape. He promptly pulled up, rescued the lieutenant, and then proceeded. All the time he handled his boat as calmly and as skilfully as though he were on the Solent in the happy days of peace. Three men were shot down by his side as he coned the boat, and as he cleared the entrance to the canal his steering-gear broke down. This might have led to a terrible calamity; but Lieutenant Dean averted it by steering the boat with his engines, and by running so close under the Mole that the guns of the shore batteries could not be depressed sufficiently to hit her. During her exit from the harbour there was scarcely a moment when machine guns were not firing at her from a distance of a few yards. It was solely due to the courage and daring of Lieutenant Dean that Motor Launch 282 got safely away with her priceless freight of heroic lives.

CAPTAIN EDWARD BAMFORD, D.S.O., Royal Marine Light Infantry.

This gallant officer was chosen by his brother officers of the Royal Marine Artillery and Royal Marine Light Infantry for the highest award of valour. He landed on the Mole from *Vindictive* with three platoons of the storming force, and showed splendid courage and resource in directing the operations of his men. His fearlessness and cool courage inspired them in their desperate work. His first task was to establish a strong point to cover the disembarkation, and when he was satisfied that our men could not be cut off while returning to the vessel, he led an assault on a neighbouring battery. Much of the success which attended the attack of the Marines—"soldiers and sailors too"—was due to the fine leading and cool judgment of Captain Bamford.

SERGEANT NORMAN AUGUSTUS FINCH, Royal Marine Artillery.

Sergeant Finch was second in command of the pom-poms and Lewis guns in the foretop of *Vindictive*. At one period shells came crashing on board the vessel every few seconds, and the splinters which flew around caused many casualties. Owing to the darkness and the smoke, it was most difficult to discover the whereabouts of the guns which were doing the damage; but Lieutenant Rigby, who was in command of the foretop, and Sergeant Finch, kept up a continuous fusillade, rapidly changing from one target to another, and in this way keeping down the enemy's fire to a considerable extent. Un-



Lieutenant Crutchley searching for

(From the picture by F. Matania.

Vindictive was being brought into position between the two piers of Ostend Harbour when a shell second in command. Lieutenant Crutchley then took charge. He blew out the bottom of the vessel and splintered decks for survivors. All the time he was under the heaviest possible fire. (See page 347.)



Survivors on Board the sinking Vindictive.

By permission of The Sphere.)

from the shore batteries struck her conning tower, killing the commander and severely wounding the
gave the order to abandon ship, but before leaving her made a thorough search of the littered and

fortunately, two heavy shells made direct hits on the foretop, and all on it were killed or disabled except the sergeant, who, though badly wounded, was not put out of action. The enemy now directed his fire against the foretop, and it was soon terribly exposed and battered. The sergeant, however, never thought for a moment of abandoning his post. He got a Lewis gun into action, and with it harassed the enemy on the Mole until another direct hit wrecked every gun on the foretop. Then, and then only, did he seek safety elsewhere. His comrades, in admiration of his superb courage and endurance, chose him for the high honour of the Victoria Cross.

ABLE-SEAMAN ALBERT EDWARD M'KENZIE, R.N.

This most gallant bluejacket was selected for the highest award of valour by the crews of *Vindictive*, *Iris*, and *Daffodil*, and by the seamen engaged in storming the Mole. He belonged to B company of sailors who went ashore with the Marines, and was in charge of a machine gun. Along with Lieutenant-Commander Harrison, he accompanied a party which advanced along the Mole, and in spite of very great difficulties he did splendid work with his weapon. Most of his companions, including the officer, were killed; but he was able to shoot down several of the enemy who tried to make their way to a destroyer lying along side the Mole. Later on, while working his gun in a very exposed position, he was severely wounded.

* * * * *

On 29th August our newspapers announced that three heroes had been awarded the Victoria Cross for their splendid services during the second blocking operation against Ostend on the night of 9th-10th May. Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, in submitting the names of the following three officers for the highest award for valour, tells us that aerial photographs taken before the operation showed clearly that the enemy had made special preparations for the renewed attack. "The operation," he says, "was carried out in mined waters in the face of a tremendous fire, and the greatest credit is due to those who volunteered for hazardous service in *Vindictive* and in motor launches detailed for rescue work, and to the crews of the numerous craft who covered and screened the approach of *Vindictive*, led her to her objective, and rescued the survivors of her crew after she had been blown up between the piers of Ostend Harbour.

LIEUTENANT-COMMANDER GEOFFREY H. DRUMMOND,
R.N.V.R.

This gallant officer volunteered for rescue work, and was placed in command of Motor Launch 254. He was following *Vindictive*, and had arrived off the piers when a shell burst on board his launch, killing Lieutenant Gordon Ross and Deckhand J. Thomas, and wounding him severely in three places. Despite his injuries he remained on the bridge and navigated his vessel, which had already been badly damaged by the enemy's fire, into the harbour, where he placed her alongside *Vindictive* and took off two officers and thirty-eight men, some of whom were killed and many of whom were wounded while embarking. When he was assured that no living man remained on board the blocking ship he backed his vessel out clear of the piers, and then, his work done, fell exhausted. Half an hour later his vessel, then in a sinking condition, fell in with *Warwick*, and the survivors were rescued. The splendid courage and magnificent endurance of Lieutenant-Commander Drummond undoubtedly saved the lives of most of *Vindictive's* crew.

LIEUTENANT-COMMANDER ROLAND BOURKE, D.S.O., R.N.V.R.

As a volunteer, Lieutenant-Commander Bourke was given the command of Motor Launch 276, which also followed *Vindictive* into the harbour, and while doing so engaged the enemy's machine guns on both piers. After Motor Launch 254 had backed out, Lieutenant-Commander Bourke laid his boat alongside *Vindictive* and made a thorough search of the vessel for wounded men. Finding no one, he steamed off; but hearing cries from the water, again entered the harbour and scanned the surface narrowly until he found and rescued Lieutenant Sir John Alleyne and two seamen who were clinging to an overturned skiff. During all this time his boat was under heavy fire at close range, and was hit in no less than fifty-five places, once by a 6-inch shell, which killed two of her crew and wounded others. Thus seriously damaged, the launch could only make slow headway; nevertheless, thanks to Lieutenant-Commander Bourke's skill and perseverance, she was got safely out, and eventually reached a monitor, which took the survivors on board. "He displayed," says the official account, "daring and skill of a very high order."

LIEUTENANT VICTOR A. C. CRUTCHLEY, D.S.O., R.N.

This officer was in *Brilliant* during the unsuccessful attempt

to block Ostend on the night of 22nd-23rd April, and on his return to Dover volunteered for a further attempt. He acted as First Lieutenant of *Vindictive*, and worked with untiring zeal in fitting out the vessel for her second and last adventure. On the night of 9th-10th May, after her commanding officer had been killed and the second in command had been severely wounded, he took command of *Vindictive*, and did his utmost by manœuvring the engines to place the vessel in the right position for blocking up the harbour. After the charges had been touched off and the vessel was sinking he made a thorough search of her with an electric torch, and discovered several wounded men who were got on board Motor Launch 254.* When Lieutenant-Commander Drummond, who commanded the launch, fell exhausted from his wounds, our hero took charge and "carried on." His little vessel was full of wounded, and was so badly damaged by shell-fire that the fore part was flooded. He set the unwounded men baling out the water with buckets, shifted the weight aft, and tried every device to keep the launch afloat. When she reached *Warwick* she was nearly awash, and was on the point of sinking. "The bearing of this very gallant officer and fine seaman throughout the operations was altogether admirable, and set an inspiring example to all who came in contact with him."

* See illustration, p. 344-345.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

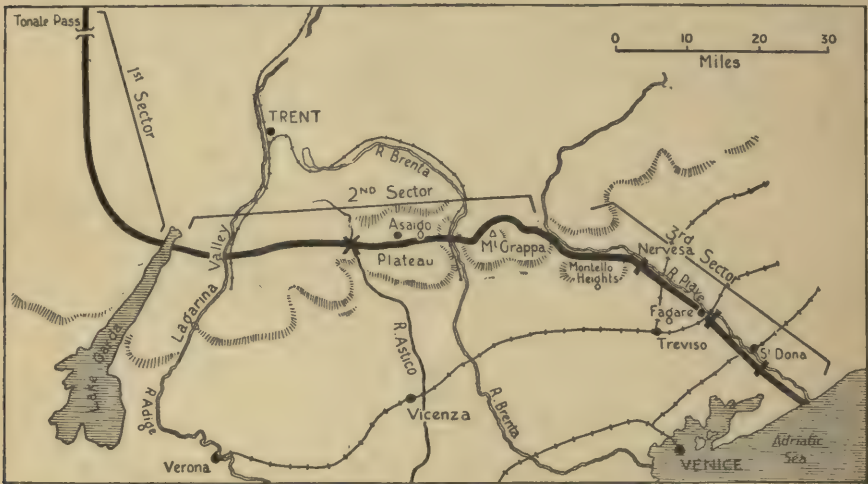
THE ITALIAN FRONT ONCE MORE.

IN Chapter XV. of our eighth volume I described that disaster which forced our Italian Allies to retire rapidly from the line of the Isonzo, which they had held for two years, and snatch back their troops over a distance of forty miles along narrow and twisting roads, and across the few bridges which spanned the intervening streams, to the river Piave, on which they made a stout stand. By piercing the Italian line at Caporetto the Central Powers came very near to a decisive victory. During the retreat it seemed that nothing could save our Allies, and that Italy would soon suffer the fate of Serbia, Russia, and Rumania. Some 250,000 prisoners fell into the hands of the Austro-Germans, and 2,500 Italian guns were captured. Everywhere in Allied countries there was grave anxiety. At once British and French troops were hurried to the Italian front, and along the Piave and the mountain wall that falls steeply to the plain a most determined resistance was made. Early in November 1917 the Italians reached the Piave. Fierce struggles continued, both on the river and along the mountain barrier, right down to the eve of Christmas 1917. During the earlier part of the fighting the Austrians seemed to be on the verge of success; but happily they were held, and Monte Asolone, which they had captured, was recovered.* In the next chapter you are to read how the Austrians, after five months of waiting, made another great effort to pierce the mountains and carry the river.

Before I describe this onset I must recall to your minds the character of the front which the Allies held. Look at this little map, and follow the broad black line which shows the

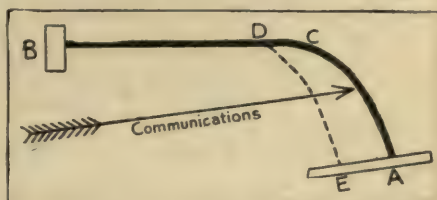
* See pp. 358, 359, Vol. VIII.

general direction of their defences. I have marked off the front into three sections. The first section extends from the Swiss frontier to Lake Garda. Nature has strongly fortified this region, which consists of very high mountains with snow-clad crests. There is only one gate in the mountains through which an enemy can pass from the Trentino to the Italian plain—the Tonale Pass—and this, at the time of which I am speaking, was locked, bolted, and barred by the Italians. Behind the line of lofty mountains there are no railways and but poor roads. Clearly, no successful attempt could possibly be made to break through in this section. We may, therefore, leave it out of consideration.



The second section, you will observe, extends eastward from the north end of Lake Garda to the point where the western bank of the Piave is reached. I want you to give particular attention to this section, for it offered the Austrians their best chance of destroying the Allied armies opposed to them. A glance at the map shows you that if they could force their way southward they would turn the line of the Piave, and compel the Italians to leave the banks of that river and begin another retreat, which could only end on the Adige. This would mean giving up the rich plain and its fine old towns, including the lovely city of Venice. It would mean much more: the Austrians would be in the rear of the Allies, and would be able to cut off the armies between them and the

Piave, in which case as great a disaster as that of Caporetto might follow. You will understand the position better if you examine this diagram, in which the Allied front is shown by a broad black line, somewhat in the shape of the letter J lying on its side. At B you have Lake Garda, between B and C the line of the mountains, and between C and A the river Piave. The flank at B is strongly guarded, and that at A rests on the sea. The general line of railways by which the whole front is fed is shown by the line with an arrow-head. You observe that it is roughly parallel with the line of the mountains.



Now suppose the enemy breaks through between C and B—that is, along the line of the Piave—and compels a retirement, he may capture prisoners, guns, and stores; but he cannot trap the armies opposed to him, because they have behind them good railways, by which they can move to the rear. But it would be quite otherwise if he could break through between B and D. He would then swoop down upon the communications and cut off all the forces which lie between the point where he struck the railways and the river Piave. It would be best for him to break through as near as possible to B, for in that case he would cut off nearly the whole of the armies holding the front, and would be able either to destroy them or to force them to surrender.

You can now understand that the weak place in the Allied line was this second section. Fortunately it was very strong by nature. Between Garda and the valley of the Astigo, where I have put a cross on the map, the gaps through the mountains are very narrow, and the enemy can only advance through them on a narrow front. The Italians had trained their guns upon the exits from the valleys, and were in a position to sweep away any troops that might issue from them. Had, however, the enemy been able to push through these valleys and stream out upon the plain, he would have taken the whole Italian army in the rear, and would have captured the railway which fed it. Happily, this part of the section was capable of defence by comparatively few troops. You will notice that the mountains extend farther south the nearer we approach Lake Garda.

This means that the defenders would be able to fall back for a greater distance than would be possible farther east, and still maintain a strong resistance.

Now you understand that though the Austrians wished to break through as near as possible to Lake Garda, they had but a poor chance of doing so. Look at your map again and find the valley of the Brenta, along which run two good roads, one on each side of the river, and the great international railway coming down the Trentino from Vienna. At a glance you see that the Austrians would be most likely to make their great attempt in this region. To the west of the Brenta, where it breaks through the mountains, is the Asiago Plateau, so called from the ruined town of Asiago, in its centre. This plateau is composed of limestone, and juts out from the Alps like a shallow dish, sunken in the middle and rising at the rim. From the southern edge of the rim the ground falls sharply to the plain. Across this plateau ran the Allied line of British, French, and Italians.

It was against the Asiago Plateau that the Austro-Germans made their greatest effort during the offensive which I am about to describe. The railway, you observe, runs on two sides of it, and numerous roads had been made from the railway to the front. The enemy thus had excellent communications by which he could bring troops very rapidly to any part of the plateau. If he could only bend back the Allied line for a few miles he would be standing on the plains. The railway which fed the Allies was only twenty miles to the south, and the plain nowhere more than seven miles away. Undoubtedly, the Asiago Plateau was the chink in the Allied armour through which a thrust could most easily and most successfully be made.

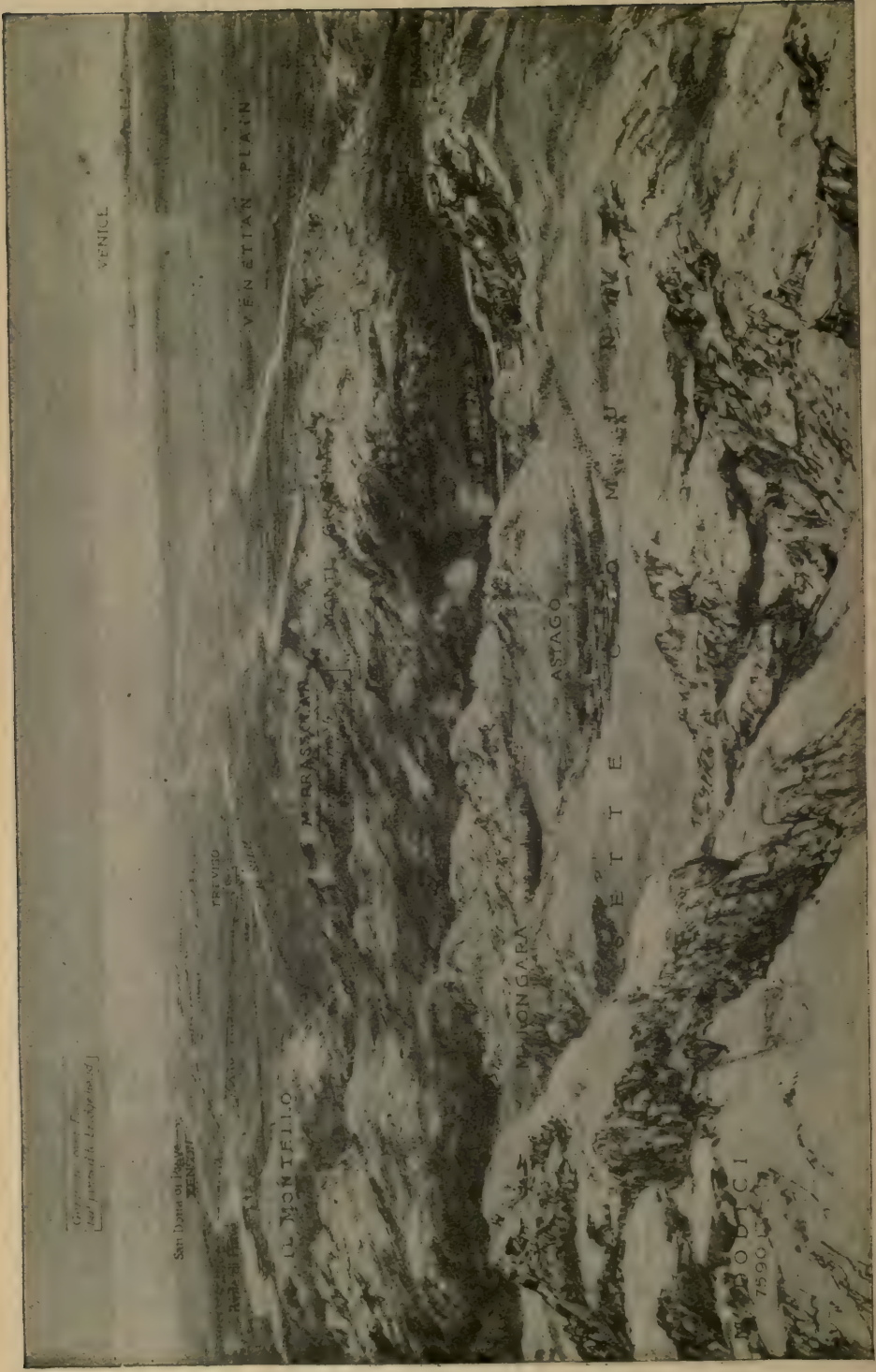
Now let us examine the third section, which runs from the eastern end of Mont Grappa to the Adriatic Sea. This sector was by far the weakest part of the front; but, as you know, an attack upon it did not promise any decisive result. The Piave is not the kind of river that would hold up for long a determined enemy. You will find a full description of it on page 157 of our eighth volume.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE GREAT AUSTRIAN FAILURE.

GENERAL CADORNA, who was commander-in-chief of the Italian armies at the time of the Caporetto disaster, had been sent into retirement, and his place had been taken by General Armando Diaz. He had won the highest honours in the Italian Staff College at Turin, and had gained a great reputation as a gunnery expert. Under Cadorna he had been Director of Military Operations, and afterwards had led with great success one of the divisions in the Duke of Aosta's Third or Carso Army. Those British gunners who served under him greatly admired his skill as a general, and said that the successful retreat of the Third Army was more due to him than to any other man. When appointed Generalissimo he was fifty-six years of age, and was remarkable for his silence and his modest and dignified bearing. A glance at the man's large brow and deep-set eyes showed him to be a thinker; and his spare, broad-shouldered figure marked him out, at the same time, as a man of action. He was now about to be put to the test; and, as you will learn, he satisfied the test in every particular, and emerged a victor.

I have already told you that a British army under General Plumer was sent to the Italian front immediately after the Italian disaster at Caporetto. The Germans ridiculed this army, and their agents vainly strove to sow discord between us and the Italians by representing that our arrival in Italy was an attempt to make ourselves masters of the country. Our troops were everywhere well received. They were chiefly stationed on the Montello Plateau, that broad hill, flattened like the back of a tortoise and covered with acacias, which stands on the right bank of the Piave, between Nervesa and Mont,



The British, French, and Italian Front behind Asiago and on the Grappa Range.
(By permission of *The Sphere*.)

Grappa. Before the offensive of June 1918 began, most of our men had been transferred to the Asiago Plateau, where the chief brunt of the struggle would be certain to take place.

It is interesting to note that the whole direction of the Austrian armies had by this time passed into the hands of Germany. Austria, as you know, has always possessed a genius for defeat : in all her history she can point to no success in a first-class struggle. Again and again in the Great War she failed ; not only because the bulk of her people lack soldierly qualities, but because her armies include many races, such as the Czecho-Slovaks, who are bitterly opposed to Austrian rule. Thousands of these men deserted and joined the Russians and Italians, and we shall read in the next volume that many of them upheld the Allied cause in Siberia after the collapse of Russia. It is said that the Austrian failure of June was largely due to the information given to the Italians by Italian-speaking deserters from the Austrian army. They declared that the offensive would begin on 15th June at 3 a.m. and the information was true to the letter. While the Austrians were advancing on the Asiago Plateau, some of the Czecho-Slovaks blew up their own ammunition dumps.

The offensive was forced upon the Austrians because of the terrible condition of their people at home. They were horribly hungry and deeply disheartened. It was clear that, unless some success could be won to buoy up their spirits and obtain food for them, their cries for peace at any price would soon force their Government to give up the struggle altogether. It was, indeed, a "hunger raid" on a grand scale. Here is an address penned by their Commander-in-Chief, and read to the troops at the time when their guns were beginning to thunder all the way from Lake Garda to the sea. You will notice that it appeals to their hatred of Italy, and to their greed for possession of its fruitful plains.

"Soldiers, for months and months, resisting manfully among the glaciers and snows, carrying out all your duty faithfully in the midst of winter tempests, you looked upon the sunlit plains of Italy. The time has come for you to reach them. Your valour, put to the proof on all the battle-fields, knows no obstacle. Like a terrible storm you scourge the false and faithless one-time Ally, together with the friends she has called to her aid. You will show to the world that nothing can resist your heroism. Your fathers, your grandfathers, your ancestors, have with this spirit fought and conquered the same enemy. I am sure you will not fail them. Nay,

I am sure you will surpass them. Italy must never again reach out her greedy hand towards our magnificent Alps, our coasts, our harbours, to which are bound, with the same love, the interests of all of our nations. The prosperity, the future, the honour of our old, great, dear, and common native land is in our hands. Her glory will be yours. Together with you, with all my heart, will I follow your steps, which will be an irresistible race towards victory. I firmly confide in you, and launch you with the shout, 'Sweep all before you.'

This was more easily said than done. The Italians, you must remember, had certain important advantages in the struggle now about to begin. In a former chapter I explained to you the meaning of the phrase "the interior lines." The Italians on their J-shaped front held the interior lines. While the Austrians had no lengthwise communications between their wings, the Italians had excellent railways running parallel with their mountain front, and leading directly to the Piave front. They could readily and quickly place their reserves wherever they were most needed. The Austrians, on the other hand, could not do so. The mass of their reserves, which they had brought from Rumania, was assembled on a plain behind their left wing. They could not possibly be conveyed in time to the right wing, where help was most needed. During the offensive they never came into action at all. The Austrian Commander-in-Chief thus committed one of the gravest blunders known to the science of war: he only employed half the troops at his disposal. We shall see later on that this was not his only blunder.

Now what was the general idea of the offensive? The enemy regarded the whole of the Allied forces in the West as one. The army of Diaz was the right wing of the Allies; and by putting it out of action the Italians would be prevented from sending reinforcements to France to help the British, French, and Americans, who at this time were pressing heavily on the western side of the "pocket" into which the Germans had thrust themselves between the Aisne and the Marne. The Italians were to be overwhelmed by an enveloping movement round the flanks. The Austrian right wing was to come down the two banks of the Brenta, while the left wing crossed the Piave. Pincers were to be applied to the Italians, and when the claws met there would be an end of their armies. But, as you have gathered from these pages, enveloping operations of this kind are seldom a success. The claws of the pincers do not close at the same time, and the enemy escapes.

So it was after the break-through at Caporetto, and so it was to be in the offensive soon to be launched. The right claw of the pincers scarcely moved at all ; the left claw not very much. The whole operation was, therefore, a complete failure.

For their ambitious effort the Austrians massed seventy divisions along a line of seventy-five miles from the Val D'Astico to the sea. It was timed to begin at 3 a.m. on the morning of 15th June, and for the preliminary bombardment no fewer than 7,500 pieces of artillery had been brought up, some of the largest of them borrowed from Germany. About 1,500 guns were trained on the Asiago Plateau, where the Allied line was held by the 14th British Corps, under Lord Cavan ; the 13th French Corps ; and Italians. The Fourth Italian Army and the French troops held the rest of the mountain line as far as, and including, the Montello Plateau. Along the Piave were the Second and Third Italian Armies, and a few British.

Thanks to the information furnished by deserters, the Italian guns opened fire first, and shortly after midnight played upon the Austrian artillery and the assembling troops with deadly effect. Thousands of men were killed before the advance began, and the Austrian gun emplacements were filled with poisoned gas. At 3 a.m. the Austrian artillery began to speak. Following the plan adopted by the Germans in France, they flung many gas shells, which stained the trees and the ground a reddish colour and struck down many of our men, despite their gas masks. At half-past seven their infantry were launched with the shout, "Sweep all before you." They flung in front of them smoke bombs and fog producers, which created a cloud lasting ten minutes before the fumes dispersed. The men had been trained to go forward in open formations, and their equipment had been lightened to lessen fatigue.

Not only did the Austrians advance all along the second and third sector, but they made an attempt, which was probably no more than a feint, on the Tonale Pass. Of course it led to nothing. The main effort was against the Asiago Plateau. On the extreme left were Italians, next to them were British on the south-western ridges, then French, and beyond them Italians once more. Against this position four divisions were hurled. They pushed forward along the railway from Asiago, and while doing so were partly covered by the valley. Northumberland Fusiliers and Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry lay

on the left of the British line, and had to bear the brunt of the heaviest Austrian attack. On both flanks of the Oxford and Bucks front the enemy made headway, but the centre stood firm. The two wings, though outnumbered, fell back steadily to switch lines in the shape of the letter V, and a three-sided battle was fought among the dense pine woods on the steep hillside.

When the Austrians entered this "pocket" they were swept with cross-fire from two sides. Penned in this murderous area, they suffered terribly; and next day the Warwicks hurled them out by a counter-attack, during which they took over seven hundred prisoners, four guns, fifty machine guns, and several flame projectors. The British commander gave great praise to the Italians on his left for their invaluable help during the crisis of the battle. Along the mountain front from the Brenta to the Piave the Fourth Italian Army had to give way at various points, and in some places was pushed to the edge of the mountain wall. Next day, however, vigorous counter-attacks enabled it to recover all the lost ground. The right claw of the pincers had altogether failed to grip.

A correspondent tells us that during this attack a detachment of British cyclists behaved very gallantly. When moving from one position to another along a sunken road running parallel with the front, they suddenly ran into a vastly superior body of Austrians. Instead of seeking safety in flight, the cyclists dismounted, fixed bayonets, and scrambled up the steep banks of the sunken road in order to attack the enemy. The Austrian commander, on seeing the small numbers of the British, ordered his men to charge; but before they could do so our men sprang forward. The bayonets met, and a fierce hand-to-hand struggle ensued. The Austrians stood their ground for a time, but soon began to waver, and before long were rushing to the rear and throwing away their rifles in order the better to escape from their pursuers. A number of prisoners remained in the hands of the intrepid cyclists.

During the onset which drove our men from their front line a small detachment of advance troops remained on a crest over three thousand feet high to cover the withdrawal. The Austrians at once attacked, in the hope of overwhelming this little force. It stood its ground, and, meeting the onslaught with the utmost spirit, kept at bay ten times its own number. An

Italian commander of Alpini reserves on the left of the British line saw what was happening, and determined to go to their rescue. Some of his men thought that before they could reach the position every Briton in it would be either killed or wounded. The Alpini commander, however, had no such doubts, and said, "We should arrive too late if any troops but the British bulldogs were defending the position, and if any but the Alpini chamois were rushing to their rescue." His men thereupon dashed forward, crying at the top of their voices, "Viva Inghilterra!" and were received by their rescuers with loud cheers for Italy. The Austrians, surprised by this unforeseen advance, drew back; whereupon the British officer ordered his men to charge. This was too much for the Austrians, who prudently took to their heels.

Another British officer, commanding an advanced post, lost all his men, and held the position alone. Two machine guns were firing at him; but he managed to shoot the crews and capture the weapons, which he immediately turned on the enemy. It is said that during their brief success the Austrians reached the headquarters of one of our battalions. The commanding officer did as many had done before him: he collected all the available men, including the cooks, and at their head counter-attacked, with the result that twenty prisoners and a number of machine guns and flame projectors were captured.

Now let us see what was happening on the Piave front. A correspondent wrote: "It is a lovely stretch of country in which and for which the Italians on the Piave are fighting—a land of the richest green, with ample meadows and dense woods of towering trees. Scattered up and down its remote lanes stand the great villas and castles of the Venetian nobility." On the first day of the offensive the Austrians crossed the river at several points. They seized the bank on the Italian side opposite to St. Dona, and began to form a bridgehead. The bed of the stream was also crossed higher up, and the invaders began fighting their way up the eastern slopes of the Montello Plateau. The river by this time had risen sufficiently to enable him to float his pontoon bridges, and thus make the crossing easy. It may surprise you to learn that when the water rose the work of bridging the stream became easier. While the river was very low the troops could walk across for most of the



The Austrian Retreat across the Piave:

About the fifth day of the Austrian offensive the Piave became flooded, and in one sector alone swept bridges mercilessly. Our illustration shows one of the bridges on the Italian side being smashed by



a Bridge broken by Italian Shells.

[By permission of The Sphere.

away twelve out of fourteen pontoon bridges. While the torrent was at its height the Italians shelled the artillery fire.

distance. Here and there, however, they came across a narrow arm where the water was too deep to be fordable. The men might get across these deep places, but they could not carry their guns with them. When, however, the river rose sufficiently, the pontoons floated, and men and guns could pass along them very quickly. You must not forget that, while the bridges were being floated and the men were crossing, Italian shells were bursting among them, and were working frightful havoc. Some five floating bridges were thrust across the stream above St. Dona.

Early on Monday, the 17th, the third day of the battle, it was clear that the effort on the mountains had failed, and that the chance of envelopment had vanished. It would now seem that the enemy had determined to give up his original plan and devote all his energies to the Piave. If we are to understand what followed, we must consider that a new battle had now begun. The enemy was about to try a frontal attack on the line of the river. As you already know, it could not yield him any such success as he hoped for when he set his pincers to work ; it was, however, the second-best plan that he could think of. If he could force the Italians to retire to the Adige, he would win much ground and uncover the coveted city of Venice. Its capture would be a feather in the Austrian cap, and the rich Italian plain would provide some of that food which was necessary to keep down the clamour at home.

In order to drive the Italians from the river, he would have to turn the line either by making himself master of the Montello Plateau—which would put him on the left flank of the Italians, and give him excellent observation of all their movements—or by thrusting out a very large bridgehead opposite St. Dona. He first made a great effort against Montello, which was held by the Eighth Italian Army, under the Duke of Aosta. Hungarian troops reached the crest, and even began to descend the southern slopes ; but as the battle continued they lost ground. Every bit of food, every shell, and every additional man had to be sent to them across the river, which was being fiercely shelled by the Italians. Behind Montello they had from five to ten footbridges ; but the number constantly changed as the Italian shells smashed them and sent the splintered pontoons whirling down the eddying river. When the rain began to descend in torrents and the river rose in flood, the Austrians on

•

Montello were in a most perilous position. By Wednesday the Austrian High Command had come to the conclusion that the best chance of turning the Piave line was by a thrust near St. Dona.

You already know that a bridgehead had been formed on the Italian bank opposite St. Dona. By the evening of 17th June the enemy held a shelf of this bank stretching southward to Fossalta and then bulging westward for three miles round St. Dona. The ground which he occupied resembled in shape the stem of a tobacco pipe with the bulge turned towards the Italian army. During the 18th the Austrians strove hard to enlarge this salient, but never did it stretch for more than about five miles to the west of the river.

On the evening of the fourth day, 18th June, the Italians made a determined assault on the Austrians holding the St. Dona salient. Detachments of Arditi, specially trained assault troops, swept down upon it from the northern side. The rain was falling in torrents at the time, and the country, which consists of flat meadows divided by thick hedges, copses, and deep streams, was very difficult. Nevertheless, the Arditi went forward most eagerly, and soon were busy capturing and sending back prisoners. While they were rounding up the battle-weary Austrians, other Italian troops attacked the salient from the south side. Do what he might, the enemy could not make headway; he was cramped in the narrow space, and he had behind him flimsy footbridges which were continually being smashed by Italian naval guns fired from pontoons further down stream. Further, the river, now swiftly flowing, was behind him, and he could only retire at the cost of terrible losses.



On 19th June, the fifth day of the operations, the Piave rose rapidly and unexpectedly, and soon was a roaring torrent. Many of the bridges were swept away by the flood, and their destruction was assisted by the cut logs which lay upon the mountains, and were swept into the current by the swollen

streams. As these logs were swept forward they beat against the piles of the bridges or the pontoon boats like battering rams. The bridge behind Montello held firm, but for many miles below everything went. The Austrians were now in a very dangerous position. They were like Horatius on the farther bank of the Tiber—

“Twice thirty thousand foes in front,
And the broad flood behind.”

During 15th June and the two following days the Austrians sent sixteen infantry and two cavalry divisions over the river between Nervesa and St. Dona. From the first these troops found great difficulty in supplying themselves with food and ammunition. The river was still rising; the salient, under the pressure of the Italian artillery, the Allied airmen, and the Italian infantry, was growing narrower every day. No supplies or reinforcements could cross the stream, and by the evening of the 19th the position was desperate.

By this time the Austrians on the Montello were completely cut off from their supports on the left bank of the river. It was clear that they could maintain themselves neither on the plateau nor in the salient in front of St. Dona. There was nothing for it but retreat across the river—the most terrible operation that could be undertaken by any army. The Piave had to be crossed under a murderous fire from the Italian artillery, machine guns, and aircraft. Those who had crossed had lived for eight days in an inferno. No respite had been given them. They had been shelled day and night, their bridges had been destroyed, their boats sunk, and their comrades shot down as they climbed the river banks. The wavering enemy was driven into retreat by two dashing operations—the one at Montello, the other between the St. Dona salient and the sea. Let me describe the latter first.

On page 363 is a little map which shows you the marshy ground lying to the west of the Lower Piave. Notice the great lagoon with its many arms. Running along its northern edge is a river called the Sile, which is joined to the south of St. Dona by a branch of the Piave known as the Old Piave. The combined rivers skirt the lagoon, and reach the sea to the south of its eastern end. Just where the stream makes a sharp angle from north-west to south-east a canal has been cut to the mouth of

the Piave proper. You will understand all this more clearly if you refer to the little map.

On Friday, 21st June, the Italians landed a mixed force of soldiers and sailors on the coast, and pushed them forward across the canal in the direction of Grisolera. The Austrians dared not advance southward from their salient, because the country is little more than marsh and mud flat. The Italians, striking north-eastward from the canal, had good firm ground, and were able to make headway. You will see that they were now beginning to turn the St. Dona salient. It was this movement which finally decided the Austrians to retreat.

While the advance from the sea was in progress, the Italians made a fierce attack on Montello, at the other end of the line. Some of our Allies reached the left bank of the stream to the north of the plateau, and took the enemy in the rear, while others attacked in front and at Nervesa. The combined result was that the Austrians were driven pell-mell into the river. The battle raged furiously, and the ground was strewn with dead.

On the night of 22nd June, and throughout the following night, the retreat was continued under the cover of strong rear-guards of picked troops, who fought with a desperate courage, which the Italians fully recognized. As soon as the enemy was seen to be on the move they pressed forward eagerly. The Italian cavalry, famous throughout Europe for its dash, was let loose, and, breasting the Piave, threw the flying Austrians into terrible confusion, great numbers of them being drowned. The enemy admitted a loss of 100,000 men, including 20,000 or more prisoners; while the Italians, taking into account the casualties in the mountain fighting, estimated the Austrian losses at 180,000, together with 22,000 prisoners. High as is this figure, the Austrians were fortunate to get off as easily as they did. There was no rout, for the retreating troops were able to rally on the other side of the river. Nevertheless, Caporetto had been avenged, and the Italian victory was complete.

The main battle ended on 25th June, by which date the Austrians had been thrown back over the river at all points north of the confluence of the Old Piave with the Sile. Between that point and the river the Italians gradually pushed back the enemy, recovered most of the guns which they had



In Front Sure Defeat; behind no Retreat. Austrians surrendering to Scots on the Piave.
(From the picture by G. Amato. By permission of The Graphic.)

lost, and captured sixty pieces of enemy artillery. In the mountain sector there were still some Allied positions in the enemy's hands. On 29th June an attack was made to recover them. After a brief but intense bombardment, the Italians at dawn stormed Monte di Val Bella, repulsed counter-attacks, and finally captured the position. Other struggles, some of them very fierce, gave our Allies other points of vantage in which the enemy had retained a footing. In the end every position of moment was recovered, and 2,000 additional prisoners were taken.

The battle which I have described in this chapter was really won on the second day of the offensive, when the Archduke Joseph's advance on the Montello Plateau was held up before he could completely seize it. In the first rush the Austrians went up the south-eastern slopes and over the crest, but there they were stopped by the maze of wire entanglements constructed by our engineers when General Plumer was holding the position. This check decided the fate of the battle. Had the plateau been won the story might have had a different ending.

General Diaz deserves high praise for his victory ; but the Austrians by their bad generalship did much to bring about their own defeat. Their first great blunder was to throw too small a number of men across the river, which they knew was liable to sudden floods. They had plenty of men for the purpose, for there were many divisions within striking distance ; but, as you know, they only employed about half the forces available. The command was divided between two generals, and no arrangements had been made for reinforcing the sectors in which it was vital that there should be victory. Attacks on too wide a front, the lack of lengthwise communications, wasted effort, fighting with a flooded river in the rear, using only a portion of the troops massed for the purpose—these were the blunders which led to the Austrian disaster.

The great defeat came at the moment when a military success was all-important to Austria.

“ It is a defeat,” said the Prime Minister on 24th June, “ inflicted upon a Power which is not in the best position to sustain it. Here is a great offensive in which the Austrian Empire has put the whole of her strength. She gathered up the whole of her available strength for this attack ; she brought every available man she could spare from the Eastern front, and

she has thrown the whole of her strength upon the Italian armies. . . . Over 50 per cent. of the Austrian army were actually engaged in the fight. They won a certain preliminary success. They crossed the Piave; they captured a very important position on the Montello, and if they had captured the whole of it they might have got behind the whole of the Piave position, and there might have been a disaster. What happened? They were first of all held. The Italian armies then began to bring pressure to bear upon them. The pressure increased from day to day. The Austrians are now in full retreat. The Italians have driven the enemy across the river; they have crossed themselves, and now they are, for the first time for months, on the left side of the Piave. The Austrian Army and the Austrian Empire have had inflicted upon them one of the greatest and most disastrous defeats of the war, and that at a time when there is serious discontent in Austria—very serious discontent—when three-fifths of the population are completely out of sympathy with the objects of the war.”

While this defeat depressed the Austrian people, it gave new heart and hope to the Italians. After the disaster at Caporetto they lost faith in their army. The shattering blow delivered along the Piave restored their confidence, and made them proud of their soldiers once more. While they believed that the Austrians would make another great assault, they felt confident that they could beat it off, no matter whether it was delivered on the mountains or on the line of the river.

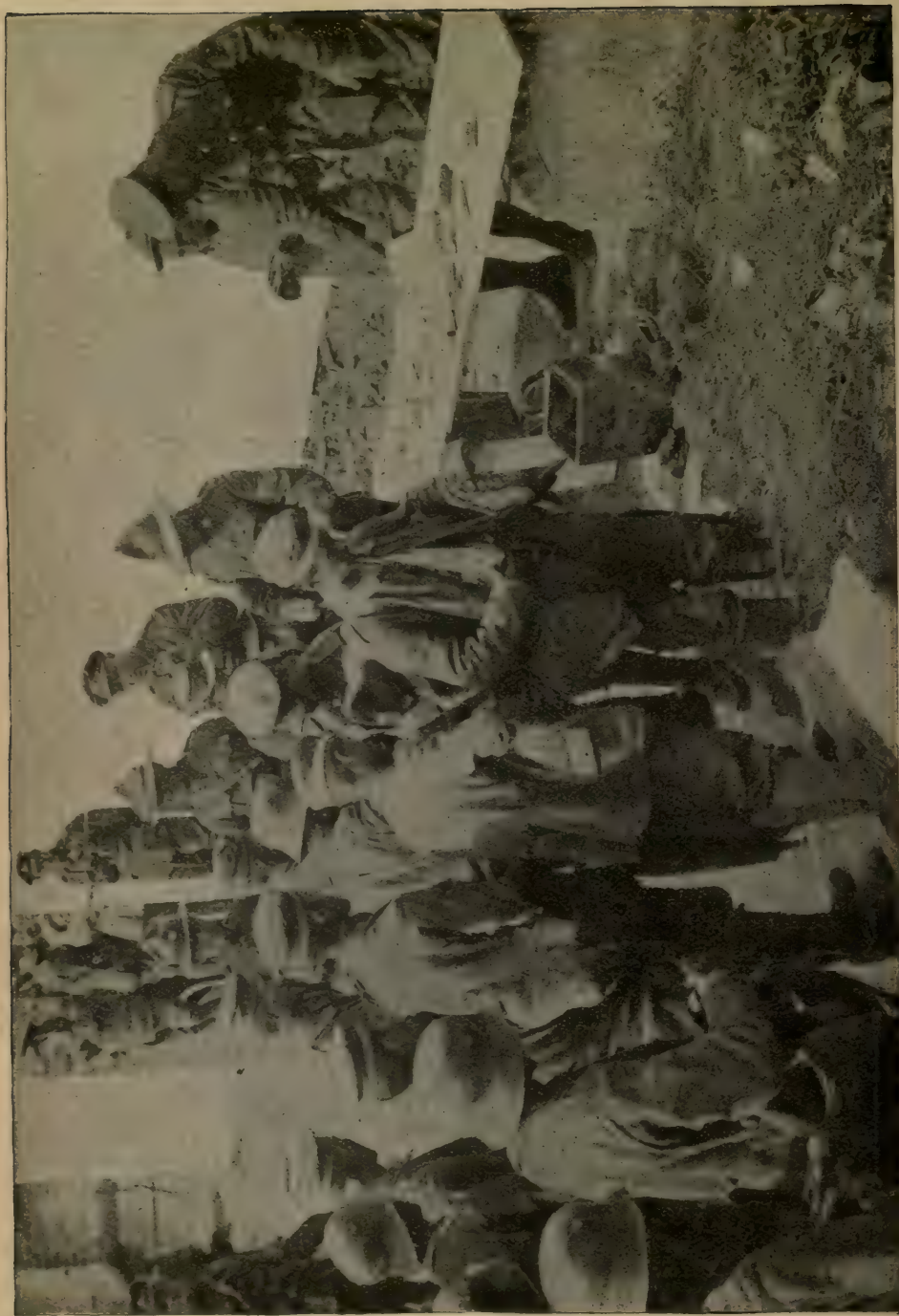
CHAPTER XL

THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE MARNE.

AFTER the failure of von Hutier's effort on the Matz river (see Chapter XXXIV.) the Germans devoted six weeks to preparations for their fifth and mightiest blow. During this interval the Allies were not idle. In Flanders, on 28th June, the British advanced their line by capturing a series of fortified hamlets; and on the same day the French, under General Pétain, began a sudden offensive to the west of Soissons, where, you will remember, von Boehm's army had made an advance as far as the northern end of the Forest of Villers-Cotterets. The Germans were surprised, and were driven from the high ground with a loss of 1,200 prisoners. General Pétain followed up this success next day by pushing back the enemy south of the Ourcq for half a mile.

On 1st July the Americans very neatly and rapidly flattened out the salient round the village of Vaux, about two miles west of Château-Thierry. Though, as I told you on page 304, the Allies had captured Hill 204, which looks right down upon Château-Thierry, the Germans still held the village of Vaux, which stands on the north-western side of the hill. To make their position on the hill secure, the French had to clear the enemy out of the village. The task was entrusted to the Americans, who advanced with such dash that in forty minutes they were masters of the place, and had captured over three hundred prisoners. Next day the Germans counter-attacked; but before they could come to grips they were badly mauled by the American artillery, and were forced to abandon the enterprise, leaving a further batch of prisoners in the hands of our transatlantic Allies.

Probably you know that Independence Day—4th July—is



Dealing with German Prisoners captured on the Western Front.

(British official photograph.)

When a prisoner surrenders he is marched off to a cage, and each man is required to give up his papers and personal belongings. These are examined before he is sent on to his place of captivity. On the first day of the great Allied counter-offensive upwards of seven thousand prisoners were sent to the cages.

observed as a national holiday in the United States. It is the anniversary of the 4th of July in the year 1776 on which the American Congress formally declared that the thirteen United States of America "are, and of right ought to be, Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from All Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, dissolved." The 4th of July 1776 was a day of angry parting. The 4th of July 1918 was a day of happy meeting and warm friendship. On that day of bright sunshine tens of thousands of Londoners wore at their buttonholes little American flags, and for the first time in history a banner combining the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes floated above the Victoria Tower of the Houses of Parliament.

Naturally, the Americans in France were eager to mark the day by some feat of arms. You have not forgotten the small town of Villers-Bretonneux. It stands on a plateau across which runs the main road to Amiens, only about ten miles to the west. On the northern slopes of this plateau there are a couple of woods—Vaire Wood and Hamel Wood—and between them and the Somme stands the village of Hamel. Both the woods and the village were in the hands of the Germans on the morning of Independence Day, 1918. Some weeks previously the Germans had tried to rush the end of the plateau and get round on to the slopes overlooking the old cathedral city. They had been beaten back by the British on the left and by the French on the right, and in this way the northern flank of the plateau had been secured.* All that now remained was to thrust the Germans out of Hamel and the woods which I have mentioned.

Australians and Americans undertook the business. The ruins of the village were heavily bombarded, and the troops went forward behind Tanks which crushed the machine-gun posts and cleared the enemy line. The Germans made but a poor resistance, except south of the woods, where the ground was marshy and the Tanks were checked for a time. Soon, however, the Tanks worked round the soft ground, and the whole line was captured. You will be interested to learn that the Australians were commanded by Lieutenant-General Monash, a Jewish officer who had received very rapid promotion.

* See page 263.

"Vaire Wood and the battered village of Hamel, on the green slopes above the Somme," wrote Mr. Percival Phillips, "will find a place in American history; for there, in the dawn of Independence Day, British troops and the soldiers of the Republic fought side by side for the first time, and died together in the cause of freedom. 'We will make good,' said a sergeant to his men as they shook hands in the darkness a few hours before the attack. They 'made good.' New troops never faced a barrage with finer courage, or saw the horrors of battle for the first time with less dismay. Australians who were their sponsors on the field will tell you that these American lads fought as determinedly as any veterans, meeting the Hun with his own weapons of bomb and bayonet, reaping their share of the harvest of prisoners, and killing, wherever killing was necessary, without flinching. The American boys who came back wounded from Hamel and Vaire Wood do not try to tell you that it was their battle. They are modest, and they say, 'It was an Australian show, and we were allowed to take part.'"

* * * * *

Four times in less than four months the Germans had made fierce but unavailing assaults upon the Allies. On 21st March they had struck on a fifty-mile front between the Scarpe and the Oise. On the following day they had broken through the Allied line, and had forced upon the British a rapid and lengthy retirement that cost them thousands of prisoners and many guns. For days our Fifth Army was in dire peril; but the onset was stayed on the outskirts of Amiens, and the enemy was robbed of the full fruits of his victory. On 9th April he struck his second blow along the Lys, where he pierced the front held by the Portuguese; and, advancing rapidly, flattered himself with the hope that the Channel ports would soon be in his hands. Again he failed to "make good," and before the hill region of Flanders his offensive petered out.

On 27th May he attacked the sector between Soissons and Rheims, and with wonderful speed and at a very small expense overran the Tardenois plateau and reached the line of the Marne, but found that he had thrust himself into a pocket where he was forced to fight on three fronts. On 9th June, while he was struggling to push out the side of the ever-narrowing salient which he had created, he launched his fourth offensive all the way from Montdidier to Noyon, and strove to outflank the western side of the salient by an advance towards Compiègne. On the little river Matz he was checked, and though his left reached the northern end of the Forest of Villers-Cotterets, he could go no further. All these offensives had failed to secure their objectives, and had cost the enemy enor-

mous sacrifices of men ; it was now time to make one huge effort to retrieve the situation. Germany was about to put her whole strength into the crowning stroke of the war.

Look carefully at this diagram, which roughly represents the Allied line on 14th July. You observe that it resembles a sickle in shape. The tip of the sickle lies to the west of Soissons ; the blade of the sickle is represented by the curve running southwards to Château-Thierry and round to Rheims, while its handle is the straight line striking eastward from the north of Rheims. Let us give our attention to that part of the blade which extends from Château-Thierry to Rheims, and thence to the Forest of Argonne. It was upon these sectors that the great blow was to be struck.

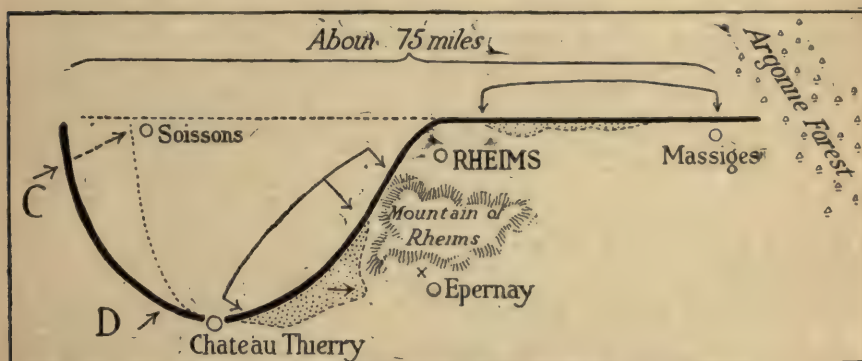


Diagram illustrating the French Counter-offensive.
(The shaded lines show the extent of the German advance.)

You already know the character of the country between Dormans and Rheims. It consists mainly of woods and high forested hills. The ground falls sharply to the south, and the slopes are as steep as those of Box Hill in Surrey, or of the Cotswolds as they sink to the vale of the Severn. The hills vary in height from three thousand to five thousand feet above the water level. The great obstacle on this eastern limb of the salient is the Forest of the Mountain of Rheims, which I have already described. This hill mass, covered with woods, could not be captured by a frontal attack ; but it might be turned, as in the case of the Lassigny Hills during the Battle of the Matz. To get behind it, the enemy would have to advance eastward along the banks of the Marne.

Now look at the sector which forms the handle of the sickle. Between Rheims and Massiges the line of battle runs across the open country of Champagne, with its wide, rolling fields. You would suppose that an advance could easily be made across these downs; but you must remember that the French knew every inch of the ground, and that their defences in this region were very strong. They had fought two great battles in this Champagne country, and had made special preparations to meet the forthcoming attack.

The enemy's plan was as follows. He meant to make a great effort on a front of fifty-five miles, with the ruined city of Rheims as its centre. He hoped to push back the handle of the sickle, and at the same time make a thrust against the eastern side of the blade. If he succeeded he would trap the Allies as in a vice, and would probably make huge captures of men and material. Further, if he could push southwards to Sézanne or Vitry, he would cut the main railway line from Paris to Nancy, and would rob the troops lying round Verdun and along the Vosges of their chief means of supply. If he could advance along the Marne westward from Château-Thierry for fifteen miles, he would be able to shell Paris with his long-range guns, and, as he hoped, break down the spirit of the sorely tried Parisians. The great operation upon which he was now about to embark promised as much success as the offensive which he launched between the Scarpe and the Oise on 21st March.

The enemy's plan was very clever, but it had one grave weakness. It took for granted that the Allies had been so reduced in numbers that they could do no more than stand on the defensive. The German High Command believed that Marshal Foch had used up his reserves, and that he had now no large mass of troops to fling into the battle. Foch, as you know, was a great student of war, and he strongly held by Napoleon's plan, which was to put as few men as possible into the fight right up to the moment when he was prepared to make his main attack. Foch had met the four great German offensives with forces far less in numbers than those of the attackers, and he had not frittered away his reserves by attempting to win back the lost ground by striking separate blows here and there. He was prepared to wait until his opportunity for a big offensive arrived, and meanwhile his reserves were growing in numbers every day.

The German people had been taught to make light of the Americans. They were assured in their newspapers that large numbers of United States troops could not be brought across the Atlantic, and that their U-boats would sink them before the transports could reach the shores of France. Even if American troops could be landed, they would prove but poor soldiers, and they could not be supplied with food and munitions of war from bases more than three thousand miles away by sea. The Allies had not sufficient ships for the purpose, and such ships as they had would fall an easy prey to the torpedoes of their submarines. Then, again, such American troops as were landed would be raw, and months would elapse before they were sufficiently trained to take their places in the firing-line. Never was a people more bitterly deceived.

The disaster of March had stirred the Americans to a wonderful effort. Transport followed transport in quick succession, and by the first day of July there were over a million Americans in France. In the ten months between May 1917 and the beginning of March 1918 less than 300,000 United States soldiers had been landed in Europe. During the four months March, April, May, and June of 1918 this number had been almost trebled. Many of the newcomers were not fit as yet for the field, but every day saw more and more of them ready for battle. Thus, while the German strength was ebbing away, the tide of Foch's reserves was flowing more strongly every hour. It must be remembered, too, that the American troops which were pouring into France were the very pick of the nation, and that they came fresh to the fray at a time when the bulk of the forces on both sides were battle-weary after nearly four years of terrible and almost constant struggle.

The German High Command refused to believe that the Americans were a menace to them; they were quite sure that Foch had not sufficient troops with which to begin an offensive on a large scale. They could dictate the form of the battle, and the Allies could do no more than meet the forces thrust against them. If you turn to the diagram on page 373, you will see how this ignorant conceit led them to run their heads into a noose. You know that they proposed to advance along the handle of the sickle, and at the same time against the inside of the blade on the eastern side. While they were so engaged, and the front of their attack was turned towards the south and



"As to a Feast." American Soldiers passing through

(from the drawing by J. Semont. By permission

This drawing shows the scene at a railway station in the suburbs of Paris as a troop-train full of American allies is well contrasted with the quiet but deep satisfaction of the French, whose losses have been so a feast.' Your magnificent dash overthrew and startled the enemy. . . . You have shown yourselves



a French Station on the Way to the Front.

of The Illustrated London News.)

soldiers passes through on the way to the fighting zone. The freshness and eagerness of our American
severe. General Mangin in his order to the 3rd American Army Corps said, "You went to 'battle as to
worthy sons of your great country, and you have won the admiration of your comrades in arms."

south-east, it would be possible for the Allies to strike against the outside of the sickle blade on the western side. This would mean that the Germans inside the bend of the sickle would be taken in the rear, and would run the risk of being cut off. If such a movement took place it would spell ruin for the Germans ; but, as you know, they were quite ready to take the risk, because they believed that Foch was too weak in men to undertake any such enterprise. Before you reach the end of this chapter you will see that the unexpected happened, and that the Germans were defeated because the French took full advantage of their colossal blunder.

Now for the story of the battle, which began on the morning of Monday, 15th July. It falls into four chapters, which might be headed : The Great German Blow ; Carrying On ; An Unexpected Assault in the Rear ; Defeat. Before five o'clock on the misty morning of the 15th the Germans were arrayed for the attack all the way from the Forest of the Argonne to Château-Thierry, a distance of fifty-five miles—that is, on a longer front than that which they assailed on 21st March. East of Rheims lay the Third German Army, under General von Einem, and a new army which had been formed for the purpose under General von Mudra. Between Rheims and Château-Thierry extended the First Army under General van Boehm. These forces consisted of some fifty-five divisions, twenty-five of which were intended to break down the resistance east of Rheims, and thirty of which were to smash the French from Rheims to Château-Thierry.

Three French armies were guarding the front to be attacked—the Fourth Army, east of Rheims, under General Gouraud ; the Fifth Army, south and west of the city, under General Berthelot ; and the Seventh Army, commanded by General de Mitry, holding the line of the Marne from a little east of Château-Thierry to Fossoy. Between the left of de Mitry's army and Château-Thierry lay American troops. Other units from the United States were fighting with Gouraud, while detachments of British and Italians were with Berthelot. Seventy per cent. of the Allied forces engaged consisted of native-born Frenchmen.

Let us first give our attention to the fortunes of the German attack along the handle of the sickle. I have already told you that special and secret preparations had been made to meet

this assault. General Gouraud had established large numbers of isolated posts in the forefield, and had stationed his advanced batteries in positions from which they could take a terrible toll of the advancing host. On the eve of the attack he sent an order to his men telling them that they might be attacked at any moment, and bidding them remember that, powerfully reinforced by artillery and infantry, they were fighting on ground which they had transformed into a fortress. "The bombardment will be terrible, but you will endure it without weakness. The assault will be fierce, and accompanied by smoke clouds and gas waves, but your position and your armament are both formidable. In your breasts beat the strong hearts of free men." When the bombardment began he withdrew his troops from the outpost line, and massed them in the positions where he meant to make his chief resistance. The Germans, who employed many Tanks in their advance, found an empty field before them, and they suffered terribly from the French guns as they pushed forward. Before the end of the day they had lost 50,000 men. The slight extent of ground which they gained was of no value to them, and the French line was still intact. This failure meant the failure of the whole offensive.

Meanwhile, von Boehm's forces were in motion. The left wing advanced a few miles, but was held up by Berthelot's army. Against the Mountain of Rheims it could do little or nothing; but along the eleven miles of the Marne above Château-Thierry the right wing crossed the river, reached the crest of the hills on the south side, and descended into the villages of St. Agnan and La Chapelle. All day long a furious battle raged along the south bank of the river. The Americans on both sides of Château-Thierry behaved splendidly. As the enemy attempted to force his way through Vaux and along the road leading to the river, they fell upon him, shattered his attack, and captured hundreds of prisoners, along with a brigadier-general and his staff. Between Fossoy and Jaulgonne they offered a stubborn resistance to the Germans, who crossed by pontoon bridges and canvas boats, and were covered by heavy fire from every kind of gun. Under the terrible hail of shells the Americans were forced to retire; but at certain points their machine gunners stood their ground, and prevented the enemy from crossing.

Then came the counter-attack. The Americans advanced

with such determination that the Germans were flung back across the river, leaving a thousand prisoners in their hands.

When the fierce day drew to its close, Ludendorff must have been bitterly disappointed. The advance had been checked at the outset, and this check had wrecked the whole enterprise. The attack along the handle of the sickle had broken down completely, and von Boehm had only pushed forward on the right for some three or four miles. He had hoped to reach the line Epernay-Montmirail before evening, but had not come within eight miles of it. Nevertheless, he had crossed the Marne, and by Tuesday morning had pushed the French from the hills that gave them observation along the line of the river. Though his success was imperfect, many people in the Allied countries grew gravely anxious.

On the 16th the Germans strove hard to extend their gains. Their left wing had failed upon the bare plains of Champagne the previous day, and they had been foiled in their attempt to advance from Château-Thierry towards Paris. Though the original plan had failed, they might still push along both banks of the river towards Epernay, and by turning the mountain mass of Rheims, destroy the salient round that city and capture large masses of men. All day Tuesday a swaying battle was fought along the road to Epernay. The French were driven from Chatillon, on the north bank of the river, and from a village on the south bank, and it seemed that Epernay must fall. At Malvoisin, seven miles from the great wine centre, the advance was finally checked, after the village had changed hands several times. Meanwhile, the French had counter-attacked against St. Agnan and La Chapelle, had won both villages, and by nightfall had carried the heights above. They had thus won back their points of observation along the river from Jaulgonne to Dormans, and were in a position to smash the pontoon bridges by which which eight German divisions had crossed the stream.

On the third day, Wednesday, 17th July, the Germans made fresh efforts to push eastward and southward, but without result. Next morning a sudden, secret blow was struck which changed the whole face of the campaign. I have already given you a hint as to what was on foot. When the Germans began their attack along the eastern side of the salient from that city to Château-Thierry, Foch clearly perceived that they had made a huge

blunder, and had left him free to fall upon their rear by a sudden assault on the western face of the salient. He had bided his time until the enemy was held on the Epernay road, and beyond the Marne. Now his hour had arrived.

Before I describe the fighting that followed, let us clearly understand why an advance on the western side of the salient would prove fatal to the Germans inside the sickle bend. Examine this map, which shows you the main roads and railways of the Tardenois plateau. Look first at the roads. The main road, which supplies the whole of the front from Château-



Map showing Roads and Railways on the Marne Pocket.

Thierry to the Mountain of Rheims, runs from Soissons to Château-Thierry, and throws off a branch at Rozoy which proceeds to Fère, where it again branches into two—one road running direct towards the Mountain of Rheims, the other passing through the wooded country to meet the Marne at Jaulgonne. You can plainly see that if the main road from Soissons to Château-Thierry could be cut anywhere north of Rozoy, it would be impossible for supplies to reach the eastern face of the salient by means of horse and petrol-driven vehicles. Once the French were astride the main road south of Soissons,

the enemy's road communications, with his fighting front on the eastern side of the salient, would be badly hampered.

His plight would be even worse if the railway communications could be cut. Though he had constructed several narrow-gauge railways in the salient, every shell and gun that entered the whole pocket had to pass through a junction just east of Soissons. If this junction could be seized, or if it could be brought under fire at short range, he would be deprived of his main railway routes of supply. At Château-Thierry and along the river to Dormans he would be thirty miles from his railhead. Thus, he would be forced to retreat both from the line of the river and from the eastern side of the salient. This great result could be brought about by a French advance of six or seven miles against Soissons and the main road running southward to Château-Thierry.

On the morning of the 18th French troops to the north of the Ourcq, and American troops to the south of the same river, struck on a twenty-mile front. I have spoken of this blow as secret and sudden. The Germans, however, must have gathered that a counter-attack was preparing, because for days past certain villages had been captured to form jumping-off places for the great assault. The enemy, however, paid no attention to these operations, because he was fully assured that the French were too feeble to undertake an offensive. The army which was to advance north of the Ourcq was commanded by General Mangin, the other by General Dégoutte. General Mangin first became famous when he planned the heroic attack which recovered Fort Douaumont. He added to his fame by capturing the Chemin des Dames in April 1917, and was afterwards promoted to command the army which brought von Hutier to a standstill on 9th June. He was considered one of the best French leaders, and was known as the "Sepoy general," because in 1912 he organized a colonial army for France. General Dégoutte, his fellow-commander, had scarcely been heard of until he was placed at the head of the Franco-American army which fought so stoutly to the north-west of Château-Thierry.

Mangin sent his troops forward without a preliminary bombardment—thus following the example of General Byng at the Battle of Cambrai. He relied on numerous Tanks to break down the wire and sweep a path for his infantry.*

* See panorama on page 290.



General Mangin.

By half-past ten in the morning the whole of the enemy's first-line defences had been overrun, and in some places five or six miles of ground had been gained. To the west of Soissons the " Hill of Paris," which overlooks the town, was seized, and at a range of 4,000 yards the all-important junction was under fire. Further south, near Buzancy, the main road was cut. At a single bound the two great objectives had been won, and the enemy's communications had been paralyzed.

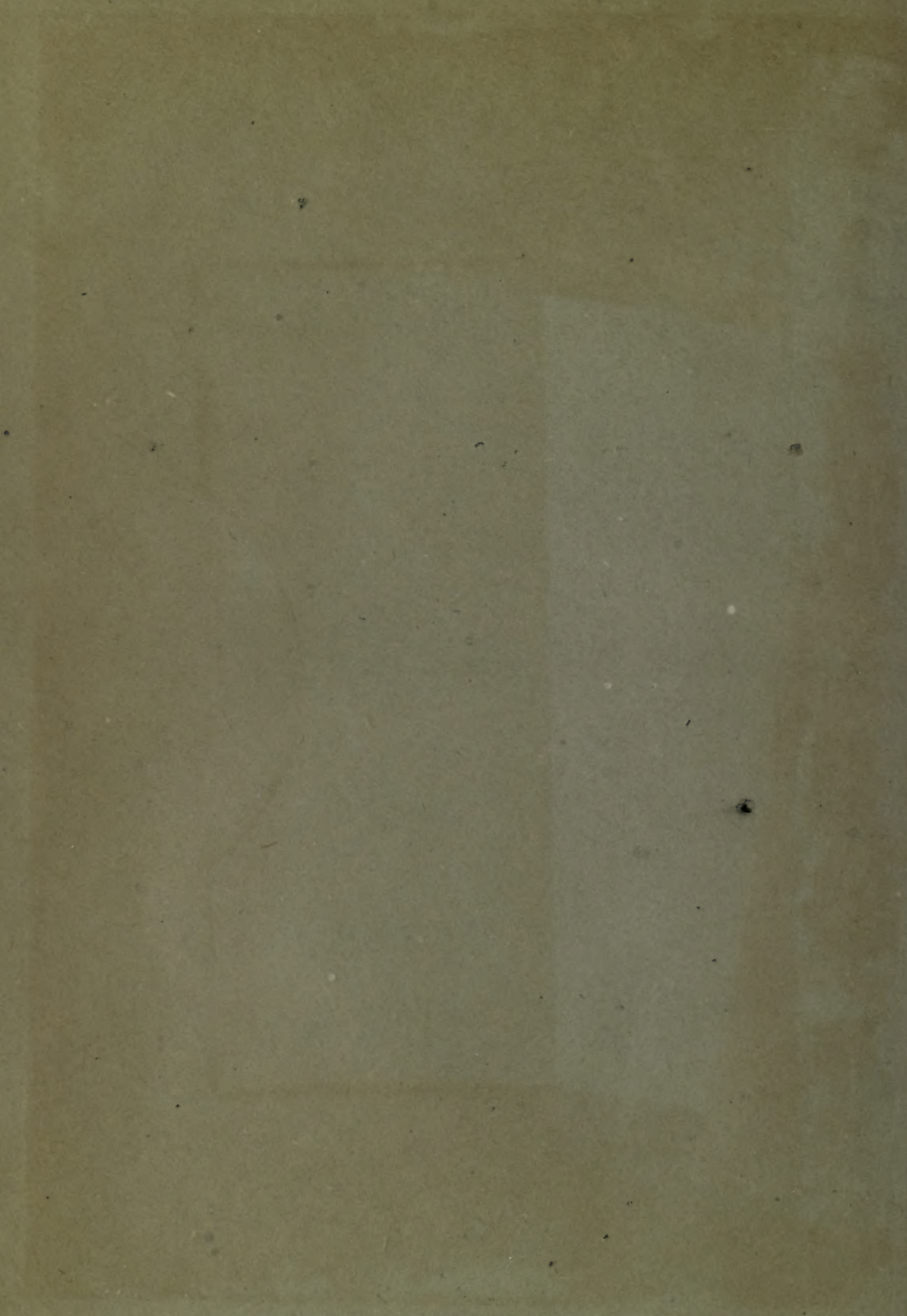
By noon on Thursday the commander of the eight German divisions which had crossed the Marne knew that his great routes of supply were closed to him. On Friday evening, as the situation grew desperate, he was forced to give the order to retire.

* * * * * * *

With this great dramatic stroke, which in a single day brought the fifth and mightiest of the German offensives to naught and compelled the enemy to retreat in confusion, our ninth volume may well draw to a close. So sudden, so unexpected was the French onset, so completely did it falsify the calculations of the German High Command, and so remarkable were the results, that the Allies, though taught by bitter experience not to base high hopes on a single turn of Fortune's wheel, could not but hail it as a harbinger of shining hope. For four terrible months they had passed from anxiety to anxiety as the German hordes bit deep into their battle lines, and drove them back by the sheer weight of numbers. Again and again they stood upon the brink of disaster, but the enemy achieved no decisive result. The armies which he had striven to destroy were still intact, and every day saw them increased by those new reserves from across the ocean which would soon give them overwhelming strength. Hour by hour the scale was turning in their favour, and this second victory of the Marne—name of ill omen for Germany—seemed to them the first flush of the dawn of victory.

END OF NINTH VOLUME,

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN AT
THE PRESS OF THE PUBLISHERS.



**PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET**

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

D
522
.7
P37
1915
v.9
c.1
ROBA

