GERMANY
DEFEAT

By
Count Charles de Souza
and
Major Haldane Macfall

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A STRATEGIC HISTORY OF THE WAR

FIRST PHASE

BY

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AND

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CONTENTS

LIST OF MAPS

THE PERSONAL NOTE

Lady Day, 1915.

To add to the torrent of literature—or letterpress—that is being poured out upon the Great War demands a profound reason. Were the public—our own public and the neutral public, above all the American public—being fully enlightened as to the significance of the strategy of this war, and as to the prodigious results already achieved, these pages would have no excuse. The public, strangely enough, for all the vast journalistic effort to enlighten it, has not yet fully grasped the strategic significance of the war—yet it is of the most vital consequence to the public that it should so grasp it, and no time lost.

This is not to lay any blame upon journalism. It is not the fault of the journalists. The service rendered to the public by journalism in this stupendous strife is astounding. Journalism is concerned with the recording of events as they arise from day to day; and this service has been wonderfully performed. But strategy is outside the training and ken of journalism—it requires close study; and, let us say, for an editor to think that

by " reading up " a few text-books on war he can grasp the strategy and intention of a campaign is as though a journalist by reading up a few text-books on medicine and surgery could perform an exquisite surgical operation upon the brain.

Then the English-speaking public has never been keenly interested in the reading of strategy—indeed, the very word strategy at once conjures up in their minds a boredom of technical details and of tedious manipulation of numbers and armies and commanders and the like. Military and other expert writers, writing for soldiers, have increased the public distaste for any study of strategy. And by consequence the public are content to read the mere picturesque accounts of personal heroism or of battle written by a good journalist, and to leave the significance of the strategy to fighting men. The Great War has broken this habit by bringing forth two writers amongst us in particular who have made strategy and tactics of human interest to the public. Colonel Maude has brought his fine gifts and deep knowledge of strategics within the view of the man in the street, but unfortunately his essays are scattered throughout the press. Mr. Belloc has had the better fortune to secure a week to week rostrum from whence, with consummate skill, he has employed all his training in the French artillery to popularise tactics—written in the most illumin-

ating fashion—so that the public has had the inestimable advantage of being able to follow every tactical move of the armies in this great struggle from stage to stage as each move developed. And it is in the hope that the public, so educated, may follow and pay serious consideration to the more profound significances of the war as a whole, it is in the hope that they may try to grasp its strategic aims and acts and results, that these lines are being written. For—and this is of first importance to the public to-day—it is of vital importance to us all that we shall try to look at the war in the large, since our future and the destiny of our peoples depend upon a thorough grasp of that strategic significance.

It is most important for the public, as it is most important for the proper and unswerving prosecution of the war to a complete finish, for us to realise that *Germany was defeated at the Marne—that she has been a defeated people ever since—and that at hand is, and must resolutely be carried out, her complete crushing as a fighting force.* It may seem a startling statement to make on Lady Day of this year of 1915, that the destinies of Europe for generations to come have already been shaped. Few at least seem to have realised the fact. It may seem, if this be so, as if the journalists and writers in general upon the war were strangely blind

and dense. But the point that the public ought to grasp is that the destinies of Europe have already been settled in France, and that the vast operations now pending are but the perfecting of an achievement. Let there be no mistake. The crushing of Germany may call for a blood-sacrifice far greater than her defeat. She is in defeat—not vanquished. Her peoples are being tricked and deceived. But her guiding spirits know that she is defeated ; and they are now striving to trick the world into blindness to that defeat as they have so far tricked their own peoples. To crush her will demand perhaps a vast and hideous sacrifice. But if she be not crushed, the sacrifice of the generations to come will be so great and the threat and danger to democracy and to the freedom of man and the welfare of the world so constant, that civilisation will be baulked and set back for ages and the good of mankind thwarted and maimed.

Let us have no misunderstandings about it. This is no appeal for vengeance. It is a simple statement that if Prussianism, and all for which Prussianism stands, whether in Potsdam or Timbuctoo, be not smashed and broken here and now, this war has been wholly in vain, and our beloved dead lie slain in a frantic farce.

For the public to appreciate this is clearly a vital act. To grasp it, the public must make an effort

to understand the significance of the strategy of the war. There is no mystery, nothing really difficult to understand in it all. To rid it of the suspicion of dry-as-dust is the effort of these pages. It is the effort of a couple of men who have been life-students of strategics, and of Foreign Affairs upon which strategics are founded. The heavy duties of helping, in what small fashion may be granted to me, in the training of men for the Great War limits my day ; but in my friend Count Charles de Souza we have a student of strategics of astoundingly wide knowledge and skill, and it will be my chief part but to make the Englishing of his remarkable work clear to the public, and to explain for the man in the street what might otherwise be somewhat outside his ordinary ken. Count Charles de Souza brings to his study of strategy that freedom from bias which is essential to a judge. His researches reveal some startling facts in the larger aspects of the war. And if I can assist in making his pages clear to the man in the street I shall be well content.

HALDANE MACFALL.

MATTERS INTRODUCTORY

I

THE world will soon be full of books, indeed they already begin to rain upon us, wherein a sort of book-making from official pamphlets, and articles, and the like matter, codifies for us in an intelligent summary the chief events of the war. The work is, and will be, largely done by skilful penmen without any knowledge of strategy. It will fulfil useful purposes. The following pages bear no relation to any such intention. We have made strategic notes for our own guidance during the course of the campaign; we have made the most elaborate research for the position and acts of every unit that has fought in the war; we have tried to place these corps in their positions on the morning and the evening of each day—at reveillé and in bivouac and billet. Without the advantage of communion with the leaders and commanders, we have, from strategic training, sought out the motives for strategic acts, and drawn deductions from the attempts to execute those acts. This means a laborious process which it would be impossible to give to the public in detail without boredom. But

the picture of the war that we here give to the man in the street is the result of this complex search after facts and truth. The public does not see into the workshop—it only sees the finished work. The secrecy imposed by the commanders, especially the French, has not made for ease; but by dogged watchfulness and by his quick grasp of strategy, Count Charles de Souza has rarely been baffled for long in regard to the position of any unit.

The strategics of the campaign I shall leave practically as de Souza has written them. All sorts of theories of the fighting have been given to the public as though final; it will be seen that we have tested and found these accounts lacking the support of fact. The position of corps on the mornings and evenings of certain dates prove few of these accounts to be correct.

Histories of wars are prone to be one-sided, since those who write them generally belong to one of the warring powers and twist events with a national bias. The result is that the strategy of a campaign is confused, difficult to understand, and even when not an affair of stupid ignorance, it is of no mental profit to any man to read it. It is small wonder, then, that being so close to the din, few of even the best educated members of the community have been able to grasp the strategy of this Great War amidst the general upheaval and confused by

the wide assault of several nations, big and small, who are in armed conflict to-day—even after eight months of war.

One inevitably has a bias towards one's own people. Impartiality, especially in a period of strife, when the existence of one's own nation and of our allies is at stake, is not easy to attain. But if one would arrive at the strategic significance of war, it is absolutely essential to try to attain it. It is possible, with calm judgment and a sense of proportion, to reach a lucid estimate of the more important operations, and so to find the truth ; and, having found it, to state it with the courage of conviction once and for all.

We are not here concerned with the political aspects of the situation, as they have no definite laws underlying them, such as strategy has. Besides, the history of the diplomatic negotiations can easily be reconstructed in detail from a considerable amount of official documents which have been given a wide circulation. Indeed, it is in this province, and with rare clarity, that the Press has done so remarkable a public service. I will here but give a simple review of the outstanding points which directly affect the strategic intention guiding the war, and so clear the ground for de Souza to confine himself to a concise and lucid account of the actual struggle, that is to say the armed conflict which is the

result of strained political action and the inevitable end of all national rivalry and ambition. This description of the acts of the war will be rid of all those details which only confuse the main issue ; and thus the way will be simplified for the strict impartial statement of the *strategic* acts of the war.

II

To journalism can be paid this great tribute, that it has made clear certain basic truths to the wide world. There is no delusion, except amongst the hopelessly ignorant, that Germany made her war for colonial expansion. Germany made her war with one deliberate purpose, a purpose that she has pursued with dogged resolution and unflinching courage and relentless intention for a generation —World Domination. The chief end of all German preparation for war was the destruction of the mastery of the English-speaking peoples. All other action was aimed at this supreme achievement. It was impossible to arrive at this ambition without first destroying France. Whether, having crushed France, the Prussian intended to take territory from her is merely academic discussion and useless guesswork. Germany's design was to crush France swiftly once and for ever, that she might thenceforth proceed to her attack on the English-speaking peoples—first the British and then the American.

Whether Britain had stood aloof from her war with France or not, Germany intended to strike down British power. Had Britain stood aside Germany's work had been the easier—that was all. Germany's dogged scheme of befooling America is the guide to what would have been her handling of Britain.

It followed that France was bound to bear the brunt of Germany's attack. Whatever else happened, this was sure. And so it has proved. Russia was pledged to come to France's aid ; but Russian help could not come soon enough to save France if the German plan had succeeded. The entrance of Britain did more to help France in these perilous days, not only for the prodigious moral effect on France, not only for the great service done to France by Britain's small army, but by that sea-power which has damaged Germany more and more every day that the war was prolonged.

In challenging Britain at sea, Germany tried a fall with nature. The Germans challenged Destiny —or they rushed in where heroes fear to tread. Napoleon wrecked his great dreams of conquest by wasting his strength in challenging the sea-power of a sea-folk, as the Spaniard wrecked his all before him. The Prussian is to-day the victim of the like conflict with world-forces. The challenge to Britain at sea has been his ruin. The German is no more

capable of sea-power than an elephant. Sea-power does not come from bookish theories and an elaborate organisation ; sea-power is an instinct, arising out of the seafaring habit, and is as much compelled on a people as the necessity for that people to win its bread upon the waters. All the professors, all the encyclopædias, all the admiralty offices, all the gold lace, all the submarine murders in creation cannot yield it. The master-key to admiralty is the sea-genius of a whole people.

Germany's machine-made effort to master the seas is of a part with her machine-made nightmare of world-dominion. A people does not become a world-empire by the book. World-dominion grows out of the very marrow and instinct of a race, and needs generations for its building. The German genius, but lately freed from serfdom, thought, like a parvenu, to become an imperial force by mechanical organisation. The parvenu needs always to be forgiven for his vulgarities ; they are part of his energies. But being lately risen out of slavery, it was inevitable that her valour should be the valour of the slave-folk, not of the master breeds. It was inevitable that chivalry should be denied to her, and that her wars should be fought foully. It was inevitable that she should think her navies to be made of master-stuff by shirking battle with her enemies' navies and accounting acts of piracy upon

unarmed merchant craft as being acts of valour and of war. It was inevitable that she should employ falsehood and treachery in her acts of war, since it calls for a long tradition of mastery to rise above the habits of the slave-folk.

Surely history can show no more tragically pathetic sight than a people arming themselves to go forth and conquer the world, who have not yet arrived at self-government—a people so lacking in master-valour that they have fallen behind the leading democracies of the world, and have not had the courage to acquire government over themselves! The German peoples have been gulled into political slavery; but that such a subordinate people should march forth to overwhelm the great democracies is surely the maddest venture outside Bedlam! Nevertheless, so it has come about.

However, of prodigious value as the British alliance, above all Britain's sea-power, has been to France, we must not let our natural interest in the British achievement give us a false proportion. The fact remains that France had to bear the brunt of that stupendous onrush of Germany's vast legions, which the Prussians had prepared for a generation wherewith to overwhelm her, before she could gain help on any large scale. So far the world at large has probably realised the general state of affairs. But we now arrive at a significant part of the crisis in

the destiny of Western Europe which is not generally grasped. *France not only bore the onrush of Germany's legions with consummate strategic ability, but she came within an ace of crushing the German armies very early in the campaign on Belgian soil; and within a few weeks had not only stalled off the German attack, but had defeated the German arms in a series of battles that decided the destinies of European civilisation.* In bald terms, with only a small contingent of British troops, and before Russia could come to her assistance, France had defeated and flung back the German armies, had taken the initiative, and had brought Germany to a state of siege. Further, France, had she cared to make the stupendous sacrifice, could have smashed the German armies to pieces. In other words, Germany is a defeated country, and at any moment she can be crushed.

It will be said that Germany is not yet crushed, and that her crushing may cost more loss of life than her defeat. That is perfectly true, just as it was true that the crushing of France after Sedan required as many months as the disaster of Sedan took weeks. It is equally true that Germany's defeat is not complete until she is crushed. The real danger lies not in the losses that may have to go towards her crushing, but in the patching up of a peace that will leave her the power to strike again.

III

There is yet another political factor that stands forth in this war, not wholly grasped even to-day, but necessary to a full appreciation of the war.

There is a muddle-headed idea abroad that Germany has, so far, held her own and is in a dominant position because she has not suffered any large dramatic loss—has known no Sedan—that not being invaded she holds the key to mastery. And, to do them justice, the General Staff has boasted this splendour to the German people with no uncertain breath. But when the General Staff take off their coats and put their heads together in secret conclave, they talk no such balderdash. Yet the boast has its value, and for a quaint reason.

The inability of journalists to understand the full significance of the strategy of the war was rendered still more obtuse by the cunning and unscrupulous skill of the German Staff in the manipulation of the foreign—especially of the neutral—Press. But there was a more intense blindness and deafness inherent in journalism due to the wide Moltke-olatry of the military world since 1870.

Now, of all the delusions of man, perhaps the most difficult to cast forth is an "olatry." Whether a man love his idols or fear his idols, for some mad reason he is as unwilling to test them as he is unreasoning in his worship. And it is significant that,

hating Prussia as most of the writers on the war hate her, there is scarce one of them that discusses or approaches the war except with Moltke-olatry upon the altars of his faith. There is scarce one who does not write as if Prussia were the Lord of War and the greatest of the warrior breeds ; there is scarce one who does not reason upon the war without looking at it in the terms of Germany. There is scarce one who does not reason as if Germany held the initiative and controlled the movements of the campaign !

Indeed, we find even military writers urging conscription and the *imitation of the German methods and system upon us*, at the very moment when we are giving our life's blood to destroy for ever those methods and that system !

The fact is that the sudden triumph of Prussia in 1870 tricked and dazzled Europe. That the Prussians blundered and botched their way to victory, that victory came often against the plan laid by Moltke, that Prussian strategy was successful because the French strategy was even more blundering and botchy, was wholly unrealised. Prussia succeeded ; and the world set up Moltke as the supreme genius in war, and the Prussian as the supreme warrior. So we get all this bombastic drivel in the Press about the War Lord and the like, which reads pretty childish to-day. Yet the creed has been

gabbled for so long that it seems impossible for the writers to shake themselves free of the banality. We, and Europe with us, are as responsible for the mad conceit of Prussia—if so blatant and tragic an egoism can be called by so trivial and light a word as conceit—as is Prussia herself. She came to look upon herself as invincible, and, to do her justice, she did all that lay in her power to make herself invincible. But she knew that the vast machine of war into which she had converted her people and her wealth and industries had this limitation—she must overwhelm her enemies with a rush, or fall. Time would always be against her wherever she struck. It was vital to Germany to win great victories and crush her enemies at the very outset of the war. To see what Europe, under Moltke-olatry, took to be the significance of the strategy of the opening of the war, there is no need to quote the fatuous editors who, last September, made the land ridiculous, but let us take the words of one of our most brilliant military writers in this week that I pen these lines: "The first of these expectations was amply realised" (*i.e.*, great victories at the outset of the war). "The strong fortress of Liége was completely in German hands within ten days of the first shots. The full mobilisation of the German forces had not been completed a fortnight when the greater part of Belgium was securely held. The

capital, Brussels, was entered and occupied immediately afterwards. The first French armies gathered to meet the shock were borne down in an avalanche of invasion. All the six weeks succeeding the forcing of the war were an uninterrupted triumph, *even exceeding what had been expected by the general public in the German Empire:* the whole garrison of Maubeuge, the crashing blow of the battle of Metz, the uninterrupted and enormous charge through Northern France, to the very gates of Paris, prisoners by the hundred thousand, and guns in interminable numbers. To crown all, just as the decisive stroke against the beaten French army made possible the immediate occupation of Paris, with the approach of Sedan day, the German population received the astounding news of Tannenberg."

Now it is certain that the German General Staff thus desired the German public to read the opening chapter of their war. It is certain that the Moltke-olatry of the German people so led them readily to read it. It is only too well known that the mass of our Moltke-olatrous Press so read it. It is the object of these pages to show that, on the contrary, the Germans went to their doom; that they lost their war; that the retreat of the French was one of the most masterly acts of war in the history of man; that the Germans came near to complete and appallingly disastrous defeat at the very early

stages of their " victory " ; and that the invincibility of the German arms lay shattered and broken at the end of this " victory." What is more, it is incredible that the German Staff were ignorant of the disaster that had befallen the German arms, however much they might strive to deceive Germany or Europe. It may be that in the first days of their astounding and overwhelming rush into France they looked to victory ; but the dream could not have lasted a week. Hours before they arrived within sight of Paris, the General Staff must have sat uneasy in their saddles—for these men are soldiers, and they are bound to have realised that the master-mind and master-will of the whirlwind was no German, but lay in one called Joffre, and that Prussia had brought forth no man of genius to compare with him. They must have realised that, except by some stroke of wild fortune, they were a defeated people—and it is to their credit that they so realised their defeat, and with consummate skill prepared a series of positions for their retirement so that that defeat should at least not become a mad rout.

I say these men were soldiers. As they rode back towards the Rhine from the Great Defeat, they at least knew full well that the dream of Prussian World-Dominion had flickered out, and that the star of Prussia had sunk in the waters of the Marne.

H. M.

CHAPTER I

THE POSITION OF THE GERMANS AT THE OPENING OF THE WAR

A HISTORY of the War of 1914–15, written in English or French, must necessarily begin with the campaign waged in France and Belgium during the first phase of the war, because although it is true that the first flames of the conflagration lit up the banks of the Danube and that developments in the Eastern theatre quickly assumed a decisive character, the fact remains that the first and principal effort of the aggressor nation was made in France and Belgium, and that the destinies of Europe were there fought out.

This campaign, to be clearly understood, must be divided into three distinct periods : First, from the opening of hostilities to the end of the so-called " Battles of the Marne " ; second, the battles of the Aisnes and of St. Mihiel and those of Flanders ; and third, the war of the trenches, commonly called the " siege-war."

The first period, naturally, should start further back than the actual outbreak of hostilities, as it should include such important matters as the organisation, mobilisation and concentration of the armies.

The military problem should be looked at, from the start, as more directly affecting the two principal and more military opponents in the struggle; that is to say France and Germany. In the long run it is true that the scope of operations became considerably wider, extending as it did as far as the Caucasus, the Dardanelles, and the Egyptian plains, not to mention Tsing-tao in distant China; but during the first and most decisive period of the war the main factors in the conflict were the French and German armies. England, at the outset, could not put more than a couple of small army corps in the field—the Indian contingent, a couple of divisions, not landing in France until after the end of the first period of warfare. Belgium had also but very few soldiers to put in the field, and had no time for effective concentration. And finally, Russia was not able to make her weight felt on Germany until her mobilisation was complete and she had properly settled with Austria.

The German scheme of operations, as is well known, was based on the rapid and overwhelming defeat of the French. Reading Bernhardi, one

sees that the Germans, or rather that their military leaders, did not despise the French army as much as might be thought, and that France was clearly realised to be their most powerful and resourceful foe upon the Continent.

The German solution of the problem therefore lay in the direction of the most effective use of all the means at their disposal for the crushing of France in the shortest possible time.

The means at the service of Germany if employed with full force were of the most decisive nature—rapidity of mobilisation and of concentration, and vast superiority of numbers. The first—rapidity of mobilisation and of concentration—was bestowed partly by the German Constitution, which allowed the head of the army to issue mobilisation orders without sanction of parliament; and partly by a railway system built entirely for strategic purposes. The second—vast superiority of numbers—was provided by a larger population and a greater centralisation of forces. In this matter Germany enjoyed a special advantage, for she had no troops to bring out from across the sea from distant shores; whilst France had part of her best fighting material away in Africa and in her Asiatic colonies.

No German, even of the less sanguine temperament, could entertain any doubt as to the result of the struggle; and in those busy days of active

preparation and hasty diplomatic dealings Germany stood triumphant, intoxicated with the consciousness of her might and the absolute certainty of victory—of swift and crushing victory. Her people had lived on the memories of 1870; and since then Germany had become even more united, strong and defiant. The respect and awe in which she was held bespoke to the German recognised weakness on the part of her neighbours. Pacifism, to the German mind, the desire for universal peace, was but a euphemism for cowardice. The hour had come. Germany, with a light heart and the "silvery laugh of Siegfried," would step over her boundaries and overwhelm "effete," "decadent" nations with her war-trained millions. Of a certainty, amongst the vast and glittering armies which, towards the end of July, 1914, poured across the Rhine in a westerly flood, there was not a single man who doubted for one instant that the end of France was at hand. Even the date chosen for opening the campaign was of good omen and must bring luck to the Kaiser's arms, for was it not on the first of August, forty-four years ago, that the victors of Sedan and Metz had crossed the frontier!

This time, however, in variance with 1870, and as the higher command clearly foresaw, the problem of crushing France in the shortest possible time would only be half solved by the secret mobilisation

and rapid concentration of the German armies. The mobilisation and concentration, for instance, would not be sufficient to place all the first-line troops and an equal number of first-rate reserve formations in the west, as at least half the units thus mustered through lack of space or of ground on which to deploy would have to remain inactive in the rear for many weeks, and could only advance to fill up gaps in the more forward army corps—a congestion due to the nature of the difficulty presented by the shortness of the French frontier. From Thionville in the north to Mulhausen in the south, no more than three armies, each of four or five army corps, could be concentrated; and there were four more armies of equal strength that would consequently be held back. Furthermore, the French eastern line of defences was very strong; and French concentration could be safely effected behind this unassailable line, thus robbing Germany of the benefit of her greatest advantage—superiority of numbers. She would win, of course—she had no doubts on the subject; but it might be months before she achieved a decisive and complete success; and Russia by that time would have become a dangerous foe at her back.

Such were the views of the German General Staff, who, contrary to popular belief, considered their war-plan entirely from its technical aspect, and

were never influenced by sentimental reasons nor restrained by any moral or political considerations. Full of their books and the teachings of Frederick the Great and of Moltke, they subordinated everything else to strategic necessity.

This is so true that the problem we have just surveyed had been thought out and solved by the Germans long before the war; and the German Staff had made no secret of it. A scheme of strategic railways had been elaborated and laid down along the Belgian frontier; and the military writers of Germany—some of whom were officers of distinction—had given the widest publicity to the fact, and to the aims of Germany in this direction. Finally, the points chosen north of Treves for the concentration of several German armies conclusively proves that the German General Staff had irrevocably made up their minds to violate Belgian neutrality; for the concentration of an army is an intricate, lengthy business, and cannot be altered without cross-orders, counter-marches, and the confusion which results.

In fact, the German Staff, adhering always strictly to strategic principles, omitted nothing from their calculations—not even the possibility of Great Britain participating in the struggle, nor of Belgium resisting. The German people and the rest of the army, of course, knew nothing of that, as it is not

customary for the heads of the army to discuss their plans in public. Nor is the public, untrained to reason in strategy, able to draw conclusions from even obvious preparations.

But the weighing of alternatives, which is the basis of all strategic counsels, can leave no doubt that when the gauntlet was thrown down and the Teutonic hosts were sent swarming along the frontiers of Luxembourg and Belgium, the German General Staff were quite ready to face all eventualities and to modify their plans, if necessary, as they went along. Nothing could stop them. They accounted themselves geniuses in war, every one of them. They accounted their troops invincible, and themselves the directors of invincibility. They confidently believed that no troops in the wide world could stand against the German arms. Even at the worst, with Belgium and England fighting on the side of France, they entertained no doubt as to the result. They had enough resources to crush any foes, and alternatives galore to fit any political modification that might present itself. Of course they preferred to fight France by herself until they could, in all ease, transfer their victorious and invincible troops to some other corner of the earth.

CHAPTER II

THE POSITION OF THE FRENCH AT THE OPENING OF THE WAR

At the outbreak of war the situation for France, although terrible and most threatening, looked simple enough ; and it was, after all, the one that had been anticipated for years, and for which the military authorities had made ready.

War with Germany implied an attack from the foe on the frontier which mattered most, the frontier which, for that reason, had been most elaborately fortified. From Verdun in the north to Belfort in the east, close to the Swiss frontier, stood the vast rampart against German assault—a bastion of strength against all surprise. There also lay the covering troops—" troupes de couvertures "—the " iron divisions " of the 20th and 7th corps, the " Ironsides " of France, fully trained and equipped, ever ready for war at an hour's call, not to mention other troops trained almost to as high a pitch for battle. Whilst these superb armies fought and kept the Germans at bay, the other forces of France would be mobilised, concentrated, and brought for-

MAP 1.

To face page 8.

ward to the field of battle. The shortness of the front to be defended, as well as its strength, would make all this possible; and, as matters stood on the day that the Germans set foot on French territory, the immediate prospect was not unfavourable to France.

Even the inclusion by the enemy of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg in the scope of operations could not make much difference, as the frontier portion of this tiny State where it touches France was infinitesimal. It only enabled the invaders to attack the insignificant fortress of Longwy, which was garrisoned but by a battalion of infantry.

The Germans derived some advantages by the orders given to the French covering troops to leave a space of ten kilometres (six miles) between themselves and the frontier. This measure, which was taken by the French Government in order to show its pacific intention and its strong desire for compromise and a peaceful solution, enabled the aggressors to seize some important positions along the frontier, particularly over the Vosges mountains; also to extend their entrenched lines in Lorraine, south of Saarburg and Savern, right into French territory. But all this mattered little, and German incursions and depredations on the frontier villages could not affect the strength and value of such strongholds as Verdun, Toul, Epinal or Belfort,

—or decrease the *moral* of the finest troops in France. The concentration of the French armies, therefore, was undertaken on the basis that France alone would oppose Germany in Western Europe; and the whole of the French forces, consisting of five armies of four to five army corps each, were gathered up gradually, to be stretched on a line extending, roughly, from Mezières to Belfort. They were to face eastwards. One of these armies, however—the 4th—was slightly in the rear, in reserve, west of Commercy; and this was the only indication that a strategist would get, by a glance at the map, that the French General Staff felt, or knew, that the dreaded violation of Belgian neutrality by the Germans was imminent; because, from its position, the 4th French army could, without a pronounced change of front, proceed to the north as well as to the eastward. This it did when the violation of Belgium by Germany was an accomplished fact and Belgium asked France for her support. Then, and not until then, the action of the three first armies was extended northwards; the 5th army slipped along the Meuse, from Mezières to a point opposite Fourmies on the Belgian frontier; and the 4th army, wheeling slightly northwards, stepped in between the 5th and 3rd army on the Meuse.

But it should be here borne in mind that this change of position was not entirely accomplished by

the troops themselves, as, when the plan of concentration had to be changed, mobilisation was still going on. The French Staff merely issued new orders, altering the destination of certain units. Some of these units had to change trains or return to their base in order to pick up a new line. The alteration applied to all the branches—artillery, cavalry, as well as commissariat; hence the delays and confusion often attending the adoption of a new plan of concentration under pressure of events. That the French authorities were able to accomplish the mobilisation and concentration of the troops in the scheduled minimum of time was in itself a remarkable achievement. It certainly was not anticipated by the Germans, who had hoped, by their hurried attack on Longwy and their swift incursions into French territory, to confuse the French Staff. A more immediate surprise (for they could not guess until some time afterwards the thoroughness of the French military arrangements) was the unity and coolness of a nation which they had thought to be divided amongst themselves, and above all other peoples volatile and superficial. The Germans, themselves trained most superficially in knowledge of foreign affairs, fully expected a revolution to break out in Paris. They even expected a gigantic mutiny through which Royalist, Socialist, Democrat and Republican, by fighting

amongst themselves, would create confusion, chaos, a regular panic, and thus greatly facilitate the already quite easy work of the German armies.

No nation made sadder mistakes than Germany in 1914, nor blundered more fatuously in its calculations. The beliefs she entertained about France in particular were extraordinary—they were colossal in their ignorance and *naïveté;* and certainly, if real Culture implies a total neglect of the history of other peoples, then the Germans had Culture to the pin of their collar. Setting aside their misapprehension as to the English psychology and character, and their fantastic interpretation of the Irish question and of the Suffragist movement, the tales seriously spread throughout Germany about a nation with which they had been in immediate contact for centuries were ludicrous to the point of fatuity. In spite of the way in which France had recuperated from her defeat and losses in 1870–71, in spite of the great and evident progress France was making in almost every field of human activity and enterprise, she was, according to the German view, even to the most learned amongst the Germans, decadent and, therefore, ripe for conquest. How could such a country—a Republic, a democracy—have an army and bring forth a great captain to lead that army! Was not French administration, military and civil, steeped in corruption?

Were there not scandals enough to prove it! Even on the eve of war had not one been breaking forth? Had not a deputy in the Chamber declared that the army had no ammunition!

It must be confessed that Germany was not entirely to blame for such beliefs, since, apart from the public washing of dirty linen so frequent in France, apart from the partisan spirit of politicians, there were enough French people, of the kind generally opposed to Republican ideals and institutions, to spread abroad the legend of French corruption and degeneracy. But, for all that, the German, with his much-vaunted knowledge of history, should have realised that a nation that had so often recovered from past defeats and so often astonished Europe and the world by its sudden bursts of energy, would become, when its back was to the wall, a most bitter and dangerous foe. There were the instances of the Hundred Years War and of Joan of Arc to ponder upon, and the more recent example of Rossbach, followed by Valmy and Jena. In the Seven Years War France had only mediocrities to lead her troops. It had been the same in 1870. But in the intervening period, not to mention anterior phases, her military genius had shone forth in all its lustre. Her whole past had been remarkable for her recuperative power above all other qualities. And here we come to the greatest surprise in reserve

for Germany in this war—France has revealed *many* men of genius to lead her troops. They were unknown because unadvertised. None of them had written sensational books concerning the subjugation of Europe and the re-establishment of the Frankish Empire! None of them taught their troops the goose-step or the like parade eccentricities. None of them advised the Sultan or contributed loud ringing essays to a subsidised press. They worked quietly and conscientiously at the mastering of their profession and in the training of their troops towards mastery. And on the critical day they fell without a flourish of trumpets into their allotted places of command. The Commander-in-Chief alone was given some recognition from the start, but the names of those under him who directed the operations of huge bodies of men have only become known to the public in order of merit of achievement. Some of the greatest feats in arms of the war have been performed anonymously; and it is not even certain that the operations of war that really saved France and Europe have as yet been noticed or will be remembered by future generations.

Naturally we do not mean to say that all the French generals were men of genius. Some were to turn out but indifferent leaders in the field. The Commander-in-Chief whom the Republic placed at the head of her armies, being a strong man, had

begun, before the war, to weed out, regardless of politics or creed, all commanding or staff officers whom he did not think fully fitted for their work. Thus he cashiered five popular commanders who were nearly all amongst his personal friends. He did so in the teeth of considerable opposition, political and social. But General Joffre would rather have relinquished his command than have kept men in the army on the principle of favouritism that had cost France the loss of Alsace and Lorraine. However, partly through caution and partly through the difficulty of judging the true work of a military man in time of peace, General Joffre was not altogether fortunate in the choice of some of his subordinates, three of whom were given high commands but proved themselves unworthy of the selection—not in the quality of honour, as some evil rumours would have it, nor even of brains, for they were brilliant theorists, but in their leadership in action in the presence of the enemy. To put it in the people's phrase, they lost their heads at critical moments amidst the confusion of battle, and committed mistakes the import of which cannot be exaggerated—blunders and errors of judgment which it required all the ability of the really able men to redress.

CHAPTER III

THE STRATEGIC PERPLEXITY PRODUCED ON THE FRENCH BY THE OPENING GERMAN MOVES IN THE WAR

THE strategic situation created by the German incursion into Belgium was rather dark and complicated; and for some time the French Staff knew not what to make of it nor what to expect from an enemy so unscrupulous—an enemy, moreover, who possessed the initiative.

As it was, rumours came of a German occupation of Basle in Switzerland. Strong bodies were stationed in the neighbourhood along the right bank of the Rhine. They might cross Upper Alsace and make a dash for Belfort, the nearest French stronghold to the German frontier. There was no denying, however, that the threat in the north was more serious, and would increase in danger if the Germans succeeded in overawing Belgium and sweeping unopposed through that country. Yet, their movements there taking place so far north might have a different significance —the Germans might simply wish to distract the

MAP 2.

To face page 16.

attention of the French from their eastern line of defence, which, when all was said, was the real key of the position. This explanation seemed the most likely, and later it turned out to be the correct one.

A German attack was impending on Nancy. Considerable bodies of troops were massed south, west, and east of Metz, biding their time. The attack was only to be made when the French, by pressure of events, had diverted some of their troops elsewhere and had thus weakened their line. But the French Staff were not bound to know this; and at such an early stage of developments they could not guess the real intentions of the German Staff. They took the safest course by acting on the assumption—one might say the belief—that the Germans were going to attack Nancy at once.

For those who do not realise the importance of the capital of Lorraine, or rather of the positions surrounding it, it is as well to explain that these positions, called "Grand Couronné," command the approaches to the fortress of Toul. This fortress lies at the northern extremity of the "trouée de Mirecourt" which the fortress of Epinal shuts off in the south—a gap of 50 miles in the high grounds through which an enemy besieging either Toul or Epinal could easily pour into France. That is what the French Staff meant when they said that

a successful attack on the "Grand Couronné" and the German occupation of Nancy would be fatal to the concentration of the French armies. The "camp de Chalons"—the Aldershot of France—would be threatened, and most probably seized, by the Germans; and all the French armies of the north would have their communications cut off. It will thus be understood that the anxieties of the French Staff in the early days of August were well founded. Before any other consideration they wished to consolidate the threatened position; and, whilst the work of mobilisation and concentration of the main armies was still going on they decided to attempt a diversion which, if it did nothing else, would at least ward off the German attack, and would have the valuable effect of causing confusion and anxiety in the minds of the German Staff as to the French intention. This diversion was prepared and launched with some of the forces already in hand; but meanwhile the situation in the north assumed a different and more definite aspect.

The Germans had entered Belgium on August 3—the same day of their attack on Longwy and three full days after they had already violated the territory of another neutral State; and the French Staff, as has been shown, had proceeded to alter their first plan of concentration accordingly; but,

as yet, until August 5 and the attack on Liége, nothing further had happened—except in the realm of diplomacy, the overtures of Germany to the Belgian Government at Brussels, and the appeals of Belgium to England and France. This interval of two days marks an epoch in the history of the world.

In France, from the moment that war was understood to be inevitable, all eyes were turned to the mistress of the seas. Even when the strategic situation in Western Europe concerned France alone, the uppermost desire of Frenchmen was that England should intervene—partly because, not wishing for war, they felt that the intervention of England would mean peace ; partly for sentimental reasons coupled with the almost superstitious belief that if war really came, the side on which England stood would win. This belief had little to do with the actual resources that England could or would throw into the balance, nor with the excellence of the British army as a tactical unit, which was not yet proved. The gist of the matter lay in the complex nature of the French or Latin temperament, which is rather prone to seek the approval and encouragement of its friends, and lacking that, is apt to become dangerously depressed. In this particular case, no doubt, it would be unfair as well as strategically inaccurate to assume that France, without

the help of England, would have been definitely conquered by the Germans. Such was the spirit and soul of France and the genius of her commanders, that means would have been found within the nation itself to defeat and repel the invader. France had deliberately and calmly decided from highest to lowest that this should be so—or obliteration. But —and this is the main point—it would have been terribly costly for France ; it would have drained the nation's resources, principally in men ; and there would have been a lasting grudge against England if she had failed her friend in the hour of need. The support of England at first seemed doubtful. The violation of the neutrality of Luxembourg took place on August 1. It was a *casus belli*, which, indirectly at least, affected England. France was attacked all along the frontier on August 2—the declaration of war being formulated on the next day ; on this day, August 3, the violation of Belgian neutrality took place. Here the *casus belli* affected England directly ; but her attitude remained unknown until the 5th ; and yet the French people, who could now, on technical grounds, as the French Staff did, take it for granted that England would remain neutral, did not flinch. There can be no better proof of their confidence in themselves ; but it would have been with a heavy heart that they would have faced the foe ; whereas,

when the English declaration of war to Germany at last came, a great wave of enthusiasm swept over the country. With their characteristic quickness of mind, the French understood the reasons which had made England hesitate—the internal political crisis caused by the Irish question; the Labour unrest; the spirit of pacifism which permeated even the British Cabinet, of which more than one member was suspected of German sympathies, were all at their height when the trumpet of war rang through Europe. Thus it was that when, a few days later, whilst events were quickly developing in the theatre of hostilities, the first British contingent landed in northern France, it was given a reception such as few troops have ever known in a foreign land; and, let us here add, such as only a truly great people is capable of offering. The smart and trim "Tommies" of England, worthy descendants of the archers of Crécy and Agincourt, were frankly admired and enthusiastically taken to the heart of France.

Once the co-operation of the British army was assured, the main matter for the French Staff was to co-ordinate, in the best way possible, all strategic efforts. The problem, again, had somewhat altered, and some modifications had to be made in the concentration of the left wing—the 5th army, and the formations that were later to become the 6th

army. But even with these modifications, which did not extend beyond Arras and Lille, France found herself now with a line of concentration far too long for her resources compared with the German line of concentration. The isolation of some of her forces might spell disaster—as in 1870. Yet something had to be made not only of British but of Belgian co-operation. At the same time, and above all other considerations, the French Staff were obliged not to lose sight for one instant of their eastern fortresses—the main defensive line of France and the true pivot of the whole scheme of operations.

Such was the exact condition of affairs on the French side on, and after, August 5, 1914, when the Germans attacked Liége in Belgium, and England declared war on Germany. From a broader, or political, standpoint there were now other and vaster issues at stake than the mere existence, as an independent State, of the French nation. The struggle assumed a more general international aspect, and the prestige and wealth of Britain, as well as her mastery of the seas and her domination of the trade routes of the world, were destined to loom larger than the more substantial and costly efforts of other nations ; but the strategic problem, viewed intrinsically, was to remain in essentials (as far as the military operations in France and Belgium were concerned) the particular domain of a body of men

not much thought about until then—the French General Staff—and especially of its head, the generalissimo, Joffre, who had until the war lived in comparative obscurity and was totally unknown to the world at large.

CHAPTER IV

THE REAL AND WHOLLY UNREALISED SIGNIFICANCE OF LIÉGE

THE attack and investment of the Belgian fortress of Liége had, from the German standpoint, a strategic intention of the utmost importance.

This result had a world-wide importance from the mere glamour that arose and surrounded the event, owing to its historic defence by the Belgians under General Leman ; but its *strategic* importance was wholly and rashly misinterpreted, as is often the case at the start of a campaign when the military plans and motives of the belligerents are necessarily kept in the dark and, indeed, remain shrouded in mystery for a long time afterwards—sometimes for ever.

It is well to note that all, or nearly all, controversies about affairs of war dwell on the opening moves or plans which are rarely, if ever, explained in a satisfactory manner. One eagerly strives to know what happened here and there, and what was the reason, or the cause, of this or that action or lack of action. Generally, of course, the mass of

MAP 3.

To face page 24.

people, who take no interest in the military aspect of a struggle, are quite satisfied with a simple explanation of events that seems to give an obvious solution. This explanation may be utterly false, and in the light of succeeding events may show ridiculous. But it has been accepted, and becomes one of those convenient and pat commonplaces that assures ready acceptance, and helps unthinking babblers out of dialectic difficulties. Ask one of these autocrats of the armchair: "Why did the Germans attack Liége on August 5, 1914?" and he is sure to answer: "Why, to move through Belgium, of course." . . . It is the accepted formula of the opening strategy of the war, the doggedly held dogma of this campaign. Ninety-nine people out of a hundred have a settled conviction that the German strategy was to pour through Belgium and make for Paris thereby. Indeed, to challenge this theory—a plan of campaign astutely advertised by the German writers before the war—is almost to risk the strait-waistcoat of Bedlam, or to be taken for one of those consequential fellows who make a point of opposing all popular beliefs. But should you happen to have made careful notes of the position of army corps, and to have gone a little deeper into the first strategic moves of the German armies in Belgium, and watched their relation to the armies deliberately kept elsewhere,

you will be tempted to follow your first question by another: "Why did the Germans not attack Namur at the same time as they attacked Liége?" And to follow it with yet another and more explicit and clear query: "Why did the Germans wait until the 20th—that is to say, two whole weeks—to do so?" The tea-table and the armchair are at once upset; the autocrat gapes at you and, mentally reviewing the map that he has so often glanced at since the war began, he answers falteringly: "I don't know."

After all, dates and the exact position of army corps on those dates are very stubborn facts to juggle with.

The sudden bewilderment of the cocksure is the beginning of wisdom. The "I don't know" of the dogmatist is the proof positive that the popular theory, and generally accepted solution, of the siege of Liége were wrong. Obviously the Germans were not hammering at Liége as one beats on a gate that one would break down, in order to "sweep" through Belgium; and that this was the intention of the main German strategy when the Belgians scorned their ultimatum is a myth of the popular imagination.

Let us deal with the ungarnished facts.

On August 2, whilst four huge German armies concentrated along the Belgian frontier, and one of

these armies penetrated through the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg as far as the French frontier, the German proposals to Brussels for free passage were categorically rejected. On August 3 a final ultimatum was presented and a German army—the 2nd army under General von Bulow—stepped into Belgium, and the Belgian Government made its appeal to England and to France, and at the same time affirmed its determination of defending its neutrality. Therefore when, as is usual in warfare, the German commander on the next day, the 4th, approaching Liége, sent a summons to surrender to the Governor of that fortress, he knew that the Belgian Governor, General Leman, had orders to resist, and would do so. The same would apply to the other Belgian stronghold on the Meuse, Namur. In plain terms, the Germans knew that resistance would be met with everywhere. It is not for us here to consider the speculative value of such a position as it appeared to the German Staff at the time of the Belgian resistance ; but we are solely concerned with the simple fact that this resistance altered the original strategic problem as it was viewed by the German Staff before the rejection by Belgium of the German proposals for free movement through the country. In short, the German Staff, *strategically*, could not now simply make use of Belgium as a convenient open door. The German

military operations could not begin, as had at first been hoped, within the French frontier, but considerably outside of that frontier, in Belgium itself. The strategic problem had, therefore, to be tackled accordingly.

This alternative, be it clearly understood, had been well weighed by the German General Staff, who did nothing except in a most thorough manner, and were guided by military rule of thumb rather than by moral or political considerations. But even political considerations went to strengthen the decision of the German Staff; for, by this time, the date of the first attack on Liége, England had declared war, and this meant that the area of strategic possibilities must be widened. It had not been intended to make the stroke through Belgium the chief, but the secondary act. But Belgium was now suddenly decided upon to be made the decisive battle-ground where the fate of France was to be settled at once.

The factor of time, more than anything else, dictated such a course, because the original "hacking through" policy might be a slow process, and it could, after all, be picked up again later, if the more advantageous alternative failed.

Everything, however, pointed to the early success of this alternative. The spirit of France, of her armies, of her commanders, was judged according

to the standards of 1870. The French Staff would submit to the pressure of events and of public opinion, which would demand the instant relief of the Belgians. With their usual impatience and impetuosity the French would rush forces into Belgium, and the fate of these armies would instantly be sealed—*the Germans were in waiting for them.*

This is the true explanation of the German delay in the matter of Namur, and the comparative inactivity of their centre armies until the 20th of August—that is to say, several days *after* the fall of Liége. They wanted to " trap " the French, and maybe the English army also, in Belgium. And they felt sure that *the French could* and *would fall into the trap*, rush their troops to Belgium, weaken their eastern forces, and be overwhelmed. The rest would have been easy, and the conquest of France would have been accomplished, as in 1870, *before* even Paris was reached. It would be a colossal victory, which, at the outset, would give Germany the mastery in Western Europe and enable her, at an early date, with huge forces, to face the Russian hosts on her eastern border.

It must not be thought that German reliance on French preparedness was at all imaginary, and that France had not the means necessary for a quick advance into Belgium. The early French offensive

in Alsace, which started from Belfort *on the same day that the Germans attacked Liége*, is a proof in point. Far from thinking that the French were not able to enter Belgium at such an early date, the Germans had done everything they could to entice them to violate Belgian neutrality before they—the Germans—did so. The mobilisation and concentration of the first five French armies, despite the change of plan forced on the French Staff by the German invasion of Belgium, were accomplished on or before August 14. The German Staff felt sure that by that date a French army of four or five army corps, perhaps more, would be well on its way to Brussels or Liége.

There were, as a matter of fact, very early reports to that effect. "Six French soldiers had arrived in Liége in a motor car." "*Many* French officers had been seen in Brussels a few days after." "French cavalry had joined Belgian cavalry south of Huy, and also north of the Sambre." "Thirty-two trains, full of French troops, had arrived at Tournay, on their way to Brussels, through Hal!" These reports, and many others to the same purport, were spread abroad between the 6th and 12th of August. By whom? Before answering this question with any degree of assurance one would have to examine the reports carefully in the light of subsequent developments, and also go rather deeply into the

strategy of Joffre in Belgium in August, 1914, which we shall do in due course. Sufficient to say that whosoever had spread them had fairly gauged the intentions of the German Staff, and was more than solicitous for the welfare of Belgium and the success of the French arms.

The Germans, there can be no doubt, believed these reports. Their extensive reconnaissances west of Liége, after they had mastered the crossings of the Meuse, show it. Their expedition to Dinant on August 14 shows it. Their carefully entrenched positions in the Ardennes show it. Their bomb-throwing on Namur on the 14th also shows it—they thought that Namur was full of French troops. Finally, the prolonged inactivity of the German armies *south* of Liége from the 5th to the 20th of August—that is, for over a fortnight—shows it beyond question. These armies, under the command of General von Hausen, the Grand Duke of Wurtemberg, and the Crown Prince, were of a strength between them of fifteen army corps, not counting the Prussian Guards and several cavalry divisions, and except for the siege of the small French fortress of Longwy, begun on August 3, a reconnaissance in force in the direction of Verdun on August 10, and another at Dinant on the 14th, these huge bodies of troops, totalling nearly a million of men, remained inactive for a matter of two weeks, thus giving time

to the French to collect their forces and increase their strength.

What could have kept them from advancing?

Not the resistance of Liége surely, since the place was only attacked by the 2nd army under Bulow —the 1st army under Kluck also lying inactive behind it. Not the first French offensive in Alsace, which had been defeated; nor the subsequent advance of the French in Lorraine, which the Germans had ample means of defeating.

No. It was not any of these things. The real truth was that the Germans were in waiting for the French in Belgium. Their plan was to involve them *there* in a calamitous disaster; and then to proceed to the easier task of beating them, of finishing them off in detail, in other places. Their eastern line would be pierced; and to the Crown Prince's army would fall the honour of marching on Paris *through Reims*. That was the original plan of the German Staff; and it was for this that the Crown Prince was placed in the centre and not at the extreme right wing. Unforeseen developments alone gradually brought the German Staff to alter the plan—as well as the strategic objective of their armies.

Let us now deal in chronological order with the said developments.

CHAPTER V

THE REAL GERMAN DESIGN IN THE SIEGE OF LIÉGE AND THEIR HESITATIONS IN BELGIUM

It was on the 4th of August that the German columns advancing into northern Belgium by the roads of Verviers, Hervé, and Vizé came into contact with Belgian troops.

This advance had been slow on account of the difficulties accumulated by the Belgians on the route taken by the German march—barricades, felled trees, destroyed railway lines, and the like. Thus the invaders knew almost at once the character of the opposition that would be offered by the Belgians.

The first attack on Liége began on the evening of the 5th, after General Leman had rejected the summons of the German commander, von Emmich, of the 10th corps of the 2nd German army, who was given the direction of the movements for the reduction of the fortress. Von Emmich, in his attack, acted on the principle of concentration on a single sector—which proves that he had no certainty that the defenders would give way at

once ; since, had the presumption of the Germans been such that they believed they could overawe the Belgians and rush the place, they would have made from the start a greater display of force. The north-east sector—three forts—was attacked first, the German infantry trying to get a foothold on the intervals between the forts. This, had they succeeded, would have enabled them to bring their artillery to bear on all sides of the forts. The Belgians, however, had thoroughly prepared the ground in these intervals. They fought well ; and their fire, as well as their counter-attacks, told. The Germans suffered great losses ; and retired in disorder to their original positions.

It was after the failure of this attack that the Germans directed their attention to the south-eastern sector of forts. This action took place in the early hours of the morning. It was not so advantageous to the Belgians as the first. The Germans not only gained the desired footing round the forts, but they even entered the town itself and thus gained control of the crossings over the Meuse.

Liége was virtually occupied by the Germans on the 6th of August. On the next day they had mastered the crossings at Vizé and at Huy. From Huy General Leman had brought back a brigade for the defence of the south-eastern sector. Thus the Germans were able to occupy Huy.

The work for the regular siege of the forts of Liége began on August 7.

Most of the forts resisted well, considering the weight of metal brought to bear upon them. But in the meantime the Germans could pour their troops across the Meuse at will, which was their first consideration.

Now what we want to point out is that the German advance on Brussels *could* have begun there and then—at the latest on the 9th of August. There were no Belgian troops east of the Meuse ; and the Belgian army, like the French, had scarcely begun its concentration. In not more than three days, taking account of all difficulties, a couple of German corps could have reached the Belgian capital. They did not do so. Why ? Because it did not suit the German strategists to do so. Yet the illusion was entertained amongst the allies that the Germans were doing all they could to reach Brussels, but that each time they attempted to do so they were hurled back by an extraordinarily inferior number of heroic Belgians. The actions of Eghézée, Haelen, Diest, and Hasselt, on August 11 and 12, which were mere reconnaissances on the part of the Germans, were magnified into regular pitched battles. The fact is that a reconnaissance under modern conditions of war is apt to foster such an illusion. In the wars of the past an

operation of the kind was generally carried out by a very small number of troops—a few companies and squadrons, with perhaps some light guns. Nowadays, in a war of millions, the operation is not *comparatively* larger; but battalions take the place of companies, whole cavalry regiments that of squadrons, and the force, which may number from 5,000 to 6,000 men, is accompanied by a large number of machine guns, armoured cars, cyclist companies, aeroplanes, and so forth. Thus the reconnoitring party is a small army in itself; and if the operation be carried out on a wide front—which it is, on account of the mobility of its various units—the impression is given of a numerous army on the march.

Viewed in their true perspective and proportions, the "battles" of the 11th and 12th of August to the west of the Meuse were skirmishes, or at most but loose attacks delivered by the Germans with the object of discovering the main point of concentration of the Belgian army, for on the position of this point depended the further course of German strategy in northern Belgium.

There was another, and just as important end in view—but first let us deal with the question of the concentration of the Belgian field forces. This concentration was carried out according to a preconceived plan based on the situation and strength

of the fortress of Antwerp. This the German Intelligence knew full well. Belgium had only three fortresses, and the strongest was Antwerp, where was a huge arsenal, with immense supplies; and it could be further supplied by sea. In the Government councils before the war it had always been laid down as a principle, indeed as an axiom, that whatever happened Belgium must not relinquish Antwerp except at the last extremity. Thus the more sound strategic principle of initial and complete co-operation—in the military sense—with the allied armies was laid aside. The point of concentration was selected for *defensive* purposes near Antwerp instead of for *offensive* purposes near the French frontier—which would have proved more advantageous in the long run. The plan was drawn up, apparently, with the approval of the French Staff; but, considering the tendency of the modern French school of war to attach little value to fortresses *as such*, one can feel certain that Belgian strategy, at the opening stages of the war, was little, if at all, influenced by the spirit of the French Staff. Or Joffre, who might have ventured into Belgium sooner, adopted an alternative which suited the Belgian plan of defence. This alternative was risky; but there could be no other as long as it could not be proved that Antwerp was of no value in the Belgian system of defence.

Later on we shall see what this alternative was.

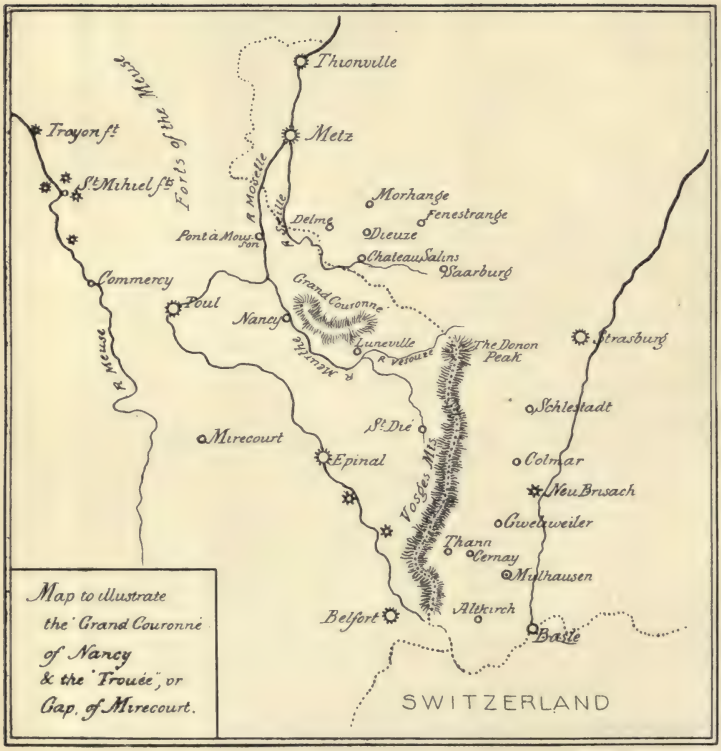
Let us explain now what was the second objective of the German reconnaissances to the northwards of the Meuse on the 11th and 12th of August. The false reports already mentioned in regard to the generally *looked for*, and much *hoped for*, advance of the French into Belgium gave the Germans the idea that, as early as the 9th or 10th of August, French troops were on their way to Brussels. It was known, as a matter of fact, that French cavalry had crossed the Belgian frontier on the 6th, and a skirmish had taken place somewhere at the opening of the Ardennes forest. The Germans, therefore, wanted to test the accuracy of these reports about the French being in force in Belgium, for the severity of the French military censorship was such that a couple of French army corps or more might be concentrated in Belgium alongside the Belgian army without the Germans being the wiser. This course of action on the part of the French, as has been said before, would have suited the German strategists, since they were looking and hoping for it; and they firmly believed that such a concentration was actually taking place, but they were bound to make sure before venturing upon measures which might prove abortive. It was mainly with this intention of discovering whether the French were

in strength in Belgium that the German commanders spread their reconnoitring forces over such an expanse of ground. The result was disappointing, and rather perplexing—no French troops were met with north of the Sambre. Then, and not until then, the German Staff began to doubt whether French troops—in important numbers—were in Belgium at all. This, to them, seemed incredible, precisely on account of the point of concentration for the Belgian army having been selected so far north. The most efficient Belgian resistance came from the direction of Aershot and Louvain. In the south there were only a few troops. Surely the Belgians would not be left isolated by their allies, the French! Or did it mean that the English army was already landing *in Belgium*, and would come and fill the gap between Brussels and the French frontier? Reports to that effect were also in circulation.

It suddenly occurred to the German Staff that, after all, French troops might have entered Belgium in large numbers, but not necessarily that they might have reached Brussels, nor even crossed the Sambre as yet. So another reconnaissance in force was undertaken, on August 13, 14, in the direction of Dinant. This time French troops were met. Three battalions of Jaegers carried the town in the teeth of a strong opposition. On the next day a large French force, with field artillery, delivered a

counter-attack and retook the town. From the fierceness of this attack, and principally from the number of field batteries employed by the French —the Germans had only machine guns—the German Staff deduced that a general French advance had begun in Belgium—*and they shaped their strategy accordingly.*

But before going further into the developments on Belgian soil it is necessary, in order not to lose the sequence of events on the whole front of operations, to give an account of one of the initial moves of General Joffre, which will make clear to all the true character of his strategy.



MAP 4.

To face page 41.

CHAPTER VI

THE FIRST FRENCH OFFENSIVE IN ALSACE, AND ITS REAL STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE

THE first important move on the French side was the offensive in Alsace.

At the beginning of this war the French suffered from two grave dangers of sentiment—the passionate desire for " the lost provinces " of Alsace and Lorraine and the intense feeling for Belgium. To wage France's war compelled supreme qualities of will upon the director of her strategy to withstand these two dangers. It must be remembered that the heroism of Belgium and the passion for Alsace tore at the heartstrings of the whole people, and that any act of the higher command which seemed to neglect the relief of either of these realms of the people's imagination was bound to be severely criticised by the nation as a whole. And the German Staff understood this full well and calculated upon it. The sacrifice of the strategic value to the sentimental value had wrecked France in 1870; and that sentimental danger was tenfold more powerful now.

The strategic reasons for this first French move into Alsace, as well as its great moral significance, have not been perfectly understood. It should be remembered that this offensive was launched from Belfort *on the day of the first attack on Liége.* It had been thought out and prepared before the German incursion into Belgium, and, therefore, it was not intended at first as a diversion to the German " coup " at Liége. It had a far more vital intention.

The position of the French Staff on the opening days of the war was precarious on account of the German threat against Nancy at a moment when French mobilisation had scarcely begun. The French positions, called " Grand Couronné," were no doubt very strong, as they had been carefully prepared since the year before, when General Joffre, being Chief of the Superior Council of War, had determined, in spite of the experts, to base all future plans of concentration on the assumption that the positions about Nancy could be held against any attack. Now, however, it seems that at the outset of the campaign General Joffre did not feel so confident; and subsequent events were to show that his uneasiness, if he had any, was not without cause.

In that light the first French offensive in Alsace must be viewed. At the time that it was executed Joffre had not yet made his mark; and his capa-

bilities could not be fully gauged. Many were those who, knowing how to make war better than the great and incomparable chief, criticised this movement in the most slashing spirit. They declared that Alsace would have been better left alone ; that the French must subdue their feelings about the " lost province," ; that the decisive quarter of the war was in Belgium ; that only in Belgium could Alsace-Lorraine be reconquered. The military side of the problem was left severely alone. No one seemed to realise the danger that threatened the whole plan of French concentration, nor that the ultimate fate of Belgium, of France herself, and the whole course of the Allies depended on the absolute security of the French eastern line of defence.

When a commander like Joffre undertakes some move, he considers, he weighs everything, taking into account *even the possible failure of the move,* and makes provision for a possible disaster. In the hands of such a leader of men a country is safe, and, given proper support on the part of the nation and of his subordinates, he must accomplish great things.

It would be no exaggeration to say that General Joffre started the campaign on the supposition that *all* his initial moves might fail ; thus it was that he always found himself with sufficient reserves to redress the balance and to lead the invaders to their

doom at the Marne. In his own spirit everything that he undertook should be viewed. Thus his first offensive in Alsace, which, strategically, was a wonderful stroke, practically settled the whole course of the campaign, without anyone, and least of all the Germans, being aware of it at the time—nor probably since ! The moral impetus it gave to the French troops, as well as the tactical redistribution which it compelled upon the Germans, were the main and all-important advantages gained through it, not counting the postponing by the Germans of their attack upon Nancy, an attack which, if it had come sooner, would have been the end of everything for France, and probably of her Allies as well. So an operation which in itself had no importance, and which failed *materially* (or tactically), had nevertheless all the weight and consequence of a decisive victory in the strategic balance.

It remains to be seen how it was done and why, whilst triumphant in its strategic results, in its tactical execution it miscarried. And it is interesting to compare it with the French tactical success at Mulhouse later on, which, *strategically*, was a failure, as we shall see further on.

First of all it should be realised that, at the early stage of developments when it was undertaken, in order to stop the Germans from massing, there was practically nothing else for General Joffre to do.

The point from which the column started was nearest the French centre of concentration to the German frontier ; it was also more easily and more quickly reached by its quota of mobilised men, as it is the southernmost position, and it had not been affected by the change of the general plan of concentration consequent upon the German invasion of Belgium. So that even if General Joffre had been quite an ordinary commander, it was the most natural and obvious thing for him to do. The wonder is that the Germans, so well informed as to the arrangements and resources of their opponents, and *with a military map of France before them*, did not expect anything of the kind, and were consequently quite taken unawares ! This in itself shows how confident they felt that they had distracted the attention of the French Staff northward, and how eagerly their own attention was fixed upon the central portion of the French fortress-barrier. The concentration of their own troops in that quarter shows it also. They had several army corps in the region of Metz ; several more in or near Strasburg, but only a thin screen of advanced troops in the Vosges and Upper Alsace. A larger number, it is true, were gathering along the right bank of the Rhine, near Basle, but these were really mobilised elements from South Germany on their way to Strasbourg or Metz, by way of Neu Brisach and Schlegstadt. Here was

another opportunity for an ordinary commander to strike a swift and effective blow. Since the opening of hostilities the French flying men had been busy, and they had noticed the relative weakness of the Germans in Upper Alsace. Joffre resolved to cut off these detachments and, if possible, to gain control of the bridges over the Rhine, and to pin down in that region such German troops as were on their way northwards to increase the German strength about Nancy. The move, whether successful or not, would have the further effect of weakening the German centre, which was inordinately strong, particularly in the region opposite Nancy.

What ensued is well known.

The French crossed the frontier on the 7th of August, took the Germans by surprise at Altkirch, routed them, and entered Mulhausen in triumph on the heels of the fleeing Germans. France was unduly elated by the event; and as depressed afterwards by the result of the German counterstroke.

Now this change of mood, which was reflected amongst the Allies, and provoked a storm of hostile criticism, was caused by the unmilitary habit of judging a manœuvre or a battle by its material and local aspect. The French had advanced, and had been immediately driven back again; and it looked as if they had uselessly squandered forces that they might better have employed in Belgium. As the

Germans had hoped and longed for, the attention of the world was riveted on the hapless Belgians. But the greatest injustice done by the critics to the French was to forget that, at the moment of the offensive in Alsace, *France was still in the throes of mobilisation;* she was not as yet halfway through with her work of preparation; her line of concentration in the north stood off a long way from the point where the Germans were in contact with the Belgian forces. All this apart from the fact, not realised at the time, that the Germans were *expecting, and hoping for,* a hurried premature French advance into Belgium, and making ready for it with a smashing blow.

Materially, and locally, the French manœuvre in Alsace failed for two reasons.

First, the too great impetuosity of the French troops, including the officers themselves, when, elated by the fact that they had at last crossed the frontier and set foot in their beloved province, they attacked, or rather flung themselves, at random, on the German entrenchments at Altkirch. Another French column, going up by Thann, had been set the task of cutting off the retreat of the Germans at Altkirch. But the frontal attack, being delivered too soon, the enemy was able to extricate himself from his dangerous position. In this the Germans were further helped by another detachment, which,

hurriedly issuing from the forest of Hard, attacked the French in flank as they advanced on Mulhouse. Some German troops, quartered in the town itself, took part in the severe action which developed west of Mulhouse; and, thus supported, the main German body was able to retreat in good order. The German tactics were admirable; had the French been as good the Kaiser's arms would here have suffered at the outset of the campaign a serious disaster. Yet, once the French were in possession of Mulhouse, there was still a chance for them of winning a considerable victory, if the officer in command—a general of high degree—had grasped the situation better and thoroughly.

This brings us to the second reason for the French failure (in the tactical sense) of the first offensive in Alsace. The commander in question did not gather up his forces immediately, as he should have done, and thus made no provision against the German counterstroke, which he should have foreseen. Well served by their spies, the Germans did not wait. They struck quickly. Troops came down in the night from Neu Brisach, others crossed the Rhine, and it was a miracle that the French division in Mulhouse was not surrounded. Even then the French commander had still time, whilst he resisted with his main body on the heights to the south of Mulhouse, to bring over the troops left at Altkirch

and to execute a flank attack on the Germans at Cernay. Seeing how well the French troops stood their ground under the pressure of superior numbers, and what were the German losses, particularly near Cernay, the victory for the French would have been certain had the reserves from Altkirch been brought up in time. The opportunity was lost, and the French retreated, the safest course to adopt under the circumstances and in face of the accumulating strength of the enemy.

Such was, in its broad tactical outline, the first battle of Mulhausen—a most sanguinary action, or set of actions, in which the Germans tasted for the first time the bite of the French field guns and the sting of their bayonet charges. The Germans could certainly claim a victory and a few captures. But their losses, for an engagement of this kind, were severe. At or near the village of Cernay alone they buried 800 of their slain.

From the strategic point of view the operation in itself had the desired effect, and therefore it was a success. The German Staff, startled and nonplussed, thought that the French were far more ready for offensive operations than they were, and they kept pouring down German troops from the north, thereby weakening their centre, and so delayed their contemplated attack on Nancy. Their movements were easily followed by the French air-craft, which

at the beginning of the war, were far more active than the German. And General Joffre was enabled to pursue and complete the concentration of his armies without undue anxiety. For this reason alone, if for no other, the first French offensive in Alsace can well be considered as one of the decisive strokes of the war.

The cautious retirement from Alsace shows further the true character of the strategy of General Joffre, who was determined to resist all sentimental compulsion in favour of sound strategic ends.

So far, then, the Germans had calculated on the Belgian sentiment luring the French legions away from the fortress frontier into their Belgian trap. Knowing, however, the lure of Alsace, they were now being tricked by calculating upon it.

CHAPTER VII

THE FRENCH EVADE THE GERMAN TRAP IN BELGIUM; LAY A TRAP THEREIN FOR THE GERMANS INSTEAD; AND, IN THEIR SECOND ADVANCE INTO ALSACE, WIN THEIR GREAT TACTICAL VICTORY OF MULHAUSEN, WHICH BECOMES STRATEGICALLY VALUELESS

THE full concentration of the five first French armies was accomplished on August 14, and that date marks the beginning of the operations on a large scale.

There were, in the western theatre of war, two main spheres of activity. First, that of Belgium and Northern France; second, that of Alsace-Lorraine and the Woevre region. The operations in each sphere were of such magnitude that, although connected strategically, it is impossible to give a clear account of the whole at the same time in a single narrative. For the sake of clearness it is therefore necessary to deal with each region in turn separately, but they must not, naturally, be considered as different periods of time.

Now, to understand the strategic significance of this war, it is essential to remember that the cam-

paign was one and whole. The enormous numbers employed were just as much employed in what one may call one great battle as in former days of battle, but we get divisions taking the place of battalions, and consequently we get their movements taking weeks where aforetime they took days—or even hours. To grasp this is vital to a true survey of the campaign as a whole. And we shall see the consequences of this as the campaign becomes more intense along the Marne. For instance, where a movement in a Napoleonic battle saw the troops at the end of that stroke exhausted by twelve hours' fighting, we to-day in these vaster actions must remember a movement when completed as having put as much as a week's continuous fighting upon the troops as the new measure of fatigue.

It has been customary, up to now, in surveying this Great War, in more or less loose and disconnected narratives of the war, to commence with the great acts that unfolded themselves after Liége, on the Belgian plains and northern French frontier—and this with utter disregard to dates and the chronological sequence and true strategy of the campaign. Herein lies the cause of so much confusion in the public mind and even in the brains of those who have quite sincerely endeavoured by means of lectures and newspaper articles to enlighten the world as to the real significance of the great

happenings that we are witnessing. Quite apart from the dramatic appeal of the German rush into France from Belgium, dominating the public mind; quite apart from the utter lack of training and capacity for strategic vision of the journalists who naturally see only very obvious things in war, there were, as has already been shown, a complex series of conditions which tended to confuse the issue—the national sentiments about Belgium and the "lost provinces," the arrogant publication by high Prussian officers of scores of books in which the strategy for the conquest of France was openly laid bare in elaborate and confident plans (generally through Belgium), plans which the energetic journalist could "read up," but as to which he had not the strategic training and vision to warn him might be deliberate blinds to turn the French commanders' minds from the real German strategic intention; and the like. Public opinion throughout Europe as to how Germany would conquer France had been created by Germany before a shot was fired—and a man sees what he goes out to see. In short, the public confusion was, and is, due to the fact that the *political and sentimental* have overshadowed the *strategical* in this campaign to an uncommon degree in the public vision in face of, and in spite of, the all-compelling fact that the directors of the French strategics, like true pro-

fessional makers of war, have been astoundingly uninfluenced by political or sentimental considerations, and have by their dogged and loyal adherence to strategic necessity achieved a constant tide of victory over their enemies—a tide of defeat for Germany that has never been turned from the day that war was declared.

It is wholly in the public imagination that the delusion exists that certain strategic moves have been for a political or sentimental reason, whilst the high command on either side, but more particularly on the side of the Allies, has been striving with all its will to keep all sentimental or political considerations out of its military calculations. For France, without such adamant stoicism in its great leader, the strategic problem could not have been handled successfully; and France, and England perhaps, might by now have been under the heels of the Prussian.

Yet, with that curious discounting of *facts*, which is no great voucher for the mental balance of mankind, the majority, including some brilliant penmen, keep to the fallacy of a scientific war waged on, and influenced by, political and sentimental principles, thus diminishing the professional value and strategic acumen of their own leaders!

We have shown in the previous chapter how General Joffre doggedly fought shy of all sentimental

appeals—how he confined himself in the period of preparation to a diversion in favour of completing his scheme of concentration, and how he did not hesitate to withdraw from Upper Alsace on to a sound strategic line. In other words, whilst Joffre is moved by intense and passionate love of France, and is as fiercely intent on winning back the "lost provinces" as any Frenchman living, whilst he is as keenly sensitive to the sufferings and heroism of Belgium as any Belgian, the moment he makes war he becomes the absolute soldier, and to the true soldier the strategic act is the sole act that will win what he desires.

Having made his first advance into the "lost provinces," and having withdrawn—acts of pure strategy that were misunderstood for acts of sentiment by the Germans quite as much as by the rest of the world, indeed it is likely enough that Joffre wished that it should be so mistaken—suddenly, as if to contradict his real self, as if, after all, he put a moral and political premium on the speedy reconquest and occupation of the "lost provinces," Joffre renewed the diversion on a still larger scale, seemingly abandoning the hapless Belgians to their fate!

Knowing the facts and realising the strategic reasons of this move and grasping its decisive effect on the whole campaign, one cannot read or listen

to the opinions widely entertained upon it without a sense that a great wrong, a shocking injustice, has been done to the great strategist who might well be termed the saviour of Europe. He is said to have gone to Alsace and to Lorraine in order to provoke a rising of the people when, on the contrary, for months his officers have had orders to discourage any attempts at a civil outburst! All sorts of causes have been sought out in order to explain the early advance of the French eastern armies into German territory *except the true one*. And no effort has been made, on the other hand, to explain with accuracy—strategic accuracy—the delay in the matter of the French advance in Belgium! Even after the publication of the terse and clear official account issued by the French Staff, entitled "Six Months of War," the same erroneous opinions are persisted in as if they were articles of faith high and above the supreme command of the field forces! Yet apply to these futile, if dogged, opinions the damning evidence of dates, and of the positions of corps on those dates, and they crumble to pieces. But perhaps they are an excuse for the budding writer to leave out of account those great operations, of such vital issue that they mattered most of all, and to focus his pettifogging interest and that of his readers upon the more theatric and kaleidoscopic events of the war. He knows nothing of, or cares little for, the eastern

pivot of the campaign, and willingly imagines that it has been comparatively bare of incident; he prefers to think that the "German avalanche," the whole of the Kaiser's legions, burst through Belgium, driving before them, like an irresistible flow, their "defeated" opponents, until something —he knows not what—stopped short this "astounding" progress "at the very gates of Paris"! Think of it! Here we have a vast battle in which the multitudinous number of the slain was larger than that of any action of the campaign, with, perhaps, the exception of Ypres in the second stage of the war—a battle which was the most murderous and the most sternly disputed in the whole course of the campaign, yet a battle which will for ever receive but the scantiest attention—if any attention at all!

But we are not here concerned with the merits of particular combatants. The strategic problem alone, in its true aspect, is here under our consideration. We want to show the real balance of events, east and west, regardless of national preferences. We cannot do so, as we have seen, in a continuous narrative of the whole phase; so that once the preliminary operations have been reviewed, we are bound to start with the first operations on a large scale attempted by France.

But first we must show the true position of the

French Staff in relation to Belgium; and state, once for all, the reasons, strategic and otherwise, which delayed the movements of the French left wing and centre armies, and incidentally prevented General Joffre from walking blindly into the trap set for him by the Germans in Belgium.

The strategic principle to act upon in offensive operations, *meant to be decisive*, is to obtain superiority of numbers. This, General Joffre on the 14th of August, by which date his first five armies had finished their concentration, could not do *at any point*—least of all in Belgium. But acting on a miscalculation of the enemy's forces—a miscalculation the cause of which we shall explain later on—he hoped to be able to do so as soon as the redistribution of his left wing, consequent upon the co-operation of the British and Belgian forces, had been accomplished.

Here we must glance at the alternative that Joffre had adopted for the prosecution of military action in Belgium. This alternative in its main outline had been suggested to him by the position of the point selected for the concentration of the Belgian field forces, as well as the configuration of the country on which his left wing was to operate.

It consisted in waylaying the German right wing west of the Meuse—in other words, in reversing

against the Germans the situation that they were attempting to create for the French! Good advanced work and a great display of the mobile French field-guns would bring the Germans on to the point; they would be "trapped" instead of the French, and smashed; and the destinies of Europe —or rather of the German Empire—would be settled on the plains of Brabant, where many another war had been decided before. But in order to succeed in this ambitious, but not unreasonable, project General Joffre must first of all obtain superiority of numbers, so as to make the victory swift and sure. This superiority he might obtain through the British army and the Belgians; but to make it more certain General Joffre, not being fully informed as to the real and full strength of the Germans in all quarters of the field, calculated upon two other factors—or, rather, upon a double factor—and this brings us to the keystone of the general offensive in Alsace and Lorraine.

It was taken for granted by those who took some interest in these operations that the French had massed nearly all their strength at the opening phase of the war in the region of Alsace and Lorraine; that their armies there were huge in comparison with those on the Belgian frontier, when, as a matter of fact, the number of army corps given to Generals Pau, Dubail and Castelnau to execute

the great move in Alsace-Lorraine was less than half that of the northern and western armies.

By the 14th of August, when the second offensive on the eastern frontier began, there were fifteen French army corps ready along the Belgian frontier, and before the 18th both Dubail and Castelnau's commands were depleted of an army corps each to reinforce the 5th army commanded by Larenzac in the north, to which were further added the Algerian division, the Morocco division and an extra cavalry corps. General Joffre might even have had in the north a new army, the 6th, if the nucleus formations of that army had not been collected as far south as Compiegne, in order to leave the communications of the British army entirely free, at least during the period of concentration.

On the eastern frontier Generals Castelnau and Dubail had the equivalent of six army corps between them, and General Pau not half that number. This made nine army corps, including reserve divisions; whilst the total of army corps in the north on August 20, excluding the British army, was eighteen! But this accumulation of forces was not sufficient; and since General Joffre could not assume offensive operations in Belgium until the arrival of the British troops, he thought he would make the most of the intervening period by trying to weaken as much as possible the German northern

armies. This was the main reason for the early French advance in Lorraine and Alsace. It was hoped by the French Staff that this move, coming on the top of the first offensive in Upper Alsace, would puzzle the Germans, delay their movements in Belgium, and divert another considerable number of them from north to south. That the French Staff succeeded in their object leaves no doubt; for by August 20 the German 6th army at Metz, under Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, which was already very strong, was further reinforced to the extent of three more army corps; and the Germans realised only too late that they had been befooled, that the main strength of the French lay not in Lorraine, but in Belgium! It was too late because troops in such vast numbers cannot be transferred in the twinkling of an eye from one part of such a long front to another! And at the very moment that the real significance of Joffre's move in the "Reichland" dawned upon the German Staff the French strategist was leading the Germans to strike *too soon* in Belgium, to deliver against him a blow in the air, previous to smashing their dreams for ever on the banks of the Sambre! The dashing valour of the French columns in Alsace and Lorraine had been enough to deceive the German leaders. Joffre had made use of the enthusiasm of his troops on an "annexed" soil to blind their opponents as to

their true strength and numbers. All the while he was laying his trap in the north and egging on the Germans to a premature unfolding of their plans. He would have got them eventually in a ring of steel if some tactical mistakes, committed by one of his generals, had not dashed his whole plan to the ground, as we shall see.

But before going further, the importance of the operations which thwarted the Germans so early in the war must be realised. Without a true perspective of events on the eastern frontier of France the strategic developments in the north and west mean little or nothing. The pivot was *there*, between Luneville and Nancy, and the Germans were brought on to make their mightiest effort upon it after having been delayed in a contemplated attempt, which, *if it had been made at the right moment*, would have meant the end of France and the triumph of Germany over Europe.

It would be difficult to assign an exact date to the beginning of this general forward movement of the French in Alsace and Lorraine. The French eastern armies were more ready than the rest, partly because their nucleus formations were already on the spot—the famous "Iron Divisions" are always at war strength and battle-preparedness along the fortified frontier of France—and partly owing to the anxiety entertained by the French

Staff about the safety of their eastern line of defence. There can be no doubt, however, that this forward movement, being a corollary of the first offensive in Alsace, began very early. Already, ever since the declaration of war, the advanced troops near the German frontier were in constant contact everywhere; and simultaneously with the opening of hostilities at Altkirch, General Dubail, of the 1st army, whose headquarters were at St. Dié, was setting himself the task of capturing the passes of the Vosges, at first with small effectives, which swelled gradually as the mobilisation progressed. These arduous operations were well advanced, the Vosges passes were nearly all in French hands, when General Castelnau in the north and General Pau in the south assumed a definite advance —Castelnau starting from Nancy to drive back on the one hand the Germans who had crossed the Moselle and Seille and had brutally bombarded Port à Mousson, an open town, and on the other hand to reduce the strong entrenchments of the Germans south of Saarburg; General Pau to reoccupy Mulhausen and to gain control of the Rhine bridges south of Strasburg.

General Pau, who had replaced the first blundering commander at Belfort, was a retired officer, seventy years of age, and lacked one hand, which he had lost in the war of 1870. An extremely able

and popular man, had he been on the active list when the war broke out he might have found himself in the place of Joffre, or at least been given a very large command. As it was, he came to replace a blunderer and to direct the movements of the right wing of General Dubail's army.

Pau at once revealed his great ability. The plan for attacking the Germans in Upper Alsace was redrawn, and Pau launched his columns accordingly. It was not a question of a mere reconnaisance, but of a large operation, which, in its local results at least, was meant to be decisive. Nor were the odds in favour of General Pau. Since their first alarm, the Germans had extended their left wing and had massed a large number of troops at Mulhausen and Altkirch. Three army corps, at least, were spread in the triangle of Neu Brisach-Altkirch-Basle. Therefore General Pau had a hard task before him. Yet, such was his tactical skill and the enthusiasm of the troops under him that the victory was swift and complete.

Instead of striking east at Altkirch, he advanced northwards from Belfort and struck from the region of Thann. Taken by surprise, the Germans had no time to re-form and change front. Their rear divisions were crushed in detail at Gwebweiler and Mulhausen, whilst their main body lay idle at Altkirch. Then, when they attempted to move against

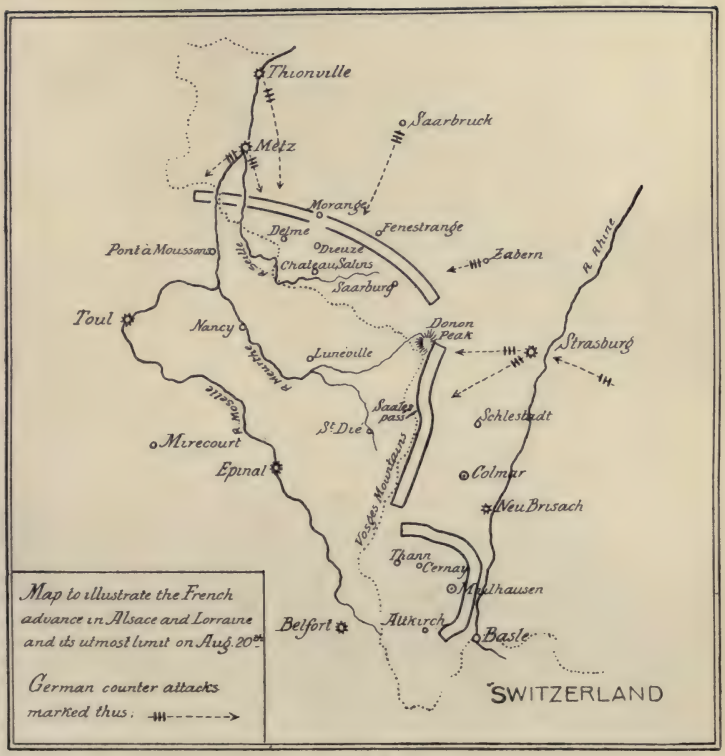
Pau's flank, this consummate tactician had already effected a change of front, and, overwhelmed by numbers, since their supports were destroyed, the Germans gave way and retired in disorder in the direction of Basle and across the Rhine. Their losses in men could not have been less than 10,000; and the French captured twenty-four field guns and a large amount of war material and munitions. It was altogether a brilliant victory. Pau had issued from Belfort on August 14, and by the 19th he had smashed three German corps, was master of all Upper Alsace, and had gained control of the Rhine bridges and of the approaches to Colmar and Neu Brisach.

But this victory, glorious to the French arms and complete as it was, was destined to remain, in the larger strategic issues of the war, an indecisive or negative success, for the simple reason that it had been won outside the main line of German concentration. No doubt, if events in other quarters had been more favourable, Pau would have turned his victory to great account. He could have crossed the Rhine at once and invaded South Germany, which he was probably preparing to do when events in the north reversed the position against him and rendered the conquered position untenable.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GERMANS, PERPLEXED BY THE FRENCH VICTORIES IN ALSACE-LORRAINE, SWIFTLY SEIZE AN ADVANTAGE AND WIN A GREAT TACTICAL VICTORY OVER THE FRENCH, WHICH, HOWEVER, BRINGS ABOUT STRATEGIC DISASTER TO THEIR PLANS OF CAMPAIGN

General Castelnau, like Pau a brilliant tactician of great gifts, was at first completely successful. In spite of the difficulties of the country in which he had to operate, and of the strong defensive works raised by the Germans along the whole frontier and right into French territory, the commander of the army of Lorraine so well co-ordinated his movements that, within a week, after hard and incessant fighting, he had driven back the Germans all along the line, and had captured all their positions south and south-east of Metz, right up to and including the Donon, the highest peak in the Vosges. General Dubail had also succeeded in wresting from the Germans all the passes of the Vosges, which they had elaborately fortified; and these arduous and complicated operations terminated triumphantly at the pass of Saales, where a considerable success



MAP 5.

To face page 66.

was won, no less than 1,500 prisoners, 20 pieces of artillery, a standard, and an enormous amount of war material falling into the hands of the French on August 18 and 19.

Thus the results achieved by the French in the opening stage of the war surpassed anything that had been anticipated, and this led onlookers to take a crooked view of Joffre's strategy, for it was openly held that if the same effort had been made in Belgium—that if General Joffre had kept strictly to the defensive on the eastern frontier and had assumed the offensive in the north, Belgium might have been spared invasion and Liége would have been relieved. These well-meaning if futile critics did not realise at the time—indeed they may not realise it yet—that what they so naïvely advised and violently declaimed was *precisely* what the Germans expected and *hoped* that Joffre would do. From the moment that the Belgians had decided to resist, and had shown that they could and would do so, the German Staff had felt confident that the French would rush into Belgium and leave their eastern line insufficiently guarded; then, with a comparatively small force, the Germans would have pierced that line, and, almost simultaneously, with an overwhelming superiority of numbers, they would have crushed the French in Belgium. But the Germans had *not* been prepared for an early,

sudden, and general advance in the "Reichland." It puzzled them—it blinded them—for Joffre's strategy was astoundingly supple; indeed, the said critics may be altogether absolved after all, since even the mighty brains of the German Staff were—for a time at least—completely taken in. Yet they had indications, if they could have read the book of Fate—of a kind not furnished to the ordinary amateur strategist: the big reconnaissance by the Germans at Dinant, and an earlier one at Maugienne, north of Verdun, had convinced them that the French were rapidly gathering great forces in the north. Yet the violence of the blows dealt in Alsace and Lorraine by the French made them ponder and hesitate. They could not make out the real meaning of it all, nor penetrate the intentions of their opponents. The advance in Alsace, and in Lorraine principally, looked serious from the German point of view. The German line of concentration was menaced at a vital spot. But at the same time, on account of the great strength of this spot, an opportunity of striking a decisive blow in Lorraine seemed suddenly to loom—a blow which would open to them at once the contemplated entry into France through her main line of defence.

The measures they took to effect this blow show they believed that Joffre had adopted the risky strategic principle of operating on parallel lines—

that he had equally divided his forces between his northern and eastern theatre of operations, when, as a matter of fact, he was far stronger in the north. There, in any case, the Germans thought that they would always be stronger than he, a fact that Joffre, even from his high position, could not easily guess—the reason for which will be seen later on—and if Joffre's right wing, strong as it was supposed to be, could be crumpled up and destroyed, then their task in the north would be made still easier.

But, it may be argued, why should the Germans expect to break through the French line of defence when they thought the French right wing was so strong? Because, as they saw by reason of their own punishment, this right wing was not *all* concentrated in Lorraine—it extended to the Vosges and Upper Alsace; and a swift and smashing victory over the Lorraine army would place the others to the south in jeopardy. Now the Germans calculated that the victorious French in the south would hesitate to evacuate Alsace a *second time;* and that, before they did so, the German columns, coming down from Saarburg, would have reached Chalons —the French armies of Upper Alsace and the Vosges would be isolated and cut off—and later on would be surrounded in Epinal and Belfort. The efforts made to achieve all this would not affect adversely,

from the German point of view, the situation in the north—on the contrary, it would help matters in Belgium greatly, for the French armies of the south would be destroyed, and the fate of those of the north would be thereby settled, if by that time they had not also succumbed on the Belgian plains in the grasp of Kluck, Bulow, Hausen and Wurtemberg.

So it came about that the German Staff decided to strike at the French in Lorraine with great strength.

The 20th of August marks the end of the great French advance in Lorraine and Alsace. It also opens the period of decisive developments in Belgium. But inasmuch as the strategy of Joffre in Belgium was greatly dependent upon the course of events on the eastern frontier, and that these events reached the critical stage sooner than those in Belgium, and that it is necessary to keep them well in mind whilst judging the state of affairs in the north of the same period, we had best realise the events of the next four or five days upon the French eastern frontier.

We have seen that, after considerable fighting, Castelnau's army had captured one after another most of the German positions south and south-east of Metz. On the 20th of August the advanced posts of this French army reached Fenestrange, to

MAP 6.

To face page 70.

the north of Saarburg ; and the other troops getting into line, Castelnau proceeded towards the carrying of the last positions of the Germans between Metz and Strasburg with the object of piercing their line of concentration.

To understand what happened it is good to bear in mind several things : First of all that Castelnau's army was not as strong as when it had left Luneville and Nancy ; it had been depleted of a whole corps —the 9th—which had been sent to reinforce Larenzac's army in the north, this being part of Joffre's strategy of making the Lorraine army, as it progressed, to appear much stronger than it was. Then the cost of capturing the first German entrenchments had been very heavy. Then, again, several units, partly through exhaustion, partly for the purpose of organising the conquered ground and fulfilling other duties, lagged behind. Under these circumstances, Castelnau would have been better advised to wait a day or two before attacking —in which case he would most probably not have attacked ; he would have confined himself strictly to the defensive, or even have retreated across the frontier, *his task being now fully accomplished.* But he saw, or fancied that he saw, a great opportunity before him : the Germans, he thought, were demoralised—as indeed those of them were whom he had defeated, but certainly not so the fresh army

corps that the German commanders were now bringing down from the north to meet him. The Germans also had seen an opportunity before them. As the French advanced in Lorraine, the Germans were making their last line of defence stronger and stronger, indeed impregnable—there were interminable lines of trenches, redoubts, barricades of felled trees, wire entanglements galore, and, what was to prove more formidable still, an immense amount of heavy artillery drawn from the huge arsenal of Metz.

It was to perfect and useless slaughter that the French officers led their troops at Saarburg and Morhange on the 20th of August. In vain Castelnau's wearied columns, with extraordinary pluck and heroism dashed themselves against the formidable obstacles erected by the foe. They were enveloped in a tornado of steel, an inferno of shot and shell. First the poor reservists gave way. Then the Germans, perfectly fresh and with a superiority in numbers of three to one, launched their counter-attacks. Happily the 20th army corps—the "Ironsides"—were there, or the destruction of Castelnau's army might have been accomplished. The 20th, commanded by Foch, did not give way, and protected the retreat. The Germans made vain efforts to break that corps; and in the attempt they sustained greater losses than they had ever contemplated, at

the same time the losses of the heroic "Ironsides" were terrible—they cannot have been less than 20,000 men, besides nearly all their artillery.

Thus it will be seen that Castelnau squandered a good third of his troops, and came near to being surrounded; for, before he had recrossed the frontier, the Germans on one side were ascending the Moselle and the Seille, towards Nancy, whilst on the other side strong German columns were advancing from Strasbourg to the Vosges. This, perhaps, saved him, for he hurried his retreat and did not attempt to make a stand until he had reached the "Grand Couronné" and the Meurthe. In one thing the Germans were baffled, for they had counted, with absolute certainty, on the annihilation of Castelnau's army at Saarburg; but they were to suffer more serious disappointments.

After all, the affair of Saarburg in itself, whatever the losses, could not influence Joffre's strategy. It was the counterpart of Mulhausen—a defeat sustained *outside* the main line of concentration. Had it led to the piercing of the gap of Mirecourt and the isolation of Dubail and Pau, the one in the Vosges and the other in Alsace, then it would have been another matter. It would have been *the* decisive battle of the war, and France would now be a German province.

As it was, it did *not* lead to the piercing of the

famous gap, nor to the isolation of Pau and Dubail in Alsace, and Joffre's end was attained. He weakened the Germans in the north by drawing several of their corps to the south; and with his bait he drew a huge army on to a point that he saw to it they did not pierce. For, against the hopes of the Germans, and to their profound astonishment, Pau and Dubail instantly evacuated Alsace and the Vosges, and came up just in time to reinforce the sorely-pressed army of Lorraine, and thus to save France and Europe from the direst calamity. The efforts of the Germans, of the army of Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, to reach the banks of the Moselle, west of Luneville, and to shut up Castelnau's army in Toul, were tremendous—gigantic. The German commanders were bent on reaping all the profit of their victory at Saarburg, and of the redistribution of forces they were compelled to make, a redistribution that must be disadvantageous to them if it did not at once yield decisive results. Against their intention they had been forced to spread out their strength—to open their fists apart and leave bare their breast to a blow—when they would have preferred to have kept their strength together, to have remained concentrated on a shorter front. They somehow began to understand the game of Joffre without as yet giving him credit for more strategic acumen. According to them he was still bound to

be caught in Belgium, and to leave his army of Alsace where it was! If nothing of this kind happened (and the German leaders could not bring themselves to speculate on such a probability), then the war was just as good as lost to Germany. All the period of preparation and waiting would have been for nothing!

Now it was not likely that, having the initiative from the start, the French would wilfully lose it. This initiative had been obtained by the first stroke in Alsace; it had been obtained by the next advance in the annexed provinces; they were keeping it also in Belgium by drawing the Germans on to their positions instead of walking up to the German positions; and, whether they succeeded or not, whether they advanced or retreated, the result would be the same—Germany was doomed. The fact that the Germans, like the journalists the world over, were deceived into thinking they held the initiative simply because they attacked Joffre where Joffre decided that they should attack him did not give the Germans the initiative.

It was perhaps a sense of the coming calamity of their strategic fiasco that brought the Germans to squander their forces in the way they did—to strike so desperately in so many quarters at the same time, and to commit the most senseless barbarities. It was not Liége that lost them the war; it was Alsace—

it made them lose the initiative, and that was enough. They followed the designs of Joffre, obeyed his moves, lost their balance, and tumbled down after him as a man might be pulled down a steep incline at the foot of which his assailant destroys him. The fact of his rushing down on top does not prove that he commands the fall. The Germans might have been cornered sooner and France spared the invasion had Joffre been better informed as to the German strength, and had all his subordinate commanders helped him equally well.

Nothing severe, of course, can be said against Castelnau. He only erred in the psychological calculations, and that is what the ablest of men can do and have done. And there should be eternally put to his credit the high praise he deserved for the way in which, after such a reverse, he reorganised his army whilst keeping the foe at bay, and for the skill with which he co-ordinated his movements with those of Dubail and Pau. He paid back the Germans at Luneville for the losses sustained at Saarburg —whole regiments were mown down; brigades entirely disappeared. The Germans were held up for two whole days on the right bank of the Moselle, which they just managed to reach; then they were finished by two great flank attacks by the French, one from Nancy, and the other from the south (August 25). They lost ground, and henceforward

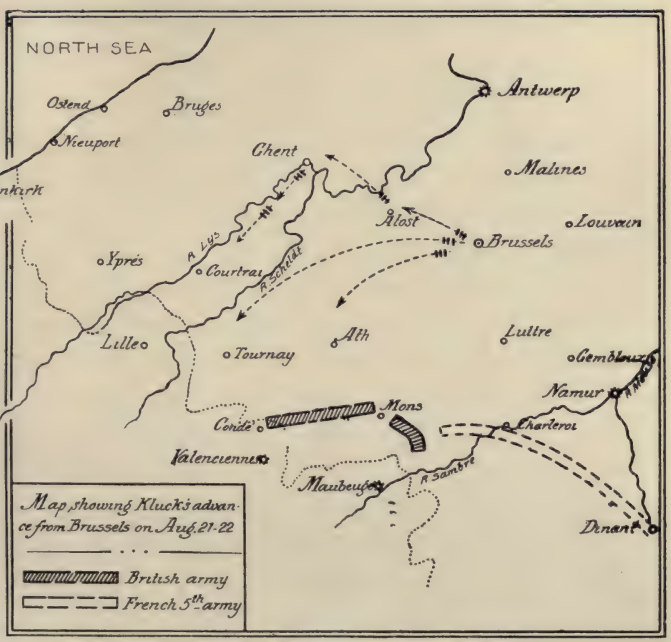
stood on the defensive, until their second great attempt further north and the gigantic battle of Nancy.

Thus we see the Germans winning a tactical action on a large scale, but, in the doing, losing strategically, and thinning their strength at their vital spot, in obedience to Joffre's design ! We shall see this domination of the will of Joffre over the German commanders again and again until it has almost become a law of German subordination to the will of the conqueror. And it is curious as regards the German psychology, and amazing as to the nerve of the great French commander, that these German strategic defeats have always alarmed Europe as though they were the onrush of victories.

CHAPTER IX

JOFFRE EVADES THE GERMAN TRAP IN BELGIUM; THE GERMAN GENERALS, RUSHING TO OVERWHELM THE FRENCH THEREIN, STRIKE THEIR BLOW IN THE AIR, AT THE SAME TIME BAULKING JOFFRE'S COUNTER-STROKE BY THEIR SUCCESSFUL CONCENTRATION OF A WHOLE SECRET ARMY

THE position in Belgium on the 14th of August, when the French advance in Lorraine began, was as follows:—The German 2nd army was rapidly and methodically reducing the forts of Liége, whilst keeping in contact with the Belgian forces that were concentrating at Louvain; the 1st German army was crossing the Meuse both at Liége and Vizé, and was slowly feeling its way in the direction of Antwerp; the other German northern armies—the 3rd under Hausen, the 4th under Wurtemberg, and the 5th under the Crown Prince—were busy in various ways, but not in active operations, if we except the investment of the small fortress of Longwy, near the Luxembourg frontier. This fortress—a very old one dating from the eighteenth century—had been first attacked on the 3rd of August. By the 5th or 6th of August it was completely invested.



MAP 7.

To face page 78.

Its dogged resistance was surprising, but of no great consequence to the Germans. Apart from the moral value of the performance, its commandant, d'Arche, might well have surrendered at once without the least endangering the safety of France.

The work done by the German centre armies in other ways was of greater import than the subduing of this small stronghold. They were entrenching carefully south of Liége, along the Ourthe and at the opening of the Ardennes forest. Their strength in number of units was no doubt diminishing on account of the redistribution southwards compelled by the French offensive in Alsace ; but, taking for granted that their enemy was going to act in the way the German commanders expected, their strength, coupled with the elaborate preparations made to receive the French, was quite sufficient to involve the French in a crushing disaster if the French blundered into the Belgian trap. And be it remembered that the Germans had not, as yet, awakened to the skilful habit of Joffre in using the Prussian self-confidence and self-deception into employing their violent onrushes to draw them into positions where *he* desired to give them battle ! We must remember that, at this time, the German commanders were still convinced that the French were in strength in Belgium, lured thereto by sentiment. Their Belgian battles, so far, were German recon-

naissances in force to discover where the French were. Let us try to grasp the German psychology at this stage as revealed by their strategy and tactics.

The result of the big reconnaissances at Dinant, and even of the earlier one at Mangienne, north of Verdun, must, at the time, have raised the hopes of the German commanders to the highest pitch. In the first (Mangienne, on August 11 and 12) the counter-reconnaissance had been terrific, no less than 1000 prisoners and even some guns being captured by the French. This must have given them encouragement. It pointed, at any rate, to a pronounced effort northwards. At Dinant, on August 14 and 15, it was better still. There in Belgian territory, and quite near Namur, the strong German reconnoitring force—a small army of itself—had been simply swept away by what seemed to be a whole army corps, a great number of French field batteries being in action whilst the Germans had only machine guns.

Now an army corps does not generally advance by itself so far from its own frontier. It is usually accompanied, or followed, by several more. The Germans deduced that a general advance of the French in Belgium had begun. They were convinced of it the next day, August 16, when another German reconnoitring force, based on Huy, came

into collision with French troops at Gembloux! These French troops had also with them a good quota of field guns, and on the 17th, after a stiff fight, the French recaptured Gembloux. The reports about French troops being in great numbers at Brussels, and even in contact with the Belgian army near Louvain, were persistent. The expected French attack in the Ardennes might take place at any moment.

The German commanders, flushed with anticipation and excitement, decided that it was about time to strike. And they struck—but in north Belgium only, for it was held that the chance of a counter-stroke delivered under the best conditions against the French centre armies must not be missed. These French armies were known to be gathering at Montmedy and Sedan; they must be ready by now, thought the German Staff, but they were uncommonly slow in reaching their positions! Certainly, by that date, their advanced guards should have reached the Ourthe, yet they had not even crossed the frontier, whilst the left wing, on the other hand, was distinctly going up to perdition! Dinant and Gembloux were there to prove it. There must be at least an army corps in and around Namur, not to mention those that might be taking up positions between the Sambre and the Meuse.

Kluck struck; and Bulow and Hausen followed suit a little afterwards.

The task of Kluck was to pin down and surround the Belgian army. That of Bulow was to drive a wedge between this Belgian army and a number of imaginary French corps south of it. Bulow also must help Hausen, who was acting from the east, in a hurried assault on Namur. Thus the Belgian army and the French left wing would be disposed of at the same time. Whilst this was going on the French centre armies would feel bound to hurry on to the attack in order to relieve the pressure in the north. They would at once be assailed in front by Wurtemberg and the Crown Prince, whilst their retreat was to be cut off by way of the Meuse by Hausen and Bulow.

At once a perplexing position is explained, and we now see why the army of the Crown Prince was placed in Luxembourg. For directly the German right wing had achieved its main object of surrounding and destroying the French left wing, the Crown Prince was to push on to Verdun and Rheims and establish connection with the army of Bavaria, which, by that time, so it was hoped, would have broken through the gap of Mirecourt and have reached Chalons. From thence the two prospective young monarchs would push on to Paris and leave

to the wing armies the task of finishing off the beaten French armies.

Kluck, in the north, proceeded with his task very well—only the Belgian army fought in the open much better than he had expected. The strategy of the Belgians may have been defective, and their tactics not quite up to the mark, but nothing can be said against their valour, endurance, and courage. Kluck, although he struck heavily at Aershot, failed to cut off their retreat on Antwerp. His frontal attack succeeded; but that was of no use—strategically—to him, except that it enabled him to advance on and to enter the Belgian capital. The Belgian army retreated in good order on to Antwerp, where, as it was not defeated, the German commander found it necessary to keep a sufficient strength to contain it.

When Kluck entered Brussels in triumph *he found no French troops there!* But he may have supposed that they had hurriedly evacuated the town on his approach.

Bulow, by now, with the 2nd army, was busy; but to his astonishment he met no considerable French forces north of the Sambre—but only detachments, which, spreading over the wooded country, constantly waylaid and ambushed his advancing troops. But, what was worse, there were no indications as to the French having reached Namur as yet!

The French armies, or their main body, were still on the frontier. On the day that the Germans attacked Namur and entered Brussels these French armies moved forward, together with the British army, which, having finished its concentration behind the fortress of Maubeuge, advanced swiftly towards Mons.

The position of the German right wing was now precarious, for it had reached its limit of expansion without having achieved anything definite or decisive. It had stumbled forward blindly; it had the Meuse behind it, and the forces of the Allies were on both its flanks. Technically, in terms of strategy, it was *surrounded*.

Happily for them the German commanders were not slow to grasp the fact, nor did they fail to realise that, in order to avert a disaster, they must quickly modify their plan. The movement westward must continue, and even be accelerated so as not to leave time to the French and British forces to take and prepare strong positions. The German commanders, it must be noted, were up to this time wholly in the dark as to the whereabouts of the English army. They knew that it had been landed in France, but what line of action it would follow they could not guess. Up to the 22nd of August, when some of Bulow's Uhlans met vedettes in khaki at Soignies, the German generals were inclined to

think that the British would begin operations from the line of the Scheldt. So well accepted was this theory that, when other Uhlans belonging to Kluck arrived at Tournai on the same day (August 22) they enquired for the French, not for the British, who were advancing not far, but *westward*, from that place. The troops of Kluck, in issuing from Brussels, spread in the direction of Ghent and Ostend on the one side, and at Ath and Tournai on the other.

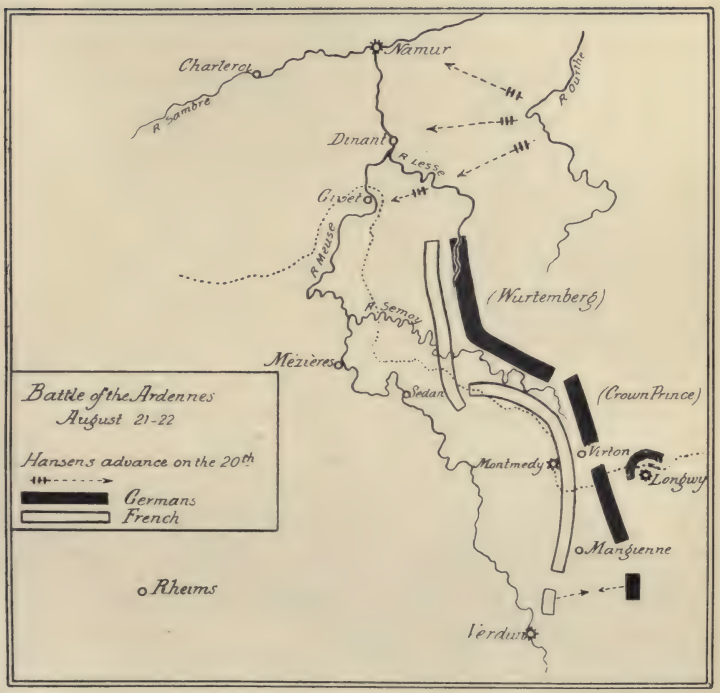
This shows a double purpose—that of meeting "something" along the Scheldt, and of driving the usual wedge between that something and the French forces west of the Scheldt.

The British were not where the Germans supposed them to be; and here is another instance of the sentimental being wisely sacrificed to the soundly strategical. The invasion of Belgium by the Germans affected the English more than one can say. The wish for the instant relief of this small and heroic nation was foremost in all English breasts, and it appeared to many that those responsible for the prosecution of the campaign were bound to, and would endeavour to, bring the British and Belgian forces into touch as soon as possible, and would, therefore choose the most likely line of action to effect that purpose above all other tactical or strategic considerations whatsoever. The base for this line lay in Belgian territory, and was later on

chosen for the landing of the column which was sent to relieve Antwerp. To this degree the Germans did not err so greatly in their assumption; only once again they were tricked by their tendency to undervalue the firmness and strategic ability of their enemies, for there can be no doubt that if Kluck's columns, instead of spreading westwards as they did and losing time in the process, had hurried immediately southwards towards Valenciennes and Mons, the fate of the army under Sir John French would have been at once settled.

In short, the Germans struck their blow in the air; neither the French nor the British were in the trap —and the triumphant entry into Brussels, however much it may have warmed the pride of the German people, must have left the German commanders anxious and disturbed at their strategic failure. Fine tacticians, however, Kluck and the other commanders made the best of a bad job and at once moved to retrieve their blunder.

But, before coming to subsequent operations on this side, it is necessary to see what was happening—or had already happened—east of the Meuse. For it was there that the German plans for the annihilation of the French left wing (a disaster in which the English army would have been involved) had been somewhat modified. It was in this way: the advance of the French centre armies, like the



MAP 8.

To face page 86.

rest, had been expected by the Germans to take place sooner; but on the 20th of August, whilst Bulow and a part of Hausen's forces were attacking Namur, the French centre armies were still on the frontier; the German commanders still believing —and the illusion did not vanish until two days later—that the French left wing extended far to the north of the Sambre, and was in occupation of Namur, the German Staff could not account for this delay in the centre. To them it looked as if the French left wing stood in a dangerous position—which, it is true, would have been the case if it had been disposed as the Germans thought, whereas it was only just about to leave the frontier!

The opportunity to the Germans seemed a great one: they could cut off the French left wing in Belgium, as they had hoped and designed to do earlier! Therefore it was not necessary to wait for a French attack in the Ardennes—besides, that attack, if it came, might come too late, and already the line of the Ourthe had been abandoned by the German forces advancing on Namur from the east. These forces must be increased in the direction of Givet and Dinant so as to outflank the French army on the Sambre; and, in the meantime, the German centre armies would issue from their positions in the forests, and deal with the forces opposed to them.

Thus the general advance of the contending parties in this region took place simultaneously—and the collision which ensued on the banks of the Lesse and of the Semoy, tributaries of the Meuse, was terrific—no less than 300,000 men being engaged on each side. The 3rd and 4th French armies under Generals Ruffey and de Langle were each of a strength of five army corps [1]; and they were opposed, partly by Hausen's army, the whole of Wurtemberg's five[2] corps, and at least half of the army of the Crown Prince acting from Luxembourg and the Woevre. It is interesting to note here that the Crown Prince of Germany expected a complete smash of the French in the Ardennes, and was holding himself in readiness to advance on Verdun and Rheims, as originally planned. In order fully to understand this, the reader should realise that it was the date of the French defeat at Saarburg (August 21), and that if the retransference northwards of the German corps sent to Lorraine was impossible, all the German commanders were in touch with each other and knew at once through Von Moltke, the Chief of the General Staff, all that was happening on any part of the front. The Crown Prince knew that the army of Bavaria had

[1] Two first line corps, three reserve corps.

[2] A German Corps of the 1st line had three divisions; a French corps only two.

defeated Castelnau in Lorraine; and that the Bavarian army was advancing to pierce the French line of concentration at the gap of Mirecourt, with the ultimate object of reaching Chalons. There the junction of the centre German armies would take place and the advance on Paris begin.

The gap of Mirecourt, as we have seen, was not pierced by the Germans; and the defeat of the French in the Ardennes, although serious, was not decisive, nor even complete.

Taken aback by the numbers of the Germans opposing them, and hampered by the difficulties of the broken country, the French generals, it must be said, rather lost their heads, principally Ruffey, who, as he advanced towards Neufchateau, found himself seriously outflanked in the direction of Longwy and Virton. There were also other causes of discomfiture which are explained in the French official survey of the campaign: "There were, in this affair, individual and collective failures, imprudences committed under the fire of the enemy, divisions ill engaged, rash deployments and precipitate retreats, a premature waste of men, and finally the inadequacy of certain of our troops and their leaders, both as regards the use of infantry and of artillery. In consequence of these lapses, the enemy, turning to account this difficult *terrain*, was able to secure the maximum of profit from

the advantages which the superiority of his subaltern cadres gave him."

Nothing could be more frank and impartial. But the words "maximum of profit" must be taken here in the tactical sense, for *strategically* the Germans derived no benefit from their victory. The Germans might have had the maximum of profit if *all* the French subaltern commanders and the troops under them had been equally inefficient. But there was one amongst them, General Sarrail, who had the soul and the capacities of a great leader of men; and the corps under him, the 6th, was the one which he had specially trained at Chalons. This 6th corps (whilst the other troops were falling back across the frontier under pressure from the enemy) retook the offensive and delivered such a counter-stroke against the Crown Prince's army at Virton that the Germans in that region were brought to a standstill after suffering great losses. General Sarrail, two days later, took the place of General Ruffey at the head of the 3rd army, and, during the Great Retreat that followed, he was entrusted with the defence of the approaches to Verdun, the great eastern "camp retranché" of France. With what ability General Sarrail was to perform his task we shall see later on. It now remains to be explained how it was that General Joffre, in spite of his efforts in Lorraine and Alsace,

did not quite succeed in obtaining the superiority of numbers which he was striving to attain on Belgian soil, and which, in spite of the tactical shortcomings of some of his subordinates, might have ensured an early and decisive victory for the Allies.

General Joffre was misinformed from the start as to the number of German armies operating against him. A Russian report, from a reliable source, placed the number of German armies in the western theatre of war at six, thus implying that the strength of the German eastern forces operating against Russia was greater than it was. Other reports seemed to corroborate this. For instance, it became known that one of the German armies destined for Poland was the army of Saxony. The Saxon officers, however, gave vent to public complaints and protests about it, saying that they had hoped to be sent to the land of good food and good wine, whereas they were now to be sent to die of hunger and thirst on the dreary *steppes* of Russia ! In the end they were made happy, and were led towards the land of their predilection. But whether all this was part of a deep-laid, well-calculated plot to mislead the French Staff one cannot say definitely. However that may be, the French Staff *were* misled, and they were not to realise until the third or fourth week of the war the true strength of the German armies opposing them. What points to the likeli-

hood of the change of destination of the Saxon army being part of a carefully conceived plan to deceive the French Staff is the choice of the part of the German front selected for the concentration of that army—the Ardennes Forest, where the Saxons took up positions alongside the army of Wurtemberg; also the fact that the Saxons were placed under the command of General von Hausen, former Chief of the Staff to the Grand Duke of Wurtemberg, for when the name of General von Hausen appeared in the list of German commanders it was quite naturally supposed that he was acting in his former capacity, whereas he did not command the Grand Duke of Wurtemberg's army at all, but one of his own—the Saxon army of five army corps, and *including the Prussian Guards*, which brought up to *seven* the number of German armies concentrated in the western theatre of war.

Thus Joffre was misled by the French Intelligence, and was only to discover the true state of affairs—the increase of the German strength by the addition of the Saxon corps—when the German centre armies issued from the forest of the Ardennes in their leap forward to cut off the French left wing and their assault upon the French centre armies in order to crush them. But it must not be supposed, because of the success of this secret concentration, that Joffre's manœuvre in Lorraine had failed or been

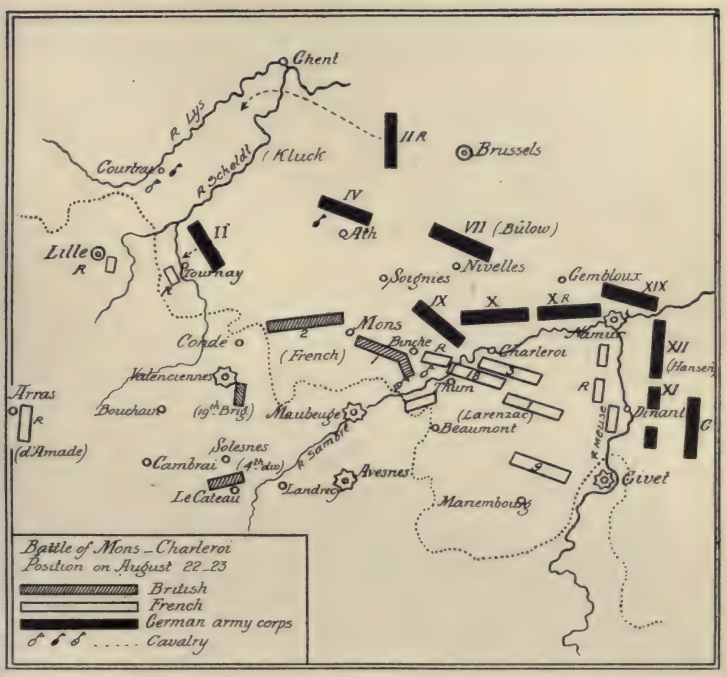
futile, or had come to nothing. For, though Joffre had not been able to obtain the superiority of numbers at which he had aimed in Belgium, neither did the Germans obtain that overwhelming superiority. At least three of the German corps, some 150,000 men, had been diverted from north to south ; others were " pinned down " in Lorraine and Alsace ; and the Germans failed to achieve anything decisive in Belgium ; indeed, they came instead within an ace of being utterly smashed to pieces there themselves, as we shall soon see.

CHAPTER X

THE GERMANS WALK INTO THE TRAP LAID BY JOFFRE FOR THEIR ANNIHILATION, BUT ONE OF JOFFRE'S GENERALS LEAVES THE TRAP DOOR OPEN, AND THE BRITISH ARE WASTED

THE battle of Charleroi—or Mons, as it is sometimes called—began on the 22nd of August—that is to say, at least a whole day after de Langle and Ruffey had assumed the defensive in the Ardennes, and Castelnau was in retreat in Lorraine. At Mons itself, where the British army deployed on hastily prepared positions between Condé on the French frontier and Binche in Belgium, there was no fighting on the 22nd itself. Kluck was looking for the British army along the Scheldt; and Bulow's more western columns were still feeling their way, wholly in the dark, south of Brussels. But at Charleroi, early in the morning, the fray began.

The French army (Larenzac's) occupied positions stretching from Anderlues and Thuin on the Sambre to Dinant on the Meuse. The front was, therefore, diagonal, and not parallel to the Sambre. This was on account of the situation of Namur at the junction of the two rivers, and because the French high com-



MAP 9.

To face page 94.

mand had not wished to occupy the fortress, which was already sufficiently garrisoned by Belgian troops. Namur had been under attack since the 20th of August; and on the 22nd, when the battle of Charleroi began, a couple of forts had already been reduced. So it is worthy of remark here that the length of its resistance did not matter to the French Staff, who meant to entrap the Germans there, and also that the Germans only attacked it *on the day they did* because they fully believed it to be held by French troops.

The composition of the Larenzac army, like that of the other French armies, was very heterogeneous; but it was still more so than any of the others, as it contained a high percentage of African troops—Arabs, Moors, and negroes. It was altogether the strongest army on the whole line, as it contained four infantry corps of the first line, besides the African divisions and the magnificent cavalry corps (three divisions) of General Sordet. It is true that this corps had been on the move since the 6th of August, and was considerably fatigued after its exertions at Dinant, along the right bank of the Meuse, and on the north bank of the Sambre at Gembloux, Luttre, and other localities. Its toll of casualties was already heavy, but as it fell back before the German columns marching on Charleroi and Thuin it was still full of fight, and was able to do splendid service on the

23rd and 24th, as we shall see. There were also reservists (three divisions), less good, but full of enthusiasm and anxious to meet the foe.

With such an army, and the support of the British on his left, General Joffre felt that he ought to win the victory.

This victory would have been his if the command of the 5th French army had been placed in better hands. General Larenzac, its commander, was a brilliant theorist, but nothing more. No man ever disappointed his chief more utterly than did Larenzac. General Joffre was bound to leave some initiative to his subordinate commanders; otherwise there would have been no such thing as "army commanders."

General Joffre only stated, roughly, what his general intentions were, and left their execution to his army commanders. It would have been impossible for him to control the army corps and divisional handling of the immense array of troops stretching from the Sambre to the Swiss frontier.

General Larenzac, commander of the 5th army, committed mistakes which were not at first apparent, and of which General Joffre only became aware when it was too late.

First of all, he should have occupied with great strength *both* banks of the Sambre, and not the south bank only; failing this—if he meant to

remain on the defensive—he should have destroyed the bridges. He should have treated the line of the Meuse in the same way. For, once these positions were rendered secure against any attack, *the fate of the German right wing in Belgium was sealed.* Namur would have become a death-trap to the Germans, and the British army, acting from Mons northwards, would have placed in a very tight position those German corps that had ventured too far to the west on their blind quest after the said British army. On the other hand, once the Germans were allowed to cross both rivers the position would be practically reversed against the Allies, who must then retire to avoid an envelopment.

General Larenzac had had ample time to fortify the lines of the Sambre and the Meuse with strong entrenchments, and, above all, to occupy Charleroi *in strength.* He did none of these things. All these advanced positions were held loosely, Charleroi, for instance, being only occupied by a detachment of light troops and a few machine guns ! Only south of Dinant, towards Givet, was the line of the Meuse fairly strongly prepared ; but north of it, towards Namur, nothing had been done, except that, seemingly as an afterthought, General Larenzac sent on the 22nd of August, to the fortress there, a regiment of the line, for what definite purpose will probably never be discovered.

The battle of Charleroi, therefore, opened badly for the French when, on the contrary, from the strength of the 5th army, it should have begun with a distinct advantage. The Germans were in earnest, and bent on the annihilation of the French eft wing. They were not slow to grasp the situation, the danger to their own position should the French be allowed to recover and make good their mistakes. And, fighting with desperate will knowing what failure meant, they struck quickly and as heavily as they could on both sides.

On the north of the Sambre there were two German corps. A third was winding its way down, west of Charleroi, towards Binche and Thuin.

Another corps, the 7th, was still far behind, on the road from Brussels to Nivelles ; but it would be in support or continue towards Mons. On the east of the Meuse the whole army of Hausen (the 5th), including the Prussian Guards, was coming up.

The town of Charleroi was smothered in shells. The weak French detachments in the town made what was described by imaginative correspondents as "a medieval sortie"—but it was a useless slaughter of men, a futile squandering of brave lives. Once Charleroi was not properly occupied, it would have been better to retire from it to the main position, or even as far back as the frontier. Yet Larenzac became aware, through the efforts of the

Germans, of its importance, for on the 23rd he made four distinct attempts to retake it. But all in vain. The only result achieved was the packing of the streets of the town with dead. What casualties the 3rd French corps who fought there suffered will probably never be known.

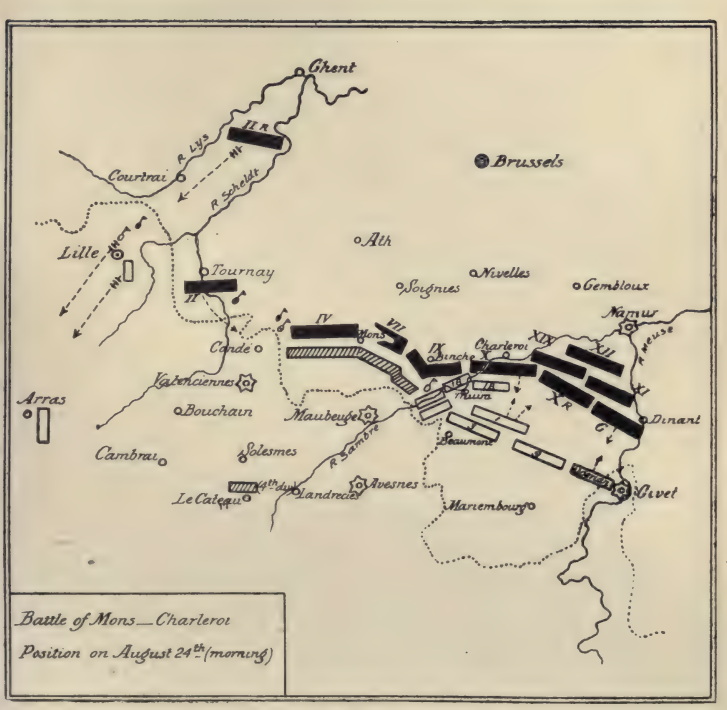
But what troubled Larenzac more was the flank attack of von Hausen. As a matter of fact he should not have been so anxious about this flank attack. The African troops were lining the Meuse, and could have inflicted terrible losses on the Germans, as they did later on the next day from a far worse position.

All the French commander had to do was to gather all his strength on the main lines south of the Sambre, and to dispute the crossings of the Meuse with von Hausen. The French would thus still have had a chance of winning the victory and of crushing Bulow's western corps between them and the English. Larenzac, instead, withdrew his right wing, and thus allowed the Germans to cross the Meuse at Dinant and north of it. Once this was done all possibility of a French victory on Belgian soil vanished.

And the British troops were now going to be placed in a tight corner.

The fighting at Mons—or rather at Binche—only began on the 23rd of August at noon, that is to say,

a full day after Larenzac had lost, practically, the crossings over the Sambre. The situation of the 5th French army, however, was not as yet hopeless, as Larenzac had not yet begun his retirement from the Meuse. The German corps which came into collision with the British east of Mons was the 9th of Bulow's army, one division of which was already engaged with the French at Anderlues. This corps had as its objective the fortress of Maubeuge, in the rear of the British army. Its march was impeded by the French, who struck at it heavily on its flank from Thuin; and judging from the reception it got from the British a little afterwards, it would have been routed without a doubt—annihilated or captured—if only Charleroi could have been held by the French. When, however, its attack developed against the British, Charleroi was securely held by Bulow. On the rest of the British front, north and west of Mons, there was also a certain amount of fighting from the early morning, but it was only of a desultory nature, the main bodies of the advanced troops which were attacking there being still far in the rear at Nivelles and at Ath, so that one can say that the brunt of the fighting on that day on this part of the line fell to the British 1st corps, under Sir Douglas Haig, which occupied entrenched positions in front of Binche and Peissant.



MAP 10.

To face page 100.

The battle opened very favourably for the British. The troops, after their enthusiastic reception at Boulogne and all along the marches thence were full of fire and felt that they could beat any enemy. The Germans, of course, animated now with a special and peculiar hatred of England, felt just as anxious to meet them. Thus the encounter was bound to be a formidable one, with the advantage distinctly on the side of the English, since they were carefully entrenched and not yet outnumbered. Besides, their tactics and their high standard of musketry must have been something of a surprise to the Germans, who were easily mown down by the hundred before they themselves could inflict serious losses in return—indeed, when they did so, it was mainly with shell, not with rifle fire. In fact, Sir John French's infantry was doing such execution in the serried ranks of their enemies that it was a pleasure to go on, so that when Sir John French suddenly received in the late afternoon the message from General Joffre, advising him of the 5th French army's retirement, and of the number of German corps west of Charleroi, whose presence was now becoming a danger, he felt aggrieved, and even incredulous as to the second part of the message. To see victory within your grasp and to have to turn your back upon it through no fault of your own is a most painful and dramatic situation,

savouring of the tragic. Sir John was loth to break off an action that had started so well. He must have felt like the Iron Duke at Waterloo—"What will they think of us in England!" if we retire before the very first onslaught of the Prussians? And he probably hoped that something would turn up—or at least that General Joffre was misinformed as to the strength of the Germans in the north.

Sir John French did not break off the action, although he made ready to do so in his mind should it become absolutely necessary. Instead he sent up his flying men to reconnoitre.

But General Joffre was quite well informed; in fact the information he had as to the strength of the Germans formed the base of his original plan of enticing the German wing as far west as possible in order to crush it. But now that, through the fault of a blundering subordinate, he had lost his pivot on the Meuse, his plan not only could not be carried out, but the German strength west of the Meuse became very disadvantageous to the Allies. The Germans could not cut off the French left wing, but they might now surround it, as well as the British.

The delay in the retirement of the British forces was almost fatal. The German commanders had, since that morning of the 23rd of August, located

the exact positions of Sir John French's army—and they were closing in on it from north, east, and west. The 7th corps (Bulow) was hurrying forward from Nivelles. The 4th corps (Kluck) was moving down from Ath; the 2nd corps (Kluck) was now engaged at Tournai with a division of French Territorials, and was further delayed there by the news of a great cavalry fight north of Lille, near Courtrai. This cavalry fight, in which the nephew of the Kaiser, Count von Schwerin, was taken prisoner, gave Kluck the idea that strong French forces were stationed at Lille and even along the Scheldt—and these forces might take him in flank and render his advance southwards dangerous. Kluck only found out his mistake on the next day, the 24th of August; a fight had indeed occurred between a French cavalry detachment based on Lille and squadrons of Uhlans who were scouring the banks of the Lys, but the reconnoitring forces of Uhlans, whose action extended as far as the neighbourhood of Ostend, did not report having seen any considerable bodies of the enemy west of the Scheldt; but by this time Sir John French had begun his retrograde movement from Mons. The advanced guard of the German 2nd corps only reached Condé that day, the objective of this corps being Valenciennes. So anxious was Kluck to forestall the English that he gave his troops no rest, and pressed his cavalry

forward and ever forward in the direction of Bouchain and Cambrai. He must have regretted bitterly his delay at Tournai. Such an opportunity might never come again. Yet, hoping against hope, he still thought he held the English within his grasp, for he received hourly messages from the other German commanders that the English were "pinned" at Mons, that they could not retire, and that the 9th German corps, battered as it was, and probably the 10th, also battered at Charleroi, would reach Maubeuge before the British did!

This calculation was wholly founded on the assumption that the French, being in a difficult corner themselves between the Sambre and the Meuse, would make an uninterrupted flight to their own frontier, leaving their allies to their fate. This withdrawal of the French would make room for the German corps mentioned to deploy round the British, and would have left the passage quite free along both banks of the Sambre to the fortress of Maubeuge.

But if the Germans thought the French were really defeated in the full sense of the term, they were sadly mistaken; and if they further thought, as they most likely did, that General Joffre would be capable of such an infamy as to leave the British in the lurch, they were still more mistaken.

During the night of the 23rd to the 24th the

French 5th army stopped in its retirement on the line Beaumont-Givet and, partly to relieve the enormous pressure brought to bear on the English at Mons, partly to prevent the Germans from reaching Maubeuge before the English had fallen back on to it, they held on like grim death to that line, and delivered furious counter-attacks. The counter-attack delivered by the Algerian division against the Prussian Guards, who had crossed the Meuse at Dinant, will be remembered in all time, for the German "*corps d'élite*" suffered tremendous casualties thereat, and lost its commander, Baron von Plattenberg. One German regiment alone had 1,800 men placed "hors de combat." But the African troops lost heavily themselves. The other counter-attack, perhaps more important from the point of view of the English, was less noticed as it was delivered by a corps of the line—the 1st French corps—whose commander, Franchet d'Esperey, was a leader of the stamp of Sarrail, who had saved the situation in the Ardennes by his brilliant stroke at Virton.

Franchet d'Esperey led his troops with consummate mastery, and nearly all the villages south of Charleroi, almost right up to that place, were recaptured. They could not be held for long; but the main end was attained—the British and the Germans reached Maubeuge *simultaneously*.

Franchet d'Esperey was immediately given the command of the 5th army in place of the dismissed Larenzac.

It is only fair to say here that even with the *strategic* support of the French just described, not to mention a good deal of tactical work along the banks of the Sambre on the 23rd and 24th of August by General Sordet and the 18th French corps, the British army, outnumbered as it was and outflanked, could never have extricated itself from its terrible position if its commander and corps commanders had not been such masters of tactics as they were. In Sir John French, Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, and Sir Douglas Haig, Britain had a trio of men to whom the fate of an army could well be entrusted—and it is also to be confessed that if France had had such a trio at the head of the 5th army the battles of Mons and Charleroi would have been great and decisive victories.

But, and this is a point too often forgotten by the critics—there were few generals in the French army who had seen active service. What was true of the generals was also true of the rank and file. The British troops consisted mainly of long-service men, and they were led by generals and officers whose ability had been tested in the heat of battle, in South Africa, in India and elsewhere. For that reason there has probably never been a better tactical

unit in the field than the British army that stood against the Germans at Mons.

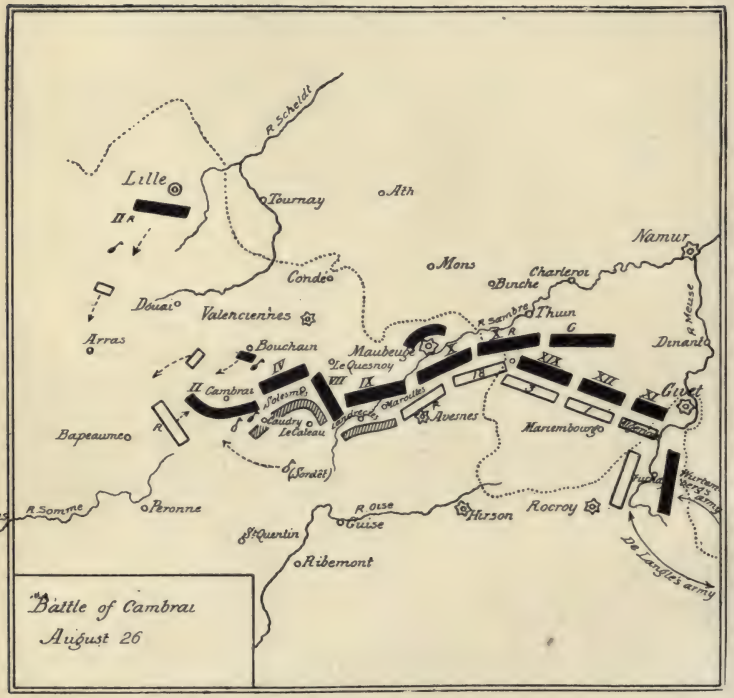
The tactical methods of Sir John French in his retirement from his advanced positions at Mons are interesting. First of all, seeing the preponderance of German cavalry in the west, Sir John quickly transferred the main part of his mounted troops from his right wing to his left, and the fine squadrons of General Allenby, by their repeated charges against the flank of the enemy, relieved much pressure from Smith-Dorrien's corps as it fell back south of Mons. Then, to prevent a "jamming" of this corps with that of Douglas Haig's, which had evacuated Binche, Sir John directed a couple, or "cross" counter-attacks by Haig's two divisions, as if to retake Binche from south and west. This not only stayed the enemy's advance in that quarter, but left enough space to the 1st corps to keep fully deployed and thus to effect its retrograde movement without confusion.

Thus Sir John French, ably seconded by his corps and divisional commanders, was able to retire on the evening of the 24th of August on the line Jenlain-Maubeuge, with the very minimum of losses for an operation of the kind.

The losses of the British in men during the four days' fighting (August 23-26) was from 6,000 to 8,000. Those of the 5th French army during the same

period were variously computed at 20,000 to 30,000, whilst Kluck, Bulow and Hausen are said to have lost as many as 80,000 men, the majority of casualties being sustained in front of the British lines.

But the danger was not past, and whilst the French kept at bay the Germans on their frontier line, the British were to sustain further south another onslaught more formidable than the first.



MAP 11.

To face page 109.

CHAPTER XI

THE GERMANS, BAULKED OF THEIR SCHEME TO TRAP THE FRENCH IN BELGIUM, AND ELUDING THE FRENCH TRAP, AND COMPELLED TO A PARALLEL FIGHT, SEEK TO CUT OFF AND ENVELOP THE BRITISH WING OF THE LINE—AND FAIL, THE BRITISH GETTING TOUCH WITH THE FRENCH LINE TO RIGHT AND LEFT

THE 25th of August marks the abortion of *all* the initial plans of Germany.

On this date the first German attempt against the French eastern line of defence failed definitely. The Crown Prince of Germany was held up, and even driven back, by General Sarrail in the Woevre and in Belgian Luxembourg; the Grand Duke of Wurtemberg did not pin down and surround de Langle's army in the Ardennes, as he had hoped; Hausen and Bulow failed to cut off or crush the 5th French army between the Sambre and the Meuse; and, finally, Kluck and Bulow were unable to pin the British to their line of Mons and to cut off their retreat on Maubeuge.

Thus, after high hopes of an early and decisive victory, the Germans were on French soil without

having effected anything except the costly reduction of a couple of fortresses and the occupation of ground which was now strewn with their slain and littered with their wrecked war material. Towns and villages were in flames behind them; in the more important localities the ruthless invader could levy contributions of war and obtain supplies. He was, in fact, enjoying the advantages of fighting in the enemy's territory; but there his strategic gains ended, for the opposed armies which, with unparalleled confidence, he had set out to destroy, were intact, unbroken, and, moreover, had suffered less.

In the north, round Antwerp, the Belgians were stoutly holding their own and even assuming offensive operations; in the west, at Ostend, a British auxiliary force was landing to give the Belgians support, and thereby hampering the course of German strategy; in the south, all along the French frontier, numerous, superb armies were keeping the enemy at bay; whilst at Luneville the grim struggle along the banks of the Meurthe and the Moselle was distinctly turning to the advantage of the French.

The German commanders must now have been sitting uneasily in their saddles. They had calculated upon a rapid and overwhelming success, a success which would have solved their problem at once and made the invasion of France rather a

pleasure than a task. But somehow this success had been denied them. Every one of their strokes had, so far, miscarried, not through the mishandling of affairs by subaltern leaders, since tactical profit had been achieved in almost every quarter of the field, but through the surprising, disconcerting, uncanny strategy of the man called Joffre—Joffre, a Frenchman, and a southern Frenchman at that! therefore a man who, from the German point of view, should have proved unbalanced of mind and of excitable disposition, whereas the handling of his armies showed coolness and determination.

Summing up events since that extraordinary commander had struck so unexpectedly in Alsace, the German Staff were bound to admit at their war councils that they still found themselves, as far as strategic results were concerned, at the starting-point; that the tables were slowly but perceptibly being turned against them, and that the project of conquering and subduing France was a far more formidable affair than had at first been contemplated. The invaders could not, as they did in 1870, now make use of the convenient French eastern line of railways; and, without these shorter lines of communication Paris, the ultimate German goal in this campaign, could not be directly approached, except from the north, and it followed that, before the investment of the French capital could take

place, the French forces in the field must be disposed of, captured or destroyed; otherwise, an attack on such a huge armed camp as the French capital would undoubtedly prove a most dangerous enterprise, and constitute a powerful moral factor in favour of the undefeated French troops. The German Staff still remembered how well the badly-trained "mobiles" of France had fought in 1870 whilst Paris was being besieged.

Had the Crown Prince of Bavaria succeeded in piercing the Mirecourt gap, and had the Crown Prince of Germany, with his six army corps, not been overthrown at the very gate of Verdun, it would have been possible for the Germans to cut off the communications of the French armies of the north. As it was, on the 25th of August the German Staff had lost all hope of achieving anything of the kind, and they found themselves compelled instead to adopt an entirely new alternative—grandiose, colossal in its conception, but doomed to failure because, like all the alternatives that had gone before, it left out of account the strategic power and possibilities of their opponents. If Germany had had an enemy that simply did what she wanted done, or had been fighting the newspaper "experts," then all had gone well for Germany.

The new plan was really a variation of the first, but it aimed, as far as the French northern armies

were concerned, at a simple envelopment. When, under the stress of events, it was elaborated, this envelopment was meant to take place on the Falaises and the plains of Champagne—that is to say, a long way from Paris, which shows the popular conception of the German "march to Paris" to have been quite wrong, since the German leaders had no intention whatsoever of attacking the French capital in the teeth of huge, enterprising, and unbeaten armies.

This "enveloping" alternative was *compelled* upon the Germans, because the French and British retirement, from the Sambre and Mons, had drawn on the German armies, *against the wish of their leaders*, to a strictly parallel line of attack. Although they might still continue, as they were doing, to try and make "incisions" at various points—trying to pierce the French line on the Meuse, in the Woevre, and in Lorraine—these "gnawing tactics" had not the sufficiency and the weight of great flank attacks like that of von Hausen at Dinant on the 23rd, or the abortive effort of the Crown Prince on the same day in the Ardennes and the Woevre. Whereas such flank attacks had almost constituted important ends in themselves, the new and smaller efforts were only part of a more ambitious plan. The French armies of Joffre, being now well on a parallel with the

Germans, had no flanks open to attack, except at both extremities. But the French right flank rested on strong obstacles; the left flank only, which rested on nothing, was somewhat exposed, and, by consequence, it was on the French left that the German alternative alone could be applied, for the Germans had there a pronounced superiority in numbers, a superiority which might still more have been increased if Joffre's unexpected strategic move of holding on to the line Beaumont-Givet after the retirement from Dinant and the Sambre had not considerably minimised this superiority.

The German corps, which had crossed both rivers simultaneously, found themselves jammed and mixed up in a somewhat restricted space. In the parallelogram, Charleroi-Namur-Dinant-Beaumont, there were, on the 24th and 25th of August, at least five German corps vainly endeavouring to deploy. A great deal of confusion ensued, principally amongst the Saxons, whole columns going astray and intermixing with each other. At one moment there were batteries being directed *to the Sambre* from Dinant! It was this confusion which enabled part of the garrison of Namur to escape and join the French lines near Mariembourg. At night time they were probably mistaken for German troops.

Thus, of all the German strength there gathered

together, no more than about half could effectively come into play, and that too in but a very haphazard, unmethodical fashion. Their losses were, in consequence, greater than before, and had not General Joffre been so threatened further west, he might have taken advantage of the enemy's plight and won some considerable victory.

The Germans and the English, as we have seen, reached the position of Maubeuge together on the evening of the 24th of August. At that moment Kluck's western corps (the 2nd), delayed at Tournai, was only approaching Valenciennes ; but his cavalry was much in advance and reached Bouchain on the next day. So Kluck still had a chance of outflanking Sir John French and of justifying the rather hasty reports which at that time dazzled the German public. The German commander knew from history that the British were firm on the defensive, and that they lacked imagination and elasticity of movement ; already at Mons they had stood their ground longer than necessary, and had narrowly escaped being surrounded in consequence. With the fortress of Maubeuge on their right, and with such tactical support as the French might feel bound to give them, the German commanders calculated upon the English standing their ground and holding on still longer at the new position, and thus they would be surrounded, gathered into and

captured in Maubeuge itself, which in this case would become another Metz. So sure were the German commanders that this would happen that they did not hesitate to announce in their glowing reports the eventual and inevitable destruction of the British army, which was to be the prelude, of course, to the definite envelopment and destruction of the French armies themselves.

But Sir John French disappointed all these dreams; for, better acquainted now with the situation than he had been, he refused to be nailed down to his new positions or to wait to be enveloped by the German corps acting from Valenciennes. No doubt he would have preferred to stand; and on the 25th of August, whilst hard pressed near Maubeuge, he made an appeal to General Sordêt, who commanded a cavalry corps on his right at Avesnes, for support; but General Sordêt could not or would not act, and thereby gave good grounds for the British commander to continue his retirement. The support of General Sordêt, it must be pointed out, if it had been given, would not have been of much help to Sir John French. Apart from the fact that his horses were practically exhausted after their three weeks of hard and costly work on the Sambre and the Meuse, General Sordêt was just going to be transferred from the 5th French army to the 6th army on the *left* of the English,

where German mounted troops were in great preponderance. From Avesnes General Sordêt had a long way to go in order to find suitable ground for cavalry work. He had in his front the broken country of the valley of the Sambre, and the fortress of Maubeuge blazing away with all its guns at the advancing Germans; and on his left the vast forest of Mormal, where even infantry, to say nothing of cavalry or artillery, could not move about freely.

In the way of support, General d'Amade, acting from Arras, where he was forming one reserve corps appertaining to the 6th army, was to do much better and to prove a valuable ally. He did not leave Arras too soon, seeing the comparative insignificance of the detachment he had in hand; but he did not leave Arras so late as is generally thought. The French columns left the town on the night of the 24th to the 25th of August—that is to say, when the English were still on the line Jenlain-Maubeuge —and one of his columns was able to meet on the noon of the 25th the German cavalry division which had reached Bouchain. This German cavalry division was mown down by the French guns and defeated—and Kluck, hearing of the disaster and fearing a flank attack which might develop as he advanced against the English, again altered the objective of his 2nd corps, which, from Valenciennes,

marched south-westwards on Cambrai, and from thence on the 26th divided itself into two portions, two divisions advancing against D'Amade near Bapaume, and the 3rd division moving against the English at Le Cateau. Thus the *strategic* support of D'Amade meant two German divisions *less* against the British than would otherwise have been the case. It remains to add that the English army was now stronger than it had been at Mons, having been joined by a detached brigade—the 19th—at Valenciennes on the 24th, and by a full division—the 4th—at Solesmes on the day following. Whereas, to counterbalance this increase and the weight of metal from the guns of the fortress of Maubeuge, the Germans, as we have seen, could only bring on the single division of the 2nd corps—these troops not getting into contact until the 26th of August on the line Caudry-Solesmes.

The German assault on this line, however, was particularly formidable. There were seven German divisions there against three English divisions and a brigade.

Here there was an interesting development—the artillery of the German 9th corps, not being able to negotiate the difficulties of the ground up the valley of the Sambre and along the forest of Mormal, was sent a roundabout way west of the forest, and the German generals took the opportunity of " mass-

ing " it with the artillery of the 4th and 7th corps against Smith-Dorrien's corps. Thus it came about that the English artillery at Le Cateau was frightfully outnumbered; and Sir John French thought he was attacked all along the line by five German corps, whereas there were exactly three corps and a division.

With such a superiority, however—a superiority of a little over two to one in men, and three to one in artillery—the English army should have been crushed, and must have been had their tactics not been so fine and their musketry above all praise. The men stood firm and continued to inflict terrible losses on the massed Germans. In the end, however, they must have succumbed if Sir John French had not broken off the combat and decided to retire behind the Somme in order to keep closer touch with the French on both sides of him. This was not easily done, the German game being to nail down the English, and to sever their connection with the French, in order to surround them with what reserves they had still in hand after their enormous losses. Both the English corps commanders, however, rose to the occasion and, wisely abandoning all cumbrous material, they successfully extricated their worn-out troops from the grip of the German talons.

By this time the Germans themselves were thoroughly exhausted, not only here but all along the

line from Cambrai to the Woevre. To what extent we shall see further on. For the moment it is only necessary to make clear the relation of Sir John French's army to the strategic action of the French armies on both his wings.

It will be remembered that at the time of mobilisation General Joffre had provided for the formation of a 6th army. Towards the 20th of August this army was being collected partly at Compiègne in order to leave free the communications of the English in the north and partly at Lille and Arras. General Joffre had intended to use it as an active force in Belgium if he had won the victory there, or as a powerful reserve if he found himself outnumbered and forced to retreat. The northern divisions were nothing to boast of, being, with the exception of cavalry and artillery, entirely composed of Territorials. But the two *first line* army corps—the 4th and the 7th—of which the 7th, from Alsace, had fought at Mulhausen—were fine troops. Another reserve corps belonging to the same army was being collected near Paris ; and the Tunis division, first-rate troops, were on the way to join it. We thus see that the effectives meant to reinforce the great contingents operating in the north were, owing to circumstances, a good deal scattered. The problem for General Joffre was how to bring them together in the best conditions possible and the most telling

manner on the strategy of the invader. They were destined, however, through rapidity of the developments in the north, to be brought into battle piecemeal—until an opportunity presented itself for a great collective effort.

When d'Amade, with two divisions, left Arras to outflank Kluck at Cambrai, the first line corps of the French 6th army were only just leaving their base for the north. On the 26th of August it was found that, if these corps continued on the way chosen, hopeless confusion would ensue, the retreating armies having need of all the roads and the railway lines in their rear. These corps, therefore, had to return and take a circuitous route by Creil and Beauvais towards Amiens. Thus the Territorial divisions in the north were left to deal with the situation by themselves as best they could.

They did not do so badly after all. At Tournai, on the 23rd of August, a few battalions only, with no artillery, faced most steadily a full German army corps; and they retired on Lille in good order. D'Amade's divisions, on the 26th, stood their ground during a whole day a ainst an equal number of German first-line troops; and later, on the 27th, with the help of the English 4th division, now retreating from Solesmes, and General Sordêt's cavalry corps, now transferred from the 5th to the 6th, the French Territorials, who had lost heavily,

were able to drive back Kluck's right wing on Cambrai. The connection between the English army and the 6th French army on its left was definitely established on this day (27th).

The English right wing, as is known, had been in earlier touch with the 5th French army ; but in the retirement from the Sambre this touch had been lost, and the Germans were doing their utmost on the 25th to sever it altogether, as this breach would have enabled them to envelop the English from the east. But partly through the exhaustion of the advancing Germans, and partly through the fine work of the French reserve divisions on the right of the British, this breach did not come about. These French divisions on the English right, instead of retreating in front of the German 10th corps straight backwards on to Hirson, took an oblique line of retreat through Avesnes towards Landrecies ; and in spite of the efforts of the German commanders they managed to re-establish their connection with Douglas Haig's corps east and south of Maroilles on the night of the 25–26th. It would be difficult to say whether the French tactics near Avesnes and Maroilles relieved much pressure from the English 1st corps at Landrecies ; as Sir John French put it in his despatch it was chiefly owing to Haig's efforts that the 1st corps extricated itself from a dangerous position ; but that the said French

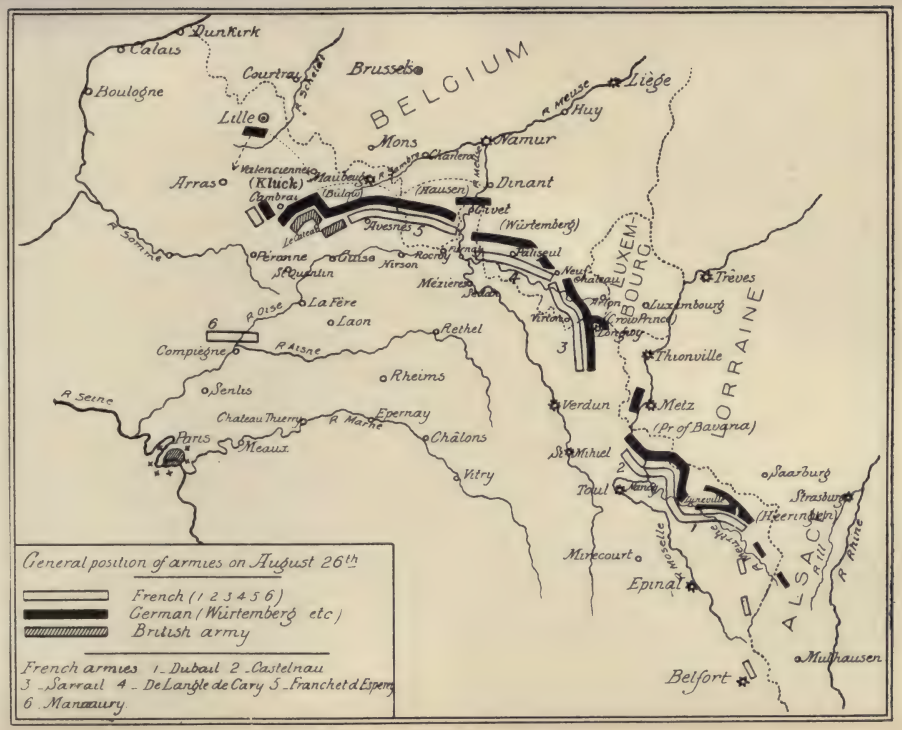
tactics prevented the Germans from effecting a turning movement that might have been proved fatal there can be no shadow of a doubt; and considering that it was the work of Territorials tired out by heavy fighting on a considerable scale, it was an achievement worthy of high praise.

CHAPTER XII

AFTER THEIR STRATEGIC CHECK AT CAMBRAI THE GERMAN STAFF RESUME, MORE TO THE WEST, THEIR ENVELOPING MOVEMENT

THE great wave of the German attacks west of the Meuse had broken itself against an indomitable rock; the attempt at a wide turning movement had failed; whilst in the Ardennes, in the Woevre, in Lorraine, events were distinctly turning in favour of the French. Such in concise terms would give a full view of the German disappointment on August 26–27.

The disappointment cannot be exaggerated. We are, of course, treating of the view of the German General Staff, and not that of the common soldiers, who thought they were winning as long as they were advancing, nor of the people at home who were ignorant of strategy or were kept in the dark as to the true state of affairs—the views of the German Staff, be it said, when in secret council and treating of things as they really stood, and weighing values, not writing advertisements for Berlin.



MAP 12.

To face page 124.

The German Staff knew this—that in modern warfare, with the huge numbers of men employed and with a very complex system of tactics, it is extremely difficult, if not actually impossible, *after the first shocks*, to deliver decisive blows or to get a hold on the enemy's lines of communications. The Germans had had the chance of effecting this. After Saarburg and the battles in the Ardennes and on the Sambre they had strained every nerve to do so and to reap the maximum of profit out of those victories, but every time the strategy of Joffre had thwarted them. The redistribution of their forces, imposed on them from the very beginning, had prevented them from obtaining a crushing superiority of numbers at any vital point. Joffre, indeed, had himself failed on the Sambre to achieve his own immediate ends, but his failure mattered far less to France and her Allies, who had not set out to conquer the Germans in a minimum of time, and were quite content to play a waiting game, whilst the Germans, on the contrary, were absolutely in earnest in their full expectation of conclusive results after the first three weeks of the campaign. The only conclusive results, so far, were hecatombs of German dead, whilst for them the strategic horizon was becoming daily darker and darker. Everything had been tried, alternative had succeeded alternative, and with the abortion

of every new plan compelled upon them by the master-mind that controlled the allied forces, the German Staff sank deeper and deeper into unforeseen difficulties. They had lost the initiative, and they knew it; they knew also that the initiative, once lost, cannot be regained except through a strategic mistake committed by the foe.

But Joffre was committing no mistakes. Backed by a people to whom invasion was no new thing, and who were bent on securing victory *at any cost*, material or moral, the great leader was able to work serenely in that full equanimity and placidity of mind which is essential to the attainment of great ends.

The German commanders were not yet aware of this, as they still entertained the hope that the French commander's will would be overruled by the sentiment of the nation; that he would feel compelled to risk a general and decisive action on doubtful lines in the hope of saving the country from total invasion. It was one thing to evacuate Alsace in order to prevent the Germans from forcing the gap at Mirecourt; it was another thing to abandon all northern France to the invader on the forlorn quest of new lines further back where the issue might be, after all, just as problematical as in the north. Had the German leaders been better acquainted with the real char-

acter of Joffre, and the extent and nature of the preparations that he was making behind his front, they would have come to a different conclusion, and, after Cambrai, they would have sensibly altered their own course of action.

The first attempt at an enveloping movement on a large scale had failed, as we have seen, on account of the French forces which the 2nd German corps, in its march upon Valenciennes to Cambrai, had suddenly found on its front. These forces—the reserve divisions under d'Amade—had hurried from Arras eastwards, and had practically outflanked the Germans themselves. D'Amade's army corps was not strong enough to turn the tide of invasion, so that the battle itself was lost to the Allies ; but Kluck's manœuvre was thwarted, and this was the main thing to be accomplished. Now Kluck had the means of resuming the same manœuvre further west, and here we come to the actual parting of the ways as far as German strategy is concerned. It can even be stated, without fear of contradiction, that *here* the issue of the war was definitely settled, although no one could possibly have been aware of it at the time. At the very moment when some of the allied newspapers were full of the most calamitous details, the issue of the campaign was already a foregone conclusion. The fact was only going to be disclosed some days later,

and it would take ages even for the cleverest men to realise it, but it is nevertheless a fact. The German Staff, by sticking to a measure which was already anticipated by Joffre, definitely lost all chances of winning the war. Their *only* excuse in the light of military criticism was that they were in desperate strategic plight, for they had failed to break, surround or disperse the armies of their enemies. The parallel positions of the struggling forces on such a wide front precluded other means of effective forward action than the one the Germans employed, but if their leaders had not been, or felt, so pressed for time, if they had not wished to bring on at all costs a rapid decision in France, they might have seized a new and more advantageous alternative which lay within their grasp : this was to make an end, there and then, of the business at Antwerp —to eliminate the Belgian army as a fighting force, and thus to obtain not only a great moral profit, but also, immediately afterwards, a crushing superiority of numbers so much needed in France.

In order to do this it would have been necessary to withdraw northwards one of the German corps which had been hurried south from Brussels to participate in the aforesaid turning movement. This corps was the 2nd reserve of Kluck, which approached Lille on the 24th, and entered that city

without opposition on the 25th, the French Territorials of General Perrin, which had fought at Tournai previously, having evacuated Lille after, by decree of Government, it was declared an open town. On the 26th of August this German corps was marching on Arras ; the German Staff judged then that it was too late to bring it back again. Yet, on the 24th, when the corps in question was still in Belgium, the Belgians at Antwerp, finding that the Germans on their front were keeping on the defensive, attacked them in a most energetic manner, and drove them back as far as Louvain. The German troops of occupation in Brussels were brought back quickly northwards and they barely saved the situation. Had the German 2nd reserve corps been there too, the Belgians must have suffered a serious disaster. As it was, the Germans were content to sack Louvain on the flimsy pretext of quelling a civilian rising, and they kept to their resolve of staking everything on their enveloping policy in France. This resolve was based on the assumption that Joffre had no more reserves on his left to bring into play, or else that, in bringing them up, if he could do so in time, he would weaken some other part of his line with disastrous results to himself. There were other grounds, such as the belief that the French commander would risk a general action *where he stood*. Developments all along the

line, from St. Quentin eastwards, helped to foster this impression.

The French counter-offensive in the Ardennes and the Woevre, begun on or about the 24th of August, and continued up to the 26–27th, were strong indications, to the German mind, that the Allies would not retire further than the lines of the Somme and the Oise, and would fight out the issue there. This calculation was made by the German Staff on the 27th, when the 2nd reserve corps had reached Arras, and General d'Amade was falling back on Amiens. The events of the following days strengthened that impression, and Kluck's western corps were kept on the move at a frightful speed. So intent were the German leaders on the pursuit of the course of action entered upon, and so certain were they that victory lay at last within their grasp in northern France, that it did not occur to them to seize and occupy the French seaports of Calais, Boulogne and Havre. They left these places behind them as so much useless, cumbersome, impedimenta. Beyond d'Amade's columns in the west they saw nothing, and to his rear they did not suppose that there was much, being firmly convinced that France had already done her utmost, and that all her mobilised elements had already been placed in the fighting line. Another motive prompted the German leaders to this breakneck

race to disaster; the anniversary of Sedan was at hand. A great surrender of French or English troops must take place on that day, when the much-trumpeted invincibility of the German legions would be once more blazoned across the world.

The events which convinced the German Staff that Joffre would accept a general action in the north, and let himself be surrounded there, are little known to the world. These were the great counter-strokes which Joffre delivered with his centre armies on the 28th, the 29th and the 30th of August. At that time the German 2nd reserve corps was approaching Amiens, and a set of disconnected actions was being fought east of that city in the bend of the Somme between Amiens and St. Quentin. The pressure in that part was not so great as it appeared, but the British army was thoroughly exhausted, and d'Amade's divisions on the left of the British were not in a fitter state for battle. The German corps, which had found themselves jammed between the Sambre and the Meuse on the 24th of August, had been released as they were slipping westwards and gradually getting into line, thus increasing the preponderance of German numbers in the western part of the field. The 6th French army was coming up, but after its journeyings backwards and forwards as already shown, it could

not reach the line of the Somme before the Germans did. And if the Germans entered Amiens, then the retreat of the 6th French army would become imperative ; so Joffre, although he had already made up his mind to retreat, and, in consequence, had stopped the offensive in the Ardennes, accelerated the action of the 4th army on the Meuse, and sharply brought forward the 5th army against those German corps that were slipping westward from the north along the Oise. The battles of Mézières and Guise—more particularly Guise—can well be said to have saved Joffre's left wing from a disaster which at first appeared inevitable.

It would be tedious to go into the tactical details of these battles. But it is as well to give a general view of them which will show their importance. The battle of Mézières may be said to have begun on August 28th, although it was the continuation of incessant fighting which had been going on since the first French forward movement in the Ardennes had been checked, since when the Grand Duke of Wurtemberg had been bent on the destruction of de Langle's army. This army of de Langle's had suffered less in the first shock than that of Ruffey on its right. It had retreated, quickly reorganised, and resumed the advance at the same moment that Sarrail, with the 6th corps, was checking the Crown Prince at Virton and in the Woevre. Then de

Langle, having reached on the 26th the line Paliseul-Neufchateau, received orders from Joffre to fall back. He did so just in time; for Hausen, on the left bank of the Meuse, had crossed into France and could cut off the 4th army. Thereupon Wurtemberg advanced once more, and in the teeth of very strong opposition forced the crossings of the Meuse at Fumay and Charleville, and, later on, at Mézieres and Sedan. It was in the region Launoy-Signy l'Abbaye, south of those places, that a considerable action developed on the 28th. De Langle was outnumbered, having in his front the whole of the German 4th army (at least five army corps), and against his left three of von Hausen's corps (Saxons). The success of the 5th army at Guise, however, helped de Langle to hold back the Saxons with an inconsiderable portion of his forces; whilst, with his right and centre, he struck heavily at Wurtemberg. The victory was complete. On the 29th Wurtemberg's advance came to a standstill; on the 30th his columns were rolled up, and on the next day his whole army was back again in great disorder across the Meuse. (See the Official German Report to date.)

About that date the Crown Prince of Germany was also trying to cross the Meuse above Verdun. The 3rd French army, now under General Sarrail, had withdrawn by the orders of Joffre, in conjunc-

tion with the 4th army, to the left bank of the river. Its task was to defend the approaches to Verdun, the most important French frontier fortress. The Crown Prince, after his early disappointments in the Woevre and his severe defeat at Virton, had become very wary. Besides, he had now to conform to the new plan, which aimed at the envelopment of the French armies from the west. So he made no further effort to "rush" the fortress, as he had tried to do when outflanking the 3rd French army at Longuyon and at Spincourt on August 23. He mainly endeavoured to cross the Meuse with the object of surrounding Sarrail's army in Verdun later on. His attempts, as long as the French defended the river, were unsuccessful and costly. A whole infantry regiment and a cavalry division were almost annihilated at Dun, near Stenay, on the 30th of August; whilst big sorties from Verdun kept harassing the Crown Prince on his flank. It was only when Sarrail joined in the Great Retreat and followed the retrograde movements of the western armies that the 5th German army was able to cross the Meuse.

We now come to the important battle of Guise. It was less disputed than that of Mézières, but was of far greater consequence to the Allies. The French 5th army, which had resumed touch on the 26th with the British, east of Landrecies, had fallen back

behind the Oise on the 27th, closely pursued by part of Hausen's forces. There was a comparative lull on that day and the next along that portion of the line, and it looked as if the Saxon army had not yet recovered from its severe shaking at and near Givet on the 24th. But what was happening was this: the confusion resulting from the "jamming" of the German corps between the Sambre and the Meuse on the 24th had imposed upon Hausen a change of front. The Guards corps (active and reserve), which originally formed his left wing, were now on his right, having crossed in their path the German 19th and 12th corps which advanced from Namur after the fall of that fortress (August 25). The 11th German corps, which had been in the centre and had fought at Dinant on the 23rd, found itself now on the left, in touch with Wurtemberg's right wing above Rozoy. Thus, more by accident than by design, the German Guards corps came to increase the pressure that Kluck and Bulow were exercising on Joffre's left wing in the bend of the Somme between Amiens and St. Quentin.

The Prussian Guards, however, did not reach as far as that. They had to their right, east of St. Quentin, Bulow's head corps, the 10th (Hanoverian). They were advancing on the front Guise-Ribemont; and it was there, along the banks of the Oise, that

the 1st French corps crashed into their flank on the 29th of August, while the 3rd French corps dealt as severe a blow to the 10th German corps near St. Quentin. On the next day the Prussian Guards were back over the Oise in confusion after having suffered considerable losses. This victory, as has been said, stopped the progress of the Saxon corps against de Langle's left wing and materially helped him to overthrow Wurtemberg at Mézières. But it did more than that; for Kluck and Bulow in the west became cautious, and this afforded some respite to the sorely tried English troops; also it enabled the 6th French army to form its junction with the reserve divisions under d'Amade south of Amiens.

Amiens, however, was reached on the 31st of August by the German 2nd reserve corps; for although, in consequence of Guise, Kluck held back his other corps between Moreuil and Ham, he was more than ever determined on the completion of his turning movement. This mattered more to him than the immediate crushing of Joffre's left wing, and for that reason he did not view Guise and Mézières in the light of disasters. On the contrary, it seemed to him and his colleagues of the General Staff that Joffre would now be tempted to accept a general action, and the issue of the war would be decided there and then. September the

2nd, 3rd or 4th at the latest was to herald to the world the definite victory of the German arms, for by that time the German right wing would be opposite Paris, and Joffre's left wing would be surrounded in the north.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GREAT RETREAT

On the matter of General Joffre's Great Retreat to the Marne there are two well-defined and contrary opinions, according to the bias of those who express these opinions.

It is generally assumed by one group—those who are in sympathy with the Allies—that the Great Retreat was willingly started from the line of the Sambre on August 23; that General Joffre had planned it long beforehand, and that from his advanced positions in Belgium he deliberately led the invaders after him into the centre of France in order to defeat them there. This view is not wholly incorrect, but it leaves out of account the reasons that took the Franco-British armies into Belgium, and ignores the early plan of General Joffre for crushing the German right wing there.

The opposite view is held by pro-Germans, who declare that the allied armies were borne down by superior German strategy and an irresistible avalanche of men, and that the allied armies would have finally succumbed on the Marne if the news of

MAP 13.

To face page 138

the Russian victories in Galicia had not thwarted German designs in France! It is useless to point out how absurd and false this opinion is, except by reminding the reader that the Germans were in superior numbers *all along the line* in France, that they had all the means of winning the victory if their strategy had been better than that of Joffre; and that the news from the eastern theatre of war so far from having a deterrent effect on the Germans would only urge them to further and more strenuous efforts against the Allies in France and Belgium.

Controversy on the subject, as on the vital issues of some of the campaigns in the past, is likely to last a long time, true impartiality being an almost unknown quality amongst the usual critics of warfare, whose opinion is more often than not the mere assertion of half-baked knowledge. Besides, in this case there is a particular difficulty which the ordinary tyro in the study of strategics is not likely to overcome: the fact that both theories, whilst wrong in themselves, nevertheless contain some elements of truth, which shows how futile it is to present the strategic problem in a cut and dried sort of way, everything in war, as regards the prosecution of a plan of action, depending on a variety of circumstances and on the material resources as well as the strategic ability of the belligerents, and being modified and even wholly changed in intention by

such varying conditions as arise in the process of execution.

It is quite true that General Joffre deliberately planned in his mind the Great Retreat, but he did so gradually, as events developed; and he sought to adjust his moves to those of the enemy in a manner that would not entail the loss of the initiative, which he had conquered and which he strove hard to keep in order to compel his will upon the German commanders and thereby to win the campaign. For it did not matter to him nor to France where he won the campaign *provided he won it.* The loss of a battle, the giving up of a portion of territory had little weight in his considerations as long as he could keep his line of armies intact for the resumption of the offensive under the best conditions, at what time and where and when he chose. Thus one is able to grasp in its fulness the astounding achievement of the Great Retreat, one of the most masterly acts of war in history, and also to realise the important fact that the "offensive" is not necessarily the "initiative."

Joffre entered the war in the full knowledge of the perfection to which a whole generation of vast and thorough preparation had brought the machinery of the Germans for war; and with a clear understanding that victory for that machinery depended on the swiftness of its employment and the crushing-

ness of its application, he made use of the German "rush and crush" to serve his own ends, doggedly refusing to fight on the positions the Germans desired, and separating all dangerous German concentrations, so that the very violence and rush of the German offensive must, in the long run, be turned to their disadvantage.

When, through the tactical mistakes of one of his generals, Joffre failed to obtain the results he sought in Belgium, he wisely and coolly retired to the French frontier; there the conditions, for a variety of reasons, not being good enough, he continued the retrograde movement, although at one moment, as we have seen, he had a chance of turning to account the difficulties in which the Germans found themselves between the Meuse and the Sambre. But to counterbalance this his left flank stood somewhat exposed; the British were exhausted; d'Amade's divisions, more to the west, were only just able to stand their ground; and the rest of the 6th army, as has been explained, could not reach its positions in time. Finally, when Joffre's left wing was resting on the line of the Somme, and his centre armies were pushing back the Germans at Mézières and Guise, the Germans resumed, more to the west, their turning movement which had been checked at Cambrai. They entered Amiens before the nucleus formations of the 6th

French army had quite accomplished their junction south of that town with the reserves under d'Amade. And it was not certain that the 6th army, strong as it was and eager for battle, could have counteracted the German move in a decisive manner. If it did not. the action, at best, would result in a draw, which would give time to the Germans to bring still more weight to bear at the western extremity of the line. The fact that a new French army, the 7th, under General Foch, the brilliant commander of the famous 20th corps who had so ably protected the retreat from Saarburg, was coming up to reinforce the left wing could not induce a strategist of the stamp of Joffre to accept a general engagement with one wing in process of reconcentration. Moreover, the 7th army, being principally made up of units brought over from Lorraine and Alsace, could not, for lack of time, forestall any further movement of the Germans between Amiens and the sea. It had perforce to deploy where it did, along the Aisne and slip in as best it could between the 4th and 5th armies. Finally, Joffre aimed not at half measures, but at something big and definite that would ensure him the possession of the initiative until the end ; and he saw his way, through a further sacrifice of the soil of his country to the incursion of a ruthless foe, of turning to vast account Kluck's stubborn desire to outflank him.

Joffre decided to abandon the lines of the Somme and the Oise and to retreat on Paris and the Marne.

From that time, at any rate, the armies of France cannot be said to have been "borne down," since they carried out their retirement deliberately and with method, and from that moment also did General Joffre really "plan" his retreat to the Marne. Knowing the lure of Paris and acquainted with the methods of the German commanders, Joffre could calculate precisely upon what the Germans would do as if they had done it. And all the more so if they were under the delusion that they held the initiative and were conquering. The longer their delusion could be made to last the more terrible must be their overthrow. We shall see that it was the sudden awakening of Kluck at the eleventh hour that saved the German western armies from instant annihilation. The Great Retreat in itself was a gigantic task to perform, yet not so difficult to carry out in all its details as has been imagined, modern facilities for transport simplifying its execution. The moral of the troops, besides, was unimpaired. They had perfect confidence in their chiefs and in their own individual superiority over the foe, and, consequently, unshakable faith in the final issue. The same might be said, naturally, of the Germans themselves, whose

numbers, material equipment and unscrupulous ways of waging war constituted so many weighty points to their advantage, not to speak of a costly but effective system of tactics which seemed destined to carry everything before it. But this leads us back to strategics; for numerical superiority, machinery, brute force, cunning devices in matters of detail are not sufficient to give one the victory. We will go further and say that even moral fortitude added to all that is not sufficient either. It is the high command, high strategy, in other words trained brains that win wars.

Joffre made use of his armies as a skilled musician employs a perfect instrument; and every time he struck he outwitted the enemy, who certainly never dreamed that such a leader could be born outside Germany. They were soon to get a startling awakening.

In the meantime their illusions were fed by the way in which Joffre carried out the retreat.

He refused a general engagement on the line of the Somme, but as his armies fell back towards Paris and the Marne he did his utmost to make the Germans pay dearly for every bit of ground over which they advanced, thus making it appear that he was really pressed back against his will and patriotic sentiments. His ulterior motive was to draw the invader into a deadly trap and to involve

him there in a calamitous disaster, a disaster which, if all went well, would be complete and would considerably shorten the length of the war. For no other reason would General Joffre have momentarily relinquished such a portion of France to the Germans ; the points chosen from which to resume the offensive show the boldness of his plan : these points formed a semi-circle round the advancing foe, from Paris to Verdun.

But, it might be asked, how could General Joffre know that the Germans would walk into his trap ? Because there comes a time in strategic developments when the answering moves of the enemy can easily be surmised, especially when that enemy has been playing into one's hand all the time. In their blind rush towards the attainment of a speedy victory the Germans had exhausted almost every alternative, and they were now too far forward to resort to any other than the one to which they were committed once they had launched such vast hosts at such a pace—the one, at any rate, that Joffre felt sure they were bound to take. For one thing they could not guess the gathering strength of France's western armies ; and so, even before General Joffre declined a general engagement in northern France the Germans began their assaults on the positions of Nancy fully confident that by so doing they would attract there and pin down a consider-

able portion of the French forces whilst they drove the rest before them.

But General Joffre was a wily opponent. We have seen how he took advantage of his early advance in Lorraine to strengthen his northern armies. He was now repeating the same manœuvre on a larger scale—and taking measures which showed how well he understood the psychology of the Germans. As early as the 26th of August, when the danger of the Germans piercing the gap of Mirecourt had passed, Joffre had restrained, if not entirely stopped, Castelnau's counter-offensive in Lorraine, at the same time ordering him to keep strictly to the defensive as far as the positions around Nancy were concerned, but to make these positions as strong as possible and, if need be, to defend them to the last man. Thus he was able to draw upon the eastern contingents to reinforce once more the western armies, those contingents being weakened to their utmost limit, the limit that would still enable them to hold on successfully to the positions they were entrusted to defend.

The positions around Nancy were strengthened so as to make up for the numerical deficiency of the defenders, and the whole affair was so well managed that when the Germans come to know of the manœuvre, and principally by what handfuls of

men their gigantic efforts were baulked at Nancy, they will, in all probability, be thunderstruck.

That they misinterpreted Joffre's retirement from north France is obvious—the way in which Kluck exposed his flank at the Marne shows us this very clearly, for he did not know of the strength of the 6th army. Neither did the other German commanders know that a new army, the 7th, under Foch, was added to the French western line; this army, at the beginning of the retreat, slipping unobserved between the 5th and 4th above Château Thierry.

Thus Joffre drew the Germans on. After some desultory but quite severe fighting east and south of Amiens, the 6th French army retreated on Paris; the British army, after several brilliant rearguard actions, notably at Villers Cotterets and Compiègne (September 1), retired across the Marne immediately east of Paris; the 5th army fought a big action south of Château Thierry, and fell back, together with the 7th army on its right, towards the Seine; the 4th and 3rd armies gave battle to the Germans between Rheims and Verdun (September 2–3); and whilst the 4th army, after this engagement, proceeded southwards by way of the broken and wooded country of the Argonne, the 3rd, under Sarrail, pivoting slowly backwards on Verdun, had the difficult task not only of protecting Verdun from attack, but of

keeping its connection with the 4th army in the direction of Bar-le-Duc.

Thus the Germans, whose big guns in their rear were shelling the fortress of Maubeuge, entered in triumph Laon, Rheims, Le Fère, and other important places. To the onlookers it seemed as if their onrush would never be stopped—as if they must eventually occupy and conquer the whole of France.

The eyes of the world were fixed on the French capital, many and many people believing that the Germans would soon enter it. Paris appeared to all as the immediate objective of the Germans, and the situation for France and the Allies looked black indeed. The fate of the French armies was not thought of—in the mind of the pessimistic it was already settled, since few could have as yet an inkling of General Joffre's designs. The removal of the French Government to Bordeaux added the last touch to the gloom of the picture. In vain it was officially explained that Paris, in order to play its part in the general scheme of operations, must cease for a time to be the capital; in vain the veteran General Gallieni, of Madagascar fame, was appointed governor and entrusted with its defence in case it really came to be attacked; the depression continued and the exodus from the seemingly threatened capital for some days, at any rate, was a flood. Not that the nation really quaked, its calm

astonished every one ; not that the people had lost faith in the destiny of France and the cause of the Allies—but the seemingly irresistible advance of the Germans towards the goal that every one assigned to them was too strong an argument, an argument that the unstrategic mind of the masses could not digest. It was hoped that " something would turn up," that the addition of the British army to the field forces of France not being sufficient to " turn the tide," the Russians, who were winning at Lemberg and East Prussia, would swoop down in hundreds of thousands, from Archangel through Britain, against the German rear, about Ostend ! It is a curious statement to make, but the Great Retreat, which actually saved France and Europe, lowered the prestige of the French army, although this army had demonstrated its superiority over the Germans in many an encounter.

The aim of the Germans, however, was misinterpreted. *They were not marching on Paris.* The rank and file, the officers and even, probably, the subaltern leaders, believed it, or were made to believe it, as it helped them to keep up their enthusiasm and self-confidence ; but the General Staff had other plans. Ever since the first efforts of the Crown Princes of Germany and Bavaria had been foiled in Lorraine and the Ardennes, the idea of a direct march on the capital of France had been

abandoned by the German leaders, for it stood to reason that the French armies in the field must be dealt with first. To attack such a strong entrenched camp as Paris before the French field forces had been completely defeated would have been sheer madness on the part of the Germans. The investment of a single sector alone would have weakened the German field strength by a couple of army corps ; and, as it was, the German corps in the field, after the enormous losses suffered in Belgium and north France, did not feel too strong for the task that lay before them. The German commanders, also, were trained soldiers and good strategists. They knew that an attack on Paris would add moral impetus to the French armies, a moral impetus which might be dangerous to the Germans. The German generals certainly remembered how in 1870, after Sedan, the ill-trained reserves of France had fought for the defence of their capital. Finally, the German estimate of the French leaders was now considerably higher than at the opening of hostilities. They at least had come to learn and to feel that Joffre, since the beginning, had been playing a very close game, and that, if they made a slip, he would not fail to turn it to account.

Nevertheless the illusion of victorious German armies advancing on Paris remained, and was

fated to remain. The strategic chessboard was as plain as could be, but the dramatic situation of an anxious capital stoically awaiting the onrush of the foe made too strong an appeal to the imagination. A single glance at the map would have shown that only one extremity of the huge German line could come in direct and immediate contact with Paris ; it required but rudimentary knowledge to understand the vast strength of the French capital, a strength that lay not so much in the forts and their stupendous armament, but in the numerous masked batteries which surrounded the line of forts from a great distance. A full army and a formidable garrison were ready for any emergency. The Germans refrained, and kept to their main objective—that of annihilating the French armies in the field. But to the masses and the amateur strategist Paris was *the military objective* of the Germans. The French armies, evidently, did not count, and so it has come about that, after long months of war, and of official accounts and explanations, the strategy of the most decisive operations of the campaign has not been properly understood.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BATTLE OF NANCY

We have already seen that it is not easy to understand the early military moves in Belgium and northern France without a full knowledge of preceding or contemporaneous events in Alsace and Lorraine. In the same way further developments in the western part of the field cannot be well grasped, nor properly focussed in the mind, if one leaves out of account those operations which truly formed the base of General Joffre's strategy. In the neglect or ignorance of this fact lies the cause of so much confusion in the public mind as to the real position of affairs and the importance of the results achieved. It was natural, indeed, that it should be so, that people should fail to realise the relative value of certain incidents and the exact meaning of the whole scheme, for the secrecy enforced by the military authorities (especially the French, who carried out the scheme) made it difficult, not to say impossible, to follow the trend of events in their right perspective. The eyes of the world, as we have said, were fixed on Paris, and on the western extremity

MAP 14.

To face page 152.

of the battlefield in France, not only because the British were there; not only because the situation of the apparently threatened capital seemed desperate; but because representatives of the world-wide Press—who were allowed to follow the operations from a safe distance—found it easier, and no doubt more interesting, to confine their attention to that sector of the line. Mention must be made also of the different methods of conveying news of an official character adopted by the various belligerents, the British Staff, for instance, having to be, for many reasons, most prolific in its accounts, whilst the French, for more vital reasons still, had to remain most concise. This disparity of methods more than anything else contributed to a general distortion of view that has never been attained before during the progress of a war, for it inevitably gave prominence to actions and incidents of minor consequence, whilst it left in the dark developments and achievements of the utmost import.

Thus it is that wrong theories of the strategy of the campaign are still held; that it is believed, for instance, that in the first phase of the war the Germans made their greatest effort in the vicinity of Paris, an assertion which amounts to giving them more strategic ability than they possessed and automatically diminishing the merits of the French.

Another influence detrimental to the proper

study of this campaign is the utter disregard of chronology displayed by most commentators, who *will* follow the bend of the public towards the kaleidoscopic, and present the strategic problem, such as they understand it, in a topsy-turvy way. They begin with Liége ; follow with Mons immediately ; rush down to the Marne at a rate of speed that takes one's breath away and that would have certainly landed General Joffre at the foot of the declivity, panting, breathless, and with a bad pain in the side. Then Paris is " saved "—the Germans are pursued to the Aisne . . . and, quite as an afterthought, the other previous or contemporaneous operations are thrown in, or rather are reviewed in the most detached, desultory sort of fashion. Result in the minds of readers or listeners : chaos, and a strong impression that the Allies of Britain are inefficient and weak.

This favourite way of talking or writing about the war has almost condemned to oblivion what can well be considered, without exaggeration, as the finest achievement of the campaign.

This is the defence of Nancy, an action which if the field of operations had been reversed, if it had been fought out in Belgium or near Paris, would have immediately received from the world the amount of attention that it deserved. For, on the defence of Nancy, or rather of the positions surrounding it

and the approaches to the fortress of Toul, depended entirely the course of events in the west, and therefore the success of the retreat to, and of the battles on, the Marne. Furthermore, it was the longest and most bitterly contested action of the first phase of the campaign ; and the material results achieved, apart from the strategic, were of paramount importance to the successful prosecution of the war by the Allies ; for, at little cost to the French, it swept off the surface of the earth a number of first-rate German units. In other words, the Germans, at Nancy more than anywhere else (until the battles of Flanders in the second phase of the war) squandered their strength in the most ineffective and useless fashion, not to mention the moral effect of the failure, which was immense, for it was the first time that German soldiers were defeated in the presence and under the very eyes of their Emperor.

Apart from all this the battle of Nancy would still take precedence over those on the Marne if for the only reason that it started a whole week previously, and reached its climax before the other efforts of the Germans elsewhere reached theirs. To realise this one must keep in account that the German attack on the " Grand Couronné " began at the moment that Joffre abandoned the line of the Somme in order to carry out the Great Retreat, and that when he resumed the offensive east and

south of Paris, the German efforts at Nancy were practically spent. The fact that the Germans persisted until the end is no proof that they would have carried the positions if Joffre had been compelled to continue his retreat further south. It simply demonstrates what we have pointed out before, that, beyond the taking of Nancy and the investment of Toul, the Germans had what constituted a more important object at this stage of developments: the weakening of Joffre's left and centre armies, and the "pinning down" in Lorraine of a considerable portion of the French forces; this end (the last strategic hope of the Germans during their first offensive) was not attained. They must have understood this directly their right wing had to retreat and their centre armies were overthrown. The game was up. Joffre had baulked the Germans.

Thus can the battle of Nancy alone be appraised at its true worth, and its decisive character impressed on the minds of men.

The German attack on the "Grand Couronné" was a direct answer to Joffre's refusal to accept battle on the line of the Somme.

Up to August 30 the Germans, having failed to gain control of the gap of Mirecourt, meant to attack or isolate Verdun and pierce the French line north of Toul, at St. Mihiel. What shows it plainly is that on that date (August 30), the 5th German

army corps, under General von Stranz,[1] based on Metz, was advancing in a straight line *westwards* to St. Mihiel, and that suddenly, as it became known that the Allies were falling back from the Somme, this army corps wheeled sharply round to the south, towards Pont à Mousson, and the position of St. Geneviève, which is the northern extremity of the "Grand Couronné." Concurrently the garrisons of Metz and Strasburg were being drawn upon in material and men to reinforce the army of Bavaria, whose losses along the banks of the Moselle and the Meurthe had been fearful. What happened further south, from Gerberviller to St. Dié, after Castelnau's successful counter-attacks from the 26th to the 30th of August, was only a parallel action along the line of the Meurthe, in which the Germans, now on the defensive in that region, endeavoured to protect their flank and the communications of the Bavarian army, whilst this army transferred its activities to the north, aiming first at Verdun, then, in obedience to the change of plan, at Nancy. The terrific artillery actions that took place east of Nancy on the 27th and 28th were the outcome of the German flank march past positions, where they thought the French might attack in great strength, as they had done two days earlier to check the German effort against

[1] This army corps belonged to the army of the Crown Prince. See Appendix, p. 207.

the gap of Mirecourt. This is rendered more illuminative by the fact that it was not there, but on the *northern* sector of the " Grand Couronné " that the Bavarians began their infantry assaults, when they would have saved time and the fatigues of a march by beginning with the southern sector.

Thus the importance of Joffre's retreat is more and more emphasised, for by so doing he not only saved his left wing, which was in jeopardy on the Somme, but he also saved Verdun. Verdun had no " Grand Couronné " to protect it, and even without taking it the Germans could isolate the fortress and surround from the south the army of Sarrail, which at the time (August 30–31) was still disputing to the Crown Prince the passage of the Meuse north of Verdun.

Instead the Germans turned their attention to Nancy and concentrated their efforts against the " Grand Couronné," a course of action which allowed Sarrail to keep a tight hold on Verdun and play his part in the Great Retreat.

The attacks on the " Grand Couronné " were preceded by the most terrific bombardment, no less than 400 heavy guns, brought from the arsenal of Metz, being massed against it. The French, who had already had a taste of the German heavy gun fire at Saarburg, were fully prepared for it, and not being able to reply to this weight of metal, they had taken

all the precautions necessary to reduce to a minimum the effects of the German siege ordnance. The troops had dug themselves in and improvised all sorts of ingenious shelters against shell fire, and the field guns (*Rimailho's* and " 75's "), to be used only at short range against infantry attacks (since these weapons were outranged by the howitzers and siege guns of the enemy), were cleverly concealed in the folds of the ground. Thus the effective defence of the positions was made possible by an extreme minimum of men. The position of St. Geneviève, for instance (which to many was the key of the " Grand Couronné ") was only held by a regiment of reserve (Territorials). But the ground in front of it, especially in the valley of the Moselle, was elaborately prepared; it was covered with wire entanglements and other obstacles of a more or less deadly kind. To the west of the Moselle there was a division based on Toul; the plateau of Amance, north-east of Nancy, was occupied by the 20th army corps. Further south a thin line of troops—perhaps two divisions—extended as far as the Rhine-Marne Canal, where they were in connection with Dubail's army based on Epinal, Dubail having in front of him, from that point to the Vosges, the main body of von Heeringen's army.

The positions around Nancy, from Pont à Mousson to Dombasle, near Lunéville, were attacked by no

less than eight army corps, or, their equivalent in number of men (about 350,000).

The infantry assaults began, as we have said, in the north, on August 31, and gradually extended south, the Germans employing everywhere the same tactics; issuing in dense masses from the thick woods, they rushed on the positions with the greatest bravery and determination. Invariably they were shot down at short range by the thousand, and were finished off with the bayonet. Thus they were able to realise the small impression that their big guns had made on the French. Again and again Bavarians, Prussians and Saxons returned to the attack. The result was the same ; they never conquered an inch of ground, and their slain kept accumulating in heaps on the slopes and at the foot of the " Grand Couronné." At one single spot near St. Geneviève, in the valley, the French found 4,000 German dead. The Germans christened the locality " The Hole of Death." The only momentary progress was made by von Stranz, who took Pont à Mousson, and carried the tall hill of the same name, whence he raked with artillery fire the flank of the St. Geneviève position. But a counter-attack by the French division based on Toul made the Germans lose these gun positions.

The resources of France being limited, or not yet completely concentrated and brought together, the French generalissimo apparently found himself in a

dilemma. Either he must relinquish Nancy and the supporting line of eastern fortresses, or else he must uncover Paris. The second alternative he thought the safer, principally as the Germans might feel inclined to attack Paris and thus expose themselves to the full effect of a sudden resumption of the offensive by the French. But, supposing the Germans did not take the bait offered! If, instead of making a rush on the capital they elected to pursue relentlessly the course of their enveloping policy, what then? The result could not be in doubt for one instant: the French, weak and demoralised as they seemed to be, would be surrounded and crushed behind those very strongholds to which, on one side, they were clinging so desperately.

This conviction held by the Germans is the true, and only, explanation of Kluck's sudden move on the Marne, and the reckless way in which he exposed his own flank to the attack of the French from Paris.

Kluck was not aware of the formation of the 6th French army. The French forces he had met up to then on the left of the British were not considerable. They appeared to consist only of a couple of weak Territorial divisions, with a cavalry corps attached. These troops had been sorely tried and were, no doubt, exhausted. They were retiring, behind the retreating English, into Paris, in

order to recuperate there and also to increase the strength of the garrison in view of an expected German attack. Thus Kluck, as he left Paris on one side, and made his swing in to the east of Paris, did so without experiencing any anxiety for his flank, nor for the safety of his line of communications. The precautions that he took had not the French in view, but were to guarantee himself against a possible attack of the English who, having crossed the Marne at Lagny, were spread across the wooded region to the south of the Grand Morin, and, therefore, would constitute a danger to Kluck as he made his flank march past them.

Kluck left two army corps on the banks of the Ourcq ; this was to outflank the British when the time came. He also threw his cavalry westward beyond Crécy and Coulommiers, to keep the British well under observation, whilst his forward corps and those of Bulow on his left converged towards Montmirail and La Ferté Gaucher against the left of the French armies. The statement, therefore, made in one of the communiqués that Kluck "*ignored*" the British is quite wrong. The British had given very recently proofs of efficiency—at Compiègne, and at Villers Cotterets ; they were first line troops, all of them, and the German commanders knew from history that the British are not demoralised by retreat ; whilst the French, on the

contrary, were generally supposed to lose all grit, all courage, when placed on the defensive. Kluck *did* nevertheless ignore something—but it was not the British. It was the 6th French army under General Maunoury.

So the main point to remember in order to have a clear view of the operations on the Marne is that, until the sudden appearance of the 6th French army on Kluck's rear, and the failure of the German efforts to break the French centre later on, the German commanders were in the dark as to the real number and strength of the French western armies; and that this ignorance was mainly based on the turn of events in Lorraine, of the little headway made there by the Germans, and—in spite of their strenuous exertions and terrible losses—a state of affairs which certainly made it appear as if Joffre had massed his main strength around the French eastern fortresses.

The Germans were soon to have their awakening.

On September 5, in the words of the French official account, the conditions were attained that the generalissimo had been seeking from the moment he had declined a general engagement on the line of the Somme.

On that day Joffre issued his now famous proclamation, making an appeal to the courage and patriotism of his troops. The time had arrived for

a resumption of the offensive. No man in France must look backwards any further, but forward, and in the words of the proclamation, " be killed on the spot rather than give way."

The effect of the proclamation on men who had seen their country's soil once more trampled upon by the foe was electrifying ; but such an appeal must not be taken as signifying that the French armies were really standing with their backs to the wall, nor that their leader thought that only their heroism and combative powers could save the situation and the country. The Great Retreat, as we have shown, was deliberate, and not the result of defeat or weakness. Joffre was master of the situation, and he knew it ; but he also knew that the Germans were strong, that they were in earnest, and that they would make desperate, supreme efforts to achieve the decisive victory which they were so impatient of winning since their attack on Liége.

Joffre felt confident that he could break those efforts, but he wished to achieve something more—to involve the German armies in a tremendous and complete disaster, and, in order to do so, he aimed at nothing less than the envelopment and destruction of Kluck's army, the army which since Cambrai had vainly endeavoured to envelop him. It was not a presumptuous design—on the contrary, Kluck was walking serenely into the trap prepared for him,

and unless the French arrangements went wrong again, as they had done on the Sambre, Kluck *must* be caught, and Bulow also. The fate of Germany would then be sealed, and the war be ended there and then, leaving the Allies triumphant.

The forlorn attacks of the Germans on the " Grand Couronné " culminated on September 6 in a grand and general assault on the plateau of Amance. This assault, or series of assaults, was delivered by masses of 50,000 men at a time, under the eyes of the German Emperor, who had hurried from his headquarters at Metz with the intention, it is said, of entering the capital of Lorraine on that day or the next, at the head of his white cuirassiers who formed his escort. From a hill in the rear of his troops he anxiously watched the action. He knew from his staff, as well as from the early developments of the campaign, that things had not been going too well ; that the enemy was wily, resourceful and intelligent, and that up to now the German arms had scored no decisive success. The attack on Nancy, if it succeeded, would put everything right. It would, at any rate, help the sweeping moves near Paris. So the Kaiser hoped, and he came to put some heart into his soldiery, to give more impetus to their attacks. From afar his lonely figure could be seen on the top of a sunny hill on that fatal day, peering through his glasses. He was pointed

out as a great favour to some French soldiers who had been captured near St. Geneviève. The French soldiers were not in the least awed. One of them, a reservist, having escaped, wrote home to say that he had at last seen "the scoundrel who had plunged Europe in this calamitous war!"

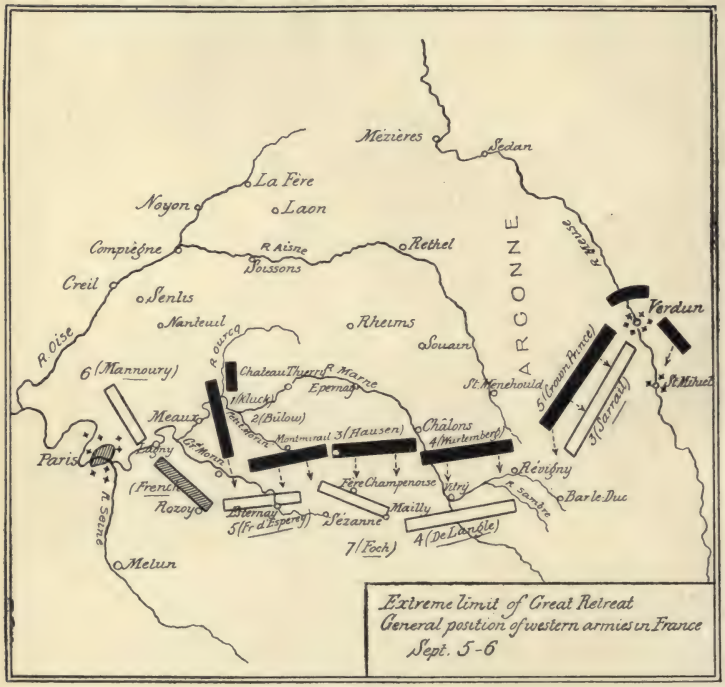
At the sight of their Kaiser the German troops were truly inspirited. They dashed from the woods in serried ranks, with flags unfurled and bands playing. Three times on that day they ascended the deadly slopes of the "Grand Couronné," already strewn with slain; and three times, under the terrific fire of the "75's" and the bayonet charges of the 20th French corps, they reeled back in confusion. In the evening the Kaiser returned to Metz, where he received ominous tidings of the developments of affairs near Paris. He had lost all hope. Not so his commanders, who, on the 7th and the 8th, renewed their attacks in less theatrical fashion. But the troops were exhausted, disheartened, and terribly diminished in numbers. To have an idea of their losses it is only necessary to know that in front of the positions of the "Grand Couronné" alone the French picked up afterwards more than 40,000 identification discs of German dead. The other casualties have not been estimated, and probably never will be. Whole brigades, entire regiments had vanished; divisions and army corps

were sorely depleted, whilst the losses of the French in comparison were insignificant. On the 9th, when the battles of the Marne were nearing their climax, the German efforts against the " Grand Couronné " had already slackened. It was on the evening of that day that, more out of spite than any effective design, the Germans pushed up, under cover of darkness, an advanced battery, which dropped some seventy shells in the suburbs of Nancy. On the next day the battery was destroyed by the French guns. On the 11th a German division issuing from Einville made a dash against Dombasle, with the apparent design of cutting into the French line there. But this division was trapped by the French artillery in and around the woods of Crevic and practically annihilated. The French counted there more than 3,000 German bodies.

Einville marks the end of all German offensive action in Lorraine. It was the last kick of a baffled foe, of an army in distress. By this time the issue on the Marne had been decided.

The Germans evacuated Lunéville, which they had held since August 23, and they retreated sullenly back to their own frontier. Nancy was impregnable. It had cost the Germans well over 200,000 men (the equivalent of five army corps) to learn the fact. They had effected nothing. Joffre, full of confidence in the valour of his troops and

the strength of the "Grand Couronné," had not worried unduly about the strenuous German efforts in Lorraine, and thus had been able to leave the French western armies strong enough to achieve their purpose on the Marne, their ranks unthinned by the need for reinforcements for the sparsely occupied trenches of the heroic defenders of Nancy.



MAP 15.

To face page 169.

CHAPTER XV

BATTLE OF THE OURCQ

We have now reached those events which, although they were not clearly understood at the time and are still misinterpreted, showed to the world that Germany was not winning the war; indeed, that she was actually losing it. Military minds alone (and, at that, only a few) could have guessed previously from the meagre information to hand that the German armies in France were rushing to disaster. The vast majority of onlookers measured the extent of the German victories, those past and those to come, by the amount of Belgian and French territory occupied, the number of Belgian and French cities and strongholds in the hands of the invader. Had the Germans attacked Paris at once, as they were expected to do, people would have thought that it was the end; and, indeed, it would have been the end, because a German attack on Paris would have meant that the armies of France were no longer of any account, that they were beaten.

But something strange happened, or rather something that seemed strange to those who were too

much taking for granted that France was defeated and helpless: the German columns that were apparently marching on Paris suddenly altered their course. From Compiègne, instead of advancing straight on Paris, they wheeled to their left, south-eastwards, in the direction of the Marne, which they crossed at Meaux. The Allies were puzzled, but relieved to think that Paris was safe, and yet seeing that the public was not better acquainted with the true position of affairs and with the intentions of General Joffre, it should have been more alarmed still, for the objective of the Germans was not changed. It was a deadly one, and mattered far more than the mere capture and occupation of the French capital by the Germans, for that sinister objective was no less than the envelopment and total annihilation of the French field forces, a hard task, but one that the German leaders felt they could now accomplish, their confidence being increased by the stout resistance of the French in Lorraine, at Nancy especially, as this resistance made it appear as if the French were in great strength there and, consequently, much weaker elsewhere. So, at least, and most naturally, the Germans interpreted Joffre's retreat.

The end sought by Joffre would have been attained if only the French troops, detailed for the turning movement and the attack of Kluck's rear, could

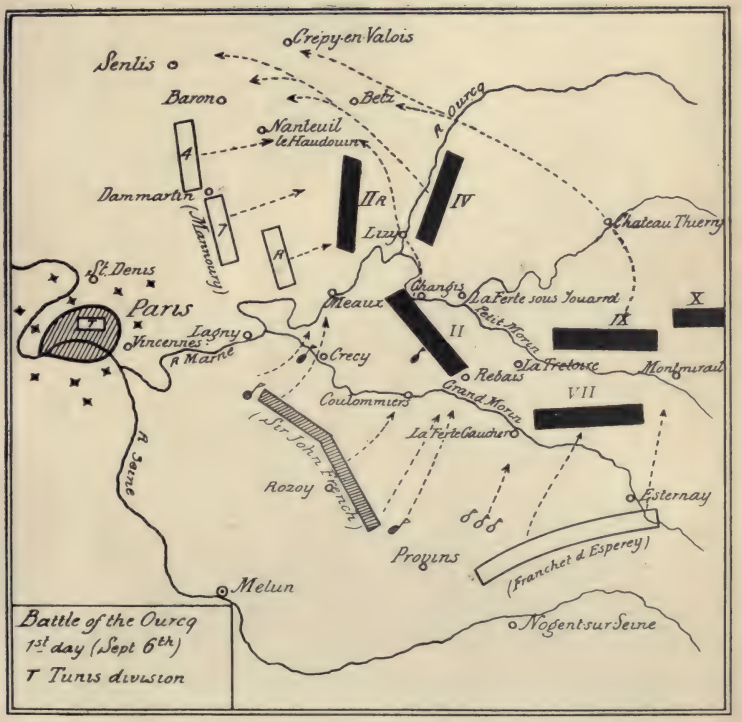
have momentarily restrained their ardour. These troops, it must be said, were in a peculiar position. Since the 26th of August, when they had first moved forward from Compiègne, they had been eagerly anxious to meet the enemy. They had been sent back, in consequence of the retreat from Belgium, and had been led by a circuitous route towards Amiens. But there, again, they had been disappointed, and had been made to retire still further without having had a serious encounter with the Germans. At last, on reaching Paris, they were told the enemy was near, and was preparing to attack. The stirring appeal of Joffre transported to the wildest enthusiasm every man from the generals downwards. Thus it came about that the French 6th army acted prematurely.

When the reserve corps under General Lamaze, which formed the right wing of Maunoury's 6th army, came into collision with the Germans near Meaux, Kluck's forward corps was still on the move above Coulommiers, and could, therefore, be quickly brought back and withdrawn across the Marne before the forces opposed to it along the Grand Morin had time to act.

That is precisely what Kluck did as soon as his eyes were opened and he realised the danger of his position. He lost no time, he waited not a moment and determined to defeat this new force which had

so unexpectedly appeared behind him. Leaving strong detachments and his cavalry to delay the Allies south of the Marne, he wheeled round his 2nd corps, which recrossed the Marne at Meaux, and in order to crush Maunoury swiftly, he prevailed upon Bulow to send him one of his corps. This was the 9th, which lay the nearest to Kluck's forces. It was camped west of Montmirail; and was hurried north by way of Château Thierry—the way it had come—to outflank the French in the direction of Betz and Crepy-en-Valois; whilst the 2nd corps, slipping behind the forces that were at grips with the French west of Meaux, went to the support of the 4th German corps south of Betz.

Besides acting too soon Maunoury's army went into the fight piecemeal; and so quick were Kluck's moves that, on the evening of the 7th, the 6th French army was cut off from Baron and Nanteuil. The French troops, however, aware of what a defeat at the very gates of Paris would mean, fought with wonderful devotion and courage; and their commander, a hard hitter if a little quicksilvery in temperament, did all he could to retrieve the day; otherwise the 6th army might have succumbed before it had time to receive reinforcements or establish contact with the British forces which were advancing south of the Marne. The 7th French corps especially distinguished itself, although at one



MAP 16.

To face page 172.

moment it was hard pressed and driven back from Betz. But reinforced, together with the 4th corps, by troops of the Paris garrison, it resumed the offensive, kept at bay the Germans, and captured many trophies. The 4th corps also stood its ground well near Nanteuil. The reserves only, near Meaux, being rather outnumbered, gave way, until the Tunis division arrived from Paris, on the evening of the 8th, in a regular fleet of motor vehicles that had been hastily requisitioned in the capital. The Tunis division, under General Drude, consisted entirely of first line troops. It was therefore worth an army corps, as the troops were quite fresh and rushed into the fight direct from the conveyances that had brought them. Although unsupported by artillery, the Tunisian troops drove back the Germans into Meaux, where the French came again into touch with the British who were acting from the Grand Morin.

General Joffre, in pursuance of his plan, had asked Sir John French, on September 5, to effect a change of front by pivoting on Lagny, where the British left rested. This had been done, and directly the signal for a general offensive had been given the British army had sprung forward in the direction of Meaux and La Trétoire. But before these points were attained, on September 8, it had been necessary to deal with the cavalry divisions and strong rear-

guards which Kluck had left behind him. Then, south of Meaux, the British left found unexpected resistance, and for some little time was held back, until the arrival from Paris of the Tunis division. The English and the Tunisian troops entered Meaux together and, after stubborn fighting, wrested it from the Germans. At La Trétoire, on the English right, there was a severe action, in which the Germans, outnumbered, held their ground heroically, and were finally all slain, or captured, together with booty and guns.

On the 9th the British army was across the Marne, east of Meaux. On the whole it had had comparatively little fighting, but this was the fault of the 6th French army, which by attacking prematurely on the Ourcq had drawn against itself a great number of the enemy who otherwise might have been engaged with the English south of the Marne, and been pinned down there, which would have assured the complete success of General Joffre's plan. The 5th French army, on the right of the British, had a more heavy task, as it had to contend with three full army corps, which faced it from La Ferté Gaucher to Sézanne.[1] It was necessary that its action should be quick—quicker than the

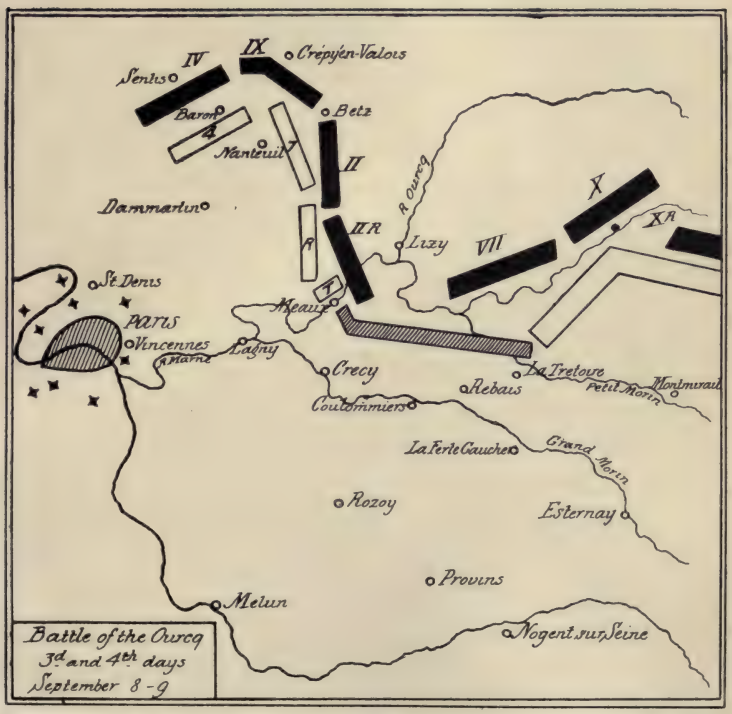
[1]The French official survey of the War says that there were four, but this would include Bulow's 9th corps, which, as we have seen, was withdrawn to help Kluck on the Ourcq.

British, because the intention of Joffre was to cut off the German right wing from the centre, roll it up from north and south and encircle it between the Ourcq and the Marne, an object which might have been achieved if, as we have stated already, the 6th French army had not too eagerly hurried its attack on Kluck's rear on the Ourcq.

The action of the 5th French army under Franchet d'Esperey was brilliant. On the night of the 5th to the 6th the Germans were surprised in their bivouacs near Montmirail. Three villages were carried with the bayonet. On the next day a severe action developed in that region, between the Petit Morin and the Marne. The dash of the French troops was irresistible. Two corps of Bulow were overthrown and pursued to the Marne in the direction of Château Thierry. The confusion amongst the enemy was so great that there is no doubt that the German commanders in that part of the field lost their heads entirely. After their swift and practically unchecked advance from the frontier of Belgium they had felt convinced that their opponents were demoralised, or, at any rate, incapable of resuming the offensive in such an energetic fashion. The troops of Franchet d'Esperey did not give time to the enemy to recover. Fighting day and night, and keeping well in contact on their left with the British, who were progressing in the

same direction, they reached the line of the Marne on the 9th and crossed the river on the following day in the teeth of a desperate opposition. The booty captured by the 5th French army was immense. It included guns, howitzers, maxims and 1,300,000 cartridges. The number of prisoners, however, was comparatively small, which shows that the German leaders, once they grasped the situation and the design of their adversaries, determined to get as quickly as possible out of the trap which was closing round them. In order to effect this they wisely abandoned all cumbrous material, and only opposed the resistance necessary to delay the enemy and avoid an envelopment. Those detachments which were meant to be sacrificed were sacrificed. The rest of the troops were well kept together and withdrawn, not without disorder and great losses, but with a rapidity and a cohesion of movements which, under the circumstances, were nothing short of marvellous.

On the morning of the 10th of September the British and French were astride the Marne, between Meaux and Château Thierry ; and, on the same day, Kluck, giving up all further attempts against Maunoury on the Ourcq, retreated to the Aisne. This retreat seemed the natural outcome of Bulow's overthrow at Montmirail and of his rapid retirement to the north bank of the Marne. The asser-



MAP 17.

To face page 176.

tion is made in nearly all accounts, including one of French official surveys of the war, which makes it appear that Maunoury's move on the Ourcq after all attained its object in full. But another account, published in the *Bulletin des Armées* on December 5, makes it clear that the final retirement of the Germans' right wing armies to the line of the Aisne was due to another cause that we shall deal with in a subsequent chapter. Let us add here that strict chronology is not quite in accordance with the accepted view, and that, considering the Germans were able subsequently to maintain themselves in France for such a long time, and even to resume prolonged offensive operations on a large scale, there can be no doubt that, *strategically*, the French turning movement on the Ourcq miscarried, and that the issue of the so-called battles of the Marne was decided *elsewhere*.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GREAT RETREAT, WHEREIN FOCH COMPLETELY OVERTHROWS THE WHOLE GERMAN ARMIES AND SAVES FRANCE AT THE BATTLE OF FÈRE CHAMPENOISE.

In the survey of a campaign the truly decisive moves are often overlooked. This comes as much from ignorance of strategy as from the inclination of most people to dwell on those events or details of the fighting which appeal to the imagination and stir patriotic sentiment or stimulate pride. The various accounts given of the battle of the Marne furnish an instance in point, all the attention of this dramatic happening having been centred on the incidents in which the safety of the capital of France seemed directly concerned—the creation of a picture of the famous city being saved, as in the times of Attila, from the incursion of barbarous hordes constituting the main attraction of the war. Other parts of France could be ravaged, polluted by the foe; but this, to the outside world, did not so much matter—whilst Paris, the happy hunting ground of the cosmopolitan

pleasure seeker, must not, of course, be touched by the rude hands of the barbarian. And so all eyes were fixed on the region where the western extremity of the invaders' line came in contact with the forces detailed for the protection and defence of the capital. The 6th army, under Maunoury, issued from the fortified camp in Kluck's rear; then the British and French 5th armies advanced from the south, and the Germans retreated hurriedly to the river Aisne, where, curiously enough, in spite of their recent "rout" and "complete" overthrow, they managed to put up a stout resistance for a matter of seven or eight months!

Paris was indeed "saved," but by whom? By Maunoury? By the English? By the 5th French army? No one seems to be able to answer those questions in a definite manner. Maunoury *did* stop Kluck's advance against the French armies south of the Marne, and forced him to withdraw to the north bank, but then Maunoury was nearly surrounded and overwhelmed by Kluck, and the arrival of reinforcements and the progress of the British and the 5th French army, south of the Marne, barely redressed the balance. Finally, on the date of their final retirement, on September 10, Kluck and Bulow were still strong and quite able to resume the offensive from advantageous positions. Maunoury was still dangerously outflanked by way of

Baron and Nanteuil, which Kluck held on September 9. On that night, September 9 to 10, Maunoury prepared for the morrow an attack, the issue of which, in his mind, was uncertain. This attack, however, did not take place, *because in the early morning of September* 10 *Kluck abandoned his positions.* Bulow, at the same moment, did likewise, and Joffre's left wing had then nothing more to do but to start in pursuit and push on as far as it could go. No serious resistance was met by the Allies until they reached the line of the Aisne.

The date on which this sudden flight of Kluck and Bulow took place is important to remember; the time of the day at which it began still more so. It was in the early morning of September 10, at about 6 o'clock, that the German right wing abandoned its positions on the banks of the Ourcq and on the north bank of the Marne—and yet, on the previous evening, the English and French had forded the Marne; and Meaux had been in their hands since the evening of the 8th! The position being such as it was, surely the Germans, if they had been really hard pressed, could have carried out their retirement sooner, during the night itself, and not waited for broad daylight to do so! That is the usual course followed in war. In order to avoid unnecessary losses and the dangerous confusion

often attending a retirement carried out in front of an active and enterprising enemy, commanders who find themselves under the necessity of beating a retreat avail themselves, whenever they can, of the protecting veil of darkness to evacuate their positions. This is what Kluck and Bulow, who were good generals, should have done, and what, strangely enough, they did not do! On the evening of the 9th the front columns of Franchet d'Esperey were across the Marne, at Château Thierry, and the British forces were also on the north bank of the river; yet the Germans did not break off the combat until the following morning, when, for safety, and also to baffle their enemy, they could easily have done so immediately with less disorder and fewer losses. What then, at the eleventh hour, caused Kluck and Bulow, who were holding their own fairly well, to retire—to fly in point of fact—so precipitately? The answer to this question will be found, as we have hinted before, in the French official survey of the campaign, published in the *Bulletin des Armées*, on December 5, 1914, and entitled "Four Months of War." This survey, in reference to the battle of the Marne, contained an illuminating paragraph. The paragraph, which deals with the action of the 7th French army under General Foch at the battle of the Marne, concludes with the following significant words: ". . . *if they* (the

Germans) *had pierced us* (viz., our lines) *between Sézanne and Mailly* (where the 7th army stood) *the situation* (created by the action of the 6th army on the Ourcq) *would have been reversed to their* (the Germans') *advantage.*" Nothing could be more definite nor clearer. It amounts to saying that the action of the 6th army on the Ourcq, against Kluck, was not decisive; and that, if the Germans had succeeded in driving back or piercing through the 7th French army under General Foch in the centre, the 6th army would eventually have been defeated, and the British and the 5th French army would have been involved in the disaster; and then it would have been, had this contingency resulted, that Paris would have been attacked; and Joffre's left wing, cut off from the centre, would have been driven back and invested in the capital. Germany would thus have won the war.

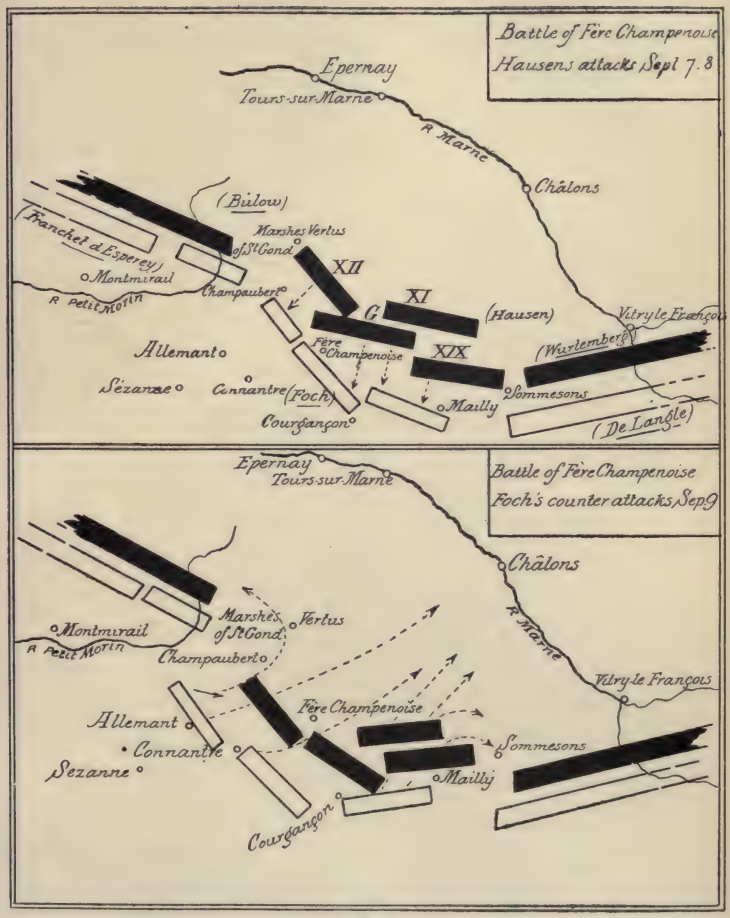
This, as is proved by the statement in the *Bulletin des Armées*, is no supposition, no theory. We have shown that the action of the 6th army was somewhat premature; that Maunoury, by hurrying developments, instead of waiting until Kluck was thoroughly engaged in his front and pinned down south of the Marne, did not succeed in outnumbering the Germans on the Ourcq as would otherwise have been the case; Maunoury was outnumbered himself and came near to being crushed. *It was Foch's*

victory in the centre, at Fère Champenoise, which saved the situation; which saved Paris, and which, also, saved Joffre's left wing from ultimate disaster. Yet Foch's victory, like that of Castelnau at Nancy, seems condemned, by the ignorance and indifference of the crowd, to eventual oblivion. The indications that this action was the most important and decisive of all those fought in western France are not lacking. The communiqués and subsequent accounts pointed out that it was at Fère Champenoise, between Sézanne and Mailly, that the most violent fighting had taken place; that the Germans there fought desperately and did their utmost to break the French line; that it was there that the Prussian Guards, the *élite* of the German infantry, sustained their second and almost final overthrow; and that the Kaiser, on hearing of the disaster and of the way in which Hausen, who commanded the Germans there, had been outwitted by his French opponent exclaimed that, after such a defeat, General Hausen should have blown his brains out! (This report, like others of the kind, may not be true; it certainly fitted the event.) But all this was in vain; the attention of the masses was centred elsewhere—Paris being, after all, a more attractive spot then Fère Champenoise.

Von Hausen's defeat at Fère Champenoise was the outcome partly of the German ignorance as to

the real strength of the French western armies, but mainly the result of General Foch's strategic ability.

The date at which von Hausen began his frantic attacks against Foch should be borne in mind. These attacks began on the 7th, therefore Hausen delivered them in the full knowledge of Maunoury's turning movement against Kluck, which had taken place on the Ourcq on the previous day. This shows that Maunoury's move, although it certainly surprised, did not disturb the German commanders overmuch, once they knew that the answering move of Kluck against Maunoury was being carried out under favourable conditions. On the contrary, the German commanders argued that, since the French were stronger on their wings than had been expected, they must be correspondingly weaker at their centre. Hence von Hausen's attack on Foch on the 7th, supported by the severe fighting of those carried out simultaneously by Wurtemberg on de Langle and the 4th French army further east. The value set on these attacks, and upon those of the day that followed, by the high German command was further enhanced by the proclamation which was issued to the German troops at Vitry le François on *September* 7, *at* 10 *p.m.* This proclamation, which, like that of Joffre on the preceding day, was calculated to stimulate the ardour of the combatants, ended with the words: "Everything



MAP 18.

To face page 184.

depends on the result of to-morrow." Those words clearly applied to the efforts of the German armies of the centre, regardless of what the issue might be elsewhere. This proclamation, however, is always quoted in current accounts of the war *at the opening of the narratives dealing with the battle on the Ourcq*, which makes it appear that everything depended on the issue of that battle, whereas the locality from which the German proclamation was issued and the date of the document prove the contrary, and that the decisive action was fought, not near Paris, but in the centre, between Sézanne and Vitry le François.

We are here chiefly concerned, however, with the action of Foch's army.

This army was the smallest French army on the long line of battle, as it only consisted of two army corps, a detached division, and the Morocco division which had formerly belonged to the 5th army under Franchet d'Esperey.

Retreating from the Aisne across the Marne, these troops had reached a line stretching, roughly, from Champaubert, through Fère Champenoise to Mailly, when, on September 6, Joffre's famous proclamation that the retreat was at an end and France about to strike was issued. The armies of de Langle and Foch halted, but instead of assuming the offensive, they remained where they were, and entrenched, severe fighting going on all the time with the ad-

vanced parties of the enemy. This momentary inaction at a time when all Joffre's line, from Paris to Verdun, was supposed to spring forward in order to drive the invader back is easily explained, and shows out in all its grand simplicity the plan conceived by the French generalissimo for trapping and surrounding the Germans between Paris and Verdun. Foch and de Langle, as they suddenly arrested their retreating columns and wheeled them sharply round from the high ground above Sézanne to the banks of the Saulx, decided to wait and give time to the turning movement of Maunoury to develop before they began their advance, so that the trap should close securely round the Germans. These hopes were disappointed by the quickness with which Maunoury struck, for Kluck, on the alert, walked swiftly out of the trap, and Bulow likewise, although with less mastery. It was left now to Foch to retrieve the day, and, in order to appreciate the importance of his victory, it is as well to remember that the Germans had the means of entrenching on the Marne as they did later on on the Aisne. The issue of the war would have been uncertain, Paris would have been bombarded, like Rheims, and the French northern ports occupied by the Germans. Foch's achievement is, therefore, worthy of wide recognition.

The advance of von Hausen against Foch re-

sembled that of Kluck on September 5 south of the Marne, in this particular: that he (Hausen) also bore to his left, eastward, but to this direction he was chiefly committed by the character of the country. To his right, he had in front of him the swampy grounds of St. Gond, near Champaubert, and the heights which rose south of it towards Sézanne; whilst to his left, east of Fère Champenoise and towards Chalons and Mailly, the country was perfectly flat, although rather broken and intersected with woods. Hausen's plan was to "contain" the French forces on his front between Champaubert and Sézanne, whilst with his left he drove a powerful wedge between Foch and de Langle's armies near Sommesous and Mailly. The disposition of his forces was curious, and shows that in their hurried advance the German corps had again crossed each other in their paths, the 19th (Saxon) corps, which originally was on the right, being now on the left, near Chalons, whilst the 12th was now on the right, towards Champaubert, and the Guards were in the centre. This new disposition was favourable to the Germans, since the *élite* of their army would be brought to bear on the point at which they intended to pierce the French line; but in one particular it was vicious, as the hurry of the advance had left no time nor sufficient space for the rear corps (the 11th Saxon) to deploy. This corps was, therefore,

destined to be brought into the fight piecemeal, and to achieve little, although it suffered terribly from the French artillery fire, a single regiment sustaining over 2,000 casualties. Furthermore, during the confusion produced in the German ranks, on the evening of the 9th, by Foch's sudden and unexpected masterstroke, the 11th German corps lost its bearings, and ran hither and thither, north, south and west, until it found itself, on the morning of the 10th, near Chalons, on the path of the retreating 19th corps, not knowing, evidently, until then, that it was turning its back on the enemy! The action on September 7 developed all along the line from the north of Sézanne to Mailly, Vitry le François, and the banks of the Saulx. On the 8th tremendous pressure was brought to bear on Foch's right, which stood its ground well against heavy odds, but which, for ulterior motives, was drawn back a few miles as far as Courgançon. Here the French had the advantage of the position, for this special reason, that the locality was proximate to the "camp de Mailly," the famous rifle range and exercising grounds which, in the words of a Saxon officer, the French knew "like the backs of their hands." The French artillery and rifle fire obtained there their maximum of effect, the shells of the "75's" in particular sweeping the plain, and searching the woods and the folds of the ground in a mathematical fashion that stag-

gered the Germans. The progress of the German columns was arrested. It was also in the vicinity of Mailly that the 11th German corps, which fought but little, nevertheless sustained most heavy casualties. The Prussian Guards and the 19th corps dashed forward repeatedly, but in vain, against the French entrenchments. Their night attacks also failed, and both sides in this region fought themselves to a standstill, until the final *débâcle* of Hausen's army, brought about by Foch's masterly flanking movement. Foch, during the same night of September 8, also withdrew towards Sézanne the division which was opposed to the German 12th corps, and which, it must be said, was giving way under the pressure of superior numbers. The Morocco division, which linked Foch's left to Franchet d'Esperey, was battling, in the neighbourhood of Champaubert and St. Gond, with Bulow's 10th corps, which had not yet been withdrawn across the Marne. The Morocco division, now under Foch, thus helped to the west Franchet d'Esperey's action against Bulow and, in the words of the official accounts, its " behaviour was heroic."

On September 9, at 6 o'clock in the morning, the retirement of Foch's right wing and centre army corps, a movement which was carried out during the night, had attained its limit, and thus the 7th French army, although vastly outnumbered by

von Hausen's hosts, formed a semicircle round the Germans, the French line running from a point north of Sézanne, through Allemant, Connantre and Courgançon, to Mailly.

Directly Foch had achieved the disposition of forces necessary for the success of the bold plan he had conceived, he launched his counter-attacks on Hausen's flank. The effect of this was sudden, terrific. Hausen, in his vain endeavour to pierce the French line at Mailly, had gradually massed the greater part of his forces there, to the east and south of Fère Champenoise. And he, no doubt, thought that his opponent had likewise reinforced his right by drawing on his left, whereas the contrary was the case, Foch having drawn in his *right* to reinforce his *left*, in order to turn to profit the high ground north of Sézanne, on which his left rested, and in front of which the Germans were not in such great strength as elsewhere. But, to make von Hausen's discomfiture more complete, Foch was not content to push his left front columns against his opponent's flank, but he ordered a general offensive all along the line, so as to protect his own flank from any counter-attack. Thus he executed what might be described, in terms of strategy, a forward contraction of his right wing, whilst his left, coming down from the above-mentioned heights, pivoted forward, round the moving "*point d'appui*" thus created.

This manœuvre of Foch was the crowning strategic achievement of the war. His left columns went into Hausen's flank, near Fère Champenoise, like a knife, or a set of knives, into butter. Taken unawares, Prussian and Saxon divisions gave way in confusion. At and about Champenoise, Hausen's left wing, driven back by Foch's right, rallied somewhat, and offered desperate resistance, some of the localities, hamlets, châteaux, villas and farms, changing hands many times. In this way a French regiment of the line and one of the Territorials, in terrific combat, finally wrested from the Prussian Guards the Castle of Mondement. To the north of Fère Champenoise Foch's triumphant columns progressed rapidly, pushing pell-mell before them the disconnected units of the 11th and 12th German corps, who fled in all directions, some to Epernay, others to Tours-sur-Marne, others to Chalons; and Hausen, in despair, hastily collecting those remains of his battered army that still preserved some cohesion, retreated across the Marne, thus uncovering Wurtemberg's right, which Foch forthwith attacked. All this was effected on September 9, *before Kluck or Bulow had fallen back from the Ourcq and the Marne.* Foch, it is true, only entered Chalons *in person* on the morning of the 11th, as, until then, he had to direct the operations against Wurtemberg's flank, but most of his troops by then were already

in pursuit of the routed Saxon army on the north bank of the river, and it is at this precise moment (September 10) that Kluck and Bulow, receiving news of Hausen's disaster, definitely broke off the action near Paris and fell back northwards to the Aisne.

One may add here that the Saxon army's losses were enormous. This army was the only one on the German line which was subsequently reorganised and placed under a new command (von Einem). One may also add that had not the troops under Foch been so exhausted as they were after all their exertions, or had they been equal in numbers to their opponents, nothing could have saved the Saxon army from complete annihilation.

The losses of the Saxon army and of the Prussian Guard corps at the battle of Fère Champenoise cannot be computed with anything approaching accuracy. It is said, however, that when their battered remnants reached the line of the Aisne they were minus 300 guns, captured or destroyed by the French, or left behind in the marshes of St. Gond. The number of prisoners must have been large, despite the rapidity of the German flight and the exhaustion of the victors; but the exact number of German prisoners made by Foch will not be known until the French military authorities make a public detailed account of captures and losses, a thing which, for

various reasons, cannot be done during the prosecution of war under modern or conscript conditions.

The next action was that of Vitry le François, the result of which was caused by that of the battle of Fère Champenoise. The Grand Duke of Wurtemberg was outflanked south of Chalons, on the line Sommesous-Mailly, where Foch's right and de Langle's left met. Enthused by the great victory won by the 7th army, the soldiers of de Langle, who had been resisting heroically to the frantic attacks of Wurtemberg, resumed the offensive, and carried all before them. Vitry le François, which the Germans had quickly, but strongly fortified, was stormed and captured, and the rest of the 4th German army was overthrown on the banks of the Saulx, and driven back northwards, in disorder, in the direction of Chalons, Suippes and Rheims.

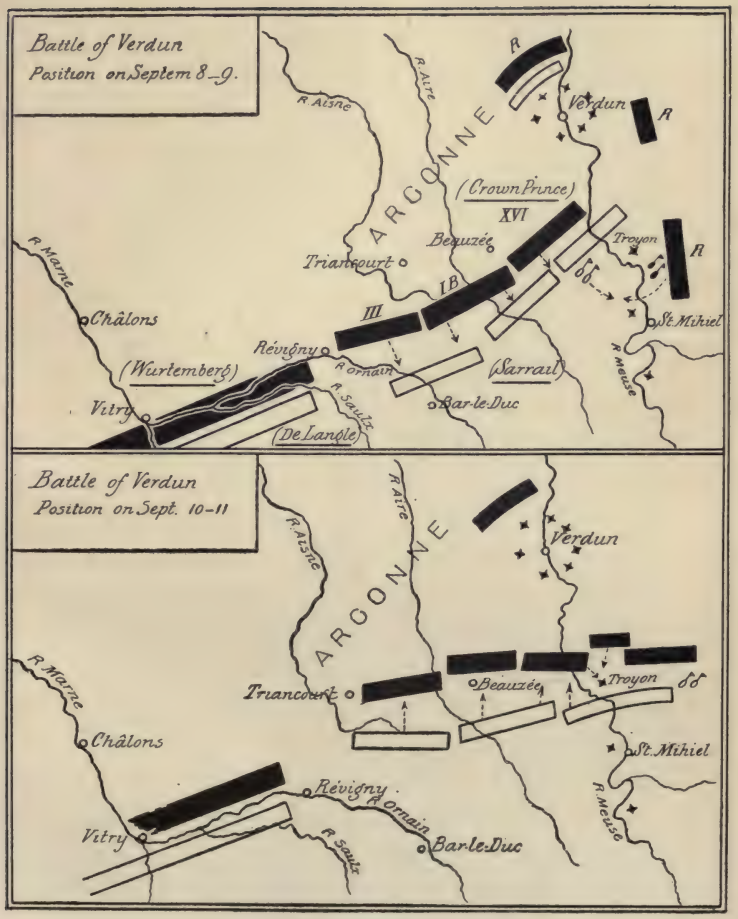
CHAPTER XVII

THE OVERTHROW OF THE LARGEST GERMAN ARMY BY THE ARMY OF SARRAIL BEFORE VERDUN

ALTHOUGH it may be said in all fairness that whatever took place along the fighting line in France after September 9 was the result, direct or indirect, of Foch's stupendous victory in the centre, yet there was another action on the issue of which a good deal depended, and which for that reason is worthy of record.

This action was fought by General Sarrail with the 3rd army, and had for its main object the defence of Verdun, or rather of the approaches to it, for, in the words of a French general, a "place assiégée" is a "place prise" (a besieged stronghold is a town taken).

Verdun, as we have seen, was the eastern pivot of the western armies of France, the eastern armies, between Toul and Belfort, acting independently (in the tactical sense). The Germans had contemplated, at a very early date, the taking of Verdun, where the most important railway lines of north-eastern France converge, and where the Germans would have found a great arsenal and a huge amount of supplies. What the possession of the fortress



MAP 19.

To face page 194.

would have meant to them it is difficult to estimate, but it would have meant a good deal; its capture, at any rate, would have counteracted any success of the French elsewhere, and appreciably altered the course of the war.

Here we must point out the curious attitude of mind of most people—the public and the military "experts" alike—in reference to the apparently passive *rôle* played by the great French eastern fortress. It is readily assumed by these learned critics that because the Germans did not invest or take Verdun that they had no intention of doing so. This is a grotesque idea, considering that the centre German army, whose task it was from the very beginning to approach Verdun in order to besiege it, or to isolate it—which in modern war comes to the same thing—was the *largest* army on the German line and was placed under the Crown Prince of Germany, whose chief of the staff, von Eichhorn, was one of the best generals in Germany. This army consisted of the 3rd, 1st Bavarian and 16th army corps, and six divisions of reserves, not counting, of course, the cavalry and the help that the Crown Prince of Germany was to receive in the course of events from his colleague the Grand Duke of Wurtemberg,[1] whose army was almost as large as his own. The

[1] This does not include the 5th army corps, which was detached to attack the "Grand Couronné" of Nancy, as shown at p. 156-7.

army of Sarrail (formerly under Ruffey) was smaller than the army of the Crown Prince by no less than five infantry divisions—the Crown Prince having fifteen, and Sarrail only ten. Yet we are asked by these " experts " to believe that such a force was meant to remain inactive and wait, with arms folded, for developments to take place elsewhere. The terrific battle in the Ardennes ; Sarrail's tremendous counter-stroke at Virton ; the hotly-contested actions of Arrancy, of Spincourt, of Longuyon ; and the energetic and effective manner in which the 3rd French army disputed the crossings of the Meuse to the enemy till the beginning of the Great Retreat—all this is ignored or forgotten. So are the great sorties made by the garrison of Verdun against the flank of the Germans during the Crown Prince's advance. Thousands of French soldiers have fallen for the protection of their fortress, but their prowess will probably remain unrecognised and unsung by the indifference and the lazy-mindedness of the multitude.

The Germans meant to take Verdun—they did all they could to approach it and besiege it. The change of plan imposed on them by Joffre's retreat did not alter the strategic objective of the Crown Prince. We have seen how General von Stranz, who was marching on Verdun from the west, changed the direction of his columns in order to attack the

"Grand Couronné" of Nancy. It was a mistake, for General Sarrail with this additional German corps against him, being in the position he stood in at the time, would have been surrounded and overwhelmed, but the mistake was of the Germans' making; they were again playing into Joffre's hand; and this does not alter the fact that the biggest German army, under the Crown Prince, fought incessantly with the main object of isolating, of investing, and of taking Verdun, and that to attain this object the Crown Prince of Germany and his counsellor, von Eichhorn, did all in their power to overwhelm and destroy the 3rd French army under General Sarrail.

Sarrail during the retreat had a difficult and thankless task to perform. As he fell back through the broken and wooded country of the Argonne so as not to lose his connection with the other French armies on his left, he had to protect Verdun from north, east and west. The Crown Prince had sufficient forces to deploy round his opponent, to cut through his lines from east to west and west to east, and surround and drive in into Verdun at least a portion of Sarrail's army. The German 3rd army corps advanced through the forest, making straight for Bar le Duc, whilst the 1st Bavarian and the 16th army corps pressed on in the direction of Troyon and St. Mihiel. To the east of Verdun German

reserve divisions made their way, on the right bank of the Meuse, with the object of crossing the river near St. Mihiel and linking their efforts to those of the German forces which were operating on the left bank. Had the Crown Prince's plan succeeded Sarrail's right army corps, which rested on Verdun, would have been cut off from the rest and driven into the fortress ; whilst to the south, Sarrail would have lost his connection with the 4th army on his left and been driven into Toul. What the moral effect of such a development would have been on the defenders of Nancy, who were fighting back to to back with Sarrail at the time, it is difficult to say ; but the German success would have heavily counterbalanced the successes already achieved by the Allies on the Marne. That these successes of the Allies weighed heavily on the minds of the Crown Prince and his generals there is no doubt, but their army was powerful and practically intact, and, therefore, they had the means of gaining a complete victory before the Allies had time to make further progress elsewhere.

On the 8th of September the army under Sarrail reached the limit of its retirement. The Germans, continuing to press on, were attacking in strength, all along the line and on all sides. On the next day (the same day as the battle of Fère Champenoise) Sarrail counter-attacked in his front, whilst

he diverted from left to right his two cavalry corps to check the progress of the Germans who had succeeded in crossing the Meuse in his rear, near St. Mihiel. Both operations succeeded beyond the expectations of the French general. At St. Mihiel the Germans were driven back with heavy losses across the Meuse ; on Sarrail's left, near Révigny, the 3rd German corps, which was endeavouring to reach Bar le Duc, was thrown back after a murderous struggle ; whilst in the centre the 16th German corps lost eleven batteries, destroyed by the French artillery. It was on the next day (September 10) that the Crown Prince, completely baffled, and now distracted by the news of Hausen's and Wurtemberg's overthrow at Fère Champenoise and Vitry le François and the sudden retreat of Bulow and Kluck to the Aisne, made his desperate attempt against the fort of Troyon. His army corps lay then on a straight line running from Triaucourt, south of the Argonne, through Beauzée to Troyon. They all faced east, thus offering their flank to Sarrail's advancing columns. The disposition of the German corps, then, show that the Crown Prince, or rather von Eichhorn, his counsellor, felt sure they could batter their way through the Meuse to Metz. They no doubt could have done so, for the Troyon fort, which barred the way, in spite of the wonderful and heroic resistance it offered, must have been speedily

reduced; but Sarrail gave no respite to his war-worn battalions; and overcoming the difficulties of the ground and the obstacles and defences hastily put up by the enemy to delay his advance, the French general carried all before him. The Crown Prince gave up the forlorn attempt, and withdrew his battered forces through the immense forest across which his opponent himself had retreated a few days previously, but in a totally different manner; for the Crown Prince's retreat resembled a rout. He left behind him prisoners, wounded and baggage, and at last got into line, to the north of Verdun, with the other discomfited and terribly depleted German armies, which now spread along the Aisne, as far as Soissons, behind a strong line of defensive works, a line which they were enabled to make stronger by the temporary exhaustion of their adversaries, who besides, it must be owned, were not prepared for the course of action the Germans, after their huge defeat, were about to take. The Allies, elated by success, had lost, in their swift advance and relentless pursuit of the enemy, some of their own cohesion. Otherwise they might have quickly carried the first line of defences hastily thrown up by the Germans along the river Aisne, and they might thus have kept the enemy on the run, if not as far as the Rhine, at least as far as the Belgian frontier.

The victory of the Marne, however, in a general

sense, was complete. The Germans had not been annihilated, nor definitely overthrown as Joffre had meant that they should be. But the shadow of defeat and of permanent invasion that had hung over France until then was dispelled, and dispelled for ever. The theory of German invincibility which had been flouted across the world for half a century was shattered. It was proved in this titanic action, which settled the future destinies of Europe, that the Germans, with the superiority of numbers (which they enjoyed *all along the line*), and a most perfect military organisation, were unable to crush their adversaries, as they were expected to do by the vast majority of onlookers. On the contrary, they were thrown back and pursued for a distance of forty miles by opponents who were much weaker in numbers and who further lacked the military organisation and thorough preparation of the Germans.

To what was this surprising result due ? To bravery, courage, fighting power ? To a certain extent, perhaps, but not altogether, for the Germans also are brave and courageous and know how to fight. Their tactics were fine, and although these tactics were of a murderously costly kind to the people employing them, they reached a completeness and standard higher than that of the French.

The victory of the Allies was due to superior strategy, for everything else being equal, or even

somewhat unequal, as was the case in this campaign, strategy *must* and *will* always prevail. Good leading, sound principles of war will give a weaker army the advantage over a stronger one in the long run. The behaviour of the Allies, of the English, of the Belgians, of the French was fine. The despised Belgian army fought well at Louvain. The English musketry fire staggered the Germans at Mons, at Cambrai. The " 75 " French guns were a revelation, as was the wonderful suppleness and elasticity of the French infantry fighting all the time against heavy odds ; but in spite of all that, the Germans *must* have won the campaign, and the war, if they had had a Joffre or a Foch at their head. For it must never be forgotten that the greatest surprise of this war was not the heroic conduct of the Belgians, nor the tactical efficiency of the " contemptible " little army of Britain, *but the totally unknown and unadvertised ability of the French Staff*. It is to the French Staff, to men like Joffre, Foch, Pau, Castelnau and Sarrail that France owes her safety and the Allies their success over the consummately well-trained and highly-organised legions of the vast Germanic hordes. For without the first French offensive in Alsace, which gave the Allies the initiative—the initiative which they have kept ever since and are not likely to lose—without the successful defence of Nancy and Verdun ; without

the great retreat and Foch's crowning manœuvre at Fère Champenoise, the campaign would not, and *could not*, have been won. France would have been speedily crushed and conquered; Belgium would have remained for ever in German hands, and Russia, in her turn, would have succumbed under the irresistible avalanche of the victorious German armies. As for England . . . but it is enough! We leave to the imagination of the reader the picture of what the eventuality of a struggle between England and a totally Germanised Europe might have been, and to realise what debt of gratitude is due to the nation which has unflinchingly and silently sustained the brunt of the overwhelming attacks of Germany.

We have to add here, however, that the victory, although it was won, was not of a definite character. The so-called victory of the Marne (which, perhaps, would be more aptly named if it were called the battle of "Fère Champenoise") was not definite. It did not, and could not, end the war, nor even shorten it, and that for many reasons, one of which we have stated above—the premature action of the French 6th army on the Ourcq. The other reasons were obvious—the numerical preponderance of the Germans, their almost inexhaustible resources, and their vast and thorough preparations for war. France, on the other hand, was handicapped from

the start, and even after the defeat of the German onrush and the terrible losses of the invaders; even with England to help her and the Belgian field forces also on her side, France could hardly hope to do much more than she had done, unless she wished to bleed to death and to emerge out of the struggle victorious, but terribly withered and maimed. The main object had been achieved—the invaders had been checked, driven back, and forced to assume the defensive. This in itself was a wonderful, *marvellous* result. It was *victory;* but there was a harder task to perform—that of battering the foe, of reducing his strength, and of crushing him in the end and for all time.

In order to effect this the forces of France alone were not sufficient, and thus a sort of waiting game was imposed on General Joffre, whose course of action was now to gather all his forces whilst he kept the enemy busy along the lines on which, through political more than strategical reasons, the Germans had elected to remain. How he effected this; how the Belgian army, which was isolated at Antwerp, was enabled to add its strength to the allied line; how the Russian pressure in the east made itself felt in the long run on the German front in France, and how England gradually enlarged her share of the military operations will be shown in the second phase of the history of the war.

MAP 20.

To face page 204.

APPENDIX

THE disposition of the German field units (army corps) as given in this narrative of the campaign is not quite in keeping with the official accounts. It is, nevertheless, correct, the official accounts containing many discrepancies and contradictory statements on the subject. Thus—to quote a few instances—in Sir John French's dispatch on the battle of the Marne, the German army under Kluck is made to contain the 3rd army corps, the 4th reserve and the 7th corps, whereas this corps, the 7th, formed part of the army under General Bulow, the 4th reserve was near Antwerp, and the 3rd corps belonged to the Crown Prince's command near Verdun and Metz; in the French official survey of the war the 8th corps is given to the Crown Prince, whereas it really belonged to the Duke of Wurtemberg's command, and was fighting at the time mentioned (September 8–10) not near Revigny, in the Argonne, but at Vitry le François, on the Marne. In various accounts drawn from official sources other inaccuracies of the kind occur, some of them being apparently due to careless figure writing. Thus we find

the 10th corps, which appertained to Bulow's command, made to belong also to the Crown Prince's army at the other extremity of the western line in France. The corps mentioned as being under the Crown Prince was really the 1st Bavarian, written down in abbreviated form thus: 1B, the "B" of Bavarian looking like an "O." In the same way the 11th corps (Hausen) is often confused with the 17th, and placed under the command of Wurtemberg. Here the figure 7 looks like 1. The error made in the French official survey in connection with the 8th corps is probably due to the same cause, the figure 3 being often made to resemble an 8.

We have spared no pains to find out the exact composition of the German armies in France in August–September, 1914. It was not an easy task, as the secrecy enforced by the German military authorities as to the distribution of their forces was almost as severe as the French, but in spite of all difficulties we have succeeded in drawing up an accurate memorandum of German army corps which were operating in France in the early days of September, and their groupings under different commands:—

1st army—General von Kluck: 2nd, 2nd reserve, 4th army corps.

2nd army—General von Bulow: 7th, 9th, 10th, 10th reserve.

3rd army—General von Hausen : Guard, 11th, 12th, 19th army corps ; this command is generally termed Saxon army.

4th army—Grand Duke of Wurtemberg : 8th, 13th, 17th, and reserve corps of one of these.

5th army—Crown Prince : 3rd, 5th, 16th, 1st Bavarian, three reserve corps.

6th army—Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria : 21st, 2nd and 3rd Bavarian, two reserve corps.

7th army—General von Heeringen : 14th, 15th, 18th, one reserve corps.

This does not include cavalry, of which there were ten divisions variously distributed amongst the different commands, nor the 4th *reserve* and 6th army corps of Kluck, which were operating against the Belgians near Antwerp.

AUTHORITIES CONSULTED

1. The French "communiqués."

2. The dispatches of Sir John French.

3. French official survey of the war, *Bulletin des Armées*, December 5, 1914.

4. French official account, entitled "Six Months of War."

5. Accounts given by officers of the French Staff to various members of the Press on the operations around Lunéville, Nancy, Verdun, and on the banks of the Ourcq.

6. Official reports on *atrocities* for ascertaining the exact position of certain German units at certain dates.

7. French advertisements for *men lost* on the various battlefields, for ascertaining the position of certain French units.

8. Diaries of officers and men, especially German, for ascertaining the position of German and French units.

9. German casualty lists, for ascertaining the position of certain units; and a mass of other reliable material.

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