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THE UNDYING STORY



W. DOUGLAS NEWTON



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THE UNDYING STORY

By the same Author

WAR

THE NORTH AFIRE

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THE UNDYING STORY

*The work of the British Expeditionary
Force on the Continent from Mons,
August 23rd, 1914, to Ypres,
November 15th, 1914.*

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BY
W. DOUGLAS NEWTON
AUTHOR OF "WAR," "THE NORTH AFIRE"



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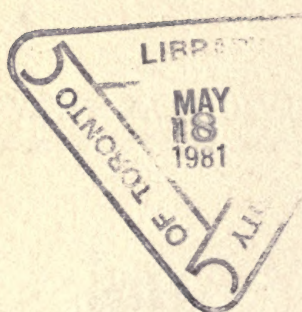
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A FEW WORDS OF PREFACE.

UNTIL a few weeks before I started my periodical —“T.P.’s Journal of Great Deeds of the Great War” —Mr. Douglas Newton was unknown to me personally ; but I had made his spiritual acquaintance many months before. For I had read a story of his, called “War” ; and in common with its many other readers, I was immensely struck with the vividness, the inspiration even, with which Mr. Douglas Newton was able to give a picture of what war really means. There was in this book a singular combination of realistic and even small details —sometimes as petty as the pettiest things of daily life—and the ever-present horror and sinister splendour of the battlefield. When I read this book I knew that I had found the man who could best write a story of battle. And so I was fortunate enough to obtain his co-operation in my new Journal. His articles in that Journal have already attained their celebrity ; for there was no feature in the new paper which attracted such attention and admiration. Week after week he traced the march of our splendid soldiers through disaster and through victory, through painful retreat and through rushing advance. He has

now collected these articles into a volume, and they will be found in the following pages. I will not attempt even in a few sentences to re-tell the story which he tells with such skill and eloquence. He has well entitled the narrative himself as "The Undying Story." It is undying; and one of the records that will help to its immortality is his eloquent pages.

T. P.

AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENT.

I AM indebted to Mr. John Buchan's magnificent "History of the War" (Nelson), Mr. Roger Ingpen's admirable "The Fighting Retreat to Paris," and Mr. Edmund Dane's equally admirable "The Battles of the Rivers" (both Hodder & Stoughton), for correction of dates, details and facts, since it was not always possible when writing serially to eliminate error in handling masses of material so close up to events. Thanks to these books, too, I feel that I have been able to add strength to whatever strategical and tactical story there is in an account mainly concerned with the individual and personal side of the first four months of the campaign. I gratefully acknowledge the value of these books to me.

W. D. N.

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The Undying Story.

CHAPTER I.

MONS.

THE hawk that is called by the Germans the dove (Taube) came sliding with its sinister grace over the entrenched lines of the British. It hung over the camp like a bird searching out its prey, and the jolly British Tommy tried to bring it down with his rifle. Then, in a long curve, the aeroplane turned and swept north again. A few minutes later there flowered above our army the first delicate white balloon of shrapnel-smoke. The battle of Mons had begun.

There had been much fighting before. After the irreparable act of August 3rd, when Germany in force had come with ruthless stride over the borders of Belgium, the whole of Europe had sprung to arms, and had used them. Germany, following its iron-bound gospel of attack by time-table, had lunged a great covering army through the core of

the easy Flemish plains, in order to pave the way for the advance of her huge military machine in its attack on the heart of France, Paris. Across the road of these forces the devoted Belgians flung themselves. Their cavalry fought the Germans inch by inch along the road of their advance ; and when the cavalry had done its best and fell back, the steel and concrete of Liége's forts took a hand in the stern game.

It was the awful impact of Liége that definitely shattered for all time the German military rule-of-thumb rush. Before the Homeric ardour of Liége's defence the invading armies were held up, and under the screen of that check the corps of Britain and France mobilised and flung themselves into the battle line. On August 14th France was in touch with Belgian arms, and on August 16th Britain woke up to find that, after a lapse of ninety-nine years, a British army was again out campaigning on its most glorious battle-ground, the Continent. Five days later this army was at work in its age-old way, playing the same old game it had played to the downfall of its enemies throughout the centuries. It was fighting a rearguard action with superb and smiling equanimity. With unhurried gait it was retreating before overwhelming odds, even as its fathers had retreated in 1809.

And even as Sir John Moore had done, Sir John French was doing. He was falling back with a line unbroken and undismayed, and as he retired he was blunting the attack of his foes with smashing victories.

The battle front of Britain at Mons was planned on the grand scale of modern war. It was twenty-five miles long, though for all that it was but a segment of the monstrous line of the Allies, which extended well over two hundred miles. The main body of the British force lay along two sides of a very flat triangle that had its apex at Mons. Cut in a rigid trench fifteen miles from end to end, and facing dead north, a canal runs from the village of Condé to the town of Mons; then the line turns a little back and runs eastward for another ten miles to Binche. Condé was on the extreme left of the main British army; Binche on the extreme right.

Behind the moat of this canal lay the major portion of General Smith-Dorrien's force (the Second Corps), and his outposts were strung beyond it. From Mons to Binche were Sir Douglas Haig's men (the First Corps). Massed about Binche lurked the eager British cavalry. The Third Corps was only just coming up, but, even with their absence, eighty thousand men waited along the line for the attack of Germany. The country in

which the men lay was a gentle country, and with the August sun mellowing it, it reminded the English of their own Cotswold valleys. Little villages gemmed it, and towards Binche it was rolling gently in small hills.

Mons itself is, or was, a town quaint and lovable, asleep on the Flemish border. It stands on a hill that lifts it with gentle importance above a humdrum country. It is a town, as are many continental towns, seemingly set under a glass, so that their clean quaintness might be the better preserved. Its square-set cobbles are always scoured. Its Grand Place and the archaic Hotel de Ville set in it, might have been aslumbering since the sixteenth century, whose architecture moulded the fabric of the walls. Reaching with a sleepy hand to heaven, its old Clock Tower stands over the town. Only the lumbering and wheezy street tram of steam gives it any sense of the fervour of modern life. It is the connecting link between the doze of Arcady and the throbbing mesh of foundries and mills that fret heaven with their chimneys, that smear the sky with their thick smoke, three miles away, and whose piled-up mounds of slag and *débris* give to the district an air of being a segment of our own Potteries that has strayed by mistake into this gentle land. This is Mons,

the archaic, the pretty, the industrious, and the prosperous. Mons is Belgium; its sixteenth century Town Hall nodding at the Commercial Institute of the Manufacturers of Hainault, is Belgium in its national character. An old faith, an old and indomitable temper, an old glory and an industry marvellous among the moderns, is Mons, and all Belgium, too.

About Mons and its canal the ground was flat and much cut up with many deep dykes filled with muddy water. In front of the British line the country was dense with undergrowth and young woods. Out of these woods, and in the serene air of the afternoon of Sunday, August 23rd, the German hordes came rolling.

CHAPTER II.

THE IMPACT OF ARMIES.

THE first abrupt surprise of shrapnel-shelling caught some of the outposts, the West Kents, for example, at the awkward moments of washing parade and dinner. Some of the men were only armed with rinsed shirts, and some only with food pannikins. For an instant there was a whirl of confusion. Then the infantry pulled themselves together and sprang for their arms. In a flash they had lined out in their trenches and were ready to meet the enemy.

All along the immense battle-front the British hurried to arms without flurry. The infantry moved out to their stations and stood ready in their trenches. Those who had not entrenched got to work with their "grubbers," and with keen zeal dug themselves in at once. The men prepared their lines, as an eye-witness declared, with extraordinary rapidity, sometimes doing so under a lash of shrapnel so deadly that the men had to lie flat on their stomachs as they dug.

In the heart of the screening woods facing the lines the infernal symphony of the German artillery got to work ; it beat up and up in terrible roarings. Every gun concentrated to shatter the lines in the trenches in such a way that the blue-grey rush of the German military machine might sweep them aside in its first effort. The sky precipitated to steel, and shivered fragments into the British. All the sky above the waiting Tommies became palled with the soft, fleecy cloud of exploding shrapnel, and the earth was threshed with the iron hail of the down-slashing bullets. The British infantry lay on its face and laughed. They made bets on the accuracy and the explosive qualities of the shells. They could not as yet strike back, but they were demons for waiting.

Meanwhile our artillery was doing its job, and doing it extraordinarily well. The British artillery has a reputation which it will exchange with no one ; it lived up to that reputation. The guns smashed at the enemy with devastating effect. They were examining the German front with the cold care of accuracy, and when they found things to hit, they hit with the might of Thor's hammer. At one time they picked out a German battery, rather ebullient and excited by the noise it was making ; getting the range prettily, our men loosed

a squall of shell at it. The German guns fought for a moment, grew feeble, became silenced altogether.

The German artillery at the outset began as it was not going to go on. It ranged badly. The shells leaped the trenches and killed a myriad worms in the fields behind, but no Englishmen. The English Tommy sat back in his earth and delivered himself of much shrewd humour at the expense of the feeble shooting; caps were hoisted on sticks to encourage the gunners. Presently over the billowing cumulus of shrapnel-smoke the aeroplanes again came sliding. They reached the British trenches, hovered over them, then some shiny object or a small black-smoke bomb dropped from the machines. Immediately the hidden German gunners gripped themselves together, and the shrapnel came beating in on top of the trenched men, striking right and left with its prodigal hands of iron. The irrepressible British infantrymen flattened themselves to earth, coiled into the smallest possible compass behind their earthworks, and took to playing marbles with the bullets from the shrapnel shells.

As the thunder of the guns deepened, the general advance of the German force began. On the extreme right—that is, on the Binche line—the enemy were soon pressing with desperate force.

Under cover of the awful rain of artillery fire, the dense masses of the blue-grey infantry were trying to push their charge home. Here the trenches were weakest, for the British had gone to earth in haste, and some of the men were more or less tired out, for they had only just come off a long and trying march under a hot sun. Still, though his lines may be weak in theory, the British soldier can prove himself strong enough in practice. The attack that was meant to overwhelm failed to overwhelm. As the packed ranks of Germans came on like a crowd breaking away from a football match, the British private, disdaining the lash of the shrapnel, held his fire.

The Germans rolled forward, chanting their hymns, some say, evidently exultant, evidently certain that the massed rush was going to sweep the British out of the field. The British lines remained inscrutably calm. So they remained until the enemy arrived at the most deadly point of their rifles' trajectory. Then in a crash every trench loosed, every spitting maxim was turned on full at the tap. "It was like cutting down hay," the privates said. Before that awful pelting of nickeled bullets, rank after rank of the blue-grey host went sinking into the earth. The Germans stuck to it gamely, pushing on in a dazed way; but the gale

of that awful, steadily calm British firing was too much for them; its scythe-like cut threw them down in heaps. They wavered, broke, and went back.

The German hosts were charging British infantry for the first time in history. They were in for the lesson that other nations had learnt since the bowmen taught it at Cressy; they were suffering as others had suffered in their ignorance. "Our line in the trenches was thin, but our shooting was very accurate, and the fellows were very cool," one man wrote home in a letter; and this was quite true. The infantry were not only shooting, they were aiming as though they were out for efficiency marks at the butts. Even when they got the order for rapid firing, they did not throw a shot away, and in any case it was almost a difficulty to miss the massed Germans, for they moved forward against the positions in flat grey plaques that gave the riflemen a target like a wall. "It was like shooting down rabbits. They fell down in heaps." In one place a breastwork five feet high was formed of piled corpses, and the men had to run from the trenches to find out when and how the Germans were advancing. It was an awful reaping of slaughter. Greedy as he is for a fight, the British private was filled with disgust at this wholesale and abominable killing.

CHAPTER III.

THE PRESSURE OF MASS.

THE Gordons were battling near the Mons centre of this vivid and enormous fight. What they went through the whole line went through. The regiment rose in the early morning light, and marched out to the core of the British position. They were to line the Mons road to the right of the town, and before them there lifted a rampart of woods, that also covered them to their rear. At once when they had reached their position they set themselves with brisk and soldierly skill to dig themselves in, and as one of them, Private Smiley, says, this undoubtedly saved the regiment from a bad list of casualties, for when the Germans and the mass of their guns came on to the scene the battalion was under cover.

As the day grew up the battle opened with the thick packed fire of great guns. All the British positions were searched by a systematic drenching of shells. The range was exquisite, for, thanks to

their aeroplanes, the enemy were able to find their marks at once, and hit them. As the shelling deepened, the Highlanders came under the dreadful downpour of shrapnel and high-power shell, the sky over the trenches was palled with the bursting smoke of the explosion, and the smoke itself was slit by incessant knives of flame. The Gordons experiencing for the first time in history the concentrated shelling of a first-class and efficient military power, sat tight, and sang as many of their old ballads as they could remember.

Behind them, in the screening of the wood, a battery of the R.F.A. came jumping into the fight, and began to argue the battle with the guns of the enemy. Then quickly the angle of the guns' trajectory dropped. The infantry saw the white balls of shrapnel splashing and gouting against the warm verdure of the distant trees. The fields at the edge of the woods had become full of small figures, pushing forward in chunky and square-cut lines. The Highlanders looked at this incredible idiocy of armed men amazed; the German advance continued in the precise and solid way; with grim smiles the Highlanders pulled clear the cut-outs of their rifles, thumbed-in their magazine-clips, and made ready. Along the trench-tops, and in the verges of the woods, the men of the maxim sections

braced themselves more firmly at the triggers, swept the sights in line, and eased the belts so that they could race at full pitch when the command to fire was uttered.

There was going to be slaughter. The Gordons were resolved that it should be a wholesale affair.

The German shells were spraying all along the British line, but the Highlanders forgot their dead, kept their eyes only on the dense masses pouring up to them at that fatal and fatuous charge. Behind were the officers, with their whistles ready, waiting to give the word to go when the most deadly range was reached.

Pushing up in walls and cliffs of living grey, the enemy came on. The hard-working gunners caught them as they came, and ploughed and smashed them into long lines of ragged death. Still the orderly mob poured on, swept at the line like the lift of a sea that refused to tumble and break. At the given point the long, keen, silver whistles blew.

What followed was massacre. The Germans, pressing on in companies of 150 men, five deep, were met by a solid blast of lead and flung to the earth in ranks by that devastating wind of slaughter. The wicked little maxims on the trenches and in the wood flared up, and bored into the throng with

the everlasting stream of their bullets. The guns joined in the slaying, and soaked the field in blood.

The terrible fight went on all day, the Highlanders smashing down every attempt of the Germans to come on. In the evening, so great had been the enemy's loss, that they drew off, leaving only their slain behind.

Still, with even this relief from the incessant tumult and labour of firing, the Gordons were not allowed to rest. The Royal Irish and the Middlesex Regiments had been cut up badly, and the Highlanders were swung to the rescue. They marched for an eternal mile and a half under a ghastly pounding of shell fire. As they came into the open to gain the Irish trenches, an inferno of shelling was loosed at them, and they were gouged and rent by ugly wounds.

They found the trenches in a terrible condition, for the Royal Irish, caught unready, had been mauled in horrible fashion by the great German guns. The Highlanders lined out in the works, and until well into the evening they held the lines sternly and obdurately against the fury of effort put out by the enemy.

And indeed not the Gordons alone but all the unflinching British regiments held on. The British have formed the habit of sitting tight, and they

sat tight. They felt that in time the force of the attack must expend itself, for they still remained under the impression that they were facing an enemy no more than their equal in strength. "From information I received from French headquarters I understood that little more than one, or at least two, of the enemy's army corps, with perhaps one cavalry division, were in front of my position; and I was aware of no attempted outflanking movement by the enemy. I was confirmed in this opinion by the fact that my patrols had encountered no undue opposition in their reconnoitring operations. The observations of my aeroplanes seemed also to bear out this estimate." So wrote General Sir John French, the British Commander-in-Chief.

Even while he was thinking this, at least three German corps were moving on to his front. Even while he was thinking this a great German corps was rolling with all its pomp of power round his left flank, and about the tiny and glorious town of Tournai there was burning with fierce ardour the flames of a splendid fight. The Germans were trying to roll us up along the roads of Tournai,*

* The fight at Tournai has not been mentioned in any official despatch. A note in the *Times* referred to it; it was mentioned in a soldier's letter from the front; and the Rev. Owen Spencer Watkins, Chaplain to a Field Service Ambulance, gave in the *Methodist Recorder* the statement of a sergeant in the R.F.A., upon whose remarks my narrative is based.

and a number of British men and a battery of British guns were handing them off. The Black Watch, apparently, were here intimidating ten thousand with the scorn of their level rifles; a battery of the unquenchable Field Artillery was here, certainly, drumming the enemy off with a hot spate of shelling. A sergeant gunner of that battery fired sixty rounds in forty seconds from his piece at the thickly-clotting Germans, who poured forward against the intrepid guns, and during an hour's work he shot at all ranges from 1,500 to 700 yards. It was a vivid and stirring little fight, but Germany, in tremendous mass, was thronging forward, and the plucky handful could not hold them off. And not only here, but at all points Germany, in huge and vigorous power, was pouring overwhelmingly against the British front.

The British fought steadily, confident, indeed, of victory. For from no source of information had Sir John French found reason to suspect the real weight of his adversaries.

Yet if he did not know in actual fact, the awful pressure on his front was telling him something. Hour after hour the enormous battering-ram of the German advance was pressing his line, trying to buckle it, trying to pierce it altogether with the lunging effort of the German rush. The British

were fighting them back, but against the enormous odds their strength was draining. The Middlesex, the Royal Scots, and the Royal Irish (who were later relieved by the Gordons, as has been noted already) holding an important cross road, were subjected to awful attacks of shell-fire and infantry. They thrust back the infantry, but under the tempest of shells their ranks were woefully thinned. Cavalry was hurled at their line in the hope of breaking it with the terror of the charge. The Gordons and the Irish Rifles blew great wounds in the hurling ranks, and the stuttering maxims in the trenches carved and slashed the squadrons into rags.

Still the pressure grew more and more awful. The bayonet was attempted against the swarming hordes. But the Germans were not built of the stuff that can meet the steel with a sprinting British regiment behind it. The Cheshires tried it, but at the chilly glint of cold metal the advancing waves wilted, broke, and "went off squealing." Only at one place along the battle line did the charge get home. "The South Lancashires did it," said a man. "The Germans don't want any more of that stuff." They were not so lucky when the British horsemen got busy. There was no holding the troopers once they were loosed. As the dense masses of German infantry worked right up to the trenches,

the trenches would cease fire. Then the cavalry were on them. "Hell's fury blazed from the eyes of the trapped Germans." As the squadrons drove home, they tried to hold their ground, and the flail-like sabres sank and hacked amid them; then, "with a blood-curdling wail, they ran as though the fiends were after them"; and as they ran they cast aside their rifles, caps, bandoliers, and everything—anything that would hamper.

Yet, as the day went on, the trenched line was wearing thin. The awful tempest of artillery fire was eating the heart out of the defence. Slowly but surely as the evening drew near the British batteries were silenced. They fought, in the artillery's way, to the last shell and the last man. One half battery drew the attention of the German guns by the accuracy of its fire. Several batteries combined to crush it out of existence. It was a fight between a David and half a dozen Goliaths. One by one the guns were silenced as the men serving them were killed. At last one man, Driver Butcher, was left. He went on working, doing his best steadily and calmly. He was ready to fight the whole massed force of German artillery by himself, and it was only with reluctance that he retired when an officer called him off.

The calmness was not his alone. The whole of

the superb corps was imbued with it. When another battery was put out of action, an officer, apparently oblivious of the torrent of shell bursting about him, walked from gun to gun, making each useless. At another point, rather than lose their guns, two drivers took their horses through a storm of shell, limbered up, and brought them away safely.

As night came on it was seen that this right wing of the Army was too greatly outnumbered to hold its own. It had fallen back already to a position on higher ground; now, as evening came on, and after being as many as fifteen hours under fire, it learnt for the first time of the vast forces massed against it. Worse, it heard of the retirement of the French from Charleroi on its right. Slowly, therefore, and with its line yet unbroken, the right wing fell back. And as it fell back General Sir Philip Chetwode's happy cavalry, with its tunics off, broke up every effort of the enemy to cut up the rear with the yelling electricity of their headlong charges. "We went through the Uhlans like brown paper," said the enthusiastic General.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BATTLE OF THE BRIDGE HEADS.

WHEN the right wing of the British line fell back to the high ground in the course of Sunday afternoon, the force under General Smith-Dorrien lined along the canal had been left in a weakened position. At any moment the enemy might break through the angle of the two forces and fall upon his flank.

When the right wing actually retired his line was endangered. This line, too, had been fighting heavily all day. The enemy's Dragoons and Uhlans had endeavoured to win the canal in a sweeping thunder of hoofs, and had been driven back. After this the enemy played its usual game—had tried to suffocate the British line by sheer weight of numbers. They wanted to get to the canal and over it, either by the bridges still standing or by pontoons they carried with them. The English were determined they should not. Lined along the canal and in the ground about it the Scots

Borderers, the East Surreys, the West Kents, the Suffolks, and the Yorkshire Light Infantry raked the advance of the German infantry for hours, drove them back, and continued to do so without flinching under a rain of shells. As elsewhere, the Germans paved the way for their infantry advance by a tremendously concentrated artillery fire. With their brothers all over the field, the lined-out regiments took this awful bombardment with heads "bloody but unbowed." They sang the war-chant of their legions, "It's a long, long way to Tipperary," and they cheered to a man every time the enemy tried to hit the big gasometer in Mons and missed it, though it probably meant death to many men in the line if that fateful coup had been brought off.

Over their prone ranks, too, the aeroplanes came soaring, giving the range to the avid gunners with their smoke signals and Deitz morse-discs. But here one aeroplane at least played the game too long and too daringly. He came flying above the lines, and he flew too near. The gunners behind let him come on. Then suddenly out of his native air a shell punched him. The machine shivered, crumpled, and fell in a trailing wreck across the sky. It was a score against the air-scouts; but it mattered little. The enemy had the range, and

they hammered away mercilessly at their ruthless, wearing-down tactics.

The West Kents took the initial thrust of the monster attack. A company of that regiment were strung out as advance posts across the canal, and theirs were the rifles that met and engaged the first filaments of the German advance. The enemy found the Britishers at once, too, and packed his skirmishing lines to charge down and overwhelm the Kentish men. The nervy and volatile southerners, from Bromley and Chatham, Maidstone and South London, refused to be overwhelmed. As the rushes came on the level rifles broke up the rush, and massed advances were staunched with a quick energy of good shooting. The first rill of the assault went back, and officers in the German advance battalions began passing a frantic word rearward for guns, guns, guns, and plenty of guns.

Jumping at the tails of the slogging teams, the German guns came into action. Piece after piece flung into position, swung on to the mark, loosed. In a flash of seconds the stubborn West Kents were bathed in shrapnel, were being whipped to death by a whirlwind of lashing bullets. Crouching in their lines, hearing a thousand deaths wailing by them in the air, the West Kents remained as

stubborn as ever. The assault lunged out again, and the men who should have died, but had not, were up, vigorous, alert, active, electric, and they were beating it back. The flames of the charge were quenched again. But the Britishers suffered loss, too, suffered so woefully, that their ranks were but grim parodies of what they had once been, and all their officers were down save Lieutenant Bell. But he remained alive, very much alive with that live handful; and, shattered and seared with wounds as it was, A company, West Kents, still fought the Germans off.

Then, when the attack was building up again, there came doubling in quick lines across the bridge other companies of the same staunch regiment. They arrived in the nick of time, for the Germans under their storm of shelling had worked their front to within three hundred yards of our men. Nimble the new arrivals flung themselves into cover, packed into the trenches, strung themselves out behind the loop-holes of a glass-blowing factory. And nimbly their rifles blazed off in knives and sheets of flame. Under that ardent fire the assault melted, the Germans retired, leaving the problem of crushing the West Kents to be solved by the brow-beating guns. But the West Kents remained obstinate even under the shelling, losing heavily,

that brave and capable officer, Major Pack-Beresford, being among the faithful dead. They fought with a cheerful grimness until night came and they had to fall back across the bridge.

Others, beside the West Kents, were across the canal. The Scottish Borderers, and the East Surreys were here, too, holding the bridge heads against the enemy. There was a battery of guns with the latter. The Germans concentrated on those guns, and, fighting to the last man, all the gunners died. When the pieces were silenced, the grey-green, juggernaut infantry came on. The outposts on the further bank fought with desperation. Attack after attack came at them, and was driven back; but each wave left the little force weakened, and, though reinforcements came, in the end the juggernaut process was successful and the mastery of the further bank was gained. Those who could, made their escape across the bridges. Those who could not, stayed and fought.

A detachment of the Surreys was hemmed in in this way. As soon as they discovered their predicament they resolved to sell their lives dearly. They took cover, and fired until firing was no longer possible; then the heroic few fixed bayonets and charged armies. They were all but exterminated, but they died game.

THE BATTLE OF THE BRIDGE HEADS 33

With the bank held by the Germans, a series of battles began to burn with fury about the bridges. The Engineers had been busy all day blowing up the barges in the canal with gun-cotton, now they blew up all that they could of the viaducts. They did it under fire with the calm audacity of the Engineers. Here Captain Wright, R.E., wounded but unshaken, blew up a bridge under fire and won the V.C.; Lance-Corporal Jarvis won the Cross for destroying a bridge after an hour's desperate work. At one of the bridges the fuse failed to act. It was a bridge held by a devoted company of the Scottish Borderers. In an instant a sergeant and three men of the company dashed out on to the bridge, and under the fire of the enemy ran at the fuse. The three men dropped in their tracks, but the sergeant gained his object. Without losing a precious moment in thought of self, he hacked the fuse short and fired it. When the bridge was destroyed, he, too, was destroyed.

Foiled at the bridges, the enemy massed on the bank, and tried to win a way across with their pontoons. The artillery duel built up to an indescribable clamour as each side strove to drive the other from the mastery of the canal bank. Masses of men advanced on the German side, and were blown out of existence almost immediately by the

British guns and rifles. Still they pressed on, and slowly, slowly, they began to work their pontoon bridge across the smoke-clouded face of the water. They did so under frightful loss and in a battling that had become a positive butchery. As they built out their flat spans the clustering shrapnel puff-balls formed a deadly corona about them, and the startling accuracy of the British guns destroyed their work of blood and wounds. Ten times they got their pontoons nearly over, and ten times the gunners splintered them to ruin.

But by now it was beginning to be understood that the splendid effort of the British was in vain. The enemy were attacking with an increasing, and not a decreasing, force. Away to the east Namur had, quite unexpectedly, fallen; nearer along the same line the French were going back. Fresh hosts, possibly released from the investing lines of Namur, were hurling into the fight. Behind the German front great motor transports were hurrying more and more men to attack the British. Away to the far west, at Tournai, a giant turning movement had unexpectedly developed, and the small force found itself battling against army corps. Sir John French's flanks were in grave danger. It was time to retire here as well as on the right wing.

CHAPTER V.

THE LINE RETIRES.

WITH great reluctance the British Force began to fall back in the evening of Sunday, August 23rd, and throughout the morning of Monday. They still did it fighting desperately against the ever-increasing odds. And they did it with acts of heroism that blazed like diamonds in the fine fabric of the retreat.

The Munsters, the "Dirty Shirts" of Delhi fame, wrote for themselves across the scroll of this retirement a story of undying glory. Called to the aid of a stricken Royal Horse battery, they flung themselves in the path of a charging regiment of Lancers and beat them off with terrific impetuosity. To these guns, and under a storm of shell, they clung throughout the day, and when the order for retirement came, so furious were the Irish lads at having to leave the pieces they had so bravely saved, that they harnessed themselves to the limbers and, scorning the shell-fire, dragged the guns themselves right out of action and into safety.

Only one battery was lost in the retreat ; the other batteries limbered up, and, with traces taut, bits jingling, and steady in line, they trotted out through the haze of the firing with all the coolness they showed on parade at Woolwich in the piping times of peace.

Throughout that night the men fell back in a movement that was terrible but superb. The enemy were determined that the cloak of darkness should not save the force, and all through the black hours they strove to catch and crush the moving columns that were feeling their way through the thick summer darkness, through the lanes, over the fields, through the slag heaps and the litter of factories, across the mesh of railway lines that trail all over this district. And as they went tumbling forward like legions of blind men, the angry appetite of Germany was raging in their rear.

The covering troops, the Guards among them, beat the attacks back with an unfaltering fire, refusing to be annihilated. In their determination to overwhelm the British the Germans had to resort to every mechanical means for searching them out. All night long the frigid beams of the searchlights moved their uncanny arms over the countryside, feeling for the troops. They came

starting in great blanched swords against the night, they swung slowly across the country, turning over every shadow and nosing beneath. They were immutably silent, inexorably deliberate. When they found their quarry they held steady, bathing the men in their callous, unwinking, inhuman glare, while down the lane of light the shrapnel and the singing bullets poured in a spate of death.

When the searchlight failed, the aeroplane took up the task. They hung over the retreat, dropping star shell that lit the country for miles with its pallid flame, and all the men it showed were shelled. But these efforts were unavailing. The troops were superbly handled; nothing went amiss. Through the night and its terrors the British went stumbling, but they stumbled under brilliant guidance. When the dawn came they were still retiring—and they were still unbroken, still undefeated.

Writing to his brother Joseph, the great Napoleon once said that the general who went forward without having first prepared a line of retreat deserved to be shot. General Sir John French was not of the type of leader who came under that drastic ban. He had not only prepared a line of retreat, but he knew exactly how he was going to retreat. It had now become perfectly obvious that the

Germans were concentrating every effort to drive the British right out of the field, that they meant by hook or by crook to smash for the rest of the war "French's contemptible little army." The enemy were crowding every possible man into the volume of attack, and his masses were making desperate efforts to turn the left. He was determined to crush the British if he could, and if he could not, at least to drive the army into the fortress of Maubeuge, where they might be bottled up and presently broken to pieces by the big siege howitzers he had in his train. It was an excellent plan; its one fault was that the British were commanded by a man with brains enough to see through the cunning move. It was Sir John French who dictated the line of retirement, not the German Head-quarter Staff.

Throughout Monday the British fell back to a new position resting on the fortress of Maubeuge, digging themselves in and tangling their front with wire when they arrived. Part of the 1st Corps, under General Douglas Haig, had already reached this position, had already half-buried itself in trenches, when Smith-Dorrien's long line began to lift and to flow back in retirement. As the men of the Second Corps fell back with extreme reluctance, and under the firm impression that they had beaten the

enemy so soundly that this movement was all nonsense, as they came back, the Germans rushed swinging with a threat of enormous power to hurl against the force. There seemed good reason to think that Germany in an exultant mood would come plunging against Smith-Dorrien's right from Bray and Binche, and that if there was enough force behind that rush, the Second Corps would be rolled up and flung out of the schemes of battle once and for all.

But there was to be no rolling up. Sir John French played his game with coolness and skill in spite of the burning excitements of these days. The best way to resist is to attack, is an aphorism of war. Sir John French attacked. General Douglas Haig thrust out at this imperative right the First Division. He strung it out in line of battle from Harmignies, pressing upward against the flooding enemy at Binche. In this countering division marched the Guards' Brigade, and, to leaven the effort with the vehemence of shelling, there were at least one hundred and fifty guns.

The Germans, in the face of this new development, were forced to call off the plunging rush intended to submerge the Second Corps, were forced to hold back men and guns, to put, if possible, a halt to this fine fighting thrust made by Sir

Douglas Haig's attack. At the impact of the two ideas a battle burst out in vehement fury. The line of the First Division was marked across the country with a trailing smoke of heavy guns, and about Binche there swelled to the sky the enormous racket of warring armies. The Germans were hammering away with desperate zeal, frantically anxious to burst through this firm and indomitable front, and to get to the brisk and easier business of cutting up a retreat. The line caught the rushes on its bayonets and tossed them back; the one hundred and fifty guns, served with mercurial zest by some of the finest artillerymen in the world, split and broke and splintered the assaulting German columns every time they gathered to charge. The Division was fulfilling its purpose. The Division was refusing to be hustled out of its set intentions. The Division was holding off the raging Germans in a calm and dignified way.

And behind that line of fire and smoke and steel and fine humanity, General Smith-Dorrien's men fell back. They moved imperturbably, beating back the attack that was consistently pushed forward at them, with the unexcited ability of first-class soldiers. For five fighting miles the unshaken corps retired, until it came to rest, its right finding cover of natural strength in the embank-

ments and pit heaps and pit-head works of the mining village of Frameries, and its left extending by Dour westward to Quarouble.

At this time, in his turn, General Smith-Dorrien faced about and gave battle, holding up the torrent while Sir Douglas Haig's 1st Division fell back on to the Maubeuge position. Against Smith-Dorrien, too, the Germans piled up an incredible attack, and mass after mass of the grey-men were hurled against the line, only to be met by a savage fire, to be broken and flung back. Battery after battery was brought up by motor traction into position behind the German front, and battery after battery began its appalling vomiting of noise and death, until it seemed impossible that even one largish universe could stand the strain of all this noise, or one body of men exist before the deadly outpouring of shells. Yet the line existed, it suffered its incredible wounds but fought on. Regiments were all but blown to pieces, but these pieces still fought. The West Kents lost three hundred men and four officers, but what was left was indomitable stuff and unyielding. The Cheshires came in for such a shelling that some of the men were killed by concussion alone, but that did not prevent their rifles firing in steady bursts, or dim the fervour of their bayonets.

And as the battle developed in rage and vigour, it became more and more apparent that the Germans were swinging great masses from the direction of Tournai in the deliberate hope of turning Smith-Dorrien's flank. It was certain that one corps at least was engaged in this fateful stroke, and that if it succeeded, the battling Second Corps would have the greatest difficulty in the world in saving itself. That it should have less chance to save itself, or to separate men to ward off this flanking blow, the Germans redoubled their frontal attack, and into a line crowded with the thousands of one Army Corps they packed tens of thousands of another corps. So, out-gunned and out-numbered, and all but out-flanked, General Smith-Dorrien was battling for his very life. All the German corps poured into his fatigued but unintimidated ranks every energy of death-giving and wound-dealing agency they could muster. The place raved with an abomination of sound. The sky was veiled with the smoke pall of an unimaginable shelling. The British lines were sowed with the awful storm of shell, lashed with the myriad scourges of shrapnel. And under this cloud of fire the dense infantry masses pushed forward to buckle the front.

The British line was made of unbreakable material; it stood rigid. More of our troops (the 19th

Brigade from Valenciennes) had hurried up from the communications and came to help their fellows in the battle; but, in spite of this relief, the pressure was too enormous. Soon Sir Charles Fergusson, on the right, was complaining of the abnormal strain. His was the Fifth Division at Frameries, and the Germans were striking hard and often at his front, so that they could break through, and by breaking through break the British line by getting well between the Second Corps and the First. So urgent was the call, so desperate his need, that General Allenby's cavalry was at once moved out to his aid. Here they did brave work, checking with headlong charges the over-impetuous Germans. It was here, at Thulin, that the 9th Lancers attempted with splendid but unavailing courage to silence some German guns.

In the line before them a battery of heavy guns was cutting the British front with the savagery of their fire. The guns were well concealed under straw thatching, and the British artillery could make no impression upon them. Word was sent to the 9th Lancers that these guns were to be cleared out. Colonel Campbell formed his squadrons up, and as the first two wheeled into line, the third, C Squadron, determined not to be left behind, wheeled, cheering with them.

The command snapped out, and over a field laced with shell, fogged with battle smoke, and drenched with pouring rifle bullets, the 9th went racing to the guns. The charge was as fruitless as it was brilliant. Torn to pieces by shell fire as they galloped forward, the Lancers were pulled up before the guns by entanglements concealed in the long grass. The squadrons were all but annihilated and had to retreat.

But they made of their retirement an act of bravery that gave them fame and earned for one of their leaders, Captain Grenfell, the Victoria Cross. Wounded by shrapnel already, Captain Grenfell extricated his men and found cover for them under a railway embankment. Here were gathered what was left of the 119th R.F.A. Battery, and not only did Captain Grenfell save his own men, but he brought the guns out of action also. The guns had to be man-handled to safety by the Captain and his men, but it was done. He was badly wounded once more, but he got the cavalrymen and guns and gunners away, and though he was taken to a temporary hospital, he broke out, refused to be treated, and took his place at the head of his men.

Thanks to their unbreakable demeanour, thanks to the cheerful and singing valour of the men, their

steadiness and their eminent abilities to manœuvre under fire, thanks to the cool and sure efficiency of the leaders, the two Corps were able to fall back to that line—extending from Jenlain to Bry, and then eastward to Bavay at the centre, and eastward again until the right wing rested on the steel and concrete lines of the fortress of Maubeuge—that had been planned and prepared for them. The position was reached by nightfall of the 24th, and, after a day of terrible arduous and superb heroism, the force hoped, at least, for some few hours of rest.

Heroic deeds, however, were unavailing against such odds. The pressure continued unabated. The French were still falling back, and the British had no support to face the determined efforts of the enemy to get round the left flank and so end the first great engagement of the war in complete disaster for the Allied arms. General Sir John French, therefore, determined to retire again. “The operation,” he laconically admits, “was full of danger and difficulty, not only owing to the very superior force in front of me, but also to the exhaustion of the troops.” In this terse sentence does he discuss one of the most brilliant military feats of modern times. The “very superior force” stood for no less than 120,000 of picked German troops.

They were animated by a burning determination to crush the force before them. They felt that they must beat the English now or never.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GUARDS AND LANDRECIES.

ON Tuesday, August 25th, the most critical phase of the battle of Mons began to develop. The Germans were receiving greater and greater accumulations of men, and they determined to use them with all their force and power. To stand before that host was to court disaster.

“Once more, therefore,” as a military writer has put it, “our troops drew off from the death-trap and fell back on to Cambrai and Le Cateau.” The British troops had been legging it for two days; they had been subjected to an attack that has no parallel in the history of warfare; they had spent days and nights without food; they were suffering from a multitude of wounds; they were crying out for sleep. But they retired stubbornly facing about at times with undiminished ardour. As the infantry retired the cavalry was loosed at the Germans again, and again they went in, yelling,

to the terror of their foes. The German cavalry and infantry simply turned and ran from them. Every now and then the British infantry faced about, and from hastily dug trenches swept their foe back with devastating volleys. The English artillery turned, and with an electric "action front," fell into position and fought the Germans off. As usual, they fought until every spark of life had been extinguished. The 80th Battery R.F.A. worked their guns to the last gasp. The two other batteries brigaded with them had been silenced, and one by one five of their own pieces had gone out of action; yet, undismayed, Lieutenant Mirrlees and two gunners kept a gun going at a sound rate of fire until the last shell had been expended, and they were forced to retire, all of them unwounded.

Again, as in previous battles, the enemy's aeroplanes were brought into use to locate the defending lines; only by now our own aviators had taken their measure. As one soared over the army, up went a British plane after him. The German swerved and tried to make off, but the Englishman was too skilful. He rose up in the sweeping spirals of flight, working to get above his rival. With all his cunning the German strove to break away. For two minutes the gaping army played audience to

the new and thrilling drama of air fighting. Then both men began to fire, the little jetting puffs of smoke breaking way from the machines in pretty, soft-looking bulbs of vapour. They fired and circled in a breathless way, neither getting the mastery. All at once the German machine checked and came swooping earthwards on a long vol-plane. When it touched ground the aviator was dangerously wounded, and the waiting infantry captured his machine and burnt it.

By noon of this day part of our army was trenched in the cornfields about the villages, principally that of Cateau, and holding the enemy for the time. But only for the time. To aid the devilish work of his field batteries and his infantry attack, the German had brought up his heavy howitzers. The huge shells from these burst with vast and shattering explosions all along the English line, blowing men in groups to fragments, slaying by sheer concussion, and digging for themselves with their explosion great cavities that would bury men by the half-dozen. And as the day went on these monsters were moved closer and closer, until they seemed right on top of the defending trenches. Flesh and blood, one thought, could not stand this Gargantuan attack, but the British soldier stood it. Cheerfully he made jokes about the personal

appearance of the shells, coolly he smoked his "fag," admired the self-sacrifice of his officers, talked football, and sat tight. When the Germans advanced their packed infantry, the packed infantry "got it in the neck." The rain of shells has yet to be fired that will damp the courage of the British infantryman.

Another night, and another repetition of the old story. The French still retiring, and the overwhelming enemy pushing forward with all his strength to envelop the British left flank. And in actions the same old story, too. Once more the tired but stubborn English lifted themselves out of their trenches and went back. Far into the evening Sir Douglas Haig was manœuvring his men and getting them back, with the skill of infinite capacity, along the road that goes through the eastern fringes of the Forêt de Mormal. As his men moved back, Smith-Dorrien at Cateau stood firm, fending off the attack to the west. By the evening the retiring First Corps arrived in Landrecies. Here the utter exhaustion of the force called a halt, as it was seen to be impossible to move them further. The army bivouacked, and it was hoped that the enemy would hold off for the night at least.

It was a vain hope. At 9.30 and in the dark of

the summer night the pickets of Coldstreamers guarding the road that came out of the forest heard a muffled approach of an armed force. They challenged, and out of the darkness there came a voice crying out, "We are the French. Do not fire." The men held their fire; for the French, in answer to an urgent demand from the British commander, were expected to arrive. The men were not the French. A soldier in a French uniform certainly got among the Guards; he put his hand out to a private to shake hands, and as the private responded he stabbed the defenceless Britisher in the stomach. Then at that signal the Germans in French clothing made a rush. They caught the Guards unaware, but only for a minute. The Coldstreams opened on them briskly, and soon the first line was falling back.

But they came on again in enormous numbers, pouring down into the narrow streets of the little town from out the forest in a river of men. The Guards, 150 in number, were not to be beaten back. They lay on their faces across the road and sprayed a withering fire on to the head of the advancing columns of the German 9th Corps, as they moved on solidly against the town. Their maxims, mounted in the road and on house-tops commanding the road, were rap-rap-rapping all

night, whirling their bullets into the Germans with the nervous urgency of sewing machines.

The clamour of battle that filled the narrow canon of the street was indescribable. The attacking infantry were carved down in solid chunks of death. All night the Guards battled, while behind them an exhausted army snatched the life-giving sleep. If they had broken, that army would have been overwhelmed.

And not only in this one spot against the Coldstreamers did the Germans strive to crush their way into the town. Through all the entrants at the northern side of Landrecies the great oozing attack was coming on. The whole of the Fourth Guards Brigade woke from sleep to immediate activity in arms. The Irish Guards took a German rush through the narrow streets on the points of their bayonets and thrust it back over its litter of dead. Against the blackness of the night there began to bloom the great red flowers of gunfire. Shells began to burst above and among the Guards with their vivid and incandescent flashes. Houses were struck, and the walls fell outward in clouds of dust and avalanches of scoriated brick. The flames of houses began to leap and dance against the night and to turn the battle into a writhing inferno, in which was excited and vehement humanity

fighting and moving with the jerky motions of battle amid the bands and billows of thick and stinging smoke.

At the men thrown into huge relief by this glare, the Germans in great strength launched their attack. They punched the heads of columns into the gaps of streets, and against the *chevaux de frise* of bayonets, swung their masses to get round to the west, in their old trick trying to force a wedge between the First and the Second Corps. But their old trick was a stale trick now; the British were habituated to it, ready for it. Troops were jerked up with grim and adamant lines, and with long and slashing volleys they knocked the virtue out of the turning idea. And in Landrecies proper the unwavering Guards took every surge assault upon their *barrage* of bayonets and sent it rocking back with an undertow of wounds.

Into the jam of battle before the Homeric 150 holding the main road into Landrecies, the enemy brought up a gun to within two hundred yards of the British line, and at point-blank range began to fire on the devoted Coldstreamers. For a moment it seemed as though the defence must cave under that decimating impact of shell-fire. Finely the major rallied them: "For God's sake, boys, don't retire. Come on up," he yelled, and the ranks

closed and fought afresh. Rush after rush was made at the little band, but it held firm. Then guns were spun up urgently to the right; the gunners running the pieces forward by hand alone. They came to action, their grinning muzzles laid to the flash of the enemy's gun. Then one of the gunners silenced the German gun with a well-aimed shot, and under the relief of its silence the maxims and the rifles worked a more vigorous havoc in that congested place.

Still the fight raved on against a defence not only drenched with the fatigue of much marching and fighting, but also a defence that was never quite strong enough to meet all it was called upon to meet. Away through the blue darkness to the east the flames of another great fight breathed, fluttering against the sky. At Maroilles, a segment of the First Corps was also engaged, also fighting bitterly. All the terrors of an ugly rout hung over British arms, since the Germans seemed determined to force their way through the right, get among our sleep-drugged men and cut the army to pieces. It was a desperate and crucial time. It was a time when the destinies of armies, and perhaps empires, hung in the balance of an hour.

Bunching and clattering gallopers flung with a

headlong drumming of hoofs to the east, and to two French divisions bivouacked to the east. Through the darkness of the tree-knit lanes, through a thousand chances of an abrupt spitting shot in the blackness of the night, these men went for aid on the wings of immense urgency. Behind them the battle filled the world with its dull and quaking roar, and the flames of firing dappled all the sky. In the core of that firing and fighting a few brave men were keeping armies at bay, fighting through mists of blood to hold the enemy off and save their fellows who lay unheeding and beyond feeling in the log-like sleep of utter exhaustion. For an eternity of hours these few men fought, praying for relief, gradually growing hopeless because it seemed never to come. Then when their wearied bodies all but refused to perform the duties assigned to them in battle, a crackling of fire began to live in the right.

It began in the jerky, in the disconnected, and the inconsequent fashion of a "set-piece" kindled at a firework display. The east was full of crackling and snapping, with blank silences in between the outbreaks. Then the jumbled noises steadied, grew, fused into an immense and growing swell of explosions, expanded awfully and deliberately to the vastnesses of full battle. The French divisions

were coming up, the French line was extending and working forward into the fight.

Soon the tired men in Landrecies and Maroilles began to feel the reflex of their advance. The virulence of the attack against them began to lose its acid; the vehemence of the assaults began to degenerate to feebleness. Soon the fight was spasmodic, without snap; the artillery fire nerveless and unconvincing in its anger. The French were making themselves felt, they were distracting attention, they were giving anxiety to the attacking commander. Soon the attack itself tailed off, dwindled to a hiccupy firing and a flaccid shelling. Dawn lifted its drawn and sleepless face over Landrecies and the battle was done.

It had been a wonderful and terrible affair. Our men had lost badly, but they had saved the sleeping army and the strength of Britain. The Germans had done nothing save disappoint themselves, and they had lost appallingly. The grey-clad dead were found piled everywhere, across the heads of the roads, in the ditches, and strewn in their hundreds the open spaces; 1,500 Germans were accounted for in the short space our bearers had for their work, what could not be accounted for must have reached a horrible magnitude of figures.

And this, by the way though crucial, was not the entire fighting of that ugly night. Further along the line, in the gap by Le Cateau, through which the Germans strove to pass, the 5th Cavalry Brigade were busy checking and holding the advancing army and covering the retreat. The Royal Lancaster Regiment was doing the same thing, quenching all assertiveness on the enemy's part by a disturbing rush of British steel. The Dublin Fusiliers were in the thick of it too, fighting like demons, in the usual Irish way.

CHAPTER VII.

“THE GLORIOUS TWENTY-SIXTH.”

THE morning of the 26th of August broke ominously. The left wing, under Smith-Dorrien, lay in an exposed position, and was meeting the full force of the concentrated German attack. Three hundred thousand Germans were trying their hardest to encircle the tiny force, six hundred guns were firing at it, trying to batter it to pieces. It seemed impossible that anything could save the corps. The Germans were apparently of this opinion, for the Berlin Press Bureau came out with the triumphant pæan of a message that said, “The British Army, beaten before Maubeuge, has been forced to retire south. It is completely surrounded.” Berlin became wild with joy, and visions of a second Sedan floated before the enraptured imagination of the populace. The towns throughout the empire were painted with the glowing pigments of flags, and joy-bells made a haze of the summer air. Britain was doomed. Britain in a military sense was finished.

Indeed, the situation was desperate enough. Smith-Dorrien's force, lying with its right at Le Cateau, the centre at the point of an angle behind Caudry, and the left, the Fourth Infantry Division of the Third Corps, flung to the aid of the bone-wearied men by rail and motor lorry, behind Serainvilliers, just below Cambrai, this force and line was attacked so fiercely that it became dangerous to withdraw it, because withdrawal would mean complete annihilation.

It was impossible for General French to send any support; the French cavalry of General Sordet, appealed to, was far too exhausted to make a move in any direction. Alone General Smith-Dorrien's army faced an enemy pouring forward with the exultance of men certain of victory. On itself it alone depended, in itself was its own salvation.

“There had been no time to entrench the position,” and from unprotected fields “the troops showed a magnificent front to the terrible fire which confronted them,” wrote the English commander, covering in those few words one of the most glorious days in the history of English arms. All day long the infantry fought under a shrapnel fire that might have “been turned on through a hose.” All day long the British infantry stood firm against the swarming attacks thrust out against them.

Six times did the enemy try to break the line, and six times the attack itself was broken and driven back. The enemy raged at the defenders with an ardour that was ferocious. Not only had the "contemptible little army" frustrated all their efforts to turn the flank and win the great battle for the German arms, not only had it saved the whole Allied line by the unshakable valour of its resistance, but it was scorning all the accepted rules of warfare, and refusing to be beaten when all the text-books could prove it crushed. No wonder the German raged at General Smith-Dorrien's men with all the passion of his packed masses. Smith-Dorrien stood between him and Paris. Smith-Dorrien held the door to France.

There was brave work done by brave regiments. The Dublin Fusiliers were well in it, and piling up honours for themselves. Whole ranks of the advancing foe were blotted out by the withering leaden blast from their rifles. The Dubliners were lying in a turnip-field quite unprotected, and the enemy's machine guns played, spraying on the ranks, tearing them to pieces and filling them with wounds; but they gave as much as they took, and a trifle more.

The Somerset Light Infantry did as well. Not only did they hold the Germans with the stern

iron fire of their line, but when the overwhelming pressure of multitudes pressed them rearward, they turned back in their retreat, faced the oncoming enemy, pulled them up with a slashing fire, then charged them as they lined out on a string of hills set with villages. They had been marching for twenty-seven hours, but that made no difference; they went sweeping through the shrapnel straight at the foe. They got into the villages all right, but the enemy opened on them from a cornfield, and they had to retire. After the battle only two hundred men of the battalion answered the roll-call.

The Connaughts, too, got home with a magnificent charge, in this magnificent fight, going through the enemy and tossing them aside like hay; in this way they retook from the enemy six of our guns. They were not even thoroughly satisfied with retaking them, for they went forward, driving the foemen back, and under their screen the gunners were able to creep up and draw the artillery off.

The Pompadours (Essex Regiment) were the heroes of a more dramatic moment too. The heavy German cavalry came at them at a huge rush and tried to break them. The Britishers had only a moment to prepare, but without hesitation

they came out of their trenches and rallied in groups. As they rallied, their rifle-magazines rapped off with the crisp fervour of defiance, and men and horses went down in ugly sprawling heaps. Still the horsemen came on. The thin, nasal voices of the officers could be heard against the din of the battle, and the naked sabres came slanting to the engage. The busy rifles flared again—and the cavalry charge was ended.

The Gordons were in the fine fury of the fighting, with all the fervour of their clan. Like the rest of the British regiments, they strung their line amid open fields, and without any adequate means of cover they held the enemy off through all the long hours of that red and awful day. The Germans ploughed their line horribly with their cyclone of shrapnel, and they lunged rush after rush at the regiment to follow up and complete the work of the artillery fire. But the Gordons saw that these infantry attacks cost the enemy dear. They checked the advance when that was humanly possible with the steadiest and coldest of rifle fire, and when the Germans thrust their way through the pelting bullets they rose from their trenches with every power of their dash and spirit, and carved the assault to pieces with a true Highland charge.

Avalanche after avalanche of fresh German

troops were hurled at the indomitable line until it seemed certain that the tartan must be drowned in grey. But always when the full rush of the invading sea seemed likely to win its way, the strong ranks rose up and hurled it back. Into the undertow of these rushes the enemy poured regiment after regiment, determined to win not by weight and skill, but by numbers. The Highlanders shook the Germans off, and, in their own time, retired steadily towards Ham.

The British cavalry, especially the cavalry of General Chetwode's 5th Brigade, fought ceaselessly, brilliantly, and untiringly. Time after time the rush of the German horsemen was pulled up dead by vivid counter-charges delivered by the British squadrons. At no time did the enemy's horsemen show themselves at all capable of resisting the swinging and scientific recklessness of the British cavalry charge. Even our light horse, like the 12th Lancers and the 20th Hussars, rode through the heavy German squadrons with ease, and a heavy corps like the Scots Greys simply broke them to pieces.

The Guns, in the inveterate way of the Guns, fought with their strong and marvellous calmness. There were only one hundred and fifty of them to face the enormous and concentrated fire of six

hundred, but they faced their enemy with demeanour unflinching and unhampered in efficiency. The quick notes of their firing met and fought with the deeper voices of the German guns. Now they found a battery, fixed on it, and ground it to powder with the electric squalls of their pounding shells. Again and again they swung to bear on the throng of the grey-bodied charge, and rent and tore the advancing ranks with the cold and unfaltering science of their shooting. Now and then they met the German cavalry on the rush, their muzzles dropped, shrapnel was changed to case, and the huddled ranks, with their flashings of steel and their throbbing thunders of hoofs, were gouged with long red lanes of slaughter, were blown away in chunks by the storm-claps of the shells.

Always the British Artillery fought as the British Artillery has fought through the long and splendid annals of its history. For five hours they held their own under an inferno of fire that would not leave them alone, that pounded away at them through every second of every minute until the guns went out fighting, as the gunners died fighting over the dripping trails of their pieces. Even when the battered remnants of the wonderful batteries were forced to retire, they went back without flinching over open country, through avenues

of shell-fire that followed and searched and scorched every movement. But they went back with their heads up, and their spirit unbeaten and undimmed.

“ At length it became apparent that, if complete annihilation was to be avoided, a retirement must be attempted,” Sir John French’s report states. This retirement was begun in the early afternoon, and the artillery and the cavalry covered it with fearless devotion. Smith-Dorrien fell back, as he had held on, fighting. Slowly and calmly the lines withdrew, and the enemy, exhausted by the determination of the resistance, was powerless to push home a victorious attack. So the day of days was over, and General Smith-Dorrien had saved the Army.

“ I say without hesitation that the saving of the left wing of the Army could never have been accomplished unless a commander of rare and unusual coolness, intrepidity, and determination had been present to personally conduct the operations.”

In those grave and sincere words Sir John French registers General Smith-Dorrien’s claim to eternal fame. On that day the General commanding the British left wing took his stand beside Sir John Moore in the annals of his country.

CHAPTER VIII.

SIXTEEN WELSHMEN.

THAT day, "the Glorious Twenty-sixth," was the last day on which the British arms had to bear alone the brunt of the huge German attack. On the two following days French forces, cavalry under General Sordet and reserve divisions under General D'Amade, came into line with our force and eased the awful power of the thrust.

The pressure was eased certainly, but the pressure was there all the same, and though the British went back in order and in greater ease, it was with rear-guards flaming fire, halting, and checking the rush of pursuit with vivid outbursts of incessant little battles. Through the thick summer night that spanned August 26th and 27th the troops fell back steadily, the columns pouring in thick fat worms of men and horses, of guns and wagons and motor lorries, towards Paris. As they fell back there came from the rear the muttering of firing, the slashing and sudden outburst of rifle firing,

and now and then the heavy and sullen boom of the guns.

All that night, all the next day, the weary British troops strode onward in a coma of fatigue. Men were falling asleep on their horses, men were dozing on their wagon seats, men even were sleeping as they marched. The columns as they moved, plaques of khaki in a hot and biting haze of shifting golden dust, were saturated and benumbed with fatigue. They heard the battle behind them, they were too tired to care or to listen; they heard the slash of rifles at their heels, they were too benumbed to be anxious. They knew that some stern, grim, brave fighting was going on away there behind, that plucky handfuls of men were flinging themselves across the onweeping advent of the Germans, but they were not quickened at all by the thrill of bravery of these men. Stumbling, groping, choking in the dust, stung and tormented in their sweat-chafed flesh, drugged and embittered by lack of sleep, they went on, only asking for rest, only asking for the saving anodyne of a bed.

Yet behind them, fighting in a barrier of steel and khaki, men of indomitable spirit were holding back the Germans; saving and safeguarding the British Corps. Among these men were the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. Among the many deeds of bravery

shining in the grey fabric of retirement, one particular deed of the Welsh Fusiliers stands out in splendour. The Welsh Fusiliers have a record in valour, and in this glorious and bitter retreat they upheld it. When the British fell back, they, too, fell back, calmly, taking their places in the retreat without panic or flurry. Through the chaotic and whirling days of incessant attack, superhuman bombardment and unsleeping vigilance, they did their work as all the British regiments did their work, capably and well. It was on the bitterest day of all, on August 26th, when all the force of the attack was concentrated against Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's Corps at Cambrai, that their efficiency and their courage were called upon to endure a tremendous test; they took over a rearguard action and saved the British columns.

It was a brilliant and glowing piece of work. Somewhere south of Landrecies was a bridge spanning a river (probably one on the Oise below Wasigny), and across this bridge the bone-weary, fight-worn British columns pressed southward before the enormous rush of the German assault. The Welsh Fusiliers, as the *Western Mail* explains, were called upon to hold this bridge, were ordered to check all aggressiveness that the Germans might show while our troops were crossing. They were

to hold the bridge itself until our corps got a safe distance away. The 23rd went to their posts at once; they were as weary, as battle-worn as their fellows, but duty gave them this desperate and onerous position, and they accepted it.

The Welshmen set about their work with soldierly spirit. Companies were strung out, without cover, in turnip fields that dominated the zone of the advance, and the rifles and the maxims of these companies beat steadily outward at the enemy on every occasion that he showed signs of pushing forward his assault. On the bridge, eighty men with a maxim put themselves into a state of workmanlike defence, and started that defence, whipping the path of the advance with an unceasing outpouring of bullets. Meanwhile, as these dogged and brave men fought, the filing companies of the retiring army passed in a vast line over the bridge, making for safety along the road to Paris.

The Germans came on, hurrying up great masses to thunder through the thin defence and fall in might upon the moving columns. They came up in force and tried to break through with numbers. The grim and smiling Welshmen let them come—up to a point. At that point every magazine was emptied, every maxim roared and raced as it ate up cartridge belts at unbelievable speeds. The

German attack was blown backward by the wind of lead ; it left the débris of its dead about the fields, retired to concentrate itself again in energy and numbers. Over the bridge the tail of the retirement passed, moving unfaltering and unfearing. The Welsh Fusiliers were holding back the swinging steel of the pursuit, and they felt they would be safe.

The Germans pushed forward a thick column of assault, a swarm of German riflemen worked forward, endeavouring to decimate the brave few men covering the retreat with the frantic firing of their rifles. Before this cloud of attack the companies in the turnip fields were forced to give ground, to fall back, and to leave the main defence of the retreat to the men and the maxim on the bridge. The army was over by now. But it was still moving somewhere along the road. It had not yet reached safety. If the Welsh failed, the enemy could still rush swamping on to the straggling columns, and the retreat would become a rout.

The Germans knew this, and came on in a rage of desire. The Welsh Fusiliers on the bridge knew it, and quenched that rage to slay with the cool deliberation of their shooting. The bridge was an admirable affair, with strong stone parapets, and from behind these parapets an awful fire was kept up against the German advance.

Gradually the gallant company, C Company, was worn and frayed to nothing. The place was awkward with brave dead Welshmen, and only the fewest possible were left. Only sixteen were left.

Sixteen Welsh Fusiliers, and an army of Germans against them, and an arsenal of German rifles and mitrailleuses pouring death on to the bridge at every angle. The task seemed hopeless. To stay seemed fatal. Only death could come to the men if they held on. They stayed. They held on. They had their orders. The army was still marching away to safety behind them. The rush of the Germans still had to be checked. They remained, their level rifles and their one bubbling maxim spitting defiance into the German assault. And for an hour and a half they stayed.

The Germans did not know their weakness, or they might have risked a rush; but if they did not know this, they kept up so terrible a fire on the bridge that they might have been facing a battalion, and were eager to exterminate it. The air became drenched with lead. The stone parapets of the bridge flew to splinters under the beating of the thronging bullets. The mitrailleuses screamed in their frantic desire to kill. Behind the parapets and the mounds of their dead the sixteen Fusiliers met the attack with an equable and unhesitant

rifle fire. When the rifles burnt their hands with the scorching heat of firing, they threw that rifle down and picked up that of a dead comrade. They fought on with sublime equanimity, blenching every attempt to rush with the smash of their rifles.

Soon it became obvious to them that such a resistance could not go on for ever. The Germans had reached the river bank, were constructing a bridge to cross the river. The Welsh Fusiliers realised that it was time to go. But before they went they had to destroy the bridge upon which they fought. They had been expecting some Engineers to come and help them, but they never came. They resolved to break the bridge themselves. The officer in command ordered the men to retire, and clambered down below the bridge to burst a charge under it and blow it up while the men fell back. He was, no doubt, inexpert in explosives, for though he placed the charge he remained by it too long, and when it detonated he was killed. He was a brave man, and gave his death gladly, for if he were dead he had done all that was necessary. The bridge was completely destroyed.

The devoted fifteen who were left alive retired as they had been ordered to retire. They carried the maxim with them, and went back at the run. They had to cross open ground, and as they passed

over it the entirety of the German force loosed at them in a passion of frustrated anger. But if the Germans were bad shots before, they were worse shots now. None of the men were hit, all of the men escaped, and rejoined what remained of their regiment. It was a wonderful and wondrous piece of work, accomplished quietly and with a soldierly lack of demonstration, as it had been accomplished with a simple and soldierly splendour of purpose and spirit. They did not parade their valour, but the Army knew, for the Army had been saved by that gallant action.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ODYSSEY OF WEARINESS.

WITH flashes of valour sparkling along all the roads of the retirement, the bone-weary men of the British Army fell back through the serene fields of France, and, under a smiling sun, shuffled on to the Somme and the Oise, and thence on to Paris.

The Second Corps, still stiff with the wounds of Wednesday the glorious, marched back through St. Quentin and Ham and on to Noyon. The First Corps crossed the Oise below Wassigny, aimed for and passed Guise, marched wearily through the torment of their own dust parallel with the river, crossed again near La Fere, and joined ranks with their tired brothers of the Second Corps at Noyon.

Through the nights and the days of August 27th and 28th the men fell back ; pressed a little by the enemy, but never with the vehemence that had made the days of battle so terrible. Their chiefest enemy in these scorched and dusty days were thirst and fatigue.

There was no rest. Through a mirage of miles the shuffling infantry, the staggering and creaking

wagons, the floundering horses went in a slow ooze upon the roads. The travail of retreat went on until men's brains were overwrought, and they began to see commonplace things assuming all the movements and the shapes of phantasy. Haystacks took motion and walked beside the men, cottages blurred and became distorted like things seen through bad glass, trees formed ranks and fell in step with the weary columns; ghostly Uhlans seemed to spur like Valkyries through the dancing air. The march was a nightmare of bad dreams and limp and wearied bodies. Eye-witnesses tell how horses dropped in their traces, how men fell out and sank prone by the wayside, caring not at all if the Uhlan lance found them, caring only for the drugged oblivion of sleep. When loads could not be drawn by the horses, or carried by the men, those loads were thrown into the ditches and left to Germany. A heavy gun overturned: with the blank stocism of fatigue, the gunners left it where it fell, and the river of retreat flowed round it, the men scarcely lifting their eyes to look at it as they drifted onward.

But even the monotonies and slow tortures of retreat had its glories and its quiet and simple heroism. The writer who has been drawn upon for some of the above facts, came up with two

ambulance wagons and their water-filter carts standing bleak and waiting in the half-tones of the dawn. The officer who had charge of the wounded had gone on to find firing to boil water for his stricken charges, and for the moment the water-carts stood without guard and authority.

Out of the dust-drenched road, on to the scene there came a battalion of exhausted infantry. They moved listlessly, with the thirst pangs of fighting and marching upon them. They saw the water-carts, and dashed at them at once. No oasis was ever so happily come upon. They clustered in a swarm about the spiketts fighting for a drink. They would have fought for it too, in the ordinary way; they were in desperate plight. They did not. Up to them spurred the narrator of the incident. He got among them and told them there was little enough water left in the carts, and that was for the wounded.

“I am thirsty myself,” he said, “and I am awfully sorry for you chaps, but you see how it is; the wounded must come first.”

There arose not even a murmur from the parched tongues of the dust-dry men.

“Quite right, sir. Didn’t know they were hospital water-carts,” the men called. The water was left, and with their aching thirsts the men marched on

again.* Tommy is not only a hero on the particular occasions of battle-fields, he is the lawful son of Sir Philip Sidney anywhere.

Not only thirst and exhaustion made labour of the roads; there were little galling and painful fights also. The Uhlans in their galloping attacks came up with the fringes of the rearguards now and then, and a tiny and vehement rattling of firing would leap up spasmodically. It would continue in throbbing bursts for minutes and then die down, with nothing particular done save more wounded for the care of the overburdened Royal Army Medical Corps, more graves to be dug by the peasants, and yet another overlay of strain put upon the aching nerves of the men.

Sometimes, too, the enemy's advance guard, coming along in their swift stride, would overtake a segment of our line, and then a graver and more fateful episode would break out. There were many of these affairs along the wide rear of the retirement. Many were more painful to the Germans than to our men. But some were hurtful to us, and in one the Gordons suffered badly.

The 1st Gordons, marching steadily through the dark, took the wrong lane of a maze of roads, and

* This story and the story of the Gordons which follows are taken from Mr. John Buchan's "Nelson's History of the War," vol. II.

drifted away from the main body of Smith-Dorrien's men. Somewhere near two o'clock in the darkest of the morning, they were following a narrow lane, marching, tired but unsuspecting, between the wire-fencing that hemmed the narrow channel. Marching thus, they were fired on. From their left there came the flame-spit, and the sharp spatter of rifles, and over their heads bullets whined.

The battalion—or rather what Mons and Cambrai had left of the battalion—halted. The men were not surprised, only pained. They felt that a particularly bitter mistake had been perpetrated. Not a thought of Germans occurred to them. All they felt was that a self-important French picket had taken them for foes, and had loosed at them without stopping to inquire. They had reason to think in this way. They understood that the whole object of retirement was to get into touch with a supporting French force.

The commander of the Highlanders, Colonel W. E. Gordon, a fine and brave man who had already the Victoria Cross to his credit, drove his horse through a gap in the fence wires, and rode across the open field at the firing. In a moment the waiting men heard him calling through the night :

“ *Les Anglais ! Les Anglais !* ”

If there was an answer it was not heard in the

road, but again the Colonel's voice lifted in French as he addressed men whom he thought Allies.

The men, of course, were anything but Allies. Quickly the Highlanders realised the unpleasant fact. Against the shadows, and moving to cut them off, they saw the blacker shadows of massed men. On their front, on their flanks, they heard the creak of battle harness, the click of ammunition boots, the rattle of arms. The Colonel realised the danger too. From the field there was the sound of the horse being jerked round, the rapid hammer of hoofs as the Colonel leapt towards his men. Then the Germans fired.

From both front and flanks the thousand flames of rifles were dancing in the dark, the quiet of night was split by the crackling of a thousand magazines worked at a full fury of pace. Into the unsuspecting Gordons a solid sheet of lead swept with a terrible impact ; and men went down.

They went down in heaps, the Colonel among the first of those to fall. And the total of the hit accumulated rapidly and discouragingly, though the Highlanders gripped themselves together and strove to hand the Germans off with a resolute fire. But with that spate of death poured into them from three sides their case was hopeless. In a vehement fight of minutes the tragic episode was

ended. Nearly all those not killed were wounded, and even those not wounded were with the hurt taken prisoners.

The Gordons marched with Smith-Dorrien's force. Douglas Haig's columns, pouring down through the pleasant lands of Oise, also had their tragedies. Douglas Haig and his fagged battalions had been pushing south through the sun while Smith-Dorrien fought at Le Cateau. Because the few British had held up the many Germans, the retiring men had been free from gross attack. Yet though pursuit had slackened, there was enough vigour in its expiring strength to catch a brave regiment and to decimate it.

That regiment was the Munster Fusiliers. Halted on the night of the 26th August in the rearguards of the retreat, the messenger that was to give them their moving orders never reached them. Morning came and the Munsters were alone, for their companion regiments were moving south, quite ignorant of their isolation. So the Germans caught them.

The Germans found them out and came on to the attack with all the vehemence of overwhelming strength. They determined to smother the Irishmen with the mass of their numbers, to leave nothing to chance, to stake everything on force.

The Munsters, however, are not of an easily annihilated sort. They had but a battalion to pit against accumulated Germany, but a battalion is enough to fight a good fight. The Irishmen, refusing to acknowledge the military rules which decreed that they should consider themselves overwhelmed, fought. They fought with a faint hope that help would be jerked up to them, they fought in the hope that they might cut their way clear. Both hopes were futile, but their fighting was not. Here, in the valley of the Oise, near Guise, the unfearing and splendid Munsters put up a dazzling battle against enormous odds.

“The Germans came at us from all points—horse, foot, and artillery and all—and the air was raving with screaming, shouting men waving swords and rifles, blazing away at us like blue-murder.” The Irish lads stood up to them without the least sign of fear, and when the cavalry came down on them they caught them on their fixed bayonets, the rear ranks firing steadily. The Munsters would not surrender, and they tried their hardest to cut through the hemming wall of Germans. It was a brave, mad, awful fight, and if the battalion was all but exterminated, it went down with the colours of its high courage flying. They fought till their Colonel was down, till nearly all of their officers

were hit, till the ranks were starved and thin from the hunger of the fire poured into them. Then, ringed with rifles and spitting mitrailleuses, without ammunition, without a sound company or section in their ranks, the superb Irish boys put down their arms. Another little blazoning on the roll of high courage had been entered to British arms.

Yet with all this pain and suffering, the odyssey from Mons was nearly over. Now St. Quentin was behind the main body, and the valleys of Somme and Oise encompassed the weary men with coolness and a promise of ease. Six interminable days of fighting and marching, of unparalleled effort, of wondrous courage and steadiness were behind the exhausted men. They had met huge armies and not been beaten by them. They had held those armies in check, refused to cave before their immense strokes, had preserved a staunch front before every effort of annihilation. They had held the left of the Allies safe against an incessant effort of envelopment, and in doing so had saved Paris, France, and indeed Europe. So from Noyon to La Fere the wearied line settled to rest. They had saved Europe, but they were too tired to know it.

CHAPTER X.

GERMANY RUNNING DOWN.

FRANCE was full of the tragedy of impending defeat. In the last days of August her fervent armies, planned to resist with victorious energies, planned, even, to thrust back Germany through the Flanders plain on to its own border-line, had been crushed back in a racing series of dolorous days.

From the first feverish moments of Charleroi, when the chances of French victory were changed to French retreat by the sweep of von Hausen's Corps across the Meuse at Givet against the Fifth Army's flank, since that day France had been going back on the swift ebb of unsuccess. Her lines upon the Meuse, that were to have been so strong and so enduring, buckled under a Gargantuan impact of great German armies led by von Buelow, von Hausen, and the Duke of Würtemberg. With electric effort of speed these strong and mobile forces came after the French at a dismaying gait,

threatening to roll them up and exterminate them through every hour of six tempestuous days.

From Charleroi and Dinant to Rocroi, from Rocroi to Mezieres, and then on again through Donchery, through Sedan towards Longuyon, the three lunging armies pressed the French through days of dizzy and reeling battles. Our Allies, fighting without breaking, strove to hold to the ground, strove to present a firm front to the thronging enemy. Always that vast attack muffled their front, while the nimble legions came swinging across and round their flank.

At Longuyon a rigid stand was attempted on and near the ground that had seen the French submerged by the genius and the numbers of von Moltke in the September of 1870. It was a stiff affair. The French fought better in 1914, and they were also better led, for when it was obvious that the day was against them, they went back swiftly, making for Rethel without breaking, and reaching it sound and strong enough to fight again. Here along the heights of Champagne the entire line stiffened for the moment and stood firm.

The caving of this French army before superior weight and manœuvring power was partly the reason for Mons and its retreat. As our Allies

retired, it left a gap on General French's right ; a gap through which von Buelow's army pushed its way, holding out an incessant threat to the British flank. As the Fifth French army fell back, so had the whole line to the right and left to fall back, so that its front might accommodate to the circumstances, that is, to prevent the Germans getting through and behind the line.

In a particular way our army had to fall back. We were on the extreme left wing. If the Germans got anywhere in our rear we were surrounded and doomed. And if we were doomed, France was doomed also. Our men were the guardians of their flank, and to give way was to let the Germans in behind the Allied army. For the Germans to get behind was to cut the communications and stop the life's blood of the fighting units. The Germans knew this particularly well, and the left of the line had, all through these frantic days, their keenest attention.

From the first shrapnel burst at Mons, von Kluck had been flinging out his wing to overlap our left, and part of the vital reason of Sir John French's retreat was to outstrip the sprinting advance of this enveloping corps. He was able to do it. Always the Germans seemed to be on the point of circling our line; always with the adroit

suppleness of extreme skill Sir John French and his Generals withdrew in time, eluded the danger of envelopment by retreat. It was superb, ice-cool, dazzling generalship, and it is as fine as anything that has ever happened in history.

Meanwhile over the entirety of the north and north-west of France the German cavalry screens were flung across the country; their objects in life were to menace the British communications that stretched along the railways to Calais and Boulogne. French Territorial regiments and British communication guards, to secure this ground, flung themselves into scores of incandescent little fights, that blazed from Lille to the Seine Valley. The fights were always extraordinarily plucky, but never actually successful. Weight was against them, and weight told. The Germans rode over the defences and went on. The story of these fights will be the fabric of many future romances, meanwhile official reports have been far too busy to mention them.

So with these tentacles of cavalry columns pushed through the gentle and serene land before them, the Germans were hurling in the last days of August towards the heart of France. Unceasingly they chased the Allied armies, hoping to catch and crush them, hoping to win the war in a battle. They had commenced their dash with

meteoric speed, but the friction of battle and pursuit had slowed the pace, and by August 28th the rush was no longer a rush, but the difficult momentum of a tired army that had outrun its athletic ability.

On the 28th there came the first definite sign that the German impetus had run down. News was flung back to the line from the British cavalry screen that cavalry columns were moving from St. Quentin, which our rearguards had but lately left. They were strong columns, but they were moving without any apparent supporting corps. They might be engaged with satisfaction to ourselves. General Allenby was out at them at once, and two of his brigades spread over the country eager to find and to fight the enemy's troopers.

General Gough with his Third Brigade found the scent first. Packed in the country before him were Uhlans, the Lancers of the redoubtable Prussian Guard, and horse artillery to match. General Gough cared not a bit for Prussian Guards. He had his squadrons, the 4th Hussars, and the 5th and 16th Lancers, into battle order immediately, had them jumping to the attack with a snappy electricity, and very soon he had the Germans broken badly and running at their best. Prussian Guard notwithstanding, the German cavalymen have never shown the slightest ability to hold

British squadrons when the latter attacked. They are big, solid, hefty men, with pretty uniforms and high-sounding regimental names, but they ride their horses cruelly, have not the slightest idea how to use their weight, and when the British lances and the British sabres come slanting towards them through the air they—not one, but many letter writers affirm it—squeal and cry for quarter, when they do not run away.

While General Gough was finishing off his column, Sir Philip Chetwode and his Fifth Brigade were doing very definite things to the enemy on the right. General Chetwode had been proving daily throughout the fighting and retreat that he could handle cavalry with a dash of authentic genius in his method; and against the German column he enhanced his reputation. The troopers under him, the Scots Greys, the 12th Lancers, and the 20th Hussars, and horse batteries to back them, pulled up the German advance with a chilling fire. Working down upon their foe, on foot or astride, as the ground demanded, the Brigade quickly had their opponents in difficulties, and, when the difficulties were most supreme the British squadrons flung at them.

Letters and reports say that in this fight the Black Watch went into the *mêlée* clinging to the

stirrup-leathers of the Scots Greys, in the brave old way of Waterloo. The charge came down in thunder upon the unsteady Germans, the sabres at the first guard, the horses bouncing over the ground like things of india-rubber, and at the stirrups the excited Highlanders jumping forward in great strides with the leaping horses, clinging tight to their rifles, yelling their slogans with all the breath left in their bodies by the charge.

Into the Germans punched the mass with a bitter and iron impact. The clamour of the *mêlée* shot upwards wildly. The sabres were lifting and swinging, the bayonets of the Highlanders and the whirling butts were striking at all angles into the clogged jam of frantic Germans. The story comes to us from many sources in a glowing and splendid vision of battle. Whether it is an accurate picture or not, the future must decide. Its veracity or unverity, in any case, does not affect the issue of the battle. Sir Philip Chetwode and his troops rolled up the German column, smashed regiments to pieces, and came off from his victory with a train of prisoners.

This brilliant cavalry episode, the growing fatigue of the German pursuing forces, the good work done by our engineers in bridge shattering, and the growing support of General D'Amade's

French army to the British left, conspired to take the strain of retreat from Sir John French's Corps. On August 29th the whole force accomplished the wonder of a full night's sleep ; many indulged in the miracle of a bath.

CHAPTER XI.

BATTERY "L" OF THE R.H.A.

EIGHT hours' sleep and one bath ; cooked food and sufficient of it—the British Army had been in Eden for one night only. A new morning saw them marching again, and twenty-four hours later saw them fighting once more.

The Allied line was not to hold the heights of Champagne after all. General Joffre, a grey, stocky figure, business-like, and sharpened keen as only a Frenchman can be, preserving through all situations the attitude of a plump and Gallic sphinx, Joffre, in a conversation with Sir John French declared his intention of drawing the enemy still further on until the Allies could be in a position and possessed the means to strike a good and decisive blow also. The Germans were still pressing hard against the whole line with an obvious surplus of power, and, since both considerations conspired to one end, back went the corps yet again. So the Tommies marched through the uplands and valleys

of Champagne, and streamed under the leaves, and grateful for them, of the pine woods of Compiègne. On the night of the 31st the rearguards bivouacked in the woods; at dawn they were awakened by a réveille of guns.

Out of the chill distance of the early autumn morning, and sullen and sodden with the early morning fog, there struck abruptly the heavy boom of artillery in action. The guns thudded for a minute unanswered, buffeting the air with their heavy, clock-like beats, then from under the dew-drenched leaves of the woods of Compiègne the tearing rip of the rifles and machine guns began their shrewish retort.

Artillery stationed at a distance from the zone of firing came alertly to order at the first fog-muffled report. They were just about to have breakfast, but there was no breakfast for them that day. They "hooked in," and were streaming to the fight at once, and none too early. When they arrived at the firing line at Nery the battle of the 1st of September already raged fiercely.

Through all the alleys of the woods, and through the wet bushes and over the saturated grass of the open spaces, the Germans were already pouring. A heavy German force was coming forward swiftly, and the screen of light cavalry flung out before it

had attacked the British with the abruptness of surprise.

At 4 a.m. the enemy opened fire, and the first of their spitting shrapnel-shells caught a cavalry squadron and a battery of Royal Horse Artillery still concerned with the domestic details of bivouac. The battery and squadron, taken unaware, tried to get clear, but the enemy were already whipping machine-guns to the flank, and the front, the rear, and the wing of the tiny British force were threshed by the streaming bullets. The horses of the squadron—it was of the Queen's Bays—were stampeded immediately by the outburst of firing, at once also the teams of Battery "L" of the Royal Horse Artillery began to go down. The battery and the cavalry were trapped, hamstrung.

It was a desperate moment, full of the nervous excitements and wild bewilderments of surprise. The men of "L" battery and of the Queen's Bays faced it without panic. The cavalry dropped back to cover, fell prone; their rifles came up, and their thin but admirable line was firing steadily with rifles and a machine gun into the press of the German attack, overawing any overt eagerness, checking throughout the fight any predilection to rush. The brave work of the Queen's Bays must not be forgotten in this fight.

“L” Battery was not so lucky as the cavalry. The full force of the assault, the outpouring of two full batteries, the mitrailleuses on the flank, and the rifles of the creeping infantry under all the trees, burst a cyclone of shells and bullets on to the teams from point blank range. At the first break of alarm the guns had been “hooked-up” with the lightning habit of the gunners, the teams were jerked into the traces to advance at the word of command. The gale of missiles struck with its solid wind against guns, and men, and horses as they stood in line. In two minutes there was not a horse alive on the field. In two minutes nearly the entire strength of the battery had been struck down, and three of the British guns blown to ruin. Here was a *débâcle*, brought about by one smashing stroke.

Rather, it would have been a *débâcle* if the men of the battery had flinched. They did not. They refused even to consider themselves or their guns out of action. The unwounded officers, the unmaimed men, shook themselves free of their cumbering dead, and, across that abattoir, sprang towards their sound guns. While there are yet guns to fire, and shells to fire from them, and men free enough from wounds to work the guns, a battery of British Artillery is still a living and terrible thing to encounter.

The German guns were five hundred yards away. They were pumping off "case" as fast as the sweating gunners could feed the pieces. The mitrailleuses under the leaves were racing at top-speed through their belts. Platoons and companies of fresh infantry, as they came running up through the woods, joined their rifles to the tremendous clamour of killing. The atmosphere about the guns was lethal. But three guns were sound, three guns could fire. Towards those guns Captain Bradbury, Lieutenants John Campbell, Mundy and Giffard sprang, and none the less eager, none the less devoted, Sergeant-Major Dorrell, Sergeant Nelson, and the splendid but pitiful few of the gunners and drivers yet living sprang forward also. Two hundred and three officers and men there are to a battery, less than a hundred, probably less than sixty, jumped to work the pieces.

Two of the guns were struck and dismantled almost before they came to bear, and under the plunging shells the crews fell dead or wounded over the shattered trails. Two guns out of order at once, and one only left, but Captain Bradbury was at that; he had swung it to face the enemy. He took on the two German batteries, the quick-firers and the hosts of marksmen alone. He was bringing it

into action even as his crew crumpled up and died about him.

A round or two was fired, then the indomitable officer was left without men. He called to the gunners crouching by the two dismantled pieces, and at his shout the men came running across to him. The stream of bullets engulfed them, the shrapnel burst in an eternal canopy of death above their heads, the mitrailleuses screaming on a high and hoyden note swept the path with a spouting jet of slaughter. The men were caught and whirled to fragments by the solid beat of pellets. The path was marked by the strewing of dead. The fire was pitiless and implacable; scarcely a man escaped unhit; Lieutenant Giffard won four wounds in that terrible crossing, and when the men gathered to work the gun, only four officers, Sergt.-Major Dorrell, Sergeant Nelson, a gunner and a driver survived the holocaust of death and wounds. Yet the gun was worked.

The one gun with its unyielding crew faced the German batteries and the German marksmen, and spat heroic defiance at them in a bulldog British way. Appalling difficulties clogged their actions, but they surmounted those difficulties with set teeth and an adamant courage.

A driving shell tore one of Captain Bradbury's

legs away. It was a ghastly wound. But he refused to be treated as wounded at all. Without changing his position, or his composure, he went on directing the fire of the gun.

The shell caisson was some distance from the piece. It had been impossible to drag it near, and shells must be brought from it. Lieutenant John Campbell passed to and fro through the sheets of bullets carrying shell after shell to feed the gun. He did all the work he could possibly do, for this brave man was killed just as he handed the last shell to the gunner.

Lieutenant Mundy was hit in the same brave way. He found it was impossible to direct the fire of the gun from the shelter of the shield. Therefore he stepped out into the open, and with demeanour unconcerned, he directed the gunner, gave the ranges, corrected the faults of laying. So he remained until a shell took his leg off; he died soon after the fight was done.

With all the officers down, with gallant Bradbury alone able to lift a faint voice in directing the fire, with the rest of the artillerymen hit or killed, the remaining four men, the unbreakable sergeant-major, the sergeant, the gunner and the driver, handled the gun alone. Four men and a gun as the focus of a concentrated hell of shelling and shoot-

ing. It was a flame of mad heroism facing impossible odds. This must be the end of the splendid and pitiful episode, one would think. It was not. The gun still fought on. Across the field, quick with death, the ammunition was carried from shattered caissons by these Homeric fellows, from the resolute muzzle of the unintimidated piece the steady shots still spat, the cool shooting still smashed its ineffable defiance in the face of the attack. The four men were fighting two batteries and an army.

It was a fight full of wonder and marvel. The ground round the gun was simply a dumping place for death in every violent form, yet, though gallant Bradbury was struck again, the four men at the gun were not put out of action. The gun, standing there a butt for batteries and battalions, should have been blown to pieces, not once, but every instant. It was not injured in any way, but instead knocked out one, then another, and another, and yet a fourth of the German guns by its skilled and magnificent shooting. The little coterie of valour fought the gun to the last shrapnel—and even then they lived.

For, tearing through the woods with the leaping gait of the R.H.A., bursting through bushes, taking obstacles in their stride, accomplishing a dozen miracles a minute on the run, and thinking nothing

of it, " I " Battery came hurling to the rescue. They pulled up in a vivid halt, came to " action front " with a snappy fervour, and in a flash what was left of the German batteries were fighting for the breath of life in a solid fog of shrapnel.

On the heels of the rescuing battery the First Cavalry Brigade came up at the gallop. They picked up the plucky Queen's Bays in their stride, rode to within hitting distance of the enemy, then, with the agility of cats, they were off their horses, and spreading through the woods towards the Germans, in long lines. Quickly the bushes and the trees were a-crackle with a running fire of rifles and the whirring stutter of the man-carried maxims. The firing grew and advanced. Infantry from the British lines came tumbling into the fight. The Germans were getting it hot, the bullets were sweeping down on them from amid the delicate leaves, whipping in their faces, breaking companies to pieces with ugly wounds. Soon the Germans were sorry they had attacked. They began to break.

Then the cavalry charged.

The picket men came up at a run with their horses at the call of the whistle, the troopers were astride like lightning, rifles were thrust back into their buckets, sabres came out. Then the word

was given, and like the slide of an avalanche the cavalry went over the ground at the Germans and their guns.

The cavalry leapt right at the German artillery, and the German ranks broke. In a wave the horsemen were on to and over the guns. There was no checking that avalanche of horse and man. Headed, it is said, by a farrier, who, not to be left out of it, charged in his shirt-sleeves and with his shoeing hammer as his only weapon, the cavalry got among the guns, killed those Germans who stayed, routed in headlong fashion those who did not, and captured all the pieces. Having captured the guns, on they went again to spur into real earnestness the rout of the German masses. The wrecking of "L" Battery had been amply and handsomely avenged.

Of that indomitable battery but forty survived of the full strength of 203. They were a glorious forty. Indomitable Captain Bradbury was dead, but he had died with the V.C., Sergeant-Major Dorrell and Sergeant Nelson were living, and they, too, gained the high honour of the V.C. Dead were the rest of the heroes who fought the gun; dead, that is, in the flesh. In the annals of history and of courage they are and will be for ever living.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BULLDOG TURNS IN HIS WALK.

NOT only the leaves of Compiègne were shaking with the hot winds of battle on September 1st. The woods of Villers-Cotterets to the east of Nery were also echoing with war. Early in the morning the enemy's advance corps pushing swiftly along the wood paths, found a rearguard of the British force—the Fourth Guards Brigade—and were possessed of the happy idea that their greater number could overwhelm the British. Using surprise as a weapon, they attacked with all their forces.

Not for the first time the enemy made a mistake in treating the British as a panicky, easily shaken race. The Germans were unlucky enough to disturb the Guards Brigade at the profound and almost sacramental moment of the bath. They were in a field by a stream, making active preparations for a "tub" that had been delayed for these men of the rearguards many days, when the first

shell split the air above them with its sharp crash. There was no panic, only curses for an enemy who had spoilt the best chance of a wash the British soldier had had for four days.

Immediately, too, the crowd at the stream edge was magnetised to order. The long, silver calls of the bugles rang throughout the camp, and the Guards, frustrated in cleanliness, ran to their posts vowing vengeance on their disturbers. By the time the Germans appeared in force the lines were ready, the men cuddled alertly into the trenches, with rifles out and eager for work.

The enemy were full of the certainty that they had effected a surprise, and came on swiftly. Their cavalry, bulked in great strength, broke out of the woods and drove forward at the British left. They were too eager, too exultant, too confident. They still laboured under the delusion that before them was an army shattered and fatigued from the stressful days of Mons. The Guards, waiting coolly, soon undeceived them. At the most effective range the rifles blazed, and went on blazing, and the whirring notes of the maxims worked up in machine-made fury. Such a storm of bullets was poured into the elated ranks of Germany that saddles were emptied in a wholesale way, and horses were swept to the earth in heaps. In a flash the cavalry was broken

and was flying in all directions, as chaff scatters before a strong wind.

The cavalry, however, merely played the prelude of the vicious little fight. Soon the German artillery was working forward into the battle, worming by degrees closer and closer to the British front. And behind the artillery the squat battalions of the German infantry soon appeared pushing into view.

Apparently they had learnt something of their necessary lessons, for now they came against British infantry in a formation more loose than their usual packed mass. But they had not learnt all that it was necessary to learn if they were to live before British rifle fire. Loose as they were, they climbed against the sky-line in erect ranks. A dramatic sight, but also a gorgeous target for riflemen. The British were the best riflemen on the Continent at that moment, and into that obvious mass they smashed their best delivered effort.

The artillery, now up in line, now vigorously in action, backed the rifles with their streaming shells. Lanes and chasms of death were hacked and blown in the living wall. "You couldn't miss them," declared a Coldstreamer. "The bullets just ploughed gaps in them." Before that thronging death the attack melted away. The solid ranks

tried to remain solid, tried to press on, but their case was hopeless. Soon the lines began to waver, to suck back.

Presently, glaring through the fume of their own cordite, the Guards found that the Germans had dissolved into nothing. Only the sullen artillery remained to keep alive the battle.

By now the Germans had staked a big force on the gamble of this battle. They meant and hoped to crush, and crush swiftly. They were still under the impression that the disconnected bodies of British and French which had been retiring before their pressure for the past six days were still disconnected, still able to be defeated by an ardent and concentrated attack against details. Not for the first time in this war they were wrong. The line was solid. The British force could now fight with the certainty that their flanks were supported and guarded by the French, and so they fought with an even finer vigour than before. The Allied line was retiring, certainly; but it was retiring because it meant to retire, not because it had to retire. It was not retreating.

The Germans had not yet fully gauged this new element in the Allied plan, though two days ago (August 30th) they must have guessed something of it, for, coming too close to a retiring French

army, that army had swung about, sprung at them, and shattered them with a decisive defeat before turning and retiring again. If that lesson had not been driven home, there was going to be no mistake at Villers-Cotterets. A German army, fatigued by a ceaseless and futile chase, was about to learn that the army it considered more fatigued than its own, and broken and dispirited into the bargain, was neither tired nor broken.

The British Bulldog, going about the business of retirement in his own way, and at his own ease, turned and flew at the throat of the venturesome German, and drove him flying from the field.

The German attack against the Guards that had been broken at its first effort gathered again, and, under the protection of its own guns and their heavy fire, gained numbers and strength, and came back to battle with the British line. The thick infantry, massed like shadows, concentrated in the gloom under the trees, and gradually the battle was resumed. This time the Germans had determined to make sure of victory, and the infantry was strengthened by a host of machine guns and many batteries of artillery, while hovering on the flanks were dense masses of cavalry. "All came on at a smart pace, with the apparent plan of seizing a hill on our right," says an eye-witness.

At that instant the British cavalry appeared in view; and then, at one command, the entire Guards Brigade sprung to its feet and advanced.

It was a race that thrilled the souls of the on-lookers. Both armies were moving towards the hill at top speed, and for a moment it seemed that the British might get there first. Only for a moment did this hope remain alive. The Germans were fully half a mile nearer, and with a shout they flung themselves on the hill and held it.

This appeared to be the decisive moment of the battle. The German infantry dug themselves in at once, and their volleys began slashing off instantaneously; a moment later their guns were in position, and frantically at work. The advancing Guards were soon the centre of a dazzling mist of bullet and shell, pumped into them with all the rapidity of rifle and mitrailleuse and Krupp gun. They went to earth and clung tight in their hastily "grubbered" trenches, and in that position clung tenaciously.

For a moment the German shouts of victory were numbed. The Guards were doing the unexpected. They were holding their ground (losing frightfully, to be sure) where they should have been shattered by the enormous attack of shells

and bullets. The Germans saw their brave plan spoiled by these stubborn English and Irish men. They saw the Guards holding tight until adequate forces came up to drive Germany back. They must do something at once.

They made a desperate and final throw. Since even the gale of shot and shrapnel was unlikely to shift the British, the cavalry was loosed at the line.

Three heavy German regiments at once hurled themselves at the Guards with the intention of riding them down. The Irish Guards were the nearest, and every heart in the British front stopped beating for a moment as the terrific mass of horse-men thundered at the thin khaki line. Extermination of the Irish could be the only result, everyone thought, and all waited breathlessly for the awful crash of fronts. The Irish Guards were the least excited of any on the field. There are several reports of what happened, but all reports have the same trend. The Irish were absolutely undismayed. The Germans came on like an avalanche; the Irish (says one eye-witness) knelt and prayed. Then they stood up.

The breathless watchers could see, with the vivid clarity of men on the point of death, everything that happened with biting distinctness. They could see

the slow-walking officers passing up and down the lines, joking and stimulating their men ; they saw one man put down his rifle when the enemy were but two hundred yards away, demand a cigarette off a pal, light it, and with a calmness almost god-like take up his rifle and stand ready. An order snapped, a line of glittering bayonets fell forward with the precision of a machine and remained rigid ; another order, and in a wave of steel the Irish ranks, headed by their superb commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Morris, rose from their trenches, lunged forward, and with a gesture sweeping and superb took the hellish shock of the charge. And as they rose in line from the earthworks, there ascended from their strong ranks the impassioned notes of the song of their own strong land. The Irish Guards took the charge singing " God Save Ireland."

In an instant it was all the mad chaos of a futuristic picture. Khaki and grey, wild lance and plunging sabre, men writhing against the sky in frantic attitudes, the steady, awful bayonet line of the firm front Irish rank, the slash of the second rank's rifles, and the dribbling spurt of the excited maxims. It was all chaos, all the maddest, wildest, hacking and stabbing confusion. Then through the torn veils of the headlong cavalry the superb Irish

emerged ; their ranks were jetting smoke ; their bayonets were pushing forward ; they were unbroken. Their fine Colonel was dead, their ranks were torn to pieces, but the three picked regiments of the Kaiser's cavalry were gouged and smashed and splintered, and were flying over the desperate field ; the steady Irish rifles chased them as they flew.

Again, as at Alma, as at Waterloo, as on a score of bloody and desperate fields, the British infantry had taken the shock of cavalry, and had broken troop and squadron to pieces. Not only the Irish Guards, but a regiment inscribed for ever on the most glorious pages of war, emerged from the frantic welter of that encounter.

This movement of advance was now taken up by the entire Guards Brigade and ultimately it finished the battle. While the cavalry charge was in progress the German infantry began a confused movement, as if to go to the aid of the horsemen. For a while they hesitated, thought better of it, and remained where they were. The British did not. The movement of the Guards had gone on in spite of the threat of the German cavalry, and, the magnificent affair over, the movement was taken up with a finer impulse than before.

The Guards, in brisk masses, were steadily

rushing towards the German position, the Coldstreams leading this time, the Grenadiers following, and the Irish supporting. Taking advantage of the cavalry attack, the German artillery had crept forward to new positions, and were firing with deadly effect into our battalions. To the advance of the Guards the British horse, always eager to get at the heavy Germans, added themselves, and the whole line sprang forward at the enemy. Nothing could stop that smashing attack.

The Guards were hardly any distance behind the horsemen. With a great shout they fell swamping upon the German line, and the busy bayonet got to work. But the bayonet in British hands is a thing of terror to the Germans. "They cringed at the bayonet," and they bolted, and as they bolted the steady rifle-fire and the whip-lash of the British shrapnel picked up the range and stung them on to frantic flight until they were well out of harm's way. The German had had for seven hours a taste of British fighting at its best, and he had had enough. The fight, as far as the German was concerned, was over.

Having turned about and administered a sound thrashing to an over-presumptuous enemy, the British army as calmly as ever continued its quiet retirement back to Paris. For five days it remained

unattacked, steadily, coolly recruiting its strength. Then when it was fully refreshed, it took up its task again, and this time it was not the Allies who retreated. For by then the battle of the Marne had begun, and the story of battle was to be told in a different tongue. The Germans had shot their last bolt. In future they would not harry, but be harried by the British army and the Allied line.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TURN OF THE TIDE.

THE lunging rush of the great German military juggernaut slackened and lost impetus before the resolute resistance that has made for ever glorious the bitter road from Mons to Paris. When the elusive and brilliant British had, at Cambrai on August 26th, slipped the attack meant to annihilate, the German host was already more fatigued than its quarry. Compiègne and Villers-Cotterets and those startling battles along the Allied front on September 1st had been the despairing effort of an enemy desperately tired to win through the British line. The giant advance had been checked. It slowed down—stopped.

With resolute nonchalance the French and British moved back upon the lines prepared for them about the outer fortifications of Paris. Attempts were made to attack and hold them, but they were feeble attempts. Tired German cavalry came out of the lines to be dashed back by the

fresh and vigorous cavalry of the Allies. The mutter of the German artillery still continued in the rear, but it was the querulous muttering of extreme fatigue. Germany had shot her bolt. In chasing an army still fresh, the Germans had run themselves to a standstill. The leaders of the Allies smiled, and throughout September 3rd, 4th, and 5th prepared their lines with the assurance of men who knew that at last their time had come. Germany had reached the very outskirts of Paris, at Senlis, after fighting cavalry skirmishes through the woods of Chantilly, but there was that behind Paris which was to give them quite a different reception to the one they had anticipated. The Allies, knowing what they knew, chose their own time for the stroke. On the evening of September 5th all were in line, all were ready. On September 6th France and England struck.

The enormous German Army had poured forward until it seemed bound to overlap and envelop the French capital on the coastward side. The massed forces were almost under the guns of the heart of the city. The German Emperor was, no doubt, even then preparing in splendid detail the pomp and circumstance of his victorious entry. So stood events on Saturday, 5th. On Sunday, 6th, at sunrise, the Allied line began to move. Away

to the west of Paris it began to climb northward over the map, to climb and to curl inward. On the eastern side of the capital it began to move relentlessly, too, pushing northward and outward, going forward with a steady, uncheckable flow, ramming the Germans back along the way they had come, pushing them ruthlessly towards Germany.

The whole huge Allied line from Chantilly to Verdun was in motion. It was going forward. The German advance was on the ebb. The tide had turned. The battle of the Marne had commenced.

The British force at the extreme moment of retirement had been whipped across from the north of Paris to the extreme east of the capital. There was now a great French army on its right and another on its left. The army on the left was a new army, perhaps a surprise army collected and held in readiness by General Joffre to startle and stagger the German advance. The British themselves had received reinforcements, and went into battle reinvigorated. Also they were advancing for the first time in the war, and the advance is the natural state of the British soldier, and the condition in which it is most unfortunate for an enemy to meet him.

The British had hurried along the battle-line to

the east of Paris until they were to the south-west of the Grand Morin river, and hidden at ease behind the storied forest of Crécy. Through the paths of this forest, and grateful for the coolness of the leaves, they marched in the early day. And from the trees they broke to the brazen heat of the open country somewhere about noon.

Before the British lay a rolling country, a country rather like their own ; gentle and pastoral, full of orchards and cornfields, with the stooks still standing in them ; full, too, of woods and the mesh of bushes. It was cut and laced by many rivers and small streams, but the British know the ways of rivers and streams, and liked rather than feared them. In this country, ideal for their kind of fighting, the exultant British swept at and on to the Germans.

They went forward with the swing of victory in their advance, for they knew that now they had a German army at their mercy.

What exactly had happened to that mechanically perfect but dehumanised instrument the German war machine, we have yet accurately to discover. The strategists, professional as well as amateur, only help us with confusion. There are several well-assumed and reasonable theories put forward by men whose opinions are valuable, but only at the

end of the war can the Germans tell us which of these is correct. Whether von Kluck, at the culmination of his dazzling advance sensed and felt the pressure of a great, new and secret army waiting to leap from its hiding-place to the west of Paris, whether von Kluck had outrun his companion Generals and his supplies and supports, or whether he swung east still following the Allied left, still in the hope of catching it and crushing it, remains to be determined by history. What can be said is that abruptly von Kluck swung his army in an amazing and audacious *volte face* towards the south-east, and began his astonishing advance right across the front of the Allied lines. Perhaps he meant to join the other German armies, and attempt, in one smashing blow, to burst through the defending armies somewhere near Verdun. If so it was audacious strategy. The result might have been a dazzling victory. It had one flaw. The Germans once again quite failed to recognise the value of the Allied left. Von Kluck crossed the English front as though Joffre, and in particular Sir John French and his men, had ceased to exist; and indeed he had made up his mind that no armies in the kingdoms of arms could have continued to live in anything but a ragged and hopelessly inefficient state after the terrible six days'

harrying by the cream of the massed German power. In other words, the military might of Germany had settled the force retreating from Mons, once and for all. It was a sin of military pride, and for this costly miscalculation he lost the day. As the Germans marched forward the British joined in with the lunging French attack, and fell thundering upon von Kluck's flank.

The brilliant British and French airmen had been telling the Staffs for days exactly what the Germans were doing, and now that they were acting, the Allies knew what to do. All through the easy valley of the Ourcq, the Marne, the Grand and Petit Morin, the air began to throb and shudder with the growing roar of artillery. It worked further south as the Germans pushed forward their desperate advance, and as each section of the Allied line came into action the note of battle deepened, as the chorus of some giant fugue deepens as the different voices join in. Under a crystalline sun great veils of smoke began to lift slowly, and to drift south heavily as the battle extended. Over the peaceful hills, the stubble fields, the open plough land, the serene stretches of the cornfields, the fretted intaglios of the many coppices, the delicate white balloons of bursting shrapnel began to string out against a cobalt sky. The country was steeped

in repose and gentleness, and these strange pyrotechnics of slaying accentuated its peace.

Over the fields, under the shrapnel, from out the deep, drifting smoke, battalions of men were running forward, falling down, firing, up and running again ; through the woods and the bushes men were worming and pushing their way to battle, and, hidden by the hills, the brisk cannon were pumping off shell as fast as the nimble gunners could work the pieces.

In this brave and quickening rush as our flowing and singing line drove irresistibly forward through the fields and the coppices, drove singing and clattering through nodding, sun-washed villages, they swept up the German outposts with the unhesitant and decisive onslaught of a broom. The foemen were caught by the push of advance, their excited and nervous resistance all but ignored, and they were jerked back to the German with a gesture of disdain.

The Germans, working feverishly, rushed out a cavalry division, its supporting artillery, and a body of infantry to do something, anything, to stave the torrent of advance. This counter-assault, handled bravely and vigorously, was caught by the British line between two breaths. The butting rush of the Germans was met, handed off,

forced back by a series of punching attacks. It was followed up, and late in the afternoon the torrent was on to the German position, was beating it to pieces with surge after surge of men, was reaching the trenches at point after point, was over them, submerging them, flooding Germany out altogether with the tide of attack. The little sand-castle of defence had been useless in the face of the on-coming sea.

So through the late afternoon our men pushed ahead with the lilt of victory in their stride for the first of the rivers. They were coming up with the Grand Morin, and hitting strongly at the Germans who still clung to it; who still failed to recognise that defeat was hanging over their heads.

About the river banks the battle raged with especial ferocity. The Germans were trying to get over the streams to resist with better effect the attack of the Allies; the Allies were endeavouring to push their enemies back and to cross themselves. The bridges were all down—the Engineers had seen to that—and when the Germans tried to cross, it was by means of pontoons. These pontoons met the same fate that other bridges of their kind had been meeting in this war. Time after time the Germans pushed their flat spans over the river; time after time the spans were shattered to splinters.

One British battery came into action in front of just such a bridge. As the gun-layer was about to sight his piece he asked the officer, "Which pontoon, sir?" "Number One," said the officer, and Number One flew to splinters. "Number Two," said the officer. Number Two was shattered. Number Three, and Number Four went to pieces before that cool and deadly shooting. The Germans built out another bridge, and the British gunner began his steady game again. At one time the bridge was packed with men as the shell struck, and the men were blown to pieces. The German pontoons never crossed that river.

On the other hand the British did, and the day ended for them with their force lying across the south of the stream, with their left centre before Coulommiers and their right to the north of Dagny.

CHAPTER XIV.

RED ROUT.

DAWN had scarcely powdered the face of the sky when the battle was burning with all its anger again. The Allies, having got Germany on the run, were going to keep Germany at it, were going to allow von Kluck not the slightest ease.

The 6th French Army had fought a stubborn battle with enthusiastic pluck all through the 6th of September, and that battle had gone on through the night, stringing the autumn darkness with a thousand fires. Morning only intensified the fighting, as the Frenchmen, high up on the west of the battle, at once took up the happy game of driving the Germans by a series of smashing punches towards the Oureq, which stood up pointing north, almost at right angles to the general battle scheme.

The Germans fought with a stolid courage, holding stubbornly to every cottage, and tree, and blade of grass as long as they had strength to

do so. They knew well enough what this exuberant attack on their right wing meant. But though they battled with a desperate, sullen front against the swift-striding menace of envelopment, their courage and obduracy were not of the type to beat a volatile French army rushing into battle with all the intoxication of certain success racing in their veins. Striking deep into the heart of their opponent's lines with a series of dazzling thrusts, the French steadily, implacably drove the Germans back to the Ourcq, while along the red route of battle, villages and woods and stacks flamed and smoked against the sky in a series of ghastly burnt-offerings to the dark-browed gods of war.

Before night had paled to day the British were out against the Germans. The happy regiments were in flux, the guns were massing and firing and slashing the darkness with their orange tongues of flame and the brilliant incandescence of their exploding shells, starred in a new firmament of death above the German position. A terrible battle was clamouring over the land, was filling the hedges with the dead and the horribly maimed before the easy people in Great Britain had awakened from their first sleep to think in a drowsy moment how this war was going to affect business. Before the servants had gone down to the chilly kitchens

of the United Kingdom to cook breakfast, Coulommiers had been snatched from German armies over ramparts of dead.

Coulommiers was at the heart of the British line, and from the packed barricades between its quaint houses the Germans disputed the path of armies. Against this defence, at this huddle of homes, regiments were hurled in running lines, battery after battery was concentrated. Squall after squall of shrapnel beat down on to the place, spout after spout of smoke and débris and flame shot in negroid columns against the sky, as the high-explosive shells drove home. The place was burning, crumbling, collapsing at once. As it sank to ruin, sea after sea of swinging British infantry came down on it, splashed in great waves of the fiercest fighting against the German lines before the town, swamped over those lines, went swirling and surging in eddies of steel through the barricaded, the rubble filled, the blazing and clamouring streets.

Germany fought well enough, but fighting was not sufficient against that ocean of all-conquering infantry. Already disheartened by the dazing surprise of yesterday, already pounded to nervelessness by the avalanche of shells, the Germans could not stand against the electric attack. They fell back wildly, fought for safety through the jam on

Coulommiers bridge, fled, choking the roads with their fear-fuddled columns in a stampede northward.

That was the work of the British centre and left. The glory of that rush was exceeded in the work done by the right of our line. Here the infantry went on in an undamable flood, hitting and hitting hard at the four German divisions opposed to them every time the fatigued and desperate men halted in the hope of holding the rush; harrying, then pounding them, driving them inward in a headlong and mighty *battue*. Nowhere could the Germans staunch the British flow, nowhere had they the slightest chance or hope of making even the rumour of a stand. They went back, and back, and back, and always the insatiable British infantry came in a hungry flood at their heels.

British infantry and British cavalry, all did incredible and wonderful work. But superb though the infantry men were, the cavalry surpassed them. It was the cavalry's day out. The cavalry is born to shine in routs, created to be the terror of retreats, and the British Cavalry accomplished its destiny with a magnificent purpose. Forty-five British squadrons met seventy-two of the German Guard divisions, fought them, and smashed them.

The Guard divisions of the German Army are the aristocrats and supermen of war. They are the cream of battle units. When they speak no military dogs may bark. The British squadrons did not mind that. The nippy democracy of British troopers went out at them over a wide and running fight. They cut them up in battle lines, fought afoot over the fields and through the trees and in and out of the collapsing villages; the cavalry's guns extinguished the German horsed pieces in snapping and vehement bouts; the hurtling rush of the Anglican squadrons went through the pretty uniforms of Teutony, as though the German horse were but paper decorations of the landscape. It was a blazingly brilliant cavalry battle. In a war in which horsemen have snubbed to humbled silence all the learned men who have proved cavalry were effete and obsolete—on paper—this chase and harrying and battling was the cruellest snub of all.

Not content with pounding up the cream of seventy-two German squadrons, the cavalry had a fine and busy time amid the flying sheep of the rout. As the Germans retreated from their first vantage place, the British cavalry rode catapulting out of the lines to keep them on the run. General De Lisle's brigade, with the 9th Lancers and the

18th Hussars, got in among the rout, and their flail of the sabres broke and shattered it into chaos. Sometimes, as in the pictures, the horsemen go home with a swinging charge, but the work of modern horsemen does not live up to the pictures as a rule, and much of the good work was done by units in the lanes, and the clearings, and in the villages of the river valleys.

A section of Hussars came upon a large body of Uhlans. There was no time to take shelter, and no cover to be found if there had been time. But that did not matter. The Hussars were off their horses in a trice, their rifles were unshipped and busy, and in a flash a great body of the Kaiser's best cavalry was bolting before thirty Britishers, who whipped up their flight with stinging bullets.

Again, the same section came upon a farm held by the Germans in force. There was artillery defending this place, but again that did not matter. In a yelling rush the British horsemen charged down on the Germans. A storm of bullets lashed out at them directly they appeared, a storm so fierce that all the leaves of the trees in front of them were stripped. The Hussars went on, went on to and over the Germans, and the guns were captured.

Again, at another part of the battle area a

scouting party of the Royal Irish Lancers ambushed and captured a big train of munitions. The escort of the train was at least five times the strength of the Lancers, but the Irish divided forces and spread themselves so cleverly along the road, that when they opened fire the Germans thought they were attacked by an army; they fought wildly, chaotically, as men fight who know they are overwhelmed. In the midst of the train's mad confusion the Lancers charged the convoy in two bodies. They went in at a reckless rush, yelling in every language they could remember, from Gaelic to French. The commander of the convoy fell into the trap, and to this mere handful he surrendered his supply column with every man he had.

So on the 7th of September the Germans were on the run all along our front. We were over the Grand Morin and rounding the enemy up at the sharpest pace, driving them helter-skelter towards the Petit Morin and the Marne.

As the Germans ran, the British aeroplanes went streaking over the jammed roads of the rout, and the signals and the smoke balls were marking out the lines of the retreating men. As the signals appeared our big guns broke to action with their deep, baying voices, and the huge shells struck

flaring into the crowds along the roads. It was magnificent ranging and shooting, but appalling slaughter. As the shells swished through the pack on the road, they swept entire companies out of existence, as they exploded they blew men by the score—horses, guns, wagons, and lorries by the dozen—to shreds. The roads became an indescribable litter of men and things, with now and then a village making a torch against the sky, or the petrol of a lorry blazing in a delirium of horror about the exploding ammunition cases that had formed the load. The entire routes of this frantic retreat were strewn with the débris of this saturnalia of terror and flight. “War is war,” says the German officer, shrugging his shoulders. This is what he means.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SWEEP OF ARMIES.

BY the 8th of September the tremendous battle along the intricate and convolute front of the Marne and its sister rivers had built up to its most enormous pressure. The new-born French, who had thrust behind them their national traits of emotionalism and volafility so that they might go into their battles an amazing race of grimly stubborn and deliberately enduring men, had been hammering away with scientific patience at von Kluck's flank high up on the map. They had forced the Germans back as far as the Ourcq, and were busily engaged in driving them across that river. The British, in their fighting, had served the end of battles well enough. They had smashed back the Germans before them, exposing the flank to the cruel air of war, and against the harried enemy corps the British left had pushed right up to the Marne, east of Meaux.

Here the Germans made yet another attempt to hold. With the urgency of fear they sank their line into earth along the lifting ground that juts like an elbow between the curving bends of the rivers. But again the Germans were to have no rest. The British were up and out and fighting through the autumn mists of morning. By 5 a.m. their fronts were ablaze with rifles, and from their left at Meaux to their extended right, somewhere on the Grand Morin, every battalion was hitting hard at Germany and making her tired legions wince.

The high ground that humps about the rivers, the hills that lord it over the Marne and the Grand Morin, were full of the famed and fabled heavy guns of Germany. They had taken over the task of the rearguards, and, with their monster projectiles, they strove to stem the unrelenting pursuit. The infernal "Black Marias" began to nag the battle, to argue against the chase with their loud and terrible tongues. The British (as well as the French) suffered at first, for only the Horse and Field Batteries were up in line, and the light guns, with all their pluck, are useless against the heavies. But the line did not suffer long. The British had their big guns also, and they could use them as well as the Germans, and perhaps a little better.

Presently into the fight the great sixty-pound guns of the British Royal Garrison Artillery came lumbering. The garrison gunners got their thirty-foot guns into gun-pits, watched the British aviators as they circled over the German lines with calculating scrutiny—then they began firing. The gunners showed “magnificent imperturbability.” They plugged away without faltering, utterly heedless of the attentions the German gunners were paying them, and they taught an awful lesson. The batteries they attacked were destroyed, the infantry supporting the guns were decimated. “The British guns mowed the ground with a sweeping fire. Shell followed shell. The air was thick with them. The clouds of dust and sand, the smoke from the powder, and the smell, prevented us from breathing. . . . Our men began to fall like flies.” These are the words of a German officer who was under that deadly fire. This man was glad to get the order to retire; but some were not so glad.

On the left the battering of the big guns broke up the German front, and let the French right into their positions on the Ourcq line. As our Allies, charging with the British, gained ground, they flung themselves on to the ragged Germans with uncheckable fury, and the deadly bayonet, so hated

by the Teutons, took its awful toll. The Zouaves did splendid, terrible work in these charges ; " but," they said, " the British were superb."

By noon of September 8th all the British Corps had forced their way across the Grand Morin and were fighting upward in the brilliant sun across the happy corn-fields, and through the orchards that turn the country between the Grand and the Petit Morin into a land made lovely with plaques of different tinted jewels. Through all these fields, from amid all these gentle trees, the lazy fume of battle lifted steadily all day. The fire of war burnt with its crackling hate in the hearts of all the woods. The Germans were fighting a string of rearguard actions, and they were fighting with the fervour of desperation. Yet the fighting was futile. Through the valleys, across the fields, over the stubble and along the hot ribbons of the roads the thronging British went pouring. Rebaix was won in a clamour of firing and passed in a swirl of khaki. The Germans were harried continually, kept on the move eternally. It was only when they reached the Petit Morin that they were able to fight with any hint of real resistance.

Here, where the town of La Trétoire stands as turnpike-keeper to the Petit Morin, Sir Douglas Haig and his First Corps found that the enemy had

gone to ground, and that they had a position to take and a foe to meet in the sternest fashion.

The Germans clung to their front tenaciously. The British line came roaring at them, and the battle raged furiously. The Germans tried to stem the advance with savage counter-attacks, the German masses thrusting themselves at the British lines in their usual sullen and close-packed formations. Wave after wave of men came pouring forward, firing in their curious and futile way from the hip, supported all the time by the heavy fire of their own shrapnel, and the jetting outbursts of their many mitrailleuses. But they made little impression. Our men lay in their trenches under the apple and pear-trees while the artillery battle raged over their heads, and their own rifles grew hot with firing.

Their skilled fire tore great holes in the German line, their feverish maxims did awful execution. Their rifle-fire, the Germans admitted, was deadly, while to the German eyes, that is, the eyes that gained no lesson from the Boer War, the British were almost invisible, so well was cover taken. Before this invincible, invisible front the attacking ranks were shattered. Then came the order for which Tommy had waited so patiently, and the infantry rose, sweeping from the trenches, and

crashed home into the wavering German battalions.

Or if there were no Germans to charge, and an advance only to be made, the men came out of the rifle-pits under a withering fire from the German infantry and their exuberant quick-firers, and in the open order, which was one of the tricks taught by the South African campaign, ran forward, stooping low, to the nearest line of cover. So all the evening these movements were repeated, and although the Germans fought stolidly from a strong position on the bank of the Petit Morin to keep the British off, they were at length dislodged at the end of the day, and were thrust back in retreat, with huge losses, not only in men killed and men wounded, but also in men and guns and munitions captured. Again, after a fruitless, desperate stand, the enemy was running.

While Sir Douglas Haig was breaking the enemy and flinging him back, the Second and Third Corps in their place of line were sweeping onward with the same skilled and resolute impetuosity.

The Second Corps, that is, the centre of the British line, had to press a series of stubborn encounters in forcing its way forward. But it did go forward. It met and broke every resistance, in a score of vivid, but, unfortunately, unrecorded

affairs, in its keen march. By nightfall it was facing the Petit Morin on a free and unhampered line, and eager to cross it.

The Third Corps moved with a swing, too. It drove the enemy out of the high ground to the left of the battle area with the cool passion of its gunnery, and after that marched at the shoulders of the French with the brave and irresistible impetus of that brave day. It encountered no grave check, and when night came it was against the river, too, the left of a determined line only waiting for dawn to begin its battling once more. From somewhere near Changis on the Marne to La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, where the Marne and the Petit Morin come together, and on again to Sir Douglas Haig's wing above La Trétoire, the British line had swept all the ground in their tremendous advance.

The French, too, had made their huge advances in spite of constant and bitter resistance. The Fifth French Army had fought its way upward from the Grand Morin, and had burst a way across the Petit Morin at the important point of Montmirail. In doing this it had stripped the right flank of von Buelow's army fighting along a German line extending eastward. The Ninth Army, further to the east, had also made its thrust of great meaning. It had smashed in its thunder of attack at the joint

where von Buelow's and von Hausen's army joined, north of Sezanne. It had made this attack with such dash and with such brilliance, that a wedge of French had been forced through the German front; so that not only did von Buelow find his remaining flank exposed, but von Hausen was also threatened on his right wing.

The Fourth and Third French Armies saw some of the heaviest fighting of the day, and were threatened with some desperate moments also. The Duke of Würtemberg attacked with savage pressure, and the pendulum of fighting swung this way and that with the wild vicissitude of terrible fighting. Still these French armies were able to make some movement, for with grim obduracy they forced their way upward to Vitry-le-Francois.

So, at all points an advance was scored, and in the main the Germans were driven back with calamity and loss. The ground was littered with their dead. The coppices were full of their slain and their wounded. In one trench alone six hundred corpses were found. At Esternay eight thousand dead Germans are said to have been collected. It was an affair tinged with all the colours of débâcle, but the dawn of September the 9th was at hand, and a worse condition was to follow.

Meanwhile, over the town of Nancy, the Kaiser watched and waited with a shining train of triumph, while his stubbornly infatuated soldiery flung themselves in vain against the iron defences of the French in order to take the town for his pleasure. Even while the Most Highest in his shining armour waited impatient, even while the Crown Prince yelled his orders for "advance," and yet again "advance," from a comfortable seat at the safe end of the telephone, the assault was being smothered in the slaughter of defeat. The Emperor and his son were posing dramatically, even in Germany's most bitter hour.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MARSHES OF ST. GOND.

SEPTEMBER 9th, weeping in a misery of rain, saw fighting immense with meaning and with war.

Through the night the guns had been burning with their vivid fires of destruction, and talking in their deep voices of deliberate anger. Through the night the outposts had been quick with the astringent outbursts of shooting from incessant encounters. Through the night the French had been manœuvring with purposeful intent.

General Foch, that brilliant man of war and its theory, had found the two weak joints in the German front before him, and was driving his rapiers of armies into them. Von Buelow's right flank had been stripped of covering strength, General Foch swung forward his own left wing into the gap to turn and envelop that flank. There was a wound between von Buelow's and von Hausen's forces. General Foch whipped a corps upward through

the dripping darkness across the fringes of the plain of Châlons and carved a way between the two German generals. Thus with dawn breaking on a world weary with war, there were two wedges driven deep into the German line at or about its centre, and these wedges of battling French were fighting their way resolutely, winning their way forward in spite of every desire of the Germans to smother their electric attack.

These French forces had been fighting strenuously through the drenching night, with the dawn they fought harder. Give Frenchmen the hope of victory by attack, and nothing, not even the deliberate planning of Germany, will hold them. The French in stirring lines and under the chaperonage of their deadly artillery, swept against von Buelow's flank, and, though that flank was buttressed by a Corps of the Prussian Guard, they began rolling up frantic Germany from the beginning of the day. Von Buelow was in a dangerous position. He found his army in the grips of the clayey marshes of St. Gond, with every chance of repeating an unpleasant Napoleonic episode in which the Germans had suffered in the same area. Under the impetuous attack of his enemy he soon discovered that he would have the greatest difficulty in extricating his men from this ominous region.

He had received reinforcements, he fought vehemently. But the rain had reinforced the French, and the almost trackless marshes had become terrible in their impassability. What should have been a solid effort of mere resistance, became a febrile battle for sheer existence. On the treacherous fringes of the marshes the Germans struggled to keep the exuberant Gallic attack off, and to extricate their corps from the grip of the slime. The French, with irresistible effort of shelling and bayonet rush, punched the bewildered line closer and closer to the fringes of the soft ground; attacked so ruthlessly and so brilliantly that von Buelow had all his work cut out to save himself from annihilation. It is to his credit that, though on that bitter day of fighting he was defeated, he was not engulfed. Regiments and battalions were smashed back into the Marshes, artillery was driven into them implacably, and he lost forty guns, as well as many men made prisoners; his Guards were badly cut up, and his shaken army was torn to rags. But in the end he was able to fight his way clear, and was able to fall back to the high ground nearer Marne with his badly frightened army. The French had won a striking success.

And they were winning other successes as striking elsewhere. The wedge that General Foch had

driven up beyond von Buelow's left and von Hausen's right was also busy with a vehement zeal. The French had made good their position through the night, and the morning found them busy before the Germans had quite realised what had happened. Under the dismaying assault of the vivid Gallic onslaught both wings—von Buelow's and von Hausen's—were crushed inward, and forced to break backward to save the whole of their line from extermination. The Germans, as usual, fought with grim pluck, but the French outfought them. The conditions were such that the French *élan* was developed to an irresistible power, and through the mist of rain and shelling the volatile and irrepresible infantry broke, shredded and smashed back the stolid facets of the Teutonic resistance. Von Buelow, full of terror for both his wings, went back here also in a great hurry, and only stopped for breath in the neighbourhood of Epernay. Von Hausen had a worse time. His torn and tattered wing endangered his entire line. He was incapable of coherent resistance, and his force was rushed back, leaving its incredibly numerous trail of dead, until it managed to make some sort of stand near Châlons. So the German line collapsed and retreated, and all through September 9th Germany was falling back in a frantic effort to save itself.

CHAPTER XVII.

OVER THE MARNE.

GENERAL FOCH'S brilliant double stroke above Sezanne reacted on the whole line of war. It had a painful reflex at that point where the Germans were suffering from the effects of a carefully planned good fortune.

Von Kluck, on the extreme German right, staggering and fighting with his fatigued forces against an overwhelming attack, had received fresh drafts of troops, but not drafts enough. He was an able enough man, and, in fighting for his very existence, he showed himself a skilled and courageous soldier, but with a weakened and unreplenished line he had a difficult task in any case. With the other corps in the German front, not only unable to assist, but falling back and exposing his line to an additional flanking threat from the east, his condition was hopeless. He was a defeated man from the first, but under the conditions which prevailed he seemed

a man doomed to figure as the bad example in a débâcle.

He began his day (the 9th of September) with a dramatic show of energy. With what reinforcements had come to him, he flung out in attack, plunging the whole of the Oureq front into a red rage of fighting. He swung his lines of bayonets and pumped his violent outpouring of shells into the Sixth French Army in a vast effort to quench the ardour of that exultant force. His line fought with a game effort. It met the French rush with tremendous counter-attacks. And for a while, and in spite of the tragic conditions of that terrible day, the Germans were able to hold their own. It was indeed only when the pressure began to be felt that the Teuton effort began to lose way.

The British Army was continuing its sweeping attack with an uncheckable spirit. Impatient through the curtain of the night, the men were out and at work with the first airs of the morning. Through the steady fret of the rain the whole of our front was advancing, attacking, winning.

Although the sweep of British advance was irrepressible, the progress of the attack varied in its swiftness and its extent. While the First and Second Corps forced their way across the Petit Morin and began, with some ease, to push upward,

northward and eastward, the Third Corps found itself opposed to a strong position, strongly held at La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, on the confluence of the Marne and the Morin. Here the Germans held in strength the town across the river, their artillery was well placed on the hills beyond, and they had a good force to face the advance on this side of the stream.

All day long the British attacked and checked counter-attacks in their fierce battling for the passage of the river. The Germans, clinging obstinately to the near bank, had to be fought and driven across the Marne with a tremendous worrying of fighting. This alone was a great battle. Slowly and with great loss our men wore down the resistance as the day went on. Every rush brought them a little nearer to the Marne. Every furious effort to drive the British back weakened the German force on the southern bank. Gradually it was seen that the British were winning. All the bridges had been blown up, so the enemy had to cross on their frail pontoons. Some got over safely, but not all. It was a slow job, and before the Germans were through, the British were stabbing their charges at the rear of the retiring regiments, their artillery was already at work smashing man and bridge to pieces with uncanny accuracy.

With the Germans forced backward across the stream the battle had only begun. Across the moat of the river the Germans beat at the British with the iron flails of great guns. Every creeping advance or breathless rush of battalion towards the bank was met with a corrosive fire of rifle and gun. From every vantage point the artillery and infantry laboured with sweating and dogged resolution to prevent our men reaching the Marne and forcing their way across it.

The reaches about La Ferté were made impassable by a haze of firing. Our gunners were stringing out their chaplets of shrapnel over all the German positions, they were sowing the northern banks with leaden death so that victory might be reaped ; but with the strong river before, and the well-grounded foe beyond, the crossing was as yet impossible and fatal.

It was soon obvious a crossing must be found elsewhere.

At Changis, further west, where our men were fighting shoulder to shoulder with the French, a weak joint was found in von Kluck's armour of defence. Here, while the German artillery beyond the river was being pounded with shell, our advance guards began to drive at the Germans on the southern bank with the cold, cruel rush of bayonets.

The Germans, on the southerly bank, stood the onslaught for hours. They met attack with rifle and mitrailleuse from their trenches with stubborn obduracy. But they could not hold out long. The waves of khaki and the waves of red trousers were rising to their works in an inevitable tide. The shrapnel ate in their defence in unperturbable avidity, and the big shells from the sixty-pounders flattened whole sections of the works with huge blows.

Soon the positions became too hot to hold Germany, and the trenches were evacuated as the shaken men ran for the few pontoons spanning the stream. In this state of nerveless flux the bayonets of the romping attackers came swirling into them, dealing out death and wounds in a manner all but nauseating.

The Rifle Brigade was one of the regiments that thrust at the rear of the rout and helped to shatter it. The regiment came out of a belt of trees about half a mile from the river bank, and began to charge the Germans. As they rushed they discovered a French infantry regiment bent on the same errand. The French saw them at the same time, and a race began. The sporting instinct of the British was aroused. They refused to be left behind, and, urging each other with cheers, they

ran for the bank and the clustering Germans on it at top speed. The Rifles got home by a head, and they took their prizes out of the German rout with cold steel.

They went slap into the Prussian infantry with the bayonet, "but the Germans didn't seem to have the least heart for fighting. Some flung themselves into the stream and tried to swim for safety, but they were heavily accoutred and worn out, so they didn't go far. Of the three hundred men who tried this, not more than half a dozen succeeded in reaching the other bank, and the cries of the drowning were pitiful in the extreme." So writes Private Duffy, of the Rifle Brigade, and he also tells of desperate work that went on at another part of the river.

Here the Germans were crossing by a pontoon bridge under the fire of the British and French artillery. So terrible was the slaughter that the Germans would not risk the crossing, and flung themselves down by the river-side to escape the awful hail of shrapnel. The Rifles sent against these men came under the shelling of the British guns. But guns or no guns, the Rifles stuck to their job, and though many were hit they succeeded in dislodging the enemy.

As the fugitives crossed the red river, the British

followed on untiring feet. The stream was to be forced, and they allowed no moment to fly by in their attempt. From half a dozen points spans of pontoons began to spring across the water, to be broken by the hailing smash of shells, but ever to be thrust across again. The spans grew steadily ; but even before they touched the northern bank the British were across.

One party, that of the fine East Lancs, had flung itself into an armada of small boats, had ferried these with swinging haste across the stream, had reached the bank and spilt the cargoes, fighting outward at once. As these covering troops numbed the efforts of the Germans with their fire, the pontoon spans made the bank. Across them the jumping infantry poured, breasting through the fierce shell-fire, leaping to the further bank, extending their line, fighting and firing immediately.

Changis was the doom of La Ferté. The British swung east along the stream from there, harrying and driving in the stumbling Germans as they swept forward.

Meanwhile, at La Ferté itself, a battle of extraordinary grimness had been filling the river valley with fire and noise and death. The British had been endeavouring to force a passage with the greatest resolution. They had flung the Ger-

mans to the northern bank, and they had kept them there with an appalling artillery fire. Now they strove to cross themselves.

The fire from the town and from the artillery beyond the town was terrible, but the British set about their task without hesitation. The Engineers started to build out a pontoon to replace the shattered German bridge, and the enemy's artillery began to play the game that the British artillery had played earlier in the battle. As the devoted Engineers pushed their work across the stream, so the German artillery smashed it, and even while the Engineers worked, the infantry on the further bank kept up a terrible fire from rifle and mitrail-leuse. All through the afternoon the Engineers laboured, and the German guns shattered their work ; but it was the Engineers who possessed the greatest patience. By evening the bridge spanned the stream ; at nightfall the British began to cross.

The British were across. Still the Germans fought gamely for their now hopeless cause. Through the streets of La Ferté the battle clanged with the screaming fury of rifles fired in the cañons of the streets. Every road was barricaded, every house dribbled fire from every window. The cobbles became treacherous with blood ; clogged with dead.

Yet more and more British poured into the town. The Engineers' bridges let them in by the column, the roads from the Changis flank saw them pouring up in thousands. The position of the Germans was doomed, and steadily in this vehement battle of the pavements, the enemy was hounded from the town. It was an appalling and ugly business in which many brave men, like Lieutenant-Colonel Le Marchant, D.S.O.—who fell at the head of his splendid East Lancashire Regiment—were killed. It was, however, a more fatal and fateful fight for Germany. By night the Germans had lost La Ferté entirely, and the Third British Army Corps had won its way to the north bank of the Marne.

CHAPTER XVIII.

GERMANY IN A HURRY.

WHILE the Third British Corps was bursting its way across the Marne in and about La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, the other corps were swinging upward on the map with an electric purpose.

The fine British line in its long and splendid battle front—the First Corps to the right and the Second moving in the centre—had opened the day by engaging the Germans holding on to the Petit Morin. In the earliest hours of the dawn the guns were already shelling the defending positions, the battalions were already flung forward to beat a path and a passage to and over the river.

Unlike their brothers at La Ferté, the Germans here fought in a nerveless fashion. The work of the French further to the west, at Montmirail and at Sezanne, was no doubt having an intimidating effect on the German *élan*; the gaps in those places were beginning to let in the draught, and the front

here began to fear for its safety. With a less vigorous attack to throw back they might have done something, but the note of the British thrust at this moment was vigour at its best applied degree. Under the blows of two first-class army corps, the defence along the Petit Morin collapsed.

Crumpling up the resistance with ease, the First and Second Corps forced the river and struck upward towards the Marne with a swiftness dismaying and inconvenient to Germany. The great line rushed onward, purging the land of the enemy, sweeping from the fields, the woods, the villages, and the hills, the flotsam and jetsam of scuppered armies, as it advanced, dashing aside all efforts of resistance with the superb gesture of its assault.

In the early afternoon the line had "redded-up" the land between the rivers, and was driving with its impetuous zeal on to the Marne at Charly and Chateau-Thierry.

At Chateau-Thierry the Germans tried to stand. Reinforcements were rushed into the line, huge efforts were made to stem the tide of advance. A giant worry of fighting, of attack and counter-attack, of headlong, wonderful charges by the French—who fought at the shoulder of our line here—and British, of sullen and packed counter advances by the Germans, spouted up about the town. But

the end was inevitable, the defence was worn down ; it was pushed slowly, steadily backward ; the pontoons began creeping under gun-fire across the river. The gaps on the broken bridges were healed by imperturbable engineers working with an arctic calmness under fire. Very quickly the Germans were scorched away from the banks, and the British were into Chateau-Thierry.

The fighting worked through the very streets of the town, was waged on the doorsteps of homes. Barricades of earth, of stone, of furniture, of doors, of carts, and even bedding, were piled across the roads, and men fought and fired at each other from the ends of streets. Houses were fortresses, the dead were ramparts ; the stammering shout of mitrailleuse and the keen, shrill notes of rifles echoed between the walls with an unspeakable clamour. Then from behind their barricades the Turcos or the British would rise in a wave, and as a wave surge from end to end of the street, sweeping it clean. So street after street, won inch by inch, was gained. Soon, after most terrible fighting and ugly damage, Chateau-Thierry was purged of the German, and the fight went on again over the open and rolling country.

At Vitry, the centre of the Allied line, there was another great fight. The German line was well

placed and well held here, and the foe were heroically tenacious. All through the day and through the night the pendulum of battle swung this way and that. The Allies attacked under General Langle de Cary, and were checked; the Germans came at us in turn, and were hurled back. For a time there was no result. One battalion of German infantry was caught, refused to surrender, and was decimated; another was caught, and bravely shared the same fate; but two battalions are not an army, and grimly the Germans held on. Soon the battling in other parts of the line told here. German troops were withdrawn to help comrades in a more desperate plight—and the Allies attacked again. Under the repeated assaults the line sagged and began to buckle. No rest was allowed it, bayonet attack and shell-fire slashed and hacked into it—and it broke. As it broke the Allied line came swamping after it, giving it no time to pause, giving it no time to re-form. It was a rout. It had every outward sign of rout. Guns and wagons and men, rifles and cartridges and clothes, the entire débris of an army were strewn in an indescribable mess of war over the fields of flight.

By the end of the ninth of September the battle of the Marne had become the defeat and rout of Germany. The British and the French acting in

the region of the Ourcq had crumpled the enemy and had rolled him up with an irresistible energy, so that, leaving his wreckage of armies like the trail of a paper-chase behind him, he had fled wildly to the north. The remainder of the British forces had thronged with immense elation across the Marne, were harrying and hounding the Germans over the land towards the Aisne. The French had shattered von Buelow at Montmirail, and were tossing his battalions northward also as fast as bayonets could work. At Sezanne, so swift and decisive had been Foch's stroke, that the reeling armies of von Buelow and von Hausen were already divided by a gap fifteen miles wide—and through this gap the elated French troops were pouring. Disaster, then, was all along the line for Germany, and back she went in a hurry, to save herself.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GREAT DRIVE.

THE battle had now resolved itself into a great drive. As far as the battle of the Marne went, the enemy was defeated. Isolated units of the German force faced about and put up good fights to check the advancing Allies, but at no point were the Allies checked. At Torcy, north of Chateau-Thierry, there was another brisk, snapping battle, where the enemy turned at bay before the exultant rush of the First British Army Corps. He had his artillery well placed on a high, partially wooded ridge, and although the German artillery is slow in its working, this had the inevitable Taube to aid, and it did excellently.

The French and the British, however, had learnt all the tricks for circumventing the Taube by this. The Taube was allowed to fly over the Allied lines at his own sweet will. The Allies did not mind the observer obtaining the range and flying back with

it to the batteries, for the Allies could play a game worth two of his. No sooner did the Taube arrive at the German lines than the Allied batteries "hooked in" and moved to another position. Here they went on with their work unconcernedly, no more than amused when the German guns began sowing with an awful tornado of death—the place they had just left. Throughout the battle the French and British artillery kept up this game, firing a few shots from one position, and then moving away. The Allied guns never stopped their arduous and splendid work all day, and the German batteries were silenced by the British.

When the guns were dumb, the British infantry were loosed at the enemy. They went forward with a splendid rush, shouting and singing at the top of their voices, telling the world with all the strength of their lungs that they were NOT downhearted. It might have been a glorious charge, but the Germans do not wait for charges when delivered by our infantry. They were out of the trenches at once, and flying. Out of the frying-pan, that is, into the fire. No sooner had they started to run than the French and British cavalry were after them, cutting them to shreds, scattering them hopelessly over the countryside.

When the cavalry tired of this chase, the cyclist



corps continued it. The presence of these cyclists is interesting. They show that all the resources of modernity are crowded into war. They did admirably. They were flung out in a net far beyond the Allied advance, working forward, guerrilla fashion, through the fields, along the side roads and amid the woods. They did great work. At one point fifty cyclists caught and ambushed one hundred and fifty German troopers in the mazes of a wood. The horsemen were hopeless amid the trees, and the hidden cyclists killed and unhorsed eighty of them before they, too, joined in the universal flight northward.

These brave and desperate attempts on the part of bodies of the enemy to stand firm, and steady the rout into a retirement, blossomed into many grim and glorious little fights. It was, for instance, in this phase of the fighting that the Lincolns suffered, and recovered and captured a battery. It was here that the Black Watch and some of the Camerons turned the tables on the enemy with a tearing charge. Somewhere about here, too, as far as one can fit in the details, British infantry came upon some of the Prussian Guard, engaged them, fought them with a singing crispness of battle, and drove them right off the field.

The Lincolns started their exploits with a very

bad ten minutes. With some French infantry and cavalry the regiment had fought its way right up to a German trench. The men were just pulling themselves together for the final rush, when the earth beneath their feet burst with a terrific explosion, and the air was thick with bodies blown sky high. The Lincolns themselves were not badly damaged by the explosion of the land-mine, though many of them were stunned by the force of the detonation. In a moment, however, they recovered, and with a great shout they leapt at the Germans in the trench.

For once the Germans held their ground, and an indescribable *mêlée* raved over the earthworks. Stubbornly the enemy fought, but urgently the Lincolns drove them back. Soon the trench was cleared, and the Lincolns were firmly installed in it. But that had not ended the fight. It was a desperate business to keep it. The Germans came back again, and in force, bringing many of their vicious little machine guns; at the same time a battery of field artillery came into play, and raked the British with a galling hail of shrapnel.

There was no cover for the Lincolns, because the protective mounds were on the wrong side of the trench; all the same they held on. Again and again the enemy attacked, again and again the

prone men were lashed by the fire of mitrailleuse and shrapnel. It seemed that their situation was hopeless. Then, just at that moment when things looked their worst, the Fusilier Brigade was rushed out to their aid.

The Fusiliers came out under a fierce shell fire, moving forward in a series of clever rushes. A quarter of a mile from the trenches the enemy loosed their horsemen against them with a heavy and fierce hurled charge. That charge failed. The splendid story of the Guards at Compiègne was repeated. The Kaiser's cavalry could not intimidate the Fusiliers. They were met in approved style with bayonet, and even with clubbed rifle, and just at that moment when the German horsemen should have emerged victorious from the whirl of fighting, it was the Fusiliers who broke through the squadrons, scattering them with the deadly steel in their impetuous rush towards the Lincolns. The Lincolns were saved.

A little while later, to even up things a bit, the Lincolns charged with great dash right on to a battery, bayoneted all the gunners stupid enough to stay, and captured all the guns.

The episode of the Black Watch was as unexpected, as brilliant and as fierce. By all the rules of war the Black Watch should have suffered defeat

in this affair from an ambushade. At all times, however, the British Tommy has shown scant respect for the rules of war set down in text-books (which are indeed mainly Prussian), and on this occasion he saw no reason to change his attitude.

While acting as advance guard the famous regiment came to a hill covered with thick bush. French cavalry, after reconnoitring, reported this hill clear; all the same a terrible fire was opened on the Highlanders when they came up to it. The entire hill, from top to bottom, was tiered with trenches cunningly hidden in the bush. The first fire was opened when the British were but ninety yards distant, and ghastly gaps were torn in the front ranks. The Black Watch and two companies of the Camerons who were with them rallied immediately. Bayonets came out, and the "kilties" jumped at the hill. The first line of trenches were swept clean in the dash, the Germans having no stomach for the Highland charge, and in this first trench the men held their line, waiting until the rest of the regiment came up to their aid. Then, forming again, they went forward, working up to the crest in a series of deadly charges.

On the eleventh of September the battle of the Marne was ended. The Sixth French Army had by now broken the defence of von Kluck, and with

the British co-operating, the Ourcq was crossed and the Germans driven back beyond Soissons. With the thrust of the French and British armies smashing behind, the Germans were also forced back beyond Rheims, the Suippes and Clermont, and further east the French had pushed back the invader and had even rushed Pont-a-Mousson, and gained the command of one of the passages to the Vosges.

The sweep of the Allies had been implacable as well as overpowering. The Germans had fought bravely and skilfully enough, but they had now been attacked with an equal bravery, and a greater skill. They had been over-bold and had made a mistake; every fault had been perceived and punished with a brilliant thoroughness. Thus, the giant army that was to shatter France, to seize Paris, and to win the war in one superb dash, now went trailing across the plain of Châlons and towards the strong banks of the Aisne in a stumbling flight for safety. As they ran, the Allied cavalry drove into them and cut them up; as they ran, the Allied artillery dropped shell after shell into their convoys and batteries and battalions.

The rout was strewn with wrecked wagons, wrecked guns, and wrecked men. Huge hauls of guns and prisoners were made by the Allies. On

the tenth Sir John French reported he had taken thirteen guns and two thousand men as well as machine guns, and the Germans were already driven to the Aisne. On the twelfth the entire artillery of a German army corps—160 and more guns—was taken, and the Allies rounded up prisoners until they were tired of doing so.

By the thirteenth, too, the whole of the German army had pivoted back towards the Aisne to save itself from the threat of defeat that this shattering of the right wing and the piercing of the centre might produce. Already German armies were defeated and discredited, and though they were able to breathe more securely once behind the immensely strong works they had prepared about the river, they had lost moral force, and must henceforward fight under the depressing burden of failure.

For they knew that they had failed utterly. One of their own experts, General von Caemmerer, had already inscribed for von Kluck's defeated army its epitaph of doom. "An offensive," he said, "which had to retrace its steps before the gates of Paris, or cannot even reach them, means a complete fiasco of the whole enterprise." During the long battle of the Aisne the German leaders had ample time to reflect upon the battle of the Marne, and "the complete fiasco" of their whole enterprise it signified.

CHAPTER XX.

THE AISNE.

THE battle of the Aisne grew up out of the wild fight of the Marne. Since September 6th, when the Allies had turned in their retreat and swept the startled hosts of Germany back with the swing of their attacking rush, the Germans had been retreating in a desperate and headlong fashion. Across the rolling valleys of the Marne and its daughter rivers the exultant armies had raced at the heels of the tired invaders. Time after time the weary men had faced about and tried to stem the rout, time after time the wave of the driving armies had thundered into them, swept them on again. Now on the banks of the broad Aisne they turned and fought yet again. For their very existence they stood firm, tried once more to check the awful thrust of the attack.

On the afternoon of Saturday, September 12th, even before the fighting which made up the Marne

was really over along part of the front, the battle began to growl to the west of Soissons, where the French and British on the extreme left of the Allied line had caught the quarry and engaged him. Gradually the thick and heavy note of the great guns began to expand, working towards the south-east, as the whole of the French and British line came into touch, moved forward into the fight. Quickly all the high ground about the river began steaming with the fume of war. The battle, the longest battle in the history of war—that is, the longest battle until September 12th, 1914—had commenced. The Germans had found a vantage ground for armies in the difficult country about the Aisne. They were standing and fighting.

In the inspired laconicism of his despatches, General Sir John French has drawn the picture of the arena of this tremendous battle.

“The Aisne Valley runs generally East and West, and consists of a flat-bottomed depression of width varying from half a mile to two miles, down which the river follows a winding course to the west, at some points near the southern slopes of the valley and at others near the northern. The high ground both on the north and south of the river is approximately four hundred feet above the bottom of the valley, and is very similar in character, as

are both slopes of the valley itself, which are broken into numerous rounded spurs and re-entrants. The general plateau on the south is divided by a subsidiary valley of much the same character, down which the small River Vesle flows to the main stream near Sermoise. The slopes of the plateau overlooking the Aisne on the north and south are of varying steepness, and are covered with numerous patches of wood, which also stretch upwards and backwards over the edge on to the top of the high ground. There are several villages and small towns dotted about in the valley itself and along its sides, the chief of which is the town of Soissons. The Aisne is a sluggish stream of some 170 feet in breadth, but, being fifteen feet deep in the centre, it is unfordable. Between Soissons on the west and Villers on the east (the part of the river attacked and secured by the British forces) there are eleven road bridges across it."

Here the Germans had gone to ground, into this great arena the armies of the Allies marched to give battle, moved to drive the Germans out.

Through the heavy rain of the twelfth the whole line was moved up rapidly, and already segments of that line were fighting.

South of Soissons the French, with the Third British Corps, thrust heavily at the Germans on the

south bank of the stream, were checked, and then went forward again under the cover of the British artillery. The Germans tried to hold the attack, but there was no staying it. The Allies fought their way through the wooded country to Buzancy, south-east of Soissons itself, caught the enemy and hurled him out of that place, and, ignoring the heavy smashing of the guns from across the valley, drove the Germans at a great pace all the way down the hillside into Soissons, out of it and over the river.

The fierce rush of the French and British bore the Germans back, and they went pell-mell across the river under a strenuous and appalling fire from our guns. Once across they blew up the bridges, and for a breathing spell remained, entrenched on the northern bank.

The Third Corps had thus begun the British share of the battle on the left; they had, however, begun to fight no earlier than Sir Douglas Haig's First Corps. While the Third were romping after the Germans at Soissons, the First was slashing at the Aisne across the Vesle at Fismes.

General Allenby's admirable First Cavalry Division was working forward, to screen the advance. Vauxcéré was swamped by the squadrons with but a firework display of shooting, the outposts of the

enemy were driven in, venturesome bodies of Germans were charged and cut to pieces. Through the woods, along the roads, the trotting cavalry worked, clearing the ground of the foe, preparing the way of the advance. Right up to and into the little town of Braisne the cavalry went. In Braisne the enemy was in some strength. He had artillery and tried to use it. The cavalry, however, were too nippy for the Germans. Into Braisne the squadrons went catapulting, they cleaned up the streets at a rush, and at a dash had swept through and were over the river. The Germans were entirely surprised, and fell back headlong before the squadrons, among whom the Queen's Bays did brisk work.

Behind this efficient screen the long, fat columns of the Army Corps came marching on to the river. By night the cavalry had crossed the winding Vesle on the right wing, and were at the Aisne, and other troops were at the main stream itself, and all the south bank was held from Soissons to the south of Craonne. So on the night of Saturday the Allied arms were ready. All night the big guns thudded a warning to them, and they waited. In the morning they were moving forward again, fighting their way across the river.

CHAPTER XXI.

ACROSS.

ON Sunday, September 13th, 1914, the British advanced all along their line against the defences of the Aisne.

As the Corps moved out, all the heights along the Aisne caught fire. From the multitude of trenches cut under the trees on the steep slopes of the northern rise the rifles began to crackle ; from under the trees the numberless mitrailleuses began to hiss and spit. From their cunning hiding-places beyond the crests of the hills the German batteries began lacing the air with the terror and the fret of shrapnel, and into the fight from their positions six or seven miles behind it, the thick and brutal howitzers began pumping their vast shells at the attack. The heights began to boil with a furious rage of resistance. The air of the valley shivered with frenzied effort of man and gun to decimate the British. The atmosphere became lethal with lead. Nothing could live there, it seemed ; nothing could push against that strong, beating gale of bullets. Over the floor of

the valley the British army marched. In a calmness that ignored death and bullets, it pushed forward to the river.

Through the trees, crouching amid the bushes, running doubled over the fields, the long, thin lines of skirmishers moved swiftly. Men were dying by the score; but they were progressing. Behind the first line another followed. Behind that another. Away back, and covered by the trees, the steady infantry columns, the alert cavalry squadrons, waited, working forward by fits and starts; ready, avid to seize every vantage of advance. The British advanced on a big front. The 1st Corps drove forward on the right on a line extending from Chavonne to Bourg, the 2nd Corps held the centre from the high ground at Missy westward to Vailly, and the 3rd Corps was on the left from Venizel to Missy.

Behind still, the nimble British gunners were working briskly at their pieces, the big guns and the small, sowing the enemy's positions with shrapnel, driving the enemy out of their works, preparing the further bank for the fine effort of the advance.

They did well. They stashed all endeavours of the Germans to annihilate by bullet the attack, and under that excellent nursing the British reached

the river. At a dozen different points along that front of miles the British were preparing to cross, were crossing.

The front the Germans had chosen was immensely strong, the enemy had made it stronger. They had prepared it even while they advanced with victorious tread to Paris, for they were wise in military knowledge and knew that the best soldier is he who prepares for all eventualities. Thus the heights to the north of the Aisne, powerful and bold as they were made by nature, were reinforced in strength by a thousand carefully-planned and cut trenches and by scores of gun positions. The grim chalk hills of Aisne were sown with works from which gunners and infantrymen could play with certainty and deliberation and ease upon all the attackable crossings of the river. It was in the face of this scientifically certain fire that the British advanced.

On the far right the infantry of the First Division and the cavalry struck at the river near Bourg. There was a strenuous opposition all the way of the advance, but the men went on. Just here there is a canal, and this canal passes over the river by a viaduct. The fire seemed not so excessive as the force came to it, and the cavalry began to cross. But the German reticence with shot and shell was

intended for a trap. As soon as some of the horse-men had got over, the firing blazed out in a frenzy, and shrapnel and bullet began to pour over the place. It was impossible for the cavalry to move out of the town, so they made themselves secure and prepared to fight. But they had mistaken the German spirit. No hand-to-hand rush was intended, merely the hail of shot and shrapnel densened, in the hope that the horsemen would be slain by bombardment. The horsemen were not even intimidated, and while the Germans hesitated about charging, the bunching British infantry came lunging over the bridge, and quickly put a new complexion on the episode.

They at least were not content to remain still. The British attack opened out again, went forward, and was soon pressing the enemy back. The Germans hurried fresh men into their lines, but, curiously, refrained from charging down the British, whom they might have exterminated as they lay below them on the slope of the hill striking upward towards Chamouille.

They contented themselves with opening a fresh and savage artillery fire, hoping that would do the work their bayonets should have done. In answer to that fire the British advanced their columns in greater force across the canal viaduct. The

Germans fired with an industrious activity at these determined Brigades, but the battalions pressed on. The viaduct was encircled by a disintegrating atmosphere of explosion and sudden and violent death; but soberly and steadily in the face of the pelting bullets and the detonating shells the soldierly companies pressed on. The men of the 1st Division went forward nimbly along the towing path, pushing onward always, fighting sometimes, dying sometimes, wading deep in the water when that was demanded, but always progressing. So, as the day went on, a personable army piled up on the northern bank, a space for armies to breathe in was cleared by the slowly expanding front of the persuasive British attack, the men on the slopes were reinforced and stiffened, the front worked upward with rush after rush, and the Germans were resolutely driven back. By night the 1st Division had made good. By night Moulins, Paissy and Vendresse on the Aisne slopes had been reached.

Further along the river the resistance was fiercer and better planned. Every bridge was down. Not only had our army to face the galling fire from the slopes, but they had to build bridges. These the Engineers began to construct, calmly, methodically, under that awful fire. It was terrible work. Spans

were splintered to matchwood at the river bank, even as they grew. The Engineers began as calmly as ever to build anew. As they worked the Germans came pressing down to the water's edge to drive them off with the blast of their rifle fire, even to make a counter-attack across the river by means of temporary bridges, the sections of which they carried.

The British artillery immediately lobbed a shell into the group carrying the first bridge section, and there was no bridge section left. A squall of shell leaped after the first, and in a moment the enemy's design was relinquished. Still the Germans pressed their riflemen to the bank, and opened a hot fire. They did not remain there long.

Three hundred Connaught Rangers waited on them across the Aisne, and, as they made for the water, the Irish rifles let go at them. It was a great day for the Connaughts. When they were not firing they were making pointed personal remarks about the appearance of the Germans. "I see you," they yelled across the stream; "it isn't any good your hiding in there. We can see your ears sticking out." When they were not joking they sang as they fired. They sang lustily, and they sang a song that the Germans have many reasons to appreciate—had they not based part of their plans

on an Irish rebellion? For the song they sang to the Germans as they picked them off was that cheery, splendid doggerel, "What do you think of the Irish now?"

Meanwhile, as the Engineers laboured, the troops, fretting to cross and to come to grips with the Germans, had found for themselves a viaduct. At Pont-Arcy a railway bridge straggled its ruin across the Aisne. In blowing it up the Germans had made a bad job of the task. The bridge, which should have been impassable, was almost impassable—but not quite. Just one thin, frail girder swung in a perilous arc across the swift, rain-gorged stream.

A classic adventurer in the British lines found that girder, announced the glad tidings—and a British army crossed it. It is like a line from Homer—that mad, that wonderful crossing. Along the frail and quivering plank of steel the insouciant and happy British infantry went scrambling. The German fire, guns and mitrailleuse and rifles, screamed up angrily as, with streaming death, they tried to stop the crossing; but the long, thin file of men did not cease to cross that thin ribbon of metal and to gain the other side. Soon the Germans were forced to abandon hope of stopping the passage. The British, the Connaughts, the

first in the crush, were over, were working forward yard by yard, until they had established themselves less than four hundred yards away from the Prussian rifle-pits. The Prussians fell back. All the time the Engineers went on building. By five o'clock that day they were passing men and guns across the completed structure.

At another point of the river, at Chavonne, the Fourth Guards Brigade met with desperate resistance. All day long the sections of both armies warred with each other across the bullet-whipped river, the British striving with every sinew to cross, the enemy baffling them with giant efforts in slaying. The Guards persisted, refused to be beaten, and late in the afternoon they were able to ford a way over. It was a deadly and difficult crossing indeed, a crossing as amazing as that of the girder bridge. They crossed in ferry boats, any old boats commandeered from anywhere, punts and skiffs and bumboats, but anyhow boats enough to get a thousand men across. Under a blaze of fire they swam their frail armada across the stream, and out on to the bank the keen, brave men tumbled. They made themselves secure at once, and though they had to fight a battle the next day to clinch their right of occupation, they were never turned off the bank.

At Missy, towards the left of the British line, a terrible fight raged. The advance to the bank was over open ground, bleak with slaying. It was whipped by bullet and shrapnel; the huge "Black Maria" shells of the German howitzers tore vast and hideous holes in it. Across this acre of death the British fought their way. The great howitzers could not be located, but the German artillery and the German riflemen could be searched out and found by the British aeroplanes and their servants, the gunners, and slowly the fire of resistance was quenched. As the fire died down, and in spite of the "Black Marias," the infantry worked down to the water's edge and commenced to cross. There were no pontoons or girders here; but the men did not let the absence of these little things worry them. They began to build rafts. Anything was used—house-doors, furniture, planks, everything portable. Soon the river was covered with the flimsy flotilla, and with the water jumping and jetting all round them from the bullets, the cheery British won their passage over.

On the extreme left of the line, at and near Soissons, the battle fluctuated in a desperate manner. The enemy were established in strength. Nearer the centre of this line there was a partly damaged bridge, and although the enemy was in

force, the British got across, hauling their guns over by hand.

At Soissons itself there was a ding-dong battle that at moments looked dangerous. A small force crossed in the teeth of a fierce resistance, by boat or raft or plank or anything that could float with a man on top of it. Having gained the passage, the men lined out in a wood, and fought throughout the day against enormous odds. The men were well in the zone of the howitzer fire, which was so heavy here that when the pontoon train came up the bursting of these shells made it impossible to get the bridge across. Yet, howitzer shells or no shells, the men held on. They had been ordered to hold the head of a shattered bridge, and they held it.

Among the British on this side were sections of the West Kents, Black Watch, and the Scottish Borderers. If they could do no more than hold their ground, they could yet give the bravest account of themselves. The Germans worked their lines right down to these men, but they never broke them. Officers and privates were slain in woeful numbers, yet they never wilted. Lieut.-Colonel A. Grant-Duff, of the Black Watch, died here a brave man's death. Under the awful smash of the big shells the men had fallen back. An infantry attack was launched at them, and the Colonel and

his adjutant took up rifles to fight in the ranks with the men—and so died fighting.

The Germans seemed on the point of breaking through here, but in the end bravery stopped them. The dense mass of their attack was coming on at a rush, when the maxim of the little group ceased fire—the whole of its crew lay in a ring about the gun, dead. At this critical moment, when so much depended on breaking the front of the attack, a big Highlander jumped from the firing line, sprang to the quick-firer. In a flash his strong arms had lifted the piece, tripod and all, and he had run to the bridge-head and planted the gun full in the face of the German advance. There, absolutely alone, he sat down, and his fingers raced the fully charged belt through the deadly little machine. Under that jet of death the head of the advancing column wavered, broke, ran for cover to the fields, on either side of the road, leaving scores of dead that the stammering maxim had scythed down; and as the last man vanished the big Highlander fell forward on to the gun, quite dead; thirty bullets were found in him when he was picked up.

But the valorous dead were winning the way for armies. At a number of points along the river front the British Army was already pouring across the Aisne. The French were winning their great

victories to the right and left of the British line, the enemy were being rolled up everywhere, were being thrust back from the mastery of the stream. Only at one point did they hold the vantage at the water edge. This was at the bridge at Condé, in the centre of the line. Strong forces had been sent at them here, but the Germans had not been shifted. The British Commander examined their position, and allowed them to stay. They might hold the bridge of Condé as long as they wished; it did not matter. As the British moved forward the Germans must either retire or be surrounded.

So was the crossing of the Aisne won. By the evening of September 13th the enemy knew that again they had failed. They withdrew the main body of their troops to the high ground about two miles north of the river, to the strong line of works they had already prepared there. Already the British had moved after them and had won a space up the slopes, capturing villages as they went forward. All night long the British masses were pouring across the river, all night long the tireless Engineers were building pontoons, repairing bridges for more and more British to cross. The morning of the fourteenth found the Allies facing the long range of iron-held heights that made the siege battle of the Aisne.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BATTLE OF THE HEIGHTS.

THROUGH the trailing misery of the mists that made dreary the early hours of a wet Monday, the British Army slipped out quietly against the grim battlements of the Aisne. Throughout the desperate attacks of Sunday, September 13th, the British had, at nearly every point attempted, fought their way across the broad river in the face of a stubborn and vigorous resistance. By night-fall the northern bank of the stream was theirs, and before them, looming in inscrutable menace, towered the tree-bearded heights of the Aisne plateaus. The problem of these plateaus had been faced by the English Commander-in-Chief throughout the night. Were those high and secret slopes occupied by an enemy in force? Did that bland and expressionless screen of trees on the hills, and furring the many deep "chines" down which from the heights run many small streams, mask

a strongly held position, or merely a big rearguard force meant to hold the British back while the main German Army withdrew ?

The British Commander asked himself these things anxiously, and he planned his battle-line to give him his answer. The force moving out to attack on Monday was going to tell him whether the enemy had gone to ground in a superb position for defence, or whether the German array were still in retreat. In its first phases this movement was not only a battle, but a question.

Through the dark that precludes the morning, a little officers' patrol went stealing forward on the extreme right of the British force. The cavalrymen were out probing the wooded valleys, here freer and wider flung, feeling the way, searching out any hiding Germans. Behind this patrol the steady battalions of the First Corps from the front Chavonne-Moulins moved up. They were then, and would be throughout the fight, consummately handled. One of the ablest of our Generals, Sir Douglas Haig, held the reins of direction.

Soon, thick and muffled by the sodden air, there came back to the marching corps the fluttering "pit-pot" of the small-bore rifles. The tramping regiments stiffened, quickened in their rhythmic swing. They knew what that sound meant. The

cavalry patrol had found and disturbed the enemy. The battle had begun.

Very quickly the fine regiments under Sir Douglas Haig's command were working into the fight. The attack was aimed to take and hold the edge of the plateau where the Chemin des Dames ran east and west paralleling the Aisne, to Craonne. The major portion of the 1st Division was to swing upward along the rising Vendresse valley, while the 2nd Brigade and the 25th Artillery Brigade, all under General Bulfin, were to work forward to a crest east of Troyon and to capture it. The regiments drove steadily up the slopes, driving in the enemy's posts as they were encountered. Their movement was steady, and it was not until the Germans had been found in force about a factory north of Troyon village that the advancing line was checked.

Having proved the strength of the Germans here, the British line manœuvred to attack and force them away. The King's Royal Rifles and the Royal Sussex Regiment were swung forward to drive them out. This was at 3 a.m., in the dark and in the rain. Resolutely the two fine regiments pushed forward through the saturated trees against the riflemen and the mitrailleuses about the factory that had become a fort. They

attacked vigorously, but for all their courage they could make very little impression. At 4 a.m. the Northamptonshires came rushing along the spurs to the east that commanded the factory. Along the spur were Germans well entrenched; but pressing swiftly forward, the "Cobblers" were on them, the bayonets were busy, and the Germans ran. But that was all they could do just then. They held the trench, but could not advance, for the enemy's gunners had marked the range, and the entire lip of the firing parapet was seared with a fire of shrapnel, mitrailleuse bullets, with occasionally the burst of the hugely detonating howitzer shell to weave the horror of explosion together. There was no relief given to the prone regiment by their own guns. The guns were behind, eager to be doing a brisk business, but the rain and the mist obscured the view, and they could not pick up the range of the Germans.

Into this pack of fight and its momentary deadlock the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment advanced. The corps, old and tried in battle, pushed up to the aid of the regiments attacking the stubborn Germans in the factory. The Germans continued to be stubborn. Attacks were rushed violently at them, lives were lost in an heroic endeavour to brush them away, but the Germans

held tight. Under the chaperonage of their artillery and their hidden howitzers they kept up an unchecked fire of rifle and quick-firer, and it was disaster to try and charge them out.

Sir Douglas Haig knew his business. He meant to have that factory and the line of positions it commanded, and, handling his men with an ability "skilful, bold, and decisive in character," he won his way. He piled more regiments into the fierce fight. He sent up the 1st Coldstream Guards into the attack. The Coldstreams had marched three hundred and more miles since they had landed, and had not had rest yet, but that did not take the edge off their appetite for fighting. Under a terrible shrapnel fire they lunged forward to the line of battle.

They went into the fringe of the woods and worked upward briskly, dashing aside the few feeble Germans who tried to bar their passage. The Germans had the range to an inch, and the storm of shrapnel that whirled about them was terrifying; but they went on. Near the summit the trenched enemy let fly so fiercely that the regiment had to lay flat to escape extermination, and from this position to work towards the crest in small parties only. It was during this manoeuvre that the Coldstreamers came upon a body of Germans

in a hidden trench. The Germans had felt that they were safe in this trench; but the Guards soon undeceived them. They were, in fact, the particular type of Germans the Coldstreamers had been looking for for many a day, and they rushed at them warmly. The bayonets were ready and eager for an introduction, and with fine *élan* the Guards were on to their foe. There was a little fighting, but not much. The Germans knew the antidote to a British bayonet charge, and they used it; the white flag was hoisted.

As the Guards relieved the pressure on the right of the assaulting North Lancashires, the line went forward. The mist had lifted, the British aeroplanes had begun to slide across the sky, and the artillery was catching up the range from the signals of our incomparable aviators. Soon the enemy's artillery was smothered under the blanket of fire our gunners loosed at them; soon the resistance of the German infantry became feeble under the torture of decimating shrapnel. The defence of the nearest line was buckling. In a swamping rush the Loyal North Lancashires went shouting at the enemy in the fortress factory, and swept him out. The whole line, including the dashing "Cobblers," advanced, secured good positions to the north of Troyon, and although the British

were checked in further advance by a strong line backed by machine-gun and shell fire, they had, so far, made good.

The troops on the right, the 3rd Brigade, had made good their advance up the valley of Vendresse, too. A strong hostile column had flung downward to beat them back; but two British battalions were enough to check that attempt. The enemy strove to break through by a succession of furious counter-attacks. Line after line and mass after mass of men and quick-firers were thrust at our troops; but as fast as they came on, the British smashed them back with bullet and with bayonet. All the afternoon this pendulum of battling swung to and fro; but the vigour of the enemy waned and waned, and the columns were finally driven off with a terrible loss.

On the left of this attack—that is, towards the centre of the British line—our men advanced across the river to seize and hold a ridge, which, unfortunately, the Germans had only just occupied. The enemy made a determined resistance, and our infantry, which had first to cross the river, had a most difficult task to accomplish against a stubborn position. Much of the work had to be done without the help of the guns, and though our men fought well, it is not easy to make an impression

with bullet and bayonet against well-found positions. Soon artillery was hurried up to this point, and, particularly, a brigade of howitzers was brought into play by way of retort to the thick-voiced "Black Maria." As in many another fight, the heavy British guns showed that they could play the game as well as the big German artillery—and play it better. They crushed in the face of the resistance, and our troops advanced.

The 4th Guards Brigade crossed the river at this point about ten o'clock, and joined briskly into the attack. The Guards Brigade was made up of all the regiments—Grenadiers, Coldstreams, Scots and Irish—and they gave the best possible account of themselves. As soon as they passed the river they came under a ferocious artillery fire. A barren stretch of country lay between them and the battle, then a drenched wood veiled the rises, and behind the wood the death-dealing German guns. Across this open space and under a pall of shrapnel the Guards went at the double to the attack. Although the Germans had laced the undergrowth elsewhere with a mesh of barbed wire, they had, by some singular mistake, left this stretch of woodland free of the terror. It was a grave error, and soon the Germans knew it. With a

superb rush the crack regiments went in under the trees and climbed toward the trenches. Though the enemy tried to stop them with a torrent of death poured out as fast as rifle and mitrailleuse could be pumped off, the Guards would not be stopped. The British, with fixed bayonets, were charging. In five minutes the trenches along the Ostel ridge were minus living Germans, and six guns were in possession of our fellows.

But the fight which had developed so well and so rapidly had moments when the position of the British appeared critical. Between the Guards Brigade and their comrades on the left a lunging attack of the Germans had driven a weak line backward. Into this gap more and more of the enemy were hurled, until it seemed as though a wedge would drive right through and split the British line near Vailly. There was no reserve at hand, and matters looked desperate.

Then at this crucial moment Sir John French sent forward to Sir Douglas Haig the only troops he had available. Not infantry, which was needed, but the Cavalry Division. The Cavalry Division sufficed. The British horseman can fight well, whether he is on foot or straddling a mare, and now, when he was asked to fight as an infantryman, he did it with the best of them. Skilfully Sir

Douglas Haig strung these happy arrivals across the gap between the Guards and the other regiments, and as skilfully the troopers fought. The point of the threatening wedge was blunted.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE VALLEY OF HEROES.

TOWARDS the afternoon all this steady looking for positions had been accomplished, and about four o'clock the whole of the line began to heave its way upward and onward in a general attack over the Aisne slopes.

Over the slopes, under the trees, along the winding and difficult chimes, climbing and fighting through little scared villages of chalk workers, the British troops toiled upward in battle. The whole scheme of the fight was excellently arranged for defence, and the Germans endeavoured to make all possible use of the tactical advantage nature had provided for them. Our troops, however, had gained a momentum that could not be checked, and the most ardent of Teutonic endeavours was quelled by our resolute advance.

It was an inchoate and bewildering fight, in which the doings of the regiments were fused into

the splendid incoherence of the assault. Certain vivid moments of bravery blaze out from that inspired mêlée on the slopes, and little more than that can we know of the affair.

There are many of these deeds. The annals of the Victoria Cross and the Distinguished Service Order, the new-founded annals of the Distinguished Conduct Medal, are full of them. It would be impossible in any book to set down the details of all the splendid actions, for not only do the new honours and new facts arrive even as one writes, or even after one has written, but the number is so great that no adequate mention of each case could be made unless a separate book of several volumes could be written about them and them alone.

Still there are, however, specific deeds that stand out or come to one's attention even in these early days, and these deeds are so splendid and so vivid that they demand mention. One of them is the act that won for Private George Wilson, 2nd Battalion Highland Light Infantry, the Victoria Cross.

Private George Wilson is one of those creatures who seem to have stepped straight from the age of sagas into this age of magazine rifles and howitzers, to find that the human qualities of courage have not changed very much after all.

In a wood near Verneuil there was posted a German machine gun, and because it was so well screened the machine gun was a menace and a nuisance. The Highland Light Infantry, moving forward in the attack of the 5th Brigade, found it more than a menace and a nuisance. They were losing a number of good men because of it, and they felt that it should be silenced. Private Wilson, not a man strikingly heroic to the eye, felt this concrete fact even more than his comrades. Not only did he think the mitrailleuse should be put out of action, he thought he should be the man to effect this ideal. He mentioned the fact to his officer.

The officer said "No" with a certain amount of promptness, and the machine gun continued its steady industry of slaughtering Highland Light Infantrymen. It also continued to anger Private Wilson until, at last, his emotion reached that point when it overruled the axioms of discipline, and he determined in spite of his officer to go out and silence the torment.

He went out. Another man jumped forward with him, a man of the Middlesex Regiment, and in the face of a tremendous fusilade the two charged the gun. They rushed forward for many yards, though every yard should have meant death.

The Germans loosed excitedly at them to pull them up, but for moments they were untouched. Then, suddenly, the throng of bullets caught the Middlesex man, and down in a heap he went.

Private Wilson, however, did not go down. He survived amazingly in the face of the frantic firing. The luck of heroes was with him and he was not touched. Bullets spat and hissed all about him but he went running on. The Germans, unable to touch him with their rifles, swung the machine gun on him. They intended to blow him out of existence with the spouting jet of its many bullets.

Private Wilson was too sharp for them. As a gunner jumped to the firing levers of the maxim, the Britisher's rifle went up and jumped off, and the gunner collapsed against the tripod of the gun. Another German sprung to the firing seat, kicking aside his dead comrade: he died before he could sit down. There was another man in his place immediately—and another man dead immediately. In this mad and magnificent charge Wilson could do no wrong. Every time a man leapt to the gun the infantryman's rifle spoke, and that man died. Wilson in this breathless moment shot the entire crew of six.

He rushed in to capture the gun, and as he did so the German officer who had commanded the

detachment came to his feet. Wilson had wounded him already, but not enough to make him helpless. The German rose pluckily, and his revolver jerked off in his hand at once. It was Wilson's day of days, however, for the revolver missed, and Wilson finished his man with the bayonet.

With this act he had accomplished his end; the quick-firer was silenced.

That, however, was not quite enough for the Light Infantryman. The gun was still usable, and he saw no reason why it should not be used. There was a mass of Germans not a hundred yards away, and the Britisher determined they should have a sample of their own gun's fire. They did. Working calmly at the firing levers, in a penumbra of shrapnel bursts, Private George Wilson put 750 rounds of ammunition into the Teutonic mass, and the mass broke. They went down right and left as the bullets bit into them, and when they had had enough they fled.

When all this was done, Wilson picked up the quick-firer and carried it back as a peace-offering to the officer who had forbidden him to capture it. He then fainted, but not for long. Upon recovering he heard that the man who had charged with him had not been brought in, that he was still outside the line upon the bullet-swept ground. Wilson

brought him in. His luck was still good, for though he should have died many times, he was not even wounded. The Middlesex man, however, was dying. He had received twenty bullet wounds in all, and he expired next morning. His chief thought as he "went west" was one of pleasure that Wilson had kept his word and got the gun. Wilson was slightly wounded on five occasions in subsequent battles, and was ultimately invalided home through rheumatism.

Wilson's case was but one of many. Indeed, the Aisne valley on September 14th was rich in heroism. At Vailly Captain Theodore Wright, of the Royal Engineers, after being wounded in a plucky attempt to blow up a bridge at Mons, was mortally wounded while assisting the 5th Cavalry Brigade to cross a pontoon; for these two acts he received the V.C. At Missy, where the 5th Division crossed the river, Captain William Henry Johnston, of the Royal Engineers, worked with a cool and unflurried courage to serve the advancing British. From before dawn until seven in the evening he kept two rafts passing backward and forward across the stream, and he did this in spite of the heavy fire poured upon him. The rafts when they went south carried the wounded, and thanks to his steadiness much suffering was alleviated and many

lives were saved. The rafts when they went north carried ammunition, keeping up a ceaseless supply to the men in the firing line, and because of this the fighting British were able to do their work without faltering. Captain Johnston received the Victoria Cross, too, and deserved it. He was helped throughout the day by Lieutenant Robert Bradford Flint of the Royal Engineers, who obtained the D.S.O. for his brave work.

Another V.C. was won by Private Ross Tollerton, of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders. The Camerons who joined the 1st Corps in the place of the Munsters, who had suffered so terribly at Mons, fought their way up towards Vendresse, and made good an advance, until stopped by heavy rifle, machine-gun, and artillery fire. Under this pelting the Highlanders went to ground, and held firm in a long and extended line. A terrible number of men were hit, and among the many were Private Tollerton and one of his company's officers.

Tollerton was hit in the head, but the condition of the officer was more grave. He was rendered incapable of stirring. The private saw this, and decided, wounded though he was himself, to get the other under cover. The Germans had the range with great accuracy. To rise and move in

the Cameron line was to accept the chances of death. Private Ross Tollerton both rose and moved.

He lifted his officer and carried him to a place away from the line of firing. The bullets were kicking and fluffing in the earth as he stumbled under his burden, but he went on. He saw the officer safe, and then he returned. He was a wounded man himself. The right place for him was the dressing-station. He did not go to the dressing-station, but returned through the showering bullets to his place in the line. He wiped his own blood out of his eyes, lifted his rifle, and took up the regular business of a private soldier once more. There is nothing on earth so calmly sedate as the hero.

Soon the heavy shelling had thinned the ranks so terribly that the Camerons were reduced to less than half strength. Seventeen officers and five hundred men were wounded or killed, and it became obvious that if they were to save themselves whole as a regiment they must fall back. Without undue excitement, in good order in face of the appalling shelling, the Highlanders fell back to the main British line—that is, all the Highlanders left fell back save Private Ross Tollerton.

Private Ross Tollerton remained. He recognised that the wounded officer would be in great danger

of death if he were left alone ; so he did not leave him alone. Suffering a great deal himself, he went to the officer's side and lay down with him. He lay there for three days. It was a simple enough act, but it demanded a splendid courage. The two men were without water and food. Their wounds might mortify and lead to death. They might be struck any moment by one of the shells that passed over and exploded near them. They might be killed by a scouting party of the enemy. Their chances of death were as many as the minutes of the day. Private Tollerton, without parade, accepted these chances. At the end of the third day the two were found, almost dead, but yet alive. Both were saved, Tollerton for the highest recognition a brave British soldier can earn.

On the same day, and on the same spirited field of the Aisne valley, Lieutenant Arthur Lefroy Pritchard Griffith, of the 36th Brigade R.F.A., and Captain John Barry Walker, R.G.A., both won the D.S.O. Lieutenant Griffith was hit while handling his guns under fire, but he continued handling his guns, and actually helped man-haul them out of action until he collapsed through exhaustion. Captain Walker performed an act as calmly plucky. A shell had fired an ammunition wagon, and a disabled gunner lay beneath it, expecting

every moment to be killed by the explosion of the shells in the burning vehicle. Captain Walker coolly faced the risk of these exploding shells and brought the injured man away safely.

The final splendid deed of this day, and the final Victoria Cross of this attack, was won by Lance-Corporal William Fuller, of the 2nd Battalion Welsh Regiment. He won it while endeavouring to save the life of an equally brave man and a noble officer: Captain Mark Haggard. The Welsh Regiment were fighting its way up-hill at Chivy, striking upward towards the German position on the Chemin des Dames. Captain Haggard and an advance party worked forward up-hill to find, and did find, if the Germans were in strength. The enemy immediately opened a bitter fire from rifles and machine guns, and all the party save the Captain and Lance-Corporal Fuller were struck down. Captain Haggard called out, "Fix bayonets, boys, here they are." He had pulled up one of the stakes of the barbed wire, and had commenced an advance, but almost immediately he fell, shot in the stomach. The enemy continued a strong fire all along their line, and the Captain's company was swept by bullets; the right platoon, forced to retire, strove a little later to relieve the *impasse* by thrusting an attack from amid the trees

on the right. But the retirement left Captain Haggard and Fuller exposed on the ridge and in imminent danger of death. The Lance-Corporal saw this. He lifted the Captain in his arms and carried him through the beat of the bullets to the safer place in which the remainder of the company was crouching.

Captain Haggard was suffering great pain, but he ignored that to encourage his men. "As the shells burst over us," said Private C. Derry of this company, "he would open his eyes, so full of pain, and call out, but 'twas very weak, 'Stick it, Welsh; stick it, Welsh!'" He also asked Fuller to lift his head up so that he could "see how the artillery was mowing down the Germans—and they were mowing them down, I can tell you," comments Fuller. Later the Lance-Corporal bandaged the officer and carried him under fire out of range once more. Captain Haggard died two days later. His last words are said to have been, "Stick it, Welsh." Fuller, who escaped hurt in this plucky moment, was badly wounded at Dixmude.

These acts of extreme individual bravery had their good effect; by nightfall the British had worked their way up the intricate and ugly slopes, and, if they had not fully realised their objective,

the Chemin des Dames, they had at least obtained their footing upon the heights themselves, from the hill above Vailly, through Cour-de-Soupir, Chivy, to and through Troyon. Condé still thrust its high nose towards the river, but it was the only bridge-head the Germans held.

The French, too, had made their gains, the Algerian regiments pushing forward to the immediate right of the British. The Zouaves fought like inspired demons. One man saw a regiment leave their trenches and advance in one long dash, "just like kilties." "Those of the Zouaves who got to the Germans in their trench just lifted them out with the bayonet," said this witness. "The long thin bayonet did the trick. The bayonet seems too long and too thin, for after the charge many of them were broken, but I warrant that every broken bayonet was in a German body."

By now, however, the Allies were beginning to perceive the enormous power of the German line before them. On the next day, the 15th, it became obvious to the British Commander-in-Chief that the enemy had entrenched and fortified his position to a phenomenal degree of strength. During that day, too, the huge shells of heavy siege artillery began to fall among the men, and Sir John French judged that these must come from guns planted

as much as 10,000 yards behind the German lines. He knew that the fortress of Maubeuge had fallen a few days previously, and he concluded that the heavy artillery, released from that siege, had been brought up to aid the German defence. He knew now, then, that before him there was not a range of hills so much as a range of fortresses. He knew that to protect his men from the fortress guns, adequate trenches must be mapped out. So he built a line of beleaguering works before the ramparts of the Aisne. The battle of the Aisne, which had begun in assaults, ended in a siege.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SETTLING INTO THE MUD.

THE battle of the Aisne began to settle into the mud. This phase was already commenced on September 15th, though on that day there were smoking fires of war along the lines of the heights. The strong German fronts were angry with the steady success of yesterday. From their thick, powerful and staunch works, deep masses of counter-attack were hurled against the Allied divisions.

Against the Fourth (Guards) Brigade an enormous attack was poured out in the first hours of the morning. It drove forward at the British position situated dangerously close to the narrow neck of the high ridge at Braye, and from the first heavy night-hidden assault it was obvious that the Germans were determined to drive the Guards headlong down the slopes to the Aisne. Six huge attacks were pushed at our works in and about the village of Braye and the canal near by.

The Germans in their inevitable mass endeavoured to steam-roller resistance flat by the energy of enormous pressure.

The Guards met the human avalanche with unflinching demeanour. The level rifles, the coughing maxims, and the implacable bayonet received each lunge of assault calmly, and as calmly splintered to pieces the packed columns. The slaughter was, as usual, enormous. The dead of Germany clotted the ground and tripped the lines of the living advance. As the walls of humanity lurched onward, the Guards slashed them down at point-blank range. As they slashed them down fresh levies from the reserve leapt into the places of the dead. The assault flowed on.

Round the pitiful houses the eddy of battle sucked and raved. All men fought in a pack, and life was to him who could get his elbow free to stab, or his rifle up to shoot. The houses, starved under the drifting spray of bullets, crumbled as the whips of shrapnel struck down upon the walls. Houses gave off curdles of smoke and burst into flame; amid these torches of burning homes the wild and awful fight went on.

Battle went swirling through the channels of the little streets, clamoured back from the walls of the houses. With the jumping light of flames,

the knife cuts of the angry rifles, the vivid and electric flaring of the shells, and in this light, the tangle and tumult of battling figures, Braye and the trenches about Braye might have stood for a picture of Hades in revolt.

The enemy advanced with a firm purpose of amendment. They had determined to retake the positions lost. No one ever denied them courage, and courage was theirs now. But courage alone could not win that fight, and it was soon obvious that courage and Germany allied were going to be beaten. There was, to be sure, an equal courage facing the attack, the courage of troops with whom the Germans "have great difficulties." It must have been in this episode that the Grenadier Guards emblazoned their record with the immortal nickname of "Stick-in-the-Muds." As the thick ranks of Germans pushed down on top of them, the Grenadiers came out of their works to throw them back. In the deep mud there was a precarious foothold, and under the weight of the attack the men were slipping back. It looked as if the Guards must be swept away. But immediately the regiment braced itself. The men plunged their feet and legs deep in the slime, anchored themselves, and when the Germans came on again they rushed against a solid wall, a terrible wall of bayonets

set on firm foundations. Against that wall the attack was impotent.

The Guards took the attack when it drove up to them on their red bayonets. When the attack did not reach them it was because the outpouring of bullets built up a *barrage* through which the dense pack of Germany could not penetrate. So the lengthy battle went on, until the assault waned in strength, began to ebb rather than flow. And as the assault hung the Guards drove out from their light-held positions in a dazing and decisive counter-assault.

The hanging and hesitant Germans were caught in the air of indecision. The Guards swept on to them, burst over them, drove through them, picked them up on the crest of their bayoneted advance and flung them down in pieces. The German attack dissolved and broke and ran. Their ghastly and painful experiment of attack was over. The enemy left dead in appalling numbers on the field, and they had gained nothing at all.

During this fighting the British artillery had backed up the efforts of the Guards in their usual splendid and capable manner. From the valley, from the southern heights, the choric batteries had swung their shells with an incessant and deliberate accuracy into the German works, on

to the advancing battalions. The British artillery had come in for a heavy shelling itself, but it had borne that shelling cheerfully, had worked through it heroically.

Something of the superb attitude of the gunners can be gathered from the action of one of them, Bombardier Ernest George Harlock, of the 113th Battery, R.F.A. Harlock served his gun admirably, fighting under heavy fire in the Vendresse valley. In doing his work he was badly wounded in the thigh, and, in spite of his disinclination, was sent back to the dressing-station as a man put out of action by his wounds.

At the dressing-station his hurt was dressed, and he was told to wait with the rest of the wounded for the ambulance that would take them all to the base. Bombardier Harlock did not wait. Once out of the range of the doctor's eyes, he returned very coolly to his battery, and, without arguing the point, began serving his gun again as if wounds were nothing and shell-fire of little account.

Again he served his gun admirably, but again he was wounded, and taken back to the dressing-station. Here the doctor, a little angry, demanded an explanation of his action ; Harlock should have been on his way to the base, why was he here, and not only here, but wounded once more ? Harlock

had nothing to say. All his anxiety was centred in the desire to have his hurt bound up. It was. He was again sent to join the group waiting for the ambulance train.

It would be thought that he had had quite enough of fighting and pain by now, but he had not. Again he slipped the vigilant R.A.M.C. men, again he found his way back to his gun, and yet again he served it under the heaviest fire. He did not advertise or demonstrate or argue about it. He just did the act and did it well. His was a fine example of the coolly reckless British spirit. He broke the laws of discipline, but he broke them in a British way. He should have been reprimanded; he received the Victoria Cross and was made sergeant instead—that is also quite British.

The attack on the Guards Brigade was not the only attempt of the enemy to throw back our line on the 15th of September. On our left, heavy and sustained attacks were delivered from Vregny, south of which the Fourth Division of the Third Corps had established their advance. These attacks were both savage and well-handled, and, as usual, they were backed by the full power of the German artillery. In spite of this energy of counter-movement, however, our line stood firm, met the attacks with fire and bayonet, and remained unintimidated

by the pounding of the German artillery. After a day of disastrous effort, the position was as it had been in the morning. The Germans had squandered many lives without making the slightest impression.

From their position at Missy, the Fifth Division, under Sir Charles Fergusson, was able to fling back an equally dangerous attack delivered on the west side of the high Chivres bluff, and, though they were raked by fire from the bluff, and Condé, and enfiladed from Vregny, and though the division was forced back towards the stream, the British here yet again maintained their front unbroken.

Under the fire of guns browbeating their line everywhere from the heights, the Fifth Division behaved splendidly, and fought unexcitedly. The lines were searched and raked unceasingly by shells from artillery of all calibre, but the courage of our men did not break. It was here that Major Sidney George Butler, of the Royal Army Medical Corps, won his D.S.O. All through the day, and under the eternal threshing of the shells, he went about his business, which was to collect the wounded, without excitement, and doing infinite good. His imperturbable courage is but an indication of the ideal of quiet heroism animating all ranks of the R.A.M.C. Here and at

all other places they did their work coolly, certainly and pluckily. The business of the R.A.M.C. does not give them opportunities to attain the heady glories of passionate fighting, but their steadfast and splendid work calls for its own peculiar commendation, and in no other war have the men of this corps deserved our unstinted admiration as they have in this war.

There was much fighting also at Vailly, where the Third Division was in line, but here honours were in attack and not in defence, for the Third Division, not at all pleased with the Germans, who had driven them back yesterday, tightened their belts, shed their kit, and went up to the heights they had failed to grip. There was no mistake about the attack now. The Germans worked industriously to keep them out, but the Third Division were not going to be kept out this time. In a series of swinging assaults and steep rushes, in a series of stinging little small-arm battles made emphatic by the explosions of British shells, the Third Division worked its way upward, and the Third Division won the heights, and held them.

This was practically the sum total of the day's brave work as far as the British are concerned. On our left the Germans had thrust heavy counter-assaults against the French, clinging to the

difficult spurs about Autrechés and Nouvron, and had driven them back to the line of the Aisne. In this movement Soissons had been bombarded and part destroyed.

Still further to the left, however, a French flanking attack was creeping steadily up the Oise towards Noyon, and some good was expected from this. On our right the Fifth French army had tested the German position on the heights of Craonne and had felt the great strength here, realised the impracticability of carrying it by assault, and had passed the news and the warning along to Sir John French. Then the French fell back to positions more definitely defensive than that which the commander had projected.

Thus the day waned in the Allied acknowledgment of Germany's strong position. The last of our attempts to carry the enemy's works by storm had ended. Siege warfare supervened.

CHAPTER XXV.

DAY SIEGE AND NIGHT BATTLE.

THE man, painted like a shadow on the dark screen of the night, stiffens. His body hangs forward, his rifle rises to an alert and menacing angle. He whispers. From the ground at his feet other black shadows rise against the curtain of the night. They all stand, crouching alertly. The rain falls in steep lines upon them, and upon all the countryside. The men can hear it drumming in the sodden earth, and they can hear its quick whisper as it slides over the leaves of bushes and of trees.

But the men are not listening to the rain. Somewhere, somewhere up above them on the long hillside, somewhere over them in the blackness, there is another sound. A sound, soft, creeping, and secret. The picket in the advance butt heard it just now. The sergeant and the men of the advance post have come to learn whether the man's nerves have made him foolish, or whether there is danger.

The men hear the rain, its soft hiss, the small thudding of the drops on the wet turf. It was nothing, then! The sergeant throws up his hand. They hear his hiss for silence. Above them, in the dark, a man has softly cleared his throat.

As the men listen they hear the cheep of leather harness, the shuffle of battalions moving. They hear the guttural whispers of command. Then like a stroke of a hammer the sergeant's rifle cracks off. The picket fires upward, then the men turn and run. At once, above them, the blackness is cut with a sword-stroke of flame, and there is the hard smash of a ragged volley. The Germans, startled in their attempt to surprise, have fired and given themselves away. One of the men of the picket trips, takes a couple of long strides, and comes down heavily. He is not dead; but his mates must leave him, as they have a duty to the army to perform. They race on.

Above them and behind them on the hill the Germans are running too. Their night surprise has been spoiled; but they hope to gain their purpose now by the onslaught of their heavy downhill charge. All along the front of the hill there is a succession of sparkling flashes in the night as other pickets hear and fire on the enemy. As they fire the British outposts fall steadily back.

As the pickets run they hear the thunder of the racing German battalions behind them. They begin to wonder whether the men in the trenches will be prepared in time for this avalanche of death rushing down the hill.

Without warning, from a discreet hiding-place, a British field gun jumps off. As the shell comes at its swinging curve through the air, another and another gun speaks. Up on the hill there is the splitting smash of shrapnel shell, and then a series of explosions. Not hits, perhaps; but against the vivid flame of the detonations the advancing Germans stand out like creatures cut flat in tin. The pickets—they are the Worcesters—clamber over the firing parapets of the trenches, tumble down amid their own men, who are standing in their shirt-sleeves, silent, ready, and angrily eager to deal with these unregenerate creatures who have robbed them of their sleep. They had leapt to arms at the first sharp crack of rifle up the hillside like good soldiers; but, like very ordinary men, they are furious at being wakened.

By now the Germans realise that their surprise has failed. Their artillery begins to wake all along the front, shrapnel comes spraying over the trenches. Sometimes, high in the air, a star-shell bursts, and the whole of the country is steeped in dreadful and

livid light. From the trenches on the German side of the Aisne plateau the searchlights start out in solid beams of frigid light. They work over the hillside, fingering the shadows, trying to illuminate and dazzle the British infantry. For once the British do not mind the searchlights. They help them to see and shoot Germans.

Soon they see the mass coming on. Out of the inky darkness between the searchlight beams a long line of white faces swims towards the trenches. The men in the trenches remain quiet. They are as steady as rock. They know that at a certain range the fire from their rifles will do an awful and enormous damage. Checking their nerves with the iron will of discipline, they withhold their fire. The pallid, white line comes on. It comes very close. It seems on top of the trench. Then the whistles blow, and from the lip of the trench the great flame and thunder of death burst in an appalling clap. The line of white faces shivers; part of it dissipates into nothingness, but at once another line sweeps up, and the advance still comes on. The British trenches speak again and again. The infantrymen behind the parapets are working steadily, crisply, through their cartridges in the magazines. From the angles of the trenches the busy maxim-guns begin whirring with the high note

of brisk sewing machines. An incredible spate of death is sweeping outward at the attacking Germans.

They are brave. They still come on. The front rank falls prone, fixing bayonets. The second rank stands and returns the fire. Then reserves come up, the prone rank rises, and all rush forward. They beat their way through the bullets, and come on to the British trench. In a wave the Worcester Regiment rises out of the trench, mounts the parapets, and drives down on to the German mass in a fierce bayonet attack. The Germans have the face of the hill and the weight of numbers with them. For a desperate minute the British front rank bends under the enormous impact. Still, in the fierce medley of hand-to-hand fighting our men recover. They force the face of the attack back; then, while the Germans hang to dress ranks, the quicker-thinking British thunder into them with a ferocious counter-charge. The unready ranks wilt; as they hesitate the British cavalry, that had been waiting eagerly to get busy, is launched at the German flank.

In a whirlwind of horse and man and swinging steel the troopers punch into the packed ranks. There is an awful *mêlée* of fighting, a short, sharp worrying. Then the Germans are streaming back, the British hard at their heels. The British are

not going to stop at a mere counter-attack. They rush up the hill, driving the enemy before them until they have gained the line of works from which the Germans issued to make their "surprise" attack. The British mean to make good use of this moment. They are going to steal yet another four hundred or so yards out of this affair. They swamp over the German trenches, capture them. When morning comes their line has advanced yet again towards the German stronghold on the Aisne plateau.

Night attack and day siege—that is the story of the last phase of the battle of the Aisne. The night affair just now described is not a picture of one incident, it is a picture of many incidents happening through many nights. When, on the 14th and 15th September, the German defences of the heights had been tested by the British and found to be strongly held, Sir John French realised that he was facing not a battlefield, but a fortress. He realised that he would have to employ siege conditions if he was to drive the German out and win his way in battle without abnormal loss of life. Siege conditions were undertaken, the British battle-front was changed from advancing battalions to long, elaborate, and wonderful lines of trenches. These trenches were so deep and

elaborate that many of them resembled caves scooped out of the hillside. They were cut in the earth, or roofed over to escape the awful impact and explosion of the great German howitzer shells, the smoky "Coal-Boxes," the "Jack Johnsons," with their terrible killing punches, and the deadly "Black Marias." It was from this elaborate scheme of rifle-pits, stretching along the fifteen-mile front from Bucy to beyond Troyon, that the British gradually, slowly, and with infinite patience worked their way upward across the slopes that led to the German positions on the northern high land hanging over the plateau of the Aisne.

It was not a battle. It was rather a snail-like progress forward and up. All day long there was a long-range bombardment from the big guns, little creeping-forward attacks of the British, and a few counter-attacks of the enemy. All night long there was the same attempt at attack, little vigorous rushes in the dark for the German trenches further across the plateau, little movements when our men would steal onward, ten, twenty, a hundred or more yards, and then dig for themselves a trench that they would be able to hold throughout the following day. More often than not it was the Germans who employed the night. They would make an attack to drive the British out of

the trenches they had already won ; or, secretly, they would endeavour to push forward trenches themselves. So through the dark, wet, and chilly days between September 16th and 28th the interminable round of fighting went on. It fluctuated this way and that ; but assuredly, working slowly but certainly onward, the British gradually won their way inch by inch towards the German position.

In this book, which is not so much a record of tactical and strategical detail so much (as far as possible) as a record of individual and regimental fighting valour and fighting achievement in the fields of war, it is not necessary to make any profound attempt (in this battle or in any other) to unravel the scientific intricacies of strategical detail. We are concerned with the undying history of heroism. Others more capable have and will discuss the technicalities of war and the scientific value of fighting.

Thus, though the Aisne battle was a drab, sodden, tedious affair, it was strung through its length with the bright jewellery of splendid deeds. Each day shone with heroism. On the 16th of September a part of the British force found itself in difficulties on the high ground about Missy. They had to retire ; but they made the minimum move rear-

ward. With intrepid skill and tenacity the commander, Sir Charles Fergusson, clung to his new position. The German trenches were only 400 yards from his front, and they were also above him on the slope of the plateau. The British front was commanded, but General Fergusson was not going to retire because of that. He held on. All through the desperate days of the battle he held on, keeping secure his line for the well-being of the British force. At the same time the French on our left returned to attack the crests from which they had been driven, and returned so irresistibly that they drove the Germans from the crests, secured Autrèches, and whipped the beaten enemy northward to Nampcel. This fine movement helped to relieve the pressure on Sir Charles Fergusson's force and enabled it to consolidate its position.

On the 16th of September, too, great reinforcements began to move up to the French on the left, and a thrusting movement began to go forward against the enemy's flank above Soissons. Throughout the 17th, 18th, 19th, the game of battle was handed over to the heavy guns. Across the valley of the Aisne the great shells went soaring, the British sitting in their trenches watching them, diving into their burrows like rabbits to evade them when they came from Germany, being slain

by them, but always being amused by them. In these days the "Coal Boxes" and the "Jack Johnsons" and the "Black Marias" were christened, and jokes that will go down in the brave history of arms were made about them. The huge and awful shelling was meant to intimidate. The Germans had planned that by firing so many shells so many hours the nerves of the men must be broken. After working the theory out on paper in the admirable German way, the enemy delivered a charge against the nervous wrecks that made (on paper) the defence of the trenches. A big attack was massed and flung at Sir Douglas Haig's force on the afternoon of the 17th.

Unfortunately, the British race was not built by German super-professors to paper specifications. The "nervous wrecks" rose up in their trenches and stubbornly "handed" the enemy off. It was a fight in the mist, and in the brave *mêlée* there were certain specific deeds of splendour.

CHAPTER XXVI.

“ THE COBBLERS.”

THE brunt of this attack on the 17th September, which was delivered against the First Division, fell on the Northamptons holding the extreme right of the line; all the morning the attack raged against the trenches of the “ Cobblers ” through the pelting rain. The attack went for nothing. The Northamptons beat it off with keen shooting, and, when shooting failed, with a vivid onrush of bayonets. In this way the morning attack was broken.

In this way a heavier attack launched through the mists of the afternoon was shattered. Having had quite enough of waiting for a foe to charge them, the Northants determined to pay that foe back in his own metal.

An order for counter-attack was given.

Out of their trenches the “ Cobblers ” came tumbling, and up over the hillside they moved

swiftly, taking cover cleverly, as a good regiment should. With them were the Queen's and a battalion of the Divisional Reserve, but the Northhamptons led the attack.

The mist of the autumn afternoon lay on the slopes like a blanket, and through this mist the "Cobblers" went in their swift and skilful rush. Somewhere in the womb of the mist there was a worrying of rifles, and a warring of mitrailleuse and shells, and up to this rage of sound the regiment pushed. The men did their work with extreme ability. They went forward until they were within one hundred yards of the enemy, and then they prepared to charge. Along the line of the crouching men the order was passed. The figures bunched, the bayonets came out and were ready. The whistles strung out their silver threads of sound.

Up at the thick, stubborn, fire-strung trenches in a wave tipped with steel the splendid regiment flung. Talavera was behind that charge, Badajoz and the iron heights of Quebec. With a spring and a rush they gathered way and launched themselves onward. At once the solid breast-works awoke with a yell of rifles. The entire line leapt answering flame, every rifle raced, every mitrailleuse worked through its skein of death with the whirring babble of a frantic sewing-machine. From behind the line

the frantic battery commanders swung their guns, slashed down at the " Cobblers ' " flail-strokes of shrapnel. Death had broken out in anarchy, was running amok with a thousand knives of slaughter.

Over the trench the regiment and the regiments following went in a magnificent rush, into it, spouted out of it, tore the defenders to rags and tatters with the singing bayonets, and chased them, scuttling, up the slope. Away after them like a pack of breed-hounds in full flight the Northamptons drove the scurrying grey men up the shell-pocked slope. They tossed and tore them to pieces, tossed them again and chased them in a mad surge. Up to the crest the Germans scurried, and over it. But not all of them. Some, in trenches higher up, saw death and defeat hanging over them, and they yelled a surrender. The Northants were Britishers. They did not slaughter scared and helpless foes.

They accepted the surrender, they put up their smoking rifles, checked their dripping bayonets. They called to the Germans to drop their guns, to hold up their hands. They checked their rush, came up casually to take their prisoners. The Germans let them come on. Then, at a deadly distance, all the wretches fell flat; behind the

beasts there rose above the hill-crest platoon after platoon of riflemen. The Northants had been trapped in their charity. They were exposed and helpless, and the first flare of the rifles tore them and scythed them down in swathes. It was a vile moment.

But it was only a moment. The Northants were not beaten even by treachery. Their line became solid at once. Their maxims were jerked erect on their tripods, their magazines began to open. The vile fire from above was answered by a fire more terrible and deadly. Other regiments—the Queen's and the Coldstream Guards, for instance—seeing the despicable act, opened on the grey cowards with a vengeful fire of maxim and rifle. The torrent of nickled bullets burst the standing and firing line, the awful vengeance of the British decimated the treacherous infantry. The standing line vanished under the sweep of bullets. The Northants in line went forward again, and took full payment with the unappeasable steel. With an awful anger in their hearts for the good men basely slaughtered, the "Cobblers" completed their day. They shattered the defence and made themselves masters of the crest.

During the 18th a night attack was made on the left, and the Queen's broke it. Night attacks are

nearly all the same; they happened this night as they happened every night, and this one was no more than a repetition of that described in the opening account. Further along the line the Gloucesters had a small but vivid attack on their own. Not the Germans, but themselves, went out through the dark, and fell thundering on a trench. But with this difference, the Gloucesters did their work properly. They took the trench, filled it in, and brought home two maxims as souvenirs. At this and other times British regiments made similar bags. The Durhams charged the first of four lines of trenches somewhere near Soissons. There were three maxims in the trench and nine Germans when the Durhams arrived, and the British got the lot.

On the 18th and 19th there were more night attacks, but, fighting up to their waists in mud and water, the cheerful British drove the assaults back with horrid slaughter. The fight of the 20th spilled over into the day, when mass after mass, regiment after regiment, came out from under the fire of the German guns to break the British line. All day long, right into the night, the desperate worry of desperate fighting raged. Every effort, every form of appalling attack, every ingenuity of war, was employed by the Germans to win a way forward.

When the slaughter was done, when they were back again in their lines, the British front was still made of steel fabric, still undented.

All the British regiments along that indomitable front covered themselves with undying glory. Among them was Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's old regiment, the Sherwood Foresters, just out from England. They arrived at the trenches only the night before (19th), and, after standing to arms all day, turned in, expecting nothing to happen for twelve hours at least. Something happened, and very quickly. They had not even got to sleep when it was seen the attack on the forward line of the British was a desperate affair. The Foresters were called for. At a great rush they went down the valley, across the river, climbed upward, and bumped right into the fight. Here Germany was trying to annihilate the men in a line of trenches, and grimly the Foresters saw that they did not. All night long without let the men fought until brigades were moved up to their aid, and made solid again the line. General Smith-Dorrien says they saved the situation, and he should know. Anyhow, the Foresters are proud of their glorious "blooding" in war.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FRESH MOVE TO THE FLANK.

BUT the German lines were now wearing out. The French were pushing them steadily back on the left. In spite of their vandalism at Rheims to the right of the British, the enemy were being driven back in that direction also. They were growing tired and dispirited. They had held on stubbornly to an intricate line of quarries about Soissons, but the British, the South Wales Borderers, the Leinsters, and others, had slowly and surely won those quarries away from them in fights that shine gloriously from out the smoke of the battling. On the night of the 21st there was another violent night attack, and it was smashed back with prodigious losses. On the 23rd the four howitzer batteries that General French had ordered from England arrived, and their arrival was the beginning of the end. The half-finished fort of Condé, which had held out, against no very urgent

attack, it is true, on the very bank of the river, went down before the awful impact of the great shells in very quick time, the British moved up, and presented a firmly ruled line across the slopes to face the attack.

On the 23rd General De Castelnau's French army on the left menaced the German flank in a grave way, and the main line was weakened. The British General knew it was weakened, and did not give his opponents a moment's rest. The defence was now dying down. There was a spasmodic outburst of heavy firing on the 26th, and the Germans tried to approach the British trenches by "sapping," that is, by cutting trenches forward in zig-zags, so that their advance would be under cover most of the way. The British perceived the "saps," and shelled them. Again the Germans attacked, and again they were driven off, and inch by inch again the British gained their way further across the plateau. The defence was being worn down. It was appreciably more feeble. It expired as a candle expires, in a great flame of fighting that took place during the night of the 27th and 28th. It was an enormous and frightful effort, that cost men and guns to an inordinate degree. It proved fruitless and futile. It was flung back, and again the British crept on and up.

After that last flame of defiance the battle of the Aisne flickered out, and to all intents and purposes was dead. The siege went on, but there was now no battle. The British had quenched the Germanic ardour for fighting in this district. All the same the Germans had bedded themselves strongly in a position planned by nature to be supreme in defensive fighting. If the allies held their enemy, that was all they did. They could not shift Germany. Other plans and other lines of attack had to be developed.

The plans were made, and the line of new advance chosen. Already by September 20th the French had begun to take a leaf out of the German book of strategy, were initiating a great enveloping movement to the west.

The French line on the Oise began to extend northward and upward. New French armies were formed and were being hurried into the front extending swiftly towards Arras and Lens, a front pressing firmly westward also to bend the German flank (extending rapidly, too, to meet the menace) back so that there seemed every hope that our Allies would break through, and by doing that, force a general German retirement by cutting the network of communications.

There seemed hopes of success, almost immediate

success, but that hope waned. It was very quickly discovered that the Germans were moving, also that they, too, had formed the project of enveloping our western flank. They had enclosed Antwerp in a firm grip, and had thus safeguarded the northern communications. Now they were piling up men to work downward by the sea.

It immediately became a question of which of the opponents would make good their front first. Advance German cavalry screens were already appearing at Lille and Armentières, and it was imperative that a force should be flung up to this corner of the map to interpose between this movement and the sea. The French line was rapidly extending. Now, with French troops taking their place in the Aisne Valley, the British moved up north.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AT THE GATES OF ANTWERP.

THE Germans, who had been moving sluggishly through skirmish and repulse in North Belgium throughout the whole of September, suddenly quickened with life. The indeterminate attacks grew hard and definite; the skirmishing lines thickened to battle fronts; the ebb and flow of retreat and victory changed to the settled on-sweep of determined attack. The armies gathered and moved upward on to Antwerp.

The solid lines of the invading hosts began pushing up determinedly through ravished Termonde and shattered Malines. The bravest of European soldiers, the indomitable Belgians, met them, tried to stave them off, as they had staved them off in many a quick battle in the past four weeks. This time the Prussian juggernaut was not to be repulsed. It was determined to roll over all resistance, not beat it, but crush it flat. On September

27th, the day when the battle of the Aisne began to weaken, Malines was fought for over its rubble heaps and won away from the Flemish. Without checking, the huge advancing line rolled onward, began to lap round the outer works of Antwerp. On the 28th the great guns were working, were throwing their shells at the outer ring of forts that guard the town. The siege of Antwerp had begun, one of the most astonishing episodes in this war, in history, had opened.

The Germans came pushing vigorously to the attack. Many people, in spite of Liége and Namur and Maubeuge, still thought Antwerp impregnable; but the Germans, with their great howitzers in their train, were certain among themselves of a speedy ending. It would be an affair of a few days; nothing could resist the awful attack of their big artillery, they felt. On Monday, September 28th, they attacked the forts of Waelhem, Wavre St. Catherine, with a concentrated fury of shell fire. It was about September 28th that the British and French Commanders realised that their own flanking movement was meeting another, that the Germans were spreading to the west as well and even more swiftly than their own forces.

The Germans were in a hurry to break into Antwerp, and they were also clever. They chose

the easiest sector of the line of forts, forts standing in a tract of country free from inundation and other difficulties that might impede their advance, and these they battered ruthlessly. Their giant shells came punching down out of the sky, hammering awful blows on the steel cupolas of the forts; the lighter artillery strewed the whole of the trenched line with death-dealing shrapnel. The enemy turned that point of defence into a raging hell of shell and bullet. In their forts, behind the inadequate parapets of their trenches, the indomitable Belgians fought as best they could. They could not see the foe that was dealing them out death with so lavish a hand, for the howitzers were firing from six or seven miles away. Even if they could have seen it would not have mattered. The guns in the defences were hopelessly inadequate—the Germans had seen to that—the long-range pieces that should have been delivered by Krupp had not been delivered, and the semi-obsolete guns in the works were utterly outranged.

Yet the intrepid Belgians fought steadily. They were tired out with nearly two months' incessant activity, their nerves were strained by the horrible shell fire, but they were not intimidated. Wavre St. Catherine was put out of action. The powder magazine of Waelhem went spouting to the sky,

the huge rage of the shelling began to pour on another fort, Lierre, but the Belgians still clung to their lines. Nothing but annihilation, it seemed, could break them, and they remained under fire in their trenches and in their forts while the enemy poured an unfaltering stream of powerful long-range shells upon them.

The forts crumbled, the defences were hammered to dust. On Wednesday, September 30th, the strong fort of Waelhem was a heap of smoking rubble, Wavre was all but silenced, Lierre was being deluged in projectiles. The strong trenches that flanked and supported these forts had been torn to pieces by the terrible onslaught of shells. The outer line of the two lines of forts that formed a double circle about the great city seemed in danger of being pierced. The Germans had made a gap, and they showed signs of rushing that gap. In the doomed city men and women stopped talking to listen to the thick and heavy muttering of the great cannon. "It is nearer," they said. "It is nearer." Already the clutch of siege was tightening on them. Shell fire had smashed the waterworks out on the further line of forts. Water was becoming scarce. Still, in the face of an awful attack, the bone-weary, harassed, nerve-frayed Belgian army refused to let go of their lines, though those lines had been

dug in a hurry, and were almost useless as protection against shrapnel fire.

On Thursday, October 1st, the German force began to push forward over the area that the destruction of the forts had left unprotected. They were making for a narrow river, the Nethe. They would cross that, and at once their great guns would be thundering at the town itself. The fort that holds the river line is Fort Lierre. It was the key. On to Fort Lierre swung the bunched attack of the German artillery. On Lierre a clever and humorous fellow put a big water-copper stern upwards on a part of the fortress slope away from the cupola, and for an hour or so the Germans shelled this under the impression they were putting the place out of action. The guns of the fort did not join much in the battle. It was useless to fire at guns that were two or three miles out of range. But they fired occasionally at little venturesome parties of Germans, and the German aeroplanes, spotting them, gave the range to their gunners. Presently, finding out the trick that had been played on them, the Germans turned from the water-copper to the real thing, and very soon the hammering shells slowly punched the strong fort out of action. As the forts were silenced, the German infantry came scurrying over the flat country

past the burning hamlets and the broken trees, to attack and overwhelm the battered defences.

As they came, there flickered through the weary Belgian ranks a flame of energy. The men quickened, in spite of their fatigue, at this chance of retaliation. They gripped their rifles, waited. The Germans came rushing on to within a given distance of the trenches ; then the vengeful trenches spoke. Before that bitter and determined fire rank after rank of the attack went down, and in horrible slaughter the rush was repulsed. The long and tedious game of gunnery recommenced. Up and down the trenches the shrapnel felt for living men. The soldiers in the trenches must be decimated, so that next time Germany attacked it must attain its end without resistance.

The hideous bombardment continued right into Friday, October 2nd. Nothing could live under that deliberate, cold, and scientific shelling. The defence began to disintegrate. The long line of the outer defences gave way. Presently the Belgians fell back. Fighting stubbornly, they made their way across the Nethe, and entrenched on the town side. Bridges were blown up, and plans laid for a desperate resistance. But it was the most desperate resistance. Under that awful shelling, in the face of that ruthless advance, even the Belgians, " the

bravest of all the Gauls," were losing heart. The Germans were winning; it seemed but a matter of hours now before the city would fall. The Government was already preparing to leave; the Diplomatic bodies had already left. It was, men thought, the end.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A N T W E R P F A L L S.

WHILE Antwerp was in the throes, the Allied troops were moving. The great flanking stroke to be pushed up northward had already been initiated. The French troops had already strung out on a new western front by Lassigny, by Roye and Chaulnes, already they had been fighting terribly upon the high ground of Albert. Already the British had left their positions along the Aisne line, and the Corps were going north-west.

And, more than aught else, already the Allies had begun to sense the parallel enveloping movement of the enemy, and to realise that big forces were being marshalled downward and outward, making a new thrust into France, spreading the front of that thrust so that its flank would reach the sea.

It may be that all this movement and counter-movement had its reflex upon the siege of Antwerp.

The city was apparently ready to fall on October 2nd, yet it did not fall. It is unnecessary to attempt to unravel the Antwerp mystery, by plunging into the deep sea of strategical polemics. This book is mainly an attempt to give a descriptive account of British forces and the engagements they fought on the Continent. British forces were sent to fight at Antwerp. They were sent at a time when Antwerp had decided to capitulate, and their coming was part of a large strategical plan. It is obvious that this plan must have concerned either the saving of Antwerp or an attempt to prolong her resistance for military reasons; and the military idea underlying this, quite conceivably, may have been either the intention of forming a new Allied front with the main purpose of containing the Germans within a definite area in Belgium and away from the sea, or else the military intention was merely the desire to maintain Antwerp's resistance and keep a large force employed before the town until such time as the Allied line fell into position along the French-Flemish border.

Whatever the reason, a British contingent was sent to Antwerp, and the failing Belgians in the town were abruptly stimulated to additional heroism by the promise and the sight of British reinforcements. Possibly they were stimulated

beyond an ordinary point by the dramatic aura surrounding the coming of this help. Dramatic certainly is the just word here.

Into beleaguered and despairing Antwerp came hurling a great motor car. It drew up with a reckless braking of wheels before the principal hotel, and from it leapt a nervous, vital, volatile, youngish man in a semi-naval uniform. That youngish man was the new spark of vitality and energy that was to fire the courage and resistance of the weary defence. It was the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill. He brought a promise of help. He brought help.

Right on his heels, on October 4th, a heavy armoured train came steaming into the town, and from the train there poured a contingent of "His Majesty's Jollys," the Royal Marines, two thousand strong. They had travelled all night; they had scarcely slept, for the threat of German attack hung all over their journey. But they were game. They were ready to fight at once, and they were given fighting at once. Out through the shell-strewn lines the men were hurried into the shell-burnt trenches of the Nethe line that abutted Lierre fort, still holding out. Half an hour after they had left the train they were being shelled, were in the trenches beating off German attacks.

It was a fine, brave, thrilling piece of work. Directly they arrived, the ubiquitous spies, who had hampered the defence from the outset, signalled through to the enemy, and shell fire was concentrated upon the British at once. The Marines ignored the shell fire, dug the trenches deeper, protected them overhead with timber and earth to resist shrapnel; then they settled down to work, as if holding trenches against German gunners and German infantry had been their sole solace from boyhood up.

Mr. Winston Churchill came with them into the trenches, and shared their risks, and admired their courageous determination. The Marines cheered "Winston," made jokes, and held on. When the Germans came forward through the night, hoping to finish easily the work their shells should have begun, they were met by a terrible fire from British rifles, and driven out of the field. The Germans attacked resolutely, endeavouring to cross the river near Lierre, and were slaughtered consistently. They fell back again, and, with wisdom, left the attack to the guns.

On Monday, October 5th, the German masses came on again under the protection of their concentrated artillery. They made a desperate attack. They must cross the Nethe at all costs, and drive

the Belgians and British back on the second line, so that the great German guns could be moved up to bear on the town fortifications at once. All day long they fought for the crossing. pontoons were swung over the narrow stream, and were splintered to ruin by the artillery of the defenders. The defenders' guns were not good, and they were not many, but they sufficed for this form of fighting, and they did their work magnificently. All day long the Belgians and the British Marines staved off the attack with an awful ardour of slaughter, and though the German lines and the German artillery in them crept nearer and nearer, the attack that was to have been successful that day failed.

The fight went on all through the night, though the Germans drove hard at this segment of defence in their determination to get through. Further British reinforcements had come bundling into the town on London motor 'buses. These were made up of men of the Royal Naval Reserve, young men, inexperienced men, ill-equipped men with but two months' training behind them, but men full of fight all the same. They were rushed to the trenches at once, and, as usual, their positions being noted by the kindly spies, they were at once shelled.

They treated the shelling with the joking calmness of veterans. Away on the Lierre line the

attack had grown up again during the night. The frontal advance on the trenches made no impression, for still the vicious rifles of the Belgians and Marines forbade pontooning; but at Lierre itself the shattered fort succumbed, the Germans came swamping forward, and forced a way by wading and swimming across the river. In the early hours of the morning their troops and guns were crossing, and massing on the near bank for attack.

On Tuesday morning (the 6th October) the battle blazed out again with a redoubled and awful fury. The German military balloons, the signallers posted on the tall tower of Lierre Town Hall, the flitting aeroplanes, gave their artillery the range with exquisite precision, and the storm of well-directed fire was like hell let loose.

All the defending trenches were seared with the terrible flame of this fire. At one point a giant shell fell outside a trench, detonated with the force of an earthquake, and drove the trench in so violently that three men were buried. The Marines dug their comrades out and continued to fight. But it was the fight of Liliputians against giants. The artillery of the defence might have been air-guns, so little did they affect the attack, though an armoured train, in which a number of British big naval guns were mounted, swept up and down the

railway behind the trenches, doing first-class work. Soon the situation became desperate. The trenches were being blown to pieces, the parapets were simply scattered in dust to the four winds under the terrible rain of explosive, the Belgians supporting the Marines to left and right were driven out of their works, the Germans were pushing forward in enormous masses. There was nothing else to do but retire. Under the terrible pall of shell fire the Marines went back. How they came out of that tornado of death alive they never knew, but, in good order, without faltering, they did so. They fell back to the second line of forts that ring the town proper. They joined the R.N.R. in the trenches there. They turned and fought again.

On the 7th of October Antwerp was being bombarded. The Germans had now established themselves within the outer ring of forts, and through the gap they had forced fresh troops, fresh guns were being poured. Their howitzers were said to have been fixed on concrete positions thoughtfully made by spies in times of peace, and from these positions fire was opened.

Both the inner line of forts and the town proper were bombarded. The town suffered sadly. The big shells just blew buildings to rubble, vast holes were torn in the streets, the entire façades of houses

by the row were sheered right off by the onrushing shells. Fire burnt upward from a hundred spots all over the town. Every street of Antwerp became littered with the wreck of houses and of homes. The people began flying. Already the Government and the devoted King had moved away, westward, to Ostend ; already a great portion of the Belgian army had left to work along towards Ghent and Ostend before the Germans extended their left flank, as they now showed signs of doing, in order to cut off the retreat of the forces in the town. Now the citizens in a pitiful stream followed in terror and tears. The city was doomed. But the military did not allow the terror of this knowledge to interfere with their efficiency. They set to work to make Antwerp as useless to the invader as a town could be. The vast stores of petrol on the river bank were fired, and the flame and smoke of the conflagration filled the heavens with mottled horror. The river was made useless, tugs and barges and ships were sunk in the fairway ; German vessels were disabled ; everything eatable and usable was destroyed. The Germans might capture a town, but it would be the shell of a town only.

All the time the terrible shells were plunging into the heart of the city, shattering whole blocks

of houses to ruin, devastating suburbs in one stroke. All the time the awful battering of steel and explosive made horrible the trenches. All through the 8th of October the Belgians, the Marines, and the young men of the Royal Naval Reserve held their positions against the most determined attacks of the enemy. It was not until night they retired. Then, under shell fire, and amid great danger, they fell back in calm order. The last remnant of defenders did not fly. They were cool; they did all they had to do calmly. The trenches were destroyed, guns were smashed, the forts were blown up—blown up with a splendid spirit of devotion that will live in history, for the Belgian and British commanders of forts fired their magazines with their own hands after they had sent their men to safety.

Over the last bridge of the Scheldt the rear-guard went, and, after blowing it up, they swung off on the long and trying march to Ostend. Through the darkness, through a strange country infested with a determined enemy, through the clogging crowds of refugees, they tramped, almost sleeping as they moved. At one point a stiff rear-guard action was fought, the Belgians and the Marines turning about in the night to beat off their pursuers. But, after exhausting hardships, the majority of the 6,000 Britishers and the greater portion of the

Belgian army arrived at Ostend. They had lost a number, 2,000 of the British among them, who had both failed to realise that the retreat had been ordered, and had thus been left behind, and had mistaken their way and crossed the Holland border and been interned. But the bulk had carried out a masterly retirement, and though they were dropping with fatigue, they were still effective for use in further battles.

Meanwhile, from the valley of the Aisne, an Allied army had been pouring northward. Its movement had begun on October 3rd, when brilliant General Gough and the 2nd Cavalry Division had begun to sweep the country through Compiègne right up to Lille, westward to Ypres and Dixmude. If Antwerp had fallen on October 3rd, a German army might have hurried down and met the moving forces at once. Antwerp was not in German hands until the 9th. By October 9th the Allies had secured the major line of their new positions. Dense masses of horse and foot, guns and wagons, by road and by railway, had been pouring steadily upward to the new, the northern line of battle. All through the early days of October they had moved forward, and they had remained unmolested. If the Germans, in any strength, had been able to swoop down on those creeping and heavy masses

of munitions and men, they might have done irreparable damage. The Germans did not attack. While the siege still raged the Allies were able to reach the northern area, and were sufficiently in line to give battle all along the front from Lille to Dixmude, from Dixmude to the sea, by October 11th. That may be the meaning of Antwerp.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FLANKING STROKE.

YPRES was beginning.

The battle along the Aisne had degenerated into a torpor of trenches. After their last desperate flicker of attack on September 28th the Germans went slack. They held strong lines, they remained holding tight to these lines. The Allies could only move them by inches through days of infinite tedium. So two huge armies had faced each other from all but invulnerable fronts along the plateaus of the river. The battle had waned to "stale-mate."

So the big slow-moving lines of battle had been shifted so that attack would gain its power from a new fulcrum. We have seen how the French moved north, we have seen how the jogging British Cavalry struck up and west through leafy Compiègne. Now, under the cool, clear and efficient brain of Lieutenant-General Sir William Robertson, a man with a dazzling genius for organization, the Corps railed north.

All the roads were fat with troops, men and guns and wagons were flowing over the sodden countryside, all the railways were packed with moving armies, train after train running forward like great trams, as the corps were railed forward to the striking point. The Germans were moving also. They too were swinging outward towards the coast, and downward towards Calais. That portion of the Belgian army not shut up in the town was being hurried and harried towards the coast. The moment was a desperate one. Let Antwerp fall, and many German corps would be released, to hurl the devoted Belgians in the field towards the coast and towards the French boundary. The northern marches of France might be seized in a swinging rush, and the hosts moving up from the Aisne might be caught unready, might be flanked and driven back, heavily defeated. The turning movement planned by the Allies, which at first looked so promising, was now dangerously threatened. It was a critical and crucial time.

Across the giant chessboard of war the pieces were hurried to meet the crisis. Into failing Antwerp a body, as has been seen, of British Naval men were flung, so that the town might hold out until danger was passed. Light screens of French troops, cavalry and Territorial regiments, were

strung out over the Flanders border to check and hold any advance of the German host.

We moved our knights and pawns, too, to assure the Allied safety in this great game of battle. Into the pleasure port of Ostend the smoking transports came pitching, and hurriedly a new British Corps (the 4th), under General Rawlinson, was disembarked. Quickly it was thrust out through Belgium towards Ghent, until the thin cavalry filaments of the German advance towards the coast were met and driven back. All these moves were made with consummate skill to check and hold the enemy, and skilfully they checked and held. And as they did so the heavy Allied masses from the Aisne, the new troops from France and from Britain, rolled up by rail and road into the positions fixed for them in the new flanking plan.

It was the corps landed at Ostend and the Belgian Army it supported that began that vast, confused, complicated scheme of trenching and crawling and snail-pace advancing and retreating, immense and deadly resistances and vivid and plangent moments of assault, that will be named in history as the glorious battle of Ypres. The new corps was one hurriedly gathered together. In addition to its regular regiments, it contained Territorial units, the first (apart from Antwerp's Naval men)

to be tested under arms in this great war. Still, whatever its composition, it fulfilled its purpose ; it did its work splendidly. It had the most difficult and terrible, perhaps, of all tasks to do. With its almost pitiable few, it faced enormous forces. The pitiable few should have been engulfed in half an instant's battle ; it was never actually beaten. The doings of this Fourth Corps must necessarily be enfolded and hidden in the enormous scheme of the battle, but their glorious obstinacy through a long period of bloody days should never be forgotten.

In the early days of October this Fourth Corps began to move steadfastly towards Ghent, and to thrust spiteful attacks at the German lines, so drawing the enemy their way and relieving the awful pressure from the front of the intrepid and devoted Belgians. Out over the flat, dyke-scarred country the British cavalry patrols, the 10th Hussars and the Territorials of the fine Northumberland Yeomanry, pushed a number of stinging little raids right up to the German lines, cutting up marauding Uhlans, driving in outposts, and generally irritating and confusing the enemy in a bright and happy British way. The work was well done. The Germans were distracted from the Belgians, ceased to harry them, and massed to attack the British.

The British had played their game to no other

end. They had perplexed and tantalised the Germans, now by a show of active resistance, now by a short, snappy retreat, now by vigorously repulsing an attack from a stubborn line of trenches. They drew the Germans on to themselves, away from the Belgian Army. They made it dangerous for the Germans to think of going south against the masses moving up into line from the Aisne. Huge forces were launched against this corps; but fighting sternly and bravely, the regiments forming it, among them the 2nd Borderers, 2nd Yorkshire Regiment (the Green Howards) the Glasgow Territorial Engineers, fell back.

During those days between the beginning of October and the 11th they should have been annihilated several times over. They refused with bullet and bayonet to be annihilated. By the 11th they had reached the country about the little Flemish town of Zonnebeke. Here as guardians of Ypres and the road to Calais they stretched their dangerously tenuous line across the route of the German advance. Here they went to ground, dug for themselves their trenches. Here the few in the face of Army Corps and massed artillery sat tight. The Germans might rage at them with all their forces. That did not matter. They would sit tight. That was their order.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SECOND AND THIRD CORPS IN THE FIGHTING.

THE main battle was developing. The British Army was coming up. Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's men, the Second Corps, had detrained and were coming into the battle. Already the keen-nosed cavalry were pushing forward over the difficult country below and to the east of the line holding fast at Zonnebeke, and the enemy were being whipped back. Already Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien and his line were flowing forward to battle. Over the difficult ground the solid wads of marching men were pushing forward. And those who came from the Midlands thought they were marching through their own homeland. There were the same large villages huddled so close that they seemed one great town, the same myriad factory chimneys and the lattice of derricks about pit-heads making a pattern of filigree against the sky. And the whole country was flat, flat with

rough lozenges of cultivation hacked out of the pack of houses. And these patches of fields and hop-grounds were hemmed by high bedraggled hedges, and the whole surface made messy with ditches, and ditches again, until the soldier grew weary of them. Many canals made difficult the way of marching regiments, and the roads were narrow, abominable, and had a vile habit of dissolving to mud at the pressure of heavy traffic. Along the roads stand the inevitable rows of scraggy poplars, lugubrious and depressing, like hired mutes at a funeral. Through this country the British marched to meet Germany in force.

October 11th burnt with a score of little cavalry fights, as General Gough and his brisk squadrons drove the Germans back. All along the line the cavalry brushed the Germans away, and Smith-Dorrien pushed after. On the 12th of October the Corps was up, and with the French on the right the first stiff fighting commenced. The Allies swung forward to push their way to the line they had already decided to hold; the Germans, gathered in ever increasing force, met them and strove to fight them back.

The ditches and the flat country made artillery attack difficult, and for a time the battle was a ding-dong affair, both armies slipping and stabbing at

each other in a maze of muddy dykes. But gradually the work of the Allies told. The fierce counter-attacks of the Germans were shattered by a coldly steady fire, and the men in return drove right home against the enemy with the terrible British bayonet. By night a distinct advance had been accomplished. Bailleul, after being held by the Germans for eight days, was evacuated without a parting shot, and heaps of dead were left on the field, as well as a number of machine guns destroyed. First blood that to Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien.

On the next day, the 13th, the fight grew up with ungovernable ferocity. The Second Corps had the task of driving the Germans out of the high ground about the town of La Bassée. They commenced, that is, a task of many bitter months. The Germans were solidly entrenched, magnificently served with artillery, and invincibly stubborn. The British pushed forward under a fierce and devastating shell fire, trying to force their way slowly, inch by inch, towards the German position. The Germans fought them off with a fury of fire. Across the marshy fields the British regiments pushed to the charge. When a ditch was met, doors and planks were flung across it, and, scoffing at the earnest efforts of the Germans to slaughter them wholesale, the British Tommies

flocked over, and at each village that barred their path a miniature battle spouted up.

Into one of them, Pont Fixe, the splendid Dorsets went romping at the heels of their brave commander, Major Roper. It was a dashing and brilliant little attack; the worry of battle roared and raged for a few minutes between the houses, and then the Germans were running for their lives. Having scuttled out of Pont Fixe, the enemy found they must have it again. They came on with a force sufficient to take it several times over, they bombarded it with heavy artillery until it seemed certain that there was no soul left alive to defend it, but the Dorsets were still there; their ranks were torn with shocking wounds and death, indomitable Major Roper was killed, but the Dorsets had made up their mind that the village was going to remain their own, and they kept it. In the whirling inferno of high-power shell and shrapnel and bullet and bayonet charge that encompassed Pont Fixe throughout that day, the Dorsets had 400 men down, and out of that number 130 dead. But they were glad to pay the price. They held the village. When that dazed and blood-drenched day was over the Dorsets held Pont Fixe, not the Germans.

The Second Corps were striking to swing round

behind La Bassée, trying to cut the Germans off from their main army, but it was a stubborn and awful task. The enemy were too strong, their positions too secure. Heroically the British worked their way forward. The Warwicks, under Major W. C. Christie, found 2,000 of the enemy in a village on a hill, and racing forward over a distance of 800 yards, they thundered down on them. They were checked, but later the Seaforth Highlanders, the Irish Fusiliers, and the Dublins came sweeping up to their aid, and in a grand rush the British swamped forward, over rough ground, and on to the crest of the hill. The Highlanders' pipes sang on the charge all the way, and the crest was swept clear with magnificent dash; then again the Germans ran, but this time they left two machine guns and sixty men behind them. By evening, however, in spite of a day's strenuous fighting, only small progress had been made, and though at night the Durham Light Infantry and other corps made a stirring attempt to smash their way into the German trenches, the attempt lost heavily.

During this day, the 13th, the line of battle had begun to expand north and west in the direction of Ypres. The Third Corps of the British Army had begun to march into the fighting. Under General Pulteney, an officer of real ability, who

was already distinguishing himself, the Third Corps began to press across the country above the sphere in which General Smith-Dorrien was fighting; a French cavalry corps marched with him, filling the gap between the two forces. General Pulteney moved forward over a drenched country, made even more difficult by fog and drizzle. He had good artillery with him, but in that weather artillery could neither see nor travel, and the regiments had to fight their way with bayonets and rifles only. But this made no difference. The enemy was met, and after a fierce tussle in the swirling fog the enemy was driven out of the field. As they ran, the Germans left their litter of accoutrements and prisoners behind them in a way now old and familiar to our men.

By now the German forces in front of the Allies were thickening. Regiments, released from Antwerp, were pouring down the railways to strengthen the already strong line. More and more regiments were rushed across Belgium from Germany. The enemy was gathering powerful armies to attack and fling back the British and the French along the Ypres line. The peril of the situation had advanced and not eased. The First Corps was still in its string of trains and motor lorries working up towards the giant battlefield. It could not come

into action for days yet. Much was to be done if the situation was to be saved. The British set themselves to do it.

General Smith-Dorrien concentrated his attack on the 14th, sent it powerfully against the strong lines of La Bassée. In spite of the pouring bullets and the death-beat of a thousand shells, the bulldog British infantry hacked their way across the country and its fret of dykes. Every dyke was a moat which had to be won, and at the point of the bayonet the British won it. It was a terrible day, many were slain. Noble General Hubert Hamilton was struck down by a shrapnel ball while directing his men under a terrible fire, but over their dead the corps steadily worked a way forward.

On Thursday, October 15th, the enemy had grown stronger, but the British were in the swing of their rush, and for the time nothing could stop them. They had come to a land thick with villages; about these the tornado of fighting raged fiercely. The villages were held desperately, and as desperately attacked. The British infantry surged against the loop-holed walls and the barricaded streets through frenzied hours of fighting. They were checked. Then the howitzers came up and blew the places to ruin, and the advance moved on again. Even then the fighting swayed indecisively over

the scoriated piles of rubble and the pitiful heaps of brick that had once been the homes of men and women and children. Villages were fought for three times, bayonets crossing and stabbing in charge and counter-charge before our men "made good." But make good they did, and with the aid of the French cavalry five miles had been gained towards La Bassée by nightfall of the 16th. Indeed, this advance had only been checked on the very flank of the German Army at the strongly held village of Aubers, set on its difficult high ground.

Higher up British arms had been carrying all before them with their superb *élan*. With the cavalry sweeping before them, the Third Corps had vanquished everything that stood in their way. They had won the country almost up to the River Lys, that formed the moat of the German flank here. This by the night of the 15th. On the 16th Armentières had been carried by a flood of bayonets. The Lys was found to have been neglected as an obstacle by the enemy, few, if any, of the bridges being destroyed, little, if any, opposition being made; so with a rush of armies the British were over, were pushing vigorously at the German flank, securing all the river towns and the crossings for their own.

There was some brisk fighting above the river,

but not much, for the Germans were concentrating elsewhere to deliver a blow that was soon to be felt. At Warneton, one of the towns on the Lys, there was a terrible few hours of fighting by night. Here, if nowhere else, the enemy had made a strong stand, and resisted with all courage and effort the attempts to carry it. The British cavalry, fighting in a novel way, on foot and with their sabres exchanged for rifles and bayonets, were among those who strove to break a way through the barricades of the little town. They man-hauled a gun into position and battered resistance down, charging home through the ruins and the débris.

Slowly they fought their way through the streets until they came to the market-place, and into this they advanced cheering to meet tragedy. For at once one of the buildings spouted to heaven in explosion, and in its blaze and under the eerie light of a multitude of star shells the enemy opened fire on the British, the 4th Hussars, from every roof and window in the neighbourhood. Under the torrent of machine-gun and rifle bullet the attack wilted, and the men fell back, leaving their dead and wounded behind. Unlike the Germans, however, they would not desert their hurt comrades. They went back into the inferno to bring them out, stealing quietly with their boots off

until every maimed trooper had been brought away.

By now, however, the Germans had concentrated in alarming numbers. They had begun to push forward an attack at a weak segment of the British line. Their masses were rolling onward and menacing the splendid Fourth Corps that had been fighting in Flanders and was now stationed about Zonnebeke. The corps, as has been noted, was extended on a very wide front, and it had to face the approaching attack of the Germans without help. The First Corps had not yet arrived on the scene of battle, could not arrive until the 20th, and Sir John French had no supports to send to Sir Henry Rawlinson at Zonnebeke until it did arrive. Threatened by an overwhelming enemy, with but 20,000 men to face them, this line on the 16th was in a position that might at any moment prove dangerous. The British were winning advances, would continue winning them at other parts of the line to-day and the next few days, but already the Commanders were looking anxiously towards this point of their far-flung line; were wondering whether it would hold out.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A FRAIL BUT DEFIANT THREAD.

THE battle of mud and ditches and incessant rain that is called Ypres, built itself upon a crescendo of roaring effort. The stroke that had been intended to win the German right had been blunted, and that battle in the north had evolved to a critical phase eminently dangerous to ourselves.

We were now faced with the problem, not so much of turning the Germans, but holding them back. True, two attempts had been made by Sir Henry Rawlinson's force (which will be mentioned more fully later) to move on Menin, but both these advances had gone for naught, thanks mainly to a German advance and gain at Roulers, high up on the left flank. It was becoming obvious that the German movement was more rapid than our own, and the weight they could put into that movement was likely to be almost overpowering. Our line had been caught in a state of flux. Not all the Corps had been moved up into battle positions, for though the Second and Third were fight-

ing, the First was only travelling. This left a very palpable weakness on our left wing. Before Ypres was but the thinnest skein of men aligned to face the enormous German pressure.

Here was the critical spot in the swaying desperate front of battle. If the Germans found that weak point and thrust determinedly at it, they might shatter their way through, pierce the Allied line, go swamping through to Calais, endanger France, and scatter the Allied forces in rout. And the German lines were deepening, massing, growing in enormous strength daily.

Antwerp had fallen. Massed battalions released from the investment of that city were pouring south to strengthen the German offensive. The brave Belgian army was being pushed back to Ostend, from Ostend to a line about Furnes and Dixmude. At its heels the Germans came sweeping. All along the front the enemy were pressing, pushing forward with the irresistible impulse of enormous numbers. At any moment they might break on to the thin line that stood in their path, break on to it and possibly break through it.

Stretched across the path of the oncoming rush was a frail thread of defence. A weak army Division—that has been called the Fourth Corps—but 15,000 to 20,000 men, to meet the rush of hundreds

of thousands. A Division of good regiments, but some of them unprofessional regiments, Territorials. It was a frail-looking line, a faint pencilling drawn across a vast landscape, but for all that a line of steel—a British line. It was the line of what should have been the Fourth Army Corps, but which was never really more than the Seventh Division. It was under the command of General Sir Henry Rawlinson. It had been landed fresh from the training camp only a few days before. From Ostend it had fought brisk fights in the direction of Ghent, and had screened and saved the tired and retiring Belgians. Now the Division was to fight a great and momentous battle. The regiments were ordered to hold on. To hold on against all efforts to break them. They had to keep the enemy at bay until Sir Douglas Haig and his First Corps came up. They held on. They dug a dam of trenches across the face of the German advance to hold back the river of armies that was flowing forward to reach the sea at Calais. The river was in full flood, all the storm-water of massed forces made fierce the current of the stream that soon was raging fiercely against the barrier of British.

The line stretched on a great front just outside Ypres; it ran from Zandvoorde to Zonnebeke, and this extended order drew the forces out, made them

more tenuous and weak than they really were. But weak though it was, it was strong enough in spirit. It remained firm throughout many days of bitter fight, clinging to its line with unshakable tenacity. The great German force hurled itself at the corps, strove to exterminate it with a dreadful and overwhelming impact; but the thin line swept back the attack with a bitter flame of fire, drove back charges with a swinging line of steel. The British suffered enormously. The 2nd Border Regiment fought and piled the dead about their trenches; the heroic Territorials of the Northumberland Yeomanry, the "Green Howards," the 1st Grenadiers, the 2nd Scots Guards, the 2nd Gordons, the 2nd Scots Fusiliers, the 2nd Wilts, the 1st Welsh Fusiliers, the 1st South Staffordshires, and the 2nd battalions of the Queen's and Warwicks refused to break, but broke instead whatever regiments were hurled at them. Still without reinforcements, without help, in an atmosphere of spitting rifle and screaming mitrailleuse bullet, of bursting shrapnel and the vast detonations of great shells, the line remained undented. Detonation slew and spread an epidemic of wounds. Still through the tormented and bitter days the line remained firm. It had its orders. It abided by them.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE TEUTONIC MASS.

MEANWHILE the other pushing lines of the British battle front were moving forward. On the extreme right Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien and his Second Corps were winning a way by inches against a stubborn foe. On the morning of the 17th of October the village of Aubers, that had, with its loopholes and its barricades, lived through the siege of a desperate night, was swept clear of Germans by a wave of British infantry crested with a foam of bayonets. On went the wave, sparkling its spume of steel, fighting its way over the slippery slopes towards the trenches of the Germans. The massed choirs of enemy artillery broke out in their infernal chorus of slaying, strove to decimate the oncoming regiments. The regiments, trailing their dead behind, went forward. Brigadier-General Shaw, swinging his men with superb certainty, flung the Lincolns and the Royal Fusiliers against the

obstinate village of Herlies ; there was a swishing worry of fighting in a torment of battle smoke, then through the smoke the two magnificent corps broke, and their bayonets had the place.

Higher up the line, between Smith-Dorrien and the heroically battling Seventh Division, the Third Corps was swinging forward. The impetuous battalions flung all opposition out of their path ; with an imperious gesture of advance they swept the country clean of Germans ; through the day they pressed forward steadily beyond the River Lys. Only at nightfall did they halt. And when they had halted they had made ground enormously, they had captured the whole of the country across the Lys as far as Capingham, and were thus within striking distance of Lille itself. Opposing them, massing at Lille and in the country about, was a growing army of the enemy. Regiment after regiment of Germans were being flung across Flanders to strengthen the line, to hold the town for the invader, to win ground back, if possible. Even when our armies halted on the ground they had won, the night was made wild with the ferocious counter-attacks of the enemy, delivered through the darkness. The nights were mottled with rifle fire and starred with shells. But no attack could drive the British front in and back.

On the 18th of October the battle along the British fronts had expanded to enormous proportions. On the right wing General Smith-Dorrien was curling his line, threatening to get behind La Bassée, and to turn the enemy from this strong position. In a huge effort of resistance the Germans concentrated all their strength to fight him off. Great masses of men were advanced under cover of a dazing artillery fire to break the British advance. They came on in vast waves of grey; walls of Germans striving by mere mass and weight to flatten out our men, and our men drove them off. All through that grey and lacrymose day the rims of our trenches were bitten in light from an out-pouring of rifle fire; all through the day the humming maxims streamed out death at express rate.

The Germans, as they poured across the churned-up ground, as they tried to bridge the muddy dykes, were cut down in sheaves, mown down in swathes. When a mass survived this strong wind of slaughter and crept too close, the lines of British in the swimming trenches rose with a shout and smashed the face of the advance with stinging bayonet charges.

Again, and again, and again the stolid and driven ranks of the enemy were shorn of all life, splintered by shell and bullet, tossed back by the red bayonets.

And as they were flung back, the British slipped out of their trenches, stole forward yet another yard towards the main German position. It was a crawling day, a day of victory by fractions. Only small progress was made for all those lives lost.

Higher up on the far-flung battle line the densening of the German mass had made the progress of General Pulteney and his Third Corps difficult, had made the fight more stubborn. General Pulteney, with a vigorous attack, was striking at Lille. His swinging brigades were out to rush the defences that, carried, would make easier his advance on that town. Into this area of the fight the enemy had packed their men with a lavish hand. The flowing British regiments were checked and fought, over every mud-soaked foot of ground. The Germans were driven slowly back, and a wedge was thrust forward along the road that winds to Lille. But the enemy had piled up a great wall of defence against the lunging British, and, strive how they might, through the thresh of shell fire and steaming death the line moved forward but slowly.

It was, however, on the line defending Ypres that the furnace of battle was enkindled on this day to its greatest fury. "Take Ypres at all costs," was the order delivered to the German army facing

Sir Henry Rawlinson's weak corps, and the enemy, striving with every fibre of strength, certainly did their best, and very certainly died. Ypres was the key of the battle. It stands on a ganglion of roads and railways that command the entire tract of this countryside. Take Ypres and the battle was won. Take Ypres and the roads to Calais and the coast were open. That master rhetorician of Prussia, the Emperor, had demanded the coast and Calais with all the passionate flowers of his speech. His armies, whipped by words, were out to hack their way through to the sea against all odds.

The whole fires of fighting were fanned to fury about the town. The thin line of the Fourth Corps had had reinforcements ; regular troops, the Guards, Highlanders, and other regiments, had come to strengthen it, but it was still woefully thin, it still had too large a front to cover. Nevertheless the front was covered, the thin line refused to budge or break through a series of days of unimaginable battling. Under the artillery attack, under sweeping bayonet charges made by huge forces, the British remained firm. Slaughter struck right and left in their ranks with a lavish hand. The Scots Guards and the Grenadiers, the Gordons also, shed their indomitable dead over all the fields of the fight. The Northumberland Yeomanry, the men

of the Yorkshire Regiment, fought from their trenches until their hot rifles skinned their hands. They only left their trenches when it was necessary to thrust back a too venturesome attack with the cold corrective of British steel. There were 75,000, some say, others 250,000, Germans anxious to burst through the line, and 20,000 held them stalwartly at bay.

This frail but invincible line was stormed at by a shell fire great to abnormality. All the batteries, field and howitzer, were concentrated to blow the British away. Shrapnel formed a settled pall over the line, the huge howitzer projectiles slew and maimed men in clusters. And where they did not slay they buried men wholesale. Thirty men of the Scots Guards were engulfed in the earthquake caused by one explosion, segments of trenches were blown in on top of the defending men. But the men were not broken, they fought calmly and heroically against the great odds. "Officers and men," says one report, "smiled at death and continued fighting in untold agony." And the artillery, from their positions behind the firing line, served the defence magnificently.

The unshakable British artillery is superb always in its proud sense of efficiency; but in those dread days about Ypres it was more than superb. In an

atmosphere of horrible violence and abrupt and awful dissolution the gunners worked calmly, the guns were fired with the mechanical perfection of exquisite machinery. The German artillery tried to overwhelm the batteries in a squall of shell fire. The guns worked on steadily; they could not be overwhelmed. Officers and men in that drenching of death were sublime. Lieutenant-Colonel E. P. Lambert stood in a whirling haze of shrapnel directing the guns in their gun-pits when all his officers were put out of action. He was struck, but he remained at his post, giving his husky orders, nursing his men, until pain overcame his unconquerable spirit, and he fainted. Lieutenant Williamson, with the bones of his arm shattered, directed his men at the guns, and would not be taken to the hospital, until nature overcame him, and he dropped unconscious.

This courage, this unbowed spirit, that shone supreme through wounds and pain and the threat of imminent and awful death, was burning all along that raging battle-line. It was common to all ranks in that desperate time. The General in command of the division spent one day with his staff in the trenches encouraging the men. Brigadier General H. E. Watts rushed into the very firing line on one occasion to rally the infantry. A spy,

a German in a British uniform, had brought an order to retire at a moment when retirement would have meant annihilation. From his post in a chateau the Brigadier saw the movement. He acted at once. He ran through the sweep of the shrapnel, placed himself at the head of the ragged battalions, formed them up under cover of a road, and then headed them at the charge back to the trench they had vacated. Another officer attached to the staff, Captain A. G. Bruce, came down each day to the machine-gun section to see how the pieces were working. He came calmly. Each morning, smoking a cigarette, he strolled to the trenches across the danger-zone that was alive with the kicking jets of rifle and shrapnel bullets. He refused to take cover; he walked as a man walks along a street. Foolhardy? Ask the men who saw that brave officer walking his rounds. The men were inspired and encouraged by his courage. The act stung them to effort like a tonic.

The British at this point were pressing for an advance and not succeeding. An attack of the 21st Brigade was driven forward from Gheluvelt to and through Becelaere. The Bedfords, Scots Fusiliers and Wiltshires were the prime movers in the attack, and as they went forward they came under a terrible shelling. Becelaere fell in ruins

about the ears of our men, and the streets took fire with shelling. Raked and torn by the bitter fire, the three regiments fell stubbornly back, facing about in their retreat, and shattering the energy of advance with their steady shooting.

The Germans came on without check. Each gap in the line was plugged by a live man; the numbers were inexhaustible. When the regiments had reached their trenches the attack still came on. The Germans stormed at this point with all the power of their artillery, all the might of their rushing regiments, but the Scots, the Bedfords and the Wilts stood firm. Charge after charge was made at the Britishers; under the terrible shelling the trenches were battered to mud, were blown down with big explosions, so that numbers of the men were buried; but the Britishers stood firm. The trenches were searched by shrapnel from end to end, other trenches were pushed close up to the defending line, and the men in that line stung by the waspish outpourings of many mitrailleuses. Death ran riot in the rifle pits; the Scots lost seven hundred men, the ranks of the Wiltshires were shredded to tatters. Neither regiment yielded.

Soon the pressure became too abnormal. Something must be done to ease the fearful strain. The Wilts leapt to the task. Out of their trenches

the men came on the 19th of October, and at a run they dashed at the heavy columns of Germans. The vast crowds of the enemy simply engulfed the devoted regiment; it was wrapped in the soft mass of Germans; still, with swinging bayonet and cracking rifle, the men fought to the last gasp. They were all but wiped out, but they had done their work. The pressure had been eased. This is but one brave tale in a pageant of brave deeds. Other regiments were fighting superbly. The Bedfords were a regiment of heroes commanded by giants in valour; the Durham Light Infantry, the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, battled with undismayed courage through all the bitter hours of fighting. The thin but valorous line before Ypres was sublime in its resolute resistance.

On the 19th the other fronts of the battle area had been quick with a most determined fighting. The Cavalry Corps had been trying to work up the valley of the Lys in an endeavour to secure a line from Wervicq to Pont Rouge. They had to make progress against terrible odds, fighting their way through a spawn of villages, each village a fort to be carried by siege method. The cavalry did their fighting with the cavalry's laughing *élan*. They used the most awful language, an officer insists, but they talked quietly, like men sure of their nerves,

and laughed whenever they found the excuse. The cavalry was checked, but they spread the tale and the fear of their workmanship in the hearts of many Germans. The cavalry was forced to retire, and at night found for themselves a line from just below the Fourth Corps at Zandvoorde to Messines. The Germans on their side were pouring across the Lys at Comines and Warneton, and pressing forward at the British front.

On the right, Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien and his Corps were facing a difficult situation, a bad country trenched and held by the enemy in great strength. The Germans had massed their forces about La Bassée in such overwhelming numbers that the Corps had to defend its positions from attack, instead of following its own inclination for attacking Germans. It held on resolutely, thrusting back with death and wounds all attempts to drive it in. Even the regiments were able to do a little position-carrying themselves. It was on this day that Major Daniell and his Royal Irish Regiment found the enemy in the village of Le Pilly. It was a strong position; loop-holed houses and line upon line of trenches made the place a fortress. At that fortress the Royal Irish swung yelling. They charged down on the Germans through zones of shrapnel death, and their rush overwhelmed the village and

exterminated the German defence. It was a wonderful, an electric moment, and though the brave regiment was cut off, and suffered heavy losses next day in the village, they would not give up. The story of that charge and that fight will live as history.

By now the battle had spread in fury along the whole line of war. From Ypres south to La Bassée the British front was blazing with the fight. Below the British the French were engaged furiously. Above the British from Ypres to the coast the Belgians and the French were locked with the Germans in a most desperate struggle. Germany had massed her armies to their most enormous and effective force. She was thrusting them in huge masses against the lines of the Allies, they were meant to crush through at several points by sheer weight, and to force their way through blood and ruin to the coast. Particularly at the weak spot about Ypres were the Germans endeavouring to break through. They had concentrated an enormous power of effort there. Army Corps after Army Corps was pushing at the few dazed and desperate men. The thin line grimly held its own, in spite of all its dead. It was still without reinforcements, still without help. It was only on the 19th that the First Army Corps reached St. Omer, began to

form, began to march into the battle line. It was pushing forward to aid the tortured lines about Ypres, going to change the whole face of the battle.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE PENDULUM OF BATTLE.

ON the 19th of October the huge and swinging line of battle that canted on the pivot of Ypres had burnt itself up to a blaze of ungovernable fury, had also developed in enormous gravity. Far down on the right, where General Smith-Dorrien's wide-flung wing touched and marched with the French, the pace of sweeping advance had slowed to creeping. La Bassée, like a buttress of granite, held firm against the surge of the British infantry. The villages on the left of his curling wing had developed themselves into fortress-towns, and checked the flanking stroke that was to cut in behind the German lines. Higher up in the line, in the centre, General Pulteney's Third Corps had butted into a solid wall of German defence, had pulled up fighting hard, was forced to fight harder to stem attack. The forward movement along these sectors of the front had come to a standstill.

Before Ypres the thunder of the battle had grown enormously. During the 19th the jogging cavalry of the Third Division had been riding through the country, high up on the map of war, that is on the extreme left of the Seventh Division, which held the road to Ypres. The sensitive patrols were out to find if some forward movement might not be made in force against the vital points of Roulers and Menin.

The woods and the country were full of the enemy, and the enemy attacked. A long fight strung itself over the fields. The gunners of K and C batteries, R.H.A., came snapping into the battle, and the guns did crisp business. There were brains behind the guns; the brains told; and the noise of warring rolled crackling over the country, checking any undue aggression on the enemy's part. Back fell the cavalry, their rifles rapping out a symphony of defiance, and back, in the time of their own choosing, came the guns. It was a capital little fight, managed by good men. After the retreat raced the Germans, eager to catch and to kill; but there was no flurry, and with the fewest possible wounds the force arrived at the British line holding the road to Ypres—a line that was even then on fire with the greatest battle of the war. Behind all this tumult of fighting the First Corps

reached St. Omer from the Aisne, detrained, and moved out to battle.

So to the growling of guns the morning of the 20th opened. The German artillery had massed against the frail line before Ypres, and with the concentrated vehemence of their mechanical perfection, were labouring to exterminate all humanity that held the route to the coast. The heavens opened to flood down a torrent of shrapnel and howitzer shell, the earth became a batter under the flogging of high-power explosive. But in the trenches the British infantry gripped tight their rifles, and sat firm. Behind them, over the clogging mud of the roads, Sir Douglas Haig and his First Corps hurried up to their aid.

Germany in bulk was pushing at the British front. Half a million Germans were gathering to break our front, and were moving to their task. Down the line of the Lys the head of the masses picked up the advancing British cavalry, and there was a swirl of fighting. The cavalry fought in the brilliant and teasing cavalry way, felt the pressure of the immense numbers behind the attack, and retired. The cavalry does not fight and win pitched battles. It only finds out the forces that want to fight, and hands on the warning to the army. The enemy had taken the initiative into their hands.

they had resolved that by sheer flow of mass they would batter their way through the Allied line to the coast. Marching, a balance of five to one in their favour, they swung at the firm British line.

On the extreme right, General Smith-Dorrien's fight for La Bassée had developed into a stolid wrestling in which Briton and German fought for a mastery of inches. In the centre, on the other hand, General Pulteney was deep in the fury of a great battle. The enemy had grouped their forces in tremendous mass here. Armies were pouring over the high ridge about Lille on to the British line. The entire area was full of the spouting of great guns and the pelting of shrapnel death. As the German mass came forward, it pressed savagely on General Pulteney, pushing back the advance posts of the Twelfth Brigade at Le Gheir. The left held out, fighting the enemy off with an earnest effort of rifle and artillery fire, and, when bullet and shell failed, with the flashing rush of the bayonet attack. But the mass healed up after the slaughter, and came on again. Soon the line was bending under the immense strain, soon to save itself from cracking it fell back, yielding way by inches, contesting every yard of the precious mud of the battle area.

This meant a critical moment. As the line fell back, the pushing swarm of the Germans came flooding in the wake of retirement. The enemy moved quickly, and came against the flank of the force—the cavalry trenched at St. Yves—that, still fighting grimly, had not yet budged. The rush had to be checked, the British line properly connected up again. A counter-attack matured. Developed and organised swiftly by General Hunter-Weston, and Lieutenant-Colonel Anley of the Essex Regiment, the plan was enforced at once. British regiments were lunged from the retiring line at the exultant and onrushing Germans. Lieutenant-Colonel Butler, of the Lancashire Fusiliers, handled the brave business of the attack. He had at his will his own superb regiment, and a regiment equal in courage and soldierly efficiency, the King's Own. With irresistible *élan* the two battalions sprang at the Germans. Over a country slippery with rain, and gouged and whipped with shell fire and bullets, the two regiments advanced. Their keen rifle fire intimidated and abashed the German attack, and after their bullets they rushed themselves. Right into the stolid grey ranks the khaki and steel crashed, disintegrating them with the free, wild work of the bayonets. The attack was dissipated, the Germans were running in their usual athletic manner.

Trenches abandoned under pressure by our men were re-occupied, the position consolidated, two hundred German prisoners were taken, and forty captured Britishers released. A spirited stroke, admirably handled by admirable soldiers.

Elsewhere, as in this part, the German advance was extraordinarily active. All along General Pulteney's line sharp attack had to be tossed back with sharper counter-attack. Particularly bitter was the German attack poured out from Frelinghien. Gunfire made a pall of awful sound over the whole field, and through this pall tore the shrill and bitter scream of a most violent rifle discharge. The Germans worked their trenches up to one hundred yards of the British rifle-pits, and from time to time the battle front would break out into a torment of bayonets as our men rushed out to hurl the enemy back. At one point the 3rd Battalion of the Black Watch came from their trenches with the high slogan of a cheer, raced through the deluge of bullets, and flooded over the German lines. In the face of the terrible Highland charge the enemy wilted, broke completely, and ran for their lives. It was, indeed, a day of shelling and charging, and, for the Germans, a day of failure in assault and being killed. The battle line was gorged with slaughter; at the end of one counter-attack eleven

hundred German dead were found in a trench, and forty prisoners were taken.

But through all this swaying of battle, the accumulating force of the enemy was pushing steadily against the line. There could be no advance; indeed, it was necessary for the British General to shorten his line on the right, and even after this manœuvre it was as much as the British could do to hold their ground. But they did hold their ground. Able General Pulteney, though his line was drawn out to undue length—it was nearly thirteen miles long; though his force was cut in half by the River Lys, which it straddled; though his men, toiling in the trenches and in building trenches, could not be relieved of their labours because, as yet, there were no adequate supports; though the fiercest and most infernal of all modern artillery fire was concentrated to smash his men to pulp; though the German trenches had drawn so close to his that the guttural voices of officers could be heard giving orders; though all these things conspired against General Pulteney in an augury of defeat, he was not defeated. With supreme skill every attack directed against the line was tossed back, the regiments were so skilfully handled that the enemy was impotent against the khaki barrier.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE BEGINNING OF YPRES.

ON the 21st of October Sir Douglas Haig's iron First Corps, hurried up without rest from its battling on the Aisne, was into the battle. On the previous day this Corps had found for itself a position running from Elverdinge to the cross-roads a mile and a half north-west of Zonnebeke. On the left of the First Corps and to the north of the Ypres Canal were French troops endeavouring to work forward, but not successfully, towards the Forest of Houthulst.

From Zonnebeke by Becelaere and Gheluvelt, in a wide and rather dangerous curve, the redoubtable Seventh Division held the roads—especially the Menin road—before Ypres. Below the Seventh Division lay Allenby's Cavalry, striding both the Ypres-Lille railway and the Ypres-Comines canal, both of which run together in line here. Below Allenby was the Third Corps, following to a certain

extent the curve of the Lys and crossing it at Armentières. It was this line of British troops which bore the brunt of the German thrust, and came gloriously through the great battle which is known as Ypres.

On October 21st it was still felt that there might be some chances of forcing an advance, and perhaps making ground as far as the important junction town of Roulers. Sir Douglas Haig attempted that advance. His troops struck out across country, aiming to make a line—Pollcappelle-Passchendale. Sir Henry Rawlinson's men moved forward on the right, conforming with the advance.

The movement was steady, and on the whole uniform. The roads were blocked at certain points and the enemy found in force. But the enemy was swept away in a string of stabbing fights in which the bayonet played a vivid part. During this time Sir Douglas Haig had swung his left wing forward, had crossed the Ypres Canal, and had fought his way to a point stretching from Bixschoote through Langemarck, where it crossed the railway, to Zonnebeke. Here the advance was pulled up, not because it was checked, but because the Germans were pushing at the flanking corps with earnest and dangerous vigour.

The French Territorials and cavalry on the left

had essayed an advance through the forest of Houthulst, had found Germany in unexpected strength and had been driven back. The Seventh Division and its cavalry supports also had met a German thrust of immense and quite numbing power.

The new masses of Germany were being brought to bear with every effort of weight and pressure. A powerful attack was being organised against the joint at Zonnebeke, where the First Corps and the Seventh Division connected up, and so strong and persistent was this assault that it seemed possible the enemy might break through and threaten the flank, not merely of the Seventh Division, but of Sir Douglas Haig's Corps. The fighting here was tremendous and strenuous, our men dazed by the overweening attack, and by the huge pummelling of artillery fire, yet held stoutly to their position. All the morning the Germans poured out men in an effort to break through, but never successfully. Later in the day the joint was made sound by the movement of Sir Douglas Haig's right, and the danger was, for the time being, over.

Towards the centre of this big half-hoop of Ypres defence the tide of the Teutonic attack poured, thundering against the line near Becelaere. The sea of grey men came on time after time in the

surges of their attack, and time after time the waves were broken and beaten off by the groining of rifles and bayonets that made staunch the British front. The shelling was strenuous and heavy. The men who held the trenches lived in a forcing-house of flame and explosion, and they had to endure this plunging death without intermission. Still they held on, and fought finely. From their blood-drenched works they beat back the German ardour, and only at one point—between the Yorkshires and the Scots Fusiliers—were the Germans able to make a temporary lodgment. Further south and west there was another attack poured out with extreme violence from the direction of Houthem. Here Gough's cavalry were holding the ground about Klein, Zillebeke and Hollebeke, and though they came in for an excessive gruelling, they were able to hold firm. They beat off all attacks, and presently their line was made assured by some of the few available reinforcements being hurried to their aid. The Life Guards rode bucketing into the battle, flung off their horses, went racing to the trenches, the maxim tripods swinging between the men. Their maxims were spluttering off at once, then the stream of death steadied and began to beat with a level stroke into the sullen mass of the attack.

The shell fire from the enemy's batteries was terrible, men and horses were down on all sides, but the Life Guards, the Scots Guards, the Welsh Fusiliers, the Camerons, the Northumberland Yeomanry, and the French infantry in the line quickened at the brave influx of new fighting men ; the trenches were lit anew by the biting flame of furious rifle fire. With a resurgent ardour the fierce attacks were driven off. New guns of the First Corps came into play immediately, and a German battery was caught coming into action. The first British shell fell twenty yards short ; the crisp voice of an officer corrected the range. The guns were on the mark, the swinging shells were plunging on to the doomed guns ; in a few seconds there was no German battery.

The fight wrestled over the trenches that guarded Ypres all day ; the infantry in the rifle-pits fought superbly. The 1st Welsh Fusiliers came in for an especial galling. From the trenches but five hundred yards away the Germans swept the Welsh with a bitter rifle fire, and piled on to that fire an earthshaking bombardment of shelling. A new gun had been brought into position, a short gun that lobbed a monstrous shell over a few hundred yards into the trenches. The great shells were packed with explosive, and this burst with frightful effect. They

struck the trenches of the Welsh Fusiliers and blew them to pieces. On top of this disaster, the enemy came swarming over the British position, and, occupying the ground held by the Fusiliers, began to rake with a bitter cross-fire the rifle-pits of the 2nd Warwicks. The Warwicks fought gamely, but the regiments about them were falling back, and quickly they became isolated. It was a terrible scene. The enemy began to close round the wound-torn ranks, began to cross bayonets with the Midlanders, began to mass in vast numbers to overwhelm the unyielding infantry. The Warwicks, giving themselves up for lost, prepared to sell their lives with a great payment in killed. The bayonets were ready, the rifles were spitting out a steady stream of defiance, the Germans crowded in. Then, at this critical moment, the air was filled with cheering, and the nimble French infantry came at a run on to the encircling mass of Germans, the long French bayonet did cruel work, and the Germans were swept back.

The red riot of the battle spilled over into the night. Through the darkness spanning the 21st and 22nd of October, mass after mass of Germans pressed forward to the trenches, the wan and death-like light of their star-shell illuminated. In the darkness they planned to fall upon the British and

crush them. They were battered back. They tried trickery. They came stealing forward under the veils of darkness right on to the British line. "Don't fire!" one mass called, "we are the Coldstream Guards!" But the trick was too old. Along the entire face of the defence the magazine raced through eight cartridges, the magazines filled and ripped off again. The sneaking attack was decimated.

It was on the 21st of October that the British Commanders first estimated the gravity of their position. That day General French had had an interview with General Joffre. The French Commander had his plans cut and dried. He intended bringing up reinforcements, the Ninth French Army Corps and other French troops, and with these new forces he intended to drive the Germans east from the Belgian line—that is, from a line stretching from the sea to the British wing at Bixschoote. But before this plan could come into force there would be a wait of days. Joffre could not move his men at all until the 24th.

Therefore, until the 24th, the British must fight unaided. They could expect no help. They were facing an enormous concentration of Germans, a concentration of something like 500,000 men, and to meet the attack of this force they had not more

than 100,000 men themselves. They had also a dangerous line to hold. The curving salient at Ypres presented many weak joints to the attack. The line itself was composed of a strange jumble of British infantry and British cavalry fighting on foot, with French cavalry and Territorials plugged into any point that showed signs of weakness; and where British and French troops did not suffice, company cooks and camp engineers, and any other available man was flung to give some suggestion of strength to the position. The leaders of the British defence had met the Commander-in-Chief on this day and they had decided on this form of resistance. The troops would dig themselves in and hold on. With finger and claw, and tooth and nail, the British were going to keep Ypres sound.

The night of October 21st saw them grim and obdurate in their determination.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WITH TOOTH AND NAIL.

FIGHTING grew on the morning of the 22nd October as the day grew up. The whole of the enormous line from the Flanders coast to Dixmude, from Dixmude to Ypres, from Ypres all over the river lands, past Lille to La Bassée and beyond, was glowing red with battle. The Germans were ever more determined to break through. The bombardment of the great guns was an abomination of noise, battery answered battery over the miles, shells flew in their vast arcs across counties. Beneath, the two great armies were grappling and writhing in the agonies of war. Stubborn was the resistance of the line, hideous the shambles of slaughter; but the battle did not check or falter. One trench was fought and won and lost again seven times. A German regiment came on as in a pageant, with flag flying. At three hundred yards from the trenches it was met by a fire so deadly that its

brave ranks withered as they walked. It fell back, reformed, and came on again. When it was one hundred yards from the Allied line, the sickle of fire slashed into it, again its ranks fell down in heaps, again it retreated. Yet a third time it came on. But now no mistake was made. It was allowed to come close, fifty yards, forty—twenty. Then the rifle-pits blazed at it with a vast shout of firing. In ten minutes the regiment ceased to exist. In less than an hour 3,000 men had been slain.

The entire line, not only from Bixschoote to Armentières, but from the latter town to Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's Second Corps battling about La Bassée, was in difficulties under the unparalleled pressure both of attack and bombardment.

As the day built up, the main attacks upon our line began to take general direction. The Third Corps came in for a vast hammering along the entirety of its front, the 16th Infantry Brigade, especially, being forced to meet heavy and powerful thrusts not only on this day, but on succeeding days. The Third Corps, however, was equal to all the strain brought against it, was able to fling back every outpouring of Germany with appalling and unbelievable losses.

Higher on the map another ominous attack was thundering against the lines of Zandvoorde, held

along a knuckle of high ground by cavalrymen fighting as infantry, and fighting extraordinarily well as infantry. Zandvoorde, and its neighbour Hollebeke, were anvils upon which the "puddling" of excessive shelling and the steam-thrust of assaults were being constantly struck. The cavalry held. The attacks were rolled back as they came on. The shelling was endured. There was no weakness here.

Against the curve of the Seventh Division the battle was poured out with its greatest passion. The enemy had punched two dents in the indomitable line. They held some of our ground in the line of the 21st Brigade near Becelaere, where they had found a joint between the Scots Fusiliers and the Yorkshires. At this point they strung their thronging attack with dizzying persistence. And that attack was met by the Yorkshires.

The Yorkshires had every reason to break. Possibly by the laws of war they should have broken. They were assailed on two fronts, and they were assailed with scientific bitterness. They did not break. They held on grimly while the waves of grey poured on to them, through the streaming weather and out from the reek of battle vapour. They held on with hot rifles and kept the line sound. There was the break certainly enough, and the Germans should have forced their way through

that break. They did not; the Yorkshires made certain of that.

The 21st Brigade was in danger also. An overweening attack had driven in the left of the line, and though the Wiltshires fought gamely, it seemed impossible that they could hold the line inviolate. When this sector of the attack was retired the danger was not averted but only increased, and though the regiments fought strenuously, the night came down for this front with the feeling that here was distinct danger.

Yet here was not the greatest danger to the Ypres front. The gravest danger arose on the front of the First Corps, on that portion of the 1st Brigade fighting north of Pilkem. Throughout the day Sir Douglas Haig had been hampered by the necessity of sending reinforcements hot foot to save the struggling Seventh Division. While this was going on he was also fighting a vehement battle along his own front. He accomplished all his tasks with great courage and great success, but on the borders of the right the huge momentum of the attack caught a point of his line and drove through it. The huge attack came spouting against the Camerons, and that regiment, fresh from a mauling on the Aisne, met it as resolutely as possible.

Resolution, however, was not possible in the face of that enormity of assault. Fighting with wild vehemence, the Highlanders were engulfed in the ocean of grey, fighting tooth and nail they were all but swallowed by the torrent of attack. The trench line caved and cracked. The Germans overran the line of defence, flung the Highlanders back, cut off part of their battalion, and thus ended the day before Ypres with a gain to themselves, and a bad hole in the British line, through which they were at liberty to push an attack when the morning came.

On the other extremity of the British front, on the right about La Bassée, fighting was difficult, and things went ill with us on the 22nd also. After a few days of quiet a big and powerfully supported attack had been thrust forward. All our line was engaged, but, in particular, that portion of our line in and about Violaines was savagely assaulted.

Violaines stands above La Bassée on the Neuve Chapelle-La Bassée road, and it was held with staunchness by the Fifth Division—until this moment. Staunchness, however, could not prevail against the thrust of tight-packed Germany, or the bombardment poured out by the massed batteries of Germany's guns. The Fifth Division, battered to pieces by shells, swathed in the death

of shrapnel, broke. The avalanching attack rumbled down upon their trenches, drove the British out of them, came after them fighting a clamorous battle through the streets of Violaines, crushed our men by sheer blanketing of numbers, gained the village and came on swarming, carving a way into the depth of our lines.

It was a touchy moment. The Germans, with the gravity of numbers and success behind them, seemed certain of breaking through. Their velocity seemed irresistible, and their guns were shelling well ahead of the attacking columns to staunch resistance and to stretch a screen against counter-attack. It was a moment of extreme danger.

It was so only for a moment. Against the resolute head of the advance two fine British regiments went catapulting. The 3rd Worcesters and the 2nd Manchesters had been warned of the danger at once, had been organised immediately, had flung themselves to counter-attack without a moment's hesitation. With a flash of charge they hurled themselves into the face of the grey mass pushing from Violaines into our line. Over the mud-drenched ground, and through the veiling of shell fire and shrapnel smoke the two corps rushed. They came with a mighty impact into the advancing battalions. The battle writhed and tossed

itself aloft madly, as the sea does when cross-waves meet. Then, after that mad moment, the British bayonets burst through. The throng of the assault had been pierced and shattered, the power of the assault hamstrung. With red bayonets the Worcester men and the lads from Manchester carved and shredded the effort of advance to pieces. The impetus of victory ran down. The German columns broke. The mass retired. Violaines was not won again, but the British line had been saved. While the two regiments had been busy dispelling the danger our front had been formed up.

Yet even this superb valour had not been able to hold up the steady and awful pressure that the Germans were enforcing here. Smith-Dorrien's line was suffering, and it was also exposed. To strengthen it and to save it he must fall back, and on the night of the 22nd October this was what he did. He retired pivoting on his right wing at Givenchy, until his left extended past Neuve-Chapelle to Fauquissant below Laventie. October 22nd had been an unpleasant day for the British Army along all fronts.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

STROKE AND COUNTER-STROKE.

THE line, ragged and battered, tortured with shell fire and torn with wounds, the line that made the barrier of flesh and steel before Ypres, was suffering and was in danger. Regiments were cut to pieces, and holding positions that brigades should have held. Brigades were jumbled masses of scattered regiments. Lieutenants commanded regiments, and colonels at times commanded no more than a handful. The front before Ypres was but a line of ragged British infantry stiffened by discipline and pluck, commanded by Generals who refused to recognise the words "defeat" or "impossibility." They would not be defeated. They refused to recognise the theoretical impossibility of their situation.

The night between the 22nd and 23rd of October was thick and heavy with shelling. The Germans had found, as they felt, a weakness, and the Germans were not going to let it grow strong again.

The dazed British were to be hammered and hammered until they fell back helpless and blind and reeling from their positions. Germany had the power, it was going to use that power. Germany desired the coast, Germany was going to hack through to the sea.

Particularly did the Germans pound at that weak spot where they had poured through over the Camerons' position. They had resolved to enlarge that gap, and to make use of that gap to gain a victory. The British recognised this tactic, and they planned swiftly to heal this wound in their front.

In the piercing and azure light that is before the dawn the British were moving to retrieve the loss. Regiments were forming and massing, were pushing towards the gap at Pilkem to dam the flow of German arms that threatened to sweep through and engulf the Allies in the floods of defeat. Before night had stretched itself and woke to day the dancing lights of rifle-fire were gavotting over all the fields of battle. Behind the massing men the guns began to speak in the huge accents of war. British battalions were moving and attacking in their turn. In a great front of men the superb Queen's West Surreys, the indomitable Northamp-tons, and the splendid King's Royal Rifles were advancing towards the German position that, yes-

terday, had been a British position. A fine and capable officer, Major-General Bulfin, led them.

The fires of war burnt up with an awful ferocity at once. The Germans in their new-won trenches opened their defence with a crash of rifles and a rage of artillery firing. They were determined to defeat the counter-attack; to attack, even, themselves to swing our armies out of their path. Our men went on. Rush following rush, as they wormed their passage across the mud of the fields and the fret of dykes that made the country terrible as a place for battle. All the German guns were concentrated to stem the impulse of the moving line. The great "Jack Johnsons" blew vast craters into the surface of the meadows; the enormously detonating "Coal Boxes" blasted the moving ranks and the fields alike with their huge and ragged wounds. The attack went on. It had an irresistible flow. The unceasing scream of the rifles, the stuttering spit of the many mitrailleuses, could not make it falter. Gradually it worked its creeping way on to the German defence. The first line of trenches fought off its encroachment with a bitter warring of bullets. The bayonets of our line heaved and flashed as the ranks lifted to the charge. The line quickened. Over the lip of the firing-parapets the British ranks swept in a boiling flood of men and steel.

One line of the lost trenches was ours. The attack went on again. Slipping in the slough of mud, gashed and torn with the slashing knives of steel, it was yet invincible. The houses, with their loopholes, their hidden maxims, and their barricades, collapsed before the steady flow of British fighting men. A detachment of the Camerons, cut off but still fighting, was relieved. Trench after trench of bravely obstinate Germans caved before the crushing stroke of that inexorable charge. The lost ground was recovered, the lost positions were won. All through that frantic day, over a distance of six miles, the irresistible torrent of khaki moved. Night came and the gap was filled again. The wound in the line was healed.

But the enemy was attacking also. New troops were being piled up against us, and in a way astonishing in its reckless prodigality these troops were flung forward against our line.

Especially on the left wing of Sir Douglas Haig's front—against his 3rd Brigade—did the cyclone of battle rage with unimaginable fury. The capture of the trenches at Pilkem had given the enemy one of the few stirrings of hope experienced during a battle deadly to their aims. They punched brigade after brigade at the British line before Langemark in the hope of making yet another gap through

which to pass their armies. "The enemy advanced with great determination, but with little skill," wrote Sir John French. They came on with a magnificent, if abortive, courage also.

Five times did the dense, grey wall of hostile soldiery come over the batter of sodden fields at the British trenches. They came on like men realising the romantic beauties of a battle picture; their flags were flying, their drums were rolling, and from the flowing pack of the ranks there lifted up the throbbing lilt of "Die Wacht am Rhein." The British artillery carved their formation to tatters with plunging shrapnel as they came. The British infantry planted their feet more firmly in the soup of water and mud that half-filled the trenches, and waited, finger on trigger.

On came the singing, the pictured mass, up to the sighting marks the British had already set out, up to the deadly web of barbed wire entanglements. Then the rifle-pits leapt to a flame of fire. The shrill rip of the rifles tore from end to end of the parapets, the maxims opened wide at the throttle, spouting their leaden jets of death. At point-blank range maxim-belt and magazine raced through their cartridges. The lines of attack were blown from off the face of the earth.

Five times the attack came on. Five times it

melted to the ground in slaughter. Five times the courageous but unscientific young Germans pushed breast-forward against the unquenchable beat of bullets. They lost awfully at each charge, and the losses broke their spirits. The assaults died. The ranks were dissipated. Shattered, the Germans fled from the field. As they fled the guns opened on them, and slew, and slew. The fields were abhorrent with their dead, and yet more dead and more dead were added. The British howitzers exterminated half platoons with the awful smash of their shells. When the frantic men sought shelter in villages or in buildings, the villages and the buildings were shattered to rubble by high-explosive shell, and as the men scuttled from these death-traps, the spray of the shrapnel came over them and strewed the rout with horror and with slaughter. After them, too, came the clamant British regiments, galling with the keen edge of their bayonets the ragged streamers of the *débâcle*. The Loyal North Lancashires, in the hampered country about Langemarck, romped in the rear of the retreat. They poured after the Germans with dismaying *élan*, enfolded the retirement in their line, and decimated the ranks with a terrific rifle and machine-gun fire on front and flank. It was a ghastly day in the history of Germany in arms.

Six hundred prisoners were taken ; 1,500 dead lay about Langemarck through that day alone. A note found on a German officer stated that the Corps which attacked the British line was reduced to but 25 per cent. of its effectives by the end of the day.

On this evening the British obtained the first measure of relief they had had since the opening of the battle. A division of the French Ninth Corps marched into our line and took over that portion of the front held by the Second Division, which in turn relieved the Seventh Division by taking over the ground between Poelzelhoek to the Becelaere-Passchendale road.

Even with these reinforcements our men were still called upon to endure the terrific strain of concentrated attack. After a night fretful with shelling, the attack went on without cessation on the 24th. Having been beaten back from their lodgment near Pilkem, the Germans concentrated a more profound effort against the weak joint held so gamely by the Wiltshires, and in this glowering battle in the woods near Reytel village they gained a point. The frayed and fagged Wiltshires were overcome, and still fighting, they were spun back out of their works by the deep waters of the assault.

The Warwicks were flung to the rescue. They swung at the Germans, fighting a hundred little

battles through the intricacies of the woods. The enemy fought with every tree a trench, and the wonderful Warwicks lost heavily. But with Colonel Loring, wounded in the foot, bootless, unable to put foot to ground at all, at their head, they swept on. Splendid Colonel Loring lost two horses, and then his life; 105 officers and men went down. But the Germans still held their gain when the day was over.

On the night of the 24-25th October the Ypres half-circle received more relief, the position of the First Division being taken over by French Territorial troops, and the Division itself moved over to Zillebeke to take the strain off the frontal fighting there.

The 24th of October saw Smith-Dorrien's line suffering also from the high-power shocks of advance. The enemy, as usual, moved up to the assault with a courage magnificent but pitiable. As usual, they searched the trenches from end to end with the huge fire of their guns, and then in solid companies came on. Against General Smith-Dorrien's fatigued line the heavy masses of the charge were pushed. The British infantry, and particularly the British artillery, were ready for them. The attacking mass made an excellent target, and our gunners seized their chances with

avidity. The lines of the enemy were devastated by a pelting death even before they could come into touch. Sheave after sheave of the grey throng went down before that scything of slaughter. The gunners and the riflemen grew sick with killing. But the lure of Calais and the coast hypnotised the host, and they advanced again and again, and died, and came on over their litter of dead.

All day long this awful business went on; all day long the British in their trenches seemed to slaughter at will. It was killing at a convenient range, for the enemy during the major portion of the day could not get to close quarters. It was only in the evening that the Germans approached anything like contact with our fighting men. Then the stolid cohorts forced their way through the torrents of bullets almost up to the Seventh Brigade to that sector of the trenches where the 1st West Kents and the 1st Wiltshires held their own. As the attack developed here the fire from the Wilts and the Kents bit great wounds in the German lines, staunching the fervour of their rush with lead. The Germans still pressed on.

To make sure of their victory the enemy turned the full force of his artillery against this sagging sector of the line. On to an area of only 150 yards the Germans applied the fire of several 6-inch

howitzers, as well as the fire of three or four field guns and many machine guns. From their trenches, less than 800 yards away, the enemy's riflemen whipped the whole surface of this shell-thrashed place with a hail of bullets. Under this awful and abnormal bombardment the trenches of the West Kents were pulped to ruin and churned to mud. The firing parapets were blown away, and all the men could do was to crouch at the bottom of the pits waiting for death or the enemy. It was impossible to rebuild the trenching works. If but an elbow showed above the earth-line, that was death. When night came the shelling went on, so that no repairs could be made under the cover of dark, and during the night, too, the enemy crept closer, dug their trenches nearer. The regiment to the left of the West Kents were driven in, and the flank was then left in the air. To make the most of the advantage, the Germans attacked the weakened left, and though they did not get through then, they paved the way for a later and greater rush.

On the same afternoon, against the 18th Infantry Brigade the German juggernaut came rolling also. The thick push of the rush turned the Gordons, fighting like cats, from their trenches, who began to creep into the gap thus made. Without a moment's hesitation Lieutenant-Colonel Hull had his Middlesex

Regiment into the whirl of the fight. The "Die Hards" went punching at a rush into the head of the attack, staved in the face of it, flung it back. As it broke, the Middlesex went leaping at the huddled men. Over the captured trenches they harried and hurried the stumbling Germans, over the trenches and out over the open back to the kinder shelter of their own lines they drove them helter-skelter. It was an electric rush, and it secured the lost works of the Gordons again.

For all its resolute front, however, the Second Corps, which had entered into the battle first and had been fighting unendingly ever since, was now exhausted, and calling for reinforcements. Fortunately, reinforcements were to hand. On this day, the 24th October, the Lahore Division of the Indian Army Corps arrived, under Major-General Watkis, and they were immediately sent to Smith-Dorrien's aid, coming into the supports in the neighbourhood of Lacon. The 8th Infantry Brigade also came up to the left of the Second Corps, to take part in the battling immediately, and successfully, for they beat back attacks. Yet even with these reinforcements the Second Corps was not fully reinvigorated. It had lost enormously, as it had fought enormously. It was woefully thinned and woefully fatigued. It went on fighting all the same.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

TAUTENING THE LINE.

DURING the 25th of October the left of the Ypres line, the Second Division, with the Seventh on its right, and the Ninth French Corps marching on its left, drove forward in a counter-offensive. Working upwards to the north-east, it strove by force of arms to distract some of the overweening attack from the centre. It was not very successful in this, though it made good progress and captured guns and prisoners.

On its part the German effort was restrained during the day. The outpouring of assault ceased, and only the guns strode the field with their unspeakable clangour. The Germans had dragged artillery to the battle in huge excess. The Corps batteries were supplemented by heavy batteries; from Antwerp the great howitzers had been hauled and massed to join the enormous effort of gunnery. From the evil and ingenious foundries of Herr

Krupp the *Minenwerfen* had been brought, a weedy little trench gun that spat a 200-lb. shell from the bottom of a pit across an interval of yards, and burst the very earth with the awful impact of its explosion. All these guns massed in one hideous effort to pulp or blast the British defence from the surface of the universe, and all through the day the stunning smash of the shells beat down upon the resolute and unyielding British in their disintegrated lines.

The tired and dazed and deafened British regiments crouched in their works, holding their rifles and their bayonets ready for the inevitable attack that must grow up out of this orgy of shell fire. As they crouched they piled up many little accounts that they would settle when the bunching grey regiments came at them over the gouged fields, and the bullet and the bayonet could make amends for the torments they were now suffering. They could afford to wait, the British regiments; they knew how to wait. Centuries of the sternest fighting had inured them to a patience most deadly to their foes. Then, as the evening marched up, their turn came. The solid grey masses came over the slippery fields, and through the meshing of the woods at them.

The attack came threshing at the ridge where

the village of Kruseik lorded it over the Wervicq-Becelaere road. Kruseik held the key of the Zandvoorde segment, and at all costs the woods and the ridge must be held. The 2nd Scots Guards were holding the post here, and when the Germans in mass arrived they put up a very wholesome fight. Thrusting desperately through the dark, the German advance came into the Guards' trenches and entangled them in a furious *mêlée*. The Guards held them in a stabbing fight, yielded just once, and then held tight again.

That momentary break had been fateful, however, but only for the Germans. In its wild excitement a body of the grey-coats had broken through, had begun a vivid fight on the wrong side of the Guards' parapets, and had then been trapped. Captain Charles Vincent Fox had attended to those Germans who had broken through, while the re-healed line of the Scots kept the rest of the grey-coated cohorts at bayonets' length. Captain Fox and a detachment flung themselves on to those who had broken through, and not only did he and his men put the fear of British bayonets into their hearts, but he captured five officers and two hundred men into the bargain. For this he obtained the D.S.O.

The fight brimmed over into the day, the Germans

finding with the morning more reasons than less for rushing the position. The Scots held on grimly, driving back assaults firmly. And as they fought, the 7th Cavalry Brigade worked out from Zandvoorde to their aid. The cavalry came on with particular dash, the Royal Horse Guards doing particularly well. By noon the first squadron, under Captain Lord Alastair Robert Innes-Ker, arrived at the scene of the battle, and with their coming the pressure was relieved. Lord Alastair Innes-Ker showed conspicuous bravery here, ignoring the heavy fire to bring men out of action. For this he, also, received the D.S.O.

The attack that was here thrust out towards Ypres in mass, also caught General Pulteney's Third Corps. His men had a savage night and day of it, beginning with the night of the 25th October when the trench of the Leicesters was blown in by shell fire and that regiment forced to retire. With the retirement of the Leicesters, the entirety of their sector had to be re-schemed, and the line south of the Lys was shortened.

Shortening front was an ideal in the air. On the 27th of October General Sir John French was at the First Corps Headquarters, at Hooge, to investigate and examine the state of things obtaining before Ypres.

He found a state of things terrible and incredible. The Seventh Division had practically ceased to be a division in anything but its glorious name. Its tattered but indomitable regiments were in some cases less than platoons, and all had suffered in an appalling way. It was resolved that the Seventh Division should join itself to the First Corps, and that Sir Henry Rawlinson should return to England to supervise the mobilization of the Eighth Division.

With these changes the line of front was also changed, and Sir Douglas Haig aligned his new Corps along a more compressed and powerful front; the Seventh Division ran from the east of Zandvoorde to Gheluvelt on the Menin road; the First Division from the Menin road to a point immediately to the west of Reytel, and the Second Division from thence to the Moorslede-Zonnebeke road.

The new alignment was carried out at once and easily. There was no attack on the 27th October or the 28th. Stashed for a moment in their fervour against the Ypres line, great attacks were held up, and the full power of the artillery turned on to flush the meagre but heroic defending line with death. But the British had guns also, good guns, superbly served. They flicked their repartees of shells at the German artillery and took their toll

in men and damage. They intimidated the men in enemy trenches, they curbed the fury of the German gunners. They did superb, awful work. One shell, and one only, punched into a farm that had been lively with rifle fire. The farm was silent. A patrol rode up to it, and found twelve men in it: eleven were dead, and the other had not yet recovered from the lethal fumes of lyddite.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

NEUVE CHAPELLE.

THERE was a lull before Ypres. Before Smith-Dorrien's Corps there was a tornado.

The enemy had begun to experience their passionate craving for Neuve Chapelle, and they endeavoured to assuage that craving with assault. They had sense in their passion. By breaking through the thin, tired line—thin even in spite of the Indian reinforcements that had come up and were fighting most ably—at Neuve Chapelle, they might break round behind Ypres and force the main line to fall back. So against Neuve Chapelle the Germans launched a monster of attack.

The attack first struck, on the 25th of October, the West Kents—"the regiment that never gives up a trench"—still holding grimly to their works. By all the rules and theorems the West Kents should have been exterminated. It was not easily exterminated and the Germans knew it. They had

tried, and also they had failed. To retrieve their failure, they resolved to quench the plucky regiment with shell fire, and on the 25th of October their guns concentrated to this laudable effort.

On the 25th the shelling was more furious. The whole of the ground was torn to pieces, the beams of the trench supports shattered, even the trees about the trench dashed to splinters. It was no good hiding in the "dug-outs" under the trenches; the huge 6-inch shells plunged through the earth, broke right down into the deep caves dug in the earth. Everything was wrecked. The communication trench was impassable, and the reliefs, who should have made their way along it, had to double across a shell-scorched patch to reach the firing trench. All the same, they reached the firing line. The men were quite undismayed. A great shell burst and buried some of the West Kents under the earth-slide it caused. At once ten men seized shovels, raced through the hell of fire, and began to dig their comrades out. They had to dig lying flat—to stand up, to kneel even, was to die. And all this time the Kentish men were clinging to their position, though the very dirt that formed the parapet of their trenches was dashed in their faces by the beating shells.

On the 26th the artillery fire had had its effect.

The regiment posted to the left of the West Kents were forced to fall back, so that on the regiment's flank there was left an ugly and dangerous gap. At this gap, hoping to break right through the line, the Germans hurled their battalions. As they came on, the plucky regiment prepared for them. They swept the advancing ranks with a deadly and deliberate rifle fire, and when the shattered head of the advance came on, the English left their line and staved it in with a furious bayonet rush. Again and again the Germans tried to win through; again and again the thin but indomitable ranks hurled them back with bullet and with bayonet.

The Germans, sick of being slaughtered, unable to penetrate that inflexible rank of Kentish men, withdrew, and only the great guns roared on. But they came back the next day, and now they were determined to win their way through at any cost. Their approach was heralded by a sweeping storm of shell fire. The guns worked systematically over the whole area occupied by the regiment, endeavouring to kill and slay in every yard. Defying the storm, the West Kents rose from the batter of earth that had been their defence works, and went to meet the attack. They moved out about fifty yards, and lined a road at right angles to the

trenches ; thus they could cover their desperately exposed flank. Battered, and nerve wrung, and fatigued, they were yet unflinching. They showed unexampled courage. As they moved, as the fat German columns came at them, a brave non-commissioned officer, Colour - Sergeant Penny, walked among the men calmly smoking a cigarette, steadily nursing his section. His coolness inspired the men ; they responded with tremendous *élan*.

The enemy flooded on, trying to overlap the ranks, trying to thrust their way through the 400-yard gap on the left flank that was without defenders. The West Kents fought them off gamely, all the men fighting superbly, all the officers magnificently. "Such magnificent officers, too!" — that was General Smith-Dorrien's opinion of them. Twelve of the fourteen went down ; the Colonel, Colonel Martyn, was wounded ; but young men like Lieutenant White and Second-Lieutenant Russell fought the regiment with a skill and a bravery that will not be surpassed on any desperate field. For a time their efforts had splendid result. The Germans were held. Then greater masses were brought up, and the attack went on again. A splendid company of the regiment was strung out to close the gap, but the weight and the numbers of the attackers told. By the evening of the

27th the enemy had crushed their way through the British line; they had turned the flank of the West Kents and had entered the village of Neuve Chapelle.

But even with this footing in Neuve Chapelle the Germans had not won it. A fight that was terrible at once burst into being. The village took fire at once with a blaze of resistance. Our men had made of Neuve Chapelle not a village, but a fort, formed out of a string of forts, the houses. The Germans pushed on, went down in swathes, and came on again. The maxims and the artillery of our men exterminated regiments, company by company. Death was discounted; fresh men gathered over the corpses. The attack came on again. It pushed into the works about the village, driving the British Tommies out by sheer mass. It flowed over, and filled the trenches in a whirling wrestle of personal combat. Then the mass, having the trenches, rolled on into the village.

The fighting in the streets was infernal. Every cobble was a battlefield. From every window death was jerked into the pack of the fight. Men jammed in the narrow space, fought with their elbows only, working the stabbing bayonet with violent dagger-thrusts. Still the momentum of the mass pushed the British back. The German

glacier ground onward. From their barricades, from the houses melting to rubble over their heads, the British fought the enemy off. The place was choked with dead and clogged with wounded, was raving between the high pitch of the walls with the appalling noise of fighting. Still the terrible and frantic battle continued between the gutters. The impetus of the mass oozed forward until half the village was German, half the houses were in the hands of the enemy. Then the attack stopped. The British, with their steady rifles, refused to be beaten back another foot.

Night fell with the battle boiling about the village. Through the night the red fires of war smouldered against an ugly sky. Not only the great guns were flashing, and the trenches and barricades in and about the village were cut sharp against the dark with the acid light of rifle firing, but the farms outside the place were burning, the ricks and the houses and the very woods were full of sullen and damped-down flames. Over the fields and athwart the rifles and the guns the coil of thick smoke from the ravished homes sagged like the fume of a latter-day hell. Dante might have walked in the horror of that night and known it to be infernal. And through the reek and the fire of it the guns were coughing, attacks were worming

forward, and men, up to their knees in slime, were flopping down in a thousand angular attitudes of death.

The morning of the 28th came, but merely to bring a greater ferocity to the Neuve Chapelle fight. The gust of battling in and about the village was amongst the most awful phases of the War. Neuve Chapelle was saturated with the blood of brave men. Neuve Chapelle became a new Hougomont. The fiercest blaze of war enfolded it. With the first hint of Wednesday, the 28th, in the air, the British were out to recapture it again. The Indian troops, the superb 47th Sikhs and the 20th and 21st Companies of the admirable Sappers and Miners, and the 9th Bhopal Infantry, were rushing with the regiments to the attack. The Indians were "blooding" themselves in their first fight; it was a terrible *début*. Again the battle was ferocious to a degree. The Germans clung to the shot-torn ruins desperately, their rifles and their many mitrailleuses worked frantically to hold the British off. Losing their dead over every foot of ground, the Indians and the British stormed at the place. They were checked, but on they rushed again. They were at the village and into it, and the rush of their bayonets and the crackling of their rifles were clearing the rubble-filled streets inch

by inch. Again the fight roared between the walls, and again the attack was an affair of inches. But the favours were on our side now. The British progressed. By nightfall the greater part of the place was ours, and we were holding on to it grimly with bayonet and bullet and maxim.

But here the attack and counter-attack became locked. Each side clung to half the village, and each side refused to let go. From their parallels of trenches and barricades the British and the Germans defied and glared at each other, and remained defying and glaring at each other through the weeks.

CHAPTER XL.

THE GREAT EFFORT.

ON Thursday, October the 29th, the Germans, with fresh corps drafted into their line, commenced their most tremendous effort to break the worn British line. Through the dawn against the fainting blue of the night the bunching attack came at the British again. The fields and the woods were alive with men pushing forward. The Germans had concentrated for their last thrust at the coasts. With every effort they could make they were going to batter at the line that had thrown them back so consistently from the front about Ypres. The British had been tempering that line with an adjustment of troops. Sir Douglas Haig had spread his regiments to their best effect; his force was woefully small, but it was ready.

The Germans, with mass pressing on mass, struck at Ypres, pouring out from Menin along the road, until their dreadful impact with the 7th

Division at the cross-roads of Gheluvelt pulled them up. From Gheluvelt southward through Zandvoorde and towards Zillebeke—where the cavalry were fighting on foot—the attack began to build up with desperate fury. They prepared the line of their advance with a squall of shells that blazed and smoked against the morning sky. The British batteries leapt out at the German guns with vigorous defiance. Under that lacing of shell the enemy strove to drive his assault home, into and through the front. It was a vehement and desperate worrying of battle. The Germans, as ever, came on in their squat, tight masses of grey, wave after wave seeking to pile up on our trenches. Our men met them with an astringent fire, the rifles flaring all along the trench crests, the maxims bubbling and steaming their steady jets of death. The slaughter was appalling.

Still from the swathes of the dead, new, grey ranks jumped to life. Germany seemed to be turning on its legions at an inexhaustible tap. The waves crept nearer and nearer. The savage yelling of the rifle battle, the febrile screaming of the quick-firers from both sides, the smash and shatter of the shrapnel and the vast and powerful howitzer shells fused into an insane wave of noise. We were cutting and hacking their ranks to death by

battalions, but fresh fanatics, mesmerised by the magnetism of Ypres, leaped into the gaps. They came rolling up, spilling their dead over the field, but certainly rolling up. As the morning wore on they came up to the trenches, fought in a whirl for the mastery, shoved our men out of them with the sheer bulk of line.

The British fell back through the smoke of their own rifles, eerie figures in billows of vapour, rifles jumping and jetting in their hands. Then in a bunch they would gather, and, as smoke swirls in a draught, so they swirled forward at the Germans, hammering into them with strokes of bayonets. But weight was against them, weight and always weight, stolid, thick, soft and overpowering. The second line of trenches was filled with the grey ooze, the British were stumbling and fighting backward once more.

The sliding bog that was the German advance crept after our men, pouring after with solid pace to win the last line of waterlogged works. But the British were determined they should not win those. Fresh men came catapulting to the line's aid. The line was nerved afresh. The lines of the First Corps were drained for reinforcements. As the enemy came on the fiercest fire of that fierce day withered and scorched the face of the advance. It seared

and bit the life out of regiments. Against that conflagration of hostility the rush pulled up. It hung hesitant on its toes, went back to the second line of trenches, content with what the rush had won.

Our men were not contented. They were our trenches the enemy held; we made up our minds that ours they should be at the end of the day. The British force gathered itself for their recapture; came surging out of the trenches in ferocious counter-attack. The Guards Brigade, the Grenadiers especially, and the 2nd Gordon Highlanders, scattered their indomitable dead profusely to win our position back. And it was done. The plunging bayonets had their way. By two o'clock the Germans had begun to dent and sag before the knife-edged attacks. By night they had all been driven back, the Kruseik Hill had been recaptured, the 7th Brigade had re-established its front on the Menin road, and the over-assertive enemy had lost more than he had attempted to gain. Between six hundred and seven hundred dead Germans were counted before one trench alone. It was here that Lieutenant J. A. O. Brooke, of the Gordons, bravely led an attack in this fight, won the Victoria Cross, and died in the winning.

Lower down the line on the Lys at Le Gheir, the plunging attack had pushed forward with equal

passion. The waves of grey men came thundering against the steady battalions, were met by a decimating fire, were broken by a flashing thrust of glinting bayonets. The attack dissipated in rout. In one trench, where for a flustered moment the Germans had gained a footing, the stabbing bayonets turned them out with a loss of seventy killed and fourteen captured.

At midnight the vast attack tried again. One effort was caught by the artillery and slaughtered almost before it was born, another came on heavy as usual with men. It poured foaming over the trench of the fighting Middlesex, and with the push of twelve battalions behind it made a gain. The Middlesex went back and stormed at the trench in an angry rage, and for some hours the fight was a chaos of smoke and jetting rifle, of rapping mitrailleuses and thumping bayonet attack. The Germans held for those hours. Then in a spate of kilts the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders came bunching into the battle. They went into the Germans with electric dash, their pumping bayonets notched the front with wounds, and the Germans were just tossed out of the place. Those who did not surrender, died. Two hundred dead, and more, clutted the Brigade front when the trench was won back.

Against another section of the line another heavy-shouldered attack was moved. The line was ready for that. Under the pelting of shells the men remained grimly silent. Their rifles were ready, and they were sighted to prearranged marks. For forty minutes the squat mass of the attack came over the fields towards our trenches, the Germans confident that their shelling had stifled all resistance. Our men held their fire, their fingers itching on the triggers. Then, when every bullet must hit and kill, the long line of the trench burst flame. Every rifle ran furiously through its magazine, every maxim-belt rattled and kicked through its breech. The attack was ended.

On the La Bassée sector of our line Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's Corps was also forced to endure a terrible attack. Against Festubert the Germans came on in their inevitable heavy formation under the heavy shelling of their artillery. The combination was successful. Although they fought with a great deal of tenacity, some of our regiments, the 2nd Manchesters among them, were driven out of their works and thrown back.

The Manchesters retired, fighting and sullen, to the supporting trench. They were not pleased with themselves, the Manchesters, for they do not enjoy

being beaten. At the supporting trench they gathered themselves together and gained some satisfaction by smashing back, with deadly vehemence, a German attempt to overrun that also. They drove the enemy off to the trench they had won; then the Manchesters waited, scheming to retrieve their day.

Soon they were out of their trench again, doing their best to regain the lost rifle-pit. Here it is that Lieutenant James Leach, a boy of twenty who had been promoted from the ranks of the Northamptonshire Regiment, and Sergeant Hogan, a quiet veteran of the South African War, appear. These two brave and determined men headed the attempts to drive the Germans back, and secure the tenure of their old line again. Ten men started out with them at first, and without hesitation they moved forward bravely over the saturated ground. The Germans, determined to hold firmly to what they had won, lit the line of their trenches with the bitter fire of their rifles, and their throbbing mitrailleuses began their work of death. Two of the ten went down, and before that spate of bullets the tiny British advance was checked. The Germans fired more vehemently. It was death to go on, so again without happiness the Manchesters went back.

Yet the Manchesters gripped their courage together, the Lieutenant, the Sergeant, and volunteers went forward again. They went forward with great courage, and with soldierly skill, but the enemy were too well placed, the fire too strenuous and hot. The counter-attack failed once more.

Two brave failures against a strong enemy in a first-class position would have left any regiment with its honour intact, but Lieutenant Leach and Sergeant Hogan were not satisfied with that brand of negative glory. Defeated twice, they had the courage of a third attempt. Now they decided that numbers were an obstacle, and also numbers meant more chances of losing lives. They decided against volunteers. They resolved to attack and gain that trench alone. They attacked, a regiment of two men.

They crept out alone. They went crawling over the bullet-bitten earth, across the zone, quick with exploding shells. They should have died a score of times. They were not even wounded. Worming their way through the mud, they crossed the hundred yards between the trenches, gained the German works, and dropped into them. Then they began to fight.

In those narrow ditches slippery with mud the

two men fought the packed Germans. The rifles began smashing off at once, and the thin fume of cordite stung the eyes and came bitter on the lips, so close were the spitting rifles. The huddled Germans tried to beat them away in a frenzy of firing. Deaf, dazed, but resolute, the two brave men fired into the pack but ten yards away from them. Men went down; they fought over the dead men clogging the slippery place; the bullets streamed about them; the lieutenant's hat was knocked to pieces, his scarf shredded to tatters, but unwounded, unweary, the two men worked the enemy back.

From traverse to traverse of the trenches they battled, slipping, stumbling, shooting, stabbing. The Germans backed away from them, shooting and stabbing wildly too, to drive them off. But the two Manchester men fought the crowd, beat the trench load of Germans out of one traverse into another. Men were wounded and slain as the wrestle of fighting worked onward. Eight men were killed outright, only two wounded. Indeed, there was no room for wounds; it was kill or be killed in that cramped, choked space. The Germans soon realised this. The stinging scourge of the bullets lashed and cowed them, and there was no escape. They scuttled before the two men. Soon

they could scuttle no more. The dead-end of a traverse held them up. They turned to fight. The viperish bullets snapped into the huddle. That was enough. Down the rifles were flung. Up went sixteen pairs of German hands. The trench again belonged to the Manchesters. With a shout the regiment poured forward from the supporting works and resumed their old positions. The air was full of cheering for the two heroic men who, unaided, had won the day.

Both Lieutenant Leach and Sergeant Hogan have received the V.C. for this superb bit of work; and they deserved it. They had been brave as few men have been brave, and they had done their army a signal service in winning back an important position. But they are as simple and unassuming as all brave men. "I only did what others would have done, and what others have done," said the sergeant.

This success, however, was small enough, for the sorely tried regiments had all they could do to resist the vast weight of the attack flung out against them. They were strengthened just about now by the arrival of the Indian troops, under Sir James Willcocks, but the relief this arrival gave was not for long. The line was attacked again and more fiercely, and that was not all, the intensity

of the attack upon Ypres called off some of the regiments which were hurried northward to defend the road to the coast. There was to be no rest for the British soldier during these days.

CHAPTER XLI.

YPRES AT ALL COSTS.

THE assault upon Ypres was persisting and deepening. On October 30th the enemy tried again, and came on with a terrific effort, endeavouring to find a weaker joint in the British armour, striving with every ounce of weight and all numbers, with every man and gun, to crush a way through to Ypres. They struck lower down on the Ypres line, swarming forward mainly towards the cavalry lines on the Zandvoorde ridge, but attacking the line higher up also along the front towards the Gheluveld road, where the thin ranks of the wonderful Seventh Division were fighting, trying to pour over it and the country under it and come to the bank of the Ypres Canal. Reinforcements had been massed and piled into the German line. Guns in huge numbers had been brought up. Some of the fiercest and most strenuous assaults of the interminable battle were to go forward against the British that day.

The assault came on in a fury, and in a fury was met. All the British regiments were fighting superbly, doggedly, and grimly against the overwhelming flush of numbers. The Welsh Fusiliers put out a glorious fight. The regiments to the right of them were pushed back by weight of numbers, but the Welsh held on firmly. The mass of the grey men lapped round their wing, but the Welsh fought them off. It was a terrible day for them; they lost nearly all their men, including their colonel; but through that storm of wounds and death they showed the high excellence of their soldierly qualities. They did superbly, but, as a battalion, they had practically ceased to exist.

The Royal Scots Fusiliers suffered as sadly; points of the line about them were driven in, and they were outflanked. They fought as gallantly as they suffered heavily. Presently, in the rough and tumble of the fighting, what was left of the regiment joined up with the Yorkshires, and the two corps, making rather less than a battalion, held on to the trenches under Colonel King, of the Yorkshires, throughout the day—until, in fact, the line fell back under pressure and found a new position behind Gheluvelt.

It was lower down that the enemy exerted his greatest force. The Germans hammered away

strenuously at the Zandvoorde hill, and the joint between the Seventh Division and Byng's Cavalry. Artillery fire was concentrated on the line until the whole was eaten up with explosion and fire. Following up this fire the Germans came on in inexhaustible columns.

The weight of numbers bulged the line, and it was forced to yield in places. It went slowly back, fighting furiously, towards the wooded Klein Zillebeke ridge. Battle spouted and blew about in fury over every inch of the ground. The magnificent British cavalry of the Third Division were the men facing the chief thrust of the attack here, and they faced it magnificently. Dismounted, fighting on foot with bayonet instead of sword or lance, they met the flood of Germans as the finest of trained infantry could meet him.

Still through the day the fresh German Army Corps and heavy German columns crushed forward at the threatened segment of the line below Zandvoorde. "Ypres must be mine by November 1st," had shouted the melodramatic Emperor, and, under his eyes, his host of supers were marshalled and poured out to do his will—or to endeavour to do his will. They were indomitable and splendid in their valour, these Germans. The one flaw in their plan was that they were meeting men as brave as

themselves, and men very much more tenacious and obstinate. And, indeed, the British had to be obstinate. The position was quite desperate. Inadequate in force, they were threatened every hour with annihilation. If the enemy broke through at all, it meant without a doubt the fall of Ypres, and the fall of Ypres would not only give them the coast, it would do something more immediate and terrible. It would place nearly the whole of the British Army at their mercy. No wonder brilliant Sir Douglas Haig manipulated his line, filled out what bad places he had with troops taken—with great danger—from other points of the front. No wonder the British fought with a terrible determination.

The pressure against our men, especially about Hollebeke and southward to Messines, where Allenby's Cavalry was fighting so wonderfully, became almost unendurable. The line was forced to go back, until it took a position before St. Eloi, and was strengthened by a fresh fusion of men. A vivid and terrible battle raged round Messines. The village came under a heavy shelling, and thanks to this the Germans at one time penetrated into the streets. A regiment of Lancers, ordered to recapture the village, burst into it in a bayonet rush, fought a snapping and ugly battle through the

reddened streets and flung the Germans out. Still the situation was precarious. More cavalry was sent to the aid of the line, Indian troops were sent up, and the London Scottish, whipped from all over France, was moved up to support at Neuve Eglise. But the pressure crushed on to the line, and they had to fend it off stubbornly. The Indian regiments of the Seventh Indian Brigade were showing their mettle finely, and were fighting, even through the fatigue of many days of battle, miraculously. In this fight an Indian soldier, Sepoy Khudadad Khan, of the 129th Beluchis, won the V.C. Under shell fire he kept his machine gun working, and though all the crew were hit and he himself was wounded, he handled his gun in the face of a bayonet charge until he could handle it no more, and only left it when he had destroyed its mechanism.

Southward again the fighting was stiff. Against General Pulteney's line the attack was maintained with unstinted ferocity. Bombardment and attack filled out the day. All our regiments fought soundly and stubbornly. The splendid East Lancashires, after battling through terrible and fatiguing days, were shelled in a benumbing manner from dawn to dusk. They held on under all their pain.

There were attacks, too, the fierce and solid

attacks that our men had come to know well. Most were driven off. Even where they broke through on this day along the long and tumbled line, they were flung back. At St. Yves the front of the 11th Infantry Brigade was splintered, and the enemy began to pour through. At once brave and capable Major Prowse, with the Somerset Light Infantry at his heels, hurled themselves into the breach. They came on, a line of infantry flecked with bayonets, they crashed into the Germans with a shouting impact, and drove them off. For this admirable piece of work Major Prowse was recommended for special award.

Night came with the line, back in parts, but unbroken. The men had endured the almost unendurable, they had met and held an overwhelming foe; they were almost decimated by war, quite worn out with fighting. They had faced what no other army in history had been asked to face. All the same they had not encountered the supreme moment of their agony. To-morrow they would be asked to endure conditions more terrible, fighting more awful.

CHAPTER XLII.

“THE MOST CRITICAL MOMENT.”

THROUGHOUT the night of the 30th-31st the battle burned on, only to flare up with a more violent and terrible fire on Saturday, October 31st. Now the enemy was making his decisive effort. Everything was flung into the scale to bring about the overthrow of the British. Army Corps after Army Corps was brought to batter at the line. The British were not idle or acquiescent. They replied with zest, and gave the attack a bitter reception. The line in front of Ypres came in for the chief assault. The enemy was still obsessed with the idea of “hacking through” and winning the battle by winning the town. To obtain that end the attack was pushed on vastly, and lives were flung away with unstinted gestures.

The main mass of the attack was thrust forward on and between the Menin-Ypres road and the Ypres Canal. The full force of the human avalanche

had to be met by a wing of the First Division, fighting north of Gheluvelt, the Seventh Division, fighting in and below Gheluvelt, and French and British troops stretching from the right flank of the Seventh Division through Klein Zillebeke to the canal.

The weight of the German assault fell with terrible force against the wing of Sir Douglas Haig's force, fighting above Gheluvelt; particularly it fell against that part of the First Division holding the line here. Following the decimating fire of their artillery, the enemy attacked with overwhelming force. The men in the battered trenches held off the tidal-bore of the attack as long as it was humanly possible to do so—and perhaps a little longer. But to remain in the face of that sea of grey was to be submerged. Fighting over every inch, the British line went back.

This going back meant awful losses to us. Several British battalions were all but annihilated in the process. The 1st West Surreys, fighting Homerically, found themselves isolated by the British retirement; and almost before they realised this they were cut off. The Germans turned upon the splendid corps every conceivable arm of slaughter. Rifles and machine guns, and specially directed batteries, swamped the Surreys' position

with death. The men went down wholesale, their third Colonel in this campaign—Colonel Pell—was wounded, practically every other officer was down. Major Watson, D.S.O., and Lieutenant John Dopping Boyd—who won the D.S.O. in this terrible moment—endeavoured to extricate the battalion, and they did manage to find a place where some could escape by crawling through a hedge. But few were lucky. The enemy were determined to wipe out the plucky battalion, and death was poured in from all sides and from all angles. A sergeant, coming back from Ypres after only an hour or so's absence, found his regiment at the cross roads. Major Watson, Lieutenant Boyd, a sergeant, a corporal, and five men stood there. That was the battalion immediately after the fight. More re-joined later, but at nightfall the number had been increased to fifty only, the rest of the 735 officers and men who had gone into the battle line that morning were either killed, wounded, or prisoners.

During this period of desperate battling the 1st Coldstream Guards suffered in the same awful fashion, being caught in the lunge of the German attack, and all but exterminated. Lower down, the Scots Fusiliers were in a like case. The retirement of the First Division left them, as they fought on the left of the Seventh Division, completely in the

air. They had suffered heavily the day before, nevertheless, they held tenaciously to their trenches, and though the regiment was practically destroyed in the submerging rush, they were destroyed fighting to the last.

Even in the face of this heroism, however, the British could not hold above and about Gheluvelt. The enemy, pushing in enormous strength along the route from Menin, hammered our line back and back with a series of terrible blows. Every man was flung into our battle front, to keep that front unbroken; cooks, transport men, the personal guards of the staffs, any unattached masculine thing obtainable in a scouring of the country was pressed into the fight. The battle was a wild, chaotic, whirling, incoherent affair of tooth-and-nail warring. It had ceased to be a battle at all, it had become a *mêlée*. Into this *mêlée* the regiments plunged fighting and the shells broke exploding. The fields were wrung with a wild and indescribable effort for very existence. The fringes of war struck at the very Staff billets. Shells came bursting into the Headquarters of the First and Second Divisions. General Lomax, the Commander of the First Division was wounded, six officers of the Divisional Staffs were killed, the General Commanding the Second Division was stunned, and was for a long

time unconscious, and wounds were scattered broadcast.

The attack, indeed, was engulfing every yard of our line. And the line broke, recovered from its break, and went back to a safer position. Gheluvelt was lost, the First Division moved back fighting, and rallied on the line of woods east of the bend of the woods. The Germans came after, full of exultance. They meant to shatter what they had already damaged. Their rush was tremendous and awing. But it was checked. As the Germans lunged, the British to the north of Gheluvelt, who were not heavily engaged, turned and swept the enemy's flanks with an acid, enflading fire. This fire pulled up the German advance and held it.

Still, in spite of all this pluck, the mass of the attack was telling; the main British line was being heaved back. About 2.30 General Lomax, of the First Division, reported that the enemy was still coming on in great strength, and that he had had orders from Sir Douglas Haig to take his line back until it touched the canal near Zillebeke. The movement in the face of rushes and under the pounding of shells was admirably accomplished. Here the line rallied with such skill and purpose that the romping Germans were pulled up short by a wilting, enflading fire that swung into them

from the north. Higher up, by a series of attacks and hammer-headed strokes, the 22nd Brigade was forced to retire, and the left of the 2nd Brigade was thus undefended in the face of the enemy. The devoted Seventh Division, that had fought so magnificently through all the bitter days of Ypres, flung its reserves into the gap to reheel the line. The reserves went forward with great dash, the regiments, the fine 2nd Yorkshires among them, went up with a swing, only to find the left of the 2nd Brigade pushed back before the abnormal flood. Not for a minute did the 7th Brigade hesitate between a like retirement or going on into position. They flung themselves into the deserted works, pitched out the Germans who remained in the face of their rush, with the bayonet, and sat tight. They were exposed to the full cyclone of the attack; they were peppered by an unbelievable rain of shells; but sit tight they had made up their minds to do, and sit tight they did.

On the Menin road a counter-attack was being jerked forward by Sir Douglas Haig, to relieve the awful strain of the attack. Gheluvelt, captured by the Germans, was recaptured by a storm of bayonets at 2.30. The 2nd Worcesters did it. They were supported by other regiments, and nursed by the wonderful accuracy of the 42nd Brigade Royal

Field Artillery. The charge of the Worcesters was a magnificent affair. The lines of the men worked forward over the ground with the ability and skill of splendid soldiers.

They had been screened by a wood, and as they left the shelter of the trees the full gale of the frantic artillery fire beat in their faces. The Worcesters faced the fire. In sections they went forward by rushes. There were nine hundred yards of “open ground” to cross; ground that should be called “death ground,” for over every inch of its surface the shells of the Germans were pelting. The ground was teeming with the leaden germs of instantaneous death. The Worcesters went across it. Over the surface, “whitting” with the incessant patter of shrapnel, over the shell-craters, still fuming from the volcanoes of discharge, through a wind-driven rain of rifle bullets, the Worcesters made for the village of Gheluvelt. They marked their passage with a trail of dead; but they ran on.

The Germans were ready for them. The church of the village had become a fort, and from the tower and roof and every traced window rifles and stammering mitrailleuse were fired at them. Shedding men like discarded garments, the wave of Worcester bayonets fell thundering upon the place, went

spouting in a red and steel-flecked foam up the roaring channels of the streets.

It was a terrible slaughter; the village became clogged with death. Through every street the writhing men fought, through every door the victorious bayonets battered. Houses were battle-fields, living-rooms became tombs, bedrooms were full of struggling and of killing. The Germans fought stubbornly. They quarrelled over every cobble. They defended the houses obstinately, and when the British broke in, flung themselves from the windows to escape. But there was no escape. The Worcesters had orders to clear the Germans out; they cleaned Gheluvelt from gutter to chimney, from entrance to exit, of all Germans. They won the village back, they drove the enemy off, they saved the flank of the Seventh Division. Their courage and dash saved a wild and ugly situation. "I regard it as the most critical moment in the whole of this great battle," said Sir John French. And he also said, "If one unit can be singled out for especial praise, it is the Worcesters." *

* Worcestershires,—

I am very glad to have this opportunity of addressing you; this I have wished to do for some time, and have taken this occasion of doing so.

On October 31st we were in a very critical position. At Head-

The Worcesters and the regiments with them saved and made possible the surety of that day. Their electric attack relieved the line of the overweening pressure. The 6th Cavalry Brigade was released, and flung to help the battling First Division. Two regiments launched themselves into the gap between the Seventh Division and the 2nd Brigade, went forward mounted and unmounted with splendid spirit, scouring the woods of the enemy, surprising them, slaying them, capturing them, driving them out always in headlong fashion. A French Cavalry Brigade came clattering up into the whirl of fight. They extended along the line, dismounted, and a detachment went off on the brave work of clearing the woods.

quarters we received the report that the village of Gheluvelt, an extremely important strategic point, had been taken by the enemy. Matters looked most critical. Shortly after I was informed that the village of Gheluvelt had been recaptured by a counter-attack. Since then I have made repeated inquiries as to what officer was responsible for the conduct of this counter-stroke, and have invariably received the reply that it was the Worcestershire Regiment who carried out this attack. I have, therefore, in my dispatch to the Secretary of State so mentioned it, and said it was the Worcestershire Regiment who took the action in relieving this critical state. You bear on your colours the names of many famous victories, and in this War you have added lustre to your former reputation.

No man can say what the future has in store for us, but I have every confidence that in the future you will conduct yourself with the same soldierly bearing as in the past.—*Sir John French's Address to the Worcesters.*

Through the valleys of the woods, under the funereal and naked branches, the nippy cavalry drove forward in a series of quick little battles. The men moved like ghosts among the tree-trunks, shuttling between them in the loom of war. Now and then they found the enemy, and the silences were split by the snap and rattle of the busy rifles. Then came moments of dodging and running, of stabbing little attacks, of smoke that blew about and clung to the trunks; then the rush of the cavalry told, and down the arcades of the woods the Germans were scuttling for their lives.

At times the cavalry, beating the woods, would break from it into clearings where farm buildings stood calmly unconcerned with war. Round these buildings the inferno of fighting spouted at once. The Germans from behind the farmyard walls, from barns, and from the living rooms of the building, strove to keep the pushing cavalry at bay. With the slimness of Indians on the war-path in an American forest, the troopers crept on to the building, slid forward from bush to bush, crawled toward the house, using every shadow of cover. The Germans fought passionately against this invasion of ghosts. The farm buildings were veiled in smoke. Soon with a shout the troopers rushed the place, swarming in from every side,

thronging over the farm walls, filling the yard, thrusting and battering at the doors and mattress-filled windows. The house was theirs.

Meantime the heavy thunders of the battle had stretched further south during the day along the Ypres line. The French cavalry that had come earlier into the battle were holding the line against enormous attack lunged by the Germans towards Klein Zellebeke. General Moussy, the Commander, strove to relieve matters by endeavouring to drive forward an attack on the enemy. But against that mighty current the French could not, clever and brave as they were, make headway, and soon they were brought to a standstill. The enemy pushed on, pushed on steadily in spite of stinging counter-attacks driven in his face. And soon the line, like every other portion of the line, was in desperate straits. It was only by employing every man that the French could hold at all, though by doing that they preserved their position with the greatest gallantry.

Yet the French held and the British held, and the day ended with the Germans no more forward than they had been in the morning. The British counter-attacks were successful, and the Germans, after advancing, were pressed back. With the new force of arms gathered for greatest effect, the

enemy gave ground everywhere, position after position succumbed to the steady British counter-pressure. The line moved up. By ten o'clock that night practically the whole of the front occupied by us in the morning was recovered and held again. During the night the long battle line was annealed everywhere, became firm and solid again. The French were dispensed with, and our own cavalry sent back into the reserve.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MESSINES AND THE LONDON SCOTTISH.

IN those wild and furious days when October fused into November with a fire of guns, the Germans put out their most strenuous efforts to break the British line. Every ounce of force was concentrated to smash through, to win a way over the dead to Ypres and the coast. It was a huge effort, because it was a final effort. It was a raging inferno of battle, stringing the days together with a bitterness never quite so terrible before. It had to be so. The Germans recognised that success must come now or never. They knew that if they failed to win in this supreme output of force they would never win.

Throughout the lowering hours of Saturday, October 31st, the Germans were battering in a thunder of guns and a storm of rushes against the knitted front. Saturday sank to darkness, and still the fight continued with an unabated fervour

of ferocity. While they fought before Ypres, the Germans piled wave after wave of attack against the weak joint that they imagined existed in the line south of Ypres. They poured out their enormous energies of attack against Allenby's Cavalry and Pulteney's Third Corps, holding the long and straggling front from Hollebeke through Messines to the Lys. The line with its Indian reinforcements kept the attack, vast and overbearing though it was, at bay, and though the Germans employed every effort of gun and man against the obdurate front, that front held through the raging twenty-four hours. During this day, also, Smith-Dorrien's line suffered a heavy attack. The 8th Gurkha Rifles of the Bareilly Brigade were attacked and, under a terrible fire, driven from their trenches. Apart from this, the Second Corps was called upon to endure shelling, though this was heavy and terrible and taxed the courage of the over-fatigued men to breaking-point.

November 1st came, and the great attack recommenced. Repulsed on the Gheluvelt arc of our defence, the enemy stabbed his attack with incredible strength hard against the defences lower on the line. One attack struck out against the defences of the bend of the canal at Klein Zellebeke, where General Bulfin's 2nd Infantry Brigade

was entrenched. General Bulfin obtained the help of the 6th Cavalry Brigade, and with the 7th Cavalry Brigade also moving up to extend the line upward towards Klein Zellebeke, the front was rendered firm and the vehement attack was flung back.

An attack thrust towards Messines, Wytschaete, and Hollebeke, was more dangerous. General Allenby's Cavalry held the line here. He had obtained Indian and London Scottish to reinforce him, but for all that his line was fagged and thin. A violent bombardment not only broke the village of Messines to pieces, but dazed and tried the exhausted British line. The Germans followed the heavy plunging of their shells, and drove forward against the British. They fought their way into Hollebeke, and stubbornly they fought forward to take Wytschaete and Messines also. The most vehement of the fighting was about these places.

It was along the Messines front that the London Scottish distinguished themselves.

The Scottish had been rushed under the fire of field artillery and howitzer battery to a position in the line of defence, and through the night of the 31st they were lined out, holding off the over-avid Bavarians with their steady rifles. All through

the night the attacks were poured out at them; all that night the Scottish mopped up the outpourings. At 2 a.m. on November 1st the German battalions bunched and charged the unyielding men in all their mass. They came sluicing up to the front, and their wings curled round and overlapped the Scottish left. It was a wild, mad moment of snapping rifle, jerking bayonet, swinging rifle-butt.

It was a ticklish moment, too. The flanking force got among the Londoners, oozed in between the lines. The reserve companies of the Scottish engaged them, and worked them steadily with desperate fighting out of the position. But a few had made good between the lines, and these began to fire into the rear of the trenches and to slash up our men. More reserve companies concentrated and attacked these at once. Through the dark—lit indeed by the fluttering light of a burning farmhouse, but by no more than that—the reserves plunged their charges again and again in the muddled masses of their foes. Dawn grew up on a strewn and worried battlefield. The Germans had worked their mitrailleuses to the flank, and a streaming cross-fire bit like acid into the ranks of the London men. They faced it gamely, as they faced the fact that their position had become un-

tenable, and they must retire. Still, moving with the calm of veterans, they fell back gamely, unshaken, unbroken.

While the London Scottish fought, the battle towards the left of their line was going on with terrible ardour. An enormous bombardment leapt out into the day, and the shells fell, searing the entire British defence as far as, and into, Ypres itself. Under the haze of shelling the attack precipitated, came on in huge mass, broke in a foam of dead against the British line, reformed and came on vastly again. The British line fought staunchly, bayonet engaging bayonet. Every trench was a battlefield, every ditch a fortress. But numbers had their way. We were obliged to fall back.

But not to fall back far. The British Infantry, with their jokes and their laughter in the face of death, and their unconquerable obstinacy, pulled their shattered companies together, and lunged at the foe again. The Royal Horse Guards (Blue), finding themselves facing colossal odds, resisted vigorously, gave as much as the Germans could give—and a little more. A grey-coated regiment, with its bands playing, with its heels kicking up in the fatuous goose-step, came on at them. At their own range the Life Guards opened with maxim

and rifle, and cut the enemy down rank after rank. The Germans paused, sang a hymn, formed, and on they came once more. Once more the rush of bullets tore into the mass, decimating platoons and companies. Still the Germans—brave men, certainly—tried once more. Again they came along in six different columns, five abreast, rifles at hips, and war cries on their tongues. Three times they rushed; a party even worked round to the flank, showed themselves and their busy quick-firers, and gave the Guards moments of anxiety. The Guards turned on them, and in a vehement minute wiped them out. Then with a flash and a rush the “Blues,” forgetting they were horsemen, loosed their line at the attack in a bayonet charge. They rose in a torrent of khaki, went slap through the enemy, broke them, chased them over the field up to their trenches and over them, filled those trenches with dead.

The movement of the Guards was the movement of the whole line. As surely as the Germans made an impression, as surely did our men gather their ragged forces and push them back over the litter of their slain. Everywhere, or nearly everywhere, the line was evened up, and the old positions regained.

At Hollebeke and at Messines villages the Ger-

mans did gain a success. With a giant rush they pushed the British clear of the latter place, and won it in a rousing battle through the streets. Also they gained the village of Wytschaete. But this at least was not to be theirs. Our cavalry gathered with their bayonets, the French—who had now come to reinforce our line—flocked up to join in a rush, and so, across the slime of the fields the hammer-head of the charge was driven against the Germans. The enemy left Wytschaete at the run, and though we did not reoccupy it, we held it secure, and kept the enemy off.

The German effort against the rest of the line on this day was mainly confined to shelling. But there was fighting at La Gheir, especially during the night. The attack made by the Germans was, however, unsuccessful, and Drummer Spencer John Bent, of the East Lancashire Regiment, was the main reason for that unsuccess. When his officer, platoon sergeant and section commander were struck down, he took command, and, displaying great coolness and presence of mind, he succeeded in holding the position; for this and other acts he received the Victoria Cross.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE WANING BATTLE.

FROM November the 1st onward to the 15th the battle of Ypres was declining to its last phase. There were minor attacks ; there was one dangerous attack—that of the Prussian Guard—but for the most the German spirit was losing its resilience and its power before our obstinate line, and heavy bombardment absorbed more and more of their energies.

But the battle continued even with this wavering measure of assault until the defeat of the Prussian Guard shattered the last German hope of gaining Ypres. On the 2nd November the Germans attacked again at several points. They made an attempt high up on the Ypres salient, against Zonnebeke.

Here the Border Regiment held tight against all efforts. The Borders had been exposed to a heavy shell fire for days, their trenches had been pulped

and blown in, their ranks were strewn with wounds. Still the enemy could not get through them. The regiments in line with them were driven in by force of the attack, their flank was turned and searched with a galling and astringent fire. They refused to budge. So they held on, safeguarding the situation until fresh troops could hurry up to assist them.

Other German attacks were numbed elsewhere, one more to the south, another further to the right by Armentières being stemmed in the flood by the barrier of lead and steel. Further away on the right several assaults met the same fate in an attack on General Smith-Dorrien's men, though here the grey-coats made a point, blunted our line in, and gained Neuve Chapelle. Fierce fighting here, and a flooding of reserves from both forces both to win and to check the battle. The warring wrestled over acres of mud, and the Germans, elated by the initial success, were determined to gain and gain yet further along our front. It was critical work amid critical moments.

Then, when things looked grim, Colonel Norie and his 2nd Gurkha Rifles came flinging into the fight. The deadly little men came out in line, sped out in section-rushes with the nippiness and the skill of the best of their white brothers. They

took the heavy shelling with frigid disdain, they faced the bubbling mitrailleuses with equanimity, their level rifles met and mastered the fire that the German ranks poured into them. On they went, rushing a charge at a charge, running swiftly and unhesitatingly. The two bodies of men came together with the foaming up-lift of meeting waves, and for a flash they were wrestling for the mastery. Then the cruel and terrible kukris were swinging and busy, the steel of the Indians was eating its way through the softer metal of the German ranks. No men can stand against the ghastly strokes of the Gurkhas' knives, and soon the Germans were bolting in terror. So in a rush the inroad of the enemy was checked and the front consolidated again.

The attacks were losing force. After the Gurkhas had won their charge, the fronts declined to gunnery once more, trenches began to grow deeper, wire entanglements were profound. Siege warfare was coming to lock the land.

The thunder of the guns entered into continuous debate, began to smash at the soggy lines with their huge hands of hate. All the villages that reared their pitiful cottages along the rocking fronts were smashed to rubble by the plunging shells. Homes flamed sullenly and wept thick smoke across the

sombre winter plains. Ypres, the noble town with noble houses, burnt against the sky with a dozen different torches of conflagration. Guns tried to exterminate towns, disintegrate positions, and to decimate regiments. And the guns were flying at the throats of guns. The German artillery was being mastered, their pride of weight was slowly being whittled down as artillery of huge and dominating calibre was placed in the Allied line. "Black Maria" was being spanked by newly arrived "Mother." Fresh regiments were replacing decimated ones. And the Germans, too, quiet along the Ypres front, were feeling about for fresh joints to assail in the Allied armour.

One of the moves that seemed to give a ray of hope was an attack on the line that sprang from Ypres to the sea. Fierce work was done by their infantry and artillery here, and with all the influences of power and weight the enemy was able to make a definite impression. From muddy dyke to muddy dyke the assault thronged towards battered Dixmude and the staunch British and Belgian regiments that held it. From Sunday to Tuesday terrible charges and terrible resistances bathed the area in a rave of noise and horror. The Germans, pressing, made point after point, and by Tuesday they had gained Dixmude, and

turned the defenders out of sound and strong positions. They were elated, and inclined to overdo the habit of optimism. Already they were seeing themselves staunchly entrenched all along the coast, and, with Gargantuan guns, paving the way for successful invasion of hated Britain. On Tuesday night they were different creatures. The bubble of their elation had been violently pricked.

On Tuesday, the 4th, the retiring Allies ceased to retire, and came back at the Germans with astonishing vigour. They came on with a dash that Germany, with all its numbers, could not engender, and could not check. They spilt their steel-tipped lines into the grey-clad trenches, turned the trenches into shambles, and flung the infantry out. Again the line was the Allies', and the Germans were disconsolate and discomfited. And they continued in these emotions. Three times they strove to recapture the vantage they had lost. Three times with vehement resistance the Allies flung them back. The carnage was awful. The German dead clogged the land for acres.

By Wednesday, November 4th, any hope they had of success here had vanished. The Yser was through the sluices, and the low country became a sheet of creeping and expanding water. The

Germans, harassed by shell and bayonet and bullet, had to break away from their works before the rising waters. As they fled, attacks battered into them, shell fire cut them up, and they streamed along the roads a disorderly and undisciplined rabble. Up to the pontoon bridge across the Yser the Allies spurred the rout, and with such fine fervour that hundreds of the struggling, grey-coated wretches were forced into the swollen stream and drowned. The flight was a fiasco and a débâcle. Guns and munitions were left on all sides, howitzers were overtaken by the inundation and lost to Germany, though two of them and some field artillery were recovered by the Allies. So, here as elsewhere along the line, the German aggressive had been broken.

Thus along the entire front the general battle lulled. Only the great guns fought on, only the creeping snipers struck at the trenches with their hornet thrusts, only the stinging little night attacks—we gave as good as we took—worried the lines, only the industrious sapper worked like a mole through the wet ground towards the hostile trench before him, blew it up, was blown up himself, or was caught in his sap-head, and made to fight out the episode with bullet and bayonet. It was a time of “comparative relaxation,” as the amiable

“Eye-Witness” puts it. That means the men in the trenches were not consistently engaged, and that both forces were massing, one for its huge and more powerful attack, one for a more stern and terrible resistance.

Preludes to this enormity of attack were played in the days before November 11th—when it was delivered. A vigorous advance abruptly sprang to being on the 7th. It was directed against Klein Zillebeke. The French, holding the position, were driven in by the fierceness of the impact, and to save this dangerous situation Brigadier-General Kavanagh’s 7th Cavalry Brigade was sent to their aid.

The 7th Cavalry, the Royal Horse Guards (Blue) particularly, flung themselves into the fight with great dash, met the German onslaught, blunted it, and drove the enemy back with great losses. The position was made sound again, but in the course of the fight Colonel Gordon Wilson, the commander of the Life Guards, and Major the Hon. Hugh Dawnay, two very valuable officers, were killed at the head of their men.

There was more fighting, too, when the 22nd Brigade charged the German position, and carried it with a splendid effort of assault. The South Staffordshires did magnificently here, and one of

their officers, Captain J. F. Vallentin, gained the Victoria Cross for his courage and ability in the assault.

During this period, too, another V.C. was won, Lieutenant Arthur Martin Leake, of the R.A.M.C., gaining it for the second time. He had won it for gallantry at Vlakfontein, in the South African War. Now he won it for his unhesitant devotion under fire. Constantly he attended and rescued the wounded lying close to the enemy's trenches at Zonnebeke. Only one other man has won the V.C. twice, and that was Lieut.-General Sir C. J. S. Gough, who not only won it but won three bars to it for acts of courage.

Again the battle died down. The guns took up the scoring once more. With growing mass and strength they shelled our lines. They were preparing the way for the Prussian Guard.

The redoubtable Prussian Guard, after failing at Arras, was being moved up secretly to the Menin front of our Ypres line. During the 9th and 10th there was no sign of activity along the fronts. On the 11th November they struck.

CHAPTER XLV.

YPRES ENDS.

TUESDAY, the 10th of November, saw the German artillery piling up the effort that was to be the supreme and final attempt to break the front in this Homeric battle. The guns in a line of leagues worked with a frenzy of energy and hate.

Then on Wednesday the final attack, the charge of the Prussian Guard.

The day opened with a crash of shell fire. Every gun was swung on to the British position to the north and the south of the Menin-Ypres road, and every gun opened. It was the most ferocious bombardment ever launched at a line in this war, perhaps the most terrible shelling that war has ever seen. The very air grew dazed at the horror and abnormality of the attack. And it went on for hours, clamorous, unspeakable, gigantic in its noise and in its awful capacity for spreading wounds and death. The British regiments clung to their

trenches, wondering whether the very earth would not be blown away by the cyclone of the explosion, wondering how they could exist at all in this pulping and battering and grinding to muddy particles that was assaulting and scattering their parapets. But though they wondered, they did not budge.

Then moving through the ground-mist of that dreary day, marching under the red canopy of the shells in a splendid pomp of death, the Prussian Guard came out at the British line. They came in three columns along the Menin road, striding for Gheluvelt. They came on superbly, marching solidly; stepping with the sublime grandeur of parade; big men, brave men, they swung at the Allied line with a magnificence of *élan* that stirred and quickened the heart.

Thirteen grim battalions moved across the slippery fields of war. They were out to make the supreme effort of the battle for the coast, and they knew it. They were moving to do what every other corps had failed to do; they were out to smash the line; they were going to hack their way through at all costs, with all efforts. Victory depended on them. They stood for the last effort. They came on superbly conscious of all their meaning, proud and certain of their success. As steadily as on parade they stepped across the

fuming plain of war ; the men in lines of iron, the officers with their swords at the "carry," the battalions lifting and falling with the exquisite lilt of a great machine.

On they came, pressing solidly at the British line, their flags jerking in the wind. The gunners far behind sprayed and searched the British line with avid shells, well-posted mitrailleuses whipped it with thongs of nickel. On came the three columns of the Guard, and never a rifle snapped from a British trench. Elation then in the lifting ranks of the Guard. The huge shell fire had done its work, the terrific onslaught of shrapnel and high-power shell had decimated and emptied the trenches. They saw their path smoothed, they saw themselves marching straight to the heart of the defence. The way to Ypres and the road to Calais lay easy before them. They swung on exultant. But exultant though they were they were good soldiers. At two hundred yards the columns halted. The viperish mitrailleuses were whipped to the front. The silent parapets were drenched with a flood of bullets. The British trenches did not answer.

On went the Guard, striding exultant. The pace quickened. The ranks broke into a foam of cheering. The columns broke into the double. With a great crescent rush the Prussian Guards were

charging the trenches; they were one hundred metres from them; they were theirs. The trenches opened in a shout of thunder.

From a point considerably in advance of the main parapet, the parapet which the Germans had expended so much labour and ammunition in shelling, a sheet of fire burst down upon the packed line. The British were not in the main trench; they had cunningly dug small and inconspicuous trenches many yards in front, and the vile shelling had gone over their heads, pulping inanimate earth, hurting them not at all. It was from the advance trenches that they fought, that they poured out an appalling gust of bullets into the dense German formation. The hidden British leaped into view at once, and their thousand rifles were pumping death into the Guard as fast as human trigger-fingers could unleash slaying. Above the parapets there lifted the spidery forms of many maxims, and without a pause these were outvying the rifles in their riot of death. Slaughter indeed dashed against the Prussian Guard in a solid wall. Men fell down in solid platoons, battalions were no more in a flash. It was not a battle, it was an abattoir.

Not all the military perfection of Prussia could face and live down that awful charge of lead. The Guard broke, retired, reformed; came back with

magnificent bravery, were broken and defeated again. The place was impassable with their superb dead; still they dressed ranks, came back again. Six times they pushed their breasts against that gale of bullets, six times the bullets splintered and ground the ranks to powder. Flesh and blood and Prussianism could not exist before that fire; and it caught them not only from the front; but, since they were marching diagonally across our line, in their flanks as well. Their case was hopeless; the main body broke and made for their own lines.

But some of the indomitable fellows got through our ranks. In spite of their awful wounds, battalions thrust forward by the resolution and the momentum of the attack, broke through the Allied line in three places near the road. They swamped the trenches, poured through into the tangle of woods behind our works. Here a wild, desperate, bloody and incoherent battle raged amid the trees, and raged not for that day only, but right into Thursday, November 12th.

Furious counter-attacks were lunged at them, and the flames of rifles and of shells flickered through the trees for all the hours of the two days. The woods were whirling and mad with fighting. Brave British regiments excelled themselves in bravery during this desperate and frantic affair;

the Worcesters, the Northhamptons, the Camerons, who fought magnificently, died prodigally, and launched electric charges to the discomfort of the Prussians; our own Guards Brigade, the King's Royal Rifles, and other corps added imperishable lustre to their honours throughout the fight.

The Highland Light Infantry did bravely, too, and Captain W. L. Brodie of that regiment won his V.C. in the fighting. Captain Brodie was in charge of a machine-gun section, and he led a plucky and clever attack along the trenches, fought the Germans who had got in and drove them out.

It was in this fight, too, that Lieutenant Dimmer won his V.C. by an act of magnificent pluck. He was an officer of the splendid Royal Rifle Brigade, a regiment that deserves many V.C.s. At 1 p.m. on November 12th, in the final throes of the Prussian Guard's attack, the Royal Rifles, after being engaged in a fury of fighting since the 8th, exerted themselves to a greater effort to drive the enemy back. One of their inspirations in the fighting was Lieutenant John Henry Stephen Dimmer. He had been handling the machine guns under his charge with superb courage and ability through the raging of the days. He had, with other brave men—Corporal Cordingley, who earned the D.C.M. and won his death in this affair, being of them—

saved one of the maxims once, and had pushed it forward again at the first and most effective chance. In the face of the Prussian attack of the 12th he again used this gun with terrible effectiveness.

The damp of the misty morning had affected the cartridge belt, however, and the maxim jammed. The gun position was a breeding ground of death, and all the rifles in the attack seemed to be spurting bullets into it. Lieutenant Dimmer did not mind; he snatched a spanner and tried, in the core of the firing, to set the gun right. A bullet hit him in the jaw—"it only made him wild"; shrapnel was shaken down upon the spot as though from the caster of a god; rifle fire screamed in its desire to slaughter the lieutenant and his men. One by one the privates with him were punched backward by shots, and a shrapnel ball hit the lieutenant in the right eye, almost blinding him. Still he remained with his spanner working on the gun.

Soon the lieutenant was wounded again, and had to stagger back, but only for a moment. The attack paused and drew breath. Lieutenant Dimmer was out at his gun at once. He had mended the instrument; he was crouching behind it; he had its belt racing. Alone at the gun he slashed belt after belt through the coughing and kicking maxim. A shrapnel burst over him, and

a bullet lodged in his shoulder. He still kept the maxim screaming onward at its full pace of fight ; nine hundred cartridges he spun through that hectic little gun before a rifle pellet caught him in his wounded shoulder and knocked him over. Still, he had done his fine work ; he had saved a section of the line ; he had won for himself the imperishable glory of the V.C.

And the Kaiser's Guard was broken, the last huge effort of the huge battle was ended, and in our favour. The Allied line still hung grimly between Germany and the sea, and the line grew stronger every day. Ypres was lost to Germany, and Germany knew it. The coast was lost to Germany, and they were recognising the grim fact. At the Yser an attempt was made to move forward from the river ; the Germans had crossed it ; but even here, on the night of November 12th, the French caught the grey-coats with the bayonet and annihilated them. On Nov. 16th and 17th attempts were made to break through, but the snap had gone out of them and they were defeated.

Ypres had ended. The Germans had failed. Germany had flung one million men or more into her desperate effort for the coast. They had failed to break through an army that had at no time numbered more than 150,000, and at most times was

rather a third less than that figure. That number had been lowered terribly during some days of the fighting when whole battalions were annihilated and brigades ground and scattered to nothing. The indomitable Seventh Division, that bore the brunt of the fight, had landed at Ostend with 400 officers and 12,000 men. When the Seventh Division went out of the line it possessed only 44 officers and 2,336 men. One of its brigades was reduced to 700 all told; some of its regiments to little more than cooks and transport units.

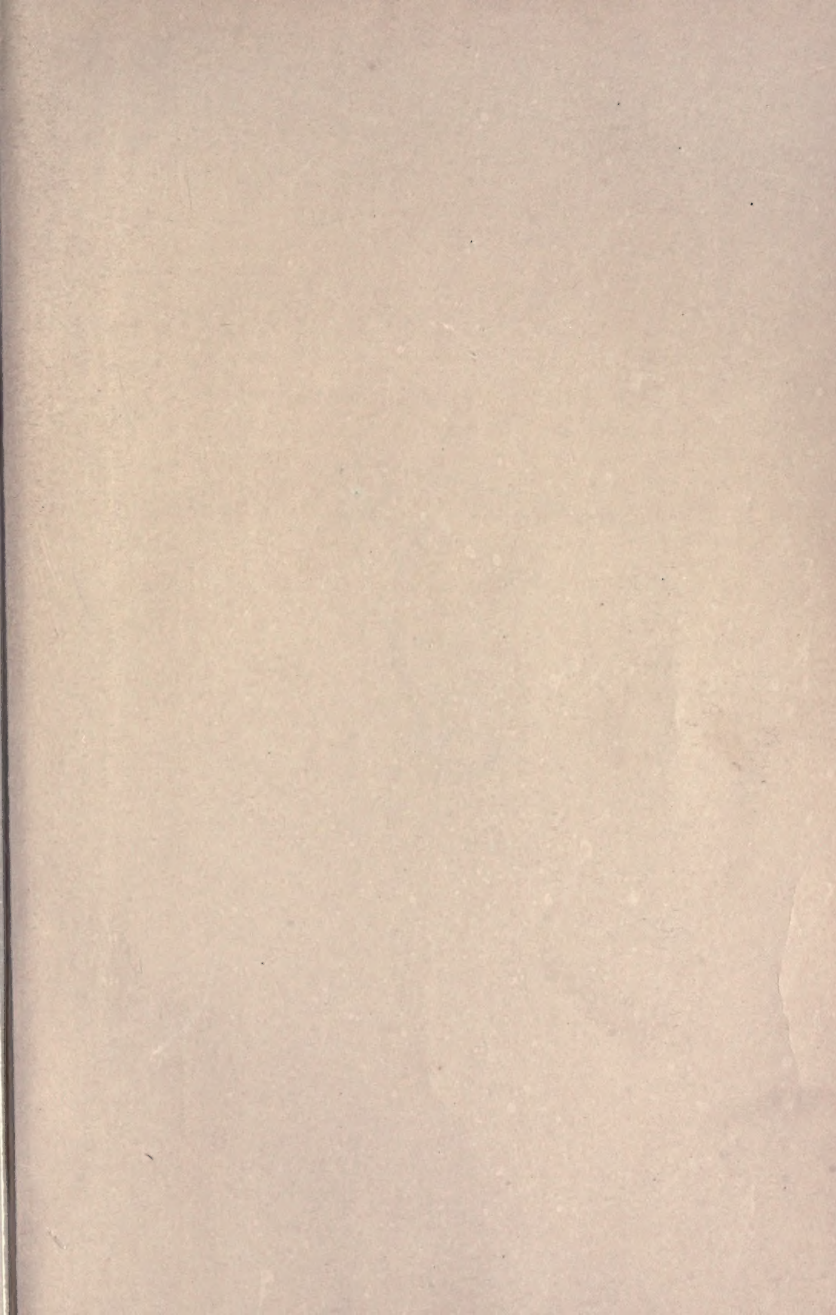
Ypres was, perhaps, the most dazzling battle of the first part of the war. It was a battle in which all the rules of war were defied, when theorems were shattered and an army that should have been ground into the Flanders mud refused to acknowledge defeat. It was a wild and miraculous battle in which the British private showed himself the most dogged and unbeatable unit in the fighting universe. It was not only that the British had a most scientifically skilful enemy against them, it also had enemies every bit as brave as themselves, every bit as tenacious, ardent and reckless of personal suffering and of death. It was a brilliant, muddy, glorious battle, in which an indomitable and unconquerable soldiery were led by brilliant, patient, and able generals. It is a battle which

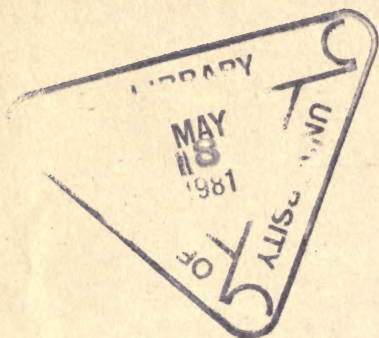
will take its place among the supremely important battles of the world. It was perhaps the most supremely important battle in the world. And though there was, apparently, no decisive result, the British and the French won it.

* * * * *

Everywhere along the vast fronts the battle dwindled to gunnery duels. There were some inconspicuous attacks to follow, and, indeed, to rage all through the days. But the German bolt had been finally shot. The battle of Ypres was ended; a phase, and the most marked phase, of the war had concluded. Germany had lost her offensive, and, in the words of the French Official Report, in time her defensive would be broken also.

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