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WAR BOOKS

# WITH THE FRENCH EASTERN ARMY

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BY

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## A TRIBUTE TO OUR FRENCH ALLIES

EARL KITCHENER in the House of Lords: "During all this time the long line from Lille to Verdun was maintained intact by our French allies against constant attacks from the German forces. The French Army have shown the greatest tenacity and endurance and have displayed the highest fighting qualities in thus defending their position against any advance of the Germans. For although they have made notable advances at various points, they have never yielded up a yard of their country since I last addressed your lordships.

EARL CURZON: "Glad I was to hear the noble Earl include in his tribute words regarding the tremendously heavy part that has been played by the French. We are rather apt in this country—it is a pardonable fault, concentrating our attention as we do on the fifteen or twenty miles

where our own troops are fighting—to think that is the centre and focus of the war. Do not let us forget that it is not more than one tenth of the line held by our allies, and it is due to their patience and the strategy of the French commander and to their endurance that France, who is fighting our battle just as much as her own, has so gallantly held her own all the way from Switzerland to the sea."

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# CHAPTER I

## Germany's Western Schemes

Attention in England has been concentrated first on the brilliant retreat effected by General Joffre and Sir John French on Paris, then on the battles of the Marne and the Aisne, and next on the long series of capital engagements in that cockpit of Europe, Belgium. Because of this, little interest has been shown in the fighting on the right of the Allied line. The British troops have had no share worth mentioning in that. The whole brunt of it has fallen on the French and they have acquitted themselves there with a skill and a bravery worthy of their finest records.

The unfortunate absence of war correspondents will prevent for ever many heroic deeds done in these months of struggle against Germany's invading hordes from becoming known. This volume is an attempt at doing some justice to the work of our

allies in that quarter and of showing how important it has been to the common cause. The writer had exceptional opportunities of studying the French action in this region and is convinced, that it was the impossibility of crumpling up the French right which has led elsewhere to defeat after defeat of the Germans in their efforts to break through the Allied line and overrun the rich provinces of France.

Something must necessarily be said of the political side of the warfare which has gone on in Alsace Lorraine and on the eastern frontier. When I arrived in Paris, the French Government had just gone off to Bordeaux, and something like a couple of million of people, residents in Paris for the most part but with a large proportion of panic-stricken American citizens, had seized the opportunity to fly from the French capital. The fear of a siege was before their eyes. Even many of the newspapers shifted their offices to Bordeaux and produced their sheets in that great and beautiful city of the South. Those who did remain nicknamed the others "The Swallows" flying south.

The inner history of those days will be

well worth telling when the time comes. There are a number of public men who are not anxious that the story of that period should be told at all. It would explain why one prominent gentleman found it necessary to leave France on a mission of inquiry to another people, a mission which is not likely to be concluded in a hurry. It was more than whispered that a scheme was on foot which would have been greatly to the advantage of a group of international financiers, and amounted practically to the sale of the French capital. But the sellers were to be the Germans and the buyers the people of Paris. In other words the proposal was one to purchase immunity for Paris by providing the Germans with a large sum in hard cash which the enemy badly needed to finance them in their operations against Russia and Great Britain.

Patriotically, the French kept this to themselves, and M. Poincaré, the President, in consultation with the Prime Minister and the Council of War, solved the difficulty by ordering a retreat to Bordeaux. Paris was left in the hands of that able soldier, General Galliéni, the man who consolidated the French conquest of Madagascar, and he soon

dissipated into thin air any notion of surrendering the capital as an open town. Immediately the Government had been safely bestowed on the banks of the Garonne he set to work to still further strengthen the already strong outer defences of Paris, and enabled General Joffre to have a free hand for the great strategical movement which he had worked out with Field-Marshal Sir John French, in preparation for the very eventualities which have now occurred, that is, a fierce but carefully prepared attack on France by Germany through what it was hoped would be an inactive and possibly complacent Belgium. From the military point of view this was a tremendous gain. It made Paris, as it were, the hub of the wheel on which the right wing of the Allies—entirely French in composition—and the left wing made up of French and British troops could pivot, and it made easy the transfer of troops from either flank by means of the *ceinture* railways of Paris.

Now, it was known that the Germans had no stomach for an attack on the Eastern frontier of France. One who is well in the secret of the Great General Staff of Petro-

grad, has stated that the basis of all present-day German strategy is to take the line of least resistance. Ordinarily that would answer could the line of least resistance be always exactly discovered. But not once in the present war has the Kaiser and his generals found it. On the contrary, they have invariably accepted both in the Eastern and Western battlefields what the opposing forces pretended was the line of least resistance and have thus fallen into carefully arranged traps, involving them in appalling losses.

It discounts entirely their boasts about the quality of their heavy artillery in that they would not face the fortresses on the Eastern frontier. Yet if their guns had been so efficient it would have been distinctly to their advantage to have tried to break through between Verdun and Toul, or between Epinal and Belfort. They would not then have had to tear up that scrap of paper of which the German Chancellor spoke so slightingly to Sir Edward Goschen, the British Ambassador in Berlin. They would not have infringed the neutrality of Belgium, and above all would have kept us out of the struggle with our powerful

fleet, and, as it has proved, our unconquerable army. At least we could not have gone into the war with so splendid a reason and Germany would have found friends in neutral nations where now she has her most severe critics.

But years and years ago the Kaiser and his War Lords decided against any attempt otherwise than through Belgium, or by French Lorraine, as likely to be effective in the raid they proposed to make on France. Our Headquarters Staff, as well as that of the French, were well aware of the German plan of invasion. Looking at the matter from the Teutonic standpoint and leaving all questions of international guarantees out of account, their decision to turn the formidable defensive lines which protect the French frontier between Verdun and the Swiss border, by moving a portion of their fighting forces through neutral territory, was a wise one. Months before war was thought of a distinguished officer, then on the retired list, but now recalled with the rank of General to serve in the British Army, wrote : " Experiences in recent campaigns indicate that fortifications even when they are not of the most formidable

type, cannot readily be rushed—that was proved at Port Arthur and has since been shown at Adrianople, Janina, and Chatalja —and in the warfare of the present day it is all important to gain the upper hand from the start. For many years after the French had taken their lines of defence between Verdun and Toul and between Epinal and Belfort, German military thinkers were inclined to assume that these fortifications would not, in the event of war, prove sufficient obstacles to compel invading hosts coming from the east to find their way through the gaps purposely left by General de Riviére. But the lessons of the war in the Far East, coupled with the fact that the defences have been somewhat strengthened at important points, have obliged the Germans to realise that for practical purposes advances in force can only be carried out through the gaps."

The justness of these observations was shown by the surprising resistance offered by Liége, though the forts were not at all of the type which the Germans would have had to attack at Verdun and elsewhere. When General de Riviére originally designed the lines of fortification, the gaps

between Verdun and the Belgian frontier, and between Toul and Epinal had a width of about forty miles. The routes through the northern gap lead, in the first instance, into a somewhat rugged and inhospitable Argonne country, and as Luxembourg was neutral territory the approaches from the German side were too narrow for the development of great armies. The gap between Toul and Epinal, on the other hand, was a gateway into the upper basins of the Meuse, the Marne, and the Seine. It was a fertile region eminently adapted for military operations conducted by great masses of men, and the great lines of railway communication leading from the interior of Germany converge upon the Franco-German frontier opposite to this gap. They were calculated to insure the concentration, within a very few days of the commencement of hostilities, of a vast army ready to advance.

Changes, however, had been made in the lines in the period that had elapsed since they were first laid down. The French extended the works on the Toul side. An awkward fort was constructed in an important position close to the Lunéville, and

the gap was no longer forty miles wide. Further, the fighting strength of both the French and the Germans had appreciably increased and sufficient room was no longer available on which to manœuvre these vast forces. It was essential that Germany's millions of men should be made full use of from the very outset, and thus it is obvious that the line of least resistance must lie through Luxemburg and Belgium, and the Great General Staff in Berlin decided without any scruples whatever to overrun their two small and, as they thought, harmless neighbours. Luxemburg has not even an army and they believed that Belgium would offer no resistance. Besides it was part of the German scheme of conquest to make that country a province of the Empire. They were, in fact, going to attack and destroy France by advancing through a country which they regarded as already, in essence, owning allegiance to the Kaiser.

Ever since 1909, the Germans have been busy preparing for this attack through Belgium. The country immediately to the east of the Belgian and Luxemburg frontiers is not unlike the Ardennes country, which has been long a favourite with British

tourists. It is hilly and in places is practically a barren plateau. It is largely covered with forest growths and has very few inhabitants. There is neither population nor commerce to justify the existence of many railways, and as a matter of fact up to less than six years ago only light railways were thought necessary for the region. Important developments were then begun and I cannot do better than quote again the General already mentioned, who seems to have personally examined this portion of German territory and brought away with him a minute description of the changes that were made or in progress not quite a year ago :

" In the first place the Stolberg-St. Vith line has been relaid and doubled, and very extensive detraining stations have been constructed at various points along it, especially at Weiwertz and St. Vith. Then the Remagen-Adenau line has been doubled as far as Dumpelfeld, whence a double line has been continued to Hillesheim, with double branches outwards from Hillesheim to Pelm and Junkerath, both on the Cologne-Treves railway. Moreover from Ahrdorf, between Dumpelfeld and Hilles-

heim, a single line has been constructed to connect with the Cologne-Treves line at Blankenheim. Then a most important double line has been constructed across barren country from Junkerath to Weiwertz on the Stolberg-St. Vith line. Up to the present, however, little has apparently been done on the line from Andernach on the Rhine to Pelm, except that it has been doubled as far as Mayen. Five lines converge on Pelm—the double line from Cologne, the new double line from Remagen via Hillesheim, and a single line from Andernach. Actually from Pelm to Gerolstein, a distance of two or three miles, there are laid down six parallel lines of rail, besides numerous additional sidings. Moreover, the double line from Hillesheim to Junkerath crosses over the main Cologne-Treves line by a bridge, and runs parallel to it for some distance before turning off to the left to reach Weiwertz. In fact, this knot of lines about Junkerath, Pelm, and Gerolstein is so arranged that practically no signalling difficulties would arise in case of a sudden flood of traffic going in various directions. Then the line from Gerolstein to Pronsfeld has also been doubled."

" Further south a new line is being constructed from Waxweiller, near Pronsfeld (to which there was already a branch) to Bitburg, and another single line has been constructed from Bitburg to near the Luxemburg frontier, which is to join up with the Luxemburg system at Echternach. Moreover, very important work has been carried out at Treves. Five years ago there were at this point the double lines from Cologne and Coblence, meeting at Ehrang, a very extensive detraining station, and then crossing the Moselle to run via Treves to Thionville. There was also a single line from Ehrang along the left bank of the Moselle to the Luxemburg frontier, with a bridge over the Moselle (then recently constructed) joining the main line beyond Treves. Since then this line along the left bank has been doubled as far as the frontier and an entirely new double-line bridge has been constructed across the Moselle, linking the railways on the two banks of the river ; its channel is here of about the same width as that of the Thames at Kew, and navigable, so that these bridges are costly works, involving long stretches of high embankment. Moreover,

at Igyl, within half a mile of the Luxemburg frontier on the left bank, a big entraining station is at present being laid out—it is as near to the frontier as it can be got, a bluff intervening to prevent its actually reaching the border. There are vast sidings about Treves; and Igyl, Treves, and Ehrang, with the three bridges over the Moselle, form for practical purposes one huge detraining and rearranging station. It is worthy of note that the double line on from Igyl into the Grand Duchy is not double all the way to Luxemburg, a stretch near that town, crossing some hills, being only single. Igyl and the new railway bridge are, in fact, purely strategical, and they are directed against territory the neutrality of which has been guaranteed by Prussia."

It will be seen from the foregoing that long before the war began the French entrenched camps on the eastern frontier had cost the Germans millions of money. They have since cost them many millions more, both in money and in men's lives, wantonly sacrificed to gratify an ambition secretly entertained by the Kaiser and his War Lords, and one which they were bent on pursuing

regardless of rights or wrongs, or of the death and ruin which it would spread among peaceful and unoffending populations. The French fortresses could not be reduced by direct attack, but somehow or other France was in Bismarck's historic phrase " To be bled white " (literally like veal), Belgium be annexed and then they were to turn on us.

The case was brutally stated on the eve of war by the *National Zeitung* of Berlin, which not only dragged in the Almighty as backing the German aims but jeered with true Prussian disregard of the religion of Bavaria and of Austria at the Lady of Lourdes, a sacred figure to all Catholic Europe. The Berlin journal declared " Whatever may be reserved by Providence for the German nation it is certain that He will compel France to once more indemnify us, but in another measure to that of forty-four years ago. It will not be merely five milliards which will be necessary to repay us, but possibly thirty milliards. The Holy Mother of God at Lourdes will have plenty to do if she, as the worker of miracles, has to cure all the bones that our soldiers will break among the fellows on the

other side of the Vosges. Poor France, there is yet time for her to change her views, but in a short time it will be too late. France will then receive such terrific blows that she will feel them for many generations."

It was hoped to take France at a disadvantage and from all I heard and all I saw, Germany was successful. The fortresses of our ally were garrisoned by what amounts to the only professional army the country possessed. She was not mobilised, and because of provisions made in the treaties binding Germany, Austria and Italy in an unholy alliance, she dare not take an aggressive step, lest Italy came in. Had she contemplated an attack on Germany then or later, all I can say is that the preparations made by French statesmen and the French War Office were of the poorest possible description. The French had to face with what equanimity they could the knowledge that on their frontiers their troops had actually been retired and that, with huge German armies on the march to sweep over their territory, at least a fortnight was necessary before their mobilisation would become effective.

Happily for France, she is a nation of quick resource and never showed herself so great in every respect as during those early days in August, when disaster sudden, complete and irredeemable stared her people in the face.

I like to think of that month of August as it was in France. Some of us, myself among the number, thought we knew the French and their characteristics. It was a time when we might have expected excitability and even public clamour. Instead, calmness reigned. The endless groups of French political parties coalesced into one patriotic whole, the Government was reformed on National lines, and every man who could bear arms flew to defend the beloved soil of France. Women and children and old men were left to reap the harvest, this year unusually abundant even for France. The Boy Scout movement has appealed strongly to the French, and lads were out in their uniform doing good and useful work for "La Patrie." I found Paris as the city of Petra in Edom. Most of the restaurants and cafés were closed, not because they lacked custom, but because proprietors, waiters, chefs, everyone on

the roll of the army had donned his uniform and was at the service of the State. In the newspaper offices editors, special writers, reporters, compositors, machine-room hands, even the camelots who sold the journals on the boulevards had gone to their stern duties. The theatres were closed, for the actors, too, were playing a greater and, alas, very often a tragic part in this drama of war.

The journals were reduced to single sheets, not so much because paper was scarce as that no staff existed to bring out larger issues. It speaks well for French journalism that the men who were called in to edit and produce their papers, though most of them were beyond the age for active service, had all the cheerful confidence of younger men and believed in the ultimate success of their country's arms. They never struck a despondent note and soon had material to which they could point as proof that things were not going badly. It does not fall to my lot to deal with the brilliant and strategically excellent defence of their Fatherland which was offered by the Belgians. That, however, was and is gratefully acknowledged in

France as of vital value to the French. Even more than ourselves they are resolved that Belgium shall lose nothing materially because of that gallant stand they made against the vast hordes of the Kaiser.

They were able themselves to bring their army on the east into active operation in the very first week, and it is with that army that I am chiefly concerned. They then made that bold dash into Alsace and Lorraine, which was disconcerting to the Germans and proportionately heartening to the French who were still in the throes of mobilisation. That early fighting in the two provinces which Prussia seized after the war of 1870 has received little attention, but I shall give in another chapter some intimate details of it from one who was through it all.

When Great Britain threw her sword into the scale against Germany, it was a happy thing to be British and in France. There had been doubts as to whether we would move, and I have a shrewd suspicion that many of the rumours that then gained ground were spread by the German agents with which not only Paris, but the whole of France were infested. No one who was

acquainted with what was going on behind the scenes paid any heed to these stories. All the English knew that this nation would not refuse the challenge which the Kaiser had thrown down, and when we declared war the French accepted it as absolute evidence of certain success. They remembered the Napoleonic days and said : " Ah ! these English never give in till they have won."

Military officers had from the first no fear as to the courage, skill and efficient training of our army. Many of them expressed themselves enviously of both the Russians and ourselves, because we were the only two nations who had known modern war. They had studied our system of training very closely, and many would have liked to have seen it adopted in France, but there is all the difference in the world between a professional army and one raised by conscription, and they were under the impression at first that our methods of fighting, which leave so much to the intelligence of the non-commissioned officer and individual soldier, were unsuited to the mentality of their men.

Before the war had been in progress many

weeks they had changed their minds, and under the stress of battle they began quietly to assimilate their ways of fighting to ours. In the earlier phases of the war they lost men because their troops were brave to a fault, and had not learnt to the full the value of every scrap of cover and how much could be done by spade work. The French officers were especially gallant. They exposed themselves with all the ancient valour of their race, and lost proportionately. They also have learnt better now, and are modelling themselves successfully on the British officer in every possible characteristic. Gone are the gesticulations, the waving of swords, and what seemed to us, with our habits of self repression and lack of demonstration, the theatrical side of drill in the army of the Republic. They saw our adaptability and in a word have imitated it.

When Earl Kitchener's little message of advice to British soldiers on the continent was republished in translations in the French newspapers, it was hailed, and not unjustly, as the correct expression of how an army should comport itself, and I found an enthusiastic approval of it in the *Bulletin*

*des Armées*, which is daily issued to the French troops. Nothing could have had a finer effect, and it was strongly commended as the ideal of a great soldier, but above all "an officer and a gentleman," a phrase which one found in very common use.

It was with determination and confidence, therefore, that the French prepared to take the field against their ancient foes. Their mobilisation was conducted with swiftness and General Joffre, the generalissimo, knew, when he was ready to face the enemy some fifteen days after the declaration of war, that the numbers who had rejoined the Colours exceeded all expectation. France's sons had rallied to her need wherever they might be, and when the official figures are available, it will be found that the absentees were very few indeed. The French General Staff had long decided that they would not expend on the first operations the younger of their First line troops. They went back to the class 1909 and earlier, leaving the later classes to come into the fighting line when their elders had borne the brunt of the first shock.

The plans laid down by the French Staff are very clearly stated by Mr. Hilliard

Atteridge in his book " The First Phase of the Great War " (Hodder and Stoughton). Their scheme was " to attack simultaneously at several points the German armies that were massing in Belgium and along the frontiers of France. The great battle line would extend for hundreds of miles from Belfort near the Swiss frontier, along the Vosges, and the borders of Lorraine, to the wooded hills of Luxemburg and the Ardennes, and the undulating plains west of the Belgian Meuse, along the Sambre and by Mons towards Tournai. It was not, of course, a continuous line of guns and men everywhere of equal strength. Along the eastern frontier the line of entrenched camps and forts from Belfort to Verdun enabled comparatively small forces to oppose the German invasion. Here there was to be an advance from the northern Vosges into the lower lands of Alsace, and a second move of a strong force into Lorraine south of Metz by Château-Salins and Morhange. These movements were inspired by the desire to show the tricolour again in the annexed provinces.

" North of Verdun there was to be another advance towards Longwy, an at-

tempt to hold out a hand to the little garrison that was gallantly keeping the flag flying over the old bastioned fortress, which seemed hardly capable of defence against modern heavy artillery, but for all that was making a stubborn resistance. On the Allied left the main advance was to be made into Belgium. East of the Meuse a French army was to march across the Semois into the forests of the Ardennes, where the Duke of Wurtemburg's army had its headquarters at Neufchateau. On the other side of the Meuse another army was to cross the Sambre, and march by the battlefield of Ligny against the German army that was advancing between Brussels and Namur, and had already begun the siege of the Namur forts. This movement would be covered on the left by the advance of the British Expeditionary Force by Mons."

No doubt all this had been arranged in consultation with Sir John French, who was singularly familiar with the country in which the troops were to engage, but the French Secret Service had failed to note the preparations made in peace time by the Germans for their attack on France. Under

the plea of carrying out commercial undertakings positions for heavy artillery had been surveyed and selected and platforms constructed in places which would dominate the fortifications on the Franco-Belgian frontier. These had been neglected, and were not up to date. Lille, in fact, was practically dismantled, and Namur, as it proved, could be taken by a ruse. The French, acting in perfect good faith, had not strengthened their defences on the Belgian frontier, because they feared nothing from Belgium, whose neutrality was guaranteed by Great Britain and Germany. That guarantee, it should also be remembered, was directed against the French, who were themselves parties to it, and rigorously respected their treaty obligations even in the stress of the war of 1870, when it would have been of advantage to them to have torn up that famous " scrap of paper."

## CHAPTER II

### The Inspiration and the Man

In many if not most of the villages and towns lying behind the line of battle from Soissons to Belfort, there has frequently been seen a tall, heavy-looking man, his hair and moustache grey, his face somewhat fleshy, his eyes dark and rather somnolent. Except his uniform, there is no indication about him of the Commander-in-Chief, as Earl Kitchener called him, of the Allied army. But it is General Joffre all the same. He is as deceptive in appearance as he is in his fighting. He is as little like the great soldier of tradition as was the von Moltke of 1870, or the Sir John French of to-day. Joffre and French have, however, a curious resemblance to each other. General Joffre never came much before the French public. He was not often named in their newspapers, but his tremendous abilities were known to his comrades and to

the French Army Council, which, owing to the frequent changes of Ministry and so on, is less dominated by the civilian element than is our own War Office.

General Joffre is one of the most unassuming of men. He has not throughout his career posed to the gallery at any time, but has devoted himself with a single eye to his chosen *mètier*, and is one of those happy men whose profession is their hobby. He is a being of regular habits. During the months of heavy fighting when he was retiring before the German advance, and afterwards when the Allies began to beat back the enemy and demonstrate their tremendous superiority not only in strategy, but in tactics, General Joffre conducted his campaign as though he was managing a bureau in peace time. He had his *petit déjeuner*, his *déjeuner* and his dinner at the accustomed hours, and it is said that he has not hurried over a meal since the war began, not even when the German spy system enabled the enemy's artillery to plant heavy shells in the neighbourhood of his headquarters. It must not be supposed that he is fond of the table. He is not, but he thinks that a regularly nourished body

assists in keeping the mental faculties at their normal. War, from his point of view, if it is to be successful, must be, like the attainment of genius, a matter of painstaking effort.

There is a saying of our Indian fellow citizens—the men who are fighting side by side with us and the French—that the crocodile is always at the ford where he is not expected. This is one of the characteristics of General Joffre. The enemy and even his own men may think the French Commander-in-Chief is in this place or that, but he is generally to be found where no forewarning of him is given. He has the knack of getting the very last ounce out of everyone in the fighting line, and when they have reached the stage when they feel that they can do no more, and are simply clinging on desperately to their position, because help and General Joffre are seemingly far away, they find that both are with them and recognise themselves as unconquerable.

General Joffre had at first some unpleasant things to do. Even senior officers, who are crack soldiers in peace time, prove themselves disappointing when war tests the souls of men. The French Commander-

in-Chief had, therefore, to send back many distinguished comrades and replace them by others who were showing capacity. There is nothing remarkable in this, for Field-Marshal Sir John French was doing exactly the same thing at the same time; that is in the initial stages of the conflict. General Joffre was solely concerned with one object, and that was the success of the French arms. One of the first regulations he laid down was that under no circumstances, except when they were killed on the field of battle, were the names of generals and other officers commanding to be mentioned. He wanted no spectacular heroism but hard honest work. It is remarkable that a great many of the men who have come to the front, and whose names will be known later, are from opposite ends of France. The Normans have shown in their bulldog tenacity how closely they are related to ourselves, while the men from the South have had dash and imagination. The Commander-in-Chief of the Allied forces is a man of the Midi, and has both imagination and tenacity. They can be seen indicated by his high broad forehead and his heavy jaw.

His headquarters were generally some little French town well situated on cross roads where could be concentrated the system of field telegraphs and field telephones by means of which a Commander-in-Chief receives news of the progress of his three hundred miles long battle front, and can transmit his orders. High powered motor cars are at his disposal and those of his A.D.C.'s and petrol is more important than horse-flesh to these swift messengers. General Joffre might be seen in the market square slouching about rather heavily, his hands behind his back, and very often in company with that splendid fighter, General de Castelnau, who has seen two of his sons die for France without a sign of his grief. Were General Joffre in mufti one might be deceived into thinking from his comfortable appearance that he was a fairly prosperous merchant, instead of a man who has destroyed in a few months the German prestige, rendered nugatory the German art of war, which has been dinned into our heads for so many years, and assisted to free Europe from the nightmare of German militarism.

Such is the man, what of the inspiration which moves him and the whole French

nation? It is M. Maurice Barres, of the Académie Française who supplies the answer in a wonderful piece of writing which General Joffre had published in the *Bulletin des Armées* shortly after war was declared. No translation can give an adequate idea of the spirit-stirring phrases of the original which is here Englished :—

"From whence comes this prodigy, this transformation of France? How is it we are all standing united, purified, and on fire? France has always been the land of re-awakenings and of new beginnings. Her enemies believed her dying. They regarded her coming end with spiteful joy, but she rose in might and said as she seized the sword: 'Behold me; I am youthfulness; I am Hope; I am the Right invincible; I am young like Jeanne d'Arc; like the great Condé at Rocroy; like Marceau the Republican; like General Buonaparte.' She breathes of the clear air of the great days, sacred and national, and by an uplifting of her soul she decides the Victory. It is to express this force of resurrection which there is in our race, that we insist on a national fête day in honour of the Maid of Lorraine, who saved France when all

appeared lost. If we do not have the fête and the commemoration of her miracles, we have better, for we see that the miracle is happening again. We live to-day one of those sublime moments when in France all is saved by the outburst of our enthusiasm, by the depth of our inward fires. The Germans have said 'France is exhausted by centuries of greatness, and yet more by the anxiety with which she is distracted of maintaining her past and preparing for the future. We will easily make her our slave. She is a prey, rich and to be quickly won. Her sons have taken a disgust at war. They would rather quarrel among themselves.' That is how they regard us, these Germans. But they will see our young men with their eyes glowing, their breasts swelling with love of real glory and contempt of death, forming a rampart behind which the elders await the hour when they in turn will shed their blood in the fighting line. A mysterious force which is incarnate in no person, and which no will can command, has reunited us shoulder to shoulder and foot to foot. The enemies of yesterday have become brothers-in-arms and brothers-in-spirit. There is no more of party. One

single soul rises towards the heavens and flames with ardour.

"Ah! from what heart, from what sanctuary has sprung that redeeming fire which has inflamed all France? What word of a great poet has reanimated in our consciences the spirit of our ancestors? What act of a political genius has pierced through the thicknesses of indifference and whom must we thank and glorify for having sent through our nation such a current of strength and of brotherhood? It is Alsace-Lorraine which has saved us. It is Alsace that has performed this miracle. The secret of our strength reposed in the foundations of our being unknown to ourselves. The thick rock was pierced, the spring commenced to flow when, some months ago, military Imperialism began to abuse, provoke and to strike the honest traders, workmen, and peasants of Alsace because they preserved in silence a filial affection for the genius of France. The arrogant wickedness; the offences against justice; that barbarism insulting at the same time our country and our humanity, that is what has awakened in all of us the knowledge of our moral superiority and of our mission.

It is not we who have asked the question: What is the spirit that must govern the world? But since it has been asked with one single voice France has replied: 'The spirit of injustice must not prevail under Heaven,' and the hearts and the armies of the entire world rush to our assistance. Alsace-Lorraine, grief-stricken daughter, be contented. During forty-four years by thy fidelity thou hast maintained in our breasts the common amity. The best of us receive from thee their virtue. Thou art our bond, our sign of communion, the hearth of our patriotism, our shining example. To-day the sacred fire has swept through all France. Thou hast saved us from ourselves. It is for us to deliver thee."

This document also helps to make it clear why the French attack was made through Lorraine. It was so sudden and swift, actually taking place within a few days of the declaration of war that it gave the impression that the French had reached a further stage in their mobilisation than was generally supposed. It had a double effect, putting heart into the French and making the Germans afraid that they would possibly, after all, not retain the

element of surprise on which they had built extravagant hopes. It was really a well-planned effort by a small force under General Pau, who is one of the best known leaders in the French Army, and one, moreover, who is thought by the French to have a personal revenge to wreak upon the Germans because he lost his right hand in the fighting in Lorraine in 1870. He made a dash for Mulhouse, captured it and held it just sufficiently to make his presence and his influence felt in the two lost provinces, caused the Germans to detach a strong force lest the offensive should be a serious one, and then retreated rapidly but fighting rearguard action after rearguard action till his forces conformed with the general line of the French Army. There is much to be said of that fighting, which did not receive adequate notice in the English newspapers till November.

I give extracts from the diary of a sergeant there engaged which was published by a special correspondent of the *Morning Post*:—

"August 4th, 8 p.m., Toul.—I am going to bed having learnt that war has been declared. It will come to us as no surprise; it was so absolutely inevitable.

"August 6th, 5 p.m.—At Hoeville, five kilometres from the frontier.

"August 14th, 5.40 a.m.—We are now over the frontier, everyone is in high spirits. After marching for half an hour we see the artillery taking up its position. The country is so like ours that the present boundary could never remain. The firing keeps going on to our right, but still no one in front of us. We regard Lorraine as re-annexed from to-night.

"August 15th, 5 a.m.—The 7th company is off to make a reconnaissance in the direction of Vic. They will probably not all come back. The German aeroplane that has been above us since daybreak is still there. Our machine-guns hidden in the wood fire upon it for pure sport, as the aeroplane is more than two thousand yards up. The bullets as they drop nearly hit us, and break the branches off the trees as they sing over our heads. All these little incidents, however, leave us quite calm.

"August 17th, 3 p.m.—Some troops are in front of us between Vic and Chateau-Salins, some of our men in reconnaissance to see whether the Germans have stopped. It seems that we are the joint of a great

pair of pincers which is to squeeze the Prussian corps in front of us, and our work is to hold firm without trying to advance. They are retreating from the pincers, seriously threatened by the right jaw. When shall we become one of the jaws in our turn? We are getting tired of always retreating.

"August 19th, 7 a.m.—In sight of La Neuville en Saulnois the battalion advanced in echelon, my company leading, supported by two machine-gun sections. After a few rifle shots the Hussars entered the village at the gallop, but nobody was left. There had been ninety-nine mounted men, but they retreated at once. We continued on our way towards Faxe, finding no troops in the villages, five or six of them not having been occupied for three days. We were most enthusiastically received by the country people, who were very ill-informed by the Germans. The Germans, according to their own reports, are getting successes everywhere, making thousands of prisoners, and so on. They were astounded when we told them about Mulhouse and Liège, and would not believe us. . . . We are to take up our quarters at Chicourt.

"August 20th, 5.30 a.m.—The bullets are singing terribly along the road, and a young Colonial just beside me has had a bullet through one side of his face and out at the other. The captain of the 7th company is down with a bullet through his chest and arm, and the Prussians are taking the heights around us. Our regiment is suffering terribly. We must have advanced too quickly yesterday, and have got to evacuate Chicourt, which is too near to the hills and woods. We retire slowly from crest to crest on the road to Morhange to get the cover of the wood. Behind, the German artillery keep firing on ours, and their shells keep bursting among our legs. I have been hit by some flying earth, but by a miracle am unhurt. What a heap of dead and wounded! It is a terrible sight. A rain of 105-centimetre projectiles keeps steadily falling. Whenever a group of men forms it is shot at at once. The German gunners are firing at 7,000 and 8,000 metres. Our poor soldiers! There are only 300 left of our battalion that was 1,000 strong. We reach at last the great woods at Château-Salins, and pick up a few men who had got separated from us,

and retreat slowly in line, taking the road for Delme.

"The regiments re-formed slowly to-night at eleven o'clock, and we started crossing the Seille, near the château de Barthecourt. The sappers were mining the bridge as we passed. The regiment halted on the hill, and lay down in the open air on an empty belly. No one wanted to eat. All wanted to sleep.

"August 21st, 3.30 a.m.—We take up positions on the hills, and the march to the rear continues. At daybreak the firing begins again. From crest to crest we retire little by little. By five at night we are again in the German shell field, for the Germans are shelling the French batteries which are stopping them from getting out of the woods too quickly. We are just behind Sorneville, and ought to sleep there. At seven we are sent on to Cerceuil, and then to Senancourt. At midnight we lay down dead with fatigue.

"August 22nd, 3.30 a.m.—Reveille. We are to continue retreating and to cross the Meurthe. We crossed at two in the afternoon at La Neuville. I might perhaps manage to get back to Nancy, but should

be ashamed to do so after such a retreat, and would rather people did not come to see it. We have heard the cannon all day, and hope it is our pieces. They are the only means we have of preventing the Prussians from getting into Nancy. At ten I lay down.

"August 23rd, 4 a.m.—Reveille. The first good sleep I have had for three days. I am feeling almost right again. After various duties, at nine I had a chance of washing. I have an enormous bruise in my back and right biceps where I was hit by the lumps of earth three days ago. The shells have really been very good to me, but I now know why I have been so tender. If it was not that I was afraid of the Prussian soldiers being in France I should be all right. They can't be far from the Meurthe to-day, and then our forts will be able to bombard them in their turn.

"August 24th, 4 p.m.—We are off again, and have come near to St. Nicolas. Four or five biplanes have just landed on the hill to our left, less than a kilometre from us, so that one of the army corps positions is probably there. Three available German army corps near Morhange were due to

move, one to Alsace and two others to Belgium. Our division had to make contact with them and keep them here. Our attack and retreat before such a force appears not to have been in vain, especially as the position seems to have been improving for us.

"August 25th, 3.30 a.m.—Reveille. We are advancing towards Drouville in short rushes. At six the thunder of the cannon and the crack of the rifles started. An hour later our '75's advanced, batteries and batteries of them. The cannonade is terrible, but our guns seem to be getting the better. By eleven the German shells are few, but their rifle fire is becoming more and more intense. By three o'clock we have been ten hours under fire without a mouthful of food. At seven a terrible cannonade and fusillade. What an awful day for anyone with nerves. The orders have come for us to retreat in echelon, and it is my duty to take them to my captain despite shells and rifle shot. I should like to get through the day without being bowled over. At eight the companies retreat, some of them not in very good order. The Prussian infantry are coming

out of the wood at 1,200 yards. The artillery, which was less vigorous this afternoon than this morning, gives us a good watering, but luckily without hurting us. Our own batteries, which are quite close to us, keep firing with amazing rapidity, and the row is deafening. The guns recoil at each shot. Night is falling, and they look like old men sticking out their tongues and spitting fire.

"August 27th, 4 p.m.—We can now get a better idea of the desolation at Crevic. What barbarism on the part of the Germans, and what a disgrace to them! By seven we are on our way to the woods. There was a terrible battle there two days ago. I shall never forget the sight. French and German corpses by the dozen, almost all hit in the head by shells, with terrible wounds. Everyone groans and curses war. Whole groups have been mown down where they stood. In many places the men were lying pell-mell, arms in their hands, with bayonets directed at each other. In the ditches the French soldiers are lying almost touching each other, where they have been brought down by the machine guns. A whole section of Prussians seems to have

been killed where they stood. One German soldier lay with his head resting on a clod of earth, clasping his rosary; he must have died saying his beads. The rain is falling in torrents, and that makes everything still more dismal to everybody. What a curse war is! If only those responsible for it could see! The sacrifice of our generation must benefit our children. It is impossible that such a thing can ever happen again. Our orders are to hold and dig trenches in advance. I have had all the slopes of the trenches covered with fresh grass, and helped the stretcher bearers carrying out the German dead. We have taken their cartridges off our own dead and collected them as they may very likely be useful to us soon. The cartridges on the Prussian dead I have had buried to prevent them being used against us.

"It is impossible to eat, one is so sick at heart. I am quite worn out and hardly strong enough to walk, but one marches all the same.

"August 28th, 4 a.m.—I get up, after having hardly slept despite terrible fatigue. There were alarms all night, and the cannon was firing quite close to us. Our cloaks

were wet through and prevented us from being warm. A wounded German, hit in the leg, slept quite close to us. This morning he told one of our men who speaks German that he was looking for his rosary that had gone astray. Poor devil! He was in a blue funk that the Prussian artillery would open fire again, and that he would be left where he lay. He kept calling for the stretcher-bearers. One of our provision wagons came up about nine o'clock and took him away. He was delighted. Last night was terrible. In the intervals of silence you could hear the groans of the wounded, who had not yet been picked up. They all make the same sound. Ah! ah! It makes you shiver. What a curse war is! Two men of the 7th company have already gone mad. I can quite understand it.

"10 a.m.—Two hundred Reservists from Melun joined our battalion to-day. Though they are between 25 and 35 years old, they seem 'rookies' to us. They've new equipment, and their faces are full; they are not tanned. They are not yet veterans who have seen fire and suffered heavily. They keep asking questions and say that

the Germans can come on. They don't know what is waiting for them. . . . At five o'clock we had a heavy artillery fire in our new positions; some of the shots came very close to us. Our recruits jumped as the shells screamed over us. They thought they had burst above us. Our seasoned men laughed, and from this we can tell that we are really getting broken in to war. . . . Everybody is horribly muddy. The rain has soaked everything, and we are so tired that we can hardly stand up. My knees hurt and my legs are stiff. I have a job in starting to move, but once I get going I manage more or less all right.

"August 29th, 3.30 a.m.—Reveille. We are to occupy the hill in front of the Crevic woods. There is a thick fog, and we can't see twenty yards ahead. It is not raining, though. That is the main point.

"8 a.m.—The fog is lifting, and it is going to be fine. It is better to be scorched by the sun than drowned and chilled by rain. Another artillery duel, luckily a good way off. There are numbers of Germans dead on the hill, and huge holes have been dug by our big cannon. Four

o'clock has been a critical time for us. Our corner has been literally riddled by German shells, which have been pouring on us for two hours incessantly. The result—two killed and a few wounded near us.

"August 30th, 4 a.m.—Reveille. We had several alarms during the night, with rifles going off and everyone jumping to the trenches. I feel sure the alarms were caused by clumsy, nervous people shooting at shadows. We are being bombarded, and have been covered with dirt more than twenty times. I have been hit in the left arm, luckily without anything getting in, but the place is very painful. I hope nothing is broken. At six we came away. In my half-section we had two killed and eight wounded. A bad day for us. When we were burying the dead this morning, and were just putting one in a hole made by a shell he moved his leg. He was just in time. He had been wounded four days ago, and had not moved since. He was a German. The medical corps took the poor devil off in the course of the day.

"August 31st, 2.30.—Reveille. My left arm is very painful and a bit swollen, but

it will get all right. We could rest if it were not for this terrible strain by the continuous cannonade. We shall probably be relieved after to-day.

"1 p.m.—We are to be relieved to-night, and to go into barracks near Crevic. Everyone is delighted at the idea of getting a barn to sleep in. We have only now the five o'clock bombardment to go through. From time to time men come back to us quite dazed. Five or six of the company have become mad.

"September 1st, 3 a.m.—Reveille at Granvesin on good hay bedding. We have been moved off to Einville, and taken cover in the woods there. Midday, we are moving from the woods to the great trenches. Five or six German shells burst above our heads, and some of us were literally lifted off the ground. One man had been cut in half only two yards from me. The fact is that we left the woods too soon. Half of two companies were brought down by the bullets from the German trenches in less than five minutes, and we were ordered to retreat to the woods. I had to take the order to my company, which has almost been destroyed. Poor 7th; it has suffered

a second terrible sacrifice. By five o'clock there were only 110 left of my company. The wounded dare not make any movement because they are at once shot at. Some, however, crawl back to the trenches on all fours, and we dress all we can on the spot. The Captain had a bullet in his arm at three o'clock, and only went off to be treated at seven. My officer was knocked down by a shell, but is only suffering from shock. Food has been brought to us from the rear, but we can only eat bread, as the least smoke in the wood attracts an immediate bombardment.

"September 2nd.—I slept very little, despite terrible fatigue. I had nothing in my belly. Everyone lay down at midnight. Cannon were thundering all the time. The patrols at the borders of the wood kept on firing, and there were alarms whenever the firing got closer. We waited behind the trees as the bullets whistled past. The whole thing was pitiful, as whenever there was quiet we heard the wounded crying for help from all over the wood. At five a few stretcher bearers came up and were able to take away a few wounded. Though it was against orders, I went into the wood

with two men and brought in a few of them. Midnight. Another regiment is in our rear to relieve us. We are off for Haraucourt and Drouville to the trenches there and to recover. No sleep.

"September 3rd.—We reached Haraucourt at 4 a.m., accompanied by the sound of cannon."

Since the date at which the diary concludes its author was wounded, but he has recovered and is returning now again to the front. As an account of how in a few days unseasoned troops became veterans the diary is a valuable human document.

## CHAPTER III

### The Fighting in the Conquered Provinces

In England the general disposition has been to regard the early fighting in the conquered provinces as of small account and strategically unimportant. Fuller information, which will not be available until we are furnished with the despatches, not only from General Joffre, but from General Pau and General de Castelnau, is bound to change this view. The fighting in Alsace and Lorraine was important, and was undertaken for other reasons than merely to show the national flag to the people who since 1870 had been crushed under the Prussian jack-boot. The frontier was crossed within the first week of mobilisation, and it was a police commissary from Petit-Croix who took possession of the German police station at Montreux-Vieux. That was the signal for many Alsatians

and Lorrainers to escape into France and enlist in the French army, as volunteers.

The success of the French force was swift and unexpected. Both Altkirch and Mulhouse were occupied by August 9th. The entry of the French army into these places was, and is, regarded by our gallant allies as a historic event. On the Friday evening, just as night was falling, a patrol of French horsemen belonging to the advanced guard reached Altkirch. The town was defended by a series of strong field works, and held by a considerable force of Germans. The cavalry engaged in a brief skirmish until French infantry and machine guns could come into action, and then the Frenchmen charged with an ardour which nothing could resist. There had been an impression among army theorists, because rifles and quick-firers have attained such a stage of perfection, that bayonet charges were utterly impossible in modern warfare. The soldiers of General Pau dissipated that theory in their very first contact with the enemy by charging the defences of Altkirch, and bayoneting the Germans who held them. No wonder there was rejoicing among those daring raiders into German

territory at the success of their first assault with the beloved bayonet. It augured well for the future, for to both French and British the use of the cold steel and body to body fighting has become, during generations of conflicts, second nature.

Relatively small as that affair was, it was a glorious opening to the campaign. The Germans retired in great disorder. They could easily have held their second line of defences, but those they also abandoned precipitately, and finally they bolted from the town. Their experience of a French bayonet charge seemed to have inspired unreasoning terror, and it is a remarkable fact that not since then have the Germans stood up to one. They have invariably either surrendered or fled shrieking. The quick moving French, burning with a passion for vengeance, have never hesitated—and quite rightly—to plunge their weapons into the backs of the flying foe. Our men did hesitate at first. It seemed unsportsmanlike to drive a bayonet into the back of a screaming and terrified man, but they have learnt better since.

The Germans had quit the frying pan for the fire. A regiment of Dragoons, in

action for the first time for over forty years, showed that they were not behind their comrades of the infantry in dash, and were as good in the use of the "white arm" as their predecessors who charged a German army corps before Sedan under the brilliant cavalry leader, General Marguerite. These Dragoons had a joyous time. They rode down the fleeing foe and caused them serious losses, while small resistance was offered by the boastful soldiers of the Kaiser. Night saved the Germans from further pursuit, but Altkirch was occupied by the French, and the inhabitants of the old Alsatian city welcomed them with the pent up enthusiasm of years. They pulled down, and carried away in triumph, the frontier posts which had been set up by the Germans to mark the Imperial boundaries.

Daybreak the following morning saw the French advance marching on Mulhouse, and shortly after noon that town was also in the hands of the French, whose cavalry, charging through the streets at the gallop, drove out the German rearguard. The French outposts that night were established north of the town. The French losses were

slight in numbers, and trivial considering how much had been gained. The action and the movements that had led up to it showed that their troops were in excellent training, and animated by a splendid soldierly spirit. Mulhouse itself was a valuable capture. It contained a hundred thousand inhabitants, and was a great commercial and industrial centre. Its possession, so quickly achieved after the sudden declaration of war by the Kaiser, made a deep impression, not only in Alsace but throughout Europe. It seemed to show that the French were better prepared than the world had been led to suppose, and it also assisted to dispose of a prevalent notion, a notion strongly held in Germany itself, that war was repugnant to the modern Frenchman.

The Germans retired towards Neuf-Brisach, the country that they had oppressed so long rising against them as they passed and aggravating the situation in which they found themselves. The occasion, it is not generally known, called forth from General Joffre one of the few proclamations which that usually silent man has issued, and it, as well as a message from

M. Mèssimy, Minister for War, was printed, posted on the walls, and read with almost passionate delight by the Alsatians. M. Mèssimy said that the entry of the French troops into Mulhouse amid the acclamations of the Alsatians had sent a wave of enthusiasm through all France. No doubt, during the campaign that was to follow they would have many successes greater than that, but, at the opening of the war, the energetic and brilliant offensive which had been taken in Alsace would have a moral effect which would be of the utmost value. He, therefore, expressed to the General and the troops the deep gratitude felt by the Government.

General Joffre, it is important to note, was at Nancy when this invasion of German territory was begun. That he had made that frontier town his headquarters for the moment serves to show the value he attached to the work of that little frontier army, and he wrote as follows: "Sons and daughters of Alsace, after forty-four years of weary waiting French soldiers once more tread the soil of your noble country. They are the first workers in the great task of revenge. To them it is

a source of emotion and of pride. Some to perfect that work have made the sacrifice of their life. The whole French nation will push that work onward, and in the folds of its flag are inscribed the magic names of Right and Liberty."

From that day onwards up to the moment of writing there has been fighting in Alsace and Lorraine, very often no more than affairs of outposts, but much more frequently serious engagements. Both sides reinforced, and the French gained and held with desperate tenacity the passages of the Vosges. Had the enemy retained or captured the command in the Vosges the course of the campaign would probably have been of a different character. The French pushed on until their advanced troops came into action between Sarrbourg and Baccarat, but they were not able to maintain their position long. Sunday saw masses of Germans moving from Mulheim and Neuf-Brissach, and the French fell back to the south of Mulhouse, remaining for the time masters of Haute-Alsace, and beating back the Germans in the districts of Manonviller and Spincourt. In every case the French showed alike in cavalry,

artillery and infantry an invaluable moral superiority over the Germans. Their aeroplane service at the same time came into effective operation, and began to demonstrate how exceedingly useful the information it obtained would be to the allied troops throughout the campaign. For instance, at the time under notice they were able to let the Headquarters Staff know that the Germans were massing troops at Gerolstein, and also in rear of Metz and Thionville.

This fact was important because, coincident with the advance into Alsace, another was being carried out into Lorraine south of Metz by Château-Salins and Mörchingen, and initiated a struggle which developed into a series of prolonged and furiously contested actions for the possession of the department of Meurthe and Moselle, with the city of Nancy as the great prize the Germans wished to gain. The French were therefore engaged in an offensive-defensive which was to go on for weeks. During the night of August 10th, at Mangiennes in the district of Spincourt, north of Verdun, the Germans drove in the French advanced posts, but their success was only momen-

tary. The French brought up reserves and made a vigorous counter-attack, bringing into use with destructive effect their batteries of artillery composed of the gun which has made itself famous as the "75." Indeed its pet name throughout the whole army is "Soixante-quinze." Here it met the German guns for the first time, and marked its entrance into action by destroying a German battery and smashing to pieces a German cavalry regiment which the French gunners caught in close formation and shelled out of existence. At the same time, at Château-Salins, another German attack was delivered in the nature of a strong reconnaissance. This was driven back with heavy loss, and the French made a forward movement in which they seized the village of La Garde between Château-Salins and Avricourt at the point of the bayonet. These combats, as Napier would have called them, were merely preliminary to actions of first-class importance.

We have heard much of the German time-table in this war. In this frontier region was noted the first evidence that the enemy had got behind hand. The French General Staff anticipated that their

mobilisation would not be more than two or three days in progress before the Germans would have started on a bombardment of Pont-à-Mousson, situated on the very edge of the French territory, and they also expected by that time the invasion of the region which has Nancy for a centre. But it was not till the twelfth day after the declaration of war that the bombardment of Pont-à-Mousson was entered upon, and then it was by heavy artillery at long range. The French dash over the frontier had already borne welcome fruit, and had produced hesitating councils on the other side of the Rhine. The Germans were using their heavy artillery, of which we were to hear more than enough during the murderous progress of the enemy through Belgium, though there is also a suggestion that they fired from the fort of St. Blaize.

As this was the first time that they were employed, and as there has always been something of a mystery about these weapons, some details concerning them will be of interest. It was supposed that they required platforms of reinforced concrete, with special fittings for mounting the carriage, and that at least three weeks

were necessary to get them into position. The Allies ascertained, but not till the war was two months old, that this was not the case, and the information they now possess has been of material value to the *personnel* of both the French and the British heavy batteries in keeping down the fire of these vaunted German howitzers. They are of 42 cm. calibre, and each is permanently mounted on a railway truck of special construction from which it is fired. The length of the truck is 59 feet, and is carried on two bogies. When the gun is brought into action the weight is supported on hydraulic jacks placed under the central portion of the truck, the bogies being thus relieved of all load. The train comprises, in addition to the gun truck, an ammunition waggon, a carriage for the men who work the weapon, and a waggon containing a petrol engine which drives various auxiliaries, such as hydraulic pumps, a dynamo, etc. The shell, weighing about three-quarters of a ton, is handled by means of a revolving crane, which is mounted on the gun truck. The gun can thus be brought quickly into action, granted the existence of a railway of ordinary

gauge within range of the position to be attacked. That a railway is necessary is a source of weakness, because the railway line becomes more than ever an object for attack by the heavy guns of the Allies.

The Germans could, and no doubt did, use these guns against Pont-à-Mousson, because their strategical railways made it convenient to do so, and they were doubtless eager to try the weapon. It is, however, considered by artillery experts that they have not been used to any extent in the field since. They were possibly used at Maubeuge, and could have been employed at Mons and at Antwerp, where they did not run any risk of capture. There is no ground for believing that they reduced Namur, for the batteries employed there were the 28 cm. Austrian howitzers, several of which had been placed at the disposal of the Germans by the Austrians. The latter, no doubt, now deeply regret their generosity. The German heavy field artillery is 15 cm. and fires a high explosive shell of, roughly, 90 lbs. weight. The siege train comprises 21 cm. howitzers throwing a shell of about 280 lbs. weight. This is what the French call the " Marmite " and

"Petit marmite," or "Soup pot" and "Little soup pot." The maximum range of both weapons is about 8,000 yards.

The Germans wasted a hundred of those shells upon the little town, killing and wounding several of the inhabitants, and demolishing a number of the houses. It was not followed by an infantry attack, which confirms the view that the Germans were merely carrying out an experiment with their hitherto untried weapon, and it is on a par with many things that they have done in that they made no attempt to ascertain the results. They took it for granted that their fire was effective, just as they have consistently taken it for granted that a heavy artillery fire directed against the Allied trenches insured the success of an attack by their infantry. This absurd conceit has cost them the lives of hundreds of thousands of their very best troops. Incidentally, it was at Mangiennes that the French discovered their superiority in artillery. Not only did they destroy, by the fire of their 75's, the enemy's batteries and cause the guns to be abandoned, but the German projectiles proved themselves ineffective, either not

bursting, or else breaking into such minute pieces as to inflict slight wounds only.

A summary of the military situation in the east of France at the end of the first seven days of warfare showed that though, after all, it was only affairs of what might be called outposts still at Altkirch, Mulhouse, in the Vosges, at Spincourt, and at Mangiennes, the French had held their own. Exaggerated statements were published about the fight at Mulhouse. The French had there only an infantry brigade, and their object was to destroy an intelligence department which was centred in the town. They were met by the 14th Army Corps from Baden, and a division of the 15th German Army Corps. The small French force were willing to continue their attack on the enemy, but the French corps commandant thought the situation too risky. They had carried out their mission, and it was not necessary for them to hold the position they had gained. The corps commander therefore ordered them to retire, and they fought a brilliant rearguard action against a vastly superior force until they reached their main body. The Germans attempted an attack on the French

army corps, but they could make no progress, and withdrew during the night. It had, owing to the rapidity with which the French were effecting their mobilisation, been possible for them to place in Haute-Alsace strong forces resting on Belfort, and the situation, from a strategic point of view, was not unsatisfactory.

Fighting for the crests of the Vosges had been in progress throughout the first week. The French had seized the lower heights and, despite vigorous German counter-attacks on the hills Bonhomme, St. Marie, and Saales, had beaten back every effort of the enemy, superior though it was in number. The fight for the hill of Saales was a furious one, the Germans throwing reserve after reserve into the attempt to seize this dominating position, but they were sent reeling back, mowed down by thousands by the machine guns and the French rifles. The town and the hill were both held by the French troops, who were able to establish their artillery on a neighbouring and commanding plateau. These guns took the Germans in reverse, and they were compelled to fly so hastily that they abandoned their equipment.

The French effort into Lorraine had, however, spent itself, and they were falling back before the great wave of the German advance. Around Blamont, Cirey, and Avricourt sanguinary combats were taking place between the French and the Bavarians, who were under their Crown Prince. Like the Crown Prince of Prussia, the Kaiser's eldest son, the Crown Prince of Bavaria is not a successful soldier. Both of them have to remember the eastern departments of France as the scene of repeated defeats and humiliation for them. The only success in this quarter which was conceded to the Crown Prince of Prussia was the robbing of a château.

The villages of Blamont and Cirey and the heights above them were brilliantly carried and the German columns were hurled back, leaving a great train of dead, wounded and of prisoners. This meant a gain in the Upper Vosges, which were now of serious importance to both armies. The French Government were able to make clear what appeared to them the main features which would dominate the great battle practically extending from the Swiss frontier at Basle to the Dutch frontier at Maestricht. They

asked public opinion to fix itself upon the conditions under which the battle would be joined and quoted the valuable indications given by German military writers and the Great General Staff of Berlin. Events were proving that the enemy was going to carry out as he had already announced a furious double attack, one by way of Belgium, the other by way of Nancy. The Belgians had checked the first by the energetic courage of their army, and by the dashing intervention of the French cavalry. The French cavalry had, in fact, done excellent work and continued to do so until they had taken the very last ounce out of man and beast, and it was owing to the continuous hard work that they had been carrying on day and night while holding up the German advance on Belgium that General Sordêt had to report to Sir John French at a critical moment that his horses were too done up to move.

The second attack on France by way of Nancy, even on the 16th day of August (fifteen days after the Kaiser had declared war), could not be said to have started. The strength of the French covering forces and their action in Alsace and Lorraine had thrown out the Germans by at least eight days.

That these eight days were invaluable to the Allies goes without saying. The French were able to concentrate their several armies, and instead of having the clear walk through to Paris that they expected, the Kaiser's generals were confronted with powerful forces extending along their front for 300 miles.

The French were actually executing two forward movements in German territory, one in the north and one in the south, and holding the centre of the Vosges between those two lines of advance a fortnight after the outbreak of war. The general French advance was successfully carried out along the whole line of the frontier from Pangy-sur-Moselle close to Metz as far as Belfort in the south. The Germans had bombarded Badonviller and Baccarat, two villages near Cirey. The latter place and the villages they occupied, but only for a day or two, during which they burnt down portions of each place. When they retired they carried off hostages with them, the precursers of many more burnings and seizures of hostages in pursuance of the barbarous German idea of striking terror into the enemy. On the contrary it made the French of the frontier more anxious to carry out reprisals.

It was not till August 20th when the successful French movement on Saarbourg was checked before the great military camp of Mörchingen, that any change in the position took place. Both sides were fighting with their forces based on a fortress. The German attempts at Pont-à-Mousson and about Cirey, and the hold they established on the north end of the Vosges were based on Metz and Strasbourg. The French had also attacked German Lorraine and Alsace and secured their position in the central and lower sections of the Vosges because they had behind them the great entrenched camps of Toul, Belfort, and Epinal. It will thus be seen how invaluable these frontier fortresses have been to France, and they were to serve even more materially in the phases of the war that were immediately to follow.

Away to the north of Verdun the French also put up a gallant little struggle which was intended more as a delaying action than one of a serious nature. There at Longwy was what had at one time been a place of arms. It had been fortified by the great Vauban in the seventeenth century and was encircled with a simple *enceinte.*

It could not be described as a fort, let alone a fortress. The town had developed owing to the extensive iron works in the neighbourhood, and contained only a small garrison. The Germans summoned the commandant to surrender, but he courageously refused and displaying the French flag from the old bastions, prepared and did make a stubborn resistance. The French tried to relieve him, and their efforts led to a brilliant combat on the banks of the river Othain. Two battalions of the French had thrown at them five times their number of Germans. The Frenchmen held their ground and during the night procured reinforcements including artillery. With the dawn they delivered a counter-attack, which compelled the Germans to make a precipitate retreat, during which they suffered severe losses in killed and wounded. The Germans were forced to abandon a battery of artillery, three machine guns, and a large quantity of ammunition. In the pursuit which followed, a French battery surprised the 21st German Dragoons dismounted. The opportunity was too good to be lost. The French opened fire on the dragoons, caught at a terrible dis-

advantage, and annihilated the regiment, both horses and men. The result of this double success was to hold up the Germans and then to cause their withdrawal, leaving the villages through which they passed, Pillon and Othe, full of their wounded.

A more important affair was recorded on the Meuse. There a French detachment crossed the river and occupied the town of Dinant, one of the beauty spots of Belgium, and familiar to many thousands of British tourists and holiday makers. The army of the Duke of Wurtemburg had occupied the Belgian Ardennes, and he detailed a German column to drive the French out of Dinant. This they were successful in doing, but the victory was of a temporary character, the French coming up with heavy reinforcements and timing their counter-attack extremely well, drove the Germans out with great slaughter. The punishment of the Germans was continued for a long distance by the French artillery. Here again the French fought with an élan and skill which made it clear to all qualified observers that the army of the Republic was a very different machine to the army of the Empire which had fallen, forty-four years before, at Sedan.

## CHAPTER IV

### A Heavy French Defeat

By the 20th of August, the Headquarters of the French Eastern Army—that is the right wing of the Allies—were able to report with justice that their progress in Upper Alsace and Lorraine had been continued, and that they had compelled the enemy to retreat in disorder, abandoning his wounded and quantities of his material. The French were in possession of the greater part of the passages of the Vosges, where they look out towards Alsace. They were concentrating troops on the level ground south of Saarbourg, and were otherwise threatening points of tactical advantage in the annexed provinces. The enemy had entrenched themselves very strongly, and had heavy artillery in position, but despite this the French gained ground, and they succeeded in driving the Germans back for quite considerable distances, harassing them in addi-

tion with a violent cavalry pursuit. The Germans were outflanked at Seille, and had to evacuate their positions, and the horsemen of General Joffre had seized on Château-Salins by a brilliant coup. The French Commander-in-Chief then reported highly on the courage of the troops and the ability of their leaders.

They followed up their successes with ardour, decision and rapidity, and yet they must have been surprised that they were permitted to penetrate so far into the enemy's country. They understood the situation better four days later, for by that time they had sustained a decisive defeat, and were falling back in some disorder on the river Meurthe to the south of Lunéville, the canal of the Marne, and the line of the river Seille. Nor could they hold that position, which was strategically weak. They merely rested there prior to falling back still further westward to the line of the river Mortagne, which is one of the principal tributaries of the Meurthe.

Not throughout the war anywhere have the Germans come so near to securing a great and important victory. There is no excuse for the Germans. They ought to

have been able to utterly destroy the French army operating in Lorraine, and won their way to Nancy. The pedantry which has marked so many of the German movements, when they have secured not merely a tactical but a strategical success, came into evidence here, and the French escaped destruction. What happened was that the French were permitted to advance into Lorraine until they reached Mörchingen, or as the French call it in their official communications on this phase of the campaign, Morhange. Mörchingen is the Salisbury Plain of Alsace-Lorraine, and the French found waiting for them there an army five times their number. Mörchingen, had the Germans known their work, ought to have proved as fatal to the French as any of the Alsatian fights of 1870, and should have cleared the way to Nancy. As it is, our French allies covered themselves with glory. They were defeated, but not disgraced, and they saved themselves from disaster by refusing to realise that they were beaten.

After all the French had not penetrated into the country in force, and they were not employing their First Line troops. The German dispositions were naturally good

because they were actually in one of their principal military camps. The French losses were excessive, and it is worth noting that they led to a change in the nature of the official bulletins dealing with the operations in Alsace-Lorraine, which from that day onwards said less and less of the fighting on the eastern frontier. The check the French had received would probably have been regarded as of the most serious character had the knowledge of it become public property. One could easily imagine the news of the result of the fight being as depressing to the French public as certain newspaper reports, which about the same time proclaimed, with exclamations to the Deity and many tears in the ink, the total rout of the British Expeditionary Force, were to nervous and ill-informed people in England. Without doubt the French right wing was for days in a parlous state, but beaten as they were, the remnants of the French army corps fell back fighting with a courage and endurance that cannot be admired too sufficiently. Any doubts which might have existed as to the quality of the French troops of to-day must have disappeared after the battle of Mörchingen.

Their officers showed the highest skill, and all ranks succeeded in holding off the Germans by dealing them sullen and heavy blows when they attempted to push the pursuit. In all the stress of a closely formed withdrawal from a dangerous situation which threatened them every moment with annihilation, the French officers contrived to reform their men and bring order out of what was for the time being something in the nature of chaos.

Though the French had lost a number of field guns and quickfirers, they had managed to render all of them useless before they were abandoned, for they had no desire to see the weapons left to the Germans in a workable condition. Many an artilleryman sacrificed his life for this object. The French gunners, even more than our own, are devoted to their guns, and they knew that every "Soixante-quinze" captured by the foe would be paraded in Berlin as a great trophy. Day after day the French retreated hard pressed by the Germans, but the former proved themselves the better metal. They were, as already stated, not First Line troops, but established themselves as veterans and gained a reputation which

has served to make the several French corps engaged in the Meurthe and Moselle invincible to all German attacks since. They fought rearguard after rearguard action, till they got under cover of their reserves and fresh artillery and gained their way back to the position indicated by the river Meurthe. There for twenty-four hours General de Castelnau again stayed the German invasion till he had secured the valley of the Mortagne, and a front parallel with the famous range of heights known as the " Couronné " of Nancy.

Beyond that line, struggle as they might, the Germans have never been able to advance. The French had the impression that the full force of the German attack when it did come was inevitable by way of Nancy. They had under their mobilisation scheme plans for a great concentration of troops in that neighbourhood. When it became clear that the Kaiser, regardless of treaties, was to advance " on the line of least resistance " through Belgium, a change was made in the disposition of their forces and the number stationed on the eastern frontier was greatly reduced. The defeat at Mörchingen did not weaken General Joffre's

views. He had clearly foreseen that he must fight the great German advance through Belgium and the north of France by a series of gigantic rearguard actions until he had them safely held, if necessary, on the very banks of the Seine itself. He still concluded that the wise thing to do was to keep General de Castelnau on the right of the allied armies, in command of what may be called the army of Nancy. It was a decision which showed his remarkable insight into character and events.

The defeat on August 20th of the French at Mörchingen laid open to the Germans four lines of advance on Nancy. They could come from the north through Pont-à-Mousson; from the north-east through Château-Salins; from the east through Cirey; and from the south-east through St. Dié. All these routes were excellent. An experienced and well-informed observer states: "From St. Dié along the wide valleys of the Meurthe and its tributary the Mortagne, from Cirey past Lunéville down another Meurthe tributary, the Vezouse; from Château-Salins by the main road between the forests of Champenoux and St. Paul; and from Metz southward past Pont-à-

Mousson up the channel of the Moselle and the Meurthe, the ways into Nancy are straight forward, and the ground for the most part flat and unbroken. But, besides the villages and towns by which they pass, there is, at irregular intervals between them, a ringed fence of wooded heights proudly known as the Grand Couronné of Nancy. To the north these hills rise to a height of about a thousand feet on each side of the Meurthe and extend beyond Nancy, which they encircle from the south, along the side away from the frontier to a point a little east of north. East and south the remaining segment of the circle consists chiefly of a wide plain, rising gently to the horizon, five miles away, with more hills and forests springing out of it. The most important of these landmarks are the Plateau of Amance, six miles north-east of the town, with the forests of Champenoux and St. Paul just beyond it, north and south of the Château-Salins road, and secondly, more to the east, in the direction of Lunéville and Cirey, the forests of Vitremont and Parroy."

The French retreat had exposed to the Germans a number of prosperous frontier

towns. Chief among them were Guebwiller —which is also known as Gerbéviller—Xermaminel, Lunéville, Vitremont and Crevic. All these places were bombarded by the Germans, were laid waste, their principal inhabitants shot in cold blood, and the last indignities inflicted on the womenfolk. They were denuded of money, provisions and everything of value. At Guebwiller the château and its chapel, which had belonged to one of the oldest families in France and contained many objects of historical and intrinsic worth, had been turned into hospitals, and were flying the Red Cross of Geneva. Both were bombarded and set on fire by means of incendiary shells. What treasures the flames spared the Germans stole. The place was held by only fifty Alpine Chasseurs, who put up a heavy fight. They withstood the absurdly overwhelming German attack for ten hours, contriving to cleverly duplicate themselves by changing their positions swiftly on their bicycles. All except two of them succeeded in getting away. When the Germans entered they were in a state of furious exasperation, and persisted in the pretence that the town had been

defended by civilians. They arrested all the men remaining, no matter their age, and with few exceptions shot them out of hand. They rushed into houses taking money and jewellery, and after spraying walls and furniture with paraffin set them on fire. They were told that they had been opposed by only a few Chasseurs, and one officer admitted that he knew that was the case, but they were out to strike terror and thus continued their work of pillaging and burning.

They were not contented with shooting the men, but they mutilated the bodies, which remained for three weeks unburied. This was done under the direct orders of General Clausen. The Mayor, M. Liegey, has the names of forty men who were shot and of two children, a boy and a girl, who were burnt before the eyes of their mother. Some of the German officers had their wives with them, and it was for their benefit that waggons were loaded with linen, furniture and silver plate. They left the town a wreck. The château was not even complete in its bare walls; much of the framework had gone. The dome and roof had tumbled and inside the marble columns were

shattered and scorched by the heat. They ransacked the cellars of the brewery, and left the building alone. The return of the French army prevented them destroying it or carrying off the wine they had collected in the grounds of the château. Where the fifteen men who were seized by the Germans when they entered are buried is not far from the roadside. Above the grave is a wooden cross bearing their names. Their neighbours have planted an evergreen tree close by, and the mound is decorated with flowers. Not far off is another grave which contains the remains of some hundreds of Frenchmen. The enemy had skilfully concealed themselves in trenches masked by wooded ground, and when the French advancing from the south unsuspectingly approached close to these, they were met by a terrible fire. But that ambuscade cost the Germans dear.

Everywhere in the departments of the Meurthe and Moselle and the Vosges the same story might be told. At first the Germans pretended that they only behaved badly in those villages from which the population had deserted in whole or part. They declared that this showed the French

civilians to believe in the bad faith of the German soldiers. An insult was therefore implied to the great and glorious and cultured army of the Kaiser. The French authorities on the frontier tried to accept this view, but they learnt by bitter experience that the German assurances were utterly worthless. All the district round Lunéville has been devastated in the most infamous manner, and its helpless inhabitants driven out as refugees. St. Benoit, Rambervillers, and Raon l'Etape and many other places in the Epinal region were wrecked, and the country people tell of German female domestics in those towns who made themselves busy while the Germans were in possession by showing their compatriots where they would find valuables, and particularly furs, for their womenfolk.

When, at the end of November, M. Poincaré, accompanied by M. Viviani, the Premier, and other members of the Government, went on a visit to the scenes of the long continued and dogged fighting in Lorraine, they inspected several villages which had been destroyed by bombardment or by fire. At Guebwiller, M. Poincaré conferred upon one of the heroines of the

struggle the Legion of Honour. She is Soeur Julie, Superior of the Hospital in the town. The brave woman had already been mentioned in an Army Order for having by her presence of mind and courage defended and saved the hospital, which had been transformed into an ambulance station, and for securing food for the wounded occupants during the bombardment.

This courageous French woman tells very simply what she did. When the French were driven out and the Germans came in mad and shouting, and shooting down people, one of the first places they went to was the ambulance station, avowedly with the object of bayoneting the French wounded. Soeur Julie resisted them, told them they had no business to act as they had done and would only allow them into the hospital on condition that they did no harm. They agreed to leave it alone but wanted to set fire to the rest of the street. Soeur Julie had to point out to their dense Teutonic minds that if they did that the hospital would be almost certain to catch fire as well. Eventually she and three other sisters had not only the

French wounded to look after but the German. The callous brutality of the invaders in the handling of their own wounded shocked and horrified these good women. The Germans took no trouble over their own men but shoved them down anyhow in the hospital corridors, and when these were full simply left them on the ground outside. The four sisters had 400 Germans to tend, and only had one visit from a German doctor with the troops, who seemed to have thought he did his duty by staying half an hour. The Germans actually demanded bread from her for their men, and she had much satisfaction in calling their attention to the fact that no bread could be had because they had deliberately burnt the public bakehouse. The whole thing is typical of the senseless stupidity which marked so many actions of the Germans in the earlier stages of the war. They have ceased since then, probably because so many of the worst of the vandals have been killed by the Allies' troops.

We heard much of the destruction wrought in Belgium, and quite rightly, but the French, burning with hate at the shooting of

innocent men, women and children, and the destruction of their towns and villages, were forced to suppress the knowledge of these things because of military reasons. Glancing in December over the communiqués for the end of August and the beginning of September when, in the Vosges, the Meurthe and Moselle, and the departments further to the west as far as Soissons, day and night was spent in fierce fighting, one realises how little was known outside the actual area of the struggle. In Lorraine alone eight German army corps of First Line troops, a corps of Bavarian Landwehr, and a Reserve corps with cavalry and artillery were attacking much smaller French forces in the neighbourhood of Lunéville. More Bavarian army corps, two brigades of Prussian Uhlans, and the White Cuirassiers of the Imperial Guard were operating in attempts to seize the forests of Champenoux, while the army of Metz (which feinted as though it were making for Verdun but had really turned south and fronted towards Nancy) lay with its right on St. Mihiel, on the Meuse, and its left on Pont-à-Mousson. Wounded men who had been in this constant storm of shot and shell and had

engaged time after time in hand to hand bayonet struggles were surprised at the scanty references which were made to what they were bound to regard as important affairs. Like the rest of us they could not understand why more justice was not done to the invaluable efforts on the French right to hold up the second great line of German advance—an advance controlled by the Crown Prince himself. A Paris correspondent quoted the views of a private in a French line regiment on the subject. Said the French soldier: "These official messages are all the same. They say either too much or too little. Our General says too little." He went into particulars.

"It was on the frontier, close to Rezonge, that a bit of shrapnel gave me this scratch on the arm—it is nothing important; none of us were badly hurt in that little affair. We had started out from Lunéville soon after midnight to make a surprise attack; and we came on the enemy at about five o'clock in the morning, just to the north of Rezonge. The 'Bosches' who happened to lie in the path of my regiment showed very little fight, and the dragoons who were

with us took about 150 prisoners without losing a man. The regiment next in line to ours had a couple of men killed and an officer wounded; but those, so far as I know, were the only losses in our own little part of the affair.

"To the right and to the left of us, of course, there were other troops taking part in the movement. One lot of Germans, surprised by our cavalry and our advanced parties, shot their commandant because he refused to surrender. Our guns, when they got to work, scattered those who were inclined to make a stand, and the 'Bosches' bolted seven or eight miles beyond the frontier. We could see them hopping away like rabbits!

"Many of the prisoners we took were Alsatians or Lorrainers, who were only too pleased to fall into French hands. They told us that they had been very hungry there in the forests on the frontier, where no supplies could be brought up to them. But all of them must have been glad to get out of the forests. There has been too much fighting there. The place is pestiferous.

"Between Nancy and Lunéville, on the

railway, there was a good sharp fight between the guns. Ours broke up six German batteries, and I don't think that many of the German gunners got away. They had built a bridge across the Meurthe, but we drove them away from it, and they left fifty transport waggons full of bridge-making stuff when they went. The Germans shelled us as long as they could—it was a perfect storm of shrapnel while it lasted—but they shot badly. We did well that morning!"

He seemed to have wandered from his point and the correspondent had to bring him back to the subject of the "communiqué." He fished into his pocket and brought out his "Livret militaire" in which he had preserved a scrap torn from a newspaper. It was the "communiqué" referring to the little affair in question. "To the east of Nancy," it read, "we have made some progress in the neighbourhood of Rezonge and of Parroy." That was all!

It should be remembered that all this time the German newspapers and the German publication bureaux generally were cracking up the Crown Prince as a great and glorious commander worthy of the

highest traditions not only of the Hohenzollerns—these do not amount to very much—but of the greatest of German heroes. The only one to be named in the same breath with him was said to be Alaric the Goth. The Parisians used to describe the Kaiser as a café-concert Napoleon. His son proved himself a café-concert Alaric. He had captured the venerable fort of Longwy, and had made a demonstration against Verdun, which was futile to absurdity. The German General Staff committed the folly of officially representing these as great French reverses. Nothing he did in this region affected the French campaign and the sole result which one can note as accruing from this lavish laudation of the Crown Prince was that it gave him a further accession of that disease called by the French *tete montée* and led him to commit blunders which have materially assisted the Allies and added to the long series of disasters to the German arms.

## CHAPTER V

### The Fight for Nancy

To appreciate the value of Nancy to the Germans one must consider its situation and resources, and especially its position in relation to Paris. The town, at the commencement of the war, contained roughly 120,000 inhabitants. It lies on the left bank of the river Meurthe, and is only 170 miles south-east of Paris. Not only is it the centre of a network of excellent roads leading right into the heart of France, but it is the junction of an important railway system. One line runs over the frontier direct to Strasbourg and actually communicates with the strategical railways built by the German Government on the banks of the Rhine. Another line goes to Metz and thence to Treves, while on the French side there are lines to Epinal and Belfort and a main line passing by Bar-le-Duc, Vitry, the great camp at Chalons

and Château-Thierry to Paris. Both Bar-le-Duc and Château-Thierry are important junctions, the former leading direct to Sedan and the latter to Rheims, Laon, and through Amiens to the Channel. From the point of view of railway communications there is no need to enlarge on the importance which the Germans attached to the capture of the capital of the Meurthe-et-Moselle.

The town is a prosperous manufacturing centre. It contains a wealth of supplies of all kinds and could have been held to ransom for an enormous sum by the chief of the German organised brigandage, the Crown Prince. In fact it will be remembered that the Kaiser himself felt that success there was so vital that he lent his armies the inspiration of his own presence, and issued a famous order that Nancy must be taken at all costs and under his eye. It was not taken, though the cost to the Germans was enormous, and all that the Kaiser saw was some of his finest troops blotted out of existence. The ancient part of the town is noticeable for its narrow, irregular streets, but there is a modern part which has broad, open boulevards commanding a view of the

surrounding hills. The handsome Place Stanislas divides the old town from the new, and contains many fine buildings, such as the Hotel de Ville, and the Bishop's Palace, while there is also the ancient cathedral and the church of the Cordeliers. Without doubt all these buildings would have suffered from the usual expression of German "kultur," but in this case all that the Germans have been able to do to Nancy is to throw a few ineffective shells into it.

When the French were defeated and compelled to retreat from Mörchingen, their General had already selected the positions he would take up for the defence of the town. The French had a splendid line of natural positions to fall back upon which only required a little preparation and determined courage to hold against an enemy attacking in immensely superior numbers. The Germans, after the battle at Mörchingen, had swept onwards with great rapidity. They had captured Lunéville and at Dombasle were on the banks of the Meurthe. Their lines curved eastwards from Crevic to Erbewiller, then westward from there to Champenoux and

skirted the Forêt de Champenoux to Jeandelaincourt. They reached there on August 22nd, and it was the limit of their advance.

Mention has been made of the hills which surround Nancy and make it such a picturesque and attractive place of residence. They are known as the Couronné de Nancy, and rise to considerable height, are well wooded and are noticeable for their abruptness and terraced character. Many of these terraces are actual plateaux, and one, known as the Plateau of Amance, was the height which dominated and rendered inoperative the German advance. It was, in fact, this hill of Amance which all experienced observers who have studied this portion of the campaign agree as having shattered the German attack. They held the village of Champenoux and the forest of the same name at its foot, but their attempts to capture the hill itself cost them the lives of hundreds of thousands of good soldiers. The retreat on the Mortagne had taught the French that they must modify their system of offensive and be content with wearing down their abounding enemy, while they themselves lost as few men as possible.

They took up a line from south to north with their right flank resting lightly on the river Mortagne, which a little lower falls into the Meurthe. Curving by Drouville—Remériville, eastwards, they compelled the bend in the German line already noticed. They held the forest of St. Paul and Languvelotte strongly with the south-eastern slope and crest of Amance. The crest of Bouxieres aux Chênes and the lower heights of Montenoy, the neck and village of Bratte, the Col de Sivry, the height of Mont St. Jean and Mont Toulon to the north were also French. The latter was their extreme left and overlooked the German right at Jeandelaincourt. General Joffre had carefully surveyed the position with General de Castelnau and General Pau, and they recognised that here they had a natural fortress made to their hands, of enormous strength, against which the Germans were bound to batter themselves to pieces in vain.

Nancy always contained a garrison numbering several divisions and reinforcements were available from Toul, while the men of the divisions who had been driven over the frontier after Mörchingen were so far

from being demoralised that they took a prominent part in the month's fighting that followed and the subsequent advance. The Germans had a great preponderance in men and abundant artillery, but the French outclassed them in the latter respect by possessing excellent artillery positions, especially on the Plateau of Amance, and the accuracy of fire was another factor in favour of the defenders. The French had also crowned the crests with their guns of 155 calibre and their long range kept down the effectiveness of the German heavy guns. The first German attack on the position, it will be noted, corresponded with the attack on the Allied left and justified the official description of August 22nd as the day on which between the Moselle and Mons a battle general was in full progress.

On the extreme right of the French armies the fighting was at first most marked about Dombasle, which was seized by the Germans, who also struggled hard to obtain Haraucourt and Rosiéres. They were compelled to retire and fell back on Crevic and its small stretch of forest. They tried the day after to gain the heights north of the road from Lunéville to Dombasle, and

made a furious onslaught on the French right at Vitremont. The only result was that they left thousands of their dead in the forests. A few days afterwards two French brigades tried to drive out the Germans from the neighbourhood of Serres, but failed. They could not obtain the necessary artillery support and gallant though the effort was, it was misplaced. They lost heavily and had to retire leaving many killed and wounded behind them. The latter had to remain where they fell unattended for days.

The Germans were in worse case for they had realised how vitally necessary it was to obtain Amance, and they delivered the first of a series of long drawn out and well sustained attacks on that hill of death through the forest of St. Paul from the south and the forest of Champenoux on the north. Their infantry were mown down as they advanced by the well-placed French guns on the plateau, and from their trenches the French infantry swept away the Germans like reapers do ripe corn. The beginning of September saw a new development, for by then German aeroplanes had indicated the positions of the

French batteries and the German heavy guns threw a perfect tornado of shells on to the plateau and the village on the reverse and the hill. The fire was ineffective, so far as the guns were concerned, and the infantry supports were well entrenched. Little harm was done and after some four days' bombardment the French were able effectively to reply.

Then came the Kaiser and the spectacular side of war. The weather had been foggy, and from time to time mist had covered the hills and made the French nervous of a German attack under cover of the obscurity. By September 6th these conditions had changed, and there was clear sunshine, so that when, two days afterwards, the Kaiser ordered that Amance was to be taken "regardless of cost" the French had the supreme satisfaction of seeing the Germans emerge from Erbéwiller, Champenoux and its forest and the forest of St. Paul in bright sunlight. According to all accounts the enemy advanced, because they were under the eye of their War Lord, with their bands playing and at their absurd parade step and pace. If this be so it was a piece of murderous folly on the part of the Kaiser and the subordinate generals.

The French gave no sign of movement. Their guns were silent and their infantry did not discharge a round. Instead the latter allowed the Germans to approach within less than 300 yards on the lower slopes of the hills and then dashing out with fierce yells bayoneted without mercy the surprised enemy. The survivors, tumbling down the hill in disorder, affected the troops coming in support. Few escaped into the shelter of the woods, where their columns had formed, for the French field guns caught them at point blank range and annihilated them. Again and again they returned to the attack trying to force that terrible hill with its invincible infantry supported by the deadly fire of machine guns and quick-firing field guns. They advanced either six or seven times. The French really ceased to count. They were almost sick of the slaughter when in a mad moment the Kaiser ordered that his own White Cuirassiers should be launched against the French position apparently as a last desperate effort. Probably the intention of this ludicrous charge of cavalry against infantry entrenched was due to some foolish memory of the action of

Bredow's horsemen forty-four years ago, and further to the north. Bredow's horsemen were thrown away, like the White Cuirassiers, to permit a breathing space for demoralised infantry.

The charge was a sheer waste of life. They never reached anywhere near the French infantry, but were smashed to pieces by the French shrapnel and all that remained of one of the Kaiser's most famous cavalry regiments were the dead bodies of men and horses which strewed the plain. No further infantry attacks were attempted. No troops on earth could have faced that blood-stained stretch of soil. Even the iron discipline of the German army could do no more, and they are hardly to be blamed, for at the last, so it is declared by French soldiers, they were firing through heaps of dead Germans in order to get at those of their foes who yet remained alive. Never was there such an example of the futility of the boasted German attack *en masse* against a well-armed, well-trained and well-entrenched enemy. The September sun set that evening on one of the ghastliest scenes in the annals of human battles and the German

Emperor must have realised then and there that not for him was there to be a triumphal entry into Nancy with its sequence of a successful advance on Paris.

It must have been for him a terrible evening, that of the 8th of September, when he retired to his headquarters knowing that many thousands of the flower of his army had thrown away their lives and effected nothing to forward his scheme for conquering France and, through France, England and Europe. He must have realised that it was the beginning of the end, for it coincided with the defeat of the Crown Prince's army further to the west and the consequent retirement of the army of General von Kluck, which had penetrated within twenty miles of Paris. There are no blacker days in the German calendar of this war than the 6th, 7th, and 8th of September.

General Joffre might have been able to command in person every movement throughout the whole of the Allied line from Nancy to Soissons and beyond, they so co-ordinated. For the following day saw the Germans faced with a general offensive. On the extreme right the French

followed up their tremendous success of the previous day by a counter-attack on the Germans, who were under cover in the woods and the terrain generally in front of Amance. It was largely an artillery action which ended in the French driving the invaders, such of them as were alive and unwounded, out of the woods and back to Mazerulles, Sorneville and Bezange-La Grande. The Germans begged for a truce and obtained one for a few hours in which to bury their dead. It is the last truce they will be granted by the French, for events proved that they seized the opportunity to bring up and safely mount their heavy guns in the positions from which they later attempted to bombard the reverses of the Couronné and the town itself.

Had this determined assault succeeded, nothing would have saved Nancy from capture with all its attendant consequences, including the turning of the right flank of the Allies and the probability of an advance on Paris from the south. In view of this tragic failure the attempts which the Germans made to overwhelm the defence in other directions seem of small moment, yet such was not the case. But for the high

tempered courage of the French any of them might have succeeded with equally disastrous results to the Allies. It was the failure of the army of Metz and of the Bavarian corps from Strasbourg to make any headway nearly a fortnight before which had compelled the Emperor to order a frontal attack on Amance. The Prussians advancing from Pont-à-Mousson tried to seize the western approaches of the hills on the French left. They followed the line of the Moselle, their first object being to capture the little town of St. Genevieve. The French had foreseen and prepared for an attack on this quarter and so contrived their defences that they compelled the Germans to enter upon a long wasteful and ineffective artillery preparation. The French had constructed a line of entrenchments which caused the Germans to mistake the real frontage of the defending force. They were trapped into ascending a spur of the hills at an acute angle, and instead of finding themselves as they had imagined on the left of the French position they really hit its centre.

The French did not employ their batteries to reply to the enemy's cannonade and their

gun positions were therefore hidden. It was only when the dense masses of German troops had reached a close range that they commenced to fire, pouring in salvo upon salvo from their "75's" besides a perfect hailstorm from the mitrailleuses and doing dreadful havoc on the advancing, closely packed regiments. The Germans were hurled back and again the German guns resumed the bombardment. Once more the French were silent, as though they had been destroyed by the German artillery fire. Fresh German troops were sent forward over this natural glacis which was now strewn with the bodies of their comrades and slippery with blood. This time the French guns showed no sign of life and not a bullet was fired by the infantry. Steadily the Germans charged up the slope in slow, methodical fashion until within two or three hundred yards of the French trenches. Once more it was "thus far and no further." The deadly Lebels and machine guns poured a withering hail of projectiles into them and they fell rank upon rank. It must be said that their comrades did not hesitate. They clambered over the dead bodies until they in turn were piled so high

that their successors could leap from them over the wire entanglements. At one point alone the French counted nearly four thousand dead in front of a relatively small section of that slope of death.

Nightfall saw the army of Metz as well as its supports from Lunéville beaten and in retreat, a retreat which did not cease till they were once more back at Pont-à-Mousson.

A trained and experienced observer in *The Times* summed up the situation as follows : " General de Castelnau and General Pau always had the game well in hand, and when it was over 11,000 German dead lay in the fields and forest round Lunéville (which was bombarded by the French and partly burnt by the Germans) and 20,000 were dead between Nancy and Champenoux. On September 6th the German Emperor made a last desperate attempt to turn defeat into victory by ordering the famous White Cuirassiers of his Imperial Guard to storm the fort of Amance which with its guns had from the beginning done more even than the splendid courage and endurance of the field troops to keep the Germans from their prey. But when that had

failed the end had come, for the trifling bombardment of Nancy on the night of September 9th did little damage and was only due to a fit of spleen. The Germans were beaten and knew it, and knew also that they had lost the battle of the Marne. So while their troops on that part of the line were retiring to the Aisne the disappointed assailants of Nancy were also in full retreat. On September 12th their three weeks occupation of Lunéville was over, and a little later all their forces on that side were crowded back to the frontier or across it, and nearly all the towns and villages of Lorraine were freed from their grasp."

## CHAPTER VI

### Beating the Crown Prince

One of the immediate effects of the French victory was that the Germans evacuated Vitry-le-Francois which they had fortified, and when attacked at Sermaize and at Révigny they fled, leaving great quantities of munitions of war behind them. The main force occupying the Argonne commenced to retire, fighting rearguard actions, towards the north, by the Forest of Belnoue, and the French advanced permanently to Champenoux, Rehainviller, and Guebwiller, clearing the Germans out of St. Dié. The troops were rewarded by an order of thanks issued by General Joffre in which he praised their vigour, tenacity, and dash. They well deserved it for they had fought magnificently against tremendous odds. Three days afterwards the inhabitants of Nancy had the satisfaction of seeing posted up at their Mairie

an official communication stating that the enemy had fallen back upon Etain, Metz, Delme, and Château-Salins.

It is necessary to retrace our steps somewhat and discuss what had happened on the left of General Pau's gallant and invincible little army. Certain changes had been made in the German command. The Crown Prince, after his absurd demonstration in force before Verdun and his reduction of the 17th century fort at Longwy, had fallen into line on the left of General von Kluck's army and was bearing down on Paris for the great coup of the war in which it was arranged that he should figure prominently. A curious fact is that not for some time afterwards was it known what had happened to him and his army. The French Headquarters Staff were in ignorance of the extent of their success, and the official communiqué issued from Bordeaux was most guarded in its terms, suggesting a drawn battle and indicating a belief that the first of the German horde to retire from Paris and the Marne was that of General von Kluck.

That General was in fact made the scape-

goat by the Germans, for the Crown Prince was in practical command of the German left wing. So far as the British public were concerned the news of what had occurred was first revealed by Mr. Granville Fortescue, one of the ablest of the many able war correspondents which the *Daily Telegraph* sent out to the front. Mr. Granville Fortescue realised the situation as no one else did, and his account of what took place is a document of great historical value. He points out that in the plan of the German operations the path that promised the greatest glory was reserved for the Crown Prince. This was in accordance with the policy of bolstering up the fast fading popularity of the House of Hohenzollern. Throughout Germany he was acclaimed as the hero of Longwy. His futile demonstration against Verdun was magnified into a series of glorious assaults. In official bulletins he was declared to have inflicted a severe defeat on the French.

Now, as a matter of fact, so far from being defeated the French army opposed to him had carried out a skilful and effective retirement before superior numbers, and when

the time came took up the offensive in a fashion which has made it impossible, probably, for the Crown Prince ever to visit Paris except as a prisoner of war. Mr. Granville Fortescue in his despatch made it clear that, contrary to the general impression, the great battles round Paris did not begin with the defeat of General von Kluck. That commander's misfortunes were due directly to the retirement of the German left wing on the night of September 6th–7th. The mystery which has surrounded the movements of the German Army disappears now that we know that the main body of the Crown Prince's army retired forty kilometres during that night. Such a retirement amounts to a rout.

The Germans advanced on the line Verdun – Ste Menehould – Chalons sur Marne. Their progress was exceedingly rapid. When the Uhlans of Kluck's force were in Chantilly the main body of the Kaiser's heir's army was yet 200 kilometres away. Then this army was ordered to push on with all speed. The order of march of the German Army up the Champs Elysées was being drawn

up, and as the Crown Prince was to head this historic march, undoubtedly dressed in the uniform of his pet regiment, the Death's Head Hussars, the French troops opposing him must be brushed aside. Fighting began at daybreak on September 6th, adding another to the long list of decisive battles which have taken place on Sundays. The struggle continued until dark, and trustworthy information shows that the artillery fire went beyond anything the history of warfare has hitherto recorded. The French guns were served with undeniable superiority, and the loss they caused to the Germans cannot be approximately estimated. I note that Mr. Granville Fortescue hesitates to give the figures which he obtained from a trained observer who was on the battlefield before the dead had been touched. The loss was roughly 100,000, of whom 20,000 were killed.

Much has been said about the wonderful French artillery which thus broke up the German plans, but no adequate description has appeared outside the technical press. A French artillery officer writing to a relative in England who had asked for some account

of the famous "Soixante-quinze" says: "The 75 mm. cannon is a field piece, that is to say, it is light, easily transportable, very rapid, and available in almost any kind of country. It is the model of 1900. The German equivalent, which is not to be compared with it, is the 77·25 mm., the projectiles of which are less heavy than those of our '75' and far less effective. With our field pieces it is possible to deluge a given space with projectiles, for each piece can fire eighteen rounds a minute. The fire sweeps from right to left and *vice versa* in such a way that a body of troops surprised in the open without any means of taking cover by a battery of 75's is assailed with shell at a very high rate. The shells explode automatically at a height of about four metres from the ground. You see, then, that such a body as I have mentioned is quickly annihilated. It is worse still if there are three or four batteries which are unmasked and put in operation at the same time. The effect is like that of a gigantic sickle. When the war is over it is to the 75's that we shall have owed the victory."

The wonder about these weapons is how

the supply of ammunition is kept up. To maintain the rate of fire which went on through this battle along the line which the French were holding from Verdun to Sezanne must have required a perfect transport service. The total artillery expenditure is put at four thousand shells, and hundreds of ammunition waggons must have been emptied. The Germans with inferior artillery suffered severely, and there seems to be no doubt that their supply of ammunition began to fall short. Then they were fighting in the north-east against one of the best of the armies of France, that commanded by the veteran General de Castelnau. It contained a division which boasts itself to be made of "iron," and is in friendly rivalry with another which declares that it is made of "steel." Two such divisions require a commander of metal, and they found it in General de Castelnau.

He is a smallish man who always suggests to Englishmen who have met him something of Lord Roberts. He could claim the prize offered in France for large families, having no fewer than ten sons, and whimsical stories are told of him making miscounts at family gatherings

as to whether all were present or not. Several of his sons are serving in the French Army, and two have made the great surrender for *La Patrie*. One of them was serving directly under his father when he was killed. The General did no more than kiss the dead lips, and then the stern little man continued his task of directing the battle. He has since lost another son, and it is not to be wondered at that he is one of the most terrible foes that the Germans have to meet. A man who animates his soldiers with his own iron nerve and unconquerable spirit. When this war is over and we welcome the victorious French Generals, say to a great reception in the City of London, some of us will be prepared to give an extra special greeting to General de Castelnau, one of the most capable of General Joffre's lieutenants.

The German Army had to advance on a front nearly forty miles in extent. Now the north-east of France is not the best of countries for an army to operate in, and it is particularly bad in the neighbourhood of Sezanne. There is much marsh land in the valley bottoms and the necessary deployment caused by these impassable

marshes gave the French their opportunity. Not that they escaped the need for heavy sacrifice. It is stated that one corps was practically wiped out of existence, but each French soldier fought with a stubbornness and a courage unequalled even in the brilliant annals of their nation. The Germans could do nothing against the resistance they offered, and when night fell neither side could claim much advantage in position gained. That the French had held their ground and were ready to take the offensive was as good as a victory. That the enemy had not forced its way through the opposing troops was tantamount to a defeat for the Germans.

And then came the German retreat. As Mr. Granville Fortescue said in the *Daily Telegraph:* "The long line was giving way, not only on the right towards Paris, but also on the left, where there seems to have been heavy fighting about Verdun. It has been suggested that there was a breakdown of the transport service in this direction. If this were the case, after the enormous expenditure of ammunition during the first day of action, the Crown Prince's army would have been obliged to fall back

or be captured. The circumstance of their precipitate flight incline me to the last explanation. Of course, the fighting on this wing continued for several days, but the Germans were only trying to save what was left of a badly crippled army from complete destruction.

"With the Crown Prince retreating, there was nothing left for von Kluck's and von Bulow's armies but to execute the same manœuvre. This brought about the battle of the Aisne and all the subsequent fighting. In the fighting the French have been uniformly successful. It goes without saying that the English troops contributed largely to this success. Their bravery has passed into a proverb throughout France."

The defeat of the Crown Prince assisted in relieving the pressure on the forces defending Nancy, and made that commander responsible for the failure of both the German main attacks—that on Paris through Belgium and on Paris through Nancy. His reputation as a general was lost in the mud of the French marshes, and since then he has done little more than potter in the Argonnes, at times running narrow escapes from still more personal

disasters. Other German generals have had to extricate him time after time, and he has proved a valuable asset—to the French Eastern Army. Rumour in the French capital frequently associates him with capture, and fact always with defeat.

At any rate as the battle progressed on the Aisne it was found possible to continue the French offensive-defensive in Lorraine and Alsace with fewer troops, and a fresh army was formed by General Joffre in rear of Nancy which enabled him to make a redisposition of his troops further westward. He withdrew General de Castelnau and his army, all now veterans tried and proved, to reinforce his line in Champagne, and to surprise the Germans who were enjoying themselves in the cellars of Rheims. I saw something of this great transfer from the French right to the left centre, and the details are not without interest even to non-military readers.

The movement was effected for the most part by railway. The whole railway system of France seems to centre on Paris, and the German military writers have always counted upon it as being inefficient compared with their own, which was constructed

with a single eye to strategy and an invasion of France. They were convinced that the French railways would not stand the strain put on them, and they did their best when they reached, for instance, Amiens, to bring about a breakdown by making prisoners of all the railway employees on whom they could lay their hands in that important junction and centre for the exchange of traffic.

In France all employees of the several lines become part of the army when war breaks out, and are doing military service, though going about their normal duties. Everything on or about the railways is at once placed at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief, and the guarding of the lines is carried out by territorials—that is, men who are too old for the active reserve. Many of them were old enough, I observed, to wear the medal for the war of 1870, and these grizzled veterans were proud to be out again relieving younger men of a duty, necessary but irksome. They were sometimes a trial to the inquiring stranger, for they were desperate against spies and had a fine excess of zeal. The wives would bring their meals to their husbands, and

the couple would share the food at the man's post of duty. Mostly their uniform was of canvas with the national kepi, and they were armed with the old pattern breech-loaders without magazines. Many were content with an army cap and a brassard. Each railway employee sports one of these indicating his rank and duty, and at important places the station master is a commissioned officer. The signalling on the French railways has always been a dark mystery to me and, possibly quite wrongly, I have a slight opinion of it. The fact remains that the troop trains only travelled at ten miles an hour and at ten minutes interval. The object was to lessen the risks of and the damage done by collision.

The length of the trains was anything up to thirty or thirty-five of the big goods waggons, which can carry forty men or eight horses. Sometimes wooden forms were rigged up for the men inside the waggons, but generally the floors were simply heaped with straw, and the men lay about in not unpicturesque attitudes, with the sliding doors in the middle left open for light and air. Wounded men, when General de Castelnau's big movement was in full swing,

had no better accommodation than this, and were fortunate if they spent less than a week on the way to the base hospital. As a result many of them arrived at places like Villeneuve St. Georges, to the south of Paris, in a terrible state, and our Royal Army Medical Corps and the French surgeons were very grateful for assistance given them by the doctors and trained ambulance men who form part of the rank and file of the London Scottish. Many lives and limbs were lost through the enforced delay in reaching skilled care, but not a word can be said in the way of criticism. The needs of the Army, the active fighting Army, had priority, and it must always be so. Wounded men had to suffer. Afterwards it was much better, for the French hospital trains were well arranged and equipped, and they got their wounded away quickly.

That was almost the only period when our men were not well supplied with food and other requirements. No ordinary trains were run, and General Sir Wallis King, the British Director-General of Supplies, whose excellent work has secured him mention in Sir John French's despatches, had to personally insist, he told me, on certain

trains being at his service. But despite all this transport of troops, our supply was so well managed that by the end of the week in September in which General Joffre was forming new armies, and bringing Castelnau's veterans into fresh positions a hundred miles away, we could furnish the French with from 20,000 to 30,000 rations a day. It was then that they became acquainted with "bully beef," which has since become an article of popular diet in Paris itself. The French did not recognise in the word "bully" their own "bouilli" or boiled beef, and they have called the tinned meat "monkey." But they are always glad of it. The French supplies were chiefly of fresh meat, and for long it arrived irregularly, but their troops can make a well-cooked meal where most of our men would fail to find material to boil a pot.

One of their great faults was that the horseman, whether cavalry, artillery or transport, could not understand why his beast should be fed, watered and cared for if he, the master, was hungry and thirsty. The cavalry and the artillery horses had very hard work as may be imagined when they were screening the retreat of the

army down to the Marne and the Eastern frontier. Their horses were in a terrible state because the French, though fine horsemen, are not good horsemasters. Afterwards all was changed. The mounted arms were accustomed to share fighting and quarters with the British, and they saw and soon appreciated the care given by our soldiers to their animals. A better time has set in for French army horses, for the commanders, observing the condition which the mounts of General Allenby's division, in the hands of leaders like Sir Philip Chetwode, Gough and Byng, speedily regained after a ten days' rest on the Marne, are seeing to it that their men are following suit. Let me say from what I learned during days spent in cavalry barracks and talks with the men, that the soldiers are willing to fall in with the new order of things. What an English soldier does is absolutely right in the French view. They are prepared to imitate him not only in looking after their horses before they trouble about themselves, but they took to trenching work because our mounted men did, and they are undemonstrative because Tommy never shows his feelings. Sometimes this absolute worship

of the British soldier causes one to choke, partly with laughter, partly with sheer pride.

It was the latter when certain French Dragoons told me of the honour they felt it to be to have charged with British cavalry the massed regiments of the Kaiser and routed them utterly, though five to one. No wonder the German Minister for War has now intimated to the German officers training new troops that the day of cavalry charges is over, and that the only use of horses is "to go at an easy pace for long distances from point to point." That may be the rôle of German cavalry in the future, and that it should be so is due to the gallant cavalry of the French and British armies who out-scouted, out-charged, and fought out of existence the Uhlans, Cuirassiers, and the crack horsemen of the Emperor's own Prussian Guards. The terror-inspiring Uhlans became themselves so frightened that on one occasion they fled from the mounted escort of a horsed supply-train moving along a road when they might easily have captured every one of the long line of waggons. In fact, particularly on the eastern flank of the French army, the

cavalry have almost spoilt the game for themselves by driving every German horseman beyond the limits of the horizon.

The French retain for their cavalry the steel helmet as well as the characteristic uniforms. The helmet, however, is covered with a yellow-brown cloth for campaign purposes. An opening is left at the back for the long horse-hair plume, and when the wearer is clean-shaven this gives him a curiously feminine appearance, as though he were a girl with her hair down. The French horseman has shown that there is nothing feminine in his behaviour in the crash of battle and the meeting of squadrons. The Cuirassiers also retain their cuirasses and go into action with them. It is even said that these steel breastplates have saved many a life. After a few weeks campaigning, they certainly became both rusted and well dented. When cavalry is being taken by rail, as was the case with those of Castelnau's army, the men share the waggons with their horses, and one can hear when the beasts become restless that their masters are having an exceedingly lively time of it among the hooves.

General Joffre was anxious that this

movement along his front should be effected without the knowledge of the enemy, and he took extraordinary precautions with that end. Marching was done at night as much as was possible, and an instruction was issued that troops who were on the roads during the day should, when an aeroplane was seen—and the enemy's aeroplanes were very busy at that time—should turn and seem as if they were tramping the other way. The "Iron" division put in some wonderful marches. They boast in peace time that they do two hundred kilometres on foot every week, and they appeared to get tired positively of train travelling. One of the battalions, finding that it was within five miles of its camp, and learning that the train would be held up for probably half an hour or so, made no bones about it, but left the waggons, shouldered their packs and baggage, and tramped off in the darkness, saying they would be there first. Unfortunately, the enemy did get wind of this movement through an indiscretion of a censor, and all that was hoped from it was not realised. In addition the Germans, thinking that the right wing had been unduly weakened, made a furious attack

on the French Eastern Army. They had been deceived, and were again beaten back with severe losses. Thereafter in the region of the Meurthe and Moselle, the troops set themselves down once more to steady and persistent fighting, and to a slow but sure advance.

## CHAPTER VII

### In the Vosges

All the fighting was not over, and continued fiercely for weeks. The French, if they retired rapidly, came again surely and made certain of their ground in Lorraine, the Vosges and Alsace, and also in the Argonne. In the latter the progress made was secured by the infantry, and there must have been some fine combats which cannot now be put on record. One regrets that competent observers were not with the force that early in the war worried and outmanœuvred the Crown Prince.

When General Joffre had formed his new armies, there were several changes in the commands, and as the *Bulletin des Armées* remarked, "none of the mistakes were again committed, which were noted and punished in August." Like ourselves, the French War Office is secretive on the punishment of high officers unless they are

tried by General Court Martial. It is well known that several high officers were dealt with by being sent to posts which were honourable and—ornamental. Between the Oise and the Argonne the Generals commanding after August were Maunoury, D'Esperey and de Cary. They had their trials on October 2nd, when the Emperor came in person to encourage his armies to break through to Paris by the east of Rheims. It was another of his expensive "cut-through-at-all-costs" visits. All he saw was the defeat of more of the flower of his active army. In fact, the handling the Germans had was attended with heavy loss, and three days after the battle the enemy's dead were still lying in heaps on the field. Labour could not be obtained to inter them, and special means had to be taken to incinerate them least they should breed a plague. And yet the Kaiser went off to Ypres to try the same "strategy" there very shortly afterwards.

All this time the Germans were trying hard to advance on Toul and then on Nancy from the north-west, and when that could not be done, they struggled to reach the same points from the south-east by

way of the Valley of the Meurthe. It was a fight for the Vosges, and by consequence for Alsace. The Vosges have always meant much to France. They rise along the western bank of the Rhine and are very like the Black Forest range on the eastern bank of that river. Practically they stretch 150 miles from Basle to Mainz between the departments of Vosges and Meurthe in north-east France and German Lorraine on the one hand, and Alsace on the other. The highest point is the Ballon d'Alsace or de Guebwiller, which rises to nearly 5,000 ft. All through the slopes of the Vosges the French had prepared forts and gun positions. The wayfarer often comes to clearings which are the beginning of military roads, and if he understands these matters will realise that they probably lead to a "false battery," that is a spot ready for use as a gun position. The French are adepts at the employment of their artillery now that they have a really mobile weapon. They can thus move them from parapet to parapet, which are all protected by elaborate entanglements planned in peace time with leisure and thoroughness. The Ballon d'Alsace closes in the head of

the Moselle Valley and the main road to the Gap of Belfort passes right over its summit.

The French at first, and indeed for a long time, were content to guard the line of approach in Epinal, Nancy and Toul. This lies in the great trench-like river valley, and the Germans tried to make way at St. Mihiel where they failed. Had they succeeded, they would have been in touch with the Crown Prince's army in the Argonne. They could also have advanced on Toul and in turn on Nancy. This is described as the German advance by the Meuse, and was followed by an attempted advance by the Meurthe. They came on from Maon l'Etape, along the valley of the Hurbache, and so reached the north of St. Dié. Their immediate objective was to obtain command of the roads leading to the Plateau de Donon and the Col de Saales to the north and south-east and on the west to Lunéville and Nancy. St. Dié itself is on the Lunéville-Nancy road, and lies on both sides the Meurthe with high hills all round. The district is a curious one and was generally named in the official reports as the Ban de Sapt. That is a general title for a number

of small communities. One morning in mid October, the Germans made a determined attempt to secure this district and the roads.

The engagement was not a big one, but is typical of the fighting in the Vosges. The Germans made their way to a position which commanded the Ban de Sapt, their artillery opening fire on that place. A body of Bavarian infantry with machine guns attempted to carry one of the villages. The French, however, had a little surprise for the Germans. They had a battalion of Chasseurs with three mitrailleuses and some field guns carefully hidden, and in something like half an hour the German quick-firing batteries were destroyed, their field guns were escaping at the gallop, and the Bavarian infantry were swept out of existence with the bayonet. That little affair cost the enemy three hundred killed. The French do not expose themselves as they did at the beginning of the war. Instead, they wait till their 75's have subdued the enemy's artillery and driven the infantry, as in this case, into the houses in the villages. Then they came on with the bayonet, the woods allowing the French to get close up

to the village before they made their rush. A trick which was effective in this hill fighting, where the Germans approaching the French trenches had to come crouching up the slopes, was for the officer commanding the French to give the word for a bayonet charge. The men were instructed to remain still, in the trenches. The Germans, hearing the order, naturally rose to their full height to repel the dreaded charge and then the French would pour a deadly volley of musketry fire into them.

The armies faced each other for long at close quarters, and night and day the engagements took place, often developing into quite serious combats. Hardly a village or town has escaped bombardment. The force around Epinal did remarkably well. They were generally opposed by an enemy ten times their strength, but the whole country up to Rambervillers is wrecked and ruined. All these picturesque and beautiful valleys have become just so many burial grounds for the brave men who fought and killed one another while contesting the ground foot by foot. From the Argonne to the Vosges the French troops have proved their power of endurance.

Every day and every night round Verdun and on the heights of the Meuse they had to repel attacks, some of which were particularly violent. Special mention must be made of the affair of Chauvoncourt. The French, by a bold offensive, set foot in two barracks to the west of Chauvoncourt, a suburb of St. Mihiel. Twice they were driven back and twice they retook the position. They were holding the greater portion of it when a fierce fire from 11-inch mortars compelled the leading company to shelter in the cellars of the first barracks. At that moment the Germans blew up the building, which they had mined. The French lost in killed, wounded and prisoners about 200 men, but the effort of these gallant fellows had not been in vain. The French were able to destroy defensive works which had served as a base for the enemy's counter-attacks. The Germans who had tried to cross the Meuse in order to support their forces at Chauvoncourt had on the other hand suffered much more heavily. The French artillery prevented the enemy from gaining any ground at Chauvoncourt, and though the 4th Bavarian Regiment held the edge of the suburb, yet even with

reinforcements amounting practically to a division, they were still unable to retake the ground they had lost under the fire of the terrible French artillery.

By mid November we found the same places being named in the communiqués as was the case at the beginning of August. This in itself indicates how steady and irresistible has been the pressure exerted on the Germans by the French on the right wing of the Allied army. Pont-à-Mousson was once more in French hands, and heavy batteries were bombarding Arnaville, which is only ten kilometres from Metz. Under these circumstances it was not surprising to learn that the Germans were becoming alarmed about their lines of communication. Along that route the German supplies of all sorts of munitions of war were coming from Metz, the surrendered town which the French will strain every nerve to regain now that the time has come for avenging its betrayal. The destruction of Arnaville would involve the withdrawal of the German forces entirely from Lorraine. But not without a fierce struggle.

That they had made up their minds to this as inevitable was obvious from the

elaborate fortifications which they proceeded to construct at Cirey, Blamont and elsewhere on the frontier. It was at Cirey, it will be remembered, that the first fighting in the war took place, and it is at Cirey that the Germans arranged to offer the most determined resistance to a French invasion. They cleared out what inhabitants remained in the villages round about, sending them into Nancy through the Forest of Parroy. The men were made prisoners and compelled to work at the making of trenches and the laying of mines in front of their new position. That they felt it necessary to do this was an acknowledgment of failure. It marked the close of the great effort to overrun the east of France and showed that they had so far shot their bolt that they were under the urgent compulsion to prepare for the defence of their own territory.

When this stage was reached the situation was so sound, even tactically, for the French that the President of the Republic, with M. Viviani, the Prime Minister, was able not only to visit Nancy, but to make a tour of the places from whence the Germans had been driven out. M. Poincaré

drove in his motor car to Guebwiller and Lunéville and others of the towns and villages at the foot of the Grande Couronné. M. Keller, the Maire of Lunéville, and M. Minier were warmly congratulated by the President on the way they had stuck to their posts. They had been held as hostages by the Germans and ran very serious risk when in turn Lunéville was bombarded by the French. They were fortunate in escaping with their lives, for in this part of the country the enemy seemed to make it the rule to shoot any hostages they had seized when they were compelled to evacuate a place.

Everywhere throughout the long line which the French held extending from Soissons to Belfort, a feature of the fighting has been the closeness of the combatants to each other. Trenches in a vast number of cases were not more than two or three hundred yards apart. Both sides tried to make themselves as comfortable as possible, but the French were quickest in learning the art. The east of France is not the dryest section of that country, especially in the late autumn and during the winter months, but the soldiers contrive

to keep themselves dry by constructing in well chosen spots to the rear of their trenches underground dwellings approached by covered ways, which are of the nature of zigzags, and could be used for sniping and indirect fire. They are fond of giving these underground houses high-sounding names, and have planted in the earth which forms the roofs shrubs, which serve to disguise their character and position.

The nature of the ground, which is very unlike the flat plains of Flanders where the left wing of the Allies were fighting, enabled a system of drainage to be devised which kept the rain out and the men could sleep on their bags of straw in perfect comfort. The German attacks had a certain regularity about them, and were invariably preceded by a burst of artillery fire. This was a signal for reinforcements for the advanced trenches to prepare for eventualities. It was always a nerve racking experience, the German heavy shell plunging into the earth and exploding sometimes in front, but most often in rear, while overhead would shriek the shells from the French guns replying to the enemy. The impression created,

French soldiers said, was unimaginable, and produced a feeling as though both heaven and earth had taken on a new aspect.

The infantry attack generally followed with the inevitable repulse, and then comparative quiet would settle down unless the French in their turn had prepared a bayonet attack on the Germans. The African troops delight in this work. Neither the Turcos, the Senegalese, nor even the Zouaves care for work in the trenches, and it serves to explain why their losses were so very heavy in the first few weeks of the campaign. Their forte is the charge and must necessarily be so seeing the type of fighting which they have had to face in the French African dominions. Charge is met by charge in that savage warfare and delivered at a rapid pace. How effective it can be was shown during that twenty-four hours of terrific fighting at Charloi, when General Joffre was falling back on Paris. At that place the Turcos and Zouaves had full opportunity to indulge their favourite tactics, charging the masses of the Prussian Guard with the bayonet and piling the streets of the town with the

dead of the Kaiser's finest infantry. Unfortunately the French suffered severely in their turn.

During the slow, methodical advance made by the Eastern Army of France, it was always a welcome moment when these African troops got permission to move out at night and approach, with all the cunning of Red Indians, the enemy's trenches. The terror shown by the Germans when these wild figures suddenly swarmed in on the unsuspecting enemy whose sentries had been strangled or otherwise quietly disposed of did not lessen the satisfaction of the warriors from Africa.

Belonging, as he does, to a nation largely agricultural, the use of the spade seemed to come naturally to the Frenchman. Their troops have had to work as we would say like navvies, and most often when thick mists have come down or during the night. But it is not all digging and fighting. They organised, as only the French can, their *service de cuisine*. The hours for the meals may seem unusual. Coffee, of course, was forthcoming first thing in the morning, and at ten o'clock arrived *la soupe*, generally rich with vegetables and followed by a

stew of some kind. A similar meal would be served at five o'clock, and then those not actually on duty would turn in and sleep awaiting the unfailing night attack by the Germans. The cooking was done in a cottage if the cooking stove was intact, or in the field kitchens, which are very much on the lines of our own. The troops contrived washing places such as have since been described by the eye-witness with the British army, where by utilising a stream provision could be made for half a company to bathe at the same time.

When a battalion was in reserve and out of range of the German projectiles, the officers generally managed, like our own, to get up some form of amusement for their men, and in numbers of cases they got together quite remarkably good amateur companies, and performed revues which furnished opportunities for plenty of regimental wit and of gibes at the " Bosches," the sound of whose shells could be heard in the distance. Never did one come across anything that suggested despondency or lack of confidence. The temper of the French troops could not be bettered. They were daily facing death and suffered cold and hardships

and wounds, but their spirits never flagged. It was as if the souls of the soldiers who, under Napoleon, had swept over nearly all Europe were reanimating their descendants. The latter-day army of France, however, in each individual unit recognises that its rôle is changed, and that they are fighting not to establish, but to abolish a tyranny.

General Joffre's report in the *Bulletin des Armées*, published on December 5th, showed that the French even then were only at the beginning of their resources. He said: "Our forces are as large as they were at the beginning of the campaign, but the quality of the troops has enormously improved. All our soldiers are profoundly imbued with a sense of their superiority over the enemy, and they have absolute confidence in victory. The supply of ammunition for the artillery has been largely increased, while the heavy artillery of which we were short has been supplied and put to the test. The German scheme has sustained the following checks which have far-reaching consequences:

"The rush attacks on Nancy, the rapid march on Paris, the envelopment in November, the attack on Dunkirk and Calais and the attack on Ypres.

" In their futile efforts the Germans have exhausted their reserves and the troops which they are bringing up to-day are badly officered and badly trained.

" More and more Russia is asserting her superiority and the halt of the German armies in the East is doomed inevitably to turn into retreat."

## CHAPTER VIII

### Threatening the German Left

Anyone glancing at a map of Haute Alsace and what the French call the Territoire de Belfort will see that the term used in the geographies to describe the depression which lies between the last spurs of the Vosges and the first spurs of the great range of the Jura is not exact. The Gap of Belfort has none of the characteristics of a plain—the term commonly used for it in this country—any more than the great rolling downs at Salisbury suggest a flat surface. The Gap of Belfort consists of a series of low hills or downs separated by a multitude of valleys through which pass an endless number of small streams, which in the hollows spread out into lakes of considerable depth. These make the approaches to Belfort easy to defend, and it would be necessary for a German army of invasion to try to turn the flank of the fortress by

way of Montbéliard. But here another great obstacle presents itself.

To reach Montbéliard otherwise than through Belfort, the invaders would be compelled to make their way through Swiss territory between Basle and Delemont. They would thus reach the valley of the Doubs and turn, instead of destroying the obstacle. The Germans for a long time thought of doing this, and there are abundant proofs come to light since the war began that they had had it seriously in their minds to force the neutrality of Switzerland just as they violated that of Belgium. Under one pretext or another members of their Headquarters Staffs have made minute examination of the country from time to time in all the places through which they would have to pass, and marked down the routes which would best serve their advance. But if Germany contrived to create a certain sympathy among the Swiss of German race it was of doubtful value, and was more than counter-balanced by the feelings entertained against Germany by the Franco-Swiss cantons bordering on the French frontier. There the opposition to the German secret schemes was naturally

acute. These comings and goings of high officers from Berlin did not escape the Swiss observation. The Franco-Swiss newspapers did good service by denouncing the peril which threatened their country long before the conflict began, and, after four months of hostilities, as a result France on her Swiss frontiers has not been invaded, and there is now little prospect that the Germans will attempt the mad enterprise of turning the flank of Belfort through neutral territory.

The French are very much on the watch there. Under the direction of an energetic military Governor, General Thévenet, of whom the least that is said is that he knows his work, the French engineers have created marvels. The defences of Belfort in actuality are prolonged beyond the advanced forts. Not a feature of the terrain but is utilised. Each post is protected by a system of redoubts and blockhouses invisible at a distance, and strengthened by a triple ring of trenches carefully designed of which the faces are defended not only by barbed wire, chevaux de frise, caltrops, and abatis of wood, but by a system of ingeniously contrived waterworks, by which

inundations can be brought about. Belfort is, in fact, impregnable as far as a fortress can be made so. To lay siege to it would require at least five army corps, and now that the French are again at Altkirch and Mulhouse it would be necessary before making any attempt against the fortress to dislodge the French from all their positions in Alsace. This would be no small task, because Belfort, under the circumstances, is now not merely a defensive work, but provides a base from which a serious threat is made on Germany itself. The Germans realised this and have had to take troops, which might have been employed elsewhere with advantage, to strengthen their lines on the western bank of the Rhine.

All is then for the best on the French side. Life in Belfort, and the whole of the vast area included in the fortress, though active enough, would have seemed somewhat monotonous and wearisome were it not that the soldiers always had the hope that they would soon be in the firing line and engaged on a forward movement. They knew that in maintaining and strengthening their position there they were really fulfilling a great object, but,

like a mettled charger, eager to dash into a gallop, they were longing for the signal to march into Germany. The civil inhabitants also, as the French say, "champed the bit" but for other reasons. The strict regulations in force in a fortress during war time hit them hard. All foreigners were sent away. All the inhabitants who were useless and only added to the numbers to be fed were despatched to Nancy and elsewhere, and the population, which in ordinary times amounts to 35,000, was reduced to the military employees, the police and other functionaries, and a few traders. Very few women and no children were allowed to remain. None but soldiers were in the streets and they, for the most part, were men marching to and from their posts. Neither cabaret nor café was open and every shop, no matter what its character, had to be shut at eight o'clock.

The rural population, as is not uncommon under the circumstances, were the most troublesome to manage. They made great complaint of the regulation which compelled them to obtain a permit to enter or to leave even if the occasion was a slight one, and when permits were refused, as

they frequently were, they were voluble in their protests. In this quarter they belong to that type of French peasant which is always close in its dealings, and they resented the military requisition made on them for billeting officers and men. They strongly objected also to the sanitary measures which were ordered and enforced by the Governor, but their children will benefit by the drainage works of a permanent character which were carried out in order to ensure the health not only of the troops but of the ordinary population. Typhoid fever has long been endemic in this region owing to the polluted state of the water supply, and all the soldiers underwent innoculation against the disease. Provisions are stored in Belfort in abundance, and one of the advantages of being quartered there is that the men get the ordinary bread and not that baked for the army in the field.

Life in the heart of the fortress cannot be described as unpleasant, for hotels were open though occupied chiefly by the staff officers. The food was excellent, and one who stayed there for a few days is prepared to say that he was better served than has

often been the case in a hotel, with a name, in Paris in peace time. The French officers were delightful men to meet, keen on their work and free from any suspicion of boastfulness or swagger. In fact, life was run on much quieter lines than in the case of most English messes. An almost conventual rule of silence prevailed, but one rite was observed each evening that was striking. At the principal table, which was always presided over by a General or the senior officer present, at the close of dinner a captain of Engineers would stand up and in the midst of dead silence would read aloud the bulletin published at three o'clock each day in Paris relating to the progress of the war.

War brought together in a true confraternity men of much diversity in occupation, mind and character. Not only were there the officers who were professional soldiers, but others who had been called from civil life as reservists or territorials. They came from all parts of France and included engineers, manufacturers, professors, advocates, farmers, and commercial men, and all found themselves after two or three months of contact perfectly homogeneous.

It was the same in the advanced posts. Indeed there the impression was strengthened rather than diminished. At the quarters of the commandant of each section of the fortress one found the same diversity in origin and the same fraternity. Between officers and men the like exchange of cordiality was to be noticed. Constant care had to be taken against surprise and espionage, therefore twenty times a day even the officers would have to show their papers of identity, particularly to the sentries and patrols. The formality completed, the soldier might say " Excuse, me, mon capitaine, it is an order," to which the officer would reply : " You are quite right, my lad."

It was from Belfort that Commander Briggs with Lieutenant Sippe and Lieutenant Babington, of the Naval Flying Corps, set out on their successful expedition to destroy the Zeppelin sheds at Friedrichshaven on Lake Constance. There is an aviation ground and aeroplane park at Belfort, and a ceremony which took place there has been picturesquely described by M. Thiebault-Sisson :

" Ten o'clock in the morning, with a clear

sky and a temperature that would freeze a wild duck. Over the aviation ground at Belfort whistles an icy wind. In a huge shed, of which one end is occupied by spherical balloons, 1,500 men of the garrison are gathered. To the left is a battalion of infantry, to the right a company of engineers and detachments from all the *corps d'elite* which the fortress contains, and near them a battery of artillery, with a regimental flag. In the middle, side by side, and fronting the entrance of the shed, are two young men, clean shaven and without arms, who might be taken, owing to the absence of any badge on their caps and by their workmen's jackets and black overalls, to be ordinary civilians were it not for the strip of gold braid which encircles their sleeve. They are the two English officers who the day before had bombarded Friedrichshaven, the Zeppelin factory. One, tall, bony and thin, may have passed his thirtieth year a little. He is Lieutenant Sippe. The other, short and slender, is not more than twenty-three. He is Lieutenant Babington.

"The drums beat, the trumpets sound, and the troops carry arms. General Thévenet, the Governor, comes forward,

followed by his pennon bearer and the French flag, with his Guard of Honour. The Governor halts before the English officers and says: 'In the name of the President of the Republic, and by virtue of the powers which are conferred on us, we make you Chevaliers of the Legion of Honour.' And upon the breast of Sippe, and afterwards on that of Babington, the General fastened the Star which marks their rank in that distinguished order of brave men. Then in due form, with his sword, he gives them the accolade on each shoulder. The ceremony closed with a march past before the two young officers.

"The same evening in the hotel, the officers of the garrison offered to their English comrades a dinner of honour, in the course of which General Lecomte and the Administrator of the District of Belfort, M. Goublet, made speeches in French; Colonel Lanty of the Engineers in English, and Lieutenant Sippe replied in French. At the close of dinner I had an interview with Lieutenant Babington. He told us in the simplest possible way, and as if it were an everyday affair, about the feat of arms in which he had taken part.

"'Yesterday morning at half-past ten, in the biplanes which we brought from England, Lieutenant Briggs, Lieutenant Sippe and myself left the aviation ground. Our machines followed each other at five minutes interval, and we made straight over Alsace. When we had found the line of the Rhine, we followed that river, taking care to constantly leave it upon our right, so as to avoid flying over Swiss territory. In two hours and a half we had flown the 200 kilometres to the Lake of Constance. We had maintained during all our flight a height of 750 metres. Over the lake we separated so as to attract less attention, and came down to about 150 metres. We flew over Friedrichshaven at a slow rate, arriving from three different sides, one from the lake and the other two from the north and south. We each had six bombs at our disposal. Sippe was able to launch all his. I was only able to throw five, the machine for throwing them failing me at the sixth. I do not know what happened to Briggs, who was in rear of us, and I cannot tell you whether the hangars contained Zeppelins or not or what damage our projectiles caused.

"'Scarcely had we been seen by the enemy than a furious cannonade broke out below us. Flying low as we were, we offered a beautiful target, and there was nothing for us but flight. When we found ourselves, that is Sippe and myself, over the right bank of the Rhine, after making several spirals to obtain a good height, we proceeded to follow the route by which we had left in the morning, and our return journey took us about the same length of time. You gave us a welcome here which we shall never forget. The Governor was not content to congratulate us, but he telegraphed to General Joffre and asked that we should have the Legion of Honour. He immediately accorded us that distinction. It is a reward which we never expected and which is far beyond our merits. We rejoiced exceedingly when a telegram arrived by way of Holland to let us know that Briggs is safe, though with his machine damaged and himself slightly wounded. He had been forced to land in German territory and had been made prisoner.'"

When on December 2nd the French occupied Lesmenil and the Dexon signal station, matters began to look serious for the

Germans, for at the same time the French carried the Faux summit to the south of the village of Bonhomme, which commands the frontier ridge and was used by the Germans as an observation post. Coincidently in Alsace the French seized Aspach le Haut and Aspach le Bas, south-east of Thann. The following day they occupied Burnhaupt and established themselves on the line Anspach-Pont and Aspach Burnhaupt.

The importance that the French attached to these advances is indicated by the fact that General Joffre, who neither wastes his time nor his words uselessly, made a long journey from his headquarters and paid a visit to the Alsatians of Thann. Nothing could be more touching than the brief account which appeared in the official record of this meeting between the Alsatians of Thann and the man who had planned the operations intended for their deliverance from the Prussian yoke. General Joffre saw before him old men who were French prior to 1870, and many quite young ones, the hope of the Alsace of to-morrow. The first to present arms to the General was a lad with a rifle. He was scarcely older than

the small boy who was brutally shot by the Germans for aiming his toy gun at them in play. More happy than the younger, this lad has the chance of becoming a French soldier. Although he knew nothing except the education he had received in a German school, with its German history and the German regulations, by sheer instinct he contrived to escape to the French lines.

Except the older men, there were few males in Thann. The men of active age were all at the war. Some had managed, by incurring a thousand dangers, to enter the French army, but the greater part were serving in the ranks of the Germans, threatened with death from French bullets in front and the bullets of their hated masters in rear. That is the tragedy of Alsace. General Joffre walked through the town saying little as usual, but in response to the welcome which was informally extended to him, he uttered only the sentence : " You are now French for ever." General Joffre is a man of his word, and probably that little phrase, with the events which have followed it in the Alsatian theatre of war, caused profound disquiet at the enemy's headquarters.

General Joffre's visit to the recaptured territory was somewhat of a surprise. All the intimation that was given to the local committee, which had taken charge of the resources of the place under the control of the military commandant, was that a distinguished personage was likely to arrive. It was thought that the visitor might be President Poincaré, who indeed was there later. The committee gathered in the Hôtel de Ville and waited doubtless with some impatience. At half-past two in the afternoon there came the sound of several motors. The cars stopped outside the Hôtel de Ville, and a number of officers descended. One was a General, and as he entered the room where the committee sat, a member of his staff announced simply, " Gentlemen, General Joffre." The surprise was complete, and it was with enthusiasm that the citizens shook hands with the Generalissimo of the Allied Army. In conversation he explained the motive of his visit.

For forty-four years General Joffre had, he said, been waiting for the great moment when Alsace, which had been stolen from France, would once more become part of

French soil. The moment had come. One by one all their kindred, the Gaulois of the left bank of the Rhine, were being freed. One by one the valleys of the Eastern Vosges were being liberated from their half century of slavery. Very soon like a ripe fruit the whole province would fall into their hands. It was only a question of days. Also he desired to come himself to instal in person the first French official since 1870. Finally, he exclaimed, " Permit me, gentlemen, to embrace in the person of your president the whole of Alsace, which is now indissolubly reunited to France."

In the East of France, on the frontier and on the entire front from Soissons to Belfort, the object of General Joffre was to keep occupied as large a number of German troops as possible. The French Headquarters summarises the story briefly : " In Alsace the first French attack, badly conducted, took them to Mulhouse, which they were not able to retain. The second attack directed by General Pau enabled them to retake it, and also to hold in the Vosges and on the plain the road to Colmar, inflicting huge losses on the Germans. Unhappily at that moment, adverse events (the defeat

at Mörchingen) in Lorraine and Belgium, compelled them to reduce in Alsace the extent and intensity of their effort. They had to fall back on the Grande-Couronné of Nancy and the south of Lunéville, where a counter-attack, delivered simultaneously by the armies of General Dubail and General de Castelnau, consolidated permanently their position."

In that brief passionless way the Headquarters Staff of General Joffre have told the great achievements of the French Army described in this volume. Since then we have seen the King of England and Emperor of India among his troops in the fighting line; a meeting of President Poincaré and the King at the Allied Headquarters and a review of Belgian troops by the King of the Belgians and our own monarch. King Albert has received on the field of battle the Order of the Garter, an event unparalleled for six hundred years. The British Sovereign has passed in perfect safety to and fro on the seas while the Great German Fleet hides ingloriously in harbour. These things are in themselves victories.

The Kaiser was to smash France in August. We are in a New Year, and his

triumphant march into Paris is now impossible. He is flitting from the scenes of one disaster after another, with his Empire threatened both on the East and West. In his downfall the Eastern Army of France will have taken a splendid share.

## CHAPTER IX: A Postscript

### The "Nibbles" become great "Bites"

While, in the old phrase, this book was passing through the press the forecast it contains, that events would develop on the French Eastern frontier, was in process of fulfilment. Not for nothing had General Joffre gone to Thann to instal the first French functionary since 1871, and declared that not again would Alsace form part of Germany. His "nibbles" have become great "bites," and as I write this postscript the Germans are sending what reinforcements they can to resist the French advance on Mulhausen and Colmar. The fortress of Metz has been bombarded by French airmen, and the great station with its troop trains seriously damaged. The railway at Altkirch is not merely threatened but broken, and had to be repaired time after time. The French forces north of Belfort are being supported by new bodies from

that fortress and so speedily and with such dash are the French sapping and mining, capturing lines and positions with the bayonets, and above all destroying the enemy by their invincible and unequalled artillery fire, that it will be no surprise to find them in Mulhausen and threatening the Rhine defences by the time our little volume is in print.

To some impatient people progress on the Allied East as on the Allied West may still seem slow. We see in the communiqués in January the names of the same places which figured there in, what looks now like ancient history, the months of August, September and October. Really, of course, that is not so long ago. Yet how changed it all is. In England we have come to realise the importance of the movements on the right of the Allies, and to appreciate the splendid work the French have done in first holding the Germans fast and then surely and not slowly driving them back. Just as when General Joffre decided that the time had come to assume the offensive after the avalanche advance of the Germans on Paris, the whole line of the Allies took it up in brilliant attack after brilliant attack,

so, with the New Year, the Allies, having utterly conquered the German initiative, have again taken a fierce offensive at every point of their long front. The hold of the enemy in all sectors, whether it is in Belgium where Ostend is threatened, at Soissons, at Rheims, at St. Mihiel or at Sennheim, is daily becoming a more precarious one.

Wherever they have been evil has been their good. In Belgium venerable priests have felt impelled to preach to the poor victims of German violence and lust, that under the circumstances the practice of abortion is not sin, and that there is absolution for the mother who destroys the offspring of an enforced and unnatural union with a German invader. "Holy and innocent victims of the Huns," is how one aged and beloved Belgian pastor describes these poor women. The official account of the German occupation of part of Eastern France is an appalling record of atrocities. The knowledge of what the Bavarian soldiers did wherever they were for a time in possession, has nerved the French soldier to revengeful zeal and for him the only good German is a dead German, as the

North American settlers used to say of the Red Indians.

The French Commission, writing of their investigations in the department of the Meurthe-et-Moselle, state: "We experienced a feeling of horror when we saw the pitiable ruins of Nomèny. Apart from a few houses which are still standing near the station there remains in this little town only a succession of broken, blackened walls. In the midst of the mass of ruins can be seen here and there a few bones of animals partly calcined, and the carbonised remains of human bodies. The fury of a maddened soldiery was let loose there without restraint." On August 14th the Germans, after firing into each other by mistake, entered the town at midday. According to one of them, their officers had told them that the French tortured the wounded, pulling out their eyes and cutting off their limbs. Consequently they were in a state of terrible excitement and committed abominable excesses—pillage, burning, and massacre. When the inhabitants tried to escape, their houses were deliberately set on fire. The unfortunate people, driven from the cellars by the fear of fire,

were brought down with the rifle like game. Many cases of murder and individual brutality are cited.

"The most tragic incident of these horrible scenes happened at the house of a man named Vasse, who had collected in his cellar several people. About four o'clock fifty soldiers invaded the house, broke in doors and windows, and finally set fire to the place. The refugees tried to escape, but were struck down one after another as they went out, M. Mentre was assassinated first; his son, Leon, fell next, with a young sister eight years old in his arms. He was not killed outright, and a rifle barrel was put against his neck and his brains blown out. It was then the turn of the Kieffer family. The mother was wounded in the arm and shoulder. The father, a boy of ten, and a girl of three were shot."

The report describes how several others were killed in similar circumstances and continues: "At the end of the butchery an officer came up and ordered the women still living to get up, saying 'Go away into France.' While all these people were massacred others, according to witnesses, were taken in herds to the fields under threat

of immediate execution. The curé, especially, owed it to exceptional circumstances that he was not shot." In explanation of the atrocities officers alleged that civilians had fired on them. This, the Commission states, is an absolute lie, because all the arms were in the Town Hall, and the population, terror-stricken, were hidden in the cellars. Further, the alleged incident would not excuse the destruction of the town and the murder of women and children. A list drawn up by the Councillor of the arrondissement shows fifty names.

During the first days of the occupation of Lunéville, the Germans contented themselves with pillage. For instance, on August 24th a house was rifled, and the objects stolen were loaded in waggons, in which were three women, one dressed in black, and the others wearing military uniform and appearing to be canteen keepers. On the 25th the attitude of the invaders suddenly changed. At about half-past three in the afternoon the Mayor saw soldiers firing. The Germans stated that the inhabitants had fired on them.

The Mayor of Lunéville offered to prove the absurdity of this by going round the

town with the authorities. On finding the corpse of a civilian, Crombez, in the road the officer who commanded the escort said to the Mayor: "You see this corpse. It is that of a civilian, whom another civilian killed in firing on us from a house near the Synagogue. So, according to our law, we have burnt the house and executed the inhabitants." The officer referred to the murder of a man whose timid character was known to all, the Jewish minister Weill, who had just been killed at his house with his sixteen-year-old daughter. While the Mayor and the officer were touring the town fire broke out in all directions, and at the same time massacres began that were to continue till next day. The report continues: "Murders were committed in the following circumstances: On August 25th, after firing two shots in the interior of the Worms Tannery to give the impression that they were attacked, the Germans invaded a workshop in the factory where a workman, Goeury, was working with a man named Balastre and his son. Goeury was dragged into the street, was robbed and brutally treated, while his two companions, who had hidden, were found and shot. On

the same day soldiers came and called for M. Steiner, who had hidden in his cellar. His wife, fearing disaster, tried to stop him. As she was holding him she received a ball in the neck. A few minutes later Steiner, obeying the order, fell mortally wounded in his garden."

M. Kahn was also assassinated in the garden of his house. His mother, ninety-eight years old, who was burned in the fire, had previously been bayoneted in her bed, according to the statement of a man who acted as interpreter to the enemy. M. Binder, who was going out to escape the flames, was also struck down. The German who killed him admitted that he acted without motive, while the man was standing quietly before his own door. About three o'clock the Germans broke into a house, smashing windows and firing into the dwelling, in which were Madame Dujon, her three-year-old daughter, her two sons, and a M. Gaumier. The little girl was nearly killed, her face being burned by rifle fire. At the same moment Madame Dujon, seeing her youngest son, fourteen years old, lying on the ground, called to him to get up and fly with her. She then saw he was

holding his entrails with both hands. The house was on fire, and the poor child was burnt, as well as M. Gaumier, who had been unable to escape.

Other similar cases at Lunéville are described by the Commission, including an instance of saw bayonets being used against women. A less serious case, which, however, sheds light on the mentality of the Germans like several others, refers to a man of sixty-seven years old, taken with his wife into the fields with hands tied behind his back. Both were cruelly treated, and a non-commissioned officer seized eighteen hundred francs in gold which the old man had in his possession.

In the village of Chanteneux the hostages were brutally treated, and when a German officer was told by a French schoolmaster on his word of honour that civilians had not fired he exclaimed: "Pig of a Frenchman, don't speak of honour; you have none." Out of 465 houses in Guebwiller only twenty were left habitable. Over 100 persons disappeared, fifty at least being killed by the Germans. The statement is made in the report that a Red Cross worker named Werher was shot, and as he

still moved, was saturated with paraffin in the presence of his mother and burnt alive The Commission give on good evidence a statement that the corpse of a woman was violated by some of the Bavarians, and this in itself is an evidence of degeneracy in the men of the Kaiser's Empire, which bears out many dark and unbelievable stories of strange sexual depravities which have grown up in Germany coincident with militarism.

The Commission visited Baccarat, where the town was pillaged and set on fire. For purposes of arson the German army utilised a complete plant comprising torches, explosive grenades, fuses, petroleum pumps, rolls of explosive stuff and bags containing pellets of a highly inflammable compressed powder. Pillage was methodically practised everywhere, even in the presence of officers. Wine cellars were emptied, safes burst open, table silver, jewellery, pictures, furniture, linen, dresses, sewing machines and even children's toys were carted across the frontier. At Jolivet, Bonvillers, Einville, Remonville, Sommerviller, Rehainviller, Lamath and Fraimbois, burnings and outrages were reported. At Mont,

bombarded by the French, a German officer was furious that a Frenchwoman had been allowed to leave the house, saying: "I did not want the door opened. I wanted the French to fire on their own people." Other atrocities by retreating Germans are reported from Magnieres, Croismare, Remereville, Drouville, Courbesseaux, and Erbeviller.

In a commune of the Meurthe-et-Moselle Department, two women were exposed without defence to the brutalities of a German soldier, who, after compelling the elder to take off his boots, stripped both naked and outraged the younger under peril of her life. The Commission adds: "We have undertaken not to reveal the names of the two women (they were nuns) nor the village where the deed was committed, but the facts were given us under oath by witnesses worthy of full credence, and we accept all responsibility for the verification of them."

The village of Embermenil was the scene of particular cruelties. At the end of October, or beginning of November, an enemy patrol, meeting in the outskirts of the village, a young woman, Madame Masson, who was pregnant, questioned

her as to the presence of the French troops. She knew nothing, so could not answer, but after the Fifth Bavarian Regiment had been received with shots from French troops on entering the village some days later the entire habitants were assembled before the church, and the officer demanded to know who had betrayed the Germans. Madame Masson bravely stepped up and repeated what she had said days before, asserting that it was her honest knowledge. She was instantly taken and shot, together with a young man picked out at hazard from the crowd. The whole village pleaded for her, but it was useless. Her father-in-law's house was then burned. In Donievre-sur-Vezouze 136 houses were destroyed by incendiary compounds. A lad named Maurice Claude was shot dead with three bullets while quietly standing before his aunt's house. Two others were similarly killed, and two taken as hostages have since disappeared. But enough of these atrocities which make the heart blood run cold in the reader. That the Germans will pay a terribly heavy price for them there is no doubt. Retribution has indeed already begun.

The Allies could not have had worse weather than that which was experienced throughout the last month of the year and the beginning of 1915. They have had to fight in drenching rain and on ground not merely sodden, but many feet deep in mud. In spite of numerous difficulties, dummy fortifications and well concealed artillery, their progress eastward of Rheims was continued with method and tenacity. The enemy's attitude was strictly defensive. The French had suffered too much from the Germans to even give them a Christmas truce. The fighting was continued on both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. So abhorred and untrustworthy are the enemy opposed to the Eastern Army of France that when some of them left their trenches on Christmas Day shouting "two days' truce," their ruse did not succeed. All were shot down. The French have not forgotten how their foes utilised a truce for the burial of the dead in September to bring up their heavy guns and place them for the bombardment of Nancy.

Throughout the whole of the eastward region the turn of the year was marked by

fresh successes. All counter-attacks by the enemy were repulsed, and the French appreciably increased their gain. For instance, by the evening of December 24th, they had driven the enemy from some of his first line saps. They were masters of all the line Perthes-les-Hurlus, Mesnil-les-Hurlus, and Beauséjour. The night of Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day were marked by five violent attacks in strong force against the position taken by the French troops. The four first were directed to the west of Perthes. They were carried out on a front of 1,500 metres or roughly between ten and twelve miles. The French infantry and machine guns received them with such a murderous fire that the Germans were thrown back. The artillery then came into action and completed the rout, the enemy leaving large numbers of dead in front of the French lines. The importance of this success was emphasised by the fact that the Germans had brought reinforcements from other parts with the object of repairing the losses of the previous days. The only result was to make them heavier.

In the last week of the year the advances continued. Three battalions of Colonial infantry—who are among the most daredevil troops in the army of our ally—carried whole lines of trenches with the bayonet, and the French fought on, making progress by hundreds of yards on New Year's Day, and right up to the time of writing. All the ground captured was held, and they were able to start upon their new positions in spite of the desperate efforts of the enemy. On the whole front their artillery obtained complete mastery over the German batteries, and on January 3rd it inflicted very heavy losses on the enemy's infantry concentrated to the north of Massiges. In the captured trenches the French found, as evidence of the extent of the German defeat, minenwerfers, with armoured hoods, quick-firing guns, machine guns, boxes of cartridges and other ammunition, boxes of explosives for trench work, fuses, cigars, boxes of chocolate, tinned provisions and other indications of a hurried flight. In the Argonne, progress has been slow, but here also it has been sure, and violent counter-attacks by the enemy were without result.

In the region of Verdun and the heights of the Meuse the French have continued to advance, and the vigorous counter-attacks of the enemy at the close of the year were invariably repulsed. On the heights of the Meuse our allies have everywhere gained ground. At Eparges the enemy's batteries were withdrawn half a mile, finding the French fire too hot for them. The German artillery contented itself with long range bombardment of villages in rear of the French front. Between the Meuse and the Moselle the Germans announced that they had obtained great successes in the Bois Brulé. The name of this wood recalls a literary reminiscence, for the village is described by Mr. Hilaire Belloc in one of his most entertaining books. "And Brulé is a very good omen for men that are battered about and given to despairing since it is only called Brulé on account of its having been burnt so often by Romans, Frenchmen, Burgundians, Germans, Flemings, Huns, perhaps, and generally all those who in the last few thousand years have taken a short cut at their enemies over the neck of the Côte Barine. So you would imagine it to be

a tumble-down, weak, wretched and disappearing place ; but so far from this it is a rich and proud village, growing better wine than any in the garrison, though Toul stands in a great cup or ring of hills, very high and with steep slopes, and guns on all of them, and all these hills grow wine, none is so good as Brulé wine." As a matter of fact, the Germans have not reached the Bois Brulé, but for weeks were fighting on its outskirts suffering severe losses. Not for them is the wine of Brulé which Hilaire Belloc eulogises.

In another wood, that of Le Pretre, near Pont-à-Mousson, for six weeks they tried in vain to penetrate. In fact, throughout the Vosges, the French activities have been crowned with the most happy results. In the Ban de Sapt, near Bonhomme, they were often attacked, but never gave way, and an attack on the latter place on Christmas Day, renewed three times with great violence, was repulsed first with the bayonet and then by the artillery. The enemy lost heavily, the bodies of 500 men and several officers were found in front of the French trenches after the bayonet repulse, and they were compelled to abandon much

ammunition, hand grenades and other stores.

The capture of Steinbach, however, opens the door to the French for renewed attempts upon Mulhausen and Colmar. It must be remembered that the French already hold all the tops of the passes along the Vosges, and from these points of vantage can outflank every position the Germans can take up to oppose a French advance up the Rhine valley as soon as the situation makes it worth the while of General Joffre to pay the necessary price in human life. Already the threat against Mulhausen at the beginning of January was causing alarm at the German headquarters, and from the Swiss frontier came news of troops being rapidly railed to the threatened point. These troops had to be taken from somewhere and the margin of reinforcements is steadily growing smaller. Somewhere in other words they had to weaken their defence, and this process will go on steadily increasing until the Germans find themselves compelled to fall back, first probably to the line of the Meuse, then to the line of the Rhine. It is this that makes the uninterrupted progress of the French from

Christmas Day onwards particularly profitable alike in the region of Thann, in the Vosges, about Cernay (or, as the Germans call it, Sennheim) and Steinbach.

They held the outskirts of the two Aspachs to the south of Sennheim on Christmas Day, and notwithstanding a vigorous resistance installed themselves in the borders of the wood near Steinbach. Next day they advanced in the wood and in what is known as the Uffholz ravine, while to the west of Sennheim they were in close grips with the enemy, and to the south were attacking the woods to the north of Lower Aspach. The fight continued next day, the French advance being over ground covered with German corpses and abandoned arms and equipment. For thirty-six hours more violent fighting occurred, a ridge to the west of Uffholz being gained and Steinbach wood surrounded and cleared with heavy losses on both sides. The French cleared the village of Steinbach, house by house, and street by street. It is, or was, a pleasant little village of irregular construction, lying at the foot of the deep cup formed by the surrounding hills, of which that numbered 425 is the most

commanding. On New Year's Day, the Chasseurs Alpine did some splendid work, dashing through the village amid the flames of burning houses and the enemy's machine-gun fire. Two days later these nimble mountaineers had not only captured the whole village, but their comrades had carried the enemy's trenches on Hill 425.

The Germans, exasperated by the continual progress of the French, made two determined counter-attacks with overwhelming numbers. They recaptured Hill 425 and drove the French back to their original trenches. They regained possession of the cemetery and the church of Steinbach, but it was beyond their power to hold them. Without waiting for daylight the French delivered their reply. Before dawn they were once more in possession of Steinbach, and had cleared the enemy from Hill 425, and by nightfall, not only was the entire village in French hands, but they had commenced their untiring advance to the north-east and south-west. They also gained ground on the road from Thann to Sennheim.

Well may the official account say that

the German defeat was complete. The conduct of the French during these days was heroic. It has been so throughout the whole of the prolonged struggles on the eastern frontier.

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